

ML Update: 16-22 November 2010

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Eyewash of Resignations and Cover Ups Will Not Suffice Probe Scams and Punish the Guilty

Inundated by a series of scams involving top Ministers in the UPA Government as well as Congress leaders, the UPA Government and Congress party are desperately trying to save face by securing the resignations of Ashok Chavan from the post of Maharashtra CM, Suresh Kalmadi from the post of secretary of the Congress Parliamentary party, and finally, in the wake of the CAG Report exposing large scale corruption in the 2G Spectrum allocations by the Telecom Ministry, DMK leader A Raja from the post of Union Telecom Minister.

For the past three years, the process of allocation of 2G Spectrum airwaves and licences were under the cloud of corruption allegations, but the UPA Government, invoking 'coalition dharma,' turned a blind eye and refused to act against the concerned Minister from the DMK. A full year ago, the Central Vigilance Commission recommended a CBI probe into the matter, and the CBI raided the Telecom Minister's office - but the UPA Government remained impervious to all demands for the removal of the Telecom Minister. Questions about the feasibility of an impartial probe while the accused remained a Minister were royally ignored. The CAG Report has now vindicated all the allegations, exposing how procedures were manipulated to unfairly benefit certain companies, granting them 2G spectrum - a national asset - at throwaway prices leading to a loss to the public exchequer to the tune of Rs 1,76,379 crore.

In the first place, the 2G spectrum was not auctioned but was instead allocated on a 'First-Come-First-Served' (FCFS) basis for a mere Rs 1,651 crore each. Companies, Reliance Communications and Tata Teleservices were also given GSM and CDMA licences at prices fixed in 2001. In comparison, auction of 3G spectrum earlier this year fetched Rs. 67,710 crore. But the matter did not rest with the choice of FCFS procedure over competitive bidding. Even the FCFS procedure was tampered with to 'fix' the match in favour of certain companies! The procedure whereby applications were ranked on the basis of the date of receipt at the central registry section of the Department of Technology, the basis was changed to that of compliance with Letter of Intent conditions such as bank guarantees. The CAG further noted that the time limit for compliance with the LoI conditions was reduced to just half a day, and miraculously, certain applicants (who obviously enjoyed advance information) were all ready with demand drafts and relevant documents. Of the 122 licenses issued in 2008, 85 were found to fall short of the eligibility conditions prescribed by the DoT itself! Corruption in the Telecom sector has come hand in hand with privatisation of this sector. More than a decade ago, Congress Minister Sukhram was at the centre of a telecom scam that accompanied the first moves to privatise telecom. And now, the size and scope of the scams have grown with more rapid privatisation of this sector.

Not long ago, the Supreme Court pulled up the CBI for 'dragging its feet' and being 'slipshod' in its investigation of the 2G Spectrum scam. Clearly, the political pressures of the UPA Government and its tainted Telecom Minister were telling on the CBI. This inspires little confidence in the pending investigations promised into other mega scams. Foremost among these scams is of course the CWG scam. The Adarsh Housing Society scam is another in which top Army officials and politicians conspired to grab real estate in violation of environmental regulations by falsely invoking Kargil veterans and widows. The IPL scam too had involved UPA Ministers. A paddy scam too has been alleged - in which rice to the tune of Rs 2500 crore was exported in violation of the ban on paddy export - an act which is all the more criminal given the state of people reeling under price rise and hunger and the Centre's refusal to distribute rotting food grains to the poor. Apart from these, of course, there are innumerable mining scandals all over the country and rampant corruption in MNREGA.

Corruption and crony capitalism are certainly the name of the game in times of liberalisation - and not only the Congress and its allies ruling at the Centre but even the main Opposition party BJP cannot escape the taint. Let us recall that the mining mafia Bellary brothers in BJP-ruled Karnataka are part of the same phenomenon, and the BJP central leadership too has time and again showed its allegiance to the power of such corrupt corporates.

The resignations of Congress leaders and UPA Ministers are a clear admission of guilt, but such resignations must not divert from or dilute the struggle to ensure thoroughgoing probes and speedy punishment in all manner of scams. Those who are bleeding the country to favour a handful of rich corporations must be exposed and brought to book.

12th National Conference of Jan Sanskriti Manch Held at Bhilai

The 12th National Conference of Jan Sanskriti Manch was held at Bhilai on 14-15 November. The inaugural session of the Conference began with a seminar on 'Culture and Power'. Poet Manglesh Dabral inaugurated the Conference, saluting the memory of poet Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh who had hailed from Chhattisgarh. The main speaker at the seminar, Bangla poet Nabarun Bhattacharya called for a cultural of resistance that would confront imperialism and state repression. He spoke of the struggle of adivasis against displacement and repression in Chhattisgarh, and called for solidarity with the struggle for democratic rights in Kashmir and Dantewada. Noted critic and JSM President Prof. Manager Pandey spoke of the legacy and renewed relevance of socialism worldwide. Cultural activists from various states presented rousing performances of dance and music. In the second session, noted art critic Ashok Bhowmick spoke of the progressive tradition in Indian painting. Baul singers from Bengal gave a moving musical performance.

