

frontier

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On Other Pages

Comment	2
Note	3
TRICOLOUR AT EVERY HOME Hypocrisy of RSS Shamsul Islam	4
BETRAYAL BY THE CENTRE Farmers are back on the Streets Rajeev Khanna	6
REVIEW Paradise Lost S M	8
TRAILOKYANATH CHAKRABORTY 30 Years in Jail Harshavardhan Prabal Saran Agarwal	11
FREEDOM OF PRESS NDTV: a 'Hostile Takeover'? Pallavi Pundir	13
Letters	14

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Labour Conference sans Labour

THE MODI GOVERNMENT HAS VIRTUALLY DESTROYED YET another institution—Indian Labour Conference (ILC)—a tripartite mechanism developed over the years as per the guidelines of International Labour Organisation (ILO). The two-day 'National Labour Conference' inaugurated by Prime Minister Modi in the last week of August in Tirupati, was organised by the Union Labour Ministry to discuss the four contentious labour codes with state labour ministers and officials but central trade unions representing workers and employees were not invited. According to ILO convention labour issues have to be discussed in tripartite forums involving employers, employees and the government. The labour ministry had been holding an event called Indian Labour Conference every year without any break till 2015. For the last seven years the Conference has not been held, for reasons best known to the persons in authority. For one thing the industrialists and employers never really implemented the recommendations of 2015 ILC. Nor did the Centre, even during the Congress rule, ever tried to force the employers to honour the ILC norms in any sector of industry. And now the out and out pro-corporate dispensation of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is all set to kill the tripartite process in labour management while undermining the Constitution. They have been systematically crippling the Constitution to pave the way for authoritarianism. Their activities mock at the basics of democracy—they are ruining democratic institutions built through struggles in the yester years at a very rapid pace to make India a haven for the corporates.

All central trade unions opposed the Centre's move to replace Indian Labour Conference with what they call 'National Labour Conference', bypassing labour, the main stakeholder in this all important exercise. Surprisingly, Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh (BMS), the trade union wing of BJP vehemently criticised the government's attempt to abolish ILC. The BMS said in a resolution that "the National Labour Conference attended by only the representatives of government of both Centre and states, is the first deviation in history of labour in India since Dr Ambedkar established the tripartite culture". The CPM-controlled Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) said the much publicised Tirupati Conference could in no way be called a National Labour Conference as workers' unions were not there. The Congress- led INTUC demanded that the Indian Labour Conference be immediately convened. The oldest central trade union—CPI-controlled All

India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)—said and quite justifiably that the four labour codes that they discussed at the meet would impose a new form of slavery on workers, particularly on the unorganised, contractual and out-sourced workers who constitute more than 90 percent of the Indian workforce.

The notorious labour codes have subsumed 29 labour laws in the country. The rules have not yet been notified. The participants in the conference actually deliberated on how to finalise the rules that would further curtail labour rights. The four labour codes—the wage code, the industrial relations code, the social security code, the occupational safety, health and working conditions code—are designed in a way to take away whatever minimum democratic space workers enjoy in industrial relations. Now it will be too difficult for trade

union activists to unionise workers.

For the last several years, excluding the corona period, trade unions failed to combat the combined government-corporate onslaught. Automation, rather continuing up-gradation of technology has made industry less and less labour intensive. Machine is the main reason for dwindling job market. Even unionised workers in organised sector, not to speak of unionless unorganised sector, face a tough time to bargain with their employers. It was not really the situation in the '50s and '60s when labourers asserted themselves militantly. Labour power in those days really mattered a lot in national politics. It's no more. After the 4th industrial revolution and massive digitisation of manufacturing process TU leadership in general, irrespective of colour and flag, is in a bind as they don't know how to

cope with the emerging industrial scenario. They still depend on old slogans; many of them have outlived themselves long ago. Workers are not rallying even behind left forces because they too are wandering in wilderness, busy to maintain the status quo.

Sporadic industrial strikes that erupt in the West are not that powerful enough as they were even a decade ago, to force the corporates and governments to come to honourable settlements. All are trying to save whatever jobs they get, even by accepting wage cut. For the employers labour is the only area to minimise production cost and maximise profits. A gloomy picture lies ahead for workers and their representatives as the government simply ignores them to decide their fate.

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COMMENT

77 Years On

THE ATOMIC BOMBINGS OF Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 77 years ago, marked the crucial turning point in the history of the 20th century. By the end of World War II, Europe, the Soviet Union and the Japanese Empire lay in ruins, and the United States was in a position of unprecedented power with sole possession of the Bomb.

There is broad consensus among serious historians that the atomic bombings were not necessary to end the war with Japan. By 1945 Japan was a destroyed and starving nation desperately seeking a negotiated surrender and the Soviet Union was preparing to enter the Pacific war in early August, eliminating the need for an invasion of the Japanese mainland. For the Truman administration, the use of the Bomb served two purposes: a demonstration of

the terrible power of the split atom to be held against the entire world, and a means to deny the Soviet Union a major role in the post-war settlement.

Its strategy has been and continues to be to threaten use of nuclear weapons to advance US interests and, if deemed necessary, to launch a first strike. "US nuclear strategy maintains military strength sufficient... to provide a war-fighting capability to respond to a wide range of conflict in order to control escalation and terminate the war on terms acceptable to the United States."

Following Hiroshima and Nagasaki, US nuclear policy continued to be first strike, at least up to the signing of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF) treaties

which, for the first time, actually raised the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons. The ABM and INF treaties were, arguably, the most important arms control treaties because they both raised the threshold to nuclear war and, at that time, marked the beginning of a tentative retreat from a first-strike strategy. It is no coincidence that both of these nuclear risk-reducing treaties have been abrogated by the US in its pursuit of global hegemony in the face of a rapidly emerging multipolar world.

Why Hiroshima and Nagasaki Matter Today? Although the number of nuclear weapons has been reduced to about 13,000, today's weapons are vastly more accurate, sophisticated and usable. Scientists estimate that even a tiny fraction of these weapons, as few as a hundred, if detonated against cities would result in a global nuclear winter and countless deaths.

Currently, the Bulletin of the

Atomic Scientists' Doomsday Clock is set to 100 seconds to midnight, the closest ever. This is in part due to the existential threat posed by climate change, but also to the current radically lowered threshold to nuclear war posed by a range of factors including the US-Russia proxy war in Ukraine, rapidly deteriorating US-China relations, the emergence of a multi-polar global economy rapidly replacing US hegemony, the end of the era of plentiful and cheap fossil fuels and other critical resources, and the absence of the ABM and INF treaties. In the words of UN Secretary-General António Guterres, speaking during opening ceremonies of the 2022 NPT Review Conference,

"Today, humanity is just one misunderstanding, one miscalculation away from nuclear annihilation."

Nuclear war is more likely because of military interventions caused by increased regional resource wars

and conflicts such as the current conflict in Ukraine. As resources dwindle, one can expect to see more and more regional conflicts, any one of which can quickly devolve into nuclear war. With the two most important nuclear weapons treaties gone, and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), currently under review, there is little to prevent a regional conflict from "going nuclear."

Absence of the ABM or INF treaties, and NATO expansion up to Russia's borders leaves US/NATO and Russia face to face, each side with nuclear weapons poised to launch on warning. If either side felt threatened enough to launch a nuclear missile, the warning time would be about five minutes. Russia considers this situation to be existential to its survival and has made this "Red Line" clear for the past 30 years, including under Yeltsin. □□□

[Contributed]

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NOTE

Indian Constitution or Manusmriti?

