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Report on Certain Political Developments

(Adopted at the Central Committee Meeting held on January 28-29, 2023)

The Global Economy

The global economic growth has sharply slowed down. There is a universal apprehension of an impending recession. This would mark the first time in more than 80 years when there are two global recessions occurring within the same decade.

According to the World Bank, global growth is projected to slow to its third-weakest pace in nearly three decades, overshadowed only by the 2009 and 2020 global recessions. Latest forecasts indicate a sharp, long-lasting slowdown, with global growth declining to 1.7 percent in 2023 from 3.0 percent expected just six months ago. The deterioration is broad-based: in virtually all regions of the world, per-capita income growth will be slower than it was during the decade before COVID-19.

Growth in advanced economies is projected to slow down to 0.5 per cent in 2023. USA growth is forecast to fall 0.2 to 0.5 per cent in 2023. This is 1.9 percentage points below the previous forecast and its weakest performance outside of official recessions since 1970. EU growth is expected at zero per cent in 2023, again a downward revision of 1.9 percentage points.

Chinese economy is projected to grow at 4.3 per cent - 0.9 percentage point below the previous forecast. All other developing economies are projected to grow at 2.7 per cent in 2023 from 3.8 per cent in 2022. By the end of 2024 GDP of emerging and developing economies (EMDEs) is projected to be 6 per cent below the pre pandemic forecasts.

The imminent global economic recession will further worsen the living conditions for the vast majority of the world population. **Poverty** levels are bound to worsen with the per capita income growth in the developing economies projected to average 2.8 per cent – a full percentage point lower than 2010- 2019 average. Sub-Saharan Africa

accounts for 60 per cent of the world's extreme poor. Growth in per capita income in 2023-24 here is expected to average at a mere 1.2 per cent. This means pushing more people into poverty.

Unemployment: The ILO in its World Employment and Social Outlook Report (January 14, 2023) has downgraded the forecast for labour market recovery in 2022 projecting a deficit in hours worked globally equivalent to 52 million fulltime jobs. In May 2021, it had projected a deficit of 26 million fulltime jobs. Global unemployment is estimated at 207 million in 2022 as against 186 million in 2019. ILO cautions that the overall impact on unemployment is significantly greater than reflected in these figures as many have left the labour force. The Global labor force Participation Rate in 2022 is projected to remain 1.2 per cent below that of 2019.

The service sector, particularly, information technology sector is seeing large scale lay offs and wage cuts. This is having a global impact.

Global Inflation, particularly for food, including grain and cooking oil was the highest in 2022, since the records began to be maintained by the FAO in 1961. The food price index averaged 143.7 points in 2022. This is more than 14 per cent higher than the 2021 average.

Global Inequality: The latest *Oxfam* report titled, 'Survival of the Richest' (January 2023) shows that the richest 1 per cent of the world have accumulated nearly twice as much wealth as the rest of the 99 per cent of world's population put together over the last 2 pandemic years. This richest 1 per cent cornered two-third of all new wealth worth \$ 42 trillion created since 2020. The fortunes of world billionaires are increasing by \$ 2.7 billion a day even as at least 1.7 billion workers live in countries where inflation is outpacing wages. Consequent cut in real wages is estimated to have wiped out \$337 billion from global wages – the biggest cut in real wages in history.

Davos: The world's super-rich converged at the World Economic Forum, Davos, Switzerland celebrating the fact that despite the pandemic and the looming global economic recession their combined wealth increased by an enormous \$2.6 trillion since the pandemic.

Davos confirmed the fact that we noted in our 23rd Party Congress that the way these stimulus packages, totaling nearly \$ 17 trillion, were designed to inflate the stock markets driving the asset prices dramatically high. This resulted in two-third (63 per cent) of all new wealth created since 2020 being cornered by the richest 1 per cent. The bottom 90 per cent received just one-tenth.

The Global Risks Report 2023 notes "as 2023 begins the world is facing a set of risks that feel both wholly new and eerily familiar". Amongst the familiar risks it

highlights inflation, cost of living crisis, trade wars, capital outflows from emerging markets, widespread social unrest, geo-political confrontation and the spectre of nuclear warfare. These combined with new risks of unsustainable levels of debt, low growth, low global investment and deglobalization, decline in human development indicators, growing pressures of climate change impact in an ever-shrinking window for transition to a 1.5 degree centigrade world. In short, it warns of an uncertain and turbulent decade ahead.

The report naturally evades the central question: the rapidly shrinking purchasing power in the hands of global population is deepening the crisis, hurling the global economy towards a recession. This can be reversed only by reversing the widening income and wealth inequalities. Critical to this is to impose a global minimum tax that was agreed upon by 136 countries in 2021-22 but never implemented.

Predatory Neo-liberalism: As noted in our 23rd Party Congress, International Finance Capital led neo-liberalism is further consolidating the process of widening income and wealth inequalities – the object of maximization of profits. Neo-liberalism has proven its bankruptcy in its inability to provide any solution to the current economic crisis leading towards a global recession. On the contrary, its singular focus on profit maximization is further exacerbating the economic crisis. Despite the growth of obscene levels of inequalities, neo-liberalism prohibits the imposition of a super-rich and wealth tax on global billionaires.

