

# frontier

Vol. 55 : No. 31

ISSN 0016-2094

January 29-February 4, 2023

Founder-Editor : **SAMAR SEN**

## On Other Pages

Comment	2
Note	3
38 YEARS LATER Bhopal Gas Tragedy Indira Jaising	4
A TRIBUTE TG Jacob, Activist-Scholar (1951-2022) K T Rammohan	
'TWO LEAVES AND A BUD' Plight of Bengal Plantation Workers Nityananda Ghosh	10
G20 PRESIDENCY How to Gain Electoral Mileage Atmanirbhar	11
HISTORY IS REVENGING Ukraine War has Shaken up World Order Patrick Wintour	12
Letter	15

Editor : **TIMIR BASU**Assistant Editor : **Subhasis Mukherjee**

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.

E-mail : frontierweekly@yahoo.co.in  
frontierweekly@hotmail.com

Telephone : 2530-0065

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

## *Challenge to Dollar*

**T**HE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR IS GOING TO REORIENT THE existing global order and monetary system challenging the very dominance of dollar. The end of uni-polar world is in sight. The initiative began much before the start of the war under the leadership of Russia and China but the war has just expedited the process of an alternative arrangement to conduct bilateral and multilateral trades. Despite the united face of America and NATO in the context of anti-Russia coalition against the backdrop of Ukraine war the decline of Dollar seems irreversible.

The Eurasia Economic Union (EAEU) is speeding up its design of a common payment system, which has been closely discussed for nearly a year with the Chinese under the stewardship of Sergey Glazyev, the EAEU's minister in charge of Integration and Macro-economy.

Through its regulatory body, the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), the EAEU has just extended a very serious proposal to the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) which, crucially, are already on the way to turning into BRICS+: a sort of G20 of the Global South.

The system will include a single payment card—in direct competition with Visa and Master Card—merging the already existing Russian MIR, China's Union Pay, India's Ru Pay, Brazil's Elo, and others.

That will represent a direct challenge to the western-designed (and enforced) monetary system, head on. And it comes on the heels of BRICS members already transacting their bilateral trade in local currencies, and bypassing the US dollar.

This EAEU-BRICS union was long in the making—and will now also move toward prefiguring a further geo-economic merger with the member nations of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

The EAEU was established in 2015 as a customs union of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus, joined a year later by Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. Vietnam is already an EAEU free trade partner, and recently enshrined SCO member Iran is also clinching a deal.

The EAEU is designed to implement free movement of goods, services, capital, and workers between member countries. Ukraine would have been an EAEU member if not for the Maidan coup in 2014 masterminded by the Barack Obama administration.

The plan is to establish a joint financial market. Banking, Insurance and Stock Market will soon come under its ambit.

Meanwhile, trade and economic cooperation between the EAEU and BRICS have increased 1.5 times in the first half of 2022 alone.

“It is advisable to combine the potentials of the BRICS and EAEU macro-financial development institutions, in particular the BRICS New Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), as well as national development institutions. This will make it possible to achieve a synergistic effect and ensure synchronous investments in sustainable infrastructure, innovative production, and renewable energy sources.”

The possibility of advancing

convergence of not only BRICS and EAEU but also the financial institutions deeply involved in projects under the China-led New Silk Roads, or Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is very much there.

As if all that was not game-changing enough, Russian President Vladimir Putin is raising the stakes by calling for a new international payment system based on blockchain and digital currencies.

The project for such a system was recently presented at the 1st Eurasian Economic Forum in Bishkek.

At the forum, the EAEU approved a draft agreement on cross-

border placement and circulation of securities in member states, and amended technical regulations.

All of these moves acquire even more importance as they connect to fast increasing, interlocking trade between Russia, China, India, and Iran: from Russia’s drive to build new pipelines serving its Chinese market—to Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan discussing a gas union for both domestic supplies and exports, especially to main client China.

It remains to be seen whether the fractured world succeeds in halting the America-centric Age of Plunder. □□□

[Contributed]

---

## COMMENT

### Poverty and Hunger

THE UNION GOVERNMENT HAS announced free food grains to 81 crore poor in the country for one year. This will be under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) but is like an extension of the free food grains scheme announced under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) in March 2020, which provided 5 kg of food grains to each poor person. It was to cover 80 crore people badly impacted by the pandemic and the complete lockdown.

At that time, NFSA was already in existence and providing subsidised food grains to the poor. It covers 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population. The number to be covered was estimated to be 81.34 crore. As per the official website of NFSA, 80 crore poor people were getting rice, wheat and coarse grain at Rs 3/Rs 2/Rs 1/ per kg.

Budget documents reveal that the two schemes together led to a food subsidy of Rs 2.9 lakh crore in 2021-22.

In 2019-20, before the PMGKY scheme was launched, the food sub-

sidy was Rs 1.09 lakh crore. Now the two schemes are being merged into the NFSA with 5 kg of food grains provided free to 81 crore poor.

So, the food grains provided under PMGKY will be given to the poor but what they were getting at concessional rates under NFSA will no longer be made available to the poor. Thus, the government will save Rs 1.09 lakh crore of subsidies that went for the cheap food grains under the earlier NFSA.

This will become an additional burden on the poor, and it will be much higher than the subsidy saved by the government. The poor will have to supplement their needs from the free market where the price of food grains is now much higher than the Public Distribution System price. In 2022, due to an early summer, wheat production and procurement declined. Paddy crops also suffered due to late rains in major rice-growing areas and flooding towards the end of the season.

Assuming no leakages, 81 crore people were provided with about

100 million tons of food grains out of a production of 316 million tons. Thus, 60% of the population was getting about 32% of the food grains from the government and had to depend for their balance needs on the free market. The last consumption survey was in 2011-12 which may be outdated.

According to the Economic Survey, the average availability of cereals in 2019-20 (pre-pandemic) was 13.9 kg per month per person. It indicates the average consumption of food grains. The rich supposedly consume less per capita than the poor, but assume that the poor consume the average amount. Then, earlier, the poor had to buy 3.9 kg per person per month from the market and now they will have to buy 8.9 kg per person per month. At the current ruling price of about Rs 2,500 per quintal for wheat, the extra monthly expenditure will be Rs 575 for a family of five.

This does not take into account the lentils that the poor got under PMGKY, which will no longer be supplied.

So, poverty in India will increase. It had already increased due to loss of work and decline in incomes dur-

ing the pandemic. Importantly, the government has accepted that India has 80 crore poor who need free food grains.

By international standards, more precisely as per World Bank estimates, 90% of Indians are still poor.

NFSA, covering 60% of people, actually needs to enlarge its coverage. No, that is not going to happen. The Modi government is asking the poor-daily wage labourers and other vulnerable sections of society to tighten their belts. □□□ [Contributed]

## NOTE

### Books in Brief

*I Satya Sundaram writes:*

**T**HERE HAVE BEEN ATTEMPTS, both at the national and international levels, to revamp the economic and social status of women. There have been international conferences too. Yet, there are miles to go to ensure full empowerment of women.

In most developing countries, women spend much of their time on household management. Some women take up agricultural operations and activities relating to mini and small enterprises. They mostly work in the informal sector.

The \*book [*Women Empowerment: A System of Sustainable Development* by Shukla Mahanty, Gyan Geeta Prakashan, Pp.312, Price: Rs. 110.0] under review, containing eight chapters, deals with issues like gender equality, women organisations, rural women, and women and panchayati raj.

Political empowerment of women is important even to get economic gains. India has Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to ensure decentralisation of power and empower local bodies. However, the levels of awareness about panchayat-related matters continue to be low for both men and women (p, 282). Gram Sabha should be revamped.

Where structures of patriarchy and caste are more oppressive, empowerment of women through PRIs faces formidable obstacles (p, 289). The real challenge is that in

most cases, women sarpanches entrust their functions to their husbands. Instances of surrogate representation are found all over the country (p, 292).

