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Shifting Balance of Power

CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES ARE DEVELOPING SECURITY policies to adjust to their changing fortunes in the regional balance of power, with consequences for heightened competition. As the power transition deepens, as China continues to rise and develop capabilities that challenge US maritime hegemony in East Asia, US-China tension will continue to intensify as each great power seeks to maximise its security. The fundamental challenge for each country is to manage this competition to avoid a spiralling conflict and a greater risk of war. Central to avoiding conflict escalation is mutual restraint in managing their conflict over Taiwan.

Since 1949 China has been a dissatisfied power. Given the presence of first the United States and then the Soviet Union on its borders, its revisionism was simply the expected reaction to its untenable security environment. As a continental power with a long coast line, Chinese security required its interior borders and coastal waters are free from the strategic presence of a great power. Throughout the Cold War, to realise territorial security, China fought the Korean War, the Sino-Russian War, and the Sino-Indian War and it participated in the three wars in Indochina. Following the US defeat in Indochina and then the collapse of the Soviet Union and its retreat from Indochina, China achieved its objective—securing dominance along its entire mainland periphery. It had established a sphere of influence on mainland Southeast Asia, military domination of its borders with its neighbours in Central Asia, India and with Russia in Northeast Asia, and developed sole political influence in North Korea. Moreover, with the normalisation of US-China relations in 1979, China secured the withdrawal of US military forces from Taiwan.

But at the end of the Cold War, China had yet to achieve coastal security. United States remained the hegemonic power throughout maritime East Asia and its navy could sail with impunity in Chinese coastal waters. Secure US access to the air force and naval facilities of its regional security partners, South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia, amounted to maritime encirclement of Chinese territory. Thus, at the end of the Cold War, China was still a dissatisfied power. Nonetheless, it was too weak to challenge the post-Cold War maritime security order. It required a prolonged period of economic and technological modernisation both to consolidate its continental security and to develop the capabilities to

challenge the US-dominated maritime status quo. This was the strategic foundation of China's post-Mao economic strategy of the 'Four Modernisations', in which defence modernisation ranked fourth, and of its diplomatic strategy of 'peaceful rise'.

Under Xi Jinping's leadership, China's has embarked on a new security strategy. Confident in its economic and technological capabilities, over the past ten years China has strengthened its naval capabilities to challenge US maritime hegemony. By 2015, through the rapid development of modern submarines and missile destroyers and of advanced aircraft, China had developed qualitative and quantitative maritime forces that approached parity with the US military in East Asian seas. Moreover, its conventional land-based missiles put at risk

US access to its security partners' naval and air facilities throughout the region. China is now an East Asian maritime power that exercises sea control in the South China Sea and challenges American war-fighting capabilities throughout East Asia.

As the United States developed security cooperation with Vietnam and supported Philippine challenges to Chinese territorial claims and strengthened US-Philippine military cooperation, China constructed its artificial islands in the South China Sea and developed military facilities on these islands. China had thus strengthened its forward presence to enable more frequent and larger air force and naval operations near US security partners. Its objective is to enhance the PLA's (People's Liberation Army's) coercive capabilities to compel the South China Sea coun-

tries to reconsider security cooperation with the United States.

China has made great strides in eroding the US alliance system within East Asia and realising greater maritime security. With the exception of Japan, the maritime countries in East Asia, in a clear break from the post-World War II security order, no longer proclaim themselves as committed American security partners. Rather, despite the existence of treaty agreements and their long-time partnerships with the United States, governments from South Korea to Malaysia insist that they will not take sides in the US-China competition; they are moving toward equidistance between China and the United States. And they express concern that the US policy towards China contributes to regional instability. □□□

[Contributed]

COMMENT

India 75

AUGUST 15 COMES, AUGUST 15 goes. But this year it was a special occasion as Indians celebrated the 75th anniversary of Independence. Indian freedom struggle has not only shaped India as a modern constitutional democracy but also shaped the nature of state, society and citizenship. The anti-colonial and anti-feudal struggle laid the foundation of a sovereign nation state promised to pursue a society based on socialist, scientific and secular values to ensure egalitarian citizenship rights without any form of discrimination. These inalienable values are central to the unity, integrity, peace, prosperity and progress of India as a multicultural society and secular state. It is time to celebrate these values and promises of Indian independence, a product of struggles and sacrifice of millions of working-class people across the country. India at 75 is still a young nation but old

enough for a critical introspection and evaluation of all the achievements, failures and challenges ahead.

The post-colonial India managed to pursue economic progress, advancement in science and society in a planned manner despite many shortcomings. The United Nations Development Programme has released its 2019 Multidimensional Poverty Index which documents that India has lifted 271 million people out of poverty in a decade. The growth of availability and accessibility to health and education has increased considerably over the years. The infrastructure for transport and communication is visible across the country. These significant improvements are testimonies of independent India. But these achievements are not enough for the masses because of unequal outcomes of a class, caste, gender and urban biased development process. The wid-

ening gap between rich and poor, men and women, rural and urban areas, rising unemployment, poverty, homelessness, hunger and food insecurities are crucial challenges India is facing today. These challenges are accelerated by the neo-liberal policies furiously followed by the Hindutva government led by Mr Narendra Modi. But the main danger lies elsewhere as the Modi enterprise is trying to transform the nature of state and society concomitant with exclusionary ideology of Hindutva shaped by the RSS. The Hindutva forces led by RSS did not participate in the anti-colonial struggle for Indian independence, but these forces now manage to pursue electoral democracy as a means to establish a capitalist Hindu Rashtra (state) incompatible with constitutional, liberal and secular democracy in India. The Hindutva ideas and visions are completely opposed to the ideas and visions the freedom fighters stood for during their long protracted anti-British movement. The flag waving Hindutva nationalism is

historically anti-national. The farmers, youth, students, Dalits, tribals and women were the flag bearers of Indian freedom struggle whereas Hindutva forces were collaborators of British colonial rulers.

Har Ghar Tiranga campaign exposes the hollowness of Hindutva; it is therefore the responsibility of all progressive and democratic Indians to reclaim the Har Ghar Tiranga campaign to defend the values of Indian constitution enshrined in the Constitution of India that the Hindutva forces are destroying on a daily basis, because Indian Constitution is not compatible with Hindutva ideals and visions. The celebration of the 75th anniversary of India's Independence is an opportunity to defend Indian constitution and defeat the rise of saffron brand of fascism in Indian politics.

For one thing Subhas Chandra Bose seems to be a 'tragic hero' as veteran journalist Sumanta Banerjee

calls him in his latest book "AZAD HIND". Bose is hardly remembered in official functions. Congress buried him in history long ago and the present saffron dispensation has no moral obligation to highlight his efforts to liberate India from British colonial rule.

