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Politics of Cease-Fire

THE CENTRE HAS DECIDED TO EXTEND THE CEASE-FIRE agreement with the three Naga groups for a further period of one year. The Naga question is a complex one that embodies political, cultural and historical elements. The periodic cease-fire arrangement is unlikely to pave the way for achieving an effective solution and securing the ultimate goal of enduring lasting peace. Then the government has no option but to continue this tactical move to keep the game going. Cease-fire means breathing space for both sides to get regrouped. In other words the Naga insurgency is still resilient and the security authorities think twice before launching massive oppressive measures as they frequently do in Kashmir and elsewhere. The recent cease-fire agreements were signed on April 6 with the three Naga outfits—the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-NK, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Reformation and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-K-Khango. All these groups are breakaway factions of Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim and National Socialist Council of Nagaland-K-Niki group. Interestingly, all of them are 'socialist' and yet they never explained what kind of socialism they would like to offer to their people if they succeed in achieving their goal. Unlike some Latin American guerrilla groups they don't subscribe to communist ideology either.

For one thing the Naga insurgency being the oldest has passed through many ups and downs. At one stage they used to look towards China for moral and material support and yet they never acquired any Marxist tag. In the late sixties and early seventies their leaders reportedly met Chinese Communist Party stalwarts including Mao and possibly utilised border areas in Tibet as their rear. It is no more. The Chinese benevolence has stopped long ago. Some Naxalite groups in those days allegedly tried to contact Naga insurgents in view of their proximity to the Chinese Party and the Chinese border as well. No insurgency can sustain itself and maintain continuity without a rear. If Kashmiri militants are able to hold the ground despite huge mobilisation of Indian armed forces it is because they have a solid rear in Pakistan. Without a rear it is not possible for the Naga insurgents to continue their campaign for long. It is bound to make a retreat. And every cease-fire agreement means some kind of compromise.

With so many Naga insurgent groups fighting for political space it has become somewhat easier for the government of India to manage the most

difficult problem in a divisive way. The split within split syndrome is the hallmark of Naga 'liberation movement'—it has suffered so many splits since 1947. In truth the Nagas became vocal about independence even before 1947. What the authorities cannot achieve through force can easily be achieved by engineering splits. Every popular struggle faces such danger and the Naga movement for independence is no exception.

The Union government signed the cease-fire agreement with dominant Naga group NSCN-IM in 1997. In 2021 more than 200 cadres of NSCN-K group surrendered their arms and joined the mainstream. But the stalemate in the peace process continued as the NSCN-IM remained firm on its demand of separate flag and constitution. They want this special right under the Indian Con-

stitution which is a contradiction and the Centre is unlikely to accept it in foreseeable future. Nagas had to fight even for a separate state. The state of Nagaland was formed in 1963 truncating Assam. New Delhi took so much time in granting statehood and accepting the distinct ethnicity of Nagas. Then there was the 13th Constitutional amendment adding Article 371A and consequently providing special protections of customary laws and religious beliefs of Nagas. But after the abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir they are apprehensive that it may happen to them also.

So many accords and cease-fire agreements and yet peace remains elusive. Also, there is the contentious question of continuation of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958. In December 2021 14 Naga civilians were killed by Para-military

forces in violation of 1997 cease-fire agreement.

As things are the Naga issue is unlikely to get resolved within the framework of Indian Constitution if they refuse to budge an inch from the demand of separate flag and constitution, albeit the 2017 agreement between the Centre and seven Naga rebel organisations agreed to a solution without a separate flag and constitution. But most Nagas didn't accept it in spirit. So it was back to square one. The government is simply buying time by deploying the strategy of 'cease-fire'. Meanwhile, the Centre has lifted the notorious AFSPA in some parts of Nagaland but what is needed is to scrap the Law altogether. How, ordinary people are being regularly harassed by security personnel is well recorded and the people of North East know it better. □□□

COMMENT

Sanctions and their Limits

OVER THE PAST DECADE, ECONOMIC sanctions emerged as Washington's preferred foreign policy to deal with a range of concerns, from adversarial governments in Iran and Venezuela to international drug trafficking. Sanctions became popular because officials saw them as a low-cost tool to punish the adversaries. The 2015 Iran nuclear deal, which Iran agreed to after years of devastating sanctions, seemed to vindicate policymakers' view that sanctions could force adversaries into strategic concessions. Under US President Donald Trump, renewed sanctions against Iran and sanctions targeting Venezuela were widely seen as effective in debilitating those countries' economies.

When Russian President Vladimir Putin launched special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022,

the Western response was immediate: the United States and its allies slammed Russia with a raft of sanctions and other economic restrictions. But a year later, the effectiveness of these measures offers important lessons on their limits. Sanctions and export controls have been useful in undermining Russia's financial resources and industrial base, but they have done little to change the Kremlin's strategic calculus.

With the start of Ukraine-Russia war the United States and its allies moved swiftly to impose economic costs, both to signal resolve and, in anticipation of a protracted conflict, to begin to degrade Russia's financial reserves and military might. Within a week of Russian tanks crossing into Ukraine, the United States and its G-7 partners had leveled sweeping sanctions on

Russia's central bank and on several of Russia's most significant commercial banks, oligarchs, and political operatives, as well as on the country's military-industrial complex. Moreover, the West instituted sweeping export controls to cut off Russian access to semiconductors and other key high-tech products.

Sanctions initially rattled markets, with the ruble plunging and Russia forced to double domestic interest rates to stem capital flight. Export controls had a compounding effect on Russian military-industrial production over the course of last year, with Moscow forced to turn to Iran and North Korea for ammunition and weapons, and with other metrics of industrial production, such as the manufacture of cars, slumping. But by late 2022, it was increasingly apparent that Russia had weathered the initial economic storm better than many Western officials and experts had expected: Russia's economy contracted by more than

two percent in 2022, a sharp reversal from the five percent growth in 2021, but a dip not nearly as severe as some initial estimates of a ten percent or greater decline in GDP. Sanctions rarely succeed in forcing changes of strategy.

Unlike the “maximum pressure” economic warfare that the United States has waged in recent years against Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela, sanctions on Russia have been somewhat more limited in scope. Consumer goods have generally been exempt. Dozens of Russian banks remain connected to the international financial system, providing a financial conduit for trade that has not fallen under sanctions. The West has broadly refrained from in-

roducing secondary sanctions that seek to prevent countries such as China and the United Arab Emirates from trading with Russia. Finally, even if sanctions will not alter Putin’s war strategy in the near term, history suggests that the prospect of lifting of sanctions can be a useful incentive over the long term. Years from now, after the Ukraine war is resolved on the battlefield, sanctions relief can still be a useful chip in broader negotiations aimed at reintegrating Russia into the West.

