

frontier

Vol. 55 : No. 42

ISSN 0016-2094

April 16-22, 2023

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

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

In the Name of Ram

FOR THE FRONTAL ORGANISATIONS OF BHARATIYA JANATA Party (BJP) Ram Navami is a grand occasion to propagate their communal ideology and assemble armed goons in the guise of cadres to terrorise minority community people. Religious processions are being organised with a lot of fanfare with the sole objective of polarising people on communal lines. The religious outfits owing allegiance to BJP have been doing it for long as they don't believe in social harmony and cosmopolitan nature of Indian society.

Last year they did it extensively but this year they mainly targeted the non-BJP ruled states, particularly Bengal and Bihar while Modi's home state Gujarat was riddled with some 'minor incidents'. The persons in power in Bengal admitted that this year inaction of a section of police personnel who were on duty allowed the riotous mob to continue rampage for more than 48 hours in Howrah's Shibpur area having a sizeable section of Muslim population. Vandalism, burning of cars, stone-pelting and looting were the common scenario. Incidentally Chief Minister of Bengal who happens to be Home Minister too cannot avoid responsibility by blaming it on a section of police force. Fear was so deep-rooted that many inhabitants had to abandon their homes. They deliberately lead processions in semi-slum areas with provocative slogans inviting stone-pelting and violent retaliation. Nalanda and Sasaram in Bihar witnessed massive violence on Ram Navami day forcing many minority community families to flee because the guardians of law and order failed to stop riot. In north India Ram Navami apart Hanuman Jayanti also serves the purpose of the saffron flag bearers. Panic-stricken people from both communities are being forced to stay inside their houses and housing complexes. Disruption of public transport was the first casualty of communal riot leading to shortage of food supply and basic amenities.

The hate is being spewed by the religious crusaders; the hate speech of most derogatory nature is being made by the saffron jersey holders to vitiate the atmosphere of peaceful co-existence. Why they come in religious processions with swords, pistols and country-made guns year after remains unanswered. The ex-DIG of UP police Dr Vibhuti Narayan Rai, in his doctoral research states that 'the minority community is so cornered before the violence that many a time it is compelled to throw the first stone. He also shows that there are deep biases in the police force'. Maybe this is one reason

why policemen in some cases as it happened recently in Bengal and Bihar remain passive during riots. As per a survey report released by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies trust in police is least among Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis and the poor. In truth violence begets violence and hatred begets hatred creating an atmosphere of permanent animosity and mistrust between communities.

For one thing after communal riots the BJP gains the most electorally. Violence in the name of Ram has a pattern across the country. Even when BJP was not in power at the centre they used to indulge in religious festivity-related violence to address their constituency. The ever-growing hate campaign by the people who appear

to have official patronage and against whom no meaningful and strong action is taken is disturbing. The way they raise issues related to dress code, food, festivals and language is powerful enough to keep the society perennially divided. Perhaps 'this is the worst era of independent India'.

The role of so-called secular parties in fighting the spread of communal virus is so naive that communalists simply ignore their exercise in escapism. They finish their duty by issuing harmless press statements. Sometimes they organise peace rallies in riot-affected localities without really doing much to ease the super-charged situation. A rally or two is no answer to restore confidence of the affected people in their 'secular politics'.

Secularists do hardly attack the economic roots of communalism. Initially it was the trading community that used to support the advocates of communal politics. Today communal outfits have the backing of corporate power. It's a very hard and useful base for the BJP. Only popular movements against the ruling party-corporate nexus involving all the aggrieved of the society could pave the way for a broad-based united front against the divisive forces. And secular parties, including left parties have no idea as to how to mobilise masses in their millions against the communal ploy of the saffron brigade; they simply react to the agenda set by BJP. □□□

03-04-2023

COMMENT

ICC and Hypocrisy

IMPERIALISM DOESN'T BOTHER about shame. This power of shamelessness energises imperialism's business with hypocrisy. The latest example is an arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court [ICC]—based in The Hague on March 17. The warrant of arrest has been issued for Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, and for Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia's children's ombudsman. The charge against them: Unlawful removal of children from Ukraine to the Russian Federation since February 24, 2022.

People from areas bombarded by the armed forces of Ukraine were evacuated to safer places. Among those people were children. An evacuation to safety is the crime! Bombardment of civilian areas for years, since 2014, isn't a crime! Logic of the ICC takes capricious path of illogic; and the ICC's role in imperialism's designs is well-known.

The imperialist microscope and telescope see everything in its fash-

ion, as these like, at near, and to distant. It finds wrong in Russia, but it goes blind in lands ravaged by imperialism.

Imperialist propaganda machine, they call it free media, and all its accessories forget incidents in Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, Syria, Yugoslavia, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia. They forget incidents in Indonesia and Chile. They forget incidents in once apartheid-ruled South Africa.

In all these lands imperialism created havoc—thousands of citizens killed or murdered, maimed, bombed, entire people's life spoiled, environment and ecology ransacked, economic activities turned upside down. But all instigators, planners, organisers and implementers of these murders, destructions and havocs enjoyed impunity. They, who are alive among those folks, are still enjoying impunity. It seems, for them, it's impunity in perpetuation. It's, as if, no crime was there; so, no question, no accountability.

Someone with higher "sense" of liberty and freedom may consider life in imperialism-invaded countries, in countries that turned victims of imperialist conspiracy including murderous coups, and countries ravaged by imperialism with many tools, political and economic, carries no value at all. But what shall be the answer from that higher "sense" about loss of life the people in the US and UK made for invasion, occupation and destruction of the countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America? Who shall take responsibility of those lives in the US and UK?

What comes out, if all other imperialism-destroyed lands are set aside, and a single country—Iraq—is considered? What's the price the people in Iraq paid for imperialist lie?

With that lie, a white lie, a lie told bluntly, hundreds of thousands of its citizens were killed and tortured in Iraq. The lie is now well-exposed, and the trail of destruction is well-recorded.

What shall happen to the liars? Shall those responsible for the killings and destruction be questioned, be issued warrant of arrest, be put on trial?

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There's no response to these questions. The mainstream—the mainstream media and the political arrangement—shall not even discuss the issue.

But, voices of dissent haven't died. Former UN weapons inspector Hans Blix said Tony Blair, many in the UK call him as Tony Beliar, should face a tribunal for Iraq invasion. Speaking on MSNBC ahead of the 20th Iraq invasion anniversary, Hans Blix said, "in principle", Blair and Bush should have faced consequences for their invasion—which is now widely regarded as illegal under

international law. He said there should be a penalty for breaking the "principle rule" of the UN charter—not to "use force against the territorial integrity and independence of other states".

Other than Bush and Blair, there are Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Paul Bremer, and a few more in the gang.

Shall the ICC issue warrants of arrest for these gentlemen?

That business will go unattended as there's the business with hypocrisy. □□□ [Contributed]

28-03-2023

NOTE

It's not the Question of Taking Side

B D writes:

AFTER THE COLD WAR shadow of several decades, the best hopes of ending superpower rivalry appeared around the early 1990s. The assurances given to Gorbachev by top western leaders appeared (deceptively, as it later turned out) to lead in this direction. China, it appeared, could not just live with the increasingly globalised world but prosper in it. United Nations agencies published glowing reports about the 'peace dividend'—with lesser need for militarisation much more resources would be available to end deprivation and hunger at world level.

