

Thousands March Against Bulldozer Raj in Lucknow

On February 23, CPI(ML) organised a Vidhan Sabha (Assembly) march in Lucknow, with thousands of people from across the state uniting against the repressive and anti-people policies of the BJP regime at both the state and central levels. Despite police repression and the house arrest of CPI(ML) leaders in various districts, comrades from across Uttar Pradesh gathered near Lucknow railway station for the march.

In an attempt to foil this massive assertion of people's voices, the Yogi-led BJP government deployed heavy barricading and a large police force near the railway station itself. The February 23 march was called to raise urgent and long-pending demands of the poor, workers, peasants, students, and marginalised communities. These include an end to bulldozer-driven evictions; guaranteeing land

rights for the poor; freedom from crushing debt; protection of forest rights; implementation of the UGC Equity Regulation 2026; granting government worker status and proper wages to ASHA and other scheme workers; and restoring and strengthening MGNREGA. The march also demanded expansion of employment opportunities, protection of constitutional and democratic rights, and action on several other pressing concerns of the people.

The protest also raised its voice against arbitrary electricity bills and the forced installation of smart meters, which are creating havoc in the lives of poor households.

On the eve of the march, police forcibly detained several CPI(ML) leaders in an attempt to sabotage the February 23 mobilisation. Police reached the residence of Comrade Devashish, District

Secretary of the party in Pilibhit, who was preparing to travel to Lucknow with comrades, and placed him under house arrest. Similarly, Comrade Arjun Lal, District Secretary of Sitapur and a Zila Panchayat member, was also detained at his home. Similar detentions were reported from other districts, including Mathura, Basti, and Azamgarh.

In a statement, CPI(ML) Uttar Pradesh State Secretary Sudhakar Yadav said that people distressed by the government's policies were coming to peacefully present their demands before the state's highest democratic forum — the Legislative Assembly. "What is the government afraid of? Why are leaders being stopped in the districts?" he asked.

The February 23 march stood as a resolute declaration that the poor and marginalised of Uttar Pradesh will continue to resist bulldozer raj, defend their rights, and fight for dignity, justice, and democracy. ■

Victory of Justice Against State Repression: All Framed Activists, Including MP Rajaram Singh, Acquitted in the Aurangabad Protest Case

February 16, 2026: CPI(ML) Central Committee welcomes the verdict of the MP-MLA court of Aurangabad district of Bihar acquitting Comrade Rajaram Singh, MP and leader of the party's parliamentary group and, other activists in a false case filed by the Bihar police in 2012.

Comrade Rajaram Singh was injured by the police while leading a public protest against the murder of Chhotu Singh Kushwaha, mukhia of Sonhatu panchayat of Haspura block, and incarcerated on false charges along with 28 other activists. In 2013 Bihar Human Rights Commission (order attached below) indicted the government for this atrocity and awarded a compensation of Rs One lakh to Comrade Rajaram. Today's acquittal comes as the final judicial slap against this police repression and administrative vendetta

camouflaged as 'good governance' by the Nitish-Modi double engine government.

This rare judicial victory cannot however make us oblivious of the reign of terror and repression that has become the hallmark of the fascist Modi government. Comrade Jitender Paswan, president of the Bihar unit of Revolutionary Youth Association, has just been convicted by the Gopalganj District Court in a false case. Comrade Manoj Manzil, MLA from Agiaon (SC) seat of Bhojpur was disqualified following his conviction in a similar case in 2024. Countless activists, scholars, journalists, lawyers and innocent citizens continue to rot in India's jails without trial and bail.

We draw strength and inspiration from today's judicial victory to intensify the battle for liberty and justice for India's deprived millions. ■

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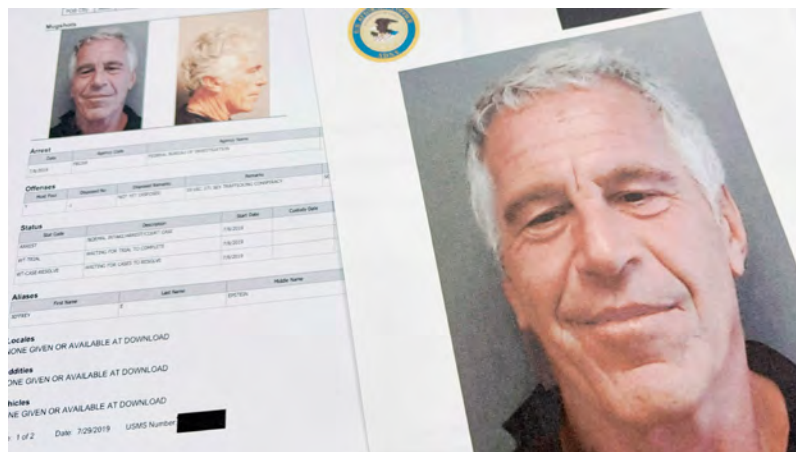
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The Epstein Files: The Secret Diary of Crisis Ridden Global Capitalism



The storm triggered by the release of three million pages, photos and videos from the Epstein files continues to rock the world. At least another three million pages await disclosure. While the Trump Administration is desperate to redact names and derail the scheduled disclosure, Epstein survivors and justice-seekers around the world demand not just complete disclosure but effective action to hold the perpetrators and all who have been complicit in this horrific criminal enterprise of paedophilia, trafficking of children and women and sexual exploitation accountable. Reports of resignations, arrests, raids, enquiries, apologies are coming in, albeit belatedly, from many countries.

In India, however, we have only seen the government and the dominant media protecting the Indian names appearing in the infamous Epstein files. Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri trivialises and rationalises his close association with Epstein while Prime Minister Modi wishes his tainted colleague on his birthday. Bill Gates, a major figure indicted by the released files, is invited to address the AI summit in Delhi and is accorded a warm welcome, but it is Gates who pulls out at the last moment fearing a global backlash. Clearly, the Modi government has much to hide. And it also believes it can get away without any accountability just on the basis of its bare majority in Parliament.

What makes the Epstein files an unprecedented horror story is not just the scale of abuse but the complicity and indeed participation of so many of the world's richest and most powerful people. In many ways Epstein island appears to have served as an underground chamber of the US-Israel axis. A power-broker who pleaded guilty way back in 2008 and became a known convicted pedophile continued to operate with near-total impunity for yet another decade before reportedly

being found dead in a high security prison. This is the decade when Trump becomes US President and starts trampling over every norm or institution which places any check on untrammelled capital accumulation and imperialist plunder.

We know that as elsewhere, in India the culture of the super-rich and powerful is infused with the same misogyny, routinised sexual violence and exploitation, and impunity which allowed Epstein's crimes to be ignored and even celebrated. But beyond this, what explains the cosy complicity of Indian men like Hardeep Puri and Anil Ambani with Epstein and his shadowy, shady world? The Epstein files reveal that their bonhomie with the Epstein network develops in the wake of Modi's ascent to power in Delhi in 2014 and both clearly operate on behalf of the new regime. Anil Ambani does so explicitly and Hardeep Puri says he had started selling Modi's digital India campaign months before the campaign had its official launch in India. Did the Modi government hire the services of Epstein to create the illusion of the so-called Modi-Trump bonhomie that would be sold as proof of Modi's great global stature? For good measure Epstein also claims credit for having successfully

advised Modi to curry favour with Trump by cosying up to Benjamin Netanyahu.

Why did the Modi regime explore the Epstein route to sell the myth of India's enhanced global stature under Modi's prime ministership? We know after the 2002 Gujarat carnage, the BJP had lost power at the Centre and Modi had become officially persona non grata in the US, UK and several other countries of Europe. The political rehabilitation of Modi within India began with corporate backing under the Vibrant Gujarat banner, but his global isolation continued. In Epstein the regime looked for a pathway to end that isolation and launch Modi as a new entrant in the international power elite.

For Modi, everything from domestic governance to international diplomacy is personalised event management. Modi emissaries like Hardeep Puri, a former Indian Ambassador to the US and Anil Ambani, a flamboyant failed scion of the Ambani empire, cultivated Epstein to promote the Modi brand and reaped lucrative rewards in the process, call them brokerage fees if you will, like the petroleum ministry and Rafale deal. But then, an Epstein can be useful only as long as a Trump

needs him. By 2019 Epstein had exhausted that utility and now Modi has to rebuild his 'friendship' with Donald Trump by mortgaging Indian interests to Trump's MAGA mission.

The Epstein files are like a secret diary of today's crisis ridden global capitalism. The Indian names appearing in these files whether Puri and Ambani who appear hand in glove with Epstein, or even Narendra Modi himself on whose behalf Puri and Ambani dealt with the Epstein network are no accidental entries, they tell us how the Modi government is running the affairs of India and what kind of company our ministers and corporates keep in their pursuit of power and wealth. The struggle for action against the Epstein-tainted men in various positions of power in India is a key part of the fight for accountability and justice for the survivors of the extensive abuse suffered at the hands of Epstein and those in his vast and interlinked networks of the rich and powerful. Simultaneously, it is part of an ongoing battle for India's strategic autonomy and against geopolitical collusion with and subservience to the US and Israel. ■

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A Beacon of Love in Kotdwar, Standing Firm Against Hatred

▲ **INDRESH MAIKHURI**

It was January 26, 2026. The entire country was celebrating Republic Day, the day the country became a democracy. However, mocking the legacy of the struggle for freedom and democracy some Bajrang Dal goons targeted an elderly shopkeeper, Vakil Ahmad for his religion in Kotdwar, a city in Uttarakhand's Pauri district.

Those who chose January 26 to target an elderly muslim man, have no connection to the legacy of the freedom movement, nor do they believe in democratic values! Thus, they used the day the country became a republic as a day to spread communal poison.

Those communal fascists fabricated the argument to target Vakil Ahmed that his shop's name is "Baba," which according to them is a Hindu word, and there is a temple of Baba Siddhabali in Kotdwar. Therefore, Vakil Ahmed should change his shop's name. 70-year-old Vakil Ahmed has been running his shop under the same name in Kotdwar for the past 30 years, and no one has had any problem with either his shop's name or his religion! But these Hindutva rioters are only interested in furthering their hateful agenda. Had they been exposed to humanity, logic, and reason, they would have known that the word "Baba," isn't the exclusive property of any one language or religion. It's a word used with different meanings in various languages, from Turkish, Persian, Slavic (Russian, Polish, Czech, etc.), to Japanese.

However, when the voices of a 70-year-old man being threatened reached Deepak Kumar, a gym

trainer, and his friend Vijay Rawat, who were sitting in the adjacent shop, arrived at the scene. Deepak and Vijay protested the harassment of the man and when Bajrang Dal members asked Deepak's identity, he gave his name Mohammad Deepak to show solidarity with the aggrieved person!

Deepak and Vijay's resistance forced the Bajrang Dal members to leave the shop. However, to target Deepak, they themselves made viral a video clip in which he gives his name as Mohammad Deepak. Those fanatics must have thought they would be able to incite hatred against Deepak in society. However, the opposite happened. As the video went viral, people saw Deepak Kumar standing firmly in support of a Muslim elder in this era of communal hatred and frenzy, as a brave example of harmony and love.

But the frenzied fascists did not stop here. Seeing the backlash on their failed attempt, Bajrang Dal members on January 31st, gathered in large numbers from Dehradun and Haridwar and created a massive hooliganism in Kotdwar, blocking the road in front of Deepak Kumar's gym, using abusive language, and shouting communal slogans. They coincided this open act of goondaism with Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama's visit in Kotdwar that day. The police allowed it to happen and later gave an excuse that the entire police force was engaged in CM's security hence they could not stop the Bajrang Dal members. What could be a more illustrative example of the failure of law and order than the Chief Minister being present in one part of the city, while

in another part, frenzied people were blocking roads, abusing, and spewing communal venom?

If this had happened under any other Chief Minister, strict action would have been taken against the police officers for such serious negligence. However, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama himself is known to regularly spew communal hatred by referring to new types of jihads every day, he continues to express his animosity towards minorities. A recent report, "Hate Speech Events in India - Report 2025," released by the Washington-based American think tank, the Center for the Study of Organized Hate, identified Pushkar Singh Dhama as the person who delivered the most hate speeches in 2025. The state ranked fourth in hate speech events, the Chief Minister ranked first in hate speeches, meaning he is leading this hate campaign from the front.

This is the most plausible reason why the state police take a soft stance toward communal elements, who create unrest in various parts of the state on a daily basis.

Deepak Kumar's stand in support of the Muslim elder not only troubled the fanatic communal elements, but it appears to have also deeply troubled the Uttarakhand government and its police. Therefore, based on Deepak's complaint, the police did not file FIR against Bajrang Dal members, but lodged FIR against Deepak and Vijay Rawat on a false complaint by Bajrang Dal. Fakery is evident from the complaint itself which states that Bajrang Dal members were on a 'mass contact campaign called by Vishwa Hindu Parishad for Dharm Raksha Nidhi', while everybody saw them threatening an elderly minority community member asking to change the name of his shop.

It is only for the protection given to lumpen communal elements by the Uttarakhand government and the police that in the previous month a hundred year old shrine of Sufi saint and poet Baba Bulle Shah was demolished in Mussoorie, migrant Kashmiri shawl vendors were brutally beaten up in Vikasnagar of Dehradun, followed by this Kotdwar incident. Things did not stop here, communal elements gave an open call for 12 February to attack the gym of Deepak Kumar. This was opposed by left parties and some civil society organisations who lodged their protest at the police headquarters in Dehradun, only then police came into action and stopped those elements from going to Kotdwar. Lumpens are still at work and one of them announced a booty of Rs five lakh on the head of Deepak Kumar right in front of the police station. Police simply lodged an FIR but the person calling openly for murder was allowed to go.

BJP is transforming Uttarakhand into a laboratory of communal hate for long. It has succeeded to an extent but at the same time youths like Deepak Kumar show that to change the fundamental fabric of society is beyond the powers of fascists. In April last year a young woman Shaila Negi bravely confronted a frenzied mob in Nainital when minority community was targeted after the arrest of a rape accused Usman Khan. Bagrang Dal members may find the name Mohammad Deepak unusual, because of their history of their ancestors of evading from the freedom movement. Those who carry forward the legacy of the freedom struggle today are well aware of martyr Udham Singh that he told his name Ram Mohammad Singh Azad to the British police in London in 1940 when he had assassinated Michael O'Dyer.

Kotdwar had been a place where comrade Chandra Singh Garhwali worked among the people in his struggle for a socialist democratic and egalitarian society after he came back from the army where he had refused as a soldier to fire on unarmed Pathan freedom fighters in Peshawar on 23 April 1930.

At a time when people who spread communal venom and hate in the society are in the seat of power, this is our prime task to further strengthen the fabric of our syncretic culture and rich legacy of martyrdoms, and boldly support every effort of resistance against fascists. ■

Civil Liberties Get Increasing Focus as State Repression Intensifies

▲ AKASH BHATTACHARYA



There have been growing concerns about India's track record on tolerance and freedom to dissent. Much of these concerns center on the use of anti-terror laws to suppress voices critical of the government. Two cases in particular – the Bhima Koregaon case and the Delhi Pogrom case – have led to the long incarceration, without either bail or a fair trial, of prominent dissenting voices under terror charges which are yet to be proved. This has been done through the use of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967, has been amended in recent years to make it more stringent.