Sanctions are a valuable supporting tool but are rarely going to be a magic bullet or radically alter the decision calculus of an adversary in the short term. □□□

[Contributed]

NOTE

Bilkis Bano Gang Rape Trial

Arup Kumar Sen writes:

GUJARAT RIOTS OF 2002 symbolise a dark chapter in the history of post-colonial India. To put it in the words of Frontline: “...State-wide riots in Gujarat... lasted seven days, leaving over a 1,000 dead and more than a lakh in refugee homes. The victims were primarily Muslims and the attackers Hindus. It is considered India’s worst riot since Partition.” (See 2002: Godhra Riots, [frontline.the hindu.com](http://frontline.thehindu.com), August 15, 2022)

21-year-old Bilkis Bano was gang-raped and 14 members of her family were murdered during the 2002 Gujarat riots. Among those murdered was 3-year-old daughter of Bilkis Bano. Bilkis was pregnant at the time of mob violence.

A special CBI court in Mumbai sentenced the 11 accused to life imprisonment on the charge of gangrape and murder of 14 members of Bilkis Bano’s family. Their conviction was later upheld by the

Bombay High Court. (‘Bilkis Bano Case’, *The Wire*, August 16, 2022)

On August 15, 2022, all the convicts in the Bilkis Bano gang-rape and mass murder case were released from a jail in Godhra after being granted remission by the Gujarat government. Live Law noted in this context: The Gujarat government has told the Supreme Court that it decided to release the 11 convicts in the Bilkis Bano case on completion of their 14 years sentence as their “behaviour was found to be good” and after approval from the central government. (‘Bilkis Bano Rape Case’, *Live Law*, October 17, 2022)

Very recently (March 27, 2023), the Supreme Court conducted hearing of the petitions against the premature release of the 11 men convicted in the Bilkis Bano case. Reportedly, the Supreme Court bench of Justices K M Joseph and B V Nagarathna issued notices to the

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central and Gujarat governments, seeking responses on the rationale and policy adopted for the convicts’ release. It asked the two governments to be ready with the files relating to the remissions (*The Telegraph*, March 28, 2023). Justice K M Joseph, heading the Bench, asked during the hearing: “What is your answer to something which is said to be... a very horrendous act... I have the experience of people coming to this court saying that they have been languishing in jail for ordinary cases of murder, their remission is not being considered. So does the state have an across-the-board, level-headed... policy.” (Quoted in *The Indian Express*, March 28, 2023). Advocate Shobha Gupta, appearing for Bilkis Bano, said that the jurisdiction for possible remission was actually vested with the Maharashtra government since the trial was held in Maharashtra, but Gujarat wrongly exercised the

power to grant remission (See The Telegraph, March, 28, 2023). Senior advocate, Kapil Sibal, appearing for some of the PIL petitioners, asked: “This is not an ordinary case. The matter was transferred from Gujarat to Maharashtra by this court because there was no confidence in the Gujarat government. But now

the same state has decided their remission. What is this?” (ibid.)

The Supreme Court posted the matter for next hearing on April 18, 2023. The alarming fact is that a few days before the last hearing of the case in Supreme Court (on March 25, 2023), one of the 11 convicts in the Bilkis Bano case was found

sharing stage with the BJP MP from Gujarat’s Dahod and his brother, the BJP MLA from Limkheda, in a government programme. (The Wire, March 27, 2023)

The above developments make us apprehensive of state of justice in BJP-ruled India.

□□□

WAR AND PEACE

The Ukraine Question

Ranabir Samaddar

WHAT WILL PEACE constitute so that it becomes a constituent power? This is important if any suggestion to launch a peace initiative has to go forward. It is also clear that banal calls for peace will likely fail and peace will return only with one of the two adversaries finally laying down life on the battlefield. If Russia wins, which is highly improbable, victory (whatever is defined as “victory”) will come at an incredibly high cost to human lives and resources. If Ukraine is victorious, NATO’s eastward march will proceed triumphantly and the East will be now dominated by Western capitalism; world will be militarised even more; and NATO will be the only global military sovereign with more Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan in present time. If Russia has to die, and if that is going to be the case, it will be simply because in this war a multi-national coalition of armed forces and greater amount of resources confronts a single country. Else, Russia will have to inflict significant damage to the collective strength of the coalition to make the latter agree to peace. This again means more violence, loss of lives, greater destruction, and impoverishment and destitution of two countries of an erstwhile united land.

The battlefield position may also

assume a stalemate—sort of the eight-year Iran-Iraq war (1980-88). Exhaustion and economic devastation impoverished the two countries in that war. In total, around 500,000 people were killed during the Iran-Iraq War, and combined financial losses amounted probably US 1 trillion. Yet, the war resulted in neither border change nor any reparation. It too was a sort of proxy war with the US and several European Powers supporting Iraq with financial and political assistance.

There is one more thing to be taken in account when charting out a peace campaign of present time, namely the fact that, democracies are among the most strident war mongers. They are at least as much war mongers as the authoritarian states. The two most war like states in modern history—the United States and the United Kingdom—are the most enthusiastic ones in continuing the present conflict. Peace campaigners cannot have any illusion about war like democracies. They cannot begin on the basis of having only “democrats” in their ranks. Indeed, it will be defined the other way—peace will decide the nature of democracy to come.

The call for constituent peace assumes significance in this context. This is because, it suggests something else than the three prospects

mentioned in paragraph 1. So, the question is: What will be constituted by peace in terms of a post-war scenario other than these three prospects outlined above?

Also, the idea of constituent peace resonates with Leninist history. Lenin’s idea and call for peace during the First World War linked peace with land and bread. Recall the Zimmerwald Conference of 1915, where the anti-war Socialists debated on the path to peace, and the Zimmerwald manifesto signed by Lenin among others laid out the path to peace and the goal that peace will attain. Peace for Russia was achieved through revolution, which linked land, bread, and peace in one call. Peace did not symbolise land and bread; peace articulated the desires for land, bread, and a just society. Yet as people know, civil war continued, interventionist wars by foreign powers were launched, and peace had to wait for a few more years after 1917. So, the question is: What will the constituent peace of present time articulate?

Here, to continue with the Leninist view, one needs to determine the dynamics of articulation by a call for peace. This war is being fought by Russia not for export of capital, or domination over a landmass known as Europe or more correctly the Eurasian space, and indeed if there is any motivation of the other side, one may speak of a goal of conquest of Russia by the Anglo-American West.

Bluntly speaking, this war is over

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security, co-existence of nations, settlement of borders and boundaries and the principle of dialogue among nations in place of a unilateral imposition of order—with all these having deep tentacles in the global economic order. But all these factors one may reasonably think of are congealed in the two most important factors: security and co-existence of nations. In this sense, the current conflict is possibly the final backlash against the Washington Consensus ushered in by 1989 that enabled NATO offensives in several parts of the world, with the Pacific being the latest theatre of western militarism. Strange as it may seem, Europe, which proudly proclaimed to the world that it had solved the question of nationalism and nation states, is once more the battleground in this new turn in the destiny of a global order and global governance. Europe's innocence, genuine or contrived, and gullibility has and will further cost the world hugely. If it has been dreamed by philosophers as a possible land of "permanent peace" or "zone of translation", it is also the most continuing zone of violence and unilateralism. Hence the question of the nation in the post-1989 age, which demands amicable resolution in terms of mutual security, co-existence, non-interference, protection of minorities, and mechanism of dialogue over mutual concerns. A multi-national military alliance cannot be the instrument of ensuring security.

