

## **ML Update: 02-08 September 2008**

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### **Bihar Floods: Criminal Negligence, Not Divine Deluge**

The Nitish Kumar regime's boasts of 'Bihar Shining' are now submerged by the cries of Bihar Drowning. The NDA Government's claims of 'good governance' have proved a washout in the face of the floods, and now the Chief Minister is trying to paint the floods as a 'natural' calamity or divine 'Deluge' ('Pralay'). Nothing could be further from the truth. The flood devastation was highly preventable - and is a direct result of callous negligence of basic flood-prevention strategies by Governments both at Patna and Delhi. Despite the fact that every year breaches in embankments cause floods in the State, maintenance and repair of embankments were rampantly neglected. It took the Bihar Chief Minister two weeks after the first breach appeared in the Kosi embankment to begin the most primary initiatives for evacuation, rescue and relief. As the Kosi changed its course and flood waters covered entire villages, affecting over 25 lakh people in nearly 12 districts of the State, the desperate pleas for help were ignored by the State Government. Even today - in all the flood-affected areas, there is an acute shortage of rescue motorboats and boats, as well as food, drinking water, polythene sheets and other emergency essentials. At the Centre too, the Prime Minister apparently woke up late to the magnitude of the calamity. And UPA leader and Rail Minister Laloo Yadav (whose home constituency Madhepura is one of the worst-affected areas) has been fiddling as the floods swallow Bihar. His gesture of donating his 'earnings' at a TV reality show Paanchvi Pass mocks at the misery of the flood-affected people. Of course, that's nothing new. When Laloo Yadav's RJD ruled Bihar, he is the one who made the remark (worthy of Marie Antoinette) that floods are good for the poor because that's when fish from the ponds of the rich swim into the homes of the poor.

In the mirror of the Bihar's flood waters every year, the rot in Bihar's polity and society can be seen starkly: its nexus of corrupt politicians, bureaucrats, and middlemen for whom the floods are a bonanza; criminalised goons governing and monopolising the structures of rescue and relief; and state repression on protesting people. Even last year, there were instances of police firing on protesting flood victims. A few years back, Time Magazine had lionised a young Bihar District Magistrate Gautam Goswami for his sterling work in flood relief - later it came out that he, along with thugs backed by ruling politicians, had siphoned off crores of funds meant for flood victims. This year too - the same story is unfolding. Recent reports in papers indicate that thugs are cornering rescue boats for themselves and are snatching and hoarding relief materials.

In the same mirror, we can also see clearly the sordid reality behind the Central Government's boasts of '9% growth', of India being a 'rising Asian superpower', and 61 years of planning and development in independent India. Chronic hunger and starvation in India, we know, is not due to

'natural' drought and famine but due to deliberate institutional callousness and skewed priorities. The same is the case with floods too - plans for flood control on the Kosi river have been shelved and sidelined year after year for half a century. In 1951, the people of eastern Bihar had faced the fury of the Kosi's floods - and as a result, comprehensive plans had been chalked out to tame the floods. In keeping with these plans, a treaty was signed with Nepal in 1954 and the foundation laid for the Kosi Barrage in 1959. But subsequently the other dimensions of the Kosi Project were forgotten and neglected by successive Governments at Bihar and the Centre. Under the bilateral agreement with Nepal in 1954, maintenance and repair of embankments on the Kosi were the Bihar government's responsibility. Today, in order to explain away its neglect of that responsibility, Governments of India and Bihar are seeking to shift blame for the floods onto Nepal.

Hurricane Katrina exposed the underbelly of the superpower USA - the mightiest Army in the world failed to protect its people; racist callousness of the Government towards the (largely Black) poor of Louisiana was on display; and the myth of corporate 'efficiency' was exploded. In contrast, Cuba (David to the US' Goliath) did a far more creditable job of protecting its people when the same hurricane hit its shores. The episode proved that in dealing with such crises, it is the priorities of nations and administrations that are more decisive than actual affluence or wealth. It is concern for and participation of common people which is actually effective and 'efficient', while corporatized governance displays efficiency only in greed and loot. The floods in Bihar prove the same.