The *Oxfam* reports shows that only 4 per cent of every tax dollar comes from taxes on wealth. An annual wealth tax of 5 per cent on wealthy billionaires could raise \$1.7 trillion a year – sufficient to wipe out global poverty providing health and education to all.

People's Protests

The working people across the world took to streets protesting against the escalating cost of living crisis with growing inflation, unemployment and decline in real wages. Europe, facing the brunt of shortages caused by the Ukraine war is seeing the rise in protest actions.

A nationwide strike took place in France on January 19 with massive worker participation protesting the government's plan to reform the pension system and raise the retirement age. Strikes are expected to continue. Strikes are taking place in the UK, too. Nurses went on strike in England in December 2022 for the first time in 106 years. Rail workers have been on strike in recent weeks, and teachers and health workers are planning to strike in February. Workers in several EU member countries including Greece, Spain and Germany went on strike recently, primarily asking for better pay and working conditions.

Ukraine War

The Ukraine war continues creating greater instability and global disruption in the flow of food and energy materials.

Events have confirmed the understanding of our 23rd Party congress that this is a war actually between USA/NATO and Russia with Ukraine as its theatre. The Biden administration has spent more than \$ 27.4 billion in military aid to Ukraine. The US President has now authorized the 13th installment of further aid up to \$ 2.5 billion.

In total aid (military, financial and humanitarian combined), the European Union and its countries have provided the most to Ukraine, whereas the United States has by far provided the most in military aid. This has strengthened the US military-industrial complex. The consequent generation of jobs to meet the higher production targets of armaments, USA hopes, will increase domestic demand and counter the growing recessionary trends.

The Kiel Institute has tracked €108.8 billion from 46 countries in financial, humanitarian, and military aid, from 24 January to 20 November 2022. Out of that €108.8 billion, €51.8 billion came from the European Union and €47.8 billion from the United States, with most of the remaining coming from the United Kingdom, Canada and Norway, and significant but smaller amounts from several other countries. In military aid, the United States has provided more than every other country combined. Some NATO countries and allies, such as Germany and Sweden, have reversed past policies against providing offensive military aid in order to support Ukraine, while the European Union for the first time in its history supplied lethal arms through a new financing instrument, the European Peace Facility (EPF).

Israel: New Far-right wing government

The new Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, is pushing through its far-right policies, after coming into office on 29th December 2022. These policies severely impact both internal Israeli politics and policies towards Palestinians in Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territory. The nationalist-religious government, said to be the most right-wing in Israel's history, emerged after Netanyahu's Likud and allied far-right parties won the most seats in parliamentary elections on 1st November 2022. The new government's agenda includes a plan to increase government control over the judicial system and weaken the Supreme Court. The plan, which was released as draft legislation, would significantly limit the Supreme Court's ability to strike down laws and would allow the government a greater role in the appointment of Supreme Court judges. It would empower the country's 120-seat parliament, or Knesset, to override Supreme Court decisions with a simple majority of 61 votes. Netanyahu's ultra-Orthodox and ultranationalist allies

have also said they hope to scrap Supreme Court rulings outlawing Israeli outposts on private Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank.

Another important agenda of the government is annexing the occupied West Bank. In one of the many agreements signed before the government took office, Netanyahu promised the communal Zionism party, one of his main coalition partners, to annex the occupied West Bank, making it clear that it had no intention of allowing the creation of a Palestinian State. The government also ordered police to remove all Palestinian flags in occupied East Jerusalem, and inside Israel, calling the Palestinian national symbol an act of terrorism.

Israeli attacks on the Palestinians intensified with outright shooting and killing of protesters and innocent civilians. In the first 20 days of this year, 19 Palestinians were shot dead. Last year, 176 were shot dead. The latest outrage has been the raid by the Israeli army in Jenin in the West Bank leading to the killing of 10 Palestinians including an elderly woman.

In what is seen as a reaction against the Israeli killings of the Palestinians, at least 7 people were killed and three were injured in a shooting near a synagogue in East Jerusalem on 27 January. With the advent of the extreme rightwing government, a virtual war has been declared against the Palestinians.

Protests: Tens of thousands of Israelis took to the streets of Tel Aviv and other cities to protest against the proposals to subvert the independence of the judiciary. Thousands of students from university campuses across the country also joined these protests. In a rare demonstration by attorneys, hundreds of Israeli lawyers rallied outside various courts to protest the government's plans to overhaul the judicial system. Many center and left-wing parties, including Hadash and the Communist Party of Israel called on Jews and Arabs to reject the new government's policies.

Brazil

Within a week after the swearing in of Lula as the President of Brazil, supporters of Jair Bolsonaro, who was defeated in the elections attacked the three wings of the government in Brazil. They tried to occupy the legislature, judiciary and executive buildings in Brasilia, the capital city. Timely intervention of the federal government nipped in the bud their attempt to destabilise the democratically elected government of Lula. Thousands of people rallied in various cities of Brazil condemning the right-wing attack on government institutions and expressing their solidarity with the newly elected government of President Lula of the Worker's Party.

Lula is expected to once again work towards strengthening multilateral groupings like BRICS, ALBA and CELAC. He had already announced that Brazil would be rejoining CELAC and he attended the meeting held in the last week of January.

