

The People's Democratic Revolution in India

Communist Party of India – Marxist (CPIM)

*Interview with Comrade Arun Kumar
Fulltime CPIM member for 30 years.
Central Committee Member – CPIM
With deputation in the foreign affairs department.*

Content:

Part 1: The character of the Indian state, the Imperialists, and India's global position.....	2
Part 2: Post-independence developments within India.....	6
Part 3: The Indian communist movement and the struggle for National Sovereignty.....	15

Part 1: The character of the Indian state, the Imperialists, and India's global position

What do you make of India's decision to not condemn Russia's military intervention in Ukraine? Has India under Modi taken an anti-US/ anti-imperialist stand?

To answer this question and understand India's position globally, it is very crucial to understand the character of the Indian state and look at its historical development. CPIM has always characterized India as a state led by the big bourgeoisie and the landlord class where these two collaborate and compromise with the imperialists. This was always our understanding, and it remains to be our understanding today.

So, in this context when we talk about India's position on Russia, its non-aligned policy, or its "independent" foreign policy, we should talk with certain caveats. That is very important for various reasons.

1. India, after independence, chose to remain in the British commonwealth and it was not ready to nationalize the British capital that was there in the country. And in fact, initially, it tried to approach the British and the Americans for assistance with its first 5-years plan for the industrialization of the country. But after the imperialist countries refused to part with the technology that was necessary to build heavy industries in our country, it was then the Indian government chose to approach the Soviet Union and the other East European socialist countries. And these countries readily accepted to assist India in its industrial development.

2. And though, the newly liberated India always had its sentiments with other colonized countries and had always expressed solidarity with the other anti-colonial struggles including the struggle for the Palestinian cause, however, its decision to portray itself among the non-aligned block was the result of the Indian ruling classes pursuing its own interests after realizing that the imperialist countries are not ready to allow independent development of the Indian bourgeoisie. Thus, it turned to the Soviet Union and other socialist states who were eager to help and assist India. In fact, the IITs, the Indian Institute of Technology, which have earned so much name for the country because of the technological advancements and contributions these institutes made to Indian society, are an example of how the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR helped India in its strive to attain technological sovereignty. Initially, there were five IITs, in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kanpur, and Kharagpur. Out of these five IITs, four were supported by the socialist block. When the British and the Americans saw this, that's when they came in and supported the fifth one. It was so that the Indian ruling class understood that it is not advisable for it to depend completely on one side. Thus, the foreign policy was declared to be not aligned with any of the blocks.

Thus, in that manner, India came to align itself with the non-aligned movement. And then we find the other non-aligned countries like Egypt, etc., all of these were recently liberated countries. Together they believed that it is better for them not to join any block because of the pursuit of their own interests. Today, India's decision to continue buying Russian oil and not condemn Russia is a carrying forward of a foreign policy that pursues the sole interest of the Indian ruling classes. All these things must be considered before we can conclude that India has become anti-imperialist today because of its position on the Ukraine war. No, it hasn't. It is purely pursuing its own interests.

Can you give a brief overview of how this “independent” foreign policy has developed over the past seven decades?

The Indian ruling class, pursuing its own interests has always tried to play one block against another. For instance, in 1962, in the war between India and China, India immediately appealed for help from the US and asked for supplies in the form of ammunition, heavy weaponry, etc. So even after espousing the cause of non-alignment and independence of the colonized countries, it was always ready to go to the imperialist forces for assistance. But in the 1971 war with Pakistan for the liberation of Bangladesh, when the US sent its naval carriers to the Bay of Bengal to support Pakistan, only then did India go to the Soviet Union who then sent its own naval fleet to counter the US forces. This is how India has always played.

And then in the early 1990s, 89-92, when the entire Soviet bloc and the East European socialist states faced a setback and collapsed. It was then, as the CPIM calls it, the balance of forces shifted towards imperialism. So naturally, there was no other option for the Indian ruling classes but to completely depend on the US-led imperialist order. But here also it is very important to keep in mind that by that time, a lot of integration had taken place between India and Soviet Union in areas of the defense sector and technological support for heavy industries like steel, construction of multi-utility dams, etc. And because of these dependencies, it is not easy for the Indian ruling classes to cut ties with Russia today. These ties always remained and continue to play a role in India’s position in the Ukraine war.

However, as the overall balance of forces shifted in favor of imperialism, the Indian ruling classes in 1991 had no problems to immediately go ahead with the neoliberal reforms which were pushed at the behest of the World Bank and the IMF. So, the natural progression from 1992 is that Indian ruling classes have been shifting closer and closer to the US and imperialist powers. For instance, till 1992 we did not have any relations with Israel, but after these reforms, India established relations with Israel. So now the situation has come to such a point that Modi has become the first Indian PM who even didn’t go to Ramallah when he went to Israel. This is a major shift that has come in Indian foreign policy.

The other important development took place in 2008 when India decided to go ahead with the nuclear deal with the US. We as CPIM were opposing that not just because of the nuclear deal per se, but because it involved many other conditionalities which would certainly push India into the embrace of the US.

What were these conditionalities?

India-US nuclear deal had come up with provisions for closer defense ties and increasing penetration of the cooperation between India and the US on agriculture and opening of service sectors. Till 2008, although India had started liberalizing and opening its economy in 1992, the service sector which included education, health, and financial services was never open-end up. Till that point, though the Indian state entered various treaties with the imperialists and open-end up various sectors, we always used to refuse to concede any liberalization in the service sector. Neither were we ready to succumb to the pressure the imperialists had applied to amend the patents act nor open our banking sector primarily for international finance capital. These steps in fact, which sort of worked as a buffer for the Indian economy, helped India to weather the 2008 financial crisis that had impacted the world.

It is important to understand the 2008 nuclear deal within the context of the 2008 financial crisis. In 2008, capitalism had reached a deep crisis, instead of manufacturing and exporting the produced goods, more and more economic activities were going into financial speculation. It was vital for the international finance capital to open new markets and enter areas where it has still not reached. India till then was a market for industrial goods, but Indian markets of industrial goods were not sufficient, and the nuclear deal was used to exert pressure to open its financial sector.

