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Privatisation of a fine Public institution
for Private Profits
is **UNPATRIOTIC**



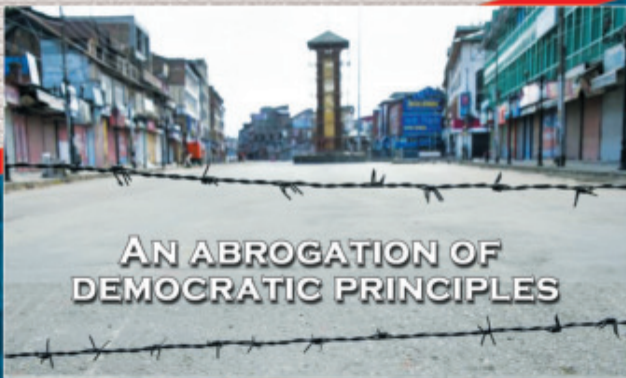
Handing over Public Savings to Private Capital
Making the Development
hostage to Foreign Capital
is **ANTI-NATIONAL**



Protect
LIC

which has invested
Rs.30 lakh crore
in the national economy
& secured the lives of
40 crore people

as a Public Sector Institution



**AN ABROGATION OF
DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES**



**GANDHI IN KASHMIR,
GANDHIANS ON KASHMIR**

**PUSH FOR
PRIVATIZATION
OF EDUCATION**

Draft
National
Education Policy 2019



धार्मिक बहुलता के
दम्भ में फसता भारत

**RTI AMENDMENT
IS RETROGRADE**

**FIFTY YEARS AFTER
BANK NATIONALIZATION**





(REPORT ON PAGES 10-12)

THEY PARTICIPATED IN THE DEBATE AND ENRICHED DELIBERATIONS



Com. J. Vijaya



Com. Madhu Khandelwal



Com. Tapshi Mishra



Com. A. D. Poornima.



Com. Neeta Singhal.



Com. P. Sujatha



Com. Manju Sheel



Com. Fullara Talapatra.



Com. Bhavana B. Baraiya



Com. Manorama Mohanty.



Com. V. Latha.



Com. S. Shobhana.



Com. Geeta Pandit



Com. Arpita Ray.



Com. Sanghamitra Sarangi.



Com. Madhu Tewari.



Com. Ritu Abban.



Com. T. Sunanda.



Com. Usha Parganiha



Com. Shyama Bhattacharya.



Com. Pratibha Mishra.



Com. M. Varsha Deshmukh.



Com. Neelam Sharma.



Com. H. R. Gayathri.

Apart from the above Coms M. Kameswari, Git Shant, Asha Velingkar and Shika Chadda also participated in the debate.
(See back inside cover also)



CELEBRATE THE SUCCESS OF LIC DEFEND AND PROTECT THIS MARVELLOUS INSTITUTION

The LIC of India enters the 64th year of its glorious existence on September 1, 2019 with pride and confidence. Proud that it touched the lives of millions of Indians directly and every citizen of this country indirectly through massive contribution to the nation building exercise. There is no segment of the economy that is left untouched by LIC. In the last 63 years LIC had to sail through rough weather and pass through hostile terrain to develop immense capability and confidence to face the present day challenges. It is truly amazing that at a time when the government institutions are looked down upon by the people, LIC has emerged as the most trusted brand. LIC is a perfect example as to how a public sector institution can work on sound business principles and yet make impressive contribution to the social obligations. It is not surprising that today the nation has come to admire and trust this great financial institution. Therefore, we must celebrate the success of LIC.

The successful journey of the last 63 years

was never easy. The Independent India soon found that the colonial power had ravaged and plundered the traditional economy of the country and when power was passed on, we inherited an industrially backward economy which was totally dependent on agriculture. In this background the Parliament entrusted responsibility to LIC to mobilise long term funds for industrialisation. The Parliament also asked LIC to ensure the safety of the policyholders' funds and spread the insurance awareness to every part of the country. LIC did not fail the trust reposed in it by the nation by successfully carrying out the assigned twin tasks.

From a humble beginning in 1956, LIC today has emerged as the biggest financial institution of the country. The Government invested ₹ 5 crore as capital in LIC and today this institution has invested nearly ₹ 30 lakh crore in the economy. From a total life fund of ₹ 440 crore at the time of nationalisation, its asset base has risen to ₹ 31.11 lakh crore in these 63 years. The total number of policies

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were 55 lakhs in 1957 and today it has 30 crore individual policies and another 12 crore lives are covered under group assurances. It is estimated that just around 50% of the Indians constitute insurable population and in this background insuring around 40 crore people is a fantastic feat. The LIC has never defaulted on a policy payment. Therefore the task entrusted to LIC to mobilise funds for industrialisation, provide security to the policyholders' monies and spread insurance awareness has been fulfilled very successfully.

The opening up of the insurance sector in the year 1999 was premised on the understanding that the country need more than one insurance company to mop up savings required for investment in infrastructure and social sector. The arguments were also advanced that the participation of private sector would increase the insurance penetration and density. These arguments did not account for the fact that penetration and density both are dependent on disposal incomes. These arguments also did not take into consideration the significant success LIC achieved in insuring lives as a percentage of the total insurable population. These arguments were smokescreens to hide the real reason behind opening up of the economy. The real reason was the embracing of neo-liberalism by the Indian ruling classes where the dominant belief is that economy must be liberated from government regulations and private sector must be given a greater role as the government has no business to be in business. A critical analysis of the life insurance premium mobilised for a decade before the opening up of the sector and a decade after it was opened up brings out the stark fact that both the decades registered identical annual growth rates. This suggests that private participation did not expand the market size but resulted in more players competing for a share without increasing the size of the cake.

The LIC secured a first year premium income of ₹ 142191.19 crore in the financial year 2018-19. The total premium income during this period rose to ₹ 337185.4 cr and the total income of the corporation reached ₹ 523611.11 cr. The market share of LIC during this financial year was 66 percent in premium income. This reflected a small decline compared to the earlier year. However, LIC fought back in the first four months of the current financial year to increase its share in the premiums to 73.17% and the total number of policies to 71.86%. Of the 23 private companies who

are operating in India only 7 have succeeded in securing a market share of over 1%. The HDFC Life whose foreign partner is Standard Life comes a distant second to LIC with a market share of 6.56% in premium income. The market dominance of LIC is incredible. Even after 19 years of opening the sector for competition, it retains a market share of over 73%. Nowhere in the world has an insurance company in any single country dominated the market as LIC has done. This is due to the trust of the insuring public and the dedication and commitment of the workforce.

As LIC enters its 64th years, newer and greater challenges confront this institution. These challenges come from government policies, regulatory changes, aspirations of the policyholders and the increasing power of technology and artificial intelligence. The government is contemplating to hike FDI limits and allowing greater leverage of funds by the private sector. This gels with the understanding of the government that the role of public sector be diminished and greater space should be provided to the private sector in the economy. AIIEA is of the firm belief that Life insurance business is not capital intensive unlike manufacturing and other financial services. The sector therefore will not benefit from FDI hike but it provides opportunity for the Indian partners to make huge profits by transferring their equity shares. The unjust charge of GST on life and health premiums too retards the growth of business. The frequent regulatory changes rather than promoting the orderly growth of the business are restricting its growth. The youth which has grown up in the neo-liberal era is made to look at the public institutions as inefficient. The LIC has to win this battle of perception. The LIC has to develop innovative products and efficiently market them to attract this section of the population. The private sector will increasingly use technology and artificial intelligence to mark their presence. The LIC cannot afford to ignore this aspect but has to carefully balance the interest of the institution and its workforce while adopting necessary technological upgrades.

But the biggest challenge comes in the form of protecting its public sector character. Attempts have been made since 1994 to list LIC through disinvestment. The nefarious designs to privatise this successful public sector financial institution have been thwarted for the last 25 years through strikes and public opinion mobilisation. This success has

no parallel in the world as a policy decision of the government is halted for over quarter century. But the danger has increased with a government totally wedded to neo-liberalism in power with absolute majority. The Parliament is redundant with Opposition being made inconsequential. This government is now contemplating to list LIC on the bourses. The Indian economy is in a serious crisis. Private investments have practically dried out in the economy. There is no political will to raise revenues for development through taxation, removal of concessions to corporate sector and attacking the black money. In such a situation selling the family silver is the easy option. The government says that it needs 100 lakh crore worth of investments in the next 5 years. The question is where from this money will come. The government, therefore, has put outright sale of public sector units and disinvestment on the fast track. There are loud howls from vested interests that government should unlock the value of LIC by selling its equity. They argue that even sale of a small portion of LIC equity could fetch the government impressive amount. Therefore, plans are afoot in this direction.

For the insurance employees, LIC is not just a financial institution but an ideological commitment. The LIC has served the nation and given security to the savings of the policyholders. Privatisation of such a fine public institution and handing it over to the private entities for maximisation of profits is an unpatriotic act. It is surprising that a government which never tires of delivering sermons on nationalism is proceeding to hand over domestic savings to private capital rather than controlling and leveraging it for the greater benefit of the people. The fascination with the foreign capital is making the development hostage to foreign capital. Protecting LIC as a Public Sector Institution is the biggest challenge today. This challenge has to be met by uniting all sections of the employees and field force within the industry; building common struggles with other sections of the public sector employees; winning over the policyholders and waging an intense battle to win the public support. LIC is the Jewel in the Crown and we cannot allow the greedy private capitalists to rob the nation and its people of this invaluable Jewel. Let us therefore prepare for the intense battle to defend and protect our beloved institution. ●

एल आई सी की सफलता का जश्न मनाओ इस अब्दुत संस्थान की संरक्षा और रक्षा करो

भारतीय जीवन बीमा निगम ने 1 सितम्बर, 2019 को बड़े गर्व और आत्मविश्वास के साथ अपने गौरवशाली अस्तित्व के 64वें वर्ष में प्रवेश किया है। गर्व है कि इसने प्रत्यक्ष रूप से करोड़ों भारतीयों तथा अप्रत्यक्ष रूप से इस देश के प्रत्येक नागरिक के जीवन को राष्ट्र निर्माण के कार्यों में अपने असाधारण योगदान के माध्यम से छुआ है। अर्थव्यवस्था का ऐसा कोई हिस्सा नहीं है जो एलआईसी से अछूता रह गया हो। पिछले 63 वर्षों में, एलआईसी ने प्रतिकूल परिस्थितियों से लड़कर तथा अनेक मुश्किल रास्तों से गुजरकर अपने अन्दर वो असीम क्षमता तथा आत्मविश्वास अर्जित किया जिससे वर्तमान समय की चुनौतियों का सामना किया जा सके। यह वास्तव में आश्चर्यजनक है कि ऐसे समय में जब लोगों द्वारा सरकारी संस्थानों को निम्न दृष्टि से देखा जाता है, एलआईसी सबसे भरोसेमंद ब्रांड बनकर उभरा है। एलआईसी एक आदर्श उदाहरण है कि कैसे एक सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र की संस्था उच्च व्यापार सिद्धांतों पर कायम रहते हुए काम करे और फिर भा? सामाजिक दायित्वों के निर्वहन में अपना प्रभावशाली योगदान देती रहे। इसलिए इसमें जरा भी आश्चर्य की बात नहीं है कि आज राष्ट्र इस महान वित्तीय संस्थान की सराहना तथा विश्वास प्रकट करने के लिए आगे आता है। इसलिए, हमें स्ब् की सफलता का जश्न मनाना ही चाहिए।

पिछले 63 वर्षों की यह सफल यात्रा कभी भी आसान नहीं रही। स्वतंत्र भारत को जल्द ही यह समझ आ गया था

कि औपनिवेशिक शक्ति ने देश की पारंपरिक अर्थव्यवस्था को तबाह और लूट लिया था और जब सत्ता हमें हस्तांतरित की गयी थी, तो हमें एक औद्योगिक रूप से पिछड़ी अर्थव्यवस्था विरासत में मिली जो पूरी तरह से कृषि पर निर्भर थी। इस पृष्ठभूमि में संसद ने औद्योगिकीकरण के लिए दीर्घकालिक पूंजी जुटाने के लिए एलआईसी को जिम्मेदारी सौंपी। संसद ने एलआईसी को पॉलिसीधारकों के फंड की सुरक्षा सुनिश्चित करने और देश के हर हिस्से में बीमा जागरूकता फैलाने के लिए कहा। एलआईसी ने राष्ट्र द्वारा सौंपे गए इस दोहरे दायित्व को सफलतापूर्वक अंजाम देकर उसमें दिए गए विश्वास को डिगने नहीं दिया।

1956 की एक छोटी सी शुरुआत, एलआईसी आज देश की सबसे बड़ी वित्तीय संस्था के रूप में उभरकर सामने आया है। सरकार ने एलआईसी में पूंजी के रूप में 5 करोड़ रुपये का निवेश किया था और आज इसने अर्थव्यवस्था में लगभग 30 लाख करोड़ रुपये का निवेश कर दिया है। राष्ट्रीयकरण के समय 440 करोड़ रुपये की कुल जीवन निधि से, इन 63 वर्षों में इसकी परिसंपत्ति आधार बढ़कर 31.11 लाख करोड़ रुपये हो गया है। 1957 में कुल पालिसी की संख्या 55 लाख थी और आज इसमें 30 करोड़ व्यक्तिगत पालिसियां और समूह बीमा के तहत अन्य 12 करोड़ जीवन शामिल हैं। एक अनुमान के मुताबिक भारत की कुल जनसंख्या के पचास प्रतिशत लोग बीमा योग्य हैं, और इस पृष्ठभूमि में लगभग 40 करोड़ लोगों

का बीमा करना एक शानदार उपलब्धि है। एलआईसी ने कभी भी पालिसी भुगतान में चूक नहीं की है। अतः औद्योगिकरण के लिए धन जुटाना, पालिसीधारकों के धन की रक्षा करना तथा बीमा जागरूकता को फैलाने के सोंपे गए समस्त दायित्वों को एलआईसी ने बहुत सफलतापूर्वक पूरा किया है।

वर्ष 1999 में बीमा क्षेत्र को खोलने की अनुमति इस समझ के आधार पर दी गयी थी कि देश को बुनियादी ढाँचे और सामाजिक क्षेत्र में निवेश के लिए आवश्यक बचत को जुटाने के लिए एक से अधिक बीमा कम्पनी की आवश्यकता है। यह तर्क भी प्रस्तुत किया गया था कि निजी क्षेत्र की भागीदारी से बीमा पेनीट्रेशन और घनत्व बढ़ेगा। इन तर्कों को देते समय इस तथ्य पर ध्यान नहीं दिया गया कि पेनीट्रेशन और घनत्व दोनों बचत हेतु उपलब्ध आय पर निर्भर हैं। इन तर्कों को देते हुए यह भी ध्यान में नहीं रखा गया कि कुल बीमा योग्य आबादी के प्रतिशत के रूप में जीवन बीमा करने में एलआईसी ने कितनी महत्वपूर्ण सफलता प्राप्त की है। ये तर्क धुँए की दीवार थे जिनके पीछे अर्थव्यवस्था को खोलने की असली वजह को छिपा दिया गया। असली वजह तो भारतीय शासक वर्गों द्वारा नव-उदारवाद को गले लगाना था जहाँ प्रमुख धारणा यह है कि अर्थव्यवस्था को सरकारी नियमों से मुक्त किया जाना चाहिए और निजी क्षेत्र को एक बड़ी भूमिका दी जानी चाहिए क्योंकि सरकार का व्यवसाय स्वयं व्यापार करना नहीं है। जीवन बीमा व्यवसाय के खुलने के एक दशक पहले के तथा एक दशक बाद के समय में एकत्रित जीवन बीमा प्रीमियम के एक महत्वपूर्ण विश्लेषण में यह तथ्य सामने आया कि दोनों ही दशकों में एक समान वार्षिक वृद्धि दर रही। इससे पता चलता है कि निजी क्षेत्र की भागीदारी ने बाजार के आकार को विस्तार नहीं दिया बल्कि केक के आकार को बढ़ाने की बजाय उसके अधिक हिस्से को हासिल करने की प्रतिस्पर्धा खिलाड़ियों के मध्य होने लगी।

एलआईसी ने वित्त वर्ष 2018-19 में 142191.19 करोड़ रुपये की प्रथम वर्ष की प्रीमियम आय प्राप्त की। इस अवधि के दौरान कुल प्रीमियम आय बढ़कर 337185.4 करोड़ रुपये हो गई और निगम की कुल आय 523611.11 करोड़ रुपये हो गई। इस वित्त वर्ष के दौरान एलआईसी की बाजार हिस्सेदारी प्रीमियम आय में 66 प्रतिशत थी। पिछले वर्ष की तुलना में इसमें थोड़ी गिरावट देखी गई। हालांकि, एलआईसी ने चालू वित्त वर्ष के पहले चार महीनों में प्रीमियम में अपनी हिस्सेदारी को 73.17 प्रतिशत और कुल पालिसी संख्या में 71.86 प्रतिशत बाजार हिस्सेदारी हासिल करते हुए जोरदार वापिसी की है। भारत में काम कर रही 23 निजी कम्पनियों में से केवल सात 1 प्रतिशत से अधिक की बाजार हिस्सेदारी हासिल करने में सफल रही हैं। एचडीएफसी लाइफ जिसका विदेशी साझेदार स्टैंडर्ड लाइफ है, प्रीमियम आय में 6.56 प्रतिशत की बाजार हिस्सेदारी के साथ एलआईसी के बाद बड़े अन्तर से दूसरे स्थान पर आता है। एलआईसी का बाजार प्रभुत्व अविश्वसनीय है। प्रतियोगिता के लिए सेक्टर खोलने के 19 साल बाद भी, यह 73 प्रतिशत से अधिक की बाजार हिस्सेदारी रखता है। दुनिया में कहीं भी किसी भी देश में कोई बीमा कम्पनी नहीं है जो बाजार पर इस तरह से काबिज है जैसा कि एलआईसी ने किया है। यह बीमित जनता के विश्वास एवं कर्मियों के समर्पण और प्रतिबद्धता के कारण है।