BRICS

The collaboration among Latin American nations to explore a new alternative world order will likely to advance as a result of Lula's victory. The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) – the vice-presidents of China and Russia and the foreign minister of South Africa – leaders attended Lula's inauguration ceremony as the new President on January 1. The lone exception was India. At a time when Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia are seeking to enter the BRICS fold, India is uncomfortable with the BRICS centre of gravity potentially moving away from furthering US imperialism's interests.

Protests Against Coup in Peru: Pedro Castillo, the Leftist teacher and union leader, who was elected as the president of Peru by popular vote, was removed from his office, through the ruling of three judges who accused him of acts of corruption, without any evidence. Popular demonstrations have erupted in Peru after the ouster of President Pedro Castillo and his replacement by Vice President Dina Boluarte. Now the right-wing has assumed presidency by jailing Pedro Castillo and brutally suppressing popular protests demanding the restoration of democratic rights and reinstallation of the constitutionally elected president Castillo. The new government enjoys the support of the majority of bourgeois parties, including the Free Peru party from which Castillo comes.

Indonesia's President Joko Widodo recently acknowledged the “staggering mass slaughter” of Communists that took place 57 years ago. This criminal extraordinary US backed blood bath carried out by the Indonesian military following the 1965 coup led by Suharto was part of the US imperialist war against Communism.

Mere acknowledgement and expressing regret are not sufficient. Accountability must be established and justice delivered.

Neighboring Countries

Nepal: In the general elections held in November 2022, the Nepali Congress led by incumbent PM Sher Bahadur Deuba emerged as the single largest party winning 89 seats. He was in alliance with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Center) led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal “Prachanda” which won 32 seats and NCP(Socialist United) led by Madhav Kumar Nepal which won 10 seats. In the 275 member House, this alliance was short of 2 seats which they could have managed with the support of independents.

The Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist) led by former PM K.P. Oli won 78 seats.

The pre-poll alliance between Nepali Congress and CPN (Maoist Centre) had an understanding that if their government is formed, then Prachanda and Deuba will be Prime Minister by rotation. Post-election, Prachanda insisted on being the PM, but Deuba refused since the Nepali Congress emerged as the single largest Party and claimed to be the PM for the first half of the full term. Sensing this deadlock between Deuba and Prachanda, just before the deadline set by the President of Nepal for parties to stake claim to form government, Oli offered Prachanda to join hands with him and his alliance pro-monarchy party and become Prime Minister for the first half of the term. Prachanda took advantage of the situation where neither the Nepali Congress nor the NCP(UML) could form the government without his support. Prachanda became the PM with only 32 members in Parliament.

Given this, there is an inherent instability in this arrangement with tensions between Prachanda and Oli and with pressures mounted by the pro-monarchy party growing. Its longevity may well be the causality.

Pakistan: The Pakistan economy is in a serious crisis, with foreign exchange reserves at their lowest since 2014, the value of their currency fast depreciating and rising inflation. Energy prices have soared with gas, petrol and diesel prices shooting up. Huge power blackouts were also witnessed in the month of January. All these burdens are adding to the hardships that the people of Pakistan were facing from the unprecedented floods, which had effected more than 15 percent of the population, last year. The Pakistani government is negotiating with IMF for the disbursement of \$1.1 billion that were due from a \$6 billion bailout package it was promised in 2019. The IMF is insisting that Pakistan agree to all the conditions it had imposed, which include withdrawing electricity subsidies, linking gas prices to the international market and imposing new taxes to the tune of Rs 200 billion (Pakistani rupee). These conditions are going to further burden the people of Pakistan, and also its industrial and agricultural sector, which are passing through most challenging times after the devastating floods. These burdens are going to accentuate the growing discontent among the people. Ignoring this reality, the government has formally conveyed to the IMF its willingness to accept all its major conditions.

The opposition led by former Prime Minister Imran Khan's party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf hopes to benefit from early elections riding on popular discontent. He had dissolved the provincial assemblies of Pakistan's two largest provinces, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in order to pressurise the central government to declare early elections. On the other hand, terrorist acts such as the recent suicide bombing in a mosque in Peshawar, killing over a hundred people by the Pakistan Taliban are strengthening the hands of sectarian forces. The involvement of the army in the political processes is further complicating the situation. In this situation the elections scheduled in the later part of this year assume significance.

Myanmar: following the February 1, 2021 military coup and the imposition of a state of emergency after detaining the head of government, Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and other leaders of the National League of Democracy the attacks on people continue to mount.

In December 2022, Aung San Suu Kyi was sentenced to 7 more years in prison. She had already been sentenced to 26 years earlier. The sentence is, thus, 33 years now. Initially under house arrest, she was shifted to a jail and is now shifted to solitary confinement.

Recently, Myanmar military launched an attack on a prominent military camp of pro-democracy forces close to the Indian border. However, Indian Defence establishment sources said that no such operation or attacks took place in Indian territory. A UK media report claimed that bombs were dropped on the Indian side of the border.

National Situation

Indian Economy

The Indian economy continues to falter with recessionary conditions intensifying. Notwithstanding all propaganda and claims made by the government on economic recovery, investments in augmenting India's productive capacities are not growing. This means that employment generation is stagnant, if not declining, contributing to greater poverty and misery.

