

frontier

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So Many Palestinian Prisoners

THE HAMAS ATTACKS ON ISRAEL ON OCTOBER 7 HAVE shifted the global attention back to the Palestine-Israel issue. As we go to press the hostage-for-prisoner swap has been stopped by Israel after the expiry of extended 'humanitarian pause' on November 30. Israel has been under international pressure to agree to some agreement, and the Netanyahu "unity" government has felt the heat, for seeming to disregard the hostage. Internal discontent against Netanyahu is rising. Thousands of demonstrators are rallying in Tel Aviv to keep pressure on their government to secure the release of hostages. As the cease-fire lasts longer than original time-frame, Hamas which controlled all of Gaza until Israel invaded it, would have more time to regroup. The same is true of the Israeli Defence Forces-IDF. Now the cease-fire is over and Israel is all set to start its military campaign, this time in South Gaza.

Meanwhile, some Israeli hostages have been released in exchange of Palestinian prisoners languishing in jails of Israel for years. The fate of the remaining hostages is still unclear. What is clear is that the war will continue after the brief cease-fire. The so-called humanitarian pause allowed both sides to prepare further for the fighting. As usual both sides have claimed victory. Surprisingly Netanyahu visited Gaza strip to encourage his soldiers who are camping in prime locations, including Gaza University. It is also a message to the world that he is in charge despite his shaky presence in domestic politics.

For one thing this was not the first time that Israel engaged itself in hostage exchanges. They resorted to this kind of practice many times before and thousands of Palestinian prisoners have been released as a result of such settlements over the years. In 2011, 1,027 Palestinians were let out of prison in exchange for one Israeli soldier held hostage by Hamas. This diplomatic culture is not unique to Israel only. Even in America, whatever they say about hostage crisis at the start, it almost always ends in paying the captors' ransom—be it agreeing to a prisoner swap or releasing a large sum of money. Tel Aviv knows hostage crisis may recur anytime and hostage deal will always involve release of prisoners. It is one reason so many Palestinians are always detained illegally in the West Bank or what the Israelis call Samaria.

Before October 7, the number of Palestinians held by Israel under administrative detention was already at a 20-year high. According to the Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem, there were 1,310 Palestinians

imprisoned without charge or trial at the end of September, including at least 146 minors. Since then, Israel has dramatically increased its use of administrative detention, pushing the number of detainees to over 2,000 within the first four weeks of the war. This is out of a total of roughly 7,000 Palestinian prisoners at the moment. Then thousands of others are serving sentences because unlike administrative detainees, they actually were charged with a crime and convicted.

This administrative detention by Israel is illegal. They do it under the

pretext of security concern. In reality they create an excuse to prosecute people of their fundamental rights and freedoms because they challenge the Israeli military occupation. In a sense administrative detainees are political prisoners but the Israeli authorities treat them as criminals.

West Bank is not part of Israel's sovereign territory and therefore subject to military laws that restrict people's civil rights. The detainees from the West Bank can appeal their detention orders but very few appeals succeed because neither the detainees nor their

lawyers are told what evidence Israel has against them. Many young men and children are in detention for throwing stones. Even a Facebook post may invite imprisonment.

Now the cease-fire agreement between Hamas and Israel for a short period was surely a welcome break in a barbaric war. Not least, it permitted UN-sponsored food and fuel to enter a devastated Gaza. The hostage diplomacy, however, doesn't make the region or the world much closer to a lasting peace. □□□

29-11-2023

COMMENT

Patnaik's Fiefdom—Odisha Today

THE CLASSICAL ODIA LITERATURE, art, architecture, stone carvings, and its historical and cultural heritage, along with distinct philosophical musings, stand as testaments to Odia renaissance of the state, society, and polity in Odisha. The internationalist outlook is embedded within its easy-going and laid-back attitude towards everyday life. Resilience and determination define the Odia renaissance, where the acceptance of the 'other' as its 'own' delineates its unique cultural heritage and legacies. In spite of its caste-class based feudal-cliental political landscape, the progressive Odia ethos has survived all onslaughts of history, both past and present. However, contemporary Odisha appears to be a 'politics-free zone', where technocratic interventions have buried the political processes aimed at deepening democracy and empowering its citizens for progressive transformation toward social, political, and economic equality in the state.

Under the leadership of Mr Naveen Patnaik, the state of Odisha displays the growth of a bureaucratic culture of 'anti-politics machines', reinforcing existing reaction-

ary power structures, exacerbating all forms of inequalities, and undermining local political processes. The political landscape also exhibits over-centralisation of power, creating conditions of tyranny and undermining decentralised democracy in the state. The hyperactive bureaucracy under centralised leadership functions as a tool to bypass, marginalise, and weaken democratic institutions and structures of governance. This is against the ideals of progressive political, social, and economic transformation of the state.

Mr Naveen Patnaik and his government had a great opportunity to transform the state within the last twenty-three years of governance. However, his government has utterly failed to deepen democracy, transform Odia society, and realise the promises of Odia renaissance by overly relying on bureaucrats. He is centrally responsible for undermining local political processes and outsourcing empowerment to 'Self-Help Groups (SHGs)'. Political transformation appears elusive in rural areas, and hospitals, schools, colleges, and universities in the state seem to be in a debilitating condi-

tion. Progressive politics involves bringing people and their lived experiences to frame policies and programmes, empowering them as shareholders of a democratic state. Mr Naveen Patnaik has failed to transform the state due to his disconnected bureaucratic politics. The propaganda of progress and modernisation can mask the underlying power dynamics that shape political transformation based on the ideals of Odia renaissance.

Progressive politics not only articulates the needs and aspirations of the masses but also materialises them for an egalitarian transformation. Mr Patnaik and his government have failed to articulate such an agenda in the last twenty-three years of his leadership and governance. Despite all his promises, the agenda for social justice and equity looks gloomy in the state. By hobnobbing with Hindutva politics, Mr Patnaik has helped the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to strengthen its organisational base in Odisha and weaken the politics of social justice. The depoliticised political environment is a fertile ground for the Rashtriyaswayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) to grow. The RSS has entered into every nook and cranny of the state. Mr Patnaik's political art of equidistance is anything but politics

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of opportunism disguised as neutrality that is suitable for the BJP at the centre.

The twenty-three years of depoliticisation in Odisha under Mr Patnaik have not only weakened its political processes but also under-

mined accountability and transparency in governance.

The death of political opposition and engagement, and the rise of a depoliticised bureaucratic culture are twin achievements of Mr Patnaik's leadership. □□□ [Contributed]

NOTE

COP 28—New Approach Needed

Bharat Dogra writes:

THERE IS INCREASING TALK now of geo-engineering solutions which may end up doing more harm than good. 'Solutions' which come up in the form of several big nuclear power projects or large dams to meet energy needs are also likely to be very problematic in their own way.

This is really not a question of technical fixes mainly, but of changing life patterns and basic human thinking and values. When such a serious situation emerges that the basic life nurturing conditions of the planet are seriously endangered by human-made factors, then this is really a way of earth and nature to tell people that the way in which humanity has been living is not sustainable at all, the thinking and values behind it are highly distorted and it has to change in very basic ways in order to protect the highly diverse and beautiful life on earth.

