

frontier

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On Other Pages

Comment	2
Note	3
MUSTO'S COLUMN Marx on Liberation of the Arab People Marcello Musto	4
DISMANTLING PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY Towards a Presidential Tyranny? Dipankar Bhattacharya	6
MORE ON G V RAO (1949-2023) 'Gaddar—the Communist Guerrilla' K Y Ratnam	7
"THE PALESTINIANS ARE SPARTACUS" John Pilger is No More Al Jazeera Staff	9
'SPRING THUNDER IN BHOJPUR' Gambhira—the Martyr of Champaran Arup Kumar Sen	11
14-POINT CHARTER How to Save Media Freedom Newslick	12
INHUMANITY FOR INHUMANITY Left Apologias for Hamas Franklin Dmitryev	13
Letters	14

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Old Wine, New Bottle

FOR MOST INDIANS 2023 WAS A TERRIBLE YEAR. THE PROBLEM is that the ensuing year doesn't seem to be better. On Christmas Day, President Droupadi Murmu signed the three criminal law bills—Bharatiya Nayaya (second) Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagrik (second) Sanhita and Bharatiya Sakshya (second) Sanhita, which will replace the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Criminal Procedure Code (CrPc) and the Indian Evidence Act—into law. The bills were cleared amidst suspension of the 146 opposition members of Parliament. The government purged the two houses of opposition MPs so that there was no voice of dissent that could go on record. Not that the old IPC was humane but it had some 'democratic rights' for citizens. And the judiciary had a role to intervene and look into police excesses. These new laws give blanket impunity to the police. Whatever little accountability the police had, all that is gone now; they are free to abuse and misuse the laws. And the ruling parties will always use it to silence the dissenters.

The government is saying they are replacing a colonial law with an Indian one. It's far from the truth. The Modi government is only playing to the political gallery with an eye to the coming parliamentary polls when Modi will seek the third term. By and large this is an old version of Indian Penal Code 1973 redrafted. In truth there is no decolonisation as claimed by the Home Minister Amit Shah because 90 percent of the old bill is retained in the new law. Nothing is decolonised. It is at worst old wine in new bottle!

The new law—BNS—gives extra-ordinary powers to the police. They are giving beyond 15 days, from 60 days to 90 days PC. It will enable police to torture, as opposed to 15 days earlier. In other words they have diluted the D K Basu Judgement which provided for so many safeguards like everyday medical check-up making sure custodial torture is not happening. It took 15 years before the government made the D K Basu judgement into a law in the form of Section 41A of the CrPc, after the sustained campaign by the human rights bodies across the country. In the judgement the court laid down certain basic requirements to be followed in all cases of arrest or detention to prevent custodial violence and protect human rights. Earlier, if a prisoner was tortured and brought to court he could speak about his torture to his family or lawyers but now he won't be able to do that with the video conferencing. Under the current law, legal aid is provided from arrest. In the new law there is no such provision.

In the new law the police can ask for police custody beyond 15 days from 60 days or 90 days. This is a drastic change to keep the arrested person in detention without trial. Show-casing India as the 'biggest democracy' in the world mocks at itself—for all practical purposes it is a police state.

All the legal precedents which were evolved around the IPC for the last 159 years might not hold good now. True, they have removed the word 'sedition', but it has really come

back in another form. They have added economic security. The focus of BNS echoes that of IPC to punish individuals rather than ensure justice.

The new legislation is neither anti-colonial nor transformative. Many say BNS is '10 times more draconian'. In the name of decolonisation, the laws with several regressive clauses just confer more arbitrary powers to the state. The police will now have freehand without being questioned to repress citizens, all in the name of national security.

Right now political parties, right and left alike, are more concerned about the suspension of MPs. This radical change in criminal law to make it more authoritarian is not their headache. Much depends on human rights organisations whether they could mobilise public opinion against this legalised fascism. People will have to resist the march of the 'iron heels' otherwise the saffron rule will erase whatever little democratic space is still available. □□□

02-01-2024

COMMENT

From Manipur to Mumbai

MANIPUR IS AGAIN IN NEWS FOR fresh violence. Ethnic conflict apart this time strife involved Manipur police commandos and militants in which one commando sustained bullet injuries in the Indo-Burma border town of Moreh. The previous violence in which 13 people died took place almost a month ago. While the continuing conflict is by and large ethnic in nature, there has been an underlying communal element to the violence, thanks to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its ideological mentor Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). They have long been trying to communalise the Manipur crisis to divert public attention from the real problem—the fear of dispossession of land which was at the root of the flare-up in May last year. Meiti Christians are now under attack. Even though over 40,000 Indian armed forces personnel are present in the state, firing continues on the edge of the valley and the hills. More than 4,300 weapons are said to have been looted from police armouries, mostly in Imphal valley. With a population strength of 300,000, Meiti Christians are actually, 'a minority within a minority'. Despite being the

majority ethnic group in Manipur, Meitis are an ethnic minority in India. Christian Meitis continue to feel insecure as many of their churches have been vandalised and destroyed. For quite some time there has been a silent programme to reconvert Christian Meitis to Sanamahism, the indigenous faith followed by the Meitis before their conversion to Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

Meanwhile, Rahul Gandhi will begin his second 'Long March' or what they call 'Bharat Naya Yatra' from January 14, a 6,200 km journey from Manipur to Mumbai. The first March or Bharat Jodo Yatra last year was planned to connect North-South. This time it is the East-West phase and Mr Gandhi will cover 14 states and 85 districts. Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Chattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra will be among the states he will travel. The Gandhian party is not in power in any of the states Mr Gandhi is supposed to tour for his public relations exercise. The Congress leadership thinks the March [or Yatra] is set to conclude on March 20 ahead of the general elections. Bharat Jodo

Yatra was credited by the party for its electoral successes in two southern states---Karnataka and Telangana. The Congress had snatched power from BJP in Karnataka and BRS in Telangana elections held not very long ago. But the March could not save them from humiliating defeat in Rajasthan, Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. How much the extensively publicised Yatra influenced voters is anybody's guess but it certainly motivated the demoralised Congress cadres to some extent. On choosing violence-hit Manipur as the starting point the Congress leaders would like to begin the 'process of healing the wounds of the people'. The mere presence of Mr Gandhi and his foot-soldiers is not going to help the Manipuris recover from the trauma they have been in for the last several months.

The BJP-led Manipur State Government and valley-based civil society organisations attempted to portray Kuki-Zo tribes as 'illegal immigrants' from Burma or 'not indigenous' so that their constitutional right to land could be questioned and Meitis could claim their right to hilly land otherwise reserved for the scheduled tribes.

More than 200 people have died in Manipur since the riot began in last May, with over 65,000 displaced within and outside the state. Mr

January 14-20, 2024

FRONTIER

3

Gandhi's Naya Yatra (or justice march) cannot deliver justice to the victims who perpetually live in a state of fear psychosis .Yatra or no Yatra Congress has not offered any alternative economic agenda other

than what BJP is preaching. Nor could they address the thorny land question that triggered the Kuki-Meiti ethnic conflict in Manipur in the first place. □□□

02-01-2024

NOTE

Mao Zedong 130

Sylvie Zhuangin writes:

EVERY 10 YEARS, CHINESE leaders hold events to commemorate the birth of the late chairman Mao Zedong, who was born on December 26, 1893. The events are an opportunity for the leadership to call for solidarity and rally the nation to address challenges, while reflecting on the legacy of the Great Helmsman.

