

frontier

Vol. 56 : No. 39

ISSN 0016-2094

March 24-30, 2024

Founder-Editor : **SAMAR SEN**

On Other Pages

Comment	2
Note	3
'SAIBABA ACQUITTED' Between Life and Death Jyoti Punwani	4
COMPETITIVE POPULISM Politics of Unemployment Yogendra Yadav	6
HONORARIUM, NOT WAGE ASHA and MDM Workers Atanu Chakravarty	7
SUBHAS GANGULY ONCE AGAIN Memories of 'MAMA' Chandramouli Sengupta	9
AMERICAN DOUBLE STANDARDS Taiwan: Another Ukraine in the Making? Ramakrishnan	9
FROM ART GALLERY Pabitra Saha's Paintings Atanu Basu	12
POLITICS OF NO LOGIC A Tale of Prof Nitasha Kaul Asok Chattopadhyay	13
Letters	14

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]

International Women's Day

MARCH 8 COMES, MARCH 8 GOES. POLITICAL PARTIES AND civic society groups observe International Women's Day in business as usual fashion. The basic issue of how to empower women remains unanswered. On the eve of International Women's Day UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that 'global backlash against women's rights is threatening and in some cases reversing progress in developing and developed countries alike'. International Women's Day was officially recognised by UN in 1977. This year's theme was investing in women and girls to accelerate toward equality. But legal equality for women, as per UN's own admission, could take 300 years to achieve. Socialists and liberals have been debating the Women Question since the days of August Bebel only to see no serious progress even in the 21st century. As for the communist left in India celebration of Women's Day is one more ritual like May Day. And their discourses mostly hover around Clara Zetkin, Alexandra Kolontai or Rosa Luxemburg while remaining vague about the liberation of toiling women in the broader domain of class struggle. Talking about class struggle loudly, dismissing feminism as elitist culture is not going to liberate women who are doubly oppressed in patriarchal society.

Surprisingly, while duelling on women's rights UN Secretary General, did hardly talk about the plight of women and girls who are being forced to live in hell in war zones. In every conflict, violent or not-so-violent, sexual violence against women is being extensively used as a weapon. It is more powerful than missiles to destroy a population psychologically and physically. How the wars in Ukraine and Palestine have devastated the lives of thousands of women and their families beggars description. If there is any hell on the earth it is in Gaza. Palestinian women don't know how to observe the International Women's Day. Nor do they get any assurance from the international community that their lives would be better any time soon as there is no immediate possibility of a cease-fire in Israel-Hamas war. Some Israeli women too are facing equal brutality. A report by a UN team of experts released on March 4 said they found "clear and convincing information" that some hostages were subjected to sexual violence and that such violence may be on-going. The UN report came four days before the International Women's Day. They were brutalised in captivity. As the war continues despite international outcry for peace and immediate cease-fire hostages will rot in detention.

It has been four months since the Israel-Palestine war began. The civilian death toll from Israel's retaliation in Gaza has climbed to more than 30,000--70 percent are women and children. In truth more non-combatants have been killed in less than four months in Gaza than in nearly two years of war in Ukraine, where the civilian death toll only recently exceeded 10,000.

Nearer home is there any point for the women of Manipur to celebrate International Women's Day? They have not yet recovered from the shock they received during the ethnic riots and police high-handedness. Many of them are still homeless, trying hard to get back what they

have lost--peace, dignity and mutual trust.

The sexual abuse suffered by Dalit women in BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh is routine. There was a barbaric incident in 2020 when a 19-year-old Dalit girl also in Hathras was gang-raped and her body was hurriedly cremated by the police against the wishes of her family. In most cases similar incidents of violence against women are dubbed as suicides and, cases are dismissed without hearing. Culprits are seldom brought to book.

Women from the marginalised section of society face a higher risk of gender and caste-based violence at the hands of the men from dominant castes who use sexual violence as a

tool to exercise their traditional social and economic authority. Women's Day or any other Day, these poor women are not aware of their civil, social, economic and cultural rights they are entitled to. They live in the largest democracy of the world, having no democratic rights otherwise guaranteed under the Constitution.

Wives and mothers of protesting farmers joined the movement on International Women's Day to highlight the legitimate struggle for the welfare of thousands of women farmers who toil on farms, enduring sunburns to sustain their livelihoods. On International Women's Day they want the government to recognise their labour contribution. □□□ 08-03-2024

COMMENT

The Saibaba Trial

THE WELL-KNOWN HUMAN rights activist, wheelchair-bound G N Saibaba, was acquitted on March 5, 2024, after spending 10 years in jail. Born into a poor peasant family in Andhra Pradesh in 1967, Saibaba completed his post-graduation in English from the University of Hyderabad and got his Ph. D degree from Delhi University. From 2003 till his arrest in 2014, he taught English literature at a Delhi University college. He came out from the prison in utter distress. Saibaba was paralysed below the waist since his childhood. Recounting the brutal treatment in the prison after his release, he said: "On May 9, 2014, when I was arrested, police dragged me by my left hand. That hand has remained swollen for a decade now. For nine arduous months, I endured the trial without any treatment for my hand. When finally taken to a hospital, I heard that it was too late. The doctor informed that he couldn't revive my nervous and muscle system." He also shared with

the media his psychological distress: "My mother passed away when I was in prison. She carried me to school as I was disabled but she wanted me to get a good education. When she died, I was not allowed to see her. I was denied parole and even permission to attend the funeral..." (Saibaba quoted in *The Telegraph*, March 9, 2024)

Saibaba's long imprisonment has a unique legal history. To put it in the words of *The Hindu* (March 10, 2024): "Mr Saibaba was first arrested on May 9, 2014 over his alleged links with Maoists. He approached the Bombay High Court, challenging his arrest and was given bail on medical grounds in 2015, but was back in jail again. In 2016, the Supreme Court released him on bail unconditionally. However, in 2017, a trial court in Gadchiroli, Maharashtra, convicted him under sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). Though he challenged his conviction in Mumbai High Court, he couldn't get bail due to stringent

provisions of UAPA. In October 2022, the Bombay High Court set aside his life imprisonment and concluded that the proceedings before the sessions court were 'null and void'. But his acquittal was stayed by the Supreme Court..."

