

frontier

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Israel on Trial

THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE (ICJ) ORDERED ISRAEL to prevent any acts of genocide against the Palestinians and do more to help suffering civilians. However, it stopped short of ordering a ceasefire as requested by South Africa, which filed the case. And quite expectedly South Africa's initiative to isolate Israel internationally has been widely appreciated by the people in the global South.

Palestinians said the World Court let them down by failing to order a halt to the Israeli military offensive on Gaza, but they also described the proceedings as a victory which has inspired hope of accountability.

In a nearly unanimous vote, the court's international panel of 17 judges ordered that Israel must do everything it can to prevent acts of genocide, clampdown on domestic incitement to genocide and ensure immediate and effective humanitarian aid for Palestinians in Gaza. But the all important January 16 ruling of the ICJ is just beginning of the case. It will take years of litigation over jurisdiction and the ultimate merits of South Africa's claim of genocide. And by that time how many more Palestinians will be devastated by the Israeli Defence Forces is anybody's guess.

The Israeli assault in response to attacks by Hamas on October 7 in which 1,200 people were killed and around 250 abducted, according to Israeli figures, has laid waste to much of the Gaza strip and uprooted most of its 2.3 million inhabitants. At the time of writing more than 100 people are still in the custody of Hamas while chiefs of CIA and Mossad were negotiating in Egypt over the hostage deal. Hamas wants permanent ceasefire but Israel is ready to concede a two-month humanitarian pause. As a result no deal was scripted to give peace a chance, albeit all the concerned parties hoped somewhat against hope that there would be light at the end of the tunnel.

The war has already killed more than 27,000 Palestinians in just four months, most women and children, and wounded more than 64,000 others. The death toll also includes 150 UN aid workers and dozens of journalists. Thousands of children are without guardians—they are war orphans. The Russia-Ukraine war cost about 10,000 people in one year.

The top court, however, has rejected South Africa's claims that Israel has committed genocide.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed the ICJ's decision not to order a ceasefire but rejected the claim of genocide as "outrageous"

and said Israel would continue to defend itself. Israel says it makes the utmost efforts to avoid civilian casualties. But the ground reality tells a different story. They are now carrying military operations in the West Bank as well. No doubt the ICJ ruling represents a legal setback for Israel but Palestinians need peace and space to rebuild their shattered lives.

Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh of the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority said Palestinians had hoped the ruling would include an immediate ceasefire.

Anyway, the decision "confirms the end of Israel's time with impunity and puts it in the dock as a war criminal".

The court did not rule at this stage on the core of the case brought by South Africa - whether genocide has occurred in Gaza. But the ICJ's acceptance of the case "means putting Israel on trial for its crime for the first time".

Palestinians see the UN court verdict as both win and setback.

Meanwhile, Israel's allegations that 12 employees of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) were

involved in the October 7 attack, have led several donor countries, including the major donors like the USA, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Finland to suspend aid to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres says two million Palestinians in Gaza, or 87 percent of the populations rely on UNRWA services that would be scaled back immediately, if the money is not restored. Many more Palestinians will die of hunger and disease, not Israeli bullet. □□□

03-02-2024

COMMENT

'The Paradox of Power'

'THE REPUBLIC IS DEAD. LONG live the Republic!' On 22 January 2024, the Republic of India, which came into being on 26 January 1950, was fully dismantled. It was not about the statue, or Lord Ram, or the Ram temple for that matter. It involved multiple violations of constitutional rights. It represented the political colonisation of Hinduism. 'People are witnessing the emergence of political Hinduism, with Modi being the chief priest. In its background, its design, the nature of its mobilisation, and in its impact, 22 January was a political event, meant to anticipate, precipitate, and consolidate a political triumph. It was, in essence, a consecration of a "Hindu rashtra" that is neither in line with Hindu ethos nor a rashtra as defined by Indian nationalism.

Indians have a new constitution now, not in the form of a fresh document, but by way of a fresh arrangement of political power that crystallises the changes that people have witnessed over the past decade. The original Constitution recognised minority rights as the limit, so as to define what a democrati-

cally elected government could not do. The new one institutes the will of the majority community to draw a line of fire that no organ of the government can cross, no matter what the text of the original Constitution said. Indians now have a two-tier citizenship: Hindus and associates are the landlords while Muslims and other religious minorities are the tenants. The original compact of the "union of states" has been replaced with a unitary government that delegates some administrative functions to the provinces. The fast-fading fiction of division of power between executive, legislature, and judiciary has now been repudiated in favour of governance by the all-powerful executive that lays down legislative rituals and demarcates the arena where the judiciary is permitted to adjudicate. Parliamentary democracy has given way not to a presidential system but to a rule by one—an elected king—a system where people elect their supreme leader and then leave everything to him.

This imposition of a new constitution does not yet enjoy the legiti-

macy of a constituent assembly. The Cabinet resolution might claim that the spirit of India was liberated on 22 January 2024, but it is not yet the official date of birth of India's second Republic.

Whatever the 2024 poll outcome, one cannot wish away the reality of this new political order. One cannot push away any further the challenge of radical rethinking.

It is pointless to blame the RSS and the BJP for doing what has been their *raison d'être*. The onus must lie with those who pledged their allegiance to the Constitution of the first republic. The gradual degeneration of secularism from the politics of conviction to convenience has contributed to this dismantling. The sheer arrogance of secular ideology, its disconnect with the people, its refusal to speak to people in their language and idiom has helped the delegitimisation of the very idea of secularism. One cannot forget that this death knell came thirty years after a full-fledged warning was announced by way of the demolition of the Babri Masjid. For thirty years, secular politics prevaricated, from a lazy assumption that this disease will disappear on its own to the cynical belief that caste politics can counter it. If secular

politics is in shambles today, it is the outcome of its own sins of omission and commission.

Republican politics has to rethink its strategy. The old lines dividing different parties may not be relevant in this new political world. The present crisis calls for a tectonic reconfiguration in politics. Those who are true to the spirit of the Republic will have to practically merge into a single political bloc. As elections turn

into a plebiscite with a pre-decided outcome, electoral politics will have to take a back seat. Movement politics and street opposition would be more efficacious in this new situation. But that too would come under pressure as the space for democratic protest would shrink. Politics of resistance would need to carve new and innovative ways while remaining democratic and non-violent. □□□

[Contributed by Yogendra Yadav]

NOTE

“Agriculture for Profits”

Bharat Dogra writes:

THE GRAIN REPORT, TITLED ‘Expanding Markets, Under mining Food Sovereignty—10 Years of Belt and Road’, released towards the end of January 2024, deserves serious attention in the context of the debate on China’s controversial Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

According to GRAIN China’s food trade with BRI partners surged by 162 percent in the last decade, reaching USD 76.10 billion. Since 2018, China has been the leading country providing investments internationally to agriculture, averaging USD 1.71 billion annually. While China has made significant strides in securing control over its overseas food supply through BRI investments, its dependence on food imports has grown has also grown.

