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10 Years of BRI

CHINA HOSTED THE THIRD BELT AND ROAD FORUM FOR International Cooperation in October 2023 with a lot of fanfare while highlighting what they call the Silk Road Spirit of “planning together, building together and benefitting together”. President Xi Jinping, the architect of China’s grandiose scheme of ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (BRI) in his remarks at the ceremony of the Forum unveiled a blueprint for his government’s future strategy to expand ‘Belt and Road’ cooperation from ‘physical connectivity to international connectivity’. For one thing BRI reflects China’s limited success as a rising capitalist power in global economy otherwise dominated by America and Western Europe. China’s great leap outward is too ambitious to sail smoothly. Talking day in and day out about the swan song of ‘people’, ‘cooperation’ and ‘development’ doesn’t alter the basic character of capitalist investment—exploitation of nature and human resources.

Over the last 10 years more than 150 countries and over 30 international organisations have signed Belt and Road documents. It only illustrates how Chinese capitalism, though late, is trying to make its presence felt in global market. From 2013 to 2022, trade between China and BRI partner countries reached \$19.1 trillion, with an average annual growth rate of 6.4 percent. It was precisely the message of the 10th anniversary of BRI.

But initial euphoria over BRI is vanishing very fast. Many see in this geopolitical tool of China a kind of ‘debt trap’, particularly after the bankruptcy faced by Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Several BRI projects, including the controversial Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, the Gwadar port in Pakistan, created dangerous debt trap in those countries, leading to social unrests and civil wars. Finally Sri Lanka had to surrender its sovereign authority over the port by way of allowing China to control it exclusively. If anything Hambantota is viewed as a ‘neo-colonial outpost’ of China in the Indian Ocean, designed to keep its grip over the sea lanes. And these days people in Pakistan frequently take to streets protesting against their rulers for surrendering to the ‘Chinese neo-colonial masters’. Anti-China sentiment in Pakistan runs so high that China had to withdraw its technical experts after suicide bombing by Baloch Liberation Movement in which four Chinese staff engaged in Gwadar port lost their lives. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor which has been under severe criticism from Pakistan’s

opposition forces, has a plan to link Gwador port with Kashgar in North West China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous region which has been in the news for Beijing's ruthless suppression of minority Muslims.

Defending their lending practices, the Chinese authorities justify their programme of action by accusing the West of spreading false propaganda against China. They say 'Western private and public institutions owned 80 percent of Sri Lanka's debt, 70 percent of Pakistan's and 77 percent of Zambia's, whereas China's share was only 10 percent, 15 percent, and 17 percent, respectively, for these countries'. In other words they are equally responsible for the neo-colonial bondage these countries have been in. After all lending agencies, irrespective of their headquarters located in Western capitals or Beijing follow the same law

of coercion and subjugation. Dubbing 'loans' as aid doesn't make the Chinese investors more benevolent. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China do hardly differ from their global counterparts—the World Bank and the IMF, in treating the debtors.

In a press conference after the conclusion of the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing on October 18, 2023, Chinese Foreign minister Wang Yi, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, 'hailed the conference of unity and "win-win" cooperation that has broadened the bright prospects of BRI'. But the Sri Lankan crisis doesn't substantiate their claim that they are really promoting "win-win" game. Their client states are always at the receiving end.

Having failed to contain China's

geo-political tool called BRI Washington 'launched the Build Back Better World (B3W) during the G7 summit in 2021'. Then came the much publicised and yet less effective 'The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor' on the sidelines of G20 leaders' summit in New Delhi last year.

Meanwhile, the Chinese have made it clear that they have no 'intention to challenge the current global order'. Development of the BRI involves massive lending plans and China is said to be assuring the West in so many sweet words that their lending business follows 'internationally accepted rules'. If that is the case, according to their own admission, how do they differ from Washington-controlled multi-lateral funding and investment institutions is open to question. □□□

COMMENT

Nepalis in Russian Army

SOME YOUNG NEPALIS HAVE reportedly joined the war on behalf of Russia against Ukraine. The Kathmandu government recently announced six of its citizens had been killed while fighting for Moscow. Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world and its soldiers are being tempted to join the Russian army because of lack of gainful employment opportunities in their country. Unemployment is the root cause of their migration to foreign countries in search of job. Even a contract with a mercenary group seems preferable though it involves life risk and uncertain future. After all mercenaries are not bound by any war rules and conventions.

Nepal's prominent daily newspaper The Kathmandu Post reported Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal as saying that in excess of 200

Nepali citizens have joined the Russian military since the full-scale war began in February 2022.

Strangely enough, Nepalis are also serving in the Ukrainian army as well according to a Nepali government statement.

In truth now-a-days private armies or mercenaries are being increasingly deployed by the governments across the world. The story of the notorious Russian mercenary group Wegner that was instrumental in advancing Putin's military goal in eastern Ukraine is well known. And how the Wegner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin was eliminated because of his disagreement with Russian president Putin is also well known. Prigozhin is gone but his mercenary outfit continues to serve the Russian cause in the Ukrainian battle field. Wegner apart other mercenary groups

are also active in Russia-Ukraine war theatre. Both Moscow and Kyiv are utilising their services.

In the middle of last year, Moscow paved the way for recruiting foreign nationals legally to fight in its army after a decree signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin. And the response was not that bad.

Three months later, Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement urging citizens not to join foreign armies in war-torn countries. But the unemployed youth defied the government circular.

"The policy of the Nepal government does not allow Nepali citizens to join foreign armies except for the fact that Nepali citizens are being recruited in the national armies of some friendly countries as per the traditional agreement reached between Nepal and those countries".

Nepalis are recruited annually in the British and Indian armies, as part of the Tripartite Agreement between the United Kingdom, India

and Nepal. This treaty was signed in 1947 concerning the rights of Gorkhas recruited in armed forces of the United Kingdom and India.

But Nepal has no such arrangement with Russia. This is, however, not stopping dozens of Nepalis from joining the Russian army. Those who reached Russia on visit and student visas are now enlisted in the Russian army. Then India and Nepal share unique ties characterised by an open border. Indians and Nepalis don't need passport and visa to cross the border.

Nepal's ministry of foreign affairs has asked Moscow to repatriate Nepali citizens immediately and not to commission them into fighting the war. The ministry is also on a diplomatic mission to rescue citizens

captured in the war, now languishing in Russian jails or Ukrainian jails as POWs.. It is not known how the Kremlin is reacting to Nepal's diplomacy. "In October 2022, Nepal voted in favour of a UN resolution condemning Russia's annexation of four Ukrainian territories, at the United Nations General Assembly".

Many of the Nepalis serving in the Russian military have been reported missing by their families.

