

# frontier

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## *Against 'Communal Fascism'?*

INDIAN NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INCLUSIVE ALLIANCE [INDIA] concluded its third conclave in Mumbai after earlier two sittings in Patna and Bengaluru with the promise of a united face in the up-coming 2024 general elections. There are 28 political parties, mostly regional, who have come together to fight the Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP]—the torch-bearer of 'communal fascism' in India. Many of these 28 parties are too small to be taken seriously. Maybe, they are being floated by some big regional parties with the aim of increasing their comparative bargaining power in INDIA. To make a consensus on logo is not that difficult. Nor is it very important. What remains difficult even after three rounds of parley is how to harmonise the diverse perceptions of unity at the central and state levels. In other words what matters most is the basis of seat sharing. Marxists, Socialists, Gandhians, Liberal Democrats, Mandalites—all are there and yet it is not certain whether they could agitate from a common platform i.e. INDIA on a common minimum programme. For the ministerial berth almost all parties seem to have realised the Congress reality barring AAP that controls two state governments—Delhi and Punjab—at the moment. But the bone of contention is seat adjustment and policy of accommodation. A target date has been fixed in October to complete seat-sharing which looks impossible. Given past experience it won't be that easy to clinch a deal on an agreed formula. Here lies the strength of BJP that counts heavily on disunity in 'unity drive'. The saffron brigade is out to create a wedge in INDIA camp following a caustic remark by a prominent DMK leader on 'Sanatan Dharma' [Hinduism]. The chief minister of Assam Himanta Biswa Sarma warned that if Congress doesn't sever ties with DMK, it could be perceived as being anti-Hindu by the public while senior BJP leader and former Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad labelled INDIA as an anti-Hindu alliance'. It is one way to tell the voters that INDIA is against the majority community and a crude attempt to communalise the polity with the sole purpose of wooing minority voters even before poll campaign starts. They are united, no doubt, but this unity is yet to be reflected in action. The BJP is trying to create fissures in Opposition bloc by every possible means and DMK leader's 'Sanatan Dharma' statement, otherwise a secondary issue has come as handy to aggravate communal polarisation by the saffronites. At the Mumbai meet they adopted three resolutions announcing INDIA was going ahead to fight the Modi-led BJP

government together with a rider 'as far as possible'. In plain language the doors for what they call 'friendly contests' in parliamentary culture are wide open. The end result: BJP may laugh the last laugh.

BJP stands for Indian version of fascism backed by India's powerful corporate lobby. Fascism means war-war against people. The Congress Party's strategy of inaction against the corporates, notwithstanding Rahul Gandhi's murmur in highlighting Adani link with Modi, has no potential to galvanise voters to stand up against Modi's party. Talking vaguely about unemployment makes little sense. Why do they not demand to fill up vacancies in government de-

partments? Almost all government establishments including Postal Authority, Railways and Nationalised Banks are running with chronic shortage of staff, and consequences are tremendous degradation in public utility service. Not that this is a recent phenomenon. It all started during the Congress regime and Modi's NDA government is maintaining that tradition faithfully. Automation is killing jobs like anything and opposition parties, not excluding left parties, have no alternative proposal to offer. People are eagerly waiting to see the common agenda INDIA is going to release any time soon.

Digitisation came late in India but the way it is spreading at neck-

breaking speed is simply horrifying for job seekers, young and old. The days are not far when robots will drive vehicles making driving jobs scarce. Opposition has no answer. They just react to spontaneity.

Ex-facie BJP is posing itself as a powerful political entity with a goal to reach, having very little concern about what INDIA is saying--or not saying. But the sudden reduction of domestic and commercial prices of LPG answers many unanswered questions. They are really worried--the BJP leaders. Maybe more populist exercises are in the making because deadline for 2024 nightmare is approaching dangerously. □□□

06-09-2023

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## COMMENT

### Face Value

MOST OF INDIAN TV CHANNELS have developed a habit of creating war hysteria even in areas where the possibility of immediate war doesn't exist. They love to generate war scenario with imagination while ignoring the ground reality. They don't sell military hardware but their war propaganda helps the global military-industrial complex market their products. They display their wares to potential buyers, mostly in third world countries. The Russia-Ukraine war is a grand occasion to whip up nuclear panic as if Russia is going to detonate nuclear bombs anytime. They present Russian nuclear alert vis-a-vis American response with counter preparations in such a way that recreation of Hiroshima horror is just a few weeks away. But the Russian threat to resort to nuclear options in case its survival is at stake is repeatedly dismissed by the White House experts as a bluff. After all nuclear war cannot be won. Russia knows it. America knows it. Even Ukrainians don't think they are

going to face nuclear holocaust despite the current stalemate and Russian set-backs on the front.

Then they frequently dramatise the military drill by America and its allies in the Pacific to such an extent that one may think that a war between China and America-backed Taiwan may break out any day. How many times China has violated Taiwan's air space is their regular staple. Even an accidental crash of a helicopter of any side is viewed as a symptom of impending war. And how America is arming Taiwan with sophisticated arms gets priority on their daily discourse on the Taiwan crisis. They predict a war between China and Taiwan any time soon.

For one thing China is unlikely to attack Taiwan despite its military exercises in the region. To keep Taiwan as an American post is beneficial to Beijing. Many people have forgotten the history of Taiwan or Formosa or Kuomintang China. Mao's People's Liberation Army failed to liberate this island from the

Kuomintang and in due season it became an independent entity. It was part of China before the Chinese revolution and the Chinese policy of treating it as 'one country, two systems' seems to be working well. Major portion of foreign direct investment [FDI] to China comes from Taiwan. Beijing has a lot to learn about capitalist intricacies from Taipei because capitalism came late in China. Their much touted 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' has been turned into 'capitalism with Chinese characteristics'.

China has developed a unique device called the 'China-Taipei Forum' to maintain people to people relationship. And it matters in global diplomacy. In other words China doesn't look too eager to deploy force against Taiwan.

'China may have just banned the import of Taiwanese mangoes but two sides have had some fruitful exchanges this summer, including the travel of Taiwanese athletes to Chengdu for the World University Games, albeit under the Chinese-Taipei banner'. Last month Taipei's Mayor Chiang Wan-an visited his counter-part in Shanghai for a city-

level meeting—the first time the annual conference was being held in-person since 2019.

The Shanghai-Taipei City Forum began in 2010 as a channel to promote cross-strait trade but grew in political significance after Tsai Ing wen became president in 2016. Of late Tsai has extended an olive branch to Beijing by announcing an end to travel restrictions imposed on Chinese businesses during corona virus pandemic. With this type of mutual cooperation and cordiality

between them it may be wild speculation to see a war between China and Taiwan or for that matter between China and America in the near future. To talk of war is one thing and to go to war is quite another. Even if there are no tensions they can always create ones to keep the pot boiling. Asked about the possibility of a war Andy Huang, a restaurateur in Taipei said somewhat sarcastically, “I have been hearing China invading for 30 years”.

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## NOTICE

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## NOTE

### A People's Journalist

*Abhay Kumar writes:*

**A**DIVASI RIGHTS JOURNALIST Rupesh Kumar Singh completes one year in jail. In his absence, the family has suffered hardship. Her wife Ipsa Shatakshi has been fired from her teaching job at a private school, yet she remains resolute in waging the battle outside.