The sad story of how all these promises were eroded over the next three decades is well-known. While Russia (even under Putin initially) was willing to accept a relatively junior position in the west-led world order for several years, the denial of the option of protecting its self-respect and essential national interests led it reluctantly to again prepare for a confrontation role with the West (which has been irrationally hostile towards Russia for over

100 years now—since the Russian Revolution). China also learnt that its assigned role in globalisation led capitalist growth path was acceptable (to the West) only till its growing economic and technological strength did not challenge western supremacy.

So it was that big power rivalry returned to haunt world peace in a most critical phase of earth's history when international peace and cooperation are most needed to together sort out the life-threatening environmental crisis. With the outbreak of the proxy Ukraine war, a war used by the USA and close allies to weaken Russia in various ways, the hostility between two biggest nuclear weapons powers began to peak and is now worse than in cold war years. Incredibly, around the same time the USA increased several hostile gestures towards China, which is already heavily targeted by the military systems of the USA and its allies. This led China and Russia to come closer to each other than at any other time in recent decades. This also prompted China to seek a wider international role,

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particularly in terms of strengthening ties with countries of critical importance, such as major oil and gas exporting countries.

Thus the world is being polarised along lines of two big power blocks more than ever before in the post-1945 times, with the two big power blocs accounting for a little less than half of the world's population, and with most other parts of the world also getting affected adversely by this drawing up of dividing lines (which may become battle lines).

This is nothing less than a suicidal course of action in the context of the welfare of all life on earth or even its survival, as on the one hand this increases significantly the possibility of nuclear weapon wars which can destroy most life and on the other hand such divisions, hostilities and militarisation will make it impossible to check major environmental problems in time, apart from

increasing deprivations suffered by millions or even billions.

It is common for strategic analysts to devote more attention to which side will emerge victorious, but such analysis becomes pointless in the present context when there are high chances of the entire world getting destroyed by the accentuation of such hostilities in the ongoing phase of world history.

It is common also for thoughtful people to search for the side with the stronger ethical base. As the most dominant power for years, the USA leadership has clearly been using highly unethical means to try to maintain and extend this dominance

(even though in a highly irrational way most of the time). At the same time, the regimes of countries which are emerging as its main opponents are by no means known for their commitment to peace, environment protection, democracy and human rights. While the USA as the already dominant (although weakening and troubled) power behaves often in highly unethical ways, there is no convincing reason to believe that if tomorrow China emerges as the most dominant power, then it will behave in more ethical ways.

Hence being critical of the unethical means used by USA and NATO does not mean or imply be-

ing on the side of Russia or China, or justifying their past and future course of actions. For most thoughtful people the existing situation is not one of taking sides at all, but one of working with commitment and continuity for peace, democracy, justice and environment protection, realising that we are living in times of unprecedented threats when every possible effort to reduce threats and ensure a future of peace and safety must be made at all levels.

□□□

[The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include Planet in Peril, A Day in 2071, Protecting Earth for Children and Earth without Borders.]

REJOINDER

‘Sumanta Banerjee on Ukraine War’

Farooque Chowdhury

MR SUMANTA BANERJEE in his article “Emerging re-configuration of geopolitical forces” in *Frontier* (Vol. 55, No. 38, March 19-25, 2023) misses little information, skips a few facts, and creates a bit of confusion.

Mr Banerjee writes: “Russia [...] started the war” and “Ukraine is retaliating”.

He misses the chronology and a few confessions. For example, he should check:

- [1] What happened with the Minsk agreements?
- [2] What did the German and French leaders said about those agreements?
- [3] How the Kiev authority dealt with the two regions seeking autonomy at that time?
- [4] For what purpose Ukraine was prepared? And, how was that preparation? And, who prepared this?

Mr Banerjee should check with related information from the MSM—the mainstream media or sources,

not from Russian and Chinese sources.

Moreover, Mr Banerjee should check the entire perspective, part of which is NATO—the imperialist war alliance: What was promised during disintegration of the USSR regarding the war alliance—its expansion? Mr Banerjee should check with the information related to the infamous Maidan incident, and imperialism’s role there. And, Mr Banerjee should check with the information related to the Nazis’/neo Nazis’ role in politics in Ukraine.

It’s hoped that Mr Banerjee will not stand for,

- [1] imperialism,
- [2] imperialist war alliance,
- [3] imperialist intervention, and
- [4] Nazis.

With this stand, and with the information, available in the MSM, Mr Banerjee will change his position if he doesn’t like to stand for imperialist geopolitical game.

Mr Banerjee writes: “Refusing to sit [...] for negotiation, both are

sticking to their respective positions and claims.”

Here also Mr Banerjee misses facts. He should check with the following from the MSM:

- [1] What was the role of BoJo–Boris Johnson of the UK—immediately prior to the halt of the Istanbul negotiation?
- [2] What has been written in the Ukraine constitution?
- [3] What were the statements made by the leaders of (a) Ukraine, (b) EU, and (c) Russia?

It’s hoped that, after checking with the information, Mr Banerjee will rethink his comment cited above.

Mr Banerjee writes: “In September last year, Russia’s Putin issued a threat of nuclear retaliation against pro-Ukraine Western powers.”

Mr Banerjee should check what were the incidents(s) prior to that threat?

It’s hoped that Mr Banerjee [1] will be factual, and [2] understands that such threats don’t come from the blue in Ukraine War-like situation. His check with the information will change his position.

Mr Banerjee deserves thanks for telling about Mr Biden’s open declaration of US’ continued military support to Ukraine.

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But Mr Banerjee again misses vital fact: This military support was openly and repeatedly declared months before Mr Biden's Kiev visit; and that support was implemented: weapons worth billions of dollars have already been supplied to Ukraine by the imperialist NATO camp. There were other military supports including providing training, real time intelligence sharing, surveillance, etc. These all were going on for months, long before February 2022; and these were not secret. So, what Mr Banerjee has told is partial, not the full fact.

Mr Banerjee has missed facts related not only to Ukraine. His list of missing facts is a bit longer, as he writes, "they [the US and Russia] are now using small states as proxies".

To take out his own confusion Mr Banerjee should try to prepare a list of these small states, which are, as he writes, being used "as proxies". He will find there are discrepancies in his statement.

Mr Banerjee again fails to be factual, as he writes, "at times", the Western states "express reservations about the need to continue the war."

Can he cite a single statement of these states, and of the EU and NATO leaders that told about their reservations about continuing the war till China proposed a negotiation plan?

Mr Banerjee forms a wrong comparison as he writes: "In contrast, Russia has failed to garner much support from major members of the international community, except China."

He told about the Western states' "reservations" about the war; then, he finds "contrast" in Russia's "failure" to "garner much support from ..." Are the two contrasting? Shouldn't contrast either be between reservation and non-reservation or between failure to have much support and success in having much support? Probably, Mr Banerjee has lost his arguments or facts.