It should be noted in this connection that on March 5, 2024, in its judgment on the Saibaba case, the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court overturned the 2017 Trial Court judgment, both on the basis of the merits and procedural lapses. The Court also came out strongly against thought policing of individuals and acquitted, along with Saibaba, five others charged under UAPA. (See cjp.org.in) Hours within G N Saibaba's acquittal, the State of Maharashtra moved the Supreme Court challenging the decision of the Bombay high Court.

The predicament of G N Saibaba reminds one of the opening sentences of *The Trial*, the famous novel by Franz Kafka: "Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K, for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning". □□□

[Contributed by Arup Sen]

NOTE

'Save the University of Madras'

SPCSS-TN writes:

THE IRONY IS THAT THE A++ Graded University is found to be violative of I-T Laws. The I-T Department had frozen the bank accounts of the University of Madras, a 165-year-old State University that produced great personalities like Sir C V Raman.

According to I-T Rules, a State University should get 51% of its funding from the State Government. At present, Madras University is getting only 19% of its funding as salary grant due to many reasons. Citing the State Government's grant accounting for less than 20% of its expenditure, the income tax department has sought Rs 424 crore as income tax from the university.

It also froze all its bank accounts. Without access to all bank accounts, all the routine functions of the university have been affected. The issue is not something that is about freezing or de-freezing. The issue is about the categorisation of the University. Whether the University of Madras is a Public Funded State University or it is a Private University?

The State Government for various reasons, mainly due to audit objections, reduced the Government Grants over a period of time. If irregularities are observed it is duty of the State Government, the owner of the University, to take such measures to identify the cause for the irregularities and take appropriate measures to ensure that every action of the university is in accordance with the law and the university is able to carry on the research and other academic activities as per the agreed guidelines and provisions.

The Government of Tamil Nadu

for over a decade failed to take remedial measures. Instead it reduced the spending. The State Government Grant to the University was substantially reduced. The university employed temporary teaching staff with a monthly salary of Rs 30,000. Almost all the teaching and non teaching staff recruited in the past ten years was temporary staff.

In spite of all challenges, the teachers and students put in their best efforts to maintain the academic standards. The approach of the Government over a period of time with regard to this university was in tune with Draft NEP that was placed in public domain for discussion in 2016.

The UGC reduced its grants. States faced financial crunch. Naturally, the State Governments were forced to implement NEP even during the draft stage. The university was allowed to find its own sources to meet its requirements. As a result the University introduced self finance courses, parallel self finance sections. In a particular course, one set of students were Government Grant Students and another set of students were self financed Students.

On one hand Government spending on the university decreased and spending by University through its own source increased. This led to the I-T Department placing the University of Madras in the category of "Private University". If the university is allowed to function by mobilising funds through its own sources including approaching the philanthropists and CSR, in the longer run the university will claim that it need not follow the Reservation Policy of the State of Tamil Nadu.

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. 80

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

It is pertinent to note that NEP 2020 is silent on the issue of Reservation based on Social and Educational Backwardness in both admission and recruitment. The NEP 2020 clearly States that the Government will spend only for the core area and the Public Institutions will be encouraged to mobilise funds through its own sources including approaching the philanthropists and CSR.

The Governing Council of the Higher Education Institutions will have corporate representatives. The Autonomous Status of the Higher Education Institution is not to grant academic freedom or meant for academic purpose. The academic, administrative and financial autonomy that NEP2020 envisages is to slowly but surely convert all public funded State Universities into Private Universities.

The crisis in the University of Madras is a wake-up call. The similar crises or more serious crises are sure to happen in any State University in any part of India. □□□

'SAIBABA ACQUITTED'

Between Life and Death

Jyoti Punwani

I EXPECTED THIS. AFTER ALL we knew there was no evidence, no crime committed by him", said an overjoyed Vasantha Kumari, wife of Professor G N Saibaba, who was acquitted by the Nagpur bench of the Bombay high court on Tuesday, March 5, 2024.

Yet, her joy was tempered by caution. "I don't know what they will do now", she said, "we have seen people being re-arrested as soon as they step out".

Behind the successful battle to prove the innocence of Professor G N Saibaba and his co-accused, went years of preparation. The backbone of that preparation was the work put in by a group of lawyers, all of whom had been juniors to Advocate Surendra Gadling.

Advocates Barun Kumar, Nihal Singh Rathod, Harshal Lingayat and Akash Sorte, worked as a team to brief the seniors who argued in court: Advocates Trideep Pais, Pradeep Mandhyan and S P Dharmadhikari.

Professor Saibaba, Mahesh Tirki, Pandu Narote (he died in custody August 2022), Hem Mishra, and Prashant Rahi were sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of being Maoists in 2017, while Vijay Tirki got a 10-year-sentence. The appeal against their conviction was filed immediately.

But in 2018, Surendra Gadling, the defence lawyer in the trial court, who had filed the appeal, was arrested in the Bhima Koregaon case.

"At that time, the appeal hadn't even been listed for hearing", recalls Advocate Barun Kumar, who joined Gadling's team at the fag end of the trial, after the recording of evidence was over.

Their first priority was to get a suspension of sentence for the accused and bail, recalls Barun. However, they managed to get bail only for Vijay Tirki. Professor Saibaba's appeals for bail even on medical grounds were rejected.

After repeated rejections of appeals for bail and parole, including when Professor Saibaba's mother was ill and then passed away, the court asked them to prepare for the final hearing of the appeal, recalls Barun. But courts were working only through video conferencing through the Covid lockdown.

