



UNION POWER

NTUI

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E D I T O R I A L

On October 7, on the occasion of the International Day of Decent Work, the campaign on the Asian Floor Wage (AFW) had its public international launch at Delhi. This launch was the culmination of a process initiated in 2006 by NTUI to build an international trade union strategy around the issue of wages in the export garment sector. In India, beside the NTUI, AITUC, HMS and INTUC are participating in the AFW campaign. The campaign raises several important issues.

First the garment industry is probably the most exploitative example of global outsourcing. The global supply chain has got structured in the past decade so that around 80 percent of all garment exports are from Asian countries. The industry uses largely women workers in extremely vulnerable employment relationships, which make any unionisation in the industry extremely difficult. Wages in the sector are kept extremely low under threat of factory closures and movement of industry within the country, and from one country to another. Thus an Indian garment worker gets paid around \$2-3 per day, as against a wage of over \$7 per hour that a similar worker in the USA would get. This is a wage differential of around 25 times. The differential would be even greater in Western Europe.

Second, the industry uses a highly exploitative pricing mechanism along the whole supply chain in order to keep prices down. The Indian manufacturer gets only around 25 percent of the final retail price of a garment. Wage costs within India in garments are around 15 percent, while they are only 3-4 percent of the final garment price in the USA. The super profits are made outside the country. This further reduces the bargaining capacity of the garment worker within the country.

Third, governments in the countries where garments are manufactured – India or Bangladesh or Sri Lanka or China – are unwilling to take a strong stand for fundamentally changing conditions of work. Government stand in outsourcing has typically been of subservience to the power of global capital. Despite the fact that global garment manufacturing today is concentrated in some ten Asian countries, with a combined workforce of around one crore workers, governments in these countries are not willing to make a joint effort for better wages in the industry. Today global capital has managed to make countries competitors for outsourced business, driving down wages in the process.

It is in this context that NTUI formulated its stand on a trade union strategy for the garment sector. The main campaign demand is to index wages of garment workers in the Asian countries in a manner in which buying capacity of workers in the sector in different countries is equalised, while it improved in absolute terms. The campaign has sought to bring together unions in the garment industry in Asian countries, with trade unions and ethical consumer groups in the developed countries to take on the issue of wages and working conditions in the sector.

Capital today has perfected the strategy of outsourcing and global supply chain management to keep wages down; maintain high profits; while keeping prices stable and inflation down in the developed countries. The opposition to it can only come from an alliance of unionised workers in the poor countries, coming together with trade unions, social movements and campaign groups of consumers in the developed countries.

SPECIAL ARTICLE

UNITE TO RESIST IMPERIALIST GLOBALISATION

Since the 1990s, India has systematically opened up its political and economic space by pursuing a liberalisation agenda and creating a space for the manipulation and free play of capital. This has led to a consolidation of imperialist forces exposing domestic capital to international competition. This has resulted in the eroding of existing legal machinery and labour laws, meant to protect the rights of industrial labour to serve their capitalist interests. Not only are labour laws, which have been enacted after hard fought battles of the working class, being flagrantly flouted, but any protest or struggle by workers against this has been met with a violent onslaught by the employers in collusion with State agencies.

Between 1990 and 2006, the growth in productivity has exceeded wage growth which implies that the share of labour in total incomes has declined. Of the 470 million workers in the country, 435 million belong to the unorganised sector with essentially no protection and regulation of work. The government too has made its lack of political will evident by enacting the Unorganised Workers Social Security Bill which only institutionalises the machinery for exclusion of rightful beneficiaries rather than creating a measure for universal social security. The government has also failed to universalise existing social security mechanisms like the ESI and PF by extending it to the informal economy.

While there has been an increase in women's participation in wage labour, a large percentage of the workforce only goes into home based self employed work and casual work. (NCEUS Report on Conditions of Work and Promotions of Livelihood in the Unorganised sector.) This essentially means that women continue to be employed in vulnerable and precarious employments. A similar situation exists in the case of workers in non standard work where there is complete lack of regulation of work. While there are laws like Minimum Wages Act, Payment of Wages Act, etc., there is no enforcement machinery in place.

With the return of the UPA government, sans the Left, even the most protected work force, i.e government and public sector employees will not be spared the onslaught of liberalisation. The government has pushed the VRS on large numbers of employees as a prelude to a quick spate of privatisation. While the process of privatisation of PSUs was slowed down earlier due to pressure from the Left and the trade unions, presently the UPA is back with the agenda of privatisation in a new garb.