On the second day, JSM General Secretary Pranay Krishna presented a draft document for discussion on the floor of the house, which was debated by the delegates from various states. The Conference elected a National Council, with representatives from all over the country, and re-elected Prof Manager Pandey as President and Pranay Krishna as General Secretary.

CPI(ML) Statement on Building Collapse in Delhi

New Delhi, 16 November 2010: CPI(ML) Liberation expressed deep shock at the building collapse in Laxminagar which has claimed the lives of 65 poor migrant workers. The toll of dead and injured continues to rise, and the party shares the grief and outrage of the family members of the victims.

The tragic incident underscored the callous attitude of the Delhi Government towards migrant workers. The Congress Government has attempted to pass off blame to the builders, owner and the MCD (which is dominated by the BJP) alone. Clearly the responsible Government bodies in collusion with unscrupulous builders have allowed unsafe and illegal buildings to continue to stand, safe in the knowledge that they will be inhabited only by the poor and desperate. But the Delhi Government cannot escape responsibility for the incident.

A preliminary investigation by a CPI(ML) team comprising CC Member Prabhat Kumar, Delhi State Committee members and AICCTU leaders Amarnath Tiwary and VKS Gautam as well as Gaurishankar revealed that most of the residents of the doomed building had earlier been residents of the Yamuna Pushta jhuggi cluster. When the Pushta jhuggi was demolished to make way for the Yamuna Pushta flyover towards the Commonwealth Games, the jhuggi dwellers were forcibly evicted, and therefore forced to make their home in unsafe buildings including the one that collapsed.

The building collapse is an incident where eviction of the poor from slum clusters, combined with a housing policy ignores the need of the capital city's poor workers, has caused the deaths en masse of so many workers. The Shiela Dixit Government makes empty promises of housing for workers at election time, but later allows workers to live in perilous illegal buildings and insanitary slums in constant threat of eviction.

Stringent punishment must be given not only to owner of the building but also for the concerned authorities who failed to take preventive measures. The Government's declaration of ex-gratia is nothing but a token gesture, seeking to divert attention from the Government's own criminal responsibility for the accident. Workers' families must receive full compensation with dignity, and immediate measures be taken to ensure social security, recognition and safe and dignified housing to the city's poor and migrant workers.

Workers of Gouripore Jute Mill Hold Rally

The workers of the Gouripore Jute Mills, a closed mill since 1997, organised a "Bhukha" (Hunger) rally with bare body and empty plates. On 15 November, from Sealdah station to Esplanade under the leadership of BCMF (AICCTU). More than 500 workers participated in this spirited rally, marked by the overwhelming presence of women. They displayed posters, placards and red flags and the rally resounded with the sound of slogans and beating plates. The rally blockaded the busy 4-point Esplanade crossing for some time. The rally converged at Metro, where a Dharna was held till 5 PM.

The rally demanded disbursement of their legitimate PF and pension dues forthwith. It is to be mentioned that the Calcutta High Court passed an order, directing the PF department to disburse PF to the workers, which the PF department flouted. Com. Gayatri Das, one of the leading organisers of the rally, addressed the gathering, exposing the role of the local CPIM MLA and present Transport Minister Sri Ranjit Kundu, who hobnobbed with criminals and the corrupt nexus of the erstwhile PF trustee Board and openly opposed the workers' just demand of PF-Pension disbursement. Com. Ramshakar Paswan, another organiser of this movement, spoke of the sustained struggles of workers under the banner of the BCMF (AICCTU). Sri Somnath Basu of 'Naihati Shilpa Bachao Manch', and Sri Bankim Dutta, an organiser of the science movement, also addressed the gathering.

Prominent Trade Union leaders of AICCTU, AIUTUC, UTUC, Comrades Rabindra Prasad, Amal Sen and Barun Choudhury expressed their fighting solidarity with the ongoing movement. Prominent intellectual and economist Sri Subhendu Dasgupta, Columnist Pachu Roy, Convenor of Nagarik Manch Sri Naba Dutta, and Prof. Sri Salil Biswas also greeted and cheered the fighting workers. The meeting was also addressed by AICCTU & BCMF leaders Comrades Basudev Bose, Subrata Sengupta, Dibakar Bhattacharya, Batokrishna Das, and Atanu Chakravarty.

Protests against Obama's India Visit

In our last issue, we reported the countrywide protests on 8 November in response to the AILC call for protests against Obama's India visit. This time we report on some of the protests that could not be covered in the last issue.

