

# ML Update: 19-25 Oct. 2010

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## The CWG Aftermath: Lessons and Challenges

The Commonwealth Games 2010 are finally over. India finished second with 38 gold medals (third in overall medal tally), with Indian women participants contributing nearly 40% of the total medals. This is certainly a high point in the country's performance in international sporting events, revealing the great potential that can be tapped with appropriate policies and care. The corrupt and inept organizers of CWG 2010 are now trying to bask in this glory achieved by Indian sportspersons, hoping that the country will forget and forgive the huge scams and bungling that made everybody aware of the CWG in the first place. We cannot let that happen.

The UPA government has announced a high-level probe headed by former Comptroller and Auditor General VK Shungloo into various allegations of irregularities concerning the conduct of the Games. Several investigative agencies including the CBI, Central Vigilance Commission, Enforcement Directorate are supposedly already looking into various aspects of the CWG mega scam. The Public Accounts Committee of Parliament, headed by Murli Manohar Joshi of the BJP, is reportedly also ready to table its report regarding the CWG expenses in the forthcoming winter session of Parliament. The report was apparently held back by the BJP till the Games were over, ostensibly to protect 'national pride'.

There is a strong public opinion in the country that wants responsibility to be fixed for the mammoth CWG mess. But given the maze of scams and the multiplicity of agencies involved in the whole process of organizing and conducting the Games, it is quite possible that the process of investigation will get lost in the bureaucratic labyrinth and the political game of mutual mudslinging and shadowboxing. Already there are signs that the whole thing is being sought to be reduced to a showdown between a Kalmadi and a Dixit or the CWG Organising Committee versus Delhi Government. The government has decades of experience in delaying and diverting such probes and blunting their edge by finding a scapegoat or two. Moreover, the major political parties are all closely involved in the business of running the sports and games show in the country. Pushing the CWG probe to at least some reasonable level of logical conclusion will therefore call for a high degree of sustained civil society activism.

The CWG debate concerns not just misappropriation or wastage of public funds and bureaucratic inefficiency and bungling, but equally importantly issues related to the sports policy, orientation and priorities of the government. Even after sixty-three years of independence, sports in India remain largely an elitist domain. Yet the bulk of the medals have come from disciplines like wrestling, boxing and weightlifting in which people from rather humble backgrounds have been

excelling in event after event. All that is needed is to ensure that more and more people have access to sports facilities from an early age which in turn demands massive decentralization of training facilities and provision of adequate sports scholarships for promising talents. But the government's obsession with sporting extravaganzas like the CWG 2010 comes precisely at the cost of such a sustained and decentralized thrust on the promotion of sports. It would be instructive to contrast the expenditure on the 1982 Asiad and CWG 2010 to the country's cumulative total sports budgets since independence.

There are also some striking socio-cultural and socio-economic aspects to the CWG lessons. Many of the medals won by the Indian contingent have been claimed by women participants. And a good number of these women winners are from the Punjab-Haryana belt, notorious for its patriarchal environment and institutionalized discrimination against the female sex, including rampant killing whether in the embryonic stage or in the name of family/caste/clan honour. Then there are tribal women from backward states like Jharkhand who have time and again proved that they can excel in several disciplines like athletics, archery and hockey but are often subjected to the vagaries of migration and deprivation. Improvement in the conditions of women whether in India's economically advanced states or in backward areas can open up great new vistas in the advancement of sports in India.

Sections of the media have tended to project CWG 2010 as India's answer to the 2008 Beijing Olympics. But surely the run-up to Beijing 2008 was not marked by the kind of murky scams and bureaucratic mess that became synonymous with the Indian preparation for CWG 2010? And China proved that there is more to national pride than spectacular opening and closing ceremonies, world class urban infrastructure and the hassle-free hosting of mega global events - it was China's own sporting performance in the Olympics which put China on top of the world. India did put up a much improved sporting performance, but still has miles to go on every count, and the reason must not be sought only within the sporting arena for it lies first of all in the poor quality of India's social indicators.

The 2010 Global Hunger Index released recently by the International Food Policy Research Institute gives us one crucial clue. Among 84 countries ranked on the basis of three leading indicators - prevalence of child malnutrition, rate of child mortality, and the proportion of people who are calorie deficient - India was found to be lagging at the 67<sup>th</sup> place, way behind the 9<sup>th</sup> position held by China. Among India's other neighbours only Bangladesh has a worse rank (68<sup>th</sup>) while Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Nepal are all placed significantly ahead of India at 39<sup>th</sup>, 52<sup>nd</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> position respectively. In spite of a bigger population, China can still boast of a strong baseline and much better facilities and greater access for its vast human resources, even though the current policy regime of China has clearly led to greater income and regional disparities in the country.

If the aftermath of CWG 2010 witnesses a focused public debate on the orientation and priorities of India's sports policy and the wider social environment obtaining in the country, we can at least have the satisfaction of deriving a healthy byproduct from an eminently avoidable and wasteful extravaganza.