अब जबकि एलआईसी ने अपने 64वें वर्ष में प्रवेश किया है, नई और अधिक बड़ी चुनौतियाँ इस संस्था के

सामने हैं। ये चुनौतियाँ सरकार की नीतियों, नियामक परिवर्तनों, पालिसीधारकों की आकांक्षाओं एवं प्रौद्योगिकी और कृत्रिम बुद्धिमत्ता (आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस) के बढ़ते प्रभाव से आ रही हैं। सरकार एफडीआई सीमा बढ़ाने और निजी क्षेत्र द्वारा पूंजी का अधिक लाभ उठाने की अनुमति देने पर विचार कर रही है। यह सरकार की इस समझ को और मजबूत बनाता है कि सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र की भूमिका कम हो और अर्थव्यवस्था में निजी क्षेत्र को अधिक से अधिक स्थान प्रदान किया जाए। एआईआईईए का स्पष्ट मत है कि विनिर्माण और अन्य वित्तीय सेवाओं की तरह जीवन बीमा व्यवसाय पूंजी-प्रधान नहीं है। इसलिए एफडीआई वृद्धि से इस क्षेत्र को अधिक लाभ नहीं होगा बल्कि इससे तो भारतीय साझेदारों को अपनी शेरधारिता स्थानांतरित करके भारी मुनाफा कमाने का अवसर प्राप्त होगा। जीवन और स्वास्थ्य प्रीमियम पर जीएसटी का अनुचित प्रभार तो व्यवसाय के विकास को और भी अवरूद्ध करता है। व्यापार में सुव्यवस्थित विकास को बढ़ावा देने के बजाय लगातार विनियामक परिवर्तन इसकी वृद्धि को रोक रहे हैं। वे युवा जो नव-उदारवादी युग में बड़े हुए हैं, उन्हें ऐसा दिखाया जा रहा है कि वे सार्वजनिक संस्थानों को अयोग्य समझें। एलआईसी को धारणा की इस लड़ाई को जीतना होगा। आबादी के इस वर्ग को आकर्षित करने के लिए एलआईसी को अभिनव उत्पादों को विकसित करना होगा तथा कुशलतापूर्वक विपणन करना होगा। निजी क्षेत्र अपनी उपस्थिति को दर्ज करने के लिये प्रौद्योगिकी और कृत्रिम बुद्धि (आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस) का उपयोग करेगा। एलआईसी इस पहलू को नजरअंदाज नहीं कर सकता है, लेकिन आवश्यक तकनीकी उन्नयन को अपनाते हुए संस्थान और उसके कर्मचारियों की रूचि को ध्यान से संतुलित करते हुए आगे बढ़ना होगा।

सबसे बड़ी चुनौती तो अपने सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र के चरित्र की रक्षा के रूप में आती है। विनिवेश के माध्यम से एलआईसी को सूचीबद्ध करने के लिए 1994 से प्रयास किए जा रहे हैं। इस सफल सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र के वित्तीय संस्थान के निजीकरण के नापाक मंसूबों को पिछले 25 वर्षों से हड़तालों और जनमत जुटाने के माध्यम से नाकाम किया गया है। इस तरह की सफलता का उदाहरण दुनिया में और कोई नहीं है जबकि सरकार के किसी नीतिगत निर्णय को चैथाई सदी से अधिक समय से रोका जा सका है। लेकिन खतरा तब और बढ़ जाता है जब एक पूर्ण बहुमत वाली सरकार पूरी ताकत के साथ नव-उदारवाद के साथ गठजोड़ कर ले। विपक्ष को अप्रसांगिक बनाये जाने के साथ ही संसद निरर्थक हो गयी है। यह सरकार अब एलआईसी को बाजार में सूचीबद्ध करने पर विचार कर रही है। भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था एक गंभीर संकट में है। निजी निवेश का तो व्यवहारिक रूप से अर्थव्यवस्था में सूखा पड़ गया है। कराधान के माध्यम से विकास के लिए राजस्व जुटाने, कॉरपोरेट क्षेत्र की रियायतें हटाने और काले धन पर हमला करने की कोई राजनीतिक इच्छाशक्ति नहीं है। ऐसी स्थिति में परिवार की चांदी बेचना आसान उपाय लगता है। सरकार कहती है कि उसे अगले 5 वर्षों में 100 लाख करोड़ रुपये के निवेश की जरूरत है। सवाल है कि यह पैसा कहां से आयेगा। इसलिये, सरकार सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र की इकाईयों के विनिवेश और एकमुश्त सीधी बिक्री को और फास्ट ट्रेक पर ले आई है। निहित स्वार्थी वाले

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JOINT FRONT UNIONS OPPOSE FDI HIKE & PROPOSAL TO LIST LIC

The leadership of Federation of LIC Class I Officers' Associations, National Federation of Insurance Field Workers of India and All India Insurance Employees' Association met at Bangalore on 29th July 2019 to discuss issues relating to insurance industry and the LIC employees in great detail and decided to jointly work to address these issues.

Tasks decided in earlier meeting achieved

The last meeting held at Hyderabad on 13th February 2019 had decided on an agitational program to secure the final pension option and open negotiations on wage revision. The meeting noted with great satisfaction that both the tasks laid were successfully accomplished. The Final Pension Option was secured in the background of the governments across the world abolishing the defined benefit pension schemes. The Indian governments too had adopted the same policy and refused to reopen the defined benefit pension scheme for 60 lakh government employees. It had also rejected the recommendation of RBI to give a final open to its employees. In the background of these facts, the securing of a final pension option was a tremendous achievement. It was noted that nearly all eligible in-service employees have exercised their options to join the pension scheme. An overwhelming number of eligible retired employees have also joined the pension scheme. The Joint Front strongly recommends all eligible retired and those eligible for family pension to join the scheme well before the last date for exercising such options. The Joint Front has decided to seek improvement in family pension and updation of pension as this demand has been accepted in the RBI.

The meeting expressed satisfaction that negotiations on wages were opened and an offer of 10% wage increase is already secured. While this is a good beginning, the offer fell short of the legitimate aspirations of the employees and the paying capacity of the institution. The Joint Front has decided to take up the issue with LIC management for an early satisfactory wage settlement.

Budget disappoints Insurance Industry

The Meeting noted that the Union Budget for 2019-20 has ignored the insurance sector. The demand for withdrawal of GST on life and health insurance premium is not considered. The other important suggestion for a separate income tax exemption limit for life insurance premium to promote savings through life insurance too is not considered. It was decided

to take up these issues once again with the Finance Minister. The proposal to further hike the FDI limit in insurance sector was opposed as it would not bring any benefit to our national economic interests. On the other hand this measure would help the foreign capital to gain greater access to our domestic savings. At a time when Indian economy is suffering from lack of investments and a decline in domestic savings, this measure would be counter-productive. The allowing of 100% FDI in insurance intermediaries will impact the insurance sales force and surveyors and loss assessors.

Listing LIC is a step towards privatisation

News reports have appeared that government is contemplating disinvestment in LIC and listing it on the stock exchanges. This certainly is a step towards privatisation of the most successful and the biggest financial institution in the country. The LIC was created to provide security to the policyholders and save them from the fraudulent practices of the private insurers. The other objective of nationalisation was to channelize the peoples' savings for peoples' welfare. Privatisation of this great institution will negate both these objectives. It is needless to say that a privatised company will have to work to enhance value for the shareholders rather than taking up social obligations and working for the national interests.

In the background of these facts, it was unanimously decided to lodge a strong protest against the idea to list LIC, hike the FDI limits and privatisation of public sector units through a **lunch hour demonstrations in front of all LIC offices on 2nd August 2019**. We request the entire workforce of LIC to massively participate in this demonstration.

The meeting also discussed the business performance of LIC and the challenges of the regulatory and competitive environment. It noted with concern that there is some decline in the market share but hoped that with innovative products and better servicing standards, LIC would continue to dominate the market. The Joint Front will take up joint programs on these important issues. **The Joint Front firmly believes that Agency force is the lifeline of LIC and appealed to all officers and employees to extend full support, whatever help and guidance the agency force needs to meet the present challenging situation.**

Restart Wage Revision – Joint Front writes to LIC Chairman

The Federation of LIC Class I Officers' Association, National Federation of Insurance Field Workers Federation of India and All India Insurance Employees' Association have jointly demanded restarting of wage negotiations and raised issues relating to Pension through a letter addressed to LIC Chairman on 8th August, 2019. The same is reproduced hereunder.

“Two years have elapsed since the wage revision fell due on 1.8.2017. Our organisations submitted Charter of Demands for upward revision of wages and improvement in service conditions based on the aspirations of the employees and the financial strength of LIC. We were happy that the negotiations were finally opened on 12th March 2019 and an offer of 10% wage increase was made. While welcoming the opening of negotiations and making an offer, we pointed out that the offer falls short of the expectations and genuine aspirations of the employees. We requested that the process of negotiations has to be carried forward aiming to settle the issue at an early date so that all our energies are pooled together to meet the challenges of competitive environment and regulatory mechanism. However, we note that even after five months of the opening round of negotiations, there has been no move forward in this regard.

We would like to point out that LIC today is the finest financial institution in the country due to the dedication and commitment of its work force. Since the last wage revision in 2012, the LIC has registered enormous growth and prosperity. The employees contributed to this prosperity through increased productivity. This can be seen from the fact that the per employee generation of premium income increased from Rs. 1.69 cr in 2012 to Rs. 2.6 cr in 2017. Similarly the per capita total income increased from 2.4 cr to Rs. 4.27 cr during this period. Therefore, it is reasonable for the employees to expect a good wage revision on the basis of their increased productivity and the financial strength of LIC. We, therefore, request you to commence the process of negotiations aiming to take it to finality at an early date.

Improvement in Pension Scheme

We have been representing for the past several years the necessity to bring about some improvements in the benefits available under the LIC Employees' Pension Scheme 1995. We have pointed out that the rate of family pension requires immediate revision on the lines of what is obtaining in the central government and the RBI. The non revision of

the family pension to 30% severely impacts the life standards of the family pensioners.

We have also been demanding that there should be updation of the basic pension along with the wage revision as is done in the Central Government. The government recently has decided to extend this provision to the employees of RBI. The government has decided the issue in RBI on the grounds that it has the capacity to pay. We are convinced that LIC too has the financial strength to bear the additional cost on updation of pension. We would like to point out that the projected growth in total premium income is capable of absorbing any additional cost on the updation of pension. We, therefore, request you to take up these two demands with the government and pursue for a favourable response.

Scrap the Defined Contribution Pension Scheme

The employees recruited in LIC on or after 1.4.2010 have been made ineligible to join the LIC Employees' Pension Scheme 1995 through an arbitrary notification. These employees are compulsorily covered under Defined Contribution Pension Scheme. This has created two different set of service conditions for employees in the Corporation which is not healthy for industrial relations. We urge upon you to scrap the Defined Contribution Scheme, the details of which are still unknown to those covered and bring them under the LIC Employees' Pension Scheme 1995.

VIGILANCE CASES

It is a matter of grave concern that there is inordinate delay in finalizing vigilance cases which result in withholding retirement benefits, refusal of housing loan and even NOC to visit abroad. Therefore, it is necessary that vigilance cases should be closed as per corporate guidelines and employees should not be penalized for delay from Management. We hope you will take immediate remedial steps in this direction.

On LIC's Performance

The market share of LIC had marginally declined in the financial year 2018-19. We are happy that LIC has regained the market share in June 2019 and we hope that this

positive trend would continue in the current financial year. We strongly feel that LIC has to be more innovative in developing products and marketing through increased support to the agency force. LIC also has to focus on creating infrastructure for better servicing of the policyholders. We also feel that in the present situation where there is economic slowdown and the stock markets have

become volatile and showing a bearish trend, we need to be cautious in our investments. The sole consideration for our investment decisions should be to protect the interests of the policyholders and enhance the value of their investments. Our organisations remain committed to the interests of our great institution and its policyholders.'

ISSUES RELATING TO INSURANCE INDUSTRY AND ITS EMPLOYEES JOINT FRONT REQUESTS FINANCE MINISTER TO INTERVENE

The Federation of LIC Class I Officers' Associations, National Federation of Insurance Field Workers of India and All India Insurance Employees Association has written to the Finance Minister on 5th August 2019 on some important issues relating to the industry and its workforce. The same is reproduced below:

“We would like to inform you that our three organisations represent nearly 90 percent of the officers, field officers and employees of the Life Insurance Corporation. We have been playing a very constructive role in advancing the interests of our great institution and motivating the workforce to do their best in meeting the objectives for which LIC was created by an Act of Parliament. We take legitimate pride that from a humble beginning in 1956, the LIC today has emerged as the biggest and finest financial institution of our country. It has been mobilising small savings and converting it into capital for investments in social and infrastructure development. The LIC has been playing a very important role in the nation building activities. Since you are aware of the role LIC has been playing in the national economy, we do not want to burden you with further details. However, some developments relating to the industry in the past few days are disturbing us. Therefore, we are bringing our opinion on these issues to your notice.

Listing of LIC in stock exchanges

The leading newspapers have been carrying reports that the government is contemplating to divest its holding in LIC and list it in the stock exchanges. We are totally opposed to this measure as it would ultimately lead to privatisation of LIC. The Life insurance business was nationalised in 1956 by taking over 245 Indian and Foreign companies to create LIC. This step was taken to safeguard

the interests of the insuring public from the fraudulent practices of the erstwhile insurers. The government saw these steps leading to the spread of the message of life insurance in the remotest parts of the country. The major objective of nationalisation was to mobilise small savings for the nation building activities. Thus the motto of nationalisation became peoples' savings for peoples' welfare. In the last 63 years, LIC has greatly succeeded in meeting these objectives. Today on the basis of customer base and number of claims it settles, LIC has emerged as the largest life insurer in the world. It is the single largest investor in the Indian economy. Therefore, any dilution of the government stake which would lead to privatisation will harm our national interests. It is common knowledge that a listed company has to work in the interests of the shareholders to the neglect of social objectives and national interests. We, therefore, request you to drop the idea of listing of LIC.

Hike in FDI Limits in insurance

We also understand that the government is considering further hiking the FDI limits from the present 49%. We have held a consistent position that FDI hike will allow the foreign capital to gain greater access to domestic savings. There is a consensus worldwide that foreign capital is a poor substitute for domestic savings. At a time when there is lack of investments in economy and household savings are on decline, it is necessary for the State to have greater control over these savings.

The insurance industry makes cheaper finance available for long term investment in the economy to meet the social objectives of the government and development of infrastructure. The past experience has proved that very little funds mobilised as premiums globally by the Indian partners of private companies have found their way into Indian economy. The FDI hike rather than bringing any significant gains to the national economy will only help the Indian promoters to profit from divestment of their holdings. We, therefore, request you to have a relook at this issue.

Withdrawal of GST

The risk portion of the life insurance premium and health insurance premium are charged 18 percent GST. We have been requesting for the withdrawal of GST on life and health insurance premium. Millions of policyholders have also submitted memorandums requesting the government to withdraw GST on life and health premiums. The imposition of 18% GST on life premiums is restricting expansion of business. Similarly it is unfair to charge GST on premiums paid to cover the risk of sickness. We urge upon you to consider withdrawal of GST on these two segments of insurance business urgently.

Separate Income Tax Exemption Limits

At present the life insurance premiums are grouped together with other forms of savings for the purpose of income tax relief under Section 80 (C). We believe that life insurance premium need separate exemption limits considering the fact that they provide long term capital for social and infrastructure development. Though significant part of our population is covered through individual and group insurances, it is seen that there is a huge insurance protection gap. Those who have insurance policies are also not adequately covered. In order to encourage new insurances and adequate protection to the existing insured, it is necessary to have a separate and substantial exemption limits for life insurance premiums. We request you to kindly consider this.

Wage Revision

The Wage Revision in LIC fell due on 1.8.2017. The LIC has recorded significant progress since the last wage revision on 1.8.2012. During these five years, there has been spectacular growth in the productivity of employees resulting in increasing prosperity for

the Corporation. We, therefore, request you to advise LIC to convene meaningful discussions on wage revision and settle the issue early on the basis of the prosperity and paying capacity of LIC taking into consideration the legitimate aspirations of the employees.

Improvements in Pension Scheme

The Pension Scheme was introduced in LIC in 1995 on the lines of Central government pension scheme in lieu of Employer's contribution to Pension. In the last 24 years, there are no improvements in the benefits available in the pension scheme. In the government, pension is upwardly revised whenever Pay Commission recommendations are implemented. However pensions are not updated in LIC whenever wage revision takes place. The government has permitted such updation in RBI.

Similarly the rate of family pension remains at 15% of the Pay despite it being revised to 30% in both government and the RBI. There is an urgent need to enhance the family pension to 30% of pay to bring parity with the government and RBI pension schemes. There is also discrimination in the payment of dearness allowance to the pensioners. Those who retired after 1.8.1997 get full neutralisation consequent to the increase in inflation while the pensioners retired earlier get lesser rate of neutralisation. This discrimination is in violation of Article 14 of the Constitution. We request you to take immediate steps to end this discrimination early.

Scrap Defined Contribution Pension Scheme

The employees recruited in LIC after 1.4.2010 are not covered by the LIC Employees' Pension Scheme 1995. These employees are asked to join a new scheme where contribution is defined but benefit is not. This has created two sets of employees in the institution. We, therefore, request you to scrap the Defined Contribution Pension Scheme and allow the employees who were recruited in LIC on or after 1.4.2010 to join the LIC Employees' Pension Scheme 1995.