Women's organisations have to play a key role in enhancing women's status. Public awareness of women's real issues such as gender equality and equal rights, has been enhanced with the emergence of self-help groups (SHGs) and support from mass media. Rural women should become active partners in the modernisation of agriculture. Some believe modernisation in reality has led to worsening of women's status in society (p, 141).

Writing is an art. The author has touched on various aspects of women empowerment. But, she should have reduced the size of the book by 100 pages. The first chapter "Introduction" contains 44 pages. Reading thus becomes a tedious and cumbersome exercise. Also, the chapters are not rationally arranged. However, this book is a comprehensive one on women empowerment.

#### **DOWRY MENACE**

**A**MONGST THE EVILS Facing Indian society, dowry continues to be the most obnoxious one. The situation worsened because not only there is payment of dowry, but there is harassment even after marriage. Women no doubt enjoy inheritance rights. Yet, the dowry menace has not been

**Just Published**

## **WITH THE PASSING TIME**

by  
**Farooque Chowdhury**

Published by  
**NGG Books**

4, Aati Bazar, Keraniganj,  
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Email: [nggbooks@gmail.com](mailto:nggbooks@gmail.com)

Website: [www.nggbooks.wordpress.com](http://www.nggbooks.wordpress.com)

Price: 400tk

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

muzzled. Even the highly educated demand dowry.

The origin of this \*book [*Dowry: Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice*, Edited by Tamsin Bradley, Emma Tomalin & Mangala Subramanian, Women Unlimited, New Delhi, Pp. 245, Price: Rs: 350] can be traced to the Dowry Project which was established in 1995 at the International Conference on Dowry and Bride Burning at Harvard University, USA. The aim of the conference was to encourage, share and disseminate research in the areas of dowry, bride burning and son preference in South Asia. The focus of research was also on why anti-dowry campaigns have been, by and large, unsuccessful.

There is no doubt dowry is an evil. As rightly observed by Sirohi: "Dowry is a reality which often envelops other forms of oppression. Dowry and other practices degrade women, and one is not exclusive of the other." (p.3).

The book deals with issues like dowry in rural Bangladesh, interfaces between Gender, Religion and Dowry transactions, Legacies of the Dowry Prohibition Act in India, Dowry and Transactional Activism.

In Bangladesh, a typical rural

dowry might amount to Tk 30,000 plus a TV and Jewellery. The bridegroom's family insists a loan from the bank arranged by bride's parents. Even the village leaders insist on payment of dowry (p, 45). Some insist bride's parents should borrow from microfinance NGOs. (p, 48).

It is generally argued that dowry practice should not be linked to the Hindu religion, mythology and tradition. Indeed these are much older than the dowry practice (p92). The

practice can be attributed to close correlation between class, caste or socio-economic position and marriage transactions (p118). Many poor families had taken loans and mortgaged their land and other assets. Ultimately, they may lose their houses too (p162).

Some people propose love marriages and the formation of nuclear families as possible means of tackling dowry problem (p, 77). It is also argued that eradication of dowry

can be achieved if deeper gender inequalities that reduce women to economic commodities are also dealt with (p, 102).

Legalising property rights for women may marginalise the dowry problem, though this cannot completely eradicate the evil (p, 190). Working with local women's organisations can bring pressure for change in gender relations (p, 220). The book throws useful light on the nuances of dowry practice. □□□

### 38 YEARS LATER

## Bhopal Gas Tragedy

*Indira Jaising*

**T**HE DISASTER OCCURRED on December 2-3, 1984 and the victims have been agitating for compensation and medical treatment since then. The case wound itself through several courts, both in the USA and in India. In 1985, Judge JF Keenan of a district court in New York held on the basis of the doctrine of forum non conveniens that the forum to hear the cases for compensation was India and not the USA, although the Union Carbide Corporation (UCC), owned by Dow Chemicals, an American multinational, was headquartered in the USA and all the evidence of standards of safety to be maintained at the gas plant in Bhopal

was available in the USA at the UCC plant. Eminent lawyer, the late jurist and economist Nanny Palkhiwala had filed an affidavit in the US court to the effect that India had the necessary legal infrastructure to hear the case and hence the case should be heard in India.

It was only after this that the claims came to be heard in Indian courts. One wonders whether his analysis was at all correct, as 38 years later, the Supreme Court today (January 11) heard a curative petition asking for the reopening of the settlement between the Union of India and UCC.

It was jurist and senior advocate Fali S Nariman who represented UCC at that time in the Supreme Court of India on a special leave petition filed by the Union of India against the interim order of the High Court, upholding the order of the district court granting interim compensation to the victims. The district court had ordered 350 crore rupees to be disbursed to the victims, which on appeal was upheld, but the amount was reduced to 250 crore rupees. This was challenged by the Union of India and the UCC.

In the Supreme Court, without

notice to the victims, the Union of India entered into a settlement dated February 14-15, 1989 with UCC. The parties agreed that all criminal proceedings would be dropped and a sum of USD 470 million dollars would be given to all victims in a "full and final" settlement of all dues. The victims were so outraged that they approached the court to reopen the case on multiple grounds, including primarily that they were not heard and that the number of victims was not quantified.

In the Supreme Court, without notice to the victims, the Union of India, represented by the then Attorney General for India K Parasaran, entered into a settlement dated February 14-15, 1989 with UCC. The parties agreed that all criminal proceedings would be dropped and a sum of USD 470 million dollars would be given to all victims in a "full and final" settlement of all dues. The brief written settlement was accepted by a Supreme Court bench headed by then Chief Justice RS Pathak, who later became a judge of the International Court of Justice.

The victims were so outraged that they approached the court to reopen the case on multiple grounds, including primarily that they were not heard and that the number of victims was not quantified.

Meanwhile, a petition filed by

**For Frontier Contact**

**D.K. AGENCIES (P) LTD.**

Booksellers, Publishers & Subscription  
Agents since 1968

CIN: U74899DL1983PTC017169

"DK" is a registered trademark

Regd. off: A/15-17, D.K. Avenue,  
Mohan Garden, Najafgarh Road,  
New Delhi-110059. INDIA

Metro Station: Nawada (Blue Line)

Web: <http://www.dkagencies.com>

Ph: (011) 25357104, 25357105

Fax: (+91-11) 25357103

the late journalist Rajkumar Keswani (the only journalist who had warned a few months earlier, in a series of three articles, that there was a disaster waiting to happen at UCC Bhopal due to neglect of the plant) challenging the validity of the Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster (Processing of Claims) Act, 1985 was pending at the Supreme Court and was yet to be decided when the settlement was authorised. The challenge was to the power of the Union of India to supplant the victims and give to it the authority to litigate on their behalf. It was by virtue of this authority that the settlement was signed by the then Attorney General on behalf of the victims. They were never heard and the order of the court was delivered without consulting the victims. The victims learnt through the press that all their claims were "settled".

On March 6, 1989, the BGPMS filed a review petition on the ground that they were not heard, and on March 9, 1989, the Bhopal Gas Peedit Sangharsh Sahyog Samiti filed a writ petition challenging the settlement.

The number of victims was considerably higher compared to the number on which the settlement was based. Obviously, there was a case for re-opening of the settlement based on the Supreme Court order of May 4, 1989.

If anything the challenge to the validity of the Act authorising the right to represent the victims should have been heard before the settlement was signed. Hence the settlement was kept in abeyance while the validity of the Act was decided. On December 22, 1989, a Constitution bench of the Supreme Court held that the Act was valid, subject to the condition that victims were heard and interim relief was given to the victims by the Union Government of India (The court further

held that the victims should have been heard before the settlement was entered into).

It is this observation which is the basis of the instant curative petitions in which the Union Government argues that the number to victims far exceeds the number anticipated in the settlement, and hence, there is a case for reopening the settlement and direct UCC or its successor-in-interest, Dow Chemicals, to increase the amount of settlement commensurate with the additional number of victims found to be injured or dead.

