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Protest Rally Against ADB Meeting In Hyderabad

NO SAFETY FOR COAL MINERS IN INDIA

Manas Kumar Mukherjee

The 28th meeting of the standing committee on safety in coal mines, the highest forum to take and recommend major policy decisions in respect of safety in coal industries, was held at New Delhi on May 9, 2006 chaired by Minister for coal Sibu Soren. State Minister for coal, Dasarinarayan Rao and chief executives of the nationalised and private coal companies, DGMS, representatives from central trade unions and officers associations attended. The agenda included review of the action taken on earlier decisions, the present safety conditions, cause of accidents, remedial measures to avert such accident in future, amendment of Coal Mines Regulation Act, taking into consideration the modern technology and particularly Open Cast Mining.

The workers' side complained of the indifferent attitude of the management of coal industries in implementation of earlier decisions. Though there was definite time frame for implementation of the decisions taken in the 27th meeting, almost all the major policy decisions, but for a few small issues, were gathering dust. Members urged proactive action on the part of the management on safety related issues raised by the trade unions or the safety committees at various levels.

ON OTHER PAGES

	Page
1. West Bengal: Left Front Victory - Chittabrata Majumdar	256
2. Problems of International TU Unity - M K Pandhe	258
3. On Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises Development Bill - Tapan Sen	260
4. C Kannan - A Revolutionary - A K Padmanabhan	262
5. Two Years of the UPA Government - K Hemalata	264
6. Heroic Struggle by Haryana Roadways Workers	268
7. International Symposium on Safety in Mines	270
8. Protest Rally against ADB Meetings - M Venugopala Rao	272
9. On Balco	273
10. Reports & Events	274
11. Price Index	278

Despite the last meeting desiring that one representative not below the rank of joint secretary from the labour ministry be present in the meeting, but attended this meeting. This only reflected the lack of seriousness on the part of the government in spite of thousands of miner's death in different mines accidents.

Private mining activities including captive mines increased many fold in recent past but no report is available in regard to the safety of the miners and adjoining villages. The decision to constitute a committee to carry out inspection of the private mines has not yet implemented.

Though there are 1850 posts of Overman, Mining sardars are lying vacant, only 101 post of statutory manpower has been filled up. Even the DGMS offices are not functioning properly due to the shortage of manpower. The CITU representative urged the MOC to immediately implement the above decisions. MOS (Coal & Mines) assured implementation in right earnest and that a draft would be prepared by the DGMS with the amendments to the existing CMR, which will include new technology and open cast mines, and would be sent to Ministry of Labour. Trade Unions will be consulted before the amendment is made.

The CITU representative raised the inadequate and poor quality of PPE (Personal Protective Equipments) lime Safety Boots, Cap Lamps and engaging contractor workers in hazardous work without any training. PME (Periodical Medical Examination) of the miners is not carried out regularly to identify occupational Diseases. The increasing trend of fatal/serious accidents and Fatalities/Serious Injuries in coal industries is causing concern.

MOS (Coal & Mines) assured the members that the Safety of the miners will not compromised and directed the management to take effective proactive steps to minimize the number of accidents.

(The writer is a member of the Standing Committee on Safety in Coal Mines)

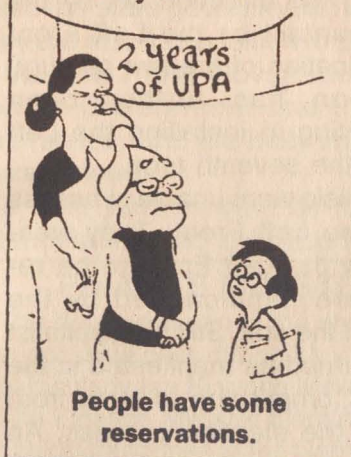
THE WORKING CLASS

CITU MONTHLY

JUNE 2006

Business as Usual

By UNNY



Courtesy: The Indian Express

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EDITORIAL

POILITICAL INDIA IN A CHURNING MODE

Developments of far reaching consequences have pushed political India in a churning mode.

Elections to the legislatures in five states have thrown up expected, but exciting results. In this mini-general election, the Left forces have gained strength with massive mandates secured in West Bengal and Kerala. The worst ever government Independent India had witnessed in any state was thrown out in Tamil Nadu. The question is: how the UPA regime reads the people's mandate?

The UPA government had observed the second anniversary of its governance, though the celebrations were on somewhat a low key. From the common man's viewpoint, the UPA's commitments vis-à-vis its performance has been more of a disappointment than of satisfaction. Changing gear from the over zealous pursuit of anti-people neo-liberal reforms kow-towing U.S imperialism will augur well for the UPA regime in the remaining three years of its rule.

The economy has been rocked by the worst ever crash in the share market. The government is seemingly obsessed with keeping the Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) in good humour, rather than protecting the interests of the small investors.

The increasing price of essential commodities is hurting the household in both urban and rural India, the latter being already in the grip of acute distress. Unmindful of people's sufferings, the government is readying to impose yet another hike in oil prices.

The reservation issue, nick-named as Mandal II by the media, has stirred up an emotive response. It is difficult to comprehend the 'merits' of keeping the higher institutions of learning like the IITs, IIMs etc outside the ambit of reservations for the OBCs. Despite the unanimous passage of the Constitutional amendment on this issue, forces opposed to social justice are seeking to create unrest and trouble. The government must move swiftly to douse the 'fire' kindled by these forces.

The main opposition party in Parliament, the BJP, has suffered successive jolts, first by the 'firebrand sannyasin' Uma Bharathi floating a rival political outfit and Babulal Marandi raising the banner of revolt. Yet, it cannot but fall back on its rabid communal agenda. When the democratic forces all over the world welcomed with glee the developments in Nepal, where the Monarchy was over-turned by the people who waged a glorious battle against 'Royal' oppression, the BJP was full of lament over that country switching from a 'hindu' nation to a secular democracy. It went on to claim that 'hindu' and 'secular' are synonymous! This attempt to twist the political discourse in the country needs to be countered.

All these impose a stupendous task on the working class and it is imperative that the struggle that culminated on September 29th strike last year should be resumed in all earnestness!

WEST BENGAL: MEANING OF LEFT FRONT VICTORY

Chittabrata Majumdar

The victory of the Left Front in West Bengal Assembly Election for seventh time in a row with three-fourth majority is an unprecedented historical event in a multi-party system. Also, it is in fact a resounding re-affirmation by the common people of the state of the policies pursued by the State Government since the formation of the first Left Front Government in 1977.

Many permutations and combinations are likely while explaining and interpreting a coalition government continuing for three decades defying 'anti-incumbency factor'. But failure to recognise the consistency in pursuing the policies to ensure the pro-people governance along with the sustained struggle waged against the state power and tireless efforts by the left parties to organise the toiling masses to resist the onslaughts on the lives and livelihood of the people will be a serious mistake.

The utmost sincere effort as well as the achievements of the former six Left Front governments has consolidated its support base. Their openness to admit the limitations have established the integrity of the Left parties, expanding their support every day and every time. Continued peasant and working class movements against the anti-people policies, followed by the struggles against authoritarian repression in 1970s paved the way for the installation of the first Left Front government in West Bengal. Meaningful implementation of land reform and *barga*-record has been one of the prime factors behind the mass support of the Left Front.

The conscious move of the Left Front Government to ensure the peoples' participation in the decision making process, development of the state through decentralisation of power and guaranteeing the democratic rights of the people by regular and timely elections to of local bodies equally contributed to enhance its support base.

Right from the unjustified discrimination in giving the legitimate share of the state in financial aspect to the biased use of licensing system to obstruct the industrialisation in the state were the means that the bourgeoisie led state machinery used off

and on. The people of the state viewed this as not only anti-Left Front Government moves but also as an altogether anti-people game plan. The Left Front Govt. despite various constraints, placed emphasis on the cottage and small scale industries, along with the continuous efforts to set-up large scale industries which generated employment in the state.

Now that the direct obstacle to set up the much needed industries have been removed to a large extent, the state government despite of all odds caused by the neo-liberal reforms and globalisation that has slowed down the industrial growth across the globe, has, by and large, been moving inch-by-inch in the direction set by the industrial policy announced by the Left Front Government in early nineties of the last century. Thus, the foundation has further been strengthened, culminating in installing the Left Front Government for the seventh term.

It is not that the bourgeoisie were unable to assess the support base of the Left Front. They were uncomfortable to allow the Left Front to be re-elected. But they were handicapped by the opposition in disarray in the state. Still the capitalist class left no stone unturned as manifested in the action of the Election Commission of India from the very beginning of the election process. An unprecedented huge number of genuine voters were barred from exercising their voting right by purging their names from the electoral list without justification. By scheduling the polling in five phases, deputing an extra-ordinary large number of observers to oversee the election process and deploying the para-military forces, attempts were made to air the impression that all the previous elections in the state were marked by malpractices, far from manifesting the people's mandate! The functioning of and some derogatory comments made by a section of observers were highly objectionable. These, and above all the comparison of the state with Bihar by the bourgeoisie owned media, hurt the people's pride. Thus, the people with all their determination gave a befitting reply that reflected in increase in

vote percentage, crossing fifty percent this time, in favour of Left Front.

Another serious aspect needs to be recognised here. With the process of neo-liberal reform for more than one and half decades, the attacks on the toiling masses have been accentuated manifold. People of the country have been experiencing how the attacks on social aspects have been growing along with the growing attacks on the economic front particularly in recent times. In such a situation, the people also realise that it is the Left forces, who based on the principles, have consistently been opposing and resisting all sorts of anti-people moves by the successive governments at the Centre. They are convinced that the Left is fighting for the cause of the people with utmost determination. Also, the people of West Bengal understand the limitations within which the state government has been performing. They are also in a position to distinguish the quality of the Left Front Government from that of the Central Government and the governments of other states, who are busy implementing the neo-liberal reforms.

The Left parties with all their strength and determination had mobilised the people across

the country against the misrule of NDA government led by communal forces. With the decisive defeat of the NDA government in 2004, the Left forces with their increased strength has extended outside support to the Congress-led-UPA government at the Centre to keep the communal and anti-people forces out of power. But the policies the UPA has been pursuing are not in the interests of the people and the country. The Left has been opposing those policies. To pressurise the Centre to follow the National Common Minimum Programme, the basis on which Lefts have extended support to UPA government, the Left will have to continue to fight. And the people of West Bengal as well as of Kerala, have come forward with larger support, so that the task ahead can be continued successfully. Left has been able to have a significant presence in Tamil Nadu and Assam too.