Ram Puniyani writes:

INDIA HAS A POLITICAL SYSTEM where the executive makes the laws, rules the country. There is judiciary to ensure that the executive walks the path of Indian Constitution. Judiciary's major commitment is to Indian Constitution and has to protect the values of the same. Currently there are criticisms that judiciary seems to be working under the pressure of the executive. To cap it all; one of the judges in a recent statement stated something which is totally contrary to the values of Indian Constitution.

Judge Pratibha Singh as per Bar and Bench is reported to have said that "I really think we are a blessed lot of women in India and the reason for that is our scriptures have

always given a very respectable position for women and as Manusmriti itself says that if you don't respect and honor women, all the pooja path that you may do has no meaning. So I think our ancestors and Vedic scriptures knew very well how to respect women,"

It is true that Manusmriti does say "yat naryasto pojyantay, ramantay tatr devta [3/56] (where women are provided place of honour, gods are pleased and reside there in that household). But that does not reflect the position of women in society given by this holy book. This Holy Scripture is also called Manav Dharma Shastra and is upheld by the ideologues of Hindu nationalism, from Savarkar to Golwalkar.

Sadly its provisions are patriarchal to the core and give very low status to the women. These quotes from the said book in a way sum up the social place of women, "Even in her own home, a female – whether she is a child, a young woman or an old lady – should never carry out any task independently. As a child, she must remain under her father's control, as a young woman, under her husband's; and when her husband is dead, under her sons," it says in chapter 5, shlokas 148 and 149. And "Though he may be bereft of virtue, given to lust, and totally devoid of good qualities, a good woman should always worship her husband like a god,"

Also the deeper connection of caste and gender is ordained by this book, "The Manusmriti lays down the law that a woman who makes love to a man of a higher caste incurs no punishment; a woman

who makes love to man of a 'lower caste' than hers' must be isolated and kept in confinement. If a man from a subordinate caste makes love to a woman of the highest caste, he just is put to death."

It's not only caste-Varna hierarchy which this book proclaims. It is a total embodiment of the hierarchical values which Brahmanism upholds. There are claims that it is a revealed book and henceforth cannot be challenged. It was written between 170 BCE to 150 BCE. This is a period parallel to the attack on Buddhism/Buddhists by the Brahmanical King Pushyamitra Shung. (Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches Vol 3, page 270-271). This book traces Varna System to its divine origin.

As Buddhism, which articulated

values of equality; was attacked and finished off in India these laws prevailed in the society, till long. It is only during colonial period, when the modern education was introduced and social reforms were conceptualised that Savitribai Phule started the schools for girls and that in a real sense is the beginning of social struggle for women's equality. She had Fatima Sheikh as the teacher in her school. Savitribai Phule faced the attacks of conservatives, those upholding Manusmriti. She was opposed to the extent of being subjected to mud and cow dung being thrown on her as she used to go to the school. Later one sees the likes of Pandita Ramabai and Anandi Gopal, defying social norms and taboos to come up in the society and contribute to process of gender equality.

Indian Constitution reflects the values of Indian Freedom movement; where struggles for social justice ran parallel and were also part of the national movement. There is a long list of women who were part of National movement, Sarojini Naidu and Aruna Asaf Ali, Madam Bhikaji Kama, Usha Mehta being just few from the long list which broke the shackles of patriarchy and became the leading lights of struggle for Independence.

India has been in the grip of caste and gender hierarchy from centuries. Overcoming this is a real long struggle for which currently many women's group are dedicatedly struggling against the atrocities against women due to secondary position being given to them.

□□□

TRICOLOUR AT EVERY HOME

Hypocrisy of RSS

Shamsul Islam

UNDER THE "HAR GHAR Tiranga" [Tricolour at Every Home] campaign the Centre facilitated hoisting of the Tricolour at 24 crore homes across the country from August 13 to 15 as part of the celebration of the 75th year of India's independence. Even PM Modi who long back identified himself as a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and a Hindu nationalist (Hindu nationalists are committed to replace the Tricolour with the saffron flag) changed his social media profile picture to 'Tricolour'.

Even a chameleon would look like a minion in face of Hindutva rulers' change of colour regarding the National Flag. To get familiar with the criminal hypocrisy of the RSS one has just to access the archives of RSS and Hindu Mahasabha led by RSS 'Veer', V D Savarkar.

The RSS since its inception in 1925 has been opposed to the Tricolour as the Indian national flag. In order to be familiar with the boundless dislike that the Hindutva fraternity has had towards the national flag, one has just to access the archives of the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha led by V D Savarkar.

The RSS hated anything which symbolised the united struggle of the Indian people against British rule. The case of the Tricolour is the most pertinent one. In December 1929, the Congress, at its Lahore session, called upon the people to observe January 26, every following year, as Independence Day by displaying and saluting the Tricolour (it was the flag of the national movement at that time with the charkha in the middle). When January 26, 1930 was approaching, K B Hedgewar, as

Sarsanghchalak and founder-Supremo of the RSS, instead issued a circular on January 21, 1930 to all RSS shakhas to worship the bhagwa jhanda (saffron flag) as the national flag.

Violating the national consensus, the circular asked all in charge of the Shakhas to hold a meeting of their respective swayamsevaks at 6 p.m. on Sunday, January 26, 1930, at the respective sanghasthans (places where shakhas are held) and offer "salutation to the National Flag, i.e., the Bhagwa Dhawaj."

[Palkar, NH (ed.), Dr. Hedgewar: patr-roop Veyakti Darshan (Hindi translation of Hedgewar's letters), Archana Prakashan, Indore, 1981, p. 18.]

It must be noted that this circular has never been withdrawn.

M S Golwalkar, one of the most prominent ideologues of the RSS and top leaders while addressing a Gurupurnima gathering at the headquarters of the RSS in Nagpur on July 14, 1946, stated: "It was the saffron flag which in totality repre-

sented Bhartiya [Indian] culture. It was the embodiment of God. We firmly believe that in the end the whole nation will bow before this saffron flag.”

(Golwalkar, MS, Shri Guruji Samagr Darshan, vol. i, Bhartiye Vichar Sadhna, Nagpur, nd, p.98.)

On the eve of Independence when the ramparts of Red Fort were being readied for the hoisting of the Tricolour by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, the common man was marching with the Tricolour in every part of India and hoisting the National Flag on house tops. But, shockingly, the English organ of the RSS, Organiser, in its issue dated August 14, 1947, denigrated the National Flag [the ‘mystery behind the bhagwa dhawaj’] with the following words: “The people who have come to power by the kick of fate may give in our hands the Tricolour but it will never be respected and owned by Hindus. The word three is in itself an evil, and a flag having three colours will certainly produce a very bad psychological effect and is injurious to a country.”

So according to the RSS Indian National Flag was never to be respected by Hindus. It was a bad omen and injurious for the country.

The Organiser, in an editorial (‘The Nation’s Flag’ July 17, 1947), reacting to the news that the committee of the Constituent Assembly of India on the National Flag had decided in favour of the Tricolour as the National Flag, wrote: “We do not at all agree that the Flag ‘should be acceptable to all parties and communities in India’. This is sheer nonsense. The Flag represents the nation and there is only one nation in Hindusthan, the Hindu Nation... We cannot possibly choose a flag with a view to satisfy the desires and wishes of all the communities... We cannot order the choice of a flag as we order a tailor to make a shirt or coat for us...”