We are confident that you will consider our views placed on the above issues favourably. We assure you of our continued support for the expansion of the business of LIC and our commitment to the noble objectives of nationalisation."

Central Trade Unions Oppose Government decision to privatize NTPC

The Central Trade Unions (CTUs) in its meeting held at New Delhi on 2nd August 2019 expressed deep concern at the decision of the Central Government to divest further 10% equity of NTPC through OFS (Offer for Sale) route. The present share holding pattern of NTPC is 56.41% with the Company and 43.59% with market players.

Now with further 10% equity sale through OFS shall push NTPC to minority share holding of 46.41% and majority share holding shall be passed on with private market players. In other words from a present 'Maharatna' Central Public Sector Undertaking, NTPC will become a market players controlled private company.

NTPC has been continuously excelling its physical and financial performance. It has been contributing to Government exchequer higher dividend payment in every succeeding financial year. Out of the all total installed power generation capacity 3,54,000 MW in the country, NTPC alone is 55,786 MW and another around 15,000 MW is in the pipeline. As a singularly biggest power generation company, the 'Techno-Economic' efficiency of NTPC is the best in the country. NTPC has 53 power generation stations and 11 renewable energy projects. In 2017-18 NTPC earned profit of Rs.10,501.50 crore and the dividend paid to the Government was Rs.1,970.67 crore and in 2018-19 profit increased to Rs.12,633.45

crore and interim dividend already paid is 2,951.88 crore and more shall be paid as final instalment.

The shocking decision by the Government is suicidal for the country. The only beneficiaries will be the private power sector players. The huge assets of the giant power sector CPSU are going to be grabbed by private power generators. Change in share holding pattern of the company is bound to seriously affect the employees in several ways including huge job losses.

The Central Trade Unions demand the reversal of the suicidal decision of the Government. Pushing NTPC to the control of market players shall amount to bestowing the dominant control of power sector to the private sector which ultimately shall push the price of power to prohibitive height and common consumers shall be hit hard. Agriculture and rural consumers shall be worst victims.

The Central Trade Unions appeal to all the employees of NTPC – Executives & Non-Executives, Permanent & Contract workers to forge total unity and launch united resistance struggles to stop privatisation of NTPC. And further appeals to the entire public sector power sector employees in particular and the public sector workers in general to extend solidarity support NTPC employees' struggles.

एल आई सी की सफलता का जश्न मनाओ

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जोर-जोर से चीख रहे हैं कि सरकार एलआईसी का अपना हिस्सा बेचकर उसकी कीमत खोल दे। उनका तर्क है कि सरकार एलआईसी में अपनी इक्विटी के एक छोटे हिस्से की बिक्री से ही एक प्रभावशाली राशि ले सकती है। इसलिए, योजनाएं इस दिशा में चल रही हैं।

बीमा कर्मचारियों के लिए, एलआईसी केवल एक वित्तीय संस्थान नहीं है, बल्कि एक वैचारिक प्रतिबद्धता है। एलआईसी ने राष्ट्र की सेवा की है और पॉलिसीधारकों की बचत को सुरक्षा दी है। इस तरह के एक बेहतरीन सार्वजनिक संस्थान का निजीकरण और इसे निजी संस्थाओं को बेहिसाब मुनाफा कमाने के लिये सौंपना एक देशभक्ति के विरुद्ध कार्य है। यह कैसी आश्चर्य की बात है कि जो सरकार राष्ट्रवाद के उपदेश देने से कभी नहीं थकती, वह लोगों के हितों का अधिक ध्यान रखने के लिये घरेलू बचत

पर अधिक नियंत्रण रखती और जनता को लाभ प्रदान करती लेकिन यह इसके बजाय घरेलू बचत को निजी पूँजीपतियों के हाथों में साँपने के लिए आगे बढ़ रही है। विदेशी पूँजी के प्रति मोह ने विकास को विदेशी पूँजी का बंधक बना दिया है। सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र के संस्थान के रूप में एलआईसी की रक्षा करना आज सबसे बड़ी चुनौती है। इस चुनौती से लड़ने के लिये एकजुट होना होगा, उद्योग के अन्दर के सभी वर्ग के कर्मचारियों तथा विकासवाहिनी को; सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र के कर्मचारियों के अन्य वर्गों के साथ आम संघर्ष के निर्माण द्वारा; पॉलिसीधारकों को यकीन दिलाकर जनता का समर्थन हासिल करने के लिये एक वृहद् लड़ाई छेड़कर। एलआईसी मुकुट का हीरा है और हम लालची निजी पूँजीपतियों के हाथों देश और देश के लोगों के इस अनमोल हीरे को लुटने नहीं देंगे तो फिर आइये हम अपनी प्रिय संस्था की रक्षा और संरक्षा के लिए गहन लड़ाई की तैयारी में जुट जायें!!!



ANOTHER MILESTONE IN THE HISTORY OF AIIEA

The 4th All India Women's Convention held at Bengaluru on 11th August 2019 has become another milestone in the history of AIIEA. The Jaipur Conference of AIIEA decided to activate women employees by forming women's sub-committees and also to conduct women's conventions at Divisional/Regional level. Over a period of 20 years, the growth we could achieve in bringing the women comrades to the trade union activities paved way for conducting the women's convention at the national level. And we started conducting the All India Women's Convention since the year 2007.

The first 3 conventions were held for half a day along with the Working Committee Meeting of AIIEA.

For the first time, it was decided to conduct the 4th Convention separately and that too for one full day, so that sufficient time could be allotted for the deliberations by the delegates. It was decided that the Convenor of the Women's Sub-committee of the Divisional/Regional Units and the Convenor and Joint Convenors of the Zonal level Women's Coordination Committees would attend the Convention as delegates and from each Division/Region, one more woman comrade would attend as observer.

In spite of the battering rains in some parts of the country, around 500 women comrades including from Bangalore participated in the Convention and made it a thumping success. The Convention started with the flag hoisting by Com. Amanulla Khan, President, AIIEA. In a significant gesture, he invited the Women Divisional Presidents present to join him in hoisting the flag amidst thunderous slogans. The contents of the backdrop, wordings of

the banner displayed in the hall and the choir songs presented by the women comrades of Bengaluru Division-I and II set the tone for the Convention.

The Presidium consisting of Comrades Sangeeta Jha (Bilaspur-CZIEA), Manorama Mohanty (Cuttack-ECZIEA), Maitreye Mishra (Gauhati-EZIEA), Geetha Shanth (Bareilly-NCZIEF), Renu Kalra (Jalandhar-NZIEA), M Kameshwari (Vishakapatnam-SCZIEF), K Thulasi (Chennai-II-SZIEF), Neha Meta (Nagpur-WZIEA) and Uma Maheshwari (Chennai-SZGIEA) conducted the proceedings of the Convention. Com.Vijayakumari, Convenor of Bengaluru Division-2 delivered the welcome address. The Convention paid homage to Comrades N M Sundaram, R Govindarajan – the veteran leaders of AIIEA, E M Joseph – former Vice President of SZIEF and Madhava - former President of Udupi Division and Vice President of Southern Zone; Deepa Sharma (Shimla – Northern Zone), JayasudhaRajan (Madurai Region – South Zone), Amudha (Vellore – South Zone) and S Lata (Bengaluru – South Central Zone) were in the Minutes Committee.

The renowned and celebrated journalist of





the country Com. Parvathi Menon (The Hindu and Frontline) and author of books such as *Breaking Barriers* inaugurated the Convention. In her inaugural address, she recalled her association with AIIEA since her student days and she lauded the organisation for its multifaceted activities. She congratulated all the delegates and observers who have gathered with enthusiasm and union spirit and solidarity. She drew the attention of the participants to the challenges that we face today and the circumstances that have given rise to these challenges. She pointed out that because of new forms of work that are emerging in our economy, today increasingly the organised sector is becoming a smaller and smaller island in a sea of sectors and groups that are unorganised. She emphasised the need for self-equipping ideologically, intellectually and politically which is also a continuing aspect of the struggle. She gave an insight of the situation of women in the country and attacks that are being unleashed on their rights. She related the discrimination against women to the declining sex ratio and pointed out to the alarming situation in many States of the country. She also spoke on the sexual harassment of women at work places and the non functioning of the committees set up as a follow up of Vishakha case decided by the Supreme Court. She urged the women organised under AIIEA not to confine themselves to the issues of the industry but also to take lead in highlighting and agitating on issues relating to women in Indian society.

On behalf of AIIEA, Com.MGirija, Joint Secretary of AIIEA submitted the work report. The discussion on the report was initiated by Com J Vijaya, Joint Convenor of South Zone. 31 comrades representing all the 8 zones and the General Insurance unit participated in the debate and enriched the report. These comrades placed their views fully

understanding that we cannot free while any other woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from ours. They expressed their concern on the status of women in general and the working women in particular and placed their suggestions to carry forward the struggles for emancipation of women. The experience shared by our Comrades about their activities, viz., functioning of Media Response Committee, GEWECA committee, social activities, etc., enthused the participants and inspired them a lot.

Com. Amanalla Khan, President, AIIEA intervened and guided the Convention. In his enthusing special address he said that the large participation in the Convention of AIIEA has without any doubt conveyed that the organisation is maturing, progressing and getting strengthened. This society in which we live, the women are normally called as a weaker sex. But in the AIIEA, with pride we say that the women comrades are our strength, our inspiration and our movement. Today a large number of women comrades are participating in the daily activities of the organisation and thereby getting involved in the decision making process. Today the Organisation is having women leaders in the various tiers of the organisation and they are not just the leaders of women, but the leaders of both the men and women. And that is the greatness the organisation has achieved over these years. He pointed out about the pathetic working



condition of the regular wage earners in the country. Quoting the Labour Survey of the Government, he said 73% do not have a written contract, 54% do not get any paid holidays and 52% do not have any social

security benefit. He said that the attacks on workers through codification of labour laws would further erode their life and living standards. He cautioned the audience about the attacks that are being unleashed by the right wing forces on the democratic and secular fabric of the country. He called upon the participants to further strengthen the organisation by implementing the decisions of the Organisation in letter and spirit.



Com. V Ramesh, General Secretary, AIIEA summed up the discussions. While he lauded the participation in large numbers, he appreciated the women comrades for the various activities that are

being carried out in their respective places. At the same time, he pointed out with concern that in few of our Divisional Units, the women's sub-committee is yet to be formed. And he emphasized the need to overcome this weakness. He also stressed that the Divisional Units should ensure that the Divisional level Women's Conventions and Trade Union classes exclusively for women comrades are conducted regularly. He also said that the Organisation would address a letter to The Prime Minister on the issue of 33% reservation for women in decision making bodies. On the issues pertaining to women employees, viz., special leave for menopause related issues, crèche facility, ladies room, representation for Class-III & IV in the Divisional level Committee against sexual harassment at workplace, etc., he said that AIIEA would take up them with the managements of LIC and the four public

sector General Insurance Companies.

The Credential Committee with Com. Poonam Gupta (Meerut-NCZ) as Convenor and Comrades Vaishali Patel (Ahmedabad-WZ), Sangamitra Sarangi (Sambalpur-ECZ), Gayatri Suri (Jabalpur-CZ) and SupriyaSen (Jalpaiguri-EZ) compiled the details pertaining to the delegates. The arrangements made by the leadership and cadres of Bengaluru Division-I and II and the Bengaluru Region General Insurance Employees Association was much appreciated by all the participants.

The Convention evoked unprecedented enthusiasm across the country. A record number of women comrades had arranged for their travel to participate in the Convention. But for the flood situation in some parts of the country, the participation would have exceeded 600. The discussions revealed that the attachments and affection towards the AIIEA but also the deep understanding of the women comrades on the problems of women in Indian society. They were clear that the issues of women cannot find solution unless the struggle of both the men and women work for a just fair and equal society.

The tireless and dedicated work of the volunteers from Bangalore Divisions went a long way to make the Convention a tremendous success. A large number of women volunteers along with the men volunteers were present at Airport, Railway Stations and Bus Stations to receive the delegates and observers. The venue of the Meeting was beautifully decorated. The backdrop placed at the stage summed up the entire theme and proceedings of the Convention. It read TRUST YOUR STRUGGLE FOR PEACE EQUALITY HARMONY. It is with this trust and confidence that the 4th All India Women Convention came to a successful close.





RECEPTION COMMITTEE FOR 25th SILVER JUBILEE CONFERENCE OF AIIEA FORMED

The 25th Silver Jubilee Conference of AIIEA will be held at Vishakapatnam from 27th to 30th January 2020. More than 1700 delegates and observers from all parts of the country are expected to participate in this Conference. The responsibility of hosting this historic Conference has been entrusted to ICEU, Vishakapatnam Division. There is wide enthusiasm among the employees of Vishakapatnam to host this Conference.

In order to make all arrangements for the success of the Conference, it was decided to form a Reception Committee. A meeting was called on 21st July 2019 for this purpose at Andhra University Platinum Jubilee Hall. The Meeting was presided over by Com M.Kameswari, President of ICEU, Vishakapatnam. Com N.Ramanachalam, General Secretary, ICEU welcomed the gathering and explained the issues involved in organising the Conference. Nearly 80 trade union leaders, intellectuals and progressive personalities from different walks of life attended the meeting.

Com K.Venu Gopal, Vice-President, AIIEA addressed the meeting. He explained the political, social and economic situation in the country and the challenges a class based trade union faces in such circumstances. The 25th Silver Jubilee Conference

has to debate on these challenges and chart the path for the organisation. Pointing to the attacks on the public sector character of LIC, he said LIC has emerged as the most trusted brand, respected by policyholders and admired by the nation. Therefore, any attack on LIC has to be forcefully resisted. He was confident that Vishakapatnam will successfully host the conference and sought the support of trade union and progressive forces of Vishakapatnam.

After this, Com. N. Ramanachalam, proposed a Reception Committee with Prof. K.V.Ramanna, former Vice-Chancellor, Andhra University as Chairman, Com CH.Narasinga Rao, President, CITU, Andhra Pradesh as Vice-President, Com N.Ramanachalam as Convenor and Com N.Jagannadha Raju as Treasurer. He also proposed all leaders of SCZIEF, ICEU, Visakhapatnam and representatives of fraternal trade unions like Steel Plant,



Banks, BSNL HPCL, APSRTC, Postal union as members of the Reception Committee. The Reception Committee will also have a representative from the General Insurance Wing of AIIEA. The proposal was unanimously accepted.

Prof K.V.Ramana was gracious to accept the responsibility as Chairman of Reception Committee. He said he is always connected with LIC employees association being chairman of PFI forum. He exuded confidence that the Silver Jubilee Conference of AIIEA to take decisions not only to fight the policy of privatisation but all policies of Modi Government that are adversely impacting the livelihood of the people and social fabric of the country.

Com. Ch. Narasinga Rao, Vice chairman of AIIEA reception committee said that AIIEA 25th Silver Jubilee Conference will be smoothly performed. He spoke at length on the emerging struggles of working class in Andhra Pradesh. He pointed out that Vishakapatnam houses a number of public sector units. These units are facing the threat of privatisation now. He hoped that the 25th Silver Jubilee Conference will galvanise the entire working class in Visakhapatnam in their struggle against anti people policies.

Com. K. Venugopal AIIEA Vice President unveiled the logo of AIIEA 25th Silver Jubilee Conference. The meeting ended with a vote of thanks by Com Ramanachalam.

A meeting of the Activists of the organisation was held in the afternoon. This meeting was addressed by Com.K. Venugopal and Com. Clement Xavier Das, General Secretary, SCZIEF, General Secretary. Both of them expressed confidence in the ability and capability of Visakapatnam to make arrangements for the success of the Conference. Around 300 Comrades from various branches and Divisional Office of Visakhapatnam Division participated.

Com. N. Ramanachalam informed that there was a competition for designing the logo. 12 entries were received. Finally, the logo designed by Com D.S.Prasad, Assistant, Rajam Branch was selected as the logo of the 25th Silver Jubilee Conference of AIIEA. The logo designed by Com K.V.Ramana Murthy, HGA, DO was ranked second.

The Meeting ended with great enthusiasm and confidence. Onward to 25th Silver Jubilee Conference of AIIEA.

Fifty years ago on July 19, 1969, fourteen large private banks had been nationalized. Ironically the Golden Jubilee of that event, which had been a significant step in the process of building up a new financial architecture for the country, is being celebrated today by trade unions in the banking sector but not by the government of the day.

The argument that had been given for bank nationalization had been simple: since credit represents command over capital, how this command is distributed across sectors, across social groups and across regions, determines the trajectory of social development. If the distribution of bank credit has such powerful social consequences, then this distribution must be socially controlled, for which the banks must be owned by the State on behalf of society. In fact bank nationalization had been preceded by a brief period when there was an attempt at social control without State ownership; its failure prompted nationalization as the only feasible means of effecting social control.

To be sure, notwithstanding all the promises, bank nationalization did not actually mean a democratization of the access to credit; how could it in an economy pursuing the capitalist path of development? What it did however, apart from bringing about a massive expansion of banking facilities across the country, was to broaden the base of capitalist development, by making loans available to the agricultural sector that had been systematically denied institutional credit till then; and this made possible the so-called Green Revolution. It also made finance subservient to the needs of production, rather than being employed for speculation and corporate takeover strategies as earlier.

From the very beginning however bank nationalization had faced stiff opposition from big capital, since it had taken away control over the financial sector from its hands. This opposition intensified immensely after “economic liberalization” was introduced. International finance capital, which now became a dominant force and with which the domestic corporate-financial oligarchy became integrated, was keen to have the entire world as its arena of unhindered operation; the idea of a major country like India having a financial structure that did not just elude its control but was actually largely State-owned, was anathema for it.



