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KASHMIR IS BURNING, GOVERNMENT IS HELPLESS SPECTATOR

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Kashmir is virtually burning. Mass unrest and street violence have reached its peak during the last two months. Reckless firing, following lathi-charge and bursting of tear gas, by the police and CRPF has caused about 60 civilian deaths since June 11, 2010. The large crowds appearing on the streets, violating curfew, have of course retaliated by protests and pelting of stones. It appears like a fight between the people and the security forces, while the governments at the state and at the Centre have become helpless spectator. Innocent people are killed and getting injured, while buses, public property and police stations are also burning at the same time. The notable feature of the present mass unrest is that mostly the young people, students and the youths, are involved in anti-police protest rallies. Many innocent teen-agers, in the age group of 10 to 16, are killed or injured. Hundreds of instances of violence of human rights in recent times have caused this unrest among the young people. Disgruntled students and hungry unemployed youths have joined the protest rallies which the government have tried to pacify by the use of lathis and bullets. The resultant loss of lives and injuries is highly regrettably.

In a statement on the floor of the parliament on 6 August 2010, the Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram said that between 2004 to 2009, excepting 2008, there was no such civil strife, which is now prevailing in Jammu & Kashmir. He further claimed that 'Quiet dialogue' with key political parties and individuals initiated by the Central Government was continuing during this time, which gave much benefit. But he has no answer why that 'quiet dialogue' has failed and how the present unrest has developed.

In fact, it is a matter of concern that the old separatist forces have resurfaced through the present spell of unrest and the voices of "Azadi" or "Quit India" have been raised after a long time.

This has happened due to wrong policy of the centre and the state government which rely more on the security forces to combat public grievances and aspirations. Repeated demands for reducing security forces have been consistently ignored. Now, only in view of strong public opinion, the Centre hints to take steps for reduction of forces, which should have been done long before. Even the 'Armed Forces Special Power Act' (AFSPA) was bitterly opposed by the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Now the state Chief Minister Omar Abdullah also striving the need of its amendment, which has been so long opposed by the Centre. It express the rift between the Centre and the State. In a pre-independence day meeting, Omar Abdullah has openly 'appealed to the Centre to take concrete steps for revoking this Act.'

The other issue which the Chief Minister has raised in his aforesaid speech, dated 14 August 2010, is a matter of more concern. He openly advocates for autonomy of the state. He said -- "There is a need for the Central Government to initiate action to remove all doubts from the minds of the people and bridge the gap that has emerged over the last six decades. I think by restoring autonomy this trust deficit will be removed. I request the Centre to take urgent measures in this regard." The Central Government must immediately react to this statement made by the Chief Minister.

But the reality is this, that it is too late to talk about this 'trust deficit'. So, when the Chief Minister has announced that the state government will engage 50,000 youth in government service within the next few months, the public reacted in his independence day meeting by throwing shol at him of course, this may be can act of an individual out of frustration and can not be supported. But at the same time, this may be a symbol of public disapproval of government policy. It may be recalled that opposition leaders like Gillani has recently said that Kashmir are not interested in any development package, they need their own state. It therefore, has little impact when the Union Home Minister offers to ensure 'equality, justice and honour for all sections of the people of Jammu & Kashmir.' (side his statement in the Parliament). Prime Minister's late initiative for all party dialogue has also failed to pacify the Kashmir - agitators. Continuation of simultaneous atrocities of the security forces stands in the way.

We need sincere immediate political dialogue in true conciliatory perspective. On behalf of our Party, we have already resolved in our Central Committee meeting held in Kolkata on 204 July 2010, to organize people's. Human Rights Convention in Jammu and Kashmir to address issues like series of fake encounters', atrocities on the people by the security forces, 'vote of the terrorist separatist and outfits', unwarranted intervention of the US in the matter of J

& K and utter failure of the Central and State Government to safeguard the fundamental rights of the people of Jammu & Kashmir. Kashmiris urgently need a package of justice.

PRICE RISE AGAIN TOPS THE DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT

After continuous 4 days disruption of the monsoon session of Parliament from 27 to 30 July 2010 on the entire opposition's demand for discussion on continuing price rise and considerable hike in prices of petroleum products -- ending on voting, a consensus was reached to initiate debate on a motion, moved in both Houses, that the 'House do consider the inflationary pressure on the economy and its adverse impact on the common man'. Accordingly, both the Houses debated once more on the unprecedented price rise situation in the country.

It has become ritual to debate on alarming price rise issue on each and every session of Parliament in recent times only because there has been no change in spiraling price rise situation during the last couple of years. In fact, in spite of recent countrywide agitations, debates in Parliament, lengthy replies by Hon'ble Minister of Agriculture and Food at the end of each stormy parliamentary session and even occasional environments by Hon'ble Prime Minister or Hon'ble Finance Minister or the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission assuring relief shortly, nothing tangible happened in containing the rising price situation. Apart from this prevailing distressing situation during the last two to three years causing much concern to the common people, the latest blow to price position has come due to recent considerable hike in prices of petroleum products like petrol, diesel, kerosene and LPG. This undesirable price hike, having cascading effects, has aggravated inflationary pressure on economy, particularly hitting the poor common people -- the aam admi. We therefore demand, apart from other important measure, on immediate roll back of hike of petroleum products. We also demand with drawal of deregulation of prices of petroleum products as it is apprehended to adversely effect the price situation.

Consistent demand of the opposition regarding Universal Public Distribution System, supply of subsidized food grains and other essential commodities -- not only to BPL, but also to hard-pressed APL should also be considered. The rate of high increase in prices of essential commodities is quite disproportionate to marginal increase in salaries of employed person, what to speak of the fate of millions of unemployed persons of the country. Not only the BPL, even the hard pressed section of APL need supply of subsidized food grains. But the government is quite unconcerned about. Instead of increasing quota of supply to Public Distribution network, the Ministry of Food and its Food Corporation of India can afford to allow thousands of tones of wheat and rice to rot due to utter negligence. It is indeed a shocking experience for the people of the whole country to see hunger and wastage of food grains going side by side. The Supreme Court has rightly issued strict structure on this issue advised the government to distribute the food grains free to the hungry people instead of wasting it simply on the plea of dearth of godowns. Perhaps it amounts to criminal offence to waste precious food grains in such irresponsible negligent way. We do not ask the government to supply food grains free to people, but at least the government should release the food stocks to the states for distribution through PDS. This will have positive effect on the market.

But at the same time it cannot be denied that one of the basic reason of the unprecedented price rise is utter failure of our agriculture sector. Due to dismal performance of the Union Agriculture Department, agricultural productivity has miserably gone down. Just on the plea of drought and inadequate monsoon this can not be justified. It is high time to appreciate that food security should be the topmost priority of the government. Until and unless it is fully appreciated and implemented, along with strong political will, price rise can not be contained.