Such important considerations are entirely ignored by those who are used only to thinking in terms of technical fixes and perhaps are only trained to think in such narrow terms.

However the time has clearly come for a paradigm shift in examining the climate crisis and its solutions. The most basic reality of nearly a dozen serious environmental problems led by climate change is that these together threaten the essential life-nurturing conditions of the planet. The same threat of disrupting life-

nurturing conditions has been created by the accumulation and continuing pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, currently led by but not confined to nuclear weapons. The challenge today is to protect life-nurturing conditions of the planet from any and all sources that threaten them. Unless such a broad and integrated view is taken, no real success can be assured. Even assuming that there are highly successful efforts to check climate change for three decades, the entire achievement can be destroyed by just three days or perhaps just three hours of exchange of nuclear weapons.

Hence it is strongly recommended here that the international summits on climate change should be changed instead into international summits for protecting the basic life-nurturing conditions of the planet.

Moreover the basic causes of environment destruction on the one hand and war and violence on the other hand are rooted in the related instincts of greed and dominance. The prevailing human values in turn promote these instincts in many ways, increasingly so. The desirability of these widely spread human values and instincts must be checked in many creative ways at the level of families, communities, educational institutions etc. There should be increasing acceptance of values of equality, justice, social harmony, voluntary simplicity, social harmony,

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cooperation, improved social relationships, community life and seeking happiness in helping others.

Emphasis on these social values helps to create a society which will extend mass support to the agenda of peace and environment protection which is essential for protection of life-nurturing conditions.

Equality and justice in world are increasingly needed as additional carbon constraints or GHG constraints place new and additional limits on the capacity of industrial systems. With these limits, industrial and farming systems must give increasing priority to first meeting the basic needs of all people of the world. This cannot be achieved without much higher commitment to planning based on justice and equality. Hence, as this writer has persistently argued, there is a clear need for linking adequate reduction of GHG emissions with the production of adequate goods and services to meet the basic needs of all people as a top priority.

Once the agenda of checking climate change and checking all threats to life-nurturing conditions is

re-defined to include urgent concerns of the masses of poorer people (such as their basic needs being protected), then their support for such efforts will be very strong and sustained, and it is above all such support of people which is most

needed for resolving these issues.

Just one decade of very sincere worldwide effort can prove to be a big game-changer. It is with this hope that this writer has been pleading for the UN to declare the next decade as the decade for saving

earth, when the world will learn in various ways, in schools and colleges, in families and communities, to give the highest priority to saving the life-nurturing conditions of earth within a framework of justice, peace and democracy. □□□

CONSTITUTION DAY

Revisiting Ambedkar's Democratic Legacy

Dipankar Bhattacharya

IT WAS THE MODI GOVERNMENT which in 2015 started observing 26 November as the Constitution Day in memory of the adoption of the Constitution on 26 November 1949. It keeps reminding people that the epithets 'socialist' and 'secular' were inserted in the Preamble through a subsequent amendment and continues to propagate and pit the original version against the current version. After shifting Parliament to the new building, it promptly named the earlier building as the Constitution Bhawan. And in his latest RSS foundation day address, Mohan Bhagwat asked his audience to read Ambedkar's addresses at the Constituent Assembly. Indeed, now that the Constitution of India is facing this combination of a renewed attack reminiscent of the rightwing conservative reaction during its formative phase and early years and simultaneous attempts to appropriate and misrepresent it, it is instructive to revisit Ambedkar's enunciation and explanation of the fundamental constitutional principles and perspective.

Apart from Ambedkar's historic address of 4 November 1948 while presenting the draft constitution before the Constituent Assembly and the one delivered a year later on 25 November 1949 at the time of adoption of the final text of the Constitution one should also revisit "States and Minorities", the memorandum

that Ambedkar had prepared for submission to the Constituent Assembly on behalf of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation. The latter states a blueprint of the kind of constitution that Ambedkar actually wanted and which informed his vision while discharging his role as chairman of the drafting committee of the Constituent Assembly. Ambedkar was pleasantly surprised to have been elected the chairman of the drafting committee and he shouldered that heavy responsibility by presenting the draft at the seventh session of the Constituent Assembly (4 November, 1948 – 8 January, 1949) and finalising it by the eleventh and concluding session (14-26 November, 1949).

In his 4 November, 1948 address presenting the draft constitution, Ambedkar discussed the special features of the Indian constitution and answered the criticisms then being levelled against it. He began with a discussion on the form of government preferred and prescribed in the draft—parliamentary democracy as opposed to a presidential system. Ambedkar argued that a democratic executive must satisfy two conditions—stability and responsibility, adding that "unfortunately it has not been possible to devise a system which can ensure both in equal degree". He then said that the draft considered responsibility (accountability) more important than stability in the Indian

context and hence the conscious preference for a parliamentary system. The executive in a parliamentary system, Ambedkar emphasised, is subject to both daily and periodic accountability—daily accountability to Parliament and other institutions through parliamentary procedures and other norms of democratic functioning and periodic accountability to the people through elections. If an executive loses majority support between two elections, it has to quit office and face the people.

This defining feature of the Indian Constitution, this fundamental premise of Indian democracy as explained by Ambedkar in his address, is now being daily overturned through the relentless centralisation of power in the hands of the PMO and now through the move towards 'one nation, one election' which will effectively convert India's parliamentary democracy to a US-style presidential system. Ambedkar also discusses the specific features of Indian federalism. He calls India a dual polity with a flexible federal system where the idea is to combine federalism with certain unitary features like a single all-India citizenship, a single judiciary and an all-India civilian bureaucracy.

Ambedkar then goes on to rebut the criticism about the alleged lack of 'originality' and 'Indianness' of the Constitution. Every written modern democratic constitution, he asserted, should reflect common or universal features and the efficacy of the Indian constitution should be assessed in terms of adapting those basic democratic features to the diversity

and particularities of the Indian context. There were strong opinions that the Constitution should uphold the democratic heritage of the ancient Indian polity and base itself on India's so-called self-sufficient village republics. Ambedkar refuses to romanticise the so-called 'village republics' and boldly declares that he is "glad that the Draft Constitution has discarded the village and adopted the individual as its unit". He also responds to the allegation that the Constitution had borrowed heavily from the 1935 Government of India Act in matters of administrative details. While acknowledging the scope for future amendments and administrative evolution, he emphasised the role of developing an administration compatible with the Constitution and ensuring that the legislature could not pervert the administration and make it inconsistent with and opposed to the spirit of the Constitution. It is in this context that Ambedkar highlights the need to cultivate constitutional morality as the guiding spirit and reminds Indians so prophetically that democracy in India is a top-dressing on an essentially undemocratic Indian soil.

