

COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST)



Central Committee

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Report on Political Developments (Adopted at the Central Committee Meeting held on July 25-26, 2020)

Due to the conditions created by the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdowns, our Central Committee is meeting after a gap of six months. This is unprecedented. But under the current conditions and uncertainty there was no other option. Even this meeting is a virtual meeting using digital technology as a meeting with physical presence is near impossible due to the travel restrictions and importantly the precautions necessary to combat this pandemic. Until a vaccine against Covid-19, or a proven therapeutic antidote emerges, such conditions of uncertainty will continue. It is absolutely essential that all our comrades, especially those older than 60 years, must adhere to the required precautions of maintaining physical distance, wear masks and ensure personal hygiene.

During this period, the Party at all levels from the Centre, state committees and lower committees have intervened, through various activities, to maintain our links with the people, raising issues of immediate concern and doing very commendable activities for providing relief to the suffering people. The reports of the Party Centre and state committees have been circulated to all CC members. Hence those details are not contained here.

International

Covid-19 Pandemic

With the surging infection across the globe, the entire world is passing through a very critical period. As of July 12, nearly 1.3 crore or 13 million people have been infected and there are close to six lakh deaths with nearly 1.4 lakh in the USA itself (figures will be updated, but they keep changing by the hour). Among the countries that have the most number of infections, USA stands with the highest, followed by Brazil and then by India.

Nearly all countries have imposed lockdowns in varying degrees depending on their assessment of the spread and intensity of the pandemic. In some countries,

the lockdown conditions have continued for months. The pandemic and the lockdowns put together have severely disrupted the social, economic, cultural and political life of the people globally.

Deaths are disproportionately high in developed capitalist countries. This is not surprising. The vigorous pursuit of neo-liberal policies led to the large-scale privatization of essential services, importantly public health. Virtual absence of public investment in research for reinforcing protection against any epidemic/pandemic has also left the world vulnerable to the ravages of this pathogen. This drive of international finance capital led neo-liberal dispensation to maximise profits at all costs had left provision of basic access to health unavailable to a large number of people. Public health systems were thus left largely at the mercy of private insurance and big pharmaceutical corporates. While the virus does not distinguish between one human being and the other, the huge widening of economic inequalities created by neo-liberalism has left large sections of the population vulnerable. Conditions were thus fertile, under capitalism, for the ravages of the pandemic.

The Director General of the World Health Organisation has warned (July 12) that the pandemic is worsening globally and that “there will be no return to the old normal in the foreseeable future”. Without naming countries he said about some in Europe and Asia that “too many countries are headed in the wrong direction”, saying that they are “undermining the most critical ingredient to any response: trust”. Clearly, he was speaking of countries with rightwing authoritarian governments, who today top the list of the maximum number of positive cases. About countries not combatting by the scientific advice, he said “if the basics aren’t followed, there is only one way this pandemic is going to go – get worse and worse and worse”.

Socialist Countries: In contrast, socialist countries which for decades had established an effective universal health care system were able to combat the pandemic in a much better manner. In **China**, where the virus first manifested itself in Wuhan, the spread has been contained. As Chinese people return to their country from various parts of the globe, after the initial lockdown, the pandemic is once again manifesting itself. But vigilance has been able to contain and isolate such pockets of spread. China has now begun opening up of its economic and normal activities in a phased manner. **Vietnam**, sharing a long land border with China reports not a single death due to Covid-19. **Cuba** has reported fewer than 100 deaths and has been able to contain the spread. It is now helping more than fifty countries in the world by supplying them with medicines and equipment to combat this pandemic. **Laos** also reports no deaths from the pandemic. Insulated as it is, **DPRK** reports no positive cases.

The superiority of the socialist system in tackling the pandemic is starkly visible.

In other countries which have better universal health care systems like South Korea, Singapore, New Zealand, Taiwan etc., the control has been more effective.

Kerala: In India, the Left and Democratic Front of Kerala led by the CPI(M) has set an exemplary record in tackling the pandemic. The 'Kerala Model' has won international appreciation and has been lauded by the World Health Organisation as a model that needs to be emulated. This was based on scientific advice of a four-pronged manner in which the pandemic must be combatted. These are intensive testing; isolating the positive cases; contact tracing; and quarantine.

Many countries, particularly those with rightwing neo-liberal dispensations, have seen the rejection of scientific advice in strengthening their preparedness to face the pandemic, resulting in greater devastation. It is therefore, not surprising that the largest number of infections are in countries like the USA, Brazil and India with rightwing authoritarian governments.

Global Economy

The global economy, already on the verge of a recession before the pandemic appeared, has now been severely battered. The World bank has projected a global GDP fall by -5.2 per cent in 2020. USA is projected at -6.1 percent, Eurozone at -9.1 per cent and Japan at -6.1 per cent. These are widely off the mark with the projections that the World Bank made of the global economy in January 2020. The international rating agency Moody's has estimated that the G20 advanced countries will see a -6.4 per cent contraction while all countries in the world are projected to experience a deep contraction. The projection by several other international agencies are also in the similar range. World merchandise trade is likely to fall by nearly 30 per cent in 2020 according to WTO. This much of shrinkage of global output will have a disastrous impact on the livelihood conditions of the people. It is already begun its disruptive impact with growing poverty, unemployment, hunger and misery across the globe.

Growing Poverty

The United Nations anticipates that nearly 35 million additional people, mainly those in the informal sector, will fall below extreme poverty levels this year. The World Bank estimates that this may reach up to 60 million people.

The prolonged lockdowns and the closure of all educational institutions affecting 1.25 billion children and youth in over 120 countries, will have negative impact for human development.

The World Food Programme estimates that an additional 2.65 million people will be pushed into crisis levels of hunger.

Unemployment

The ILO estimates that half of all the working people globally will lose their jobs due to this pandemic and the lockdown. The Asian Development Bank estimates that the global employment decline will be between 158 and 242 million jobs. 70 per cent of these will be in the countries of Asia-Pacific. Global labour incomes will drop between \$1.2 trillion and \$1.8 trillion. Workers in the informal sector are the worst affected according to the ILO, which estimates 1.6 billion have already lost their livelihoods globally.

Widening Inequalities

While this is the plight of a majority of humanity, in sharp contrast, the super-rich across the world have become richer than they were between March and May 2020. *Forbes* says that the top 25 world's wealthiest people were worth a whopping \$255 billion more between March 23 and May 23.

Bankruptcy of Neo-Liberalism

The incapacity of capitalism as a system to single-mindedly combat this pandemic, work collectively to develop a vaccine and to provide relief to people who are suffering from economic miseries and agonies is being exposed most vividly across the globe.

Our 22nd Party Congress analysis of the bankruptcy of neo-liberalism and the failure of international finance capital led neo-liberal globalisation was carried forward in our central committee meetings subsequently. The neo-liberal order of deregulation of domestic financial markets, the removal of job protection laws in the name of labour reforms, the opening up of domestic resources and markets and the removal of barriers to international trade and finance movement across countries has clearly shown being unable to either resolve the capitalist crisis, particularly the intense global slowdown since the 2008 Wall Street col-

lapse and in addressing the concerns of people's welfare. On the contrary, the drive to maximise profits has led to higher levels of exploitation sharply shrinking global demand. This, by itself, further intensifies the capitalist crisis, widening economic inequalities.

More State Intervention: Given the destruction of the global economy due to the current situation, many voices are being raised from ardent neo-liberal proponents for greater State intervention. Prestigious media houses like the Financial Times, London, New York Times, the Economist etc. have all been articulating that the global economy has reached a stage where Keynesian State intervention and Roosevelt's New Deal in the US to overcome the Great Depression of the 1930s has returned. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson in a public address, prefacing by declaring himself as not being a communist, argued for greater public investment and public provisioning of essential services like health, education etc.! The issues of reduction of economic inequalities and enlarging labour rights are being put forward as necessary preconditions to overcome the challenges to the neo-liberal order, to safeguard and promote the development of capitalism. Sections of such opinion, in fact, argue that international finance capital will understand the need for such State intervention for its own benefit.

