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DECEMBER 2024 | Volume 2 | Issue 12
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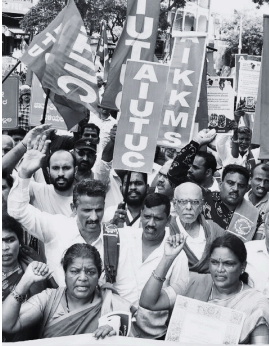
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— UPDATES ON PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS —



AICCTU Conducts Huge Workers' Rally in the RSS Heartland of Karnataka

All India Central Council of Trade Unions conducted a mass rally in Bantwal of Udupi district on 24th November. Hundreds of workers from all across the state joined the group. The demands were repeal of the 4 labour codes of slavery, repeal of the 3 draconian new criminal laws, statutory minimum wage of Rs 35,000/- and a pension of Rs 10,000/- per month and many others. The rally was followed by the first state conference of AICCTU. A new state committee was elected at the conference.



Farmers and Workers Rally Across Karnataka, Warning the Government

Thousands of farmers and workers protested across India on Tuesday, led by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha and Central Trade Unions. Their demands included repealing four labour codes, legal MSP for crops, a national minimum wage of ₹26,000, and ending labour outsourcing. They also sought comprehensive loan waivers for farmers and opposed privatization in sectors like healthcare, education, and defense.



Mid-day Meal Workers Protest Demanding Equal Wages in Kalaburagi

Mid-day meal workers took a protest march under the banner of the Akhila Karnataka Akshara Dasoha Employees Association demanding equal wages for equal work. The protestors demanded the regularisation of mid-day meal workers by the government and extension of all benefits that government employees are entitled to. A memorandum was submitted to the Deputy Director of Public Instruction demanding timely payment of wages and protection against harassment in the workplace.



24-Hour Hunger Strike in Cochin against the Sagarmala Project and Coastal Land Grabbing

The Chellanam-Kochi Janakeeya Vedhi organised a 24-hour hunger strike against the increasing sea erosion by the development projects by the state along the coast between Chellanam and Fort Kochi. The strike protested against the government, the Cochin Port Trust and ISRO. The fisherfolk are being forced to flee their lands and livelihoods. The speakers called for people's action against the Sagarmala Project and the Blue Economy Policy, criticising the state for serving corporate interests at the cost of the fisherfolk.



Mass Rally in Manipur condemns killings, protests Re-Imposition of AFSPA

A rally led by women and organised by various groups including the Manipuri Students' Federation (MSF) saw participation of hundreds of protestors denouncing the violence in Manipur and demanding an end to human rights violations in the state. The rally was organized to protest the brutal killing of six innocent people in Jiribam. The protestors called for the repeal of the AFSPA in the Imphal region carrying posters saying "Repeal AFSPA, 1958" and "Stop killing women and children." The rally was stopped by security forces 1 km from the Secretariat.

Muslim Protesters attacked and killed during Protest against Survey of Mosque in Sambhal

Sambhal in Uttar Pradesh has been a site of rampant protests and police violence. The locals protested against the court-ordered survey of a local mosque, with claims from Hindutva forces that the site was originally of a Hindu temple. A large crowd protesting the survey was attacked by the police. 6 people were killed by the police and multiple injured.



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Spark is a monthly magazine run by students and youth.

Today, the state and the corporate controlled media are constantly propagating lies and fabricated news that suit their interests which makes exposition of the truth an imminent task. The intention of Spark is to provide an alternative perspective on issues that affect the masses.

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The Right to Education: Luxury or Necessity?

Saniya

COVER

Education in Karnataka has been getting increasingly inaccessible, with reduced government investments, high dropout rates, teacher shortages, and inadequate infrastructure being recurrent issues. Students from elementary schools to degree colleges in Karnataka are bearing the brunt of a poor education system that is getting rapidly privatized and exclusionary, making quality education a luxury and not a basic right of the common people.

A report titled “Implementation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009: Where Do We Stand” was recently released by the Right to Education Cell (RTE Cell) and the Council for Social Development, New Delhi. It exposes several shortcomings of Karnataka’s education sector. Only 11% of Karnataka’s 2023-24 annual budget has been allocated for education, as opposed to an average of 14.7% in other states of India. This drastic under-investment is a major concern as it leads to several other issues plaguing the education sector in Karnataka. Recently, Karnataka has seen a rise in the closure of many government schools due to poor infrastructure and low-enrolment. This has led to an increase in student dropouts. In the absence of affordable quality education, the few that can afford end up paying more than they can to send their children to private schools while a vast majority of students are kept out of schools.

“By not filling teacher vacancies and closing schools, the government is effectively ‘shrinking’ the public education system and reducing access to education,” the report said. Karnataka has 1,41,358 vacant teaching positions, which makes it the highest in the country. There is a very high pupil-teacher ratio and only 68% of the high schools have teachers for all core subjects. Ineffective and inadequate teacher professional development (TPD) was also highlighted in the report. These shortages, the report says, limit the academic support available to schools. A 2023 report of the Union Ministry of School Education and Literacy on RTE compliance shows that Karnataka’s RTE compliance rate is 23.6%, which falls below the national average of 25.5%. All this data portrays the alarming reality of primary education in Karnataka.

Many students discontinue their education after high school due to financial difficulties. When some of the students who finish their school education manage to move to government degree colleges, they are faced with similar problems there as well. In October, 300 students from government degree colleges staged a protest in Freedom Park against a huge faculty shortage. Despite being two months into the new academic year, many colleges had only 5 to 8 permanent government faculty for several hundred students. “Since the academic year started, not a single lesson has been completed

by guest lecturers. Only the permanent government faculty are teaching and they cover just 25% of the subjects,” said a student from Government First Grade College, Peenya. In this college, senior students take classes for their juniors due to the lack of lecturers. Students are worried about clearing their end semester examinations in December with irregular classes and a lack of lecturers.

Discrepancies in the conducting of examinations are also very frequently seen here. In November, candidates protested outside a government degree college in the Sindhanur town, Raichur district, against misconduct in a Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC) examination for the recruitment of Panchayat Development Officers. The question papers were given late and a seal on the bundle of question papers was tampered with and opened before the scheduled time. Candidates agitated over the possibility of the papers being leaked. Similar instances were also seen in Kalaburagi city. Such instances of irregularities while conducting examinations adversely impact employment in an already underemployed society.

Engineering colleges, too, are getting increasingly privatized, with the implementation of 50% payment quota seats from this academic year in the University of BDT College of Engineering, Davanagere. The introduction of management seats in a government engineering college has sparked outrage among students. Of the 504 seats in total, 254 seats are management seats, being sold for Rs. 97,000 each according to rankings, whereas the remaining 250 merit seats have a fee of Rs. 47,000. Instead of improving access to education by reducing the fees, the Karnataka state government is selling half the college seats for higher fees to those who can afford it. Recently, Karnataka Information Technology Minister Priyank Kharge said 100 engineering colleges are set to be ‘adopted’ by the corporate sector next year to improve ‘employability’.

