

frontier

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Cup and Labour

INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL MEANS BIG BUSINESS. AND BIG business means super exploitation of labour. In the case of Qatar World Cup 2022 they are migrant workers. FIFA awarded Qatar the rights to host the World Cup on December 2, 2010. But at that time there was not a single suitable stadium. Also, it was a difficult decision from the point of extreme climatic condition. In summer temperatures reach 110 degrees Celsius. But football or what they call soccer opened huge business opportunities for global contractors and their innumerable sub-contractors. In the following 12 years the World Cup catalysed a breath-taking construction boom in Qatar which relied overwhelmingly on migrant workers from South Asia and North Africa. And it is also a story of tragic death of unknown number of poor South Asians who went there to earn a decent living.

Nobody really knows how many people died building the World Cup 2022. Last year the Guardian reported that sixty-seven hundred and fifty South Asian migrants died in Qatar since the construction began. Maybe, this is an underestimate as the figures were provided by foreign embassies. To counter the allegation Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, the state body in charge of preparing the tournament, said that the true number was thirty-six and only three had died in workplace accidents. There was hardly any taker of this official statement. However, later the Committee revised the estimate of the dead to about five hundred. Causes of death were haphazardly reported. And it is next to impossible to get the exact scenario. 'Autopsies of poor workers were rarely performed'—again no official statistics. United Freedom, a human rights body, repeatedly focused on the plight of the Nepali migrant workers without getting any response from the concerned authorities and employers. To disentangle World-Cup related atrocities against the migrant labour of South Asia and North Africa seems to be a hopeless task as the so-called international community didn't like to offend Qatar which is the world's largest exporter of natural gas-LNG. They are now reaping enormous profit due to the on-going war in Ukraine. In truth both America and Qatar are happy that the war is prolonging because they are the major LNG exporters to the energy-starved Europe in view of the stoppage of Russian gas and oil.

The Investment Authority of Qatar that manages an estimated four hundred and fifty billion dollars didn't build a stage for football festival; it

actually built a city to encompass the stage. The Metro system, airport extension, bridges, man-made islands, fighter jets—all these under the heading of World Cup. The work was done by migrants. As per the report of the Vital Signs Partnership, a coalition of migrant advocacy groups, more than half of the ten thousand annual deaths of South Asians in the Gulf region are “effectively unexplained”. In 2019, researchers concluded that around a third of almost six hundred deaths among young, otherwise healthy Nepali migrants in Qatar could have been prevented if there was timely medical intervention. Many Nepali migrant labourers were suffering from mental illness.

For all practical purposes migrant workers are treated as slaves though slavery in Qatar was offi-

cially abolished in 1952. 32 world class teams participated in the event but they were totally unconcerned about the World Cup tragedy called migrant labour. Only the Iranian players showed their western counterparts what actual courage looked like by refusing to sing their national anthem, in solidarity with protests against the clerical regime in Tehran. Iranians in the field were highly applauded in social media across the world for their bold attitudes towards women’s movement. Meanwhile, Iran is said to have abolished the moral police, following months of protests set off by the death of a young Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini who was held by the security forces for supposedly violating the country’s Islamic dress codes. If it is true then it is a great victory for ordinary people who have been under iron

heels since the Islamic revolution in 1979. The announcement of abolition came from the attorney general, albeit it was not confirmed by the interior ministry which is in charge of morality police.

South Asia apart, North Africa too is a potential supplier of labour. Those are the best places to get large number of workers very easily and cheaply. In the months leading up to the World Cup, migrants were evicted from their lodgings to make room for tourists and to comply with the city’s zoning laws. Many were moved to the industrial area with a population density similar to New Delhi’s. In other words the migrants were going to face more hardships, if they are allowed to stay in Qatar in the coming months after the World Cup. □□□

06-12-2022

COMMENT

Terrorist State? Who Defines?

THE MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN Parliament (MEP), adopted a resolution in their holy ‘assembly’ in late-November. The 494-58 vote resolution named Russia as a “state sponsor of terrorism”. Forty-four MEP abstained.

Prior to that resolution, the gentlemen’s powerful guide had a similar resolution, and that was in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

These were in response to their camp follower Ukraine that has allegedly executed Russian prisoners of war (POWs) violating all international norms. Even the pro-government media persons in America didn’t contradict the charge of the murder of Russian POWs at point blank range. And yet Ukraine is not a terrorist state!

The learned parliamentarians do not care about limit of their authority. They think, they are the boss,

and they can do and undo, say and unsay anything.

The bosses’ legally non-binding resolution said: The EU’s “current legal framework, unlike those of countries such as the United States and Canada, does not provide for the designation of a state as a sponsor of terrorism.” So what? They are morally bound to react!

When Iraq was bombed and invaded, the bosses were silent. When Libya was bombed and interfered, the bosses were silent. When Yugoslavia was bombed and torn into pieces, the bosses were silent.

These people in Europe do not see the Nazi bands and their brutalities in Russian speaking areas in Ukraine today. The bosses are so gentle and polite that Nazis do not annoy them.

What is being implemented against Cuba? It is a decades-long economic

and financial embargo that is hurting the Cuban people, their food and health care systems and the entire economy. It’s being implemented by the imperialist master. Have the gentlemen of EU said a single word against this embargo? No.

The NATO Parliamentary Assembly’s resolution called on its members to designate Russia as a “terrorist” state.

The non-binding resolution claimed that Russia is a “direct threat” to “Euro-Atlantic security”. The resolution asked that any existing restriction on the “forward deployment” of NATO forces along the Russian borders be declared “null and void.” This means it goes for aggression.

The assembly, independent of NATO, has no direct oversight over NATO policies.

The NATO PA’s newly-elected head, a French politician, said the Russian leaders “must be judged as terrorists in front of international tribunals.”

The NATO PA's resolution followed a similar resolution adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

All these anti-Russia resolutions are part of a grand design to destabilise Russia. But the propaganda managers do not look at mirror. They will find the military and militias in Ukraine are resorting to Nazi-like acts. They will find backers of Ukrainian forces shelling civilian targets in regions that decided to join Russia.

The EU's position on terrorism is so baseless that the move failed to get direct and open support from the US. The US Ambassador-at-large for Global Criminal Justice Beth Van Schaack said that the US cannot designate Russia as a "state sponsor of terrorism" since Russia does not fit the criteria.

But she didn't forget to lend indirect support to the European move to grill Russia. She said that the US is "very interested in what the Europeans are doing". She also said that such resolution "carries great weight". No doubt they have developed a habit of talking in multiple voices, sometimes at cross purposes.

The bosses forget their acts of terrorism in countries. How shall US drone attack on a bridal party in Pakistan be designated? How shall US interference in Venezuela be designated? How not transferring of Venezuela's gold, now in the UK, to the country's government shall be designated? There are acts of sabotage in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Chile. How shall those be designated?

