

frontier

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The Delhi Declaration

FINALLY THE MODI BRIGADE HEAVED AN AUDIBLE SIGH OF relief as the G20 gathering in New Delhi produced a consensus declaration without duelling on the Russia-Ukraine war, notwithstanding the West's insistence that it condemns Russia in the strongest terms. Some people were too eager to expel Russia from G20 for which, however, there is no provision. The G20 members expressed concern over the escalating Ukraine crisis without directly condemning Russia, called for a comprehensive, just and durable peace in the embattled nation. Last time they failed to reach a consensus in Bali. The ground reality in Ukraine cannot be changed by issuing vague statements. The contradiction between Russia and Ukraine is antagonistic and it cannot be resolved without using force. The notable absentees in the Delhi conclave were Russian president Putin and Chinese president Xi. For one thing Xi has attended every G20 summit since coming to power except one in Rome in 2021, amid Covid-19 pandemic, when he joined by video link. Xi's G20 absence shows among other things, China 'worried' about India. The Russian side was represented by their foreign minister Lavrov. Ahead of Lavrov's arrival in India which is now called Bharat at the official venue, the Russian foreign ministry released a statement saying that Moscow was working "with all G20 countries" to prevent attempts to explain the world's humanitarian and economic problems solely through the conflict in Ukraine. For all practical purposes Ukraine didn't stand in the way of an agreement signed by all participants. Svetlana Lukash, Russia's Sherpa in the G20 said that the negotiations on the Ukraine issue were very complicated, but the collective position of the BRICS countries worked. The Declaration took note of the position Russia and China had adopted from the start of the negotiations for the New Delhi summit that the G20 grouping is not a platform for resolving geo-political and security problems. With the next two hosts, South Africa and Brazil, sharing a similar inclination and global perspective like India, the G20 summit might continue functioning smoothly, even if thornier international issues, including the Ukraine conflict remain beyond its capacity to address. After the conclusion of the summit Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov looked happy that there was no condemnation of Russia in the Declaration document. He dubbed it as a victory of the Global South.

Perhaps the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres was the most

disappointed person at the meet as he would cry himself hoarse about how 'climate crisis is spiralling out of control'. He emphasised in no uncertain terms that 'together, G20 countries are responsible for 80 percent of global emissions'. He proposed a deal to be called 'Climate Security Pact' that would see big emitters make more efforts to cut emissions and 'wealthier countries support emerging economies to achieve this'. 'Half Measures' won't avert climate disaster, UN chief warned. But G20 leaders had little time to listen to what the UN Secretary General was saying because all were busy to clinch business deals. Climate was not on their agenda. For one thing G20 accounts for 93 percent of global operating coal power plants and 88 percent of new

unabated coal-fired plants. The Declaration couched in beautiful language is at worst a rhetoric, having very little practical application in practice when it is the question of climate catastrophe.

After assuming presidency of the bloc on December 1, 2022, India held around 200 meetings related to G20 across the country on a range of its priority areas. The G20 member countries represent around 85 percent of the global GDP, over 75 percent of the global trade, and about two-thirds of the world population. So the participants were more interested in promoting their national business interests.

India, the United States, Saudi Arabia and the European Union announced a 'historic' agreement to launch a mega India-Middle East-

Europe shipping and railway connectivity corridor. At a time when America is trying to curtail China's dominance in global economy this might be an answer to China's ambitious 'Belt and Road Initiative' project while Modi's launch of Global Bio-fuel Alliance was interpreted as a counter measure to China's electric car, rather battery industry. This way or that it was business that dominated the much publicised proceedings of G20.

African Union has been inducted as a new permanent member of the G20. The Union is headquartered in Ethiopia and collectively has a GDP of \$3 trillion with some 1.4 billion people. The bloc has 55 members, although six have been suspended in light of military coups. Again business matters. □□□ 11-09-2023

COMMENT

War and Corruption

WAR MEANS DESTRUCTION. BUT war means money as well. Military contractors play a huge role in all wars. And contractors corrupt the system while bribing the persons who matter in defence deals. Ukraine is one of the most corrupt countries in Europe. Very recently Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy fired his defence minister Reznikov amid graft scandal. Rustem Umerov is the new man in charge of defence. He is from the Muslim Tatar community in Crimea that largely resisted Russia's 2014 annexation. Reznikov's ministry allegedly spent \$20m on the windbreakers and paid way over the market price. Nearer home once there was furore over supply of body bags in the Kargil war involving persons in authority.

The Reznikov episode fuelled yet another scandal in the Ukrainian military, where corruption has been endemic, especially in non-transpar-

ent procurement contracts—and where new forms of corruption emerged after the war started in February 2022.

Reznikov, a 57-year-old ex-lawyer, said on August 25 that he would provide proof of purchase "to make sure that the [bet's] winner is obvious to the Ukrainian public".

But before any documents were made public, he lost his job.

Reznikov, whose negotiating skills and fluent English helped him convince dozens of Western diplomats and military officials to boost their aid to Ukraine, does not appear to be implicated in the scandals.

Ukrainian media suggested he may become Kyiv's ambassador to the United Kingdom.

Zelenskyy, a comedian who came to power on anti-corruption slogans, appointed Reznikov in November 2021, three months before the full-scale war with Russia began.

Rustem Umerov served as a

member of parliament and authored a bill to dam a Soviet-era canal that supplied most of the water to the arid peninsula causing the "annihilation of agriculture" and severe water shortages.

He also helped facilitate the release of political prisoners jailed by Crimea's Moscow-installed "authorities" before becoming the chairman of the Ukrainian State Property Fund in 2022.

In March 2023, Umerov was part of a team that tried to negotiate a truce with Moscow. After the talks failed, Kremlin-controlled media declared him a "US spy."

Umerov's appointment may serve as Zelenskyy's signal to Moscow that Kyiv would not trade the peninsula for a peace deal and that its de-occupation remains a priority.

Reznikov's dismissal coincided with another major development.

Immediately after Reznikov's dismissal a court in Kyiv arrested Ihor Kolomoisky, a billionaire oligarch and media mogul, on fraud and money laundering charges.

“Between 2013 and 2020, Ihor Kolomoisky legalised more than half a billion hryvnias [\$14m] by transferring them abroad and using the infrastructure of banks under his control,” the SBU, Ukraine’s main intelligence agency, said in a statement last month..

Analysts say the arrest of Kolomoisky along with Reznikov’s dismissal is part of Zelensky’s push to mend ties with Ukraine’s Western backers, especially the US, who have been unhappy about the mishandling of multibillion-dollar military contracts.

War breeds grassroots corruption. Corruption has been plaguing Ukraine’s military and arms producers for long.

Petro Poroshenko, Zelensky’s predecessor and rival in the 2019

elections, had his approval ratings tank largely due to his failure to tackle it.

He was also involved in one of Ukraine’s largest and loudest corruption scandals when the company of his childhood friend’s son smuggled used spare parts for weapons and military equipment from Russia and resold them to Ukraine’s defence ministry at extortionate prices.

