

frontier

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Prison Reforms

THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS IS SAID TO HAVE FINALISED a comprehensive Model Prisons Act 2023 which can serve as a guiding document for states for adoption in their jurisdiction. It is based on the basis of a draft prepared by the Bureau of Police Research and Development. Only a few weeks ago Prime Minister while addressing the national annual police-meet suggested prison reforms to improve jail management and repealing obsolete criminal laws. But he remained silent on the applicability of notorious detention laws he is now utilising indiscriminately to increase jail population. The present Prisons Act 1894 is almost 130 years old. Indian prisons mostly built in the British period are in dilapidated conditions. They are actually living hells created to dehumanise human beings. Lack of space, inadequate ventilation, pitiable sanitation and unhygienic atmosphere make living conditions deplorable. 149 jails in the country are overcrowded by more than 100 percent. It's a nightmare for the prison dwellers. Then 65 percent of prisoners are under-trials. The share of people awaiting trial or sentencing is extremely high by any standards, not to speak of international standards. It is 11 percent in the UK, 20 percent in the US and 29 percent in France. The ratio between prison staff and prison population is 1:7. As a result recurring violence and other criminal activities are rampant in Indian jails. And administrative corruption only adds fuel to fire. So hardened criminals have no problem in running their bloody business from solitary cells.

Jails, euphemistically called correctional centres, are in reality torture chambers. Prisoners are subjected to inhuman psychological and physical stress. The same pre-independence tradition continues unabated in post-independence era. The brown sahibs are no less ruthless than their white predecessors. In 2015, a total of 1584 prisoners died in jails. A large number of the deaths in custody were from natural and easily curable causes aggravated by virtual absence of health service. What is available in jail clinics is just apology of medicare. Labour is extracted from prisoners without paying proper wages. According to Human Rights Watch socio-economically disadvantaged prisoners are deprived of basic human dignity. Even prisons are not free from class discrimination. The Privileged get all the privileges but the poor are treated badly.

The issue of jail reforms is long overdue. The persons in power have been talking of it for long without doing anything concrete. Various Committees

and Commissions have been constituted by the state governments as well as the government of India to study and make recommendations for improving the prison conditions and administration. But reports and suggestions are not for implementation. They are gathering dust. For the authorities it is business as usual.

The Mulla Committee way back in 1983 recommended among other things to set up a National Prison Commission to oversee modernisation of the prison system in India. A major suggestion of the Mulla Committee was to reduce the number of under-trials to bare minimum and keep them separate from the convicts. The opposite is happening; under-trial prisoners are increasing in leaps and bounds. What the Modi dispensation is doing was previously done by the Congress government.

India is unique in the sense that it is an elected autocracy and this autocracy cannot function without putting dissenters of every shade behind bars. The Krishna Iyer Committee in 1987 looked into prison conditions and gave special emphasis on women prisoners. A lot has been written about the abuses, including sexual abuses women prisoners face but nothing has changed since then. Mary Taylor, a British citizen who was arrested in connection with a 'naxalite' case made a vivid and emotional account on prison conditions and women prisoners in particular in her classic treatise 'My Years in an Indian Prison'. The Justice Amitava Roy Committee made some special observations in respect of overcrowding and release of petty offenders on personal bond if they fail to arrange surety. As for legal

aid to prisoners the less said the better; the powerless and voiceless as well simply don't get any legal help. It remains to be seen whether the proposed Model Act can accommodate even a few suggestions made by the previous committees.

What is urgently needed is mass movement for unconditional release of all political prisoners and innocent people who have been incarcerated under false and fabricated charges. Barring a few human rights and civil liberties bodies, no political party is interested in making prison an issue in their poll manifestos and campaigns. Only after lifting of Emergency there was an opposition-initiated move to make political prisoners free. The bitter truth is opposition parties too are ruling parties in some states; they too need 'cages' to silence their critics. □□□

COMMENT

Beyond the Karnataka Verdict

CONGRESS SEEMS TO HAVE heaved an audible sigh of relief after winning the Karnataka assembly elections with an absolute majority. Karnataka was the only state in South India which first opened its door to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). And the saffron party was desperately trying to use Karnataka as a springboard to make its 'Mission South' successful. Now its 'Mission South' hits a roadblock. Instead of 'Mission South' it is now busy to save its 'Mission North East'. If Congress is a dynasty-oriented party BJP can boast of being called an authoritarian enterprise run by a clique. Modi made so many road shows to attract voters during campaign but all their tricks failed. BJP has long been trying to communally polarise voters on a number of sensitive issues that affected the minority community people.

For the first time Congress openly declared that they would ban BJP's frontal outfit Bajrang Dal—the main mischief-maker. And it paid dividends in a state otherwise supercharged with communal tensions for the last one year or so for more than one reason. In truth people don't believe in Congress party's vague secular noises. But their categorical statement about the Dal had some positive effect.

Surprisingly enough, Congress didn't raise the Adani-factor related economic corruption at the top. Perhaps they played it safe with the corporate lobby. After all they need their blessings to bounce back at the centre. There is not much to cheer about the Karnataka verdict because the opposition has no desire to project a united face against the saffron party. Nor do they present any ideological and political alternative to

BJP. What all they say about hate politics, divisive policies etc doesn't matter much in the real world of massive unemployment, jobless growth and runaway inflation. Congress is essentially a Gandhi family owned party while BJP is a two-man power centric establishment. Regional parties are unlikely to play the second fiddle by accepting Congress party's unchallenged leadership role despite their Karnataka victory. All regional parties are sovereign in their own way and their electoral calculus revolves around how much bargaining they may exert.

Congress is not challenging BJP's economic agenda and yet it thinks it is a party that represents the poor. During campaign for the Karnataka assembly polls Congress sought to keep the narrative to local issues. They heavily banked on their five guarantees—Gruha Jyothi, Gruha Lakshmi, Anna Bhagya, Yuva Nidhi and Shakti—with the party leaders promising their immediate implementation if the party comes to power.

But this much populism is no answer to the crisis that has gripped the economy and created hopelessness in society. They are replacing BJP's right-wing populism with a kind of centrist populism. But people want jobs. They have no idea as to how to create jobs. Jobs cannot grow in the vacuum. Rahul Gandhi's foot march is at best a public relations exercise having no long-term impact on voters. Euphoria over vote percentage will be over soon. And poll analysts will go back to their respective news rooms to dish out more post-mortem reports.

For one thing right-wing populism has not exhausted itself despite certain setbacks here and there. Far-

right populism has emerged in recent years globally. Populists have managed to govern in seven European countries—Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Austria. It is a powerful political tendency in Latin America and Africa as well. So there is no panic in the Modi camp.