There is the expanding involvement of Chinese corporations through BRI across the global food chain, from seeds to processed foods. In Africa, the BRI approach, referred to as “agriculture for profit”, has operated through massive private or state-owned companies and has coupled the financing of transportation infrastructure projects (like rail and ports) with projects to industrialise African agriculture through hybrid seeds, machinery,

logistics, food storage and processing facilities provided by Chinese companies.

Through its massive communication network, the BRI is promoting agriculture capitalisation in Africa. China’s agricultural intentions in Africa are mainly concerned with its soaring domestic meat consumption and support of its factory farming of poultry and pigs, which has created a huge demand for imported soybeans and maize for animal feed.

Despite earlier failed attempts, at the China-Africa Leaders’ Roundtable Dialogue in Johannesburg in August 2023, President Xi Jinping emphasised that China would continue to try and develop large-scale crop farming on the continent. He also stressed that importance would be given to build up seed production capacity and seed markets for its corporations.

In 2022, the GRAIN report says, the Tanzanian government provided it with 53,000 hectares for a large-scale farming operation in the Chunya District of the Mbeya Region and in 2023 it fast-tracked the approval of the company’s seed varieties. This company has also expanded in South America in a big way emerging as one of the biggest

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seed companies internationally. What is more its GM (genetically modified) maize varieties have been approved for use within China. Longping High-Tech and COFCO are also actively developing exports of soybeans in the West African country of Benin, which along with Tanzania and Ethiopia, was recently singled out by China for the development of soybean exports..

Benin is also a target for maize exports. Other crops for export to China, beyond maize and soybeans, are also being supported in Africa through the BRI.

Coming to the fisheries sector, the GRAIN report says that China’s rapidly expanding fleet of deep-sea trawlers as a techno-fix to deal with the decline in global fish stocks is actually playing a major role in accelerating the depletion. “Having badly overfished their own coastal waters, Chinese companies are sending their giant trawlers further and further overseas, bringing them into increasing conflict with coastal communities who depend on these same waters for their livelihoods and food needs”.

Under current BRI projects, the GRAIN report says Chinese fishing companies are encouraged to leverage BRI investments in harbour infrastructure to gain more fishing access in foreign countries, for instance Somalia, at the expense of local fishing communities and the sustainability of local marine resources.

Chinese fishing companies started moving into Somali waters in a big way after December 2018, when the Somali government issued renewable annual fishing licenses to 31 vessels that are part of the China Overseas Fisheries Association. A new deal with Chaoliang Group under the BRI framework will only worsen the situation.

In Pakistan, the GRAIN report says, a major project of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is part of the BRI, is the development of a massive deep-sea port in the fishing village of Gwadar in Balochistan that will connect by rail and road to China's Xinjiang region. The project, which gives control of the port to Chinese companies, has also brought an influx of Chinese fishing trawlers to the area. One of the Chinese companies now fishing the waters off of the Gwadar coast is Fujian Hengli Fishery, which is known for its illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing in West Africa, with evidence of various infringements including illegal nets,

shark finning and fishing without licences.

In December 2022, the Haq Do Tehreek (Gwadar Rights Movement) led a two-month protest to demand an end to deep-sea fish trawling by Chinese vessels and, together with thousands of people from local small fishing communities, staged a blockade of the port. Despite the strong community resistance, the Chinese companies are eager to fish in Pakistan's waters as they can sell the catch back home duty-free.

"Agriculture for profit" is not only an economic gamble, but also a social and environmental one—for China and its BRI partners".

□□□

RACE AND CASTE

Ambedkar and Du Bois

MC Staff

IN THE 1940S, AMBEDKAR reached out to W E B Du Bois, a prominent African-American activist and intellectual. In a short exchange, Ambedkar referred to Du Bois's fight against racism as 'the cause of securing liberty to the oppressed people' and introduced himself as an 'untouchable of India', drawing the parallels of the struggle in the discriminatory systems of India and the United State.

Writing from Bombay, Ambedkar found similarities in the fight against racism in the United States of America and the battle against casteism in India. He wrote:

"There is so much similarity between the position of the Untouchables in India and of The position of the Negroes in America that the study of the latter is not only natural but necessary".

The letter intended to inquire about a petition filed to the United Nations by the Negroes of the United States.

Ambedkar seemed to want to understand the process in order to take similar steps for the Untouchables of India.

On 31 July 1946, Du Bois respectfully wrote back to Ambedkar. His letter enclosed details of the petition. Du Bois acknowledged Ambedkar and his role in the upliftment of the Untouchables of India and expressed 'sympathy with them'.

The letter was short and sweet but expressed clear acknowledgement of parallels between the struggles of two communities oceans apart. The struggle for equal rights and the fight against discrimination based on Caste in India had piqued Du Bois's interest for a long time. Like him, many have pointed out to the similarities in the struggles of the caste system and racism over history; however, many have called the two systems similar and even the same.

Recognising the basic fundamental differences between the two oppressions is essential to be well-informed and respectful of each

struggle. While both systems result in a hierarchy with tyrannical exploitation of those at the bottom of the pyramid, the two are distinctly different. Casteism has been practised over millennia in India and is rooted in a religious background, unlike racism, which is based on the theory of a superior race.

The caste system is based upon 'hereditary monopoly' rather than competitive opportunism like in the United States. Racism arose from the need to support the institutions of slavery, exploitation of labour, and to keep Black Africans as free-serving labourers. Caste was assigned as the primary occupation of the people and gave no possibility of vertical mobility in it. The person is identified by the work they do.

Dalits, previously known as Untouchables, are in the lowest position in the 'four-tier' caste system. The notion that the Dalit community is 'impure' creates a divide between them and the other castes. Within the caste system, Brahmins claim, without any logical or rational justification, to be on the top. However, Dalits are discriminated against by all castes.

On the other hand, 'impurity' or 'inferiority' was a result of racism, not the cause. One single race [Caucasian] is viewed as 'superior to all the others. Hence, people not from the 'superior' race are viewed as lesser than or inferior.

Race, a classification based on physical traits, is different from Caste, where one group may not be distinguished by their physical features. Unlike racism, caste discrimination is practised amongst the people of South Asian ethnicity and plays within the same nation. People of the same ethnicity are discriminating against one another. People could not even determine the difference in their caste without knowing their last or family names.

Despite the differences, the caste system has often been used to find relativity in the experiences to understand the relationships between the oppressor and the oppressed across the globe. It also becomes a way to extend empathy and solidarity for one another, unite the causes to fight against all the oppressors and learn from the historical and social reforms brought by one another.

