

frontier

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The Empire's Declining Authority

IMPERIALISM HAS VIRTUALLY VANISHED FROM COMMUNIST vocabulary. Nor does anti-imperialist liberation struggle get currency in their discourse. Barring the anarchists no leftist outfit raises the question of class and class interests in defining war. Imperialism means war. And the roots of American imperialism lie in its war economy. The world is now suffering more wars than at any time since 1945. The on-going wars in Gaza and Ukraine demonstrate among other things the limits of American imperial power. The Pan-Americana is not yet dead but it is surely heading towards an inglorious demise. America's abilities to support wars in Gaza and Ukraine are dwindling. In truth the White House looks powerless in influencing its western allies and Israel.

Biden's appeal for a temporary cease-fire or what they euphemistically call 'humanitarian pause' was ignored by Israel. France is in favour of an immediate cease-fire in Gaza but Israel is not listening. And the strategists in Washington have no power to force Israel to obey the rules of war.

Washington is maintaining a delicate balance shielding Israel from international condemnation for war crime in Gaza and washing its hands of the bloody human catastrophe. Israel's relentless air-strikes, the heaviest bombing campaign since the Second World War, have surpassed all previous records of barbarism. Every day every smart phone in the world brings forth bone-chilling horrors from Gaza: whole families extinguished, dead children pulled down from the ruins of their homes, entire districts reduced to rubble in an instant. With the Israeli authorities losing legitimacy, Hamas has already won a moral victory. They bombed the Jabalia refugee camp to kill just one Hamas commander while creating a living hell and turning a hospital into a huge cemetery.

Both sides pay lip service to the civilian-combatant distinction. But in practice civilians and military objects are equally targeted. Many Israelis argue that Gazans cannot expect full civilian protection because they elected Hamas 16 years ago and Hamas denies it to Israeli civilians on the grounds that they are all settlers. With hundreds held hostage in Gaza and thousands in Israeli detention the Uncle Sam is in no position to bring in a radical shift in the war, unless there is a prisoner swap, the possibility of which is nowhere in sight as Hamas has suspended hostage negotiations in Katar.

For one thing the Netanyahu government is wildly unpopular in Israel itself. As the Gaza war escalates and the release of hostage remains

uncertain, more and more Israelis are taking to streets demanding pause and peace. And even in America opposition to America's support to Israel is growing posing a strategic threat to the Jewish state. Not much is said about the Jewish Left that has been vocal in Israel and elsewhere about this unjust war launched by the Israeli killing machine—Israeli Defence Forces [IDF].

As Gaza attracts the world attention now Ukraine's leadership is struggling to maintain focus on its own existential conflict. America's Ukraine war is another example of

the widening gulf between the Empire's commitments and its dwindling capabilities. The present stalemate in Ukraine war, notwithstanding disinformation galore, suggests how America along with its western allies is trying, somewhat hopelessly, to get rid of the bind they have been in for the last two years. Their cherished dream of defeating and isolating Russia is evaporating very fast.

America and NATO encouraged the Zelensky administration to pursue war aims that have now proved a nightmare for the Ukrainians. America and European Union forced

Ukrainian planners to broaden their goals from 'a return to the country's de facto 2022 borders to a return to its de jure 1991 borders' with a view to disintegrate Russia. But the dubious design of the White House warlords has created a situation in which Ukraine now faces disintegration.

Pro-Palestine protest marches are everywhere. And American hegemony is declining. "The withering of American reach is already shaping up to be bloodier than the fall of the Soviet Union". □□□

15-11-2023

COMMENT

A 'Graveyard of Children'

THE MEDIAN AGE OF PEOPLE in Gaza is just 18 years. Some 65% of the population is under 24.

To date, more than 41% of the 11000 people killed in Gaza as of November 2023 are children, according to the UN.

Many people are missing, trapped under the rubble of destroyed homes. More than half of those missing are children.

Children account for more than 30% of those injured in Gaza, possibly indicating the low level of survival among children caught in the conflict.

These statistics echo previous research showing the disproportionate consequences on children in armed conflict.

But the violence against children has not been limited to Gaza.

Graphic accounts point to the killing of numerous Israeli children in the Hamas attacks on October 7.

Scores of young people were killed at a music festival.

Thousands of lives are being lost in the Israel-Hamas war, including a disproportionate amount of children.

At least 33 of the estimated 240

Israeli hostages taken by Hamas are thought to be children, including babies and infants.

In the West Bank, at least 122 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli military operations since October 7, 39 of them children. It's unclear how many of those casualties are directly because of the conflict.

It's an extraordinarily grim stocktake, but key to understanding the nature of the conflict.

Sadly, the suffering of children in Gaza is not new.

For decades, children in Gaza have been among the world's most vulnerable groups, with very high rates of paediatric mental health problems, stunted growth, lead poisoning, malnutrition and post-traumatic stress disorder.

An Israeli study showed high rates of psychopathology among those exposed to trauma from military attacks.

Other research that compared the wellbeing of Israeli and Palestinian children found the latter fared significantly worse.

These conditions have worsened

since Hamas took power in Gaza in 2006.

There are claims from both sides of breaches of international humanitarian law and violations of the Laws of War.

Regardless of these allegations, there has been a fundamental breach of the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child by all parties.

The convention is made up of 54 articles that aim to protect and secure children's wellbeing, including during armed conflict.

There are specific requirements of states to protect the lives of children from violence, abuse and neglect at both civil and political levels.

Children in Palestine and Israel are bearing the brunt of the conflict between Israel and Hamas.

International humanitarian law is unequivocal in combatants' legal responsibility to protect children in all situations of armed conflict.

The Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols cover children in the same way they cover civilians during war.

But there is extra protection for those under 18, with children considered an "object of special respect".

This extends to children who are

actively participating in the conflict.

Israel and Palestine are signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Geneva Convention.

The UN is also investigating allegations of war crimes on all sides from October 7, 2023.

Despite all the legal protections, it is clear children are suffering.

The legal provision for special respect of children in war isn't being adequately considered. It requires all sides to consider carefully the world they will leave behind. □□□

[Contributed]

NOTE

Destroying Palestinian Livelihoods

Bharat Dogra writes:

WHILE THE ATTENTION of the world is focused on the huge tragedy resulting from the conflict in Gaza, on October 27 GRAIN, an organisation dedicated to support of agriculture and related rural livelihoods based on communities of small farmers, released a note on the disruption of Palestinian livelihoods over the recent years as a result of arbitrary and unjust actions and policies of Israel.

This review states—"Prior to October 2023, 35% of Gaza's farmland lay within an 'access restricted area' on the border with Israel. As a result, 113,000 farmers lost access to their lands located in this area".

This review titled 'The Palestinian people have a right to their lives, land and sovereignty' informs that since 2014, Israeli crop duster planes have been systematically spraying herbicides, including glyphosate, during harvest periods, often when the wind blows towards Gaza. In January 2020 alone, this spraying damaged 281 hectares of Palestinian crops, affecting 350 farmers.