In spite of repeated demand of the opposition, the government is still reluctant to ban forward trading in all the essential commodities. This speculative trading is one of the reason for continuing price rise. Strong action must be taken in the matter.

It is the sense of the House that the unprecedented price rise situation has become a national crisis situation, of which the poor common people are the worst victims. We urge upon the government to treat it in proper spirit and take all possible measures to address it.

AIFB Demands All Party Meeting on Kashmir Uprise

Com. Debabrata Biswas, General Secretary of All India Forward Bloc wrote letter to the Prime Minister today demanded to convene an all party meeting to find solution for the current Kashmir revolt. The unarmed people are being attacked by the Police with gun and bullets. The AIFB is of the opinion that a political solution is very much needed for the Kashmir impasse.

The Letter is as follows:

Dear Dr. Manmohan Singh ji,

I am aware that the matter which I would like to draw your attention is fully known to you. It is the growing insurgency in the Kashmir valley.

It was reported that more than two dozen young people have been killed since March 2010. The public is agitating against the wrong doings of the state police and the military. I have received several testimonies from the Kashmiri young people including women about the highhandedness of the Police and the Military. The current reports from Kashmir show that the agitating mob is attacking the police with stone and wood pieces. But in retaliation, the police is attacking the people with gun and bulletins. The state government and the Chief Minister have openly said that the situation is out of control and the perpetrators of the rebellion are from across the border. Therefore the role of Pakistan based organizations is a matter of serious concern.

The current impasse of Kashmir need apolitical solution not military one. We are of the opinion that the government of India, while upholding the great values of our federal system, can initiate many proactive measures to build up confidence among the people such as all party meetings, proper and impartial enquiry about the 'encounter Killings', proper rehabilitation of the devastated people, providing employment for the family members of the victims and to extend all possible assistance including special programmes, schemes etc to the state government to control the situation. Moreover, the government of India should make maximum efforts to inculcate patriotism among the young people of Kashmir by way of including the life and contributions of our great patriots like Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Bhagat Singh, Ashafulla Khan, Chandrashekhar Azad etc in the School/College syllabus. Incidentally, I would like to inform you that our party, the All India Forward Bloc is working among the young people of Kashmir even in the far flung areas of Kashmir with an aim to develop self confidence among the youngsters and inculcate patriotism. I am happy to share with you that the young people those who are joining our party and our movement are enthusiastically raising the slogan "JAI HIND". Many of our Military and police personals were witnessed our movement and appreciated our cadres. But the government is not providing minimum assistance to these patriotic young people in the form of security and accommodation even after several persuasions. It is an example how the military and police is utilizing the youngsters of the valley in the process of building national spirit.

The All India Forward Bloc is offering all sorts of cooperation to the government to bring back normalcy in the valley through democratic means. Therefore we request you to take immediate steps to convene an all party meeting and to send an all party delegation to Kashmir at the earliest as a part of confidence building measures among our people.

Hope that you will take this letter in its true spirit.

Thanking you,

(Debabrata Biswas)
General Secretary

AIFB DEMANDS JUDICIAL ENQUIRY ON CWG SCANDALS

The media reports and the preliminary enquiry report of the CVC reveal the mind boggling scandals in the ongoing constructions related to the Common Wealth Games.

The All India Forward Bloc urges upon the government to constitute a judicial enquiry to probe the financial transactions of the entire construction works and other preparations for the Games.

NATIONAL ROUND TABLE ON FTAs WITH EUROPEAN UNION, ISRAEL AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIAN AGRICULTURE

The Government of India has decided to sign Free Trade Agreements with European Union and Israel. Nine rounds of talks have already taken place between Indian and European Union. Much has not been reported in media nor has the Government of India revealed anything about this to our Parliament. A year back our Government has already signed an agreement with ASEAN despite protests by farmers' organizations and State Governments. The adverse impact of India-ASEAN FTA and India-Sri Lanka FTA are already well-known. Another 56 FTAs are in the pipeline and there are serious concerns about its impact on the peasantry in our country.

There is a widespread apprehension in the minds of farmers and their organizations about ongoing dialogues and they think if it signed then its implications could be far-reaching for the peasantry and have a cascading effect on our farm products. Our farmers will not be able to compete with the highly subsidized farmers from Europe and the terms of engagement in these FTAs will be extremely unequal. Agricultural goods and dairy products from European countries will flood the Indian market without paying any duties while the

Indian farmers will be hit by price crashes and Indian agricultural products will be alien in our own country.

To discuss the myths and realities associated with such FTAs, a cross section of agricultural experts, scientists, policy planners, export-import experts, Government of India officials and farmer leaders exchanged their views on 29th July 2010 at Mukti Dhara Auditorium, 18-19, Bhai Veer Singh Marg, New Gole Market, New Delhi. The "National Round Table on Free Trade Agreements with European Union-Israel and its impact on Indian Agriculture" adopted the following resolutions:

Resolution:

In the backdrop of the agrarian crisis and the global economic crisis this Round Table expresses serious concern at the manner in which the Government is entering into Free Trade Agreements. This will only lead to a further intensification of the agrarian crisis and its implications for the peasantry, the working class as well as the poor could be disastrous. The breakdown of the Doha Round of WTO negotiations has caused a stalemate which has not been overcome despite various efforts. The immediate reason for the breakdown was the inability of the EU and the USA to arrive at any agreement on the controversial issues, particularly on agricultural subsidies. In the context of the breakdown of the Doha Round of WTO negotiations, a devious alternative very much entrenched within the Free Trade Paradigm has emerged: a myriad of Free Trade Agreements. In the backdrop of the global financial crisis the developed capitalist countries in the EU and USA are cautious and also want to pass on the burden of the crisis to countries like ours. Developed capitalist countries are resorting more and more to Bilateral Agreements with individual developing countries to push forth the agenda of Free Trade. Bilateral Free Trade Agreements could also serve to break the possibility of any united stand by developing countries in multilateral forums like the WTO. Not merely the developed capitalist countries but also the ruling classes in countries like India are enthusiastically taking to the idea. The urge of the Indian ruling classes to have a share in the global market and their drive to earn profits is sought to be addressed through the FTA route. The FTAs are different from the bilateral trade agreements that were being entered into earlier. The scope of FTAs is many times more than such agreements and covers the entire gamut of issues ranging from goods and services to investment and Government procurement. The difference between the FTAs and the earlier trade talks is that while the multilateral talks under WTO were relatively open with texts in the public domain, the FTA talks are shrouded in secrecy. The Congress-led UPA Government has also kept the Parliament and State Governments in the dark about the actual content of these FTAs. Now the Government is finalizing an FTA with the European Union and FTAs with Israel and Japan are among the 56 FTAs in the pipeline. The numerous FTAs in the pipeline reflect a policy shift by the current Government and the indiscriminate signing of FTAs under the veil of secrecy raises some serious concerns.

