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Founder-Editor : **SAMAR SEN**

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

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

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

Telephone : 2530-0065

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Farmers Defy Bullets and Pellets

FARMERS OBSERVED 'BLACK FRIDAY' ON FEBRUARY 23 following the death of a 21-year-old protester Subhakaran Singh at Kharauni border. He is the first martyr of peasant agitation-2 under Modi's authoritarian rule. At the time of writing farmers' protest movement entered the thirteenth day. The situation at Sambhu and Kharauni borders is extremely tense with security forces resorting to tear gas shelling and lobbying water cannon as farmers tried to break the police barricades. Surprisingly this time they also used iron pellets to prevent the protesting farmers from crossing over from Punjab into the state of Haryana which borders New Delhi. People in this part of the country never heard of iron pellets being used as ammunition by police against civilian demonstrators. In the past such pellets have been mostly used in Jammu and Kashmir inviting condemnation from human rights bodies across the world. Pellet guns have blinded scores of people, mainly young, in J&K.

Despite repression farmers stick to their decision to continue their peaceful march to Delhi. Meanwhile, Sanyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), an umbrella platform of different peasant organisations announced a series of agitational programmes, including a tractor rally on February 26 on high ways towards the national capital and, a 'mahapanchayat' [grand general council meeting] at Ram Leela Ground in Delhi on March 14.

Four rounds of talks between the Centre and SKM failed to produce any agreement. It is unlikely that the fifth round will make a breakthrough because the Union Government is just buying time to see protesters get tired, frustrated and jailed. They are also trying to divide the united movement. The farmers rejected the government's proposal that its agencies would procure cotton, maize and pulses at minimum support prices (MSP) for next five years. What about wheat and paddy? Wheat procurement season is round the corner.

While Modi is issuing so many 'guarantees' to different sections of society almost every day through gigantic advertisements in print and electronic media, his 'guarantee' managers don't know what to offer to the protesting farmers so that they can be pacified. So they prefer strong arm tactics to silence them. Farmers are not interested in Modi's tall talk about 1,389 mandis-markets- and on-line marketing facilities. Nor do they attach any importance to his vague assurance of better prices for agricultural products through 'Beej Se Bazar Tak' initiative. Farmers are demanding

that their produce be procured at a reasonable minimum price. In 2021 agitators called off their strike after the government agreed to scrap the proposed farm laws and discuss other demands, including criminal cases against the protesters. Two years later they are back on the streets to remind the government of the promises made back then. Today in 2024 they feel they have been betrayed and cheated.

MSP apart they have other important demands that have remained largely unaddressed. They urged the government to waive their debts. How loans created a situation in which farmers were forced to com-

mit suicide in thousands is known to everybody. The government virtually did nothing other than glorifying some peasant leaders of yester years while awarding them Bharat Ratna post-humously.

Farmers say that those who sell fake seeds, pesticides and fertilisers should be penalised. But the government has so far done nothing---it is business as usual. They want the government to double the number of work days under rural employment guarantee scheme to 200. Ironically, the government is curtailing the budget for rural guarantee work. Then they have one major demand which is supported by all shades of

political left in India. They want the government to withdraw from the World Trade Organisation [WTO] and get rid of all free trade agreements. Modi being a darling of global right-wing politicians is unlikely to oblige peasants. After all farm policies are actually framed by corporates.

Instead of recognising the just demands of the farmers as a matter of their right to life and livelihood, Modi's government is treating them as criminals and their peaceful movement as a law and order problem to be suppressed by bullets, iron pellets, water cannon and even drone. □□□

25-02-2024

COMMENT

War in Ukraine

AVDEYEVKA IS NOW IN RUSSIAN control. After the fall of the meat grinder Artemovsk [the Kiev regime calls it Bakhmut] into Russian hands last year, Avdeyevka, a former Ukrainian stronghold north of the city of Donetsk, is Russia's biggest battlefield gain. The Kiev forces made a chaotic retreat from Avdeyevka, reported The New York Times, which cited Western and Ukrainian sources. The ill-planned retreat, according to The Telegraph (UK), may be more significant.

Liberating Avdeyevka, the coke plant town, by Russia appears beginning of a long, devastating retreat by Kiev forces; and, also, kickoff of a wide collapse of the Ukrainian defence along the entire frontline. It is now being calculated that Russia would force forward its operational advances.

The first victim of the retreat from the heavily-fortified town would be loss of Kiev force's morale. Over the last nine years, the industrial town was held by the Kiev forces.

The Ukraine War, actually

NATO's war against Russia, is not limited in the battlefields of Ukraine. Like other major wars, it has political, economic and diplomatic faces also. In these areas, Kiev is also losing ground. Over the entire warscape, shadow of a losing war by its instigators – the imperialist camp – is visible.

Elon Musk has a recent forecast: Ukraine will lose the conflict; and with each passing day; Kiev's position in any future peace talks is weakening; panic is brewing among Kiev's backers in the US; a peace deal should have been done a year ago; since then, thousands of boys died for nothing, and Kiev's position grows weaker by the day.

The tone of defeat or pessimism was also heard from Admiral Rob Bauer, a senior NATO commander chairing NATO Military Committee. Bauer told the Financial Times: The West grossly overestimated Ukraine's chances of battlefield progress against Russia last year; the Western powers had been overly optimistic about the war in 2023; the West

believed Kiev would win if training and ammunitions are given to them.

Among the ardent hopefuls about Kiev's victory over Russia were the imperialist media. Now, that hope is fading. The NYT painted an interesting picture of the Munich Security Conference (MSC) in February 2024: In the same event in 2023, there was talk of how many months it might take to drive the Russians back to the borders that existed before February 24, 2022. Now, that optimism appeared premature at best, faintly delusional at worst. The FT said: There was unremitting gloom in the MSC. Last year, in the same event, there was optimism.

Reality is taking away last rays of imperialist optimism about the Kiev regime's victory; and that reality is being created by Russia and the imperialist camp. Russia is creating this with its strategy while the imperialist camp is shaping the reality by its strategy. Imperialist strategy was wrong in many areas – beginning from its high hope on "invincibility" or "efficiency" of its war machine, to its political, diplomatic and economic tools, to Russian "weakness", "incapacity", "stupidity". Now, imperialist strategists

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and tacticians appear miscalculating, novice-planners, tactless diplomats, or, fools. Kiev's much touted, but, ultimately, shamefully failed counteroffensive in the last summer made the war-realty appear foolish in the imperialist camp. The Zaluzhny-Syrsky drama was another show of disheveled condition of the Kiev administration.

So, Politico cited officials who sounded far from certain about what a victory might look like for Ukraine even with renewed US aid. Citing a number of US politicians and for-

eign officials, Politico's observation: Now, the West's plan is simply to keep the Ukrainian military from collapsing. The NYT said in another report: Ukraine faces cascading front-line collapse; its troops are exhausted; there's battle fatigue; there's lack of ammunition.