Ten years ago, Xi led the Communist Party's Politburo Standing Committee, China's top decision-making body, in a tribute to Mao, bowing three times in front of the late chairman's marble statue.

Later that day, Xi, who was just months into his first presidential term, delivered a speech to honour Mao that was closely watched for insights into the party's new direction under his leadership.

Chinese Communist Party resolution cements Xi Jinping leadership, putting him on par with Mao.

In that 2013 speech, published by state news agency Xinhua, Xi called on the party to learn from Mao's political thoughts, which have served to guide party doctrine to ensure its rule continues.

Since coming to power, Xi has frequently noted Mao's political teachings. In 2020, he led the Politburo Standing Committee in 70th anniversary commemorations of the Korean War. The war, which lasted from 1950 to 1953, was officially known in China as "the war to resist US aggression and aid Korea".

During a speech to mark China's only military conflict with the US, Xi called on his nation to channel its "Korean War" spirit, and urged citizens to "keep their faith in ultimate victory".

In a veiled shot at the US, he said the spirit forged during the Korean War would inspire them to "prevail over all enemies".

This month, a series of state-backed events to commemorate Mao have been held across the country.

In an article last month intended to commemorate Mao's legacy, Qiushi, a leading party theoretical journal, also hailed what it called the country's "good fortune" to have Xi as "core of the party and leader of the people" again.

State-run television has been broadcasting television shows and films portraying Mao in his younger years following party doctrine, and leading it to victories such as the defeat of the Kuomintang, which was led by Chiang Kai-shek.

Marxist schools at leading institutions such as Peking University and the Chinese Academy of Sciences have also joined efforts to celebrate the occasion by hosting scholarly conferences reflecting on Mao's legacy and discussing China's path to a "great rejuvenation".

In recent years, Xi has repeatedly hailed a social management approach known as the "Fengqiao experience", a teaching of Mao's that did not enjoy popularity under

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previous Chinese leaders.

The mechanism is intended to mobilise ordinary people to resolve social conflicts at the grass-roots level to reduce the workloads of higher legal bodies.

Under Xi's leadership, Chinese authorities have also intensified crack-downs on non-official historical accounts of the Communist Party, especially ones about Mao, adding to a long-standing official ambiguity about the legacy of a leader praised for his role in national independence, but criticised for mistakes in later years, including the Cultural Revolution, a decade of social and political upheaval that ended only after Mao's death in 1976. □□□

[Courtesy: SCMP]

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MUSTO'S COLUMN

Marx on Liberation of the Arab People

Marcello Musto

[When he lived in Algiers, Marx attacked—with outrage—the violent abuse of the French, their repeated provocative acts, their shameless arrogance, presumption, and obsession to take revenge like Moloch in the face of every act of rebellion by the local Arab population.

“A kind of torture is applied here by the police, to force the Arabs to ‘confess’, just as the British do in India”—he wrote.

Marx: “The aim of the colonialists is ever the same: destruction of the indigenous collective property and its transformation into an object of free purchase and sale”.]

IN THE WINTER OF 1882, during the last year of his life, Karl Marx had a severe bronchitis and his doctor recommended him a period of rest in a warm place. Gibraltar was ruled out because Marx would have needed a passport to enter the territory, and as a stateless person he was not in possession of one. The Bismarckian empire was covered in snow and anyway still forbidden to him, while Italy was out of the question, since, as Friedrich Engels put it, ‘the first proviso where convalescents are concerned is that there should be no harassment by the police’.

Paul Lafargue, Marx’s son-in-law, and Engels convinced the patient to head for Algiers, which at the time enjoyed a good reputation among English people to escape the rigours of winter. As Marx’s daughter Eleanor Marx later recalled, what pushed Marx into making this unusual trip was his number one: to complete Capital.

He crossed England and France by train and then the Mediterranean by boat. He lived in Algiers for 72 days and this was the only time in his life that he spent outside Europe. As the days passed, Marx’s health did not improve. His suffering was not only bodily. He was very lonely after the death of his wife and wrote to Engels that he was feeling “deep attacks of profound melancholy, like the great Don Quixote”. Marx also

missed—because of his health condition—serious intellectual activity, always essential for him.

The progression of numerous unfavourable events did not allow Marx to get to the bottom of Algerian reality, nor was it really possible for him to study the characteristics of common ownership among the Arabs—atopic that had interested him greatly a few years earlier. In 1879, Marx had copied, in one of his study notebooks, portions of Russian sociologist Maksim Kovalevsky’s book, *Communal Landownership: Causes, Course and Consequences of its Decline*. They were dedicated to the importance of common ownership in Algeria before the arrival of the French colonisers, as well as to the changes that they introduced. From Kovalevsky, Marx copied down: “The formation of private landownership—in the eyes of French bourgeois—is a necessary condition for all progress in the political and social sphere’. Further maintenance of communal property, “as a form which supports communist tendencies in the minds, is dangerous both for the colony and for the homeland”. He was also drawn to the following remarks: “the transfer of landownership from the hands of the natives into those of the colonists has been pursued by the French under all regimes. (...) The aim is ever the same: destruction of the indigenous collective property and its transformation into an object of

free purchase and sale, and by this means the final passage made easier into the hands of the French colonists”.

As for the legislation on Algeria proposed by the Left Republican Jules Warnier and passed in 1873, Marx endorsed Kovalevsky’s claim that its only purpose was “expropriation of the soil of the native population by the European colonists and speculators”. The effrontery of the French went as far as “direct robbery”, or conversion into “government property” of all uncultivated land remaining in common for native use. This process was designed to produce another important result: the elimination of the danger of resistance by the local population. Again, through Kovalevsky’s words, Marx noted: “the foundation of private property and the settlement of European colonists among the Arab clans would become the most powerful means to accelerate the process of dissolution of the clan unions. (...) The expropriation of the Arabs intended by the law had two purposes: 1) to provide the French as much land as possible; and 2) to tear away the Arabs from their natural bonds to the soil to break the last strength of the clan unions thus being dissolved, and thereby any danger of rebellion”.

Marx commented that this type of individualisation of landownership had not only secured huge economic benefits for the invaders but also achieved a “political aim: to destroy the foundation of this society”.

Reflections on the Arab World

In February 1882, when Marx was in Algiers, an article in the local daily *The News* documented the injustices of the newly crafted system. Theoretically, any French citizen at that time could acquire a concession of more than 100 hectares of Algerian land, without even leaving his country, and he could then resell

it to a native for 40,000 francs. On average, the colons sold every parcel of land they had bought for 20-30 francs at the price of 300 francs.

Owing to his ill health, Marx was unable to study this matter. However, in the sixteen letters written by Marx that have survived (he wrote more, but they have been lost), he made a number of interesting observations from the southern rim of the Mediterranean. The ones that really stand out are those dealing with social relations among Muslims. Marx was profoundly struck by some characteristics of the Arab society. For a “true Muslim”, he commented: “such accidents, good or bad luck, do not distinguish Mahomet’s children. Absolute equality in their social intercourse is not affected. On the contrary, only when corrupted, they become aware of it. Their politicians justly consider this same feeling and practice of absolute equality as important. Nevertheless, they will go to rack and ruin without a revolutionary movement”.