Meanwhile, the war spawned new forms of grassroots corruption in the Ukrainian military.

Oleksander, a 32-year-old trooper, was demobilised in May after stepping on a landmine and losing his right leg on the front line of the southern Kherson region. The military reportedly owes him one million hryvnia (\$27,000) as compensation, but his commanding officer alleg-

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edly did not sign the papers, demanding half of the money.

This is the bizarre world of ‘war and military’, rather ‘war and corruption’. Perhaps this is the scenario in every military establishment. □□□

[Contributed]

NOTE

Graveyards for Marginalised Students

Pranav Jeevan P writes:

ANIL KUMAR IS THE LATEST name to be added to the list of Institutional Murders of students from marginalised communities this year by the premier IITs along with Darshan Solanki, Ayush Ashna and Mamita Naik. Both Anil and Ayush belong to the same batch and same department in IIT Delhi (Department of Mathematics), and both were staying in hostel due to degree extension. After the loss of Ayush barely 2 months ago, the institute neither reached out the students who were going through similar problems nor did they create any support systems to help them. This criminal neglect of marginalised students by the administration points to the structural discrimination that is embedded within these institutes.

RTI data collected by the APPSC (Ambedkar Periyar Phule Study

Circle) IIT Bombay clearly shows that there was no faculty in the mathematics department of IIT Delhi who belonged to SC/ST community. The same is true for department of chemical engineering of IIT Bombay which Darshan Solanki belonged to. RTI Data collected by APPSC also shows that reservation is violated in faculty composition of all IITs. In IIT Delhi, only 2% of faculty are SC, 1% ST, and 7% OBC. The remaining 90% positions are filled by savarnas. Same is the case for IIT Bombay where 94% are savarnas, with just 2% OBC, 3% SC, and 1% ST. With these institutions blatantly violating constitutional provisions and the government nor the courts are holding them accountable, how can one ensure safe, diverse, and inclusive spaces for students coming from these communities?

On July 10, 2023, the

honourable President of India, Droupadi Murmu stated that students’ suicides are a matter of concern and educational institutions should make it their priority to protect and support students against stress, humiliation, or neglect in their campuses. On February 25, the honourable Chief Justice of India, D Y Chandrachud also lamented the lack of recognition of discrimination and harassment present in these institutions by the administration and pointed to their lack of empathy.

Most IITs demand post-doctoral (Post-Doc) research experience as a necessary qualification for faculty recruitment. But none of the IITs implement reservation in Post-Doc appointments. In an RTI response to APPSC, IIT Bombay admitted that they do not implement reservation in Post-Doc admissions, and also accepted that there was no rule that exempted Post-Doc appointments from reservation. Post-Doc admissions happen mostly through academic networks dominated by faculty from among the savarna caste, where they

recommend that their students to other faculty in different institutes. Students coming from Dalit Bahujan Adivasi (DBA) communities without any cultural and social capital find themselves outside these networks and lose the chance to avail of these positions entirely.

When an anti-reservation Facebook post by the head counselor of IIT Bombay was reported to the administration in June 2022, they ignored it and took no action. Further enquiry by APPSC showed that there were no SC ST Counsellors. The counsellors were not caste

aware and discarded the casteist harassment faced by SC ST students as “just inside their head” further worsening students’ mental health and denied the presence of caste discrimination in campus.

□□□

[Source :Sabrang India]

MODI IN DESPERATION

‘One Nation, One Election’

Dipankar Bhattacharya

EVEN AS REPRESENTATIVES assembled in Mumbai for the third meeting of the united opposition, now known by the acronym INDIA, the Modi government announced an extraordinary session of Parliament from 18 to 22 September. The way the session was announced close on the heels of the recently concluded monsoon session of Parliament, and that too absolutely unilaterally without any consultation with the opposition and in brazen violation of established parliamentary norms, has understandably raised suspicions about the government's motive. The five-day session will not have either the daily question hour or the customary zero hour and will be used exclusively to conduct an agenda that has not yet been made public. With every passing day, the Modi government is reducing an elected parliament in a democratic republic to the status of an emperor's royal court.

In another sudden move, the Modi government has announced the formation of a High Level Committee under the chairmanship of former President of India Ram Nath Kovind to make recommendations for holding simultaneous elections to Parliament, State Assemblies and rural and urban local bodies. Getting a former President to chair a committee to make recommendations on a constitutionally suspect

and politically contentious subject reveals the desperation of the Modi government to impose its political agenda in utter violation of the basic spirit and structure of the Constitution. The committee had only one representative from the opposition, leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, who has refused to join the committee in view of its dubious mandate which is designed to endorse the 'one nation, one election' agenda, and selective composition - excluding the current leader of opposition in the Rajya Sabha while including a former leader of the opposition in RS who is now close to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

'One Nation, One Election' has been a pet agenda of the Modi government for quite some time. From the Law Commission to the Niti Aayog, several bodies have already examined the subject and found it to be a tricky and contentious proposition needing a series of constitutional amendments and broad consensus involving opposition parties and state governments. The current exercise seems to be to find ways to impose the idea without building a consensus. The committee is completely packed with BJP leaders, pro-government members and known advocates of the 'One Nation, One Election' idea and the opinion of the committee is thus

a foregone conclusion. By introducing electoral bonds the government has already rendered electoral funding completely opaque and unaccountable. The proposed bill regarding the selection of the Election Commission would rob the EC of all autonomy and neutrality and make it subservient to the executive. And now by imposing simultaneous elections, the Modi government wants to make further mockery of the election process.

The government's basic argument in support of the 'One Nation, One Election' idea is that it will reduce cost and expedite the pace of 'development' by sparing it the pauses imposed by the election code of conduct. Both these arguments are highly spurious. The bulk of the election expenses is borne by the political parties and the BJP which is flush with electoral funds from dubious sources is the principal culprit for the escalating role of money-power in elections. The election code of conduct (which restricts the announcement of new policies and schemes) affects only poll-bound states and there is no nationwide 'pause' on development. The temporary disruption supposedly caused by elections anyway is nothing compared to the long-term havoc played by ill-conceived measures like demonetisation and protracted lockdown.

Till 1967 India actually used to have simultaneous elections to Parliament and State Assemblies. The point is there was no such constitutional requirement, but elections just

happened to coincide. The cycle changed after 1967 owing to a number of reasons - the need for mid-term elections as several governments lost power before completion of their terms, creation of new states and rise of regional parties and arrival of coalition era (which changed the erstwhile pattern of single-party domination) and institutionalisation of elections to local bodies as the third tier of representative democracy, to mention three key factors. Even if the clock is once again artificially set back, the cycle cannot be maintained unless mid-term elections are ruled out by denying people the right to have elected governments and subjecting states to President's rule or rule by Governors or Lieutenant Governors. This is precisely what has been inflicted on Jammu and Kashmir since 5 August 2019. Is the 'One Nation, One Election' formula just a ploy to institutionalise over-centralisation of power and application of the J&K model to the whole of India?