The Congress state government that came into power riding high on promises of social and economic justice is doing little to rectify the situation in terms of basic needs like education, health, agriculture etc. The writing on the wall is quite clear on the efforts to commodify and commercialize education as a luxury good. From the primary school to college level, education is slipping away from the masses. The situation is similar throughout the country, as privatization of education is aided by National Education Policy 2020. While Karnataka claims to be a ‘progressive’ state that scraps the NEP and is drafting a new alternative State Education Policy, the government is employing all kinds of backdoor methods to continue clearing the way for more privatization of education. The need of the hour is a policy that uphold the ethos of universal education, one that is yet to materialize.

The student-youth must unite to demand such a policy and its implementation from the state government.

How Bengaluru's Migrant Workers Pay with Their Lives for Climate Change and Corruption

Malini Ranganathan, Sachinkumar Rathod

In Bengaluru, a mix of intense rainfall and real estate corruption had a deadly result last month. On October 22, eight construction workers and a sub-contractor were crushed to death when a seven-story building – still under construction – collapsed in Babusapalya, Hennur, in northeast Bengaluru. The eight deceased workers have been identified as Mahmed Arman, Mahmed Arshad, Tirupali, Solo Pashwan, Phulchand Yadav, Tulasi Reddy, Gajendra, and Manikanthan Satya Raju. The sub-contractor Elumalai was from Tamil Nadu. Of the 20 or so workers rescued from the building, six were badly injured.

Socially marginalised groups and the working classes suffer disproportionately as a result of extreme weather disasters. Because workers toil outdoors or in poorly ventilated workshops and live in informal slums or labour camps without adequate shade, drainage or infrastructure, they are vulnerable to extreme heat and rainfall. In the Babusapalya case, there was the added culprit of corruption and substandard materials deployed in the construction of the building.

Who are Bengaluru's migrant workers and where are they from?

"We have come here to work because there is no work in Bihar," said Arman, one of the rescued workers who hails from Bihar's Khagaria district. Another worker, Arshad, echoed this, "We came here from Bihar because we get higher wages. We were doing tile work on the first floor. We stay in the same building – cooking, toilet, sleeping – everything is done inside the building.

"Iss kaam ke alawa hamare paas kuch nahi hai Bengaluru me" (We don't have anything other than this in Bengaluru). I jumped from the fifth floor when the

building collapsed. My three men died here. My nephew died in front of me. We won't work anymore in this kind of building. What will the family of these people tell me? How will I explain it to them? It all happened suddenly."

Laxman from Bihar said, "My parents live in the village, I left everything to come here to earn a living. In the village sometimes the farm gets flooded; here they made the building itself collapse!" And then he echoed Arshad, "Me unke ghar walo ko kya bolu?" (What will I tell their families?)

In recent years, migrant workers from northern and eastern India, in addition to those from the neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, have been coming to Bengaluru to work in gruelling, unorganised sector jobs. Workers from four different states were identified on the Babusapalya site: Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and other parts of Karnataka, of which Bengaluru is the capital.

One woman from Karnataka's Yadgir district was badly injured. Migrants from the impoverished regions of north Karnataka and Hyderabad Karnataka, similar to migrants from Bihar, leave their villages on account of drought and debt, only to find themselves in daily-wage and other precarious work in Bengaluru. The main difference between non-Kannadiga and Kannadiga migrant workers is that the latter can navigate the city, forge social networks, and join labour unions due to their language ability, whereas the former are often excluded from such networks due to language and cultural barriers and find themselves dependent on the thekedar (contractor) or mestri (labour overseer).

Our interviews with the workers and other migrants in brickmaking, ragpicking, and construction sectors in eastern and northeast Bengaluru reveal

that those who are among the most economically and socially marginalised – who are caste, class, linguistically, and/or religiously marginalised – leave their villages amidst debt, landlessness, unpredictable rains (both droughts and floods), and widespread unemployment. Rural unemployment has been worsened by the Modi government's budgetary cuts to (and added bureaucratic hurdles and delays surrounding) the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) and its Aadhaar-linked payment system.

Once in the city, migrant workers are housed in inhumane conditions, without proper accommodations, toilets, or other facilities, making them all the more susceptible to extreme weather. On Babusapalya and other sites that employ migrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, workers sleep on the site itself, either in makeshift tents or in the partly-finished building.

Exploited and paying with their lives

Climate change has serious effects on unorganised or casualised workers in the construction, brickmaking, sanitation, and app delivery sectors, among others. Erratic, unpredictable monsoons in South Asia are one sign of climate change. So is extreme heat; in fact, the two severe weather patterns are linked. This year alone, some 1,500 people have died in India due to catastrophic flooding, which comes on the heels of summer heatwaves.

Add to this the fact that the collapsed building in Babusapalya was 'unauthorised': three extra floors were under construction without permission. It was built from sub-standard materials that made it vulnerable in the face of torrential rainfall. The rainfall on October 22 in Bengaluru was the heaviest recorded over a 24-hour period

in 27 years. To make matters worse, the building was constructed illegally on Kharab-B land, a category of 'non-cultivable' or waste land in the Karnataka Land Revenue Act 1964, which consists of, among other types of land, raja kaluves, or storm drains and rivulets. Despite three notices by the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) to stop work, the builder continued.

Even without severe rain, Bengaluru has witnessed such under-construction building collapses because of corruption involved during the plan approval stage. Typically, the owner and promoter of the project gets the plan approved for a three-story building and then constructs a six- to seven-floor building. When the construction is completed, he quickly sells it for profit and moves to the next project. Residents of the area blame developers from Andhra Pradesh who are wealthy and politically connected, and are able to buy land and invest in construction. They also identify a nexus between real estate developers, politicians, and officials, which also clearly extends to labour contractors and sub-contractors who become involved at a later stage in the recruiting of low-paid migrant workers.

So far, Andhra-based Muniraju Reddy and his son Bhuvan Reddy have been arrested in the Babusapalya case for flouting regulations and constructing illegally.

Unfortunately, it is workers who pay with their lives. Migrant workers do not receive legal protections. They are not provided with safety hats and are denied minimum wages, insurance, or other benefits. They often find themselves exploited by thekedars, who are notorious for withholding pay and meting out other forms of abuse.

Demands for accountability and worker protection

It is clear that accountability is lacking on multiple levels. Regular surveys of illegal constructions by engineers would enhance accountability and place more checks and balances on real estate construction. An investigation into the contractors, engineers, and officials who are responsible for the Babusapalya incident is also the need of the hour. Finally, the Labour Department needs to comprehensively survey the plight of migrant workers in the city and their housing conditions.

