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Shrinking Opposition Space

WITH THE HUMILIATING DEFEAT OF OPPOSITION IN THE recently-held Gujarat Assembly election the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is now doubly encouraged to see in the event a dress rehearsal for the 2024 Parliamentary polls despite their minor setback in a small enclave called Himachal Pradesh. The double-engine formula of BJP worked well in Gujarat but it failed miserably in Himachal. For the first time since the formation of Gujarat state in 1960, the house would be without an official leader of Opposition. As Congress has won only 17 seats of the 182-strong legislature, the tally is less than 10 per cent of the total strength which is mandatory to claim the post of leader of Opposition which enjoys the status of a cabinet rank minister. In truth Modi and his men are ruling the country without any effective opposition. All opposition parties, including the left parties, have virtually lost the course in the middle; they simply don't know how to confront the saffron party's aggression, politically and ideologically. More they talk of BJP's Hindutva without attacking its economic base, more they get isolated from a large number of masses. People are losing faith in opposition parties because of their strategy of inaction. They remain in a state of calculated hibernation and get activated only during election. Whenever there is an independent initiative people support it as it was proved at the time of farmers' movement. While post-mortem reports of 'Gujarat model' continue to flood mainstream media, one thing is certain that Congress is dying. It has no future unless the Gandhians show sincerity enough to oppose the BJP. All of them talk of united opposition only to get disunited at the time of need. The reason is simple: they have no principled approach to BJP's divisive politics. The Bihar-based Janata Dal United is hoping against hope that they will unite all opposition parties through a grand alliance to defeat BJP in the coming Lok Sabha polls. For all practical purposes their grand alliance is a non-starter; it remains alive in press releases and TV coverages. Most opposition parties, barring Congress, are regional outfits having no national programme of their own. Ironically all of them want to play the national game in Delhi. Dishing out all the bold statements about opposition unity the newly elected JDU 'national' president Rajiv Ranjan Singh finally said "the task of opposition unity was difficult but not impossible". Talking vaguely about unemployment and development, or for that matter opposition unity, makes little sense to the vast majority of masses who are in perpetual distress.

Reviving the opposition space under the banner of Indian National Congress is next to impossible as it has virtually lost its national status. They are now trying to get back what they have lost--- national credibility by way of launching a public relations exercise through their much-publicised 'Bharat Jodo Yatra'. Their declared aim is to fight divisiveness and reclaim the Constitution destroyed by the BJP. But in reality they are desperately trying to boost the image of Rahul Gandhi by playing with the gallery. And it is unlikely to work. The unemployed need employment and not Yatra. They need growth, not jobless growth.

True, BJP favours somewhat nakedly a few corporate houses but Congress is not a pro-worker party and yet they think toilers in the organised

and unorganised sector as well will vote for them. Congress and its so-called allies in the 'grand alliance' never show any interest to fight the BJP-induced new labour codes that will ruin labour organising and destroy the rights the workers gained through arduous struggles and sacrifices. For one thing new labour codes will push India back to the British era when slavery was a norm. Most labour laws have been enacted on the basis of tripartite consultation or on the basis of reports of committees which have heard representatives of both management and workers. But in one stroke BJP has put the last nail into the coffin of labour protection. And the opposition just accepts it as inevitability.

Intellectual dissent arising in universities and cultural organisations is crushed brutally and they remain

silent. Institutions after institutions are losing autonomy and they finish their duty by issuing harmless press statements. Writers, social activists and human rights crusaders are languishing in jails for years without any trial and they find no reason to agitate on such sensitive issues. As per official parlance they are either terrorists or maoists though it is an open secret that they are implicated in false cases manufactured by the security establishment. For one thing many Congressmen are not opposed to Modi's action to abolish Article 370 in Kashmir. They are happy that what their 'weak leadership' could not do in decades was done by the Modi brigade in a matter of few years! And yet they think they will be able to build a broader united front against Modi's BJP. □□□

COMMENT

December 6

DECEMBER 6 COMES, DECEMBER 6 goes. But the Babri issue remains supercharged dividing the two communities as usual. Civil Liberties organisations mark the occasion to emphasise on India's plurality, opposing religious bigotry of the ruling dispensation. There ends the matter. The much talked about concept of unity in diversity is a myth. Social disharmony, not harmony is the order of the day. With Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) firmly in the saddle communal polarisation continues unabated while the so-called secular parties have failed miserably to counter BJP's game plan.

The claim that there was Lord Ram's Temple at that spot has been on tenuous grounds. The Supreme Court in its judgement did not uphold this view of Lord Ram's temple being there and Babar having destroyed it. There are claims by some archaeologists that the remains of

some pillars and other artefacts prove that temple was there, but it is disputed by other archaeologists. On the other hand while levelling the land for the Ram Temple, few months ago, remains of Buddhist structure was found there.

As such the seeds of the dispute was actually sown by the British in pursuance of their 'divide and rule policy'. In recent history, the first incident which occurred was putting up of Lord Ram idols in the Mosque in 1949 in a surreptitious manner. This was done in the middle of the night. Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime minister asked the UP Chief Govind Vallabh Pant to get the idols removed but no action was taken by UP's Chief.

The mosque was locked and remained so till mid-1980s. Under the pressure of Hindu nationalists the gates of the disputed structure were open and shilanyas was performed

when Rajiv Gandhi was PM. This shilanyas was not at the site where it has been done now. This criminal act of Ram Lalla idols being kept inside is recorded by the SC judgement. Later on 6th December through communal mobilisation three lakh Kar Sevaks (saffron volunteers) assembled and destroyed the Archaeological monument in broad day light. The UP Chief Minister had given an affidavit to protect the mosque, but he backed out and later proudly proclaimed that he is glad about what he did.

The Muslims Kings and Hindu Kings both had destroyed the temples for wealth and political rivalries. The Maratha armies destroyed a temple in Shrirangpatnam, which was repaired by Tipu. Aurangzeb got Vishwanath temple destroyed in Kashi but the same Aurangzeb gave donation to many Hindu temples, and also destroyed one mosque in Golkonda. But here destruction of temples got associated only with Muslim kings, reflecting it on the Muslims of today and atmosphere

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of Hate against Muslims was intensified. Muslims of modern times are in no way responsible for what the Mughal emperor did.

The majority of Muslim community accepted the Supreme Court verdict with honour without any protest. They have been allotted five acres of land as compensation. While a Prime Minister who took oath by the Indian Constitution, went to in-

augurate the temple building, it remains to be seen if he will go and inaugurate the building of Mosque in case Muslims decide to build one. His associate the Chief Minister of UP, who was accompanying PM while temple ground breaking ceremony was done did declare that he will not be part of Mosque building ceremony. □□□

[Contributed]

NOTE

The Phenomenon of Rishi Sunak

Bhabani Shankar Nayak writes:

RISHI SUNAK'S ELECTORAL victory within the Conservative Party and his entry into the 10 Downing Street as the PM of United Kingdom is celebrated across the political and ideological isles as a case for post-racial Britain. It is a historic moment in the political and national life of Britain. The politically correct under-carpet racists celebrated it as a sign of diversity and political empowerment of British ethnic minorities. There is no doubt that the rise of Rishi Sunak's leadership shows progress in terms of representative character of democratic diversity. The narrow electoral representation of upper echelons of privileged British higher class diminishes the empowering character of diversity by incorporating people of colour within political conservative ideology. However, it has given Tories some breathing space to shed their old racism to sell modern Britain and hide its colonial past and racist present.