"Given the bulky documents, it wouldn't have been possible to argue the appeal through video conferencing", says Barun.

After Gadling was arrested, new lawyers had to be found. There wasn't just one lawyer representing all the accused. Hence the juniors divided the work of briefing the three senior lawyers, says Akash Sorte, who joined Gadling as a junior at the appeal stage.

"We were sure our appeal would succeed", recalls Sorte. "We knew we could break down the evidence and show it was hollow".

In Gadling's absence, what his juniors banked on were his written arguments and the proceedings of his cross-examination. "We would read and re-read them", recalls Barun. "But it was Pradeep Sir (Pradeep Mandhyan) who taught us to read between the lines. He made us study the FIR for an entire day!"

"I still remember his words: 'It is not the accused who have conspired; it is the other side that's entered into a conspiracy", adds Barun. "He could decipher the mind

of the police, and he developed his arguments like a story teller. He taught us how to look for the larger picture behind the police documents".

Harshal Lingayat was Gadling's junior throughout the trial. Speaking to Rediff.com on Wednesday while driving to Gadchiroli to get the necessary documents for Professor Saibaba's release, the 41 year old recalled how confident they had been that all the accused would get acquitted by the trial court.

"The nature of the evidence against them gave us that confidence, but the judge overlooked it. Every single point that's been listed by the high court was pointed out by us. These arguments were noted, but never considered", he said.

Yet, lamented Barun, a hype was created around that sessions court judgment. It was even found worthy of being included in the SCC Web site (Supreme Court Cases) and on Manupatra, an online data base for legal research.

Lingayat was in court when Gadling was told that after Professor Saibaba, his turn would be next. (Details of these threats have been mentioned in Gadling's application for bail in the Bhima Koregaon case.)

Sorte has been meeting Professor Saibaba in the Nagpur Central Jail all these seven years, handing over medicines, clothes and dealing with hostile jailors. "There used to be an intelligence officer taking photographs of our meetings in jail", he alleges.

Despite these risks, none of the juniors dropped out of the case. Indeed, they are also involved in the Bhima Koregaon case as defence lawyers. Barun Kumar has appeared before the Bhima Koregaon Commission of Inquiry as Harshali Poddar's lawyer.

"In criminal cases, cross-examination is the only effective weapon

March 24-30, 2024

FRONTIER

5

in the armory of defence to impeach the credibility of prosecution witnesses', says the judgment acquitting Saibaba and his co-accused.

The judges rely significantly on the cross-examination of key witnesses that took place during the trial. That cross-examination was conducted by Surendra Gadling.

Gadling meticulously scrutinised all the documents relied upon by the police, such as FIRs, seizure memos, arrest panchnamas, and confronted the witnesses, including the investigating officer, the panch witnesses, and even the magistrate before whom two of the accused allegedly confessed, with the discrepancies he found in them.

His cross-examination showed how the provisions of UAPA were flouted by the police throughout the case.

Perhaps the most shocking example of police illegality were the admissions made under cross-examination by Jagat Bhole, who worked as a barber on the campus of Delhi University, and who was roped in against his will by the police as a panch witness for the raid on Professor Saibaba's home.

In his cross-examination, Bhole said he had told the police he was illiterate. He also said that Professor Saibaba had requested them to conduct the search in the presence of his lawyer or any of his students who had rushed to his house hearing of the raid.

Ignoring both their pleas, said Bhole, the police kept him and Professor Saibaba out of the house and locked the doors of the house while they conducted the search.

Thus he witnessed neither the search nor the seizure of material from Saibaba's home.

Two panch witnesses were examined. Both admitted to being illiterate and not knowing how to differentiate between electronic devices

such as CD, DVD, pen-drives, etc, which were seized. While one admitted to be a stock police panch witness, the other admitted to not having witnessed the search!

Among the discrepancies brought out in police documents were:

1. Over-writing on FIRs,
2. Different handwriting and different inks used on the same FIR to fill in different details.
3. Different dates on the first and last pages of arrest panchnamas.
4. The date on the bottom of screenshots showing the Facebook pages of Hem Mishra preceded the official date of his arrest, whereas police claimed that he had opened the page for them after his arrest.
5. The seizure panchnamas of the articles seized from Professor Saibaba's house did not indicate that the seized articles were sealed with wax, or labelled with the panch's signature.

Observed the court: 'The prosecution case entirely hinges around the seizure of incriminating material from the accused... arrest and seizure of incriminating material is the backbone or foundation of the entire prosecution'.

Thanks to the discrepancies that came through during Gadling's cross-examination, which was relied upon by the judges, the court concluded that the defence had 'succeeded in creating a reasonable doubt' about every aspect of collection of evidence, from the date of the arrest, to the seizure of 'incriminating material' from the accused.

For this stellar work as a lawyer, said his junior Harshal Lingayat, Gadling was suitably rewarded—with arrest in June 2018, a year after Professor Saibaba was convicted.

Interestingly, Sub Divisional Police Officer (Gadchiroli) Suhas Bawache, who arrested Professor Saibaba, and was the investigating

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

officer in the case, was felicitated by then Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis for his 'painstaking investigation' in the case that resulted in the conviction of Professor Saibaba.

Soon after his conviction in 2017, Professor Saibaba wrote a poem—*Refused to Die*. Finally he will be able to see the blades of grass he loves so much.

*When I refused to die
my chains were loosened
I came out
Into the vast meadows
Smiling at the leaves of grass
My smile caused intolerance in them
I was shackled again
Again, when I refused to die
tired of my life
my captors released me
I walked out
into the lush green valleys under
the rising sun
smiling at the tossing blades of grass
Infuriated by my undying smile
They captured me again
I still stubbornly refuse to die
The sad thing is that
They don't know how to make me die
Because I love so much
The sounds of growing grass. □*

*November 2017.
(Remembering October 1917)
[Courtesy: Rediff.com]*

COMPETITIVE POPULISM

Politics of Unemployment

Yogendra Yadav

CONGRESS PRESIDENT Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi's job guarantee promise, made at a rally in Banswara, Rajasthan, on the route of the *Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra*, queers the pitch for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which must now scramble to make a competitive offer.