It is common knowledge that the Modi government is permanently in election mode and addressing election rallies in poll-bound states is

always the topmost priority for Narendra Modi. While Modi found no time to visit Manipur, he kept on hopping from Karnataka to Madhya Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh to Rajasthan to address poll rallies, road shows and booth-level cadre conferences. Why then suddenly this desperation for clubbing Assembly and Lok Sabha elections? Clearly it has a lot to do with the growing fear of losing power with more and more states slipping away from the regime's control. Empirical evidence apparently suggests that the party ruling at the Centre has better prospects in the event of simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections than separate elections. It is also clear that the 'Modi factor' works better at the Lok Sabha elections than in Assembly polls. Hence this desperation to leverage the advantage by changing the system.

Driving this project of course is the Sangh-BJP scheme of over-centralisation of power and systematic weakening of India's diverse culture, plural politics and federal framework. Every election has its own context. Panchayat and Assembly elections are bound to reflect

immediate local conditions and not be swayed by the Sangh-manufactured so-called 'national reality' unless the cacophony of the latter becomes overwhelming. By clubbing all elections together, the Modi government seeks to rob elections of their distinct contexts and limit the political choices of the people. Federal India offers the most vibrant opposition and determined resistance to the Modi government's Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan paradigm as can be seen from the growing cultural and political churning in states beyond the Hindi heartland (as well as increasingly within it). 'One Nation, One Election' is a formula to curb those churning and subject democratic India to the imperial designs of a fascist regime. This design is of a piece with the whole of range of attempts going on in the spheres of law, governance and constitutional architecture to reduce empowered citizenship to loyal subject-hood and enslave India in a fascist straitjacket. India must defeat this design by all means. □□□

*[Dipankar Bhattacharya is General Secretary, CPI(ML) Liberation]
[Source: www.cpiml.net]*

"A GREAT CASE"

Remembering Sthabir Dasgupta

Jayanta Bhattacharya

JEROME GROOPMAN, ONE of the most celebrated veteran teachers and researchers of Harvard Medical School, recalled his days of being a student, an intern and teacher in a stirring article "A Great Case" (published in the New England Journal of Medicine, November 11, 2004). He recounted—"It's a really great case," the neurology resident said. "Gerstmann's syndrome". "I was a third-year medical student, and neurology was my first clinical rotation".

Initial enthusiasm and avid search for "a great case" took a different meaning and turn in the later years of his career. His first child survived narrowly from near-death situation. He experienced extreme anxiety, great pain of losing the most beloved one and all his sufferings—all those characteristics shared by his patients he had seen and which were unknown layers of medicine-being interaction to him until the time. At that critical moment, Groopman narrates, "A surgical resi-

dent in the emergency room began taking the history. Suddenly, an intern in scrubs burst into the room. What have you got in here? What is it? A good case?"

I fixed on the intern's expectant eyes and lost control. "Who the hell are you? My son is not a 'good case!'" He felt that it was foolish to deny the profound intellectual excitement that came from medicine. It was also a hollow form of medicine that was practised without factoring in the ultimate outcome. He finally came to his lifetime conclusion, "I still find myself unable, except in retrospect, to retrieve the language of my youth and speak about 'a great case.' It is as if

medicine at this stage of my life has split into two streams—a current of marvellous biology and an undertow that pulls at the soul. From the bank where I stand, it is hard to imagine that these two streams can ever again flow as one.”

Though against an altogether different perspective, perhaps this realisation echoes on Sthabir Dasgupta's life too—embodying many streams in his life, namely, a doctor by passion and profession, once a political activist and whole-timer of CPI(ML) of the late 1960s and early 1970s, an activist against inherent maladies of medicine by equal passion, a relentless writer against the dehumanising face of techno-medicine controlled by corporate, a strong upholder of public health programmes and who always endeavoured to put people at the centre stage of health policy (not effusing from the top brasses ensconced in air conditioned rooms), sometimes against vaccination, lending his implicit and reticent favour for ‘conspiracy theories’ around COVID epidemic, and, moreover, a prolific writer. At the same time, he, often in his later years, went at length against the present practice of technology and medicine, even to the point of dismissing it.

He was born on 14 January, 1949 and died in ventilation on 5 September, 2023. Truly speaking, he was the son or product of a tumultuous time of the Naxalbari period (1967-1972) in which he fully breathed in and assimilated the spirit—critical analytical capacity, relentless queries to any sort of power game, be it in material political world, be it in the realm of medicine, with his unquestionable dedication to general populace arising out of that time. His commitments and inheritance are explicitly contained in the Swapner Sottor: Maya Rohiya Gelo (The Memories from

the Insurgent Revolution of the Seventies). He lived in the period he has depicted in his book. He was also an active actor of the time. After so many years, many people who believed in the revolutionary dream are bereft any vestigial commitment to that legacy of the time—power to the hands of people. But Sthabir Dasgupta did not belong to that degraded genre. He carried it forward as a private oncologist trained in oncology from UK, doctor and social scientist.

In one of his early books (among so many books written by him) *Cancer: Puroho Bhoi, Notun Bhabona* (Cancer: Old Fears and New Thoughts), published in 2010, seemingly like a soothsayer relating myths around conquering cancer and consistent robust propaganda to perpetuate it to Nazi propaganda machinery. In his own words, “Nazism also operates in a subtle way. Nazism is a faith. Apparently its activities produce many ‘benefits’ in its initial phase. Those who are believers get increasingly obsessed with those illusions. More and more, these beliefs get stronger and stronger. In course of time, its intensity makes the person gets petrified and beefy immune to all logic”. (pp. 223-224) Such an analysis for cancer-victory propaganda seems to be truer for today's India's state propaganda.

To note at this juncture, the turn to cheer of technologically winning over cancer was not because the picture was improving. Rather, the mood of post-war America was optimistic. Popular belief in technology and scientific progress overwhelmed thoughtful counter-messages based in scepticism and caution.

In his early years, following the footsteps of Dr Manu Kothari and Dr Lopa Mehta (*Nature of Cancer*, published in 1973, and the second book *The Other Side of Cancer*, 2009), Dasgupta strongly raised his

voice against existing understanding and treatment of cancer, even to an extent to stick to old drugs and therapies instead of more effective newer ones. Is this a kind of orthodoxy replacing his avowed principles of critical thinking? Later in his years he stressed on the understanding of epigenetic theory of cancer causation. In a research paper “The history of cancer epigenetics”, published in 2004 in no other journal than *Nature Reviews*, it was observed, “Since its discovery in 1983, the epigenetics of human cancer has been in the shadows of human cancer genetics. But this area has become increasingly visible with a growing understanding of specific epigenetic mechanisms and their role in cancer”.

A few interested readers might also be interested to go through my article “Commerce and Corporate Capital Exceeding Science—Cancer: The Disease of Modernity” published in the webzine *Doctors' Dialogue* for a comprehensive appraisal of cancer research where corporate greed and avarice for unquenchable profit deem patients as guinea pigs to conduct all kinds of experiments through medicine or new technologies (<https://thedoctorsdialogue.com/cancer-disease-of-modernity/#comments>).