While 38-year-old Rupesh is put in jail and the family needs more financial support, Ipsa was asked to quit the job. Apart from the family needs, she has to pay for the education of six-year-old son, Agrim. Amid this financial crisis, she has to offer private tuition. From pursuing the legal battle to fighting for the release of her husband, she works as a brave woman. Even in this difficult time, she is pursuing law and doing a course in journalism through the distance mode. Earlier she did B.Com and M.Com and earned a degree in Bachelor of Education. During an interaction, she is optimistic and firmly believes that Rupesh would be released soon. Her political conviction keeps her resolute and unwavering.

At present, Ipsa lives in Ramgarh

(Jharkhand) while his husband is imprisoned in Patna's Beur Jail. When Rupesh was earlier kept in Ranchi Jail, it was much easier for her to meet him because of the relative proximity of the jail to her home. Not many people know that Rupesh and Ipsa became friends through social media. She has been very active on social media platforms and Rupesh first noticed her there. Her father Vishad Kumar is a journalist and politically left-oriented person. Rupesh has also been associated with the left organisations since his student days. Their shared political worldviews brought them closer. In 2016, they finally got married.

In an online interview with the writer, 38-year-old Ipsa recalled that a few colleagues at her school were quite helpful. But later the school authority decided to fire her.

One year ago on July 17, 2022, Rupesh was arrested from his hometown Ramgarh by Jharkhand police. Since he was relentlessly writing against the exploitation of natural resources in Adivasi areas and raising voices against the attacks on their lives and liberty through his

pen, he became a thorn in the eye of the establishment. As an exercise of silencing him, he was first arrested in 2019 under Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). Since the Bihar police failed to file the charge sheet, he got bail in December 2019. But again he was arrested last year and charged with several provisions of the IPC. So far, he has been charged with four cases including draconian UAPA. At present, he has been incarcerated in Beur Jail.

Earlier, Rupesh alleged that his phone was put under surveillance by Pegasus (spyware). To substantiate his claim, he said that whenever he reached any Adivasi area for reporting, he noticed that some unidentified people were already present there to persuade the local people against him. According to him, this was an indicator that his movement was being monitored. Against this regime of surveillance, he, along with some other journalists, moved to the Supreme Court.

He has provided a valid critique of the developmental model that the ruling classes are forcing upon the people. He has also argued that the areas inhabited by the Adivasi community are bereft of the basic amenities including the safe drinking water, while, at the same time, the localities occupied by the outsiders and business classes have every facility. □□□

## CHANDRAYAAN-3

## On the Dark Side of the Moon

*Kamalesh Roy*

ON 23RD AUGUST, INDIAN space research organisation led lunar mission successfully landed on the moon. The soft landing online live event by ISRO has been named as the most viewed live streaming session globally with more than 80 lakh of Peak Concurrent Views (PCVs). It has even surpassed the online viewership of the most popular football match in the history of commercial sports between Brazil and Croatia that took place in FIFA World Cup 2022. Right after the lunar module landed on the moon surface, almost all the Indian National or Multinational business enterprises appropriated the 'National Space Sensation' with the fastest possible online ads, social media posts and others, as if the bunch of these national and international corporations, looting the country and their people, care much about an integral scientific and social development. Private enterprises that supplied some or many components for the mission were covered by the Lords and the Barons of the broadcasting industry only to add 'value' to those newly opened space subsidiaries or the recently listed 'space stocks'. Like all other National Space organisations, ISRO which has been built to cover up the tracks for the Military might and missiles technology in the name of civilian space research, finally served the purpose of the ruling elite with fifty and more days (July 06–August 24) of exhilarating a show pumped by ultra Nationalism, sponsored by Sangh-Dal-Parishad syndicate and their native and foreign friends. The marvelous scientists, technicians, engineers, scholars and the mighty workers of

the country, who contributed to this greatest scientific and engineering feat, have been fraudulently made the face of a Government which promotes communalism, pseudo-science and the interest of the national oligarch in the most obnoxious, exploitative and shameless manner. A government that has been exempting corporate loans that exceed its education budget and allocating larger amount of funds even for Mandir beautification in Ayodhya than the Chandrayaan-3 cost, is a savage agent of the wealthy minority of the country and it only resorts to the glory of the generations of the scientific tradition at ISRO just because the 'Scientific and Technological esteem' of the glorified 'Space Race' are of great use this time to invigorate the nationalist fanaticism.

The greatest tragedy of this 21st century digitised PR stunt is that the audience at the consumer end of the gigantic space sensation show doesn't bother to ask whether this great national feat will serve any of the crisis and the uncertainties of the nation at all! ISRO's 90 lakh of peak concurrent live stream viewers were probably taking a break from the catastrophic reality where 2.8 crore aspirants apply for 90k railway jobs or 25 lakh aspirants sit for 6000 group D posts. Some of the viewers must be trying to bask on the warmth of the great national publicity of Rocketry and Moon just to avoid the hellish facts on agrarian front that pushes 15 farmers and 15 farm workers to commit suicide each day. Many millions who were not a part at the consuming end of this national sensation, were perhaps busy in making their ends meet in a

country where poorest 50% holds only 13% of national income. They must be taken aback with the absurdity of space exploration in a country which stands as poor and extremely unequal with its filthy rich minority along with half of the demography living on income of rupees 146 a day only.

A careful introspection of the tragedy points to an ambiguity in the scientific temperament of a society that has historically failed to separate its state affairs free from the religious affairs. What scientific character an ecosystem would promote, that drives the finest scientists at DRDO to sit for a Puja by a Brahmin right before the test launch of Agni V (2014), if not the nationalism fortified by the religion of the majority? What trust of knowledge and progress a government will manifest, that persuades their Defence minister to write a religious note after Sastra Puja at the induction ceremony of fighter jets, if not bigotry and jingoism? ISRO chairman Dr K Radhakrishnan offering his prayer to Venkateshwara Temple (right before the Mars Mission in 2013) or Dr K Sivan (before the 50th launch of PSLV) and Dr S Somenath (before Chandrayaan-3 launch) doing the same in 2019 and 2023, demonstrates the attitude of the respective Governments to vilify and obscure the scientific ethos of a nation. And finally, naming the Chandrayaan-3 landing site as 'Shiv-Shakti' is the ultimate mockery of the true scientific temper and the technological vocation of the great 'Viswakarmas' that this country has produced. History says that the governments that legitimise Science and Technology only for their Military and Space aspirations, are the Governments that have failed miserably in terms of social and economic welfare of its people.



