

# frontier

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## 'The Coromandel Ambulance Express'

**A**T LEAST 288 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN CONFIRMED DEAD AND 1,175 injured in what is India's deadliest train accident in decades. Meanwhile, 207 of 288 bodies recovered from the site have been identified and returned to their families. The remaining 81 bodies are still lying at the AIIMS Bhubaneswar mortuary. Prima-facie the failure of a sophisticated electronic system designed to keep trains from colliding has been blamed for the crash. Witch-hunt has just begun to suppress the precarious condition the Railways have been in for long. Opposition parties as usual without hitting the root cause of ailment in the Railways finished their duty by attacking the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for "man-made devastation caused by utter negligence". After the Bihar Railway accident in 1981 when a train plunged off a bridge into a river killing an estimated 800 people, the June 2 Balasore accident is the most horrific in recent times. Minor and major accidents are occurring almost regularly and it cannot be otherwise because of all round privatisation of the system and stoppage of fresh recruitment in vital divisions to maintain the tracks safe. According to National Crime Records Bureau [NCRB] there were roughly 100,000 railway-related deaths in the country between 2017 and 2021. Not a small figure even by Indian standards!

India's railway network is the fourth largest in the world--after the United States, Russia and China—and carries about 13 million passengers on 14,000 passenger trains every day. The network consists of 64,000 kms (40,000 miles) of track with more than 1.5 billion tonnes of freight being transported annually. They are introducing super-fast trains every now and then to influence voters without bothering about safety requirement. And nobody talks of dwindling workforce burdened with heavy work load. Continuous curtailment of employees has created a situation in which accidents will be more frequent. Indian passengers are lucky that it doesn't happen so frequently.

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has sought a CBI probe into the catastrophic accident near Balasore as if CBI has a magic wand to improve working conditions with inadequate manpower. They can at worst find a scapegoat to shield the reality.

The Railway Ministry no longer presents a separate budget; it is now part of the national budget. The Railway has lost its traditional character. The way the Modi government is farming out railway jobs to private players

is bound to create more teething problems instead of solving them. Hundreds of thousands of posts lie vacant in critical departments and yet they are talking more of the same—modernisation and more machines, not working men.

Incidentally, a large number of people in the two passenger trains involved in the accident, namely the Coromandel Express and the Bengaluru-Howrah Express, were residents of West Bengal, who were either going to or returning from south India where they had gone for their advanced medical check-up or treatment. Sundarbans area in South 24 Parganas has recorded the maximum

number of casualties from the state in the derailment of several coaches of the condemned Coromandel Express. Many people call this train 'Ambulance Express' and rightly so. It's a pity that so many people, mainly middle class and poor people from the state are rushing in hordes towards Hyderabad, Coimbatore, Bengaluru, Chennai, Vellore and other cities equipped with advanced medical facilities. A patent allegation against Bengal government hospitals is that patients don't get proper attention from the persons in authority, including doctors and ordinary staff. Then most hospitals lack adequate arrangement for proper service. It's

at a time when many physicians in the state have achieved international recognition in their respective field for excellence.

Strangely enough, political parties are now busy in blame game. While some BJP leaders are defending the indefensible—accident—citing statistics of non-BJP period, opposition leaders' criticism of privatisation is too weak to move the Modi rock. With 2024 Parliamentary Polls not far away, the government is in a hurry to grab headlines announcing bullet trains, Metros and Vande Bharat express at the cost of passenger and rail safety. □□□

12.6.2023

## COMMENT

### Western Hypocrisy and War

THE NORWEGIAN HELSINKI Committee has exposed the hypocrisy of some western countries in respect of sanctions imposed by America and European Union against Russia. The Committee has shown how European businesses and third countries are actively circumventing sanctions, providing Russia with sanctioned goods and thus helping its war effort while showering abuses on Russia for 'war crimes' all the time.

On February 25, 2022, a day after Russia undertook a full-scale "special military operation" in Ukraine, the European Union and America introduced unprecedented sanctions against Moscow. In the following months, the sanctions regime against Russia was expanded with eight more installments, hitting its most valuable exports to Europe—oil and gas—and curbing its access to products that could be used in its war on Ukraine.

But despite the wide-ranging measures imposed and Brussel's commitment to uphold them, some

observers are now claiming that they have failed.

The Russian economy appears more resilient than expected and the Russian military retains the capacity to destroy civilian infrastructure and military targets. What is more, sanctioned goods are still finding their way to Russia and to the battlefield in Ukraine, making the mockery of the sanctions strategy of the West.

If the sanctions are not working the way they ought to, it is because some European countries are actively undermining them. A recently released report by Norway-based risk consultancy Corisk reveals how that is done.

Its analysis of customs data from 12 EU countries, Norway, the UK, the US and Japan shows that the circumvention of export sanctions on Russia amounted to an astonishing 8 billion euros (\$8.5bn) in 2022.

Of the countries studied, Germany appears to be the largest exporter of sanctioned goods to Russia; the second largest is Lithuania. The two provide half of the Western

goods Moscow should not have access to, officially after imposition of sanctions. This is the real world of capitalist market economy.

The research reveals that European businesses, and especially German ones, use third countries to sell their products to Russia. This is apparent from the analysis of the export data for sanctioned goods, including luxury items such as jewellery and perfumes, cutting-edge technology, like advanced semiconductors and quantum computers, machinery and transportation equipment.

In early 2022, Western exports of these goods to Russia plummeted, but to its neighbours, they skyrocketed. Nearly half of this "parallel export" is channelled through Kazakhstan and the rest is divided between Georgia, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and others.

Importantly, the list of sanctioned products includes dual-use goods that can be used for both civilian and military purposes, such as drones, vehicles and certain chemicals.

Germany's export to Russia of diesel trucks in this weight class dropped to zero by May 2022. However, the sales of these same trucks to Armenia increased exponentially

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and reached levels five times what Germany sold to Russia previously by September.

Polyamides are another dual-use product that has made its way to Russia, breaking the ban on exports. These chemicals are used in the manufacturing of body armour, military pilot flight vests and many other military and civilian items. Until June 2022, Germany exported virtually no polyamides to Kazakhstan. After

the sanctions were introduced, Kazakhstani demand for these chemicals exploded and by October it was importing 200 tonnes from German producers.

Lithuania has also been exporting sanctioned goods to Russia, but through another route—Belarus. ‘They throw the Kremlin out of the front door but Moscow sneaks back in through the rear window’. □□□

[Contributed]

#### NOTE

## The Balasore Rail Accident

*Bharat Dogra writes:*

**N**EARLY 1000 PEOPLE HAVE been injured in the recent extremely tragic train accident in Odisha; various new reports have mentioned a figure ranging from 800 to 1100 injured persons. There have been assurances at the highest level that the government will make very good arrangements for their treatment. However it is important to remember that many injuries suffered in rail accidents can be very serious and require longer term treatment and rehabilitation.