That is the time when in the insurance sector, which was till then 100% under the ambit of the state control, slowly the de-regulation and privatization started taking place. Till then, we never had private insurance players, but that was the time when TATA (an Indian company) teamed up with AIG, the American insurance company, and that was the time Maruti-Suzuki insurance came in. Suzuki and Maruti come together not just to produce cars, but also to enter the financial sector. The Bajaj-Alliance insurance is another example of the penetration of the imperialist finance capital where it collaborated with the Indian bourgeoisie. So, all these developments intensified after 2008.

Also, since this phase of opening, we have seen an increasing number of private universities. Though attempts were made to start private universities in the late 1990s, it could not fully take place. In several Indian states, they tried, but the projects failed. But now, all along the major highways coming out of Delhi, you see these areas flush with many sorts of private universities. Every new university in the private sector came up during this period. Till then, education was always considered to be something under the purview of the state, as these are regulatory sectors. As the state would decide and regulate the syllabus and subjects and evaluate the educational policies. Moreover, the value of the Indian education sector, back then during 2008, was more than \$1 billion market, now it must be even higher. Thus, education was an important market to make inroads into, both for the Indian bourgeoisie and the imperialists.

Until this point, only a handful of Indian students went to foreign universities to study. This was only available for a limited section of Indians, who were financially well off. But instead, the imperialists wanted to come to India and set up universities in India. With a brand value that they command just for the mere fact that they come from a developed country, they were sure, that they will attract many more students to India. This penetration of the imperialists in the education sector is taking place in two ways. One: collaboration between an Indian and a foreign university which resulted in student exchange programs between these two universities. Second: the imperialists directly come here and establish their branch in India. So, the opening up that is taking place in the education sector is thanks to the nuclear deal which had pressurised the Indian govt to open its services sector.

Also in the agriculture sector, land relations are being dismantled in favor of the Indian bourgeoisie and the imperialists. This shift in the agricultural policy is threatening India's self-sufficiency in the food sector and making it dependent on imports from the imperialists to fulfil its food security. Same in the defense sector. Though still, a major chunk of Indian defense procurement is from Russia today, it is increasing its defense ties with the imperialists.

Looking at India's position on the Ukraine war, would it be fair to argue that the Indian ruling class doesn't even want to fully go away from Russia because it is in the interests of India to always have two blocs which it can always play against each other?

Yes, but it is important to understand that Russia over a period has not been part of any bloc. Especially during the Yeltsin period and during the initial years of Putin. Russia was even invited to become part of the G7 and develop it into G8. Russia was happy with this arrangement. But only after Russia began to assert itself and grow economically, it became a problem for the West. That is why now India is finding it problematic to continue its relationship with Russia. As long as Russia was together with the US, the US also didn't have any problems with India maintaining its relationship with Russia. But now that, their relations got sour, they want Indian relations also to be broken. But it is not so easy for India to break its relations because of the dependencies that have developed for all these years. So, it is now necessary for India to ensure that it maintains its relations with Russia. But here again, despite its need to maintain its relations with Russia, on the other hand, they also want to prove to the US that they are not shifting or going along with Russia at the cost of the US, or the West. So that is why whenever India-Russia dialogue takes place, immediately a QUAD meeting takes place, 2+2 dialogue takes place with the US, or their secretary of state comes here, or our defense minister goes there or PM goes to the west, and they come to some new agreement to pacify the US saying we are there with you. That's why India was also invited to the G7 in Hiroshima when the summit took place there. As I said before, India has not become anti-imperialist, it is solely pursuing the interests of the ruling classes.

Moreover, India is buying the oil from Russia but most of it is processed here and is sold to the European Union and the US. It is a double benefit for Indian companies. And the US and EU are also benefiting because though they had imposed sanctions, they still need Russian energy to sustain themselves. They are finding an easy way to circumvent the sanctions they themselves had imposed and India is helping them in that manner also. Also, take a look at India's position on China, it is part of QUAD, it is part I2U2, India-Israel-US-UAE, that is the western Quad they want to establish. India is very much part of all these imperialist game plans. The grandiose statements that Modi gives for instance that 'this is not an era for war', and all these things, in reality, he is not doing much, he cannot do much. Jaishankar, India's Minister for external affairs, also goes to Europe and says that not everything should not be seen from a European viewpoint, we also have our own interests, all this is just talk, noise, but there is no substance behind this noise.

You say that the rule of India came into the hands of the big bourgeoisie and the landlord who right thereafter came into alliance with imperialism. For instance, it also did not nationalize the British capital that was there in India, also for its first five-year industrial policy plan, it first went to the imperialist, and they were denied help. That is a very interesting thing, would it then be fair to say that the imperialists do not allow the development of productive forces in countries where it is present?

Absolutely fair but I need to make an important correction, and this correction is a part of a very important debate that is there within the Indian communist movement. You have said that the Indian ruling class is in alliance with the imperialist. It is not in alliance with imperialists, it is only collaborating and compromising with imperialists. Because if it becomes an ally, then it would have never gone to the Soviet Union, it only collaborates, it keeps its self-interests as a priority, it was an emerging bourgeoisie at that point in time, and it wanted to establish itself, it wanted to capture the Indian market and still wants to do that. It wants assistance for these expansions which it cannot do by itself. But it doesn't want to play second fiddle to the imperialists. That was the entire reason why it participated in the freedom struggle against British colonialism in the first place. And after winning the struggle against the colonialists, it cannot let the project back into the hands of the imperialists by being an ally with the imperialist. This is very important. It is not an ally. The rule of the Indian state after the

independence came into the hands of the big bourgeoisie and the landlord class who collaborates and compromises with the imperialists.

But going back to your question, you are absolutely correct. See, wherever the colonial powers ruled, whether it is Africa, Latin America, or Asia, they ensured that they still remain dependent on these colonial powers. That is the reason why they are all still underdeveloped, why their productive forces are still not advanced, except in those countries which broke through this bourgeoisie capitalist phase and started moving towards socialism. East European countries, China today, and Vietnam, are the ones who have gone ahead in the development of their productive forces. Imperialism on the other hand would never allow them to develop. Look at the entire Latin America today, it is still producing raw materials for the consumption of developed countries. Africa similar situation, Asia similar situation, and whatever little industries we have in these parts of the world, are already that the imperialists find redundant. That is correct.