Thus, the verdict of West Bengal Election 2006 where Left Front has secured 235 seats out of 294 is for forging ahead with the on-going pro-people development in the state as well as a directive to resist the anti-people globalisation process and the anti-people policies followed by the Central Government.

FINANCE MINISTER SUBMITS TO US FUND MANAGERS' BLACKMAIL

The developments in the share markets, which had witnessed a mayhem as a result of crashing on successive days during May 17 – 22, 2006, call for an introspection on the part of the UPA government, particularly the Finance Ministry.

The Finance Minister blaming the crash on 'uninformed reporting by a section of media' borders on a panicky response to the blackmail by the US Fund Managers, who had made a forthright demand on the Government of India that no tax liability should arise on their fees. The Finance Minister has submitted to this blackmail by choosing to classify the Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) as a whole as 'investors' and not 'traders', even for the limited purpose of subjecting to tax the management fees paid by them. In the process, the Finance Minister seeks to obliterate the demarcation between the FIIs and the Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). The plea of the FIIs having no permanent residence here (in India) is a dubious one. While the FIIs may not have a physical presence here, they are deriving huge gains through trading in Indian stock markets. It defies logic that they should not be subjected to tax, even to the limited extent that the CBDT circular and notices have attempted. The present situation is a clear manifestation of the vulnerability of Indian economy as a result of the current phase of liberalisation drive with its sole dependence on inflow of foreign finance capital and servility of the government towards the same.

The Finance Minister is well known for his keenness to devise ingenious methods to squeeze the tax payers in the country, particularly the salaried class, by subjecting the perks received by them to taxation, by proposing to subject the terminal benefits under small savings, provident fund etc. to tax. But, when it comes to speculative foreign funds, which are virtually dominating the Indian capital market, the Finance Minister gleefully confers handsome benefits to them. But, the stubborn refusal of the Finance Minister to either bring back the long term capital gains tax or review the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement with Mauritius reflects the sway that the international finance capital has over governance in India. This has to be fought decisively.

PROBLEMS OF INTERNATIONAL TU UNITY

M K Pandhe

On the eve of the forty-eighth Congress of CGT France, a meeting was arranged between National Committee of CGT and several leaders of the international TU movement on April 23, 2006 at Lille (North of France) to consider the problems of unity in the world TU movement. CITU was invited to participate in the discussion. Guy Ryder, General Secretary, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), Willy Thys, General Secretary, World Confederation of Labour (WCL) participated in the meeting.

Bernard Thibault, General Secretary, CGT in his introductory remarks referred to the challenges faced by the trade union movement all over the world due to the policy of globalisation. Emilio Gabaglio, leader of the European trade union movement, reviewed the background of the division in the world TU movement. He noted how the World Federation of Trade Unions was founded in 1945 when the fascist forces were on the retreat. It brought together, on a common platform, unions of different ideologies and a powerful trade union center emerged to defend the interests of the working class. The unity was, however, short-lived and on the eve of implementation of Marshall Plan, the WFTU was split and ICFTU came into existence. The division continued in the cold war period.

TU MOVEMENT WEAKENED

After dismantling of socialism in former Soviet Union and East European countries, WFTU was considerably weakened. Earlier All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) also left WFTU during the Cultural Revolution period. CGIL (Italy) and CGT (France) also left the WFTU.

The division and weakening of the trade union movement at the international level enabled the capitalist class to push ahead with the policy of globalisation and impose onerous conditions of work on the working class. Closure of factories, growing unemployment, imposition of the right of hire and fire, downsizing of manpower and increasing the workload, increasing the hours of work and part time low paid employment,

casualisation, contractorisation and outsourcing of jobs, attack on trade union and democratic rights of workers including right to strike became a global phenomenon.

Speakers who participated in the discussion highlighted these features in their speeches. The representative from Belgium pointed out that in his country right to form a union - in an establishment where less than 50 workers are working - is denied by legal enactment. In Colombia, the hirelings of the employers have murdered hundreds of trade union leaders without any action by the government. In Indonesia, curtailment of trade union rights of the workers have become a matter of daily occurrence and TU activity has become increasingly difficult. In former Soviet Union countries, privatisation offensive is in full swing and the trade unions have to go on strike even to get their earned wages. The trade unions in Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) have to fight against closure of several establishments and large-scale unemployment. The standard of living of the workers is declining while pensionary benefits bring them below the poverty line. The speaker from Communication Union in USA noted that his union has been fighting against the policies of Bush government. He called for strengthening of the struggle against globalisation not only in meetings but on streets also.

Guy Ryder, General Secretary, ICFTU, called for reorientation in the world TU movement and a meaningful dialogue in the world today within the TU movement.

Willy Thys, General Secretary, WCL, expressed his conviction that organisations of democratic and independent trade unions were crucial for the well being of the workers, their families, and for the social progress and prosperous future for all. "Today, more than ever in history, confronted by unbridled globalisation, effective internationalism is essential to the future strength of trade unionism and its capacity to realise that mission," he said. John Monks, Secretary General of Confederation

of European Trade Unions, expressed concern at the low trade union membership of less than 10 per cent in most of the advanced countries. He also mentioned about growing resistance of the workers in these countries against deteriorating working and living conditions. The massive vote of the working people against European constitution was a reflection of the feelings of the workers about the unfavourable situation they had been facing. He called for strengthening the unity of the workers to resist the attacks with more determination.

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Speakers from developing countries pointed out how under WTO regime trade relations have become more unfavourable to the developing countries as a result of which the share of the developing countries in the world trade is declining. They also mentioned about the protectionist policies adopted by advanced capitalist countries. The working class movement is facing difficulties in improving their standard of living as a result of these policies. MNCs in developing countries do not abide by the national laws and regulations, which gave them unbridled right of exploitation of the workers. The governments of developing countries, in a mad craze to attract foreign direct investment, do not take any action against MNCs.

They, therefore, proposed that the world trade union movement had to give up its present defensive position and become aggressive so that capitalist onslaughts can be fought more effectively. Unity of the world trade union movement must be directed towards this objective. Some speakers mentioned that the united trade union movement should suitably highlight the task of social transformation.

Speaking on behalf of CITU, M K Pandhe pointed out that global finance capital is united to launch offensive against the working class, which is sorrowfully divided. This has resulted in inability of the trade union movement to fight the offensive with determination. The dominant world trade union movement is today more concerned with the problems of developed countries, while

adequate attention is not properly focused on the issues of the developing countries, which are employing largest number of workers in the world today.

In the dialogue that followed, united as well as divergent views emerged with the hope to continue the dialogue.

Another meeting on April 24, 2006 discussed the formation of a new international organisation. TUs from Uruguay, India, Peru, Colombia, Madagaskar, Angola, CIS countries, Poland, Niger and France participated in the discussion. General Secretaries of ICFTU and WCL were also present. The founding conference of a new world organisation after merger of ICFTU and WCL will take place in Vienna (Austria) on November 1-3, 2006, preceded by separate meetings of ICFTU and WCL on October 30 to pass resolution dissolving the two organisations.

The CITU expressed its inability to join the new organisation and would prefer to remain independent and strive for still wider unity of the world TU movement. Noting that the WFTU is not included in this unity, it urged establishing of some working relations with WFTU. Further, no worldwide TU unity is possible without involvement of All China Federation of Trade Unions, a trade union of the largest populated country in the world. Any worldwide unity of the working class must spell out clear-cut policies of the TU movement towards neo-colonialism and the heightened global offensive of the US imperialism, which the international TU movement cannot ignore.

International dialogue between the countries of the North and South must proceed to evolve common understanding and action programme to protect the interests of the working class. Trade union cooperation must transcend ideological differences and international affiliations in the struggle against the policies of globalisation. Leadership of both the ICFTU and WCL, while respecting the CITU views desired continued dialogue on the contentious issues faced by the trade union movement the world over.

ADDRESS REAL PROBLEMS OF MICRO & SMALL INDUSTRIES

Tapan Sen

At the outset, thanks to the Hon'ble Minister for incorporating some vital changes pertaining to labour and inclusion of the tiny sector in the original Bill, before Lok Sabha passed it. The original Bill contained certain anti-labour clauses. We are thankful that those have been dropped at our request.

While extending general support to the basic content of the Bill and the laudable objectives underlying it, I draw your pointed attention to some important issues.

The micro and small scale sector deserves preference, patronage and protection since it is this sector whose contribution to employment generating growth and better distributive impact on the society - more towards aam-aadmi oriented growth - is much more, compared to virtually jobless rather job loss pattern of exercise being carried on by the large scale sector. But, most unfortunately, despite such high contribution, the small-scale sector is getting a raw deal. This Bill attempts to address some of the issues. But there are shortcomings too.

The Bill seeks to facilitate promotion, development and enhancement of competitiveness of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises as enumerated in section 9 of the Bill. What is the situation right now in that front? Despite the small scale sector of the economy registering continuous growth in terms of production, employment generation and export, this sector is also the victim of worst industrial sickness and closure in the face of uneven competition from the large scale sector, both domestic and particularly foreign, and unfriendly discriminatory policies in respect of "credit, infrastructural facilities, technological lags and marketing constraints" as identified by the Economic Survey of 2005-06 itself. Of the estimated half a million sick and closed industrial units in the country, overwhelming majority are in the small-scale sector. The problems got further aggravated by continuing de-reservation of items, from the reserved lists for the small-scale sector in the successive budgets since 1997. The de-reservation exercise is the direct consequence

of the pro-active pleasantries offered by the Govt. to WTO ideologues, but that is sought to be camouflaged by the ridiculous theories that de-reservation will help the SSIs to grow.

In reality, the de-reservation process is squeezing the small scale units operating in the de-reserved segments of their strength and capability to negotiate terms and bargain with the larger units and big traders including the MNCs they supply and service, and make them victims of delayed payment and other hazards. The Bill aims at enhancing the competitiveness of the small-scale enterprises, but de-reservation runs counter to that laudable objective; instead of allowing the SSIs to compete on equal footings, it makes SSIs an appendage to or dependent on the large scale entities and MNCs. Hence, I urge upon the Govt. not to allow any further de-reservation, while restoring the already de-reserved items in the reserved list, if the objectives underlined in the Bill are to be attained in real terms and the full potential of the small-scale sector are to be harnessed to unleash a horizontally inclusive and employment generating growth pattern in the industrial economy.