Moreover, Mr Banerjee should again check with the following facts:

- [1] number of countries sanctioning Russia,
- [2] number of countries not joining the sanctions,
- [3] number of countries supplying weapons to Ukraine,
- [4] number of countries not in this weapons-to-Ukraine business.

He may go with [1] the total population of the camp fuelling the Kiev regime, and [2] the total population of the countries not joining the weapons-to-Ukraine camp. He will find this fact in the MSM, and then, calculate it.

He again fails to be factual, as he writes: Russia has gained support from China.

Till now, China has not extended support to Russia in this war.

He again fails to go by facts. Mr Banerjee knows it, but has forgotten to mention that Cuba, Venezuela, Syria and North Korea are among the countries that have supported Russia. It will be helpful for him if he checks with the MSM for the facts.

Moreover, he fails to find NATO-imperialist camp's support to the Kiev regime. He has not noticed that a number of unions in a number of countries are opposing imperialist camp's ammunitions, etc. shipment to Ukraine. Shall he question himself, his analytical power: Why does the imperialist camp pumping so much money and weapons to the Kiev regime?

Mr Banerjee's major problem is with definition. He confuses bourgeois democracy. Bourgeois democracy is not democracy. It's authoritarianism of the bourgeoisie, of the dominating capital. So, he gets busy with defining authoritarian system in the MS, mainstream, way. It's an old debate with the MS scholars, and that has been discussed by non-MS theoreticians with a class point of view long ago. So, here, that

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debate is being skipped. It's just to mention that [1] none supports authoritarianism, [2] authoritarianism in all forms should be opposed, [3] capital's authoritarianism shouldn't be missed.

Mr Banerjee finds China's "regular sabre rattling against Taiwan."

Then, is Mr Banerjee standing for Taiwan's independence, or for the position the Empire has taken? His confusing position is gradually

thickening with uncertainty of its destination.

Mr Banerjee again misses perspective, as he writes, "Sino-Russia led alliance" "resemble" "Nazi Germany-Fascist Italy-Imperial Japan axis." Although he knows history and economy of these states—Russia, China, and Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Imperial Japan—he fails to compare these two groups of states with proper perspectives. Shall he

kindly check with the voting pattern in the UN on a proposal on the Nazis? The voting on the proposal was held a few weeks ago.

With so much distance from facts, and with so much confusion, is it possible to have anti-imperialism stand? And, today, is it possible to be a democrat or democracy-lover without having anti-imperialist position? Mr Banerjee knows the answer. □□□

CLIMATE CHANGE

Workers Exposed to Heat Wave Conditions

Bharat Dogra

AN IMPORTANT PART OF various manifestations of climate change is in the form of increasing heat waves. In India very worrying heat waves have been experienced in recent times, particularly in 1998, 2002, 2010, 2015 and 2022. More generally, as increasing extreme heat events are being experienced almost every year, there is growing concern over their health impacts, particularly in the context of those sections of people who are more vulnerable to heat waves. Hence heat action plans have been prepared in various states, cities and in some cases even at district level.

In a recent review of nearly 37 such plans spread over 18 states, the Centre for Policy Research has stated that more attention should have been given to identifying more vulnerable groups. In this context it is important to note that a large number of workers in India toil for long hours in open space conditions where they are exposed to very intense exposure to sun, while some others work indoors in work which involves high thermal stress without adequate protective steps. Some of these workers and their work conditions are identified here, with the

hope that vulnerability analysis gets more attention in heat plans prepared in future, and further that the concerns of these and other workers who face similar problems get more attention so that adequate preparations can be made in time.

India has a large number of workers in mining and stone crushing units who have been often found to be employed in very difficult conditions in extremely hot weather. If their working conditions, which are already known to be hazardous, are not improved in the coming phase of global warming, the health of these workers can deteriorate very fast. Many of the working sites are known for their extremely hot conditions for several months and this situation is certain to aggravate further in times of global warming. At most of these sites the problems of dust related health hazards is also very high. Many of these workers suffer from silicosis and other dust related health problems which increases their vulnerability to heat waves further. The accident rate at mining and stone crushing sites is also very high. Change in work time, provision of better diet and cool and clean drinking water period, providing rest time and rest place as well

as first aid facilities should be prioritised.

India has a very large number of construction workers who have to do most of their work in the open. Sometimes even basic facilities like clean drinking water are not available. The accident rate in this sector is known to be quite high, particularly in the construction of skyscrapers and dams. In times of climate change, exposure to intense heat and other extremes of weather can increase health problems for workers and heat stress in turn resulting in increase in possibilities of accidents. Hence relief needs to be provided to workers in the form of longer afternoon lunch break cum rest period, rest place which is shady and cool, better provision of cool and clean drinking water, first aid facilities at work sites apart from overall improvement in working conditions. As conditions of construction workers has deteriorated in recent times in terms of income and nutrition, their vulnerability needs all the more attention.

India has a large and increasing number of domestic workers, particularly in urban areas. These domestic workers often work in a number of homes. Even now they frequently face exhaustion due to hard work in many homes and their poor nutrition. Their problems can increase greatly in heat wave conditions as they go to many houses for work, apart from commuting from their

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own home. Helpful laws should be enacted so that their working conditions, nutrition and income can improve. Those domestic workers who come from distant areas need some resting place and time at a cool place which they often do not get at present. Employers should be sensitised for better care of the needs of domestic workers. They should be entitled to government medical care facilities in the places where they come to work, and not just where they live. In addition with some educational inputs and training, they can help in checking wastage of water, energy conservation and reducing GHG emissions in many homes where they work. In COVID and post COVID times, their income has decreased and debts have increased, so they need more attention.

Workers employed under the rural employment guarantee legislation in India are often called NREGA workers in short. Although this law enables them to get their employment near home, they often have to do earth digging and carrying work in intense heat. The exposure to extreme heat can increase with global warming. They can be helped by regulating work hours, avoiding hours of extreme heat and providing better water and care facilities near the work sites. Some provisions for better work conditions are already provided in the law while some others can be introduced to take care of excessive heat related conditions. In areas where flexibility according to local weather and other conditions prevails, it has been seen that health risks have been decreased significantly by starting work early in time and avoiding afternoon heat stress altogether (returning late in the evening if needed for work). However some of the recently introduced, unnecessary attendance changes may prove to be a serious problem for achieving such flexibility in work hours.

Many industrial workers such as steel and iron workers, other metal workers, glass workers and others are exposed to heavy thermal stress. Protective cover should be provided to these workers in times of climate change and resulting heat waves by workplace improvements, rest time and rest place as well as first aid facilities. The working time spent in intense heat conditions, for example in front of a furnace, should be reduced and strictly regulated.

India has a large number of forest workers, employed by forest departments or corporations, or working for contractors or other agencies. In addition an even larger number of persons including a high share of women are engaged in seasonal collection of diverse kinds of minor forest produce (or non-timber forest produce) including fruits, seeds, leaves, flowers etc. for self-consumption as well as for sale. In the case of many tribal communities, forest-produce gathering is still a very important source of livelihood even though this is being eroded all the time by hostile laws and rules, hostile officials, depletion of forests and exploitation by traders.