The inference that inevitably follows from Ambedkar's warning is the need to democratise the Indian soil, deepen and firmly uphold the spirit of constitutional morality in every sphere and not allow the legislature to ride roughshod over the system of administrative checks and balances. But today people are faced precisely with the danger of executive tyranny subjugating the institutional system of monitoring and accountability. Laws are being made and even judgements are being delivered in the name of satisfying an imaginary 'collective conscience' and 'majority opinion' in brazen violation of what Ambedkar considered the litmus test of 'constitutional morality'. In the same address Ambedkar underlined the im-

portance of the rights and safeguards for minorities and reminded the majority of the need to 'realize its duty not to discriminate against minorities'. Whether and how long the minorities need special rights and safeguards depends on when 'the majority loses the habit of discriminating against the minority'. For Ambedkar, stopping discrimination against the minority was the point of departure, but today the discourse has been turned on its head – it is now all about satisfying the majority that the minorities are not being 'appeased'! Instead of the reality of discrimination against the minorities, the focus has been shifted to the fiction of 'minority appeasement'. This is nothing but unmitigated majoritarianism going berserk, which is bent upon crushing the minorities in the society, targeting the opposition in the political arena and silencing every dissenting voice in the academic, media and the wider cultural world.

In his November 4, 1948 address Ambedkar had referred to the rightwing conservative and reactionary criticism. Without naming the Hindutva brigade's constant invocation of the Manusmriti he had addressed their charge of neglecting the framework of ancient India and defended the idea of taking the free individual as the basic unit of the constitutional republic. Early on in his public life Ambedkar had consigned the Manusmriti to flames in the course of the Mahad Satyagrah on December 25, 1927. There was no way he could use this code of caste oppression and patriarchal violence as the guiding spirit of the Constitution of modern India. In his concluding address of November 25, 1949 Ambedkar dealt with criticisms coming from other quarters including Communists and Socialists. Ambedkar said the communist criticism revolved around the class nature of parliamentary democracy

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while the Socialists advocated nationalisation or socialisation of private wealth without any compensation. It is instructive to note that Ambedkar did not reject the communist and socialist ideas per se; he only referred to the balance of forces within the Constituent Assembly to defend the Constitution as the opinion of the drafting committee and the constituent assembly.

It is instructive to read Ambedkar's exact response in full: 'I do not say that the principle of parliamentary democracy is the only ideal form of political democracy. I do not say that the principle of no acquisition of private property without compensation is so sacrosanct that there can be no departure from it. I do not say that Fundamental Rights can never be absolute and the limitations set upon them can never be lifted. What I do say is that the principles embodied in the Constitution are the views of the present generation or if you think this to be an over-statement, I say they are the views of the members of the Constituent Assembly. Why blame the Drafting Committee for embodying them in the Constitution? I say why blame even the Members of the Constituent Assembly? Jefferson, the great American statesman who played so great a part in the making of the

American constitution, has expressed some very weighty views which makers of Constitution, can never afford to ignore. In one place he has said: "We may consider each generation as a distinct nation, with a right, by the will of the majority, to bind themselves, but none to bind the succeeding generation, more than the inhabitants of another country."

This clearly means Ambedkar did not ideologically reject these debates but left these possibilities open for the political wisdom and choice of a future generation. Indeed, if one reads the memorandum "States and Minorities" which Ambedkar had prepared on behalf of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation, one gets a clearer picture of Ambedkar's own political preferences. In this memorandum Ambedkar describes India as United States of India, and promises for all its citizens a set of fundamental rights with comprehensive judicial protection against executive tyranny, unequal treatment, discrimination and economic exploitation. It promised the minorities effective remedies against social and official tyranny and social boycott and provided scheduled castes with due safeguards to ensure proper representation in all spheres.

One should also recall that the All India Scheduled Caste Federation was preceded by Ambedkar's experience with the Independent Labour Party. Formed in 1936, the ILP fought simultaneously against caste and capital. In 1937, ILP won 14 of the 17 seats it contested in the Bombay Legislative Assembly. This was when Ambedkar wrote his famous monograph on Annihilation of Caste, organised a 20,000 strong march of tenants from the Konkan region to Bombay with the support of the Congress Socialist Party and joined hands with the communists to organise Bombay textile workers against the Industrial Disputes Bill. From 1942 to 1946 Ambedkar also

served as de facto Labour Minister in the Viceroy's Executive Council and pioneered the beginning of labour legislations in terms of an eight-hour working day and collective bargaining rights. Today when the government is pushing for indiscriminate privatisation and unbridled corporate power while rendering labour increasingly insecure and devoid of rights, it is important to revisit Ambedkar's radical legacy of socialist economics and fighting worker-peasant unity.

In this address Ambedkar beckons people not to be content with just 'political democracy' but to strive for 'social democracy'. Social democracy or democracy in society means recognition of liberty, equality and fraternity as core principles of life. Ambedkar tells to look at liberty, equality and fraternity not as three separate items in a trinity, but as a union where one cannot be divorced from another. Divorcing one from the other defeats the very purpose of democracy, affirms Ambedkar. Without equality, Ambedkar warns 'liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many', whereas equality without liberty, he argues, would kill individual initiative. And fraternity would ensure that liberty and equality will become a natural course of things and will not have to be enforced by a constable. But Ambedkar reminds people that the Indian social reality is far removed from this ideal state of affairs. With the adoption of the Constitution India entered a life of contradictions – while the Constitution will ensure the political or electoral equality of one person one vote, India remains mired in massive economic and social inequality. If this contradiction is not resolved at the earliest, it will blow up the structure of political democracy, warned Ambedkar.

Ambedkar then goes on to say how there can be no fraternity in a

caste-divided society. Caste is a system of graded inequality and as such it is an impediment to India becoming a nation. He elaborates further why the drafting committee chose the expression 'the people of India' over 'the Indian nation' – declaring caste-ridden India a nation would be 'cherishing a great delusion'. Ambedkar compares the Indian situation with the racial divide in America and narrates that caste marks an even greater obstacle to the development of real fraternity without which India could not possibly emerge as a cohesive nation. The anti-colonial struggle surely created the environment and laid the foundation, but the freedom movement remained predominantly about winning political independence and not gaining social equality. With the BJP trying to redefine Indian nationalism on an aggressive Hindu supremacist basis, the fault-lines have only widened in recent years. Here again people are reminded of another prophetic warning Ambedkar had issued in the early 1940s while discussing the Pakistan question: Hindu Raj will be the greatest calamity to befall on India and must be avoided at all costs. The Partition could not be avoided, but the Constitution ensured that India managed to avert that calamity despite the trauma of Partition by proclaiming a social compact based on comprehensive justice, liberty, equality and fraternity for all citizens without any discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, language and culture.

This emphasis on complementing political democracy with social democracy by establishing liberty, equality and fraternity as principles of social life and on achieving national unity through annihilation of caste has become all the more pertinent in the face of the Hindutva bulldozer of the Sangh-BJP establishment. For Ambedkar, national unity could not be achieved as a

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conglomeration of castes; he wanted liberty, equality and fraternity to prevail in society by annihilating the caste-based order of social slavery and injustice.