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## **CPI(ML) Candidate from Sandesh Comrade Rameshwar Prasad Arrested**

Former MP and president of All India Agricultural Labour Association, Comrade Rameshwar Prasad, who is the CPI(ML) candidate from Sandesh constituency of Bhojpur in the upcoming Bihar Assembly polls, was arrested on 19 October when he came to file his nominations. To arrest him, a decade-old case pertaining to a protest against police firing which had claimed the lives of four CPI(ML) supporters was invoked. In August 2000, a massive protest demonstration had been held at the Arrah Collectorate against the fake encounter in which CPI(ML) activist Vishwanath Ram was killed. The police opened fire on the demonstrators and four of them - Vishram Pandey, Harey Ram Mushahar and Dharmendra Kumar as well as a 16 year old student Anand Kumar, were killed. While the police firing case against accused police officers is still pending, police had also filed a case against CPI(ML) leaders (No. 237/2000) in the Ara/Nawada Police Station. It is this case that has been unearthed to arrest Comrade Rameshwar Prasad. It should be noted that when Comrade Rameshwar contested the Lok Sabha polls recently this case was not invoked to arrest him. Significantly, the case in question was used as a pretext in 2009 to brand legendary CPI(ML) MLA Ram Naresh Ram as well as Rameshwar Prasad as 'extremists' and seek non-bailable warrants against them. At that time, there was vociferous protest within the Bihar Assembly against this attempt at witch-hunt, and the police was forced to go on the back foot. Now again the same case - in which it was the police who killed unarmed protestors in firing, and clearly the case against CPI(ML) leaders is a retaliatory action by offending police officers - which is being used to harass a CPI(ML) candidate.

The CPI(ML) has strongly condemned such political targeting and motivated arrest of a party leader and candidate in the Bihar Assembly polls and has demanded release of Comrade Rameshwar Prasad and withdrawal of the decade-old case against him and other party leaders.

### **Students & Youth Gherao Singur Police Station**

While the commemoration programme of fourth martyrdom anniversary of Rajkumar Bhul was underway at Singur, news reached that Police had lathicharged the protestors agitating against pollution caused by the Himadri Chemicals factory in the area and had arrested Bhaskar Dhara, leader of the anti-pollution movement.

Condemning the lathicharge and arrest, AISA and RYA organisers immediately gheraoed Singur Police Station. They demanded that Bhaskar Dhara be released and the polluters be taken into police custody. CPI (ML) Liberation leader Sajal Adhikari and State committee leader Tapan Batabyal were also present during the gherao. There is a long tradition of the CPI (ML)'s solidarity with agitating villagers in the anti-pollution movement.

The protesting villagers complained that Himadri Chemicals had been dumping waste on the surroundings since a long time, paying no heed even to the directives of the Pollution Control Board. However the Police and Administration failed to take any steps against the factory authorities. Environmental conditions of the areas adjacent to the factory are deteriorating steadily. In the morning of that day, pitch from the factory was being strewn on the road. Angry villagers put up a road-blockade in protest. Police arrived only to lathicharge the protesters. They took along Bhaskar Dhara on the pretext of holding discussions, and eventually arrested him. As the thana gherao gained momentum with local people joining the students' and youth leaders in large numbers, the IC and OCs of Singur and Haripalpur Police Stations shed their initial reluctance to listen to the demands of the gherao. They admitted complaints on the pollution and promised all the necessary action to address the matter. The gherao was then lifted. The CPI (ML) district leadership visited the affected village and discussed at length with the villagers the future strategies of the movement.

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## **Workers' Struggles From Around the World: Snapshots**

### **FRANCE**

#### **Refinery Workers on Strike**

More than 10 percent of French service stations were estimated to be out of fuel after walkouts and blockades at ports, refineries and storage depots halted imports and distribution.

Refinery management threatened workers who refused to return to work with five years in prison. The workers' strike is part of the ongoing upsurge among workers in different sectors all over France against a government plan to raise the retirement age.

### **GREECE**

#### **Contract workers blockade ministry entrance**

Protesting culture ministry contract employees staged a blockade/sit-in of the entrance to the ministry on 18 October. The contract employees are demanding payment of 22 months in back pay, extension of their close-ended contracts and filling in organic vacancies at the ministry with tenured personnel. They also called on contract workers to take part in the 24-hour strike called by the Association of Greek Archaeologists on Thursday.

### **BELGIUM**

#### **Railway strike**

On 18 October, rail traffic ground to a halt in Belgium in response to a strike call by the Socialist trade union ACOD in protest against reform in rail freight transport which ACOD claims will cost hundreds of train drivers' jobs.