At Puducherry, CPI(ML), CPI, CPI(M), AIFB, and RSP organised a massive joint state level protest demonstration on 8th November 2010 in front of the head post office at Puducherry. S.

Balasubramanian State Secretary CPI (ML), Kalainathan State Secretary CPI, Perumal State Secretary CPI (M), Muthu State Secretary AIFB, Lenin State Secretary RSP addressed the protest gathering. Protest posters were pasted throughout the town and thousand of leaflets were distributed.

Haryana: A protest demonstration and five hour long dharna from 11 am to 4 pm was organised at the Karnal's Mini-Secretariat main gate on 8 November by the CPI(ML), led by Party's State incharge Comrade Prem Singh Gahlawat, and other comrades Som Prakash, Sukhbir, Rajendra, Sultan and Ramesh among others. Com. PS Gahlawat addressed the dharna.

Mumbai: CPI(ML) and Lal Nishan Party Leninist jointly organised Obama Go Back protest demonstration at Mumbai.

DTC Unity Centre GBM

Workers of the Delhi Transport Corporation held a General Body Meeting of the DTC Unity Centre (affiliated to AICCTU) on 11 November to resist privatisation of public transport in Delhi. The hall was named after late DTC workers' leader Comrade Ajaib Singh Siddhu. The GBM was inaugurated by CPI(ML) CC member Comrade Prabhat. Unity Centre Secretary Comrade Thomas presented a report of the union's struggles and challenges ahead, which was discussed and later adopted by workers. The GBM elected the new leadership committee with Comrade Thomas as Secretary, Comrade Santosh Roy as President and Comrade Rajesh as Working President. The new committee resolved to intensify the struggle to resist privatisation, mobilising not only the permanent workers but also the contractual staff.

The GBM was also addressed by CPI(ML) CC Members Rajendra Pratholi, Kavita Krishnan, Delhi State Secretary Sanjay Sharma and AICCTU National General Secretary Swapan Mukherjee. MTNL labour leader Comrade Satbir rendered revolutionary songs at the GBM.

CPI(ML) in UP Panchayat Elections

CPI(ML) candidates contested on 89 zila panchayat seats in the panchayat polls held in October in Uttar Pradesh, and won two seats - in Pilibhit and Lakhimpur Kheri districts. At Pilibhit, CPI(ML) candidate Rama Gairola secured 7768 votes and won by a margin of 4713 votes. In the reserved seat

in Lakhimpur Kheri, CPI(ML) candidate Asharam secured 11000 votes and defeated his nearest rival by more than 5000 votes. In the contest for Gram Pradhan and BDC, CPI(ML) won 17 gram pradhan and 18 BDC seats. The CPI(ML) campaign concentrated on resistance to corruption in panchayat institutions, development and land reform for the poor, freeing panchayats from bureaucratic stranglehold, and making panchayats the centre of people's movements.

On Clash in Allied-Nippon Factory

On 13 November, yet another incident reminiscent of previous instances at the Graziano factory in Noida and Pricol factory in Coimbatore took place at the Indo-Japanese Allied Nippon Company situated in Sahibabad Site-4 near Delhi, when a manager of the company Yogendra Chaudhary lost his life in a clash with workers of the factory.

The union that had been organising the workers, while deploring the death of the manager, has alleged that the manager Yogendra Chaudhury had opened fire on striking workers, injuring one worker and thereby provoking the clash that led to his own death. A struggle had been ongoing against violation of labour laws by the management, and the workers had been facing strong-arm tactics by the management which was trying to break the union.

Those who attempt to paint the workers as killers ought to recall that Sahibabad is the place where labour organiser and theatre activist Safdar Hashmi had been killed in broad daylight while performing street theatre during a struggle. The incident is yet another reminder that the impunity with which companies violate labour laws and the callousness of governments towards penalising and correcting such violations, combined with crackdowns and persecution of workers who struggle for their rights or attempt to unionise, are leading to an explosive situation whereby incidents of the Graziano-Pricol-Nippon type are becoming more and more common. It is alarming that instead of acting as a wake-up call for stringent implementation of labour laws, such incidents are being used as a pretext to intensify the political attack on the labour movement.

AIPWA Intervenes in Triple Honour Killing Case in Deoria

On 4 November, an AIPWA team of 50 activists visited Singahi Deeh village in Deoria district of UP, led by Geeta Pande, on hearing of the bodies of 3 young women being found buried in a field. On investigation the team were told that the three young women were Sarita, Anita and Neeta (all between 19-22 years of age) who were friends and belonged to the Rajbhar community. Their bodies had been found when animals had dug up some body parts which came to the notice of a farmer. It appears that Anita's uncle Dadan had suspected her of meeting a lover in the name of going to answer the call of nature in the night, and he along with five associates killed Anita and her friends and buried them in a field.