One hopes that the government will give adequate consideration to this aspect of the need for a longer-term commitment to the treatment and care of accident victims in the case of this accident as well as any other accidents. In the past it was often seen that there was much immediate sympathy and care but over a longer period free and proper treatment could not be sustained. Many of those injured are poor people including migrant workers and their families are entirely helpless in arranging treatment for complicated injuries. However not only in their case but in fact in the case of all victims it is the duty of the government to ensure longer-term continu-

ing treatment to those who need this.

A quick review of some studies will indicate the nature of injuries suffered by victims of train accidents. A study was conducted involving 174 victims of train accidents admitted in a hospital of Cape Town, South Africa during 2013-19. The results of this study were published in a paper written by Christina NioviKontoghiorghie and published in SICOT-J with the title ‘Train related injuries: A descriptive analysis highlighting orthopaedic injuries and management’. This paper has stated that tibial fractures were most common. 38 percent of these patients had suffered open fractures. 68% of patients underwent surgery. 5% died. 13% underwent amputation, despite the fact that a lot of attention was given in this hospital to avoiding amputation and instead trying limb salvage to the extent possible. Many patients of this study needed high levels of intervention through multi-disciplinary reviews, surgical procedures and lengthy in-patient stays.

At the same time this study has cited other studies in the USA where there was a higher incidence of amputation in place of limb salvage and another study in Turkey where

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higher rates of death as well as amputation were reported.

A study of victims of accidents in suburban trains in Mumbai by Ruchita Bhoyar, Nitin Borle and others published in the National Medical Journal of India in 2021 was also based on patients admitted to hospital. This study revealed that 46 percent were seriously injured and 12 percent died. Most of the serious injuries were on head and neck (36 percent), followed by extremities (26 percent) including fractures and amputations. Despite the seriousness of most patients, only 23 percent had received first aid before being brought to hospital. Such a record is worrying for a city which has a very high number of accidents very regularly in its suburban trains which in turn is related to shortage of trains, overcrowding and rush to catch trains.

A note on common train injuries in the USA prepared by the law office of Marc S Albert, where several such cases relating to train injuries have been handled, mentions the following common train accident injuries--

-brain injuries ranging from mild ones to open head wounds and traumatic brain injuries requiring lifetime of care and involving possibility of permanent harm, amputation, spinal cord injury requiring several surgeries and extensive rehabilitation, burns, lacerations etc.

Even this brief review of train accident injuries from medical and legal perspectives reveals the compelling need for being well prepared to provide longer-term treatment, care and rehabilitation. If the government is to live up to its promise of providing the best possible care, it must prepare very well to fulfill this responsibility as well as allocate adequate resources for this as longer term commitment for such serious injuries and medical conditions is certainly going to need adequate back-up of resources. The tendency

so far to seriously underestimate the number of persons injured in various rail accidents should be given up and carefully prepared records of all seriously injured persons requiring longer-term treatment and care should be maintained. There should be periodic reviews of their treatment and needs.

The tragic accident in Odisha has again highlighted the urgency for the Indian Railways to correct their priorities in order to achieve balanced progress on a safe path. In recent times there have been fund shortages for RRSK, the most important safety fund, as seen from the fact that during the first four years of the working of this fund, the share of resources that was to be generated from the internal funds of railways fell short by 79 percent. The Comptroller and Audi-

tor General (CAG) drew attention in a report in 2022 to the fact that fire extinguishers had not been provided yet in 27,763 coaches where these are needed and that there was 30 to 100 percent shortfall in various places in inspections of tracks. Renewal of tracks has been lagging much behind targets and even more behind actual needs.

There are about 1,14,907 km of railway tracks and it has been officially estimated that apart from this being maintained properly, on an average 45,00km of tracks need to be renewed annually, but as this has not been happening regularly, a backlog making it more and more difficult with passing years to ensure the safety of railway tracks. While luxury trains have been rolled out in increasing numbers, adequate funds were not made available for safety. □□□

#### A TRIBUTE

## RANA BOSE

(October 1950-May 2023)

CRB

**R**ANA BOSE, WHO DESCRIBED himself as a “playwright, novelist, author, poet, writer and professional engineer” and was also a progressive, an activist, a Calcuttan of long-standing, a Montrealer of long-standing, a longtime contributor and supporter of Frontier, passed away on 10 May 2023 in Montreal.

He had been in remission for four years from a rare form of leukemia. Early this year the cancer returned, but Rana neither yielded, nor stopped striving. He (and Lisa) visited his beloved Kolkata in January this year and returned to Montreal via Italy (the other place he had grown to love).

### **Childhood and Upbringing**

Born to Amiya Kumar Bose and Chameli Bose (née Dutta) on 17

October 1950 in Calcutta, Rana had a relatively unusual upbringing informed by anti-colonial activism and progressive politics. He grew up hearing how as a teenager, his father toured villages with his younger sisters, giving magic lantern shows about James Connolly, Sinn Fein and the Easter Rising of 1916. And of how great aunts courted arrest, demonstrating against colonial rule.

Amiya Bose, a village boy, became an eminent cardiologist who taught generations of medical students in Calcutta, was a sympathiser of progressive causes and supporter of individuals associated with them. Dr Bose was instrumental in setting up Peoples’ Relief Committee, Students’ Health Home, helped in founding Patha Bhawan School and Islamia Hospital and was a found-

ing committee member of the Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR). Chameli Bose, a trailblazer in her own right, was the first woman to graduate from University College, London with a Bachelor’s Degree in Statistics and Mathematics. She worked for the Indian Statistical Institute and then went on to head the Bureau of Applied Economics, West Bengal with a staff of 1600. As a consequence of her life and career, it was normative in the Bose household for a woman to work outside the home.

Politics, local and global, were ever-present in the household. Reading material abounded. Visitors, many of whose names now appear in books or in the annals of movements for change—against apartheid, for revolution, cultural movements—came and went. It was a fertile environment for curious and intelligent young Rana. Right up until his teenage years, the family lived on Elliot Road, in a neighbourhood which had a diverse population of



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Muslims, Christians and Hindus and was also where many of the city's Anglo-Indians lived. Growing up in a household and city rich in the culture of progressive politics and what can be called 'multiculturalism' (in its purest meaning, sans more recent pejorative connotations), Rana said, from the very beginning, in his environment, bourgeois legitimacy "was declared questionable, correctness was fallible, badness was good."

Rana's father was a huge influence on him, though they had their political disagreements. A cherished photo of Rana's was of his father at Rosa Luxemburg's grave in Berlin. Rana observed, "My father nurtured me to think rationally, be empathetic and behave in a dignified manner", hastening to add with characteristic mischievousness, "this last attribute had limited impact on me".

Rana attended kindergarten in Loreto House and then went to St. Xavier's, from where he entered Jadavpur University to study engineering. His home environment was bolstered by a Jesuit ethos, and school teachers, many Anglo-Indian, contributed to his developing and critical perspective, even though there may have been at time some inherent contradictions. (Decades later in the late '80s, Fr. Bouché of St. Xavier's remembering Rana said, with a twinkle in his eye, "He was one of our naughty boys!") In late adolescence, the burgeoning western pop music scene in Calcutta drew him in and he along with friends formed a band that played in upscale venues in the city. Throughout his life Rana had a deep appreciation of music, with eclectic tastes that included Western pop, jazz, experimental, rap, hip hop, reggae and the confluence of beat poetry and music. He also had a love for political music coming out of the anti-fascist movements in Europe and Latin America and for the revolutionary songs of India.