Further this note says that Israel has turned fishing in Gaza—a livelihood deeply rooted in the local culture and economy—into a highly precarious and dangerous occupation. Due to fuel shortages and a lack of equipment, caused by restrictions on the entry of goods to Gaza, going out to sea for fishing has become difficult. According to this review, fisher-

folk venturing beyond the designated 6 nautical miles often face imprisonment or direct gunfire by Israelis. This is in contravention of international law which allows the Palestinian State to claim permanent sovereignty within 60 nautical miles, this review says. As a result, only half of the 3,800 registered fishers of Gaza have the possibility to pursue their work, ultimately affecting 35,000 people who depend on the sector for their livelihood.

This review states that in the West Bank, some Israeli settlers have taken advantage of the present situation in Gaza to step up their own violent attacks to grab more land, displacing hundreds of Palestinian farmers.

Providing more details of the situation in West Bank, this review by GRAIN states, "The West Bank is 90% farmland, yet a substantial portion of it has been under direct Israeli control since the Oslo Accords of 1993. A separation barrier, mostly situated within the West Bank, has been significantly hampering access to land for thousands of Palestinian farmers by dividing farm and pastureland from their villages. In 2019, only 12 of the 76 gates designated to allow access to farmers opened daily, while 56 of them required permits".

This review alleges that Israel pushes Palestinian farmers into using seeds and agrochemicals sold by Israeli companies, thereby destroying

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their soils and biodiversity and leaving them in debt and poverty.

Water is of crucial importance for agriculture. However Palestinians face severe discrimination in the sharing of limited water supplies. This review by GRAIN states, "In terms of access to water, the Israeli government has imposed severe constraints, which the human rights organisation Al-Haq calls "water apartheid". Since 1982, Palestinians have depended on Israel for their water supplies, as the national water company, Mekorot, controls infrastructure..." In the West Bank, Israeli settlers consume in average over six times more water than Palestinians.

Waterborne diseases have become a leading cause of death in Gaza due to water shortages in the towns and villages, as well as the lack of access to running water in rural communities.

The review ends by drawing attention to the urgent need just now for ceasefire and peace, while making a strong case for longer-term protection of livelihoods too. □□□

ELECTION EXPENDITURE

No Money, No Vote

Yogendra Yadav

HAVE YOU NOT HEARD OF Munugode? I was in Telangana, trying to make sense of the forthcoming elections. Every conversation began and ended with money.

This was my turn to be smiled at. A few weeks ago I had smiled at the naiveté of my movement friends, when someone from Bihar was shocked that every MLA candidate spends more than a crore, when someone from Madhya Pradesh informed that you don't get a ticket unless you have at least Rs 2 crore to spend.

I smiled because a few months ago, I was in Karnataka. I had a chance encounter with a failed aspirant from one of the major parties. Dejected and bitter, they were complaining about the lack of transparency in the selection of candidates. I was all sympathy. "What should I do now with all my investment?" the candidate turned to me. I mumbled something about politics being a long-term game where no investment goes waste. "No, that's not what I was asking. I have a concrete problem. What should I do with the 40,000 colour TV sets that I bought for distribution when I was assured a ticket? They told me things get expensive close to the elections, so I bought these well in time for a discount." That would be at least Rs 40 crore even if we price a bottom-of-the-range discounted TV at Rs 10,000 a piece, I reckoned.

Stunned by this disclosure, I made inquiries in political circles. Sure, this particular candidate's budget was over the top, but an overall expenditure in this range was the norm. The total expenditure of each

candidate in a normal rural assembly constituency in Karnataka was Rs 20 – 30 crore, a little lower in reserved seats and a little higher in prosperous regions. In the urban seats, especially in and around Bengaluru, the expenditure was to the tune of Rs 40-50 crore. Everyone spoke about this candidate in a constituency at the periphery of Bengaluru who was believed to have spent Rs 150 crore.

Since then, I have been trying to get a sense of the scale of money in the ongoing elections. Karnataka is on the higher side, but so are most of the southern and western states, except, perhaps, Kerala. The much-maligned corrupt politics of the Hindi heartland cannot compete with them. The more prosperous a state, the higher the rates. But in the northern states as well, every serious assembly candidate spends around Rs 5 to 10 crore. Assuming an average of Rs 10 crore across the states and at least three serious candidates per constituency, this adds up to about Rs 1.25 lakh crore just for assembly elections across the country. And perhaps we should think of a similar amount for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections.

This is when I encountered Munugode. I was in Telangana sharing my dismay at the level of election expenditure in Karnataka. This time, my friends smiled at me. "Just Rs 20-30 crore? You must be joking. Have you not heard of Munugode?" I vaguely remembered this by-election that was held in the middle of Bharat Jodo Yatra in November 2022. I recalled tales of how desperate Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao was to win this

by-election for his newly christened Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS). The Congress was keen to defend the seat it held, and the Bharatiya Janata Party to demonstrate its growing clout.

The consequences were staggering, at least in terms of election expenditure. It was not limited to rent-a-crowd rallies or the usual biryani with liquor or sarees. It was reported that one of the contestants gifted 10 grams of gold to each family. There were standard rates not just for attending a rally or canvassing for a day but even for wearing the scarf of a party for one day. Some villages that were left out of the cash distribution sat on dharna on the polling day with the placards "No money, no vote". In these booths, voting finally began, post settlement, at 3 pm and continued till 11 pm. Political grapevine in Telangana puts the ruling party expenditure in Munugode at Rs 400 crore. Forum for Good Governance, an NGO, filed a complaint to the Election Commission alleging a total expenditure of Rs 627 crore in this by-poll.

Munugode has set 'gold' standards for election expenditure in Telangana. I am told this time that no candidate is expected to spend less than Rs 100 crore in each assembly segment. Even if this is hyperbole, we are looking at more than Rs 50 crore of spending by each candidate in a general seat. Munugode could be the future of electoral politics in India. At the ground level of electoral competition, we are not looking at a nexus of business and politics anymore. More often than not, politics is a 'side business. You make your money through mines, exports, educational institutions, and what have you. And then you get into politics – and media – to protect your main business interests.

Is anyone watching? Yes, the Election Commission of India has a whole division dedicated to election expenditure monitoring. There is a fat manual of do's and don'ts of election expenditure for parties and candidates. There are rules and proforma that require you to file every detail of what you spend in elections, including a separate row for garlands and flowers in the election rally. That is a pain, I can tell you.

There is an army of IRS officers who are stationed as Election Expenditure Observers, each supported by a local team. That's a lot of expenditure, you can guess. And then there are raiding teams that set up check-posts and examine every passing vehicle to catch any attempt at electoral inducement. That is a lot of public harassment. There is an upper limit of permissible expenditure, Rs 40 lakh per assembly constituency in most states. There are strict deadlines for filing returns. And a threat of disqualification for those who fail to file the returns. A lot of work for chartered accountants, I guess.

There is a catch, though. So far, no elected MLA or MP has been disqualified during their tenure due to false expenditure statements. One MLA was disqualified after her tenure was over. A handful of cases are

pending in courts. That's all. That is the net outcome of the entire charade of election expenditure monitoring.

