

Insurance Worker



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UNPRECEDENTED HEALTH AND ECONOMIC CRISIS



A MOMENT WHEN WE DECIDE WHICH WAY TO GO

A POINTER TO RURAL DISTRESS



OUR MEDIA NEEDS TO INTROSPECT



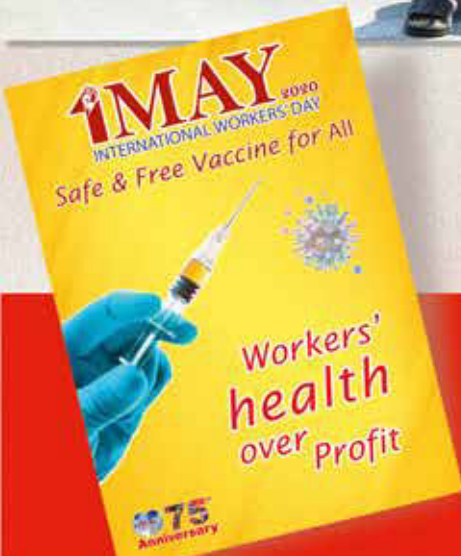
FINANCE VS PEOPLE



KERALA & CUBA SHOW THE WAY



SILENCING VOICES THAT SPEAK FOR MARGINALISED



AIIEA in BATTLE against COVID-19



Vizag



Bangalore



Hyderabad



Allahabad



HRGIFA Hyd



Cuttack



Bangalore



Jalpaiguri masks & sanitizer preparation



Chennai GEA



Jadcherla Sec'bad door to door

UNPRECEDENTED HEALTH AND ECONOMIC CRISIS

The Coronavirus has infected over 2.8 million people and claimed over 192000 lives so far across the world. This is the worst pandemic in the last one hundred years. A large number of cities in all continents have been locked down to break the spread of this virus. This pandemic has created an unprecedented crisis in the world economy. The crisis has severely hit the working class and poorer sections of the populations. Millions of jobs have been lost with consequent adverse impact on the life and living of the working class. The crisis has brought into sharp focus limitations of capitalism in meeting challenges posed by such a pandemic. The virus was first noticed in the Wuhan province of China. There are accusations that China delayed warning world about the virus and had it done so early, many precious lives could have been saved. China has defended itself saying that it informed the WHO and the world about the virus soon after it found evidence of its presence. While there are attempts to cover up the inefficiencies and limitations of the US administration in tackling this emergency by blaming China and WHO, it is also important that China lays down all the details to clear itself of the accusations.

India has not escaped from this pandemic. At the time of writing this, over 24000 people are infected by the virus and more than 740 persons have died. In the absence of sufficient testing, it is difficult to know the extent of spread of virus. The first case of Corona was reported in India on 30th January 2020 in Kerala originating from China. While the State of Kerala made preparations to fight the virus, unfortunately no such urgency was shown by the Government of India. Even in the second week of March 2020, the Union Health Minister said that there is no health emergency in India. Therefore when more cases started surfacing, the government was found wanting in preparation. It is well known that the public health infrastructure in the country is in a terrible shape. The doctor and nurse's ratio as against the population is inadequately low compared to the standards defined by WHO. The country of 130 crore has only a little over 7 lakh government hospital beds which means 0.5 bed per 1000 population. There is massive shortage of ventilators which are so necessary to treat the critical patients. It is estimated that India has just over 50000 ventilators. India could not even offer personal protective equipment to the health workers who are in the front line to fight this virus.

After experimenting with a Janata Curfew on 22nd March, the Prime Minister announced a nationwide lockdown for 21 days on 24th March. Even before this announcement, a number of States had already declared lockdown. While there is no argument that lockdown was necessary to break the chain in spread of the

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REVOLUTIONARY MAY DAY GREETINGS TO ALL READERS OF INSURANCE WORKER

virus, the government lacked preparations and totally failed to anticipate difficulties and problems of migrant and unorganised workers and other weaker sections of society. The Prime Minister in a theatrical manner gave a notice of just 4 hours before implementing the lockdown creating the avoidable panic. No economic relief for the loss of livelihood, shelter and food for these migrant workers were announced before the lockdown. This resulted into huge miseries and India looked like a country of medieval period when thousands of migrant workers wanting to reach their homes decided to walk hundreds of miles in the absence of any transport. The brutality of the administration and the police in dealing with these unfortunate migrant workers has shamed Indian democracy. It is only days later that the Finance Minister announced an insignificant relief package to mitigate the sufferings of the migrant workers and the poor.

The lockdown is further extended now up to May 3rd 2020. But while announcing the extension

of the lockdown, the Prime Minister unfortunately did not take into account the sufferings of the migrant workers and the poor and failed to announce any relief package to them. The Prime Minister is justified in expecting what 'We The People' should do for the country but equally 'We The People' are also justified in asking Prime Minister why his government has failed to mitigate the hardship of the people. It looks that India which is hungry, without livelihood, shelterless has just disappeared from the radar of government. It is estimated that more than 200 people have died due to the impact of lockdown with hunger, exhaustion and desperate walking on roads hundreds of miles to reach their villages.

The impact of coronavirus on world economy is bound to be unprecedented. The IMF estimates that crisis this time around is going to be much worse than that experienced during the Great Depression. The global economy is projected to contract by negative 3% in 2020. The ILO in its initial assessment has said that more than 25 million jobs

अभूतपूर्व स्वास्थ्य और आर्थिक संकट

कोरोनावायरस ने 28 लाख से अधिक लोगों को संक्रमित किया है और दुनिया भर में अब तक 192000 से अधिक लोगों की जान ले चुका है। पिछले एक सौ वर्षों में यह सबसे बड़ी महामारी है। इस वायरस के प्रसार को तोड़ने के लिए सभी महाद्वीपों में बड़ी संख्या में शहरों को बंद कर दिया गया है। इस महामारी ने विश्व अर्थव्यवस्था में एक अभूतपूर्व संकट पैदा कर दिया है। संकट ने मजदूर वर्ग और आबादी के गरीब वर्गों को बुरी तरह प्रभावित किया है। श्रमिक वर्ग के जीवन और आजीविका पर प्रतिकूल प्रभाव के साथ लाखों नौकरियां चली गई हैं। इस तरह की महामारी से उत्पन्न चुनौतियों का सामना करने में पूंजीवाद के पास कितने सीमित विकल्प उपलब्ध हैं यह बात सबको स्पष्ट पता चल गई है। वायरस को पहली बार चीन के वुहान प्रांत में देखा गया था। ऐसे आरोप हैं कि चीन ने दुनिया को वायरस के बारे में चेतावनी देने में देरी की और अगर उसने यह काम जल्दी किया होता तो बहुत सारी कीमती जान बचाई जा सकती थीं। चीन ने यह कहते हुए अपना बचाव किया कि उसने डब्ल्यूएचओ और दुनिया को वायरस के बारे में इसकी मौजूदगी के सबूत मिलते ही फ़ौरन सूचित कर दिया था। एक तरफ़ इस आपातकाल से निपटने में अमेरिकी प्रशासन की अक्षमताओं और सीमाओं को ढंकने के लिए चीन और डब्ल्यूएचओ को दोषी ठहराने की कोशिश हो रही है लेकिन यह भी महत्वपूर्ण है कि चीन अपने ऊपर लग रहे आरोपों से बचने के लिए सभी सूचनाओं के विवरण को सामने रखे।

भारत इस महामारी से बच नहीं पाया है। इसे लिखते समय 24000 से अधिक लोग वायरस से संक्रमित हो

चुके हैं और 740 से अधिक व्यक्तियों की मृत्यु हो गई है। पर्याप्त परीक्षण की अनुपस्थिति में वायरस के प्रसार की सीमा जानना मुश्किल है। कोरोना का पहला मामला भारत में 30 जनवरी 2020 को केरल में चीन से उत्पन्न होकर आया था। जब केरल राज्य वायरस से लड़ने की तैयारी में लगा हुआ था दुर्भाग्य से भारत सरकार इस प्रकार की कोई आवश्यकता प्रदर्शित नहीं कर रही थी। यहां तक कि मार्च 2020 के दूसरे सप्ताह में केंद्रीय स्वास्थ्य मंत्री ने कहा कि भारत में कोई स्वास्थ्य आपातकाल नहीं है। इसलिए जब अधिक मामले सामने आने लगे तो सरकार तैयारी में लग गई। यह सर्वविदित है कि देश में सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य ढांचा भयावह है। डब्ल्यूएचओ द्वारा परिभाषित मानकों की तुलना में डॉक्टर और नर्स का अनुपात जनसंख्या के मुकाबले अपर्याप्त है। 130 करोड़ के देश में केवल 7 लाख से अधिक सरकारी अस्पताल के बिस्तर हैं जिसका अर्थ है प्रति 1000 जनसंख्या पर 0.5 बिस्तर। वेंटिलेटर की भारी कमी है जो गंभीर रोगियों के इलाज के लिए आवश्यक हैं। ऐसा अनुमान है कि भारत में अभी 50000 से कुछ अधिक वेंटिलेटर हैं। भारत इस वायरस से लड़ने में सबसे आगे लगे स्वास्थ्य कर्मियों तक को व्यक्तिगत सुरक्षा उपकरण भी पेश नहीं कर सका।

22 मार्च को जनता कर्फ्यू का प्रयोग करने के बाद प्रधानमंत्री ने 24 मार्च को 21 दिनों के लिए देशव्यापी तालाबंदी की घोषणा की। इस घोषणा से पहले ही कई राज्यों ने लॉकडाउन की घोषणा कर दी थी। जबकि वायरस के प्रसार की श्रृंखला को तोड़ने के लिए लॉकडाउन की आवश्यकता के अलावा और कोई सार्थक तर्क नहीं है।

could be lost worldwide as a result of this pandemic. The governments across the world are pumping huge funds to meet the challenges posed by the virus and to revive the economies. Many countries have announced packages that equal 10% of their national GDP. The crisis in India is much more profound. More than 90% of workers are employed in the informal sector. The unorganised sector and medium and small enterprises are bearing the brunt of crisis. Millions of jobs have been lost by the workers. The ILO estimates that nearly 40 crore people could be pushed into poverty. The optimistic projection for economic growth is between 1.5 to 2%. Therefore in such a situation the most important task for government is to save jobs while saving lives, prevent industries from collapse and place substantial money in the hands of the unorganised workers and poor. It must also give sufficient attention to the crisis in agriculture. This demands government to take a break from the fiscal fundamentalism and meet the needs of people and economy even by breaching

the fiscal targets by a huge margin. The prominent economists believe that India needs a stimulus package of around 12 to 16 lakh crore. But there seem to be no indication from government in this regard.

The crisis has brought into sharp focus three important issues namely federalism, need for a social safety net and strengthening of public health system. The fight against Coronavirus is being fought at the States. Some States like Kerala have done exceedingly well. While the first announcement of lockdown came without consulting States, extension of lockdown was done after some semblance of consultations. The major responsibility of fighting the virus is on States with Centre playing only a supportive role. Therefore, it is necessary to support the States with foodgrains and necessary funds. India has no social security worth the name for the unorganised and poor. It is time to demand for a social safety net



सरकार के पास तैयारी की कमी थी और वह प्रवासी और असंगठित श्रमिकों और समाज के अन्य कमजोर वर्गों की कठिनाइयों और समस्याओं का अनुमान लगाने में पूरी तरह से विफल रही है। प्रधान मंत्री ने जिस नाटकीय ढंग से लॉक डाउन को लागू करने के लिए मात्र चार घंटे का नोटिस दिया उससे टाले जा सकने योग्य पैसिक पैदा हुआ। तालाबंदी से पहले इन प्रवासी श्रमिकों के लिए आश्रय भोजन और आजीविका के नुकसान के लिए कोई आर्थिक राहत की घोषणा नहीं की गई थी। इसके कारण भारी मुसीबत पैदा हुई और भारत मध्ययुगीन काल के देश की तरह लग रहा था जब हजारों प्रवासी श्रमिक अपने घरों तक पहुंचने की चाह में और किसी भी परिवहन के अभाव में सैकड़ों मील पैदल चलने का फैसला कर रहे थे। इन दुर्भाग्यपूर्ण प्रवासी श्रमिकों से निपटने में प्रशासन और पुलिस की क्रूरता ने भारतीय लोकतंत्र को शर्मसार कर दिया है। इस सब के कुछ दिन बाद जाकर वित्त मंत्री ने प्रवासी श्रमिकों और गरीबों की पीड़ा को कम करने के लिए एक अर्थहीन राहत पैकेज की घोषणा की।

लॉकडाउन को अब 3 मई 2020 तक और बढ़ाया गया है। लेकिन लॉकडाउन के विस्तार की घोषणा करते हुए प्रधान मंत्री ने दुर्भाग्य से प्रवासी श्रमिकों और गरीबों की पीड़ा को ध्यान में नहीं रखा और उनके लिए किसी भी राहत पैकेज की घोषणा करने में विफल रहे। जहां प्रधान मंत्री का “हम भारतवासि” यों को अपने देश के लिए क्या करना चाहिए यह अपेक्षा करना न्यायसंगत है वहीं समान रूप से “हम भारतवासि” यों का भी प्रधान मंत्री से यह पूछना उचित है कि उनकी सरकार लोगों की कठिनाई को कम करने में विफल क्यों रही है। ऐसा लगता है कि भारत जो भूखा है आजीविका विहीन, आश्रयहीन है सरकार की दृष्टि से ओझल हो गया है। ऐसा अनुमान लगाया गया है कि तालाबंदी के प्रभाव से अपने गाँवों तक पहुंचने के लिए सैकड़ों मील की सड़कों पर चलने

भूख थकावट और हताशा में 200 से अधिक लोगों की मौत हो गई है।

विश्व अर्थव्यवस्था पर कोरोनावायरस का प्रभाव अभूतपूर्व होना तय है। आईएमएफ का अनुमान है कि इस बार का संकट महामंदी के दौरान के अनुभव की तुलना में बहुत बुरा होने वाला है। वैश्विक अर्थव्यवस्था के 2020 में तीन प्रतिशत तक घटकर सिकुड़ने के आसार हैं। आईएलओ ने अपने प्रारंभिक आकलन में कहा है कि इस महामारी के परिणामस्वरूप दुनिया भर में ढाई करोड़ से अधिक नौकरियां जा सकती हैं। दुनिया भर की सरकारें वायरस द्वारा उत्पन्न चुनौतियों का सामना करने और अर्थव्यवस्थाओं को पुनर्जीवित करने के लिए भारी धनराशि डाल रही हैं। कई देशों ने पैकेजों की घोषणा की है जो उनके राष्ट्रीय जीडीपी के दस प्रतिशत के बराबर है। भारत में संकट बहुत अधिक गहरा है। 90 प्रतिशत से अधिक श्रमिक अनौपचारिक क्षेत्र में कार्यरत हैं। असंगठित क्षेत्र तथा मध्यम और छोटे उद्यम संकट का खामियाजा भुगत रहे हैं। लाखों कामगारों को नौकरी से हाथ धोना पड़ा है। आईएलओ का अनुमान है कि लगभग 40 करोड़ लोग गरीबी की तरफ धकेल दिए जा सकते हैं। आर्थिक विकास की दर का आशावादी अनुमान भी 1.5 से 2 प्रतिशत के बीच है। इसलिए ऐसी स्थिति में सरकार के लिए सबसे महत्वपूर्ण कार्य जीवन को बचाते हुए नौकरियों को बचाना है उद्योगों को टूटने से बचाना है और असंगठित श्रमिकों और गरीबों के हाथों में पर्याप्त धन पहुंचाना है। कृषि में आने वाले संकट पर भी पर्याप्त ध्यान देना चाहिए। यह सरकार से राजकोषीय कट्टरता से एक विराम लेने और लोगों और अर्थव्यवस्था की जरूरतों को पूरा करने की मांग करता है यहां तक कि एक बड़े अंतर से राजकोषीय लक्ष्यों को तोड़कर





that assures basic incomes, freedom from hunger and decent existence. India has one of the most privatised health services. This has to be reversed. The government must increase its investment in public health and create necessary infrastructure to meet needs of people. It must be understood that Supreme Court in a number of landmark cases has held Right to Health as a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the State to meet the health needs of the people and that cannot be done through an insurance based system alone but by creating necessary public health infrastructure.

It is heartening to note that the trade unions and NGOs have been doing a commendable job in providing some relief to migrant workers and those severely impacted by the lockdown. The AIIEA is proud that across the country its units have been expressing solidarity through relief work. A substantial amount has also been collected and sent

to the States CMDRF. The AIIEA has also remitted Rs.5 lakhs to the PM Relief Fund. But there are also worries that in these times of unprecedented crisis when the need is for the nation to stand united and fight the crisis - both the health and economic, there is a section which is bent upon communalising the issue and dividing the people. All those who are responsible for the Tabligi Jamat gathering including the administration and police must be brought to book. But it is patently wrong to stigmatise the entire community. Such divisive tactics and unchecked spread of fake news can only weaken our struggle against the unprecedented crisis we face today. The working class must stand united at this hour of crisis to defend the unity of the people and the nation. Let us be confident that we shall overcome the present crisis too. We salute the brave doctors, nurses, police and security personnel, other health and sanitary workers and a number of our brethren in working class who have been saving lives putting their lives and safety to risk.