India-EU FTA and Trade In Agricultural Commodities: Agriculture is a very small component of the total trade between EU and India at present. India ranks around 12th in EU list of top trading partners in Agriculture. On the export side however, India ranks even lower. Of total EU agricultural exports to the world, India ranked 41st in 2007. The main reason for such ranking was primarily the mismatch of product categories. EU imports primarily edible fruits nuts, oil seeds and oleaginous fruits, coffee, tea, spices and other such tropical items which India exports. However, EU exports products like beverages, spirits and vinegar, dairy products, eggs natural honey, tobacco and products, meats etc which do not feature in the top imported agricultural commodities of India. In agriculture, EU is a net importer of raw products; Tropical products, oilseeds and fruits and vegetables form the bulk of it. However, in processed agricultural products, EU is a net exporter with a total surplus of Euro 205 Billion in 2007. India has been exporting products like basmati rice, processed fruits and vegetables, floriculture, jaggery and confectionary etc to EU. In terms of imports from EU, wheat has in recent times featured high in the list, given India had to import wheat in 2006-07 due to domestic shortage. The EU is very keen on the FTA with India because it wants to have a major share of the Indian market for the above mentioned products and processed food products. EU seeks to force India into exporting raw materials and importing processed agricultural and food items post FTA. EU will try to push its top export products like dairy, processed coffee and tea and animal meat products, which do not feature in the top items imported by India.

The main thrust of the EU-India FTA, from EU's point of view is to raise the market share of EU primary commodity exports to India as it is one of the largest and fastest growing markets in the world. Their effort is to find an ever expanding market for their subsidised wheat and dairy products. India will not stand to benefit much because the EU are signing FTAs with many other developing countries and whatever advantage India has presently will be short-term and we will have to compete with tropical agricultural goods from these countries which will also flood the EU market. What then is the urgency that is propelling the Indian ruling classes to sign the FTA? They are eyeing the possibilities which the services sector could receive and the opening of investment opportunities for the Indian monopoly houses. They hope that this will promote the interests of the Indian big monopolies to get markets for their goods and services as well as investment opportunities. In this pursuit they are however sacrificing the interests of the peasantry, workers, the poor and seriously compromising their livelihoods.

Drastic Cuts in Tariffs and Increased Imports: The India-EU FTA envisages a lowering of Indian tariffs to zero or near zero levels for 90 per cent of the agricultural products, while the huge agricultural subsidies enjoyed by the farmers in EU countries remains unaltered. This will ensure that EU can still continue to dump subsidized farm products in the Indian market. Indian farmers who are not having any such support cannot compete with the EU

farmers. Tariff barriers used by India to protect its industry and agriculture are being dismantled even as the EU uses non-tariff barriers such as engineering and phyto-sanitary standards and also heavy subsidies, particularly in agriculture. Tariff negotiations at the WTO were on bound rates (maximum applicable rates), which is different from actual rates imposed. EU average bound agricultural tariff rates are very low (15.9% in 2009) compared to India (114.2% in 2009). The FTA commitments to bring tariff rates to 0 or near 0 for 90% of products means that India stands to face massive protection loss, much more than EU. Already 29.9% of India's agricultural exports to EU are already duty free while the rest face low EU tariffs. So India's gain in agricultural exports will hardly increase, as compared to EU's exports which will see a quantum jump.

Death Knell For Millions of Dairy Farmers: The EU has been aggressively arguing for the opening up of the dairy sector in India by claiming that the taxes levied by India on imported food products were unrealistically high. Europe's dairy companies have identified the high tariffs as the main obstacle to expanding their commercial ties with India. Dairy Sector in India is estimated to employ 90 million people a majority of whom are women. A 2009 study by the Centre for Trade and Development, which monitors economic issues affecting South Asia, found that women would bear the brunt of any moves to expose India's dairy sector to grossly unequal competition from European imports. Women are estimated as comprising 75 million of the employees in dairy sector. Dairy sector is of crucial importance to small and marginal farmers as well as the landless poor and a significant source of income for millions of families. The very existence of the vibrant network of cooperative milk federations and women's groups will be under threat.

Intellectual Property Rights, TRIPS+ Commitments and FTA Compliant Laws: On Intellectual Property the EU is demanding TRIPS + provisions and re-writing Indian patent and copyright laws. TRIPS + commitments on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) would severely affect India's ability to provide access to affordable medicines, to protect farmers' rights to seeds and to uphold access to knowledge, thus undermining people's livelihoods and achievements in healthcare, agriculture, and education and research. EU and Japan wants the extension of patent protection by five years and more barriers for generic manufacturers using patent linkage and data exclusivity. Data Exclusivity notably was not mandatory under WTO. All these measures are attempts to extend the sphere of patents and retain their monopoly well past the normal time period of 22 years granted under TRIPS. If agreed upon, this will increase costs and delay the process of bringing generic drugs into the market as well as perpetuate the monopoly of few pharmaceutical giants. The EU also seeks that India brand as "counterfeit" all its pharmaceutical exports to other countries through EU territory if they are not in conformity with EU's patent laws. What goes on unnoticed by many is the fact that preceding the FTAs there is an unusual hurry to bring about legislations that would be FTA compliant. A careful scrutiny of most of the recent decisions and Acts proposed including the Seed Bill, Pesticide Management Bill, Nutrient Based Subsidy Regime in Fertilisers and Protection and Utilisation of Public Funded Intellectual Property (PUPFIP) Bill 2008 to name a few clearly indicate such a tendency. The PUPFIP Bill allows the plant varieties developed through public funds would be protected under intellectual property rights. Both EU and Japan are said to be pressing for India to join the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants-1991 (UPOV). This will seriously compromise the right of the peasantry to grow, sow, re-sow, save, use, exchange, share or sell their farm seeds and planting material. The UPOV goes far beyond even what is required by TRIPS. Data Exclusivity for Agro-Chemical Industry provided by the Pesticide Management Bill also clearly seems to be aimed to make Indian laws compatible to EU-FTA. Regulations on Government purchases as well as the opening up of India to waste dumping at low or zero tariffs are other crucial concerns emanating from these FTAs.

Most Favoured Nation Status and Special & Differential Treatment: The India-EU FTA envisages automatic extension of MFN status to the EU, implying that a favourable treatment by India to any other country on matters covered under the FTA must be automatically replicated in trade with EU. However, India which enjoyed 'Special and Differential Treatment' under the multilateral system, will cease to enjoy it as the EU FTA calls for full reciprocity. This must be seen in contrast with India's position in the WTO which was strongly opposed to providing unbridled access to Indian markets by reducing tariffs to the lowest possible. India had along with other developing countries had unitedly ensured the institution of 'Special and Differential Treatment' especially in the context of the Non Agricultural Market Access (NAMA) negotiations where developed countries called for such drastic cuts in tariffs. This seriously compromises India's interests and only furthers the monopoly interests of the EU MNCs.