Meanwhile, Netaji's daughter Anita Bose Pfaff, living in Germany demanded the Indian Government to bring Netaji's remains to India. Actually the death of Chandra Bose is a mystery. His remains were reportedly preserved at the Renkoji Temple in Tokyo. Since then three generations of priests have cared for the relics. The 79-year-old Anita Bose said that she is ready for DNA test of the remains. She also said that the temple priests and the Japanese government also had no objection to the trial. But who is listening? Indian ruling authorities are not interested in obliging Anita Bose—Subhas Bose's daughter. □□□

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NOTE

'Rotten Apples'

Bharat Dogra writes:

AUGUST 5 WITNESSED the biggest protest of apple growers in Himachal Pradesh in recent decades as a very large number of them joined a march in Shimla, following the getting together of nearly 27 of their organisations under the Sanyukta Kisan Manch (SKM or Joint Farmers' Front). This was the biggest protest of apple growers since 1990. Incidentally then too the protest was during the tenure of a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government.

The protest was further strengthened by the presence of important representatives of opposition parties including the Congress, the CPM and AAP.

Following talks with the government at senior levels, the SKM said

that they are giving the government 10 days to resolve their problems and if satisfactory solutions do not emerge till then, then they will launch an even bigger protest including a jail bharaandolan (a movement which involves courting arrest).

This protest has raised a range of demands which are related to their growing problems. One of the latest problems which came on top of other accumulating issues related to the rise in packaging costs and the raising of GST on packing materials. Hence relief on this aspect including GST exemption for packing materials of apples as well as other horticulture and floriculture produce was highlighted in this protest as well as other recent negotiations. The protest has cited all-round

increase in input costs to demand more subsidies.

Several demands relating to better price and marketing such as payment of minimum support price for various crops have been raised now as well as earlier. A Market Intervention Scheme for apples similar to the pattern of Kashmir has been demanded, as also better implementation of agriculture produce marketing committee legislation. Much earlier the state government had facilitated the entry of big business interests in apple purchase by giving them quick NOCs and claimed that this will help to get higher price for apples. However this was soon followed by increasing problems of apple growers who complained that one of the big business houses was in fact responsible for setting a market trend towards lower price. Apple growers have been complaining that they get cheated in the arbitrary gradation of the farm pro-

duce as even better quality produce gets place in a lower category leading to lower price.

Another important demand Himachal apple-growers have been raising together with apple growers of Jammu and Kashmir and Uttarakhand has related to significant increase of tariffs on imported apples so that Indian apple growers do not have to face unfair competition. This demand was also repeated in the recent protest.

Other demands related to easier transport of produce, doing away with market fee at barriers, formation of a horticulture board, setting up committees to check the manipulation of private trading and business

interests in purchase of produce, better adherence to spirit of law while acquiring land for various purposes.

Here it should be pointed out that apple orchardists as well as other farmers in the state have suffered much in recent times from increasingly adverse weather conditions, made worse by distorted policies and their even worse implementation, leading to increase in displacement and disasters like landslides and floods. Trucks carrying apples and other perishable horticultural produce sometimes face a lot of problems in reaching their destination due to landslides, leading to fruits and vegetables getting spoilt.

In these conditions apple growers

and farmers have been looking to government for more help but more often than not they have been disappointed. Some of the policies such as import of foreign plant material and varieties have led to losses as these could not grow properly. Indiscriminate sprays of pesticides and plant regulators have also led to ecological problems, particularly the disruption of natural pollination processes as bees, other friendly insects and birds who are natural pollinators have been harmed. Hence both the government as well as farmers have to give much more attention to ecological aspects in order to promote sustainable livelihoods related to orchards and horticulture in particular. □□□

MUSSOLINI AND MODI

The Italy of 1920s and the India of 2020s

Ramachandra Guha

I READ A LOT OF BIOGRAPHIES, these often set in other countries than my own. A book I have just finished is Benedetto Croce and Italian Fascism, by the Canadian scholar, Fabio Fernando Rizi. It uses the life of a great philosopher to tell a larger story of the times he passed through.

Reading Rizi's book, I found uncanny parallels between the Italy of the 1920s and the India of the 2020s.

The myth of Benito Mussolini, like the myth of Narendra Modi, was crafted by writers and propagandists "eager to sing paeans to the genius of the Duce". These propagandists had begun to call the leader of fascism "the providential man", "the man of massive faith", or simply, "the Man of Providence". Thus was created "the myth of the Duce, the chief who is always right, the leader who dares where others vacillate".

In December 1925, the Italian State passed a new law, which came

down hard on the press and its freedoms. The consequences of this law were that "within a few months, the most important papers came under Fascist control, one by one. Some owners were compelled to sell under economic or political pressure. All the liberal editors had to resign and were replaced by more accommodating men."

In the same year, Benedetto Croce characterised the ideology of the ruling party and of Mussolini as a "bizarre mixture of appeals to authority and to demagoguery, of professed reverence for the laws and of violation of the laws, of ultra-modern concepts and of musty old trash, abhorrence of culture and sterile attempts at producing a new one..." In this regard, the Italian State of the 1920s bears a striking resemblance to Modi's regime today which speaks respectfully of the Constitution while blatantly violating its spirit and essence, which appeals to ancient wisdom while displaying

a contempt for modern science, which claims to exalt ancient culture while manifesting an utter philistinism in practice.

While most independent-minded Italian intellectuals were forced into exile, Benedetto Croce stayed on in his homeland, offering an intellectual and moral opposition to fascism. As his biographer puts it, "[w]hereas the regime employed the mass media and the education system to promote the cult of Mussolini and to inculcate submission to authority, demanding from the new generations, in mystical union with the Duce, without asking questions, 'to believe, to obey, to fight', Croce, instead, offered a set of liberal values, preached freedom, defended the dignity of man, as a free agent, and urged individual decision and personal responsibility."

Reading further into Rizi's book, I found this passage: "By the end of 1926, liberal Italy had died. Mussolini had consolidated his power and created the legal instruments for the continuation of his dictatorship. Political parties had been outlawed, and freedom of the press destroyed. The opposition had been disarmed

and Parliament reduced to impotence. By 1927 it had become almost impossible to undertake any political action; it was also dangerous to express critical opinions in personal letters or in public places. Civil employees could lose their jobs if they expressed views contrary to government policy.

“Besides a powerful and revitalized police division in the Ministry of the Interior, under the direct responsibility of the chief of police, a new and efficient secret police organization, ominously and mysteriously called OVRA, was created with the aim of repressing any sign of anti-fascism and controlling any expression of dissent. In a short while, it collected files on more than one hundred thousand people, including Fascist leaders, and built an impressive web of special agents, spies, and informers whose reach extended throughout the country and even abroad.”

As I was transcribing these words from Rizi's book, news came in of the home ministry demanding, from the Finance Commission, a sum of Rs 50,000 crore to fund what it called “real-time surveillance” of citizens. This at a time when the states are being denied the money owed to them by the Centre; and while the home ministry has already dangerously abused its powers through the foisting of fake cases on independent thinkers, activists, and journalists.

And here is Rizi's description of the Italian Parliament, c. 1929: “Parliament had become a rubber stamp of the government's decisions. Speeches of the few remaining members of the opposition were ignored, or more often shouted down to jeers from the floor and from the public galleries.”