To the extent that climate change may have an adverse impact on certain types of forests and trees, some of these livelihoods may face more threats in times of climate change. What is even more likely is that forest workers and forest produce gatherers will suffer much more from the intense heat and heat wave conditions. More protective conditions in the form of readily available cool and clean drinking water and resting places for afternoons will have to be created near work sites with first-aid facilities for tackling dehydration and related conditions and/or some facilities can be provided for forest workers at forest department buildings that already exist. A rest place with essential provisions

can be set up within a forest areas where needed. Due to their experience of working in forests, these groups can also contribute greatly to increasing green cover.

India's cities have a large number of rickshaw and hand cart pullers. They lead a precarious life with many problems and risks, and these are likely to increase in times of climate change. Shady waiting places with clean drinking water and better access to health care will help to reduce some of these problems. Although neglected, rickshaw and cart pullers contribute to reduction of GHG emissions.

Sanitation workers have been among the most neglected in India and face several health risks. Their health problems are likely to increase in heat wave conditions and they need access to health care as well as first aid close to their working place.

Farm workers and farmers will invariably face more heat stress during most months while working on farms. While farmers are relatively more free to decide their working hours, this cannot be said of many farm workers who may be asked by their employer to toil even in conditions of heat stress particularly when it is a busy season. Hence farm workers need better legal protection.

The number of these vulnerable groups is certainly much more. Migrant workers are certainly more vulnerable, as indeed are homeless people. There is need for advance protective preparations so that the coming difficulties can be better faced with less harm. The number of destitute or nearly destitute people on the streets can be quite high in several cities and they too will need a more caring attitude in times of increasing heat stress. □□□

[The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include Planet in Peril, Man over Machine and Protecting Earth for Children.]

A REPORT

APEA Annual Conference

I Satya Sundaram

THE 39TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE of Andhra Pradesh Economic Association (APEA) was held at SV University, Tirupati, under the auspices of the Department of Economics, on 27th and 28th March, 2023. The Organising Secretary was Prof D Krishnamoorthy. At the Inaugural Session, President of the Conference, Prof R Sudarsana Rao, former Vice-Chancellor, Vikram Simhapuri University, Nellore, Andhra Pradesh, underscored the need for maintaining fiscal balances between the Centre and the States. 'Too much dependence of the states on the Centre is not desirable', he added.

Prof K Jothi Sivagnam, Member, Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission, Chennai, observed that 'Governments will be efficient, if they are close to people'. In the sphere of public expenditure, the States' share is 2/3. But, in the sphere of revenue, the Centre's share is 2/3. Prof Jothi highlighted the need for strengthening State finances.

Prof S Rathnakumari, Chairperson, 5th State Finance Commission, Government of Andhra Pradesh, stated that strengthening finances of local bodies was needed to successfully implement welfare programmes.

Prof D Harinarayana, former Director, School of Distance Educa-

tion, Andhra University, presented the nuances of international trade. He said, 'there are benefits of trade, but the developing countries are not getting their due share. This should be corrected'.

The Conference discussed three themes: 1. Acceleration of economic growth in India, with special reference to Andhra Pradesh. 2. Implications of National Education Policy 2020. 3. Issues in Economic Development of Rayalaseema Region.

The COVID-19 hit hard the Indian economy. The growth rate was only 4.2 percent in 2019-20. It was 8.7 percent in 2021-22. It may be around 6 percent in 2022-23. The social safety nets continue to be tenuous. There are many problems like poor infrastructure and delay in the completion of projects. Only 12 percent of population faces acute poverty. Yet, malnutrition is widespread. In the Global Hunger Index, India got a rank of 107 out of 121 countries. The failure on the employment front is not to be missed. India has to accelerate economic growth by stepping up capital expenditure.

In Andhra Pradesh, around 60 percent of the workforce depends on agriculture. Yet, agriculture labourers have enough employment only in some regions.. The MGNREGA is poorly implemented. However, some schemes like skill promotion and organic farming performed well. The vast natural resources are not properly utilised. Moreover, the state suffers from poor investment as it could not decide on the capital city. The social sectors like education and health remain neglected. All sectors function in a climate of uncertainty.

Even the panchayats are pulverised.

Education in India suffers from poor quality at all levels. The NEP 2020 is a vision document. It is considered a game changer. It is holistic, multi-disciplinary, flexible and skill-oriented. It lays stress on early childhood care education. NEP 2020 put forward some useful proposals --10+2+3 has been replaced by 5+3+3+4 (giving importance to pre-primary education), multi-disciplinary higher education, cluster of colleges and inviting foreign university campuses.

However, educationists are not happy with some proposals--starting schooling at the age of 3, inviting foreign university campuses when India's own colleges and universities are facing formidable problems, and no clarification on issues relating to implementation.

The Rayalaseema is a backward region. It has been neglected by all Governments. No doubt there is an increase in food grains output, but the net area sown declined, cropping intensity remained stagnant. Industrial development is also very poor. The government has to declare Rayalaseema as a backward region, invite investments and offer various incentives.

Prof K Muniratna Naidu, former member, A P State Finance Commission, observed that in a country like India, 'inclusive growth is important, and the agriculture sector has to play a key role in achieving the goal'. Prof N V Narayana, former Professor, Department of Economics, SV University, said no government should neglect values. Neglect of values will have adverse impact on economic growth. Also, it means dis-respecting environment.

The APEA was affected by COVID-19. It wants to enlarge the membership and also start a research-based journal. □□□

For Frontier Contact

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SHABARS OF PURULIA

From Hunting to Farming

Sukanta Sarkar

CARS ARE RUNNING FROM Rajnowagarh to Kuda along the high-low road. A little before entering Kuda village, Bhim Chandra Mahato showed the newly planted tomato saplings on several bighas of land and said, 'Brihaspati earned 75 thousand rupees by cultivating tomatoes on this land last year. That year, during the summer, watermelons were sold for lakhs of rupees. Apart from tomatoes, cabbage and other vegetables were also cultivated on that land.' Brihaspati means Brihaspati Shabar. Kuda is a hamlet of Shabars. This is also called Shabar Tola. Bhim informed that apart from Brihaspati, Nakul, Lakshman and Vinod Shabar of Boro village of Manbazar-2 block have achieved significant success in small scale farming. They have grown a lot of cucumbers and brinjals. These vegetables are being sold at a good price in local markets.

As Brihaspati has shown speciality in tomato and cabbage cultivation, Ajit Shabar of Makrakkeni in tomato, Gurupad Shabar of Bangathupi in kopi, Anil Shabar of Popo village in Bandwan cabbage, Cauliflower, Chotulal Shabar of Mrigchami in tomato or Mahadev Shabar of Phuljhari eggplant, Satyaban Shabar of Turang in Barbati, Tulu Shabar of Janara in green chilli. The Shabar community has responded positively to the mainstream society.

Although the Shabars are originally forest dwellers and hunters, the forest rights were taken away from them a hundred and fifty years ago. They never did the farming. Even if the rights of the forest were taken away, no one thought how the

Shabars would survive! Today, 150 years later, the descendants of those same people are growing crops in the rugged and hard soil of Purulia. No government initiative has been seen or worked to bring the forest-dependent Shabars into cultivation. Yet today they are good cultivators as Brihaspati and others have shown.