There are two criteria for definitions in the imperialist-defined "rule-based" world system—one for the

NOTICE

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bosses, and another for those the bosses consider as their enemies. This is an old fact. The resolutions, the propaganda ploys, tell this old rule. □

03-12-2022 [Contributed]

NOTE

Violence against Women

Ram Puniyani writes:

THE CASE OF BRUTAL, horrific violence against Shraddha Walkar has shaken the whole nation. It is a gruesome and utterly despicable crime. One recalls with similar horror the case of Nirbhaya (Jyoti Singh), the Tandoor case, and the recent one of Abhijit Patidar, who slit the throat of Shilpa in a Jabalpur resort and video graphed it. One also recalls with equal fright when Rahul killed Gulshana in recent times.

In case of Shraddha Walkar since the culprit is Aftab, added angle of love jihad is being inserted by some, into the problem, which young women, involved in interfaith relationship find them. Many of these relationships, marriage or 'living together' occur against the concurrence of parents or close relatives and friends. They cut off the con-

tact with the defiant girl who is left defenceless in the atmosphere where the patriarchal notions are dominant and some men involved in the relationship take the utter step, leading the condemnable violence, not only in India but all over the world.

The women in such situations are disowned by their families and the communication between the girl and relatives-friends is cut off, leaving the girls more vulnerable. A section of media has got the sensationalising material and frightening gory detail of heinous crime are being presented repeatedly for the TRP battle, which adds to the problem.

In the case of Aftab-Shraddha the communal twist not only shows the rising tide of divisive politics in India but also it tends to hide the real problem of violence in such alliances. Prominent rights worker Kavita

Krishnan points out "The issue is not men from one community being abusive towards women from another community. Making this the focus simply surpasses the actual cause."

Two tweets (translated from Hindi) summarise the propaganda which has been instilled into the social understanding. The first one by BJP's Kapil Mishra states, "Bollywood, media, ads that promote false constructs like brotherhood, politics that is soaked in the blood of daughters, rich and upper middle classes drinking the poison of fake secularism, the sold police and the jihadi education model. Don't blame daughters for murders like Shraddha."

This second one is by one Tapan Das: "The biggest weakness is that we have not been able to keep our sisters and daughters within our grasp. They are left free to do what they want. If parents and brothers keep an eye on each and every sister's/daughter's movements, then I do not think anyone else will fall in love so soon. They will be caught in

the net.” This shows patriarchal angle very prominently,

This is just a sample from what is circulating in the social media with all its negative impact and not only intensifying the prevalent hate but at the same time eclipsing the basic issue related to violence against women more particularly those in interfaith and inter-caste relationships.

The term ‘love jihad’ is a very clever signal for an alleged conversion conspiracy. The projected purposes are presented as recruitment into Islamic terror groups, sex trafficking and changing India’s demography.

Love Jihad, the construct floated by communal forces has been

popularised in large sections of society by communal organisations. Conceptually, this love Jihad does not believe in the agency of women and girls being capable of taking their own decisions. This is part of the patriarchal ideology of religious nationalism. Ministers and leaders who are upholding the Hindutva politics are now promising new laws for ‘protecting Hindu girls’. Unfortunately even the Supreme Court Judges are directing the Government to do something about preventing conversions.

In recent months, Karnataka, Assam, Haryana, Gujarat, all ruled by the BJP by itself or in coalition, have promised laws to curb ‘love

jihad’; Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and in recent weeks, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, have already passed laws that criminalise conversion by marriage.

The Recent film “Kerala Story” takes the falsehood of love jihad to absurd limits by claiming that 32000 Kerala girls have been converted and taken to Syria-Yemen etc. The sources of figures are totally unreliable and the maker of the film has ruthlessly trampled the logic to arrive at such a figure.

The need for ‘help lines’ and support systems for such isolated girls; in painful relationship; is the need for the hour. □□□

6 YEARS LATER

Revisiting Demonetisation

Arun Kumar

IS IT NOT UNREASONABLE that to try to bring to heel a few, a very large number of people were inconvenienced, especially when other measures were available?

The Government of India has filed its affidavit in the Supreme Court in the Vivek Narayan Sharma vs Union of India case filed in 2016, questioning the legality of demonetisation promulgated on November 8, 2016. The case is being heard six years after it was filed and six years after the event.

The inordinate delay has literally killed the case, since neither demonetisation nor its consequences can be reversed now. No order of the court can undo the unfortunate deaths in the queues at the banks or the chaos in the economy for months. Can compensation for the loss of incomes, especially in the unorganised sector, be computed and paid, and to whom? The only possible outcome of the case can be to determine whether what was done

was legal and within the bounds of the constitution.

The court could look into the narrow aspect of the legal correctness of the ex-post legislative actions. But would it be able to pronounce verdict on the broader aspect of moral correctness? The government has been taking the stand that on policy matters, the courts should not intervene.

Be that as it may, the affidavit gives a chance to revisit the event and its consequences. In the affidavit, the government has not only clarified its stand on demonetisation but provided justification(s) for carrying it out. The arguments can be divided into legal, social and economic, and further into short run and long run.

On the legal aspect, several prickly issues arise. The government notification was ‘issued in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (2) of section 26 of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 (2 of 1934)’. This sub-section reads, ‘...with effect from

such date as may be specified in the notification, any series of bank notes of any denomination shall cease to be legal tender...’ The question is whether the term ‘any series’ can imply an entire denomination (like Rs 1,000 notes).

The then Attorney General of India, arguing in the Supreme Court on November 15, 2016, made a distinction between demonetisation and the withdrawal of legal status for old notes. In the former case, he said, possession of the old notes would be illegal, while in the latter case the notes could still be owned, though they were no longer legal tender. And, while the former would require an Act of Parliament, the latter could be done via a Gazette Notification.

A notice is displayed stating the refusal to accept old Rs 500 and Rs 1000 Indian rupee banknotes at a market in Allahabad, November 24, 2016. Credit: Reuters/Jitendra Prakash/Files

A notice is displayed stating the refusal to accept old Rs 500 and Rs 1000 Indian rupee banknotes at a market in Allahabad, November 24, 2016. Credit: Reuters/Jitendra Prakash/Files

Demonetisation of 2016 was pro-

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mulgated via a Gazette Notification on November 8. Neither the Government of India nor the Reserve Bank of India used the term 'demonetisation' in their notifications. Instead, they stated, '...specified bank notes [SBN] shall cease to be legal tender'. But from day one, it was evident that possession of old notes would be made illegal. The affidavit now filed goes further and says that demonetisation should be viewed in the wider economic context.

On December 30, 2016, the last day for surrender of old notes by the public, the Specified Bank Notes (Cessation of Liabilities) Ordinance, 2016 was promulgated. The Bill for replacing this Ordinance was introduced in the Lok Sabha on February 3, 2017 and notified on March 1, 2017. This Act made the possession of more than ten of the old notes illegal. The affidavit says that after the Act was passed, the challenge to the notification of November 8, 2016 is not valid.

The government justified the suddenness of demonetisation and its resort to a Gazette Notification rather than an ordinance on grounds of secrecy. Given that the parliament was in session from November 16 to December 16, 2016, could a Bill not have been brought in during the session? This would have enabled the people's representatives to discuss this draconian move and maybe suggest modifications. Instead, the entire session was disturbed because the government did not provide answers.

It seems that the entire intent was to bypass Parliament on this important policy move.

It has been known theoretically that demonetisation does not stop black income generation and cannot unearth any significant portion of black wealth. This was implied in the letter written in 1978 by the then RBI governor. According to reports, that was also the advice of RBI

governor Raghuram Rajan in 2016.