Fabio Fernando Rizi's book focuses on one person in one country, and eschews comparative analysis. However, in passing, the author re-

marks that “Italian Fascism created an authoritarian regime, ever increasing its reach, but it did not have the time, perhaps did not even possess the strength, to build a totalitarian society.” This must be read as meaning only one thing; however awful Mussolini's Italy was, it was not nearly as awful as Hitler's Germany.

After reading Rizi's intellectual biography of Benedetto Croce, I turned to David Gilmour's magnificent book, *The Pursuit of Italy*, a wide-ranging and compellingly readable history of that country from the beginnings of time. Thirty of the four hundred pages of this book deal with Mussolini's years in power. As with Rizi, much of what Gilmour said about Italy in the past chillingly resonated with what I am witnessing in my own country at present.

Consider thus these remarks: “In the 1930s the regime's style became more ostentatious. There were more parades, more uniforms, more censorship, more hectoring, more speeches from the leader, more shouting, gesturing and grimacing from a balcony to vast crowds, which greeted Mussolini's every reference to patria and gloria with chants of ‘Du-ce! Du-ce! Du-ce!’”.

Much the same could be said about Modi's rule, especially after he won a second term in 2019, his every utterance greeted with “Mo-di! Mo-di! Mo-di!”.

Why did the Italian demagogue enjoy such great popularity among the masses? Here is Gilmour's answer: “Mussolini survived so long partly because he incarnated certain strands of Italianità; he embodied the hopes, fears and generations that believed Italy had been cheated of its due, both by its liberal politicians and by its wartime allies, who had forced it to accept the ‘mutilated peace.’”

By the same token, Modi has successfully appealed to an alleged

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Golden Age in the distant past where Hindus were supreme in India and abroad, argued that Hindus had slipped from that pedestal owing to Muslim and British conquerors in the past, and pitted himself against conniving and corrupt Congress politicians who would drag Hindus and India down again.

Reading these books about Italy in the 1920s in the India of the 2020s, I was depressed by the many parallels; but also consoled by the few departures. Unlike Mussolini's Italy, in Modi's India, the Bharatiya Janata Party has had to contend with political opposition from other parties; admittedly an Opposition much attenuated at the Centre, but still fairly robust in half-a-dozen major states of the Union. The press has been tamed, but not entirely crushed. And while Mussolini's Italy had only Benedetto Croce to call it to account, Modi's India still has

many writers and intellectuals speaking out courageously in defence of the founding principles of the Republic, and in all the languages of the Republic too.

In *The Pursuit of Italy*, after describing how Mussolini consolidated his rule, Gilmour remarks: "Fascism's appeal was blunted, however, by its failure to provide prosperity. Italians might be deceived into thinking they were well governed but they could not be deceived into thinking they were well off." Mussolini failed in providing jobs and prosperity; whereas Modi has, in fact, done far worse on the economic front, his ill-thought and quixotic policies annulling much of the progress that the Indian economy had made in the three decades since liberalisation.

Millions of young men today fanatically follow Narendra Modi. The fate that awaits them, and us, is

anticipated in what Benedetto Croce said with regard to the millions of young men who fanatically followed Mussolini. After the Italian dictator had died and his regime had finally fallen, Croce wrote sadly of "the treasury of moral energies that the oppressive regime misguided, exploited and at the end had betrayed".

Benito Mussolini and his fascists thought they would rule Italy forever. Narendra Modi and the BJP think likewise. These fantasies of eternal rule will not come to fruition; but so long as the present regime remains in power, it will continue to extract a horrendous cost—in economic, political, social, and moral terms. Italy took decades to recover from the ravages of Mussolini and his party; India may take even longer to recover from the ravages of Modi and his party. □□□

[This article first appeared in The Telegraph]

POLITICS OF CHANGE?

Wooing Pasmanda Muslims

Ram Puniyani

THE ELECTORAL STRENGTH of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been rising through various mechanisms. On one hand, the voting percentage in favour of this party is on the upswing; on the other, it has been luring elected representatives from other parties. The process of luring has diverse ways and underlying causes. At the same time, there is some impression in the society that Muslims do not vote for the BJP by and large. This may not be fully true.

At the recently concluded National Executive meeting of BJP, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called upon his party to reach out to those sections of the society which have not been voting for BJP due to the 'BJP phobia' created by the Opposi-

tion. The BJP blamed the opposition parties even for its own actions due to which there is a fear of the BJP. Hate speech and dog whistles from the top leadership are aplenty due to which many are scared of this party.

The Muslim community has also faced the might of bulldozers. Political observer Zainab Sikander has neatly summarised it: "A man with amputated hands is accused of stone-throwing in Madhya Pradesh's Khargone. His only source of income, his shop, is bulldozed. But Muslims? This is their daily reality. What is the future of Muslims in India when they are being psychologically broken by being brandished as conspirators, terrorists, illegal migrants, rioters and stone-throwers?"

One can safely add that among the victims of communal violence, the majority are Muslims; those in jail are also mostly Muslims. Lately, human rights activists calling for peaceful protests are also being incarcerated. Most of them do not have the luck of Muhammad Zubair, the co-founder of Alt news, to secure bail.

In this light, one recalls the conclusions of the Gopal Singh Commission, the Rangnath Mishra Commission and Sachar committee reports which show the economic and social status of Muslims sliding down in the social pyramid. Minority appeasement as a phrase runs parallel to worsening socio-economic conditions of Muslim minorities. And now people are made to believe that the phobia against BJP has been created by opposition parties.

This is the backdrop in which the Prime Minister Modi advised his partymen to start "sneh yatras" (outreach campaigns) to woo Pasmanda

Muslims. He may have multiple goals in mind. To begin with, it may aim to win over a section of Muslims to the BJP fold to divide the Muslim community along caste/economic lines. Already, the RSS has floated a Muslim Rashtriya Manch to win over a section of Muslims by propagating common ancestry, and stating that 'change in your (Muslim) methods of worship has not changed your nationality'.

Pasmanda is a Persian word, which stands for 'left behind'. It is religion and caste neutral. As such, the ST, ST and OBC can broadly be included in this. Among Muslims there is another social gradation: Ashrafs, who claim their ancestry from the Prophet, Ajlaf (the equivalent of OBC) and Arzal, which are the lowest of the lowest castes among Muslims. It is a paradox that the many from low caste in India embraced Islam to escape the tyranny of the traditional caste system. But caste is such a deep phenomenon that it has affected Muslims and Christians and other religions in India.

Overall, Pasmanda is predominantly used for low-caste Muslims

who have been left out from the process of affirmative action, especially brought in by the Mandal Commission. The community includes Dalit (Arzals) and backward Muslim (Ajlaf). Based on the Mandal commission report, 27 percent reservation was started for the OBCs. Of this, 79 castes were from Muslim community—nearly all belonging to the Pasmanda community. The rest of 15 percent Muslims are considered upper class or Ashrafs.

The castes within Pasmanda Muslims are generally decided by their profession. Among the Pasmandas are Malik (Teli), Momin Ansar (weavers), Qureshi (butchers), Salmani (barbers) and Hawari (washer men).

While the Mandal Commission did give the status of OBC to many Muslim communities, some have not been included in the category to which they belong and so remain deprived from the much-needed affirmative action. It is true that in the Muslim community, most organisations are dominated by Ashrafs.