But it should be emphasised here that what we—including me, Sthabir Dasgupta and others—are doing is not any fundamental research works in this field. What we produce always comes from rigorous researches of western scholars' papers or books or monographs. Following this logic, it can be said that we are making an ‘Indian version’ of critiques already in circulation in western academic world.

Actually, one must not think that medicine up until now has remained an individual or contractual type of activity that takes place between patient and doctor, and which has

only recently taken social tasks on board. On the contrary, medicine has been a social activity since the eighteenth century. In a certain sense, 'social medicine' does not exist because all medicine is already social. Medicine has always been a social practice. What does not exist is non-social medicine, clinical individualising medicine, medicine of the singular relation. All this is a myth that defended and justified a certain form of social practice of medicine: private professional practice. Thus, if in reality medicine is social, at least since its great rise in the eighteenth century, the present crisis is not really new, and its historical roots must be sought in the social practice of medicine.

At this juncture, we need to make distinctions between (1) Clinical Health (or patients being treated privately as an individual) and Public Health (taking community as the point of intervention), (2) Health (following the historical Alma-Ata Conference of 1978) and Health Care (as a commodity with varying costs), and (3) viable primary health care system for every citizen and super-specialty hospitals.

What emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, was the fact that medicine could be dangerous, not through its ignorance and falseness, but through its knowledge, precisely because it was a science. This characteristic phenomenon of the history of modern medicine has acquired a new dimension today in so far as that, until the most recent decades, medical risk concerned only the individual under care. At most, one could adversely affect the individual's direct descendants, that is, the power of a possible negative action limited itself to a family or its descendants. Nowadays, with the techniques at the disposal of medicine, the possibility for modifying the genetic cell structure not only

affects the individual or his descendants but the entire human race. Every aspect of life now becomes the subject of medical intervention. We do not know yet whether man is capable of fabricating a living being which will make it possible to modify the entire history of life and the future of life.

Sthabir Dasgupta tried his best to bring to our most of these aspects of lacunae in health policy-making and great influence of corporate tributaries in shaping false perceptions about our own need for being healthy. He fought tooth and nail against 'medicalisation' of life in all its aspects. But sometimes he, in my opinion, failed to acknowledge due recognition of devoted new researches for the betterment of mankind. Better to keep in mind all the scientific researchers are not dictated by corporate and all scientists are not stooges of giant MNCs.

In the decades ahead, the pace of biomedical discovery will accelerate. The state of an individual person will be characterised with increasing precision from the molecular level to the genomic level to the organ level and by interactions with medications, nutrients, the microbiome, therapeutic devices, and the environment. This "precision medicine" will become possible because of huge data sets on large populations, with millions of characterisations of each person. Study populations will grow to millions, which will allow observational studies with novel statistical methods that will allow discovery of useful, reproducible patterns and relationships from these data.

This will give answer to the question raised by Sthabir Dasgupta—why all the patients do not respond equally to chemotherapy? Medicine will proceed towards personalised treatment.

□□□

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GURUKUL IMPARTED LIES

Denigrating Hindu Women

Shamsul Islam

THE BIGGEST ‘HINDU’ organisation in the world, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) also functions as an exclusive Gurukul where Hindutva cadres are trained to specialise in the ruthless use of lies, spread of hatred and indulge in sectarian violence. It is the hallmark of RSS functioning. The most prominent ideologue of the RSS, Guru MS Golwalkar who also was the 2nd Supremo of the organisation set the ball rolling for which he is also known as “Guru of Hate”. The violence against Indian Muslims in the name of cow is rightly attributed to him as while deliberating on the history of cow-slaughter he told the RSS cadre that “It began with the coming of foreign invaders to our country. In order to reduce the population to slavery, they thought that the best method to be adapted was to stamp out every vestige of self-respect in Hindus... In that line cow slaughter also began”. [MS Golwalkar, Spotlight, Bangalore, Sahitya Sindhu (RSS publication house), 1974, p. 98]

There could not be a more blatant lie than this one as Vedic scriptures are full of references of large scale cow-slaughter while throwing grand feast for Brahmanical gods and sages. Swami Vivekananda regarded as a philosopher of Hindutva by the RSS, while addressing a meeting at the Shakespeare Club, Pasadena, California, USA (February 2, 1900) declared: “You will be astonished if I tell you that, according to old ceremonials, he is not a good Hindu who does not eat beef. On certain occasions he must sacrifice a bull and eat it”. [Vivekananda,

The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol. 3, Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, 1997, p. 536.]

While addressing a gathering of Brahmins at Madura (now in Tamil Nadu), he stated: “There was a time in this very India when, without eating beef, no Brahmin could remain a Brahmin; you read in the Vedas how, when a Sannyasin, a king, or a great man came into a house, the best bullock was killed...” [Ibid, p. 174.]

The latest addition in this criminal trait of RSS functioning was witnessed at the University of Delhi on September 3, 2023. Krishna Gopal, Sah Sarkaryawah (general secretary), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh addressed a gathering on women’s empowerment under the aegis of Naari Shakti Sangam. While referring to the disempowerment of women [he meant Hindu women] in Indian history, he stated that “prior to the 12th Century, women were reasonably free to a great extent but with the ushering of the middle ages [medieval period]. It was a very difficult time... the entire country is struggling with subjugation. Temples were broken, universities destroyed and women were in danger. Lakhs of women were kidnapped and sold in international markets. (Ahmed Shah) Abdali, (Mohammed) Ghouri and (Mahmood of) Ghazni had all taken women from here and sold them.... It was an era of great humiliation. So, to protect our women, our own society put multiple restrictions on them.”

He continued to enlighten the women gathering that “To ensure that our girl children were safe, child marriages started. Our country had no ‘satipratha’. There may have

been a couple of examples... but (after the advent of Islamic invaders), a large number of women started committing ‘jauhar’, ‘sati’...there was no restriction on widow remarriage either”. [Ibid]

It is interesting to note that no female ideologue of the RSS came to deliver main address in this women’s conference. Apart from holding ‘Islamic invaders’ for evils like Sati, child marriages and opposition to widow remarriage, he warned Hindu women present at the University of Delhi conclave not to ape the Western culture stating “kitchen was as important as becoming a scientist”. Of course, no such advisory issued to Hindu men by any of RSS ideologue.

Krishna Gopal shamelessly hid the reality that hundreds of years after ‘Muslim’ rule, the organisations associated and affiliated with RSS have been preaching, Sati, opposing widow remarriage and human rights for Hindu women. The Epic Mahabharata which is regarded as actual history records incidents of sati; when Pandu, a patriarch died his wife Madri mounted her husband’s pyre and performed sati. Likewise, when Vasudeva (father of Shri Krishna) died his 4 wives immolated themselves with him.