Ambedkar was keenly aware of the threats to India's fledgling constitutional democracy. He wanted the Constitution to be the supreme arbiter in governing independent India's political and social life, he wanted the people to stick to constitutional modes of protest and reject what he called the grammar of anarchy. The underlying assumption here was of course that the Constitution would be implemented by people who could be trusted with it. At the outset of his concluding address he had said, "however good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot. However bad a Constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are called to work it, happen to be a good lot. ... It is, therefore, futile to pass any judgment upon the Constitution without reference to the part which the people and their parties are likely to play." He therefore placed utmost reliance on the vigilance of the people, reminding them of John Stuart Mill's advice not "to lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man, or to trust him with powers which enable him to subvert their institutions". He knew that "in India, Bhakti or what may be called the path of devotion or hero-worship, plays a part in its politics unequalled in magnitude by the part it plays in the politics of any other country in the world" and he had no doubt that "in politics, Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship".

For Ambedkar, the adoption of the Constitution marked the advent of responsible and accountable governance. The concluding remarks of his final address before the Constituent Assembly summed it up in the following words: "By independence,

we have lost the excuse of blaming the British for anything going wrong. If hereafter things go wrong, we will have nobody to blame except ourselves. There is great danger of things going wrong. Times are fast changing. People including our own are being moved by new ideologies. They are getting tired of Government by the people. They are prepared to have Governments for the people and are indifferent whether it is Government of the people and by the people. If we wish to preserve the Constitution in which we have sought to enshrine the principle of Government of the people, for the people and by the people, let us resolve not to be tardy in the recognition of the evils that lie across our path and which induce people to prefer Government for the people to Government by the people, nor to be weak in our initiative to remove them. That is the only way to serve the country. I know of no better." The ideology that threatens the Constitution in today's India is the good old fascist ideology which had been waiting in the wings for so long and is now desperate to dump and kill the very Constitution which allowed it to come to power.

A few weeks before his demise, Ambedkar used his constitutional right to choose his religion to embrace Buddhism with hundreds of thousands of his followers.

Today Ambedkar, the radical democrat and champion of social equality would have found himself languishing in prison under UAPA in a fabricated Bhima-Koregaon type case. And yet the fascists also have the audacity to try and appropriate Ambedkar. Defenders of democracy and social justice will have to uphold the radical legacy of Ambedkar and turn it into a powerful weapon to defeat this fascist conspiracy. □□□

*[The author is General Secretary,
CPI(ML) Liberation]*

[Source: Liberation]

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DATA DISCOMFORT

Silence on Caste Inequality

Yogendra Yadav

WHETHER IT'S ECONOMIC status or educational and employment opportunities, caste remains the principal factor in India.

If the first round of caste 'census' data in Bihar established that caste count was possible and useful, the second tranche of data has established beyond doubt that a nationwide caste census is essential to combat social inequalities in today's India. To those who needed evidence, the recently released data from Bihar demonstrates that caste matters. Caste continues to be a determinant of educational opportunities, a robust indicator of economic status, and a gateway to decent employment opportunities.

Predictably, no one wants to look at this data. The entire debate on pros and cons of caste census focused not on the census but on the merits and demerits of reservation. Now that the data has been released, the focus is mainly on the 65 percent quota. Or on a casual (though ill-thought and indecent) remark by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, so as to hijack the entire debate away from the real issue of caste inequalities. As and when the media has bothered to report the findings of this 'census', it has highlighted some perfunctory or generic data on Bihar's poverty or levels of education. Such data has always been around. No one seems to be interested in the fresh data on caste inequalities.

What is really new about this caste census data in Bihar? The first tranche of data released last month—the X-ray—had offered jaati-wise population estimates that were not

available since 1931. It established that backward castes—BC as well as EBC—numbered much more than expected. And the dominant 'upper castes' were numerically much smaller. The data released lately—more like an MRI—provides jaati-wise socio-economic profile.

Specifically, the recent data provides economic status by way of family income, ownership of vehicles and computers, educational level of each member of family, and employment status for each person. All this data is available by each caste group and for each jaati separately. Though it has not been released, yet this break-up should be available for each district, each bloc, each village, and indeed for each family. This is a goldmine of sociological information that will be used by policy makers and researchers for decades to come. Since this data is not limited only to backward or disadvantaged sections and includes the 'upper' caste as well, people have for the first time a social profile of three dimensions of privileges in terms of economic status, educational attainments, and employment secured.

Since much of the analysis is based on self-reported family income (which can be dodgy since people tend to under-report), one needs to double check it with data on ownership of vehicles (from two-wheeler to six-wheeler) and computers (with or without internet). At the lower end of the income spectrum, one finds poverty distributed across all caste categories. Even among the 'upper' castes, one-fourth is very poor, with a family income of less than Rs 6,000 per month. The proportion

increases gently to 33 percent among the BC and EBC, and 43 percent among the SC and ST.

The slope is very steep when one looks at the upper end of economic privileges of those who report Rs 50,000 or more as their family monthly income. The proportion of these 'rich' families is just around 2 per cent for SC and EBC. It rises to 4 percent for the BC and shoots up to 10 percent among the General or the upper caste. This trend is corroborated by the data on laptop ownership (a proxy for material educational opportunities) and vehicle ownership (a proxy for economic assets). Interestingly, among the upper caste, the richest are the Kayasthas and not landed communities like Bhumihars and Rajputs. Among the OBCs, the numerically largest group of Yadav is substantially poorer than Kurmis or Baniyas (who are BC in Bihar) or even the Kushwahas.

The caste-wise data on education shows an even sharper slope than the economy. These include postgraduate degrees like MA, M Sc or M Com along with engineering or medical degrees and higher qualifications like PhD or CA. Here the impact of centuries of caste privileges and prohibition on learning are very stark. A Dalit in Bihar is ten times less likely to obtain any of these quality degrees than the upper castes. The difference is staggering. Of every 10,000 people, 1089 Kayasthas (traditional literary community) possess these employment-worthy degrees. The corresponding figure for Musahar, at the lowest rung within the Scheduled Castes, is just 1 out of every 10,000 persons.

Interestingly, Bhumihars are more educated than Brahmins, though the proportion for both is less than half of the Kayasthas. The traditional savarna/shudra divide continues to

filter educational opportunities. The proportion of Backward Castes with high degrees is less than one third of the General category. The proportion among the EBCs is less than half of that among the BCs. There are very serious disparities within the BCs. Yadavs stand at 0.82 percent while Kurmis are three times higher, at 2.4 percent.

One critical insight of this census relates to the internal division within Muslims. The data on economic and educational status confirms that Syed Muslims are quite like the Hindu 'upper' castes, though Sheikhs and Pathans appear to be misclassified as 'General', because their economic and educational profile fits in more with the 'backward class' category. Malik Muslims, who are

currently classified as BC, approximate the economic and educational profile of the General category. This demonstrates the relevance of caste census for fine-tuning the reservation policy.

Disparities in the economic and educational opportunities reflect directly in the occupational profile. Less than 3 percent of Bihar's population is employed in the 'organised sector' jobs with regular salary, PF, and perhaps pension. This proportion is nearly 7 percent among the upper caste but drops to 2.8 percent among the BCs and 1.7 percent among the EBCs.