However, the world of Keynes and Roosevelt is no longer the world in 2020 under the neo-liberal dispensation. International finance capital inherently abhors any State intervention through public financing that can enlarge fiscal deficits thereby depriving the IFC of making greater profits as capital gets locked in by State investments. The neo-liberal order will resist such prescriptions to the hilt. IFC would want larger investment and enlargement of global demand for its profit maximization but this must be done not through State intervention but by the State making provisions to facilitate private investment by placing public funds at the disposal of private capital.

This is precisely the trajectory being followed by almost all capitalist countries where a substantial part of announced fiscal/financial stimulus packages are earmarked for provisioning of loans to private capital and not direct transfers to people or investments that will generate greater employment and enlarge demand.

The bankruptcy of the neo-liberal prescriptions is yet again clear. No private entity will borrow and invest when what is produced by such investment cannot be sold, as people do not have purchasing power. Unless a product is sold, profits cannot be made under the capitalist system. Hence, the vicious cycle of enlarging profits through further merciless exploitation of the working people, through

further cuts in their incomes, job loss, drastic reduction in social security expenditures etc – all ‘austerity measures’ – will further intensify.

The stage is this emerging for intensification of class struggles both at the global and in individual countries.

Popular Protests

Even in the difficult conditions of the pandemic and the lockdown, working class protest actions took place in many countries in the world against the further intensification of capitalist exploitation and attacks on working conditions and livelihood. Workers took to the streets in USA, Italy, Spain, Britain, Greece, Japan, Chile, Brazil, Lebanon and many other countries. Despite restrictions, May Day was observed in a big way in many countries. In some countries strikes were organized. All these protests followed the precautionary norms in place. Newer forms of struggle have emerged like online protests, street protests maintaining physical distancing, wearing masks etc. which are now called as ‘hybrid protests’.

Political Rightward Shift

The imposition of neo-liberalism under these conditions increasingly engenders greater rightward political shift. Both in our October 2019 and January 2020 Central Committee reports on political development we had said:

“The 22nd Party Congress had noted the global political rightward shift as a consequence of the prolonged global capitalist crisis. The protests against the policies of neo-liberalism and profit maximization that are ruining the lives of billions of people across the world and intensifying exploitation has to be disrupted in order to ensure that they do not reach levels threatening the continuance of the neo-liberal order despite its bankruptcy. A slowdown in the levels of profit maximization cannot but affect adversely the interests of the global capitalism. Rightward political shift of rousing passions, disruptive trends like racism, xenophobia, spreading hatred, suppression of democratic rights and civil liberties have all been brought into play to disrupt the growing unity of the working class led working people’s protests across the world.” (October, 2019)

“This political rightward shift continues in many countries also has its impact in India. There are, of course, growing resistance to this trend in many countries. This resistance will have to be further strengthened

globally by forging international solidarity amongst communist and workers parties". (January, 2020)

This tendency can be seen to intensify further globally. The efforts to divide the people on emotive passions and disrupt their unity against growing exploitation among countries are intensifying through racist divide like in the USA, religious divide like in India, the latest on this score is Erdogan's Turkey, which has now declared the iconic Hagia Sofia as a Islamic prayer facility reversing its status as a museum. Bolsanaro's Brazil has unleashed repressive measures while leaving the combatting of the pandemic to the people, abdicating government's responsibility.

These efforts have intensified in countries which already have rabidly rightwing authoritarian regimes, adopting fascistic methods, which are unleashing intense exploitation of the working people and catering to the interests of propping up the bankrupt neo-liberal order.

Even with such a rightward shift, the systemic crisis of capitalism cannot be overcome. It is clear that there is no solution for the crisis within capitalism. The political alternative to capitalism i.e. socialism, has to be strengthened by mobilising larger and larger sections of popular forces. The conditions for the emergence of such an alternative that we have discussed in detail both in our ideological resolution of the 20th Party Congress and in the political resolution of the 22nd Party Congress, crucially depends on strengthening the Leninist 'subjective factor' in all countries.

US Imperialism Intensifies its Hegemonic Drive

This current situation warrants greater levels of international cooperation to both combat the pandemic and provide relief to billions of people whose suffering intensifies today. Negating this, on both these counts, USA under President Donald Trump has embarked upon a path to ensure his re-election and at the same time to position USA in the post pandemic world to emerge stronger in furthering its global hegemonic designs.

Instead of global scientific cooperation to develop a vaccine at the earliest, Trump has led the USA out of the WHO, the premier global health agency under the United Nations. Trump justifies this on the so-called grounds that WHO is shielding China. It was Trump who initially praised China for the manner in which it had identified the sequence of the spread of this Corona virus and the manner in which it had tackled it. Trump now charges China as being responsible for the Pandemic. Trump withdrew from the WHO despite China, confident

that it has nothing to lose, agreeing for an investigation by the WHO into the circumstances that led to the pandemic.

Contrary to the expectation of global cooperation in tackling this pandemic, Trump along with his close ally, the UK's conservative Tory government, have opposed universal access to the vaccine when it emerges without the obligations under Intellectual Property Rights and international patents rights. USA is, thus, party to the prohibitive pricing by private pharmaceutical corporates who will now astronomically charge for the vaccine, depriving access to billions of people globally. Further, all drugs that have been of some use in the treatment of the pandemic are being bought and hoarded by Trump, denying the rest of the world access to them. He recently bought the entire global production of *Remdesivir*. However, USA under Donald Trump has severely suffered in its reputation, globally, due to mishandling of the pandemic and the surging spread of the virus claiming more deaths daily.

USA's image took a further beating with the brutal murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis Police. This reflects the growing racist hatred and violence in Trump's USA. The widespread protests have sharply escalated not only in the USA but globally under the slogan "Black Lives Matter". This BLM movement has also brought out the historical context of colonialism as a major source for the emergence of racial hatred. Instead of trying to contain this situation by upholding the universal rights proclaimed by the UN and the US Constitution, Trump is seeking now to divide the people on racial grounds hoping to benefit from the polarisation in the forthcoming Presidential elections. He has now advanced the slogan of "White Power" as opposed to "Black Lives Matter". It is not merely the inability to ensure justice by punishing the perpetrators of racist violence but such racist hatred is sought to be exploited for electoral gains.

'Containment of China': The Chinese economy grew in the second quarter of 2020 according to *Bloomberg*. The GDP expanded by 3.2 per cent in the second quarter, April-June, compared to the second quarter growth in 2019. In the first quarter of 2020, GDP had declined by a massive 6.8 per cent. Having shut its economy in the first quarter to arrest the spread of Covid, China has managed to largely overcome the subsequent outbreaks. However, the economy is still 1.6 per cent smaller than what it was at the end of the first half of 2019. A weak domestic demand that shrunk all retail sales is an issue that is being tackled.

The Chinese government reported to its National People's Congress that it will accomplish the goals set for 2020 by eliminating poverty and for building a moderately prosperous society in all respects. It is expecting to create nine million new urban jobs, provide pension funds for nearly 300 million senior citizens, ensure needed food supply for 1.4 billion Chinese people and further increase the incomes of the people. The Chinese economic recovery of such a na-

ture will pose a serious challenge for US global hegemony in the post-Covid world.

This is being seen by US imperialism as a danger to its global hegemony in the post-Covid world. Hence all efforts are being made to further strengthen its earlier declared strategic objective of ‘containment of China’. It has begun the blocking of Chinese companies like Huawei and also imposing trade restrictions and making all efforts to adversely affect China’s economic recovery.

At the strategic military level it has intensified the already existing presence of the US navy in the South China Sea. In June it deployed three carrier battle ships into these disputed waters. For the first time multiple aircraft carriers of the US navy have conducted military exercises in this area. The USA is actively promoting the grouping of US, Australia, Japan, India – referred to as ‘QUAD’ to bring pressure on and to isolate China.

US Interventions

During this period of the pandemic and the lockdown US imperialism has intensified its efforts to destabilise countries like Venezuela, Iran, Syria, DPRK and intensified the economic blockade against Cuba. Disregarding all United Nations calls for waving US sanctions against countries like Cuba, Iran and Venezuela so that they may effectively combat the pandemic by accessing required medical equipment, food and other supplies, the US brazenly continues with these sanctions with impunity.

