

frontier

Vol. 55 : No. 30

ISSN 0016-2094

January 22-28, 2023

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On Other Pages

Comment	2
Note	3
MILITARY LITERATURE FESTIVAL Militarisation of Bhagat Singh's Heritage Shamsul Islam	4
100 YEARS LATER Birth Centenary of USSR Harsh Thakor	7
AKSAI CHIN From Johnson Line to Macdonald Line Bishaldeep Kakati Bagmita Borthakur	9
'DON'T LOOK UP' Adam McKay's Film in Today's World Swapnani Mukherjee	11
BACK FROM UKRAINE Daily Life in Kyiv Dave Eggars	12
Letters	14

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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]

World without Billionaires

IT IS SIMPLY UNTHINKABLE—A WORLD WITHOUT BILLIONAIRES. In truth with every passing day their number is multiplying. A recent report from Oxfam entitled “Carbon Billionaires: The Investment Emissions of the World’s Richest People” points the finger at the wealthiest individuals for causing and continuing to fuel climate change through not only their individual carbon footprints but more importantly their investments in polluting industries. The study looks at the impact of 125 of the richest billionaires globally, whose carbon emissions equal those of France, or 67 million people, and shows that just the richest 10 of those individuals own more wealth than the poorest 40% of humanity. The average billionaire in the study is responsible for carbon emissions over one million times higher than the average person in the bottom 90% of humanity.

While their lavish lifestyles—yachts, private jets, mansions and other excessive material wealth—contribute to climate change, their investments account for 50% to 70% of their carbon footprint. Fourteen percent of these investments are in fossil fuels and other polluting industries, with only one of these 125 billionaires having investments in a renewable energy company. A disclaimer from Oxfam states that these figures are likely low estimates of the true carbon emissions of the wealthiest due to lack of independent verification.

But what is missing from this report is that the system of capitalism is the root cause. The very nature of capitalism—endless growth, maximisation of profits, competition over markets and resources, lack of centralised planning—has caused climate change. The insatiable need to endlessly produce products using the cheapest materials and most exploitative labour with complete disregard for the long-term implications has decimated ecosystems worldwide and spewed massive amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere since the Industrial Revolution.

Capitalism can never be environmentally sustainable, as it treats the living world as a commodity to be exploited until there are no more profits to be made. For instance, before colonisation, North America was a lush, bountiful landscape supporting an abundance of biodiversity due to the Indigenous peoples’ understanding and respect for the natural world. With the invasion of Europeans came capitalist market forces that drove entire species to near extinction for profit—beaver and otters were killed for their fur, bison slaughtered for their meat, bones and hide, and forests clear cut

for lumber, cash crops and cattle grazing.

This drive for profits, largely to feed the markets of Europe, forever altered the ecosystems of this continent. The disruption of the inextricable balance between species that had evolved over millions of years to create the most optimal conditions

for all life to thrive impacted how water cycled through the landscape and transformed once-lush ecosystems into deserts.

The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change continues to warn the people across the globe that the window is rapidly closing to maintain a habitable world with only

a few years remaining for rapid emission reductions. It is too late for taxes and regulations. If people are to survive, the workers must take control of the economies and create a socialist system. A world without billionaires is the only path forward. The million dollar question is who will bell the cat? □□□ [Contributed]

COMMENT

Helpless Prisoners

ON NOVEMBER 26, 2022, PRESIDENT Droupadi Murmu in her valedictory address at the Constitution Day celebrations held by the Supreme Court brought the spotlight back on overpopulated prisons. “Who are these people languishing in jails?” she asked the gathering that included Union Law Minister Kiren Rijju and Chief Justice DY Chandrachud. She then replied: “They are the people who don’t know anything about fundamental rights, the preamble, and fundamental duties.”

She referred to excessive litigation costs as a major impediment in the delivery of justice and urged the executive, judiciary, and legislature to jointly evolve an effective dispute resolution mechanism that would eliminate the need for additional jails. But who is listening? Nobody. After some initial furore it is business as usual.

The situation is simply horrible. One Jai Prakash, 47, a resident of Uttar Pradesh’s Chaundali district, reportedly had to spend over 22 years in judicial custody without a trial because there was none to furnish a surety bond of Rs 30,000. How many Jai Prakashs are languishing behind bars as under-trials and pre-trials is anybody’s guess. But the persons in power are thinking over how to construct more jails, not jail reforms.

Experts believe the longstanding problem cannot be solved without police and jail reforms. They say there is an urgent need to redress issues of an understaffed and overworked judiciary, strengthening district legal service authorities, and most importantly, introducing substitutes for money or property-based bail systems in Indian courts. For the poor litigation is luxury; they can hardly afford minimum court expenses.

As per the National Crime Records Bureau, prison overcrowding in 2019 was the highest in the past 10 years. Prison Statistics India report 2021 revealed that the number of convicts in jails decreased by 9.5 per cent, whereas the number of undertrial inmates increased by 45.8 per cent between 2016 and 2021.

According to Aakar Patel, chairman of Amnesty International India, the criminal justice system in modern nation states is designed to correct the imbalance between the state and the accused. “All powers lie with the state, which controls the police and the prosecution and which makes and amends the laws. This imbalance is corrected through due process and an independent judiciary. What has happened in India is that over the years the state has lost interest in the actual prosecution and conviction, perhaps because this is difficult to achieve given the levels of competence in the sys-

tem. Therefore, it has turned its attention to the denial of bail.” And jails are becoming overcrowded—for all practical purposes they are living hells.

Patel pointed out that three-fourths of India’s prisoners are undertrial prisoners, with a vast majority from underprivileged and minority communities. “The President’s comments should be understood in this light, and as a democratic state committed to upholding the rights of all, it is incumbent on the state to improve its record on this front.”

Tribal groups form a large percentage of those who get customarily imprisoned. President Murmu particularly spoke about the plight of poor tribals in her home State, Odisha, and in Jharkhand. In truth forest laws have criminalised Adivasis since British times and continue to do so even after the Forest Rights Act, 2006, which was passed to correct historic injustices. “It is ordinary tribal people who are caught in the net of cordon-and-search operations and charged. They spend long years in prison before they are eventually acquitted for lack of evidence.”

Additionally, customary Adivasi practices are mechanically criminalised, leading to arrests rather than empathetic handling by the police and courts. For instance, youths from tribal communities in Tamil Nadu’s Nilgiris district are routinely arrested under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) for consensually living with under-18

women of their tribe, a common practice among these communities. Members of denotified tribes such as the Pardhis and Lodhas are regularly picked up when any petty crime comes to light because of deep-seated prejudices and laws like the Habitual Offenders Act. The very idea of dubbing a tribe criminal is a colonial hangover.

A combination of factors such as poverty and illiteracy, not understanding the language of the court, ignorance of the law, and ineffective or absent legal representation render the prisoners helpless.