'The war's third year opens with Ukraine on the defensive and struggling to hold the line as it finds itself outmanned and outgunned, much as it was in the first days of the war'. □□

25-02-2024

NOTE

Defaming Protesting Farmers

Prem Singh writes:

IT IS UNDERSTANDABLE THAT a pro-corporate government should launch a campaign to defame the farmers from the very first day of its agitation against the government's apathy to their long-pending demands. Because it considers the people of the country, especially the hardworking farmers, labourers, artisans, unemployed and underemployed, not as citizens but as subjects who live at the mercy of the government.

But the professional noblemen of the civil society should defame the farmers in an organised manner—this, in reality, explains the crisis of India's fractured civil society.

It is a matter of utmost regret that the president of the Supreme Court Bar Association has written a letter to the Chief Justice of India demanding that he take suo motu cognisance of the "erring" farmers who are forcibly trying to enter Delhi in a bid to create nuisance and disturb the daily life of citizens. He further asked the Chief Justice to take action against them.

It seems that the action taken by the Haryana police is not enough

for the Bar Association president. The letter is quite elaborate, which has been written without hiding the intentions behind it. That means the letter writer does not care about the responsibility and dignity of his position and status.

It is yet to be known what the Chief Justice and the Supreme Court will say on this letter of the Bar Association president and the demand made in it. Or what stand will other office bearers and member lawyers of the Bar Association take.

However, it can be inferred that from the very first day, the Modi government has made a strategy to mobilise various professional organisations of the civil society to defame the farmers. It is possible that after the letter of the Supreme Court Bar Association, organisations of some other professions may come forward with similar letters.

Perhaps the government does not have full confidence in the police and central security forces deployed in large numbers in Haryana and Delhi; its strategy of dividing farmers into provinces, organisations and castes; and the skill and strength of

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its media management. It seems that this time the government has decided to wage a decisive fight against farmers and their demands.

Government has made a strategy to mobilise various professional organizations of the civil society to defame the farmers.

Even before the Lok Sabha elections 2024, the Prime Minister has announced his third term in the speech at the Red Fort and then in the Parliament. He has also already expressed his determination to do some "big" work in his third term.

The work to be done in the third term may also include the "big" task of implementing the three withdrawn agricultural laws by making them more pro-corporate. While withdrawing the laws, the government had openly stated that the laws would be implemented when the opportunity arises.

Bharat Ratna awarded to Karpoori Thakur, Chaudhary Charan Singh and MS Swaminathan is the government's effort to accomplish the same big task. The "heirs" of Karpoori Thakur and Chaudhary

Charan Singh will drag the farmers and labourers into the government's fold. Those who do not come will be thrashed by the security forces and the farmers themselves!

The farmers' movement of 2020-21 is an example of this. Around 750 farmers died in that movement. An elected BJP MLA from Uttar Pradesh

had openly called for shooting 'anti-national' farmer agitators. And along with BJP supporters at Ghazipur border, he had planned to teach a lesson to farmer leader Rakesh Tikait. Surrounded by all sides, Rakesh Tikait had tears in his eyes.

It should be hoped that this time the farmers, who struggle for their

livelihood through agriculture, a profession that was once considered the best and now the lowest, will put their hands around the neck of the unbridled corporate-horse and control it firmly. And, like the movement of 2020-21, they will not let all the energy dissipate. □□□

[Source: Counterview]

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The Rise of Neo-Fascism

Arup Baisya

BJP HAS ASCENDED TO power in 2014. The background was set by the twin process of neo-liberal economic reconstruction and the social "Rammandir Nirman" movement that culminated into demolition of Babri Masjid. This is the economic, social and political aspects of neo-fascism. The neoliberal restructuring was set in motion in 1980s. After the initial decades of apparent success stories of neoliberal Washington consensus, the global capitalism plunged into deeper crisis of over-production or under-consumption. The rise of fascist social movement and fascist political power can be conceived in this backdrop. The definition that emerged in the backdrop of the rise of fascism in the backward capitalist state of Germany underlined the fact that though the rise of fascism and state repression is fundamentally directed towards the toiling masses, it is also characterised by the suppression of the section of the old bourgeoisie to serve the interest of the new bourgeoisie. It is fundamentally directed towards the toiling masses because the masses do not want to be ruled in the old way and rulers are also not capable to rule in the old way due to the change of social relations of production which is not compatible with the existing productive

forces—this is also one of the conditions for revolution as Lenin articulated. In Indian context, people observed the similar features at the initial phase of BJP's ascendance to power. The rise of the rightist social movement is primarily due to the weakening of left working-class resistance throughout the entire neoliberal phase preceding BJP's ascendance to power in 2014. Within this broad framework of neoliberal global framework, there are certain new features in the here and now that needs to be taken into cognisance while formulating the revolutionary strategy and tactics. In the dependent country like India, concatenation of events related to fascism domestically and imperialism globally needs to be looked into through a continuous process of concrete analysis of concrete situation. In that sense, the danger is neo-fascism in India in the backdrop of neo-imperialism.

When BJP ascended to power in 2014, neo-liberalism was the globally accepted policy. Though the firm faith of the capitalist-owners on neoliberalism had been shaken after US sub-prime crisis in 2007-08, trend to sever ties with Washington consensus started gaining ground in post-Covid period. This trend is gaining ground due to the decline in global hegemony and domination of US imperialist and the rise of China-

Russia axis power. The rise of various regional formations including that of BRICS posed a formidable challenge to US hegemony both economically and militarily. The fundamental reason for the rise of fascist forces is due to the deep-rooted economic crisis, change of the social relation of production and the absence of any left alternative from working-class perspective. It gained momentum through a reactionary social movement of Hindutva with an imagined solution of the crisis through the investment of the new bourgeoisie in infrastructure and service sector with the support of global financial centre of the US imperialism. But the situation has taken a different turn due to the decline of US power and the challenge from China-Russia axis power. So Indian fascism has lost its US imperialist prop and the political dispensation in power is now compelled to tread a difficult path of balancing between the two dominant imperialist poles.

But this has given some leeway to ruling class to pursue a domestically oriented economic policy for addressing the domestic economic crisis to contain social turmoil. This economic policy can only be pursued by reversing the trend of privatization, state regulation on corporate capital, ensuring government's welfare participation and most importantly through federalism, social justice and secularism. BJP vis-à-vis Sangh Parivar is averse to such policy framework due to

their core ideological position of centralised Hindu Rastra. Does Congress led opposition is committed to follow this path of economic and social development? At the present moment, the reply to this question is ambiguous so long as there is no policy shift of global capitalism from neoliberalism for a new restructuring. Though ideologically Congress has positioned itself in such a direction, but so far as the domestically inward looking policy is concerned, Congress as a ruling class party is reluctant to impose any state regulation on corporates and is destined to succumb to the pressure of global finance capital as Monmohan Singh Government did in 1991. The challenge which is posed by the imperialist capital needs to be resisted by the popular national uprising of Indian masses. The deep economic crisis and the loosening grip of old feudal classes over the masses due to change in relations of production leads the Indian society in turmoil. In the backdrop of this tumultuous socio-economic situation, diverse social and economic categories are agog at the idea of launching spontaneous movements, and this might be visible in the popular uprisings in foreseeable future. The capitalist system needs to contain this situation for social stability to ensure profit and accumulation for the Capital. Bourgeoisie of all hues realizes this threat when corporate consultants have been occupying the

driving seat replacing or conniving with the bureaucracy to advise the political power at the helm of affairs of the state. The pivot of the transitional phase of capitalist state system featured with two opposing intertwined trends of neo-fascist and a democratic options rests on workers vis-à-vis the people. This new emerging reality needs to be visualised from a working class perspective.