Coming after the MSP guarantee for farmers, this second guarantee is an unusual combination of politically savvy and policy-wise thinking by the Congress. Any solution must begin by acknowledging the problem. The one issue that has come up everywhere in the second leg of *Bharat Jodo Yatra* led by Rahul Gandhi is that of joblessness. This announcement, thus, is a formal political acknowledgment of the gravity of the problem that has topped the charts in every opinion poll. Acceptance must be followed by careful listening. This is evident in the announcement, as it reflects the issues raised by the protesting youth. Some of their major concerns and demands have found a place in this package. But the *Yuva Nyay Guarantee* isn't merely a convenient reiteration of the demands of a movement. The Congress party think tank has moved away from some of the hackneyed ideas or magic remedies to offer a solution that attempts to be both responsible and creative.

No doubt the component that would attract the highest attention would be "Bharti Bharosa", a promise of 30 lakh government sector jobs. That's a big one, if one knows where the jobs would be generated and where the resources would come

from. India's problem is not that India has a bloated bureaucracy or that there are no vacancies. Compared to other economies of similar size, India has fewer public servants per capita. And there are around 10 lakh vacancies in the central government itself. Another 3 lakh jobs could be created in the education and health sectors — including the centrally sponsored schemes like Anganwadi and Asha workers and the educational and health institutions of the central government. Add to it an additional 2 lakh jobs from the reversal of workforce shrinkage in the public sector in recent years. So, there are at least 15 lakh jobs that can be filled within the existing set-up. That is a good beginning, something the educated unemployed have been asking for.

The calculation of additional 15 lakh jobs would need careful planning. Creating government jobs for the sake of providing jobs is not a sensible and sustainable policy. New jobs must fulfill new or pending needs. Massive expansion of public investment in human resources in the form of centrally sponsored schemes that seek to enhance capabilities and quality of life seems to be the way forward. These would mean additional employees in the states or local bodies for early childhood care and education, expansion and augmentation of primary and secondary health care, elderly care, and 'Green jobs' for ecological regeneration. Hopefully much of this would be spelt out in the days to come. Also, the additional bill of such an expansion needs to be known and debated. What would be the salary component of the Union

budget if these additional employees are all paid salaries as per the 7th Pay Commission?

What's more attractive is the second component named "Pehli naukri pakki", basically a Right to Apprenticeship scheme. This would involve a statutory guarantee of one year of paid apprenticeship at Rs 1 lakh a year for every college graduate and diploma holder under the age of 25. To be sure, this is not a regular and permanent job. Nor does this legal entitlement qualify to be the right to work that social democrats dream of. But this is a fiscally feasible and economically sensible version of the popular demand of "har haath ko kaam do" (every hand must have a job). Therefore, the details of the scheme would be keenly awaited. But there is no doubt that placing unemployed youth in a public or private sector company is much better than paying unemployment allowance. This short internship would help them build skills, gain on-the-job learning, and improve their employability. This should also attract private businesses, as they would get many skilled trainees at a very low cost. They have incentive to onboard apprentices and it is not unreasonable to expect that some of the better interns will be absorbed in the company.

Here too numbers will be keenly discussed. About 95 lakh students complete diploma or graduation or higher degree every year; out of these, about 75 lakh enter the job market. Assuming that about half of them do not get employment of their choice, people are looking at a demand for apprenticeship at around 40 lakh per year. This is a big ask, but not an impossible one. There are about 10 lakh enterprises in the formal sector with a turnover of Rs 5 crore and above who can take 4 interns on an average. The country

already has an Apprentices Act of 1961, which mandates companies to take apprentices between 2.5-15 per cent of their labour force. At the moment, just about 45,000 companies participate in it. But with legal tweaks and government funds, it should be possible to involve the entire formal sector and gradually incentivise the informal sector to join in. The total budget works out to Rs 40,000 crore, if the government pays the entire honorarium and only Rs 20,000 crore if the companies can be asked to share half the cost. There are many details to be worked out here, but this is clearly a big political step in the right direction.

The other three components are useful supplements to these two big ideas. The "Paper Leak Se Mukti" plan goes beyond the usual promise of "severe" punishment to those involved in question paper leaks, pre-

mised on the false assumption that raising the quantum of punishment is the best cure for any crime.

The 'Yuva Nyay Guarantee' promises much more, a whole Code of Conduct for public sector recruitment that lays down a calendar, norms of transparency, and modalities for doing away with the malpractices that affect over 2 crore youth aspiring for government jobs. The proposal for around 1 crore gig workers offers them social security benefits on the same lines as introduced by the outgoing Congress government in Rajasthan, or its improved version being prepared in Telangana. This is a progressive step, waiting to upscale at the national level.

Finally, the "Yuva Roshni" scheme seeks to create an Rs 5000-crore fund to extend loans for new youth-run businesses. This appears to be a modified version of the current Mudra

Yojana targeted at the youth. But it would need careful review lest it meets the same fate as the Mudra loan scheme.