Strangely, political parties, including left parties hardly take the issue

of release of prisoners who are kept as under-trials for years. Civil Society organisations are too weak to develop any powerful movement against injustice meted out to thousands of innocent people all in the name of justice. Then the voice of the human rights bodies is so feeble that the plight of these 'voiceless people' remains unheard while the persons in authority simply ignore even international outcry against inhuman conditions in which under-trial and pre-trial prisoners are being forced to live. They are forgotten people; many of them cannot get back what they have lost—their prime youth. □□□ [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

The Demonetisation Verdict

The Wire writes:

EVEN AS THE BHARATIYA Janata Party (BJP) celebrated the Supreme Court's majority judgement upholding the legality of the 2016 demonetisation move, the opposition attempted to corner the ruling party on the policy's "disastrous" impact on the Indian economy.

The Congress hit out at the Narendra Modi government, while saying that the apex court has said nothing on how demonetisation singlehandedly "crippled MSMEs", slowed down growth, and killed lakhs of jobs in the informal sector. "The Supreme Court has only pronounced on whether Section 26(2) of RBI Act, 1934 was correctly applied or not before announcing demonetisation on November 8, 2016. Nothing more, nothing less," Jairam Ramesh, the party's chief spokesperson, said, while emphasising upon dissenting judge B V Nagarathna's observation that the decision should have been taken through legislation instead of a gazette notification. He

went on to equate demonetisation with a "Tuglaqi decision".

On January 2, 2023, four of the five-judge bench overruled the challenge to the 2016 policy and held that the Union government was within its powers in demonetising Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes.

Ramesh said that to interpret that the apex court justified the controversial policy will be "misleading and wrong" as the verdict didn't say anything about whether the "stated objectives of demonetisation were met or not".

"The majority Supreme Court verdict deals with the limited issue of the 'process' of decision making not with its 'outcomes'...None of these goals- reducing currency in circulation, moving to a cashless economy, curbing counterfeit currency, ending terrorism & unearthing black money-was achieved in significant measure."

Former Union finance minister and senior Congress leader P Chidambaram echoed Ramesh's views.

However, he said that the dissenting judgement, although in minority, will "rank among the famous dissents recorded in the history of the Supreme Court" and was a "welcome slap in the government's wrist".

The Left parties, which have consistently criticised the Union government for taking the sudden monetary measure, too didn't believe that the apex court "upheld" demonetisation. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) in a polit bureau statement said that the Union government has not been able to establish the merits of the policy as most of its stated objectives—be it "unearthing black money" or "ending terror funding and corruption" or "reducing cash flows in the economy"—hadn't been met.

"On the contrary, according to RBI, currency with the public has gone up from ₹17.7 lakh crore, on the eve of demonetisation to ₹30.88 lakh crore now, i.e., an increase of 71.84%," the party said.

Similarly, Communist Party of India general secretary D Raja said that the judgement didn't look into the "false claims" made by the Union government. Demanding a white paper by the government, he said,

“The government, in fact, as the judgment itself points out, bypassed Parliament setting a bad precedent and ignoring the democratic traditions of the country.”

Hours after the Supreme Court delivered the judgement, former BJP Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad lashed out at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his negative campaign on demonetisation and demanded an apology from him. Prasad claimed that demonetisation was “a historic

decision and in national interest”.

Responding to Prasad, Ramesh said, “We are still facing the brunt of the negative impact demonetisation had on the economy. So if anybody has to apologise, then the so-called father of new India should apologise.”

Nationalist Congress Party spokesperson Clyde Crasto said that although the Supreme Court upheld the legality of the decision, the BJP-led Union government should be made accountable for “the downfall of the

economy due to demonetisation and the loss of many lives due to the disastrous, ill-planned process”.

Trinamool Congress MP Sukendu Sekhar Roy said that the dissenting judgment “exposed the fact that the policy fails on the factor of larger ‘common good’”. He said that the Supreme Court should have “also dealt with the questions raised by the plaintiffs on whether demonetisation met the goals it set out for”.

□□□

MILITARY LITERATURE FESTIVAL

Militarisation of Bhagat Singh’s Heritage

Shamsul Islam

THE FOLLOWING QUOTE IS from the first paragraph of Lenin’s great work; *The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution* (2017) underlining a cardinal truth; how rulers and their henchmen/women repress those ideologies and individuals who strive to emancipate masses from the exploitative rules.

“What is now happening to Marx’s theory has, in the course of history, happened repeatedly to the theories of revolutionary thinkers and leaders of oppressed classes fighting for emancipation. During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them, so to say, and to hallow their names to a certain extent for the ‘consolation’ of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time robbing the revolu-

tionary theory of its substance, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it. Today, the bourgeoisie and the opportunists within the labor movement concur in this doctoring of Marxism. They omit, obscure, or distort the revolutionary side of this theory, its revolutionary soul. They push to the foreground and extol what is or seems acceptable to the bourgeoisie.”

What is happening to great martyr Bhagat Singh and his revolutionary heritage in India is a living proof of the truthfulness of Lenin’s understanding of the phenomenon. Since India is supposed to be ‘Vishwa Guru’ (spiritual teacher of the world) the rulers have added new sinister dimensions to it! The British rulers hounded him (and his associates) which culminated in his hanging on March 23, 1931 with Rajguru and Sukhdev. After Independence these were/are his supposedly ‘fans’ who converted him into harmless icon robbing the substance of his revolutionary heritage or presented him as a hero of Jats or Sikhs. It could be witnessed in more than half a dozen Hindi movies on his life. Even Hindutva group which shamelessly

colluded with the British rulers and denigrated the whole tradition of martyrdom has the audacity to display his photos in public.

The newest foul, in fact, criminal addition goes beyond imagination of all those who have read Bhagat Singh and are familiar with his commitments in his short eventful life. This time Bhagat Singh is being offered as a package in the form of a decorated book; a coffee table book to the Indian armed forces as an icon for militarisation of the Indian State not by someone inimical to Bhagat Singh, a Communist revolutionary but by someone who is stated to be ‘a chronicler of Bhagat Singh’s life’ Professor Chaman Lal who genuinely believed in the ideals of great revolutionary!

He is a retired Professor from JNU, honorary advisor to Bhagat Singh Archives and Resource Centre, New Delhi, Dean, Faculty of Languages, Panjab University Chandigarh and former President JNU Teachers Association. According to his own description (‘Spreading Bhagat Singh’s ideas’, *The Tribune*, December 3, 2022) he seems to be the most prolific author after Bhagat Singh of latter’s writings:

“I received author/editor’s complimentary copies of 11th reprint of the book from National Book Trust, New Delhi, few days before I got a copy of another book, Jail

Notebook, and other writings from another publisher leftword [sic], mentioning it as 12th reprint...Marathi translation of Bhagat Singh's complete writings from my edited book in Hindi of same title by Datta Desai was released by late Supreme Court Justice, PB Sawant, during Bhagat Singh birth centenary.

