



25 years journey of struggle and reconstruction

National Alliance of People's Movements

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BRING WORKERS HOME: END THE EXPLOITATIVE AND INHUMAN CAPITALIST NEXUS

THAT DENIES WORKERS THEIR RIGHT TO RESIDENCE & RIGHT TO LIFE

NO MORE 'DEATHS', NO MORE 'DELAYS': WE WANT TRAINS & BUSES NOW

10th May, 2020: National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) expresses its absolute shock and deep anguish at the tragic and avoidable 'death' of sixteen migrant workers, most of them Gond adivasis, who were run over by a goods train, near Aurangabad, two days back. These workers were trying to return to their home state of Madhya Pradesh on foot. This and several other 'deaths' of migrants, who have been forced to walk thousands of kilometres to their homes reflects the complete failure and criminal apathy of the Modi government towards the plight of lakhs of migrant workers. The situation has been exacerbated by the unwillingness and incapacity of many states to prioritize the return of workers, partly owing to vested interests of corporate-builder lobbies.

The whole country has witnessed that the government has facilitated travel of many persons from abroad but has shown abject disdain towards the rights of migrant workers, here in India. The ill-planned nature of the 'lockdown' has clearly not taken into consideration the dire conditions of crores of migrant workers, who are already vulnerable and deprived of social security. This has resulted in a chaotic and desperate situation where workers are trying to reach home by whatever means available to them and mostly by foot!

News reports as well as our own engagements with workers across the country, as trade unions, movement and civil society groups has brought forth heart-rendering accounts of suffering of the very people who build our cities and create the wealth of this nation. Researchers tracking the 'non-corona' lockdown deaths have painstakingly documented about 350 (avoidable) deaths till date, mostly of working-class people, due to 'accidents', denial of medical care, hunger, financial distress and 'suicides'! Govt. of India is squarely responsible for each of these 'deaths'.

An unforgivable situation arose when the Govt. started charging higher train fares from the stranded workers! Major outrage from both the opposition and citizens shamed the Centre into declaring that it would 'bear 85 % of the fare'. Even 10 days after the (much delayed) Union Home Ministry order permitting movement of migrant workers and announcement of "Shramik Special" trains, the workers continue to suffer and have been made to wait endlessly. The order itself is ambiguous (as it uses the word stranded) so that it can be used subjectively to deny or allow workers travel to their home district. A week ago, MHA came up with yet another outrageous 'clarification' that persons who were stranded 'just before the lockdown' would only be permitted to travel, thus seeking to deny travel support to most migrant workers.

As compared to the massive migrant population that is desperate to return to their villages, the trains are very few. There is no transparent mechanism for workers to know the schedule of trains and when they will be taken to their home states. Many are being illegally charged for their travel. Attitude of state governments has not helped either. Many states are under pressure from industries who want to keep the workers forcibly without caring for their food, shelter and safety. It was only huge public outcry that forced Karnataka to change its decision, after it initially decided to 'stop trains', based on exclusive meetings with builders. We gather that states like Telangana, Tamil Nadu and others are also in consultation with the builders on similar lines, although the same is not being made public. One the home-state front, Bihar Govt. did not give clearance to trains coming from Kerala, which had to be cancelled!

Shortage of trains and inadequate preparedness by the state and central governments have further added to the miseries of the stranded workers. Clearly, an unprecedented situation of *enmasse* bondage is being created as many states are now in a mode and mood to “revive the economy”, while the workers insist on going home. We are already seeing multiple CMs make 'ardent appeals' to workers to 'stay back and that they will be taken care of'!

There have been innumerable accounts of migrant workers in transit having been harassed by the police. They are being picked up in different states during their travel to home state and are sent to quarantine facilities where they have not received adequate food, care and sanitation. Caught between the Centre, home and host states, as everyone shifts the ‘burden’ to the other, workers have begun to rely on their feet and just walk, with their entire families and belongings, or take trucks wherever possible, paying money! At numerous places, workers have also risen up in mass protest against being ‘locked-up’ indefinitely! It must be pointed out that this ‘locking down’ of migrant workers is an assault on their right to free movement guaranteed by the Constitution.

In the midst of all this, BJP Governments in UP and MP government have announced relaxation of labour laws for the next three years. Multiple other states including Congress states like Rajasthan have extended work hours from 8 to 12 hrs per day. Other state governments are contemplating the same. All of this will further exploit the already exploited. No economy can be ‘revived’, if workers who are our backbone are in distress and treated with such indignity!

In the light of such intolerable treatment meted out to the workers who are trying to reach home, we demand that:

- 1. Workers be brought to their respective home district and state immediately, free of cost with safety and dignity. Those in transit should be allowed to reach the home state where they can be quarantined, in the village school / panchayat with all facilities.**
- 2. Fully equipped quarantine centres be set up at all main entry points of state and districts for returning migrant workers. COVID 19 guidelines and protocols to be strictly followed, including physical distancing, PPE kits and nutritional requirements.**
- 3. Stringent actions should be taken on touts and corrupt officials who are charging migrants money for the travel or medical certifications.**
- 4. Free transportation to be provided from quarantine centres to respective villages.**
- 5. A minimum and immediate cash support of Rs 5,000/- should be provided to every migrant worker who enters the home-state.**
- 6. Workers must be provided clear details of train and bus schedules and a proper mechanism for communicating the same in multiple languages must be put in place. Home states and host states must bring forth clear and simple protocols, including off-line registration and a state-wise toll free, 24 x 7 functional helpline exclusively for migrant return. Neighbouring home and host states must co-ordinate to ensure bus travel for workers.**
- 7. Strict Instructions to police must be given to not ill-treat, harass or beat the workers under any circumstances. Instead, on-ground officials must have adequate information, so that the same can be conveyed to the workers. All workers who are**

stranded in host state, must be ensured food and shelter until the date of return journey.

- 8. Arrangements for food and help / information desk on all major highways, railway stations to be made.**
- 9. The Government must come up with long term ‘Migrant Workers Action Plan’, since a very large number of them have lost livelihoods and are rendered impoverished due to the lockdown.**
- 10. Govt must universalize dry ration delivery, through PDS, at least for the next 6 months. Likewise, State must ensure all workers are paid full wages for the entire duration of lockdown and contractors are held accountable.**

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