

Modi banks on venal, right-wing character of opposition to secure third term

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Indians will go to the polls this Friday in more than 100 Lok Sabha constituencies, including all 39 in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu, in the first phase of a seven-phase national election. Voting will conclude on June 1, with the results of the elections to the 543-member Lok Sabha, the lower and more powerful chamber of India's bicameral parliament, to be tabulated on June 4.

The elections highlight the urgency of the working class blazing a new political path in opposition to the entire bourgeois political establishment, including the Stalinist parliamentary parties and their affiliated trade unions, which for decades have suppressed the class struggle.

Opinion polls indicate that the far-right, Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its National Democratic Alliance will secure a third successive five-year term.

The Congress Party, till recently the Indian bourgeoisie's preferred party of national government, heads a ramshackle opposition electoral bloc of more than 30 parties—known as the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance, or INDIA.

The Congress leaders and their allies, including the Stalinists, are claiming that the only means of preventing Modi and the Hindu supremacist BJP from “destroying democracy” is to elect an INDIA alliance government. Far from representing a “democratic bulwark,” an INDIA government would be a right-wing capitalist regime, one that would come into headlong conflict with India's workers and toilers as it pressed forward with the Indian ruling class' agenda of “pro-investor” reform and the anti-China “Indo-US Global Strategic Partnership.”

The BJP government enjoys strong support from Indian big business, including Mukesh Amabani and Gautam Ambani, respectively Asia's first and second richest people, and from the corporate media. They view the Modi government as their best means to accelerate privatization, gut what remains of labour and environmental regulations and implement other anti-worker measures in the face of mass popular opposition, and to pursue their great-power ambitions on the world stage.

During its 10 years in office, the Modi government has taken on an ever more pronounced authoritarian character. It engages in continuous communalist incitement, with the aim of mobilizing its fascist activist base, diverting mounting social anger and frustration along reactionary lines, and splitting the working class. It has become ever more brazen in flouting democratic norms, largely bypassing parliament, stripping predominantly Muslim Jammu and Kashmir of its semi-autonomous status through a 2019 constitutional coup, and jailing left-wing political opponents on trumped up terrorism charges. In January, placing one historic crime atop another, it made a national spectacle out of Modi's inauguration of a Hindu nationalist temple on the site of the former Babri Masjid, a 16th century mosque that was razed by BJP-incited Hindu fanatics three decades ago in defiance of the express orders of the Indian Supreme Court.

The BJP election campaign revolves around the promotion of Modi—who first came to national prominence due to his role in inciting

and presiding over the 2002 anti-Muslim Gujarat pogrom—as a combination Hindu “strongman” and pious devotee of the mythical Hindu god Lord Ram.

India's jobs crisis

When not flaying the opposition parties as “corrupt,” “anti-national” and Muslim “appeasers,” Modi, his chief henchman, Home Minister Amit Shah, and their minions boast on the campaign trail about India's “world-beating” economic growth and increased stature in world affairs.

Much of this is nationalist tub-thumping. In recent years, India's growth has largely been driven by unsustainable, deficit-financed state infrastructure spending rather than private investment. While in purchasing power parity terms, India is now the world's third largest economy, it remains in many respects backward, with globally integrated manufacturing, IT, bio-engineering and other modern sectors existing alongside a huge “informal” economy based on petty production and long-antiquated technology.

In so far as India's economy has experienced substantial growth over the past decade of BJP rule and the 33 years since the Indian bourgeoisie repudiated its failed post-independence state-led development strategy in favour of full integration into the US-led world capitalist order, its fruits have been almost entirely monopolized by the ruling elite and their upper-middle class hangers on. Social inequality in contemporary India is more extreme than at the height of British colonial rule over South Asia. In 2022-23 the top 1 percent of the population gorged on 22.6 percent of all the income Indians earned and held 40.1 percent of all the wealth. With the bottom 50 percent earning just 15 percent of India's income and having a wealth-share of just 6.4 percent, the vast majority of Indians live in poverty and with the fear that any misfortune (loss of a job, illness in the family, etc.) will throw them into an economic abyss. As it is, hundreds of millions of Indians suffer from malnutrition and wasting due to extreme poverty.

In recent years, the problem of “jobless growth,” first identified in the previous decade, has only become more acute. According to the Centre for Monitoring of Indian Economy, India's youth unemployment rate in 2023 was 45.5 percent.

A further indication of India's jobless crisis is the rise in the portion of the workforce engaged in agriculture. Many of the tens of millions of migrant workers who fled India's cities after the Modi government without any warning left them to fend for themselves at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, never returned, although agricultural incomes are largely stagnant. In sharp contrast with what would be expected under conditions of rapid capitalist growth in a developing country, the percentage of the workforce engaged in agriculture has risen by more than

3.5 percent over the last five years, from 42.5 percent in 2018-19 to 45.8 percent in 2022-23.