"Another coincident is that Publication Division, Government of India, had released an edited volume in Hindi of complete writings of Bhagat Singh, in 2007 in the presence of two of his nephews and late Kuldip Nayar. This was updated into a four-volume edition, brought out in the beginning of celebrations of 75th anniversary of independence. I was invited to write a biography-Life and Legend of Bhagat Singh: A Pictorial Volume! I was more in collecting and researching on Bhagat Singh's writings and was in a dilemma how to plan it since there were already a number of biographies in print! It suddenly struck my mind that since decades, I have been collecting documents, writings, images, etc., in order to focus on the authenticity of Bhagat Singh's life and writings, I accepted the invite and this book has just come out. The Bhagat Singh Reader is being published by Harper Collins shortly, as I found more documents since its first publication in 2019. In 2019, I had included 130 writings of Bhagat Singh along with Jail Notebook and three more writings are being added to an upcoming edition."

Professor holds the copyright of all the above mentioned books. He missed mentioning few Hindi editions of Bhagat Singh's writings copyrighted to him. This inventory of Professor Chaman Lal's writings of/

on Bhagat Singh is quite impressive. After its perusal it is natural to assume that Professor genuinely believes in the ideals of Bhagat Singh whose writings were based on deep academic research. Bhagat Singh was a voracious reader who did not let die his thirst for knowledge despite high-handed censorship and unspeakable hardships of the jail life. In fact, he and his co-workers resorted to hunger strike for 116 days at Mianwali Jail (now in Pakistan) demanding supply of books and status of political prisoners in 1929 in the course of which Jatindra Nath Das was martyred. Bhagat Singh was in Jail for 716 days out of which 167 days as death prisoner. In this period he read 143 foreign published English books and 159 Indian published books (English 54, Hindi 63, Punjabi 7, Urdu 28, Bengali 17 and Marathi 3.

Professor also shared the following information with 2 exclamations that,

"I was invited to write a biography-Life and Legend of Bhagat Singh: A Pictorial Volume! I was more in collecting and researching on Bhagat Singh's writings and was in a dilemma how to plan it since there were already a number of biographies in print! It suddenly struck my mind that since decades, I have been collecting documents, writings, images, etc, in order to focus on the authenticity of Bhagat Singh's life and writings, I accepted the invite and this book has just come out."

Who invited him to accomplish this task and when it was released has not been made clear by him. However, a perusal of the official site of the Publication Division of Government of India unravels the reality. It was planned in January 2022, an e-tender floated on August 4, 2022 and printing work awarded on Au-

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gust 17. It must have been out in last November. It is priced INR 895 with Chaman Lal mentioned as author on the cover (only hard bound edition available presently).

There is no record of release of this book but author does inform where it was first discussed. According to him:

“It was a bit perplexing for me when I got a call from Sports University, Patiala, Vice Chancellor, Lieutenant General JS Cheema (Retd), inviting me to be part of a discussion panel in a session on Bhagat Singh in Military Literary [Literature] Festival, as I could not see any connection, since the festival concentrates more on defence related books and matters, national and international. Among other panellists, he named Mahavir Chakra awardee, Maj Gen Sheonan Singh (Retd), who is a nephew of Bhagat Singh...Among all close relations of Bhagat Singh, he is one of most well read about Bhagat Singh and his ideas, as Ranbir Singh, his father and younger brother of Bhagat Singh, had penned a biography of the great martyr in Urdu!”

Professor is reported to have told the top brass of the Indian army, the 4th most powerful army in the world, on the last day of the Military Literature Festival at Chandigarh [The Times of India, Chandigarh, December 5] that “Bhagat Singh was a socialist revolutionary...by calling only patriot and fearless, attempts are made to reduce his stature...Governments are not interested beyond his stories and photographs”.

There can be no objection to the Indian Army deliberating on Bhagat Singh or releasing books on his valour. But it is highly ‘perplexing’ (resorting to the term used by Professor himself while accepting the invitation for the

Military Festival) that he was allowed to say what he told about Bhagat Singh to the military personnel. It could happen only if Indian Military was changing its character from Indian State’s armed organ to people’s army. The reality is that it is committed to serve loyally the interests of the pro-rich Indian ruling elite which believes that slogan INQUILAB ZINDABAD preaches violence and refuses to accord the status of martyr to Bhagat Singh and others who laid down their lives during the freedom struggle. It is also to be noted that writings of Bhagat Singh are part of the archives or museums and not part of academic syllabuses at any level.

It is sad that while joining the Military Literature Festival Professor as a chronicler of Bhagat Singh brazenly overlooked that Bhagat Singh while in Jail read an amazing book by a German revolutionary academician Karl Liebknecht (1871-1919) titled Militarism & Anti-Militarism (1907). Karl was assassinated with Rosa Luxemburg on January 15, 1919 by a killing squad of the German reactionary ruling classes. This book is a great work of academic research combined with his experiences in the revolutionary movements not only in Germany but in whole of Europe. This peerless work on militarism traces roots of militarism under capitalism and fore-warned the coming of the World War I. According to Karl militarism is not only a project for saving the Fatherland from foreign enemies but also controls colonies and crushes the ‘internal enemy’; the rising tide of working class, peasantry and youth movements against the repressive rule.

In a chapter titled ‘Sins of Militarism’ Karl discusses how under militarism soldiers are ill-treated, people have to bear the cost of financing it, “it is rule of the sword

and rifle against strikes”, army is used as “a tool against the proletariat in the political struggle” and is “danger to peace” and “proletarian revolution”. The book ends with a list of tactics to be used fighting militarism.

One should not be foolish enough to believe that Indian military establishment is developing love for a Socialist revolutionary, Bhagat Singh who combined two mottos together: Down with Imperialism and Long Live Revolution. Professor was allowed to introduce Bhagat Singh in a military-literary conclave held in Punjab as year-long (2020-21) historic farmers’ struggle used Bhagat Singh (his visuals as well as writings) as the most prominent tools of resistance against all kinds of repressive acts of the Modi regime. Bhagat Singh needs to be converted into a harmless icon, blunting his revolutionary edge and adopt him as a hero who laid down his life for the country without going into the question; country for whom!

This writer will be the last person to believe that Professor Chaman Lal had any illusion that he would bring about change of heart of the participants or those who invited him to this Military Literature Festival. His pictorial book coinciding with this festival will bring him more laurels, more royalty; may even get him a mention in Guinness Book of World Records as the most prolific author (or compiler) on Bhagat Singh.

It brings a serious ethical issue concerning writings, contemporary photos and records of Bhagat Singh, his activists and the family. Professor has been chronicling/remodeling writings of Bhagat Singh and his contemporary material in book forms assigning to himself as copyright owner. Furthermore, nobody knows under what authority the copyright of Bhagat Singh’s writings published

by Government of India publication houses and edited by Professor have been appropriated by the former. Forget about revolutionary morality, even bourgeois morality demands that if descendants of Bhagat Singh have not claimed ownership of his writings (a great gesture) these belong to all those who love and follow him. Professor should have retained copyright of his introductions to the books, if any. A Hindi edition of Bhagat Singh's writings titled as 'Bhagat Singh aur unke Sathiyon ke Dastavez' [Documents of Bhagat Singh and his comrades] jointly edited by Bhagat Singh's

nephew (sister's son) Dr Jagmohan Singh and Professor Chama Lal copyright of which was assigned to a committee formed to collect revolutionary's unearthed documents.

