



COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST)

Central Committee

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Report on Political Developments *(Adopted at the Central Committee Meeting held on August 06-08, 2021)*

It has been over six months, since the Central Committee last met. The elections to the Assemblies of West Bengal, Kerala, Tamilnadu, Assam and Pondicherry and the lethal second wave of the pandemic created conditions for this. In this long gap many important developments have taken place that merit our attention and understanding, both internationally and nationally.

INTERNATIONAL

Covid Pandemic

The Covid pandemic continues to play havoc globally and some countries are seeing a new surge in the number of cases. As of August 1, 2021, nearly 200 million (19,90,25,424) people were infected and deaths are more than four million (42,40,425). Nearly five lakh new cases are being reported daily with over 8,000 deaths. There are fears of a new surge of the Delta variant which has already impacted many developed countries. In China the Delta variant upsurge has reached 35 cities in 17 of China's 33 provinces. New lockdowns are enforced in various parts of China. All are being tested again all over the country.

Global Vaccine Inequalities

It is clear that unless vaccination proceeds at a faster pace and is universal, the pandemic cannot be contained. This is adversely affected by very high levels of global vaccine inequalities. High income countries have administered nearly 70 times more doses per inhabitant compared to low income countries. Countries with 16 per cent of the world population pre-purchased 50 per cent of the globally available doses. According to WHO 31.4 million doses have been administered in 50 African countries i.e. mere two per cent of population getting a single dose. 10 countries around the world account for 77 per cent of globally administered vaccine.

One reason for these inequalities is the accumulation of vaccines by the developed countries, many times more than their needs. If these countries share

one billion doses, they would still have enough to vaccinate 80 per cent of their 12 years plus population.

The other factor is the enforcement of the patent regime on vaccines that prohibits many poor countries from accessing required amounts of vaccines due to high prices.

While the pandemic exposes the inadequate public health care systems in the capitalist world, the worst are the poorer countries. Vaccine inequality and woeful public health is having an inhuman disastrous impact.

Unless the whole global population is protected, no one would be safe. The continuing pandemic keeps raising conditions for the development of new variants that may negate the immunity provided by the present vaccines. This would lead to a new health catastrophe globally especially in poorer countries.

On the other hand, **China**, supplied more than 100 countries and international organisations 500 million vaccine doses. This makes it the country providing most vaccines globally. Chinese vaccines have been approved for use in more than 100 countries. Free universal vaccination for the entire global population is essential to contain this pandemic.

Global Economy

IMF *World Economic Outlook* (July 2021) retains its global growth projections at 6 per cent. IMF had earlier recorded that the global GDP contracted by minus 3.3 per cent in 2020.

The World Bank (July 2021) projects a 5.6 per cent GDP growth. This primarily is due to the low base in the growth in the previous year. It, however, maintains that global output will be 2 per cent below the pre-pandemic projections in 2022.

Both IMF and WB caution that lack of speedy vaccination will result in growth rates being well below these projections.

US and EU New Stimulus Packages

These optimistic projections by IMF and WB are to a large extent based on expectations of recovery generated by the US and EU's new stimulus packages.

Under President Biden, a new a \$ 1.9 trillion package was announced which includes direct cash payments to people earning less than \$ 75,000 per year, a \$ 300 per week Unemployment Insurance boost, expanding Child Tax Credit etc. This is probably the biggest financial boost in recent times larger than one made

during the 2008 Wall Street collapse crisis. While the working people and the middle classes get some benefit from this stimulus, big business and finance capital will get a bonanza, adhering to the neo-liberalism's dictum. Surprisingly, after having campaigned to increase taxes on the super-rich, Biden has not done this.

The EU agreed on a €1.8 trillion (\$ 2.2 trillion) post pandemic stimulus financed directly by its budget. A big portion is earmarked for public spending.

These massive fiscal packages by themselves negate neo-liberalism and demonstrate its bankruptcy in providing solutions for the current global economic recession. However, the poorer countries are forced to implement fiscal discipline which means a reduction in public expenditures, welfare programmes and greater exploitation of the working people - 'austerity measures'.

Global Minimum Tax

Nearly 130 countries including US, China and India supported a Global Minimum Tax (GMT) on big global corporates of at least 15 per cent. To prevent the registration of these companies in tax heavens, this tax is levied on where global corporates are doing their business, not where they are located. This is slated for reviving the economy of many countries. This revival is essential to pursue the neo-liberal objective of maximising profits. There are many controversies and opinions about the impact of such a tax that need to be resolved.

Taxing the super-rich must be accompanied by increasing the guaranteed minimum wage for working people, provision of universal health care and other social support measures for any meaningful economic recovery to take place.

Impact on The People

Growing Hunger: World Bank notes the reversal of the earlier growth of low income countries and the compounding of global hunger. Global rise in food prices will in future add to people's miseries. In July 2021, the Agricultural Commodity Price Index remained at its highest level since 2013. With rising prices and reduced incomes, UNICEF estimates a 10th of global population (around 811million) were undernourished last year and nearly, 150 million children were stunted; 45 million wasted in 2020. Between 2020 and 2030, it is estimated that 22 million children will be stunted; additional 40 million will be wasted in low and middle income countries. With around 180 million more facing chronic hunger than last year, it is estimated that 30 per cent of the global population (2.37 billion) lack adequate access to food in 2020-increase of 320 million in one year. Oxfam estimates a six fold rise in people living in famine

conditions. Globally, 11 people are dying every minute from acute hunger. India, Brazil, South Africa are the emerging hunger hotspots in the world.

Poverty: People living in extreme poverty is projected to reach 745 million by the end of 2021, an increase of 100 million. Employment loss cost women around the world at least \$800 billion in lost income in 2020. An additional 47 million more women worldwide are expected to fall into extreme poverty in 2021.

Rising Inequalities: In response to Jeff Bezos' space flight, Deepak Xavier, Oxfam International's Global Head of Inequality Campaign, said:

“We’ve now reached stratospheric inequality. 11 people are likely now dying of hunger each minute while Bezos prepares for an 11-minute personal space flight. This is human folly, not human achievement.”

The ultra-rich are being propped up by unfair tax systems and pitiful labor protections. US billionaires got around \$1.8 trillion richer since the beginning of the pandemic and nine new billionaires were created by Big Pharma's monopoly on the COVID-19 vaccines.

Unemployment: Global working hours declined by 8.8 per cent in 2020, equivalent to loss of 255 million full-time jobs. The ILO projects the global crisis-induced ‘jobs gap’ to reach 75 million in 2021. This fall in employment and working hours comes on top of persistently high pre-crisis levels of unemployment, under-employment and poor working conditions. Global unemployment is expected to reach 205 million people in 2022, leaping from 187 million in 2019. Compared to 2019, an additional 108 million workers worldwide are now categorised as poor or extremely poor (meaning they and their families live on the equivalent of less than US \$ 3.20 per person per day). Women employment declined by 5 per cent in 2020 compared to 3.9 per cent for men. Domestic responsibilities resulting from crisis lockdowns are creating a risk of a “re-traditionalization” of gender roles. Globally, youth employment fell 8.7 per cent in 2020, compared with 3.7 per cent for adults. Many of the jobs lost are unlikely to return due to digitalisation and automation.

Educational Deprivation: According to the UNESCO, as of May 2021, schools in 26 countries were closed and partially open in 55 countries. An estimated 90 per cent of the world's school-aged children have had their education disrupted by the pandemic. School closures and the resulting disruptions are projected to amount to losses valued at \$10 trillion of affected children's future earnings. For millions of students, school closures will not be a temporary interference with their education, but the abrupt end of it. Children have begun working, married, become parents, grown disillusioned with

education, concluded they cannot catch up, or aged-out of free or compulsory education as guaranteed under their country's laws. During school closures, education moved online strengthening the already existing 'digital divide' with problems of internet access, connectivity, accessibility, material preparedness, teacher training and home situations.

