

# Insurance Worker



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The Question of PENSIONS



The Mahatma & the CII



प्रायोजित बहसों के बीच

DECADE OF DIVISION



'MODI ki GUARANTEE  
for 3RD TERM

*- India will be world's 3rd largest economy'*

Then, why this growing economy is unable to create jobs?  
Why halt Recruitment in Class IV categories,  
hitting hard the less privileged sections of the society?



**LIC MUST END ITS  
PROCRASTINATION  
RECRUITMENT IS AN URGENT NECESSITY  
FOR THE VERY SURVIVAL OF OUR INSTITUTION**

**OBSESSION WITH PAKODANOMICS & GDP MUST END  
STOP IGNORING ISSUES OF LIFE & LIVING  
& WORK TO CREATE DECENT JOBS**

Observe 13th March 2024 as "My LIC My Pride" Day

Courtesy: Ramendra Nath Chakravorty



"By Ramarajya,  
I do not mean Hindu Raj.  
I mean by Ramarajya  
Divine Raj,  
the Kingdom of God.  
For me Ram and Rahim are  
one and the same deity.  
I acknowledge no other God  
but the one God of  
truth and righteousness."

WITH BEST COMPLIMENTS  
from

**INSURANCE EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION**  
HAZARIBAGH DIVISION



## RECRUITMENT IS AN URGENT NECESSITY

One of the major demands projected in the one-hour strike on January 10, 2024 was recruitment. The success of the strike action has endorsed this demand of the Joint Front. Looking at the age profile of LIC, it is clear that the institution is aging and infusing young blood is necessary for its very survival. The past few years have seen a steady decline in numbers in all classes of employees. For the first time in decades, as on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 the total staff strength of LIC stood below one lakh. It has further declined as on date to a little over 97000. But what is more disturbing is the steady decline in the number of Class III & IV employees. From 49129 as on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, it has further declined to 45955 as on date. This is impacting the servicing and, in many centres, LIC Branches looks like ghost offices with minimal staff struggling to run the operations. The situation is much worse relating to Class IV employees. A large number of offices are without a permanent Class IV employee. There are zones where there is not a single permanent Class IV employee.

The AIIEA has been demanding recruitment in Class III & IV cadres for past many years now. It argued that LIC had assessed the

need of 8000 Assistants in year 2020 and went for recruitment. It could not fill all notified vacancies due to various reasons and even among those recruited there were significant attrition. Therefore, even accepting the LIC's assessment, more than 2500 of the 8000 vacancies notified in 2020 still remain unfilled. Since 2020, there have been large scale retirements. Why then is LIC not filling up these vacancies?

In discussions with AIIEA, LIC Chairperson and Officials of Personnel Department agree that there is a need for recruitment in Class III. But they also say that LIC is seriously working out the mechanism to arrive at the number of vacancies. Unfortunately, this seems to be a work in progress for the last several years. Why does it require years for LIC to determine the cadre strength? However, on the issue of recruitment in Class IV cadre, LIC has remained non-committal citing some difficulties. It looks LIC too has bound itself with the government understanding that Class IV personnel are no longer required in the offices. This may be the reason why Class IV recruitments have virtually stopped in government, banks and insurance industry. It appears LIC is keen on outsourcing

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of all Class IV jobs which cannot be acceptable to AIIEA.

There is chest thumping in government circles and the hired pen pushers over the fact that India is the fastest growing among the large economies in the world. The Prime Minister has announced that he will make India the third largest economy in the world in his third term. There are also claims that India will be a \$10 trillion economy by the turn of this decade. While claiming this, what is conveniently ignored is that the economic activity of 140 crore people has to be larger than those countries with a population size of less than 5 crore. What is important is whether the growth in the GDP is creating jobs and is it improving the life standards of the people. India today may be 5<sup>th</sup> in the world in terms of size of economy but remains 139 in global ranking in terms of the per capita income which is around \$2500. Deciding well being of the people on the basis of per capita income too is risky in a situation where there is unprecedented concentration of wealth in the top 1% of the population. The government itself has conceded that over 80 crore people depend on its free ration for their survival.

Why this growing economy is unable to create jobs? We can find solution if the government acknowledges that country has huge unemployment problem. But the obsession with pakodanomics refuses to acknowledge the existence of this problem. The International Labour Organisation and Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, both agree that the rate of unemployment in India is far greater than the global rate for the last several years. The Status of Working India Report brought out by Azim Premji University estimates that graduate unemployment rate is over 15 percent and the rate of unemployment among graduates who are below 25 years is an alarming 42 percent. Nearly 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the population today is under 35 years and the country is fast losing the demographic advantage it enjoys with the youth finding the future bleak without jobs. Apart from this, every year 12 million new job seeker enter the market.

It has become the policy of the government to end the permanent jobs and create appointment on adhoc basis. The government itself has become the biggest contractual employer. By halting recruitment in Class IV categories, the government is hitting hard the

marginalised and less privileged sections of the society. The share of wages in the value added in GDP was 30.3% in 1981-82 and it declined to 18.9% in 2019-20. During the same period the share of profits for the owners and shareholders of corporate India increased to 38.6% from 23.4%. This trend is indicative of the fact that not only jobs are not being created but wages are remaining stagnant or falling while the profits of the Corporate Sector is registering tremendous increase.

Despite tall claims of the economic growth, there is a consensus that private consumption which constitute the major share of GDP is continuously falling. This shows that people do not have adequate disposable incomes and this is a serious concern to the economy. The government, therefore, must leave its obsession

जनवरी 10, 2024 को एक घंटे की हड़ताल की प्रस्तावित प्रमुख मांगों में से एक भर्ती की थी। हड़ताल की सफलता ने ज्वाइंट फ्रंट की इस मांग के समर्थन पर अपनी मुहर लगा दी है। एलआईसी में आयु वर्गीकरण को देखते हुए, यह स्पष्ट है कि संस्थान बूढ़ा हो रहा है और इसके अस्तित्व के लिए युवा रक्त का संचार करना आवश्यक है। पिछले कुछ वर्षों में सभी वर्गों के कर्मचारियों की संख्या में लगातार गिरावट देखी गई है। दशकों में पहली बार, 31 मार्च 2023 को एलआईसी की कुल कर्मचारियों की संख्या एक लाख से नीचे थी। आज की तारीख में इसमें और गिरावट आई है और यह 97000 से कुछ अधिक हो गई है। लेकिन जो अधिक परेशान करने वाली बात है, वह है तृतीय और चतुर्थ श्रेणी के कर्मचारियों की संख्या में लगातार गिरावट। 31 मार्च 2023 को 49129 से आज की तारीख में यह घटकर 45955 हो गयी है। इसका असर सर्विसिंग पर पड़ रहा है और कई केन्द्रों में, एलआईसी शाखाएं बिल्कुल भूतिया कार्यालयों की तरह दिखती हैं, जहां न्यूनतम संख्या में कर्मचारी परिचालन के लिए संघर्ष कर रहे हैं। चतुर्थ श्रेणी कर्मचारियों को लेकर तो यह स्थिति और भी अधिक खराब है। बड़ी संख्या में कार्यालय स्थायी चतुर्थ श्रेणी कर्मचारियों के विहीन हैं।

कई जोन ऐसे हैं जहां एक भी स्थायी चतुर्थ श्रेणी कर्मचारी नहीं है। एआईआईईए पिछले कई वर्षों से तृतीय और चतुर्थ श्रेणी संवर्गों में भर्ती की मांग कर रहा है। यह माना जाता है कि एलआईसी ने वर्ष 2020 में 8000 सहायकों की आवश्यकता का आकलन किया था और फिर भर्ती के लिए गया था। यह विभिन्न कारणों से सभी अधिसूचित रिक्तियों को नहीं भर सका और यहां तक कि जिन लोगों को भर्ती किया गया था उनमें भी उल्लेखनीय रूप से छंटनी हो गई। इसलिए, एलआईसी के आकलन को स्वीकार करते हुए भी, में अधिसूचित में से से अधिक रिक्तियां अभी भी अधूरी हैं। 2020 के बाद से बड़े पैमाने पर रिटायरमेंट हुए हैं। फिर एलआईसी इन रिक्तियों को क्यों नहीं भर रही है?

एआईआईईए के साथ चर्चा में एलआईसी चेयरपर्सन और कार्मिक विभाग के अधिकारी इस बात पर सहमत

with GDP and work to create decent jobs. The jobs now created are menial and exploitative in construction and those who in a desperate measure take to work as delivery boys, tele-callers or vendors of street food. The growth of the economy must benefit all sections of the society and therefore, it is the constitutional responsibility of the government to attack and prevent the unprecedented concentration of wealth. The government cannot be allowed to abdicate its responsibility as a distributor of social and economic justice.

The procrastination of LIC on recruitment must end. The LIC has been taking new initiatives, deploying higher technology and digitisation projects. If the administration feels that business operations can be run with higher technology and human resources are

not required, it is sadly mistaken. Even today large number of our policyholders who live in towns and villages are not enamoured by digital drive and prefer personalised services. LIC must understand that recruitment is necessary for the very survival of the institution and therefore must take immediate steps in this direction. The AIIEA also has to push forward with this demand if required through intensified agitation. Agitations on the issue of recruitment are taking place in Banks and other institutions. The issue of employment and decent jobs has to be brought to the centre stage of political discourse. All attempts to ignore the issues of life and living through the mixing of politics and religion must be defeated. This is an urgent task.

## भर्ती तत्काल जरूरी

रहते हैं कि तृतीय श्रेणी में भर्ती की जरूरत है। लेकिन उनका यह भी कहना है कि एलआईसी रिक्रियों की संख्या तय करने के लिए गंभीरता से प्रक्रिया निर्धारित करने पर काम कर रही है। दुर्भाग्य से, यह कार्य पिछले कई वर्षों से प्रगति पर ही चलता प्रतीत होता है। एलआईसी को कैडर की संख्या निर्धारित करने में इतने वर्ष क्यों लगने चाहिए? और वहीं, चतुर्थ श्रेणी कैडर में भर्ती के मुद्दे पर, एलआईसी कुछ कठिनाइयों का हवाला देते हुए अप्रतिबद्ध बने रहना चाहती है। ऐसा लगता है कि एलआईसी ने भी खुद को सरकार की इस समझ के साथ बांध लिया है कि अब दफ्तरों में चतुर्थ श्रेणी कर्मियों की जरूरत नहीं है। शायद यही वजह है कि सरकार, बैंकों और बीमा उद्योग में चतुर्थ श्रेणी की भर्तियां लगभग बंद हो गई हैं। ऐसा प्रतीत होता है कि एलआईसी सभी चतुर्थ श्रेणी की नौकरियों को आउटसोर्स करने की इच्छुक है जो एआईआईईए को स्वीकार्य नहीं हो सकता है।

सरकारी हलकों और भाड़े के कलम चलाने वालों में इस तथ्य पर छाती पीटी जा रही है कि भारत दुनिया की बड़ी अर्थव्यवस्थाओं में सबसे तेजी से बढ़ रहा है। प्रधानमंत्री ने घोषणा की है कि वह अपने तीसरे कार्यकाल में भारत को दुनिया की तीसरी सबसे बड़ी अर्थव्यवस्था बनाएंगे। ऐसे भी दावे हैं कि इस दशक के अंत तक भारत 10 ट्रिलियन डॉलर की अर्थव्यवस्था बन जाएगा। यह दावा करते समय, जिस बात को आसानी से नजरअंदाज कर दिया जाता है वह यह है कि 140 करोड़ लोगों की आर्थिक गतिविधि उन देशों की तुलना में ज्यादा बड़ी होनी चाहिए जिनकी जनसंख्या का आकार करोड़ से कम है। महत्वपूर्ण बात यह है कि क्या सकल घरेलू उत्पाद में वृद्धि से नौकरियां पैदा हो रही हैं और क्या इससे लोगों के जीवन स्तर में सुधार हो रहा है। भारत आज भले ही अर्थव्यवस्था के आकार के मामले में दुनिया में 5 वें स्थान पर है, लेकिन प्रति व्यक्ति आय, जो लगभग 2500 डॉलर है, के मामले में वैश्विक रैंकिंग में 139 वें स्थान पर है। प्रति व्यक्ति आय के आधार पर लोगों की भलाई का निर्णय करना भी उस स्थिति में

जोखिम भरा है जहां आबादी के शीर्ष 1 प्रतिशत में धन का अभूतपूर्व संकेद्रण है। सरकार ने खुद माना है कि 80 करोड़ से ज्यादा लोग अपनी आजीविका के लिए उसके मुफ्त राशन पर निर्भर हैं।

यह बढ़ती अर्थव्यवस्था रोजगार पैदा करने में असमर्थ क्यों है? अगर सरकार यह मान ले कि देश में बेरोजगारी की भारी समस्या है तो हम इसका समाधान ढूंढ सकते हैं। लेकिन पकोडानॉमिक्स का जुनून इस समस्या के अस्तित्व को स्वीकार करने से भी इनकार करता है। अंतर्राष्ट्रीय श्रम संगठन और सेंटर फॉर मॉनिटरिंग इंडियन इकोनॉमी, दोनों इस बात पर सहमत हैं कि भारत में बेरोजगारी की दर पिछले कई वर्षों से वैश्विक दर से कहीं अधिक है। अजीम प्रेमजी विश्वविद्यालय द्वारा जारी वर्किंग इंडिया रिपोर्ट में स्थिति का अनुमान है कि स्नातक बेरोजगारी दर 15 प्रतिशत से अधिक है और 25 वर्ष से कम उम्र के स्नातकों के बीच बेरोजगारी की दर खतरनाक 42 प्रतिशत है। आज लगभग दो-तिहाई आबादी 35 साल से कम उम्र की है और देश तेजी से अपना जनसांख्यिकीय लाभ खो रहा है और युवाओं को नौकरियों के बिना अपना भविष्य अधकारमय लग रहा है। इसके अलावा हर साल 1.2 करोड़ नए नौकरी चाहने वाले बाजार में आते हैं।

स्थायी नौकरियां समाप्त कर तदर्थ आधार पर नियुक्ति करना सरकार की नीति बन गयी है। सरकार स्वयं सबसे बड़ी संविदा नियोक्ता बन गयी है। चतुर्थ श्रेणी वर्ग में भर्ती रोककर, सरकार समाज के हाशिये पर पड़े और कम सुविधा प्राप्त वर्गों पर कड़ा प्रहार कर रही है। सकल घरेलू उत्पाद में जोड़े गए मूल्य में मजदूरी का हिस्सा 1981-82 में 30.3 प्रतिशत था और 2019-20 में यह घटकर 18.9 प्रतिशत हो गया। इसी अवधि के दौरान कारपोरेट भारत के मालिकों और शेयरधारकों के मुनाफे का हिस्सा 23.4 प्रतिशत से बढ़कर 38.6 प्रतिशत हो गया। यह प्रवृत्ति इस बात का सूचक है कि न केवल नौकरियां पैदा नहीं हो रही हैं बल्कि वेतन स्थिर या गिर रहा है जबकि कारपोरेट क्षेत्र के मुनाफे में जबरदस्त

वृद्धि दर्ज की जा रही है।

आर्थिक वृद्धि के बड़े-बड़े दावों के बावजूद इस बात पर आम सहमति है कि निजी खपत, जो जीडीपी का बड़ा हिस्सा है, लगातार गिर रही है। इससे पता चलता है कि लोगों के पास पर्याप्त खर्च करने योग्य आय नहीं है और यह अर्थव्यवस्था के लिए एक गंभीर चिंता का विषय है। इसलिए सरकार को जीडीपी का मोह छोड़कर अच्छी नौकरियां पैदा करने के लिए काम करना चाहिए। अब जो नौकरियां सृजित हुई हैं वे निर्माण क्षेत्र की तुच्छ और शोषणकारी हैं और वे लोग हताशा में डिलीवरी बाँय, टेली-कॉलर या स्ट्रीट फूड के विक्रेताओं के रूप में काम करने लगते हैं। अर्थव्यवस्था की वृद्धि से समाज के सभी वर्गों को लाभ होना चाहिए और इसलिए, धन के अभूतपूर्व संकेंद्रण पर हमला करना और उसे रोकना सरकार की संवैधानिक जिम्मेदारी है। सरकार को सामाजिक और आर्थिक न्याय के वितरक के रूप में अपनी जिम्मेदारी से भागने की अनुमति नहीं दी जा सकती।

भर्तियों पर एलआईसी की टालमटोल खत्म होनी चाहिए। एलआईसी नई पहल कर रही है, उच्च प्रौद्योगिकी और डिजिटलीकरण परियोजनाओं को लागू कर रही है। यदि प्रशासन को लगता है कि व्यवसाय संचालन उच्च तकनीक से चलाया जा सकता है और मानव संसाधनों की आवश्यकता नहीं है, तो यह दुखद रूप से गलत है। आज भी बड़ी संख्या में हमारे पॉलिसीधारक जो कस्बों और गांवों में रहते हैं, डिजिटल ड्राइव से प्रभावित नहीं हैं और व्यक्तिगत सेवाओं को पसंद करते हैं। एलआईसी को यह समझना चाहिए कि संस्थान के अस्तित्व के लिए भर्ती आवश्यक है और इसलिए इस दिशा में तत्काल कदम उठाने चाहिए। आवश्यकता पड़ने पर एआईआईईए को भी तीव्र आंदोलन के माध्यम से इस मांग को आगे बढ़ाना होगा। बैंकों और अन्य संस्थानों में भर्तियों को लेकर आंदोलन हो रहे हैं। रोजगार और अच्छी नौकरियों के मुद्दे को राजनीतिक विमर्श के केंद्र में लाना होगा। राजनीति और धर्म के मिश्रण के माध्यम से जीवन और आजीविका के मुद्दों को नजरअंदाज करने के सभी प्रयासों को पराजित किया जाना चाहिए। यह एक जरूरी काम है। ●

## AIIEA Leadership meets

Com. V. Ramesh, President and Com. Shreekant Mishra, General Secretary, AIIEA met Sri Siddhartha Mohanty, Chairperson LIC on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2024 at Central Office and discussed some important issues relating to the employees and the institution. Sri R.K. Dubey, Executive Director (Personnel) was also present during the discussions.