According to the World Bank the Indian economy is projected to slow down to 6.6 per cent from the earlier projection of 6.9 per cent.

The IMF had lowered India's growth projections on three occasions in 2022. From 9 per cent to 7.4 per cent and to 6.8 per cent. Worse is that it has projected the growth to further decelerate in 2023-24 to 6.1 per cent.

Industrial output sharply contracted during 2022. In October 2022, the Index of Industrial production stood at 1.19, the lowest from October 2021 with a significant 5.4 per cent drop in manufacturing output.

Though bank credit is reportedly growing, the CMIE reports that this is not being employed for capital expenditure. "It seems likely that 2022-23 would be the 3rd fiscal year in which corporates will have stayed away from expanding their productive capacities". The main reason for this, apart from contracting global trade, is the lack of domestic demand. This, in turn, is due to the sharp fall in the purchasing power capacities of the Indian people due to growing unemployment and inflation.

While the RBI reports that the rate of inflation is declining, it is still considered high and unless it reaches the level of around 4 per cent from the existing 6-7 per cent any resurgence of domestic demand would not be possible.

Unemployment: Data from the Center for Monitoring Indian Economy showed that India's unemployment rate rose to 8.30 per cent in December, the highest in 16 months from 8 per cent in the previous month. The urban unemployment rate rose to 10.09 per cent in December from 8.96 per cent in the previous month, while the rural unemployment rate declined to 7.44 per cent from 7.55 per cent, the data showed. In a jobless growth economy, unemployment remains high even as the economy grows. This occurs when a relatively large number of people have lost their jobs, and the resulting recovery is insufficient to accommodate the unemployed, the underemployed, and those first entering the workforce. Even those who manage to get a job, find themselves in a high degree of job insecurity with no guarantee of any permanency and without any social security benefits.

MGNREGS: Criminally, when it was most needed the rural employment guarantee scheme has seen a severe curtailment. The average days of employment provided per household is now lowest since last five years. Delays in wage payment and reduction in allocations are severely undermining the rural employment guarantee scheme.

The allocations for MGNREGS must be increased to at least a minimum of Rs. 2 lakh crore annually.

Unless massive hikes in public investment in jobs-generating infrastructure areas take place, neither employment generation nor a growth in peoples purchasing power capacities can materialize.

The Obscene Widening of Inequality: The *Oxfam* report titled 'survival of the richest; the India supplement' shows that more than 40 per cent of India's wealth owned by mere 1 per cent of its population. The total wealth of the 10 richest Indians stood at Rs. 27.52 lakh crores in 2022, a 32.8 per cent rise from 2021. The bottom 50 per cent of the population accounted for a meagre 3 per cent.

The total number of billionaires in India increased from 102 in 2022 to 166 in 2022. In stark contrast nearly 23 crore people – the highest in the world – live in poverty.

Noting the regressive taxation regime in India the report pointed out that the bottom 50 per cent of our people pay 6 times more on indirect taxation as a percentage of income as compared to the top 10 per cent. Of the total taxes collected from food and non-food essentials 64.3 per cent was incurred by the bottom 50 per cent.

It is high time that the tax concessions for the rich that continue to be given by the Modi government are reversed, a wealth tax and an inheritance tax introduced and GST on all essentials especially food items be abolished.

Allegations Against Adani Group

A high-level inquiry is essential to probe the allegations leveled by Hindenburg Research against the Adani group, monitored on a day-to-day basis by the Supreme Court. Till this enquiry is completed and the truth is known the interests of India and our people must be protected. Around Rs. 80,000 crores of LIC are invested in Adani companies and 40 per cent of all loans taken by the group from national banks are through the SBI. Both the LIC and the SBI are institutions where crores of Indians park their life long savings for their future security. Since this report became public Adani groups capitalization in stock market dropped by over \$50 billion. This cannot lead to the ruination of people's lifelong savings in these public sector institutions.

The Party will coordinate with other secular opposition parties and raise this issue in the forthcoming budget session of the Parliament.

Sharpening Communal Polarization

The efforts to sharpen communal polarization continue to escalate in various ways. All the BJP ruled states have announced that they shall proceed with the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code in their state. This is accompanied by strident comments of abolishing the Muslim Personnel Law. A BJP member has moved a Private Members' Bill in the Rajya Sabha to this effect. All the BJP state governments have already enacted laws targeting Muslim minorities either in the form of 'love jihad' or 'cow protection' and stipulating conditions that virtually prohibit any voluntary religious conversions and interfaith marriages.

The RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat's atrocious comments in an interview to RSS weeklies, constitutes an open and blatant challenge to the Constitution of India, to equal rights of all citizens and to the rule of Law. He has threatened the Muslim minority community that they will have to give up ideas of "supremacy" to remain safe. He justifies the aggression of "Hindu society" in the name of perceived historical wrongs, stating that Hindus are "at war." He has virtually given a call for violence against a section of Indian citizens on the basis of religious affiliation.

Bhagwat's statements are an update of the hate filled communal writings of RSS icons like Hegdewar and Golwalkar that Muslims can live in India only if they accept a subordinate position.