Part 2: Post-independence developments within India

Let's go a little bit deeper into developments that took place in India. The Indian ruling classes compromised and collaborated with the imperialists, but in the first several decades India undertook certain policies whereby for instance in the core sector it put in place public sector enterprises. Can you talk about that?

CPIM's understanding is that the public sector is a necessity that was felt by the bourgeoisie because it was an emerging bourgeoisie, who was not capable of investing so much capital and who did not have the capability to wait for such a long gestation period before the profits could be realized, it did not have that capacity. So, this had to be a donkey's job, which can only be done by the public sector. Moreover, apart from the lack of capital, the Indian bourgeoisie did not have the technological expertise either. In both ways, they were not ready to invest in these sectors. Thus, it was decided that the state would invest in certain sectors. It is easier for the state to act as a guarantor who can go abroad and get technological know-how or deal with capital issues. Thus, during this period, we saw public sector enterprises come up in all the core sectors of the economy including power, steel, mining, transport, banking, etc. The objective of the Indian bourgeoisie was to use this platform, for its own development till it could enter these sectors and assert itself.

At the same time, India initiated the "green revolution", whereby the Indian state attempted self-sufficiency in terms of food security. What were the reasons behind that and what system was put in place?

There were several factors behind it. When India got independence, India experienced mass famines in several regions. Moreover, during the partition, a lot of areas that were the major producers of food grains were reduced as these areas went to Pakistan.

Same time, hunger was increasing, and the hungry people could not wait for India to attain technological self-sufficiency. You had to feed people every day. In fact, there was criticism against the first Indian PM that he should have first prioritized the green revolution before the industrial revolution. But only in the second 5-year plan, agriculture was prioritized. This was so because agriculture could not have been prioritized before the Industrial "revolution", without the infrastructure in place, like irrigation facilities, technology for dams, fertilizers, etc. Without this technological know-how, and infrastructure in place, the state could not have

proceeded ahead with the green revolution easily. On the other hand, because of whatever small development that was taking place in India, the life expectancy of the people was increasing, meaning overall food needs were increasing.

Also, the Indian government, under the rule of Congress had started facing anti-incumbency because of its failure to fulfill the needs of the people. In 1967, the Congress party for the first-time lost elections in seven to nine States. Internally also, Congress was facing difficulty because of the death of Nehru (the first prime minister) and there were questions as to whether his successor Indira Gandhi could establish herself as a strong leader.

Thus, because of various factors including the anti-incumbency and also the fact that the ruling classes could not blame the colonizers anymore for the miserable conditions of the masses, the Indian government had to bring in certain policies to ensure certain basic needs of the people. This was the background of the green revolution. And as a result of this revolution a certain “Public Distribution System - PDS” was established whereby the state bought the food grains directly from the farmers, ensuring a minimum price for the crops, and sold it directly to the vast majority of the poor people of the country at a very low price ensuring a level of self-sufficiency in terms of food security.

Thus, despite the bourgeoisie/landlord character of the country, the ruling class did take some steps including the setting up of public sector industries, and the green revolution, whereby the state sort of acted as a buffer for the people of the country against the global market. Would you say that through these measures, India attained a level of national sovereignty?

You know the question of sovereignty is much bigger, but it is not despite the ruling classes, but BECAUSE of the ruling classes India took this path of industrialization. And secondly, who benefited from the green revolution? It is not the poor marginal farmers who benefited from the revolution, it is the rich farmers who benefited from the green revolution. Of course, there was a little spillover effect for a few marginal farmers who also benefited. But it was always the rich landlord who primarily benefited. Because even though the state was providing subsidies for the inputs, it was only this class of farmers who had the capital to buy fertilizers and cover input costs to be able to invest in farming.

Moreover, who even had the land for farming? India is the land of vast majority of agricultural laborers who don't possess the land. This “revolution” benefited again the richer sections of the ruling class among the Indian peasantries. The real democratic “green” revolution would have been the one where land was distributed among the masses, but the landlords didn't want to cede their land, they didn't want to part away from their land, they wanted their land and very importantly they wanted to use the land to control the landless farmers. Land distribution was not their idea of reforms and the said green revolution also was used to benefit the richest section. Thus, it is again not despite the ruling classes, it is because of the ruling that the state had acted as a buffer.

Moreover, it was forced to act as a buffer because internationally also a period of welfare policies was going on. Why? two reasons, One, the earlier laissez-faire policies proved to be not sufficient to allow the progress of productive forces. Second, now there was also a socialist block that was presenting itself as an alternative. Thus, to safeguard the capitalist system in other countries and ensure that the liberation struggles and the colonial states which had at that point of time gained their independence did not progress on the path of socialist revolution,

these welfare policies were undertaken globally. And Indian state was not an exception to this international phenomenon.

All these measures including public sector enterprises, and the green revolution were taken up in the interest of the ruling class. The major shift in India's policy came in 1991 when wide-ranging privatization and liberalization were undertaken. However, even before that, liberalization had already started taking place in certain sectors of the economy. What were the reasons behind that?

In the 1980s India faced its first economic crisis. As a result of various developments that took place in the international financial sector, by the 1980s India was facing its balance of payments crisis whereby the Indian people had lost the purchasing power to buy goods to satisfy their minimum needs. Thus, in 1980-82, with Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister, India for the first time took out a loan from IMF. As part of this loan, certain conditionalities were imposed which had to be accepted. Indira Gandhi then passed away in 84 and then Rajiv Gandhi, her successor, wanted to bring in reforms, especially in the education sector, whereby he wanted to bring India to the 21st century. During this period, India also started importing computers into the country. This was met with opposition from the trade unions because the computers were not seen as something that would assist the workers in their work, but as something that would go on to eat up their employment opportunities. So, this is how opening up initially started.

What were the conditionalities that came with the 1982 IMF loan?