Suppressing Terrorism or Suppressing Dissent?

'Terrorism' referring to the indiscriminate killing of people in order to strike terror among the people at large, in order to force certain political outcomes, is a scourge. There are not two ways about it. However, UAPA'S effectiveness in rooting out terrorism has increasingly come under question. Less than 3% of the arrests made under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act between 2015 and 2020 have resulted in convictions, the People's Union for Civil Liberties said in a report in September 2022. Instead, UAPA has facilitated the long-term incarceration of political dissenters.

Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP) have pointed out that while the NCRB reported a 13% decrease in

'Offences against the State' in 2023, independent monitoring revealed a starkly different reality. States like Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, and Jammu & Kashmir accounted for over half of all Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) cases, despite the NCRB's lack of disaggregated data. Sedition cases rose by 165% from 2016 to 2019, with only 3.3% conviction rate.

Field reporting by the CJP tells a darker scenario. In Uttar Pradesh, over 260 people were booked under UAPA between 2020-2023 for affiliations with alleged banned organizations or protests. In Assam, about 240 UAPA cases were filed, most against ordinary villagers for alleged "extremist sympathies." In Jammu & Kashmir, local officials confirmed over 400 preventive detentions under the Public Safety Act (PSA) in 2023, but the NCRB reported zero sedition or communal violence cases.

Prisoners' Testimonies

The 1 February issue of *The Outlook* drew the reader's attention to these worrying trends by dedicating the issue to voices of political prisoners imprisoned under UAPA and their relatives. Titled *Thou Shalt Not Dissent*, the issue features first-person accounts from political activists imprisoned under India's anti-terrorism laws, including Anand Teltumbde, Gautam Navlakha, Umar Khalid, and others.

The issue explores the trauma of incarceration, the weaponization of laws like UAPA, and the enduring power of dissent despite systemic suppression. It highlights how activists continue to speak out even in captivity, with voices like Sidhique Kappan and Sudha Bharadwaj reflecting on the long-term impacts of detention and surveillance. The

cover story underscores the human cost of political dissent in India, particularly in cases involving long legal battles and unjust trials.

The issue contains analytical pieces highlighting the long history of preventive detention in the post-colonial legal framework (Snigdhendu Bhattacharya), imprisonment of Adivasis of Jharkhand under charges of being 'Maoist' (Asghar Khan), and testimony of the wife of Lt. Colonel Srikant Purohit who was imprisoned in the Malegaon Blast case only to be acquitted after 17 years. All these testimonies reflect not only on the inhumanity of being assumed to be guilty unless proved innocent, but also the challenges faced after coming out of prison – challenges in getting a job, rebuilding a social life, and getting rid of the social stigma.

Anthology Challenges the Victim Narrative

On 19 February 2026, an anthology titled 'Umar Khalid and His World' was released. The book offers a profound look into the life of jailed activist Umar Khalid during his five years in prison, following his arrest in connection with the 2020 Delhi riots. The anthology, compiled by researcher and activist Anirban Bhattacharya, artist Shuddhabrata Sengupta, and writer Banojyotsna Lahiri (Khalid's partner), features previously unpublished letters from Khalid, reflections from prominent public figures, and contributions from fellow activists and scholars.

The book opens with Khalid's own writings, in which he reflects on the rise of '21st-century Indian fascism' and the erosion of democratic ideals in India. It includes essays by historians Romila Thapar and Ramachandra Guha, comedian Kunal Kamra, and

New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, who pens a heartfelt handwritten note to Khalid. Key themes include hope, resistance, the cost of dissent, and the resilience of the human spirit.

The book serves as both a tribute to Khalid and a call to solidarity with all those imprisoned for speaking out against injustice. It was launched at the Press Club of India in New Delhi on February 19, 2026, and has drawn attention from human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, which condemned Khalid's prolonged detention without trial.

The anthology is not only an archive of what he described as a grim period, but also proof that people responded 'with defiance, with compassion and with solidarity.' It questions the 'victim' tag attached to the prisoners, and produced as thinking, feeling individuals who are ready to take responsibility for their actions and who believe that they did nothing wrong.

These journalistic efforts are an expression of solidarity to people imprisoned for their dissent. These also express the political will of activists, lawyers and journalists to fight for a fair system of dispensation of criminal justice. Those at the receiving end of unfair treatment at the hands of law range far and wide, much beyond the Bhima Koregaon and Delhi Pogrom prisoners. For long-term systemic changes to take place, the voices demanding just and fair criminal procedures and trial will need to encompass a diverse range of citizens, which is a challenge in times when any form of political dissent invites stringent state action. ■

Union Budget 2026: The Government Chooses to Remain Oblivious to the Real Needs of the People

Amid the sharply increasing inequality and unemployment, wage stagnation and dwindling people's purchasing power and crumbling manufacturing sector along with global economic and political uncertainty, the Budget 2026-27 presented by the Modi government is the worst on the bench-mark of anti-people budgets presented by this regime in previous years. The budget throws around the empty rhetoric of 'Viksit Bharat', while the Indian economy and the lives and livelihood of the people crumbles under its feet.

The Budget 2026-27 underlines the continuing neglect of agriculture and farmers, workers, youth and Women. The majority of the population are forced to live in a highly stressed economic environment with rising inequality marred with low incomes, high unemployment and escalating costs of living a decent life. This was the least to expect some announcements to boost prolonged stagnant incomes. But this budget fails miserably on this count.

Allocations for key social security and poverty alleviation schemes have either been reduced in real terms or left stagnant, failing to keep pace with inflation and rising population needs. The revised estimates (RE) of actual expenditure for FY 2025-26 also shows the trend with RE being less than last year's budget allocation in key sectors of Agriculture and Allied industries, Education, Health, Social Welfare and Rural and Urban development.

The reduction in revised

estimates of actual expenditure for FY 2025-26 is dramatic in even flagship schemes of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna (PMAY) Urban Rs 7,500 Crore (BE Rs 19,974 Crore), PMAY-Rural Rs 32,500 Crore (BE Rs 54,832 Crore), Swacch Bharat Mission Rs 2,000 Crore (BE Rs 5,000 Crore), Gram Sadak Yojna Rs 11,000 Crore (BE Rs 19,000 Crore), and in Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PMABHIM) Rs 2,443 Crore (Rs 4,200 Crore). This is irresponsible, and deliberate, on the part of the government to not spend even its own allocated amounts especially in welfare schemes.

While the agriculture sector sustains the country and provides an all-weather support to growth, again the budget completely ignores its need. The core issue of farmers income, MSP, issue of climate change and impact on agriculture, strengthening of storage and food processing facilities etc have no mention in the budget. New peripheral Agri-related schemes like drone intervention, AI in agriculture and focus on high-value agri-sectors are being sold by the government as empowering the agriculture sector. Moreover, fertilizer and food subsidy allocation in the budget for FY 2026-27 is less than that of revised estimates of last year. The agriculture research and education department allocation also witnessed a decrease in fund allocation pointing to complete lack of interest of the government in welfare and strengthening of the agriculture sector in India.

Public healthcare continues to



Without addressing the core issue of income inequality of the majority population the aggregate demand can't be raised.

suffer from shortages of doctors, nurses, medicines and infrastructure, while the government promotes a private-sector-led model. Public expenditure on education and health remains grossly inadequate. With the implementation of the VBSA Bill, the private sector is set to gain even greater control over education. This budget has again reiterated the Modi government's skewed vision, that the Education is not an emancipation project, but a tool for industries and corporates to obtain cheap labour. Universities and colleges are being oriented to train students with skill sets that will make them employable in industries. The proposal for five new educational townships in industrial corridors, and 15,000 schools and 500 universities to have content labs where students will be taught to create content in order to prepare skill sets to feed the labour force required for the gaming industry by 2030.

The budget should have acknowledged the severity of Trump's tariff war and in order to give some respite to the Indian exporters it was needed to provide them some monetary

relief measures. Moreover, no measures have been taken to deal with massive job losses incurred due to Trump's tariffs on Indian industries. Customs duty exemptions extended at this juncture shows that the talks of Aatamnirbhar Bharat are hollow and that the economy is not tied to domestic realities and necessities.

Crores of women under SHGs are under severe debt trap of microfinance private institutions. This budget goes on with the same policy framework encouraging private companies to exploit more.

The budget gives big tax relief for MNCs and companies that will set up cloud data centres in India till 2047. Worldwide, data centres have become an environmental threat due to massive groundwater depletion, air pollution, and excessive mining to meet the enormous energy requirements for running these centres, along with land conflicts as they require massive tracts of lands.

Under the guise of promoting self-reliance, the government has announced mining corridors across mineral-rich states. Freight corridors and expansion of road infrastructure also feature prominently in the budget speech. However, this must be seen alongside the massive disinvestment drive unleashed by the government since its inception. As the public sector is systematically pushed into the background, the real profits from mineral extraction will accrue to Modi's favoured crony capitalists—Ambani, Adani, Vedanta, and others. This, combined with the dilution of forest rights and workers' rights, clearly points towards a model of resource extraction designed to maximise private corporate profits at the cost of people and the environment.

MGNREGA, already weakened over the years, has now been replaced by a far more diluted VB-GRAM G. In this budget, allocations have been made under both NREGA and VB-GRAM G heads. However, while NREGA has witnessed a substantial cut, the allocation for VB-GRAM G remains almost unchanged from the previous year. Given that the rollout of VB-GRAM G will take time, the reduction in NREGA funding will have an immediate and devastating impact on the rural poor.

The budget proudly claims the implementation of over 350 reforms, including the labour codes. These labour codes have systematically diluted workers' legal rights—ranging from wages and working conditions to social security. The budget completely ignores the urgent need to strengthen the right to health, pensions, provident fund, and other forms of social protection. Platform workers, scheme workers, domestic workers, and the vast majority of informal sector workers—who constitute the backbone of the Indian workforce—continue to live without access to any meaningful social security and find no place in this budget.

The under-utilization of budget in the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, further proves that India is losing manufacturing jobs. The budget gives major tax incentives to the rich, while Start-up India and employment generation projects are ignored and denied major reliefs.

Without addressing the core issue of income inequality of the majority population the aggregate demand can't be raised is common knowledge. But the budget lacked the vision to address this core issue and is not sufficient to push aggregate investment to sustain

economic growth.

The government's refusal to raise taxes on corporate profits and incomes of High Networth Individuals (super rich) has reduced space for budget leverage.

The overall expansion of budget size to Rs 53.47 lakh crore is mere 5.6 %, less than even claimed nominal growth in GDP. Out of the overall expenditure one fourth goes to interest payment on past accumulated debt of the government of India.

As the budget follows the pro-liberal policy driven tightrope, fiscal deficit is maintained by cutting allocations and actual expenditure in the core sector of agriculture and rural infrastructure, food security, health, education and housing.

While welfare expenditures are being cut, the budget announces impunity from prosecution for tax evaders and those who have not declared their incomes and properties in the past. Modi came to power with a claim of bringing foreign black money back to the country but the budget has ironically announced a scheme for voluntary disclosure of foreign income and assets albeit in the name of facilitation for small taxpayers but the 'specified limit' has not been announced raising suspicion!

In essence, Union Budget 2026 continues the Modi government's consistent betrayal of the people's most pressing concerns. It reinforces a trajectory marked by corporate loot, erosion of democratic and social rights, and the systematic devaluation of the people's right to a dignified life. ■

No Pasarán!

Resist Modi's Surrender to the US on Trade Deal!

The so-called Indo-US trade deal is turning out to be a shocking example of surrender of India's national interests and economic sovereignty. The government that had promised to double the income of the Indian farmer is busy enriching the American farm lobby. The government that keeps peddling phrases like Atmanirbhar Bharat and Viksit Bharat (Self-reliant and Developed India) has mortgaged India's interests to Trump's aggressive agenda of Making America Great Again.

Let us first look at the basics that are being sought to be camouflaged by the Modi government's propaganda machinery. India will be required to pay an increased average of 18% tariff on Indian exports to the US, up from 3% till recently before Trump started waging the tariff war. Modi government however shows it as a decline from the threatened penal level of 50% tariff, but as mentioned in Trump's executive order, this decline is conditional on a US-monitored certificate of India not purchasing any oil from Russia!

India, on the other hand, used to charge more than 50% tariff on most American imports, which will now come down to Zero. And this includes the hitherto protected agriculture sector which is now being opened up to American agri imports in howsoever calibrated a manner. In other words, the crisis-ridden agriculture sector of India which is still predominantly small-scale and accounts for the livelihood of half of Indian population is being exposed to a

disastrous competition with the highly mechanised and heavily subsidised gigantic American farming involving only around 1% US population.

Then there is also the issue of non-tariff barriers or NTBs. As of now India applies less than 500 NTBs as against 6000 NTBs applied by the US. Yet it is only India which is being pushed to lift the NTBs without any reciprocal relaxation from the American side. India's commerce minister dodges the issue of Russian oil purchase by passing the buck to the External Affairs Minister while the latter passes it back to the Commerce Ministry. The Commerce Minister also evades the issue by talking about oil companies deciding the details. Meanwhile, the Finance Minister draws false comfort by comparing India's 18% tariff level with the 19% tariff level for Bangladesh. But now we know that Bangladesh has got zero reciprocal tariff on certain textile and apparel items, and shares of Indian textile exporters have already begun to tumble.

The claims of "India's calibrated opening of agriculture safeguarding farmers" and "no sensitive agricultural sector included" peddled by Modi regime are also being exposed with Trump and the White House spilling the beans on a regular basis. The fact sheet issued by the White House now includes zero or reduced tariffs on "certain pulses", a detail hidden from the people in the initial framework agreement issued on February 7. Though, the very next the fact-sheet was updated to remove "certain pulses" after

an uproar. We now know that the phrase "additional agricultural products" with reduced or zero tariff is the real devil in the details that will undo decades of effort to protect Indian farmers, the overwhelming majority of whom are small and marginal cultivators.

Historically, India has defended tariffs and non-tariff measures such as subsidies, procurement and import quotas for decades at the WTO and in bilateral trade agreements, despite immense pressure from Western countries. This is because our history, and the history of the entire Global South, has taught us the bitter lessons of colonial and unequal trade relationships — which continue to dominate international trade — in which rich countries engulf and control the markets of developing nations, destroying domestic production and livelihoods.

The dangers are itched everywhere in global history. In Mexico after NAFTA (1994), heavily subsidised U.S. corn entered duty-free and undercut millions of small maize farmers who could not compete with mechanised American agribusiness backed by federal support. Between 1994 and the early 2000s, U.S. corn exports to Mexico more than tripled. Rural incomes fell, agrarian communities were destabilised, and large-scale migration became a structural feature of the economy. In Haiti, tariff cuts in the 1990s, under pressure from international financial institutions and the US, opened the floodgates to heavily subsidised U.S. rice, devastating domestic producers and turning

the country from largely self-sufficient into structurally import-dependent for a basic staple.

