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The Return of Rajapakse in War-Torn Sri Lanka

On January 26, when India was observing the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the Indian Republic, her southern neighbor Sri Lanka was busy electing the next President for the island nation. For incumbent President Mahinda Rajapakse, the election was a 'military coup' of sorts. He had cut short his current term as President by two years to go for an early election to cash in on the military victory over LTTE. While waging war on the LTTE his government had total support of the opposition and the armed forces, but once elections were announced he found his war-winning army chief as his principal adversary. General Fonseka, who had led the military campaign to trounce the LTTE was quick to tender his resignation and stake his claim in the Presidential elections.

With the opposition throwing its weight behind Fonseka and the US and its allies in the West too viewing him as an emerging alternative, the Presidential election in post-Prabhakaran Sri Lanka was billed as a close contest. There were even speculations that the former Army chief may well pip the incumbent President at the post, making Rajapakse look like Sri Lanka's Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister who had won World War II but lost the first post-war parliamentary elections.

The poll has however delivered no such surprise. Rajapakse has won the battle with an emphatic lead of nearly two million votes as compared to his 2005 margin of only 150,000. Out of 22 electoral districts of Sri Lanka, Rajapakse has swept the polls in the Sinhala-dominated heartland while Fonseka led in Tamil-dominated North and East and also in Colombo and Kandy with sizable non-Sinhala population. Fonseka has however refused to accept the result accusing the Rajapakse camp of indulging in massive electoral malpractices. The Election Commission too seems to lend credence to his allegations with the Chief Election Commissioner regretting the biased role of the administration and the state-controlled media and expressing his desire to be relieved of his responsibilities.

Both camps had projected their candidates as 'war heroes' and sought to win the polls by whipping up competitive waves of Sinhala chauvinism and triumphalism. For Rajapakse supporters, the President had become Maha Rajanani (the great king), and State-run television channels and radio stations regularly played a song that hailed him as the great king who united the country. The Fonseka camp, on the other hand, hailed Fonseka as the real decimator of the LTTE. In his resignation letter Fonseka openly attributed the victory over LTTE to his own "vision, command and leadership" while charging Rajapakse with undermining the army, mismanaging the economy and

promoting corruption and cronyism all around.

Both Rajapakse and Fonseka are unabashed votaries of Sinhala majoritarianism. In an interview published in the Canadian magazine National Post on September 23, 2008, Fonseka quite bluntly advocated his “Sri Lanka for the Sinhala” line: “I strongly believe that this country belongs to the Sinhalese but there are minority communities and we treat them like our people. ... They can live in this country with us. But they must not try to, under the pretext of being a minority, demand undue things.” Yet in their poll promises both Rajapakse and Fonseka waxed eloquent about devolution of powers to the Tamils. If in 2005, Rajapakse had won the poll by a narrow margin, it was largely because of an LTTE-enforced boycott in Tamil areas that affected the chances of the then UNP nominee Ranil Wickremasinghe. Ironically, in this election the post-LTTE Tamil nationalists (represented primarily by the Tamil National Alliance) found themselves in the Fonseka camp together with the same UNP and the pro-Sinhala JVP.

The US, though not expressing any explicit view regarding the elections, is known to be feeling uneasy about the Rajapakse regime’s growing economic and political ties with China. But both Fonseka and Rajapakse have strong US connections. While Fonseka is a US Green Card holder, Rajapakse’s brother and defence secretary Gothabaya Rajapakse who is credited to have mapped out the strategy of the war on LTTE, had also been in the US before returning to Sri Lanka to assist his brother after the latter became President in 2005. While Sri Lanka took full advantage of the American discourse of war on terror to step up its military offensive against the LTTE, the US may now well find it convenient to invoke the slogans of human rights and democracy to keep Colombo under control.

For the overwhelming majority of the Sri Lankan population – Tamil as well as Sinhala – life has indeed become quite harsh. Sri Lanka’s once celebrated model of social welfare has crumbled under the growing burden of militarization of the island’s economy and polity. Contrary to the empty promises of greater devolution of power, hundreds of thousands of Tamils find themselves herded into refugee camps (ostensibly called ‘welfare villages’) in miserable conditions and the media and international relief organizations have very little access to these camps. In such conditions it is difficult to think of any meaningful national reconciliation between the Sinhala and Tamil peoples. Democracy and welfare have been the biggest casualties of the Sri Lankan state’s war on LTTE and Rajapakse’s emphatic return to the Presidential throne riding on a Sinhala chauvinist wave does not augur well for the cause of justice for the war-ravaged population of Sri Lanka.

AICCTU Workshop in Chennai

All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU) held a workshop in Chennai at the district level on 26 January to kick start the campaign to increase the membership tally of TN AICCTU to 1.5 lacs before April. 64 leading comrades from working class background participated.