FIFTY YEARS AFTER BANK NATIONALIZATION

The insulation of the Indian financial system from global finance, which State ownership entailed, was resoundingly demonstrated when the financial crisis of 2008 struck. For the entire Indian banking system, foreign assets accounted for only 7 percent of total assets, and these too were mainly held by private sector banks like the ICICI bank. The nationalized banks held hardly any foreign assets, let alone toxic assets, because of which the financial crisis left them completely untouched. But this very insulation was what irked international finance capital.

The U.S. administration put enormous pressure on India to privatize the banking system, and at the very least to privatize the State Bank of India as a “signal” of its intent. Lawrence Summers and Timothy Geithner, Treasury Secretaries respectively under Presidents Clinton and Obama, would visit India and insist upon the privatization of the State Bank of India. The Indian government however could not muster enough courage to do so, since bank nationalization had caught the imagination of the people.

Then a new offensive was launched, namely that nationalized banks were not profitable enough, that they compared poorly in terms of profitability with private sector banks. This was a complete red herring: banks had been nationalized to serve a social purpose, not for making maximum profits. The criterion for judging them was how far they had served this social purpose, not how much profits they made; and yet this argument was put forward, quite shamelessly, by individuals and “slot machine” Committees (which give the government the report it wants) to discredit nationalized banks and gradually prepare the public for their eventual privatization.

Prof. Prabhat Patnaik

WHAT THE NATIONALISATION OF BANKS DID, APART FROM BRINGING ABOUT A MASSIVE EXPANSION OF BANKING FACILITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, WAS TO BROADEN THE BASE OF CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT, BY MAKING LOANS AVAILABLE TO THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR THAT HAD BEEN SYSTEMATICALLY DENIED INSTITUTIONAL CREDIT TILL THEN; AND ALSO MADE FINANCE SUBSERVIENT TO THE NEEDS OF PRODUCTION, RATHER THAN BEING EMPLOYED FOR SPECULATION AND CORPORATE TAKEOVER STRATEGIES AS EARLIER.

Finally there was the argument about nationalized banks being saddled with a larger proportion of “non-performing assets” which, it was claimed, indicated their “irresponsible” lending practices. As a matter of fact, nationalized banks’ NPAs arise not because of their “irresponsibility” but because of changed government policies, in the context of which playing the role they are called upon to play saddles them with NPAs. There are three obvious changes in government policy that has meant that nationalized banks have been left holding the can.

The first relates to the fiscal squeeze that the government has brought upon itself, by limiting the size of the fiscal deficit through the FRBM Act on the one hand, and by handing out large tax concessions to the private corporate sector on the other. This has meant in effect that large infrastructure projects, which require lumpy investment, which have long gestation periods and therefore involve high risks, are now left to be implemented by the private corporate sector, rather than the public sector as earlier.

The second relates to the end of specialized financial institutions that had earlier provided long-term loans for such projects. Under the earlier regime banks gave largely short-term credit while a whole range of financial institutions like the IDBI, IFCI, SFCs, ICICI, were specially set up to provide medium and long-term loans for investment. These specialized financial institutions have now dwindled in significance; some of them like the IDBI and ICICI have even converted themselves into banks. As a result banks now have to provide not just short-term credit but also medium and long-term loans. Since banks depend upon deposits for their resources, which can be withdrawn at any time, they are in effect “borrowing short to lend long”, a sure-shot recipe for financial stress, especially when it is remembered that many of the projects in the infrastructure sector for which they lend are highly risky projects.

Nationalized banks could just walk away from financing such projects, as many private banks do; but being nationalized banks they feel obliged to pay heed to government directives to finance such projects. And of course since these projects are now being undertaken by the private sector, the scope for “willful default”, where the capitalists involved simply walk away with the funds instead of putting them into the project, is great, which exposes banks to further stress. Ironically the same government which directs banks to give loans to these private projects, then makes a song and dance about the NPAs, and wants to privatize these banks because of such NPAs.

The third change in policy relates to the great reduction that has taken place in the profitability of the agricultural sector. Even though the definition of “priority sector” within which agriculture falls, has been widened to a ludicrous extent, nationalized banks still give loans for agriculture, while foreign banks and private Indian banks have by and large withdrawn from giving such loans. Many private banks give loans to middlemen who then use these very funds to give loans to peasants, becoming in effect a new class of private moneylenders. In fact the ICICI bank flatly refused to give loans directly to peasants, preferring instead to deal with them through middlemen called “facilitators”.

The fact that loans to agriculture have to be periodically written off, is not because peasants have developed “bad habits”, as

many bourgeois commentators pontificating against loan write-offs allege, but because agriculture has ceased to be a profitable activity. The stressed assets of nationalized banks arising from this source therefore are attributable not to any “irresponsibility” on their part, but precisely to their “responsibility” in giving loans to agriculture in a context where government policy has undermined agricultural profitability.

To say all this is not to paint nationalized banks in rosy colours; it is just to underscore the fact that government policy has moved away from what it had been when banks were nationalized. Indeed, the phenomenon of nationalized banks sits somewhat uncomfortably in a world dominated by international finance capital. The travails of nationalized banks arise for this reason, namely that the ethos of neo-liberalism undermines their functioning. But reversing nationalization would simply carry forward the dominance of international finance capital. It would further undermine national sovereignty, and further accentuate the process of primitive accumulation of capital at the expense of petty production and peasant agriculture.

In all the discussion about the fate of nationalized banks however one important fact has been totally ignored, namely that these banks are not government-owned but State-owned. The government, as merely the executive wing of the State, cannot decide entirely on its own what should be the fate of these banks. But this is precisely what it has tended to do, for instance in allowing private equity into these banks and then raising the share of such equity. An announcement is simply made in the budget about disinvestment and when the budget gets passed this also gets ipso facto ratified. This must stop.

When banks were nationalized in 1969, not only did Parliament approve the decision, but even the judiciary had to give its assent, since nationalization was challenged in the Supreme Court. Nationalization in short had the approval of all the organs of the State. It is necessary to insist that any interference with the ownership structure of the nationalized banks, including reducing equity even in the range above 51 percent, should have specific parliamentary sanction.

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AN ABROGATION OF DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES

The recent abrogation of Article 370 ending the special status of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) in the Indian Constitution along with the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill, 2019, bifurcating the State into two Union Territories (J&K and Ladakh), have delivered a knock-out blow to the long-drawn-out peace process in Kashmir.

These moves also herald a paradigm shift in the fundamental premises and parameters of India's approach towards the Kashmir issue, with long-term implications for its political strategy of tackling such internal conflicts. There are three cardinal principles which successive political regimes have hitherto followed in addressing internal conflicts and seeking political reconciliation with alienated segments of the populace. These in turn have bolstered the robust and resilient nature of Indian democracy. The future, however, appears much more uncertain. Here is why.

Accommodative parameters

The first principle entails adhering to the letter and spirit of the Indian Constitution. Its far-sighted and malleable nature has stood the test of time. Since 1947, India has faced a wide-ranging nature of political demands ranging from secession, to the creation of a separate State for Jammu, Union Territory status for Ladakh and others seeking affirmative discrimination for the Dogri language, Scheduled Tribe status for Gujjars and Paharis and so on.

In response, the central leadership has tried finding ways and means within the overarching parameters of the Indian Constitution and

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have rarely been disappointed. In view of the difficult circumstances under which the Dogra Maharaja Hari Singh had acceded to India, Article 370 itself offered an excellent example as to how the special needs and political aspirations of the people of J&K could be politically and constitutionally accommodated by India's Constitution makers.

Decades later, when Ladakhi Buddhists launched an agitation in 1989, demanding Union Territory status, the Indian Constitution once again made space for political experimentation by introducing intermediate state structures — the creation of two autonomous hill councils for Leh and Kargil.

Weakening federalism

Against this backdrop, it is for the first time in independent India's history that the Bharatiya Janata Party government has used constitutional provisions for opposite ends: to undermine and weaken India's federal character by downgrading a State and territorially dividing it into two Union Territories without the consent of the people of J&K.

The method adopted to execute this decision is of special concern because by equating or replacing the Constituent Assembly of J&K (which was dissolved in 1957) with the Legislative Assembly of J&K, and Parliament

appropriating the latter's powers since the State is under President's rule, the Central government has acted unilaterally to reorganise the State of J&K.

This rests not only on legally shaky ground but also flies in the face of constitutional norms and propriety. If this passes judicial scrutiny, it can then be done to any State in India, with drastic implications for its federal character.

The second principle pertains to the maxim of 'inclusivity', that is, a political demand being made must be inclusive in terms of representing the interests of all those in whose name it is made. This supported bridge building and coalition-making among different communities certainly helped in shaping the peace process, in turn bolstering India's deeply diverse and plural character.

In J&K's context too, it has also proven to be a critical common factor helping to explain the failures and successes of various political demands. The Kashmiri idea of self-determination in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual society, for instance, was to call for a plebiscite as mandated by the UN resolutions of 1949 or seek an independent and sovereign State of J&K, but this was not the approach taken by other communities such as the Dogras, Kashmiri Pandits, Gujjars, Bakkarwals, and Ladakhi Buddhists. In the 1950s, as indeed in the 1990s, the demand by Kashmiri Muslims for a right to self-determination or azadi was politically checkmated by these communities as their political choices were very different; time and again, an exclusively Valley-focussed approach has doomed the prospects of the peace process.

Demographic impact

The BJP government's move has, however, not only completely swung the pendulum but is also antithetical to the very idea of inclusivity. By turning J&K, especially the Valley, into a virtually open air prison, with a full clampdown and information blackout, the message is clear: that New Delhi alone will decide the political future of the people of J&K with no room for any consultative process and no space for dissent.

The decision to divide the State is particularly fraught with the risk of deepening regional and communal fault lines. While Ladakhi Buddhists, for instance, are now celebrating the fulfilment of their long pending demand for Union Territory's status, the voices of Kargilis who are still under a strict curfew are yet to be heard. They may not support this

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN INDEPENDENT INDIA'S HISTORY THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY GOVERNMENT HAS USED CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR OPPOSITE ENDS: TO UNDERMINE AND WEAKEN INDIA'S FEDERAL CHARACTER BY DOWNGRADING A STATE AND TERRITORIALLY DIVIDING IT INTO TWO UNION TERRITORIES

decision because 'a Union Territory without a legislature' not only negates the idea of decentralisation of power to the grassroots (the undergirding principle of the autonomous hill council) but could well lead to a shifting of the loci of power to Leh, resulting in losing whatever gains they have assiduously made over the years.

The celebrations by Kashmiri Pandits are anticipated because of the gross injustice and displacement they have suffered since their forced exodus from the Valley in the early 1990s. It remains to be seen whether the abrogation of Article 370 by itself, would facilitate their return to the Valley without the support of local Kashmiri Muslims and rising violence.

Instead of making all communities equal stakeholders in the peace process, the BJP government's decision may well end up pitching one community against the other. A deepening of societal fissures and communal

GANDHI IN KASHMIR,

Mahatma Gandhi visited the Valley of Kashmir once, in the first week of August 1947. He was then 77, and the journey was arduous, but personal duty and national honour both called him there. His country was about to be freed, and divided; it was not clear which way the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir would go. While the population of the state was mostly Muslim, their popular leader, Sheikh Abdullah, detested Pakistan as he was a thoroughgoing secularist himself. The ruler of the state, Maharaja Hari Singh, was a Hindu, but he did not want to join either India or Pakistan, nurturing the fantasy of creating a sort of Eastern Switzerland instead with himself as its presiding deity.

Gandhi's trip had two main aims; to get the Maharaja to release Sheikh Abdullah from prison, and to get a sense of what the people of Kashmir were thinking. When

THE ABROGATION OF ARTICLE 370, A MOVE WHICH IS ONLY LIKELY TO DEEPEN THE ALIENATION. THE MODI GOVERNMENT FACES AN UPHILL TASK IN IDENTIFYING CREDIBLE LOCAL PARTNERS IN USHERING IN PEACE TO THE VALLEY, WHICH MAY WELL END UP IN FACING YET ANOTHER IMPASSE.

fault lines do not go hand in hand with the agenda of peace-making.

The third principle refers to a promise and the practices of holding a dialogue process and sharing political power with opponents of all hues. In Kashmir, successive Central governments have until now never shut the door of dialogue in the face of political opponents who have ranged from the Sheikh Abdullah-led Plebiscite Front in the 1960s to the Muslim United Front in the 1980s to the Hurriyat leadership since the 1990s. This also holds true for militant groups.

While the bottomline of Congress governments has been a commitment by their opponents to abjure the path of violence and abide by the Indian Constitution, the erstwhile Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) regime was even more generous in offering the broad framework of 'insaniyat, jamhooriyat and Kashmiriyat'.

Political fallout

In a significant point of departure, the present government is pursuing a hard, top-down approach. The Home Minister has categorically ruled out any dialogue with militants and the Hurriyat, and has even castigated the mainstream regional political leadership of the National Conference and Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Democratic Party for being corrupt, promoting family rule and fomenting separatism and violence. This move has nullified the very idea of a process of dialogue and runs the risk of discrediting the mainstream politicians and obliterating the middle ground between the militants and mainstream politicians.

The Prime Minister in his recent address to the nation, expressed hope that new leadership in Kashmir would emerge from grass-roots politics. It is important to note that in 1,407 out of 2,135 halqas or village clusters, there was no voting at all in the panchayat elections that were held in 2018. This does not lend credence to youth being optimistic about joining mainstream politics especially after the abrogation of Article 370, a move which is only likely to deepen the alienation. The Modi government faces an uphill task in identifying credible local partners in ushering in peace to the Valley, which may well end up in facing yet another impasse.

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GANDHIANS ON KASHMIR

he reached the Valley he received a terrific reception. On his entry into Srinagar he was met by thousands of people on either side of the road, shouting "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai". Since the bridge across the river Jhelum had been taken over by the crowd, Gandhi took a boat to the other side, where he addressed a public meeting of some 25,000 people, convened by Sheikh Abdullah's wife. He spoke of spiritual

Continued on next page

Ramachandra Guha

Eminent Historian,

Courtesy: Telegraph 17/8/2019

IN LATE SEPTEMBER 1947, THE MAHARAJA RELEASED SHEIKH ABDULLAH FROM PRISON. THREE WEEKS LATER, PAKISTAN INVADDED KASHMIR, SEEKING TO FORCIBLY ANNEX THE STATE. THE SHEIKH TOOK THE LEAD IN MOBILIZING THE PEOPLE AGAINST THE RAIDERS. HEARING ABOUT THEIR COURAGE, GANDHI SAID, AT HIS PRAYER MEETING IN DELHI ON OCTOBER 29, 1947: "KASHMIR CANNOT BE SAVED BY THE MAHARAJA. IF ANYONE CAN SAVE KASHMIR, IT IS ONLY THE MUSLIMS, THE KASHMIRI PANDITS, THE RAJPUTS AND THE SIKHS WHO CAN DO SO." GANDHI NOTED, ADMIRINGLY AND SIGNIFICANTLY, THAT "SHEIKH ABDULLAH HAS AFFECTIONATE AND FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH ALL OF [THESE COMMUNITIES]".



GANDHI IN KASHMIR, GANDHIANS ON KASHMIR

Continued from previous page

rather than political matters, in Hindustani. His doctor Sushila Nayar, who was with him, wrote that “men and women flocked from the neighbouring villages to have a glimpse of the Mahatma. Friends and foes alike wonder at the hold he has on the masses. His mere presence seems to soothe them in [a] strange fashion”.

Gandhi spent three days in the Valley and two days in Jammu. In a short note on his Kashmir visit, that he sent both to Nehru and to Patel, Gandhi wrote of his conversations with the maharaja, Hari Singh, and his son, Karan Singh. He remarked that “both admitted that with the lapse of British Paramountcy the true Paramountcy of the people of Kashmir would commence. However much they might wish to join the Union, they would have to make the choice in accordance with the wishes of the people. How they could be determined was not discussed at that interview”.

Although Sheikh Abdullah was in jail, other leaders of his National Conference were not, and Gandhi met them too. He later wrote to Nehru and Patel that these National Conference leaders were “most sanguine that the result of the free vote of the people, whether on the adult franchise or on the existing register, would be in favour of Kashmir joining the [Indian] Union provided of course that Sheikh Abdullah and his co-prisoners were released...”

Gandhi spent India's first Independence Day not in Delhi but in Calcutta. He was in no mood to celebrate because of the wave of Hindu-Muslim rioting that was sweeping across India. By his own example and through his fasts, Gandhi single-handedly stopped the violence in Calcutta, and then proceeded to Delhi, hoping to do the same there.

In late September, the Maharaja released Sheikh Abdullah from prison. Three weeks later, Pakistan invaded Kashmir, seeking to forcibly annex the state. The Sheikh took the lead in mobilizing the people against the raiders. Hearing about their courage, Gandhi said, at his prayer meeting in Delhi on October 29, 1947: “Kashmir cannot be saved by the Maharaja. If anyone can save Kashmir, it is only the Muslims, the Kashmiri Pandits, the Rajputs and the Sikhs who can do so.” Gandhi noted, admiringly and significantly, that “Sheikh Abdullah has affectionate and friendly relations with all of [these communities]”.

A month later, with the Indian army now fully in charge of repulsing the raiders, Sheikh Abdullah came down to Delhi. At Gandhi's prayer meeting of November 28, the Sheikh stood next to him, where the Mahatma said: “Sheikh Abdullah had done one great thing. He had kept the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims united in Kashmir and created a situation in which they would wish to live and die together.”

Two months later Gandhi was murdered, by a Hindu fanatic. In the seven decades since, Kashmir has lurched from crisis to crisis, with State repression combining with religious fanaticism to make this most beautiful part of India also the most strife-torn. Had Gandhi been alive, he would perhaps have been most appalled by three events in the modern history of Kashmir: the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah by the Nehru government in 1953, the ethnic cleansing of the Pandits by Islamic jihadists in 1989-90, and the unilateral abrogation of Article 370 and the savage crackdown by the Narendra Modi government on Kashmiris in 2019. The last especially would have horrified him; that, in the 150th anniversary year of his birth, an Indian government had refused to “make the choice in accordance with the wishes of the people”, and, instead, made the Valley into the largest open-air prison in human history.