So, this was the view on the design of the Tricolour which represented the three colours symbolising freedom, equality and fraternity.

Even after Independence, it was the RSS which refused to accept the Tricolour as the National Flag. Golwalkar, while denouncing the choice of the Tricolour as the National Flag, in an essay entitled ‘Drifting and Drifting’ in the book, Bunch of Thoughts (collection of writings/speeches of Golwalkar), wrote: “Our leaders have set up a new flag for our country. Why did they do so? It is just a case of drifting and imitating... Ours is an ancient and great nation with a glorious past. Then, had we no flag of our own? Had we no national emblem at all these thousands of years? Undoubtedly we had. Then why this utter void, this utter vacuum in our minds?”

(Golwalkar, M S, Bunch of Thoughts, Sahitya Sindhu Prakashan, Bangalore, 1966, pp. 237-38.)

Shockingly, RSS chief was comparing design of the Tricolour which represented three colours symbolising, freedom, equality and fraternity with the stitching of a shirt or coat by a tailor! It was height of shamelessness, worst kind of denigration of the National Flag carrying which thousands of patriotic Indians had sacrificed their lives.

Savarkar too refused to accept the Tricolour as the national flag. Demanding its boycott, he declared in a statement on September 22, 1941: “So far as the flag question is concerned, the Hindus know no flag representing Hindudom as a whole than the ‘Kundalini Kripanankit’ Mahasabha flag with the ‘Om and the Swastik’ the most ancient symbols of the Hindu race and policy coming down from age to age and honoured throughout Hindusthan... Therefore, any place or function where this Pan-Hindu flag is not honoured should be boycotted by

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the Hindusanghathanists [members of the Hindu Mahasabha] at any rate...The Charkha-Flag in particular may very well represent a Khadi-Bhandar, but the Charkha can never symbolise and represent the spirit of the proud and ancient nation like the Hindus.”

(Bhide, A.S. (ed.), Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's Whirlwind Propaganda: Extracts from the President's Diary of his Propagandist Tours Interviews from December 1937 to October 1941, na, Bombay pp. 469, 473.)

Well-known socialist leader and a leading freedom fighter, N G Goray was witness to a shocking incident in 1938 when the Hindutva cadres tore up the Tricolour and physically attacked the renowned freedom fight-

ers. He squarely held Savarkar and Hedgewar responsible for it. According to Goray: “Who attacked the May Day procession? Who assaulted men like Senapati Bapat and [Gajanan] Kanitkar? Who tore up the national flag? The Hindu Mahasabhaites and the Hedgewar boys did it all...They have been taught to hate the Muslims in general as Public Enemy Number 1, to hate the Congress and its flag... They have their own flag, ‘the Bhagwa’, the symbol of Maratha Supremacy.” [Congress Socialist, 14 May 1938.]

The campaign by the government of the day, i.e. “Har Ghar Tiranga”, could have had credibility had the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government been able to con-

vince the RSS to discard its agenda of denigrating the Tricolour and its project of replacing the Tricolour with a saffron flag. For one thing the saffron flag is part of a larger project of diluting the democratic-secular polity of India.

The patriotic Indians must demand public apology from the BJP rulers as they claim to be members of the RSS for this persistent denigration of the Tricolour. This anti-national lot must not be allowed to use National Flag to cover-up their anti-people and anti-national agenda. (The RSS and Hindu Mahasabha sources quoted in this article are from their publications.)

□□□

[Shamsul Islam taught Political Science at the University of Delhi]

BETRAYAL BY THE CENTRE

Farmers are back on the Streets

Rajeev Khanna

FARMERS ARE AGAIN MOVING into the protest space. With new dimensions being added to their earlier movement. One is the larger programme being led by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), which is the umbrella organisation that had led the farmers' movement last year that saw the centre withdrawing the three controversial farm laws last year that were passed by the Parliament in 2020. Second is the agitation taking place at the state and district levels that are being organised by various groups on local and regional issues.

The Agnipath scheme and the contentious Electricity (Amendment) Bill-2022 have added to the pent up anger on the minimum support price (MSP).

Farmers along with the trade unions of electricity department engineers and employees registered their opposition across Haryana, Punjab

and various other places by burning copies of the electricity bill.

The SKM had stated earlier that the withdrawal of this Bill was one of the main demands of the year-long farmers' struggle. On December 9, 2021, the union government had given a letter to the SKM, which stated as follows, ‘On the provisions in the Electricity Bill which affect farmers, there will first be a discussion with all stakeholders/SKM. Only after the discussion with the Morcha will the Bill be placed before the Parliament.’

The farmer leaders maintained that no such discussion has taken place in the last eight months. “This is therefore, a stark betrayal of the union government's own written assurances,” the farmers conglomerate stated.

The SKM said the Bill aims to ensure entry of private companies in the power distribution sector. “This will give them enormous profits by

hiking power rates for farmers, and for all other sections of the people in our country. Cross subsidy will be ended. Free or cheap electricity to farmers will end. The cost of production for farmers will further rise. Domestic rates of power in both rural and urban areas will rise tremendously. The jobs of electricity department employees and engineers will be adversely affected,” the farmers' statement read.

“It is a move of deceptive orientation with tools like direct benefit transfer (DBT). It is the creation of an illusion to trap people like they did in the case of LPG subsidy. There is a federal element involved as power is in the concurrent list and states cannot be ignored. The other two stakeholders besides the state governments are consumers and employees. The burning of the copies of the Bill was the first protest action on the issue,” said Inderjeet, who is an All India Kisan Sabha leader from Haryana.

On the broader national level, the SKM has come out with a road map of protests and demonstrations

September 11-17, 2022

FRONTIER

7

on Agnipath and other pending issues.

The farmers along with ex-servicemen and youth have joined hands to start a sustained campaign against the 'disastrous' Agnipath scheme. The SKM along with United Front of Ex-Servicemen that has completed 2600 days of continuous struggle for One-Rank One-Pension and various youth organisations protesting against the Agnipath scheme in particular and unemployment in general have started a series of Jai Jawan Jai Kisan meetings at selected places.

Those attending the event pledged to take this campaign to every village across the nation.

A Jai Jawan Jai Kisan Rally was also held at Kolkata. Similar rallies were also held at Muzaffarnagar and Mathura in UP.

According to SKM leaders, "This campaign aims to educate the public about the disastrous consequences of the controversial Agnipath scheme and compel the central government, by using democratic, peaceful and constitutional means, to roll back the scheme. If the farm laws were dire, the Agnipath scheme is disastrous. With our kisans and jawans in distress, the very backbone of our nation is in the danger of breaking. Our silence cannot be the reason for the government to bulldoze and destroy the protectors and feeders of the nation. We have stopped them once, we can stop them again."

It is being demanded that the Agnipath scheme be rolled back instantly and all the notifications issued under it must be withdrawn. The time-tested method of regular, permanent recruitment must continue.

"The pending vacancies (about 1.25 lakhs) and the current year vacancies (about 60,000) should be filled immediately following the pre-existing method of regular and permanent recruitment. The recruitment

process already initiated must be completed with age-relaxation of two years in lieu of non-recruitment for the last two years," said the SKM leaders and leaders of Ex-servicemen.