Meanwhile, from 1992 to 2004, the actual claims of the victims running into one million in number were adjudicated, and a final figure of 5,73,000-odd victims were recognised as having suffered various degrees of injury/death. The number of victims was considerably higher compared to the number on which the settlement was based. So, there was a case for re-opening of the settlement based on the Supreme Court order of May 4, 1989.

On December 22, 2010, two curative petitions were filed, one seeking a reopening of the settlement of 1989 on the ground that the actual number of victims far exceeded the estimated number; the other sought to change the prosecution from being under Section 304A (causing death by negligence) of the Indian Penal Code to Section 304(ii) (punishment for culpable homicide not amounting to murder). The latter was rejected.

What survives to be decided is the curative petition to enhance the compensation on the fact that the number found to be injured and dead is 5, 73,000+, which is far more than the estimated number on which the settlement was based.

The Union of India, represented by Attorney General R Venkatramani, has informed the court that it intends to pursue the curative

## FRONTIER

44, Baram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006

Phone: (033) 2530-0065

Mail: frontierweekly@yahoo.co.in

frontierweekly@hotmail.com

Site: www.frontierweekly.com

### SUBSCRIPTION RATES

(W.e.f January, 2022)

India [Annual]	Rs.	500
Frontier Associate [Annual]	Rs.	1000
Life Subscription [Inland]	Rs.	5000+

Make payment by Cheque/Draft  
in favour of FRONTIER or  
GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.  
or  
FRONTIER [GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS  
PVT. LTD.]

MO should be addressed to Frontier  
Please add Rs. 40/- to inland outstation  
cheques towards bank charges, all  
remittances to FRONTIER

Payment should be made by cheque/  
Draft in favour of

FRONTIER or  
GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.  
Or, in favour of  
FRONTIER [GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS  
PVT. LTD.]

\*\*\*\*\*

**Payment could be made directly to  
our bank accounts as given below.  
Check the bank details before  
transferring money. Also inform us  
through e-mail after sending money.**

Beneficiary Name: **FRONTIER**

Bank Name: CENTRAL BANK OF INDIA  
Address: 8, Lenin Sarani, Kol-700013  
Branch: Esplanade Branch  
Current Account Number: 3116713216  
IFSC Code: CBIN0280098  
Swift Code: CBININBBCAL

or

Beneficiary Name:

**GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.**  
Bank Name: PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK  
Address : 223, C. R. Avenue, Kolkata-6  
Branch: Jorasanko Branch  
Current Account Number: 0085050001319  
IFSC Code: PUNB0008020  
Branch Code : 0008020  
Swift Code: UTBIINBB0BC

or

Beneficiary Name: **FRONTIER**  
**(GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD)**  
Bank Name: PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK  
Address : 223,C. R. Avenue, Kolkata-6  
Branch: Jorasanko Branch  
Current Account Number: 0085050001378  
IFSC Code: PUNB0008020  
Branch Code : 0008020  
Swift Code: UTBIINBB0BC

petition and demand a reopening to enhance the compensation on the ground that the number of victims exceeds the estimated number. It remains to be seen whether the Supreme Court will honour the pledge made to the victims on May 4, 1989, in some measure, undoing the damage that was done by the acceptance of settlement signed behind their back. In 2010, the Union

of India estimated the additional compensation amount to be around 7,800+ crore rupees.

Even if the court does reopen the settlement, the litigation is not likely to end there. There is a special leave petition filed by the victims still pending in the Supreme Court, in which they argue that the government has underestimated the injury caused to them.

Medical records which were directed by the Supreme Court to be computerised have not yet been computerised. As a result, the true picture of injured and dead is not before the court. The end of the tragedy, which took place on December 2 and 3 in 1984, is nowhere in sight. □□□

*[The author had appeared in court on behalf of the victims in 1989 and thereafter.]*

*[Courtesy: The Leaflet]*

## A TRIBUTE

# TG Jacob, Activist-Scholar (1951-2022)

**K T Rammohan**

WHEN JACOB ABANDONED doctoral research in JNU to take up the editorship of the far-Left journal *Mass Line*, his teachers were upset but not surprised. They had seen him at the forefront of many a militant struggle within and outside the campus and knew that it was unlikely that he would pursue a conventional career path. It was just that they were unhappy to see that the academia was losing a promising economist. *Mass Line* was brought out by the Central Reorganising Committee (CRC), Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). It was not the official mouthpiece of the CRC but the editorial board comprised only party card-holders. Published from Kerala beginning from the early 1970s, the editorial office was shifted to New Delhi with Jacob assuming charge in 1981.

What the academia lost was to the gain of the society at large. Jacob's editorship infused a fresh breath to *Mass Line*. The years from 1981 to 1987 during which period Jacob edited *Mass Line* were undoubtedly the heydays of the journal. Certainly, the political conditions of the times, the vitality of campus discussions, the robustness of the party which published the journal, and the intel-

lectual calibre of other members of the editorial board counted. The times were tumultuous. Within the country, events of great political importance followed in quick succession: for instance, the military attack on Golden Temple complex, assassination of Indira Gandhi, anti-Sikh riots, and gas disaster in Bhopal, all happening within a span of six months in 1984. The world was being swept by various forms of aggression, submission, and resistance. These were the years of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Iran-Iraq war, US airstrikes against Libya, Palestinian Intifada, and the beginning of Perestroika and Glasnost. Planned economies were fast succumbing to the dictates of multinational corporations and international financial institutions. On the horizon was unbridled capitalism. Through it all, *Mass Line* stood with the oppressed and Jacob spearheaded this activist journalism. A distinctive feature which the journal acquired under Jacob's editorship was its coverage of international events. Many of the outstanding international reports that appeared, like the one on the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, were eye-witness accounts penned by the new editor himself. Besides, the journal liberated itself, even if partly, from the sloganeering

style characteristic of party publications. There was a remarkable improvement in the quality of prose. The layout attained elegance by doing away with screaming captions in oversized fonts and by reducing the use of exclamation marks.

Under Jacob's lead, fortnight after fortnight, the journal came out with incisive pieces on the lived economy. The articles embodied a kind of sensitivity that was missing in academic studies. While the latter mostly dealt with state policy and its success and failure as reflected in a set of development indices, *Mass Line* articles unraveled the much-less-discussed brutal other side of the state—its lawlessness and the ferociousness with which it suppressed the struggles for existence by the poor. These articles were not obsessed with issues of sampling and statistical significance as was characteristic of academic studies, yet came out with substantive, qualitative field-level observations. The reports threw light on peoples' struggles for land and wages, issues of bonded labour, caste wars, assertions of tribal identities and territorial self-determination, and violation of human rights. Rather than revolving around a set of concepts or replicating stereotyped frameworks, they began with the immediate phenomenon and sought to dig deep and disclose the dynamics of social transition. Importantly, even while centralising concrete analysis of concrete conditions, the reports

did not shy away from theoretical abstractions. The overriding point, however, was to change the concrete conditions rather than merely interpreting these.

As editor, Jacob travelled widely, creating new networks and raising financial resources for the journal. This also helped to widen the range of writers and to expand the readership. He visited university campuses, talked to students, and inspired them to write. Increasingly, articles were sourced from discussions with young researchers. Many of them were first-time writers. As long as their ideas made sense, Jacob did not bother about the writing style. The only caveat was that it should be direct and pointed. To the greatest possible extent, he spared the editorial scissors. It was in the course of one such campus visit during the mid-eighties that this writer got to meet him first. The elections to the Kerala Assembly were round the corner and at the hostel room in the Centre for Development Studies the electoral manifestoes of the rival fronts were discussed.

A major theoretical contribution of Jacob to Marxist-Leninist literature is the neo-colonial thesis. Developed in close association with other intellectual activists in the CRC, the thesis grew out of the recognition that the 'classical', Naxalite characterisation of India as a semi-feudal and semi-colonial entity fails to factor in the important changes occurring in the internal development processes and in the international political-economy since the sixties. The changes included, among others, the decline in the economic power of feudal forces and the rise of a definitive stratum of capitalist farmers following the spread of cash crop agriculture; the development of productive forces in the manufacturing sector, the dependence on imported capital and technology notwithstanding; the commodity ex-

change and technology transfer deals that marked new forms of exploitation by imperialist powers, including the Soviet Union; and India's regression into a debt economy. Resistance to the neo-colonial state was viewed to assume varied forms including workers' strikes, farmers' agitations, tribal assertions, and territorial and linguistic nationality struggles.