The break-up of organised sector jobs between government jobs and private sector jobs shows a clear contrast. The 'upper' castes have

cornered disproportionately bigger share in both these categories, still higher in the private sector. Here, again, the Kayasthas outstrip everyone else in the proportion of government as well as private sector jobs. The Backward Caste share goes down in the private sector. Within the broad grouping of OBCs, the upper segment (that is the BC in Bihar) have cornered more jobs than the numerically larger segment of the EBC. A comparison of the proportion of Dalits, who managed to get organised sector jobs in the government sector (1.13 percent) and in the private sector (less than half at 0.51 percent) is a neat illustration of what the condition of Dalits would have been if they had no advantage of reservation in government jobs. □

REVIEW ARTICLE

'Shadow Armies'

Joydip Ghosal

SHADOW ARMIES 'BY Dhirendra K Jha, published by Juggernaut offers its readers valuable insight into dreadful trajectory of the nation's journey to a horrifying juncture where Hindutva fanatics rule the roost. In this book the author has profiled eight organisations which are fuelled by one particular desire. According to the author they want one particular community to define the identity of India. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) as the vanguard ushered this politics. Despite claiming itself as a cultural organisation political motivation remains the Sangh's main propelling force. It modelled itself as the British colonial army. Benito Musdolini's fascist outfit in Italy inspired it heavily. Though it was banned thrice it expanded its network rapidly. Mr Jha has established the fact that theoretically the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was

the sole outfit dedicated to politics but in reality most of its affiliates acted as political instruments to dismantle the secular fabric of the country. Publicly the RSS eschewed politics but it supplied ideological and strategic direction in communal conflagration of BJP. Attack on minorities led to stark polarisation which was mainstay for the growth of this fanatic organisation. These outfits driven by religious fanaticism developed issues for political polarisation. During votes these organisations also managed booth-level campaigns. Whenever the other bodies created controversy the RSS and BJP promptly labelled them as fringe organisations. Some of those organisations were not technically created by RSS but after a careful reading of this book one can come to conclusion that these organisations perpetrated brazen acts which were required to create polarisation in the

society. Author discussed threadbare the origins of Sanatan Sanstha, the Hindu Yuva Vahini, Sri Ram Sene, Abhinav Bharat, Hindu Aikya Vedi, Bhonsala Military School, Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, Bajrang Dal. These bodies were not entirely autonomous. Shadow armies showed that their umbilical cord was attached to Sangh Parivar. They derived their ideological inspiration from Savarkar's Hindutva: Who is a Hindu? Despite their play of words with regard to ideology RSS and various offshoots manifest disregard and contempt for other religions. BJP and RSS tried to dissociate from the activities of these fringe organisations but they offered tacit support to them. In this book one finds that shocking evidence linked those organisations to communal disturbances throughout the country. Within the Hindutva universe this book tries to prise open the existence of shadow armies. According to Pragya Tiwari they lurked in the shadows for a long time. These organisations tried to propagate a problematic definition of nationhood by employing falsify-

ing history coupled with hate mongering. At first glance they seemed to reflect manifest the trajectories of local politics. But an intense look would show them as communaleddies. Powerful Hindutva politics generated that. This book deals with the inner workings, their relationship with politics. As each organisation possesses distinct identity this book unearths many details.

Author travelled extensively for research. He established in this book that these organisations had their own paths of evolution. Driven by their own motivations these organisations were beset by internal contradictions as well. After the victory in 2014 Hindutva forces tried to recolonise the earlier vacated places. The author has pertinently cited example of Italian scholar Marzia

Casolari while discussing Bhonsala Military School. During the second world war and the preceding years militant Hindu organisations 'seemed to uneasily oscillate between a conciliatory attitude towards British and a sympathy for the dictators'.

This book is an essential reading for understanding the bedrock on which communal politics thrives.

□□□

THEY ARE NOT TERRORISTS

Israel's War on Journalists

Jonathan Shamir

[By casting reporters as Hamas accomplices, Israel seeks to discredit critical coverage—and to justify unprecedented violence against Palestinian journalists]

ON OCTOBER 10TH, Palestinian journalists Muhammad Sobh and Hisham al-Nawajah arrived in a western neighbourhood of Gaza City, where they had learned Israel was planning to bomb a high-rise building. They took cover a "sufficient distance away" and "took all necessary precautions," Saleh al-Nazli, editor-in-chief of the reporters' news agency, told The Washington Post. But the building from which Sobh and al-Nawajah sought to safely cover the attack was targeted, killing both of them as well as fellow journalist Said al-Taweel.

Sobh, al-Nawajah, and al-Taweel are only three of the 37 Palestinian journalists who have been killed in Israel's bombing campaign in Gaza since October 7th—some while on duty, others in their homes. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the figure represents more media casualties in a single month than in any comparable period of conflict since 1992. This unprecedented attack on journalists has drawn international attention, with over 1,300 journalists (including the author) signing an open letter condemning Israel's killings of journalists, and Reporters Without

Borders (RSF) charging Israel with war crimes in a petition to the International Criminal Court (ICC). "The scale, seriousness, and recurring nature of international crimes targeting journalists, particularly in Gaza, calls for a priority investigation by the ICC prosecutor," Christophe Deloire, RSF's secretary-general, said about the petition.

Before October 7th, Israeli forces had killed 20 media professionals since 2001; according to a May 2023 report by the CPJ, no one has ever been held accountable for these killings. In the aftermath of such attacks, Israel's typical response has been to say that it does not deliberately target journalists. However, in recent weeks Israeli leaders and media outlets have attempted to associate Palestinian reporters with Hamas in order to justify violence against them. On November 2nd, The Jerusalem Post said that independent journalists in Gaza "effectively act as the mouthpiece for the terrorist organisation." And on November 8th, Israel's official X account parroted a claim, first put forth without basis by the pro-Israel media monitoring group Honest Reporting, that "AP, CNN, NY Times and Reuters had journalists embed-

ded with Hamas terrorists" while they were carrying out the October 7th massacre. The post, which has since been deleted, included an image of journalists photographing Hamas militants as they transported a kidnapped woman on a motorbike. "Did these 'journalists' know about the impending Hamas attack and fail to warn relevant parties?" a later post asked.

The AP, CNN, Reuters, and The New York Times forcefully denied the allegation, but it was nevertheless immediately picked up by Israeli media outlets and adopted as a talking point by Israeli politicians, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office calling the journalists in question "accomplices in crimes against humanity" and opposition leader Yair Lapid asking international media outlets if they were going to fire the journalists. Other top-ranking politicians went further, with war cabinet member Benny Gantz and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir both calling the reporters "terrorists." Such a designation appears likely to be a matter of life and death, as Danny Danon, a lawmaker from the ruling Likud party; made clear when he tweeted that Israel would "eliminate all participants of the October 7 massacre. The 'photojournalists' who took part in recording the [Hamas] assault will be added to that list."

