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On Other Pages

Comment	2
Note	3
PHYSICS, PHILOSOPHY AND CONSCIOUSNESS More on Democratic Centralism Arup Baisya	4
'AZADI KA AMRIT MAHOTSAV' Politics of Tiranga Ram Puniyani	5
FOOD FOR THOUGHT Russia is the Villain! Sajai Jose	7
THE INEQUALITY PANDEMIC Profiting From Pain	8
A NEW INTERVIEW Noam Chomsky on Ukraine War Joshua Yaffa	10
QUESTIONABLE JUDGEMENTS Judiciary is Collapsing Prem Shankar Jha	13
Letters	15

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75 Years Later

WITH THE OPPOSITION IN TOTAL DISARRAY, THE RULING Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is now doubly encouraged to mark the 75th Independence Day with a lot of fanfare to show the world that it is the biggest functioning democracy. But this biggest showcase of democracy is also the biggest prison house of the socially and economically disadvantaged people. They are out to assimilate the legacy of tricolour, albeit they never fought for independence. On the contrary their ideologues from the RSS camp were at one stage apologists of British imperialism. Only the other day Chief Justice of India N V Ramana expressed concern at indiscriminate arrests, prolonged incarceration, prisoner's indefinite wait for bail or trial, and the violation of fundamental and human rights through unlawful eviction. In India's criminal justice system the process is the punishment. The CJI said the 6.1 lakh prisoners in the country's 1378 prisons were among the most vulnerable in India. For all practical purposes it is a dictatorial regime. No dissent is allowed and yet it is the biggest democracy! Independence Day has very little appeal or no appeal to prisoners, particularly those belonging to marginal communities. They want freedom, freedom from injustice and Modi's authoritarian rule. After 75 years of independence India is now competing with Sub-Saharan Africa in international rankings. On the global hunger index India stands at 101 out of 116 countries ranked by international agencies. With every passing day the overall political and economic climate of the country is becoming worse---more and more people are going below 'official poverty line'.

The rise of BJP and decline of Congress is a hard reality today in Indian politics. The fall of Congress seems irreversible. Not that Congress was pro-people in yester years. Nor did it try to execute Nehru's vague concept of socialistic pattern of society. Under the garb of mixed economy what it developed was bureaucratic capitalism a la Soviet model. It nationalised core sector industries without really empowering the toilers. And now BJP is all set to de-nationalise them and hand-hover public assets to private players. Modi's bulldozer of reforms has aggravated inequality in society. The billionaires are increasing in numbers. The total wealth of all Indian billionaires was bigger than the size of the Union Budget for 2018-19.

The point at issue is BJP, the ultra-right face of Indian politics, with its perverse ideological thrust of Hindutva, is re-writing history, rather distorting

the history of India's freedom struggle as well, to its advantage. The anti-nationalists of yesterday are today super-nationalists!

For one thing rightist swing in economic and political affairs is an international trend. Opposition parties are trying to fight BJP without attacking its economic base. And it won't work. The saffron assault on education and culture is so pervasive that opposition parties' naïve approach is simply meaningless. They are dribbling in the mid-field without advancing an inch. Then BJP is making the 75th Independence Day a special occasion to polarise people on divisive lines.

What requires special attention on the eve of 75th Independence

Day is how India is slowly but steadily getting integrated into the American strategic defence umbrella under the Modi dispensation. India's entry into QUAD or what may be called Asian NATO is going to change geo-political landscape of South Asia and Indo-Pacific region. QUAD is an American initiative to contain China and India under Modi is part of it. India's strained relations with China frequently created many a flash points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) recently. And India's QUAD membership is not going to ease tensions across the disputed border left by history. If anything the global order is changing very fast after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The American dream of unipolar world

has been shattered, particularly after the emergence of Russia-China axis as a counterweight to American military and economic hegemony. In India-China conflict Russia never came to support India. With the formation of Russia-China bloc India can hardly expect any favourable treatment from Russia in case of a border war between the two Asian nations, the possibility of which cannot be ruled out because of Indian and Chinese build-ups on both sides of Line of Actual Control.

Opposition parties don't oppose BJP's foreign policy. Nor do they fight its communal politics seriously. And yet they think they will be able to oust Modi in the next general elections. □□□ 14-08-2022

COMMENT

Ukraine-Russia Pact

UKRAINE AND RUSSIA REACHED a landmark agreement to allow grain shipments to restart through blockaded ports in the Black Sea. But a Russian missile strike on Odessa seemingly threatened the deal, but there were signs that they were moving forward despite the Odessa fiasco.

Some 20 million tons of grain—from last year's harvest—has been stuck in Ukraine since the beginning of the war in February. The reason: Russia has been blocking shipments out of the Black Sea, a key freight route, and Ukraine has been mining sea lanes as a defensive measure. As a result, the world has lost a key source of supply for essential staples such as wheat, barley and sunflower oil. Sudden surge in edible oil prices in India is due to stoppage of imports from Ukraine. It's fanned what was already a major global food crisis. Now, a deal has been struck to allow these shipments to leave the country—and Ukraine said it

had begun work to set up sea corridors to resume grain exports.

The deal, which was announced in Turkey, is aimed at restarting Ukrainian grain exports by ensuring safe passage out of the Black Sea for ships carrying wheat, barley and other staples. Turkey and the UN will help with inspecting ships to make sure that they aren't being used to transport anything else, like military equipment.

The mechanics are, on the face of it, fairly straightforward. Turkey and the UN will help with inspecting ships to make sure that they aren't being used to transport military hardware. The ships will be steered out by Ukrainian captains, head to Turkey, where a joint command centre will be set up to inspect the vessels; there, in addition to Turkish and UN officials, Ukrainian and Russian representatives will be present to safeguard the interests of both sides.

Now, Russia also gets something out of the pact, of course. As a

result of the negotiations that led to this deal, steps will be taken to facilitate exports from Russia of grain and, perhaps most critically, fertiliser. Moscow is the world's largest fertiliser exporter, and a drop-off in supplies since the outbreak of the war has hit farmers worldwide, in places as far off as Peru.

The biggest impact will be on the countries that were most dependent on Ukrainian imports, and most of those are located in the surrounding Middle East and Africa region—places such as Egypt, which has been waiting on deliveries of hundreds of thousands of tons of grain since February, and Somalia, which relied on Ukraine for the majority of its wheat imports.

Ukraine is a major part of the global food supply chain. Getting the 20 million tons of grain from last year's harvest out of the country is important, but experts are already looking to the next harvest. It's not clear right now exactly how successful it will be—and the reason for that is the war. In parts of the country, particularly around the eastern provinces, it's not clear how

August 14-20, 2022

FRONTIER

3

much land Ukrainian farmers will be able to access safely. Certainly, as the war continues, it will be reduced—and so the harvest will be smaller. And that means the world will continue to suffer, as a major source of food is squeezed, creating shortfalls and driving up food prices internationally.

