

DEFEAT The BJP – Combine In Forthcoming Election

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The country is going to the polls to elect the 14th Lok Sabha in April and May consequent upon dissolution of 13th Lok Sabha by the President as per recommendation of the NDA cabinet.

During the run up to the elections to the 13th Lok Sabha, the battle cry of the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee was 'fixed 5 year tenure for Lok Sabha' while the NDA government had embarked on a Constitution Review exercise. Throwing all that talk to the winds, the same PM has now advised the President to dissolve the Lok Sabha prematurely to enable the BJP to seek a fresh mandate from the people. This is nothing but the buoyant mood under which the BJP top brass is feeling exhilarated after its success in the Assembly elections in three states, due to the anti-incumbency sentiments. They have a fond hope that it can help them win the parliamentary elections as well.

In this background the working class movement of the country has to decide its task. And they have to decide on the basis of their experience of the last five years' BJP led governance.

A GOVERNMENT OF DEGENERATION AND DISTORTION

The last five years' BJP led governance witnessed all round degeneration and perverse distortion of the social, political and cultural values, accompanied by disaster on the economic front.

The Vajpayee regime has been marked by its pro-imperialist foreign policy tilt, resurgence of worst communal rioting, lawlessness and incendiary violence, record number of scams involving the NDA ministers and leaders, a shift back to aggressive 'hindutva' plank for vote bank mobilisation and onslaughts on the democratic rights of the common people.

BARTERING HUMAN-LIVES WITH POWER

This ought to be under the BJP-rule. Its economic policy is directed to serve the forces of big landlords and capital, both domestic and foreign, and mass of the populace has to bear the burden. In every budget during 1998-2003 and also in the interim pre-election budget of 2004, a huge bonanza was given to the capitalists and landlords amounting at least Rs 20000 crore every year in the form of tax-concessions, grants and various other give-aways and institutional arrangements, which came back upon the people through burden of taxation, high prices, closure of factories, job-losses and in various other ways. And in the face of mounting discontent among the people against such pro-rich policies, the BJP bandwagon, in a calculated manner, resorted to nasty tricks, even at the cost of human lives to create grounds for communal riots, to bring about a different divisive polarization among the electorates, just to retain themselves in power. The Gujarat riot including its antecedent, the Godhra carnage now appears to be the handiwork of the RSS outfits, just to retain BJP in political power in Gujarat and help them to occupy governments in other states.

A GOVERNMENT OF CHEATS AND SCAMSTARS

BJP came to occupy the seat of governance at the centre by cheating the people and using the divisive route. They had been able to carry on for five years playing the same balls of trickery and communal ploy together. And now, in the face of forthcoming election, resorted to the same route of cheating the people through mis-information campaign on the one hand and rousing communal frenzy on the other to manage themselves back to political power.

The last five-years' governance has exposed the BJP-led combine as enemy of the nation and enemy of the people.

Its economic policies are directed towards mortgaging the country's economic sovereignty to the imperialist powers at the cost of the country's self-reliant development.

They are frittering away national wealth created in last fifty years through its reckless privatisation drive. And in this process, the control of country's huge natural resources and vital services and utilities are being handed over to private hands, both domestic and foreign.

Further, each and every case of privatisation has ultimately turned out to be a corrupt deal of handing over the asset rich PSU to the buyer, practically free of cost. The country's exchequer lost heavily and the gainers, in all the cases are the private buyers and the officials and ministers handling the deals. Corruption in privatisation no more remained a hush-hush under the table affair but got systematized through institutional arrangement of gross under valuation of assets and shares. The BJP led government has also earned the dubious distinction of being the champion of scams with number of ministers of the NDA cabinet having been caught red-handed while accepting bribes and kickbacks and indulging corrupt deals in defense purchases. In fact the Bofors scandal of Rajiv Gandhi regime has turned out to be a pygmy in the repetitive stock-market scams, Kargil-coffin scam, Tehelka expose, Stamp-paper and foreign currency scam and various others erupted and directly handled by many of the cabinet ministers under BJP rule.

CHEATING CONTINUES....

Come election and the NDA bandwagon has jumped on an aggressive lie-campaign in the media, both print and electronic, spending several hundreds of crore from national exchequer. Some of those lies are analysed hereunder.