### Wage Revision:

The AIIEA leadership conveyed the unhappiness of the employees over the inordinate delay in commencement of negotiations for wage revision. Terming the success of the One Hour Walk Out Strike action on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2024 as a reflection of the deep-seated anguish of the employees, the AIIEA leadership demanded that wage revision cannot brook any further delay. The Chairperson was requested to personally intervene in the matter so that wage revision concludes early to the satisfaction of the employees without forcing them into further struggles. It was pointed out that while negotiations in analogous institutions like public sector banks were going on apace and reaching towards finality, there could be no plausible reason for the delay in LIC. The leadership said that LIC has maintained its pre-eminent position in the insurance industry despite a stiff competition from the private sector only due to the unwavering commitment of the employees. The delegation demanded that this commitment of the workforce should be duly reciprocated by the management in terms of a good and early wage revision. While appreciating our concerns on the

issue, the Chairperson lauded the role of the employees to the process of strengthening of LIC in the public sector and assured that LIC would seriously pursue the issue with the government for early resolution of the same.

### Enhancement of management's contribution to NPS:

The delegation also expressed its unhappiness over the long delay in the notification related to increasing management's contribution to DCPS beneficiaries from 10 to 14 percent, as is applicable to central government employees and those of public sector banks. It was pointed out that the delay was causing avoidable pecuniary loss to the DCPS beneficiaries who have now been shifted to the institutional architecture of the NPS. We made it clear that this is without any prejudice to our demand for restoration of old pension scheme. The management informed that the issue was being sincerely followed up with the government and they assured to take it up afresh with all seriousness.

### Recruitment:

The delegation demanded that recruitment to Class III & IV cadres should be taken up immediately. Arguing that Class III employees were the first point of interface with the customers in the offices, the leadership pointed out that it was always ideal to have an agile and young workforce manning the offices, especially in the changed environment. The delegation explained that LIC was in an unenviable situation where a progressively declining workforce, especially in Class III & IV cadres, had to render

# LIC Chairperson

servicing to an increasing volume of business with each passing year. It was also pointed out that in the fiercely competitive insurance market LIC had to increase its footprints in hitherto unreached areas, particularly in newly developing urban agglomerations in bigger cities. Explaining that the effort to keep LIC future-ready can only be realized by having adequate manpower, the delegation demanded that LIC should immediately go ahead with filling up the more than 2600 Class III vacancies existing from the last recruitment round. The Chairperson appreciated our understanding on the issue and assured to

consider our demand in right earnest. He assured that a call would certainly be taken once the ongoing reorientation of work processes was completed. The delegation demanded recruitment to Class IV cadre also by giving a onetime solution to the problem of temporary employees who have been working since long. The management sought some more time to examine the issue.

## **Mediclaime Issue:**

The leadership of AIIEA reiterated the unhappiness of the organization on the issue of transfer of GST burden on Mediclaime premium to the employees and pensioners. The Chairperson and ED(Personnel) appreciated our concerns on the issue but explained that owing to certain technical problems the new system had to be introduced perforce. On our insistence, they agreed to re-examine the issue. Our delegation demanded that there was a need to substantially increase the Basic Floater Sum

Insured in view of rising medical inflation in the country. The management assured to look into the demand. The delegation also reiterated our earlier demand of extending Mediclaime coverage to certain categories of beneficiaries like dependent parents and independent children and reminded the management about their earlier assurance of framing a separate scheme for dependent parents to ward-off the possibility of premium escalation. The management explained that there were some hiccups because of insistence of the insurer relating to the 'group size' and assured to sort it out soon.

## **Ex-gratia relief to pre-1986 retirees:**

The leadership of AIIEA expressed unhappiness over the paltry increase in the ex-gratia relief to pre-1986 retirees and their surviving spouses. The delegation reiterated our demand of substantial enhancement of the same without any delay. The management appreciated our concerns and agreed to re-look into the issue.

## **Need of constructive dialogue:**

The AIIEA delegation suggested that LIC should harness the goodwill and support of all sections of the workforce to successfully meet the present-day challenges. Underlining the need for regular structured dialogue with the stakeholders in the post IPO period, our delegation expressed its unhappiness over some attempts to bulldoze changes in LIC without taking the employees into confidence. The Chairperson responded positively to this issue and said that LIC's spectacular journey over the years

has been possible because of its dedicated and committed workforce. He assured that LIC will continuously engage in dialogue and discussion to thrash out whatever minor irritants are there and march ahead by leveraging the synergies of all stake holders.

## **Discussion with ED(Personnel):**

The discussion with the Chairperson in the forenoon session was followed by a discussion with the Executive Director (Personnel) and his team of officials, including Sri Sandeep Kumar, Chief (Personnel), in the afternoon session. Apart from broader issues like Recognition to AIIEA, issues relating to re-fixation of pay of ex-servicemen employees, doing away with the practice of insisting on medical certificate for sick leaves of 2-3 days duration, the need to upgrade the quality of training sessions etc. were discussed at length. The Chief Personnel made a brief presentation on the HRMS initiatives being undertaken by LIC and how LIC was contemplating to leverage technology for better utilization of manpower in the emerging situation. Assuring that at no point will the employees be inconvenienced; the management described the entire effort of LIC as people-centric and employee-friendly. The management sought the co-operation of AIIEA in ensuring a smooth implementation of the initiatives. The leadership demanded that these issues needed to be discussed further for more clarity.

Issues pertaining to some individual zones were also discussed and these will be communicated to them in due course. AIIEA shall continue to pursue all the issues till their logical conclusion.

# AIIEA writes to GIPSA Chairperson on Pending Demands

*The Secretary, Standing Committee of AIIEA wrote a letter dated 4/1/2024 to the Chairperson, GIPSA urging for resolution of long pending demands. The letter reproduced is self explanatory.*

"It is very disturbing that despite our consistent Follow up on some burning issues of employees of PSGICs and repeated assurances by GIPSA, the issues remain unresolved.

**The wage revision in PSGI companies** is due from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2022. There has been a positive development on wage revision in Public Sector Banks. Therefore it is obvious on part of employees of PSGI companies to expect the commencement of wage talks by the GIPSA. However, GIPSA continues to maintain silence on the matter.

**Improvement in Family Pension to a uniform rate of 30%** without any ceiling is already extended to the family pensioners of LIC. But almost fifteen thousand Family Pensioners of PSGICs and GIC:Re have been left to live in financial hardship as the existing rates of family pension are too meagre to support them in living a dignified life. The inordinate delay in the matter is inexplicable.

## **Increase in Employer's contribution to NPS @14%:**

We have been raising this issue ever since the Government of India approved this increase for Government Employees which was also extended to workforce in the Banking Sector and various other organisations. This is an interim measure to mitigate the hardship of new employees who have been forcefully kept under NPS. Our demand for this interim benefit is without prejudice to our demand to cover all officers and employees under the General Insurance (Pension) Scheme 1995. We have been time and again assured that the GIPSA Governing Board has recommended to the DFS for its approval long back. Yet, there is no progress on the issue.

You will agree that the issues cited above are pending for long with no resolution in sight. Unfortunately, we are yet to hear from GIPSA on either status of the matters or even a plausible reason for the delay. This perceived lack

of seriousness by GIPSA on core economic issues of employees has created a sense of discontent among them.

In this backdrop, Please take notice that as decided by JFTU in its last meeting held (through online mode) on 26.12.2024, AIIEA calls upon employees to observe following agitational programs :

1. **10<sup>th</sup> January, 2024 : Lunch Hour Gate Meetings** across HOs / ROs / major centres.

2. **17<sup>th</sup> January, 2024 : Lunch Hour Demonstrations** across HOs / ROs / major centres

3. **24<sup>th</sup> January, 2024: Lunch Hour Demonstrations** across HOs / ROs / major centres

In case there is no positive response in the matter, we shall be constrained to escalate the IR action including but not restricting to walk-out strikes. This may be taken as necessary notice for the same and our Management only should be held responsible for poor industrial relations in the Company."

## One Hour Strike Action Resounding Success

The Joint Front comprising of Federation of LIC Class I Officers' Associations, NFIFWI, AIIEA and AILICEF had called the LIC employees, officers and development officers to observe a one hour strike preceding lunch recess on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2024. The strike was to protest against the delay in convening wage negotiations and other demands. The strike was massively responded to by the employees. In a number of divisions across the country, the percentage of those on strike exceeded 90 percent. The success of this strike action reflects the deep resentment of the employees towards an unhelpful attitude of LIC and insensitivity of the government to the long pending genuine demands. The employees through this action have demonstrated readiness to further intensify the agitation if LIC and the government do not take early steps to settle the demands. It is hoped that LIC will take early steps to find resolution to these demands to avoid industrial strife in the interests of the institution and all its stakeholders.



# AIIEA Secretariat Meeting

*The Secretariat of the AIIEA met at Hyderabad on 21-22 January 2024. The Secretariat discussed the latest developments pertaining to the insurance industry and the dangers confronting public sector insurance, the latest position of the wage revision in LIC and PSGI companies and issues relating to the organisation.*

The Secretariat congratulated the employees of LIC for the remarkable show of unity displayed by way of the successful one-hour walk-out strike on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2024. The success of the strike demonstrated in clear terms that the employees were no longer prepared to brook any delay on the question of their legitimate wage demands, enhancement of management's contribution from 10 to 14 per cent without prejudice to AIIEA's demand for scrapping of the NPS and its replacement by the 1995 pension scheme, recruitment to Class III & IV cadres and the unilateral attitude of the management on issues relating to the institution and the employees. The Secretariat resolved to cement the unity of the officers and employees under the banner of the Joint Front still further and carry out struggles for realising the genuine demands of the employees. Expressing serious concern over the sharp communal polarisation, fast institutional degradation and growing authoritarianism taking place in Indian society, the Secretariat noted that maintaining the class unity of the working class was of utmost importance.

The Secretariat felt that LIC was performing admirably well in spite of a difficult macro-economic environment. Noting that LIC's remarkable performance had come in the

background of a sluggish growth performance of the economy and in the background of net financial savings falling to a historic low of 5.1 per cent, the Secretariat exuded confidence that LIC improve its market share in the coming months of this fiscal. Analysing the performance of the insurance industry globally, the meeting noted with satisfaction that Indian insurance industry, particularly the LIC, was doing much better than insurance companies of even the developed countries of the west. The Secretariat was of the opinion that the LIC management and government should appreciate the contribution of the employees to the growth and prosperity of the institution and reward them by way of a decent wage revision. Expressing serious disappointment over the fact that negotiations on wage revision had not started even after more than seventeen months of submission of the charter, the meeting called upon the employees to remain prepared for intensified struggle on the issue.

The meeting noted that there was considerable improvement in the performance of PSGI companies in the current financial year in spite of the unwarranted interference of the government by way of the KPI and restructuring exercises. The meeting discussed the growing number of mergers and consolidations taking



place in the private sector insurance industry and the financial muscle it was lending to these companies. It was decided that a serious struggle had to be taken up by our units on the issue of merger of PSGI companies so as to enable them to derive the economies of scale.

The Secretariat authorised the Standing Committee (General Insurance) to devise appropriate programmes of struggle for realising the pending demands of the employees including the wage issue in close co-ordination with the Joint Front.

The secretariat also sought to draw the attention of the employees to the shrill media hype over LIC surpassing SBI, ITC and Hindustan Lever in terms of market capitalisation and becoming the country's most valued PSU firm and 7<sup>th</sup> most valued company overall in terms of market capitalisation. The meeting analysed as to how the corporate media had started using the uptick in LIC share prices as a justification for further dilution of government equity. As per the minimum public shareholding norms of the SEBI, the promoter's shareholding should be 75% or less. The government had offloaded only 3.5% of its equity by way of LIC's IPO in 2022 and still continues to have 96.5% of the shareholding. The LIC has got a breather till 2032 to bring down the government equity to 75% as per SEBI norms. The secretariat expressed concern over the media campaign that the government can unlock Rs.1.2 lakh crore, as of the current market price, by divesting its excess stake in LIC. The Secretariat cautioned the employees to remain vigilant and thwart any attempt at further dilution of government equity from the LIC and privatisation of public sector general insurance companies.

There was a critical discussion in the Secretariat on the unilateral attitude of the management especially with regard to implementation of new initiatives. The secretariat noted that while there was no doubt about the need for modern technology to upgrade customer servicing, there cannot be any compromise on protecting the interests of the employees. The meeting expressed its serious concern over the depleting staff strength in LIC and PSGI companies. While some recruitment had started in PSGI companies of late, the meeting was critical that LIC management had been maintaining a stoic silence on the issue. The Secretariat decided that recruitment in LIC cannot brook any delay and a struggle had to commence on the issue.

The secretariat decided to observe 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024 as "My LIC My Pride" Day across the country. The day should be observed as a mega business day so that all stake holders show their love and commitment to the institution by procuring maximum business on that day. Zonal units were requested to finalise the programme by suitably guiding the divisional units about the likely amount of business they can bring in on that day. It was also decided that suitable programmes like Agents' activation programmes, No Termination Months for Agents, Employees-Agents Interaction programmes should be organised on a regular basis to smoothen the relationships in the office and help procurement of more business. It was decided that the Standing Committee (General Insurance) would take up a spirited campaign to popularise the products of PSGI companies by involving all sections of the stake holders.

The Secretariat decided to Organise Solidarity Demonstrations on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2024 across the country in support of the nationwide mass mobilisation of the Central Trade Unions and Samyukt Kisan Morcha on important issues of the country and the people. It was also decided that pressing issues of insurance employees like Wage Revision, Enhancement of management's contribution to NPS to 14 per cent, Recruitment, threat of Outsourcing, Recognition to AIIEA, Enhancement of Family Pension in PSGI companies to a uniform rate of 30 per cent etc. are also to be projected in the Gate meetings and memorandums to be handed over to the In-Charge of the Offices. (The memorandum will be sent by AIIEA headquarters to the units at the appropriate time)

The Secretariat of the AIIEA decided to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> year of the Republic of India by organising seminars and conventions on topics related to the Constitution of India; the ideas of Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity as enshrined in the Indian Constitution; the syncretic and pluralistic culture of India; Impact of neoliberalism on employment and livelihood of the people and other important issues identified by the zonal units.

The Jodhpur Secretariat of the AIIEA in July 2023 had formed a committee to study the changes in the insurance industry and suggest measures for successfully meeting the emerging challenges. The Secretariat had a detailed discussion on the report submitted by

*Continued on Page 31*

# TASKS BEFORE THE WORKING CLASS in the Year 2024

**Shreekant Mishra**

As the year 2023 recedes into the lap of history and a new dawn awakes on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2024, we wish all the insurance employees, their family members and the Indian working class a very happy and purposeful New Year 2024. We hope that the New Year 2024 would bring peace, progress and happiness for the working class across the globe. New Year is an occasion to celebrate; it also is an occasion to reflect on the times past and chart one's course for the future. But then, as an eminent poet said over a century ago, "What can be said in New Year rhymes, that's not been said a thousand times"?

The world is in turmoil. There is no end in sight to the Russia Ukraine war. The war is not going well for Ukraine. That is to say, it is going badly for the US led NATO and the EU which have bankrolled Ukraine's war effort to the tune of tens of billions of dollars. The genocidal massacre of Palestinians in Gaza continues unabated with overt US support. More than 21000 people including around 8000 children have already died. More than 50,000 have been wounded. Countless others are still buried deep in the rubble of damaged buildings. US imperialism has been shamelessly vetoing any UN resolution calling for a ceasefire and an end to the inhuman conflict.

Neoliberalism has reached almost a dead end. It has failed to promote economic growth and overall people's prosperity. With its singular focus on profit

maximisation, its prescriptions continue to perpetuate the global economic crisis adding to people's misery, higher levels of economic exploitation and alarming rise in income and wealth inequalities. The October 2023 World Economic Outlook Report of the IMF says that global growth would slow down from 3.5 per cent in 2022 to 3 per cent in 2023 and 2.9 per cent in 2024. This is well below the average of 3.8 per cent during the period 2000 to 2019. The report further says that advanced economies are expected to slow down from 2.6 per cent in 2022 to 1.5 per cent in 2023 and 1.4 per cent in 2024. The UN estimates that almost 700 million people around the world live in extreme poverty. The 2023 Global Hunger Index shows that there is not much headway so far as eradication of hunger is concerned.

Such a situation has led to two basic consequences. First, the global north, especially the US, has already introduced protectionism which is a flagrant violation of the rules of the neoliberal regime. Second, the global capitalist order has let loose a reign of terror to contain the rising crescendo of popular struggles against the exploitation of neoliberalism. Global capitalism seems determined to disrupting the unity of the working people to prevent any possibility of such struggles leading to the emergence of an alternative to the capitalist system. Emotive issues like

*A New Year has come, but there is no end in sight to the Russia -Ukraine war. The world is in turmoil.... Neoliberalism has reached almost a dead end, failing to promote economic growth and overall people's prosperity. And in India, 2023 was 'a year that tested the soul of India'.*

*Faced with a crisis of credibility and a backlash from the people, neoliberalism is in search of an alibi which could serve as a prop. This is provided by neo-fascism.*

*The neoliberal neofascist alliance has successfully shifted the discourse away from the economic issues of the people to the hatred for the 'other'.....*

*It is a tragedy that while the Republic of India enters its 75<sup>th</sup> year on 26<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2024, the lifeblood of the Republic- Democracy, Secularism and Federalism- are under severe assault, especially from those who are supposed to uphold these virtues.*



Courtesy Manjul, Facebook



Courtesy: Business Standard

xenophobia, racism, national pride, religious and ethnic divides etc. are being exploited to divide the people. This is accompanied by growing authoritarian attacks on democratic, civil and human rights. A distinct political rightward shift is taking place in many countries. Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, Marine Le Pen in France, Giorgia Meloni and Matteo Salvini in Italy, Javier Milei in Argentina and Christopher Luxon in New Zealand are some of the shining examples.

