

In wake of frame-up convictions of Maruti Suzuki workers

India's finance minister meets with Maruti Suzuki chairman

Shannon Jones
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With 13 Maruti Suzuki autoworkers languishing in jail for life after being convicted on frame-up charges, India's Finance Minister Arun Jaitley held a meeting with Suzuki Motor Corp head Osamu Suzuki in Japan to discuss stepped-up investments in India.

Following the meeting Wednesday, that involved several other leading Japanese businessmen, Suzuki announced it would invest another 100 billion yen (US\$880 million) to expand its newly built Gujarat production facilities in western India by the early 2020s. The money represented a new investment over what the company had already pledged. Suzuki alone controls about one-half of the Indian car market and it has set a goal of doubling its current sales over the course of the next 10 years.

The investment came out of talks sponsored by Jaitley over the Modi administration's "Make in India" campaign. The core of this initiative is to market India as a cheap labor platform for multinational corporations. In line with this the Indian government has pledged to brutally suppress workers struggles to ensure a docile and low-paid workforce.

The plans announced by Suzuki include opening a third production line at its factory in the state of Gujarat. The company recently announced the opening of a second production line at the facility set for 2019.

Suzuki had earlier announced a significant investment in India to make lithium ion batteries for electric vehicles. The joint project will include Toshiba and Denso. Suzuki will own a 50 percent stake while Toshiba and Denso will control 40 percent and 10 percent respectively.

For its part, Korean-based automaker Hyundai plans to invest \$2 billion in India and has set a goal of output

from India of 1 million vehicles by 2020-2021.

The Japanese government has already set up a "Make in India" fund of some 1.5 trillion yen (US\$ 13.2 billion). India has meanwhile promised to devise special incentives for companies to invest in industrial areas.

The meeting between Jaitley, who also serves as defense minister, and Suzuki took place as part of a five-day visit to Japan to shore up investment prospects and cement India's military ties with the East Asia nation. It included assurance by the Indian finance chief that the Indian ruling elite would ruthlessly suppress worker opposition.

In concert with India's military strategic alliance with the United States, aimed primarily at preparing for a confrontation with China, India has strengthened its military and security ties to Japan. Japanese authorities are seeking to nullify antimilitarist provisions of the country's post-WWII constitution as part of a campaign to significantly expand its military forces.

Jaitley's visit to Japan followed a March meeting between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Toyota President Akio Toyoda and Osamu Suzuki to discuss plans for investment in India. Japan's foreign direct investments into India currently rank third behind Mauritius and Singapore. Japan has poured some \$25.2 billion into India in foreign direct investment since 2000.

In the background of the visit is India's ongoing persecution of former workers at the Maruti Suzuki Manesar factory who were convicted earlier this year on frame-up charges of murdering a manager during a company-provoked altercation on July 18, 2012. Thirteen workers received life sentences for their

alleged part in the affair. Twelve of those workers are from the leadership of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU) established by workers at the plant in opposition to the official, pro-company union, the Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union or MUKU.

Management used the events of July 18, 2012 to launch a purge of the Manesar workforce that resulted in the firing and replacement 2,300 workers at the plant. In the wake of the incident more than 150 workers were jailed and held for three years. The attack on Maruti Suzuki workers followed a series of strikes at the Manesar plant in the period 2011- 2012.

The entire proceedings against the jailed workers were a sham, aimed primarily at intimidating opposition to the sweatshop regime in the factory and reassuring investors that the Indian authorities would suppress any struggle against speedup and low wages.

A company attorney acted as co-counsel to the prosecution. No workers were allowed to testify on the spurious grounds that they would likely be biased and therefore unreliable witnesses. Further, defense attorneys were not permitted to cross-examine key prosecution witnesses, a fundamental attack on due process. Meanwhile, the judge attempted to shift the burden of proof from the prosecution to the workers, essentially asserting that the victimized workers had to prove their innocence.

In spite of the blatant pro-prosecution bias on the part of authorities, the defense ultimately secured exoneration for most of the 150 jailed workers originally framed up for the July 2012 altercation. They conclusively demonstrated that the prosecution fabricated evidence and that arrests took place on the basis of company-supplied lists.

Despite this, the prosecution secured the conviction of 13 workers, who received savage life sentences.

The sentencing of the 13 workers evoked stormy protests across India. However, the official unions have done their utmost to isolate the Maruti Suzuki workers and suppress and divert opposition to the frame-up. In its annual May Day statement the pro-Stalinist Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) made no mention of the Maruti Suzuki workers.

The pro-Stalinist parliamentary political parties in India have likewise isolated the victimized Maruti Suzuki workers. The principal paper of the pro-Stalinist Communist Party of India failed to print anything about

the conviction of the workers for weeks. Above all the Stalinists are fearful that the struggle of the Maruti Suzuki workers could spark a broader rebellion by industrial workers across India and threaten plans to use the country as a cheap labor platform.



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