One should not forget that the trend of hyper-nationalistic space sensation has a historical root that tries to embalm the exploited millions and legitimize the despotic regimes of both liberal and the right, scrupulously diverting the masses from the social and economic perils. To choose between warfare and welfare, the ruling elite of India meticulously picked the game of nationalism umpteenth times in the past. In fact, the first such space sensation in the space history of India came at the years when inflation reached a whopping 35%, price of food grains skyrocketed only to add more to the agony of the toiling majority. Years of 1974-75 were the years of hyperinflation, food shortage and hyper-nationalism too. Pokhran test and then the launch of the first lower earth orbit Indian Satellite commemorated by millions of postage stamps and currency bills vivid with an image of metal box 'Aryabhata' shining high above the earth, all the events took place between May 1974 to May 1975 before the Indira Government finally declaring emergency in July, 1975. Almost fifty years later, having the majority of the working class under the RSS affiliated BMS, with 70 crore plus population living on average income of rupees 146 a day, made an ever popular government in the last parliamentary election just to add more to the price hike and unemployment, privatisation and liberalisation. The country now embraces killing of its religious minority with an ever stronger echoes of 'Bharat Mata ki Jai'. A country having 50% of the population below the age of 25 and 65% below 35, tormented by unemployment and uncertainty; divided by provincial, linguistic and ethnic turmoil; agonized by the ever offensive casteist chauvinism; separated between the Hindu and the Muslim; Exploited

and Alienated in the era of finance and fascism, interrogated by the saffron Sangh-Dal-Parivar coalition, must be in need for another film like Gulzaar's 'Mere Apne' to assess the face of the constellations of Indian youth equipped with mobile phones and cheap internet, endowed by the ever prominent joblessness and hunger, left helpless in a society that has approved religious fanaticism in an ever stronger conviction! It is a fact that an ambitious space programme for a poor country is in the interest of military industrial aspirations only. It is truest than ever that a country trying to touch the highest feat of the space race at the cost of its social and economic perils, is to hide the blood on the hands of their affluent elite and fanatic rulers. It is unequivocally the nationalism of the exploiters that bluffs, deceives and tricks the millions of toiling masses of the country to dance with devils at the cost of their own sufferings.

Here on the dark side, when Chandrayaan-3 has just executed the last orbit raising manouvre before it was inserted into trans-lunar orbit, a migrant worker from Bihar fell from the highest he has ever reached in his lifetime, at an under construction building in Delhi. Sheikh Shah Alam, the construction worker who died on spot, was found with no safety gear. Days after the Chandrayaan-3 entered lunar orbit and made few rotations around the shiny moon, a Dalit man named Durgam Bapu was tied to a pole and beaten mercilessly by upper caste Suram Ramreddy in Kotapally. Offence of the poor Durgam was that his bulls were grazing on the land of the upper caste in his village. The day Chandrayaan Lander module successfully separated from the propulsion module, a 40-year-old coal miner Krishna Murari died when a mine wall collapsed upon him in Godhabharikhani of Pedapalli dis-

trict in Telangana. Right before the historic soft landing of the lunar Lander, 22 construction workers died while an under construction bridge collapsed in Mizoram. While millions of jobless youth equipped with smart phones and cheap internet looming on the ISRO live stream, here on the darkest pit of India, a twenty-year-old sanitation worker named Rohit died in Uttar Pradesh while cleaning a septic tank. At any random distance between the Earth and the Moon on Chandrayaan-3's journey, Manipur has been burning. There are clashes in Nuh, Haryana in the name of religion. In Gurugram, the mighty millennium city was hit too, with riots and Islamophobia. The day when the most sophisticated thermal sensor on the lunar rover was just preparing to gauge the temperature profile in and outside the Moon surface, here in Uttar Pradesh, a schoolchild was harassed by his teachers and then the rest of the classmates were instructed to humiliate and to slap the child just because of his religious identity. On the dark side of a moon-struck nation, Chandrapur District in Maharashtra, alone counted the 73rd body (Till Jan, 2023 - July, 2023) of a farmer who committed suicide. For each day when Chandrayaan-3 has been approaching the Moon with its highly sophisticated module, here in the 'proud nation of scientific endeavour', 3 workers died and 11 workers are injured on an average due to the poor factory safety issues. In this 'New India', the dream that the 'Space sensation show' wants to sow among the children are the infants of millions of mothers who are suffering from anemia and malnutrition, leading to the birth of a generation of stunted children. To talk numbers, even the best state-wise stunting rates are far greater than that of Ghana, Bangladesh and Vietnam! □□□

## MISSION TO MOON

## What about Manual Scavenging?

*Ranganayakamma*

**T**HE MOMENT THE INDIA'S spaceship Chandrayaan-3 landed on the moon at its south pole, streams of patriotism flowed across cities accompanied by slogans like *Jayaho Bharath! Jayaho Chandrayaan! Mera Bharath Mahan! Vande Mataram!* And so on. Before the space ship was put on the rocket, the space scientists took its specimen and kept it in front of 'Lord' Venkateswara of Tirupati and 'Goddess' Chengala-mma of Sullurpet and prayed that the spaceship should land without any obstacles. That was the confidence of those scientists in their science. *Jayaho* scientists of India! After the space ship was launched from the space centre, there have been Hindu rituals like worships and yagas! TV debates! Stories in all newspapers! Editorials!

But no one pointed out the fact that landing on the moon is a kind of 'business' and some companies unhesitatingly call it 'space business' and 'space industry'. No one has talked about the fact that a 2-lakh kilos of space trash was accumulated on the surface of the moon due to the rockets, spaceships and satellites sent into the space by not only India but also America, Russia, China, Japan and some other countries. They do not utter a single word as to how that space trash makes the climate dangerous. Only few lovers of environment mention some facts here and there. According to such information, about 70 space ships were broken and scattered across the surface of the moon. Nearly 14 thousand broken parts of old rockets were lying there. Crores of space debris are floating near the

earth. Most of the space junk is due to launching of space craft by America followed by Russia and China. This junk hits the newly arriving space ships and cause damage. According to one estimate at one point of time, many leftover urine collection kits and 96 bags of poop (human excreta) were found on the moon, because humans (astronauts) are sent to the moon though for a few days. This means that the scientists had left their urine and poop on the surface of the moon! It was confirmed that those kits and bags were left by those astronauts sent in the space flight called Apollo. It is said that the American scientists are very keen to bring those bags of poop and examine if that substance underwent any changes.

Well, why countries like America, Russia, China, Japan and India are going to the moon? They will investigate whether there is water or not on the moon, what minerals are available there and then start businesses. Already, space business has been going on in the form of Satellites. For instance, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) signed business deals with 34 countries, made 342 satellites for those countries and launched them in the space. Recently, India signed 6 business agreements with 4 countries. According to the statement of the union minister for Space made in Rajya Sabha, India will get 132 million Euros (about Rs 1188 crores). What India got from the previous business deals is a different calculation.