Various conditionalities, for instance, we were told that the public sector cannot be present in every area. It was also the period when Asian games were hosted by India in 1982 for which the Indian state had constructed hotels in Delhi. That was also the period when we were hosting the international summits. We needed infrastructure for all these events. And thus, the state was making expenditures in these sectors. But when we went to the IMF, the IMF told the Indian government that the state cannot use IMF's money to make unnecessary expenditures in this sector, it asked the Indian state to leave it to the private sector.

Moreover, following the guidelines of the IMF, changes were made in the Indian corporate law as a part of which certain restrictions on imports were removed. This was the period that saw the rise of the Indian industrialist Dhirubhai Ambani whose first investment was in the textile industry.

Coming to 1991, this is the period when India officially undertook large-scale LPG policies - liberalization, privatization, and globalization. Can you talk about this crisis that led to it and the policies that were undertaken?

That was a balance of payment crisis because the Indian people didn't have purchasing power. On the other hand, India was steadily increasing its import dependencies as these policies were suiting the Indian bourgeoisie. However, the Indian market and Indian production were not yet ready to become part of international trade.

To ensure that India becomes part of the international market, this balance of payments crisis was used as an opportunity by international finance to bring pressure on India to open up. The first thing they asked India was to devalue the currency. They even asked for a complete floatation of currency in the world market which the government thankfully did not agree to,

but it had considerably devalued. The argument was that it will enable the exports of Indian goods much easier into the world market which will earn India some foreign currency with which we can pay the debt that we had incurred and pay for the imports that we were making. Thus, under that pretext, they asked us to follow certain conditions. One was the devaluation of the rupee. Then it also demanded to open up certain public sector, that is how we first started selling some of the public sector enterprises. We also started allowing private capital into various segments which were then not entered by the private sector. Then we also allowed these private sectors various concessions to import goods from other countries and incentivized export in the competitive international market which by that time the Indian bourgeoisie were ready to do.

This is what the initial phase of privatization looked like. We started by going into the GATT agreement, and various other international agreements including agreements on agriculture. That was a period when for example agriculture certain sectors of agriculture were opened. For instance, we started importing coconuts from Indonesia and Malaysia, even though we grow coconuts in India. The effect of this was felt majorly in the southern part of the country because these states were the major producers of coconuts. The coconuts were dumped in India from Malaysia and Indonesia as a result the coconut growers in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh suffered losses. Spices were allowed to be imported, restrictions were removed from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Indonesia again ruining the spice growers in India. Then the next was cotton. Thus, the commercialization of Indian agriculture ruined the Indian farmers, which is why in that period we first started witnessing suicides committed by the farmers.

In industry, it was during this period that the major corporate houses including the Ambani, the Tatas, the Goodridge, etc, all experienced high growth. Relaxation was also given to them to secure loans. The priority till then for the banks used to be to give a loan to someone in the area where the bank was operating. Most of the banks were in rural areas. That was called the priority lending to agriculture as these banks were operating in rural sectors. The priority lending condition of the banks was retained in name but ex-officio it was removed. Thus, most of the banks instead of giving loans to agricultural or small traders and others, started catering to the needs of all these industries and big capitalists.

Thereafter, as already mentioned, from 2008 onwards, the service sectors were also opened up.

The 1991 reforms are sometimes referred to as an “economic coup d’état”. Would you agree to this?

Seeing the 1991 reforms in such a way would mean that again we are falling into the understanding that the Indian bourgeoisie doesn't have a spine or a mind of its own which again means it had become an ally of imperialism. That is not what the Indian bourgeoisie is. The Indian bourgeoisie was an emerging bourgeoisie initially, now it is a growing bourgeoisie. It wanted to take over the market, but it did not yet have the capability to take over the market by itself. Why did it allow opening up? This opening up happened because it wanted this technology, it wanted this collaboration between it and imperialist international capital. That was a period when Maruti joined hands with Suzuki and as a result, Maruti Suzuki cars took over Indian roads in a big way. It was also a period when Hero merged with Honda. Honda was not allowed to start its factories in India by itself, it was forced to merge and come into a collaborative agreement with an Indian company. If it was an economic coup, it would have then surrendered to Honda, it would have surrendered to Suzuki and that was not the intention of the Indian capital. The Indian bourgeoisie used these collaborations to grow. Now we see

Hero Honda is now just Hero. Honda is producing its own vehicles. But now Hero has become a big player in the two-wheeler market. But in the case of Maruti Suzuki, the Indian company Maruti was not able to establish its dominance which is why it is only Suzuki operating in India now.

A very important point you clarify as certain sections of the Indian communist movement, especially the Naxalite movement, classify the Indian bourgeoisie as a comprador bourgeoisie. However, that being said, these policies were also undertaken at the strong behest of the imperialists.

Yes, there is another international context that we should not forget. 1991 was the period of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union wasn't there anymore to help us with growth. There are now no more two sides to play, you have only to accept one side if you want to grow. Thus, the Indian ruling classes must depend on the imperialists. As a result of this, it became easy for imperialism also to force the Indian bourgeoisie to accept certain conditions. If for instance, and of course there are no ifs and butts in history, but if the Soviet Union still existed, what would our growing bourgeoisie have done? It would have bargained from both; it would not have agreed to all the conditions imposed by the imperialist or most of the conditions imposed by them. It would have played them against each other. But because the Soviet Union is not there anymore, it is now forced to resist imperialist penetration on its own strength. Earlier they had the external strength of the Soviet Union to resist Imperialist. At least to ensure that their interests are safeguarded. But now with their own strength, they are resisting it. But they didn't completely succumb to that pressure, they have resisted it.

We will talk a little more concretely about the liberalization that is currently taking place in the agriculture and railways sectors. Both these sectors represent the backbone of the Indian economy in various ways. While the former ensures food security, the latter ensures mobility for vast masses of this country which in turn ensures access to basic amenities. Moreover, both sectors are the means to direct livelihood for a vast number of working forces in India.

