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LULA DE SILVA
PRESENTS A RAY OF HOPE



ALTERNATIVE
TO JUGAAD



TASKS AFTER
WAGE REVISION



FORMING
STAGES



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STUNNING PROPORTIONS
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SPACE OPENED FOR STRUGGLES

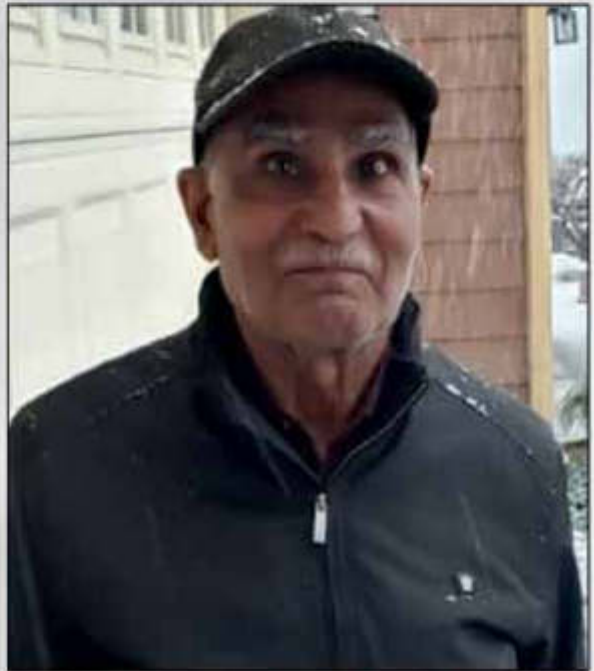


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HUMANITARIAN CRISIS OF STUNNING PROPORTIONS

The second wave of Covid 19 has hit India like a Tsunami. It has totally devastated life and livelihood. According to the official figures, the virus has claimed over 3.1 lakh lives this far and infected nearly 2.7 crore Indians. India is only behind United States in the number of infections and has the dubious distinction of having the third highest number of deaths. However, there is a wide consensus that both infections and deaths are heavily under-reported. The Washington based prestigious Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) has assessed that the death toll in India has already crossed 6.5 lakhs and it estimates that by September 2021 nearly 12.5 lakh Indians would die due to this virus. Looking at the overflowing cremation centres and burial grounds and the ghastly sight of bodies floating in Ganga and Yamuna, there is no reason not to accept this assessment.

The insurance employees too could not escape the ferocity of virus attack. As per the available reports nearly 300 serving employees of LIC belonging to all classes have been claimed by this virus. A number of deaths of serving employees are also reported in Public Sector General Insurance Companies. Thousands of insurance employees across the country have been infected. A large number of retired employees have also become victims of this virus. There are number of casualties in our agency force. This apart a large number of insurance employees are suffering the pain of losing their near and dear ones. Many of the insurance employees could have been saved if they had received prompt medical attention. The AIIEA has lost number of its prominent cadres and leaders in the last few months.

The Covid 19 has totally exposed the fragile health infrastructure in the country. The successive governments since India embraced neo-liberalism have neglected the public health sector and placed heavy reliance on the private sector to meet the health requirement of the public. India has just 0.53 hospital beds for 1000 persons and 2.3 ICU beds for a lakh of population. Therefore it is not surprising to see people running from one hospital to another in search of bed during this wave of Covid and patients dying on pavements for lack of hospital beds. We also have the horrible sight of patients dying in hospitals for lack of oxygen supply. It is reported that sofar patients who died in the hospitals

due to disruption of oxygen supply number nearly 300. Thousands more have died frantically searching for a cylinder of oxygen. The Allahabad High Court has said that this is nothing short of genocide. Commenting on the situation in Goa, the Mumbai High Court has termed the situation as unacceptable and a serious violation of the fundamental right to life guaranteed under the Constitution.

Who is to be blamed for this catastrophe? Somebody should be held accountable. The Prime Minister and his government cannot escape the responsibility of this calamitous situation. The callousness of the government and its lack of preparations have put at risk the lives of millions of our citizens. The window that was available for preparing for the second wave after ebbing of the first was not utilised to create necessary infrastructure to deal with this wave. While scientists and medical experts were warning of the second wave, the government remained utterly callous. Victory was declared over the pandemic very early ignoring science. The Prime Minister in January 2021 declared to the world that India has defeated the virus. In March 2021, the Union Health Minister claimed that India is in the endgame in dealing with this virus. Both of them proudly claimed that India has shown to the world how to fight covid. The Health Minister endorsed medicine produced by Baba Ramdev as a cure for Covid which was falsely claimed as endorsed by WHO. Ministers, MPs and MLAs of the BJP claimed that cow urine and dung has miraculous effect in treatment of Covid. Science and truth became the casualty in the process.

The Prime Minister as the leader of the nation should have led the fight against Covid. But unfortunately he was deeply immersed in electioneering to win West Bengal. He addressed 20 rallies and his Home Minister addressed 45 rallies in West Bengal along with massive road shows. The Prime Minister was exhilarated with large crowds in his rallies. Social distancing, masks and other covid protocols became a thing of the past. The Maha Kumbh Mela was allowed with lakhs participating. The Uttarakhand Chief Minister known for his ridiculous comments said that a dip in holy Ganga will prevent the virus attack. On another occasion he is reported to have said that virus is a living microbe and therefore it has a right to live. The Election Commission refused to shorten the 8

phase elections in West Bengal. Electioneering in other States too saw the people ignoring the covid protocol. The other political parties too cannot escape the responsibility.

There is an urgent need to develop national consensus in fighting this virus. There are already warnings from the scientific community that the third wave is inevitable. For this the Prime Minister and his government must accept the truth and come out of the denial mode. The Prime Minister as the leader of the country must take the lead in developing this consensus. Informing the correct number of infections and deaths are necessary to develop strategies to fight the virus. Hiding of the truth would be counter-productive. The Centre must rein in the UP administration. Perhaps it is the only State anywhere in the world which has invoked National Security Act against those who are helplessly pleading for oxygen and hospital beds in the social media. The Hospitals which have pointed out that patients are suffering and some deaths have taken

कोविड 19 की दूसरी लहर ने भारत पर सुनामी की तरह प्रहार किया है। इसने जीवन और आजीविका को पूरी तरह से तबाह कर दिया है। आधिकारिक आंकड़ों के अनुसार, इस वायरस ने अब तक 3.1 लाख से अधिक लोगों की जान ले ली है और लगभग 2.7 करोड़ भारतीयों को संक्रमित किया है। भारत संक्रमणों की संख्या में केवल संयुक्त राज्य अमेरिका से पीछे है और सबसे अधिक मौतों होने के मामले में संदिग्ध रूप से तीसरे स्थान पर है। हालांकि, इस बात पर व्यापक सहमति है कि संक्रमण और मौतों, दोनों ही को बहुत कम दिखाया जा रहा है। वाशिंगटन स्थित प्रतिष्ठित इंस्टीट्यूट फॉर हेल्थ मेट्रिक्स एंड इवैल्यूएशन (आईएचएमई) ने आकलन किया है कि भारत में मरने वालों की संख्या पहले ही 6.5 लाख को पार कर चुकी है और उसका अनुमान है कि सितम्बर 2021 तक लगभग 12.5 लाख भारतीय इस वायरस के कारण मर जाएंगे। ठसाठस भरे शमशान तथा कब्रिस्तान और गंगा-यमुना में तैरते शवों के भयावह मंजर को देखते हुए, इस आकलन को स्वीकार न करने की कोई वजह नहीं है।

बीमा कर्मचारी भी वायरस के हमले के प्रचण्ड वेग से बच नहीं सके। उपलब्ध रिपोर्टों के अनुसार एलआईसी के सभी वर्गों से सम्बन्धित लगभग 300 सेवार्त कर्मचारियों को इस वायरस ने लील लिया है। सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र की साधारण बीमा कम्पनियों के सेवार्त कर्मचारियों की भी कई मौतों की सूचना है। देश भर में हजारों बीमा कर्मचारी संक्रमित हो चुके हैं। बड़ी संख्या में सेविनिवृत्त कर्मचारी भी इस वायरस का शिकार हुए हैं। हमारे एजेन्सी बल के बहुत लोग हताहत हुए हैं। इसके अलावा बड़ी संख्या में बीमा कर्मचारी अपनों को खोने का दर्द झेल रहे हैं। हमारे कर्मचारियों की एक बड़ी संख्या को बचाया जा सकता था

place for lack of oxygen have been issued notices for creating panic. The over-crowded crematoriums, burial grounds and bodies floating in Rivers Ganges and Yamuna show how the actual figures of infection and deaths are being hidden. The television visuals of rural Uttar Pradesh and Bihar offer grim warning of a health disaster in the making.

The Central Government must also review its vaccination policy. Modi claimed that India is pharmacy of the world and its vaccinations will save not only Indians but the entire humanity. Today India is suffering for want of vaccine. It is seeking help from across the world. Just around 3% of the population has been fully vaccinated while around 10% have received one dose. The differential rate for vaccine for the Centre, States and Private hospitals will further complicate things. Adar Poonawala of the Serum Institute of India has said that selling vaccine to central government at Rs.150 is profitable. Then why the vaccine manufacturers should be allowed to earn super profits at the cost of peoples' sufferings

and misery. The Central Government must procure the vaccine for the entire population and people should be vaccinated free of cost. The differential price mechanism is sure to leave out the poor and the marginalised from the process of vaccination. It must be admitted that virus has reached rural India and unless immediate efforts are taken to contain the spread, the result could be disastrous.

There are claims that India has reached the peak of second wave and gradually the cases will plateau out. This should not lull the administration into complacency. It must seriously prepare to meet the challenges of the third wave. Right to Life is a Constitutional Guarantee. The Supreme Court has also held that Right to Life also includes the Right to Livelihood. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Modi government to protect the lives and ensure that sufficient avenues for livelihood are created. If the Government fails to act now, it will be responsible for the ensuing catastrophe.

मानवता पर संकट-बेहिसाब

यदि उन्हें तत्काल चिकित्सा सहायता मिलती। पिछले कुछ महीनों में ए.आई.आई.ई.ए. ने अपने कई प्रमुख कार्यकर्ताओं और नेताओं को खो दिया है।

कोविड 19 ने देश में नाजुक स्वास्थ्य ढांचे को पूरी तरह से उजागर कर दिया है। भारत में नव-उदारवाद को अपनाते के बाद से लगातार सरकारों ने सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य क्षेत्र की उपेक्षा की है और जनता की स्वास्थ्य आवश्यकता को पूरा करने के लिए निजी क्षेत्र पर भारी निर्भरता रखी है। भारत में प्रति एक हजार व्यक्तियों के लिए सिर्फ 0.53 अस्पताल के बिस्तर और प्रत्येक एक लाख आबादी पर 2.3 आईसीयू बिस्तर हैं। इसलिए कोविड के इस दौर में लोगों को बिस्तर की तलाश में एक अस्पताल से दूसरे अस्पताल जाना और अस्पताल में बेड के अभाव में फुटपाथ पर मरीजों को मरते देखना कोई आश्चर्य की बात नहीं है। हमारे सामने अस्पतालों में ऑक्सीजन की आपूर्ति की कमी के कारण मरने वाले मरीजों के भयानक दृश्य भी हैं। बताया जा रहा है कि अब तक अस्पतालों में ऑक्सीजन सप्लाई बाधित होने से मरने वालों की संख्या करीब 300 है। पागलों की तरह ऑक्सीजन के सिलेण्डर तलाशते हजारों अन्य की भी अब तक मौत हो चुकी है। इलाहाबाद हाईकोर्ट ने कहा है कि यह नरसंहार से कम नहीं है। गोवा की स्थिति पर टिप्पणी करते हुए मुम्बई उच्च न्यायालय ने स्थिति को अस्वीकार्य और संविधान के तहत गारंटीकृत जीवन के मौलिक अधिकार का गम्भीर उल्लंघन करार दिया है।

इस तबाही के लिए किसे दोषी ठहराया जाए ? किसी को तो जवाबदेह ठहराया जाना चाहिए। प्रधानमंत्री और उनकी

सरकार इस विपत्तिपूर्ण स्थिति की जिम्मेदारी से बच नहीं सकते। सरकार की निष्ठुरता और उसकी तैयारियों की कमी ने हमारे दसियों लाख नागरिकों के जीवन को खतरे में डाल दिया है। पहली लहर के कमजोर होने के बाद दूसरी लहर की तैयारी के लिए जो अवसर उपलब्ध था, उसका उपयोग इस नई लहर से निपटने हेतु आवश्यक बुनियादी ढांचे के निर्माण के लिए नहीं किया गया। जबकि वैज्ञानिक और चिकित्सा विशेषज्ञ दूसरी लहर की चेतावनी दे रहे थे, सरकार पूरी तरह से बेपरवाह रही। विज्ञान की अनदेखी करते हुए बहुत पहले ही महामारी पर विजय घोषित कर दी गयी थी। जनवरी 2021 में प्रधानमंत्री ने दुनिया को घोषित किया कि भारत ने वायरस को हरा दिया है। मार्च 2021 में केन्द्रीय स्वास्थ्य मंत्री ने दावा किया था कि भारत इस वायरस से निपटने के अन्तिम चरण में है। दोनों ने गर्व से दावा किया कि भारत ने दुनिया को दिखाया है कि कोविड से कैसे लड़ना है। स्वास्थ्य मंत्री ने बाबा रामदेव द्वारा निर्मित दवा को कोविड के इलाज के रूप में समर्थन दिया, जिसका ये झूठा दावा भी किया गया था कि डब्ल्यू.एच.ओ. द्वारा इसका समर्थन किया गया है। बीजेपी के मन्त्रियों, सांसदों और विधायकों ने दावा किया कि गौमूत्र और उसके गोबर का कोविड के इलाज में चमत्कारी असर होता है। इस प्रक्रिया में विज्ञान और सत्य हताहत हुए।

राष्ट्र के नेता के रूप में प्रधानमंत्री को कोविड के खिलाफ लड़ाई को नेतृत्व प्रदान करना चाहिए था। लेकिन दुर्भाग्य से वह पश्चिम बंगाल को जीतने के लिए चुनावी अभियान में पूरी तरह से डूबे हुए थे। उन्होंने 20 रैलियों को सम्बोधित



ELECTION RESULTS OPEN SPACE FOR STRUGGLES

The election results from the four States and a Union Territory are clearly a severe setback for the BJP's agenda of making an Opposition Mukta Bharat. The electorate have emphatically asserted the rich diversity of India and regional aspirations. These elections results have proved that communal polarisation has a limit and people look for solutions to their problems of life and livelihood. The massive polarisation of electorates on religious grounds had limited impact except in Assam. These results have also demolished the aura of invincibility built around Prime Minister Modi and the terrifying election machinery of BJP. It opens a huge space for struggles to promote constitutional values of Republic and make India a better place to live for all its citizens. The Congress stands diminished in these elections. It has been a mixed result for the Left which won Kerala convincingly but is decimated in West Bengal. These elections also raise several questions on the independence and neutrality of Election Commission.

The most keenly fought and watched was the poll battle in West Bengal. This is the State which was

very important for the BJP to establish its political hegemony. Therefore, BJP invested all its assets to win this State. The lethal election machine of the party was set in motion long before elections. The Prime Minister every second day for over a month was in West Bengal addressing election rallies. The Home Minister made West Bengal virtually his home in a desperate bid to win the State ignoring his responsibilities in Delhi. He engineered defections from TMC and half way through the elections boasted that his party will secure over 200 seats. The State witnessed unprecedented communal polarisation and the media projected a comfortable victory for BJP. It is to the credit of Mamata Banerjee that she single handedly fought the massive campaign to lead TMC to a spectacular victory winning 213 seats. The people of West Bengal rejected the divisive and communal propaganda by BJP and backed the TMC. The minorities and the marginalised overwhelmingly favoured her party. The welfare programs launched also helped TMC to a great extent. In the face of the massive polarisation, the Left-Congress-ISF alliance was totally marginalised and for the first time since



किया और उनके गृह मन्त्री ने बड़े पैमाने पर रोड शो के साथ पश्चिम बंगाल में 45 रैलियों को सम्बोधित किया। ये प्रधानमन्त्री अपनी रैलियों में भारी भीड़ देखकर मतवाले हुए जा रहे थे। दो गज की दूरी, मास्क और अन्य कोविड प्रोटोकॉल बीते दिनों की बात हो गई थी। ऐसे महाकुम्भ मेले की अनुमति दी गई जिसमें लाखों लोगों को भाग लेना था। अपनी हास्यास्पद टिप्पणियों के लिए पहचाने जाने वाले उत्तराखण्ड के मुख्यमंत्री ने कहा कि पवित्र गंगा में डुबकी लगाने से वायरस के हमले को रोका जा सकेगा। एक अन्य अवसर पर उन्होंने कहा कि वायरस एक जीवित सूक्ष्म जीव है और इसलिए इसे जीने का अधिकार है। चुनाव आयोग ने पश्चिम बंगाल में आठ चरण के चुनाव को छोटा करने से इन्कार कर दिया। अन्य राज्यों में चुनाव अभियान में भी लोगों ने कोविड प्रोटोकॉल की अनदेखी की। अन्य राजनीतिक दल भी इसकी जिम्मेदारी से नहीं बच सकते।

इस वायरस से लड़ने के लिए राष्ट्रीय सहमति विकसित करने की तत्काल आवश्यकता है। वैज्ञानिक समुदाय की ओर से पहले से ही चेतावनी दी जा रही है कि तीसरी लहर अपरिहार्य है। इसके लिए प्रधानमन्त्री और उनकी सरकार को सच्चाई स्वीकार करनी चाहिए और इन्कार की मुद्रा से बाहर आना चाहिए। देश के नेता के रूप में प्रधानमन्त्री को इस आम सहमति को विकसित करने का बीड़ा उठाना चाहिए। वायरस से लड़ने की रणनीति विकसित करने के लिए संक्रमणों और

मौतों की सही संख्या की जानकारी देना आवश्यक है। सच को छुपाना प्रतिकूल साबित होगा। केन्द्र को यूपी प्रशासन पर लगाम लगानी चाहिए। दुनिया में कहीं का भी शायद यह एकमात्र ऐसा राज्य है जिसने सोशल मीडिया में ऑक्सीजन और अस्पताल के बिस्तरों के लिए बेबसी की गुहार लगाने वालों के खिलाफ राष्ट्रीय सुरक्षा अधिनियम लागू किया है। जिन अस्पतालों ने इंगित किया है कि मरीज पीड़ित हैं और ऑक्सीजन की कमी के कारण कुछ मौतें हुई हैं, उन्हें दहशत पैदा करने के लिए नोटिस जारी किया गया है। गंगा और यमुना नदियों में तैरते शवों तथा खचाखच भरे शमशान घाटों और कब्रिस्तानों से पता चलता है कि कैसे संक्रमण और मौतों के वास्तविक आंकड़ें छिपाए जा रहे हैं। ग्रामीण उत्तर प्रदेश और बिहार से आते टेलीविजन दृश्य स्वास्थ्य आपदा की एक गम्भीर चेतावनी प्रस्तुत कर रहे हैं।

केन्द्र सरकार को अपनी टीकाकरण नीति की भी समीक्षा करनी चाहिए। मोदी ने दावा किया था कि भारत पूरी दुनिया के लिए दवाईयां बना रहा है और इसका टीकाकरण न केवल भारतीयों को बल्कि पूरी मानवता को बचाएगा। आज भारत वैक्सीन की कमी से जूझ रहा है। यह दुनिया भर से मदद मांग रहा है। लगभग 3 प्रतिशत आबादी का पूरी तरह टीकाकरण हुआ है और लगभग 10 प्रतिशत को इसकी एक खुराक मिली है। केन्द्र, राज्यों और निजी अस्पतालों के लिए वैक्सीन की अलग-अलग दरें चीजों को और जटिल करेंगी। सीरम इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ इण्डिया के अदार पूनावाला ने

independence, Left has no presence in the State Assembly.