The imagined reality which is projected by the neo-fascist dispensation must have a connection with some sort of productive activity. BJP government initially highlighted the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" with new entrepreneurship of MSME sector, but that could not sustain in the backdrop of dwindling purchasing power of Indian masses. Now the slogan of "Atmanirbhar Bharat" is based on constructing Military Industry for creating jobs. Budgetary allocation for such state investment is enhanced, and this is best suited for a fascist state. There is another shift in purchase of Military equipments from the US to the old imperialist master, Russia. The emphasis on semiconductor and solar energy based industry is indicative of the shift in dependence on foreign investment from the US to China. India-China bilateral trade hit a new record in 2023. China is eager to shift their mobile manufacturing factories for the US Company Apple to India for the transfer of surplus value of cheap Indian labour to China. Indian fi-

nance secretary is emphasising on shifting of focus from maintaining fixed fiscal discipline regime under Washington Consensus without imposing tax on the corporate for deficit financing. This balancing act of BJP regime at the centre between US brand of neoliberalism to Chinese brand creates the space to accommodate for all variants of bourgeoisie while shifting the entire burden of economic crisis on the toiling masses.

Under this transitional phase stated above, neo-fascism of "Atmanirbhar Bharat" with Military industry and the industrial policy driven by imperialist design is destined to be primarily directed against the Indian toiling masses by accommodating the bourgeois and intermediary sections. As such, the revolutionary strategy must focus on the struggle of every social and economic category of people to build nationwide working class vis-à-vis people's movement. It is to be borne in mind that under the given social balance of forces in here and now, any people's movement with a genuine demand of the toiling masses under apparently any leadership has the systemic tendency to be transformed into revolutionary mass movement. Revolutionaries must unite to build struggling unity of the workers vis-à-vis people's movement for a revolutionary state with an alternative vision based on nationalisation, state regulation and socialisation.

□□□

OF MPI & PL

Elimination of Poverty by Measurement

Ashok Nag

[It would be nice if the poor were to get even half of the money that is spent in studying them.] — William E. Vaughn, Columnist]

UNTIL RECENTLY, OFFICIAL estimates of the head-countratio of poor in India relied on the Household Consumer

Expenditure Survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO). The Planning Commission was tasked with calculating this ra-

tio based on the NSSO's consumer expenditure survey and the prevailing Poverty Line (PL). In the Indian context, the Poverty Line is defined as the monetary value of a basket of goods sufficient to meet the "Basic Needs" of an adult individual. The last assessment of poverty using this measure based on the Poverty Line was conducted for the reference period of 2011-12.

Niti Aayog, the successor to the Planning Commission, has since developed a new measure of poverty called the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which is globally recognised. The baseline MPI for India was computed using data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) for the reference period of 2015-16. Subsequently, the second MPI, with a reference period of 2019-21 and using data from NFHS-5, was released in July 2023. This article raises certain concerns regarding the reliability of the MPI methodology as implemented in the Indian context. Additionally, it evaluates Niti Aayog's assertion that "India has achieved a remarkable reduction in its MPI value and Headcount Ratio between 2015-16 and 2019-21, indicating the success of the country's commitment and action to address the multidimensional nature of poverty through its multisectoral approach."

Any effective poverty measure must address, at minimum, two key issues: (1) the identification of the poor and (2) the aggregation of poor. Until 2011-12, the poverty line (PL) served as the threshold for official poverty measures in India. Due to the absence of reliable income estimates, household consumer expenditure was utilised for identifying impoverished households. Over the years, the Planning Commission of India established five Expert Committees, spanning from 1962 to 2014 at intervals of 10 to 15 years, to review methodologies for poverty identification. However, these reviews remained within the framework of PL-based identification processes. For example, successive expert groups deliberated on issues such as whether a single poverty line should be used for rural and urban India, whether separate poverty lines should be established for each state, and the selection of consumption baskets.

The most recent committee, led by Dr C Rangarajan, submitted its report in June 2014. However, with a change in the Union Government, the report was disregarded.

Regarding aggregation, the distribution of household consumer expenditure, as estimated by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) for various years, was employed to determine the percentage of households with monthly consumer expenditure below the relevant poverty line. The table below presents the headcount ratio of poverty for selected years, computed following the methodology prescribed by the Suresh Tendulkar committee of the former Planning Commission. Comparison with ratios from previous years is avoided due to the incompatibility of computation methods.

Table 1
All-India Head Count Ratio (%) for Poverty Line based on Tendulkar Methodology

Area	2004-05	2009-10	2011-12
Rural	41.8	33.8	25.7
Urban	25.7	20.9	13.7

It may be seen that during first 7 years of Manmohan Singh government, the poverty declined by a compound rate of 6.7% in rural India and by 8.6% in urban India. If such a growth rate had persisted, by 2019-20, the rural poverty would have declined to 14.87%. Although it is not comparable with MPI, it is interesting to note that the All-India MPI Headcount ratio for 2019-20 has been estimated as 14.96%. In other words, the momentum of decline in poverty level has continued, abated in the post 2014-15 period, without any remarkable change in the pace of decline.

Measuring the level of poverty in a specific community using a PL is neither optimum nor logically consistent. It is not optimum because it ignores the income or expenditure distribution of population identified

as poor. To give a stylized example, let us consider two scenarios with the same PL and poor headcount ratio-100 and 25% respectively. In one scenario 20% is having income between 90 and 100. In another one 20% is having income between 10 and 50. Obviously, the first scenario, from a social welfare perspective is much more desirable than the second one. The PL and Headcount based measure of poverty is logically inconsistent because expenditure or income is only one aspect of poverty and a household having been identified as non-poor in PL based identification process, may suffer from extreme deprivation in respect of many other basic requirements of life. In other words, the "quality of life" led by such a household is below a socially expected minimum.

Despite the numerous limitations inherent in poverty line (PL) based measurements, it is undeniable that the monetary value of expenditure for a poor household is much easier to quantify and compare across households than the ordinal measurement of many other dimensions of poverty. Once a poverty line is determined for a specific period and community, its implementation, calculation, and interpretation are unambiguous. Furthermore, even the distributional aspect can be addressed by assessing what is known as the "Poverty Gap," which measures the average monetary distance of all poor households from the poverty line. However, despite these advantages, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) has gained acceptance from international agencies, including the UN, because it provides a superior measure of a household's overall "well-being."

MPI is founded upon two core concepts: Deprivation and Dimension. Deprivation, represented as Boolean data (1 or 0), gauges whether a household qualifies as

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deprived based on its access to or availability of items essential for individual well-being—referred to as indicators. A household is deemed deprived if it fails to meet specific criteria. Take, for instance, the indicator "Years of schooling." A household is classified as deprived concerning this indicator if "Not even one member of the household aged 10 years or older has completed six years of schooling." The ultimate identification of a household as multidimensionally poor hinges on how deprivation statuses across each indicator are aggregated. However, this aspect of the MPI methodology is not addressed in this note.