In this deal, while India gets some crumbs, Modi has laid out the entire platter before the US. It promises eliminating or reducing tariffs on all US industrial goods and a wide range of US food and agricultural products including dried distillers' grains, red sorghum, nuts, fresh and processed fruits, certain pulses, soybean oil, wine and spirits and additional products. Distillers dried grains with solubles, soyoil, cotton and various fruits and nuts mentioned in the agreement are bound to destabilise domestic agricultural markets already in deep crisis. The same government that claims to promote oilseeds and pulses is granting concessions for US pulses and soyoil to enter at reduced or zero tariffs. Indian cotton farmers struggling for remunerative prices will be devastated by entry of subsidised US cotton. Apple growers in Kashmir and Himachal, already facing climate stress and market volatility, will be pushed further into distress with the entry of cheaper American fruits.

Indian dairy and poultry farmers have traditionally been using oilmeals (the remaining part of oilseed after oil extraction) and coarse grains (like sorghum, jowar) in animal feed. India has expanded ethanol production under the E20 programme (Ethanol-Fuel Mix) and increased corn cultivation, leading to rising domestic DDGS production. This is also expected that along with more poultry and dairy industry expansion, DDGS production will also increase. Industry experts indicate that current production is not fully absorbed domestically. In such a scenario, opening the market to US DDGS is nothing but knowingly inflicting self-harm.

Similarly, duty free red

sorghum imports (which earlier had customs and duties @ 60-65%) will directly threaten millions of farmers in rain fed regions of Maharashtra, Karnataka and the Deccan plateau. Existing Sorghum tariffs are high because this crop serves as staple coarse cereal as well as animal feed traditionally in the region. Sorghum is part of the Shree Anna basket promoted by the government itself. Yet the same government is exposing it to cheaper subsidised imports.

The Modi government is also silent on GM crop products while US farmers cultivate genetically modified corn and soybean, and there is danger of genetic contamination with DDGs (from GM corn) as well as soyoil that will introduce invasive species threatening native crops.

Currently the US exports agricultural products to India worth approximately ₹17,000 to ₹19,000 crore annually, facing weighted average tariffs of 60 to 65 percent. If this framework translates into zero or minimal tariffs, not only will Indian farmers face devastation, the country will also lose an estimated ₹10,000 to ₹12,000 crore annually in tariff revenue based on existing import volumes. The result will be agrarian devastation combined with fiscal erosion.

For Indian industry, there is little beyond selective tariff adjustments on a few identified products and vague promises of reciprocal arrangements. Even these remain far higher than pre Trump levels. In contrast, India is offering zero or minimal tariffs on US industrial goods across a wide range.

The language surrounding pharmaceuticals reveals a deeply asymmetric structure. India's treatment on pharmaceuticals and pharmaceutical ingredients will be "contingent on the findings" of a

US Section 232 national security investigation. Indian generic companies supply nearly half of all generic medicines consumed in the United States. Indian generic companies supply nearly half of all generic medicines consumed in the United States. However, a significant share of the active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) used by Indian generic manufacturers, the core raw materials of medicines, are sourced from China. With the Section 232 investigation framed within a China focused national security narrative, the Indian generic industry could face tariffs, quotas or pressure to relocate manufacturing to the US in order to retain market access. The real objective appears to be to force Indian generic manufacturers to shift towards more expensive, US approved API supply chains. This will not only weaken India's export competitiveness but also increase medicine prices domestically, directly impacting public healthcare and access to affordable drugs.

Significantly, under the Section 232 investigations, key industrial products such as steel and aluminium remain excluded from the so-called reciprocal tariffs, meaning Indian exporters in these crucial sectors will continue to face high US duties, severely limiting their competitiveness in the American market.

Further, Modi has committed (later changed to "intended" in the fact-sheet) to purchase over 500 billion dollars of US goods over five years, translating into roughly 100 billion dollars annually, approximately ₹9 lakh crore. Such a commitment will strain foreign exchange reserves and create serious fiscal pressures. At present, weighted average tariff rates are around 13.5 percent. Under a zero tariff regime, India

could forgo roughly 13.5 billion dollars annually in customs revenue. At a time when public expenditure on health, education and rural development is constrained, who will bear this revenue shock?

The deal also reflects India's growing subordination to US geopolitical interests. The US share in India's oil imports has already nearly doubled over the past year. It is therefore alarming that the Indian government would commit to purchasing oil from the US or Venezuela or to refraining from buying oil from Russia or Iran, at the behest of the United States. Any decision to buy oil from Venezuela—or not to buy from other countries—is a bilateral matter between sovereign nations, and not a prerogative of Donald Trump or the US government.

Switching from discounted Russian crude to more expensive US supplies could impose additional annual costs estimated at 25 to 30 billion dollars, apart from higher shipping and logistics expenses. They will be passed on through higher fuel prices, raising costs across agriculture, transport and industry. Inflationary pressure will deepen, and ordinary citizens will bear the burden.

The framework for the interim agreement explicitly includes negotiations on “intellectual property, labour, environment, government procurement, and trade-distorting or unfair practices of state-owned enterprises”. In plain language, this omnibus clause subjects India's entire regulatory architecture to Trump's diktats. From MSP and fertiliser subsidies to labour protections and public sector enterprises that anchor national infrastructure, every policy instrument designed to protect domestic interests is being placed on the negotiating table.

The farmers, workers and all the toiling masses of India must unite to resist this new colonial blueprint of the US Imperialism that Trump is inflicting on India emboldened by the Modi government's policy of total capitulation. We have seen how the Modi government remained a mute spectator while Trump handcuffed, shackled, and deported Indians. Now, it is preparing to shackle the entire country itself.

No Pasarán! They shall not pass! India shall resist and defeat the neocolonial expedition of the Trump Administration and US Imperialism.

12 Feb General Strike: 30 Crore Workers and Farmers Rise Against Modi's Anti-People Policies

The All India General Strike and mass mobilisations on 12 February 2026, joined by more than 30 crore workers, farmers and other sections of the people, marked a historic show of unity and resistance against the Modi government's anti-worker and anti-farmer policies. The joint platform of Central Trade Unions and independent sectoral federations, along with the Samyukt Kisan Morcha and agricultural workers' unions, organised massive strike actions in over 600 districts across the country.

From coal mines to banks, steel plants to postal services, industrial areas to rural worksites, participation was widespread across both formal and informal sectors. Women workers from ICDS, ASHA, Mid-Day Meal, beedi and other unorganised sectors were at the forefront of Rasta Roko (road blocks) and Rail Roko (rail blocks) actions. Students and youth joined with slogans demanding employment and the defence of public education. The strike strongly opposed the four Labour Codes, privatisation, India-US trade deal, 100 percent FDI in insurance, anti-farmer measures, attacks on MGNREGA, and policies that surrender national interests to corporate and foreign capital.

In a joint statement, central trade unions including CITU, AICCTU, AITUC and others congratulated the workers and farmers for making the 12 February nationwide general strike a grand success and noted that: This strike action took place in the background of fast deteriorating economic situation when the union government, in order to contain and weaken the trade unions in face of the onslaught of capital, have notified the four labour codes and rules thereafter, without due process of law, no consultations with stake holders, not holding Indian Labour Conference defying international labour standards to which India as the Nation state is signatory. The codes were passed in the Parliament with brute force and in case of three codes even in absence of whole opposition from the Parliament and during Covid 19 period with Disaster Management Act which prevented gatherings.

The attempts of the government to cripple the democratic movements through various means has further angered the working class and the farming community. The Unions have called for intensifying the united struggle against anti-worker and pro-corporate policies of the Union Government. ■

Fight Back Against the Sinister Stay on UGC Equity Regulations

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHRYA



It has been ten years since the shocking institutional murder of Rohith Vemula which had awakened India to the brutal reality of caste discrimination in India's institutions of higher education and research. Ten years later, Rohith Vemula has been murdered all over again with the Supreme Court and the Modi government betraying the quest for equity and justice in India's higher education institutions. Every attempt to end social discrimination, injustice and oppression has historically always been met in India with virulent social reaction from the powerful and the privileged, but this time round the government and the judiciary both shamefully sided with this social reaction using the manufactured outrage as an excuse and escape route to betray the very cause of social justice.

The first serious attempt to address the issue of caste and gender discrimination and injustice in campuses led to the adoption

of the 2012 UGC regulations. But the institutional murder of Rohith Vemula in January 2016 exposed the inadequacy of those regulations. Students and progressive citizens across India have since been demanding effective legislation in the name of Rohith Vemula to end caste discrimination in campuses. But the Modi government refused to pay any heed to that demand. On the contrary, students of JNU, HCU and other universities that took the lead in demanding justice for Rohith were subjected to a witch-hunt and demonisation by the Sangh brigade.

In May 2019, Maharashtra witnessed yet another institutional murder when a young Adivasi post-graduate medical student Dr. Payal Tadvi lost her life to caste discrimination.

The cry for a Rohith Act resonated with renewed urgency following Payal Tadvi's institutional murder. The mothers of Rohith

and Payal, Radhika Vemula and Abeda Tadvi, went to the Supreme Court demanding justice and discrimination-free campuses where no student, researcher or teacher from a marginalised social background has to die like Rohith or Payal. It was as a result of this legal battle and the continuing call for stricter anti-discrimination measures that the UGC eventually issued the equity regulations days before the tenth death anniversary of Rohith Vemula. Compared to the 2012 regulations, the new 2026 equity rules provided for a more specific and time-bound redressal process and structure and also took note of the discrimination suffered by the OBCs along with complaints made by individuals from SC/ST communities.

It took just a few days of upper caste outrage against the UGC's new equity rules for the Supreme Court to step in and stay the regulations. The same Supreme Court which had urged the UGC to draft stricter anti-discrimination regulations as recently as September 2025 now described the UGC focus on caste discrimination suffered by the SC-ST-OBC Bahujan communities as a regressive roadblock in India's journey towards a casteless social order! What was equally galling was the complete silence of the UGC and the government and their refusal to defend the regulations they had notified just a few days earlier, while congratulating themselves for taking this historic step! Meanwhile, the manufactured upper caste outrage on India's streets screamed about reverse discrimination and upper caste victimhood, even burnt Modi-Shah effigies to dramatise the backlash, and spewed all kinds of familiar casteist venom.

The regulations had their share of flaws including vagueness in defining discrimination and

weakness of the proposed structure and system of grievance redressal. But the claims of upper caste exclusion and vilification are clearly misplaced and the alleged threat of misuse of the new rules is deliberately exaggerated. The remedy is to improve the regulations to make them more effective and certainly not to accept discrimination and oppression as the natural order and protect the well-entrenched privileges of the dominant castes as their right. The very fact that, even more than seventy five years after the proclamation of the constitutional commitment to ending all kinds of discrimination and establishing social equality and ensuring social justice, the state still does not have the political will to enforce the spirit of the Constitution, shows us how the caste order continues to pull India back at every step.

The system of affirmative action in the form of reservation for historically oppressed and marginalised groups has periodically faced acute opposition in India. Attempts to ensure rights of women have also evoked patriarchal backlash since the colonial period when Rammohan Roy fought for the banning of widow immolation or Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule pioneered education for women and Dalits. The reaction has continued even after the attainment of independence and adoption of the Constitution. From the enactment of the Hindu Code Bill in the 1950s to the subsequent passage of anti-dowry or anti-rape legislations or the women's reservation bill, every progressive measure has run into stubborn Manuwadi opposition from well-entrenched caste hierarchy and patriarchy. The memory of the frenzied upper caste opposition to the Mandal Commission recommendations in 1990 and the BJP's withdrawal of support to VP Singh is still quite fresh.

The current juncture can clearly be seen as a continuation of this battle. In the Modi era, the BJP has managed to camouflage its essential Manuwadi identity by creating a pro-OBC image and perfecting the art of social engineering by sub-dividing castes, both SCs and OBCs, pitting one group against another and cobbling a larger social coalition around its core upper caste support base. The bracketing of OBCs with SCs and STs in the UGC regulations can potentially unsettle this social engineering blueprint. The Supreme Court stay on the UGC regulations has therefore come as a huge relief for the Sangh-BJP establishment. While the BJP sees this as an opportunity to wriggle out of the crisis, the upper caste lobby has smelled victory, and having stalled the UGC regulations it would now like to stop every quest for social equality and equitable representation in diverse spheres and push for reversal of the entire trajectory of affirmative action.

The movement for land rights offers an instructive analogy. Following the defeat of the Vajpayee government and its "India Shining" narrative, we had seen a renewed surge for land protection and land rights legislation in India. This was the phase when the Forest Rights and Rural Employment Guarantee Acts were passed, the Land Reform Commission set up by Nitish Kumar government submitted its report and the Land Acquisition Act was passed making consent and adequate compensation mandatory for any acquisition of land. The Bihar land reform report was however dumped by the government to appease the feudal lobby, and ever since its ascent to power the Modi government has been relentlessly trying to subvert and reverse these legislations. Even though

its attempt to scrap the Land Acquisition Act did not succeed and the pro-corporate farm laws too had to be repealed, the government has now unleashed an all-out bulldozer raj to grab as much land as possible.

While the Supreme Court stays the UGC regulations, the VBSA Bill 2025 proposes to replace the UGC itself, along with the All India Council for Technical Education and National Council for Teacher Education with a single centralised regulatory body. The entire domain of higher education is being subjected to unprecedented centralisation, privatisation and Hindutva ideological regimentation. And in a repeat of the assault on JNU, HCU and other progressive student movement campuses in the wake of the institutional murder of Rohith Vemula, once again JNU has come under attack at this juncture of churning among students for social justice, academic freedom, quality education and dignified employment. In a shocking crackdown on campus democracy, JNU administration has rusticated all four central office bearers of JNUSU - President Aditi, Vice President Gopika, General Secretary Sunil, and Joint Secretary Danish, along with former President Nitish, for protesting against the installation of a surveillance system in Dr. BR Ambedkar Central Library.

For seekers of substantive social justice, equitable representation and functional democracy, the stakes are clearly much higher than just UGC regulations. A powerful student upsurge at this juncture holds the key to the future of India's democracy and the road to the annihilation of caste, within the campuses of higher education and beyond. ■

Students Resist Sanghi Manuvadi Conspiracy Against Equity and Social Justice

On 13 February, a Sanghi-feudal-casteist attack unfolded at Delhi University during a protest by DU students demanding the implementation of UGC Equity Rules based on Rohith Act. What transpired that day exposed a pre-planned conspiracy by feudal-casteist forces against social justice, with deliberate attempts to demean and derail the movement. One of the tactics of this conspiracy, as witnessed earlier during protests at DU and Jantar Mantar, was the aggressive use of casteist slurs and abusive questioning by right-wing social media influencers masquerading as journalists, aimed at discrediting and humiliating the movement for social justice. Such incidents occurred in multiple protests, where certain right-wing social media influencers barged into the demonstrations for UGC equity rules and abusively asked protesters, "Pani nahi mila kya?" [Didn't you get water?] — a casteist remark that mocks and insults the historic struggles of Dalits and other marginalised communities who were denied access to common water sources and wells by upper castes.

Amid the attack, comrades of All India Students' Association (AISA) and other students organisations intervened and resisted the nefarious Sanghi conspiracy. Below is the statement from AISA detailing the sequence of events that transpired in Delhi University.