Someone has rightly said that 2023 was a year that tested the soul of India. The reasons are not far to seek; they are many and varied. Despite the no holds barred propaganda by the spin doctors of the government, the fact remains that the Indian economy is in a bad shape. Much is being made of India soon becoming the third largest economy in the world. The truth is that India ranks 142<sup>nd</sup> in the world in terms of per capita GDP. While India claims to have become the Vishwaguru, the fact is that India has the lowest per capita GDP among the G 20 countries. Continuous decline in people's purchasing power has a deleterious impact on investment and employment. Falling employment coupled with rising prices has brought miseries to the life of the common man.

The State of Working India 2023 Report brought out by the Centre for Sustainable Employment at Azim Premji University makes some damning observations. It says that while the real earnings (adjusted for inflation) of self-employed workers (the largest segment accounting for more than half the workforce) fell in real terms between 2017-18 and 2021-22, that of regular workers (constituting around one fifth of the total workforce) remained stagnant during this period.

What is unacceptable is that this stagnancy and decline in real wages has come at a time when corporate profitability has soared to a decadal high in this period. This clearly points to the K-shaped recovery in the post pandemic period with corporate profits and workers wages moving in opposite directions. As a consequence, inequality has assumed monstrous proportions. As per the Oxfam Report, the richest 1 per cent own more than 40 per cent of the wealth of the country while the bottom half of the population own just 3 per cent of the wealth of the country. This also explains the current slump in consumption demand which is mainly responsible for the sluggish growth. Recent data from the Reserve Bank of India show that the net

financial savings of households fell to a 47 year low of 5.1 per cent of the GDP in 2022-23. Financial savings form a major part of household savings and their depletion can seriously erode the growth potential of the economy.

The distress in the economy and the consequent sufferings of the common man has brought about disillusionment with neoliberalism among a large section of the people. Faced with a crisis of credibility and a backlash from the people, neoliberalism is in search of an alibi or an excuse which could serve as a prop. This new prop is provided by neo-fascism. The neoliberal neofascist alliance has successfully shifted the discourse away from the economic issues of the people to the hatred for the 'other'. This 'other' in India is the Muslim and the appeal to the majority is in the name of "Hindutva". The primary agenda of the corporate communal alliance has been to handover all aspects of the economy, basically the public sector and peasant-based agriculture, to corporate control and take away workers' rights.

In order to further its drive of profit maximisation, the corporate communal alliance has not only weakened workers' movement but it has launched an onslaught on any dissenting voice by branding them as 'seditious'.

*Continued on Page 13*

Courtesy:  
Sajith Kumar,  
Deccan Herald

STAY VIGILANT!  
STAY SAFE!





# DECADE OF DIVISION: RISING INEQUALITIES

**Dr Santosh Kumar Mohapatra**

*According to Oxfam report 'Inequality Inc' published on January 15, 2024, the richest 5 men in the world have doubled their fortunes since 2020, while world's poorest 477 crore people have been impoverished in "decade of division".*

*In India, the number of billionaires has further increased to 169 as per Forbes' 2023 World's Billionaires list.*

*Through squeezing workers, dodging tax, privatizing the state and spurring climate breakdown, corporations are driving inequality and acting in the service of delivering ever-greater wealth to their rich owners. But they're also funnelling power, undermining our democracies and our rights.*

*No corporation or individual should have this much power over our economies and our lives - to be clear, nobody should have a billion dollars.*

**E**conomic Inequality is more dangerous than poverty as it creates grievance and heart burning among those who found them unequal. Widening economic, gender, and racial inequalities-as well as the inequality that exists between countries-are tearing our world apart. Nobel laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz says in his book "The Price of Inequality (2012)" that inequality is self-perpetuating, that it is produced by the vast amount of political power the wealthy hold to control legislative and regulatory activity.

The Oxfam, the British-founded confederation of charitable organizations which is dedicated to alleviating global poverty, annually publishes an inequality report to mark the start of the World Economic Forum's annual meeting at Davos to underscore the gaping divide between the rich and poor. It is warning of a growing gulf of inequality fuelled by corporate power. But this year's report especially highlights the extent to which the disparity is growing. Oxfam says the global economy has

entered a new era of widening inequality. This inequality is no accident; the billionaire class is ensuring corporations deliver more wealth to them at the expense of everyone else".

According to Oxfam report 'Inequality Inc' published on January 15, 2024, the richest five men- Elon Musk, Bernard Arnault, Jeff Bezos, Larry Ellison and Mark Zuckerberg - in the world have doubled their fortunes. Their wealth has increased 114% from \$405 billion to \$869 billion (£681.5bn) since 2020 -at a rate of \$14 million per hour- while world's poorest 477 crore people - making up 60% of the world population - have been impoverished in "decade of division. Their wealth has declined by 0.2% in real terms (I.e., taking inflation into account).

Highlighting a dramatic increase in inequality since the Covid pandemic, Oxfam said the world's billionaires were \$3.3tn (£2.6tn) richer than in 2020, and their wealth had grown three times faster than the rate of inflation. It means, fortunes of five richest men have shot up by 114 percent

since 2020. Meanwhile, the wages of nearly 80 crore workers have failed to keep pace with inflation, meaning that these individuals have effectively collectively lost \$1.5 trillion over the last two years.

Hardship and hunger are a daily reality for many people worldwide. Oxfam predicts, the yawning gap between rich and poor is likely to increase, and will lead to the world crowning its first trillionaire within a decade. At the same time, it warns, if current trends continue, it will take 229 years to ensure the number of people living under the World Bank poverty line of \$6.85 was reduced to zero.

What is reprehensible is that a huge concentration of global corporate and monopoly power is exacerbating inequality economy-wide. Monopolies harm innovation and crush workers and smaller businesses. A billionaire is running or the principal shareholder of 7 out of 10 of the world's biggest corporations. These corporations are worth \$10.2 trillion, equivalent to more than the combined GDPs of all countries in Africa and Latin America.

Through squeezing workers, dodging tax, privatizing the state and spurring climate breakdown, corporations are driving inequality and acting in the service of delivering ever-greater wealth to their rich owners. But they're also funnelling power, undermining our democracies and our rights. No corporation or individual should have this much power over our economies and our lives —to be clear, nobody should have a billion dollars”.

Oxfam's report also shows how a “war on taxation” by corporations has seen the

effective corporate tax rate fall by roughly a third in recent decades, while corporations have relentlessly privatized the public sector and segregated services like education and water. Mirroring the fortunes of the super-rich, it also says business profits have risen sharply despite pressure on households amid the cost-of-living crisis. It finds 148 top corporations made \$1.8 trillion in profits, 52% up on 3-year average, and dished out huge payouts to rich shareholders while hundreds of millions faced cuts in real-term pay.

Their windfall profits surged to nearly \$700 billion. The report finds that for every \$100 of profit made by 96 major corporations between July 2022 and June 2023, \$82 was paid out to rich shareholders. Share ownership overwhelmingly benefits the richest. The top 1 percent own 43 percent of all global financial assets. They hold 48 percent of financial wealth in the Middle East, 50 percent in Asia and 47 percent in Europe. The world's richest 1% own 59% of all global financial assets – including stocks, shares and bonds, plus stakes in privately held business. In the UK, the richest 1% own 36.5% of all financial assets, with a value of £1.8tn. One of the key findings in the Oxfam's report is that women are still significantly overrepresented among the poorest in society. Globally, men own about \$105 trillion more wealth than women which represents a difference in wealth equivalent to more than four times the size of the entire U.S. economy.

At the time of writing this article, Oxfam has not published its Indian supplement for 2024. However,



Courtesy: Oxfam India

the World Inequality Report 2022 released by Paris-based World Inequality Lab, a global research initiative, pegged India to be among the most unequal countries in the world. The Oxfam's report, “Survival of the Richest: The India story”, published in January 2023 also says that between 2012 and 2021, 40% of the wealth created in India has gone to just 1% of the population and only a mere 3% per cent of the wealth has gone to the bottom 50%, adding that the total number of billionaires in India increased from 102 in 2020 to 166 billionaires in 2022 when India has the world's highest number of poor at 22.89 crores. The top 30% of Indians own 90% of the wealth in the country. According to Oxfam's “Inequality Virus Report”, Indian billionaires increased their wealth by 35% during the lockdown ranking India after U.S., China, Germany, Russia and France.

In India, the number of billionaires has further increased to 169 as per Forbes' 2023 World's Billionaires list. To probably no one's surprise, Mukesh Ambani tops the list, and it goes on to include

Gautam Adani and Uday Kotak. The needle has not moved much this year regarding the collective wealth of India's 100 wealthiest people. At \$799 billion, it is a touch lower than \$800 billion in 2022. This was low due to depreciation of rupee vis-à-vis dollar. After the Hindenburg report was released, the stocks of Adani Group companies have been in free fall. After soaring to \$150 billion last year, his net worth declined by a whopping \$82 billion or 54.67% this year. However, due to patronage of government and Supreme Court's verdict on Hindenburg Research case, Adani's wealth has increased by \$7.67 billion in a single day. As on January 4, 2024, Adani is now worth \$97.6 billion, surpassing Mukesh's \$97 billion.

However, the count of billionaire promoters of India Inc's listed firms has increased by 21% in 2023 as per a report by Business Standard. The billionaire promoters in 2023 swelled to a record high of 152 in 2023 as against 126

in 2022. In addition to this, a 16% uptick was also recorded in their combined net worth in 2023 at \$858.3 billion. In 2022, the combined net worth of the promoter billionaires was around \$739 billion. India Inc's net profit as a percentage of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) is just shy of reaching all-time record of 5%, bolstered by strong earnings growth in the second quarter of 2023-24.

This ever-widening gulf between the rich and the rest is not accidental nor inevitable. Governments worldwide are making deliberate political choices that enable and encourage this distorted concentration of wealth, while hundreds of millions of people live in poverty. A fairer economy is possible, one that works for us all. What's needed are concerted policies that deliver fairer taxation and support for everyone, not just the privileged."

Oxfam urges a new era of public action, including public services, corporate regulation,

breaking up monopolies and enacting permanent wealth and excess profit taxes. Calling for a wealth tax to redress the balance between workers and super-rich company bosses and owners, Oxfam thinks that there is evidence and history that public power can rein in runaway corporate power and inequality —shaping the market to be fairer and free from billionaire control. Governments must intervene to break up monopolies, empower workers, tax these massive corporate profits and, crucially, invest in a new era of public goods and services.

To end extreme inequality, governments must radically redistribute the power of billionaires and corporations back to ordinary people and end extreme inequality. A more equal world is possible if governments effectively regulate and reimagine the private sector.

*(The author is President, CDIEA)*



## TASKS BEFORE THE WORKING CLASS IN THE YEAR 2024

Contd from Page 10

The independent press, judiciary, election commission and all constitutional bodies are rendered toothless and are made only to subserve the interest of the corporate communal alliance. The interest of this alliance goes on to become the 'national interest' and everything else becomes 'anti-national'. The year 2023 has seen a serious erosion of democratic values and emergence of streaks of authoritarianism.

It is a tragedy that while the Republic of India enters its 75<sup>th</sup>

year on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2024, the lifeblood of the Republic- Democracy, Secularism and Federalism- are under severe assault, especially from those who are supposed to uphold these virtues. Hitler's Minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, was absolutely right when he said: "This will always remain one of the best jokes of democracy, that it gave its deadly enemies the means by which it was destroyed". The last parliamentary session witnessed the rare spectacle of important legislations being bulldozed while 146 members of Parliament from the

opposition were suspended for the crime of seeking answers from the government on important issues pertaining to the security of the nation and its people. De- secularisation of the Indian State is going on apace with impunity. The way Governors of some opposition ruled states are behaving beyond their constitutional remit speaks volumes about the designs to weaken India's federal structure. The foundational pillars of our Constitution- Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity – are being severely undermined.



# MIXING POLITICS AND RELIGION IS DANGEROUS

**TVNS Ravindranath**

*It is a sad augury that the champions of the consecration of the Lord are neither talking nor doing anything about bringing the Ram-rajya.*

*Lord Ram is portrayed as 'Maryada Purushotham', in whose kingdom women are treated with utmost respect and honour and where the government and the Ruler are accountable and answerable to the common people of the country. Unfortunately, the country witnesses all of these tenets being violated with impunity.*

*It is evident that the entire exercise smacked of sheer political expediency and got nothing to do with religion.*

*What should otherwise have been a religious event, is made out into an official governmental event, no doubt with a eye on the forthcoming 2024 Parliament elections.*

The consecration ceremony in the Ram Temple at Ayodhya is finally over. The scientific and judicial validity of the claim notwithstanding, people are made to believe that it is made possible only now for Lord Rama to enter the country under the auspices of the Vishwaguru, though the Lord is present in the hearts of the devotees and in innumerable temples across the country, for ages. It is similar to the claim of some hardcore right wing followers that India got Independence only after 2014. What is, in fact, consecrated, is not just the idol of Rama in the Ramlalla at the unfinished temple, but, a concrete step towards creation of a Hindurashtra.

It is evident that the entire exercise smacked of sheer political expediency and got nothing to do with religion. What should otherwise have been a religious event, is made out into an official governmental event, no doubt with a eye on the forthcoming 2024 Parliament elections. This fact is stressed by religious heads of the stature of the Shankaracharyas themselves. All of that is now history. But, what is of importance and relevance is the fact though the Lord is supposed to have arrived, what the people of this country badly need and desperately await is his rule i.e. the Ramrajya. It is a sad

augury that the champions of the consecration of the Lord are neither talking nor doing anything about bringing the Ram-rajya. Lord Ram is portrayed as 'Maryada Purushotham', in whose kingdom women are treated with utmost respect and honour. Freedom, Equality, Fraternity and Answerability are said to be the hallmarks of the Ram-Rajya where the government and the Ruler are accountable and answerable to the common people of the country. Unfortunately, the country witnesses all of these tenets being violated with impunity.

Democracy and Democratic values are threatened as never before, in the country. The Constitution of India defines its 'Basic Structure' in terms of federalism, secularism, fundamental rights and democracy. The Constitution of India provides for 'judicial review' to safeguard the citizens' liberties and to preserve the ideals on which the Constitution is based. Today, the basic structure of the constitution itself is seriously challenged. Democracy flourishes when all three of its organs – the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary – operate in tandem. An independent judiciary which effectively counter-balances the executive and the legislature is the



backbone of a democracy.

But, today, there is an increasing attempt to make the judiciary subservient to the executive and legislature. Some of the recent judgments of the Supreme Court, according constitutional validity and endorsement to the unilateral actions of the executive, give rise to such an impression. For example, the Court verdict upholding the abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status under Article 370 of the constitution is a retreat from the Court's known positions on federalism, democratic norms and the sanctity of legal process. It is an endorsement of the government's audacious move to strip Kashmir of its special status. It is also a verdict that legitimizes the subversion of federal principles, undermining the constitutional procedure. This is a verdict that weakens the institutional limitations on power and it undermines federalism and democratic processes to a frightening degree.

The Supreme Court judgment in the Adani case, rejecting the petitions for an impartial probe is disappointing and unfortunate. SEBI informed the court that it did not conduct any probe into the allegations against Adani.

It is surprising that the Court chose to accept the statement of SEBI at face value, without questioning why SEBI has not acted on the complaints. The court has further given approval to the amendments of SEBI which admittedly act as a wall to conceal identities of the links of foreign investors with the 'ultimate beneficiary'. It is also most unfortunate that the judgment has given an open license to the government to probe whether Hindenburg Research's allegation's 'ignored rules' and take action accordingly. This may jeopardize all those media outlets which had published the Hindenburg report. The Supreme Court has not enhanced its credibility with this judgment.

Accountability and answerability to the people is a basic requirement of ideal governance. But, apart from sharing his uninterrupted "Man ki baat", the Prime Minister is averse to listen or respond to the people's voice and woes. Even after 9 months of a never ending ethnic carnage, which is unfortunately coated in communal colour leading to loss of hundreds of precious human life, the Prime Minister is still to respond to the people of Manipur. The Prime

Minister, who could find time to watch the Cricket World Cup Final Match, does not have time to visit Manipur, as if it is not a part of the country. Similarly, the protracted struggle and agitation of the women wrestlers demanding justice and action against the former president of the Wrestling Federation of India and Member of Parliament, Brijbhushan Singh did not find any sympathy from the Prime Minister or his government.

In a land mark judgment on the Bilkis Bano case, the Supreme Court has directed all the 11 convicts who were released on remission, by the Gujarat government be once again sent back to jail. This is a victory for the justice system and which may be termed as a reward for the resilience and faith exhibited by the victim and her legal team, in the judicial system. The Supreme Court held that the Gujarat High Court does not have the jurisdiction to sanction remission and even commented that the Gujarat government acted as if it is in cahoots with the culprits. An interesting analogy here is that the Gujarat government went on record previously, stating that they have acted under the instructions and guidance



of the Union Home Ministry. Quite surprisingly, neither the Gujarat government nor the Home Ministry is yet to respond to the observations of the Supreme Court. Here, the question arises, whether Sri Amit Shah, Hon'ble Home Minister and a close associate of the Prime Minister is not liable to issue a clarification on the issue relating to this gross misuse of authority and violation of law.

