

frontier

Vol. 56 : No. 35

ISSN 0016-2094

February 25, 2024-March 2, 2024

Founder-Editor : **SAMAR SEN**

On Other Pages

Comment	2
Note	3
PALESTINIAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT Women Writing Resistance Sohini Sengupta	4
POLITICS OF BHARAT RATNA Appropriating Icons for Political End Prem Singh	6
ANTONIO, BRUNO AND ALOKA Bicycle: The Rider is its Engine Farooque Chowdhury	8
'PROBLEMATIC SOVEREIGNTY' China and Taiwan I Mallikarjuna Sharma	11
HIDDEN CHALLENGES Budget 2024 and Sanitation Workers Ayanabha Banerjee	12
OVERVIEW Violation of Human Rights in India in 2023	13
MASUM Letters	15

Editor : **TIMIR BASU**Assistant Editor : **Subhasis Mukherjee**

Published weekly for Germinal Publications Pvt. Ltd. by Sharmistha Dutta from 44, Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006 and Printed by her at Laser Aid, 35A/3, Biplabi Barin Ghosh Sarani, Kolkata-700 067.

E-mail : frontierweekly@yahoo.co.in
frontierweekly@hotmail.com

Website: <https://www.frontierweekly.com>

Telephone : 2530-0065

[Typeset by THE D-COMLASER, 60 Sikdar Bagan Street, Kolkata-4, Ph : 98361-58319]

Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency

WHILE SPEAKING AT THE 60TH RAISING DAY OF SASHATRA Seema Bal [SSB] in Assam's Tezpur on January 20 Union Home Minister Amit Shah vowed to eradicate the problem of 'Naxalism' in the next three years under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Ironically, only 10 days later there was an ambush between the maoist guerrilla army and the Security Forces in Tekalgudem region in Chattisgarh. In the ensuing exchange of fire between maoists and policemen, three police personnel succumbed to their injuries and some sustained serious wounds. The persons in power have been talking about eliminating 'Naxalism' for the last fifty years only to see the spectre of 'Naxalism' returning with a regular interval defying all their repressive measures and disinformation campaign. They kill the naxalites in fake encounters and arrest hundreds of innocent people branding them maoists but fail to bury their ideology. They are in no position to fight them politically. After setting up a new police camp in Tekalgudem area they resorted to massive search operations terrorising local tribals who are denied their right to forest at the point of gun. Incidentally the maoist insurgency in some parts of India is the only insurgency with Marxist orientation and the rest, operating Mainly in J&K and NE, are aligned with religious orthodoxy or ethnic sub-nationalism.

The Congress regime described the naxalite movement as the principal threat to internal security and made elaborate arrangement to destroy it militarily by continually enhancing police budget with special emphasis on anti-naxalite operations. The BJP dispensation carries the same action blue print with more ruthlessness and brutality while silencing every voice of dissent in cities and semi-urban localities in the name of curbing urban Naxalism—a troubled way to define naxalite politics as there is no such thing as urban Naxalism and rural Naxalism.

When a movement is ideologically motivated it is not that easy to crash it physically. So the maoists who have boycotted parliamentary politics permanently during their New Democratic phase of revolution make news every now and then despite their set-backs in recent years.

In most third world countries insurgency and counter-insurgency go hand in hand. Even super powers initiated counterinsurgency plans failed in a number of countries. What happened to USA in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan is known to everybody. When an insurgency has a rear and gets external help, in most cases counter-insurgency becomes ineffective. The

Indian maoists have no rear. Nor do they get external assistance. So their influence is limited to a few difficult terrains where tribal people live. But Indian revolution is not the question of mobilising the tribal people only. The authorities have nothing to worry about so long as the naxalites fail to mobilise masses in their millions against the system. It is not really the case in J&K where the jihadists with religious extremism as their ideological weapon has the backing of a powerful rear in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. It's the main reason why militancy in Kashmir never dies, notwithstanding huge deployment of Indian military and Para-military forces.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and to some extent Cuba provided support to communist-

backed insurgents in Angola, Greece, South Africa and Vietnam. And humiliation of imperial America in Vietnam is now history.

But America worked with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to arm the Afghan Mujahedeen against the Soviet Red Army throughout the 1980s and the mighty Soviet troops finally had to withdraw after a lot of bloodshed. Moscow's Afghan adventure—or mid-adventure was one of the main reasons for the collapse of Soviet Russia. The Afghan insurgency succeeded. Then the Taliban with the covert support of Pakistan and some Mid East countries defeated the superpower America. In other words external support was essential to the insurgents' ability to continue fighting much longer than

they would have otherwise and, in many of these instances prevail. Without a rear it is difficult even for a better equipped militant group to sustain activity in the face of state repression.

After partial withdrawal of Israeli regular combatants Gaza may be a new theatre of Hamas-led insurgency and Israel-scripted counter-insurgency. What began as an essentially conventional war may be morphing into something altogether different: a counter-insurgency campaign by Israeli forces? But rather than bringing the violence closer to an end a counter-insurgency campaign in Gaza would produce a forever war! Peace is unlikely to return to the flashpoint of Middle East anytime soon.

□□□

COMMENT

Collective Punishment

THESE DAYS THE SCENARIO IN Gaza is almost identical with what one sees in strife-torn Sudan. It's famine—plain and simple. Perhaps one may compare it with the British-made great Bengal famine. Emaciated children are scrambling for gruel. But this gruel has now become uncertain for Palestinian refugees struggling for survival after a dozen of countries including the US have suspended funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency [UNRWA] responsible for providing aid to Palestinians. Withdrawal of support by major donors follows allegations made by Israel that 12 UNRWA employees were involved in the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack, albeit UNRWA lost no time to dismiss all accused employees and start an investigation. UNRWA employs 30,000 Palestinians to carry on relief work. Charges against those 12 employees are serious but the response of donor coun-

tries is equally cruel. 'The wrongdoing of a few individuals should never lead to the collective punishment of entire population'. Western countries, however, didn't defund other UN agencies or peacekeeping operations amid accusations of sexual assault, corruption or complicity in war crimes. Then the policy of double standards is the hallmark of Western diplomacy.

Gaza is a vast slum created by the state of Israel; from which there is no escape for Palestinians. America and its allies are now denying food, medicine and water to survivors of Israeli bombing. Doctors are helpless as they are being forced to conduct operation without anaesthetic, electricity and water to scrub up. The stoppage of economic activity in Gaza coupled with refusal of work permit to Palestinians in Israel after the Hamas attack has transformed this tiny enclave already overcrowded with teeming millions,

into a living hell. Even biased western media cannot hide the horror of Israeli military offensive. There is every reason to believe that Israel doesn't want UNRWA to help Palestinian refugees who are today homeless in their own homeland because of Israel's plan to deny them right to live with dignity and, erase the name of Palestine from the world atlas.

While US President Joe Biden is busy to present his human face before Presidential elections by continually advocating 'humanitarian pause' in Gaza war and urging Israel to scale down its military operations, with an eye to Arab voters in America, he didn't think for a moment to execute 'pause in UN funding'.

The funding cut is likely to affect 1.7 million Palestinian refugees in Gaza along with an additional 400,000 Palestinians without refugee status as they are currently displaced.

Refugee aid or for that matter any humanitarian aid is often meant to be neutral and impartial. But funding is frequently used as a foreign policy tool, whereby allies are rewarded and enemies punished.

Prior to the formation of UNRWA, some voluntary organisations, many of them religious used to provide humanitarian services to displaced Palestinians. Because of the extreme poverty and dire situation pervasive across refugee camps, the UN General Assembly, including all Arab states and Israel, voted to create the UNRWA in 1949. It was aimed at saving 750,000 Palestinians who were expelled or fled from their homes. Since then the UNRWA has been providing food, Medicare, schooling, and in some cases, housing for the uprooted Palestinians living across Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza territory.