A few returnee Nepali soldiers have spoken to local media about the brutality of the war and the money involved in it. Some have revealed that they were not given proper training to go on the frontline and were not paid salaries for many months. □□□

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NOTE

Lick Your Wounds

Farooque Chowdhury writes:

FOSSIL FUEL OR NO-FOSSIL fuel—what to do? Let mercury rise or drop it down—how far the mercury's liberty should go? To the people, the answers are easy—a bold nay: no more warming of this planet; let it cool down. But, to parties with deep foundation in the warming up business, all driving force of its survival lies in that foundation. The recently concluded COP 28 was a show of tension between that yes and no.

To some, it turns difficult to sum up the COP 28: gain or loss? To others, a few gains, a few steps towards a hopeful direction. To the third party, the oil bosses overwhelmed the show. The fourth party assumes: warming industry is retreating, taking time to adjust investments, assess areas of profit, complete final calculation—loss from here and gain from there.

The COP 28, thus, turned into a stage of changing equation in the area of energy within two given times—now and future. This ongoing change in equation has already conveyed a strong message to the fossil fuel traders: Their days are going to an end. It is not that the warm upwals have turned sympathetic to the humanity and they feel the fatal temperature. But, they are finding increasing costs—a major loss is emerging in the property market in the world metropolis; the insurance industry in that metropolis is facing a challenge; and similar arithmetic is increasingly haunting them. This mathematics is not friendly to them. There's a promise of increased profit from the emerging "green" market. The COP 28 reflected this reality of pushes and pulls.

Therefore, the conferences of about 200 parties reached a consensus—transition from fossil fuel. As

the Baanglaa saying goes Naai maamaar cheye kaanaa maamaa vaalo, something is better than nothing, the COP 28 has brought in some promises: the era of fossil fuel is going to find its dusk. "It's twilight for the fossil fuel era", said Manish Bapna, president and CEO of the Natural Resources Defense Council. The UN seems happy—a historic deal at the end of the conference, a road map to move away from fossil fuel.

But, there was no call for "phase out" of the fossil fuel, which has now turned into an imperative, as 1.5 trillion tons of carbon dioxide has been pumped around our life over the last hundred and fifty years.

Sticking to the goal "will be impossible without the phase out of all fossil fuels", said António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General.

Now, there's a threshold, which is going to decide our planet's destiny. Now, also, there're the powerful capitals that are also going to decide the Earth's fate. Life of billions of people doesn't carry any value to capital hungry for gains unless and until its

regeneration is threatened. Capitals warming up this planet are facing this question—shall regeneration be thwarted? It's one aspect of the reality of global warming. Other aspects

include competition between capitals involved with the trade with temperature, and capitals search of path to higher profit in the area of energy. The COP 28 reflected this reality.

So, the cataclysmic future is still on the horizon. So, licking wounds is a task to compel capital to bow down to common future. □□□

24-12-2023

AN ALTERNATIVE IMAGINATION

Why Unemployment Keeps Rising in India

Amit Bhaduri

ABOUT THE TOP 10 TO 20 percent of Indians have been happier with a more luxurious consumption basket made possible with partially or totally imported goods sustainable only with international capital inflows. The inflows have not only eased the foreign exchange constraint on their consumption, but also helped in boosting the prices in the stock market.

This happier and politically most vocal upper class of Indians wants this show to go on. So do corporate houses, especially two or three large houses, not only because it helps them to use their inflated stock prices as collateral for borrowing from banks, apart from other undue favours they receive from a government.

Meanwhile, the unemployment situation worsens relentlessly, while the government and the corporations talk of higher GDP growth, but not of employment!

Looking through several estimates of unemployment in India, a reasonable guess on the conservative side would be that about 11 million persons currently enter the labour force every year, with at least 20 million as the carry-over unemployment from the past.

Assuming an average 7.5% unemployment, these figures yield an annual 4.1% growth in unemployment, in addition to the growth rate of population at approximately 1.9%. This means employment has to grow at least at 6% percent per annum

(without considering labour productivity growth) so as not to let the unemployment situation get worse over time.

Two qualifications are essential here. First, the really poor in search of their next meal so to say, cannot afford to be unemployed, and in this sense the unemployment estimates used here are likely to be underestimates.

Second, a similar phenomenon is also visible in the Indian statistics in case of women's participation in so far as very poor women have a higher rate of participation than better off ones.

This understanding is important for devising employment guarantee schemes. At near subsistence wage with relatively long hours of work, it is reasonable to suggest those who would seek employment cannot afford to search around for long. Therefore, making such jobs available without complicated bureaucratic procedures is sensible.

The labour productivity difference between small agriculture and large, organised industry is about 12 to 16 times. This enormous difference in labour productivity is a double-edged sword. It is a potential source of large increase in output by shifting labour from small agriculture to large, organised industry – the policy of corporate industrialisation pursued by India.

But it also has the destructive potential source of creating a serious unemployment problem, because any

given level of output can be produced with much less labour. Thus, it can result in a serious loss of livelihood if the much higher labour productivity in the organised and corporate sector faces constraints of market size, due to rising unemployment.

Also, corporate industrialisation is not the solution for reducing unemployment, but part of the problem. This is because large scale land acquisition for industrialisation adds to the growing pressure of unemployment with more people losing livelihood than gaining jobs. So long as India continues on this path of development, the unemployment problem will only worsen.

The political problem of grossly inadequate industrial job creation surfaces as an unmanageably vast informal economy which exists side by side with the formal organised economy.

Those displaced from small scale agriculture without an alternative livelihood are unambiguous losers. The human situation only gets worse in the economy unless compensation is actually paid by the state through some mechanism because higher growth fails to do that job.

Indeed, the mechanism for compensation payment needs to be specified as an integral part of the industrialisation process. Without an institutionalised welfare state where basic needs like nutrition and health, education, housing, and old age pension are guaranteed by the state, make-shift mechanisms emerge.

Various mechanisms for compensating those adversely affected emerge, especially prior to elections with political parties promising vari-

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ous freebies. This process gains momentum in a competitive democracy with the political parties trying to outdo each other. It invariably is a zero-sum game if total welfare funds are fixed, and the ruling party has a decisive edge.

If the welfare fund has to be expanded, it requires either taxing heavily the rich corporates and the upper classes, the gainers of the jobless industrialisation, or seeking temporary solutions like selling off public assets including not only public sector enterprises but also natural resources.

In India people now have the spectacle - instead of offering tax breaks and subsidies - the handing over of natural resources like land, water bodies, village commons, sea-shores, and forests to corporations in the name of incentivising the corporations for higher economic growth.

Silence is the golden rule which no political party wants to break because none have escaped the slogan of higher corporate-led growth. As a result, no political party has been able to confront the real challenge of creating an extensively decent livelihood and reducing rising unemployment.

Pretending to bypass the problem, by promising various dole outs is a hollow electoral game, played with much show and little substance, so long as it lasts, because the real problem of unemployment, lack of livelihood and destitution grow like a galloping cancer to engulf the system.