The indicators are grouped into dimensions. The three dimensions mostly used are Health, Education and Cost of Living. Although UNDP uses 10 indicators, in India 12 indicators are used for identification of a deprived household in respect of a given indicator. All dimensions carry the same weight 1/3 for aggregation purpose. For example, the dimension "Standard of living" consists of the following indicators each with weight of 1/21: Cooking fuel, Sanitation, Drinking water, Housing, Electricity, Assets, and Bank Account. It is important to note that no monetary indicator has been included in the MPI. When considering various indicators, the identification of a household as deprived aims to target those that are most severely deprived. Below are some examples.

The Bank Account indicator returns a positive value (i.e. not poor) when at least one member of the household has a bank account or post office account. However, the indicator does not capture information regarding account usage frequency, average balance, or the purpose of opening the account. According to the NHFS 2019-21, only 4% of households are deemed deprived (i.e., poor) based on this indicator.

An investigation carried out by Indian Express has found that half of the Jan Dhan accounts, primarily held by less privileged people, maintain a zero balance. Data disclosed by the Finance Minister on the 9th anniversary of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) indicates that the average deposit amount in Jan Dhan accounts is merely INR 4000. For impoverished households, such accounts primarily serve as conduits for receiving government benefit payments and cannot be viewed as indicators of escaping poverty.

Moving on to the Electricity indicator, a household lacking access to electricity is categorized as deprived in relation to this measure. The estimated headcount ratio of poverty for this indicator stands at 3.27%. However, for this indicator to accurately reflect deprivation, it is crucial for surveyors to assess the average daily consumption of electricity rather than solely the presence or absence of an electricity connection.

It's worth noting that the all-India average per capita domestic electricity consumption was 224 kWh in the year 2019-20. For instance, one incandescent light bulb used for 4 hours a day would consume 12 kWh in 31 days, totalling 144 kWh annually. This means that if a household were to consume electricity at the average rate, it would be enough to power just two light bulbs for 4 hours each day. It becomes evident, without the need for extensive surveying, that Niti Aayog's measure of deprivation concerning electricity consumption grossly underestimates the actual deprivation experienced by households.

Regarding the Assets indicator, a household is considered deprived if it possesses no more than one of the following assets: a radio, TV, telephone, computer, animal cart, bicycle, motorbike, or refrigerator, and

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does not own a car or truck. Therefore, a household owning, for example, a 10-year-old radio and a 20-year-old bicycle would be classified as non-poor according to this criterion. The estimated percentage of poverty using this indicator was 10.16% in 2019-21.

In this context, it would be beneficial to combine data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) with asset ownership data obtained from the All-India Debt and Investment Survey-2019. According to this survey, the average value of assets was INR 41,000 in

rural areas and only INR 2,000 in urban areas. Considering the types of assets held by households, it was found that 91% and 92% of households in rural areas owned land and buildings, respectively. Thus, the only assets of substantial value likely to be owned by poor households are small patches of land and thatched huts for shelter. The corresponding percentages in urban areas were 63.2% and 63.9%, respectively. Given this data, it may be argued that the ratio of deprived households in terms of asset ownership is significantly underestimated. In fact, for each of

the indicators comprising the dimension of Standard of Living, the approach adopted by Niti Aayog to identify deprived households would only target the most impoverished individuals.

The current space constraints prevent the author from delving into all the issues regarding the reliability of each indicator in measuring the multidimensional poverty status of the Indian population, as well as its aggregation process. However, in essence, the MPI should serve as a supplement to PL-based measures of poverty rather than a substitute. □□□

THE BOB MAN

Remembering Rabindranath Majumdar

Sabyasachi Chatterjee

RABINDRANATH MAJUMDAR, or Rabinda as he was popularly known to his countless admirers, was born on November 24, 1946, in a village near Memari in Burdwan district. He came to study chemistry honours at Narendrapur Ramakrishna Mission Residential College. He obtained first class in Chemistry honours, B.Tech in Chemical Engineering and M.Tech in Chemical Technology; in all the three occasions he secured first place. He did his PhD from Calcutta University in 1972. In 1974, he started teaching in the Department of Chemical Technology. In 1984-85, he worked as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Leeds, England. In 1993-95 he served as the Head of Chemical Technology Department of Calcutta University. This distinguished scientist was engaged in teaching and research. However, he did not confine himself in the classroom and laboratory; rather he always tried to make science social and society scientific that was the motto of the journal *Bijnan O Bijnankarmi* (BOB). In fact Rabinda was somehow synonymous with

BOB. The magazine for which he was known in the field of science movement was *Bijnan O Bijnankarmi*. The *Bijnan O Bijnankarmi* was launched in July 1977. It was bi-monthly at first. Each year, six issues were published from July 1977 to June 1983. In 1983 five issues were published with a joint issue of No. 2 & 3 (September to December 1983). From 1984 onwards, this journal was published, sometimes singularly, and often as joint issues. The publication of *Bijnan O Bijnankarmi* was suddenly stopped in 1993 and from 1994 a new format was adopted. The period of the year was changed from July-June to January-December along with its periodicity from bi-monthly to tri-monthly. It was regular in its periodicity till March 1996. Then a joint issue was published taking 2nd and 3rd number of the 18th year. There was no further change regarding its periodicity till December 1997. But in few recent years *Bijnan O Bijnankarmi* was published annually during the time of Kolkata Book Fair. However it did not come out to newsstand after 2022.

As to its subject matter, *Bijnan O Bijnankarmi* was truly a representative of the ideal, phrased like 'think globally, act locally'. It always highlighted the global phenomenon. It vividly reported the debates and issues that were taking place in different international summit on environment. As far as the movement was concerned it had played a pivotal role in the movement against a proposed chemical fertiliser company in the Sunderban area of the South 24 Parganas. Rabinda himself was deeply attached to the movement. A contemporary novel portrayed a character of a scientist on the basis of Rabinda's role in the movement. *Bijnan O Bijnankarmi* had contributed significantly in the anti-nuclear movement of the state. Till the Pokhran explosion of 1998, as many as forty-one articles/reports were published in the *Bijnan O Bijnankarmi* on nuclear power and weapons. After Pokhran explosion, when a movement was started against nuclear weapons and nuclear power, comprising of ninety-eight people's organisations, *Bijnan O Bijnankarmi* was a part of that initiative. On August 6, i.e. the Hiroshima Day, 1998 a huge rally from Sealdaha to Birla Planetarium was organised in Kolkata where

Rabinda along with other like-minded activists took part.

The disastrous Bhopal Gas tragedy took place on 2nd December 1984. After the Bhopal gas disaster, BOB tried to demonstrate the dangers of manufacturing hazardous chemicals. It tried to show the risk behind the making of dangerous chemical pesticides. It had also showed the huge loss and sufferings, which the concerned company did not pay. BOB protested against this nuisance and demanded compensation for people.

