

An open letter to all South Asian workers: The pandemic must be ended and lives saved in 2022!

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
7 January 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As the new year begins, workers in South Asia and throughout the world must act collectively and finally put an end to the COVID-19 pandemic. 2022 must not be another nightmarish year of mass infections, illness and death!

The social catastrophe of the last two years is the outcome of the criminal subordination of public health to the relentless accumulation of corporate profits and the private wealth of mega-millionaires and billionaires.

In terms of its cost in human lives, the pandemic ranks among the greatest tragedies in the history of South Asia and India in particular. When 2021 began over 148,994 people in India had succumbed to the virus. Today, that figure stands at over 482,000, more than trebling in a year, despite the rollout of life-saving vaccines.

According to a study published last July by the US-based Center for Global Development, the real toll of the COVID-19 pandemic in India is between three and five million, ten times the official figure.

As of January 4, India and other South Asia countries—Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Maldives—have officially recorded a combined total of over 573,300 COVID deaths and 39.51 million cases.

Life expectancy—the most critical indicator of public health—has fallen drastically. According to the International Institute for Population Studies (IIPS), life expectancy at birth for men and women in India “has declined from 69.5 years and 72 years in 2019 to 67.5 years and 69.8 years respectively in 2020.”

IIPS assistant professor Surayakant Yadav stated that the impact of COVID-19 on India in the past two years has “wiped out the progress we made in the last decade to increase the life expectancy figure.”

Officially, 10.26 million Indians were infected by the virus during the first year to December 31, 2020. With the ending of lockdowns and the Modi government’s refusal to do anything to stop the spread of the Delta and Omicron variants, case numbers reached a staggering 34.83 million the end of 2021—an increase of over 24 million.

In Sri Lanka, the government of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse is further easing its limited coronavirus restrictions, despite the virus, including its new Omicron variant, spreading through the

country. From January 3, the government ordered all public sector employees to resume onsite work, cancelling COVID-related leave for pregnant women and mothers with infants less than one year old. Almost all restrictions on wedding functions, outdoor shows and sports festivals have been removed. The tourist industry, non-essential businesses, schools and shopping malls are now fully open.

The government has placed all responsibility for “following health guidelines” on the people themselves and washed its hands of responsibility for providing any measure to control the pandemic.

Despite Rajapakse’s boasting about his “success in controlling the pandemic,” infections in Sri Lanka are reaching 600,000 with over 15,000 deaths even according to the official under-counted figures. The Rajapakse government, like its counterparts in South Asia, is promoting vaccination as the sole solution to the pandemic declaring it is necessary to “live with the virus”—a criminal policy that prioritises profit over human lives.

According to October 31 figures, an estimated 49 percent of COVID-19 survivors in Asia—tens of millions of people—are suffering from Long COVID. This affliction can impact every organ in the body, persist for years, and leave infected individuals with serious physical problems and brain damage more severe than that associated with lead poisoning.

Virtually everyone has a friend or family member who has died from this horrible virus. Many of you reading this will have yourselves been infected and may be suffering from Long COVID.

The rapid spread of Omicron carries with it the danger that 2022 will be even worse than 2020 and 2021. On January 4, India reported over 37,379 new COVID cases, a 116-day high, and 124 deaths. Medical experts have warned that COVID infections in India could reach 1.4 million a day if no additional measures are taken.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government, along with its counterparts throughout South Asia, have been repeating the mantra that Omicron is “less severe than Delta,” but medical experts are warning that a fatal Omicron-driven, third wave of COVID will engulf India. As with Delta, hundreds of thousands, if not millions, will seek hospitalisation.

India’s under-funded, run-down medical infrastructure proved incapable of dealing with the massive number of patients it faced

in the past two years. Other shocking factors, including significant numbers of unvaccinated people, high levels of chronic diseases such as diabetes, and a large proportion of elderly in the population, will contribute to exponentially rising numbers of COVID-19 deaths this year.