Palestine

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu had earlier announced that the formal annexation of 30 per cent of Palestinian West Bank territories illegally occupied by Israel would take place on July 1. While this did not happen, Netanyahu maintains that the preparations for annexation are on. This illegal annexation comes under US protection and instigation. Trump announced the notorious “peace through prosperity” plan in January 2020. This plan envisages that the Palestinian lands on which illegal Jewish settlements are established be annexed by Israel. It also deprives East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestine State despite several UN resolutions to this effect. Trump is pushing for this to perpetually seal any prospect of a two-State solution. Thus the century long denial of a legitimate homeland for the Palestinians is set to prolong.

Syria Peace Talks

Through a video conference, leaders of Russia, Turkey and Iran discussed efforts to stabilise the situation in Syria through a political settlement to end the nine year conflict. In early March Russia and Turkey succeeded in halting the Syrian government's military campaign against the rebel held Idlib area. The consequent ceasefire has been successful so far. They strongly criticised the US and EU for sanctions to "strangle Syria economically". The US however has begun implementing new sanctions, thus strengthening efforts to further destabilise Syria.

World Social Contradictions Intensify

The four major global social contradictions viz. between imperialism and socialism; between imperialism and developing countries; inter-imperialist conflicts; and between Labour and Capital are all intensifying in varying degrees as a consequence of these developments. In this period when there is intensification of class struggles at the global scale and in every capitalist country, it is the task of our Party to strengthen our solidarity with these struggles at the international level and strengthening class struggles in India.

National

Covid Pandemic Situation

The Covid pandemic is surging relentlessly in the country. Each day, the numbers of positive cases and deaths are increasing. This is a situation of serious concern.

The first death due to the pandemic, in the world, was reported at end of December 2019 in Wuhan, China. The whole world was put on alert of the possible global spread and many countries had started taking certain containment measures. But in India, no such containment activity was undertaken then.

The first positive case in India was reported on January 30 in Kerala. The LDF government in Kerala, soon after the global alert, began preparations anticipating that when people, particularly students from Kerala, will return from Wuhan and other parts of the world, they may carry the deadly virus. Even before the positive case was noticed, by January 20, district control centres started functioning.

Unlike the LDF government in Kerala, the Central government did not take any measures in the whole month of February and first three weeks of March. During this period, big events were held with large assembly of people where none

of the precautionary measures like physical distancing, masks and sanitisers were used. In fact, there was no social awareness campaign on these measures. The month of February and March saw the large gathering at Ahmedabad welcoming US President Donald Trump. Lakhs of people were mobilised for *Namaste Trump* event on February 24, 2020 at the Motera Stadium. The horrendous communal violence in north-east Delhi had diverted attention from the required preparations for facing the pandemic and undermined the efforts and capacities to combat the pandemic. The Tablighi Markaz with delegates coming in from countries where the pandemic was on the rise like Malaysia, Indonesia etc took place in Delhi. The organisers of these events were irresponsible in going ahead with the event under these circumstances. However, all due permissions and visa clearances for these events were granted by the Central government. In contrast, the Maharashtra government had refused them permission for a similar event. The Parliament continued to be in session till March 23, when it was adjourned sine die. On the same evening, the BJP government was sworn-in in Madhya Pradesh, after the toppling of a democratically-elected government, through horse-trading. Large gathering was there at the public swearing in ceremony in Bhopal.

National Lockdown: The very next day, March 24, the Prime Minister announced a 21-day national lockdown giving the country, the state governments and the people a mere four-hour notice. This lockdown was extended three times to end on June 1. Since the lockdown restrictions have been eased, each day the highest number of cases and deaths are being reported.

A lockdown is not a cure; it helps in containing the spread and provides time to prepare and take steps to contain the spread. During the lockdown, widespread testing, isolating the positive cases, contact tracing of people who were in touch with the positive cases and quarantining them is the manner in which the period of lockdown should have been utilized. But this was not done by the Central government.

The Prime Minister's demagoguery conditioned the people to think that like the Mahabharata war was won in 18 days, India will win the battle against the pandemic in 21 days. The grim reality was the misery that the lockdown imposed on our people.

No Augmentation of Health Facilities: The lockdown period should have been used to augment our medical and hospital facilities, provide Personal Protection Equipment (PPEs) to our doctors and health workers and prepare for large-scale testing. None of these issues were addressed by the BJP Central government, either prior to the lockdown or during the lockdown. India has an abysmal 0.8 doctors per thousand people and 0.7 hospital beds for thousand people. Private

hospital space should have been commandeered by the Central government for the treatment of Covid-19 patients. This has not happened so far, except for some instances in some states. Countries like Spain have nationalised their private health facilities. PPEs are still in short supply. India's testing rates remain one of the lowest in the world with just around 8 out of a thousand people.

People's Miseries: The unplanned, unscientific and abrupt lockdown has destroyed both the economy and the livelihood of a large majority of our people. The worst is the case of the migrant workers, who walked on roads back to their homes for over two months with their families. If the lockdown had come with some time for preparation, many of these migrant workers may have returned home at their own expense. Subjecting them to such miseries by the abrupt announcement, the BJP Central government refused to provide any transportation, free of cost, to them. Even when, after many weeks of the lockdown, the Shramik special trains were started, the Central government demanded advance payments to the Indian railways from the state governments. In many cases, desperate workers had to pay, by borrowing, for themselves. The consequences of an irrational abrupt unilateral lockdown were being forced upon the state governments to bear the burden. However, they are not being assisted financially, despite thousands of crores of rupees being collected in a private trust fund named after the PM.

Cash Transfers and Free Food: Party had demanded, from the day of the announcement of the lockdown, a cash transfer of Rs. 7,500 to all families outside of the tax bracket and distribution of 10 kg free foodgrains to needy individuals per month for six months, from the huge stock of foodgrains stored in Central godowns. But the Central government refused to do this leaving the people to survive at the mercy of hunger and job losses.

Economic Impact

The Indian economy was already in a tailspin plunging into a recession before the Covid-19 pandemic impacted us. The GDP growth rate, 2019-20, is an eleven-year low of 4.2 per cent against 6.1 per cent in 2018-19. Many international rating agencies and independent domestic institutions estimate a huge fall in the GDP growth rate this year, ranging from (-) 3.2 per cent to (-) 6.8 per cent. The World Bank predicts it at (-) 3.2, IMF estimates (-) 4.5 per cent and Asian Development Bank (-) 4 per cent. Nomura projects (-) 5.2 per cent. S&P asserts that India will suffer the biggest GDP loss of 11 per cent due to the pandemic. This is nearly double of the loss of Latin America and Africa together and 5-6 times of the rest of Asia. India's SBI projected the contraction by (-) 6.8 per cent, ICRA projects (-) 9.5% and CARE ratings has projected contraction at (-) 6.4 per cent.

Even prior to the outbreak of the pandemic and the lockdown, Party has been intervening seeking greater public investments as the only way to revive the economy that was plunging into a severe recession. The building of our much-needed infrastructure through public investments would have generated high levels of new employment which, in turn, would have vastly expanded domestic demand in the Indian economy. This would lead to a situation where the already closed factories and halted manufacturing could revive. But committed as it is to the neo-liberal agenda, the Modi government continued to pursue policies that further reduced the purchasing power in the hands of the Indian people pushing the economy deeper towards a recession.

Post-pandemic and the lockdown, the Modi government has unleashed an aggressive pursuit of the neo-liberal agenda, instead of the required State intervention, compounding people's miseries and agonies. This is resulting in exponentially widening economic inequalities and nurturing higher levels of crony capitalism. The stimulus package announced contains un-distilled neo-liberal prescriptions of large-scale privatization, opening up of the Indian markets and economic wealth to plunder by private capital and attacks on the rights of working people. This will impose further greater misery and economic burdens on the people.