भी। प्रमुख अर्थशास्त्रियों का मानना है कि भारत को लगभग 12 से 16 लाख करोड़ के प्रोत्साहन पैकेज की आवश्यकता है। लेकिन इस संबंध में सरकार की ओर से कोई संकेत नहीं दिख रहा है।

इस संकट ने तीन महत्वपूर्ण मुद्दों जैसे कि संघवाद, एक सामाजिक सुरक्षा व्यवस्था और सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य प्रणाली को प्रमुख रूप से सामने लाते हुए उन्हें मजबूत करने की आवश्यकता पर जोर दिया है। कोरोनावायरस के खिलाफ लड़ाई राज्यों में लड़ी जा रही है। केरल जैसे कुछ राज्यों ने अच्छा प्रदर्शन किया है। जबकि लॉकडाउन की पहली घोषणा राज्यों के बिना परामर्श के हुई थीए कुछ दिखावटी परामर्श के बाद लॉकडाउन का विस्तार किया गया था। वायरस से लड़ने की प्रमुख जिम्मेदारी राज्यों पर है जिसमें केंद्र केवल एक सहायक भूमिका निभा रहा है। इसलिए राज्यों को खाद्यान्न और आवश्यक धन के सहारे की जरूरत है। भारत के पास असंगठित और गरीबों की सामाजिक सुरक्षा व्यवस्था के नाम पर कुछ भी नहीं है। यह एक सामाजिक सुरक्षा व्यवस्था की मांग का समय है जो बुनियादी आयए भूख से मुक्ति और सभ्य अस्तित्व का आश्वासन देता है। भारत में सबसे अधिक निजीकृत स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं में से एक है। इससे उलट होना है। सरकार को सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य में अपने निवेश को बढ़ाना चाहिए और लोगों की जरूरतों को पूरा करने के लिए आवश्यक बुनियादी ढाँचा तैयार करना चाहिए। यह समझना चाहिए कि सर्वोच्च न्यायालय ने कई ऐतिहासिक मामलों में संविधान के अनुच्छेद 21 के तहत स्वास्थ्य के अधिकार को मौलिक अधिकार माना है। इसलिए यह राज्य की जिम्मेदारी है कि वह लोगों की स्वास्थ्य आवश्यकताओं को पूरा करे और यह केवल

बीमा आधारित प्रणाली के माध्यम से नहीं किया जा सकता हैए बल्कि आवश्यक सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य बुनियादी ढाँचे का निर्माण के द्वारा ही किया जा सकता है।

यह बातें उत्साहबर्धक हैं कि ट्रेड यूनियनों और गैर सरकारी संगठनों ने प्रवासी श्रमिकों को कुछ राहत प्रदान करने और लॉकडाउन से गंभीर रूप से प्रभावित लोगों के लिए एक सहायक काम किया है। एआईआईईए को गर्व है कि देश भर में इसकी इकाइयाँ राहत कार्यों के माध्यम से एकजुटता व्यक्त कर रही हैं। एक पर्याप्त राशि भी एकत्र की गई है और राज्यों के सीएमडीआरएफ को भेजी गई है। एआईआईईए ने भी पीएम राहत कोष में 5 लाख रुपये भेजे हैं। लेकिन चिंताएं यह भी हैं कि अभूतपूर्व संकट के इस समय में जब स्वास्थ्य और आर्थिक दोनों स्तरों पर राष्ट्र को एकजुट रहने और संकट से लड़ने की आवश्यकता हैए एक ऐसा वर्ग है जो इस मुद्दे को सांप्रदायिक बनाने और लोगों को विभाजित करने पर तुला हुआ है। जो भी लोग तबलीगी जमात में जमा भीड़ के लिए जिम्मेदार हैंए प्रशासन और पुलिस सहित सभी लोगों के खिलाफ मामला दर्ज किया जाना चाहिए। लेकिन पूरे समुदाय को कलंकित करना स्पष्टतः गलत है। इस तरह की विभाजनकारी रणनीति और फर्जी खबरों का अनियंत्रित प्रसार तो केवल हमारे सामने उपस्थित इस अभूतपूर्व संकट के खिलाफ हमारे संघर्ष को कमजोर कर सकता है। मजदूर वर्ग को इस संकट की घड़ी में लोगों और राष्ट्र की एकता की रक्षा के लिए एकजुट होना चाहिए। हमें विश्वास है कि हम वर्तमान संकट को भी दूर करेंगे। हम बहादुर डॉक्टरोंए नर्सोंए अन्य स्वास्थ्य और सैनितरी श्रमिकों और श्रमिक वर्ग के हमारे कई भाइयों को सलाम करते हैं जो अपनी जान और सुरक्षा को खतरे में डालकर जीवन बचा रहे हैं।

SILENCING VOICES THAT SPEAK FOR MARGINALISED

Anand Teltumbde, a dalit scholar and one of the foremost intellectuals of the country surrendered before the National Investigative Agency at Mumbai and was immediately arrested. Anand Teltumbde, the great grandson in law of Dr B.R.Ambedkar ironically was arrested on 14th April when the country was observing the 129th birth anniversary of the architect of our Constitution. Similarly Gautam Navalka, a social activist too surrendered at Delhi and arrested by the NIA. They surrendered as Supreme Court did not accept their anticipatory bail applications and asked them to surrender.

These two social activists who speak for the dalits, adivasi and other marginalised sections of the people were arrested under the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act. They are accused of instigating violence during the Elgar Parishad meeting in Maharashtra's Bima Koregaon on January 1, 2018. They are also accused of conspiring to assassinate Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Earlier nine other social activists have been arrested by the Pune police and they are languishing in the jail for more than one year without any trial. It is pertinent to note that those who really perpetrated the violence being supporters of regime ruling the country are roaming scot free.

The Pune Police has failed to produce any credible evidence against these social activists. This was pointed out in a dissenting judgement in the Supreme Court by Justice Chandrachud. When the new government in Maharashtra decided to review the case, surreptitiously the union government handed over the case to NIA. This is a blatant misuse of government machinery and speaks of State Vengeance against people who take up causes relating to poor and speak on behalf of the marginalised.

It is strange that an accusation as serious as the conspiracy to kill the Prime Minister is being treated so lightly by the investigating agencies. Why the details of such a conspiracy are not shared with the nation? Why efforts are not being made for a speedy trial? It appears that the government just want to silence their voices and break their will by invoking draconian acts where they will not even get the bail. Today the terms Urban Naxals and tukde tukde gang are freely used by the highest functionaries in the government. But strangely the Home Ministry in a reply to the RTI concede that they do not have any information as to who are the Urban Naxals and who constitute the tukde tukde gang.



हाशिए के लोगों के लिए बोलती आवाजों को मौन किया गया

आनंद तेलतुम्बडे, एक दलित विद्वान और देश के अग्रणी बुद्धिजीवियों में से एक ने मुंबई में राष्ट्रीय जांच एजेंसी के सामने आत्मसमर्पण कर दिया और उसे तुरंत गिरफ्तार कर लिया गया। आनंद तेलतुम्बडे, डॉ बी आर अंबेडकर की पौत्री के पति, को 14 अप्रैल को गिरफ्तार किया गया था जब देश हमारे संविधान के वास्तुकार की 129 वीं जयंती मना रहा था। इसी तरह एक सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता गौतम नवलका ने भी दिल्ली में आत्मसमर्पण कर दिया और एनआईए द्वारा गिरफ्तार किया गया। उन्होंने आत्मसमर्पण कर दिया क्योंकि सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने उनकी अग्रिम जमानत अर्जी स्वीकार नहीं की थी और उन्हें आत्मसमर्पण करने को कहा था।

ये दो सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता जो दलितों, आदिवासियों और अन्य हाशिए के लोगों के वर्गों के लिए बोलते हैं उन्हें गैरकानूनी गतिविधि रोकथाम अधिनियम के तहत गिरफ्तार किया गया था। उन पर 1 जनवरी 2018 को महाराष्ट्र के बिमा कोरेगांव में एलगर परिषद की बैठक के दौरान हिंसा भड़काने का आरोप है। उन पर प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी की हत्या की साजिश रचने का भी आरोप है। इससे पहले नौ अन्य सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं को पुणे पुलिस ने गिरफ्तार किया है और वे बिना किसी मुकदमे के एक

साल से अधिक समय से जेल में बंद हैं। यहाँ यह बात भी प्रासंगिक है कि जिन लोगों ने देश के शासक वर्ग के समर्थक होते हुए वास्तव में हिंसा को भड़काया वे स्वतंत्र रूप से घूम रहे हैं।

पुणे पुलिस इन सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं के खिलाफ कोई भी विश्वसनीय सबूत पेश करने में विफल रही है। यह न्यायमूर्ति चंद्रचूड़ द्वारा सर्वोच्च न्यायालय में एक मतभेदपूर्ण निर्णय में बताया गया था। जब महाराष्ट्र में नई सरकार ने इस मामले की समीक्षा करने का फैसला किया तो केंद्र सरकार ने चुपके से इस मामले को एनआईए को सौंप दिया। यह सरकारी तंत्र का घोर दुरुपयोग है और ऐसे लोगों के खिलाफ सरकार के प्रतिशोधात्मक रवैये को दिखाता है जो गरीबों से संबंधित मुद्दों को उठाते हैं और हाशिए पे पड़े लोगों की ओर से बोलते हैं।

यह अजीब है कि ऐसे आरोपों तक को जिसमें प्रधान मंत्री को मारने की साजिश जैसे गंभीर आरोप लगाए गए हैं जांच एजेंसियों द्वारा इतने हल्के ढंग से लिया जा रहा है। ऐसी साजिश का विवरण राष्ट्र के साथ





In the last few years there is a systematic attack on democracy and democratic rights. Dissent is treated as treason. Persons speaking against the Prime Minister or some Chief Ministers are charged with sedition. Any person who does not agree with the government is easily branded as anti-national. Not surprisingly, India's standing in the Global Democracy Index has fallen 10 places to stand at 51 position. The arrest of Anand Teltumbde and others on frivolous charges is an attack on democracy and democratic rights. It is necessary to stand with those who are falsely accused through misuse of State machinery. We must demand a speedy and fair trial so that these social activists if proved not guilty can be freed early. It is unnecessary to emphasise the need to defend democracy and prevent the country from falling into authoritarianism which will be dangerous to not only the constitutional rights of the people but also the national interests.



साझा क्यों नहीं किया जाता है "स्पीडी ट्रायल के लिए प्रयास क्यों नहीं किए जा रहे हैं" ऐसा प्रतीत होता है कि सरकार सिर्फ उनकी आवाज़ को शांत करना चाहती है और ऐसी कठोर धाराओं को लगाकर जहां उन्हें जमानत तक भी न मिले एउनके हौसलों को तोड़ना चाहती है। आज सरकार के सबसे अधिक उच्च पदस्थ लोगों द्वारा भी अर्बन नक्सल और टुकड़े टुकड़े गैंग जैसी शब्दावली का प्रयोग खुल कर किया जाता है। लेकिन आश्चर्यजनक रूप से गृह मंत्रालय ने आरटीआई के जवाब में कहा कि उन्हें इस बात की कोई जानकारी नहीं है कि अर्बन नक्सली कौन हैं और टुकड़े टुकड़े गैंग कौन हैं।

पिछले कुछ वर्षों में लोकतंत्र और लोकतांत्रिक अधिकारों पर एक व्यवस्थित हमला हुआ है। विरोध को राजद्रोह माना जाता है। प्रधान मंत्री या कुछ मुख्यमंत्रियों के खिलाफ बोलने वाले व्यक्तियों पर देशद्रोह का आरोप लगाया जाता है। कोई भी व्यक्ति जो सरकार से सहमत नहीं है उसे आसानी से राष्ट्रविरोधी करार दिया जाता है। फिर कोई आश्चर्य नहीं रह जाता कि ग्लोबल डेमोक्रेसी इंडेक्स में भारत का स्थान दस स्थान गिरकर 51वीं पायदान पर आ गया है। आनंद तेलतुम्बडे और अन्य की बेहूदा आरोपों पर गिरफ्तारी लोकतंत्र और लोकतांत्रिक अधिकारों पर हमला है। उन लोगों के साथ खड़ा होना आवश्यक है जिनको राज्य सत्ता की मशीनरी के दुरुपयोग के माध्यम से गलत तरीके से आरोपित किया गया है। हमें शीघ्र और निष्पक्ष सुनवाई की मांग करनी चाहिए ताकि दोषी साबित न होने पर इन सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं को जल्द मुक्त किया जा सके। अब इस बात को बताने की जरूरत नहीं है कि लोकतंत्र का बचाव और देश को अधिनायकवाद में गिरने से रोकने के लिए जोर देना आवश्यक है और ऐसा न करना न केवल लोगों के संवैधानिक अधिकारों बल्कि राष्ट्रीय हितों के लिए भी खतरनाक होगा।

The COVID-19 pandemic has wrought havoc on the life and living of the people. It has created unprecedented health and economic crises. While infecting over 16000 people as we write this reportage, it has claimed over 500 lives. The poor, unorganised and downtrodden section of Indian society has had to bear the brunt of the Corona induced lockdown. Migrant labourers- thrown out of jobs, homes and a livelihood- have been the worst sufferers. Women and children belonging to the underprivileged section have faced the toughest time ever. Government assistance that is coming in dribs and drabs is found to be woefully inadequate compared to the scale of the crisis. As a class organisation conscious of its social responsibilities, the AIEA had given a call for liberal contributions from the employees to extend solidarity to the poor and needy. We are happy to inform that the response to AIEA's call has been overwhelming throughout the country. True to the traditions of the AIEA, our units have been showing their firm commitment to stand by the poor and destitute even in today's trying times.

The units of AIEA from all over India have already remitted over Rs.3.56 crore to their respective Chief Minister's Relief Funds, over and above the Rs.5 lacs remitted by AIEA to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund. We are proud to inform that our comrades from the state of Kerala have been the biggest contributor thus far, having already remitted Rs.1.40 crore to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, followed by units of Tamil Nadu with a contribution of Rs.80.56 lakh. We would like to make a special mention here of Kozhikode division which has contributed Rs.58.29 lacs till now. Many comrades of the Division have contributed amounts equal to their one month's Gross Salary in the range of Rs.80,000-Rs.90,000. That is truly amazing! Thrissur, Kottayam, Ernakulam and Coimbatore Divisions in South Zone have each contributed more than Rs.20 lacs till now. The total collections in South Zone,

Contribution being handed over to
Transport Minister, AP;



OVERWHELMING RESPONSE TO AIEA'S CALL FOR RELIEF

FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS EXCEED RS.4 CRORE AS OF NOW
KERALA UNITS CONTRIBUTE MASSIVELY
UNITS PROVIDING SUCCOUR TO THE NEEDY ACROSS INDIA

Shreekant Mishra

South Central Zone, Central Zone, Northern Zone, Eastern Zone, North Central Zone, Western Zone and East Central Zone thus far have been Rs.2.50 crore, Rs.33 lacs, Rs.11.85 lacs, Rs.30 lacs, Rs.10.54 lacs, Rs.9.50 lacs, Rs.11.11 lacs and Rs.6.42 lacs respectively. The collections are continuing. Our units in general insurance sector have already mobilised contributions in excess of Rs.9 lacs. It is to be appreciated that the contributions would certainly have been much more than this had there been ways and means of personal contact with the employees. In the absence of personal contacts, the units experimented with the method of collection through net banking. This has been a very successful experiment. We are confident that the collections would surge once our offices open and employees start attending offices regularly.

We are proud to inform that apart from mobilising financial contributions, our comrades across the country are doing some wonderful work in providing relief to those severely impacted by the present-day crisis. It is indeed great to see our comrades helping the poor and unorganised risking their own safety. From Varanasi to Bangalore, from Raipur to Rajahmundry, from Hyderabad- Secunderabad to Allahabad, from Kanpur to Machilipatnam, from Meerut to Bhopal, from Chennai to Tirunelveli, from Nashik to Kadapa

everywhere our comrades can be seen to be helping the poor and needy among the working people of India.

Rajahmundry Divisional Unit has done an excellent work involving all the 13 branch units under the Division. An amount of Rs.4.5 lakh has been collected as donations. Groceries and essential items were distributed to around 500 families. Food items were also distributed among the migrant workers from Bihar, West Bengal and Odisha. More than 100 comrades including women comrades participated in this activity. Our comrades of Bangalore, both in life and general sectors, along with the CITU distributed some 18 essential grocery items among Hamali workers of APMC Yard and among poor domestic workers of Basavanagudi and contract workers of BSNL. They are continuing with the relief work and LIC Class I Officers' Association, Bangalore has also joined the effort. Machilipatnam Divisional unit has also been doing a commendable work. They have carried out relief activities at Machilipatnam, Vijayawada, Guntur, Guduwada, Tenali and Repalle distributing essential groceries to various sections of the unorganised workers. Machilipatnam has also handed over a DD of Rs.100000 to Sri Perni Nani, Minister for Transport of AP. Mysore Divisional Unit along with CITU,

Com D.Suresh, second from right as part of Team supervising supply of cooked food, Bangalore



SZIEF donates medical equipments to Chennai Stanley Government Hospital





Contribution being handed over to Chief Minister, Gujarat & Transport Minister, Maharashtra

ICPA and BRGIEA has taken up the relief work in a big way. They distributed essential items among poor families in Mandya, Kollegal and Maddur. Our comrades in Karimnagar, Kadapa, Nellore, Vishakhapatnam etc. are doing yeoman service in providing food to the poor and downtrodden. The Divisional Units of Hyderabad and Secunderabad have collectively mobilised around Rs.6 lacs and have taken up relief work in right earnest. Karimnagar handed over a cheque of Rs 3 lakhs towards CMDRF to Gangula Kamalkar, Minister, Telengana.

Our units in South Zone have been doing a fantastic job. Apart from huge contributions to CM Relief Funds in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puduchery they have also provided direct relief to the tune of over Rs.25 lakhs. The SZIEF donated medical equipments like PPE Kits, Laryngoscope Blades, BVF Filters, Stillets, Shields etc. worth Rs.1.77 lacs to Chennai Stanley Government Hospital. Immediately after the announcement of the lockdown, our units in Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai and Tirunelveli extended monetary assistance worth Rs.5.86 lacs to the Sweepers, Scavengers, Security personnel and Temporary employees. This apart, units like Chennai, Vellore, Salem, Coimbatore, Madurai, Tirunelveli etc. also undertook relief distribution work on a massive scale.

The leadership of WZIEA met Sri Vijay Rupani, Chief Minister of Gujarat on 13th April 2020 and handed over a Cheque of Rs.5,55,555 towards the CM Relief Fund. At Mumbai, a cheque of Rs.5,55,555 was handed over to the Transport Minister Sri Anil Parab. Our comrades in Surat, Gandhinagar, Rajkot, Bhavnagar, Nashik, Pune, Satara and Nagpur are actively involved in the relief activities along with organisations like CITU and different religious trusts. Ludhiana Divisional Unit of NZIEA met Sri Bharat Bhusan Sahu, Cabinet Minister of Punjab and handed over a cheque of Rs.1,85,064/- towards the CM Relief Fund. Jalandhar and Rohtak have remitted Rs.345351 and Rs.300000 to the Punjab and Haryana CMDRF respectively. Our units in Jaipur and Ludhiana are involved in relief activities in co-ordination with other organisations. Despite the fact that Delhi is reeling under the COVID attack, our units are distributing food and other essential items among the poor and destitute. Our comrades in Raipur and Bhopal under Central Zone are actively involved with other trade unions in running community kitchens and providing food to the slum dwellers and other poorer sections. Divisional Units under Eastern Zone are also in the thick of activities. Kolkata Metropolitan Division I (KDLIEA) undertook relief work by distributing food items to 750 poor and needy people in association with

Com Gopal Rana (extreme left) arranging blood donation for patients



Ludhiana - donation cheque handed over to Minister, Punjab





Contributions being handed over to Chief Minister, Puducherry

CITU. Jalpaiguri Divisional Unit distributed masks, hand sanitizer and gloves among 3700 ASHA workers. Jalpaiguri also sent the first instalment of Rs.250000 to West Bengal CMDRF. Coochbehar and Alipurduar branch units of the Division also undertook relief efforts. Raghunathpur branch under Asansol Division distributed food items to the poor people of their locality. Kolkata Metropolitan Division II (KMDO II) and Howrah Divisional unit also took up relief activity in a big way. Our comrades of Cuttack and Dhanbad under East Central Zone distributed relief materials among construction workers and migrant labourers along with the CITU. Cuttack has so far sent Rs.150000 to the Odisha CMDRF. Six to seven divisional units under North Central Zone are actively involved with some voluntary organisations in running community kitchens for the poor and marginalised. Our units in Meerut and Allahabad are providing food on a regular basis to the construction workers and poor jobless workers. The NCZIEF has sent a donation of Rs 100000 to the UP CMDRF and Rs.50000 to Uttarkhand CMDRF.