When the job of industrialisation is entrusted to large private corporations, as an essential aspect of growth, the state is hardly in a position to devise a fiscal mechanism of fair compensation to be borne by private industry. Instead, a dangerous anti-people mutualism between the government and the

large corporations develops under the guise of economic development.

Symptoms of the disease are abundant: heavily subsidised price for land and related natural resources for corporations, tax breaks and cultivated blindness to frauds by favoured corporations, and receiving in return generous contributions to the political party and its election funds (think of electoral bonds, willful defaults of bank loans.)

The cost of industrialisation is borne to a disproportionately large extent, not by the general public but the most vulnerable section. High prices, increasing cost of living, heavy indirect taxes are general symptoms, but much worse is hidden from the public eye.

In India, the Adivasis, the poorest and roughly 8% of the population account for 40% of the displaced population, i.e. 5 times higher probability of being displaced in the name of development. A similar story would be told if one could have reliable data of the displaced classified by castes.

The focus should be on raising the productivity of small agriculture in the present phase of India's development. The emphasis would be on raising the productivity of land, not of labour.

Infrastructure development including road communication and connectivity should have this land productivity augmentation as the focus. This is instead of the currently pursued self-defeating programmes of creating world class connectivity among cities amidst a sea of destitution and poverty in the countryside.

The biggest potential for expansion of employment probably exists through expansion of basic welfare services like delivery of primary health and education. They are not only public goods needed desperately by the poor, but they can become a

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part of the social wage, rather than simply trying to increase private monetary wage to cover consumer expenditure on those basic items.

It will be utterly misleading to think of these sketchy suggestions as a complete blueprint for economic development focused on employment. This is meant to stimulate an alternative imagination, an imagination of development which escapes the trap of corporate-led growth that breeds more and more inequality and environmental degradation.

Even worse, in the name of economic development a dangerous mutualism between authoritarian government and a few favoured large corporations develops. It leaves only the empty shell of democracy with all contents hollowed out. □□□

[Amit Bhaduri is a researcher and former Economics Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi; and Professor of 'Clear Fame', Pavia University, Italy. He was also professor in a number of world famous universities. He resigned from JNU in 2020 over the "throttling" of dissent on the campus.]

[This is an abridged version of Amit Bhaduri's note: "Rethinking Employment and Industrialization in India".]

[The abridged article was first published in Global Indian Times, USA, on December 22, 2023, <https://www.globalindiantimes.com/globalindiantimes/2023/12/22/india-unemployment-122023/>]

POPULATION PROBLEM

Towards a Demographic Catastrophe?

Bruno Kern
Saral Sarkar
Ernst Schriefl

WHILE THE MANIFOLD symptoms of the ecological and humanitarian crises are becoming increasingly visible, it is astonishing that a very weighty and obvious contributing cause thereof is hardly being mentioned anywhere—the continuing strong growth of human population (globally, and especially in many conflict areas). As is certainly well known, the world population recently passed the 8 billion mark. There is practically no public discourse on the subject. The issue tends to be suppressed and hushed up.

The world's population continues to grow rapidly—by an astounding figure of 85 to 90 million people per year. Figuratively speaking, the world is growing by one Germany or ten Austrias per year, at least in relation to the population of these countries.

In which houses will these newly added people live, where will they get their food from, how will they be mobile, what jobs will they have (if they will have any at all)? Will they ever have the chance of (and the material means for) a fulfilling and decent life?

This growth is taking place on an already "groaning planet," on which the limits to growth have already been reached, as many indicators suggest. The ecosphere, on which people as species *homo sapiens* and all other species depend for survival, has already been severely affected.

The growth of the world population goes hand in hand with the various pressures on natural environment, such as growing greenhouse gas emissions, soil consumption and

consumption of mineral and biogenic resources.

It would of course be wrong to blame population growth alone for these pressures. But it would be just as wrong to ignore and play down its significance. Since the beginning of industrialisation, per capita consumption of these resources has grown even faster than the world population; but both driving forces working together are exerting massively increasing pressure on the ecosphere and the planetary resource base.

It is also becoming very clear, though many or most people do not want to admit it, that technological innovations alone will not be sufficient to "save" the situation. For example, the energy transition, which is being seen by many as a key project for sustainable development, will not be realisable in the expected way. On closer examination, one can see that this project has too many weaknesses, dilemmas and limitations.

Ultimately, long-term survival of mankind and a fairly good life for all can only be possible in a degrowth society, whatever political form it might take. A degrowth society means that, on the one hand, human population growth must come to an end and that, subsequently, population should even shrink to a significantly lower, more sustainable level. And, on the other hand, it means, that also material consumption per capita cannot remain at the current high level, and that it must therefore also shrink significantly.

Although this reduction in per capita material consumption prima-

rily applies to rich countries (in the so-called "global North"), it also applies to more than a few people in emerging and developing countries who have already achieved a relatively high standard of living. It holds true also because in these latter countries, the aspirations of most people after achieving a high material standard of living cannot be realised—and if at all they could, then only at the high price of further damaging the local and global natural environment.

Unless the world at least puts a halt to population growth, and a subsequent decline in global population takes place, a sustainable, ecologically sound and just economic system cannot even be imagined. Either this shrinkage of population is brought about in a conscious and planned way, or it happens in a disorderly, chaotic manner in the form of collapsing societies.

It is no coincidence that many conflicts and wars take place in regions where population has been growing almost unchecked for a long time. The Middle East conflict, that has recently again heated up, also has a strong demographic component, even if this is not the focus of media reports and analyses.

Like so many things in the world, population dynamics too differs strongly from region to region. While there are some regions that have already undergone a demographic transition, i.e., where the population is not growing any longer or may even be declining, there are other regions where population is still growing massively and a demographic transition is not in sight.

Particularly Sub-Saharan Africa is a hotspot in this regard. UN forecasts say that the population in this region will at least triple by 2100 (unless something is done against that). Considering the instability and

the multitude of problems that already exist in this large region, this prospect of a population multiplication in the coming decades can only be understood as a demographic catastrophe, a catastrophe that the international community is virtually watching helplessly.

But there are unsustainable, problematic developments in other regions of the world too. For example, the population of India, now the most populous country in the world, is growing by around 14 million per year. This means that more than 15 percent of global population growth is taking place in this country alone.

If one accepts this outline of the problem as essentially correct—at least to a large extent or in key areas—many questions arise:

What is to be done? Can the international agencies influence the demographic development at all, especially if the people in question live in distant geographical regions and in other cultures?

Is it even legitimate for "us in the global North" (or the West) to think about what others—countries, regions, groups of people—should or may do? Is it not perhaps presumptuous and hence inappropriate in view of colonial past characterised by exploitation?

And are not the contentions of critiques right that any population policy actually implemented has shown that it is inherently reactionary and inhumane?

Despite all such concerns and objections, that it is time to overcome this defensive attitude and bring the subjects of population growth and population policy out of the taboo zone.