Unemployment: During the period of the lockdown, it is estimated by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) that anywhere near 150 million people have lost their jobs. Between April and May, the unemployment rate shot up from 23.5 per cent to 27.1 per cent. During 2019-20, average employment was around 404 million and by April 2020, i.e., in the first month of the lockdown, this number fell to 282 million – nearly 30 per cent fall, i.e., 122 million.

The daily wage labourers, workers in the informal sector and small traders account for most of these losses. Workers from these sections averaged 128 million during 2019-20. By April end, this fell to just 37 million, i.e., a massive loss of 91 million livelihoods, including 17 million women, in just one month. 23 per cent of those working in large enterprises with fixed assets have lost their jobs, i.e., from 78 million in 2019-20 to 60 million in April 2020. 18 million business personnel are estimated to have lost their employment. The number of salaried employees, from 86 million in 2019-20 fell to 68 million in April 2020, i.e., one out of every five salaried employee has lost employment.

The impact of unemployment on our youth is very disturbing. Over 27 million youth in the age group of 20 to 29 have lost jobs. 33 million in the age group of 30 to 39 lost their jobs.

“Green Shoots” of Economic Revival? Prime Minister Modi claims now that he is seeing “green shoots” of economic revival! This is based on the fact that unemployment has begun to reduce since the lockdown restrictions were relaxed.

The reality is that out of the 12.2 crore million jobs lost in April due to lockdown, 9.1 crore jobs came back in June. However, against the average employment of 40.4 crore in 2019-20; employment in June registered at 37.4 crore, i.e., 3 crores less. According to CMIE, as the lockdown relaxed, small traders and daily wage workers returned to their jobs. 63 per cent of the jobs that came back were essentially informal forms of employment. However their earnings had not returned. There are widespread instances of small traders switching to farming activities in their neighbourhoods. There has been an increase in the workers in agriculture. Usually, during a period of economic distress, an increase in agricultural employment is an indication of disguised unemployment with incomes drying up in the small and retail trading sectors, people return to work on fields. This is more a reflection of the distress rather than a rise in gainful employment. 80 per cent of the jobs that are reported as recovered belong to small traders, daily wage labourers and farmers. The MGNREGA also reflected an increase, though totally inadequate, in the levels of employment.

PM Modi has claimed that during the lockdown period, India received \$20 billion as FDI. This is another instance of the claims regarding green shoots for economic revival. The reality is that \$18.4 billion of this was due to equity sale proceeds of Ambani’s Reliance. This is no investment but proceeds from a sale of equity made through deals with multinational firms.

Industry: In the month of March alone, prior to the imposition of the unilateral lockdown, there was widespread decline in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP). Most of the eight core sectors registered a significant decline in their production. Post the lockdown, the IIP, according to *Bloomberg*, contracted by 55.5 per cent in April and then further, on top of this, by 34.7 per cent in May.

Profiteering during Lockdown: Despite such continuing all round decline in production and services, the wealth of the ultra rich in India surged immensely. Amongst the notable gainers is of Mukesh Ambani who became Asia’s richest person in April when he raised \$10 billion of fresh capital in less than one month. Ambani is now worth \$52.7 billion, up nearly \$20 billion since the pandemic outbreak. Already, as noted in the January CC meeting, in the pre-Corona period, income inequality in India had reached an obscene level with one per cent richest population cornering four times more wealth than what the bottom 70 per cent population, together, possessed.

Agriculture: Instead of addressing the agrarian distress, which got further aggravated during the lockdown period, through increase in public investments, the focus, yet again, is to provide loan facilities to our farmers. Our farmers are already committing distress suicides because of the debt burden and are unlikely to avail of any fresh loans.

Through the so-called stimulus package, the Central government has issued ordinances to remove the Essential Commodities Act. It amended the APMC Act to allow the free movement of foodgrains across states on the basis of unregulated pricing. This has serious implications for the country's food security in the future. Both the producer, the farmer, and the consumer will suffer severe exploitation at the hands of the middlemen who will also create artificial shortages and food scarcity situations in order to maximise profits. Whatever little protection the farmers were getting through MSP procurement will end. This will also destroy whatever little of the public distribution system that is existing in the country. These measures, importantly, will open the way for the entry of big multinational agrobusiness and domestic corporates to fully access India's agricultural produce and markets. Guidelines have also been suggested for 'contract farming'.

Cash Transfer Claims: PM Modi claims that Rs. 18,000 crores have been spent for providing cash transfers benefiting nine crore farmers. The PM kisan scheme announced on the eve of the 2019 general elections was to give three annual instalments of Rs. 2,000 to 14 crore farmers. What Modi claims now is the second tranche of this scheme. Instead of 14 crore kisans benefitting, now it is nine crores only. This repackaging propaganda gimmick is now depriving five crore kisans from even these measly benefits.

The Central government had also announced cash transfer to widows, disabled and those with *Jan Dhan* accounts of Rs. 1,000 in two instalments. Much of this has not reached. Amongst the disabled population, this has benefitted only to 3.81 per cent persons. Despite announcement of such schemes, given their very limited reach, a vast majority of people, who are suffering, are being denied.

MGNREGA: The number of people employed last year were 8.23 crore. In 2019-20 an additional one crore household are to be given 100 days work a year. The government will, then, have to allot at least Rs. 2,46,000 crore. Instead of which it has given for the entire year only Rs. 90,000 crores. So, the addition of Rs. 40,000 crore in the announced stimulus package is totally inadequate.

In April and May, an unprecedented 8.4 Crore workers in rural India demanded work under MGNREGA reflecting deep distress. But, shamefully, 1.8 Crore workers were forced to return with the highest number in Uttar Pradesh. The Central Government is undermining the Act by not releasing the required amount of funds and, on the other hand, floating non-statutory schemes in the name of Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Rozgar Yojana.

Expand MGNREGA to ensure at least 200 days of work a year with enhanced wages. Promulgate an Urban Employment Guarantee Act. Announce unemployment allowance to all the unemployed.

Oppose EIA 2020: The draft Environment Impact Assessment 2020 is a blue print to open up India's natural resources to corporate plunder. The proposed clauses exempt a wide range of projects from the critical aspect of public consultation, eliminate protective Constitutional and legal provisions for Adivasi communities in mineral rich areas, post facto permissions for gross violations and many other retrograde proposals. The notification seeks to nullify judgments by the National Green Tribunal and even the Supreme Court on many of these issues. This must be withdrawn.

Burdens on the People

Instead of providing the much-needed relief through direct cash transfers and distribution of free foodgrains, the Modi government has been imposing additional unprecedented burdens.

Rising Inflation: Retail inflation in June crossed the RBI 6 per cent barrier (revised from its earlier 4 per cent ceiling) by registering 6.1 per cent. The Consumer Price Index shows the prices of food and beverages rose by 7.3 per cent. The main source of protein, pulses, grew by 16.7 per cent; milk and dairy products by 8.4 per cent; meat and fish by 16.2 per cent. Even vegetables, despite being a perishable commodity, have seen becoming costlier by 2 per cent. This is further compounding people's misery.

Even under these conditions of the pandemic, the government is charging a 18 per cent GST on sanitizers and other hygienic materials which are essential to combat the spread of this virus.

The massive hikes in petroleum prices are causing even greater misery for the people. The prices of petrol, diesel and cooking gas have been continuously hiked for 16 consecutive days. During the period of lockdown, excise duties on petroleum products were hiked massively to garner greater revenues for the

government. When this BJP government assumed office in 2014, the excise duty on diesel was Rs. 2.56 per litre. It is now Rs. 31.83. Likewise for petrol, it increased from Rs. 9.40 to Rs. 32.98. The prices of kerosene oil per litre under the PDS has increased from Rs. 14.96 in 2014 to Rs. 21.70 now. While the government is garnering revenues, the people are being forced to bear the burden. For two consecutive months, LPG cylinder prices were increased by Rs. 5 per cylinder.