The broader political context was also formative for Rana. As he wrote: "The 1959 Food Movement against the famines had left an indelible impression in my mind about how the Communists (CPI) had organised against it and how the Congress Government of Bidhan Roy, Nehru and Atulya Ghosh had imprisoned thousands of people and killed around one hundred people on the streets of Calcutta and in nearby towns." Rana was also very familiar with the history of peasant movements in Bengal and elsewhere.

Non-alignment was palpable. His father had been part of the India-China Friendship Association, set up in Calcutta in 1951 by Prof Satyen Bose and Rana grew up hearing about the attempted assassination of Chinese premier Zhou Enlai when the Kashmir Princess, the Air India plane, that had been sent by Nehru to take the Chinese premier to the Afro-Asian Bandung conference in 1955 was blown up in mid-air. Sixteen died, including cabin attendant Gloria Berry. Zhou was alive. He had not boarded the plane due to an emergency appendectomy.

#### **Naxalbari**

All the above notwithstanding, perhaps the most formative personal and political influence in Rana's young life was the Naxalbari movement. In 1967 the Naxalbari uprising began and Rana, along with thousands of youth from all sections of society, disenchanted with the unfulfilled promises of freedom after British rule and also critical of the organised left, was attracted to what seemed to them, the promise of real change. Rana described how he came into the movement because "in my household, certain movements and historical events and certain critical books stared at me." He observed how his "father's friends included some staunch anti-Stalinists from the time of the end of the

Second World War. Some admired Tito more than Stalin, some were Trotskyists and others, who felt things, had gone wrong in 1917 itself. They had read 'Lenin's Testament' long before. They simply chose to detach themselves from the communist movement. They met every Sunday morning at my parent's house, played cards, had breakfast together and quietly read and discussed books from the past." Having been immersed in histories of revolutions and revolutionary movements, he was also a realist and pragmatist, which made him "quite wary about the jubilant belief systems and insurrectionary enthusiasm that was being promoted".

Rana left home and went underground much to the consternation of his parents, despite their progressive leanings and beliefs. Many details of his life at that time are unknown. Perhaps people will never know them all. However, what is known is that he emerged as an iconic leader, who inspired many of his youthful contemporaries to join the movement, and they in turn inspired many more. The state, as was its wont, came down with full force against them, unleashing unimaginable repression. Thousands were killed in so-called 'encounters'. Many were arrested and subjected to horrible tortures. Those who survived were imprisoned for years.

In 1970, Rana was arrested and charged with the murder of Gopal Sen, Vice-Chancellor of Jadavpur University. He was tortured in police

**For Frontier Contact**

**ALAIGAL VELIYEETAGAM!**

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lock-up and interrogated. The police officer who interrogated him told him that it had come down from the highest political person in the land—they must produce a head on a plate in retaliation for Gopal Sen. With his charisma and ability to inspire others, his fame and popularity, and hailing from a prominent family, charging him for this would demonstrate the determination of the state to smash the movement. That Rana was nowhere near the scene --he was undergoing a chest x-ray (he suffered from acute asthma) at the time of the murder --was immaterial. A perpetrator was needed and he fit the bill nicely. Eventually however, the authorities were unable to make their case and Rana was released.

Feeling an affinity with the objectives of some of those seeking liberation for Bangladesh, Rana and some other youth crossed into East Pakistan for a while. Meanwhile back in India, though the state was unable to make a case against him, it was considered unadvisable for Rana to remain in India and shortly after, he left for the USA where he enrolled at Washington University in St. Louis.

Rana's departure from India however did not mean a rupture in his links with either the city where he was born and grew up in, or the politics he grew into. Relationships with comrades remained a lifelong affair. He and other comrades helped where they could both financially and emotionally. He was also closely associated with two magazines and journals of critical enquiry that came into being as a direct result of the Naxalbari movement—the now defunct 'Now' and 'Frontier'. It was these relationships and this commitment which meant that Kolkata has always been home, even though he has not lived in the city for more than 50 years.

**St Louis, Montreal and Beyond**  
Rana completed a degree in Chemi-

cal Engineering and then started a Master's in Economics. Among other things, he worked on the student paper and wrote the editorial when Saigon fell in 1975. He also participated in the local poetry and music scene. Then, unable to return to India because the Emergency was in force and it would have been unsafe for him to do so, Rana found refuge in Montreal. He got a position as a lab technician with Dr Daya Varma of McGill University's Pharmacology Department in the Faculty of Medicine. Daya would become a lifelong mentor.

In June 1975, the Indian People's Association in North America (IPANA) was founded, coincidentally on the same day that the Emergency was declared in India. IPANA had chapters across Canada and the USA that worked in collaboration and solidarity with other groups of expatriates from different countries, who were also concerned with what was happening in their countries of origin at the time—Iran, Haiti, etc. In Montreal, some of them had been in the city for a while, including during the so-called Sir George Williams University affair, when black students' complaints about racism by a white professor fell on deaf ears and the students and their supporters protested. In Montreal, currents of internationalism and solidarity abounded. Quebec nationalism was palpable, as well as movements that challenged narrow-based nationalist platforms and were more in tune with some of the ideals, like those in India for change from the roots up.

IPANA chapters in the US were comprised mainly of Indian students studying in universities there. In Canada, they were largely immigrant-based. During the Emergency, IPANA was one of the most well-known organisations outside India, raising awareness of what was hap-

pening there, demanding the release of political prisoners, to the point where the Indian government impounded the passports of some of the more well-known members. During the clampdown of the Emergency, APDR was outlawed. Rana's father and others of the group were interrogated at Special Branch [police intelligence services] and the civil liberties report they were publishing about the "orgy of slaughter and brutal repression" unleashed by the Indian state on political activists, in the background of the Naxalbari uprising", was confiscated in a police raid on the press. Eventually a copy of the text, *Bharatiya Ganatantrer Swarup* was smuggled out of India by Ranajit Guha, got translated into English by IPANA members and *The Real Face of India's Democracy* was published by IPANA Montreal.

Over the years, especially in Canada, IPANA also got involved in local struggles and solidarity movements against racism, for farm workers' rights, immigrant rights and so on. When Rana came to Montreal, he got involved with IPANA right away. His background, his wide readings—Che, Fanon, Cabral, George Jackson and his knowledge of history informed his work and perspectives. IPANA published *New India Bulletin* from Montreal and *India Now* from New York. In Montreal, Rana along with others was involved in writing, typing, lay-out-design, printing and distribution. There was also a lot of community outreach. Study groups met to discuss issues. Cultural events were also organised locally, as well as with visiting activists such as Gail Omvedt and Gursharan Singh's Amritsar Natak Kala Kendra. IPANA continued to exist even after the Emergency. Debates that had been on-going about the semi-feudal, semi-colonial, semi-capitalist nature of India and about Mao's Three World

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Theory continued, inconclusively. The end of the Emergency as well as theoretical disagreements contributed to IPANA eventually disbanding.