Existing policies need to be strengthened. In the wake of this

tragedy, the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU) has pointed out the paltry minimum wage under MNREGA, which is further driving people to out-migrate, and has called for the expeditious processing of worker compensation, which should be increased from Rs 5 lakh to 10 lakh, as well as the strengthening of existing migrant worker laws.

The Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulations of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979 is one of those laws. It provides for occupational safeguards and calls for mandatory licences for contractors. The Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Services) Act, 1996 is another act. It recognises that construction labour is one of the most numerous and vulnerable segments of the unorganised sector, characterised by its causal nature, temporary relationships with employer, uncertain and long working hours, lack of basic amenities, lack of data on workers, and inadequate welfare facilities. Section 34 of the Act requires employers to provide temporary accommodations with "separate cooking place, bathing, washing and lavatory facilities."

Without strengthening these minimum worker safeguards and accountability surrounding real estate construction, the Babusapalya tragedy will unfortunately not be an isolated incident.

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(First published in The News Minute)



8 workers and a supervisor died after building collapse in Bangalore

Victory for Devanahalli Farmers

Sharath

The farmers of Devanahalli have been fighting against forcible land acquisition for almost three years now. The initial notification for acquisition was given by the then BJP government and the Congress had vowed to withdraw it if it came to power. However, it has become just another false promise made by the current ruling party. The Congress government has been continuing the process of land acquisition backtracking on its promise despite severe resistance by the farmers. The situation turned grim when the Congress government went on to issue the second of the three notifications to the farmers, notifying them to vacate their lands in thirty days and hand them over to the Government.

Enraged by this, on 7th November, the farmers assembled in front of the residence of KH Muniyappa, the minister of food and civil supplies and the MLA of Devanahalli. An indefinite sit-in was started. They agitated against the government's move calling it an anti-farmers move, raising slogans against the government and the corporates it serves. The notification issued by the government was burnt in defiance. The matter immediately garnered attention from the media and the minister was forced to talk to the cabinet ministers as well as the Karnataka Industrial Area Development Board (KIADB). A notification was passed on the very day by the government directing that no further proceedings will be conducted regarding the land acquisition till further instructions are given to KIADB from the government. No clear decision has been taken yet about completely withdrawing from the land acquisition. However, the farmers were successful in demanding and securing an interim relief for now.



India's Labour Should Build Lives, Not Fuel Genocide: The Ethical Failure of Adani- Elbit Defense Ties

Satyam

India's burgeoning defense industry, marked by collaborations with Israeli arms giant Elbit Systems and domestic firms like Alpha Elsec, is casting a shadow over its ethical responsibilities. While the government touts these partnerships as part of the "Make in India" initiative to boost self-reliance in defense, the reality is far more damning. These deals are not just about advancing India's defense capabilities—they are about complicity in genocide, destruction, and the systematic oppression of Palestinian lives.

Adani and Elbit: Manufacturing Machines of War

In 2018, Adani Enterprises partnered with Elbit Systems to form Adani Elbit Advanced Systems India Limited. This joint venture operates the only facility outside Israel to produce Hermes 900 drones, a UAV widely used by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in their military campaigns. The Hermes 900, equipped with advanced surveillance and combat technologies, is a weapon of war, implicated in countless operations in Gaza that have led to civilian deaths and the destruction of critical infrastructure.

By enabling the production of these drones in Hyderabad, India is no longer just a neutral party in this conflict. It has become an active participant in enabling a military campaign that is genocidal. Human rights advocates worldwide have called for states to divest from Elbit Systems, but India has gone the other way, embracing this blood-stained technology and providing its labour force and resources to manufacture tools of oppression.

Alpha Elsec: Supplying the Tools of Destruction

Alpha-Elsec Aerospace Systems, a joint venture between India's Alpha Design Technologies Limited (ADTL) and Elbit, plays a supporting role in this disturbing collaboration. With its Bengaluru facility, Alpha Elsec develops essential tactical components like thermal imagers, night vision devices, and laser target designators—critical technologies that enhance the operational precision of drones like the Hermes 900.

India's skilled workforce is thus directly involved in creating the very technologies used in Gaza to surveil, target, and kill. The human cost of these drones is no secret: entire neighbourhoods reduced to rubble, families obliterated, and basic infrastructure destroyed under the watchful lens of these machines. Yet, instead of channeling this labour and expertise into uplifting its own citizens, India is exporting tools of violence and repression.

COVID-19: A Stark Contrast of Priorities

The starkest indictment of this misplaced focus comes from the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed India's woefully inadequate healthcare system. During the crisis, hospitals overflowed with patients while ventilators and oxygen supplies ran out. Hundreds of thousands of lives were lost—not because of a lack of knowledge or labour, but because of a failure to invest in the infrastructure that could save lives.

Imagine if the same effort and resources that went into building drones

for Israel's military campaigns were spent on producing ventilators, improving housing, or developing life-saving medical technologies. Instead, India's labour force is being exploited to build machines that take lives abroad while its citizens die preventable deaths at home.

India's Labour: Build Lives, Not Destroy Them

India's workers deserve better than this. The nation's skilled workforce and technological prowess should be directed toward creating opportunities that uplift Indian lives. Strengthening healthcare, improving housing, and building resilient infrastructure should take precedence over manufacturing weapons for conflicts thousands of miles away. These workers should not be reduced to cogs in the machinery of a genocide in Gaza.

As citizens of this country it is our duty

to point out that India's participation in these defense partnerships cannot be tolerated. By aiding Israel's military-industrial complex, India aligns itself with a regime that has been repeatedly accused of war crimes. It also squanders the chance to harness its labour and technology for its own development, to heal its own wounds, and to prepare for its own challenges. The lakhs of Indian labourers being sent to Israel is also part of the same problem.

The Call for Accountability

The Indian government must take responsibility for this failure. States have the power to terminate contracts and divest from companies like Elbit Systems. Other countries have shown that divestment works. Why should India not follow suit? Why should Indian workers' labour fuel the destruction of Palestinian homes instead of building homes for their own people?

This is not just a question of policy but of morality. An erstwhile colonised nation has a duty to reevaluate its defense partnerships and consider the ethical cost of aligning with companies implicated in genocide. It must prioritize the welfare of its citizens and the ethical use of its resources.

A Path Forward

India's labour should be a force for good—a means to improve healthcare, bolster education, and build infrastructure that uplifts its people. The government and corporations must redirect their focus to these areas, ensuring that every worker contributes to preserving and supporting life, not to perpetuating suffering and death abroad.