Terminated trainees of Hyundai donated Rs.1500, workers of Hyundai Rs.25,000 and workers of MRF Rs.50,000 as solidarity fund for the Pricol workers struggle. On the same day workers of LMW Unit-3 workers donated Rs.35,000 for Pricol workers struggle. Workers of another unit LMW have already donated Rs.40,000 for Pricol workers struggle.

Four papers were presented in the workshop based on investigations in Sriperumbudur Industrial

area which is dominated by MNC's, in a ward in Ambattur where unorganized workers live in large numbers, among migrant construction workers who are involved in constructing the new Assembly building, which is a pet project of TN CM and about the welfare boards for the construction workers.

It was found that Nokia in Sriperumbudur pays only 0.7 percent of what the workers produce and that Hyundai pays only 0.3 percent. It is only to continue this exploitation the foreign and domestic capital wants No-Trade Union-Zone in this industrial belt. AICCTU decided to work among the trainee, contract and casual workers in this belt and prepare the ground for a general strike by the end of this year, highlighting the issues of trainee, contract and casual workers. Our slogan will be No-Exploitation-Zone.

It was found that over 4000 migrant workers are involved in the construction of the new Assembly building, most of them from Orissa, Andhra, Jharkhand and Bihar. Their working and living conditions are inhuman and they are paid only Rs.110 a day for which a construction worker in Chennai would demand Rs.350. A demonstration will be held on February 1 to demand canteen on no-profit-no-loss-basis and living conditions as stipulated in the Inter-state Migrant Workers' Act. It was also decided that if the demands are not met in a week's time, the Assembly building under construction will be gheraoed.

As far as the TN Construction Welfare Board is concerned only Rs.77 crores has been distributed to 2.37 lakh workers by the board in the past 15 years. Cess levied by the TN govt is only 0.3 percent while the Central Act provides for a cess of 1 percent to 3 percent. Cess so far collected by the TN govt is Rs.290 crores. It was decided to demand for collection of 1 percent levy.

Demanding White Paper on the Conditions of Migrant Labourers

A demonstration was held in Chennai on February 1, demanding implementation of Inter-State Migrant Labourers Act for the 4000-plus construction workers who are involved in the construction of new TN Assembly building. These workers are from Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa. They are paid only Rs.110 to 130 for a day's work for which the Chennai construction workers get Rs.300-350. Their other working and living conditions are extremely pathetic. Accidents are frequent which are seldom reported.

Tamilnadu Democratic Construction Workers Union has demanded that the TN Govt. should act as principal employer, give wages as per the market rate, a canteen on the no-loss-no-profit basis must be provided for the workers, a permanent medical team and an ambulance at the site and a white paper on the conditions of the migrant workers working for the new Assembly building.

Comrades Eraniappan- General Secretary, Kuppabai- State Treasurer, A.Sekar- District President, Munusami- District GS, Mohan- District President of Workers Rights Forum addressed the demonstrators.

AISA's 10th Bihar State Conference Held

Bihar unit of the All India Students' Association (AISA) held its 10th State Conference on 29-30 January in Patna with its central slogan of pro-people development and transformation, and against the betrayal by Central and State governments on education reforms, employment and campus democracy. The Conference began with the garlanding of Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh's Statue.

Inaugural address was delivered by CPI(ML)'s Polit Bureau member Com. Ram Jatan Sharma. The inaugural session was also addressed by economist Prof. NK Chaudhary, educationist Prof. Vinay Kanth, AIPWA's National Secretary Meena Tiwari, RYA's National VP A. Kushwaha, PU senator K. Reza and employees' leader V. Mishra.

Com. RJ Sharma, while speaking of a number of challenges being faced by common people today, said that the Govt.'s bodies themselves have highlighted through statistics in a number of reports about the tragic state of the majority population and all this while the Govt. has busied itself in floating hollow slogans of young India and aam-aadmi (common people). The Nitish Govt. in Bihar has betrayed the broader students-youth and common people and has relegated the reports on Land Reforms and Common School System in cold storage. AISA can challenge these anti-people governments only by its organisational expansion and unleashing all around political initiatives. The solution to the deepening economic and social crisis is only through Marxism and AISA has the responsibility to unite and mobilize broadest section of students-youth and also politicize them.

136 delegates, which included 10 women students, from 19 districts of Bihar participated in the Conference. The political-organisational report elaborately discussed the all-round educational decline in Bihar and associated phenomena of educational anarchy, absence of student unions, repression of people's movements, migration and backwardness of the State apart from several other issues. About 40 delegates debated on breakthrough in organizational expansion, unleashing initiatives and change in work-style and membership expansion.