As per the reports of the Office of National Statistics (2020), the ethnic pay gap in London is 23.8%. The British capital reflects the worst but the ethnic pay gap between white and non-white workers exist across all regions in the country. It reflects continuity of everyday racism which

is institutionalised in every step of life in Britain. The structural racism reproduces itself with political patronage. It reflects political, social, cultural and legal failures in establishing racial equality in the country. The ruling elites of Britain managed to keep the ugly head of racism; Rishi Sunak represents the ruling and non-ruling elites of modern Britain. He neither presents people of colour nor represents interests of working people in the country.

Rishi Sunak's foreign policy upholds the spirit of old and imperial Britain. Like his predecessors, he follows the footprints of American imperialism. There is no difference between Tony Blair and Rishi Sunak as far as their approach to war and workers are concerned. Sunak supports supply of weapons to Ukraine for 'peace' and defends expansion of war mongering NATO at the cost of lives and livelihoods of people in Ukraine, Russia and across the world. He is silent about execution of Russian POWs by the Ukrainian forces.

Rishi Sunak's ideological, political and legal positions on worker's right to fight for their wages and well-being shows his double standards in public life and disdain for deepening of democracy. Rishi Sunak supports Chinese workers' right to

NOTICE

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strike but opposes British workers' right to strike. Workers' struggles are not only for wages but also for the deepening of citizenship rights and decentralisation of democracy. The Conservatives in Britain under the leadership of Rishi Sunak does not believe in the ideals of workers' struggle. The Tory politics believes in depoliticised and domesticated workers who work without questioning the legitimacy of illegitimate power of conservative crony capitalists, who run Britain today.

The divesting of funding from deprived areas to invest in rich boroughs define the class character and class location of Rishi Sunak. It fits the bill of the crony capitalists of the Conservative party donors who squeeze public money and weaken the welfare state and democracy. His policies on health, education, regional developments and employment are not concomitant with the everyday requirements of the underrepresented communities and working-class people in the country. His policies are benefiting the crony capitalists in and outside Britain.

Political symbolism matters and meaningful when it is embedded with emancipatory ideals and policies. The essentialist character of

electoral democracy and its representative leadership illustrates dominance of privilege over politics of emancipation. Rishi Sunak represents such a trend in British politics that lacks any form of emancipatory

project for the racial minorities nor for the white working classes. It is time to expose the double standards of the Tories under the leadership of Sunak, who represents a kind of elite politics and legitimises policies

that are detrimental to the masses. Sunak also represents false sense of empowerment of racial minorities in Britain when massive wage gap exists between white and non-white workers. □□□

STATE, SOCIETY, PARTY

Democracy is the Essence of Marxism

Arup Baisya

AMERICAN SOCIALIST HAL Draper wrote, the two things are woven together in Marx's theory, which "moves in the direction of defining consistent democracy in socialist terms, and consistent socialism in democratic terms." Lenin intended to ensure democracy to prevail over centralism, but the idea inherent in the concept of Democratic centralism was dualistic with its functional separation and formulaic idea of interaction between centralism and democracy. The planned implementation from above and democracy of soviets from below in functioning of the state were separated in space and time and so was the functioning of the party. To achieve unity of the party by doing away with the factional groups since 1921 had become an attempt to homogenise the party through central command. These two phenomena cannot be justified in the pretext of an adverse international and domestic situation facing the building of socialism in Russia at that time because it contradicts the basic Marxist ideas of "emancipation of working class is conquered by themselves" and the emergence of communist society is guaranteed by the process of withering away of state and party. This initial aberration was the result of Leninist vanguardism which formulated the rise of socialist mass consciousness to be instilled from outside. At a later stage in post-Lenin era, Lenin's democratic centralism

had degenerated into bureaucratic centralism in Russia.

The idea of vanguardism contradicts the field theory of consciousness. The active and living interaction between the communist party activists and the workers can occur when the workers can find the conscious communist elements within the range of the energy-field of consciousness generated from their own struggle that brings disparate elements closure together to form collective power. The socialist consciousness cannot be instilled from outside, it is emancipated through a social process of which communists are part and parcel. This is not socialist consciousness from outside, but it is a linkage inside. This linkage develops from a desire to bridge the social cleavages historically developed through alienation of labour from the nature. The deepest and diversified forms of alienation emerge in capitalist social relations of production. The desire to bridge the cleavages is objectively determined and linkages with communists are coincidence.

One fundamental category of Marxist way of dealing with the social reality and social change is the category of alienation. This alienation is diversified and deepened with the diversification of labour. The objectified results of workers' past labour actually became the rulers and exploiters of today's workers. The past created by workers becomes the ruler of the present.

The labour becomes really subsumed to its own creation 'capital' which is dead labour and so also is the wealth in all pre-capitalist class divided society. Capitalism is the highest form of social relation in the history of society when it can only be replaced through a journey of bridging the gap and doing away with diverse forms of alienations. This journey is accompanied with a revolutionary break to seize the power from the classes that runs the system to maintain status quo and by the collective actor which is working class for eroding capitalism. The extreme and diverse forms of alienation of capitalist system are mediated between individuals as an abstraction by capital as commodities and abstraction by state as community. The individuals adhere to the capital's market rule of exchange and state's juridical rule of community. Here individual loses its identity as relation between one individual with other is mediated through commodity and the people loses their identity as the relation between the people is mediated through state. So to make the inverted world straight, the point is to appropriate alienated social power and to organise them as social powers. The project of practical re-appropriation is the only secure basis for democratisation. In this context only, Marx's idea of communist society as described in Communist Manifesto as "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" becomes meaningful. Struggles to "democratise democracy" are thus pivotal to the prospects for eroding capitalism.

The more deeply democratic is the capitalist state, the greater the possibility of state policies supporting the conditions for non-capitalist alternatives, and the obverse is also true, that is, the lesser the democratic character of the state, the greater the possibility of state policies supporting pre-capitalist relations. The values like racism, religious bigotry, casteist parochialism, sectarian and chauvinistic identitarianism etc are the hallmark of the regressive nature of a bourgeois state policy curtailing democracy. The democracy under a bourgeois state extends in consonance with the increase of collective power of workers vis-à-vis social power and is dependent on the balance of forces and limited by the hegemony and dominance of bourgeois rule. In Jews question, Marx states that the limits of political emancipation are evident at once from the fact that the state can free itself from a restriction without man being really free from this restriction, that the state can be a republic without man being a free man. In the middle Ages, Marx writes, the economy is political and man is the basic principle of the state – but the “unfree man.” Then, as landed property and trade are freed from the medieval constraints, the material sphere becomes private and independent, which clears the way for a republican political system. The republic is the negation of monarchy but within the same sphere as monarchy, for it merely creates a heavenly beyond of political equality within an earthy framework of continuing inequality. This limitation of the bourgeois democracy is to be overcome by strengthening social power through collective mobilisation which bourgeois state restricts as the state appropriates the social power through indirect and passive 'participation' of the representative system. Thus extending democracy actually

means the decentralisation and re-appropriation of power by the society. This re-appropriation of power by the society is preceded by the process of collective political emancipation of labour. This collective political emancipation of the labour is achieved through the denial of diverse forms of alienation of labour under capitalist social relations of production and also in pre-capitalist relations where labour is formally subsumed under capital.