The people of India must come together to pressurise the government that has been hand-in-gloves with the Zionist regime both economically and ideologically to cut off all ties with the Israeli state.

Repeal AFSPA! Restore Peace in Manipur! AFSPA Not an Answer to End Ethnic Divide Manufactured by BJP-RSS!

(statement from All India Students' Association)

With a death toll of more than 250 and with 60,000 people being displaced, Manipur has been burning since May 2023 with periodic upsurge in violence and counter violence with the Union and State governments miserably failing to handle the situation. More recently the situation escalated with the burning of a woman, then an encounter in which 11 persons were killed, and then the abduction and murder of these women and children. In this prevailing scenario, the Union Home Minister Amit Shah saw it better to impose the draconian Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 in six police station limits of the valley districts on November 14th, 2024.

Amidst the continued internet blackouts, curfews and the raging violence, the imposition of AFSPA was justified by the Union Government by stating "volatile" situation and "active participation of insurgent groups in heinous acts of violence" as the reasons. We assert that AFSPA is not an answer to the ethnic divide that has been manufactured by the BJP-RSS in Manipur, but is being used as a tool to further the BJP-RSS agenda to sow hatred.

While either the Central or State Government can issue AFSPA notifications in Manipur, AFSPA has been imposed this time in the valley districts despite the disapproval of the state government. must be noted that the provisions of the Act were withdrawn from Imphal Municipality area in 2004, with six districts being removed from under AFSPA in April 2022 and the disturbed area notification being withdrawn in April 2023 from four other police station limits. However, the hill

districts of Manipur saw the extension of AFSPA for another six months in September 2024. This exposes the hypocrisy of the Central Government in its selective use of AFSPA in the hill and valley districts of Manipur, which is further fueling the ethnic violence. AFSPA is a brutal denial of basic liberty to the people. Kashmir, to Chhattisgarh, Manipur to Mizoram, the "special powers" granted to armed forces has only seen mass rapes, killing, abductions and illegal detentions.

The use of AFSPA has been accompanied by repeated complaints of torture, murder and rape. Can we ever forget Kunan Poshpora or the Mothers of Manipur's protest in Imphal against the rape and murder of Thangjam Manorama, while holding the banner "Indian Army Rape Us"? So, the question really is whether AFSPA imposition would bring about peace or political resolution in Manipur.

The twin-BJP governments have orchestrated an ethnic divide, which they will communally exploit. The BJP did what it is best at, that is to widen existing fault lines in a society and feed a chauvinistic narrative. AFSPA is the latest weapon to further fuel this ethnic conflict.

It is now clear that the Union or State Government has overseen the segregation of communities and increasing hostilities, and both are to be held responsible for the violence. PM Modi has not even visited Manipur yet, while Amit Shah has failed miserably as the Home Minister. The recent leaked audio tapes show the partisan approach of the CM, with no concern for the well-being of Manipuri society. They all must step down unequivocally.

The Killing of Vikram Gowda : A Call for Justice and Accountability

Sushant

“Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.”

- (Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights)

The killing of Vikram Gowda, a Maoist leader, on November 18, 2024, near Peetebailu village in the Kabbinala area near Hebri of Udupi district caused grave concerns regarding the routine excesses by the state. Karnataka police claimed that it was an act of self-defense during a combing operation. People’s Union for Civil Liberties, CPIML (Liberation), Karnataka Janshakti, and other organizations and activists have unequivocally condemned this extrajudicial killing and violation of the right to life (Article 21) and demanded an independent probe.

Vikram Gowda, a hotel worker originally from Kudlu Nadwalu village in Udupi district, belonged to the Gowdalu tribe. His villagers said he was a peaceful, good-natured person. He started activism protesting against eviction from forests in the Malnad region of the Western Ghats. He participated in several rallies and protests against the establishment of Kudremukh National Park. He was regularly harassed and tortured by the police and forest department. Later he joined the Maoists and went underground.

The Police Narrative

According to Karnataka’s Internal Security Division, the Anti-Naxal Force conducted a combing operation in the Kabbinala forest on November 18. During this operation, the police encountered 3-4 armed individuals, including Vikram Gowda. The police claimed they asked them to surrender, but they refused and ‘opened fire’ on the police, leading to retaliatory action and

Gowda's death. The police then registered an FIR on November 19, with the accused being named as Vikram Gowda and others under the different sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita containing the same narrative. To support their claims, the FIR mentions that the police recovered a 9mm carbine from the surroundings.

The police report raises critical concerns:

- No police got injured, questioning the need for the alleged self-defense. Police recovered one bullet from the site, without enough proof of the Maoists firing.
- An FIR was registered against the deceased rather than initiating a separate investigation into the killing, as mandated by legal guidelines.

Questioning the police claims, Journalist Naveen Soorinje asked, “The police had arrested two people on the suspicion of being Naxal in Dharmasthala (Dakshina Kannada district) a few days before the encounter. Who were they? Were they produced before a magistrate? The police must be answerable for why they killed a man”. He recalled similar claims by ANF in October 2011 of Maoists opening fire during combing operations in Savanalu village in Belthangady taluk, killing a constable named Mahadev Mane. In the FIR, Vikram Gowda and other Naxals had been named as Mahadev Mane’s killers. A few months later, an inquiry found that Mane was killed by the bullet of ANF.

The Pattern of Extrajudicial Killings

This is a pattern where police often justify the killings as encounters in the name of national security. In the past 10 months, more than 200 people have been killed in Bastar alone, most of them being civilians. In Sambhal, the UP police opened fire on unarmed civilians who were protesting the survey of the



Shahi Jama Masjid, killing five Muslim youths. Such practices undermine the rule of law and foster a culture of impunity among law enforcement agencies.

Need of Inquiry

As per the BNS and the IPC, the killing of Vikram Gowda should be treated as murder, and an FIR should be registered against all police officers who were involved. Every citizen is entitled to a fair trial and hearing before being punished irrespective of their political ideologies. Families of those killed in encounters deserve justice and compensation as part of the state’s responsibility.

Karnataka government rejects calls for probe

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, on November 20, defended the encounter and said, “You should appreciate it (the encounter)”. He asked, “Should Naxalism remain or go?”. Home Minister G Parameshwara, on November 20, rejected calls for a probe into the killing and said, “He (Gowda) was carrying a deadly weapon, an automatic machine gun-like weapon.

If they (ANF personnel) did not shoot him, he would have fired at them. So, I’m told that he was shot at first sight. So there is no need to suspect anything”. Ignoring the Supreme Court’s 2014 judgment on national human rights, the state government is justifying the killing

of Vikram Gowda.

Congress is not an alternative

These statements show that the Congress government doesn't care about human rights violations rather applauds it. Congress has a legacy of conceiving and using draconian laws (e.g. Preventive Detention Act, MISA, AFSPA, UAPA, etc) that are now used by BJP.