As the people of Bihar battle the floods, the first priority must of course be rescue, relief and humanitarian helping hands. But our concern also demands that we take Governments at Patna and Delhi to task for their apathy and negligence, so that the yearly recurrence of the tragedy can be prevented. Activists of our party and mass organisations in the affected districts of Bihar are at the forefront of rescue and relief activities. Apart from rescue, relief and rehabilitation as well as compensation for the flood-affected, we are also demanding that a time-bound judicial enquiry be set up to investigate the many instances of negligence by Governments in the matter of flood-control.

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## **Displacing Peasants, Disarming Workers of their Right to Strike -CPI(M) at the Service of Corporates**

*"Personally, I don't support bandhs. Bandhs do not help us or the country. Unfortunately, I belong to a political party. They call strikes and I keep mum. But I have decided to open up the next time."*

- West Bengal Chief Minister from the CPI(M) Buddhadeb Bhattacharya addressing industrialists at an ASSOCHAM meeting

Time and again, CPI(M)'s pride and joy, West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya comes out to assure corporate heads of his abhorrence for the working class movement's legacy of strikes, gheraos, and bandhs. Now he's done it yet again. This time, Buddhadeb, who sees himself as 'CEO' of West Bengal, has said it is 'unfortunate' that he belongs to a political party that calls strikes! The corporate media has lapped up this latest gem, and has immediately come out with editorials and commentaries galore, according to which strikes are 'politically' motivated; 'politics' is a bad word; and Buddhadeb is a lone honest voice because he, like every good CEO, bears the 'responsibility' of 'governance' unlike the 'irresponsible' party leadership. Just as Somnath Chatterjee tried to project the Speaker's Chair as being 'above' politics, Buddhadeb, another parliamentary poster-boy of the

CPI(M), is trying to divorce 'governance' and 'industry' from 'politics': both have provided grist to the anti-Left, anti-politics, anti-working-class corporate mill.

The capitalist has far more painful weapons than strikes - he tames workers by threatening them with hunger. Workers who lead protests are routinely thrown out of jobs. In the face of the organised tyranny of capital, strikes are the only effective weapon of the working class. Every meagre measure of rights for the working class has been won through strikes. The corporates and their media portray this reality upside down - accusing striking workers of 'organised tyranny' and painting the capitalist as helpless and virtuous victim. When Buddhadeb echoes the same myth and seeks to disarm workers of their sole weapon, it is because he wishes to appease corporates and capitalists at the cost of workers and peasants.

The CPI(M) has claimed that it has 'censured' Buddhadeb for his statement. It would be wrong to imagine that there is any fundamental contradiction between the CPI(M) and Buddhadeb on this matter. Buddhadeb is no isolated maverick or dissident in the CPI(M) - as he has often pointed out, it is his position that the CPI(M) has endorsed at its Party Congress! CPI(M)'s basic policy orientation is proved by the actions not just Buddhadeb but even of Kerala Chief Minister Achuthanandan, supposedly the last bastion in the CPI(M) of the struggle against neo-liberal policies. Achuthanandan recently inaugurated a Rs. 250 million 'infotainment' park run by the Malabar Pleasures India Limited under party-led Malabar Tourism Development Cooperative Society. Why should a communist-led Government spends crores to promote an elitist and exclusivist park that wastes water, and where entry fee is Rs.300 per person for adults on working days and Rs.375 on weekends?!

Today the people's protest at Singur has brought the Tata's Nano plant to a standstill. Ratan Tata has threatened to shift his operations to the Pantnagar plant at Uttarakhand (in the SIDCUL industrial enclave where workers are not allowed to unionise). Unfortunately, the Trinamool and its leader Mamata Banerjee have sabotaged the Singur protest from the very outset. She has declared that the Tata Plant is welcome - and her only demand is that 400 acres of land for which farmers had not given consent or had not accepted compensation should be returned to farmers on the grounds that is 'superfluous' to the plant. Mamata's stance reflects her party's own double standards, and tries to hide the real grounds on which the Tata plant was opposed at Singur. It is timely and important to refresh our memory on that matter. Singur was highly fertile multi-crop farmland, and CPI(M) lied to declare that it was 'single-crop' or poor quality land. CPI(M) lied to claim that 96% of farmers at Singur had given 'consent' for acquisition of their land - later, in Court, the CPI(M) State Govt had to admit that Court that out of the 997.11 acres acquired for the Tata car plant, owners of just 287.5 acres gave consent; the clear implication is that the bulk of the land has been grabbed by force. Most importantly, the crucial question is: why did the WB Govt dole out sops from public money to the tune of 850 crore rupees to Tata? The Tata plant at Singur is founded on lies told by the CPI(M) and its WB Government; on misuse of taxpayers' money to appease corporate giant Tata; on grab of fertile land by force - and the murder of Rajkumar Bhul and rape and murder of Tapasi Malik. It has no moral right to continue.