Right-wing populism has flourished in the absence of revolutionary solutions of the contradictions of the system. But in India the traditional left is so dependent on the Congress for their day to day existence that they can hardly fight the rise of right-wing populism on their own while the far left is wandering in ideological wilderness. □□□

NOTE

Of Mafia and Police

ISS writes :

A STAID BLEMISH OF Indian political scene is the mighty role of money power and the mafia. The obnoxious nexus between the mafia and the rapacious politicians is potent, particularly in States like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Recently, dreaded crime lord of Uttar Pradesh, Atiq Ahmed and his brother were eliminated. He is said to have sent a message to the Lucknow-based builder. In the message, Ahmed said his sons too will join the mafia, and there will be no postponement of settlements (*The New Indian Express* (Magazine), April 30, 2023). Intimidation, violent booth capturing or day-time murder of rivals—all these are common.

The politicians are blind to all these happenings. Ahmed's empire remained strong even when he was in jail, mainly because his family is a powerful mafia. The mafia rule continues for decades. There were 100 cases against Ahmed, and his

criminal career lasted for four decades. Why a notorious criminal was allowed to thrive for decades? The answer is: such criminals were close to the powers that be. Surprisingly, no politician, at the time of elections, promises to eliminate the mafia.

India has many democratic institutions, but they remain tenuous. It has been rightly observed by Ajit Prakash Shah, Chairman of the 20th Law Commission of India: "In India today, every institution, mechanism or tool that is designed to hold the executive accountable, is being systematically destroyed. It is not just the judiciary that has fallen victim to this. Parliament has already failed people during the pandemic. Add to this list, the Election Commission, National Human Rights Commission, the Information Commission, academia, the press, and even civil society." (Interview, Seminar, February 2021, P.22).

Considering the situation serious,

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the Supreme Court insisted that each candidate has to:

1. Submit a sworn affidavit giving financial details;
2. Inform the political party in writing of criminal cases against him or her; and
3. See that the party puts the names and details of such candidates on its website and other social media including newspapers.

The Apex Court further observed; "In 2004, 24 percent of the Members of Parliament had criminal cases pending against them; in 2009, that went up to 30 per cent; in 2014, to 34 percent and in 2019 as many as 43 percent of MPs had criminal cases pending against them".

The police too are to be blamed. They indulge in favouritism and generally discourteous even to responsible people. The police ignore the complaints of the poor and un-influential people. Very often, the police officials themselves do not comply with laws. They are blamed for fake encounters.

However, the police are in a piti-

able condition. As early as in 1979, the National Police Commission had observed: “long and arduous hours of work without facilities for rest and recreation, continuous employment on jobs under extreme conditions of stress and strain, both mental and physical have all had their telling effect on the morale of the constabulary throughout the country”.

Experts say the police should be insulated from political influence so that police is not misused for settling political scores. One should aim at creating and cultivating an institu-

tional character, so that the common man finds a friend in police. Ideally, reforms in police administration and in the criminal justice system should go hand-in-hand.

For political reasons, the police is insouciant to mafia raj. The situation will improve if the police enjoy autonomy. Transfer and suspension are the most potent weapons the politicians to use against the police.

In India, police reforms have not been undertaken seriously. In 2006, the Supreme Court issued a slew of directives on police reforms. No seri-

ous attention was paid either by the Centre or the States. Many States have not implemented a single directive of the Apex Court. It is for the judiciary to step in and enforce the diktats it has passed (M P Nathanael: “Still Waiting Police Reform, “The Hindu, October19, 2020).

The courts should support the honest and duty-bound police officials. This would reduce political interference. Also, a strong message should be sent to the politicians by the voters that candidates supporting the mafia cannot come to power. □□

THE UNTOLD STORY

Looting Ukraine

Bharat Dogra

THE ECONOMIC INVASION of Ukraine started much before Russian ‘Special military operation’ in February 2022. Following the notorious coup in Ukraine in 2014, supported by the USA and some of its allies, which ousted a democratically elected government, a number of very important changes took place in policies. The political aspects of these policy changes have been better known even though largely ignored in the big media discourse. These include pressures from those who facilitated the coup to have a permanently anti-Russia policy, to be aggressive all the time towards Russian speaking citizens of Ukraine, to strengthen neo-Nazi forces to facilitate their attacks on Russian language speaking citizens of Ukraine, resulting in about 14,000 deaths—all these together adding up to a policy that was bound to lead to a conflict situation, even though peaceful co-existence and cooperation was definitely possible and highly preferable from the point of view of the welfare of the people of both countries.

However the changes in economic policies were also very important but

are even less known and acknowledged. Ukraine became more indebted (with the third highest debt in the world to the IMF) and had to face structural adjustment policies imposed by the IMF and other international financial institutions. As in the case of most such structural adjustment programmes, there was a lot of privatisation leading to big gains to the already richest persons, including foreign interests, while at the same time heavy costs were imposed on ordinary people including workers and farmers. There was stagnation and decline of real wages while prices were rising. In particular there was heavy increase in the price of gas which is very important for people for heating and fuel. The elderly people depending on pensions were very badly affected. The poverty rate increased from 28% to 41% in 2019, although it even approached about 55% at one stage in between.

Far-reaching changes were initiated regarding land ownership and land relations so that land ownership pattern started becoming heavily concentrated in the hands of the super-rich. As Ukraine has a lot of

fertile land capable of supplying Europe, attempts were being made earlier also by big agribusiness interests and super-rich oligarchs to grab some of this land or gain control over it. However before 2014 various governments also took steps to check such trends. After the 2014 coup, however, restrictions on land markets were increasingly removed in the name of new ‘land reforms’. While the term ‘land reforms’ has been generally used to indicate highly positive, equality-based changes of land relations in favour of the poor and the landless, in the present case the so-called ‘land reforms’ were pushed in the structural adjustment programme with an entirely opposite intention and actual impact. The aim was to facilitate the passing over of vast areas of farmland into the hands of the richest oligarchs and even foreign interests. Even though some restrictions on foreign control may still remain formally, in practice this has not presented effective control passing into the hands of foreign interests based mainly in the USA, Europe and Saudi Arabia. Several of the oligarchs and foreign interests are also linked to tax havens (and may be registered there), making even taxation more difficult, while at the same time several of the oligarchs and agribusiness inter-

ests have borrowed from western banks and funds. West-based banks, pension and equity funds, various endowments and foundations have their money invested in such deals, and thus have a stake in the continuation of regressive changes in land relations which take ownership and control from farmers and hand it over to big business.

A recent study titled 'War and Theft' by the Oakland Institute (USA), an institute known for its commitment to justice based farm growth and ecologically protective farming, has revealed that nearly 3 million hectares of arable land in Ukraine have passed into the hands of just about a dozen big controlling interests. Altogether about 9 million hectares has passed into the hands of oligarchs, corrupt individuals and big agribusiness. The other side of this grab is that less and less land is available for the ordinary farmers. If a big share of the cultivable land is to be taken by the super-rich then certainly the land available to the ordinary farmers is reduced significantly at a time when they need to earn more to cope with inflation and other adverse factors.