So, for the government to say in the affidavit that consultations with the RBI started eight months before the step was announced is diversionary. Consultation does not mean concurrence. Rajan was the RBI governor till September 2016 and most of the consultation would have been held during his time. The affidavit does not clarify, what was the RBI's advice regarding the usefulness of demonetisation to tackle the black economy?

Since literally all the demonetised currency notes returned to the banks, what purpose was served? If there were black cash hoards, they got converted to new currency notes and became legitimate. In fact, new black incomes were generated for the conversion of the old notes into new ones. And, if the high denomination notes are to be blamed for black income generation then why issue the even bigger Rs 2,000 denomination notes?

When it became clear that cash was coming into the banks rapidly and getting exchanged to new notes, the goalpost was shifted within two weeks, from control of black economy to making the economy cashless. Did this lead to a lowering of the cash-to-GDP ratio in the economy? Instead, it is now higher than it was in 2016. And that too when electronic transactions have grown rapidly. Clearly, more cash is being held now than in 2016.

Was the step justified in any way? In legal parlance, it is said that there should be 'a correlation between reasonableness of a legislation and its immediate effect'. Demonetisation has not curbed the black economy, cash holdings have increased and the economy declined drastically. The adverse impact is not just short run but long term, so how is the step reasonable or desirable?

Reasonableness was further

dented because the authorities were not prepared for the havoc that followed the announcement even though the affidavit says there were preparation. If so, why were the rules for exchanging old currency repeatedly changed? Why were certain assurances given to the public suddenly withdrawn? By December 31, 2016, in 51 days, 114 notifications were issued. Further, the affidavit says that there were advance preparation for the printing of new notes. But then why do they have the signature of Urjit Patel, who became governor of RBI in September, and not of Rajan?

People, including members of opposition parties, gather in central Delhi for a protest against the government's decision to withdraw Rs 500 and Rs 1000 banknotes from circulation, November 28, 2016. Credit: Reuters/Cathal McNaughton

People, including members of opposition parties, gather in central Delhi for a protest against the government's decision to withdraw Rs 500 and Rs 1000 banknotes from circulation, November 28, 2016. Credit: Reuters/Cathal McNaughton

The affidavit says that the Central Board of the RBI made a specific recommendation to the government which was the basis for the

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step taken. Actually, it is the government which asked the RBI to recommend the steps taken one day before the announcement. This was like a diktat. So, the recommendation of the Board was not based on detailed deliberations on the matter. It is not even clear how many of the Board members could attend this important meeting and give advice.

Another criticism is that wiping out 86% of the country's currency overnight caused harassment and

loss of work for a large number of people, especially in the unorganised sector, including agriculture. Does this constitute a violation of the fundamental right under Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution, allowing any citizen to practise any profession? It is not that the move impacted only those with black money—in fact, they seemed to have gotten off scot free.

Is it not unreasonable that to try to bring to heel a few, a very large

number of people were inconvenienced, especially when other measures were available and when in the past, this measure has been known to not help curb the black economy?

In brief, the legislature was bypassed and the Central Bank dictated to, and the courts did not act in time. Does that not undermine democracy? □□□ [Courtesy: *The Wire*] [This article is based on the author's book, *'Demonetization and the Black Economy'*, Penguin Random House, 2017]

A FEW REMARKS

The Absence of Scientific Temper in the Lands of Bose, Raman and Salam

Ravi Sinha

[Following is a speech delivered by the author at the online panel discussion organised by the Indian Diaspora Washington DC Metro USA on the theme 'Absence of Scientific Temper in the lands of scientists Raman, Bose, Abdus Salam on November 19, 2022.]

THE TITLE REFERS TO THE land of Bose, Raman and Salam, which might betray an assumption that a scientist is guaranteed to possess scientific temper and he is influential enough to leave an imprint on the society. In an ideal world, perhaps, that ought to be the case. But even scientists do not live in an ideal world.

Take the example of Sir Isaac Newton, the greatest icon of science, whose genius did put its final and authoritative seal on the Scientific Revolution. Running away from plague in Cambridge to his native village, the young and solitary scholar single-handedly laid the foundation of modern science. He accomplished this during a mere 18 months of his *anni mirabiles* of 1665-66 when he formulated his laws of motion and his theory of gravitation. In addition, he also invented calculus during the same months. But, after that, he devoted a large part of his long life to the practice of alchemy and to the theological labours of interpreting the Bible. He denounced what he thought

were corruptions of Christianity—such as trinitarianism—and adopted a radically puritanical version of Arianism that considered the Bible as an exact Revelation about the future. Nothing in Newton was of normal proportions—neither his scientific genius nor his rigid dogmatism and confident superstitions.

After all he could only be a product of his times—you are already conceding part of the point I am driving at. But let me cite a few examples from more recent times before I try to peep into the relationship between Science and Scientific Temper. Pascual Jordan, a pioneer of Quantum Mechanics, was an active Nazi who continued to hold his fascist views even after his rehabilitation in post-war Germany. Physics Nobel laureates Philipp Lenard and Johannes Stark too were active Nazis and confirmed anti-Semites. A little earlier, the great mathematician, Emmy Noether, had been prevented from becoming a faculty in the mathematics department of the University of Gottingen just because

she was a woman. An exasperated David Hilbert famously said, "I do not see that the sex of the candidate is an argument against her admission as a privatdozent. After all, we are a university, not a bathhouse." And a scientist friend of mine reminded me the other day that our own Sir C V Raman, one in the title of this programme, was opposed to a woman being admitted as a Ph.D. student, because, in his views, women were unfit to do science.

I am not here to withhold the certificate of scientific temper from being awarded to eminent scientists. My purpose is to examine whether lack of scientific temper comes in the way of doing good science. Pervez Hoodbhoy wrote a book some thirty years ago. The book is called "Islam and Science", and the subtitle is "Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality". In the book he cites a telling example. Steven Weinberg and Abdus Salam—the same Salam who too is in the title of this programme—came up with one of the greatest physical theories of 20th century—the unified quantum theory of electromagnetism and the weak nuclear force. They invented this theory independently of each other and shared the Nobel Prize for it. Weinberg was an avowed atheist; Salam was self-confessedly a believer. Salam wrote the foreword to Pervez's book in which he concurs

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with the author that being a believer made no difference, one way or the other, to his coming up with the theory. There you have it from the horse's mouth. What, then, is the relationship between science and scientific temper?

The scientist does not live by science alone. Even a scientist's mind is not entirely colonised by Scientific Reason. I do not know if, like the brain, the mind too has two separate but interconnected lobes. But allow me to use a simple-minded metaphor. Scientific temper, it seems to me, has something to do with the rational side of the mind trying to influence the emotional side. This may give rise to a reasonable and cultivated individual, but it can also result in disaster. With the rational side meddling too much with the emotional side, it may give rise to a rather childish adult, if not a veritable Dr Strangelove.

Scientific temper is a tricky business. It involves a very intricate game between Reason and Culture. Neither side of the game we understand very well. There are those who think that Reason is transparent, whereas Culture harbours dark corners. The opposing side points out that this is a false picture. It labours to show that Reason has murky origins—it did not result from an immaculate conception. And, it is not at all self-aware—it does not know that it is inextricably entangled in structures of power.