Indeed the idea of neocolonialism, or indirect colonialism or neo-imperialism as variously called, in the sense of extraction of economic surplus even in the absence of formal political rule had been in vogue for long. A 1963 document of the Communist Party of China noted that despite formal independence the Third World had not been able to shake off imperial control. "While wolf has left by the front door, tiger has entered through the back door". Third World countries continued to be objects of aggression and exploitation by their former masters. Political and economic control was exercised through a grid of international cooperation and development institutions based in the West and their puppet regimes and local agents in the former colonies. Foreign aid was the major mechanism through which the colonies were retained as a market for surplus capital and commodities. Occasionally, such control assumed the form of military aggression. In the academic sphere too, Paul A Baran's *The Political Economy of Growth* (1957) and subsequently, the works of the Dependency school had dealt with the idea of neocolonialism. Yet, before Jacob, it had not been sharply formulated in the Indian context, especially focusing on the internal contradictions and in conjunction with the nationality question.

Jacob's book on neocolonialism, *India Development and Deprivation: Neocolonial transformation of the economy in a historical perspective*

## NOTICE

**Subscribers are requested to renew their subscription and send their phone numbers otherwise it is becoming difficult to communicate with them as old practice of sending reminder slips through subscription copy is no longer followed.**

was brought out in 1985. Its arguments broadly run thus. The metropolitan nations are driven by the need to expand the market for capital, technology, and industrial commodities worldwide. The development of productive forces in agriculture and industry in the former colonies therefore assumes importance. Full-fledged and independent development of productive forces would have, however, exhausted the need to draw on metropolitan supplies. The neo-imperial policy of development and control was born in this context. The metropolitan requirements coincided with the needs of big capital in the colonies, the latter being a junior partner of global capital. Over time, in India, these processes gave rise to contradictions between the rural bourgeoisie on the one hand and the big capital and the state on the other. While the prices of agricultural produce were set by the state, those of manufactured goods, including agricultural inputs, were left to the market forces. Such a situation widened the gap between agricultural input and output prices to the advantage of metropolitan capital and its local players but to the detriment of the farming classes. Temporary concessions like subsidies and hike in minimum support price failed to offset the imbalance. Another social group that was pushed to great disadvantage was the tribal people. During the colonial period,

with increasing restrictions on shifting cultivation, they had been persistently pushed to less fertile land. In the post-independence times, the mega development projects, wildlife conservation areas, and mines displaced them and limited their access to forest resources, eventually turning them into wage-labourers. The manufacturing sector was beset with contradictions between workers in organised and unorganised sectors, permanent and contract workers, factory owners and workers, small-scale units and large-scale units, and regional bourgeoisie and pan-Indian monopoly houses.

Alongside advancing the neocolonial thesis at the general and macro level in *India Development and Deprivation*, Jacob sought to explore how it unfolded at micro and meso-levels. In fact, Jacob had first expounded the idea of neocolonialism by undertaking a case study of Kerala titled *Kerala: A Backward Economy on the Neocolonial Track* as early as in 1981. Two more case studies on Kerala were subsequently published: *Tales of Tourism from Kovalam* (1998) and *Wayanad: Misery in an Emerald Bowl* (2006). These enquired into the working of the dependent development model characteristic of neocolonial transformation in relation to two micro regions within Kerala.

Meanwhile, Jacob carried out a detailed study of Punjab in transition. The book *Chaos in Nation Formation: Case of Punjab* (1988), set against the Khalistan agitation, showed how suppressing the struggles for national self-determination was critical to the perseverance of the neocolonial state. It was pointed out that the all-India market was the major edifice of the neocolonial state and any attempt to create a sovereign nation-state outside its fold would not be tolerated. An outstanding feature of Punjab's post-1960 agricul-

tural economy was market integration. The Green Revolution saw a spectacular expansion of agricultural output. As the output market expanded, so did the market for technical inputs such as farm machinery, fertilisers and pesticides. Huge investments were made in infrastructure including irrigation, electricity generation and distribution, roads, and warehouses. Formal and informal institutions flooded the credit market. The labour market expanded with the influx of migrant workers from neighbouring states. The role of the state expanded while powerful, new strata of big traders, industrialists, moneylenders and labour contractors emerged. With agricultural produce prices decided by the state and input prices set by big capital, farmers had control over neither. Save the early years of Green Revolution, the terms of trade turned against agriculture. While industrialists and traders steadily prospered, the farming community correspondingly lost. Agricultural subsidies failed to compensate the losses suffered by farmers. The big traders based in cities were mostly Hindus while the majority of farmers were Sikhs. Also, as migration tended to freeze or even depress local wage levels, contradictions developed between resident Sikh workers and migrant Hindu labour. These caused economic contradictions to assume a communal hue.

The neocolonial thesis marked such a radical departure from the fundamental premises of Marxist-Leninist theory and practice in the country that it took a while to gain acceptance even within the CRC. The rest of the Marxist-Leninist parties in the country were outright hostile to the new formulation. As the idea of agricultural backwardness owing to feudal relations recedes from analysis, so does the need for an agrarian revolutionary programme that hinges on the elimi-

nation of feudal lords as a precondition for moving towards socialism. Countering neocolonialism required an altogether different agenda of linguistic and territorial nationality assertion that involved alliance with those sections of the local bourgeoisie which had sharp contradictions with the pan-Indian big capital and the Indian state. The enemy had to be redefined. Radical Marxist-Leninist parties continued to hold fast to their earlier programme of agrarian revolution. Those Marxist-Leninist parties which had taken to parliamentary politics could not anyway be expected to retract and take up arms against the state.

Considering that the question of neocolonialism overlapped with the national question, Jacob increasingly turned his attention to studying the approach of the Indian communist movement towards the latter. Towards this, together with Pranjali Bandhu, he meticulously researched the communist party documents on national question. Following this, two volumes were brought out in 1988: *National Question in India: CPI Documents 1942-47* and *War and National Liberation: CPI Documents 1939-1945*. The introductory essays of these compilations highlighted the initial ambiguity and the subsequent regressive shift of the Indian communists relating to national question in India. The undivided communist party had upheld the Leninist theory of right of self-determination of nationalities and supported the nationalist aspirations of the diverse linguistic communities. At once however, there was a conceptual tension because even while suggesting that India is a multinational country the idea of the Indian nation was not forsaken. The tension was sought to be overcome by noting that the genuine unity of India could be attained through a voluntary union of different nationalities. Over time, the CPI and the



CPI (M) turned into being staunch champions of 'national' integrity, viewing all self-determination assertions as imperialist conspiracies meant to weaken the country.

Beginning from the early 1980s till his end, Jacob subscribed to the characterisation of the Indian state as neocolonial and upheld the claim of self-determination of nationalities, including the right to secede. Such consistency in larger political thinking notwithstanding, towards the end of the 1980s, there occurred a critical shift in his perception of party organisation. For quite some time he had been discontented with what he viewed as the undemocratic functioning of communist parties including his own. He noted that the entrenchment of party bureaucracy showed that democratic centralism was largely a myth. Dissent met with suppression of facts, repression of deviants, and often, their expulsion from the party.

Jacob noted that the rationale advanced in defence of centralism in the pre-revolutionary days was that the party was struggling against heavy odds. Once the party captured power, again centralism was defended as being necessary to protect the nascent state from attacks by the capitalist forces. This logic reinforced the party bureaucracy and their policing of party members and supporters. The people who make sacrifices for freedom are betrayed by the leadership forever. The oligarchic organisation cut across all communist parties, radical or reformist. As Jacob observed, those who do not practise democracy among themselves cannot hope to liberate the masses. Their parties can only transfer power from one oligarchic group to another.