The changing patterns of employment are evident with increasing deregulation of the labour market. Employers have made concerted efforts to contractualise work by employing a large numbers of trainees and apprentices to perform work of a regular and perennial nature. Moreover, many large enterprises are being allowed to close down with

work being outsourced to smaller ones and at times even to home-based workers. While there are laws like the Contract Labour Regulation Act to protect working conditions of contract workers, there is a large scale violation of these laws. The government's own data reveals that inspectors detected 83414 violations in the year 2000, but only 3857 cases were prosecuted and 2 registration certificates were cancelled. The machinery to check and implement violations need to be strengthened now more than ever, and any violation of the statute on equal pay for equal work must be made a cognisable offence.

The scale of deregulation has meant that income inequality has risen by 4% over the last decade evident with the steeply rising executive pay even as the wages of blue collar workers continue to decline. While the government is prompt to create an income ceiling on bonus, there has been no move to cap executive pay to check this growing inequality. There must be a move towards fixing a need based minimum wage based on cost of living to further ensure that this inequality is reduced.

The global crisis has adversely affected the working class both in terms of price rise and job losses owing to government's poor management of the agricultural sector. The government has also failed to acknowledge that employers who have not been affected by the crisis have used the economic crisis to restructure their operations at the cost of workers resulting in unjustified closures, contractualisation, outsourcing and mass layoffs. Stimulus packages offered to the recession stricken sectors have not been linked to employment security to prevent exploitation and misuse.

Moreover, the space for collective bargaining and the sanctity of the fundamental right to association has also come under attack from employers in close collusion with the state and judiciary. Be it large Indian corporations like MRF and KEC International or multinationals like Unilever, Hyundai and Bosch, all have engaged in various forms of victimisation of workers who have led efforts to form unions. Using violence and other police machinery to quell peaceful struggles has become common practice. The recent strike of the Jet Airways pilots is an instance that clearly indicates the hostile space that unions have to negotiate their rightful demands. The never ending cycle of unfair labour practices goes unchecked while in reality these are to be treated on par with criminal act.

Existing trade unions have found their collective bargaining powers considerably reduced and are battling rampant labour law violations - be it violations of the minimum wage, PF and gratuity, arbitrary dismissals, or forced over time and no over time pay. While in public sector, the periodicity of negotiations has increased from 3 to 5 and even 10 years, private sector trade unions have lost this right all together.

There are instances of refusal by employers to negotiate even with unions which have been democratically elected by the workers. It is time for trade unions to reclaim this space and the government must make recognition of trade unions which have been elected democratically though secret ballot, mandatory.

In face of this all out offensive it is in the interest of the working class to come together with renewed vigour and build a united resistance to reclaim their space in the economic, political and social life in the country. It remains for all progressive trade unions in the country to respond to this clearly articulated expression of the working class to build a united working class movement, necessary to successfully combat imperialist globalisation.

TOWARDS THE SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

REGIONAL MEETING - KERALA

The Kerala State Council Meeting was held on 3 October 2009 at Thiruvananthapuram. Affiliate unions of the NTUI came together to evaluate progress leading up to the General Assembly. Affiliates from the Power Workers Unity Center, Cochin International Airport Mekhala Construction Loading and Unloading & General Workers Union, Cochin Shipyard Employees Union, Construction Workers Union, Ernakulam District Casual and Contract Employees Union, Jeeva Cashew Workers Union, Jeeva Construction General Workers Union, Housemaid Workers Union, Agricultural Workers Union among others reported on their activities and shared their expectations from NTUI. Comrades Ashim Roy and Gautam Mody attended the meeting besides senior leaders of the Kerala State Council.

The discussions focused on sector specific problems, including efforts of the ruling government to corporatise the Kerala State Electricity Board. It was felt that NTUI must take the demand for protection of electricity workers to the national level. Comrades from the airport unions said that multiplicity of trade unions in this area has adversely affected the work of the union including regularisation of workers belonging to non party unions. It is only by organising workers across party lines that a living wage above minimum wages can be achieved.

In the Banking sector, several works had been outsourced and there was a reduction in recruitment even on compassionate grounds. The affiliates in the ship building industry also said that there was a significant increase in the intensity of work, while contractualisation had also increased. The impact of economic crisis was also felt by the Cochin port where number of containers had drastically reduced.

