

frontier

Vol. 55 : No. 29

ISSN 0016-2094

January 15-21, 2023

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Published weekly for Germinal Publications Pvt. Ltd. by Sharmistha Dutta from 44, Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006 and Printed by her at Laser Aid, 35A/3, Biplabi Barin Ghosh Sarani, Kolkata-700 067.

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[Typeset by THE D-COMLASER, 60 Sikdar Bagan Street, Kolkata-4, Ph : 98361-58319]

No Sign of Peace

FOR THE UKRAINIANS 2023 IS GOING TO BE A YEAR OF darkness and trauma. Over the past few days Russia has launched some of the most intense assaults of the on-going war that has crossed 10 months, firing from various directions, with air and sea-based cruise missiles on targets including Kyiv. Dozens of attacks have pounded Ukraine in recent weeks, ending the year with a very clear message: Russia wants peace on its own terms. Ukraine's 'unrealistic' demands can lead to a bind with no prospects of early negotiations, though back-channel diplomacy is very much active. For one thing Russia didn't programme this conflict to go on for so long. But much to the dismay of Western defence experts the recent attacks by Russian forces prove that Moscow still has a substantial store of missiles that it plans to use in the coming days. There is no evidence that Russia is on its knees, notwithstanding some set-backs on the front. American policy of defeating Russia through proxy-war is unlikely to succeed. If Assad cannot be ousted in Syria by a proxy war it is next to impossible to dethrone Putin without completely neutralising Russia's formidable war machine. This war is actually between America and Russia and the Biden administration is against peace while Europe is divided. But American strategy of unifying its European partners through this war is creating its opposite—more disunity—and strengthening a political space for a new world order with Russia and China as the pivot. Whether the warlords in the White House like it or not Europeans too are talking about multi-polar world. American design to break Russia by utilising Ukraine may backfire because Europeans are no less worried about American domination. An endless war is going to be counter-productive for the grand alliance of Ukraine, Europe and America. No doubt they are dancing together at the moment but to different rhythms. All are singing their own, individual hymns of a post-Ukraine vision.

Having failed to defeat Putin quickly Washington is trying to outspend him, bleed him economically by way of imposing multiple sanctions but war of economic attrition has so far remained ineffective. Sanctions have just forced Russia to explore alternative trade routes to tide over the crisis. In truth the differences within the anti-Russia coalition began to surface at the very outset of the war. As early as September last year France's President Emmanuel Macron told a conclave of French diplomats that "300-year-old Western hegemony was coming to an end". If anything he could not help

taking a jibe at the Uncle Sam. 'For the past three centuries of western dominance', he said, 'France, England and the US contributed in the west-dominated world order'. Interestingly, Germany and Italy were absent in his swan song. He was candid enough to recognise the changed geo-political reality that within western hemisphere, "many wrong choices the United States has made in the face of crisis have deeply shaken our hegemony". In a way he also criticised the White House for the current predicament they have been in since the beginning of the Ukraine war in February 2022. Unlike American leaders Macron had no problem in admitting the changing global contours: 'China and Russia have achieved great success', under

'different leadership styles'. In Macron's framework European security is unthinkable without Russia. In other words a war with Russia means third world war but Europeans are not going to oblige America by extending war beyond the borders of Ukraine and the third world war at this stage cannot be anything but nuclear.

To blame it solely on Putin for the massive destruction of Ukraine is just one side of the story. Zelensky, being the trusted stooge of America is equally responsible for the plight of Ukrainians who have lost their right to dissent under the emergency situation. Russian allegation that American and Western military officers in Ukrainian uniforms are fighting in the battlefield and a full-

fledged CIA office operates in Kyiv to help Zelensky's defence department is not baseless. Russian forces are being criticised for targeting civilian structures. There are grains of truth but Russian counter-allegation that they utilise non-military establishments for military purposes holds water. When it is war, it makes little sense to expect that the adversary will bomb selectively following rules. Americans never followed any rules in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan despite international outcry.

The world cannot remain the same in post-Ukraine polarisation and strategic re-alignment. Despite expansion of Euro Zone and NATO amidst Ukraine war fever the decline of American power seems irreversible. □□

03-01-2023

COMMENT

Coaching Menace

INDIA'S TUITION EMPIRE TODAY is a real menace threatening traditional education system. Coaching culture is an epidemic now. For one thing coaching is now big business with reasonable returns and low risk. Its size is growing in leaps and bounds. Some big establishments spend huge sums on advertisement engaging film stars to attract students and their parents. It was unthinkable even a decade ago.

From Madhya Pradesh to Maharashtra, Bihar to Kerala, Bengal to Tamil Nadu the tuition republic of India with its neighbourhood tutors, teachers moonlighting as tutors, social media edu-influencers and coaching classes has spread its tentacles into the digital world as well. After two years of pandemic interruption, it's now bigger than ever and is an inescapable part of growing up in urban India. According to the data published by the National Sample Survey in 2016, there are 7.1 crore

students enrolled in tuitions.

Psychologists are studying the effect of this prolonged period of lost childhood and stress induced by this rush for a ceaseless tuition race.

"There was a time when tuition classes were temporary solutions. These days they become a lifestyle. It starts from the age of five and goes on for the next two decades. When that person becomes a parent, he/she enrolls their children in tuition as well".

The government is banking on the National Education Policy to improve the existing education system and reduce the dependence on tuition teachers and coaching classes. But so far, legislation has done little to stem the growing reach of this parallel industry.

"The annual revenue of coaching institutes was a whopping Rs 24,000 crore, according to a 2015 estimate by an expert committee set up by the education ministry (then-Union Hu-

man Resource Development ministry). The current market revenue of the coaching industry in India is Rs 58,088 crore, according to Infinium Global Research, a consultancy firm based in Pune. The coaching industry's growth is projected to reach Rs 1,33,995 crore by 2028.

Educationists and psychologists are alarmed and are calling for a large-scale survey to study the industry, especially at the school level where kindergarten children rely on private tuitions.

Whether they realise it or not, they're in the race for a limited number of seats in medical, engineering, law and teaching colleges, or jobs in the civil services, railways, etc. Too many people are chasing too few jobs.

This year, UPSC 2022 preliminary examination saw more than 11 lakh aspirants competing for 1,011 seats. And more than 18 lakh students attempted NEET for 91,927 MBBS seats in 612 government and private medical colleges across the country.

In small towns and villages, it's

almost as if every third household has transformed into a personalised tuition centre. Living rooms have become classrooms and the neighbourhood aunty or the young college graduates have become teachers.

Parents see tuitions as the only way for their children to edge out competition, escape the family's social station and ace the jobs game. For teachers, conducting private tuition has evolved into a lucrative business.

The vast majority of the middle-class opts for coaching centres. The sector dominated by giant brands like Byju's, Allen Career Institute and Resonance come into the picture.

Byju's, for instance, has more

than 4,000 tuition centres across India. Within a year of launching in Jaipur in October 2021, the brand set up six centres in the city. Students from class one to three are taught online, while the rest up to class 10 have to attend offline classes.

A survey conducted by the WHO reported that Indian mothers spend 7.5 hours per week on childcare and 1.3 hours on child development activities, totaling nearly nine hours. In 2021, American mothers spent 12.3 hours a week on their children.