Shockingly, the title of his latest book on Bhagat Singh which coincided with the military festival at Chandigarh describes Bhagat Singh a LEGEND. According to almost all English dictionaries LEGEND means a story from the past that is believed by many people but cannot be proved to be true. In Hindi too it is defined as *pracheen katha jiska satey yaa asatey hona prasangkik naheen hae* (an ancient story whose

being true or untrue is not relevant). The ruling classes need a Bhagat Singh who happened sometime in the past, to be worshipped as a saint having no relevance in the present times; a harmless icons devoid of revolutionary side of his theory as stated by Lenin. Only this kind of Bhagat Singh is acceptable to the rulers and Professor Chaman Lal is facilitating it. □□□

[P.S. I received above mentioned *The Tribune* piece penned by Professor Chaman Lal on December 19 and immediately wrote a protest note to him which read "Unbelievable that you were involved in this!" Since there was no response I decided to pen this piece. —Shamsul Islam]

100 YEARS LATER

Birth Centenary of USSR

Harsh Thakor

PROGRESSIVES AROUND the world commemorated the birth centenary of historic formation of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) on December 30, 2022.

Representatives of the Soviet governments of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Transcaucasian Republic (encompassing Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia), declared the formation of a new country: the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the first nation in the world based on Marxist socialism.

"By the time the USSR turned 50, in 1972, it was recognised as a global superpower, matching or exceeding the military strength of its only rival, the United States," says Benjamin Nathans, a history professor in the School of Arts & Sciences.

This was an event of great historical significance which knit the seeds of the entire path breaking achievements of Soviet Union in industry, agriculture, literacy, health, housing, employment, emancipation of women and winning the Great

Patriotic War. Path was carved for establishing industrialisation and electrification, collectivisation and modernisation, the establishment of socialist production relations in the city and in the countryside. Scientific centralised economic planning catered towards the needs of the people and the socialist construction and overpowered evils of capitalism. A path-breaking experiment and true manifestation of the democratic spirit of Leninism.

It paved the way for adopting the most democratic constitution established ever till then in 1924.

It illustrated the democratic approach to resolving the question of merging nationalities into a nation. The formation was linked to the policies of a proletarian state formed in 1917 by the Bolsheviks, with Marxist method applied for the first time in history in integrating different states into a nation. Autonomy was given to the republics themselves, and not imposed from above. Marxist Scholars of history should all research into how proletarian

power was linked with nationality question and truly democratic methods of establishing national unity.

Quoting Timor Fencer, of Party of Labour of Austria "The founding of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on 30 December 1922 marked the greatest state-political achievement of the revolutionary working class to date. It was the result of the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917, the successful struggle of the young Russian Soviet Republic against counterrevolution and interventions, the overcoming of civil war and so-called "war communism".

Tragically in December 1991 USSR fell. It had its roots in the Khrushchev overturning of Socialist policies after 1956. Still till 1991 many salient features of the USSR were preserved.

From 1990s, conspiracy was hatched for breaking integrity of the Soviet State through separate existence due to the criminal actions of the authorities. As a result, the convenient shortest railway from Belgorod to Rostov-on-Don was changed because it entered the Kharkov region that had become "foreign".

The whole capitalist world was decisively against the revival of the union of the former Russian state on any socio-political basis.

Lenin had elaborated deeply that unions of capitalist states are either lifeless or reactionary, with an objective of intensifying the power of capital and the exploitation of labour. Workers unity is destroyed by such unions.

After the destruction of USSR, production in Russia slumped by more than 50% in the 1990s, and half of these losses were the result of the destruction of the country's unified demographic complex. Even in the last three years, the disruption of economic ties between Russia and Ukraine has adversely affected the aviation industry, rail transport, energy supply and many-many other economic sectors of both countries.

Vladimir Mayakovsky most aptly said: "The land with which you froze, you cannot fall in love forever. And we, the Soviet people, together with the land of our great united country were not only freezing. We defended her together from the enemy, together, wounded, walked out, and together decorated with plants and gardens, together dreamed about her and our happiness. That is why December 30—the Day of Education of

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the USSR becomes more and more disturbing for us every year. After we were forcibly melted in different states, we began to relate to this day much more thoughtful, but not because of nostalgia, but because we need to know the most accurate and shortest route to the revival of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, surrendered to the opponent as a result of a deep retreat."

Today many intellectuals deride Stalin, including Marxist-Leninists. They fail to comprehend Stalin's deeply engrained Marxist Leninist perspective on the question of nationalities, who applied the proletarian perspective towards nationalities.

Bujar Hioxha in November 2022 issue of Revolutionary Democracy has summed up the revisionist theorisations of Khrushchev and Brezhnev and how they violated Leninism in Ukraine. It links subject with the current war in Ukraine in the context of 'national liberation war of the Russian state with puppet states established in Eastern Ukraine, a current issue of national question in Ukraine today. Valentin Sakharov traces the distortions of Stalin's positive role in 1922 refuting trends that condemn Stalin's actions in Georgia. It assured that Stalin had allowed right of nations to secession.

No doubt Stalin made gross errors in later stages be it in violating democratic centralism through dictatorial approach and gave one sided emphasis to productive forces. However as a Commissar of nationalities he historically acted in compliance with Lenin. Stalin's writings on nationality question are a permanent part of a Marxist Leninist treasure house.

Indian Marxists applied Stalin's writings while condemning repression on nationalities like in Kashmir, Assam, Chhattisgarh or Uttarakhand and even during the Khalistan movement in Punjab they applied his

thesis. This was in stark contrast to how leaders like Bismark united Germany or unity of princely states into a semblance of bourgeois democratic form by Sardar Vallabhai Patel in 1947. Late Harbhajan Sohi when writing on Kashmir defended Stalin's thesis on nationality.

One should never forget how the American nation was formed endorsing slavery.

Even non-Stalinists or non-Marxists expressed great admiration for creation of USSR. The writings of EH Carr or even A P Taylor on Soviet Russia give insight on the essence of Soviet democracy.

One of the major problems dealt by the Soviet regime was the contradiction between class and national question and solution of the national problem. The Soviet government declared that any republic wanting to separate was granted a free right. As a result, Finland gained independence in 1918. This was a most democratic step by the new government, and illustrated its intentions. Russia consisted of so many nations and countries like the Ukraine, Byelorussia, the central Asian republics and so on.

Russia was not one 'country' in the conventional sense of the term. It included so many countries which evolved into future 'republics'. So, a most flexible national policy was adopted, which was applicable to Russian revolution. Significantly, most of the republics or countries and areas chose to remain within the political-economic orbit of Soviet Russia due to democratic and socialist revolutions.

Soviet Russia consisted of 15 constituent republics, 15 in all, which became 'Soviet' step by step. They adopted or established Soviet power. They also became 'socialist'. Soviet Russia became RSFSR or Russian Socialist Federative Socialist Republics. Then it crystallised into the

USSR, joined by other republics. This was a slow, complex and complicated, dialectical and contradictory process. The Soviet power germinated arduously or painstakingly, due to sharp class antagonism imposed by former Tsarist forces and imperialist countries, which sent their troops into Russia to overthrow the newly established Soviet power. Fourteen (14) imperialist countries including the US, Britain, France, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Japan, and others militarily conspired to dethrone Russia. The War of Intervention was also known as the Civil War because the rightwing reactionaries and supporters of former regime, the 'White Guards', actively took part. The war lasted from 1918 to 1922, when imperialism and counter-revolution was eradicated. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was announced in 1922. It consisted of 15 republics including Ukraine, Byelorussia, Russian Federation and Central Asian Republics etc. It became a powerful union of Soviet nations with socialist direction, which deeply impacted the world history.