Another thrust area of Bijnan O Bijnankarmi was related with medical science in general and people's health in particular. It reacted to the contemporary health issues. When enteric diseases broke out in West Bengal in 1984, it published a number of articles. The same thing happened in 1985 when hepatitis broke out in Kolkata and its surrounding areas, the *Bijnan O Bijnankarmi* also raised the question of the responsibility of the government regarding it.

The *Bijnan O Bijnankarmi* was also concerned with the method of science. In this context, it had tried to evaluate homeopathic and acupuncture as medicinal methods. *Bijnan O Bijnankarmi* criticised the First World's role in using the people of the third world for experimentation of new bio-chemical medicines on their body before marketing of those specific drugs. It had tried to consolidate the grievances of the common people, who failed to get proper treatment. People took the opportunity to ventilate their feelings in the pages of *Bijnan O Bijnankarmi*.

The *Bijnan O Bijnankarmi* made an evaluation of the textbooks on science, either published or approved by the government, of primary and secondary courses in West Bengal. It exposed various unscientific subjects present in those textbooks. It also threw light on non-formal science

education based on experiments as introduced by the Ekalavya in Madhya Pradesh. In a nutshell, the Ekalavya's main areas of work were innovations in school education, publication of educational literature, science-society issues and facilitating participatory development. It had innovative curriculum, teaching methodologies and educational materials for science, social science and primary education. The Ekalavya believed that science and technology were not esoteric spheres of thought and activity but should be rooted in people's knowledge and understanding and should be addressed to their needs. Along with the Ekalavya, the *Bijnan O Bijnankarmi* also showed the camaraderie to some other people's movements like the movement centred round Chhattishgarh Shahid Hospital and the people's health movement of Latin America. Through all these efforts, it accelerated the pace of the science movements of West Bengal.

Rabinda played the pivotal role in all of these efforts. He took main initiative in presenting the important issues published in BOB as booklets. Among those mention must be made of *Bijnanshiksha Prathamik Halchal* (1988) [Condition of Science Education in Primary Level], *Bijnanshiksha Madhyamik Halchal* (1992) [Condition of Science Education in Secondary Level]. His own book on introduction and measurement of Environmental Pollution (*Paribesh Dushan Parichiti O Parimap*) came out in 1998. He and Manindranarayan Majumder wrote a quality textbook on environment when environmental studies became a compulsory subject at undergraduate level in West Bengal in the 21st century; name of that book was *Paribeshbidya Parichay* (2002) [Introduction to Environment]. The most striking part of this book was the chapter on environmental move-

ment. Actually Rabinda was an 'activist-writer'. He was integrally associated with the science and environment movement. He wrote a pioneering article on the science movement under the title "*Bijnan Andoloner Sandhane*" [In search of science movement] in BOB in November-December 1979. That search continued throughout his life. Therefore, in the last ten years, he wrote two booklets *Bharater Aamaadmir Janya Bijnan O Prajukti* [Science and Technology for the Common People of India] and *Bijnan Andololan Athaba Kupmandukatar Charcha* [the science movement or the practice of narrow-mindedness] (both of these were published in 2016). The characteristic of his writing was to give the reader a scope for thought without giving the last word; He tried to share ideas through writing, not as an authority. And that's why he never hesitated in self-criticism. He repeatedly raised questions about his work. But it is not to block the way, but to find out new direction of science movement.

This write-up would be incomplete without referring his love for Prafulla Chandra Ray. He wrote extensively on the contribution and dream of Prafulla Chandra. He sincerely believed the relevance of following Prafulla Chandra's footsteps. Apart from writing a number of post-editorials on the life and works of Prafulla Chandra in the *Ei Samay*, he wrote a full-length monograph. Like Prafulla Chandra, Rabinda also emphasised on the trinity of science, society and human being; incidentally that was the title [*Bijnan Samaj Manush*, 2006] of the compilation of the articles published in the *Bijnan O Bijnankarmi*. Rabinda would be remembered not by the BOB family alone, his devoted work would inspire the activists of people's science movement.

□□□

ALEXEI NAVALNY

Russia's Tradition of Repression

Sumanta Banerjee

ALEXEI NAVALNY HAS joined the long list of Russian martyrs and dissidents who dared to oppose the ruling powers in the past, whether the Tzars, or Stalin, or Putin today. Sorry to say, all through their history, Russians had suffered from dictatorial regimes (whether Right-wing or Left-wing), barring a few interludes like the years immediately following the 1917 Revolution when they enjoyed freedom of expression and right to dissent under Lenin's Bolshevik government till it was taken over by Stalin, and still later under Khrushchev and Gorbachev when they could engage in open debates to some extent. Putin has reversed that trend of liberalization by reviving the spirit of Tzarist aggression abroad in his foreign policy (as evident from his invasion of Ukraine in the name of protecting the Russian nation), and restoring the Stalinist order of persecution of political dissidents in his domestic policy (as evident from the treatment of Alexei Navalny).

Let us look at the continuity of the tradition of state repression against writers and dissenters in Russia. The novelist Dostoyevsky who was a member of a socialist group was arrested by the Tzarist regime 1849, condemned to death (to be countermanded at the last minute) and sentenced instead to hard labour in prison. The same pattern was followed by Stalin after he came to power, when he persecuted veteran Bolsheviks like Zinoviev and Kamenev through the infamous Moscow trials of 1936-38. Some twenty years later, his successor Khrushchev at the 20th party con-

gress of the CPSU came out with the shocking revelation that Stalin got rid of his opponents inside the party by arresting or killing them during 1937-38. Poets were not spared, as evident from the fate of the poet Anna Akhmatova who in 1946 was persecuted by Zhdanov, the cultural commissar of Stalin.

During Khrushchev's rule, there was a brief reprieve for independent minded writers who were allowed to express their thoughts. One of them was Alexander Solzhenitsin, who in 1963 came out with his book *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*—a graphic account of life in prison camps during the Stalinist regime. But after Khrushchev's removal from power, Solzhenitsin was stripped of citizenship in 1974, and forced to emigrate to Germany.

From Siberia to Gulag to Arctic Penal Colony

The Russian penal system indicates a continuity of a pattern (irrespective of the political hues of its rulers) which is marked by the exile of convicts to distant places instead of keeping them in prisons in their own neighbourhood. In the 19th century, Siberia situated in an area of extreme natural calamities, was designed by the then Tzarist regime as a vast penal colony. Both common criminals and political opponents were exiled there, who suffered from the cold as well as the oppression by the jailers. Stalin followed that system by creating the notorious Gulag—labour camps set up in far-away places where his political opponents were sent to be imprisoned. Accounts of their sufferings came out after the end of the Stalin regime.

Today, Putin is carrying on the

same tradition by creating the Arctic Penal Colony—where Alexei Navalny died under suspicious circumstances. Nicknamed as Polar Wolf, this colony is located in a region where the winter temperature can go down to -20°C .

The above narrative delineating the history of Russia makes it an eminent candidate for the designation 'rogue state'. But this is not meant to stereotype the country as a villain. In the past its people have risen up protesting against oppressive rulers and replaced them with leaders of their own choice. We hope that they will put an end to Putin's rule and stop his destructive war in Ukraine and his domestic acts of stifling dissent by killing opponents like Navalny.