For Indians racing to catch up, life is an unending classroom where the bell just doesn't go off. □□□

[Contributed]

Just Published
WITH THE
PASSING TIME

by
Farooque Chowdhury

Published by
NGG Books
4, Aati Bazar, Keraniganj,
Dhaka, Bangladesh
Email: nggbooks@gmail.com
Website: www.nggbooks.wordpress.com

Price: 400tk
[300tk for teachers and students, if
collected from the publisher.]

NOTE

NATO and EU

Bharat Dogra writes:

THE EUROPEAN PEOPLE suffered a lot in the two world wars, and hence in the post-1945 period it was only to be expected that there would be yearning for avoiding conflict and war within Europe. To the extent that the unity of Europe in the form of the European Union (EU) is a manifestation of this yearning, this should be welcomed by all peace-loving people of world. Troubled regions like South Asia and West Asia can learn much from this basic idea. The idea of European Union becomes even better if this can be used to maintain certain norms of human rights and democracy in all member countries, apart from facilitating economic cooperation. Of course the big capitalists have their own notions of exploiting a larger and more consolidated market, sometimes at the cost of smaller entrepreneurs and less prosperous members, but at the same time there are also some important benefits for common people as well in such a union.

This provides a model for progress and EU countries have been able to progress in conditions of better stability and peace compared to several other parts of world.

Not all has been well in Europe of course, as evident in the highly unjust and violent dismemberment of former Yugoslavia, a very distressing episode which could have been avoided by better statesmanship.

Even leaving aside this tragic episode, the ethical record of Europe in the post-war period is marred by continuing terrible violence and injustice against former colonies till a very late stage, collusion in horrible violence against several third world countries and acting within an imperialist paradigm on matters like trade and patent regimes. On increasingly important environmental issues some good initiatives have come from Europe, but so has a lot of green-washing. Opposition of European people to GM crops has been helpful for the entire world, but the reverse side is that some of the

GM and seed giant companies located here have been behaving in very harmful ways.

Even within Europe, unity and integration of Europe is hardly complete, as about one-third of the countries of Europe are not members of EU. This includes the most populated, the most resource rich and heavily armed country within Europe—Russia. This would not matter so much as long as relations are friendly, but relations with Russia have deteriorated rapidly and are just not in a stage of high risk. The paradox is that most European countries and even more so most European people are not in favour of relations with Russia being so hostile and yet this situation exists. Another aspect of this situation at present is that most people of Europe want to buy cheaper Russian gas but due to US pressures have to buy much more expensive fuel from other sources particularly the USA.

For one thing most members of EU, except perhaps four, are also members of leading military alliance NATO. The undisputed leader of NATO is US followed by its closest ally Britain (not an EU member now). While the EU also has its own

defense system in the form of Common Security and Defense Policy, NATO is much bigger and dominates military matters.

As NATO leader the USA never wanted European countries to have friendly relations with Russia and in recent times it has used the Ukraine crisis and the sanctions regime (not to mention the Nord Stream sabo-

tage, in itself a very grave issue) related to it to widen the gulf between Russia and most European countries. Hence the relations of most other countries of Europe with the most populated, most resource rich country as well as the biggest military power of Europe are captive to what is dictated by a non-European power, the USA.

It so happens that the more or less openly stated goal of the USA is to dominate the world and in this context it has ambitions to ensure the downfall/subjugation of not just Russia but also of potentially (if not already) its biggest rival China. This quest for dominance by any single country of a unipolar world is the biggest threat to world peace. □□□

PANDEMIC AND BILLIONAIRES

Why do the Rich get Richer?

Somesh Jha

[Every 30 hours, the pandemic spawned a new billionaire, while pushing a million people into poverty. Here's why.]

DEATH AND DEVASTATION are not the only calling cards COVID-19 will be remembered by. The pandemic has also drastically widened inequalities across the globe over the past three years.

According to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index, 131 billionaires more than doubled their net worth during the pandemic. The world's richest person, Louis Vuitton chief Bernard Arnault, was worth \$159bn on December 27, 2022, up by around \$60bn compared with early 2020. Elon Musk, the planet's second-wealthiest man, boasted a \$139bn fortune—it was less than \$50bn before the pandemic. And India's Gautam Adani, third on the index, has seen his wealth increase more than tenfold in this period, from approximately \$10bn at the start of 2020 to \$110bn at the end of 2022.

At the same time, close to 97 million people—more than the population of any European nation—were pushed into extreme poverty in just 2020, earning less than \$1.90 a day (the World Bank-defined poverty line). The global poverty rate is estimated to have gone up from 7.8 percent to 9.1 percent by late 2021. Now, skyrocketing inflation is affecting real wage growth, eating into the dispos-

able incomes of people around the world.

To curb rising prices, central banks are reducing the flow of money into the economy by increasing interest rates and withdrawing excess liquidity. But that has again boomeranged on workers, with companies—from tech firms like Amazon, Twitter and Meta to banks like Goldman Sachs—announcing layoffs at the end of an already tumultuous 2022.

Many countries adopt policies such as tax breaks and financial incentives for businesses to boost economies amid crises like the pandemic. Central banks flood the economy with money to make it easier to lend and spend. This helps the wealthy grow their money through financial market investments. But widening inequality is not unavoidable.

When the pandemic began, central banks across the world swung into action to protect financial markets that took a severe beating as governments started imposing lockdown restrictions.

To save the economy from collapsing, central banks slashed interest rates, thereby lowering borrowing costs and increasing the supply of money. They also pumped trillions

of dollars into financial markets with the aim of encouraging companies to invest in the economy. Major central banks have infused more than \$11 trillion into the global economy since 2020.

These interventions triggered a boom in the value of stocks, bonds and other financial instruments—but the rise in asset prices wasn't accompanied by an increase in economic production.

“Instead of leading to more economic output, a bulk of the sudden infusion of money into the financial system led to a dramatic rise in asset prices, including stocks, which benefitted the rich,” said Francisco Ferreira, director of the International Inequalities Institute at the London School of Economics.

A year into the pandemic, capital markets had risen \$14 trillion, with 25 companies—mostly in the technology, electric vehicles and semiconductors segment—accounting for 40 percent of the total gains, according to an analysis of stock performance of 5,000 companies by consulting firm McKinsey.

“The result is that this pandemic period has seen the biggest surge in billionaire wealth since the records began,” as per findings of Oxfam America's Director of Economic Justice Nabil Ahmed.

Billionaires saw their fortunes increase as much in 24 months as they did in 23 years, according to Oxfam's “Profiting from Pain” report released in May this year. Every

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30 hours, while COVID-19 and rising food prices are pushing nearly one million more people into extreme poverty, the global economy is also spawning a new billionaire.

India's Gautam Adani is today the world's third-richest man, and his wealth has multiplied more than ten-fold since the start of the pandemic.

To be sure, both income and wealth inequalities have been on the rise since the 1980s when governments across the world began deregulating and liberalising the economy to allow more private sector participation. Income inequality refers to the gulf in the disposable income of the rich and the poor whereas wealth inequality deals with the distribution of financial and real assets, such as stocks or housing, between the two groups.

Among other things, the post-liberalisation period also resulted in declining bargaining power of workers. At the same time, companies increasingly started turning to financial markets to borrow money for their investments.

"It is the financialisation of the economy in particular that generated a lot of income for the rich, who invest in financial asset. And whenever an economic crisis strikes, the central banks' response is to save the financial market from collapsing because it is so much interlinked with the real economy. This helps stock and bond markets to thrive creating more wealth and inequality."