However, emerging from these times in Montreal were organisations that continue to live and prosper, and Rana was involved in all three, either directly or with his support, right up until his death –Teesri Duniya Theatre, Montreal Serai magazine (for a time also a theatre group) and the South Asian Women's Community Centre. Elsewhere, IPANA activists also played key roles, as with the formation of the Canadian Farm workers' Union.

After leaving McGill, Rana made his way into industry in Montreal, eventually becoming an Executive Vice President Engineering, Research and Development, Quality Assurance and Total Process Improvements in one of the world's largest valve manufacturing companies. However, he also continued with his cultural activities, writing, directing and producing plays, writing short stories, poems and novels and he became well-known in the Montreal literary scene.

Rana had always subscribed to "freedom 55" and when he reached that age he 'retired' but moved into consulting, which also afforded him opportunities to travel. Among the many places he loved to visit was Italy, even recently on his very last overseas trip. He marveled at the polymath abilities of Leonardo—calculations, design, engineering, and problem-solving. In recent months he ranted against Francis Bacon, not because of his theories and methods, but because they are intrinsically linked to modernity, became a litmus test for 'civilisation' and the harbinger of the colonialism and imperialism of the last five hundred years; of Western triumphalism; nomenclature became important—'West Asia' and not 'Middle East' for example.

Rana also felt the need to take care

of older comrades who were unwell, or who didn't have close family. Even doing this when he himself was very ill. For example, his relationship with Paresh Chattopadhyay in his (Paresh's) later years. Paresh, a noted scholar of Marx and a progressive activist in his youth died in Montreal this year at the age of 96. Recognising the importance of progressive legacies, Rana with Paresh's concurrence and financial contribution was instrumental in setting up Paresh Chattopadhyay Political Economy Scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students at Concordia University. And earlier, he assisted Sam Noumoff who passed away in 2014, and his wife Francesca who pre-deceased him by a few weeks. Sam a very influential and iconic professor taught Political Science at McGill University for many years, introducing generations of students to Marxist political theory and a radical perspective on the politics of East Asia.

Friends, comrades and associates from different periods of Rana's life and through different types of interactions, professional and personal, would know him for certain things and describe him in specific ways. There are many people around the world who have been touched by Rana. Since his passing they have been connecting, saying how important association with him at a particular point in their lives was.

Rana who was widely read and thought deeply, could also be opinionated and at times cutting. He was stubborn and could be very exasperating, but equally was very giving and generous to a fault. He stood by family and friends, irrespective of his own view on matters at hand; and was capacious and warm.

Those who knew him right through, acknowledge that he changed, and he was the first to recognise this. This evolution is evident with a careful reading of his

writings, his plays and novels and his relationships, personal and political. While there are common threads and not complete disjunctions, Rana's perspectives and understanding became more catholic. He came to value Tagore. He became emotional listening to 'Sankochero Biwhalata'. In a seeming paradox, even as he became more impatient with hegemonic political status quos, he also became more patient, understanding and appreciative of people and situations that earlier he might not have. One could say that always sharp and clear, Rana mellowed, even as he maintained his acerbic wit and did not compromise on principles. At the end of 2022 he wrote to friends: "This is my message for the end of the year, nothing is happy, nothing!" Among the many causes that were dear to him was justice for Palestinians and in this end-of-year message he said he'd stopped circulating news from Palestine because of the brutality of the Israeli Defence Forces.

Rana was very familiar with the ideas and theories of many who worked for and wrote about political change. While he was attentive to European theorists he set great store on the ideas and examples demonstrated by Third Worlders or black liberationists such as Walter Rodney, Thomas Sankara, Maurice Bishop, Patrice Lumumba, Che Guevara, Fred Hampton and Steve Biko.

Over the years India remained a lodestar and he stayed in touch with events, with splits and continuities, in agreement with some of the directions, disagreeing with others. In these recent days, with the outright denuding of any semblance of democracy in India and many other parts of the world, Rana was a staunch advocate and supporter of coalition-building. In this last year, despite his health issues he participated in diasporic coalitions and even from

his hospital bed kept up lively correspondence and conversations. The days he went silent one knew things were very difficult. One waited for the next missive to arrive in your Inbox; a sign that perhaps he wasn't feeling too unwell. Such as the following: "We have looked for class-based exploitation in all struggles we have participated in. But class has changed and while words have been created to outline the intersections etc., in the end class is not enough. When tribal people clash with workers we are lost; when ethnicities clash for racist reasons, we don't know what to do; when riots/ wars are started for non-economic reasons, like geopolitical trickle down or incipient white privilege notions, we are overtaken by liberal democracy. My point is that coalitions maybe more important than class confrontation. It has happened before, but education is crucial." In terms of the world situation he said: "There must be multi-polarity first and the World

Majority must determine which system must dominate. And the World Majority is Asia, Africa and Latin America; Third World!!!!"

Rana's last novel, *Shaf and the Remington*, which he worked on intensely when he was very ill, as he felt he was running out of time, is a grand work of historical breadth, the result of deep and wide reading of history and is in many ways a synthesis of all he learned and his worldview. Commentators note how he "masterfully incorporates history, politics, philosophy, and physics" and asks people "to question the essence and roots of war and ideology." And how the book which is set "in the fictitious town of Sabzic in what is clearly Yugoslavia but never identified as such... is an allegory to the forces of human nature, which pit the petty desire to divide against the will to unite."

Rana said, "[S]acrifice is necessary if change must happen, that a complete undermining of the main-

stream consensus must happen. That you may not see what you are working for. You may long be gone before anything is achieved. That you cannot go about doing all the usual things in life and still expect to posture as a socialist of some sort." This engagement with socialist praxis remained Rana's anchor and perhaps is why these lines from Tennyson's "Ulysses" resonated so much with him.