Pasmanda groups have been trying to organise themselves to press

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

—Fr.

for betterment of their economic-social conditions. Ali Anwar, the founder of one Pasmanda group, says that in 1998 a Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz was formed. "We do not appreciate the patronising statement from the PM... The Pasmanda Muslims need 'sneh' denotes that they are an inferior lot requiring patronage from the ones who are superior... Our fight is not against any caste, creed or community; we are demanding from the government and the political elite our due that is commensurate with our population so that we can stand on an equal footing with non-Pasmanda people."

"Sneh Yatra" is fine. But what is needed more is an end to the hate campaigns against the community and the start of affirmative action for the weaker sections of the Muslim population. □□□

BEYOND BIHAR

Chanakya vs Chanakya

Harish Khare

THE CHANGE IN COMPLETION of the ruling arrangement in Patna has one and only one significance beyond Bihar: the Narendra Modi Momentum suddenly does not look irreversible. After the Enforcement Directorate-abetted coup in Maharashtra, it looked like the two Chanakyas have put a very sturdy Godrej lock on India's political near future, and have thrown away the key. The 2024 elections looked like a done deal—but no longer, because Nitish Kumar has retrieved the key.

The Modi Momentum is predicated on a carefully manufactured psychological sentiment that over-attributes the prime minister with non-existing leadership qualities, including a charismatic hold over the national imagination. Like all psychological tricks, the Modi Momentum is sustained by continuous and relentless drum-beating about dubious achievements and doubtful competence.

As a political project the Modi Momentum is designed to make rivals and dissenters, within and out-

side the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), feel vulnerable to the prime minister's over-sized political persona. Within the BJP, all the putative rivals—the Rajnath Singhs and the Nitin Gadkaris—have been made to feel puny and inadequate in comparison to the prime minister. Non-BJP chief ministers like Naveen Patnaik and Jagan Reddy have allowed themselves to feel intimidated, not just by the coercive reach of the central agencies but also by the prime minister's over-hyped persona.

The importance of the change of scene in Patna is that prime minister's bluff has been called. It was perhaps because Nitish Kumar has been such a long, steady and useful partner of the BJP in its sectarian poli-

tics; he should be credited with a certain understanding of Modi's bag of tricks. Thick as thieves. Unlike Uddhav Thackeray, Nitish could anticipate the BJP's moves and adroitly checkmated the great Chanakyas before they could inflict a midnight sleight of hand, à la Eknath Shinde, on him. It must be assumed that he and his new colleagues would be ready for an onslaught from the central agencies. That weapon is already overused and no longer carries with it the stigma of moral censure.

Nor is the BJP in a position to cry "betrayal" against Nitish. The BJP leadership is committed to a relentless expansionist strategy and it is not prepared to brook any kind of resistance or pockets of regional autonomy. Nitish would have, sooner or later, fallen prey to this new political megalomania of new rulers of Naya Bharat.

Nitish himself has been silently endorsing the BJP's political dadagiri against the opposition governments, groups and leaders. The BJP has shown scant regard for any kind of constitutional norms or moral values as its managers have resorted to every dirty stratagem; a shamelessly

captive media has heaped respectability on the BJP operatives for being so cunning and so successful in sabotaging other political parties and suborning loyalties.

If nothing else, Nitish has disrupted the Modi narrative. It is too early to hazard any guess as to how his defection would help the opposition's electoral prospects. It would be realistic to keep in mind that the BJP in Bihar is not a push over; it has a strong organisational presence, though it lacks a leadership face. The BJP is still the favourite of the entrenched, powerful social forces—consisting of upper castes and upper classes—and has considerable clout in the bureaucracy.

Last time around, Nitish allowed himself to be rattled by the distracted and distracting Yadav brothers. This time the onus would be on him to play the understanding senior mentor to the quarrelsome Lalu Yadav family. And it must be presumed that the Yadav siblings have learnt a lesson or two in the art of sincere and honest sharing of power and responsibility.

The new coalition will have to give an account of itself as a stable and cohesive arrangement, produc-

ing purposive governance. If this new partnership lasts till the 2024, its ramifications will be felt beyond Bihar. The country will need to know that Modi is not the only fulcrum of governmental stability.

The Chanakyas are not going to let the Nitish-Yadav government be. One defeat will not produce a change of heart or political humility. They will keep using all the jiggery-pokery at their command to unsettle the new arrangement. They know the Congress will overreach itself and will upset the fragile coalition. The Chanakyas are cunning enough to instigate premature talk of Nitish as the opposition's prime ministerial face—knowing fully well that any such speculation would rattle the Congress First Family rather comprehensively.

A new BJP-mukt government in Patna mocks at the pretensions of an inexorable Modi Momentum. All across the political spectrum—regional parties, national parties, leaders and operatives—will be re-assessing the chess board and revising their strategies and calculations. A new unpredictability has been introduced in national politics. For now, the Modi spell stands broken. □□□

[Source: *The Wire*]

CLIMATE DIALOGUE

'Collective Action or Collective Suicide'

Kenny Stancil

GOVERNMENTS CAN EITHER come up with a collaborative and urgent plan to tackle the fossil fuel-driven climate emergency that is already wreaking deadly havoc across the globe or keep allowing corporations to pollute the atmosphere without limit, thereby condemning humanity to a grim future.

That stark warning comes from United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, who said recently:

"We have a choice. Collective action or collective suicide."

"It is in our hands," he told diplomats from 40 countries gathered in Berlin for a three-day conference called the Petersberg Climate Dialogue. The meeting, hosted annually for the past 13 years by the German government, marks one of the last chances to work out an international agenda for mitigation, adaptation, and compensation before the UN's COP27 climate sum-

mit kicks off in Egypt this November.

At the conclusion of COP26 eight months ago, Guterres noted, the Paris agreement's goal of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C above preindustrial levels was left "on life support."

"Since then, its pulse has weakened further," he continued. "Greenhouse gas concentrations, sea level rise, and ocean heat have broken new records."

"Half of humanity is in the danger zone from floods, droughts, extreme storms, and wildfires," Guterres pointed out. "No nation is immune."

The UN chief's latest warning

comes as large swaths of the planet are being pummelled by heat waves and wildfires, with no immediate respite in sight—at around 1.2°C of warming.

Extreme heat has killed more than 1,000 people in Portugal and Spain in recent days, and France is experiencing what experts are calling a “heat apocalypse.” Thousands of people in the region have been forced to evacuate due to wildfires. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom is bracing for its hottest day on record, with temperatures expected to climb even higher on Tuesday.

It’s not just Europe that is being seared. The United States, China, and parts of Africa and the Middle East are also suffering from heatwaves and wildfires, which climate scientists have long warned will increase in frequency and severity as a result of unmitigated greenhouse gas pollution.

And yet, “we continue to feed our fossil fuel addiction,” Guterres lamented. Global energy market disruptions triggered by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine have led many nations to double down on coal, gas, and oil extraction at a moment when investments in a swift green transition are sorely needed.

Most troubling of all, said Guterres, is that governments of the world “are failing to work together as a multilateral community.”