In the agriculture sector, the Indian state at the behest of the Indian bourgeoisie and the imperialists is attempting to do away with the Public Distribution system you talked about earlier. It is now opening India's agriculture sector to the profit needs of the imperialists and the Indian bourgeoisie. It seeks to move India away from self-sufficiency in terms of food security and wants the Indian farmers to produce commercial crops that are valued in the global market. Thus, land relations are being transformed whereby the farmers would come under the direct control of the international capital and their livelihood would be dependent on the fluctuations in the global market. On the other hand, the imperialists look towards India as an export destination for the surplus food grain stock these imperialist countries are producing. Thus, they want Indian consumers to become import-dependent for their consumption needs. Once again, this would be dependent on the price fluctuations in the global market.

Yes. The Food Corporation of India – FCI has godowns where we always stored buffer stock of wheat to meet any kind of exigency, drought, floods, or severe cyclonic storms. The buffer stock in these godowns has always been maintained over and above the required levels. These godowns full of food grains are an expression self-sufficiency of India. But these FCI godowns are now being dismantled.

And with the new trade deals, instead of procuring food grains from the peasants directly and distributing them to the Indian masses suffering from hunger in this country, the relation of procurement is being changed and distribution is being dismantled. The food grains are just allowed to rot. We have always said that the amount of food grains that mice, rats, and rodents are eating in the FCI godowns, even if that is saved and supplied to the people of the country, we can eliminate hunger to a large extent. But the government is not ready to do that, it just wants to kill the distribution.

How have land use relations developed over the period of neo-liberalization?

Many changes have taken place over the course of the last few decades. India is rapidly changing, the global finance capital also had changed, and Indian ruling classes also witnessed a change. The green revolution and the new production of technologies that had come into agriculture also changed and the market-oriented policies in agriculture that have been pursued are also impacting the Indian farmers.

For instance, earlier a major section of Indian agriculture was producing foodgrains. But that has slowly started to change. The area of land where commercial crops such as cotton, sugar cane, etc., are grown has been increasingly expanding. Then horticulture production for fruits like apples, etc., which have commercial value in the international market is also increasing. Floriculture production is also increasing whereby in places like Bangalore, one finds huge farms producing various varieties of roses for export to other countries. So overall, there is an increased production of commercial crops in India.

Further, small land holdings are not suitable to produce commercial crops. For instance, Pepsi entered India during the initial phase of opening up. But Pepsi did not just start the production of cola, but also produced potato chips. But it found that Indian potatoes are not suitable for their production. Thus, it consistently pressured the government to give ownership to it of hundreds of acres of land so that it can produce potatoes in-house. Moreover, in order to wean away the Indian farmers in certain pockets from grain production to potato cultivation private incentives for potato cultivation were provided. This is how gradually land relations are being transformed in India.

By 2000, we came to such a situation where we find that increasingly capitalist relations have started to penetrate agriculture. Earlier there used to be landlords and there used to be those who used to lend money. Now with the extra capital that these landlords have generated through production for the global market, these landlords have also started giving out money as a loan to small farmers. Earlier there used to be two different professions, now they are slowly getting merged into a single profession.

Earlier, the small surplus capital that was generated used to be invested back in agriculture. But now there are new opportunities available for a landlord to invest. The surplus capital can now be invested in a sugar cane mill or a rice mill or you can build an entertainment cinema hall. Thus, they have now started investing in non-agricultural activities, which in turn is generating even more surplus. Non-agrarian activities are becoming a substantial activity and slowly these capitalist relations have started penetrating Indian rural areas.

This is one aspect that we need to consider, the other aspect is international. Internationally we see that the periodicity of the crisis has increased, earlier it used to be a few decades, then every decade and now it has reduced to every two-three years. Today, before you come out of a crisis

you are already falling into another crisis. Thus, international finance capital has also started looking into new sectors in which it can invest. The industry is out, the traditional finance sectors are also out as seen with the collapse of the Lehman Brothers, etc. Indian real estate on the other hand is a virgin territory that has not been exploited yet. Then there is also Indian agriculture that is still not fully open to foreign capital

At the same time, the three farm laws were brought in not just for the imperialist capital, but also for the Indian capital, because Indian capitalism is also facing a crisis. Because what is being produced by the Indian capitalist is not being consumed by the Indian masses as they do not have the purchasing power. On the other hand, they are not able to sell it in the international market as the Indian capitalist is not able to compete with producers in other markets. Moreover, the market in other countries is already saturated. Thus, even for Indian capitalists it is it became necessary for the Indian state to open up agriculture and land for investment as Indian real estate and agriculture are the two avenues that were found to be lucrative and virgin territories unexploited for investment and with a big room for expansion.

Isn't this expansion leading to contradictions between the capitalists and landlords in India?

Yes, this is where things are leading to. Why did the rich peasants in Punjab and Haryana come out in protest in such a big way and were ready to put up a fight for years? Because it is a question of survival for the landlords. But on the other hand, why is the Indian state so adamant to bring these reforms? Because it's a question of their survival of capitalism. Thus, the landlords were forced to protest and because of the class composition of the Indian state, the state was forced not to attack the protestors. You see whenever the working class comes out on the streets, the state uses maximum force on the working class. But on the farmers, the state was not ready to use that kind of force. It allowed them to sit in on the borders of Delhi for one year because they are also considered to be the friends of the ruling classes.

Thus, in pursuit of maximum profits, the entire patterns of cultivation here are being changed. The Indian people are being made dependent for our food sustenance on imports of grains from other countries, that is the dependence that they want to bring India into. The capitalists entering the Indian agriculture sector want to produce crops that are lucrative in the international market. It is not a necessity of the society that determines the production. It is the amount of profit that you generate that will determine what kind of production will take place.

Currently, a massive privatization drive is taking place in the Railways sector. The railways sector has shown its capacity to run the entire industry by itself, be it manufacturing, maintaining, repairing, and such. It has also shown the capacity to absorb new technology. But the question here is, when the state has the capacity to run the entire industry by itself, then why is it that when the privatization is taking place why is the entire control of the railways not going into the hands of the Indian bourgeoisie alone? Instead, why is the Indian bourgeoisie collaborating with imperialists, when the former can just take over the entire thing? For example, it has given an order to General Motors, an American company to supply around 100 locomotives every year. What is the need for this collaboration?