Geeta Press, recently awarded Gandhi Peace Award by RSS-BJP Government led by PM Modi has published in millions books like, Nari Shiksha (Education of Women) by Hanuman Prasad Poddar, Grahsth Mein Kaise Rahen [How to Lead a Household Life] by Swami Ramsukhdas, Striyon ke Liye Kartawya Shiksha (Education of Duties for Women) and Nari Dharm (Religion of Woman) by Jai Dayal Goindka and a special issue of magazine Kalyan on women. Many of these are available in English and other Indian languages.

The authors extensively quote from ancient texts like Shiva Purana and Manusmriti. They borrow heavily from these and other 'holy' texts, upholding a subservient woman/wife as the ideal Hindu woman. For instance in the book titled How to Lead a Household Life which is in question-answer format, when a question is posed, "What should the wife do if her husband beats her and troubles her?" Swami Ramsukhdas offers the following sagely advice to the battered wife and her parents:

"The wife should think that she is paying her debt of her previous life and thus her sins are being destroyed and she is becoming pure. When her parents come to know this, they can take her to their own house because they have not given their daughter to face this sort of bad behaviour."

And if her parents do not take her back to their house, learned Swamiji's pious advice is:

"Under such circumstances... she should reap the fruit of her past actions. She should patiently bear the beatings of her husband with patience. By bearing them she will be free from her sins and it is possible that her husband may start loving her."

And there is another piece of heavenly advice for a rape victim and her husband.

"As far as possible, it is better for woman (rape victim) to keep mum. If her husband also comes to know of it, he too should keep mum. It is profitable for both of them to keep quiet."

Can a woman remarry? The answer is very straight forward,

"When once a girl is given away in marriage as charity by her parents, she does not remain virgin any more. So how can she be offered as charity to anyone

else? It is beastliness to remarry her."

But can a man remarry? No problem,

"A man can have a second wife for an issue in order to be free from the debt which he owes to manes (pit-rin) according to the ordinances of the scriptures, if there is no issue from the first wife."

But this is not the only reason for which a man is allowed re-marriage. A man,

"whose desire for pleasure has not been wiped out, can get remarried because if he does not get remarried, he will indulge in adultery and go to prostitutes and will incur a badly sin. Therefore, in order to escape the sin and maintain the decorum he should get remarried according to the ordinance of scriptures."

Of course, no widow is allowed to remarry. However, she may be allowed to choose to be some male's concubine.

"If she cannot maintain her character, instead of indulging in adultery here and there, she should accept her affinity for a person and live under his protection."

Is it proper for woman to demand equal rights? The sagely answer is quite unambiguous:

"No, it is not proper. In fact, a woman has not the right of equality with man...in fact it is ignorance or folly which impels a woman to have desire for the right of equality with man. A wise person is he/she who is satisfied with fewer rights and more duties"

This literature about Hindu women openly preaches and glorifies the ghastly practice of Sati. To the question:

"Is 'Sati Partha' (viz., the tradition of the wife being cremated with the dead body of the husband on the funeral pyre) proper or improper?"

The sagely answer declaring that Sati is 'Back-bone of Hindu Religion' adds:

"A wife's cremation with the dead body of her husband on the funeral pyre is not a tradition. She, in whose mind truth and enthusiasm come, burns even without fire and she does not suffer any pain while she burns. This is not a tradition that she should do so, but this is her truth, righteousness and faith in scriptural decorum...It means that it is not a tradition. It is her own religious enthusiasm. On this topic Prabhudatta Brahmachariji has written a book whose title is Cremation of a Wife with her Husband's Dead Body is the Backbone of Hindu Religion, it should be studied."

Swamis in this series of literature while demanding the restoration of practice of Sati go on to tell us that

"There is absolutely no doubt that a woman who happily follows her dead husband to the cremation ground receives on every step benefits of Ashawmedh Yagya [Ashvamedha means horse in Sanskrit and Ashawmedh Yagya was a sacrifice of a horse in the Vedic tradition used by the ancient Indian kings to prove their imperial sovereignty]...It is a Sati woman who snatches her husband from the hands of yamdoots (angels of death) and takes him to swarglok (Paradise). After seeing this patiivrata lady the yamdoots themselves runaway."

It is not only Nari Shiksha which starts with a chapter captioned Sati Mahatmmey or 'greatness of Sati' but Gita Press also published a special issue of its Hindi journal Kalyan in which stories of 250 women who committed Sati were glorified and Hindu women decreed to emulate these worshippable Sati Matas.

If such Sanatan Dharm religious

decrees dehumanising Hindu women are being preached by Hindutva flag-bearers in an Independent India; will Hindutva zealots like Krishna Gopal also argue that the 'Muslim' rule still continues? The reality is that RSS represents a perverted male chauvinistic ideology; 'Muslim' rule or no rule could not have made any difference. One example from RSS organisational set-up would be sufficient to show how deeply it believes in the infirmities of Hindu women. The male RSS organisation is known as Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Union) but its women appendage is known as Rashtriya Sevika Samiti (National Committee of Maids). Male members are volunteers and women members as maids/servants. Mind it that RSS has no 'Muslim' past or present.

Some of the prominent Gita

Press titles denigrating Hindu women:

1. Goendka, Jaidayal, Nari Dharm, Gita Press, Gorakhpur. First published in 1938 and till 2000 it had 54 editions with 11, 20, 250 copies printed.
2. Goendka, Jaidayal, Strion Ke Liye Qartavey Shiksha, Gita Press, Gorakhpur. First published in 1954 and till 2018 it had 75 editions with 13, 71,000 copies printed.
3. Nari Ank, Kalyan, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, 1948.
4. Poddar, Hanumanprasad (ed.), Bhakt Nari, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, 2002. First published in 1931 and till 2002 it had 39 editions with 4, 62,000 copies printed.
5. Poddar, Hanumanprasad, Dampateya Jiwan Ka Adarsh, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, first published in 1991 and till 2002 it

had 17 editions with 1, 81,000 copies printed.

6. Poddar, Hanumanprasad, Nari Shiksha, Gita Press, Gorakhpur. First published in 1953 and till 2018 it had 72 editions with 11,75,000. Ramsukhdass, Swami, Grahast Maen Kese Rahen, Gita Press, Gorakhpur. First published in 1990. Till 2018 it had 76 editions with 18, 00,000 copies printed.
7. Ramsukhdass, Swami, How to Lead a Household Life, Gita Press, Gorakhpur. First published in 1990. Till 2017 had 19th editions with 1,04,500 copies printed. □□□

[Link for some of S. Islam's writings in English, Hindi, Urdu, Marathi, Malayalam, Kannada, Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati and video interviews/debates: <http://du-in.academia.edu/ShamsullIslam>]

A MAN-MADE DISASTER

Himachal: 'Development' Leads to Destruction

Bharat Dogra

HIMACHAL PRADESH HAS suffered heavier damage during this monsoon season than in any recent year that most people here can recall. While over 300 people have died and economic damage has been put at Rs. 12,000 crore till early September, given the extreme nature of the devastation the mortality figure could have been much higher but for the noble efforts of many brave rescuers.