Also, the question is who has the will to negotiate an end to this war? Russia and Ukraine, both have reasons to negotiate, but will the EU, the G7, and the United States want a negotiation? Ukraine war may drag on. Russia has the demographic and industrial resources to hold out longer; it has three times Ukraine's population, an economy much better than Ukraine's, and superior military tech-

nology. At the same time, Ukraine receives from the United States and European allies weapons whose destructiveness is due to the fact that these weapons are linked to an advanced and superior information network that keeps the battle going, working independently of the warrior and will not be fully shared with the warrior. Ukraine war is thus a part of the geostrategic game whose essentials have not changed much in the last two centuries. Hence, the economic and the military elements of present time, however novel one may think them to be, are deeply embedded in the geostrategic questions of access to outside world, secure frontiers and safe borders, arms control and agreed demilitarisation, cooperation and security, mechanisms of protection of mutual interests, end to unilateralism, sharing of resources, and a dialogic order. In short, the call for peace is linked to an acknowledgement of the nation question in the post-globalisation order. The nation question of today is not what it was, say one hundred years ago. There are continuities and discontinuities in the national problematic. Yet in essentials it is a question of the nation in post-1989 word, whose implications have been briefly mentioned in the preceding paragraphs. What is at stake is not simply a broadening of the geography of the national issue but also to reconstruct the network of events of aggression, plunder, military alliances, border changes, suppression of minorities, that marked the processes of decolonisation, and formation of postcolonial states. Ukraine war is a glimpse into a multi-centred global history of militarisation, and unilateralism in post-1989 era.

These developments have pushed the "Ukraine question" to the fore. The principle of self-determination is now linked to all these issues.

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“No support for war and peace negotiation now” is a call that unambiguously demands as primary steps immediate cessation of hostilities and resumption of dialogues (including dialogue over contested areas). Only these two primary steps will be able to arrest the growth of militarisation and politics of military alliances as the mode of intervention. Such a call does not require any central body to be articulated.

Indeed, it will be better if there are many calls on this basis, many forums, and many bilateral or multilateral agreed announcements by the states. It is important to propose such a resolution in the United Nations and it will not harm if such a resolution for peace fails to master a majority there. Like the Zimmerwald Conference such a call for peace will determine who are in support of peace and mutual security and who support unilateralism, militarism,

expansion of military alliances, proxy wars which have depended on mixing a classic war with modern elements (often called a “hybrid” war), sanctions, and interference in other nations. The demand to end the “sanction regime” is important, because economic and trade sanctions are part of modern-day warfare and peace and dialogue cannot co-exist with a sanction regime. The hypocrisy and erasure of inconvenient truths about sanctions cannot hide the inhuman consequences. The tragic deaths of thousands upon thousands of children of Iraq as a result of sanctions including that on baby food is not an instance from a far-off century.

Lack of clarity regarding the goal of a possible peace campaign prevents the emergence in Europe of as strong movement in favour of a just and lasting peace. The fear of peace campaigners of the risk of being

viewed as friends of Putin or communists is holding common Europeans back. In the global South there is an overwhelming mood of neutrality. With the spirit of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) inscribed in its history, the global South is better poised to articulate the peace question at this juncture. The history of Bandung (1955) reminds of the crucial role of the principles of anti-racism, non-interference, self-determination, peaceful co-existence, and dialogue in creating a platform for lasting peace.

Such a politics of peace envisions a new international order in which smaller nations, weaker peoples, broken states, developing nations, and social demands for prosperity, equality, dignity, and justice will find voices that can be articulated. That peace will be what one may call “constituent peace”. □

[Courtesy: INSAF Bulletin]

WILLOW PROJECT-1

Carbon Bomb

**I Mallikarjuna Sharma*

RECENTLY WITH THE US President Joe Biden again giving green signal to the Willow Project for extraction and refining of Oil in the controversial, native communities-inhabited, wild lands of Alaska in the USA, much furore has again arisen in the environmental agitational front there and the Earthjustice and other pro-people environment protection and promotional organisations and groups are on war path once again to stop the project and save the environment and peaceful living of the natives in those lands. Wikipedia briefly informs:

“The WILLOW PROJECT is an oil drilling project by Conoco Phillips located on the plain of the North Slope of Alaska in the National Petroleum Reserve in

Alaska. The project was originally to construct and operate up to five drill pads for a total of 250 oil wells. Associated infrastructure includes access and in-field roads, airstrips, pipelines, a gravel mine and a temporary island to facilitate module delivery via sealift barges on permafrost and between waters managed by the state of Alaska.

Oil was discovered in the Willow prospect area west of Alpine, Alaska, in 2016, and in October 2020, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved ConocoPhillips' Willow development project in its Record of Decision. After a court challenge in 2021, the BLM issued its final supplemental environ-

mental impact statement (SEIS) in February 2023.

Alaskan lawmakers from both sides, as well as the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, have supported the Willow project. On March 13, 2023, the Biden administration approved the project.

Environmentalist organisation Earthjustice filed a lawsuit on March 14, 2023, on behalf of conservation groups to stop the Willow project, saying that the approval of a new carbon pollution source contradicts President Joe Biden's promises to slash greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030 and transition the United States to clean energy.

The project could produce up to 600 million barrels of oil and 287 million tons of carbon emissions plus other greenhouse gases over 30 years, and could adversely impact Arctic wildlife and Native American communities.

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The Willow project would damage the complex local tundra ecosystem and, according to an older government estimate, release the same amount of greenhouse gases annually as half a million homes.”

Firstly, it is essential to know that Alaska itself was originally a territory of the Russian Empire which was sold away to the USA way back in ...almost for a farthing—to put it so.

Here it may also be mentioned that in the background of enormous American sanctions against Russia, and especially with the present Ukraine War raging between Russia and Ukraine, and the US-NATO-EU alliance solidly supporting and enormously aiding Ukraine with all sorts of dangerous weapons and funds, the hostility and animosity in relations between Russia and America has also grown manifold and recently some grumbling and also stray demands were heard from Russian sources about this old sale-for-a-song transaction of Alaska and suggestions were made that Russia again press for restoration of Alaska to its sovereignty.

“Earthjustice is the premier non-profit public interest environmental law organisation. We wield the power of law and the strength of partnership to protect people’s health, to preserve magnificent places and wildlife, to advance clean energy, and to combat climate change. We are here because the earth needs a good lawyer.” The organisation claims to have intervened on many occasions to save the Earth by opposing environmental degradation and damage projects and efforts and succeeded in those interventions to a considerable extent.

As regards its intervention against this Willow Project by launching a lawsuit to bar it the Organisation informs in its introduction to an interim relief seeking petition in—

THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF ALASKA

CENTER for BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY, FRIENDS OF THE EARTH, and GREENPEACE, INC., {Plaintiffs}

v.