Liberalisation of Services, Investment and Government Procurement: The EU FTA has brought back the focus on Government Procurement, Investment and Competition which were together known as 'Singapore Issues' in the WTO negotiations. WTO had removed these issues from ongoing negotiations due to opposition from developing countries with India playing a significant role. The liberalisation of services markets will seriously undermine the capability of elected bodies to develop and regulate strong public services. The commercialisation of these services will render essential services inaccessible for poor people. The global economic crisis has exposed the risks of increased financial liberalisation and de-regulation of financial services. In such circumstances while Governments across the world are recognizing the need for closer regulation of this sector any move to further liberalise is irrational and against our interests. Allowing opportunity to MNCs for effective competition in local market will adversely affect Indian farmers and small entrepreneurs. The scope of Government's intervention for building domestic firms, providing jobs and fostering domestic value-addition will be greatly reduced by further liberalisation of investment while simultaneously it increases the rights of investors without corresponding responsibilities to fulfill social and environmental requirements. It also provides for the prohibition of capital controls which is an important tool for ensuring macro-economic stability during financial crises. With

the liberalisation of its services and investment, India may have to privatise some essential sectors for development such as environment, health and education services. EU is seeking opening up of Government procurement of Central, State and Local level including public utilities of goods and services. This can undermine the scope for Governments to address poverty and inequality by directing Government spending to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and marginalised groups as well as the scope to use Government procurement to provide critical support for domestic firms during times of economic recession.

The urgency with which the UPA Government is carrying forward its negotiations for an FTA with Israel which is guilty of crimes against humanity is condemnable. Israel will tend to benefit as a big exporter of processed food, chemical fertilisers, other agro-chemicals and agricultural implements. In the context of decontrol of fertiliser prices the farmers are going to face extreme hardship even as MNCs based in Israel and other countries will rake in huge profits at their expense. Our light industries will also be adversely affected. It is clear that the FTAs with EU, Israel and Japan are going to adversely affect the livelihoods of people and will put a question mark on employment generation as well as poverty alleviation. Food security will be undermined, Public health will be a casualty and the poor will find it impossible to access quality medicines for treating major diseases. Indian farmers have been hit hard by the earlier FTAs and we have seen how the plantation sector, oilseeds sector, textile industry, light manufacturing industry and fisheries have been facing their adverse implications. Cheap imports of tea, coffee, spices, fish products and palm oil have led to drastic fall in domestic production and destruction of livelihoods. Farmers' suicides have been high in regions growing some of these crops. There have been widespread protests against the India-ASEAN FTA in different parts of the country. Despite this the Government is carrying forward its agenda of trade liberalisation compromising our interests. This National Round Table calls upon the peasants, workers, the poor and middle classes to unite for intensifying struggles against such FTAs and resolves to oppose any move that will compromise the interests of the country and its people.

We demand:

- A White Paper on WTO and its Impact on Indian Peasantry.
- No FTA should be signed without the approval of the Parliament and State Governments.
- Immediate release of the negotiating texts in the public domain.
- Widespread consultations with State Governments, Farmers' representatives, Experts and Scientists.
- Strengthen Trade Barriers and Provisions that Protect Indian Agriculture, Dairy and Public Health Concerns.

ICAPP CONFERENCE ON POVERTY ALLEVIATION HELD AT KUNMING, CHINA ASIAN POLITICAL PARTIES REITERATES THE COMMITMENT TO REDUCE POVERTY

125 leaders of 55 governing and opposition political parties from 28 countries in Asia and the Pacific, together with African Political parties and international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA), gathered at the International Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP) Conference on Poverty Alleviation held in Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan Province, China, under the auspices of Communist Party of China from 13th to 19th July 2010.

The Communist party of China has organized two days field trip prior to the Conference to Chuxiong prefecture and Honghe prefecture for all the delegates to have on the spot study about the Chinese initiative to reduce poverty in the rural areas and the involvement of the ethnic and indigenous people in the developmental programme.

Com. Hui Liangyu, Vice Premier of China and the Member of Polit Bureau of CPC made the Keynote address. The opening remarks were made by Jose De venecia, founding Chairman of the ICAPP and Com. Wang Jiarui, CC member of CPC, Minister of International department and the Chairman of ICAPP Conference on Poverty Alleviation. Mr. Ban Ki Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations sent a video message to the Conference.

Com. G. Devarajan, Secretary of All India Forward Bloc attended and addressed the Conference. The other delegates from India were Com. D. Raja, M.P.; (CPI), Manish Tewari, M.P.; (Congress (I)), Murlidhar Rao and Nirmal Singh (BJP).

In a declaration adopted in the Conference as 'Kunming Declaration' appealed to all political parties, governments, parliaments, NGOs, the civil society organizations and the international community to pursue Millennium Development Goals with a view to alleviating poverty with a single minded determination. The Conference suggested two important ideas to create an Asian Anti-Poverty Fund and an Asian Micro-Finance Fund. Further the Conference expressed its admiration for China's success in lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty within the span of a generation. This is a unique economic and social achievements of the people in the human history, for which the CPC and its wise leadership deserve due credit.

The full text of Com. G. Devarajan's speech is given below:

Significance of Poverty Alleviation in Asia to the Implementation of MDGs.

Dear Comrades and distinguished guests,

At the very outset I would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the Organizing Committee of ICAPP Conference on Poverty Alleviation and the International Department of Communist Party of China for providing

me an opportunity to submit our views before this august gathering of the prominent leaders of Asian political parties.

Our party, the All India Forward Bloc, the party founded by great evolutionary hero of India, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is considering this Conference as one of the important political events of the recent times as it provides an opportunity for the political parties of Asia to discuss and share the experiences about the first target of Millennium Development Goals -End Poverty and Hunger. It is also significant that the High Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations, which is scheduled to be held at New York on 20-22 September 2010, is going to evaluate the subject we are discussing today.

It is a fact that many Asian countries are moving towards economic growth due to policy liberalization from its traditional development paths. As per new reports from the World Bank, over three billion people ie; almost half of the world population live on less than 2.5 Dollar per day. The new figures from the World Bank therefore confirm that the poverty has not been reduced as much as was claimed. It is also a fact that more than 80% of the world population lives in rural areas where income differentials are widening. The poorest 40 percent of the world's population accounts for 5 % of the global income. The richest 20% account for three-quarters of world income. It shows the widening disparities between the rich and the poor, urban and the rural. The figure reveals that Economic growth alone not enough to achieve the MDGs. The main lacuna is that the target of MDGs is not integrated with the budgetary planning of many countries in Asia.