The US has used its power to block criticism of Israel, vetoing at least 45 UN resolutions critical of Israel. This is not the first time the US resorted to the dubious practice of blocking UN funding. In 2011 the US cut all funding to UNESCO that provides educational and cultural programmes around the world, after the agency voted to admit the state of Palestine as a full member. And the impact of the action was severe. Within just four years, UNESCO was forced to retrench its staff in half and roll back its operations. Now it is the turn of UNRWA to shut doors to the hungry and disabled. □□□

[Contributed]

NOTE

Budget and Confusions

Bharat Dogra writes:

MANY PEOPLE WAIT EAGERLY for budgets of the governments at union and state levels, but frequently also complain that the information they receive from various sources is confusing and sometimes even contradictory.

Budget analysis can be a very useful exercise as the mass of statistics and information contained in the budget can be examined in terms of what is most important for people and to what extent the needs and priorities of ordinary people have been fulfilled, with special emphasis on the needs and priorities of the weaker and more vulnerable sections.

Such analysis can be also very useful from several other perspectives such as gender, childhood, rural development and environment protection. From the basic budget document one may get a figure for various rural development schemes but these figures may not mean much to many people by themselves. However budget analysis

brings together various rural development schemes which may be spread over several ministries, compares the current allocations with previous allocations and actual spending as well with actual needs based on several indicators. With this additional information provided by budget analysis, the budget figures become much more meaningful and people understand their implications. People also find it very useful to know whether the original allocations were cut or increased later, and what was the extent of fund utilisation.

While the importance of such analysis and understanding is quite obvious, one must also be aware of some pitfalls. Let us imagine a situation where allocation for agriculture increases suddenly in a significant way, but this allocation is highly biased in favour of corporate led and ecologically disruptive growth and against small farmer led, ecologically protective growth. In such a situation

BOOKS BY T VIJAYENDRA

Just Released

REQUIEM FOR OUR TIMES Rs. 100

AFTER ALL IT IS ONLY HIM!

AND OTHER STORIES Rs. 70

AN INTELLIGENT BIRD'S GUIDE

TO THE BIRDWATCHER AND

OTHER STORIES

Second reprint Rs. 40

THE LOSERS SHALL

INHERIT THE WORLD

Third Reprint Rs. 60

REGAINING PARADISE:

TOWARDS A FOSSIL FUEL FREE

SOCIETY Rs. 120

THE TEACHER AND

THE CHILD LABOUR Rs. 50

For Copies Contact :

MANCHI PUSTAKAM

12-13-439, St. No. 1 Tarnaka,

Secunderabad 500017

Email: info@manchipustakam.in

Cell: +91 73822 97430

one cannot say that the increased allocation means the betterment of farmers. Instead people need to voice the high risks and adverse impacts of such a pattern of agricultural development. When the government may be facilitating the increasing corporate control over farming people cannot praise government farm policy just because allocations for agriculture have increased.

The need for increasing the budget allocations for education and health in India has been repeatedly emphasised, and there is no doubt that this is badly needed. However at the same time one should note that in these two sectors the need for avoiding high profiteering is the most acute and yet at the same time big profiteers are increasingly dominating both these sectors. So it is possible that certain increases in budget allocations may just be gobbled by these profiteers with very few genuine benefits reaching ordinary people and weaker sections. Hence it is important to look in more detail at how exactly any increased allocations are being used.

A particularly important aspect is to know the extent to which the poorest sections of society are benefited in sustainable ways by various budget allocations. In particular it is very important to know to what extent and in what ways budgetary allocations are likely to benefit landless farm workers in villages and informal sector workers in cities.

However in order to provide such detailed and relevant budget analysis, access to detailed information at the right time is needed. Access to information regarding budgetary cuts at the time when revised estimates are prepared is very important, but

generally in a credible way such information becomes available to people much after the cuts have been made when it has limited usefulness. Hence there is clearly need for the government to be much more transparent in such matters and release information at a more early stage.

A very large number of people listen to the budget speech and to the analysis which follows immediately on TV channels, which in turn is much influenced by the budget speech. Therefore there is a clear need for the budget speech to include several more important facts about the budget.

While there is definite scope for budget analysis to make a much more important contribution to people's understanding as well as policy, at the same time the fact remains that a lot of budget analysis is based on protecting the interests of important and influential elite groups and hence may be reflecting such concerns and not those of ordinary people and weaker sections. Hence special efforts should be made to ensure that budget analysis based on concerns of weaker sections as well as other priorities such as environment protection can have a stronger base and a wider reach. □□□

PALESTINIAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT

Women Writing Resistance

Sohini Sengupta

"There I am, a five-year-old, sobbing in the middle of the night because Israeli soldiers have once again barged into our house to arrest my father. I see my mother falling on the concrete road after being shot by a soldier in a jeep; my younger brother pinned to the ground by another soldier, who is squeezing his little neck in a chokehold; my favorite uncle bleeding to death on the rocks behind our home".

I FOUND AHED TAMIMI'S MEMOIR, *They Called Me A Lioness*, through a brilliant and timely Bengali translation by journalist Arka Deb—and this haunting image that she painted of her family stayed with me. Israel's acute attacks on Palestine, its soil and its people—by no means a new thing, but presently on the scale of a genocide—have, from October 7 till the end of January 2024, claimed more than 27,000 Palestinian lives, and displaced around 1.9 million Palestinians within Gaza by official records alone. Civilian residences, schools, and hospitals have been bombed relentlessly, and over a million are presently facing acute shortages of food, electricity and potable water. Naturally, women, children, and infants have been disproportionately affected. Women in Gaza have been taking period-delaying pills in the absence of hygiene products; mothers are

giving birth in a war zone—their newborn babies have been given no birth certificates, no healthcare, and no vaccines; the roar of warplanes signals the threat of death every passing moment. Even as they are the ones most critically affected, women have historically led, and are still leading, much of the anti-colonial resistance in Palestine. Ahed Tamimi—who slapped an Israeli soldier who had shot her 15-year-old cousin in 2017, and was incarcerated—was arrested again in November 2023 because she was "suspected of inciting violence and calling for terrorist activity to be carried out", while Israeli forces slaughtered over two hundred Palestinians.

Tamimi, whose retaliation in 2017 made international news, is by no means alone in her struggle; thousands of women in Gaza Strip and West Bank know "what it was like to be captive in her own country". A

Party for Thaera: *Palestinian Women Write Life in Prison* (2021), published a year before Tamimi's memoir, brought together some of such narratives. Activist and author Haifa Zangana conducted a creative writing workshop with women political prisoners in Palestine, and autobiographical narratives by eight women came together in the book. Today, as a startling number of voices, many of them from the first world, try to present the current state of Israel-Palestine conflict as a war that has its genesis in the Hamas attack on southern Israel of October 7, 2023, it is important to remember the long history of occupation and oppression that Palestine has suffered. It is important to remember the women that have fought back—even as their counterparts today lose entire families, children, and critical health support. For the survival of a history that many today wish to tyrannically deny and warp, *A Party for Thaera: Palestinian Women Write Life in Prison* (2021) and *They Called Me a Lioness: A Palestinian Girl's Fight For Freedom* (2022) are timely reads.