To be sure, Gandhi is not around to comment on current affairs in Kashmir. But some who speak with some credibility in his name are. I have just received a statement on Kashmir issued by the Gandhi Peace Foundation, an independent body set up



Cartoon courtesy: Satish Acharya, SIFY.COM

in 1959 to commemorate the Mahatma's memory, and which has done good work since. Younger readers may not know that the great Jayaprakash Narayan was closely associated with the GPF. Like him, it courageously opposed the Emergency, and was hounded by Indira Gandhi on her return to power in 1980 as a consequence.

The GPF's statement is issued both in Hindi and in English. It says: "The gun that was used to silence Kashmir is now being used as a telescope through which to see Kashmir. This is shameful, unfortunate and ominous for India." It continues: "A whole state has vanished from the map in broad daylight. The Indian Union had 28 states, now it has 27. This is not a magic show, where a magician shows us, we know, something unreal and illusory. Here we are witnessing something cruel, ugly, undemocratic and seemingly irreversible. It reveals the poverty of our democratic politics."

Of the sham conducted in the 'Hall of the People', the statement says: "What took place in the Parliament this time was far from an exchange of views or a serious debate. One man shouted, more than three hundred thumped desks, and the rest sat crestfallen, defeated. This is not bahumat or majority, but bahusankhya or majoritarianism — an attempt to rule by by numbers."

The GPF warns us: "We will not be able to lock down Kashmir forever. The doors will surely open, the people will come out, and their anguish will burst forth. Foreign elements will poison their minds with even more vigour. All the leaders of the opposition who were urging the people to maintain peace and abide by the rule of law have been imprisoned. We have burnt all the bridges for a possible dialogue."

The statement from the GPF ends with this exhortation, addressed both to ordinary Indians and to the government: "We must

stand with the Kashmiris in their hour of crisis, which is equally our hour of crisis. Our helpless fellow-citizens who have been imprisoned must know that all right-thinking Indians share their anguish. The government must protect law and order, but it must also allow free expression at every level. That will help us to normalize the situation."

As someone who has studied Gandhi for many years, and soaked himself in his writings, I believe the GPF statement is absolutely in line with what the Mahatma would have thought about the tragic happenings in Kashmir now. Let us recall the remarks Gandhi himself made in 1947: "Kashmir cannot be saved by the Maharaja. If anyone can save Kashmir, it is only the Muslims, the Kashmiri Pandits, the Rajputs and the Sikhs who can do so."

The power-hungry political maharajas of today who pretend to be Kashmir's saviours cannot save Kashmiris. Nor can the avaricious corporate maharajas toadying up behind them. Nor indeed can the Pakistani army or their proxy jihadists, who have cynically brainwashed so many Kashmiri young men over the decades and sent them to their tragically early deaths.

Given its geographical location and the burdens of history it carries, it may be that Kashmir is condemned to many more decades of conflict and bloodshed. But those Indians — Kashmiris included — who have not turned their back entirely on the teachings of the Father of the Nation must not stop trying. Truth in speech and writing, reason in debate and argument, non-violence in action, an absolute commitment to inter-faith harmony in everyday life — these ideals and principles must be kept alive in these dark times too. ●

"THE GUN THAT WAS USED TO SILENCE KASHMIR IS NOW BEING USED AS A TELESCOPE THROUGH WHICH TO SEE KASHMIR. THIS IS SHAMEFUL, UNFORTUNATE AND OMINOUS FOR INDIA. A WHOLE STATE HAS VANISHED FROM THE MAP IN BROAD DAYLIGHT. THIS IS NOT A MAGIC SHOW, WHERE A MAGICIAN SHOWS US, WE KNOW, SOMETHING UNREAL AND ILLUSORY. HERE WE ARE WITNESSING SOMETHING CRUEL, UGLY, UNDEMOCRATIC AND SEEMINGLY IRREVERSIBLE. IT REVEALS THE POVERTY OF OUR DEMOCRATIC POLITICS."
- GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION



Cartoon courtesy: Sajith Kumar, Deccan Herald

DRAFT NEW EDUCATION POLICY PUSHES PRIVATIZATION OF EDUCATION

K.Venugopal Rao

The Union Human Resources Ministry formed a committee on 24.06.2017 under the chairmanship of Sri Kasturirangan, former chairman of the Indian Space Research Organization to prepare a draft report on the National Education Policy. The Committee presented its report on 31.05.2019 to the Government. The government is now soliciting the views and opinions of academics, intellectuals and the public on the draft report of National Education Policy 2019. The government is planning to totally revamp the education system and want to transform the education system in India to suit to the present conditions by 2030. The release of draft report on an important issue like education within a few days of returning to power by NDA is significant. The government wishes to bring about reforms at all levels of education (primary, secondary and higher). The Committee says that the new policy is *“built on the foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability”*. But when we study the draft report we find that most of the recommendations are in line with the political and social philosophy of the ruling party and will be helpful in the wider spread of its thinking across India.

The policy document asserts about the need to teach constitutional principles and values to the students. But the words “secular” or “secularism” are not found anywhere in it. The National Policy on Education 1986 categorically states: “All educational programmes should be carried on strict conformity with secular values. National Curricular Framework (NCF) 2005, affirms, “the first is a commitment to democracy and the values of equality, justice, freedom, concern for others well-being, secularism, respect for human dignity and rights.” Against this policy tradition of honouring secularism as a core Indian value for designing Indian education, the omission of the words “secular” and “secularism” in the NEP 2019 is odd. There is no clear commitment to secular ideals and there is no mention that the other ideals of pluralism and diversity will be abided by the NEP 2019. There is no mention that the state shall not discriminate against Indian citizens on grounds of religion, and there is

no mention that care will be taken for bringing in a democratic experience in classrooms. The curricula and pedagogic methods in Indian classrooms have a vital role in eliminating caste and religious prejudice specially when there is a sharp rise in caste and religious violence in the present day India. The challenge for the education system is to make the young minds understand these difficult and complex social realities. The NEP 2019 should have focused on these but unfortunately these are not part of the suggestions made by the draft report.

When the report was released, controversy over the Hindi language broke out. The report made learning of Hindi language compulsory even for the Non- Hindi speaking states. This resulted in big protests in the southern states. The committee responded immediately and the dispute was resolved with the amendment of the provision of compulsory learning of Hindi. But it exposed the philosophy of the government in the matter of language.

The report recommends that child care and their education should be given top priority. Anganwadi teachers are currently taking care of the child care through ICDS. Now they will be entrusted with the responsibility of giving education also. But there is no mention in the report of providing infrastructure facilities to ICDSs and hiring of trained teachers to do this work. The report is totally silent on the play school system of private educational institutions and huge fees they collect for child care education. The report recommends for the reduction of teacher-student ratio and also increase of salaries and promotions to teachers. This report says this will attract best talent to the teaching profession. The policy document does not specify whether the nature of employment in education system is temporary or permanent in the context of neoliberal policies.

The report feels that the current regulatory regime is tough and this has to be made simpler. This proposition will benefit the private educational institutions. The report recommends for private exam boards, private

THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DRAFT REPORT FOR MOST OF THE TIME, IS LIKE THE REPORT OF THE PRIVATE LOBBIES IN EDUCATION WHICH PUSHES FORWARD THE NEO-LIBERAL AGENDA OF PRIVATIZATION AND COMMERCIALIZATION OF EDUCATION. THEY DO NOT HELP THE POOR AND MARGINALIZED SECTIONS OF OUR SOCIETY IN GAINING ACCESS TO EDUCATION. BUT THIS IS ONLY A DRAFT REPORT AND WE HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE WHAT THE GOVT PROPOSES TO DO ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE. ACADEMICS, ACTIVISTS AND MEMBERS OF CIVIL SOCIETY SHOULD RESPOND TO THE DRAFT REPORT AND SHOULD STRIVE FOR STRENGTHENING OF AN INCLUSIVE AND PUBLIC EDUCATIONS SYSTEM

accreditation institutes, full autonomy to private educational institutions, and establishment of new private universities and allowing of foreign Universities in India. It also recommends for the establishment of overseas campuses of the Indian universities. The report has given priority to the private sector. The authority to decide fees in the private institutions has been left to the whims and fancies of private managements. The report recommends for the liberalization of regulations in all levels of education. It is surprising that while expressing concern for education being made a tool of profit by the private managements, the report gives top priority to private players in the expansion of education. The aim of the report is to strengthen the private players in education by giving scope for more privatization of education.

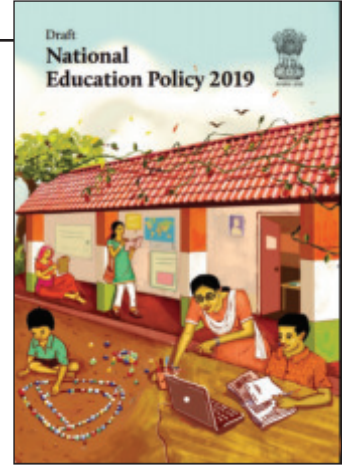
In higher education the policy proposes centralization and commercialization. For this Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog (National Education Commission) will be established which will be headed by the Prime Minister. The report proposes setting up different bodies for regulation, accreditation, funding, standard setting, etc. which will make it easier for the government to scrap the University Grants Commission (UGC). The report advocates autonomy in administration, academics and financial management. The report classifies universities into "research universities", "teaching universities" and colleges offering undergraduate courses. Flexibility in curricula, teaching processes and board exams, introduction of semester system for classes 9 to 12, introduction of concepts of assessment, accreditation and autonomy in the schooling system will lead to commercialization and de-regularization of the school education.

Private colleges can give accreditations. They can conduct exams and can give certificates to the students. The private accreditations will pollute the education system. Education will be made into a business. The public universities will be weakened. The role of private and foreign universities in education will increase. UGC will be converted into a mere funding agency

to the universities and colleges. This will enhance the private sector role in higher education. All colleges will have a u t o n o m o u s status. There will be no affiliating universities. The system of affiliation will be abolished by 2030. This will weaken educational infrastructure in rural areas. The chances for employment for rural youth will decrease. No one will come forward to start educational institutions in rural areas in the absence government institutions.

The report suggests for increase in public expenditure on education to 6 percent of GDP from the present 3% and to 20 percent of all central and state government expenditure from the present 10%. The report also suggests for reducing the control and influence exercised by the government and the bureaucracy over higher education institutions. There are suggestions for focus on liberal arts, social sciences, and languages. It also focuses on research and increasing funding for research etc. These are all progressive recommendations. But for most of the time the report is like the report of the private lobbies in education which pushes forward the neo-liberal agenda of privatization and commercialization of education. The report also advances the regressive agenda of right wing politics of our country.

The recommendations of the report do not help the poor and marginalized sections of our society in gaining access to education. But this is only a draft report and we have to wait and see what the Govt proposes to do on the recommendations of the committee. Academics, Activists and members of civil society should respond to the draft report and should strive for strengthening of an inclusive and public educations system



Cartoon courtesy:
Satish Acharya

धार्मिक बहुलता के दम्भ में फंसता भारत

गीता शान्त

ले दे के अपने पास फकत इक नजर तो है,
क्यूँ देखे ज़िन्दगी को किसी की नजर से हम।

हमारी नजर साफ तौर पर देख पा रही है कि देश एक गम्भीर साजिश का शिकार हो रहा है। बहुत चालाकी से जनतन्त्र को धार्मिक बहुसंख्यकवाद से प्रतिस्थापित किया जा रहा है।

यह प्रतिस्थापन कारपोरेट वर्ग की आवश्यकता है। क्योंकि नव उदारवादी आर्थिक नीतियों के महिमा मंडन द्वारा भारतीय जनता को जो स्वर्ग सरीखे झूठे स्वप्न दिखाये गये थे उनकी पोल अब खुल चुकी है। इन नीतियों के चलते देश को कारपोरेट के हवाले करने से आम जनता की बदहाली का जो ज्वालामुखी तैयार हुआ है उसे काबू करने के लिए अब कारपोरेट जगत ने बहुसंख्यक धार्मिक दम्भ वाली राजनैतिक शक्तियों को अपना सारथी नियुक्त किया है।

2014 व 2019 के चुनावों में कारपोरेट जगत ने इन राजनैतिक शक्तियों पर अथाह धन व मीडिया संसाधन खर्च किये। यह निवेश फिलहाल ऐसा वातावरण बना पाने में सफल दिख रहा है कि जनतंत्र, धर्मनिरपेक्षता, संवैधानिकता, राष्ट्रीयकरण, राज्य की उत्तरदायित्वता जैसे वे तमाम राष्ट्रीय मूल्य जिन्हें स्थापित करने के लिए भारतीयों ने असंख्य बलिदान दिये जिनके दम पर विश्व में भारत की प्रतिष्ठा बढ़ी, उन्हें कूड़ेदान में डाला जा रहा है। अर्थसत्ता व राज्य सत्ता का गठजोड़ अपनी सम्पूर्ण सामर्थ्य से धार्मिक बहुलता के दम्भ का नशा जनता को परोस रहा है। इन नशों की ही यह विशिष्टता है कि इसमें डूबा इन्सान सत्ता से सवाल नहीं करता, वह रोजगार, शिक्षा, चिकित्सा किसी चीज की माँग नहीं करता बल्कि जो उसके पास है वह भी उससे छीना जा सकता है। यह नशा बस इस बात से सन्तुष्ट कर देता है कि अब धार्मिक अल्पसंख्यक उससे डरे-दबे हुए अपनी औकात में हैं और यदा-कदा उन्हें प्रताड़ित करने का सुख पा लेता है।

बहुसंख्यक दम्भ आधारहीन श्रेष्ठता का एक वह सामन्ती बोध है जिसकी नाव पर सवार कारपोरेट बहुसंख्यकों का ही अथाह शोषण करके मुनाफे के भंडार भर रहा है। यह बहुसंख्यक श्रेष्ठता बोध का ही काल है जब पहली बार पूजा एकत्रण इस ऐतिहासिकता पर पहुँचा है कि हम महज 1% लोगों के पास 73% आमदनी चली गई। यही वह काल है जब बेरोजगारी 45 वर्ष के चरम पर है और भुखमरी, बीमारी, लाचारी, नारी असुरक्षा के सूचकांकों में हम वैश्विक स्तर पर ऐतिहासिक रूप से लुढ़क गये हैं।

हम अक्सर हैरान होते हैं कि नोटबंदी से लोग मर गये लाखों रोजगार चले गये, किसानों के बाद अब व्यापारी भी आत्महत्या कर रहे हैं, चुनाव के समय किया गया कोई वायदा पूरा नहीं किया गया फिर भी उसी राजनैतिक दल की बढ़त जारी है। ऐसा नहीं है कि सिर्फ कम पढ़े-लिखे या अशिक्षित लोग इस नशे का शिकार है। बल्कि तमाम मध्यमवर्गीय, कर्मचारी-व्यापारी भी इसी नशे में चूर है। यही वजह है विभाग दर विभाग समाप्त हो रहे हैं निजीकरण की आंधी चल रही है, छंटनी हो रही है, स्थायी रोजगार की अवधारणा समाप्त हो रही है, वे तमाम श्रम कानून (जिन्होंने भारत के श्रमिक वर्ग को गुलामों की श्रेणी से बाहर निकाला) समाप्त करने की साहसिक घोषणाएँ लाल किले से हो रही हैं, पेंशन, मृतक आश्रित सेवायें समाप्त हो रहा है और वही कर्मचारी वर्ग उस राजनीति की वाह-वाह कर रहा है। व्यापार ठप हो रहे हैं व्यापारी वाह-वाह कर रहा है। ऐसे में कैफी आजमी के यह शब्द खुद-ब-खुद जुबाँ पर आ जाते हैं कि

इसको मजहब कहो या सियासत कहो,
खुदकुशी का हुनर तुम सिखा तो चले।

निःसंदेह भारत एक वैचारिक विचलन के दौर से गुजर रहा है। जनतंत्र की आलोचना है क्योंकि यह असहमति का सम्मान करता है और सत्ता से स्वयं पर पुर्नविचार का आग्रह करता है, जबकि धार्मिक बहुलता का दम्भ तानाशाह होता है और सत्ता से असहमति को राष्ट्रद्रोह बताने का



Cartoon courtesy: Shekhar Gurera

THE CORPORATES HAVE CHOSEN THE MAJORITARIAN POLITICAL FORCES AS THEIR DRIVING FORCE, THE CONSEQUENCES ARE BEFORE US - THE NATIONAL VALUES NURTURED IN DECADES OF STRUGGLES - DEMOCRACY, SECULARISM, CONSTITUTIONALITY, RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STATE ETC. WHICH MADE INDIA PROUD IN THE COMITY OF NATIONS, ARE BEING CONSIGNED TO DUSTBIN. PEOPLE ARE FED WITH MAJORITARIAN WARES. IT IS REALLY A CHALLENGING TASK FULL OF RISKS, TO BE SENSIBLE AMONG THE INTOXICATED. BUT THE CHALLENGE HAS TO BE MET AND WILL BE MET.