In Kerala, the Left and Democratic Front recorded a stunning victory breaking the tradition of over four decades not to vote back the incumbent. Despite all efforts made by both UDF and BJP to sway the voters on the issue of Sabarimala, the voters chose to vote the LDF on the basis of its performance in the last five years. The manner in which Pinarayi Vijayan administration handled the Nipah virus, floods and the coronavirus pandemic were appreciated by the Kerala voters. The social welfare programs also endeared the LDF and support came in from all sections and communities in the State. The LDF increased both the number of seats secured and vote percentage by winning 99 of the 141 Seats. The UDF campaigned on the issue of corruption and Sabarimala but failed to convince voters and suffered a humiliating loss and lost seats even in its traditional strongholds. The BJP which claimed of winning over 40 seats failed to win even one. Its vote percentage also came down. Interestingly, LDF won all five seats from Pathanamthitta District, the hotbed of Sabarimala protests.

The DMK Front recorded a comfortable victory in Tamil Nadu defeating the incumbent AIADMK

Front. The electorate did not like BJP doing the back seat driving for the last several years during the AIADMK rule. Infact the alliance with BJP became a handicap for the ruling party. This was a vote for preservation of the Dravidian culture and demonstrated in unmistakable terms that communal polarisation cannot work in this State. Though the pollsters projected a clean sweep for DMK Front; AIADMK did put up a good show. This was the first election fought in the absence of two towering political personalities of the State Ms Jayalalitha and M.Karunanidhi. Leader of DMK M.K.Stalin proved his mettle to lead the alliance to a victory. Though BJP won 4 seats, its vote percentage came down significantly compared to the last election. The CPI (M) and CPI which contested elections as part of DMK alliance secured 2 seats each.

The BJP alliance was voted back to power in Assam though it secured lesser number of seats compared to 2016. The election was fought between two alliances, one led by BJP and the other Congress. The elections witnessed heightened communal polarisation and inflaming of regional chauvinism. Two regional parties who campaigned against the CAA, refused to join the broad secular front against BJP led alliance and succeeded in splitting the votes adversely impacting the prospects of Congress led alliance in a number of seats. Though the BJP can take comfort from this victory, it must be noted that the vote difference between the two alliances was just 0.9%.

The election in the Union Territory of Puducherry was fought after the BJP engineered defections to bring down the Congress Government. Despite the popularity of N.Rangaswamy, the AINR Congress and BJP alliance just scraped past with 16 seats in a house of 30. The BJP would aim to expand its foot prints in Tamil Nadu with this victory but will find the task extremely difficult.

These elections brought into sharp focus the falling standards in public discourse. Prime Minister repeatedly ridiculing Mamata with taunts as Didi o Didi was the lowest point. The diminishing independence of the institutions was in full display with the CBI, ED and other Central agencies used to harass the opposition. The Election Commission has come out very poorly. The gruelling 8 phase election despite the worsening pandemic in West Bengal was only to help the BJP. The Commission while

कहा है कि केन्द्र सरकार को 150 रूपये में वैक्सीन बेचना लाभदायक है। फिर क्यों वैक्सीन निर्माताओं को लोगों के कष्टों और दुखों की कीमत पर अत्यधिक मुनाफा कमाने की अनुमति दी जानी चाहिए। केन्द्र सरकार को पूरी आबादी के लिए वैक्सीन की खरीद करनी चाहिए और लोगों को मुफ्त में टीका लगाया जाना चाहिए। विभाजनकारी मूल्य तन्त्र निश्चित रूप से टीकाकरण की प्रक्रिया में गरीबों और वंचितों को बाहर कर देगा। यह स्वीकार किया जाना चाहिए कि वायरस ग्रामीण भारत में पहुंच गया है और जब तक प्रसार को रोकने के लिए तत्काल प्रयास नहीं किए जाते, परिणाम विनाशकारी हो सकते हैं।

ऐसे दावे हैं कि भारत दूसरी लहर के चरम पर पहुंच गया है और धीरे-धीरे मामले उच्चतम स्तर से खत्म होने की तरफ जाएंगे। इससे प्रशासन को सन्तुष्ट नहीं होना चाहिए। इसे तीसरी लहर की चुनौतियों का सामना करने के लिए गम्भीरता से तैयारी करनी चाहिए। जीवन का अधिकार एक संवैधानिक गारण्टी है। सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने यह भी माना है कि जीवन के अधिकार में आजीविका का अधिकार भी शामिल है। इसलिए, जीवन की रक्षा करना और आजीविका के पर्याप्त रास्ते तैयार किया जाना सुनिश्चित करना मोदी सरकार की जिम्मेदारी है। यदि सरकार अभी कार्यवाही करने में विफल रहती है, तो वह आने वाली तबाही के लिए जिम्मेदार होगी।

punishing and passing strictures against opposition was benign towards BJP. This is problematic and has potential of undermining democracy. The election results in West Bengal have raised serious questions about the relevance of Left. Left is important to promote the interests of the working class and the marginalised. Left is the conscience keeper of the nation. Therefore, it must seriously introspect as to why it failed to impress the electorate. The Left cannot progress through hastily forged alliances. The Left can grow only through class struggles. It must

therefore take up the issues of life and livelihood and constantly be in struggle to connect to the people and project itself as a viable alternative. The Congress is in a pitiable position. It looks this grand old party has lost all conviction and interest to reinvent itself. These elections have created space for the expansion of struggles for democratic rights and to protect the constitutional values. This is the challenge that democratic, progressive forces and working class have to face.



चुनाव परिणामों ने खोला संघर्ष का रास्ता

चार राज्यों और एक केन्द्र शासित प्रदेश के चुनाव परिणाम स्पष्ट रूप से विपक्ष मुक्त भारत बनाने के भाजपा के एजेण्डे के लिए एक करारा झटका है। मतदाताओं ने भारत की समृद्ध विविधता और क्षेत्रीय आकांक्षाओं को प्रभावशाली तरीके से उभारा है। इन चुनाव परिणामों ने साबित कर दिया है कि सांप्रदायिक धुवीकरण की एक सीमा होती है और लोग अपने जीवन और आजीविका की समस्याओं का समाधान ढूंढते हैं। धार्मिक आधार पर मतदाताओं के बड़े पैमाने पर धुवीकरण का असम के अलावा अन्य स्थानों पर सीमित प्रभाव पड़ा। इन नतीजों ने प्रधानमंत्री मोदी के इर्दगिर्द बनी अजेयता की आभा और भाजपा की भयानक चुनावी मशीनरी को भी ध्वस्त कर दिया है। यह गणतन्त्र के संवैधानिक मूल्यों को बढ़ावा देने और भारत को अपने सभी नागरिकों के रहने के लिए बेहतर जगह बनाने के संघर्ष के लिए एक विशाल मैदान खोलता है। इन चुनावों में कांग्रेस कमजोर पड़ी है। वामपंथियों के लिए इसका मिलाजुला परिणाम रहा है, जिसने केरल को तो पक्का जीत लिया लेकिन पश्चिम बंगाल में उसका सफाया हो गया। चुनाव आयोग की स्वतन्त्रता और तटस्थता पर भी ये चुनाव कई सवाल खड़े करते हैं।

पश्चिम बंगाल की चुनावी जंग सबसे अधिक उत्सुकता से लड़ी और देखी जाने वाली जंग थी। यह वह राज्य है जो भाजपा के लिए अपना राजनीतिक आधिपत्य स्थापित करने के लिए बहुत महत्वपूर्ण था। इसलिए, बीजेपी ने इस राज्य को जीतने के लिए अपना सब कुछ दाव पर लगा दिया था। चुनाव के बहुत पहले से ही पार्टी की घातक चुनावी मशीन चल पड़ी थी। प्रधानमंत्री एक महीने से भी अधिक समय तक लगातार हर दूसरे दिन पश्चिम बंगाल में चुनावी रैलियों को सम्बोधित कर रहे थे। गृहमंत्री ने दिल्ली की अपनी जिम्मेदारियों की अनदेखी करते हुए बेताबी से राज्य को जीतने के लिए पश्चिम बंगाल को वस्तुतः अपना घर बना लिया था। उन्होंने अपनी विशेष चालबाजियों से टी.एम.सी. से दलबदल कराया और चुनावों के आधे रास्ते से यह डींगें मारना शुरू कर दिया कि उनकी पार्टी 200 से अधिक सीटें हासिल करेगी। राज्य में अभूतपूर्व सांप्रदायिक धुवीकरण हुआ

और मीडिया ने भाजपा की सहज जीत का अनुमान लगाया। ममता बनर्जी को इसका श्रेय जाता है कि उन्होंने अकेले दम पे बड़े पैमाने पर अभियान का नेतृत्व करते हुए टीएमसी को 213 सीटों पर शानदार जीत दिलाई। पश्चिम बंगाल के लोगों ने भाजपा के विभाजनकारी और सांप्रदायिक प्रचार को खारिज कर दिया और टी.एम.सी. का समर्थन किया। अल्पसंख्यकों और हाशिए के लोगों ने उनकी पार्टी का भरपूर समर्थन किया। शुरू किए गए कल्याणकारी कार्यक्रमों ने भी टीएमसी को काफी हद तक मदद की। बड़े पैमाने पर धुवीकरण के सामने, वाम-कांग्रेस-आई.एस.एफ. गठबन्धन पूरी तरह से हाशिए पर था और आजादी के बाद पहली बार, वामपंथ की राज्य विधानसभा में उपस्थिति नहीं है।

केरल में, वामपंथी और लोकतांत्रिक मोर्चे ने सत्ताधारी को वोट न देने की चार दशकों से अधिक की परम्परा को तोड़ते हुए एक आश्चर्यजनक जीत दर्ज की। सबरीमाला के मुद्दे पर मतदाताओं को लुभाने के लिए यूडीएफ और बीजेपी दोनों द्वारा किए गए सभी प्रयासों के बावजूद, मतदाताओं ने पिछले पांच वर्षों में इसके प्रदर्शन के आधार पर एलडीएफ को वोट देने का विकल्प चुना। पिनाराई विजयन प्रशासन ने जिस तरह से निपाह वायरस, बाढ़ और कोरोनावायरस महामारी को संभाला, उसकी केरल के मतदाताओं ने सराहना की। सामाजिक कल्याण कार्यक्रमों ने भी एलडीएफ को पसन्द किया और राज्य के सभी वर्गों और समुदायों से समर्थन मिला। एलडीएफ ने 141 में से 99 सीटों पर जीत सुरक्षित कर सीटों की संख्या और वोट प्रतिशत दोनों में वृद्धि की। यूडीएफ ने भ्रष्टाचार और सबरीमाला के मुद्दे पर प्रचार किया लेकिन मतदाताओं को समझाने में असफल रहा और उसे अपमानजनक नुकसान हुआ यहाँ तक कि इसे अपने पारंपरिक गढ़ों में भी सीटें गंवानी पड़ीं। भाजपा जिसने 40 से अधिक सीटें जीतने का दावा किया था, वह एक भी जीतने में विफल रही। उसका वोट प्रतिशत भी कम हुआ। दिलचस्प बात यह है कि एल.डी.एफ. ने सबरीमाला विरोध के केन्द्र पथानामचि 1 जिले की सभी पांच सीटों पर जीत हासिल की।

डीएमके फ्रंट ने तमिलनाडु में मौजूदा अन्नाद्रमुक फ्रंट

को हराकर आराम से जीत दर्ज की। अन्नाद्रमुक के शासन के दौरान पिछले कई सालों से बीजेपी का पीछे से सत्ता चलाना मतदाताओं को पसन्द नहीं आया। वास्तव में भाजपा के साथ गठबन्धन सत्ताधारी दल के लिए एक बाधा बन गया। यह द्रविड संस्कृति के संरक्षण के लिए एक मतदान था और बिना किसी गलती के मतदाताओं ने यह अभिव्यक्त कर दिया कि इस राज्य में सांप्रदायिक धुवीकरण काम नहीं कर सकता। हालांकि मतदाताओं ने द्रमुक मोर्चा के लिए एकतरफा जीत का अनुमान लगाया था फिर भी अन्नाद्रमुक ने अच्छा प्रदर्शन किया। राज्य की दो बड़ी राजनीतिक हस्तियों सुश्री जयललिता और एम. करुणानिधि की अनुपस्थिति में लड़ा गया यह पहला चुनाव था। द्रमुक नेता एम.के.स्टालिन ने गठबन्धन को जीत की ओर ले जाने के लिए अपनी योग्यता साबित की। हालांकि बीजेपी ने 4 सीटें जीतीं, लेकिन पिछले चुनाव की तुलना में उसका वोट प्रतिशत काफी कम हो गया। डीएमके गठबन्धन के हिस्से के रूप में चुनाव लड़ने वाली सीपीआई(एम) और सीपीआई ने 2-2 सीटें हासिल कीं।

भाजपा गठबन्धन को असम में सत्ता में वापस वोट दिया गया, हालांकि उसे 2016 की तुलना में कम सीटें मिलीं। चुनाव दो गठबन्धनों के बीच लड़ा गया था, एक भाजपा और दूसरा कांग्रेस के नेतृत्व में। चुनावों में बड़े हुए सांप्रदायिक धुवीकरण और क्षेत्रीय अन्धभक्ति की उत्तेजना देखी गई। सीएए के खिलाफ प्रचार करने वाले दो क्षेत्रीय दलों ने भाजपा के नेतृत्व वाले गठबन्धन के खिलाफ व्यापक धर्मनिरपेक्ष मोर्चे में शामिल होने से इन्कार कर दिया और कई सीटों पर कांग्रेस के नेतृत्व वाले गठबन्धन की सम्भावनाओं पर प्रतिकूल प्रभाव डालने वाले वोटों को विभाजित करने में सफल रहे। हालांकि भाजपा इस जीत से आराम पा सकती है, लेकिन यह ध्यान दिया जाना चाहिए कि दोनों गठबन्धनों के बीच वोटों का अन्तर सिर्फ 0.9 प्रतिशत था।

केन्द्र शासित प्रदेश पुडुचेरी में चुनाव भाजपा द्वारा कांग्रेस सरकार को गिराने के लिए दलबदल के बाद लड़ा गया था। एन.रंगास्वामी की लोकप्रियता के बावजूद, ए.आई.एन.आर. कांग्रेस और बीजेपी गठबन्धन 30 के सदन में 16 सीटों के जरूरी बहुमत के मानक को बस तोड़ने में ही सफल हो

सकी। भाजपा इस जीत के साथ तमिलनाडु में अपने कदमों के निशान का विस्तार करने का लक्ष्य रखेगी, लेकिन यह काम बेहद मुश्किल होगा।

इन चुनावों ने सार्वजनिक विमर्श में गिरते मानकों की तरफ विशेष ध्यान खींचा। प्रधानमन्त्री का बार-बार ममता को दीदी ओ दीदी पुकारना इसे सबसे निचले स्तर की तरफ ले गया। सी.बी.आई., ई.डी. और अन्य केन्द्रीय एजेंसियों द्वारा विपक्ष को परेशान करने की घटनाओं से संस्थानों की घटती स्वतन्त्रता पूरी तरह प्रदर्शित हो रही थी। चुनाव आयोग का प्रदर्शन बहुत खराब निकला है। पश्चिम बंगाल में महामारी की बिगड़ती स्थिति के बावजूद आठ चरणों के थकाने वाले चुनाव केवल भाजपा की मदद के लिए थे। आयोग जहां विपक्ष को दंडित करने वाली और उनके खिलाफ बाध्यकारी कड़ी कार्यवाही कर रहा था वहीं भाजपा के प्रति सौम्यता दर्शा रहा था। इससे समस्याएं पैदा होती हैं और इससे लोकतन्त्र कमजोर पड़ने की संभावना पैदा हो सकती है। पश्चिम बंगाल के चुनाव परिणामों ने वामपंथ की प्रासंगिकता पर गम्भीर सवाल खड़े कर दिए हैं। मजदूर वर्ग और हाशिए पर पड़े लोगों के हितों को बढ़ावा देने के लिए वामपंथ महत्वपूर्ण है। वामपंथ राष्ट्र के विवेक को जागरूक रखने वाला है। इसलिए, इसे गम्भीरता से आत्मनिरीक्षण करना चाहिए कि यह मतदाताओं को प्रभावित करने में विफल क्यों रहा। जल्दबाजी में बनाए गए कूटनीतिक गठजोड़ से वामपंथ प्रगति नहीं कर सकता। वामपंथ का विकास सिर्फ वर्ग संघर्षों के माध्यम से ही हो सकता है। इसलिए इसे जीवन और आजीविका के मुद्दों को उठाना चाहिए और लोगों से जुड़ने और खुद को एक व्यवहार्य विकल्प के रूप में पेश करने के लिए लगातार संघर्ष करना चाहिए। कांग्रेस दयनीय स्थिति में है। ऐसा लगता है कि इस भव्य पुरानी पार्टी ने खुद को फिर से स्थापित करने के लिए जरूरी दृढ़विश्वास और रूचि खो दी है। इन चुनावों ने लोकतान्त्रिक अधिकारों और संवैधानिक मूल्यों की रक्षा के लिए संघर्षों के विस्तार की जमीन तैयार की है। यह वह चुनौती है जिसका सामना लोकतान्त्रिक, प्रगतिशील ताकतों और मजदूर वर्ग को करना है।



Com K.R.Gouri Amma

Com K.R.Gouri Amma, an outstanding leader of the peoples' movement in Kerala passed away on 11th May 2021 at the age of 102.

Gauri Amma was the Minister for Revenue, Excise and Devasom in the first communist government elected in Kerala, headed by EMS Nambooridipad in 1957. She is credited with being one of the architects of land reforms in Kerala.

AIIEA and Insurance Worker pays rich tributes to the memory of Com Gouri Amma and shares the grief with her family and comrades.





Com. K Venugopala Rao President, SCZIEF is no more

Clement Xavier Das

**“The light has gone away from us,
Leaving a void and a fear of distress;
By no means, the world will remain the same and
not a single day will pass without we taking his name”**

With a deep sense of sorrow and grief, we inform you that Com K Venugopala Rao, President, SCZIEF passed away in wee hours of 30th April 2021 while undergoing treatment at Apollo Hospital, Hyderabad. Hundreds of followers and admirers were shell shocked to learn that he is no more. He is survived by his wife and two sons.