An electoral promise, however good, is not a solution to the problem of unemployment. Given the enormity of the unemployment crisis, any policy proposal of this kind has to be a work in progress. There are many loose ends to be tied here, many data issues to be resolved, besides the big issue of additional revenue generation. The real solution to the crisis of unemployment has to be found through a fundamental transformation of the prevailing model of jobless economic growth and an education system that leaves the students without knowledge, enterprise or skills. □□□

[Yogendra Yadav is National Convener, Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan | Member, Swaraj India | Swaraj Abhiyan| Jai Kisan Andolan] [Source: The Print]

HONORARIUM, NOT WAGE

ASHA and MDM Workers

Atanu Chakravarty

IT WAS A SPECTACULAR show of strength. A splendid assertion of the hitherto invisible, faceless nameless women workers that scripted a new fighting chapter on January 29, 2024 at Esplanade, the busiest thoroughfare and one of the nerve centres of Kolkata. They were the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) workers of West Bengal coming from far flung districts in thousands and thousands with banners, festoons, flags of their unions and associations. Two rallies, one from Howrah station and the other from Sealdah culminated at Dorina crossing. Though this programme was informed well in advance to the state administration and the concerned department, no arrangement was made to accept the memorandum

of the MDM workers. Such was the insensitivity and apathy towards this section of the population.

Visibly agitated, the MDM workers decided to block the junction of the busiest thoroughfare at Esplanade, with a resolve 'come what may', until their demand to meet their delegation by the concerned cabinet minister was met. But what are the causes behind this simmering anger and discontent that snowballed into such unprecedented assertion by working women ?

Since the last two decades, approximately 2.5 lac women, from the most backward and marginalised section of the society are engaged in cooking mid-day meals for the students in government schools catering nearly 20 crores of students daily.

Since 2013 they have been getting a paltry sum of Rs 1,500 monthly which is allotted to the self- help group (SHG) through which they are engaged, which means the per head amount varies from Rs 50 - 250. Though they work for 12 months without any paid or sick leave, they are paid only for 10 months. After assuming power, the Modi government slashed the central allocation on this head from 75% to 60%, which means states will have to pay the rest share of 40%. Neither the Central government nor the state government recognise them as workers, they are deprived of the minimum wages, sans all social security benefits. Though the 45th-46th Indian Labour Conference (ILC), categorically recommended that the scheme workers (Asha-Mid day meal workers) should be recognised as workers, get government stipulated minimum wages and have social security benefits. But all these recom-

mentations were not accepted neither by the UPA nor the NDA government and under Modi's dispensation ILC was not convened till date.

A number of states increased their state budget, hiked allotment both for the meals and honorarium (the scheme workers get honorarium and not wages) eg, Puduchery Rs12,000, Tamil Nadu Rs 7,000-14,000, Haryana Rs 7,000, Kerala Rs 600 (daily), Himachal Pradesh Rs 4,000, Karnataka Rs 4,000, Odisha Rs 3,000. But not a single penny was increased for the MDM workers for years together in West Bengal. The global definition of employment(ILO) is that work is considered as employment where wages are paid .The scheme workers are not paid wages, they get honorarium, the quantum of which is fixed arbitrarily by the state. It's worth mentioning that on December 15, 2020, the Allahabad High Court while delivering a judgement noted," persons employed as cooks throughout the State of Uttar Pradesh are being paid such paltry amounts which clearly qualify as forced

labour." The Hon'ble High Court directed the state government and Union Government to ensure that cooks are not paid wages less than the minimum prescribed under the Minimum Wages Act. The court also observed that this is a gross violation of fundamental right enshrined in Article 23 and directed to pay the arrears of minimum wages for the last 15 years! (Chandrawati Devi vs State of UP And 6 others).

Both the Central and State governments have compromised on the vital aspect of nutrition. Of late, the United Nations noted that in India more than 74% children and women are undernourished.

After battling for years together, the unions and association of Mid-Day Meal workers realised that to fight against these injustices united move is essential. Three central trade unions, AICCTU-CITU -AIUTUC and independent organisations viz AMMA, Paschim Banga Swarajgari O Radhuni Union and Paschim Banga Randhankarmi Union firstly organised a convention on December 29, 2023 at University Institute Hall, College Street which was attended overwhelmingly by MDM workers and intellectuals of civil society and from that convention the march to Nabanna was accepted.

Huge deployment of police force could not pacify the women agitators and the police officers were forced to negotiate on behalf of the administration and government and a team met the respective officials to submit their seven- point demand, including hike in their honorarium, recognition as workers and minimum wages. The State Government at last in this year's state budget announced a hike of Rs 500 as 'additional remuneration from April 2024 for MDM workers for ten months in a year'. Such additional financial assistance of Rs 500 was announced for the first time on 22.11.2013 for ten months in a year.

Thousands of ASHA workers across the state organised different forms of struggle and from March 1, struck work, refused to participate in the polio vaccination drive and warned of indefinite stoppage of work unless their demands are met. They were demanding revision of their remuneration, regularisation of their incentives, retirement benefit, social security etc.. The ASHA workers struck their work at the correct moment during the polio vaccination drive and the state government was forced to hike the remuneration of ASHA-ICDS workers to Rs 750 and Rs 500 respectively. Not only in West Bengal, the state governments of Odisha and Bihar also increased the remuneration of MDM and ASHA workers and to suppress the massive organise strike of ASHA workers at Telangana, the state government even went to the extent of declaring ESMA upon the striking workers!

The scheme workers, predominantly women, are the newly emerging section of the working class in India fighting against the Government of all hues for dignity, recognition as workers, for minimum wages, and social security. The code on social security has no place for this vast number of women workers representing the most marginalised and backward section of the society. These nameless faceless invisible caregivers are now on the street for their fair share. They constitute the most important informal workforce, which the society is yet to reckon with. On one side of the spectrum lies the most neglected, oppressed women workers all over India, and on the other end, the nationwide grandeur and pomp of International Women's Day celebration, tall talks of women empowerment sounds like the biggest hoax of the year!

This is the real face of Modi's Vikashit Bharat... □□□

DOORSTEP COMPOSITOR

[Contact for Bengali DTP Operator at your Doorstep]

At present, we have started a new facility, throughout India. The Bengali language is now used in many places. Thus, there is a need now to have Bengali Computer Operators for publishing in Magazines, Books, Periodicals, Souvenirs. Further, we have created this new facility for preparing Question Papers for Schools, Colleges and Universities. So, you need not send the confidential works to outside. We can go to your Office or Institution to complete such works. We shall also make them in printable formats. Moreover, the translation to Bengali is also done. You may contact us for these types of work.