राजतंत्रीय व्यवहार करते हुए दण्डित करता है।

धर्मनिरपेक्षता की निन्दा हो रही है जबकि धर्मनिरपेक्षता ही वह धागा है जिसने भारत को पिरोया है। स्वतंत्रता के पश्चात् 565 रियासतों का विलयीकाण होना था। पाकिस्तान ने स्वयं को इस्लामी देश घोषित किया मगर भारत ने धर्मनिरपेक्षता का मॉडल अपनाया। इस नाते भारत ने सभी धर्मों, जातियों, जनजातियों, संस्कृतियों, भाषाओं आदि की विविधताओं का सम्मान करते हुए विकास की सर्वसमावेशी राह को चुना था। इसीलिए लगभग सभी रियासतों ने प्रसन्नतापूर्वक भारत में विलय को स्वीकार किया। धर्मनिरपेक्षता से सैद्धान्तिक विचलन उस धागे का टूटना है जिसमें यह देश पिरोया हुआ है। धर्मनिरपेक्षता भारतीय जनता की एकता की सबसे पहली व बुनियादी शर्त है। कारपोरेट जानता है कि एक धर्मनिरपेक्ष राष्ट्र को उतनी सरलता से नहीं लूटा जा सकता जितना कि धार्मिक उन्माद में डूबे राष्ट्र को। मध्य एशिया के तेल पर साम्राज्यवादी कब्जे का सफल प्रयोग कारपोरेट को उत्साहित कर रहा है।

वामपंथ को तो प्रतिपल सबसे ज्यादा अपमानित किया जा रहा है क्योंकि इसी ने भारतीय श्रमिक वर्ग को अधिकार सिखाये। सरकारी व सार्वजनिक क्षेत्रों की स्थापना के आन्दोलन चलाकर भारतीय श्रमिक वर्ग के बड़े हिस्से को सम्मानित जीवन सिखाया। वामपंथ ही है जिसे भारतीय संविधान में श्रम कानूनों के पन्ने जोड़े जाने का श्रेय है। श्रमिकों का लाभ ही एकमात्र चीज है, जो पूँजीपतियों के मुनाफे पर सीधी चोट करता है और वामपंथ श्रमिक वर्ग का वकील है, इसलिए आज के प्रचार का यह सबसे बड़ा कोपभाजन है।

यह सत्य है कि इतने वर्षों में भारत को जितना परिपक्व धर्मनिरपेक्ष जनतंत्रिक राष्ट्र बनना चाहिए था नहीं बन सका। इसका दोष तमाम जिम्मेदार शक्तियों को जाता है। इसी ने

आज की इस राजनीति के लिए स्थान खाली किया है और आज धार्मिक बहुलता के नशे में चूर जनमानस ही सत्ता को यह साहस व शक्ति प्रदान कर रहा है कि प्रधानमंत्री द्वारा स्वयं को पूँजीपतियों का मित्र बताने में कोई हिचक नहीं है, वह दोबारा जीतने पर राष्ट्र के नाम सम्बोधन में पूरी बेबाकी से कहते हैं कि देश में केवल दो वर्ग है एक गरीब और दूसरा गरीबी दूर करने में मदद करने वाला अमीर वर्ग, वह स्वतंत्रता दिवस के सम्बोधन में भी अपनी वर्गीय मित्रता की प्रतिबद्धता स्पष्ट आम जाहिर करते हुए कहते हैं कि अमीरों को शंका की दृष्टि से न देखा जाये। अर्थात् बैंक ऋणों की लूट, टैक्सों की माफी, जंगलों-खदानों की बंदरबांट पर कुछ न कहा जाये। उन्हीं की सहूलियतों के लिए श्रम कानूनों की समाप्ति की घोषणा हो रही है। इन पर सवाल उठाने वालों को प्रधानमंत्री द्वारा 'पेशेवर नकारात्मक लोग' घोषित कर दिया गया है।

नशे में डूबते लोगों के बीच होश में रहना और होश की बात करना न केवल चुनौतीपूर्ण है बल्कि जोखिमपूर्ण है, पर अभिव्यक्ति के खतरे उठाने ही होंगे। कहना मुश्किल है कि देश में नशे का दौर कितना लम्बा होगा। और हम इसमें क्या-क्या गवाँयेंगे फिर भी इसके जल्दी होश में आने की उम्मीद इसलिए की जा सकती है क्योंकि जनतंत्र व धर्मनिरपेक्षता की गौरवपूर्ण पृष्ठभूमि इसकी विरासत है। वामपंथ सत्ता में न सही पर सामाजिक, आर्थिक व राजनैतिक न्याय की हर आकांक्षा में बह जाने-अनजाने हर भारतीय की समझ का हिस्सा है। इसलिए हम लौटेंगे जरूर। जो लोग इस समय सत्ता की चौखट से बंध गये हैं और सत्य के साथ नहीं हैं उन्हें समझ लेना चाहिए कि

होठों को सी के देखिये, पछताइयेगा।

हंगामे जाग उठते हैं, अक्सर घुटन के बाद।।

प्रधानमंत्री स्वतंत्रता दिवस के सम्बोधन में भी अपनी वर्गीय मित्रता की प्रतिबद्धता स्पष्ट आम जाहिर करते हुए कहते हैं कि अमीरों को शंका की दृष्टि से न देखा जाये। अर्थात् बैंक ऋणों की लूट, टैक्सों की माफी, जंगलों-खदानों की बंदरबांट पर कुछ न कहा जाये। उन्हीं की सहूलियतों के लिए श्रम कानूनों की समाप्ति की घोषणा हो रही है। इन पर सवाल उठाने वालों को प्रधानमंत्री द्वारा 'पेशेवर नकारात्मक लोग' घोषित कर दिया गया है।





AMENDMENT TO RTI ACT IS RETROGRADE

G. Thirupathiaiah

RTI Act amendment Bill, 2019 was passed by the Parliament on 25th July 2019. The irony is that there were no requests from any corner to amend the present provisions of RTI Act. The Bill was not even referred to a Select Committee, with 117 members voting against referring the bill to a select committee, and 75 members voting for it. The government had hardly tried to explain, in the parliament, the reasons why such amendments were proposed. Even former commissioners have not been consulted before proposing the changes to RTI Act. It would have been appreciated by all, had the Govt., at least, enlisted the shortcomings of the present RTI Act, which led to these amendments. Thus, this arbitrary decision of the government is certainly objectionable.

RTI Act – a weapon of empowerment

The Right to Information Act (RTI) was enacted in June 2005, and came into force in October the same year. It was a landmark legislation that, for the first time, empowered citizens to obtain vital information from governmental authorities. No longer could government bodies evade providing information that should legitimately be in the public domain. The aim of the Act was to enforce transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority. In this respect it was a pivotal reform measure, a powerful blow in favour of the ordinary citizen.

RTI does not give any direct benefit to the citizens. But, it has virtually, become a tool to prevent the wrong doings of authorities and has been working as the watchdog on all the transactions of the governance. RTI Act facilitates to collect information from the authorities. And, it is not a mere tool to seek the information but an official source to approach and know the functioning of elected and appointed officials. In the history of independent India, RTI Act is the only Act which has been an authorized weapon provided to citizens to question their administering machinery. Of course it is not a magic wand to control all sorts of wrong practices, but certainly a pointing stick in the hands of the users. RTI Act brought the accountability under scanner. Prior to RTI enactment, people

THE ACT HAS BEEN WORKING SMOOTHLY SINCE 2005, AND HAS RIGHTLY BEEN USED TO UNCOVER CORRUPTION AND ADMINISTRATIVE INEPTITUDE IN GOVERNMENT, APART FROM ASSISTING ORDINARY PEOPLE IN GETTING THEIR DUE FROM PUBLIC AUTHORITIES. WITH SUCH A TRACK RECORD, THE QUESTION ARISES AS TO WHY THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT HAS AMENDED THE RTI LAW. IT WAS THIS VERY LAW THAT WAS OF GREAT USE TO BJP WHEN IT SOUGHT TO UNCOVER AND EXPOSE THE ALLEGED CORRUPTION WITHIN THE EARLIER UPA GOVERNMENTS... STEERING THE LAW IN RULERS' FAVOUR IS A BAD PRECEDENT.

had no access to the procedures followed by authorities. RTI permits to scrutinize the information personally if needed. Many of the laws enacted so far are helpful for individual's protection. Information under RTI Act can be sought for individual as well as collective purposes in public interest. The law is acting, virtually like a vigilant eye on all the concerned. Keeping future consequences of RTI Act in view many misdeeds are being prevented by authorities. The law has transformed the landscape of information flow from the government to citizens. Every day, some 5,000 RTI applications are filed, and bureaucrats and politicians are aware that with a few exceptions almost all information pertaining to their departments are now available for public scrutiny. Significantly, apart from the government, even privatized public utility companies, and NGOs that receive 95 per cent of their infrastructure funds from government, are covered under the Act. That is the reason enactment of RTI Act is the biggest milestone in the history of free India.

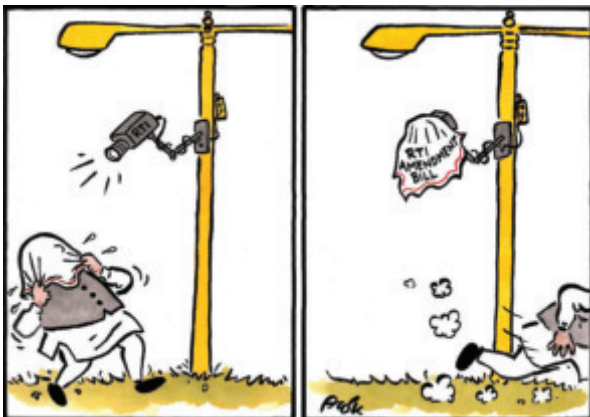
Information sought under RTI has never been a burden or loss to the govt. It might have irked the authorities. For instance, it was an RTI query that revealed that former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Raghuram Rajan had submitted a list of loan defaulters to the government. Embarrassment was also caused to the government on an RTI request seeking information on the educational qualifications of PM Narendra Modi and Minister Smriti Irani, as also on whether the RBI was in concurrence

with the decision on demonetisation, and the quantum of black money recovered by the government thus far.

Its aim was not to control the corruption but to supply information. But, indirectly it has been helpful to curb the corruption, especially wrong practices. It forced the departments to maintain and keep the records and data available. Hence people could be able to have statistics in their hands. Rules and regulations for appointments, promotions and transfers are strictly being followed by almost all the Public and Govt. departments. Allocation and spending of funds for different government schemes is almost channelized. Information sought under RTI revealed that funds allotted for the upliftment of SC & ST Communities had been diverted for other uses. This led to huge uproar in the then united Andhra Pradesh. Under the leadership of Com. B.V. Raghavulu, Vice President, Kula Vivaksha Vyatireka Porata Samithi (KVPS) and CPM Polit Bureau member, a sustained struggle was unleashed. As a result, SC&ST sub plan to monitor the allocation and spending of funds was achieved. Budget allocations and distribution of funds between the States have been streamlined taking questionable RTI provisions into consideration. Any attempt to weaken the autonomy and functioning of the RTI Act, must be considered a retrograde step, and against the interests of the citizen. Do the government's latest amendments to the Act constitute such an attempt? The answer is certainly yes. Let us see what those changes are.

The Changes effected

The RTI (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was passed by Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on 22nd and 25th July, 2019 respectively. This amendment now takes away the independence of the Information Commissioners as the



Cartoon courtesy: Alok Nirantar, Twitter

term of office and salaries, allowances and other terms and conditions of service of the Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners and the State Chief Information Commissioner and the State Information Commissioners, shall be such as may be prescribed by the Central Government. To be specific- The RTI Act, 2005, stated that the term of central and state information commissioners would be fixed at five years or until 65 years of age, whichever is earlier. It also stipulated that the pay of the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) would be equivalent to that of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), and that of the Information Commissioners (ICs) with that of the Election Commissioners (ECs). Now, the amended RTI Act stipulates that tenure and salaries of the CIC and ICs would be decided on a case-by-case basis. This amendment simply changed the nature of employment of CIC and IC from fixed to unstable and subject to conditions.

Govt. is trying to assuage the uproar by explaining away as merely a “technical” change that does not dilute the government’s commitment to transparency and accountability. But, it will have a direct impact on the independence and autonomy of the functioning of the CIC and IC, since a Damocles sword would be hanging over them with regard to how long they can serve and what they would be paid. Govt. also argues that CEC is a constitutional entity and CIC is a statutory body. What is wrong if same provisions are applied to CIC for the benefit of fair enforcement of law? It is an established fact that fixity of tenure, and insulation from changes in prerequisites, adds to the impartiality of functioning of crucial regulatory authorities. That is why, even in the case of the EC, the same level of constitutional protection that is available to the CEC needs to be extended to the other two ECs. Clause (5) of Article 324 of the Constitution specifies that the CEC cannot be removed from office except in like manner and on like grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court. There is no reason why this same protection should not be made available to all the ECs.

Across the world, one critical means of ensuring the impartiality and independence of regulatory, judicial or quasi-judicial authorities is to grant them fixity of tenure, and insulate them from interferences. In case of Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) the service of Director is fixed as a minimum of two years

term to ensure fearless approach and decision making on the cases entrusted. Before 1997, the tenure of CBI director was not fixed and they could be removed by the Govt. in any manner. But the apex court in Vineet Narain judgement fixed tenure of minimum of two years to allow the officer to work with independence. The straightforward issue is: if the government appropriates to itself the power to decide how long a CIC or IC can serve, and what they should be paid for services rendered, will this not influence their autonomy and neutrality of functioning?

Conclusion

The Act has been working smoothly since 2005, and has rightly been used to uncover corruption and administrative ineptitude in government, apart from assisting ordinary people in getting their due from public authorities. With such a track record, the question arises as to why the current government has amended the RTI law. The ruling dispensation led by BJP would be aware that it was this very law that was of great use to it when it sought to uncover and expose the alleged corruption within the earlier UPA governments.

Empowering the law in favour of citizens strengthens the democratic infrastructure of a country, and the RTI is very much a part of this infrastructure. The changes that have been made will be harmful to the independence, autonomy and impartiality of the functioning of the authorities that administer the RTI Act. Such a step will be injurious and a disservice to the rights of citizens. People look upon the RTI as a potent weapon to protect their rights and ensure that public authorities work both transparently and with accountability. Because of the uncertainty of the job tenure and pay, individual interest of the officer to safeguard himself becomes priority and the societal interest dies its death. Thus all the commissioners do dance to the tunes of their masters (appointing authority). This is not the first time that BJP Govt. tried to weaken the top institutions in the country. CBI, Supreme Court and Election Commission have already witnessed the heat, how they had been gagged, in the previous regime of present Govt. "Governments come and governments go" but laws enacted are permanent. A favourable law may turn hostile to the makers if the change in dispensation takes place. Steering the law in rulers' favour is a bad precedent.

(Writer is President of
ICEU Hyderabad Division)

6th CZIEA Zonal Working Women Convention

The Sixth Triennial Zonal Convention of the Working Women of Central Zone Insurance Employees Association was held at Raipur on 28th of July 2019 in an atmosphere of tremendous zeal and determination. The Convention venue was named after Com. N.M.Sundaram, the doyen of Insurance employees' movement. The inaugural session was attended by large number of employees both men and women apart from the elected delegates from all the 8 divisions of Central Zone. Inaugurating the convention Dr. Usha Vairagkar Athley, Retd. Professor of Hindi, Govt. College, Raigarh, renowned writer and social worker congratulated CZIEA and its women co-ordination committee for the wonderful jobs they have undertaken to make the women employees a very active part of the trade union movement. She said it was beyond her comprehension that the women employees of public sector undertaking could be so effectively mobilized and motivated towards such noble causes. She further said a woman is discriminated right from the birth. From the day one they are taught not to question, not to have curiosity, always to be obedient and so on and so forth. They are subjected to physical, social, economic and political discriminations and crimes in so many ways. United struggles alone of as the working class can effectively fight against the onslaughts being faced by the women in society. Remember we have to fight not only against economic inequalities but against all kinds of inequalities, she said. She spoke about the anti women and anti working class attitude of the present government and said that this government is targeting all those individuals and organizations those who are fighting for the interests of the Dalits, tribals, workers & peasants. She said that the Central Government is privatizing the Railway, Steel Authority of India Limited, Airport Education and Health. We must unite the women and other section of the society to fight such undemocratic acts and all kinds of atrocities against the women.



Special Guest AIIEA Jt. Secretary Comrade B Sanyal, recalled that the Jaipur conference of the All India Insurance Employees' Association very rightly decided to organize the women employees with the clear understanding that without organizing and mobilizing a large chunk of women employees to make them part and partial of the active trade union movement it was not possible to sustain the trade union movement itself. Quoting Com. B.T. Ranadive the great icon of trade union movement of this country Com. Sanyal said that if half of the membership of a trade union remains inactive or passive in the day to day activities and struggles, no trade union worth its salt could achieve its ultimate goal of establishing an egalitarian society. If the women employees could be made active then trade union activities did not remain confined to the Industry alone they gradually travel to the individual houses also. He said that the present government was trying to divide the workers on communal lines. It was trying to attack the scientific thoughts and temperaments. The workers have to accept the challenges and fight back, he concluded.

Com. Usha Parganiha, Zonal Convenor presented the activities report for the last

three years in the delegates session. 12 women comrades from all the 8 divisions of the central zone participated in the debate. The debate was summed up by the convener. The convention unanimously adopted the activity report. General Secretary of CZIEA Comrade Dharmaraj Mahapatra, in his concluding remarks said that if the women employees feel safe and honoured in LIC the credit goes to AIIEA. He said that the present government only talks about BETI BACHAO-BETI PADHAO but the current finance minister reduced the budget allocations for the schemes related to women empowerment. He said that women were the victims of every malfunction of society. Our unity was the first requirement for the struggle against all these. He called upon the women comrades to make the organization strong. In the end the convention elected 17-member Working Women Co-ordination Committee. Com. Usha Parganiha was re-elected as convenor.

The Convention came to a successful conclusion with vote of thanks by Com Atul Deshmukh, General Secretary, RDIEU. More than 250 women comrades attended the convention which was presided by a presidium consisting of Comrades Geeta Pandit, Jaya

D e k a t e ,
Sangeeta Jha
and Ranjana
Tiwari.