Not minding to address to any of the aforesaid, the Prime Minister and his team goes on boasting about making the country a 5 trillion dollar economy, thereby, the third largest economy in the world by 2027. But, the IMF's World Economic Forum report released in the third week of December 2023, warned that India's general government debt, which includes federal and state government debt, could be 100% of GDP, under adverse circumstances, by fiscal 2028. According to the recent analysis of IMF, the country's foreign debt will reach 681 billion dollars by March 2024 and 748 billion dollars by March 2025. As per the data from the budget papers the total debt may reach Rs 169 lakh crore i.e. Rs. 164 lakh crore internal and Rs. 5 lakh crore external debt.

The BJP proposes to fight the 2024 elections with the slogan "viksit bharat by 2047". One may recall that the slogan was 'Shining India' in 2004 and "Ache Din" in 2014. The government is also selling to the people that India will be a developed nation by 2047. Per capita income is a key element in the growth story of any country. But, in the global rankings of per capita incomes, India's place is 141<sup>st</sup>

out of 190 countries. But, one fails to understand how a country with 83% of its population still dependent on free ration through public distribution system and over 25% of the population below the poverty level, could achieve this feat within such a short span of time. India's rank in the world happiness index is 137 out of 146. The unemployment rate is 8.39% with urban unemployment reaching 10.09%, in December 2023, as per the CMIE report. Retail Inflation reached 5.69% with food inflation soaring to 9.38%. India's Ranking in Global Hunger Index is 111 out of 125 countries. The country's ranking in global press freedom Index is 161 out of 180 countries. According to the NCRB report, over 4.45 lakh crimes against women are reported in 2022, one every 51 minutes. Uttar Pradesh, where the Ram Temple is being constructed, registered the maximum of 65746 FIRs in cases of crimes against women in 2022.

It was Mahatma Gandhi who wrote this in 'Young India' in 1931. He said "I dare not take before them the message

of God. I may as well place before the dog over there the message of God as before the millions who have no luster in their eyes and whose only God is their bread. I can take before them the message of God only by taking the sacred message of work, before them. How am I to talk God to the millions who have to go without two meals a day? To them God can only appear as bread from their soil." How true it is even today. But, today, a concerted effort is being made to camouflage the real issues concerning the people and the country by sharpening the communal polarization for electoral gains. This trend should be arrested at once in the interest of the country and its people. It is possible only by making the government accountable and answerable to the people of the country. The forthcoming general elections play a great role in bringing about such a change. It is only then that a road to Ram-rajya in the right sense could be laid. Otherwise, it will remain a temple without soul.

**(The author is  
General Secretary, SCZIEF)**



Courtesy: Sajith Kumar, Deccan Herald

# प्रायोजित बहसों के बीच

रामजी तिवारी



*Today if you observe the issues of debate in any public place in North India, most of them get bogged down in the binary of Hindu and Muslim.*

*You will not be able to guess that there is huge unemployment in the country .....A shameful aspect is that our media have stopped trying to draw the attention of the rulers by field reporting on any such issue.*

*And when a foreign media reports such cases, the government and the domestic media rush to condemn it as a conspiracy.*

*Petrol, diesel, cooking gas, food items, rail and air travel, education and health expenses, even skyrocketing prices of medicines, are also left out of the debate.*

*And whenever someone raises this, it is diverted to the Hindu-Muslim debate.*

*A lot of fake stories are manufactured in the WhatsApp University and in the mainstream media, which is not good for the country.*

मीडिया के अनुसार उत्तर भारत के किसी शहर, कस्बे या गाँव में रहने वाले व्यक्ति के लिए इस समय देश में सबसे बड़ा मुद्दा धार्मिक ध्रुवीकरण का है। यह ध्रुवीकरण मंदिर और मस्जिद के नाम पर हो सकता है। लव जिहाद और खानपान से सम्बन्धित हो सकता है। नागरिकता क़ानून और अवैध घुसपैठियों से जुड़ा हो सकता है। शोभायात्राओं और धार्मिक जुलूसों के रूप में हो सकता है। और इन अंतहीन बहसों को चलाने के लिए इतिहास के नित नए प्रेत भी खड़े किये जा सकते हैं। सुबह आने वाले हिंदी समाचार पत्र की सुर्खिया इन्हीं खबरों को उद्धाटित करती हुई मिलती हैं। हमारे व्हाट्सअप ग्रुप में आने वाले सन्देश इन्हीं खबरों को और विस्तार देते हैं, साथ ही साथ दूसरे धर्मावलम्बियों के प्रति हमारे मन में नफरत के कुछ बीज भी बोते चलते हैं। चट्टी, चौराहे और कार्यालय की बहसों में धर्म-आधारित ऐसी खबरें किसी न किसी रूप में जरूर हमारे सामने तैरती रहती हैं। और फिर शाम को टेलीविजन के प्राइम टाइम में होने वाली लगभग सभी बहसों यह सुनिश्चित कर देती हैं कि रात को सोने से पहले हम अपनी बुद्धि और विवेक को मीडिया प्रायोजित बहसों के हवाले कर दें। और कुल मिलाकर मनुष्य के रूप में हमारा स्वतन्त्र चिंतन पूरी तरह से कुंद हो जाए। हमारी सोच उस भीड़ की सोच में तब्दील हो जाए, जिसके पास सामान्यतया अपना विवेक नहीं होता है।

जब ऐसी बहसों सूचना के सभी माध्यमों द्वारा अनवरत दुहराई जाने लगती हैं, जब हमारे साथ उठने बैठने वाले मित्र और रिश्तेदार उन्हीं पर बात करने लगते हैं, जब सार्वजनिक स्थानों का स्पेस इन्हीं बहसों से आच्छादित होने लगता है, और जब वे पब्लिक स्पेयर में फ़ैल जाती हैं, तब वैकल्पिक माध्यमों के जरिये यदा-कदा हम तक पहुँचने वाले वास्तविक मुद्दे गायब होने

लगते हैं। हमारा खुद का विश्वास उन पर डगमगाने लगता है। ऐसी स्थिति में हम सामान्यतया दो निष्कर्षों पर पहुँच जाते हैं। अबल तो समाज और लोक व्यवहार के भय से हम अपने स्वतंत्र चिंतन को स्थगित कर देते हैं और उसी बहस का चुपचाप हिस्सा बन जाते हैं। या यदि हमारा आंतरिक मन थोड़ा कमजोर पड़ा तो हम अपने विवेक को ही प्रश्नांकित करने लगते हैं और मानने लगते हैं कि हमारी सोच ही एकांगी है। क्योंकि आखिर सारा समाज तो गलत नहीं हो सकता है। और इस तरह हम भी उन्हीं बहसों के अंदर खींच लिए जाते हैं।

मसलन आज आप उत्तर-भारत के किसी भी सार्वजनिक स्थान पर बहस के मुद्दों को तलाशने की कोशिश करेंगे तो बात घूम फिरकर मंदिर और मस्जिद के मुद्दे पर ही चली आएगी। अधिकांश बहसों हिन्दू और मुसलमान के बाइनरी में ही उलझी हुई मिलेंगी। आपको यह अंदाजा ही नहीं लग पायेगा कि देश में इस समय रोजगार का अकाल फ़ैल रहा है। सरकारी संस्थानों के कमजोर पड़ने और निजी क्षेत्र के मजबूत होते जाने के बाद यह प्रक्रिया बहुत तेजी से घटित होती हुई दिखाई दे रही है। जैसे कि सेंटर फार मानिटरिंग इंडियन इकोनामी का ताजा अध्ययन बताता है कि दिसंबर 2023के महीने में 25 से 29 बरस के युवाओं के बीच बेरोजगारी की दर चार साल में सबसे अधिक लगभग 15.5 प्रतिशत तक पहुँच गयी है। यह दर कोविड महामारी वाले साल से भी अधिक है। वहीं 20 से 24 वर्ष के नौजवानों के बीच बेरोजगारी की यह दर 45.5 प्रतिशत तक चली गयी है। यहाँ तक कि 30 से के 34 वर्ष के बीच के लोगों के लिए भी बेरोजगारी की स्थिति तीन वर्ष में सबसे अधिक ख़राब है।



Courtesy: Rakesh Ranjan, molitics.in

तनाव के ऐसे दौर में गाँवों के अधिकतर कामगार लोग मनरेगा के सहारे हैं, जिसकी कहानी भी कोई खास उत्साहजनक नहीं है। इस पूरी स्थिति का शर्मनाक पहलू यह है कि हमारा मीडिया ऐसे किसी भी विषय पर फील्ड रिपोर्ट करके सरकार का ध्यान आकर्षित करने की रवायत ही खत्म कर चुका है। और जब कोई विदेशी मीडिया ऐसे मामलों की रिपोर्टिंग करता है तो सरकार और देशी मीडिया उसके हस्तक्षेप को षडयंत्र बताने लगते हैं। यही नहीं यदि किसी राज्य में रोजगार जैसे विषय पर संवेदनशीलता दिखाई जाती है और सरकारी क्षेत्र में लाखों युवाओं की भर्ती की जाती है तो उस खबर को मुख्यधारा का मीडिया सीधा निगल जाता है। उसकी हवा तक नहीं मिलती कि गत एक वर्ष के दौर में बिहार जैसे राज्य में 2 लाख से अधिक लोगों की विभिन्न पदों पर नियुक्तियाँ हुई हैं।

इसी तरह महंगाई ने इस देश में कितना रौद्र रूप धारण कर लिया है, इसकी भी कोई खबर मीडिया में दिखाई नहीं देती। जिसे सब लोग महसूस कर रहे हैं, जिससे सभी लोग प्रभावित हैं, और जिससे सभी लोग परेशान हैं, उस मुद्दे को भी जमीन के नीचे दफन दिया गया है। पेट्रोल, डीजल, रसोई गैस, खाने पीने की वस्तुएं, रेल और हवाई यात्रा, शिक्षा और स्वास्थ्य के खर्च, यहाँ तक की आसमान छूती दवाओं के दाम ने आम सामान्य आदमी के जीवन में तमाम दुश्चारियाँ पैदा की हैं। मगर अफ़सोस कि महंगाई जैसा महत्वपूर्ण और जरूरी मुद्दा भी बहस से गायब कर दिया गया है। और यदि कोई इस पर सवाल भी करता है तो उसे हिन्दू-मुसलमान वाली बहस की तरफ मोड़ दिया जाता है।

दुनिया में विकास, समृद्धि और खुशी के जितने भी सूचकांक जारी किये जाते हैं, उन सभी पर हमारे देश की स्थिति लगातार दयनीय बनी हुई है। लेकिन इस पर सरकार से जबाब मांगने के बजाय हमारा देशी मीडिया इन सूचकांको को ही कटघरे में खड़ा करने लगता है। मसलन वैश्विक भूखमरी के सूचकांक को ही लीजिये। 10 वर्ष पहले इस पैमाने पर भारत स्थान 63वाँ था। आज 2023 में वह फिसलकर 111 वें

नंबर पर चला गया है। आखिर क्यों...? क्योंकि इंडियन कंज्यूमर इकानामी के आंकड़े बताते हैं कि वर्ष 2016 से 2021 के बीच के पांच वर्षों में गरीब आबादी की आय लगभग 50 प्रतिशत कम हो गयी है। और इनमें से अधिकाँश लोग अब सरकारी अनुदानों पर निर्भर होते जा रहे हैं। निम्न मध्य वर्ग की आय भी लगभग 30 प्रतिशत कम हुई है। जबकि मध्य वर्ग भी पहले से लगभग 10 प्रतिशत कम अर्जित कर पा रहा है। दूसरी तरफ उच्च वर्ग की आय में इन्हीं 5 वर्षों में लगभग 40 प्रतिशत की वृद्धि हुई है। सनद रहे कि इसमें वह संपत्ति शामिल नहीं है, जो टैक्स हैवन के जरिये विदेशों में भेजी गयी होगी।

धार्मिक धुवीकरण के अलावा जिस एक विषय पर व्हाट्सअप विश्वविद्यालय और मुख्यधारा की मीडिया में खूब कहानियाँ गूँजी जाती हैं, वह है भारत के विश्वगुरु बनने की दिशा में बढ़ते कदम। दुर्भाग्य यह कि इसके लिए नेता, अभिनेता, धर्माचार्य, पत्रकार, खिलाड़ी और कारपोरेट लोग ट्रोल जैसा व्यवहार करने लगे हैं, जिससे कुल मिलाकर भारतीय विदेश नीति का नुकसान हो रहा है। अभी मालदीव के साथ हुए ताजा प्रकरण को याद कीजिये। हम सब जानते हैं कि हाल के चुनावों में वहाँ पर जो सरकार सत्ता में आयी है, वह भारत के साथ द्विपक्षीय संबंधों को लेकर बहुत सहज नहीं है। ऐसे में हमें बहुत सावधानी से फूंक फूंककर कदम उठाने की जरूरत थी। लेकिन हालिया घटनाएं बताती हैं कि दोनों देशों की तरफ से मुख्यधारा की मीडिया और सोशल मीडिया के ट्रोल्स ने आपसी संबंधों को काफी नुकसान पहुंचा दिया है। इतना कि मालदीव अपनी जमीन से भारतीय सैनिकों को निकल जाने का अल्टीमेटम दे रहा है और चीन की तरफ स्पष्ट रूप से झुकता हुआ दिखाई दे रहा है।

बात सिर्फ मालदीव की होती तो शायद इतनी चिंता नहीं होती। दुखद यह है कि इस समय लगभग सभी पड़ोसी देशों के साथ भारत के संबंधों में असहजता बनी हुई है। पाकिस्तान के साथ हमारे सम्बन्ध जगजाहिर हैं और उसमें कोई सुधार नहीं आया है। तालिबान के आने बाद अफगानिस्तान के

साथ भी हमारे सम्बन्ध बहुत सहज नहीं हैं। चीन अपने आपको दुनिया की एक महाशक्ति के रूप में देखता है तो उत्तरी सीमा पर तनाव की स्थिति लगातार बनी हुई है। आर्थिक नजरिये से भी चीन के साथ हमारा बड़ा व्यापार घाटा चल रहा है। नेपाल और भूटान जो हमारे सबसे अधिक विश्वसनीय पड़ोसी हुआ करते थे, आजकल वे भी असहज बने हुए हैं। इन दोनों देशों पर चीन का बढ़ता हुआ दबाव साफ़-साफ़ दिखाई देता है। बांग्लादेश से अलबत्ता हमारे संबंध जरूर बेहतर हैं, लेकिन हालिया संपन्न चुनावों में जिस तरह से वहाँ लोकतंत्र का मखौल उड़ाया गया और सभी प्रमुख विपक्षी पार्टियों को चुनाव से बाहर कर दिया गया, उससे कहा नहीं जा सकता कि भविष्य में वहाँ कितनी स्थिरता रहेगी। जाहिर है हमारे संबंधों में भी। म्यांमार में लोकतंत्र के खात्मे के बाद उस पर चीन का प्रभाव साफ़ दिखाई देता है। और यही स्थिति कर्ज में फंसे श्रीलंका की है, जिस पर चीन लगातार शिकंजा कसता जा रहा है।

भारत की विदेश नीति हमेशा शान्ति, मैत्री और सह-अस्तित्व के सिद्धांत पर चलती रही है। इसलिए आवश्यक है कि अपने पड़ोसियों के हमारे सम्बन्ध बेहतर हों। इस विषय पर देश में एक राय पाई जाती है। कहना न होगा कि इसी तरह की एक राय देश की मुख्य समस्याओं- जैसे रोजगार, महंगाई, बढ़ती अस्मानता, भ्रष्टाचार, शिक्षा और स्वास्थ्य पर भी होनी चाहिए। साथ ही साथ धार्मिक मुद्दों पर हमारा व्यवहार वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् की भारतीय परम्परा और संविधान के अनुरूप होना चाहिए। यही मापदंड आज की सभ्य और लोकतांत्रिक दुनिया का भी है। राज्य का कर्तव्य है कि वह सभी नागरिकों के साथ समान व्यवहार करे। चाहें वे किसी भी धर्म, जाति, रंग, क्षेत्र और भाषा से सम्बंधित हों। ऐसे में धार्मिक धुवीकरण वाली बहसों समाज में विघटन पैदा करती हैं, जो देश के लिए ठीक नहीं है।

भारत की प्रगति और विकास का रास्ता सबको साथ लेकर चलने से ही आयेगा।

(The author is activist

○ of Varanasi Division)



# THE QUESTION of PENSIONS

**Prof. Prabhat Patnaik**

*The world's "fastest growing economy", it appears, cannot afford pensions for its old, just as it cannot afford an adequate diet for its female population, since 57 percent of women between the ages of 15 and 49, according to the NFHS, suffered from anaemia in 2019-21. The reason cannot lie in the fact that while*

*GDP growth is occurring at a rapid rate, the government's fisc is somehow constrained from expanding at the same rate, for there is no earthly reason why this should be so.*

*The real reason then must be that the government simply wants ever larger proportions of the GDP to go to the capitalists and the rich.....There is no dearth of resources in the country for instituting a universal, non-contributory pension programme.....*

We observe a strange phenomenon everyday, so strange that its strangeness goes generally unnoticed. Government spokespersons from the Prime Minister downwards go on repeating *ad nauseam* that India is the most rapidly growing major economy in the world today, that it will soon become a \$ 5 trillion economy, and that it has overtaken China in terms of the growth rate of the Gross Domestic Product. And yet the same government spokespersons claim that the government has no money to pay for the Old Pension Scheme for government employees, let alone for a proper universal non-contributory pension scheme for the millions who spent their working years as employees in the unorganized sector.