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### **AISA-RYA Pose 5 Questions to PM on his Bihar Visit**

As PM Manmohan Singh made a belated aerial survey of flood-affected Bihar, students and youth,

represented by Kamlesh Sharma, National General Secretary, RYA and Abhyuday, Bihar State Secretary AISA, posed 5 questions to him and demanded that he answer the nation:

Why have the plans made way back in 1951 immediately after independence for flood-management on the Kosi never been implemented? Why, in the midst of more than half a century of claims and counter-claims of competing Governments at both Centre and Bihar to 'development,' why do the floods wash Bihar back to 1951 every year?

This year, the Kosi embankment breach occurred at less than 1.5 lakh cusecs of water; in 2004, the breach occurred at 2.68 lakh cusecs; while in October 1968, the same embankment had withstood 9.13 lakh cusecs, and 6.64 lakh cusecs in 1984. This gives the lie to the claim that unprecedented levels of water have caused the breach: in fact, the weakening of the embankment is squarely to blame. At Kusahara in Nepal, two spurs at 12.01 and 12.90 were showing cracks two whole weeks before the floods occurred, and newspapers had reported this. Yet no preventive measures were taken to protect the people. Is this not criminal negligence, a fact that today is being white-washed with talk of a 'Mahapralay' (Great Deluge)?

Generation after generation are tired of hearing grand promises made from the lofty heights of aerial-survey helicopters - promises that are washed away in the next year's floods. Isn't your visit to Bihar more of the same?

As always, you will promise the services of central agencies in rescue and relief operations - but like every year, this aid (and the Central Government's responsibility) will vanish when the flood waters recede. Will you guarantee six months free rations (food and fuel) as well as Rs. 5000 to each poor person in the flood-affected region of eastern Bihar - which has the greatest concentration of backward and poor communities and from which the maximum workers migrate every year for lack of work?

Will the Central Government make any plans to translate into practice the long-pending promises of Projects on the rivers of Bihar - Kosi, Kamla Balan, Bagmati, Gandak and Mahananda?

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### **CPI(ML) Statement at the All-Party meet on Bihar Floods**

CPI(ML) Bihar State Secretary Nand Kishor Prasad and Politburo member Ramjatan Sharma attended the all-party meeting convened by the Bihar Govt on the floods, and in a hard-hitting statement holding the floods to be a result of government's negligence, demanded a time-bound judicial enquiry in the matter.

### **JNUSU Protest Demo Forces Boucher to Stay Away**

A massive protest demonstration on 27 August, led by the JNUSU, forced US President George Bush's Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher to cancel his visit to JNU. JNUSU had been mobilising students against Boucher's visit for a week before the protest: a protest meeting addressed by Prof. Achin Vanaik was held on August 25, a protest rally was organised on August 26, and there were class-to-class campaigns on the issue.

Students of JNU declared that Assistant Secretary Boucher was an emissary of George Bush's global mission to justify America's present occupation and plunder of Iraq and Afghanistan in the nations of the subcontinent. They refused to offer moral or academic support to this project. Some student groups like NSUI and YFE chose to be the local agents and spokespersons of US imperialism and

tried to mobilise students in Boucher's support, but failed completely. The JNUSU led by AISA successfully mobilised a massive protest on the day of Boucher's proposed visit. The prospect of being greeted by hundreds of students raising slogans against US imperialism was too much for Boucher, who changed his plans and stayed ensconced in the US embassy.

### **CPI(ML) Protests in Delhi against Crackdown in Kashmir**

The CPI(ML) held a demonstration at Parliament Street in New Delhi to protest the continuing military repression of protesters in Kashmir, demanding that the UPA Government ensure the release of arrested Kashmiri leaders and initiate an unconditional dialogue with them. Protesters burnt the effigy of UPA Govt. responsible for the deteriorating situation in Jammu and Kashmir. They condemned the Congress and BJP's competitive communal tactics for creating a communal division between Jammu and Kashmir. The protestors also condemned the communal pogrom by the Sangh Parivar against Christians in Kandhamal (Orissa), emboldened by the tacit support on part of the BJD-BJP-led State Government and the inaction of the UPA Government at the Centre.