Jacob left the party but the storm within him never died down. Not bounded by the party line, his scholarly enquiries garnered greater independence and momentum. Together

with Pranjali Bandhu he first established a publishing venture, Odyssey, and subsequently a research unit, the South Asia Study Centre. The Centre's prime objective was to pursue and promote research on national, ethnic, religious and minority questions and aspects of caste and gender in South Asia. Operating from the Nilgiris district in Tamil Nadu, the Centre facilitated a host of studies including Reflections on the Caste Question: The Dalit Situation in South India (2000), Eastern Marxism and Other Essays (2008), Back to Basics: A J C Kumarappa Reader (2011), Left to Right: Decline of Communism in India (2012), and Encountering the Adivasi Question: South Indian Narratives (2019). Most of these works were jointly edited by Jacob and Bandhu.

Jacob began to view land reforms, decentralisation, and self-reliance as advocated by Kumarappa as effective antidotes to the intrinsic violence of the capitalist system. He explored why Kumarappa's ideas were cast aside by the policy planners of post-1947 India. Development is a powerful ideological tool to misrepresent the interests of capital as the interest of the whole people. Its targeted outcome was the unfettered expansion of the capitalist market. All political parties, whether Left, Right or Centre, uncritically uphold the idea of development. The fact that it destroys the environment, dispossesses the poor, and increases inequality is suppressed. Jacob noted that those who indict Kumarappa's 'villagism' as utopian were merely bent on manipulating the villages to serve the cities.

Jacob kept working till his last breath. Not only qualitatively but also quantitatively his works were a cut above that of most academics attached to formal institutions of teaching and research. His intellectual output is incredible: besides half

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

—Fr.

a dozen books, a rough estimate shows that he had published over 400 articles. Jacob's politics was reflected in the choice of publishers as well. He shunned monopoly publishing houses. Save newspaper articles, nearly all his writings appeared in alternative journals like Frontier and Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars besides Mass Line. Translations of some of these articles and others were published in Oli and Edatha (Tamil) and in Madhyamam, Kerala Padanangal and Maruvakku (Malayalam). Of late, Jacob had started writing in Malayalam, his mother tongue, and many articles were published in the Malayalam newspaper Thejas.

Jacob was unique but at once very much that generation—round pegs in square holes, straight shooters, a bit wild, not fond of rules, and with no respect for the status quo. Communist leaders of Kerala are often bid farewell with gun salutes in their honour. The presence of the state manifested itself in a different manner at Jacob's funeral. Policemen in civilian clothes descended to find out who facilitated the funeral, who attended it, and who spoke at the condolence meeting that followed. □□□

[K T Rammohan is former Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. Email: rammohankt@gmail.com]

**For Frontier Contact**

**BOI-CHITRA**

College Street Coffee House 2nd floor

---

'TWO LEAVES AND A BUD'

---

## Plight of Bengal Plantation Workers

*Nityananda Ghosh*

**T**HE DEEPENING CRISIS IN the tea gardens of Darjeeling, Terai and Dooars of North Bengal has created a survival question for thousands of workers. While visiting some of the gardens in November, 2022 this correspondent and his colleague Ashwini Pramanik have gathered horrible experiences. The plight of tea garden workers cannot be gauged from outside unless someone goes there and take stock of the situation. Happy Valley, a 150-year-old tea garden situated in the very heart of the Darjeeling hills has lost its past glory as the productivity has been significantly diminished over the years. The old plants are unable to produce reasonable yield. The management did not adopt new policies to reinvigorate the garden e.g. Re-plantation has slowly progressed either or it has not been done at all. The workers of Happy Valley who resorted to cease work in the fourth week of November 2022, for not getting even their paltry salary since September, 2022 are literally starving. The unions finally gave a strike call in all tea gardens belonging to the Ambutia group. The strike covered the Happy Valley tea garden as well. However the strike was withdrawn following some assurances from the management.

Meanwhile, the ownership of the Happy Valley garden has been changed. The previous owner reportedly took Rs 900 crore loan from a Nationalised Bank for revival of the garden but nothing had been done. Workers further alleged that the old owner had virtually misappropriated the entire amount instead of investing it for the revival of the garden. Right now there are 300-350 work-

ers engaged in the Happy Valley garden but they did not face such a precarious situation earlier. Processed tea leaves of this garden i.e. namely flavoured tea leaves have tremendous demand and those are being exported. There is no such traditional union in this garden except the nominal presence of Gorkha Janamukti Parishad's trade union wing. So there is no official platform to raise the justified demands of the workers to the management. As a result workers are in a weak position to bargain with the owner despite increased repressive measures.

There are 276 set tea gardens in the Dooars-Terai-Hill region of North Bengal spreading over 1,62,979.12 hectares of land, having 2.6 lakh permanent workers according to a survey done by the office of Joint Labour Commissioner of North Bengal (located at Siliguri). The survey entitled—'Survey of tea gardens conducted by Regional Labour offices under jurisdiction of Joint Labour Commissioner', was done in the year 2013. Besides set gardens there are about 50,000 small tea gardens which produce maximum tea leaves and employ lakhs workers in production. The workers of these small tea gardens are the worst sufferers as they do not get statutory ration facilities; also they can't avail Prime Minister's Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY). The workers holding the BPL card only get free ration otherwise they have to purchase rice or wheat from open market. Most of the workers of small tea gardens as they are unorganised, have been deprived of BPL cards. Naturally the workers who do not hold BPL cards have no access to food security i.e. they are

not under AAY although they can avail food guarantee yojana of the state government (RKSYS1&2). They can purchase ration (rice or wheat) at the rate of Rs 2-3 per kilogram. Ironically, they fall under APL (Above Poverty Line) category, not under BPL. The living conditions of tea workers of Terai are very much deplorable according to Abhijit Majumdar, president of Terai Sangrami Cha Shramik Union affiliated to AICCTU.

There is Plantation Act to regulate the employment of tea garden workers (Plantation Labour Act 1951 i.e. Tea Labour Act 1951). But most garden workers do not get benefits under this act. Besides, Provident Fund Act 1952, Payment of Gratuity Act 1972, Equal Pay for Equal Work Act 1976 and anti- Child Labour Act 1986 etc. are in vogue for the employees and workers but tea garden labourers of small gardens are denied rights guaranteed under these acts. Permanent workers apart, a large number of contractual workers are employed in those set gardens as well as in small gardens. Temporary Workers engaged in the tea gardens are known as bigha workers. These workers do not get provident fund, gratuity facilities and even the negotiated daily wages determined by the Planters Association, Government representatives and Tea Board members through the mechanism of tripartite agreement.

At present each worker gets Rs 232 per day which is far below minimum wages settled by the labour department, Government of India. Tea garden workers get salary after every 14 days i.e. in each week's payment there is a gap of one day (which is counted as leave). In truth each worker gets 12 or 13 days' salary after two weeks' work whereas each permanent worker gets about Rs 5000 per month.

For one thing tea garden workers used to get Rs 90 as daily wages during the left front rule (i.e. upto 2011). Then the Trinamool Congress government increased the daily wages step by step which was ultimately fixed at Rs 232/- per day following a negotiated agreement between trade unions (there are 36 registered trade unions in tea industry in this region), planters' associations and labour department, Government of West Bengal. But there is a tripartite committee to address the minimum wages dispute. R A Sharma, a member of the planters' association of Birpara

(Jalpaiguri district) openly confessed that the committee was yet to settle the minimum wages of the tea garden workers. So the tea garden workers of Darjeeling and Dooars still do not get minimum wages although their counterparts of South India (Tamilnadu and Kerala) and even in Assam get wages more than what Bengal tea garden workers get.

Temporary workers of the set tea gardens lost their jobs during December to February as plucking of leaves was stopped. No compensation was offered. Tea Garden Owners, big or small, do not bear social responsibility.