*We are not now that strength  
which in old days  
Moved earth and heaven, that  
which we are, we are;  
One equal temper of heroic  
hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but  
strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and  
not to yield.*

Rana is survived by Lisa, Raka, Siraj, Durga, Bratin, Kim, Jesse, Jo, Coco, Fran, extended family and scores of activists and friends whom he inspired and was inspired by. □□

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## NORTH EAST IS NORTH EAST

# Manipur Imbroglia and the Road Ahead

**Arup Baisya**

*"A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!" (Richard III, Shakespeare)*

IN 2021, THE MINISTRY OF Home Affairs (MHA) asked the Chief Secretaries of Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh to "take appropriate action as per law to check illegal influx from Myanmar into India. The MHA has said that State Governments have no powers to grant "refugee" status to "foreigners" and added that India is not a signatory to the United Nation's Refugee Convention of 1951 and its 1967 Protocol. Mizoram Government's humanitarian approach to give shelter to 270 members of the Kuki-Chin community who entered Mizoram from Bangladesh by referring to them as

"officially displaced persons" necessitated such overriding 'Farman'. The kingdom regurgitates similar 'Farmans' from time to time to put the institutional architecture of the relation between state and centre, between citizens as voters and the state in the reversed order in the power relation. Be it the process of NRC or the identification of citizens, the message is loud and clear—"The ruler King is almighty, the state is mightier than the people". Now the Subedars in the states in the North-east are emulating the same vocabulary verbatim. Mizoram wanted to be an exception by being humane towards their ethnic brethren in the

neighbouring countries; this is considered insubordination by the Kingdom. The kingdom has ignored the ethnic ties of the North-Eastern states with neighbouring countries and its special diverse character. The Kingdom betrayed the Northeast long back by raising the bogey of infiltration and lost the battle to socially and psychologically integrate this part with the rest of India. They raised the bogey in Assam against Bengalis and now in Manipur against Kuki-Chin and the battle is lost. The Bengalis still have their socio-political stake within Indian state however fragile, but Kukis are the most marginalised and vulnerable. Over the dead bodies of the innocent, the King is now walking the tightrope in search of his horse which has lost its course within the smoke generated by the fire of internecine conflict within the Manipur imbroglia. It's a



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fallacy that the Kingdom knows that the bogey of infiltration would lead the Kingdom to scrape the barrel and break fresh ground.

In the recent past, the Kingdom strived to tread a different path to integrate North-East with India. This path does not place the people at the core for inducing the socio-psychological passion of Indianness. But it's built on the idea that geographical connectivity is the foundation of Indianness. This opportunity of building connectivity has not arisen from the requirement of the emerging market economy from within, but from the opportunity of mercantile order of trade resuscitated in the ancient trade route as a global imperialistic design of competitive trade and geopolitics thereon. This imperialistic interest is considered by the Indian big bourgeoisie as a God-gifted opportunity, albeit the imperialists are God for them when they are keener on making a stupendous profit from the speculation of buying and selling with Government backing, be it real-estate or spectrum for telecom industry or infrastructure, than risking their investment in manufacturing. North-East is north-east, rugged hills to plunder, valley for internecine conflict, it's not that part of India where FDI is forthcoming. The rest is, of course, left with coercion, AFSPA, and army baton and bullet. The look act policy, the term coined by Modi Government which has been adept in coining slogans, is an effort in recasting India's restive northeast as the gateway to Myanmar and the rest of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. New Delhi has been planning to build profitable trade with South-east Asia through Myanmar as part of the Asian Highway Network. New office buildings and customs departments are being built on the outer edge of Moreh town; a smart hotel heralds the hope of more high-pro-

file visitors. Visitors and residents alike pass three to five checkpoints to enter the city and building sites in Imphal. Despite the illusion of security, Moreh is host to a myriad of insurgent organisations from all three ethnic communities: Meitei, Kuki/Zomi, and Naga. Why such insurgency from all the communities of Manipur, even the Meitei's of Manipur? Those who think that Meitei is a monolithic community enjoying their dominant position in the valley do live in absurdity. All insurgent groups are vigilant to guard their "no man's land" so that their land and resources are not grabbed by the so-called "modern moneyed mafias". This modern development is alien to their own internal development and integral to their social dynamics. Despite rugged hills, Manipur has been witnessing modern development of agriculture, especially by the Meiteis, developing small businesses and transformation of household handicrafts into marketable commodities. But mercantile capitalist development from above also needs to establish a client-patron relationship with all communities. Based on this class, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) could garner support to elect the ST legislatures in the state Assembly to form Biren Singh Government. The long-drawn-out RSS Hindutva campaign also fits within this framework of the client-patron relationship. RSS has been promoting the symbols, rituals, and culture of the tribal religion, mostly the oral tradition of animism, and painting these traditions within broad canvass of Hinduism and transforming the mass pathos generating thereon to be pitted against Christianity which is alleged to be responsible for destroying the tribal culture. This reactionary subaltern revivalism has helped RSS to get their act together and made significant inroads in an ethnically diverse region of the North-

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east. Rammadhav was deputed long back to stitch an ethnic alliance under political Hindutva, and his temporary success made him on cloud nine, but eventually, it seems now, they have burnt their bridges.

Manipur lost her independence to British India in the year 1891. From 1892 onwards it became a princely state under the political control of the Government of British India. Accordingly, the administration of the state was a political agent who was vested with all political powers. This British Paramountcy continued till 1947 when India got independence. The policy of non-interference was followed by area expeditions that were reported in order to quell the opposition of the hill communities to the colonial extension of commercial activities in and through their land. The territorial politics which was hitherto unknown to the hill communities was subsequently introduced by forcefully merging the hill tribal areas into the princely state of Assam for administrative convenience. The pre-independent Northeast Frontier comprised of Assam and two princely states of Manipur and Tripura had witnessed reorganisation and redrawing of the boundary in the region during the post-independent period until the attainment of statehood by Manipur in 1972. The erstwhile British legacy of handing over of few states of North-East to India in the backdrop of the then-world imperialistic geopolitical interest is written in History. Within this global imperialistic geopolitical order, Indian territorial policy from the period of Indian independence to the beginning of the neo-liberal phase was to integrate the region through a form of clientelism where the local client class of state-wise dominant community was allowed to maintain their privileged position within the territorial chauvinistic power of the state. Manipur

has been a centralised state in the valley region and village-based autonomous authorities in the hills. The autonomy of the hill areas is maintained by the promulgation of various acts by the state Government dominated by the valley predominantly inhabited by the Meiteis and it is the only state where the fifth and sixth schedules are not applicable in the hills. This institutional architecture built over the years had been supporting the flow of surplus revenues from the hills to the valley through a government tax system and the lack of Government investment for infrastructural development in the hills. This has remained the long-drawn-out bone of contention between the hills and valley due to the demand of the tribals for territorial scheduled status.

This relationship took a new turn during the neo-liberal phase and got momentum when the BJP came to power both in the Centre and the state. The organisational ground for such a policy shift had been prepared by RSS from below. The essence of this shift was to dismantle the power of the client class over the territory of the state and to bring it under the direct command of the Centre on Hindutva plank. The look act policy, the changes in the land relation, and the formidable presence of Christians to be pitted as alien "other" have made the situation favourable for the Indian ruling class to pursue such a project vigorously. The Indian ruling class has succeeded to a large extent in their policy drive barring some still insurmountable territory of resistance like Nagaland and Mizoram.