There are growing reports of dangerously intensified hatred against the Muslim students in educational institutions. The incident at Manipal university in Karnataka, where a Muslim student was insinuated as a terrorist, which was widely covered in social media, is not an isolated incident. Muslims students are routinely compared with terrorists and their religious identity is decried. The growth of rabid poisonous hate campaigns accompanied by violence against Muslims, under various pretexts, like the flogging of Muslim youth in Gujarat by police in plainclothes are finding a reflection in educational institutions.

The scheme for scholarship and fellowships for Muslim students under the name of Maulana Azad National Fellowships (MANF) has been scrapped by the Modi government, the Parliament was informed. MANF was launched as a part of implementing the Sachar Committee recommendations by the UPA I government. Between 2014-15 and 2021-22, 6722 candidates were selected for this fellowship and Rs 738.85 crores was distributed. The Government informed the Parliament that the decision was taken as MANF overlaps with various other scholarship schemes. This is blatantly incorrect. Muslims and other religious minorities are not considered OBCs in various states. This scholarship scheme, must be restored.

Subsequently, the Modi government has now discontinued the scheme of interest subsidy on education loans for overseas studies for students belonging to the minority communities (Padho Pardesh). This scheme was started in 2006 following the Sachar committee report, to award interest subsidy to meritorious students belonging to economically weaker sections of notified minority communities to provide them better opportunities for higher education abroad.

In the recent round of by-elections to various Parliament and Assembly constituencies across the country, alarming reports have appeared regarding efforts to stop the Muslim minorities from casting their votes. This was particularly so in Rampur assembly constituency in Uttar Pradesh. The Uttar Pradesh BJP state government has been aggressively pursuing incendiary communal polarization denying Muslim minorities basic Constitutional guarantees. Recently, the principal of a government school in Uttar Pradesh's Bareilly district was suspended for children singing a popular Urdu song composed by Allama Iqbal.

In the North Bastar district of Chhattisgarh there have been large-scale attacks on the Christian community. The propaganda of forcible conversion used as a pretext for such attacks is not borne out by facts. There has not been a single case of forcible conversion reported. This is a clear case of pursuing an agenda of targeting and attacking the Christian community and forcing them to accept 'Ghar Vapsi' by the Bajrang Dal under the patronage of RSS/BJP. Criminal assaults have taken place with violence unleashed, particularly, against women and children. These criminal attacks are also designed to weaken the united movement of the adivasis for the

implementation of the Forest Rights Act. The state government has not dealt with the situation with the seriousness that is warranted.

Attacks on Democracy: The attacks on democracy and democratic rights noted in the political resolution of our 23rd Party congress continue to deepen.

At a recently held conference of Director Generals of police from all over the country the BJP government had ordered that all the papers submitted by the DGPs on the law-and-order situation in their states and their perceptions about them be removed from the website. This was mainly due to the fact that many of these submissions carried information about rightwing Hindutva outfits as causing potential law and order disturbances in their respective states.

Protecting Sexual Violence Perpetrators: A BJP MP and the president of the Wrestling Federation of India is facing serious allegations of sexual harassment by women wrestlers including those who have won medals in international tournaments. Neither the government nor the ruling party has taken any action against him.

Soon after the remission of life sentences of the guilty in the Bilkis Bano case, all 21 persons accused of rioting and in the cold-blooded murder of Mohsin Shaikh case in Pune in June 2014 have been acquitted and welcomed by a large contingent of Hindutva outfits. The police and the administration have so far not moved to contest this in a higher court.

Restore Free 5 kg Foodgrains under PMGKAY and 5kg at Subsidized Rice under FSA

The ‘free’ ration under the 2013 Food Security Act for nearly two-thirds of our people for the year 2023 is an admission that the spectre of hunger is stalking the country which cannot be overcome otherwise. This is the truth despite the vociferous denial by the Modi government of the Global Hunger Index describing hunger in India as “very serious”.

By merging FSA and PMGKAY while 5 kgs of food grains would be provided free to 81.35 crore people, they will now be denied 5kg of food grains at subsidised rate of Rs 3 / kg for rice, 2 / kg for wheat and Rs. 1 / kg for coarse millets that was existing under the FSA. As a consequence, in order to make up for the 5 kgs of subsidised foodgrains, so essential to maintain nutritional levels, people will have to go to the open market where wheat is selling around Rs 30+ / kg and rice at Rs. 40 +/- kg. This would be a cruel blow to crores of households struggling to survive, with 5 kg rice now costing Rs. 200+ instead of earlier Rs. 15 and wheat costing Rs. 150+ instead of Rs. 10!

Undermining Judicial Independence

The authoritarian drive of the Modi government has been directed at the higher judiciary in recent months. With the purpose of having a 'tame' judiciary, the government has been interfering in the appointment of judges to the High Courts and the Supreme Court by delaying or refusing to clear various names recommended by the Supreme Court and the High Court collegiums.

The Law Minister, Kiren Rijju, began attacking the collegium system and the Supreme Court's refusal to involve the executive in the appointment of judges in November 2022. These attacks were stepped up with the Law Minister demanding that the government decide on appointment of judges and writing to the Chief Justice of India that a new "search and evaluation committee" be set-up which will include a government nominee for making recommendations to the collegiums for appointment of judges.