While houses of several people were shattered and destroyed, even more numerous are the people whose houses are endangered now—damaged, with cracks or threatened by further landslides—and so they have to stay in tents or seek temporary refuge in religious places or with their relatives. As a report in The Times of India titled 'Landslides and

sinking mountains turn 122 villages of Solan unsafe' towards the end of August stated—"Rain-triggered landslides and sinking of mountains have rendered over 122 villages of Solan district unsafe and displaced 8500 inhabitants who have been moved to safer locations by the district administration. The landslides have led to the damaging of 1200 houses in Himachal Pradesh's Nalagarh, Kasauli and Arki sub-divisions". Another report in Amar Ujala newspaper (3 September) stated that in Doon area of Baddi industrial zone 112 houses were damaged and 45 have developed cracks. These families are still living with others despite a month having passed. However these are the more accessible areas, not the worst affected areas. The situation is much more serious in

the worst affected Mandi-Manali zone and in the very remote areas from where news may not travel so fast as from the more accessible places and the tourist resorts. There have been reports of people including women, children and the elderly having to walk on very dangerous paths where a single wrong step may mean serious injury or even death by drowning in the rivers below. The needs in terms of repairing roads, bridges and other essential infra-structure are huge.

In view of the massive damage caused there is a clear case for the central government to be very generous with its help for the state and more resources for providing relief and rehabilitation should be rushed here.

While the need for stepping up in a big way the relief, repair and rehabilitation work is the biggest priority today, there is also an urgent need for re-defining development, for a new understanding of development so that it is in tune with the

fragile geological and sensitive ecological conditions of a very young (in geological terms) and unstable mountain region whose greater part is exposed to high seismicity. In this context recent development experiences of the state have been disastrous. The most disastrous and destructive projects have been initiated in the name of development and tourism. What has been done in the name of attracting tourists may ultimately prove so destructive as to scare them off. The beautiful heritage railway track from Kalka to Shimla has suffered more destruction this time than ever before, while the size of the boulders brought by the very frequent landslides on the Kalka-Shimla highway is scary. Some officials now say so much harm occurred because of the soil conditions, but they did not think about the soil when they were cutting thousands of trees mercilessly for too much widening of road which was not really needed, or when they were cutting the hills vertically for the same purpose which was likely to bring disaster sooner or later.

Now there are many allegations

and even a legal case against the way in which the Parwanoo Solan highway has been badly mishandled, involving criminal negligence, although till some time back this was being showcased as a big achievement. It appears that the most obvious precautions have been ignored by the National Highway Authority in many Himalayan four-lane projects, causing huge harm to people and environment. However earlier when attention was drawn to this even by eminent persons, they were simply labeled by the authorities as anti-development. While the Chief Minister has done well to draw attention to the serious mistakes of highway authorities which resulted in a narrowing of the flow of the Beas river, his suggestion that more tunnels are needed in the Parwanoo-Dharampur stretch or that more tunnels can help to avoid problems that have been created are not at all based on the factual situation.

Flash floods caused by dams are a reality now, and the government is itself concerned about the dam management in difficult times after the havoc caused recently. 21 dams are

reported to have violated safety norms.

It appears that apart from the large scale known felling of trees for dam and highway projects, there has been illegal felling too, and a lot of boulders of these trees flowing with the torrential flood water added to the immense destruction.

While many experts have talked about the man-made factors behind the recent disasters, there is still no sign that the development model will be changed in any significant ways. On the contrary people are still seeing headlines like 'Fresh muck dumping in Bilaspur district' (The Times of India September 1) and "After rain disaster, Shimla sees illegal felling of trees' (The Tribune). This is really sad, and till there is a clear re-defining of what constitutes development in such fragile and sensitive zones, the people of Himachal will never be safe from such high-risk, highly destructive situations as seen this year, and this is likely to be all the more true with worsening climate change. □□□

[The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include *Planet in Peril*, *Man over Machine* and *A Day in 2071*.]

CUP OF WOES

Fight for Fair Wage

Atanu Chakravarty

THE ABJECT WORKING AND inhuman living conditions of tea labourers is reminiscent of the indentured labour introduced in colonial times by British planters", noted a 2022 report by a Parliamentary Standing Committee. This Committee further emphasised on the importance of implementing the Minimum Wages Act for the tea garden workers. The Committee stated that the daily wage in Darjeeling tea estates is "among the lowest paid to any industrial worker in the country". The Darjeeling tea, known

world-wide as the 'champagne' of Indian teas, stands its own ground, alongside the teas from the Nilgiri Hills in South India and the plantations in Assam, is in the cusp of crisis passing through trying times. This is the reality of tens of thousands of workers, in a sector with a large number of women, who are paid meagre wages. It is tied together by a colonial labour system, sans land rights and with little access to government schemes. The wage rates are the lowest among all other plantation sectors which also

indicates a persistent gender wage gap in the plantations. The tea gardens of Bengal and North Eastern India witnessed starvation deaths of more than 1400 people, and acute malnutrition during 2000-2015. The starvation deaths and hunger seem to be hiding behind the lush green gardens.

There is no uniformity in wage structure for workers across states in tea and among other plantation sectors. The North Eastern region constitutes around 80 percent of the total land area under tea plantation and more or less equal productivity, the auction price of tea in North East (NE) India is higher when compared to South India, but the NE region shows depressed wages com-

pared to the South. The initial gap in wage rate between regions of tea plantations widened and the difference is almost double now. In West Bengal, after a series of tripartite meetings involving all trade unions operating in the industry, (known as Joint Forum of Trade Unions in Tea Industries and Management), the state government proposed a minimum interim wage of Rs 250 per day, which the management denied to pay and challenged in the High Court. The High Court (HC) rejected management's appeal and ordered immediate disbursement of Rs 250 per day as proposed by the state government. HC also ordered to fix minimum wages within a stipulated time frame of six months. This new interim minimum wage has been effective since 1st August. It has also been decided that the wages due for June-July shall be disbursed

later. The increase in interim daily minimum wages is Rs 18 only. Henceforth, all workers are to receive this amount. Daily wage of Assam's tea workers was hiked by Rs 27 in 2022. However, this was much below the wages received by the plantation workers in the southern states. This hike from 1st August raises a worker's daily wage to Rs 232 in the tea-gardens located in the Brahmaputra valley, and to Rs 210 in gardens located in the Barak valley. Promise of higher wages for tea workers was one of the biggest poll-issues in the 2021 assembly election in Assam. Daily wages for plantation workers in Kerala are Rs 421.26, which is the highest in the country, followed by Rs 406.80 in Tamil Nadu and Rs 376.78 in Karnataka. These three states recently revised the wages upwards. Bihar and Tripura have the lowest

wages for plantation workers—Rs 175 and Rs 176 respectively. Along with their salary, workers in tea gardens are entitled to PF, gratuity, housing, free medical facilities, free education for their children, fuel and protective gear such as aprons, umbrellas, rain-coats, high boots and creches for female workers. Currently, these are merely on paper. All these rights have been systematically violated. Nonpayment of PF dues and gratuity after retirement is very common in the industry. The already precarious lives are at greater risk because the tea industry is facing serious challenges and problems due to climate change, competition from cheaper teas, recessionary global market and ebb in production and demand, etc. The cupful of tea that cheers people every morning is now replete with tears!