Indian railways, it's still a huge public sector and the maintenance of this behemoth is not possible by the Indian bourgeoisie alone. One because, it is one public sector that has expanded its roots to remote parts of the country and if the Indian bourgeoisie takes its in toto, these

routes will be totally non-profitable and unproductive. Marx says that when capital doesn't find something to be productive or it is unable to change the productive relations, it will kill certain productive forces to maintain its hegemony. This is how the COVID lockdowns were used in certain ways to suit the interests of capital, particularly in railways. As you see, in the name of lockdown the entire movement of railways was shut down for a period. But till today certain trains that were running before COVID have not been restarted yet. Many of the trains were cancelled, many of the stoppages were removed and many new trains are being introduced. In this way, the period of COVID emergency of one year or so was used to ensure that people slowly get acclimatized to such changes. Today, we don't find an introduction of any new passenger trains. What you see is the introduction of these very expensive fast trains such as "Vande Bharat" or "Gatimaan Express". The introduction of these expensive trains is going to affect rural connectivity.

The new infrastructure that is being laid caters to the needs of a section of Indian people who are financially well off. Thus, to sway this section of the population, the state needs to bring in "modern" locomotives which presently only foreign companies can provide. For instance, for the Delhi metro, the entire technology came from Germany and Japan. Therefore, currently, the Indian bourgeoisie is entering into a collaboration with the imperialists.

Can you talk more about how privatisation is taking place in the railways and what changes is it bringing to the conditions of the working class?

Apart from the production of new locomotives, which are going into the hands of the private sector, the railway stations are also being privatized now. I believe some stations in Delhi have already been privatized. Whereby, if you want to enter the station, you must now pay an entry fee for your vehicle. That means people are going to stop far away, but how will the people come with the kind of heavy luggage they carry? Slowly, people are being pushed away from this mode of transport. Only certain profitable stations and segments will be retained.

The privatization and the shift towards a profit-driven railways infrastructure are also affecting the working conditions. For instance, when you convert trains into superfast trains, you increase the speed let's say from 90 kilometers per hour to 130 kilometers per hour. Thus earlier, in one hour a train would pass 90 train signals, which means that every minute you are passing through one signal. Now with the increase in speed and you will cover a longer distance. Thus, for every hour you pass 130 signals, meaning crossing a signal every 40 seconds or so. This would demand more concentration on the part of the driver. The driver needs to always be awake; the driver won't be allowed any mobile phone or any distraction inside. But on the other hand, the driver is asked to work 8 hours non-stop. Earlier, in an 8-hour shift, a driver could work for 6 hours and take a break for 2 hours, or work for 4 hours, take a break, and then finish the rest of the shift. The time for relaxation is removed which would increase the likelihood of accidents.

Then in order to ensure that the driver doesn't exhaust himself, they give you a pedal which is placed near the foot of the driver and the driver needs to press that pedal every minute which will be registered at a central tracking point to ensure that you are awake, and you are concentrated. During the entire shift, the driver is not allowed to sit, he must stand the entire time and he must push the pedal every minute. If by mistake the driver forgets to push the pedal, he is penalized.

On the other hand, when accidents happen, which largely is the result of crumbling infrastructure, lack of investment in safety mechanisms, and increased workload on the drivers, it is the driver who is blamed for the accidents. Thus, you see we have already started introducing driverless locomotives in the metros systems. In the name of safety, workers are being laid off.

Today, the railways is still the largest employer in India in any sector. But, by reducing the workforce, the railways sector is being made lucrative for the capitalist takeover. Already the state has allowed these private players to run their own carriages, container shipment is almost privatized and most of the services in non-core operative areas like cleaning the carriages and cleaning the platforms, supplying food, or these kinds of things, they're all privatized now and most of them are put up under contract or sub-contract work.

This sub-contraction of work is leading to the rise in the practice of bonded labor. For instance, the track maintenance work is under the purview of contract work. It plays out in the following way: Let's say, I take the contract to maintain a track. I get my own laborers from Bihar (one of the most backward states in India) or somewhere else. I agree to pay the worker 12,000 rupees for two or three months of work. As part of the deal, I am liable to pay let's say 133 rupees per day to the worker. But I would pay only 111 rupees per day for the period of three months. Thus, in the end, instead of paying the entire 12,000 rupees, I pay the worker 10,000 rupees. After the end of the said work period, I send the worker back home with 10,000 rupees and tell him that he will receive the rest of the 2,000 only when he returns the next time. I keep the 2,000 rupees as a bond to ensure that the worker returns and to ensure that the worker doesn't flee to some other job. So, these are some of the few developments that are taking place due to increased privatization.

Can you shortly sum up what we have so far talked about?

To sum it all up, what is happening today is that the capital is in search of new arenas for its profit because it finds itself in crisis. Land, real estate, railways, or agriculture are such arenas which it finds in India to be lucrative for its entry. The services sector, and by that, I mean not just the services like food delivery, I am talking about water, electricity, waste disposal, sanitation, education, health, insurance, etc., these are some of the services that are now open for its entry. And these policies of privatization and opening of such essential sectors of the economy are proving very detrimental to the people. Health for instance is a major expenditure for people after food. If you do not have any public health institutes, people are then forced to go to a private hospital even though they are not confident about the quality of treatment that they will get there. But at least there, the people are confident that they will find a doctor or find a person who can attend them. But instead of strengthening the public health sector by providing it with a sufficient budget, the government is promoting private insurance. It says that you can get yourself treated in any private hospital which normally charges high fees, and the treatment will be covered by private insurance.

Both private insurance and private hospital are getting benefited at the cost of the people. They are killing two birds with a single stroke. The public health sector is completely getting dismantled, and the public sector insurance is increasingly getting open to all private players, both Indian and foreign.

Part 3: The Indian communist movement and the struggle for National Sovereignty.

Where does the Indian Communist movement stand today?