164 Shabar Tolas of Purulia are changing the landscape of drought-hit Purulia in a small corner in their own way. Life is changing. The Pashcimbanga Kheria Shabar Kalyan Samiti (PKSKS) started this process for the last fifty years. As the day progresses, the speed of conversion is increasing by leaps and bounds. After the 'forest rights' of the once forest-dwelling Shabars were taken away first by the British and then by the native government, this hunter-gatherer tribe otherwise notified as 'criminal tribe' by the British, found itself in dire straits. They lived for ages by hunting in the forest and eating fruits. During the British period, the life of the Shabars became endangered due to the ban on entering the forest. Then in 1871 the name of Shabar was included in the list of 'criminal aborigines' published by the British government. In other words they were declared a 'criminal tribe'. Since then, the oppression of the state and other high caste people on the Shabars began. After independence, in 1952, the name of the Shabars was officially removed from the list, but in practice the local administration and other castes saw the Shabars as 'criminals' and the police used to arbitrarily arrest the Shabars for various crimes in the area and tortured them. It became a normal occurrence to beat the

Shabars without evidence when there was a robbery in the area. This custom continued until a few decades ago.

Gopivallabh Singhdeo of Rajnowagarh, 35 km from Purulia town, teacher by profession was the first in the '60s to stand by the Shabars of the area. He came forward not only to protest but also to remedy the arbitrarily arresting Shabars and torture. Gradually his work spread to all the Shabar Tolas of the district. In 1968, Gopivallabh formed Pashcimbanga Kheria Shabar Kalyan Samiti with Naran Shabar, Chunaram Shabar, Nanda Shabar, Budhan Shabar of Dumurdi, Haradhan Shabar, Shambhu Shabar of Babuizor, Shuku Shabar of Balkadi and Madan Roy of Deorang village. Since the formation of the PKSKS or Association, the life of the Shabars of Purulia started to change little by little.

Gopiballabh became a defender in stopping the police brutality on Shabars. Later, in the early '80s, he talked to noted writer and social activist Mahasweta Devi as advised by Subodh Basu Roy, a writer and the then principal of Purulia College. Prashant Rakshit who is now the Director of Pashcimbanga Kheria Shabar Kalyan Samiti. Earlier, Mahasweta Devi worked with Lodha

For Frontier Contact

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Shabars and Badhua Mazdoors in Daltonganj which is under present-day Jharkhand. In 1983, Gopiballabh invited Mahasweta Devi to work among the Shabars in Purulia. He said to Mahasweta Devi, 'I want your pen.' Gopiballabh and Mahasweta Devi organised Shabar Mela in 1983 to unite the tribals to prevent injustice and torture on Shabars. Mahasweta Devi was called the 'mother of Shabars' in that Shabar Mela.

Not only to stop the injustice and torture of the Shabars, the Samiti began to pay more attention to teaching the Shabars farming and training them in manual work. Besides, to provide education for Shabar children, Mahasweta Devi's writings and initiatives made the entire state aware of the plight of the Shabars. Many famous and anonymous individuals and organisations came forward to the side of Pashcimbanga Kheria Shabar Kalyan Samiti. 'Shabars should not only be given legal assistance, their dignified living is possible only when they become self-reliant in their own labour and intelligence. Therefore, the Samiti insisted on making the Shabars interested in agriculture,' continued Prashanta, 'it was not a very easy task'.

Traditionally, the Shabar people have no connection with agriculture. The biggest problem for them was the question of land. Where to farm? Shabars do not have their own land. Cultivation was started in the fallow land left by the forest department. For that, basic training in farming has also been given to several families. In addition, the fight for agricul-

tural land started by the PKSKS. And it is going on still.

Judging by the success of the Brihaspati Shabar in farming, there is no reason to think that all the Shabars of Purulia are prosperous agriculturists! The truth is not promising at all. Most of the people tried to resort to farming but could not really grasp the traditional agrarian practice. In Purulia's 164 Shabar Tolas, 3,176 Shabar families have a little more than 12,000 population strength. According to Pashcimbanga Kheria Shabar Kalyan Samiti, 1,286 Shabar families are engaged in farming. Not even for the whole year. In this context, Prashanta said, 'there is a lack of water here. Rainwater is the only source for farming. And rainwater harvesting is not possible more than once a year. No family survives the whole year after farming once. And besides, no one cultivates much land. Because most of them do not have their own land. They cultivate in the land of the the forest department. During the Left Front period, due to Operation Barga, 826 acres of Khas land or vested land was given to some Shabars, but most of it is not cultivable.

Farming is the way of liberation of today's Shabars. Keeping this fact in mind, Pashcimbanga Kheria Shabar Kalyan Samiti encourages the Shabars in agriculture by providing indigenously prepared fertilisers from grain seeds, neem, tobacco leaves etc. The Samiti is giving a 'calendar' of vegetable cultivation by verifying the market price of any vegetable at any time so that the farmers can get better prices for the vegetables they produce. The success of Brihaspati, Ajit, Satyaban in farming has encouraged most of the Shabar society, but not all are getting the opportunity to farm. Most do not even dare to cultivate the land left by the forest department because of police reprisal. There is

no initiative at the government level to solve the problem faced by Shabars in cultivating forest land. However, after taking away the forests from the forest dwellers, it is the responsibility of the state to provide them with alternative livelihood. The state cannot avoid that responsibility. It is the duty of the State to give land in lieu of forests to the Shabars or other forest dwellers whose forests have been taken away.

In the 'Forest Rights Act 2006', the rights of the forest-dwelling tribals have been recognised, but till date the Shabars or any other tribal people have received nothing. Rather, the central government took the initiative to take away the rights granted to forest dwellers by the Forest Conservation Rules in June last year. Anyway, let's get back to the Shabars of Purulia. Even though the forest hunters bring the Shabars to the farming yard, they do not allow the Shabars to be kept in agriculture due to lack of land. As a result, many of the Shabars are migrating to other states in search of work. There they are forced to work as day labourers. Due to lack of land, lack of work, Shabars are also migrant workers today. Gopivallabh, Maheshweta Devi, Prashanta or Jaldhar Shabar, the secretary of the Samiti, thought of emphasising the education of Shabar children to combat poverty. But, if forced to live like a nomad instead of settling down with a family based on guaranteed income, how can parents teach their children education! No nation can stand up if it is deprived of food insecurity, lack of nutrition and lack of education. Keeping this reality in mind, the Pashcimbanga Kheria Shabar Kalyan Samiti is giving the highest priority to the land ownership demands of the Shabars. This demand of the Shabars is not only theirs, but the right of all the forest dwellers. □□□

For **Frontier** Contact

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DEFENCE-ORIENTED ECONOMY

India's Military-Industrial Complex

Ramakrishnan

INDIA'S SHIFT TO A DEFENCE-oriented economy, with increasing role for the private sector, was embedded in the 2023-24 Budget. The slogan of 'Aatmanirbhar' or 'indigenous' in Defence was a camouflage. The Defence sector is increasingly a happy hunting ground for private sector, Indian and foreign, Adani being a major beneficiary.