However, you have to arrange or pay the expenses for our Travel and Stay. We thus also accept some amount as Honorarium; it depends on the importance and quantum of work. We sincerely expect that you will use the facility.

Please contact: **THE D-COMLASER**

BHASKAR DAS (Proprietor)

39A, Nalin Sarkar Street, Kolkata 700004

Mobile : 98361-58319

Email : bhaskar_sananda@yahoo.com

SUBHAS GANGULY ONCE AGAIN

Memories of 'MAMA'

Chandramouli Sengupta

"On the 6th of November, 2023 you had bodily left us, but your soul is present in all of us, since you cannot leave us alone"...

IT IS CRYSTAL CLEAR IN MY eyes when I first met Mama before my inclusion in this family of in-laws. My husband Saibal Sengupta took me to meet him for the first time at his Salt Lake residence. We had a chat for an hour or two. In the conversation that followed, he totally engulfed me in a spell bound bonding, as if we were known to each other for years. His self prepared tea had left the same unfading flavour on my taste buds.

Each word he spoke came from his inner core. His beautiful words with full of love and compassion penetrated in my neurons like a fresh fragrance of spring days. His father-like gesture always made my world beautiful and blissful. Mama and Mamoni together always made their presence special in our family. Mamoni enjoyed our company very much and she was ready with our feedings and all types of amenities when we were at their Salt Lake house.

In my memory lane Mama will always be present holding a big banquet of different colourful incidents like a wintry sunshine. When

he and Mamoni sometimes came to visit us by managing their tight schedule, Mama always carried with him his secret journeys of creation on literature and science. Just after taking a cup of tea with snacks, he would made all our family members sit together and boarded us in his creative journey boat, and unfolded his writings and read to us as well as explained his various views. He demanded our opinion on his writings. When he read out his creation, Mamoni, too, sometimes participated with her opinion. She sat beside him with patience and harmonious gesture.

Introduction of Mama is incomplete without mentioning Mamoni, as she supported all our family members in all wakes of our chaotic episodes of life. Now too, Mamoni is supporting us mentally as well as physically quite a lot.

Mama and I, when together at our residence, used to go for long walk in the morning. During our long walk he used to talk about various incidents of his life time journey. Sometimes he would make jokes. Among many of which I liked

the most was:

*Khur Gharsanang, Khur Gharsanang
Chirik Chirik Pani,
Tomar ja moner Katha
Se to Ami jani...*

After making such a joke we used to laugh aloud like an open sky and he really looked beautiful in those gestures.

As I was born and brought in Arunachal Pradesh where my father worked, he wanted to know many experiences of mine, like the life style and food habits of those tribal people with whom my parental family used to mingle for years. Mama used to be highly enchanted when I performed before him the various dance modes and songs of them. Sometimes he asked me to repeat as he enjoyed seeing those dances.

Though Mama and Mamoni did not believe in religious ceremonies, both of them respected our sentiments and participated in our "Griha Pravesh" ceremony at our Sodpur flat and made their presence very touching.

Sometimes my heart cries to see him once again and want to hear his loud call 'Mou', his loud laughter, his words "tokey gatta marbo". But it will never happen again till my existence over here. His treasures of love and affection will be with me forever. □□□

AMERICAN DOUBLE STANDARDS

Taiwan: Another Ukraine in the Making?

Ramakrishnan

TAIWAN ELECTIONS BECAME big international news, significant as US wishes to create another Ukraine in the Far East, envisages an Asian Nato, part of its Asia Pacific Strategy. The big media, fed by the West, manufacture news about Taiwan. "Taiwan

which China claims as part of its territory," is a cliché. It hides the hard fact: out of 193 members of UN, only about 12, tiny in size and population, recognise Taiwan. The UN, which recognises even Palestine Authority, does not recognise Taiwan. None from the developed coun-

tries, neither USA nor any from Europe, nor India recognise it. Taiwan is about 200 km away from south China coast, compared to Andamans, about 1200 km away from India. It was colonised by Japan until the end of Second World War, and was liberated by China's victory against colonialism.

Reviewing the recent January elections in Taiwan, James A Smith of University of London, a renowned historical relations analyst wrote:

"The DPP is fighting a losing battle and lacks a strong mandate, as evidenced by the fact that 60 percent of the population on the island did not vote for them. Contrary to the misleading claims made by the US and the media, it is not about the issue of "democracy" and never has been. Democracy in Taiwan is dubious: Two officials from the Reunification Alliance Party have been detained a week before the polling. Political terms like "peaceful reunification," the "1992 consensus" which indicate that Taiwan and China belong to "one China" are all crimes in Taiwan, where, ironically, KMT favouring re-unification has been a ruling party for long.

The ruling party DPP is back in power but polled less votes and lost a crucial absolute majority in the parliament: DPP won 51 seats in total, 10 less than 4 years ago. The nationalist opposition KMT won 52, and TPP 8, in a House of 113. While the KMT sees the island as part of China, the DPP is in favour of an independent Taiwan. The TPP is not for confrontation.

DPP's Lai Ching-te received 5,586,019 votes, or 40.05 % of the total, defeating Kuomintang's Hou Yu-ih, who took 33.49 %, and Ko Wen-je of the TPP with 26.46%. Lai had a much smaller margin of victory than did outgoing President Tsai Ing-wen of the DPP in 2016 and 2020 when she won by 25% points and 18.5 points, respectively. In many democracies, victory requires 50% plus seats and votes. Democracy by definition is a rule by majority. In India there is the First Past The Post System, where the rule by the minority is pictured as the people's mandate. No party in India till date ever got a distinct majority. Only Rajiv Gandhi in 1985 general election, thanks to sympathy wave post -Indira's assassination, came close to 50% vote. The new regime in

Taiwan, with minority vote, will take office only in May. That gives some time to the US, in its own election year, to fish in troubled waters of the Far East: The very next day of the results, a US delegation arrived in Taiwan, and began manipulations.

