

Public Statement

Modi Administration attempts shutting down We20

People refuse to bow down, We20 continues as scheduled

New Delhi, 19.08.23: Jairam Ramesh, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) termed “extraordinary” that “Delhi Police is stopping people from attending the We20 meeting”. Nikhil Dey of MKSS wondered if this is the message Narendra Modi wants to send to G20 nations, that India is a country that does not even allow a seminar to be held. What Annie Raja of CPI declared is not merely an attack on the seminar, and the Right of Expression of the peoples of India, but is particularly an assault on the poor whose houses have been torn down and street vendors displaced all to dress up Delhi as ‘world class’.

Even as multiple sessions were underway at HKS Surjeet Bhawan, in Delhi, as part of the We20 program, a forum where representatives of peoples movements, trade union, civil society, were gathered to discuss and debate the implications of Modi government, a large battalion of Delhi Police swept into the venue demanding the seminar be shut down. None of the participants agreed, demanded the police leave and also ensure the seminar participants’ fundamental right to meet and discuss public concerns is protected. All scheduled sessions continued smoothly with enthusiastic participation from over 400 participants despite the attempt to halt the program. The 3-day program will continue as planned and would end with a cultural program in the evening of 20th of August.

In an unbelievable step, Delhi Police barricaded the gates to Surjeet Bhawan not letting anyone in around 11 am. This when Jairam Ramesh, Aneel Hegde, MP (RS), Medha Patkar (NBA), Vandana Shiva (Navdanya), Anjali Bhardwaj, Nikhil Dey, Thomas Franco, Shaktiman Ghosh and others were analysing how the Modi administration projected to the global leaders of G20 that he is governing India in the best traditions of liberal democracy. Why then was he afraid of a few hundred activists gathering to examine his claims in Delhi that he had to direct the police to disrupt the proceedings!!

The summit began with a rousing inaugural session attended by a host of political leaders, movement activists, and civil society organisations including Teesta Setalvad, Medha Patkar, Jayati Ghosh, Manoj Jha, Harsh Mander, Arun Kumar, Brinda Karat, Hannan Mollah, Rajeev Gowda among others. A total of 9 workshops are planned in the summit to deliberate on key issues pertinent to the G20 agenda such as agriculture and food security, climate crisis and just energy transition, rising inequalities, labour and employment, alternative ideas of development, democracy and dissent and more.

What’s happening in Surjeet Bhawan is how the situation is across India. People are not allowed to participate in meaningful democracy to question and hold accountable the Modi administration. Why, even Parliament has been stepped aside and laws that fundamentally protect human rights, environment, biodiversity, privacy, etc. have been rendered meaningless. Anyone who dares to question the government, be it an activist, a trade unionist, academic, even a Minister or Deputy Chief Minister, is targeted with fabricated cases and hauled through the tortuous process of criminal trials, and even locked up under draconian laws. This is how things are in India today.

When G20 leaders gather in Delhi in a few weeks, they will be walked around Delhi, and tall claims will be made that India is a liberal democracy. All they need to do is contrast the actual diversity of India, its peoples, languages, its faiths, and its cultural and natural biodiversity, with what is being projected through G20 and C20 platforms in India. It is

instead a picture of majoritarian, cultural imposition - all of which is nothing short of using global forums to promote bigoted and highly divisive Hindutva agenda that Modi champions.

Progressive people's movements and democracy activists from all G20 countries, and around the world, condemn this repression by Narendra Modi and his administration. We demand the police are withdrawn unconditionally and people's We20 process is allowed to continue without any further hindrance or hurdle.

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