Our units in General Sector are also doing an extremely good job. HRGIEA and CHRGIEA are in the forefront insofar as distributing relief is concerned. Relief works are being carried out by Chennai, Madurai, Hyderabad, North East, Bangalore Regions and West Bengal State Unit.

ICEU, Karimnagar handing over donation to Sri Gangula Kamalakar, Minister, Telengana



Our units have distributed Relief materials worth Rs.17.5 lakh. The CHRGIEA has experimented with an innovative idea which is not only commendable but worthy of emulation. They have pooled funds from employees, their friends and relatives (some of them even NRIs) and have been successful in taking food to the doorsteps of around 800 families of poor street vendors, rickshaw pullers, para medical staff and other unorganised sector workers. The cost of each

packet of delivered food items works out to Rs.1000 approximately. What is innovative is that they have collaborated with six shops who take the trouble of delivering the food right at the doorstep of the beneficiaries and the contributors (including NRIs) remit their amounts directly to the account of the shops by way of NEFT/RTGS.

Apart from our units, there are many comrades and their family members who have been doing extremely hard work in their individual capacities to mobilise funds and distribute relief among the poor and needy. The AIIEA is proud of these comrades and their family members. Com D.Suresh and some other comrades of Bangalore are working as volunteers for cooked food distribution to over 1 lakh workers in collaboration with the Labour Department of Karnataka. Com Gopal Rana, Joint Secretary of Ludhiana along with his friends is doing a commendable job in supplying safety kits to the health workers, arranging blood donation camps and supplying cooked food for needy families. There are inspiring reports like Com Faquir Chand working as Sweeper-cum-Attendant in Rampura phul Branch of Ludhiana investing his entire month's salary to supply fodder and water to the wandering animals. There are numerous stories relating to the humanitarian intervention of our units and members in the entire country during

this great humanitarian crisis. Since extraordinary situations demand extraordinary responses, we are happy to note that the response of our units and comrades is nothing less than extraordinary.

The AIIEA conveys its warmest greetings and deep sense of gratitude to our comrades across India and hopes that we shall work tirelessly to help the poor and marginalised till the situation stabilises.



AT THE TIME OF A PANDEMIC

S.SIVASUBRAMANIAN

The working class is the wheels of the economy. Those wheels have to move, to push the economy forward. The working class has to be protected at this hour of crisis to protect and improve the economy and ensure growth. The crisis has brought the limitations of capitalism. This exploitative order has to be replaced by a system that places the people in the centre of development rather the insatiable greed of the capitalists. This should be the message of May Day 2020.

May Day signifies the sacrifices of the workers throughout the world. The rights of the working class could not be earned with ease. The working class had to struggle a lot to earn its rights, even shedding its blood. It was the struggle of the workers in Chicago on May 1, 1886 demanding 8 hour work which was instrumental to the struggles of the working class in the decades to come. This year, when we celebrate the 134th May Day on 1st of May 2020, the entire world is under the grip of COVID 19 Coronavirus which is causing the loss of precious human lives. India is not an exception to this. The working class is the most vulnerable section to this Pandemic. In India the 21 day lockdown was imposed without much planning and preparedness leading to unimaginable miseries for the migrant and poor labour across the country and dire consequences for the economy.

The Economic Reactions to the Pandemic

The Pandemic has already started impacting the economies of countries around the world. The US economy sheds jobs for the first time since 2010. Forecasting firm Oxford Economics is predicting a 16% unemployment rate by May with the loss of 27.9 million jobs, more than double the 8.7 million jobs cut during the 2007-09 recession and its aftermath. If the unemployment climbs above 15%, it would be the highest on record since 1940. Writing in the Guardian, the economist David Blanchflower, said UK unemployment could rapidly rise to more than 6 million people, around

21% of the entire workforce. Unemployment across the Atlantic could reach 52.8 million, around 32% of the workforce.

In its preliminary assessment report titled "COVID 19 and World of Work: Impacts and Responses", the ILO calls for urgent, largescale and coordinated measures across three pillars – Protecting Workers in the Work Place, Stimulating the economy and employment, and supporting jobs and incomes. The ILO said these measures include extending social protection, supporting employment retention (i.e. short time work, paid leave, other subsidies), and financial and tax relief, including for Micro, Small and Medium sized enterprises. The note said that falls in employment also meant large income losses for workers to the tune of between USD 860 billion and USD 3.4 trillion by the end of 2020. This will translate in to fall in consumption of goods and services, in turn affecting the prospects of businesses and economies.

Unprepared India – Consequences Galore

India's jobless rate climbed to 23.4% for the week ended April 5. Moody's Investor service, on March 27, sharply slashed its projection for India's GDP growth for 2020 from 5.3% to 2.5%. The markdown was the second in 10 days after the imposition of lockdown.

The Pandemic has led to global concerns about the state of agriculture and food security. The Food and Agriculture Organisation has warned of a food crisis, if countries do not

protect vulnerable people from hunger and malnourishment. The prolonged lockdown will increase the miseries of the farmers and farm-workers. The rabi harvest is to start in the month of April 2020. The harvesting and marketing of crops are likely to become a big crisis during this period because of 1) shortage of workers to harvest the rabi crops; 2) disruptions in the collection of harvests from farmers by traders 3) shortage of truck drivers to carry them across the country 4) blockades of transport of commodities and 5) shutdown in the retail markets. A prolonged lockdown may result in rise in the prices of essential commodities due to hoarding and the reasons cited above.

According to a Report in Frontline (April 24, 2020) of the 460–470 million workers in India, about 369 million (more than three fourth) are engaged in agriculture or work in micro, medium and small enterprises (MSMEs) employing 10 workers each. Of the remaining, more than half are temporary or casual workers in the organised sector. Over half of India's daily wage and migrant population earns just Rs.200 – Rs.400 a day, much below the prescribed minimum wage of Rs.692/-, Rs.625/- and 571/- for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers respectively. The loss of even this barest wages is proving to be a catastrophic one. Over 80% of the country's migrant and daily wage population fears it will run out of food before the end of the lockdown on April 14 (later extended upto May 3) The workers who have lost jobs suddenly on the announcement of the lockdown may again return to the centres where they have worked previously in search of jobs, once the lockdown is over. There are all possibilities that India's army of reserved labour force is going to increase in the coming days immediately after the lockdown is over.

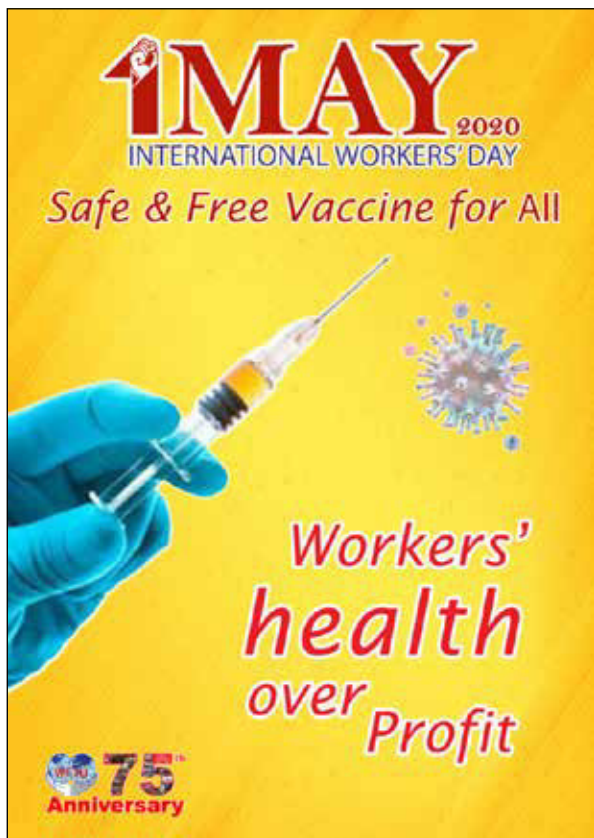
Aids and its Inadequacies

Many countries around the world have announced aids and concessions to the workers in various forms i.e. assistance in the form of cash aid and assistance to the companies in which they work. USA has announced \$3.5 billion package which is Rs.2,67,46,650 Crores. Each adult American is provided with \$1200 and each child \$500 if their income is below \$9000. Jobless persons are to be provided additional \$600 per week. Denmark's government has announced moves to cover 75% of wage bills helping companies struggling in the face of a slowing economy caused by the virus. France, UK, Netherlands and many other countries have also announced relief measures.

The Government of India has announced a Rs.1.7 lakh crore package which includes an additional 5 kg grain a month for the next three months under the PDS; Rs.500/- a month for the next three months for women holding Jan Dhan Yojana accounts; three months Pension in advance to widows, senior citizens and the differently abled and a little hike in wages for MGNREGA workers. The stimulus package in no way addresses the crisis forced upon the millions. There are huge dues under the MGNREGA Scheme to the tune of Rs.11,499 crores out of which the government has released an amount of Rs.4,431/- only after the lockdown was announced. The paltry increase of Rs.20/- in MGNREGA wages (the national average wage under MGNREGA has been increased from Rs.182/- to Rs.202/- per person) and the transfer of Rs.1500/- over three months via Jan Dhan accounts will barely compensate for the forced loss of jobs. The system prevails also excludes a large proportion of workers from the relief. Many of the workers are unaware of the relief measures and how to access them. In the eventuality of the lockdown being extended, many are barely having enough money to support the basic household expenses. Several migrant workers also have debts to repay, which are an additional burden on those who lost their regular income.

What is needed at this hour

Even before the threat of this Pandemic, the Indian economy has been slowing down for the last few years. Therefore, the government should make an effective intervention by way of taking up appropriate measures to revive the economy. The government has to increase its Public Expenditure. The Federal structure of the country demands close cooperation between the Centre and the States. The States have greater responsibility in implementing lockdown, stopping the spread of virus and taking care of migrant workers. It is learnt that a number of States have written to the Union Finance Ministry requesting it to release immediately Rs.40,000 crores being the Goods and Services Tax Compensation to the States which is due for the last more than four months. This has to be released immediately to ease the burden of the States in reviving the economic activities. The huge reserves accumulated through taxes and cess on oil should be utilised for stimulating the economy. Large projects can be taken up by the government itself instead of giving them to the big business and Corporates. The neo-liberal policies, which are inimical to the welfare of the people and the sovereignty of the country, should



WFTU poster for MAY DAY 2020

be abandoned. The Pandemic has exposed the inadequate health care in this country. At least hereafter the right to health and a healthy life should become the basic rights of the Indian citizens and allocations towards the Public Health system should be improved. Peace and tranquillity are the basic requirements for any society to develop. The divisive attempts should be stopped and curbed. The people of India have to unitedly fight against the economic consequences of the Pandemic as they have shown their unity in the fight against the COVID 19 Coronavirus.

The working class of this country is the wheels of the Indian economy. Those wheels have to move, to push the economy forward. The working class has to be protected at this hour of crisis to protect and improve the economy and ensure growth. The crisis has brought the limitations of capitalism. This exploitative order has to be replaced by a system that places the people in the centre of development rather the insatiable greed of the capitalists. This should be the message of May Day 2020.

(Writer is Treasurer of SZIEF)

April 7th



The entire planet is deeply immersed in the coronavirus pandemic. To this day, there are 921,002 infected and 46,153 dead, according to official data.

The situation is tragic on all continents. Thousands of families mourn their dead, hundreds of thousands suffer from the disease and millions of people live with anxiety and fear. We express to all of them our solidarity.

Monopoly and transnational groups are making use of the pandemic, laying off workers or limiting their rights. Many governments, taking advantage of the coronavirus, prohibit democratic and trade union rights. Their objective is to track the movements and activities of citizens by electronic means. It has been proven at a global level that freedoms have been jeopardized in the wake of the pandemic.

This situation has once again exposed the barbarism of the exploitative social system in which we live, as well as its inability to face the crises in favor of the peoples.

No matter how hard the capitalist governments, the bourgeois class and the leaders of the reformist unionism try to obscure the truth and hide the responsibilities of the capitalist system, they will not succeed.

They will not be able to put the people's minds in quarantine. They will not make it to prohibit the minds of simple people from thinking and judging, from drawing conclusions according to their own experience.

One conditions in which we live during this period demonstrate that:

FIRST: The moral superiority of the working class against the parasitism of the ruling class is confirmed once again. While parasites speculate, workers risk their lives in the front line of the pandemic fire, producing all the essentials for life. While powerful industrialists, kings, cardinals are hiding in their palaces, the manual and intellectual workers are struggling on the front line to produce food, medicine, transport, cleaning, communications, energy and everything necessary to make life possible. The poor peasantry, along with the popular strata, contribute to the effort to continue

We demand free and public health for all

George Mavrikos, General Secretary, WFTU

The King is naked .The pandemic stripped capitalism naked, removing its mask and fancy clothes.So today, the duty of all militants is more necessary, more urgent. We must unite the workers and the peoples for a society without capitalists and capitalist exploitation. All the workers, together, we can do it.

the production of goods.

On the other side, one can see the ruling class which is speculating. Ruthless and inhuman, it is taking advantage of the pandemic, increasing prices, stealing from the pockets of simple people, hiding products in order to generate artificial shortages. As in wars, in crises too, they only believe in one god: profit.

On the one hand, then, one can see the working class with its allies and, on the other, the bourgeoisie with its instruments. Two worlds. Two ethics.

SECOND: Who bears the full burden of treatment and healing? The private or public sector? In many European countries, simple people, in their despair, came out on their balconies to applaud the heroes of public health, public hospitals, scientists of public health structures. This slandered public system, these slandered doctors and nurses as well as the entire staff are waging an unequal fight. They are waging an unequal fight because all those who have been barking for years asking for "less state and privatizations", both social democratic and neo-conservative governments, with their policies have deprived the public sector of human resources and equipment.

Even so, this public health sector, this abandoned sector, fights today like an invincible army; many times without weapons, without individual protection, but with courage. Until today, 61 doctors in Italy got sick and lost their lives, they died in the first line of this unequal struggle. The same happens in Spain, France, Greece and the USA ...

On the other side one can see speculators from private monopoly groups who steal from the public sector, who sell their hospital beds and virus tests at over-expensive prices, exploit the suffering of ordinary people and stain their profits with blood, in collusion with the governments.

THIRD: This crisis highlighted the truth once more; that is to say that only between workers and peoples can authentic, sincere solidarity and support develop. The example of the heroic Cuba that sent 60 doctors to the north of Italy, in

the heat of the battle, is an opportunity for the peoples to seriously think and evaluate. On the day that Cuban doctors arrived in Italy, Germany refused to send medical machines to Italy, Italy prohibited exports to Greece, Spain did the same, the US state of California refused to sell masks to New York, other US states had been hiding medical ventilators etc.

During the summit of the European Union leaders on March 26, 2020, a group of countries (Germany, the Netherlands) said no to measures requested by countries with a large death toll such as Spain, Italy and France.

Capitalism is a jungle, with predatory alliances and dogfights...

A dog-eat-dog world...

On the other side one can see the humanity and solidarity that only workers and socialist society can display.

FOURTH: The pandemic, with the data available to date, strips the USA policy bare; the policies of a country that is at the top of the imperialist pyramid. USA admirers worldwide now see their admiration turn to disappointment.

This country has endless missiles, fighter jets, submarines and mercenaries.

But what do they have when it comes to masks?

Medical ventilators?

Public hospitals?

Social Security?

Hospital beds available for poor people?

There are huge shortages in all of this. Now they are requesting medical supplies from the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation.

The United States is the country with the worst healthcare system for the poor, the unemployed, and the economically weak. The worst in the world!

- ▶ Nothing is free in their hospitals. One must pay for everything and, in fact, at very high prices for everyone, without exceptions.
- ▶ There are 28 million uninsured people
- ▶ 33 million people are underinsured.
- ▶ There are 8 million people who, although

they pay their taxes, do not have legal documents.

- ▶ Unemployed, elderly, and low-income people receive basic assistance only if the application they must submit is approved.

▶ And, while the popular strata in the USA suffer the pandemic and the policies of their government, President Trump announced a package of measures of 500 billion dollars for the strengthening of monopoly groups. In addition, packages of \$ 29 billion were announced for airlines, \$ 17 billion for security companies etc. At the same time, the gun lobby in the USA has filed a lawsuit so that gun stores continue their operation. In a country where, according to official data, in 2019, 40,100 people have lost their lives to guns, of which 24,100 have been suicides.

In this regard, capitalists in the USA, Brazil, the United Kingdom and other countries of northern Europe increase their pressure in order to make all companies work, arguing that no protection measures are necessary. The economy is everything, the life and health of workers is nothing. It is this strategy that statements like those of Trump, Bolsonaro and Boris Johnson serve, who affirmed that in a few days they would get rid of the pandemic.

FIFTH: The inter-imperialist antagonisms for the production of the vaccine and effective medicines against the coronavirus are showing the true face of the transnational corporations. When it comes to jointly deciding on anti-labor measures and anti-worker policies they unite against their common enemy, the workers and their struggles. But when it comes to speculation, they are killing each other. Each one tries to steal the other's secrets. They know that whoever discovers the vaccine first will skyrocket his/her profits. It is a dogfight for profit, not for the protection of public health.

Therefore, according to the above, it is confirmed that not all of us are equal in the face of the pandemic, nor does the slogan "all united to get out of the crisis" have any pro-worker content. If the rich become infected with the disease, they have the possibility of receiving a different treatment than the unemployed. Furthermore, in the crisis it is the simple people who will suffer the consequences at the labor, salary and economic levels.

So, it is certain that the bourgeois class and its mechanisms are going to take advantage of the pandemic to drastically limit the democratic rights and freedoms of workers and peoples.

With his first speech on the coronavirus, Prime Minister Narendra Modi got us to scare evil spirits away by having people bang the hell out of their pots and pans.

With his second, he scared the hell out of all of us.

With not a word on how the public, particularly the poor, are to access food and other essentials in coming weeks, it sparked off a panic waiting to happen. The middle classes thronged the stores and markets – something not easy for the poor. Not for migrants leaving the cities for their villages. Not for small vendors, domestic help, agricultural labourers. Not for farmers unable to complete the rabi harvest – or stuck with it even if they have. Not for hundreds of millions of marginalised Indians.