Permanent workers' quarters are not maintained; they are just apologies of houses. School buses for the children are not provided, there are dispensaries but nurses, doctors and support staff are not adequate. The corporate social responsibility is a buzz word in tea gardens. In short, workers, both permanent and temporary, are being continually haunted by insecurity, anxiety and threat of closure. Reports of starvation death are not uncommon but they hardly get currency. Tea Gardens in this part of the globe symbolise mediaeval industrial culture. □□□

## G20 PRESIDENCY

# How to Gain Electoral Mileage

*Atmanirbhar*

WITH ITS BY NOW WELL-known efficiency, the Core of the Core has gone about extracting maximum mileage out of India getting its turn to chair the G20 from December this year. A dedicated team of talented and tech-savvy officials and spin experts has been put in place; it has been simply named: Mission G20 PR.

The other day the Mission G 20 PR received a note of appreciation from A Very, Very Competent Authority:

"A good beginning has been made. The team deserves credit for persuading so many national and regional newspapers to accept the Hon'ble Prime Minister's write-up. I never realised that these so-called independent newspapers were so eager to trade their supposedly 'sacred' space—their edit and op-ed pages—for a front-page ad.

"I am particularly happy with the understated tone of this front-page ad. A simple, full-length photograph of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, purposely striding forward conveys the essence of the New India on the move.

"But this can only be just a beginning. We have to summon imagination and brazenness to stretch our G 20 presidency for a whole year and even after, till the next Lok Sabha poll in 2024. Indeed, a senior editor has already suggested—apparently unprompted—that the G 20 presidency would be Modiji's 'G24'. I never realised that these very self-important editors were so impressionable.

"We must exploit, unapologetically, the national media's awe of the Hon'ble Prime Minister. And, of course, we should be prepared to use all our financial clout and assets to send out a message that no newspaper—even those who take pride in having established themselves more than a century ago—is beyond a bit of third-degree treatment.

"Here are a few suggestions that can be creatively fleshed out during the next twelve months:

"It can be suggested to the University Grants Commission and other bodies like the Indian Council of Social Science Research that all universities and research institutes

be asked to hold seminars and events on India's G20 presidency. By the end of the year, there should be substantive 'scholarly' material about India's dynamic stewardship of this most important global platform, as per the inspiration provided by our dynamic prime minister. A log book should be maintained of all contributions and it should be made clear that non-compliance would have financial and other costs.

a) "Similarly, all Kendriya Vidyalas can be instructed to observe the first Monday over the next 12 months as G20 day. All kinds of activities, like elocution competitions, essay-writing, etc can be organised. The schools can invite local and state-level functionaries to impress upon young minds how large the Hon'ble Prime Minister looms on the global stage.

"Now that we have data about all clubs and civil society groups in Delhi, we should not hesitate to impress upon them firmly the need to hold seminars and webinars where Ministry of External Affairs officials must be invited. And, again, as a general rule, do not hesitate to flaunt the stick.

"It should be easy and legitimate for us to use "central" locations—

like petrol pumps and airports—to put up G20 hoardings with an image and message of our dynamic and confident prime minister, leading the world out of its current confusion and turmoil.

“In big cities, the metro trains can be the site for a body wrap advertisement—Competent Prime Minister, Competent Confident India.

“I do not need to spell out in detail but I think Mission G 20 PR should be mindful of the electoral schedule over the next 12 months. After this week’s election in Gujarat, Karnataka is the next big battleground. At least, every month a major event should be staged in Bengaluru and other cities of the state and the Hon’ble Prime Minister, of course, would be available as the centre of attraction. And each monthly G20 event, in turn, would be the perfect excuse to have front page/jacket ads

in all newspapers in Karnataka.

“I am assuming that our team would monitor closely if any of the newspapers/publications goes off the reservation: there should be no official no ads for anyone who pretends to flaunt their institutional autonomy. We should make it clear that the media’s freedom, credibility and professional standing take second place to the nation’s pride and dignity, as personified by the Hon’ble Prime Minister.

“It is vitally important that the Ministry of External Affairs should discourage any talk or discussion by foreign policy experts that the G20 presidency is simply an automatic rotation arrangement. No columnist or strategic expert should be allowed to suggest that Indonesia and Turkey have held the presidency in recent years. We are unique because our national leader is unique, beyond

comparison to any living or dead leader.

“I shall urge the communication cells to reach out to the foreign media as well. A good start was made by placing Modiji’s article in some newspapers abroad. Editors of prestigious media organisations can be approached, with the usual understanding that we shall be underwriting all travel arrangements, as well as with a promise of an off-the-record meeting with the senior most ministers, perhaps even the prime minister.

“In the end, it is important to underline that our interlocutors should firmly reject any suggestion that the government is milking the G20 presidency for domestic political and electoral mileage. Our argument ought to be simple: it is a great honour for India and all Indians ought to rejoice in Modiji’s G20 presidency”. □

[Source: the wire]

## HISTORY IS REVENGING

# Ukraine War has Shaken up World Order

*Patrick Wintour*

**F**EW CONFLICTS HAVE been so shaped by the chief actors’ sense of their own national story as the Ukrainian war that began in February. It is the competing grand narratives of the past, not just in Russia and Ukraine, but in Germany, France, Poland, the Baltics, the UK, the US, and even the global south, that make this war so hard to resolve.

Indeed, sometimes this war feels less like the end of history and more like the revenge of history.

Putin is sometimes described not as commander in chief, but as Russia’s historian in chief. The ground for this war was prepared by the Russian president’s pseudo-historical essay “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”, published in July 2021. In this document, Putin argued Ukraine was, histori-

cally, indistinguishable from Russia, citing Oleg the prophet’s 10th-century dictum: “Let Kyiv be the mother of all Russian cities.”

Radoslaw Sikorski, the former Polish foreign minister, said he became sure an invasion would happen when he read that essay and learned Putin had ordered it to be sent to every serving Russian soldier. “The plan was to do again what Russia had repeatedly done to Ukraine in the past: extermination of its elites, Russification of its culture and population and the subjugation of its resources to its own imperial needs. Ukraine could be permitted as peasant folklore but not as a free and democratic nation choosing its own destiny and allies.”

When Putin talked about Ukraine needing to disarm and making Russian its second official language, it

was not only about restoring Ukraine as part of Russia, but a staging post to the full reinvention of the Russian empire.

During his Victory Day speech in Moscow in May 2022, the president told Russian soldiers back from the Ukrainian front they were “fighting for the same thing their fathers and grandfathers did”—for “the motherland” and the defeat of Nazism. The Ukrainian revolution of 2013 was a fascist “Banderite coup”, the government in Kyiv a “junta”, NZTO enlargement an Anschluss, and the EU a decadent threat to Russian culture. Russia in 2022, according to Putin, was like the USSR in 1941, threatened by an invasion from the west.

Zabuzkho argues that this deep historical sense of injustice and betrayal drives not just Putin, but the whole of Russian society. “One wants to find Russians who are not preoccupied with self-pity right now. The feeling of injustice is one of the most distinct symptoms of the moral

breakdown that characterises so much of Russian society today.”

Ukraine, too, has its own sense of injustice and points its accusatory finger at Russia. Olesya Khromeychuk, director of the Ukrainian Institute in London, argues: “Ukraine’s historical experience—of statelessness and struggle, repressive external rule and hard-won independence—has shaped Ukraine into the nation we see today: opposed to imperialism, united in the face of the enemy, and determined to protect its freedom. For the people of Ukraine, freedom is not some lofty ideal. It is imperative for survival.”

Ukraine’s identity took time to form after it gained independence in 1991. Two narratives competed—one national and nationalist, the other Soviet nostalgic. This was not unique among post-Soviet states, but the process was never more intense or confrontational than in Ukraine.

Battles were fought over school textbooks, monuments and the choice of national anniversaries, street names, state archives, or the status of the Holodomor—the human-made famine of 1932-33 that killed millions of Ukrainians—as a genocide. Under the “historical presidency” of Viktor Yushenko between 2005 and 2010, 159 historical decrees were issued, the vast majority about the de-communisation of Ukraine.