While Ambedkar and Du Bois empathized with each other's cause, Ambedkar's letter shows that he aimed to draw inspiration from the steps taken by National Negro Congress to fight racism. It is pertinent to note that Ambedkar became a prominent Dalit leader who was invited to serve as the first Law Minister of India.

Similarly, in 1972, Dalit Panthers emerged, taking idea from Black Panthers. In their manifesto, the Panthers underlined their inspiration:

"From the Black Panthers, Black Power was established. We claim a close relationship with this struggle"

When Martin Luther King visited India with his wife, Coretta, he also saw similarities in the struggles of the lower

castes Indians and Black Americans. A fan of Gandhi, King wanted to see the 'untouchables' and visited a high school low-caste students in Kerala. The principal introduced King as a 'fellow untouchable from the United States of America'.

At first, King was upset, not understanding what he had to do with the caste system. 'I was a bit shocked and peeved that I would be referred to as an untouchable', King had said.

After giving a bit of thought, King was able to see what the principal meant: the society caged the financial advancement of African Americans, who were placed at the lowest rank in the racial hierarchy of the United States, just like Dalits, who were chained with limited opportunities to prevent them from reaping social and financial benefits in the country.

"Yes, I am an untouchable, and every Negro in the United States of America is an untouchable,' King had realised. In her article, the journalist Isabel Wilkerson stresses these similarities in a way that it seems that racism is the caste system of the West. However, equating racism and the caste system without acknowledging the differences runs into the danger of turning a blind eye to the very different horrifying experiences of the victims of two different systems.

The differences are central to the experiences of slavery of Black Americans in history and of the systematic racism faced in the United States. It is also these differences that make the isolation of Dalits from society, literal untouchability, and the violence faced by them today experiences unique to casteism. These differences in experiences, distinctive in their way, must be recognised. However, they can still create multi-ethnic empathy and find support as a larger community of the oppressed in a system of social discrimination. □□□

[Courtesy: Madras Courier]

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Musical Chair in Bihar

Ahmed Raza

ON JANUARY 28, NITISH Kumar was sworn in as chief minister of Bihar for the ninth time, with support from the Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP]. With this, the week-old drama over the change of alliance in the state came to an end. Congress, meanwhile, made a scathing attack on Nitish Kumar and said Mr Kumar was giving tough competition to 'chameleons' in changing colours.

The appointment of the NDA government under Nitish Kumar and events over the last few days raise many crucial questions about the emerging contours of Indian politics. The issue of morality, for long has been abandoned in favour of political pragmatism or opportunism. Institutional structures and propriety that provided a fig leaf for deception were cast aside way back in the 1960s. Now, the crucial question is: Are ideology, morality, and legitimacy in Indian politics coming to an end? Does the mandate of the people matter in the new coalition politics that India is witnessing at the moment? When ideology is rendered irrelevant, how is the mandate of the 2020 Bihar Assembly Election to be understood?

There are numerous examples of unholy and opportunistic coalition governments, both at the centre and the state. From the time of the Janata Party government in 1977 when a disparate group of parties came together to form the first anti-Congress government at the Centre, politics of convenience continues to rule the roost. Bharatiya Janata Party-People's Democratic Party (PDP) coalition in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir was the

most unexpected alliance in recent years. Ideologically they were pole apart and yet they came together to manage the exchequer. If anything, a political and opportunistic alliance often compromises the mandate given by the people. This was most apparent in Bihar in 2015 when the Janata Dal (United) and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) came together to fight the election and form the government in Bihar, but later the RJD pulled out of the alliance in 2017 and the Nitish Kumar-led JD (U) continued in office with the support of the BJP. Nitish Kumar's JD (U) performed poorly in the 2020 Bihar assembly elections as the party was reduced to just 43 seats. Despite overshooting the partner JD (U), the BJP agreed to form the government under Nitish Kumar's leadership. The BJP needed Nitish to keep the RJD-led coalition out of power, and Nitish needed the BJP to form the government. Again, Nitish quit the NDA in 2022 and formed a government with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and Congress. Political parties discard their core ideology in lieu of power gain and connect their decisions with the 'development of the nation'. It is unfortunate that political ideology is now associated with the business of pursuing personal interests. A political ideology attempts to provide a comprehensive vision of society and human existence. It is an overarching framework within which individuals can make sense of the world and find ways to improve it. Bihar has been experiencing the lowest scores on various developmental indexes, such as low human capital, weak institutions, and poor infrastructure, as it has had a history of political

instability with frequent changes in government. The execution of policies and the quality of public administration have not played a defining role in development trajectories. Economic growth and political stability are deeply interconnected. On the one hand, the uncertainty associated with an unstable political environment may reduce investment and the pace of economic development. On the other hand, poor economic performance may lead to government collapse and political unrest.

Indian party politics is typically characterised as centred on leaders, based on social cleavages, and not ideological orientation. For today's politicians, power is the essence of life. Ideology, political commitment, and loyalty are variables. The party system that existed until a decade ago is under challenge. It is more like business executives seeking better career options. It has become purely transactional. Political parties in India appear to be personalised parties, and political credibility does not find any space. Uddhav Thackeray has so well diluted Shiv Sena's aggressive Hindutva to accommodate his secular allies like the NCP and Congress.

Declining Nitish Kumar's political credibility and trust among the voters in Bihar on account of personal power gains leads to a dent in JD (U) for the forthcoming 2024 parliamentary election. The JD (U), which governed Bihar for most of the period since 2005, suffered its worst electoral loss in 2020 due to the shrinking credibility space among the voters. The people of Bihar brought Nitish Kumar to power in 2005 with great expectations after 15 years of RJD's rule. Ten years ago, Nitish Kumar was known as 'Susashan Babu' (an architect for good governance) in the political system, as he

was then the face of development in Bihar. From 2005 to 2013, everything was fine, as he also tried his best to live up to the expectations of the people. Though, in the last 10 years, Nitish Kumar has lost political credibility, he is now the best example of repeated 'U-turns' politics, frequently changing political allegiance. Nitish Kumar remained in the post of chief minister and continued to run the Bihar government according to his own political, if not personal interests. His popularity and the party's influence are waning.

There appear to be a few questions about why Nitish Kumar loses his political credibility and is ready for far-reaching consequences. Whereas the BJP and Congress did not lose their credibility if they compromised their core ideologies while making unholy alliances with the PDP in Jammu and Kashmir and

with Shiva Sena in Maharashtra, respectively. Both the BJP and the Congress did not deal for the chief ministerial position despite having the single largest party and offered these positions to others. The BJP remained in one of the alliances under the chief ministership of Mehbooba Mufti. Like-wise, the Congress did it in Maharashtra under the chief ministership of Uddhav Thakrey. On the other hand Nitish Kumar has changed political alliances conveniently for the last ten years and remains as the chief minister of Bihar. Nitish Kumar always looks forward to opportunistic alliances and often compromises the mandate given by the people.