The finance minister's package – announced yesterday, March 26 – has this one saving grace: 5 kilos of free wheat or rice for each person for three months in addition to the 5 already given under PDS, the public distribution system. Even there – it is not at all clear if the earlier or existing 5 kilos will also be free or must be paid for. If that's to be paid for, it won't work. Most of the elements of the 'package' are sums allocated for schemes already in existence. The MGNREGA wage hike of Rs. 20 was due anyway – and where is there any mention of an additional number of days? And how if they get down to it at once, and with what kind of work, will they maintain their social distancing norms? What will people do in the many weeks it will take to roll out the scale of work needed? Will their health be up to it? We must pay MGNREGA wages daily to every labourer and farmer for as long as the crisis lasts, work or no work.

The Rs. 2,000 benefit under the PM-KISAN was already there and due – what does it add? Instead of being paid in the last month of the quarter, it is advanced to the first month. Nowhere did the finance minister give a clear break up of the Rs. 1.7 lakh crores package responding to the pandemic and for the lockdowns – what are its new elements? What part of this sum is old or existing schemes recobbled together to make the numbers? Those hardly qualify as emergency measures. Further, pensioners, widows and the disabled will get a one-time amount of Rs. 1,000 in two instalments over the next three months? And 20 crore women with Jan Dhan Yojana accounts will get Rs. 500 each for three months? That's worse than tokenist, it's obscene.

How will raising loan limits for self-help groups (SHGs) change a situation where getting an existing loan amount is a nightmare? And how exactly will this 'package' help those countless migrant workers stranded far away, trying to return to their home villages? The claim that it will

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What We Should Do About COVID-19

We need to act right now. It's not just one virus we're fighting – pandemics are also a 'package.' Of which economic distress can be a self-inflicted or self-aggravated part – driving us from calamity to catastrophe. The idea that we're fighting just one virus, and all will be fine once we're on top of it – is dangerous. Sure, we need to fight COVID-19 desperately – this could be the worst pandemic ever since 1918But focusing on COVID-19 to the exclusion of the larger canvas – that's attempting to mop the floor dry with all the taps open and running. We need an approach which pushes ideas that strengthen public health systems, rights and entitlements.

P. SAINATH

(Courtesy: Counterpunch 2/4/2020)

help migrants is unsubstantiated. If the failure to produce a serious set of emergency measures is alarming, the attitude of the packagers is terrifying. They seem clueless on the kind of situation developing on the ground.

Lockdowns of the kind we are into – with no serious social support or planning for the vulnerable – can lead, already have led, to reverse migrations. It is impossible to get a fix on the extent or intensity of those. But reports from several states suggest that large numbers of people are heading back towards their villages as the cities and towns they work in go into a lockdown.

Many are using the only transportation now available – their own feet. Some are cycling home. Several find themselves stranded midway when trains, buses and vans stop functioning. It's scary, the kind of hell that might break loose if this intensifies. Imagine large groups walking home, from cities in Gujarat to villages in Rajasthan; from Hyderabad to far-flung villages of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh; from Delhi to places in Uttar Pradesh, even Bihar; from Mumbai to no-one-knows-how-many destinations. If they receive no succour, their rapidly diminishing access to food and water could trigger a catastrophe. They might fall to age-old diseases like diarrhoea, cholera

and other.

Besides, the kind of situation that could build up with this mounting economic distress would see those deaths very largely amongst the working and younger populations. As Prof. T. Sundararaman, global coordinator of the People's Health Movement, pointed out to PARI, health services – so, along with this economic distress, we may end up substituting deaths from other diseases for coronavirus deaths." The 8 per cent of the population in their 60s and above are most at risk from the coronavirus. The outbreak of other diseases, along with decreased access to and curtailment of other essential health services, could see working age people and the younger population taking a huge hit." Dr. Sundararaman, a former executive director of the National Health Systems Resources Centre, asserts there is a desperate need to "identify and act on the reverse migrations problem and the loss of livelihoods. Failing that, deaths from diseases that have long tormented mostly poor Indians could outstrip those brought about by the corona virus." Particularly if reverse migration grows – with migrant workers in the cities gripped by hunger, failing to receive even their meagre wages.

Many migrants live on their worksites. As the

sites shut down, and they're asked to leave – where will they go? Not all of them can walk gigantic distances. They have no ration cards – how will you reach food to them?

The economic distress is already picking up speed.

What's also surfacing is demonisation of migrant labourers, domestic workers, slum-dwellers, and other poor by housing societies convinced that they are THE problem. The truth: the carriers of COVID-19, as also of SARS earlier, are the flying classes: us. Rather than recognise that, it seems we are trying to sanitise the cities by purging them of these undesirable elements. Consider this: if our flying carriers have passed on the infection to any of those returning migrants – what could be the outcome when they reach their villages?

There have always been some migrant labourers walking back to their villages, if those were in the same or neighbouring states. The traditional way was to work at tea stalls and dhabas along the route to earn their meals – sleeping there at night. Now, with most of those shut down – what happens?

Somehow, the better off and middle classes seem convinced that if we stay at home and practise social distancing, all will be well. That, at least, we will be insulated from the virus. There is no recognition of how the economic distress will work its way back to us. For several, 'social distancing' resonates differently. We invented its most powerful form nearly two millennia ago – caste. Class and caste factors seem embedded in our kind of lockdown response.

It doesn't seem to matter to us as a nation that close to a quarter of a million Indians die of tuberculosis each year. Or that diarrhoea claims up to 100,000 children's lives annually. They aren't us. Panic sets in when the Beautiful People find they have no immunity to some deadly diseases. So it was with SARS. So it was with the plague in Surat in 1994. Both were terrible diseases but killed far fewer people in India than they might have. But they did get a lot of attention. As I wrote at the time on Surat: "Plague germs are notorious for their non-observance of class distinctions.... worse still, they can board aircraft and fly club class to New York."

We need to act right now. It's not just one virus we're fighting – pandemics are also a 'package.' Of which economic distress can be a self-inflicted or self-aggravated part – driving us from calamity to catastrophe. The idea that we're fighting just one virus, and all will be fine once we're on top of it – is dangerous. Sure, we need to fight COVID-19 desperately – this could be the worst pandemic ever since 1918 and the misnamed 'Spanish Flu.'

(India lost between 16-21 million lives to that between 1918-21. In fact, the 1921 Census remains the only one ever to record a net reduction in the rural population).

But focusing on COVID-19 to the exclusion of the larger canvas – that's attempting to mop the floor dry with all the taps open and running. We need an approach which pushes ideas that strengthen public health systems, rights and entitlements. In 1978, some great minds in the field of health drew up the Declaration of Alma Ata – in days when the WHO had not been brought to heel by western government-backed corporate interests. It was that declaration which made famous the phrase 'Health for All by 2000'. Something it believed all people of the world could attain "through a fuller and better use of the world's resources...". And from the '80s, the idea of understanding the social and economic determinants of health was growing. But another idea, too was growing. More rapidly: Neoliberalism.

From the late '80s and the '90s, the idea of health, education, employment – as human rights was trashed worldwide. With the mid-1990s came the globalisation of communicable diseases. But instead of building universal health systems to meet this deadly challenge, many nations further privatised their health sectors. In India, it was always private dominance. We have one of the lowest health expenditures – barely 1.2 per cent (as share of GDP) – in the world. From the 1990s, the public health system, never terribly strong, was further weakened by deliberate policy-driven measures. The present government is inviting private management takeover of even district-level hospitals.

Health expenditures across India today are possibly the fastest growing component of rural family debt. In June 2018, the Public Health Foundation of India, analysing diverse data sets on health, concluded that 55 million people had been pushed into poverty in the single year of 2011-12, because of having to fund their own health issues – it also said 38 million of these had fallen below the poverty line due to spending on medicines alone.

One of the most striking common features among many thousands of households hit by farmers' suicides across India is this: outrageous health expenditures, often funded by borrowing from the sahu-car. We have the largest population that is least equipped to cope with a crisis like COVID-19. And here's the tragedy: there will be COVIDS by other names in coming years. Since the late '90s we have seen SARS and MERS (both also from corona viruses) and other global-spread

diseases. In India in 1994, we had the plague in Surat. All signals of what was to come, of the kind of world we'd built and entered.

As Prof. Dennis Carroll of the Global Virome Project recently put it: "We've penetrated deeper into ecozones we've not occupied before...." Activities like oil and mineral extraction in areas earlier having few human populations, he says, have come at a price. Our incursion into fragile ecosystems have triggered not just changes in climate but potential health disasters as wildlife-human contact increase the potential for the spread of infection, of viruses we know little or nothing about.

So yes, we're going to see more of these.

As for COVID-19, there are two ways this can go. The virus mutates (to our advantage) and dies out in weeks. Or: it mutates to its own advantage, worsening the trend. That happens, all hell breaks loose. What can we do? I make the following suggestions – over and above, or alongside and in concurrence with, some of those already put forward by some of the finest minds amongst India's activists and intellectuals. (There are also ideas that consider measures in a larger global context of debt, privatisation and financial market failure). And accepting as inspirational, some of the measures announced by the Kerala government.

1. The very first thing that needs doing: preparing for emergency distribution of our close to 60 million tons of 'surplus' foodgrain stocks. And reaching out at once to the millions of migrant workers and other poor devastated by this crisis. Declare all presently shut community spaces (schools, colleges, community halls and buildings) to be shelters for stranded migrants and the homeless.
2. The second – equally important – is to get all farmers to grow food crops in the kharif season. If the present trend persists, a terrible food situation looms. They will not be able to sell cash crops they harvest this season. Going in for more cash crops could prove fatal. A vaccine/cure

for the coronavirus seems many months away. Meanwhile food stocks will dwindle.

3. Governments must help, pick up and buy big time, the produce of farmers. Many have been unable to complete the rabi harvest – social distancing and lockdowns being in force. Those who have, can't transport or sell it anywhere. Even for food crop production in the kharif, farmers will need an ecosystem of inputs, support services and marketing assistance.

4. The government must be prepared to nationalise private medical facilities across the country. Advising hospitals to have a 'corona corner' – so to speak – within themselves, simply won't cut it. Spain last week nationalised all its hospitals and healthcare providers recognising that a profit-driven system can't meet this crisis.

5. Sanitation workers – sahai karamcharis – must be immediately regularised as fulltime employees of the governments / municipalities employing them, with Rs. 5,000 a month added to their existing salaries, and with full medical benefits they have always been denied. And supplied protective gear that they've never been given. We spent three decades further devastating millions of already vulnerable sanitation workers, shutting them out of public service, outsourcing their jobs to private entities – who then re-employed the same workers on contract, at lower wages and with no benefits.

6. Declare and rush free rations for three months to the poor.


7. Immediately regularise ASHA, anganwadi and mid-day meal workers – already on the frontlines of the battle – as government employees. The health and lives of India's children are in their hands. They too must be made full employees, provided proper wages, given protective gear.

8. Give MGNREGA wages daily to farmers and labourers till the crisis tides over. Urban daily wagers to get Rs. 6,000 a month in the same period.

We need to get down to these measures right now. The government's 'package' is a curious blend of callousness and cluelessness. It's not just one virus we're fighting – pandemics are also a 'package.' Of which economic distress can be a self-inflicted or self-aggravated part – driving us from calamity to catastrophe. If the virus trend persists for the next two weeks, urging farmers to grow food crops for the kharif season becomes the single most important thing to do. At the same time, can we be detached enough to see COVID-19 as a spectacularly revelatory moment in history? A junction from where we decide which way to go. A moment to renew and pursue debates on Inequality and Health Justice.



Cartoon courtesy: Subhani, Deccan Chronicle



Revealing magnitude of Migrant Worker phenomenon, COVID-19 points to Rural Distress

The COVID-19 crisis, by revealing the magnitude of the migrant worker phenomenon, should open the eyes of the urban dwellers to the grim situation of India's agriculture. This sector of the economy should become a priority again in term of policies.

Christophe Jaffrelot & Hemal Thakker

(Courtesy: Indian Express April 10, 2020)

The COVID-19 crisis is affecting rural India at a time when agriculture is already in a precarious situation. The thousands of migrant workers who have returned to their villages since the lockdown used to send home large remittances. Tariq Thachil's field work shows that a majority of the migrant workers send 25 to 50 per cent of their monthly income to their families — which will now miss this money. In Bihar, these remittances accounted for 35.6 per cent of gross state domestic product in 2011-12, up from 11.6 per cent in 2004-05. How will the villagers of Bihar, or Orissa, for that matter, cope with this new situation?

The question is particularly relevant at a time when Indian agriculture is facing huge challenges. In fact, the migrant worker phenomenon is a symptom of these challenges, as they have moved to the city mostly because of the push factors. According to the 2011 census, 3.5 million migrants who moved within the last one year stated economic reasons for migration. The corresponding numbers for the 2001 and 1991 census, were, respectively, 2.2 and 1.4 million.

For years, rural India has been losing ground vis-a-vis towns and cities. In 2008, the "rural-urban gap" was at 45 per cent in India in terms of average revenue — versus 10 per cent for China and Indonesia. The data from the 75th round of NSSO for 2017-18 suggests that the rural-urban gap widened during 2012-18. The rural monthly per capita expenditure declined from Rs 1,430 in

2011-12 to Rs 1,304 in 2017-18 — an 8.8 per cent decline — while it rose from Rs 2,630 to Rs 3,155 in urban India — a 2.6 per cent increase. This is partly due to the slow growth of agriculture over the last decade. In 2013-2019, the average agricultural GDP growth rate was 3.1 per cent, much lower than the average GDP growth rate — 6.7 per cent. This growth in agriculture was also driven by non-crop sectors, including livestock. The average growth of the crop sector, which accounts for two-thirds of the agricultural sector GDP, was 0.3 per cent, the lowest in two decades.

Tillers of the land have left villages for that reason, and also because of the shrinking of landholdings. More than half of those who live off agriculture are landless peasants. And the others have very small holdings. According to a survey carried out by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, the average landholding size of an household had shrunk to 1.1 ha in 2016. In fact, 37 per cent of farm households owned land parcels of smaller than 0.4 ha, another 30 per cent had holdings which fall between 0.41 and 1.0 ha. Only 13 per cent agricultural households owned landholdings bigger than 2 ha. As a result, the proportion of those owning less than one ha reached 82.8 per cent — whereas a farm household needs to have at least 1 ha of land to make ends meet.

Secondly, irrigation has stagnated, with less than half of Indian farmland irrigated. Thirdly, rural India suffers from what Ashok Gulati calls



**Cartoon
courtesy:
E.P.Unny,
Indian
Express**

the “urban consumer bias”: To spare urban consumers, government has kept food prices very low. One of the techniques it used was to let imports of food products submerge the Indian market. Fourthly, [budget](#) cuts have affected key programmes such as the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana and the Backward Regions Grant Fund as well as irrigation schemes, such as the Integrated Watershed Management Programme and Accelerated Irrigation Benefits. The actual allocation in agriculture has been short of the budgeted allocation since 2014.

Qualitatively, the agricultural sector has suffered because of the rise of monocultures based on the intensive use of chemical pesticides. Nearly 30 per cent of India’s land has been degraded due to deforestation, intensive farming, soil erosion and groundwater depletion, resulting in desertification — the level of water tables fell by 65 per cent in 10 years.

For all these reasons, over half of the farmers are indebted: The average loan amount outstanding for a farm household in India in 2017 was Rs 47,000. More than 3,20,000 farmers committed suicide between 1995 and 2016, according to the National Crime Records Bureau — which has stopped providing this data since. Many others live in great economic distress. In fact, this crisis not only explains the increasingly large number of migrant workers, it also puts food security in jeopardy for the poor. While grain stocks have increased, access to food has not in rural India, especially for those who live below the poverty line. NSS data show that rural poverty rose about 4 percentage points between 2011-12 and 2017-

18 to 30 per cent whereas urban poverty fell 5 percentage points over the same period to 9 per cent. India, which was ranked 93 in 2015 in the [Global Hunger Index](#), slipped to the 102nd rank (out of 117 countries) in 2019 — below all the other South Asian countries.

Thus, the COVID-19 crisis, by revealing the magnitude of the migrant worker phenomenon, should open the eyes of the urban dwellers to the grim situation of India’s agriculture. This sector of the economy should become a priority again in term of policies. Indian agriculture needs more investments (in irrigation, for instance) and more financial support (by relaunching the MGNREGA, among other things). But not only that. Further liberalisation of Indian agriculture would hamper food security as the existing food procurement system is essential in maintaining food reserves and protection of vulnerable farmers from the whims of the global markets with the minimum support price offered for wheat and rice under the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) Act.

In the midst of every crisis lies an opportunity. An agro-ecological transition will regenerate not only the soil which was depleted due to the excessive use of chemical pesticides but also ensure sustainable supply of food in the long run. Since the agro-ecological system of farming is more bio-diverse in nature, it will make the system more resilient overall and provide a safety net for farmers in case of crop damage due to factors such as climate change or droughts. It will also strengthen food security and help the nation fight hunger and malnutrition. Finally, it will help bridge the urban-rural divide as much-needed investment will occur in rural areas after decades of neglect that created the staggering inequalities.

The transition to an agro-ecological system of agriculture has the capacity to become the engine to restart a sustainable economy by increasing soil fertility and reducing groundwater exploitation. Indian agriculture would provide millions with livelihoods, making migration to the city less necessary.

