

Voice of the Radical Left

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ON 22ND AND 23RD APRIL 2012, the Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF) held their first state conference at Sundaraiya Vigyan Bhavan in Hyderabad. It was a remarkable achievement that the organisation could stage the historic conference when its units and constituent forces faced the onslaught of state repression all over the country. The theme of the conference was on the opposing of 'Operation Green Hunt'. This front was formed in May 2005 as a result of the merger of the All-India People's Resistance Forum with the Struggling Forum for People's Resistance. Such a force like RDF has immense significance when the democratic rights of struggling, revolutionary sections are being trampled upon on all spheres of life.

Earlier, a constituent of the Revolutionary Democratic Front, the All-India People's Resistance Forum staged 3 conferences. These took place first in Calcutta in 1994, (a fantastic mobilisation in the rally consisting of over one lakh people) then in Hyderabad in 1997 and finally in Sangrur in 2000. They were historic steps in assembling the struggling revolutionary organisations like the Andhra Pradesh Radical Students' Union and Andhra Pradesh Rytu Collie Sangham or the Mazdoor Kisan Sangrami Parishad and Bharat Naujavan Sabha in Bihar etc. They also gave solidarity to the nationality struggles, democratic rights of minorities and the anti-imperialist mass movements. The author cannot forget the 1992 rally in Calcutta attended by 10 lakh peasants resembling a storm thundering literally lighting a red flame.

Sadly since its formation massive repression has been launched on the Revolutionary Democratic Front. In West Bengal 2 of their office bearers have been arrested and in Jharkhand open rallies are virtually prohibited. They are simply dubbed as 'Maoist' outfits and their revolutionary democratic identity is virtually erased. The RDF has units in Punjab, Uttarakhand, Delhi, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar. However it has still been unable to form effective functioning units, becoming consistent victims of state repression. In Orissa it was banned even before officially forming an organisation, while in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana or Maharashtra they have stray contacts but no proper organisation. In recent years the RDF carried out a huge range of programmes covering every sphere of struggle. They fought for the release of political prisoners, defended struggles of nationalities, opposed repression on minorities, gave solidarity to peasant movements in Lalgarh and Dandakaranya. It is a tribute to the organisation that withstanding the repression they held conferences in Punjab in 2007 and 2011, in Bihar and Jharkhand in 2009 and in Uttarakhand in 2010. One of the most significant solidarity movements was that of opposing the death sentence on the Bihar peasants in 2004. Thousands of mass activists from around the struggling areas were even prevented from participating in the conference and in Chattisgarh 35 activists were arrested on the way to the venue.

After 2006 there were great efforts to curtail the movements of the RDF. The most important struggles which the RDF launched independently were for the unconditional release of political prisoners from 2-8, 2006, against Salwa Judum in Chattisgarh from 19-25 January in 2006, forming the Campaign Committee for the release of political prisoners in April 2006, a bandh call in Orrisa, Jharkhand and Bihar on 14th October 2006 against the arrest of leader Sheela Devi, an all-India conference on March 23rd 2007 opposing displacement on Bhagat Singh's martyrdom day. With other organisations RDF under the banner of CATAS launched a campaign from 10 August to November 10 against Salwa Judum in 14 states with a culmination convention in Delhi on 9-10 November with a public rally organised and a memorandum given. RDF endorsed several anti-war fronts and promoted a series of joint forums condemning the killing of Azad and opposing Operation Green Hunt. Against Nandigram and Singur RDF joined a series of Dharnas. It also sent civil liberties activists to visit places of State repression. Sadly the level of open struggles like the erstwhile organisations like the All-India People's Resistance Forum was absent.

The historic first conference of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF) went underway on 22 April 2012 in the Sundarayya Vignana Bhavan in Hyderabad with the hoisting of the RDF flag by Goru Madhav Rao, the veteran fighter of the Srikakulam armed people's uprising and the founding president of All India People's Resistance Forum (AIPRF). The red flag was hoisted with slogans hailing the ongoing revolutionary movement and condemning the Indian state's repressive class violence in the form of Operation Green Hunt and now Operation Haka and Operation Vijay. In the inaugural session, B S Raju, the Secretary of the Reception Committee of the Conference welcomed the delegates and participants, and declared that the RDF stands resolutely in favour of a democratic and separate Telangana state. M T Khan, chairperson of the Reception Committee, condemned the Chhattisgarh government for preventing the 34-member team of delegates from that state coming to attend the conference.