This is what major central banks did during the global financial crisis in 2008-09—injecting liquidity into the market through various tools and lowering interest rates to encourage companies to borrow and invest.

"The easy money policy that began after the global financial crisis led to really low to negative interest rates and big liquidity in the financial system," said Jayati Ghosh, professor of economics at the Uni-

versity of Massachusetts Amherst. "So, in the past 15 years, corporations chose to reinvest the money into buying more financial assets chasing high returns, rather than increasing their production."

The pandemic accelerated those structures of inequality—be it liberalisation of the labour market, surge in monopoly power or erosion of public taxation. One example is that 143 of 161 countries analysed by Oxfam froze tax rates for the rich during the pandemic, and 11 countries reduced them.

Tech giant Meta announced in November, 2022 that it would lay off 11,000 employees, or 13 percent of its workforce. It's one of many major companies to cut jobs in recent weeks.

As countries started easing COVID-19 restrictions, a sharp rise in consumer demand coupled with supply shocks contributed to global inflation touching record levels.

That has forced central banks to wind up their policies of allowing access to easy money. They have also announced sharp interest rate rises. Their aim now is to reduce demand so that prices soften and, in advanced economies like the United States, to also cool down the jobs market.

To preserve their earnings in the wake of this policy shift, major companies have now started announcing job cuts, even as inflation bites the poor with low savings.

Interest rate increases have increased borrowing costs, also affecting the ability of low-income and developing countries to spend more on welfare schemes as they have high levels of public and private debt.

"Because of the way the global financial system works, there will be a lot of pressure on developing countries to implement austerity measures". "That can create more inequalities and this is perhaps more significant because it limits their

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capacity to provide social protection to the poor.”

According to Oxfam, lower-income countries spent approximately 27 percent of their budgets in repaying their debts—twice the money spent on education and four times that on health.

After World War II, countries started following progressive taxation policies and took steps to address monopoly power. And while many nations reversed that approach during the pandemic, a few bucked the trend. Costa Rica increased its

highest tax rate by 10 percent and New Zealand by 6 percent in order to redistribute wealth.

“There are examples of countries doing the right thing. And it reminds the world that inequality is not inevitable. It’s a policy and a political choice”.

If left unaddressed, on the other hand, wealth inequality gives power to the rich to influence policies in their favour, which can further deepen the income divide, independent of the boom-and-bust nature of economic cycles. “Higher wealth tends

to be associated with capture of government and state institutions by the elite,” said Ferreira at the London School of Economics.

This, he said, can take different forms in different democratic contexts. But the result is the same. “The bargaining power of the rich increases due to various tools they use such as lobbying”. “Policies end up benefitting the wealthy and that again creates a cycle. But, this time, it’s a political cycle.” □□□

[Source: Al Jazeera]

VISVA BHARATI UNIVERSITY

Snuffing out Dissent

TNM

EVER SINCE BIDYUT Chakraborty took office as Vice Chancellor (VC) of Visva Bharati University (VBU) in 2018, the university has been witnessing constant agitations. Students and teachers allege that from increasing admission fees, restricting movement of faculty and students on campus to refusing hostel accommodation and indirectly enforcing Hindu religious practices, the VC has employed several harassment tactics.

Professor Sudipta Bhattacharya, president of the Visva Bharati University Faculty Association (VBUFA), who had been vocal against the VC’s actions, was issued a termination notice on December 22, 2022. He had just rejoined service after a 21-month suspension for filing an RTI about irregularities in appointments. On December 23, the university announced the suspension of six students, three of whom were Dalits, and two OBCs. Interestingly, the university had also issued orders to ‘suspend’ another person from Dalit community, who was no longer a student there.

Two weeks ago the University Registrar had registered a complaint

at the Santiniketan Police Station, alleging that the Vice Chancellor was injured on December 13 after being hit by stones thrown by miscreants at the entrance of his official residence. Students however denied this and said it was the VC who threw the stone.

The action against the students came a month after they began demonstrating outside the VC’s office raising two key demands. The first of their demands was that the university grant admission to Somenath Sow, a Dalit student who completed his Bachelors in Economics from VBU in 2021, to a Masters course in the university. The VC had done everything in his capacity to ensure that he did not get admission, alleged Somenath Sow. “As I did my undergrad here, I should be considered as an internal candidate and given direct admission to MA Economics. I applied for two other subjects and sat for entrance exams for the same. While the initial merit list contained my name, the university took it down and published a revised list that did not include me,” said Somenath.

Somenath feels he was targeted

by the VC because of two social media posts that he put up, condemning the VC’s actions. Last year, Somenath had to face casteist abuse from a faculty member who supports the VC. Sumit Basu, the accused teacher, was in police custody for over two weeks. However, he faced no action from the university and continues to teach there.

Somenath took the issue of his admission to court and procured an order that the university should take appropriate action after he wrote an apology for the social media posts. Despite emailing an apology and later sending a hard copy on the request of the proctor, Somenath has still not been granted admission, in defiance of the court orders.

The agitation, which began on November 23, 2022, also raised the grievances of Minakshi Bhattacharya, a PhD scholar and the VBU unit president of All India Trinamool Chhatra Parishad (TMCP), the student-wing of TMC. Not only were her yearly reports withheld and marked “incomplete”, her request for a two-year extension (which is granted to all female scholars) was also denied, Somenath said. The students are also demanding prompt publishing of exam results, placement assistance and hostel accommodations.

While the VC’s harassment of

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students and staff is mostly trained at those who oppose his actions, Shaona Barik, a Dalit professor in the English Department, has been allegedly targeted despite not having taken part in any protest activity. "I was the teacher who was never rebellious," she said. Shaona won the Charles Wallace Visiting Fellowship at the University of Leeds. Even though her Department is ready to relieve her for the period of the fellowship, the VC has been continuously refusing to relieve her, she alleged. "For a Dalit person to achieve what I have is no small task. However, the VC's irrational actions are posing a roadblock for me now," she said.

When repeated entreaties to the VC saw no result, Shaona registered complaints with the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and with the Human Rights Commission. It's been over a month since she filed them. However, she has got no response besides a complaint number from both authorities.

Professor Sudipta alleged that the VC is affiliated to BJP and has openly declared that the Prime Minister sent him to VBU with an 'agenda'. The campus has a meditation hall under the Shantiniketan Trust that holds weekly meditation sessions linked to Brahmoism, a religious movement. "The VC has made evident attempts to Hinduise the meditation sessions. Not only does he meticulously attend them, he also forces faculty members to do so," Sudipta alleged. He recounted how two professors were denied promotions on the grounds that they did not participate in the meditation sessions. This was later quashed by the High Court.

The VC has also been accused of making inflammatory remarks against the Constitution. A speech he made in the men's hostel, allegedly, about the "need to rewrite the

Constitution in the background of CAA-NRC as the existing one was written by people from minority religions", was recorded by a student and circulated on social media. The Dalit student who recorded the speech, Bijju Sarkar, was arbitrarily expelled from the hostel soon after the incident. Somenath alleged that the hostels are not filled to capacity. "Only 20-30% of the hostel seats are filled. The VC has ordered that the remaining seats be left vacant as he fears that accommodating more students can lead to more demonstrations and protests," he said.