Casteist oppressors are crying victim because the oppressed are demanding dignity — the curious case of Ruchi Tiwari and violence

in Delhi University! Stop the casteist lies! Enact strengthened UGC Regulations against casteism!

All over the media and right wing ecosystems, yesterday's protest for implementation of the UGC Social Equity Regulations is being highlighted as an attack on upper caste people. A woman named Ruchi Tiwari, who has developed a notorious reputation of creating chaos and inciting violence in this social movement has taken a victim stage, while AISA activists Anjali and Neha are being targeted, getting rape and death threats constantly. It is nothing but a classic case of crying victim when the movement for dignity is taking centre stage in India society. We have seen this same gameplan during the Mandal agitations as well where casteist forces tried to play victim while spewing all forms of filth at people demanding dignity.

AISA appeals to all those concerned with peace, justice and democracy to look at hard facts and place the narrative where it must be placed: why does the demand for equality trigger Sanghi forces so much?

TIMELINE OF FACTS:

1. On 12th February, ABVP goons attacked Historian S Irfan Habib while speaking on how RSS history refuses to acknowledge caste system at Arts Faculty in Samta Utsav organised by AISA. Stones were hurled and dustbin filled with water was thrown in the public meeting. Despite this, the organisers and the speaker remained calm and continued the programme. The perpetrators from ABVP have been identified and their videos have been publicly

released by AISA on its handles and it was seen and condemned widely.

2. The stay on UGC Regulations has invoked widespread anger among the students and teachers from SC/ST/OBC communities. On 13th February, as part of the All India Vanchit Adhikar Divas, where over 100 campuses raised the demand for UGC Regulations, students of various organisations and movements held a public meeting at Arts Faculty. The meet was completely peaceful and organised.

3. During the public meeting, several miscreants tried to provoke, create chaos and incite violence. The protesters made sure that all of them were handed over to the police.

4. Ruchi Tiwari, who claims to be a journalist, but has constantly incited violence in protests for UGC Regulations came to the scene. She was accompanied by several men who hurled abuses at protesters. She immediately identified and started harassing Dalit journalist, Naveen. As Naveen has stated, AISA activists Anjali and Neha rushed to Naveen's defence to hand over Ruchi Tiwari to Delhi Police.

5. Two Videos have surfaced. In one, you can clearly see Ruchi Tiwari attacking Naveen and then hurling a punch at Anjali, who fell down. In another you can see Anjali and Neha holding Ruchi Tiwari trying to hand over her to the police. There is a reason why the second video is being circulated on mute by the castesit ecosystem. Because with audio, you can hear people saying, "maar ke bhaagi hai ye, isko police ke paas lekar jaana hai" [She attacked and tried to flee; take her to the police.]

6. Even after many disruptions by Ruchi Tiwari and her

likes, the public meeting concluded peacefully by 5PM.

7. By 6:30PM, Anjali along AISA activists went to Maurice Nagar Police station to file a complaint against Ruchi Tiwari and her companions. At the police station, a mob was already gathered who identified Anjali from the protest and rushed after her inside the police station. AISA activists were rushed into a small room by the Delhi Police while the mob of around 50 people hurled abuses, rape threats and murder threats to the activists. For around 4 hours, four AISA activists were taken hostage inside the police station by the hate mob.

8. Common students of Delhi and friends of the AISA activists who had been threatened inside the police station gathered outside Maurice Nagar Police Station. The police completely failed in controlling the mob of more than 200 casteist goons as can be seen in several videos that have been shared with the media. One can clearly see the mob raising slogans of 'goli maaro saalon ko', [shoot them] and 'brahmanvaad zindabaad' in a complete police presence. For hours, the mob continued its threats and intimidation at activists outside Maurice Nagar Police Station.

9. At around 12 midnight, the police was able to clear the mob and complaints by AISA activists were filed against Ruchi Tiwari and her mob. The Activist were released and Anjali was taken for officiating the medico-legal certificate.

Since then, all across the right wing social media and mainstream media, we have seen violent calls against women activists and casteist abuses against the movement for dignity.

Calls for equality will not be compromised in face of casteist anti-women slogans! AISA appeals to all justice loving people to call out hate and demand equality and dignity of marginalised groups in Universities! ■

JNU: Resist the Manuvadi Forces! Legacy of Ambedkar Must Prevail!

As part of the conspiracy against social justice, on the night of February 22, ABVP goons unleashed brutal violence on peacefully protesting JNU students. Bricks and iron rods were used to carry out the attack. The assault took place soon after the massive Samta (Equity) March held on campus in the evening, which demanded the resignation of the casteist JNU VC, opposed the rustication of JNUSU office-bearers and the former president, and called for the implementation of UGC Equity Rules.

The attack on JNU students by Manuvadi-Sanghi forces is part of a larger conspiracy unfolding across campuses, as seen in Delhi University and elsewhere in the country, where students are uniting and rising in support of implementing UGC Equity Rules on the lines of the Rohith Act.

The JNU Equity March strongly condemned the casteist and racist remarks of JNU VC Shanti Shri Dhulipudi Pandit, who dismissed the UGC regulations as "irrational" and "unnecessary" and said that Dalits and Blacks are "drugged" with "permanent victimhood," brazenly insulting the struggles of oppressed communities. Thousands of JNU students joined the march, rejecting the VC's blatant casteism and demanding her immediate resignation.

Unable to crush the resolve of JNU students, the Sangh Brigade resorted to its age-old tactic of violence. When hundreds of students gathered at the SL-SIS lawn, the ABVP unleashed brutal late-night attacks. Repeat offenders and well-known campus goons of the ABVP hurled bricks and stones at the encampment site, where the JNUSU office-bearers and the former JNUSU President were protesting their unjust rustication along with hundreds of students. ■



The Trump Administration Is Emerging as a Classic Combination of Imperialism and Fascism

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHRYA

While discussing the alarming ongoing rise of fascism in India, we often look for analogies with Hitler's Nazi Germany. There are of course quite a few striking similarities, but there is a fundamental difference that we cannot and must not miss. Unlike Germany, India is a former colony, and today's Indian fascists, whose predecessors collaborated with the British rulers during the colonial era, bolster their power with the authoritarianism and contempt for the people which is the colonial legacy, even as they simultaneously try to use the language of decolonization to advance their agenda. In fact, it is the US under Trump which is closest to Germany under Hitler today, offering us another classic case of the fusion of imperialism and fascism which characterized Nazi Germany. Several recent developments concerning the Trump Administration make it quite glaring.

After using tariffs and trade as a tool of aggression and backing Israel in its genocidal campaign in Gaza and assault on Iran, since the beginning of 2026 the Trump Administration has unleashed a series of overtly military threats and steps to reinforce the declining power of the US empire. In Venezuela we witnessed a novel kind of CIA operation. Following a failed coup attempt two decades ago to oust Hugo Chavez, this time the CIA abducted President Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores

while Trump openly talked about 'running Venezuela' and controlling Venezuela's enormous oil resources. As many as thirty two Cuban soldiers embraced martyrdom in defending Venezuela and the Trump Administration makes no secret of the fact that a regime change in Socialist Cuba remains its ultimate objective in Latin America and the Caribbean region.

Around the same time Trump also stepped up his aggressive rhetoric about the US plan to acquire Greenland which has been an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark. Earlier he had even made provocative remarks about turning Canada into the 51st state of the United States of America. Most atrocious has been the launch of a so-called Board of Peace by Trump at the World Economic Forum with the cooperation and participation of twenty countries (out of sixty countries invited by the Trump Administration) intended to ensure not just permanent US-Israel control over Gaza but to virtually replace the very architecture of the United Nations. While Trump launched the Board of Peace under his own lifelong chairmanship, his son-in-law Jared Kushner unveiled a \$30 billion masterplan to 'develop' Gaza by destroying the Palestinian population and culture and transforming Gaza into an artificially engineered corporate centre of tourism and entertainment. Meanwhile, the US has also indicated its readiness to

intervene in Iran using the mass upheaval in the country on the issues of livelihood and democracy as a pretext.

Ironically, the western world, which remained conspicuously silent over the US aggression against Venezuela and the abduction of President Maduro and by and large also kept mum or actively colluded in the continuing US-backed Israel-led genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and occupation of Palestinian territory, reacted quite strongly on the issue of Greenland. Canadian President Mark Carney took the lead to appeal to the 'middle powers' of Europe and beyond not to toe the US line with the illusion of 'buying safety', but to explore alternative options and assert strategic autonomy, and more or less the entire European Union and overwhelming majority of NATO rallied around Denmark and Greenland against the US attempt to grab Greenland by hook or by crook. The Board of Peace project and the Gaza masterplan have also not received any significant support beyond a select small group of US allies.

Alongside this imperialist expedition to reinforce America's financial and military domination, the Trump Administration has also unleashed a campaign of brutal state terror within the US to crush all dissent against Trump's anti-immigrant fascist and racist agenda. Minneapolis, the city which had been the epicenter of powerful 'Black Lives Matter' protests following the brutal killing of an African American citizen George Floyd has now been witness to a barbaric reign of state terror by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) agents and the Border Patrol wing of Homeland Security, including the killing of two US citizens who were taking part in peacefully defending

their neighbourhoods from ICE, Renee Good and Alex Pretti, in two successive cases of summary execution. America's imperialist foreign policy of financial and military aggression abroad has now found its fascist complement in its descent into a rogue police state at home. Eight decades after the defeat of Hitler, the US is now being haunted by the classic Nazi convergence of imperialism and fascism, inflected of course by America's own unique history of white supremacy and global empire.

In many ways, the Sangh-BJP fascist project in India dovetails into the fusion of imperialism and fascism in the US under Trump. The politics of communal polarisation which for long focused on fomenting a permanent state of war hysteria vis-a-vis Pakistan now revolves around the bogey of demographic threat from alleged infiltration from Bangladesh. In the realm of foreign policy, the Modi government follows a line of total acquiescence to the US-Israel axis even as Indian goods and services face punitive US tariffs and Indian citizens are being deported from the US to India in chains and handcuffs. The words used to justify state terror and persecution are also uncannily similar – the Modi government uses terms like urban Naxals, anti-nationals and andolanjeevi to silence dissenting voices while the Trump Administration describes victims of US state terror as 'professional agitators', 'domestic terrorists' and 'Leftwing insurrectionists'. While extending full support to anti-imperialist anti-fascist and anti-racist struggles in the US and other parts of the world, we need to sharpen our own struggles within India against fascism and imperialism. ■

Rubio's Imperialist Fantasies

▲ SIKANDAR

A dying man is no threat, but a dying empire is vicious. At its deathbed, the dying man can only repent and regret and do no harm, whereas a dying empire can cause wanton destruction. It is in this spirit of desperation that Marco Rubio, one of the vilest ogres of Trump's satanic coterie, has called for a revival of Western imperialism. He has done so after angering the vassalic Europeans over a host of issues. The speech delivered at the Munich Security Conference, an annual event on security matters (akin to the Davos World Economic Forum) comes in the wake of signs of a major rift within NATO over Trump's bid to annex Greenland, an autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark.

To cement the emerging cracks within NATO and address the growing anxieties and anger of Europe over Trump's aggressive tariff war and renewed hegemonic claim over the entire western hemisphere through a revived Monroe Doctrine (termed Donroe Doctrine by the Trump Administration), Rubio invokes the colonial era nostalgia and calls for a return to the unity of Christian faith and Western Civilization by recovering the erosion caused by 'godless communist revolutions and anti-colonial uprisings'. In other words, an open bid for a collusive and aggressive imperialist alliance against the rise of the Global South.

For most of the Global South, imperialism has never ended. It continues in the form of income deflation, military invasions, debt traps, surplus transfers, and forms of imperial-monopoly rents. Rubio is blind to these mechanisms. In his speech, he mentioned the need to go back to earlier forms of imperialism. He believes that Western imperialism served as the cradle of civilisation and marked an epoch of glorious economic and cultural triumph. Nothing else could be farther from the truth. The rise of Western imperialism, which officially began with the Portuguese capture of Ceuta in 1415, has been a history of violence, wanton loot, murder, slavery, war and genocide. The first major form of loot that enabled the West to purchase Asian goods was bullion looted from the Americas by the Portuguese and the Spanish. Bullion from the Americas was distributed by the Portuguese, Dutch, English, and French to Asia via the 'Cape of Storms', as the Muslims had long called it, but which was renamed as the 'Cape of Good Hope' by the Iberians after 1498, as it began to provide economic hope to feudal empires. The mining of bullion in huge quantities was made possible by the ruthless exploitation of Amerindian labour and later African slaves. Before Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492, the Americas hosted a native population of 60 million people. Europe's population at the time was 70-88 million spread over less than half the area. Within a century of European colonisation, 56 million Amerindians perished. On the corpses of the natives, the huge edifice of the 'first global economy' was built. 75 per cent of the English East India Company's (EEIC) total exports between 1660 and 1760 were in American bullion, while the equivalent figure for the Dutch Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC) was 87 per cent (1660-1720). Between 1699 and 1751, more than 90 per cent of British exports to China were in silver.

The next great tragedy that was caused by Western 'civilisation' was slavery. Slavery pre-dated western slave trade. The pre-Western

slave system was less malign than the Atlantic system, and, moreover, the slaves were often treated no differently from peasant cultivators, as they were, in fact, the functional equivalent of free tenants and hired workers in Europe. Under the Western trans-Atlantic slavery, racialization of Africans became the core norm of dehumanization which continues to exist even today. Between 1500 and 1900, some eighteen million slaves were transported from Africa. The labour of these slaves built the most commercially successful plantations in the Americas and the Caribbean. For example, in the mid-eighteenth century, the French colonial slave plantation in Martinique became one of the largest suppliers of coffee and sugar to Europe. In 1740, Martinique dispatched 6.5 million lb of coffee to Europe and began to drive the Arabian and Moroccan product from the markets of Western and Northern Europe. In 1743, 97.3 per cent of the West Indian coffee arriving at Bordeaux was dispatched from Martinique. Unlike other larger colonial slave plantations like Saint Domingue, whose size was 10,714 sq. miles, Martinique stood at 425 sq. miles. The great productivity of Martinique was made possible by tightening the leash of slavery and making sure that the slaves 'productivity' matched the industrial scale.

The third major gift of Western civilisation was the building of formal colonial empires. By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the world was partitioned among a handful of states, with about one-quarter of the globe's land surface distributed or redistributed as colonies among a half-dozen states. Britain increased its territories by some 4 million square miles; France by some 3.5 million; Germany by more than 1 million;

Belgium and Italy by just under 1 million each. The worst was Belgian imperialism in Congo. King Leopold II of Belgium claimed Congo as his private property and imposed a harsh labour regime that killed 5 to 8 million Congolese between 1890 and 1910 and left countless others maimed and disabled. The Belgian colonisation of Congo was also racialised to an extreme degree. The word 'macaque' (a species of monkey) was used by Belgians (and even children) as an epithet for the native Congolese.