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कोविड-19 और भारत

रामजी तिवारी

चीन के वुहान शहर से शुरू हुआ कोविड-19 वायरस आज दुनिया भर में फैल चुका है। दसियों लाख लोग इससे संक्रमित हैं जिनमें हजारों-हजार की जान भी जा चुकी है। यह वायरस दो तरह की विपदाएं लेकर आया है। एक स्वास्थ्य सम्बन्धी और दूसरी आर्थिक। स्वास्थ्य सम्बन्धी विपदा का आकलन इस बात से किया जा सकता है कि विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन ने इसे वैश्विक महामारी करार दिया है। और चूंकि यह एक संक्रामक बीमारी है, तो इससे भारी संख्या में लोग प्रभावित हो सकते हैं। यदि हम इससे होने वाली मृत्यु की दर को तीन से पांच प्रतिशत के बीच भी रखते हैं, तो भी दुनिया पर पड़ने वाला इसका पराभव रोंगटे खड़ा कर देना वाला है। दूसरी तरफ इस संक्रामक महामारी के कारण दुनिया का पहिया भी थम गया है। आर्थिक विशेषज्ञ यह आशंका जता रहे हैं कि इस संकट के कारण विश्वव्यापी महामंदी भी आ सकती है। आशंका तो इस बात की भी जताई जा रही है कि दुनिया की विकास दर कहीं शून्य न हो जाय। यदि ये आशंकाएं सच निकलीं तो लाखों लोग इस बीमारी से मर सकते हैं और अन्य कई लाख उसके कारण उपजी आर्थिक सुनामी से भी।

विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन इस बीमारी से लड़ने के लिए तमाम दिशा-निर्देश जारी कर रहा है व इनमें से एक सलाह ऐसी है, जिसे वह प्रतिदिन दुहरा रहा है। और वह है एकजुटता की सलाह। ऐसी एकजुटताएं जो देश के भीतर विभिन्न समाजों में हो और देश की सीमाओं से बाहर अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर भी हो। चूंकि यह बीमारी मनुष्य जाति में किसी भी विभाजन को नहीं मानती, इसलिए इससे होने वाले संघर्ष भी सभी विभाजनों से मुक्त होने चाहिए व अर्थात् इससे लड़ने के लिए जो एकता देश के भीतर हो, वही एकता हमें अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर भी चाहिए।

दुनिया भर में इससे मुकाबला करने की जो रणनीति दिखाई देती है वह कुछ इस तरह की है। पहली समझ यह है कि चूंकि यह वायरस अति-संक्रामक है और इसका शिकार कोई भी व्यक्ति हो सकता है, इसलिए इससे पीड़ित व्यक्ति के साथ सहानुभूति रखी जाय। दूसरी बात यह कि चूंकि कोविड-19 का वायरस एक व्यक्ति से दूसरे व्यक्ति में फैलता है, इसलिए जो व्यक्ति इससे पीड़ित होता है, उसे इलाज के दौरान समाज के बाकि हिस्से से दूर रखा जाय, जिससे कि समाज का अन्य हिस्सा उससे प्रभावित न हो। तीसरी बात यह कि चूंकि इस बीमारी के वायरस कुछ समय तक सुप्तावस्था में रहते हैं, तो हमें पता नहीं चल पाता है कि कौन व्यक्ति इससे पाजिटिव है और कौन नहीं। तो इसके लिए समाज में व्यापक स्तर पर परीक्षण किये जाय। हम वायरस के पीछे न चलें, वरन उससे आगे बढ़कर उसके फैलाव के मानचित्र को चिह्नित करें उसकी गति को समझें।

हम सब जानते हैं कि इस वायरस का उद्भव और फैलाव

चीन से आरम्भ हुआ। वहां नवंबर महीने में इसकी आहट मिल गयी थी, लेकिन अफ़सोस की बात यह रही कि चीन ने इसे उस समय गंभीरता से नहीं लिया, जब तक वह इसकी गंभीरता को स्वीकार करता, एक महीने का समय निकल चुका था। और उससे भी अफ़सोसनाक यह हुआ कि चीन की गलती को दुनिया ने भी दुहराया। जनवरी में दुनिया के सामने इसका खाका आ चुका था। लेकिन फरवरी के महीने तक दुनिया इसके प्रति लापरवाह और उदासीन बनी रही। नतीजा यह हुआ कि यह वायरस चीन से निकलकर इटली और स्पेन होते हुए पूरे यूरोप में पहुंच गया। और फिर अमेरिका के साथ पूरी दुनिया भी इसके जद में आ गयी। भारत में इसका पहला मरीज 31 जनवरी को केरल में मिला था। लेकिन सच पूछिए तो हमारे देश में भी इसके प्रति पहली वास्तविक जागरूकता मार्च के शुरूआत में दिखाई दी। जब प्रधानमंत्री ने होली को सार्वजनिक रूप से नहीं मनाने की घोषणा की। उन्होंने पहली बार तभी सामाजिक दूरी वाले सिद्धांत की बात कही। हालांकि प्रधानमंत्री इधर अपनी बात कह रहे थे और उधर समाज और व्यवस्था दोनों की तरफ से उदासीनता और लापरवाही दिखाई जा रही थी।

11 मार्च से 20 मार्च के बीच का समय भारत में मिला जुला गुजरा। इधर विभिन्न राज्य सरकारें इस वायरस को लेकर एडवाजरी जारी करती रहीं और उधर समाज में अधिकतर उदासीनता ही दिखाई देती रही। देश में विभिन्न धार्मिक पूजा स्थल 19 मार्च तक खुले रहे, यहाँ तक कि देश की संसद भी चलती रही और मध्यप्रदेश में सरकार गिराने और बनाने का खेल भी 23 मार्च को जाकर पूरा हुआ। इस बीच 19 मार्च से कुछ राज्य सरकारों ने अपने यहाँ लाकडाउन घोषित करना शुरू किया। दिल्ली की सरकार भी उनमें से एक थीकिया। फिर 22 मार्च को प्रधानमंत्री ने जनता कर्फ्यू का ऐलान किया व और 24 मार्च को देशव्यापी लाकडाउन अस्तित्व में आ गया। यानि जो जहाँ था, वह वहीं रहने के लिए बाध्य हो गया।

इस अचानक हुए लाकडाउन के कारण लाखों लोग जहाँ-तहाँ कैद हो गए। इनमें दिल्ली के हजरत निजामुद्दीन इलाके में स्थित तबलीगी जमात के लोग भी शामिल थे। पता चला कि यहाँ पर मार्च महीने के मध्य तक मरकज का आयोजन हुआ था, जिसमें कई हजार लोगों ने भाग लिया था। इसमें कुछ संख्या विदेशी लोगों की भी थी। दुखद यह रहा कि जमात के मुख्यालय में फंसे कुछ लोग कोरोना से पाजिटिव भी पाए गए। चूंकि भारत में अभी कोरोना पीड़ित लोगों की संख्या बड़ी नहीं थी, इसलिए मरकज से आने वाली खबरों ने सबको चिंता में डाल दिया। देश और मीडिया का पूरा ध्यान जमात की तरफ जाने लगा व इस पूरे घटनाक्रम दो बड़े सवाल सामने आये। पहला सवाल यह था कि जब देश और दुनिया में लेकर चिंता जताई जा रही

We are supposed to follow the advice of World Health Organisation. It's a common struggle of humankind and this has to be fought unitedly. Since this is a global pandemic, no community could be left out. We, in, India, particularly the Media and the Government can never forget this.

थी तो फिर दिल्ली पुलिस ने इस मरकज का आयोजन क्यों होने दिया। सरकार ने इसमें शामिल लोगों की एअरपोर्ट पर स्क्रीनिंग क्यों नहीं की। उन्हें यहाँ आने से क्यों नहीं रोका। और दूसरा यह कि जमात के लोगों ने सरकारी सलाह और दुनिया की स्थिति को देखने के बावजूद मरकज का आयोजन क्यों किया। जबकि उन्हें पता था कि इसमें बड़ी संख्या में विदेशी लोग भी शामिल हो रहे हैं।

जमात का मसला सामने आते ही सरकार का पूरा फोकस उससे सम्बंधित लोगों पर हो गया। यह उचित भी था। क्योंकि किसी को अंदाजा नहीं था कि मरकज में शामिल होकर बाहर निकले लोगों ने कितने और लोगों को संक्रमित किया है। ध्यान रहे कि उस समय भारत में टेस्टिंग की सुविधा भी बहुत सीमित थी, इसलिए उसका उपयोग भी संभावित केस के आधार पर ही होना था। जांच शुरू हुई और जमात से सम्बंधित लोगों के पाजिटिव होने की संख्या लगातार बढ़ने लगी। यहीं से मीडिया ने नैरेटिव बनाना शुरू किया। अब सारा फोकस व्यवस्था से हटकर जमात पर चला गया। यहाँ मीडिया ने तीन बड़े सिद्धांत रच डाले। पहला यह कि भारत में इस बीमारी के फैलाव के लिए तबलीगी जमात ही जिम्मेदार है। दूसरा यह कि इसे जान बूझकर कोरोना-जेहाद के लिए फैलाया जा रहा है। इसके जरिये तबलीग के लोग भारत से बदला लेना चाहते हैं। और तीसरा यह कि इस बीमारी के लिए सिर्फ तबलीगी जमात ही नहीं, वरन पूरा मुस्लिम समाज ही जिम्मेदार है। ये तीनों नैरेटिव मीडिया के जरिये समाज में भी पहुंचे।

मुख्यधारा की मीडिया के साथ सोशल मीडिया ने भी घुणा की कमान संभाली। फर्जी वीडियो और झूठी खबरों के सहारे यह स्थापना की गयी कि मुस्लिम समाज के लोग इस बीमारी से लड़ने में सहयोग नहीं कर रहे हैं। वे डाक्टरों और स्वास्थ्य कर्मियों पर हमला कर रहे हैं। इस बीमारी

को फैलाने के लिए उन पर थूक रहे हैं। अस्पताल में नंगे घूम रहे हैं। अश्लील इशारे कर रहे हैं। मस्जिदों में छिपे हुए हैं। रूप में थूक लगाकर इस बीमारी को फैला रहे हैं। पूरा पब्लिक स्फेयर इन्ही फर्जी कहानियों से भर गया। कुल मिलाकर हफ्ते-दो हफ्ते में पूरे मुस्लिम समुदाय के खिलाफ एक घृणा का वातावरण तैयार कर दिया गया।

सच्चाई यह थी कि जब यह बीमारी दुनिया भर में फैल रही थी, उस समय जनवरी से मार्च के बीच भारत में हवाई मार्ग से लगभग 13 लाख लोगों ने आमद की। चुकि उतनी बड़ी जांच के लिए भारत में सुविधा उपलब्ध नहीं थी, तो हवाई अड्डे पर बुखार चेक करके ही सबको जाने दिया गया। ऐसे में जो केस भारत में पहले दिखाई दिया, उसकी कड़ी को तलाशा जाने लगा। तबलीगी जमात उसी शुरुआती कड़ी में शामिल थी। आज के दिन जब टेस्टिंग का विस्तार हो रहा है तो भारत में कोविड संक्रमित लोगों की संख्या का भी विस्तार होने लगा है। अब वह संख्या तबलीग से इतर जा रही है। जैसे कि आज की तारीख में कुल 17 हजार कोविड पाजिटिव लोगों में से 75 प्रतिशत लोग तबलीगी जमात की कड़ी से सम्बंधित नहीं है। जैसे-जैसे टेस्ट का विस्तार होता जाएगा, ऐसा अनुमान है कि तबलीगी जमात की कड़ी और छोटी दिखाई देने लगेगी।

लेकिन इसका मतलब यह नहीं है कि तबलीगी समुदाय ने सब अच्छा ही किया। उन्होंने सरकार की एडवाजरी की अवहेलना की, अपने-आप को छिपाया अपनी ट्रेवल हिस्ट्री भी छिपाई। कुछ लोगों ने स्वास्थ्य कर्मियों के साथ दुर्व्यवहार भी किया। कुछ ने सहयोग भी नहीं किया। लेकिन ध्यान रखने वाली बात यह थी ऐसी गलतियाँ और ऐसी मूर्खताएँ सिर्फ तबलीगी समाज से ही नहीं हुईं। अनेक और नामी-गिरामी लोगों ने भी अपनी ट्रेवल हिस्ट्री छिपाई अपने-आपको को छिपाया, अपनी बीमारी भी छिपाई घ और हां, तबलीग के अलावा अन्य समूहों की तरफ से भी स्वास्थ्य कर्मियों पर हमले हुए। उनके साथ दुर्व्यवहार हुए। दुर्भाग्यवश यह कहानी दुनिया भर में भी दुहराई गयी। विशेषज्ञों ने कहा कि इसका कारण लोगों में जागरूकता की कमी और अज्ञात भय का वातावरण है। समय के साथ इनमें सुधार आ जाए।

होना तो यह चाहिए कि हम विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन की सलाह के अनुसार चलें। हम दुनिया के प्रसिद्ध दार्शनिक-बुद्धिजीवी युवाल नोवा हगरी की बात को सुने, जो कहते हैं कि यह मानव जाति का साँझा संघर्ष है। इसका मुकबला हम अपनी एकजुटता से ही कर सकते हैं। चुकि यह वैश्विक महामारी है, इसलिए इसमें कोई भी समुदाय बाहर नहीं छूटना चाहिए। यह लड़ाई सबको साथ लेकर लड़ी जानी चाहिए। क्या भारत जैसे महान लोकतंत्र को यह सबक याद नहीं आ रहा है। यह देश तो आखिर सबको साथ लेकर ही बना है। हमारा समाज तो विभिन्नताओं में एकता का समाज है। ऐसे में हम अपनी 20 करोड़ से अधिक की आबादी को खलनायक बनाकर कैसे इस बीमारी से लड़ पायेंगे। हम उम्मीद करते हैं कि मीडिया अपनी जिम्मेदारी को समझेगी। सरकार और समाज अपनी भूमिका को निभाएंगे। क्योंकि आने वाल समय हमारे लिए बहुत कठिन होने जा रहा है। और जब समय कठिन होता है, तो समाज और राष्ट्र की एकता सबसे अधिक महत्वपूर्ण हो जाती है। यह सबक हमें हमेशा याद रखना चाहिए।

(Writer is an activist of Varanasi Division)



Media in the Time of COVID-19

COVID-19 is a serious threat to the nation and therefore many rational measures and “honest conversations” must be expected from the government, which cannot be beyond the critical radar of journalism. What should the role of governments be in such a situation, and what is it that journalism is meant to do? This is the time to introspect and examine the role of capitalism, state, and the media to avoid creating a future that threatens to destabilise democracy

BHUPEN SINGH

(Courtesy: EPW 18/4/2020)

The author is a freelance journalist and researcher



The spread of the COVID-19 has proved deadly, and this is a challenging time for the union as well as state governments as they work to address this health emergency. However, shows that in times of crisis, democratic governments may take a dangerous autocratic turn. In such a situation, journalism has a great role to play in a democracy, as it has been ideally visualised as a platform for objective information and critical-rational discourse. Thus, the health of journalism in a country can be examined in the times of a crisis.

However, corporate control over most media bodies also means that they become an instrument of the ideological apparatus of the state. There are many concerns associated with the COVID-19 crisis: ill-equipped public health systems, policies to combat the pandemic, and the lack of planning and support to the vulnerable sections. These issue demand serious examination, but the mainstream media, barring some courageous exceptions, seems to be forgetting its democratic role. The vilification of migrant labourers and a minority community whilst failing to critique the lack of measures to help these sections deal with the crisis is an important such indicator.

Manipulation of Discourse

Just before the announcement of the nationwide lockdown till 14th April 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reportedly called upon print and electronic media owners and editors of the country and asked them to support government efforts to combat the pandemic and also advised them to present “positive news” related to COVID-19 (Sagar 2020). Plainly put, these were the owners and editors who control most of the Indian media at the national and regional levels who were advised to abide by the official narrative

and present information as provided to them by the government about COVID-19.

Why would media houses follow government diktat rather than investigating the real state of affairs, unless they have associated business interests? Journalism is considered to be an ethical communicative practice in a democracy, but corporate ownership subverts the autonomy of journalism and the freedom of the press. Unfortunately, this conflict of interest has become a common feature of Indian journalism.

However, even though a majority of Indian media is under corporate control, there are many counter-voices both within and outside this grouping. Thus, the Indian mediascape has become a battleground of ideologies. Many of these alternate counter-voices have raised genuine issues of social concern during the pandemic outbreak. The prevalence of international media on the internet and small media organisations in the country has played an important role in disseminating factual and more nuanced information, but unfortunately, these platforms do not have the vast access that big corporate media platforms are privy to. Most of the non-English mainstream media—both print and electronic—was seen to be playing a role that was far from responsible during the outbreak. A small section of the English print media has raised some pertinent questions, but they also have a select readership. The government, however, is not ready to listen to any rational criticism. The centre sought a direction from the Supreme Court on 31 March that “No electronic/print media/web portal or social media shall print/publish or telecast anything without first ascertaining the true factual position from the separate mechanism provided by the central

government" (Livelaw News Network 2020).

The sudden announcement of the lockdown which gave people barely four hours of advance notice created a nationwide panic, and the migrant labourers were the worst affected. In the absence of work and other support in the cities, thousands of labourers and their families desperately wanted to go back to their homes. With no transportation available, many began the arduous journey on foot, and many were subjected to police brutality along the way, and some have died on the road back home. The lockdown, thus, was worse than COVID-19 for the homeless and the poor. While a few in the media made visible their plight, a particular kind of media coverage and projection also led to the middle class blaming migrants for their "irresponsible behaviour" during the pandemic (Abi-Habib and Yasir 2020; Ellis-Petersen and Chaurasia 2020).

It seems most media organisations were compelled to cover the labourers' plight because of its sensational value, but this coverage was inadequate. However, journalism still survives because of a few courageous journalists in mainstream media and alternative media platforms. Two English dailies with their ground-level investigative reporting (one of which is known for its investigative news stories) covered the disaster with more empathy. Many others in their attempts to show the reality faced the wrath of the government (Scroll 2020). Further, even on social media platforms, doctors and nurses were heavily trolled when they voiced grievances about the lack of personal protective equipment (Bengali et al 2020).

Media Shows Its Islamophobic Side

Media's ugliest moment, however, was its coverage of the news surrounding Delhi's Tablighi Jamaat Markaz (meeting). Many participants had



Cartoon courtesy: Satish Acharya, Newssting

left after the markaz, but many were stranded in the mosque due to the lockdown and were later found infected. However, the media outrage that followed was clearly an extension of the already prejudiced and polarised coverage, as the Tablighi Jamaat was blamed for violating lockdown rules and for "corona jihad," "Islamic insurrection," and "corona terrorism." This is clearly an example of fake news propagated by the mainstream media to further the predominant agenda (BBC 2020; News Laundry 2020). Muslims were also attacked in various parts of the country.

News presented on the markaz immediately found space in social networking sites and public opinion was quickly constructed around the premise that Muslims were responsible for the pandemic. Never mind that even though the markaz incident triggered a spread, it is not as if it was planned. The first case of the virus was identified in India in January. The abject lack of planning by the government was not adequately questioned by the mainstream media. Nor was it questioned as to why such a gathering was permitted in the first place.

People of other religious groups also gathered at religious places in large numbers even after the lockdown, but they were not criticised in a similar manner. However, when some journalists did raise questions, they were threatened with legal action (Scroll 2020).

The Need for Greater Accountability

Since most of the people are at home during the lockdown, it is natural to see a growth in media consumption. People are using various media platforms for COVID-19-related information, but what is provided is far from factual and does not further a critical rational discourse. Rather, the media has become a tool of propaganda and sensationalism. Some television news channels see a Chinese conspiracy in the spread of COVID-19. In such a "positive" atmosphere, the news related to labourers' mass exodus and the markaz was mostly presented due to its sensational value. The true situation would not have gained attention in the first place, if not for the ground-level reports by the committed journalists and social media coverage. The Janata curfew announced on 22 March before the lockdown failed as people came out on the streets in the evening, clapping, banging utensils, shouting religious slogans, and blowing conch shells, as if they could defeat COVID-19 with a show of such masculinity. Social distancing was forgotten. Later, people were again asked to switch off residential lights for nine minutes and light a candle or diya in their balconies. Can the virus really be eradicated by chants of "go corona?" Yet, the media became a part of this "festivity." These exercises were lapped up by a majority of the

news media, as it sells the big spectacle—a hyper real experience—and accepts the obeisance of a “supreme authority” along with a large number of citizens. The trivialisation of the crisis and a toxic “positivity” is ruling the media.