Nitish Kumar's credibility is always questionable in the 'INDIA' alliance owing to frequent political flip-flops. Nitish Kumar had brought the concept of the 'INDIA' alliance in

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order to counter the BJP at the national level and shifts his alliance which weakens people's faith in democratic institutions. It should be a cause for concern in Indian politics. □

[The author is Assistant Professor in MANUU University]

DOCUMENT

76th Anniversary of Gandhiji's Assassination

Shamsul Islam

[The following is the compilation [in chronological order] of communications of Sardar Patel's home ministry, his letters to Nehru, Syama Prasad Mookerjee and Golwalkar on Gandhiji's murder. This chronological presentation clearly shows how Sardar Patel developed his understanding (which must have been based on facts supplied by his officials) of the role of RSS and Hindu Mahasabha involved in Gandhiji's assassination.

This document also carries comment of a contemporary senior ICS on the linkages of the killers with RSS. Another shocking document is from 2013 Goa conference for Hindu nation of Hindu Janjagruiti Samity which was opened with a congratulatory message of Modi (the then CM of Gujarat) and where Gandhiji's killing was celebrated.]

GOVERNMENT

COMMUNIQUÉ BANNING RSS 4TH FEBRUARY 1948

"Undesirable and even dangerous activities have been carried on by members of the Sangh. It has been found that in several parts of the country individual members of the RSS have indulged in acts of violence involving arson, robbery, dacoity, and murder and have collected illicit arms and ammunition. They have been found circulating leaflets exhorting people to resort to terrorist methods, to collect firearms, to create disaffection against the

government and suborn the police and the military."

[Cited in *Justice on Trial*, RSS, Bangalore, 1962, pp. 65-66.]

SARDAR PATEL LETTER TO NEHRU

FEBRUARY 27 1948

"All the main accused have given long and detailed statements of their activities. In one case, the statement extends to ninety typed pages. From their statements, it is quite clear that no part of the conspiracy took place in Delhi...It also clearly emerges from these statements that the RSS was not involved at all. It was a fanati-

cal wing of the Hindu Mahasabha directly under Savarkar that (hatched) the conspiracy and saw it through. It also appears that the conspiracy was limited to some ten men, of whom all except two have been got hold of."

(RSS supporters quote the above part of Sardar's letter and hide the following text of the same letter which is very significant)

The letter continues: "In the case of secret organisation like the RSS which has no records, registers, etc. securing of authentic information whether a particular individual is active worker or not is rendered a very difficult task."

[V. Shankar, *Sardar Patel: Select Correspondence 1945-50*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1977, p. 283-85]

SARDAR PATEL LETTER TO SYAMA PRASAD MOOKERJEE JULY 18 1948

"As regards the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha, the case relating to Gandhiji's murder is sub judice and

I should not like to say anything about the participation of the two organizations, but our reports do confirm that, as a result of the activities of these two bodies, particularly the former, an atmosphere was created in the country in which such a ghastly tragedy became possible. There is no doubt in my mind that the extreme section of the Hindu Mahasabha was involved in the conspiracy. The activities of the RSS constituted a clear threat to the existence of Government and the State. Our reports show that those activities, despite the ban, have not died down. Indeed, as time has marched on, the RSS circles are becoming more defiant and are indulging in their subversive activities in an increasing measure."

[Letter 64 in Sardar Patel: Select Correspondence 1945-1950, volume 2, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1977, pp. 276-77.]

**SARDAR PATEL LETTER TO
THE THEN SUPREMO OF
RSS, M S GOLWALKAR
19 SEPTEMBER, 1948**

"Organising the Hindus and helping them is one thing but going in for revenge for its sufferings on innocent and helpless men, women and children is quite another thing... Apart from this, their opposition to the Congress, that too of such virulence,

disregarding all considerations of personality, decency or decorum, created a kind of unrest among the people. All their speeches were full of communal poison. It was not necessary to spread poison in order to enthuse the Hindus and organize for their protection. As a final result of the poison, the country had to suffer the sacrifice of the invaluable life of Gandhiji. Even an iota of the sympathy of the Government, or of the people, no more remained for the RSS. In fact opposition grew. Opposition turned more severe, when the RSS men expressed joy and distributed sweets after Gandhiji's death. Under these conditions it became inevitable for the Government to take action against the RSS... Since then, over six months have elapsed. We had hoped that after this lapse of time, with full and proper consideration the RSS persons would come to the right path." But from the reports that come to me, it is evident that attempts to put fresh life into their same old activities are afoot."

[Cited in Justice on Trial, RSS, Bangalore, 1962, pp. 26-28.]

**COMMENT OF A SENIOR
ICS WHO WAS FIRST HOME
SECRETARY OF UP**

"Came January 30, 1948 when the Mahatma, that supreme apostle of peace, felt to a bullet fired by an RSS fanatic. The tragic episode left me sick at heart."

[Rajeshwar Dayal, A Life of Our Times, Orient Longman, 94.]

**MODI AS CM OF GUJARAT
SENT CONGRATULATORY
MESSAGE TO GOA HINDU
RASHTRA CONFERENCE
(2013) WHERE GANDHI'S
'VADH' WAS CELEBRATED. IT
SHOWS RSS HATRED FOR
GANDHIJI EVEN TODAY.**

For the BJP executive committee meeting in Gujarat in June 2013, the then Gujarat CM, Modi sent a mes-

sage to the 'All India Hindu Convention for Establishment of Hindu Nation' organised by the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti (HJS) on JUNE 7th. Modi's message read: "Even though every Hindu conducts himself with love, compassion and intimacy with god, giving precedence to non-violence, truth and "satvikta", repelling demoniacal tendencies is in our destiny. It is our tradition to remain alert and raise a voice against persecution... Only by protecting our culture, can the flag of "dharma" and unity be kept intact. Organisations inspired by nationalism, patriotism and devotion for the Nation are true manifestations of people's power."

On the 3rd day from the same dais in this convention from where Modi's felicitation message was read, one of the prominent speakers, K V Sitaramiah, declared that Gandhi was 'terrible, wicked and most sinful'. Rejoicing the killing of M K Gandhi, he went on to declare, "As Bhagwan Shri Krishna said in the Gita, *Paritranaya Sadhunam Vinashaya Cha Dushkritam/Dharamasansthapnaya Sambhavami Yuge-Yuge* (For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I am born in every age) On... 30th January 1948 evening, Shriram came in the form of Nathuram Godse and ended the life of Gandhi".