It is true that a majority of the world's poorest people today are in Asia. Pressure of population growth, inadequate facilities for education, health, drinking water and sanitation, lack of proper livelihood and war and terrorist activities are the main reasons for the growing trend of poverty in Asia. Many East Asian countries are now planning and implementing vigorous programmes to alleviate poverty. But the South Asia is far behind to achieve the targets of MDGs such as end poverty and hunger, ensure universal education, gender equality, child health, maternal health, environmental sustainability, global partnership and to combat HIV/AIDS. This negligence was there even before the world economic crisis started. Many South Asian Countries are spending lion share of their national income for procuring arms and ammunitions from abroad than spending for basic needs of the common people. It is imperative to remember here that Southern Asia has the highest rate of child malnutrition in the world, according to the United Nations progress report 2010, with 46 per cent of children younger than five years underweight in 2008, down a negligible 5 percentage points from 51 per cent in 1990. Agricultural inputs are costly therefore farmers are starving. Global financial crisis, job loss and migrant labour issue are the other reasons for the growing poverty among the common people. More over in many countries in this region, land is a problematic issue, which is also a reason for increasing poverty.

In India, though we got independence 64 years ago but only the last government has taken some positive steps to achieve the first target of MDGs such as National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and Right To Information Act. It was the left parties who supported the Congress (I) led UPA I government from outside forced the government to adopt such important legislatures. Now India is seriously discussing about Food security act and Social security for unorganized workers.

All the South Asian Countries are now practising democracy in different forms. In a democracy political parties are the policy makers. Therefore political parties are responsible for the pathetic condition of the poor people. It is known to all and there is no need for any statistics that Poverty is the lack of fundamental requirements such as food, employment, drinking water, nutrition, health care, education, sanitation, clothing and shelter. Now the onus goes to the political leadership of the Asian countries to plan accordingly in order to eradicate the poverty from their respective countries. While doing so the political leadership of Asia should ponder upon the following issues for achieving the MDGs:

- (i) Budgetary allocation for basic needs,
- (ii) Steps to end discrimination,
- (iii) Issues of Farmers and workers including migrant labours,
- (iv) Proper rehabilitation of displaced people and their livelihood,
- (v) Food security,
- (vi) Employment,
- (vii) Corruption,
- (viii) People's participation in planning,
- (ix) Issues of ethnic and indigenous people and
- (x) Pro-people economic reforms.

Our party, the All India Forward Bloc has no hesitation to declare here that whatever may be our influence and capacity in the Asian politics in general and in our national politics in particular; we will leave no stone unturned in the struggle for eradicating poverty from our continent.

We are confident that this important conference of Asian Political Parties on Poverty Alleviation will definitely encourage the administrators of this region to approach this vital issue with more concrete plan and programmes.

Finally we express our sincere gratitude to the International department of CPC and the Provincial Committee of CPC for extending warm hospitality and arrangements to make the Conference a grand success.

Netaji in ICAPP Conference

The second session of the Conference was chaired by Mr. Mushahid Hussain Syed, Secretary General of the Pakistan Muslim League. While he was inviting Com. G. Devarajan to address the Conference, he made a brief introduction about Netaji and his contribution in the anti-imperialist struggle of Asia. He said that the people of Asia in general and the people of South Asia in particular are keeping Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as an inspiration centre in the struggle against imperialism. He further said that Netaji was a great freedom fighter, patriot and a revolutionary icon for the generations. Com. G. Devarajan expressed sincere gratitude to Mr. Mushahid Hussain Syed for his wonderful remarks on Netaji while speaking on the occasion.

RESTORING BANGLADESH'S CORE VALUES

Bangladesh has been waiting for a return to its core values, affirmed through its Liberation War. The nation has suffered for nearly three decades the consequences of unconstitutional and undemocratic practices and processes set in motion to seize state power and then nourish the illegality.

Now democracy stands restored thanks to a massive and united movement against autocracy, and many good things have emerged from the change. The latest is the nullification of the controversial 5th Amendment to the Constitution by the appellate division of the Bangladesh Supreme Court. The Amendment, made in 1977, helped some elements to usurp the country's constitutional processes through martial law decrees. The landmark judgment delivered on July 28, therefore, will be seen as a milestone in restoring the constitutional course of Bangladesh's history.

The ruling by the six-member full bench headed by former Chief Justice Mohammad Tafazzul Islam, has laid the foundation for a process of reviving the secular spirit of the Liberation War. This spirit was at the core of the original Constitution framed by the Constituent Assembly in 1972, a year after the Liberation War.

The 5th Amendment, incorporated in the Constitution during General Ziaur Rahman's tenure, was meant to provide constitutional legitimacy to governments in power - be they military-led or others - following the 1975 assassination of the nation's founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Upholding a previous historic verdict of the High Court that in 2005 had declared the 5th Amendment to be illegal, the Supreme Court said it is now up to Parliament to enact laws to prevent the recurrence of martial law administrations. But it observed: "We are putting on record our total disapproval of martial law and suspension of the Constitution or any part thereof in any form." It added: "[The] Preamble and the relevant provisions of the Constitution in respect of secularism, nationalism and socialism, as existed on August 15, 1975, will revive."

Justice A.B.M. Khairul Haq of the High Court in August 2005 gave the first ruling that declared the 5th Amendment illegal, in a petition challenging the legality of a martial law regulation. In that landmark ruling, the first such by a court of law in Bangladesh, the judiciary declared illegal three regimes that were in power between August 15, 1975 and February 1979. These were headed by Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed, Abu Sa'dat Mohammad Sayem and General Ziaur Rahman respectively. But the ruling exempted certain measures that the regimes had initiated for the public welfare.

There were immediate judicial challenges against the High Court ruling, which had shaken the then ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its ally, the Jamaat-e-Islami. But, rejecting their petitions, the Supreme Court has observed: "The perpetrators of such illegalities should also be suitably punished and condemned so that in future no adventurist, no usurper, would dare to defy the people, their Constitution, their government, established by them with their consent."

This strong condemnation of military rule by the Supreme Court should serve as a deterrent against any future adventurism by the Generals who might want to rely on the supremacy of the gun. But whether the Generals will really respect such a judicial caution is still an open question. Yet, the ruling has given a solid legal and moral footing against any such eventuality.

The verdict has come as a clear denunciation of military takeovers of state power and a message against extra-constitutionalism. The judiciary has, in unmistakable terms, upheld the core values of the original Constitution - and thereby restored its own image as well.

The 1972 Constitution has four basic state principles - democracy, nationalism, secularism and socialism. The latest judgment has restored those principles. The verdict observed that by "omitting secularism, one of the [principles of] state policy, from the Constitution," the martial law proclamations had "destroyed one of the basis of our struggle for freedom and also changed the basic character of the Republic as enshrined in the preamble as well as Article 8(1) of the Constitution."

General Ziaur Rahman, who founded the BNP while he was in power, had deleted Article 12 of the Constitution that prohibited religion-based politics and communalism in all forms. The Supreme Court has now restored that Article. Of course, this has caused consternation among those religion-based political parties that had grown in their dozens over the years, and their patrons at home and abroad.