Stopping population growth is not only a planetary necessity. It is also in the interest of the countries that are overburdened in every respect by a rapidly growing population.

Population policy is not reactionary per se. As in other policy areas, it

depends on the specific form it takes. The highest possible degree of participation, education and self-empowerment of the people concerned, which builds on their own maturity, prevents abuse. There are already encouraging examples of this here and there, such as the educational work of Hermione Quenum in Benin.

If anything it is particularly difficult for politicians from rich countries and countries with a colonial past to address this issue publicly. But they get many opportunities to draw, in confidential talks, the attention of their counterparts of the global South to the urgency of the issue.

Clarity in communication is particularly important. For example, by making it clear that high numbers of children do not mean more wealth, but, on the contrary, even more poverty and underdevelopment. And that it is not only "evil forces from outside" that are responsible for underdevelopment and lack of prospects of better times in these regions. It must be made clear that there is also a substantial home-made contribution to this bad situation and that it includes, first and foremost, high population growth.

There are many other ways to make the problem of population growth visible at various levels: at the grassroots level, through local, regional and global NGOs; within the framework of UN organisations, through international conferences, at which appropriate initiatives, measures and encouraging examples are presented, etc. Above all, it must be made clear everywhere that the commitment to preserve decent livelihoods and a healthy environment is closely linked to a sensible population policy. A very effective approach is a reorientation of development cooperation (aka development aid).

In the "South," national population policy measures require foreign funding. Politicians from countries

of the "North" can offer to fund programmes in the problem countries that have population policy objectives. Such dedicated funds would be among the most effective types of development aid.

Allocation of funds for development aid (or development cooperation) can be made dependent on the existence of a population policy and/or on the effectiveness of existing population policies. Establishment of monitoring, support and advisory mechanisms also requires external financial support.

There is a whole range of non-repressive measures that have already been tried out in various countries.

These include:

- Awareness and education programmes, especially for young women and girls.
- "Positive campaigning", e.g., advertising for small families (for two-child families), as was done in India in the 1970s.
- Free provision of contraceptives.
- Financial incentives for voluntary sterilisation (of men and women).
- State guarantee of a pension for the poorer classes, which is linked to not having more than two children.
- Establishment of advisory and support structures as part of development cooperation. □□□

[Who We Are: Initiative Population Policy
Dr Bruno Kern, born 1958, author, translator, public speaker. Published, among others, "Das Märchen vom grünen Wachstum" (2019) [Tr. The Fairy Tale of Green Growth]. Lives and works in Mainz.
Sara Sarkar, born 1936 in West Bengal (India), lived in India until 1982, then in Cologne. Author and activist. His publications include "Eco-Socialism or Eco-Capitalism? A Critical Analysis of Humanity's Fundamental Choices" (1999).

Dr Ernst Schrieffl, born 1969, works in a firm for building physics and energy efficiency. Also active as author; e.g., book "Öko-Bilanz" (2021) [Tr. Ecological Balance-Sheet]. Lives and works in Vienna.]

40 YEARS LATER

'Bhopal': Continuing Health Nightmare*Nicholas Muller*

NEARLY 40 YEARS AFTER the world's worst industrial disaster, scores of victims still suffer with little recourse. The victims recently marked the 39th anniversary of the deadly night when methyl isocyanate, better known as MIC, smothered Bhopal in central India.

The contamination area was estimated to affect almost half a million people. The dense, highly toxic chemical used in pesticides burst from a local factory of Union Carbide and went on to swiftly and silently kill thousands of people almost immediately. In the following years, it has directly and indirectly contributed to the deaths of thousands more. Those who survived suffer daily with a wide range of debilitating conditions, cancers, and shortened life expectancies, searching for any relief they can get without a clear medical solution.

Rachna Dhingra worked with survivors of the early December 1984 disaster at the Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal as a campaigner for the Bhopal Group for Information and Action for more than two decades.

During her student years at the University of Michigan, Dhingra first came into contact with the fallout of the disaster after meeting Bhopal survivors and doctors who had come to speak at a shareholder meeting of Dow Chemical, which purchased Union Carbide in 2001. "I was shocked to hear that close to 19 years after the disaster ... how dire things were in terms of healthcare, contamination, and justice," she said.

In 2003, she moved to Bhopal where she has been for the last 20 years, dedicated to helping survivors

with legal issues, access to health care, contamination, and striving for victims to "live a life of dignity."

"Like most people who hear about Bhopal, they associate it with something that happened a long, long time ago, a terrible thing and that was it," Dhingra said.

But that is far from the reality. Bhopal's recently dubbed status as India's third cleanest city doesn't match with current conditions on the ground for most of its poorest residents.

In a new long-term study conducted using data from the state of Madhya Pradesh, in which Bhopal is the capital, published this year by the University of California San Diego, the aftermath of the disaster is much more wide reaching than was previously understood. The research was done using entirely publicly available survey data from 1999 and 2015.

UCSD economist Gordon McCord, a co-author of the study, explained, "there has been a broader shock beyond the immediate chemical poisoning." He noted that the shocks radiate "further out than we previously thought."

Bhopal's water contamination is widespread throughout the city. The study focused on a specific population of children still in-utero and found three key consequences they later faced as adults. "That cohort of in-utero children compared to the children who were significantly older when the disaster happened had higher cancer rates by 2015. They also had a higher likelihood of having a disability that prevented employment, and lower levels of education compared to their peers who are just one or two years older or

younger... who might have been living a little further away from Bhopal," said McCord.

McCord hopes this research can help affect the situation not only in Bhopal, but anywhere governments seek to make it attractive for foreign companies to invest in similar projects. "In the process of economic development and the process of industrialisation, there is this risk of overlooking regulatory and safety investments because they are deemed to sacrifice or slow down this process or make you uncompetitive relative to some country that is not going to be investing in some kind of regulatory and safety processes," he said.

"We are not going to understand some of these impacts for a very long time and we won't really understand the mechanisms," he continued.

McCord believes that a line can be drawn connecting people who are disabled today and can't work, and who were in utero at the time of exposure.

McCord added that the Indian government has not responded to this new research.

"Union Carbide never revealed the toxicology of gasses that leaked on that night, keeping it a trade secret until today. Here doctors do not know how to treat people, there is no sustained relief for people," said Dhingra.

Without such knowledge, treatments are only of symptoms with little long-term relief. Some have breathlessness, and take inhaler after inhaler, painkiller after painkiller. People in Bhopal have consumed medicine by the kilogram, antibiotics, and psychotropic drugs, anything in search of relief.

"There are ten times the rates of cancers, huge kidney problems for patients because they have taken so much medicine, and there is no sustained relief," she said.

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“That is how it has continued. The worst affected people are getting the least compensation. The whole settlement cost Union Carbide not even 50 cents per share. A disaster like this in any other place would have made the company fold,” she argued. Instead, Union Carbide persists, since 2001 under the umbrella of Dow Chemical.