In truth K V Sitaramaiah has also authored a book titled 'Gandhi was Dharma Drohi and Desa Drohi' in which the back cover matter, quoting from the epic Mahabharata, demands 'Dharma Drohis must be killed', 'Not killing the deserved to be killed is great sin' and 'where the members of Parliament seeing clearly allow to kill Dharma & truth as untruth, those members will be called dead'. □□□

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For Frontier Contact

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REPUBLIC DAY PARADE

The Question of Sovereignty

Prem Singh

(Following comment was written on the occasion of 68th Republic Day—26 January 2017. The same is again released to the youth of the country for their serious consideration.)

THE CONSTITUTION OF India was adopted on 26th Jan 1950. Ever since 26 January is being celebrated as the Republic Day, a celebration of India's sovereignty. Vibrant tableaux of various states and departments are part of the parade. But predominantly it is a celebration of the display of military prowess. On careful observation one will find that after the adoption of the new economic policies in 1991—that is after the ruling classes compromised the economic sovereignty of the nation—the celebration of Republic Day has become more and more extravagant. During the past three decades, as political sovereignty got compromised along with economic sovereignty, the celebratory extravaganza of Republic Day on Rajpath reached its zenith.

The question is whether sovereignty has also come of age with the coming of age of these exhibitionist celebrations? A quick look at the decisions taken in the wake of the neoliberal order makes it clear that the ruling classes have derailed governments from the axis of the Constitution, which embodies sovereignty; and instead mounted them on the axis of neo-liberalist institutions of global capitalist order like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation etc. These agreements and decisions have been taken at the behest of global capitalist economic institutions to further the interests of national and international corporate houses, multinational companies and the likes. The current leadership, which claims that nothing has been done in the last 70 years, has shown

remarkable promptness in compromising national sovereignty in just two and a half years of office. They have no concept of either freedom or of the sacrifices made by people in the struggle to achieve freedom for the country, hence they do not care if sovereignty is lost.

The ruling class presents military power as the symbol of the nation's sovereign power. But it is a false reassurance given that now there is 100 percent foreign direct investment in Defence and the concessions have been given to America to interfere in defence apparatus. Governments, especially the current government, whip up nationalistic hysteria to mislead the people, so that they are unable to see or comprehend the treason against constitutional sovereignty. The nationalist sentiment is usually whipped up against Pakistan, the country the Indian army has always had the wherewithal to defeat. Several thousand square kms of Indian Territory is under Chinese control. The ruling classes never invoke nationalism for a military solution to that. All in all, the spectacle parade at the Republic Day has become a comprehensive exercise by the ruling classes, its civil society and the common masses to fill the void resulting from the loss of sovereignty. The more the neoliberal noose tightens around sovereignty, the more extravagant this display will be. Jingoistic nationalism will get more jingoistic.

This situation is tremendously knotted and depressing. But it also presents an opportunity to salvage and strengthen the sovereignty achieved after a long struggle. Espe-

cially to the young. The youth in India do not come from any one domain. There are distinct economic, social and educational domains. Across all these three domains, there is a huge army of educated, semi-educated and uneducated unemployed youth. They have different perspectives regarding the nation and their place in it. They don't necessarily even have the same point of view about the neoliberal assault on national sovereignty. Most, though, want to see India as a superpower. Some indeed believe that it already is one.

The youth must understand that a nation which cedes its sovereignty can never become a superpower. They can attempt the difficult visualisation that in the neoliberal order, private enterprises will also have their tableaux in the Republic Day parade in future. The 100 percent foreign/private investment in Defence will also have an imprint on the parade. They must think if it is acceptable to them? Will they want a share in the neo-imperialist/neoliberal nation? Or will they carry out their responsibilities in the sovereign Indian nation? The nation's sovereignty can only be saved if the nation's youth resolve to save it with new preparedness and understanding. □□□

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

LAND REFORMS IN LEFT REGIME

A Probe into West Bengal's
Socio-Economic Perspective
1977-2011

by **Manas Bakshi**
Price : Rs 195

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 PERVERSIONS OF MARXISM-LENINISM

China and DRC

*Charles Andrews**

LATE IN JANUARY SINOHYDRO Corp and China Railway Group Limited re-negotiated their plunder of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). They hold 68% of Sicominex, a joint copper and cobalt mining venture with a local corporation. The two Chinese corporations will pay a pitiful royalty of 1.2% on gross sales.

The Chinese firms also pledged to invest \$7 billion in infrastructure in the Congo during the life of the agreement. However, in the previous contract they had agreed to put in \$3 billion but actually invested only \$822 million.

Congo is the world's biggest producer of cobalt and third-largest copper producer. Chinese companies dominate its mining sector.

The Chinese state owns Sinohydro, the globally dominant builder of hydropower dams. The state originally owned China Railway Group Limited outright, then spun off the equity in shares traded on the Shanghai and Hong Kong stock exchanges. The state retains majority control, while Lehman Brothers, Allianz Global Investors, and ICBC Credit Suisse among others hold millions of shares, too. It is no problem; both the government of the PRC and Western finance capitalists are interested in profits.

Those profits come from the sweat, long hours, and dangers endured by workers. In the Congo, the mining corporations contract with logistics agents who in turn subcontract truckers to carry the ore to a seaport. If a trucker loses a cargo, it is out of his pocket. The truckers went on strike last year, demanding a risk allowance because of frequent

robberies. Did the Chinese companies make a separate, more equitable agreement with truckers? Of course not. Western and Chinese corporations looked the other way while the contracting agents fought the strike.

For the people of the Congo there is no real difference between Chinese and Western exploiters. They are all in league with state bosses, they plunder the mineral wealth of the country, they make and break promises about infrastructure and industrial development, and they care not a whit for the workers.

In a discussion posted on Youtube, Joti Brar, a leader of the World "Anti-Imperialist" Platform, excused the actions of PRC state monopoly capitalists in the Congo.

First, Brar tried to narrow the issue to private firms. "If Chinese companies are operating [in other countries] and they're not run by the Chinese state..." Sorry, but they are. Brar goes on, "The conditions for how they operate there will be the conditions of the country. ... China is not in charge of the conditions."

Is this how communists think? Brar says, "In countries in Africa ... the struggle of the workers is mostly against comprador governments, or capitalist governments, that allow particularly bad conditions to carry on. ... It's not China that's enforcing that. China says, 'We don't interfere in how you run your country.' With a straight face Brar offers, "It's not China's responsibility to fix that." Tell that to the truckers who move the ore to seaport.

This is not hands-off commodity trade. Chinese state capital in the Congo exploits workers just like

Western corporate capital. Yet Brar has the nerve to declare, "It's in the responsibility of the workers in those countries to fix that [the bad conditions]." Ms Brar, when the day arrives that the workers do fix things, will Chinese capital want compensation for expropriated mines?

The apologetics of Joti Brar, the World "Anti-Imperialist" Platform, and similar publicists for Chinese imperialism are not only a moral outrage. Their stand against imperialism is only against U S imperialism – and drains all revolutionary force out of what remains. With rosy lies about the People's Republic of China, they push aside the work of advocating, explaining, and organising for socialist revolution in their own country. For credibility they talk a veneer of socialism; they join social democrats on particular injustices and reforms; but their main activity is to peddle illusions about China, including its perversions of Marxism-Leninism.