In the course of the Civil War, Ukraine, Byelorussia and the Russian Federation entered into a military and political alliance. In 1921 and 1922, it established diplomatic alliance in foreign trade and policy. In 1922, the CC of RCP (Russian Communist Party) formed a commission to discuss the relations between the republics in the midst of serious debates. Lenin proposed for-

mation of the USSR, a voluntary union of equal and sovereign states.

Lenin's proposals were accepted unanimously. The First All Union Congress of Soviets held on 30 December 1922 accepted the formation of the USSR. A Treaty of Union was signed. Two years later, a declaration on the formation of USSR was adopted and also the Constitution of USSR in January 1924 in the Second All Union Congress of Soviets.

USSR at the time included two federal republics of Russian Federation and Transcaucasia including Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, plus Ukraine and Byelorussia. All Union Congress of Soviets (AUCS) became the highest body of power. All Union CEC became the highest executive power.

Stalin's writing on 'The Formation of Soviet Republics' on December 30, 100 years ago deserves more attention than ever before. Quoting an excerpt: "Comrades, this day marks a turning point in the history of the Soviet power. It places a landmark between the old period, now past, when the Soviet republics, although they acted in common, yet each followed its own path and was concerned primarily with its own preservation, and the new period, already begun, when an end is being put to the isolated existence of the Soviet republics, when the republics are being united into a single union state for a successful struggle against economic ruin, and when

the Soviet power is concerned not only with its preservation, but with developing into an important international force, capable of influencing the international situation and of modifying it in the interests of the working people.

What was the Soviet state five years ago? A small, scarcely noticeable entity, which evoked the derision of all its enemies and the pity of many of its friends. That was the period of wartime ruin, when the Soviet power relied not so much upon its own strength as upon the impotence of its opponents; when the enemies of the Soviet power, split into two coalitions, the Austro-German coalition and the Anglo-French coalition, were engaged in mutual warfare and were not in a position to turn their weapons against the Soviet power. In the history of the Soviet power that was the period of wartime ruin. In the struggle against Kolchak and Denikin, however, the Soviet power created the Red Army and successfully emerged from the period of wartime ruin."

Also useful is Stalin's writing "The Federation of Soviet Republics' written in January 1923. 'The fundamental principle of the Federation is that the republics are voluntarily affiliated, have equal rights, and retain the right of leaving the federation of republics.' □□□

[Harsh Thakor is a freelance journalist who has undertaken extensive research on Marxism-Leninism and history of Communist Movement.]

AKSAI CHIN

From Johnson Line to Macdonald Line

Bishaldeep Kakati
Bagmita Borthakur

INDIA-CHINA BORDER DISPUTE traces its roots to the colonial period in India. And the major reason behind the continuing con-

flict is regarding areas covering the borders of Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh.

According to the treaty of

Amritsar (1846), the British recognised Raja Gulab Singh as the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir including the area of Ladakh. William Johnson, a British surveyor, surveyed the region and incorporated Aksai Chin into the state of Jammu and Kashmir. This demarcated boundary line was later came to be known as the Johnson line.

However, the British revised the borders again and this time they put Aksai Chin on the Chinese side, and this line came to be known as the Macartney Macdonald line.

The exit of British from India marked the end of the colonial rule leading to the formation of two new independent nations in the form of India and Pakistan and this led to the start of a fresh dispute between the newly formed sovereign countries as both of them asserted their claim of whole of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. India's claim in relation to the princely state was based on the accession pact which was signed by its last ruler with New Delhi while Pakistan's claim was based on the Muslim majority population in the state. After all India was divided on the basis of religious-communal basis. However, China's dispute regarding this matter was distinctively different as China insisted on the Macartney-Macdonald line to be the 'legitimate' border while India would like to stick to the Johnson line that marked India's border with China in that region as per the first survey conducted by the British authorities. Thus Aksai Chin remains a bone of contention and it will likely to remain so indefinitely unless both sides show flexibility in demarcating the contentious border.

Meanwhile, a significant event that took place was the border agreement between China and Pakistan and border issues between Pakistan and China were resolved as both the countries regarded Macartney-Macdonald line to be the legitimate border, and this allowed Pakistan to agree to the concept of Chinese sovereignty over the disputed territories, including Aksai Chin. India refused to recognise the de facto Chinese control and rule in that area and Pakistan's right to negotiate with China by virtue of its illegal occupation part of Kashmir-POK or what

the Pakistanis call Azad Kashmir. There have been repeated border skirmishes between India and China over the years as both sides continue to claim Aksai Chin to be theirs.

After invasion of Tibet by PLA, China built a road in that particular jurisdiction, leading to protests in India and with the Dalai Lama taking refuge in India and forming a Tibetan Government in exile headquartered in Shimla, China blamed it on India for anti-China activities which ultimately culminated in India-China war of 1962 and the consequence of that particular war was India losing some of its territories to China while China strengthened its control in Aksai Chin. In truth India was not aware of the hard reality that China was engaged in all-weather road construction in that region since the fifties when Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai slogan was in the air!

History speaks loud that the base of India-China conflict is still the unclear demarcation of borders, while China's expansionist governance and India's political instability in the initial post-independence years, complicated the boundary question. Competition still exists between both the countries in building infrastructure along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and the construction made by India of a new road at high altitude can be regarded as one of the major factors behind the deadly confrontation between the two countries in 2020. Another face off was recorded in January 2021 which resulted in injuries of soldiers from both the countries and the event occurred in the state of Sikkim, adjacent to Bhutan and Nepal borders. A lot of deliberation and talks ensured that both sides did not engage into any clash for more than a year till another clash very recently happened near the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh.

Engagement in clashes can be

deadly and catastrophic as both are established nuclear powers and a fall-out would also mean economic degradation for China because India still remains one of the biggest trading partners of China despite strained bilateral relations.

De-escalation of confrontation is a notion that countries across the globe accept to follow to normalise ties and the same should apply for India and China as well. And as such, both the countries need to operate with a new modus operandi to solve the border dispute-- a legacy left by history. To bring in normalcy it is desirable that a new set of rules must be established to manage the LAC. In this regard, a few radical steps may be adopted in the form of No Patrol Zones. They basically mean disengagement of troops in areas where both sides have been in an eyeball-to-eyeball situation since 1962. In fact no patrolling zones have already been established in Galwan and Pangong Tso and additionally, more such zones can be established in areas such as Depsang and Kugrang where the Chinese frequently block the access of the Indians, to ward off the threat of war. Since no patrolling zone means disallowing troops from either side, for a certain length of time, it can come handy in the case of India and China where both the countries are struggling with a shifting boundary called LAC. Another solution to the escalating border dispute between India and China can be found in the statement given by a Chinese Scholar Qian Feng in FORCE. Feng commented about replacing the concept of the line of actual control with the concept of zone of control and adopt the method of delimiting the disputed 'border belt' in question which does not involve population adjustment, and thereby going beyond the traditional concept of a 'border line'.