Both texts bring forth the raw reality of Palestinian resistance, and the female solidarity that have forti-

fied the women's lives. Ahed Tamimi writes of demonstrating against Israeli soldiers with her girl friends, and of her mother's ceaseless participation in protest demonstrations even after multiple arrests, threats and brutalities. One of the stirring accounts is of Ahed's younger cousin Janna. When Janna was only four, soldiers threw a tear gas canister in her home. Trapped in a tiny bedroom with several other children and her mother, Janna was only rescued when her mother threw her from the second floor window to men who had formed a human ladder outside to carry out the rescue; it was an incident that left her with severe trauma. Yet, the trauma had a transforming effect: Janna began recording Palestinian protests that did not gain enough coverage and circulating it on Facebook on her mother's phone—at the age of only seven, earning her the unofficial title of the world's youngest journalist. "No seven-year-old should ever feel she has to shoulder the burden of documenting the human rights abuses taking place in her own backyard. We shouldn't have to grow up seeing our parents arrested and fearing they could be shot or killed at any moment", Tamimi writes. Yet, the dire circumstances made children age early, and the ordinariness of lives fragile. In A Party for Thaera, Nadiya Khayyat and May al Ghosain's narratives speak of Thaera and Hanin, infants born to political prisoners, born and raised for several years in prison. Thaera and Hanin learnt resistance early, from their own experience of Israeli violence within the prison system. "She was able to carry things from one cell to another without being spotted by the guards", Khayyat writes about Thaera, "who let her play in the corridor and run around the locked cell doors". One day, carrying a blank slip of paper from one cell to another, she was

accosted by a guard; Thaera only replied, "I am not giving you anything!" Likewise, when women in the prison were on a hunger strike, little Hanin proclaimed, "I, too, am on strike. I don't want to hear the noise of the keys [locking the prisoners inside after medical examinations] after today".

Thaera, Hanin, Janna—or even Ahed, during her childhood, should not have had to learn resistance this early, but they did. Children in Palestine today have done so as well, as Palestinian children across generations have done. They were not indoctrinated; this was a direct lesson from their space and circumstances—life and resistance were one and the same. The lives of women grew around them, their own mode of resistance unconventional in the everydayness of it. Caring for Thaera became an act of shared responsibility and love: Khayyat writes, "She was the child of twenty-five mothers". Forbidden from gathering together, something as simple as Thaera's birthday celebration grew into a form of resistance; as the group were singing 'Happy birthday' to the child, the guards violently broke the gathering. In "You will Not Understand", the other piece in the book by Khayyat, the author writes how the women prisoners in Neve Tirtza coordinated with each other and their visiting families to wear the colours of the Palestinian flag along with their keffiyehs to their trials, enraging the judges and the army. On other occasions, the women prisoners baffled and thwarted the prison guards by calmly accepting sentences of "a life imprisonment plus twenty years", even laughing in the face of it. Ahed Tamimi's persistent silence in the face of intense interrogation similarly made a bold mark of resistance. "I was in a totally different world", she wrote, describing how she dissociated to survive the harrow-

FRONTIER

44, Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006

Phone: (033) 2530-0065

Mail: frontierweekly@yahoo.co.in

frontierweekly@hotmail.com

Site: www.frontierweekly.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

India [Annual]	Rs.	500
Frontier Associate [Annual]	Rs.	1000
Life Subscription [Inland]	Rs.	5000+

Make payment by Cheque/Draft
in favour of

GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.
or

FRONTIER [GERMINAL
PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.]

MO should be addressed to Frontier
Please add Rs. 50/- to inland outstation
cheques towards bank charges, all
remittances to FRONTIER

Payment could be made directly to
our bank accounts as given below.

Check the bank details before
transferring money. Also inform us
through e-mail after sending money.

Beneficiary Name:

GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.

Bank Name: CENTRAL BANK OF INDIA

Address: 8, Lenin Sarani, Kol-700013

Branch: Esplanade Branch

Current Account Number: 3116713216

IFSC Code: CBIN0280098

Swift Code: CBININBBCAL

OR

GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.

Bank Name: PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK

Address : 223, C. R. Avenue, Kolkata-6

Branch: Jorasanko Branch

Current Account Number: 0085050001319

IFSC Code: PUNB0008020

Branch Code : 0008020

Swift Code: UTBIINBBOBC

OR

**FRONTIER (GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS
PVT. LTD)**

Bank Name: PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK

Address : 223,C. R. Avenue, Kolkata-6

Branch: Jorasanko Branch

Current Account Number: 0085050001378

IFSC Code: PUNB0008020

Branch Code : 0008020

Swift Code: UTBIINBBOBC

*For MO, Regd. Post and Speed Post mailing
address should be written in the following
fashion :

To

FRONTIER

C/o Durbar Mahila Samanawya Committee

44, Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006

West Bengal, Contact : 8240016324

ing experience and maintain her silence, “one that my mind had created as an escape, and I made sure it was a world I loved. And in that world, as a survival strategy, my imagination would kick into overdrive”.

Ahed Tamimi brings to sharp focus the political climate of her time. From close accounts of violence and resistance in her village of Nabi Saleh to the gradual internationalisation of the Palestinian cause. She writes of how the Black Lives Matter movement and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions played important roles in rallying popular support for Palestinian liberation. She speaks out against the charges of anti-Semitism being levelled against the movement by Israel and the USA, charges which continue even today: “[I]t’s not anti-Semitic. It’s anti-Zionist, and conflating the two not only is dangerous, but it dismisses our valid grievances as a population denied our human rights and our rightful land”. Similarly, the prisoners’ accounts in *A Party for Thaera* reveal dual consciousness of their Palestinian identity and the Zionist ideology they were acting against. They write of the jailors’ scheme “to undermine the morale and obliterate the resistant identity”, and so, theirs was a “fight for existence and steadfastness”. The accounts do not shy away from bringing to the reader the starkness of the violence that the Palestinian women

faced, and the uncertainty of their lives. But these autobiographical narratives emphasise most of all on the humanity of Palestinians: we, too, are human, they say. The narrative of dehumanisation was used against them at every turn, just as is being deployed by Israeli media today. Before closing, a pertinent, if slightly long paragraph from *A Party for Thaera* is worth citing, where Khayyat describes how the prison authorities were:

“...labelling us as murderers, saboteurs and terrorists to stir up feelings of hatred and revenge ... hurling insults like “daughters of sin” and “Mohammad died and only left girls as offspring”. Later, a few sympathetic Jewish prisoners told us that the administration was brainwashing every new Jewish inmate, telling her that the Palestinian prisoners were terrorists who killed Jewish boys, and that we were not human but looked like monkeys or wild animals. Given the rumours, the newcomers wanted to see the ‘animals’ in their cage, without getting too close; they were afraid of getting hurt or being eaten alive!”

Perhaps this will remind some of us of Nazi narratives during the Holocaust.

Voices from the present crisis in Palestine are difficult to come by, with insiders and journalists shot down and narratives smothered by counter-

narratives and cries of anti-semitism. Perhaps, many years in the future, the world will shake its head too late and sigh, What a tragedy. Perhaps, years into trauma, coherent narratives of survivors will emerge. Years after their incarceration and release, most of the authors of *A Party for Thaera* were writing out their voices for the first time; in her memoir, Ahed Tamimi was doing likewise. Their writing is not just a piercing demand, but a steely gaze that challenges the world to look, to truly gaze forth and see what they have been through. “The world takes notice and acts selectively. One sees what one chooses to see”, Rose Shomali Musleh wrote, the heavy truth of her words leaving no space for weak justifications and excuses. How much does it take for the world to notice?—these women ask. “Do we have to die every day so that the world can be moved?”. □□□

References:

- Haifa Zangana (ed). *A Party for Thaera: Palestinian Women Write Life in Prison*, translated by Salam Darwazah Mir, Women Unlimited, 2021.
- Ahed Tamimi and Dena Takruri. *They Called me a Lioness: a Palestinian Girl’s Fight for Freedom*. One World, 2022.
- Summer Said and Dov Lieber. “Israel Arrests Palestinian Activist Ahed Tamimi on Suspicion of Inciting Terrorism,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 8, 2023.
- Simran Srivastava. “In Palestine, Women Are The Driving Force Behind Anti-Colonial Resistance,” *Youth ki Awaaz*, November 30, 2023.