BONANZA FOR ELITES AT THE COST OF COMMON PEOPLE

Cut in peak rate of customs duty on non-agricultural goods, on cell phones, coal, some equipments and components, allowing lap-top computers as free baggage, raising of permissible limit of duty-free import of foreign liquor, drastic cut in inland travel tax and foreign travel tax for air-travel and 50% cut in excise duty on aviation fuel etc are the priority of the Vajpayee Govt. as reflected in the interim budget placed in January 2004. Hardly 10 per cent people will be benefited by these largesse but it will burden the exchequer a heavy loss of revenue to the tune of around Rs 11000 crore till March 2004 itself.

FOR THE PEOPLE AT LARGE...

ONLY GRAND PLANS FOR PUBLIC CONSUMPTION BUT NO FUNDS

The Finance Minister announced grand plans of constituting "Agricultural Infrastructure Fund" of Rs 50000 crore and another "Small and Medium Industries Fund" of another Rs 50000 crore. But the announcement is for mere public consumption to cheat them for getting votes. Actual budget allocation for such One-lakh crore-fund commitment is a meager Rs 2000 crore for the entire fiscal year that too on one account only.

THE BLUFF CALLED SOCIAL SECURITY

Electronic media is daily showing the Netaji-like posture of Vajpayee announcing the "Social Security Scheme for 37 crore workers of unorganised sector workers" which will ensure Rs 500 monthly pension to all after retirement besides accident insurance of Rs 1,25,000 and health insurance of Rs 30000. Another unalloyed falsehood!

The interim budget of Vajpayee has not sanctioned a single pie for the said scheme although the Govt. is supposed to pay 1.16% of minimum wage per every worker for the said social security corpus. The written scheme and the statement circulated by the Govt. on 23rd January 2004 stipulates that the scheme is meant for only 25 lakh workers in 50 select districts for a period of next five years — not even a miniscule fraction of “37 crore”. These facts are not stated in the media campaign, because facts cannot cheat and mislead.

MYTH OF 8 PER CENT GROWTH

Much euphoria is being created about 8 per cent growth in GDP in the current year. The Vajpayee Govt. can definitely claim credit, but for not for attaining a higher economic growth in real terms, but for forging and juggling with statistics. They did not mention that the last year the economy marked an abysmally low growth rate owing to industrial slow-down, and a decline in agriculture in a drought affected year. And a low base of previous year's growth rate has made this year's rate comparatively higher. In order to make the growth picture glossy, the previous year's declared growth rate has been further revised downward twice from 4.8 per cent to 4.3 and further to 4 per cent to project election year's growth rate reaching the 8 per cent target. What else can be called statistical forgery?

Looking into the annual average growth over last five years people may make the reality check of state of the economy under NDA rule. The figures published by Economic Surveys and Reserve Bank depict that:

1. The annual economic growth during all the three years in the new millennium till 2003 fell well below the average growth rate of 1990s, meaning thereby that the first decade of liberalized policy regime set the economy in the track of

decline.

2. As compared with the average yearly growth rates of 6.7% of the pre-NDA regime, the growth rate declined during 1998-2003 in the NDA regime well below 5%.

MYTH OF 84 LAKH JOB CREATION

The Prime Minister earlier announced a commitment for generating one crore additional jobs every year. And as the election is approaching nearby, the Prime Minister, posing himself to be more credible, has claimed that 84 lakh jobs have been created last year. Again an unalloyed falsehood.

The organized sector employment has been declining consistently over last five years. As admitted by the Union Labour Minister in Parliament, the year ending March 31, 2002 recorded a further drop of 4.2 lakh, making it the fifth consecutive year of decline. In all, in the five years between 1996-97 and 2001-02, there has been a destruction of about 8.8 lakh organized sector jobs. An analysis of the employment scenario indicates that mining and quarrying registered the highest decrease of 5.1 per cent, followed by 2.6 per cent in manufacturing. Zone-wise analysis of the growth of employment in the quarter ended March 2001 over the quarter ended March 2000 indicates the highest decrease of 3.01 per cent in the central zone, followed by 1.06 per cent decrease in the western zone and 0.84 per cent in the northern zone. State and Union Territory-wise analysis reflects that only Pondicherry, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh recorded a decrease of more than 3 per cent.