Some kind of normalcy can also be expected regarding the border dispute if the Chinese government does not resort to their expansionist mind-set in an exaggerated manner and not look at their ties with India through the prism of its relations with third countries. This idea of asking China not to look at their ties with India keeping in mind third country relations was forwarded by Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar at a meeting between him and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi at the

sidelines of the SCO Ministerial meeting at Dushnabe.

As much as it is difficult to predict China's way forward, keeping in mind its opaque geo-political strategies as an Asian power, it is high time for India, as a growing counterpart to tackle the issue diplomatically by moving ahead with non-traditional approach of controlling the borders. In the present context, one cannot also deny the co-existing nature of India-China relations in terms of trading as well as balance

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

—Fr.

of power in Asian sub-continent. Thus, India-China conflicts can never be solved through war, but only through mutual negotiations, and if required even by going astray from the conventional ways of solving border disputes. □□□

'DON'T LOOK UP'

Adam McKay's Film in Today's World

Swapnanil Mukherjee

IF ONE LOOKS AT THE HISTORY of human evolution then he or she can find that nature and its resources played an important role in this entire function. Every invention like the origin of the fire, the wheel, and the weapon of stone was invented with the help of natural resources which were very much needed for the survival of primitive people. Those inventions were evolved for the sake of need. Without those inventions, the lifestyle of those primitive people became full of struggle but in the recent world, the invention has become a part of the profit mechanism. In this competitive world, the invention provides huge profits to corporate giants. Science and research are used to make more money which creates greed for the corporate whales. And these profit-making functions cause huge pressure on the environment.

Coca-Cola and its subsidiaries have been accused of creating severe water shortages for the community by extracting large quantities of water for their factories, affecting both the quantity and quality of water in several districts of India. The company has the largest soft

drink bottling facilities in India. Another example comes from the Adani group, If Adani's mine goes ahead it will be one of the largest coal mines in the world and will generate an estimated 4.7 billion tonnes of carbon pollution over its lifetime.

Recently a film named 'Don't Look Up', directed by Adam McKay, was released on Netflix where Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Lawrence took leading roles. In that film, they played cosmologists, who tried to show the world in various ways that a giant comet was coming toward the earth which could lead entire lives on earth on the path to extinction. They went to the President's office to do something about this issue, at first they didn't understand the gravity of the issue, but then they took the initiative to destroy that asteroid. But the main part was not started at that moment. There was a big company named 'Bash', which found that there were many precious resources in that asteroid which could help them in innovation at a very cheap price by which they would be able to manipulate the world, so they wanted not to destroy that asteroid entirely

but they would break that into small pieces and according to them it would not make any harm of the world people. But those two scientists knew that was impossible. When they shouted the truth in front of people they were jailed. There were many aspects of that film, and one of the many aspects is media, this film showed how media turned into a place of entertainment from an institution of finding the truth, how a singer's breaking up and patching up were made a national issue to gain TRP, but no one cared for those two scientists and their concerns regarding the lives of Earth. The most tragic part of this film was when that asteroid was very near to the earth when everyone could see that it was coming, and then the president was also trying to make people believe that it was nothing and advised the people not to look up. But at last, it came to the earth; those two scientists could do nothing despite trying. The world was destroyed by that comet.

But the last part of that film showed the reality, money can't save anyone in the long run. In that film, some so-called big men, the President and the owner of 'Bash', survived that apocalypse and succeeded to go to a different planet to live. But there also they were unable to identify the upcoming threats and

became a good tiffin for some giant birds of that planet.

The essence of the film can be felt in the present days. Glaciers started to melt and one of the main causes is global warming, which is nothing but a reaction to the exploitation of nature. One of the main reasons for the unlimited exploitation of nature is resource collection. Big giant companies collect it to maximise their profit but they don't even think once about upcoming threats. But there are hopes, that people are becoming aware of these natural issues, and they are making resistance to this exploitation of nature. There is an example of the resistance of the Dongiria Kondh tribe before the Vedanta which is a giant mining company.

Vedanta, a British-India joint venture mining company determined to strip-mine on Niyamgiri hills.

Niyamgiri hosts over 300 species of trees, and the forest is home to many endangered species. If Vedanta successfully establishes its intention, and then the biodiversity of Niyamgiri will be destroyed. But correspondingly economic growth will rise to the increasing income of Vedanta, and there will be an increase in GDP.

This meaningless obsession with GDP and growth has faced resistance from the tribal groups, as 12 village councils of Dongiria Kondh have rejected the project in their lands, and have hampered the aspirations of Vedanta.

This action of the Dongiria Kondh tribe makes ordinary people hopeful but this cannot be enough. There was a video found on Instagram, shared by NDTV that a big tree in Kerala was cut down by the Kerala government to extend the road, for

which more than 100 birds died. In Lataguri, thousands of age-old trees of the Lataguri Forest were cut down to make an over-bridge which was not even needed and most importantly which is still in an unfinished condition. Besides many private resorts flourish by cutting down the jungle where their prime motive is profit maximisation. The local people of Lataguri have tried to make some resistance but political pressure made a huge barrier to oppose it. This is the main reason for the word of Chico Mendes, Environmentalism without class struggle is just gardening. In this superstructure, one can't do anything because the profit mechanism is the main fuel of this superstructure. For this reason, people have to overthrow it first otherwise the world will break into pieces and all will just turn into ashes and blow in the air. □□□

BACK FROM UKRAINE

Daily Life in Kyiv

Dave Eggars

IT WAS JUST AFTER 1 PM. The weather in Kyiv was about fifteen degrees Fahrenheit but felt far colder. The writer Peter Godwin and I were walking through the university district. To get warm, we entered the National Museum of the History of Ukraine, its lower windows covered with sandbags and plywood. Inside, the lobby had been transformed into an exhibit of recent artifacts of the Russian invasion—street signs riddled with bullet holes, a child's pillow pierced by a bullet. In the light-filled stairway just off the main floor, pieces of shrapnel and Russian bombs had been hung from the ceiling, making a grim installation of rusted steel.

A guide approached. Her name was Svitlana. She wore skinny jeans and an orange faux-fur vest. We

asked her if we could see the rest of the museum. She told us that much of the museum was empty, that the most precious of its eight hundred thousand artifacts were hidden, to avoid being looted by Russian forces. We asked if we could see the museum anyway. She called the museum's press secretary and, after a few minutes of intense conversation, she got permission to give us a tour.

"But the cashier isn't here yet," Svitlana said. She asked us to wait a few minutes, so we sat down on a bench in the lobby, next to a couple of Ukrainian women who looked to be in their seventies. They were bundled up in heavy down coats and rubber boots.

A few minutes later, Svitlana approached again.

"I'm sorry," she said. "There is

an air raid. We must go downstairs."

These days in Kyiv, news of air raids is more commonly communicated by smart-phones than by sirens. We followed her to the basement.