Which side is more important for a successful and at the same time a meaningful life? Which side should sit in judgement? It is a debate that is hard to settle. There are funny episodes, for example, of scientists sitting in judgment over poetry. Paul Dirac, one of the greatest scientific minds of the 20th century once told J R Oppenheimer, another great scientist and a polymath, "I don't see how you can work on physics and write poetry at the same time. In

science, you want to say something nobody knew before, in words everyone can understand. In poetry, you are bound to say something that everybody knows already, in words that nobody can understand." The judgements of poets about science, on the other hand, are usually not so funny. They are often much darker—prone to denouncing the supposed soullessness of science or mocking it as one mocks the childishness of a grown-up.

With this much as a background, let me now come to the topic of the day. I do agree with the assertion that scientific temper is largely missing from the societies and cultures that form a distinct civilisation on the subcontinent. But, I am less surprised that it is missing despite scientists like Bose, Raman and Salam. I am more surprised that it is missing despite someone like Jawaharlal Nehru. To my mind, Nehru was the best and the wisest proponent of the desirability of scientific temper. Let me quote a passage from The Discovery of India even if it consumes a precious minute,

"Science deals with the domain of positive knowledge but the temper which it should produce goes beyond that domain. The ultimate purposes of man may be said to be to gain knowledge, to realise truth, to appreciate goodness and beauty. The scientific method of objective inquiry is not applicable to all these and much that is vital in life seems to lie beyond its scope—the sensitiveness to art and poetry, the emotion that beauty produces, the inner recognition of goodness. The botanist and the zoologist may never experience the charm and beauty of nature; the sociologist may be wholly lacking in love for humanity. But even when we visit the mountain tops where philosophy dwells and high

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emotions fill us, or gaze at the immensity beyond, that approach and temper are still necessary.” I might also add that the Indian Constitution is the only Constitution in the world which prescribes developing “scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform” as a fundamental duty of every citizen.

All this, however, may sound too philosophical and too idealistic. How can one be sure that scientific temper really matters to a society or a civilisation? I think history has provided a very real example. Let me dwell on it for a minute.

Pervez’s book that I have already mentioned opens with a parable of “a team of Martian anthropologists visiting Earth sometime between the 9th and 13th centuries”. They find that “the civilization with greatest promise is the Islamic civilization with its Bait-ul-Hikmah, astronomical observatories, hospitals and schools”. Then they visit again towards the end of 20th century and find that “their earlier prediction had turned out to be wrong. The part of humanity which once seemed to offer the greatest promise now appears inescapably trapped in a state of frozen medievalism, rejecting the new and clinging desperately to the old. On the other hand, the former retrogrades have climbed the evolutionary ladder and are now aiming for the stars. Was this stunning reversal of roles, ask the visitors, the mere misfortune of one and the good fortune of the other? Was it due to invasions and military defeats? Or was it the result of a fundamental shift in outlook and attitudes?”

With minor variations the parable may apply equally well to the fate of the subcontinent. If the Martians were to visit here sometime during the 17th century, they would be dazzled by the Navratnas (nine jewels) in Akbar’s court and they

would marvel at the fact that the subcontinent accounted for nearly one third of the total world production. However, on their second visit at the turn of the millennium, they would be equally disappointed with this civilisation.

Perhaps the real question to ask is: why and how did the West pull ahead? That may shed easy light on why everyone else got left behind. The answer is obvious, but, like the case of the elephant in the room, there have been reasons for ignoring the obvious. Looking for deeper causalities behind the long trajectories of history may no longer be the intellectual flavour of the day. After all, this is the era of suspicions about grand narratives. We who got left behind can derive satisfaction from the all-round denunciations of colonialism and imperialism and attribute all that we suffer from to their crimes. We may rejoice that those in the high chairs of western academia are raising an intellectual storm against science and modernity which, supposedly, have been nothing but handmaidens of capitalism, colonialism and imperialism. The postcolonial theorist may continue to uncover sinister doings of the long dead colonialism. But someday we will have to ask—what is in it for us on the subcontinent? These critics are definitely making the western societies better, more cultivated, more democratic and more multicultural. But they already had science and modernity; they had already pulled ahead. How should we find our path out of poverty and superstition? What kind of future should we visualize for ourselves?

Explanations about why and how did the West pull ahead fill entire libraries. But, in some ways, the answer is too obvious: West did it with the help of science and modernity. Of course, both were born along with capitalism and colonialism. But

one should not throw the baby with the bathwater. It is truly astonishing that there exist high theories declaring that all claims of science about universal truths, objectivity and uniqueness of scientific method are false; that all cultures and communities in all ages had equally valid claims to knowledge and method. In India a simple way has been found to support such theories—all one has to do is to claim that everything that modern science has accomplished, and will ever accomplish, is already there in the Vedas.

In any case, West did not accomplish the miracle of Great Divergence only through capitalism and industrial revolution. Enlightenment and Modernity played an equally important role. I have already referred to the complex interaction between Science and Culture. In 18th century Western Europe this imparted an added acceleration to history. And it took nearly two centuries after the advent of modern science for scientific temper to seep into western culture. Enlightenment was the name given to this process of seeping in.

Enlightenment and Modernity cannot just be imported or imitated. This is because of the fact that science is one but cultures are many. All cultures must find their own ways to imbibe science and animate modernity. Among those who were left behind, there have been a few successful examples of catching up with the West. Soviet Union used to be one such example but it collapsed. Russia, in any case, was too close to the European civilisation to count as a distinctive example. In the East, Japan earlier and China now have been such examples. What has stopped the subcontinent from being another such example?

This too is an enormous subject and an extraordinarily complex one. It is said that fools rush in where an-

gels fear to tread. But let me rush in nevertheless. Among many millennial historical processes that have gone into the making a distinct civilisation on the subcontinent, one is special and unique. Elements of it may be found in other lands but on the subcontinent it has played role like no other place on the planet. This, in my opinion, has been the single largest obstacle to scientific temper seeping into our culture. Let me conclude by pointing a finger at it.

I am alluding to the fact that nearly all religions on the subcontinent took, in varying degrees, a mystical-devotional form, comprising of numerous sects led by gurus, pirs, mahatmas and other god-men—all engaged in the task of paving a plebeian road for a direct access to God without the mediation of priests or books or other intermediaries. On the Hindu side it emerged in the South as the Bhakti Movement and spread to the North in the second millennium. On the Muslim side it made its way through Afghanistan to the north-west of India and spread through sufis, dervishes and pirs. The phenomenon also gave rise to a new religion—Sikhism. It is this phenom-

enon of Bhakti, Sufism, Sikhism and assorted mystical-devotional movements that is at the heart of a distinct civilisation on the subcontinent.

This phenomenon has been judged favourably by nearly everyone. It has won praises from the religious and the non-religious, from traditionalists and modernists, from the right-wing as well as the left-wing. Nearly everyone prefers heterodoxy to orthodoxy. There is no denying that in many ways it has contributed positively to the culture and civilisation on the subcontinent. And yet, there is a very large negative fall-out that has been largely ignored.