POLITICS OF BHARAT RATNA

Appropriating Icons for Political End

Prem Singh

ON THE OCCASION OF the birth centenary of Karpoori Thakur (24 January 1924–17 February 1988), several programmes were organised at different parts of the country. But the coverage of those programmes

in the mainstream media was negligible. As soon as the BJP-led NDA government announced the award of Bharat Ratna posthumously to Karpoori Thakur, he became the subject of discussion in the mainstream media as a ‘socialist icon’.

Particularly English newspapers published the news, reporting, articles and editorials about him with great enthusiasm. The reactions of many leaders and parties on this sudden decision of the government also became a subject of the media. In all this, the government’s “politics” behind the decision to award Bharat Ratna to Thakur was also mentioned and discussed. It was said that the government has used

Bharat Ratna to blunt the opposition's caste-based census card. The RSS/BJP has tried to prove through this award that there is no conflict between 'Hindutva' and social justice. By conferring the same award on LK Advani is in line with its well-thought out plan.

In truth, the central government did not commemorate Karpoori Thakur in Bihar or any other state during the entire birth centenary year, which ended on 24 January 2024. Despite being awarded the Bharat Ratna, it does not seem that the government will have any serious concern with Karpoori Thakur even in future. Actually, this is just an election manoeuvre of the BJP government.

The politics of Bharat Ratna has also engulfed the Grand Alliance government of Bihar. There was a tussle between the claimants to the inheritance of Thakur. Nitish Kumar, an 'engineer' of Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs), while commenting on the award, took a dig at RJD's dynastic politics by saying that Thakur never did dynastic politics. He, in fact, declared himself the real heir of Thakur by saying that he himself too never took his family forward in politics. In order to further strengthen his claim he also stated that he made Thakur's son Ramnath Thakur a member of the Rajya Sabha, who always follows him. He also conveyed a message to the BJP that he alone has the patent on EBC votes in Bihar. That is, the benefit of giving Bharat Ratna to Thakur passes through the corridor of his rightful heir!

There was a tussle going on between JDU and RJD for some time. Apart from this, Nitish was upset that despite being a "tallest leader" in the opposition camp, the India alliance did not declare him as the prime ministerial candidate. He was not even made the president of the

alliance. Even before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, he expected that the Congress would go ahead accepting him as the Prime Ministerial candidate of the combined opposition. When this did not happen, he left the Grand Alliance and went back with the BJP. He again returned to BJP-led NDA, picking up the bale of legacy of Thakur. The interesting thing is that Thakur, who suddenly came into limelight after the announcement of Bharat Ratna, has been ostracised, and Nitish Kumar has gained the centre-stage."

In such a situation, it would be appropriate to ask the question whether the Bharat-Ratna, that came out of the womb of power-greedy politics of communalism, casteism, individualism and vanshavad (dynasty rule) while sitting in the lap of corporate houses, to Thakur enhances his honour or diminishes his dignity posthumously. In fact, this episode once again explains that in the era of corporate-communal nexus in politics the national icons are being humiliated by being used in undignified power-politics.

People in academia and literature often noted that Karpoori Thakur always used to travel with a heavy bag of books. He had his own ideological and political training in socialist thoughts and movement. However, he used to imbibe all the transformative ideas coming from various sources including the ideas of Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar. He had a deep commitment towards basic modern values like democracy, secularism, civil liberties and human rights. His simplicity and his insistence on not taking the slightest advantage of his political position for the benefit of his family and friends was a clear indication of his link with the Gandhian-Socialist stream. Thakur belonged to an extremely backward and small in numbers the barber caste. Despite such

NOTICE

We are getting regular complaints from subscribers that they are not getting their copies by post. Postal dislocation is rampant. It is particularly endemic in greater Kolkata postal district. Local post offices don't really deliver in many cases because of acute shortage of staff. We request our subscribers to lodge complaints to the post offices of their localities and send their e-mail IDs, if any, so that we could also send our on-line version.

—Fr

a background, he could develop an independent political personality of himself.

He started his political innings by leaving college and participating in the Quit India Movement. He was elected member of Bihar Legislative Assembly in 1952 elections. From then till his death, he always won the assembly elections continuously. He won the Lok Sabha election from Samastipur in 1977. In his entire political career, he lost only the 1984 Lok Sabha elections. He played the role of Leader of Opposition in Bihar Assembly for a long time. He became the Chief Minister of Bihar twice—from 22 December 1970 to 2 June 1971, and from 24 June 1977 to 21 April 1979. He had a deep knowledge of parliamentary rules and processes, and was sincerely adhered to them.

He made a provision of 8, 12, 3, 3 percent reservation for extremely backward classes, other backward classes, women and economically poor of general category respectively. This is known as Karpoori Formula, for which he had to face even abusive language from people with upper caste feudal mindset, especially the Jan Sangh cadres. Not only did southern leader Devraj Urs take a dig at Thakur's reservation policy, it

also became a subject of controversy among socialists. Some people say that the provision of sub-quota within the quota had the consent and inspiration of JP, whereas some hold the opposite opinion. Both Lalu Prasad Yadav and Nitish Kumar, who claim to be Thakur's heirs, have proven to be leaders who only settle the electoral calculations of castes. They have not been moved by Thakur's commitment to socialism and social harmony.

Dr Lohia's thesis—"Class is mobile caste. Caste is immobile class" - is about Thakur's understanding of caste and class question at a practical level. When the leaders who openly play dynasty politics in a feudal style and claim themselves as the heirs of the legacy of Thakur, they simply devalue him. Lohia's offer to bring Dalits, Adivasis, backward castes, women and poor Muslims ahead in politics was an epoch-making idea to transform the socio-

economic-political-cultural structures of the country forever.

Among the Backward/Dalit leaders, Thakur was the only one who fulfilled Lohia's hope through his political work. It is to be hoped that Thakur's relevance will not be allowed to disappear in the politics of Bharat Ratna. □□□

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

ANTONIO, BRUNO AND ALOKA

Bicycle: The Rider is its Engine

Farooque Chowdhury

A BICYCLE IS A MACHINE* most compatible with human beings-its rider. The human being is not only its rider; s/he is also its engine and its fuel. It is run by human power and the power comes from burning your fat! It is also the only transport lighter than its rider. A horse, motor cycle, car etc. are all heavier than the rider. The reason is already given above—the rider provides the engine and the fuel and the fuel tank. So in a way it is a most intimate machine and you will learn to treat it is an extension of your body", writes T Vijayendra in "Bicycle: A beginner's guide" in his amazing, thin book *Bicycle, Selected Articles and Stories*.

T Vijayendra, Viju to his friends irrespective of age, have "been writing about the bicycle since 2017", the "Bicentenary year of the Bicycle". Viju's group, Ecologise Hyderabad, decided to celebrate the year. So there were a film show, bicycle rally and meetings. They used to run a facebook page on bicycle. The group, an organisation, also published four books on the complex machine, which is easy to run. The last pandemic boosted bicycle, and Viju wrote a series of articles, which

were posted in *Countercurrents*, a leading alternate e-journal from South India, and published in *Frontier*, the famous Left weekly from Kolkata. The articles focus on environment, women, children, and people, especially the working classes. Viju's articles highlighted political and ecological concerns of the group he is involved with. His writings also entered into debate between the ordinary roadster bicycle and the fancy high-tech and race bicycles. Thus, the articles stayed away from getting drab. With ten essays and two short stories, the *Bicycle, Selected Articles and Stories* (Ecologise Hyderabad, t.vijayendra@gmail.com. 2022) is in two parts: shorter pieces and not-so-short articles. While the shorter write ups mainly promote the bicycle and praise the machines, the longer articles deal with politics and market connected to the bicycle, a people-friendly machine. One short story in the book tells about a woman's solo

ride from West Bengal to Pondicherry while the other story is about children and bicycle maintenance. ["Preface"]

There's a divide, which is told by Vijayendra: "The standard roadster cycle ruled the world till the Second World War. Thereafter the world got split into two camps"—the developed countries, and the so-called developing countries. "The bicycle in the West became mainly a sport-and-hobby bicycle and the roadster became a relic of the past. Most people changed over to cars or public transport. In the last few decades, though, because of awareness of global warming and pollution, the bicycle is once again becoming popular in the West, though still mainly for recreational purposes. Such usage, though, so far, has not reduced the car mileage per capita in the West."