In his letters, Marx scornfully attacked the Europeans’ violent abuses and constant provocations, and, not least, their “bare-faced arrogance and presumptuousness vis-à-vis the ‘lesser breeds’, [and] grisly, Moloch-like obsession with atonement” with regard to any act of rebellion. He also emphasised that, in the comparative history of colonial occupation, “the British and Dutch outdo the French”. In Algiers itself, he reported to Engels that a progressive judge Fermé he met regularly seen, in the course of his career, “a form of torture (...) to extract ‘confessions’ from Arabs, naturally done (like the English in India) by the police”. He had reported to Marx that “when, for example, a murder is committed by an Arab gang, usually with robbery in view, and the actual miscreants are in the course of time duly apprehended,

tried and executed, this is not regarded as sufficient atonement by the injured colonist family. They demand into the bargain the ‘pulling in’ of at least half a dozen innocent Arabs. (...) When a European colonist dwells among those who are considered the ‘lesser breeds’, either as a settler or simply on business, he generally regards himself as even more inviolable than the king”.

Against the British Colonial Presence in Egypt

Similarly, a few months later, Marx did not spare to harshly criticise the British Presence in Egypt. The war of 1882 made by the troops from the United Kingdom ended the so-called Urabi revolt that had begun in 1879 and enabled the British to establish a protectorate over Egypt. Marx was mad at progressive people who proved incapable of maintaining an autonomous class position, and he warned that it was absolutely necessary for the workers to oppose the institutions and rhetoric of the state.

When Joseph Cowen, an MP and president of the Cooperative Congress—considered by Marx “the best of the English parliamentarians”—justified the British invasion of Egypt, Marx expressed his total disapproval.

Above all, he railed at the British government: “Very nice! In fact, there could be no more blatant example of Christian hypocrisy than the ‘conquest’ of Egypt—conquest in the midst of peace!” But Cowen, in a speech on 8 January 1883 in Newcastle, expressed his admiration for the “heroic exploit” of the British’ and the “dazzle of our military parade”; nor could he “help smirking over the entrancing little prospect of all those fortified offensive positions between the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean and, into the bargain, an ‘African-British Empire’ from the Delta to the Cape”. It was the

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“English style”, characterised by “responsibility” for the “home interest”. In foreign policy, Marx concluded, Cowen was a typical example of “those poor British bourgeois, who groan as they assume more and more ‘responsibilities’ in the service of their historic mission, while vainly protesting against it”.

Marx undertook thorough investigations of societies outside Europe and expressed himself unambiguously against the ravages of colonialism. It is a mistake to suggest otherwise, despite the instrumental scepticism so fashionable nowadays in certain liberal academic quarters.

During his life, Marx closely observed the main events in international politics and, as one can see from his writings and letters, in the 1880s he expressed firm opposition to British colonial oppression in India and Egypt, as well as to French colonialism in Algeria. He was anything but Eurocentric and fixated only on class conflict. Marx thought the study of new political conflicts and peripheral geographical areas to be fundamental for his ongoing critique of the capitalist system. Most importantly, he always took the side of the oppressed against the oppressors. □□

DISMANTLING PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

Towards a Presidential Tyranny?

Dipankar Bhattacharya

IT WAS THE MONTH OF DECEMBER thirty-one years ago. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was yet to win power in Delhi, but it had found its way to power in Lucknow. In broad daylight on December 6 it demonstrated before the whole world what it could do with a slice of state power. The BJP government in Uttar Pradesh empowered a mob led by veteran leaders of the Sangh Parivar to demolish the Babri Masjid even as the dispute was being heard by the Supreme Court. The BJP even provided a 'logical' justification for this brazen act of vandalism. The court, according to the BJP, could not adjudicate on matters of faith concerning the majority community.

The message was loud and clear. If the BJP could throw such an open challenge to the Constitution while in power in a state, it was not difficult to see what it could do on the basis of control over state power at the centre. Ten years later Gujarat 2002 gave the country a louder and clearer warning. The UP BJP government had been dismissed for its complicity in the demolition of the Babri Masjid, but in Gujarat the

BJP government remained ensconced in power despite overseeing a carnage that was internationally condemned as a pogrom or genocide of Muslims. The term 'double engine government' had not yet become fashionable, but there was a clear forewarning about the shape of things to come.

Twenty-one years down the line, December 2023 will go down as the clearest glimpse of the Modi government's vision of India's political future. Emboldened by the BJP's victories in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan assembly elections, the government decided to bulldoze the opposition in Parliament. The assault that began with the summary expulsion of TMC MP Mahua Moitra on the basis of a dubious Ethics Committee report has reached absurd lengths with the mass suspension of MPs from both houses of Parliament following the December 13 breach of parliament security. And in the absence of opposition MPs, the regime has been ramming through one bill after another, bills of far-reaching import that threaten to convert India into a veritable police state with the executive armed with sweeping powers of surveillance and coercion and citizens left with hardly any constitutional safeguards.

India's parliamentary democracy now truly resembles a royal court running at the whims and mercy of a tyrant. In Mahua Moitra's case there was hardly any discussion on the Ethics Committee report and Moitra herself was not even allowed to speak and respond to the allegations and the report. While Mahua Moitra has been charged with

jeopardising India's national security by sharing her parliamentary login credentials with others, BJP MP Pratap Simha from Mysore on whose recommendation protesters secured passes to the visitors' gallery and managed to enter with smoke canisters has not been subjected to any kind of parliamentary scrutiny. Earlier in the previous session of Lok Sabha BJP MP Ramesh Bidhuri was allowed to get away with virulent Islamophobic abuses and threats against BSP MP Danish Ali.

In a parliamentary democracy, the government of the day is ultimately accountable to the people and when the parliament is in session, the executive is firstly accountable to the parliament. The Modi government has made it a habit to avoid the parliament in every possible way. The Prime Minister hardly attends Parliament except to deliver speeches that sound more like rhetorical demagoguery full of false claims, distorted and twisted references about past events and leaders without any historical foundation and not-so-veiled threats against political opponents and dissenting citizens. The opposition had to come up with a no-confidence motion to get him to open his mouth about the violence in Manipur. And now the demand for a statement from the Home Minister on the December 13 breach of Parliament security has resulted in wholesale suspension of members from both Houses of Parliament.

The Modi government is fast completing its arrangements to secure a total and tight grip on the state without any check and balance within the system. The Supreme Court verdict on the appointment of Election Commissioners has now been overturned by effectively vesting the entire power of appointment with the government. Without neutrality of the ECI the notion of

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free and fair elections can only become a pipe dream with electoral bonds and EVMs making the whole process increasingly opaque. The three new criminal bills passed with the dubious claim of decolonising India's legal architecture actually reduce free citizens in a free republic to the status of disempowered sub-

jects. Going beyond the Emergency era suspension of democratic rights, what people are witnessing now is a fundamental restructuring of the Indian polity—conversion of parliamentary democracy into a de facto authoritarian presidential system in a republic of fear. One can call it India's rapid descent into Modicracy

which negates every tenet of the preamble to India's existing constitution. The 2024 Lok Sabha elections will be India's last chance to stall this descent and save India's constitutional democracy. India will have to win this decisive battle. □□□
[The author is General Secretary, CPI-ML (Liberation). Courtesy: liberation, January, 2024]

MORE ON G V RAO (1949-2023)

'Gaddar—the Communist Guerrilla'

K Y Ratnam

GUMMADI VITTAL RAO (1949–2023) is known as Gaddar, one of the finest creative artists and a caste-class avant-garde poet, singer, and performer par excellence. Gaddar won titanic mass support for his exceptional contribution to the interface between cultural politics and revolutionary political cause in people's new democratic struggles in India. Coming from among the most oppressed layers of Indian caste class hierarchical society, Gaddar's creativity was drawn fervently to the folk songs of the Telangana region, specifically, Burra Katha, OGGU Katha and Veedhi Bhagotham- vernacular ballets that combined song, dialogue and performance with compelling story narration.