The key thing to watch in the days and weeks ahead will be how

much grain is eventually shipped out of Ukraine and whether Russia and Ukraine will honour the agreement. There were questions about Moscow's commitment just a day after the deal was announced, when Russia bombed Ukraine's Odessa port. So everyone will be watching what happens in the Black Sea closely—it, quite literally, has global implications. □□□

NOTE

Humanity in Danger

Bharat Dogra writes:

WHILE THERE ARE SEVERAL important issues that need the attention of concerned citizens of the deeply troubled world, there are two that cry out for very special attention on the basis of urgency.

Firstly, for the first time in human history, the basic life-threatening conditions of the planet earth are very seriously endangered. Hundreds of very senior senior scientists, including Nobel laureates, have already warned regarding this, individually as well as in groups. In addition there is broad agreement that this unprecedented threat is related to a number of very serious environmental problems, including climate change and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

These factors can easily disturb, disrupt, destroy the life-nurturing conditions within a few decades (or even within a few days or hours under the worst possible scenarios relating to the actual use of weapons of mass destruction), humanity owes it to itself, its future generations, to countless other forms of life, to nature and to the once bountiful and beautiful planet to take timely effective action for preventing such a catastrophe. Such effective action must necessarily be

within the framework of democracy, justice and peace, as the conditions of vast extended participative cooperation of humanity are only possible in such a framework.

However what is actually happening is very far from this and this brings people to the second most worrying aspect of this most critical juncture of human history. Briefly this second most worrying aspect relates to the fact that some very powerful forces, institutions and individuals have used these exceptionally difficult situations to most cynically and opportunistically try to impose an agenda of increasing pursuit of narrow interests and domination like never before. These forces include institutional forces--overarching forces spread over several countries, some of the biggest ever corporate and financial interests as well as those in garb of philanthropy—as well as private billionaires (who are able to get away with more irresponsible deeds than governments and institutions).

Thus despite all the claims of progress of democracy, in reality people have a world dominated by a few extremely powerful individuals and institutions capable of more destructive (from a longer term perspective of protection of all forms of

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life) actions than some of the worst tyrants the world has seen in previous centuries.

One part of their agenda is to seek to dominate the sectors which matter the most to people, led by health and food. At another level, their priorities relate to latest weapons technologies including possibilities of space domination and warfare. All this is sought to be manipulated in such a way as to be accepted as a part of the discourse on progress, scientific advancement, national defence etc. Billions of dollars are at disposal to make this manipulation work and spread this agenda of not just narrow self-interest but also of control and domination.

Hence precisely at this juncture of human history when the most democratic, participative and cooperative actions are needed to best utilise the great human capabilities for the most urgent tasks of resolving the survival crisis, people instead see precisely opposing trends of dominance, control and narrow self-interest remaining on top by using their

billions as well as their links with authoritarian forces.

This is really a time for the much greater unity and cooperation of all those who are committed to justice and equality, protection of environment and of all forms of life, peace

and harmony, democracy and transparency, for unity and cooperation which can transcend all narrow divides and create the conditions for resolving the survival crisis within a framework of democracy, peace and justice. Time is fast running out, this

should be achieved as early as possible. □□□

[The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now with its SED Demand (demand for declaring the next decade as the decade for protecting earth). His recent books include A Day in 2071, Planet in Peril, Protecting Earth for Children and Earth without Borders.]

PHYSICS, PHILOSOPHY AND CONSCIOUSNESS

More on Democratic Centralism

Arup Baisya

THE ENERGY-FIELD CREATED by the movement of disparate and dispersed elements of the society or classes for coming close together in its conflict with its adversaries, the elements bearing the knowledge of enlightenment or consciousness of a party or a group may find themselves within the realm of this field. This is both a coincidence or a chance and a mental state—an intricate combination of an indeterminate and a determinate part. For the determinate part, one needs a theory of mind or a mind theory that determines whether the conscious elements will engage themselves for necessary observations. As for example, those elements that desire for a radical transformation of society and believe that working class is the agent for such changes, they will immediately observe how the working class is behaving when energy field is generated and when they find themselves within the realm of such energy-field. This observation cannot accurately determine both the momentum and time. How can one know that the disparate and dispersed elements of a society or class in a particular space-time are moving to come close to create an energy-field?

Let us assume that the thousands of workers of various strata are coming close in an industry against their owner. From outside

the periphery of this particular industry, theory of mind that drives one to set one's eye on the workers' movement cannot alone draw one's attention to observe the phenomenon within this particular industry. The dissemination of information linked with particular level of energy along with the observer's position in the energy-field created by this particular energy level motivates the elements of party or group from outside to observe. Prior to that, the process internal to this industry and workers in formation as a social class does not exist to the observer. When the elements of a party or group observes, it interacts to create a new energy level. The observer determines the time to observe, but as soon as the observer observes, the momentum changes and becomes indeterminable. The reality prior to this interaction is not known and during interaction, it appears as a probability of change. This is perhaps the reason why Marx said, philosophers have interpreted the world in many ways, the question is how to change it. We are not sure whether the reality unveiled by the observer during observation is the complete picture of reality or reality exists independent of observer's observation. If it is true that the social reality exists independent of the observer, then the observer, in this specific case the element of party or group, has no role to play for giving

any direction of the movement for a radical change, the task of the observer becomes limited only to find out the fundamental law of society. Rather while dealing with a phenomenon, no sharp distinction can be made between the attributes of the elements of society or class and their interaction with the elements of a party or group. This may be the case where the inability to determine anything differentiates social science from physics whose sole purpose may be of determining what nature is as believed by Einstein and his search for an unified field theory till his death in contradistinction to Neil Bohr who believed that the task of physics is what we can say about nature. The two great physicists of their time were engaged in an unresolved debate for a long period of time based on thought experiments. It was only in the second half of twentieth century, Bell's inequality theorem which came in support of Einstein's claim that theory of quantum mechanics is incomplete and his idea of hidden variable, local reality and observer independent reality which is somewhat other than determinism, but not quantum mechanics which defines reality based on observer's observation. But many later experimental results violated Bell's inequality theorem, and these results were interpreted in such a way that the existence of quantum reality independent of observer's observation is possible only when local criteria for reality is abandoned. The experiments are going on to assimilate the two views for a unified theory. I hope, Einstein is proven

to be right. If his philosophical view for his endeavour to formulate unified field theory is proven to be correct, then physics remains as a distinct science of matter, otherwise the science of matter based on the quantum mechanics converges with the science of society.

As observation is not possible without some interaction with the elements of society or class from which energy is released or getting engaged with the internal process, the observation itself creates new disturbances or momentum and thus elevating the energy level. This interaction sets the direction of the movement of the classes. But as the energy radiated from the movement of the disparate and dispersed elements of the society or classes coming close and the timing of interaction with the members of the party or group which bears the theory of mind to transcend the existing society for a radical change are not simultaneously and accurately determinable, there are several options which appear as probable resultant future state of affairs.

