

Plandemic -How the Covid-19 was Used to Grab all Power

The Prime Minister called upon the people to make use of opportunities provided by Corona virus while fighting it and make India *Aatma Nirbhar* (loosely translated by the PM himself as self-reliant). As the economic activity forced to a complete stop, the people are not able to see any opportunity. Taking cue from the PM, the media hyped the so-called success stories such as self help groups making face masks etc. The ga-ga reached maddening pitch when a cabinet minister of Telangana boasted that cotton growers in the state would get higher prices due to the manufacture of face masks.

But Modi is adept at creating and grabbing the opportunity. His government allowed the spread corona virus and used it:

- to grab all powers from the state governments,
- to implement imperialist dictated so-called reforms in agricultural and labour fronts,
- to cover up the crisis that already set in with the guise of covid-19 spread and then throw the burden of crisis on the backs of people.

On December 31, 2019, the Chinese government informed the World Health Organization of an epidemic in Wuhan, reporting similarities to SARS-CoV (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus, originally appearing in 2002 in the province of Guangdong) and to MERS-CoV (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, originally appearing in Saudi Arabia in 2012). On January 12, Chinese scientists shared the completely sequenced genome of this new corona virus with the entire international scientific community. The city of Wuhan and the province of Hubei were isolated and locked down by January 20. All the information was shared in international medical journals by Chinese doctors and researchers starting on February 20.

Yet the Modi government followed the footsteps of it's imperialist masters and allowed the corona virus to spread. Instead of closing down all airports in the country, the main conduits of entry of corona virus into the country, it issued usual advisories to those who want to go foreign countries. For some time it joined the Trump chorus against China. The enormous spread of corona virus in Mumbai, Delhi and Gujarat (nearly 50 per cent of cases were reported here) clearly castigates the planned incompetence and conceit shown by the central government.

The abrupt and unplanned imposition of lockdown shocked the people and it was used by the Modi government to grab the powers from the state governments which are not in a position to deal with the problems arisen from sudden declaration of lockdown. The central government invoked the National Disaster Management Act and started issuing orders to all state governments and local bodies. All powers to deal with the Covid-19 were concentrated in one body - Ministry of Home Affairs and Prime Minister's Office. The NDM Act gave extensive powers to the central government that it can issue any direction to any authority anywhere in India overriding all other laws in the name disaster management. With this Modi and Amit Shaw are legally authorized to run the whole country.

The unilateral actions, instead of joint efforts, revealed the fallacy of the top-down approach and tactic of one-upmanship. The 'detailed' directions issued by the central government had to be

modified with 80 orders issued later. It was so because the detailed directions have failed to take cognizance of ground realities - standing crops need to be harvested, millions of stranded migrant workers' needs to be attended and so on. It was forced to retreat step by step.

The central government suspended the Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) funds and diverted them to Consolidated Fund. The MPs are better known of ground realities and could have used the funds, in coordination with district authorities, more effectively to mitigate the situation. It kept aside the Prime Minister National Relief Fund and created Prime Minister Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situation (PMCARES) superseding all other such funds. The central health ministry even directed the state governments not to procure Personal Protective Equipment and ventilators themselves and place demands to the centre.

The biggest attack on state's rights came in the form of withholding the payment of GST dues to the states at a time when states' revenues has fallen by more than 80% the states cannot rise their revenues as production and sale of alcohol was banned and sale of petrol and diesel dipped to the lowest. They cannot raise loans as the centre put restrictions on loans to be contracted by the states. The states are now going to Delhi with begging bowl asking for alms which are otherwise legitimately belong to them - the GST dues.

The intimidating intentions of the Centre are evident when it shot letters to the state governments of Kerala and West Bengal why they are not following the lockdown procedures. In fact, the Kerala government successfully tamed the first round of corona virus infection and the repeated appeals of West Bengal government for funds were ignored. It is using the prevailing situation to topple the Congress government in Rajasthan. The ruler has no masks.

The central government has utilized the lockdown situation to cross the every hurdle in its pursuit of agricultural "reforms" that have proved elusive so far. Governments in the past have attempted this by primarily putting pressure on States to initiate such reforms because agriculture is a State subject. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that the Central government will introduce three legislations to this effect via ordinances.

The three major reforms relate to amendments scrapping Essential Commodities Act of 1955, allowing private agri-business corporations to buy farm produce directly from farmers bypassing

Agricultural Market Committees (APMC) and a legal frame work for establishing corporate farming.

The promulgated ordinances are part of neoliberal reform agenda initiated three decades back. The present regime is actively pushing this anti people agenda further concentrating land and markets in the hands of foreign agri-business corporations. These reforms will deepen the existing agrarian crisis and further ruin the livelihoods of rural poor.

Same is the case with so-called labour law reforms. These are the demands of big bourgeoisie that labour power should be kept at its disposal without any restrictions and they were placed before the President of India in the form of labour codes. The Central government utilized the situation created by lockdown to openly declare what really contained in these labour codes - cessation of all rights of workers.

The Indian state is moving towards building a surveillance apparatus to track every citizen. It is reportedly developing an integrate system to curate data about citizens into one data base using the existing system called UIDI or Aadhar card. It is trampling all procedures of data privacy and

many news reports appeared in which aadhar based personal data was supplied to commercial purposes. The aim of government is to curate all-encompassing, auto-updating, searchable data base to track every aspect of lives of each and every Indian.

On the plea of contact tracing of corona virus patients, the government introduced *Arogyasetu* app which tracks the movement of the user through their smart phone and generates status report wherever the user goes. A Paris based consultancy, Defence Lab Agency showed that besides tracking the movements and contact tracing, the app could be used to turn on built-in sensors like microphone and camera and has access to smart phone's contacts and data. It is already down loaded by more than 10 million people.

Before the advent of Covid-19, India faced a grave economic situation which is reflected in, 1) Continued limping of the manufacturing sector for over 10 years; 2) the per capita personal spending fell; 3) unemployment grown to record level in last four decades; and 4) the growth of poverty has risen to alarming levels.

This crisis situation was exacerbated by the lock down imposed on the plea of controlling corona virus. The Indian government put the entire blame on Covid-19 and the PM assured the people that India would be saved from this meddle with *atmanirbhar* strategy by implementing various so-called reforms. As explained earlier, what Modi meant by *atmanirbhar* is not self reliance, but more integration into global supply chains and perpetuation of its dependence on imperialism.

From view point of peoples health, the lock down is necessary not to control only the spread of corona virus, but to gain time for preparing the health and medical services to rise to the occasion and to take all the supportive measures. The lock down period was not used for this purpose. As a result, after more than 65 days of lock down, the country had been landed in

a more difficult situation - that lifting lockdown could increase the spread of corona virus or its continuation could wrought havoc to the economy and peoples lives.

The Covid-19 experience overwhelmingly proved the necessity of expanding and strengthening the public health and medical services in India. The government is not ready to learn from this experience. It is not taking even a single step in that direction. On the contrary, its representatives continue to brat about the virtues of public private partnerships in health and medical sectors.

With the threat of corona virus still in the air, the contagion fanned in no small measure by sheer incompetence and worse, citizens would be in a state of panic, is the expectation of Modi government. It calculated that such a mindset would hardly encourages protests and it can move as it wished. It hoped that it has effectively curtailed the collective action of people against the draconian measures. Yet the people of India have shown their mettle; various sections of them have began struggle against these policies.