China: Assertion of its Global Rise

The Communist Party of China is observing the centenary of its foundation. On this occasion it declared that it had reached one of its two centennial goals – establishing a moderately prosperous society by 2020. This was possible by eliminating absolute poverty throughout the country. After the victorious revolution in 1949 and the establishment of the People's Republic of China, basing itself on the agricultural and industrial advancements made in the initial years, it prioritised economic growth since 1978 and embarked on a path of 'reform and opening'.

Since 1978, over 850 million people were lifted out of extreme poverty, assuring their food and clothing needs, guaranteeing their access to compulsory education, basic medical services, and safe housing. China's current poverty line is multi-dimensional and was formulated according to the standards set by international organisations and taking into consideration China's national conditions. Apart from income, education, health and living standards were also taken into consideration. It set its poverty line at a per capita annual income of ¥ 2,300 at 2010 constant values, or US \$2.3 in terms of purchasing power parity per person a day. This was revised in 2020. Now, a person making less than ¥ 4,000 a year was listed as impoverished.

In February 2021, China officially announced that absolute poverty is eliminated in the country. According to the World Bank's international poverty line, China is responsible for over 70 per cent of the global reduction in poverty since late 1970s.

GDP: China's per capita gross national income rose from \$200 (1978) to \$10,410 (2019). It is projected to exceed the current World Bank threshold of \$12,536 and become a high income country by 2023. In 1978, China's GDP was about ¥ 367.87 billion (\$57.38 billion), it rose to about ¥ 101.6 trillion (\$14.7 trillion) in 2020 – roughly 17 per cent of the world economy.

China's foreign exchange reserves of \$3.2 trillion (2020) are the highest in the world despite contribution of exports to GDP growth reducing from 33 per cent to around 10 per cent. Yuan is now number 3 among international currencies. Yuan is emerging as a reserve currency, with central banks of more than 70 countries holding it in their reserve assets.

By 2020, national per capita disposable income was 100.8 per cent more in real terms than in 2010.

China has made big advances in technological innovations by huge investments in R&D.

US-China Relations

Alarmed with the steady growth of China as an economic power threatening its global hegemony, US initiated measures to contain and isolate China.

Relations between US and China soured, particularly after Trump imposed sanctions on China. Joe Biden's administration continues with the policies pursued by his predecessor. US has categorised China as a strategic rival. US goods imports from China fell by \$103.8 billion between 2018 and 2020 and bilateral services trade fell by 35 per cent between January and September 2020 over that same period in 2018. However, the reality is, US cannot do away from trading with China. In 2020, China was the largest US trading partner (\$659.5 billion). As of December 2020, US investors held \$100 billion of Chinese debt and \$1.1 trillion in Chinese equities while Chinese investors held \$1.4 trillion in US debt and \$720 billion in US equities.

There were two rounds of talks between the senior diplomats of the two countries, but nothing significant had emerged from these talks. Apart from economic issues, US interference in Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Taiwan, South China Sea and allegations that China is indulging in cyber war are major issues. US is trying to isolate China by formalising the Quad and mobilising its traditional allies in Europe. In order to win over its allies in Europe, US resolved longstanding disputes and waived sanctions. Roping India into the Quad and increasing its military dependence are part of US policy of containment and isolation of China.

G-7 Summit: The G-7 Summit held in June 2021 was used by the US to mobilise its allies on its agenda of isolating China. The Summit declared an ambitious infrastructure development plan for developing countries, 'Build Back Better World', as a counter to China's Belt and Road Initiative. However, no concrete proposals for funding this plan was made. US hopes of winning unstinted support of all its European allies did not materialise due to their contradictory interests and relations with China.

The **NATO summit** that followed the G-7 Summit for the first time mentioned China in its statement as a security threat. The US considers China as a threat to its global hegemony and hence wants to retain the confidence of its traditional allies to isolate China.

China-EU Relations: However, countries like Germany, France and Italy were not eager to completely align with the US on the question of China. Ignoring USA, European Union and China, entered into a ‘Comprehensive Agreement on Investment’ (CAI) in December 2020. Many German and French big companies look at the CAI as beneficial to their interests and are actively supporting this agreement. This appears to send a message to the US that EU is an independent and major pole that has a role in defining global affairs.

Immediately after the G-7 and NATO summits, German Chancellor Merkel and French President Macron had discussions with Chinese President Xi Jinping. They expressed hope that China and Europe would expand cooperation to better respond to global challenges. Germany and France are not eager to ‘decouple’ with China, as the US wants and is pressurising them. Public opinion shows that nearly three-fourths of Germans consider not siding with the US in any possible confrontation with China.

However, on the question of human rights US is acting in tandem with EU, Canada and Britain. All of them had imposed sanctions on Chinese officials in March, on human rights abuses in Xinjiang province. In July once again, EU had imposed sanctions on officials of Hong Kong and China alleging that they had abused human rights in Hong Kong.

China retaliated with sanctions against certain persons and institutions in the EU, which alarmed the European business council.

As a result, the EU parliament could not ratify the CAI agreement as all such treaties are to be ratified with unanimity.

US-Russia Summit

Following the G-7 Summit, the presidents of both US and Russia met at Geneva amidst lots of tensions between the two countries. The contentious issues are the expansion of NATO to EU eastern borders, sanctions imposed on Russia and the withdrawal of Ambassadors from both the countries, US naval fleet movements in the Black Sea, military exercises at the Russian borders, refusal to renew the arms treaties signed decades back, accusations of cyber-attacks, attempts to influence US Presidential elections etc. Except for the agreement to restore diplomats in both the countries and further continue with discussions, nothing much had come out of the Summit. This meeting was more an attempt by the US to drive wedges between the growing strategic partnership between Russia and China.

The European Union was divided on Russia, with Germany and France willing to hold discussions with Russia and move ahead. Germany wants to go ahead

with the gas pipeline from Russia for its energy needs. The US tried very hard to prevent Germany from going ahead with this project, but could not succeed.

Latin America

Renewed Attacks on Cuba: The US has intensified its attack on socialist Cuba. It is using the Covid-19 pandemic as an opportunity. USA placed Cuba in the list of the States sponsoring terrorism. Trump imposed 243 measures that tightened the blockade of Cuba. These are continued by Biden.

Cuban economy fell by 11 per cent last year. Impact of sanctions resulted in shortages of many essential commodities including food, oil and medicines. Cuba was prevented from accessing almost \$2 billion that would be required to acquire medical supplies and import essential equipment that was needed to save critical patients.

Overcoming all these odds, Cuba is now in the process of developing five vaccine candidates to control Covid. Two of them, Soberana 02 and Abdala have shown an efficacy rate of over 90 per cent.

The shortages of essential commodities brought people to the streets demanding food, electricity and medicines. These were aided and abetted by USA. The Cuban government and the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) immediately responded by rushing to listen to the people and explain the reasons behind these hardships. Hundreds of thousands of people rallied in support of the Cuban revolution and to defend Socialism. Though the situation was brought under control, the PCC and government urged people to remain vigilant and thwart all imperialist efforts to destabilise the country. They have once again demanded the US to lift its inhuman economic blockade that is in place for more than 60 years.