A satrap for US imperialism as it prepares for war with China

As for Modi and the BJP's claims about India having an increased stature on the global stage, they attest to nothing so much as the utterly reactionary role that New Delhi is playing in world geopolitics. Building on the Indo-US alliance forged by its Congress Party-led predecessor, the BJP government has transformed India into a frontline state in US imperialism's reckless, all-sided military-strategic offensive against China. This includes working with Washington to counter Chinese influence across Asia, Africa and the Indian Ocean region; integrating India into an expanding web of bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral military-security ties with the US and its most important Asia Pacific allies, Japan and Australia; making India a hub of US arms production; and drawing up plans at Washington's demand as to how India's military would assist the US in the event of a US-China war.

In keeping with India's new "stature," including its hopes to expand Indian commercial and geopolitical ties in the Middle East on US imperialist coattails, New Delhi has joined Washington and the other western powers in supporting the genocidal war that Israel is mounting against the Palestinians. Only after months of slaughter did the Modi government vote for a meaningless ceasefire motion at the UN.

There are numerous indices of mass social discontent within the working class and rural poor. These include numerous protracted strike struggles, such as the 2022-23 Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation workers' strike.

For all their declamations about the strength of the BJP's popular support, Modi, Shah and the BJP are clearly terrified at the prospect of a sudden eruption of mass opposition. Hence, their mobilization of tens of thousands of security forces and use of police state methods to prevent farmers from marching on Delhi in February and March.

Their awareness of their dependence on money, muscle, a pliant media, and rabid communalism and other forms of demagoguery and manipulation to maintain their political dominance is also why the BJP is so relentless in using every means at its disposal against its bourgeois political opponents. A case in point is the fate of Arvind Kejriwal. The Chief Minister of Delhi and principal leader of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP, Common Man's Party) one of the INDIA alliance's major partners, Kejriwal has been jailed on politically manipulated corruption charges since March 21.

The INDIA alliance: a right-wing trap for the working class

The opposition parties share the Modi government's fear of India's toiling people and their hostility to its democratic and social aspirations.

When in office, whether at the national or state level, all of the parties that comprise the INDIA alliance—including the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, and its smaller, older sister party, the Communist Party of India, or CPI—have implemented "pro-investor" policies. And similarly, they have all connived in India's embrace of Washington and in making the anti-China Indo-US alliance the cornerstone of India's foreign policy.

The Congress Party, which has been dynastically led by the Nehru-Gandhi family for generations, has gone from electoral debacle to

electoral debacle since it fell from national office in 2014. In coming to power, the BJP was able to exploit popular anger over Congress-big business corruption. But even more importantly, it benefited from anger over rising joblessness, economic insecurity and social inequality and the manifest failure of the Congress' claim that it could give neo-liberal "reform" a human face.

The INDIA alliance is making a calibrated appeal to popular anger, particularly over the jobs crisis, with its member parties making various pledges to prioritize job creation and boost wages (There is no INDIA alliance platform.)

Given the right-wing record of INDIA's constituent parties it would not be surprising if these appeals fail to gain popular traction.

They are in fact entirely fraudulent and manifestly so. Take the Congress Party manifesto. It couples pledges to end the contracting out of jobs in the public sector and at government-owned enterprises (PSUs), rescind the BJP's right-wing labor "reform," and ensure farmers obtain a minimum support price for their crops with a series of promises aimed at securing big business support. These include restoring "a healthy, fearless and trustworthy climate" for business by eliminating excessive BJP "controls"; raising military spending; and ending Modi's supposed policy of ceding to Chinese pressure along their disputed border.

No less phony is the INDIA alliance's claims to defend secularism. The Congress Party has adapted to and connived with the Hindu right for decades, leading even a section of the media to dub its policies as "Hindutva-lite." But it is the presence of the Shiv Sena (UBT), a fascistic, avowedly pro-*Hindutva*-ite and erstwhile BJP ally, among the core group of parties that founded and led the INDIA alliance that most succinctly puts the lie to its claims to be a "secular" bulwark.

The Stalinist CPM and CPI, along with the Maoist Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, play the key role in the attempt to give the reactionary INDIA alliance a "progressive" face. For decades, the Stalinists and their Left Front have suppressed the class struggle and harnessed the working class to the big business Congress Party and a host of right-wing caste-ist and ethno-communal parties. The result is that the BJP and its Hindu fascist allies are stronger than ever.

Under conditions of global capitalist crisis, the only viable strategy to defend the democratic rights of working people is one based on the class struggle and Trotsky's strategy and program of permanent revolution. Indian workers must unite their struggles and, in opposition to all the political representatives of the bourgeoisie, rally the rural toilers behind them in the fight for a workers government and the socialist reorganization of the Indian and world economy in conjunction with workers around the world.



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