Despite adversities it is the small and medium farmers who contribute most of the food—99% of potatoes, 89% of vegetables and 78% of milk, according to figures quoted in the Oakland Institute report—and any

adverse impact on them will be bad for food security too. The ongoing changes are bad for environment and climate too, as the industrial agriculture practised by big business interests is much worse from the point of view of GHG emissions, while small farmers are much more conducive to adopting eco-friendly practices which makes for sustainable livelihoods that can help to check climate change as well.

The current trend in the structural changes programme and west-backed policies is to go on promoting big business interests in Ukraine farming. While already the biggest single owner may have in excess of five hundred thousand hectares, the future plans for such big owners are to grab more and more land, helped also by the tendency of government farm development programmes to favour them.

In addition the current Ukraine government is also wooing western, particularly USA oil and gas units to invest heavily in this sector in Ukraine, and this may become the other big area in which western oil and gas giants may have a big presence with high concessional terms being granted to them by the welcoming current ruling regime in Ukraine. Then of course there are the big construction companies that are waiting for their time, while the big defence contractors may want the

war to go on and on.

In the middle of all this, the ordinary people of Ukraine, farmers and workers and middle class households, may well wonder whether their real interests are being prioritised at all. This is a question that must be increasingly raised by the people of Ukraine and by their sincere friends.

While peace is the biggest priority just now, questions and concerns remain about the impact of the heavy indebtedness of Ukraine and continuing impact of structural adjustment policies linked to this. To what extent will repayment be demanded later for the loans given to facilitate the proxy war which actually promotes the narrowly perceived interests of the USA/NATO? How big will loan and interest repayments amount to? How big and long term will be the terrible impacts of structural adjustment policies which make it difficult at the same time to take several pro-people steps? In these conditions will it at all be possible to adopt a community based reconstruction effort, or will the reconstruction effort be controlled by the big construction companies? These are some of the troubling questions which face the people of Ukraine on the economic front as well. □□□

[*The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include *Planet in Peril*, *A Day in 2071* and *India's Quest for Sustainable Farming and Healthy Food*.]

CORPORATISATION OF EDUCATION

Death of a Philosopher Colleague

*Pushkar Raj**

A DELHI UNIVERSITY, PHILOSOPHY Assistant Professor, Samarveer committed suicide in his rented accommodation near the University!

This writer did not know Samarveer. But that is not important!

It was surprising why would an Assistant Professor with Delhi University, (the second-best job in India, the first being Indian Army), employed with presumably the second-best college of a top University commit suicide?

In truth, "Ad hoc"—the curse of

the corporatisation of education in the name of liberalism, globalisation, and Americanisation was the root cause.

It was reported that soon-to-be Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), Samarveer, was teaching Philosophy for six years in the Hindu college and was sacked in early February, by a selection committee comprising about half a dozen, PhDs!

In the aftermath of his departure, Samarveer may be adjectivised

as a coward by the general populace in general and new appointees in particular!

But Samarveer was not a coward that he left his profession and the temporal abode!

This writer left the profession in similar circumstances.

Nor was Samarveer an incompetent teacher as evidenced by his 21 colleagues' eulogy, shared on social media.

"Samarveer represents that stellar breed of brilliant scholars who are star teachers, intensely admired by the students and colleagues. A quiet, prolific reader and deep, original thinker, Samarveer was often seen reading in a corner of the otherwise noisy staff room of Hindu College. A thorough gentleman with smiling face and polite demeanour...."

A BBC report quoted one of his students comparing him with Jean-Paul Sartre!

Samarveer fell prey to a tainted and rotten recruitment system under the nose of the supreme leaders many of them come from the same process!

Sadly, it is an anecdotal truth (for lack of a scientific or academic) that out of about ten thousand Delhi University teachers, a majority might have felt wronged while dealing with the institution sometime or other without recourse to a redress.

These intellectuals are forced to accept such humiliations as an existential reality at the expense of what Nathaniel Brandan calls, invaluable

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self-esteem, which not only affects their lives but also ripples through classrooms and society at large like thermodynamic laws enfeebling the Ideal India!

It is very likely; Samarveer might not have compromised mortgaging his self-esteem. In return, he received dismissal from service sliding from chronic insecurity (ad hoc are always at the mercy of two masters -subject head and college principal) into what William Styron described as "Darkness Visible", i.e., deep depression!

This is not to analyse the sad incident clinically but to empathise with a bright man who had a hunger for education and a passion for teaching to realise a vision of reality with the next generations. Otherwise, what is the learning for? That's why people choose to become academics till they are betrayed for reasons other than knowledge pushing them the wayside like Samarveer!

The concept of conflict of interest in college selection committees across India is conveniently put under the carpet.

The argument that it is incompatible with the 'Mai- Bap, patronising' system is not only an intellectual dishonesty but also a serious misdemeanour damaging lives!

Samarveer could not withstand the legal tyranny of the selection committee which in most colleges is a den of bygone small-time political wood, too petty to see beyond their noses and have little idea of education, leave alone higher education!

The same is the case with the university head of departments, who being the fulcrum of the system, gets transformed overnight into the God from a petty, angel for the research students who are eying a career in their footsteps.

So, when Hindu's selection committee met on 9th February 2023, it

sacked Samarveer who was the only internal candidate teaching for six years, while there were plenty of vacant posts in the department!

There is nothing wrong with being sacked if one lacks competence in one's research and teaching area. But not receiving any feedback or reasoning post dismissal is not only humiliating but also like entering into a closed tunnel!

If the content and delivery of lectures or the standard 'employability' skills suffer from gaps one may work and sharpen them, enabling one to present themselves to the new selection committee with a fact sheet demonstrating what professional development they have achieved and why they have a rightful claim now.

It is no less than a national shame that brightest minds, the research scholars across the country do not deserve this modicum of fairness!

One is not envious of new appointees. But worse is that, often or rather invariably, the incumbent could be identified and connected with their godfathers, mothers, and uncles in the selection committee, and post-appointments the shameless open secret continues to make rounds of staff room in awe and glee till another replaces it!

They say if a country is to be sent downhill, destroy its academics, those who think and create new values. If they are not able to think, what might they create, visualise, or profess? Perhaps, old, stale, dead ideologies of slavery, professing a bright future, draw from the dark past!

Till the malaise is recognised instead of condoling and condoning and is acted decisively against replacing it with fair play, philosophers will continue to die or dump academics as the case may be! □□□

[*Melbourne-based Researcher, Author]

ANOTHER FORM OF WAR

Brutal and Inhumane Sanctions

Branko Marcetic

SANCTIONS ARE A FORM of collective punishment. Their costs are overwhelmingly borne by innocent people rather than governments. And they are just another form of war, not an alternative to it. The US's many sanctions across the world need to end.

The US government is sanctioning so many countries right now; it's hard to keep track of them all.

There are the countries people probably know about, like Russia, Syria, Iran, and Venezuela. There are the ones one hears less about, like Nicaragua, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Myanmar. And then there are the official enemies that Washington has sanctioned for decades, like Cuba and North Korea.