Signs of Left Resurgence

Peru: Left won a significant victory in the Presidential elections in Peru. Progressive school teacher and activist Pedro Castillo won defeating Keiko Fujimori, a right-wing neoliberal. In the past four years, Peru had four presidents – one resigned over a vote-buying scandal, another was impeached, a third stepped down after less than a week, and the fourth is the current interim president, who oversaw the present elections. Castillo campaigned on a pro-poor agenda, promising higher taxes on powerful mining firms, expropriation of all foreign mining projects, holding a referendum to rewrite the dictatorship era neoliberal constitution, end all inequalities, guarantee the rights of indigenous communities, women, and peasants, prioritise human rights and increase budget to education.

Chile: Chile elected 155 members to the constituent assembly tasked with drafting a new constitution and provincial governors, mayors, and councilors, which saw the rout of right-wing candidates. The newly elected constituent assembly is dominated by Left and anti-neoliberal forces. People are expecting a thorough overhaul of the current political system.

Brazil: Protests against President Jair Bolsonaro intensified throughout Brazil. The government's failure in containing the Covid-19 pandemic, growing hunger, unemployment are the main issues. Former president Lula, was cleared of all charges of corruption by the courts. Lula is the front-runner for presidential elections scheduled in 2022. Lula's victory would have big impact on Latin America and once again give fillip to the Left and progressive forces.

Colombia: Huge working class strikes are taking place in Colombia since April initially against the government's proposal to increase taxes, but gradually assumed an anti-neoliberal character and against the right-wing government. Left is leading these protests.

Ecuador: In the presidential elections held in Ecuador, the Left suffered a defeat. But, it had emerged as the largest Party in the parliament.

Venezuela: Due to the US imposed sanctions, Venezuela is passing through unforeseen hardships.

A Swiss bank blocked the last payments made by Venezuela to buy Covid vaccines through the WHO's Covax facility and stalled vaccine supply. The US Treasury Department has blocked or seized a host of Venezuelan assets abroad. Thousands of people are suffering because of lack of access to medicines or treatment. US destabilisation efforts included sabotage of oil and electricity production, promotion of armed militias and sponsoring opposition groups to create social and economic unrest in the country. Venezuela is facing acute shortage of food, essentials and fuel. In spite of these back-breaking sanctions, Venezuela is carrying out its social welfare missions.

President Nicolas Maduro announced that he is ready for discussions with opposition parties. These discussions are to be held in Mexico. The government is urging all the opposition parties to participate in the elections to various local bodies and provincial assemblies due in November 2021.

North Africa/West Asia

Israeli Attack on Palestine: The continuing Israeli air raids on Gaza, Palestine, are leading to the death of many Palestinian citizens including women and children. Israel is intent on the complete occupation of East Jerusalem and is intensifying Jewish settlements in areas inhabited by Palestinians. It had

brutally attacked those who were protesting these attempts to forcefully expel residents of the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. Israeli forces raided the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, during Holy Ramadan, the third holiest shrine for Muslims, and injured hundreds of people. The interim government led by far-right Netanyahu, launched these attacks for political gains.

Though Netanyahu was ousted as prime minister and a new government headed by Naftali Bennett was sworn, there is no change in its Palestine policy. Palestinians living in Israel are even denied vaccination. Peace cannot prevail unless Israel accepts and adheres to the two State solution with 1967 borders and East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.

Arab Countries Attitude: In 2020, four Arab countries, United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Sudan and Bahrain normalised relations with Israel under the US coercion of **lucrative deals**. The US had brokered Abraham Accords with UAE to normalize ties with Israel. Though Saudi Arabia did not sign these Accords, it is also slowly building its relationship with Israel. Palestinians opposed these deals. As these countries have established relations with Israel, none of the major leaders of these countries unequivocally condemned Israeli attacks on Gaza. They are, thus, negating the Arab Peace Initiative, which stated that Arab States would establish relations with Israel only when an independent State of Palestine is formed.

The US is exploiting the sectarian divide between the Shias and Sunnis. Iran, a Shia majority country is projected as a common enemy against which all others should unite with Israel, even sacrificing the Palestinian cause. These divisive moves in West Asia are bound to further intensify sectarian strife within the countries and between the countries.

New President in Iran and Nuclear Talks: Ebrahim Raisi was elected as the president of Iran in the recently concluded elections. The elections saw low voter turnout (49 per cent) and millions of deliberately spoiled ballots as an expression of resentment against economic hardships, high prices of food and fuel, in the absence of a credible alternative.

Vienna nuclear talks with Iran, which began in April, are now paused and postponed till August 3, after Raisi assumes presidency. Iran is demanding a commitment from the US to stick to the deal and guarantee that it would not withdraw from the deal as was done by the Trump administration. Iran also wants an immediate lifting of US imposed sanctions.

Political Turmoil

The pandemic and the economic disruption it caused has affected the whole West Asia region. There are rising protests and political turmoil due to

widespread unemployment, rising prices and economic hardships. Such a situation exists in Iraq, Lebanon, Tunisia and other countries.

Iraq: USA declared that it would withdraw its forces from Iraq by the end of this year and an agreement was signed, 18 years after the occupation and devastation. A third of Iraqis are below the poverty line. Iraq is ravaged by the spread of militias and armed groups, sectarian struggles and killings, and the emergence of terrorist organisations that occupy two-thirds of its territory. People of Iraq are demanding early elections, reform of the entire political and electoral system, combating financial and administrative corruption, an end to unemployment and an improvement in the standard of living.

The government of Iraq had declared that elections will be held in October this year. The US had promised to give \$5.2 million for the conduct of elections. The Communist Party of Iraq had conducted a referendum among its members and decided that it would not participate in the elections as the political situation is not conducive to the conduct of fair and peaceful elections.

Lebanon: Lebanon is going through one of the worst crisis in its history. World Bank says this country is now in one of the worst economic crises anywhere in the world since the 1800s. According to UNICEF, more than 77 per cent of Lebanese now don't have enough food or enough money to buy food. Banks are freezing withdrawals and pharmacies are running out of medicines. The World Bank estimates that in 2020 real GDP contracted by 20.3 per cent, on the back of a 6.7 per cent contraction in 2019. GDP per capita fell by around 40 per cent in dollar terms. More than half the population is below the poverty line. Unemployment is rising rapidly.

After the massive explosion in the Beirut port, which wreaked havoc in the city, the government resigned. Since then, there is political instability with no government being formed and two successive Prime Ministers being appointed. The French government (former colonial rulers) has been trying to intervene and shape the political and economic policies.

Tunisia: Violent protests took place in several Tunisian provinces as protesters expressed anger at the deterioration of health, economic and social conditions. They demanded the ouster of the government and the dissolution of the parliament.

Tunisian President removed Hichem Mechichi from the post of prime minister and suspended all activities of the parliament and took over the government, annulled the immunities of all parliament members, paving way for a probe into their role in the economic crisis.

South Asia

Afghanistan: US has started withdrawing its forces from Afghanistan, as part of the agreement it had entered with the Taliban last year. The US-NATO withdrawal is more than 95 per cent complete and end by August 31. This is one of the longest wars that the US had fought costing \$ 2 trillion (for 20 years). USA is not ready to completely disengage from Afghanistan due to its strategic importance and formed a 'Central Asian Quad', - Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and USA. This is intended to retain its control and also counter the influence of China and Russia over Central Asia.

With the withdrawal of US ground forces, Taliban forces are rapidly spreading their influence over most parts of the country and establishing their hold. The Taliban have swiftly captured territory, seized strategic border crossings and are threatening a number of provincial capitals.

The present government of Afghanistan had started negotiations with the Taliban in Doha in order to discuss power sharing arrangements. Taliban are demanding the government to demit office.

Many Central Asian countries share borders with Afghanistan and are concerned about these developments and the rapid advance of the Taliban. Russia has hosted several rounds of talks and was assured by the Taliban that they would not allow Afghanistan to be used to attack Russia or neighbouring countries.