Migrant Workers: The country saw the agony and the terrible plight of our workers who migrated from different parts of the country to earn their livelihood in the urban and agriculture producing centres. Government today seeks to repeal the Interstate Migrant Workmen Act 1979. This will remove whatever little legal protection such workers have. Because of its continuous non-implementation, there is no record of the migrant workers maintained by either the state governments or the enterprises employing them. *The repeal of this Act must be rejected and, on the contrary, the Act must be strengthened.*

Intensification of Social Inequalities: This aggressive implementation of the neo-liberal agenda very adversely impacts marginalized sections especially adivasis, dalits and women. The government even tried to amend the Disability Rights Act to remove penalties as these would affect corporate interests. However, the government was forced to hastily withdraw following stiff opposition.

There is an intensification of existing social oppression and discrimination. Caste based atrocities against dalits has shown a big increase particularly in rural areas where efforts are on to grab the land distributed to the dalits. Adivasis already victims of displacement are facing fresh assaults on their rights in the forests land and the elimination of rights of gram sabhas. The burden of unpaid care work on women has hugely increased. Additionally, they face increasing cases of sexual and domestic violence.

Food Distribution: This government makes tall claims about free distribution of goodgrains. The reality is as follows: (i) At present, foodgrain stock with the FCI is 10.4 crore tonne (ii) Average allocation to the states is 43 lakh tonnes every month under National Food Security Act (iii) If extra free foodgrain of 5 kg per individual were to be given as claimed by the Government, this amount should have been doubled (iv) In April, the extra foodgrain allotted under Pradhan Mantri Kalyan Yojana was only 26 lakh tonnes and in May only 29 lakh tonnes, instead of, at least, 43 lakh tonne, extra.

Health: The pandemic and the lockdown has severely exposed the gross inadequacies of public health system in our country. There are many areas where

there are no public health facilities. Where primary health centres exist, they are very poorly equipped. Facilities in government hospitals and health centres must be urgently upgraded.

During this period, several problems regarding the mental health of our people have surfaced. The pandemic anxieties and the prolonged lockdown are resulting in various expressions of mental health problems. Patients requiring regular health attention like those suffering from cancer, diabetics, TB, neurological problems and other life threatening conditions have not been receiving the regular attention that they require. Time sensitive interventions essential for pregnant women and other reproductive health issues are denied leading to acute distress. This is further compounding people's health conditions making them more vulnerable during the pandemic.

With the current agonizing experience that the people are going through, it is essential that the *Central expenditure on public health, which is less than 1 per cent of the GDP today, must be increased to at least 3 per cent of our GDP for creating a universal public health system..*

CPI(M)'s Alternative Economic Roadmap

The Party had put in the public domain its suggestions for an economic roadmap to be followed in the current situation (May 2, 2020). Forwarding this to the President and Prime Minister of India and to the leaders of opposition parties, we had put forward "an economic plan that needs to be undertaken immediately by the government. The economic crisis and the associated people's agony must be met by measures pertaining to the immediate tasks, medium term measures and the long term measures. These three however have to be initiated right now."

This roadmap identified correctly that the basic problem plaguing the Indian economy, which was already entering a recession before the pandemic, is the sharp decline in the levels of the domestic demand. The purchasing power in the hands of our people declined so sharply that this lack of demand in the economy led to closures of industrial units across the board and large-scale loss of jobs even before the pandemic. This situation worsened during the national lockdown. So any economic plan in the immediate, short term and long term needs to address this crucial issue of revival of the economy based on increasing the purchasing power in the hands of the people.

As noted earlier, with the vigorous pursuit of neo-liberal agenda, neither the President nor the Prime Minister even acknowledged the receipt of this roadmap, leave aside considering any of the issues raised by us.

Education: Retrograde Decisions

Using the situation of the pandemic and the lockdown, the BJP Central government is pushing through its controversial and highly poisonous new education policy unmindful of the widespread opposition that is there in the country's academic community and the students.

Virtual Examinations: The lockdown was imposed as the academic year was ending and admissions for the new academic year were on the anvil. The unplanned unilateral lockdown had disrupted this entire process across the country. In order to overcome this situation, the government, through the UGC, is seeking to unilaterally impose online/open book examination wherever physical examination is not possible due to the existing restrictions. This is unacceptable. Internet connectivity in the country is still around 36 per cent only. Access to online classes or examinations does not exist for a vast majority of our students, particularly the marginalised and those living in remote digitally unconnected parts in our country. This UGC direction is, thus, highly discriminatory and hence cannot be accepted.

Education is in the concurrent list of our Constitution. The UGC cannot issue such a uniform diktat without consultations with the state governments, state universities/colleges who practice diverse mechanisms/structures both for teaching and conduct of examinations. It is also important that representatives of teachers, particularly students, whose future is at stake, are consulted.

Many universities have a large number of affiliated colleges spread over wide locations. Given the surging infections and lockdown restrictions, many students will not be able to access the internet and participate in online education/examinations.

The students are currently going through severe mental trauma on account of the uncertainties and insensitivity of the authorities. This prescription of online examinations is going to further agonise them. Already there have been instances of students unable to access online classes ending their lives tragically.

A digital divide in our education system is unacceptable. However, given the fact that the final year graduate and post-graduate students have to be examined and awarded their degrees so that they can pursue their careers, it is imperative that their already assessed previous semesters' performance should form the basis of assessment for awarding degrees.

Pruning Syllabus to Suit the Hindutva Agenda: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), has taken a decision to exclude crucial chapters from classes X-XII course on citizenship, nationalism, secularism, federalism and all other aspects fundamental to our constitutional order. Using the pretext of the current pandemic and lockdown restrictions, in the name of reducing the syllabus for students, the CBSE has unilaterally taken recourse to this measure.

Such selective exclusion that undermines the constitutional values, adversely affecting secular democratic India's future must be rejected. The CBSE has not been able to provide any rationale for excluding these chapters. This is dubious.

This decision of the CBSE must be rescinded. Any effort to undermine the fundamental principles of our Constitution is not acceptable.

Party should make all efforts to mobilise different sections of the intelligentsia, the academic community, parents, students, democratic organizations, sections connected with education and spread of scientific temper to come together to resist the manner in which this BJP Central government is seeking to transform the Indian education system for advancing of the RSS agenda of a fascistic 'Hindutva Rashtra'.

EC's Unilateral Decision on Postal Ballot

The Central government issued a gazette notification permitting people aged 65 years and above the option to use postal ballot in elections. Using the situation of the Covid pandemic, this is being done and also included are those who have tested positive and those suspected.

This decision has been unilaterally taken without any consultation with any political party, who are most important stakeholders in the electoral process. Political parties also reflect the opinion of the people whom they represent. Such an unilateral decision is not acceptable.

Past experience has shown, international experience also confirms, that postal ballots are prone to large-scale manipulation. More than one-third of the people who vote normally are senior citizens. Hence, the scope for manipulation and distorting the electoral verdict is very high.

After protest by various opposition parties, the EC had to stay its implementation.

In this situation of the pandemic, when elections are held, the Election Commission must ensure that proper conditions for campaign prevail and there is level playing field. Separate booths in the same polling station should be arranged for senior citizens and Covid affected people maintaining all necessary precautions.

Bihar Assembly Elections: The defeat of the BJP-JD(U) alliance in Bihar is imperative both for safeguarding the interests of the people in Bihar and in India. The three state level Left parties – CPI(M), CPI, CPI(ML) – have jointly declared that the Left will cooperate with all other forces who are interested in achieving this objective.

The BJP has begun its feverish preparations for these elections. It has launched a massive digital campaign utilizing all resources at its command.

The CPI(M) and the Left parties have opposed the proposal of the state Election Commission, which is backed by the BJP and JD(U), to conduct these elections exclusively through digital campaigning and digital voting. This will exclude vast numbers from participating in the electoral process undermining democracy. Further, it has been proved by international experience, as well, that such methods of campaign and voting is subject to extremely high levels of manipulation. This will distort people's mandate.

It is the responsibility of the Election Commission to ensure that proper conditions prevail for the conduct of proper elections, with a level playing field for all contestants, through proper campaigning methods and physical voting by the people.

Under the conditions of a surging pandemic, it is the task of the Election Commission and the administration to ensure the safety of the people and to provide conditions for the conduct of normal elections.

Given the gross misuse of money power by the BJP, the Election Commission of India must pursue its submissions to the apex court pointing out the dangers that electoral bonds pose, distorting the democratic election processes and depriving people of exercising an informed choice. These electoral bonds must be scrapped and not allowed to be issued before any elections in the future.