Within the poor economies, similar divide is also found—the rich persons own private cars while a part of the poor uses bicycles along with badly shaped and poorly managed public transport. Vijayendra tells about this reality of bicycle-divide: In the "developing" world, "there has been a class divide"—"the rich aping the West and the poor sticking to relatively older technologies"; "often seen through the prism of the debate about 'India (rich) and Bharat (poor)', which became popular in the last quarter of the 20th century. In the context of the bicycle, of course, the standard

*BICYCLE, SELECTED ARTICLES AND STORIES

by T Vijayendra

Publishers: Ecologise Hyderabad

Email: t.vijayendra@gmail.com

Mobile: 94907 05634/95916 05634

Date of publication: 2022

roadster represents 'Bharat' and the multi-gear fancy bicycle represents 'India'. As a rule, those who have fancy bicycles also own cars, motorcycles or scooters, and they use the bicycle, like in the West, mainly for recreational purposes."

The piece "Singing the song of roadster" tells about Ashok Behera. Ashok, a 36-year-old "mason from Odisha cycled 1,100 kilometres in seven days, all the way home to Ganjam district from Chennai, and his wife Namita riding pillion. Once again the roadster, a cycle design perfected more than 100 years ago proved to be reliable." During the last pandemic, in the face of lockout, unemployment, and eviction from homes, many workers in India crossed thousands of miles riding their bicycles as they went back to their rural homes to their way of survival.

The piece mentions market: "[T]he standard roadster cycle still rules the Indian market. Out of some 150 million bicycles in India more than 130 million are the old type", which "are manufactured by four well established brands" that "cost a little less than Rs 5000/- less than half the price of a decent smart phone." Here're tricks of capital: The transport cost and expenditure, part of livelihood cost and expenditure, include necessary value capital doles out to working muscles for producing surplus value. But, it appears on surface that working muscles are awarded an opportunity—a cheaper or less costly mode of transport from and to workplace, marketplace, medical and education centers, home, etc. The transport is driven by energy, which is produced from food the working muscles consume, and that food is part of necessary value. Capital, thus, reduces its expenditure on account of labour, as labour's transportation cost is lessened; and labour bears the cost on its own shoulder—muscles

that drive the machine, and that cost comes from food that labour consumes, which is cutting down its food-cost for affording transport-cost. A brutal exchange with a tender-looking approach! The total energy spent to cycle the total number of bicycles in an economy in a year tells the size of the portion taken out of necessary value, and that's the extent of deprivation. This deprivation increases profit, which is made with the connections the commodity, here, bicycle, establishes.

While the working people producing surplus value are deprived, the working people contribute to environment—from minifying of air and noise pollution/expenditure of energy and other resources including metals, and temperature, health care costs, carbon foot print, etc., to increasing of global good and happiness. But, such a contribution to global environment and ecology by the working people goes unnoticed, unrecognised and without any payment by capital. Rather, capital increases burden on the working people. This process can't go on indefinitely. The working people, therefore, should raise demand for bicycle allowance, part of ecology allowance, for purchasing and maintenance of bicycle that helps environment. It shouldn't be limited to mills/manufacturing plants/factories only, but to be extended to agricultural workers, working people engaged in the so-called informal sector, students, office workers and town and city dwellers also. With Viju's short piece, a length of a few hundred words, this demand can be initiated.

The Bicycle tells about the Kolkata Cycle Samaj (KCS), an exception among bicycle clubs. History of the KCS makes the club an exception: "In Kolkata about a decade ago, under the pressure of car owners, the Kolkata police banned

bicycle on more than hundred roads. They also started making cyclist pay a fine of hundred rupees for violating the ban. Naturally there was uproar. The greatest sufferers were the working class members for whom the bicycle was a necessity and their jobs involved in travelling on these roads. Kolkata Cycle Samaj was born with the objective of removing this ban. While they have not fully succeeded in it they have created a great awareness about the bicycle and urban transport issues all over the country and even abroad. Its facebook page has 5,800 members!" ("Neo liberalism and the decline of the roadster in India")

The Kolkata Cycle Samaj is a story of a mobilisation and protest within its capacity. The KCS' history tells about moves by the powerful: Encroach the commoners' space, deny the commoners the commons.

The book also cites other bicycle clubs/organisations including the 22 Bikes in Bhubaneswar and Pondicherry Cycling Club. All these are spaces for organisation, mobilisation and activities with participation by wider sections of society. Not only the working people, the women, white collar employees, environment activists, youth and students can also participate in this space/organisation.

For Frontier Contact

D.K. AGENCIES (P) LTD.

Booksellers, Publishers & Subscription
Agents since 1968

CIN: U74899DL1983PTC017169

"DK" is a registered trademark

Regd. off: A/15-17, D.K. Avenue,
Mohan Garden, Najafgarh Road,
New Delhi-110059. INDIA

Metro Station: Nawada (Blue Line)

Web: <http://www.dkagencies.com>

Ph: (011) 25357104, 25357105

Fax: (+91-11) 25357103

Along with proposing activities, Viju also proposes slogans/programme /charter of demands for the bicycle organisations, which include:

- # Reduce or eliminate GST taxes on Standard Cycle costing below Rs. 5000/-. At present it is 12%.
- # Facilitate loans for cycles.
- # Provide kiosks for bicycle repair shops on convenient spots.
- # Provide cycle parking places in convenient spots, e.g. like railway stations, major bus stations and bus stops, cinema halls, shopping centres, etc.
- # Provide cycle tracks in all community sports areas.
- # Promote cycles by providing cycles to school children, police men, post men, telephone and electricity departments. Also to any other services that need a lot of travelling within city. [It should also be around city.]
- # Pedal more, pollute less.
- # Cycle to work.
- # Occupy all streets.

A number of these are political demands. These carry implications. These are to be taken seriously, therefore.

“Bicycle and women’s liberation” in the 56-page book presents a brief history related to women’s liberation, which is known to some, and unknown to some more:

“One hundred years ago, Alice Hawkins, a suffragette, cycled around Leicester (UK) promoting the women’s rights movement, causing outrage by being one of the first ladies to wear pantaloons in the city. During the fight to win the vote the bicycle became not only a tool but also a symbol for the emancipation of women.

“The American civil rights leader, Susan B Anthony, wrote in 1896: ‘Let me tell you what I think of bicycling. I think [the bicycle] has done more to emancipate women than any one thing in the world. I

rejoice every time I see a woman ride by on a bike. It gives her a feeling of self-reliance and independence the moment she takes her seat; and away she goes, the picture of untrammelled womanhood.’

“Beatrice Grimshaw, who went on to a life of travel and adventure, describes a girlhood of Victorian propriety, in which she was: ‘the Revolting Daughter—as they called them then. I bought a bicycle, with difficulty. I rode it unchaperoned, miles and miles beyond the limits possible to the soberly trotting horses. The world opened before me. And as soon as my twentyfirst birthday dawned, I went away from home, to see what the world might give to daughters who revolted.’”