The Budget session of the parliament was washed out, like always, with little discussion on the Budget itself, in particular the Defence allocations. Instead, 'anti-national Rahul Gandhi', and the Adani scam, hogged the headlines. Neither side is interested in bringing out some crucial issues. It is the Constitutional duty and the right of parliament to discuss this, but there was never any serious discussion on the huge defence allocations.

India ranks at 132 in HDI, but SIPRI says India ranks at 3, in world military expenditure 2021. It is No. 2 if military expenditure as a proportion of GDP is taken as the basis. In real value terms, it is around 2% of GDP that is going up.

Comments and discussions on the budget lamented how social sectors, education, health, welfare etc are accorded low priority. They often missed to note the huge defence component—around Rs 7.6 lakh crore, NOT Rs 5.94 lakh crore, as shown officially—and its character of serving vested interests, both of which are concealed by the government and the media. The huge budget includes amounts meant for defence sector, but shown under different accounts like those of ministries of Home, Space, R&D and Atomic Energy.

Rs 1,27,756.74 crore, allocated

to the Central Armed Police Forces under Home Ministry (with total allocations of Rs 1,96,034.94 cr, up from Rs 1,85,776.55 cr in 2022-23) are in fact part of defence. With a total strength, of over 10 lakh, they (CRP, BSF, SSB, ITBP, Assam Rifles etc) are no different from the army that has around 15 lakh troops...all of them are deployed not only along the borders, but also to suppress people fighting for their rights. The Special Protection Group (SPG), which protects the prime minister, has been allocated Rs 433.59 crore in comparison to Rs 411.88 crore given in 2022-23.

Rs 3636.66 crore for police infrastructure, Rs 3,750 crore for modernisation of police forces, Rs 2780.88 crore has for "security-related expenditure", Rs 350.61 crore for maintenance of border check posts and Rs 202.27 crore for Modernisation Plan IV for CAPFs...must all be added to Defence.

With a current stockpile of around 160 nuclear warheads (2022 estimate), with a range of up to 8000 km, India has its own share of weapons of mass destruction. But that could not prevent Kargil. Most of the funds under the Head atomic energy (Rs 26000 cr,) are meant for the nuclear weapons programme. So is the case with Rs 12,554 cr allocated for Space that includes ISRO and rockets. Adding up all the above—that is how SIPRI calculates—the real Defence budget is around Rs 7.6—NOT 5.94 lakh crore.

The government has its own alibis for such a huge allocation, China threat being its main, lame, and chauvinistic argument. Instead of

exposing this, the Opposition vies with the ruling party in chauvinism.

The Defence Ministry in a statement on March 16 spoke of a huge Capital Acquisition: "Including today's proposals, the total AoN (Acceptance of Necessity) granted for Capital Acquisition in the Financial Year 2022-23 is over Rs 2.71 lakh crore, out of which 99% of the procurement will be sourced from Indian industries. Such quantum of indigenous procurement will galvanise the Indian industries towards achieving the goal of Aatmanirbhar Bharat".

Minister of state for Defence Ajay Bhatt, replying to a question in Rajya Sabha, earlier said:

"The Indian government has set a target of achieving defence manufacturing worth Rs1,75,000 crore, including defence exports of Rs 35,000 crore by 2024-25. He said the value of production undertaken by private companies and state-run defence manufacturers in 2021-22 was Rs 86,078 crore while the amount was Rs 88,631 crore in 2020-21 and Rs 63,722 crore in 2019-20."

"Further, the DRDO has undertaken 50 mission mode and technology development projects worth Rs 23,722 crore in the last three years for development of indigenous weapons and technologies," he said.

The above report shows that the most dynamic manufacturing activity, as also R&D, in India appears to be in the Defence sector.

It is notable that with FDI beyond 50% allowed in defence, the private sector is given a lion's share, aided by the public sector that is being made a handmaid subservient to the former.

Bhatt said the modernisation of armed forces to meet future challenges is a continuous process based on the long-term integrated planning process. Thus it is indeed a shift.

According to a report released by the SIPRI on March 13, India has “once again emerged as the largest importer of weapons” and it accounts for almost 11 per cent of all such international imports of different military equipment. The report has compared the trend based on five year blocks–2013-2017 and 2018-2022 and has indicated that “India was the world’s largest importer of major arms in 2018-22.” (financialexpress.com, March 13, 2023).

The minister also said the value of defence exports in 2021-22 was Rs 12,815 crore while it was Rs 13,398 crore till March 6 in the current fiscal. The value of production was Rs 50,499 crore in 2018-19 and Rs 54,951 crore in 2017-18.

An agrarian India last year imported edible oils, raw or processed, worth around Rs 1.5 lakh crore, and pulses worth Rs 16,500 cr. It celebrates defence exports, indicating the neglect of the farm sector and revealing the inverted priorities.

The annual acquisition plan, Bhatt said, is based on requirements of the services etc and also “emerging technologies” which implies it meets the needs not merely of defence but of capital.

Manufacture, exports, imports of defence items are very much in the daily news. They indicate a shift to a Defence-oriented economy. Given that most of it involves hitech, the Defence manufacturing sector has little employment potential either.

This shift to a defence-oriented economy, with a jobless growth, a big drain, is deleterious to the interests of the country, its economy, environment, the people and peace too.

It was of course started during

Manmohan Singh era of Congress, but quickened by Modi regime. Defence sector, it needs to be stressed, is no holy cow; it has become a man-eater. It serves merchants of death and destruction who regard the people as ‘voting cattle and cannon fodder’.

For big capital, native and foreign, it is a lucrative business like any other with its own share of corruption, middlemen, cronyism, scams ranging from guns to coffins to Rafael aircraft, involving billions of dollars.

Many of these defence sector scandals include allegations related to bribery, and the alleged involvement of middlemen, termed as lobbyists, or arms dealers. Many former military officials are engaged in the job, some not so openly. No file can move without connivance of the Defence officials, though politicians are in the focus.

V K Singh, a former Indian Chief of the Army Staff, now a Cabinet Minister, once stated that the reach of lobbyists within the Defence Ministry extends to the level where agents have access to classified intelligence and know the inner workings of the ministry.

Now with enhanced role for private sector it will be worse. The security claims to oppose China are mere alibis when the whole sector is thus open to private business groups, native and foreign, and when all data and information are commodities.

According to the CBI, the three largest and most powerful arms dealers are Vipin Khanna, Sudhir Choudhrie and Suresh Nanda- all accused in several defence scandals, and their commissions from arms deals could be up to as high as 15%.

Pakistan, apart from China, has been a factor for these Indian hawks to stir up jingoism.. Global arms lobbies however always promoted conflicts and arms race in the subconti-

nent. Siachin for long wasted resources on both sides, which still continues. A political solution to the Kashmir problem is never allowed to fructify.