Jammu & Kashmir

The national lockdown came over and above the political lockdown of Jammu & Kashmir since August last year. Hundreds continue to be under custody including former Chief Minister, Ms. Mehbooba Mufti detained under the draconian Public Security Act. Many others continue to remain under house arrest in-

cluding CPI(M) Central Committee Member, Mohd. Yusuf Tarigami. Even those who have been released from detention centres in recent months are being denied permission to meet visitors and prevented from leaving their residences. These house detentions are being imposed without any administrative orders violating Constitutional rights and guarantees.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic and during lockdown, the number of Covid positive cases has been steadily rising in J&K. The state has woeful health facilities and absolutely no relief has been provided to the suffering people. The already disrupted lives are further pushed into agonising conditions.

Altering Domicile Definition: Instead of addressing these crucial issues, the Union Home Ministry which directly administers the now Union Territory of J&K has been seeking to advance the political agenda of the RSS/BJP. The definition of a domicile in J&K has been now changed to permit people from outside to get domicile status, meaning, get government jobs and purchase property and land. This is the RSS agenda for a demographic transformation in the valley. Alongside, people's democratic rights and civil liberties are severely violated. All dissenters are treated as terrorists and booked under draconian provisions.

Draconian Media Policy: In an attempt to thwart freedom of speech and expression, as guaranteed by the Indian Constitution, the Union Home Ministry announced a new media policy for the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir. Media personnel, henceforth, are answerable to the bureaucracy and security officials who have the powers to decide which news item is "fake, unethical, plagiarized" or "anti-national". This new media policy legalizes what the journalists have been subjected to since August 5, 2019. This new media policy must be withdrawn and intimidation of journalists must be stopped forthwith.

The statehood status of Jammu & Kashmir must be restored along with Article 370 and implementation of all promises made to the people of J&K at the time of its accession to India. This matter is currently before the Supreme Court, which has, ominously, not heard it yet, even after eleven months.

All those who have been detained since August 2019 must be released immediately, full communications must be restored and the free movement of people allowed. This is essential both for combating the pandemic effectively and providing relief to the beleaguered people.

Aggressive Pursuit of the RSS-BJP Agenda

Instead of addressing the serious issues regarding the economic recession and providing relief for the people subjected to greater and greater agonies, this BJP Central government is using the Covid pandemic and the lockdown situation to further its hardcore Hindutva agenda coupled with the aggressive pursuit of neo-liberal economic reforms.

First, the BJP government has put in motion greater aggression in its drive for implementing neo-liberal economic reforms. **The stimulus package announced in the name of India's self-reliance is actually a blueprint for India's self-subservience to private capital, both foreign and domestic.**

Ruthless Privatisation: All sectors of our economy have now been opened up for FDI, including defence production, atomic energy and all other strategic sectors. Most public sector undertakings are being privatized, especially Indian railways, electricity, petroleum, coal, banks/insurance, defence production etc. This is the outright loot of our national assets. This is the pathway for ruthless profit maximisation which means the corresponding intensification of exploitation of the working people. This will further strengthen the obnoxious levels of crony capitalism that we had been seeing under this government during the last six years.

Anti-Working Class: To facilitate the intensified exploitation of the workers, all the labour laws, including the 8-hour work day and importantly the hard-earned rights of the working class, are being annulled. At least 13 states have issued notifications for suspension or dilution of the labour laws. In many states, the working hours have been increased from 8 hours a day to 12 hours. This is the deadly combination of outright loot of our national wealth and anti-working people assaults which is being implemented by the BJP central government.

The attacks on the workers and their statutory rights reflects the class character of the Modi government as being ruthlessly anti-working class and anti-working people.

Second, during this period, under government patronage and protection, the RSS/BJP is further sharpening communal polarization and targeting Muslim religious minority community.

Many young activists and others who played a role in organizing the peaceful anti-CAA/NRC/NPR protests are being targeted and arrested under draconian provisions. Falsifying facts, the Delhi police, under the Union Home Ministry, have arrested activists, including students of Jamia Millia University and JNU

who were active in the anti-CAA protests. It was widely circulated in the social media, including video footage, showing how the Delhi police marched into the Jamia Millia University library, hostels, ransacked the premises and mercilessly beat up the students. The victims of such police terror are now being charged and arrested. False cases are being slapped on anti-CAA activists, human rights activists and all those who have supported these peaceful protests are being rounded up. All those who have exposed and opposed the partisan role of the Delhi police and the Union Home Minister are being charged with false FIRs while the perpetrators of these attacks on peaceful protestors are going scot-free. BJP leaders, including Union Cabinet Ministers, who gave fire-spitting hate speeches are exonerated. The affidavit submitted by the Delhi Minorities Commission to the Delhi High Court gave chilling details of the manner in which the attacks on the minorities took place during Delhi communal violence and the role of the police.

On July 13, the Delhi police submitted its details to the Delhi High Court on the ongoing investigations into the communal violence in February. This, once again, displays a very strong communal bias on how the police investigations are proceeding. The police have informed the High Court that “no actionable evidence has surfaced yet” against political leaders “instigating or participating” in the north-east Delhi communal violence. This negates all evidence, including video footage, that have been circulating very widely of the hate speeches given by prominent BJP leaders, including a Union Cabinet Minister, inciting the people to violence. This is clearly a complete cover-up job. Despite all evidence, including videographic evidence of the highhandedness and atrocities committed by the police, the affidavit submitted says: “no involvement of any police personnel has been found in the matter”. The police claimed that 751 FIRs have been lodged in connection with this violence, but refused to make these public. Of the 751 FIRs, only 200 chargesheets have been filed. Yet another cover-up job.

This report says that, of the 53 people killed, 40 are Muslims. Out of the 473 civilians injured, around 185 are Hindus. 108 police personnel were injured. Regarding reports of damages to property, 50 Muslim houses and 14 Hindu houses; shops – 173 Muslim owned, 42 Hindu owned; places of worship – 13 mosques and six temples. 1,430 are the total number of people arrested; 751 FIRs registered; arrests under UAPA are 14. In all these figures, there is a gross underestimation of casualties and damages as far as the Muslim minorities are concerned.

The communal profiling is most clear in the manner in which the BJP government of Uttar Pradesh is clamping down on the anti-CAA protestors. The draconian ordinance, `UP Recovery of Damages to Public and Private Property Or-

dinance 2020', was promulgated in the state in March. It gives the government the power to declare any individual guilty of disruption of property, levying exorbitant fines for this and auctioning of their property in case of non-payment. The claims tribunal set-up under this to adjudicate on complaints can proclaim orders that are final and cannot be challenged in any court. The brutality with which the UP police dealt the anti-CAA peaceful protests is now well-known. Hundreds are arrested without any evidence under Sedition Act. The Aligarh Muslim University is targeted and well-known intellectuals and human rights activists were assaulted and then arrested. The names of prominent anti-CAA protestors were put up in public places along with their addresses as a provocation to incite violence against them. Under this draconian ordinance, Muslims are targeted, particularly the poor, including a rickshaw puller who was fined with Rs. 2 lakh and then jailed because of inability to pay. There is no avenue for redressal against such terrorizing of the minority community.

The announced '*bhoomi puja*n' at Ayodhya for the temple construction on August 5 will be another occasion when communal passions will be roused with dangers of sharpened polarization.

Third, all voices of dissent, all activists championing democratic rights, civil liberties, the rights of the minorities and the marginalized sections are being booked under draconian laws like the Sedition Act, UAPA, NSA, arrested and jailed.

In the Bhima Koregaon case, as the coalition government that assumed office in Maharashtra was reconsidering the fabricated case of the previous BJP-led government to protect the RSS leaders involved in the instigation of violence, the Central government forcibly took over the case under the NIA. At least 11 activists championing the cause of democratic rights and civil liberties are currently in jail. Despite the spread of Covid in the jails and the health conditions of the activists, the government ensures that the bail applications on health grounds are not even considered.