“Nations continue to play the blame game instead of taking responsibility for our collective future,” he said. “We cannot continue this way. We must rebuild trust and come together—to keep 1.5 alive and to build climate-resilient communities.”

Emphasising that “time is no longer on our side,” Guterres said that “we need to move forward together on all fronts,” referring to mitigation, adaptation, and financial support for climate-related damages and losses. The latter is a longstanding demand—made by many poorer nations that have contributed the least to the problem but are already bearing the brunt of its consequences—for more green funding from richer nations most responsible for planet-heating pollution.

“First, we need to reduce emissions—now,” Guterres stressed. “Everyone needs to revisit their Nationally Determined Contributions,” he continued, referring to currently inadequate and nonbinding emission reduction targets. “We need to demonstrate at COP27 that a renewables revolution is underway. There is enormous potential for a just energy transition that accelerates coal phase-out with a corresponding deployment of renewables.”

“Second, we must treat adaptation with the urgency it needs,” he said. “One in three people lack early warning systems coverage. People in

Africa, South Asia, and Central and South America are fifteen times more likely to die from extreme weather events. This great injustice cannot persist.”

“Third, let’s get serious about the finance that developing countries need,” he added.

While wealthy governments originally vowed to contribute \$100 billion annually by 2020 to help low-income nations switch to sustainable energy sources and improve infrastructure, they have missed that target, which is a small fraction of the \$4 trillion the World Bank says is necessary. Just \$80 billion is expected this year, with the \$100 billion pledge now postponed until 2023.

In addition to redistributive investments in mitigation and adaptation, the provision of more money to address the mounting losses and damages from a rapidly changing climate and increasingly frequent and intense extreme weather disasters “has languished on the sidelines for too long,” said Guterres. “It is eroding the trust we need to tackle the climate emergency together.”

“We need a concrete global response that addresses the needs of the world’s most vulnerable people, communities, and nations,” he added. “This has to be the decade of decisive climate action.” □□□

*[Originally published in
CommonDreams.org]*

PADDY, FISH AND BETEL VINES

Back from Dhinkia

Bharat Dogra

THE STRUGGLE OF THE people of Dhinkia and nearby villagers (in Jagatsinghpur district of Odisha) to save the local green rural economy based on dhana—mina—pana (paddy, fish and vines of betel leaves, apart from cashew nuts) from the onslaught of

highly polluting big industries has acquired a new relevance and resonance in the middle of the acute environmental crisis of the 21st century which needs to be better understood and appreciated.

This is not to say that such struggles to protect the established

sustainable livelihoods of rural communities were not relevant earlier. They were relevant then also as people have a strong democratic right to protect their livelihood. However in the ensuing debates often the side of the industrial onslaught could emerge stronger because the prevailing development paradigm favoured it so much.

This is no more the case. In the 21st century, quite apart from the immediately experienced serious

health hazards of pollution, it is increasingly realized that increased GHG emissions can endanger the essential life-nurturing conditions of our planet. Hence the need for protecting the green rural economy which communities have created and nurtured over the years is much stronger than before.

In the wake of this life-threatening crisis, for all those who care to see the emerging reality, the development paradigm has shifted much more in favour of protecting the green rural economy from any industrial onslaught. In the context of Dhinkia and nearby areas, if one compares the prevailing green economy with the industrial project onslaught which threatens to uproot it, in terms of pollution and GHG emissions what will emerge after what in official jargon is called 'development' will be highly polluting aggravation of climate disaster from which, incidentally, coastal areas are most threatened. If we look from the point of view of sustainable

livelihoods of local people, again the present situation is much, much better. If we look from the point of biodiversity and the health and survival of all other species, again the present situation is much better. So why not shift the big industrial projects—steel or cement or power or others, if these are really as urgent as claimed—to those areas where displacement of green economy and greenery is not involved? Why destroy so much that is increasingly more valuable?

The people of this and several nearby villages have been involved in struggles to protect their dhana-mina-pana green economy for nearly 17 years. First they struggled against a multinational company POSCO. After several years of struggle which involved many protests, imprisonments, injuries, sacrifices, people succeeded in driving away the multinational company. However their relief was short-lived, as instead of returning all their land the government welcomed a local industrial giant for an even bigger integrated project, acquiring even more land for this, unleashing a new wave of repression and arrests, including the imprisonment of prominent leader of the people's movement Debendra Swain.

In the course of the long history of repressions, several exhausted people in nearby villages have adjusted to accepting the new project, not out of happiness but because they have already suffered too much. At the same time, significant numbers of people are still carrying out the struggle courageously, despite the beatings, despite the arrests, despite the threats and the efforts to divide them.

This great resilience shown by the people for nearly 17 years in a peaceful democratic movement to save their green rural economy, community life and sustainable livelihoods is a big achievement, which all democratic forces should appreciate and

support. One must remember that these rural households are mostly from relatively weaker section, and consider how difficult it must have been to sustain their long drawn out struggles in the midst of waves of repressions, imprisonments, implicating them in false cases, imposition of blockades and restrictions.

At a time when there is a worldwide search of green alternatives and increasing support for sustainable livelihoods based on this, their determination in the face of grim odds to protect such systems deserves appreciation and awards, not repression and imprisonments.

Generally the Odisha government in India is looked upon as a saner and more rational regime compared to several others in the country, with a relatively better record of stability and governance, with some of its welfare schemes and disaster protection works attracting much favourable notice. So its continuing repressive attitudes towards the Dhinkia struggle is a case of reason wounded, rationality ignored. Its continuing repressive and hostile actions appear to be driven more by vendetta and irrational hostility towards its own people.

The heartbeat of a genuinely democratic government should be close to the heartbeat of its people. The Odisha government must urgently change its policy of hostility and repression towards the Dhinkia movement, a movement which deserves the support of democratic forces as well as those committed to environment protection based on sustainable livelihoods of rural communities. □□□

[Bharat Dogra is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include *Planet in Peril*, *Protecting Earth for Children and Man Over Machine—A Path to Peace*.]

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EELAM TAMILS

Tamil Nationalism

Kumarathasan Rasingam

SRI LANKAN STATE VIOLENCE, persecution, and discrimination from the 1940s to 70s pushed Eelam Tamil leadership to answer the Tamil national question, manoeuvring through a maze of democratic and diplomatic methods in an attempt to achieve only a basic level of autonomy for the Tamil people. For 30 years, the Sri Lankan state's response to these methods was one of sheer brutality and repression. The failure of the non-violent and democratic movement further induced Tamils to reject the racism of the Sri Lankan state, leading to the rise of Tamil insurgency in the 1970s designed to defend the very existence of the Eelam nation.

The militarisation of the Sinhala-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka began in the 1970s when attempts to reconcile by peaceful means the Tamils' claim for basic individual and collective rights with the Sinhalese need to allay their chronic sense of insecurity finally failed. Since then the struggle has intensified, erupting successively in the burning of the Jaffna Public Library with its irreplaceable cultural treasures on 31 May 1981, the anti-Tamil pogrom in July 1983, and the army's assault on Jaffna in October 1995. The point of no return to the status quo ante has long ago been passed.