On 5 November 200 activists of AIPWA held a day-long dharna at the District Magistrate's office, declaring that 1000 women would court arrest if the accused were not arrested. Local BSP MP Ramashankar Vidyarthi Rajbhar was giving statements favouring the accused. But AIPWA's protest forced the issue out in the open and made the media recognise the killings as 'honour' killings. The struggle for justice for the three women continues.

India's Shameful Human Development Record

The recently released UN Human Development Report 2010 has revealed India's sorry record of human development and tackling inequalities.

Some of the facts revealed by the report are as follows:

India has been ranked among top 10 global countries on income gain.

But India's HDI ranking (adjusted to take into account multidimensional inequalities) is a dismal 119 among 134 nations. More than half (55%) of India's population are multi-dimensionally poor (taking account of indicators like health, schooling, drinking water, decent work and so on). Eight Indian States (Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal) are home to 421 million multi-dimensionally poor people, more than the figure of 410 million in 26 poorest African countries.

One of the chief factors dragging India back in terms of its human development performance is its failure to address gender inequality. The Gender Inequality Index in the Report shows that Indian women face greater gender inequality than their sisters in many of its less prosperous and more backward neighbours, including Pakistan.

In the overall Human Development Index, India ranks 119 and Pakistan, 125. But in the Gender Inequality Index, Pakistan is ahead of India at 112, while India lags behind at 122. Even Bangladesh (at 116) and Nepal (at 110) are ahead of India when it comes to women's welfare and rights. India has a much higher maternal mortality - 450 mothers in India (as compared to 320 in Pakistan) die in childbirth per 100,000 live births. India also has a greater rate of under-age mothers than Pakistan does. India also has a dismal sex ratio (108.5 male births per every 100 female births), again worse than Pakistan's performance on this score. In states like Gujarat, Haryana and Punjab (relatively more prosperous and 'developing') as well as the national capital Delhi, the sex ratio soars to 126 male births per 100 female births.

Another report: WEF's Global Gender Gap Report 2010 says India's position is abysmal. The Global Gender Gap Report's index assesses 134 countries on how well they divide resources and opportunities amongst male and female populations, regardless of the overall levels of these resources.

The report measures the size of the gender inequality gap in four areas:

(1) Economic participation and opportunity - outcomes on salaries, participation levels and access to high-skilled employment, (2) Educational attainment - outcomes on access to basic and higher level education, (3) Political empowerment - outcomes on representation in decision-making structures, (4) Health and survival - outcomes on life expectancy and sex ratio.

Out of 134 countries surveyed, India is among the lowest ranked countries at the 112th position, with a score of 0.6155. The index ranks 134 economies according to the size of the gaps between men and women.

"India (112) occupies one of the last places in the regional rankings. India has not been making much improvement over the years. In 2006, it was ranked 98, but dropped to 114 in 2007, climbed to 113 in 2008, dropped to 114 in 2009, and climbed back to 112 in 2010. In other words, the persistent health, education and economic participation gaps haven't been making much headway despite having a woman as the President, and a woman leading the country's ruling political party", the report says.

India has lacked the courage and commitment to pass the Women's Reservation Bill, and as a result women's representation in Indian Parliament stands at a dismal 9%. Even our neighbours like

Pakistan and Nepal have shown greater will to challenge inequality - thanks to laws reserving seats for women, Pakistan has 21.2% women in parliament and Nepal, 33%.

The Indian Government never tires of boasting about India's rising global prestige and progress. But can a country where the numbers of mothers who die in childbirth and daughters killed in the womb are on the rise, and where the government is too weak in political courage to tackle the feudal violence of honour crimes, really claim to be 'progressive' or even modern and democratic?

Obituary: Comrade Pravesh Kumar

Comrade Pravesh Kumar, who had joined our Party in 2007 and was an employee of the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), was fatally wounded in a road accident on 15th October near ITO in Delhi. He struggled for life for four days but could not emerge from coma and passed away at the LNJP Hospital on the 18th October 2010. His wife Smt. Vijay Lakshmi Sharma, who was with him at the time of accident is still undergoing treatment.

Born on 5 July 1956 in a working class family of Hoshiarpur in Punjab, he had worked very hard to strengthen economic and social aspects of his family. He always gave priority to Party work. He was a regular subscriber of Party organ and always helped Party and his close associates and relatives despite economic hardships. The comrades in DTC will always remember him as one who never let his spirit take a plunge in any situation and was always enthusiastic to face any situation. The Party pays its tribute to the departed Comrade and conveys its deepest condolences to his bereaved wife, two sons, and his parents.

Red Salute to Comrade Pravesh Kumar

P.S.

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