China has held talks with the Taliban leadership and established some understanding. Similarly, Iran that share borders with Afghanistan also have negotiated with Taliban and shared their concerns. Pakistan, which backs the Taliban, is recognised as a key player in the unfolding situation.

India Isolated: India is isolated on the issue of Afghanistan having placed all its eggs in the US basket. The statements of our government raising issues about the 'legitimacy' of the Taliban has ensured that India is further isolated from the ongoing process in Afghanistan. India has failed to find a place in the US Central Asian Quad. Indian government's efforts to engage with Taliban started quite late and are largely dependent on US-Taliban relations.

South Asia Forum: In a further setback to India's influence in South Asian region, five out of the eight SAARC members countries have joined China initiated China-South Asian Countries Poverty Alleviation and Cooperative Development Center. The creation of this Centre in July was the outcome of a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of China, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in April 2021.

SAARC: No SAARC summit was held after 2014. With India's refusal to participate in SAARC summit in 2016, the process has become virtually dead.

There is an impression that Indian government is not keen on reviving SAARC and instead is interested in the newly created group, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) which has seven countries that share the coast of Bay of Bengal. The botching up of the ‘vaccine diplomacy’ by the Indian government let down many of our neighbouring countries. These countries were assisted by China, which had supplied its vaccines to all the South Asian countries, except India. Because of these measures, India is more or less isolated in the neighbourhood.

Nepal: Nepal’s Supreme Court ordered Sher Bahadur Deuba’s appointment as prime minister after it was approached to resolve the political crisis that had gripped the country. The factional struggle in the Nepalese Communist Party (NCP) led to the withdrawal of support to the KP Oli government by members of parliament of his own party. This had forced him to resign and recommend the dissolution of the parliament. It was dissolved on December 20 last year for the first time. The Supreme Court on February 23 reinstated it saying the dissolution was unconstitutional. Oli lost the confidence motion on May 10 where only 93 lawmakers stood for him and once again recommended the dissolution of the House, which was again rejected by the Supreme Court. Instead, it had ordered the president to appoint Deuba as the prime minister. Deuba proved his majority in the parliament by winning the vote of confidence motion. As many as 165 members of the 271-member lower house – 60 per cent – voted for Deuba in the floor test, including 22 members of the CPN (UML) faction.

Sri Lanka: Since the landslide victory of the Mahindra Rajapaksa led Sri Lankan People’s Freedom Alliance in the November 2020 Parliament election, the Rajapaksa brothers, (Gotabaya Rajapaksa is the President) have dominated the political set-up with all four brothers in government posts. The government banks on Sri Lanka Buddhist nationalism which is hostile to both the Tamil and Muslim minorities.

The government has refused to proceed with an independent investigation of war crimes during the civil war, nor is it showing any signs of implementing the measures for devolution of powers to the North and Eastern provinces. The Indian government has to continue efforts to see that 13A of the Sri Lankan Constitution is implemented in letter and spirit.

Myanmar: Since the military coup in Myanmar in February, thousands of people are on the streets protesting the arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi and her party colleagues. In the elections held last year, Suu Kyi’s party won. The military refused to accept these results. The higher echelons of the armed forces have built up a powerful network of patronage and business interests. In order to protect their economic interests, they want to exercise complete control over the government.

The response to the protests against military coup was severe repression.

Unrest in Myanmar has an impact on all bordering countries including India. Imperialist forces are keen to control Myanmar and many intelligence agencies are actively involved interfering in the internal affairs of that country. ASEAN, in which Myanmar is a member, had adopted a five-point formula for the resolution of the situation. Any sort of external interference in Myanmar is detrimental to the interests of our country and also the entire region. We should express our solidarity with the people of Myanmar struggling for the restoration of their democratic rights and duly elected government.

Climate Change: Devastating Extreme Weather Events

The latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): 'Climate Change 2021: the Physical Science Basis' has rung the alarm bells over global warming trends. It said that the Indian Ocean is warming fastest leading to rise in sea levels, frequent and severe coastal flooding. 28.6 million people of India's coastline would be exposed to severe floods and frequent cyclonic storms.

Major regions of the northern Hemisphere, especially Europe, the US and Canada have been ravaged by extreme weather events related to climate change during June-July 2021. The enormous damage suffered by some of the most developed countries on earth, and their lack of preparedness, has come as a rude shock to governments and people there, long accustomed to viewing climate impacts as happening mostly in developing countries.

Northern Europe especially the UK, Germany, Belgium, Holland and Italy have witnessed very heavy rainfall leading to sudden and massive floods causing enormous loss of life, damage to infrastructure and homes, and catching authorities unawares. Simultaneously, Southern Europe especially Italy, Greece, Albania, the former Yugoslav republics, south-east Turkey and other countries on or near the Mediterranean, have experienced severe heat waves and dry weather triggering massive wildfires. United States and Canada have experienced unprecedented and prolonged heat waves, for which people and authorities especially in Canada were completely unprepared.

Experts have described these weather extremes as one-in-a-thousand year phenomena but also say trends show such events will recur frequently. If this is the condition when global average temperatures have risen by 1.2 deg C compared to 1850, the impacts at 2 deg C or greater temperature rise as international scientific bodies are predicting as inevitable, would be catastrophic.

The next climate summit in Glasgow in December 2021 is expected to deliver on raised emissions cut pledges compared to the Paris Agreement by all countries. It is now painfully obvious that much sharper cuts are required by developed countries, including targets to reach net-zero emissions (i.e. when greenhouse gas emissions are equal to GHGs absorbed by forests, oceans and other sinks) much earlier than the current target of 2050. The developed countries must transfer green technologies without strings to all countries and heavily fund mitigation and adaptation.

India: In the past decade and more, India has been experiencing extreme rainfall events of over 200-300 mm in a day with increased frequency and intensity, causing enormous damage from resultant floods, urban waterlogging, landslides in different parts of the country. Coastal erosion is taking place on a continuous basis, and the Sundarbans is experiencing submergence under rising sea levels. This also poses an enormous threat to major coastal cities. The Union Government has taken absolutely no steps to tackle any of these problems which urgently require a goal-oriented national programme with phase-wise deliverables. The longer such actions are delayed, the more expensive they will get and the more damage would have been caused to infrastructure, lives and livelihoods.

NATIONAL

Covid Pandemic – Vaccine Shortages

The daily cases of Covid infections have started rising. Seven day average of infections rose from 37,975 every day for the week ending July 20 to 40,710 for week ending August 3. The total number of Covid cases in the country is now close to 4,20,0000. The total deaths, according to official count, are 4.245 lakhs. Various estimates globally and domestically have shown that this is a gross underestimation. The Washington based Centre for Global Developments estimates the deaths in India to be between 34-49 lakhs. Various domestic studies have shown the ‘excess deaths’, over records of last year – as possibly Corona infections being passed as deaths under comorbidities.

To prevent a catastrophic third wave of the pandemic, it is imperative that the rate of vaccination increases exponentially. Currently, a mere 11.3 per cent of our adult population has received both doses and 40 per cent including this 11.3 received a single dose. At this rate, the target of vaccinating the entire adult population by this year-end would be impossible to meet.

The main reason for this relative slow pace of vaccination is vaccine shortages. Every state is complaining of short supply. On June 26, central government submitted an affidavit to the SC saying 516 million doses will be available by July 31. However, till August 2 they provided around 497 million, nearly 20 million short. Vaccine production must be undertaken on a war footing. For this, the government must transfer the technology developed for Covaxin to other PSUs and private companies to scale up production. Adequate financial support should be given. Procurement from all available global sources can be additionally undertaken.