Secondly, I like to draw the attention of the Govt. to section 11 of the Bill on preference policies in respect of procurement of goods and services produced by small enterprises by Central Govt. ministries and departments and the PSUs. To make this provision effective, what is required is to define the modality of preference in concrete terms, both in terms of price preference and purchase preference allowing the SSIs a higher price compared to bigger players on the one hand and an assured order book, subject to fulfillment of quality specifications. Unless such preference policy is statutorily defined and made in-built in the tendering process by law, the intentions expressed in section 11 is destined to remain a pious hope. Such apprehensions are not misplaced as we have already witnessed as to how Govt. has done away with such preference policies in respect of some PSUs in the intermediate and capital goods sector, thereby

pushing them towards sickness.

Thirdly, preference policy instrument is also required to be extended for infrastructural support to SSIs in respect of electricity, water etc and also by way of lowering the excise duty and value added and other taxes etc on the SSI products and services. That may lead to some revenue loss to Govt. no doubt but the return in terms of value addition, employment generation and re-distributive impact on the society will be much more. Such concessions to SSI would be much more worth than hundred times bigger concessions being liberally granted to big capital and MNCs every year.

The Bill also commits about progressive credit facilities to small-scale sector. This is also required to be clearly defined and concretised. Because, the much-touted guidelines or instructions on credit facilities to small-scale sector so far, issued from time to time by the RBI as referred to in section 10 of the Bill, could bring no relief at all to the small-scale sector, which is subjected to much costlier credit compared to large-scale industries. In reality, the large-scale sector and MNCs are enjoying cheaper credit at the cost of the small-scale sector and agriculture and that pattern has been made almost a permanent feature in the credit market. The Basel norms forced upon the country's banking sector institutions by 'Washington Consensus', in the name of 'best practices' in banking, ultimately ended up in linking the flow of credit facility to small-scale sector with their credit-rating by the accredited rating agencies, which treat both the large-scale and the small-scale at par. The result is obvious. Despite all tall talks of increase in priority sector lending, and despite almost half a dozen committees and working groups constituted by the RBI for the purpose, the SSIs continue to be discriminated with less credit facility and costlier credit, making many of them unviable.

A RBI study on 1267 non financial private sector companies as published in the RBI Bulletin of October 2003 exposed that in case of 76 companies with paid up capital of less than Rs 1 crore, the interest burden increased by 1.3 per cent in one year while those with a paid up capital of Rs 25 crore and above (1190 companies) had benefited by a decline in their interest burden by

13.1 per cent.

I again quote from the RBI report on Trend and Progress of Banking 2004-05, "The public sector banks failed to achieve the various sub-targets under priority sector lending, viz., sub-targets for agriculture, tiny sector within the SSIs, advances to weaker sections and targets for differential rate of interest (DRI) scheme.... The performance of private sector banks remained less satisfactory with 12 out of 30 private sector banks failing to achieve the target."

In this background, also please note the observation made by the same RBI Report that the share of lending at below the prime lending rate - in short sub-PLR - lending by the banks in total commercial credit have increased from 50 per cent to 60 per cent in one year span, and this clearly establishes that the big capital lobby including the MNCs has cornered almost the entire sub-PLR lending and burden of this below the rate lending to the big players had to be borne by the small-scale sector and agriculture in the form of costlier credit with stringent conditionalities.

Hence mere statement of progressive credit, as in section 10 of the Bill, is not enough; the situation demands a complete overhauling of the credit policy of the Govt. to remove its present bias against the small-scale sector with clear provision of assured and preferential credit flow to the micro, small and medium enterprises at concessional rate of interest and softer conditionalities and the matter cannot be left to the wisdom and decision of the lending agencies and the market. And while doing so, the needs of the tiny, small scale and medium enterprises are to be dealt separately and not grouping them together since each of these segments is having different problems and predicaments.

And the last point, like BIFR or the Board of Reconstruction of Public Sector Enterprises (BRPSE), an agency is required to be created for revival of the sick units in the micro and small-scale sector and guiding the SSIs to guard against sickness at the incipient stage itself.

I request the Hon'ble Minister to consider the above suggestions and assure the house of concrete and definite action in that direction.

(Excerpts from the speech in Rajya Sabha on the Micro Small and Medium Enterprises Bill 2005 on May 22, 2006)

COMRADE C. KANNAN – AN EXEMPLARY REVOLUTIONARY

A.K. PADMANABHAN

Comrade C. Kannan, the senior most Trade Union leader in Kerala and one of the senior most leader of CITU in the country, breathed his last on 16th April 2006. Affectionately known as 'Comrade C', to the people of Kerala and to his colleagues in various other parts of the country, his life and work as a revolutionary trade unionist will always remain a shining example to all those in the trade union movement.

Born in 1915, in a poor worker family, he could not continue his studies beyond primary classes. He became a beedi worker at the age of 11. After a few years, the cruel exploitation of beedi workers in those years forced him to think about organising the beedi workers.

Kannur Beedi Workers Union, the first and foremost union of beedi workers in Kerala, was formed in August 1934, with comrade Kannan as a joint secretary.

This Union started conducting many militant and long drawn struggles. In 1937, Comrade Kannan was elected as General Secretary and it is to his credit that he continued to be either General Secretary or President of the union till his death. May be, no other leader of any other trade union, would have held such a position for an uninterrupted 69 years. His attachment to the Beedi workers' movement is well known. It was his initiative that helped to form Beedi workers Unions throughout Kerala and later the formation of the All India Beedi workers Federation.

Comrade C was in the forefront in organising various downtrodden sections like sanitary workers of local bodies, in Motor Transport, Construction, Plywood and Textile workers in Kerala and he had led many historic strikes and struggles.

In 1954, he led the 'Long March' of Beedi workers from Kannur to Madras (Now Chennai) demanding a new law for safe guarding the interests of beedi workers. It was this struggle, which culminated in Com. A.K. Gopalan moving a private member's bill in Parliament and forcing the government itself to bring the Beedi Workers Bill in 1966.

As a youngster, he actively participated in various

struggles during the freedom movement. He was a member of Kannur Town Congress Committee in 1934.

He had to languish more than nine years in jail and had worked underground for 8 years. His jail life began in 1937.

He was put behind bars in various jails in South India. It was in 1944, while he was in Vellore jail, under the leadership of Com. A.K. Gopalan, he along with three others, escaped from Jail, creating history. In the year 1950, on 11th February, he was seriously injured in the police firing in Salem Jail, when 22 comrades had lost their lives. He was saved after hour-long surgery to remove bullets from his chest but was left with pieces of bullets in his head, which he carried all through his life.

He had to face brutal attacks from goondas and police on various occasions before and after independence.

Like many other communist veterans of the pre-independence era, Comrade Kannan was active in the Congress Socialist Party from 1934 and joined the Communist Party in 1939. In 1964, he chose to align himself with the CPI (M) and was a member of the state Committee.

Comrade C had very close relationships with the workers and his colleagues and everyone experienced his fatherly affection.

He had no ambition in life other than serving the cause of people. In a special interview to a psychological magazine, in the year 1978, he said that he has no private life and private sorrows. He was unmarried and all his attachments were political and trade union related. In the above-referred interview about his ambition, he only said about building a new office, library and meeting hall for the Tobacco Workers Union of which he was a founding office bearer. And, the union had built its offices in later years, true to his expectations. To a question on his remaining a bachelor, he had said that he does not justify his decision but growth of humanity will not be affected due to his remaining a bachelor.

He was a Municipal Councilor in Kannur

municipality for 25 years, from 1955 to 1980. He was a member of the first Kerala legislative Assembly in 1957 and was elected again in 1965 and 1967.

After formation of CITU in 1970, he became the president of the Kerala State Committee and held that for 30 years. He was also the Vice President of CITU at the all India level, till the 11th Conference of CITU held in Chennai in 2003, when he relinquished the post due to ill health.

Though he had health problems, he remained active till last. He was hospitalised for a short period in March 2006. The last public function he attended was the inauguration of the recent

Assembly election campaign on 31st march in Kannur constituency. He had chaired that meeting. He breathed his last on 16th April, having lived an exemplary public life for more than 70 years. The working people of Kerala bid him farewell with massive participation in paying their last respects, with thousands lining up in front of the Kannur district committee office of the CPI (M) where his body was brought from his residence. Shops downed their shutters all over Kannur district on 17th April.

Let us pay homage to the memory of a great leader who had been a pioneer in organising the downtrodden sections of the Indian Working Class.

ELECTIONS: CITU CONGRATULATES THE PEOPLE

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions congratulated the toiling people of West Bengal and Kerala for ensuring massive victory of the Left Front and Left Democratic Front respectively in the just concluded assembly elections despite all hurdles created by the Election Commission.

It is noteworthy that the Left Front has been voted to power in West Bengal for the seventh consecutive term creating an all time record. The CITU also congratulated the people of Tamilnadu and Assam for electing more number of Left party candidates to the legislative assemblies of the respective states and defeating the BJP and other reactionary forces.

In a issued on May 11, 2006 the CITU secretariat said:

"The victory of the Left Front in West Bengal with more than three fourth majority and the Left Democratic Front in Kerala with two third plus of the total seats reflects popular endorsement of the Left Parties forthright stance against the anti people neoliberal economic policies. It is also upheld the pro people and horizontally inclusive development strategy based on empowerment of the toiling people and respect to the right, being pursued by the Left Front Governments in the respective states braving all pangs of neo-liberalism imposed by the central policies on the state's economy. This is also reflects a total rejection of the communal and divisive ploy of communal forces who had also been in the fray.

"The victory of the Left forces, while empowering the people of the concerned states to fight for a pro-people alternative, will also strengthen the democratic movement throughout the country to effectively intervene against the anti-people and reactionary trends in the national arena in the matter of economic, social and foreign policy in the days to come.

"The CITU heartily greets the leaders and activists of the Left and democratic movements in those states for the magnificent victory they could secure for the toiling people."

TWO YEARS OF THE UPA GOVERNMENT

K Hemalata

The Congress led UPA government has now completed two years in office at the Centre. In the 2004 Parliament elections, people decisively rejected the neo liberal economic model of development practiced by the BJP led NDA government, as well as the communal agenda promoted by its leading Party. By bringing the UPA to power, people gave a mandate to it to implement policies that would benefit the common people, the workers, the peasants, the unemployed etc. The Left Parties increased their presence in the Parliament. This reality, along with the pressure from the Left Parties, led to the adoption of a Common Minimum Programme by the UPA and the incorporation of some pro people commitments therein. This background has to be kept in mind while assessing the performance of the UPA government during the last two years.