Quasi government (central) registered a highest decline employment (3.59 per cent) followed by state government, quasi government (state) and central government, which recorded a decline of 0.47 per cent, 0.41 per cent and 0.38 per cent, respectively (Business Standard, 17 May, 2003.) The Govt. sector as well, in tune with the decision of the

central govt. to downsize the total manpower by 10% in next five years, i.e., at the rate of 66000 every year, the employment growth has already turned negative.

And this trend of consistent decline in employment in the organized sector is continuing. Last year in 2003, 10,000 posts in postal deptt. were abolished and Govt. of the day intends to reduce number of extra-departmental employees to 1 lakh from over 3 lakh at present. In Railways there were 1.57 lakh vacancies as on 30.11.2003, in Group 'C' and Group 'D' category, which are not being filled up to facilitate outsourcing and future Corporatisation/ Privatisation. Income Tax department is going for large-scale outsourcing, rendering about 30,000 out of 55,000 employees redundant. Geological Survey's main functions like Coal and offshore exploration are being reduced, making 4500 employees redundant. National Savings Organisation has been dismantled throwing out 1100 employees. Govt. of India Form Store, Office of Development Commissioner for iron and steel, Asst. Director (outside printing) Deptt. of supply located in Kolkata have been ordered outright closure. Govt. of India Stationary Office, employing about 800 employees is going to be closed by Sept. 2004. And as per the latest reports, in March 2004 itself, around 8000 jobs in the four nationalized general insurance companies are going to be axed through VRS as reported by the economic dailies(The Economic Times, 02-03-2004).

Then where from the 84 lakh new job generation was created? Govt. of the day is claiming that the unorganised sector and Information Technology (IT) sector are the areas of such job creation.

The real situation in the IT sector does not vouch for that. As per data available from Tata Economic Services, IT sector employment is around 7 lakh by the end of 2002, which represent a miniscule fraction of the total employment. And

even greater part of such IT sector are servicing, not the domestic economy but that of other countries through business Process Outsourcing (BPO) route which are not sustainable as the BPO has already started facing rough weather in the off-loader countries. Further, as per an estimate made by a study on supply and demand of IT professionals in the country, the total supply of IT professionals will reach 11.68 lakh in next four years whereas the related IT jobs may increase to around 11.20 lakh during the same period creating thereby unemployment of around 48000 in IT sector alone (Indian Express, 27-02-2004). The projection on increase in IT jobs has been made on the assumption that present trend of outsourcing from abroad will continue without hurdles, which is not at all a realistic assumption. Therefore, intensity of unemployment even in the IT sector is bound to aggravate unless the economic policy is retuned to more organized sector employment within the manufacturing sector. The present BJP led regime does not envisage any such retuning of their industrial policy.

In the unorganised sector also, the real picture of employment generation is not at all brighter as being claimed. Agriculture, mining-quarries and construction are major sectors responsible for greater part of the unorganised sector employment. As per Economic Survey (2001-02), during last five years, both agriculture and mining quarrying witnessed an absolute drop in employment to the tune of 50 lakh and 4.3 lakh respectively. During that period, the construction sector accounted for an increase in employment by around 51 lakh. Hence, three sectors representing major part of unorganised sector employment, taken together, witnessed a negative growth in employment generation.

To summarise, the organized sector witnessed absolute decline in employment during the NDA regime. And the trend

of employment growth during last five years also shows that even in unorganised sector the employment growth is quite minimal. Nothing can substantiate the false claim of the NDA regarding 84 lakh new job-creation in 2003!

And how could the employment generation take place in a big way where the economic policy itself is tuned for jobless growth and towards erosion of domestic manufacturing capability of the country's economy. Reckless import liberalization, even beyond the WTO requirement and slashing down of import duties, while keeping the excise duties more or less unchanged have created havoc for country's manufacturing sector. The BJP's economic policy is aimed at that direction only which is bringing about ruinous distortions in the entire economy. That is why, despite the banks being flush with investible funds, the growth rate of domestic investment is dipping fast; and at the same time farmers are not getting credit owing to high and discriminatory interest rate; despite the godowns bulging with food-grains stock, people are dying in hunger.