These sanctions are presented to the public as a nondestructive, even humane alternative to military action. But a new report from the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) lays out the brutal and damaging reality of sanctions regimes and their human costs. Synthesising the findings of dozens of studies and examining the sanctions' impact on three targeted countries in particular, the CEPR study makes clear what critics of the policy have long stressed: that sanctions are a form of collective punishment, whose costs are overwhelmingly borne by the innocent people ruled by the often undemocratic governments US officials seek to punish and which is in practice not so much an alternative to war as an alternative form of it.

The report, titled "The Human Consequences of Economic Sanctions" and drawing on thirty-two studies of sanctions and their ef-

fects, concludes that "economic sanctions generate significant levels of distress in target economies", and that "the populations most often harmed, and in some cases killed, by sanctions are also voiceless in decisions about their adoption".

The author of those words, Francisco R Rodríguez, is far from a bomb-throwing iconoclast: an economist who has done stints at the United Nations and Bank of America Merrill Lynch, Rodríguez also served as the chief economist for the National Assembly of Venezuela, one of the countries examined in the report, and in 2018, advised an opposition presidential candidate who challenged current Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro.

Surveying the research on sanctions, the report finds that thirty of the thirty-two papers examined conclude there are "significant negative long-run effects on indicators of human and economic development". This body of research has found that sanctions lead to significant rises in everything from poverty, mortality, income inequality, and childhood HIV infection rates, to instances of international terrorism and the likelihood of government repression and human rights violations—even a decline in democracy.

When sanctions regimes target both a country's trade and financial transactions, the studies show, GDP drops anywhere between 0.9 and 4.2 percent, while per capita GDP—the total economic output of each individual person in a country, on average—is slashed by as much as 26 percent. To put that in perspective, during the 2008 recession, the United States suffered a 4.3 percent drop in GDP.

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Only one study disputes these findings: a 2021 study by Caracas-based think tank Anova, which claimed that US sanctions on Venezuela saw the importation of essential goods improve and living standards rise. But that study was based on a coding error and dubious modeling choices, the CEPR paper argues, including the decision to leave out categories of imports like cereals, oils, and sugars, which together made up four-fifths of Venezuela's food imports in the year it was slapped with sanctions.

The reality of US sanctions on Venezuela—the “maximum pressure” campaign started by the Donald Trump administration in 2017 as a way to foment regime change in the country—is far bleaker.

The country suffered “the largest economic collapse outside of wartime since 1950”, Rodríguez writes, with US sanctions preceding a collapse in oil revenues, in a country where oil made up 95 percent of all exports in the last year before sanctions and which is heavily reliant on imports for food and medicine. (CEPR had previously found that US sanctions led to forty thousand more Venezuelan deaths from 2017 to 2018).

While a number of neighbouring countries suffered similarly from a global fall in oil prices in 2016, unencumbered by sanctions, they eventu-

ally recovered. Venezuela, meanwhile, continued to suffer a drastic collapse in oil production that had only one other comparison, according to the paper: Yemen, which at the time was having its oil fields bombed into oblivion by the US-backed Saudi war on the country.

“The collapse in Venezuela's oil production is of a dimension that we only see when armies blow up oil fields”, the study concludes.

It's a similar state of affairs in Iran. Over the decades, the paper shows, the ups and downs of its per capita GDP and exports map closely onto the placement of Western sanctions following the 1979 Iranian revolution and in 2011 and 2018, as well as a brief recovery after the Iran deal was signed in 2015 and sanctions were lifted. Studies reaffirm what critics of the sanctions have said for years: far from targeting the elite, sanctions have pushed ordinary Iranians into poverty and led to chronic medicinal shortages.

While a lack of data and multiple disruptive events, including the decade-long Soviet war in the country, makes doing this same evaluation trickier when it comes to Afghanistan, the paper observes a similar phenomenon in the ups and downs of the country's own child mortality rate. The 76 percent fall in real per capita income Afghanistan

experienced between 1986 and 2001 is “in line with some of the largest economic collapses observed in modern world history”, Rodríguez writes. While the Taliban hasn't published official statistics since taking power in the country in 2021, US seizure of its federal reserves has helped trigger a full-blown humanitarian catastrophe in the country that rivals the two-decades-long US occupation for the horror it's inflicting on ordinary Afghans.

While less than 4 percent of the world's countries were sanctioned in the early 1960s, 27 percent of them are now targets of sanctions regimes.

The Biden administration has made expansive use of this weapon according to the paper, imposing more sanctions per year than even Trump, who had himself far outdone the Barack Obama administration in his zest for using the weapon.

“It is hard to think of other policy interventions that continue to be pursued amid so much evidence of their adverse and often deadly effects on vulnerable populations”, the paper concludes. Even as sanctions have decimated the people of these countries, those sanctions have objectively been a miserable failure when it comes to their nominal goals of collapsing governments or inducing policy changes from them. □□□

[Source: Jacobin]

DAYS ARE NUMBERED

Combating Climate Change

I Satya Sundaram

THE 26TH CONFERENCE OF the Parties (COP 26) began on October 31, 2021, at Glasgow, Scotland, and ended on 14th November. The Summit was attended by nearly 200 nations. The focus was on reducing emissions, working on expansion of renewable energy capacity, and increasing the

share of non-fossil fuel sources in energy generation.

The COP27 was held at Sharm El Sheik, Egypt from November 6 to 19 (extended by one day). The Text approved at COP27 commits only to a Fund being created, but there is no clarity on issues relating to the Fund creation. There was a proposal

to replace all fossil fuels including oil and gas, not merely coal. It was agreed that the rich nations have to bear the lion's share of funding. India introduced Clean Environment Cess in 2010. COP27 agreed to create a Loss and Damage Fund to meet climate-induced impacts.

The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has recently pointed out that climate change is endangering environment. It said the world will be 1.50C above pre-industrial levels in the 2030s mainly

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FRONTIER

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because of industry's reliance on fossil fuels. Of course, India is prone to heat-waves, droughts, cyclones and flash floods. Climate change adversely affects labour productivity which in turn reduces the GDP. In India, industry contributes about one-fourth of the country's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

According to a United Nations Environment Programme Report, adaptation-related costs in developing countries could reach \$ 140-300 billion by 2030. Yet, at the Glasgow Summit, only 14 nations came together to commit a paltry sum of \$ 232 million to the UN Adaptation Fund. It is desirable if most of the money is delivered in the form of grants. According to World Meteorological Organisation study, in 2020 alone, India lost \$ 87 billion due to cyclones, floods and droughts.

Air pollution has become a big health hazard. At the global level air pollution is said to have caused almost 6 million premature births and almost 3 million underweight babies in 2019. It is tolerated at a high cost. In Europe, air pollution for industries cost \$ 500 billion per year.