The newly-elected Vice President, Jagdeep Dhankhar, in his very first session presiding over the Rajya Sabha, criticized the Supreme Court for nullifying the National Judicial Appointments Committee Act and asserted that Parliament is sovereign. He followed this up by rejecting the 'basic structure' principle enjoined by the Kesavananda Bharati case by the Supreme Court. By this, he meant that Parliament could amend the Constitution in any manner it wanted and the courts have no right to interfere.

The collegium system was criticized by our Party too and we have been advocating that there should be a broad-based National Judicial Commission to deal with issues concerning the Judiciary including the appointment and transfer of judges. But when the government, on the pretext of undoing the collegium system, wants to replace it with a method of selection of judges which would be weighted in favour of the government, this cannot be accepted. The Modi government's aim is to subordinate the higher judiciary to the executive. The erosion of judicial independence, as per the Constitutional scheme, would spell the complete domination of authoritarianism. There should be a powerful campaign against the attacks on the judiciary and the mobilization of all democratic forces to defend the Constitutional role of the higher judiciary.

Role of Governors

Intensifying the assault on federalism the governors and lieutenant governors in non-BJP ruled states and Union Territories continue to advance the political objectives of the ruling party brazenly violating the Constitutional position. Governors in Kerala, Telangana, Maharashtra and now Tamilnadu and the lieutenant governors in Union

Territories of Delhi, Lakshadweep, Andaman & Nicobar and Pondicherry grossly misuse their Constitutional positions. The Governor of Kerala continues to sit on bills adopted by the state assembly.

The Tamilnadu Governor R.N. Ravi skipped portions of the address of the assembly prepared by the state government. Consequently, the assembly had to adopt a resolution moved by the Chief Minister to consider the distributed written text as the official address and not what the Governor spoke.

In doing what he did, Governor Ravi has brazenly violated the Constitutional principle that the Governor should act as the voice of the elected state government and the long-established convention that he reads out the complete text of the address prepared by the state government. It is now clear that portions of the text of the address which he preferred to skip was approved by him beforehand.

The portions he preferred to skip also reveals his antipathy for the government's record in the sphere of law and order which is an exclusive prerogative of the elected state governments. Furthermore, he also skipped references to contributions by doyens of the social reform traditions of Tamilnadu.

Governor Ravi's actions sharply underline a growing pattern under the current BJP-led government where governor's office is used as an instrument to undermine the Constitutional role of the state governments and smacks of an anti-federal tendency and penchant for centralization of powers.

Assam

Delimitation Exercise: The Election Commission of India (ECI) has decided to initiate the delimitation exercise of Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies in the state of Assam. The census figures of 2001 shall be used for the purpose of readjustment of Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies in the State. The Commission will design and finalize its own guidelines & methodology for the purpose of delimiting the constituencies.

The last delimitation of constituencies in the State of Assam was done in 1976 on the basis of census figures of 1971.

The three Left Parties - namely, the CPI (M), CPI and CPI(ML)-Liberation - have jointly opposed the delimitation in the year 2023 on the basis of 2001 Census. It will, in no way, serve the purpose of redrawing the boundaries of Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies on the basis of a Census conducted more than two decades ago.

The ruling party is active to utilize delimitation on the basis of 2001 Census to serve the interest of the ruling Party at the Centre and the State. Immediately after the initiation of the delimitation process, the Assam Government has dissolved four districts with a design to manipulate delimitation in their narrow political interests. These four districts -- Hojai, Biswanath Chariali, Bajali and Tamulpur -- were hastily dissolved just hours before the ban imposed by the ECI came into force on creation of new administrative units w.e.f. 1st. January, 2023. The administrative jurisdiction of 142 villages have also been changed a day before the Election Commission's freeze on redrawing administrative units comes into effect.

In fact, the boundaries of Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies in Assam can be redrawn along with the next nationwide delimitation exercise in accordance with the provisions of the 84th Amendment to the Constitution.

Cooperative Bill: Assault on Federalism: Multi State Cooperative Societies Amendment Bill 2022 is an attack on federalism and the rights of the states. Cooperatives are a state subject. This proposed bill is a blatant attempt to impose Central government decisions on cooperative societies that operate in accordance with state laws. This is nothing but a move to control the cooperative societies. This undermines the rights of the elected state governments and is an assault on federalism.

UGC Guidelines: Taking the cue from Prime Minister's Red Fort declaration that India is the 'Mother of democracy', the UGC chairperson wrote letters to all governors to encourage Universities in the states to hold lectures on the ideal Kings in ancient India and the Khap Panchayats as examples of India's democratic traditions that was ruptured by invasions of foreign rulers (read: Muslims). This obnoxious contravention of the Constitution of India was buttressed by claims that there was no autocracy or aristocratism in ancient India. Apart from all other irrationalities such an effort is a negation of the reality of caste based social hierarchy and social oppression that continues to be a major challenge in the evolution of modern democracy.

It is only when the feudal kingdoms and empires disintegrated with the rise of capitalism in human civilization that the political psychology of the 'ruler' and 'subject' was replaced by the 'state' and the 'citizen' laying the foundations for the development of democracy.