COVID-19 is a serious threat to the nation and therefore many rational measures and “honest conversations” must be expected from the government, which cannot be beyond the critical radar of journalism. The government has created a Prime Minister’s Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM-CARES) Fund to combat the pandemic and many business corporations and common people have contributed to this fund. But, many questions have also been raised about the need for this fund, as the Prime Minister Relief Fund had already been working from 1948 onwards for such situations (Hindu 2020; Mody 2020). All these issues demand serious journalistic investigation in public interest.

The pandemic is also threatening an already-deteriorating economy, which also demands a thorough investigation beyond the official narratives. The media, however, has worries related to its own economic situation. Print media, especially, is dealing with a resource crunch, dwindling advertisements, and worries of reduction in circulation and readership. With concerns of job security, inadequate resource support, and abuses faced by the police, many journalists are putting their health at stake to cover the COVID-19 situation. This scenario does little to add to the morale of honest and responsible journalists. Some media houses have already begun cutting wages; an extension in the lockdown can create a new crisis in Indian journalism.

The role of larger media as observed during the pandemic, however, is not an overnight shift. It has been visible for some time now. The media has seen phenomenal growth during the last three decades, and India has become one of the biggest media markets in the world. The alliance between predominant religious fundamentalism and neo-liberalism has also shaped it. Profit, the promotion of majoritarian views, and the exclusion of marginalised voices have become its main features.

What should the role of governments be in such a situation, and what is it that journalism is meant to do? This is the time to introspect and examine the role of capitalism, state, and the media to avoid creating a future that threatens to destabilise democracy. Will this pandemic radically change society and governance models? Will the increased surveillance and policing become the new normal, or will we see increased efforts of building solidarity and cooperation? Our media needs to introspect and pose these questions.



Kerala was first in the country to report a corona virus case. Naturally the fight was without any previous experience in dealing with this new pandemic. Also the state has many factors that pose potential challenge for fighting the outbreak of an epidemic like COVID 19 that originated abroad. Its porous borders, high number of foreign arrival every year as tourists, high number of expatriates who travel to the State frequently, large number of students studying abroad including China and large number of migrant workers are some among them. Despite all these, this small State surprised everybody in its fight against COVID 19. Many national/international media, Agencies and intellectuals have come out with their appreciation to the way Kerala arrested its transmission and minimized the hardships to the people and recommended it as a model for others.

Aggressive testing, isolating the suspected, tracing the contacts and treating the infected were key steps followed. This will be so in any other States/Countries, but what matters is how effectively this was carried out. All those who came from abroad or from other states were kept under quarantine and regularly monitored. Those with symptoms were kept under isolation/hospital quarantine. When a person was tested positive for Corona all his contacts were traced out and kept under quarantine. Even GPS /mobile data and

Door delivery of pension benefits



FIGHT AGAINST COVID 19 WHAT KERALA SHOWS US

Many national/international media agencies and intellectuals have come out with their appreciation to the way Kerala arrested its transmission and minimized the hardships to the people and recommended it as a model for others. But apart from what Kerala did and what it gained, there are many lessons to be learnt from Kerala's fight against COVID 19.....

P.P.KRISHNAN

tower locations were used to map movements of the infected persons and the route maps were made public and all suspected contacts with them were brought under quarantine. State Health Minister once said –"we hope for the best, but plan for the worst". Extensive arrangements were made for quarantine and treatment to meet the situation in case of an unfortunate community transmission. More than 2.5 lakh isolation beds/rooms were identified in various centres. Corona Care Centres were set up at different locations. In every district some hospitals were fully converted to Corona hospitals and some partially as Corona wards/Corona Block.

When the nationwide lockdown entered its second phase Kerala was number one in many indices like highest recovery rate, lowest mortality rate and highest number of COVID 19 tests conducted (per population). But even when state was showing significant improvements, government never tried to rest on its laurels and always guarded against any complacency that may creep in at any time which government cautioned will be very costly. For first time in India Kerala set up COVID Testing Kiosks and developed Plasma Therapy. Enactment of Kerala Epidemic Diseases Act, first of its nature among any Indian States, Break the Chain Campaign, Community Kitchen etc proved Kerala was moving ahead of others. All these novel ideas and initiatives compelled a media person to comment "what Kerala thinks today, India will think tomorrow". With its well planned and well executed strategy, Kerala

could flatten its Corona Curve when many others were struggling to resist. But apart from what Kerala did and what it gained, there are many lessons to be learnt from Kerala's fight against COVID 19.

To win the battle against an epidemic people must be assured food, shelter and right for decent living. Free food grains and a provision kit containing seventeen essential groceries were supplied to all families through Public Distribution System. Community Kitchens were set up throughout the state for ensuring food to those under quarantine and other needy persons. Food at subsidized rates was supplied through Kudumbasree (Women Neighbourhood Groups) hotels. When people were asked to "stay home stay safe" government rehabilitated all those in streets (with no homes to go) to comfortable shelters. Camps were arranged for Guest Workers (Kerala government refers to migrant workers as guest workers). All necessary basic amenities including food were ensured in these shelters/camps. When people lose their jobs and income maintaining their purchasing power was important to ensure a decent living. Nearly 55 Lakh elderly and disadvantaged persons received Rs.8500 each as pension from various Social Welfare Schemes. Almost an equal number of workers were given Rs.1000 to 5000 each from Welfare Funds pertaining to various sectors. Rs.2000 Crore was distributed as interest free consumption loan. A relief package of Rs.20000 Crore was declared, the first state in the country to do so even before the Centre.

.....This owes its credit to the fact that the first elected government of the state after its formation was a communist government (led by EMS) which focused its efforts on public education, public health care, public distribution system, women empowerment and decentralization. Successive Left Front governments in Kerala contributed significantly in these areas to build excellent social infrastructure.



'Break the Chain' by testing



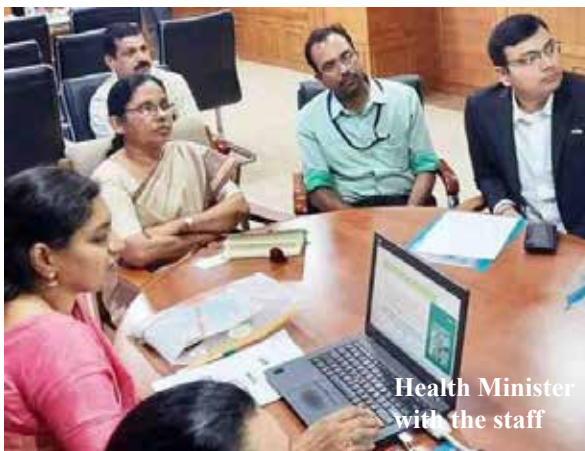
A cured senior couple aged 93 yrs & 88 yrs being sent home

A strong Public Health Care system will make fight against an epidemic easier. Today everybody recognizes the role of Kerala's robust public health care system in fighting Covid 19. The common capitalist perception that the demand for quality health care services cannot be met by public sector and the best treatments are available in private hospitals alone especially those abroad are being challenged now. Mr Brian Lockwood, a British national treated for Covid in a Government Hospital on discharge said that he received world class treatment and a better care than this can't be expected in his country. Interestingly, he was taken to hospital from airport when he was trying to fly unnoticed to his nation under fear that he may not get proper medical attention in Kerala. It was a proud moment for Kerala's public health care system when a couple aged 93 and 88 years were fully cured in a Government hospital. Successive Left front Governments in Kerala have invested heavily on public health care system. The AARDRAM Mission of the present Government gave a more focused attention on this. Already 170 Primary Health Centres are converted to Family Health Centres and 504 more are in the list. Nearly Rs. 4000 Crore is invested for equipment/ infrastructure development. 5775 additional posts are created. As per NHM data the first 12 best PHCs of India are from Kerala and 64 institutions from

the state have got National Quality Assurance Standard (NQAS) Certification. When Medical Colleges and Major District level hospitals are earmarked for exclusive COVID treatment naturally the facilities for regular medical attention for other patients will be disturbed. But the strength of the public health care system could ensure that other patients didn't face any difficulty in meeting their treatment needs. Also within a short time in every district two cancer care centres were set up to mitigate the hardships of cancer patients.

Decentralisation will make government's intervention more effective and successful. Success of Kerala in arresting the spread of the Corona Virus underlines the relevance of decentralisation and role of local self Government bodies. Their role in effective monitoring of quarantine, welfare of those under quarantine and of guest workers, running community kitchens etc are noteworthy. Incidentally Peoples Plan Campaign of Kerala that transformed its local bodies and ensured peoples participation in planning and implementation of developmental activities is entering its 25th year by August this year.

To unite the people and overcome a crisis, a pro people socio political approach on issues is important. Through timely and effective intervention at all levels Kerala reasserted that role of a government is not that of a mere facilitator



Health Minister with the staff



Daily press briefing by CM & Health Minister



as globalisation preaches. Coordinating different departments, Government prepared the entire state machinery and the society to meet the challenge unitedly. The preparations started even before the first case was reported. State Response Team coordinated 18 Different Functional Teams. Covid Control Cells and Call Centres were set up in every district. Activities were monitored regularly. In his daily press briefing Chief Minister gave people a clear picture of the situation in the state and explained further tasks to be taken up. Government succeeded in rallying the people behind it, giving them confidence and taking them into confidence. Instead of social distancing Kerala Government suggested "physical distancing and social unity". Its approach was strict, but humane. A Voluntary group was formed enrolling nearly 2.5 Lakh youth to carry out various activities like supplying food from community kitchens, supplying medicines and other essentials to those in need and help patients in hospitals etc. Government even ensured creative utilization of the time people spent at home during lockdown by promoting vegetable cultivation in home-yards, cleaning of premises, reading of books (rural libraries distributed books at home), making available many online study materials for students etc. Technology was effectively utilized to plan the activities, to create awareness

among public, campaign against unscientific propaganda, online counseling, consulting with doctors etc. When Chief Minister advised people to feed the stray dogs and monkeys in temples and other birds and animals who lost their usual foods when lockdown was implemented and everybody was confined to their homes, it reflected an ideology that believes man cannot survive without conserving the nature; it reflected an ideology that promises care to every living being, When the whole family members were together at home, elders were reminded of the need to give children a space in discussions and men were asked to support women in domestic works. Though these may sound silly, these were reflecting the understanding about a healthy and democratic family structure. The fact that despite its resource crisis the Government addressed the economic and welfare consequences of the pandemic proves its commitment to the workers and common man.

Kerala reminds us the need for a policy that places man above profits. The success of Kerala in its fight against COVID 19 was determined mainly by the preparedness of the state to meet the challenge. Among various factors that made this possible, the most important was the presence of a robust public health care system. This owes its credit to the fact that the first elected government of the state after its formation was a communist government (led by EMS) which focused its efforts on public education, public health care, public distribution system, women empowerment and decentralization (apart from land reforms). Successive Left Front governments in Kerala contributed significantly in these areas to build excellent social infrastructure. This was with a Political understanding that welfare of the people is the responsibility of the state which is against the present day liberalization policies. COVID 19 reminds us the need to strengthen such policies that consider healthcare system as a public good for people's welfare instead of a private good for profit of the producer and that places man above profits. (The writer is President, SZIEF)

Fight against Corona: States & Centre
Cartoon by P.Mahamud, Varthabarathi





The Stranglehold of Finance versus People in the Era of Pandemic

Prof. Prabhat Patnaik

The current pandemic has brought to the fore, and with exceptional clarity, the fundamental contradiction underlying contemporary globalisation, namely, the contradiction between the interests of finance and those of the people. Indeed, this contradiction, which characterises the era of globalisation as a whole, has now come to a head.

It is becoming clearly visible in country after country. Take the case of India. Millions have been suddenly rendered jobless, and lakhs of migrant workers trekking home from far-away places, where they had been employed but no longer are, find themselves quarantined with little or no money. The paramount need of the hour is for the government to provide succour to these working people; and the government can do so immediately by enlarging the fiscal deficit.

But it refrains from doing so because a large fiscal deficit is not to the liking of globally mobile finance capital. The finance minister comes up, therefore, with a package of measures that is paltry beyond belief, where the total expenditure promised as help to the distressed households, ignoring re-packaged measures, comes to a mere Rs 92,000 crore (consisting of Rs 34,000 crore of cash transfers, Rs 45,000 crore of transfers through the public distribution system, and Rs 13,000 crore of transfers in the form of gas cylinders). This comes to about 0.5% of the country's GDP (gross domestic product), which is a trivial sum in the context of what is generally considered the worst tragedy to hit the country after independence!

But consider the state of the economy. The government is sitting on a whopping 58 million tonnes of food grain stocks (77 million tonnes if we include grains available but not yet ready for immediate distribution); the rabi crop promises to be good; industry has for long been demand-constrained with

lots of unutilised capacity (in fact, the country was sliding into an industrial recession before being hit by the pandemic); and foreign exchange reserves are at a record half a trillion dollars. A larger fiscal deficit under these circumstances cannot possibly have any harmful effects for the economy; but people are suffering because finance capital would not like it.

The official fear is that, if the fiscal deficit increases further, then the credit-rating agencies would downgrade India's status, which would undermine the "confidence of the investors" and trigger a capital flight. This would cause a further fall in the value of the rupee which may become cumulative.

In all this, however, a simple point is lost: if this denouement actually comes about, then there should be no hesitation in putting restrictions on capital outflows. Even a Hindutva government should not demur at putting such restrictions, if necessary, at a time like this.

But such is the stranglehold of finance capital that the very thought of capital controls, even in a pandemic, does not enter the government's head. Hence any possibility of capital controls is simply ruled out from the very outset, so that even before any dire consequences of enlarging the fiscal deficit have actually materialised, the sheer thought of this happening frightens the government into sacrificing the interests of the people to satisfy the whims of finance.

The Union government's pusillanimity vis-à-vis global finance is also tying the hands of state governments. They have to bear a sizeable burden of the expenditure necessitated by the pandemic; and given the enormous centralisation of resources that has occurred of late, where they cannot even alter commodity taxation rates without the permission of the GST Council at which the Centre is represented and has a dominant voice, they

There is a stark urgency about reaching help to the people, but the hurdle against doing so is the one imposed by the dictates of global finance capital. The government can provide succour to the working people immediately by enlarging the fiscal deficit. But it refrains from doing so because a large fiscal deficit is not to the liking of globally mobile finance capital. This pusillanimity of the Union government vis-à-vis global finance is also tying the hands of state governments. They have to bear a sizeable burden of the expenditure necessitated by the pandemic. The intensification of this conflict in the days to come will sound the death-knell of financial globalisation. (Courtesy: Newslclick, Apr 11, 2020)

basically have to depend upon transfers from the centre.

Even their borrowing limits are controlled by the Centre. Hence, if the Centre is strapped for funds, then so are the states; if the Centre is hamstrung by the dictates of finance, then so are the states. The Centre's pusillanimity, in other words, restricts public expenditure down the line, for ameliorating the people's distress during the pandemic.

Exactly the same conflict, between the people's interest and that of finance, is clearly visible in Europe too. Many countries in southern Europe, notably Spain and Italy, have been hit very hard by the pandemic. Raising resources for public expenditure to meet the crisis at the level of each country would be extremely expensive as the yields on individual country bonds would be high; so a proposal has been made to float Eurobonds which would be the liability of a pan-European body and therefore entail lower yields. It is as if the whole of Europe would be borrowing on behalf of Italy, Spain and other needy countries instead of these countries themselves doing so.

This suggestion, made in particular by Italy, has however been opposed by Germany and the Netherlands, because German finance capital which dominates the Eurozone, is opposed to a socialisation of the risks of borrowing by individual countries; the argument is that if at all a country needs to enlarge its fiscal deficit, then it must be willing to pay the price for it. Angela Merkel, as the head of the German government, is articulating the position of German finance capital, exactly as she had done during the Greek crisis when Greece's request to re-schedule debt had been stoutly opposed by German finance capital.

There have been international appeals by economists and intellectuals generally, to Merkel to relent on this. Even the example of a century ago, when the harsh terms for Germany in the Treaty of Versailles after the First World War, had increased the depth of the recession in that country, giving rise to the growth of Nazism, has been hinted at in the appeal. (Lenin, it may be recalled, had highlighted these harsh terms in his speech to the Second Congress of the Communist International as evidence of the maturing of the conditions for a

world revolution). But finance capital has remained unmoved by such appeals.

A large number of Third World countries, which have to meet their debt repayment obligations in the midst of the pandemic, have approached the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for loans and also for arranging a rescheduling of their debt. The IMF's own resources being meagre, it is in no position to provide sufficient loans to accommodate the interests of both financial creditors and the pandemic-hit people. And the debt-rescheduling that the IMF can arrange is unlikely to be enough to leave adequate resources for succour to the working poor in these countries.

Thus all over the world the conflict between finance capital and the interests of the pandemic-hit people is becoming acute and moving centre-stage. This conflict had always been camouflaged in verbiage about "high growth rates" (supposedly of benefit to all), and "wealth creation" (supposedly for the "nation" as a whole, of which all its citizens were legatees). The idea sought to be presented was that the interests of finance coincided with the interests of the country and its people, and that serving the former ipso facto served the latter.

This idea was wearing thin anyway because of the world economic crisis. It was clear that no amount of interest rate reduction was going to get the world economy out of the crisis; what was needed was a fiscal stimulus. Given the objections of finance capital to any such fiscal stimulus (for which fiscal deficits would have to be expanded), no single State was in a position to engage upon such a fiscal stimulus while remaining within the framework of financial globalisation. For if it did so, then there would be an outflow of finance from its shores creating severe problems for it.

But now the vacuity of this idea of coincidence between the people's interest and that of finance stands fully revealed by the pandemic; it can no longer be camouflaged by verbiage. There is a stark urgency about reaching help to the people, but the hurdle against doing so is the one imposed by the dictates of finance. The intensification of this conflict in the days to come will sound the death-knell of financial globalisation.

Cuba to the Rescue

Cuba, which dispatched expert medical teams to over 59 COVID-19 affected countries, has come in for praise from the world over for its timely act of international solidarity.

JOHN CHERIAN

(Courtesy: Frontline April 24, 2020)



DESPITE the severe constraints it faces as a result of the United States-imposed economic blockade, Cuba has not shied away from extending solidarity with the world in the unprecedented challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

By end March, Cuba had dispatched medical teams to over 59 affected countries. A team of 53 Cuban specialists trained in epidemiology reached the Lombardy region, the epicentre of the epidemic in Italy, at the height of the pandemic to provide invaluable support to Italy's beleaguered medical infrastructure. A team of 39 Cuban medical professionals were also dispatched to the tiny principality of Andorra, wedged between France and Spain, whose doctors were all down with suspected COVID-19.