According to the new WHO norms, most Indian cities have recorded key pollutant levels much higher than the permissible limits. Studies show 22 percent of the 30 most air polluted cities in the world are in India. At the global level, the pollution, emissions and clean up costs of plastic produced, in 2019, were placed at \$ 3.7 trillion, and this may reach the level of \$ 7.1 trillion by 2040. Seas and rivers are polluted. The debris may cause deaths of more than a million seabirds and over 1 lakh marine mammals each year.

The plastic menace continues. According to some studies, the authorities may have to manage more than 7.7 billion tonnes of plastic waste globally over the next 20 years.

Studies show that of all the plastic waste produced in the world, 79 percent enters the environment. Only 9 percent of the plastic waste is recycled. Around 33 million tonnes (MT) of plastic will be released into the global environment annually by 2030. For the year 2018-19, India generated 3.3 MT of plastic waste. This may be an underestimate.

A UN Report has stated migratory species are most affected by plastic pollution. For the Hindus, the river is of tremendous symbolic and religious value. Yet, it is one of the largest carriers of plastic to the world's oceans. For the species that lived in the river, discarded fishing gear were found to be a major threat. Dolphins can become entangled and trapped under water by old nets.

Waste management continues to be a challenge. There is a wide variety of wastes—municipal solid waste, commercial and industrial waste, construction and demolition waste, agricultural waste and biomedical waste, electronic waste and hazardous waste. India produces 62 MT of waste annually. Of this, 20 percent is treated and 40 percent is used for land filling.

Approximately 70 percent waste globally ends up in open dumps and landfills, thus making land surfaces useless. Also, the highly poisonous leach (waste water sludge) seeps down, polluting groundwater and soil.

The world's GHG emissions are 6.55 tonnes of carbon dioxide. India's per capita emission at 1.96 tonnes is less than one-third of emissions of the US, Canada and Australia together. Critics say accepting net zero emissions by 2050 effectively prevents India's urbanisation and shift of the rural population into the middle class (Mukul Sanwal: "Negotiating the new global climate policy", *The Hindu*, August 26, 2021).

India does not owe carbon debt to the world. The country's emissions

are no more than 3.5 percent of global cumulative emissions prior to 1990 (about 5 percent in 2018). India's mitigation efforts are compatible with a 20C target (T. Jayaraman & Tejal Kanitkar: "Deconstructing declarations of carbon-neutrality", *The Hindu*, April 8, 2021).

Managing plastics is very important. One has to find out substitutes to single-use plastics. The Indian Institute of Sciences, Bengaluru, came out with a solution. It developed polymers using non-edible oil and cellulose extracted from agricultural stubble. These polymers can be moulded into sheets having properties suitable for making bags, cutlery or containers. The material is biodegradable, leak-proof and non-toxic (*The Hindu*, September 19, 2021).

Waste management remains neglected because of indifferent attitude of citizens, lack of awareness, absence of community participation and fixed mindset of people and administrators themselves. The stress should be on 3 Rs—Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

Energy generated from waste is clean and reliable. The technology treats waste to recover energy in CBG/CNG, manure, fuel such as high-speed diesel, bio-gas, and electricity. In India, there are very few waste-to-energy plants. Of course, the government is providing significant incen-

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tives like capital subsidy for waste-to-energy projects (Piyush Dwivedi: "Tapping energy from waste," Business Line, November 12, 2021). Some states have shown interest in liquid waste management—reusing treated waste water. Bio-slurry, a by-product of the bio-gas process, is converted into organic manure.

For dealing with wastes, people may depend on Public Private Partnership (PPP) model. For instance, in Indore, a private company has invested Rs 30 crore under PPP model and pays Rs 1.51 crore premium from its profits to the Indore Municipal Corporation.

True, ethanol is the hot favourite amongst bio-fuels. But, there is also methanol produced from coal bed methane. Methanol's advantage is that India has enough coal reserves. It is inexpensive. However, pilot tests are going on.

India's electric vehicle (EV) market is not impressive. The number of registered EVs sold in India in 2019-20 was just 1, 67, 041 units. However, though sales in 2019-20 stood at 7.5 lakh EVs, around 6.3 lakhs were electric three-wheelers. Thus, the number of electric two-wheelers comes to just 1.2 lakh units. The sale of electric two-wheelers should be boosted to drastically reduce fuel consumption and pollution levels.

Countries like Brazil are depending on bio-fuels. Bio-fuels can be produced from agricultural wastes. Sugarcane ethanol has one of the smallest footprints among bio-fuels. It is clean and affordable, and when blended with petrol, can reduce GHG emissions up to 90 percent.

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MYTHRY BOOK HOUSE

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India launched the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) scheme in 2003.

In India, stubble burning is common in northern plains. This worsens air pollution. People have to think of innovative measures to combat this menace. Punjab wants to promote paddy straw as a resource to create wealth for the benefit of industry and agriculture. Punjab declared incentives to industries which use paddy straw-fired boilers.

Funding continues to be a major problem. Climate finance is inadequate both in scale and purpose. Total climate finance provided and mobilised by rich countries for developing countries was \$ 79.6 billion in 2019, an increase of just two percent from 2018 level, according to Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It is expected to rise to \$ 100 billion level by 2023 (original deadline 2020).

Some suggest the issue of green bonds. They can help drive down cost of capital for sustainable projects where the proceeds are exclusively utilised for financing climate change mitigation. In 2018, the State Bank of India received \$ 650 million in certified climate bonds.

India has already initiated some measures. These include: decarbonisation of Indian Railways, sales of at least 30 percent of all new vehicles should be electric, mandatory adoption of National Green Hydrogen Mission by industry and Urban Forest Programmes for generating at least 20 hectares across 200 cities. India made some progress on the renewable energy front. The Starts Ups too are playing a positive role. However, the performance is poor in respect of creation of additional carbon sinks of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of Co2 equivalent. The government planned to open coal mines in forests.

At the COP26 held at Glasgow, the countries have agreed to end

deforestation, cut methane emissions by 30 per cent and over 40 countries have agreed to shift away from the use of coal, all by 2030. The rich nations have decided to collectively double their provision of finance to the poorer nations. The endangered nations have demanded penalty for harming them and this has been included in the text. It is reiterated that the rich countries should honour their pledge to deliver \$ 100 billion a year to help developing countries. The new target now is \$ 500 billion by 2025. Experts say India's climate commitments are bold, but meeting them will be a challenge. Also, most adaptation and mitigation strategies take more than a decade to realise their full impact,

India would have to reduce the emissions intensity (emissions per unit GDP) by 86 percent—it has so far reduced it to 24 percent from the 2005 levels. The share of non-hydro renewable energy has to increase to 65 percent from 11 percent today; the share of electric cars in passenger sales has to go from 0.1 percent today to 75 percent by 2040; and the share of fossil energy in primary energy has to decline from 73 percent to 40 percent.