The world's "fastest growing economy", it appears, cannot afford pensions for its old, just as it cannot afford an adequate diet for its female population, since 57 percent of women between the ages of 15 and 49, according to the National Family Health Survey, suffered from anaemia in 2019-21 (*up* from 53 percent in 2015-16). Likewise this so-called "fastest

growing economy" of the world cannot provide adequate nutrition to its population in general, because of which it ranks 111<sup>th</sup> in the World Hunger Index among the 125 countries for whom the Index is calculated; and the proportion of rural population that cannot access the minimum norm of 2200 calories per person per day that the old Planning Commission had taken as the benchmark for rural poverty has risen from 68 percent in 2011-12 to well over 80 percent in 2017-18 according to data made available by none other than the National Sample Survey.

Let us probe matters a little further. The *only* argument advanced by its defenders for the New Pension Scheme over the Old Scheme for government employees is the fiscal argument; and it is taken to be almost axiomatic. The moment one mentions the Old Scheme, the immediate response of most media persons and economists, almost as a reflex action, is: "But the government cannot afford it". Now, under the Old Scheme, a government employee after retirement, received half of the last salary-cum-Dearness Allowance as

pension, and this was adjusted subsequently for inflation (in sync with the DA of government employees in service). When adjusted for inflation, the “real” pension remained more or less constant until very occasionally updated after several years. Now, if the economy is growing in “real” terms by 6 to 7 percent per annum as the government boasts, then, since the number of pension-earning government employees is *not* growing at this rate, and since any increase in real pension occurs, if at all, only after a considerable time lag, *the pension amount as a proportion of GDP should be falling over time* (until any real revision occurs and that can best bring it back to its original level).

In other words, far from the pension amount becoming unsustainable over time, it should be actually falling in proportionate terms over time, and *hence becoming easier to accommodate*, if the government’s own growth figures are taken seriously. But then why is the government claiming the contrary? The reason cannot lie in the fact that while GDP growth is occurring at a rapid rate, the government’s fisc is somehow constrained from expanding at the same rate, for there is no earthly reason why this should be so. The real reason then must be that the government simply *wants* ever larger proportions of the GDP to go to the capitalists and the rich, for which it can always advance the convenient argument that such transfers help boost investment and hence GDP growth.

*There is however no justification for this argument:* the usual claim that if more money is given to capitalists they would invest more, is

a jejune one whose vapidness was exposed almost a century ago by none other than the bourgeois economist J.M.Keynes, who, along with the Polish Marxist economist Michal Kalecki, showed that capitalism is generally a “demand-constrained system”. In such a system, output, investment and growth are boosted by increasing aggregate demand, and not by making transfers to capitalists. This proposition has been so clearly demonstrated to be true by experience that even the Modi government cannot possibly believe in its veracity; its refusal to make more resources available for pensions, whether for its own employees or for the aged population in general, is a clear demonstration of class-bias, having nothing to do with any sane economic logic.

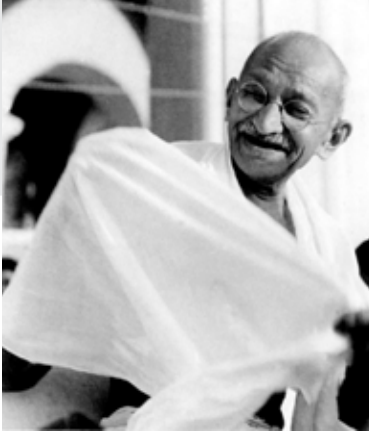
The government’s crowing over the growth rate even in the midst of acute distress, and its refusal to alleviate this distress in the name of boosting the GDP, in short this entire GDP-fetishism contains an absurdity whose limit was reached under the rule of the Maharajahs of yore. Many of them used *begar* or corvee labour, where labour is forced out of the labourer without any payment being made to him, to build palaces for themselves. Such construction would have shown itself as a high growth rate of GDP, even though the oppression inflicted on the people was inhuman; a GDP-fetishist therefore should have been proud of *begar*. Likewise we have today crores of old people being pushed into inhuman conditions of life, with only a tiny proportion of them being paid a pittance of Rs. 200 per month per person by the central government, not because there are no resources

in the country to improve their lot but because resources are appropriated by the capitalists and the rich in general, using an utterly spurious argument that their doing so would boost GDP growth.

Let us look at this question of resources a little more carefully. In 2018-19 there were approximately 13 crore persons above the age of 60 who needed a living pension of roughly Rs.3000 per month. In that year the Gross National Income of the country in round figures was Rs. 187 lakh crores, or Rs. 187 trillion. The payment of Rs.3000 per month to the old persons therefore would have required no more than 2.5 percent of the GNI. The payment of pension would result in expenditure, a part of which would accrue to the government in the form of taxes and hence can be re-spent. Assuming on a conservative basis that 30 percent of such spending accrues back to the government *after all the rounds of the multiplier have been completed* (that is, expenditure generating output and incomes and hence further expenditure and further output and incomes, and so on, with taxes being paid in each round, has finally been completed), a total expenditure of 2.5 percent of the GNI would require an initial injection of demand amounting to only 1.75 percent of the GNI into the economy.

Assuming, not unrealistically, that when the rich pay larger taxes they do not necessarily stint on their consumption (unless the taxes are extraordinarily heavy), this amount can be raised comfortably by imposing a wealth tax of only 1 percent on just the top 1

*Continued on Page23*



# What the Mahatma would have made of the Chief Justice of India

## Ramachandra Guha

*Renowned Historian*

(Courtesy : Telegraph India 08.01.24)

*Contrary to what the Chief Justice implies, there is a vast gap between the ideals of the orthodox Hindu tradition and the ideals that undergird our Constitution. A serving Chief Justice making his temple visits so public at this particular juncture in our nation's history raise disturbing questions about his personal judgement. Meanwhile, the remarks he offered to justify them, where he claimed a continuity, an equivalence even, between Hindu tradition and the Indian Constitution, raise questions about his intellectual acumen.*



Like most of my readers, I begin the day by reading the newspapers, in my case online and then in print. On Sunday, the first story I read was a report in the web edition of *The Indian Express* on a visit by the Chief Justice of India, D. Y. Chandrachud, to some Hindu temples in Gujarat, including the celebrated shrine in Somnath. The photograph accompanying the story captured the Chief Justice and his wife reverentially praying in an equally hallowed place of worship for Hindus, the Dwarkadhish temple.

The report contained these lines: “Justice Chandrachud said that he had started visiting various states ‘inspired by the life and ideals of Mahatma Gandhi’ to understand challenges facing the judiciary and to identify solutions, adding that his two-day Gujarat visit was part of the same effort.” The reference to Gandhi intrigued me, since I have spent many decades studying the life and legacy of the Mahatma.

Gandhi would have approved of any Indian — rich or poor, famous or obscure, man or woman — seeking to get to know the country and its people better. But what would he have thought of a serving Chief Justice making public visits to temples, and

getting himself photographed and giving interviews about it in the process? Gandhi himself virtually never went to a Hindu temple — one of the very few exceptions he made was when he visited the Meenakshi temple in Madurai in 1946, after the shrine had finally, belatedly, allowed Dalits to enter its premises. Though Gandhi described himself as a Hindu, his chosen mode of worship was the inter-faith meeting, held on open ground, where Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs, Jains and Christians would pray together, with verses of all their scriptures being read. That was his original and deeply moving way of affirming the principle that India belonged to all faiths equally.

Gandhi may not have wished or expected the Chief Justice of India to follow him and hold inter-faith prayer meetings. And nor should we. One of the most devout Hindus I myself know is a former Chief Justice of India, who begins his day and ends it with prayer and meditation. This he does, however, in a puja room in his own house. It is quite possible that, this former CJI occasionally visited temples, but surely never in a public manner, offering himself to be photographed. And he would certainly not have done it

at a time like this, ten days before the inauguration of the new temple in Ayodhya, in a spectacular ceremony that shall be a mark not so much of Hindu piety, but of Hindutva majoritarianism.

The report also contained some other remarks made by the Chief Justice, which bear thinking about. I quote: “Referring to the *dhwaja* [flag] atop Dwarka and Somnath temples which he visited during his two-day visit to Gujarat, the CJI said, ‘I was inspired this morning by the *dhwaja* at Dwarkadhish ji, very similar to the *dhwaja* which I saw at Jagannath Puri. But look at this universality of the tradition in our nation, which binds all of us together. This *dhwaja* has a special meaning for us. And that meaning which the *dhwaja* gives us is — there is some unifying force above all of us, as lawyers, as judges, as citizens. And that unifying force is our humanity, which is governed by the rule of law and by the Constitution of India,’ he said.”

I presume the Chief Justice has been accurately quoted. If he has, I must say, with due respect, that his interpretation of our ancient and modern history does not bear critical or indeed moral scrutiny. For it is emphatically not the case that the “*dhwaja*” which has traditionally flown above Hindu temples has served to bind “all of us together” in a common humanity. In fact, for the bulk of their existence these shrines have not even bound all Hindus together. For, as the Chief Justice surely knows, for much of recorded history Hindu temples grievously discriminated against Dalits. The head priests of the most famous temples did not allow

them to worship inside its premises. The Hindu religious tradition also discriminated against women, forbidding them from praying when menstruating. (Dalits and women were also discriminated against in many other ways — in terms of economic and political power for example).

The Chief Justice says he is inspired both by Mahatma Gandhi on the one hand and by the tradition represented by the temples in places like Dwarka and Puri on the other. I would like to remind him that when, after Gandhi’s anti-untouchability campaign, some nationalists proposed a Temple Entry Bill in the colonial legislature, the Sankaracharya of Puri himself wrote to the viceroy that allowing Dalits and Savarnas to pray together “will really mean the sounding of the Death-knell of all possibilities for Sanatanists to lead quiet and peaceful lives of Spirituality according to the dictates of their Religion and their Conscience’.

Contrary to what the Chief Justice implies, there is a vast gap between the ideals of the orthodox Hindu tradition and the ideals that undergird our Constitution. Indeed, the Constitution is in good part a product of the tireless work of social reformers like Gandhi, Ambedkar, Savitri and Jotiba Phule, Gokhale, Ranade, and many others, to challenge forms of discrimination encoded in Hindu scripture, and practiced in everyday life.

Notably, even after the Constitution abolished untouchability, the most famous temples in the Hindu tradition, such as Badrinath and Puri, continued to practice it for decades afterwards.

The treatment of women as inferior to men was also

doggedly held on to by the Hindu orthodoxy well after 1950. A report from as late as 1988 mentions the Puri Sankaracharya as defending the practice of sati and as saying that women and Dalits had no right to read or interpret the Vedas.

It is true that no tradition is unchanging. However, it is quite likely that places like Puri and Dwarka would still have held on in toto to their anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian views had it not been for the Phules, Gandhi, Ambedkar, and the like, challenging caste discrimination on the ground — and had it not been for the Constituent Assembly of India, under Ambedkar’s direction, rejecting the Manu Smriti in favour of a democratic and egalitarian Constitution. Therefore, for the Chief Justice of India to claim a congruence between the flag ‘that has traditionally flown above Hindu temples’ and the modern text that is the Constitution of India is tendentious and misleading (to say the least).

I referred to the photograph accompanying the story. It shows him dressed in a kurta coloured saffron. But even if his kurta was white or green, a serving Chief Justice making his temple visits so public at this particular juncture in our nation’s history raise disturbing questions about his personal judgement. Meanwhile, the remarks he offered to justify them, where he claimed a continuity, an equivalence even, between Hindu tradition and the Indian Constitution, raise questions about his intellectual acumen.





# Relief in rain-affected areas of Tirunelveli & Tuticorin

The unprecedented rains in December 2023 had devastated large parts of Tamil Nadu with Tirunelveli District bearing the brunt. The worst affected as usual were the poor and workers. The AIIEA and AIIPA units decided to mobilised funds and carryout some relief in Tirunelveli and Tuticorin. In Tirunelveli on 20<sup>th</sup> December 100 families were provided with rice and 22 types of groceries in Anna Nagar. On 28<sup>th</sup> December similar relief was provided to 110 families in Sivalapperi area and on 3<sup>rd</sup> January rice and groceries were distributed in Karadiyur



village which was one of the worst affected. In Rajendranagar 30 families were provided with relief material. Chairs, mats and other items were given to Balarwadi centre and a school in Rajagopalapuram.

Relief work was also carried out between 23<sup>rd</sup> December and 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2024 in Tuticorin. On 23<sup>rd</sup> December 550 families and on 27<sup>th</sup> December another 500 families were provided with 22 types of groceries. Note Books were provided to 180 students in Attur Government School on 3<sup>rd</sup> January and 10 contract employees affected in Tuticorin Branch were also provided groceries. The employees and cadres participated in this relief work with devotion and commitment.

## The QUESTION of PENSIONS

Continued from Page 20

percent of the population. It follows therefore that there is no dearth of resources in the country for instituting a universal, non-contributory pension programme, from which those who are already on some pension scheme (and presumably getting more than Rs.3000 per month at 2018-19 prices) will voluntarily drop out.

Surely, it would be thought, the number of potential pensioners would have increased by now compared to 2018-19, and because of inflation the amount of Rs. 3000 per month would have to be revised upwards;

wouldn't the fiscal strain today be heavier? The answer is "no", because meanwhile the national income in current prices too has increased, both because of real growth and also because of the price-rise that raises nominal national income. In fact, since the number of potential beneficiaries would not have grown at the same rate as the real national income, the provision of the same amount of "real" pension (Rs. 3000 per month at 2018-19 prices), would require a *lower share of national income*, and hence an even smaller fiscal effort.

There is a further benefit

from such a scheme, apart from the succour with dignity it provides to human beings. With neo-liberal capitalism reaching a crisis of over-production, greater state expenditure, financed either by a fiscal deficit or by taxes on the rich, is urgently required to overcome the crisis. Neo-liberalism however is opposed both to a larger fiscal deficit and to larger taxes on the rich, which is why there is no solution to the crisis within neo-liberalism itself. Measures like a universal non-contributory pension scheme constitute in this context a way of overcoming the crisis and the harbingers of a new order.

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## In Memoriam–Ustad Rashid Khan

Ustad Rashid Khan (55) a leading light of Hindustani classical music extinguished on the afternoon of 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2024 in Kolkata. He was a prominent voice of popular music culture of the present generation of musicians. A role model for the younger generation of musicians who drew lot of inspiration from him.

Rashid Khan was born in Badayun (UP) on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, 1968. He was initiated into music at a tender age. His uncle, renowned vocalist, Ustad Gulam Mustafa Khan was the first to trace the musical talent hidden in Rashid Khan. Took him to Bombay and trained him initially for 5-6 years. Rashid Khan gave his first public performance when he was only 11 years young. There was no looking back for him thereafter. In early 1980s, Rashid Khan moved to Calcutta to join Sangeeta Research Academy (ITC) where his maternal grand-uncle, Ustad Nissar Hussain Khan, a doyen of Sahaswan Rampur gharana was a guru. Rashid Khan's a decade long tutelage under the eminent Ustad shaped him as a fine singer. His rise as a performing artiste was rather meteoric. By 1994, SRA recognized him as a musician. It was indeed an acknowledgement of talented musicianship that Rashid Khan had attained when he was in his 20s.

Rashid's singing style was a fine blend of tradition, modernity and contemporary artistic skill that instantly impressed the music lovers of all ages. His creative singing involving unhurried Aalap, craftsman like unfolding of the raag, lively Sargam patterns, varied and intricate taans – all suffused with open-throated melodious voice regaled the audience. Though his forte was 'Khayal', he was equally adept in singing other genres of music like Thumri, Gazal, Rabindra Sangeet etc. His playback singing in a few Hindi and Bengali films won him wide acclaim. He was a versatile singer, creative

and imaginative all the time.

In last three decades he was a much sought after musician and it is no exaggeration to mention that he was a star attraction in almost every prestigious music festival held in India. Around 2005-06, in the

sidelines of his music concert at Dharwad, I had a brief conversation with Rashid Khan. When I asked him to name a few of his favourite music legends whom he admired and drew inspiration from, his instant reply was: "Ustad Bade Gulam Ali Khan, Ustad Amir Khan and Pandit Bhimsen Joshi". Needless to say, that the finesses of the singing of these stalwarts besides his own mentor gurus was discerningly perceptible in his aesthetic delineation of a Raag rendition.

In recognition of Rashid Khan's rich contribution to the field of Hindustani classical music, Government of West Bengal honoured him with 'Banga Bibhushan' award. He won Kendra Sangeeta Nataka Academy award. Government of India bestowed on him Padmashri and Padma Bhushan awards.

Rashid Khan's untimely passing away has left a huge void in the field of music. As a musician he was a true representative of our composite culture so prominently sustained for centuries in the field of classical music. He is no more. But his legacy of music is eternal!

**Raghavendra Ayi**

Former President, IEU, Dharwad Division



## We pay Respectful Homage to



**Prabha Atre**, the Indian classical vocalist from Kirana gharana passed away on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2024 at the age of 91. She was the recipient of Padma Vibhushan. She learnt classical music from Sureshbabu Mane and Hirabai

Badodekar from the Kirana gharana. She was greatly influenced by two great musicians Amir Khan and Bade Gulam Ali Khan.

## Munawar Rana

a prominent Urdu Poet passed away on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2024 at the age of 71 due to throat cancer. He was a progressive poet and made rich contribution to the Urdu literature and poetry. He was a recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award for Urdu Literature which he returned it in 2015 in protest against the government policies.