Extrajudicial killings as tools of state policy have been a persistent issue in India under both parties. In the name of internal security and combating terrorism and Maoism, both governments continue to kill people in Kashmir, North-East, Bastar, and other parts of India. In 2009, the Congress-led UPA launched Operation Green Hunt was continued by the BJP-led NDA government as Operation Samadhan-Prahar. Thousands of tribals have been killed in these operations.

Both governments are using these violent measures to silence dissent.

We Demand

- A case of culpable homicide should be registered against the police officers involved in the so-called encounter immediately.
- The investigation should be carried out by an impartial agency to ensure fairness.
- Officers involved in the encounter should be immediately transferred out of their districts to prevent tampering with evidence.
- The socio-economic onslaught on people, particularly adivasis, through a project of displacement under the Surajkund scheme must be recognised and brought to a halt.

India and Religion- Part I

Danny

Any analysis of our country's politics, culture and history is inseparable from the domain of the religious. It is one of the key ways in which people categorise or identify themselves in Indian society. Religious practice forms the foundation for the worst of marginalisation and exploitation through caste and communal divisions. Yet, it also provides a space of liberation and tolerance from those same shackles. As seen in conversions to Buddhism and the influence of various religious organisations in uplifting care. Religion is an ever present fact of Indian reality.

To understand our contemporary situation we have to ground it in our colonial history. When the East India Company began to administer the territory of Bengal they were looking to understand how to fully exploit the colony. To be able to do this they needed two things. To know the people that are being governed and to know the legal frameworks that were being used to govern them. On the first question they decided that religion would be the basis of understanding India. There would be Muslims and Hindus. When the administrators went out into the countryside they were often baffled by the diversity of practices and relative syncretism that they found in the countryside. For eg. a fisherman in the Sunderbans may be a practising Muslim, yet every day before setting out to fish they might give a prayer to a local deity for protection. This baffled the British. They needed uniformity to be able to construct a colonial state capable of extracting taxes and resources from the population. Yet the population was clearly not uniform. So, they looked for answers in legal and religious texts.

They delved into Mughal court texts on governance and the dharmashastras - the most prominent of which being the Manusmriti - to gain an understanding of how to rule over the people. Personal laws are formed, in which different communities are subject to different laws based on their religion. These texts favoured the elite ruling class and castes who had education and proximity to British administrators. They were able to influence legal decisions when inevitable contradictions between law and ground realities arose. The fisherman from the Sunderbans and others like him were

lumped into homogenous identities that they likely shared little in similarity with. Brahmanism stood out as the most dominant understanding of Hindu practice, thus codifying caste into the colonial state.

In a newly independent India it was no wonder that despite proclaiming that the nation and its constitution would be secular, the state would not try to enforce a separation between the state and religion. As even the ruling liberal elite recognized that it had become such a core part of national identity that it could not remain separate. Especially in the aftermath of a catastrophic partition of 1947 on religious lines. This is why we see the courts intervening in issues of religious law and governance. It is why we see absurdities like the idea of a non-human juristic personality. Where a "god" is brought to court in relation to a legal case. Most famously with "Ram Lala" being proclaimed a legal minor and capable of representation through a friend or guardian in the case of Babri Masjid's demolition. This clearly bizarre and irrational example led to the pomp and parade that we saw in Ayodhya earlier this year. Indian society has tied itself into a religious knot and the current fascist state and its institutions have no way of getting us out.

In arguably one of their most quoted passages Marx and Engels lay out religion's role in a capitalist society "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.". It is the illusion that keeps away the harsh realities of brutal economic exploitation. But as we see in the colonial legacy of religion in a semi-feudal country like India, it is also an instrument of exploitation and marginalisation. It is the source of the oppressive caste hierarchy. It is the communal divisions that divide the masses. It is inexorably linked to the way the Indian state rules over the people. In the end it is the instrument by which the upper caste and class hegemony sustains itself. It may have been our past and present but it cannot be allowed to shape our futures. In the next part we will look more closely at the role religion plays in India today looking at contemporary issues and global trends in religion.

Waqf Disputes Land Karnataka Congress in Hot Waters

Aratrika

Recently, the Congress state government has been embroiled in a controversy pertaining to the issue of land ownership in Karnataka with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) conducting protests in different parts of the state accusing the Waqf board of 'land jihad'. The genesis of the current tug-of-war between the Congress and the BJP has its origin in the early weeks of October when Minister for Minority Welfare BZ Zameer Ahmed Khan held waqf hearings all across the state in a bid to recover lands historically registered as waqf.

The term 'Waqf' comes from the Arabic word Waqfa, meaning full stop or inalienable. Once donated, the land can neither be taken back, nor can its ownership be transferred through selling or permanent leasing. Most mosques, dargahs, idgahs, graveyards, madrasas, orphanages, ashoor khanas etc. are constructed on waqf lands. Waqf properties across the nation come under the Waqf board that is a statutory body* in India, established under the Waqf Act of 1995 that repealed and replaced the Wakf act of 1954. Each state has its own board charged with the governance of waqf properties within its bounds. The Central Waqf Council oversees the functioning of the state level boards. Currently, the Waqf board is said to be the third largest land-holder in the country.

As stated above, the current flare-up started when many farmers in the village of Honavad of Vijayapura district found their properties to be notified as waqf properties following a 'Waqf adalat' in October. The BJP MP Tejasvi Surya came into the picture accusing the Waqf board of usurping 1500 acres of land in the Honavad village. The sudden enthusiasm of the Karnataka BJP in protecting the land rights of farmers fits neatly with its national agenda of amending the Waqf act of 1995. The actual interests of the farmers are in no

way a concern for them. Nowhere among Waqf amendments (2024), has there been any provision of distributing land to the landless peasants.

Later investigations revealed that the confusion arose due to a clerical error in the 1974 gazette notification. As for Honavada, only 11 acres of waqf property exists contrary to Surya's claims. Later, hundreds of farmers in other districts like Haveri, Shivamogga etc. also discovered similar mutations in their records of RTC**. It was found that in many places the state government went ahead and did away with due process in a bid to displace farmers from the land they have cultivated for decades. In the face of their just demands CM Siddaramaiah has verbally assured that notices will be taken back. Whether it will ensure protection from acquisition in future remains to be seen.

In the aftermath of Naxalbari uprising, many states scampered to implement land reforms to pacify peasants. In Karnataka, land reforms act was implemented in 1974 as part of which 12,000 acres of land were distributed among landless peasants. Around 1,400 acres got distributed because of the Inam Abolition Act, 'inams' being land gifted by the British to their most obedient servants. As part of these reforms, a lot of waqf properties too got distributed. In 1998, a Supreme court judgment stated that property once declared Waqf would remain so. In other words, land reforms or Inams abolition acts are not applicable on waqf land causing the current distress to the farmers. However, this cannot be a reason to evict farmers rather their rights over their land need to be upheld.