5th EZIEA Women Employees' Convention

The 5th Zonal Level Women Employees' Convention of Eastern Zone Insurance Employees' Association (E.Z.I.E.A.) was held at Jeevan Ganga Building on 27/07/2019. The Convention, hosted by Howrah Division Insurance Employees' Association (H.D.I.E.A.), was a grand success.

The Convention commenced with a beautiful rendition of Tagore song by Com. Ritu Mukherjee, Convener of Womens' Sub Committee of H.D.I.E.A. Com. Malabika Bhattacharya, Vice President of H.D.I.E.A welcomed all present narrating briefly the historical significance of Kolkata and its rich cultural heritage.

A Presidium comprising of Com. Maitreyee Mishra, Com. Shyama Bhattacharya and Com. Fullara Talapatra representing Guwahati, K.M.D.O.-I and Jalpaiguri Divisions respectively, conducted the entire proceedings. The Approach Paper of the Convention was placed by Com. Arpita Roy and Com. Maitreyee Mishra, Joint Conveners of Eastern Zone Women Employees' Co-ordination Committee.

Com. S. K. Geetha, Vice President of South Central Zone Insurance Employees' Federation (S.C.Z.I.E.F.) and the Inaugurator of the Convention, was felicitated on the dais. Com. S. K. Geetha initiated her deliberation paying homage to the legendary social reformers from Kolkata like Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and such others. She also respectfully reminded the audience that three of the greatest leaders of A.I.I.E.A., Com. Chandrasekhar Bose, Com. Sunil Maitra and Com. Saroj Choudhari are also sons of this soil.

She categorically stated that the results of the 17th Loksabha elections have been a great disappointment for us and the toiling class is bound to pay the price. She narrated that large scale disinvestment of nationalized sector, no employment opportunity and lesser purchasing power of the people have led to the problem of demand crunch in the Indian economy. Severe agrarian crisis in the country is often forcing the hapless rural women folk



to opt for prostitution. She warned that India is witnessing state sponsored communalism at its height with a B.J.P. leader going to such an extent to direct all Hindu males to perform the 'sacred duty' of raping at least three Muslim women.

COM. R. PUNNIAMURTHY, Vice President of SZIEF retired from the services of LIC on 30.06.2019. He was the President of Insurance Corporation Employees' Union, Thanjavur Division also. He is affectionately called RPM. Though RPM retired into the cadre of his entry into the service, he has climbed up many rungs of the organizational ladder of the trade union from General Council member to General Secretary and later President of the Divisional Union. Beyond that he was also elected Vice President of the SZIEF which post he occupies till date.

The time during which RPM ascended to the leadership of the union, was time of intense struggles. It was not enough to fight for wages and creature comforts of the insurance employees alone. The



She stated that in the present day society, a woman is looked upon as an object of exhibition or pleasure. She rebuked that the glamour boy of Indian politics Yogi Adityanath said that women empowerment is not necessary, rather protection of women is essential, thereby upholding the Manu Samhita. Expressing serious concern over the violence on women, she asked the pertinent question of the honour (?) behind 'honour killings'. For protection of the girl child in the true sense, she demanded enactment of legislation to save the constitutional right of women. She stressed the need for fast track courts to provide justice to the innocent women victims in the society. She unequivocally emphasized on the united movement to bring about the desired changes in the society.

Com. Jayanta Mukherjee, Joint Secretary of A.I.I.E.A. and General Secretary of E.Z.I.E.A., addressing the Convention, harped on the unity of the organization and participation in joint struggle to achieve our demands. He gave a clarion call to the women comrades to

lead the organization. Reminding the audience that A.I.I.E.A. is committed to the cause of nationalized insurance sector, he clarified that though the results of the 2017 Lok Sabha elections are disappointing; there is no question of despondency. He highlighted that religious fundamentalism should be resisted for the progress of the society.

13 delegates enriched the Convention by participating in a lively debate on the Approach Paper. Com. Arpita Roy summed up the discussions in an inspiring speech urging all to be politically conscious.

The Eastern Zone Women Employees' Co-ordination Committee Joint Conveners Com. Maitreyee Mishra and Com. Arpita Roy as Joint Conveners were unanimously reelected in the Convention. After the adoption of 25 resolutions, Com. Maitreyee Mishra delivered the concluding speech, on behalf of the Presidium, giving direction to the tasks ahead. Thus the Convention ended with an air of confidence in the presence of 122 delegates.

FELICITATION TO COM PUNNIAMURTHY

AIIEA had to launch fiercely fought struggles against the LPG policies, which the Central Government under the leadership of Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao was trying to implement. With the co-operation of the senior leaders and young cadres he could make them a successful one.

Com Punniamurthi is known for maintaining the best human relationship. He used to be firm but soft – firm on issues but personally soft and accommodative. He is a byword for a fighter and there could be no retirement as such for a fighter. And now a wider arena awaits him.

A special function was arranged to felicitate Com R. Punniamurthy on the same day at Thanjavur. The function which presided by Com S. Selvaraj, General Secretary has started with the Felicitation by the President of AIIEA, Com. Amanulla Khan followed by Com V. Ramesh, General Secretary, AIIEA, Com M. Girija, Joint Secretary, AIIEA. Offic Bearers of SZIEF, LICAIOI, LIAFI, BEFI and AIBEA had also felicitated him. Shri K. Venkataraman, Senior Divisional Manager of Thanjavur



Division and Former Tamilnadu Minister Shri S.N.M.Ubayadullah greeted him in the function.

In his acceptance Speech, Com Punniamurthy recalled his memories with the Union and praised the Union for all his success. He had donated Rs. 10,000/- each for ICEU, Thanjavur Division, Insurance Worker, Tamilnadu Untouchability Eradication Front, Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Theekkathir an official Tamil daily of CPI(M),

Com V. Sethuraman, Joint Secretary welcomed the gathering and Com M. Ravishankar, Treasurer proposed Vote of Thanks.



63rd Conference of Madurai Division - A Resounding Success

The 63rd Conference of ICEU, Madurai Division was held from 26th of July to 28th of July 2019. The Delegates Session of the Conference was held in Madurai on 26th and 27th of July and the Open Session of the Conference was held on 28th July at Virudhunagar, a town around 50 kms away from the divisional headquarters. As a prelude to the conference, public awareness campaign was conducted for two days on 23rd and 24th July in a number of towns and in the across Virudhunagar District on issues such as imposition of GST on insurance premium, need to oppose privatization of public sector insurance industry, against anti-worker labour reforms and anti-people economic and social policies. The campaign included the thappattam and a street play named “LIC is the Promise”, on the present socio, political and economic situation of the country by ICEU Madurai Division’s “Sudar Art Troupe”. Hundreds of agents, Development officers, Branch managers and fraternal trade union leaders attended the campaign in all the six centers and the campaign attracted the common public very well and the message reached thousands of people. Ten thousand handbills were distributed among the public.

The **Delegates Session** was presided over by Com. G. Meenakshisundaram, President. Com. V. Janakiraman, Asst. Treasurer, SZIEF inaugurated the Conference. After the submission of the General secretary’s report, Group Discussion was arranged involving three branches in one group. Three comrades from each group participated in the debate under the topics “industry”, “politics and “organization”. This was a new initiative which made the debate more focused and of high standard. 32 comrades including 6 women

participated on the debate.

Com. E. Muthukumar, Tamilnadu State Secretary, CITU addressed the Delegates Session. He pointed out the difficulties in forming trade unions, plight of workers in various MNC’s in Kancheepuram District and the support of the Government to employers. Com. V. Suresh, Joint Secretary, SZIEF delivered a detailed address on the issue of employee benefits and industry. Resolutions including protection of public sector, settlement of wage revision, peoples’ unity were passed. Com. N.P. Rameshkannan summed up the debate and announced decisions to conduct one lakh signature campaign against Draft National Education Policy, to protect public sector, to conduct seminar on Electoral Reforms, Water Resource Management, Development of cities under the banner of PFI, to hold seminars on 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, to conduct special training program for Lady Agents, to conduct special camp for Sudar and Kayal Kalai kuzhu and to hold trade union classes for our members, to form Insurance Worker Readers Forum. The Accounts for the year 2018 was tabled by Com. P. Mahalingam, Treasurer and was adopted in the Conference. Com. G. Meenakshisundaram, N. P. Rameshkannan and P. Mahalingam were unanimously elected as President, General Secretary and Treasurer respectively. Com. K. Swaminathan, VP, SZIEF greeted the Delegates Session.

RALLY AND OPEN SESSION: There was a magnificent rally on 28th of July 2019 at Virudhunagar. The rally was flagged off by Com. BAKKA Vairavasamy, senior agent and Virudhunagar Branch Secretary of LIAFI. The small town turned red with participation of about 600 comrades from

across the Division. The rally was very vibrant with thappattam of our sudar art troupe and comrades raised slogans to protect the industry and the nation. It was then followed by the Open Session presided over by Com. G. Meenakshisundaram. Com. K. Rajesh, Secretary of Virudhunagar Branch welcomed the gathering. Com. Amanullah Khan President, AIIEA delivered Special Address. He explained in detail the issues of wage revision, how we achieved the final option for pension, and recruitment. He was elaborative of the social situation prevailing and how freedom of expression is under attack. He exhorted that we must remain united to fight against the policies of the present Government and to protect our Institution. Com. Su. Venkatesan, MP of Madurai Constituency addressed the gathering. His presence and address enthused the participants. He inaugurated the signature campaign against Draft National Education Policy. Com. K. Swaminathan, VP, SZIEF, in his

address was very much appreciative of the growth of Madurai Division. He highlighted the challenges confronting the industry and how we should be prepared to fight the policies of Government to protect the industry. Comrades S. Balasubramanian (CITU), T. Pandian (LIC CI-1 Federation), Muthukumar (NFIFWI), C. Muthukumarasamy (General Secretary, Tirunelveli Division) L. Muthumanickam (LIAFI), V. Shanmugam (AIIPA), V. Ramesh (MRGIEA) greeted the conference. The members of Sudar and Kayal Kalai kuzhu and Sportspersons were felicitated in the Conference. The students of our members who secured more than 90% in the X STD and XII STD were felicitated. The Conference came to an end with vote of thanks proposed by Com. N.P.Rameshkannan, General Secretary.



46th conference of IEA Jamshedpur Division

44th Annual General Conference of IEA Jamshedpur Division was held on 27th -28th July 2019 at Jamshedpur. The conference started with the flag hoisting by President of IEAJD Com. (Smt.) Purabi Ghosh amidst thunderous slogans. Thereafter comrades paid homage to the martyrs column. Vice president of AIIEA and President of ECZIEA Com. Pradip Mukherjee inaugurated the conference. Joint Secretary of ECZIEA Com. Virchand Singh was the Guest of Honour.

In his address in the open session, Com. Pradip Mukherjee said that the privatization policy of the government is dangerous for the working class. He stressed on the expansion

of the ideology of the working class and the unity among them. The open session was also addressed by Com. Virchand Singh. He discussed the political and economic scenario of the country and said that the policy of the government is responsible for the unprecedented rise in the unemployment. Open session was also addressed by the representatives of the other unions at LIC, unions in Banks, Railway, BSNL, Nongazetted employees, sales representative union and representative of science forum. All the speakers protested the government's move towards rapid privatization and reforms in labour laws in favour of capitalists. The



representative of the AILRSA detailed the move of the government towards privatization of the railway. All the speakers were unanimous that we have to rise above religion and caste barriers and fight the present capitalist policy of the government unitedly .

In delegate session Annual Report was placed by Com. Amit Maity , General Secretary,, IEAJD and Statement of Accounts was placed by the Treasurer Com. Sukanto Sharma, which were unanimously passed by the house . In his address in delegate session Com. Pradip Mukherjee made a detail submission on charter of demands; emphasized the demand of AIIEA that the wage revision should be based on the strength of the LIC and the aspirations of the employees. He also discussed the employees contribution in the progress of LIC and stressed that we should make all efforts to enhance the service conditions of LIC . He also called for the unity and devotion towards

organization. While addressing the delegate session Com. Virchand Singh said that capitalist class always try to create political dilemma based on caste and religion in the minds of the public so that their attention can be diverted from the real issues and then the capitalist class will be able to collect more and more wealth. He also discussed the effect of artificial intelligence in respect of LIC and the future of the employees.

140 Delegates and Observers attended the conference. 30 delegates participated in the debate. The conference unanimously adopted a number of resolutions relating to the employees, industry and of national importance.

The conference unanimously elected Com. (Smt.) Purabi Ghosh , Com. Amit Kr. Maity and Com. Sukanto Sharma as President , General Secretary and Treasurer of IEAJD for the coming term .

6th Women Convention at Belgaum

Women Sub Committee of Insurance Employees' Union, Belgaum Division organised 6th Working Women Convention at Belagavi on 28th July 2019. The Convention was graced by Prof (Dr) K B Chandrika, Chairperson, Department of Sociology Rani Channamma University, Belagavi and Com. Sharayu Devaramani, Convenor, Women Sub-Committee, Insurance Employees' Union, Dharwad Division.

Prof. KB Chandrika while addressing the gathering appreciated women comrades for their capacity to manage both office as well as home. She stressed on the challenges of working women. She also spoke on the problems of the working women and how these issues have to be tackled through unity and struggles.

Com. Sharayu Devarmani, Convenor, IEU Dharwad Division congratulated the women comrades of Belgaum Division for actively involving in all the activities of union be it Zonal Conference, State Level Women convention, Silver Jubilee Celebration of IEU Belgaum Division. She called upon the members to involve themselves in policy holder's centric activities to strengthen LIC of India, which is the need of the hour. She highlighted the need to seek opinion, ideas from general

members which will ultimately result in creativity. She also shared the experience of Dharwad Division unit in implementing various programmes

More than 40 women comrades participated in the convention. The meeting ended with the confidence in the capability of the organisation to meet the future challenges. Com. G V Kulkarni President, IEU Belgaum Division and Com. P A Joseph, former General Secretary, IEU Belgaum Division greeted the convention.

The convention elected Com. Neha Joshi and Com. Savita Hanamsagr as Convenor and Co-convenor respectively.

Flood Relief work

Distribution of umbrellas to street vendor





at Dharamnath Bhavan,
Belgaum



at Kerur village
Chikodi Tq

Flood Relief Work by IEU Belagavi Division

Nature unleashed its worst fury on North Karnataka and especially on the district of Belgavi by way of unprecedented rains, which one may term it as deluge. Many rivers in the district were in spate leading to scores of villages and towns being inundated and people marooned for days. Even the district headquarters, Belgavi witnessed copious rains and the rain-water flowing at four feet in the streets. This hampered the relief work being undertaken by the district administration.

Dislocated people from nearby towns of Mudhol, Ramdurg, Chikodi, Holealur, Saundatti etc were airlifted and housed in many Kalyan Mantaps, Schools, community halls. Many NGOs and agencies undertook relief work at places that could be reached. The Units of Insurance Employees' Union, Belgavi also engaged in relief work. The base units of Gokak and Chikodi plunged into action swiftly and made arrangement for supply of water, food-packets, tea-cups, plates etc to the stranded people at some places. Belgavi Divisional Units along with city branch units reached

out to people in two of the Kalyan Mantaps in Belgavi viz., Dharmnath Bhavan and Adinath Bhavan(Angol) with mats, blankets, mankeycaps and towels. This programme was undertaken on 9th August 2019. Another touching programme was undertaken on 9th August 2019 by visiting the worst affected areas of Khanapur talukas covering 60 kms, where the roads were washed away by the onslaught of the unprecedented rains. The people of villages of **Hirehattiholi** and **Rumewadi** who underwent worst nightmare, with most of their belongings washed away, were very much beholden to the comrades for reaching out to them.

As few more programmes are being planned, Insurance Employees' Union, Belgavi has given a call for generous donations, and already the response has been encouraging. What IEU Belgavi has done by way of relief work is a drop in the ocean, but it underlines the fact that comrades of Belgavi division are alive and sensitive to the ideology of AIIEA – that reaching out to the people in distress.



at Adinath Bhavan, Belgaum



at Hirehattiholi of Khanapur Tq

Insurance News in brief

■ A.M.KHAN, DHARWAD

The magnitude of 2018 losses due to natural catastrophes increased the renewal premium of reinsurance by 15% to 25%. Yet the top 20 reinsurers chose to increase their exposure in order to benefit from improved rates.

Natural catastrophes and man-made disasters in the first half of 2019 were responsible for USD \$44 billion of economic losses globally. This figure is well below USD \$109 billion, the average first-half economic losses of the previous 10 years. It is also lower than the losses of USD \$51 billion reported for the same period a year earlier. Of the total global economic losses in the first half of 2019, about 42% or USD \$19 billion were covered by insurance.

In its bid to clear all hurdles for foreign insurance capital, Government of India has relaxed the minimum requirement of Net Owned Fund from Rs.5000 crore to Rs.1000 crore for foreign reinsurance companies to set up their branches at the International Financial Services Centre, Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

Private sector progresses this way. IRCTC a wholly owned undertaking of the Ministry of Railways has entered into agreement with three private insurance companies, Shriram General Insurance Company Ltd., ICICI Lombard General Insurance Company LTD and Royal Sundaram General Insurance Company Ltd for its Optional Travel Insurance Scheme. This scheme was launched in September 2016. The premium per passenger is Rs.0.92. These companies have received a premium of around Rs.46 crore in the last two years. But the payout by these companies is Rs. Seven Crore in claims.

Same is the story with the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna (PMFBY). It is the foreign reinsurance and private insurance companies who are the big beneficiaries of premiums collected under this scheme. In the last six seasons nearly Rs.5000 crore gone into the books of foreign reinsurers. In the 2016-17 and 2017-18 financial years, the total premium collected under PMJDY was about Rs 48,267 crore, while the claim payout was about Rs 39,789 crore, indicating that close to Rs 9,000 crore went collectively to insurance and reinsurance firms. Of the total premium, about Rs

8,720 crore was paid by farmers, while close to Rs 39,547 crore was subsidised collectively by central and state governments.