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT; UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE; UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR; DAVID BERNHARDT, in his official capacity as Secretary of the Interior; and CHAD B. PADGETT, in his official capacity as Alaska State Director of Bureau of Land Management, {Defendants.}—

Case No. COMPLAINT FOR DECLARATORY AND INJUNCTIVE RELIEF (5 U.S.C. §§ 701-706; 42 U.S.C. § 4332; 16 U.S.C. § 1536)—

1. This action arises from the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) approval of ConocoPhillips Alaska Incorporated’s (ConocoPhillips) Willow Master Development Plan (“Willow Project” or “Project”), a massive oil and gas development project in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (the “Reserve”). The final environmental impact statement (EIS) prepared by BLM for the Project does not meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Project also relies on a biological opinion issued by United States Fish and Wildlife Service (“Fish and Wildlife Service” or “Service”) that fails to comply with the requirements of the Endangered Species Act (ESA).
2. The 23-million-acre Reserve is recognised as a globally important ecological resource. It is home to a diversity of species, including caribou, polar bears, brown bears, muskoxen, and

millions of migratory birds, among many other species. This landscape and its values are central to the livelihood and traditional practices of the Iñupiaq people living in the region.

3. On October 26, 2020, BLM signed a record of decision (ROD) approving ConocoPhillips’ Willow Project. The massive project could include five drill sites, a central processing facility, an operations centre, 37 miles of gravel roads, up to 700 miles of ice roads during construction, 263 miles of resupply ice roads during operations, one or two airstrips, up to 386 miles of pipelines, and a gravel mine site in the Reserve. BLM estimates the Project will produce 586 million barrels of oil, resulting in approximately 259 million metric tons CO2 emissions over its 30-year life.
4. The Willow Project will have far-reaching impacts across the Reserve, the North Slope, and beyond. The Project represents a significant expansion into previously undeveloped areas of the Reserve, including large areas within the ecologically important Judy Creek and Fish Creek watersheds, and areas within the Teshekpuk Lake and Colville River Special Areas. The Project will

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disturb wildlife, destroy wetlands, and permanently alter rural lifestyles and traditional cultural practices dependent on food resources like fish and caribou. The Project will further imperil polar bears that are already threatened from climate change and the expansion of oil and gas development in the Arctic. And the Project's enormous greenhouse gas emissions are inconsistent with the urgent need to transition away from fossil fuels. Developing a massive new Arctic oil formation is a threat to the global climate and an already dramatically warming Arctic region.

5. Defendants' approval of the Willow Project is unlawful. BLM's final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) violates NEPA by failing to consider reasonable alternatives that could reduce adverse impacts, including any alternatives that are meaningfully different from ConocoPhillips' proposed project, failing to accurately describe and analyze the significance of greenhouse gas emissions from the Willow Project, and failing to adequately discuss the magnitude and nature of potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to caribou. The Fish and Wildlife Service's polar bear biological opinion violates the ESA by rely-

ing on uncertain, future compliance with the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). The Service also failed to issue an incidental take statement as required by the ESA. Several of the agencies' failures here—the failure to account for foreign consumption in assessing climate change impacts caused by the Project and the reliance on uncertain, future mitigation measures in the polar bear biological opinion, in particular—mirror those the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit recently held unlawful in rejecting the approval of another oil development project in the Arctic. See *Ctr. for Biological Diversity v. Bernhardt*, No. 18-73400, 2020 WL 7135484 (9th Cir. Dec. 7, 2020). The Court should vacate BLM's Record of Decision (ROD) approving the Willow Project and the Service's biological opinion."

And they requested for the following reliefs in the said petition: "PRAYER FOR RELIEF: Plaintiffs respectfully request that the Court:

1. Enter declaratory judgment that Defendants' decision to approve ConocoPhillips' Willow Project and Defendant Fish and Wildlife Service's biological opinion for the Project was arbitrary, capricious, and/or not in accordance with the law;

2. Vacate Defendants' Record of Decision approving the Willow Project;
3. Vacate Defendants' biological opinion for the Willow Project;
4. Enter appropriate injunctive relief to ensure that Defendants comply with *CBD et al. v. BLM et al.*, the NEPA and the ESA and to prevent irreparable harm to Plaintiffs and to the environment until such compliance occurs;
5. Award Plaintiffs the costs of this action, including reasonable attorney's fees pursuant to the Equal Access to Justice Act, 28 U.S.C. § 2412; and
6. Grant such other relief as this Court deems just and proper. Respectfully submitted this 21st day of December 2020."

There have been some temporary restraint orders blocking the Project from proceeding further and it was expected that Joe Biden's administration would finally settle the matters with a pro-people policy and strict measures against the construction of the Willow Project pipeline which the earlier President Trump administration had permitted with some safeguards, etc. However, the new Biden administration disappointed by granting approval for the Project to proceed with. □□□

**I Mallikarjuna Sharma, Editor,
Law Animated World*

WILLOW PROJECT-2

Protests in the US

By a Correspondent

THE WILLOW PROJECT IN Alaska is now one of the points of protest by the environment-conscious people in the US.

US President Joe Biden has recently approved Willow, a huge oil drilling project in Alaska. But environment activists oppose the Willow, a ConocoPhillips' enterprise. The

giant will produce a peak of 180,000 barrels of oil per day, which is roughly 40% of all current oil production in Alaska.

Environment activists claim: The oil project that would unlock an estimated 9.2 million metric tons of CO2 in a year is driven by Big Oil's greed, and it will cause irreparable

damage to the environment, Arctic wildlife, and the nearby communities depending on land. They remind that President Biden, during 2020 campaign, pledged to ban "new oil and gas permitting on public lands and waters."

There are stakes in the Willow Project in the federal oil reserve roughly the size of Indiana. There is investment, and prospect for future investments.

In this competition of opposite poles, big profit by big oil and weaker

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power of environment conservation, the powerful wins. So, Ryan Lance, chief executive of the ConocoPhillips, said in a statement: "This is the right decision for Alaska and our nation." Go with it, if it is the right decision, as the claim has been made.

Capital claims, whether it is exploiting labour or nature, or the both, capital's interest is nation's interest, region's interest, people's interest. Capital does not consider anything other than profit, expansion. Even, it endangers its life by jumping on a burning furnace if it assumes higher profit is available somewhere in that furnace. Marx told this fact, which is widely quoted, and Marx's finding has not been proved wrong.

In the Willow in the petroleum-rich North Slope of Alaska, it will talk about benefits from job creation, infrastructure build up, and other revenues that will help Alaska's economy.

Under the oil project, three drill sites, a central processing facility, an operations centre, hundreds of miles of gravel and ice roads, pipelines, air strip, and other infrastructure will press the pristine tundra and wet-

lands. Moreover, chillers would be used to re-freeze the thawing permafrost so that ground turns stable enough for continuing drilling. The area is home to polar bears, a threatened species, musk oxen, caribou, and hundreds of thousands of migratory birds. Two caribou herds—the Western Arctic and the Teshekpuk Lake herds—calve and migrate through the area and are a vital subsistence resource for Alaska Native communities in northern and western Alaska.