A major positive change after the assumption of the UPA government has of course been a shift in the political discourse in the country from communal issues to the real issues faced by the people, like unemployment, public distribution system, food security, disinvestment etc. The government has taken some measures towards ensuring democratic rights of the people like repeal of POTA and enacting the Right to Information Act. It

has also enacted legislations on domestic violence and property rights for women. After much pressure from the Left Parties, trade unions and other sections of the people, from inside and outside the Parliament, it has enacted the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, though presently it is confined to 200 districts and the urban unemployed are yet to be brought within its purview.

FORGOTTEN COMMITMENTS

But no serious efforts have been made on several other commitments. In spite of repeated demands from the Women's organisations, the Women's Reservation Bill is not even introduced; the initiative on the Unorganised Sector Workers' Bill seems to be confined to circulating different types of drafts, without making any serious efforts to incorporate the unanimous suggestions of the Central Trade Unions. The commitment of a Comprehensive Legislation for Agricultural Workers appears to be almost forgotten. The NCMP committed to universalise ICDS, but no serious effort is made even to operationalise the anganwadi centres sanctioned in 2005.

The last two years' experience with the UPA government shows that it is keener on pursuing the same disastrous economic policies as the erstwhile NDA. In foreign policy matters, the UPA is displaying the same eagerness, if not more, to

become a junior partner to the USA, as had its predecessor.

The government and the Finance Minister appear to be in a self-adulatory mood for achieving 8% economic growth in the last year. The fact that even today around 70% of our population depends on agriculture and agriculture is in deep crisis reminiscent of the situation under the British Raj is of no concern to them. Foodgrain production has fallen and reports of farmers committing suicides appear in the media every day. The allocations to agriculture are far below the requirements. The flawed agricultural policies have today led to the government importing wheat. Rural unemployment and migration are increasing at alarming proportions.

India has the highest number of malnourished children in the world. Contrary to general belief, the percentage of malnourished children in India is double that in Sub Saharan Africa. Around half of our children are malnourished, which impacts not only their physical and mental growth but also the skill development, productivity etc of the future generations. But the government is not concerned to ensure food security for the people; the Public Distribution System is almost dismantled with the focus being on reducing subsidies, a key component of the neo liberal economic policies.

FAULTY MEASURES

While the NCMP affirmed that no profit making PSU would be privatised, the government is going ahead with its drive for privatisation and disinvestment, despite the opposition of the Left Parties and trade unions. In its NCMP it has committed to hold dialogue with the trade unions on all the issues concerning the workers. But the government has made no efforts to consult the trade unions on any issue concerning labour; nor has it taken their suggestions with due seriousness. It is even ignoring the concrete alternative suggestions made by the Left Parties. The Delhi and Mumbai airports have been privatised in the name of modernisation. Now, contrary to the agreement with the workers of the Airport Authority of India, the government wants this to be extended to the other airports as well. This is being done even while the AAI is a profit making concern and is well competent to carry out modernisation.

The government also wants to privatise the pension funds and divert them to the share markets, through the Pension Regulatory Authority Bill. The recent crash in the markets only confirm the worst apprehensions of the CITU and other trade unions and shows how vulnerable the pensioners would be in such volatile situations if their money were invested in the stock markets.

In the last two years the prices of petroleum products have been increased four times, on the plea of rising prices in the international markets. Once

again, the government is contemplating a further rise in the prices of petrol and diesel, which would have a cascading effect on the prices of all the essential commodities, which are already soaring. The Left Parties have given some concrete suggestions on reviewing the taxation structure for petroleum products by which the government has imposed a big burden on the people; but the government refuses to implement these.

The government is going ahead with its decision to allow FDI in vital sectors like insurance, telecom etc, despite the opposition of the Left Parties and the trade unions. It has decided to allow foreign banks to take over Indian private banks and wants to change the Banking Regulation Act to enable this. It has decided to allow FDI in retail trading, which would adversely affect the employment of millions of small traders in the country.

The recent crash in the stock market and the volatility of the market underline the danger of going for full capital account convertibility about which the Prime Minister has made an announcement.

The government refuses to impose long-term capital gains tax or any other measures, which can raise additional resources for the government to finance its social sector and developmental expenditure.

The NCMP of the UPA has committed to pursue an independent foreign policy, in the interests of the people. But in practice, the UPA government

is pursuing a foreign policy, which betrays its eagerness to become a strategic partner of the USA in Asia. The government was forced to change its stand on the Iran nuclear issue and voted against it under pressure from the USA. The Iran gas pipeline project has been virtually shelved. Not only in the matter of foreign policy, even in domestic policies, the government is allowing itself to be influenced more and more by the USA.

The Planning Commission has become the hub for the initiation and pushing for such policies, contrary to the spirit of the NCMP.

The developments in Latin America, the struggles in France and other countries, indicate the disenchantment of the people world wide to the World Bank advocated policies of neo liberal globalisation. The results of the recent elections to the five states and the victory of the Left in West Bengal (for a record seventh term) and in Kerala also indicate the urge of the people for alternative policies.

This is the opportune time for the working class to intensify and lead the struggle for such alternative policies; to develop countrywide militant struggles not only on the direct issues of the workers, but also on all the issues that concern the people of our country. Only such intense struggles can put pressure on the UPA to address people's concerns.

Must Be Nipped In The Bud

B. S. Raghavan

The proposal to turn the IMF into a virtual Fiscal and Monetary Security Council will give it a more pervasive character, adding, significantly and disturbingly, to its considerable clout. The country representatives on the IMF's Executive Board should act decisively to put a stop to efforts that will make the IMF a super-government.

In what Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer, and current Chairman of the International Monetary and Financial Committee, Mr Gordon Brown, has called "a major shift," the IMF is being vested with expanded powers turning it into a virtual Fiscal and Monetary Security Council.

The proposal, quietly placed at the meeting of the Fund's policy committee on April 22, and coming up for approval and adoption at the IMF meeting in Singapore in September, will give to the framework of surveillance and conditionalities of the Fund a more pervasive character, adding significantly, and disturbingly, to its already considerable clout.

It is a mystery how this event, with such portent for intrusion into the domestic policies of member-countries, has passed off unnoticed without anyone sounding the tocsin.

The IMF, no doubt, has the power, under Article IV of the Articles of Agreement, to "exercise firm surveillance over the exchange rate policies of members," and oversee the compliance of each member with its obligations under the Article, to "collaborate with the Fund and other members to assure orderly exchange arrangements and to promote a stable system of exchange rates."

By virtue of this mandate, it undertakes "a comprehensive analysis of the general economic situation and the economic policy strategy of the member" and determines "the extent to which the policies of the member, including its exchange rate policies, serve the objectives of the continuing development of the orderly underlying conditions that are necessary for financial stability, the promotion of sustained sound economic growth, and reasonable levels of employment."

It must be remembered, however, that since its inception 60 years ago, the Fund has been performing this task through limited country-

specific bilateral consultations, usually once a year, with the governments concerned, forwarding its conclusions and recommendations to the policy-makers in the respective countries as also to its Executive Board.

NEW AVATAR

It would have amounted to a transgression of the Fund's charter, were it to embark upon any continued or sustained multilateral consultations, as part of the process of surveillance. The IMF generally plugs into bodies such as the G-7, the Group of 24, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the World Bank to obtain inputs for its annual reports on world economic trends. It has never been known to convene global meets to formulate and enforce policies on the fiscal and monetary front.

In its new avatar, the Fund will be entitled to take up (as the Managing Director, Mr Rodrigo de Rato, put it), "issues comprehensively and collectively with systemically important members and, where relevant, with entities formed by groups of members, such as the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council... (as) an important vehicle for analysis and consensus building... (in order) to address spillovers and linkages that affect individual members and the global financial system."

In short, it wants to acquire the authority to summon member-countries of its choice or as a whole for laying down policies which may be either generally applicable or specifically tailored for different governments.

How come this sudden discovery of the need for putting sharper teeth into the mandate of the IMF? As is the case when such initiatives are launched, this move also is persuasively packaged by adducing all kinds of reasons: Vaulting energy prices, global trade imbalances, tightening

financial conditions, existence of economic linkages between countries and international economic and market developments, what have you. Mr de Rato also built his case for the IMF wielding the baton on the arguments of curbing the tendency of individual governments to take economic actions that could hurt neighbouring countries and regions, (such as an abrupt move to close a trade deficit) and ensuring that global economy does not slip into a recession.

U.S FANTASY

It is not as if all these are new features of the world economic landscape. They are merely meant to mask the real reason which is simple: The mounting desperation with which the US eyes China's intransigence in not agreeing to "greater exchange rate flexibility" or, in plain words, the appreciation of the yuan vis-à-vis the dollar to a level that would let the US (with a trade deficit of \$202 billion at the last count with China) off the hook.

The US has not been having its way with China either diplomatically, or by involving it in G-7 confabulations. In fact, observers round the globe are agreed that deliberations of the G-7 are marked by ritualistic posturing and its homilies command neither weight nor respect. As a commentator put it, it is well past its "Best before... " date! It was no surprise, therefore, when its expostulation to China to "promote flexible currency" was promptly rebuffed.

This has provoked some members of the US Congress to introduce legislation in which China has been dubbed "a currency manipulator" and liable to punitive measures, including refusal of loans through international financial institutions, such as the Asian Development Bank, and imposition of 27.5 per cent tariffs on Chinese goods. The Chinese caravan has nonchalantly moved on.

The final hope was that the US President would be able to get the Chinese President, Mr Hu Jintao, when the latter visited Washington recently, to agree to the insistent pleas of the US. Mr Hu knew better than to commit himself. The Chinese side has stuck to its guns with impressive constancy — from which other countries subjected to similar pressures can learn a lesson or two.

The Governor of the People's Bank of China

turned the tables on the US by demanding that rather than monitoring the yuan, global financial institutions should watch the US dollar. The rise of yuan "probably... could be a little bit faster but it is not the way of Chinese reformers to do things". They believed, he said, in being slow and steady to balance competing interests and make sure the financial sector was strong enough to withstand any change. "Each country is entitled to choose an exchange rate system consistent with its own economic development... Right now, the speed of moving forward is OK... It's good for China. We don't worry too much what other people say". Enough to make the US hit the roof with rage.