Economic slowdown hits insurance premium collection.

Motor insurance segment is the largest contributor to general insurance revenue. The premium garnered in the segment constitutes nearly 38% of the total non-life insurance premium. In the June quarter, growth in this segment stood at around 4 per cent, with premium collection at Rs 15,724 crore against Rs 15,074 crore in the same period of FY19. In FY19, the motor insurance segment had seen 9 per cent growth, with premium collection at Rs 64,000 crore against Rs 59,000 crore in FY18.

LIC remains on the top as at 31st July 2019. At the time when the life insurance sector grew at 44.25 percent LIC registered a growth of 51.86 percent collecting Rs.60106.66 crore first year premium from 1st April to 31st July 2019. The total of the entire private life insurance segment collected Rs.22039.81 crore. LIC's market share as at 31st July 2019 is 73.17 per cent.

"A large single non-life PSU is needed for market health", says the CMD of United India Insurance Company. "A single large PSU would certainly have the leverage of size, the concomitant capacity and appetite to ensure it has the predominant market share. It would also be able to drive the market and have the brawn to even regulate market behavior to some extent. That would be good for market health and curb the "adventurous" tendencies", he further says in an email interview.

A dangerous thing to happen; Aegon Life Insurance, a joint venture between India's Times Group and Netherlands based Aegon, says that its website has possibly exposed data of 10,000 customers. Not due to hacking or any malicious activity but due to vulnerability on their website.

In Brazilian rainforest on a tower a sentinel scans the horizon for the signs of fire. They are not human eyes. Guided by the artificial intelligence they can tell the difference between a dust cloud, an insect swarm and a plume of smoke that demands quick attention. The equipment includes optical and thermal cameras, spectrometric systems that identify the chemical makeup of substances. Artificial intelligence and machine learning programs are being used in other weather and climate related applications also.

Working Class Struggles

S.SRIDHARA, MYSORE ■

MUNICIPAL WORKERS ACROSS BANGLADESH REMAIN ON STRIKE:

Workers from 327 Municipalities across Bangladesh are on strike since July 14th 2019. Workers are demanding years of unpaid salaries and retirement benefits and municipal services to be nationalized. More than 35,000 employees of 200 Municipalities have not received wages for several years. Over 15,000 workers held a one day strike on July 2nd on the same issue.

NEW ZEALAND VEHICLE TESTING WORKERS ON STRIKE:

Vehicle testing workers who conduct driving tests and vehicle inspection took strike action for 24 hours on 5th August, to protest for pay across New Zealand.

SOUTH AFRICAN BANK WORKERS TO STRIKE OVER JOB LOSSES:

South African Bank workers are threatening a national strike action over mass job losses. Around 10,000 jobs are under threat. Currently adult unemployment in South Africa stands at 29% with more job losses in the pipeline. South African Society of Bank Officials Union (SASBO) which has 7,30,000 members, plans to hold a two day strike, which will be longest banking strike in 100 years.

SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS HOLD STRIKE ACTION:

A five day strike by South African Municipal Workers in Tshwane Municipality has ended on 9th August. Workers had walked out and protested on the streets of Pretoria against blatant inequality in pay. Around 3000 workers brought the country's Administrative Capital to a standstill.

CANADIAN AUTO PARTS WORKERS STAGE WILDCAT STRIKE ON OSHAWA GM PLANT CLOSURE:

Workers at the SYNCREON & CEVA LOGISTICS AUTO Parts Plant at OSHAWA'S General Motors Assembly plant held one day strike on 2nd August. Hundreds of workers held protest over GM Plant closure. General Motors earlier shut down five plants across North America and laying off some 15,000 workers.

MEXICAN MEDICAL INTERNS STRIKE OVER GRANT PAYMENTS AND WORKING CONDITIONS:

Members of the Assembly of Medical Service Interns of Mexico (AMMPSS) struck work nationwide on 1st August and marched to the legislative place to present a petition to law makers. The main issue of the protests were reduction and on-payment of grants. Demands for improvement in working conditions, standardization of pay scales.

MICHIGAN ROAD WORKERS STRIKE: Hundreds of heavy Machine Operators in Michigan who have

been working without contract since June 2016 walked off the job on 31st July to oppose the subcontracting of jobs and to demand more than 1.8 million Debtors pay dues and ending wage violations. In 2018, 2000 Road Workers were locked out by employers for 4 week halting 160 Road Projects Commissioner by the Michigan Department of Transportation.

BC FORESTRY WORKERS STRIKE PASSES ON MONTH MARK:

More than 3000 Forestry workers in British Columbia (Canada) employed by Western Forest Products, remain on strike more than a month after walking out on 1st July 2019. When Contract talks between the company and the United Steel Workers Union broke down.

ARGENTINE TEACHERS CONTINUE STRIKE OVER SALARY, CONDITIONS:

Thousands of Teachers of SLTA, Capital of the Argentine Province held rally on 30th July over the continuation of strike which started on July 15th to demand improved wages and working conditions. After six hours of negotiations, the teachers voted to continue strike actions.

MELBOURNE RAIL WORKERS VOTE FOR STRIKE ACTION (AUSTRALIA):

More than 3000 Rail Workers in Melbourne are planning to go on strike in August. The workers including Train Drivers, Guards, Station Master and support staff voted 99% in favour of industrial action in a Union Ballot on 29th July, which was held as part of ongoing negotiation for a 4 year work contract with metro trains. The talks began in February 2019, the Company offered 2% rise in wages annually. However Union is demanding 6% wage increase.

OCCUPATION BY SHIPYARD WORKERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND CONTINUES:

Northern Irish workers at the HARLAND AND WOIFF SHIP BUILDING YARD IN BELFAST are continuing an occupation which began in July 29th to save their jobs. HARLAND and WOIFF has been in operation since 1861 and the Titanic Ship was built between 1909 and 1911 in its heyday, 30,000 workers found employment there.

RAIL STAFF AT MIDLANDS RAIL COMPANY IN ENGLAND STRIKE:

UK Rail Staff at the East Midlands held 24 hour strike on 3rd August over pay and working conditions. The Rail, Maritime and Transport Union members held further strike on 9th August over wage revision and working conditions.

Economic Tid Bits

■ J.SURESH, MYSORE

- The economic slowdown in India is stronger than anticipated. The GDP growth during the first quarter of 2019-20 was around 5.8%, continuing with the growth registered in previous quarters. This is the lowest growth in the last five years. The RBI has lowered the forecast for GDP growth this fiscal to 6.9%. There is deceleration in the first quarter volume growth in FMCG companies, slump in growth of Cement production, 60% of fall in production of sub-groups in manufacturing IIP in June 2019 to continuous slump in automobile sales for a year; 3.5 lakhs jobs are lost in automobile and ancillary industries to low rural wages; from slowing capital investments to low core inflation. According to Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, the GDP growth of India for 2019-20 to be in the range of 6.5% to 6.7%, lower than the 6.8% growth registered in 2018-19. The fiscal deficit of India is amounted to Rs.4.3 trillion and the unemployment rate is at 7.9%. India's merchandise trade deficit amounted to US \$ 45.99 billion during the first quarter of 2019-20. Both exports & imports shrunk by 1.2% in the June 2019 quarter. 11 million jobs lost in India in 2018. An estimated 9.1 million jobs were lost in rural India, while the loss in urban India was 1.8 million jobs. Rural India accounts for two-thirds of India's population, but it accounted for 84% of the job losses. Of the 11 million jobs lost, women lost 8.8 million jobs and men lost 2.2 million. Salaried employees lost 3.7 million jobs in 2018.
- The global bond markets are sending a clear signal that significant sections of the world economy are moving into a recession. The yields on government bonds have been falling while the price of gold, the ultimate store of value has been steadily rising and has topped \$ 1500 per ounce, its highest level in six years. The industrial production in Germany, the euro zone's largest economy and the key driver of economic growth, fell by a larger than expected 1.5% in June. With industrial production now down by 5.2% from its level in June 2018, there are fears that Germany is heading for its first recession in six years. The German and UK economy are contracted by 0.1% in the second quarter of the current fiscal. In Germany, in June only 1000 new jobs were created compared to an average of 44000 over the past five years.
- Australia's construction industry is facing an escalating crisis. The Housing Industry Association reported that there had been just 56,357 new homes sold nation wide during the year 2018, the lowest since the 1991 recession, despite record low interest rates. The Rolan group, a large property developer, went into voluntary administration, owing creditors up to \$ 500 million and jeopardising at least 3000 apartments. At the same time, Adelaide Brighton, a Cement manufacturer, announced a major fall in profits, with company's share fell by 18%, pulling down the share price of other cement -making companies. According to Australia Bureau of Statistics, the new dwelling approvals dropped 25.6% over the last financial year with 14.8% fall in new houses and a 39.3% drop for the apartments.
- According to the Automotive components Manufacturer's Association of India, passenger car sales in India fell 18.4% in the first quarter of 2019 and sales in June were at the lowest level in 18 years. The auto sector accounts for almost half of all manufacturing in India and the downturn in auto industry is a major reason for slowing economic growth. This has resulted in 3.5 lakhs of jobs lost in auto sector. China, the world's largest auto market, is continuing to see a sales decline, with new vehicle sales down 14% in the first half of 2019. General Motors sales fell by 10% and Volkswagen by 6%. The slump has eliminated 2,20,000 jobs, about 5% of the total jobs in the Chinese auto industry since July 2018. Nisan announced elimination of 12500 jobs worldwide.
- The British economy experienced a contraction in second quarter, the first such time in seven years. The GDP fell 0.2% in the three months to June, down from an increase of 0.5% in the first quarter. The decline was across the board – there was a 2.3% fall in manufacturing, business investment contracted by 0.5% and construction was down by 1.3% from the previous quarters. Growth in service sector, one of the mainstays of the UK economy, slowed to 0.1%, lowest in three years.

For our Field Force

■ ARIVUKKADAL, THANJAVUR

LIC beats: LIC has posted a higher-than-industry growth of 51.86% year-on-year (YoY) in new business collection for the April to July 2019 period. LIC collected new premiums of Rs.60,106.66 crore for the period compared to Rs.22,039.81 crore collected by the private companies. LIC's market share stood at 73.17% in terms of premium collection. The life insurer saw a premium growth across its business segments including individual and group business.

LIC funds highways: LIC has agreed to offer Rs.1.25 lakh crore line of credit by 2024 (Rs.25,000 per year), to fund highway projects, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said.

Gig market: The gig economy is becoming a core element of the labor market, pushed to the fore by platforms like Uber and Airbnb. Gig economy workers are freelancers, such as journalists who don't work for one publication directly, freelance developers, drivers on platforms like Uber and Grab, and consumers who rent out their apartments via Airbnb or other home-sharing sites. Gig economy workers are not employed by these platforms, and therefore typically don't receive conventional employee perks, such as insurance or retirement options. This has created a lucrative opportunity to provide tailored insurance policies for the gig economy.

New law: New motor vehicles law has increased the penalty for not have a vehicle insurance from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000. This may lead to more people buying insurance especially two-wheeler owners where the premium rates are comparatively low and they would rather opt for insurance than pay fine. This will bring more people within the ambit of insurance as around 70% of the two-wheelers that are plying on road are uninsured.

Technology: India's internet users are expected to register double digit growth to reach 627 million in 2019. Breaking from a traditional brick and mortar driven model, insurance companies today are going through digital metamorphosis in order to optimise the end-to-end customer experience and provide customer delight. The aim is to achieve best of both worlds: customers getting a quick, automated estimate and then, if need be, talking with an actual person for customised service. This OOO (online-offline-online) model will be most suited for a slightly more complicated insurance product.

Sachet Insurance: A slew of life and general insurance companies have brought out bite-sized insurance products to be pocket-friendly. A common grouse is that individuals still consider insurance as an option and not a necessity. A

classic example is the travel insurance product that is bundled with airline tickets. Unless it is an international trip, especially to Europe where insurance is mandatory, customers conveniently un-tick the insurance option. Secondly, the renewal of these products would be a challenge.

Digital is enough: The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has issued a notification that a digital copy of documents such as driving license and a vehicle's registration, insurance etc. which are stored in Digilocker or mParivahan mobile app, will now be accepted legally along with the actual physical documents. Original papers or photocopy of the same is no longer mandated.

Data leak: The personal data of up to 10,000 customers of Aegon Life Insurance customers may have been exposed publicly due to a security vulnerability on the company's website.

Penalty for fraud: The National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC) has imposed a fine of Rs 1 lakh on a woman, who filed wrong claim, for committing "insurance fraud".

Cover for LGBT: Star India has extended health insurance cover to the partners of LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer, among others) employees, effective July 1. The entertainment company said all existing employee benefits around maternity and paternity, in-vitro fertilisation, surrogacy and adoption is applicable to LGBT+ employees.

Innovative insurance: Since the mission at hand was quite a dangerous one, life insurance was steep and Apollo 11 astronauts (Armstrong and others) couldn't afford insurance. As a backup, each of them had autographed hundreds of their posters. So, if they do not make it back then their families could sell these to collectors to fund their kids' college tuition. Because, they were aware of the need for insurance!

Political insurance: Telangana Rashtra Samithi party's membership included Rs.2 lakhs of insurance cover and around 1,700 claims have been settled so far. This insurance attracted a lot people to become members of TRS.

Railway insurance: Private insurance companies received a premium of around Rs 46 crore in the last two years from railway and its passengers while making a payout of only Rs.7 crore in claims under the national transporter's travel insurance scheme, an RTI has found.



Felicitations to

Com. G V Kulkarni on Retirement

Com. Govind V.Kulkarni, President, Insurance Employees' Union, Belagavi Division retired from the services of Life Insurance Corporation of India on 30th June 2019. He was the General Secretary and thereafter President of Divisional Union for over 24 years. Apart from LIC union activities, he was associated with Bank, General Insurance, BSNL, Postal, CITU, FMRI and other un-organised trade union activities. His deep commitment to trade union movement endeared him to all sections of working class in the city of Belagavi.

Cpm GV Kulkarni was felicitated in a function organised at Belgavi on 13th July 2019. Com. Vasant Nalawade, President, WZIEF and Vice-President, AIIEA, in his address made a pointed reference to the fortitude exhibited by comrades like G V Kulkarni who despite all odds and hurdles took up union activities and made struggle a life-long endeavour; this he said, was because of their total belief in the ideology of AIIEA. Com. J.Suresh, Jt.Secretary, SCZIEF and Com Bhaskar Somayaji, Jt. Secretary, AIIPA also spoke on the occasion.

Shri Nagesh Sateri, former Mayor of Belagavi City, veteran leaders of Dharwad, divisional leaders, leaders of fraternal organisations like Class-I Officers' Federation, Development officers' Association, CITU, General Insurance also spoke on the occasion, acknowledging the long and dedicated service rendered by Com. G V Kulkarni to the trade union movement. Sri Arvind V.Kulkarni, elder brother of Com. G V Kulkarni, spoke very emotionally, recalling the early days of their family and thanking the union for the wonderful felicitation arranged for his brother. Another highlight of the function was the presence of two nonagenarian freedom fighters Sri Parashuram Nandihalli (two time MLA of Belagavi) and Sri Rajendra Kalghatgi who despite their old-age sat throughout the three and half-hour felicitation function.

Com. G V Kulkarni, in his acceptance speech, thanked the AIIEA and its leaders at various levels for educating and instilling in him the ideology of socialism that believed in exploitation-free society. Recalling his formative years and his journey of life, he said, he has been truly blessed and enriched by his association with the AIIEA. He also said that he will, henceforth, dedicate himself fully to the cause of the un-organised sector workers. Com. G V Kulkarni, announced cash-donation to Insurance Worker, Vima Naukara, CITU and a Laptop to Insurance Employees' Union, Belagavi Division.

DONATIONS

Com. Rajesh Pandey, Raipur I Branch	Rs.1000
Com. Edward Ekka, Raipur I Branch	500
Com. Gauri Gupta, Raipur I Branch	501
Com. D.K.Ghosh, Kolkata	1260
Com. Sadhan Sinha KMDO-1 CBO 11	3000
Com. Saraswathi, Chennai DO -1	2000
Com. Manikavachagam, Chennai DO-1	3500
Com. Bhuvanewari G Chennai DO-1	2000
Com. Sneha D.Kini, Belgaum DO	2000
Com. Subba Raj, Periyakulam, Madurai Division	2000
Com. M.Marichamy, SatturBO Madurai Division	1000
Com. Kannan, Sivakasi BO Madurai Division	1000
Com. Vinutha Muralidhar, Vijayanagar,Bangalore Div	2000
Com. N.R.Gadkar, Hubli-1,Dharwad	4000
Com. D.Kamatchi, Dindigul II, Madurai Div.	2000
Com. K.Amutha Devi Madurai III	2000
Com. P Madhava Kumar, Madurai DO	1000

Donations to AIIEA:

Com. Atul Deshmukh - Raipur	Rs.5000
Com.B.K. Thakur - Raipur	5000
Com.D.K. Bhagar -Raipur	5000

Insurance Worker heartily thanks these comrades.

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX

Month	Base 2001	Base 1960
October 2018	302	6893.42
November	302	6893.42
December	301	6870.60
January 2019	307	7007.55
February	307	7007.55
March	309	7053.20
April	312	7121.68
May	314	7167.33
June	316	7212.98

Base 1960=Base2001x22.8259

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Joint Secretary, AIEEA



Reena Mishra
General Secretary,
NZGIEU



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Visakhapatnam
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Ernakulam (SZ)



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Goa (WZ)



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HEAD OFFICE

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