The piece makes the following comment on the basis of the history it presents:

“Women gained a significant amount of independence with the invention of the bicycle. This device gave them the freedom to travel outside the home of their own power. Bicycle riding also necessitated more practical clothing for women and led to significant changes to female attire in society. One individual from the time period watching female cyclists remarked, ‘It is hard to believe, that they were the same women who went out in the afternoon for the formal carriage parade.’”

Bicycle, a complex technology with wheels, spindles, spokes, chain, gears, tires, etc., with mechanism to transfer power to gain and control speed and to move forward impacted many persons in many ways—from economy to personal life, from practice to micro- and macro-attitude, from attire to society. It empowered persons to many extents, and disempowered some forces looking backward to some extent. It entered into confrontation with some forces, visible and invisible, loud and

crook, conspiring to keep society static, but failing. The technology, as Viju writes, cheaper than varieties of cell phone, turns in as a tool to mobilise, protest, resist, and an approach to make a journey forward.

The book useful not only for bicycle enthusiasts, but also for learners, organisers, and activists covers many aspects and issues related to bicycle: learning riding bicycle, purchasing and maintenance of the machine, bicycle’s immediate future in India, improving bicycle infrastructure in city, neo-liberalism and Indian bicycle industry, role of bicycle clubs, bicycling and feminism, history of women and bicycle, the Bharat-India debate, capital’s entry in the area of bicycle, bicycle urbanism and urban cycling, rickshaws and four-wheel push carts.

The Bicycle Thief has Antonio and Bruno and a part of life they were within. Here, the Bicycle carries a tale of a lady—Aloka. She cycles from Kolkata to Pondicherry in search of new life, and dreams moving through the globe. Ann Londonderry’s 15-months long 1894-solo trip round the world keeps on ringing in Aloka’s head. Bicycle impacts Aloka’s life.

Viju’s Bicycle sparks similar dreams and encourages activism that appears simple, but helps create space for mobilisation against environment demolishing capitalist infrastructure designed by certain circles motivated with only-profit. The book claims itself Priceless, and All Rights Reversed—a new approach to a creation by a person involved with environment activism. To have copies, the book suggests: Write to the author for mailing an e-copy. Or you can download it from the net. If you want to pay for it let him know. He will send account details. Next edition of the book, it’s hoped, will take care of page numbers. □□□

'PROBLEMATIC SOVEREIGNTY'**China and Taiwan***I Mallikarjuna Sharma*

TAIWAN CALLS ITSELF AS Republic of China[ROC]. "The ROC Constitution was adopted on December 25, 1946, by the National Assembly convened in Nanking. It was promulgated by the National Government on January 1, 1947, and put into effect on December 25 of the same year. In addition to the preamble, the Constitution comprises 175 articles in 14 chapters. In essence the Constitution embodies the ideal of "sovereignty of the people", guarantees human rights and freedoms, provides for a central government with five branches and a local self-government system, ensures a balanced division of powers between the central and local governments, and stipulates fundamental national policies.

The same was revised from time to time but Taiwan has never given up its claims to entire China including the mainland China at any time though it may publish a map of its Taiwan Island alone. Republic of China Constitution 1947 is still preserved and adopted by the Taiwan Republic. Perhaps some of the articles there are inapplicable to it now but there is no official denial that it has renounced those articles—at least one could not find any such denial. In truth Taiwan still considers itself to be real successor to whole of China including the island of Taiwan (though its Constitution for a major part may be inapplicable to mainland China). For example, Article 26 of the Constitution states: "Article 26: The National Assembly shall be composed of the following delegates: • One delegate shall be elected from each hsien, municipality, or area of equivalent status. In case its population

exceeds 500,000, one additional delegate shall be elected for each additional 500,000. Areas equivalent to hsien or municipalities shall be prescribed by law; • Delegates to represent Mongolia shall be elected on the basis of four for each league and one for each special banner; • The number of delegates to be elected from Tibet shall be prescribed by law; • The number of delegates to be elected by various racial groups in frontier regions shall be prescribed by law; • The number of delegates to be elected by Chinese citizens residing abroad shall be prescribed by law; • The number of delegates to be elected by occupational groups shall be prescribed by law; and • The number of delegates to be elected by women's organisations shall be prescribed by law."

This may be read with Article 4 of the same Constitution which states so: "Article 4: The territory of the Republic of China according to its existing national boundaries shall not be altered except by resolution of the National Assembly." The existing boundaries mean those boundaries as existing in January 1947 which include the mainland China.

So neither mainland China (now People's Republic of China) nor Taiwan (Republic of China) has renounced their claims to entire China. For mainland China Taiwan is just a rebel province separated due to the evil machinations of the US imperialists and for Taiwan, mainland China is a legitimately claimed territory of its own, now under the devilish Communist regime. For mainland China or China, the permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, Taiwan is

just a province that can (and need to be) be occupied at any time. As for Taiwan "The ROC maintained its claim of being the sole legitimate representative of China and its territory until 1991, when it ceased to regard the CCP as a rebellious group and recognised its jurisdiction over Mainland China." But this does not mean that ROC has renounced its claim to mainland China totally. "The position of the PRC is that the ROC ceased to be a legitimate government upon the founding of the former on 1 October 1949 and that the PRC is the successor of the ROC as the sole legitimate government of China, with the right to rule Taiwan under the succession of states theory."

One may note that there was a mutual defence treaty between Taiwan and USA—Mutual Defence Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of China; December 2, 1954—till 1980 when President Jimmy Carter terminated it. "The Sino-American Mutual Defence Treaty (SAMDT), formally Mutual Defence Treaty between the United States of America and the Republic of China, was a defense pact signed between the United States and the Republic of China (Taiwan) effective from 1955 to 1980. It was intended to defend the island of Taiwan from invasion by the People's Republic of China. Shortly after the United States' recognition of the People's Republic of China, the U S Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act. Some of the SAMDT's content survives in the Act; for example, the definition of "Taiwan". However, it falls short of promising Taiwan direct military assistance in case of an invasion.

"According to the Montevideo Convention of 1933, the most cited source for the definition of statehood, a state must possess a permanent population, a defined terri-

tory, a government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states. Many argue that the ROC meets all these criteria. However, to make such an argument, one has to reject the PRC's claim of sovereignty over the territory of the Taiwan Island. The PRC requires all other states that establish diplomatic relations with it not to challenge this claim in addition to severing said relations with the ROC. Most states have either officially recognised this claim or carefully worded their agreement ambiguously, such as the United States.”

In his book, “Problematic Sovereignty: Contested Rules and Political Possibilities” (Columbia University Press, New York, 2001), Stephen D. Krasner says (at p. 17):

“The situation of Taiwan also confounds conventional notions of sovereignty. Taiwan has prospered in a kind of never-never land where it has many of the attributes of fully sovereign states—territory, population, and domestic and Westphalian sovereignty—but only very limited inter-

national legal sovereignty.

Yet Taiwan has prospered. Its economic growth has been robust, and it weathered the Asian crisis of the late 1990s better than most other Asian countries in part because of its large financial reserves. Moreover, functional alternatives to international legal sovereignty, such as the Taiwan Relations Act of the United States, have worked well. Taiwan has been able to conduct foreign relations, albeit in a somewhat roundabout way.

There are parties and people in Taiwan advocating unity/merger with mainland China under CCP, no doubt. But they are relatively minor forces in the polity due to various historical and political reasons, mainly due to the evil machinations of the USA, and EU. “While the EU pursues its ‘One China’ policy and recognises the government of the People’s Republic of China as the sole legal government of China, the EU and Taiwan have developed solid relations and close cooperation in a wide range of areas. // Regular con-

sultations between the EU and Taiwan deal with issues of mutual interest, such as human rights, trade and economic issues, connectivity, innovation, digital issues, green energy, circular economy, labour issues, and disaster management. // The EU has a strong stake in peace, security and stability in Asia. The EU supports the status quo and peaceful resolution of differences across the Taiwan Strait, rejecting the use or threat of force. It continues to encourage dialogue and constructive engagement.”