For the oil's profit-journey, the payment will be made, seemingly, by the nature, but, ultimately by the people, as people collectively depend on nature, unspoiled nature for 1.5% of total US oil production. The North Slope is like an economic lifeline for the Indigenous people in the region, who will get hurt while Big Oil will reap profit. To have that profit, the oil giant would produce the equivalent of more than 263 million tons (239 metric tons) of GHG over the project's 30-year life span. That is also equal to the combined emissions from 1.7 million passenger cars over the same time period.

Not only Alaska, the planet earth will have to pay for profit of the Big Oil.

Together with Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Earthjustice has filed a lawsuit on behalf of conservation groups to stop the Willow Project. Trustees for Alaska has also filed another lawsuit. That was on behalf of Sovereign Inupiat for a Living Arctic and a number of conservation groups. It is, actually, a plea of around 5.6 million people.

The project carries a consensus among the powers that govern the land—the Trump administration first approved the project in 2020. Now, the Biden administration goes with it. No problem between the Republican and Democratic administrations with the nature and life destroying project. It is the consensus among capital's factions.

This is a tale of not only from the US, but a tale from all lands dominated by exploiting capital. The Global South carries many similar projects. The question that yet goes unanswered is people's initiative to resist capital's exploiting, destroying, journey. □□□

WILLOW PROJECT-3

Oil Company and Humanity's Survival

Vinod Mubayi

THE US ADMINISTRATION recently gave approval to the Willow Project, a mega scale oil extraction project in a pristine wilderness area of Alaska at the edge of the Arctic Circle that is expected to produce 180,000 barrels of oil per day. The production and use of this quantity of petroleum will add over 9 million metric tons each year of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide to the earth's atmosphere for approximately the next 30 years. This will happen at a time when the world is expected to halve its greenhouse gas (GHG) emis-

sions by the year 2030 to prevent global temperature rising beyond 1.5 degrees C according to the recently released sixth assessment report AR6 of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) the world's most authoritative scientific body on climate change. AR6 has made clear the grave consequences of the worldwide rise in GHG emissions and the possibility of irreversible changes to the earth's climate leading to large parts of the world becoming uninhabitable should the world leaders fail to change course.

The Willow project is owned by the oil major ConocoPhillips that obtained lease rights for the area located in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A) back in the late 1990s. While environmental groups have criticized the US administration for approving the project, legal analysts have pointed out that the government had few options given that ConocoPhillips held the lease rights to a portion of the NPR-A reserves, and the government would have lost in court if they had tried to block the project and had been sued.

Moreover, while Willow is a major oil development project, it needs to be pointed out that it is just one of many hundreds of new oil and gas extraction projects that were approved

just last year of which many are in the US itself. Indeed, if the fracking of shale rock to extract natural gas that is occurring in the US is included, the US could be the world's leading oil and gas producer along with other major oil and gas producing countries like Saudi Arabia and Norway. In fact, an analysis of new oil and gas projects approved in just 2022 and 2023 in 30 countries reported in the New York Times (NYT) newspaper of April 6, 2023 shows that several tens of billions of barrels of oil equivalent will be produced over the lifetime of these projects, typically 30 years, over and above the current production of oil and gas that is already too high and needs to be reduced to meet climate goals.

In the last year, as the covid pandemic waned, oil company production and profits have literally soared to astronomical levels with the major oil companies, BP, Shell, Exxon, etc., raking in record profits of tens of billions of dollars. This bonanza is expected to continue for some years based on the planned projects that have either been approved or are in the approval chain. As the NYT report quoted above reveals:

"Amid the record profits fossil fuel companies made last year, some also extended timelines for production further into the fu-

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ture, in essence reneging on pledges to transition their businesses, however slowly, toward renewable energy. BP recently revised its plan to cut production by 40 percent by 2030, setting a new target of 25 percent. The company's stock price surged on the news."

Along with oil and gas, the other, dirtier, fossil fuel, coal, still appears to have plenty of life left. Both China and India are expanding coal production and implementing thermal power projects based on coal combustion. Despite the extensive lip service paid to renewables, India opened up significant areas of virgin forest in Chhattisgarh to bids by private investors to extract coal via strip mining, the most environmentally destructive form of coal extraction, that will destroy many thousands of acres of old growth trees. No surprise that Adani won most of the bids or that his power company has contracted to supply Bangladesh power from a plant in Jharkhand that will burn coal imported from Adani's mine in Australia. The latter project appears to have run into some trouble lately from the excessive price of power that Bangladesh would incur under the contract, allegations of corrupt payoffs to politicians and the financial turmoil currently affecting Adani's companies.

One can pause at this point and consider these plans and projects to continue or enhance fossil fuel production in the context of the predictions of the IPCC AR6 report as well as the commitments made by different countries to reduce GHG emissions at various recent COP (Conference of Parties) conferences. AR6 indicates clearly that that even the current rise in global temperature of 1.1 degrees C is causing changes in the climate system in every region of the world including more frequent extreme weather events, rise of sea

level and rapidly disappearing sea ice. The IPCC scientists unambiguously state that by 2025, at the very latest, world GHG emissions need to peak, then decline by 43% by the year 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2050 if global temperature rise over pre-industrial levels is to be limited to 1.5 degrees C. The likelihood of this happening can be gauged from the fact that by 2019 emissions had increased by 12% from their 2010 levels and although there was a fortuitous dip in 2020 caused by the covid pandemic, emissions have continued to grow ever since. A rise in global temperature by 2 to 3 degrees C will lead to irreversible changes in climate, sea level increases that may doom many island and coastal area communities, and temperature levels that could render many areas in the world uninhabitable. South Asia, in particular, including areas of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh are likely to be among the worst affected.

These facts and scenarios are by now well known, and have been discussed at length in scientific reports as well as the media. So, one may ask why are billions, if not trillions, of dollars still being invested in the Willow project and hundreds of similar projects that will produce many gigatons of carbon dioxide and other GHGs over the next decades, which could well drown many portions of the earth's surface and also render large land areas uninhabitable. And why are the social, political, economic, legal and governmental systems of these countries powerless to stop this from happening? Are the profits of the oil and gas companies more important than humanity's survival? Carbon Bomb is ticking. □□□

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THE PRICE OF TECHNOLOGY

Cycle Rickshaw Pullers—a Vanishing Tribe

Sukanta Sarkar

A SMALL ANCIENT TOWN in the western suburb. One and a half million people live. For the past 70-75 years, rickshaws have been the main form of internal or local transport in the town. Cycle rickshaw. In the past few years, auto and toto have made their way from the major roads of the city to the lanes and by-lanes. The fare is low. Speed is much higher than rickshaw. Naturally Auto or Toto is now the first choice of common people for commuting in local areas. The fifty-year-old Bapida, a resident of this town, is in trouble. Bapida means Vishwanath Mishra. But he is popularly known as Bapi or Bapida in this town. Bapida has been plying rickshaw for the past twenty years. Bapida has to regularly send some money every month for the family expenses, for the education of her two daughters and for her mother who lives with another brother. Even three years ago, Bapida's income was more or less Rs four hundred per day. Now it is not even Rs one hundred and fifty. In Bapida's words, 'Five years ago, there were more than five to six hundred rickshaws plying in this town. Now there are less than 100'. Along with Totos, some motorised rickshaws or e-rickshaws are also seen in the town. However, its numbers are very few. But it is not possible for Bapida to buy Toto or e-rickshaw. He said, 'The price of Toto is Rs 1 lakh 25 thousand and the price of motorised e-rickshaw is about Rs 90 thousand'. It is beyond their reach.