Let us examine few such options. The particular movement of

the classes against particular domination, hegemony and exploitation may unveil the character of both exploiters and the state and instill a sense of collective consciousness within the bounds of a particular space-time continuum. This consciousness in interaction with the members of the party or group may lead to the either of the many outcomes. One outcome may be that it settles down within the existing system by attaining some concessions from the exploiting classes and the state and in this scheme of things, both the consciousness from within and from outside dissipate energy to be absorbed by their adversaries within the system which has undergone changes in many forms in terms of exploitation and democracy but far short of any radical change. Another option is that the new energy-field generated from such interaction may elevate the entire space-time bounded within a state defined by a certain form of nation, howsoever inchoate, to move upward from their point of reference by absorbing the new energy. This leads to a change of energy level of both the exploiter and exploited in

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

—Fr.

opposite directions from that situation. The momentum of such change may not be accurately determined, but the time can be determined when the exploiting and exploited classes swap position in the state structure, this is the moment which we term as revolution. As the second option is intertwined with the global system, there is also a third option that emanates from global space-time continuum.

But one thing is common in the above stated options and many others. The consciousness level of both the interacting forces apparently from within and outside undergoes changes and is not pre-determined by the theory of mind and matter. The determinism which is visible in everyday mundane life collapses whenever the phenomenon of such living interaction occurs.

□□□

'AZADI KA AMRIT MAHOTSAV'

Politics of Tiranga

Ram Puniyani

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi has urged the people to participate in hoisting tricolour on their houses between August 13 and 15. The occasion has been titled as 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav'.

It looks like another spectacle is being brought up on the lines of Tali and Thali during the Covid-19 epidemic. The fact is that Indians have derived deepest of inspirations from tiranga hoisting on national days and on occasions when people have something to celebrate. Every 15th

August and 26 January the same thing is done to remind the deeper spirit of tricolour and to rededicate to the goals of the republic which adopted this flag. Why it is being done now as people celebrate the 75th Year? On one hand it is a welcome move, at another level this is also the time when the spirit of the constitution is being trampled recklessly by targeting religious minorities, Dalits and women. This is the time when India's hunger index is competing with that of Nigeria.

Unemployment and the inability to face regularly occurring natural disasters like floods and droughts are the order of the day.

This is also the time when people are disturbed that so many of social workers, raising their voice for poor and marginalised are put behind the bars for their struggle to uphold values of Indian Constitution and to come to aid of the victims of violence in particular. Case of arrest of Teesta Setalvad, RBSrikumar and putting fresh charges against Sanjeev Bhat is just tip of the iceberg of the type of politics underway in the society.

So while all the political moves are at cross purposes with the values

which the tricolour represents what is the purpose of creating this spectacle? People also understand that though the BJP-RSS is presently projecting tricolour it is deeply opposed to the values which it represents. Going slightly back one recalls that during national movement, anti British movement, aiming at secular democratic India was having tricolour as its symbol. RSS the parent organisation of BJP, not only kept aloof from anti British movement it also did not accept Tiranga and had saffron flag for itself. One recalls that when Jawaharlal Nehru became the President of Indian National Congress in 1929, INC gave a call of celebrating 26th January 1930 as a day of total Independence (Purna Swaraj) and hoisting the tricolour. RSS Sarsanghachalak even at that time opposed the tricolor and instructed RSS shakhas to hoist saffron flag (Bhagwa Jhenda).

The tricolour was adopted as the national flag with a modification that the Charkha was replaced by

Ashok Chakra. The then RSS Sarsanghachalak, MS Golwalkar commented, "Our leaders have set up a new flag for our country. Why did they do so? It is just a case of drifting and imitating....Ours is an ancient and great nation with a glorious past. Then, had we not flag of our own? Had we not national emblem at all these thousands of years? Undoubtedly we had. Then why this utter void, this utter vacuum in our minds?" And also while addressing a Gurupurnima gathering in Nagpur on July 14, 1946, Golwalkar stated that it was the saffron flag which in totality represented their great culture. It was the embodiment of God: We firmly believe that in the end the whole nation will bow before this saffron flag".

As India got Independence, a day prior to that RSS mouth piece Organiser was scathing in criticising the tricolour. The August 14 issue also carried (of Organiser) 'Mystery behind the Bhagwa Dhawaj (saffron flag)', which, while demanding the hoisting of a saffron flag at the ramparts of Red Fort in Delhi, openly denigrated the choice of the tricolour as the national flag in the following words: "The people who have come to power by the kick of fate may give in our hands the tricolour but it will never be respected and owned by Hindus. The word three is in itself an evil, and a flag having three colours will certainly produce a very bad psychological effect and is injurious to a country."

BJP is a dynamic organisation. It did strategise the use of tricolour in due course. One recalls Uma Bharati using tricolour to communalise the Idgah maidan issue in Karnataka. Later when Murl Manohar Joshi became President of BJP, he took out Ekatmata Yatra to Kashmir and hoisted the tricolour in Srinagar under the protection of Indian army. In due course, what are

called the fringe elements of this politics started taking out processions on various occasions, making it a point to take these through Muslim majority areas while waving the tricolour in an intimidating way.

Tricolour is a great inspiration to the people of India. Many protestors have on different occasions unfurled this flag on appropriate occasions. One such instance one recalls was the Shaheen Bagh movement, protesting against the CAA. The protestors unfurled this flag on Republic day with due honours to give their message of nationalism and rights as citizens.

The present campaign planned for 12 to 15th August this 2022, comes in the with modified norm that Tiranga need not be just made of Khadi. So now polyester and other synthetic material will be used in abundance with adverse consequences to the environment. Can patriotism be generated by such moves? One recalls that when Smriti Irani was the MHRD minister there was a proposal to install the Tricolour in each Central university with the height of 207 ft with due prominence. This was in the backdrop of student protests in various Universities. The idea was this will cultivate nationalism. All this while flouting the basic norms of Indian Constitution, which should be the core marker for official policies. Mere symbols don't bring the substance unless values of Fraternity, Equality and Liberty are followed. These need to be highlighted while initiating any genuine campaign. □□□

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Russia is the Villain!

Sajai Jose

THE HUNGER AND LIVELIHOODS crisis that has gripped the world since Covid-19 hit, exacerbated by the lockdown-related disruptions, has now positively ballooned into an emergency. The crisis is manifesting at just about every level: steadily increasing prices of food, but also of fuel and fertiliser (both directly linked to food prices); growing shortages of food and fuel locally, disruption of global supply chains; increasing unemployment and poverty, and the resultant fall in incomes and purchasing power for the majority; conflict-related disruptions and uncertainty; looming financial crisis and recession; growing public protests directly linked to these; and topping it all, widespread political paralysis, enabled by media silence on the crisis. In sum, people are seeing a multi-pronged crisis unprecedented in its breadth and depth in recent history, and from which few nations seem exempt.

If one is to believe Western leaders and international organisations such as the United Nations, the crisis is primarily a product of Russia's war in Ukraine. A UN task force report on the issue was titled 'Global Impact of war in Ukraine: Billions of people face the greatest cost-of-living crisis in a generation.' UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres was quoted as saying that the war was "supercharging" the crisis in poorer countries that were already struggling to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.

Addressing the G7 summit in Germany this June, US President Joe Biden too blamed the crisis on "Russia's unprovoked and unjusti-

fied invasion of Ukraine and the severe drought in the Horn of Africa region." Not surprisingly, Biden's statement came in the wake of what seems like a concerted campaign in mainstream Western media targeting Russia for the crisis ("Russia is weaponising food supplies to 'blackmail the world'", a CNBC headline said).