Western publicists for China praise the carnage that globalisation dealt the working class of their own country. One such person claimed, while parroting the PRC slogan of "win-win cooperation," that "trade with China boosted the annual purchasing power for US households." The company moved your job to China for lower wages, but you can buy a cheap kitchen faucet at Walmart.

Does effective anti-imperialism in Western countries require socialist revolution? Not necessary; just support an up-and-coming imperial power as it moves to displace established, decaying US imperialism. The apologists take pride in such opportunism, which is often rewarded with a junket, a small grant, or an academic appointment from the "Communist" Party of China, or the government of Russia, or both. □□□

*[*Charles Andrews is the author of The Hollow Colossus]
(Source: In Defense of Communism)*

TELEMARATHON SELLS LIES

Ukraine is Losing the War

John Wojcik

THE NEW YORK TIMES IN the US and The Telegraph in the UK, early and consistent supporters of flooding weapons in Ukraine to fight the Russians, are now admitting that the war, as it drags on, finds overwhelming majorities of Ukrainians rejecting the TV news they get from their government as nothing but “propaganda”.

Since 2022, the Ukrainian “democracy” Americans are defending with tens of billions of their tax dollars has only allowed one television programme to broadcast everything they hear about the war. The only news programme legally broadcasting in the country is called Telemarathon United News.

“It’s a weapon”, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine said last year when Telemarathon became the only source of information allowed. Telemarathon is allegedly a “consortium” of all the channels previously in existence and it operates 24/7, whenever Ukrainians turn on their television sets. Viewers now say that the station provides nothing but war propaganda. Unfortunately, even though the US has a plethora of TV stations and other media, most of the news they broadcast to US viewers regularly is the news they all get, one way or the other, from Telemarathon.

Everyone is fed up with this picture that says, ‘We’re winning, everyone likes us and gives us money’, Oxsama Romaniuk told the Times. She heads up the Kiev-based Institute of Mass Information. “It’s all state propaganda”, she declared.

The station was initiated by a Zelensky decree, with no input or discussion in parliament. Any televi-

sion stations that opposed the war or disagreed in any way with Zelensky’s policies were barred from joining Telemarathon.

The programme’s coverage of the recent Ukrainian counteroffensive, widely seen around the world as having been a failure, described instead a campaign that was winning battle after battle. Ukrainian forces are described as “professional”, “skilled”, “smart” and “effective” while Russian forces are described as bungling, in disarray, and unable to fight effectively. How those disoriented and poorly-trained troops now seem to be winning the war is not an issue Telemarathon addresses.

Opinion polls show that less than 15% of the population believes the propaganda the programme beams out to the country. Almost 75% of the political figures appearing on the network come from Zelensky’s Servant of the People Party; few other voices are ever seen or heard. Ukrainians tired of war and calling for peace negotiations, meanwhile, risk arrest as traitors—which is exactly how they are described on the Telemarathon network.

Never covered on Telemarathon, as on most US television networks, is the issue of who is making money off the war in Ukraine, particularly the armaments makers and fossil fuel networks. Weapons companies, for example, are having a field day in Ukraine, where they are testing all kinds of new and lucrative arms for use in current and future wars around the world.

A quick end to the war would hurt their unprecedented profit-making. That’s why these companies are pushing for congressional approval

of the Biden administration’s request for \$50 billion more to fund the war in Ukraine, hoping to extend it well into the future. It amounts to US taxpayers paying for the profit-making and arms-testing parties underway in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, the right-wing press in Europe, led by The Telegraph in the UK, is lamenting what it sees as a coming victory by Russia. “The foundations of Europe are trembling”, the newspaper wrote in an editorial in December, “as Putin closes in on a victory”. In a widely-circulated opinion article from the end of 2023, Telegraph columnist Richard Kemp declared, “Ukraine is losing, but the UK must stand by it”.

A Russian victory is becoming increasingly possible because Zelensky himself has said so, and President Biden also is saying it can happen if Ukraine doesn’t get his extra \$50 billion. The US and NATO pushed, since the end of the Cold War, to extend their power right up to the borders of Russia and into former Soviet republics. They counted on fear and on Russophobia to help them get away with the expansion, and now the world is paying the price for that recklessness with the growing danger of wider war.

With the US leading the charge against Russia in Ukraine and elsewhere, how much room is there for compromise and the construction of peace as everyone sees that the right-wing oligarchs in Ukraine have failed to do their part in defeating Russia? What dangers grow as Biden tries to grapple with the disastrous results of his war policy in Ukraine? How do the forces in Ukraine, the US and Europe that lied to the people in their countries by telling them this was a war for democracy and not a proxy war for geopolitical advantage by the US and NATO react now that they may lose their war?

There is no question that major sections of the ruling class in the West are preparing for their war in Ukraine to fail. Some of this plays out on the pages of *The Telegraph* and the *New York Times*, voices in the UK and the US that have been the ring leaders for pouring fuel onto the fire in Ukraine.

In mid-December, the *Times* wrote about what it called “People Snatchers” in Ukraine, shadowy figures who pull men off the streets and out of workplaces in order to provide more fodder for the war machine. At gunpoint, mentally disabled and developmentally disadvantaged people who are legally draft-exempt have been pressed into service and even killed in battles on the front line. There are not enough people left to allow the Ukrainian government to keep up with the numbers of bodies it needs to feed into the war machine so profitable to all those Western arms makers and the Ukrainian oligarchs enriched by their deals with them.

Only a few days later, both *The Telegraph* and the *Times* reported that Ukrainian marines were telling the Western press that they were being sent on “suicide missions” east of the Dnipro River. They said they were climbing over bodies of dead

Ukrainian soldiers lying along the shores and were just fodder for constant shelling and firing coming from Russians—and even from their Ukrainian side. As they were there dying, Telemarathon was telling Ukrainians that they were making gains and establishing “bridge heads” on the Russian side of the river.

Zelensky himself declared on TV that Ukraine had a “foothold” in precisely the marsh that was littered with dead Ukrainian marines, the soldiers told the press.

Things are dangerous because there is no sign yet about what the thus-far trigger-happy Biden administration (in both Ukraine and Gaza) will do in the face of the failure it will have to deal with in Ukraine. Will it double down? Will it reverse course and go for negotiations? How does the US election coming up affect all of this? Is the request for \$50 billion more in aid to Ukraine just a ploy to keep the war going until after the election, even though that would mean unacceptable levels of death and destruction?

As usual, imperialism gets into major wars very easily. That is its nature. Getting out of them is another matter, often requiring, at the very least, major destruction and massive numbers of civilian deaths.