The change in nomenclature from look east to look act policy is dictated by the Modi Government's claim to boil the ocean. In 2022, a senior crisis adviser at Amnesty International stated about Myanmar's army rules, "Alarm bells should be

ringing: the ongoing killing, looting, and burning bear all the hallmarks of the military's signature tactics of collective punishment, which it has repeatedly used against ethnic minorities across the country." China is exploiting Myanmar's situation of ethnic conflict and Western sanctions thereon for its economic benefit. China recognised Myanmar's Military Government and its infrastructural project restarted and China is interested in protecting its investment in rebel-controlled areas. The National Unity Government (NUG) which is a loose coordination of many of the rebel ethnic organisations is not recognised by China, but China has backed various groups in order to help secure minerals or energy resources and their business stake in drug, teak, hydro-power, gas, and rare earth. India's ambition for establishing trade hegemony in south East Asia is destabilised by Chinese influence and now it appears that the centre's wrong northeast policy and political Hindutva project have backfired and almost dismantled the bargaining power with the help of Japan against China. Imphal-Mandalay Bus service, India-Myanmar-Thailand territorial highway and Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project, and multi-dimensional regional trade are all dependent on geographical control over the land route by the Indian Government. But the alienation of ethnic communities from their land and forest resources, the containment of their anguish thereon by military means, and socially and politically diverting attention by fanning Hindutva communal-nationalistic passion cannot be sustainable for long when world's mighty powers are present as a stumbling block in the road ahead. India struck an agreement with Myanmar and Bangladesh to declare a similar approach to crack down on ethnic insurgency.

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This policy along with communal fascist design to incorporate a section of the middle class through client-patron relations and ruthlessly suppress the popular discontentment due to over-exploitation of the poor toiling masses would turn the Northeast into a boiling pot with a vicious cycle of ethnic insurgency, communal strife, and state repression.

Apparently, the demand of Manipur's Meitei for ST status had a triggering effect on ethnic violence. But the root cause lies elsewhere within the premise of alienation of the masses from their land and natural resources and thereby creating ethnic vulnerability. The neoliberal policy of the state has created a large chunk of floating young generation cutting across all the communities, albeit with quantitative differential traits of their vulnerability defined by the socio-political position of the respective community they belong to in the institutional hierarchy. This vulnerable young generation is alienated from their traditional bondage with land and nature and thereby from the traditional ethos of peaceful co-existence but has not found a place in the modern institutional arrangement and productive system. They live in a vacuum devoid of any forward-looking value system and lost faith in the system which is corrupt to the core, and can do extremely hard work for their survival and in the absence of that, are susceptible to falling prey to any reactionary ideological and masculine activities to ventilate their despair and run around in circles. Meiteis in the valley are no exception, but as a community, they are relatively privileged and dominant. Meitei-psyche in the valley were still recently boastful of their developed status in comparison to the tribals and were quite stable with their revenue earned from fertile valley land which is 10% of the

total land of Manipur and from the revenue earned from the surrounding hill areas and agricultural land. But the land crisis and unemployment already made the community restive. The Meitei social activists who have been demanding the withdrawal of AFSPA as Manipur remained outwardly peaceful during the last few years have lost ground as they failed to fathom the inner social dynamic that necessitates addressing the economic crisis through the democratisation of state and society. The reactionaries at the helm of affairs have turned the table to arouse passion against vulnerable religious and ethnic communities as imagined enemy. The reactionaries are successful in generating passion against those from the hills and outside who have settled in the valley and for grabbing the land of the hill areas where tribes reside with some kind of institutional protection. The Meiteis actually have been trapped in the overriding project of the centre to take overall control of the state to a commanding height and also for eviction of the tribal people from their land not only for route-mapping and infrastructural construction under look act policy but also for real estate business by the land mafias and their political masters who belong to a pan-Indian network of vested interest. The ruling class conspiracy is revealed by the fact that the Manipur Government issued a public notice on June 3rd, 2022 by setting a dateline of 1st July 2022 for submission of applications for forest rights of forest-dwelling scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers and notifying that no application will be accepted beyond the dateline. The Government knows very well that the people residing in the remotest part of the state in the hilly terrain with abysmal communication facilities cannot even be aware of such

Government notification in such a short period of time. Furthermore, had the Government been serious about ensuring their rights, the process would have been made continuous and sustained till the last mile residents are not provided with their legitimate land rights and forest rights. The long silence of the tribal legislatures of the ruling party over the issue has been conspicuous, but with a hidden intent. From the development of the event leading to full-scale violence, there is ample reason to believe that the eviction drive of the tribal and the desecration of churches was a meticulously designed plot. The delayed response of the central government and the central leadership raised many eyebrows from various quarters.

Every cloud should have a silver lining. One can surmise that the saner voices from Meitei activists and affected common people are the silver linings in the cloud. But the hegemonic and dominant socio-political design is a premonition of a tempest where such silver linings might fade away. What is the alternative road ahead then? The most disappointing phenomenon is the absence of any left discourse in the entire political gamut though the left played some positive role up to the 1980s. The new socio-political landscape has found the left unaware of and in the static mindset and led them to lose ground to be extremely marginalised. The political effort behind the slogan of multilayered autonomy and federalism is down for the count so long as it is devoid of any class power to challenge the super-exploitation of labour and nature by the imperialists and the Indian ruling class. Women are keen on saving nature as they are still metabolically linked with nature to a great extent in the Northeast and a vast new generation of toiling masses desires to lead a decent life with the value of their

labour power and social security. And this section of every marginalised and vulnerable community is also really agog with a desire to resist the state's policy of unabated and rampant eviction. From within the garb of a vibrant resistance movement against accumulation through displacement

that has been set in motion in the Northeast as a precondition to initiate a capitalist market economy for exploitation, the real struggle against imperialistic capitalist plunder can only surface and the agenda for a new political restructuring of state for safeguarding constitutional democ-

racy and also to do away with a democracy deficit for further democratisation of state and society can be a formidable counter-narrative in the political discourse. Let the left introspect and be socially active hook, line and sinker, it is better late than never. □□□

## MEITIS, NAGAS, KUKIS

### Manipur is Burning Still

*Shobha Warrior*

**T**HE VIOLENCE WHICH started on May 3 in Manipur continues almost a month later.

It took 26 days for India's home minister Amit Shah to visit the troubled north east state.

Thirteen citizens from Manipur met Home Minister Amit Shahji. He requested suggestions from them to bring the present situation to normalcy.

'Many of us told him that though the clash was between two communities initially—the Meiteis and the Kukis—now it is between Meiteis and different armed Kuki organisations that have entered the state.'

These armed organisations have attacked the Meiteis, they have burnt down more than 200 houses and killed 6 people. This is what is happening in Manipur.

It is the responsibility of the Government of India to stop them from attacking common people because the central government forces have set up camps in the state to observe ground rules.

If they do not observe ground rules and if they continue to attack the Meitei common people, the situation will get worse.

The honourable home minister did not make any comment, but he assured the concerned citizens that the territorial integrity of Manipur would be protected, and that the

Government of India also was very concerned about the lives of common people.

He also told them that more forces would be deployed to protect common people.

Who is supplying arms to these armed Kuki organisations? What was the home minister's comment on this issue?

He remained silent on this matter. He did not disclose anything. But he assured the distinguished citizens that the territorial integrity of Manipur would be protected.

The situation is such that the majority of common people do not like the central security forces.

They have come here to protect people, but the allegation is that they help the armed organisations attack and burn down the houses of the Meiteis.

Many people have lost faith in the central forces as they believe these forces are involved in the escalation of the problem.

At the same time, Kukis have also lost their faith in the state security forces as they say majority of the (Manipur) armed forces are from the Meitei community.