This phenomenon triggers processes that obstruct the advance of scientific temper and modernity. It encourages blind faith at the cost of a genuine sense of wonder; prevents religiosity from turning genuinely spiritual and becoming philosophical; prevents the philosophical from becoming reasoned; prevents Reason from seeping into Culture. It has been the principal vehicle of unreason, blind faith and superstition in our part of the world. George Orwell once said, "Saints should always be judged guilty until proven innocent". An ironical

meaning has been added to Orwell by today's India where god-men do not lose followers even after being convicted as rapists and murderers.

Even Nehru fails to grapple with the civilisational consequences of Bhakti Movement. He harbours contradictions. He admires Vivekanand, Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhi, Bhagat Singh and Einstein—all at the same time. He was a great man—a visionary, a leader, a thinker, a statesman. Like Whitman he could perhaps say, "I am large, I contain multitudes". He failed because the weight of the past was too heavy. He could not speak bare truths because he had to carry his people along. That is why, sometimes, you need to listen to small men too. They can speak the bare truth as they are spared the onerous task of carrying Nehru's burden. □□□

[Professor Pervez Hoodbhoy, Eminent Physicist, Prominent Public Intellectual, Civil Rights Activist, Author, Columnist from Pakistan ; Dr Ravi Sinha, Theoretical Physicist, Activist, Scholar, associated with Progressive Movements and Writer ; Mr Gauhar Raza, Former Chief Scientist, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Civil Rights Activist, Poet, Documentary Filmmaker both from India shared their ideas at the programme followed by discussion.]

'DOSTOJEE'

A Tale of Friendship in Times of Bigotry

Baul Chakraborty

IN DIRECTOR PRASUN CHATTERJEE'S *Dostojee* (a Bengali Film), religious hatred engulfs a village where a bare minimum life was lived to its fullest. The people in the village were doing just fine, in their own world of struggles and survival; slow-paced, and far away from the epicentre of rising hate and fanaticism.

Nature and mundaneness of life are captured at their best cinematically, with realistic lighting, colour grading, sound, and close-ups of ordinary faces and everyday objects

found in a living-on-the-edge household. *Dostojee* paints the glory of fireflies illuminating the dark, a kite soaring high on a grey sky and then its fall from its grace (no less than a metaphor for life), the joys of fishing with bare hands in a village pond pounded by heavy rains, and the melancholy of a lone boat resting by the river. The realism throughout the film constantly remind its viewers of Bengali auteur, Satyajit Ray's portrayal of the ephemeral nature of life, grief, and loss in a rural Bengal

setting in the iconic Pather Panchali.

Prasun has a vision, and the film takes a high moral stand in how it depicts poverty. It isn't far removed from reality, and refuses to romanticise poverty. The characters are multifaceted, reeling under socially-challenging circumstances interspersed with brutal attempts of polarisation on religious lines.

While unfolding his story in the backdrop of a Hindu-minority village somewhere on the India-Bangladesh border, director Prasun draws a quick reference to the unrest that set off in the country following the Babri Masjid demolition in Ayodhya and the chain of violence from thereon that caused

massive upheavals in the early 90s. The socio-political narrative renders the film intellectually rich as the characters constantly fight amongst themselves. This is of course excluding the protagonists of the film — Palash (Asik Shaikh) and Safikul (Arif Shaikh) — who, till the end, remain untouched by any kind of moral ambiguity and are oblivious to the raging fire of communalism that is slowly engulfing their soil.

Palash, an academically-bright kid with unwavering obedience, is the son of a Hindu priest. His bosom buddy and partner in mischief is Safikul, a son of a Muslim weaver, who lives in the adjacent house. While the latter is unlike Palash in education, he does have a creative bone. Dostojee (which is a term of endearment for a friend) tells the story of this inseparable duo. While Safikul visits Ram Jatra with his Hindu pal against his own father's wishes, Palash shares with his little sister the Eid-special semai that he gets from his immediate neighbour-cum-confidante. Their families' hesitancy to interact with each other due to their differences only weakens in time, just like the makeshift straw wall that goes between the two mud houses as a mark of boundary.

The film also beautifully captures Bombay's influence in rural India in several scenes. For instance, after looking at the poster of Amitabh Bachchan's 1975 film *Deewar*, which is pasted on the wall of a bicycle repair shop, they start imitating senior Bachchan's pose with the help

of the shopkeeper. From taking pictures while imitating their idol, to bunking classes, to seeing a bioscope of the actor, the two engage in all kinds of mischief. They prance around their picture-perfect lush green village; their mind knows no divides. They argue, make up and wear their own hand-made crowns that are illuminated with fireflies stuck on the outside. They "fight like kings" (rajader moto juddho), but their altercations never culminate in defeat or victory as their friendship isn't defined by the things that locals in the village are mostly concerned about. While one sect wants to build a miniature Babri Masjid in retaliation to the big mosque demolition, the other wants to answer back by organising a Ram Jatra on the occasion of installing a Lord Ram idol in a local temple of Lord Shiva.

Prasun sparks a debate over a highly spoken-about subject in contemporary politics. Palash's mother, worried about living in a communally unsettled area, asks her husband whether Lord Rama has ever been traditionally worshipped as a deity in Bengal. It would have been rather interesting for the audience, had Palash's father, instead of a short and crisp answer, elaborated on his understanding of Lord Rama's popularity in Uttar Pradesh and beyond.

The nearly-two-hour feature is sprinkled with several heartwarming moments that show the innocence of the growing up years and soul-stirring conversations that time and

again posit that the human bond is above everything. Take for example, the moment when an overwhelmed Safikul learns at the backstage of the Ram Jatra, that the folk theatre artists are not really foes in real life, and they play enemies on stage just to earn a living.

The film is filled with quite a few metaphors, and what cannot escape the viewers is the significance of the character of the local madman. One sees him being driven away by members of both communities. His belongings are thrown away and he is removed from his lair as the local Muslims want the land for building a mosque. He does not get prasad at a Hindu festival either. He stands as a strong metaphor for those who are often caught in the crossfire of sectarianism.

Palash and Safikul's carefree childhood gets a generous portrayal in the film until tragedy strikes. But the second half of the film lacks speed and a sense of storytelling too. Instead of further strengthening the narrative, the writing begins to slack.

In spite of that, the director manages to deliver what he wanted to in a rather convincing way. What makes *Dostojee* unique is that most of the actors in the film, including the two protagonists, do not come from an acting background. Their natural expressions and dialogue delivery make the characters all the more authentic, while they stay rooted in a film that is all about social realism. □□□

IMPACT OF NEP

SAU Students on Hunger Strike

Prabhanu Kumar Das

WHEN A STUDENT delegation of South Asian University (SAU) met its acting vice-president to revoke the expulsion of five students who had

demanding more stipends for master's courses and scholarships for the economically marginalised, he shot back, "More heads will roll."

SAU students have been protest-

ing for more than a month demanding more stipends and scholarships, parity of PhD stipends with JRF, the inclusion of students in complaints and grievance redressal committees and more social science faculty members in these panels and on administrative positions.

On November 3, the then-proctor was asked to initiate police ac-

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tion against the protesting students but he resigned in solidarity with them. The new proctor expelled two students, rusticated another two for a year and suspended one for a semester the next day.