The Indian communist movement unfortunately today is facing a lot of difficulties. We as the Communist Party of India Marxist have self-critically examined and are continuing to examine what are the means and methods that we need to pursue to expand our influence. Because one, the time is ripe, and the objective conditions are present because the people are facing a lot of attacks on their livelihood. But the discontent that is being generated is being exploited by the divisive forces with all kinds of sectarian ideologies. Thus, to make sure that people come and challenge the attacks and look for a real alternative, that is our task and that is what we as communists think we are fully capable of doing. In that respect, we want to try to first increase our base among the youngsters in this country. For us as a party, a substantial section of our membership comes from the working class, poor peasantry, and agricultural workers. Class-wise we are in a good position but age-wise we want to improve upon the youth composition in our country. Therefore, we need to work out our communication strategies to go into the young people.

The second important aspect that we need to confront today is the disappointment that many feel, namely, there is no use in fighting, that there is no gain in any kind of fighting. We need to confront this disappointment. And the material basis for this confrontation is already there. For example, the struggles that the peasantry waged recently thwarted the plans for the de-regulation of the agriculture sector. Also, the struggles in certain sectors of the working class like electricity there have been successes where the electricity workers had resisted the moves of the government to completely privatize the entire process of production and distribution of electricity. In that way, there are now certain examples with which we can inspire people. Moreover, we find that the people are also fed up with divisive politics. The people got carried away for a certain period of time. But we see for instance in several states including Delhi, Karnataka, and some other places that when there is a real alternative available, people are also choosing that.

But as I said the basic classes are with the communist movement, which is a positive thing that we need to build up further.

Earlier you mentioned that the question of national sovereignty is a big one. Can you illustrate what you mean by that? Has national sovereignty already been achieved?

National sovereignty means that the people are completely involved in deciding their today and tomorrow. Sovereignty lies with the people, it's not a concept of the state as an abstract, it is with the people. The people will only be able to exercise sovereignty when they are given certain minimum basics, for instance, knowledge to assess, analyze, and understand a situation with reason. This in turn means your education system should be democratized, it should be made accessible to everybody, it is scientific enough, and it guarantees a secure future. That is not the education system that we have even today and never had that. Then it also means that we as people are dealing with other external powers on par, that is not the case. Moreover, Indian people are never made a party to any of these decisions that the government is taking

on their behalf when it is deciding on these policies. Indian people were never consulted by the government when it wanted to pursue these Neo-liberal policies. The people were never consulted by Nehru (first prime minister) when he wanted to decide on which five-year plan should be prioritized, and which aspects of the economy should be prioritized. All these things were done on behalf of the people, but the people have never been really involved in all these decisions. In that sense, we cannot say that sovereignty has been achieved. We were in the process of becoming sovereign in the real sense as a country, but achieving sovereignty is still a journey that we need to continue.

With this, let us come to the concrete strategy and tactics of the CPIM. Seeing how much the imperialists and the Indian bourgeoisie are collaborating in their attempts to make inroads into every sector of the Indian economy, an argument arises within the Indian communist movement that the struggle against imperialism and the struggle against our own bourgeoisie are becoming one and the same thing.

Again, mistreatment of the strength of the Indian bourgeoisie. You see now when the U.S. ambassador made certain comments on the Manipur riots that are currently going on, it was the Congress party that reacted sharply to it. It criticized that he has no right to intervene in the internal affairs of India. This is not just a political expression it is also an expression of the entire bourgeoisie to retain their independence. Also, the Congress might not have been active on the field in opposing the corporatization of Indian agriculture through the three farm laws that were brought in by the Modi government, but in reality, the Congress had opposed them. This is a significant point we need to keep in mind that the Congress party represents a certain section of the Indian bourgeoisie and the landlord class whose interests are not the same as those of the imperialists.

Even from within the BJP, there are high-profile members who opposed these farm laws, because the BJP also represents those sections of the ruling class who were opposed to the changes in the agriculture sector. So, we cannot just say that this contradiction between landlords and capitalism in India has ceased to exist or that the contradiction between the Indian bourgeoisie and the US/imperialism has ceased to exist. These contradictions still exist today, they find an expression in different ways, and when they find an expression, we need to utilize them. If we refuse to recognize these contradictions, it would mean that we will isolate ourselves in the struggle against imperialism. We don't want to isolate; we want to mobilize as much support as possible in our fight against imperialism. But at the same time, that doesn't mean that we don't see through the big bourgeoisie. We know that they are not honest in their struggle, and they will compromise with the imperialists. We must also mobilize the small bourgeoisie or the bourgeoisie that is losing out due to imperialist penetration in India.

Now for instance since COVID, many MSME - Micro, Small, and Medium enterprises have closed down due to losses and the government is not ready to support them. Thus, these sections of the bourgeoisie are fighting against the government and demanding concessions from the government. What does that mean? It means that the smaller bourgeoisie is ready to question and confront the monopoly bourgeoisie. So, it is our task to mobilize them in this struggle.

Even for the monopoly bourgeoisie, strong contradictions are there. For instance, the entry of foreign capital in the insurance sector and other retail sectors is not easily accepted by the monopoly bourgeoisie. Why don't we have Walmart here in India? Because the big bourgeoisie doesn't want Walmart in India. Why is Amazon facing so much of problems from the Indian state? Because Reliance (a major corporate house) is not comfortable with the existence of

Amazon. Reliance-Jio wants to capture the online retail market which Amazon seeks to enter. So these contradictions are there that we need to recognize and accept.

Would you then say that there are instances of moments where the interests of the Indian working class align with the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie?

No, they don't align with the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie. If they say that they want to support the working-class struggle against the entry of foreign capital, we welcome their support. This is different from aligning. Aligning is we give the leadership role to the bourgeoisie, and we participate in this. No, that we don't want as we have seen during the Indian freedom struggle the Indian bourgeoisie which led the struggle did not take it to its logical conclusion. We don't want to give the leadership in the struggle against imperialism today. The struggle today in Indian conditions will be led by the working class, we would welcome the bourgeoisie if it is ready to support us.

What do you mean by the struggle not being taken to its logical conclusion?