DARK POSSIBILITIES

Suppose, the IMF's surveillance powers are enlarged to put recalcitrant nations in the dock before their accusers in a Security Council-like fashion convened under the authority newly given to it; suppose, the US, using its bludgeon (as it did in the case of Iraq, and is trying to do in the case of Iran), gets a resolution passed condemning them; hey, presto! The deed is done, global imbalances caused by the strong yuan (as if nothing else matters) are resolved and the accused marched in handcuffs to the cell in the basement.

It is hard to tell whether it is such type of fantasizing by the US to which Mr de Rato, also has wittingly or unwittingly become a party in making his proposal. As *The Economist* has warned: "For multilateral surveillance to have any credibility, there must be no suggestion that the Fund is doing the bidding of the US treasury, or that of any other country, for that matter."

Unfortunately, the move has come about, coincidentally or otherwise, at a time when a particular country is keen to force another, which has been thumbing its nose at it, to submit to its will.

The country representatives on the IMF's Executive Board, at its meeting in Singapore in September, should act decisively to put a stop to efforts that will make the IMF a super-Government, the worse for being a handmaiden of the US, micro-managing the domestic fiscal and monetary policies of member-nations and, thereby, making mince-meat of what little is left of their sovereignty and autonomy.

(Courtesy: The Business Line)

HEROIC STRUGGLE BY HARYANA ROADWAYS WORKERS

In continuity of their baton happy and pro-employer tradition, the Haryana Police brutally lathicharged the roadways workers staging peaceful dharna at Hissar Bus depot of Haryana on 4th May morning hours without any provocation, severely injuring many workers.

The Roadways workers have been staging dharna against the stealthy move of the State Govt to privatize most remunerative passenger transport route so long being operated by the State owned Haryana Roadways. The anxiety of the State Govt to launch and favour the private bus operators has gone to such extent that the state Govt is stated to have given undertaking to compensate the loss, if any, being incurred by the private operators. The State transport department introduced privately owned Volvo bus in different routes in such terms and conditions which led to heavy loss to Haryana Roadways and huge profit to the private operators. As for example, the Volvo operators in the Chandigarh-Delhi route was guaranteed a payment of Rs 11.45 per kilometer-run by the State Govt over and above the cost of fuel (@t 2.8 km per litre in place of 5.2 km per litre for state owned buses) and the salary and other benefits of conductor to be borne by the Haryana Roadways. In fine, the private Volvo operator has been guaranteed a huge profit completely delinked with and irrespective of the revenue earned by the Volvo operation.

Such private Volvo operation was introduced in Delhi-Jammu and Delhi-Manali route on 2nd October 2005 and till December 2005 it led to a loss of Rs 45 lakh to Haryana Roadways and those service were discontinued. But again from January 2006, Chandigarh-Delhi route was given to Volvo operation and it led to a loss of Rs 17 lakh to Haryana Roadways till 31st March 2006 despite the fact the Chandigarh-Delhi Volvo service was allowed to operate during the peak passenger hours of operation in the day depriving and deferring the timing of the State operated deluxe bus services to non-remunerative lean hours. The Haryana Roadways Workers' Union and Sarb Karmachari Sangh have been

demanding discontinuance of such uneconomic and loss making system of Volvo operation leading to heavy loss to state exchequer and Haryana Roadways.

But the State Transport minister did not pay heed to the pleadings of the unions which exposed the unholy alliance between the authorities and private operators. It was pointed out by the union that the cost of one Volvo bus can provide for four state owned passenger buses which can ensure expansion of bus services to new areas, particularly in still unconnected village areas and can also ensure more direct employment. On the other hand, the system of Volvo operation insisted by the Govt put every body, the consumer, the employees and the State owned services to huge loss and only gain for the private operators and also to those in the governance indulging in that system.

Despite consistent opposition by the unions to such retrograde policy, the Govt again tried to start the Volvo operation in Hissar-Delhi route and in protest of the same, the Roadways employees staged dharna on 4th May at Hissar depot without obstructing the normal bus operation.

The Police started lathicharge without any provocation on the workers sitting on dharna leaving more than 40 workers severely injured and many of them sustained head injury. Entire leadership of the Roadways Workers' Union and Sarb Karmachari Sangh present in the dharna have been arrested by police. Among the arrested were Baldev Singh, President, Haryana Roadways Union, Rajkumar Verma, General Secretary, Roadways Union, Sarbat Singh Punia, General Secretary, Fatehabad Unit of Sarb Karmachari Sangh Dalbir Kirmara, Sarb Karmachari Sangh and 18 others. More than ten workers had to be admitted to Hospital because of severe injury.

Such brutal police atrocity on the workers by the Haryana Police has evoked spontaneous Protest by the Roadways workers enmasse throughout the state in the form of demonstrations in other bus depots which led to complete stoppage of state-bus services throughout the state.

Complete strike entered the fourth day on 7th May and despite threat and intimidating tactics by the Roadways management and local police and further arrests on the second day at Sonapat, Panchkula and other places, the workers stuck to strike action and not even a single state-bus could be made to run. The struggle was joined by all the unions in the roadways irrespective of affiliations reflecting total unity. The unions demanded suspension of the Volvo bus operation and discussion with the Govt on the issues under dispute for an amicable solution. The Sarb Karmachari Sangh, representing the Govt employees in the State has already jumped into solidarity programmes with the struggle of the Roadways workers.

On 4th May morning itself, Chittabrata Majumdar, General Secretary CITU, sent fax message to Chief Minister, Haryana condemning police brutality and demanding intervention of the Govt for a negotiated settlement and punishment of the erring Police officials. In a statement issued on the same day, CITU, while expressing support and solidarity to the anti-privatisation struggle by the Roadways workers in the state, urged upon the Haryana Govt to intervene and restrain the baton happy Haryana Police to unleash brutality on the common people. CITU demanded that the erring police officials responsible for the unprovoked lathicharge must be suspended and injured workers should be given compensation. CITU also demanded upon the State Govt to refrain from their move to privatize the bus routes operated by the Haryana Roadways and take urgent steps the sort out the issues under dispute through bipartite discussion with the workers' unions instead of indulging in police action on the workers which is bound to be counterproductive. Protest telegrams addressed to Chief Minister, Haryana were sent from almost all the state Committees of CITU and the Road Transport Workers' Unions from all over the country expressing solidarity with the Haryana workers' struggle.

On 5th May, Tapan Sen, Secretary CITU visited Hissar and addressed the continuing demonstration and dharna by the striking workers to express solidarity. He also visited Hospital to meet the workers injured by lathi charge.

Having failed to break the united struggle of the

Road Transport workers, the Govt of Haryana ultimately called the union leaders for discussion on 6th May 2006 for a meeting at the level of Chief Minister, Haryana. A team of leadership from both Sarb Karmachari Sangh and Karmachari Mahasangh led by R C Jagga, General Secretary, Sarb Karmachari Sangh met Chief Minister on 6th afternoon. The meeting continued till late night on 6th May and also on 8th May 2006. The Govt had to agree for instituting an inquiry on unprovoked lathicharge on the workers and take action against the erring police officials. It was also agreed that all the arrested workers would be released and cases would be withdrawn; the injured workers will be paid compensation of Rs 5000/- by the Govt ; there will be no pay cut of the workers for the strike period. The Govt have also to agree for reviewing the economic efficiency of the system of operation of Volvo buses by private operators within three months and till that time Volvo buses will not be operated in new routes. If the Volvo operation as per system introduced by the Govt is found loss making, the Govt will discontinue the system. If such Volvo operation is found profit making, then the Govt will directly operate the buses instead of operating through private operators.

The three-day long complete strike by the Haryana Roadways Workers turned victorious. The all in unity of the workers in the struggle against privatisation compelled the Govt. of Haryana to retreat at the initial stage itself of its evil ploy of privatisation. CITU congratulates the workers for their heroic united action.

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INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON SAFETY IN MINES

The Institute of Mines Energy Social History (IHSME) of France organised an International Symposium on Safety in Mines on March 1-2, 2006 at Billy-Montigny in North France on the occasion of centenary of the big mining disaster of Courrières mining company at this very place in which 1204 miners were killed. The accident, which occurred on March 10, 1906, was caused due to powerful explosion inside the underground mine. Out of 1795 workers working in the shift only 591 could save themselves from the disaster. This was the second largest mining catastrophe known in the world, next only to the accident at Honkeido in old Manchuria province of China in the year 1942 in which 1572 workers perished. Apart from the trade union activists and academicians from France, representatives from Germany, Australia, Belgium, Great Britain, India, Morocco, Poland and Ukraine attended the international symposium. Some members of French parliament also participated in the symposium. Francois Duteil, president of IHSME, while welcoming the participants noted that several countries in the world experienced similar big disasters. He stressed the need for ensuring adequate safety measures by governments of all countries so that precious lives of our miners are saved by collective efforts.

SAFETY AWARENESS

The mayor of Billy-Montigny, Brino Troni, appreciated the steps taken by the organisers of the international symposium to commemorate that mining disaster in his town and pointed out that the mine involved in the disaster started operation in 1850 and the working conditions and wage earnings of workers were not good. The people of France as well as other European countries were shocked to hear the serious nature of the accident. Mere payment of compensation could not help to ameliorate the anguish of a large number of family members whose breadwinners were involved in the disaster.

The first technical session of the symposium dwelt at length with the causes and consequences of the Currières accident. It was presided over by

Jean-Marie Czapruga, president of Institute of Social History and addressed by Denis Varaschin, Professor of History, University of Artois, Stephane Sirot, Professor of History, University of Cergy-Pontoise, Oliver Kourchid, a research worker and Achille Blondeau, a regional trade unionist. They explained various aspects of the disaster and pointed out the lack of safety measures that led to loss of a large number of lives. The French government has now stopped operation of coal mines and the energy needs of the country are being met with nuclear fuel. The government of France is now considering the proposal to hand over the coal mines to private operators, a move that has been objected to by the trade unions. The vivid description of the causes of accident underlined the need to pay more attention – both by the government and the trade unions – to ensuring the safety of miners.

The official report of inquiry acquitted all engineers of all the blame during the rescue operation. It was noted that in the northern region mines it was not obligatory to stow or fill up the worked out and abandoned part of the mine which provided space for accumulation of noxious gas. This was actually obligatory in other regions of France. It was also noted that there was no statutory regulation in France for systematic and complete filling of abandoned mines.