Com K Venugopal Rao was hale and healthy, actively touring the Divisions as part of his organisation responsibilities. On 19.02.2021, he toured Vijayawada along with other SCZIEF office bearers, to take part in the formation of Reception Committee of the 12th SCZIEF conference which was to be held on the 24th - 25th of April 2021. He was the chief guest of the meeting and immensely motivated all the comrades of Machilipatnam Division to host the SCZIEF Conference in a manner befitting the established traditions. He passionately involved himself in the day to day activities of the organisation and contributed his might by writing articles and addressing employees meetings to galvanise the rank and file of the membership to rally round AIIEA, in the struggle against IPO of LIC and to clinch the Wage Revision issue at the earliest. Amidst these organisational activities, he went for a routine preventive health check-up. All his medical reports were normal except for some discrepancies noticed in the ECG and TMT test reports. The doctors subsequently advised him to undergo Angiogram test

and there it was detected that he had blocks in his arteries. On the advice of the doctors, he underwent cardiac bypass surgery at Apollo Hospital, a fortnight back, and was fast recovering. But, unfortunately, he then developed lung infection and was tested positive for Covid-19. He was under treatment in AIMC unit, but the infection damaged his lungs very badly and he eventually succumbed to the same. It is unbelievable and devastating that com K Venugopal Rao who was so active and healthy was snatched away from us by the cruel hands of death. It is the cruelty of nature that death is inevitable to all human beings. But, it came so early and unexpectedly that we are not able to bear. In his death AIIEA has lost a leader who was simple, humble and ideologically wedded to the philosophy of AIIEA and Working class. It has left all of us and his thousands of well-wishers and admirers in a state of deep shock and agony. It is a colossal loss to the organisation which will be very difficult to overcome in the days to come.

Com Venugopala Rao joined LIC in the year 1987 as Assistant at Adilabad branch office. From day one, he was inspired by the objectives and ideology of AIIEA. Being an intellect, ideologically and politically conscious citizen, he was naturally drawn towards AIIEA and took active part in the day to day activities of the Union as well as LIC. He excelled in all the activities that he undertook and became an exemplary and matured leader in his early days itself. As such, whenever there was a need, he became the natural choice to shoulder higher responsibilities in the organisation. He was asked to seek a transfer to Karimnagar when the division was formed. He took up the responsibility as Joint

Secretary. He was elected as Vice-President of SCZIEF in 2003 in the SCZIEF Conference held at Kadapa. Subsequently, he led the ICEU Karimnagar Division with diligence as General Secretary. He contributed immensely in developing the divisional unit with ideological moorings. Karimnagar Division is what it is today only because of the selfless contribution Com K Venugopal Rao has made. Through his hard work and exemplary leadership, Com K Venugopal Rao created good number of cadres and leaders who are at present shouldering the responsibilities of the organisation. To put it in a nutshell, he was like a fatherly figure for all comrades of Karimnagar Division and to the hundreds of well-wishers who approached him. The defining moment of his organisational capabilities came to fore when he took up the responsibility of organising the Silver Jubilee conference of SCZIEF at Karimnagar in the year 2015. He along with the militant cadres and comrades of Karimnagar division set new bench marks for hosting the Zonal Conference. Our comrades from across the Zone hailed it as one the best organised conferences of SCZIEF. The efficiency, transparency and financial discipline with which he handled the funds, ensured a substantial savings from the collections made for the conference. This fund was wisely converted into a physical asset. As a result Com. V. Sugunakar Rao Bhavan, a majestic union building has come up in the heart of Karimnagar town. This building has become the centre for democratic, progressive and trade union activities.

He was elected as President of SCZIEF in the Zonal Conference held at Karimnagar in the year 2015. He was elected as Vice President of AIEA in the Vizag conference in January 2020. He was also the editor of Karmikavahini, the vernacular mouth piece of SCZIEF. He was closely associated with democratic movement outside LIC and was the President of PATNAM Telangana State Unit, an organisation which was formed to take up the issues of the urban people with civic authorities.

***“He was the tallest amongst us all,
carving a niche by no means small,
A leader who rose from the rank and file,
winning everyone with a charming smile”***

He was an avid reader and evinced keen interest in politics, economy, culture, literature and history. His incisive intellectual analysis was seen in his regular columns to Insurance Worker, Nava Telangana and in Karmikavahini. He was an orator par excellence and his participation in debates in various conferences of AIEA and SCZIEF were looked upon with great interest. His guidance to the deliberations of various Divisional conferences in our Zone was a clear hall mark of clarity in understanding and analysing the contemporary issues with working class perspective, which we will be missing.

***“Writer and an orator of very high order, a scholar who
relished to push the intellectual border
No conference was complete without his erudite talk,
a comrade who legged the extra walk”***

Today, when the organisation is facing enormous challenges, his sudden demise has created huge void that is difficult to fill in the near future. The best way to pay tribute to him would be to take every step to strengthen the organisation and fulfil his dream of establishing a just and equal society. He always propagated that the interests of LIC must be protected at any cost. He used to exhort the comrades to work for the progress of the institution. As such, let us also take a pledge to carry forward this important objective of com K Venugopal Rao for which he worked relentlessly.

We convey our heartfelt condolences to the members of his family and dip our banner in his memory. Though he left us eternally, he will live in our hearts and minds till eternity.

***“A rich tribute we owe this beloved comrade,
Who for the common good, innumerable sacrifices made
And hold aloft the union banner in high skies
Thereby making it the apple of our eyes”***

Long Live Com K Venugopala Rao



Com. Saibal Chaudhuri passes away

Jayanta Mukherjee

On Saturday, 8th May, 2021, late in the noon the shocking news came that Comrade Saibal

Chaudhuri passed away peacefully in the hospital in which he was under treatment for Covid related issues. As the news spread, there was grief all around and condolences messages started pouring in. In the afternoon condolence messages started pouring in the EZIEA headquarters. Comrade Chandrasekhar Bose, the nonagenarian founder leader of AIIEA, wrote: "I can't believe this. He was so active, mentally, despite his illnesses and failing health. Feeling very sad. Long live Saibal." His message aptly captured the feelings of the leaders and activists of EZIEA/ KDLIEA immediately after the demise of Comrade Saibal Chaudhuri. He died at the age of 79 and is survived by his wife Comrade Kabita Chaudhuri and daughter Urba Chaudhuri.

Com Saibal served the organisation admirably in various capacities. He worked as the General Secretary of CDLIEA now KDLIEA, General Secretary of EZIEA and Joint Secretary of AIIEA for long years. Comrade Saibal Da joined LIC on 5th March 1960. The historic food movement of 1959 in which the undivided Communist Party played a glorious role had already impacted his young mind. Within the industry the mood of the employees, who had been suffering under the yoke of exploitation by private owners, was one that of jubilation. They also showed strong determination to move forward under the leadership of AIIEA. In this backdrop, it did not take long for Comrade Saibal Chaudhuri to immerse himself in the activities of CDLIEA. He took active part in the historic Anti-Automation movement led by AIIEA. The movement further moulded his consciousness.

Comrade Saibal Da's deep involvement with the activities of AIIEA enriched his understanding and knowledge of the working class movement. He possessed many qualities of a good leader. It is these qualities which took him from the position of an active member of the organisation to the position of

a leader. In 1972, he was elected the Base Secretary of Hindusthan Building Annexe Base of undivided CDLIEA, which witnessed intense ideological struggle against those who wanted to spilt AIIEA. In the following year, he was elected Assistant Secretary of CDLIEA. He led CDLIEA as its General Secretary for six consecutive terms from 1986 to 1991 very successfully. He was elected the Assistant Secretary of EZIEA in 1990 and the Joint Secretary in 1992. The EZIEA Conference held in Dhanbad in 1998 elected him the General Secretary of EZIEA. The AIIEA Conference held in Hyderabad in the same year elected him the Joint Secretary of AIIEA. As the General Secretary of EZIEA Comrade Saibal Da worked tirelessly and toured extensively across the Eastern Zone to strengthen the organisation both numerically and ideologically.

Comrade Saibal Chaudhuri was a very popular leader of the organisation. His charming personality, gentle manners, patience to listen, tolerance to opposing view points, helping attitude and his sense of humour endeared him not only to the other leaders of the organisation but also to the ordinary employees. He acquired the ability to feel the pulse of the employees and could use that ability in the process of decision making. He had thorough knowledge of staff matters and disciplinary proceedings which benefitted both the employees and the organisation. He had the privilege of working closely with the illustrious leader Comrade S. N. Bhowmick which helped him acquire legal acumen. This helped the organisation in fighting legal battles. He played a commendable role in fighting for the cause of the daily-rated employees in CGIT along with Comrade A. S. Deo and others.

Comrade Saibal Da had a penchant for reading and writing. His reading habit was never one dimensional. He was an avid reader of Bengali literature too. He was a good orator. Apart from using his writing skill for the organisation, he wrote articles occasionally for Ganashakti and other papers. In his spare time he enjoyed watching films, dramas, and travelling. Comrade Saibal Chaudhuri was wedded to the philosophy of Marxism. His faith in this

revolutionary ideology remained unshakable till he breathed his last. Comrade Saibal Da's activities went beyond the confines of the industry. He took active part in the left and democratic movement of the state. He was once elected a Senate Member of the University of Calcutta and discharged his duties well.

Even after relinquishing the post of Vice President of EZIEA a few years after his retirement on 31st January, 2002, Comrade Saibal Da never lost touch with the organisation. In between his bouts of illness in the recent years, he used to talk to many Comrades

across the zone over phone. Such was his concern about the Comrades and the organisation. He was very much concerned about the future of the state and the country as a whole.

One of the famous quotes of Haruki Murakami, the famous Japanese novelist, says: "Death is not the opposite of life, but a part of it." True, death is a part of life. It is also true that Comrade Saibal Chaudhuri's death cannot be termed premature. Yet, it seemed too soon to bid Comrade Saibal Chaudhuri goodbye.



Com. N.K.Pachauri

Com N.K.Pachauri, Former Vice-President, AIIEA and President NCZIEF became yet another victim of Covid 19 on May 11, 2021. He was under treatment in Apollo

Hospital at Delhi for nearly a month after catching the infection. He fought the disease bravely and there were expectations that he will successfully come out of hospital. But unfortunately he succumbed to the disease. He was 70.

Com Pachauri was the founder General Secretary of Aligarh Division. His commitment and tireless efforts made Aligarh one of the most militant and disciplined units of North Central Zone. He was elected as the President of NZIEF in the year 2006 and held this post till 2012. He made a wonderful team with Com Ashok Tewari as General Secretary to make the NCZIEF as a very strong contingent of AIIEA.

Com Pachauri had a deep and clear understanding of the political and economic situation in the country. He was very well versed in the Legal issues and made enormous contribution to the discussions and decisions in the Secretariat of AIIEA.

The headquarters of Insurance Worker was shifted to Bangalore in 2011. It was decided to make the Journal bilingual (English and Hindi) to fulfil the desire of a large number of subscribers. It was not easy at Bangalore to take up this responsibility. Com Pachauri came forward to help in the translation of the Editorials in Hindi and making contributions to the Journal through his own writings. This job he did for nearly a decade. He also prepared the other

cadres at Aligarh to take up this job in his absence. Therefore, even today Aligarh continues to make the contribution with editorial translations every month. The Insurance Worker as a bilingual journal owes it success to the great effort by Com Pachauri.

Com Pachauri was very soft spoken. His humility and kindness earned him affection not just from the members of AIIEA but also from his adversaries. He laid great emphasis on the collective functioning and relentlessly campaigned against individualism.

Com Pachauri was totally committed to the philosophy of the working class. He believed that the present social order is unjust and therefore trade unions cannot just get bogged down into economism but also relentlessly pursue the larger goal of establishing a just and fair society. He was connected with larger struggles of the working class and was a prominent figure in the trade union movement of Aligarh.

The philosophy of life that lay tremendous importance to the emancipation of the down-trodden and marginalised brought him close to many literary giants including the famous historian Prof Irfan Habib and his family. In his condolence message Prof Irfan Habib writes that Com Pachauri was "a model leader combining militancy with a sense of responsibility, always keeping in view the larger interests of the workers' cause".

The AIIEA and Insurance Worker deeply mourns the unfortunate demise of Com Pachauri and shares the grief with his family members, entire rank and file of NCZIEF and his friends and admirers across the country. Red Salute Com Pachauri.

AIIEA WRITES TO LIC CHAIRMAN ON 11/ 5/ 2021 SUGGESTS PRO-ACTIVE MEASURES TO DEAL WITH RAGING SECOND WAVE OF COVID 19

The second wave of the Covid19 pandemic has acquired calamitous proportions. The WHO has classified this variant of the virus as a 'variant of concern' at the global level. There is a huge surge all over India. Offices of the LIC have also been impacted severely. More than a hundred serving employees and officers have already succumbed to the deadly virus across the country. It is unfortunate that significant number of our retired employees have also been claimed by this dreaded virus. A number of employees have lost their spouses and other dear and near ones. An uncanny sense of fear, foreboding and apprehension pervades everywhere. The situation is grim as the health infrastructure has totally collapsed. The people are helplessly scampering for hospital beds and medical oxygen. The LIC employees are no exception. Significant numbers of LIC employees are lost to covid for want of hospital beds, oxygen and timely medical intervention. News of death owing to scarcity of hospital beds keeps coming with nauseating regularity.

The situation demands some intervention by LIC to ameliorate the sufferings of the employees. We appreciate that you have taken some measures for security and safety of employees. However, it has become necessary that offices must be advised to take strict security measures. The LIC must also make some efforts to ensure timely medical attention to the infected employees. Many companies in the corporate sector have tied up with some hotels and hospitals for treatment of their Covid affected employees. Some of them have also set up online help and care centres. We understand that similar arrangements have also been made by some leading public sector financial institutions. As a model employer committed to the welfare of its workforce, LIC should also seriously consider having an understanding with some hospitals/hotels for

providing quarantine centres and treatment to the Covid affected employees. The LIC may also consider using the excess space available with it in many places to set up care centres.

The Department of Financial Services has recognized LIC employees as frontline workers. The DFS has expressed desire to ensure faster vaccination of LIC employees. Unfortunately, there is severe shortage of vaccines and this is preventing faster vaccination. The situation has become more difficult with Centre, States and Corporate sector competing to secure vaccine from the manufacturers directly. Many Corporate houses have entered into collaboration with reputed hospitals for vaccination of their staff. We understand that the government has allowed the expenses incurred to be treated as part of Corporate Social Responsibility. We strongly feel that LIC can also enter into such arrangement for vaccinating its staff. This is necessary as the situation is bound to become worst with the warning of third wave of the pandemic.

Another area that merits urgent attention is the issue of Quarantine Leave. There are instances at many centres when employees on suggested quarantine by the office are being asked to submit applications for Privilege Leave/sick leave. This is absolutely unfair, in view of clear cut provisions in the Staff Regulations. We would therefore request that Central Office should issue clear instructions in this regard to sanction Quarantine Leave to employees on suggested quarantine by the office.

Given the distressing situation all around, we request that LIC should take proactive steps in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of its workforce. This is needed to give the necessary confidence to the employees and their family members so that they can discharge their duties in the office efficiently and without any fear.

AIEA WRITES TO LIC CHAIRMAN ON 3/ 5/ 2021 FOR INCOME TAX RELIEF ON WAGE ARREARS

We wish to bring to your notice that in the wage arrears calculation programs released by our IT department, Income tax relief u/s 89 of IT Act has not been provided. Moreover, the income tax deduction on wage arrears is calculated on a flat rate basis instead of slab wise rate of deduction as per the provisions of the Income tax Act. This has given rise to some avoidable problems.

For example, an employee who was in 10% tax bracket before revision but comes under 20% bracket post revision, is now being taxed at 20% flat for the entire amount of the arrears. Similarly, an employee who was in 20% tax bracket before revision but comes under 30% bracket post revision, is now being taxed at 30% flat for the entire amount of the arrears. This has resulted into a huge deduction of the arrears by way of Income Tax; in some cases the actual deduction is almost

twice the amount of Income Tax one would have paid had the tax been calculated according to the applicable tax slabs.

The instructions of Central Office indicate that the excess/ shortage of Income tax deduction could be adjusted in the current financial year. But an employee who was waiting for wage arrears for the past 43 months now suddenly finds that he is being deprived of the benefit of lump sum arrears making all her plans go askew. This is particularly harsh for the newly recruited employees and those in the lower rungs of the salary ladder.

We, therefore, request your immediate intervention in this regard and issuance of a revised instruction whereby the Disbursing Officer is given the authority to recover the income tax at appropriate rate as has been the practice during the past wage revision arrears payment.'

Protect Pension upon revision of pay for employees who retired within few months after 1.8.2017

The pension is now determined on the basis of the 10 months average pay drawn. This reduced the pension for those who retire in the few months after anew wage revision. This is the reason that AIEA has been demanding that pension should be determined on the basis of the last pay drawn or the average of the last 10 months whichever is favourable to the employee. The LIC Board accepted this demand and made recommendations to this effect to the government along with the recommendation for improvement in the family pension. Unfortunately, the government is yet to approve these recommendations. In these circumstances, employees who retired in the months of August to October immediately following the wage revision effective from 1.8.2017 will find reduction in their pension.

The issue is taken up with LIC through a letter addressed to Chairman on 22/4/2021. The same is reproduced.

“During our wage negotiations, we had been drawing your attention to the possibility of the revised pension of employees retiring between August 2017 and October 2017 becoming negative compared to their pre-revised pension. This problem is a natural corollary to the merger of the Dearness Allowance for arriving at the new pay scales.

This happened in the previous wage revision also. The Central Office, in the instructions issued vide circular No.CO/PER/ER-A/130/2016 dated 23.05.2016 under point 4, gave specific instructions protecting the Pension before Commutation. The Annexure appended to the said circular showed examples to this effect.

We are confident that you would have already noticed such possibility in this wage revision also. We are sure the LIC will issue suitable instructions addressing this problem.”

Ensure & Safeguard Policyholders' Interests

AIIEA WRITES TO LIC CHAIRMAN ON 10 / 5/2021 ON SALE OF IDBI SHARES

We have come across a number of news reports quoting from reliable sources that LIC Board has approved a resolution to pare LIC's stake in the IDBI Bank and relinquish management control as well. This decision has given rise to serious misgivings amongst important stake holders of the institution, especially the policy holders.

You are aware that there was widespread criticism when LIC decided to acquire a controlling stake in the then ailing IDBI Bank. The AIIEA however stoutly defended this move of LIC on the ground that this would provide synergy to our operations and help LIC gain a foothold in the banking space. True to our expectations, LIC's acquiring a 49.24 per cent controlling stake and becoming the promoter of the Bank brought about substantive improvements. From the position of a loss making bank with high non-performing assets under the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework of the RBI, the IDBI Bank has come a long way. Recently, the RBI has removed the IDBI bank from its PCA framework. The bank has reported a nearly four fold jump in its standalone profit after tax to Rs. 512 crore in the March

quarter compared to Rs.135 crore during the same period of last year. The Bank has also recorded an impressive 38 per cent growth in its net interest income. According to media reports, the Bank has also turned profitable on an annual basis after five years reporting a standalone profit of Rs. 1359 crore for 2020-21 fiscal against a loss of Rs. 12,887 crore last year.

We understand that LIC has a comfortable 12 year time frame to stay invested in the IDBI bank as per regulatory norms. There is no need therefore for any hasty move to reduce LIC's shareholding in the IDBI Bank, particularly at a time when the bank is making significant turnaround. The LIC today is acknowledged as the most trusted service brand. This trust has been earned through our commitment to safeguard the interests of the policy holders while at the same time making significant contribution to nation building activities.