Russian President Vladimir Putin denied the charge, in turn blaming the crisis on the crippling Western sanctions on his country, which have "created conditions that made it much more difficult" to deliver certain products internationally." He also reportedly confirmed that Russia had not "put any restrictions on the export of fertilisers, or on the export of food products."

But is the Russia-Ukraine war really behind the present crisis? A closer look indicates otherwise. As a March 2022 World Bank report explained: "Here is a fact which may surprise you: Global stocks of rice, wheat, and maize – the world's three major staples – remain historically high. For wheat, the commodity most affected by the war, stocks remain well above levels during the 2007-2008 food price crisis. Estimates also suggest that about three-quarters of Russian and Ukrainian wheat exports had already been delivered before the war started." The report refers to the food security crisis as a "food price crisis," emphasising that it's not caused by shortage of food.

Data from the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) monthly 'Cereal Supply and Demand Brief' confirms this. The FAO's forecast for global cereal production

in 2022 has been raised by 7 million tonnes in July from the previous month and is now pegged at 2,792 million tonnes and is only 0.6 percent short of the output for the same period in 2021. According to the FAO, the shortfall caused by the Russia-Ukraine war has not impacted global wheat stocks much, thanks to higher-than-normal harvests.

An assessment by the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES), too confirms that there is currently no risk of global food supply shortages. The IPES too identifies it as a "food price crisis," but goes on to identify the causes. Stating that "the failure to reform food systems has allowed the war in Ukraine to spark a third global food price crisis in 15 years," the report points to "fundamental flaws in global food systems – such as heavy reliance on food imports and excessive commodity speculation – for escalating food insecurity sparked by the Ukraine invasion," adding that "these flaws were exposed, but not corrected, after previous food price spikes in 2007-8."

Yet another report, by Navdanya, the organisation founded by environmental activist Vandana Shiva, goes even further: it points to the evidence outlined above and says that the present crisis is the direct outcome of a broken global food system that exists primarily to serve agribusiness giants."

The report, titled *Sowing Hunger, Reaping Profits – A Food Crisis by Design*, traces the crisis to excessive financial speculation, increased commodity future pricing and increased volatility in the market, all of it adding up to bigger gains for corporate players, even as it drives up food prices globally. As Shiva puts it, "what the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has once again laid bare is just how fragile globalised food sys-

tems are, and how quickly a fluctuation in the market goes on to detrimentally affect the poorest. The current globalised, industrial agri-food system creates hunger by design.”

An analysis of global wheat prices by economists CP Chandrasekhar and Jayati Ghosh reinforces this. Examining FAO data and projections from May 2021, much before the Russia-Ukraine war commenced, they find that the estimated global production of wheat in 2022 is likely to be lower than in 2021 by less than 1%, but around 2% higher than the average of 2018-20. Similarly, global trade in wheat is also projected to fall slightly when compared to 2021, but it will still remain higher than in 2018-20.

The two major factors they have identified as driving the crisis are, “profiteering by major grain trading agribusinesses, which have already shown dramatic increases in profitability in January-March 2022 as they have raised their prices without being questioned, as everyone assumes that this is the result of war-driven supply shortages. The other is

Million tonnes	2018-20 average	2021 estimated	2022 forecast
Production	756	776.8	770.8
Imports/Exports	181.4	192.1	188.9
	2018/19-2020/21	2021/22 estimated	2022/23 forecast
Total utilization	753.3	771.7	768.6
Stocks ending in	282.7	296.5	297.8
Per capita food use (kg)	67.3	67.5	67.4

[Global wheat production. Source: FAO Food Outlook June 2022]

financial speculation in wheat futures markets, which can drive up prices even in spot markets.”

As a recent Rolling Stone magazine report summed up, “this crisis... is in some sense artificial, given that it is not driven by any actual shortage of food in the world,” adding, “Commodity traders make money off wild price swings, shippers make money off people desperate for grain, fertiliser manufacturers make money off farmers desperate to maximize their yields, and proto-fascist politicians are happy to exploit rising food prices as evidence of the failure of democracy.”

It’s important to note that a country like the UK, where civil society is calling for a food emergency

to be declared, is not on the UN’s list of 107 severely affected nations, thus revealing the sheer gravity of the crisis in these nations. Multi-billion-dollar pledges apart, official efforts to tackle the crisis seem to be failing, even in rich nations.

The conclusion is stark. Without concerted efforts by citizens to force governments to act, the accelerating hunger and livelihoods crisis will engulf the majority of humanity, with grave and unforeseen consequences. Beyond that, it calls for a radical transformation of a global agricultural-industrial-financial system designed to reap windfall gains for a handful of big corporations and investors, even as it puts billions at risk. □□□

THE INEQUALITY PANDEMIC

Profiting From Pain

[Excerpts from PROFITING FROM PAIN, a briefing paper published in May 2022 by Oxfam International.]

BILLIONAIRE WEALTH AND corporate profits have soared to record levels during the COVID-19 pandemic, while over a quarter of a billion more people could crash to extreme levels of poverty in 2022 because of corona virus, rising global inequality, and the shock of food price rises supercharged by the war in Ukraine. Oxfam’s research has found that:

- Billionaires have seen their fortunes increase as much in 24 months as they did in 23 years.
- Billionaires in the food and energy sectors have seen their fortunes

increase by a billion dollars every two days. Food and energy prices have increased to their highest levels in decades. 62 new food billionaires have been created.

- The combined crises of COVID-19, rising inequality, and rising food prices could push as many as 263 million people into extreme poverty in 2022, reversing decades of progress. This is the equivalent of one million people every 33 hours.
- At the same time a new billionaire has been minted on average every 30 hours during the pandemic.

- This means that in the same time it took on average to create a new billionaire during the pandemic; one million people could be pushed into extreme poverty this year....

By every dimension, inequality has skyrocketed since the start of the pandemic.

WEALTH INEQUALITY

According to Oxfam’s analysis of the latest data from Forbes:

- There are 2,668 billionaires in the world, 573 more than in 2020 when the pandemic began.
- These billionaires are collectively worth \$12.7 trillion—a real-terms increase of \$3.78 trillion (42%) during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Total billionaire wealth is now the equivalent of 13.9% of glo-

bal gross domestic product (GDP), up from 4.4% in 2000.

- The richest 10 men have greater wealth than the poorest 40% of humanity combined.
- The richest 20 billionaires are worth more than the entire GDP of sub-Saharan Africa.
- Elon Musk, the wealthiest man in the world, is so rich that he could lose 99% of his wealth and still be in the top 0.0001% of the world's richest people. Since 2019 his wealth has increased by 699%.

INCOME INEQUALITY

COVID-19 is already set to drive the biggest systemic increase in income inequality ever seen. On top of this the rapidly rising prices of food and energy, which hit the incomes of the poorest hardest, are set to drive up global inequality still further.