In such circumstances, it is doubtful whether Sumanta Banerjee’s referendum suggestion will be of any use. The only alternative is for the (re-)unification with China forces in it to be strengthened, the current policy of the CCP—“One China, Two Systems”—may be pushed for and promoted in Taiwan, contributing to an increase in pro-[re-]unification forces there; and at some strategic phase the mainland Chinese government can/may even use force for its merger with the mainland. □□□

HIDDEN CHALLENGES

Budget 2024 and Sanitation Workers

Ayanabha Banerjee

THE INTERIM BUDGET, PRESENTED by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament on February 1, unveiled several noteworthy aspects, including the hidden challenges faced by sanitation workers and their community. Focusing on the allocation for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) presented research titled ‘Dalit Adivasi Budget Analysis 2024-25’, released on February 2 at the Press Club of India.

In the context of sanitation workers, it is crucial to discuss ‘The Prohibition of Employment as Manual

Scavengers (PEMS) Act of 2013’, which legally prohibits employing individuals as manual scavengers in the country. However, the analysis indicates a failure of the government to conduct a nationwide survey as mandated by the Act.

Many groups of sanitation workers are not happy with the budget. Safai Kamgar Union expressed its displeasure through an official statement which read as, “Safai Kamgar Union (SKU) criticises the Union Interim Union Budget 2024-25 which belies the hopes and aspirations of lacs of sanitation workers across India. It should be noted that the allocations for the National Commis-

sion for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK) is an insignificant amount of just 12 crores, clearly reflecting the merely ritualistic nature of the commission without any actual role in improving the lot of sanitation workers.”

“It is roughly estimated that about 50 lacs sanitation workers are employed across the country, with about 20 lacs working in hazardous conditions. The national average of life expectancy in India is 70 years, but the average life expectancy of sanitation workers is 40-45 years only. This indicates there is an urgent need to devote resources towards ensuring the health and safety of sanitation workers. But sadly, the political will to improve the living and working conditions of the sanitation workers is lacking and it has shown in the budgets of the present government.”

The research brings attention to

data from the National Safai Karamchhari Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC), identifying 58,098 individuals as manual scavengers. Despite this, only 530 districts out of 766 declared themselves as manual scavenging free, highlighting the government's failure to conduct a comprehensive survey.

Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment, Ramdas Athawale, addressed the Lok Sabha, acknowledging that between 2018 and November 2023, 443 individuals lost their lives while performing sewer and septic tank cleaning duties. However, conflicting figures from organizations like Safai Karamchhari Andolan report 1,760 deaths during this period.

The research poses critical questions regarding the global climate crisis exacerbating water scarcity and whether the implementation of sanitary pits and mechanization of cleaning processes can address these issues. It raises concerns about the extension of these solutions to rural areas where manual scavenging persists and explores sustainable alternatives.

Examining the allocated budget for the marginalized community, the research reveals that 'The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act of 2013' had a total budget estimate (BE) of Rs. 1273.2 crore in the past ten years, with only Rs. 231.2 crore utilized. Similarly, the Swachh Bharat

Mission-Rural had an unutilized amount of Rs. 2,318.1 crore.

There is no mention of contractual work, a subject which ails many sanitation workers.

"There is a noticeable absence of mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the performance of contracted work, leaving room for exploitation. This absence of oversight is deeply disappointing, especially for marginalised communities who rely on these jobs for livelihood. The budgets consistently favour the wealthy and neglect the needs of the marginalised, perpetuating societal segregation instead of addressing it."

The NAMASTE was launched in 2022 as a Central Sector Scheme being undertaken jointly by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MoSJE). It aims to eradicate unsafe sewer and septic tank cleaning practices and replaced the previous scheme known as Schemes for the Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS) starting from 2022 under the Department of Social Justice & Empowerment and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Harish Gautam, executive member of Safai Kamgar Union stated "The apathy of the Union Government towards the mechanisation of sanitation work is further evident from the amount allocated for National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE)

scheme which is just a miserly 116.94 crores." They added, "Already the amount is very low, but a clear picture is visible only by looking at the Budget Estimates and Revised Estimates of 2023-24 which are 97.41 crores and 30.06 crores respectively. It is obvious that though large amounts are shown as allocated for mechanisation, in reality, miserly sums are spent for this."

The Dalit Adivasi Budget Analysis further commented on the mechanisation of the process, ignoring the humane aspects, "These schemes primarily focus on mechanising the sanitation process and upgrading the skills of those already involved in sanitation work. However, they fail to address and acknowledge the systemic coercion of Dalits, particularly the Valmiki community, into intergenerational forced labour in cleaning."

The research drew attention in the shift of manual scavenging from a human lens to a mechanised lens, "Notably, there's a concerning shift in framing the issue of manual scavenging predominantly as a mechanisation problem rather than a human rights issue. This change in perspective poses a risk to the Dalit community, as they are no longer viewed through a human rights lens. This renamed scheme lacks the essential welfare component for those involved in manual scavenging." □□□

[Courtesy: *The Mooknayak*]

OVERVIEW

Violation of Human Rights in India in 2023

MASUM

THE BHARATIYA JANATA Party (BJP) led Indian government continued with state policies that discriminate and stigmatise religious and other minorities resulting in increasing incidents of communal violence in many parts of the country. In Manipur more than hundred were killed in ethnic clashes.

The police in many states have failed to properly investigate crimes against minorities on the other hand police and administrative officials responded by summarily punishing victims. Constitutional authorities like the Election Commission, National Human Rights Commission, and those designed to protect the rights of children, women, reli-

gious minorities, tribal groups, and Dalits, did not function independently. All independent democratic institutions including the judicial system are now undermined by the Government of India.

Allegations of torture and extrajudicial killings continued, with the National Human Rights Commission registering 126 deaths in police custody, 1,673 deaths in judicial custody, and 55 alleged extrajudicial killings in the first nine months in 2023. In April, 2023, the Indian government denied permission to prosecute soldiers accused of killing six

coal miners in Nagaland state's Mon district in December 2021. In June 2022, the state police had filed charges against 30 soldiers, including a major, after a special investigation team found the military had shot the miners "with a clear intention to kill." But the central government refused to sanction the prosecution, which is required for civilian legal actions to proceed under the colonial-era Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA).

On July 31, 2023, communal violence broke out in Nuh, Haryana state during a Hindu procession and swiftly spread to several adjoining districts. In the aftermath, the authorities illegally demolished hundreds of Muslim properties and detained scores of Muslim men, including minors.

On May 3, 2023, violence erupted in the north-eastern state of Manipur between the majority Meitei and the Minority Kuki Zo communities. The authorities shut down internet access in the state, and tried actively to suppress any reporting on the state's partisan participation in this ethnic clash, even filing criminal case against activists and the Editors' Guild of India in retaliation for their fact-finding efforts and reporting. By November, more than 200 people were killed, tens of thousands displaced, and hundreds of homes and churches destroyed; and ethnic violence continues to rage in Manipur to this date. Despite courageous reporting of this ongoing morbid massacre, as well as growing public pressure to intervene and put a stop to this wanton killing, the BJP-led governments at both the Centre and in Manipur have continued their tactical inaction as well as covert local support to Meitei militant outfits, whereas the NHRC has remained entirely mum, and failed even to issue any observation or directive to the respective authorities to act.