The second technical session reviewed experience of different countries on the situation of safe working conditions in mines. It was presided over by Serge Terrier, chief of International Department of Federation of Energy and Mine Workers Union (CGT). Presentations were made by Manfred Warda (Germany), Ian Laveny (Great Britain), Khalid Alami (Morocco), Rajmund Moric (Poland), Anatolyi Sabynin (Ukraine) explaining the struggle of the trade unions in their country to ensure health and safety in the mining industry. They highlighted the need to ensure ratification of the ILO Convention No 176 on health and safety in the mining industry by all countries.

ROLE OF IEMO

M K Pandhe, co-president of IEMO, explained the measures taken by the organisation to create awareness on the question of health, safety and environment in mines. He explained the decisions of the IEMO Congress held recently at Cochin in India, among which included a call for a worldwide campaign on these issues so that the life of the miners is made safer. He pointed out how despite development of new technology, mining conditions all over the world are unsafe and major accidents occur from time to time. The dreaded disease of Pneumoconiosis caused due to inhaling of coal dust while working in the mines is incapacitating thousands of workers in coal mines all over the world. The mining workers of Asbestos mines are facing serious hazards for which there is no cure. Pandhe emphasised the need for international cooperation in the trade union movement for making the life of miners safe. He explained the harrowing conditions in Indian mines, particularly the blatant violations of safety rules by the managements of mines, both in the private and public sectors. He also narrated the struggles conducted by the mine workers in India.

In a separate technical session several trade unions in mining industry in France discussed about the lessons of Courrieres disaster and the measures to be taken to intensify the struggle for ensuring safe working conditions in mines. They also reviewed the impact of globalisation on the mine workers in France.

The deliberations of the international symposium resulted in a combined resolve to develop more cooperation among the trade unions all over the world. The growing attacks on TU rights all over the world was observed by several speakers and the symposium stressed the importance of fighting for TU rights as an inseparable component of the struggle of ensuring health and safety of the mine workers.

TOWARDS UNITY

A meeting of the mining union leaders was also held during the symposium. This meeting considered the need for bringing together all the unions in mining industry, irrespective of international affiliations. It felt that the following issues should become the basis for evolving international unity of mining workers:

1. Improvement in working and living

conditions of the miners.

2. To struggle to implement ILO convention No176 on health and safety by the governments of all countries.

3. To protect the trade union rights of mine workers.

The meeting proposed that an international conference of mine workers should be held in India in October-November 2006 to consider the three issues and build a united international movement of mine workers. It also suggested that all mine workers organisations in India should work together to prepare for such a conference. It decided to appeal to all miners unions in the world to come together to make the conference a success. The conference will not disturb the present international affiliations but bring together mine unions from all over the world on to a common platform, which will be an important step in building worldwide unity of the working class.

UNION-BUSTING FRENZY

A majority of employers aggressively use both legal and illegal anti-union tactics during union representation elections overseen by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), according to a December report, conducted by the University of Illinois at Chicago's Center for Urban Economic Development and commissioned by American Rights at Work.

The report finds that:

- 30 percent of employers fire pro-union workers.
- 49 percent of employers threaten to close a worksite when workers try to form a union.
- 51 percent of employers coerce workers into opposing unions with bribery or favoritism.
- 82 percent of employers hire unionbusting consultants to fight organizing drives.
- 91 percent of employers force employees to attend one-on-one anti-union meetings with supervisors.

(Courtesy: The Multinational Monitor)

ADB MEETING PROTEST RALLY IN HYDERABAD

M Venugopala Rao

The 39th annual meeting of the governors of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) held in Hyderabad was marked by protests of the working class and some non-governmental organisations. The protests exposed the Bank's role of subserving the vested interest of multinational corporations and endangering our country's economy by imposing anti-people conditionalities for sanctioning loans for various programmes and projects of the central and state governments. Coinciding with the commencement of the meeting of the ADB on May 3, 2006, a massive rally of workers, employees and teachers was held in Hyderabad under the banner of the United Forum of the Employees, Workers and Teachers, with the rallyists raising resounding slogans of "ADB go back."

As a preparation to the protests, APNGOs Association, TNGOs Association and AP Public Sector Employees Federation conducted a state-level workshop on the March 20 in Hyderabad. About 150 representatives participated in the workshop. From CITU R Sudha Bhaskar, P Ajay Kumar, A V Nageswara Rao, P Aruna and R S Murthy presented papers in the workshop, exposing the strategy of the ADB in pushing through the policies of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation in the supplicant countries and states, resulting in disastrous consequences for the people. They also explained the experiences and consequences of neo-liberal policies imposed by the ADB as part of conditionalities for sanctioning loans in different countries and various states in India.

The ADB, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, working as agents of the imperialist countries, are making three-pronged attack on our country. Though the ADB has 57 countries as its members, it is mainly under the grip of the USA and Japan. With its strategy of policy-based lending, the ADB is pursuing the approach of encouraging the supplicant countries to create conditions favourable for entry of the private corporate houses, both indigenous and foreign, into infrastructure sector and their entry

into the public sector projects. As a result of implementation of the conditionalities imposed by the ADB, subsidies for public services like electricity and water are being cut. In the name of recovering costs of these services, charges are being increased, drinking water supply is being privatised and agriculture is being left to the mercy of the market forces, as experiences in several countries have confirmed, a resolution passed by the workshop explained. The workshop also gave a call for holding protest rallies.

On the call given in the workshop, regional conventions were held in Vijayawada, Tirupati and Kurnool. District-level conventions were also held in some districts.

On May 3, members of the AP Public Sector Employees Federation participated in the rally with umbrellas which had 'ADB Go Back' slogans written prominently over them. Effigies of the ADB were carried in the procession and burnt. Employees of the central and state governments, Railways, LIC, BSNL, and teachers of APUTF and STU and their leaders, leaders of central trade unions, and others participated in the rally. R Sudha Bhaskar, President and S Veeraiah, General Secretary of CITU-AP, V T Narasimhan (AITUC), N Narasimha Reddy MLA (HMS), Nageswara Rao, General Secretary of the Confederation of Central Government Employees, M Janardhan Reddy, President of AP Public Sector Employees Federation and others addressed the public meeting.

Protest rallies and dharanas were also held in several districts in which CITU, AITUC and other trade unions participated.

Several non-governmental organisations, under the banner of the 'People's Forum Against ADB', organised protest meetings dubbing the ADB as "anti-democratic, destructive burden." On May 5, the forum organised a rally against the ADB from Sundarayya park to Indira park. In the public meeting held at the end, along with leaders of several NGOs, R Sudha Bhaskar, T Narasimhan and N Narasimha Reddy also participated.

ON DISINVESTMENTS OF BALCO SHARES TO STERLITE

The exercise of disinvestments of the residual shares of BALCO has been put in process giving rise to serious controversy involving public interest. When the BALCO was first privatised in 2001, the issue was hotly debated in the house. And the issue of gross impropriety of the entire process, gross under valuation of the worth of the company while handing over 51 per cent shares to M/s Sterlite has come to light. At that time, this house was assured by the then NDA govt that the whole matter of BALCO disinvestments would be re-examined by the CAG. But even after five years, the report of CAG has not seen light. Meanwhile, the exercise for disinvestments of the residual 49 per cent govt shares has resumed. No one but the Attorney General of India has firmly opined that the 49 per cent govt shares is grossly undervalued and it would not be in public interest to disinvest the govt shares to M/s Sterlite, as valued by SBI Cap.

The entire process of valuation of govt shares in BALCO has been improper. To avoid conflict of interest, the assignment for valuation has been given to SBI Cap. The SBI Cap outsourced the job to Dalal Mott Macdonald, which had linkage with Sterlite. And this has given rise to 'conflict of interest' between the assigned task vis-a-vis Sterlite. The valuation made by that company has been based on certain extremely flawed assumptions that the aluminium price will not increase in next five years; and BALCO, despite having invested Rs 3800 crores by March 2006, will stagnate after 2010. These impractical assumptions were made to keep the value of govt shares in BALCO extremely low. If in this process, the Govt. proceeds with disinvesting shares of Sterlite that will be a serious injury to the public exchequer and to the country. It is also being told that the disinvestment of residual govt shares to Sterlite is obligatory on the basis of the Shareholders' Agreement. But again, the Attorney General has opined clearly, that there are three other options. One is that the Govt. shares to be retained by the Govt. in public interest.

It should also be noted that Sterlite in any case cannot claim any advantage in terms of

Shareholders' Agreement because Sterlite has grossly violated the Shareholders' Agreement. All the Central Trade Unions had written jointly to Prime Minister on such violations by Sterlite.

Chittabrata Majumdar, General Secretary of CITU and Rajya Sabha member raised the above points in his letter to the Prime Minister. He also requested the PM to stop disinvestments of residual Govt. shares in BALCO and retain the same under strict supervision by the Govt. nominees in the BALCO Board, in view of: a) questionable asset valuation during disinvestments in 2001, which is yet to be vetted by CAG as per assurance in Parliament b) flagrant violation of SHA on labour related matters c) gross under valuation of residual 49 per cent shares by SBI Caps through an agency M/s Dalal Mott Macdonald which has a conflict of interest vis-avis M/s Sterlite and d) Attorney General's opinion on under valuation of shares and Govt.'s right to retain residual shares.

Tapan Sen, Secretary, CITU and Rajya Sabha member also raised these issues in his intervention in the House and urged the government to refrain from offloading the residual shares of BALCO to Sterlite in greater public interest.

The Two Faces of Asia

... The face of Asia is changing. Today, hundreds of millions of people enjoy a better quality of life. The middle classes are growing, and Asia's place in the world is rising.

But open the lens wider, and another face appears.

In this region of increasing prosperity, one in five people still cannot access safe drinking water. Half the population is without proper sanitation. In this region of rising aspirations, more than 4 million children will die this year, never reaching their fifth birthday. And the same rapid development that has raised living standards from Shanghai to Mumbai has put the region's ecosystems in peril—endangering the livelihoods of the poor.

Absolute poverty is declining. But inequality is growing. Poverty—in all its aspects—is still our region's most daunting problem. ...

(Address by Haruhiko Kuroda, President, Asian Development Bank, at the 39th Annual Meeting on 5 May 2006 at Hyderabad, India)

REPORTS & EVENTS

MAY DAY OBSERVED COUNTRYWIDE

May-Day observance this year has witnessed massive mobilization of several thousands of workers countrywide. Most of the workplaces and industrial centers in the country saw processions, demonstrations, public meeting etc to remember the sacrifice of the martyrs of the May day and pledge for continuing the combat against the ongoing onslaughts on the rights and livelihood of the toiling people and the conspiracy of the imperialist forces besides expressing solidarity with the struggles going on in the country and abroad.