The protest gathering was addressed by CPI(ML) Central Committee member Swapan Mukherjee, students from the Manipuri Students Association Delhi, Javed Wani from AISA, JNU, human rights activist Gautam Navlakha, economist Prof. Amit Bhaduri, political scientist Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty, Shree Prakash of INSAF, Ravi Hemadri of Other Media, JNU Students' Union President Sandeep Singh and Joint Secretary Mobeen Alam. The protest meeting was conducted by CPI(ML) CCM Kavita Krishnan. Others who attended included former senior bureaucrat KB Saxena, Radhika Menon and Manisha Sethy from Forum for Democratic Initiatives (FDI), Delhi State Secretary Sanjay Sharma, CPI(ML) State Committee members Amarnath Tiwary, Santosh Rai, VKS Gautam, and many others.

### **Central & State Govts' Inaction Ensures Anti-Christian Riot Goes on in Orissa**

The violence against the people of Christian faith in Orissa, that started on 24<sup>th</sup> August, is still continuing and till the time of reporting no political party or people are being allowed by the Navin Patnaik Govt. to visit the areas gripped by saffron terror and violence. The Orissa CM Navin Patnaik himself visited Kandhamal only on 30<sup>th</sup> August. It has been reported that even Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil's visit to the violence ridden areas was being slowed down and when he was finally allowed in he was accompanied by Jagdish Tytler, a man involved in the massacres of the Sikhs in 1984 carnage in Delhi. This gesture of the Congress' Home Minister will only embolden the rabidly communal VHP-RSS-BJP killer gangs in Orissa. However this act of Shivraj Patil has immensely angered the people of Orissa who are also seeing that despite Congress having strong presence in these areas, it is not mobilising the masses against the communal forces and elements.

The anti-Christian violence has further spread to new areas and districts of Gajapati, Kalahandi, Sambalpur, Bargarh, Kendrapara and Koraput districts. Everywhere the police has become a mute spectator as Navin Patnaik Govt. is running with the support of BJP, while communal-criminal gangs led by saffron organisations and BJP are moving around freely engaging in arson and killing. All this further emboldened them to call for Orissa Bandh on 25<sup>th</sup> August and on that day they hired lumpens and anti-social elements to wreak their macabre dance of death and destruction. During the bandh they killed 18 people in Kandhamal alone and 2 in Gajapati and burnt 23 churches and countless Christian houses. Reports have it that the common Christians were being chased and killed mercilessly. In Kendrapara District some Muslim houses too were burnt and destroyed. And the entire police and law and order machinery of the State Govt. had become paralysed while the Sangh Parivar was in full control of these areas.

On the other hand the Navin Patnaik led Govt., instead of taking tough measures to suppress the saffron brigade declared holiday for all educational institutions as if paying respect to Swami Laxmanananda, the VHP man who had led the bloody riots and killings of Christians in Dec '07-Jan '08.

On 30<sup>th</sup> August some ABVP-RSS elements hung up a placard with anti-Hindu inflammable content and projected it as if it was done by the minority community and tried to mobilise college students against the Christians. Many places are in the grip of sharp tension and its evident by the fact that Shivraj Patil was not let in Kandhamal.

The CPI(ML) is making its best possible efforts to mobilise the people of Orissa against this violence. Protest demonstrations have taken place and a joint protest was held along with SUCI on 28<sup>th</sup> August. We are approaching all the Left parties for collective action against the ongoing anti-Christian violence. Young CPI(ML) cadres in Kandhamal, who hailed from Christian faith are feared killed, we have no access to those areas as yet as entry is being barred from outside. The CPI(ML) Orissa unit is trying to organise a visit to the area.

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*Excerpts from letter to Speaker (Dt/- 17 August 2008), Parliament of India, by Prof. Chaman Lal, (editor, Complete Documents of Bhagat Singh in Hindi), protesting against the distortion of Bhagat Singh's image in the statue installed in Parliament:*

Respected Somnath ji,

In the beginning I must appreciate your sincere efforts in getting the statue of country's most cherished martyr Bhagat Singh in Parliamentary complex. However... a very disturbing development has also taken place ...about which I wish to draw your most urgent attention.