Insurance Worker pays respectful homage to these two great personalities of music and literature and shares the grief with bereaved families





## 22<sup>nd</sup> Conference of ICEU Hyderabad & Secunderabad

The 22nd Combined General Conference of the Insurance Corporation Employees' Union Hyderabad and Secunderabad Divisions, that was held on 16th and 17th December at Wanaparthy town was a total success. ICEU Wanaparthy unit with less than 20 members conducted the Conference successfully. Admirably a huge rally with more than 800 people from insurance sector which included employees, agents and members of fraternal trade unions marched along the streets of Wanaparthy. The rally that culminated in the RG Gardens witnessed huge participation. The reception committee chairman and former minister of Telangana State Sri S. Niranjana Reddy presented the welcome address in which he appreciated the role being played by Trade Unions in strengthening public sector LIC. Com. Shreekantha Mishra, General Secretary of All India Insurance Employees Association delivered inaugural address. Senior leader Com. K. Venugopal; Com. V. Ramesh, President AIIEA; Com. TVNS. Ravindranath, General Secretary, SCZIEF and leaders from CITU, UTF, RTC, BANKING and Retired Employees participated in the open session. The conference commenced with flag hoisting by Com. M N Srinivasulu, President, ICEU Secunderabad.

Com. Shreekantha Mishra, addressing the gathering, briefed the audience on the current political and economic situation prevailing in the country. Explaining the prevailing post IPO conditions in insurance sector he told that AIIEA was ideologically committed to protect LIC in public sector and at the same time it would strive hard to achieve good wage revision to LIC employees, despite the obduracy of the government. He cautioned the cadres against the divisive forces at play. Com. K. Venugopal addressed the open session in his inimitable way that rejuvenated the participants. Former minister S. Niranjana Reddy, who was present as the Chairman of the reception committee, greeted the gathering with great humility and the need for the public sector as envisioned by India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and the changing nature

of employers and workers. Com. Putta Anjaneyulu of CITU pledged the support for joint struggles in the future. Open Session was greeted by Sri Jilani Basha and Sri Janardhan, P&IR Managers of Hyderabad and Secunderabad divisions respectively.

The Delegate Session, on 17th December, witnessed the discussion that enriched the report of the executive committee. Com. V. Ramesh, Com B S Ravi, Treasurer, AIIEA and Com. TVNS Ravindranath, General Secretary, SCZIEF along with other dignitaries guided the deliberations in the delegate session. The 22<sup>nd</sup> General Conference of ICEU Hyderabad and Secunderabad that adopted certain resolutions in the interest of working class came to conclusion with vote of thanks proposed by Com. Ganesh, Joint Secretary, Hyderabad Division.

The Conference unanimously elected Coms



L.Maddileti, G.Thirupathaiah and Y.Yadagiri Rao as President, General Secretary and Treasurer respectively of Hyderabad Division and Coms G.Gunashekhhar, D.S.Raghu and M.Umashree as President, General Secretary and

Treasurer of Secunderabad Division for the ensuing year.

As a prelude to the Combined General Conference, ICEU Hyderabad Division has floated a 50-day long Quiz programme which started on the death anniversary

of our beloved leader Com. Late V Sugunakar Rao. The quiz programme that covered politics, history, trade union, History of AIIEA, LIC, Economic, sports and other general issues, was well received by all sections of employees.

## 46th Conference of VKS Nashik

The 46<sup>th</sup> Biennial General Conference of the Vima Karamchari Sanghatana, Nashik Division was held on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2023. In an enthusiastic atmosphere the meeting commenced with vociferous slogans welcoming the chief guests Com Hitendra Bhatt General Secretary WZIEA, Com Harshad Popat Vice President AIIEA Com Smt Pragna Vasani Convener Women Front Gujarat State. The meeting commenced with paying homage to the martyrs.

In the prefatory speech Com Mohan Deshpande G.S. reviewed in brief the organizational activities & performance done during the period of 2021 -23. Com Sachin Chandratre presented a very pertinent welcome song.

Com Harshad Popat Vice President All India Insurance Employees Association, Com Hitendra Bhatt General Secretary Western Zone Insurance Employees Association and Com Smt Pragna Vasani Convener Women Front Gujarat while addressing the meeting, reviewed the economic, social and political situation in the country. They gave detailed information on challenges faced by LIC, employee queries, need of recruitment, pending wage revision etc. and a number of benefits secured by AIIEA. On this occasion, the leaders



informed the house how AIIEA fought the Split bill of LIC, describing former Jt. Secretary of AIIEA Com Sunil Maitra as the architect of the victory. It was informed the meeting that how AIIEA could succeed in halting the governments from disinvestment of LIC for more than 30 years in the interest of policy holders and nation. The leadership appealed LIC employees to be prepared to face the challenges in the coming period.

The meeting was well attended by members including women. Members from various branches of Dhule and Jalgaon district were present. In the meeting, Com Purushottam Chandsare, Com Arun Vani, Com Smt Pushpa John, Com Subhash Sharma, Com Sunil Joshi, Smt Jyoti Patil the retired members and Com Ashok Sanap who has been promoted as AAO all were

felicitated by the chief guests.

In the presidential speech, Com Adv Kantilal Tated reviewed his participation & performance in the functioning of the organisation, since his joining in the year 1973. In the meeting, Com Adv Kantilal Tated & Com Sunil Joshi relinquished the post of President & Vice President respectively. Com Mohan Deshpande G.S. expressed sincere gratitude to both retiring office bearers for their remarkable contribution to the organization.

The Biennial General Meeting elected Com Mohan Deshpande as President, Com Ajay Dolas as General Secretary and Com Yogesh Kelhe as Treasurer. Com Smt Anagha Yardi was elected to the post of Convener Women Front. Com Jyoti Ratnaparkhi gave a vote of thanks.

## 37th Conference of ICEU Warangal Division

The 37th Annual Conference of ICEU, Warangal Division was held on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2023. Preceding the conference, a huge rally was organised which was inaugurated by Com K.Venu Gopal, Former General Secretary, AIIEA. Warangal West MLA Sri Naini Rajender Reddy also participated in this rally.

The Conference began with Com V. Kalyani, President, ICEU Warangal in the chair. General Secretary Com M Prabhakar delivered the welcome address.

Warangal (West) MLA Sri Naini Rajender Reddy was present as the chief guest for this annual opening meeting and addressed the meeting. He said that LIC will help the central government by providing investments to provide infrastructure to the people of India. He emphasized that LIC is the only public sector company that is using people's money for the welfare of the people.

Comrade K Venu Gopal, Former general secretary, AIIEA addressed the conference. He said that the present period is challenging and we have to organise ourselves to defend our institution and unity of the employees. Despite competing with 24 private companies, LIC has remained as an undisputed market leader. The government policy of encouraging private sector and IRDAI's regulatory mechanism is hurting LIC. Post IPO, LIC is also changing its business model. The LIC employees have to meet the present challenges to protect the interests of the institution.

He pointed out that divisive forces using communal agenda are trying to disrupt the unity of employees. Therefore, we have to remain vigilant and fight these right wing forces.

AIIEA Treasurer Comrade BS Ravi said, LIC is made a great institution due to the commitment and hard work of its workforce. He criticised LIC for not convening negotiations to settle wage revision which is pending for over 17 months. He also spoke about the need for recruitment. He expressed optimism that AIIEA would win the demands with correct tactics and struggles.

Comrade G Tirupathiah, Joint Secretary SCZIEF said that trade unions are playing a very important role in the service of policy holders in LIC. A trade union is concerned about the salaries of its employees apart from other factors. Service compensation in coming days thinking to improve the services further. New Business Campaigns, carried out by the employees, stated that this convention should take a resolution to provide better

services to the policy holders and stakeholders. Shri Subramanian, Sr.Divisional Manager, Warangal greeted the conference.

The Conference was greeted by Coms G.Prabhakar Reddy, Vice-President, CITU, Warangal, General Secretary of Warangal Pensioners Association Comrade G Bhaskar and President of LIAFI Warangal Division Shri Krishna Rao.

In the Delegates session, the Report was placed by the General Secretary. The Statements of accounts were presented by Com Reshma, Treasurer. Both the Reports and Accounts were adopted unanimously after discussions. The conference elected Com B.Srihari as President, Com M.Prabhakar as General Secretary and Com Reshma as Treasurer for the ensuing term.

The conference came to a successful close with vote of thanks by Com MD Sadat Ali, Vice President.



## 55th Conference of ICEU, Machilipatnam Division

The 55th General Conference of Insurance Corporation Employees' Union, Machilipatnam Division was held at Bapatla on 9<sup>th</sup> December, 2023. On the occasion of the Conference, a massive and an attractive procession was held in the town and it passed through the main centers, with the cadres holding the union flags, placards and the banners and various demands of the working class were highlighted in the procession. The Conference was formally inaugurated with the hoisting of AIIEA flag, by Com. J.Sudhakar, President of the Divisional Unit, amidst thunderous slogans.

Former Deputy Speaker Sri Kona Raghupathi, the present MLA, Bapatla who was also the Chairman of the Reception Committee gave his welcome address. While disclosing the historical prominence of Bapatla area, he lauded the significant role of the public sector LIC as a backbone and savior of the Indian economy. He wished that this spectacular institution will continue to play its larger role in serving the interests of the nation in the ensuing times.

Com.K.Venu Gopal, Former General Secretary, AIIEA inaugurated the Conference and in an eloquent presentation, he dealt with the present challenging political and economic situation. He said, 'The BJP government at the Centre has been pursuing the economic policies which benefited only a few big corporates rather than the crores of common people who are denied a minimum standard of living. The Peoples' assets like Visakhapatnam Steel Plant are being sold to the private capitalists despite the long drawn struggle of the Andhra people. The Public Sector LIC in spite of many challenges like IPO, remained stronger and emerged as a successful financial institution as a result of the team work and tremendous contribution from both the marketing and administrative wings and with the unflinching confidence and trust from the crores of insuring public. This unity must be preserved and consolidated in future to protect the national insurance giant from every onslaught arising out of the economic agenda of the ruling

classes. The Joint Front of unions in LIC has also chalked out a clear programme of action on the main issues like wage revision and other pending issues of the employees.'

Com.G.Thirupathaiah, Joint Secretary, SCZIEF, Com.Ch.Majumdar, District Secretary, CITU, Sri M.V.Koteswara Babu, Divisional General Secretary, LIC Class 1 Officers' Association, Sri M.Nagesh (NFIFWI), Com.M.N.Patrudu (ICREA), Com.K.Bullaiah (WALIC SCST Employees), Sri J.Vara Babu (LIAFI), Com.Y.Gandhi Ramamohana Rao (LCAOI), Sri D.Srinivasa Rao, (LIC OBC Employees' Association), Sri G.Gopala Rao, Branch Manager, Bapatla and others greeted the Conference.

In the delegate session, the annual report was submitted by Com.G.Kishore Kumar, Divisional General Secretary. Following the debate on the report by the delegates, the report and the statement of audited accounts were unanimously adopted by the Conference. Com K.Venu Gopal and Com G. Thirupathaiah intervened in the debate and gave valuable information on the issues of employees and the need to consolidate unity within the organization.

The Conference unanimously passed a number of resolutions on issues of national importance and the institution,

The Conference unanimously elected Com.J.Sudhakar, Com.G.Kishore Kumar and Com.L.Raja Sekhar as the President, General Secretary and the Treasurer respectively



for the ensuing period.

The Conference has congratulated the base unit

of ICEU, Bapatla for hosting the Conference in a befitting manner. Com.K.Bhaskara

Rao, Convener of the Reception Committee proposed a vote of thanks.

## Convention on Universal Pension at Vizag



ICREA Visakhapatnam Division and ICEU Visakhapatnam Division organized the State Level Convention on Universal Pension Scheme at Visakhapatnam on 6/1/2024. The Convention was Presided by Com K Mohan Rao Vice President AIIPA and the Chief Guest was AIIPA President Com Satanjib Das .

Com Satanjib Das gave a very lucid presentation on the necessity of having Universal Pension Scheme. He gave a vivid analysis of the EPS 1995 Pension Scheme, the low amount of Pension being paid under this Scheme to millions of Pensioners, the history of National Pension System (NPS), the collusion of the Congress(I) and BJP Party in getting the PFRDA Act passed in 2013 , the non provision of any minimum or guaranteed provision under NPS . He informed that he is compelled to talk politics and being political as the economic interests of Pensioners are affected. The elections will take place in 2024 and we have to take wise decision in deciding whom to vote. He referred to the big struggle that is being built across India for restoring old Pension Scheme by lakhs of Central and

State Govt Employees who are covered by NPS. He told we have to join this struggles. He informed State Governments in 5 states have decided to restore Old Pension Scheme.

Leaders from Central Government Employees/ Pensioners Federation, BSNL, Defence (Civilian) Employees etc stressed the need for united action and elaborated on negative aspects of NPS, EPS 1995, issues relating to Pension Updation in Insurance Banks,BSNL etc.

Utilising the opportunity of the presence of Com Satanjib Das, a meeting of pensioners was organized in the afternoon. Com Satanjib Das informed how the hike in Family Pension was achieved by AIIPA . The various units of AIIPA had met 90 MP s and the letters addressed by this Hon MPs to Hon Fin Minister to hike the Family Pension had put significant pressure on the Govt to hike the Family Pension in LIC.

The struggle continues to achieve this demand for Public Sector General Insurance Companies. He recalled the meeting with Hon FM on 2/8/2023 where he alongwith Com Kunhikrishnan Gen Secy

was informed by Hon FM that when LIC Board and GIPSA had cleared the proposal and Money is not going from the coffers of Govt ,why her Ministry will oppose or have any objection. Our Leadership informed her to address a single line communication to LIC Chairperson and GIPSA Chairman that she has no objection in allowing hike in Family pension. She maintained a studied silence. Our leadership also informed that after the Dharna held on 29/3/2023 at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi ,our Delegation met DFS Officials .

DFS Secretary informed the issue will be resolved soon and only approval of Hon FM is awaited and they are unable to get her appointment as she is busy with Budget Session work. Our leadership informed her we waited for 4 months (April to July 2023) and there is no notification. Hon MP Com John Brittas also intervned and requested Hon FM to approve the proposals of LIC Board and GIPSA Chairman. She responded positively but Family Pensioners of GIC are still awaiting hike in Family Pension. He referred to other pending issues of Pension Updation, Regulation 56 of Pension Rules, Supreme Court Case, Enhanced Pension to Super Senior Citizens (Above 80 years) , Annual Preventive health check up for Pensioners etc. He informed that AIIPA is seeking appointment from LIC Chairperson in Feb 2024. Overall the Seminar was a huge Success attended by around 300 Pensioners and employees.



## Seminar on Universal Pension at Bangalore

A State level seminar on Universal Pension Scheme was jointly organized on January 6, 2024 by Karnataka Units of All India Insurance Pensioners Association, Insurance Corporation Employees' Union, Bangalore Divisions 1 & 2, Bangalore Region General Insurance Employees' Association and General Insurance Pensioners Association. Com. Bhaskar Somayaji, Joint Secretary, AIIPA presided over the seminar.

India lacks any social security and therefore the senior citizens are leading a very difficult life. The number of those aged 60 years and more are around 15 crore today in country and this number is continuing to rise. Except a small section of the workers, there is no pension for over 95% of the workers in this country. The government which is mandated by the Constitution ensure that the senior citizens lead a dignified life is not only denying to introduce a universal pension scheme but has also replaced the pension scheme in government, insurance and banks by National Pension Scheme where the benefit is not defined. It was in this background that the

above associations decided to highlight the need for a universal pension scheme as also restoring the old pension scheme for government, LIC, GIC and bank employees.

After the welcome address by Com K.Gopal, General Secretary, ICEU, Bangalore Division II, Com Kunhikrishnan, General Secretary, All India Insurance Employees' Pensioners Association inaugurated the Seminar. He said that people who have contributed to the economic and social development of the country for years should be given social security in their old ages. The central government is paying a very meager amount of monthly pension for people who are below the poverty line. Several state governments such as Kerala, have implemented such pension schemes long ago. With the population of senior citizens increasing and because of rising inflation and cost of health care, it is imperative for the governments to take steps to protect them in their old ages by providing a substantial amount of pension to all senior citizens, he said.

Delivering the keynote address, Prof. Prabhat Patnaik, renowned Economist said "the demand for universal pension

for all senior citizens is a justified and ethical demand and the government should make efforts to fulfill this demand with all sincerity". Prof. Patnaik explained how the universal pension scheme can be implemented without charging additional taxes on common people as well as without hurting the fiscal concerns of the economy. He told that in order to provide Rs.3000 index linked pension per month, a nominal 2% of wealth tax may be levied on top one percent of the super rich people of the country. He also suggested an one time inheritance tax of one third of wealth on the top 1%. The resources so raised can secure the right to old age pension, right to education, right to health and right to employment. With the implementation of New Pension Scheme in 2004, the government has forced the workers into the predatory financial market without taking their concerns into consideration. The argument that the Old Pension Scheme is a burden to the fiscal health of the economy is unacceptable, he said. Prof. Patnaik elaborated in detail about the impact of neoliberalism on the life and living of the common



people and said that though the claim that Indian economy is emerging as one of the large economies world over, the growth of GDP is not reflecting the living standard of the people. Economic inequality now is at historical high in India and it ranks 111 in the hunger index. He insisted that as our constitution has political and social fundamental rights, we should also have economic fundamental rights such as right to food, employment, quality health care, good education and universal pension for India to become a welfare state. But because of the sheer pressure from the finance capital both Indian and international, governments are not able to take up these social issues, he opined. He expressed his happiness for insurance employees' unions having taken up the issue of social concern such as universal pension scheme by organising the seminar.

Speaking on the occasion Com. Amanulla Khan, former President of All India Insurance Employees' association appreciated the units of the AIIPA and AIIEA

for the successful campaign among people by distributing pamphlets, holding press conferences as the prelude to the seminar. He said that only about 1.30 crore employees in the organised sector are getting defined pension in India, where as a large number of workers in the unorganised sector do not have any social security. While the most of the benefits of the economy are being snatched by a very few rich, the ruling classes are blaming organised employees for cornering most of the benefits. By this way they are attempting to divide the working class of the country by pitting unorganized against organized. We have to understand this and have to unite the working class to realise demands like universal pension for all. He said determined struggles like farmers agitation and truckers against criminal procedure code have succeeded. This should give us confidence to mobilise and launch powerful struggle for universal pension scheme. This has to be made an election issue in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Com. G Anand, Vice President, AIIEA, Com. S K Geetha, Vice President, SCZIEF, CITU leader Com. Mahanthesh, Com. C R Krishnamurthy, Pensioners Association, Mysore spoke on the need for Universal Pension Scheme. There was a unanimity that the campaign for universal pension should be continued further involving large section of the people.