The New Education Policy and UGC guidelines are becoming important instruments in advancing Hindutva communalism's assaults on Rationality, Reason and Scientific temper.

Release Bhima Koregaon Detainees: A senior police officer investigating caste violence at Bhima Koregaon on January 1, 2018 has admitted, under oath, that the

Elgar Parishad event organised 30 kms away from Pune city had no role in the violence.

Further, five reports have appeared in public domain, so far, following forensic inquiry of the devices of the accused by internationally reputed forensic analysis companies, which clearly show a pattern of hacking and placing fake files in the computers of those targeted, files which the accused had no idea about. Neither did they ever access those files as proved by the forensic inquiry. Yet, it is these fake files which constitute the main so-called evidence against all the accused in the Bhima Koregaon case, locked up under the draconian provisions of the UAPA.

Given this, all UAPA detainees arrested in connection with this case must be immediately released unconditionally.

G20 Presidency

The Modi government is using the G20 Presidency of India as a platform to project itself as a global leader accepted by the most influential countries in the world. In the run up to the G20 summit in September 2023, it has worked out a country wide schedule of events aimed at influencing the 2024 general elections.

The G20 presidency is a rotating presidency. Every country in the G20 will automatically be the President when their turn comes.

The G20 was formed in 1999 following the South Asian economic crisis. The G7 was expanded to G20 when the richest countries roped in the emerging economies to share the burden of the crisis that inevitably follows the neo-liberal economic reforms trajectory.

An initial ministerial level consultation was converted into the heads of government summits following the global financial meltdown in 2008. Since then, the method of rotational presidency was adopted which has little to do with the domestic economy or socio-political situation.

Modi has announced a domestic political campaign programme around the theme ‘One Earth-One Family-One Future’ and declared that “India’s G20 Presidency will work to promote the universal sense of one-ness.”

At a meeting called by the government to appraise the heads of political parties in India of its campaign details the CPI(M) warned that “The current alarming levels of communal polarization based on vicious campaigns of hate, terror and violence destroy the foundations of the declaration announced by the PM. Our economic slowdown is plunging deeper with alarmingly growing levels of unemployment and

poverty. Social injustices against women, dalits, adivasis, and marginal sections are multiplying. Constitutional guarantees of democratic rights and civil liberties are severely circumscribed by treating all expressions of dissent as ‘anti-national.’

The realisation of the theme announced by the government will be determined by reversing these current alarming trends in social, political and economic spheres and strictly adhering to our Constitutional foundations of liberty, equality and fraternity that define the character of our secular democratic republic.”

Recent SC Verdict on Demonetization

The verdict of the five-member Constitution bench on the 2016 demonetization cannot be interpreted as upholding this move.

In the majority judgment the Supreme Court has exclusively dealt with the legal right of the Central government to take such a decision and that it does not violate Section 26(2) of RBI Act 1934. The dissenting opinion of one of the honourable judges maintained that this Section of the RBI Act says that the RBI must recommend to the government to initiate demonetization. In this case the decision was taken by the Central government which sought the opinion of the RBI. Hence, the approval of the Parliament should have been taken before this decision was executed.

The majority judgement noted that demonetization had “reasonable nexus” with the objectives it sought to achieve and that it is “not relevant whether the objective was achieved or not”.

The Supreme Court majority judgement merely upholds the right of the government to take such a decision and in no way endorses the consequences of such a decision.

Himalayan Disaster

The sinking of Joshimath town in Uttarakhand is not a natural disaster but a man-made and a manufactured environmental disaster.

Cracks started appearing in buildings in late 2021. They have subsequently widened alarmingly with new cracks appearing in nearly 1,000 houses and roads. The National Remote Sensing Centre of the ISRO released images showing that Joshimath witnessed a rapid subsidence of nearly 5.4 cm in 12 days between December 27 and January 7. ISRO also found that this was on top of a near 9 cm subsidence between April and November 2022. An embarrassed Modi government, fearing a global outcry over its disastrous anti-environmental policies ordered the withdrawal of these images and banned all government agencies from providing, henceforth, any information on this disaster.

Joshimath is a 1,000 years old human settlement established on deposits of sand and stone on a fragile site in an ancient landslide zone. This is not a stable ground for largescale human settlement, but Himalayan society lived and flourished here in an eco-friendly manner. With a population of around 20,000, it is on the Char Dham pilgrimage route, gateway to the famous valley of flowers and international skiing centre at Auli. Feverish environmental degradation in the name of tourist development, mindless unplanned construction activity and the drilling of tunnels without proper planning in the world's youngest mountain range steered this path of destruction. The Modi government's preoccupation with communal mobilization promoting Hindutva pilgrimage encouraged largescale hotel construction and road building projects ignoring the load bearing capacity of the region and the warnings of geologists and environmental experts. Such dangers were being pointed out since decades which have been ignored by the vested interests of politicians-contractors. The recommended remedial measures including afforestation, proper drainage system etc., were also ignored. In short, it is crony capitalism at its worst that has led to this disaster.

Thousands of people are being forced to vacate their buildings and relocate. The announced compensation is inadequate. The BJP State and Central governments must provide adequate compensation and properly rehabilitate these people in safer areas.