In Bhopal, the disaster has continued to play out for people in various ways. For the generation of children who were between 8 and 16 at the time of the disaster, many had to quit school because their fathers were no longer able to do heavy manual labor because of exposure. “This meant they became the breadwinners in the family. There is a whole generation in the worst affected communities especially where 70 percent of people were daily wage laborers,” Dhingra says.

Dhingra says a great number of those children, now in their mid 40-50s, are dying untimely deaths due to various illnesses, mental stress, and a high rate of suicide.

“There is a total disconnect between the needs of the survivors and what the government has been doing. Even though there were more than two dozen research projects to look into the problems affecting the gas victims by the Indian Council of Medical Research, all of those projects were stopped, and in 1992, without telling a single person what was wrong with them after all kinds of studies were done,” she said.

“Union Carbide continues to hide that information and continues to hide the recent publications they carried out on long-term impacts on exposure to MIC, even on rats or on humans. We know they have the data,” she added.

There is an entire community adjacent to the factory; it is largely a slum. There, 9 out of every 10 people have received what the authorities

dub total compensation. Their injuries are categorised as a minor health incident they have recovered from – that is not the reality.

“UC fully knew that exposure to MIC would result in residual injury. When you have that data and you tell the Indian government on purpose that there will be minor injuries, it is fraudulent,” Dhingra said.

“The power of the perpetrators versus the power [of those] affected is so massively imbalanced. 70 percent are poor, 50 percent are marginalised Muslims largely discriminated against, and 50 percent are Hindus from the lowest caste, and are considered dispensable. They are fighting one of America’s largest corporations,” she continued.

In September 2023, a dozen US lawmakers, led by Rashida Tlaib and Pramila Jayapal, wrote to the US Department of Justice urging the department to serve “India’s legal summons upon Dow” and thereby ensure the company would finally appear in an Indian court.

“Finally it was served and Dow appeared on October 3 through lawyers as a partial appearance. This is their old argument where they are contesting the jurisdiction of Indian courts. Dow knew they weren’t allowed to carry on their businesses but they did it,” Dhingra said.

This turn of events is significant, because “this is the first time in 36 years that a foreign corporation/individual has actually shown up in a Bhopal court,” Dhingra said.

Nesreen and Sekina are two of the thousands who have endured major trauma in the poisonous landscape of Bhopal. When she moved to the city, Sekina found the cheapest place available, unluckily right behind the factory in a neighborhood full of gas victims and contaminated water.

“I had two daughters when I moved there and gave birth to a son

in Bhopal. After a few years, one of my youngest daughters started to lose her voice. We took her to many places to find out what was happening, but no one could tell us why. And after a few years she lost her voice altogether. She thinks she lost her voice because of the contaminated water like many other people in the neighborhood,” Sekina recounted.

Dhingra met Nesreen in 2006 when they walked to Delhi from Bhopal over the course of 37 days, campaigning for clean drinking water for the city. “The prime minister did meet with us and allocated money for clean water, but it did not reach here until 2012,” Dhingra said.

Multiple generations of Nesreen’s family have been affected by the disaster. Her father, once a horse cart puller, could no longer work after his exposure to the disaster and eventually died of tuberculosis in 1994. In Bhopal, the rates of TB are extremely high and the disease affects the immunocompromised even more severely. COVID-19 was five to six times more deadly for gas victims in Bhopal.

“At least six people in my family died of cancer,” Nesreen said.

While there are programmes for adults to access treatment, a new problem has emerged among the younger generation. In 2006, Champa Devi Shukla started Chingari

For Frontier Contact

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Trust, which works for the rehabilitation of children born to victims suffering from congenital defects. "So many children were being born with serious issues, and then children started being born like this in our own family," she said. Her nephew

was born completely disabled and another was born with a cleft lip.

The question still remains whether Union Carbide and Dow Chemical will ever compensate newer victims of the disaster as demanded by survivors and advocacy groups.

Campaigners and survivors want appropriate compensation for people who have suffered lifelong injuries, for those who have drunk contaminated water, and for the area to be truly cleaned up. □□□

[Source: *The Diplomat*]

QUESTIONS APLENTY

'The Group of Four'

Julio Ribeiro

WHAT MOTIVATED Sagar Sharma and Manoranjan D to descend from the visitors' gallery to the floor of the House and release smoke from canisters to cause a commotion? Both young men and their co-conspirators who protested outside the Parliament building had one thing in common—they were educated but unemployed.

It is gracious of the Speaker to assume responsibility for what went wrong. The people, of course, may not appreciate these niceties.

One of them had repeatedly appeared before Army and police recruitment boards, but failed to make the cut. A woman among them is well into her 30s. Though armed with academic degrees and certificates, she could not land a job as a primary or secondary school teacher. So, she took part in the farmers' protest outside Delhi in 2020-21 and, later, in the sit-in organised by medal-winning women wrestlers protesting against a BJP MP, who was then the president of the Wrestling Federation of India.

Is unemployment now a major factor in India and did the youth involved feel that they had to highlight the plight of the unemployed before those empowered by the voters to make laws? Was this the sole motive for the doomed escapade? Or was it something sinister? Could an Opposition party or the entire

INDIA bloc be behind this parody? Remember also that the pro-Khalistan founder of Sikhs for Justice, Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, had threatened to strike back when he learnt from the disclosures made public by the US authorities that the Indian government or one of its accredited operatives was involved in a conspiracy to murder him. Pannun had threatened that December 13, the anniversary of the 2001 Parliament attack, would be the 'day of reckoning'.

There could be many reasons why these four desperate young people from different parts of the country, ranging from Haryana to Maharashtra, were brought together by Lalit Jha, who is also unemployed. All five youths had come to know each other through a Facebook group called 'Bhagat Singh Fan Page'. Jha was arrested in Kolkata and is being questioned.

Home Minister Amit Shah has not made a statement in the House about the obvious breach of security. The Opposition had demanded such a statement from him. It was to be followed by a discussion in the House. It could be that Shah is waiting for the outcome of Jha's interrogation, but he has not specified that reason. Shah is reported to be sheltering under the Lok Sabha Speaker's stand that he (Speaker) is the final arbiter on whatever occurs in the precincts of Parliament and

the authorities have to act on his orders.

Is the security of the Parliament House and its occupants, the MPs and officials, not the responsibility of the government of the day? Did then Home Minister not give a statement after the 2001 attack and the Opposition parties not condemn the shoddy security arrangements? It is the first time that citizens have been informed that even security in Parliament is the responsibility of the Speaker! The officials and the police were unaware of this new interpretation. It is gracious of the Speaker to assume responsibility for what went wrong and deflect it away from the Home Minister. The people, of course, may not appreciate these niceties.