Workers may accept the alienations of wage labour in return for sufficient access to commodities to fulfil their personal wants, needs and desires. Alienated wage labour may be offset by compensatory consumerism. Marx notes that endless capital accumulation rests on the endless production and reproduction of new wants, needs and desires backed by ability to pay. This is the reason why the collective emancipation of labour occurs during the deep crisis of capitalism as a world system. The systemic crisis entails disruption of the cycle of production and reproduction for capital accumulation and this further restricts the democracy of bourgeois state. For Marx, this conflict—between the expansion of democracy and the limitation of it—was an essential part of the class struggle.

The democracy can be extended beyond the restrictions of bourgeois state in a socialist state. Foundation of this socialist state must be the collective association of labour as observed by Marx in Paris Commune as a discovery of working class. The basic tenet of the socialism is the extension of democracy of the bourgeois state to do away with all coercive apparatus to replace alienated freedom with real freedom, mediated abstract social opinion by real concrete opinion. It's a transition from the struggle for democracy in bourgeois state in socialist term to the struggle for socialism

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in socialist state in democratic terms.

A communist party with centralism at its core cannot lead the class struggle for democracy both in pre and post-revolutionary state. The communist party with elected representatives and leaders actually appropriates the opinion of the members similar to the state with representative democracy appropriates the alienated social power. The extending of democracy actually means the decentralisation and re-appropriation of power by the society from the state. Similarly the working class must also continuously re-appropriates the power of building opinion for the party, and for that, the struggle for decentralisation of decision making process and certain modalities to continuously ascertain the working class opinion which must be respected by the party and its central committee need to be en-

sured. One way to continue such struggle for democracy within the party is to ensure that the class organisations should not be in any form brought under the control of the party and this will, in turn, ensure the democratic interaction between class opinion and party opinion. If this policy is incorporated by a communist party, there will always be a need and effort for a single class organisation like trade union to achieve workers' unity.

Formation of a party means that the individuals voluntarily agree to get one's individual freedom to be subsumed under collective freedom. The formation of a party means that there exists a central committee without which there will be stalemate in the collective activity of the party as a whole. Thus the formation of party also means to create the essence of centralism in a struc-

tured format. The only difference with bourgeois party is that the communist party is a party of individuals who have a theory of mind to do revolutionary change to build communist society. This inherent trend of centralism of communist party must always be challenged by the struggle for democracy so that the opinion of the working class always prevail over the opinion of the central committee in decision making process and for this struggle for democracy, the diverse opinion of the individual, minority, group and faction must always be welcome and even after the final decision is reached, the divergent opinions must be allowed to be discussed, debated and published for public consumption. If this democratic space is guaranteed, the unified single party for communist revolutionaries can be envisaged. □□□

60 YEARS LATER

Revisiting India-China Border Conflict

Ramakrishnan

IT HAS BEEN 60 YEARS SINCE the India-China War began on October 20, 1962, and ended on November 21, 1962. Since the flames of that time have not yet been completely extinguished, it is necessary to review the past and start a new chapter in the relations between the two countries. It is essential to create a positive environment to solve the problem by removing many of the misconceptions that have been widely circulated since then.

An authentic book titled *Nehru, Tibet and China* on the subject was published in June 2021. It was written by Shri Avtar Singh Bhasin, who had served for 30 years in the History Wing of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) of India, and retired as its Director. The 403-page book contains many details collected

from archives and repositories of historical documents. This article is based mainly on that book.

The long border between the two countries was never clearly defined, Bhasin says. In the western sector, where the Ladakh border adjoins Aksai Chin, in the Survey of India maps, it was shown as "undefined". Nehru had said it was "defined chiefly by long usage and custom". Later, he ordered replacement of old maps with new maps showing this part of the international border as "defined" with a new line drawn unilaterally and made it non-negotiable. The Galwan Valley in the western sector, one of the disputed [hotspot] areas between 1959-62, remained so and violence erupted again in 2020, after four decades of relative calm. So it was in the East-

ern sector. "China has never recognised the line drawn by McMahon between British India and Tibet in the eastern sector and the Shimla Convention", he said.

In April 1960, a summit was held in Delhi between Nehru and Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai to find a permanent solution. Zhou agreed to "reconsider India's claim on the McMahon Line and come to an agreement" with a spirit of give-and-take to resolve the issue amicably. In lieu, he urged India to recognise their claims on the western sector-Aksai Chin. "Survey maps show that the border here was not defined until 1954", the Chinese team pointed out. Aksai Chin is essential to China because it is a territory that connects western Tibet with the Province of Xinjiang. Nehru squarely rejected the Chinese offer. Those negotiations, which did not resolve a single dispute, failed. Bhasin cited many sources that India's arguments at that time were not factual, and had no basis.

"After that, Nehru made two important mistakes. They are: determining the McMahon Line as the international boundary and taking unilateral assertions in support of it; changing the status of the border in the western sector [by publishing new maps] and initiating a forward-policy to occupy the claimed lands. Nehru sought the privileges and territories inherited to protect even if these were gains of the imperialist policies of the British and were the result of autocratic and deceitful imperialist policies". He adopted a stubborn attitude about the boundaries and declared "maps or no maps, the areas are ours by use". "The 15,000 square miles of area known as Aksai Chin is an uninhabited area where not a blade of grass grows, and in fact India has no access to that mountainous region", Nehru had repeatedly said earlier. It was also ignored that in fact those areas were not in India's possession or control. For example, in the 1950s, the Chinese constructed a 750-mile connector road of which 110 kms pass through Aksai Chin. India did not even notice it for seven-years—when it was under construction—a situation that Bhasin referred to as "a mystery". In 1957, even when it was known, India's protest was just a formal one and not serious, A G Noorani had said.

The narrative in the sixties that led to the conflict in 1962, which the successive Indian governments followed meticulously, was that China had stabbed India in the back. It has, since then, got firmly implanted in the minds of the people of India. Resolution of any dispute requires give and take. Zhou had proposed it, Deng repeated it when he met Rajiv Gandhi, and the post-Deng leadership too was committed to it. Bhasin insists India should reciprocate. But India was keen only on take, and hated give. Hence the stalemate.

Independent India negotiated with People's Republic of China regarding Tibet and its trade relations in 1954. It was an opportunity for India to raise the border issue, but India never did. Nehru even rejected the advice given by the then Foreign Secretary General Girija Shanker Bajpai that it was better to discuss the borders as China had never accepted the Mc Mahon line.