We would therefore request you to see that the interests of the policy holders are not undermined while taking a decision to reduce our stakes in IDBI bank and give up management control of the bank.'

JFTU of General Insurance met on 9th May

Joint Forum of Trade Unions/Associations meeting was held (through virtual) on 9th May 2021 to assess the situation about wage revision and other issues. It critically analysed the present status of wage revision and expressed unhappiness over the continued procrastination on the issue by GIPSA and Government. It came to a firm understanding that there is no reason for delaying a wage settlement with the issue already settled in LIC. The situation warrants intensified actions to force GIPSA and government to settle the issue. However, it was felt that considering the critical pandemic situation in the country any kind of IR action is not desired. It was, therefore, decided that the constituents and JFTU shall reach out the Chairman, GIPSA/ CMDs of the respective company to ensure early conclusion of the wage revision.

The reasons and rationale as to why the General Insurance employees deserve a good wage revision are already effectively placed before the management, by AIIEA. The important among these are (1) the wage bill which was at 14.10 % of the

GDPI in 2016-17, decreased markedly to 12.95% in 2018-19, (2) the management expenses, which were at 22.02 % of GDPI IN 2016-17, came down to 17.72% in 2018-19.

There was a decrease in the number of employees from 61, 884 in March 2017 to 49, 500 by March, 2021. Even though, 4615 new recruits have joined the service during this period, the overall strength of the employees was drastically reduced. In spite of this, the employees are working more effectively and contributing to for the growth of the industry, relentlessly. For example, the per capita premium income procured by the employees, which stood at Rs 97.3 lakh in 2017, reached Rs 1.45 crore by 2021.

The GIPSA management was in total agreement with the arguments of AIIEA. The management has informed that they have forwarded the Wage proposals to the government and there was a delay in process due to the prevailing Covid 19 situation. The GIPSA Management has assured that they will continue to follow-up the issue and inform us as soon as they receive nod from government.

WAGE REVISION DONE – FOCUS NOW ON OTHER TASKS

Amanulla Khan

The struggle for wage revision in LIC reached its finality on 15th April 2021 with issuance of notifications by government. The fruits of this magnificent achievement have already flowed to the employees with the payment of arrears. The employees across the country are jubilant. The headquarters of AIIEA was flooded with congratulatory messages and expression of gratitude. The AIIEA's appeal for consolidating the organisation both financially and numerically has received enthusiastic response. The AIIEA took a conscious decision to have low key celebrations in view of the massive distress of our fellow citizens due to pandemic.

The AIIEA had submitted the charter of demand to LIC Chairman on 2nd August 2017. The demands were framed rationally. The Institution had registered phenomenal growth in five years since the last wage revision. The demand of AIIEA was simple. The employees have added value and created wealth, therefore a fair share of this increased

value and wealth should be given to them in the form of wage revision. Though this demand looks simple and logical, the AIIEA was fully aware that it is very difficult to achieve. The AIIEA had a clear understanding that the society in which we live, not work but wealth is celebrated. Such an economic system always works for maximisation of profits by depressing the wages and legitimate demands of the workers. But the AIIEA had the conviction that by struggles on the basis correct economic and political understanding, it will once again succeed in securing a good wage revision. It was this understanding that AIIEA promised the insurance employees a good revision which had become due from 1.8.2017.

What were the economic and social conditions when the AIIEA raised demand for a good wage revision? The Indian economy had already started slowing down. The economy was further disrupted through demonetisation and haphazard implementation of GST. The demonetisation was announced on 8th December 2016 and the

THE WAGE REVISION IN LIC IS NOW ACHIEVED AND IT HAS BECOME NECESSARY FOR THE MOVEMENT OF LIC EMPLOYEES TO SHARPLY FOCUS NOW ON SOME IMPORTANT TASKS. IF THERE WAS ANY LESSON FROM WAGE REVISION, IT WAS THIS; THAT PROSPERITY OF EMPLOYEES LARGELY DEPEND UPON PROSPERITY OF LIC. THEREFORE, EVERYTHING MUST BE DONE TO ENSURE PROTECTION AND GROWTH OF INSTITUTION AND TAKE UP THE CHALLENGES, WHICH ARE NO DOUBT, ENORMOUS, GIVEN THE HIKE IN FDI LIMITS AND MORE THAN THAT THE GOVT'S SPEEDY PREPARATIONS FOR LIC IPO.



Midnight session of Parliament held on 20th June 2017 announced the switching over of taxation system to a GST regime. Both these measures had a profound impact on the economic and social life of the country. Millions of livelihoods were destroyed and the informal sector was decimated plunging the entire society into an avoidable catastrophe. In such a situation placing the demand for a good wage revision was a courageous act. The AIIEA dared to take up this challenge and to achieve the task successfully, it developed the necessary tactics.

The AIIEA tried to build a broad unity on the issue of wage revision. This was not an easy task. The Indian society had reached unprecedented levels of communal and political polarisation. Understandably, the LIC employees could also not escape the virus of this polarisation. Despite this, AIIEA built up a broad unity of major organisations of Class I Officers, Development Officers and of the Class III and IV employees. On the basis of the consensual policies, protests and struggles were initiated and implemented successfully. The AIIEA also made efforts to reach out to the unions who were not part of this front in order to build a common approach to the major issues.

Negotiations began and continued for a long period. In the later part, conduct of negotiations itself became difficult due to curb in movement of people due to pandemic. Therefore discussions were held virtually and through telephonic conversations. After a process of hard bargaining, the LIC finally made a wage offer of 16% increase over the wage Bill as at 1.8.2017. This was the breakthrough AIIEA had planned and waiting for. The wage offer of 16% was a clear recognition of AIIEA's demand that wage in LIC should be determined on the basis of the strength of Institution. Having achieved this, the attention was shifted to framing of pay scales which would benefit employees not only during their service but also in the post-retirement period. This was not easy as substantial loading in pay scales would mean a permanent liability to the Institution. The government in some institutions tried and succeeded in limiting the loading in Basic Pay so as to limit the permanent liability. The AIIEA held continuous discussions with LIC on this issue and thankfully the administration also accepted the logic of AIIEA. The entire process required some kind of secrecy and confidentiality in order to prevent any adverse external intervention. These efforts

paid results and AIIEA could succeed in securing a loading of 15% in Basic Pay as also achieved the long pending demand of a 5 day week. It is not necessary to explain the benefits achieved as employees have seen it themselves in the form of wage arrears and wage increase.

NOW TO OTHER TASKS

The wage revision in LIC is now achieved and the AIIEA has to work for wage revision in PS General Insurance companies. The AIIEA will also have to work for improvement in pension scheme and for implementation of the Board recommendations on family pension. It has also become necessary for the movement of LIC employees to sharply focus now on some important tasks. If there was any lesson from wage revision, it was this; that prosperity of employees largely depend upon prosperity of LIC. Therefore everything must be done to ensure protection and growth of Institution. The biggest challenge that LIC faces today is maintaining the momentum of growth and continued dominance of market. This would require huge combined efforts from administration and employees. The LIC has registered impressive growth in the last financial year despite the coronavirus pandemic ravaging the economy and destroying life and livelihood. But to maintain this growth would not be easy given the deep crisis in Indian economy.

The Indian economy was in the grip of deep slowdown even before the pandemic due to twin shock of demonetisation and GST. The pandemic and the sudden lock down of 2020 further worsened the situation. Economy was left with no steam and ferocity of second wave of pandemic has pushed

The LIC IPO will force this great institution to work on the lines of private sector where the main concern of the business would be to maximise profits for the shareholders. This will harm the interests of overwhelming number of poor and marginalised in the country and objectives of establishment of LIC would be defeated. The AIIEA considers the opposition to LIC IPO as a duty to defend national interests and those of overwhelming sections of Indian people.

back reaching of even the pre-pandemic growth by many years. Millions of jobs have been lost and a large number of formal jobs are informalised, further squeezing the incomes. It is estimated that the labour share of GDP sharply fell from 32.5% in the second quarter of 2019-20 to 27% in the second quarter of 2020-21. Neo-liberalism has almost abolished permanent jobs and has created a vast pool of contract and daily wage workers. A study by Azim Premji University suggests that casual and daily wage workers constitute 27% of the labour force and another 52% are self employed. The permanent salaried workers constitute just 9.7% of the labour force. The average monthly income of the casual and daily workers is Rs.7965/- and that of the self employed is Rs.12955/-. Such low incomes naturally mean lack of disposal incomes and this makes the demand for insurance products and the resultant growth of industry difficult. Therefore sustaining growth is going to be a big challenge. Both LIC and trade union movement must be alive to this situation and come out with strategies to overcome this problem through innovation of products, enhancing servicing standards and better marketing skills.

The government has hiked FDI limits to 74 percent. This throws up possibility of domestic promoters' transferring their holdings to foreign partners to make profits. With the management control wrested, the foreign players would like to capture major share of domestic household savings to enhance their profits. In the process, the insurance industry is going to witness unprecedented technological innovation and adoption. There will be increasing use of Artificial Intelligence. More reliance will be placed on digitisation of the work at the cost of employment. Both marketing and servicing is bound to witness unprecedented changes. There will be a thrust on direct marketing and procuring of business through alternate channels to reduce cost of procuring business. The outsourcing of premium collection in LIC already has its impact. For the financial year 2019-20, 54.8% of premium was collected through alternate channels and only 45.2% premium was collected through the cash counters. The increased customer expectations and disruption in technology will result in reliance on Artificial Intelligence in areas such as underwriting, customer service, claims and marketing. The Artificial Intelligence will also result in greater centralisation of work. We are already seeing this

trend in industrialised nations as also within our own Institution. This is bound to have impact on the employment in the industry and the possibility of LIC developing into an officer driven institution. This is evident from the fact that the ratio between officers and class III and IV employees has reached a level of 1:1.77. The AIIEA has to take all these issues into consideration and develop tactics and strategies to create a fine balance between growth of the industry and job security of the employees.

The biggest challenge, however, is the LIC IPO. The government is making speedy preparations to list LIC in markets as early as possible. The government appointed consultants have been working overtime to enable government to do so. The process of valuation of LIC by the appointed actuarial firm is underway. In the face of massive campaign of AIIEA against LIC IPO, government is publicly forced to say that LIC is not being privatised and sovereign guarantee on policy monies will continue. The AIIEA is absolutely clear that disinvestment is the first step towards privatisation. This reasoning is justified with the government laying bare its policy on public sector in which they want to sell overwhelming number of public sector units. Neo-liberalism is premised on the principle that government should get out of all businesses and just be an enabler of wealth while abdicating its responsibility to redistribute this wealth in the interests of social justice. The LIC IPO will force this great institution to work on the lines of private sector where the main concern of the business would be to maximise profits for the shareholders. This will harm the interests of overwhelming number of poor and marginalised in the country and objectives of establishment of LIC would be defeated. The AIIEA considers the opposition to LIC IPO as a duty to defend national interests and those of overwhelming sections of Indian people.

With the wage revision done, the AIIEA and LIC employees must focus their attention to meeting the above challenges. There is no doubt that these challenges are big and enormous. But AIIEA has never lost faith in struggles and ability of LIC employees to build a glorious resistance movement against policies that violate the very constitutional values of our great Republic.



LOOMING STAGFLATION

Santosh Kumar Mohapatra

AN AURA OF UNCERTAINTY LOOMS LARGE UNLESS THE MONSTROUS PANDEMIC IS INCARCERATED. THE ASSUMPTION OF SMOOTH ECONOMIC RECOVERY IS NOW IN QUESTION AS THE PRODUCTION CHAIN IS GOING TO BE DISRUPTED AGAIN. THE IMF SAYS THE SURGE IN NEW COVID CASES REPRESENTS A 'WORRISOME DOWNSIDE RISK' TO INDIA'S ECONOMY, AND IT'S THE POOREST WHO MAY BE WORST HIT.

The coronavirus pandemic is the greatest global trauma since the Second World War and unprecedented in most of our lives. Calling the pandemic, the world's worst public health crisis in 100 years, an Oxfam report in 2021 said it triggered an economic crisis comparable in scale only with the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The global economy has shrunk by 4.3 per cent in 2020 – the sharpest contraction since the Great Depression that began in 1929 and far higher than the 1.7 per cent reduction during the Great Recession of 2009. The ILO estimates it cost the equivalent of 25.5 crore people full-time jobs.

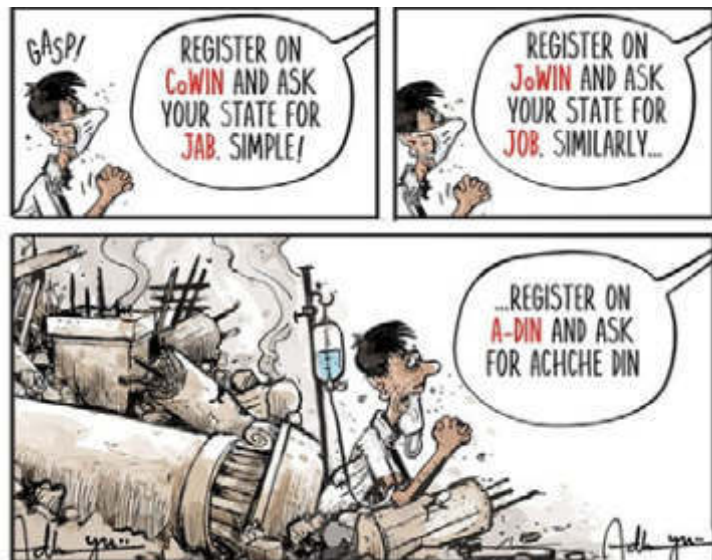
Indian economy is believed to have contracted by 8 per cent in 2020-21 while China's economy grew around 2.3 per cent. China's GDP galloped to a record 18 per cent in the post-Covid comeback in January-March 2021 while India may revise its growth forecast downward. But neither people nor politicians learnt from first wave of the pandemic. India is witnessing resurgence of the second wave in a ghastly shape. The Indian government had enough time to prepare for the second wave to at least lessen its cataclysmic impact. But complacency, arrogance, greed for power and apathy for poor hindered the ruling dispensation from foreseeing the danger ahead. The scenario appeared like Covid never hit India or will not hit again and the main issue before the ruling dispensation was to capture more power.

India's daily Covid cases have already breached the 4-lakh mark, the only second country after the US to have reached this ugly milestone. India is now the worst affected in terms of daily infections, second worst affected in term of total number of infections, and fourth worst affected in term of the death toll. This portends a scary future for the Indian economy which has been already sliding due to the draconian

demonetisation and complex GST system, defective policies and the first wave of the pandemic. The second wave is going to exacerbate the beleaguered economy further.

As some states resort to localised lockdowns to tame spike in Covid-19 cases, India's GDP growth will be hit hard further, delaying the fragile economic recovery and pulling down overall economic growth for the current fiscal. Some economists and rating agencies have started trimming India's expected economic growth in 2021-22. Some say the permanent GDP loss stemming from the brunt of the coronavirus is massive at 10 per cent.

In countries where poverty levels are already high, the immediate impact of even a small downturn in economic activity can be devastating. Recently, the US-based Pew Research Centre reckoned the global middle class shrank for the first time since the 1990s. It finds that the middle class in India is estimated to have shrunk by 3.2 crores in 2020 as



Cartoon courtesy: Sandeep Adhwaryu, Times of India



a consequence of the pandemic induced downturn while the poverty rate in India likely rose to 9.7 per cent in 2020, up sharply from the January 2020 forecast of 4.3 per cent.

Meanwhile, the number of people who are poor in India (with incomes of \$2 or less a day) is estimated to have increased by 7.5 crores. China fared much better, with the number of people in the middle-income tier decreasing by only 1 crore, while the poverty level remained virtually unchanged in 2020. As the Covid-19 recession has exacerbated inequality, the increase in the number of poor is likely greater than estimated in this analysis. The middle class may have shrunk by more than projected.

An aura of uncertainty further looms large unless the monstrous pandemic is incarcerated. The assumption of smooth economic recovery is now in question as the production chain is going to be disrupted again. The IMF says the surge in new Covid cases represents a 'worrisome downside risk' to India's economy, and it's the poorest who may be worst hit.

With the spread of the virus, economic activity is being adversely impacted—sending ripples across sectors as varied as auto, real estate, tourism and banking. Some of this is bound to spill over into the so-called informal sector as well, where the vast majority – 90.7 per cent of India's workers operate, without written contracts, paid leave, health benefits or social security.

Further, the government tax collections will plummet with debt-burden getting escalated. It may be noted that India's public debt as a percentage of GDP has increased from 72 per cent in 2019-20 to 89 per cent in 2020-21. This means debt is not spurring growth. The RBI Current Situation Index has been negative in all surveys conducted in the

past four years except the one in March 2019. On April 7, RBI released updates to its regular Consumer Confidence Survey. The households are found wary of discretionary spending.

What will also make things difficult is the fact that inflation has been rising, eroding purchasing power of people and India that witnessed recession is now facing stagflation. Consumer Price Index inflation stood at 5.52 per cent in March compared with 5.03 per cent in February and 4.06 per cent in January. Similarly, Wholesale Price Index (WPI)-based inflation soared to 7.39 per cent in March, the highest in the series that started in 2011-12. It was 4.17 per cent in February. Core inflation also increased to a series-high 7 per cent.

Unemployment is increasing. As per CMIE's latest data, unemployment as of March 31 had stood at 6.52 per cent. It has mounted to 8.4 per cent as of April 18. But urban unemployment has increased from 7.21 per cent on April 4 to 10.72 per cent for the week ended April 18. This reflects a shift in the burden of job losses to urban India, reversing the trend of rural India largely bearing the brunt of Covid-induced stress on employment. In the organised sector, companies will try and cut down expenditure, retrench employees, cut wages to maintain or enhance profits, thus affecting aggregate demand of the overall economy adversely.

The banking crisis is going to be further aggravated. The excess money in the banking system, (that banks park with the RBI) had stood at Rs 3.8 lakh crore as of March 31. It has since grown to Rs 5.55 lakh crore as of April 18, indicating that lending by banks is slowing down intensely. The ratings agency ICRA estimates that banks have accumulated bad loans worth Rs 1.3 lakh crore between September and December 2020. An economic downturn likely to have a significant increase in NPAs and credit losses could lead to a lower economic risk score.

The state has got a role and responsibility towards those who are languishing under poverty and starvation or any natural calamity or pandemic. To recall Albert Einstein, "We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them." The need of the hour is to introspect and address the old thinking which plunged the world into the worst public health and economic collapse since the Spanish Flue of 1918 and Great Depression of 1929.

ALTERNATIVE TO JUGAAD IN TIMES OF CORONA

Arindam Chandra

INDIA'S PRESENT POSTURE IN CHALLENGING COVID19 THROUGH VACCINE AND OTHER MEDICAL LOGISTICS SEEMS TO BE ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF JUGAAD. AS THE POLICIES OF JUGAAD FALL APART, IT IS HIGH TIME THE GOVERNMENT INVOKED SECTION 92 OF THE INDIAN PATENT ACT THROUGH A GAZETTE NOTIFICATION AND THEREBY ISSUE COMPULSORY LICENSE TO MASS PRODUCE THE PATENT PROTECTED VACCINES IN INDIA AS THIS IS A NATIONAL EMERGENCY. FREE UNIVERSAL VACCINATION HOLDS THE KEY TO FIGHT BACK THE CONTAGION.