West Bengal

Even in the midst of ongoing campaign for the 14th election of the State Assembly, the trade unions took active initiative to observe May day throughout the state despite numerous hurdles created by the Election Commission. Flag-hoisting, processions and public meetings were held in all the district headquarters, industrial centers and plantations in the state. At Kolkata, a huge public rally was held at Saheed Minar Maidan at the joint initiative of the central trade unions and Employees Federations. Addressing the mammoth rally of the workers Jyoti Basu, Vice President CITU called upon the working class to widen the unity and strengthen the countrywide united struggles

against the retrograde policy of imperialist globalisation. The meeting was also addressed by Md Amin, Labour Minister, Govt of West Bengal and Secretary CITU, Kali Ghosh, General Secretary, West Bengal State CITU, Ranjit Guha(AITUC), Saral Deb (TUCC), Ashok Ghosh (UTUC) and Chunilal Dasgupta (12th July Committee).

Delhi

May day was observed through hoisting of flag and holding rallies in the factory gates throughout Delhi Ghaziabad, Noida and Faridabad.

At the initiative of Delhi Union of Journalists (DUJ), thousands of journalists and press workers rallied in a procession from the Hindustan Times Building to the office of Labour Commissioner. The rally was addressed by S K Pande, President DUJ, NK Trikha, President NUJ, M L Joshi, President UNI Employees Federation, Mr Saigal, PTI Employees Federation, Satish Tripathy, All India Newspaper Employees Federation besides others.

In a thousand strong rally at Sector 4 Ghaziabad, Sudhir Kumar, President Delhi State CITU addressed the gathering. At Noida, rally was held at G-Block park at Sector 3 which was addressed by M L Malkotia, Secretary, Delhi State CITU and Uday Chand Jha,

Secretary, District CITU.

At Pandara Road, New Delhi, the rally organized by Hotel Workers' Union was addressed by Mohan Lal, General Secretary, Delhi State CITU. At Mangol Puri Chawk at New Delhi, huge rally was organized by Readymade Garments Export Employees Union which was also addressed by Mohan Lal.

In the afternoon, joint rally was organized by CITU, AITUC, HMS, UTUC, TUCC, AICCTU and other unions in front of Delhi Town Hall which was attended by thousands of workers. Tapan Sen, Secretary CITU addressed the rally.

Rajasthan

Reports of flag-hoisting followed by rallies and processions were received from all the industrial centers and districts of the State viz., Jaipur, Sriganganagar, Hanumangarh, Rawatbhatta, Bikanir, Kota, Kankroli, Jhunujhunu, Sikar and other places where thousands of workers took part. At the capital city Jaipur, flag-hoisting and rallies were held in almost twenty five spots which were addressed by the leadership of State CITU.

Punjab

In a press release issued from Chandigarh by Raghunath Singh, General Secretary, Punjab State CITU, it was informed that on the occasion of May Day, rallies and

REPORTS & EVENTS

demonstrations were held in around 70 places in the state covering all the districts and the industrial centers. Industrial workers, Govt Employees, employees of banks and insurance, transport workers, FCI workers, brick-kiln workers, Anganwadi workers and helpers, medical representatives etc took part in organizing the may day observance in a big way and several thousands took part in the programmes. The rallies were addressed by State leadership of CITU viz., Blawant Singh, President, Vijay Mishra Working President, Raghunath Singh, General Secretary besides the leadership of the affiliated unions and federations. Notable was the eight thousand strong rally at the gate of Hero Cycle factory at Ludhiana. Also the districts centers at Amritsar, Chandigarh, Jalandhar, Sangrur, Dhuri, Ferozpur etc witnessed massive demonstration.

Assam

The rallies were organized in all the districts and tea plantations. At Guwahati, joint trade union rally was held at Judges Maidan which was addressed by the leadership of Assam State CITU and leaders of other central trade unions and employees federations. Red flag was hoisted by Bimal Nandy.

Tripura

Flag hoisting followed by rallies and processions were organized throughout the state including the state capital Agartala, Dharmanagar, Kilasahar and other places which were addressed by

the leadership of CITU and other unions.

Arunachal

A massive gathering of workers was held at Rajib Gandh Stadium at the state capital at Itanagar. All Arunachal Pradesh Workers' Union (CITU) organised the May Day rally which drew participation of more than ten thousand workers. The main speaker in the rally was Deben Bhattacharya, national Vice President and General Secretary of Assam State CITU. Bhattacharya, while explaining the character of onslaught of neoliberal policies on the people and the workers stressed upon the need for broadening the struggle against those policies at all fronts with the active initiative of the trade union movement. Among others who addressed the rally were Jalley Sonam, President AAPWU, Goi Takker, President Arunachal Tata Sumo Workers' Association, Twang, Seppa, T K Baggang, all zonal leaders of AAPWU etc. The rally was concluded with colourful cultural programmes and performances by the workers.

Uttaranchal

A huge public meeting was held on the May Day at Gandhi Park, Dehradun at the joint initiative of the central trade unions. The meeting was addressed by Birendra Bhandari, General Secretary, Uttaranchal State CITU, Samar Bhandari (AITUC), D K Mukherhee (Defence Coordination Committee), Purn

Singh, General Secretary, Ordinance Factory Employees Union, besides leadership of various other unions. After the meeting, a huge procession of thousands of workers traveled through various parts of the Dehradun city to end again at Gandhi Park maidan.

Chhattisgarh

May Day rally was organized at Raipur under the banner of Joint Trade Union Council comprising various unions of the Govt employees, employees unions of banks, insurance, BSNL, medical representatives and others at the initiative of CITU. A big procession of workers and employees traveled through important parts of the city to converge into a public meeting at Fire Brigade Chawk. The meeting was presided over by N K Shukla, MPMSRU/CITU and was addressed by A K Shukla, Convenor, Joint Trade Union Council, Narendra Singh Chandrakar (Govt Employees Association), S C Bhattacharya (BSNLEU), Sujit Sharma(RDIEU), Anish Ghoritalwar(MPMSRU), N K Sangwar(MPCGIEA) and others. Reports of observance of May Day through public rally were also received from the industrial area of Siltara, Dhamtari, Bhilai, Rajhara, and Korba. In the colliery areas, morning processions were organized in all the collieries in the state at the initiative of Koyla Shramik Sangh(CITU).

REPORTS & EVENTS

West Bengal

EMC WORKERS STRUGGLE VICTORIOUS

After prolonged struggle by the workers, EMC factory at Beliaghata, Kolkata reopened at the direct intervention of Md Amin, Labour Minister, Govt of West Bengal on 9th April 2006. The factory remained closed for five long years and the company was referred to BIFR. The management tried to separate the Beliaghata unit of EMC from its

main establishment at Jessore road to secure permanent closure. But that game was foiled by the active intervention of the CITU union. The State Govt forced the EMC management to reopen its Jessore Road Factory in a new site at Sodepur and also to reopen the Beliaghata factory after finalisation and sanction of the rehabilitation package through BIFR.

The workers celebrated victory through a mass rally on 15th April 2006 which was addressed by Chittabrata Majumdar, General Secretary, CITU, Kali Ghosh, General Secretary, WB State CITU, Md Amin, Labour Minister, Govt of West Bengal, besides Prasanta Chatterjee, MP, and Arup Chandra, President and General Secretary of the workers union.

PUNJAB

FCI PALLEDAR & WORKERS STAGED DEMONSTRATION

Chandigarh, 28th April 2006, Over five thousands palledars and FCI workers staged demonstration before the office of Senior regional Manager at sector 31A. family members of the workers also joined the demonstration.

The main demand of the workers was abolition of the contract system and regularization of the contract workers in the FCI depots

statewide. All India FCI Mazdoor Federation organized the programme and FCI unions affiliated to CITU, AITUC and AICCTU joined the rally.

The rally was addressed by Balawant Singh, President Punjab State CITU, D L Sachadeva, Secretary AITUC, Swapan Mukherjee, General Secretary AICCTU and also the leadership of the Federation viz., Amar Singh,

Sukhdev Singh and other fraternal organizations. From the rally resolution was passed expressing solidarity with the struggles by the cycle factory workers of Ludhiana and Railway Coach factory workers of Kapurthala. The rally also declared that if the FCI management and the Govt do not sort out the genuine demands of the FCI workers, the struggle will be further intensified.

VICTORY IN CHANDIGARH TRANSPORT UNDERTAKING

The Secret Ballot election was held in Chandigarh Govt. Transport Workers' Union, the only recognized union in Chandigarh Transport Undertaking on 18th and 19th May 2006 under the

supervision of the appropriate authority. In the election the entire panel of CITU came out victorious polling 1179 votes in its favour out of total 2160 votes polled among the total workforce of 2283. The

joint front of all other unions of INTUC, AITUC etc together polled total 957 votes. The CITU panel comprised of Jagadish Singh as President, Satinder Singh as General Secretary, Vijay Kumar as

REPORTS & EVENTS

Vice President and Santokh Singh as Treasurer. Raghunath Singh,

General Secretary, Punjab State CITU congratulated the workers

for making CITU victorious in the election.

LEFT FRONT'S VICTORY CELEBRATED

Thousands of industrial workers, workers of Chandigarh Transport Undertaking, Govt Employees and Medical Representatives assembled before the office of the Director CTU to celebrate thumping victory of the Left Front

in West Bengal and Left Democratic Front in Kerala in the recent Assembly poll.

Raghunath Singh, General Secretary, Punjab State CITU, A Sawhney, General Secretary of Chandigarh District CITU, Pishora Singh, President, Chandigarh Govt

Transport Workers' Union, Rakesh Kumar, Convenor, Coordination Committee of Workers and Employees of MC and UT Chandigarh and others addressed the meeting.

International Solidarity to

INDIAN CONSTRUCTION WORKERS AT DUBAI

The Indian construction workers working in Dubai have been facing serious repression from their immediate Indian employer and the British Construction Company operating

there. The Union of Construction and Allied Trades and Technicians (UCATT) intervened in the matter and brought pressure on the British Company to refrain from repressive activities. The UCATT

General Secretary Allen Ritchie conveyed this to Debanjan Chakraborty, General Secretary Construction Workers' Federation of India and expressed solidarity with the Indian workers at Dubai.