The judiciary in Bangladesh has clearly laid the foundation for reviving the spirit of the Liberation War

which was at the core of the Constitution. In fact, the Supreme Court has upheld the return to unfettered democracy. The judiciary has also given the nation an opportunity to restore the secular spirit of the Constitution.

Secularism has never represented a negation of religion; it has been a principle meant to ensure equal rights for those belonging to all faiths. But that understanding was given a negative colour by sections of the religious leadership and those politicians who seek to use religion to make political capital. The omission of the particular Article of the Constitution by a military ruler not only facilitated the resurgence of religion-based politics but also paved the way for Islamist militancy.

Now that the judiciary has expressed itself strongly in favour of restoring the core values, the legislature has taken a bold step to go for a major amendment to the Constitution. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has constituted a 15-member parliamentary committee to draft a vital amendment in view of the Supreme Court's ruling.

Nonetheless, there are some crucial lessons to be learnt from the judgment. One is that it is the fundamental duty of all citizens to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution against any onslaughts as and when they are made. The Supreme Court has ensured a progressive democratic future for Bangladesh, no matter what the future may hold.

The Awami League-led ruling mahajote government has more than the required two-thirds majority to change the Constitution. It could have brought about necessary changes even in the absence of the court's judgment, had it decided to do so. The Supreme Court's ruling makes such a step easier. It has also put a special responsibility on the Sheikh Hasina government - for what are needed are fundamental amendments that would require consideration at the highest political level.

There are some fundamental observations that the Supreme Court has made on certain crucial national issues over which political parties have fought for decades. One of them is the identity of the citizens of Bangladesh. The court has ruled that this identity would be as 'Bangladeshis'; and as a nation the people are 'Bengali'.

Despite the favourable circumstances it enjoys, the government needs to give serious thought to certain issues. Probably considering the political consequences of those issues, Prime Minister and Awami League president Sheikh Hasina announced that her party was not going to delete Bismillah, a term inserted in the Constitution by means of the now illegal 5th Amendment. However, the judgment does not cover the incorporation of Islam as the state religion in the Constitution by another military dictator, General H.M. Ershad, by means of the 8th Amendment. There is also another concern. What is going to be the fate of the religion-based parties, which will stand automatically banned if the Supreme Court judgment is to be honoured in letter and spirit?

The parliamentary committee that has been assigned the task of suggesting amendments to the Constitution will need to ponder seriously over many issues before formulating its report. The major Opposition parties, the BNP and the Jamaat-e-Islami, have not nominated their members to the 'all-party' parliamentary committee despite repeated appeals made by the Prime Minister. While reserving comment on the Supreme Court ruling, they have launched a scathing attack on the government over its plan to amend the Constitution. The religion-based parties, which are the natural allies of the BNP and the Jamaat-e-Islami, are mulling over their future course of action.

There are other realities to be considered, too. The Awami League, which led the Liberation War, has ruled the country for only 10 out of the 39 years of Bangladesh's existence. For the rest of the period, those who were the promoters or direct beneficiaries of the 5th Amendment were in power. The constitutional reforms may be set in motion at a time when the Sheikh Hasina government has taken up yet another major task - to hold the trial of the war criminals of the Liberation War.

COLOSSAL WASTAGE OF FOOD GRAINS

In response to a question on 'Rotting of Foodgrains' in FCI godown, put forward by Dr. Barun Mukherji, M.P. at Rajya Sabha on 13 August 2010, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution admitted the huge damage of wheat and other foodgrains in several godown of FCI, the details of which are as follows:

As reported by F.C.I., as on 01.07.2010 at total quantity of 11708 tons of damaged/non-issuable foodgrains including 2486 tons of wheat was in godowns of FCI. Further damage to FCI wheat stocks by rains and floods during July, 2010 in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab have been reported by FCI as under:-

States/Depot	Damaged wheat (Tons)
Uttar Pradesh	
Hapur	9.3
Harduaganj	90
Orai, Jalaun	0.5

Saharanpur, CWC Bamanheri	29.2
CWC, Saharanpur, Pilkhani	1.0
Roza, Shahjahanpur	Damage yet to be quantified
Chanderi, Kanpur	Damage yet to be quantified
Rajasthan	
Udaipur, rail head	8.56
Haryana	
HSWC, Bani	Damage yet to be quantified
Punjab.05	
CAP complex Khonuri, Sangrur	Damage yet to be quantified
Uttarakhand	
SWC Gadarpur, Udham Singh Nagar	Damage yet to be quantified

In addition, damage of 8.8 tons of wheat has also been reported by FCI at Karad and Gondia in Maharashtra. Based on current economic cost to FCI, value of the so far quantified damaged wheat in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra works out to Rs. 22.75 lakh.

Reasons for the damages to wheat stock include negligence on the part of the concerned person in taking precautionary measures, storage pests attack, leakages in godowns, procurement of poor quality stocks, spillage during movement and handling of stocks, exposure to rains, floods, etc..

The following quantity of wheat accrued as damaged/non-issuable in the godowns of FCI during the last two years:

Year	Wheat (tons)
2008-09	947
2009-10	2010
Total	2957

Out of above a quantity of 1339 tons were damaged in CAP/open storage in Uttar Pradesh (32 tons), Gujarat (1262 tons) and Maharashtra (45 tons).

The minister further stated that following steps have been taken by FCI to build additional storage capacity:

- Construction of 149.40 lakh tons capacity has been approved under Private Entrepreneur's Godown (PEG) scheme.
- Increased utilization of capacity is being done beyond norms of optimum utilization of 75%.
- Plinths of 3.70 lakh tons capacity have been constructed in its existing complexes in the last one year for CAP storage.

In a separate statement the Minister has said that the total value of damaged foodgrains in 2009-10 is Rs. 3.62 crores.

AIKS KERALA AND TAMILNADU STATE UNIT MET AT KOCHI AND MADURAI RESPECTIVELY

Kerala Unit of All India Agragami Kisan Sabha met on 16th August and 2010, at Kochi.

Com. Bir Singh Mahato, G.S. of AIKS, Central Committee, Com. G. Devarajan, Secretary, AIFB and Com. Bhakti Pada Ghosh, Secretary, AIKS also were present in the Kochi. The meeting discussed several matters relating to agricultural produce and problem faced by the peasants of Kerala State and also discussed about organizational set-up and ensuing State conference of the State. The State Conference to be held on 13th and 14th November, 2010 at Thissoor, Kerala.

The Organising Committee has been formed and Mr. Joseph Karinath has been elected Chairman and Mr. Janardhan Nair has been elected Convenor of the Organising Committee.

On the 17th August, 2010, a meeting of AIKS, Tamil Nadu Unit has been held at Madurai, Tamil Nadu. Com. Birsingh Mahato, Com. Bhakti Pada Ghosh and Com P.V. Kathirvan, G.S., Tamil Nadu were also present.