It is also sought that all cases against anti-Agnipath protestors must be withdrawn and the arrested youth must be released forthwith. The leadership organising the meetings and rallies has underlined, "There should be no privatisation in the defence sector; the government must accept its responsibility for national security and protection of the honour and morale of armed forces."

Earlier on July 31, the farmers had marked the martyrdom day of the famous revolutionary Udhham Singh by organising protest demonstrations and traffic blockades against the 'betrayal' of the government on the issue of MSP and other issues. Demonstrations were reported from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Tripura, among other states.

The farmers have been saying, "The union government has not fulfilled any of the promises made to the SKM in its letter dated December 9, 2021, on the basis of which the farm movement was suspended. The Government is still not ready to discuss the legal guarantee for MSP. Nor have the false cases registered against the farmers been withdrawn. Ajay Mishra Teni remains in the union council of ministers even today."

The other demands of the farmers include removal of the penal provisions on farmers in the 'Commission for Air Quality Management in the National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Act 2021', withdrawal of 'false' cases registered against the farmers over the course of the movement, dismissal and ar-

rest of Teni and compensation and rehabilitation to the families of the martyrs of the farm movement along with allocation of land to build a memorial in their memory at Singhu Morcha.

The issue of MSP along with ensuring a foolproof marketing system for alternative crops was taken up by the Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann at the national council meeting of Niti Aayog chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on August 7.

Mann recalled that at the time when the country was starving for food, the hard working and resilient farmers of his state had made the country self-reliant in food production. He said that agriculture is no longer a profitable venture and the farmers are facing a serious crisis from which they need to be bailed out. Underscoring the need for making MSP on the crops a legal guarantee, he said the MSP must be remunerative as the input costs of agriculture have enhanced manifolds and farmers are not getting the right price of their harvest.

Coming back to the unrest in the rural domain, Kanwaljit Khanna who

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has been instrumental in organising the farmers in Punjab said, "It is not the farmers but the government that is erecting one problem after the other. The farmers are left with no choice but to react to these issues that keep cropping up.

While the old problems remain unresolved there are new ones like the outbreak of lumpy skin disease among the cattle that crop up and for which the government is yet to do something to address the concerns of the farmers. The farmers now feel the need to jointly take up all the issues whether it is the Agnipath, the MSP, The Electricity (Amendment) Bill or Lakhimpur Kheri."

He further said, "The protests will gather pace and eventually convert into a larger movement. Even those leaders keeping aloof as of now will be compelled by their own cadres to join the movement once things get going. The people know that a daylong protest or a few hours of traffic blockade make no difference to the government. It reacts only when there is a long term agitation. The people are left with no option as it has gone back on promises."

He said the rural distress is clearly getting reflected in the protests dotting the rural landscape across the states.

Inderjeet explained that things cannot be looked at in isolation.

"The peasantry sends maximum youth to the armed forces. Hence, Agnipath is closely linked to it. The job scenario is so dismal that a large number of youth has simply stopped looking for jobs and has given up hope. The disappointment and desperation among the youth has the potential to take them towards drugs which is no longer the menace in Punjab alone. This in turn leads to crime. Just look at the Sidhu Moosewala assassination case. Most of the accused were youth from Haryana," he maintained.

His point of view was further echoed by Sanjay Chauhan who is the co-convener of the Sanyukta Kisan Manch that is spearheading an agitation of fruit growers in Himachal Pradesh.

"The situation that is emerging is very dangerous. Agriculture is yielding below subsistence returns and the people are compelled to take up odd jobs under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) or work in hotels or take to driving taxis etc. The increasing stress among horticulturists and those growing cash crops because of spiralling input costs and there being no market sustainability has made things worse further.

"Take for example the crisis of tomato farmers. The farmer is not getting more than Rs 5 per kg while

the consumers continue to shell up to Rs 30 to Rs 40 for it. This is a dangerous phenomenon that has come up in cash crops."

He further explained that the Agnipath scheme has caused a lot of anger among the people. "All jobs have become casual and there is no industry in Himachal Pradesh to address the employment concerns of the youth. There is a major deep rooted crisis confronting the people of the state," he said.

Besides there are several local concerns for which farmers are agitating at various levels. There have been protests in places like Adampur and Khedi Chopta in Hisar and Narwana. These agitations were marked by farmers laying siege to government offices on issues of compensation for damaged crops. Sources say these protests have seen farmers camping for one and a half to almost three months.

Similarly, in Jalandhar in Punjab, organisations including the Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union, Pendu Mazdoor Union and Punjab Khet Mazdoor Sabha staged a sit-in demanding that employment wages of landless labourers be fixed at Rs 700 per day even for MNREGA jobs. They also demanded that a third of Panchayat lands be given to Dalits. Their other demands include a complete loan waiver along with residential plots of land. □□□

REVIEW

*Paradise Lost

S M

THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT is riddled with a plethora of problems; it has become a killing field during the last couple of years. The affairs of Kashmir had attracted many persons to write about the maladies confronting Kashmiri citizens, but an ac-

count from the viewpoint of ordinary Kashmiri citizens are very few.

Siddhartha Guha Ray is not only a trained Historian of repute, but also an active participant of Human Rights movement in the country. This dual role enabled him to look at the "Kashmir problem" from a

perspective that offers the readers a fresh and thought-provoking *book [Paradise Lost--A Contemporary History of Kashmir (1947--2020), by Siddhartha Guha Ray, Setu Prakashani, Price Rs 500,1st edition, January,2022]. This monograph covers a bigger canvas, refreshing the memory about the events in Kashmir till the beginning of 2020.

Guha Ray begins by informing his readers that "Since the end of the colonial rule and birth of two

independent countries—India and Pakistan—in 1947, both the countries have been using Kashmir as a pawn to fulfil their narrow national interests. This attitude has proven to be detrimental to the interests of the people of Kashmir. The hopes and aspirations of the people of the Valley have been trodden upon time and again, their basic rights marred by faulty policies and highhandedness of the state.” This quote does not appear to be just an assertion on the part of the author, which he very carefully and meticulously established, blow by blow, from the events as far back as August to early October, 1947, then the Instrument of Accession (October, 26, 1947) of the Independent Entity (Kashmir) to India, which, Guha Ray described as “... pinned as the starting point of the current crisis”.

RSS was active from the very beginning in this region that occupied a very strategic geographical location in this subcontinent and started engineering the critical situation by employing its most potent arm in its arsenal—the communal riot. The major communal riot took place against the Muslim population of Jammu by these outfits and in connivance with the “law-enforcers” of Maharaja. Rigging an election, constitutional manipulations, Article 370 and its eventual liquidation, all these events are analysed through the lens of a keen observer of human rights activist.

According to Guha Ray, “The real trouble in the Valley began in the late 1980s and the 1990s, when Kashmiri youths took up arms to protest against India’s misrule.” Instead of offering a linear, simplified narrative of a very involved problem having many dimensions, Guha Ray delved deep into to reach the epicentre directly, when he did not ignore the externalities involved in this scenario. He says, squarely, “An

unfortunate development in the entire episode was the emergence of Pakistan sponsored militants in the Valley which weakened the movement for Azadi. Kashmir was converted into a ground for proxy war between India and Pakistan.” In ten chapters of the book, Guha Ray reconstructed a long tale, bringing in the first place, an up to date description of the events till August 5, 2019, when the Article 370 was finally scrapped, but also offers a through analysis of the events unfolding a complex history of the region concerned.

