

# ML Update: 18-24 September 2007

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## **Ram Setu': UPA's Calculated Capitulation to Saffron Agenda**

The BJP's covert roll back of its opposition to the Indo-US Nuke Deal had exposed its own surrender on the question of defending the nation's sovereignty. In the wake of this surrender, the BJP has sought to shore up its sham of 'nationalism' by whipping up a storm over the so-called 'Ram Setu' bridge. The UPA Government, instead of boldly confronting the BJP's obscurantist saffron agenda, has instead surrendered to it and lent it legitimacy.

The Sethusamudram Ship Canal Project off Rameshwaram in Tamilnadu proposes a shipping canal across the Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay and the Palk Straits to link the Arabian Sea with the Bay of Bengal. It was in fact the NDA Government which in 1999 had announced that it would complete the project in three years, and which in its 2000-01 Budget had allocated resources for the feasibility study of the Sethusamudram Project. The NDA Manifesto in 2004 also promises speedy completion of this Project. Serious objections to this Project had been voiced by fisherpeople and environmentalists, on grounds of its impact on marine ecology and fisher people's livelihood - which the NDA and UPA Governments alike ignored.

The BJP has now conveniently discovered that the 'Ram Setu' is the selfsame bridge to Lanka built by the Monkey Army at the behest of Ram that finds mention in the Ramayana - and is opposing the Project on these grounds. A petition was moved in the SC against the Project quoting the Valmiki Ramayana and Tulsi's Ramcharitmanas to claim that the 'Ram Setu' is historical and cultural heritage. In its affidavit filed in response to this, the ASI quite correctly remarked that these texts, while of undeniable mythological and devotional value, however "cannot be said to be historical record to incontrovertibly prove the existence of the characters or the occurrence of the events, depicted therein." The affidavit also cited studies that proved that the so-called 'Ram Setu' "was not a man-made structure, but actually comprised 103 small patch reefs lying in a linear pattern with reef crest, sand cays and intermittent deep channels."

Faced with the BJP's hue and cry reminiscent of the Ramjanmabhoomi issue, the UPA Government cravenly withdrew its affidavit, and suspended two ASI officials responsible for it. It is one matter to hold that the ASI affidavit could have tactically avoided the issue of the historicity of mythological characters, and focussed instead on the fact that there is no textual or archaeological evidence to prove that the 'Ram Setu' is indeed a man-made bridge. But the UPA Government as well as its

'secular' allies have instead sought to play to the Hindutva gallery by declaring 'matters of faith' to be beyond the court's purview. None less than the Union Law Minister Bharadwaj has declared, "Lord Rama is an integral part of Indian culture and ethos and cannot be a matter of debate or subject matter of litigation in court...As Himalaya is Himalaya, Ganga is Ganga, Rama is Rama. It is a question of faith. There is no requirement of any proof to establish the existence based on faith." What are the implications of this position for the Babri Masjid issue? The Sangh Parivar claims that a particular spot is in fact the birth place of Ram that needs no historical ratification since it is an article of faith. Historians maintain that Ram is a mythological figure, likely to be a composite and idealised figure, possibly based on many actual kings and intended to represent ideal values. In this sense Ram is different from Jesus or Mohammed whose existence is backed by historical record; whether they are prophets or not is a matter of faith. If the Law Minister of the land declares Ram to be equivalent to the self-evident Himalayas and the Ganga, needing no historical evidence, then it follows that Ram's birthplace or bridge too must similarly be taken as self-evident. And that implies that the UPA Government, jettisoning the Indian Constitution and secular rational norms, is accepting the notions of VHP's 'Dharm Sansad' instead! Laloo Yadav, the self-styled messiah of secularism who boasts of having stopped Advani's Rathayatra in its tracks, too has gone on record with similar sentiments. An institution like the ASI is being penalised for merely having stated the norms and methods followed by every serious historian and archaeologist. This is nothing but pragmatic saffronisation by the Congress and UPA.

Even the CPI(M) spoke in many voices on the issue of the Ram Setu affidavit. On the one hand the CPI(M) issued a statement supporting the withdrawal of the affidavit on the grounds that the references to Ramayana's historicity were extraneous to the issue. Veteran leader Jyoti Basu however condemned the withdrawal of the affidavit as being a calculated roll back with an eye on the elections. At the same time CPI(M) politburo member Sitaram Yechury went to extent of seeking 'stern punishment' for those 'guilty' for the affidavit!

Further, the real issues of livelihood and environment at stake in the Sethusamudram Project are being drowned in the noise over a non-issue. Environmentalists have pointed out that the reef known as 'Ramar Setu' had cushioned the impact of the 2004 tsunami; that the Gulf of Munnar is quake-prone; and expressed the apprehension that the destruction of this reef entailed by the Project might make the coast more vulnerable to tsunamis. Fisher people have opposed the Project on the grounds that the reef known as 'Ramar Setu' is crucial for maintaining marine life, and its destruction would destroy their means of livelihood and survival. There had also been no proper cost-benefit analysis that showed any significant saving in costs or increase in trade through this Project. The Supreme Court's track record on such matters is notoriously poor - as witnessed in the Sardar Sarovar Project. The SC seems willing to give credence to the Sangh Parivar's superficial saffron objections while ignoring the substantial issues at stake.