- The incomes of 99% of humanity have fallen because of COVID-19, 28 with the equivalent of 125 million full-time jobs lost in 2021.
- It would take 112 years for the average person in the bottom 50% to make what someone in the top 1% gets in a year.
- The incomes of the richest have already recovered rapidly from the hit they took at the beginning of the pandemic while the incomes of the poorest have yet to recover, which is driving up income inequality.
- In 2021, the poorest 40% saw the steepest decline in income, which on average was 6.7% lower than pre-pandemic projections. This has led to rising income inequality, which had been declining since the 2000s as measured by the Gini index, but which in 2020 increased by 0.3% in emerging and developing economies.

Gender inequality

Governments have failed to prevent the pandemic from deepening longstanding gender inequalities in

the economy. During the pandemic women were disproportionately pushed out of employment, especially as lockdowns and social distancing affected highly feminized workforces in the service sectors, such as tourism, hospitality, and care work. Increased unpaid work has barred millions of women from rejoining labor markets. And now, worldwide, women are expected to cope with the huge rises in food and energy prices in order to keep their families fed.

- The gender pay gap has widened: before the pandemic it was forecast to take 100 years to close; now it will take 136 years.
- In 2020, women were 1.4 times more likely to drop out of the labor force than men³⁷ and took on three times more hours of unpaid care work.
- In 2021, there were 13 million fewer women in employment compared with 2019, while men's employment recovered to 2019 levels.
- More than four million women workers have not been able to return to work in Latin America and the Caribbean, a trend driven by high levels of informal employment and increased care work.

Racial inequality

Across the world, the pandemic has hit racialized groups the hardest. This is directly linked to the historical legacies of white supremacy, including slavery and colonialism. Previous research by Oxfam has found examples of how Afro-descendant and Indigenous people in Brazil, Dalits in India, and Native American, Latinx, and Black people in the USA face disproportionate lasting impacts from the pandemic.

- During the second wave of the pandemic in England, people of

Bangladeshi origin were five times more likely to die from COVID-19 compared with the White British population.

- 4 million more Black Americans would be alive today if their life expectancy was the same as White people's. Before COVID-19, that alarming number was already 2.1 million.
- Half of all working women of color in the US earn less than \$15 an hour, a widely used threshold for distinguishing low-wage workers in that country.

HEALTH INEQUALITY

Good-quality healthcare is a human right, but it is too often treated as a luxury. Having more money in your pocket not only buys you access to healthcare, it also buys you a longer and healthier life.

- The life expectancy of people in high-income countries is 16 years longer than of those in low-income countries.
- An estimated 5.6 million people die in poor countries every year due to lack of access to healthcare. That is more than 15,000 people every day.

গড্ডালিকা প্রবাহ থেকে

বাংলা ভাষা তথা মাতৃভাষা বাঁচান

‘শুধু পূর্বাশা’

সাড়া জাগানো বাংলা পাক্ষিক পত্রিকা

ও ‘পূর্বাশা এখন’ মাসিক পত্রিকা

এখনই সংগ্রহ করুন

সব স্টলে পাওয়া যাচ্ছে। ‘শুধু পূর্বাশা’ দাম ৫

টাকা মাত্র ও ‘পূর্বাশা এখন’ ২৫ টাকা মাত্র।

‘শুধু পূর্বাশা’-এর বার্ষিক গ্রাহক চাঁদা ১৭০

টাকা। ‘পূর্বাশা এখন’-এর গ্রাহকরা অতিরিক্ত

১০০ টাকায় পাক্ষিকটিরও গ্রাহক হতে পারেন।

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২৩, ডাঃ কার্তিক বসু স্ট্রিট, কলকাতা-৭০০০০৯

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email : editorpurbasha@gmail.com

- In São Paulo, Brazil, people in the richest areas can expect to live 14 years longer than those who live in the poorest areas.
- Ultimately, inequality, including a lack of access to healthcare, contributes to the death of at least one person every four seconds.
- The pandemic and the world's failed response to it have exposed these vast health inequalities, fed off them, and made them far worse.
- As a result of the pandemic, four times more people have died in poorer nations than in rich ones.
- Some 11.66 billion vaccine doses have been administered globally⁵⁰. If they had been distributed fairly then every adult in the world who wanted it could be fully vaccinated; instead, just 13% of people in low-income countries have been fully vaccinated.
- Every minute, four children around the world lose a parent or caregiver as a result of the pandemic. Almost half of them are in India, where over two

million children have suffered such a loss.

- When COVID-19 struck, 52% of Africans lacked access to healthcare and 83% had no safety net to fall back on if they lost their job or became sick.

INEQUALITY BETWEEN COUNTRIES

Before the pandemic, inequality between rich countries and lower-income countries was falling and had been for three decades. COVID-19 has reversed this trend. Low- and middle-income countries now face a lost decade while rich nations once again pull ahead.

Particularly concerning is the huge debt burden now facing so many countries, which undermines any hope of recovery and is preventing them from doing more to shield their citizens from soaring prices. It is becoming ever more costly for governments to service this debt, forcing them to make dramatic cuts to public services like health and education and leaving them unable to provide financial support to citizens.

- Fourteen out of sixteen West African nations intend to cut their national budgets over the next five years by a combined \$26.8bn, in an effort to partly plug the gap of \$48.7bn lost across the region in 2020 alone due to the pandemic.
- Debt servicing for all the world's poorest countries is estimated at \$43 billion in 2022—equivalent to nearly half their food import bills and public spending on health care combined. In 2021, debt represented 171% of all spending on healthcare, education and social protection combined for low-income countries.
- 87% of COVID-19 loans made by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) come with conditions that demand that low- and middle-income country recipients adopt tough austerity measures that will further exacerbate poverty and inequality.
- 60% of low-income countries are now on the brink of debt distress.

□□□

A NEW INTERVIEW

Noam Chomsky on Ukraine War

Joshua Yaffa

Noam Chomsky: Fossil fuel companies and weapons contractors are “being lauded for saving civilization by destroying the possibility for life on Earth.” (Cancillería del Ecuador/Flickr)

[Now ninety-three, Noam Chomsky is still offering his insights and wisdom to a younger generation of leftists. Here is his latest interview with Alternative Radio's David Barsamian, which first appeared in TomDispatch. Jacobin reproduced it].

David Barsamian: Let's head into the most obvious nightmare of this moment, the war in Ukraine and its effects globally. But first a

little background. Let's start with President George HW Bush's assurance to then-Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that NATO would not move “one inch to the east”—and that pledge has been verified. My question to you is, why didn't Gorbachev get that in writing?

Noam Chomsky: He accepted a gentleman's agreement, which is not that uncommon in diplomacy. Shake-of-the-hand. Furthermore, having it on paper would have made no difference whatsoever. Treaties that are on paper are torn up all the time. What matters is good faith. And in fact, HW Bush, the first

Bush, did honour the agreement explicitly. He even moved toward instituting a partnership in peace, which would accommodate the countries of Eurasia. NATO wouldn't be disbanded but would be marginalised. Countries like Tajikistan, for example, could join without formally being part of NATO. And Gorbachev approved of that. It would have been a step toward creating what he called a common European home with no military alliances.