An important step in breaking this cycle will come when the people come to reject the lies that are used to justify imperialist calamities. For many months, people were told that Putin was losing a war that he was running with criminals, drunks, incompetent, child kidnappers, and all manner of societal rejects.

How does this narrative people in America and Europe have been fed fit with new admissions that Russia may be winning? Or stories that thugs are snatching people off the streets to fill the ranks of the Ukrainian army? As the fog of lies lifts, one sees that Russia had more troops and artillery than the press previously reported and that the sanctions that were supposed to destroy the Russian economy have backfired.

Meanwhile, EU has granted \$54 billion to Ukraine, overcoming Hungary’s opposition, to save Zelensky from total collapse as he needs money desperately to keep war front burning and repair the declining domestic economy because American benevolence has become uncertain. □□□

[Courtesy: People’s World, a voice for progressive change and socialism in the United States. It provides news and analysis of, by, and for the labour and democratic movements.]

DALIT VOICE

Alternative Publishing Space

Asma Hafiz

INDIA PUBLISHES AROUND 90,000 books a year. Among these, around 150 titles in 2017, less than half a per cent, were by established Dalit authors, according to *Frankfurter Buchmesse*, which runs one of the world’s largest book markets.

In its 1950 constitution, India abolished “untouchability” and later criminalised caste-based discrimina-

tion. Meanwhile, the government the following year established a “reservation scheme”, in theory saving spaces in government and education for members of under-represented castes or tribes, to level the playing field for Dalits.

Some Dalits and other low-caste Indians have punched through, including BR Ambedkar who scripted the Indian constitution, as well as

KR Narayanan, who became the nation’s first Dalit president in 1997.

Yet prejudice shapes the experience of Dalits, calcified by India’s hierarchical Hindu society – as well as British colonialism – with routine exclusion from temples, jobs and even public water fountains. At its worst, violence is aimed at Dalits when dispute breaks out, including sexual assaults of Dalit women, especially in rural communities.

Maitreya, 37, is among the few publishers promoting Dalit writers and anti-caste literature from his Panther’s Paw label in Nagpur, Maharashtra

state, where books cram onto shelves and portraits of Dalit leaders are pinned to the whitewashed walls of an office he runs solo.

His drive to build Dalit literature began in 2015, when he met JV Pawar – one of the founders of Dalit Panther movement.

Started in the 1970s, the movement drew inspiration from the parallel black power struggle in the United States of the Black Panthers and closer to home, the work of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, a champion of Dalits.

At the end of their meeting, Pawar gifted five books written in Marathi on Dalit history to Maitreya, who later translated the first volume into English. But finding a publisher for the next step proved to be quite challenging.

“Nearly all English publications [in India] are primarily owned or founded by individuals from the upper caste,” he said. “I decided to take matters into my own hands and start publishing.”

Within the mainstream Indian publishing sector, there’s very little representation and there’s hardly any diversity at all

Panther’s Paw Publication has since published 16 books of poetry, biography, history, fiction and non-fiction works by Dalit authors.

But it is a business model complicated by the lower-than-average literacy rate of 66 per cent among the core audience of Dalits. The national average literacy stands at 73 per cent – a disparity researchers say is entwined with poverty, caste-based discrimination and limited access to education.

Despite their “low” status, politicians are courting the Dalit vote ahead of a general election that is all but guaranteed to reappoint Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a third consecutive term.

Experts say Modi, who faces

accusations of neglecting underprivileged castes despite the soaring rhetoric on Hindu unity, is trying to foreground the lower castes, including at the controversial consecration ceremony of the Ram temple on January 22 on the grounds of a razed mosque in Ayodhya.

Small-scale publishing, produced in the litany of local languages, has so far been the best pathway to building the Dalit literary scene, says Christina Dhanuja, 40, a writer and co-founder of Dalit History Month.

Held every April nationwide, it is inspired by the Black History Month in the US, and promotes talks about non-mainstream publishers and helps caste-marginalised individuals share their work. It has promoted books such as *A Rebellious Cobbler* by Dwarka Bharti and published by Panther’s Paw, otherwise overlooked by a sector dominated by Penguin Random House, Harper Collins and Hachette.

“Within the mainstream Indian publishing sector, there’s very little representation and there’s hardly any diversity at all,” Dhanuja said.

Navayana, a publishing house in New Delhi, smashed the caste ceiling when it broke out in 2003, publishing anti-caste literature, although not specifically from Dalit authors. Founders S Anand and D Ravikumar realised there was no English-language publisher in India working with caste as its central theme.

They struggled with funding until Bhimayana, a 2011 graphic novel about BR Ambedkar – one of the founders of modern India who was a pioneer of writing on caste – took off, selling more than 20,000 copies and becoming translated into nine languages.

“Because of our work, mainstream publishers have started to give space to Dalit writers,” Anand said.

Still, the community continues facing discrimination in the literary space, Anand says, as India’s cultural gatekeepers “will let one or two Dalit authors write ... but that’s all”.

In Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, where some 20 per cent of the population is Dalits, academic Ravi Kant says Dalit history has only recently caught the interest of international readers.

Titles such as *Caste Matters* by Suraj Yengde and *Ants Among Elephants* by Sujatha Gidla have gained global recognition.

“It’s only now, with a growing demand for Dalit literature, that international interest in caste issues has emerged,” said Kant, an associate professor of Hindi and modern Indian languages at Lucknow University. “Publishers are now seeking writers in demand, but there’s still a lack of institutional support for diversity in India.”

Yashica Dutt, 37, was moved to discuss her own caste after a Dalit student, Rohith Vemula, in 2016 took his life in Hyderabad, saying in a note that his dreams had been stubbed out and his birth was his “fatal accident”. His death changed how many Indians – especially in more progressive cities – thought about caste.

Dutt created a Tumblr account and wrote, “Today I’m coming out as Dalit” and publicly revealing her Dalit identity for the first time and winning applause for her courage as a wave of Dalits joined her in challenging the stigma.

“If you look at just the literature festivals, a lot of them will do one panel on Dalits and then cram all the Dalit writers in there and then be done with it,” she said. “I feel like what needs to be done is for Dalit writing to be looked at as a form of genre on its own”. □□□

[Source: SCMP]

LETTERS

Proposed Broadcasting Bill 2023

The National Alliance of Journalists (NAJ), the Delhi Union of Journalists (DUJ) and the Andhra Pradesh Working Journalists Federation (APWJF) join the Network of Women in Media India, (NWMI) and the Editors Guild of India and others, in expressing their grave reservations against the proposed Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill 2023.

In a joint statement the NAJ, DUJ and APWJF state, that this proposed bill is a further step to expanding a new era of undeclared censorship and increasing government control over all types of media from TV channels, to films, platforms like Netflix and Prime Video, YouTube, radio, even Instagram and other social media platforms as well as news websites and journalists. The Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023 comes on the heels of the Telecom Act of 2023, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 and the IT Amendment Rules, 2023.