A question needs to be asked: How did Sharma and Manoranjan, who procured visitors' passes from the BJP MP from Mysuru, manage to enter with smoke canisters hidden in their shoes? It is learnt that the young men 'modified' their shoes to accommodate a canister each! That would surely make it awkward for them to walk even a few steps! The bulging shoes should have immediately attracted the attention of the security personnel on duty.

A media report states that leaflets carried by the intruders and thrown in the well of the House were also hidden in the shoes. How many leaflets can be carried in this fashion? The 'modified' shoes would have been spotted by other visitors to the Lok Sabha gallery, even if the security men were inattentive. There is a lot of explanation to do.

The other sensational news in the past week was that the family of Nikhil Gupta, the man arrested in the Czech Republic at the behest of the US government for being involved in a conspiracy with an Indian government official to assassinate a US citizen (Pannun), has moved India's Supreme Court. The family has pleaded that he should not be extradited to the US as he has not committed the crime in question. The Czechs are more likely to pay heed to the US government's demand than submit themselves to the jurisdiction of an Indian court.

One wondered how India's pow-

erful and astute Prime Minister would pull India out of this mess. After the G20 summit, he is a global figure with clout on the world stage, but it is not enough to defy edicts or demands of a powerful country like the US. That country's judicial system rotates on a different plane from India's. The judges there are presumably independent of the political executive. Gupta may run out of options if the facts disclosed by the Americans have a leg to stand on.

Pannun has a following among some expatriate Sikhs. His views have cut no ice with Sikhs in India, particularly Punjab. But with this

narrative of being targeted, he may gain some adherents among unemployed Sikhs.

Prime Minister Modi's economic policies have greatly benefited the 'haves' in the country. Since his party's well-oiled propaganda machine and the absence of a credible Opposition leader have made a third term for him a near certainty, he can afford to reduce his own role in electioneering to concentrate on the economic needs of those at the bottom of the ladder. There are many states in the country over which unemployment looms large. □

[Courtesy: *The Tribune*]

INVOKING BHAGAT SINGH

Making the 'Deaf Hear'

Ram Puniyani

IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT building two youth breaching the security entered, jumped the visitors' gallery and sprayed the yellow gas, creating a ruckus in the house (13th December, 2023). The plan was hatched by four of them, to air their plight related to unemployment. Among them one was an e rickshaw driver, one a farmer, one a Government job aspirant and one a daily wager. They were given the visitors' pass by one BJP MP Pratap Simha from Karnataka. The two of them who entered the parliament had hidden the spray bottle in their shoes. It was on Anniversary of the terror attack on Parliament by terrorists in 2001, on the day when Parliamentarians had paid tribute to the martyrs of the attack.

The group which planned this included a girl Neelam (with post graduate degree) and a boy (Sagar Shinde) who was spraying the gas outside the parliament around the same time. Neelam Azad, is from Haryana's Jind and has many degrees to her credit—M.A, M.Ed,

M.Phil and has also cleared the National Eligibility Test. She could not get any job. Slogans shouted by them were against dictatorship, and for protection of the Constitution; they drew attention to unemployment and also shouted Bharat Mata Ki Jai and Vande Matram.

These youths were part of a social media group—"Bhagat Singh Fans club". They came in contact with each other through this online platform. Their inspiration came from the socialist revolutionary Bhagat Singh's similar action in the Central Assembly hall in 1929. One recalls that Bhagat Singh with his friend Batukeshwar Dutt had thrown the bomb from the visitors' gallery, with a caution that nobody is hurt by that. They also threw leaflets in the assembly against British colonial rule.

This action of these youth, who have been booked under UAPA, is the most powerful attempt to bring the issue of rising unemployment to the national attention. To recall, Bhagat Singh and his associates had resorted to this method as they knew

that their voice would not be carried by the media. There is an uncanny similarity to the present situation where the 'mainstream' media, appropriately called 'Godi media', is totally apathetic to the concerns of average people. The problems of rising prices, decline on the level of hunger Index and rising unemployment has not been its concern at all.

When Modi was campaigning in 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) promised that they will be creating 20 million (2 Crore) jobs per year. The real picture has been totally opposite of this. The first major blow to the employment situation came with demonetisation, where millions of workers lost their jobs in the small-scale rural sector. The BJP Government has been under total influence of big Corporate and creation of new jobs has been

For **Frontier Contact**

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put on the backburner. On the contrary some of the bigwigs (Narayanmurhti) are giving a call to work for 70 hours a week. In most of the unorganised sectors, working hours have gone up from 8 hours per day to 12 hours per day.

A report in The Economic Times points out that "The overall rate (of unemployment) rose to 10.05% last month [October, 2023] from 7.09% in September, data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy Ltd. showed, and the highest since May 2021. Rural unemployment jumped to 10.82% from 6.2%, while the urban rate eased slightly to 8.44%". Also the same paper on 1st November 2023 reported, "Last month, Indian tech-services outsourcing firms, including Infosys Ltd and Wipro Ltd, announced plans to halt hiring of college graduates, potentially leaving thousands of fresh engineering students without jobs".

This is taking place in the background where the democratic space for protests is shrinking; the Universities are preventing the student unions' elections and blocking the seminars which may be critical of Government policies.

While it is an open and shut case of frustrated students-youth

expressing their anguish in their own peaceful way, the ruling dispensation at the centre has put the UAPA like oppressive charges against them.

Meanwhile, Rahul Gandhi attributed it to the rising unemployment and rising prices, but the Home Minister has not yet made any statement in Parliament despite the opposition demanding it. Prime Minister Modi, rather than seeing the obvious, stated that this act is a serious breach and there is a need to find elements behind it. It is true that the chink in the armour of security system in Parliament has been exposed; it's vulnerable to even minor attempts like that of these youth. On the other hand what has come to surface is that there is a need to address the issue of unemployment rather than distracting the attention to try to see it as some sort of a conspiracy.

For one thing these youths are not part of any terror group. Mercifully none of the involved youth is a Muslim or from any other terror related organisation. The latter would have given an unfortunate boost to the efforts of those out to intensify Islamophobia.

The youth have brought to fore once again that it is not enough just

to pay lip service to Bhagat Singh. His concern for the deprived sections of society needs to be brought to the fore. Bhagat Singh's message of mass movements was central to his ideology. The path of violence was abandoned by him soon enough. He had come to the conclusion that Indians can achieve independence only through mass mobilisation. His act in the Central Assembly of throwing the bomb was meant only to make the 'deaf hear' and not meant for killing anybody. It is heartening to note that young people are turning to Bhagat Singh for guidance in the current troubled times and that many groups in the name of Bhagat Singh have sprung up.

The whole episode should be taken in the proper spirit unlike the attempt of Godi media in looking for villains of the piece. The aim of youth is crystal clear; their inspiration is not from any ideology of terror but from the greatest revolutionary of freedom struggle. Their anguish should be recognised and the message behind the whole episode of revising the 'employment generation' policy needs to be given a fresh and serious look rather than trying to find some conspiracy.