As of now, according to one report, there are about 9 thousand Satellites belonging to various countries revolving in the space. It is

possible to locate the military bases and installations of the enemy countries. Places of mineral deposits too can be identified. Internet connection can be secured with enormous speed through satellites than by means of cables. Thus there are so many technical advantages. In order to benefit from such advantages, Union Government of India spent about 2 crores of rupees during the past 15 years for launching Chandrayaan thrice: in 2008, 2019 and now in 2023. This amount is excluding the several lakhs of rupees paid as salaries to the scientists. Well, then, do you know how much was allotted to those who have no other means for their livelihood except manual scavenging ((holding human excreta in hands while cleaning the dry latrines)? According to the government's figures, 550 crores have been allocated during the past 17 years towards 'compensation' in case of death during manual scavenging or 'rehabilitation' of those who quit that work which is legally banned but not implemented. The figures merely represent allocation but not actually released amounts which are very less. 2 thousand crores for 'antarikshbharath' (Space India) and 5 hundred crores for cleaning 'Ashuddha Bharath' (Unclean India)

Manual scavenging workers often lose their lives while removing the human excreta from out of the septic tanks and from out of the silted manholes. The Union minister for social justice has stated in the Rajya Sabha that about 400 manual scavenging workers lost their lives during the past 5 years: 2017-22. The 'Safai Karmachari Andolan' (SKA), which has been struggling for the cause of manual scavengers in the country for the past 30 years, has contradicted the figures given by the minister and claimed many more deaths. The SKA

is not making big demands before the government. It is merely asking to provide machinery that help the scavengers to clean septic tanks and manholes. The tragedy, however, is that it is again the scavenging-caste people alone will have to do the cleaning work even after the ma-

chines are provided. Narada Samhitha, a 2400 -year -old religious text mentions that the work of lifting human excreta must be done by the untouchables only. Even today, it is the people of the bottommost caste among the untouchables who are doing that work. Those who are little

above in the hierarchy of Dalit families do not have marriage alliances with the scavenging families. This is another tragedy. This is what is called 'ladder-like caste system' (hierarchical society)!

Now, look at the moon! See urine kits and poop bags! □□□

## TARGETING NEWSCLICK

### 'Indian Version of McCarthyism'

*N Ram*

**T**HE INDIAN CONSTITUTION guarantees "freedom of speech and expression" for its citizens. This is a fundamental right. But based on the assault against the free press in India in recent times, one wouldn't know it.

The targeting of NewsClick—a progressive, medium-sized digital media venture based in New Delhi—marks a new low for press freedom, which has been caught up in a decade-long trend of uninterrupted downsliding in the "new India" of Narendra Modi. People have witnessed a state-engineered McCarthyite campaign of disinformation, scare-mongering and vilification against NewsClick, together with the ever-present threat of criminal prosecution for its founder. The world should be watching in horror.

Founded in 2009, NewsClick, which is owned by a small private company and works on a modest budget, is managed in its day-to-day operations by an editorial collective. Its founder and editor-in-chief, Prabir Purkayastha, is an engineer by background, an advocate for various scientific initiatives in the software, power and telecommunications sectors, and an influential intellectual of the Indian left. The news site prides itself on being able to bring its readers, viewers, and listeners "stories from the real India". It focuses on reporting, analysing, and com-

menting on movements and struggles at home and in other parts of the world. It regularly presents critical and progressive voices on a range of issues from around India. Apart from this, it offers serious coverage of science and technology and has taken a few strides in the field of data journalism. Unsurprisingly, NewsClick has been opposed to the Modi government's authoritarian "Hindutva"—or Hindu-supremacist-political agenda, and is critical of the policies that derive from it.

Access to the reports, analyses, and daily updates is free and the business model, if it can be called that, is based on garnering subscriptions for exclusive subscriber content and perks; sales of journalistic content to customers abroad; and attracting a measure of private investment to support its operations and expand its footprint. What is clear is that this digital media venture, although not a non-profit, is not motivated by profit.

NewsClick's big journalistic moment came during the mass protest by Indian farmers in 2020–2021 against three new agricultural laws. Its grassroots-up, comprehensive and sympathetic coverage of the movement and the issues at stake, in Hindi as well as in English, was widely followed. This coverage surpassed the efforts of the big media players—newspapers as well as televi-

sion channels—and is perceived to have contributed in some measure to the success of the movement and the repeal of the unpopular laws.

What triggered the Indian government's McCarthyite campaign was an investigative story by the New York Times that was a curious mixture of fact-finding (some of it interesting), ideologically charged innuendo, and, in places, tall conclusions drawn from seemingly innocuous happenings and mostly thin evidence. Titled "A Global Web of Chinese Propaganda Leads to a US Tech Mogul", the story claimed to have uncovered "a lavishly funded influence campaign that defends China and pushes its propaganda", at the centre of which is "a charismatic American millionaire, Neville Roy Singham, who is known as a socialist benefactor of far-left causes"—as though this were an indictable offence. (Incidentally Mr Singham was known to this writer). The article makes two casual references to NewsClick—that it had been raided by Indian authorities and that "Mr Singham's network" had financed the news site, which had "sprinkled its coverage with Chinese government talking points". The New York Times is a serious outfit and some of these issues are serious. Its lazy references to News Click were not serious.

**For Frontier Contact**

**DHYANBINDU**

COLLEGE SQUARE

Significantly, the article does not allege that NewsClick violated any law. Had the investigative journalists probed deeper or contacted the editors or management of the digital news site, they would have been assured that the particulars of the investment by a Singham-financed company had been declared to the authorities in compliance with the law; that there was no question of “money laundering” as alleged by India’s Enforcement Directorate, which had undertaken a politically motivated raid in February 2021 and had come up with nothing; that the High Court of Delhi, finding a prima facie case in favour of NewsClick, had granted interim protection from arrest to Purkayastha and more broadly protected the media organisation from coercive action by the Enforcement Directorate; and that a lower court had dismissed a complaint made by income tax authorities against the organisation on a related matter. Viewed comprehensively, NewsClick’s position looks solid.

As for the news site sprinkling its coverage with “Chinese government talking points”, the only exhibit the New York Times journalists have been able to come up with is a celebratory and admittedly uncritical video posted by the site in October 2019 to mark “70 years of the Chinese revolution”

and the transformations that had been wrought over the period.

But the spark the New York Times story provided was all that was needed by the right-wing political ecosystem that currently prevails in India. The influencers and the “bhakts”, as the fanaticised followers of the Hindutva cause are known, went wild on social media platforms, making fantastic allegations relating to the supposed danger to India’s national security that had been exposed by the US newspaper and baying for the blood of NewsClick and the people behind it. A section of the mainstream media, especially a couple of television channels that are notorious for acting as propagandists for the government, have joined this campaign, putting out misleading information obligingly leaked by the investigating agency. A 250-strong group of retired bureaucrats, retired judges, military veterans and some others have written a letter to the president of India, Droupadi Murmu—with a copy sent to the chief justice of India—demanding action against the “traitors” to the nation. In this charged atmosphere, the Enforcement Directorate has approached the High Court of Delhi, before a new judge, claiming it has fresh material and asking for the interim stay on coercive action against NewsClick to be lifted.

Fortunately, the campaign of soli-

arity with this progressive news site is gaining momentum and turning into a wider campaign for media freedom in India. While protesting the vicious targeting of NewsClick, a public statement issued by more than 750 signatories—journalists (including this writer), leaders of people’s movements, a former high court judge, lawyers, scientists, academics, writers, filmmakers, artists and actors—draws out the wider implications of such actions for a constitutional democracy. The number of statements of protest and expressions of concern on a wide range of media-related issues put out in recent months by the Editors Guild of India points to a deeper malaise in the polity than anyone could have imagined even half a decade ago. India’s rank of 161 among 180 countries and territories in the Reporters sans frontières World Press Freedom Index 2023 may shock, but should surprise no one who follows these issues.