Affiliates also drew attention to the need for radical land reform as well as the adverse impact of the ASEAN FTA agreement.

All affiliates expressed the need for consolidation of the NTUI as a trade union federation so as to strengthen the struggles on the ground.

MEETING ON ROLE OF INDEPENDENT TRADE UNIONS IN THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT IN KERALA

This meeting was held in Thiruvananthapuram on 4 October 2009. Comrades A C Jose (INTUC), Vijaykumar (BMS), K C Prabhakaram (AITUC) participated in it besides senior leaders of the NTUI. It was agreed that there was a need to promote independent trade unionism in the current situation. Viewing working class issues from a party perspective must change. The speakers unanimous agreed on the need for a united working class movement to combat the adverse effects of globalisation.



NTUI leaders at the Kerala State Council Meeting

NATIONAL LEVEL CONSTRUCTION WORKERS MEETING

A two-day all-India meeting of independent trade unions organising construction workers was called by the Tamil Manila Kattida Thozhilalar Sangam (TMKTS) in Chennai on 6-7 October. The meeting was held primarily to discuss the need for regulation of work and social security in the construction industry and was presided over by Comrade D Thankappan. Forty delegates from different unions including Tamil Manila Kattida Thozhilalar Sangam (Tamil Nadu), Nirman Majdoor Sangathan (Maharashtra), Jeeva Construction and General Workers Union (Tamil Nadu), Vidharba Construction Labour Union (Maharashtra), Karnataka Pradesh Kattida Karmikara Sangha (Karnataka), New Trade Union Initiative, Nirman Mazdoor Shakti Sangathan (New Delhi), Tanaku Construction Workers Union (Andhra Pradesh), Bharat Nirman Mazdoor Union (Punjab), Kerala Construction Workers Union (Kerala), Kurnool Building and other Construction

Workers Union (Andhra Pradesh), and Penn Thozilalargal Sangam (Tamil Nadu) participated in the meeting.

The discussion focussed on each State evaluating the functioning of the legislation in their states. While large numbers of workers were registered in the welfare boards in Tamil Nadu and Kerala where the state legislations pre dated the national one, in Karnataka and Maharashtra the number was much less. In Delhi, despite the very large number of construction workers, particularly in the context of very large construction projects like the Metro and the Commonwealth Games infrastructure, less than ten thousand workers were registered in the Board in two years.

Activists from all states expressed common concern that independent trade unions were never given representation on the welfare boards. TMKTS reported that the state government had amended rules to weaken trade union role in registering workers. A correct enumeration of construction workers in each state was also felt necessary to make the regulation effective. Another issue raised was of poor representation of women in leadership positions in trade unions of construction workers, despite their significant presence in the workforce.

The second day of the meeting was devoted to identifying the lacunae in national legislation and a discussion on the way forward. The meeting concluded that the national legislation must be universal in nature. The legislation in its present form is applicable only to sites where 10 or more workers are employed. This would exclude 90% of construction workers from the ambit of the legislation. The need to ensure union right to register workers on the Welfare Board, as well as to have a system of cess collection at time of building plan approval in the Rules of the legislation was also emphasised.

The meeting concluded with a unanimous decision to form a National Forum of Construction Workers. Com. Subbu was nominated to be the convener of the Forum.

AFFILIATE NEWS UPDATES

GAFWU REGISTERED

The Garment and Fashions Workers Union has been registered in Chennai for workers in the garment exports, leather accessories and footwear making industry. The union has been campaigning on the need to revise the minimum wages in the State for the tailoring industry which has not been revised since 2004. The union has also been supporting workers at Celebrity Fashions Ltd, MEPZ who are facing victimisation for their union activities. GAFWU activists are regularly organising local area meetings of garment workers and are on a membership drive.

Activists from the Garment and Textile Workers Union, Bangalore and the Garment and Fashion Workers Union, Chennai participated in a round table consultation on Impact

of the Economic Downturn on the Garment Industry and Concerns related to Labour Standards. The meeting was organised by Cividep India at Bangalore on 30th October '09. It sought to bring together unions, manufacturers and brands to promote a shared understanding of the challenges faced by the sector in the current context. Several issues including manufacturer's and brand representatives' perspectives on impact of economic downturn as well as health, safety and labour rights of workers were discussed.