In the situation when 'downsizing' and 'contractualisation' have become the driving strategy for the government to cut cost, it has inspired the private sector to resort to reduction in labour cost through lock-outs, unofficial closure, retrenchment etc., violating all statutes. In such a situation, employment generation is bound to decline and the crisis is bound to be more severe among the educated unemployed, and none but the desperate liars can boast of sizable overall employment generation.

CROCODILE TEARS FOR THE RURAL POOR !

What does the fact sheet say on NDA's performance in the field of rural development expenditure, which includes all employment generation programmes, special areas

programmes, village industry, irrigation and flood control etc.? It was a story of consistently robbing the rural economy and depriving the rural folk of their due share of GDP. The rural development expenditure has fallen from 14.5% of GDP during 1985-90 to 8% in early 1990s and further to 6% of GDP on the average in the years following 1998 and in some years it has fallen below 5 per cent. This means, in real terms "a reduction in rural development expenditure of about Rs. 30000 crore annually on the average compared to pre-reform years" which in turn "means a drop in incomes in agriculture to the tune of between Rs. 20000 crore to Rs 1,50,000 crore—a massive contraction indeed.

As a corollary to above situation, the gross capital formation in agriculture as percentage of GDP is consistently falling to reach merely 1.3% in 2001-02, notwithstanding all liberalization measures and all concessions to big landlords. Annual growth rate in agricultural employment also has also gone down from 1.51% during 1983-93 to an absolute decline of -0.34% during 1993-2000 and the same trend continues in the current years as well. The agricultural workers representing the overwhelming majority of rural working population, get hardly 100 days work in a year and still considered employed in the official employment statistics. Simultaneously, there has been a large increase in landless rural households as a percentage of total rural households from 35% in 1987-88 to as high as 41% in 1999-2000.

The NDA bosses have claimed through advertisements that the minimum support price (MSP) has increased from 15% to 56% during their regime. But that advertisement most unscrupulously concealed that such increase is more than offset by slow-down of procurement and also by phenomenal rise in the cost of agricultural input. The fertilizer price has increased by more than 50%. Diesel has become costlier by more than 100% and kerosene prices more than trebled.

The cost of power, irrigation and other agri-inputs also has risen by more than 100 per cent during last five years. For the middle and marginal farmers, representing the majority of the farmers, the incidence of such cost is much more heavier owing to high rent for such services charged by the big-landlord lobby. Much more is being robbed from them than what they are supposed to get through such so called increase in MSP.

FOOD FOR THE HUNGRY POOR !

The Prime Minister boastfully announced the increased coverage of Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) for 50 lakh more rural poor in addition to existing 150 lakh. They are supposed to get limited amount of rice at Rs 2 a kg and wheat at Rs 3 a kg.

The allocation for the scheme is only Rs 2000 crore. Does it make any sense when around 350 million people are living below poverty line ?

The per-capita absorption of food grains has sharply fallen from 174.2 kg per year in 1997-98 to mere 151.06 kg in the pre-drought year in 2000-01 with a marginal increase to 156.55 kg in post-drought 2002-03. The situation will look grimmer if we look into the minimum calories-intake by rural people. More than 66.6 per cent of the rural population goes extremely undernourished in terms of food intake. As per the Report of Food & Agricultural Organisation (FAO) on Food Security, 2000, the absolute number of hungry people in India has increased from 19.40 crore in 1995-97 to 21.45 crore in 1999-2001. As per an estimate, at least 16000 farmers committed suicide during last five years.

And even most of this meager allocation for AAY will not reach the targeted population. Such is the state of rural-society management in most of the states in the country.

The Public Distribution System and the Fair-price shops are the agencies through which the AAY is being implemented. How do those agencies work or to put more appropriately, how are they made to work by the Govt. aiming at dismantling the entire public distribution system ?

A Study by National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) revealed that 20 to 25 per cent of the rice allotted to below poverty line (BPL) cardholders in Tamilnadu, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra and 50 per cent of the rice allotted to above poverty line (APL) card holders is being diverted elsewhere at Fair-price-Shop (FPS) level itself. According to the study, 50 per cent of wheat allotted to BPL people has been diverted in Madhya Pradesh. In Maharashtra the diversion is found to be more than 50 per cent (Business Line, 04-02-2003).