In a small town in the northern suburb, Tapan Saha's condition is no better than Bapida's. Tapanda has been running his family for almost twenty years by plying pedal

rickshaw or cycle rickshaw. But, for the last few years, his income has also declined. The area is full of Autos and Totos. 'Whether or not, everyone wants to travel with less money. It also takes less time. So, people don't get into rickshaw. However, the number of battery-operated e-rickshaws in Tapanda's town has also increased considerably. But it is not possible for Tapanda to buy an e-rickshaw. Because, like Bapida, Tapanda also does not have the financial ability to buy an e-rickshaw. Many of the rickshaw pullers who cannot afford to buy Auto, Toto or e-rickshaw have now changed their profession and started selling fish or vegetable from door to door.

Change will come with the improvement of science and technology. Its influence will be everywhere. This is how society progresses. This is normal. New technology supersedes the old and advances development. It benefits all people. But progress is called into question if the new technology harms even a small segment of society adversely and creates unemployment. Bapida and Tapanda are blaming Autos, Totos or e-rickshaws for their precarious existence. It doesn't take much to understand why they are deprived of the benefits of new technology. Blaming technology or banks for this is also completely absurd. The fault is not with technology. It is the failure of the persons in power to bring technology to people who are left behind.

The plight of cycle rickshaw pullers today is not sudden. In the late '80s, with the arrival of the Auto in cities and suburbs, it was said from the government that rickshaw pullers and unemployed youths would be

trained to drive autos. The government also promised to help them to buy Autos by arranging loans from banks. In some cases it was done. But it is insignificant compared to the need. Very few rickshaw pullers were able to buy Autos after training and get loans from banks. However, many of the unemployed youth took this opportunity and bought Autos as well. After a few days, the matter of government initiative in training disappeared like camphor. Autos started running by making routes in different areas of the town. And the income of rickshaw pullers in the area started to decrease. For the past decade or so, Totos have been seen alongside Autos on the road. In the last few years, the number of Autos has multiplied manifold, serving even villages. As a result, the condition of cycle rickshaw pullers or cycle van pullers have become more critical.

People have definitely benefited from the arrival of Autos, Totos or e-rickshaws in Kolkata, Howrah and other cities and suburbs of the state. But, many cycle rickshaw pullers like Bapida, Tapanda are deprived of the benefits of this technology. Why deprived? Firstly, getting loans from banks is very difficult for marginalised people like them. Secondly, apart from banks, it is almost impossible for people like them to take loans from other financial institutions like cooperative credit societies, private lending institutions because of stringent rules and regulations. However, it is easier for marginalised people to get loans from microfinance institutions (MFIs), some cycle rickshaw pullers have taken loans from them and bought battery-operated or motorised e-rickshaws. But, the problem in this case is that interest rates in MFIs are much higher than banks, cooperative credit organisations or other private financial institutions. Hence,

many cycle rickshaw pullers hesitate before taking loans from MFIs as well. The result: no auto or e-rickshaw for cycle rickshaw pullers. And these cycle rickshaw pullers are not getting any help from the government, especially the local government like Municipality, panchayat or subdivisional office, block development office or BDO. Local people's representatives also do not want to be guarantors in disbursing loans from banks. There may be few exceptions. So the hapless cycle rickshaw pullers are in dire straits.

There are trade unions of rickshaw pullers, mostly affiliated to the ruling party. Needless to say, no trade union has stood by these cycle rickshaw pullers during the current crisis. Are unions only for collecting subscriptions, marching or dealing with street harassment or rioting with commuters? Has any trade union in

the entire state played any meaningful role in helping marginal rickshaw pullers to get loans from banks or financial institutions to buy Totos or e-rickshaws? But such a thing is rare. On the contrary, it is known that the rickshaw pullers who bought Toto or e-rickshaw after burning a lot of wood and straw, in most cases had to pay a lot of money while greasing the palms of union leaders to get a place at the Toto stand and e-rickshaw stand.

Marginal rickshaw pullers would not have been deprived of the benefits of technology if Trade Unions had been a little more proactive. If the Trade Unions can find a realistic way to solve this problem of the marginal rickshaw pullers by discussing it at the government level and not only in the political document or in the speeches at the meeting, then the cycle rickshaw pullers would have

benefited properly by reaping the benefits of the technology. But no such initiative is known to have been taken by any labour organisation. Also, central union leaders are known to have taken no steps to stop their Toto or e-Rickshaw Stand Unions allegedly extorting money from new entrants.

For a long time, rickshaws, rickshaw-vans have been the most trusted source of local transport across Bengal, whether it is a city, town or a village. Thanks to technology, Autos, Totos, e-rickshaws have come today. No doubt the general public has welcomed this change. But the promise made by the government to give Auto, Toto or e-rickshaw to the rickshaw pullers in the beginning has remained a non-starter. As a result, thousands of cycle rickshaw pullers are actually spending sleepless nights with uncertain future. They see no light at the end of the tunnel. □□□

POINT OF VIEW

Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology

Sumit Bhaduri

POWER" AS DEFINED BY physics must coexist with time. On the other hand, the power of money, state, ideology, etc. are the creations of human beings. Bertrand Russell even believed that the laws of social dynamics can only be stated in terms of such power.¹ This article examines the intimate relationships between power as defined by science, and these other kinds of power. Going by the history of the last two hundred years, it would appear that any concentration of economic and ideological power increases the level of political and social disorder in society, a dynamic very similar to what is observed in nature. According to Russell social power could be variously classified—naked, kingly, revolutionary, and so on.