Bhasin analyses the events that took place from 1949 to the war in 1962, and its consequences, and states: "The position taken by India in the past was not a rational one and China was not altogether perfidious as it was made out to be". So he urged: "Fully expose all the archive records relating to the border dispute with China". That would facilitate give and take.

It should be noted that despite the Chinese military's victories in the war, it came to an end when the Chinese government called for a unilateral cease-fire and withdrew its troops...the ceasefire declaration stated:

"Beginning from 21 November 1962, the Chinese frontier guards will cease-fire along the entire Sino-Indian border. Beginning from 1 December 1962, the Chinese frontier guards will withdraw to positions 20 kilometres behind the line of actual control which existed between China and India on 7 November 1959. In the eastern sector, although the Chinese frontier guards have so far been fighting on Chinese territory north of the traditional customary line, they are prepared to withdraw from their present positions to the north of the illegal McMahon Line, and to withdraw twenty kilometres back from that line. In the middle and western sectors, the Chinese frontier guards will withdraw twenty kilometres from the line of actual control..."

Thus China decided that it would not

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

—Fr.

retain any gains of the war it had in its hands. In fact, it was a political decision, not a military contingency, taken by the CPC led by Mao, with the intention of resolving the issue amicably with India, as other sources mentioned (John W Garver).

"No one has either captured any Indian territory nor crossed the borders", Modi categorically said in an all party meeting on June 19, 2020, soon after Galwan. On June 2, 2020, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had announced that "there were differences of opinion on the alignment of the LAC due to which there was a clash between the two sides patrolling along the LAC and there was no infiltration". General V K Singh, who was the Army Chief in the UPA-II regime and now a minister in the NDA, said: "There are some transgressions but they are not infiltrations. The LAC has not been marked on the land and there is no agreement on it". M K Narayanan, India's former National Security Adviser (of UPA times), had said: "The key issue with the India-China border is that it is undetermined and undefined." But still China is being depicted as an aggressor and backstabbing country.

Whatever be their political views, most of the writers on the subject like AG Noorani, Brigadier J P Dalvi, and Lt. Gen. B M Kaul, not to speak of Neville Maxwell, noted Nehru's 'forward policy'; India had lost a good opportunity by stubbornly rejecting China's proposals to resolve the boundary question. They felt Nehru had false assumptions on China. The then US government, and later the Soviet leaders played

their own roles in promoting India-China conflict in the backdrop of their differences with China. Some writers have pointed out and explained the role of external factors in perpetuating the war.

Thus the reality is: "China has borders with 14 nations, and except for India, it has resolved its disputes with all, including Russia. India has borders with six countries, and excluding Bhutan, it has disputes with all five". (Subramanian Swamy, Sinologist, Ex-Union Minister, and BJP MP (Frontline 2000 Sep 2: Sino-Indian Relations Through the Tibet Prism). That was more than 20 years ago.

The present Government, despite the above facts, in tune with its agenda of accusing Nehru and the Congress for all the country's problems including the border question, is indulging in national chauvinism. Instead of exposing that, some forces in India, more so an opportunist Congress, make jingoist statements, call it PM's surrender to China. Much of the Big Media, known to be manufacturing news and Consent for imperialism, keeps harping on it, with double-tongued ruling classes, including BJP and Delhi, prodding it all. They seek to paint any idea or move towards a solution as an act of treason. Even during the 1962 war, the then opposition, including the Jan Sangh [BJP's parent organisation], behaved likewise, and blamed the Congress. Hundreds of 'Left communists' who however were for a negotiated settlement were imprisoned branding them as anti-nationals, under sections of sedition. The recent talks at military and government levels conducted at bor-

ders, to create peace and harmony are being denigrated today too. These parties feel that their political interests are more important than a peaceful settlement. Each party is raking up anti-China, anti-Pak frenzy whenever an election is at the door.

Modi-led India is following its own version of Forward Policy. It is not out of genuine nationalist interest but to establish India as a regional hegemonistic force by acting as a junior partner and a pawn of America's hegemonistic Indo-Pacific strategy, in the quest to contain China.

A few key factors are factors today in the un-resolved border: International influences, especially India's subservience to US hegemonism; participating in Quad, extending the NATO as part of the Asia Pacific strategy of USA, not formulating its own sincere strategic autonomy delinked with imperialist forces.

The growing economic, commercial and political inequalities between the two countries and the prejudices between the two countries are a factor too: India-China trade surged despite Galwan and despite calls by Delhi to Boycott China goods. Last one year marked a peak in bilateral trade of 125 billion dollars, reported PTI. India's imports, i.e. China's exports, grew by 46.2 % and India's exports grew by 34.2%. It was \$ 31 billion in Q1 of 2022. Jingoism may get some votes but won't fetch dollars, except to merchants of death. This surge was not accidental: It was a result of efforts and agreements made earlier, but now under a cloud due to western pressures.

There are Establishment 'experts' and 'advisors', including Brahma Chellany and Sheshadri Chari (former editor of ORGANISER, RSS mouth-piece) who advocate to play what they call Tibet card. They blame Nehru for his allegedly stupid and misplaced trust in China. They however conceal the fact that Tibet

itself did not accept India's border claims. Some are suggesting to play the 'Taiwan' card, concealing that Taiwan too does not accept India's claims. Both the cards are at the behests of USA and NATO.

In fact it was Tibet and the Dalai Lama who were played up by USA in late 1960s, leading to an armed insurrection led by the Buddhists, funded and armed by USA. So brazen were violations of international law that a Government in Exile led by the Lama was seated in Himachal Pradesh, and it continues till date. It is all being replayed again.

Apart from the USA and NATO, the then Soviet Union, in its super-power phase, played its own negative role, aided by the Indo-Soviet Treaty 1971, that came in the way of any resolution of the dispute.

Even while there have been negotiations and attempts to de-escalate and demilitarise the borders, India continues its anti-China campaign by promoting anti-China forces in Taiwan, and Tibet through the Dalai Lama. Then the 18th edition of the India-US joint military exercise Yudh Abhyas is currently under way in Uttarakhand, not far from the LAC. At a time when there is so much confusion and trouble along the LAC, why invite or allow USA there? USA through NGOs is being allowed to do 'welfare' activity in scores of villages of Arunachal Pradesh. Is it not third party meddling there?

Earlier on August 30, Foreign Minister Jaishankar said "much of Asia's future depends on how the ties between the two countries develop in the foreseeable future, and for the ties to return to a positive trajectory, they must be based on mutual sensitivity, mutual respect and mutual interest". The above acts are just opposite of what he advocated. □□□
[The author is a media person and a political observer. The above is an abridged version of a more detailed article, published in countercurrents.org dated 01-12-2022]

For **Frontier Contact**

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INTERVIEW

Das Kapital in Kiswahili

Joachim Mwami

[Joachim Mwami on translating Marx—and Marxism—into the vocabulary of East Africa] [Few books have had as great of an impact on how people think about—and seek to change—society as Karl Marx’s Capital. First published in German in 1867, a Russian translation of his magnum opus subsequently appeared in 1872, followed by a significantly reworked French edition in 1875. After Marx’s death in 1883, an English translation was issued four years later in 1887, overseen by his lifelong political and intellectual partner, Friedrich Engels.