□□□

A DYING FOLK ART?

Patidars of Bengal

Sonia Sarkar

Their numbers are dwindling, but folk artists (Chitrakars or Patidars) in West Bengal are determined to preserve a tradition linked to the oral histories of Hindu mythologies. They do so by using the art form to comment on contemporary issues like climate change, child marriage, anti-Muslim hate and even India's moon landing.

ARTIST SAIRA CHITRAKAR [or Patidar as they are popularly known in Rural Bengal] left hundreds of people in Indonesia enraptured earlier this year when she sang emotionally in Bengali: "Men and women are the same, both have the right to survive, but why are women subjected to violence?"

The stirring performance unfolded at the International Seminar and Festival of Oral Traditions in June, where Saira also presented a captivating 3-metre-long (10-feet) cloth painting. Her art denounced the practice of child marriage, earning her a resounding round of applause from the packed hall.

A patua (folk painter) hailing

from West Bengal, Saira cherished this opportunity to introduce her unique storytelling art, known as patua sangeet (songs by folk painters), to a global audience.

"We want to use this heritage art to raise awareness about contemporary issues", said the 36-year-old.

The term chitrakar, meaning painter, is used as a surname by these artists to align themselves with the caste of folk painters, seeking greater respect from the predominant Hindu community despite being of Islamic faith.

Traditionally, patuas, including Saira, have depicted scenes from Hindu epics and mythologies on cloth scrolls called patachitra, which

range from around two to eight metres in length. While unrolling these scrolls, the artists sing self-composed songs that narrate the stories depicted in the paintings, resembling ballad-style performances.

These traditional storytellers trace their roots back to the former East Bengal, now Bangladesh, where they learned Hindu mythologies through generations of oral tradition dating back to the 11th century.

The tangible evidence of this tradition in the form of scrolls only surfaced in the 18th century. They suggest that these Muslim artists were invited by Hindu landlords, administrative figures and police leaders in pre-colonial India to present musical renditions of Hindu deity stories, receiving compensation in cash, food or clothing in return.

In recent years, the focus of the folk painters, who are primarily from West Bengal's East Midnapore and West Midnapore regions, has expanded to contemporary topics such

as global warming, plastic pollution, floods and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Abed Chitrakar, an eighth-generation artist, recently composed a song commemorating India's Chandrayaan-III moon mission: "India has regained its position in the world, it has created history ... the entire world has hailed ISRO [India's space agency]".

"Our identity survives when the art survives. Only when we compose songs on contemporary issues, we would be able to keep this heritage art alive", said the 50-year-old.

India makes historic landing on the lunar South Pole, becoming the 4th country to land on the moon.

Khukurani Chitrakar, 35, who recently exhibited her work on road safety in Kyrgyzstan, said that since this form of folk art combines methods of oral and visual storytelling, its impact in conveying social messages is substantial.

For three decades, both governmental bodies and non-profit organisations have engaged the artists to promote various social-welfare initiatives—including on women's literacy, sanitation, and HIV/Aids prevention—through their art and accompanying songs.

Ratnaboli Bose, founder of the Daricha Foundation, a platform that advocates for traditional folk and tribal arts, pointed out however that such projects can limit artistic freedom at times since the artists have to follow a script to meet the needs of the programme. Additionally, these paintings might not always resonate with art enthusiasts due to their specific messaging and audience.

Still, the patuas have ventured beyond mythological narratives to explore contemporary sociopolitical themes.

At a time of increasing attacks on India's Muslim minority, Abed believes their artistic efforts can fos-

ter communal harmony and alter negative perceptions.

"A section of people, who hate Muslims on the basis of their religion, may change their perception about us when they watch us perform", said Abed, who in 2012 painted a 158-metre-long Mahabharata—a Hindu text—with seven other artists.

"Islam has never come in the way of our artistic compositions on Hindu mythologies. It clearly proves that we believe in communal harmony", he said.

The art form has evolved over time. While artists initially painted on home-made raw-cotton cloth, rice starch and tamarind seeds, they now skillfully adhere paper or canvas to cloth, maintaining the tradition of using organically extracted colours from natural resources. Black hues stem from roasted rice grains, while red tones are the result of mixing betel leaves, lime, and catechu.

These colours, combined with wood-apple gum, are then applied to the paintings.

Patachitra paintings have garnered global recognition, some even being showcased by institutions like the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Indigo Art Museum in Philadelphia.

But some artists have transitioned to alternative livelihoods such as carpentry, tailoring or driving to chase better financial prospects, said Abed, who earns around 16,000 Indian rupees (US\$194) per month.

The changing landscape has led some artists to focus on visual rather than performative art, omitting the musical component due to limited platforms for showcasing their singing abilities.

While some continue to make a living by performing at fairs and exhibitions, others have adapted the art to more accessible forms like painting mythological figures on gar-

ments, attracting younger consumers, as the demand for long scroll paintings dwindles.

Abed believes that reimagining the art form to ensure a consistent income is crucial to the goal of retaining artists who might otherwise leave for higher-paying occupations. The survival of the art, he said, hinges on the survival of its practitioners. "The art will survive only when the artist survives".

Anwar Chitrakar, 47, an artist from West Midnapore's Naya, creates small square paintings influenced by the vibrant colour and bold outlines of the Kalighat genre of painting. His artwork—which has been featured on the website of the Victoria and Albert Museum—dives into corruption, poverty, the plight of surrogate mothers and the hazards of reckless selfie-taking.

"I believe the art should have some imprint on day-to-day life so that people value it", he said. □□□

[Sonia Sarkar is a journalist based in India for the past 17 years. She writes on human lives, conflict, religion, politics, health and gender rights from South and Southeast Asia. Her work has appeared in a range of international publications including Al Jazeera, British Medical Journal, Ozy.com and Nikkei Asian Review. She loves to travel and considers the world as her "beat."]

[source: SCMP]

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ALLENDE RETURNS

The Ghosts of the Disappeared

Lucia Newman

ON 50-YEAR ANNIVERSARY of Pinochet-led coup, Chileans are confronting national trauma of thousands forcibly disappeared. Tens of thousands of Chileans were tortured, executed or forcibly disappeared under General Augusto Pinochet's rule following a 1973 coup.

Jeannette Avila takes out a white handkerchief atop Cerro Chena, a hill overlooking Chile's capital, Santiago. Waving it up and down, she begins to dance to the music of Chile's national dance.

The photographs of Chilean political prisoners who were forcibly disappeared decades ago and whose remains have never been found are laid out at her feet. Among them is Avila's grandfather, whose face and name are emblazoned on her T-shirt.

"My grandfather, Roberto Avila, was a railroad worker and a protestant pastor, and we know that he was executed here with others," Avila told Al Jazeera during a memorial two weeks ago to the more than 100 people who are believed to have been killed in this spot in the 1970s and 1980s.

"But their remains are still missing."