The word JUGAAD is not a monopoly of a particular political party in India. In the author's note to her recent book "Bottle of Lies" Catherine Eban writes about two types of medicine companies in India. One, whose efforts are described "as an example of Gandhian innovation: using the inventions of science for the public benefit. But there was another business model, that of JUGAAD, one that aimed to get in the desired outcome by the shortest means possible." India's present posture in challenging COVID19 through vaccine and other medical logistics seems to be another example of JUGAAD.

In October 2020 the BJP led NDA had promised free Covid vaccine in Bihar and when the issue rocked the nation Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said in January 2021 that Covid vaccine would be free in India. Union Budget set aside Rs 35000 crore for this. However, recently the government announced a fresh vaccine policy which allows Indian manufacturers to give 50% vaccines to the central government and remaining 50% to the private hospitals and the states. At Rs 150 which the centre pays for per dose Rs 35000 crores would have been sufficient to inoculate 116 crore Indians for free. According to Indian Express, 154 crores of rupees were collected from the employees of 101 PSUs and Rs2422 crores from 98 PSU's CSR funds last year for the PM CARES fund, ostensibly "aimed at strengthening the fight against Covid19". Sadly, Rs700-900/dose for Covishield and Covaxin at Rs1200-1500/dose in private hospitals are the highest priced vaccines in the world. Besides, government's COWIN portal shows that the bulk

private-sector vaccination right now is by four big corporate hospital groups-Apollo, Max, Fortis and Manipal. This is when India is experiencing around 400000 caseloads and 4000 deaths daily; essential medicines are out of reach of the common people; there is severe crisis of medical oxygen; hospitals are full to the brim and migrant workers are going home again anticipating another lockdown. However, these do not stop the votaries of the government to claim that India has become the Vishwa Guru in successfully containing the pandemic. With the advent of liberalization basic services hitherto provided by the STATE, like education and healthcare are being privatized and financialized and a meagre 1% budgetary allocation towards public healthcare is leading to speculative profiteering by the private healthcare sector. Last year's sero-survey by the ICMR had assessed a further infection of around a billion in 2020-2021. Government should have readied its infrastructure by that time. The Parliamentary



Cartoon courtesy: Satvik Gade, The Hindu

Standing Committee of the MOHFW has in their report in November 2020 advised the government to ramp up the number of oxygen beds, ICU beds and ventilators and recommended an expenditure of 2.5% of GDP in the healthcare sector.

The government, on the contrary, allowed manufacturers to export a huge tranche of vaccines and oxygen before providing for the domestic needs. The Guardian headlines that “Modi’s overconfidence lies behind the disastrous Indian pandemic response” and says “future historian will judge Mr Modi harshly if he continues with the exceptionalist views that have led to a disastrous public health outcome”. While The New York Times published a horrific image of spiraling fire above the burning corpses their headlines read: “AS COVID RAVAGES INDIA, TRUE TOLL IS UNDERCOUNTED”. Lancet’s editorial dated 8th May says: “the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation estimates that India will see a staggering 1 million deaths from Covid19 by August 2021. If that outcome were to happen, Modi’s government would be responsible for presiding over a self-inflicted national catastrophe.” India’s impeccable history of eradicating deadly diseases like polio, chicken pox and cholera through free universal vaccines proves its strength. However, the government has its own imperatives. While the Indian Railways has flagged off its Oxygen Express containing medical oxygen from Vizag Steel Plant the government is planning privatization of these two PSUs. Similarly, the Life Insurance Corporation, which has ramped up its efforts in paying the claims arising out of Covid deaths, is being privatized through an IPO route.

Examples of “people over profit” abound, in home and abroad. Behind world’s fastest vaccine rollout in Israel it is the state intervention policy that worked wonderfully. After its virtual elimination and domestic transmission of the contagion China is now giving millions of its homegrown shots a day and has announced a goal of vaccinating 560 million of the country’s 1.4 billion people by mid-June. Cuba, with its economy further ravaged by the pandemic and its economy shrinking by 11% in 2020 that country could manage the spread of the virus with strict measures and its unique public health policy. NBC informs us about its vaccines: Soberana2, which translates to ‘sovereignty’ and Abdala, named after a book by Cuban independence hero Jose Marti. This is quite significant as the other countries developing the vaccine have bigger economies and

larger population. For Cuba: “the vaccine is as much about public health as it is a show of force; that a small communist country sanctioned by the US can compete on the world stage with its own vaccine candidates.” Without looking up to its allies, Russia and China, Cuba’s Finlay Institute of Vaccines have produced the vaccines. Interestingly, Finlay Institute is named after the Cuban epidemiologist Dr Carlos Finlay who discovered yellow fever is transmitted through mosquitoes and it was established in 1991 by the late Cuban leader Fidel Castro. A nation investing heavily on its public health and pharmaceutical sectors, Cuba is aiming for a free universal vaccination program. Vietnam has been praised globally for containing the pandemic with a targeted mass training program and strict quarantine with huge public spending for its people. Till date, the country with 96 million people has only 2830 cases and 35 deaths. Its government has urged all 19 localities that have initiated the inoculation to finish the program before first week of May and targeted 80% of its population to achieve herd immunity.

Back home in India for sure there are images of hope and reassurance in this grim time of Corona. TOI lauds Kerala and Andhra Pradesh for having consumed more vaccine doses than they had received: “Kerala was able to achieve zero wastage due to strict implementation of protocols for storage, transportation and usage, its army of dedicated and scrupulous health workers and, not least, an extremely cooperative public who wasted no time to get their shots.” Lancet, in its editorial cited above has also mentioned Kerala and Odisha who were “better prepared, and have been able to produce enough medical oxygen in this second wave to export it to other states”. The contrarian paradigm of a non-interventionist state action is shown through a centralized war-room that facilitates admissions, oxygen supplies and other pandemic related logistic issues in the Ernakulam district of Kerala.

As the policies of JUGAAD fall apart is high time the government invoked section 92 of the Indian Patent Act through a gazette notification and thereby issue compulsory license to mass produce the patent protected vaccines in India as this is a national emergency. Free universal vaccination holds the key to fight back the contagion.

(Writer works in Kolkata Metropolitan Division I)

कोरोना समय के सबक

रामजी तिवारी

देश इस समय कोरोना महामारी की विपदा को झेल रहा है। इसकी वजह से देश में लाखों लोगों की जान गयी है और करोड़ों लोग बीमार पड़े हैं। इसकी व्यापकता इतनी है कि आप देश के किसी भी व्यक्ति से बात कीजिये, उसके पास एक पीड़ाजनक अनुभव है, उसके पास अपने किसी प्रियजन को खोने की कहानी है। बहुत सारे लोग आपको यह शिकायत करते हुए मिल जायेंगे कि यदि उनके प्रियजनों को समय से अस्पताल में जगह मिली होती, उन्हें जरूरत की दवाएं मिली होती, आक्सीजन और वेंटिलेटर का सहारा मिला होता तो उनकी जान बचाई जा सकती थी। तब शायद वे हमारे बीच में जिंदा होते। कहना न होगा कि इस महामारी के खौफ का साया अभी भी लाखों-करोड़ों लोगों के सिर पर मंडरा रहा है। ऐसा लगता है कि हम किसी अँधेरी सुरंग में फंस गए हैं, जहाँ से निकलने का कोई रास्ता दिखाई नहीं देता।

बहरहाल मानव जाति का इतिहास बताता है कि वह ऐसी अनगिनत आपदाओं से गुजरा है। उसने समय के साथ इन पर विजय भी हासिल की है। ऐसे में हमारे पास यह भरोसा करने का पर्याप्त कारण है कि कोरोना महामारी के बीच से भी हमारा समाज एक न एक दिन जरूर बाहर निकलेगा। और तब वह इस बात पर भी मंथन करेगा कि हमसे कहाँ चूक हुई। हमने इस महामारी से क्या सबक सीखा। जैसे कि एक-दो सबक तो तुरंत ही जेहन में उठ रहे हैं।

पहला सबक है कि भारत का स्वास्थ्य ढाँचा अपर्याप्त और कमजोर है, और इसे सार्वजनिक भागीदारी से ही बेहतर बनाया जा सकता है। जबकि दूसरा सबक यह है कि आपातकाल में सरकार की भूमिका काफी महत्वपूर्ण होती है। और जो लोग सामाजिक जीवन में बाजार की भूमिका को बढ़ाने और सरकार की भूमिका को कम करने की वकालत करते हैं, वे सिरे से गलत हैं।

तो बात पहले स्वास्थ्य ढाँचे की करते हैं। हम जानते हैं कि देश का स्वास्थ्य ढाँचा सार्वजनिक और निजी दो पायों पर खड़ा है। इसमें संकल्पना की गयी है कि सरकार को मुख्यतया स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं की जिम्मेदारी अपने हाथों में लेनी चाहिए, और जो लोग आर्थिक रूप से सक्षम हैं, वे निजी स्वास्थ्य ढाँचे का लाभ उठा सकते हैं। सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य ढाँचे की बात करें तो भारत में इसे कई स्तरों पर निर्मित किया गया है। आरंभिक स्तर पर प्राथमिक स्वास्थ्य केंद्र और मोहल्ला क्लिनिक की व्यवस्था है, जिनका मुख्य

कार्य गाँव और मोहल्ले में जनता की छोटी-मोटी बीमारियों का त्वरित और प्राथमिक इलाज करना होता है। इसके ऊपर सामुदायिक स्वास्थ्य केंद्र होते हैं, जिसमें कई गावों को मिलाकर एक बेहतर अस्पताल की व्यवस्था की गयी है। फिर जिला चिकित्सालय आता है, जो विशेषज्ञ डाक्टरों की टीम और बेहतर चिकित्सा सुविधाओं से सुसज्जित होता है। और इसके ऊपर मेडिकल कालेज, पी.जी.आई. और एम्स जैसे संस्थान आते हैं, जहाँ जटिल बीमारियों का इलाज, शोध और चिकित्सा सेवा की पढाई होती है।

अब सवाल यह उठता है कि इतने बेहतरीन सिस्टम के होते हुए भी हमारी स्वास्थ्य व्यवस्था इतनी बदहाल क्यों है। तो इसका जबाब पाने के लिए हमें उदारीकरण के बाद सरकार की नीतियों में आये बदलाव को समझना होगा। जब सरकार ने सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं पर से अपना ध्यान कम करना शुरू कर दिया। और इसकी जगह भरने के लिए निजी क्षेत्र को प्रोत्साहित किया जाने लगा। नतीजा यह हुआ कि इतने बेहतरीन ढाँचे का जो लाभ देश की जनता को मिलना चाहिए था, वह नहीं मिल पाया। अस्पतालों में नियमित डाक्टरों की नियुक्तियाँ प्रभावित हुईं। उनका बजट कम हुआ। और धीरे-धीरे पूरी व्यवस्था पंगु होती चली गयी। बल्कि यह कहना अधिक समीचीन होगा कि सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं का पूरा सिस्टम स्वयं ही बीमार पड़ता चला गया। इसका अपवाद दक्षिण भारत के कुछ राज्यों में दिखाई देता है, जहाँ पर सरकारों ने सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य ढाँचे पर अपेक्षाकृत अधिक ध्यान दिया। जिसकी वजह से ये राज्य इस आपदा में भी उत्तर भारत के तमाम राज्यों की अपेक्षा बेहतर प्रदर्शन करते हुए नजर आ रहे हैं।

इसी से जुड़ा महामारी का एक सबक यह भी है कि भारत जैसे विकासशील देश में स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं को निजी क्षेत्र के भरोसे नहीं छोड़ा जा सकता है। 'आपदा में अवसर' वाले शब्द-युगम का जो दुरुपयोग इन निजी अस्पतालों ने इस दौर में किया है, वह आपराधिक और मनुष्य-विरोधी है। अनियंत्रित लूट-घसोट की जो कहानियाँ सुनाई दे रही हैं, वह रूह को कपाने वाली हैं। कुछ कारपोरेट अस्पतालों ने कोविड के इलाज में पंद्रह से बीस लाख रुपये का पैकेज चलाया। तो उनकी देखादेखी कुछ साधारण निजी अस्पतालों ने भी अपनी सेवायें पांच से दस गुना तक महंगी कर दीं। इन्होंने भी प्रति मरीज पांच से सात लाख रुपये की वसूली की है।

THE RAGING CORONA PANDEMIC HAS MANY LESSONS- ATLEAST TWO LESSONS ARE ALREADY OBVIOUS-FIRST ONE IS THE SORRY STATE OF OUR PUBLIC HEALTHCARE SYSTEM , AND, SECONDLY, THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT, ESPECIALLY, DURING AN EMERGENCY. THE FALLACIES OF PRIVATISATION OF HEALTHCARE SYSTEM AND THE PREMISE THAT GOVT HAS NO BUSINESS TO BE IN BUSINESS, HAVE BEEN TOTALLY EXPOSED.

अब आप कल्पना करके देखिये कि हमारे देश में कितने ऐसे लोग हैं जो अपनी बीमारी में पांच सात लाख रुपये का खर्च वहन कर सकते हैं। 135 करोड़ की आबादी में 100 करोड़ लोग तो बिलकुल भी नहीं। ऐसे में आम आदमी के सामने मरने के अलावा और क्या विकल्प बचता है।

बेशक कुछ लोग ये बात कह सकते हैं कि महामारी के समय में, जहाँ एक साथ हजारों और लाखों लोग बीमार पड़ रहे हैं। और जहाँ विकसित देशों की स्वास्थ्य सेवायें भी कम पड़ रही हैं, ऐसे में हमारी स्वास्थ्य व्यवस्था का चरमरा जाना स्वाभाविक ही है। तो उनके लिए यह कहना जरूरी लगता है कि इस दौर में हमारा परफॉर्मंस दुनिया के अधिकतर विकासशील देशों के बराबर भी नहीं दिखाई देता है। विकसित देशों से तो तुलना ही बेमानी है। सच्चाई यह है कि इस महामारी ने हमारे देश को वैश्विक पटल पर काफी पीछे धकेल दिया है। और यह किसी भी राष्ट्र के लिए सुखद नहीं कहा जा सकता है।

इस महामारी का दूसरा सबक सरकार और व्यवस्था को लेकर है। पूंजीवादी व्यवस्था के समर्थकों की तरफ से एक तर्क सामान्यतया दिया जाता है कि वही सरकार अच्छी होती है, जो कम शासन करती है, जो लोगों के जीवन में कम हस्तक्षेप करती है, जो कुल मिलाकर अर्थव्यवस्था को अपने हिसाब से संचालित होने का अवसर देती है, और अपने किनारे रहती है। जबकि कोविड समय ने दिखाया है कि समाज जब कठिन दौर से गुजर रहा होता है, तो सरकार को दूरदर्शी सोच वाली और चुस्त-दुरुस्त होनी चाहिए। केवल बाजार के भरोसे छोड़कर समाज का भला नहीं किया जा सकता है। क्योंकि ऐसे दौर में बाजार एक दैत्य का रूप धारण कर लेता है और वह समाज को ही नष्ट करने पर आमादा हो सकता है। बाजार के पास नैतिकता नहीं होती, वह कमजोर और गरीब लोगों की मदद भी नहीं करता। बजाय इसके वह दूसरे की पीड़ा में अपने लिए अवसर तलाशना शुरू कर देता है और अमानवीय व्यवहार करने लगता है। ऐसे में सक्रिय और समझदार सरकार की जरूरत होती है।

दुर्भाग्यवश भारत में ये दोनों बातें मिसिंग दिखाई देती हैं। अब्बल तो सरकार के स्तर पर जिस सक्रियता की उम्मीद की जा रही थी, वह भी नहीं दिखाई देती। और दूसरे सरकार

से जिस समझदारी भरे निर्णय की अपेक्षा थी, उस मोर्चे पर भी निराशा ही मिली है। जैसे कोरोना की शुरुआत में सरकार ने डिनायल मोड अपनाया। उसने

नमस्ते-ट्रम्प जैसा भीडभाड़ वाला कार्यक्रम आयोजित कराया। सरकार बनाने और गिराने का खेल खेला। जब लाकडाउन के बाद करोड़ों लोग सड़कों पर बेहाल होकर निकले, तो उसे नजरअंदाज किया गया। जब लोग आक्सीजन और अस्पताल में बिस्तर के लिए परेशान हो रहे थे, तो उसने आंकड़ों को छिपाना आरम्भ कर दिया। संक्रमण को कम दिखाने के लिए टेस्ट कम किये जाने लगे। जब निजी अस्पतालों में लूट-घसोट चरम पर थी, तो उसने स्पष्ट और कठोर निर्णय लेने के बजाय केवल औपचारिक आदेश निकाले। महामारी से पीड़ित जनता का ध्यान डाइवर्ट करने के लिए मीडिया के द्वारा एक विशेष समुदाय को टारगेट किया गया। और फिर पहली लहर के गुजर जाने के बाद अपनी पीठ थपथपाने के लिए आनन-फानन में कोरोना पर विजय प्राप्त करने की घोषणा तक कर दी गयी।

इसी पहलू का दूसरा दुखद अध्याय यह भी रहा कि सरकार से जब सबसे अधिक दूरदर्शितापूर्ण निर्णयों की अपेक्षा की जा रही थी, तब उसने सबसे कमजोर और साधारण निर्णय लिए। उसने चार घंटे की नोटिस पर देश में लाकडाउन की घोषणा कर दी। बिना इस बात की परवाह किये कि भारत की एक बड़ी आबादी किस तरह से रोजदिन कमाती है और खाती है। उसके पास रहने के लिए कोई मुकम्मल जगह नहीं है। उसके पास भविष्य के लिए कोई पूंजी नहीं है। और यह सब इतना अचानक हुआ कि पूरे देश में लाखों-करोड़ लोग विभिन्न जगहों पर फंस गये। फिर हमने वह हृदयविदारक दृश्य भी देखा, जिसमें करोड़ों लोग देश के शहरों से निकलकर अपने गाँव और घर के लिए पैदल ही चल पड़े। इस प्रयास में सैकड़ों लोगों की जान तक चली गयी।

सरकार से एक बड़ी चूक तब भी हुई, जब विशेषज्ञों की सलाह को दरकिनार करते हुए उसने समय-पूर्व कोरोना पर विजय प्राप्त करने की घोषणा कर दी। उसने बड़ी राजनैतिक रैलियाँ की और धार्मिक आयोजनों की इजाजत दी। इसका सन्देश जनता के बीच यह गया कि कोरोना तो अब समाप्त हो चुका है। जबकि सच्चाई यह थी कि दुनिया भर में दूसरी लहर आ चुकी थी। और तब हमें सचेत हो जाना चाहिए था कि देर-सबेर यह लहर भारत में भी आयेगी। लेकिन हमारे नेतृत्व ने फरवरी महीने में ही इस पर विजय की घोषणा कर दी और हम निश्चिन्त हो गए।

और फिर वैक्सीनेशन के मामले में भी सरकार ने समझदारी नहीं दिखाई। कोरोना के आरम्भ में जब दुनिया भर में वैक्सीन के विकास पर काम हो रहा था, उसी समय विकसित देशों ने अपनी जनसंख्या के हिसाब से कम्पनियों को आर्डर दे दिए थे। उन्होंने अपने लिए एडवांस बुकिंग करा ली थी। लेकिन उस समय भारत में कहा गया कि हम आत्मनिर्भर तरीके से इससे निबटेंगे। फिर जब फरवरी का महीना आया और कोरोना संक्रमण कम होने लगा तो सरकार ने उस थोड़ी सी वैक्सीन को भी मैत्री के नाम पर दुनिया भर में भेजना शुरू कर दिया। और तभी इस विपदा ने देश को अपने आगोश में ले लिया।

क्या हम कोरोना समय की इन सीखों का ख्याल रखेंगे? हमारे समाज का भविष्य काफी हद तक इस पर निर्भर होगा।



Cartoon courtesy:
Kirthish
BBC News
Hindi

Significant setback to divisive politics in Assembly elections



People of Kerala reposed confidence in LDF Govt. and re-elected it with increased strength- from 91 to 99 out of 140 assembly seats. In Tamilnadu, the secular progressive alliance led by DMK secured 159 out of 239 seats, with DMK on its own securing 133 seats. In West Bengal, TMC is re-elected with a aweep of 213 seats out of 292.