Tamil nationalism developed and hardened in the face of Sinhalese 'hegemonism' and as a response to their victimisation. In this view, the oppressive and discriminatory policies of political parties dominated by the Sinhalese generated a 'defensive Tamil nationalism' that initially sought a federal system as a protec-

tive device and then demanded a separate state in their 'traditional homelands' after the oppressive ratchets were tightened. A body of people who wished to find their place within the island polity was driven to such a position by Sinhala 'exclusivism'. A separate state of Eelam is the only path to peace.

Shortly after the island's independence from Britain, the Sri Lankan government passed the Citizenship Act of 1948, which made more than a million Tamils of Indian origin stateless. The government also passed a Sinhala Only Act, which severely threatened the status of Tamil as a minority language, as well as hindering the social mobility of Tamil speakers. In addition, the government also initiated the state-sponsored colonisation schemes, with the aim of lessening the numerical presence of minorities as well as monopolizing traditionally shared economic activities such as agriculture and fisheries, which have been part of the livelihood of Sri Lankan Tamils since time immemorial.

The Tamil-speaking people in Ceylon constitute a nation distinct from that of the Sinhalese by every fundamental test of nationhood, firstly that of a separate historical past in the island at least as ancient and as glorious as that of the Sinhalese secondly, by the fact of their being a linguistic entity entirely different from that of the Sinhalese...and finally, by reason of their territorial habitation of definite areas which constitute over one-third of this Island

After 2009, the survivors of genocide ended up in government-sponsored refugee camps. Conditions in

these camps were deplorable, with reports of many human rights violations. Thousands of Tamil people had gone missing after settling into these camps. Family members recall seeing loved ones with them one moment, vanishing the next. Families of the disappeared have been continuously protesting in Sri Lanka, demanding justice.

The state of Sri Lanka is unable to provide the support needed for a war-torn population; this responsibility inevitably fell on the shoulders of the diaspora. They shouldered the immediate call for mutual aid, raised money, created infrastructure around education and different economic empowerment schemes.

The physical act of war may have ended, but a war against the Tamil nation has not. The Tamil nation remains under siege by Sri Lankan Forces; military bases now occupy traditional Tamil lands. In addition, there is the ongoing destruction of traditional Tamil religious institutions, graveyards, and memorials by state-sponsored organisations. The occupation has led to the rise in the colonisation of traditional Tamil areas by the Sinhala people. Tamil areas are under constant surveillance, forcing arbitrary arrests and prolonged detention without judicial oversight, emboldened by draconian terrorism laws. The Sri Lankan state routinely arrests students and activists, who face torture and death. □□□

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WORLD ON FIRE

Time for Socialism*Eric Blanc**

[For years, Thomas Piketty has articulated a cogent critique of 21st-century capitalism. He now appears to be moving beyond just critique to call for a 21st century socialism.]

IT'S A SIGN OF THE TIMES that one of the world's most prominent intellectuals has just published a *book of essays titled *Time for Socialism*. As Thomas Piketty explains in the volume's long introduction, "If someone had told me in 1990 that I would publish a collection of articles in 2020 entitled *Vivement le socialisme!* in French, I would have thought it was a bad joke."

Yet for Piketty, like countless others across the world, the past three decades of what he calls "hypercapitalism" pushed him to question accepted truths about the prevailing economic system. And while the author still shied away from advocating socialism at the time of the publication of *Capital* in the Twenty-First Century, his 2013 best-selling magnum opus on inequality, he's now come to embrace the term—arguing that despite the baggage of its connotations of Stalinism, "It remains the most appropriate term to describe the idea of an alternative economic system to capitalism."

There's more to this than terminology. As Piketty explains, his embrace of socialism reflects his newfound conviction that "one cannot just be 'against' capitalism or neoliberalism: one must also and above all be 'for' something else, which requires precisely designating the ideal economic system that one wishes to set up." Faced with rampant inequality and looming climate catastrophe, anger with capitalism is already widespread. What's now needed above all, in his view, is a compelling and "clearly explained alternative."

Piketty summarises his case for "a new form of socialism" as one that is "participative and decentralised, fed-

***TIME FOR SOCIALISM :
DISPATCHES FROM A
WORLD ON FIRE, 2016–2021**
by Thomas Piketty
(Yale University Press, 2021)

eral and democratic, ecological, multiracial, and feminist." The vision he puts forward is decidedly in the democratic socialist tradition, which seeks to deepen and expand the representative institutions and political freedoms codified in today's capitalist democracies. Far from projecting an insurrectionary uprising, Piketty argues that "it is quite possible to move gradually toward participatory socialism by changing the legal, fiscal, and social system."

In his view, this transition has already begun: "If we take a long-term perspective, then the long march toward equality and participatory socialism is already well under way." Though progress stalled out in the neoliberal era, he notes that the big story in capitalist countries since the nineteenth century is the "sharp reduction" in inequalities and the dramatic growth of the welfare state.

In Western Europe—the geographic focus of his book—total public expenditure in the early twentieth century was only 10 percent of the national income. But it has now reached 40-50 percent, overwhelmingly dedicated to funding services such as education, health care, and pensions. According to Piketty, this progress was the result of popular pressure as codified in governmental policy—it was neither a ruling-class manoeuvre to forestall radical change, nor was it an inevitable by-product of capitalist development left to its own devices.

Though he argues that the further

expansion of public services—including, crucially, measures to make higher education accessible to all—is essential for moving toward socialism, Piketty's vision is not reducible to rebuilding robust welfare states. For true equality, one needs to rethink the "whole range of relationships of power and domination." At the core of his conception of the transition to socialism is radical redistribution of wealth combined with an extension of employee influence within private firms.

One of the more innovative proposals in *Time for Socialism* is to dramatically scale up progressive taxation to provide a "minimum inheritance for all" of roughly \$180,000 for everybody when they turn twenty-five years old. Through this policy, Piketty envisions building a society in which "everyone would own a few hundred thousand euros, where a few people would perhaps own a few million, but where the higher holdings . . . would only be temporary and would quickly be brought down by the tax system to more rational and socially more useful levels."

Providing a generous financial cushion to all would, among its many benefits, free workers from being compelled by material necessity to accept bad working conditions, low pay, and workplace despotism. A sweeping top-to-bottom redistribution of wealth, in short, would "help to redefine the whole set of relations of power and social domination."

To deepen this power shift, Piketty also proposes that all countries adopt workers' co-management, in which elected employee representatives constitute half of the boards of directors in all large enterprises. This proposal, he notes, has already been implemented in countries such as Sweden and Germany, resulting in "a considerable transformation of the classic shareholder logic."

He nevertheless cautions against idealising this co-management system

as it has been implemented in the past, arguing that more ambitious versions of it are possible. Piketty concludes his case by stressing his proposals' provisional nature: the specific policies he puts forward "aim to open the debate, never to close it" because "the participatory socialism I'm calling for will not come from the top."

The fact that a thinker with Piketty's intellectual influence has embraced socialism is significant in itself, paving the way for greater numbers of people to begin envisioning a world beyond capitalism. But what should one make of his vision of socialist transformation?