Now the battle lines are drawn, and a number of new voices are speaking up for what is their right—the constitutionally guaranteed fundamental right to “freedom of speech and expression”, of which press freedom is an indispensable part. □□□

*[N Ram is a former Editor-in-Chief of The Hindu daily newspaper in India]  
(Source: Prospect)*

## MODI’S GLOBAL FANDOM

### Democracy Abroad, Autocracy at Home

*Arjun Appadurai*

**L**AST WEEK’S BRICS SUMMIT was supposed to herald the dawn of a new world order. It would announce the end of the American era and the rise of another, this time belonging to developing nations. It would even, according to excitable analysts, be remembered as another Bandung Conference, the 1955 meeting that

paved the way for a non-aligned movement during the Cold War.

And on that front, the gathering in Johannesburg succeeded. The organisation announced its first expansion since its founding in 2009: next year, the five original Brics members—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—will be joined by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab

Emirates (UAE), Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia and Argentina (provided the current government wins the upcoming elections, which seems unlikely). Even more significantly, the summit underscored the bloc’s inclination to use its increasing economic clout to challenge the Western-dominated global order. The combination of these two elements—growing economic muscle and political boldness—means that the bloc (to be renamed Brics Plus) has become a full-blooded geopolitical actor that can no longer be ignored.



In demographic and economic terms, the power of the Brics, especially in light of its recent expansion, is all too evident. With its new members, the bloc will represent almost half of the global population. In terms of purchasing power parity (PPP), the most appropriate measure for comparing the relative economic size of countries, it already represented nearly one third of global GDP—more than the US-led G7's economies, which account for 30%. The latest additions will bring its share up to 37%.

This gap with the West will only widen, considering that emerging and developing countries are predicted to grow at much higher rates in the coming years, and that more countries are likely to join. More than 40 countries have reportedly expressed interest in joining, and 22 of them have formally asked to be admitted. In other words, the overwhelming majority of the world's population lives in countries that are either already in the Brics or aspire to be.

The importance of this becomes even more apparent if one looks at what countries produce, rather than just how much they produce. Over the past decades, Western economies have become increasingly financialised and seen their industrial production stagnate, meaning that a large part of their GDP doesn't represent the production of actual goods but rather of financial assets. Going by actual production—manufacturing—the gap between the West and the Brics is even starker: the G7 countries as whole contribute to global manufacturing output roughly as much as China does on its own.

But the growing power of this new alliance is about much more than just GDP and the production of stuff; it's also about resources. The integration of two of the world's top oil producers—Saudi Arabia and the UAE—means that the Brics mem-

bers will account for more than 40% of global oil production. The fact that two of America's staunchest allies in the Persian Gulf have decided to join a China-led (and increasingly politicised) alliance exemplifies better than anything else the paradigm shift underway. US officials can downplay the significance of the event as much as they want, but its symbolic value is clear—especially if one considers that the two Gulf countries are joined by Iran, one of America's most arch-enemies.

For one thing the move potentially represents a serious threat to the petrodollar system. During the Seventies, Saudi Arabia made a deal with the US in which it agreed to list its oil on the global market in dollars; the dollars received by Saudi Arabia for its oil sales—the so-called petrodollars—would then be recycled back into the US in the form of deposits and purchases of US Treasuries. This, combined with the fact that any country that wants to buy oil has to purchase dollars to do so, has allowed the US to run a massive trade deficit for decades without seeing the dollar depreciate. It has been one of the keystones of America's post-war global hegemony, allowing Washington to sustain a regime of perpetual war, on top of exercising financial dominance over much of the world.

South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa, meanwhile, drew a direct parallel between the Johannesburg summit and the Bandung Conference of 1955: "The Conference called for the recognition of the equality of all nations, large and small. We still share that common vision of a fair and just world." Isaias Afwerki, the President of Eritrea, one of the many non-member countries invited to the summit, was even more scathing: "US exceptionalism—or pax americana—has unleashed malaises that have gravely impaired global progress for

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almost a century now. Illegal and unilateral sanctions; weaponisation of US dominated financial, economic and judicial institutions; as well as other punitive instruments in their toolbox are routinely invoked [by the US and its allies] to punish those who do not toe the line...”

Yet not all members agree with this confrontational approach. Modi's India, in particular, which has very good relations with Washington and the West, including in the security field, is concerned about the Brics's evolution into an explicitly anti-Western organisation led by China and

Russia, and favours a more neutral approach—non-Western but not anti-Western. For the time being, however, it appears to be losing ground to the latter two, whose anti-hegemonic stance enjoys widespread support in the Global South. □□□

[Courtesy: *UnHerd Daily*]

## A DYING MASS CULTURE

# The Rise and Fall of 'Yatra'

**Sukanta Sarkar**

**R**EGARDING THE DEFINITION of Yatra, the encyclopedia says, 'Pious Hindus hold a single festival to commemorate the miracles of their gods and goddesses. The 'lower classes' of the country of Bangladesh used to call the festival of worldly gods as 'Jat'. Many people think that this word 'Jat' is a modified form of Jatra. Sun has a close relationship with human life. People have worshiped the sun since ancient times. There have been flamboyant celebrations of the sun's northward and southward journeys through dance and song among the agriculturists. The word Yatra may also have come from there. Devotees went out from village to village singing and dancing in bhakti movement. They spread the word of gods and goddesses among the people through drama festivals in temples. Some think that this unique gathering of dance and song has gradually taken the form of a journey—Yatra. According to noted Palakar, actor Phanibhushan Vidyavinod, 'the first Palagan (Yatra) was created to describe Lord Krishna's Leela. At the very beginning, the narration of various events in the life of Lord Krishna is called Yatra. Later, the expression of mythological figures and stories through song and dance was called yatra'. On the whole, it can be said that the journey of Yatra starts from Dev-Dharmotsava.

No one could say anything ex-

actly about the beginning of the Yatra in Bengal. Most of the Yatra experts believe that Yatra started in Bengal from the time of Bhakti Movement i.e, early 15th century AD. According to the renowned Yatra-personality late Makhanlal Notto, Palagan started in Bengal from Sri Chaitanya. He wrote, 'That is about five and a half hundred years ago. Nimai Sannyasi will preach Vaishnavism. He is eager to spread the word of God in the society. But, how to explain the glory of his serious words in rural simple life! He takes the medium-ship of Palagan. A medium that can make difficult things easy. Simple, almost illiterate people can absolve in their minds. That medium is Palagan or Yatra.' According to some, in Bengal Yatra begins from here.

In the earlier days, there were jurigans. There was still no concept of stage. There was no splendid attire for the Yatra. Palagans were organised in rural streets in ordinary clothes. Audience used to sit round. Acting took place in the middle space. The musicians sat on the left or right side. These are the juridars or singers. Their job was to explain each scene through songs. Before acting in each scene, the juridars used to make the point clear to the audience through songs. The singers who used to perform the introductory song were called Viveks. Then the actors would act out the scene.

In this way, one by one, it proceeded with the story. This was the original 'form' of the Yatra.