The Govt. of the day is loudly claiming that Rs 27000 crore is spent as food-subsidy. But what is the real story ? Parliamentary Standing Committee Chairman for food and civil supplies, Devendra Yadav, who as Food Minister introduced targeted PDS in 1997, said, " Sixty five per cent of the Rs 27000 crore food subsidy goes to bureaucrats' salary, establishment costs, storage, traders and exporters. The remaining 35 per cent goes by way of diversions and pilferage." (Times of India, 31-12-2003) According to a survey of below-poverty-line (BPL) families and PDS shops in east Delhi by 'Parivartan', an NGO, over 70 per cent of the subsidised food grains do not reach the desperately poor. The Parivartan had surveyed 160 families in Welcome colony near Seelampur in east Delhi. The survey report reveals, "not a single family has got full amount of ration. Only 23 per cent got something, that too lesser than the prescribed amount and at a higher price." (Times of India, 31-12-2003)

The fate of the AAY allocation is any body's guess. The

Rice at Rs 2 a kg and wheat at Rs 3 a kg, or in that matter the major part of the allocations under targeted PDS for BPL families have become a bonanza not for the targeted poor but for the unscrupulous traders who are pushing the subsidized food-grains to open market selling grains Rs 10 a kg and even to the foreign market at Rs 5 a kg. The diversion of the BPL food grains from the fair-price shops to traders and mortgaging of the BPL cards with the trading community are common phenomenon in most of the states. Definitely the traders, and fair-price shop owners will feel good and welcome the NDA announcements, not the mass of the people whom such announcement was meant for. These are announcements to fish votes and not for acting upon !

“INDIA SHINING” or “FEEL GOOD” FOR WHOM?

A massive self-congratulatory advertisement blitz was planfully launched by the BJP with life-size portrayal of Prime Minister and others with a view to creating pro-NDA euphoria through a so called “feel good” or “India shining” campaign. The common people of India do not see any feel good factor or India shining.. After all during the last two years India's ranking among the 175 countries regarding Human Development Index has gone down from 123 to 127! Is it a sign of shining ?

Then who are the claimants of the feel good factor? L K Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Uma Bharati, in spite of being charge sheeted in a criminal case are still enjoying the fruits of power in India and hence feeling good no doubt. George Fernandes who still enjoys the chair of Minister of Defense despite being exposed by the Tehelka tapes in bribe scandal and coffin-scam will also be enjoying the ‘feel good’ to his heart's content. Telgi scam-tainted police officers and MLAs who enjoyed fruits of Rs 60,000 crore swindle are also feeling really good. The private sector tycoons being gifted

with valuable PSUs on a platter would no doubt join the feel-good partying. The PMO beneficiaries of UTI scandal and also the five Cabinet Ministers against whom CVC gave a report to the Prime Minister have also reasons to believe in feel good factor. The Corporate-accumulators of Non Performing Assets of public sector banks to the tune of Rs 1,20,000 crore and the corporate evaders of tax obligations of Rs 1.50 lakh crore have never felt so good as of now. The CII, FICCI and the employers lobby also are definitely in the "feel good" circle as the workers rights are being taken away both by labour-law-changes and also well-planned administrative ferocity on the trade union movement and Tamilnadu stands before us as the burning example.

WORKING CLASS—THE WORST VICTIM

The working class got a raw deal during the NDA regime. Their rights and livelihood have been targeted for systematic onslaughts, one after another. On the one hand the Govt. has carried on hectic exercise to change the labour laws thoroughly to introduce a 'hire & fire' regime and legalise total contractorisation and thereby impose conditions of slavery on them. Being unable to bring the bill for such legislative changes in Parliament, owing to militant opposition by the trade union movement, the NDA Govt. has hurriedly provided the employers class through executive order the license to introduce "fixed term employment" with the unfettered right to retrench at the expiry of the term even without giving notice. Simultaneously, the private sector employers resorted to indiscriminate lock-outs without caring for the minimum statutory formalities, with the active support of the govt. It is not without reason that during the NDA regime, the man days lost due to lock-outs have been many times more than that due to strike and in 1999 in particular, lock-out accounted for eight times more manday-loss than strike. It is a matter of shame that the Supreme Court could afford to ignore such extreme

perversion of the employers 'class while pronouncing ban on workers' right to strike.