PUNJAB STATE COUNCIL REPORT

Public Sector Employees' Dharna: The union held a state level dharna on 17 September 2009 in Sector 17 Chandigarh defying Section 144. All workers went on mass casual leave paralysing the functioning of public sector units. About five thousand employees demanded regularisation of temporary employees and implementation of the Sixth Pay Commission recommendations. NTUI leaders Bhagmal Rana, Gurdeep Singh, Germanjit Singh and Om Prakash addressed the meeting. A memorandum of demands was submitted to the Officer on Special Duty from the Chief Minister's office.

ANM Contract Workers Union: Following NTUI's efforts to unionise the 1800 trained nurses appointed as Auxillary Nurse Midwives under the National Rural Health Mission, 177 were terminated by the government under the pretext that there had been excess hiring. Several dharnas were held at the state and district level demanding their reinstatement. As a result of the struggles, the Principal Secretary, Health and Family Planning, called the NTUI leadership along with the contract ANM union leaders for discussions. 135 nurses with reinstated with immediate effect, with assurance of reinstatement of the remaining nurses by 30th September.

Unionising ASHA workers: NTUI organised more than 20,000 Asha workers in the State with the formation of District Committees in 13 out of 20 districts. Local committees at the Primary Health Centre (PHC) level and block level committees have been formed in 70 percent of the areas. A charter of demands was submitted to the Chief Minister and the Minister for Health and Family Planning. Massive conventions and demonstrations are also being organised. As a result, illegal deductions from the honorarium to the Asha workers have been stopped. The harassment faced by the workers has also reduced.

Centre of Trade Unions of Punjab and Chandigarh: Two new unions among Brick Kiln workers and Construction workers have been formed. Following a strike by the brick kiln workers demanding a wage increase, employers hired goondas to intimidate the agitating workers. Many were seriously injured. No FIR was filed by the local police. Following a 20 day strike,

the employers were forced to accept the demands of the union. A new union office is now under construction in Muktasar as union members donated generously towards this effort.

Dehati Mazdoor Morcha: The agricultural workers organisation has been struggling for implementation of the NREGA. Dharnas were organised in Sangrur, Barnala, Amritsar, Faridkot and Muktasar districts. Women workers played a vibrant role in the struggle, and their membership in the union has increased substantially

PTS DOMESTIC WORKERS DHARNA

Domestic workers of Penn Thozhilalargal Sangam called for a one day strike on 2nd October to raise demands for Rs.25 per hour minimum wage, a weekly day off and one month's bonus. More than 300 workers participated in a dharna held on 2nd October 2009 at the Gandhi Statue, Marina Beach and raised slogans for the government to take action to enact a law to regulate working conditions, hours of work, leave and arbitrary dismissals and ensure protection against verbal and physical abuse.

The TN Government recently constituted an Advisory Committee under the Minimum Wages Act 1948 to decide on the minimum wage of domestic workers. However, for more than two years, the committee has not made any headway. Following the dharna and the strike call, the labour department has invited PTS to participate in the deliberations of the committee and present views on minimum wages. PTS will continue its campaign for a living wage and dignity at workplace for domestic workers.

KSMTF OPPOSES NEW FISHERIES BILL AND INDO-ASEAN FTA

The Kerala Swathantra Mathasya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF) organized a seminar in Thiruvananthapuram on 17 October to discuss the newly enacted Marine Fisheries (Regulation and Management) Bill, 2009 and the CMZ notification. It was noted that the government was being guided by corporate interests and this would lead to further marginalization of traditional fisher folk.

KSMTF also opposed the Indo-ASEAN FTA, which specifies 177 fish species that will be imported into India, thus adversely affecting the livelihood of members of the local fishing community.

KSMTF plans to hold a series of mass protests across the state on 21 November - World Fisheries Day - opposing the Marine Fisheries Bill and the Indo-ASEAN FTA.