The British Raj in India was equally ruthless in the age of Western imperialism. After scooping away 45 trillion dollars from India between 1765 and 1938, in 1943, Churchill created a man-made famine in Bengal that led to the death of over 3 million people. Even before the famine, the treatment of Bengal was particularly vicious. An official report written by Dr Bentley, director of the Public Health Department in Bengal for the year 1927-28, was unsparing in its details. A million and a half Bengalis were dying every year from malnutrition, curable diseases, and lack of health facilities. These included 750,000 children under fifteen years of age. A report read: It was a diet on which even rats could not live for more than about five weeks. Their vitality is now so undermined by an inadequate diet that they cannot stand the infection of foul diseases. Last year, 120,000 people died from cholera, 350,000 from malaria, 350,000 from tuberculosis ... On an average 55,000 newborn infants die every year of tetanus."

The impact of the glorious Western civilisation (read colonialism) on India was, in human terms, too traumatic and ghastly. At independence, the average life expectancy was barely 30 years. The poor obviously died much

younger. India faced acute food shortages, leading to near-famine conditions across many regions. Between 1946 and 1953, about 14 million tons of food grains worth Rs.10 billion had to be imported, seriously affecting India's planned development after independence. In 1951, 84 per cent of the Indian people, and 92 per cent of women, were illiterate. The legacy of colonialism was described by Rabindranath Tagore shortly before his death in 1941, in the following words:

The wheels of fate will someday compel the English to give up their Indian Empire. What kind of India will they leave behind, what stark misery? When the stream of their centuries' administration runs dry at last, what a waste of mud and filth they will leave behind them!

After the formal empires ended in the middle of the 20th century, American imperialism has steamrolled the countries in the Global South. Post 9/11, almost a million people were directly killed by US imperialism in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Pakistan between 2001 and 2023. Of these, more than 432,000 were civilians. The number of people wounded or ill as a result of the conflicts is far higher, as is the number of civilians who died "indirectly" from wars' destruction of economies, healthcare systems, infrastructure and the environment. An estimated 3.6-3.8 million people died indirectly in post-9/11 war zones, bringing the total death toll to at least 4.5-4.7 million and counting.

Rubio's imperialist fantasies are an attempt to turn Trump's gangster imperialism more palatable for the European Lilliputs. Rubio must be resisted; his fantasies should be nipped in the bud. ■

Cuba, The Indomitable Island

▲ LIVIA RODRÍGUEZ

*[W]e are prepared; each day we try to be better prepared; we will be better and better prepared. But one thing we can say; we are calm, we are secure, this little island will always be a revolutionary wall of granite and against it all conspiracies, all intrigues, all aggressions will be smashed to splinters. And high upon this revolutionary wall there will fly forever a banner with the legend: **Patria o Muerte! Venceremos!** [Homeland or Death, We Shall overcome!]*

- Fidel Castro, August 10, 1967 in Havana's Chaplin Theater



In Cuba today, a resistance movement exists that transcends purely economic concerns and has become a struggle for sovereign dignity against the hegemony of the North. The intensification of the US blockade, which has lasted for more than 65 years, under the White House narrative of a "national emergency," is nothing more than the latest mutation of a low-intensity war that seeks, in the words of President Miguel Díaz-Canel himself in his recent special address, to impose a "hegemonic ideology" through energy strangulation.

Faced with this situation, the Cuban government declared a strategy for the survival of its population that is not merely reactive. The island is implementing a Multisectoral Contingency Plan that prioritizes vital services (health, water supply, and basic

necessities) in the face of an unprecedented "naval pursuit" by Washington against its oil tankers. The adoption of exceptional measures, such as the temporary closure of non-essential activities, the reduction of the workweek, and the promotion of teleworking, are key pieces on a chessboard where Cuba's "War of the Entire People" now translates into extreme savings and energy sovereignty.

President of Cuba Díaz-Canel was emphatic: the leap from 3% to 10% in renewable energy generation in just one year is the concrete response to Trump's attempt to cut off supplies to Venezuela and Mexico. It's not just about surviving the blackout, but about breaking free from the dependency that the empire uses as a shackle.

In the diplomatic arena, the statements of Vice Minister

Carlos Fernández de Cossío have served to dismantle the White House's media maneuver. While Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio project an image of "negotiation" to their domestic audience, Cossío has been precise in denying the existence of any formal dialogue. The reality, according to sources at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Minrex), is an exchange of technical messages limited to security and migration issues, but with one insurmountable red line: the Cuban constitutional system is not up for discussion.

"Cuba is neither a colony nor a dominion of the United States," declared Cossío, emphasizing that any future dialogue requires the removal of Cuba from the infamous list of state sponsors of terrorism and the cessation of tariff threats against third countries.

From our perspective, what is happening on the island is a test of endurance for the new multipolar order. Mexico's offer of humanitarian aid and the support of the BRICS are not mere gestures of charity, but acts of self-defense against a sanctions model that, if successful in Cuba, would be applied by default against any nation that dares to exercise its national prerogative over its resources.

As the Cuban president rightly pointed out, the beauty of the Cuban Revolution today lies in its capacity to face the challenge, transforming the crisis into an engine of popular ingenuity and strategic unity.

(The author is from Cuba and an expert in political and social affairs of Latin America.) ■

ICE, State Violence and Resistance in the US

▲ TAMARAI



Minneapolis Murders and Resistance

During the civil rights movement, Dr. Martin Luther King, always made the connection between war abroad and injustice at home. Fast forward by more than 6 decades, the US administration is carrying out a two pronged attack against immigrants without legal status (undocumented) at home while continuing with its economic and military aggression abroad, most recently against Venezuela and Cuba. As in the 1960's when people's historic struggles won democratic rights for Blacks and the anti-war movement challenged US imperialism and war crimes in Vietnam, people across the country are at this time uniting to challenge state terrorism against immigrants. The 2 big agencies inflicting terror are the ICE and Border Patrol. The budget for ICE was 5.96 billion dollars in 2015, in the last year since Trump was elected for a 2nd term,

the budget has skyrocketed to a mind blowing 85 billion dollars (10 billion dollars base and 75 billion dollars supplement over 4 years).

We Have Always Fought ICE

Minneapolis and Saint Paul are twin cities in the Midwestern state of Minnesota. Winters can be brutal with temperatures dropping to -50 degrees centigrade. There are many interesting stories about people steeled in struggle against ice on the ground in these cities and helping their neighbours in the harsh climatic conditions, they also have learnt over time to effectively fight ICE.

According to the Migration Policy Institute, there are about 100,000 immigrants in the state who are undocumented. Many are from Somalia and Latin America. History was made in Minneapolis on January 23 this year when labour unions and community organizations organized a one day

national strike. Tens of thousands of individuals who were unaffiliated with any organizations too joined to protest the violence unleashed by the United States Customs and Border Protection and ICE agents (part of Department of Homeland Security/DHS). Renee Good, a 37 year old woman was killed on January 7 by an ICE agent and Alex Pretti, a registered nurse at the Veterans Administration hospital, was killed on January 24 by 2 agents with Border Patrol in Minneapolis. Both the victims were active in the immigrant rights movement that has mobilized tens of thousands of people against ICE in many cities and towns in the US. Renee Good was in the capacity of a volunteer observing a raid by ICE agents when she was killed. Alex Pretti was killed when he was trying to help someone pushed to the ground by Border Patrol agents. Their brutal killings by state terrorism was the immediate spark for the strike that shut down the city and there were solidarity actions around the country.

History of Indigenous and Union Resistance

Minneapolis belonged to the indigenous Dakota people prior to its expropriation by European settlers.

It is no stranger to militant movements. In 1968, American Indian Movement was founded initially as a response to police brutality and racial profiling. In 1934, the city witnessed a historic strike of Teamsters who organized truckers for better wages and conditions. Almost a century later in May 2020, George Floyd an unarmed African American man was murdered by the racist police in Minneapolis. This led to widespread mass protests in the US and many countries in the world. In 2021, the police officer responsible for the Floyd's murder

was sentenced to more than 20 year in prison. This was a result of extensive community organizing. Police accountability for violence in the US is rare. According to Mapping Police Violence, a non-profit organization, in 98.2% of killings by police in the country from 2013-2015, officers have not been even charged!

Minneapolis has become the epicentre of Trump administration's anti-immigrant attacks. On December 1st 2026, Operation Metro Surge campaign was launched in the twin cities with 3000 masked and armed agents flooding the city to arrest and capture undocumented immigrants. 2000 more agents were deployed on January 6, this led to daily protests. This 'surge' from the government in turn led to a surge in intense community mobilization. On January 23, "ICE Out of Minnesota: Day of Truth and Freedom" protest more than 75,000 people left school and work to march in the brutal winter conditions. Prominent unions who supported the strike with their members included Service Employees International Union (SEIU), American Teachers Federation (AFT), UNITE-HERE (representing hotel and restaurant workers), Communication Workers of America and United Food and Commercial Workers. Many small businesses also shut down in solidarity. Faith leaders joined in, demanded that Airlines like Delta stop deportation flights carrying immigrants out of the US.

Backbone of the Society, Attacked by Both Ruling Parties

Statistics from sources such as the Center for Migration Studies and American Immigration Council give important information about how important undocumented workers are for the US economy.



There are about 8.5 million undocumented workers. Nearly 14% of the construction industry workforce and 13% of agriculture workers are undocumented. In the mining, retail, manufacturing, transportation, and hospitality sectors, the undocumented workers range from 3.6% to 8%.

The wealth creators in the country have been subjected to terror by the Republican and Democratic parties both representing the ruling class. Obama's presidency led to deportation of 2 million undocumented immigrants. Hilary Clinton supported many draconian anti immigrant policies, including Secure Fence Act of 2006, which authorized building walls across the borders.

Since Trump became President in January 2025, there has been an escalation of attacks against undocumented immigrants with federal agents showing extreme brutality leading to daylight abductions from workplaces, bus-stops, shopping centres and other public spaces. As of mid January 2026, there are 73,000 immigrants in detention centres, more than 600 to 700,000 people have been deported. Conditions in ICE detention centres are despicable with 32 deaths in 2025. Marshall

Project analysis found that at least 3800 children were taken into detention in the last year and faced terrible conditions.

Resistance and Victories

In addition to the impressive one day shutdown of schools and businesses in Minneapolis in January 2023, it is the daily organized resistance of people in Minneapolis and the rest of the country that has exposed the cruelty of the rulers and achieved some important victories. On February 12, the Trump administration said they would end Operation Metro Surge - the occupation of Minneapolis by ICE. This is indeed a victory.

Community activist groups have prepared handouts with the help of organizations like American Civil Liberties Union and other legal advisors called "Know Your Rights" translated into many languages including Indian languages. People have been advised not to open their doors to ICE agents unless there is a search warrant from a judge. In Boston and many other cities, organizers accompany immigrants to court, have developed a network of lawyers who work pro bono, have collected financial aid for families whose wage earners

have been deported. They patrol neighbourhoods and report ICE activity and are actively taking pictures and video recordings when ICE agents arrest "undocumented" immigrants.

In Chicago and Los Angeles, both cities where immigrants have built the cities, there have been serious attacks from ICE agents with abductions, tear gassing, shooting with rubber bullets leading to one death. Community organizers have distributed whistles to alert their neighbours when they sight ICE agents. Street Vendors Association has come to the support of vendors who are too scared to be out on the streets. Organizers have targeted hotels like Hilton which house ICE agents with loud noise and music to disrupt their sleep. These 'noise demonstrations' have led to some hotels now agreeing to cancel ICE agents reservations.

In the Boston area, activists have picketed in front of Citizens Bank a private bank which is financing 2 CoreCivic and The Geo Group. Both these venal private companies are raking in huge profits from detaining immigrants in inhumane conditions. Activists are calling for a total boycott of the bank. CoreCivic won contracts of 2 billion dollars for running detention centres and Geo Group close to 700 million dollars worth of contracts. Both together have close to 90% of the detained immigrants in their prisons. Successful campaigns have included boycott and picketing of Avelo Airlines. Avelo Airlines is going to end its deportation flights for DHS.

National Nurses United (NNU) representing more than 200,000 nurses in the country held a day of action on February 19, they concluded that "ICE and

border patrol are violent, cruel, lawless, and racist organizations that the Trump administration is using as a paramilitary force to ultimately quash the American people's opposition to his fascist takeover of our democracy. Our hospital CEOs are at fault, too, for enabling Trump by doing nothing. We all need to wake up and shut ICE down now before it is too late." They are demanding that Congress abolish ICE.

The militant protests and rallies all over the country against ICE and community ICE watch organizing efforts have put a lot of pressure on liberal democrats in the Congress. On January 21, 2026, two women in the Congress Ramirez and Clarke introduced Melt ICE Act to stop detaining and monitoring immigrants by ending the funding to DHS. There is a growing demand to abolish the savage DHS as well.

David Huerta, a labour leader from SEIU was arrested in June, 2025 and spent 3 days in prison when he was in a rally supporting garment workers who were terrorized and detained by ICE in Los Angeles, California. He said to the Intercept magazine "For many of us, the immigration crackdown has deepened our commitment to this sense of worker justice. How do we broaden the labour movement to fight on behalf of those who are most vulnerable?"

Jaribu Hill, a dynamic African American woman human rights lawyer and Director of the Mississippi Workers Center has worked with unions.... "We have to talk about racism," "The union focuses on the contract, but skin colour issues are still on the table...." Organizing a multi-racial workforce means recognizing the divisions between African-Americans and immigrants,... "working across our divides." This quote from her is from some

years ago, but this continues to be very pertinent to unions and socialist parties today while they organize the multinational working class against state terrorism.

What Next?

Union members, socialist organizations and anti-war activists challenging the genocide of Palestinians, US attacks against Venezuela, Cuba, ongoing threats against Iran etc are inspired by the courage and resilience of the Indian working class and farmers. ML Update reported that the joint platform of Central Trade Unions and independent sectoral federations, along with the Samyukta Kisan Morcha and agricultural workers' unions, organized massive strike actions in over 600 districts across the country. More than 300 million workers and farmers showed resistance on February 12th 2026 against the Labor codes and anti-farmer policies.

There are ongoing discussions in the US about a general strike, with some unions calling for a general strike in May 2028 when many contracts will expire. Other organizations are discussing the necessity for a general strike sooner than 2028 while they recognize that sustained organizing of many sections of the society is needed for a general strike to happen.

The US ruling class will continue its policies of divide, rule and plunder. The struggles on the ground against ICE and imperialism will have to go hand in hand. Lenin's words written more than 100 years ago continues to be of utmost importance today - "Imperialism is leading to annexation, to increased national oppression and consequently, also to increased resistance." ■

Bangladesh General Elections: Trends and Challenges

In August 2024, Bangladesh had witnessed a major political shift with the ouster of the Awami League government led by Sheikh Hasina following a popular upheaval now known as the July Uprising. The first general election since that rupture two years ago has now produced a new government led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. The elections were by and large peaceful even though there were major episodes of pre-poll political violence targeted mostly against the deposed Awami League. In December 2025, the assassination of Osman Hadi, a prominent face of the July Uprising, triggered a wave of violence and vandalism, including a brutal lynching of a minority community worker and attacks on prominent media houses and progressive cultural centres.