The Cuban medical teams dispatched to Italy and other countries in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic have hands-on experience in dealing with life-threatening diseases such as Ebola that ravaged parts of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Henry Reeve Brigade

Before answering the SOS from Italy, Cuban doctors and nurses had been serving in neighbouring countries such as Venezuela, Nicaragua, Surinam, Belize, Jamaica and Grenada. They are all part of the illustrious "Henry Reeve Brigade" which has extensive expertise in responding to natural calamities and global pandemics. When earthquakes and epidemics struck in Pakistan, Indonesia, Guatemala and Haiti, the Henry Reeve Brigade stepped up to help.

The Brigade was set up in 2005 by Cuban health professionals trained in disaster medicine and infectious disease containment. The proposal was first mooted by then President Fidel Castro following the havoc wreaked by Hurricane Katrina in the United States in 2005. The Cuban government offered to dispatch humanitarian assistance and medical aid to the U.S. government but the offer was spurned by the George W. Bush administration. Thereafter, the Cuban government went ahead and set up the Henry Reeve Brigade that year. Henry Reeve, a young American who joined the

Cubans in their struggle against Spanish colonial rule in the 19th century, is considered one of the country's national heroes.

"For more than 60 years after the revolution, Cuba and our people have defended solidarity as a principle" tweeted Bruno Rodriguez, Cuba's Foreign Minister while seeing off 144 medical workers on their way to Jamaica. He added: "We'll face the COVID[-19] together."

Cuba has already undertaken measures to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the ravages caused to the economy by the sixty-year-old U.S. blockade, the Cuban health care system is in finer fettle than many other affluent countries including the U. S. Health care is universal and free in Cuba, unlike in the U.S., the world's richest country.

Cuba's socialist regime has been able to sustain a medical system that guarantees free and comprehensive health care. There are at least eight doctors for every 1,000 citizens—the highest ratio in the world. No country, including the U.S., can boast of such numbers. India has one doctor for every 10,000 citizens. The WHO recommends that a country should have at least one doctor for every 1,000.

Cuba has also made giant strides in the biotechnology sector. Because of the U.S. blockade, the Cuban health care system has become more or less self-sufficient.

The anti-viral drug, Interferon Alfa-2b, manufactured in Cuba, has been successfully used to combat COVID-19 in China and other countries. As the pandemic spreads, this particular drug will help save thousands of lives. Interferon is produced by Cuba's Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB), whose research and products have received international acclaim.

According to medical experts, Interferon, which was first produced in 1980, is used as a preventive measure through nebulisation during the early stages of the COVID-19 infection. It does not claim to "prevent" infections. The medicine, currently produced in China in a joint venture, was

used to treat patients in China when the pandemic spread in Wuhan.

Interferon has been available in the Chinese market for the last decade and is used for treating conditions such as Hepatitis B and C. It is used in many other countries to treat illnesses such as HIV-AIDS and shingles. The drug has since been administered to more than 1,00,000 patients in China.

Interferon is now being used in South Korea, Germany and Italy to treat patients with COVID-19. It is in great demand in several other countries as well. The Kerala government has requested the Central government to allow the import of Interferon to treat those affected by the virus.

Interferon is not the only drug used for treating patients affected by COVID-19 though it was one of the most widely used in China. Luis Herrera, the man credited for the formulation of Interferon, said: "Interferon continues to be a drug that is used to combat viral infection and it can be effective—as is happening in China".

Unlike most countries, Cuba began the groundwork to meet the COVID-19 challenge as soon as the epidemic was first reported in Wuhan in January. Despite its economy being dependent on tourism, the government took the difficult decision of disallowing foreign visitors as soon as the first cases appeared on the island. One of the first cases of COVID-19 was an Italian tourist. The government has disallowed Cubans from travelling abroad and placed restrictions on inter-island transport. Prime Minister Manuel Marrero said: "We have decided to regulate the departure of all our compatriots from the national territory for a simple reason: to look after their health, that of their relatives, their neighbours and colleagues".

Thousands of hospital beds have been reserved all over the island in both civilian and military hospitals for those likely to be affected by COVID-19. Factories which otherwise made school uniforms are now producing face masks. The Cuban government has left little to chance. In any event, the 11 million Cubans who inhabit the island do not have to worry about housing and the country's social security system guarantees the basic necessities. Cuba's President Miguel Diaz-Canel said: "We have a public health system for everyone, an established scientific community, an effective civil defence system, and a government that puts Cubans at the centre of its attention".

At the time of writing this article, Cuba had confirmed more than 130 cases of COVID-19 infection and three deaths. In mid March, the Cuban government allowed a cruise ship from the United Kingdom, with five confirmed cases of COVID-19 aboard, to dock. The ship, which carried 682 tourists and 381 crew members, had been denied permission to dock by neighbouring

countries, including the U.S.. The U.K. government requested Cuba to allow the virus-hit ship to berth so that the passengers could disembark and fly back home. The Cuban government not only promptly allowed the virus-hit ship in, but also arranged for the admission and treatment of those who had tested positive for the virus in its hospitals.

International acclaim

"Let's reinforce health care, solidarity and international cooperation," Rodriguez said. Cuba has justifiably come in for praise from the world community for its act of international solidarity. Delivering his final speech in British parliament as the leader of the opposition, the Labour party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, described the internationalism of the Cuban doctors who travelled to Italy to help in the fight against the raging COVID-19 pandemic as "inspirational" ..

The former President of Brazil, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, expressed his admiration for what Cuba is doing at a time when humanity seems to be at a crossroads. "It is at these times of crisis that we know the truly great, and it is in these hours that the Cuban people become a giant before the world", Lula said, adding that it was also a "proud and sovereign response" to those who have imposed an economic blockade on the country. Lula said that Brazil, which has the biggest surge of COVID-19 cases in central America, sorely misses the presence of Cuban doctors and health professionals.

When Lula became President, he had invited Cuban doctors to participate in his landmark "More Doctors Program" that had helped save countless lives in the more deprived and remotest parts of Brazil. More than 10,000 Cuban doctors were deployed in the country. The Cuban doctors left Brazil in early 2019 after the newly elected far-right President, Jair Bolsonaro, made disparaging comments about the professionalism and motivations of the Cuban medical contingent deployed in far-flung corners of Brazil. He had said that the Cuban doctors were in Brazil for fomenting a left-wing revolution.

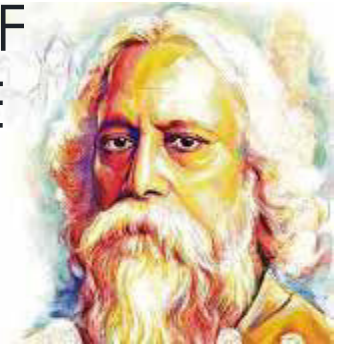
Now with the pandemic spreading, Brazil is in the throes of a grave health crisis. There is a tangible fear among Brazilians that the health care system could collapse under the weight of the pandemic infections. Bolsonaro is now signalling that he wants the Cuban doctors to come back. On March 15, Brazil's Health Secretary, Joao Gabbardo, requested the Cuban government to redeploy their doctors in Brazil. A statement put out by the Workers Party led by Lula read: "President Bolsonaro owes apologies to the Brazilian population and to all the Cuban doctors who were practically expelled from Brazil facing attacks, lies and fake news."

FREEDOM & EMANCIPATION of MANKIND

CONTRIBUTIONS OF MARX & TAGORE



Marx with his critical assessment of the society and Tagore with his profound inclination to divinization of man and humanization of God



tried to find out the real meaning of freedom with all its fragrances. Marx was a political visionary, but there was a poet in him ...and Tagore, we find him as a poet, as a philosopher

Rabindranath Samaddar Chowdhury

It is a strange coincidence of history that two great thinkers of mankind, Marx and Tagore, both were born in the month of May, the month which has a special significance to working class movements as the world observes the international labour day on the very first day of that month. Marx was born on May 5, 1818 and Tagore on May 7, 1861. Marx through dialectical and historical materialism, constituted a very effective methodology to study the development of human society to look at history and its intrinsic contradictions. He gave mankind an aspiration for a new society free from exploitation, alienation and fragmentation. And Tagore was a poet, a philosopher too, who all along his life searched to find out the ways to overcome the problem of human dissatisfaction and the ways to realize the innate beauty of life.

The Marxist philosophy and the historical and scientific analysis of the present and all pre existing societies, according to this doctrine, without any doubt points towards the attainment of a society which will be free from the menace of private property. The real appropriation of human essence by and for man is possible only if man is able to remove the shackles of his desire to hold anything of this world as his own, depriving others to get it. That kind of the world order with fully developed humanism is communism. In its course of action the world system is going to be elevated to establish communism with all the petals of our society smiling with the colours of humanity. That definitely will be the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature, and between man and man. It will be the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between freedom and necessity and above all, between the individual and the species. This resolution amounts to the

overcoming of alienation. This alienation is the result of the feeling of lack of freedom which the present dispensation, characterized by capitalist mode of production and distribution, produces as man becomes detached from fruits of his labour. Thus Marxist philosophy established the idea of positive freedom. The realisation of this freedom by eliminating private property and thereby discarding private profit which are the reasons of human self estrangement will enable man to return to himself as the social being. This return will be accomplished consciously by embracing the entire wealth of all previous developments. This wealth is the fruit of the collective effort of human labour. Positive freedom is the right and capacity of people to determine their own actions in a community which is able to provide for the full development of human potentiality. This freedom may be enjoyed by individuals but only in and through the community. The overwhelmingly dominant tendency in the history of bourgeois society has been to open up negative freedom by removing feudal and other reactionary constraints on freedom of action. Free trade and wage labour are the traits of negative freedom which has its roots in the history of bourgeoisie.

Rabindranath, the scholar versed with nearly all the aspects of human knowledge, searched truth and beauty of the mind we possess. He strived to perceive the grace of heartfelt spirituality as a process to merge with the divine. To him the aim of religion is to awaken the element of divinity that lies latent in man. To him true religion is the inner development of the individual that makes a man to rise above his society, country and sect. It is the realization of one's own nature through the attainment of an ideal society. Tagore never believed in any religious institution and practice.

He believed that organised religions act as barriers to communal harmony. It was where Tagore and Marx converged so far as their ideas about human nature was concerned.

Tagore's idea about religion was an extension of his idea about freedom and again his idea of freedom embraced the essence of true religion. In the drama *Raktakarabi*, (Red Oleander) Rabindranath depicted how the very essence of life is denied at the cost of profit. Human greed makes life a mere machine and a necessary component for production. In that drama, Tagore sketched the shapes of human protests against such exploitation of life. The inhuman adherence of our Indian society to caste system and the prejudice and social discrimination on that ground was criticized by the poet in unhesitating words. In his poem 'Durbhaga Desh' he wrote: 'Oh my wretched country! You will be humiliated in the same way you humiliated others for so long'. In the poem 'Ora kaj kare', (They toil) written in 1941, a few months before his death, the poet told that man's real excellence was produced by the silent hard work of the common people, by the toil of its working class. Undoubtedly it was his way of expressing the idea of surplus value of labour and its unjustified appropriation by the ruling class. It was also his respect to labour. He wrote: 'Hey mor chitto, punya tirtho jago re dhire. Ei Bharater mahamanaber sagartire'. ('O my spirit, in sacred pilgrimage, Awake! Arise! In steady calm... Around this shore of India's great men'). Here he depicted his idea of India, he wrote about its true history, about its shared culture. People belonging to different races and people of different religions all came to this country and settled here. This fantastic mixture produced the tune of harmony, the essence of which is secularism envisaged in our constitution. In 1930, Tagore visited Russia. He described that visit as a pilgrimage. Tagore shared his experiences of that trip in articles that comprised the collection 'Letters from Russia'. There he was impressed by the development efforts and the commitment to eradicate poverty and economic inequality.

Tagore loved his country as a patriot, not as a nationalist. He distinguished his idea of patriotism from the tyranny of nationalism. To him nationalism was a narrow and parochial idea of belongingness. He always tried to champion the idea of internationalism. Here again we find Tagore to be very close to Marx who talked about working class and labour at an international level. When Marx asked working men of all countries to unite, he advised them to meet the challenge unitedly, internationally. In 'Crisis of civilisation', Rabindranath expressed his hatred against imperialist greed. All through his life and in his narration of life, Tagore told us about extinction of the self and it was his urge to

extend the self. He wanted to be selfless in the ever growing sphere of humanity. Here too Marx and Tagore are the sound and its echo to each other. In contrasting, not in contradictory ways both Marx and Tagore, two great minds searched the routes leading to one of the final goals of humanity and that is emancipation of mankind from the chains of slavery. This slavery takes its birth in the dark province of human greed.

Marx with his critical assessment of the society and Tagore with his profound inclination to divinization of man and humanization of God tried to find out the real meaning of freedom with all its fragrances. Marx was a political visionary, but there was a poet in him as is evident from all his works, his writings, which were intrinsically philosophical, embracing humanity. And it was the poetry, the verse the world tried to write. When we look at Tagore, we find him as a poet, as a philosopher who tried to bridge the gap between the earth and the heaven, tried to convert the world into a paradise where truth and beauty would be the two sides of the same coin, humanity. But at the same time we find a political man in him who deplored all the vagaries of narrow politics to make the world free from the venomous tentacles of such confinement.

Tagore and Marx differed in their approach towards religion and private property. Marx discovered class struggle which is the real cause behind social development. Tagore provided us with the idea of self struggle which according to him is an emancipatory way for mankind to meet the divine. Also being a poet as he was, Tagore did not preach materialism. He was up to a certain extent an idealist as he did not rule out the primacy of consciousness over matter.

Be that as it may, we can imbibe the moral values they both wanted to be flourished for man to make his dwelling place a beautiful one. Both of them wanted man to have freedom. What kind of freedom that should be? The following lines narrate it beautifully. 'Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; Where knowledge is free; Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls; Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.' Yes, those lines were written by Tagore, but every breath of Karl Marx sang the same song. Yes, mankind needs to be led forward into that heaven of freedom. The world has to stop sleeping under the shroud of injustice and darkness.

As the working class around the world celebrate the glorious traditions of May Day, we pay our respect to two outstanding humanists Marx and Tagore.

(Writer is an activist of
Kolkata Suburban Division)

25th Silver Jubilee Conference of Gorakhpur Division Insurance Employees' Union

The 25th Silver Jubilee Conference of GDIEU was held on 14-15 March 2020 at Gorakhpur. The conference started with flag hoisting by Divisional President Com. Tahir Ali in the presence of the leadership and a large number of employees. After flag hoisting floral tributes were paid to Martyrs column.

As some restrictions were there in view of spread of Corona, a small rally took place from Divisional office to the Venue of the Conference Com. R.Govindrajan Nagar amidst thunderous slogans of unity of working class, Unity of people and for protection of LIC and Public Sector.

Com. K. Venugopal inaugurated the conference. He expressed happiness over the growth of organisation in Gorakhpur Division. He said that a very challenging time is ahead of the working class and the people of the country in view of the economic policies being pursued by present Government. He said that LIC is under attack and this time attack is more serious as this Govt is using its parliamentary majority to impose the retrograde policies. The IPO of LIC is nothing but a step towards privatisation of this great institution. He asserted that AIEA is determined to protect LIC while advancing and protecting the interests of employees.

Com. Rajiv Nigam, General Secretary, NCZIEF complimented the divisional unit for its efforts to enrol all the new recruits and expressed happiness over their large presence in the meeting. He informed the audience about the tasks of defending LIC, securing wage revision



and protecting the constitutional rights and demanded the participation in wider struggles.

Com. P.K.Shrama, Joint Secretary, AIIPA, Com. Rakesh Kanojia, Treasurer, NCZIEF, Com. Y.P Rai, former Gen.Secy. GDIEU, Com. O.P.Singh, Former President, GDIEU, Com. Javed, District Secretary CPIM, Com. Rakesh Srivastva, state vice president UPMSRA, Com. J.N.Shah of Railway Drivers Association also addressed the open session. Sri Diwakar Mohan Mittal, SDM of LIC Gorakhpur division also greeted the Conference.

More than 400 Delegates/Observers/ invitees including more than 100 newly recruited assistants attended the open session, in which nearly 55 were women comrades, 40 of whom were newly recruited.

At the end of the Open Session Com. K. Venugopal was felicitated with a memento amid thunderous applauds and shouting slogans.

The delegate session started with placing of report by Com. Rupesh Pandey and his Secretariat members. The report detailed all the issues relating to economy, politics and issues related to industry and working class.



The debate was initiated by Com. Shesh Nath Rai, Jt. Secretary, GDIEU. A total of 32 comrades took part in a day long debate. More importantly 08 of them were newly recruited assistants. They appreciated the role of organization during the recruitment process. There was total unanimity on the formulations of the Report. Com. Rajiv Nigam also intervened in the debate on certain points related to wage revision, employees benefits and politics of working class and importance of the ideological development if the organization.

Com. Rupesh Pandey, Gen. Secretary, GDIEU

summed up the debate and the Report was unanimously adopted. The audited statements of accounts were also adopted unanimously

The delegate session was attended 136 Delegates and Observers.

The conference unanimously elected Com. Tahir Ali as President, Com. Rupesh Pandey as General Secretary and Com. Mahendra Srivastava as Treasurer for the ensuing term.

The conference concluded with the national anthem.

90th Martyrs Day of Shaheed Azam Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev & Rajguru Observed

The Kanpur Division IEA observed on 23rd March 2020, the 90th anniversary of the martyrdom of Shaheed Azam Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru by paying glowing tributes. This program was held at the NCZIEF headquarters at Kanpur.

For the last 10 years, the KDIEA has been observing this program. This year too, it was observed despite the restrictions placed due Covid 19. The offices of LIC on this had begun the roster system of only 50% of employees to attend the office with the remaining 50% working from home. But these difficulties did not deter the KDIEA in organising the program to pay respect and remember the great revolutionaries who made the supreme sacrifice of laying down their lives to free India from the British slavery. The employees and members present in the DO/ZO building paid floral tributes and raised thunderous slogans amar shaheedon ko Lal Salam, Inquilab Jindabad etc. reverberating the air.

Com. Rajiv Nigam, General Secretary, NCZIEF in a very brief address to the employees said that in the present times, there should be determined struggle to fight divisive forces, fascism and imperialism and uphold the values for which the martyrs lived and made the supreme sacrifice. It is unfortunate that Bhagat Singh and his comrades are being appropriated by the forces who are opposed to their philosophy and ideology. Shaheed Bhagat Singh and his comrades stood for unity of the people and wanted India to take the path of socialism which alone can emancipate the vast majority of the unfortunate and deprived sections of the society. Bhagat Singh was vehemently against imperialism, the imperialism in whose good books the present rulers



of the country are vying to be even at the cost of compromising the national sovereignty.

Com. Amit Mishra, President, KDIEA, Com. Arun Tewari, General Secretary, KDIEA, Com. Rakesh Kanojia, Treasurer, NCZIEF, Com. Manoj Kumar Working President, KDIEA, Com. Indra Gupta, Office Secretary, KDIEA and many officers and Employees attended and paid tributes.

A small exhibition with banners of some very important quotes of Shaheed Azam Bhagat Singh was also displayed in the gallery of Zonal Office.