For the record, all the major candidates in Munugode have duly filed their expenditure returns; the highest one claims an overall expenditure of Rs 34.75 lakh.

I heard the Election Commission's latest announcement on the Model Code of Conduct, the limit of Rs 40 lakh per constituency for Assembly elections, the appointment of Expenditure Observers and so on. I just smiled. And I wondered if we would not be better off if we did away with this fiction of a ceiling on electoral expenditure. At least we would save on some sarkari expenditure on monitoring of election expenditure.

The fact is that the Election Commission cannot do very much about either the illegitimate 'white' or the 'black' money in politics. Over the years, all possible legal filters on white money have been removed. While there is a ceiling on how much a candidate can spend, there is no limit whatsoever on how much a political party can spend. The dividing line between the two is, of course, non-existent. The pre-existing limit on corporate political funding has been removed. And the Electoral Bonds

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have removed whatever remained of transparency in political funding. Unless something can be done about it, it is pointless to ask the ECI to guard an open field.

As for 'black' money, it is harder to detect and punish it in politics than it is to curb corruption in public life. In a country with weak institutions, how does one regulate those who make and implement rules? How does one check the growing influence of money in politics when every other domain of our life, from education to religion, is being commercialised? The only real and effective check in politics is the fear of public sanction. The cure for the ills of politics lies in more and better politics. □□□

UNITY OF OPPOSITES?

Mohan Bhagwat and Ambedkar

Ram Puniyani

WHILE AMBEDKAR stands for 'annihilation of caste', struggle for democratic values and marching towards social justice, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh(RSS) stands for status quo and 'revival of the hierarchical values system' of pre modern times. It is ironic that despite this core opposition; RSS ideologues try

to make a show of paying respect to Ambedkar in various forums including celebrating his anniversary. So in a way, it was not surprising when RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat in his annual Vijyadashmi speech (October 24, 2024) called upon his followers to read speeches of Ambedkar, particularly the last two speeches delivered by him in the Constituent

Assembly. Bhagawat went to the extent of putting Ambedkar in the category of RSS founder and First Sarsanghchhalak (Supreme leader) of RSS, Dr K BHedgewar. The response of RSS types to Ambedkar's striving has always been to oppose his efforts at ideological level under the garb of 'our glorious past'.

As such the struggle for social justice which initially came up in the form of 'Non-Brahmin Movement' in Nagpur area of Vidarbha (1920s) was one of the major reasons for the Landlord-Brahmin alliance to form

RSS. In Maharashtra, this alliance is referred to as Shetji-Bhatji (Landlord-Brahmin) Alliance. The Dalit awakening began with Jotirao Phule who struggled to open schools for education for Dalits. The awakening of this section was backed up and enhanced by Ambedkar starting his paper Mooknayak in 1920 and Bahujan Hitkarini Sabha in 1923. These might have added tremendously to awakening.

Later in his pursuit for social justice Ambedkar organised Chavdar Talab movement (access to public drinking water for Dalits) in 1927 and Kalaram Temple entry movement in 1930. RSS itself is never known to have come forward to support these movements of Babasaheb. Actually it was Gandhi, who took up the caste issue most seriously and devoted his time exclusively for improving Dalit's plight for the next few years after the Poona Pact of 1932.

RSS was propagating Hindu Rashtra. Savarkar was at the forefront of the theory that there are two Nations here, the Hindu Nation and Muslim Nation. This Hindu nation theory propagated by RSS came under severe criticism from Ambedkar as he wrote, "Strange as it may appear, Mr Savarkar and Mr Jinnah, instead of being opposed to each other on the one nation versus two nations issue, are in complete agreement about it. Both agree not only agree, but insist that there are two nations in India—one the Muslim nation and the other the Hindu nation." (Dr B R Ambedkar wrote in his well-known book Thoughts on Pakistan, published in 1940.)

Ambedkar was totally opposed to

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the concept of Hindu Nation, "If Hindu Raj does become a fact, it will, no doubt, be the greatest calamity for this country.... Hindu Raj must be prevented at any cost," wrote BR Ambedkar in Pakistan or the Partition of India (1946, pages 354-355). He was against majoritarianism, which in the Indian context meant unbridled rule of the majority community, the Hindus. This is the current dominant ideology of RSS led by Bhagwat as Narendra Modi has come forward to defend it by asking as to what is wrong with Majoritarianism?

After the presentation of the final draft of the Constitution, RSS opposition to the draft of the Indian Constitution came from the 'unofficial mouthpiece' of the RSS, Organiser. It wrote a scathing piece against the Indian Constitution. Organiser issue for November 30, 1949, carried an editorial stating "The worst [thing] about the new Constitution of Bharat...is that there is nothing Bharatiya about it... [T]here is no trace of ancient Bharatiya constitutional laws, institutions, nomenclature and phraseology in it".

Hindu Code Bill drafted by Ambedkar was a major step in efforts towards loosening the hold of patriarchy and striving for equality of women. The orthodox forces led by RSS frontally attacked it. Ramchandra Guha, the eminent historian of Modern India, writes, "The Sangh opposed the passage of the Hindu Code Bill that sought to give Hindu women the right to marry outside their caste, divorce their husband, and inherit property. In 1949, the RSS organised hundreds of meetings and protests across India to stop the bill, where sadhus and sants came to speak."

The constituent Assembly in its wisdom enunciated the provisions of reservation for SC and STs. Through word of mouth propaganda, these provisions were undermined and de-

famed leading to anti-Dalit violence in Gujarat in 1980-1981 and again in 1985. Similarly OBC reservation provision, Mandal Commission was indirectly opposed when Rath Yatras for Ram Temple were jacked up. Interestingly, RSS combine organised the Babri demolition on 6th December on the death Anniversary of Ambedkar, a tactical move to undermine the importance of this day for democratic values.

As far as the status of religious minorities was concerned Ambedkar was for providing full protective clauses for them. Though these clauses have not been implemented in full any time, the attempt to implement them is labeled as 'minority appeasement'. Babasaheb was for implementing the concept of Fraternity; on the contrary the politics of majoritarianism has spread hatred against minorities, leading to violence and polarisation of society.

The concept of Social democracy was an inalienable part of democracy as far as Ambedkar was concerned. He was for 'annihilation of caste'. RSS on contrary has founded "Samajik Samrasta Manch" (Social Harmony Forum). For RSS different castes were part of the whole giving the strength to Hindu society! In this lies the major opposition between the ideologies of these two streams. Attempt of Hindu majoritarian politics is to maintain the caste hierarchy in newer terminologies. While paying lip service to the Indian Constitution, its ideologues are arguing that India is a 'Civilisational state' (symbol for caste and gender hierarchical values in holy books like Manusmriti) for which the Constitution should be secondary!