But it is going to be a long haul for the Russians to dethrone Putin. He is in alliance with another 'rogue state'—China. Equally belligerent and aggressive like Putin, China's president Xi is embroiled in conflicts with neighbouring states in order to further his nationalist interests. Both Putin and Xi are harking back to their respective past chauvinist traditions—Putin claiming Ukraine as his territory, and Xi claiming the disputed areas bordering India as his territory. Both Putin and Xi share another habit—suppression of political dissent in their domestic spheres. It is no wonder therefore that both have struck up alliances with authoritarian religious fundamentalist regimes like Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The Sino-Russian-Saudi Arabia-Iran alliance may emerge as an alternative power to challenge the other 'rogue state'—the US which is ruling over its satellites in West Asia. But is this Russian led alliance a choice that people should opt for? Given the past history of betrayal and opportunism of the Russian rulers—whether Bolsheviks or their successors—can people trust them? □□□

THE DIARY OF A SQUAT

When the Homeless Reclaimed a Building

Bharat Dogra

THIS IS ABOUT A GREAT book that has almost never been published; or rather one should say that has never been published properly. Well, it is about a diary written by a 'practical idealist' Jean Delarue who was one among the several homeless people who occupied a building in London during 1989-90 for several months.

Jean Delarue wrote a diary during most of the days he stayed there. It was difficult to find a regular publisher for this and so this was published as a typescript by Peaceprint of the Brotherhood Church, Yorks, under the title 'No. 1 Clapham Road—the diary of a squat'. This book mentions in the very beginning—'All profits will be given to the Manna Centre for the Homeless'. Further it is stated—Free for prisoners and the homeless.

If you are not already interested adequately in the book, then let me give you an additional information that will definitely make you interested and even excited about the book—the author's name given in this book Jean Delarue is only an assumed name which under the circumstances the squatter-author had to adopt. Readers would identify more easily with the real author—none other than Prof Jean Dreze. It is better to identify him here, for the style of the diary-writing is so different from the scholarly books people normally associate with the world renowned development economist, also often called the 'people's economist', that the reader may find it otherwise very difficult to identify Jean Delarue and Jean Dreze as the same author.

This was written around the time Jean had finished a teaching assignment in London and was preparing to come to India. Towards the end

of 1988 a number of friends who were united by their involvement in peace actions started discussing the idea of helping the homeless of London to 'reclaim' a large empty building. The idea was that they would occupy some fairly conspicuous building, throw it open to the homeless and help them to organise the squat along community lines. "There would be banners and posters all over the place, free soup, noisy meetings, press visits, music, workshops, and an open dialogue..." Sooner or later people would be evicted to go back to the street, but some objectives would meanwhile be achieved hopefully. As the author says of the planning stage, "we saw this action both as a practical way of helping homeless people to create a (temporary) home of their own, and as a symbolic protest against their social extermination", with perhaps more emphasis being on the second aspect.

There was apprehension initially that the reclaiming effort may last only a few days or at the most a few weeks, but actually it could continue for several months although the number of occupants would rise and fall from time to time depending on several factors.

Jean himself was among the first group of squatters to reclaim the building but after living for a month or two he had to leave and then returned after a gap of about four months or so in August 1989. It was then that he started writing this diary which continued for about three months or so.

This diary gives a very honest account of this effort of the homeless people—good and bad, beautiful and ugly all aspects can be seen here. There is no effort to romanticise the often difficult situations, or the

people involved in them, in fact the quotes are often very raw. Yet there are many aspects of solidarity and aspirations of homeless people which stand out in this diary.

The writer of the diary is particularly involved with exploring the possibilities of community life; he is happy when he sees signs of this and sad when these appear to be losing out.

This concern reminded me of my own reporting on the homeless people in some parts of India but particularly in Delhi where I found that among several homeless people community life exists even in the street. Several of them who are migrants from the same cluster of distant villages would take care to live together and in fact even avoid going to shelters as long as they could stay together on streets and roads with their rickshaws, handcarts or other means of livelihood.

This book is full of rare observations of understanding homeless people made by a learned and sympathetic scholar who was living with them for several months like any other squatter and sharing all their difficulties, problems and work. Now that the number of homeless and 'almost homeless' people is increasing even in several western countries including the USA and UK it will be really useful to publish this valuable diary in a more regular way so that it can reach many more readers. What I would like to suggest is that the writer should add one comprehensive chapter on the situation of homeless persons today to add to the value and appeal of the book. One hopes that people can see such a book very soon. □□□

[The reviewer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. He was earlier Board Member and for some time the Chairperson of a leading program of homeless persons in India. His recent books include Protecting Earth for Children, Man over Machine and A Day in 2071.]

DEBUNKING MYTHS

HAF's Ram Temple Narrative

Shamsul Islam

IN JANUARY 2024, THE US-based Hindu nationalist group, the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), released a series of videos and a so-called factsheet addressing the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya which was built on the ruins of the 500-year-old Babri Masjid.

But a careful examination of historical records, religious texts, and legal judgments reveals HAF's article to be fraught with lies, inaccuracies, deliberate fabrications, and questionable historical narratives.

The HAF writes that the new Ram temple was "built on an ancient site of Hindu worship. The final Hindu temple on the site was destroyed in the early 16th century by the first Mughal emperor for the construction of a mosque known in modern times as the Babri Masjid. Archaeological evidence proves the mosque had no foundations of its own and was built upon a Hindu temple."

This is a brazen lie propagated by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) with no historical or legal proof, nor any corroboration in the 'Hindu' narrative of history. There is no mention of the Ram Temple even in the writings of the most prominent Ram worshiper to date, Goswami Tulsidas (1511-1623), who penned the Epic Ramcharitmanas (Lake of the Deeds of Ram) in the Avadhi language in 1575-76. According to the Hindu nationalist (Hindutva) version, Ram's birthplace temple was destroyed during 1528-1529. It would be surprising indeed if the Ramcharitmanas, written only 48 years after the so-called destruction of Ram's birthplace temple, did not mention such a momentous event.

According to the RSS, Adi

Shankaracharya, Aurobindo Ghosh, Swami Vivekananda, and Swami Dayanand Saraswati were the saints who contributed immensely to the cause of Vedic religion and the growth of the Hindu nation. None of these Vedic saints ever referred to this destruction of Ram Temple at Ayodhya by Mughal King Babar or his agent in any of their writings.

Today, Ayodhya is referred to as one of the oldest holiest places for Hindus. It would be interesting to know that Adi Shankaracharya (788-820), who toured India preaching Vedas for more than a decade, established 5 Peetams [main centers] at Badrinath in the North, Puri in the East, Dwarka in the West and Sringeri and Kanchi in the South for the revival of the Vedic religion but did not consider Ayodhya one.

Moreover, the Indian Supreme Court, in its 1,045-page Ayodhya Judgment (November 9, 2019), nowhere agrees with the claim that the Babri Mosque was constructed after destroying any temple.

HAF claimed that "As the traditional birthplace of Lord Ram, archaeological and documentary evidence shows that the site has been recognised as a place of spiritual importance for Hindus since time immemorial."