Bill Clinton in his first couple of years also adhered to it. What the specialists say is that by about 1994, Clinton started to; as they put it, talk from both sides of his mouth. To the Russians he was saying: yes, we're going to adhere to the agreement. To the Polish community in

August 14-20, 2022

FRONTIER

11

the United States and other ethnic minorities, he was saying: don't worry; we'll incorporate you within NATO. By about 1996–97, Clinton said this pretty explicitly to his friend Russian president Boris Yeltsin, whom he had helped win the 1996 election. He told Yeltsin: don't push too hard on this NATO business. We're going to expand, but I need it because of the ethnic vote in the United States.

In 1997, Clinton invited the so-called Visegrad countries—Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania—to join NATO. The Russians didn't like it but didn't make much of a fuss. Then the Baltic nations joined, again the same thing. In 2008, the second Bush, who was quite different from the first, invited Georgia and Ukraine into NATO. Every US diplomat understood very well that Georgia and Ukraine were red lines for Russia. They'll tolerate the expansion elsewhere, but these are in their geostrategic heartland, and they're not going to tolerate expansion there. To continue with the story, the Maidan uprising took place in 2014, expelling the pro-Russian president, and Ukraine moved toward the West.

From 2014, the United States and NATO began to pour arms into Ukraine—advanced weapons, military training, joint military exercises; moves to integrate Ukraine into the NATO military command. There's no secret about this. It was quite open. Recently, the secretary general of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, bragged about it. He said: this is what we were doing since 2014. Well, of course, this is very consciously, highly provocative. They knew that they were encroaching on what every Russian leader regarded as an intolerable move. France and Germany vetoed it in 2008, but under US pressure, it was kept on the agenda. And NATO, meaning the United States, moved to accelerate the de-

facto integration of Ukraine into the NATO military command.

Can we try to bring this horror to an end? Or should we try to perpetuate it? Those are the choices.

In 2019, Volodymyr Zelensky was elected with an overwhelming majority—I think about 70 percent of the vote—on a peace platform, a plan to implement peace with Eastern Ukraine and Russia, to settle the problem. He began to move forward on it and, in fact, tried to go to the Donbas, the Russian-oriented eastern region, to implement what's called the Minsk II agreement. It would have meant a kind of federalisation of Ukraine with a degree of autonomy for the Donbas, which is what they wanted. Something like Switzerland or Belgium. He was blocked by right-wing militias, which threatened to murder him if he persisted with his effort.

Well, he's a courageous man. He could have gone forward if he had had any backing from the United States. The United States refused. No backing, nothing, which meant he was left to hang out to dry and had to back off. The US was intent on this policy of integrating Ukraine step-by-step into the NATO military command. That accelerated further when President Biden was elected. In September 2021, you could read it on the White House website. It wasn't reported but, of course, the Russians knew it. Biden announced a programme, a joint statement to accelerate the process of military training, military exercises, and more weapons as part of what his administration called an "enhanced programme" of preparation for NATO membership.

It accelerated further in November. This was all before the invasion. Secretary of State Antony Blinken signed what was called a charter, which essentially formalised and extended this arrangement. A spokes-

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man for the State Department conceded that before the invasion, the United States refused to discuss any Russian security concerns. All of this is part of the background.

On February 24, Vladimir Putin invaded, a criminal invasion. These serious provocations provide no justification for it. If Putin had been a statesman, what he would have done is something quite different. He would have gone back to French president Emmanuel Macron, grasped his tentative proposals, and moved to try to reach an accommodation with Europe, to take steps toward a European common home.

The United States, of course, has always been opposed to that. This goes way back in Cold War history to French president De Gaulle's initiatives to establish an independent Europe. In his phrase "from the Atlantic to the Urals," integrating Russia with the West, which was a very natural accommodation for trade reasons and, obviously, security reasons as well. So, had there been any statesmen within Putin's narrow circle, they would have grasped Macron's initiatives and experimented to see whether, in fact, they could integrate with Europe and avert the crisis. Instead, what he chose was a policy which, from the Russian point of view, was total imbecility. Apart from the criminal-

ity of the invasion, he chose a policy that drove Europe deep into the pocket of the United States. In fact, it is even inducing Sweden and Finland to join NATO—the worst possible outcome from the Russian point of view, quite apart from the criminality of the invasion and the very serious losses that Russia is suffering because of that.

So, criminality and stupidity on the Kremlin side, severe provocation on the US side. That's the background that has led to this. Can we try to bring this horror to an end? Or should we try to perpetuate it? Those are the choices.

There's only one way to bring it to an end. That's diplomacy. Now, diplomacy, by definition, means both sides accept it. They don't like it, but they accept it as the least bad option. It would offer Putin some kind of escape hatch. That's one possibility. The other is just to drag it out and see how much everybody will suffer, how many Ukrainians will die, how much Russia will suffer, how many millions of people will starve to death in Asia and Africa, how much we'll proceed toward heating the environment to the point where there will be no possibility for a livable human existence. Those are the options. Well, with near 100 percent unanimity, the United States and most of Europe want to pick the no-diplomacy option. It's explicit. We have to keep going to hurt Russia.

You can read columns in the New York Times, the London Financial Times, all over Europe. A common refrain is: we've got to make sure that Russia suffers. It doesn't matter what happens to Ukraine or anyone else. Of course, this gamble assumes that if Putin is pushed to the limit, with no escape, forced to admit defeat, he'll accept that and not use the weapons he has to devastate Ukraine.

There are a lot of things that Russia hasn't done. Western analysts are rather surprised by it. Namely, they've not attacked the supply lines from Poland that are pouring weapons into Ukraine. They certainly could do it. That would very soon bring them into direct confrontation with NATO, meaning the United States. Where it goes from there, you can guess. Anyone who's ever looked at war games knows where it'll go—up the escalatory ladder toward terminal nuclear war.

So, those are the games we're playing with the lives of Ukrainians, Asians, and Africans, the future of civilization, in order to weaken Russia, to make sure that they suffer enough. Well, if you want to play that game, be honest about it. There's no moral basis for it. In fact, it's morally horrendous. And the people who are standing on a high horse about how we're upholding principle are moral imbeciles when you think about what's involved.

David Barsamian: In an article in Truthout, you quote Eisenhower's 1953 "Cross of Iron" speech. What did you find of interest there?

Noam Chomsky: You should read it, and you'll see why it's interesting. It's the best speech he ever made. This was 1953 when he was just taking office. Basically, what he pointed out was that militarization was a tremendous attack on our own society. He—or whoever wrote the speech—put it pretty eloquently. One jet plane means this many fewer schools and hospitals. Every time we're building up our military budget, we're attacking ourselves. □

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QUESTIONABLE JUDGEMENTS

Judiciary is Collapsing

Prem Shankar Jha

THE SUPREME COURT OF India has taken several questionable decisions in recent years.

But its June 24 judgment dismissing Zakia Jafri's appeal against the court-appointed Special Investigation Team's exoneration of Narendra Modi from his share of the responsibility—as chief minister—for the 2002 Gujarat riots, and therefore of responsibility for her husband and their relatives' death in the Gulberg society massacre, is the most questionable of them all.