Referring to manifestations of social power, like economic power or propaganda, he said that "Power, like energy, must be regarded as ...passing from...one of its forms into...other". The first fundamental law of nature is the law of conservation of energy: energy can transform from one form to another but it cannot be created or destroyed. Physics defines power as the amount of energy consumed, or useful work done, per unit of time. The term useful is important since it carries ideological connotations in a social context. For instance, trying to lift a heavy stone consumes one's energy by generating power regardless of whether the stone moves. The power generated to lift the stone would increase one's metabolic rate and ensure that the law of conservation

of energy is obeyed. If the stone is too heavy and does not move at all, no useful work is done. However, if the intention is to exercise then some useful work has been done. On the other hand, if the person trying to move the stone has a weak heart and is not aware of it or ignores it, the exertion may further damage the heart, or even precipitate a heart attack. The point is nature does not care about our intentions or tell us what is 'useful' and the consequences of our actions are often independent of our intentions. Human beings have transformed energy into power through a variety of techniques. In the early 1780s, James Watt defined one horsepower (HP) as the average power output of a healthy horse in one day. Much later, it was found that the power output from a horse could be as high as 12-15 HP but would last for only a few seconds.² That is, regardless of the source of energy, the effects of power depend on the time

over which it is consumed or released. The enormous destructive power of an atom bomb (A-bomb) is an example. Its power comes from the huge amount of energy stored in radioactive matter which is released in a very short time. The energy of a one megaton A-bomb is roughly the same as that of four trillion light bulbs, each of thousand watts power, turned on for one second. The difference is that in the case of the A-bomb, the stored energy is released in the billionth of a second. Hence the evocative Oppenheimer quote: "brighter than a thousand suns". However, while the original quote eulogised the cosmic radiance and power of Lord Krishna, the "Preserver" of the Universe, the A-bomb's power has become a destructive tool in the power politics of nations.

The generation or consumption of power takes time, and the time scale in nature covers a very wide range. In contrast Economics, supposedly the most "scientific" among all the social sciences uses only 2 time scales—"short run" and "long run". In the absence of precise quantification, "short run" and "long run" must depend on the social context, and this article seeks to examine the dynamics between power operations in the physical and social realms during what the historian Eric Hobsbawm called the "long 19th century", and the "short 20th century".³

The chemical explosives of World War I, the A-bomb of World War II, and the nuclear tests during the cold war era, demonstrated the enormous destructive capabilities of physical power, prompting Russell's observation: "To frame a philosophy capable of coping with men intoxicated with... unlimited power and also with the apathy of the powerless is the most pressing task of our time".⁴

The second universal law of nature, the 2nd law of thermodynam-

ics, brings energy and time together. It addresses how the effects of turning energy into power are dependent on time. In the early stages of the Industrial Revolution the French military engineer, Sadi Carnot demonstrated how, when heat is converted into power to get work done, some of the heat (and therefore power) is always wasted.⁵ The word "always" is important because it implies the irreversibility of time, bringing a historical dimension into science. Essentially, that wasted part gets randomly distributed in the surroundings. Such randomness, or the disorder in energy distribution, is called entropy. Carnot's work was eventually shown to be entirely consistent with the atomic theory of matter and statistical approximations. It was also shown that a lowering of entropy, i.e., the concentration of order in energy distribution in one place, increases the level of disorder elsewhere, the latter being always greater than the former. Sociopolitically, the decade that began with Watt's work, ended in the French revolution of 1789, temporarily replacing "kingly" power with "revolutionary" power. This redistribution of social power followed the same pattern as that of physical power or the 2nd law, in that the combined powers of the monarch and the aristocracy were no match and could not control the increase in the societal disorder or social entropy. What Russell called "the apathy of the powerless" turned into blind fury, unleashing the "reign of terror". The word "ideology", coined by a French aristocrat Antoine Destutt de Tracy around that time, was supposed to mean the "science of ideas". The hope was that with an appropriate ideology, the impulsive anger, or the power of the "powerless", could be controlled.

In a different context, that of the material world, Watt was motivated to define horsepower for practical

reasons. He had been engaged in manufacturing rotary steam

Engines, machines that eventually replaced the horses in a gin-mill to produce power. Due to the easy availability of coal, these machines added enormously to the growth of capital, and the might of capitalism as an ideology. By the mid-19th century, "The Age of Revolution" ended, and "The Age of Capital" with its deep penetration into the colonies in Asia, Africa and Latin America began.³ This confluence of physical power with that of ideological power was most apparent when Britain used coal fired, steam engine driven war ships against China in the first Opium War of 1839. The intended short run effect was to subjugate China through naked power. This was achieved with the occupation of Hong Kong in 1842. The long run effects of the concentration of military and economic power in the hands of a few western nations were many. They began to unfold themselves after about three decades with the start of "The Age of Empire".³

Around the turn of the 20th century the long run effects were apparent. As the power of finance capital became increasingly concentrated, social entropy, economic inequalities, and the geopolitical rivalries between the imperial powers increased. The fragile power equilibrium finally broke down when World War I began. Capitalism temporarily ceded some of its ideological power to those of nationalism and socialism. The Russian revolution of 1917, the rise of fascism in Europe, the 2nd world war, and the revolution in China followed in quick succession. Finally, dropping the A-bomb on Japan and the switching to oil (from coal) in the twentieth century made the United States the world's dominant power and began the decline of Europe's great powers.⁶

Frederick Soddy, a Nobel laureate in chemistry, was the first scientist to recognise the fundamental difference between material wealth and financial products, including money. Soddy wanted a distinction to be made between material wealth and virtual wealth by taking entropy into account.⁷ A few decades later, Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen also drew attention to the entropy problem in economic growth. He compared the irreversible loss of earth's precious mineral resources to the loss of heat as entropy.⁸

Finance capital, or Soddy's "virtual wealth", is given by the difference between the average rate of interest (r) earned by capital and the average rate of growth (g) of the economy.⁹ That ' r ' must always be greater than ' g ' under capitalism is now a well-established fact. In the 21st century as a reminder that history repeats itself albeit by adapting to changed contexts, this has led to an unprecedented level of concentration of financial power in the hands of a few investment banks and technology companies in much the same way the industrial revolution had empowered a few nations. 9-11 The resultant mind-boggling economic inequalities all over the globe, a discernable rise in social entropies in many countries, and a loss of trust in social institutions have harmed science and the scientific profession deeply. Scientists have long been perceived as a part of the social elite. In 1993, an editorial in the journal "Science" pointed out

how scientists were "engaged in building toys for the rich" though "the economic inequities in society remain sharp".¹² Just after the 2020 US presidential elections, another article observed that "almost half the voters had cast their ballots for Donald Trump", adding that the 'anti-science' label for those people "corrodes democracy... and before the present era of deregulation, government agencies ...tended to enjoy greater trust."¹³ This observation is really the crux of the matter. When philosophers say that truth and power aren't mutually exclusive, that each society has its "regime of truth" they refer to the ideology accepted by the "powerless" as the truth.¹⁴ However, when a dynamic social equilibrium is seriously disturbed by "peddling prosperity"¹⁵, it is to be expected that "the apathy of the powerless", would transform into a mistrust of the ruling elites and social institutions. Though the laws of nature discussed in this article lie outside the societal regime of truth, they have a direct impact on what we value and how we behave both as individuals and as social beings. More than 100 years ago Svante Arrhenius, the father of chemical dynamics, tried to quantify the contribution of carbon dioxide to the greenhouse effect¹⁶ and, fossil-fuel energy has been central to geopolitics for nearly 200 years, with after-effects that last decades.⁶ More alarmingly, burning fossil fuels indiscriminately has generated the very real prospect of climate change with

disastrous natural consequences. How that would play out in terms of geopolitics and social entropy only time would tell, but the outcomes are unlikely to be pretty. □□□

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LETTERS

NCERT Books

In its latest review, the NCERT has made some controversial deletions, including some pertaining to the Mughals and Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. The changes have been widely condemned by critics of the Narendra Modi government.