Cleverly while being totally opposed to Ambedkar; 'RSS Combine' is paying lip service and now even quoting him. This is a clever ploy meant purely for electoral purposes. □□□

THE SECOND NAKBA

Palestine National Liberation Movement

Firas Sarhan

[Along with the Middle East, the world today is burning with anger over Israel's conflict with the Palestinian forces, seeking emancipation. Millions of people are taking to the streets to demand an immediate end to the war. The city of London, today, stands as an important location in the anti-war movement, witnessing protest marches and rallies almost every weekend. Expatriate communists residing in London remain hugely active in this political mobilization. The London resistance movement has drawn huge forces from countries where communist activities remain banned. Arka Bhaduri of Nagarik.net recently spoke with Firas Sarhan of the Palestinian People's Party. Excerpts:]

AB. I am grateful to you for giving the time, despite your busy schedule. Your state of emotional turmoil is fathomable when your loved ones are in unspeakable misery in Gaza and the West Bank. What is the condition in Palestine, at this moment? What is the state of the ongoing struggle and resistance?

FS. Thank you for inviting me in. We want to spread our word as far as possible. We urge the whole world to stand by our side, especially our distressed children, in the name of humanity. First and foremost, what I want to say is that the relation between Palestine and India has been longstanding. We have always known India to be our friend. I can still recall the names of former Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi and the Indian Communist leader, Jyoti Basu who stood firmly by our side. As far as I can remember, even Jawaharlal Nehru supported us in our early days. I know that the people from India, especially the Leftists and the anti-imperialists, hold deep respect for Palestine's national leader, Yasser Arafat. Through you, I want to express gratitude and thanks to the all the supporting Indian masses.

Arka, I am around 55, now. I

have travelled across the world, holding a repository of experiences. I don't call myself soft-hearted. Stood firmly as a part of the Intifada movement, I have learnt, over the years, that the struggle for independence is never a child's play. But, believe me, I had trouble sleeping for the last few weeks. Felt like a criminal. The whole world is witnessing that the children of Palestine are getting killed in thousands. The entire nation is being wiped out. Israel is trying to systematically wipe us out from the map of the world. Despite this continuing brutality, the first world remains silent. I am sorry. I stand corrected, they are actually sponsoring this genocide. Could you imagine, they have killed over four thousand children! Think about it! We all have lost our loved ones. Today, the persons I spoke to on the phone, I don't know if they will be alive tomorrow. But I want to make one thing clear: If they think they will liquidate the entire Palestinian nation by killing us, they are mistaken. We can't be so easily wiped out. We will fight. The resistance is ongoing. Not just in Gaza, but also in the West Bank, we are fighting.

AB. The West is putting the blame of the conflict on Hamas...

FS. Every act of mass violence

puts up an excuse to justify itself. Hamas is being used here in the same pattern. Firstly, thousands of children being killed, are they members of Hamas? Bombs are hitting hospitals, shelters are targeted, and thousands of civilians are losing their lives. Why? They are not members of Hamas. I am a member of the Palestinian People's Party, a crucial part of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. We do not support Hamas. There is a serious political opposition and conflict with Hamas within our organisation. However, those who are holding Hamas responsible for this violence are just trying to hide the historical motive behind this.

Do you think this conflict started on 7th October? Not at all. Year after year, Israel is carrying out severe attacks in the West Bank and Gaza. People are being killed like bird-hunting. Not only in Gaza, but also in the West Bank. If Hamas is the target today, then why are people being killed in the West Bank where there is no Hamas? Last year, in 2022, over two hundred people were killed in the West Bank alone. This year, nearly 200 people have already been killed. Gaza and the West Bank are practically open-air prisons with Israeli checkpoints at every turn. Every day, Palestinians have faced unchecked brutality over the years. Israel is illegally occupying our land with its armed and unlawful settlement colonies, disregarding international law. This barbarism has been going on for decades. Their goal is to occupy the entire Palestinian territory. As I told you, Gaza and the West Bank, which were once open-air prisons, have now

been transformed into open-air concentration camps. We are facing a second Nakba today.

AB. You were talking about your father earlier...

FS. Yes, I have heard about the first Nakba from my father. Without any consultation with us or the Arabs, they forcibly expelled hundreds of thousands of Arabs, took our lands and homes, and created a new country called Israel. Private extremist groups in Israel initiated violence, implementing what they called Plan D, whose primary purpose was to kill, destroy, and set homes on fire in Arab territories. They succeeded. Over seven hundred thousand Palestinians were forced to leave their homes. Just as I have heard the story of the first Nakba from my father, I am now a witness to the second Nakba with my son. Do you know that during the first Nakba, many who were compelled to leave their homes and go to refugee camps, are still stuck there? They have not been able to return. I deeply doubt Israel's claim that clearing northern Gaza to move the residents to southern Gaza is their real intention. What is their true motive? Will they allow anyone

to return to northern Gaza? I don't trust the Zionists. For decades, they have gradually taken over our land. The vast areas of the West Bank are under their control, and they disregard any international law. But, in the end, they will not win the battle.

AB. What is the future of this conflict?

FS. We are standing at a juncture. Surely, you know that a genuine agreement was reached at the beginning of the 1990s. Like the Palestinians, peaceful Jews also embraced that agreement with hope. However, Israel has gradually undermined that agreement with incursions and systematic abuses. In this situation, the next few weeks or months are crucial. Will we obtain a long-term peace agreement, one that will help the entire Middle East move forward? Or will we, the Palestinians, be obliged to endure this dreadful oppression? We will soon find answers to these questions within the next few months.

AB. What will you say about the role of international communities?

FS. The term 'international community' is quite interesting. It was coined after the fall of the

Soviet Union, used by Western imperialism to garner support against 'atrocities', portraying itself as the defender of the oppressed. Now, American imperialism and its allies are doing the same. But that is not the whole story. Across the globe, millions are marching for peace, realising this conflict didn't start on October 7th. It began 56 years ago in 1967 when Israel occupied Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. No, I am mistaken. The conflict predates that, starting 75 years ago in 1948 during the first Nakba when we became refugees. No, let me correct that again. Western imperialism initiated this conflict 106 years ago in 1917 with the Balfour Declaration, paving the way for the creation of Israel.

I can assure you that we will not be defeated in this battle. Our bloodshed would not be in vain. We are fighting on the foundation of our historical existence. Our struggle will spread from generation to generation. It's true that if the Soviet Union existed, we might have had an advantage in this struggle. But the fight will go on. □□□

[Source: Nagorik.net

Translated from Bengali by Olivia Banerjee]

KILLING CHILDREN

Cruelty and Compassion

Prem Singh

THE ONGOING SCENE OF the Palestine-Israel conflict seems like Brecht's epic theatre, where the tussle between human cruelty and human compassion is being staged at different locations across the world. In this epic scene one can easily find and understand that big towers of cruelty are standing with their heads raised on

all sides. But sprinkles of compassion, even if small, are also spread everywhere.

