

# The Central Government is Grabbing Minor Ports for its Corporate Allies through “Indian Ports Bill 2021”

According to the existing Indian Ports Act 1908, Minor Ports are under the control of State Governments. If the “Indian Ports Bill 2021” brought by the Central Government becomes Act, the “Maritime State Development Council (MSDC)” which is at present an advisory body will start functioning as a regulatory body for the minor ports i.e., all the management and other powers which have hitherto been in the hands of the state governments so far will go into the hands of the MSDC set up by the Central Government i.e., into the control of the Central Govt., thereby to its Allies.

The Central Govt. has already taken over all the rights of the states in the sectors of education, health, agriculture and electricity. Without consulting the state governments, the Central Govt. brought in three black agricultural laws that would ultimately turn the farmers into labourers in their own fields. The farmers are waging an unrelenting struggle against these black laws. The Central Government has decided to issue licenses to private companies in the electricity distribution sector (DISCOM). Power distribution companies are opposing the Central Government’s move. There is no mention of any sort of public referendum. Despite the impediment to the development of the public and their concerns, the central government is acting arbitrarily and unilaterally. The State Govts and the people of the Country should strongly oppose the move.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister opposed centralization of minor ports. Recently he wrote letters to chief ministers of 9 coastal states and UT to register their dissent. He said the Central Govt’s decision was against the federal spirit and if the bill comes into force, the states will lose their authority in Port Development, Management, Taxes, Revenue and stressed that minor ports management should be vested with State Govts. It is opposed by the governments of Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala also. However, they are not in a position to fight strongly with the Centre for the rights of the States. Governments in these respective states have made it a priority to protect their governments and their political interests at the expense of public interest.

## **Clauses of Concern in the Bill**

The Draft states that the bill is proposed for safety, security, pollution control performance standards and sustainability of ports and adheres to respecting the international maritime agreements. It is being handed over to the Maritime State Development Council (MSDC) for effective management of the ports. It even says steps will be taken to develop the maritime sector structurally and for maximum utilization of the ports. The Council has the power to establish regional offices anywhere in the country at suitable places. The Council shall have all rights over the Port assets, procurement, sales, allocations, contracts and all matters relating to their implementation. This means that all the Ports will go under the control of the Central Government.

From the time the council is enforced, all the port lands, assets, funds, revenue which are at present vested with the state governments will be transferred to these boards. All

employees working in these ports will be transferred to these boards. These are the important clauses of concern in this bill. This would deprive the States of all benefits accruing through these ports.

The States will likely become the feudal kingdoms that would pay taxes to the Central Govt. The ruling and opposition parties, which are supposed to fight for the rights of the States, must fight against the centralization of power by the central government. But it is a well-known fact that they lack commitment and integrity. They prioritize protecting their positions for fear that they will not receive funds if they do not ally with the Centre, and that the Centre with its control over the CBI, ED will launch attacks and harassment on them.

Similarly, States are opposing the "Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2021". The States of West Bengal and Kerala have passed resolutions in their respective Assemblies against the bill for namesake and no constructive steps taken to repeal the bill.

All the anti-people reforms brought by the rulers will ultimately be a burden on the people. They will lose even the minimum existing rights. They lose the chance to even negotiate. The ports will be run by Corporate Giant Adani Group and SEZ company. Under the SEZ Companies Act 2005, no labor laws apply to workers in that industry. Employees will be reduced to that of migrant workers with no job security.

The Central Government does not have the right to Sell or Lease Public Assets such as Industries, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways, etc., which are built with Public Money. The people by their vote give right to rulers to govern them, but the rulers feel that the people have empowered them to sell or lease all the wealth of the country at their discretion.

Five decade ago, Tarimela Nagireddy, a revolutionary communist leader stated that India is mortgaged basing on the then existing economic crisis. He was called a terrorist. And now the working class should think about naming the present day rulers who are handing over the wealth of the Country to the Imperialist and comprador capitalist classes. No one came forward to invest in our country when Central Government went across the globe spending public money on the charter planes for foreign investments. That is why Industries and Companies in the Public Sector are being cheaply put for sale.

Taking spirit from the Independence Struggle, people must unite and fight for their right to live against the corporatization of the agricultural and industrial sectors by the Government. There is no alternative but to struggle to save the country.