PTC, a Punjabi news channel on 15<sup>th</sup> August and 'The Tribune's Delhi edition on 16<sup>th</sup> August has referred to the reactions of close members of Bhagat Singh's family about the inaugurated statue. Smt. Virender Sandhu, niece of Bhagat Singh (Daughter of Kultar Singh), who is the first biographer of Bhagat Singh and his ancestors in Hindi and who has been honored by Punjab Govt. this year on this forty year old classic book as 'Shiromani Hindi Sahityakar', traveled from England to be part of this ceremony, has expressed her deep disappointment at the statue, which has been installed. Abhay Singh Sandhu, son of Kulbir Singh and nephew of Bhagat Singh, who has been instrumental in getting Bhagat Singh's jail notebook, published from Punjab and Haryana Govts with Punjabi and Hindi translations for free distribution in schools and for public, felt even more distressed at the figure of Bhagat Singh as sculpted in statue. Jagmohan Singh son of Bibi Amar Kaur and nephew of Bhagat Singh has also reacted strongly about the sculpted figure. Not only family members of Bhagat Singh, even eminent freedom fighter Sh. Shashi Bhushan felt that the statue looks like that of a 50-60 year old man and not of 23-24 years young person.

... While sculpting historical figures, the face of a personality can not be changed with imagination, it has to remain closest to the real face. For very long period Bhagat Singh ideas remained shadowed by various fishy interpretations and many paintings, particularly in Punjab, based on these shady interpretations came up. One of these paintings has been of Bhagat Singh wearing yellow turban with pistol in hand, confirming the colonial image of 'a terrorist'. Some of us like Prof. Bipan Chandra, Prof. Sunmit Sarkar, Prof. Irfan Habib, myself and others, who have worked for many years to resurrect the real image of Bhagat Singh as a brilliant socialist thinker, through his writings, feel

cheated, when some of these painted images take precedence over real pictures of Bhagat Singh. Punjab Govt. has been guilty of publishing a painted picture of Bhagat Singh as real picture in media in its official advertisements for last more than three decades, including the advertisement issued on 15<sup>th</sup> August this year.

...An unsavory controversy however was created by those, who had nothing to do with the ideas of Bhagat Singh to communalize the issue of statue of a confirmed atheist. Although the whole world know Bhagat Singh by his last photograph with hat and dozens of statues throughout the country—Indore, Kolkata, Partapgarh, Delhi (Ferozeshah Kotla) and dozens of other places, are based on this world popular known photograph, which is popular even in Pakistan. Irony of the matter is that, the place where he created history by his action on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1929, in this very photographic shape, he was denied the same shape by the new rulers. ...Even if one grants that a statue with turban was the decision of certain committee, then it was imperative that the real picture with turban was to be sculpted, that has not been done. The popular picture with turban is of College drama group. In this picture Bhagat Singh is wearing white Kurta Pyjama with white falling turban, which is not a typical Sikh (close, tight) way of wearing turban. Bhagat Singh was almost six feet tall with robust health, but he was not fat. In his turbaned photo, he has very small beard and moustaches, as he was just sixteen then. (The sculpture is not faithful even to this photo.)

... To make amends to this serious blunder, first step is to cover the statue, till a proper enquiry is made into whole issue and a properly shaped statue is installed. Secondly, the hat wearing popular, real and last photograph of Bhagat Singh and B K Dutt must be displayed inside the Central Hall, preferably, where they sat watching the proceedings before throwing bombs with plaques. If these amends are not made, I am afraid, the youth of the country will always think that why Bhagat Singh like revolutionary patriots are wronged during their life time and also after their life time by the establishment of that period. Though Bhagat Singh is like a Phoenix, however he may be tried to be buried and killed at the level of body or ideas, he will resurrect himself with renewed vigour, as Che Guvera's resurrection has happened in all Latin American countries, shaking the neo colonial powers of the earth.

With hopes of your kind attention.....-Chaman Lal

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**P.S.**

\* ML Update, a CPI(ML) Weekly News Magazine, Vol. 11 No. 36 02 - 08, SEPTEMBER 2008.