Since Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel, about 6,000 children have died in the Gaza Strip under a heavy and continuous bombardment done by Israel Defence Forces (IDF). A large number of children are said to be buried under the debris. Be-

fore this, in the Hamas attack, about 30 children were killed, about two dozen children became orphans and about 35 children were taken hostage. In Lebanon too, three children were reported killed in an Israeli attack. From Israel to America and Europe, there has been a lot of propaganda politics on the children killed in the Hamas attack. For example, the news of beheading of children by Hamas terrorists in the October 7 attack was carried in the Israeli media. US President Joe Biden had also repeated it. How-

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ever, that news turned out to be false. Israel's Foreign Minister showed videos and photographs of children brutally killed in the Hamas attack at a NATO meeting. This is also an aspect of cruelty that politics is being played on the murders of children in order to justify the killings of children, and to win the public opinion. On the other hand, people driven by compassion are shaken.

Although every life is precious and absolutely savable, killing children is a direct crime against nature. It is the children who later become adults; and good and bad too. Destroying a life before it can come to fruition cannot be justified by any logic. Neither the killings of children committed by Hamas, nor the killings continued by Israel in retaliation. It has been more than a month since the war. The Israeli government and military establishment are still justifying the killings of children. Its soldiers, who have entered Gaza after the ground attack, are saying that whoever is here (in Gaza) is their enemy. The nearly 100 UN staff killed so far also fall into the category of Israel's enemies. Israel's argument for adult citizens is the same for children—that children are used by Hamas as “human shields”.

The surprising thing is that while doing all this, Israel says that “its army is the most ethically moral army in the world”. It also claims that in the ongoing war Israel is “following the highest standards of international laws”. Where does it get the courage for such self-righteous claims would be a matter of contemplation? Countries supporting Israel and America are in their support with minor ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’.

Among the major powers, anti-American countries such as Russia, China, Iran and Turkey are not opposed to cruelty. Not even cruelty towards children. It is futile to appeal to them in favour of compas-

sion by citing the murders of children. The records of their own countries regarding civil rights and liberties are not hidden. Their attitude towards the prescribed international rules and regulations is also similar to that of Israel and other powerful countries.

For one thing the spread of cruelty is not limited to Israel and its supporting countries. Organisations and countries who support Hamas cite the killings of children in Gaza as a reason for a ceasefire. But they do not do this out of true concern. Just as Israel does not feel pain about Palestinian children, similarly Hamas supporters do not regret the killings of Israeli children. Hezbollah is often mentioned among the staunch supporters of Hamas. Hezbollah Chief Hassan Nasrallah did not say anything about the Hamas attack and Israel's war for almost a month. In his highly publicised one-hour-twenty-minute speech on November 3, he described the October 7 attack as “heroic, great and grand”. He described the killings of “so-called innocent civilians” (including children) killed in Hamas attacks as the work of the Israeli army acting in “fury, insanity and confusion”. On the killings of children in Gaza, he said that the children are martyring; and they will go straight to heaven. His overall message in this regard was that the children in Gaza are being martyred on the altar of Islam; so there is no reason to get unnecessarily moved. Hezbollah's deputy chief Naim Qassem said in a statement that the killings of children in Gaza would unite all Palestinians. That means all Palestinians will unite behind Hamas; not for the freedom of Palestine, but for the glory of Islam!

Nasrallah, in his speech, warned all Arab Muslims that Israel is a “brutal and murderous entity” for them. The campaign to erase its

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existence forever started on 7 October. All these statements of his are similar to the statements of Zionist Israeli leaders, military officers and civilians. For both sides, religion and race are greater than human dignity and freedom. With such a mind-set how could there be a space for compassion for the killed children! However, people angry at Nasrallah for not declaring immediate war against Israel threw shoes at his picture on TV. Nasrallah again had to give a statement and give a strong threat of war to Israel and America.

Mustafa Barghouti, Secretary General of the Palestinian National Initiative and member of the Palestine Legislative Assembly, who lives in the West Bank, is a medical doctor by profession. He believes in non-violence. He has probably given the

maximum number of interviews to the press on the issue. He would not be ready to talk about the Hamas October 7 attacks as an isolated incident. He would rather insist that the October 7 attack should be seen as a reaction to Israel's repeated misdeeds over the past 75 years, that is, keeping the entire context in mind. He insists that Palestinians are facing "genocide, mass punishment and ethnic cleansing" perpetrated by Israel; as long as Palestinians are not considered oppressed and Israel is considered oppressor, the true perspective of the issue cannot emerge. His interview given to Sky News channel mainly focused on the killings of children. Dr Barghouti considers America not only complicit in the ongoing child killings in Gaza, but a direct participant. Barghouti, who

considers Israeli Zionism to be the root of the entire problem, says nothing about Hamas' involvement in the murders of children in Israel or in Gaza!

In many countries of the world, spontaneous marches/movements of concerned citizens are taking place protesting the killings of children. Countless citizens from all over the world are united with them. These are the citizens who do not view the killings of children—whether in Ukraine, Israel, Gaza or anywhere else in the world—through the lens of religion or race. Rather they look at it from the perspective of human compassion. □□□

(The writer associated with the socialist movement is a former teacher of Delhi University and a fellow of Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla)

BENEGAL'S FILM

'Mujib: The Making of a Nation'

Deepa Gahlot

IN RECENT YEARS, FILM-MAKERS in search of patriotic content have made films and series about the 1971 War, which resulted in the separation of East Pakistan from West Pakistan and the formation of Bangladesh, with the support of India under Indira Gandhi's reign (Sam Bahadur is coming up soon).

But there have been very few films showing the other side of the story, from the point of view of the Bangladeshis.

India had been partitioned on the basis of religion; Punjabi Pakistan was culturally, politically and economically far removed from Bengali Pakistan. There was bound to be discontent when an entire population felt ignored by its government and treated like second-class citizens.

A situation like this is ripe for a charismatic leader to step into the void and speak for the aspirations of

his people, and for East Pakistan, that was Sheikh Mujibur Rehman.

It has taken a long time for his biopic, maybe because when a beloved leader is portrayed on film, there is invariably more indignation than admiration.

There was an animation film Mujib Bhai released earlier this year, but when the governments of the two countries collaborate and the task for bringing the story of Rahman and Bangladesh is taken up by Shyam Benegal, expectations are high.

The title Mujib: The Making Of A Nation, suggests more than just a biopic of Rahman.

1971 is not that far back in time for many viewers not to remember the suffering of the people of the country, the guerilla warfare of Mukti Bahini-facing Pakistani weapons and tanks, the influx of refugees across

the border into India, for which Indians were taxed.

There is fire, brimstone, injustice, rage and tragedy in the story and what the film turns out to be is a dispassionate look at the life of Mujib.

Maybe it was all too much to fit into a 178-minute film, and the viewer feels shortchanged.

The film is more like reading edited pages from a history book -- Mujib's (played by Arifin Shuvoo) life, his political apprenticeship under the charismatic Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy (Tauquir Ahmed), his happy marriage to Begum 'Renu' Fazilatunnesa (Nusrat Omrose Tisha), who is the narrator of the film, and the birth of his children (His daughter Sheikh Hasina is the prime minister of Bangladesh).