We as CPIM characterized the Indian national movement (the freedom struggle) as the first stage of our revolution because we said that it was a struggle against colonialism and colonial rulers where it was a contradiction between colonial powers and India. In this stage of the struggle, the Indian bourgeoisie and all other classes in India including the working class, peasantry, and agricultural workers everyone was involved. We on behalf of the working class competed with the bourgeoisie to lead this struggle but the bourgeoisie was able to take the lead. It was able to become the party that had gained independence. But our idea is now that the colonial powers have gone, we have to fight against the big bourgeoisie - the landlord state which is compromising or collaborating with imperialism. This is the second phase of our strategy where we need to fight against imperialism, big bourgeoisie, and the landlord.

Who is going to be the leader of the fight against these forces?

The leaders will be working class together with the agricultural workers and the poor peasants. This will be the core and on the strength of the struggles waged by these classes, we expect the middle classes to rally around this section because most often than not the middle class's interests are allied with these sections so they will join them. With this broadened front we want to neutralize the rich peasantry, we don't want the rich peasantry to join the landlord and the bourgeoisie classes, we want to neutralize them. If they are ready to join the struggle, they are welcome, but they should remain neutral. That is the strategy that we are adopting in this phase which we call the People's democratic phase of the revolution.

In this phase, the struggle is not against the entire bourgeoisie and the entire peasantry. Neither is our struggle against the entire private property as the peasantry holds private property. With the broadened front, our main struggle is against the landlords and the monopoly capital. In that, we will not allow big land holdings. A major role will be played by the state which will nationalize the capital where the nationalized property of the state will be run by the workers. That is our idea of the People's democratic revolution. From this, we want to take it further to socialism where there will be no private property as such. That is the logical conclusion. We have finished the first stage of the Indian Revolution, with two more stages to go.

India today holds a critical position geopolitically. What does that mean for the CPIM in its struggle against imperialism?

For us as communists in India, humbly, we can say that we are the largest communist party in India, with all humility. But the responsibility, in spite of being the largest party within the country, is enormous, because still considering the population of our country, we are a small force. We want to grow in this country, and that is a necessity today in our country. Given the strategic importance that India has today in the global arena if the communist movement gets strengthened in India, as a corollary, we think that the anti-imperialist feelings among the Indian people also get strengthened, which will be a major contribution of the Indian communist in the worldwide struggle against imperialism. At present, we think that is a much more important task for Indian communists to perform.

What is the sentiment of the Indian masses in terms of the struggle for national sovereignty or for the fight against imperialism?

We are of the opinion that despite the weaknesses that the United States finds itself in today, be it economically or politically, the correlation of class forces is still in favor of imperialism. The anti-imperialist sentiment which was the legacy of the freedom struggle is slowly fading away as we are slowly losing the generation that carried out this struggle. The time span is now 75 years. There is no link for the new generation no association for the new generation with that generation that had fought against colonialism, which had an anti-imperialist ideology. Now this is an entirely new generation that was born and brought up in a neoliberal order. Where America is considered to be a closer ally than anybody else. In such a situation it's a really difficult task for us. But we have been taking concrete steps to fill various gaps. In 2015, we formed three study groups to study various aspects of neoliberalism. The first study group was on the agrarian relations in the rural countryside, the second worked on the changes taking place in the workplace. And the third one is on the urbanization and urban middle class. Thus, the first studied the peasantry, the second studied the working class and the third studied the middle class.

And as a result of these studies, we have come to certain conclusions on what are the changes that are taking place, how is the nature of work changing, and how the trade union movement needs to adapt to these changes. This is why we are now trying to organize the gig workers, whose workplace is not the traditional factory floor but instead, it is scattered. Thus, we are working on building new approaches for the trade union movement to adjust to the new circumstances.

Similarly, and very importantly, among the youth who are born and brought up in a completely alien atmosphere where they don't have any association with the freedom struggle, we are trying to inculcate the ideas of freedom struggle. The history of the Indian freedom struggle is the entire terrain of struggle today with the BJP today. BJP wants to erase this part of our history because it didn't play any part in the freedom struggle. We, on the other hand, want the freedom struggle to become an important area of study of Indian history because that is the place where we can teach anti-imperialism, and anti-colonialism to the students today and how an earlier generation of people had fought for a better society.

Can you share some experiences of the communist movement in India in terms of its efforts to impart the practices of real sovereignty?

At this point, we have our government in Kerala. Before deciding on policies, we try to decentralize decision-making as far as possible and as far as Constitution permits. We try to

approach people and discuss with them the problems that they are facing and how they intend the government to formulate policies to address those concerns that they are raising. For instance, since we have been in power in Kerala, we have visited at least three times all the houses there, spoken with the people, asked them what their problems are, and tried to involve them in the government through that. The communist movement in India is trying to engage in such decision-making processes whereby it seeks to inculcate the real meaning of sovereignty and democracy among the Indian masses

Then we have the example of the farmers' struggle. How were the decisions taken during the struggle? It was not the leadership that took the decisions, it was rather the general body meetings of the people who were gathered there on the borders, who were reported about the discussions that were taking place with the government. People's opinions were received and heard and then the leadership sat together and formulated the proposals on which the people were consulted again. It was only then a particular decision was taken to the government. This is again an expression of people asserting their sovereignty through democratic involvement.

This is something that we want to incorporate better in the way our organizations conduct struggles. Currently, we conduct many studies, we have committees that meet that take decisions after consultations. But we want to further improve upon those processes so that the workers also feel that they are a part of the decision-making. So that they are not just implementers of the decision but also become part of the decisions that everybody implements. This training we believe will be useful when we confront the government on various issues so that we can say that we are opposing a particular policy based on the democratic process.

Then we have a distant example, for instance in Cuba. Cuba recently adopted the family law where more than a million people gave their suggestions in writing to the government. Then there were many more millions who participated in the discussions that were conducted in neighborhoods and through various platforms. Based on these suggestions a draft was first prepared by the government and sent again to the people. Then again based on that draft, another discussion was conducted and on the basis of that discussion, again the parliament sat through, formulated a law and that law was put in for a referendum.

That is an example that we use here when we talk about democracy and sovereignty and how it should function. But something like this is possible only in a socialist system. Thus, we try to raise the consciousness of the people on these issues one by one.