The previous two parliamentary elections in Bangladesh were widely believed and exposed to have been rigged. The February 12 elections have not attracted such accusations. But given the fact that the erstwhile ruling party Awami League now stands forbidden from contesting, the elections were certainly not fair enough. The absence of the Awami League probably also meant a decline in voter turnout. Voting in Bangladesh happened through the ballot, something more and more people in India have been demanding quite persistently for quite some time now, and the results were declared within one day. The conduct of the electoral exercise was thus quite credible and efficient enough.

With the Awami League out of the electoral scene, the electoral contest was primarily between the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and an 11-party alliance led by the

hardliner Jamaat-e-Islami. The National Citizen Party, the popular Gen Z platform to have emerged from the July Uprising, chose to join the Jamaat-led alliance leading to a split in the party with some leaders contesting independently. The Left in Bangladesh adopted two different approaches, one section entered into a partial understanding with the BNP, while another section contested as an independent bloc. According to the final outcome, declared for 297 out of 300 seats, BNP has scored an emphatic majority with 212 seats while the Jamaat-led alliance has emerged as the main opposition with 77 seats, with the Jamaat winning 68 seats and the NCP six. The Left stream won one seat in alliance with the BNP.

Voters of Bangladesh not only chose their new parliament, they also took part in a referendum on the July Charter, a charter of proposed institutional reforms in Bangladesh. The July Charter comprising over 80 reform proposals had been signed by twenty-four political parties and the interim government on 17 October 2025 and in the referendum it was passed with 60 percent support. Among other things, the Charter proposes a maximum of two terms for the Prime Minister, creation of an upper legislative chamber, and the holding of elections under the supervision of a caretaker government. It also provides for enhanced representation of women and expansion of fundamental rights for citizens. It now remains to be seen if the charter is actually implemented as scheduled over the next couple of years.

The emergence of the Jamaat as the main opposition party in Bangladesh is surely a disturbing

political sign. This is an organisation which had sided with Pakistan and opposed the Bangladesh liberation war. It espouses a misogynist world view which considers women not fit for political and administrative roles and it did not field a single woman candidate. In many ways it is akin to the rise of the Sangh brigade in India despite the RSS betrayal during India's anti-colonial freedom movement. But Bangladesh is clearly alive to this danger and if the BNP has secured a landslide majority, it should also be seen as a vote against the Jamaat, at least to keep it out of power. The alliance of the NCP with the Jamaat has however helped the latter acquire greater legitimacy and political currency in today's Bangladesh. Sooner rather than later, secular democratic forces of Bangladesh will have to draw a stronger line of demarcation with the Jamaat camp and find effective ways of advancing Bangladesh according to the democratic vision of the 1971 liberation war.

Relations with India remain a key concern for Bangladesh. India's support to prop up an increasingly unpopular Hasina government before the July Uprising and the asylum granted to her since her ouster on 5 August 2024 have been a major irritant as has been the imposition of Adani projects and India's economic interests on Bangladesh. Apart from the precarious state of minority rights in India and Bangladesh, the constant invocation of the bogey of the 'Bangladeshi infiltrator' by the Modi government and the BJP only make matters worse. Of late the BJP has turned the issue of alleged infiltration from Bangladesh the party's central electoral plank in not just the Indian states bordering Bangladesh like West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura but even in Jharkhand and Bihar which do not share any border with Bangladesh. Bengali-speaking migrant workers across India are liable to be dubbed Bangladeshi infiltrators and subjected to systematic

harassment and violence.

Beyond the issue of Indo-Bangla relations, there is the larger question of the international situation and the increasingly aggressive design of American domination in the Trump era. As the unfolding details of Indo-US trade deal make it clearer with every passing day, the US is desperate to not just capture the Indian market, but India's 'complete alignment' with the US 'national security strategy' and policies of global American domination. Simultaneously the Trump Administration is busy playing 'divide and rule' in South Asia and fuelling rivalries between India and Bangladesh or Pakistan and India in the name of competitive trade deals. Against this backdrop, secular democratic forces of India can surely feel relieved with the peaceful conduct of the elections in Bangladesh. As a people fighting for justice and democracy in our own country and desiring peace, cooperation and friendship in South Asia, we sincerely wish the people of Bangladesh greater strength and success in shaping their future as a stable democratic republic. ■

Bangladesh in Transition: Understanding Election in the Aftermath of the July Uprising

▲ SOHUL AHMED

Bangladesh stands at a crucial juncture in its political transition following the July Uprising. The country witnessed its national election almost one and a half years after the ousting of Sheikh Hasina's autocratic regime – an election widely regarded as one of the most consequential moments in the country's political history. Our characterization of this election as "crucial" or even "historic" has deep roots in Bangladesh's recent electoral experience.

This is the first genuinely competitive election after 2008. Although three national elections were held under Hasina's rule, all remain highly controversial and deeply flawed. Before the 2014 election, the then-ruling Awami League (AL) amended the constitution and abolished the caretaker government system, fundamentally altering the electoral process. Consequently, the 2014 election was boycotted by major opposition parties. While most political parties participated in the 2018 election, it was widely criticized for massive irregularities, including allegations that a significant portion of votes had been cast the night before polling day. These experiences once again led opposition parties to boycott the 2024 election. As a result, an entire generation born after the 1990s has effectively been deprived of exercising its voting rights in three consecutive elections. For many young citizens, the 2026 election was the first meaningful opportunity to cast their vote.

The AL regime has often been characterized by scholars as autocratic or hybrid in nature. A defining feature of Bangladesh's democratic backsliding was the erosion of electoral integrity, which effectively disenfranchised citizens. The absence of credible mechanisms for peaceful transfer of power ultimately created conditions that culminated in the July Uprising, whereby the ruler was removed from office by force rather than through ballots. Yet this crisis of power transfer is not entirely new. Since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has struggled to institutionalize a stable mechanism of peaceful democratic alternation in power since once in office, incumbents have proven difficult to remove through purely electoral means. In fact, the people of Bangladesh have never been able to participate in two consecutive peaceful and credible transfers of power through elections. This political backdrop renders the 2026 election both crucial and profoundly historic.

Referendum: Why and How?

During Sheikh Hasina's rule, political activists, academics, and civil society organizations had repeatedly criticized the regime, seeking to identify the structural roots of Bangladesh's democratic crisis. A central question shaped much of this debate: why did democracy in Bangladesh fall into crisis again after a popular movement toppled military ruler Hussain Muhammad Ershad in the 1990?

This inquiry gradually shifted the focus towards what many described as a structural crisis of the state, particularly the 'Constitution'. Although the Constitution adopted in 1972 promised a democratic republic, its functional design was seen as highly centralized and executive-dominant. It concentrates extensive power in the hands of the Prime Minister. Consequently, during the anti-autocracy and anti-Hasina struggle, 'constitutional and institutional reform' became a primary demand. It is argued that without structural reform, elections would merely reproduce the same cycle of authoritarian consolidation.

Following Hasina's fall, the discourse of reform quickly gained public traction. Since the recurring crisis stemmed largely from the absence of a credible and peaceful mechanism for the transfer of power, institutionalizing such a mechanism became central

to the post-uprising political agenda. Slogans increasingly emphasized systemic transformation. Drawing on both pre-July activism and post-July popular demands, the interim government established several reform commissions. These commissions addressed key sectors, including Public Administration, Anti-Corruption, the Judiciary, the Police, the Constitution, the Electoral System, Local Government, Women's Affairs, Labour Rights, Mass Media, and Healthcare. Each commission produced reports identifying structural limitations, proposing recommendations for reform. Based on the reports of the Constitutional, Public Administration, Police, Electoral System, Judicial, and Anti-Corruption Reform Commissions, a National Consensus Commission was formed to review and consolidate these recommendations. The Commission initiated a long dialogue process in three phases, engaging political parties and a broad range of stakeholders to develop a consensus-based framework for political and administrative reforms.

After extensive dialogue and debate, a consensus was reached on major issues, though with recorded notes of dissent in certain areas. On the basis of this consensual framework, a July Charter was drafted and signed by 33 political parties. By signing the charter, these parties committed themselves to implementing the agreed reforms in Parliament upon/if securing representation. This is particularly significant because, for the first time in Bangladesh's history, the political actors engaged in direct dialogue and negotiations to resolve a deep structural crisis without any foreign mediator. The proposed referendum is fundamentally about this consensus-building process. It seeks public approval for the reform framework agreed upon by political parties. Citizens are being asked whether they endorse the consensus and authorize elected

representatives to implement the reforms. Under this arrangement, the next Parliament will assume a dual role. First, it will function as a regular legislative body. Second, the Parliament will simultaneously operate as a Constitutional Reform Council, mandated to implement the required constitutional reforms within 180 days.

The present election, while marking a return to a competitive electoral system in Bangladesh after years of contested or boycotted polls, also it aspires to establish a sustainable political settlement by institutionalizing structural reform. The referendum mechanism seeks a transformation of the constitutional and institutional framework, aimed at making the political system more accountable, balanced, and people-centred.

The Changed Political Landscape

The election therefore unfolded within the dramatically transformed political landscape, reshaped by the July Uprising. For decades, Bangladesh's political arena was defined by a binary between the AL and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). From the restoration of parliamentary democracy in the 1990s until 2008, these two parties alternated in government. The Jatiya Party (JaPa) and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) were also significant actors, typically aligning themselves with one of the two major parties.

The AL-led camp was generally characterized as centre-left, while the BNP-led camp was considered centre-right. JI's controversial role in 1971 made the public sphere highly polarized and morally contested. This structured polarization between two identifiable blocs defined Bangladesh's political competition for nearly two decades. However, after 2008, this binary equilibrium was gradually dismantled. The AL systematically suppressed opposition forces, marginalizing BNP

and other parties, and effectively consolidating a dominant-party system for nearly 15 years. The July Uprising erupted in this context. What began as a movement demanding reform of the government job quota system escalated into a spontaneous mass uprising after state-sponsored violence reportedly killed more than a thousand people during July–August. Amid the turmoil, Sheikh Hasina fled the country, and many top Awami League leaders also left. Subsequently, a fact-finding mission by the United Nations identified evidence of crimes against humanity during the July violence and pointed to the role of the ruling party in it. Victims of enforced disappearance were reportedly released following the regime's collapse, intensifying public demands for justice.

In this charged environment, a strong popular sentiment emerged demanding accountability of the former ruling party. Many argue that it would be unjust for a party accused of involvement in mass killings to resume normal political activities before facing trial. As a result, the AL's participation in reform dialogues and electoral politics has become highly contested, effectively excluding it from the current political process. This absence has fundamentally reshaped the political landscape. Former allies such as the BNP and JI are no longer aligned in the same configuration. The BNP remains the largest and most organizationally established party. Meanwhile, student leaders from the uprising have formed a new political platform, the National Citizen Party (NCP), presenting themselves as a potential 'third force' and advocating a 'new settlement' in politics. Although the NCP describes itself as centrist, its strategic electoral alliance with JI and other Islamist parties has positioned it closer to the centre-right in practical terms.

At the same time, the BNP appears to be recalibrating its position toward the centre-left, at least

rhetorically. Its public stance against mob violence and its emphasis on institutional stability have made it more acceptable to segments of the urban middle class and civil society. In the absence of the AL, Bangladesh is thus witnessing a reconfiguration of political alignments. On one side stands a repositioned BNP, increasingly occupying centre-left political space; on the other, a centre-right bloc shaped by JI and the NCP. Despite these shifts, the BNP remains the most popular and organizationally dominant party in the current landscape.

'Results' in a Reshaped Political Landscape

The BNP secured a massive landslide victory in the election, and the people endorsed the referendum with a clear 'yes'. BNP and its allies won 212 seats, JI and its allies secured 77 seats, Islami Andolan Bangladesh won 1 seat, and others obtained 7 seats. Of the 77 seats won by JI and its allies, the NCP secured 6 seats. Meanwhile, approximately 68.1% of voters supported the referendum, indicating broad public endorsement of the proposed reforms outlined in the July Charter.

The scale of the BNP's victory is not entirely surprising given the political landscape. As the largest and most experienced party, BNP had been widely projected by major surveys over the past year to win the election. The rise of far-right tendencies among certain fanatic groups – including incidents such as vandalizing religious shrines and attacks on media outlets like Prothom Alo and The Daily Star – alongside visible increase in mob violence, reshaped voter perceptions. In this environment, BNP's comparatively moderate rhetoric and its positioning against mob violence made it a more reassuring choice for segments of the middle class and civil society.

However, the rise of JI – winning 68 seats on its own (77 with allies) – drew even more attention

than the BNP's landslide victory. Several factors help explain this development. First, the absence of the AL from the political arena created electoral space for it, since Bangladesh has a large segment of floating voters, and the removal of one major pole of competition inevitably redistributed votes. Second, JI performed particularly well in Khulna and Rangpur divisions. Rangpur had historically been a stronghold of the JaPa, but with JaPa's organizational decline in the region, JI successfully occupied that political space. Pre-election surveys had already indicated that JI would perform strongly in the Rangpur belt. Third, JI benefited from alliances with other Islamist parties, support from segments of young voters associated with the NCP, and internal conflicts within BNP. In several constituencies, rebel BNP candidates divided the vote, indirectly benefiting JI. Fourth, after August 5, sections of BNP's grassroots activists became embroiled in allegations of crimes such as murder, extortion, and local-level corruption. In many violent incidents, BNP-affiliated individuals were reportedly involved. These developments alienated some voters, who then shifted toward JI in the absence of alternative options. Fifth, many of the seats won by JI were located in border areas. It can be argued that issues such as border killings and anti-India sentiment – narratives that JI has actively mobilized – resonated strongly in these constituencies.

However, JI failed to make significant gains in regions known for major religious shrines, such as Sylhet or Chittagong. Incidents of shrine vandalism by far-right Islamist groups over the past one and a half years likely played a role in limiting its appeal there. Moreover, during the campaign, JI's public stance on certain women-related issues seems to have alienated segments of female voters, indirectly benefiting BNP. Taken together, the landslide victory

of BNP and the simultaneous rise of JI should not be interpreted purely through an ideological lens. Rather, the results reflect the dynamics of the current political situation and the pragmatic calculations of Bangladesh's traditionally fluid electorate.

Two additional issues also deserve attention. First, the online sphere was overwhelmingly dominated by activists and supporters of Bangladesh JI. Major YouTube influencers – operating from abroad – openly supported JI and amplified its narratives through coordinated propaganda efforts. Their digital activism, combined with the earlier electoral success of JI's student wing in university campus elections, created a strong perception that JI was poised to secure a far larger parliamentary presence. The actual election results suggest, however, that the influence of this online campaign was far more limited in real-world electoral politics.

Second, there had been sustained propaganda from the AL camp claiming that, in its absence, Islamist forces – particularly JI – would come to power. This narrative was closely linked to the broader insinuation that the July Uprising itself was fundamentally pro-Islamist. During its years in office, AL repeatedly claimed that it alone could prevent an Islamist takeover. This became its justification for autocratic consolidation of power. The electoral outcome challenges both that narrative and the charge that the July Uprising was inherently pro-Islamist. The outcome reflects a more complex political reality.