### **BANGLADESH**

#### **Postal workers' strike**

At least 24,000 non-permanent Bangladeshi postal department workers walked off the job for 12 days on October 9 over a charter of demands. Bangladesh Postal Extra-Departmental Workers' Union members also struck for 12 days in July over the same issues, affecting mail services at 8,500 rural post offices and over 600 extra-departmental sub-post offices in metro Khulna. The union wants payment of festival, travel and outfit allowances, permanent appointment after five years' service and the basic wage increased to between 3,200 and 4,500 taka a month. The union has threatened to call an indefinite strike on December 6 if its demands are not met.

#### **Chittagong port workers strike**

Dock Bandar Sramik Karmachari Federation (DBSKF) members at the government-run Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) struck on October 11 and picketed several berths operated by private companies recently contracted by the port authority. The private operators have refused to employ

CPA workers.

DBCKF members want the six private berth operators' contracts cancelled and the reemployment of thousands of workers retrenched since 2007 when the dock management board was dissolved by the then caretaker government.

After port workers took strike action in August over the issue, the CPA agreed to set up a multi-representative committee and reinstated 1,800 workers. Another 2,500 reinstatements have been approved by the committee but the union alleges that the port authority is delaying the reinstatements in line with its plans to privatise the facility

## **CHILE**

Mine rescue exposes precarious working conditions

The collapse of the San Jose gold and copper mine that trapped 33 miners for 10 weeks 2,300 feet below ground has focused attention on the safety of operations at Chilean mines. Over the past 30 years, the mining industry, which accounts for 40 percent of Chile's gross domestic product, has profited from the high price of copper, gold and other commodities while keeping costs low by neglecting safety and accelerating the exploitation of its mining workforce.

The San Jose mine incident exemplifies what has happened to mine safety in Chile since the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Under Pinochet, in the name of regulation and free market capitalism, virtually all safety regulations were dismantled. A key player in that process was current president Sebastian Pinera's older brother, Jose Pinera, minister of labor in 1980. Jose Pinera was tasked with creating a labor code that would not interfere with big business profits. In the name of a more flexible labor code that would stimulate economic growth, he abolished labor rights that had been won through decades of bitter struggle by the Chilean working class. The labor code established in 1980 continues to be the law of the land in Chile today. As a result, fully 50 percent of Chile's working class has no stable employment. At least five of the 33 miners rescued from San Jose fall under this category. The Chilean government has yet to ratify the International Labor Organization's 1995 agreement on mine health and safety. Convention 176 commits mining nations such as Peru, Mexico and Chile to undertake a modicum of health and safety measures and to commit themselves to the elimination of mine deaths by creating a national policy on health and safety, which includes regular inspections as well as provisions to protect miners from retaliation for exposing violations. The latter is a real problem in Chile, where workers are routinely sacked for complaining about their working conditions.

Since the turn of the century, some 350 miners have died from mine accidents in Chile, a number that may well be an underestimation. According to Dick Blin, a spokesman for the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM), worldwide some 12,000 miners die every year, well above official figures. The under-reporting of mine fatalities is most glaring at small mines, such as the one at San Jose.

## **Never Give an Inch**

*"On lâche rien," a song by HK & les Saltimbanks (Kadour Haddadi and his band), has been adopted by French workers on strike against the Sarkozy-Woerth plan to raise the retirement age.*

(Source: MRZine, 16.10.2010)

From the bottom of my urban project  
Deep into your countryside

The reality has changed  
And the revolt is brewing everywhere  
In this world there was no place for us  
We didn't look the part  
We were not to the manor born  
Not on daddy's plastic  
The homeless, the unemployed, workers  
Farmers, immigrants, the undocumented  
They wanted to divide us  
And to say they succeeded  
As long as it was every man for himself  
Their system could prosper

But one day we had to wake up  
The heads had to roll  
We'll never give an inch  
They told us about equality  
And like fools we believed them  
"Democracy" makes me laugh  
If we had had it we would have known it  
What's the worth of our votes  
Up against the law of the market?  
They say "my dear fellow countrymen"  
But we're cheated all the same  
And what's the worth of human rights  
Up against the airbus sale?  
The bottom line, there's only one law, in sum:  
"Sell yourself more to sell more."  
We no longer believe  
Their beautiful words  
Our leaders are liars  
**We'll never give an inch**

So stupid, so trite,  
To speak of peace and brotherhood  
When the homeless are dying in the streets  
And the undocumented are being driven out  
Crumbs are thrown to proles  
That's just in the history of the silent  
They don't attack millionaire bosses  
"Too important for our society"  
It's crazy the way they are protected  
All our rich and powerful  
Not to mention the help they get  
For being the friends of the president  
Dear comrades, dear "voters"  
Dear "citizen-consumers"  
The alarm is ringing  
It's time  
To reset to zero  
As long as there's struggle and hope

As long as there's life and battle  
As long as we're fighting, we're standing  
Here's the key  
We're standing, we won't give an inch  
The passion for victory runs in our blood  
Now you know why we are fighting  
Our ideal, more than a dream  
Another world, we have no choice  
**We'll never give an inch**

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**P.S.**

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