Representatives of workers unions of the unorganized sectors such as Auto drivers, Domestic workers, Construction workers were felicitated on the occasion for their contribution to the welfare of the workers and to the society.

The Seminar came to a successful conclusion with vote of thanks by Com. G K Gangadhar, General Secretary, ICPA, Bangalore.

The state level seminar was a huge success with the participation of members of several associations in large numbers and had thousands of viewership across the state which was telecast live through social media platforms.

## AIIEA Secretariat meeting.... *Continued from Page 8*

this committee and suggested that there should be wider discussions at all tiers of the organisation on the recommendations of this committee to firm up our position on the emerging challenges. Similarly, the report submitted by the committee on Social Media usage (as decided in the Jodhpur Secretariat) was also discussed at length and it was decided that AIIEA would take up social media

campaign in right earnest. Accordingly, it was decided to have a You Tube Channel, Facebook Page and a Twitter Handle. The modalities would be worked out soon.

The Secretariat reiterated the need to form and activate Insurance Workers' Readers Groups across the country. The meeting congratulated SZIEF for ensuring almost hundred percent utilisation of these forums across

the zone and called upon other units to replicate the experience. Realising that Insurance Worker publication had become very expensive in view of the huge escalation in costs, the Secretariat felt that there was a need for revision in the subscription rates.

The Secretariat called upon all insurance employees to implement enthusiastically the decided programs.



## Golden Jubilee of Victory over Lock Out observed at Dharwad

**D**harwad Divisional Office was one of the six divisional offices that were locked out by LIC in January 1974. Initially, the Machines Department was locked out and on 16<sup>th</sup> January, the entire divisional office was locked out. The employees working in other offices were on continuous strike. It was a heroic struggle.

An employees meeting was organised on 13th January 2024 by IEU Dharwad to celebrate Golden Jubilee of the victory over 1974 Lock out. There was great enthusiasm for the event and employees participated in large number. This apart, a significant number of retired employees who had participated and experienced from the struggle also turned out for the meeting

despite advance age and other health problems.

Com Anulla Khan, Former President of AIEA recalled those glorious days of struggle. He highlighted the economic crisis the country faced in the early 1970s and the attempt of the then government to overcome this crisis by attacking the rights and privileges of the working class. He gave a detailed account of the struggle of employees for wage revision in 1973-74 and the decision of LIC and the government to demolish the trade union movement in LIC by declaring selective lockouts. He appreciated the tactical brilliance of AIEA in calling for continuous strike in the lockout divisions to unify the employees thwarting the

devious designs by the LIC government combine to sow the seeds of mistrust and division. He said the victory over Lockout cannot be measured only in monetary gains. This victory helped LIC employees rediscover themselves and in their capabilities to shape their own future through struggles.

Com M K Deshpande who was the President of IEU Dharwad at that time was suspended by LIC along with five other comrades. Speaking on the occasion, Com Deshpande explained the difficult situation then and how the employees were motivated and organised to fight the powerful adversary. He gave credit to the bravery and commitment of the ordinary employees in defeating the lock out. Com M.K.Deshpande was felicitated on the occasion.

A number of retired employees shared their own experiences of the struggle. This has enthused the present generation of employees.

The Program was presided over by Com Anand Archak, President, IEU Dharwad. Com Uday Gadagkar, General Secretary, welcomed and proposed the vote of thanks.





## Srinagar Division observes NZIEA Foundation Day

68<sup>th</sup> Foundation Day of Northern Zone Insurance Employees' Association was observed by NZIEA Srinagar Division on 22/12/2023. On this occasion, Flag of the Association was hoisted by Vice President of the Association, Comrade Dinesh Kumar Sharma. Speaking on the occasion, Com. Pawan Gupta said that NZIEA was formed on 22 December 1956,

and 68<sup>th</sup> Foundation Day is being observed all over the Northern Zone today. He said that LIC employees have been able to protect LIC through struggles and they will continue to fight against the policies of the Central Government, which are leading to selling of public sector, inflation, unemployment, loss of jobs, etc. He recalled the

glorious victories achieved by AIIEA in various struggles and asked the employees to remain vigilant to defend and protect the gains of their struggles. Coms Rajesh Gupta and Raj Kumar Sharma-Joint secretaries, COM. Rajesh Kumar-Treasurer, Com. Raj Kumar-Office Secretary, Com. Priya Sharma, Shunali Gupta, Neeraj Bhagat-Women sub-committee, Dharminder Kumar, Nanak Chand, Kishore Lal too briefly spoke on the occasion. The programme at Srinagar was led by Com. Aadil, Amarjeet Singh, Ajaz Ah Dar, Javed Bukhari. The programme was organised at Jammu-2 by R.P. Singh, Kathua by Vijay Verma, Samba by Surat Singh, R.s. Pura by Jagdish, Udhampur by Sham Singh, Rajouri by Vikas and Vinod Sharma, Doda by Ram Raj, Poonch by Raj Kumar Kumar, Rajouri by Vikas Sharma and Vinod Sharma, Kathua by Vijay Verma and Mohan Lal, Samba by Surat Singh, R.s. Pura by Jagdish, Udhampur by Moti Ram.

## 24<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of late Com S N Sircar

Late Com Sourindranath Sarkar (commonly known as Sarakarda) was former president of CDIEA who had shaped the CDIEA and OSGIEA as leading trade union

organisation. He was also a great trade union leader who was vanguard of working class movement in Odisha by creating Cuttack City Coordination Committee of

Unions and Associations and Odisha Sramika Karmachari Ekata Manch (OSKEM).

To reminisce his enormous contribution, a seminar was held on his 24<sup>th</sup> death anniversary on December 31, 2023 jointly by CDIEA, Cuttack and OSGIEA in S N Sircar Memorial Hall. Com Santosh Das, former editor of "The Samya Badi", state CPM secretariat member and a progressive intellectual, spoke on "Present situation and our task. He castigated BJP for throttling media, destroying democracy and exploiting religious sentiments



of people for political gains. He lambasted Modi for resorting to publicity blitzkrieg while ignoring the problems of massive poverty, inequality, unemployment and price rise plaguing nation.

Others who spoke included Com Gajendra Nath Mohanty, Om B N Sahoo, Com Rabi

Narayan Mallik (all former president of CDIEA), Com Pradeep Kumar Sinha, (OSEA), Com Prakash Ray (BEFI) among others. Com Abhay Kumar Das, General Secretary of CDIEA Cuttack gave introductory address while Com Debashish Nayak, General Secretary, OSGIEA, proposed vote of

thanks. Com (Dr) Santosh Kumar Mohapatra, CDIEA, Com Krushna Chandra Behera, OSGIEA, presided over the meeting. A good number employees, pensioners and fraternal leaders were present in meeting. Before start of seminar, the statue of late Com S N Sircar was garlanded.

## Blankets & Learning Kits by Raghunathganj Base, KSDIEA



A blanket Donation program for tribal families as well as Educational aids for their children was organised by RAGHUNATHGANJ Base under the leadership of KSDIEA on 6th January 2024, Saturday. The event was organised at Ghuting Danga and Dakshin para, two

neighbouring tribal villages situated near Sagardighi P D C L in Murshidabad District, West Bengal. The auspicious occasion was graced by the presence of approximately 130 Santhali villagers and approximately 100 children. The event was initiated with the inaugural address of our Divisional Vice-President Comrade Sandipan Majumdar followed by Divisional Assistant Secretary Comrade Dilip

Mandi whose very speech in Santhali Dialect generated a sense of liveness among the ethnic citizens of the village. A total of 130 blankets were distributed among the villagers as well as 100 learning kits were distributed among the children. The event witnessed participation from across all sections of employees comprising officers, Development officers as well as CLIAs and agents. The program concluded successfully exchanging thoughts and smiles bearing the happiness of the underprivileged section from our society .

## Convention at Murshidabad District, West Bengal

Religious Fundamentalism and Unemployment are two of the most perilous issues plaguing the country today. To raise level of consciousness regarding these and to gear up for combative action, a mass convention of trade unions was organised at Berhampore by the five base units of Murshidabad District under the aegis of Kolkata Suburban Division Insurance Association on 16/12/2023. Various

organisations under 12th July committee, LICA0, BEFI, SFI, DYFI , CITU participated. The draft proposal was mooted by President of the convention Com Dilip Mandi, Asst Secy, KSDIEA. Speakers

from various organisations delivered speeches on these burning issues.

The audience unanimously supported the resolution and expressed their resolution to participate in the ongoing struggle of the working class to combat the menace of fundamentalism and neoliberal economic policies of ruling dispensation causing increasing unemployment.



# SZIEF TU Camp for Divisional Leadership



Krishnan, President of SZIEF in vernacular for Tamilnadu and Kerala Divisions respectively. Based on an approach paper prepared by SZIEF this session discussed in detail ways and means to activate our units and strengthen the organization. Each session was followed by a group discussion. The faculties later responded to the suggestions/comments emanated from the group discussions.

The two days workshop which was presided over by Com. P P Krishnan, President, SZIEF started with an introductory speech by Com. T Senthilkumar, General Secretary, SZIEF. Com. M Girija, Joint Secretary, AIIEA inaugurated the camp. Com. Thulasitharan. K, General Secretary, ICEU, Coimbatore Division welcomed the participants and Com. IK Biju, Joint Secretary, SZIEF proposed vote of thanks. ICEU Coimbatore Division made all arrangements for the successful conduct of the Camp.

**S**outh Zone Insurance Employees' Federation conducted a two days Trade Union Workshop for the Office Bearers of its Divisional Unions, including Women Sub Committee Conveners, at Coimbatore on 7 and 8<sup>th</sup> January 2024. The camp was arranged to provide necessary inputs to the comrades in leadership and to instill confidence in them to meet today's fast changing and challenging situation.

The Camp was arranged in three sessions. Com. Amanulla Khan, senior leader of our movement led the first session on "The Present Political Atmosphere and our Role" on 07.01.2024 (Forenoon). He explained in detail how in India the Corporate and the State interests are getting merged and how politics and religion are intoxicatingly mixed against the national interest today. This is posing a serious challenge before the working class, but can be overcome if the workers fulfill their political responsibility along with their trade union responsibility. In the afternoon session on 07.01.2024, Com.

Shreekant Mishra, General Secretary, AIIEA guided the participants on "Emerging Challenges before Industry and Our Approach". He placed an explicit picture of the developments taking place in our industry and suggested required trade union approach to defend the interests of the work force and the industry.

The workshop in its third session on 08.01.2024 discussed "Organisation, Functioning and our Role". The topic was presented by Com. T Senthilkumar, General Secretary and Com. P P



## INSURANCE NEWS IN BRIEF

● **A.M. KHAN,** Dharwad

- ▶ IRDA data reveals the harsh fact that the mis-selling of life insurance is mainly by private sector. At an industry-wide level, the total surrender amount in 2021-22 was <sup>1</sup> 1,58,284.94 crore, accounting for 34 per cent of the total benefits paid to all policyholders. Out of this, private sector insurers paid <sup>1</sup> 63,166.90 crore in surrender value, representing 42.49 per cent of the total benefits paid by private insurers to policyholders. In contrast, LIC paid <sup>1</sup> 95,118.04 crore as surrender value, comprising 26.91 per cent of the total benefits paid to policyholders. Private sector insurers have a large presence in the bancassurance distribution thread, with 54.57 per cent of their business coming from this distribution channel, while LIC has just a 2.63 per cent share of sales through bancassurance. Corporate agents-banks contributed 32.77 per cent to the overall individual new business. The highest number of mis-selling complaints is directed towards brokers (9911), closely followed by banca-assurance (9631), when compared to other channels.
- ▶ 7.45 lakh number of women are working as agents in the life insurance industry, making it 28.35 per cent of the total individual agency force as at March 31, 2023. Out of the total number of women agents in the industry, the share of private life insurers was 57.33 per cent and public sector was 42.67percent.
- ▶ Investment income including capital gains and other Income of life insurance industry declined by 6.63 per cent to Rs.3.89 lakh crore as on 31 March,2023. While the LIC recorded 7.25 per cent growth, private sector insurers experienced 39.86 per cent decline in investment Income in the year 2022-23.
- ▶ 17 companies out of the 24 life insurers have reported profits during 2022-23. Profits of life insurance industry grew by 452 per cent in 2022-23 with profit after tax of Rs.42,788 crore as against Rs.7,751crore in2021-22. LIC reported increase in profits by 800 per cent while private insurers together reported an increase in profit by 72.36 per cent in 2022-23. The dividend paid by private life insurers stands at Rs.925.88 crore for FY 2022-23. LIC has paid Rs.948.75 crore in dividend to its shareholders for the year 2022-23.
- ▶ As of March 31, 2023, the combined paid-up capital of all non-life insurers amounted to Rs.40,375 crore, an increase from the previous year's amount of Rs.37,855 crore. During the course of 2022-23, general and health insurers added Rs.2,520 crore

to their equity capital base. Private sector general insurers alone infused Rs.1,691 crore in 2022-23, while standalone health insurers and specialized insurers injected capital amounts of Rs.441 crore and Rs.388 crore, respectively.

- ▶ The underwriting losses of non-life insurers increased to Rs.32,797 crore in 2022-23 (Rs.31,810 crore in the previous year). The losses increased by 3.11 percent over the previous year. The public sector insurers' underwriting losses constituted 77 percent of non-life industry losses amounting to Rs.25,317 crore and remaining by private sector insurers amounting to Rs.8,699 crore. Standalone health insurers reported a decrease in underwriting losses in 2022-23 which is Rs.529 crore as compared to underwriting loss of Rs.3,263 crore in 2021-22. The underwriting profit of Specialized insurers increased to Rs.1,747 crore in 2022-23 from Rs.56 crore in 2021-22.
- ▶ Narayana Health, a company which runs one of the largest hospital chains under the same branch name has received approval from IRDA to launch a health insurance business in India. With the entry of Narayana Health the number of Stand alone Health Insurance companies increases from existing 5 to 6.
- ▶ Press Reports are afloat that considering the advancements in the medical sciences, the consumer ministry has said that it will discuss the minimum 24-hour hospitalisation rule with the IRDA and the Department of Financial Services (DFS). Reports also say that the Government of India mulling with the idea of establishing a health sector regulator which will also provide budget-friendly health insurance coverage for all.
- ▶ A report by Swiss Re Institute says that India's insurance sector is projected to record the fastest growth among the G20 countries with the total premium expected to rise at an average rate of 7.1 per cent in real terms during 2024-28. In comparison, the growth rate for the global insurance market will be around 2.4 per cent. The expanding economy, growing middle class, innovation and regulatory support are driving the insurance market growth. The life insurance business is expected to record 6.7 per cent growth backed by rising demand for term life cover by the middle-income group and increased adoption of Insurtech; and the non-life segment is estimated to grow by 8.3 per cent owing to economic growth, improvement in distribution channels, government support and a favourable regulatory environment with health premiums forecasted to rise by 9.7 per cent.

## WORKING CLASS STRUGGLE

● S. SRIDHARA, Mysore

- ▶ Over 30000 outsourced Municipal Workers from 123 Municipalities across Andhra Pradesh have been on strike since December 26<sup>th</sup> 2023 to demand equal pay and permanent jobs. The strike was called by Andhra Pradesh Municipal Workers and employees union. Workers announced on 2<sup>nd</sup> January that their indefinite strike would continue after second round of talks with the Andhra Pradesh Government failed to resolve the issues.
- ▶ The 3 day National strike called by the All India Motor Transport Congress and other unions opposing Government's transport driving new laws was called off after 2 days on 3<sup>rd</sup> January following emergency talks with the Government. The strike involved bus, van, truck and tanker drivers and caused heavy queues at fuel stations. The new laws impose heavy fines and even imprisonment on drivers. The Government gave an assurance that the law would not be implemented until further discussions between the Unions.
- ▶ Over one lakh Anganwadi (child care) workers and helpers in Andhra Pradesh have been on a state wide strike since 11<sup>th</sup> December to demand pay rise, strikers defied police restriction on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2024 and held a protest at the Vijayawada collectorate . Police detained many workers who continued their protest at the police station. Anganawadi workers monthly pay is currently Rs.11500 and helpers Rs.7000. They are demanding Rs.26000/- for all workers, provision of gratuity, retirement age raised to 62 and 10 lakhs of group insurance.
- ▶ Hundreds of plantation workers from the Neelamalai Plantation Workers Union protested at Fort Maidan, near Salem Corporation Office on 28<sup>th</sup> December demanding a salary hike, bonus and other facilities as per labour laws and in accordance with court orders. Plantation workers called on the District Administration to intervene in the dispute and resolve the issues.
- ▶ Shimla Municipal Corporation workers in Himachal Pradesh demonstrated on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2023 outside the Offices of the Municipality and Deputy Collector over 32 demands. Shimla Environment Heritage Conservation and Beautification (SEHB) Society members demanded permanent jobs and on time payment of Rs.26000 monthly wage in line with 7<sup>th</sup> Pay Commission Recommendation. They also called for overtime payments and 39 days' vacation per year. Workers are planning for indefinite strike if their demands were not met. The strike is called by Centre for Indian Trade Union.
- ▶ School midday meal and cleaning (safai) workers in Sanarur, Punjab, demonstrated near the Chief Minister's Office demanding their monthly wages be increased from Rs.3000 to Rs.8000. Workers declared during a meeting with the education minister that they would intensify their protest if their demands are not met by 11<sup>th</sup> January 2024.
- ▶ Crematorium workers from the Bangalore Municipal Corporation protested inside Corporation head office to protest the non-payment of wages and other issues. The workers threatened to shut down the Bangalore Crematorium and Burial grounds if their demands are not met. There are 148 crematoriums in Bangalore where workers had not been paid. They were demanding permanent jobs and their wages be paid on time.
- ▶ The indefinite strike by Anganwadi workers of Maharashtra will continue as their talks with Chief Minister on increasing wages and gratuity benefits failed on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2024. Almost 2 lakhs Anganwadi workers have been on a strike since 4<sup>th</sup> December 2023 bringing to halt all nutritionist and educational activities being carried out at these centres. Anganwadi workers have been demanding that they should be granted the status of Government employees, gratuity, increase in remuneration, monthly pension, mobile phones. About 2lakh Anganwadi workers in Maharashtra have been on strike since early December demanding their honorarium to be increased to Rs.26000 and Rs.20000 to helpers.
- ▶ The workers including Railways, will hold Public dialogue in Varanasi on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2024 against NPS and privatisation. Earlier on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2024, a public campaign was conducted at Lucknow junction on the call of " Front against NPS in Railways. Similar protest was held by Indian Railway Workers in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka. They held protest at several Railway stations as part of long running campaigns by public sector workers to demand reinstatement of the Old Pension Scheme.
- ▶ Anganwadi workers and helpers have been agitating over the last 4 months in several Indian states over poverty wages. In Bihar state, Anganwadi workers organised by the Bihar Anganwadi Karmachari Sangh have been protesting since October 2023 to demand an increase in their honorarium and to be given Government employee status. They are currently paid a monthly honorarium of Rs.5950/- and helpers meagre Rs.2975/-.