Yatra was the only pastime of rural Bengal. Bangla means undivided Bengal. From the Krishna Yatra to a more mature form the Palagan that was created was entirely in East Bengal. East Bengal had a long tradition of education. The culture there was a bit different. The Palakars (writers) of East Bengal have written as many stories about Puranas and history as have not been written anywhere else. They preferred to read and write mythological stories rather than social issues. After Purana came history. After writing Palas based on Ramayana and Mahabharata, Palakars of East Bengal started presenting the history of the country for the common people in a simple way. Barisal and Faridpur, two districts of East Bengal, were the starting points of the Yatra. Numerous opera houses were in that region. Ticket booking to view Yatra began from this area. Anyone who wanted to see the Yatra, he could see, but buying a ticket. The ritual of listening to Palagan by buying ticket increased the importance of Pala to the audience. Paying attention from different districts, singing songs from one district to another district was all courtesy of East Bengal.

However, there is a difference in Yatra with different folk songs of Bengal. Yatra is seen by some as a folk song passage. Various folk songs used to feature artists or poets who came from the lower strata of society. But the Yatra was a little different. Going there, all levels of society

became united. Actors from middle-class families as well as from fishermen's families joined the Yatra. This coming together irrespective of caste and religion is definitely a remarkable aspect of the Yatra.

19th century is the century of renaissance. This renaissance was confined to a certain educated community. Its impact on common people was not seen in that way. At that time Krishnanagar was a developed city along with Calcutta. Alcoholism, charas, ganja grabbed most of the Babu community in Calcutta. The rich people who could spend money on pujas and the more money they could give to the British, those people were more popular in society. Baiji dance was a custom then. Rich people used to spend a lot of money for Baiji dance. In Krishnanagar too, most of the people who surrounded the institutions established by Rajbari and British were of low and selfish character. In addition, there were lawyers, mokhtars, bureaucrats. Through all of them, an ugly feeling was spread in the society.

It is said about Ramtanu Lahiri and the Babu Community in Bengali society at that time, 'They have wavy Bauri hair and mustaches on their teeth. Dressed in a fine dhoti, a fine muslin and kemrik banyan on the body, a well-cut vani at the neck and Chinese house shoes with thick anklets. These Babus used to sleep during the day, fly kites, watch nightingale fights, play sitar-esraj, veena etc., listen to poets, haf-akrai, panchali etc. and spend the night listening songs and having fun at the lights of the baranganas.'

This babu community and elites used to indulge in drama by watching performances in Rangalaya made by the British without seeing the Yatra. As a result, a new era began in Bangladeshi drama. 'Oriental Theatre' was set up at Garanhata under the guidance of Mr Klingner Sahib who was

associated with Sansusi Theatre. It was here that Shakespeare's Othello was performed in English for the first time by only Hindu youths. Then, one by one, several theatres were built up in the city of Calcutta in that century. As educated and elite people were keenly interested in theatre, the uneducated and less educated usually took responsibility for performing Yatra Natyaras. Yatra palas began to be composed, conducted and performed according to the tastes of the audience.

Yatra or Palagan lost its prestige and interest to the urban Babus or educated community due to the influence of Renaissance, but its journey did not stop. In the slums of the city and in the vast rural Bengal, where the majority of Bengalis live, the majority of whom are poor and destitute, the Yatra became the main form of entertainment for the vast Bengali society. From the beginning of the 20th century, the content of the journey started to change little by little. Leaving history, social issues also started to become the subject of Yatra pala. Here comes the story of love and social decency. From the beginning of this century to independence, various movements, Hindu-Muslim unity, famine and the pain of partition began to be composed and performed through Yatra. In Calcutta, mainly Chitpur, one after another Yatra Dal [group] was formed. In different districts, especially in Medinipur district, several yatra groups came into existence. The popularity of Chitpur teams in rural Bengal was no less than that of city cinema. From the mid-1960s, there was special interest in writing palas about social problems and revolutions. This interest arises among palakars by focusing on the interest of the audience. From this time, light and technical gadgets started to be used in the Yatra show. This golden trend of

Yatra culture flowed smoothly till the 8th decade. Little by little the situation started to change from the middle of the 9th decade.

Even three decades ago, when asked who satisfy the entertainment hunger of most of the people in Bengal? The answer was, Yatra. In the mid-1980s, there was a slump in Bengali cinema. At that time, many actors and actresses, starting from silver screen heroes and heroines, came to act in Yatra. The people of rural Bengal became excited to see those heroes and heroines of the screen in person in their village fields. From that time the real ups and downs in the Yatra culture started little by little. What became bigger than the content of the Pala was which movie actors and actresses were in which Pala. After walking like this for some time, it was seen that the video halls entered in rural Bengal. Then gradually, one or two TVs came to many houses in the village. Serials of different TV channels attracted the village people. In the evening, along with the people of the city, the people of the village also sat down in front of TV. If one can get such entertainment at home every day, who wants to go to see the trip sitting on a mat in the field after the harvesting season.

So, the cortege is going on quietly! □□□

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## WHAT'S DRIVING WILDFIRES?

## Wildfires and Indigenous People

*Bharat Dogra*

**I**N RECENT YEARS WILDFIRES have spread uncontrollably over very vast areas in American and Australian continents, causing immense losses including loss of human and animal life and endangering environment in various ways. Their adverse impacts on pollution and health have travelled far and wide, creating health problems even in leading cities like New York. A few days back wildfires on Hawaii's Maui Island have killed at least 55 people, forced thousands of residents and tourists to evacuate, and devastated the historic resort city of Lahaina. Nearly 85 percent of US wildfires are caused by humans. Record setting heat this summer has contributed to unusually severe wildfires in Europe and western Canada. Scientists say climate change, driven by fossil fuel use, has led to more frequent and powerful weather events.

In this context one question that is not being asked but should be asked is whether wildfires would have become such a serious threat if the native people had not been treated in such a cruel way as to either result in the death of vast numbers, or in the displacement of vast numbers and imposition of so many restrictions on them as to deny them their traditional way of life. This has been not only the loss of native people but also a bigger social loss too as the native or indigenous people had a much better understanding of nature, land and forests acquired from many centuries and generations of living close to nature. If the new settlers from Europe had tried to learn from them instead of killing them, driving them away or colonizing them, this would have

been very beneficial for the entire society.

To give an example, over several generations the native people had learnt how to use controlled fires in such ways that the danger of bigger, destructive, uncontrolled fires could be avoided and at the same time they could get more food and some specific plants (such as those needed for making baskets or for some ceremonial purposes). If these native people had continued to live with their traditional wisdom over vast areas, they would have certainly used their great knowledge and experience to minimize the risk of huge out-of-control fires. The environmental risks would be reduced. As a native person told a US journalist, they used such methods to use controlled fire that carbon was stored in soil and not released in atmosphere.

This apart, the natives had a very holistic view of various phenomenon in which fire was not to be necessarily feared and dominated but instead to be understood and lived with as a part of life and such a view makes it possible to explore fire in a more friendly and creative way, instead of looking at the appearance of even a small non-threatening fire merely in terms of rushing to extinguish it. Such a view was moreover part of a wider understanding in which there is unity and continuity between nature, land, plants, forests, animals, fire and humanity—all are linked closely and part of a being. Such a view of view integrates respect of nature, respect of land with respect of oneself and one's near and dear ones. With such a worldview, native communities scattered all over these conti-

nents would have been in the forefront of protecting forests, protecting nature, protecting rivers.