Joachim Mwami taught sociology at the University of Dar es Salaam from 1992 to 2013, before joining the faculty at Umaru Musa Yar’adua University in Nigeria. He is currently finalising a Kiswahili translation of Capital and an introductory guide to Marx for Kiswahili readers. Loren Balhorn recently spoke with him regarding his work. Excerpts:]

Q. Professor Mwami, you’ve been working on a Kiswahili translation of Karl Marx’s Capital for quite some time. Can you tell us a bit more about the project?

A. The project originally began sometime in the mid-1980s, when I and one of my colleagues, who unfortunately passed away, agreed that we should translate Capital and divided up the chapters amongst ourselves. But it didn’t actually materialise until 2008 or 2009, when my colleague at the University of Dar es Salaam, Professor Issa Shivji, approached me about the idea.

I finally completed a first draft of all 33 chapters in 2014. I was teaching in Nigeria at the time, and when I came back in 2015 on holiday, I visited a young colleague of mine, Sabatho Nyamsenda, and discussed the work with him. I moved back to Tanzania in 2016 and continued to edit the translation until recently, when Dorothee Braun, who directs the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation’s office in Dar es Salaam, approached me about hiring someone to finish editing the translation and publish it. I said “excellent”, or, as you say in German, wunderbar!

Q. What is the state of the translation right now?

A. The manuscript is now being transferred to an expert editor to ensure that the language, concepts, and terminology are consistent throughout

the book. This includes a smaller booklet, a guide to reading Marx that I wrote over the last few years.

Q. It sounds like you’ve devoted quite a lot of time and energy to the project over the last few decades. Was it an easy task?

A. It has been quite a bit of very difficult work on my part because I was doing it on my own. It’s particularly difficult to find the right Kiswahili equivalent for many English words, because the vocabulary in English is very wide and rich compared to Kiswahili. Now that the manuscript is being given to professional editors, I hope they will come up with better terminology than I was able to.

Q. Could you give me an example of a term that was difficult to translate?

A. For example, the word “commodity”, which is very central in Capital, has been translated as a bidhaa. There’s no problem with this translation. But there are two aspects of commodities: use value and exchange value. Value can easily be translated as thamani in Kiswahili. But use value? I use the word thamani mafao. The other one is thamani mauzo, which translates as “exchange value”. But whether this will easily be comprehended by Kiswahili speakers, I cannot say.

There are also other common concepts, such as the origin of

money. Marx tried to highlight the origin of money, and he used certain terminology to do so. For example, value forms. When I translate them into Kiswahili, I’m never really sure if my translation is correct or not. Remember, I cannot refer back to the German original, but that’s not really the problem. The problem is: do the Kiswahili words accurately reflect the meaning conveyed in the English version?

Q. Capital is a very dense and difficult text, even for native English or German speakers. Who do you hope will read your translation?

A. Capital is essentially a book for the proletariat—the working class, those who are exploited and oppressed by the capitalist system. I’m convinced that if the book is distributed to low-income people, it will have a very positive impact. I may not be able to prove this, but I believe it and it has also been my personal experience.

In 1976, during my undergraduate studies at the University of Dar es Salaam, I happened to teach Marxist political economy at one of the tex-

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tile mills in the city. I used the same terminology that I'd been utilising in the university. What I learned is that the workers in the factory were able to understand better when we discussed issues like "What is exploitation?" or "Who is a worker, and who is a capitalist?" They were able to internalise these concepts much better than my students at the university, who were educated members of the *petit bourgeoisie*.

I was one of what they called "militants" at that time and had internalised Marxism at a young age, but when I discussed these ideas with my fellow students, they were unable to understand these concepts: "No, Mwami, we have no exploitation in Tanzania." This experience proved to me that low-income people can understand Capital. Like I said, I may not be able to prove it, but history will prove me right.

Q. You said you internalised Marxism at a young age. How did you encounter Marxist ideas in the first place?

A. In 1968 I was employed as a library assistant in Dar es Salaam, and I started reading a lot of literature that was critical of Roman Catholicism and religion in general. In 1972, Walter Rodney published *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, and I was one of the first in the library to read it. By then I was a proper nationalist—this was around the time of the Arusha Declaration, when many young people were interested in establishing and implementing socialism in Tanzania.

The University of Dar es Salaam was a reservoir of critical thinking in the 1960s and 1970s, and in the library we had access to a lot of magazines produced by radical students. That's when I started to imbibe Marxist knowledge. So in 1975, when I joined the University of Dar es Salaam as a mature student, I was one of the most enthusiastic radicals,

reading a lot of Marxian literature, particularly Marx himself. By the time I graduated in 1978, I was really a Marxist—at least in terms of acquisition, if not application.

Q. Was Marxist literature easily accessible?

A. At the university level, yes. The good thing about that period was that a good number of student radicals in the universities had a very potent influence. They would always encourage us to read more. Whenever we read bourgeois literature, we would be encouraged to read books on the same subject but from a Marxist point of view.

We were also encouraged by radical lectures like Shivji, who taught me at the time, or Mahmood Mamdani, who was also at the university. They encouraged us to use this opportunity to gain more knowledge so that we would be able to confront these "bourgeois" radicals who were always in opposition to us.

Q. So you were defining yourselves in contrast to the "African socialism" that was the official state ideology of Tanzania?

A. Exactly. Remember, before I went to the university I was a pure nationalist, and very enthusiastic about Ujamaa, the African socialism espoused by [Tanzanian President] Julius Nyerere. But as I began reading Marx and other Marxist literature, I learned that this was a rubbish type of socialism, similar to what was introduced in England during the nineteenth century by Robert Owen and so forth, what Engels called "utopian socialism". That's when I broke with Nyerere, because he lacked a scientific understanding of capitalism and of oppression and exploitation.

Q. Is Marxism still popular at the universities?

A. No, it's gone. There are very few Marxist teachers left. I find that students today are often reluctant to

discuss Marxism or to identify as Marxists, for fear of not being able to get a financial grant if they expose themselves. Things aren't the way they used to be.

Q. Many self-professed Marxist thinkers like, for example, Cedric Robinson or Gayatri Spivak, have argued that classical Marxism is inherently Eurocentric—it offers some useful insights, but it isn't sufficient to understand social and economic developments in the non-Western world. Do you agree?

A. No, I don't. I disagree completely. I think this is the result of a misunderstanding of Marxism and Marx himself. I tend to state the following: Marxism is scientific, but more importantly, it is a scientific philosophy that is completely different from liberal philosophy. Now, misunderstanding Marxism is nothing new. It's a way of stupefying the minds, especially young minds, and the minds of people who don't understand what is happening in Africa.

Africa today is a product of colonialism, but colonialism itself is a product of capitalism. You can never understand the present state of affairs in Africa without understanding capitalism and how the two are integrated, and you can never understand the inner core of capitalism without Marxism. The way that economists identify and define "society" is completely rubbish, completely misguided. Society is always a totality, always a whole—this is one of Marx's most important contributions, to say that society is an "ensemble of social relations". But you can't understand these relations with any kind of positivist social theory or philosophy, because they are too tied to physical manifestations. Marxism helps us to understand the invisible processes beneath the surface.