## ECONOMIC TID BITDS

● J. SURESH, Mysore

- According to the latest Oxfam Report, since 2020, the world's five richest men have more than doubled their fortunes, at the rate of \$14 million per hour, from \$405 billion to \$869 billion, while almost 5 billion people, over half the world's population, have been made poorer. It noted that 4.8 billion people are today worse off than they were in 2019, prices outpacing the pay world over. This has meant that in the past two years some 800 million workers have lost \$1.5 trillion because their wages have fallen behind inflation equivalent to near a month (25 days) for each worker. Of the 1600 largest Corporations worldwide, only 0.4% of them have committed to paying workers a living wage in their value chains.
- The Oxfam report notes that, "Low and lower-middle income countries are set to pay nearly half a billion US dollars a day in interest and debt payments between now and 2029, and they are having to make severe cuts to social spending to pay their creditors". The world's largest corporations had an 89% jump in profits for the years 2021 and 2022 compared to the period 2017-2020, as data covering the first six months of last year indicates it is "set to shatter all records as the most profitable year yet for big Corporations". 278% increase in profit in 2023 for 14 bit oil and gas companies the profits of two luxury brands up by 120% from the average in 2018-21; an increase in profits of 32% for 22 financial companies in 2023, an increase of 32% profits for 11 Pharmaceutical companies. But even more significant than the profit increases themselves is the concentration of corporate power to an extent never seen in history. The report notes that the largest 0.001% of firms earns roughly 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of all corporate profits. It is estimated that about \$ 1 trillion in profits, 35% of the foreign profits, were shifted to tax heaven in 2022.
- According to the latest Global Risk Report, released by World Economic Forum, painted a picture of a series of unmitigated, inter connected disasters. It is set against the background of accelerating technological change and economic uncertainty, as the world is plagued by a duo of dangerous crisis: Climate and Conflict. It noted that in 2023, "Social discontent was palpable in many countries, with new cycles dominated by polarization, violent protest and

strikes". It is also noted that the elections over 2024, as close to three billion people go to the polls, in condition of what it called the spread of misinformation and disinformation "may undermine the legitimacy of newly elected governments". This could result in civil unrest ranging from "Violent protests to hate crimes to civil confrontation and terrorism".

In other words, there could be a complete breakdown of the democratic order. The response of the government would be a further evisceration of democracy. On the economic front, the cost of living crisis was of major concern for the outlook with the risks of inflation and an economic downturn. "Notable new entrants to the top 10 risk ranking " over the next 2 years.

- According to WEF report, Artificial Intelligence (AI) represents a major advance in technology with the capacity to enormously develop the productivity of labour and thereby provide the basis for social advancement. But its development under capitalism and the extraction of private profit means it will not have this effect, but the reverse. The increased use of AI in all sections of the industry will also lead to what is euphemistically termed the "restructuring" of the labour market. According to Goldman Sach's report, AI could lead to the automation of a quarter of the work carried out in the US and euro zone. AI systems that generate content indistinguishable from human output could increase annual gross domestic product (GDP) over the next decade. But this increase in productivity would result not in the material improvement in living standards but in increased profits. The report said AI would bring "significant disruption" to the labour market with some 300 million workers in major economies exposed to its effects and that two-thirds of all jobs were exposed to some degree of automation. According to a survey conducted by the accounting firm PwC of global chief executives, 25% of them expected that AI would lead to reduction of employment of 5% this year. 46% said that the generative AI which can generate text, images and code in seconds would boost profits over the course of the next year. These reports and surveys underscore the enormous potential for AI for increasing wealth but that left in the hands of capitalists, will not bring social advancement but, further inequality and misery.



## FOR OUR FIELD FORCE

● **A. ARIVUKKADAL**  
Thanjavur

**Benefits payment:** LIC has paid an amount of Rs.3.53 lakh crores as benefits to policyholders during the year 2022-23. All the 23 private life insurance companies together paid an amount Rs.1.57 lakh crores to their policyholders. On average, each private life insurance company has paid just Rs.0.06 lakh crore as benefits to policyholders and LIC has paid 5171% benefits comparing every private peer.

**12th largest:** With nearly \$554 billion (Rs.46.14 lakh Cr.) assets, LIC has moved up in the rankings of insurers in terms of non-bank assets. Despite depreciation of the Indian rupee, it is ranked 12th largest insurance company in the world as compared to the 13th position it held a year ago in a global list compiled by rating agency AM Best. In terms of net premiums written, LIC maintained its 16th position.

**Tax refund:** LIC has received an income tax refund of Rs.25,464 crore relating to interim bonus to policyholders in the past seven assessment years.

**Women insurance:** The share of life insurance policies sold to women in India slightly decreased from 34.7% in 2021-22 to 34.2% in 2022-23, according to IRDAI. Share of policies sold to women by LIC was higher at 35.81%, compared to private life insurers' 30.13%.

**Agents' Gratuity:** LIC has notified an increase in gratuity limit to Rs.5 lakh from Rs.3 lakh for its agents. The increase was effected by amending the Life Insurance Corporation of India (Agents) Regulations, 2017. These regulations came into force on the date of their publication in the Official Gazette dated December 6.

**GIFT City:** LIC's board has approved a proposal to set up a branch office in the International Financial Services Centre, GIFT City, Gandhinagar, Gujarat. LIC's presence in the Gujarat International Finance Tec (GIFT) City-International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) will enable the company to expand its global business.

**LIC Shares:** Despite all the false propaganda carried out with malicious intent, the shares of LIC touched a price of Rs.919 on January 17. It has been once again proved that LIC offers the best returns to investors and the best protection to customers.

**94% growth:** LIC's new business premium for the month of December 2023 has seen a growth of 94% year-on-year. Private insurers' premiums grew 4.15%.

**General sector:** The monthly premiums of non-life insurance companies grew by 14.74%. According to the General Insurance Council's monthly data, public-sector

general insurance companies grew 13.10% and private general insurers grew by 16.16%.

**Cyber insurance:** Public sector United India Insurance will foray into the retail cybersecurity insurance vertical. It will launch three products, providing insurance cover for laptops and personal computers (PC) against cyber attacks.

**Reliance Penalty:** IRDAI has imposed a penalty of Rs.2 crore on Reliance General Insurance Company for violating motor insurance service provider (MISP) guidelines and appointing in-house employees to assess the loss beyond Rs.50,000 under motor insurance.

**Ministry recommendations:** Ministry of Consumer Affairs has written a letter to the Financial Services Secretary, in which some rules regarding the sale of insurance policies and the disclaimer of conditions have been proposed. It suggests that agents should keep audio video records of conversations with the customer while selling the policy. Also, it will be mandatory to give details of every party related to the policy to the customer. In fact, the biggest issue in the complaints related to insurance through NCH (National Consumer Helpline) and other mediums is that the agent hid the fact why one's claim can be rejected. They explained the benefits of insurance but hid the conditions required for the claim. These proposals from the Consumer Affairs Secretary are in the interest of the customers. However, the decision in the matter has to be taken by IRDAI.

**Health premium:** Health insurance premium collected by the insurance industry has increased 22% to Rs.89,492 crore in FY2023 from Rs.73,052 crore in FY2022. But, the number of lives covered under individual policies in FY2023 grew 2.5% to 528.9 lakh – lower than FY2021 levels. The sharp rise in health insurance premiums without a corresponding increase in the number of lives covered indicates that insurers are growing their business by collecting more premiums from the same policyholders.

**PM Insurance:** Only a small fraction of beneficiaries of accident insurance cover under the Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) have made claims since the plan was launched a decade ago. According to Finance Ministry data, only 12,539 claims were received since April 1, 2014. Notably, the total number of number of RuPay debit cards issued to beneficiaries as of December 6, 2023, is 34.71 crore.

**New companies:** Applications of 19 companies are pending with the IRDAI. Narayana Health Insurance, Paytm General Insurance (GI), and Prudential Health Insurance, among others, are in various stages of approval from the regulator.

# INSURANCE WORKER READERS FORUM

**I**nsurance Workers Readers Forum was formed at Bellary Unit II of ICEU under Raichur Division to impart political and ideological orientation to the members. Com. R. Dathatreya President, and Com. DV Suryanarayana Secretary of the base unit took the initiative in formation of the Forum. The formation meeting began with a welcome address by Com. V. Ravi Kumar.

We invited Com. J. Channabasiah, Secretary CITU, Com. Satyababu President, CITU Ballari District, Com. K. Shashidhar, General Secretary NFIFWI, Raichur division and Com. GK Vishwanath, Moffusil

Vice President, Class 1 Officers Association, Raichur division were the Chief guests. All the 4 chief guests collectively inaugurated I.W.R.F. by subscribing to Insurance Worker on the spot, explained the need to read the Insurance Worker regularly and how to confront the future challenges confidently.

During the formation of the forum, Sri. Sampath Kumar Branch Manager asked the participants to read the Insurance Worker regularly for a correct understanding of the issues confronting us both within and outside the insurance industry. Further Many of us doesn't know that Reading is a good habit which

reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, fights depression and much more. We together took a PLEDGE to read the Insurance Worker regularly and discuss the issues periodically and plunge into the struggles in defence of PSUs of insurance industry. We are confident that the IWRF will grow in nos. all over in its true objective.

Good number of Pensioners also actively participated in the formation meeting. The formation of the IW Readers Forum is a tribute to the memory of Com N.M. Sundaram and the understanding that Insurance Worker is the guide to our Life.



## CONSUMER PRICE INDEX

Month	Base 2016	2001	1960
Apr 2023	134.2	386.50	8822.12
May	134.7	387.94	8854.99
June	136.4	392.83	8966.74
July	139.7	402.34	9183.68
Aug	139.2	400.90	9150.81
Sept	137.5	396.00	9039.06
Oct	138.4	398.59	9098.22
Nov	139.1	400.61	9144.24

Base 1960=Base 2001 x 22.8259 Base 2001=Base 2016 x 2.88

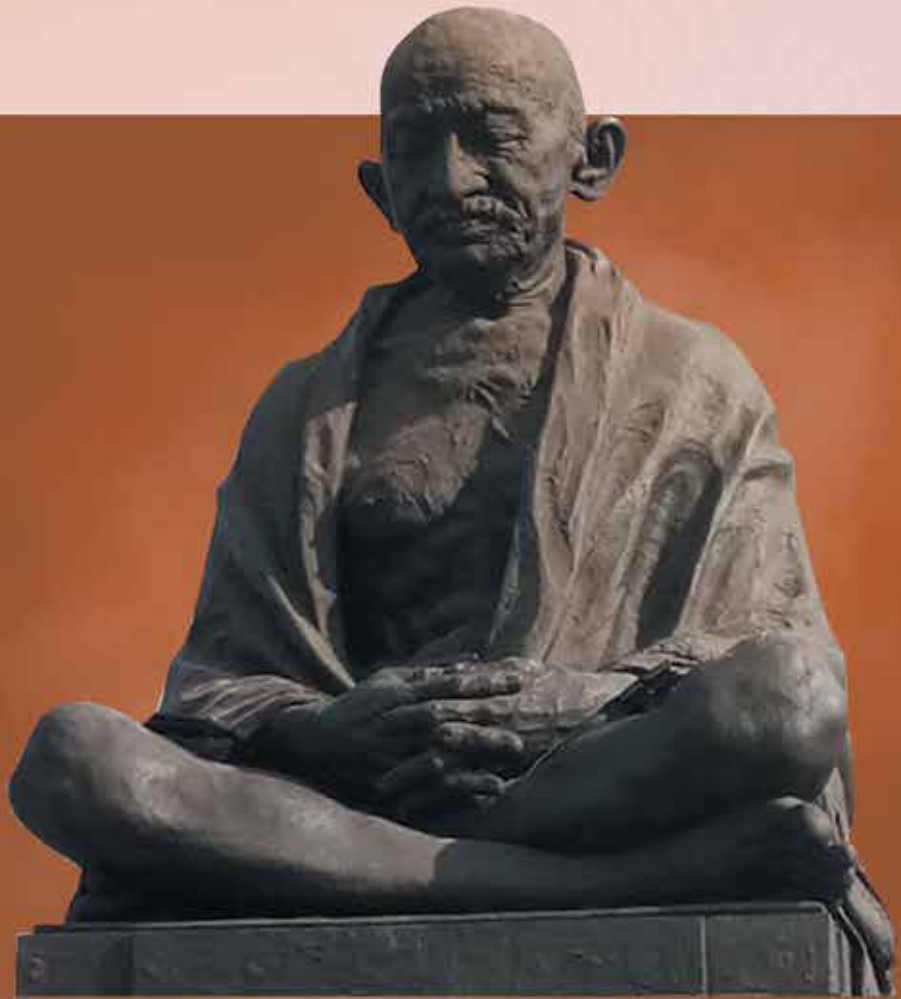
## DONATIONS

### TO INSURANCE WORKER AND AIIEA

Com. Pinak Chakraborty	Rs.5000
Com. Jayanthi Nataraj, Neyveli BO	2000
Com. V.R. Kulkarni, Bangalore DO	500
Com. P. Jayashree, P & GS, Mysore DO	5000

Insurance Worker heartily thanks these comrades for their love and affection.

*" Ramarajya  
of my dream  
ensures  
equal rights alike  
of prince  
and pauper"*



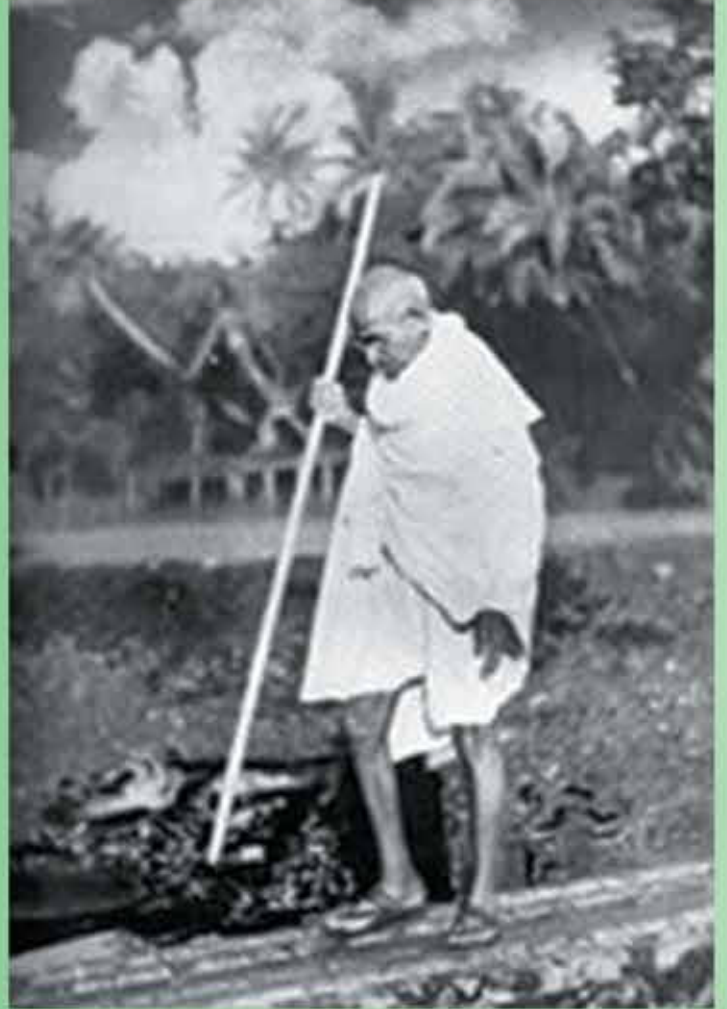
WITH BEST COMPLIMENTS  
from

**INSURANCE EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION**  
PATNA 2 DIVISION



**THERE CAN BE  
NO RAMARAJYA  
IN THE PRESENT STATE OF  
INIQUITOUS INEQUALITIES  
IN WHICH A FEW  
ROLL IN RICHES  
AND THE MASSES  
DO NOT GET  
EVEN ENOUGH TO EAT.**

**- MAHATMA GANDHI**



*With Best Compliments from*

**EAST CENTRAL ZONE  
INSURANCE EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION**