Kerala: A campaign is launched by the BJP central government to blame Kerala for the resurgence of the Corona positive cases in India citing the figures honestly put out by the state government. The reason for this high infection rate is the high level of testing in Kerala. There are days when it conducts two lakh tests. Kerala reports 1 in 6 infections being detected as against the national average of 1 in 33. Its sero-prevalence at 44 per cent is much lower than 68 per cent for India, showing it has contained the spread better. Kerala fully vaccinated 23 per cent of its adult population compared to national average of 11 per cent. Its case fatality rate of 0.5 is close to a third of the national average of 1.3. 57 per cent Covid beds and 40 per cent of ICUs is the occupancy rate in the hospitals, which shows that its public health system is much better than the rest of the country.

Relief Activities of Party

All across the country, our Party units are very active in providing relief to the people suffering in the pandemic and the lockdowns. In Andhra Pradesh, our state committee has set-up medical facilities from isolation centres to treatment. The red volunteer brigade in Bengal is providing relief on a large-scale in an exemplary manner. Likewise in many states, distribution of free food kits and other required help is being provided to the people.

Indian Economy

The Indian economy is facing an unprecedented recession. The IMF has lowered GDP growth projection for India from the earlier 12.5 per cent to 9.5 per cent for 2021-22. Every single core sector is showing a decline. India's GDP in 2019-20 was Rs. 146 lakh crores; in 2021 it fell to 135 lakh crore.

What is required to contain this recession is to make greater government expenditures, leading to increase in employment and purchasing power and money in people's hand. This could have been done by massive increase in public investments to build much needed infrastructure, generate jobs and

increasing domestic demand whose massive fall is the main cause for this recession. Instead, all stimulus packages announced so far have been essentially for providing access to credit to businesses. When the economy is in a recession no business could be willing to borrow. Increasing people's purchasing power could have been achieved through direct cash transfers and distribution of free food kits. The central government refused to undertake this. The net result has been greater miseries for the people and growth of unemployment and hunger.

The nature of the stimulus packages are anti-poor, pro-rich and discriminatory against States. These packages permitted corporate tax revenue to fall from Rs. 5.5 lakh crore to 4.5 lakh crore from 2019-20 to 2020-21. The Central government tax revenues increased by nearly 1 lakh crore during this period mainly through the massive hike in excise duties on petroleum products while the States' share of the total tax revenues fell from Rs. 6.5 lakh crore to Rs. 5.9 lakh crores. At this time of the pandemic when the states had to be financially supported to combat the Corona upsurge, their revenues were declining as the central government was garnering greater revenues.

Loot of National Assets: As noted in earlier CC meetings, loot from privatisation of large scale public sector is moving ahead aggressively through the din created by the ruling party's disruption in Parliament. Legislations have been approved to legalise privatisation. The latest has been the privatisation of the Insurance sector which will have disastrous impact on the economy. The Insurance sector is the largest investor in the financial sector and infrastructural development. Putting these humongous amounts of money in the hands of the private corporates, both foreign and domestic, will deprive India from the needed resources for development.

Further Attacks on Rights of The Working People

New attacks on the rights of the working class over and above the abrogation of the labour laws and introduction of labour codes which rob the working class of rights earned through generations of struggles is banning any strike actions in essential defence services passed by the Parliament through disruptions. More such draconian laws are likely to come.

Apart from the insurance sector, public sector banks are also being privatised, including premier profit making Navratna PSUs and the Vizag steel plant. Privatisation of the Indian railways and transport infrastructure in the country is also happening simultaneously.

The unbridled loot of our national assets like our mineral wealth continues through privatisation.

Impact On The People

Alarming Rise In Poverty: Data shows that poverty in India is on the rise. Along with abolishing the Planning Commission, Modi government abandoned, what India followed since independence, the basic nutritional norm to measure poverty levels. The nutrition norm was fixed at 2,200 calories per person per day in rural and 2,100 calories in urban India. The NSS large sample survey shows that according to this norm, 58 per cent in rural and 57 per cent in urban India in 1993-94 were below this poverty line. The next similar NSS survey for 2011-12 shows the percentages were 68 and 65 respectively. The next large sample survey was done in 2017-18. But these NSS findings were suppressed by the Modi government to conceal the truth. The data that leaked to the media shows an absolute drop of nine per cent in per capita real consumption expenditure (not just food) in rural India. Clearly, there is an unprecedented increase in absolute poverty in both rural and urban India even before the pandemic struck.

The situation since has become worse. The pandemic and associated lockdowns have come on top of this already rising poverty levels. During the pandemic, there has been an alarming increase in the indebtedness of most households with families selling their jewellery and other assets for survival. Household consumer expenditures, that contribute 60 per cent to our GDP, has alarmingly declined. This is imposing further immiserisation of the people and deepening economic recession.

Today, the Global Hunger Index places India in the “serious category”. NFHS-5 shows alarming growth of malnutrition, particularly amongst children, infant mortality and other indices. India was downgraded by ‘two’ ranks in the SDG global index. During this last one year, Pew Research Centre estimates that the number of people below the poverty line in India has grown from 60 to 134 million. India has contributed 57.3 per cent to the growth of the global poor last year. 59.3 per cent of our middle classes have slipped into poverty.

Rising Unemployment: The unemployment rate rose to 24 per cent in 2020 soon after the lockdown began. At the same time, the Labour Participation Rate fell drastically, by nearly 40 per cent last year. It is estimated that nearly 21 million salaried jobs were lost that is 25 per cent of those earlier employed. 25 per cent of the industrial workers have lost their jobs primarily due to the badly effected MSME sector. This translates to around 15 million. Though there are various estimates, the real situation of the huge decline in employment can be understood by the fact that the sectors that generate maximum number of jobs in the country have been worst affected during this period like construction (-50

per cent), trade, hotels and other services (-47 per cent), manufacturing (-13 per cent) and mining (-23 per cent).

Many of those who lost jobs particularly among the migrant labour are relying on MGNREGA for their livelihood. At such a time, instead of vastly enlarging the MGNREGA operations there was a drastic fall in allocations. In the latest budget allocated 34 per cent less than the revised estimate of the 2020-21. The demand for MGNREGA is growing (in 2020-21 an unprecedented 72 lakh households completed 100 days of work) and the government is refusing to increase the number of days of work with higher wages.

Run-away Inflation: People's miseries are compounded by the run-away inflation in the prices of essential commodities. This has been triggered by the massive hike in the central excise duties on petroleum products. Between January 1 and July 22, 2021, petrol prices were revised by 67 times and diesel by 63. The prices of gas cylinders have seen a cruel spike. Since May 2020 the subsidy on gas cylinders have been done away with. During the last seven months, the prices of cylinder went up from nearly Rs. 250 to an average cost of Rs. 834 in Delhi.

These hikes have taken place when international prices fell drastically of crude oil and LPG. The cost per barrel of crude oil for India in 2019-20 was 30 per cent less than the previous year, the lowest since 2004-05. For LPG this fell from \$ 880 per metric ton in FY 2014 to \$ 382 in FY 2021.

Instead of passing the benefit of this to the people, the government has been amassing its revenues. In 2020-21, the government collected rupees 3.4 lakh crores through excise duties and cess on petroleum which is rupees 1.56 lakh crore more than the previous year.

Obscene Growth of Inequalities: While such is the level of peoples' misery the numbers of billionaires in India have increased from 102 to 140 in this pandemic year, according to the *Forbes*. Their combined wealth doubled to \$ 596 billion. India is now third amongst countries with largest number of billionaires.

Growing Attacks on Women, Dalits and Adivasis

The incidents of sexual crimes, domestic violence and atrocities against women continue to rise. Particularly gruesome are the continuing instances of gang rapes and murder of Dalits women and minors.