In the process history was often royally misused. The Ukrainian Institute of National Memory for instance between 2014 and 2019 came to be dominated by a narrow group of rightwing nationalists that defined Ukraine in purely ethnic anti-Russian terms.

Unpopular leaders such as Petro Poroshenko relied on increasingly divisive and crude ethnic appeals to patriotism, thinking it was the shortcut to remaining in power. In 2015 the government even issued a set of “memory laws” that made questioning the official, deeply anti-Soviet view of Ukraine’s past punishable with prison terms of up to 10 years.

It was not until the advent of Volodymyr Zelenskiy and the “independence generation”—those who grew up after Ukraine left the Soviet Union—that Ukraine addressed issues of the past, identity and language in a more inclusive way, as Olga Onuch sets out in her book *The Zelensky Effect*. Zelenskiy, a former comedian and actor elected in 2019, understood the importance of history. Indeed, in the opening series of *Servant of the People*—the TV show that made his name—Zelenskiy plays a history teacher trying to convince his pupils of the importance of Mykhailo Hrushevsky, the historian who, in 1903, first tried to show how Ukrainian history was not merely a part of an overarching Russian story.

Onuch and her co-author, Henry Hale, argue Zelenskiy was critical to giving Ukrainians a chance to “realise they shared a rich common fate that transcended linguistic, national and religious diversity”. This generation did not want just to shed their Russianness, but find a new Ukrainian civic identity linked to a hard-fought idea of common values. As a Russian-speaking Jewish person from south-east Ukraine, Zelenskiy was perfect to demonstrate how Russian-speaking Ukrainians, including those in the east, could fully identify with the Ukrainian state and express their patriotism.

That mattered when the war began. The Polish historian Adam Michnik argues that the future of Ukraine as part of Europe was always going to depend not only on the western cities of Lviv and Kyiv, but also on the cities to the south and east, Kharkiv and Odesa. “There is no doubt, under Putin’s rockets; both Kharkiv and Odesa chose Europe.”

In short, Putin was invading a country that very much existed—one he no longer understood.

The FSB told the Russian president that a superior army could capture Kyiv and decapitate its leadership in hours, as it had in Crimea in 2014, since it was invading an artifi-

cial and politically apathetic country that distrusted its leaders. Just to make sure, it supposedly spent \$1bn fomenting discontent among the Russophone population in Ukraine and promoting pro-Russian politicians. Unfortunately, the FSB’s agents siphoned off some of the money and then fabricated data on pro-Russian attitudes to please Moscow.

As a result, many Russian soldiers, poorly briefed on the invasion, seemed genuinely bewildered by a Ukrainian volunteer defence force determined to protect their homeland. When they reached cities such as Kherson they were greeted with shotguns, and not flowers.

“The Ukraine in your news and the Ukraine of real life are two entirely different places,” Zelenskiy warned Russians on the eve of the invasion, “and the difference is that the latter is real”.

By day three of the invasion it was apparent to Russian commanders that serious mistakes had been made from which the operation has never fully been able to recover. Russia’s hubris and overconfidence led to false assumptions that sabotaged the mission.

Ten months on from the initial

## DOORSTEP COMPOSITOR

[Contact for Bengali DTP Operator at your Doorstep]

At present, we have started a new facility, throughout India. The Bengali language is now used in many places. Thus, there is a need now to have Bengali Computer Operators for publishing in Magazines, Books, Periodicals, Souvenirs. Further, we have created this new facility for preparing Question Papers for Schools, Colleges and Universities. So, you need not send the confidential works to outside. We can go to your Office or Institution to complete such works. We shall also make them in printable formats. Moreover, the translation to Bengali is also done. You may contact us for these types of work.

However, you have to arrange or pay the expenses for our Travel and Stay. We thus also accept some amount as Honorarium; it depends on the importance and quantum of work. We sincerely expect that you will use the facility.

Please contact: **THE D-COMLASER**

BHASKAR DAS (Proprietor)

39A, Nalin Sarkar Street, Kolkata 700004

Mobile : 98361-58319

Email : bhaskar\_sananda@yahoo.com

invasion, Ukraine's extraordinary resilience and courage has staved off defeat, but not guaranteed victory. Europe's post-cold war security landscape has changed, and yet nothing is settled. This is still a moment of transition.

By one calculation, the US has spent 5.6% of its annual defence budget to destroy nearly half of Russia's military capability.

The successive battlefield defeats have damaged the reputation of the Great Russian military. First there had to be the "regrouping" in the north, when Russia realised it could not take Kyiv and Chernihiv. On 6 September came the stunning collapse of the Russian front in the north-east in the Kharkiv region. On 11 November Russia withdrew from the port city of Kherson, retreating from territory it had announced as annexed and part of Russia only 40 days earlier. The goal of establishing a land corridor to Transnistria—a Russian-backed breakaway region of Moldova, one of Ukraine's western neighbours—is, for now, abandoned. Since September Ukraine says it has reclaimed more than 8,000 sq km (3,089 sq miles) of Russian-occupied territory.

Russia has also paid a toll in lost diplomatic prestige. In meetings with Central Asian republics, Putin sometimes find himself humiliated and contradicted, and there is talk of a security vacuum in the Caucasus as Russian prestige withers. Positive diplomatic support for Russia, as opposed to hedging, is confined to Belarus, North Korea, Syria and Eritrea. In one international diplomatic body after another, the "Russia not welcome" sign is going up. The Chinese defence minister, Wei Fenghe, in June said his country would not be providing one bullet to Russia, portraying the relationship as a partnership, not an alliance.

Moscow had bet on a return to American isolationism and a Trump triumph in the midterm elections in November. The theory was that in

swing districts, Americans would rise up against the cost of gas and the war. It is true a slow erosion of support for the war among Republicans emerged in some polls, but Joe Biden seemed to tell a more compelling story about democracy under threat in the US and in Europe.

As a result, Biden has been left with greater scope than expected to continue to shape his own Ukraine policy in the next two years.

If the US is for the moment closed off as a choke point, Putin's next best option was Berlin. But the energy blackmail he directed at Germany now looks as likely to explode in his own face as bring about German deindustrialisation.

Through a mixture of state planning and individual parsimony, Germany has weaned itself off Russian energy, an extraordinary achievement for a country that was dependent on Russia for 55% of its gas. German industry has reduced gas consumption by about 25% since the year's start, while production has only fallen by 1.4%. The state has found alternative suppliers, including in Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium and France.

Given the state of German reserves, blackouts this winter seem less likely in Europe, even if next winter is more worrying.

Germany has led the efforts to quell anger about rising bills by constructing hugely expensive subsidy packages. Since the start of the energy crisis in September 2021, according to the Bruegel Institute, a staggering •705.5bn (£614bn) has been allocated or earmarked across European countries to shield consumers from the rising energy costs.

But will it be enough? The nights are longer, the thermometers have dropped and energy bills are landing, so the witching hour is here. The recurring nightmare of Zelenskiy's young strategic communications team is that Ukraine's suffering drops out of the news, and the country, once synonymous with freedom, becomes

a burden. "Our principle is simple," says Andriy Yermak, the president's chief of staff. "If we fall out of focus, we are in danger." The attention of the world serves as a shield.

So far the drumbeat of rebellion is faint and confined to the fringes on the left and right.

That has forced Putin to switch tactics again and resort to different tools of war to weaken Europe's resolve. The attacks on civilian energy structure that began in October are not only designed to create misery in Ukraine, but to make neighbourhoods uninhabitable, so creating an exodus from the cities and a second wave of Ukrainian refugees that the west cannot tolerate. The Ukrainian MP Lesia Vasylenko, pointing out 14 million Ukrainians are already displaced, including 7 million abroad, frankly admitted to British politicians she feared the mood towards Ukrainian refugees might be about to change. Alarm bells are already ringing about the bullying of Ukrainians in schools, she said.