Such a failure on part of a Government whose secular pretensions are its principal *raison d'être*, on part of self-proclaimed secular parties, as well as democratic institutions to boldly uphold and defend secular and rational norms can only legitimise and strengthen the saffron agenda of the Sangh Parivar.

### **Brutal Lathicharge and Molestation of Women at Workers' Dharna in Rudrapur**

Workers of factories under the SIDCUL industrial area (of State Industrial Development Corporation of Uttaranchal Ltd.) were brutally lathicharged on September 18. Women (mostly family members of the workers) who had joined the peaceful dharna were molested; several male policemen would attack women protestors together, tear off their clothes and abuse them.

The agitation here began several months ago against the illegal lockout by the Bhaskar Factory Management. Despite the clear evidence of legal violations by the Management, the Uttarakhand Government and local Administration have protected the management and penalised the workers. The agitation spread to neighbouring factories as well. In the ACME Telepower factory, 3 workers were thrown out for participating in the protest; and when a Strike was held to demand restoration of these activists to their jobs, 200 workers were thrown out. The peaceful protest dharna at the factory gates has been ongoing for a long period.

On September 18, around 150 workers and their family members were at the dharna spot at the factory gates. They were brutally lathicharged, and 70 activists have been arrested. These include AICCTU leader KK Bora, SIDCUL workers' leaders Vijay Sharma, Shishupal Negi and Harish Joshi as well as CPI(ML) leader Sanjay Sharma.

In response to the outcry against the brutal assault on workers and women (footage of which was carried by some media channels), the DGP has ordered an enquiry. But the fact that the SDM was present during this display of police brutality, and management goons in plain clothes joined the police force in their attack, shows that the crackdown and attack on workers has happened with the full approval and under the orders of the Uttarakhand Government.

The CPI(ML) has demanded punishment of the police officials guilty of the lathicharge and assault on women; release and withdrawal of charges on all the workers and leaders; and immediate compliance with the just demands of the workers.

### **Lawyers Association Dharna for Implementation of Sachhar Commission Report**

The Madhya Pradesh unit of the Indian Association of Lawyers, jointly with Muslim Vikas Parishad and other democratic organizations staged a dharna in Gwalior to press for implementation of Sachhar Commission recommendations and other burning demands like scrapping of SEZ Act 2005 and banning the entry of corporate houses, domestic as well as foreign, in the retail sector.

Prominent among those who addressed the dharna were CPI(ML) leader and State Secretary Comrade Gurudutt Sharma, Lawyers' Association MP Mr. I U Khan, State Vice President Muslim Vikas Parishad and Employees' leader Irfan Beg, President of Dr. BR Ambedkar Samaj Seva Sangh Ramesh Chandra Benwadia, and others. Later, a memorandum addressed to the Prime Minister was submitted to the Additional Collector. The protest meeting at the dharna venue was conducted by Syed Nasir Ali, Advocate.

## **Tamilnadu Roundup**

### **The Rally of 'Beedi Workers' Rights' at Tirunelveli**

AICCTU organized an impressive 'Rally of Beedi Workers' Rights' at Tirunelveli on 2 September as a part of a campaign on unorganized workers' rights in the state. The rally at Tirunelveli was organized following massive rallies of textile workers of western region at Erode on 19 August and that of unorganized workers at Chennai on 26 August. The rally was a follow-up of a larger campaign covering major localities of beedi workers in the district.

The main demand was for disbursal of more than 3 crores of arrears due to workers by various managements. The Rally also demanded wage hike, DA along with housing sites for all beedi workers.

Comrade Kumaraswamy, CCM and the President of AICCTU addressed the rallyists along with State GS of AICCTU N K Natarajan, State Vice-President Sankara Pandian, Comrades Rajamanickam and Ganesan while G Ramesh presided over the rally. The rallyists resolved to gherao the local minister

and the MLA to press the demand of the workers.

### **The Rally of Powerloom Workers at Thiruchengode**

Unconventionally, the demand for 3 cents of land for housing sites for powerloom workers has assumed a greater importance in the trade union movement in the textile belt of Namakkal, Erode and Salem districts. As a sequel to mass petitioning to the collector and a political rally at Erode, more than 800 powerloom workers marched to the RDO office at Thiruchengode demanding housing sites on 10 September. Comrade NK.Natarajan, SCM, led the rally. The concluding meeting was addressed by A.Govindaraj, SCM, DCMs Venkatesan, Manohar and KR.Kumarasamy. Another demonstration led by A.Govindaraj on the same issue was also organized at Perundurai, Erode district on 11 September.