The situation today is Meiteis who live in the valley have lost faith in the central forces and Kukis who live in the hills have lost faith in the state forces.

The end result is the mistrust

between the two communities has widened. This is one of the major problems facing the state today.

How did the animosity between the Meiteis living in the valley and the Kukis living in the hills, start?

To understand the genesis of the problem, one has to go back to the historical process of the social formation of the different communities of Manipur.

With more than 36 ethnic groups living here, Manipur is a polyethnic society.

These 36 ethnic groups can broadly be divided into three groups—the Meiteis, the Kukis and the Nagas.

The Meiteis, who form the majority community, inhabit the valley districts.

The other 35 communities inhabit different mountainous districts of the state.

During the colonial administrative period, the tribal people living in the hills were broadly divided into the Nagas who live in three-four districts and the Kukis who inhabit three-four districts in the hills.

Are there more Kukis than the Nagas in the hill districts?

No, they are almost equal, but they are less than the Meiteis.

One has to also understand that the names Nagas and Kukis are just umbrella terms as they cover a number of communities.

For example, under Nagas come ten communities. Kukis also include another ten communities.

So, the population of Manipur can be broadly divided into the Meiteis, the Nagas and the Kukis.



The names, Nagas and Kukis are not given by the people, they are exogenous.

The names are given by the then British colonial administration for administrative convenience.

In fact, people do not like to be called by these names, more so the Kukis than the Nagas.

But during the Naga movement, many of the Kuki ethnic groups joined the Naga fold leaving the Kuki fold.

After Independence, many of the ethnic groups under the name Kukis disowned the name Kuki. They preferred to be identified by their own ethnic names.

So, when one analyses the social formation of Manipur, one should know that there was ethnic fusion and also ethnic fission.

But the Meiteis remained the majority community.

Kukis can be divided into two groups, old Kukis and new Kukis. This happened even during British rule.

The old Kukis are those who entered Manipur early in the historical period from the Myanmar side.

They are commonly called Chin in Myanmar, but in Manipur, they are known as Kukis.

Recently, there were protests by Kukis at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, saying, they were Indians and not illegal immigrants...

In truth Kukis are very much Indians.

The old Kukis had entered Manipur as early as the 16th century, while the new Kukis entered Manipur in the late 17th century and early 18th century during the reign of Maharaja Nar Singh.

Both the old Kukis and the new Kukis are citizens of India and citizens of Manipur as they had entered the state about 200-300 years ago.

Then, what exactly is the problem?

But after Independence, the India-Myanmar border remained porous. The result is, many Kuki people illegally entered Manipur from

Myanmar.

The migration from the Myanmar side to the Indian side accelerated because of the political turmoil and instability in Myanmar.

When in Myanmar, they are Chin, and the moment they cross the border, they become Kukis.

While the people of the state are concerned about this, no legal action has been taken against the illegal immigrants.

They have settled down in the state and have become citizens of Manipur illegally.

Did it result in Meiteis feeling animosity towards these Kukis?

In the beginning, there was no animosity and people, mainly the Meiteis, were not against them.

But with illegal immigrants becoming legal citizens, the Kuki population increased in an unnatural way.

The exponential increase was more than 100%! It differs from district to district. Then, it became a concern for the majority community, the Meiteis. □□□ [Source: Rediff.com]

## AN UNCERTAIN WAIT

# Umar Khalid's 1,000 Days behind Bars

*Apeksha Priyadarshini*

**U**MAR KHALID HAS COMPLETED a thousand days behind bars. Anyone who knows Umar even a little bit knows that he is a dynamic and restless mind. This writer met Umar for the first time in 2016, when he was just out of jail in the 2016 JNU sedition case and he was invited to a protest programme to talk about the mainstream media blackout on the state-backed plunder of Adivasis in Chhattisgarh. If the 26 days that he had spent in jail had really done anything, it was only to sharpen the articulation of his anger at the injustice that he had been so vehemently fighting against in the years before.

His vilification by TV news anchors on 24x7 news channels and the media trials that he was subjected to which had a section of people baying for his blood, had only made him more determined to expose the real crises in the country that these anchors really didn't want people to be talking about.

But today's Umar in Tihar is different. He has had years of experience in tackling extremely dangerous public perceptions about himself and the work he does, carefully built by newsrooms that stand only to do the dictator's bidding. But the challenges that he has faced in these three years behind bars have been

unprecedented. And yet, they have brought about a calmness in his personality. At times this calmness unnerves his friends. In truth it isn't a calmness of resignation or of defeat. People see an Umar more observant than ever before, more empathetic and patient, more considerate and more mindful of his demands, more measured in his articulation and more thoughtful in his writing. This is an Umar who doesn't shy away from a fleeting but warm embrace, knowing fully well the value of touch while living in a world saturated with the numbness of forgetting what love feels like. This is an Umar who reflects on and revisits his work, his beliefs, his ideas and aspirations, as his thought process transforms with the countless books he reads and the experiences he gathers. This is an Umar who holds

on to his sabre, by looking at what he is being subjected to as symptomatic of the larger progressing rot in the society, which has been facilitated by those who sit in power today and who are rendering people's sense of community and collective empathy hollow from within.

There is a particular speech which he gave in Amravati, one among the countless ones that he delivered while contributing to the equal citizenship protests from the forefront in 2019-2020, that has been picked up, circulated, vilified and made the subject of discussion on social media and consequently in the courts. It is the words he uttered on another particular occasion, on the completion of 50 days of the Shaheen Bagh protests across the country, standing in Jantar Mantar, that hold the pithy summation of the consolidation that these protests were able to facilitate. He said that when people asked, "What did these protests achieve?", the answer of those who were bearing the torches of these protests, the Muslim women who led Shaheen Baghs across the country, was that this movement helped a community, a people overcome the atmosphere of fear that has been set into motion by this regime ever since it set foot in the corridors of power.

The spectacle that violence

against Muslims, Dalits and Adivasis was made into, through the numerous acts of lynching, through judicial decisions that were made in favour of the Brahminical majority, through unilateral legislative decisions like the revocation of Article 370, had made the air heavy and unbreathable for the oppressed communities in the society. The passing of the Citizenship Amendment Bill into an Act was another brick that was being laid in the wall by the BJP-RSS regime to push the Muslims of India into a corner. It was these protests, he said, that enabled people who were being driven to the margins in their own homeland, to put together their spirits and break the atmosphere of enforced silence with their cries of inquilab. It was these protests, he said, that shattered the arrogance of those who believe they can get away with any kind of injustice that they perpetrate, to sit up and realise that their every act of violence, of subjugation and of dehumanisation, is being watched, remembered and recorded in the history that people are writing beyond their dictated textbooks.