Nationally waqf has been a recent target of the RSS-BJP central government that has proposed extensive amendments to the existing act as part of their Hindutva agenda. The amendments are intended to target the Muslim community. Two new categories of



Waqf are proposed to be added i.e. Aghakhani Waqf and Bohra Waqf, which is an attempt to subdivide Muslims of India. It omits the provision of "Waqf by user" under which a property that has been used for a religious or pious purpose over a long period of time, with the knowledge or consent of the owner, is considered a Waqf. It also gives absolute power to the collector to decide the fate of waqf properties, hence any waqf property can get declared as government property. Muslim presence in the boards is also diluted under the proposals. In essence, the amendments are geared towards centralisation of the waqf lands for greater governmental control through taxation of the properties. The working class Muslims directly dependent on these properties will suffer the most. On top of that, it is also an ideological attack on the Muslim community as a whole.

The Congress has been silent on the attack on the Muslim community through the waqf amendments proposed by the BJP as well as half-hearted in fulfilling the farmers' demands. This double game played by the Congress exposes its political opportunism. In the ensuing bureaucratic traps, the farmers are faced with a fear of losing their lands and the Muslims as a whole are facing communal attacks under the instigation of the BJP in parts of Karnataka. Hence, it is important to support the just rights of the farmers over the land they till while also exposing the communal agenda behind BJP's sudden concern regarding displacement.

**A body that came into existence through an Act passed in the parliament*

***RTC stands for Record of Rights, Tenancy, and Crops, a document containing land records and ownership details. Also known as Pahani, it has various details about a piece of land in Karnataka, including landowner's information, land type,*

Crisis in Congo

Milan

Overview of the Current Crisis

In the wake of Democratic Republic of Congo's elections in December 2023, widely accused of malpractice, the ushering in of president Felix Tshisekedi saw the resurgence of armed conflict in the eastern region of the country. In the early months of 2024, conflicts had escalated enough to garner international attention. The militant group, M23 (March 23 Movement) backed by the Rwandan government faced off against the Congolese troops, causing a wave of displacement and acute humanitarian crisis. This was just a new phase of the decade long conflict in East DRC that has taken close to 6 million lives over 30 years. The number of displaced individuals has crossed well above 7 million. Corruption, massacres and rapes have become commonplace and human rights are constantly being violated by all parties. This devastating conflict has led to acute food shortages and its resulting paralysis of livelihood for millions of people in east DRC.

The conflict is centered around the city of Goma that the militia attempts to capture. In late 2012, M23 launched an offensive, seizing Goma and several other towns and then subsequently got pushed back by the UN forces. The dormant M23 resurfaced in 2022 and seized territory in North Kivu and started to press Goma. In 2023, the EAC (East African Community) supported troops and UN forces failed to stop the advance; EAC and UN started withdrawing. In 2024, M23 closed in on the city. However, the M23 militant group is one among the 100 militia groups that are operating in the region. Although the international condemnation has been directed towards M23, the government has responded by employing nationalist rhetoric to rally countless militia under its banner. This has led to the reckless empowering of multiple armed groups bloating the security issue into further uncertainty.

Rwandan Genocide

Rwanda consists of two ethnic groups: Hutu (majority) and Tutsi (minority).



Mass displacement due to violence in Congo

Rwanda had become a breeding ground for ethnic tension even before DRC's independence and as a result Tutsi minority would pour across the border into eastern DRC. In April 1994, civil war broke out in Rwanda. Hutu militias started massacring Tutsis and moderate Hutus, killing 800,000 to a million people over 100 days in what is now known as the Rwandan genocide. In a counter-offensive, Tutsi rebel group led by current Rwandan President Paul Kagame captured the capital and formed a new government. The Hutu extremist fled into east DRC along with an estimated 2 million Hutu refugees that had feared retribution. Now the complex ethnic structure comes into picture. The east DRC consisted of local tribes, Tutsis and Hutus, while Rwanda had a Tutsi government.

First Congo War

The Hutu extremists in refugee camps within east DRC consolidated and vowed to establish a Hutu government in Rwanda. These Hutu militias attacked Tutsis within Congo, and the Rwandan government armed Tutsi Militias of DRC in response. Parallely, resentful Congolese had become tired of the then president Mobutu Sese Seko's corrupt regime. Rebel groups led by Laurent-Desire Kabila attempted to overthrow the government. Rwanda, which accused Mobutu of harboring Hutu perpetrators of genocide sent in its troops in 1996. This sparked the first Congo war. Congo troops, Tutsi Militias, Anti-Mobutu rebel groups launched offensives. Uganda, Eritrea, Angola, and Burundi joined in. The war concluded with a successful overthrow and Laurent-Desire Kabila became the new president of DRC. However, alleged Hutu massacres conducted by Rwandan forces and the forceful control over lucrative diamond and coltan mines, had

created the seeds for a second Congo war.

Second Congo War

A diplomatic fallout between the leaders and the forced eviction of Rwandan troops from DRC had reignited ethnic tensions. Rwanda backed a new rebel group and Uganda backed a second rebel group, while seeking to overthrow Kabila. The DRC government armed Hutu groups to fight back and joined forces with support forces from Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Angola. The second war started merely two years after the first. By 1999, peace talks led to the withdrawal of most foreign forces. One of the Tutsi militias, Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) had written a ceasefire with the DRC government in exchange for being absorbed into the Congolese army. However, a splinter group within the CNDP formed M23, claiming to be fighting for Tutsis' rights in the DRC. This started the current phase of the crisis.

International Involvement

DRC is home to some of the world's largest reserves of metals and rare earth minerals like cobalt and coltan. Rich mineral resources are a key factor behind the prolonged nature of the crisis. The armed militant groups battle over the control of these resources. Rwandan and Ugandan troops looted substantial quantities of DRC's minerals in the previous wars. M23 have secured sizable profits from occupying Tantalum deposits. Not to mention, that these minerals end up in the global supply chain, including the case of the DRC government's allegation of top MNCs like Apple profiting from the conflict. Countries like Switzerland, China and UAE own mines in east DRC. Countries

like France and the United States have long intervened in DRC's political affairs when they deemed it necessary. The highly unpopular and corrupt regimes like Mobutu Sese Seko's government were actively supported. It is widely believed that the assassination of President Laurent-Desire Kabila was connected to Rwanda and the United States. Declassified CIA memos show plans to poison the popular leader Patrice Lumumba (DRC's first president). The same nation finds it difficult to intervene beyond superficial statements of denouncement amidst widespread violation of

human rights. It becomes clear that there remains no profit motive to solve the conflict when it can yield greater fruits from a divided DRC, that is up for grabs.