BJP, despite all-out efforts, including use of Election Commission itself, and other Central agencies could not achieve its goal. While, in Kerala it lost the single seat it had earlier, in Tamilnadu, the voters foiled its attempt to gain a foothold by aligning with AIADMK. And in West Bengal also, people foiled Modi-Shah design to capture the State.

In Assam, BJP -led alliance though returned

to power, its strength is reduced from 86 to 75 and with vote share of only 0.9% more than the secular alliance.

In the union territory of Puducherry also, where elections were held after BJP succeeded in dividing both Congress and DMK and bringing down the earlier govt., though the alliance stitched by it has formed the Govt, it had to accept the leadership of NRCongress.

We give below, analyses of the results of these elections, in the background of the expanding struggles of working people throughout the country.

LDF SCORES STUNNING VICTORY

M.Kunhikrishnan

The Left and Democratic Front (LDF) led by CPI(M) returned to power breaking the four decade tradition of voters not favouring the incumbent. LDF bagged 99 seats out of total 140. The UDF perform poorly and could win only 41 seats which BJP led NDA drew a blank.

People of Kerala reposed confidence in LDF Government for its people-oriented policies, good governance and of course, impressed by the way it steered clear of all obstacles it had to face in the last five years.

The Pinarayi Vijayan Government came to power in May 2016, securing 91 seats. It treaded its course with a zeal implementing one after another of the items enunciated in election manifesto. It has the distinction of fulfilling election promises given to the people to the extent of 98%.

Performance indicators

Ø Strengthening public sector health care facilities, according paramount importance.

Ø Managing Nipah Virus outbreak in an exceptional way minimising fatalities, earning worldwide acclaim.

Ø Providing shelter to homeless through 'Life Mission'. More than 2.5 lakh houses constructed.

Ø Tackling Okhi cyclone havoc, two major floods rehabilitating those affected, giving them food, treatment and shelter at the time of crisis.

Ø Involving entire State machinery including local self-government bodies to tackle SARS Covid-19 pandemic in an exemplary manner, from January 2020 onwards. Government ensured that no one go hungry during the period of lockdown, which was imposed by the Centre, without notice. Food kits were made available to all ration card holders of the State irrespective of their income and the mission is continuing. State spent an amount of Rs. 4321.94 crores till April this year for this purpose.

Ø Payment of social welfare pension to various categories of people aged above 60, at the rate of Rs. 1,600/- per month.

LDF Government could thus earn a place in the heart of the people and there were all indications of people giving them a second term in office.

A Golden Opportunity!

The Supreme Court judgement allowing entry to women in Sabarimala Temple was a golden opportunity for Congress and BJP to attack CPI(M) and its front partners for standing by the Judgement and performing its constitutional duties. A virulent campaign was unleashed whipping up communal passions painting the Government as anti-Hindu and anti-devotees/believers to dent popularity of the Government. They succeeded to a certain extent and could reap rich dividend by obtaining 19/20 seats in the Parliamentary elections held in the year 2019.

All-out attack continued

Gold smuggling through diplomatic bag by certain people with tacit help by UAE Embassy officials via Trivandrum International Airport was unearthed. Hurling a wild charge that Chief Minister's Office intervened for release of persons apprehended, the Congress – BJP combine spearheaded a vilification campaign against Chief Minister. All the Central agencies, viz, NIA, CBI, Customs and ED were entrusted with enquiry into the case. But instead of conducting a fair probe and nabbing real culprits, these agencies trained their guns against CM's Office and CM. Accused persons were made approvers to elicit their statements to implicate Chief Minister. All right reactionary forces along with the right-wing media were engaged in this nefarious game to tarnish the image of LDF and Government. But the people rejected all these false propaganda and voted decisively in favour of LDF in the local body elections held last year and this put the LDF in a strong position.

Reaching the People

CPI(M) and its allies undertook the task of approaching the People to disabuse their minds. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan addressed people



through electronic media when the State was reeling under floods and also since February 2020, when the first Covid 19 case was detected. Daily press briefings of CM instilled confidence in the minds of people. They could very well feel the care, compassion and protection afforded to them during difficult times by the State Government. This willingly opened their kettles and lakhs of rupees poured as donation into Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund in return.

Account Closed

BJP was able to secure one seat in 2016 at Nemom, Trivandrum. UDF fielded a very weak candidate and helped former Union Minister O. Rajagopal to win. BJP was boasting this time that they would win 35 seats and be a decisive force in deciding formation of Ministry. Metro-man Sreedharan, Film star Suresh Gopi et.al were fielded in different constituencies. State President of BJP, K. Surendran, contested from two constituencies. Sabarimala issue was again invoked to divide people on communal lines. Star campaigners like PM Narendra Modi, Amit Shah, Yogi Adityanath and others were brought in for campaign. Despite this, BJP could not even retain the single seat which was snatched back by Sivan kutty of CPI(M) defeating former Mizoram Governor Kummanam Rajashekar. Thus, the account of BJP in Kerala was closed as predicted by Pinarayi Vijayan in one of the election rallies.

Minorities also preferred LDF

Spontaneous protest actions against Citizens Amendment Act were there in Kerala too. The CM's declaration that his Govt. would not implement CAA in the state, come what may, gave hope and confidence to the minorities, who were naturally attracted to Left forces.

Beacon of hope

The success of LDF is to be evaluated from a pure political angle. People will go by the rulers if the dispensation is able to deliver goods. This electoral victory is achieved facing many a challenges posed by Congress-BJP axis and a hostile Central Government.

Kerala is the beacon of hope. The Left and Democratic forces can ensure functioning of the Government in a democratic framework, honouring rule of law and abiding by the Constitution of the country. Life and living of people and their constitutional rights could be protected by these progressive forces only.

(Writer is Former Vice-President, AIIEA)

DMK ALLIANCE CLAIMS TAMIL NADU

K.Swaminathan

In TN assembly elections the front led by DMK has come out victorious by winning 159 out of total 234 seats. DMK has formed the government of its own since it got absolute majority by winning 133 seats including those who contested on DMK symbol. The election turned out to be a bipolar contest between DMK Front and AIADMK Front pushing other parties to the margins.

DMK front secured 44.39 %, AIADMK front 40.71%, Others got 14.49 out of which sizable votes went to Seeman's NTK, Actor Kamalahasan's MNM and T.T.V Dinakaran front. This needs deeper analysis. Out of these three political outfits first two would have cut the votes of DMK front. Third one would have cut the votes of AIADMK.

CPI(M) and CPI won two seats each as part of DMK alliance this time. Out-going Assembly did not have representation from Left. This would strengthen the voice and struggles of working class and peasants.

The BJP tried to gain a foothold in TN by aligning itself with AIADMK. For the past several years BJP was seen doing the back seat driving in the AIADMK government. In this direction BJP adopted multi faceted opportunistic moves in the political arena. The party took out "Vel Yatras" in the name of Lord Murugan. BJP state Chief Murugan himself launched that campaign in "Arupadai Veedu" (Six holy places of Lord Muruga) with a aim to whip up Hindu sentiments.

BJP adopted certain tactics of Social engineering by roping in people on caste lines. It influenced some dalit leaders. Some new demands with the intent of "Sanskritisation" were focussed. BJP made one dalit leader suddenly as it's state chief. Demands were floated to placate B.C communities as well like inclusion into ST list, Inner reservation etc. AIADMK government announced Inner reservation for a particular BC community on the last day on which notification for elections were released. Yet these manoeuvres did not work and the nature of Indian caste structure back fired. When inner reservation was announced for a particular major BC community, it stirred negative reactions from other BC communities.



There was a widespread doubt among the people with new players in the field. Those parties lacked coherent approach on the issues. Though youths got attracted towards new players to some extent they were seen by most of the people as an attempt to cut anti establishment votes against AIADMK and help them to retain the power for another term. How those parties mobilised huge funds for competing in the elections was a big question mark. Actor Kamal Hasan engaged helicopter for his election tour.

Two important factors were notable in forming formidable front led by DMK. First, DMK front was not merely based on seat adjustments. Those parties came together for more than three years and fought anti people policies of Central and State government. They were united on contentious issues such as Demonetisation, New Education Policy, Farmers agitation, CAA, Attacks on Secularism, federalism and Multi cultural identities, Issues of Environment, Attacks on Social justice, Imposition of Hindi etc. They supported struggles against Neo liberal reforms including IPO in LIC. This created confidence and enhanced credibility among the people.

Second one was widespread resentment against BJP particularly Modi in Tamilnadu. Even opinion polls revealed comparatively lesser anger against AIADMK government. Yet its subordination to centre was not acceptable to the people of TN which historically stood for State autonomy and rights. Even BJP candidates were wary of putting Images of Modi in their campaign materials. Such was the scale of opposition evident in TN. If BJP stood alone in the elections it would have lost all the constituencies.

There was unprecedented money power witnessed in these elections. There were instances in many constituencies where each vote was purchased for Rs.3000. Income tax raids were unleashed against

opposition parties to intimidate them. Election commission was mute spectator throughout the process.

Despite all these things DMK Front came out victorious. First day in office, it announced Covid relief of Rs 4000 to ration card holders, Free travel for women in city buses, Reduction of milk prices by Rs 3 per litre, Reimbursement of Covid treatment expenses from CM Insurance schemes and Separate department headed by an IAS officer for disposal, within 100 days, of petitions received from the people.

TN elections have created impact throughout the country and morale booster for secular forces of this country.

PUDUCHERY

Though it is a small Union territory, BJP had set its eyes to capture power here. Last 5 years saw bitter relations between Lt Governor Kiran Bedi and Congress government there led by Sri V Narayansamy. Lt Governor did not allow the government to function forcing the Chief Minister

to stage a sit in Dharna for some days in front of Governor's residence. Lt Governor nominated 3 BJP men to assembly where it's tally was Zero. Nominated members were given voting power also. Along with this using its clout, BJP succeeded in splitting both Congress and DMK to bring down the government.

BJP stitched an alliance with AINRC led by N.Rangaswamy to contest elections. Elections results came in favour of N.R. Congress - BJP - AIADMK alliance. Out of 30 seats N.R. Congress won 10 seats and BJP 6 seats by securing around 43% votes. DMK won 6, Congress 2 and Independents 6.

BJP game is still not over. Since BJP's tally was less it had to accept Sri N.R.Rangasamy as CM. But new Lt Governor Ms Tamilisai Soundararajan has also started the same game as her predecessor. She nominated 3 BJP men into Assembly taking the BJP tally to 9. Surely, BJP will target 6 Independents to forge a majority of its own. Hence the game is not over in this Union territory as it is bound to see many twists and turns.

(The writer is Vice-President, SZIEF)

TMC SWEEPS WEST BENGAL

Dhrubajyoti Ganguli

TMTC is back to rule the state with a sweeping victory in the West Bengal Assembly Election 2021. The People of the State could foil Modi-Shah design to capture the State. But, for the first time since the Independence the Bengal Assembly will be deprived of the presence of Left. The performance of Left led Sanjukta Morcha has been very disappointing and it (Indian Secular Front) could win only in a single assembly segment.

Gradual Polarisation

The Corporate Media since 2019 has been creating an understanding that the West Bengal elections are a straight fight between the TMC and BJP totally ignoring or underplaying the very existence of the Left in the electoral field. The Bengal election campaign, in a gradual manner gained an unprecedented polarisation. The TMC peddled soft Hindutva while the BJP went all out in spreading communal venom. The media back up to these campaign put the masses of the population in the quagmire of thought - 'either or'.



“More such incident will take place if people take law into their hands”, was the insensitive remarks by the BJP leaders after the death of four ordinary people in the Central Armed Force firing at Sitalkuchi polling station. The incident, followed by social media blitz served to consolidate minority votes in favour of Mamata Banerjee across the state. The Home Minister Amit Shah in all his speeches promised to implement CAA-NRC and had repeatedly stated, “Sare guspaytio ko bahar nikalenge” (All intruders would be thrown back). This created an environment of fear particularly after the bitter experience of NRC exercise in Assam and proved counter productive for BJP.

The Left and the Sanjukta Morcha

In an environment of wanton corruption and a violent authoritarian rule of TMC and the divisive politics of BJP, the Left forged a Morcha called Sanjukta Morcha.

The mammoth brigade rally marked the beginning of the campaign in favour of Sanjukta Morcha. The Indian Secular Front (ISF) joined the Left - Congress ally with their foundational declaration to fight against the religious and casteist oppression and to uphold the Nation's Constitutional values. The Sanjukta Morcha came as an inspiration for the youth in particular and the common people. The Morcha declaration to revive democracy and end the authoritarian rule of TMC in the state, to create permanent employment, to protect the interest of the farmers and ensure minimum wages to workers along with other progressive aspects brought a ray of hopes in the state. Good number of students and youth were fielded as the candidates by the Left. This generated enthusiasm among the youth and the students to unite for a change. But, as the electoral process gained momentum, the situation became totally polarized and media created a hype that BJP is well on the way wrest West Bengal from TMC. The media- created binary worked and the voters in their desperate bid to stop BJP from coming to power voted in favour of Trinamool Congress ignoring its failure in governance.

Struggles Were There but Not Enough

The Left had organised and led series of movements during the last five years. Working Class movement gained momentum and the all India strikes were successful. The united movements of the workers of the Public Sector Industries could

halt the sale of all the Central PSUs in the state. United movements of the industrial workers and the plantation workers of the industries and tea gardens could improve their wages and service conditions amidst an extremely difficult situation. The growing Students and Youth movements braved the police bullets but did not succumb. During the last five years most of the movements were participated by the organisations of multiple political belongings including the Congress. The unity and the success of those movements unfortunately could not be translated into electoral success. Despite the Left

The elections to 126 seats of Assam Assembly were held in three phases from March 27 to April 6 this year. The turn-out of voters was eighty two percent. In 2016 for the first time, a BJP led alliance led by Sarbananda Sonowal came to power. Of all the major states that went to polls this year it is only in Assam that the BJP led alliance could return to power though with reduced majority.

The backdrop

The backdrop of this year's assembly election in Assam was constituted by an extremely deteriorating economic scenario, the controversial NRC exercise, anti-CAA agitation that swept the State, a raging pandemic and the intensified drive for communal polarisation by the ruling party. Assam has all along been an economically backward state. The neo-liberal economic policy pursued so aggressively by the present regime has aggravated the backwardness. The fragile economy of the State took a big hit during the five year rule of the Sonowal government. It miserably failed in keeping its commitments to improve the economy of the State and put it on the path of an accelerated development. Even before the outbreak of the Pandemic the state's economy had been plagued with declining growth rate, mounting unemployment, dearth of investment, closure of industries, a gasping agri sector and growing immiserisation of the people. Pandemic only compounded the situation. The government instead of taking steps to improve the fundamentals of the economy so as to provide adequate employment and increase the income of the people, indulged on the eve of the election in announcing so-called 'welfare' schemes that provided less relief and more allurements to the crisis- ridden people.



Cartoon courtesy: **Satish Acharya** /Facebook

leading the struggle and carrying out uninterrupted relief work operations in the pandemic, it failed in becoming alternative to BJP & TMC. The contest remained intensely bi-polar.

Tough tasks ahead

In the immediate aftermath of the election several left activists have been subjected to inhuman attacks. A poor woman was lynched to death; many houses have been demolished and set on fire. Most dangerously the post poll rifts of BJP and TMC have turned into communal riots in the districts like Cooch Behar. The people though have resisted

BJP from coming to power, BJP has gained strength substantially and with TMC as the ruling party, the communal divide will increase. This is going to be a big challenge before the working class and the Left movement in West Bengal. However, as the class contradictions are bound to intensify across the Country, West Bengal can not remain isolated from the vortex of struggles. The unfolding mass and class struggle will surely help the Left to reinvent itself and project itself as a genuine alternative to the authoritarianism of TMC and divisive politics of BJP.

(Writer is President, EZIEA)

ASSAM ASSEMBLY ELECTION X-RAYED

Satanjib Das

The worsening economic situation adversely impacted the lives and livelihood of all sections of people in the State and created a groundswell of discontent among people. This was manifest in the growing struggles of different sections of the working people.

Divisive designs

But the ruling party and the government worked overtime to deepen the communal and ethnic divide. Their tactics were to distract the attention of the people from the failures of the government in the economic arena and divide them. The CAA was legislated to intensify the communal and ethnic polarisation. As a matter of fact, it has been an ideological project of BJP-RSS camp that seeks to define nationality on the basis of religion.

This instilled fear and apprehensions in the minds of a large section of Assamese people about the unabated influx from Bangladesh and whipped up linguistic chauvinism. Though a massive anti-CAA agitation swept the Brahmaputra Valley of the State, CAA greatly contributed to the deepening of communal and ethnic

divide. Added to it was the manner in which the NRC exercise was carried out in the State that resulted not only in undue harassment but also exclusion of a huge number of religious and linguistic minorities from the citizenship roll. All these had a big divisive impact on a State which is multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-ethnic. The ruling party utilised such a situation to the hilt. During the election the leaders of the ruling party publicly indulged in provocative communal campaign terming the election battle as a 'clash of civilisation' and a 'war of 65 p.c. vs 35 p.c.' Here it needs a mention that the religious minorities constitute 34.2 p.c. of State's population as per 2011 Census. Such sinister campaign was combined with massive money, muscle and media power that was put into operation with full force by the ruling BJP.

Quest for unity

The situation cried out for a total unity of secular-democratic forces. Belatedly though, a quest for total unity started in right earnest. A 'Mahajot' or grand alliance was formed consisting of Congress, AIUDF, Anchalik Gana Morcha, Bodoland People's Front and some Left parties. The CPI(M) went for seat adjustment with this alliance to prevent division of anti-ruling alliance votes. But unfortunately, all-in unity did not emerge. Because two regional parties Asom Jatiya Parishad and Rajgor Dal which was born in the womb of anti-CAA agitation decided not to be a part of 'Mahajot' and maintain equidistance from it and 'Mitrajot', the ruling alliance led by BJP and consisting of AGP and UPPL. In the name of regionalism these two parties expressed their strong



Cartoon courtesy:
E P Unny,
Indian Express

opposition to ally with any national political party. This indirectly helped the BJP led alliance through division of secular votes. However, in course of election battle the 'Mahajot' emerged as the central rallying force against the ruling combine. Hence the contending forces in the election battle this time were 'Mitrajot' led by BJP, 'Mahajot' led by Congress and two regional parties AJP & RD.