ALL-INDIA PROTEST DAY ON 28 OCTOBER

A National Convention of Workers, organised jointly by AICCTU, AITUC, AIUTUC, BMS, CITU, HMS, INTUC, TUCC and UTUC, was held on 14th September 2009 in New Delhi, called for an All-India Protest Day on 28 October 2009. The Convention called upon the Government to take urgent steps to:

- Control price rise of essential commodities through appropriate distributive measures like universal PDS and containing speculation in commodity market.
- Link employment protection in the recession stricken sectors with the stimulus package being offered to the concerned entrepreneurs and for augmenting public investment in infrastructure. Ensure strict enforcement of all basic labour laws without any exception or exemption and stringent punitive measures for violation of labour laws.
- Universalise Social Security benefits under the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act 2008 and create a National Fund for the Unorganised Sector to provide for a Minimum Social Security Benefit to all unorganized workers including the contract/casual workers in line with the recommendation of National Commission on Enterprises in Unorganised Sector and Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour.
- Stop disinvestment of Central Public Sector Enterprises along with revival of sick Public Sector Undertakings.

The NTUI came together with the unity of the trade union movement at the centre of its agenda and in pursuance of this, since the inception of the NTUI, we have at all times responded to the joint call of central trade unions for united action. It is the understanding of the NTUI that the mood of working people in the country is for unity of the working class. Therefore NTUI endorsed this call and in addition to the above, made the following demands:

- An 8-hour working day
- Violation of statute on Equal wages for Equal work made a Cognisable offence
- Fixation of Need-based Minimum wage based on cost of living.
- Non-contributory Minimum Social Security Benefit to include basic healthcare benefit and minimum pension equal to 50% of minimum wage.
- Increasing the entitlement of NREGA to 100 days to every adult living in a rural area.
- Right to Safe Work for all
- Remove Ceiling on Bonus payment - Cap Executive pay
- Mandatory Recognition of Trade Unions – Representative Trade Union chosen by Secret Ballot
- Unfair Labour Practices criminally prosecuted

CAMPAIGN UPDATES

ASIA FLOOR WAGE INTERNATIONAL LAUNCH

The international launch of the Asia Floor Wage Campaign took place in New Delhi, India on October 6-7, 2009. Three seminars entitled, "Minimum Wage to Living Wage: Building a Strategy", "Wage-led Growth

as a Development Policy”, and “Human Rights Perspectives on Wage” were held on the first day with eminent economists and legal experts expressing their views on the relevance of the AFW campaign in the current situation. A report titled “Stitching a Decent Wage across borders- Asia Floor Wage proposal” was also released.

The discussions around an Asia Floor Wage began in 2006 in India, and subsequently spread to other parts of the world. It seeks to create a negotiating space and formulate a wage demand to bargain in a global industry, across the global supply chain where manufacturing takes place in the Global South and the value accumulates in the Global North.

With the developing of political consensus, the AFW campaign has now entered the public domain through the active participation of trade unions and labour organizations.



Trade union leaders submit petition to General Secretary of Permanent People’s Tribunal

On 7 October the AFW was officially launched. A petition endorsed by union leaders from NTUI, AITUC, HMS and INTUC was presented to the Permanent People’s Tribunal General Secretary. Apart from union representatives, the launch was also attended by representatives from international brands.

Simultaneous launches of the AFW campaign were also held in other countries in support of the international launch in India. Globalization Monitor (GM) together with the Hong Kong – Clothing Industry, Clerical & Retail Trade Employees General Union (HKCCRGU) assembled in front of the HK Legislative Council where there was a public hearing on minimum wage legislation. In Austria, activists presented theatre performances in several cities depicting the plight of garment workers. German Clean Clothes Campaign activists together with members of Verdi handed over thousands of protest postcards at German Lidl headquarters. In Bangladesh and Sri Lanka photo exhibitions on living conditions of garment workers were launched.

RIGHT TO FOOD

National Consultation on Food Security Act

NTUI participated in a national consultation on the “National Food Security Act” with the Right to Food Campaign on 17th September, 2009. The meeting focussed on developing an understanding of the Right to Food Act and building a consensus on demands under the Act considering the prevailing drought conditions in the country. The larger goal was to build a political campaign around the issue.

A rally is planned for the 28th of November to protest the draft National Food Security Act and demand for a more comprehensive Food Entitlements Act that deals with at least some of the causes of hunger and guarantees food entitlements to each and every resident of this country.

CAMPAIGN FOR PEACE AND DEMOCRACY

MEETING TO EVALUATE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN SRI LANKA

NTUI participated in a meeting at Delhi with journalists and activist groups on 30th September 2009, to discuss the humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka. An ad hoc working group was formed to take forward a campaign on the issue. It was decided to put together information on the IDP camps to help understand issues relating to long term settlement of the displaced Tamils. It was also decided to form a delegation of MPs from Tamil Nadu who were to visit Sri Lanka on a fact finding visit.