At the Summit, it was observed that agriculture accounts for 13 percent of global GHG emissions and, is responsible for 30 percent of deforestation and 17 percent of biodiversity loss. It is said three things are important—how food is produced, what foods people consume and education on food waste. In fact, 40 percent of the foods produced are never consumed. FAO observed that it was immoral that 30 percent of the food produced is wasted when 811 million people go to bed hungry every day. Food habits should be nature-friendly. It is also necessary that climate mitigation schemes need to be integrated with development programmes. □□□

A CULTURAL LEGACY

Abanindranath Tagore and India's National Identity

Vaaswat Sarkar

ABANINDRANATH TAGORE (1871-1951) was a distinguished artist and a pioneer of modernism in the Indian art movement. He was born into the illustrious Tagore family of Jorasanko, Calcutta, British India. His family comprised renowned artists and scholars, who were some of the best minds that defined Bengal's cultural artscape. Abanindranath was greatly influenced by his family particularly his uncle, Rabindranath Tagore, a Nobel Laureate and arguably the greatest Bengali poet that ever lived.

Abanindranath's painting style was heavily influenced by the Bengal School of Art, which sought to revive traditional Indian art forms and techniques. His paintings are characterised by their intricate details, delicate brushwork, and rich colour palette, which often includes shades of gold and silver. In his early days, he developed an interest in Mughal art, producing a number of works based on Indian mythology and folklore in a Mughal-influenced style. Later in his life, he incorporated elements of Japanese and Chinese calligraphy art into his work, which gave his paintings a distinctive style. He was also greatly influenced by the works of the famous American painter, James Whistler, and his views on aestheticism.

Abanindranath was a diligent student of the traditional European academic art form learning the full range of techniques but with a particular interest in watercolours. It was his thorough knowledge of European art that enabled him to subvert it later on and incorporate Swadeshi values into his own dis-

tinctive Indian style. He had an Indo-centric nationalist ideology in his creative practice and believed that Indian art should return back to its roots to recover its spiritual values. Such strong ideas shine through in his paintings, which portray romantic and poetic sensibilities, reflecting his interest in mysticism and spirituality.

One of Abanindranath's most famous paintings, *Bharat Mata*, was created during the Swadeshi movement, which emerged in response to the Partition of Bengal in 1905. The Swadeshi movement involved Indian nationalists boycotting British goods and institutions. The central figure in the painting holds various items that represent Indian culture and the economy of early 20th-century India, including a book, sheaves of paddy, a piece of white cloth, and a rudraksha garland. The subject is also depicted with four hands, which is a common Hindu symbol of immense power. This evocative painting serves to portray a corporeal imagery of the nation as "a mother figure seeking liberation through her sons, as described by Jayanta Sengupta, the curator of the Indian Museum in Kolkata. The painting went on to become a powerful symbol of Indian nationalism underscoring the importance of cultural heritage in shaping India's national identity. Abanindranath cemented a cultural legacy that played a key role in shaping the identity and modernism of Indian art. Along with his brother Gaganendranath Tagore, he founded the Indian Society of Oriental Art, which aimed to promote traditional Indian art forms and techniques. He

also established the Government College of Art & Craft in Kolkata, which trained a generation of Indian artists and helped to establish a distinctly Indian style of painting.

After Abanindranath Tagore's death in 1951, his eldest son, Alokendranath, bequeathed nearly all of the family's collection of his paintings to the newly founded Rabindra Bharati Society Trust. Although the artist had not sold or given away many of his paintings during his lifetime, the Rabindra Bharati Society became the primary repository for Tagore's works. Unfortunately, these paintings have been banished to dark offices and permanent storage, preventing the full range and brilliance of Tagore's talent from being effectively projected into the public domain. Despite being intimately known to a small circle of art connoisseurs and scholars in Bengal, the true measure of Abanindranath's talent, particularly in his works from the 1920s to the 1940s, has yet to be comprehensively profiled for the contemporary art world. Art experts such as K G Subramanyan and R Siva Kumar have championed Tagore's talent, but little has been done to showcase it to a wider audience. □□□

[Source: Homegrown]

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Resurrecting Medieval India

Dinesh C Sharma

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has dropped the theory of evolution as propounded by Charles Darwin from the science syllabus for the tenth standard. This has been done as a part of the 'rationalisation' exercise taken up during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic to reduce the 'content load' on students. The purging of the section on evolution on the pretext of the pandemic could not have been more ironical—the novel corona virus that caused the pandemic is indeed a result of the natural selection process that Darwin sought to explain and children ought to learn more about it. The theory of evolution is fundamental to understanding the basis of several sub-branches of modern biology like genetics, immunology and so on.

It is hard to believe that the change effected by NCERT, particularly relating to the chapter on evolution and heredity, has anything to the stated goal of reducing the burden on students in the wake of the pandemic. In 2018, minister of state for human resources development Satyapal Singh declared that Darwin's theory of evolution was scientifically wrong because "no one had ever seen a monkey turn into a human" and that ever since man had come on the earth, he was a man. Singh later defended his comments and asserted that schools and colleges

should stop teaching the evolution theory. Singh is no more in the education ministry but what he desired is being implemented.

Darwin has raised the hackles of obscurantist groups and different religions in many parts of the world including the US during the past several decades, but only a few have taken the extreme step of stopping teaching evolution to their children. Most of these countries are in the Middle East and India's neighbourhood. Science textbooks in Pakistan, for instance, have been rubbishing the evolution theory for a long time. The theory has been banned completely in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Algeria and Morocco, and it is not taught in Lebanon. It is taught within the framework of religion in Jordan and is portrayed as an unproven hypothesis in textbooks in Egypt and Tunisia. Darwin is also a subject of many fatwas. In the US, a creationism lobby—backed by some Catholic groups—has been advocating the teaching of creationism as an alternative to the human evolution theory. Creationists believe that the world—humans, natural life, the universe—is a creation of the divine power or the god, and it did not evolve.

The removal of Darwin from the school syllabus is not an innocuous change. Seen in the context of revivalism and a return to the so-called ancient science, it is a retrograde step for the teaching of science and an onslaught on rational thinking and scientific temper. It can adversely impact the quality of higher education in science, scientific research and India's position as a formidable science and technology power in the world community.

The concept of evolution is fundamental to all branches of biology and research in this field is going to help the world fight against some of the biggest challenges facing humanity—be it climate change or antibiotic resistance or future pandemics emanating from the increased animal-human-environment interface. As it is, the teaching of science in Indian schools is a matter of concern. With the new changes in the school curriculum—and perhaps more in the future in line with the drive to reinforce traditional values and mythology—the teaching of science at the school and college levels could suffer more. Just imagine the state of Indian science in future if schools start teaching Dashavatara as an alternative to the evolution theory. The dashavatara theory was propagated by Andhra University Vice Chancellor G Nageshwar Rao at the Indian Science Congress session in 2019. 'Papers' were also presented debunking theories of Newton and Einstein at this meeting.