Recent Assembly Elections

Elections to the State Assemblies of Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh were held along with the elections to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. While the BJP retained its state government in Gujarat it lost its incumbent government in Himachal Pradesh and the Delhi Municipal Corporation which it held for the last 15 years.

In Gujarat, the BJP's seventh successive victory is a confirmation of the deep communal polarization that has been engineered by the BJP-RSS over the last three decades. The projection of a pan-Hindu identity along with the rhetoric about Gujarati pride have overcome the more vital issues like price rise, unemployment and poor public health and educational facilities.

In Himachal Pradesh, the Congress victory constitutes a stinging defeat for the BJP which had put in all its resources and state machinery to try to retain power. The popular discontent over BJP misrule prevailed. Congress party's promise to restore the Old Pension Scheme mobilized large section of votes in its favour.

In Delhi, the elections to the unified municipal corporation have resulted in the Aam Aadmi Party defeating the BJP which had held the corporation for the past fifteen

years. The people of Delhi have withstood all the blandishments and maneuvers of the BJP and the Central government.

The results of Himachal Pradesh and Delhi have exposed the vulnerability of the BJP despite its huge money power and resources. The limits of the much-touted Modi factor have also come to the fore.

The defeat of BJP in Himachal Pradesh and Delhi demonstrates that where the RSS/BJP are not able to operate their communal 'hate machine' to rouse violent passions the people's day-to-day issues dominate the electoral discourse. However, its victory in Gujarat with a higher vote share reconfirms that the communally overcharged 'hate machine' succeeded in consolidating the 'overarching Hindutva identity' and pushing the day-to-day ground realities of deteriorating living conditions of the people into the background.

This underlines the need to mount a strong offensive against Hindutva communal aggressiveness agenda of the fascistic RSS. This challenge has to be met with intensifying efforts in political, social, cultural and other areas while simultaneously strengthening the struggles over issues of growing unemployment, inflation, poverty etc. Efforts must be made to forge the broadest mobilization of secular forces against the Hindutva communal offensive.

Tripura

As the elections to the state assembly draw closer in Tripura the ruling BJP has intensified its violent attacks against the CPI(M) and other opposition forces. On November 30, a gruesome attack was mounted on CPI(M) leaders and cadres which resulted in the killing of Com. Shahid Miah.

The violent attack by BJP goons took place when the Party cadres had gone for a local programme in Charilam in Sepahijala district.

This violence typifies the state of affairs in Tripura ever since the BJP government came to office in February 2018. The CPI(M) and other opposition parties are not allowed to function freely, run their offices or conduct normal political activities. With assembly elections nearing, the ruling party, with the connivance of the administration and police, continues to terrorise political opponents.

Following the visit of the full team of the Election Commission of India to Tripura severe violence has been unleashed against leaders and activists of opposition parties including the CPI(M). Such violence intensified with the announcement of the poll schedule. Nine separate instances of vicious attacks against the CPI(M) took place.

An activist of the TIPRA Motha was murdered. The Congress party's all India Secretary in charge of Tripura was beaten up and hospitalized.

The pattern of violence is clearly aimed at creating an atmosphere of terror and fear which will clearly affect the conduct of free and fair polls. The ECI must undertake emergency measures and proactively intervene to ensure free and fair polls. A joint rally by opposition parties demanding an end to such brazen violation of Constitutional guarantees and rights was largely attended.

Democracy and democratic rights must be restored in Tripura fully, if there has to be a free and fair election.

C.C. Calls

1. Solidarity with the people and secular democratic forces in Tripura to restore democracy and democratic rights as a pre-condition for holding free and fair polls.

The CPI(M) will organize programmes all across the country expressing solidarity.

2. A nationwide call for protest action in the last week of February from 22nd to 28th against the continuing assaults on the peoples' livelihood with growing unemployment, poverty and inequalities.

Along with issues that will arise in the 2023-24 Union Budget, this campaign of protest actions will highlight the following demands:

- Hike public investments in job creating infrastructure projects.
- Restore 5 kg of subsidized foodgrains along with 5 kg free foodgrains.
- Vastly increase allocation for MGNREGS with a higher wage.
- Impose a wealth and inheritance tax.
- Withdraw tax concessions to the rich and impose a tax on the super-rich.
- Withdraw GST on food and essentials commodities including medicines.

3. The CPI(M) extends its full support to the call of the Mazdoor-Kisan rally to Parliament on April 5, 2023.

During the course of the month of March the CPI(M) will organize political campaigns and activities on the following issues all across the country:

- (i) With growing attacks on federalism, protest against BJP's policies against elected state governments, particularly non-BJP state governments and

opposing the efforts to impose a unitary state structure destroying the federal structure.

- (ii) Campaigns denouncing the BJP government's efforts to undermine the independence of the judiciary. All democratic forces must be mobilized to defend the Constitutional role of the judiciary against the Modi government's efforts to subordinate higher judiciary to the government.
- (iii) For democratic and level playing field to ensure a free and fair election. The 23rd Congress of the CPI(M) in its political resolution highlighted the set of electoral reforms that must be urgently introduced.
- (iv) To organize solidarity campaigns with the Palestinian people and against the repression by the right-wing Israeli government