The turning point in Gaddar's life was in the 1970s when he interacted with the Art Lovers Association. In this progressive theatre arts group, sensitive and socially oppressed singers and artist performers were sympathetically received and encouraged. Although he initially continued to work with Art Lovers, his innate working-class aesthetic values inevitably led him to recognise that artists have the power and the responsibility to change society that art and culture are weapons in a people's struggle, and that culture and politics are inseparable. Thus,

under the leadership of Gaddar, the Art Lovers Association metamorphosed into Jana Natya Mandali (JNM), which was subsequently drawn into the Left-wing CPI (Marxist-Leninist) People's War Group. JNM developed a new aesthetic thought under Gaddar's leadership that gave a creative reinterpretation imbued with a new spirit in addressing the question of oppressed art and culture and acquired new meaning. Its epitome was Prajalanundi Prajalaku (From the Masses to the Masses), which captured people's imagination with its down-to-earth message.

The JNM has maintained particular contact with Tribes and Dalits and brought their art forms towards the radical politico-cultural sphere, raising the human self-dignity and land question conspicuously. Remarkably, the critical top leaders of JNM came from the radical Dalit artists like Gaddar and Vangapandu Prasad. Both combined trained many downtrodden revolutionary cultural artists as poets, singers, writers and artists. Sanjeev, Divakar, and Dappu Ramesh were top-grade singers and performers.

The JNM has given performances across the country. Its songs have been translated into Hindi, Marathi, Oriya, Gujarati, Bengali, Tamil, Kannada, and several tribal lan-

guages. Gaddar was a multilingual cultural artist. For him, the song is the metaphor of a bullet, and he expressly stated that 'the revolutionary song is the art form which is the bullet fired on the exploiter.' However, the state has unleashed unprecedented repression on the JNM activists at the behest of oppressors against whom the radical songs were composed and exposed their vulgarity of exploitation. During the peak of the CPI (M-L) Peoples' War movement, the State intelligence maintained that among the surest criteria for identifying someone as a 'Naxalite' were applauding Gaddar's songs or owning his songs cassettes. The JNM artists were harassed and arrested, and false cases were filed by the State, almost eliminating the first-generation writers and singers. Gaddar was also falsely implicated in the Ramnagar conspiracy case.

Gaddar has developed an unshakable conviction and belief that the 'Peoples War' led by the CPI (M-L) movement would bring liberation to the oppressed masses because that raised human dignity and self-respect among the underprivileged in one generation than the many generations of reformist struggles led by those traditional Ambedkarite movements, and the old-style Left, in Telugu speaking society. However, the Karamchedu-Tsundur massacres shook Gaddar without losing his conviction in the CPI (M-L) Peoples' War for the new democracy. Karamchedu-Tsundur massacres took an all-out struggle

against caste-class oppression. It echoed the question of where you stand about caste. This central question sought to rethink the Left, especially the CPI (M-L), which seeks to radicalise the Dalit question by addressing the new democratic revolution in India. The Karamchedu-Tsundur massacres were seen as a fight between the dominant caste feudal and Dalits in which Dalits shed their blood and became martyrs for their self-respect and dignity. In this context, Gaddar composed a song on Dalit martyrdom, 'Dalita Pululu.' He symbolised them as the 'political martyrs.' The song pays a 'red salute' to the Dalit martyrs, who fought valiantly against the ruling dominant caste feudal system. Politically, this has created a ripple, raising complex questions about caste class as the category of the radical canon of CPI (M-L) and JNM's cultural critique.

The intervention of radical left intellectuals' concern and their critical reflection on the long-standing politico-culturally vexed problem of caste class got crucial attention. The fundamental question of whether caste constitutes the base or superstructure, whether the Dalit proletariats and the materiality of caste oppression have been seriously considered by the CPI (M-L). As part of this, the All India League of Revolutionary Culture (AILRC) organised a national seminar in 1987 under the leadership of the then-general secretary of AILRC, K V Reddy. Later, as the General Secretary of this all-India organisation from 2001-2004, Gaddar made a significant cultural contribution to disseminating alternative radical culture.

There were no inactive years, and Gaddar never laid siege to his new democratic revolutionary ideas. During the late '90s, the state resorted to massive physical elimination of 'Naxalites' in the name of

'Fake Encounters.' In this state-sponsored alleged violence, many innocent ordinary people were killed as the sympathisers of Naxalites. Calously, their dead bodies were deposited as unidentified without handing over to their parents or nearer and dearer ones. Gaddar took up cudgels, against the combined might of the state at the local and central levels, initiated a stirring movement to recover those dead bodies, and handed them over to their parents or nearer and dearer ones. In this novel movement against the state, Gaddar's slogan was 'the dead bodies speak a truth', and composed many songs exposing the state violence and fakeness of 'Encounters.'

This unprecedented, courageous movement directly confronting the state and its apparatus posed a significant threat to the very existence of the then government. It prompted political considerations and culminated first by arresting and putting Gaddar behind bars and secondly by attempting to eliminate him by pumping six bullets into his body, one of which carried until his death. He defied physical and psychological harassment and abuse without retreating from the people's struggles, especially in the second phase of the separate Telangana movement. Gaddar's artistic performances stirred emotions across the region, which ultimately got statehood. It is not to say that Gaddar is alone responsible for creating separate Telangana, which he never claimed.

Gaddar's stage dress was the Gongadi and Gosi. The Gongadi (a coarse blanket/rug) is generally black with red stripes, and the Gosi (waist loin cloth to knee) is white with a red or blue border. Along with it, he holds a long, thick hand stick. He developed a peculiar 'sense of rhythm' and 'rhythm-consciousness' of the fusion point where the artists'

experience transmutes into people's real struggles, making the audience rapt and attentive.

Gaddar songs and lyrics provide a framework of reference for politico-cultural literary quality, which is too rich and impressive at a crucial moment in radical Left cultural history. His artistic strength was his love for the songs and folk culture of the people. Gaddar's striking and invaluable legacy has manifold heights that link him to nativity but are definitively anti-tradition and anti-Western.

Gaddar was more than just an artist. He was an ardent, uncompromising, doughty warrior extending beyond the stage. Gaddar's achievements in several people's struggles were extraordinary. He developed a unique position because of the relationship between culture, political ideology, and social control under the caste feudal specificity of Indian society. He was very explicit in explaining his fight against every form of oppression through song and performance by using collective experience and his unique individual experience. Gaddar was certainly a trained guerilla if not in scientifically formulated Marxism-Leninism. Still, extraordinarily, he comprehended the significance of their world-changing philosophy in the form of revolutionary artistic performance. Gaddar also recognised the significance and welcomed the living construction of the caste-class annihilation philosophy of Ambedkar. While doing that, Gaddar never put back his radical proclivities to work for synthesising Marxism and Ambedkarism.