The few that remain as media journalists who refuse to toe the official line are being vigorously targeted and victimised while the much larger section of the ruling parties' 'drumbeaters' in the media are protected and pampered. Most media reports critical of the government have led to the filing of FIRs, harassment and arrests of journalists. Promotion of fake news is patronized by this government, while the reporting of truth is penalized.

Rationalists and people who propagate scientific temper are attacked by obscurantists enjoying State patronage. Instead of strengthening scientific temper in

people's consciousness, the RSS/BJP promote unfiltered obscurantism, superstition etc to advance their core Hindutva agenda.

Fourth, the lockdown period is being used to further strengthen the drive for centralization of all authority and power by the Central government, completely negating the rights of the elected state governments and the principles of federalism which is a basic feature of our Constitution. This is the BJP government's drive to establish a unitary State structure that facilitates the objective of a surveillance based 'security State' and the realisation of the RSS fascistic project. All decisions are being taken unilaterally by PM and the Central government and the states are burdened with bearing the consequences of such unilateral decisions.

The state governments are in the forefront of combating the pandemic. Instead of allocating resources to strengthen their capacities, they are being denied even legitimate GST dues to them. The states have now been allowed to increase their borrowings from 3 to 5 per cent of the state GDP. However, this increase means little because as this borrowing has to be undertaken on a commercial basis, the high interest rates will push the states into a greater debt burden. The Centre must immediately transfer the thousands of crores of rupees collected to combat the pandemic in a private trust named after the PM to the states.

Fifth, there is an intense effort to undermine all independent Constitutional authorities. The Parliament's functioning has been grievously circumscribed. The Centrality of the Indian Constitution – sovereignty of the people – is exercised by the people through their elected representatives to whom the Executive of the government is accountable. If the Parliament functioning is impaired, as it is now, then this entire Constitutional mechanism breaks down. We have seen how the Judiciary has been functioning in the recent years. The petitions challenging the abrogation of Article 370 and 35A of the Constitution have been pending since August 2019. The petitions challenging the Citizenship Amendment Act, likewise, have been pending. Justice delayed is justice denied. The independent functioning of the Election Commission is increasingly coming under a cloud. The recent unilateral decisions on postal ballot and the easing out of an Election Commissioner who would have assumed the office of the CEC next year due to his objections over the decision not to book PM and others for violation of the code of conduct. The CBI is functioning more as the political adjunct of the government rather than as the premier independent investigating authority. The Enforcement Department is, likewise, acting at the behest of the political leadership. All these are severely undermining India's Constitutional order strengthening the growing totalitarian assaults.

Sixth, in order to assume control over the governments in all the states in the country, the BJP has embarked on an unprecedented drive to topple democratically-elected state governments and, thus, negate the people's mandate. Using its massive money power acquired through crony capitalism, electoral bonds and other dubious methods, it is indulging in large-scale horse-trading. This is combined with intimidation and harassment through agencies like the ED, CBI etc to browbeat the opposition.

Those who defect from other political parties to the BJP are protected with their cases of omission and commission not being pursued (including criminal), while those who do not succumb to their pressures are harassed, persecuted and prosecuted.

Such efforts by the BJP is aided by infighting inside opposition parties particularly in the main opposition party, Congress. This has helped the BJP in Madhya Pradesh and it is currently attempting to do the same in Rajasthan and targeting other Congress-ruled states. It is also targeting the other non-Congress state governments, who are not supportive of it, like Maharashtra, Jharkhand etc. It is particularly targeting the LDF government in Kerala.

Efforts to Destabilise the Kerala LDF Government: The gold smuggling case in Kerala which involved the use of diplomatic baggage addressed to the UAE consulate, is being used to attack the LDF government. The Congress-led UDF and the BJP are demanding the resignation of the Chief Minister and started an agitation for the same.

The case concerns the Customs' seizure of contraband gold and does not fall in the jurisdiction of the state government. The Chief Minister asked for investigation by the Central agencies and the NIA is investigating the matter. But by making false allegations against the Chief Minister's office being involved in the racket, the Congress and BJP, working in tandem, are making an effort to destabilise the LDF government. The CPI(M) and LDF are mobilising the people against this disruptive move at a time when all efforts are being made to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic.

Seventh, this period is being used by Modi and the BJP Central government to further cement India's subordinate ally status with US imperialism. We had noted in the January CC meeting the string of agreements in all spheres, especially defence, that India has signed with USA. In the entire anti-China campaign

mounted by the USA now, India is taking a pro-US position. This has serious implications for India's foreign policy, particularly for relations with our neighbours.

Such subservience to US imperialism is not in the interests of India and our people.

Deteriorating Relations with Neighbours

China: The Indo-China military standoff has led to a physical clash with casualties on both sides, in which 20 Indian soldiers lost their life. Such a violent clash with the loss of life occurred on the Indo-China Line of Actual Control after 45 years. This incident in the Galwan valley in Ladakh was a serious breach of peace and tranquility that was maintained for some time now.

At the all-party meeting called by the government (June 19, 2020), the CPI(M) while expressing its deep condolences on the death of our army personnel, extended support to the approach and stand adopted by the government of India. The statement issued by India, after talks between the foreign ministers of both the countries, said: "At the conclusion of the discussion, it was agreed that the overall situation would be handled in a responsible manner, and both sides would implement the disengagement understanding of 6 June sincerely. Neither side would take any action to escalate matters and instead, ensure peace and tranquility as per bilateral agreements and protocols."

The Party further stated that once this happens, the government of India must initiate high level talks so that steps are taken for the clear demarcation of the LAC. The lack of clarity on this demarcation has been leading to such disputes and standoff situations. It is necessary to agree on a clear demarcation of the LAC by both India and China to maintain peace and tranquility on the border.

The government, however, did not brief in the all-party meeting about any details of the developments leading up to this clash between April and June. The earlier dispute in Doklam and now in Ladakh can only be stopped from recurring at other points by an agreement on a clear demarcation of the LAC.

PM Modi, however, surprised everybody at the meeting (and the country) by saying that there has been no intrusion of Indian territory, no violation of LAC and no Chinese installations on our soil. This left a large number of questions not only unanswered but fuelled speculation. It is in the interest of both India and China to ensure peace and tranquility on the border through a clear demarcation of the LAC while negotiations on the border question will continue in the existing mechanisms.

Anti-Communist Propaganda: The RSS/BJP and other rabid rightwing forces are conducting an anti-Communist campaign in the social media against our Party and Communists branding them as `Chinese agents`. All of its campaigns on the social media have been proven to be fake news, morphed pictures and outright lies. This anti-Communist campaign must be countered.

Nepal: Nepal has, through an unanimous decision of its Parliament, adopted a new map that will be incorporated in its Constitution and used in all official documents. This map includes certain disputed territories between India and Nepal.

On May 8, 2020 Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated an 80 kilometer-long strategically crucial road connecting Lipulekh with Dharchula in Uttarakhand. Nepal reacted sharply claiming that this road passes through Nepalese territory. Nepal has now re-drawn its map to include the disputed areas of Lipulekh, Kalapani and Limpiyadhura as belonging to Nepal.

This move by Nepal comes six months after India published a new map in November 2019.

Some years ago, most political parties in Nepal felt that India had imposed an economic blockade during the discussions in Nepal over the country's Constitution. The Indian government, however, denied this. The anti-India feeling got further strengthened amongst the Nepalese people subsequently. Bilateral relations have continued to deteriorate reaching a stage now where Nepal has banned all Indian Television channels, except Doordarshan News, for alleged objectionable propaganda against the country.

The internal developments in Nepal are marred by growing uncertainties. The Nepal Communist Party government, led by PM KP Oli, is facing problems of factional disputes, seeking his removal as PM. PM Oli alleges that India is interfering in Nepal's internal affairs.

India and Nepal share a very long open border and this deterioration in bilateral relations has serious implications.