Those who attack Marxism do so for their own reasons. And those who say that Marxism can't work in

Africa are completely wrong—they vulgarise Marx. In fact, in Tanzania, some of us have been using Marx and Marxism to better understand our own social context.

Q. How would you characterise Tanzanian society today, in Marxist terms?

A. That is a very good question. We classify Tanzania as a “neo-colonial” society. Tanzania was colonised in two or three essential phases, starting with German colonialism and followed by British colonialism. After we won independence. We entered neo-colonialism, a phase which continues until today.

Our argument is that colonial social and economic structures were established under the German and British colonial systems. What Nyerere and the regime after him did was to copy and adopt these social economic structures. They were never abandoned or revolutionised, so we still have the same economic and social structures.

We argue that the basic function of any colony in the world, both today and yesterday, is to create conditions whereby wealth is taken away and transported to the imperialist countries in Western Europe, but also in Asia and North America. Nyerere at least tried to understand these structures and, in a particular way, to change or transform them. But since he used the very awkward method of what we call “utopian socialism”, he did not manage to change the structures. That’s why he failed. Because of this failure, a new social class, which was already being created in the 1960s, was able to consolidate itself as a capitalist class in Tanzania.

This class continues to rule today, but in a subordinate position. It’s not an independent capitalist class. It is subjugated to imperialist powers in Europe, America, and Asia.

Q. What implications does that have for socialist strategy in Tanzania? How can Marxists engage in politics under those conditions?

A. In my opinion, we must accept that Tanzania is a neo-colonial country, completely different in terms of economic perspectives from Europe, Asia, or America. We have a small group of capitalists and a very, very large peasantry. But at the same time, we also have a small industrial sector and a small working class, and a lot of unemployed people. These social classes are the most important source of mobilisation—not people like you and me. Our role is simply to transfer this particular knowledge, Marxism, to their minds, so that they can design their own methods of how to struggle against oppression and exploitation.

Q. Is much Marxist literature available in Kiswahili?

A. No, I would say there is none, except for a few pieces of literature which some militants have translated from English. But even Marxist books in English are very rare and very hard to obtain in Tanzania. Even some of the books by Professor Shivji, who lives in Tanzania, are not available in bookshops here.

Q. So there’s a real need for more socialist literature in the country.

A. Exactly. There are very few Marxists in the country, you can count them on two hands, and even they are very old. There are a few young ones coming up, but they

face many problems such as economic pressure which makes it difficult to balance academic and political work. The tempo of learning and publishing is still quite slow.

But I think the future is good. There is a cadre of young people emerging, people who are questioning why unemployment is rising, why economic disparities are very great, and I am quite optimistic that in perhaps ten years’ time we will have a large number of young people leaning towards a Marxist political orientation.

Q. You work closely with the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation’s office in Dar es Salaam. Has the foundation’s presence had an impact in the region?

A. The foundation has made a big difference and there is no doubt about that. The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation has sponsored many programmes, allowing us to go out into the villages and talk to workers. It has also sponsored a lot of our publications. Some other organisations have stopped working with us in recent years out of fear of political repression, but the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation has always stood by us. It’s been fantastic.

Q. You’ve translated the first book of Capital. Are there plans to translate the other two volumes?

A. Before I die, my plan is to at least translate Volume Two. Right now I am working on Chapter 12 of Volume Two, and I have finished about 250 pages. After that, I will translate Volume Three. Then I can die happily. That is my basic programme.

□□□

WOMEN IN DISTRESS

Nirbhaya 10 Years On

Divya Arya

WHEN 23-YEAR-OLD JYOTI Singh was gang-raped by the driver of the Delhi bus she was travelling on, and

five accomplices, the incident shocked the world. Jyoti, given the moniker “Nirbhaya” or the “fearless one” by the media had fought back. But she

suffered internal injuries and was thrown naked from the bus. She died within two weeks of the attack.

The nation’s shock soon gave way to anger. Hundreds of young women and men in Delhi demanded justice, marching in the biting cold and braving water cannons and tear gas used by the police to dispel the seething crowds.

The 2012 protests did bring about a certain amount of change—laws were amended to recognise wider and more nuanced definitions of violence against women, set penalties for inefficient police action, and create stricter punishments for perpetrators—including, significantly, the death penalty.

But a decade later, there are still significant dangers for women in India. The crime rate against women has increased by over 50% in the past decade.

One woman who found herself pulled into battles for justice against rape is the mother of Jyoti Singh—Asha Devi.

Her experience inspired her to set up the Nirbhaya Jyoti Trust in memory of her daughter. Indian law requires anonymity for rape victims and their families, but Asha decided to make her daughter's name public in 2015, saying "those who commit heinous crimes should be ashamed, not the families of victims".

Asha has not just campaigned for justice for her daughter, but has also proved to be a significant emotional and practical resource for others whose lives have been wrecked by misogynistic violence. Over the years, many people have sought Asha out.

"Sometimes all they need is hope, to carry on", she told this writer at her small flat in Delhi. "At other times the complex judicial process feels daunting, so I share what I have learnt and guide them to legal aid."

I have tracked down and spoken to just a handful of the many people whose lives have been intertwined with her own.

One is Seema Kushwaha, a student at the time of Jyoti's death, who joined the Delhi protests with her friends in the wake of the attack. Unlike half of her 20 flatmates, whose worried families then persuaded them to return to their family homes, she remained in the city, and continued with her studies.

She was studying law and started going to the court hearings in Jyoti's case—she felt she needed to show support to Jyoti's family in their quest for justice. Seema eventually joined the legal team that secured the enactment, in 2020, of the 2013 death penalty verdict for the attackers.

When it was confirmed at a last-minute Supreme Court hearing that the men would be hanged, Seema ran straight to Asha's house and knelt before Jyoti's picture, telling her she had delivered on her promise—before breaking down in tears of relief and grief.

"The whole country was watching, and it was important that the rapists be executed", she says.

The decision to bring the death penalty for heinous cases of rape and gang rape in 2013 was in part a populist measure by the government, as protests had grown across the country, fuelled by the myth that rape was mostly committed by strangers who were illiterate, poor or unemployed.

All six men charged with Nirbhaya's gang rape and murder fit that profile—but the statistics show that strangers don't pose the greatest danger.

The Indian government's crime data has consistently shown that in more than 95% of all rape cases, the attackers are known to the victims—they are relatives, friends, neighbours and co-workers.

One of those whose family was devastated by such an attack is Pankaj (not his real name), whose 13-year-old sister was raped and murdered on a farm near their home.

It was Pankaj who found her body. The young girl's blood-soaked tunic was torn, she had been knifed repeatedly, and a bamboo stick had been pierced through her neck.

The attack on Pankaj's sister took place the summer before Jyoti was raped and was just as brutal.

It happened in a remote village in one of eastern India's poorest states, far from the capital, and was only reported in local newspapers.

"Her story never came out, there was no outrage, no calls for justice," Pankaj told me as I sat down with him in his small mud house. "All I felt was fear of the men who could be so inhumane."