Her grandfather was detained by Chile's secret police nearly 47 years

ago, shortly after Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet led a September 11, 1973 coup that deposed the country's left-wing president, Salvador Allende, and his government.

One of the Chilean army's most notorious interrogation and torture centres was on Cerro Chena—and the area has become a symbol for the mothers, widows, children, and grandchildren of the more than 1,160 people who were disappeared during Pinochet's 17-year military dictatorship and never seen again.

"Their souls, and ours, continue searching for peace. My grandmother died without even a bone of her husband's to bury to give her some solace," she says, tears streaming down her face.

In the lead-up to the 50-year anniversary on Monday [September 11] of the coup that initiated Chile's military dictatorship, four generations of Chileans are being forced to face a still-unresolved national trauma.

Tens of thousands of Chileans were tortured, executed or forcibly disappeared under Pinochet's rule, according to two government truth commissions set up after Chile returned to democracy in 1990.

In the vast majority of the cases, the perpetrators of human rights

abuses have not been tried and sentenced. Worse yet, for the families of the missing, the military has still refused to reveal details about what happened to them or their remains.

For years, defending the military regime's human rights legacy—at least in public—was thought of as politically unacceptable. But as in other countries in the region, so-called "dirty war denial" is growing in Chile, sowing anger and division on all sides.

Late last month, the government of left-wing President Gabriel Boric unveiled a national search plan that for the first time makes the Chilean state responsible for uncovering what happened to the missing, who was responsible for their disappearances, and where their remains are buried.

But conservative opposition leaders have refused to embrace the proposal, even boycotting the ceremony at the presidential palace. They argued that the government was using the announcement for political gain.

Yet even as some Chileans prefer to not talk about it, and others deny it, the unresolved issue of the disappeared is a wound that continues to fester in the South American nation.

And against this backdrop, some survivors of the Chilean military regime are trying to lay their ghosts to rest by facing truths that were long kept hidden. □□□

[Al Jazeera]

LETTERS

Indo-Bangladesh Border

A year ago on 7 September, 2022, a joint statement was released by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, where they expressed satisfaction on the matter that the number killings along the Indo-Bangladesh border had been reduced significantly. They also praised the

border guards of both the countries for their efforts to stop smuggling and trafficking across the border. However, ironically after a few hours after the release of that statement, Minarul Islam, a minor Bangladeshi school student was shot dead at the Dainur border in South Dinajpur district by the Indian Border Security Force.

It has been a matter of disgrace that the number of killings perpetrated by the border guards at the Indo-Bangladesh border has drastically escalated this decade. The Manmohan Singh government in July 2011, made an effort to reduce border killings by introducing non-lethal weapons to the BSF patrolling at the border. With the Modi government taking charge in 2014, the

decision was made to revert back to the use of lethal weapons by the BSF, which resulted in rampant killings at this border.

An estimated population of around 60 thousand families resides in West Bengal within the Indo-Bangladesh border fence. This population despite being bona fide citizens of India are living under constant threats, physical torture and degrading treatment from the border guards. Even after the joint statement issued by both the Prime Ministers last year there are reports of many incidents of killings by the border guards along with inhuman torture perpetrated by them, upon the residents of the Indo-Bangladesh border villages. Therefore, praising the border guards' actions by the Prime Ministers either reflected their naivety on the issue or their political intention to subdue the illegal actions of the forces of these neighbouring countries.

Kirity Roy
Secretary, MASUM
ASM Nasiruddin Elan
Secretary, ADHIKAR

'India' and Jinnah

"Nationalists in Pakistan have long argued that Pakistan has rights on the name as it refers to Indus region in".

The government in India is set to change the name of the country from India to Bharat in an attempt to "decolonise" India.

It is to be noted that the Indian government has not made any official statement on changing the name of the country. The name Bharat has roots in Sanskrit.

India refers to Indus region, basin of mighty Indus River, spanning much of modern day Pakistan. Jinnah had objected to British India adopting "India" as its name for newly independent country and had suggested Hindustan or Bharat instead.

In 1947, a month after India's Independence, Muhammed Ali Jinnah had refused to accept an invitation from Louis Mountbatten to be the honorary president of an art exhibition because the invitation used India instead of Hindustan to refer to the country. "It is a pity that for some mysterious reason Hindustan has adopted the word 'India' which is certainly misleading and is intended to create confusion", Jinnah had then written to Mountbatten.

For one thing Indian rightwing has long detested name "India".

Meanwhile, former Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan claimed that the original name of the country was "unquestionably" Bharat and it was the British that started calling it India.

South Asia Index **Summer 2023**

The summer of 2023 was the hottest on record, according to data from the European Union Climate Change Service released on September 6.

The three-month period from June through August surpassed previous records by a large margin, with an average temperature of 16.8 degrees Celsius (62.2F)-0.66C above average.

Last month was the also the hottest August on record globally, the third straight month in a row to set such a record following the hottest ever June and July.

August is estimated to have been around 1.5 degrees Celsius hotter than the pre-industrial average for the 1850-1900 periods. Pursuing efforts to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius is a central pledge of the Paris international climate change agreement adopted by 196 countries in 2015.

July 2023 remains the hottest month ever recorded, while August's

NOTICE

AUTUMN NUMBER 2023

Autumn Number will be out in the 2nd week of October. This year our contributors include—

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record makes the northern hemisphere's summer the hottest since records began in 1940.

"Global temperature records continue to tumble in 2023", Copernicus deputy head Samantha Burgess said.

"The scientific evidence is overwhelming; we will continue to see more climate records and more intense and frequent extreme weather events impacting society and ecosystems, until we stop emitting greenhouse gases".

Reuters

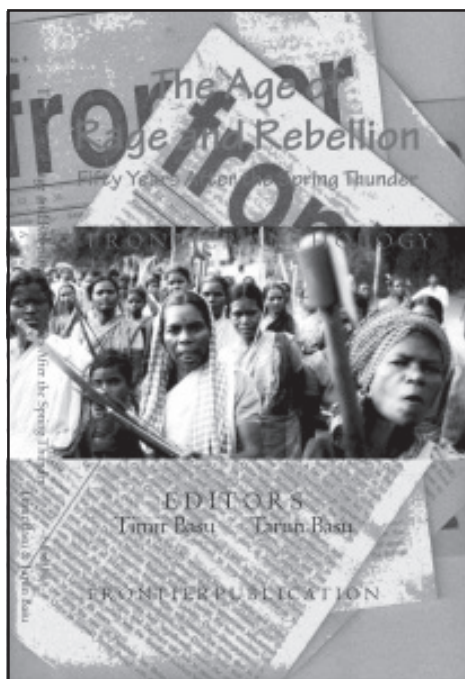
'Bharat, not India'

Here some detest the word India as they were not part of the people who secured and built this nation, while their political cousins across the border are eying to grab the name. No wonder that the Pakistani rightwing was elated at the election success of Modi—who wouldn't love the idea of someone else fulfilling one's desire of destroying their enemy country at no cost to themselves.

Faizi S

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