The meeting discussed several matters relating to agricultural produce and problem faced by the peasants of Tamil Nadu State and also discussed about organizational set-up and ensuing State conference of the State. the State Conference to be held on 20th and 21st November, 2010 at Thiruttaran Kundran, Madurai.

AIFB ACTIVISTS OF KERALA TOOK PLEDGE ON QUIT INDIA DAY

On the call of the Central Committee of All India Forward Bloc, the Kerala Unit of the party has organised mass pledge taking ceremonies throughout the state on 9th August 2010. Hundreds of AIFB activists assembled at the district headquarters and took pledge to hold high the freedom, unity and integrity of our motherland. The followers of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose took the oath that we shall fight against all social inequalities and to protect our

motherland from all anti-national forces.

In Thiruvananthapuram, the programme was inaugurated by Com. V. Ram Mohan, General Secretary of AIFB Kerala Committee. More than two hundred activists from the city gathered in front of Netaji statue near state assembly building and took pledge. While addressing the gathering com. Ram Mohan explained about the importance of 9th August in the history of our freedom struggle. He said that the Indian independence have become a reality when mass uprising under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi within our country and the armed struggle of Netaji against the Anglo-American forces combined together during the period of Quit India movement. It is necessary to propagate the patriotic sacrifices and contributions of Netaji among the younger generation to bring back the misguided youngsters to the main stream of our national polity. He further said that the All India Forward Bloc, the party founded by Netaji is all along fighting for propagating the great ideals of Netaji and the importance of patriotism. Com. Arun S.Sasi, AIFB Thiruvananthapuram District Secretary read the pledge to the participants. Com. Kazhakoottam Prabhakaran, Com. Adv. Binu, Com. Jeeja James Kandathil, Com. Jayakumar, Dr. Suresh Kumar, Com. Rajan, Com. Rajesh etc. led the procession and spoke.

In Kollam, the programme was inaugurated by Com. K.R. Brahmanandan, Central Committee Member of the party. Hundreds of AIFB activists gathered in front of the Head Post Office, Chinnakkada and took the pledge. While inaugurating the programme Com. Brahmanandan said that today all over India our party is organising such programme to inculcate patriotism among the new generation. Com. Thampi Punnathala, AIFB Kollam District Secretary read the pledge to the participants. Com. Shyam Mohan, Com. Rajeev, Com. Noushad, Com. Kuttappan, Com. Keralapuarum Khan etc led the procession and spoke. The rally started from PWD Rest House maidan.

In Ernakulam, hundreds of AIFB activists gathered at Boat jetty, Fort Kochi and took the pledge. Com Thankachan Varghese, State Secretary of AIFB inaugurated the programme. In his inaugural address Com. Thankachan Varghese explained about the importance of the Quit India day and the relevance of remembering Netaji on the particular occasion. He said that the younger generation of country is reeling under utter frustration. The anti-national forces of our country are misusing these frustrated youngsters for their nefarious activities. Therefore it is the duty of the patriotic people to bring back the misguided youngsters into the main stream of our society. He further said that as Netaji is the evergreen icon of patriotism, propagating the ideals of Netaji is the best way to inculcate patriotism among the youngsters. Com. Abdul Khader Vazhakkala, AIFB Ernakulam District Secretary presided over the function. Com. Jaison Manajili, State Committee Member of the party read the pledge to the participants. Com. Sherly Santhosh, AIAMS State President, Com. Baiju Menacherry, AIYL State Secretary, Com. Benny Pallipatt, Com. Sadanandan Njalukkara, Com. C.K. Ayyappan, Com. Joseph Karinatt, Com. Karuna Kumar etc led the rally and spoke. The procession started from High Court Junction.

In Kannur District the programme was held at Caltex Junction. Com. Adv. Manoj Kumar inaugurated the programme. While addressing the gathering he explained about the sacrifices and contributions of Netaji and the importance of propagating the same among the new generation. Com. Rajan Koodali, State Committee member of the party read the pledge to the participants. Com. K.M. Balakrishnan, Com. Jiji Thomas, Com. Pradeep Kumar, Com. Azad, etc led the rally and spoke.

(Reports from other districts are expected)

ON STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT ON CIVIL LIABILITY FOR NUCLEAR DAMAGE BILL

The Left parties had, at the very outset, opposed the draft legislation on Civil Nuclear Liability when it was sought to be introduced in Parliament. A reading of the Bill made it clear that the purpose of the legislation is directed more towards protecting the US nuclear reactor suppliers from claims of liability and compensation and less about providing effective and speedy compensation to the people affected by a nuclear accident. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology has now submitted its report in which it has made certain recommendations. The members of the Left Parties in the Standing Committee have registered their dissent to the report and recommendations. The Left Parties wish to explain to the people the objectionable features that would still exist in the legislation if the recommendations of the Standing Committee are accepted.

Protecting Foreign Suppliers

Clause 17 of the Bill currently reads as follows:

17. The operator of a nuclear installation shall have a right of recourse where -

- (a) such right is expressly provided for in a contract in writing;
- (b) the nuclear incident has resulted from the wilful act or gross negligence on the part of the supplier of the material, equipment or services, or of his employee;
- (c) the nuclear incident has resulted from the act of commission or omission of a person done with the intent to cause nuclear damage.

The Standing Committee has recommended that Clause 17 should now be amended as follows (changes in bold):

17. The operator of a nuclear installation shall have a right of recourse where -

- (a) such right is expressly provided for in a contract in writing; and
- (b) the nuclear incident has resulted as a consequence of latent or patent defect, supply of sub-standard material,

defective equipment or services or from the gross negligence on the part of the supplier of the material, equipment or services.

- (c) the nuclear incident has resulted from the act of commission or omission of a person done with the intent to cause nuclear damage.

By adding "and" in sub-clause 17 (a), the right of the operator to claim damages from the supplier of nuclear equipment and material (right of recourse) has now been made entirely contingent on whether such right is explicitly provided in the private contract between the operator and supplier. In the likely scenario of the foreign suppliers not agreeing to provide for right of recourse in the contract, they cannot be held liable for any nuclear damage, even if they have supplied defective equipment. What is more dubious is that this significant weakening of Clause 17 has been done under the guise of strengthening the right of recourse against the foreign suppliers.

The US administration and the American nuclear industry lobby have objected to sub-clause 17 (b). They are not prepared to accept the right of recourse for the Indian operator vis-à-vis American suppliers. The Standing Committee recommendation is fully in line with the demand of the American lobbies. This amendment linking 17 (a) and 17 (b) will make it worse than what is there in the original Bill.