On 4 April, Sahara's main report on its front page was about the changes. The report said a chapter on the Mughal Empire had been removed from the history textbooks and that some poems and paragraphs from the Hindi book were also cut out.

In an editorial on 5 April, the Sahara editorial said only time will tell what consequences these changes in the curriculum will bring, but they will certainly ensure that a generation will be deprived of knowledge not only about the important facts and events of India's history, but also of events in other countries that played a role in shaping the world.

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Children will not only be ignorant of the harmful effects of the immoral alliances, imperialism, militarism and nationalism that caused the First World War, they will also be deprived of the knowledge of the causes and causes of the industrial revolution that changed the world.

Abantika Ghosh
Heena Fatima

Gershkovich

Russian Federal Security Service investigators have formally charged Evan Gershkovich with espionage but the Wall Street Journal reporter denied the charges and said he was working as a journalist, domestic news agencies said on Friday.

Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) said on March 30 it had detained Gershkovich in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg and had opened an espionage case against him for collecting what it said were state secrets about the military industrial complex.

TASS reported that FSB investigators had formally charged Gershkovich with carrying out espionage in the interests of the United States, but that Gershkovich, 31, had denied the charge.

"He categorically denied all the accusations and stated that he was engaged in journalistic activities in Russia."

Gershkovich is the first American journalist detained in Russia on espionage charges since the end of the Cold War.

The Kremlin said Gershkovich had been carrying out espionage "under the cover" of journalism. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has told the United States that Gershkovich was caught red-handed while trying to obtain secrets.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has yet to comment publicly on the case.

A fluent Russian speaker born to Soviet emigres and raised in New Jersey, Gershkovich moved to Moscow in late 2017 to join the English-language Moscow Times, and subse-

quently worked for the French national news agency Agence France-Presse.

Russia announced the start of its "special military operation" in February 2022, just as Gershkovich was in London, about to return to Russia to join the Journal's Moscow bureau.

Guy Faulconbridge
Thomson Reuters

MP Farmers

Thousands are celebrating in Madhya Pradesh as the state government has called off the Atal Progress Way project. The project sought to cover the Chambal Valley with gleaming highways and glitzy establishments—but those who would have been deprived of land, livelihood, and shelter were simply not convinced. It is indeed a moment of victory for the All India Kisan Sabha, which led thousands of farmers and other affected persons against this disguised privatisation of peoples' assets.

All India Kisan Sabha

Criminalising Journalism

Peoples Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) strongly condemns the arrest of Irfan Mehraj, a Srinagar-based freelance journalist and researcher under the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) on 20 March 2023 by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in the so-called 'NGO Terror funding Case' of October 2020. Irfan's arrest is deeply condemnable as it shows the unrelenting executive crackdown on the valley's scribes in the name of terror activities. This attack on the professional rights of journalists is well-illustrated in the February 2022 arrest of Fahad Shah, Editor of Kashmir Wallah, in several FIRs under UAPA; the January 2022 arrest of Sajad Gul, a trainee reporter with Kashmir Wallah under sections of the Indian Penal Code for conspiracy and murder and the Public Safety Act (PSA), and the 2018 arrest of Aasif Sultan of Kashmir Reporter under the UAPA. Furthermore, apart from arrests, journalists such as Sanna Arshad Mattoo

have been restricted from travelling abroad to receive the prestigious Pulitzer prize for her reportage on the second phase of COVID in India.

Within this trend, Irfan Mehraj's arrest is even more disquieting. It coincided with the ten-day remand that a Delhi Court granted the NIA to investigate further the already jailed human rights activist Parvez Khurram of the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS). In the so-called NGO terror funding case, the NIA has charged Khurram with fundraising for terror activities under the garb of propagation of human rights. And since Mehraj was associated with JKCCS, his arrest is meant to establish the alleged involvement of activists and journalists in cases of terror funding. This bid to brand human rights activities and journalism as a variant of terror activities in the valley is disturbing as it shows intolerance towards independent fact-finders and reportage. It is a known fact because of continuous state pressure; reportage on the local situation and rights violations in the valley has been credibly carried out by freelance journalists and local independent platforms. The present spate of arrests is a concerted effort to silence these voices, despite international concern as expressed by the Universal Period Review, a peer evaluation body of the UN Human Rights Council in November 2022, over the widespread detention of activists and journalists under the UAPA.

This criminalisation of journalism and human rights activities in Jammu and Kashmir, as well as other parts of India, must stop. Freedom of expression and the right to know are fundamental rights. A free press is essential for giving people a voice and making information available to them.

Joseph Mathai and Paramjeet Singh, Secretaries, PUDR

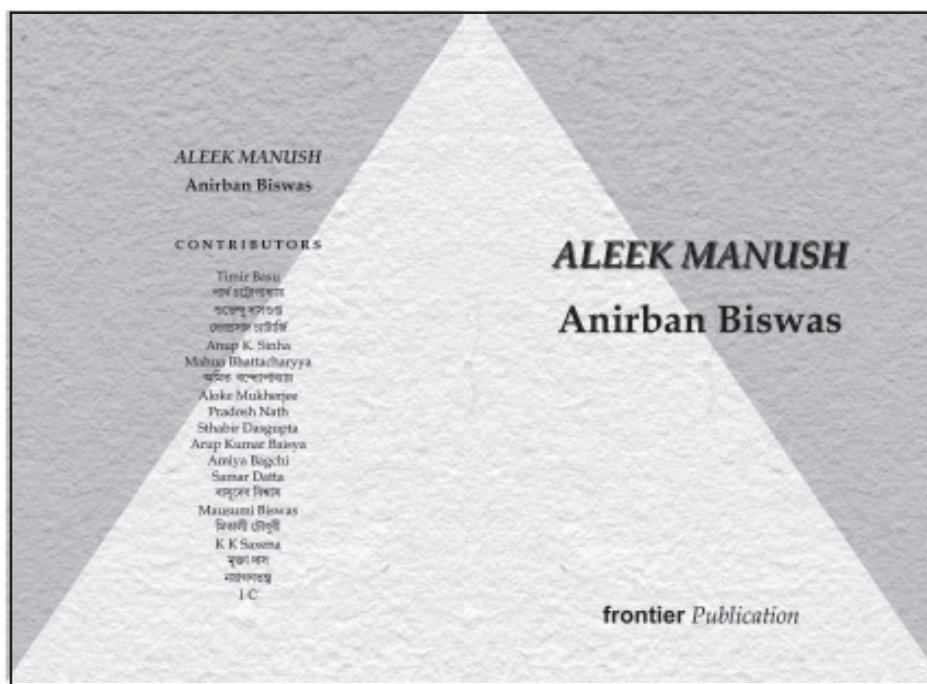
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