If we turn to the NCP, the student-led party secured 6 seats, largely with the active support of JI. However, internal divisions within the party – particularly over the decision to join the JI alliance – clearly weakened it. The split over this strategic choice undermined its cohesion at a critical moment. Moreover, the NCP did not have sufficient time to build a strong

organization capable of converting its supporters into committed voters. At the same time, its ambiguous stance on mob violence, relative silence on the vandalism of religious shrines, and participation in rallies widely perceived as anti-women contributed to a negative public image. Although the alliance with JI enabled the party to secure six seats, it also damaged its centrist claim and reinforced the perception that it was leaning toward the right.

Remarkably, after many years, Bangladesh witnessed an election with almost zero casualties – a stark contrast to past polls, where election days were marred by violence. No attacks on minority communities occurred following the vote. This is a historic and unprecedented moment, given that electoral violence against minorities had been a recurring feature of previous elections.

The ‘Left’ – Visible in Protest, Marginal in Ballot

The leftist or pro-left sphere in Bangladesh is broadly divided into two groups: partisan activists affiliated to formal left parties, and non-partisan or independent left-leaning activists. There are significant differences between these two camps in terms of strategy, positioning, and public perception. A few left parties aligned themselves with the dominant narrative of the AL during the previous regime. As a result, they are widely perceived as having justified or normalized AL’s governance practices and historical framing.

At the same time, another section of party and non-party left activists remained consistently active in protest politics throughout the last regime. They played visible roles in major movements, including the Save Sundarbans Movement, the Quota Reform Movement, the Road Safety Movement, and ultimately the July Uprising. Labor rights protests were also a regular part of their activism. In particular, the student wings of

leftist parties were highly active in anti-Hasina protests for a long time. In some cases, they even took positions that differed from those of their parent organizations. However, the left parties did not sufficiently engage with the longer-term agenda of institutional and constitutional reform that later became central to post-July politics. After July, sections of the left faced backlash from pro-rightwing groups, largely due to the earlier alignment of few left parties with AL. Nevertheless, both party and non-party left activists continued to take strong public positions against mob violence, vandalism of religious shrines, and other forms of injustice. They remained visible and vocal in street politics.

During the election, several well-known leftist leaders contested in different constituencies. Some pro-left figures aligned with the BNP, while others ran independently. However, left parties failed to build a broader electoral alliance. In several constituencies, multiple left candidates competed against one another, fragmenting their vote base. Due to organizational weaknesses and lack of preparation for electoral politics, they all suffered heavy defeats.

After July, when the student-led NCP emerged, it initially attracted activists from across ideological backgrounds, including many from the left. However, many leftists gradually distanced themselves from the party. Younger activists who identify as “neo-left” often feel disconnected from traditional left parties, which they view as outdated in rhetoric and political imagination. In this context, new initiatives have begun to take shape. One such effort is the formation of a platform called Network for People’s Action (NPA), which seeks to develop a pro-democratic, social-democratic political alternative. At present, left politics in Bangladesh stands at a critical juncture. Traditional left parties appear to be fading, struggling

to connect with the aspirations and language of the younger generation. It can be said, in the words of Antonio Gramsci, that the old is dying and the new has yet to be born. While leftists remain active in street movements and civil society, their presence in electoral politics remains weak and fragmented.

The Road Ahead

The election 2026 is a critical step in the democratic transition process that started after the July Uprising. However, significant challenges, like the implementation of the July Charter, remain. Despite broad consensus among political parties on key provisions and methods of implementation, translating this consensus into concrete action remains uncertain. The struggle over the Charter’s reform is likely to extend beyond Parliament and into public spaces. Opposition groups may allege violations, while the government may invoke its popular mandate to justify its approach. The upcoming 180-day implementation period will serve as a litmus test: it will determine whether Bangladesh’s democratic transition proceeds smoothly or risks slipping back into cycles of conflict and political instability.

The road ahead remains long and complex. Bangladesh’s democracy will continue to face serious tests, including the unresolved question of the Awami League’s political role – a potential flashpoint for future conflict. The proposed institutional reforms have yet to be realized. Yet there is reason for cautious optimism: if Bangladesh can consolidate peaceful power transfer and ensure that the right to vote is fully respected and exercised over the long term, it could fundamentally reshape the country’s political trajectory.

(The Author is a researcher, writer, and activist based in Dhaka, Bangladesh.)

Beti Bachao Nyay March: Bihar Rises Against Growing Violence on Women

Thousands of students and women took part in a Bihar Assembly march organised by AISA and AIPWA on February 10, demanding justice for the NEET victim and other cases of violence against girls in Bihar. The march, held under the banner of the Beti Bachao Nyay March (Save Daughters – Justice March), began at noon from Gandhi Maidan Gate No. 10 but was stopped at JP Golambar by heavy police barricading.

The demonstrators, who were moving peacefully to submit their memorandum to the Chief Minister, were met with force. Police resorted to pushing and a lathi-charge, injuring several women on their hands, heads, and legs. Hundreds were dispersed, and the main march was initially prevented from reaching Dakbungalow Chowk.

Despite the repression, the marchers broke through the barricades at JP Golambar and regrouped at Dakbungalow Chowk, where the police had again erected barriers. The demonstrators demanded a meeting with the Chief Minister and justice for Bihar's daughters, including the NEET student. They later held a public assembly at the chowk.

Addressing the assembly, AIPWA General Secretary Meena Tiwari said that crimes against women and girls are increasing in Bihar. The NEET victim case, the six-year-old girl in Darbhanga, and incidents in Buxar reflect the state government's failure to protect women. Instead of taking action against perpetrators, the administration is attacking women protesters.

CPI(ML) MLC Shashi Yadav criticised the government for attempting to suppress the issue both inside the Assembly and on the streets, humiliating women leaders and repressing peaceful protesters. Meena Tiwari demanded that the NEET student case be investigated under Supreme Court supervision, stating that a CBI probe alone cannot ensure justice.

The memorandum submitted to the Chief Minister included the following demands:

1. The NEET student case must be investigated under Supreme Court supervision, not solely by the CBI.
2. The Anamika case must be independently re-investigated, and strict action taken against guilty officials.
3. The Darbhanga (Bela) rape-murder case should be fast-tracked in court, and the perpetrators punished severely.
4. A state-level inquiry into the post-election rise in violence against women and girls.
5. An immediate security audit of all private hostels, student accommodations, and coaching centres.
6. Punitive action against police personnel and officials negligent in cases of crimes against women and children.
7. Ensuring that victims' families are provided a safe environment along with legal and financial support.

The memorandum warned that any failure by the government to take immediate, impartial, and

transparent action would amount to moral and political responsibility for the ongoing violence against women and girls.

The Assembly march was part of a seven-day Beti Bachao Nyay Yatra that began from Jehanabad on February 4 and witnessed participation by thousands of women and students. Prior to the march, a Jan Sunwai (public hearing) was held on February 3 at Buddha Smriti Park in Patna. At the hearing, a charge sheet was presented against the Bihar government, accusing it of complete failure in ensuring the safety of girls and of protecting criminals involved in crimes against women.

Passing through various areas of Jehanabad, the yatra travelled across regions of Nalanda, Nawada, Gaya, Arwal, and rural Patna before reaching the state capital. During the course of the yatra, more than 100 street-corner meetings were organised, with large participation from women, girl students, youth, and the general public.

Delegations met with the families of several rape survivors, bringing their pain, struggles, and demands for justice to the forefront. Besides the Patiyawan case, the yatra also examined the case of the NEET student from Aurangabad who died under suspicious circumstances. Leaders met the bereaved family and demanded an impartial investigation and strict punishment for those responsible.

The AIPWA–AISA march stood as a collective assertion for the dignity, safety, and justice of Bihar's daughters. ■

55-day Strike by ASHA Workers in Uttar Pradesh

Vijay Vidrohi

The Uttar Pradesh ASHA Workers Union waged a valiant struggle for their long-pending demands forcing the government to come to the negotiations. The ASHA union had held a massive protest sit-in on October 6, 2025, at Lucknow, and submitted a 15-point charter of demands to the state government along with the warning that they would be forced to launch a statewide indefinite strike from December 15 2025 if the demands were not met.

The charter included demands to 1. Recognise ASHAs government employees in accordance with the recommendations of the 45th Indian Labour Conference, and minimum wages should be implemented in place of incentives. 2. They should be made eligible for the EPF and ESI. 3. Payment of gratuity upon retirement be ensured. 4. Schemes for their health insurance of 4-10 lakh rupees and life insurance of 50 lakh rupees. 5. To set defined working hours with better working conditions. 6. The basic honorarium for ASHA workers at 21,000 rupees and for ASHA facilitators 28,000 rupees until the minimum wage is implemented and extra incentives for tasks other than basic maternal safety work. 7. Travel allowance or provision of scooters for daily commute. 8. Good quality 5G mobile phones and SIM cards for fast internet service. Also, remuneration for work performed as data operators. 9. A lump sum payment of ₹225.2 crore should be made for the contribution made towards the creation of the Golden Ayushman Card and Aabha Identity Card, at the rate of ₹15 per card, as in Bihar, until September 2025. 10. The families of Asha workers and Asha facilitators who died in various accidents from 2018 to 2025

should be paid the permissible sum assured of ₹2 lakh, and ₹10 lakh as compensation to their dependents. 11. In case of deaths of pregnant women who turn to private hospitals, the private hospitals and guardians should be held accountable for this situation, and all cases filed against innocent ASHA workers facing criminal charges should be withdrawn. 12. Immediate payment of all outstanding incentives, ex-gratia payments pending from 2019 to 2024, along with payment of any other amounts pending thereof. 13. Formation of a monitoring committee to oversee the forwarding of vouchers and prompt redressal of complaints be guaranteed, in order to stop the rampant bribery and extortion from ASHAs at community health centers. 14. A monitoring committee to stop the regular extortion of money in the name of sanctioning payments and a cell should be established to expedite redressal of complaints in this regard. As per an estimate by the ASHA union no less than over a 1,000 crore rupees might be extorted from nearly 2 lakh ASHA workers throughout the state in a year. 15. GSCASH should be formed in all districts to prevent sexual harassment, and ASHAs and Sanginis should be given representation on these committees.

The Uttar Pradesh government tried every repressive tactic against this strike, first by ignoring the ASHAs' memorandum and issuing warnings, and then, two days before the strike on 15 December, the Yogi government invoked the ESMA. It cleared its intentions of not going for the negotiations. However, ASHA union called these attempts repressive and undemocratic moves and decided to resist it. They began an indefinite strike starting December 15, expressing their resolve to resist any repression by

the autocratic state government.

On the very first day of the strike, more than one lakh ASHA workers across the state joined the strike. With protests at district headquarters and health centers, the striking ASHA workers sought to transform it into a mass movement.

The Union announced a march to the state Legislative Assembly for December 23, 2025. The administration tried to thwart this mobilisation, and many Union district presidents and senior officials in 17 districts, including Moradabad, Rae Bareilly, Unnao, Bareilly and Kushinagar, were placed under house arrest. Despite this, thousands of ASHA workers reached Lucknow.

The government then offered to hold talks. The Chief Minister's personal secretary and other senior officials sat for negotiations and agreed to discuss most issues in a high-level meeting within two days. However, the government reneged on its promise and showed no further interest in resuming the talks. The Union then called for demonstrations at the Divisional Commissioner's offices on January 9. In Gorakhpur, the Chief Minister's home district, Shashi Yadav, Secretary of the All India Scheme Workers Federation and member of the Legislative Council in Bihar, led the demonstration, while AICCTU national executive member Shweta Raj led ASHAs in the demonstration in capital Lucknow.

Over 40,000 ASHA workers participated in these demonstrations across 14 divisions of the state. On the same day, All India Scheme Workers Federation, supporting the strike by Uttar Pradesh Asha Workers Union, called for nationwide protest action which were taken out in various parts of the country, including Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Uttarakhand. Letters to the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh with the demand of restarting talks with the UP ASHA Workers' Union were sent through these protests.

On January 16, 2026, 10 national



federations sent a joint letter to the Chief Minister, urging him to intervene immediately to end the strike by negotiating with the striking ASHA workers.

However, the Yogi government, notorious for its anti-labor character and repression of movements, used all tactics to break the strike, which included issuing of expulsion notices to thousands of ASHA workers. Police force was used in many places to end the ongoing protests, and criminal cases were filed in Kanpur and Sonbhadra.

However, the government failed to break the morale of the struggling ASHAs and they organised protests at the residences of several ministers, MPs, MLAs, and the Speaker of the State Legislative Assembly. January 17th was observed as a Black Day across the state that also attracted huge mobilisations.

From January 19-21, people's courts (Jan Adalats) were held against the government at many prominent centres including Kanpur, Rae Bareilly, Kanpur Dehat, Badaun, Gorakhpur, Kushinagar and Allahabad. Various trade unions, civil society organizations, activists, and intellectuals participated in large numbers. This strike gradually transformed itself into a mass movement, with consistent efforts to make aware the public of the importance of such actions for the people and the democracy, through

processions, demonstrations, and meetings in cities, villages, and towns.

The government reportedly employed a PR company to combat a genuine democratic and legal strike and launched a propaganda campaign through advertisements, memes, and AI videos falsely accusing ASHAs of commission-grabbing in private hospitals, luring patients away from government hospitals, and being engaged in bribery etc. The government tried to exhaust striking workers by prolonging the situation and deliberately not coming for talks. But these tactics utterly failed eventually in front of the united resolve of ASHAs. Why was the government evading them? At the heart of the escape from the talks was a scam involving Rs 1.5 lakh crore that was issued between 2019 and 2023 as incentives. The union has been raising this issue for the past three years, demanding a high-level investigation, recovery, and payments.

The Uttar Pradesh Asha Workers Union once again organized demonstrations at district headquarters on 30 January, the day of Mahatma Gandhi's martyrdom, and announced to hold an indefinite dharna in the capital from February 9 onwards. Alarmed by this announcement, the government eventually came to negotiations. The talks were held on February 3,

more informal talks were also held on February 4th and 5th. After reaching an agreement on major points, a meeting was held with the Deputy Chief Minister and Health Minister on February 6.

Finally an agreement was reached on many demands. There will be an increase in the honorarium from the state's quota, and the incentives being given for various works will be reviewed and increased up to 25% to 35%, and gratuity will be given. This was also agreed to increase the life insurance limit to 15 lakh rupees along with health insurance, and payment of insurance claims to the families of accidental deaths from 2018 to 2025. An investigation committee will be constituted to investigate the incentives scam by including union representatives.

To implement these points the government has constituted a committee under the chairmanship of the Additional Chief Secretary of Health which will hold regular meetings with the Union. This committee also includes the Secretary Dept. of Family Welfare, the Mission Director of the National Health Mission, the Mission Director of Arogya Bharat, and the Director General of Health.

The government came to talks only because of the relentless protests and mobilisations. CPIML MP Comrade Sudama Prasad also raised the demands of UP ASHA workers in the Parliament.