Talk of a relatively gradual and already underway shift toward socialism will no doubt raise eyebrows among radicals trained to expect that a break with capitalism will necessarily require some form of revolutionary rupture in the state and economy. Yet this gradualist vision should not be dismissed out of hand.

The truth is that people have no way yet to precisely predict the form that a transition to socialism will take in an advanced capitalist democracy. Piketty's insistence that the radical reforms he envisions will be won through struggle against (rather than accommodation to) corporate power is likely sufficient as a strategic horizon for the foreseeable future. Though a more rapid and less peaceful revolutionary break may eventually be put on the agenda in the face of minoritarian employer reaction, there's no need nor any political benefit to project immediate revolution as the only possible path forward.

Some radicals may similarly frown upon Piketty's insistence that the transition to socialism is already underway, as seen in the growth of the welfare state and related declines in economic inequality. Yet here too the author is onto something: the reforms won by socialists, organised labour, and social movements over the past century have made significant incursions into market relations.

Despite neoliberalism's ravages, the welfare state has not been dismantled even in places like the United States and the UK—current and future struggles for decommodification are thus being waged on a significantly higher social baseline than they were in, say, the 1930s. As such, the most pertinent criticism of social democrats—one shared by Piketty—is not that they were gradualists, but rather that they eventually proved incapable of being effective gradualists. Instead of continuing to shift power and control toward working people, social democratic parties largely abandoned this project in the face of economic crisis, globalisation, and employer resistance from the 1980s onward.

Nor does it make sense to criticise Piketty for omitting calls for the nationalisation of the economy's commanding heights. There's a strong argument to be made that markets for private goods are fully compatible with (and arguably necessary for) a thriving socialist society—provided that the state radically undermines capitalist power and wealth, that firm-based economic democracy is expanded, and that robust welfare policies provide everybody with the essential services they need to survive. That said, Piketty's case would have been strengthened had he engaged more with proposals for a complete democratisation of firms, as famously envisioned by Sweden's "Meidner plan."

A more significant limitation is that Piketty says little in the book about the importance of rebuilding the power of organised labour. This question gets passing mentions in his admonitions to "rethink institutions and policies including public services, and in particular, education, labour law, and organisations and the tax system" and to "stop denigrating the role of trade unions, the minimum wage, and salary scales." Yet the author's relative inattention to organised labour today is somewhat

surprising given his commendable focus on the urgency of bringing back working-class politics and his consistent acknowledgement of the historical importance of trade unions in reducing inequality.

Perhaps Piketty, with his expertise in leveraging data to identify historical trends and policy solutions, felt that it was best to leave it to others to flesh out the strategic lines of march necessary to win his proposed vision. But without a revitalised labour movement to change the balance of class power, the author's most ambitious policy solutions are unlikely to pass—and some of his other proposals might not have their intended consequences.

Employee co-management, for example, generally can serve as a tool for increasing workers' influence when paired with robust trade unions. But in the absence of the relatively favourable relationship of forces created by strong working-class organisation and the credible threat of disruptive workplace action, co-management plans risk becoming toothless at best and mechanisms of employer control at worst, pushing workers to rubber stamp bosses' prerogatives.

None of this detracts from the overall importance of *Time for Socialism*—or the cogency of its vision. Piketty's effort to sketch out an alternative to capitalism should be the cause for reflection by progressives still sceptical of "the S word." And his work should be taken no less seriously by radicals, whose political effectiveness in capitalist democracies has all too often been undercut by a doctrinal attachment to formulas articulated for other eras and political contexts. To win a better world, the compellingly open-minded spirit of *Time for Socialism* may ultimately prove to be of even greater utility than its specific policy proposals.

□□□

LETTERS

Science in the Service of Villages

A substantial section of Indian scientific community comes from rural and poor background. But they are seldom able to serve the villages and villagers in their own country.

Even if they look forward to do so, the dynamics of their lives come to stand in their way. Eventually, they become estranged from ground realities of poverty and backwardness.

Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray was a scientist-pioneer who, against all odds demonstrated ways to serve India and its people in education, research, industry and social improvement.

The "Acharya PrafullaChandra Rural Science Centre" has been organised under a Voluntary Organisation, in a rural area in the district of Bankura in West Bengal.

Programmes of rural health, sustainable agriculture, children's education etc. are already being pursued there. The Science Centre also wishes to join hands with these efforts and bring a touch of science in rural life.

We are looking for scientific social worker/s inclined towards such activities and at least somewhat familiar with the functioning of laboratory-based science education. There are modest provisions of food and shelter. For those who need

it, a modest monthly allowance may also be arranged, the amount depending on availability of funds. Retired persons are also most welcome. Interested persons are invited to contact:

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Relief is no Answer

People have no equality and justice, even after 75 years of independence. They have only one equal right—the

right to vote. It is very much a constitutional matter. In practice, all have no free right to vote because of several political parties' influences and so-called scientific rigging. In spite of this, all have an equal share in the democratic government. At the same time, people have to struggle for equity and justice. But the government works for the rich to make them richer and the majority of its population is deprived of their democratic demand for survival at their own feet. The government of India is celebrating the "Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsab". Are the people of India really "Azad" (free)?

The governments (central and states) have formed National and States Human Rights Commissions, Women's Right Commission, Organisations for SCs/STs/OBCs etc, with the object of ensuring equal rights and justice. But all is under the control of the ruling political party in the government. These organisations have failed to bridge the gap between rich and poor, higher and lower classes, and so forth.

Social services and relief are prioritised measures for the disadvantaged. Unfortunately, these measures are also politicalised in their distribution to the ultimate beneficiaries. That's why about 38.4% of the population is hungry. Different government and non-government organisations, corporate and individuals are greatly involved in serving the underprivileged. But the ground reality remains unchanged. No doubt social services and relief work are impressive image-building factors in society. It's a show-off deal. They rarely consider the dignity of the underprivileged. Is it not an effort to make them dependent? Is it not discrimination against human beings by human beings? Is it their inherited stigma to be born as poor so that they have to die in poverty?

Are social services and relief efforts being used to glorify political parties, corporate, and some indi-

viduals? The government states in its long list on August 15th or January 26th every year how much it is concerned about serving the majority (poor). Each and every political party declares its manifesto during the election, which is an assurance of some social service measures or relief works. There is no effort taken for people's sustainable living.

For example, the government makes no serious effort to create jobs for educated or non-degree holders. No new employment venue has been created. But the government is very strict about privatising the public sectors. Is the younger generation social waste in this nation? They have huge potential at the time of the election? Is job guarantee under MGNEGRA a long-term policy to reduce unemployment and hunger among people? Is it not a policy of begging for 100 days of work with lower than minimum wages? It is an irresponsible policy to keep the poor in poverty. It will never be a supplement or complement to (self-reliance) "Atmanirvar Bharat".

Equality, justice, and sustainable self-dependent living are a dream for the common people of India.

Harasankar Adhikari, Kolkata

Forced Labour

Samuel (42) is among tens of thousands of migrants and refugees who have been held in dire conditions in Libyan detention centres and subjected to forced labour and torture. Despite acknowledging the abhorrent abuse they face, the EU continues to support the Libyan Coast Guard to return people intercepted in the Mediterranean to Libya.