Umesh Joshi, a PhD sociology student who was expelled, said, “No procedure was followed; the proctor just sent a notice saying we are expelled without mentioning the complaint against us.”

On November 5, the students started a mass hunger strike. “On Monday, eight students started an indefinite hunger strike. Our blood sugar levels have massively dropped. The university administration is apathetic to our issues and not even willing to talk to us,” added Joshi, who is part of the indefinite hunger strike.

As of November 14, three students had critical sugar levels and one was in critical condition after almost suffering cardiac arrest.

What is happening at SAU is part of a trend of government university students paying increasing fees with scholarships being withdrawn in the last two years—thanks to the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020.

The NEP has replaced the system of Central grants to universities via the University Grants Commissions (UGC) with a centralised funding body called the Higher Education Funding Authority (HEFA) which will grant loans to public universities. The institutes have been accorded so-called “financial autonomy” wherein they are left to fend for themselves with the burden of loans invariably falling on students.

Students of Indian Institute of Technology Delhi and Bombay, Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Delhi School of Journalism and Allahabad University, among others have been protesting fees hikes and shrinking scholarships.

Allahabad University was one of the most affordable universities with an undergraduate fees of Rs 975 per annum, which has increased by 400% to Rs 4,151 a year. Only 10% of Indians earn more than Rs 25,000 per month.

Devendra Azad, who is pursuing masters in political science at Allahabad University and part of the months-long protests, said that the university administration has completely ignored students on hunger strike. “The indefinite hunger strike continued for six days but the administration did not even bother to talk to us. On the seventh day, the proctor flatly rejected our demands. The students were kicked and the police are always present in the university,” he said.

The NEP is being rolled out and its effects are already being felt. “As soon as you switch from publicly funded education, the fees structure would obviously get affected,” explained Rohit Azad, an economics professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

“The university takes a loan to start a programme but has to generate funds to pay it with interest. How will the funds be generated? Of course, from the fees of students, who would have to pay both for the loan and salaries of professors,” Azad further explained.

“This will be exclusionary like at any private university.” At private universities, the composition is “skewed in favour of the elite and the upper-middle class, not poor students. Those who need education the most are going to find it increasingly difficult to enter the university system”, Azad added.

The educational system does need reforms, but the “NEP does the opposite”, Azad alleged. “We keep talking about youth dividends but if you don’t have enough educational institutions to cater for that

population, it will never give returns. The NEP is even more exclusionary in favour of the rich and the upper-middle class.”

The NEP will also impact the accountability and quality of research, according to Azad, as many academics and researchers will have to look at different sources of funding such as loans and corporate social responsibility programmes.

“The dependence on funds affects research. If you are getting funded by a corporate entity, the kind of research that you do will obviously be dictated by their interests. At a publicly funded university, the accountability is towards the public and not towards any individual or corporation. That’s why research flourishes much more at publicly funded universities,” Azad said.

Many students feel that resistance is the only way to counter the NEP. Shambhavi Sharma, a member of the student organisation Collective and a PhD student at IIT Delhi, gives the example of the IITs in Delhi and Bombay. “Fees of IIT Bombay and Delhi were massively hiked this year. The fees was partially rolled back only after a prolonged student protest,” she said calling for more resistance as the “frequency of fees hikes will increase”.

The sudden changes in the education system are based on the Birla-Ambani Report, which recommended fees hike and raising funds from internal accruals, according to critics and observers. Public education was formulated to provide affordable education to the masses. The NEP turns the student into a resource from which funding will be extracted and public education moves from being a social good to a corporatised enterprise with the government washing its hands of all responsibility. □□ [The writer is a student of convergent journalism at AJK Mass Communication Research Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia. Courtesy: Newsclick.]

CMRI REPORT

Hate Crimes in India

Sumedha Pal

BY HELPING OFFENDERS, detaining victims and failing to register first information reports (FIRs) in some cases, law enforcement agencies played a role in furthering hate crimes last year, a new report published by the United States-based NGO, Council on Minority Rights in India (CMRI), says.

The 'Religious Minorities in India' report was launched by the CMRI at the Press Club of India in New Delhi on November 20 and covers a number of topics related to the condition of India's religious minorities: instances of hate crimes against minorities; their portrayal in the media; the intersectional nature of oppression; and more.

The report was released by lawyer Kawalpreet Kaur and student activists Safoora Zargar, Nidha Parveen, Sharjeel Usmani and Tazeen Junaid. The latter three were involved in compiling the report. The launch was presided over by senior advocate Colin Gonsalves.

In a chapter on hate crimes, the report details the ways in which the actions of law enforcement agencies, in some cases, furthered hate crimes. In this chapter, the report records that based on both primary and secondary data, 294 cases of hate crimes against Christians, Muslims and Sikhs were recorded in India in 2021. Of these, the majority of crimes (192) were recorded against Muslims, 95 against Christians and seven against Sikhs.

The Christian community was predominantly targeted on allegations of forceful conversion while the Muslim community was chiefly targeted for inter-faith relationships and allegations of cow slaughter, the re-

port says. In most instances, the perpetrators were right-wing vigilantes or Hindu extremist groups, it says. "There is a clear pattern which suggests that incidents of hate crime against religious minorities have occurred largely in BJP-ruled states," the report adds.

"Hate crimes against Sikhs are not documented at all and are not reported by news media as well. During our primary research for cases of hate crimes against members of the Sikh community, we found several cases of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings," the authors say.

The role of law enforcement agencies, in the absence of a "definite meaning and insufficient legal provisions to implicate offenders of hate crime", is effectively driven by discretion, the report says. "There is a definite lack of action on part of the law enforcement against perpetrators of hate crimes that reveals a bigger pattern of discrimination in the criminal-judicial system," it says.

The record also shows a "clear bias" of the police by detaining or arresting the victims of hate crimes, it says, adding that there are also incidents of police "helping the offenders in a crime or overlooking the offence that is committed".

"There are also incidents wherein law enforcement personnel have in fact engaged in offences against members of the minority community. Institutional power and lack of accountability of law enforcement make the victims of hate crimes directly or indirectly affected by police action or inaction," it says.

The authors say there are also incidents where the police have filed

FIRs against the victim, making it "all the more difficult for them to be able to seek justice or any redresses.

"It may also be argued that police discretion allows politically motivated behaviour like arbitrary detention of the victims or refusal to register complaints of the victim or terming the hate crime as a quarrel or clash between two parties, at the behest of political influence or pressure," it says.

Speaking at the launch, Gonsalves shared several examples of cases of political prisoners where the crime of the accused couldn't even be established. "It shows the power of the Union government to frighten people," he said.

"We are deep into the second emergency," he continued. "For some reason, it hasn't attracted the world's attention and the media's attention like it should have. Amid this, there is participation of the legal system."

Addressing young activists, he said, "Our battle against this government and why they hate us is because of our speech. They are going for our minds and our tongues; they are going after our rebellion and our spirit."

The report contains chapters authored by activist Afreen Fatima, journalist Aditya Menon, lawyer Vikasan Pillai, social worker Mohammad Uzair and research students Mehwish Asim, Mohammad Kamran, Tazeen Junaid, Nidha Parveen J.A., Nada Nasreen, and Sabah Maharaj.