He said more than 50% of the students at VBU hail from Dalit families and face financial difficulties. They rely on the scholarships and stipends for SC/ST students. However, the inordinate delay in publishing results has made it impossible for them to apply for the scholarships on time every year.

Several institutes of higher education across the country now have heads who are affiliated to the Right Wing and Bidyut Chakraborty is no different, alleges Sudipta. "He does not even have regard for court orders. The university can go back to some semblance of normalcy only if he is removed," he said. "Two years back, I was a busy academician. But for the past several months, I have been forced to engage in constant battle. Not everybody can afford to fight like this," Sudipta said.

According to Somenath, in 2019, around 150 members of the non-teaching staff had staged a 21-day protest against various issues including the sub-standard services offered at the university hospital and the VC's attempts to hand it over to private parties. They were sent show-cause notices and asked to produce apology letters for protesting. Three leaders who refused to submit apologies were suspended. Sudipta said that the secretary of the non-teach-

ing staff's association was suspended for over a year.

The demand to remove the VC has been raised in various fora, including in the Parliament on multiple occasions. Both Shaona and Sudipta have written to various authorities including the President of India, Prime Minister and other ministers. Yet, no response has come their way. "If you are vocal against the VC's actions, or if you are a Dalit, you are sure to be targeted and harassed by the VC," alleges Somenath.

VBU VC Bidyut Chakraborty, however, denied allegations that he discriminated on the basis of caste. Regarding the refusal of admission for Somenath, he said, "I haven't done anything. He abused me in a social media post and then took advantage of his SC status. In this country, you have no right to abuse anyone," the VC said. When asked why the university then did not take action against a faculty member for using casteist slurs against Somenath, the VC said, "The professor was in jail for two weeks. However, a proctorial investigation did not convict him for lack of evidence."

He accused Somenath of misusing his caste status to frame the professor. "When you add a caste connection to frame someone that is abuse and is concocted," the VC said. He refused to comment on other allegations saying that they were decisions of the university.

TNM also spoke to Mahua Banerjee, the university PRO. She said that the recent suspension of students was a disciplinary action taken by the university for gheraoing the VC and denied any caste prejudice. She also said that hostels weren't filled to capacity at the moment because UG admissions were delayed. □□□

[Courtesy :The news minute]

A TRIBUTE

Remembering LSN Murthy

V Subrahmanyam

LSN MURTHY, A VETERAN leader of CPI (Maoist), passed away in the Nizam Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS), at Hyderabad. After five years of incarceration, he was released on bail in 2018. For four years he has been staying at the Chandra Rajeswara Rao Foundation, Home for the Aged, in Hyderabad. A month back he was diagnosed with esophagus cancer and was admitted into NIMS on 21st November, 2022. It was found to be in the advanced stage. After a month-long struggle, LSN, aka Sarat, as he is popularly known, lost his last battle on 21st December. He passed away at the age of 76. In his death, the revolutionary movement lost an important communist of the Naxalbari generation from twin Telugu states.

Born on 15th June 1946, in Tenali to the couple Lakkaraju Gopala Rao and Raja Rajeswari, LSN was the adorable child as he was the youngest among the 9 children- four male and five female. Their parents shifted from Village Katevaram which was 4 kms to the Taluk centre, Tenali which was 30 kms away from Guntur, the district centre.

LSN was not the first one in his family to face Sedition and other serious charges by the state. His family had a glorious history in the freedom struggle. His parents gave away gold and sold land for the sake of freedom. His grandfather faced sedition charges. His uncles were convicted for participating in the civil disobedience movement.

LSN's grandfather Basavaiah along with his brothers Syamsunder and Sunder Rao were active in the freedom movement. Opposing the

Minto-Marle reforms, from 1908 onwards, they actively participated in raising anti-British struggle. They helped Gadicherla Hari Sarvottama Rao and the founder of the Swaraj magazine—Pingali Lakshmi Narayana Rao to escape from the police dragnet and sent them to Pondicherry safely. But Basavaiah, LSN's grand dad, was sent to jail on sedition charges for this adventure. After his release, he procured pistols from Calcutta and distributed them to activists. He got bombs manufactured locally. In 1912, though the attempt failed, Basavaiah along with his coworkers tried to explode the train by keeping bombs on the Railway tracks when the then Viceroy—Lord Hardinge II, was to travel from Vijayawada to Madras. LSN's uncles were arrested in the civil disobedience movement and served 6 months conviction.

LSN's father sold a good chunk of his ancestral property, around 30 acres of land, towards the activities in the freedom movement. His mother gave 800 gms of gold as fund for the Quit India movement.

LSN after his studies joined Defence Accounts Department (DAD) at Pune in 1968, at a very young age. He was transferred to Secunderbad in 1970, and there he was attracted to Marxism and particularly to the Naxalbari struggle and revolutionary politics. The united Andhra Pradesh was bubbling with revolutionary activities, as the ongoing Srikakulam armed struggle was touching the hearts of Telugu people extensively. The long silence after the withdrawal of the Telangana Armed Struggle in 1951 was broken. Taking the torch of the Naxalbari struggle of 1967, Srika-

kulam peasantry took to the armed struggle to shake of the yolk of the ruling classes, exposed the Parliamentary path of the revisionists, paved way for the establishing a revolutionary communist party that needed to make a rupture with the old and new revisionism.

LSN began his revolutionary activities by organising strikes in the DAD itself. A week-long strike in 1972 unheard of its kind in the Department took place. Though LSN was not the Secretary of the Union, but he was the guiding force behind the strike.

Soon, he resigned from the job and decided to work for the revolution. From then onwards, he never looked back. He followed the Mao dictum to the letter—a real communist works till his last days.

Joining the CPI(ML) led by Kondapalli Seetharamayya, later came to be known as CPI(ML) (People's War), LSN plunged himself into the trade union activities. The AP committee had already realised that keeping away from the mass organisations was counterproductive and goes against the mass line. According to that understanding it encouraged its members, and activists to work among the masses, building, organising and participating in various kinds of mass organisations. The activities initiated by LSN and his associates like BSA Satyanarayana and Srinivas, who later became martyrs, made the foundations for the revolutionary working class movements in Andhra Pradesh. Especially the struggles led by these leaders who were working in Postal and Telecom sectors with the help of LSN conducted militant struggles during the post-emergency period.

Earlier in 1972, The Art Lovers of Hyderabad group matured into Jana Natya Mandali (JNM), whose reach to the masses in Telugu States later

became unprecedented. LSN while being busy with the trade union activities also helped in bringing out a revolutionary political magazine—Pilupu (Call), meant to hold aloft the armed struggle of Srikakulam peasantry, which by then went into a setback, and to clarify about the path of the People's War, the *raison d'être* of the Srikakulam struggle, amidst raising questions by the doubting Thomasses. While the building of various mass organisations laid the way to extend the party's mass base that supplied cadre to continue the armed struggle in AP and extend it into Dandakaranya, the magazine Pilupu helped clear the questions about the reasons for the setback, dispelling the pessimism, a natural concomitant after any defeat. Pilupu worked more as a theoretical organ of CPI (ML) during a difficult period. LSN

was closely associated with its publication activity.