There are a number of “allegations” levelled against the human rights activists that they usually remain silent about the mindless killings and gross human rights violations in act or otherwise by the “militants”. Some persons, usually close to mainstream media and status quo are very much vocal against right activists’ “dual standard of sense of judgment”. Guha Ray stands out in this score too. He declared, “... I must admit that human rights violations by the armed opposition groups, particularly the militant outfits, should never be overlooked nor [be] considered any less severe. Senseless killings by militants in the Valley should also be condemned in strongest and unequivocal terms. Several rights organisations, national or international, rightly condemned violence and killings perpetrated by the militant organisations. Violence and massacre in the Valley carried out by the Indian state machinery appeared gruesome, but irresponsible acts of violence by the pro-Pakistan militant outfits like Hizbul Mujahideen, Laskar-e-Taiba and Harkat-ul-ansar are equally atrocious.” He denounced, in no uncertain terms the senseless acts, like the abductions of respected academician Prof Mushirul Haque, the Vice-Chancellor of Kashmir University and

his secretary Abdul Ghani. The General Manager of HMT Company, Mr H L Khara was also kidnapped by some militant outfit, which was condemned by many belonging to the fold of human rights groups.

One sees the rise of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 1980s, when the Congress Party begins to see the virtue in the “Hinduisation” of Indian politics under the leadership of dethroned Indira Gandhi. She quickly repairs her personal hostile relations with the RSS and a tacit collaboration began between these two parties, true to the older tradition of Congress.

In the 1983 election of Jammu and Kashmir, people witnessed this change of stance by the Congress, then it was known as Congress (I). Congress (I) branded Abdullah’s National Conference Party as “antinational and covertly pro-Pakistan.” Sikh and Muslims were “vilified as ‘unpatriotic’ and ‘secessionist’”. The Golden Temple episode is yet to come. The Emergency-famed Jagmahon dismissed several state Assemblies in Jammu and Kashmir, applying the infamous Article 356, though in the Instruments of Accession it was specifically mentioned that Indian Government cannot apply this power to Jammu and Kashmir.

Protests against the undemocratic and hostile steps adopted by the Indian Government and their representatives in Jammu and Kashmir were gaining momentum day by day. Guha Ray quotes Balraj Puri, “The method of dealing with the agitation on each issue and the force employed for the purpose could have varied according to its nature. Again a distinction could also have been drawn between violent and peaceful as also terrorist and non-terrorist forms of protests. But the uniform and indiscriminate approach and the extent of repression only strength-

ened the existing anti-government anti-India sentiments and enabled the militant elements to identify completely with the non-militant popular unrest." Guha Ray dealt with the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley to Jammu and other places to unravel the behind scene stories of Delhi politics.

The repression of Indian army against innocent Kashmiris beggars description; even the school-going children were not spared by the CRPF persons. School-going children (aged about 11 or 12) were gathered for tuition in their teacher's residence on March 31, 1990, when a group of CRPF Jawans broke open the door of the house and singled out only that child having a Muslim name and shot him dead.

One of the very popular and respected Muslim leader, orthodox and fundamentalist in attitude and practice, yet very critical about militant's senseless violence was purported to be killed by one of the militant outfit in May 1990. There was a big procession with his dead body in Srinagar. Alarmed by such a large gathering and unprepared to content any large scale violence from this gathering, the Indian security forces opened indiscriminate firing against the peaceful mourners, absolutely unprovoked, resulting in a killing by bullet 47 innocent Kashmiri citizens.

Violence always begets violence, so has senseless killings. The blame-game on these occasions abounds and only accelerates further violence. But there are saner voices as well, which Guha Ray reveals with his painstaking research. To quote him on the issue, "Killing and terrorising the pundits in the Valley by the militants was obviously dastardly acts of violence which deserves to be condemned in unequivocal terms. If the Indian security forces were guilty of killing the innocent Muslims in the Valley, the militants also could not be

absolved of the crime of killing innocent Pundits. But one thing must be emphasised that the atrocities on the Pundits in the Valley were heavily publicised and on many occasions the reports and narration on such atrocities and violence came on the threshold of exaggeration. The ruthless ferocity of the Indian security forces, however, did not receive much space in the national press".

Hriday Nath Wangchoo was hailing from a Kashmiri Pandit family who stayed back in Srinagar and became a champion for the cause of human rights of ordinary Kashmiri citizens. December 5, 1992. He was shot by some "miscreants". The security forces immediately orchestrated a campaign that it was done by the militants. But all the militant outfits condemned this act in no uncertain terms, called a *bandh*, which was successful. It was widely believed that BSF personnel were behind this heinous crime.

Things had taken a sinister turn at the turn of the century. Forcing unwilling people to vote, applying indiscriminately the draconian "laws" like POTA, POCA, AFSPA, the Indian security forces played havoc jeopardising the peaceful civilian life throughout the Valley. Guha Ray had documented all such major events, carefully giving his readers the interpretation put forward by both the victims and the victor, very often demolishing the concocted stories handed down by the biased media. A case in point is what had "happened" in Kupwara near the LoC at Machil Sector, where, people were informed by the Indian security forces that they had courageously repulsed an attempt at infiltration by the enemy. Later, it was established beyond any shade of doubt that the entire episode was stage-managed by the Indian security persons as there was no such encounter ever happened there.

The case of Maqbul Bhatt and

later that of Afzal Guru will remain as a big black blotch in the annals of history of Indian judiciary. Guha Ray mentions "On the day of Afzal Guru's execution (9 February, 2013), Srinagar and other major towns of the Valley were barricaded and indefinite curfews were imposed. People remained confined to their homes. Three people lost their lives over clashes with the police and scores received severe injuries. Internet services were partially stalled, and newspapers did not reach the people of the Valley for three days". Killing of Burhan Wani by the Indian security forces on July 8, 2016 gave rise to a wide range of protests where ordinary female folk, even school children took part in large numbers. Within a span of just four months, between July and October, 2016 an unbelievable number of 15000 persons, as reported by the Indian security sources, sustained bullet and pallet injuries, because "they were supporting the militants to vitiate the peaceful life of the ordinary people of the Valley". This was the communiqué of the official sources. But who were those "perpetrators of violence, vitiating the serene tranquillity" of the Valley? A large chunk of injured persons were women, whose age ranged between 50 and 65. The next larger chunk of injured persons were children, age ranging between 8 to 11, most of them were girls. Shujaat Bukhari was assassinated on June 14, 2018. He had been receiving constants threats, which had been executed nicely on that fateful day!

In his brilliantly written Postscript, Guha Ray succinctly summed up what people understood as "Kashmir Problem", which, in essence is a crisis for the nation. Had poet Tagore been alive, he would have been tempted to write a new piece, with a new perspective and would have titled it as "Another Crisis of Civilisation".

□□□

TRAILOKYANATH CHAKRABORTY

30 Years in Jail

*Harshavardhan
Prabal Saran Agarwal*

THERE WAS ONCE A REVOLUTIONARY who spent 30 long years in a variety of British prisons. Of these 30 years, six were spent in the dreaded cellular jail of Andamans, yet he did not write one single apology letter or clemency petition to the British Imperialists. The name of that legendary revolutionary, which has almost been forgotten from national memory, is Trailokyanath Chakraborty.