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX

Month	Base 2001	Base 1960
June 2019	316	7212.98
July	319	7281.46
August	320	7304.29
September	322	7349.94
October	325	7418.42
November	328	7486.90
December	330	7532.55
January 2020	330	7532.55
February	328	7486.90

Base1960=Base2001x22.8259

Insurance News in brief

■ A.M. KHAN, DHARWAD

General Insurance Council has sought relaxations from IRDA in certain regulatory requirements, particularly those related to solvency ratio. The impact of Covid-19 outbreak has been very severe on the operations of general insurers. The Council states there have been huge mark-to-market losses in equity investments during the month of March 2020. Due to intense competition, frequency of catastrophes and higher claims, the non-life insurers have been reporting underwriting losses along with high combined ratio for many years now. They rely heavily on their investment income to sail them through. But the IRDA has turned down this request for a blanket relaxation of solvency margins. However it will be considering specific cases on merit.

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Rating agency ICRA notes that the impact of Covid-19 on non-life insurance firms with a large share of health in their portfolio would experience substantially rise in hospitalisation expenses, which in turn will increase the number of claims with huge claim amount. It also calculates that if claims ratio for health segment increases by 30 to 40 percentage points there will be net loss ratio of 130 to 140 percentage points taking the total increase in claims to Rs.6000 – 8000 crore higher compared to as on March 2019.

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The Life Insurance Council has instructed that all public and private life insurance companies should settle all claims if a death occurs due to Covid-19 saying that Force Majeure does not apply in these cases. LIC has already started settling such claims.

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IRDA, in line of RBI's instructions, has asked the insurers to grant a moratorium of three months towards payment of instalments of term loans sanctioned by them falling due between March 1, 2020 and March 31, 2020.

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New India Assurance, the country's largest public sector non-life insurer has been selected by Government of India to provide insurance coverage to more than 2 million health care professionals taking care of the patients diagnosed with the deadly Covid-19.

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IRDA has granted relaxation to merged public sector banks by allowing them to act as corporate agents of more than three entities in Life, general and health insurance companies for a period of

twelve months from the date of merger i.e. April 1, 2020. It has clarified that while the exemption allows transfer of existing insurance arrangements of acquired banks to the acquiring banks it should not be construed as permission of the IRDA to enter into new arrangement with other insurers.

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Global insurers are increasingly worried about shareholders, employees or customers bringing coronavirus-related claims against company executives and are considering excluding the virus from D & O insurance policies. D&O insurance – Director and Officers insurance policies cover the Companies who face legal action against their directors, officers and executives, including defense costs and penalties by the courts. Two cases have been filed in the United States in recent weeks accusing companies of making misleading statements about the coronavirus or their coronavirus plans in order to sell products and boost their share price, while cruise operators, for example, are bracing for claims from passengers stuck on ships hit by the virus.

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Credit insurers, which are often the frontline for absorbing loan losses, are lowering credit limits and are heading towards "withdrawal of coverage for places like Italy and Spain," where the death-dance of Covid-19 is the only thing that is visible. Without insurance, companies can be reluctant to buy or sell goods or services to others, with a rise in insolvencies expected among European firms forced to halt operations due to lockdowns aimed at slowing the coronavirus pandemic's spread. And rightly there comes a guarantee from European Union states to Credit insurers in a bid to keep coronavirus-hit companies afloat. The \$11 billion trade credit insurance sector has a bigger exposure in Europe than in Asia, where the coronavirus pandemic began and where brokers say insurers have withdrawn cover.

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Citing the experience of countries like Spain and Italy that the elderly, aged 60 and above, are at much greater risk than the young, the insurance companies are planning to increase the health insurance premium by anything from 30 per cent to 50 per cent for senior citizens. "Senior citizens have a less robust immune system and many already will have health conditions like heart or lung disease, diabetes etc which affects their ability to fight infectious diseases. And also the cost of hospitalisation and treatment for this disease and accompanying complications can be quite high hence it becomes imperative for a high in health insurance premium", they say.

Economic Tid Bits

■ J.SURESH, MYSORE

- ▶ According to ILO report, the Covid-19 crisis is expected to wipe out 195 million full time jobs. ILO also said that there is high risk that the end-of-the year figure will be significantly higher than the initial projection of 25 million. Currently 81% of the global workforce of 3.3 billion is affected by the full or partial workplace closures. According to ILO, 1.25 billion workers are employed in sectors of the economy identified as being at high risk of "drastic and devastating" increases in job losses, wage cuts and reduction in working hours.
- ▶ According to United Nations, Africa could fall into recession, with growth estimates revised for 2020 down to 1.8% from earlier 3.2%. The World Bank reports an equally grim situation, estimating \$ 37 billion to \$ 79 billion in losses due to the pandemic. Trade and value chain disruption and a 7% fall in food productions due to transport blockages could see food imports decline by a massive 25%. World Bank projects that Africa's economy will shrink by 2.1-5.1 percent this year. An African Union (AU) study predicts that some 20 million jobs are at risk in Africa due to the impact of pandemic.
- ▶ US job loss figures for March, which show employers cut the workforce by 710000 are only the start of what is shaping up to be deepest collapse of the job market since the Great Depression of 1930s. During the last one month some 9.9 million people have filed for the unemployment benefits. More jobs will be lost than in any month since the worst days of 2007-09 recessions. The unemployment rate for March rose to 4.4% from 3.5% in February, the largest one month increase since January 1975. The Wall Street Journal has however estimated that 3 million jobs are lost and warned that it is just a beginning. Forecast by Oxfam Economists are that US will lose another 27.9 million jobs and unemployment rate will shot up by 16%. The Congressional Budget office has said that the unemployment rate will go over 10% in the second quarter. According to Moody's Analytics, nearly 80 million jobs, more than half of the jobs in the US economy are at risk due to Corona Virus.
- ▶ Data from the US Commerce department and the Federal Reserve show that the American economy entered a steep decline in March. Retail sales, in seasonally adjusted terms, fell by 8.7% from a month earlier, biggest fall since 1992.

Figures released by the Fed showed that the industrial production including manufacturing, mining, oil and natural gas production have steeply dropped. Manufacturing output fell by 6.3%. The largest decline was in the production of motor vehicles and parts, which fell by 28%. The IMF has warned in its latest economic outlook that the world is entering the most significant contraction since the Great Depression, expected to amount at least \$ 9 trillion over 2020 and 2021. This is equivalent to the economic output of Germany and Japan combined. It has forecast that the US economy will shrink by 5.9% this year.

- ▶ China, the world's second largest economy, has recorded a 6.8% year-on-year decline in GDP for the first quarter of the year compared to the last quarter of 2019, registering the first year-on-year contraction since 1992. IMF has forecast the world economy would shrink by 3% this year but predicted that China will maintain a positive growth rate of 1.2% for the year. According to estimate by UBS economists, non-farm employment fell by 78 million in the first quarter, 60 million in the service sector and 20 million in the industrial and Construction sectors. According to the Institute of International Finance, the ratio of total debt to GDP expanded from 173% in 2008 to around 300% in 2019.
- ▶ According to a recent analysis by United Nations University (UNU), in India 104 million more people could fall below the World Bank determined poverty line of \$ 3.2 a day for lower-middle income countries. At present, 60% of India's population or estimated 812 million people live below poverty line. The CMIE has reported that the proportion of households who said that their finances were worse has risen from 9% in January 2020 to a whopping 45% in the first fortnight of April 2020. The employment rate fell to an all time low of 38.2% in March 2020 and the unemployment rate in India is over 23%. Barclays emerging market research has cut India's 2020 GDP forecast to 0.0% from 2.5% earlier, and revised its GDP forecast for 2020-21 from 3.5% earlier to 0.8% now. ■

Working Class Struggle

■ S. SRIDHAR, MYSORE

MEXICAN MEDICAL WORKERS PROTEST LACK OF SUPPLIES, PROTOCOL FOR COVID-19 CASES: Protests by doctors, nurses and interns broke out on 19th March at hospitals across Mexico as the number of Coronavirus cases grew. The common theme was the woeful lack of supplies to treat patients and protect the workers from infection. On 20th March, nurses protested in front of the Zone-1 general regional hospital in Mexico City.

ALBERTA NURSES REFUSE TO WORK WITHOUT N95 PROTECTION MASKS (CANADA): Community nurses in Edmonton Assessment clinics across Canada refusing to perform Coronavirus testing on patients unless they are provided with N95 respirator face masks. Currently, the nurses have been issued lower standard surgical masks.

TURKISH WORKERS STRIKE AS BOSSES KEEP THEM AT WORK DESPITE COVID-19: With over 1.8 million Coronavirus cases detected worldwide, Turkey is emerging as an epicentre of the pandemic in the Middle East after Iran, which has reached more than 30,000 cases and nearly 600 deaths as its healthcare is devastated by punishing US and European sanctions. Amid the rapid spread of the disease, opposition is rapidly growing in the working class to the government's policy of keeping them at work, despite a growing number of COVID-19 cases in the factories. There is deep anger at the Turkish Ruling Elite's willingness to sacrifice thousands of workers to boost profits during the pandemic. In a metal factory in Istanbul, thousands of workers walked out on 3rd April.

MALAYSIAN ELECTRONICS WORKERS PICKET FOR PAY RISE: Hundreds of workers of German-based transnational Infineon Technologies Semi-conductor plant in Kulim, Malaysia picketed the main gates on 17th March. They were demanding management resume negotiations with their union. The company refused any wage increase. The workers demanding wage increase of from 3-10% bases on years of service and full medical benefits, maternity subsidy, shift allowances and improved safety conditions.

WORKERS PROTEST SPIKE IN CHINA AFTER A MONTH OF QUARANTINE: After a month of lockdowns related to the Coronavirus which virtually erased strikes in China, workers have emerged from multiple industries protesting economic distress. China labour bulletin recorded 25 strike incidents since late February, most in the service and transport industries.

AUSTRALIAN PAPER MILL WORKERS CONTINUE STRIKE ACTION: Hundreds of maintenance workers from Australian paper mill in Maryvale, Southeast of Melbourne resumed strike from 19th to 24th March against company's proposed enterprise agreement. The actions follow ongoing limited strikes and work bans from January 2020.

WORKERS IN US OPPOSE RUSH BACK TO WORK AS DEATH TOLL RISES AMONG GROCERY, TRANSIT AND AUTO WORKERS: Strikes and other job actions are continuing as workers demand closure of non-essential workplaces and protection against the pandemic. In the US, supermarket and delivery workers have joined the ranks of frontline and essential workers protesting unsafe conditions and the lack of protective gear. On 7th April, grocery store workers in Boston from a number of chains, including whole foods, Trader Joe's, and Stop and Shop workers demonstrated.

UK'S HEATHROW AIRPORT DEMANDS WORKERS TO TAKE PAY CUT OR FACE DISMISSAL: London Heathrow, the UK's busiest airport, is forcing its workers to take a 15% pay cut or face dismissal over the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a letter issued by Heathrow's 'Chief People Officer' told the workers that they must accept 15% wage cut, a supposedly 'voluntary' reduction in pay in order to bolster the Airports Flagging Profits. If they refuse, they will lose their jobs.

QUEENSLAND PUBLIC HEALTH WORKERS DEMAND PAY INCREASE: Frontline public health workers are demanding the state government to reverse its decision to freeze a promised pay rise agreed last year. The workers including cleaners, ward-persons, kitchen hands, laundry staff and other frontline workers who are putting their life at risk during the COVID-19 pandemic, have not had a pay increase for two years.

BURMESE WORKERS DEMAND FACTORY SHUTDOWNS: Thousands of factory workers from four plants at the Dagon Seikkan township industrial zone in Yangon Burma's largest city stopped work on 3rd April over the Coronavirus pandemic. The workers, mainly women, are demanding employers to shut down the plants for the whole month of April and pay them their full wages for the month.

GREEK HEALTH WORKERS PROTEST: Health workers in Greece protested outside 28 hospitals across the country on 7th April against the government's failure to provide adequate protection against the pandemic. The worker's demands include increased funding for hospitals, personal protective equipment, accessible to free medical treatment and tests, no redundancies and special sick leave for health workers.

For our Field Forces

■ ARIVUKKADAL, THANJAVUR

LIC assures: LIC has assured its policyholders that the death claims arising due to COVID-19 will be treated at par with other causes of death and payments shall be made on an urgent basis. *LIC's policyholders can pay premiums through digital payment options without any service charge. Premiums can also be paid by downloading mobile app LIC Pay Direct. Policyholders do not need to register on the website for paying premium but can directly pay by giving basic details. *Premiums can also be paid at all IDBI and Axis Bank branches and in cash through Common Service Centres (CSC), operating at block level. *LIC's policies that can be revived without any evidence of good health can be done online. *LIC has made five plans available online for purchase: pure protection plan Tech Term, Jeevan Shanti Annuity Plan, Cancer Cover, SIPP and Nivesh Plus.

LIC crossed: LIC has crossed the mark of 21.40 million policies sold in FY19. It had sold 21.42 million policies as of March 17, 2020.

Corona Claims: The Life Insurance Council said none of its members will deny death claims to any policyholder in the eventuality of loss of life due to the Covid infection. The clause of 'force majeure' will not apply in case of Covid-19 death claims. The clause generally refers to unforeseeable circumstances that may prevent someone from fulfilling a contract.

Telemedicals: With lockdown due to coronavirus continuing, insurance players are relying on telemedicals instead of the prevalent practice of going to designate laboratories and getting the medical tests done. While taking insurance policy through telemedical, customer will be required to make a declaration about health condition through a call with a doctor appointed by the insurer who will be asking simple questions regarding health conditions and lifestyle habits. While the customers are able to buy new policies, the onus is on them to ensure that they are giving the right details. The companies will have a right to decline the claims or give proportionate claims if they find the disclosures to be untrue.

Health Premium: Health insurance premiums are set to rise due to the modifications mandated by IRDAI. The rise in premiums could be in the range of 5-25%, depending on the features that each insurance company adds on its products. Insurance firms have been given time till September 30 to include modifications mandated by the regulator.

Pandemic Pool: A section of the insurance industry has

proposed a pandemic insurance pool, on the lines of terror insurance pool, to tackle the possible claims from coronavirus-type of virus attacks.

Term Premium: The term insurance premiums are likely to go up, given the increased reinsurance costs. The premiums could go up by 40% to 15% depending upon the insurer.

TP Premium: IRDAI has said that the third-party motor insurance premiums will not be increased for the next financial year i.e FY2020-21 as proposed earlier, until the regulator notifies the same.

Insurance frauds: Frauds burnt a Rs 45,000-crore hole in the Indian insurance industry's pocket in 2019. In percentage terms, most insurers lose between 10%-15% across all lines of their business, whereas health insurance fraudulent claims can even touch 35%. Further, about 90% of auto insurance frauds are the result of padding claims (which means to add damages, injuries and fictitious passengers to insurance claims). The other 10% of insurance frauds come from organised accident-staging. In the life insurance segment, most frauds are seen where the sum assured is between Rs 2 lakh to Rs 12 lakh. Most of the advanced countries where the insurance industry has matured, have put insurance fraud laws in place. In India, there is no specific provision in the Indian Penal Code for insurance frauds.

Insurance Drones: Globally, the annual cost of insurance claims has increased eight-fold since 1970. Drones are increasingly being used by insurers today to achieve better risk management and reduce costs without compromising on efficiency while settling claims. Most popular application of drones is in assessing damage after an event or natural disaster. Enterprise drones can be programmed to reach remote locations which are hard to evaluate as soon as a calamity hits.

IAG Exited: Australia's IAG has sold its entire 26% stake in SBI General Insurance Co Ltd for Rs 2,325 crore. The stake has been sold to Premji Invest and Warburg Pincus group.



ICPA, Bengaluru Distributing relief materials to distressed unorganized workers



ICREA, Visakhapatnam handing over a cheque to AP Police Commissioner towards CMDRF

AIIPA joins Relief work against Covid-19 pandemic

AIIPA gave a call to all the units for help and contribution to Chief Ministers' Fund. AIIPA contributed ONE LAKH to "PM's Care Fund".

The reports that are pouring in from various Units of the AIIPA gives a vivid picture of the help rendered to the needy. In Siliguri (WB) the cadres of AIIPA along with AIEA units, took up the job of distribution of ration in Santhal Adivasi village for Tea garden workers. In Mysore, Cuddapah, Hyderabad, our units distributed ration packets with the help of CITU. In Madurai, physically challenged people were given grocery items worth Rs.43,100. In Guntur(AP) General Insurance Pensioners' Association, Amaravati unit, distributed 500 kits of gloves, masks and sanitary items. In Bangalore ICPA is distributing one lakh rupees worth ration on 25 April to the unorganised workers who lost their livelihood due to the sudden lock down.

The collection reports from members are overwhelming. Five Kerala units of AIIPA collected Rs 10,25,000 and remitted the same to chief minister 's relief fund. GIPA in Andra Pradesh gave Rs 50000 to PM's care fund and collected

more than 2 lakhs for CM's fund. Jaipur, Ajmer, Vishakhapatnam remitted more than a lakh rupees to CM's fund. Surat, Jalandhar, Vidarbha, Aolipa, Orissa, Karnal, Aurangabad contributed more than 50000 rupees. Pensioners of Thanjavur contributed Rs. 2,30,000 to TN CM's relief fund; Salem LIC Pensioners' Association has collected Rs. 50,000; Madurai LICPA has already collected Rs. 50000 and hopes to collect Rs. Two lakhs. Both the members of A. P. GIPA & HRGIPA have contributed Rs. 2.5 lakhs each to respective state C. M. s Relief Fund. Apart from that APGIPA has contributed Rs. 50,000 to P. M. Cares Fund." This is based on the details received by AIIPA and covers collections above Rs. Fifty thousand only."

Most of the units contributed to the gigantic task of facing the unprecedented challenge posed to the humanity. In many centres collections were incomplete because of lockdown. But it is refreshing to hear the reports of our AIIPA comrades joining the relief work as a mark of solidarity and concern towards the have-nots.

We demand free and public health for all



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In these circumstances it is important for workers to understand that capitalism only generates and reproduces disease, torment and exploitation. Capitalism

is anachronistic, it is barbaric. It cannot be humanized. The reformists who present the modernization of the exploitative system as a solution become servants of social exploitation. There is no vaccine, nor will it be found, to humanize capitalism. It contains social inequality from its "womb".

The pandemic stripped capitalism naked, removing its mask and fancy clothes.

So today, the duty of all militants is more necessary, more urgent. We must unite the workers and the peoples for a society without capitalists and capitalist exploitation. All the workers, together, we can do it. Our struggle against daily problems is just. Our struggle for the social liberation of the working class is necessary.



Kaupur



Karimnagar



Kolkata



Mysore



Nasik



Raipur



Rajahmundry



Salem



Warrangal

AIIEA in BATTLE against COVID-19



AIIEA in BATTLE against COVID-19