CUT IN INTEREST RATE ON SAVINGS

During the same regime, the working people have been desperately looted on all counts. In the name of low interest rate regime, the interest rate on workers life-time savings in Provident Fund have been consistently reduced every year from 12% to 9 per cent (for the govt. employees 8%) as on date and it is slated for further reduction to 8% from 1st April 2004. The loot will continue in the coming years if the same NDA bandwagon continues in power. Not only in PF, interest rate on all small savings instruments, viz., National Savings Certificate, Kissan Vikash Patra etc., which are generally availed by the workers and employees and also the retired people at large are being deliberately slashed down causing huge loss to them and circumstantially forcing them to park their savings in the stock market to promote gambling by the business community. For the central govt. employees another tortuous salvo has been hurled by making the pension scheme contributory for the new entrants.

The latest announcement of merger of DA with pay for the central govt. employees as per recommendation of the fifth Pay Commission has come- not out of the generosity of the NDA cabinet but out of the pre-election compulsion of the NDA combine in the background of mounting unrest among the employees community reflected in the preparatory activities for the 24th February strike. It was as per decision of the same NDA Cabinet, the Finance Secretary of the Central Govt. conveyed the outright rejection of the same demand of the employees for DA-merger to the members of the Joint Consultative Machinery (JCM) only few months back and these are all matters of record. Moreover, this announcement of DA merger by the NDA Govt. cannot just

wash away the crimes being continuously committed to the employees in particular and the people in general through reckless downsizing, closure of offices and establishments, privatization of vital public utilities and handing over them to the profit-hungry sharks of private business lobby, both domestic and foreign.

RECKLESS DOWNSIZING AND PRIVATISATION OF PUBLIC UTILITY SERVICES

In this context, one point must be clarified. The Govt. of the day justifies downsizing in Govt. departments on ground of there being surplus manpower. This is an unalloyed distortion of facts. The reckless downsizing in govt. services is nothing but a crooked ploy to hand over such public utility services to private hands. So far as manpower is concerned, employment in public services is by far lowest in India compared to other countries. The ratio of public employees to population is more than 6 per thousand in USA, it is still higher in the European countries, and even in the developing countries the said ratio is above four per thousand of population. In India, the said ratio of public employees to total population is hardly two per thousand. This position clearly exposes the anti-employee, anti-people face of the NDA Govt.

DOUBLE GAME OF RSS OUTFITS

Hence in order to cheat the people, and come back to power through tricks, the BJP bandwagon, along with their lie-campaign, has been acting overtime to rouse the communal frenzy as the election dates are coming nearer. The Sangh parivar outfits like VHP, Bajrang Dal etc are raising communal slogans, seeking to rebuild the frenzy over the Ram temple at Ayodhya, while demonstrating arrogance over their so called hindutva plank, while the leaders of its political outfit BJP are posing the role of moderator with a

crooked ploy to confuse and cheat the people and garner votes. The same trick also is being played on economic policy issues where the RSS outfits Swadeshi Jagaran Manch and BMS are spitting venom in public against the economic policy of liberalization and globalization while staying away from any concrete action against those policies.

EXPOSE THE CHEATS AND ENSURE THEIR DEFEAT

The working class and the toiling people must not allow themselves to be cheated again by the BJP led combine. They must teach this worst enemy-regime of theirs a lesson by decisively defeating the NDA combine in the forthcoming election. CITU appeals to the toiling people to launch a powerful campaign in the forthcoming period along with all secular and democratic forces so that no stone is unturned to explain to the people the anti-national, anti-people role of the BJP-led combine in pushing the country's economy, the society and the entire democratic set-up in the track of disaster and ruin to ensure their rout in the ensuing election.

- Defeat BJP in electoral battle to save India's secularism and its valuable democratic traditions!
- Vote left, democratic and secular forces so that secular vote is not divided!
- BJP's attempt to hoodwink the people through deceptive and fundamentalist slogan must be nipped in the bud to save India from MNCs and imperialism!
- Self- reliant economy of India will shine only if BJP and its allies are routed in the forthcoming elections!

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DEFEAT THE BJP - COMBINE

SUPPORT LEFT, DEMOCRATIC & SECULAR FORCES

SAVE THE COUNTRY FROM DISASTER

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