Hassan Eslayah, a freelance Palestinian photojournalist for AP and

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CNN who is one of the main targets of the Israeli incitement campaign, told Jewish Currents that far from knowing of the attack ahead of time, he was woken up by rocket fire on October 7th and only arrived at the border fence “an hour or two” after the attack began. (Jewish Currents independently verified that the first Telegram image of Eslaiah at the scene was from 8:29 am local time, around two hours after the attack began.) Eslaiah also rejected the charge that he was affiliated with Hamas, which Israel’s X account has circulated based on a photo of Eslaiah with Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar. “I have no organizational or military affiliation with Hamas or any other faction,” Eslaiah said. “The photo from 2018 that has circulated of me with Yahya Sinwar was due to my work as a Palestinian journalist with access to leaders of various factions. I only published it to prove the authenticity of my journalistic reports on what was going on within Hamas.” Yet another charge against Eslaiah is that he drove to the scene with a Hamas militant, but according to Oren Persico, a journalist at the independent Israeli media watchdog The Seventh Eye, this cannot be taken as evidence for complicity. “Israeli journalists go with Israeli military units all the time and document what they do,” Persico said, noting that in the current moment “there is a blindness to the similarities in this embedding method,” with the main focus being to portray “Palestinian journalists in the Gaza Strip [as] not journalists, but terrorists.” (Eslaiah told Jewish Currents that despite CNN and AP publicly denying the allegations made by HonestReporting, the outlets have nevertheless cut ties with him without providing any explanation.)

According to CPJ’s Middle East and North Africa programme coor-

dinator Sherif Mansour, Israel’s ongoing incitement against Palestinian reporters follows an established pattern under which the country first targets journalists, then attempts “to evade responsibility” for its actions by alleging that those attacked belonged to Hamas. This was the case in 2018, when, according to the later findings of a United Nations commission, an Israeli sniper “intentionally” shot dead Palestinian journalists Yaser Murtaja and Ahmed Abu Hussein during the Great March of Return, a largely nonviolent series of weekly demonstrations on the border fence demanding the Palestinian right to return to their ancestral lands. Shortly after the killings of Murtaja and Abu Hussein, then-Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman alleged that Murtaja was “a member of Hamas’s military wing,” a claim that was repeated by Netanyahu’s spokespeople. But Murtaja had just been strictly vetted by the United States in order to receive a media grant, and no Hamas links were found in the process. Israeli officials have not provided any evidence to the contrary in the years since Murtaja’s death. According to Mansour, the case revealed a broader Israeli strategy of “pushing false narratives, smear campaigns, and disinformation to justify its repeated attacks on journalists.”

Even before October 7th, reporting from Gaza faced exceptional challenges, with only a handful of international media outlets maintaining a bureau in the Gaza Strip. Now, with Israel preventing foreign journalists from entering the besieged enclave and warning that it will not guarantee the safety of journalists, most news outlets are wholly dependent on Palestinian reporters in the Strip. “They are our eyes and ears. Without them, we are left vulnerable to disinformation that is only designed to fuel the conflict,” Mansour

explained. But it is precisely this reporting Israel has been hampering, deliberately targeting dozens of media offices in airstrikes. With killings of Palestinian journalists documented from the north to the south of the Strip, “there is nowhere they can do their job safely,” Mansour said. “And now irresponsible disinformation puts these journalists in extra imminent danger,” he said.

In addition to acting as justification for violence against journalists, Persico said Israel’s recent campaign is also part of its efforts to suppress unfavorable news coverage. In the past month, the Israeli government has arrested 13 Palestinian journalists in the West Bank. Within Israel, a far-right mob converged on the home of Israeli journalist Israel Frey after he held a vigil for both Israeli and Palestinian victims of violence, pushing Frey and his family into hiding. And on October 20th, the Israeli government approved emergency regulations that ban the broadcast of foreign media channels which “threaten national security.” (Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi originally singled out Al Jazeera as a target for the law, describing the channel as “helping terror organisations with their propaganda,” but the government has so far only banned the Iran-aligned channel Al-Mayadeen.)

According to Persico, these moves seek to keep the Israeli public in the dark about Israel’s actions in Gaza. “The mainstream Israeli media doesn’t want [the public] to know how many civilians are dying . . . Images of the Palestinian dead or wounded are considered Hamas propaganda,” Persico told Jewish Currents. The Israeli government has taken every opportunity to discredit outside sources providing information on these questions, with officials accusing the BBC of spreading a “modern blood libel” after the

outlet blamed Israel for bombing Al-Ahli hospital, and army spokespeople calling into question international outlets' reliance on the Gazan Health Ministry's death tolls, even though they have historically proven to be accurate. The recent incitement against reporters has fed these ef-

forts. A day after the Honest Reporting allegations came out, prominent Israeli journalist Amit Segal tweeted about Eslaiah: "He and his ilk are the people who are fact-checking the death tolls and the imaginary Israeli bombing of hospitals?" As a result of these broad

attempts to target and discredit Palestinian journalists in Gaza, Persico said, "the Israeli public is in a bubble. It doesn't understand why the world is angry, and there's an ever-widening gap between the Israeli public and the international community". □

[Source: *Jewish Currents*]

AN INSPIRING WOMEN'S CO-OPERATIVE

The Story of 'AALO'

Sukanta Sarkar

BANSHIHARI, A VERY COMMON Block of Gangarampur Sub-division in South Dinajpur District is a typical rural area with predominantly agrarian landscape in North Bengal. About 46 percent of people are agricultural labourers: 30 percent of people are directly involved in agriculture and about 3 percent in cottage industry while 21 percent move elsewhere in search of work. To be precise they are migrants moving from Bengal to Kerala to Karnataka for sheer survival. Banshihari's nearest town is Buniyadpur. No doubt it is a big town. Currently there is a municipality. There are a high school, a college and a doctor's chamber. There is a market also in Buniyadpur. The town is very busy. But Banshihari represents one of the most backward villages of West Bengal. Some marginal farmers have some parcels of land to cultivate but they do not produce enough cereals for the whole year. It is not difficult to understand the financial status of people in this block! So Banshihari is not like any rich village of Bengal full of rice, full of cows and ponds full of fish. The men of Banshihari mostly spend their time outside their home in search of job and money to maintain family. Most women always remain busy with house work; this is how Banshihari's life has been going on in monotonous routine. It was supposed to continue like this for a more uncertain time

.But, little by little, the picture started to change for the last 8 years. The very ordinary, poor and proud girls of the village changed the socio-economic face of Banshihari. Today, it is their work that has crossed the boundaries of the district to become the 'model' of the state.

'AALO', a Women's Cooperative Credit Society was established in Banshihari Block on Women's Day on March 8 in 2014. A handful of female teachers, including the Assistant Headmistress of Banshihari Girls' High School, brought together 150 women from different villages of the Block. A few bureaucrats of the Block and Sub-division shouldered all the responsibilities from the planning to government assistance. Although there were a few agricultural credit cooperative societies in the district, there was no credit cooperative society, not to speak of Women's lending cooperative society! In the beginning, 150 women became members by depositing 100 Rupees each. Rs 10 lakh was given by the cooperative department. AALO started journey with this 10 and a half lakh Rupees. However, all 'Starts' have a 'beginning', in this case too, the 'start' actually started a year ago from 2013. The then Inspector of Cooperative Societies Subhashis Guha of Cooperative Department came to Banshihari after his transfer from Calcutta. He visited every village of the block only to see stagnant life not

running with time. Development requires creating and increasing economic activity but, where is the logistics to support economic activity in Banshihari! Cultivation is the one and only economic activity in Banshihari. Then most people are landless.