LSN's dedication, commitment and hard work, made him close to the AP State Committee of the CPI (ML). Apart from the responsibilities in the TU Front and in JNM as the political commissar, he was involved in many works of the State Committee. Post-emergency—CPI(ML) began its open magazine—Krantī. He became the first editor of Krantī. He took pains to publish and distribute it to all the nooks and corners of Andhra Pradesh. Krantī was read widely in all the three regions of Andhra Pradesh.

All these years, he was helping the CPI(ML) state committee in establishing contacts with CPI(ML) (Party Unity) and MCC and in the discussions with them for the unity efforts.

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

—Fr.

Arrested in 2013, he spent most of the time in Rajahmundry's notorious 2B ward which was known for its isolation. Not only he spent the jail life in a single cell, but he was all alone in the large 2B Ward. The jail life and the Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) gradually deteriorated his condition. He almost lost his vision gradually, and was unable to read or write.

LSN is a role model for all the revolutionaries. LSN is no more. But he ever lives in the memories of those who yearn for revolution and cherish to change the society. □□

CLASH OF TWO SUB-NATIONALITIES

Savarkar in Karnataka Assembly

Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay

THE BHARATIYA JANATA Party (BJP) led Karnataka government's move to put up Hindutva icon Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's portrait at the Suvarna Vidhana Soudha (state assembly building) in Belagavi, is the latest in a series of actions taken to further the party's dual objective of rebuffing Maharashtra's claim on the bilingual district, while simultaneously giving a push to the Hindutva campaign, to install the Hindu nationalistic icon alongside other great leaders of the national movement.

The dispute between Karnataka and Maharashtra over areas that both States claim to be theirs has turned malevolent and raucous in recent weeks with sporadic incidents of violence. The conflict has acquired a dangerous turn despite the fact that the BJP governs both states.

The clash that has forced the Centre, specifically the Union Home Minister, Amit Shah to intercede, demonstrates the limitations of political parties unleashing linguistic parochialism as a means to expand the electoral and political footprint.

This is where the iconisation of Savarkar has the potential to act as a handy tool for the BJP while simultaneously acting as a wedge and assist resolving the conflict between the warring people of the two states.

The memory of Savarkar can be harnessed and thereafter presented to the people of both states as the unifying force and an emblem of a majoritarian ideology that is shared by a large number of people in the two states.

The foisting of the image of the Marathi leader on the people of Karnataka would go a long way in

reducing animosity between the two sub-nationalities.

The two can be enlisted in the project to secure unanimous acceptance for Savarkar and convey to them that this is far more important a political project than locking horns over a few hundred square kms of land that is actually conspicuous in its multilingual and multicultural character.

Part of the BJP's problem stems from the fact that the build-up to this round of conflict which has been raging for the past several decades, was assisted by the BJP in the years when it was not in power in Maharashtra as well as in Karnataka.

The demand for the inclusion of Belagavi, erstwhile Belgaum, has been sporadically escalated in Maharashtra from 1960 onwards when the territories of the two states were redrawn. There was considerable support for the demand that the city of Belagavi along with several hundred villages be included in Maharashtra.

In 1966, the Mahajan Commission, a panel set up by the Centre

and headed by former Chief Justice of India Mehr Chand Mahajan when the Congress was a dominant party in both states, ruled in Karnataka's favour.

But because religious chauvinism is a handy tool for political parties to gain currency, the BJP and the Shiv Sena fanned the sentiments little realising that the issue would boomerang on them after they were voted into office.

Part of the problem stemmed from Belagavi and several border towns and numerous villages having multi-lingual populations. In India, the principle of linguistic states has only been partially followed as a result of which land disputes have ranged between various states with the pot being constantly stirred by forces of chauvinism and even mainstream parties whenever they sensed gains to be made in a particular state.

The BJP's pressure also increases with the stance of opposition parties. Significantly, the Nationalist Congress Party staged protests in the past alongside the Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti.

Not to be outrun, Shiv Sena

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leader Uddhav Thackeray has slammed the state government over the Maharashtra-Karnataka border issue. "Karnataka has been asking for our areas, villages....," he said.

Stepping up the attack on the BJP he further queried, "Is there any government in Maharashtra? Like before the Gujarat (assembly) elections (in November-December 2022), some businesses were shifted there, so before the Karnataka elections will our villages be given to Karnataka?.."

The embrace of the memory and legacy of Savarkar by the Karnataka unit of the BJP has to be seen as a tactic to ward off the offensive from political forces in Karnataka. The planned campaign is at one level, aimed at establishing Karnataka's legitimacy in the Marathi-speaking pockets in the border areas in the north.

This strategy is more than a decade old and every party in Karnataka played a part in the state's efforts to barricade Belagavi from the intentions of Maharashtra.

On the other hand, the Karnataka BJP's 'project Savarkar' advances the party's nationwide drive to enhance the image and position of Savarkar among the nation's greats. Moreover, the systemic campaign of the BJP in Karnataka would secure the endorsement, albeit tacit, of significant sections of people in Maharashtra for his universal following in the state.

The BJP has taken advantage of the lack of consistency from the opposition parties, especially the Congress, in regard to the stance to be adopted towards the legacy of Savarkar. Part of the problem stems from the Congress being unable to take the debate on Savarkar to another plane for the now worn-out theme of whether the Marathi ideologue was a 'Veer' (brave) patriot or not, and whether he had written several mercy petitions to the colonial government or not.

As the recent attack on Savarkar's legacy mounted by Rahul Gandhi demonstrated—perplexingly levelled while the Bharat Jodo Yatra was travelling through Maharashtra—ideological adversaries have focussed on the ideologues his public and private activities and not on what Savarkar preached through his writings and speeches.

They have not highlighted the contradiction in Sangh Parivar's strategy of lionising Savarkar for his role prior to his conviction and subsequent deportation from the mainland to the Cellular Jail in Andaman and Nicobar Islands although he is considered a political guru for his codification of the Hindutva doctrine by his inspirational 1923 text, Essentials of Hindutva that inspired KB Hedgewar to lay the foundation of the hydra-headed Hindu nationalistic fraternity.

Part of the problem is that opposition to Savarkar by adversaries of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-BJP in recent decades has not only not been categorical and also been pulled down by a 'sense of guilt' at criticising his legacy.

The opulent Suvarna Vidhana Soudha in Belagavi is ten years old. It was inaugurated by then-President Pranab Mukherjee in November 2012. Almost every party in Karnataka had backed this project, which was criticised by many for only one session being held here and many asked if such a huge amount should have been spent solely with the intention of neutralising Maharashtra's claim.

Two months after the installation in Parliament, Savarkar's portrait was unveiled in the Maharashtra State Assembly. Although by this time many of the forgotten facts regarding Savarkar were disclosed in the public domain, the government chose to brazen it out and not halt the process of elevating Savarkar as a

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national icon at par with Gandhi and others.

By this time Sardar Patel's letter to Jawaharlal Nehru in February 1948 too had been publicised. In this, he wrote that "it was the fanatical wing of the Hindu Mahasabha directly under Savarkar that (hatched) the conspiracy and saw it through." (Volume 6 of Sardar Patel's Correspondence, page 56).

As part of the Karnataka unit of the BJP's campaign to popularise Savarkar and lobby with the state's

people that the Hindutva codifier must be embraced by the people, the party and state government launched a programme in August this year.

The latest move of the state government and the Speaker of the Karnataka state assembly to install the portrait of Savarkar alongside those of Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Swami Vivekananda, BR Ambedkar and Basaveshwara while leaving out India's first prime minis-

ter Jawaharlal Nehru, is part of the same process that has been pursued by the RSS-BJP for the past several decades.