Known as 'Maharaj' in revolutionary circles, Chakraborty was born on August 2, 1889 in the Mymensingh district of undivided Bengal. Taking inspiration from the Swadeshi movement that arose in response to the partition of Bengal in 1905, Chakraborty jumped into the freedom struggle at the tender age of 17 and joined the Dacca (now Dhaka) Anushilan Samiti in 1906, becoming an active member and organiser.

After the arrest of Pulin Behari Das, founder-president of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, in the Dacca conspiracy case of 1910, Chakraborty, along with Pratul Chandra Ganguly, took charge of the organisation and successfully revived it as one of the most dreaded opponents of the colonial regime.

Chakraborty was arrested for the first time in 1908 and was imprisoned for six months. With this arrest ended his formal education and began his journey to several prisons across the Indian subcontinent; a journey which continued even after the British left the country.

He was arrested for the second time in 1912 and was charged with the murder of a police constable, but was later released due to a lack

of evidence. His third arrest came in 1914 when colonial police came across some Anushilan documents that proposed plans to incite native troops to rebel against the British during the First World War. As the ring-leaders of the conspiracy, Chakraborty and Ganguly, along with 42 others, were arrested and put on trial in the Second Barisal Conspiracy Case. The court found them guilty of waging war against the King-Emperor and sentenced them to 10 years imprisonment.

After spending some time in the Barisal and Presidency jails, Chakraborty was transferred to Andaman's Cellular Jail in 1916. In the Andamans, Chakraborty, like many of his other comrades, suffered inhuman torture. But his revolutionary spirit refused to die down.

When many of the revolutionaries lodged in the Cellular Jail decided to protest against the brutal torture and unbearable living conditions, Chakraborty joined them. This decision also caused an interesting rift between the revolutionaries. In this regard Chakraborty wrote in his autobiography:

"The inmates of Cellular Jail got divided into 'naram' (moderate) and 'garam' (radical) factions. The former consisted of the Savarkar brothers and Pulin Babu who already had spent considerable time in the Cellular Jail and had suffered a lot. They had protested against their condition and were able to secure some amount of benefit for themselves. Now they were close to the jailor and superintendent. They refused to let go of their 'benefits' and join our struggle".

Still, Chakraborty joined the hunger strike, despite a weak body and his suffering from Asthma.

After spending seven years in the Andamans, Chakraborty was transferred to Bengal's Alipore central jail in 1921 and was finally released three years later. After his release, he took up a teaching job at South Calcutta National School but refused to take any salary. During this period, he also tried to print fake currency notes in order to raise funds for the revolutionary movement, but his attempts ended in failure.

By the end of 1924, he was arrested again and sent to Mandalay Jail in Burma (present-day Myanmar), where he met fellow prisoner, Subhas Chandra Bose. Chakraborty spent around four years in Mandalay and was released in 1928, from where he went to the Calcutta Session of the Indian National Congress and met Bhagat Singh, who was on the run after assassinating Saunders. He extended full support to Singh's organisation, the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association.

After his fourth stint in prison, Chakraborty was able to breathe

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WITH THE PASSING TIME

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fresh air only for two years before being arrested again in 1930. This arrest came in the wake of the famous Chittagong Armoury Raid led by Surya Sen and his comrades. From 1930-1938, Chakraborty was transferred from one jail to another, only to be released in 1939.

Despite all the trials and tribulations, his revolutionary spirit refused to dampen down and he once again jumped into the thick of the freedom struggle as he began planning a nationwide insurrection among the Indian troops of the colonial army as soon as he was released. The catalyst was the speculations of another world war. It was during his fifth sojourn in prison that Chakraborty studied socialist literature and, as he notes in his autobiography, decided to form a communist party after being released from jail.

Taking inspiration from the Revolt of 1857 and the Ghadar Movement of 1915, Chakraborty and other leaders of the Anushilan Samiti decided to organise a similar pan-India revolt of Indian soldiers and civilians as a world war seemed imminent. This time, the Samiti chose to rally behind Bose, who after resigning from his post as president of the Congress, had formed a more radical organisation, known as the Forward Bloc.

On March 19, 1940, an anti-compromise conference was held in Ramgarh (now in Jharkhand) that rejected India's support to British war efforts. Chakraborty and other Anushilan leaders, under the leadership of Bose, planned a mass insurrection against the British.

To make this possible, Chakraborty travelled to Punjab, Bombay Presidency, United Provinces, and different parts of Bengal and convinced many veteran revolutionaries and former members of the Ghadar movement to join the planned insurrection. He even met

the founder of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, and the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, Ganesh Savarkar, as they also claimed to be 'nationalists'. But the two openly refused to participate in any kind of action against the British, as Chakraborty has himself mentioned in his memoirs.

It is surprising that while nationalist and Marxist historians have completely forgotten Chakraborty, he has found a place, though in a selective manner, in right-wing intellectual propaganda where one single line from his book is used to absolve the founder of the RSS from the charge of not participating in the freedom struggle.

In almost every piece of hagiographic literature that has been written—and is still being written—on Hedgewar, a single line from Chakraborty's autobiography, where he says that the former was at one time a member of the Anushilans, is quoted to prove the 'revolutionary' credentials of the founder of RSS. These academicians and journalists deliberately ignore the lines that follow, however, where Chakraborty narrates his meeting with Hedgewar in considerable detail:

"On one afternoon of 1940, I reached the house of [Hedgewar] and asked him; 'Do you still remember Kalicharan da?' He embraced me...I asked him, 'What is the strength of your volunteer force?'

He replied, 'Sixty thousand.'

I said, 'They will have to join the revolutionary struggle.' I explained everything and made him aware that Subhas Chandra Bose was in support of our plan. Listening to this, Keshav Hedgewar replied, 'Out of the sixty thousand volunteers, many are young kids. They have not been trained properly. Moreover, you people did not care to ask about my whereabouts for so long and now

suddenly you are asking for my help! How is this possible?'

Upon hearing this, I replied, 'We are not going to get such a golden opportunity again in our lifetime. We must exploit this opportunity provided by the world war. Please convince your lieutenants anyhow to participate in the upsurge, others will follow suit.'

After this failed meeting with Hedgewar, Chakraborty left for Varanasi where he met Ganesh Damodar Savarkar, the elder brother of VD Savarkar and leader of the Hindu Mahasabha. He tried to convince him to join the insurrection. Narrating this meeting he writes:

"Ganesh Damodar Savarkar—the elder brother of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar—was in Kashi. We were together in the Andaman Jail. He had learnt a good deal of Bengali. I also used to learn Marathi from him. I addressed him as Ganesh da. After telling him about our plans of insurrection I asked him, 'Will the Hindu Mahasabha support us?' To this Ganesh da replied, 'the train has left the station; now what is the use of limping after it...opportunity is lost, now nothing can be done.'"

After being disappointed by Ganesh Savarkar, Chakraborty writes that he met another fellow inmate from Andamans, Sachindranath Sanyal, who not only readily accepted his proposal but even began preparations.

These meetings, narrated by Chakraborty in the same chapter of his autobiography, tell a lot about the difference between the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS, and the 'real' revolutionaries regarding their attitude towards the freedom struggle. Sanyal, who was imprisoned twice in the Andamans, did not budge from supporting the cause, while the Hindutva ideologues backed down immediately, citing one excuse or another.