Professor Jagmohan, noted democratic rights activist and the nephew of shaheed Bhagat Singh, inaugurated the 40th issue of *Samkaleen Jan Pratirodh*, the magazine of RDF, dedicating it to the people of India and the Indian revolutionary struggle. Pankaj Dutt, the renowned people's intellectual and academic presented the Keynote address on economic crisis and possibility of revolutionary upsurge in the country. He analysed the confluence of imperialism and feudalism in a semi-feudal and semi-colonial reality like India, which then generates what is usually understood as 'growth' and 'development' which is so disastrous for the vast masses of the country. Arun Ferraira, the civil rights activist who has recently been released after years of incarceration in Nagpur jail for allegedly being a Maoist, unveiled the collected writings of Anuradha Ghandy titled *Scripting the Change*.

One of the main speakers of the conference, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, the Chairperson of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, Jammu and Kashmir, was welcomed by GN Saibaba, the Deputy Secretary of RDF. Syed Ali Shah Geelani in his speech, addressed the audience as his own brothers and sisters, and said that he respects the dedication and commitment of the revolutionaries carrying forward the Indian revolutionary movement. He complemented RDF for

raising the voice against the Indian state, against oppression, exploitation and injustice. Geelani said that he belongs to a place which is being oppressed by the Indian state through sheer military might. He declared that the Kashmiris are not fighting against the people of India, and in fact they have good wishes for the Indian people. He stated that once India was freed from British colonialism, the rulers of India should not have treated other oppressed peoples and nationalities as slaves.

A Bhumaiah of the Telangana Praja Front (TPF) said in his speech that Hyderabad where this conference was taking place, is a part of Telangana. RDF has already recognised Hyderabad as a part of Telangana region. For recognition from the Indian government the Telangana struggle will have to be intensified. He thanked RDF for taking the cause of separate Telangana to various parts of the country and mobilising public opinion in its favour in the subcontinent.

Varavara Rao, revolutionary poet and Virasam member, told the audience that 1970's was a period of division in the revolutionary movement in India, while from 80's efforts were made for consolidation and 1990s onwards was a period of unity. In 2003-04, when the merger of CPI(ML) PW and MCC resulted in the formation of the unified Maoist party, it gave a new energy and thrust to the Naxalite movement. He stated that huge mass movements need to be created and political work among the people has to be intensified for transformative politics to take advantage of neo-liberalism. He appealed to everyone to strengthen this struggle.

Shoma Sen of Committee Against Violence on Women (CAVOW) explained the essence of the Maoist slogan 'women hold up half the sky'. When companies are closed, it is the women who suffer the most. In times like today with inflation and price rise, the task of managing household and the families is taken up by women.

Professor Anand Teltumbde, noted civil rights activist, emphasised the need for the Dalit and revolutionary movement to come together to annihilate caste and to complete the democratic revolution in the country. He was critical of CPI and CPI(M) as well as identity-based parliamentary Dalit political formations, and urged social activists to carry forward the class struggle by the participation of Dalits and other oppressed masses. He said that Dr Ambedkar too believed in class-based politics, and therefore the need of the hour is to reinvent Dalit militancy as well as revolutionary resurgence under Maoist leadership.

G Kalyana Rao, the noted revolutionary Telugu author, released a compact disk of Jana Natya Mandali songs on the martyrs of the Maoist party. Kalyana Rao stated that revolutionary culture is the expression of the oppressed, and this culture articulates the blood and sweat of the wretched of the earth, presented in the form of songs, dance, plays and other popular forms, and thereby carry forward the message of class struggle.

Many speakers such as Lenin Kumar, editor of Odiya cultural magazine *Nishar*, Jharkhand's Sharmila of Nari Mukti Sangh, and others addressed the delegates of the conference on its first day. Sharmila noted the role of revolutionary culture as an integral and organic part of the lives of the Adivasis, which has traditionally upheld the principles of collective life and production. It

is this voice of revolutionary culture and resistance that the ruling elites are trying to crush, by perpetrating violence and class hatred.

Fraternal organisations and people's movements sent their solidarity messages to the RDF Conference. National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) sent the good wishes and political solidarity from the national liberation struggle of the Naga people.

Along with speeches and messages, cultural troops from Jharkhand, Delhi, Telangana and Punjab performed revolutionary songs and dance.

The first RDF conference strongly and unequivocally condemned the fascist Chattisgarh government for preventing the 34-member team of delegates from that state coming to attend the conference, and demanded their immediate release. In addition, RDF also condemned the Andhra Pradesh government for cancelling the permission to the RDF mass rally scheduled for 23 April 2012.

The meeting unanimously elected a body with Varavara Rao as President. An 18-member team has been formed under his leadership to formulate strategies and future course of action. Ganti Prasadam was elected as vice-President while Saibaba and Jiten Marandi will be General Secretaries. □□□