Fear followed by shock. Unlike Jyoti, who was attacked by strangers, all of the four people arrested over his sister's case were known to her, including a neighbour and a teacher who gave her tuition after school.

"When the police arrested the teacher, I thought they had made a mistake, because a 'guru' has a very sacred relationship with their disciple," Pankaj told me.

"Only when he admitted to the crime and helped recover the knife used in the attack, did I believe it."

The men were convicted and awarded the death penalty by a lower court in 2016. But upon their appeal, the High Court acquitted them in 2021, saying that even though the offence was gruesome, the prosecution had "miserably failed" to provide evidence against the accused. All four later denied the crime, including the teacher.

Improper collection of evidence and recording of testimonies by police officials have been the reason for acquittals in many rape cases, including one last month, leaving victim's families to risk running into the accused.

This was the case with Pankaj.

"They came to the village market and threatened me with murder for ruining their lives," he told me.

Still he did not give up. Armed only with a newspaper cutting, he headed to Delhi in a desperate attempt to get justice for his sister. And that newspaper article he had so carefully kept was about Asha Devi.

For Pankaj, meeting Asha opened

an important door. A senior lawyer who fought Jyoti's case is now appealing against the High Court acquittal of his sister's killers.

"I know I will again get the death penalty. I have faith in the justice system," Pankaj says.

The Indian justice system may be overloaded and slow but it still works better for rape cases as they get media attention, public sympathy and calls for accountability. What gets much less coverage is the violence inside homes, and yet this is epidemic in proportion.

Domestic violence is the leading crime against women in India, with four times more reported cases than rape.

For 45-year-old Sneha Jawale, the silence around this has been deafening.

She told BBC 100 Women that her husband had often beaten her to demand more dowries, but on 24 December 2000 events took a devastating turn.

"One night, in a fit of rage, he threw kerosene, lit a matchstick and burned my face, chest and arms," she recounts. She was set alight, in front of their young son.

While recovering in hospital, Sneha told her family that her husband was the one who had attacked her. But he was influential, a "big shot", and they didn't report him to the police. Instead, she says they told Sneha's extended family that she had died.

This was shocking even for me, a journalist who had heard many stories of women battling domestic violence. How could parents abandon their daughters at their most vulnerable?

The violence Sneha endured was kept hidden behind the four walls of her house. But the attack on Nirbhaya, 12 years later, changed that.

In 2013, Sneha was invited to be in a play, named after Nirbhaya and based on real testimonies of survi-

vors, which aimed to break the silence around violence against women.

For the next four years, Sneha shared her story with audiences around the world—the only member of the cast who was not a professional actor.

"The play taught me many things. It changed me," Sneha says.

"After our performance, many people in the audience would come and share their own stories. It helped me overcome my trauma. I no longer felt alone."

This loneliness in the journey of overcoming trauma, seeking help, and battling for justice was a recurring theme in my conversations.

Barkha Bajaj started a crisis line for women in distress. A trained psychologist and mental health practitioner, Barkha had already worked in the US with survivors of sexual abuse—but the Nirbhaya case was a turning point in her life.

In late 2012 she was travelling alone by train in north-east India, with no other women in her compartment. The details of Jyoti's attack were playing on her mind and fear started to take hold. She decided to sleep with her shoes on and with red chilli powder handy. It struck her that if she were in trouble, there was no helpline at that time that she could call.

"That realisation channelled all my fear into something productive," she told me over a video chat from Pune. "Nothing could stop me."

Although the helpline was set up in response to a rape by strangers, for the last nine years she has spent most of her time answering calls from women trying to escape violence at home.

"What we need is a much better state infrastructure to support women when they step out of abusive marriages, and affordable legal counsel for when they decide to take on court battles," Barkha says.

It is this sense of the wider, systemic battles to be fought, that is the reason that Seema has now turned to politics.

Earlier this year Seema joined the Bahujan Samaj Party, which fights for the rights of Dalits, a community on the lowest rung of a deeply discriminatory Hindu caste system.

A Dalit herself, Seema is a crusader for justice, especially gender justice, and believes in fighting for equal rights for her community. She hopes that as a politician she can be more effective in implementing both caste and gender equality.

"Sexual violence is one issue, but inequality in society pervades our families, marriage structures, politics—it all needs to change," she says.

Nirbhaya's mother, Asha Devi agrees that a seismic shift for women's safety is extremely difficult to bring about.

"We thought we would change things for other girls, but we could do nothing," she says.

She doesn't have a high view of the police and government-appointed lawyers, and the judicial process is complex, with information hard to come by. Navigating her way through it has taught her a lot.

"I am not educated, but I am a fighter and I had promised justice to my daughter," she says.

"It is traumatising to hear of others' pain, but it also gives me peace to be there for them in their long, lonely battle for justice—just as some stood by me in mine." □□

[Source: BBC]

For Frontier Contact

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LETTERS

Unlawful Restrictions

This is about unlawful restrictions on agricultural activities and the livelihood of the poor marginalised villagers of the Indo-Bangladesh bordering village Char Changmari under Deocharai Panchayat, Tufanganj 1 Block in Cooch Behar District, West Bengal, by the 62 Battalion - "B" Company of Border Security Force personnel posted at Jhaljhali border outpost.

About 1200 people reside in the Changmari village. Almost 70 percent of the total population belongs to Muslim community and remaining people belong to the Hindu Scheduled Caste (Dalit) background. The prime occupation of the villagers is agriculture. The average monthly income of the villagers is INR 3600.00. The distance between the border fence and the International Border Pillar is on average 1500 metre. There are about 200 acres of cultivable lands out of 3500 acres which are situated beyond the border fence. The ingress and egress of the farmers to their own agricultural land through the fencing gates are regulated by the BSF.

Farmers are not allowed to cultivate jute and maize in their own agricultural land by the BSF personnel. The farmers of Char Changmari village stated that due to this illegal restriction they faced huge losses, nearly 10000/- to 15000/- per bigha, yearly.

The nearest primary school is located 2 km from the said village. The condition of village roads is very bad, no concrete or metal or brick-built road are there. Immediate maintenance work is required but none of the authorities focus on it.

On 04.09.2022 one officer from the intelligence branch BSF visited the place and assured the villagers that they will remove the barbed wire fence which is illegally placed on the land of the farmers. But till date they

did not take any action regarding the same.

Kirity Roy, Secretary, MASUM & National Convener, PACTI 'Vedic Democracy'

On November 15, 2022, the University Grants Commission sent a letter to 45 Central and 45 Deemed to be universities, to hold lectures on India: Mother of Democracy in order to celebrate Constitution Day on 26 November 2022. The letter directs all Universities to hold lectures on the "ancient origins of Indian Democracy" apart from reading the Preamble and the Chapter on Fundamental Duties.

"The UGC appears to have circulated a concept note on this subject which identifies 15 themes. Though the note has not been made public, several media reports and the statements of the UGC Chairperson suggest that the themes include the glorification of anti-women ancient texts and traditions. The themes of the lectures include Khap Panchayats, feudal and dictatorial monarchies and anti-women customs that follow the Manusmriti. It is very ironical that the UGC has asked Universities to celebrate Constitution Day in a manner that fundamentally ignores the rights of women to a decent and dignified life. While it asks people to read the preamble, it promotes ideas and texts that have laid the foundation of the oppression of women since ancient times.