He strongly felt that the ruling classes had resorted to irrational efforts to nullify the Indian Constitution by eliminating citizens' civil and political rights. He lamented that these human rights are dreadfully in danger and felt that an all-out struggle must be waged to defeat these efforts by

uniting the masses on a common programme explaining the power of the ballot. This purported political act of focusing on essentially constitutional issues was complicated and raised various questions about Gaddar's political commitment to the people's struggles, saying that he had

abandoned his concern of a 'proper revolutionary path' for matters of immediate or transient interests.

He was undoubtedly political, but he never was, nor would he allow himself to become a politician. He was not hasty in running for office and being a movement's political

leader, as he always believed in collective endeavour. One must not undercut his enduring and profound insights into politico-cultural radical ideology. □□□

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“THE PALESTINIANS ARE SPARTACUS”

John Pilger is No More

Al Jazeera Staff

[From Palestine to Cambodia, John Pilger worked extensively to expose human suffering caused by imperialist governments. Several of his final posts on social media dealt with the carnage unfolding in the Gaza Strip, where nearly 22,000 Palestinians, including many journalists, have been killed so far by the Israeli military.]

JOHAN PILGER, THE RENOWNED Australia-born investigative journalist who was a trenchant critic of the West's "imperialist" foreign policy, has died at age 84.

His family released a short statement on his social media accounts on Sunday [December 31, 2023] to confirm his passing in London, the British capital, a day earlier.

"His journalism and documentaries were celebrated around the world, but to his family he was simply the most amazing and loved Dad, Grandad and partner. Rest in peace," the statement read.

He is survived by long-time partner, journalist Yvonne Roberts, and his two children, Sam and Zoe.

Thousands of people took to social media to mourn his death and remember his work.

"The world just lost one of its finest journalists and a man of utmost integrity," one user wrote on X, formerly known as twitter.

"A great journalist, a fine man, and a tower of strength has fallen," another wrote.

Pilger was born in Sydney, Australia in 1939, but developed much of his career when staying in the United Kingdom, where he began working as a freelance journalist in the early 1960s.

His main focus was uncovering and exposing abuses of power by governments and large corporations. He was an unwavering critic of the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom's foreign policies, which he considered to be driven by an imperialist and colonialist agenda. He was a vocal critic of the US-led military interventions in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

In his book, *The New Rulers of the World*, Pilger exposed the role of the West in the 1960s coup in Indonesia and the US-led "war on terror" that ravaged Iraq.

Pilger was internationally acclaimed for his documentaries, which chose diverse subject matters and uncovered atrocities from around the world.

He made *The Quiet Mutiny* (1970) after a visit to Vietnam. In 1979, his *Year Zero* showed the heart-wrenching aftermath of the overthrow of Pol Pot in Cambodia, propelling him to international fame and directing attention to the plight of civilians in the Southeast Asian nation.

His latest in an illustrious list of dozens of documentaries, *The Dirty War on the NHS*, was released in 2019 and detailed an investigation into the woes of the British health system.

Pilger was also a serious critic of the Australian government's treatment of his country's Aboriginal peoples and wrote *The Secret Country*—his best-selling history of Australia—and made several documentaries about the subject.

He had a long history of writing books and articles and making documentaries about the Palestinian people and their brutal treatment by Israel and its Western allies.

Several of his final posts on social media dealt with the carnage unfolding in the Gaza Strip, where nearly 22,000 Palestinians, including many journalists, have been killed so far by the Israeli military since October 7, 2023.

"When I was last in Gaza, the Israeli air force terrorised the population by flying fast and loud and low at night," reads a post from last month. "All children bed-wetted and had violent nightmares, said a psychologist, and were 'damaged forever'. Such is Israel's exercise of its 'right to self defence'."

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Pilger was a staunch ally of jailed Australian journalist Julian Assange and had spent much of the past decade campaigning for his freedom.

“Julian and David are Spartacus,” he wrote in his final published piece last month, in reference to Assange and Australian whistleblower David McBride.

“The Palestinians are Spartacus. People who fill the streets with flags and principle and solidarity are Spartacus. We are all Spartacus if we want to be.”

Pilger was a two-time recipient of Britain’s Journalist of the Year award and received numerous accolades around the world, including the Sydney Peace Prize in 2009.

“It is not enough for journalists to see themselves as mere messengers without understanding the hidden agendas of the message and myths that surround it,” reads his quote that adorns his website and social media accounts.

[Source: *Al Jazeera*]

PILGER ON RUSSIA AND CHINA

[John Pilger delivered a speech exposing the western bias and one-sided reporting about Russia, China and third world countries, at the Trondheim World Festival, Norway on 6, September, 2022. Following is a shortened version of the address originally published in John Pilger’s blog at johnpilger.com]

IN FEBRUARY 2022, RUSSIA invaded Ukraine as a response to almost eight years of killing and criminal destruction in the Russian-speaking region of Donbass on their border.

Ukraine is the frontline. NATO has effectively reached the very borderland through which Hitler’s army stormed in 1941, leaving more than 23 million dead in the Soviet Union.

In December 2021, Russia pro-

posed a far-reaching security plan for Europe. This was dismissed, derided or suppressed in the Western media. Who read its step-by-step proposals? On 24 February, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy threatened to develop nuclear weapons unless America armed and protected Ukraine. This was the final straw.

On the same day, Russia invaded—according to the Western media, an unprovoked act of congenital infamy. The history, the lies, the peace proposals, the solemn agreements on Donbass at Minsk counted for nothing.

On 25 April, the US Defence Secretary, General Lloyd Austin, flew into Kyiv and confirmed that America’s aim was to destroy the Russian Federation—the word he used was ‘weaken’. America had got the war it wanted, waged by an American bankrolled and armed proxy and expendable pawn.

Almost none of this was explained to Western audiences.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is wanton and inexcusable. It is a crime to invade a sovereign country. There are no ‘buts’—except one.

When did the present war in Ukraine begin and who started it? According to the United Nations, between 2014 and this year, some 14,000 people have been killed in the Kyiv regime’s civil war on the Donbass. Many of the attacks were carried out by neo-Nazis

Watch an ITV news report from May 2014, by the veteran reporter James Mates, who is shelled, along with civilians in the city of Mariupol, by Ukraine’s Azov (neo-Nazi) battalion.

In the same month, dozens of Russian-speaking people were burned alive or suffocated in a trade union building in Odessa besieged by fascist thugs, the followers of the Nazi collaborator and anti-Semitic fanatic Stephen Bandera. The New York

Times called the thugs ‘nationalists’.

‘Since February, a campaign of self-appointed ‘news monitors’ (mostly funded by the Americans and British with links to governments) have sought to maintain the absurdity that Ukraine’s neo-Nazis don’t exist.

In less than a decade, a ‘good’ China has been airbrushed and a ‘bad’ China has replaced it: from the world’s workshop to a budding new Satan.