It is just a matter of time before the confrontation between Maharashtra and Karnataka will be resolved at the initiative of national leaders of the BJP. The primary emphasis thereafter will be the plan to elevate Savarkar to a position that is much higher than what his legacy currently occupies. □□□

[Source: NewsClick]

"WOMEN, LIFE, FREEDOM"

Iran's Feminist Revolution

Frieda Afary

THE WOMEN-LED MASS protests in Iran have now lasted for almost three months. Since September 16, 2022—when protests began in Kurdistan and Tehran in response to the state police murder of Zhina Mahsa Amini for wearing an "improper" hijab—the state repression has increased severely. According to the Centre for Human Rights in Iran, more than 18,000 protesters have been arrested, over 450 have been killed, and more than 50 of those killed have been minors. At least 16 protesters have been charged as "enemies of God," the punishment for which is death. According to the Iranian government itself, five have been sentenced to death. Many are awaiting trial. Some protesters have been raped in police custody, which is a practice that has occurred in the Islamic Republic since its inception.

The average age of the protesters is 15, and women and girls continue to be at the forefront. Hundreds of college students who have participated in protests are now being denied the right to continue their education as they await trial for charges of "endangering national security."

The protests and some strikes have spread to many cities and rural areas around Iran and include all the national and ethnic minorities. The repression has also intensified through the use of live ammunition against protesters, especially in the provinces of Kurdistan and Sistan and Baluchestan, and through sharpshooters who aim at the protesters' eyes to blind them.

Various recent headlines have highlighted the announcement made at a press conference by Iran's Attorney General, Mohammad Javad Montazeri, who said that Iran's morality police will be shut down. However, Ansieh Khaz'ali—Iran's vice president for women and family affairs, who was appointed by President Ebrahim Raisi—immediately clarified this issue in a talk at Sharif University: "I did not say that we no longer have the morality police. I said we will no longer have something called the morality police. We still have a police force in charge of moral security." The head of the "Office for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice" also emphasised that the government will now focus more on using technology to enforce hijab rules.

The fact that women and girls are at the forefront of the protests, burning their compulsory headscarves or hijabs and chanting the slogan, "Woman, Life, Freedom," has compelled many Iranian and international feminists to refer to the events in Iran as a feminist revolution.

Others have emphasised that Iran has a long history of feminist struggles, which can be traced back as far as the public unveiling of Baha'i leader and writer Tahirih Qurrat al-'Ayn in 1848 and the participation of women in the 1906-1911 Constitutional Revolution against British and Russian colonialism, the monarchy and the influence of the clergy.

One of the most significant attempts at changing gender relations during the current uprising has been the nationwide effort of college students to desegregate school cafeterias and classrooms. After four decades of forced separation of women and men at universities, students have been taking over cafeterias and refusing to sit in separate sections. These takeovers have largely been led by women.

This campaign of civil disobedience mirrors the efforts of US civil rights activists in the late 1950s and 1960s to desegregate public places, and has produced a backlash from the state. Just as the 1961 Freedom

Riders in Mississippi faced brutal beatings, imprisonment and murder for their efforts; Iranian youth are facing the brutal assaults of an authoritarian religious fundamentalist state, its security police and their bullets for their efforts at gender desegregation.

Another significant expression of feminist consciousness has been the public unveiling by Gohar Eshghi, an older Iranian working-class woman from the traditional sector of the population that strictly observes rules concerning the hijab. Her son, Sattar Beheshti, a worker-blogger, was murdered in prison 10 years ago. Eshghi held a picture of her son, took off her hijab for the first time in public in front of a video camera, said she supported the youth demanding a revolution, and called on others to join them because "we have nothing to lose." She proclaimed that she refused to follow any religion if it meant killing people. This video had thousands of views and created a great deal of support on social media because so many Iranians were in awe of her courage, her strong defence of women's rights and her opposition to any forced religious views.

Perhaps the most significant feminist challenge has come from a group of Baluch women named Dasgoharan (sisterhood), who have issued a number of collective state-

ments during the past two months articulating the demands of Baluch women, the most oppressed, most marginalised and most deprived sector of the Iranian population.

The first Dasgoharan statement confronted an army colonel's rape of a 15-year-old girl during interrogation, and spoke out against the recent state-organised mass shooting of over 100 Baluchis after a protest against this rape. Dasgoharan claimed that in the past, a Baluch woman who was raped would be murdered by her family since she would be considered a source of shame to them. However, now after the nationwide protests set off by the murder of Amini, Baluch women and Baluch society refuse to stay silent about rape.

In a subsequent statement, the Dasgoharan group challenged the chief Sunni cleric of the Baluchis, Molavi Abdul Hamid, who had recently called for a popular referendum to determine Iran's form of government. They exposed his history of collaboration with the Iranian regime and the Taliban, as well as his sexist practices, including allowing families to deny an education to girls.

Dasgoharan stated that they are "against all forms of domination and repression" and want to express Baluch women's "own independent voice." They refuse to separate patriarchy from its social, economic and historical context or limit it to a cultural phenomenon. They see the new uprising in Iran as an opportunity to raise all these demands, including the rights of folks in the LGBTQ community.

It is toward these aims that other Iranian feminists have also been issuing calls for deepening the content of the current uprising. Protesters are continuing to express slogans which oppose both a monarchical and a clerical system of govern-

ment. Many young women have challenged the tendency to move the uprising in a narrow Iranian nationalist direction, expressed in slogans such as "Man, Country, Rebuilding" (which in Persian rhymes with "Woman, Life, Freedom").

Farzaneh Raji, an Iranian socialist feminist writer, translator and former political prisoner, has recently written that "we cannot use patriarchal slogans to fight patriarchy." She has specifically called for slogans that express the "ideals, demands and goals of the movement."

A statement by a group of Iranian feminists calling for mass protests on the 40-day anniversary of Amini's death also stated that they oppose any type of dictatorship—whether by the clergy or by the monarchy—and fight simultaneously and "without prioritisation for the emancipation of women from patriarchy, for the emancipation of workers, teachers, nurses from class exploitation, for the emancipation of students from educational dictatorship, for the emancipation of oppressed nationalities from this centralised system and for women's self-determination, for equality, justice, for women, life, freedom."

As protests continue in the streets, some of the most vocal, articulate, experienced and active feminists inside Iran are currently either languishing in prison or out on furlough and in effect prevented from engaging in any activities.

Although the cases of a few of Iran's feminists such as Nasrin Sotoudeh and Narges Mohammadi have gained some global attention, the demand for the immediate release of Iran's political prisoners has not become a global campaign. International feminists must urgently publicise the names and biographies of Iran's imprisoned feminists and speak out against the system of mass incarceration that exists in Iran.

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It is impossible to have a feminist revolution in Iran so long as these women are imprisoned and suffer from all the ailments that prison life has imposed on them.

The active presence of these feminists in the struggle, and the raising of explicit feminist issues such as opposition to honour killings and rape, support for abortion/reproductive rights, the right to divorce and custody of children, the rights of the LGBT community, labour rights, and

the rights of oppressed national and religious minorities can help guarantee that the movement to overthrow the Islamic Republic will continue to proceed in a progressive direction and not be diverted by patriarchal nationalism. □□□

[Frieda Afary is an Iranian- American public librarian, translator, writer, activist and author of 'Socialist Feminism: A New Approach' (Pluto Press, 2022). She is also the producer of 'Iranian Progressives in Translation' and socialistfeminism.org. Courtesy: Truthout.]