Conclusion

The inaction and indifference to human suffering from the international community warrants us to question the nature of the reasoning that made them maintain this status quo. A status quo that may be beneficial to the imperialist forces but unforgiving to the locals.

◆—THIS MONTH IN HISTORY—◆

December 1, 1997 - Laxmanpur Bathe Massacre - The Laxmanpur Bathe massacre was a massacre conducted in the Laxmanpur Bathe village in Arwal district of Bihar, where 58 dalits were killed by members of the Ranvir Sena, an upper-caste militia.

December 1, 1750 - Tipu Sultan's birth anniversary - Tipu Sultan, also known as Sher-e-Mysore or "Tiger of Mysore", was the ruler of the kingdom of Mysore in the South. He was a pioneer of nascent industrial growth that was nipped in the bud by the British colonial agenda. He introduced a number of administrative innovations during his rule, including a new coinage system, calendar, and a new land revenue system initiating the growth of the Mysore silk industry. He was a pioneer of introducing rocketry in warfare. His father Hyder Ali and him won important victories against the British in the Anglo-Mysore wars. He was martyred in the fourth Anglo-Mysore war.

December 6, 1992 - Babri Masjid Demolition Day - A crowd of almost 150,000 people gather to listen to speeches by BJP and the VHP leaders – including LK Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi – at the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The crowd later storms the mosque and demolishes it in a few hours. It marked a black day in the history of modern India. It was followed by communal eruptions across the country. This 'Ramjanmabhoomi andolan' marked a meteoric rise of the RSS-BJP in Indian polity.

December 15, 2019 - Anti-CAA Police Violence on Students - On 13 December 2019, the students of Jamia Millia Islamia University undertook a march to the Parliament protesting against the CAA. They were prevented from going ahead by the police who used batons and tear gas to disperse the protesters leading to clashes with them. Many students were grievously injured and violently detained.

December 18, 1878 - Joseph Stalin was born on this day. Stalin was a Soviet communist revolutionary who led the newly formed Soviet Union from 1924 on the path of socialist construction until his death in 1953. He was elected as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1922–1952) and Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union (1941–1953). From proving that socialism is possible in one country to successfully preventing a fascist takeover of the world, Stalin remains an inspiring figure for communists all over the world.

December 18, 1998 marks the death anniversary of Com. Vinod Mishra. Vinod Mishra played a significant role in the ideological and organizational aspects of the CPI(ML). He was actively involved in various struggles for land rights, labour rights, and social justice.

December 17,19, 1927 - Kakori Martyrs' Day - Ramaprasad Bismil, Ashfaqullah Khan, Rajendra Lahiri, Roshan Singh, and Chandrashekhar Azad, were among the revolutionaries who carried out the daring Kakori train robbery: looting the treasury of the colonial Government to fund the war for an independent India. Azad could not be arrested, but the other four were arrested. Lahiri was hanged in Gonda jail on 17 Dec, 1927; Bismil, Ashfaq and Roshan Singh were hanged in Gorakhpur, Faizabad, and Allahabad jails respectively on 19 Dec, 1927. All of them were founding members of the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA).



December 26, 1893 - Chinese revolutionary, Marxist theorist, military strategist and poet, **Mao Zedong** was born on this day. The legacy of the Chinese experience is inextricably linked with the leadership of the great proletarian teacher Comrade Mao Tse-tung. In essence, the Chinese revolution marked an advancement of Marxism-Leninism, particularly in the context of colonies and semi-colonies that constituted the largest chunk of the world. Comrade Mao formulated the ideological basis of the great proletarian cultural revolution.

Indian Education System in the Age of Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization

Kinjal

The world economy today is largely governed by neoliberal socio-economic policies of Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG). India surrendered to the World Bank-IMF led cartel of global financial institutions in the early 1990s. As legal terms of the surrender India had to sign treaties like General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). These treaties basically transfer the economic sovereignty of developing countries like India to an unelected entity called World Trade Organization (WTO). WTO ensures there are no roadblocks in exploitation of the developing world by global financial conglomerates. It monitors and ensures that the members change their laws and policies to adhere to the terms of GATT and GATS. The steady erosion of fundamental rights and livelihoods as a consequence is visible in all facets of our lives. What was considered a basic right has been converted into a commodity. The changing face of the Indian education system shows the ever increasing influence of LPG.

Before the Indian Government started adopting the LPG policies, education like food, water and healthcare, was classified as a “merit good” i.e. something which is considered beneficial to the society and is therefore provided by the government for free or at a low cost. This was based on the understanding that education will lead to growth and development of individuals which in turn will lead to growth and development of the nation. Hence most schools, colleges and universities were government run. Their standards were maintained by boards run by state or central governments. The fees were nominal because providing education to the citizens was not considered a financial burden on the government but an investment for a better future.

Of course, the ruling classes did not want everybody to get education. So, in practice, access to quality education remained limited. Traditionally excluded sections were population like women (especially in rural areas) and lower classes, castes and communities. Higher education remained a bastion of upper caste Hindu men. Limited employment opportunities after graduation enabled the ruling classes to control who among the educated working classes could reap the benefits of education. So when LPG started changing the education system, there were very few protests, because the existing system was not benefiting most people anyway.

In the neoliberal outlook enforced by WTO

- Education is not a merit good but a service. So it is a commodity. So there should be no government subsidy. Corporates should be able to make profit by selling it to student- consumers.
- The only reason consumers will buy education is if it increases their future earning potential. Hence education should only provide training demanded by the multinational corporations (MNCs) to meet their global human resource demands.

In other words, education, for a common person, becomes an expensive ticket to become a slave of an MNC so that they get a few crumbs of the loot.

Of course, the ruling class is complicit in this exploitation. If education was completely free, it would not have come under GATS and the government could have continued to support it even under WTO rules. Similar to what is done in other sectors, first the government system was intentionally weakened by lack of investment thereby making the entry of private sector easier. This was done by chronic underinvestment in modernization and upgradation of syllabus and the facilities and in

recruitment and training of teachers.

The goals of LPG in education can broadly be described as

- Selling education to make profit
- Using education to produce trained labour for global capital
- Control and monetize all the research and technology development

Let us briefly look at how this is done.