It is true that traditionally, Hindus believe that Ram was born in the city of Ayodhya, but the issue is whether he was born exactly under the central dome (approximately measuring 150 cm x 150 cm) of the Babri Mosque as is claimed now by Hindutva's flag-bearers.

But here it is important to note that the Indian Supreme Court, in its 2019 judgment, made two observa-

tions on this point without mincing words.

Firstly, it stated: "The exclusion of the Muslims from worship and possession took place on the intervening night between 22/23 December 1949 when the mosque was desecrated by the installation of Hindu idols. The ouster of the Muslims on that occasion was not through any lawful authority but through an act which was calculated to deprive them of their place of worship." [Supreme Court Judgment dated November 9, 2019, pp. 921-22]

Secondly, on pages 913-14, it states that "On 6 December 1992, the structure of the mosque was brought down and the mosque was destroyed. The destruction of the mosque took place in breach of the order of status quo and an assurance given to this Court. The destruction of the mosque and the obliteration of the Islamic structure was an egregious violation of the rule of law."

It is worth mentioning here that RSS—which initiated the bloody, violent campaign to build the Ram Temple at the end of the 1980s, never advanced this demand during the period of its founding in 1925, under British rule. Even after Independence, it was only in 1989 that the political appendage of the RSS, the BJP, began to focus on this issue.

The views of two RSS luminaries who initiated the Ram Temple movement reveal the preposterousness of the claim that Ram himself was born under the dome.

According to HAF, the construction of the Ram Temple at the site of the Babri Mosque was essential to seek "restorative justice to re-establish a Hindu temple that had been destroyed as a result of iconoclasm a few hundred years ago." They allege that the Ram Mandir "has great symbolic and emotional resonance for Hindus in contemporary times" and

that “the trauma that this destruction brought has been passed down through generations and continues to impact the psyche of Hindus” and “contributed historically and continues to contribute to Hindu-Muslim tensions in India to this day.”

It is nobody’s argument that Aurangzeb or many other ‘Muslim’ rulers were not religious bigots or tolerant. Aurangzeb did not spare his father, brothers, and many smaller ‘Muslim’ kingdoms of his times. There are also contemporary records that prove that Aurangzeb donated lands, money, and resources to many temples throughout India.

According to this logic, the rule by rulers with Muslim names in India was the Islamic rule of idol-breakers. This narrative of Muslim history developed only at the beginning of the 19th century is in absolute contradiction with historical facts and even common sense. To understand the lies behind this fabricated Medieval past, one needs to examine the nature of this ‘Muslim’ rule.

Despite the ‘Muslim’ rule of almost one thousand years, almost 75% of Indians did not convert to Islam, as was made clear by the first Census held by the British in 1871-72 when even ceremonial ‘Muslim’ rule was over. Hindus and Sikhs constituted 73.5 percent of the population, and Muslims numbered 21.5 percent only. Moreover, this rule was also the rule of the Hindu High Castes. According to contemporary ‘Hindu’ narratives, Aurangzeb never faced Shivaji in the battlefield; these were

his two Rajput commanders, Jay Singh I and Jai Singh II, who fought against Shivaji on Aurangzeb’s behalf. Akbar personally never fought any battle against Rana Pratap of Mewar; Man Singh, brother-in-law of Akbar fought all battles against Rana. The Deewan Ala (prime minister) of both Shahjahan and Aurangzeb was Raghunath Bahadur, a Kayasth Hindu.

HAF, parroting the RSS claim, declared that the building of the Ram Temple was “an important event for Hindus of all traditions.”

According to HAF, the mosque replacing the demolished Babri Mosque to be constructed at a distance of 22 km “will become the largest mosque in India. To be named the Masjid Muhammad Bin Abdullah, some 9,000 worshippers will be accommodated at one time”.

India already has five mosques, which are larger than the to-be-built mosque at Ayodhya. Jamia Masjid Srinagar can accommodate 33,000 worshippers, Jama Masjid Delhi can accommodate more than 25,000 worshippers, Taj-ul Masjid, Bhopal, Mecca Masjid, and Jama Masjid Agra, all three can accommodate over 10,000 worshippers. Why is it that despite these facts being available in the public domain, the mosque at Ayodhya is being touted as the largest one? The only reason is that Hindutva apologists, instead of showing any remorse or shame for the demolition of Babri Mosque at Ayodhya, want to be seen as large-hearted people who became instru-

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

mental in building ‘the largest mosque’ in India—a fact for which Muslims should apparently be grateful to the Hindutva demolition squad.

Hindu American Foundation (HAF) and its Hindutva tribe must understand that Ram was never the cause of perpetual conflict between Hindus and Muslims till RSS invented it as a convenient tool for religious polarisation. Muslims of Ayodhya stopped going to Babri Mosque once the idol of the child Ram was smuggled into the Babri Mosque on the night of 22/23 December 1949. They did not try to break into the usurped Mosque, and there was no bloodshed engineered by Muslims of Ayodhya who were in substantial numbers in Faizabad, now rechristened as Ayodhya Dham despite the Indian Supreme Court declaring that “the mosque was desecrated by the installation of Hindu idols”.

□□□

LETTERS

February 21

Every year on February 21, International Mother Language Day is observed to celebrate linguistic and cultural diversity around the world, UNESCO declared this day in 1994, to recognise the Bangladeshi Language Movement and officially

named it International Mother Tongue Day. In Bangladesh, February 21, has been honoured as National Martyr’s Day since 1952. The day commemorates the sacrifices made by Bangladeshis to establish Bangla as the state language of then east Pakistan [now Bangladesh].

The movement to reclaim Bangla started after the then Governor-General of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, declared that “Urdu, and only Urdu “could be the common language for both parts of Pakistan.

“Ekushe February” or February 21, holds special significance for Bengalis worldwide who celebrate it

as Bhasa Divas or Shahid Divas. It is a day of great significance for Bangladesh and West Bengal, two countries that may be separated by borders but are united by language. On this day they commemorate the sacrifices made by people in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) for Bangla, their mother tongue. It is a day to remember and honour the brave souls who fought for recognition of their language and culture. The celebration also serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving the language, unique identity and heritage of Bengalis.

OT Staff

'Rape is not Resistance'

According to Jerusalem Deputy Mayor Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, between 17 and 20 women and girls are still being held by the Islamist terror group since its brutal October 7 attack on Israel.

Reports of rape and sexual violence have multiplied since October 7, and at the start of December, Gilad Erdan, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, said Hamas used rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war.

Hamas has denied this, despite substantive accounts detailing the systematic sexual violence perpetrated against Israeli women and girls by Palestinian terrorists on October 7, including interviews with more than 150 witnesses, medical personnel, first responders, soldiers, rape counselors, and government officials, along with the scanning of video footage, photographs and GPS data from cellphones.

It is believed that 132 hostages abducted by Hamas on October 7 remain in Gaza—not all of them alive—after 105 civilians were released from Hamas captivity during a weeklong truce in late November. Four hostages were released prior to that, and one was rescued by troops.

The bodies of eight hostages have also been recovered and three hostages were mistakenly killed by the military.