A young Mujib demanded the recognition of Bangla as the national language when Jinnah imposed Urdu that led to prolonged periods of incarceration.

The oppression and economic hardship of the people is hardly conveyed.

Mujib's popularity threatened the leaders of Pakistan, and even when his party swept the elections, he was told by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto that a Bengali would never be accepted as the prime minister of Pakistan.

It is much later in the film that Mujib puts forward his six-point agenda, which led to brutal and violent reprisals by the Pakistani army.

However, the impact of the Mukti Bahini, the involvement of India (Indira Gandhi is seen in a television interview) and the large scale dis-

placement and the poor is not given due importance.

The other people around Mujib are not even properly introduced—all they seem to do is sit around having stilted discussions or making speeches.

The way Mujib and his family (barring Hasina and Rehana who were abroad) were massacred was a shocking tragedy but one did not expect a film-maker of Benegal's stature to have the camera slowly pan over the body and the blood-

soaked bodies of his wife, children and grandchildren.

Arifin Shuvoo looks like Mujib, and dominates the rest of the cast, none of whom really stand out.

Mujib: The Making Of A Nation may be a source of information for a generation that is unaware of recent history but probably having to mind the many restrictions in the interest of staying non-controversial, has made the film dry and boring. □□□

[Source: Rediff News]

REPORT

Forum against Fascism

Shatabdi Das

BENGAL AGAINST FASCIST RSS-BJP is a civil society platform that was formed through a mass convention on 4th January, 2021, when the apprehension of the BJP taking over the power in the Vidhan Sabha in West Bengal, was looming large, or at least seemed so, courtesy to the paid news channels. The platform actively took part in anti-RSS as well as anti-BJP awareness campaigns throughout the state in the following months, which, according to veteran politicians of the CPIM, Congress, BJP itself and TMC (the ruling party) played a significant role in shaping the defeat of BJP. The campaign, however, was trolled throughout for 'conspiring' to make the win smooth for TMC, especially by the Bengal brigade of CPIM, who wanted the platform to campaign only with the slogan 'Vote for Left'. However, following the consensus of the convention dated 4.1.2021, the platform raised 'No Vote to BJP' slogan instead. The motto was to mobilise the masses to vote for anyone other than the BJP. The following programmes were based on the common minimum

principle that all the parliamentary parties, when in power, take part in corruption and other malpractices. Some even become tyrannous. But the Bharatiya Janata Party, with RSS as its anchor, is different from all these parties, not quantitatively, but qualitatively. It is an extremist Hinduist group, leaning towards Fascism, and abides by a rigid set of principles, which are the polar opposites of the secular spirit and the constitutional values of equality. They want a 'Hindu Rashtra' instead of the secular, socialist, democratic republic that people are promised in the Constitution.

Even after the 2021 election, the platform continued its anti-BJP, anti-RSS awareness campaigns. As a part of this continual campaigning, the third mass convention was organised at Moulali Youth Centre on 12th January, 2023 from 3-7 pm with demands of repealing UAPA and other sedition acts, releasing Umar Khalid, Gulfisha Fatima, Khalid Saifi and others jailed in Delhi riots conspiracy case under sedition act/s. Apart from Sujato Bhadra, the conveners' representative and eminent human rights ac-

tivist, three other invited speakers shared their thoughts, all of whom came from outside Bengal. Local leaders of various women's and labour organisations also delivered their short speeches in the second half. The convention was conducted by three conveners, Kushal Debnath, Satabdi Das and Ashok Mukhopadhyay, while another convener, Ashiskusum Ghosh, read out the proposed resolution.

The convention strongly opined that Umar Khalid, though acquitted from the stone pelting and arson cases linked to the 2020 Delhi 'Riot', is still behind the bar, as are others for more than three years, proving the Islamophobia of the present Government. When protests against CAA-NRS was gaining momentum, the 'riot' was shrewdly manoeuvred by the ruling party itself to thwart the ongoing protest, while the leaders of the protest movements were put behind the bar with false allegations of instigating it. Like the Bhima Koregaon case, where sixteen activists were put behind the bar in 2018, the cases against the protesters at Shaheen Bagh were based on manipulated evidence and predetermined ideas. Paying homage to Stan Swamy who was allowed to die under judicial custody on July 5, 2021 and noting with deep shame that no one was even booked, let

alone punished, for this, this convention sharply criticised the facts that the Supreme Court in an unprecedented manner had suspended Bombay High Court's verdict regarding the acquittal of the paraplegic professor G N Saibaba (October 14, 2022) and that Arundhati Roy, the author, is being threatened with a possibility of arrest. The sedition laws, UAPA and others, are even worse than the colonial Rowlatt Act. As per latest data provided by the PUCL, more than 8000 arrests were made under UAPA between 2015 and 2020. These laws are being used by the ruling government at the centre and various state governments to silence the political dissent and thereby replacing democracy by elected autocracy. The convention registered its strong protest against the recent attack on journalists and founders of a media group, NewsClick, on the flimsy ground of a report published in New York Times and demanded immediate unconditional release of the two journalists. The convention noted that the three Bills (Nyaya Samhita), tabled towards the end of the monsoon session of the parliament, with the so-called claim to replace "punishment" with "justice", actually aim to restrict the basic freedom and fair trial system in the name of public order and national security. Recounting the recent experiences of the mysterious administrative procedure of the justice system and the dangerous emergence of inquisitional jurisprudence and analysing onerous bail conditions to the accused in UAPA cases,

the convention expressed concern over the demise of judiciary and fearless judgement.

The convention demanded the followings:

1. Release Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam, Khalid Shahidi, Gulfisha Fatima and others immediately.
2. Repeal UAPA.
3. Release immediately and unconditionally all political prisoners all over India.
4. All bail conditions must be reasonable and just and fair.
5. Roll back three Bills relating to the criminal justice system.
6. Repeal all other draconian laws including AFSPA.
7. Release all poor, long-term-serving prisoners from jails in compliance to the appeal (2022) of Droupadi Murmu, the honourable President of India.

Among the speakers, Mihir Desai, the human rights advocate from Mumbai High Court, the co-founder with Colin Gonsalves of Indian People's Tribunal, informed about the directive sent to all the High Courts that the treatment of under-trial prisoners would be based on what the prosecution wanted and not on the merit of the case. This indirectly means that jail and not bail would be the priority. He said that 93% of ED cases are fake. 67% percent of UAPA cases have no merit. All codes of NIA are arranged in such a way that the centre will not need to consult the state even before thrusting UAPA on an individuals. Talking about UAPA, he said, 'After Bhima Koregaon in Maharashtra, CPIM activists also came to fight against UAPA, but even they charge people with UAPA in Kerala. No ruler wants to scrap it.' It may be mentioned that TMC also charges protesters with UAPA in this state. He also said that the 'People's Money Laundering Act', too, is a tool to choke the opposition.

That the use of UAPA had increased manifold during the BJP regime and that the practice of 'planting evidence' was something new. e.g-the 'evidence' was planted in the laptops of Stan Swamy and others through malware. He discussed how the three new bills of the proposed Nyaya Samhita were designed to be the worst tools of curbing freedom of speech and expression and will bring sedition under IPC.