Downstairs, a group of older docents were huddled together in a carpeted room used for children's education. We sat with Svitlana in the adjoining hallway, brightly lit and covered in gray tile. The hallway was unheated, so we kept our coats on. We asked how long the air raids usually lasted.

"Sometimes an hour, sometimes two," she said.

Her full name was Svitlana Slastennikova. She was in her thirties, with blond hair, a heart-shaped face, and an earnest disposition. Her fingernails were painted red and matched her phone case. Hunched forward on a bench, she opened an app that allowed her to track Russian missiles in the air.

The technology is now so ad-

vanced that Ukrainian citizens can know, more or less in real time, where the Russian missiles are coming from and generally where they're going. In this case, Russia had just launched some seventy missiles, headed to sites all over Ukraine. The assumption was that they were directed at power substations, meant to cripple the country's electrical grid. Vladimir Putin's recent strategy has been to knock out the power in the depth of winter in hopes of breaking the spirits of everyday Ukrainians.

So far this strategy has not worked.

"My friends and I, we have jokes about it," she said. "At home I organize all my housework during the hours I have power." She and her husband, a doctor who runs a private medical clinic, recently bought an inverter, which stores power when the grid is functioning. "I'm ready to be without electricity, but not a part of the Russian world, you know?"

Svitlana was born in 1986, "the year of Chernobyl," she said. She's worked at the museum for thirteen years, but her work has grown more urgent since 2014. When the Russians invaded the Donbas and annexed Crimea, Ukrainians wanted to learn more about their history as a people, independent of Russia. Because she finds so many Ukrainians, and foreign visitors, confused about the distinct histories of Ukraine and Russia, Svitolana wrote, and is now translating into English, a lecture titled "Ukrainians vs. Russians. Why Are We Not 'Fraternal' Nations?" It details the distinct history of Ukraine, going back centuries. "We're not the same people," she says. "Ethnically, we're totally different from Russians."

For years, Svitolana had been giving tours inside the museum, but immediately after the February, 2022, invasion, the staff closed the building. Before the war, the museum employed about three hundred, but

around twenty per cent of the staff left when the war started and have not returned. Now, on any given day, between fifty and seventy curators, guides, archivists and other staff members are on site, she says, and they have to fulfill their educational mission without many of the museum's holdings.

"At the moment," Svitolana says, "We have lectures, lectures, lectures."

Meanwhile, Putin has made every effort to erase Ukrainian identity. His troops have ransacked museums and churches, bombed schools and cultural centers, and have fed Russian-speaking Ukrainians in occupied regions a constant diet of propaganda asserting that Ukrainians are Russians, and always have been. Before the 2022 invasion, even Svitolana's own mother had believed some of the messaging coming from Moscow.

"When the Russians first invaded in February", Svitolana said, "my mother told me, 'In one month we will be part of Russia'. I said to her, 'You are insane'."

This is part of the generational divide in Ukraine. Those who grew up in Soviet times are often more sanguine about Russian control, while those who grew up after Ukraine's independence, in 1991, often look to Europe, not Moscow, as their past and future. The fierce resistance put up by Ukrainian troops, and the atrocities committed by Russian soldiers, have shocked many older Ukrainians.

"My mother, when she saw how wild these Russians are," Svitolana said, "she changed her mind. These crimes being committed in the twenty-first century? Now she doesn't want to be part of Russia." Her mother, like millions of Ukrainians, is fluent in both Russian and Ukrainian. But many people now choose to speak Ukrainian, even if they grew up speaking Russian. A few days earlier, Peter and I had joined

NOTICE

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a delegation from PEN America (where Peter served a term as president) that was highlighting cultural erasure in Ukraine, and toured a library in Chernihiv that had been hit by a missile. The second floor was largely ruined, but on the first floor, a group of women gathered for tea, biscuits, and lessons in the Ukrainian language.

Peter and I were getting texts now from friends in Ukraine, telling us to get somewhere safe. In recent weeks, the danger was most acute near any of the power substations. Residents could either be hit by the missile itself or, more likely, by a fragment of that missile after the Ukrainian military had shot it from the sky.

But in our time in Kyiv, nine months into the war, we saw that life away from the front was going on with shocking regularity. The grocery stores were well-stocked and immaculate. Restaurants were full. The streets were crowded with people shopping, working and living. The nail salons were open. The tattoo parlours were open. Stores were bright with holiday decorations. Make no mistake, there were countless signs that the country was at war—checkpoints outside the city, rolling blackouts—but, also, throughout Kyiv, a profound defiance was evident in every packed café and gallery. Even the members of the museum staff, as we'd been talking to Svitolana in the basement, were

moving up and down the stairs, seeming unworried about the missiles in the air. A cleaning woman had been busy with the basement's two bathrooms; she hadn't paused once since the raid began.

We heard the scuffling of footsteps on the stairs. A group of people trundled down, two adults and a teen-ager in a sweatshirt bearing the face of Johnny Depp. They'd been outside and had come into the museum for shelter. They went into the carpeted classroom and sat next to a whiteboard featuring a handwritten time line of Ukraine's history.

Online, we could see images of families massing in the subways of Kyiv. Built during Soviet times in anticipation of nuclear war, the subway stations are among the deepest in the world—some as far as three hundred feet below street level. I asked if Svitlana needed to check in with her own husband and kids. No, she said. She already had got word on her phone that they were sheltering in place. Her kids' school had a basement they used during raids.

"They started practicing before the invasion began," she said, "I didn't approve of this. I thought it was scary to the kids, to have them doing these drills." Like so many Ukrainians, Svitlana didn't think the invasion would actually happen—even when a hundred thousand Russian troops were amassing at the border.

Her son is twelve and her daughter is five, and by now they're used to the drills. Her children play games while they shelter in place. At the beginning of the invasion, Svitlana had

taken her kids west for a couple of months, but now that the fighting has moved to the eastern front, she is content to stay in Kyiv. With every Ukrainian victory, more residents of the city have returned from elsewhere in Europe and the western part of the country. "I can't imagine living in Poland. Living in some gymnasium," she said. Her husband, like all men between eighteen and sixty, is barred from leaving the country anyway.

Svitlana checked her phone again.

"Explosions reported in Vinnytsia," she said. This was southwest of Kyiv. She put her phone down. She scoffed at the Russian strategy. Using Telegram, she'd been able to watch Russian political talk shows—those surreal programmes where pundits expound on the war on a TV set resembling "The Weakest Link."

"They were saying they have to continue to hit these electrical targets, because they want people to rise up and overthrow the government. To get rid of Zelensky. They want it to be like Maidan," she said, referring to the 2013-2014 Ukrainian movement that pushed for closer relations with the EU, and resulted in the fall of the country's government. "It is insane. They do not understand us."

The teen-ager in the Johnny Depp sweatshirt and her parents emerged, putting their coats back on. They made their way up the stairs and left the building. The air raid was still on, but, these days, Ukrainians are only willing to sit still for so long. Peter and I thanked Svitlana and left at about two o'clock, an hour into the raid. The day was clear and cold, and

eventually the sidewalks filled up with pedestrians. Stores and bars were open, and there was virtually no sign that Kyiv was under attack.