Amid this unprecedented crisis, the stock market continues to soar because the Modi government, with the full backing of opposition Indian National Congress and other establishment parties, refuses to initiate any public health measures that would restrict corporate profit.

Misinformation and falsehoods from the government feed a sense of discouragement, which is then used to promote outright defeatism towards the pandemic. The corporate-controlled media now argues that the masses have to “live with COVID,” which, it declares, will become endemic. What does this even mean? What is the end goal of this policy, and when will the needless suffering and deaths of millions stop?

In fact, with appropriate measures, the virus can still be eliminated in the course of a few months. In China, the zero-COVID strategy led to the elimination of the virus by April 2020, with only two recorded deaths since May 2020. The methods used in China are well known and developed out of more than a century of experience fighting infectious diseases.

The principles of science and public health are constantly being ignored and falsified to impose a narrative to validate the full reopening of businesses and the economy.

Though it has not yet made any changes to its COVID quarantine and isolation guidelines, the Indian government from the outset has pursued a criminal “herd immunity” policy. Massive political rallies by the government and opposition parties in five states where state assembly elections are due early this year are being held in defiance of a court request that they not go ahead.

The reckless indifference of the entire ruling elite towards the lives of millions of people and its insistence that factories and other workplaces remain open and children sent to school, flies in the face of everything that has been learned in the fight against infectious diseases. Centuries of scientific study have given humanity an arsenal of knowledge to fight disease. This knowledge was used in the 20th century to eliminate viruses that were once leading causes of death, including polio, smallpox, measles, malaria and yellow fever.

Modern science has shown that the closure of all non-essential workplaces and the transition to remote learning for all schools for a period of two months could quickly bring viral transmission under control and lay the basis for the full-scale elimination of COVID-19. These necessary lockdowns must be accompanied by the provision of full financial and social support for all workers and small-business people affected.

Two-month lockdowns must be combined with the globally-coordinated production and distribution of vaccines and high-quality masks to all countries, as well as the use of mass testing, contact tracing, the safe isolation and treatment of infected patients, and a dramatic expansion of health care infrastructure. At every essential workplace and hospital, workers must have access to the highest quality FFP3 or better masks, as well as modern filtration and ventilation systems. All non-essential domestic and

international travel must cease immediately to allow for the elimination of the virus in each country.

The working class must take matters into its own hands. The fight to end the pandemic must be based on the following principles:

1. The present policy of “herd immunity”—i.e., allowing COVID-19 to spread throughout the population—must be repudiated. A new strategy directed toward the elimination and eradication of SARS-CoV-2 must be adopted.

2. The policies implemented to stop viral transmission must be determined by the needs of public health. The protection of human life and safety must take absolute and unconditional priority over all corporate-financial interests. The costs of fighting the pandemic—including the payment of wages and salaries, compensation to small business owners, full medical coverage for the ill, and payments to bereaved families—must be borne by corporations and a 100 percent tax on the windfall pandemic profits obtained by large investors through the run-up in the stock market.

3. The fight against the pandemic must be conducted on a global scale. The pandemic cannot be stopped unless SARS-CoV-2 is eliminated in all countries.

Ruling bourgeois parties, big business and the corporate-controlled media will declare that these policies are 1) impossible to implement and 2) incompatible with the existing capitalist system.

The answer to the first objection is that it is impossible to accept the infection of millions of people and the massive loss of life.

As for the second objection, the answer is simply this: If capitalism can offer no solution to a crisis that threatens the lives and well-being of the vast majority of the population, then it should be gotten rid of and replaced with a socialist system that prioritises life over profits.

The fight against COVID is, in essence, a struggle against capitalism. The tragedy of the past two years has made the case for the reorganisation of the world economy in the interests of the working class.

We urge all workers to circulate this statement, initiate discussion at your workplace, form rank-and-file committees and win support for collective action to stop the spread of the pandemic.

Contact the Socialist Equality Party and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. We are eager to discuss with you the situation in your workplace and to assist you in organising the fight to end the pandemic.

Fraternally,

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)



To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)