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BEYOND 'THE KASHMIRI FILES'

The Nadav Lapid Controversy

Ashok Rajwade

AT THE 53RD INTERNATIONAL film festival of India in Goa, in the concluding remarks made by Nadav Lapid, the Israeli filmmaker came down heavily upon The Kashmir Files. He called the film propaganda and vulgar movie which was inappropriate for an artistic competitive film section of such a prestigious Film Festival. Soon after, Israel's ambassador to India criticised the filmmaker saying that Lapid abused the invitation to the judges' panel in the worst way. He took to Twitter to criticise Nadav Lapid and wrote 'he should be ashamed.' However, Lapid's remarks stirred a hornet's nest. Predictably, the right-wing Hindutva elements made all the noise without making an attempt to justify the artistic merit of the film. Later, jury member Jinko Gotoh, and two fellow jurors Pascale Chavance and Javier Angulo Barturen, stated: "the entire jury knew and agreed with what Mr Lapid said. We stand by his statement." Sudipto Sen, the only Indian filmmaker on the IFFI International Competition jury claimed that Mr Lapid made the statement in his personal capacity and he was not a signatory.

Lapid said: 'I felt totally comfort-

able sharing these feelings on stage since we felt that this festival can truly accept a critical discussion, which is essential for art and for life'.

Before the controversy on The Kashmir Files, virtually nobody in India knew of Nadav Lapid despite him winning numerous awards and honours in prestigious festivals the world over. Lapid's movies, which are frequently critical of nationalism and Israeli identity, are widely celebrated in art houses and film festivals around the world. A director from a 'foreign' country making comments on 'our' movie—and that too the movie which was a favourite of the ruling party here—was seen as misusing his position as a guest.

Keeping aside all the brouhaha that his comments created, it would be pertinent to know more about the very genre of filmmaking that Lapid represents. Two of his latest movies express his mind in a lucid way since both these films are semi-autobiographical in nature. They express the anger of a person or an artist vis-a-vis vis the hostile and meddling state. His movie Synonyms (2019) shows its hero Yoav landing in Paris. Yoav wants to sever all links to Israel. He wants to forget

even the Hebrew language. He wants to learn French and be French in every possible way. In the opening scene, Yoav is seen entering an empty flat in Paris. He removes his clothes and goes to take a bath. Once he comes out of the bathroom; he discovers that his backpack is stolen and he is without any clothes. He runs naked; knocks on a few doors; returns to the bathtub shivering with cold—almost resigned to death. He is ultimately rescued by his neighbours Emile—who is a writer and his companion Caroline—an oboe player—who both take him to their flat and help him in every possible way. Yoav buys a pocket-sized dictionary and synonyms flow from him in a constant stream. Guided by Emile and Caroline, he tries to spend his time with other Israeli ex-pats. He shares stories of his past, his militaristic upbringing, and his family torn apart by war. Yoav is unpredictable at any moment. Many of the dialogues in the movie are parable like including the opening scene. In fact, the movie is full of such images. Why does Yoav want to forget his past even though he faces many uncomfortable situations? Can the pursuit of shedding one's national identity be so simple? How can he achieve it? People carry the memories, the local language, the signs, the gestures, the internal psychology, etc. Can people remove the same from their psyche

and throw them all in the dustbin?

Lapid raises these questions through the story of Yoav.

And why does the hero in the movie like to shed his Israeli past in disgust? Nadav states in an interview with the *Now Toronto* magazine, "The film talks about the collective Israeli soul and the Israeli collective soul is a sick soul. Something in the deepest essence of the Israeli existence is false—is rotten. It's not just Benjamin Netanyahu—it's not special to Israel. But, at the same time, I think this Israeli sickness or nature is characterised by young Israeli men muscular, smiling, who don't raise any questions and don't have any doubts. They are extremely proud of being Israeli. They have a totally dichotomist vision of existence: Us versus all the others."

The reasons for the rot and his disgust of it are not clear in the movie but they are obvious to anyone familiar with settler colonialism and the apartheid Israeli state and its discriminatory nature when it comes to Palestinians. And Lapid is frank and outspoken about it.

His latest movie 'Ahed's Knee' (2021) answers this question by the very choice of the topic. The movie shows a director simply known as Y

in the preparation for a film about Ahed Tamimi, a real-life Palestinian activist known for a viral video of her slapping an Israeli soldier in 2017. Y wishes to focus, in one scene, on a tweet by an angry Israeli demanding that Tamimi be shot (at least in the knee). While casting the main role, Y travels to the Arava region—a secluded landscape of rock and dust—to attend a screening of one of his films, organised by Yahalom, one of his local admirers, who works for the Israeli Department of Libraries.

Before Y can screen one of his movies in a public library in an Arava desert town, he is told he must sign a document from Israel's Ministry of Culture. The agreement states that, during his visit, he will only discuss with his audience a list of approved topics, including 'Israeli history,' 'the Holocaust,' 'family,' 'love' and 'comrades in arms'. And there is one more list of unapproved topics like 'Palestinians,' 'the occupation' and so on.

Nadav is always uncomfortable about the state meddling in the arena of artist. But it is not an abstract state, but the belligerent 'here and now' Jewish state of Israel and its discriminatory character and

the consequent crises. About Ahed's Knee, he says: In general, in my movies there are hardly any Palestinians. I think it's because I'm totally fascinated by this research into Israel's soul. I feel that the Palestinians are already present inside the Israeli soul. When Israelis look in the mirror, they also see the reflections of Palestinians. The feelings of fear, anxiety, hate, guilt, otherness. It's the shadow that accompanies Israelis whenever they go.

The common thread running through both his semi-autobiographical films is Lapid's search for a collective Israeli soul. And the Palestinians are not excluded from this soul.

Nadav Lapid is a ferocious and brave artist seething with anger like his hero Yoav in his movie *Synonyms*. He is not afraid to talk his mind openly on platforms like the 'International' Film Festival of India. He does not hide his love-hate relationship with Israel and calls the Israeli collective soul a sick soul. In an interview after the storm created due to his remarks at IFFI, he says: In countries that are increasingly losing the ability to speak their mind or speak the truth, someone needs to speak up.

□□□

LETTERS

Bordering the Nation

The eminent scholar of border studies, Sandro Mezzadra, has recently made the following insightful observation: "...it is easy to grasp the relevance of studies that over the last decades have investigated the mutations and the proliferation of borders with respect to migration. Again, many of these studies have emphasised the 'necropolitics' of borders, the proliferation of fences, barbed wires and walls..., processes of militarisation and the refinement of technologies of control." (*Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 26, Nos. 4-5, 2022)

Sandro Mezzadra's observation finds contextual meaning in India in the light of the year-end statement of the Union Home Minister, Amit Shah. Reportedly, speaking at an event (December 29, 2022) to launch the 'Prahari' app for the Border Security Force (BSF), Shah said that fencing could not be done at some places due to difficult topography. However, construction of 140 km of fencing and 400 km of roads had been completed in difficult places, along with construction of 120 border outposts. He further said that borders could be permanently secured only when bor-

der villages were populated by patriotic citizens, and asked the border-guarding forces to use the Vibrant Village Programme (VVP) for the same. (*See The Hindu*, December 30, 2022)

The above narration gives us a hint of technologies of border control and surveillance mechanism of the hyper-nationalist Indian State.