In fact time and again, despite all the injustice and deprivation they have suffered, they have been coming forward and making important contributions to several important environment protection efforts. However conservation efforts which entirely drive away human beings are not inkeeping with their integrated views, and they would have contributed even more if the environment protection efforts had been based on a unity of nature and humanity instead of being isolationist. Even with all the problems of the present systems, they have come forward to make important contributions, often motivated by their desire to protect their sacred places, which are again a reflection of their integrated understanding.

If they had been allowed to live peacefully by the colonisers, the native people of the Australian and American continents would have contributed to the creation of a better society, more sustainable society in numerous ways. It is therefore one of the greatest regrets of history that they were treated in such cruel and insensitive ways that very small numbers survived over vast parts of these continents. During the last 550 years or so some of the worst injustices ever seen in human history have been inflicted on these indigenous people. Some were so destructive that perhaps no compensatory action can come even close to making up for what happened. Despite this, urgent efforts must nevertheless be made to achieve what can still be done in the interests of justice.

After Columbus opened up the new American world to Europeans in 1492, waves of settlers and traders started coming here with modern arms to plunder or drive away the native people.



Columbus forced the Taino 'Indians' in Hispaniola to bring him an ounce of gold every three months. Those who did not, had their hands chopped off while escapees were hunted down with dogs.

A priest Bartolome de Las Casas was very distressed by what he saw of the interactions of the newcomer 'civilisers' with indigenous people. He wrote, "For 40 years, they have done nothing but torture, murder, harass, afflict, torment and destroy them with extraordinary, incredible, 'innovative', and previously unheard of cruelty."

Las Casas estimated that about 50 million Indians perished in Latin America and the Caribbean within 50 years of Columbus' landing. (Quoted in *Third World Resurgence*, No. 5—Genocide of the Indians).

The New Internationalist journal prepared a special issue (No. 226) on 'Hidden History—Columbus and the Colonial Legacy'. Here in the cover story Wayne Ellwood has written after examining the available historical evidence, "Scholars now reckon that 90 percent of the indigenous population of the Americas was wiped out in a century and a half—the greatest demographic collapse in the history of the planet and the proportional equivalent of nearly half a billion people today."

While in some places the native 'Indian' population recovered partially, in other places the recovery was almost non-existent. The New Internationalist compared the population of these indigenous people over a period of 500 years from 1492 to 1992.

In Mexico there were 21.4 million Indians in 1492, 8 million in 1992. In the Caribbean there were 5.85 million Indians in 1492, but only 0.001 million in 1992. In Lowland S.America there were 8.50 million Indians in 1492, but only 0.90 million in 1992. In North

America there were 4.40 million Indians, but only 2.54 million in 1992.

A somewhat similar tragedy was later repeated later in Australia and its nearby areas. Robert Hughes writes in his book *The Fatal Shore*—"It took less than 75 years of white settlement to wipe out most of the people who had occupied Tasmania for some 20,000 years."

What is more, in some places some of the most terrible atrocities inflicted on the indigenous people continued right into the 20th century. For example let us compare more recent accounts from Guatemala with what was happening a few hundred years back.

First let us see Bob Carty's account of the 16th century regarding a conqueror Pedro Alvarado's atrocities in Guatemala—"He directed eight major massacres killing up to 3000 Indians at a time. Mayan chiefs were incinerated alive as Catholic priests burned Mayan historical records. Alvarado rewarded his soldiers with the right to enslave the survivors. Mayan lands were appropriated, the people herded into towns and forced to work the Spanish Estates."

Now compare this with a more recent account from Guatemala in the 1980s—"In the early 1980s it was as if the new conquistador Pedro Alvarado was back in power. All Mayans were seen as supporters of the guerillas, the military set out to destroy the people as well as their culture. Mayans were burned alive, babies murdered and women raped. The dictator Rios Mantt wiped 440 Mayan villages off the face of the earth. Soldiers are so brutalized in their training that they follow orders to kill their people as enemies." (New Internationalist)

This account indicates the shocking reality that terrible atrocities have continued against indigenous people till recent times in many countries.

These are in fact aggravated whenever indigenous people offer resistance to injustice or demand justice and restoration/protection of land rights much beyond the small concessions the existing regimes are willing to offer.

While some sincere initiatives for their welfare have indeed been taken up in various parts of world, generally the human development indicators for them remain much lower. Their human rights violations and imprisonment rates are generally higher than those suffered by other communities. They often experience discrimination and loss of dignity. Appreciation of their different world view, which may be much, much better than those dominant views which have entangled our world in a web of environment ruin and wars and violence, is generally least appreciated, something which is not just their loss but the loss of the entire humanity. A much better appreciation of the thinking, culture and life-views of indigenous people as well as many-sided, overdue justice for them should be an essential part of the world's future agenda. □

[The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include *Planet in Peril*, *Man over Machine*, *Protecting Earth for Children*, *Earth without Borders* and *A Day in 2071*.]

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## LETTERS

## Death of 22 Migrant Workers in Mizoram

In India, the government has no proper register for the inter-state migrant workers. The migrants leave for other States in search for work at their own peril. Article 19(1)(e) of the Constitution, guarantees all Indian citizens the right to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India, subject to reasonable restrictions in the interest of the general public or protection of any scheduled tribe. However, people migrating for work face many challenges including lack of social security and health benefits and poor implementation of minimum safety standards law.

The ISMW Act provides certain protections for inter-state migrant workers. Labour contractors recruiting migrants are required to: (i) be licensed, (ii) register migrant workers with the government authorities and (iii) arrange for the worker to be issued a passbook recording their identity.

But the Central government had not made any concrete and fruitful efforts to ensure that contractors and employers mandatorily register the workers employed with them enabling access to benefits under the Act.

According to a report published by RBI in 2020, there is huge disparity in average daily wage of the workers in different parts of India. Per se, the average daily wage of a non-agricultural worker in the State of West Bengal was

INR 291.0, while the same was INR 670, almost double, in Kerala. This disparity forces a huge number of people to pursue an uncertain journey to find livelihood from one part of the country to the other.

Many among the deceased workers are from Indo-Bangladesh border

region of Malda and Murshidabad. As an organisation working in the border region for the past 25 years, Banglar Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha has seen that the rate of unsafe migration is much higher in the border region due to illegal restrictions put in place on the livelihood of the people by the Border Security Force (BSF).

**Kirity Roy, Secretary  
Banglar Manabadhikar  
Suraksha Mancha**

## Air Pollution in South Asia

Rising air pollution can cut life expectancy by more than five years per person in South Asia, one of the world's most polluted regions, according to a report published on Tuesday which flagged the growing burden of hazardous air on health.

The region, which includes the world's most polluted countries of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan, accounts for more than half of the total life years lost globally to pollution, the University of Chicago's Energy Policy Institute (EPIC) said in its latest Air Quality Life Index.

Rapid industrialisation and population growth have contributed to declining air quality in South Asia, where particulate pollution levels are currently more than 50% higher than at the start of the century and now overshadow dangers posed by larger health threats.