The concluding session was addressed by CPI(ML) State Secretary Com. Nand Kishore Prasad who outlined the radical role of student and youth movements throughout the 20th century when they challenged the undemocratic powers.

In the end the Conference elected a 41 member State Council and 17 member State Executive. Raju Yadav from Veer Kunwar Singh University and Abhyuday were elected State's President and Secretary respectively. Markandeya Pathak, Keshri Kr. Yadav and Arvind are new VPs and Kumar Parvez, Manoj Manzil and Rahul Vikas are new Jt. Secretaries. Prakash is new Propaganda Secretary.

An 11-point political resolution was also passed by the Conference which includes demand to withdraw all fabricated cases slapped against student leaders, release of AISA leader Manoj, implementation of Common School Education System, granting Central University status to Patna University, students' union election, urgently opening of AMU's Bihar Campus, implementation of Sachar Committee report etc. Youth International tune was played and resolves to make successful AISA's 7th National Conference marked the conclusion of this Conference.

AISA's Nawada Dist. Conference

AISA's 12th Nawada Dist. Conference was held on 25 January participated by 150 students. It was inaugurated by hoisting of the flag by CPI(ML) dist. secretary Com. Santan Kumar. AISA's Bihar Secretary Abhyuday was main speaker and in the end the Conference elected a 15 member executive.

CPI(ML) Organises anti-Repression day in UP against Mayawati's Repressive Rule

While the wounds of police lathi-charge at Lucknow on 21 January were still raw, the UP police did it again, this time in Gazipur, where it criminally assaulted CPI(ML) activists after detaining them for sitting on a dharna in front of the Nonahara police station. A dozen of them were slapped with fabricated cases and sent to jail. The Party members and leaders were on a dharna protesting the extreme subjection of poor forest dwellers by a nexus of police and feudal elements in the district. Among those sent to jail include Party's dist. secretary and State Committee member Com. Ram Pyare Ram.

The feudal and repressive forces in the dist. devise the accusation of theft against the forest dwellers to keep them under subjugation. Recently, the police brutally tortured such an 'accused' in Thana. His brothers were also falsely accused by the police since they protested their brother's detention in the Thana for 7-days. When the CPI(ML) took up the issue including all the cases of exploitation and oppression of poor people, one BSP MLA jumped in the fray to defend the nexus of feudals and police.

On 25th January, CPI(ML) called for a State-wide protest day against the Lucknow lathi-charge on employees and teachers and these incidents observing anti-Repression day. Party members sat on dharna at Shaheed Smarak in Lucknow demanding sacking and punishment of Lucknow DM and unconditional release of Party members jailed in Gazipur. It is notable that the employee who was slapped by the DM bore further brunt of state machinery's autocratic rule when he was suspended and sent to the jail, instead of any action against the DM.

The CPI(ML) members are being increasingly harassed and targeted in UP, specially in Pilibhit, Ambedkar Nagar etc. Party members were brutally attacked in Pilibhit when they exposed and protested corruption in PDS meant for BPL families, being operated by corrupt Kotedar and Thana-incharge of Chandia Hazara village.

Apart from Lucknow, the protests were held at Madihan and Ahiraura in Mirzapur dict., Jamania, sadar and Saidpur tehsils in Gazipur, Ballia, Deoriya, Varanasi, Chandauli, Sitapur, Khiri, Pilibhit, Ambedkar Nagar, Jalaun and many other districts. Party also handed a memorandum to the Governor mentioning all these incidents in the State and demanded to initiate urgent action against the accused police officials.

Struggle in Patna against Land Mafias and Feudal Oppression

The feudal dominated village of Bindaul saw for the first time oppressed people organising against sand mafia to free their land for which they hold parchas and feudal exploitation on 24 December, 2009, when they attended the CPI(ML) meeting on the issue, though, in a small number. Our Party has recently found inroads here. The poor are terrified to come openly for the meeting. 60 landless families were granted parchas in 1975, however, till date no government could ensure them actual possession of the land. Sand mafias use their land for illegal extraction of sand and the local administration is hand in glove with the mafias. Similar is the story of 110 families in Yamunabad and Katesar in this region who have parchas but not actual possession.

Bindaul, a village of 316 families is notorious for its feudal subjection. The Rajputs, Brahmins and Bhumihars account for only 80 households in this village, but even near-by villages live under the terrifying shadow of their feudal excesses. Poor, mainly belonging to Dalits and EBCs, and 50 each household of Muslims and Yadavs, are not allowed to exercise any of their democratic rights and are

virtual slaves of the upper castes here. The poor and women are constantly humiliated and harassed by some professional criminals of this region. Earlier the dominant feudal lot was with Congress, and now they are in BJP. Their morale is high on JD(U)-BJP Govt.'s rule in Bihar, but the poor have slowly started to rise-up against the feudals after coming in contact with CPI(ML).