The social injustices and crimes against Dalits continue to increase. The government has recently informed the parliament that there were no deaths due to manual scavenging during the last five years. This is a brazen untruth when

the government itself informed the parliament in the February budget session of 340 deaths in the last five years due to this banned evil practise. The actual figure given by Dalit rights organisations is 472.

Tribal rights under the Forest Rights Act are being severely undermined. Due to the privatisation of mining in many places they are being mercilessly displaced from their traditional habitations.

Growing Assaults on Federalism

There is a relentless all-round attack on federalism and states' rights in all spheres – political, fiscal, social and cultural.

The role of Governors and Lt. Governors transgress all Constitutional proprieties. Whether it be the Governor of Maharashtra or West Bengal, they are openly acting as agents of the Central ruling party. The manner in which the Administrator of Lakshadweep is trampling upon the rights of the local people there is truly scandalous. From the menu of mid-day meals in schools to land rights, the Administrator (a BJP leader of Gujarat) is behaving like a Viceroy.

The states' fiscal space is being continuously squeezed. The Centre has not been paying the GST compensation dues to the states. The raising of borrowing limits for the states is attached with conditionalities. More and more cesses and special duties are levied to deprive the states of their share of the divisible taxes. The GST compensation to the states must be extended by another five years.

The Centre has encroached into states' rights in education, health, agriculture, rural development etc through the three farm laws, National Education Policy and various Centrally-sponsored schemes. The creation of a Ministry of Cooperation at the Centre is another major encroachment on states' rights as cooperatives are a state subject.

It is essential that non-BJP state governments come together to stave off such assaults on federalism. The defence of states' rights and the federal principle is part of the struggle against authoritarian centralization.

Attacks on Parliamentary Institutions

The obdurate refusal of the Modi government to discuss Pegasus spyware surveillance is disrupting the ongoing monsoon session of the Parliament. All other important issues like the farmers' struggle, the attacks on people's livelihood, growing unemployment, price rise, attacks on people's fundamental rights and civil liberties etc. are also not being allowed to be discussed in the Parliament.

It is clear that the Central government does not want to tell the truth and be accountable to the Parliament as ordained by the Indian Constitution. The Parliament is the crucial link in our Constitutional scheme of things in enforcing people's sovereignty — '*We, the people....*'. The government is accountable to Parliament and the MPs are accountable to the people. With parliament not functioning, this link is disrupted undermining the centrality of people's sovereignty. This is how the Constitutional order is being destroyed.

Other independent Constitutional authorities continue to be under pressure like the Judiciary, the Election Commission etc. to toe the line of the government. Agencies like the CBI and ED continue to act as the hand maidens and political agents of the ruling party.

Attacks On Democratic Rights And Civil Liberties

Under the draconian UAPA/Sedition/ NSA hundreds of people continue to remain in detention without even charges being framed. For nearly 2 years, the Bhīma Koregaon accused remain in jail and the country saw the inhuman treatment meted out to an 84 year old Jesuit priest Stan Swamy who died due to denial of treatment for his various ailments including Parkinson's. By the time judiciary intervened and directed him to be hospitalised it was too late to prevent his death in custody. Those responsible for foisting false cases and continued detention and inhuman treatment must not escape accountability. All such detainees under politically motivated cases must be released forthwith.

With judicial intervention few youth who were participating in the peaceful protest against the CAA/NPR/NRC have been released. Many others continue to remain under detention without any case being made out. Many journalists continue under detention for the truthful reporting. The Parliament was informed that the Delhi police have not made any arrest on the violence unleashed by outsiders inside the JNU campus last year in spite of video coverage being available. Under the BJP rule in centre and in states the police is acting at their behest to further their political agenda.

Sharpening Communal Polarisation: Aiming to further sharpen polarisation against the minorities, new laws are being promulgated by BJP state governments for targeting them and the consolidation of the communal Hindutva vote bank. New laws like on population control, movement of cattle etc. are being promulgated.

A lower court order on the Gyanvapi Mosque asking for a survey to ascertain whether a temple existed at the spot is violative of the existing law on the matter. This is being used by the Hindutva brigade to further sharpen communal polarisation. The Places of Worship(Special Provisions) Act directs the

maintenance of status quo in all places of worship. The higher judiciary should immediately intervene to nullify the lower court order.

Jammu & Kashmir: Situation Worsens

It has been two years since Article 370 and 35A were abolished by the Central government and Jammu & Kashmir state dissolved and restructured into two Union Territories. It is most unfortunate that the judicial challenges against this abrogation as a violation of the Constitution continue to remain pending before the Supreme Court. This allows for a *fait accompli* endorsement justifying the extent of the damages that these measures have done for the relationship of the people of J&K with the Union of India.

The abrogation of Article 35A has made the status of permanent residents redundant, protection of jobs and land right has been arbitrarily dispersed which is leading to a deepening alienation and a sense of insecurity in all regions of J&K. The economy has virtually collapsed, unemployment rising very alarmingly and corruption with lack of governance continues. The gagging of the media has resulted in the news of people's agonies and repression being silenced.

The much-advertised meeting of Prime Minister with the leaders of the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), which was mounted under the slogan '*dil se jodo, dilli se jodo*' has remained merely a rhetoric with nothing substantial emerging. The delimitation exercise of constituencies is proceeding with the agenda of the RSS/BJP to reduce the weightage of Valley in the assembly.

The suppression of civil liberties and democratic rights continues unabated. Indiscriminate arrests and harassment of all sections of people, including employees, continues. New directions are being given like non-clearance for passports and government services to anyone involved in 'law and order' and 'stone pelting cases'. This negates the principle of natural justice by equating a police report with being guilty and being denied all these services. Jurisprudence underlines that everyone is innocent till proven guilty. This is brazenly violated in J&K.

For two years now, the usual livelihood, movement and communications of the people in J&K remain disrupted substantially. Even after two years, of the 2,364 people arrested under draconian UAPA, 1,100 continue to remain in detention. Out of the 854 arrested under the Public Safety Act (PSA), 284 continue to remain under detention.

The PAGD declared that the BJP's slogan of '*Naya Kashmir*' has been thoroughly exposed. The common refrain among people in J&K is asking: what

has been achieved by destroying the `Kashmir` which came into being through protracted historic struggle of the people of Jammu & Kashmir. This had empowered the people of all the regions and communities with dignity by liberating them from the shackles of authoritarian monarchy and ruthless feudalism.

It is absolutely imperative that people in every region and community in J&K remain united and not fall prey to false campaigns and attempts aimed at dividing and disarming them.

The statehood of J&K must be restored with full rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution and assembly elections must follow.

All political prisoners must be released immediately. Full communications must be restored along with unhindered movement of the people in the state.

Cinematographic Act Amendments

The proposed amendments to the Cinematography Act by the Modi Government is an all-out assault on the creative talents of film makers and the constitutional right of freedom of expression. The Central Government wants to add a provision to give it the right to “revisionary powers” on account of violation of Section 5B (1) (principles for guidance in certifying films) of the Act. This is tantamount to withdraw films already certified and closed. Recently we have seen the right-wing forces led by the Hindutva brigade and casteist groups indulging in mob censorship of films not to their liking. Now the Government itself wants the powers to stop films critical of its ideology. As it is the autonomous powers of the Film Censor Board have been subverted in various ways by the I & B Ministry. In April the Appellate body to which film makers could appeal against cuts by the Censor Board to their films was arbitrarily dissolved by the Ministry.

These atrocious amendments are designed to throttle cinematic talent and freedom. The Appellate Tribunal as demanded by noted film makers should be restored. The struggle of those in the film industry who have courageously raised their voice against this assault on democracy and freedom of expression, must be supported.