OTHER NEWS UPDATES

WORKERS FROM 70 AUTO COMPANIES IN GURGAON JOIN SOLIDARITY ACTION FOR RICO WORKERS

1800 workers at RICO Pvt Ltd, an auto parts manufacturing unit in Gurgaon have been on strike from 17th September 09 demanding a salary hike and recognition of their union. On October 18th, one worker, Ajeet Yadav was killed in the unrest that broke out. 16 workers trying to form union in the factory were illegally terminated from their service.

In response to the offensive by the management, on 20th October 2009, more than one lakh workers from 70 factories stayed away from work and assembled in Gurgaon in solidarity, demanding that action be taken against the company for death of the worker. Workers are continuing with a peaceful dharna even as the management continues to use massive numbers of police personnel to pressure the workers into calling off the strike.

HMSI WORKERS UNION SIGNS 3 YEAR WAGE SETTLEMENT

The three month old labour dispute at Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India (HMSI), the wholly owned subsidiary of Japanese auto major, has been resolved with a new wage agreement signed between the workers union and the management. As per the new long term wage settlement (LTS) valid for three years, workers will get the enhanced fixed basic salary of Rs 4,400 per month. This is 50% more than the Rs 2,900 that they used to get till July this year after the first LTS was signed in August 2006.

Workers will also be entitled for productivity linked incentive based on number of vehicles produced at the factory in Manesar. For every vehicle produced in a month, Rs 4 will go to a fund which would then be distributed equally among the 1,900 permanent employees out of 3,600 total workforce of the company. HMSI has just raised its production capacity to 15 lakh units per annum by adding a third assembly line to its plant.

BOSCH AND BREMBO EMPLOYEES CALL OFF STRIKE

Bosch Chassis Systems Kamgar Sanghatana (Employees Union), Pune went on strike on July 18th demanding the implementation of pay rises stipulated in the 2007 collective bargaining agreement. Workers' demands included equal pay for equal work for contract workers, trainees and permanent workers in unity in the fight. The IMF affiliates in Italy, Germany and South Africa with members employed in Brembo and Bosch sent letters of support to the workers.

After 85 days of united strike action the strike was finally called off on 10th October after an agreement was reached between the union and management before the Commissioner of Labour. The terms of the agreement included:

- Immediate resolution of the lack of implementation of the collective agreement at Brembo.
- Mutual discussions to resolve the lack of implementation of the collective agreement at Bosch.
- An assurance for a fair and without prejudice inquiry against the General Secretary and five union members.
- Continued legal process of abolishing the contract labour system.
- Ending of the strike.

Workers at Brembo have been paid 50 per cent of the wages owed in arrears and are currently negotiating for the remaining 50 per cent. At Bosch wages for the third year have been paid and negotiations for the payment of arrears from the second year are continuing. The contract workers however, are awaiting the judgment of the Industrial courts.

The struggle has had a significant impact because contract and permanent employees fought in unity and it has ensured that other factories in the region have started implementing statutory provisions.

PARLIAMENTARY CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE TAKES STOCK OF NREGA

Union Minister of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, Dr. C P Joshi in his address to Parliamentary Consultative Committee on NREGA in the Parliament Annex has emphasized the need to streamline the implementation of NREGA by consistent monitoring of works being done under the Act. Till date a total of 10.63 crore job cards have been provided since the enactment of the Act. For the year 2009-10, till September 2009, 3.37 crore rural house holds got employment. 52% beneficiaries were women; while over 51% were SC and ST. The members were also informed of the positive trends in NREGA such as increase in Agriculture Minimum wage and opening of 7.99 crore bank/post offices accounts.

MINE WORKERS URGE GOVERNMENT TO RATIFY ILO CONVENTION

Trade unions representing miners across the country urged the government to ratify an International Labour Organization (ILO) convention that seeks to promote worker rights in terms of health and safety in mining operations. An estimated one million people, including contract workers, are engaged in mining in India. The convention will help workers freely report accidents and demand information on hazards in the workplace from employers. The Labour Ministry in a letter said that India cannot sign the ILO convention before several issues are resolved. The present Mines Act, 1952, does not cover activities such as coal-handling plants and mineral beneficiation plants. It also said the Directorate General of Mines and Safety will need trained staff before it can ratify the ILO convention. The unions claim that these are lame excuses and threatened industrial action if the convention is not signed soon.

WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS OPPOSE SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND STATE REPRESSION

Representatives of women's organizations issued a statement condemning the Indian government's plans to launch an armed offensive by paramilitary and army forces in the adivasi-dominant forest areas of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The statement viewed that the Indian government has a history of using false pretexts like insurgency in the North East and Kashmir to kill democratic aspirations of the people. Presently, driven by aggressive corporatisation, sustained state violence in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, and West Bengal and other states has become the means to evict people from their land and livelihood under the pretext of "development" or "maintaining law and order".

The report also contained several instances of rape and sexual violence perpetrated by the salwa judum against Tribal women in Bastar. They demanded immediate

repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and called for an end to the armed offensive against the tribal population. The groups called on the government to take immediate action and urged them to take part in a political solution.

INTERNATIONAL UPDATES

CUT CALLS FIRST TRADE UNION MEETING AS PART OF IBSA

In June 2003, through the Brasilia Declaration, the India, Brazil and South Africa -IBSA was created as a co-ordinating mechanism. It seeks to coordinate and work in a unitary form in political and economic multilateral forums, in order to participate and contribute to the construction of a new international architecture. At the meeting of the IBSA on 15 and 16 July, the proposal of CUT (Brazil) to create a Trade Union Forum within IBSA was accepted. CUT has called trade unions of India and South Africa to join the first trade union meeting to work towards creating a permanent platform of dialogue.

ROYAL MAIL STRIKE

Royal Mail workers voted in favour of a national strike. Almost 81,000 Communication Workers Union (CWU) members took part in the ballot, a turnout of 67 per cent. A total of 61,623 supported the need for strike - a majority of 76.24 per cent. The union is seeking reassurances on job security covering both redundancies and fair workloads.



Postal workers in Bristol launched a 24-hour strike on 8 October followed by a walkout the next day in Kilmarnock, London, Carlisle, Coventry, Chelmsford, Hatfield, Leeds, Nottingham, Swindon and Warrington. CWU members held five 24-hour strikes over the last two weeks of October, which involved members in different roles striking on different days.

BRITISH TRADE UNIONS APPROVE ISRAEL BOYCOTT

British trade unions approved a boycott against importing goods produced in some Israeli settlements. The boycott was approved by the Trade Union Congress at its annual

conference held last month. The congress also called for an end to arms trading with Israel and for disinvestment from some Israeli companies. The boycott was proposed in response to Operation Cast Lead, Israel's military offensive in the Gaza Strip last winter.

SOUTH KOREAN GOVERNMENT CRACKS DOWN ON CIVIL SERVANTS UNION

The Court Government Employees' Union, the Korean Government Employees' Union and the Korea Democracy Government Employees Union merged to form the Korean Government Employees Union (KGEU) and joined the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU). An estimated 89.6 percent of the total union membership voted to merge the three unions together, and 68.4 percent voted to join the KCTU. The merged union, with a membership of 110,000, would make the KCTU the country's largest union federation for the first time. The consolidated union of public servants includes rank-and-file civil servants of the legislature, administration and judiciary. The government issued a statement condemning the public servants' union's decision to join the KCTU. It has also declared the KGEU to be illegal.

CONDOLENCE

CIVIL LIBERTIES ACTIVIST K. BALAGOPAL PASSES AWAY

Noted civil rights activist, K Balagopal passed away after a cardiac arrest on 2 October. A brilliant mathematician, he gave up a career in teaching and went on to play an active role in several struggles.

In the early 1980s, as General Secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) he faced several threats, including arrest for false charges of murder and was kidnapped. In 1998, he along with other like minded activists formed the Human Rights Forum which looked into to enquire into rights violations like land grabbing by the state or private agencies for special economic zones; hazardous mining, farmers' suicides, public health etc.

His writings on several issues include the response to state violence, struggles of the Indian peasantry and analysis of the situation in Kashmir and the role of the Indian army and the State were insightful and unparalleled. His demise is deeply mourned by all in the trade union movement and the civil society at large.

ALERTS

KSMTF PROTESTS ASEAN-FTA ON 21 NOVEMBER

RIGHT TO FOOD RALLY ON 26 NOVEMBER