"The UGC has been attempting to push courses of Vedic culture and alter the academic syllabus to suit the patriarchal Hindutva brigade. By issuing this letter, it has shown that it is not an autonomous agency which is wedded to the ideals of modern education, but that it is becoming a hand-maiden of the Hindutva brigade. It is directly following the direction of the Prime Minister Modi, who has been selling the idea of Vedic

democracy as an ideal political system. This idea is fundamentally against the spirit of the Constitution and furthers the regressive and anti-women content of the NEP, 2020. The NEP, 2020 lays the foundation of the promotion of Hindutva morality in universities and opens the window for the glorification of patriarchal traditions. The UGC Chairperson's latest comments, also provide a justification for legitimising illegal and conservative social institutions like the Khap Panchayats, against whom the AIDWA has waged a long campaign."

Therefore the AIDWA calls upon the UGC to exercise its constitutionally mandated role of promoting modern education that is based on the Constitutional Values. It appeals to all members of the University to oppose attempts which will alter the character of UGC and make it an instrument of conservative Hindutva politics.

**Malini Bhattacharya, President
Mariam Dhawale, General Secretary**

**All India Democratic Women's Organisation (AIDWA)
Politics meets Football**

There are many who'll tell you that politics and sport don't mix. But come on, this is Iran against the USA that we're talking about—the political undertones to this World Cup game were always going to be there. A roll call of some of the world's major events of the last 70 years explains why: a CIA-backed coup against a democratically elected Iranian leader, the 1979 Islamic revolution, the Iran hostage crisis, the Iran-Iraq war, the Lebanese civil war and the Iraq war—all the way through to the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, and then the subsequent withdrawal from it by the Americans.

Well, look at how domestic events in Iran have affected this FIFA world cup tournament. The Iranian team

didn't sing the national anthem in their first game, a sign the country's anti-government protesters took as tacit approval for the protest movement. The team then proceeded to sing in the next two, with some speculating there may have been government pressure—especially following the arrest of a former national team player for supporting the protests. And in the stands, pro- and anti-government Iranians were both present, leading to tense situations at times, with some protest supporters even ordered to remove anti-government symbols by Qatari security.

The Americans themselves got involved in the act. A US Soccer social media account used an altered version of the Iranian flag to “support ... women in Iran”. That was not well-received by the Iranian Football Association, who demanded that the US be thrown out of the tournament.

As for the actual football, well, it was essentially a play-off for qualification to the knockout stages. The Iranians didn't really turn up, at least not until the latter stages of the game, and the US won 1-0, sending Iran home.

Abubaker Al Samahi, Al Jazeera Poll Results

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is steadily and diligently expanding its influence in the tribal belts—all over the country.

Even then, it indicates failure on the part of the Congress organisation.

To sum up, on the one hand the BJP—by taking, due and undue, advantage of its expanding and tightening grip over the various levers of the state, including the watchdog bodies—was increasing its strength at an accelerating rate and, on the other, the Congress—the only other national party—was dying a slow death.

The Bharat Jodo Yatra has stated—to be sure, only started—bringing in a new element into the equation.

It's a hugely audacious move to change the mood of the nation—by

raising the call of "Jodo" as opposed to the incessant moves in the direction of "Todo". All at the same time, it'd, hopefully, also open up the possibility of the renewal of the Congress—both ideologically and organisationally.

Even in the event of achieving that—which is far from guaranteed—it won't be too easy to overpower the BJP electorally. More so, given the situation with the ECI and the MSM, in particular.

But, that appears to be the only possible escape route from the looming doom.

And giving up is just no option.

Sukla Sen

Social Security Pensions and Maternity Entitlements

To

Smt Nirmala Sitharaman

Finance Minister, Govt. of India

Re: Social Security Pensions and Maternity Entitlements

Dear Madam,

This is a follow-up to our letters of 20 December 2017 and 21 December 2018 (addressed to your predecessor, Shri Arun Jaitley), where we tried to flag two priorities for the next Union Budget: an increase in social security pensions, and adequate provision for maternity benefits. Since both proposals were ignored, we are writing again, well in advance of the next Budget, with the same recommendations. Our argument, much as before, is as follows.

Social security pensions: The central government's contribution to old-age pensions under the National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS) scheme has stagnated at just Rs 200 per month since 2006. This is unfair. It is also a missed opportunity: NOAPS is a good scheme (with low leakages and administrative costs) that reaches some of the poorest members of society. The central government's contribution should be immediately raised to Rs 500 (preferably more) at the very least. This

requires an additional allocation of Rs 7,560 crores or so, based on the current NOAPS coverage (2.1 crore pensioners). Similarly, widow pensions should be raised from Rs 300 per month to Rs 500 at the very least. This would cost just another Rs 1,560 crores.

Maternity entitlements: Maternity benefits of Rs 6,000 per child are a legal entitlement of all Indian women (except those already covered in the formal sector) under the National Food Security Act 2013. For many years, the central government did not act on this. In 2017, a scheme was finally launched for this purpose: the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMVVY). However, the provision made for it in the Union Budget never exceeded Rs 2,500 crore – less than one third of what is required based on NFSA norms. Further, in flagrant violation of the Act, PMVVY restricts the benefits to Rs 5,000 for just one child per woman. The Union Budget 2023-24 should provide for full-fledged implementation of maternity entitlements as per NFSA norms. This requires at least Rs 8,000 crores (assuming a birth rate of 19 per thousand, effective coverage of 90% and 60:40 ratio for centre: state contributions). Along with this, the illegal restriction of maternity benefits to one child per woman should be removed.

It is also important to streamline payment systems so that pensions reach the recipients on time every month, i.e. by the 7th day of the month as directed by the Supreme Court in its order of 28 Nov 2001.

We urge you to accept these modest recommendations.

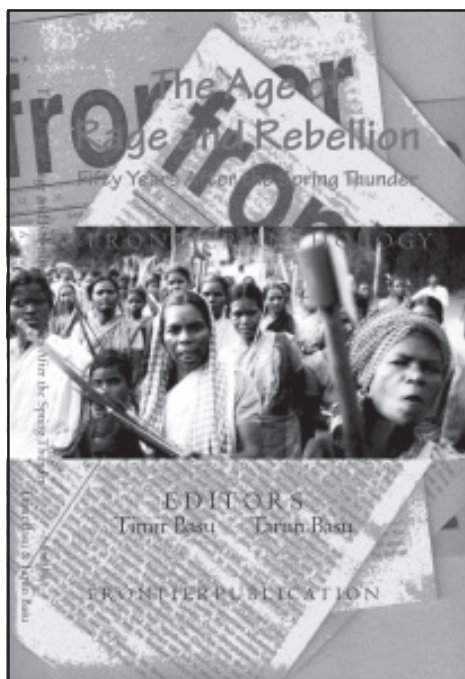
Yours sincerely,

Abhijeet Singh (Assistant Professor of Economics, Stockholm School of Economics) & 50 others

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