Today, when one sees him languishing in jail, Eid after Eid away from his mother, unable to witness his young nieces and nephews grow into promising human beings while showering them with his love, mis-

chief and stories, away from friendships that he has nourished and nurtured for decades with his care and wisdom, while one looks for reasons to keep fighting. It's true that this uncertainty in wait is in itself an injustice and Umar's identity as a vocal, political and most importantly, a fearless Muslim in today's India is the real reason behind his incarceration. But even though today seems dimmer than yesterday as everyday violence takes the shape of institutionalised cleansing. There's no time to spare because those who will lead people into the future of an equitable and just society are being punished for standing up for all in the past. If the saffron tint of Indian history textbooks must come undone and the vibrant colours of every season must return, if the erasures must speak up from the interstices, if newer, more inclusive histories of people must be rewritten, then those who have played such an important role in shaping these histories must be allowed to speak again, from beyond the iron bars. □□□

[Apeksha Priyadarshini is a PhD scholar at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and Councillor, Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union. She is also a member of the Bhagat Singh Ambedkar Students Organisation, JNU.]

[Source: *thewire.in*]

## LETTERS

### **Brutal Bulldozer-Raj!**

National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) expresses full solidarity with the thousands of traumatized residents of Tughlakabad and some other bastis in New Delhi, whose homes have been demolished and whose lives have been ravaged both prior to as well as in the lead-up to the G-20 Summit. The disregard for their minimum well-being and gross violation of their rights is deeply troubling and demands immediate atten-

tion and redress. We condemn actions by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) that launched a massive demolition drive recently, razing down nearly 1,000 houses. Additionally, hundreds of homes have been demolished in other bastis too. At some places hawkers have also faced brutal evictions, in violation of law.

The forced evictions and demolitions carried out by the authorities have not only left close to 1,600 families comprising 2.6 lakh residents

homeless, but have also resulted in the loss of their belongings and livelihoods. The lack of proper resettlement prior to any move to 'evict' and absence of adequate support exacerbates the vulnerability of these already marginalized communities. The role of the Union Government and even the Delhi Government in displacing citizens out of their homes repeatedly is abominable.

The blatant violation of laws and regulations during the demolition drive is equally alarming. These actions disregard legal safeguards and due

process, including provisions under the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act, 1971, New Delhi Municipal Council Act, 1994, and the principles outlined in the United Nations Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-Based Evictions. We strongly condemn such disregard for the rule of law and call for state accountability towards all working-class communities, urging the authorities to immediately cease the demolitions, investigate these violations, and provide legal remedies and redress for the homeless residents of Tughlakabad and other localities.

Every individual has the inherent right to a safe and secure home under Article 21 of the Indian constitution. It is disturbing to see the preparations for the G-20 Summit take precedence over the people's fundamental right to shelter. The forced evictions, demolitions, and mass displacements experienced by these communities who are also marginalised on the accounts of religion, caste, gender primarily in underprivileged areas like Kashmiri Gate, Yamuna Floodplains, Dhaula Kuan, Meharauli, Moolchand Basti and recently in Tughlakabad, are not only a violation of their fundamental rights but also a harsh reminder of the systemic failures on the part of the state to ensure fundamental rights of the most vulnerable sections.

- We urge the Government to halt all the demolitions and forced evictions immediately.
- We demand that the Government must fully and fairly compensate all affected individuals and families for the losses incurred, including damage to property and loss of livelihoods.
- We also urge the Government to conduct a thorough and fair investigation into the events surrounding the brutal demolition of houses as a lead-up to the G20 Summit, including the high-handed actions of law enforce-

ment agencies and hold them accountable by taking appropriate legal action.

- We also urge the Union Government and the Delhi Government to stop its repressive approach and engage in meaningful dialogue with the affected communities because it is the State's responsibility to protect its citizens and ensure their rights, especially while hosting mega events like G-20, which have such drastic and life-altering consequences on the working poor. Otherwise, big slogans like 'Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas' remain a hollow rhetoric.

### ***National Alliance of People's Movements, New Delhi*** **Hard News in Brief**

More than 2,50,000 people are homeless after the recent demolitions in Delhi's Tughlakabad village. NewsClick's Hrishi Raj Anand surveys the desolation and the eviction of residents from their tiny homes and establishments. The judiciary gave them 'temporary' relief and Delhi's ruling party vanished from the scene, too. People who lived together have been separated permanently, as the demolition has triggered a reverse migration—from the capital city to villages in the hinterland. The Centre pursued the destruction of houses and livelihoods until the residents had no recourse. No wonder they are calling it a State-sponsored earthquake.

Remember Samarveer Singh: Teachers recalled the University of Delhi professor who was denied a regular job despite years of service, and died by suicide last month. They say they will not forgive this or the politically-motivated candidate selection ongoing at the university, writes NewsClick reporter Ravi Kaushal.

Black Diamond: The contractual workers of West Bengal's Pandaveswar live under the shadow of death, working in underground coal mines. But they also confront job losses as the Indian government takes up 'just

transition' to so-called clean energy. Informal workers and small businesses around mines will be the hardest hit, reports NewsClick journalist Saurav Kumar.

Belagavi Floods: For four months every year, the residents of over a dozen villages along the Krishna River in Karnataka's Belagavi district become homeless. Seven other rivers flow through this region, irrigating fields while destroying villages. But the State government takes residents on a merry-go-round of which entitlement category they fit instead of compensating them for their losses with an even hand.

Silent Sport Stars: Sporting stars have been criticised for ignoring the protest of wrestlers in Delhi against the wrestling federation chief. Independent journalist Subhash Gatade looks at the possible reasons for their silence.

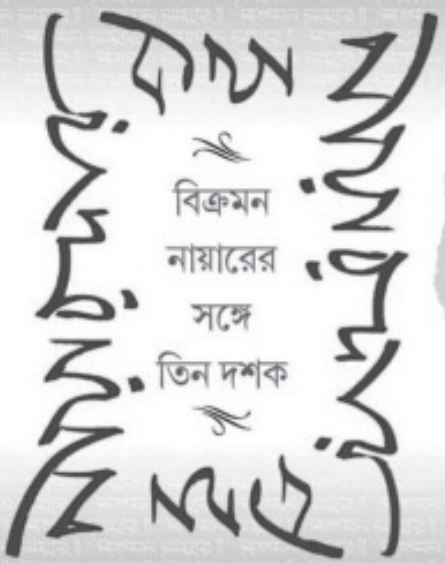
Caste Census Crisis: Conflicts along religious lines also have a caste implication, finds NewsClick reporter Tarique Anwar, who was recently touring Bihar to report on the Ram Navami day violence in several towns. While the caste census can be a glue for the socially and economically backward groups, Hindutva mobilisation along religious lines can test their ability to raise collective demands.

City Governance: The Comptroller and Auditor General has questioned successive Himachal Pradesh governments for failing to empower city governments. Former mayor of Shimla, Tikender Singh Panwar, explains how and why city residents are being denied better services.

World Press Freedom : And Last but not Least: NewsClick editor-in-chief Prabir Purkayastha and senior journalist Bhasha Singh discuss Day and the war in Ukraine in Padtal Duniya Bhar Ki. What makes Julian Assange stand out among those who defend the free press, and will the Russia-Ukraine war intensify?

***The NewsClick Team***

মানস ভট্টাচার্য



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