The result & the lesson

'Mahajot' though belatedly forged gave a good fight. However, BJP led alliance came to power with 75 seats down from its earlier strength of 86. BJP with 60 seats, on its own could not secure majority. Opposition alliance 'Mahajot' won fifty seats which includes one seat won by CPI(M). The difference of vote shares of 'Mahajot' and 'Mitrajot' is less than one percent. Opposition alliance received 43.5% of votes polled while the ruling alliance received 44.4%. Election Commission data reveals that the 'Mahajot' would have received at least fourteen to twenty seats more if the anti-BJP votes were not divided due to the stance taken by AJP and RD. The AJP could not secure a single seat while RD secured only one seat. But they succeeded in spoiling the prospect of 'Mahajot'. The lesson is clear. Secular-democratic political forces of the State must broaden their unity to make it all-inclusive and continue their struggle against the anti-people policies and all divisive designs of the present government. The results of the election have shown that communal polarisation has gone deep in the State. This poses tremendous challenge to the peoples' unity and struggle. Hence the paramount need of the hour is to integrate the working peoples' struggle for life and livelihood with the struggle against communalism and other divisive forces

(Writer is Former Vice-President, AIIEA)



Former Brazilian President Lula de Silva has been acquitted of all charges foisted against him. On March 8, Supreme court judge Edson Fachin quashed the charges. Subsequently, a five member bench of the Supreme Court presided over by Justice Gilmar Mendes upheld the verdict. Mr. Lula was accused of taking bribes from politicians and big business. Another allegation is that Lula received a bribe from a construction company in 2016 in the form of a multi-storey building for allotting a contract in return. These were fabricated charges without any evidence and for political motives.

The real reason was that he was influential and a front runner in the 2018 presidential election and therefore it was a conspiracy hatched to prevent him for contesting the elections.

The court also observed that Judge Sergio Mora who imprisoned Lula in 2017 by his ruling had a cozy relationship with President Jair Bolsonaro. The judge handed down such a verdict after conspiring with other lawyers, high ranking government officials and many aristocrats. The Court further said that Judge Sergio Mora's conduct should be thoroughly investigated and truths should be made public.

It is no coincidence that the infamous Justice Moro was later honoured by the Brazilian Government by making him a Minister of Justice as a quid pro quo. It was another matter that he fell out with the President and was removed from the minister post subsequently.

In 2015, WikiLeaks also published secret documents revealing that Barack Obama administration had ordered a tapping of phones

Brazil Supreme Court acquits Lula

V. Sugumaran

IT IS IRONIC THAT THOSE WHO PREVENTED LULA FROM CONTESTING IN THE ELECTION UNDER THE GUISE OF CLEAN SLATE LAW HAVE DISRUPTED THE RULE OF LAW BY REVERSING ALL THE DEMOCRATIC ADVANCEMENTS ACHIEVED IN HIS PRESIDENCY YEARS (2003-2011). THE TRAGEDY OF HISTORY IS THAT THE CONSPIRATORS CHOSE THE WORST PRESIDENT AND VOTED FOR A INSENSITIVE REGIME.



of the then President Dilma Rousseff. There were credible reports that Moro delivered the verdict with the blessing of the US justice department.

Stock Market Jittery

Following the news of Lula's release Brazilian stock market became jittery and the value of stocks plunged by 4%. The local currency nosedived against the US dollar. The ultra rich who never bothered about the monstrous suffering of the people due to the mishandling of COVID-19 by the far right Bolsonaro government got terribly worried about the protection of their ill gotten wealth.

It is ironic that those who prevented Lula from contesting in the election under the guise of Clean Slate Law have disrupted the rule of law by reversing all the democratic advancements achieved in his Presidency years (2003-2011). The tragedy of history is that the conspirators chose the worst President and voted for a insensitive regime.

Media Singing Paeon

Brazil is next to the United States in the list of most affected countries due to COVID-19. Three lakh people lost their precious lives. Bolsonaro is indifferent to this fact and brushed aside Covid as a small flu, not caring a bit to contain the virus and its gory aftermath. He continues to usurp repression by stripping the working class of their hard won rights. But, Lula's tenure was refreshingly different. Be it home for all, education for all and the massive reduction of poverty and amelioration of hunger or some of the positive strides achieved.

The truth being so, the Western media heartlessly portrays them as pox on both sides. It is tragic that the Operation Car Wash ended in white washing the scams of the corrupt dictator. It is no secret that Brazil's top military circles have pressurised

the judiciary to convict Lula on corruption charges to prevent him from contesting the 2018 elections.

Lula-President Candidate for 2022

Lula has described that the trial is their biggest judicial lie told in the 500 years of Brazilian history. He is now busy travelling the length and breadth of the country to feel the pulse of the people. He also said he would announce his decision on filing the nomination at the appropriate time. He is also exploring the possibilities of forming a broad spectrum coalition of likeminded forces to overthrow the right wing government.

73 Members of the Parliament have sent in their letters demanding the impeachment of Bolsonaro. Moreover, the country paid a huge price for electing a right wing President by way of losing nearly 30 billion dollars on the economic front and 40 million workers have lost their gainful employment. In this situation, Lula will frame suitable political strategies.

In the past, his tweet that the plight of the poor is causing the turmoil has been very popular. The people's retweet "I love you" was also trending at that time. Currently "#Lulapresident2022" is once again gaining momentum. His political campaign would also be powerful and impact making. And for the people who are ravaged by the pandemic and the loss of livelihoods, Lula presents a ray of hope. *Vive Lula!*

(Writer is the former Office-Bearer of ICEU, Vellore Division)

INDIA'S COVID 19 EMERGENCY

The scenes of suffering in India are hard to comprehend. As of May 4, more than 20.2 million cases of COVID-19 had been reported, with a rolling average of 378 000 cases a day, together with more than 222 000 deaths, which experts believe are likely to be substantial underestimates. Hospitals are overwhelmed, and health workers are exhausted and becoming infected. Social media is full of desperate people (doctors and the public) seeking medical oxygen, hospital beds, and other necessities. Yet before the second wave of cases of COVID-19 began to mount in early March, Indian Minister of Health Harsh Vardhan declared that India was in the “endgame” of the epidemic. The impression from the government was that India had beaten COVID-19 after several months of low case counts, despite repeated warnings of the dangers of a second wave and the emergence of new strains. Modelling suggested falsely that India had reached herd immunity, encouraging complacency and insufficient preparation, but a serosurvey by the Indian Council of Medical Research in January suggested that only 21% of the population had antibodies against SARS-CoV-2. At times, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Government has seemed more intent on removing criticism on Twitter than trying to control the pandemic.

Despite warnings about the risks of superspreader events, the government allowed religious festivals to go ahead, drawing millions of people from around the country, along with huge political rallies—conspicuous for their lack of COVID-19 mitigation measures. The message that COVID-19 was essentially over also slowed the start of India's COVID-19 vaccination campaign, which has vaccinated less than 2% of the population. At the federal level, India's vaccination plan soon fell apart. The government abruptly shifted course without discussing the change in policy with states, expanding vaccination to everyone older than 18 years, draining supplies, and creating mass confusion and a market for vaccine doses in which states and hospital systems competed.

The crisis has not been equally distributed, with states such as Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra unprepared for the sudden spike in cases, quickly running out of medical oxygen, hospital space, and overwhelming the capacity of cremation sites, and with some state governments threatening those asking for oxygen or a hospital bed with national security laws. Others, such as

Kerala and Odisha, were better prepared, and have been able to produce enough medical oxygen in this second wave to export it to other states.

India must now pursue a two-pronged strategy. First, the botched vaccination campaign must be rationalised and implemented with all due speed. There are two immediate bottlenecks to overcome: increasing vaccine supply (some of which should come from abroad) and setting up a distribution campaign that can cover not just urban but also rural and poorer citizens, who constitute more than 65% of the population (over 800 million people) but face a desperate scarcity of public health and primary care facilities. The government must work with local and primary health-care centres that know their communities and create an equitable distribution system for the vaccine.

Second, India must reduce SARS-CoV-2 transmission as much as possible while the vaccine is rolled out. As cases continue to mount, the government must publish accurate data in a timely manner, and forthrightly explain to the public what is happening and what is needed to bend the epidemic curve, including the possibility of a new federal lockdown. Genome sequencing needs to be expanded to better track, understand, and control emerging and more transmissible SARS-CoV-2 variants. Local governments have begun taking disease-containment measures, but the federal government has an essential role in explaining to the public the necessity of masking, social distancing, halting mass gatherings, voluntary quarantine, and testing. Modi's actions in attempting to stifle criticism and open discussion during the crisis are inexcusable.

The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation estimates that India will see a staggering 1 million deaths from COVID-19 by Aug 1. If that outcome were to happen, Modi's Government would be responsible for presiding over a self-inflicted national catastrophe. India squandered its early successes in controlling COVID-19. Until April, the government's COVID-19 taskforce had not met in months. The consequences of that decision are clear before us, and India must now restructure its response while the crisis rages. The success of that effort will depend on the government owning up to its mistakes, providing responsible leadership and transparency, and implementing a public health response that has science at its heart.





AIIEA PAYS RICH TRIBUTES TO COM. K. VENUGOPAL RAO

Leaders of All India Insurance Employees' Association condole the passing away of Com. K. Venugopal Rao, President, South Central Zone Insurance Employees' Federation [SCZIEF] and paid rich tributes to him on 8th May, 2021 in a condolence meeting organized by SZIEF through a virtual mode. It is estimated that nearly 18 thousand employees from across the country attended this condolence meeting.

The meeting began with the AIIEA leadership paying floral tribute to Com Venugopala Rao. Com Jayathirtha, Joint Secretary, SZIEF presided over the program.

Paying heartfelt tributes Com. Sreekant Mishra, General Secretary, AIIEA said that Com. Venugopal Rao developed himself into a politically matured trade union leader. He was a great intellectual with a strong ideology and philosophy who used to critically analyze the things going on around us. At a time when we are going through great turbulence in the national life and the government is bent upon privatization of PSUs and floating of LIC IPO, the organization will miss his guidance. He expressed heartfelt condolences to the deceased leader's family members and assured them that the entire family of AIIEA is with them.

Com. V. Ramesh, President, AIIEA recalled his long association with Com. Venugopal Rao from the time he was the secretary of the base unit and then occupied most important positions in the organisation. He became much closer to him when he was elected as Vice President of SCZIEF in 2003. He was very meticulous in dealing with the issues and straight forward in his approach. He was actively involved in various organizations of working class

in other sectors. He participated in the secretariat meeting of SCZIEF just days before the surgery from the hospital bed, which shows his invaluable commitment to the organization. With his untimely death the organization has lost an intellectual and a wonderful leader, but his ideology and philosophies will be alive for a long time, he said.

Calling him a valuable and formidable leader, Com. Amanulla Khan, former president, AIIEA said that his heart is still in denial to accept that Com. Venugopal Rao is no more. Com. Venugopal Rao had chosen the challenging path of struggle from the beginning of his career and his journey of life was to spread happiness and compassion while striving for an equal, just and fair society. He was a leader with enormous intellect and had in depth knowledge of the issues concerning the society. He always gave prominence to collective interest over individual interest. He used to share his deep understanding in his writings to various trade union magazines apart from Insurance Worker. Com. Amanulla Khan said that while mourning the sudden demise of Com. Rao we also celebrate the rich life he lived for the cause of the working class. The right way to pay tributes to him is to take our struggle forward from where he left, he said.

Com. K. Venu Gopal, former General Secretary, AIIEA while giving tributes said, Com. Venugopal Rao was a committed comrade who never compromised on issues of employees. Though he appeared to be simple and soft, he was firm on such issues. He was well versed with both Telugu and English which made him a truly literary person. He was a post graduate and Fellow of Insurance Institute. His contributions to Insurance Worker, Karmika Vahini, Prajashakti, Nava-Telangana and various other newspapers were enormous. His relentless work in various fields, uniting people for the struggles of toiling masses was like a thread in a garland of flowers. We should be committed to his ideals for the cause of working class and the entire society.

Mr Saketh, son of Com. Venugopal Rao also participated in the meeting and thanked AIIEA for respect and admiration that his father received and

for being in the large family of insurance employees. Mr Saketh noted that his father was a simple man with minimum personal needs and had books, music as his companions. He was not only a father but also was a great friend. He imbibed democratic values in his family respecting the opinions of its members. He used to have discussion on matters of trade union activities, capitalism, political and peoples issues with family members. He is feeling very proud that his father could make such an impact on the community and helped the needy in their time of distress.

Com. Clement Xavier Das, General Secretary, SCZIEF called Com Venugopal Rao as a great visionary. His qualities and virtues will motivate all of us. He was the man who lived for the organization and lived the organization. His understanding of the issues

was crystal clear, logical and reasonable. He was of the view that not only welfare of the employees but also the growth of the institution, the LIC is equally important. Com. Rao's ideals and commitment are to be imbibed by all of us. Com Clement said that the legacy and principles for which he lived should be carried forward.

Com. B.S. Ravi, Treasurer, AIIEA, Com. KVSSN Raju, Vice-President, AIIEA, Com. Saibabu, General Secretary, CITU Telangana, Com. J. Suresh and Com. P. Satish, Joint Secretaries of SCZIEF and Com. Kameshwari, Convener of Zonal Womens' Subcommittee also paid tributes to Com. Venugopal Rao by recalling their close association with him.

(Report by Com H.K. Narasimha Murthy, Jt.Secretary, ICEU, Bangalore II)

NEOLIBERALISM AND WORKERS' RIGHTS

Com Amanulla Khan speaks to students of Ethiraj College

Commemorating International Labours' day, Com. Amanulla Khan, Former President, AIIEA and Editor of *Insurance Worker* delivered a special lecture on "Neoliberalism and Workers' Rights" in a national webinar at Ethiraj Womens' College, Chennai. The webinar was organized by Post Graduation Department of Human Rights and Duties Education. Com. Amanulla Khan elaborately dealt various aspects that lead to the advent of Neoliberalism and its implications on the working class across the world and India in particular. Here are the excerpts from his address:

He thanked Prof Nithya Rangarajan, HOD for organizing the program. He pointed out that Chennai has glorious traditions of working class movement and the first trade union In India was formed in this city which was then called as Madras by Com Singaravelu. He also said that the first May Day was

observed in India in the city of Madras in the year 1923.

He said workers gained substantial rights during the reconstruction of Europe after the World War II. Europe adopted the Keynesian economic policies and the State became a dominating economic player. The progress registered by USSR, the first workers' State was also influencing the European working class. It was in this background that workers won many rights and social security schemes were introduced. European States modeled themselves as Welfare States.

Meanwhile in India after the Independence, it became the responsibility of the State to create infrastructure for industrialization. The then important Capitalists in India (Bombay Club, as it was referred) too wanted the State to play the big role as they lacked resources to establish industries

that required huge capital and long gestation period. It was in this background that Public Sector units were established in all sectors of the economy and this also paved way for large scale employment generation. These public sectors helped the Indian



economy to grow with their enormous contribution. In the mean time workers started organizing themselves to demand their rights to live a dignified and decent life. That is how trade unionism began in India.

The workers' demand was simple. They wanted to a fair share of the value they create through their labour to help them lead a dignified life. Therefore, the rights of the workers are not different from the human rights. In the face of rising struggles of workers, the first legislation on labor came through Trade Union Act, 1926 to regulate these unions. Industrial Dispute Act, 1947 provided some benefits and rights to the workers.

But in 1970s, the capitalist economies plunged into crisis. In order to overcome the crisis, Keynes was dumped and that led to the emergence of neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism demanded free markets with no regulations; unhindered freedom for capital to move anywhere in the world; privatization of public sector units and stopping of subsidies to the poor. Neo-liberalism also demanded withdrawal of permanency of employment. These policies were hostile to the interests of the working class and the hardwon rights and privileges of the workers were under attack

India also embraced these neoliberal policies in 1990s and today we find the massive increase in income and wealth inequalities. PSUs which are the real strength of the economy are being privatized which is resulting into unprecedented concentration of wealth.

In 2020, when the workers were struggling to escape from the pandemic, Indian government came out with new Labour Codes in place of earlier labour laws and industrial acts in the name of labour reforms. These laws are passed in the parliament without proper scrutiny and detailed discussion. These acts are mainly in favour of the employers and are anti-worker as the workers' rights are suppressed. The right to organize, right to collective bargaining and the right to strike are curtailed. Therefore there is an urgent need to strongly oppose these policies because these will affect the next generation of the working class.

In such a scenario, the young generation must realize the gravity of the situation and come forward and join the movements that are involved in struggles to defend the rights of the workers. They should also understand that only by overcoming these struggles can we aspire for a better place to live with dignity.

After this presentation, there was a lively interaction. The program was conducted by Profs Nithya Rangarajan, Shobha Sharma, Shirley Grace and M.R.Pavithra of the Human Rights Department. Apart from the students, large number of trade union functionaries and social activists participated in the program. It is estimated that the program had 2800 participants.

(Report by H.K. Narasimha Murthy,
Jt.Secretary, ICEU, Bangalore II)

SUPPORT TO COVID CENTRE



LICEU Kottayam Divisional Office Base Unit contributed essential equipments viz, 2 Washing machines, refrigerator etc worth Rs.1 Lakh to the Covid First Line Treatment Centre (CFLTC) organised by Kottayam District Panchayat.

Picture: LIC Employees' Union Kottayam Division President Com. Treesa P Ignatius, President, LIC Employees' Union, Kottayam division handed over the equipments to Smt K.V.Bindu, District Panchayat Member.

The worsening Covid-19 scenario in the country, infections as well as deaths rising at an alarming rate, the claims experience of life insurers has become adverse making the insurers apprehensive of renewing group-term policies of some corporate entities, Complaints that the private insurance companies are not renewing group-term plans as they do not want to underwrite such risks during the pandemic. Either there is an indirect denial to renew or a steep high rate of premium is quoted by the private insurance companies. Reinsurers also have become more diligent while evaluating the risk and potential exposures to avoid volatility in their portfolio.

Over the past few weeks, hospitalisations have gone up substantially due to Covid-19. This has resulted in a spurt in demand for health insurance products. While there was a huge demand Covid specific plans last year, this year sees a distinct feature. More and more people are opting for comprehensive health products. The share of younger and healthier people who are looking to buy health insurance products has increased in the past one year,

With the passage of the Finance Bill, which had proposed permitting trusts to issue debt securities, IRDA has now allowed the insurance companies to invest in debt securities of Infrastructure Investment Trusts and Real Estate Investment Trusts that are rated not less than "AA" under the "approved investment" category. IRDA has also specified that the cumulative investment of insurance companies in units and debt instruments of these trusts cannot exceed 3 per cent of their total fund size at any point in time.

LIC closed last fiscal with a new business premium or first year premium of Rs 1.84 trillion claiming a market share of 66.16 per cent. It has added 345,469 agents, taking the total to about 13.53 lakh agents. It has paid Rs.1.34 trillion as claims - 2.19 crore maturity claims, money back policy claims and annuities, amounting to about Rs 1.16 trillion; 9.59 death claims amounting to about Rs.181 billion.

A survey by Goldman Sachs Asset Management reveals that globally insurers want to put more money into private equity this year which is reducing on hedge funds. The reason is that in the past 10 years Private equity returns have been strong and have outperformed other asset classes.