Parveen, the president of the student union at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) Mumbai and author of the chapter on 'Gendered Islamophobia' in the report, said, "Muslimness is seen as a threat in our times, We have to carry the burden of secularism and nationalism. We are asked to carry this burden for collective consciousness."

“There is an intersectional nature of oppression; the bodies of Muslim women have become sites of violence. This is something that was witnessed in Gujarat, the Northeast Delhi violence, and elsewhere. The accused enjoy impunity while Muslim women are objectified, raped and auctioned online.”

Activist Usmani raised the question of how young Muslims growing up right now might be affected by the current atmosphere.

“We saw four of our friends go to jail; four of our friends get harassed online; four of our friends auctioned online. We have documented our lives, our friends’ lives and the lives of our families. Young Muslim kids growing up right now are witnessing this consistently, relentlessly on phones, on televisions, and in the streets. [They] are hearing and seeing their friends and relatives being beaten up, being threatened. Every aspect of their lives is being demonised and vilified. How is that child looking at his future in India right now? How do they understand their own belongingness in this country?” he said.

The authors and editors of the

report, collectively, said, “Principally, the report is written by young students who are impacted by the deepening divide in society—with a hope of a better and equal future in the country.”

Kaur, speaking at the event, discussed the legal aspects of persecution. “It is evident that minorities are facing the brunt of the state in varying degrees. When we see the example of the 2020 Northeast Delhi pogrom victims, we see the cases lying in the high court for the last two years. Indian courts need to keep their eyes and ears open; it is not a one-off case of Afreen Fatima’s house being bulldozed; it is not a one-off what happened in Khargone, or when the stalls of working-class Muslims were razed in Delhi, despite a stay from the courts,” she said.

“The judiciary should see that it is an attack by the Indian state against its minorities. It is also a campaign of misinformation and Islamophobia that we see everyday,” the lawyer added.

The release of CMRI’s report comes at a time when numerous countries and organisations are calling upon India to take stock of the

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

—Fr.

plight of its religious minorities.

Six international rights groups—the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), Inter-national Dalit Solidarity Network, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch—in a joint statement reminded New Delhi that it is yet to implement recommendations of a recent UN report on India which cover topics which include the protection of minorities and human rights defenders, upholding civil liberties, and more.

“The Indian government should promptly adopt and act on the recommendations that United Nations member states made at the UN Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review process on November 10,” the joint statement read.

□□□

[Courtesy: the wire]

UKRAINE UPDATE

‘Executing Russian POWs’

Countercurrents Collective

THE WORLD HEALTH Organisation (WHO) has warned: This winter may be a “life-threatening” experience for “millions” of Ukrainians.

Hans Kluge, the WHO regional director for Europe, has warned: Up to three million Ukrainians are expected to migrate “in search of warmth and safety.” Kluge made this warning on Monday during a press conference in Kiev.

“We expect 2-3 million more people to leave their homes in search

of warmth and safety. They will face unique health challenges, including respiratory infections such as Covid 19, pneumonia and influenza, and the serious risk of diphtheria and measles in under-vaccinated populations,” Kluge said.

Those who remain at home will likely be forced to opt for “alternative heating method,” the WHO official said, warning that doing things “like burning charcoal or wood, or using generators fuelled by diesel, or electric heaters” carry health risks as well.

They include “exposure to toxic substances that are harmful for children, older people and those with respiratory and cardiovascular conditions, as well as accidental burns and injuries,” he said.

The ongoing conflict is also taking a heavy toll on the mental health of Ukrainians, according to Kluge. Some 10 million of them are already “at risk of mental disorder such as acute stress, anxiety, depression, substance use and post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD,” the official said.

According to the latest UN figures, more than 7.8 million refugees from Ukraine have migrated to Europe amid the conflict between Mos-

cow and Kiev that broke out in late February. Some 4.7 million of them have been registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes across the EU. A sizable portion of the refugees have gone to Russia, with more than 2.8 million recorded in the country.

US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin warned on Saturday that Ukraine faces a “harsh winter,” as Russia continues missile strikes on its infrastructure. Earlier, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, suggested that Kiev should take the opportunity to talk with Moscow.

Speaking at the Halifax Security Forum in Canada, Austin cautioned that “hard times lie ahead as Ukraine faces a harsh winter.”

Although Ukraine has received tens of billions of dollars worth of weapons from the US and NATO, Russian drone and missile strikes have been pounding its command centres and energy infrastructure since early October. These launches have, according to Ukrainian authorities, left 40% of the country’s power infrastructure destroyed or damaged.

In his address on Saturday, Austin claimed that Ukraine’s population would rather go without electricity and heat than have talks with Moscow. However, he reiterated that the U S would “not drag into Putin’s war,” but would continue to funnel arms to Kiev.

The New York Times says it has verified the authenticity of videos that surfaced online last week, showing the execution of captive Russian soldiers by Ukrainian troops. The men “appear to have been shot dead at close range,” according to the newspaper.

The events shown in the clips occurred in the village of Makeyevka in the People’s Republic of Lugansk, earlier this month, the newspaper reported on Sunday.

“The videos whose authenticity has been verified by The New York Times, offer a rare look into one gruesome moment among many in the war, but do not show how or why the Russian soldiers were killed,” the NYT wrote, adding that what actually happened to the soldiers remains “a mystery.”

However, the outlet noted out that judging by the footage, “at least 11 Russians appear to have been shot dead at close range after one of their fellow fighters suddenly opened fire on Ukrainian soldiers standing nearby.”

The NYT also cited Dr Rohini Haar, medical adviser at Physicians for Human Rights, who said that “killing or wounding a combatant, who, having laid down his arms or having no longer means of defence, has surrendered at discretion” is a violation of the laws of international armed conflict.

“It looks like most of them were shot in the head,” Haar said of the Russian soldiers in the clips. “There are pools of blood. That indicates that they were just left dead. There appears to have been no effort to pick them up or help them.”

In one of the videos, which appeared on social media, the Russian servicemen were shown surrendering to Kiev troops and lying down on the ground, before a second clip showed their bodies lying motionless in pools of blood. Another video with no sound, which is also believed to have been made at the scene, purportedly showed a Russian soldier emerging from a building and shooting at the Ukrainians. It is unclear whether that second clip is linked to the alleged execution. At least one of Kiev’s fighters was allegedly injured in the incident, according to the footage. It is unclear how this particular episode was linked to what happened to the Russians next.

The UN’s human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine has called on Kiev to probe a video that apparently shows the country’s troops executing Russian prisoners of war.

The UN body told the news agency AP on Saturday that it “is aware of the video and is looking into it,” adding: “we reiterate our call that all such allegations should be properly and promptly investigated by respective authorities.”

The Russian Presidential Human Rights Council calling the incident a “demonstrative and audacious crime.” The council demanded an international investigation, and said that it had notified the UN, Council of Europe, Amnesty International, and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Russia’s Defence Ministry, however, said that not only does the footage depict the “barbarous killing of Russian prisoners of war,” it shows “a widespread practice of the Ukrainian Armed Forces that is actively supported by the Kiev regime and outright ignored by its Western backers.”