Much of this propaganda originates in the US, and is transmitted through proxies and ‘think-tanks’, such as the notorious Australian Strategic Policy Institute, the voice of the arms industry, and by zealous journalists such as Peter Hartcher of the Sydney Morning Herald, who labeled those spreading Chinese influence as ‘rats, flies, mosquitoes and sparrows’ and called for these ‘pests’ to be ‘eradicated’.

News about China in the West is almost entirely about the threat from Beijing. Airbrushed are the 400 American military bases that surround most of China, an armed necklace that reaches from Australia to the Pacific and South East Asia, Japan and Korea. The Japanese island of Okinawa and the Korean island of Jeju are loaded guns aimed point blank at the industrial heart of China. A Pentagon official described this as a ‘noose’.

Palestine has been misreported for as long . To the BBC, there is the ‘conflict’ of ‘two narratives’. The longest, most brutal, lawless military occupation in modern times is unmentionable.

The stricken people of Yemen barely exist. They are media unpeople. While the Saudis rain down their American cluster bombs with British advisors working alongside the Saudi targeting officers, more than half a million children face starvation.

January 14-20, 2024

FRONTIER

11

The history that is a living presence in China and Russia is rarely explained and rarely understood. Vladimir Putin is Adolf Hitler. Xi Jinping is Fu Man Chu. Epic achievements, such as the eradication of abject poverty in China, are barely known. How perverse and squalid this is.

In recent years, some of the best journalists have been eased out of the mainstream. 'Defenestrated' is

the word used. The spaces once open to mavericks, to journalists who went against the grain, truth-tellers, have closed. The case of Julian Assange is the most shocking.

And when will writers stand up, as they did against the rise of fascism in the 1930s? When will filmmakers stand up, as they did against the Cold War in the 1940s? When will satirists stand up, as they did a generation ago? □□□

'SPRING THUNDER IN BHOJPUR'

Gambhira—the Martyr of Champaran

Arup Kumar Sen

CHAMPARAM DISTRICT OF Bihar has entered the lexicon of anti-colonial struggle in India in the wake of Gandhi-led revolt of the indigo farmers in 1917. The same district witnessed revolutionary spark in the wake of the Naxalite movement in the early 1970s. However, this post-colonial revolt did not find place in the annals of Indian history. Very recently, a Bengali radical magazine, *Ebong Jalarka* (April-September, 2023), has attempted to document this revolt in Champaran, in its special issue on 'Spring Thunder' in Bhojpur and other districts of Bihar.

The fire of the Naxalite movement spread its wings to Champaran, particularly after the visit of Charu Majumder to Bihar in the year 1970. Gambhira Shah, of the Teli caste, led the peasant movement in Champaran. After finishing his study at Motihari college, he started earning his livelihood as a truck mechanic. He came to Kolkata in connection with his profession and got involved in the Naxalite movement. After giving farewell to his profession, he returned to his village, Mahuabon, in Champaran.

Gambhira started giving leadership to the downtrodden people for

establishing 'Garib Raj'. The radical movement protested against the rape of women and other social evils, and fought for the minimum wages of the agricultural labourers. Village Committees were formed in 25 villages under the leadership of Gambhira. After consulting the villagers in the meetings, the foot-soldiers of the revolution started occupying the lands of the big landlords of the region.

In 1977, Gambhira and his six associates were picked up by the police and they were told that a peaceful settlement would be made with the landlords at the Darpa Moth (a religious place), the mahanta of which owned 400 acres of land. Later, they were brutally tortured at the Moth by the landlords and their henchmen. On July 3, 1977, when the policemen and the chowkidar of the local police station refused to torture Gambhira and his associates further, the police officer opened the lockup and allowed the landlord/s and their goondas to enter into the police station, and they killed Gambhira after torturing him for four hours. Thus ended the life of the revolutionary son of Champaran.

Gambhira's wife stated after his

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murder that they would pursue the struggle to establish 'Garib Raj', the ideal preached by her husband. His mother, Babunia, said, 'Gambhira is not my son only, he represents the

poor of the world..

In the last rite of Gambhira Shah, 10,000 poor people congregated, of whom 3,000 were women. On July 3, 2007, a bust of Gambhira was

erected in his village, Mahuabon. Even now people congregate in the village on the day of his martyrdom every year.

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14-POINT CHARTER

How to Save Media Freedom

Newsclick

IN A JOINT EFFORT TO ADDRESS the challenges faced by the media fraternity in India, prominent journalist unions, including the National Alliance of Journalists (NAJ), the Delhi Union of Journalists (DUJ), the Kerala Union of Working Journalists (KUWJ), and the Andhra Pradesh Working Journalists Federation (APWJF), representing around 10,000 journalists, along with associated members from across the nation, have issued a compelling 14-point charter to members of Parliament and various political parties. The charter calls for immediate measures to safeguard and rejuvenate journalism, given the escalating threats to press freedom and the rights and dignity of journalists.

The unions have specifically urged the establishment of a Media Commission of India, drawing inspiration from the First and Second Press Commissions. The charter strongly condemns the prevailing Labour Codes and ongoing attempts to stifle media voices. It highlights the grim reality that numerous journalists are incarcerated for exposing governmental actions and the controlling forces. The document also points to journalists facing criminal charges, including UAPA charges, with several enduring years in prison.

In Kashmir, journalists like Fahad Shah, Sajad Gul, Irfan Mehraj, Aasif Sultan, and Majid Hyderi have faced arrests, instilling fear among their colleagues. Notably, since 2010, 15 journalists and two media managers have

been charged under UAPA, with seven still behind bars. Sedition charges have been levied against prominent journalists like Vinod Dua, Mrinal Pande, Rajdeep Sardesai, and others, while defamation charges target figures like Paranjoy Guha Thakurta and Ravi Nair. The charter further raises concerns about raids on media, confiscation of electronic devices, and harassment of media employees.

The unions stress the absence of Wage Boards for the past 13 years and the government's reluctance to constitute a new one or provide interim relief. Timed with the ongoing parliamentary session, the unions hope to draw attention to the detailed charter, attached herewith, and seek support in addressing the critical challenges faced by the journalistic community. The charter is a comprehensive effort to secure the future of independent journalism, emphasising the need for collective action to protect democracy and press freedom in the country.

The charter, delivered in the form of a demand letter, emphasises the crucial role of media in a democratic society, citing the declining ranking of India in the Freedom of Press Index. The unions express concern over the challenging environment faced by journalists in recent years, marked by an increasing number of journalists facing legal actions and attacks.

Highlighting the need for legislative reforms, the unions call for a law to protect journalists from arbitrary

arrests and malicious prosecution, emphasising that journalists should not be treated as terrorists. The demand also includes the withdrawal of recent amendments to the IT Rules, 2021, aimed at censoring independent digital media.

The charter advocates for the establishment of a common Media Council for print, electronic, and digital media, along with a comprehensive Media Commission to study the entire media landscape. Other demands include checks on cross-media ownership, support for national language news agencies, and the repeal of the four Labour Codes.

The unions urge the implementation of the last Wage Board recommendations and the restoration of previous pro-labour legislations, emphasising the pressing need for a new Wage Board. They also call for proper risk insurance coverage for media workers, a decent pension scheme, and financial support for national news agencies facing challenges.