Though Chakraborty's plan of insurrection failed ultimately, his spirit did not. He continued his struggle for freedom and went back to East Bengal and began to reorganise the Dacca Anushilan Samiti. He was arrested for the sixth time for giving a speech at a political gathering in Chittagong in 1940, and was released only in 1946.

After the British left the country and partitioned it into India and Pakistan, Chakraborty decided to stay in his home in what was then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), where he co-founded the Pakistan Socialist Party. He was elected to

the provincial assembly of East Pakistan in 1954, but after Ayub Khan declared martial law in the country, the activities of the Pakistan Socialist Party were banned, forcing Chakraborty to retire to his home village.

His failing health forced him to travel to Kolkata in 1970 for treatment, from where he was shifted to Delhi. On August 9, 1970, the legendary freedom fighter breathed his last.

Of his 42-year-long revolutionary career, Chakraborty spent 30 years in jail, and many years living underground. He faced all kinds of ha-

As Timir Basu is still seriously ill, he is not in a position to communicate with contributors and subscribers. Please bear with us.

—Fr.

rassment and torture that were reserved for those Indians who dared to oppose the British. Despite these hardships, Chakraborty did not budge an inch from his commitment to the freedom struggle. If anyone truly deserves the title of 'Veer', it is Trailokyanath Chakraborty. □□□

[Courtesy: The Wire]

FREEDOM OF PRESS

NDTV: a 'Hostile Takeover'?

Pallavi Pundir

A FINANCIAL TUG-OF-WAR between Asia's richest man and an influential TV news network in India is triggering alarm over dwindling independent media in the world's largest democracy.

Gautam Adani, the world's fourth-richest man and India's biggest infrastructure magnate, announced the acquisition of nearly 30 percent of New Delhi Television (NDTV). He also proposed buying an additional 26 percent from the news network's public shareholders. NDTV, in turn, said the acquisition was done without any input or consent of its founders, and called it a "hostile takeover."

Media watchers call NDTV one of the last bastions of independent media in a country where most media ownership lies in the hands of a powerful and politically connected few. Under Modi's Hindu nationalist government, media censorship has escalated. In the past, NDTV faced temporary bans and was accused of being anti-national for reporting news critical of the government. Critics say that Adani, who has a net worth of \$139.9 billion and whose success is

seen as directly aligned with Modi's policy objectives, could impact NDTV's journalism. NDTV tried to block Adani's attempts to acquire a majority stake. But Adani Enterprises announced that regulatory restrictions imposed by NDTV will not affect their attempts to do so.

India's media industry is one of the world's largest, with over 17,000 newspapers, 100,000 magazines and 178 TV news channels. And yet, its journalism landscape serves as a cautionary tale for authoritarian societies. Out of a list of 180 countries, the World Press Freedom Index puts India in 150th place. Last year, 108 journalists were attacked, six killed, and 13 media houses targeted by authorities for their critical reporting, according to one estimate.

"There has always been a certain degree of bias across TV channels for years, but we've seen a stark rise in hyperpartisanship in news coverage and discussions since 2014," Manisha Pande, executive editor of media critique website NewsLaundry, told VICE World News.

Modi first became prime minister in 2014, and since then, human

rights reports have documented an aggressive crackdown on critical reporting on the government. At the same time, many peddled a rosy picture of current events, or fuelled bigoted sentiments against the country's minorities.

Pande, who analyses Indian television news, said NDTV stood out in this deeply polarised space. "For example, if we're covering Modi's speech, many news channels would show how great those speeches were," she said. "NDTV would be an exception to scrutinise it." All this could change after Adani's takeover, she added.

Last year, Adani filed a defamation suit against journalist and author Paranjay Guha Thakurta for critical reporting, alleging Modi's government tweaked rules relating to power projects in special economic zones, which benefitted Adani. A gag order against Thakurta still stands.

A Reporters Without Borders study on media ownership found that a majority of leading Indian news outlets are controlled by individuals with political ties.

NDTV's acquisition by Adani, experts say, puts the focus on the news industry's financial vulnerabilities. Across the world, for decades, big media relied on corporate or political funding to sustain them-

selves because the business of news simply isn't profitable. The Indian government spends millions of dollars on advertisements in newspapers, TV channels and web portals, including NDTV.

The acquisition laid bare NDTV's financial struggles from 2009, when it took a massive loan of over \$50 million from a private lender. The agreement allowed the private lender to freely convert warrants into equity stakes and hand them over to any person they nominate. Speculation about an Adani takeover has been

doing the rounds for over a year.

This year, Adani set up a media subsidiary, AMG Media Networks, which hired veteran journalist Sanjay Pugalía as its CEO and editor-in-chief. Pugalía called the NDTV acquisition a "significant milestone."

"[AMG Media Networks] seeks to empower Indian citizens, consumers and those interested in India, with information and knowledge," his statement said. "We look forward to strengthening NDTV's leadership in news delivery."

Industry expert Deepak Shenoy,

who runs the investment research firm Capitalmind, said that the current takeover was a long time coming, and that calling it a "hostile takeover" ignores NDTV's missteps. The acquisition should serve as a cautionary tale for media houses who take loans they can't repay, he added.

"Big corporations will be aggressive with their strategic gains, and there's a lesson to learn from media barons overleveraging," he said. "If you take leverage, you have to bear the consequences." □□□

LETTERS

World Cup 2022

Bide Majakoti knows the horror of forced labour and modern day slavery in Qatar first-hand. He travelled from Nepal on the promise of a well-paid job and paid high recruitment fees to secure it. When he arrived in Qatar he was forced to accept a different job and his nightmare with exploitation and modern slavery began.

Unfortunately, as construction for the football 2022 World Cup intensifies, more migrant construction workers will be vulnerable to forced labour and Qatar slavery than ever before. Over 90% of Qatar's workers are foreign workers, brought to the country under kafala, the 'sponsorship' system. It is a worker sponsorship programme that jeopardises basic human rights of migrant workers, allowing slavery-like working conditions to flourish leaving thousands of migrant workers in Qatar vulnerable to forced labour and other human rights abuses, often without the ability to change jobs or even leave the country.

Bide was forced to do his job in terrible working conditions, in the blistering heat without safety precautions or pay. With no other option open to him, he returned home saddled with debt. While Bide ultimately left his job and returned home to tell his story, thousands of other employees never get that chance. Many others' experi-

ences are even worse; construction workers often have their wages withheld, are denied exit visas, are housed in dirty, unsafe conditions and forced to work long hours with little rest despite the high heat.

When the 2022 World Cup is over, there will be less eyes on Qatar and less urgency for the Qatar government to implement these crucial reforms, protect workers' rights and freedom.

Call on the Qatari authorities to deliver on the critical reforms they promised and end forced labour. Help improve the working conditions of hundreds of thousands of migrant workers in Qatar.

Miriam Karmali, Freedom United

Libyan Detention Centres

"For the first three days after they caught us we had no food. We had to drink from the toilet," said Samuel, a 42-year-old Nigerian of his experience in al-Nasr Detention Centre in Zawiyah, Libya to i. "It was so cramped, we slept sitting up," he added.

Samuel is among tens of thousands of migrants and refugees who have been held in dire conditions in Libyan detention centers and subjected to forced labour and torture. Despite acknowledging the abhorrent abuse they face, the EU continues to support the Libyan Coast Guard to

return people intercepted in the Mediterranean to Libya.

Libya's migrant detention centers are notoriously horrendous. Guards systematically torture and abuse detainees to extort money from their friends and families abroad.