Back in March, another shocking video emerged showing Ukrainian troops shooting captured Russian soldiers in the legs at point-blank range, while other wounded Russians lie on the ground nearby. Countless other videos of Russian troops being mistreated by their Ukrainian captors have also surfaced online in the months since Moscow’s military operation in Ukraine began in late February.

While acknowledging concern over videos that showed Ukrainian forces executing captured Russian soldiers, the US war crimes envoy has argued that allegations against Kiev’s forces pale in comparison to Moscow’s alleged atrocities.

“We are obviously tracking that quite closely,” Beth Van Schaack, U S ambassador-at-large for global criminal justice, told reporters in a

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telephone briefing on Monday. “It is really important to emphasise that the laws of war apply to all parties equally, both the aggressor state and the defender state, and this is in equal measure.”

However, Van Schaack added, “when it comes to the war in Ukraine, that is really where the equivalency ends. When we are looking at the sheer scale of criminality exhibited by Russian forces, it is enormous compared to the allegations that we have seen against Ukrainian forces.”

The envoy also claimed that Kiev has dealt with allegations of wrongdoing more responsibly.

“Russia inevitably responds with propaganda, denial, mis- and disinformation, whereas the Ukrai-

nian authorities have generally acknowledged abuses and have pledged to investigate them,” she said.

Officials in Kiev have denied that Ukrainian forces executed Russian prisoners. President Vladimir Zelensky has also denied Russian allegations of his government’s involvement in other atrocities, such as the assassination of journalist Darya Dugina in a Moscow suburb—which US intelligence has attributed to Kiev.

Moscow Accuses Ukrainian Soldiers killing Russian POWs

Earlier reports said:

The Russian Defence Ministry has accused Ukrainian forces of committing a war crime after a video surfaced on social media, on Friday, which appears to show captured

Russian servicemen first alive and subsequently dead.

The ministry described the video as evidence of “the deliberate and methodical murder” of over ten Russian servicemen at the hands of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, who “shot them straight in their heads.” Such actions prove the “barbaric nature” of the government in Kiev led by President Vladimir Zelensky, as well as “all those, who defend and support it,” the statement added.

Moscow will send the information on the alleged execution of Russian captives to the UN Human Rights Office, the Council of Europe, as well as Amnesty International, and the International Committee of the Red Cross. □□□

[Source: *countercurrents.org*]

LETTERS

Sentenced to Death

Dear friends,

It’s shocking—Iranian courts sentenced five people to death over the mass protests that have swept through the country.

Many more people are in immediate danger. Journalists, human rights defenders, university students, moms, and schoolchildren have been murdered and many of those arrested face torture, enforced disappearance, and unfair trials.

The regime is not backing down, and is now even resorting to public executions to crush the revolution. We must stand with the people in Iran!

Thousands of Iranians continue to protest, and we can help them keep the world’s attention on their struggle for freedom and justice.

So far, more than 300 demonstrators have been killed by the government’s repression—but the protests are not stopping. More than 1,000 indictments have been issued in Tehran alone, with hundreds more brought against people arrested across the country.

The US, the EU, the UK, and Canada have all adopted human rights sanctions on Iranian leaders and some institutions, but much more is needed!

Today, the UN Human Rights Coun-

cil is holding a special session to discuss the Iran protests. This could lead to establishing an independent mechanism to investigate and address the most serious human rights violations committed in Iran during the recent crackdown.

Global solidarity is needed to echo the call for freedom, and our support can help show government leaders that the world stands with the people in Iran.

From the brutal crackdowns in Tibet and Burma to the Arab spring, over and over again, Avaaz community has stood side by side with pro-democracy movements. Now, let’s echo the call from all the brave people in Iran who are being crushed for wanting a government that brings justice, equality, and freedom.

With hope and determination,
**Laura, Wissam, Fadi, Luis,
Abdelrahman, Joana, Huiting
and the whole Avaaz team**

Honour Killing

It happened “in a fit of rage,” Nitesh Kumar Yadav reportedly confessed to the police. A few days ago, the police found the body of a 22-year-old BCA student, Aayushi Chaudhary, in a red trolley bag near Raya on the Yamuna Expressway.

Allegedly, Aayushi had a ‘secret’ wedding with Chhatrapal Singh Gurjar, a 24-year old young man she knew since her school days. She was trying to convince her parents to accept her husband, and therefore, told them that she was pregnant. However, the post-mortem report confirmed that she was not.

On Monday, November 21, Yadav (49) and his wife, Brajbala (45), performed Aayushi’s last rites in Mathura. The parents were reportedly aggrieved by their daughter’s ‘independent style’ of living. Their relationship worsened when she confessed to marrying Gurjar.

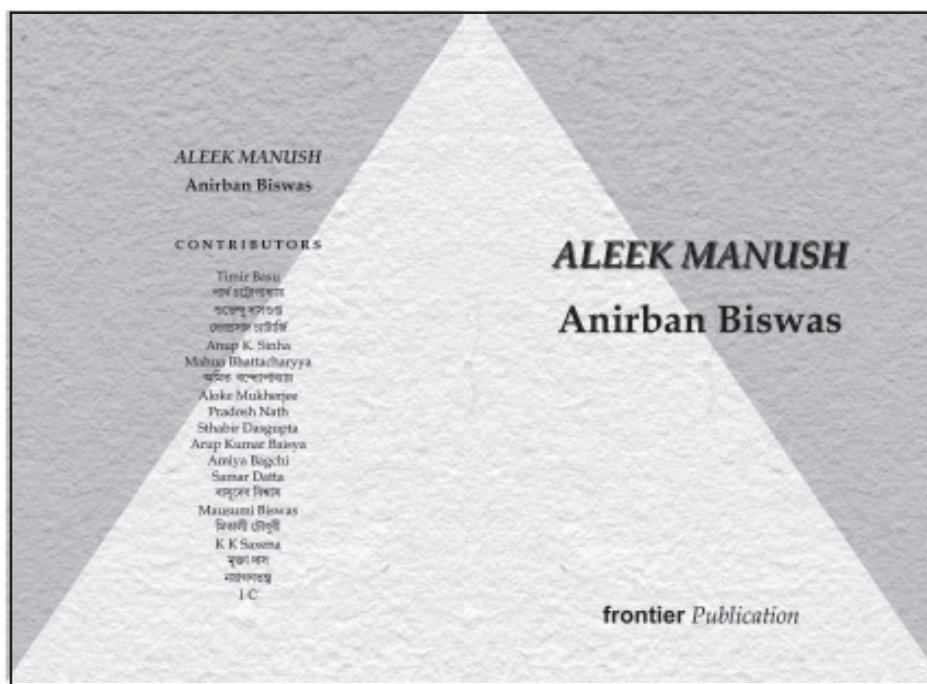
According to the police, Aayushi’s parents had ordered him to stay away from Gurjar. She got upset when she learnt about it, and in an argument with her parents, the woman said she was experiencing stomach aches probably because she was pregnant. Reportedly, Yadav shot her and his wife helped him in disposing of the body of their daughter.

MP Singh, SP (City), Agra, said, “Though her marriage was solemnised in an Arya Samaj Mandir a year ago and registered in a Shahdara court in October this year, Aayushi wanted her parents to accept it and ‘willingly’ marry her off to Gurjar publicly again.”

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