The charter addresses issues related to internet shutdowns, misuse of laws like Sedition and Defamation against journalists, and the need for legal provisions for freelance journalists, stringers, and consultants. The unions also emphasise the release of all journalists, academics, and activists arrested arbitrarily.

In their closing remarks, the unions express hope that their demands will be considered with earnestness and immediacy. They assert that immediate steps are essential to save independent journalism, allowing print, broadcast, and digital media to coexist and flourish responsibly. □□□

(Courtesy: Newsclick.)

INHUMANITY FOR INHUMANITY

Left Apologias for Hamas

Franklin Dmitryev

[This is part of a longish piece—'Israel's war and Hamas attack stoke retrogression'—originally published in News & Letters]

A TERRIBLE NEW ROUND of war and reaction was set off on October 7 by Hamas, which rules Gaza in one-party fashion while suppressing protests. Carrying out massacres in Israel at a music festival, Hamas indiscriminately targeted mainly civilians, from babies to the elderly, and killed mostly Jews but also Palestinians, Thai guest workers and others. Its fighters wore body cameras documenting their own atrocities, such as beating, torturing and raping victims, including children, before killing them. One man told interrogators that his commander said that when it came to women and children, "Do whatever you want."

The horrors multiplied as the Israeli state declared war and rained massive 2,000-pound bombs on the Gaza Strip, again mainly killing civilians, including babies and children—and at the same time Israeli soldiers and settlers ramped up the violence against Palestinians on the West Bank, as another front in their war.

So many shocking news reports have come out of Gaza every day since October 7 that the horrors start to seem normal. Hospitals have been bombed, and most can no longer function. The UN agencies said that people "are literally starving to death as we speak," and that clean water is running out. Apartment buildings, schools, bakeries and refugee camps have been decimated. Nearly half of housing units have been destroyed. Two-thirds of the population is homeless.

Netanyahu and his fanatical allies have made no secret of their

ambition to annex all of Palestine, or "the whole land, including Gaza, including Lebanon," as Capt. Amichai Friedman preached to cheering troops. In fact, an Israeli think tank with ties to Netanyahu issued plans on October 17 for the complete ethnic cleansing of Gaza.

Clearly the historical and ongoing context is Israel's expulsion of 700,000 Palestinians at its founding and its occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem since 1967, and its relentless displacement, invasive surveillance and everyday violence.

This in no way justifies the way some in the world Left celebrated the murderous attacks and hostage-taking by Hamas. The void in revolutionary thought led them to equate the reactionary, theocratic-nationalist, authoritarian, patriarchal organisation Hamas with "the Palestinian resistance" and therefore to declare its atrocities "legitimate".

In truth this ideological pollution of the Left came to the fore during the Bosnian genocide in the 1990s. There is a real division on the Left between those who raise up Hamas as the embodiment of Palestinian resistance, and therefore see all its actions as justified, and those who reject its total disregard for human life. And yet, as with Syria and Ukraine, there is a large mushy middle that doesn't outright endorse Hamas but wants to conciliate the campist part of the Left that does and to maintain an unprincipled unity with them.

The crisis of the Left is situated within the global crisis of capitalism

and the ascendancy of counter-revolution. The biggest and loudest parts of the Left have lost confidence in the self-activity of the masses reorganising society, which is unseparated from their lack of confidence in the power of the Idea, that is, of a philosophy of revolution. In their desperation, they grab onto whatever power seems to oppose U S imperialism, whether that be a "multipolar" order based on China and Russia, Syria's Assad, Hamas, or unprincipled unity with the broad Left. Seeing the world's state powers divided into camps is easier than trying to hear the two worlds of rulers and ruled that clash within every country, and a diversion from a revolutionary perspective. Their ground is tail-ending state powers—real or aspiring—not dialectics of revolution. Missing is a banner of full human liberation.

Those on the Left who deny that Hamas targeted civilians, or who equate them with Palestinian resistance, or declare them to be a "progressive force" or their al-Aqsa Flood to be "a global turning point," have evaded the crucial question of what Hamas is for. The group has made no secret of its vision of the future: an Islamist, authoritarian, patriarchal state covering the area from the Jordan River to the sea. Israel's theocratic right shares the same vision, except with a different religious ruling group in charge. Its debased concept of "liberation" extends no further than expelling the occupation and does not mean liberation for women, workers, Jews, or the Christians and nonreligious who make up a substantial portion of the Palestinian population. One need only look at women's repression and courageous resistance in Iran, the country that supports, funds, and arms Hamas. The religious right in Israel is no better.

In this time when vestiges of democracy are under attack, war is spreading, new variants of fascism are growing in country after country, and society and its material foundations are crumbling under the impact of the climate and ecological crisis, nihilism infects the ruling class, whose belief in its own future is flagging. Too much Left thought is also trapped within the horizons of decaying capitalism. It therefore attaches itself to powers of resistance or opposition, not revolutionary transcendence. Resistance can lead to revolution, but not when it limits itself to these narrow horizons.

What is the nature of the resistance of Hamas, which presents itself as the one and only form of Palestinian resistance? Its origins lie in the global fundamentalist retrogression—Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Hindu—that surged in the 1980s, in part powered by Khomeini's counterrevolution in Iran. Iran has supported Hamas for most of its existence. Islamist movements fed off

the impatience with the lack of success of secular nationalist revolutionary movements. Hamas was born during the first Palestinian intifada, a mass uprising that began from below in the Jabalia camp in 1987 and spread throughout the occupied territories and within Israel.

The Israeli state had already been supporting the establishment of what became Hamas as an Islamist alternative to secular revolutionary groups. David Hacham, who worked in Gaza for the IDF at the time, said 20 years later, "I think we made a mistake."

However, Netanyahu and some of his top extremist allies repeatedly propped up Hamas and undermined the Palestinian Authority to maintain divisions and sabotage any chance of an independent Palestinian state as had been envisioned in the 1993 Oslo Accords that followed the first intifada. Hamas and Israel's right-wing extremists danced a deadly duet that energised reaction on both sides, ever since a right-wing Jewish extremist assassinated Israeli Prime

Minister Yitzhak Rabin, signer of the Oslo Accords, in 1995. His successor was well ahead in the polls until a campaign of suicide bombings by Hamas pushed the Israeli electorate to the right and paved the way for Netanyahu's first stint as Prime Minister.

In 2005 Israel withdrew settlers and soldiers from inside Gaza, while keeping control from the outside. Hamas won the last election in Gaza in 2006 and defeated its secular rivals militarily the next year. Since then, Israel has maintained a harsh blockade making life for ordinary Gazans difficult. Netanyahu in particular combined periodic military attacks on Gaza, callously calling the bloodshed "mowing the grass," to limit the power of Hamas with, at the same time, propping it up. His illusion that Hamas could be forever contained within his chosen limits follows from the grand illusion that an occupied people's quest for self-determination could be buried for good. □□□

[Courtesy: News & Letters]

LETTERS

A Happy New Year

Every cloud has a silver lining. The human spirit and human conscience is still alive and kicking. Protest against genocidal war, resistance to repression and oppression and the voices of peace, sanity, reason and humanity are vocal, visible and audible world-wide as well as in this large and diverse land of ours.

So let us move forward Friends, with a hope and the resolve to unitedly struggle for a better world of love, harmony, peace, friendship and equality. Wish you all a Happy New Year 2024!