The school curriculum change has serious implications for scientific research in the country. In recent years, people have witnessed the rise of pseudoscience activities in research institutions and universities in the name of research on ancient knowledge and to provide a scientific basis to myths. Funding agencies like the Department of Science and Technology and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) have also been forced to support research on some topics concerning 'ancient science'—cow urine, cow dung, spiritual farming, medical astrology etc. With a state agency (NCERT) discarding the theory of evolution, funding agencies may soon have to deal with proposals to study alternatives to the evolution theory and to find a 'scientific basis' for ancient ideas. All such trends don't augur well for the future of Indian science.

When Satyapal Singh rubbished

CORRIGENDUM

What is wrongly cited as Partha Chatterjee's assessment of Ranajit Guha's literary writings in the piece 'More on Ranajit Guha' by Arup Kumar Sen in May 21-27, 2023 [vol 55 no 47] issue is actually Sukanta Chaudhuri's. Error is regretted.—Fr

the theory of evolution in 2018, the scientific community condemned it strongly. In a rare move, three academies—Indian National Science Academy (INSA), the Indian Academy of Science (IASc) and the National Academy of Sciences-India (NASI)—issued a joint statement. They categorically stated that “Evolutionary theory, to which Darwin made seminal contributions, is well established. There is no scientific dispute about the basic facts of evolution. This is a scientific theory, and one that has made many predictions that have been repeatedly confirmed by experiments and observation”.

Referring to Singh’s statement that the theory should be removed from the syllabus, the academies said: “It would be a retrograde step to remove the teaching of the theory of evolution from school and college curricula or to dilute this by offering non-scientific explanations or myths”. Evolutionary biologists presented their arguments and requested the minister to retract his statement. Now that what Singh said then is being implemented by NCERT, the academies should reiterate their stand and use their collective clout to reverse the

decision. Science academies the world over have been fighting anti-science and pseudoscience tendencies, and proactively trying to promote public understanding of science. Indian science academies should be no exception.

An independent group of scientists and educators, Breakthrough Science Society, has written an open letter criticising NCERT. It said “an understanding of the process of evolution is also crucial in building a scientific temper and a rational worldview. The way Darwin’s painstaking observations and his keen insights led him to the theory of natural selection educates students about the process of science and the importance of critical thinking. Depriving students, who do not go on to study biology after the 10th standard, of any exposure to this vitally important field, is a travesty of education?”

The voices of rationality need to become stronger because the onslaught against science is not going to stop at Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution, if the developments leading to this decision are any indication. It should not be seen as just a matter of science educa-

tion or science academies but as something that concerns society and the country as a whole.

In an open letter addressed to the Indian government, 1,800 scientists and educators expressed their concerns over removing the topic of evolution from the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbook. The letter was signed by scientists and educators from noted institutions, such as Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) and IITs, among others.

According to the letter, understanding the process of evolution is “crucial in building a scientific temper” and depriving students of this exposure is “travesty of education”.

The open letter highlighted the importance of the theory of evolution in the field of science and its contribution to our understanding of the natural world. The scientists and educators called for the government to restore the chapter on evolution in the NCERT textbook and ensure that scientific principles are not compromised in the education system. □

[Courtesy: *The Wire*]

PROPAGATING HATE

“The Kerala Story”

Ram Puniyani

WHEN ONE HEARS about Kerala, the things that come to mind are a state whose residents live in peace and harmony, which has eradicated illiteracy, is high on social indices related to health, education, and well-being, and combated the Covid-19 pandemic in the best possible way. It is also where Christianity arrived as far back as in 52AD with Saint Sebastian, and Islam first arrived in the seventh century with Arab traders. Contrary to all this,

the teaser and promo of ‘The Kerala Story’, project Kerala as a state riddled with conversions to Islam and where Hindu women are being dragged into the terrorist outfit Islamic State in large numbers.

The film is made along the lines of The Kashmir Files, where, to promote discord and hate, half-truths and outright fiction are claimed to be facts while the actual situation is hidden. For this reason, that film was called “propaganda” by the head of the jury of the 53rd International

film festival held in Goa. Nadav Lapid also labelled it vulgar and stood by his initial diagnosis despite outrage in India and some sections of Israel over his assessment.

The teaser was released on November 2, 2022, with the trailer following on April 27. These releases have given concerned citizens adequate indication of the half-truths and lack of research into the actual situation of religious conversions and the scale of recruitment into the terrorist organisation, the Islamic State. This outfit reared its head after the United States invaded Iraq and promoted fundamentalist Islamic groups to counter Russian influence in West Asia’s “oil zone”.

The film makes the ludicrous claim that 32,000 Hindu girls have been converted and are part of the Islamic State. The source of this number is highly dubious—in that there isn't any source for this information. A paper by Adil Rasheed titled 'Why fewer Indians have joined ISIS' published in the Manohar Parrikar Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA) says there are about 40,000 recruits to the Islamic State [earlier known as ISIS] across the world. Less than 100 Indian migrants ever left for Islamic State territories in Syria and Afghanistan, and about 155 were detained for having links with it. The data from the World Population Review of the radical outfit's recruits worldwide shows that the countries which provided its mass recruits were Iraq, Afghanistan, Russia, Tunisia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, France, and others. The Middle East was the top source of its membership, followed by the European Union.

Yet, the filmmakers' fantasy about Kerala, clearly meant for propaganda purposes, claims that the film is based on a true story. It refers to a girl who realises she is trapped and is currently in an Afghan jail. She claims there are others like her—according to the filmmaker, this amounts to the testimony of "many" women and girls and, out of thin air, claims this figure is 32,000.

The status of religious conversion in Kerala is the next issue in the film. Oommen Chandy, former

Kerala chief minister, provided the related statistics for 2006 to 2012: "A total number of 7,713 persons were converted to Islam during 2006-2012 as against 2,803 conversions to Hinduism". He said the number of people who converted to Christianity during the period was unavailable. Among those who converted to Islam during 2009-12, 2,667 were young women, of which 2,195 were Hindus and 492 were Christians. He also said there were no forced conversions.

Recall that the campaign around love jihad (conversion of Hindu girls to Islam by duping them into marriage) originated in conservative elements of Kerala. Communitarian politics always need divisive, emotional issues to root themselves in society. Chandy said, "We will not allow forcible conversions. Nor will we allow the spread of hate campaigns against Muslims in the name of love jihad". An inquiry by police commissioners did not reveal any campaign to lure and convert Hindu or Christian women or girls to Islam.

But the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) latched on to the issue, and 11 states now have laws against "love jihad". Maharashtra recently saw a massive mobilisation by the Sakal Hindu Samaj, which claimed that the love jihad propaganda was an actual threat to Hindu society. The Samaj organised rallies in rural Maharashtra that can become a building block of hate against Muslims and other minorities in the BJP-ruled state. There is no empirical

basis for love jihad cases. An RTI inquiry revealed on 11 November 2020 that the National Commission for Women does not maintain any data on this issue. The NCW said, "No specific data under the category of complaints related to 'love jihad' is maintained by the NCW".