Questionable may well be an understatement: a better word could be 'destructive'. For with this judgment, the Supreme Court has destroyed whatever faith civil society had retained in the fairness of Indian jurisprudence. For not only did Justice Khanwilkar and his fellow judges dismiss Zakia Jafri's petition with two contemptuous words—"without merit"—and noting caustically that "the present proceedings have been pursued for [the] last 16 years", they devoted a significant amount of their judgment to vilifying Teesta Setalvad, founder of Citizens for Justice and Peace and Jafri's adviser since 2006, Sanjiv Bhatt and R B Sreekumar, two officials of the State Intelligence Bureau whose testimony Mrs Jafri had been relying upon in her quest for justice.

Nor did the learned judges stop there, for in a key paragraph they virtually invited the government to prosecute these three on the grounds that it was they, not Modi's Gujarat government, who had concocted 'a larger conspiracy to keep the pot [of Modi's culpability in the Gujarat riots] boiling'. And they did this when Bhatt and Sreekumar were not even petitioners in the case and Teesta's own locus as a petitioner it

refused to accept! This attack on members of civil society who were not even appearing before the court, could well be a precedent not only in Indian but global jurisprudence.

The learned judges' intemperate recorded judgment is not the only worrying aspect of this case. For the judgment is 416 pages long, but the Gujarat Police arrived in Mumbai to arrest Setalvad within a day of its being given. The arrest of Sreekumar and the re-arrest of Sanjiv Bhatt, to discrediting whom the judges had also devoted more than 50 pages of their judgment, followed within hours.

Did the Gujarat Police have speed readers in its service, or was it, perchance, able to somehow access a copy of the judgment before it was pronounced? However improbable this is, the mere fact that the suspicion exists, and is being voiced, highlights the depths of distrust that have now developed between the highest court and 'l'etat civile'—civil society—that, has been protecting individual rights and constitutional freedoms in other democracies since their inception, and has been doing so with increasing vigour in India as the danger to it from Modi-ism has developed over the past eight years.

On June 28 three days after Teesta's arrest, former Supreme Court Judge Madan Lokur asked in these columns, "Did the Supreme Court intend or suggest that Teesta Setalvad should be arrested?" If it did not then it was incumbent upon it to say so. But the court has remained silent till this day, thereby reinforcing the suspicion that this was indeed what the three judges on this bench had in mind. Through its silence, therefore, the court has made itself a party to the wholesale destruction of habeas corpus—the right of citizens to freedom until proven

guilty of a crime punishable by imprisonment—that is the cornerstone of democracy and has been under especially heavy attack since the Sangh parivar came to power in 2014.

Why has the Supreme Court stooped so low? Ever since judges began accepting lucrative post retirement posts after giving judgments that were to this government's liking, civil society has begun to suspect the worst. Justice P Sathasivam, a highly respected chief justice of the Supreme Court with several benchmark judgments to his credit, had set the ball rolling when he accepted the governorship of Kerala 16 weeks after he stepped down from the court in 2014. In April 2013, Justice Sathasivam had quashed the FIR against Amit Shah in the Tulsiram Prajapati fake encounter case and ordered that it be treated as a supplementary chargesheet filed for the killing of Sohrabuddin and Kauser Bi. Since Shah was already on bail in the latter case, this was a major relief for him as it meant he could not be arrested again as the CBI had wanted to do. Did Sathasivam not realise that when he accepted the governorship of Kerala, he would be reinforcing civil society's fear that Modi and Shah were intent upon suborning the highest court of the land?

Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi strengthened this fear when he followed in Sathasivam's footsteps and accepted nomination by the Modi government to the Rajya Sabha with equal celerity. Civil society's suspicions hardened still further when former CBI director R K Raghavan, who had been kept on as the head of a redundant SIT for another five years, was appointed India's high commissioner to Cyprus within five months of resigning from it on 'health grounds' in April 2017. Raghavan had accepted these sinecures despite the fact that his own SIT had commented adversely on Modi keeping

the three senior-most civil servants who had attended the controversial late night meeting at his home on February 27, 2002 in post-retirement posts through the entire period of the investigation, to shut their mouths.

The shock aroused all over the world by the Supreme Court's latest dismissal of Zakia Jafri's petition are therefore understandable. But assuming the worst about the Khanwilkar bench's judgment will serve no purpose because it will only hasten the catastrophe that civil society fears the most. This is the collapse of the last pillar upon which the battered remnants of our democracy still rests.

To understand this fear it is necessary to look at the case from the judges' point of view. Zakia Jafri's plea was not about the Gulberg massacre. The Supreme Court had monitored this, and eight other specific cases. The Gulberg trial had resulted in 24 convictions and 32 acquittals. Zakia Jafri's first information report (FIR), which she had submitted first to the Gujarat police after the riots, and when it took no action, to the Gujarat High Court, had accused the decision makers in the government of Gujarat of actively conspiring to let the riots happen. The wording of the FIR was explicit:

"I beg to bring to your kind notice the deliberate and intentional failure of the State Government to protect the life and property of innocent denizens of this country through a well-executed and sinister criminal conspiracy amongst the accused above named, that resulted in the breakdown of Constitutional Governance in the State... since 2002, when a mass carnage was orchestrated by the most powerful in the State Executive using pressure and connivance of the State Administration and Law and Order Machinery there"

Heading the list of 62 conspirators was Narendra Modi, the then chief minister of Gujarat, and since

2014 the prime minister of India. This petition created a serious problem for the Supreme Court: How to avoid a truly serious "judicial overreach" that would destroy the position the court had built as the final guardian of citizens' rights when these were threatened by actions of the executive or enactments by the legislature.

This role was not spelt out anywhere in the constitution, but had been created by the court itself as India's democracy had matured and in some respects soured, in the decades that followed. The constitution had spelt out the original, appellate and advisory jurisdiction of the Supreme Court in Articles 132-134 and 143-144. Its appellate jurisdiction allowed it to entertain appeals in civil matters in cases that 'involved a substantial question of law of general importance', and in criminal matters if a high court had, on appeal, reversed the order of acquittal of an accused and sentenced him to death, or had withdrawn for trial before itself any case from a subordinate court.

These were highly restrictive clauses, but their severity was mitigated by a clause that allowed the Supreme Court to give 'special leave to appeal' if it was satisfied that a case warranted it. It was under this last, omnibus permission that it had assumed the role of protecting the rights of citizens as the shortcomings of Indian democracy began to surface. Its adjudication under this provision transformed the court from being the court of final appeal on points of law, usually affordable only to the rich and powerful, into the final guardian of the rights and freedoms that have been guaranteed to the people in the constitution.

In two memorable lectures given under the auspices of the Palkhivala Foundation in 2007 and 2017, Harish Salve, a former solicitor-general of India, traced the origins of judicial activism to what he labelled "the Krishna Iyerisation" of jurisprudence

in India in 1970s. In Salve's words, "before him the Supreme Court was the Supreme Court of India. Justice Krishna Iyer made it the Supreme Court for Indians".