The Broadcasting Bill blurs the distinction between journalism and content creation. The definition of news and current affair has been deliberately left so broad that all sorts of online media can be controlled through it. It clubs together both broadcast and digital media, although broadcast media includes the big channels while digital news media channels are often small outfits run by one or two persons. Many clauses, particularly those relating to self-censorship, are completely impractical given the nature of small news media. Some dangerous clauses include the power to seize electronic devices including studio equipment. There are apprehensions that the Bill could muffle independent voices including those of

YouTube journalists, news analysts and digital websites.

The Broadcast Bill is being pushed in a hurry and could be yet another attempt to curb independent thinking, protest and dissent. It should be immediately rolled back.

Sujata Madhok, President-DUJ
A M Jigeesh,
General Secretary -DUJ
G Anjaneyulu,
General Secretary-APWJF
N Kondaiiah,
Secretary General-NAJ
S K Pande, President-NAJ

A Misleading Interim Budget

By its own admission the government has brought in this interim budget, a vote on account, more as a stop-gap measure in the election year. It is a vacuous exercise which makes a futile attempt to paint a rosy picture of the economy. The reality is that unemployment rates are higher compared to when this government took charge ten years back and there is increase in agricultural workforce indicating shrinking of job opportunities in other areas. Farm distress is obvious with fall in agricultural prices. The fertiliser subsidies, food subsidies, MNREGA allocations have all fallen. There is marginal increase in Animal Husbandry budget but not enough to take care of all stray cattle which destroy more crops than what the PM-Kisan DBT can compensate. Similarly, Anganwadi, PM-Poshan, Old age, Widow and Disability pensions allocations have fallen too. The budget doesn't have anything to arrest rising inequality, it is an anti-poor budget. In spite of high sounding slogans of Make in India or Atmanirbhar Bharat, the reality is that India's dependence on China for essential items has increased.

The Prime Minister who criticises opposition politicians for distributing freebies does the same thing and has overseen a lacklustre performance of the economy. The much touted FDI hasn't arrived to boost the economy, on the contrary declaring substantial amounts of loans, much larger than by previous governments, taken by crony capitalists as NPA has led to flight of capital from the country. There has been migration of HWI and, even illegal, of ordinary people from Gujarat risking their and their family members' lives from the country indicating the economy is not so rosy after all.

Manoj Sarang, Spokesperson
Socialist Party (India)

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 manojtsaran@gmail.com

ESI for All Workers

The statistics surrounding work-related incidents are deeply alarming, with devastating consequences for countless individuals. Globally, a shocking 5 people lose their lives every minute due to work-related injuries and illnesses, totalling 2.78 million deaths annually. Moreover, an astounding 374 million workers suffer non-fatal work-related injuries and diseases each year. In India, the figures are equally troubling, with approximately 5.2 million recorded medical injuries and 98,000 lives lost annually due to medical negligence and errors. Tragically, this leads to nearly 3 million years of healthy life lost each year due to work-related injuries, illnesses, and medical negligence.

It is essential to look beyond the numbers and give faces to the countless working men and women who confront such tragedies and vulnerabilities daily. Several media and research reports highlight the struggles of average workers and the poor due to inadequate medical services and the inability to access quality and

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affordable healthcare in the country, which boasts of being the world's largest democracy.

Regrettably, the rise in industrial accidents can be attributed to the weakening of industrial labour and safety regulations over time, all under the guise of improving the country's ranking in the Ease of Doing Business indexes. As a result, the labour departments are rendered powerless, and the well-being of workers is compromised.

It is imperative to acknowledge that the right to health and safety is an essential component of the fundamental Right to Life guaranteed to every citizen under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. Ensuring this right is the government's duty, and it must provide quality and transparent healthcare services accessible to all citizens.

To address these challenges and ensure adequate protection of workers' rights, Working Peoples' Coalition [WPC] is organising a National Conference to Demand ESI for All Workers. The main proposition of universal access to the Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) for all is an ambitious and essential goal. We are asking for providing access to quality healthcare and social security for every working individual. The event will foster a space for open discussions and exchange dialogues, encouraging participants to challenge existing norms and seek creative solutions.

Event Details:

- Date: 24 February 2024
- Time: 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM
- Venue: Deputy Speaker Hall Annexe, Constitution Club, Rafi Marg, Near Sansad Marg behind RBI Bank, New Delhi
Meena Menon, Working President; Gayatri Singh, Vice President; Lourthusamy Arokiasamy, Vice President; Rajiv Khandelwal, Vice President; Rajendra Bhise,

General Secretary; Dharmendra Kumar, Secretary; Varghese Theckanath, Secretary; Shweta Damle, Member; C Nicholas, Member

Working Peoples' Coalition Back to Ballot?

What may and will happen when there's paper ballot. There could be no "rigging" at the point of polling, it's done (exclusively) at the point of counting. But, both these points are vulnerable. According to specific circumstances, these vulnerabilities would be blatantly exploited.

The EVMs—in its very specific Indian version—to be sure, was introduced under the UPA Government.

The BJP cantankerously demanded its withdrawal, till it would win via (EVM) poll.

Later, the VVPAT feature was added.

Till today, despite the entire din, there's not a single specific complaint that has formally been filed and pursued. And, during this period, the BJP did also lose big at least two very bitterly fought crucial state polls: West Bengal and Karnataka.

That's not to suggest that there's no need to be vigilant.

In fact, the regime would constantly be on the lookout for an opening to manipulate the system.

So, the working of system needs constant monitoring and public pressure has to be built to make it more and more tamper proof.

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Teenage Pregnancies

Teenage pregnancy is a serious problem in rural West Bengal. The law enforcing authorities have failed to save the girls from their painful future as well as their immature deaths. Rajnagar Block of Birbhum district is a backward area where 34.9% of the population belongs to SCs and

STs and the female literacy rate is about 59% (as per the 2011 census). About 50% of the population is involved in marginal activity for their livelihood for less than 6 months in a year. They are mostly dependent on the government's dole for survival. There is no sustainable income-generating scheme taken on behalf of the government (both central and state) for their economic upliftment. Girls or females (about half of the total population) are the worst victims of the situation.

The parents treat their daughters as liabilities. So they get relief after giving their daughters in marriage early, even at the age of 14. The block-level status report estimates that out of 641 registered pregnancies, 183 are teens for the first time, and 114 cases are experiencing second pregnancies within their age range of 15–18 years in November–December 2023. The government health employees are only generating awareness to promote injectable contraception (ANTARA). There is no meaningful health programme to protect the girls from early marriage or to promote their higher education. Only when the girl reports her unwillingness to get married, the local administration takes some steps to protect her.

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