Retrograde IT Rules

The government has recently modified the rules concerning the safe harbour provisions in the IT Act for intermediaries such as Facebook and Twitter vide its notification dated February 25, 2021. This is to come into operation from, May 26, 2021. The notification requires all intermediary platforms providing

messaging services to identify the “first originator” of a message trail and furnish this on demand to either the Court or the Government.

Digital platforms have pointed out that this means breaking the security of the existing messaging protocol, and therefore of all those who use messaging services. This has been endorsed by technical experts. Weakening security protocols violate user privacy and increase vulnerability to hacking for criminal purposes as well.

The Government of India used the Delhi Police to intimidate Twitter for flagging various BJP leaders Tweets as manipulated media. The BJP government’s partisan use of the IT Ministry and the police raids on Twitter’s offices is an act of blatant intimidation.

Undermining security protocols to provide government access to people’s messages is a dangerous and retrograde measure. These strengthen the architecture of a surveillance State violating the right to privacy of citizens. There has to be a strong Data Protection Act passed by Parliament to protect the privacy of citizens.

Plunging Global Rankings: Attacks on people’s democratic rights, civil liberties, and human rights treating all dissent as anti-national and undermining Constitutional guarantees has led many global organisations to downgrade India’s standing as a democracy.

Sweden’s VDem Institute termed India as an ‘electoral autocracy’. *The Economist*, intelligence unit calls India a ‘flawed democracy’. US based Freedom House downgraded India from a ‘free democracy’ to ‘partially free democracy’. The Human Freedom Index downgraded India’s rank from 94 to 111. On the Transparency international Corruption Perception Index India slips six places.

Indian Education: Shattered Status

Several studies by UNICEF, OXFAM and Asim Premji University have brought out the horrific state of Indian education from the primary to the university level including research institutions.

These studies point out that the Corona virus pandemic and the resultant lockdown in 2020 already impacted 247 million children enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in India (UNICEF). The report also establishes that the existing levels of inequality both in terms of access to primary health and digital education, the pandemic has accentuated these sharply. Government’s own data shows that six million children were already out of school and only a quarter of households (24 per cent) had access to internet. Obviously, this access also

suffered from large rural-urban and gender divide not to speak of further skewed patterns for SC/ST and minorities.

The futility of online education, notwithstanding the initial attempts by the central and many of the state governments to peddle online education as a likely solution is comprehensively exposed by the Asim Premji university study among teachers and parents. It's findings have established that 80 per cent of the respondents pointed out that no emotional connect is possible and 90 per cent point out no meaningful evaluation is possible on the online platform. The pathetic state is also highlighted by the impact on nutrition of children because of the disappearance of the mid-day meal scheme. Further, this situation is creating innumerable problems such phenomenal growth in child trafficking, child labour, petty crimes etc.

During this period there have been attempts by the central government to derail the process of reservation for entry into educational institution particularly for admission to medical institutions for the OBC category.

In higher education as well, there have been major problems with closing down of hostels and other facilities. The payment of scholarships, the evaluation of students for promotions and admissions have also caused huge problems and there has been complete lack of sensitivity and application of mind to address anxieties of students and parents. Overall, there has been a near total erosion of our human resources — wastage of our democratic dividend. Further, the young people have been most adversely affected by the unabated growth in unemployment during this entire period. Therefore, the immediate way ahead is to re-open the educational institutions with adequate protection including complete coverage of all staff, teachers and students with free double dose vaccination.

OBC Reservations

The Modi government's callous and partisan approach to OBC reservation is seen in the way it had deprived the states of their right to identify OBCs for reservation. The Modi government had brought a Constitutional amendment (102nd) to provide Constitutional status for the National Commission for Backward Classes. By this amendment, the power to notify a class as socially and educationally backward class (SEBC) was vested with the President. At that time, in Parliament, opposition members had pointed out that this may adversely affect the right of the states to identify OBCs for the purpose of reservation. Till then, the Central government through the National Backward Classes Commission was identifying OBCs for the Central list while state governments through the state Backward Classes Commission were undertaking that job for the state list. The Supreme Court hearing a case regarding this amendment has, in May this year, interpreted this amendment as vesting sole

power to the President, i.e., the Union government to notify who are OBCs. The Supreme Court verdict said that the states by this amendment have been deprived of this power.

This constituted a serious attack on the right of states to determine who are OBCs within their states. The only way to undo the damage was by amending the Constitution further. Finally, at the fag end of the monsoon session of Parliament, the government brought a Constitutional amendment restoring the right of states.

Even the announcement of 27 per cent OBC reservation in all-India quota for undergraduate and postgraduate medical seats was made recently under compulsion. The Modi government had refused to introduce OBC reservation in the all-India quota. It required an order of the Madras High Court and a contempt notice to compel it to make the announcement.

BJP Government's Surveillance Using Pegasus Spyware

Very alarming information emerged on the Government of India procuring the Pegasus spyware from an Israeli firm, NSO, the worldwide leader in cyber surveillance. NSO has categorically clarified that it deals only with “vetted governments”. These investigations reveal a large number of people, human rights activists have been targeted for hacking their smart phones for surveillance. Globally more than 50,000 instances concentrated in countries known to engage in surveillance of their citizens and also known to have been clients of the NSO has surfaced. Among the countries mentioned is India in the company of Rwanda, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Mexico etc.

This report says, “In India, the numbers of phones belonging to hundreds of journalists, activists, opposition politicians, government officials and business executives were on the snooping list”. Reports in Indian media have named at least 40 journalists who are under surveillance of this spy software, Pegasus.

The Modi government's response has not categorically denied that it engaged the services of NSO but claimed that there is no “unauthorized surveillance”.

With these revelations, it is clear that the government has engaged NSO for such surveillance against its own citizens. The Central government must come clean on what is its engagement with NSO, what are the terms and how much our public funds have been paid for this.

Earlier instances of hacking smart phones and computers of human rights activists have been exposed. Material was digitally planted on their devices as established by international agencies in two of the jailed Bhima Koregaon accused. It was then used for their arrests under draconian laws.

The BJP Central government must answer and come clean on using the Pegasus cyber software for surveillance of Indian citizens ranging from political leaders, journalists, officers of the judiciary, ex-CBI chief, ex-Election Commissioner etc. This is ominous. The attack is not only the violation of the fundamental right to privacy but it is an attack on institutions that act as vital checks and balances in a democracy and discharge their constitutional duties. Use of this spyware is tantamount to destroying democracy and its institutions.

There should be an immediate high-powered judicial enquiry monitored by the Supreme Court to establish the truth and punish the guilty.

Rafale Deal: The revelation in a French media portal that one million Euros were paid to a “middleman” in the deal to buy 36 Rafale jets has once again raised the issue of kickbacks and other illegal payments in the Rafale deal. The report is based on an analysis of the Dassault company’s accounts of 2017.

Subsequently, the French public prosecution services (PNF) has ordered an investigation by a French judge into the 2016 multi-billion dollar deal for Rafale fighter jets entered into by the Modi government. Judicial investigation was formally opened into the Inter-Governmental Agreement on June 14 following a decision by the Financial Branch of the PNF. The exposures of official papers concerning the deal by a French investigative website show that Dassault Aviation, the manufacturer of the Rafale and Anil Ambani’s Reliance Group entered into an agreement on March 26, 2015 i.e. fifteen days before PM Modi’s announcement of the new deal and exclusion of HAL.

This reconfirms the apprehensions raised by the Party that PM Modi’s turnaround from the earlier purchase agreement, is mired in deep corruption and money laundering.

The dogged refusal by the Modi government to order a probe into the Rafale deal confirms that it has something to hide in the matter. The CAG audit report could not obviously look into the issue of illegal payments.