People in Bangladesh, the world's most polluted country, stands to lose 6.8 years of life on average per person, compared to 3.6 months in the United States, according to the study, which uses satellite data to calculate the impact of an increase in airborne fine particles on life expectancy.

India is responsible for about 59% of the world's increase in pollution since 2013, the report said, as

hazardous air threatens to shorten lives further in some of the country's more polluted regions. In the densely populated New Delhi, the world's most polluted mega-city, the average life span is down by more than 10 years.

## Sharon Kimathi, Reuters Article 370 Case

In a significant development during the twelfth day of the Constitution Bench hearing in the Article 370 case, the Supreme Court asked the Union Government to provide a time-frame or roadmap for the restoration of statehood of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The bench, comprising Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud and Justices SK Kaul, Sanjiv Khanna, BR Gavai, and Surya Kant, was actively deliberating upon the issue of conversion of J&K from a state to a Union Territory (UT) in 2019 when its special status under Article 370 was repealed.

Solicitor General (SG) Tushar Mehta, representing the Union Government, referred to a statement made by Union Home Minister Amit Shah in the Parliament while tabling the J&K Re-organisation Bill in 2019 that the statehood of J&K would be reinstated in due course of time. When the SG asserted that the UT status is not permanent, Chief Justice inquired about the timing and asked, "How impermanent is this? When are you going to have elections?"

The Solicitor General responded that he would seek instructions on the matter, reiterating that the process of restoring statehood was already in progress.

In the course of the arguments, the CJI also pondered upon whether it was possible for the Union to convert a state into a UT for a temporary period in lieu of national security.

However, the CJI also emphasised that in such a scenario, the Govern-

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ment also had to make a statement before the Supreme Court that that progression of a UT back to a state had to take place. "It can't be a UT permanently," said the CJL.

**Sukla Sen**  
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30.08.2023

## Attacking JADS

In the continuing assault on Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Sangathan, on 28.08.23, Nitin, an activist of Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Sangathan [JADS] has been arrested after being implicated in a false case. This is the latest in a series of attacks by the Madhya Pradesh government against Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Sangathan over the past few months. The Sangathan, in addition to campaigning for Forest Rights has been protesting against state connivance in the massive deforestation in Burhanpur district.

On 2nd March, 35 Adivasis of Guarkheda (Baladi) village had been arrested following a fracas with forest department personnel, and Nitin's name was added later even though he was not present during the incident. 4 Adivasis, including two women of Guarkheda (Baladi Panchayat), were forcefully taken away from their homes by forest personnel. People of the village attempted to find them and also informed Sangathan activists, including Nitin, of the incident. Nitin immediately contacted the DFO and District Collector, Burhanpur, seeking their intervention in the matter to ensure that due process of law was followed and no violence was committed against those picked up.

According to the villagers, when people reached the Burhanpur range office in search of the four picked up by the forest personnel, they heard screams from a locked room where it seemed like people were being beaten up. It is alleged that, following this, a clash between the

villagers and the forest officials ensued, after which 35 Adivasis including 15 women were arrested by the police.

Since graduating from the reputed "Tata Institute of Social Sciences" (TISS), Nitin has been with Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Organisation for the past 5 years and has played an active role in the organisation's awareness campaign for legal forest rights.

Adivasis members of JADS reached Burhanpur in large numbers and protested Nitin's arrest which they said was an attack on their non-violent struggle for legal and constitutional rights.

**JADS**  
**Antaram Awase, Ashabai Solanki, Nasribai Ningwal, Valsing Sastia**  
**Save Mohammad**

Mohammad is only 27 and a judge decided that's how he should die for protesting the brutal regime in Iran.

Mohammad could be executed any day, and he had already been tortured in prison.

But there might still be hope: Global pressure stopped executions in Iran before. Now people around the world are joining the call to save his life, and prominent lawyers are asking the UN rights chief and key governments to help stop his execution and hold Iran accountable.

Mohammad's passion is boxing, and he's one of the champions of his club in Mashhad, Iran's second largest city. When he was 23, he traded punches for principles—he became a political prisoner when he was arrested for joining the 2019 anti-government protests. Now his biggest fight begins: not in a ring, but for his own life.

When historic protests followed Mahsa Amini's death in police custody last year, Iran's ruthless regime unleashed a violent crackdown to crush the uprising. Torture and ex-

## NOTICE

### AUTUMN NUMBER 2023

Will be out next week [i.e. 4th week of September]. This year our contributors include—

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ecutions of prisoners soon became its most vicious tool of repression – some were sentenced to death within two months and executed within weeks. Now it's Mohammad's turn.

Avaaz's movement has helped save lives before: last year over a million people helped stop Amal's death by stoning in Sudan. And hundreds of thousands around the world have stood in solidarity with Iran's protesters as they face brutal and often deadly crackdowns. Solidarity can become the lifeline Mohammad needs right now.

**John, Abdelrahman, Mo, Chris, Antonia, Nate and the whole Avaaz team**

For **Frontier Contact**

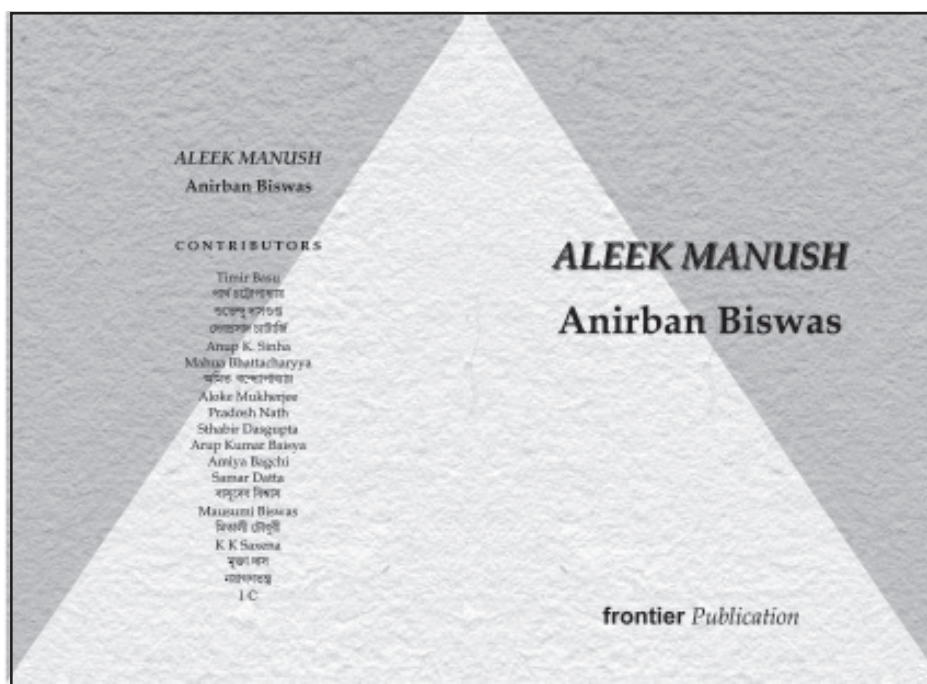
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