□□□

REFLECTIONS FROM A FRIEND

Subhas—An Argumentative Person

Vir Bharat Talwar

[There was a memorial meeting on Subhas Ganguly on December 19, 2023 at Tripura Hitesadhani Hall, Kolkata. 'Kaladhani', 'B-O-B' and some friends of Subhas organised it. Many of his friends could not attend it for various reasons. As Vir Bharat Talwar is seriously ill, he failed to come to Kolkata from Delhi. He wrote a short piece remembering Subhas in Hindi. T Vijayendra, yet another long-time associate of Subhas, has translated it into English for frontier readers.]

MY FIRST MEETING WITH Subhas Ganguly took place at Ballygunge Science College. Probably it was during 1971-72. I came from Patna and some members of National Liberation and Democratic Front [NLDF] took me to

meet Subhas and Bharati to a room in the Science College hostel. The hostel was adjacent to the college campus. At that time both Subhas and Bharati were vigorously working among students there with a view to developing a broader political

organisation. Those were the days when the 'event of Spring Thunder over Darjeeling' had tremendous impact on the student community in Calcutta and elsewhere. In those days in West Bengal and particularly in Calcutta, the political situation was supercharged. Terrible attacks were going on the Naxalites. Anyone even remotely connected with the naxalite movement came under police scanner. Violent skirmishes were going on between C P M and Congress -led students organisations. Living in those difficult conditions it was not that easy to work for building political organisation. For that a lot of cour-

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age, patience and commitment were required. By this one can understand what metal Subhas and Bharati were made of.

I could not get to know Subhas much because I never lived with him for a long period. He always lived in Calcutta and I lived first in Patna and then among tribals in Jharkhand. Sometimes I used to go to Calcutta in connection with my political organisation and the Journal Filhal [Hindi] which I used to edit and then meetings with Subhas also used to occur.

Subhas along with three other activists were arrested for political reasons and went to jail and suffered tortures in custody. After coming out of jail, Subhas joined Sanjay Mitra and worked for creating an organisation to fight for Democratic Rights and started a movement for the release of a large number under-trial prisoners who were denied bail. In truth all of them were arrested under false cases. In the process the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights [APDR] was born. In addition to human rights movement Subhas also wrote many valuable articles in Frontier magazine. One of his articles on the Human Rights Situation got the PUCL award. During this period political organisation NLDF kept on disintegrating. In later days, like many other members of our organisation Subhas and I, both moved away from practical political work and apart from reading and writing we got getting attached to works related to democratic rights movement across the country.

For one thing during this period I came a little closer to Subhas. Sometimes with my work and sometimes just to meet old friends I would come to Calcutta for 3-4 days and then I would stay with Subhas and Bharati in their Salt Lake apartment. Like this I stayed five-six times at their home and enjoyed the hospitality of Bharati.

Later when I was a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies in Shimla, Subhas went there and stayed with me for 10-15 days. This way, having spent a few days with him at Calcutta and Shimla, I got a bit nearer to Subhas and got to know him a little bit more and got acquainted with his good and bad habits.

I found that in personal conversation Subhas was very argumentative. He used to emphasise on the argument and make fun of illogical talks. Any idea behind which there was no argument, he would refuse to accept. He used to respect the individuality of the person staying with him and never asked very personal question. Subhas would like to read a lot. Whatever he read, he would tell his friends and talk about it. While reading if he liked something or found it very important he would immediately make a note of it. His reading range was vast and he read books of literature, politics, philosophy, history, mathematics, science etc. His likes and dislikes both were severe. While debating, even while talking ordinarily, he would immediately get excited and his voice would rise in emotion. However he would quiet down also. But the other person, in face of this excitement and emotion would be a bit cowered and get frightened.

Subhas had a very bad habit of smoking beedis. This habit affected his health also. There was another thing. He spent nearly all his life in Bengal. As a result he did not think much beyond Bengal or Bengalis. Because of this he had sharp arguments and differences with political activists from outside Bengal.

All the same Subhas was an indivisible part of all of us who rebelled against the system in the 1970s. Without him we all have been left a little reduced. It feels sad thinking that now when I go to Calcutta there won't be a meeting with Subhas. □

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HISTORY OF EXCLUSION

Criminal Tribes and Denotified Tribes

B K Lodhi

THE HISTORICAL JOURNEY of categorising and including or excluding various groups in the constitutional framework of India is a complex and evolving narrative. In 1919, the Government of India Act introduced the concept of the "Depressed Class", encompassing Criminal Tribes, Nomadic Tribes, Forest Tribes, Untouchables, and backward Hindus. This classification aimed to reserve seats for these communities in state and central assemblies through nomination.

However, when the Simon Commission reviewed the consequences of the enactment of this Act, 10 years later, on the advocacy of B R Ambedkar, only untouchable Hindus were included in the Depressed Class for reservation. Criminal Tribes, Nomadic Tribes, Forest Tribes, and 'Touchable backward Hindus' (later termed OBC) were excluded from this category. Over time, the 'Depressed Class' evolved into what people now know as the 'Scheduled Caste'. However, the efforts of Thakkar Bapa, a prominent social

activist for Tribals, played a crucial role in recognising the unique challenges faced by different types of indigenous tribal groups i.e. Criminal Tribes, Nomadic Tribes and Forest Tribes. The Government of India Act in 1935, influenced by a report by a Joint Select Committee led by Lord Linlithgow, granted constitutional status as Scheduled Tribes to these groups. This marked a significant shift, acknowledging their distinct identities and concerns.

Criminal Tribes were initially categorised as communities not adhering to any religion, enumerated separately from Hindus in the 1911 Census. In 1935, the British government identified a 'Schedule of Tribes' comprising diverse indigenous tribal groups, including Criminal Tribes, Nomadic Tribes, and forest dwellers. By 1937, both Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were granted affirmative action rights and political representation.

Post-independence in 1947, the Indian Constitution continued affirmative action for the now desig-

nated 'Scheduled Castes' and 'Scheduled Tribes.' However, Criminal Tribes and Nomadic Tribes were unfortunately deprived of constitutional status and excluded from the Schedule of Tribes, on the basis of this fallacy that since the Criminal Tribes are more backward than the scheduled Castes, Forest Tribes and hill Tribes, hence by including them in the Scheduled Tribes, they will not be able to get the benefit of reservation.

Despite meeting the criteria for SCs, STs, and OBCs, 269 De-notified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) were left off the list. Recognising this gap, the NITI Aayog initiated an ethnographic survey through the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) to include these overlooked communities in appropriate categories of reservation.

In summary, the historical trajectory reveals the intricate interplay of societal classifications and constitutional amendments, reflecting the evolving understanding of inclusivity and the ongoing efforts to address historical inequities and provide representation and opportunities for marginalised communities in India. □

[Author is the National Coordinator, Intellectual Cell of Vimukt, Ghumantu Janjati Parishad-AI]

LETTERS

A Parliamentary Trap?