The IDF has confirmed the deaths of 32 of those still held by Hamas, citing new intelligence and findings obtained by troops operating in Gaza. One more person is listed as missing since October 7, and their fate is still unknown.

The Times of Israel

Why Aadhaar is Becoming Inactive

In the aftermath of Aadhaar Act, 2016 (as amended in 2019), Hon'ble Supreme Court's verdict of September 26, 2018 and November 13, 2019, there is a logical and legal compulsion for States to unsign their MoUs with UIDAI.

These MoUs were signed in the pre-Aadhaar Act era and continued to operate in the era when unconstitutional Sections like Section 57 of Aadhaar Act was recognised and declared as unconstitutional and illegitimate by the Hon'ble Supreme Court's verdict of September 26, 2018 and by the deletion of Section 57 by the amendment of 2019 in Aadhaar Act. The verdict of November 13, 2019 recognised that the entire Act is unconstitutional.

A 7-judge Constitution Bench has been constituted to declare it to be so in order to adhere to judicial discipline. The fact remains no sane person will wait for formal announcement of poison to desist from consuming poison. Aadhaar Act is a poisonous law. It is a black law akin to the colonial law which was bitterly resisted by Mahatma Gandhi's first Satyagrah. Hon'ble Chief Justice of India has declared this law to be a fraud on the Constitution of India in his order dated September 26, 2018. He has reiterated it on at least two more occasions. In this

backdrop, constitutional, legal, judicial and political imagination creates a logical compulsion to resist this law which creates an architecture of unlimited government based on 360 degree surveillance. It is eroding the constitutionally mandated autonomy of States beyond repair.

West Bengal's Home Department signed the MoU with UIDAI on July 1, 2010. Shri A.G. Ghosh, OSD & ex-officio Special Secretary signed it on behalf of Home Department, West Bengal Government and Shri Nirmal Kumar Sinha, Deputy Director General, UIDAI; Planning Commission signed it on behalf of UIDAI. This MoU is outdated and it imperils the autonomy of the State and the citizens. West Bengal Government's considered intervention will pave the way for other States to act on this MoU which is facilitating unlimited and indiscriminate mass surveillance and mass spying at the behest of World Bank's eTransform Initiative and its partners since 2010.

Citizens Forum for Civil Liberties (CFCL) welcomes WB Chief Minister's letter to Hon'ble Prime Minister on the subject of "Aadhaar is becoming inactive" in defence of the natural and fundamental rights of fellow citizens. (Source: <https://www.livehindustan.com/national/story-why-aadhaar-is-becoming-inactive-west-bengal-mamata-banerjee-wrote-a-letter-asking-for-reply-from-pm-9346756.html>)

This writer's articles—"India's First Metadata case: Supreme Court's Constitution Bench to decide illegitimacy of Aadhaar Act amid Great Data Robbery" (<https://mainstreamweekly.net/article13958.html>), "India's First Metadata Case and Pegasus—Part 2" (<http://mainstreamweekly.net/article14053.html>) and India's First Metadata case: Mass Surveillance, Mass Spying and Unending Census Part 3 (<http://mainstreamweekly.net/article14196.html>) provide robust argument in this regard.

March 10-16, 2024

FRONTIER

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Having worked on the subject since 2010, this writer will be happy to share more details regarding the illegitimacy of Aadhaar Act.

Dr. Gopal Krishna, Advocate,
Citizens Forum for
Civil Liberties (CFCL)
forcompletejustice@proton.me
web: www.eirc.in

Jagan Nath Azad

Jagan Nath Azad, who once lived in Pakistan, migrated to India during the partition. He was a well-known poet, scholar and journalist who wrote well over seventy books on Urdu poetry. People from both countries—India and Pakistan—loved him and his work. But there was one less-known claim about his work: that he, upon the request of Jinnah, penned Pakistan's first national anthem--Tarana-e-Pakistan.

In an interview with journalist Luv Puri, Azad said that he wrote down the song because "Quid-e-Azam wanted the anthem to be written by an Urdu-knowing Hindu".

Jagan passed away on July 24, 2004. A year later Luv's interview was published in Milli Gazette and almost a year later The Hindu republished it.

Hector Bolitho's official biography, *Jinnah: Creator of Pakistan*, published by John Murray in 1954, claims that Jinnah asked a Hindu to write Pakistan's anthem.

In August 1954, lyrics from a submission by Hafeez Jalandhari were adopted as the new national anthem. The anthem was known as Quami Taranah or the anthem of the community.

Team Madras Courier

SMILE

Transgender people are yet socially, educationally, economically, psychosocially, and psycho-sexually deprived in the society after being recognised as the third gender in 2014 by the Supreme Court of India. According

to the 2011 census, the transgender population of West Bengal was about thirty thousand and more, out of about five lakh in India. This population is still deprived of all their rights for better survival. Most of them are engaged in begging.

Post-COVID, beggars have increased, and they have chosen railway platforms, trains, and crowded places in a city or town. There are no significant strategies adopted for their rehabilitation except the formation of a welfare board for the vulnerable.

Anyway, in 2022, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, launched a central sector scheme called SMILE (Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise) with an allocation of Rs 365 crore from 2021-22 to 2025-26. And it promises to 'provide welfare and rehabilitation to the transgender community and the people engaged in the act of begging.' The stipulated service coverage of this scheme is to provide Scholarships for Transgender Students studying in IX and till post-graduation to enable them to complete their education, to provide a comprehensive package in convergence with PM-JAY supporting Gender-Reaffirmation surgeries through selected hospitals, to set up 'Garima Greh'(housing facility) for food, clothing, recreational facilities, skill development opportunities, recreational activities and medical support etc. to the Transgender community and the people engaged in the act of begging, to set up Protection Cell in each state to monitor cases of offences and to ensure timely registration, investigation and prosecution of offences and other related services for their rehabilitation.

Tragically, there is no visibility of this scheme--SMILE--in a city like Kolkata.

Harasankar Adhikari

CRY's Appeal

Give children a gift of brighter future by contributing to CRY's Academic Support Centres.

While schools have reopened formally, children are still struggling with their studies. The prolonged gap has led to the loss of learning opportunities and many important life skills for children. Many of them were even forced to drop out of school during this gap and discontinue their education. If not addressed on time this learning crisis can lead to children dropping out of school permanently putting their bright futures at stake.

To address this issue, CRY has set up Academic and Psychosocial Support Centres that are helping children across many states to reconnect to their studies and give them the necessary confidence to go back to school by:

- Conducting support classes using interactive audio-visual platforms to bridge the learning gap and protect children from dropping out of school.
- Retaining motivation levels among children through fun and creative activities like storytelling, singing, dancing, etc.
- Conducting awareness drives on the importance of education for communities and parents.
- Creating awareness about the ill effects of dropping out of school, child marriage, labour, and trafficking.
- Forming children's collectives to build the agency of children to promote their well-being and give them the confidence to pursue their aspirations.

So far, CRY has reached over 30,000 children. Now, CRY is counting on people's help to reach 50,000 children, reconnecting them with education and empowering them to reimagine their future.

Donate today and get a 50% tax exemption under section 80G of income tax!

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