Meanwhile, the government has released ₹1,090 crore and ₹224.2 crore in two installments after the Feb. 6 talks for the payment of outstanding dues from previous years. After 55 days, ASHA workers triumphantly announced their return to work, defeating an arrogant government. However, most ASHA workers only began returning to work after participating in the all India strike on February 12th. ■

Fisherfolk Convention at Rameshwaram

While Modi is striving to make Rameshwaram a popular place of worship, the fisherfolk in the region are struggling for their survival. CPIML – AICCTU held a public convention at Rameshwaram, Tamil Nadu on the problems of fisherfolks and the people involved in associated activities on 20 Feb 2026. In the context of Sagar Mala project and the Blue Economy, fishing population is at the receiving end.

Despite the fact that fisherfolks all over the country are struggling for survival and to earn their livelihood, the problems of Rameshwaram fishermen are particularly pathetic because they are often arrested, boats seized and put behind the bars by the Sri Lankan government for crossing borders, consciously or unconsciously, at the international waters. Handing over of Katcha Theevu (a tiny island at the borders) to Sri Lanka by the Indian government in 1974 and Modi government issuing license to Adani to facilitate the blunder of the sea, its resources and the shores - are other important problems being faced by the Rameshwaram fishermen.

The fisherfolks who were using hooks with baits for catching fish were forced out of the fishing profession now. In the context of increasing domination of motorboats, fishermen using traditional manual boats like Catamaran, etc., unable to compete with motorboats, are being ruined economically. With the entry and growing domination of shipboard fishing industry led by corporate companies, the motor boat fishermen are also suffering because of lack of level playing field.

Small businesses for livelihood are being strangulated by the domination of corporate companies in the fish market

in fish selling business. The associations of fishermen and associated businesses are unable to challenge the domination of corporate companies and often erupt in outbursts. While the bottom trawling with the net is prohibited all over the world, including Sri Lanka, it is not prohibited in India benefitting corporate companies, including Adani's. In such a backdrop, people using traditional and motor boats are pushed to the most disadvantaged situation and are fighting for their survival, often leading to inter-community clashes between traditional and motor boat fishermen. The access to sea resources are practically denied to this section which is powerless while the powerful corporates engaged in shipboard fishing and selling business are able to loot the entire sea, its resources and the wealth.

In such a background, the fishermen convention passed the following resolutions:

- The borders of international waters should be made common to both countries, in this case, India and Sri Lanka, so that the interests of fishermen of both countries are protected. The Government of India should negotiate with the Sri Lankan government and work out an amicable and political solution to the vexed issue.

- The continuing arrests of fishermen, seizing of boats, etc., shall be stopped, the fishermen languishing in Sri Lankan jails shall be immediately released and proper compensation shall be awarded to them to lead a decent life.

- Katcha Theevu (Katcha Island) should also be made common to both countries and the access, as per the mutual agreement in 1974, to the people for fishing and related operations including drying the fishing net and worshipping in

the church in the island shall be restored.

- The union government while offering the entire sea and the coastal areas on a platter to corporate companies like Adanis, the native, generations-old fisher folks are being brutally denied pattas to their residential land by the successive governments in the state. All fisher folks shall be awarded pattas to their land immediately.

- Commercialisation and privatisation of water (the sea and the coasts) shall be stopped. Exploration of Methane and Hydro-Carbon shall be banned forthwith and the environment shall be protected. Domination of corporate companies in the sea and the blue economy should be curtailed and the fishing communities shall be protected from unequal competition.

- Sea leeches were declared as rare species and rare food and catching leeches were banned for 10 years from 2001 by the then government. Now, the fishermen demand removal of the ban which is needed to be reviewed.

- The entire fishing community is strangulated by the menace of loans by micro finance companies. The fishing community shall be liberated from the MFCs and interest-free loans shall be granted by the nationalised banks.

The convention was presided by a veteran leader of fishermen movement, comrade S Murugandham and welcomed by Shanmugarajan, the district convener of AICCTU. Comrades S Kumarasami, AICCTU Advisor and Asaithambi, CPIML state secretary, Simpson, DCM delivered special address in the convention. Comrade K Muruganandham, the Rameshwaram block secretary of the party delivered vote of thanks.

(With inputs from Simpson A) ■

Defend Adivasi Land! Stop State Repression in Anakapalli!

After reorganisation of Andhra Pradesh in 2022, the then YSRCP government divided the earlier 13 districts into 26, has had serious consequences for tribal communities. The historic Visakhapatnam district — dating back to the Madras Presidency — was split into three parts. The Paderu revenue division, comprising 11 fully Scheduled Tribal Area mandals along with the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), was constituted as the new Alluri Seetharama Raju district as part of formation of new districts.

However, Anakapalli district, carved out with 24 mandals from the old Visakhapatnam district, presents a disturbing picture. Tribal communities reside in eight of these mandals, yet these areas were excluded from Fifth Schedule protection under the Constitution. This deliberate exclusion has left Adivasi lands vulnerable to corporate interests, land mafias, and political land brokers.

The exclusion of these areas from Pader ITDA administration has further weakened institutional safeguards. The introduction of a web-based land records system in the name of technological reform has made manipulation of land records easier, opening new avenues for land grabbing at the click of a mouse.

Land Grab Attempt in Chatarjipuram

In Chatarjipuram village of Rolugunta mandal in Anakapalli district, members of the Gadaba tribe — recognised as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) — have cultivated 10 acres of dry land for generations.

Since 2022, Mr. Vara Nookaraju, a ZPTC member of the then ruling YSRCP, allegedly purchased this land from third parties, attempted

to seize this land. Between 2022 and 2025, he arrived multiple times with hired rowdies and destroyed standing crops belonging to Gadaba tribal farmers. On October 20, 2025, during Deepavali, he returned with armed associates and again began destroying crops. A hut was set on fire. Reports indicate that his associates were intoxicated. A confrontation followed, during which Mr. Nookaraju died.

Following the incident, seven tribal persons — including two women — were arrested the same day and taken to Kothakota Police Station. They were kept in illegal custody until October 22.

During this period, they were subjected to severe custodial torture by the Circle Inspector (CI) and Sub-Inspector (SI) to extract confessional statements. In order to evade mandatory video recording of arrests and custody, as directed by the Supreme Court, the detainees were confined in a separate room.

They were produced before the Magistrate only on October 23, while police records claimed the arrests were made on October 22 — raising serious questions about procedural violations and deliberate falsification. This is a blatant case of state repression targeting Adivasi peasants defending their land.

In a further act of intimidation, Advocate P.S. Ajay Kumar — who has worked for Adivasis in the district and state for more than 40 years and is currently State Vice President of the All India Lawyers' Association for Justice — was falsely implicated as the ninth accused and arrested on December 11, 2025.

CPI (ML) Liberation Intervention

Comrade Raja Ram Singh, Member of Parliament from Karakat (Bihar) representing CPI (ML)

Liberation, wrote to Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on December 4, 2025, demanding an impartial inquiry into the illegal detention and custodial torture of the Gadaba Adivasis.

On January 4, 2026, a massive public meeting was organised in Anakapalli. More than 700 Dalits, Adivasis, and agricultural workers participated in solidarity with the arrested tribal and Advocate Ajay Kumar.

Comrade Sudama Prasad, MP from Arrah (Bihar), addressed the gathering and strongly condemned the repression. He demanded withdrawal of the fabricated cases and an end to anti-tribal land policies. He pointed out that exclusion of tribal habitations from Fifth Schedule protection, combined with corporate-driven land policies of both the state and central governments, has paved the way for systematic land grabbing.

Leaders from CPI and CPM also expressed solidarity. Comrade Bugatha Bangarao, State Secretary of CPI (ML) Liberation in Andhra Pradesh, and Comrade D. Harinath, district in-charge, spoke in detail about the growing nexus between land mafias, political power, and administrative machinery in the district.

The meeting unanimously resolved to intensify the struggle to defend Adivasi land, dignity, and constitutional rights. The meeting demanded:

1. Judicial inquiry into illegal detention and custodial torture
2. Immediate withdrawal of fabricated cases against tribal peasants and Advocate Ajay Kumar
3. Inclusion of affected tribal villages under Fifth Schedule protection
4. Restoration and protection of Adivasi land rights
5. Strict action against officials responsible for custodial torture.

*(With inputs from
Ajay Kumar) ■*

Convention on Women's Rights in Tamil Nadu

A convention on women's rights with the title 'No Revolution without Women's Freedom; No Women's Freedom without Revolution' organized by All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) in Srilata Swaminathan Hall, Kumbakonam, (Tanjore district) Tamil Nadu on 17 February paying tribute to the women martyrs. In the inaugural address, AIPWA State Secretary Revathi stressed on the urgent need to develop a strong women's movement to fight the escalating violence against women and the reactionary onslaught of patriarchal Manuvadi forces of RSS-BJP, which are snatching away the hard won rights of women. She gave a call to women to fight unitedly and defeat the BJP-AIADMK combine in the forthcoming assembly elections.

All India General Secretary of AIPWA Meena Tiwari, in her special address, stated that we need to advance the struggle for women's equality, freedom and justice. She highlighted the significant role women have played in the nationwide struggles in the recent past and stated that women should emerge as a major force against the anti-women BJP government at the centre.

The convention honoured the brave women leaders who led the sanitation workers struggle against the Greater Chennai Corporation for 167 days and won the battle against privatisation. Comrade Meena Tiwari honoured Chennai Comrades Jyothi, Ashraf Begum, Kuttiyamma, Velankkani, Periyanyagi, Vasanthi, Lakshmi and Valli (Coimbatore) with shawl, plaque and Periyar's book on women's enslavement. She congratulated the fighting spirit of vanguard fighters for their significant victory on behalf of all members of the AIPWA. She further highlighted how working women, ASHA,

Anganwadi scheme workers are in the forefront for struggles to secure their livelihoods, security, dignity and democracy. This successful struggle by women sanitation workers has strengthened the fighting spirit and unity of AIPWA, she added.

Comrades Kuttiyamma and Asraf spoke about the determination with which they fought the government and the corporate company RAMCO against the takeover. They urged that women should stay united and fight for justice.

At the outset veteran AIPWA leader Santhanamary rendered women's rights songs. Comrades Jacintha, Vijaya, Manimekalai, Carmel, Madhavi, Philomina, Saroja, Manonmani and others presented the report of AIPWA work in their districts.

CPIML Polit Bureau Member V Shankar, State Secretary Pazha Asaithambi and Central Committee Member Balasundaram addressed the convention. Comrade Shankar called for the defeat of the anti-women Manuvadi BJP alliance in the coming state elections.

In the concluding speech, comrade Ranjani emphasized the necessity to mobilize women on issues like waiver of microfinance loans and interest, against the implementation of VB-GRAM-G and against violence on women and children.

The convention congratulated the sanitation workers of Chennai for their 167-day long militant struggle and adopted the following resolutions:

1. Tamil Nadu Government should abolish the contractual employment of all sanitation workers in the state, regularise their service and withdraw all the cases slapped on the protesting sanitation workers. Increase the wages of rural sanitation workers (Thoimai Kavalari) as per G O 62.

2. The state government should disburse a one-time payment of Rs. 25,000 per ration card to alleviate the debt crisis of women. The central government should abolish all the microfinance institutions, waive all the loans in MFCs and provide interest-free loans in nationalised banks. The convention resolved to launch a statewide campaign "Freedom from Debt, Freedom from Unemployment.

3. The convention condemns the move to change MNREGA to VB-GRAM-G and demands the extension of employment under the scheme to 200 days a year and wage at Rs. 700 per day.

4. The convention condemns the misogynistic politics of BJP and passes a resolution to launch an intensive campaign for equality, dignity and safety of women, and demands a strong legislation to prevent honour killings.

5. The convention demands equal wages for equal work for Aanganwadi workers, mid-day meal workers, village health nurses, guest faculty and teachers, and regularisation of their services before the next Assembly elections.

6. The union and state government should fulfil women's demands for basic housing and must pass legislation for housing as a basic right.

7. The state government should immediately close all the government run TASMACH wine shops and guarantee alternative employment to 23000 workers of TASMACH establishments.

8. The convention appeals to women, women's rights organisations, progressive, leftist, Periyarist and Ambedkarite forces to ensure an astounding defeat for BJP-AIADMK combine which is posing a grave danger to the legacy of feminist, Periyarist, secular, federal and egalitarian Tamil Nadu.

(With inputs from Ranjini) ■

AIPWA Convention at Andhra Pradesh

AIPWA held a convention on "The attacks on women and the tasks of the women's movement" was held at Tenali in Andhra Pradesh on 20th February 2026. Comrade Meena Tiwari, the General Secretary of AIPWA delivered an inaugural address following the hoisting of AIPWA flag.

Com Ramdev, the district secretary of CPIML, Guntur, addressed the convention.

Comrade Meena Tiwari condemned the growing atrocities on women and elaborated the shrinking

of women's space and rights since the BJP assumed power at the centre in 2014. She underlined the frontline role of women in the freedom struggle along with Dalits, Adivasi and other oppressed people. She also emphasised the struggles of women for right to education, health, Safety, freedom, financial independence and employment with dignity in the post-independence period. The fascist forces are reinforcing the Brahmanical manuwadi values and the culture of misogyny across the country. She

called upon the women to strengthen the women's movement of Andhra which has inherited a great legacy of women's struggles.

Comrade Nagamani, the state convener of AIPWA, spoke about the promises and failures of the Chandra Babu Naidu led NDA government in Andhra and against the brutal assault of rural and urban women by the Micro finance companies. Comrade Aruna, a leader of AICCTU in the state, elaborated on the impact of the Labour Codes on the life and the livelihood of women.

(With inputs from Nagamani) ■

Statue of Martyr Suresh Bind Unveiled

On 23 February 2026, at Azad Nagar, Usfa, in Fatuha block, a statue of Martyr Comrade Suresh Bind was unveiled by CPI(ML) General Secretary Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya.

Comrade Suresh Bind, popularly known as Azaad, was killed by feudal-criminal forces on 22 February 1998, shortly after he had cast his vote at a polling booth in Fatuha, Patna district, during the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. A popular organiser of the oppressed landless poor, Comrade Azaad led militant land struggles in Patna in the 1980s and 1990s, through which hundreds of landless households were settled in various parts of Fatuha and adjoining areas. Among them, more than 500 households established a colony in Usfa village, which is today known as Azaad Nagar in memory of his martyrdom.

In March 2024, hundreds of houses in Azaad Nagar were destroyed in a sudden fire. Yet, defying the devastation and the constant threats of the land mafia and Bulldozer Raj, the residents of Azaad Nagar rebuilt their colony. In January 2025, they erected a plaque bearing the Preamble of the Constitution; in April, they installed a statue of Babasaheb Ambedkar; and today, a statue of Comrade Azaad was unveiled in the presence of hundreds of villagers, comrades, and members of his family, including his wife and son.

This statue of Comrade Azaad stands as a testament to the power, unity, and fighting spirit of the rural poor — the foundational strength and enduring identity of CPI(ML) in Bihar. ■



12 Feb General Strike: 30 Crore Workers and Farmers Rise Against Modi's Anti-People Policies



(L) CPI(ML) MPs Raja Ram Singh and Sudama Prasad in solidarity with the strike at Parliament. (R) Strike picket line at Delhi's industrial area.



(L) March in Patna. (R) ASHA workers organise a strike picket line in Patna, Bihar.



(L) Strike action in West Bengal. (R) Strike action in Karnataka.

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