The renowned journalist and economist, Paranjoy Guhathakurta narrated his ordeal as the consultant of NewsClick when the channel's offices were going through raids. He was asked whether he covered the peasants' movement and Muslim slaughters during Delhi riots. Every penny he has received from NewsClick is accounted for and shown in the IT return file, Paranjoy Guha Thakurta reported. He opined that the media, unfortunately, has forgotten its duty and is acting rather like the central Government's very own ad agencies.

Nadeem Khan, the National Secretary of APCR (Association for Protection of Civil Rights) and founder of United against Hate, a friend of Umar Khalid and Khalid Saifi, was also invited. He, himself an 'accused' in twelve odd cases, requested to show 'a little bit of commonsense'. 'Let's put aside differences and fight against the BJP unitedly, because if the BJP comes to power again and again, there will be no room even for expressing points of view, let alone arguing over subtle differences', he said. Reports of APCR's activities, surveys on butchery and oppressions of Muslims and Christians were also presented, among which the recent one was on the Nuh riots.

Finally, Kushal Debnath, the veteran convener, summed up the discussion. With the consent of the audience, the aforementioned sevenfold resolutions were passed. □□□

For Frontier Contact

DHYANBINDU
COLLEGE SQUARE

REVIEW ARTICLE

One Bikraman Nair

Nityananda Ghosh

READING MANAS BHATTACHARYA'S* 'Naiarda'r Katha' [The Tale of Naiarda i.e. Bikraman Nair, in Bengali], is very interesting to recollect and reflect on the world around Nair, a popular journalist in a Calcutta-based daily. The writer has shared many events of Nair's life during his 30 years of journalistic journey in a light mood. Nair hailed from Kerala but he actually made Bengal his home while learning Bengali seriously and integrating himself with Bengali cultural milieu.

The writer has shared so many anecdotes in this well-readable book containing 174 pages! Once the writer went to Nair's mess at 69, Ripon Street, along with Jyotida--Jyoti Chattopadhyay. Jyoti went there to collect party levy from Nair. The first encounter with Nair for Manas was not pleasant. As he was a stranger Nair became furious and rebuked Jyoti at length because those were the days when naxalite movement was picking up. Perhaps Nair didn't like the idea of disclosing his revolutionary political identity to an unknown person. Few days later Nair inquired about Manas and asked Jyoti to bring him to his residence. Hearing the incident Pradip Chatterjee, another party whole-timer, consoled Manas and asked him to meet Nair again. Nair was actually a very soft person. But apparently he looked tough. The time was April 1976. Manas Bhattacharya's second encounter with Nair was nice. And he became a close associate of him in no time. Their bond or friendship whatever one may call it remained solid for the next 30 years. Nair engaged

***NAIRDAR KATHA**
Aksharik Publication
19/2, Radhanath Mullick Lane
Kolkata-700012
Price: Rs 250

Manas as a typist to type the manuscript of Asit Sen, a naxalite leader who announced the formation of CPI-ML at the Saheed Minar Maidan meeting. Sen presided the meeting but tragically enough he had no prior knowledge about the party formation. Meanwhile, Nair arranged a meeting of Manas with Samar Sen at 61, Mott Lane and soon he began to work as an office assistant of Frontier, the magazine Samar Sen launched in 1968. Finally, Manas joined the *Telegraph*.

Nair's life is full of colourful events. After passing intermediate from Maharaja College of Ernakulam in Kerala he was admitted to BA in Biswabharati of Santiniketan at the initiative of one of his teachers G Shankar Kurap, a Gyanpeeth awardee for his poems. In truth Santiniketan was the turning point in his life. He learned Bengali with precision and became a part of Bengali art and cultural milieu in Kolkata.

After passing BA from Biswabharati Nair joined a school in a remote village near Silchar in Assam. But after sometime he returned to Kolkata and started studying MA in English in Jadavpur University. Once he met Samar Sen who was then working in the Ananda Bazar group's English daily *Hindusthan Standard*. As he was jobless Samar Babu asked him to join *Hindusthan Standard* and Nair gladly accepted the offer. Surprisingly enough, after Nair's joining

Samar Sen within a few days resigned from *Hindusthan Standard* because of a dispute with the management over the publication of a controversial news item on communalism. Nair finally moved to Ananda Bazar house's business daily *-Business Standard*.

Bikraman Nair was the only son of Kartayani Ponnama and Gopalan Nair, born in a tiny village named Aanakutty under Aleppy district of Kerala on 9th August 1936. Since his childhood he was a voracious reader. At his early age his father left home forever to join Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's INA. He was brought up by his grand-father and grand-mother. Professionally his father was a lawyer.

Nair had to pass through many bone-chilling moments when death narrowly missed him. Nair once interacted with Bhenkitesh Ramakrishna, the Nobel laureate NRI and during discussion he said he overcame hard times of his life by reading literature. Nair felt magic realism in real life too. Detective writings were his special area of interest. George Simone was one of his favourite writers. Once he visited the place where the great Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay wrote his 'epic' ANANDAMATH at Joynagar in the district of 24-Parganas. Nair stayed at the two-storied old building with whirling stairs for a night to grasp the environment in which Bankim wrote that historic novel.

He maintained good relations with everyone. He had no enemies. He was a great admirer of veteran journalist Sankar Ray, a regular contributor to Frontier. Manas has written this book in a very lucid manner and readers cannot stop without finishing the story of a journalist who was also a political activist in those turbulent days of the 1970s. □□□

POLICING THE MEDIA

Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill

CJP

THE PRESS AND REGISTRATION OF PERIODICALS BILL, 2023 was passed in Rajya Sabha on August 3, 2023. This law aims to modernise and streamline the registration process for periodicals in India. The law seeks to replace the Press and Registration of Books Act 1867, which was a colonial-era law that was no longer considered to be fit for the purpose. The 1867 act was brought by the British with a view to curb free speech, which should not be surprising.

Newspapers, despite the “digital dawn”, still serve a large population. Any law regarding newspapers and other periodicals is one that impacts freedom of speech and hence it is critical to understand all implications of such a law.

Newspaper means a periodical of loose folded sheets usually printed on newsprint and brought out daily or at least once in a week containing information on current events, public news or comments on public news.

Periodical is defined as any publication including a newspaper published or printed at regular intervals containing public news or comments on public news but it does not include a book art journal of scientific technical or academic in nature. This means that essentially newspapers or any such content which comes at regular intervals and has content related to developments which are not scientific are covered. This implies all political, legal, social, or economic periodicals.

Publication means newspapers, magazines, journals, or newsletters printed periodically and published in India but does not include the reproduction of all these materials in electronic form.

The act states that the publishers have to present an online application to the Press Registrar General and also to the authority of the local jurisdiction. The application should contain the title of the periodical.

The local authority would furnish its no-objection consent or further comments to the Press Registrar General within 60 days. This local authority consent is not required by periodicals proposed by the government, Central or State, or any other authority under such government. The Registrar General can/may either accept or refuse to grant a registration certificate.