Pakistan: Relations between India and Pakistan further deteriorated during this period with both countries summoning diplomats from the concerned missions over ceasefire violations. India ordered a 50 per cent reduction of diplomatic staff in the Pakistan High Commission and recalled 50 per cent from Indian Mission in Pakistan. These violations have occurred in various parts along LoC with shelling and firing and loss of life. There have been instances of cross bor-

der infiltration with militants being killed by the Indian armed forces. Pakistan has summoned a senior diplomat from the Indian High Commission on July 6 registering strong protest over alleged ceasefire violations by India which, it claims, had killed and injured its people. It claims that India committed 1595 ceasefire violations this year. India, on the other hand, has pointed out that ceasefire violations by Pakistan have increased by almost 69 per cent this year accounting for 2027 violations.

Bangladesh: Following the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act, that was accompanied by a shrill anti-Bangladeshi rhetoric by Home Minister Amit Shah against the so-called illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, the relations between the two countries have seen a deterioration.

Iran: Iran has dropped India from the Chabahar rail project, which was finalized in May 2016 during PM Modi's visit to Tehran. Citing delays from Indian side in funding, Iran announced that it is taking this decision. This railway line goes to facilitate the building of an alternative trade route to Afghanistan and Central Asia. The possible impact of US sanctions on India's projects with Iran could also have been a factor. India had secured an exemption for investment in the Chabahar port, earlier, from US sanctions. But, bilateral ties with Iran deteriorated after its Foreign Minister condemned the February communal violence in Delhi.

Overall, the relations with all our neighbours, including Sri Lanka, have, to say the least, not seen any improvement in the recent period. On the other hand, with some, there is a disturbing deterioration. With India further cementing its relationship with USA and entering into joint military exercises and strengthening the 'Quad' alliance, China is seeking to enlist support for itself from all our neighbours. India's traditional independent, Non-Aligned foreign policy has been abandoned by this BJP government. It is India's supreme interest that an independent foreign policy is pursued.

Implementation of Central Calls

The PB call for observation of an all-India protest day on June 16 was implemented all across the country, with good participation, by our Party units. Detailed statewise reports have already been circulated to all Central Committee members. Therefore, details are not being repeated.

During this period, at regular intervals, calls for protest actions were given independently by the Party and jointly along with Left parties. The protests

against the hike in petroleum products was widely observed all across the country.

In many states, on local issues and demanding redressal of people's problems and providing relief to the people, the Party initiated a number of actions. Comrades belonging to all frontal organisations actively participated in such activities. The ASHA and Anganwadi workers played an important role along with all the health care workers. All our mass fronts have given calls for protests independently and jointly. The July 3 joint call by trade union, kisan and agricultural workers fronts was widely implemented across the country with a larger participation. The broad platform created by the student front for defending public education could successfully protest against imposition of the UGC guidelines on virtual exams.

A joint call has been given for a countrywide protest on August 9 based on a charter of demands by the trade union, kisan sabha and agricultural workers union fronts.

The working class has gone on militant actions, including a historic and successful three-day strike by 5.3 lakh coal workers protesting against the privatization of commercial coal mining. This strike was a grand success despite the constrained conditions of the pandemic and lockdown. The working class, in some other sectors have also gone on strike actions. Many other sectoral actions are being planned. The Central trade unions observed many protest actions during this period and are now jointly sponsoring a strike in the coal industry on August 18.

Polit Bureau Tasks

All the 13 tasks identified in the report adopted by the Polit Bureau at its meeting on June 2, 2020 will have to be carried forward. Our focus should be on:

1) **Strengthening Struggles on Local Issues:** There are a host of issues at the local level that surfaced due to the Covid epidemic and lockdown conditions - livelihood issues, food and PDS, price-rise, health facilities etc; Local campaigns and struggles by Party and mass organisations on these issues should be conducted depending on the situation in the area concerned. The forms of such campaigns should scrupulously observe the required precautions like maintaining physical distancing, wearing protective masks etc. As the situation improves, these activities must be stepped up. State level and all-India campaigns must be taken up step by step.

2) **Strengthen Left Unity:** United actions by the Left parties under these circumstances is very important to project Left alternatives and solutions for the acute problems that people are currently facing. Stronger coordination and joint activities and action must be planned and undertaken at all levels in the country with the Left parties.

3) **Forge Broader Joint Actions:** People's discontent that has been mounting during the last few months, will lead to spontaneous actions amongst various sections. Party and mass organisations must consciously intervene in such issues and be prepared to take initiatives. Efforts should be made to forge united activities or actions with all those willing to join in championing people's issues. Specifically we should raise the issues of people's livelihood; against aggressive implementation of neo-liberal policies; protection of democratic rights and release of prisoners who have been arrested on manufactured charges for expressing dissent against the government.

4) **Strengthen Political Campaign against RSS/BJP:** The focus of our political attack must be on the RSS/BJP and the Central government which is pursuing their agenda as noted above. Even after the easing of restrictions of the lockdown, the restrictions, through prohibitive orders by police and administration, on the right to organise public rallies, protests and struggles are likely to continue. Repression of the workers and the people will continue to take place to advance the RSS/BJP agenda. Opposition to these issues will have to be taken up as part of the political campaign.

Organisational

1) **Activate Party Comrades and Branch Functioning:** All PMs and CMs must be contacted and branch functioning revived to ensure their active participation and to strengthen our links with the people.

2) **Committee Functioning:** Reviving committee functioning at all levels from the branches onwards is urgently necessary. This will have to be done within the restrictions in the concerned areas. Where physical meetings are not possible, maintaining precautions, then digital technologies must be utilized.

3) **Virtual Communications:** During the period of the lockdown, digital/video communications have been used by all the committees. Through such technological communication methods, Party has been able to reach out to a sizeable number of people. Such technological communications must continue to be

utilised alongside our normal activities. Party's social media should be further strengthened.

4) **Consolidation:** Our Party and mass fronts have played an important role in conducting relief activities during the lockdown period. These contacts should be consolidated, particularly amongst migrant workers, and efforts must be made to bring them into organisational structures.

Central Committee Demands

1) Immediate cash transfer of Rs. 7,500 per month for the next six months to all families outside the income tax bracket.

2) Immediate distribution of free foodgrains of 10 kg per individual per month for the next six months for all the needy.

3) Expand MGNREGA to ensure at least 200 days of work a year with enhanced wages. Promulgate an Urban Employment Guarantee Act. Announce unemployment allowance to all the unemployed.

4) Scrap the proposal to repeal the Interstate Migrant Workmen Act (Regulation of Employment & Conditions of Services) Act 1979 and, on the contrary, strengthen the Act.

5) Increase Central expenditure on public health to at least 3 per cent of the GDP; immediately strengthen governments-run universal health care at all levels for primary to tertiary treatment.

6) Scrap the ordinances that remove the Essential Commodities Act and to amend the APMC Act to allow free movement of foodgrains across states on the basis of unregulated pricing.

7) Withdraw all proposals to abolish/amend/suspend existing labour laws.

8) Scrap privatization of public sector undertakings, especially Indian railways and in electricity, petroleum, coal, banks/insurance, defence production sectors.

9) Transfer all funds collected in a private trust fund bearing the PM's name to the States who are in the forefront of combating the pandemic.

10) As the Disaster Management Act has been invoked for combating the pandemic, announce a one-time financial assistance to the families of victims

who succumbed to the pandemic in accordance with the National Disaster Relief Fund provisions.

11) Strictly implement reservations for SC/ST/OBCs & disabled. Fill up all backlog posts.

12) Examine and award degrees to the final year graduate and post-graduate students on the basis of their previous semesters' performance.

13) Immediately release all those who have been detained since August 2019 in Jammu & Kashmir. Restore full communications and allow free movement of people.

14) Release all political prisoners in jails detained under draconian laws like UAPA, NSA, Sedition Act.

15) Withdraw Environment Impact Assessment 2020.

16) Punish the perpetrators of growing caste violence against Dalits, domestic and sexual violence against women and exploitation of the tribals.

Central Committee Calls

1. Highlighting this demand charter, the Central Committee has called upon all units of the Party to **observe a protest week from August 20 to 26** all over the country adhering to the required restrictions and precautions.

2. The Central Committee extends the Party's support and solidarity to the call for an all-India protest action given by the trade unions, the kisan sabhas and the agricultural labour unions on August 9, 2020.