Later we found out that over sixty of the more than seventy rockets had been shot down by Ukrainian forces. The ten or so missiles that found their targets shut off electricity in at least six regions: Zhytomyr, Sumy, Mykolaiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Cherkasy and Odesa. This was the sixth large-scale attack on infrastructure since October 10th, and would not be the last. Four civilians were reportedly killed, bringing the total dead to well over sixty-five hundred, including more than four hundred children.

As evening came on, we entered the closest subway station and stepped onto the escalator. We moved at an alarming speed, through a concrete tunnel, descending into the bowels of the earth while triumphant signs greeted us left and right—children's drawings of Ukrainian soldiers. When we finally reached the train platform, we expected it to be empty, or full of families sheltering in place, but instead we saw a few dozen commuters waiting for trains, in office clothing, heading home from work.

Then, when the first train arrived, a thousand Ukrainians poured from it like water from a broken dam. They flowed around us so quickly we had to throw our backs against the station's wide concrete columns. The people of Kyiv were going about their business, entirely uncowed. □□□

[Source: *The NEW YORKER*]

LETTERS

Pele—A Legend

Edson Arantes do Nascimento, better known as Pele, was a football pioneer. He has passed away at the age of 82 after a battle with cancer.

He was born with the ball at his feet. Every movement, every pass,

every goal was special. He impressed fans with his agility, technique and love for the game.

In FIFA's 1904-1984 anniversary book, Pele was hailed as the person who made football an art form. World football's governing body also named

the Brazilian striker the World Footballer of the Century, while the International Olympic Committee named him as its sportsperson of the last century. Pele was the king of football—a man small in stature but for whom no superlative is too big.

In 1956, Pele earned a contract with Brazilian side Santos and scored

against St. Andre in his league debut at the age of 15. It wasn't long before he was called up to the Brazilian national team. At just 16 years and 257 days old, he made his international debut in a 2-1 defeat to Argentina, scoring Brazil's only goal of the game.

A year later at the World Cup in Sweden, he was in the squad, although he had to be content with being on the bench at the start. But then the little magician scored six goals in four games, helping his country to the title. In the final against the hosts, Pele put on a brilliant display of football artistry and tricks. An international star was born.

In his hometown, Pele was adored like no other footballer right from the start of his career. Brazil's government went as far as declaring him a national treasure at the age of just 20 to prevent him from taking a transfer abroad. When Pele did venture beyond Brazil's borders, he was welcomed like a head of state. At the 1962 World Cup in Chile though, the striker suffered a setback. Brazil defended their title, but footballer's newest hero hardly played a part, getting injured in the second group-stage game.

As if to make good on a disappointing campaign, Pele led Brazil to their third title in 1970 in Mexico. A year later, the super striker made his 92nd international appearance in front of 180,000 fans in Rio de Janeiro's iconic Maracana stadium. It was Pele's final appearance for the Selecao. Many considered his international retirement premature, considering Pele was only 30 at the time, but with 77 goals to his name and a unique style, no one could doubt his commitment.

Even today, the reasons behind Pele's retirement remain unclear. Did it come as the result of a dispute involving the then-president of the Brazilian governing body, Joao Havelange? Pele was later to cite political reasons, stating that he didn't want to support his country's military

junta. Whether he really was opposed to the dictatorship or had good connections with ministers remains a question about Pele's life.

"Every child in the world wants to play football like Pele—that's why I take on the responsibility to show how to not only be a good footballer, but also a good man," he once said. The world will always remember Pele as the king of football.

**Jonathan Harding, DW
Asha Workers**

Asha workers are the backbone of primary healthcare in the country. It was mentioned earlier that Ashas are community health volunteers under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) who act as a vital link between the government's health system and the community. NHRM was later expanded to cover urban areas in 2013. At present, there are about 10 lakh Asha workers in the country.

The government across the country is not ready to consider the Ashas who do such important work as employees. Their monthly income is less than the minimum wage. Haryana currently has over 20,000 Ashas, who, like other parts of the country, are community health volunteers, acting as a vital link between the health system and the community. Under NHRM, they are entitled to work-based incentives for over 60 activities listed by the Centre. In addition, Ashas get an incentive of Rs 2,000 from the centre for a set of routine activities. In addition to work-based incentives, states are also allowed to fix monthly remunerations for Ashas. In Haryana, this amount is Rs 4,000.

The condition of Asha workers in the country is not better than this. Almost everywhere they are forced to work in this miserable condition. Trade union leaders have expressed concern about this several times, but unfortunately, the government does not pay any heed. In truth women workers in this country are considered second-class workers. They say that the honorarium they get is not humiliating. It is a matter of regret that

these women workers who work day and night do not even come under the ambit of the labour laws of the country and that is because the government does not consider them as workers, in its view, they are mere servants and that they have to serve the public. And just take what you get in return for that service.

**Asha Workers Union, Haryana
Nizam's Gold**

5,000kg gold was donated by the former Nizam to the Government during India Pakistan war of 1965.

This news item exposes false stories, aided by the Union Government, that create communal hatred and this was covered up by communal-minded authorities. It is true it was money amassed by feudal the ruler, but it is the same with all feudal lords irrespective of religion. Not many Hindu feudals donated in any comparable manner. This needs to be shared in the interest of truth.

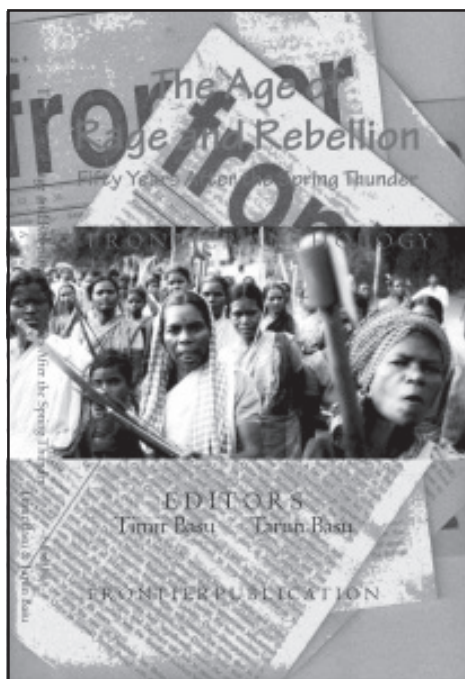
**Syed Akbar
Asset Transfer**

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the EU has frozen the •19bn of oligarchs' assets that are in its possession, as well as the Russian Central Bank's estimated •300bn in foreign currency reserves. Now, as nations debate what should be done with those assets, Estonia has decided to take matters into its own hands. Tallinn has started the process of developing a legal basis for handing them over to Ukraine's government to help rebuild the country's war-torn cities. "Estonia wants to put pressure on other EU member states because our government sees the lack of activity in deciding how and when to use Russian frozen assets to help Ukraine," Priit Hõbemägi, editor in chief of Estonian daily newspaper Postimees, tells The Monocle Minute. Estonia currently controls about •20m of Russian assets and a draft proposal will be presented to its government next month.

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