There has to be a high-level investigation into the whole business of cancellation of the earlier order and the fresh order for 36 planes at a higher cost.

Assam-Mizoram Conflict: It is unprecedented that two neighbouring states, both with NDA governments — Assam and Mizoram, are engaged in armed clashes and hostilities. This is a total failure of the Central Government and the Home Ministry. Worse, such a situation developed soon after the Union Home Minister had gone there and attended a meeting convened by him of all the North Eastern states and their officials. The Central government appears to have

lowered tensions by talking with both state governments but tensions are simmering. Efforts must be effectively pursued to ensure peace and tranquillity in the North East.

Growing Struggles

Growing Unity of the Trade Unions, Kisan and Agricultural Labour Organisations: The highlight of this period has been the strengthening of unity in joint movements by the trade unions, kisan and agricultural labour organisations in rallying support and solidarity for the farmers' struggle and on common demands of all three.

This is a historic step in strengthening the unity of the basic working people of our country in defence of their rights and to safeguard the country's economic sovereignty and national assets. This is a process that is strengthening and must be further consolidated.

Historic Farmers' Struggle: The struggle of the farmers continues for over eight months demanding the repeal of the agri-laws and the legal right for an MSP of C2+50 per cent. Thousands of farmers have laid siege to the capital at its borders like Singhu, Tikri, Ghazipur, Shahjahanpur, Palwal and Mewat. The farmers' struggle began by braving intense repression by the BJP-JJP Haryana state government and also by the BJP central government. Social boycott of BJP-JJP Ministers, MPs, MLAs and leaders in Haryana and BJP leaders in Punjab continues unabated for the last several months.

The huge peaceful one lakh strong tractor rally by lakhs of farmers was held on Republic Day, was disrupted by a handful of the BJP government's agent provocateurs. In the following days the farmers at Delhi's borders fought back the repression unleashed on them. Chakka jams, rail rokos, mahapanchayats were also held. A Bharat Bandh was also observed on March 26. From July 22 onwards hundreds of farmers are protesting at Jantar Mantar organising a 'Kisan Sansad' – Farmers' Parliament. This will continue till the end of the ongoing parliament session on August 13.

Struggles of the Working Class

Big struggles both at the all India level as well as in several sectoral level are going on. A joint strike was conducted by steel workers for wage negotiations. The struggle by the workers of the Vizag Steel Plant against privatisation is going on. Anganwadi workers as also Asha workers have conducted struggles and strikes during this period on their demands including for enhanced wages and demands in relation to Covid duties. Coal workers conducted a campaign against commercial mining. Around 66000 employees and officers of public sector General Insurance companies have staged almost complete strike on

August 4, 2021 against the enactment of General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Bill 2021 aimed at privatisation. Electricity Employees and officers are slated to go on strike on August 10 against the Electricity Amendment Bill, 2021 which proposes to privatise electricity distribution network.

Youth for Employment

Protests have been organised by the youth across the country against the abolition of Rail vacancy. Youth workers have worked extensively providing relief in the Covid Situation across the country, especially in the states of West Bengal, Kerala, Tripura, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Maharashtra, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

Availability of both employment opportunities and quality employment are one of the primary issues at this point of time. In both rural as well as urban areas, units were formed to launch movements. The second wave has stalled developments of such local movements in many states. However, the process has been resumed with the thaw in Covid cases.

Students for Public Education

Various secular and democratic minded student organizations, under the banner of All India Forum to Save Public Education, conducted a mass mailing campaign addressed to the President of India, against the UGCs proposal for Blended Mode of Education. The students are continuing their campaign against the NEP 2020, for reopening of educational institutions etc. Due to consistent protests, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Welfare of Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes decided to intervene in the matters regarding the violation of reservation in central universities and institutions.

Student organisation had approached the Supreme Court demanding free universal vaccinations. Considering this petition, and similar other petitions the court asked the government to reconsider its vaccine policy following which the central government announced a new partially free vaccine policy.

Women Against Hunger

The free food grains from the government were not being distributed properly. A large number of beneficiaries were being deprived under some pretext or the other. Women picketed ration shops against the corruption in distribution of food grains. This forced the administration to take steps to provide food grains.

Women's teams in villages and bastis/mohallas all over the country distributed food grains and other essential items during this second wave of Covid. Women

activists ran local kitchens and even distributed cooked food to families facing starvation

Gherao of food godowns, struggles for getting ration cards, implementation of the widow and old age pension schemes, problems faced by children during online education, protests against schools demanding high fees, relief for domestic workers, taking up cases of violence, etc are some of the interventions by women's organisation.

Political Situation

The assembly elections in four states in April-May were a setback for the BJP. It and its allies lost in West Bengal, Tamilnadu and Kerala. Only in Assam, it could come back to power with a narrow margin.

In the recent period, the BJP has faced problems within the party and government in two states – Uttarakhand and Karnataka. It had to change two Chief Ministers in the space of two months in Uttarakhand. In Karnataka, Yediyurappa had to step down and a new Chief Minister Bommai was installed.

Having mishandled the second wave of Covid, the BJP government at the Centre has been faced with growing discontent even from sections of its middle class supporters. In Uttar Pradesh, the Adityanath government totally bungled the tackling of the second wave and the images of bodies floating down the Ganga became international news.

With the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections just seven months away, the BJP government is busy pursuing a communal agenda to divert the attention of the people. The population policy, the love jihad law and so on are being implemented to sharpen communal polarization.

However, the farmers' struggle and workers struggles have been strengthening in this period. In Parliament, there has been a more united opposition taking on the government.

It is, therefore, necessary to build wider united struggles and rally all the secular democratic forces to unitedly counter the Hindutva-neoliberal agenda of the Modi government.

Central Committee Demands

The Central Committee demands that the following issues must be implemented by the Central government:

1. Marshall and augment all vaccine production capabilities in India, procure vaccines globally and speed up the free universal mass vaccination drive immediately; adequate compensation for those who lost their life due to Covid; vastly expand public health care system.
2. Implement free cash transfers of Rs. 7,500 per month to all families outside the income tax bracket.
3. Distribute free food kits containing all essential commodities of daily consumption to all the needy.
4. Withdraw hikes in Central excise duties and other surcharges on all petroleum products and control galloping inflation.
5. Repeal agri-laws and legislate right to sell at MSP which is C2+50 per cent.
6. Stop and reverse the privatisation of the public sector.
7. Repeal the labour codes; restore the rights of the working people to protest through strikes and for wage bargaining.
8. Announce monetary stimulus packages for revival of MSMEs, not provision of loans.
9. Vastly enlarge MGNREGA with increasing guarantee for 200 days with at least doubling of wages.
10. Legislate an urban employment guarantee programme on similar lines.
11. Increase public investments to build our economic and social infrastructure generating jobs and boosting domestic demand; fill up vacancies in government jobs.
12. Prioritise the vaccination of teachers, staff and students to ensure early re-opening of educational institutions.
13. Immediate Supreme Court monitored judicial enquiry into the use of Pegasus military spyware for surveillance of people.
14. High level investigation into the Rafale deal – the cancellation of the earlier order and placing of a new order at higher cost.
15. Release all political prisoners including those under draconian UAPA in Bhima Koregaon case and anti-CAA protests. Stop using other draconian laws like sedition/NSA to violate democratic rights and civil liberties of the people.

Release all media personnel detained for exercising their fundamental right of freedom of expression. Release all political prisoners in J&K.

CC Call

On the basis of the above demands, the Central Committee calls for organising countrywide protests and struggles by the state committees and all lower units during the month of September depending on the local conditions of the pandemic and associated lockdowns. The state committees will decide the details of these protest actions over the month.

Efforts must be made to draw in all other sections who are willing to join these protest actions on the above demands.