Arup Kumar Sen, Kolkata
Jose Maria Sison

The New Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party (NDMLP), Sri Lanka expresses amid profound sorrow its highest respects for Jose Maria Sison who led and guided the Philippine revolution as founding chairman of Communist

Party of the Philippines (CPP), founder of the New People's Army (NPA) and pioneer of the People's Democratic Government in the Philippines. The NDMLP considers Sison among the greatest Marxist Leninist thinkers of present time and an indefatigable revolutionary fighter.

His life since days as a youth leader and activist has been one of revolutionary struggle to uphold and promote Marxism-Leninism and national democracy. In the process he waged relentless ideological and cultural struggles against anti-communist forces to build the Communist Party of the Philippines from its humble beginnings into a formidable mass political force.

He was an outstanding Marxist Leninist ideologist upholding Mao Zedong Thought as Marxism Leninism in the era of neo-colonial revival of imperialism, and he persevered against revisionism within the CPP to reset the Party firmly on the foundations of Marxism-Leninism.

His leadership guided the CPP's growth into a strong revolutionary political force, even when it was forced underground by the martial law regime of the brutal dictator Ferdinand Marcos, and inspired the masses to shake the foundations of the martial law regime.

SK Senthivel, General Secretary of New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party, Sri Lanka
Massive Evictions in Assam

On December 26, 2022 around 40 families in Kanara Satra in Assam's Barpeta were evicted due to alleged illegal encroachment. Only a week prior to this, another major eviction drive was carried out in the state at Batadrava Than in Nagaon district. "Approximately 400 people were evicted today," the officer said. "Between 45 and 60 structures, all of them semi-permanent, were demolished. There was no resistance from those evicted; the whole process was carried out peacefully."

A Congress MLA, Sherman Ali Ahmed was detained after he staged a protest against the demolition and demanded rehabilitation of those evicted. "The government must stop evictions without giving suitable rehabilitation to eviction victims. I demand that these people be rehabilitated within one month," Ahmed told the media present at the spot.

The eviction drive in Nagaon was to clear 1,000 bighas (1.35 sq km) land which ended up evicting 359 families. After this massive eviction, the Congress had staged a walkout in the Assam Assembly. "All people, whether Hindus or Muslims, will have to vacate Satra land. We request people to leave encroached land, otherwise we will carry out eviction drives," said Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma. Satra is a form of Hindu Vaishnavite monastery.

As reported by Scroll.in, the authorities have evicted 4,449 families since May, 2021 when the BJP government came to power.

Earlier protests against demolition drives have resulted in the murder of innocent people by the state. On September 23, 2021 two residents of Dhalpur were killed by police firing during an eviction drive targeting a minority Muslim community in Assam. One of them, Maynal Haque, was protesting against the evictions but 12-year-old teenager Shaikh Farid had nothing to do with the protests.

Sabrangindia, 02 Jan 2023
Bhima Koregaon

Five years on, Bhima Koregaon congregation still faces right wing resistance.

On January 1, 2018, the annual event had sparked off a caste violence. Two groups had clashed with each other along caste lines in the adjoining areas of Koregaon Bhima, Sanas-wadi, Kondhapuri and Shikrapur on Prune/Ahmednagar Road. While one person was reported dead, several others suffered injuries.

Violence had erupted after activists had organised an event in Pune

on December 31, 2017, commemorating the battle of Bhima Koregaon in 1818, when a force of Mahar soldiers of the East India Company defeated the 28,000-strong forces of Peshwa Baji Rao II. The battle is seen as a Dalit victory against upper-caste oppression.

The organisers comprised a group of activists, political leaders and retired judges, who came together at Shaniwar Wada in Pune, under the banner of the Elgar Parishad (Congress for Speaking Aloud). The organisers included former Supreme Court judge, Justice P.B. Sawant, and former Bombay High Court judge, Justice B.G. Kolse-Patil.

The event saw songs, street plays and speeches on various issues, including Dalit rights. Many activists even slammed the Narendra Modi government in their speeches.

The speakers included Jignesh Mewani, Radhika Vemula, Umar Khalid, Vinay Ratan Singh, Soni Sori and Prashant Dontha. Khalid, who is currently in jail, gave a fiery speech on taking inspiration from Koregaon-Bhima battle to fight "modern day Peshwa rule of RSS and BJP."

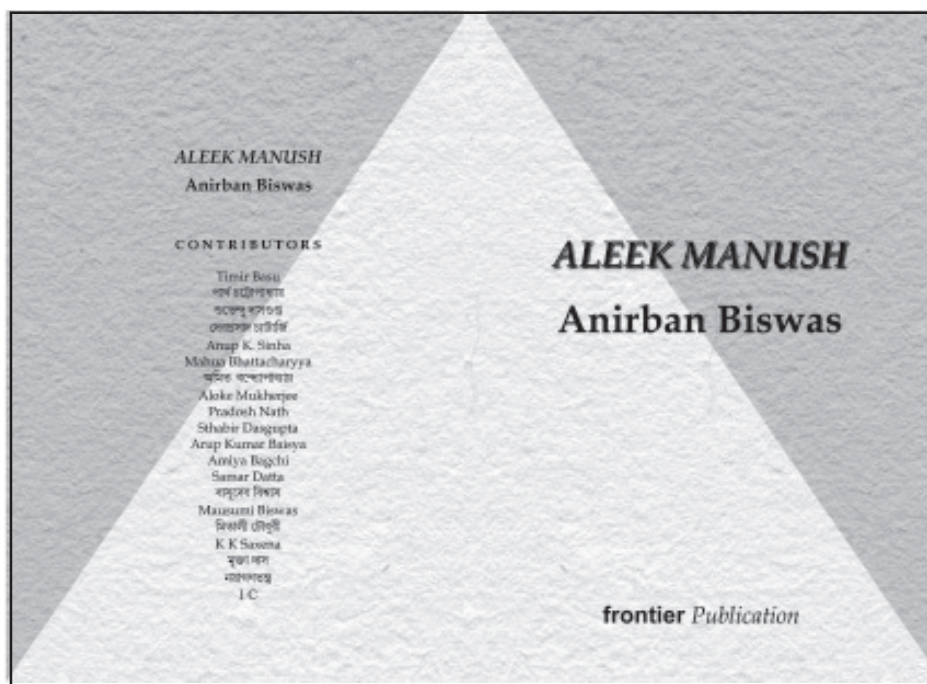
After stone-pelting at the location, allegedly by right-wing groups, clashes broke out, which led to state-wide protests for several days as Dalit protesters called for a Bandh in Maharashtra.

According to the NIA, 16 people played an active role in "provoking" the crowd at Bhima Koregaon with their speeches and triggering violence. The 16 accused were arrested: While three persons have been released on bail, one person died in custody. The remaining 12 continue to languish in the prisons of Mumbai. In August, 2022, the Supreme Court granted 82-year-old activist and poet Varavara Rao—held as an undertrial in the case since August 28, 2018—permanent bail on medical grounds. Five years after the infamous arrests, the annual event continues to face right wing resistance.

A Reader, Pune

A **frontier** Publication

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Contribution: INR 100