Foreign policy is not a key factor in local body elections, which however reflect relative strengths of parties: What was the position a year ago? The DPP was not very popular, even in the metros. Hsien-Ming Lin, of National Open University, Taiwan, wrote 5 Jan 2023: In the Nov 2022 Taiwanese local elections, the DPP won only five of 22 city and county mayor's positions. The major opposition KMT won 13 mayoral positions, including the four major metros including Taipei. Together with TPP, the KMT will control the governance of 15 cities. All told, the election was an overwhelming victory for the KMT.

"The DPP's loss of support was reflected in the low 59.86% turnout, the lowest since 2008, particularly among the youth. This time the turnout was over 70 percent, and most of the youth voted TPP." The youth are not with DPP. That is the trend of the times. The USA and the West hoped that a belligerent DPP now would emerge stronger, and a new Ukraine is in the making in the Far East. But the Jan vote belied their hopes. Apart from KMT that favours re-unification with the mainland, the TPP too wants peace and amity with mainland China. Thus forces of peace gained an upper hand.

As to advocates of "Taiwan independence", James Smith bluntly wrote: it is a result of openly funding admittedly anti-China organisations like the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China and lucratively paying right-wing politicians to visit Taiwan and make provocative statements. Fig-

ures such as Mike Pompeo, Liz Truss and Scott Morrison "have reportedly received hundreds of thousands of dollars for this purpose."

Smith is not alone. Exposing claims of "independence", Wu Rong-yuan, the chairman of the Labour Party of Taiwan, also a contestant, explained the situation before polls: "the economic positions of both parties (DPP and KMT) are not significantly different. Both align themselves with the US, with common ground in anti-communism, and against Beijing." He added, "while the KMT claims that the residents of Taiwan and the mainland form one Chinese nation, separated by the sea and different ideologies, the DPP invented Taiwanese nationalism: Since they came to power 23 years ago, they managed to create a distinct Taiwanese identity out of nothing."

A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said: "the Taiwan question is China's internal affair. Whatever changes take place in Taiwan, the basic fact that there is only one China in the world and Taiwan is part of China will not change; the Chinese government's position of upholding the one-China principle and opposing "Taiwan independence" separatism, "two Chinas" and "one China, one Taiwan" will not change; and the international community's prevailing consensus on upholding the one-China principle and the long-standing and overwhelming adherence to this principle will not change..." Russian Foreign Ministry said Moscow continued to view Taiwan as an integral part of China.

"We do not support independence," Biden said, with all its duplicity, when asked for reaction to elections. But words and deeds do not match. US Secretary Of State Anthony Blinken congratulated Lai on his victory and the people of Taiwan for "demonstrating the

March 24-30, 2024

FRONTIER

11

strength of their robust democratic system."He went on to re-state U S policy of wanting peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait." The double-tongued USA sniped at China, but frankly spoke of their own interests. "We look forward to working with Dr Lai to advance our shared interests and values, and to further our longstanding unofficial relationship, consistent with the one China policy," the US statement said. But US, in violation of its commitments, supplied arms, and made enactments in relation to Taiwan, meant to undermine China.

British Foreign Minister David Cameron congratulated the DPP. "I hope that the two sides of the Taiwan Strait will renew efforts to resolve differences peacefully through constructive dialogue, without the threat or use of force or coercion." Japan's stand was similar. Germany's Foreign Office said: "Germany has close and good relations with Taiwan in many sectors and wants to expand them within the framework of its One-China policy."The French foreign ministry called on all parties to respect the status quo and said it hoped dialogue between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait would resume.

Even before the elections there was a diplomatic battle, amid scary reports. The US has been provocative, itching to create another Ukraine in the Far East. The US had floated scary reports on the eve of the polls: CIA Director William Burns alleged that Xi has directed his military to be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027. It is admittedly a half-truth: "Now, that does not mean that he has decided to conduct an invasion in 2027, or any other year, but it is a reminder of the seriousness of his focus and his ambition," Burns said.

Republicans and Democrats were asked to work together to deter China. Biden said that the US mili-

tary would defend Taiwan if China invaded. But facts are otherwise: Xi Jinping bluntly told Biden during their recent summit in San Francisco that Beijing will reunify Taiwan with mainland China but that the timing has not yet been decided. In fact China's policy is clear: At last year's CPC Congress, Xi stated publicly that China would attack Taiwan militarily if it declares independence with foreign support.

Xi's statement is backed by an economic rationale: Xi, who has set a goal of doubling the size of the Chinese economy by 2035, also said that "we must continue to pursue economic development as our central task." Any military conflict would undermine it. Officials familiar with the conversation between Biden and Xi described him as blunt and candid, but not confrontational.

Xi had told Biden that the "Taiwan question remains the most important and most sensitive issue in China-U.S. relations." The U S should "support China's peaceful reunification" and that "China will realise reunification, and this is unstoppable."China was successful in the battle for peace: After the summit, Biden reiterated: "We maintain an agreement that there is a 'One China' policy," he said, adding, "That is not going to change."There was no other way.

Dismissing scary speculation, Xi said during his Nov 2023 San Francisco visit that China was not preparing to "fight a cold war or a hot war with anyone." But US continues open and provocative meddling in Taiwan. Hong Kong's SCMP reported, 13 Jan, 2024: The US House of Representatives advanced three bipartisan finance bills concerning Taiwan and mainland China on Jan 12, a day before polling, to "send the Taiwanese people a strong message of solidarity and support for their democracy".