RYA's Maharajgunj Dist. Conference

Revolutionary Youth Association held its 2nd Dist. Conference at Nichlaul in December, 2009. The Conference was inaugurated by RYA State President Bal Mukund Dhuria. Conference was addressed by CPI(ML) Jharkhand State Committee member Com. Rajesh Sahni, Dist. Secretary Com. Harish and Com. Swaminathan Pal. The Conference decided to organise and mobilize the youth in struggles against price-rise and unemployment. The Conference elected a 21-member Council and 11-member Executive. Ram Surat Patel and Mahesh Gupta were reelected President and Secretary respectively.

CPI(ML)'s 1st Gorakhpur Dist. Conference Held

At the time of peasants' movement during Naxalbari, the CPI(M) unit in Gorakhpur split and joined CPI(ML). After a phase of underground Party work and then open work led by Com. Jeeta Kaur during the IPF phase, struggles of the Party had influenced different sections of the people. Gorakhpur University produced quite a few cadres for the Party. However, later, the organizational work turned dormant for a long period.

Post 2004 general elections, once again the Party work was revived with youth coming from the Eklavya Sena. Planned Party work spread in the villages close to the town. In the town itself urban poor were organised in three wards. Based on these work we were also able to challenge communal forces in the recent times. Centring on NREGA, BPL etc., the membership of All India Agricultural Labourers' Association (AIALA) spread in about 100 villages with seven thousand members. A Party group from rural poor also developed. Membership campaigns were undertaken by the Party, RYA, AIPWA and our trade union. Party members were organised into branches which eventually culminated into first Gorakhpur Dist. Conference on 17th January, 2010, held at the meeting hall of Gorakhpur Journalist Association. Apart from 36 members of Electoral College, 110 Party members were present. Com. Ram Pyare Ram, State Committee member was present as observer.

The Conference was inaugurated by Veteran Comrade Haridwar Prasad by hoisting of the Red Flag. A minute's silence was observed soon after in the memory of Comrades Rambali Pandaye, Jeeta Kaur and martyred comrades.

Delivering the inaugural address, CPI(ML) State Secretary, Com. Sudhakar Yadav said that the Party's effort is to build competent cadres from among the rural and urban poor, youth and women for the alternative politics and emerge as the opposition force and Gorakhpur is an important centre. This session was also addressed by journalist Manoj Singh and VP of Jan Sanskriti Manch, Ashok.

Work report presented by Com. Rajesh Sahni was discussed by the house and in the end an 11-member Dist. Committee was elected with Com. Sahni as its Secretary.

Crop Seizure by the Poor in Arwal

Defying dozens of Gun-toting policemen and the zamindar, 700 rural poor of Koil-Ismailpur, Masadpur, Kamta and dozens of other villages assembled on 10th December, 2009, for seizure of the standing paddy crop. Siyaram Ojha, who owns 95 acres of cultivable land watched the happenings standing along with the police team. The police initially threatened to fire at them if they did not

move out. But the people's readiness to face come what may punctured the morale of the policemen. They were even shouting slogans for land reforms, identity cards for share-croppers, distributing ceiling surplus land to the poor etc. while simultaneously harvesting the paddy.

Sensing the militant mood of the people, policemen returned and sent a proposal for talks with the Party. The officer in-charge, in a bid to save his standing in the eyes of feudals, prayed to stop the cutting of crop. In the presence of the police officer, CPI(ML) Dist. Secretary of Arwal- Com. Jitendra Yadav, and the zamindar, an agreement was reached to give the occupation of 54 acres of land to the poor people on which the poor have been doing cultivation, and another 26 acres of ceiling land, on which share-croppers have been doing labour, will be cultivated by poor people.

The landlord Ojha, by manipulation and with administration's help had reconcentrated the land he had to part with during the 1970's. Earlier the CPI had taken up the issue (in 1985) and had got the poor to cultivate the ceiling land. However, during the Nitish Govt., the zamindar, with police presence and help mowed down the crops sown by the poor people and recropped the fields. He also managed to divide the unity of poor people. Since 1995 the struggle is going on under CPI(ML) and CPI leadership to retain the land under the possession of poor. The CPI comrades come with our Party to take this struggle forward and the recent campaigns by the Party for implementation of Land Reforms Commission' report has re-energised the villagers.

Obituary

Comrade Ashok, who recently got associated with the Party in Delhi, and was helping in managing day-to-day work at the Central Office, passed away on 1st February. He was afflicted with tuberculosis and associated illness that progressed extremely swiftly before medical intervention could provide relief. The cremation took place at Nigam Bodh Ghats in Delhi. CPI(ML) mourns Comrade Ashok's sudden passing away and pays homage to him.

P.S.

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