Libya's migrant detention centres are notoriously horrendous. Guards systematically torture and abuse detainees to extort money from their friends and families abroad.

Samuel spoke of frequent beatings with metal pipes: "If I take off my T-shirt, you will see the marks".

Many survivors have reported that guards force detainees to carry out unpaid manual labour.

Seventeen-year-old Mohammed from Gambia was a victim of forced labour at a centre. He had been picked up by a Libyan group on the street who demanded money from him. When he couldn't pay, they made him work—he was not allowed to leave until he completed a year of unpaid labour.

“If you try to escape because you don't have money, they even shoot you”.

The EU is complicit in the trafficking of people on the move in Libya. With a budget of •84.85m (around \$86.32m) for the period from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2023, the bloc provides capacity building for the Libyan Coast Guard as well as “strategic and operational” assistance for wider Libyan border management efforts.

Activists and organisations are urging the EU to stop facilitating the enslavement of people in Libya.

Freedom United

Peaceful Protests in Sri Lanka

Sri Lankans had been protesting for months over the country's economic crisis that has led to a severe shortage of many essential imported items like medicines, fuel and cooking gas. Wickremesinghe's predecessor Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled the country after protesters stormed his official residence and occupied many key state buildings including the president's office and prime minister's office and official residence. Wickremesinghe was elected by Parliament to complete Rajapaksa's term, which ends in 2024.

The untiring efforts of the peaceful protesters succeeded in forcing the resignation of three Rajapaksha brothers; first it was Mahinda Rajapaksha who resigned the post of Prime Minister on May 09, 2022. Finance Minister Basil Rajapakse on June 09, 2022. But the objective of the protesters was the removal of President Gotabaya Rajapaksha. Due to the siege of the President's house he was forced to go on exile to Maldives and

then secured a 14 day visa to Singapore.

Sri Lanka is the first country to succeed by the protests for a “Regime Change”. The country is riding the waves of revolutionary change for the first time in history. The mass protests irrespective of race, religion or social class, Sri Lankans, Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims collectively protesting against the growing hardships influenced by the economic crisis the country has faced since independence. The country is desperately struggling to meet the fuel, food and financial commitments.

An essential part of this struggle is peaceful assembly, freedom of expression and communication as well as the freedom of mobility. These rights and their use by an informed, youthful protest leadership was able to shake the foundations of the government pushing it to change the President, cabinet and important office holders in the government bureaucracy.

Kumarathan Rasingam, Sri Lanka

GST on Rent

A GST-registered tenant needs to pay a goods and services tax of 18 per cent for renting a residential property, according to the new GST rules effective from July 18. Earlier, only commercial properties like offices or retail spaces given on rent attracted GST. However, the tenant can claim the GST paid under input tax credit as a deduction.

According to the recommendations of the 47th GST Council meeting, tenants should pay an 18 per cent GST on a reverse charge basis (RCM) and they can later claim it as a deduction under the input tax credit.

Abhishek Jain, partner (indirect tax) at KPMG in India, said, “The new GST rule will increase the cost of every residential rent agreement where the transaction involves a registered person, such as a company or a corporate. The 18 per cent additional cost on the rent could either be borne by the company or the landlord, depending upon the commercial ar-

angement thereof. Further, input tax credit in respect of such transactions may be sought...on the ground of the said services being for the personal use of the employees.”

The 47th GST Council meeting at June-end decided to accept the group of ministers' interim reports on the correction of duty inversion and exemption. Pre-packaged and pre-labelled retail packs, including curd, lassi and butter milk, were brought under GST, effective July 18.

The Council also decided to impose a GST of 18 per cent on the fees charged by banks for the issue of cheques (loose or in book form); bring hotel rooms under Rs 1,000 per day under the 12 per cent GST slab as opposed to tax exemption category currently.

Hospital room rent, excluding intensive care unit (ICU), exceeding Rs 5,000 per day per patient will also be taxed at 5 per cent, without input tax credit. The Council also decided to impose a 12 per cent GST on maps and hydrographic or similar charts of all kinds, including atlases, wall maps, topographical plans and globes.

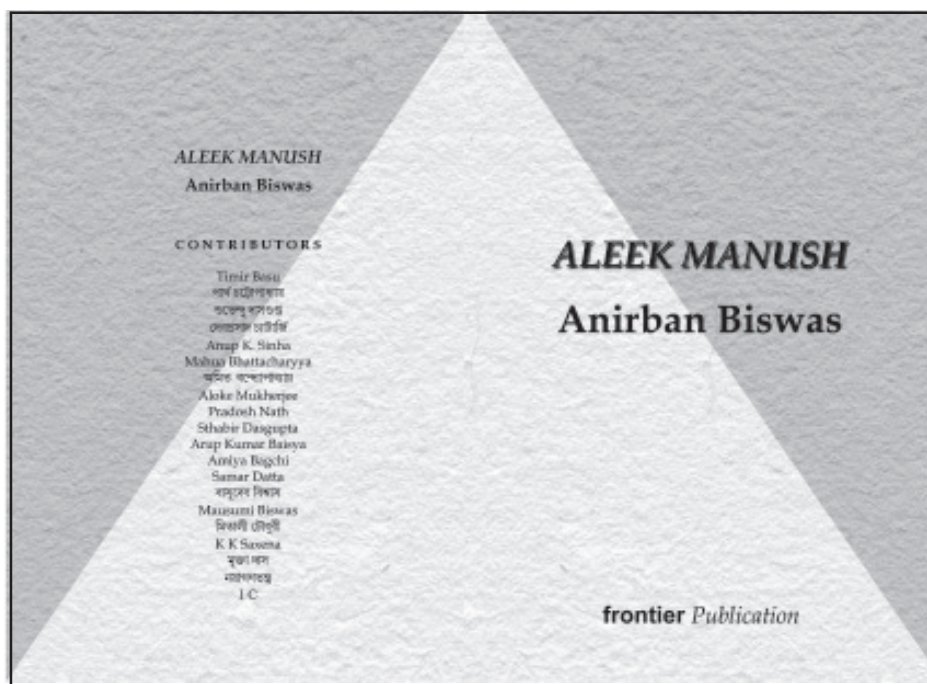
GST on petroleum/ coalbed methane has been increased to 12 per cent, from 5 per cent earlier. The tax on e-waste has also been raised from 5 per cent to 18 per cent. GST exemption on services extended by RBI, Irda, Sebi, FSSAI and GST has also been withdrawn. The tax on scientific and technical instruments supplied to public funded research institutes has been raised from 5 per cent to the “applicable rate”.

The GST Council also reduced the tax rate on ostomy appliances (including pouch or flange, barrier cream, sleeves, irrigator kit, micro-pore tapes, stoma adhesive paste, belt) from 12 per cent to 5 per cent. It also cut GST from 12 per cent to 5 per cent on orthopedic appliance (splints and other fracture appliances); artificial parts of the body; other appliances which are worn or carried, or implanted in the body, to compensate for a defect or disability; and intraocular lens.

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