

LOMEA:**India to Serve the US Seventh Fleet**

When the Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) was proposed and then signed in August 2016, we commented in these columns that the Indian military bases would be used by the US to wage wars and draws India into its hegemonic designs in the Indian Ocean as a junior partner. The LEMOA gave US warplanes and battleships routine access to Indian bases and ports for rest, refuel and resupply and also allows the US military to “forward” deploy war material at Indian bases.

As a continuation of LEMOA, a Master Ship Repair Agreement was signed between the Pentagon and the Reliance Defence and Engineering in the second week of February 2017 to service and repair Seventh Fleet warships and supply and patrol vessels at the shipyard Pipavav in Gujarat.

According to the spokesman of the Reliance “over 100 ships of US navy can now avail services at Pipavav shipyard”{. He further said that the shipyard stands to carry out as much as Rs.100 billion (\$1.3 billion) worth of work for the US navy over the next five years. This is a massive windfall of profit for Reliance Defence and Engineering as its total revenue in 2014 was less than \$ 30 million after the shipyard was taken over by Anil Ambani. The Gujarat state government gave tens of crores of rupees as aid to the RDE to upgrade its shipyard so that it could get the designation of “approved contractor” from the US Navy.

Since India and the US formed a “Global strategic partnership” in 2009, the Indian big bourgeoisie has inclined more towards US imperialism. Since coming to power in 2014, NarendraModi and BJP government unabashedly declared that Washington is the strategic ally of India and transformed India into a frontline state in the US hegemonic designs in Asia and Indian Ocean. It joined the trilateral strategic ties with US, Japan and Australia as a part of “Pivot to Asia” which is aimed to surround China.

Seventh fleet is stationed in Diego Garcia with responsibility of operations in western pacific and eastern stretches of Indian Ocean up to India-Pakistan border. It gives the US imperialism control over the strait of Malacca and south China Sea through which 70 per cent of the world trade passes. The maintenance and repairs of ships of seventh Fleet are being carried out in Japan and Singapore.

Diego Garcia, one of the Chagos islands in the Indian Ocean, was leased by Britain to the US for the military base in 1966 for 50 years (two years before Mauritius independence in 1968). Nearly 2,000 islanders were driven out and settled in Mauritius and Seychelles. London administers it as the British Indian Ocean Territory.

The lease expired recently, but has been renewed by London until December 20, 2036, much to the chagrin of Mauritius and those seeking the return of displaced inhabitants. London also announced in November last that it will not allow them to return.

Mauritius Prime Minister AneroodJugnauth has threatened to take Britain to the International Court of Justice to resolve the dispute over the sovereignty of Chagos islands after securing a vote in the UN General Assembly on the issue.

The Hindustan Times reported in the last week of January 2017, “Britain and the United States have approached India to leverage its influence with Mauritius on the contentious issue of Diego Garcia, where the US has a major military base, but is caught in claims over Mauritian sovereignty and legal rows over return of former islanders.New Delhi’s help was sought by foreign secretary Boris Johnson, who is currently on a visit to India, during Wednesday’s meeting with Prime Minister NarendraModi, London-based sources told HT.The help was sought since it is seen as part of the “same security architecture” with Britain and the US, sending what is considered a “good signal” from New Delhi’s perspective. Continuation of the US base would also be in India’s interests, Modi was told.”

An open blackmail and dole out to cajole India to become propagandist on behalf of US imperialism. It was this very Seventh Fleet that US used to threaten India when it militarily intervened to form Bangladesh, but restrained itself because India at that time signed a military treaty with Russian social imperialism. True to its comprador nature, the Indian big bourgeoisie has no respect for the sovereignty and security of India.