Liberalization relaxes the rules for setting up of schools and colleges and in training the teachers who teach in these. This results in an explosion in the number of private colleges and schools, many of them without the proper infrastructure and faculty to actually train the students in the degree they offer. When the global labour market demands English speaking labour with basic programming skills, private English medium schools and private engineering colleges grow rapidly to supply them. These institutions charge very high fees since their primary goal is to make profit by selling a product called education. There are no regulations controlling the fees, nor any oversight on the quality of the degrees they give. As a result they can get away by selling inferior products with nice packaging at a very high cost. Of course, large sections of the population are not able to pay these prices. To improve their customer base and to increase the labour supply produced for the MNCs the concept of educational loans came into being. Government controlled banks also offer such loans so that the private sector can profit from the shiny new schools and colleges they have set up. As the government withdraws the subsidies, even the fees of government colleges and IITs increase.

The overall rising costs of education virtually puts education beyond the reach of the already marginalized sections of the society. In fact the education industry has become so

lucrative, that global capital wants a direct share of the profits by starting foreign university campuses in India.

Once private capital feels that India has enough urban middle class and rural upper class to sustain the education business, they shut the door for the remaining populace. This is done by introducing standardized tests for admission to the engineering colleges, in a country like India with a weak school network. An additional benefit is a growth of a new unregulated industry, the coaching centres.

The coaching centre industry has grown into a fifty thousand crore industry in the matter of decades, thanks to LPG. The human cost is not just the sections who are deprived of education, but also the middle class. The middle class takes huge loans and invests in their children for getting into a MNC via the coaching centre>engineering college route. The rising mental health issues among our youth is a testament to the havoc neoliberal policies can cause to even relatively well-off sections of the population. The standardized admission tests also serve another purpose. These are designed to reward ability to work long hours on routine problems, the very skills which are essential for joining the workforce of sweatshops of “Knowledge-based economy”.

As the students are trained specifically for the current need of the global capital, once the need is fulfilled, the jobs available to the “student-consumers” dry up. This happens either when there is surplus labour or when new technology renders a particular skill obsolete. After the market need is met, specific degree and diploma programmes, introduced without standardization, to meet the specific needs of global capital, become obsolete. Thousands of students are left holding a degree which does not help in getting a job, because that job does not exist anymore. Jobs in call centres, data entry and (very soon) coding dry up as the requirements of the market are saturated or when the demands change. The surplus labour, who are trained for only specific jobs, drive down the salary offered for these jobs.

Further, the fear of losing the job and the huge educational loan commitments ensure that the exploited workers of the “knowledge sector” cannot form unions to protest against the violations of labour laws. Liberalization ensures that the government aids the exploitation by removing all labour law requirements regarding white collar jobs. Headlines like “85% of Indian graduates are unemployable” should make us question the set up which nurtures this education system and also question what “employable” really means.

The education system, instead of being the way to meet individual aspirations and social needs of a country, becomes a conveyor belt to feed the ever hungry machine of global capital. There is however another side to the effects of LPG policy. As long as education was seen as an investment of the country in its future, all forms of knowledge were funded by the government. When education becomes a product, only the products which have “market value” become relevant. Since global capital sees no monetisation opportunity in social sciences and humanities, funding in these branches of human knowledge were cut drastically. Social scientists can critically examine the socio-political-economic environment of the world and how various policies change and affect such

structures. So reducing funding in social sciences helps in suppressing current and future voices against neoliberalism. In the market driven world, these “arts” subjects are reduced from branches of human knowledge to “soft skills”. Even basic sciences, which do not ‘make’ products which have ‘immediate’ use, see fund cuts. Jobs in India in the fields of basic sciences, social sciences and humanities have become virtually non-existent as there is no demand for them in our “Knowledge-based economy”. There is a clear hierarchy in funding, and hence in importance, of the various branches of study. Since not the government but the private industry funds most of the research and development activity, they control the research agenda of the research and technical institutes of India. The importance of research is judged in terms of “research income” generated or in patents produced and not in terms of publications or in terms of PhD students trained to become future researchers or teachers of our country.

A couple of questions are relevant here.

1. If the education system is designed to produce mechanical robots, where is the new research and innovation coming from?

Whatever research and innovation happening in India is in spite of the system not because of the system. From the perspective of global capital, the activities of thinking, questioning, experimenting, trying out new ideas will all be done in first world countries. Of course the upper classes of the developing world can be part of that by sending their children to these countries for education. But the role of these countries is to be the service sector of the developed world, and hence their citizens will be trained only for that.

2. If the government funding in education is cut so drastically, why is that not reflected in the budget?

A couple of examples can provide an answer. The government has spent crores in building new IITs, while most of the public colleges and universities have not been given funds to recruit enough faculty for decades. They have allotted a lot of money for buying computers and smart boards in schools while giving very little for recruitment and training of teachers.

The government is basically giving public money from the education budget

- to the construction industry to build buildings.
- to MNCs to dump off unwanted and stockpiled products
- to build laboratories which can be used by the private sector companies to implement their research agenda.

Of course this is an incomplete list but looking at the details of government expenditure in education confirms this pattern. The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) is the latest step in the LPG agenda which focuses on converting the school education system to a school education industry. Fighting only against LPG policies in education does not serve any purpose. It is important to realise that the changes in the education system are a reflection of the socio-economic environment imposed by the neoliberal philosophy. While issue based protests are definitely needed, it is also necessary to be aware of the broader context.

(Author is Associate Professor in Physics at BITS Goa)

— UPDATES ON STUDENT MOVEMENTS —



Students and Faculty protest in AUD against the unjust termination of their 2 Faculty.

On November 5th, Ambedkar University, Delhi unjustly terminated their two faculty members Asmita Kabra and Salil Misra for doing their duty (they regularised 38 contractual non-teaching staff who very rightly deserved it). The students immediately started a protest in support of their professors demanding restoration of their termination. Red Salute to the students and faculty of AUD joining hands against injustice and fighting the authoritative, undemocratic, admin and the state.

UP state kills 6 Muslim youth in Sambhal, students protest in Delhi, get brutally detained

On 26th of Nov, Students activists got brutally detained by the Delhi Police for protesting against the killing of 6 Muslim youth in Uttar Pradesh. They stated that the Yogi govt's Islamophobia is the reason behind Police's action of 'Right to Kill'. The students demanded that immediate action be taken against the police officials involved. They also demanded enforcement of the Places of Worship Act, 1991.



Students of Shaheed Bhagat Singh college protest casteist attack by principal

November 18, students in Shaheed Bhagat Singh college protest against their Principal casteists attacks on a student. The Principal verbally and physically assaulted the student and used casteist slurs. The protesting students gheraoed the principal office and demanded his resignation. The protest still continues with the demand of the Principal's immediate arrest.

Protest in Freedom Park over caste bias against IIMB faculty

November 20, Three organizations including All India OBC Students Association held a protest in Freedom Park over caste discrimination against faculty in IIM, Bengaluru. They demanded that the admin must stop harassing the faculty who are raising diversity and inclusion issues. They also demanded full compliance with constitutional mandates of reservations for SC, ST, and OBCs.



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