Following the Delhi High Court's direction to the insurance regulator to advise insurers to communicate their cashless approvals to



the hospitals/ establishments within a maximum period of 30 to 60 minutes, the IRDA has asked all general and health insurance companies to communicate their decision on the authorisation of cashless treatment for Covid-related claims to network providers within an hour of receiving the request and have to communicate their

decision on the final discharge of patients, whose Covid claims are covered, within an hour of receiving the final bill from the hospital. The IRDA also has urged hospitals not to discriminate between patients having cash and cashless policies while treating COVID-19 cases.

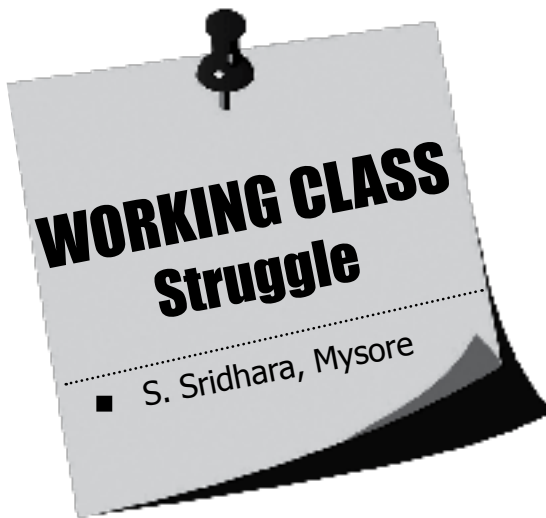
The IRDAI has also not taken any disciplinary action against any insurance company over the last ten years on grounds of non-compliance with the awards of insurance ombudsman. The minimum capital required to set up an insurance company has also remained at Rs 100 crore since 2001, and even linking it to the Consumer Price Index would yield an equivalent figure of Rs 354 crore in 2021.

The unprecedented amount of Covid Claims has taken a hit at the loss ratio of health portfolio of the non-life insurers. As of May 14, non-life insurers have received 1.48 million claims amounting to Rs 22,931 crore. They have so far settled 1.23 million claims amounting to Rs 11,784 crore.

Even as world's top insurance brands have lost nearly \$30 billion in branch value due to the onslaught of Covid-19, LIC has emerged as the THIRD strongest insurance brand and TENTH most valuable insurance brand globally. According to the Branch Finance Insurance 100 2021 ranking prepared by the London based Branch Finance. Brand value is understood as the net economic benefit that a brand owner would achieve by licensing the brand in the open market. Brand strength is the efficacy of a brand's performance on intangible measures relative to its competitors. Brand value is also understood as the net economic benefit that a brand owner would achieve by licensing the brand in the open market. Brand strength is the efficacy of a brand's performance on intangible measures relative to its competitors, LIC's brand value at \$ 8.6 billion, as 10th most valuable insurance brand, has gone up by 6.8 per cent helping the insurer to improve its ranking from 13th to 10th in this segment. **Another history has been created by LIC.**



New Zealand's Government declared a pay freeze across the public service for the next three years. Tens of thousands of doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, border staff, conservation staff, administrative personnel and others will be hit by the freeze. About 30,000 New Zealand public sector nurses and health care assistants have voted to strike for 8 hours on June 9th 2021.



Thousands of temporary workers from shuttered mills of state-owned Amin Jute Mills Ltd. demonstrated on May 8th outside the mill in Chattogram to demand payment of salary arrears. The Bangladeshi Jute mills corporation closed all state-owned mills in last July. About 50,000 workers lost their jobs overnight, including 25,000 permanent employees and thousands of jute farmers were left with no income. Jute mill workers and farmers facing poverty without income have been holding ongoing protests demanding the mills be opened.

Public health inspectors (PHIS) in Badulla district and Galle in Sri Lanka stopped work on 10th May to 12th May respectively over interference in their duties by health authorities. In September, association of public health inspectors called an 11-day national strike by its 2000 members to protest the government failure to implement adequate legal procedures to contain COVID-19.

Power maintenance workers from the state owned South Australian power networks walked off on 6th May in opposition to management's proposed enterprise agreement. ETU members have twice rejected the company's initial offer to maintain current condition with a 2% pay increase in a 12-month agreement. Workers claim that the increase fails to compensate for the loss previous wage cut.

Truck drivers organised under the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Union stage limited actions and pickets in the last weeks of April at the Port of Los Angeles, US to demand the rehiring of workers fired in December 2019 and an end to the classification of Drivers as independent contractors instead of Employees. In support of Truck Drivers thousand of Dock workers of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union joined the protest action. Elsewhere, nearly 1300 steel workers at Allegheny Technologies Inc. in the North East US are in their second week of striking against steep concessions on raises, health care and pensions. Similar strike action took place at the Bath Iron

Works in Maine demanding new contract.

Almost two thirds of the workforce at the Mantruck & Bus Company in Steyr, Upper Austria voted to oppose the sale of the plant to Australian investor Siegfried Wolf. This plan, however, involves massive job cuts and wage reductions. Only 1250 of the existing 2900 full time employees will be retained and also average

wage reduction to 15 to 30%.

General Motors Workers were on strike on May 3rd in several European Countries to protest against more than 1400 job cuts planned at its OPEL Plant in ANTWERP, Belgium.

Dock workers went on strike in Ports of Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal and Finland on 10th May to protest against the Port Liberalisation directive of the European Commission. The strikes were called by the International Transport workers federation and the European Transport workers Federation and were timed to put pressure on the European Parliament. Representatives of Dockworkers also demonstrated in front of the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 10th May.

The strike by Amazon workers in Europe entered the second week. German Trade Union Ver.Di has called on Amazon Employees in six warehouses- or "Fulfillment Centres" across Germany to stop work from 10th May to 13th May. The Union called on the online retailer to recognize collective agreements for the retail sector in addition to a collective agreement for "Good and Health Work". The Company has yet to sign a collective agreement in Germany.

About 50000 workers from 3000 Companies and factories have held rallies across Indonesia on traditional May day. Workers held marches in 200 cities and district in South East Asia's largest economy.

Unionized Public health workers in Tunisia went on a nationwide protest from 3rd May to 5th May. The strike is in response to the Government's alleged failure to honor the terms of a previous agreement.

Greek Transport workers joined a 24 hour Public Sector strike to protest over planned labour Legislation on 13th May 2021. State TV Journalists also walked off the job on May 13th demanding wage increase.



* The wealth of Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, the world's richest man has crossed over \$ 200 billion. His net worth is now roughly equivalent to the annual GDP of entire Greece (\$ 218 billion). Ukraine has a GDP of \$ 131 billion, Hungary has a GDP of \$ 157 billion and Sri Lanka has a GDP of \$ 89 billion. The personal wealth of Bezos is also higher than the entire government budgets of Austria (\$ 201.9 billion, according to 2017 figures), Turkey (\$ 190.4 billion), Argentina (\$ 161 billion), Israel (\$ 102 billion) and Poland (\$ 102 billion). According to Bloomberg Billionaires Index, Bezos increased his wealth by \$ 87 billion in the first eight month of 2020 amidst Covid pandemic. With the wealth of this scale, Bezos has taken a large bite out of the total resources available to human resources on the Planet Earth. He is not an individual but he is many countries. The sum of \$ 202 billion is the equivalent of the combined national budgets of 118 countries in the world, which is unprecedented in the human history.

* According to the National Bureau of Statistics, in China some 600 million people have monthly income of 1,000 RMB (\$ US 145). In 2018, the rural population was about 564 million and their annual average disposable income was just 14,617 RMB (US \$ 2090) or about 1,218 RMB (US \$ 174) a month. While almost half of its population earns less than \$ 145 a month, China recorded 373 billionaires in 2020, the second highest figure in the world. In 2019, there were 174.25 million rural migrant workers in China, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. The Data from the National Bureau of Statistics show that the annual average disposable income for the top 20% of the population is 70639.5 RMB (\$ 10,191) almost higher than that of the bottom 20% and twice than that of the next 20 % immediately below them. According to a survey, among urban populations, the assets of the top 20% household constitutes 47.5% of the total assets, while the bottom 20% only constitutes 2.6%.

* Fitch Ratings have projected global GDP

to contract 4.4% in the current year, but revised upwards China's growth estimate to 2.7% for 2020. In its global economic outlook, Fitch has cut its GDP forecast for emerging markets excluding China to (-) 5.7% from (-)4.7% estimated earlier. Fitch has slashed India's growth projection to (-) 10.5% from (-)5% estimated earlier. It projected US GDP to contract 4.6% in 2020,

less than the 5.6% decline it had forecast earlier. According to Goldman Sach, India's GDP would shrink to 14.8%. It also noted that the Indian economy will contract 13.7% for September quarter and 9.8% for December quarter, compared with 10.7% and 6.7% contractions respectively estimated earlier. India Ratings and Research revised down their estimate to an 11.8% contraction for FY 21 while SBI is now expecting Indian GDP a 10.9% contraction. Crisil Research predicts India's GDP to shrink by 9% in 2020-21.

* According to a data released by National Statistical Office (NSO), India's GDP fell 23.9% in April - June quarter this year, compared to the same period last year. It also expects that annual GDP to contract 5% - 7% in 2020-21, which is worst since independence. Agriculture was on the only sector which recorded a modest growth of 3.4% on year-to-year basis. All other sectors saw contraction with steepest fall of 50% in Construction and the trade, hotels, transport and communication services shrinking 47%, manufacturing shrank more than 39%. While mining and quarrying dropped by 23%. Private consumption fell by 26.7% while investments as reflected by gross fixed capital formation plunged by 47% and export contracted almost 20%. Contracting for the sixth straight month, India's export slipped 12.7% to \$ 22.7 billion in August. India's merchandise imports too declined 26% to \$ 29.47 billion in August, leading to a trade deficit of \$ 6.77 billion compared with \$ 13.86 billion deficit last year. Oil imports declined 41.6% to \$ 6.42 billion in August.



For our FIELD FORCES

■ Arivukkadal, Thanjavur

LIC supports: To facilitate speedy settlement of death claims in the prevailing situation where death has occurred in a hospital, in lieu of Municipal death certificates, LIC has allowed alternate proofs of death such as: Death certificate, Discharge summary/Death summary containing clear date and time of death issued by Govt/ESI/Armed Forces/Corporate Hospitals and counter-signed by LIC class I officers or Development Officers of 10 years standing along with Cremation/Burial certificate or authentic identifying receipt issued by the relevant authority. In other cases, Municipal Death Certificate will be required as earlier. For Annuities with return of capital options, production of life certificates is waived for annuities due up to 31.10.2021, besides accepting life certificates sent through email in other cases. LIC has also introduced Life certificate procurement through video call process.

World's 3rd strongest: According to a study by Brand Finance Insurance 100 2021, a London-based brand valuation consulting company, **LIC has emerged as the third strongest and tenth most valuable insurance brand globally.** As the insurance industry deals with the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, the total rating of the top 100 most profitable insurance brands has dropped by 6%. LIC's brand value, on the other hand, rose by nearly 7% to \$8.65 billion.

Record Profit: LIC booked a record ¹ 37,000 crore profit from share sales in 2020-21, the **highest in its 65-year history.** The latest profit is a 44.4% jump against its ¹ 25,625 crore profit from stock sales in fiscal 2020. The record profit increases LIC's ability to pay **better bonuses and returns to policyholders** and better dividend to the government.

96% Growth: LIC saw ¹ 3.76 lakh crore addition in its equity holding value in FY21. LIC's equity holding value rose to ¹ 7.69 lakh crore in FY21 as against ¹ 3.93 lakh crore a year ago. This represents a whopping 96 percent year-on-year growth. This data comprises all companies where LIC has a more than one percent stake. Equity holdings below one percent are not reflected in the stock exchange data.

Highest Premium: LIC has collected the highest ever new business premium of ¹ 1.84 lakh crore in the fiscal ended March 31, 2021. Its market share stood at 81.04% in number of policies for March 2021 and 74.58% for the full year. It procured 2.10 crore

policies, out of which 46.72 lakh were procured in March alone, registering a growth of 298.82% over FY20 for the corresponding month. Its market share in the first year premium stood at 64.74% for March and 66.18% for the entire fiscal. LIC's pension and group schemes vertical also created a new record by clocking its highest ever new business premium income of ¹ 1.27 lakh crore

over a huge base of ¹ 1.26 lakh crore in the previous year ended March 31, 2020.

LIC - PayTM: LIC has appointed Paytm to facilitate its digital payments. As per the new agreement, the payment process needs to be smoother including a **broader range of payment options and the inclusion of more players — banks, wallets, etc — in payment channels.** During the COVID epidemic, LIC collected a premium of ¹ 60,000 crore through digital mode. This does not include payments made from the bank. These are about 8 crore transactions, which is expected to grow further.

Metro Station Branding: LIC has acquired the station branding rights for Andheri Metro Station, Mumbai. The metro station will now be called LIC Andheri. LIC has also widened its communication visibility through Metro train wrap and digital screens spread across 12 metro stations.

Covid cover: With complaints of life and non-life insurers not selling or renewing standard coronavirus specific health insurance policies Corona Kavach and Corona Rakshak, the IRDAI has advised the insurers not to deny the risk cover. In a softly worded letter to the life and non-life insurers, the IRDAI advised them saying it is not correct to deny such coverage to the customers in this crucial time when the second wave of Covid-19 is spreading fast.

Model Villages: IRDAI has suggested setting up model insured villages throughout the country to increase insurance penetration in rural areas. The concept may be implemented in a minimum of 500 villages in different districts of the country in the first year and increased to a minimum of 1,000 villages in subsequent two years.

Penalty: IRDAI has penalised SBI General Insurance Company Ltd ¹ 30 lakh for repeatedly violating Insurance Act and the regulations. It also has imposed a penalty of ¹ 3 lakh on Max Life Insurance and ¹ 5 lakh on IFFCO Tokio General Insurance for violation of Motor Insurance Service Provider (MISP) guidelines.

GIEA (SZ) Donates material to GOVT HOSPITAL

On 20th May 2021, a delegation of GIEA (SZ) visited Chrompet Government Hospital, Chennai to offer help to fight Covid 19. The Dean of hospital had requested for support to provide utensils, ECG machine, NRBM masks, oxymeters, BP apparatus etc. This hospital is adding 150 beds next week. We have decided to support Chrompet GH, TB Sanatorium and Tondiarpet GH during this period. We are also planning to open a kitchen to provide food at free of cost to Corona victims and people who are in isolation. As a first step, GIEA (SZ) donated 4 water dispensers, 1000 masks, 5 oxymeter total worth Rs. 40,000 to Chrompet Government Hospital, TB Hospital, Sanatorium.

Com G.Anand, General Secretary, GIEA (SZ), Com. S Mageshkumar, Treasurer, CHRGIEA and other local comrades participated in the programme.



WELL DONE COMRADES

Com S. Sridhara, Treasurer, ICEU Mysore along with Com Panindra Rajalakshmi, who recently retired from LIC decided to make some contribution to the fight against Covid. They donated medical equipments amount to Rs.1.6 lakhs to K.R.Hospital,

Mysore on May 8, 2021. These include Digital BP Apparatus 20 number, Nebulising Apparatus 20 numbers, Portable ECG Apparatus 2 numbers and 5000 Sugar track Test Strips.

Insurance Worker records its appreciation for this kind gesture.

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX

Month	Base 2016	Base 2001	Base 1960
Sept 2020	118.1	340.13	7763.73
October	119.5	344.16	7855.76
November	119.9	345.31	7882.06
December	118.8	342.14	7809.74
Jan.2021	118.2	340.42	7770.30
February	119.0	342.72	7822.89
March	119.6	344.45	7862.34

Base1960=Base2001x22.8259;
Base 2001=Base 2016x 2.88

DONATIONS

Com. Muthulakshmi,
Malleswaram Branch, Bangalore DO-1 Rs.5000
Com. Kabir Badajena, Khurda Branch,
Bhubaneswar Div. 2000
Com. G.Karthikeyan, Palakkad Branch-2 5000
Com. Ashok Bandekar, Vasco, Goa 10000
Com. Pradeep Kumar Naik,
Vice President, BDLIEA 1000
Com. Paak Biswas, Krishnanagar Br-2 10000
Insurance worker heartily thanks these comrades
for their love and affection



Com. J.C. Chauhan

former Vice President of NCZIEF and Former President & General Secretary of Meerut Division passed away on 26th April 2021 at the age of 82.

Com Chauhan made enormous contribution to the growth of the organization at Meerut and the North Central Zone. He was elected as the General Secretary of Meerut Division at the age of 29 years and ably led the organization. His role in leading the employees during the 1974 lock-down was indeed memorable.

Meerut along with 5 other divisions were locked out during the struggle for wage revision in 1974. He was unwavering in his commitment to the ideals of AIEA and as a result was subjected to physical attacks by the rivals of the organization.

He was suspended during the struggle against automation. But the administration could not succeed in cowing down. He was reinstated into the services after 13 months with the intervention of AIEA.

Com Chauhan was committed to the philosophy of the working class and till the end continued to guide the organization at Meerut. The AIEA records its gratitude to the contributions made by Com Chauhan and conveys heartfelt condolences to his family members and thousands of his friends and admirers.



Com. Bhalchandra Kerkar

the early morning of 25th April 2021 in Pune at the age of 85 due to Covid.

He was born on 5th Sep 1935 in village Keri near Savantwadi. He joined New India in 1954 at the age of 19. He did Fellowship in Marine & Fire Insurance. He opted to work in LIC. He had many opportunities for promotion to the officer's cadre. But he chose to work for the working class committing himself to the philosophy of AIEA. He worked as the President of IEU Pune till retirement on 30 - 9 - 1995. In 2001 he became General Secretary of IPA PUNE. He was also Central Committee Member of AIPPA for quite some time. He took initiatives in forming IPA units in all divisions of Maharashtra and Goa.

He possessed vast knowledge on social & economic issues. He was closely associated with Com A S Deo. Both kept the flag of AIEA high in W Z particularly in Maharashtra during split time.

He was also associated in other local trade union organizations for Central, State, Banks. His help to Com Ajit Abhyankar for organising the unorganised under the banner of CITU was commendable.

He took initiatives in organising the Maid workers and other marginalised workers and farmers. He was also associated with Indo-Pak Association for Peace.

Com Kerkar's unfortunate death has created a huge void in the working class movement in Maharashtra and more particularly in Pune. Insurance Worker deeply condole the unfortunate demise of Com Kerkar and shares the grief with the bereaved family and thousands of his friends, comrades and admirers.



Com. Ranjana Nirula

a prominent leader of the working class and women's movement breathed her last on 10th May 2021 at a Delhi hospital where she was undergoing treatment for Covid.

Com Ranjana was the Working Editor of 'The Voice of the Working Women'. She discharged responsibilities as Treasurer of CITU from which position she was relieved in 2017. She was the Convenor of the All India Coordination Committee of Asha workers.

Com Ranjana was a very soft spoken and lovable person. She was a great human being. She had a special relationship with the AIEA. She was very appreciative of the work the Women Sub-Committees of AIEA were doing across the country.

The AIEA and Insurance Worker deeply mourn her death and share the grief with the bereaved family.



**WORLD CONDEMNS
ISRAELI AGGRESSION
DEMANDS FREEDOM
FOR PALESTINE**