Aurobindo Ghose

[Aurobindo Ghose, writer, economist, lawyer, human rights activist, can be reached at

Email: g_aurobindo@yahoo.com]

[Source: Countercurrents]

'Stop the Assault on Gaza'

P Smith, Christopher Pissarides, John F Clauser, Giorgio Parisi, Richard J Roberts [all Nobel Laureates] and 2049 Academics, Clergy, Professionals and Artists of America called on the US to lead the way in negotiating an immediate and lasting ceasefire, implementing a hostage-prisoner exchange, and supplying urgent humanitarian aid to Gaza.

The human toll is unbearable, with both sides committing grave violations of the Geneva Conventions and humanitarian law. Some 1,200 Israelis were killed in the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023 close to 7,000 wounded, and 240 taken hostage. Hamas committed atrocious crimes that day, including rape.

Since then, [update January 1, 2024], more than 21,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli bombing, the majority of them women and children. Tens of thousands are wounded, 7,000 are still missing under the rubble, and—in what amounts to a humanitarian disaster—most of Gaza's 2.3 million residents are starving, displaced, and deprived of water, electricity, and medicine.

The signatories to the statement sent to US President Biden denounced the October 7 attacks. At the same time, they made it clear how '75 years of displacement, 56 years of occupation, and 16 years of blockade have generated an ever-worsening spiral of violence that can only be stopped with a political solution'. Israel's continued apartheid in the West Bank, administra-

January 14-20, 2024

FRONTIER

15

tive detention (jail without trial) of civilians, while daily terrorising Palestinians by armed settlers, is causing an escalation of violence. This historic injustice continues unchecked because the US allows Israel to flout binding UN Security Council Resolutions.

The signatories also urge the US to stop its unconditional support of Israel's assault on Gaza and flagrant violations of international humanitarian law. Ideas for a political resolution abound but they require political will. The US must set the tone for a paradigm shift, from managing the conflict to solving it within a short and reasonable timeframe.

**Grazia Borrini-Feyeradend, USA
Assam CM**

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, citing Bhagwat Geeta, tweeted that it is the natural duty of a Shudra to serve the three Varnas—Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya. But times have changed. This is not the era of Ved Vyas but of Ambedkar.

Abhisek

No Protests in India

It is strange to note that none of the political parties in India—even the left or left extremist groups—have conducted any protest demonstrations and rallies against the inhuman genocide—especially of thousands of children and women—being perpetrated by the Zionist chauvinist terrorist state of Israel in Gaza War! With PM Modi definitely siding with the genocidal Israel, ditching India's longstanding pro-Palestinian foreign policy traditions in one go without any public or parliamentary discussion even, it seems people have given up the courage and perseverance to protest against the injustice and cruelty in such international affairs and especially on a matter in which thousands of people are coming to streets in protest demonstrations even in the US, Britain and

the West. Things look very sad and bad.

Israel's current war crimes in its continuing aerial attacks and horrible aggression of Gaza Strip, killing more than 22000 Palestinians, mostly women and children seems to have no parallel in the annals of modern post-WWII wars. Doubt whether even the barbarous bombings of Vietnam in the 1960s by the American imperialists took such a huge toll of civilians, especially children and women, in so short a time span. The chief war criminal Benjamin Netanyahu has absolutely no regrets but is giving more belligerent calls to exterminate the population there in the name of annihilating Hamas Jihadi terrorists. Strangely the International Criminal Court [ICC], which just in the last January issued a much-publicised but secretive arrest warrant against President Putin of Russian Federation on the allegations of his having transported some 'Ukrainian' children from their home places to somewhere in Russia—as per Russian sources it was done for their own protection to avoid war casualties—has remained completely silent in this mass genocide being committed by the Neo-Nazi Israeli ruling circles, supported by most of the Israeli Jews now turned into Nazi gangs. ICC is acting just as a lackey or tool of the American imperialists and not for the welfare of people of the world in general. True, Hamas did conduct a heinous terrorist operation on

7 October 2023 causing deaths of more than 1400 Israelis and other nationals, taking hostages, committing horrible atrocities, which everyone strongly condemns, but the Israeli 'retaliatory' attacks—a mini-Holocaust by Zionist chauvinists, that turned Gaza into a 'graveyard of children' as the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres described—are too excessive. The ICC must shed

its duplicity, immediately investigate into this mass-slaughter, first of all name the war criminal Netanyahu as the chief accused and issue public warrants of arrest against him for the genocide of children and women in Gaza as also the blatant transgression of all rules and norms of international law.

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Why Not a Plebiscite in Taiwan?

In all these debates over China's claim on Taiwan—whether to be brought about by peaceful diplomacy or military invasion—what is lost sight of is the choice of the people of Taiwan. Do they want to be a part of China under the present regime of Xi? Has any survey been undertaken to assess their views? Mere geographical proximity to the mainland does not mean that the same Chinese-speaking people inhabiting this particular territory (an independent state all these years), who had been enjoying civil liberties, will have to be herded into the state of People's Republic of China, where such liberties are denied. Let there be a plebiscite held in Taiwan, under the auspices of the UN, or some other international neutral body which is acceptable to PRC, to find out what the people of Taiwan want.

Sumanta Banerjee, Hyderabad

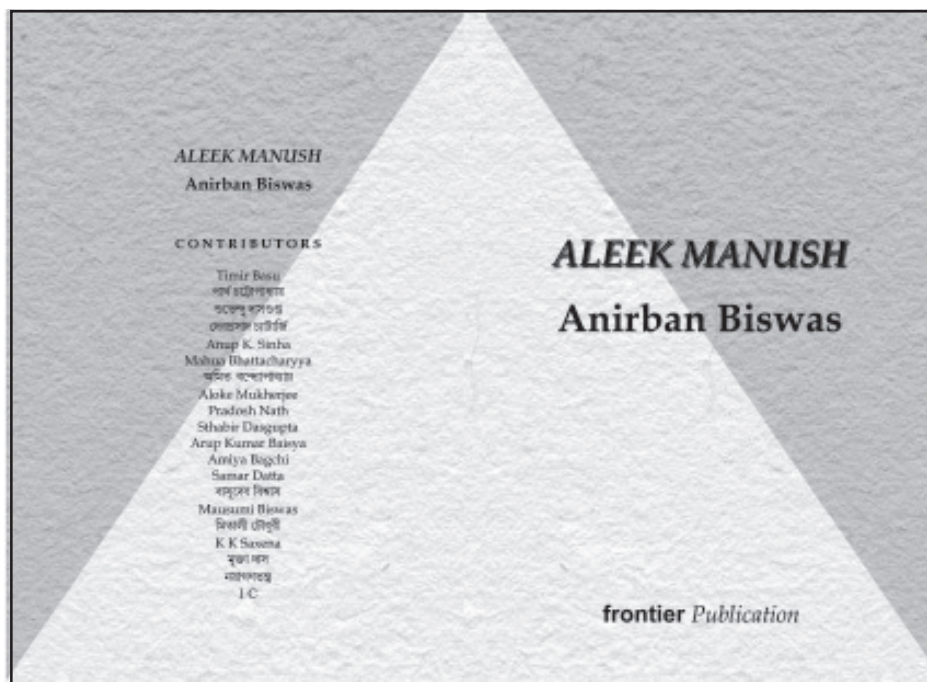
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