Ministry of Defence issued a statement on March 16, 2023:

“A meeting of Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), held on March 16, 2023 under the chairmanship of Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh, has accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for capital acquisition amounting to over Rs 70,500 crore under Buy Indian-IDD (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured). Out of the total proposals, Indian Navy proposals constitute more than Rs 56,000 crore, which largely includes indigenous BrahMos missiles, Shakti Electronic Warfare (EW) systems, Utility Helicopters-Maritime etc...

“Including today’s proposals, the total AoN granted for Capital Acquisition in the Financial Year 2022-23 is over Rs 2.71 lakh crore, out of which 99% of the procurement will be sourced from Indian industries. Such quantum of indigenous procurement will galvanise the Indian industries towards achieving the goal of Aatmanirbhar Bharat”.

“While this additional procurement of BrahMos missile system will enhance the maritime strike capabilities & Anti-Surface Warfare Operation, the addition of Utility Helicopters will multiply the operational readiness of the Indian Navy in the domain of Search & Rescue operations, Casualty Evacuation, Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief (HADR). Similarly, Shakti EW systems will equip and modernise the frontline Naval ships to counter any Naval Operations by the adversaries,” the Ministry’s statement further said.

It is far fetched as there is no such naval threat. Real reasons are elsewhere : India is being a junior partner in Asia-Pacific Strategy of USA. All this is not meant merely for ‘defence’

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of India. It is more a business opportunity for billionaires, for merchants of death, Indian and foreign.

The defence allocations are part of the “Runway to Billion Opportunities” as highlighted in the Aero India 2023 the PM Modi inaugurated last February. The country which was the biggest defence importer for decades now exports defence equipment to 75 countries, the PM said: “India has rejuvenated its defence sector in the last 8-9 years. We just consider this to be just the beginning. We aim to take defence exports to \$5 billion by 2024-25.”

It is a new phase where ‘defence’ is made into an engine of growth, with an increasingly big share to the private sector: Defence Minister termed the Union Budget of 2023-24 growth-oriented. He has said this will help in making India a \$5 trillion economy within a few years.

Soviet Union as a super power had it, and it was one factor for Soviet collapse. America has been at it no doubt, the military-industrial complex thrived at the cost of people within

USA and across the globe. One can also see the Defence expenditure is one that is not hit by the pandemic. An earlier report showed how it helped the private sector last year.

About 50 Indian companies in the private sector have contributed to defence exports to 75 countries, including some in Europe. Thus ‘Defence’ is now business too, the gullible patriots need to be told of this harmful shift over the years, now faster under Modi.

“The Indian Defence sector, the second largest armed force, is at the cusp of revolution. Defence exports grew by 334 per cent in the last five years; India now exporting to over 75 countries due to collaborative efforts,” Press Information Bureau (PIB) mentioned in a tweet.

The beneficiaries included many in the private sector: Ashok Leyland Defence Systems, Larsen & Toubro, Reliance Naval Shipyard in partnership with MDL, Mahindra Aerospace, Mahindra Defence Systems Ltd, BrahMos Aerospace, Aditya Birla Aerospace & defence Pvt Ltd.

But now Adanis who entered De-

fence sector late in 2017, allegedly backed by Modi, are rising fast and going for a kill. They are entering sensitive areas, for the first time, hitherto not open to Indian private sector.

Adani Defence has established India’s first unmanned aerial vehicles manufacturing facility, India’s first private sector small arms manufacturing facility and is currently in process of setting up India’s first comprehensive aircraft MRO facility in Nagpur. With the emerging threat of rogue drones, India has taken an initiative of implementing counter drone systems for both defence & civil applications.

Through its comprehensive ecosystem of Tier I & Tier II capabilities across the defence supply chain, Adani is well-positioned to facilitate integration of larger platforms. ad less

Thus Adanis are allowed deep into the defence sector. And the persons in authority promoted it all. It has an Israeli connection that by itself is another story that needs to be told separately. □□□

[This is a shorter version of an article, in two parts, published on 19/03/2023 in the online magazine, countercurrents.org.]

POLITICS OF FAKE NEWS

Dividing North and South

Apoorvanand

AS PEOPLE KNOW NOW, A person from Jharkhand, living in Tamil Nadu, created a ‘fake video’ appearing to depict violence against him and circulated it with the desire to become famous. He is an individual who was playing a dangerous game. He was fabricating a lie hoping that his people would believe it because of their already existing prejudices against Tamils. Some live in a culture of lies and think that it is perfectly okay to lie if it gets them some benefit.

The person is in jail now. But the people who are responsible for the

spread of this culture of lies are free.

Those who spread this false story all over the country were mainly leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from various states. Also active were the Hindi media platforms who published this news prominently. They can also be treated as part of the larger Hindutva network of which BJP is the leader.

Along with the rumours of attacks, the news that Bihari workers are fleeing Tamil Nadu due to fear of violence has also proved to be false. It was found that like every year, this year too on the occasion

of Holi, they were going to their homes to celebrate the festival. One should all thank Mohammed Zubair of Alt News for busting this fake news. Single handedly, he prevented possible violence due to this rumour.

In addition to creating violence, the fake news had the potential of increasing suspicion and distance between the Tamil and Hindi regions. Due to the alertness of fact-checkers like Zubair, people have been saved. Zubair has, in the process, snatched a weapon from the hands of BJP and Hindutva to spread hatred against Tamil Nadu.

One would have expected that newspapers and other mass media thereafter launch criticism against BJP leaders for their irresponsible rumour mongering. That they ask

their readers and viewers to be careful when the BJP tells them something. But this was not done. Instead, the media put out general advice for all political parties to work together for the safety of workers from other states in Tamil Nadu. It is everyone's job to allay their fears, they said. A journalist even asked how the Tamil Nadu government would be able to manage this 'crisis'.

Who can object to this assertion that in any part of India it is everyone's responsibility to provide a sense of safety and hospitality to people from other parts of the country or the world?

But that is not the issue now. BJP leaders and platforms created suspicion and hatred against Tamils by spreading false news of violence against Biharis. Many labourers claimed they had heard about violence even if they themselves had not experienced it. This means that the false rumours did have their effect.

The Bihar government was also accused of conniving with the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister while Biharis were being killed in Tamil Nadu. This was an outright lie. But the BJP kept repeating it.

Isn't what the BJP did an anti-national act?

Even after the false news was busted, the suspicion that has arisen among a large section will not go away easily. Many people will still refuse to believe that all it was, was a rumour. Their reasoning would be

that if there is smoke, there must be fire somewhere. There must be some truth in this news, they will think. They will show you old videos of Tamil Nadu leaders in which they are seen mocking Hindi speaking people. The videos must be criticised, but what does the present spread of fake news have to do with it? Can it be justified by saying that the rumours are a response to the earlier speeches of the Tamil leaders?

There will always be people saying that if Mohammed Zubair has busted the fake news, there must be some truth in them—as Zubair cannot be trusted! There would also be people who would particularly like to believe this fake news because it reinforces their own anti-Tamil prejudices. So, the fake news will have a life of its own.

That is why the damage done by the people of BJP is very deep.

It is a conspiracy to divide this country into antagonistic groups. Not only Bihar, but people of Hindi-speaking states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh etc. will also develop a suspicion against Tamil Nadu. This act of the BJP should therefore be kept in the category of most heinous crimes.