India witnessed an alarmingly growing trend of police raids on human rights activists, lawyers, reporters and organisations that have been critical of the BJP-led central government, in effect flouting Article 19 of

the Indian Constitution, which guarantees Freedom of opinion. Police raided the offices of the news agency NewsClick in New Delhi (October, 2023), the house of human rights activist Teesta Seetalvad in Mumbai, among others, and threatened to prosecute writer and activist Arundhati Roy; Indian tax officials raided the BBC offices (February, 2023) in retaliation of the release of the documentary, India: the Modi Question, that brought to question PM Modi's abuse of power as erstwhile CM, Gujarat in enabling the Gujarat pogrom. The government has further expanded its control over online content through the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, April, 2023, and the Telecommunications Act, December, 2023 - both undermining basic privacy rights of citizens as well as granting the central government broad authority of censorship, seizure of office and equipment, and annexure or suspension of communication services including telephone and internet connection services.

In August 2023, the Indian Parliament passed the Forest Conservation Amendment Act, despite vocal opposition from environmental activists and tribal communities. The law dilutes existing safeguards and could lead to a loss of legal protection for one-quarter of Indian forests—enabling industry, mining, and infrastructure development in formerly protected areas—and threatens encroachment on tribal communities' traditional territories.

Indian authorities has repeatedly delayed the investigation into allegations of sexual abuse (surfaced in April, 2023) by a member of parliament from the ruling BJP and the president of the Wrestling Federation of India, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, despite weeks of protest by athletes. In October 2023, the Supreme Court declined to legalise same-sex marriages, instead accepting the government's offer to set up a panel

to consider granting certain benefits associated with marriage to same-sex couples.

In the Global Hunger Index 2023, India ranked 111th out of 125 countries, continuing its downward trend in this index from 2015, and marked with a serious level of hunger and malnutrition. Neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan (102nd), Bangladesh (81st), Nepal (69th), and Sri Lanka (60th), scored better than India.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has extended the jurisdiction of the Border Security Force (BSF) up to 50 km inside the international borders in Punjab, West Bengal and Assam. At the same time, the Ministry has reduced BSF's area of operation in Gujarat from 80 km from the border, to 50 km. This matter was decided through arbitrary procedure, circumnavigating due discussion in parliament and with the federal state governments. The BSF's powers - which include arrest, search and seizure - were limited to up to 15 km in these states, until 2023. This is a severe infringement on the rights of the federal states and an attack on the federal structure of the country, as well as an extended threat to the human rights of a huge number of people.

Article 51A (h) of our Constitution says "to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform". But the BJP government's discriminatory and divisive policies have on one hand led to increased violence against minority people in the country marginalised by religion, caste, ethnicity, gender, and social markers; on the other hand, they have used the judiciary and the executive as antagonistic forces -harassing, impeding, threatening, and punishing journalists, lawyers, human rights activists, and critics of the government in general - through raids, allegations of financial irregularities, and use of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, which regulates foreign funding of non-governmental organisations. Basic human rights and democratic rights of citizens, as well as fundamental con-

stitutional principles—have been rampantly trampled over in pursuit of absolute state-authority, in a display of increasing autocratic tendencies of the government both at the union centre and in the federal states. BJP-led Narendra Modi government at the Centre is ushering in an “agency raj” in the country—disenfranchising marginalised people, throttling dissenting voices and shaking the very foundations of democracy. Similarly, the non-BJP state governments of Indian provinces have also failed to cre-

ate any credential for them as far as democracy, rule of law and freedom of expression are concerned. Use of unlawful force, corrupt practices, state agencies to run a totalitarian regime is common in every Indian province.

The scenario of democracy and human rights in neighboring countries is no different; attacks on dissenting voices and religious minorities are the pattern in common in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. Human Rights Defenders and protagonists of democracy are facing in-

timidation, torture and wrath of the state while agitating for people’s cause.

General elections are expected to be held in India between April and May 2024 to elect members of the Lok Sabha, in this political juncture, we wish to create a formidable people centric coalition which can challenge the ongoing onslaught on the constitutional fabric of India and democracy. □□□

[Excerpted from
MASUM’s Annual Report 2023]

LETTERS

Cancer Day

4th February is observed as world Cancer day, when the entire world unites to fight against the global cancer epidemic.

People should salute the cancer survivors and the ones bravely fighting cancer and the entire medical fraternity for supporting these brave fighters.

Often it is the combination of medicine, the fighting spirit and the never say die attitude of patients helps them recover. Norman Cousins said “Drugs are not always necessary. Belief in recovery always is.”

The answer to Cancer is—Never Give Up, Fight Back.

It is the need of the hour to take measures on war footing to tackle the scourge of cancer that is spreading across the world.

T S Karthik

Unity Rally in Dumka

There is an attempt to divide the tribal community on religious lines. About one and a half months ago, a mega rally was taken out in Dumka in support of delisting the Scheduled Tribe people who changed their religion. They demanded that they should be removed from ST reservation category. Instead they should be included in minority category. For this, a meeting was organised at Rasikpur ground in Dumka, in which thousands of

people from all over Jharkhand had come. It was led by former MP Kadiya Munda. Dumka’s BJP MP Sunil Soren also participated in this programme. In the delisting rally, everyone in one voice demanded from the Central Government that it should bring such a law that the converted person should not get the benefit of ST reservation. They should be removed from the list of ST reservation.

In response to the delisting rally, thousands of people of Santhal com-

munity took out a Tribal Unity rally under the banner of Adivasi Ekta Manch. This mega rally started from Gandhi Maidan of the city and reached Gandhi Maidan again via Ambedkar Chowk and Main Road and turned into a public meeting. A large number of women, men, youth and elderly participated in the rally. Everyone said in one voice that stop the nefarious design of dividing the tribals in the name of religion. ‘First we are tribals, second comes our religion’.

Adivasi Ekta Manch

FRONTIER

Statement required under the Registration of Newspapers (Central Rules) 1956

Form IV

(See Rule 8)

Place of Publication	:	Kolkata
Periodicity of its Publication	:	Weekly
Printer and Publisher	:	Sharmistha Dutta
Nationality	:	Indian
Address	:	1, Laxmi Dutta Lane Kolkata-700003, West Bengal
Editor	:	Timir Basu
Nationality	:	Indian
Address	:	BE 102 & 103, Rabindra Pally Swapna Apartment, Ground Floor Flat-B, P.O. Prafulla Kanan Kolkata-700101, West Bengal
Names and addresses of individuals who own the newspapers and partners or shareholders holding more than one percent of the-total capitals.	:	Germinal Publications (Pvt.) Ltd. 44, Balam Dey Street, Kolkata-700006, West Bengal

I, Sharmistha Dutta, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Dated, March 2, 2024

SHARMISTHA DUTTA
Publisher

A **frontier** Publication

Just Released



THE AGE OF RAGE AND REBELLION: 50 YEARS AFTER THE SPRING THUNDER

[Price: INR 300+ 100 for postage]

(An anthology of articles and interviews published in frontier to commemorate and re-assess the Naxalbari uprising)

Editors:

Timir Basu and Tarun Basu

Contributors: Santosh Rana, Debabrata Panda, Arup Baisya, Farooque Chowdhury, Jan Myrdal, Harsh Thakor, Bernard D'Mello, Timir Basu, Gautam Navlakha, Lawrence Lifschultz, Ranabir Samaddar, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Nazes Afroz, Subhendu Dasgupta, Sumanta Banerjee, Varavara Rao, Ramachandra Guha, Dipanjan Raychowdhuri, Alope Mukherjee, T Vijayendra, Mallikarjuna Sharma and Nirmal Brahmachari

Available at: FRONTIER Office and PATIRAM STALL (College Street) MANISHA, DHAYNBINDU (College Square) and other book stalls selling regular issues of frontier.