

Lockdown - Unlock - Let them die!

The response of Narendra Modi's government to the Corona virus crisis appears haphazard, but has sinister motive. The lockdown was clamped abruptly without any early warning for the people to get themselves prepared. Though first corona case registered on January 20, it kept open all the doors for the entry of virus for about 60 days, during which time it maintained covid-19 is not a problem for India despite the warnings from the WHO. It is a standard practice during the breakdown of an epidemic to clamp lockdown of the affected areas, followed by aggressive testing, isolation and treatment. The lockdown meant for gaining time to prepare the administrative and medical systems to deal with the epidemic. If it were extended for a long time, it would be counter-productive. It is not a panacea. The sudden imposition of lockdown without proper planning and without follow up measures had not helped in containing the virus.

The geographical spread of Corona virus and its severity has concentrated around four metropolitan cities - Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad and Chennai and later spread to metros like Bengaluru, Pune, Hyderabad and then to other cities. This clearly indicates the entry of virus and the failure of the government to contain it in initial stages.

The government spokesmen time and again claimed "The original purpose of the lockdowns was to delay the spike so we can put health services and systems in place, so we are able handle the spike [when it comes]... That objective, to a large extent, has been met." News reports such as those titled "Corpses in Hallways, Patients on Floor as Virus Overwhelms Mumbai," hardly instill confidence in those preparations during the lockdown period. It is obvious that complimentary measures have not been taken fully to prepare the people for when the lockdown is finally lifted.

Narendra Modi addressed the country five times. Every time he exhorted the people to do the tasks given by him - observing janata curfew, clapping and clanging the utensils, turn off lights and come out into balconies with lighted candles. But he did not tried to tell the people what the government is going to do to relieve them from the situation resulted from his government's mishandling of Corona virus pandemic. The grandiose announcements over five days like the serial episodes of a soap opera had not offered anything substantial for the people who are facing hunger and lack of job.

Modi's lockdown has been disastrous for the overwhelming part of the populace, most of the workforce that is employed in the informal economy. So, continuing the lockdown in the way it was imposed by the Indian government appears to have no sense. In fact the implementation, and now the lifting, are both largely ill-thought out exercises and just mimicked those of imperialist powers.

To cover up this failure, the government led by Modi adopted anti-China rhetoric unleashed in the West Europe and North America by the imperialist powers that China wantonly spread the virus from its laboratories. It focused on the congregation of Tablighi Jamat at Nizammuddine as an epicenter of corona spread in India and tried to rake up anti-Muslim hatred to divert the peoples attention. Yet it was not able to dupe the people and the people have seen the real play through these smoke screens.

Though the pandemic came handy for the Modi to hide the already set in economic crisis in the country and to blame corona for all the ills of economy, during the four phases of lockdown it became clear that deaths due to starvation would surpass many times than those caused by the Corona virus. Then the leaders in government, including the PM, and media began to engage themselves in spreading the canard of inevitability of living with corona. With this plea, the really failed lockdown was lifted.

Learning to live with corona indicts the failure of every claim made by the Modi's government that it would protect the life and livelihoods of the people. The very arguments, borrowed from the west, tantamount to asking every individual to behave with utmost responsibility if he wants protection from corona and wants to live. This is nothing but individualizing the responsibility that has to be discharged by the community and its organizations, in the present case the state and central governments. In other words, it stood by the side of neo-Malthusians allowing the people to suffer from corona, economic deprivation and exploitation; that is, let them die.

Modi and 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; and 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.

Such a brazenly anti-people policies always couples with severe repression on people and their organizations; suppression of democratic rights and erasure of democratic values. See how Modi-Shah duo's move in this direction. Amulya Leona, still in her teens, has been in jail for three months now, charged with sedition and other serious crimes for simply shouting 'Long Live Pakistan' and 'Long Live India' from the stage of a public event in Bangalore. In many parts of India today, the right of the people to criticise their leaders no longer exists. The police in Madhya Pradesh registered a criminal case against a journalist for referring to the prime minister as a '*gappu*', or braggart. In Agra, a man who called the Uttar Pradesh chief minister a 'dog' has been charged with sedition. A young photographer in Kashmir was threatened with arrest under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act as a terrorist for a photograph she posted on Instagram in 2018. In Andhra Pradesh, a woman who asked a series of embarrassing questions about the recent industrial accident in Vishakapatnam was arrested by the police. The purpose these 'individual' cases serve is to scare others into silence. The amended UAPA has also given home minister Amit Shah the power to designate any individual as a "terrorist" without a trial or even the filing of charges. Forty five years after the imposition of Emergency by Indira Gandhi, the leaders of BJP continue to claim that they fought against the Emergency and restored democratic values. Contrary to these claims, Modi's government turned a genuine health emergency into a political emergency. Here various political parties of ruling classes are functioning normally - from horse trading in Rajasthan to mud-slinging and trading charges, while maintaining silence over the problems faced by people and alternative proposals. At the same time, the revolutionary and left parties as well as organizations that are working for the people are not allowed to function.

With the threat of corona virus still in the air, citizens would be in a state of panic, is the expectation of Modi government. It hoped that it can effectively rush through all the anti-people policies without fear of collective action from various sections of people. Yet the people of India have shown their mettle; various sections of them have began struggle against these policies. It is the bounden duty of the communist revolutionaries and democratic and patriotic forces to lead and strengthen these struggles. Indian economy is in a deep crisis accentuated by the Covid-19. The great challenge it posed before the country is to restore the lost jobs and create newer ones. While most of the economists advised the government to spend more to enhance demand, the government took the other way. It refused to spend more and resorted to attract more foreign investment and integrate more with global supply chains, ironically in the name of *aatmanirbhar*. This strategy, being implemented for the past four decades, will lead to further foreign takeover of Indian economy, pillage of national wealth and destruction of peasants, small industries and small businesses.

The only path that leads the economy out of crisis is to address the basic needs of the people immediately. The government should distribute foodgrains to each and every family to relieve them from hunger. This is possible as there are substantial stocks of foodgrains with the government agencies.

Next is to regain the lost jobs. Instead of show piece schemes like *Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyan*, the allocations for MNREGA should be increased so as to create employment in the rural areas. As the most of the installed capacity in the industrial sector is lying idle, they should be encouraged to restart production. For this, there is no need for fresh investment and savings from low oil rates can be used to incentivize production. These two measures in combination would raise the incomes of people and thus pushes the demand up and creates internal market. To sustain the internal market, structural changes in the existing system should be taken up. Instead of wooing the foreign investment and encouraging the growth of service sector, the manufacturing sector should be revived. More sustainable growth of the economy could be achieved only through the distribution of land to the tiller and coordinated development of agriculture and industry. There is no other way or short cuts to revive the economy with peoples perspective. The communist revolutionaries, democratic and patriatic forces should demand for such path to development.

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