After such an act, BJP can justifiably be called a party of those who want to divide India into a thousand pieces. This is not the first act of BJP to create suspicion and hatred among the people of India. A few days ago people heard the Union home minister of the country speaking in Karnataka. He was asking his audience to be careful about Kerala, their neighbouring state.

This attempt to create hatred towards Kerala in the Hindi speaking regions of India is disgusting. But Shah is not the only BJP leader to do so. During the Uttar Pradesh elections, BJP leaders said that Uttar Pradesh has to be saved from becoming "Kerala, Bengal and Tamil

Nadu and that's why it is very important to bring BJP to power." Only the BJP can keep the danger of Kerala away from Karnataka and states like Uttar Pradesh.

The hatred that Amit Shah was spreading towards Kerala through his speech has been instilled in the people to such an extent that when the state was battling the devastation of floods, the Hindutvavadis were asking people to not give any kind of help to it.

Another similar case is that of hatred towards Jammu and Kashmir with the source again being the BJP or the RSS. Violence against Kashmiri people in the Hindi-speaking areas now does not make it to the front pages.

Why is hatred for Tamil Nadu or Kerala spreading in places like Uttar Pradesh? To show that there is not enough 'Indianness' in these territories. Since they refuse to accept Hindi imposition, hatred is instilled against them among Hindi speakers.

It is the duty of Hindi speaking people to keep BJP in power to spread 'Indianness' in states like Tamil Nadu. Hindi people also believe that Tamil Nadu's non-acceptance of Hindi is an anti-India act. Ending this 'anti-Indianness' is nationalism, therefore the rule of the BJP is necessary, goes the argument.

The BJP's propaganda of alienation towards these states is part of the BJP's larger politics of hatred. The basis of Hindutva politics is hatred and that too mainly against Muslims and Christians. But in order to make hatred the nature of people, it becomes necessary to find new objects of hatred and if necessary, to create them. To make this hatred permanent, lies have to be created continuously through which it can be justified. That is why this new lie was created. □□□

[Source: the wire.in]

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LETTERS

Expulsion of Rahul Gandhi

The disqualification of Rahul Gandhi, leader of the Congress Party from Lok Sabha following his conviction in a defamation case raises serious questions about the manner in which Indian democracy is being run today by the people at the helm of affairs. In this case he was given the maximum sentence of two years jail which also raises doubts about the objective of the verdict. Jurists have expressed surprise that the Lok Sabha secretariat worked at such lightning speed to deprive Rahul Gandhi of the membership of the house without even waiting for the higher courts to take a view of the order of the lower court. In fact both the acts, the conviction and sentencing of Rahul Gandhi and his subsequent expulsion from the House bring the judiciary and the people heading the house into disrepute. Whatever be the argument defending these two acts, it is clear that Rahul Gandhi has been targeted for his relentless criticism of the government, inside and outside the parliament. The entire episode, apparently, is not only an assault on the Opposition but also weakens the two pillars of democracy, the judiciary and the parliament. If anything the Opposition has a duty to speak on behalf of the people and make the government accountable for its acts. Democracy dies if all state institutions, including judiciary, are used to disable the Opposition from doing its job by criminalising its political acts. People have seen with concern the constant persecution of Opposition leaders using various investigative agencies and by putting them in jail. The unprecedented disruption of the parliament by the ruling party is disturbing. The role of the presiding officers in not allowing the Opposi-

tion leaders to use the forum of the parliament to air people's concerns is subversion of democracy. The action against Rahul Gandhi has to be viewed as part of defaming and criminalising the Opposition and demolishing the entire democratic structure.

**Apoorvanand, Gauhar Raza,
Shabnam Hashmi
and 1000 others**

Defending Freedoms

People have been familiar with Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP)'s three decade long mission and goals. Dedicated to defending fundamental freedoms and protecting the rights of marginalised communities in India, CJP is facing with the increasingly acute challenges with the proliferation of hate in the public discourse. With CJP's years long experience in tackling this on ground, CJP teams are now constantly innovating, building strengths through human and technological interventions. Join and support all CJP campaigns, be it legal interventions, public campaigns and partnerships. Ensure diverse presence in several more locations by supporting constitutional rights guaranteed to all, including free speech not hate speech, the right to protest, and non-negotiable rights for children and women.

CJP

BJP can be Defeated

According to the survey done by CSDS regarding the 2024 elections, if all the opposition except BJP fights the elections together, then BJP can be easily prevented from coming back to power in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The survey organisation says that if this happens, the opposition will easily get a majority. In fact, this claim of CSDS is based on the seats and vote percentages won by all the parties in the last elections.

In its report, the CSDS has

claimed that if all the parties fight the elections together against the BJP, the BJP may be reduced to 235-240 seats. In 2019, the allies also had a big hand in the seats won by the BJP. Statistics show that if the BJP gets even one percent less votes in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections than in the last election, the BJP will be reduced to 225-230 seats, while the opposition will reach 310-325 seats.

Similarly, if the BJP gets two percent less votes in the 2024 election than in the previous election, then its number of seats will reach 210-215. Another interesting thing has come to light in this investigation, which has given sleepless nights to the BJP. The report says that if five percent of the opposition votes go to any other party, the BJP will be able to reach only 242-247 seats. While the opposition will get 290-295 seats.

Virendra Kumar, Dalit Dastak Divided Society

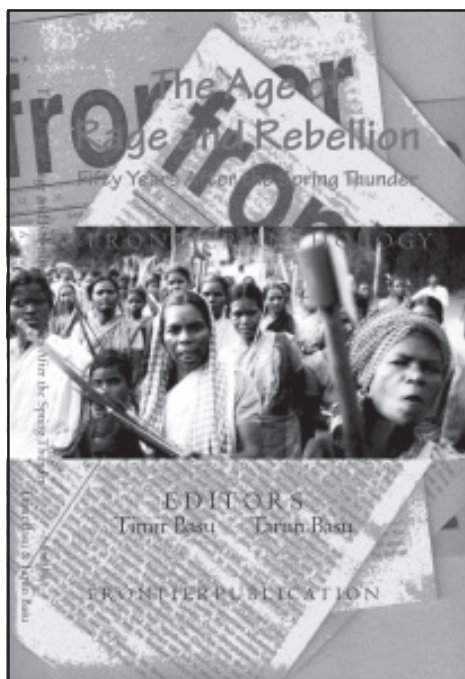
From 1850 to 1936, the British imperial government used to call them by the name of depressed class. On the other hand, if one adds 20 million Dalit Christians and 100 million Dalit Muslims, then the total population of Dalits in India is about 320 million, which is one fourth of the total population of India.

Dalits are the mirror of a divided society. All Dalits are discriminated against; they are deprived of their rights. In truth Dalits are the mirror of Hindu society divided into high and low status. After the Round Table Conference in 1931-32, when the British rulers divided the society communally, they made a separate schedule for the untouchable castes of that time, in which the names of these castes were inserted. They were called Scheduled Castes for administrative convenience. This colonial system was maintained even in the post-independence Indian constitution.

Shashank Dubey

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