The ruling CPM government in Kerala and the Indian Union Muslim League are against screening the film as it would only serve to add to the anti-Muslim propaganda and create divisive politics in the state. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has said that artistic freedom should not be abused to divide society along religious lines. Equally disturbed by what is known of the film so far, Congress leader Shashi Tharoor has tweeted that the one who proves that 32,000 girls have been victims of this mythical love jihad will get Rs 1 crore as a reward and that a film based on falsehoods should not be permitted.

This film comes just as the Supreme Court came down against hate speech and asked the authorities to take suo motu action against such acts. The Central Board of Film Certification should review the film for fitness to circulate in the country and Kerala. And, considering the risk to not just Kerala but the entire country's social fabric, the Supreme Court needs to restrain propaganda films masquerading as art. □□□

[The author is a human rights activist and taught at IIT Bombay. The views are personal.]

LETTERS

Writing on the Wall

The Writers Guild of America (WGA) announced this week that, after six weeks of negotiations, no agreement had been reached with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers. And so, just like that,

Hollywood's TV and film writers went on strike on 3rd May, turning off the taps for new scripted entertainment.

The stages of late-night shows such as Saturday Night Live have been vacated with immediate effect.

Network TV in the US and the mighty streaming services upon which people have come to rely will gradually run out of material. Even if the strike stops, productions will be affected by decreased preparation time. The strike could lead to programmes being cancelled too.

Writers' strikes aren't new in Hol-

lywood. The last time the WGA went on a 100-day hiatus, between 2007 and 2008, the cost to California's economy alone was \$2bn (•1.8bn) and it affected a wide range of peripheral businesses. To outsiders, the strike might seem to be motivated by little more than a request for more money. But such a mobilisation was inevitable: the film industry is at a potential flashpoint. To the WGA's 11,500 members, the craft of professional screenwriting is at stake. The rise of streaming services has brought seismic changes to the industry and resulted in many writers struggling to earn a living wage. Staff numbers have been cut and, in many cases, so have payments for material reuse.

With the use of artificial intelligence looming large and a lack of funding for "mini-rooms"—spaces where writers can throw around ideas about unconfirmed projects—the question of whether screenwriting can remain a viable career needs to be addressed.

Karen Krizanovich,
A film journalist and broadcaster
Corpses on the Shore

There is a problem with large numbers of corpses arriving on the shore. We don't know who they are or what shipwreck they came from—and the number is increasing"—Faouzi Masmoudi, an official in the Tunisian city of Sfax. More than 200 refugees have died in shipwrecks off the coast of Tunisia in 10 days as they try to reach Europe. But despite the risk, there are still many people willing to make the journey, even as the European Union tries to pull up the drawbridge.

Al Jazeera
So Shameful!

The man who has been accused of sexual exploitation, by six female athletes and of sexual assault by a seventh who is underage, is just strutting all around with the Delhi Police bothering not even to interro-

gate him. The SC's intervention, as yet, has resulted only in registering two (apparently pointless) FIRs.

In too stark a contrast, the international medal-winning wrestlers peacefully agitating for justice have been assaulted with the whole world watching.

That's where we've landed ourselves today.

If it's the plight of the internationally famed athletes, what an ordinary folk can expect!

Sukla Sen

The First Victory Stop

A lot of people know of the Moscow Victory Parade, held on June 24 of the same year (1945), but few know the true first Victory Parade, held in the den of Nazi-fascism hours after the annihilation of the beast.

On May 4, 1945, the 5th Shock Army of Colonel-General Nikolai Berzarin held, in front of the Ancient Museum, next to the Berlin Cathedral, a small military parade to commemorate the taking of the city.

The parade ended up taking place even before the formal signing of the surrender, which would only take place days later, and on that occasion the men marched in the same uniforms they had used to capture Berlin, with the city still burning and with the sounds of gunshots and artillery nearby of the German capital as several local conflicts unfolded in the following days.

The brave soldiers of the Red Army paraded accompanied by horse-pulled infantry cannons. The symbolic act was intended to praise the hard fight that the USSR had undertaken to not only liberate its territory occupied by fascists but also to free much of Europe.

Moments later, the soldiers marched a few blocks away, and also extended the parade to other parts of the city, marching next to the Reichstag building and crossing

the symbolic Brandenburg Gate, which had earned a red band with Russian inscriptions glorifying the entrance of the Red Army in Berlin: "Glories to the Soviet forces who hoisted the Victory Flag over Berlin!

Berzarin, the commander in charge of conducting the military parade, would later become the Soviet officer in charge of the USSR occupation forces in Berlin.

Lucas Rubio

[Source: Stalin Society]

Khader Adnan

Early in the morning on May 2nd, Khader Adnan was found unconscious in an Israeli prison cell, and later declared dead. A member of the political wing of Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad, Adnan had been on hunger strike for 87 days to protest his jailing by the Israeli military on charges of affiliation with a terrorist group, support for terrorism, and incitement to violence. Adnan is at least the seventh Palestinian prisoner to die from a hunger strike since 1970.

His death sparked Palestinian protests and international outcry. At the United Nations (UN), for instance, experts said his death was "a tragic testament to Israel's cruel and inhumane detention policy." Hours after Adnan's death, militant groups in Gaza fired rockets into Israel, injuring at least 12. In response, the Israeli air force bombed Gaza, the coastal enclave battered by repeated Israeli bombing campaigns and a devastating air, land, and sea blockade.

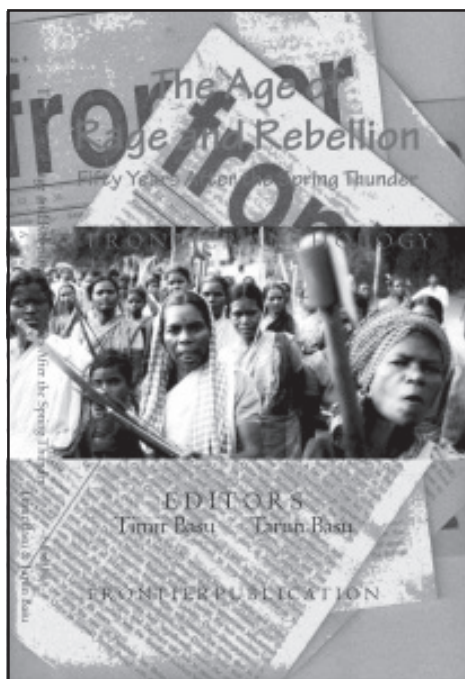
One week after Adnan's death, his body has not been returned to his family because the Defense Ministry decided to keep it. Adnan is now one of over 130 Palestinians whose bodies are being kept by Israel in freezers or unmarked graves.

"They want to control us in life and control us in death", said Buttu, the Palestinian Lawyer

Alex Kane, Jewish Current

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