JUDICIAL DENIAL OF MINIMUM WAGES:

CITU DEPLORES GOVERNMENT INACTION

After the Supreme Court's verdict, in a case filed by the Karnataka State Government that a daily wage earner, even after years of toil in the same job, cannot claim the right to regular employment, the same apex court has issued another verdict in the case of Lingegowda Detective & Security Chamber (P) Ltd. Vs Mysore Kirloskar Ltd. that the workmen of private security agencies are not entitled to minimum wages as the State of Karnataka has not included this in the purview of Minimum Wages Act, 1948.

However, the apex court has not uttered a single word against such appointments by the supplying agencies and the companies, employing the workers nor have they said anything about the terms on which such companies should recruit workers so that the workers may get a fair deal. The apex court verdict legitimises the denial of even the right to get minimum wages to the workers but precisely uphold the right of the employers to exploit the workers according to their will.

The CITU Secretariat in a statement issued on May 8, 2006, regretted this anti-labour mindset and demanded of the Karnataka Government to take immediate steps to amend the Minimum Wages Act to cover the workers in private security agencies in the State. It also demands that the Central Government to cover all workers irrespective of type of employment under the Act. The CITU also appealed to all trade unions to campaign for such a legal enactment.

Consumer Price Index Numbers for Industrial Workers on Base 2001=100

State	Sr. No.	Centre	Feb., 06	Mar., 06	State	Sr. No.	Centre	Feb., 06	Mar., 06
AP	1	GODAVARIKHANI	121	120	MHR	44	MUMBAI	121	121
	2	GUNTUR	117	116		45	NAGPUR	121	122
	3	HYDERABAD	113	113		46	NASIK	120	120
	4	VIJAYAWADA	116	115		47	PUNE	120	121
	5	VISHAKHAPATANAM	115	115		48	SHOLAPUR	116	117
	6	WARRANGAL	118	118	ORI	49	ANGUL-TALCHER	116	117
ASM	7	DOOM DOOMA-TINSUKIA	112	114		50	ROURKELA	118	119
	8	GUWAHATI	111	111	PND	51	PONDICHERRY	121	119
	9	LABAC- SILCHAR	119	117	PUN	52	AMRITSAR	125	126
	10	MARIANI-JORHAT	110	112		53	JALANDHAR	124	124
	11	RANGAPARA-TEZPUR	107	109		54	LUDHIANA	126	125
BIH	12	MONGHYR-JAMALPUR	120	121	RJN	55	AJMER	117	117
CHD	13	CHANDIGARH	122	123		56	BHILWARA	121	121
CHS	14	BHILAI	116	118		57	JAIPUR	123	124
DLH	15	DELHI	117	119	TN	58	CHENNAI	116	114
GOA	16	GOA	116	118		59	COIMBATORE	117	116
GUJ	17	AHMEDABAD	113	114		60	COONOR	114	112
	18	BHAVNAGAR	113	114		61	MADURAI	115	113
	19	RAJKOT	115	115		62	SALEM	113	110
	20	SURAT	112	112		63	TIRUCHIRAPALLY	119	118
	21	VADODARA	113	115	TRP	64	TRIPURA	110	110
HRY	22	FARIDABAD	118	118	UP	65	AGRA	123	124
	23	YAMUNANAGAR	124	125		66	GHAZIABAD	123	123
HP	24	HIMACHAL PRAD	115	117		67	KANPUR	122	123
J & K	25	SRINAGAR	115	114		68	LUCKNOW	117	118
JRK	26	BOKARO	115	116		69	VARANASI	118	118
	27	GIRIDIH	126	128	WB	70	ASANSOL	119	119
	28	JAMSHEDPUR	122	122		71	DARJEELING	117	117
	29	JHARIA	120	122		72	DURGAPUR	115	116
	30	KODARMA	129	128		73	HALDIA	111	111
	31	RANCHI HATIA	121	121		74	HOWRAH	116	116
KNT	32	BANGALORE	122	121		75	JALPAIGURI	112	113
	33	BELGAUM	121	119		76	KOLKATA	115	116
	34	HUBLI DHARWAR	119	119		77	RANIGANJ	118	119
	35	MERCARRA	111	111		78	SILIGURI	120	121
	36	MYSORE	121	119					
KRL	37	ERNAKULAM	122	122					
	38	MUNDAKAYAM	122	121					
	39	QUILON	125	123					
MP	40	BHOPAL	120	121					
	41	CHHINDWARA	119	119					
	42	INDORE	115	117					
	43	JABALPUR	122	122					
								ALL INDIA INDEX	
								119	119

DEREGULATION GONE MAD

WILLIAM PFAFF

A man who played a key role in the deregulation of the U.S. airline industry in 1980, Tom Allison, says that if senators had known then what they know now about airline deregulation, they would never have passed the measure.

Allison says that by lifting restrictions on airline competition, and on where airlines could fly, Congress unintentionally created unending disruption and cost to both industry and consumers, with gross accompanying inefficiencies.

In an interview, he said the human and other costs of U.S. airline deregulation outweighed benefits to consumers, which were chiefly lower airfares on the popular routes between big cities that attract competition.

Small-city air service, typically provided in the United States by single carriers, has greatly increased in cost, or has simply been abandoned. From any big American city, Allison said, "It's cheaper to fly to Paris than to Missoula." In practice, to get to Missoula, in Montana, you now need a car, the Greyhound Bus or a bicycle.

Allison said that deregulation cut airline salaries, slashed retirement benefits, forced job cuts despite rises in the frequency of airline services, bankrupted many formerly great airlines or forced them into bankruptcy protection, ruined standards of airline service, raised fares on most non-mainline services, and made life miserable for travelers and airline employees.

A further consequence of deregulation, Allison noted, which most Americans fail to appreciate, is that deregulation resulted in a "massive shift of airline debt to the public," via a federal corporation established to pay the pensions (or a part of them) of the employees of airlines driven out of business or forced into bankruptcy.

"I had no idea these things would occur," Allison says, speaking of 1980, when he was a believer in deregulating America's airlines.

I recount this American experience because of its relevance to the European debate on air travel deregulation, but mainly as an example of the economic and human harm that has been caused

in recent years by unthinking submission to the prevailing ideologies of deregulation and privatization.

A further example, a very small one but in its own way significant, was brought to my attention last week by an annoying demand that I choose among 18 different operators competing to provide me with the telephone number I don't happen to have at hand.

There are certain things that are natural monopolies, and providing telephone-directory service is one of them. Another is providing water to communities. The private water companies that rushed in to developing countries early in the deregulation era, making promises of improved, abundant and cheapen water service, have recently acknowledged that they cannot do so and still make a profit in typical third world circumstances (what a surprise!). They recommended properly regulated nonprofit public monopolies.

The European Parliament has recently removed the controversial "Bolkestein amendment" from the terms on which transnational competition in services is authorized inside the European single market.

Once again, the problem was doctrinaire defiance of common sense. The obvious intention of the EU in creating the single market was to raise the living standards of all, not to undermine the wages and social standards of the more advanced EU countries. This is what the Bolkestein proposal was accused of doing, by authorizing companies in poorer countries to perform work in other EU states for the lower wages and social charges of their own countries.

The intention of doctrinaire deregulation is to eliminate what are deemed "inefficiencies," including wages and standards uncompetitive with those in less advanced countries. In the EU case this constituted the kind of retrograde thinking that, as in the case of airline deregulation, drives everyone's standards down, ending in a net loss to society.

(Tribune Media Services International)

WE NEED QUOTAS

Bhalchandra Mungekar

The attack by elites and the corporate sector against the proposed quotas for OBCs in the IITs, IIMs and central universities, and reservation in the private sector for SCs and STs is deplorable though predictable.

They condemn the proposals on the ground that quotas would jeopardise merit and efficiency, which are the two main planks of a globalised and competitive economy.

It is distressing that the defenders of merit forget that they are condemning nearly 80 per cent of the country's population as non-meritorious, inefficient and unworthy of occupying a due space in the overall structure of entitlements.

The ongoing debate on merit versus quotas not only defies objectivity, but also common sense. To consider merit in a mechanical manner in a society like India, which is governed by an unequal opportunity structure resulting from a highly skewed distribution of social, economic, educational and cultural entitlements, is indefensible.

Caste still governs life in this country. If merit is to be construed in a purely secular manner, and not be judged in the context of caste background, why is it that the elite never questions caste-based exclusion and discrimination?

Our academic community spends time in analysing and describing caste rather than arguing that caste is the greatest monster in the way of progress. Let us take only one facet of this glaring inequality. In 2002-03, the drop-out rate for general category students up to class V, class VIII and class X was 34.89, 52.79, and 62.59 per cent respectively. But for SCs, the figures were 41.47, 59.93, and 71.92 per cent respectively; while for STs they were 51.37, 68.67, and 80.29 per cent respectively.

This kind of inequality prevails virtually across all socio-economic indicators. Are we so naive to demand exactly the same level of merit from SC/ST boys and girls condemned to live in deplorable conditions and a small minority?

So far as admission to engineering, medicine and other professional courses are concerned, at the entry level there is virtually no difference between marks obtained by general category and OBC students. SC/ST/OBC students have to take the same tests and examinations.

Given the opportunities, they have proved their merit. Assuming that there was no reservation for SCs/STs/OBCs, would it have been possible for them to reach where they are today?

Even after creating some quotas in both education and employment, hundreds of posts remain vacant as no suitable candidates are available from these categories. Sometimes, due to deeply rooted prejudices, even suitable candidates are not considered fit.

Affirmative action in one form or the other is a universal phenomenon. For instance, the US has used two instruments to provide protection against discrimination and also to give fair access and equal opportunities to African-Americans, Hispanics and women.

Under the Equal Opportunity Act, the minorities get legal protection against discrimination in employment. The US also has policies to provide fair access to minorities in government contracts in employment and admission to educational institutions.

Besides, the private sector adopts voluntary measures to ensure fair participation of minorities. Since there is no evidence to show that SCs, STs and OBCs are inefficient, arguments of merit and efficiency do not hold much water.

It is essentially a conflict of interests. On the one hand, a small elite class is fighting to perpetuate its monopoly; on the other, vast sections of society are aspiring for a legitimate share in these privileges. In a highly inegalitarian society like India, protective policies are unavoidable for inclusive development. The only substitute to quotas and reservations is to create a more egalitarian social order guaranteeing equal opportunities to all and, simultaneously, to fight against all sources of inequality, exclusion and discrimination.

(Courtesy: Times Of India)