The young men who suddenly appeared in parliament invoking Bhagat Singh were probably enacting a drama carefully orchestrated by the ruling party. The Ruling party member who provided passes for them to enter parliament has not even been questioned! The Home Minister has quietly passed on the responsibility of the security of parliament house to another agency. How smoothly all this has been done.

The drama actually realised its objective of providing a cover to suspend opposition MPs so that dra-

conian laws could be passed without a murmur. This was a well thought out trap. The ruling party is pass master in laying such traps. The pangs of unemployment were only a facade.

Madhu Bhaduri **Navlakha Granted Bail**

The Bombay High Court in its judgement granting bail to human rights activist Gautam Navlakha, an accused in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case, has noted that 'there was no material on record to infer prima facie that he conspired or committed any terrorist act'. Navlakha turned

71 a week ago. His health is deteriorating. The order, however, stayed for three weeks for NIA to move Supreme Court.

Last year the National Investigating Agency [NIA] opposed his bail application, claiming that he had been introduced to a Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence [ISI] general for his recruitment, which shows his nexus with the organisation.

The court refused to accept the NIA's allegation that Navlakha had connections with Pakistan's ISI as he had written a letter to a US court judge seeking clemency for Ghulam Fai (a US based Kashmiri separatist). Navlakha is currently under house

arrest in Navi Mumbai as per Supreme Court's directive.

Incidentally most of the 16 co-accused in the Elgar-Parishad case are out on bail. While scholar-activist Anand Teltumbde, lawyer Sudha Bharadwaj, Vermon Gonsalves, Arun Ferreira and Mahesh Raut are out on regular bail, Telugu litterateur Varavara Rao is out on bail on health grounds. Stan Swamy, an 84-year-old Jesuit activist of Jharkhand died of 'post-Covid complications' in judicial custody.

A Reader, Kolkata Who will listen to us?

Since the past month, there have been many complaints of contractual sewer workers under Delhi Jal Board (DJB) being unexpectedly removed from their jobs. The number of these complaints have been increasing with workers coming from all different zones of Delhi with similar cases. The sudden removal of hundreds of contractual sewer workers has not been covered by most media agencies and there has been no public debate on its repercussions on sewer maintenance.

Some of the workers have been working since the last 10-15 years in hope to secure regular employment under DJB. These workers, who were already facing financial difficulty because their salary was not released even during the festival season, are now left jobless and struggling to make ends meet.

Dalit Adivasi Shakti Adhikar Manch (DASAM) has been working with sewer workers since the past few years and has been meeting with administrative bodies regarding their issues.

DASAM, Delhi Manipur: Dead Bodies

According to a report by a Supreme Court-constituted committee to look into the violence, 175 deaths were reported during the clashes and 169 bodies were identified.

The bodies of 64 victims of the Manipur violence lying in morgues

since ethnic clashes broke out in the state in May were handed over to their families recently under tight security.

According to a report by a Supreme Court-constituted committee to look into the violence, 175 deaths were reported during the clashes and 169 bodies were identified.

The bodies of 60 members of the Kuki community, which were kept in the JNIMS and RIMS hospitals here, were airlifted amid tight security arrangements put in place by the Manipur Police and the Army's Assam Rifles unit.

Four bodies of Meiteis that were lying at a morgue in Churachandpur, a district dominated by tribals, were also brought to Imphal and handed over to their families for the last rites.

A Reader

BSF 'Ignores' NHRC Order

In a representation to the Chairman, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), human rights defender Kurity Roy, Secretary, Banglar Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM), has alleged Border Security Force (BSF) personnel, stationed near the Indo-Bangladesh border, have "completely destroyed" a West Bengal Dalit fisherman's property, "ignoring" NHRC directives.

Providing chronology of the MASUM complaint to NHRC, Roy said, the value of the property destroyed by BSF personnel stood at Rs 700,000, pointing out, this happened after repeated NHRC directives to BSF to allow the Dalit fisherman, Madhai Mondal, to go on fishing.

Tragically enough no notable action has been taken to address the concerns of the residents of Amudia village in particular and Swarupnagar block or taluka in general. The village falls under the North 24 Parganas district in West Bengal. Complaints against personnel of the BSF (Border Security Force) stationed near the Indo-Bangladesh border on deliberate interference in the livelihood ac-

tivities of the rural poor have largely gone unaddressed.

MASUM has repeatedly written to all the concerned authorities and also to NHRC office with the hope of effective redress of the legitimate grievances put forward by the villagers, primarily dependent on farm-based livelihood activities. A specific complaint from Ms Aparna Mondal, wife of Mr Madhai Mondal of Amudia village, to SP Basirhat Police District was also submitted.

Names of the perpetrators: 1) Company Commander of Amudia BOP, 112 BN BSF; 2) Mr. J C Pan 2 IC of 112 BN BSF; 3) Mr Jaffar Hossain Khan, 'G' Branch, 112 BN BSF; 4) Other labourers engaged by BSF to destroy properties of victims.

It is a direct attack on the life and livelihood of Mr Madhai Mondal and his family members, along with a number of households dependent on farm-based livelihoods in villages near the international border with Bangladesh.

**A Correspondent,
Counterview**

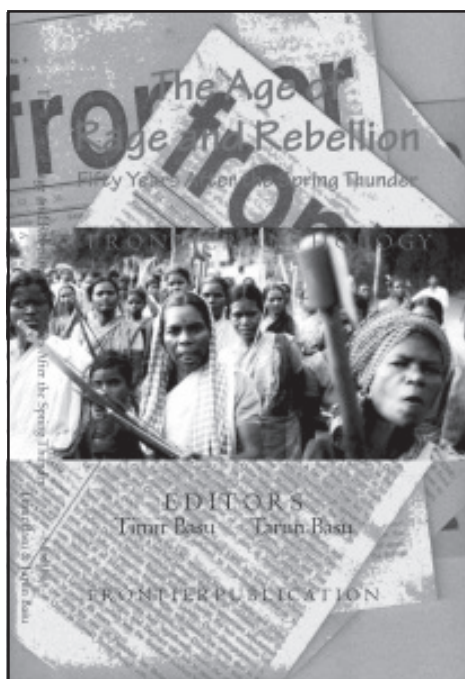
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Sales of physical books are booming, despite the rise of e-books. The growth of the Amazon Kindle and other e-readers in the early 2000s was predicted to kill off print books and, perhaps, the independent bookstore. But print-book sales are up 10-14% over the last three years across English-speaking markets, an industry analyst told CBC: Nice numbers "for an industry that many people thought was dying." Surprisingly, e-readers are more popular among older people—being able to make the text bigger is a plus for the varifocal generation—while younger readers, driven by the growth in genre fiction and young-adult novels, and by social-media trends like "BookTok," are buying print books in ever-greater numbers.

**Brandie Weikle,
CBC Radio, Canada**

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