But according to the Polish migration expert Prof Maciej Duszczuk from the University of Warsaw, 70% of Ukrainian refugees cross the Polish border, and in Poland, again for historical reasons, there is no sign of a backlash yet. For Poland, Russia is synonymous only with conquest, partitions, genocide, colonialism and communism. Whatever its past or present differences with Ukraine, the two countries know that in Russia they share a common enemy, according to Duszczuk. Poland is now home to approximately 1 million refugees from Ukraine (and as many Ukrainians who lived there before the war). Nearly 60% have found jobs. In elections next year, Duszczuk does not expect the refugee issue will feature.

That is not to say the influx is painless. In Warsaw alone, schools and nurseries have taken 18,000 kids, and Warsaw's mayor is appealing for European financial sup-

port. Duszczuk says so far the position at the border crossing is stable, but admits each morning to getting an update on the weather and status of electricity stations in Kyiv. "Are we, as a state and society, ready for a second wave of refugees from Ukraine?" he asks.

If Poland did decide it is full, or tried to play electoral politics with Germany over the issue, as many as 2 million more refugees could, in theory, move on to countries in western Europe, predominantly Germany. By one estimate that might cost an estimated •48bn a year.

More than any other European country, Germany will determine whether the continent stays the course with Ukraine. Wolfgang Ischinger, the former German diplomat, says Germany has been the European country most willing to change its foreign policy and shed its worship of the status quo. At one level Germany has spent the past 12 months shedding its postwar mindset. Olaf Scholz's *zeitenwende* signalled •100bn investment in its depleted army. Germany agreed to send anti-tank missiles and Stinger missiles

into a war zone. The country's president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, for years the country's most vocal proponent of compromise with Russia, went to Kyiv to apologise. He said Germany's dependency on Russian gas had been a strategic error, born of a stubborn misreading of Putin. "In the face of evil, goodwill was not enough."

Annalena Baerbock, the Green foreign minister, went further, arguing the Social Democrats' Ostpolitik had been based on a false historical analysis. Germany's moral debt of "special responsibility" bound Germany not to Russia, but primarily to Jews and Poles, Belarusians and Ukrainians, and only then to the Russians. She argues, in a formula that Scholz avoids: "We will achieve security only without, not with Vladimir Putin's Russia."

One senior Baltic diplomat promises there will be a reckoning when the war is over that will see a shift away from the Franco-German centre of gravity. He says "Everyone understands the reasons for Germany's pacifism and, yes, often in the end they do the right thing,

but only after they have exhausted every other possibility and in the process completely damaged their own reputation."

A Ukrainian diplomat concurs. "We have to get rid of this constant fear of escalation in certain capitals. It is what holds us back, and it misunderstands the nature of Russian and the existential conflict we are fighting."

That returns the conflict to Putin's view of what he described as Russia's historical future.

Jade McGlynn, an Oxford academic and author of the forthcoming *Russia's War*, explains why it is so hard for Russia to relinquish Ukraine. "Sergei Lavrov [the Russian foreign minister], for instance, says that without Russia, Ukraine does not have any history. But it is actually the opposite. Without Ukraine, Russia's understanding of its own identity—this third Rome, based on Orthodoxy, this gathering of all the lands of Rus—does not really work. "That is why it is going to be very hard for Russia ever to accept this war has failed." □

[Source: *The Guardian*]

## LETTER

### Poona Sarvajanik Sabha

The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, founded on April 2nd, 1870, is a worthy predecessor of the Indian National Congress. The Sabha drew its members from the aristocratic and professional classes. It had a representative character as its members were required to possess the power of attorney of fifty adult men from in and around Poona. Initially, the Sabha's objective was to work for reforms in the management of the Parvati Temple, but it also acted as a mediator between the government and the governed. Though the Sabha took an interest in a number of issues, it was the Sabha's intervention in agricultural issues that stood out. This could be attributed

to the fact that most of its members held land properties in the Deccan countryside. The Sabha conducted fact-finding studies on the agricultural situation in India, especially in the Deccan region. In 1872, a twelve-member sub-committee of the Sabha conducted such a study and submitted its findings to the East India Finance Committee, appointed by the British government. Similarly, when famine struck Western and Southern India in 1876–77, the Sabha was not only active in the relief work but also conducted a study on the after-effects of the famine. The Sabha was of the opinion that an enduring solution to the agrarian problems lies in the permanent settlement of land revenue. It

also suggested supplementary measures like legal reforms to prevent extortion by money lenders and state guarantees to capitalists engaged in loan business to address the paucity of capital. A mention should be made here about M.G. Ranade. Mr. Ranade acted as a friend, philosopher, and guide to the Sabha. The Sabha became a formidable organisation in western India. The prestige of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha can be gauged from the fact that it played a major role in making arrangements for the first session of the Indian National Congress.

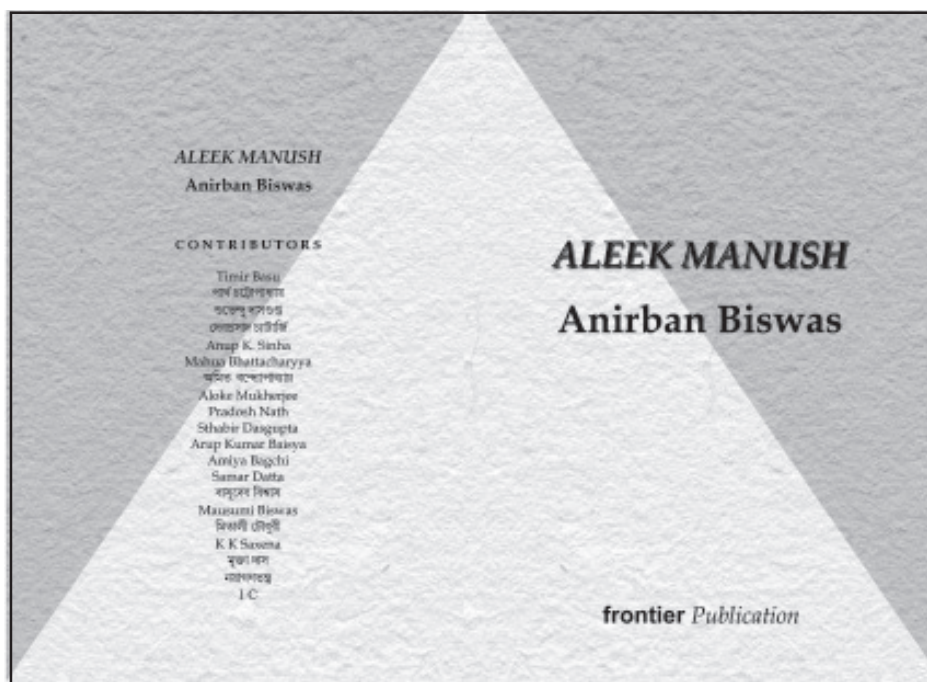
**Visakh S M, Kerala**

Readers are requested to note the changed address (new) of our website

**[www.frontierweekly.com](http://www.frontierweekly.com)**

# A **frontier** Publication

Just Released



## **ALEEK MANUSH**

**Anirban Biswas**

**COMPILATION TEAM:**

TIMIR BASU, ARUP SEN, NABINANDA SEN, TARUN BASU

**CONTRIBUTORS:**

TIMIR BASU, PARTHA CHATTOPADHYAY, SHUBHENDU DASGUPTA,  
DEBAPROSAD CHATTERJEE, ANUP K. SINHA, MAHUA BHATTACHARYYA,  
AMIT BANDYOPADHYAY, ALOKE MUKHERJEE, PRADOSH NATH, STHABIR  
DASGUPTA, ARUP KUMAR BAISYA, AMIYA BAGCHI, SAMAR DATTA,  
BASUDEB BISWAS, MAUSUMI BISWAS, MITALI CHOWDHURY, K K SAXENA,  
MUKTA DAS, NAYAGANATANTRA, I C

Available at:

Frontier Office, Patiram Stall (College Street), Dhyانبindu  
and other book stalls selling issues of frontier.

**Contribution: INR 100**