Liability Cap Unacceptable

The recommendation to enhance the operator's liability cap from Rs. 500 crore to Rs. 1500 crore is hardly significant, since total liability for each nuclear incident remains capped at 300 million SDRs (Rs. 2122.40 crore or \$ 455 million) as per Clause 6 (1). This amount is less than even the Bhopal settlement of \$ 470 million, which has been acknowledged as grossly inadequate by the Government itself.

It is noteworthy that none of the international nuclear liability conventions set any cap on total liability, but only set a floor. Countries like South Korea and Sweden have set operator's liability at 300 million SDRs, not total liability. The operator's liability in the US is \$ 11.9 billion. Countries like Japan, Russia and Germany do not have any cap on total liability. In contrast, the Indian bill seeks to cap total liability to 300 million SDRs, displaying scant regard for the lives and security of the Indian people.

Further Objections

The Standing Committee report has failed to take on board several more objections to the Bill, especially regarding the extant provisions protecting the operator and suppliers from facing litigation and the ambiguities regarding nuclear accidents in defence installations and the jurisdiction of the AERB. It has also made an objectionable suggestion to create a liability fund to reduce government liability by levying additional charges on electricity.

The recommendations of the Standing Committee does not alter the fact that the intent behind the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Bill, as well as its provisions, are meant to facilitate India's joining the Convention on Supplementary Compensation (CSC), which was explicitly committed by the UPA-I Government to the US in 2008, during the nuclear deal negotiations. Other than the US, no other country having a substantial number of nuclear plants have signed or ratified the CSC. None of India's neighbours who could be affected by a trans-boundary impact of a nuclear accident are signatories to CSC and its funds cannot be used for augmenting trans-border compensation for settlements. India gains nothing from joining the CSC.

[The Press Statement was jointly issued by Com. Prakash Karat (CPM), Com. A.B. Bardhan, Com. Debabrata Biswas (AIFB) and Com. Abani Roy (RSP) on 19 August 2010.]

All India Convention on Education

CLARION CALL TO STOP CENTRALISATION, PRIVATISATION AND COMMERCIALISATION OF EDUCATION.

A national convention of students, teachers, university employees, parents, youths and Science Movements was held at Mavalankar Hall, New Delhi on 13 August 2010. The convention was jointly organised by left students' & youth organizations and others, including AISB and AIYL. The convention resolved to fight against the anti-people policies of UPA-II government in the field of education.

The convention was addressed by several members of Parliament like Sitaram Yechuri (CPIM), D. Raja (CPI), Dr. Barun Mukherji (AIFB) and Abani Roy (RSP), Higher Education Minister (West Bengal) Prof. Sudarshan Roy Chowdhury and student and youth leaders.

The convention has resolved to launch National Forum in Defence of Education and has given call to hold a **massive central rally on December 2, 2010** involving all stateholders.

The convention uphold the following demands:

- I Allocate 6% of GDP for Education as committed in the CMP of the UPA-I Government.
- I Include pre-primary to Senior Secondary education under the purview of the Right to Education. Central Government should bear all the expenditure for implementing the Right to Education. Increase the number of schools along with strong social monitoring mechanism involving local stake holders.
- I Recruit quality teachers on a permanent basis. Remove the freeze on appointment and cuts in teaching and non-teaching positions.

- | Oppose handing over of public educational institutions' infrastructure and management to the private sector in the name of Public Private Partnerships.
- | Reject fee hike. Fully subsidize students from economically backward and disadvantaged backgrounds.
- | Enact a central legislation to bring all private self-financing institutions under strict social control.
- | Implement constitutionally mandated SC/ST/OBC reservations in all educational institutions.
- | Fight all attempts to undermine the democratic control of the Parliament, State Assemblies and statutory structures of Universities and colleges (including through instruments like NCHER). Fight against centralization of education.
- | Oppose FDI in Education.
- | Scrap the FEI Bill and suitably amend the other recently introduced bills.
- | Scrap private universities and deemed university status to private institutions.
- | Use Information Technology for Distance Education to provide universal lifelong quality education. Do not commercialize distance education.
- | Undertake Assessment for improvement not Accreditation or Funding. Evolve a democratic and transparent mechanism for Assessment.
- | Uphold democratic rights in the sphere of education. Hold elections for Students' Unions, Teaching and Non-Teaching Association. Provide elected representation in all decision making bodies.

BJP : CAUGHT IN A BIND IN GUJARAT

The BJP has indeed painted itself into a corner. After being on the run for a couple of days, Gujarat's outgoing Minister of State for Home Amit Shah, known to be CM Narendra Modi's close confidant, surrendered before the CBI on July 25. But not before making a dramatic appearance at the State BJP headquarter at Ahmedabad in the morning repeating Narendra Modi's charge against the CBI investigations. "All the allegations against the BJP and a move motivated by the Congress Government (at the Centre)," he declared while the BJP's women activists and supporters performed aarti for him. The national leaders of the party in no time fell in line, backing him to the hilt on the plea that the CBI had been frequently misused by the ruling party in New Delhi, and this too was a similar episode.

Shah was chargesheeted along with 14 others for being involved in the Sohrabuddin Sheikh fake encounter case that resulted in the liquidation of Sohrabuddin, his wife Kauser Bi and another eyewitness Tulsidas Prajapati in November 2005. The first summons against him was issued by the CBI on July 23 but Shah was then untraceable. Much later did he surface on July 25 and then surrendered to the CBI following his political outburst against the Union Government sitting in the BJP's State office. He has been remanded to judicial custody for 14 days. Lodged in the Sabarmati Jail he is currently being grilled by the CBI.

Whatever is being revealed in the press regarding the chargesheet shows that the accusations against Shah leveled in it are substantive and serious. (That is also because one of the accused officials has turned an approver.) It is understood that Shah has been described in the CBI chargesheet as the mastermind of the plot against Sohrabuddin and his wife. However, it is for the court to decide on the merits of the case and do the needful. In the circumstances it would have been perfectly in order for the BJP leaders in the State and at New Delhi to say that the law should take its course. Instead they have gone out of their way to politicize the issue while defending Amit Shah. This gives rise to the suspicion that Shah's legal defence is weak and that is known to the BJP leaders. For that very reason they are trying to divert attention.

No doubt the CBI's past record does not inspire much confidence. However, as has been noted in The Indian Express, "it is an entirely different and dangerous thing to shield possible criminality by reducing all pursuit of justice to a question of politics". But the BJP is doing just that and in the process trying to once again bring about communal polarization in Gujarat. Which only shows that it has refused to draw any lesson from the consequences of the state sponsored anti-Muslim pogrom that was carried out there in 2002.

In short, the party is engaged in a dangerous game of defying democracy, secularism and the rule of law. All in the name of politics. This is a frontal attack on the fabric of our parliamentary democracy. However, what cannot also be overlooked is that by its actions and behaviour it has painted itself into a corner on this issue thereby impairing its national outlook. It is really caught in a bind in Gujarat.

....Courtesy : Observer