Men work in the village as agricultural labourers for some time of the year, but for the rest of the year they have to be outside in search of work. Women stay in villages. Barring domestic chores they have nothing else to do. Shubashis started thinking about utilising the unused and certainly neglected human resources. But with mahilas (women), especially in places like Banshihari where the minority community women are in significant numbers, for a man who is not a native, mobilising women even for a noble cause is too difficult to imagine for urbanites. After a few days, Shubashis told Gargi Lahiri, the then co-principal of Buniyadpur Girls' High School, about his plan. Initially she hesitated but Gargi ultimately came forward with some of her colleagues in the year 2013. Shubashis and Gargi started contacting the women of the village.

But what will be done by loosely organising the women of the village? What is needed for development is achieving financial independence through small, cottage and micro enterprises. The basic condition of any kind of business is money. It is not possible for women from economically backward families in a backward place like Banshihari to pay even 1000 rupees. With the formation of Women's Cooperative

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Credit Society village women can now develop small and micro businesses individually or in groups by taking loans. For seven-eight months, after visiting the villages of Banshihari, campaigning from door to door, talking to women several times in the yard, overcoming their inertia, finally in 2014, the first Women's Cooperative Credit Society of the district AALO started the path of light in Buniyadpur. And AALO Mahila Co-operative Credit Society got registration in 2015. Within four years, the number of members increased to about 3,500 and the amount of deposit totalled Rs2 crore 10 lakh. Today membership has gone up with increased deposit.

AALO's activities have now expanded across Jordighi, Daulatpur, Ditol, Shivpur, Ganguria, Sherpur, Khushipur, Andharamanik and Banshihari proper. AALO members are doing various kinds of work; they take loans for medical treatment, children's education, home repair. However, most of them are doing some kind of economic work with loans and members are encouraged to borrow from AALO for such work. AALO also arranges training for its members in arts, handicrafts, tailoring etc. The women who once used to take care of households only are today running small food processing units where at least 10 women are involved in production. Another 8-10 women get job for selling the products. Then some women by taking loans from the Co-Operative do the business of making imitation ornaments at home. As some of them are making clothes alone by learning tailoring, many are making school uniforms and hospital staff uniforms. Special mention must be made of AALO's members managing sanitary napkin production unit. This unit was launched at the end of 2016. 3 lakh sanitary napkins are produced per month. 14-15 women are associated with it. They market it through a

Tripartite Agreement signed with Manjusha, District Health Department and AALO. They supply sanitary napkins to hospitals, schools and colleges in the block. Some also go to local drug stores. Now AALO is the Ambassador of the district administration in promoting women's menstrual health awareness.

At least 30 members have been trained in kitchen gardening with the help of Horticulture Department, Government of West Bengal. They are doing commercial Rose cultivation on 10 bighas of land starting from Ginger cultivation in sacks. Milk collection centre has also been constructed. Catering unit is running well. Food is supplied to various government offices and other institutions on various occasions. Apart from this, the members are literally self-reliant today by taking personal loans to set-up and run Beauty Parlours, Boutiques, Animal Husbandry, Incense, Cottage industry producing jute items - bags, crystal bags, carpets etc. Encouraged by the success of AALO, women's cooperatives have been formed in most of the blocks of the district such as Pritilata in Kushmandi block, Pragati in Gangarampur, Disha in Balurghat, Navdisha in Tapan Block. AALO was declared a 'model' in the state for women's cooperatives in the year 2016. In that year state Cooperative department decided that Women Cooperative Lenders Association like AALO would be established in every Block of the state and the instructions had been sent to every office of the Cooperative Department in the state.

Social development comes from economic development. Researchers from the Institute of Development Studies (IDSK), one of the leading sociological research institutes of the country, conducted a survey in 2016 to observe the impact of AALO on women in South Dinajpur district and based on the research paper published, it was found that AALO

members are more advanced than women who are outside the ambit of AALO. They significantly stand at the top in socio-economic indicators in terms of Institutional Birth, Access to Newspapers, Opinion Making, Drinking Water, Sanitation, Literacy etc. Members of AALO are ahead of others. Apart from this, AALO members are working in Banshihari Block as a supporting force of the government in several other projects including prevention of women and child trafficking, prevention of child marriage, menstrual health awareness, inclusion in voter list and community-based forestry.

A recent survey report shows, the migration of the male population for livelihood from the villages of Banshihari Block has been significantly decreased because of AALO's activities. This Women Cooperative has created a number of working areas and generating job opportunities for not only local female population but few hundreds of men are also getting job from AALO. According to a Block level government official, '7-8 years ago at least 21 % male population of this Block had to migrate elsewhere for job; today it has come down to 10 to 12%'.

Three and a half years ago, the pale, backward-looking, obscure Banshihari has really changed. Presently people of Banshihari are always active. Shopping in bazaars has also increased at a significant rate. It is an established fact that most of the people of Banshihari have work in their hands and rice in their stomachs. The main architects of this transformation of Banshihari are the house-bound shy women. A successful co-operative movement has brought the light of self-reliance and self-respect to the faces of those forgotten people who never thought they would be able to live with dignity and honour.

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LETTERS

Weapon Seller (WINS)

No country wins any wars; only private weapon manufacturing companies benefit from wars as they make huge profits. Only peace is the most powerful weapon in the world. All countries should strive to make the world peaceful.

**T.S. Karthik, Chennai, TN
In Solidarity
with Palestinians**

Across India, several organisations including workers' unions, civil liberties and feminist groups, student organisations and kisan unions, along with more than 100 Indians—writers, artists, students and educators, and queer persons, and non-resident Indians across walks of life have released a statement in solidarity with the Palestinian people's struggle and their enduring national cause against Zionist occupation.

The November 1 statement came amid severe repression of pro-Palestine protests across Indian cities, as protestors have been detained, assaulted and booked under criminal charges by state police. The signatories demand the end of Israeli occupation of Palestine and Palestinians and call attention to the Indian government's complicity in its ongoing war on Gaza. India abstained from a UN General Assembly resolution calling for an enduring humanitarian truce on Israel's barbaric war on Gaza, with the poor excuse that the resolution lacked "explicit condemnation" of the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7. With this statement, Indian citizens continue to push the government to "commit to a boycott of the Israeli state and military combined, and immediately end all military, strategic and industrial cooperation between the governments and private entities of India and Israel. End all

arms deals between India and Israel NOW."

Human rights groups and independent fact-finding investigations have recorded the use of Israeli drone technology to drop bombs on Adivasi homes and lands in Bastar and Bijapur in at least 4 separate incidents since 2021, the latest being reported on 7 April 2023.

**Feminists in Resistance
Deporting
Afghan Refugees**

The move to expel Afghan migrants from Pakistan has enraged the Taliban regime in Kabul and could push the Islamists faction to move closer to their ideological allies across the border.

Islamabad is conducting a massive deportation effort directed at Afghans, expelling over 200,000 refugees since the push started this month. This is just the beginning—Pakistani authorities estimate four million Afghans are living in Pakistan, and some 1.7 million of them are undocumented refugees. The government has warned that anyone staying in the country illegally past November 1 would face arrest and confiscation of assets.