Samuel spoke of frequent beatings with metal pipes: "If I take off my T-shirt, you will see the marks," he told i. He was only allowed to leave once his family transferred thousands of dollars for his release.

Many survivors have reported that guards force detainees to carry out unpaid manual labour.

Seventeen-year-old Mohammed from Gambia was a victim of forced labour at a centre. He had been picked up by a Libyan group on the street who demanded money from him. When he couldn't pay, they made him work—he was not allowed to leave until he completed a year of unpaid labor.

"If you try to escape because you don't have money, they even shoot you,"

The EU is complicit in the trafficking of people on the move in Libya. With a budget of •84.85m (around \$86.32m) for the period from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2023, the bloc provides capacity building for the Libyan Coast Guard as well as "strategic and operational" assistance for wider Libyan border management efforts.

[It's] essential to continue engag-

ing with Libyan authorities in building capacity for an effective border management system in line with core fundamental rights standards, to save lives at sea and to fight the criminal gangs that profit from irregular migration.

However, the EU's support for the Coast Guard is leading to more people being intercepted at sea and returned to the country's infamous detention system, where they face extreme danger.

A Reader

Bilkis Bano Case

The decision of the Gujarat government to grant remission to the 11 convicts who gangraped Bilkis Bano and murdered her family members during the 2002 Godhra riots has set a bad precedent, said former Bombay High Court judge, Justice UD Salvi who had as trial judge convicted the 11 men.

Speaking to Bar & Bench, Justice Salvi said that the decision would have wide ramifications.

"A very bad precedent has been set. This is wrong, I would say. Now, convicts in other gang rape cases would seek similar reliefs," he said.

He opined that it is ironic that the State of Gujarat let the 11 men out of jail at a time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi is urging Indians to respect women and avoid demeaning them.

Justice Salvi had conducted the trial in the rape case and had convicted the 11 men and sentenced them to life imprisonment in 2008, when he presided as a special judge over a court designated to hear CBI cases in Mumbai.

He had also acquitted 7 accused.

The conviction and sentence of 11 were upheld in May 2017 by the Bombay High Court Bench of Justices Vijaya Tahilramani and Mridula Bhatkar, which also convicted 7 other men who were acquitted by Justice Salvi.

The 7 men convicted by High Court were sentenced to time already served in prison.

The State has now granted remission to the 11 convicts as per its 1992 policy. However, there is another policy formulated in 2014 based on the directives of the Supreme Court, which had invalidated the 1992 policy.

He pointed out that there isn't any clarity as to how the 1992 policy is made applicable to these convicts.

The idea of punishment, the judge believes, is to make a person realise his guilt and that he has done something wrong.

Lastly, the retired judge expressed his displeasure at the 'grand welcome' given to these men on their release.

Bano was gangraped in the wake of the 2002 riots and her three-year-old-daughter was among 12 people killed by a mob in Limkheda taluka of Dahod district in Gujarat.

Narsi Benwal

"Partition Horrors Remembrance Day"

14th August "Partition Horrors Remembrance Day"—Another Strategy to Fuel the Politics of Hate & Division! A day of mourning and introspection is being transformed into a day of further spawning hatred and division—people must resist it!

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Government is hell-bent on weaponising its agenda of hate, by marking the 14th of August as "Partition Horrors Remembrance Day".

Undoubtedly the tragedy of Partition shrouded the euphoria of hard-earned freedom. The Partition was an unparalleled human tragedy that has inflicted deep scars on the very soul of the nation. 75 years later it still evokes passions and a deep sense of hurt in those who directly suffered due to the tragedy and collectively too. The Partition resulted out of the confluence of Hate and political ambitions, as well as the British Colonial policy of divide and rule. Yet it was the common Indian masses that had to suffer due to the greed of a few. One should never forget the savage consequences of the tragedies of the past but the wounds of those tragedies must not be exploited to

further fuel hate and division, but in fact must be treated with care, love and healing. Keeping the wounds festering, makes the body gangrenous and only leads to further withering away of the society. They do not care about the human cost of perpetuating hate. The Commemoration of "Partition Remembrance Horrors Day" on August 14 is a very subtle disguised attempt to perpetuate hate, keep the wounds festering and earn political dividends. The insanity fuelled by hate resulted in the tragic vivisection of India and along with the displacement of millions of people and massacre of a million, which also consumed the life of Mahatma Gandhi.

The SGPC, has called for a day of remembrance of the victims of the Partition. The victims of Partition were Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, all ordinary Indians.

Dr G G Parikh,
Medha Patkar,
and many others.

No Wage

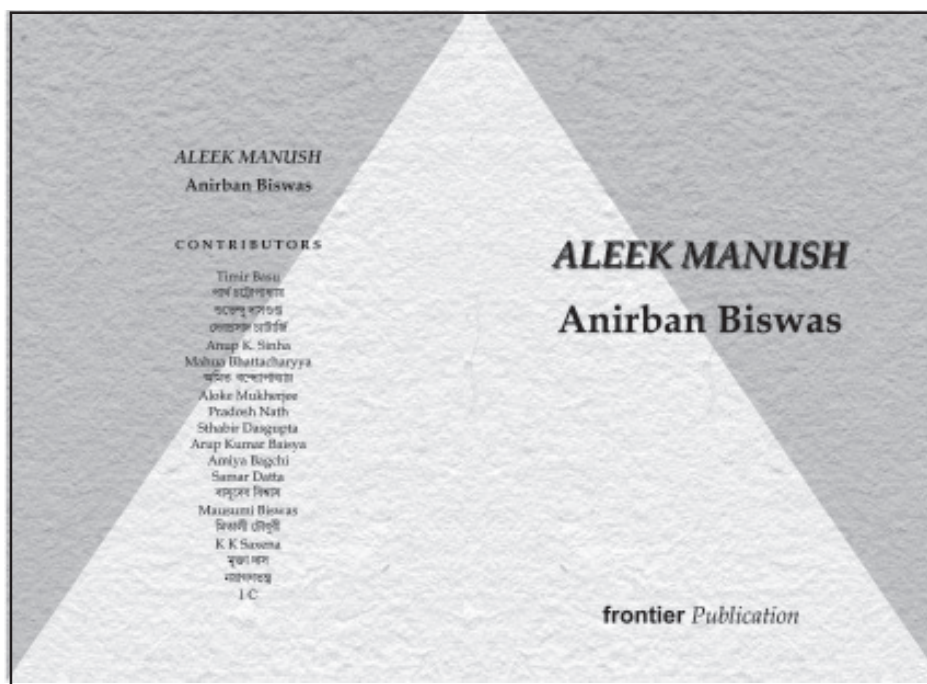
Workers, who have been suffering because of non-payment of MGNREGA wages since 26th December 2021 have been protesting outside the Panchayat Bhawan (Block HC Plot 7 Sector III Salt Lake, Kolkata) in front of the NREGA Commissioner, West Bengal and Additional Chief Secretary, Rural Development, for quite some time.

400 workers belonging to Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samity and other members of the Right to Food and Work Campaign West Bengal were banging on empty plates, symbolic of the hunger in their families to make the government aware of their plight. They wanted to draw attention to the Central government's callousness in not transferring funds, as well as to the uncontrolled corruption by State government officials, which in reality has led to a situation where workers have not been paid wages to the tune of over Rs 2600 crore for the past eight months.

Pramod Gupta, Kolkata

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