### **Demo against Nuke Deal at Kumarapalayam**

Kumarapalayam town unit (Namakkal district) of the party organized a demonstration against the anti-national Indo-US Nuke Deal on 16 September. The demonstration was addressed by Comrade NK.Natarajan and led by Manohar, secretary of the town unit. Comrades A.Govindaraj, SCM, KR.Kumarasamy, Thattankuttai area secretary, Venkatachalam, RYA, Saravanan, and Thenmozhi also addressed the gathering.

## **Bihar Roundup**

### **CPI(ML) State Cadre Convention in Patna Towards 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress**

Intensifying the preparations for the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, scheduled to be held in Kolkata from 10 to 18 December, the Party's Bihar State Committee organized a state level cadre convention in Patna on September 17. More than one thousand cadres hailing from all parts of the state participated in the convention. The main speaker at the Convention was Party General Secretary Comrade Dipankar who appealed to all genuine communists to march with CPI (ML) for thoroughgoing democratization of India and resistance to imperialism. Comrade Nand Kishor Prasad, Party State Secretary, Ram Jatan Sharma, In-charge, Party's Central Education department and other CPI(ML) leaders also addressed the convention. The Convention expressed serious concern over the rising graph of crime and police highhandedness in Bihar. The Convention strongly condemned the arrest of the leaders of Party and mass organizations under patently false and fabricated charges. They include Comrades Mahboob Alam, ex. MLA, Amarjit Kushwaha, State Secretary RYA (Siwan), Anil Patel (Nalanda), Madan Prajapati (Aurangabad), Upadhyay Yadav (Arwal) and Kesari Yadav (Darbhanga).

### **Convention Against Nuke-Deal in Patna**

CPI (ML) organized a People's Convention in Patna against the Nuclear Deal. Addressing the convention Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya, General Secretary CPI(ML) called upon the patriotic masses to come on the streets against the treacherous UPA government responsible for Indo-US deal which is a great danger for our sovereignty and security. He alleged that ruling classes want to impose American slavery on the country from back door. He declared that the promises of cheaper electricity being made by the UPA Government and its allies like the RJD are mere eyewash to hide the real agenda of capitulation to US imperialism. He reminded that similar claims had been made at the time of the ENRON agreement and today people know its fate. Many cultural personalities, intellectuals and senior citizens including Mira Dutt, Prof. Bharti S Kumar and Prof. Santosh Kumar also participated in the convention.

## **Demonstration on Food Security and PDS in Delhi**

Corruption in the PDS system and erosion of food security for the poor is a burning issue, not just in the rural areas but even in the capital city of Delhi. The CPI(ML) held a massive rally and demonstration on 19 September at Parliament Street demanding a guarantee of food security and PDS coverage for all the working poor population of Delhi and an end to corruption in the Public Distribution System.

The Demonstration raised the following demands:

1. Issue BPL cards to all unorganized sector workers, construction workers, all poor people and habitants of JJ colonies, slums and resettlement colonies. Make issue price of Rs.2 /- for wheat and Rs.3/- for rice.
2. Make units as basis for providing ration. Make available 10 kg wheat, 5 kg rice and 2 kg sugar per unit (or per person)
3. Stop reductions and cuts in rations of APL card holders and provide them their full ration
4. The ration shops and kerosene oil shops (or FPS) should be opened every day. Receipts for all transactions must be ensured
5. The menace of dispensing reduced volume of kerosene oil must be done away by installing a proper volume dispenser at each ration shop
6. There should be a ration shop and k.oil provider for each 500 ration/BPL cards
7. Identity card provided to construction workers by the labour department must be accepted for making Ration Cards and Election Photo Identity Cards (EPIC)
8. The verification visit for BPL, APL and EPIC cards should only be conducted after 7 p.m. and after informing the concerned person(s) and family(ies)
9. Arrest the guilty and end the nexus of goons-agents-politicians-administrators involved in illegally occupying and snatching the plots and rights of poor people of Delhi
10. End the widespread corruption in the PDS and the ration system

A Memorandum was submitted to the Food and Agriculture Minister SHarad Pawar with the above demands.

**AICCTU Rejects Unorganised Sector Workers' Social Security Bill 2007**

AICCTU along with the Sponsoring Committee of Central Trade Unions rejected the Unorganised Sector Workers' Social Security Bill 2001 that was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on September 10, terming it an act of tokenism and eyewash. AICCTU has called upon workers to respond to the Sponsoring Committee's call for countryside action programmes including mass protests on 4-5 December 2007

### **Red Salute to Com. Ashok Mishra**

Com. Ashok Mishra breathed his last on September 8 at his home in Deoghar. He was suffering from cancer for the last 4 years. Knowing fully well that his days were numbered, he made it a point to clear his Party renewal and levy dues of the last two years just two days before his death! Active since the IPF times (1989-90), he joined CPI(ML) in 1992-93. Born in an upper caste feudal family

with Congress background, Comrade Mishra imbibed revolutionary democratic values and consistently fought against feudal, anti-people forces. Party expresses heart-felt condolences to his bereaved family.

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**P.S.**

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