The deportation drive, along with reports of refugees being harassed and humiliated, has prompted outrage in Kabul. The Taliban regime urged the Pakistani government to refrain from what they described as acts of cruelty.

In the years following the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, several militant groups in Pakistan formed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a local offshoot of the Afghan Taliban. They declared that, since Islamabad sided with Washington, the Pakistani army had become an "apostate force" and fighting against them was justified.

The Pakistani Taliban have since carried out hundreds of attacks. A 2014 attack on an army-run school in Peshawar prompted the Pakistani authorities to launch a massive crack-down against them. Most of the militants took shelter in Afghanistan and continued to hit targets in Pakistan using Afghanistan as their base, though with reduced intensity.

**A Correspondent, Islamabad
Capitalism & Climate**

Capitalism, as a system, is based on producing and selling more and more goods and services. Large corporations make goods that become obsolete within a short period, forcing consumers to buy newer, more advanced models. The measure of a country's Gross Domestic Product is based on the goods and services produced and sold. However, there is no measure to assess the natural resources.

In the name of boosting economic growth, Governments are decimating natural resources. Forests are being decimated to mine minerals, leading to a loss of biodiversity.

This has a direct impact on the climate. Global warming is causing floods and starvation. But what can be done about it? Is capitalism compatible with managing climate change? The answer is 'No'.

**Team Madras Courier
Killing the Amazon**

My people [Surui] have cherished this rainforest for 6,000 years—it is the greatest manifestation of life, anywhere on the planet.

But oil companies don't see that. They drill precisely where the rainforest is most alive, spilling their black death, poisoning rivers—and fuelling the climate fever. They are killing the rainforest and all the life it holds.

Now those same oil giants are ready to grease negotiations at the UN climate talks. A huge oil boss

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will lead the summit in Dubai, and hundreds of industry lobbyists are ready to feast.

"We don't just live in the rainforest; we are a part of it. The Suruí people, the Baniwa, Karipuna, Ashinka and so many others... let us ALL be heard".

My father was the Great Chief Almir Suruí—he taught me that we must listen to the stars, the wind, the animals, and the trees. They are pleading with us now.

Today the climate is warming. The animals are disappearing. And our plants don't flower like they did before. The Amazon has more plant species than the number of stars you see in the night sky—and look what they're doing to it!

The Amazon is Earth's most intricate ecosystem—and my people are part of that web. If the rainforest is under mortal attack, then so are we. The fate of the Amazon hangs in the balance, and we must be heard.

Txai Suruí with Avaaz
27-11-2023

Pakistan expels Afghans

It began in October, with the Pakistani government's announcement of mass deportations for all migrants without papers by November 1. The vast majority of these migrants are Afghans. This is a forced expulsion campaign aimed at well over a million residents. The interior ministry established a special telephone number encouraging Pakistanis to report any "illegal foreigners" living in their neighbourhood. Landlords were threatened with fines for continuing to rent to foreigners without papers.

Tens of thousands of Afghans fled the country in the weeks before the deadline. They were prohibited from taking much with them—not their cattle nor other property and only a limited amount of money. Since November 1, police have been

going door to door to check migrants' documents. Those without papers face arrest, or are taken to the Afghanistan border and expelled. It is estimated that over 350,000 migrants have been expelled, with thousands forced out every day. There are perhaps 1.4 million undocumented Afghans living in Pakistan. Millions of others with different types of provisional papers are not necessarily safe.

Why have Pakistani authorities decided on this mass expulsion campaign? After all, millions of Afghans have lived in Pakistan, some for decades—first during the Russian occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, then during the first Taliban rule in the 1990s, and now with the most recent Taliban government which routed the U S and its allies in 2021.

The most immediate reason lies in the deteriorating relations between Pakistan and the ruling Taliban in Afghanistan. At issue are the armed attacks being carried out in Pakistan by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a banned armed group which swears allegiance to the Taliban in Afghanistan. Founded in 2007, the TTP says its goal is to impose its hardline interpretation of Islamic law on Pakistan. Bombings carried out by TTP have increased since the Taliban returned to rule Afghanistan. Pakistan has pressured them to stop the TTP attacks, but without success. Now Pakistan is carrying out mass expulsions of Afghans to force the Taliban to take action. What an inhuman action!

Eugene Walker

The Silkyara Tunnel Collapse

The Silkyara tunnel collapse is the chronicle of a tragedy foretold. While authorities try to pass the buck on climatic or natural phenomena for such accidents, it is the very nature of such ill-conceived projects that must be called into question. Since

its start, this 4.5-km-long structure has been questioned by innumerable people, activists, and scholars. The chairman of the Supreme Court-appointed high-powered committee (HPC) on the Char Dham all-weather road project, Ravi Chopra, expressed grave displeasure that authorization for "brazen widening of roads" was granted in the ecologically vulnerable Himalayas.

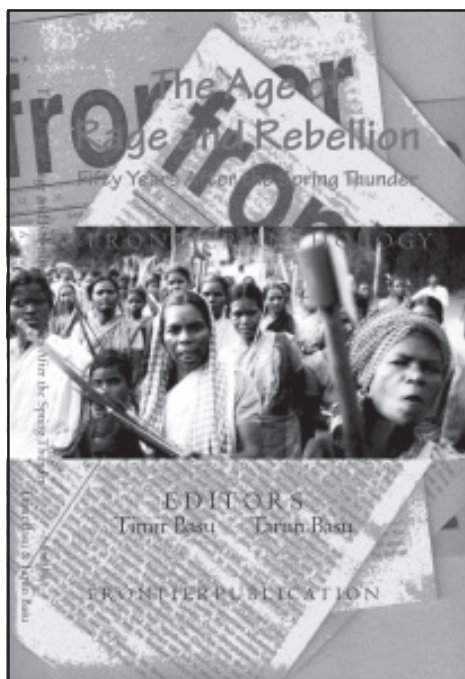
The tunnel is a component of the Char Dham Mahamarg Pariyojana, a mega-project to build wide, all-weather roads between the Hindu pilgrimage sites of Gangotri, Yamunotri, Badrinath, and Kedarnath. The government pushed to complete the project at any cost before the forthcoming parliamentary elections, sidestepping matters of environmental clearance. Environmentalists and concerned citizens have long expressed concerns about the potential adverse effects of extensive drilling and construction activities, which can result in subsidence, landslides, and significant environmental damage in the ecologically vulnerable Himalayan region. WPC demands that environmental norms and due diligence be strictly followed before clearing such projects in the Himalayas. No 'development' projects be undertaken at the expense of causing ecological imbalances and threatening the lives of people engaged in the projects or those living in the region.

WPC demands stringent health and safety measures to rule out accidents at workplaces, as well as the ratification and strict implementation of ILO conventions about 'a safe and healthy working environment' that have been brought under 'Fundamental Principles of Rights at Work' by the United Nations agency in a session in 2022.

***Raju Bhise, General Secretary
Dharmendra Kumar,
WPC-North Zone***

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