If the registration was obtained on false representation or concealment of any material fact or if the publisher has failed to publish the periodical continuously or if the publisher has given a false particular in the annual report to the presenter general or if the publisher has failed to furnish the annual statement the Registrar General may suspend the certificate of registration for a period of not less than 30 days but also not exceeding 180 days i.e., the period that the Press Registrar General could suspend certificate of registration for, is between 1 and 6 months.

Apart from this, the Press Registrar General can also cancel the certification if the owner or publisher of such periodical has been convicted by any court for an offence involving terrorist act or unlawful activity or for having done anything against the security of the state.

- For publishing periodical without obtaining a Certificate of Registration- A fine of amount not

exceeding 5 Lakh with a direction to cease the publication has been included.

- If the publication is not ceased within 6 months of issuing the direction-Imprisonment for a term that could extend to 6 months.
- For failing to furnish the annual statement within one year from the end of the financial year in respect of which the financial statement had to be submitted –A fine between Rupees 10-20,000 for the first default, and twice the quantum for every such default not exceeding Rupees two lakh rupees.

For the decisions made by the Press Registrar General of India, there shall be an Appellate Board, consisting of the Chairperson of the Press Council of India, two members to be nominated by the Press Council of India from among its members. The time-period within which the appeal has to be filed is 60 days.

The bill also states that the central government’s permission has to be taken to publish any foreign periodical in India.

While the one step registration process is a positive element of the ease of registering one’s periodical, the issue seems to be from the wide and expansive powers that have been given to the Press Registrar General with respect to the cancellation of the certification of periodicals.

Since the Press Registrar General can give the power to any central government gazetted officer to conduct his function with respect to verification of circulation, this would also mean that the central government officer could be allowed to enter the premises of the periodical’s management building.

This is seriously concerning since the police also could be used for this purpose. Why is the police being used

for this purpose? The concern is because of the consistent friction between journalists who are, in a way representatives, of the free democracy and also the Police who are representatives of the state and the repression it causes from time to time.

More importantly the definition of when the Registrar General can cancel or suspend the registration of certain periodical is vague.

The first part of the reason is that if the periodicals owner or publisher is convicted by any court any unlawful or terrorist act under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) then the registrar may suo moto suspend the registration certificate. As much as draconian UAPA is, it is a surprise that this is not the vague part.

.Now, it is not clear as to which offences could be categorised as of-

fences against the security of the state and central government will obviously have further power to notify those offences to which will be coming under the term 'offences against the security of the state' thus allowing for administration an expansive power in the matter of curbing freedom of speech and expression.

□□□

LETTERS

Forced Conversion

Pastor Jose Papachen and his wife Sheeja were arrested in January 2023 in Uttar Pradesh, Their supposed crime? Giving Bibles to people. A complaint was filed with the police, accusing them of alluring people belonging to the Scheduled Caste and tribal communities into converting to Christianity.

Uttar Pradesh is one of twelve Indian states that have passed anti-conversion laws, and there have been calls for a nationwide anti-conversion law. In theory, these laws stop Hindus being forced or bribed to convert to other faiths. In practice, these laws are often abused to target and harass Christians and other religious minorities, or even to settle personal scores. There has been a steady rise in false accusations that Christians are trying to forcibly convert people from other faith backgrounds. There is no equivalent law about people being converted to Hinduism.

Pastor Jose and Sheeja were initially denied bail in March this year. On appeal, however, the Allahabad court in the southern city of Prayagraj said the couple could be instantly released and were not guilty of any crime.

Uttar Pradesh's anti-conversion law prohibits any attempt to force someone to convert to another religion (than Hinduism) through misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or by fraudulent

means. The appeal court affirmed that Pastor Jose and Sheeja were not going any of these things.

A Reader, UP

'All of Palestine is Under Attack'

For people around the world, it's impossible to imagine the scale of death and destruction in Gaza.

In just two weeks, the Israeli military has killed over 5,000 Palestinians in Gaza. Israeli warplanes have flattened entire neighbourhoods. Shell-shocked children are left to search for their parents under the rubble. Millions of Palestinians have once again been made refugees, bombed as they tried to flee. Surgeons are operating by the light of their cell phones, increasingly without anesthesia. This is genocide. This isn't a war on Hamas. It's a war on the Palestinian people.

While international attention is focused on Gaza, the Israeli government and extremist settler groups are taking the opportunity to accelerate the ongoing ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in the West Bank.

Israeli settlers are being armed by the Israeli state, and have become indistinguishable from Israeli soldiers. Both abuse Palestinians with impunity.

On October 12, as the last villagers of Wadi al-Seeq left their homes, driven out by ongoing settler terror, a group of Israeli "soldiers-settlers"—some dressed in military uniform and

some in civilian clothing—took three Palestinian men captive.

For hours, the men were tortured: They beat them, forced them to strip down to their underwear, handcuffed and blindfolded them, urinated on them, extinguished cigarettes on their bodies, and attempted to sexually assault one of them.

Settlers have carried out dozens of attacks, setting Palestinian homes on fire, destroying their property, and shooting at them with live ammunition.

Over 90 Palestinians in the West Bank, including 26 children, have been murdered by the Israeli military and settlers since October 7.

They include 16-year-old Mohammad Rafat Mohammad Edwan, who was throwing stones at Israeli soldiers when he was shot with live ammunition. The bullet lodged itself in his lung, and four days later, on October 14, he was dead.

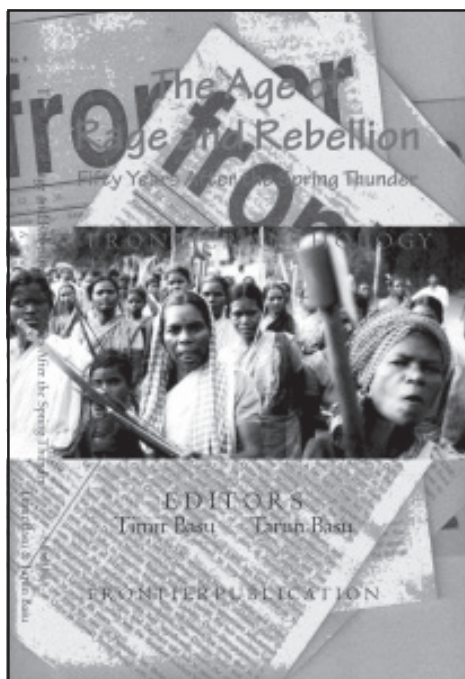
On October 12, 62-year-old Ibrahim Wadi and his son, 24-year-old Ahmad Wadi, were killed when Israeli settlers opened fire on the funeral procession of four Palestinians who had been murdered the previous day — three by Israeli settlers and one by an Israeli soldier.

And on October 19, 11-year-old Yousef Mohammad Omar Zaghdad was killed when the Israeli military fired a missile at a group of civilians inside Noor Shams refugee camp. Three other children were killed in the attack.

Assel Al Bajeh, The Wire

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