In his 2007 lecture, Salve highlighted four pivotal issues on which the Supreme Court did this. A decade later he identified three more. But in 2007, and again much more forcefully in 2017, Salve also warned that judicial activism could create its own perils. Chief of these was that the more citizens came to rely upon it to enforce the rule of law and ensure justice and equity in governance, the greater would become the risk of popular disillusionment if it failed.

But Salve also did not hide his concern that 'where the Court steps in too often, it builds up hopes that it will not be able to deliver'. 'The court has neither the sword nor the purse' he warned. 'If popular will turns against it, the institution (will be) destroyed'. He placed the blame for this squarely upon the legislatures and the central and state administrations, accusing 'those in power (who) cannot arrive at a consensus on (abiding by the spirit of the constitution and) keeping the judiciary above suspicion.'

With the BJP's ascension to power at the helm of the Union, the abuse of citizens' rights became normal so the chasm between the executive and the judiciary widened rapidly. Zakia Jafri's appeal to the Supreme Court in 2017 made it unbridgeable because its principal accused was now the Prime Minister of India. This put the Supreme Court in an impossible position: Not entertaining her petition would have further eroded the confidence of the public in the judiciary's guardianship of its rights. But reopening the case would create a constitutional crisis. □
[Prem Shankar Jha is a veteran journalist.]

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LETTERS

Teaching Profession

In Sanskrit, the teacher is referred to as a "guru" who dispels darkness. That's why the teacher is a torch bearer. He/she imparts knowledge to change the inner world of the pupils. He/she corrects pupils from ignorance to knowledge. Teachers are the people who are working in educational institutions. So, "the teachers are those who have dedicated their lives to the cause of education." Swami Vivekananda suggested it for man-making and character-building education. Education is the backbone of a nation and it is the only trait that can make a nation strong and self-sufficient. The role of a teacher is an important agent of change for the future. Dr APJ Abdul Kalam said, 'If you are a teacher in whatever capacity, you have a very special role to play because more than anybody else, it is you who are shaping the future generation. "The officers, businessmen, ministers, etc., can afford to go for money; they may be forgiven, but the teachers cannot be forgiven because, through their bad examples, thousands of students may be affected. Swamiji said, "Be and Make". The influence of teachers can cause a student to become either great or demon-like.

But today's education in India has become a demon making due to democratic politics and the political parties' ideology and agenda. Education is limited mostly to rank or grade for a lucrative money-making profession for the pupils and their guardians. Because of the socio-political and economic crisis, the main purpose of education is to get a job and a consumer lifestyle. Moral or ethical values in education have been left out purposefully.

Unemployment and the job market are the giant crises in India, particularly in West Bengal. For a

long time, no new job avenue has been created. Only urban-based service sectors are avenues for jobs (mostly contractual), which usually accommodate all without any education background. Service benefits, etc. in these service sectors are not even enough to lead a life with minimal self. So, the younger generation of West Bengal has migrated from the state. Most of them have only a school education because they think higher education is nothing but a wastage of time and money. However, the democratic state government has fabricated and mouthful of publicity on the state's development and progress. Chop making (oil fired) is an industry here, and the state government promotes it.

Therefore, the teaching profession has become an important and crucial job sector for the educated youth of the state. Although there is a particular process of teacher recruitment, the political party and its leaders in the rule take it as a platform for money making. A teaching job from primary to university level has been sold for money. And it is the biggest state-sponsored scam in India. For a teaching job, educational qualifications, merit, and others are less prioritised than money. The teaching profession has transformed into an unethical and immoral profession. How would the teachers teach their students to always tell the truth or not tell a lie when they are the result of corruption? It is a setback to the future generation. It would push them into the darkness. The people of the lower strata would be misguided. Their children would be out of school.

The people of Bengal enjoyed a glory of education, culture, and intellectuality. But it has been sinking into the deep ocean. Today, Bengal

does not think what India thinks tomorrow. The leadership of the political party in power has desperately adopted this policy. They forgot the history of education in Bengal. For instance, with the support of Lord Hardinge, Vidyasagar established 101 "Banga" schools in different districts of Bengal, and Vidyasagar was the selector of teachers for these schools, who were the pass-out students of the Sanskrit college of Calcutta. His colleagues criticised and blamed him because no reference in the selection of teachers would be entertained. The only eligible would get the job.

As a result, the next generation is facing a major crisis. How it would be made up is also a great crisis.

Harasankar Adhikari, Kolkata

Emblem Row

How about the issue of desecration of national symbols?

"Lions are supposed to be aggressive but these lions (Ashokan) are not aggressive, they send the message of peace and protection and are benign kind of lions. The teeth are more visible in the new lions which is not so in the older ones," (Historian Harbans) Mukhia told PTI.

The showing of teeth is a strong sign of "aggressiveness" which shows the "aggressive nationalism" that is being attempted to be portrayed, he said.

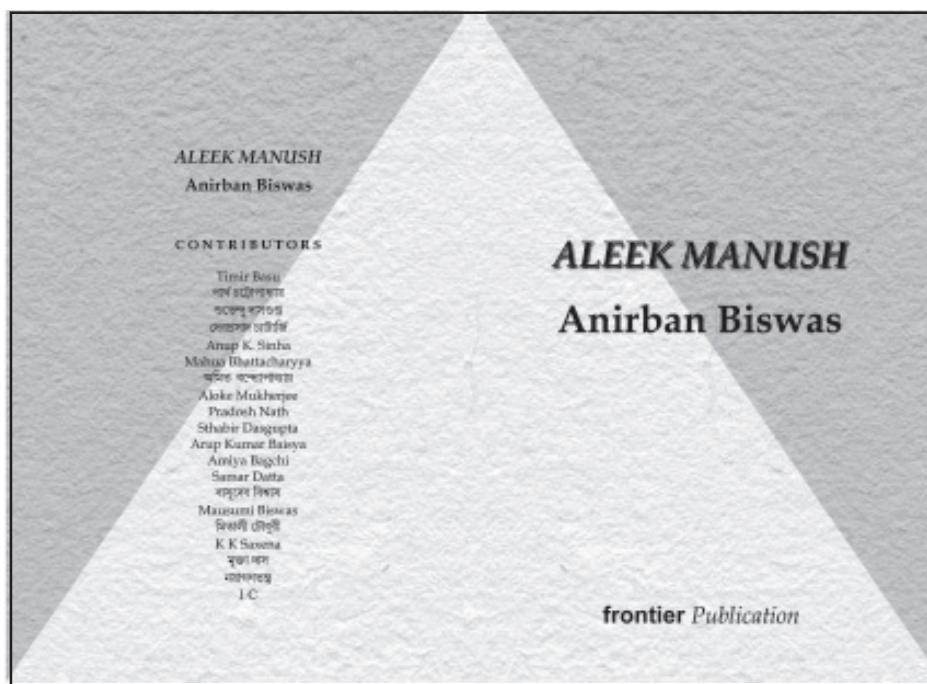
This has not been done unconsciously or is artistic liberty, he said. In his view, artists do have liberty but they can't change the basic message the piece of art wants to convey.

"The teeth are particularly aggressive here. It changes the basic nature. Modifications convey a meaning. What kind of message is this regime trying to convey? Are you transforming India from a peaceful nation to an aggressive one?"

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