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: CBININBBICAL

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

The first Bill supports including Taiwan as a member of the IMF. The second directs regulators to exclude the China from banking organisations if the US president notifies Congress of threats to Taiwan arising from Beijing's actions. The third requires the US Treasury to push Beijing for greater transparency in its exchange rates at the IMF. Now the bills must pass the full Democratic-controlled Senate before heading to President Joe Biden to be signed into law. It is only a beginning: "IMF membership for

Taiwan would also unlock the potential for membership in other international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank," stated a congressional report.

The US is quietly arming Taiwan to the teeth. When Biden recently signed a \$80m grant to Taiwan for the purchase of US military equipment, China said it "deplores and opposes" it. Taiwan, with a population of 23m, has about 300,000 active troops, and enjoys a US nuclear umbrella.

China seeks correcting a historical injustice caused by the intervention of external powers that separated the two sides of the Taiwan Straits. The one-China principle is not about hegemony, dominance, ideology or forging alliances or blocs. It is ultimately about respecting the principle of lawful national sovereignty among states. Countries of all backgrounds and political systems respect the one-China principle. Taiwan elections cannot alter that. □□□

[This is a revised, abridged version of an article by the author, published in countercurrents.org, 21/01/2024.]

FROM ART GALLERY

Pabitra Saha's Paintings

Atanu Basu

SOUTH KOLKATA'S ART gallery, "Chobi O Ghar" organised a solo exhibition of Pabitra Saha, an artist well known in his own right. Christened as "Hidden Harmonics", the exhibition showcased more than 30 of his paintings in one go.

The paintings exhibited in the exhibition are lyrical. His works in acrylic and paper included many themes from water bodies and ponds through homes, sky, boats with numerous varieties. The landscapes that he presented, had quite a broad appeal, because of his careful and intelligent reconstruction and deconstruction of the themes.

Pabitra was successful in revealing the inherent contents, or the soul of the image presented by him. He situated this spirit with a unique stylisation. His was a struggle of a different dimension with specialisation

in commercial art as he graduated from the Government Art College about 35 years ago.

He had internalised the kernel and characters of painting; thus it is no wonder that one encounters in his paintings the various components like unity, simplicity, dichotomy and many other parameters.

His temperament was aptly expressed by the imagery, symbols that he used, which had enriched the depth of his themes, sharpened the messages and touched the chords to create a harmony connecting his audience.

One can see many patterns in Pabitra's canvas. As for stages, one may be amazed to find vertical, horizontal, rectangle, plane surface, geometrical, to name a few. In some cases, he used patterns, such as angular formations flowing spontaneously with the theme.

Space played a major role in his landscapes. When he uses individual space, or even empty space for that matter, his composition depicts a deep contemplation. He is quite at home both in rendering abstract as well as classical form. Sometimes,

he used Indian miniature art form and parallel formation to drive home his point, where again, space becomes his vehicle of communication.

No matter whether his medium is canvas or paper, he often used colour harmonisation through triangular or other forms-- lamp posts, huts and figures entered into the frames as small motifs. One may find some glimpses of Tantra art here and there. Sometimes he placed the central theme of his composition in the middle of the space, yet the same was very skillfully distributed throughout the entire space.

He was extremely careful in using colours in symbolic or simple forms. While recreating the pristine blue water body along with its approach, he meticulously included places for the anglers, big canopy for them, blue fishes, steps that led to the water, the whole composition displayed a superb restraint on the part of the painter as regards sense of proportion of using colour.

The geometrical pattern that he used, his supreme command over using colour, his sensitive treatment and depth of theme, all teamed up in a synchronous manner to impart a lasting impression on the audience. His paintings truly harmonise sensuous beauty of nature. □□□

Frontier is available at

SARBODAYA BOOK STALL
HOWRAH STATION

POLITICS OF NO LOGIC

A Tale of Prof Nitasha Kaul

Asok Chattopadhyay

TO COMBAT A PERSON, call him a bad name and then kill. It's a well-known saying. And this saying seems to be followed by the ruling class ideologues to teach the opponents a good lesson. Palestinians are considered to be the worst 'declared' enemy of the Israel Government and as such they can kill, murder a Palestinian be him an aged or any child at any time anywhere in Palestine. The entire people of Palestine are the worst enemy and they have to be killed, assassinated in the manner practised never before. In no country the ruling government patrons an opposition beyond a short limit. And as such a bad name remains ready in the register and many an opposition, opponent is branded with it to go forward.

In India it is a running show of everyday politics. No government in power be it state or Centre, is ready to tolerate a bit of the voice considered antagonistic. All the governments of different hues refuse to pay justice to the cry of populace. People witness it everywhere in India as the inseparable part of Indian polity. The fascist government in the ruling power is not at all hesitant to wipe out the Sayers of oppositions' tongue. Even the regional left regimes were no different. From Kashmir to Sandeshkhali via Uttar Pradesh this sort of intolerance is evident with a common feature as ruling class ideology.

But of late an incident with a difference has taken place in the country which is hardly common. London-based Professor Dr Nitasha Kaul who happens to be an overseas citizen of India (OCI) was invited by the Congress-ruled Karnataka Government to participate in an international conference on the 'Constitution and National Unity' to be held

on 24th and 25th February in Bengaluru. But she had not been permitted to attend the conference at all due to the 'guaranterring' central government with no justified ground so far. Dr Kaul has written with deep grief that she had with her all valid documents along with current passport; she is stirred enough because she had not been shown any ground for denying her to attend the conference. She was only told that nothing in this regard can be done sans Delhi signals green! Even she had had no previous notice or information in advance that she had been denied to attend the conference. Dr Kaul said that after a long travel by air she had to be detained in a 'holding cell under direct CCTV with restricted movement and a narrow area to lie down, and no easy access to food and water.' She has posted in her 'X'handle:

'How can the world's largest democracy be threatened by my pen & the word? How is it ok for the centre not to allow a professor to be at a conference on constitution where she was invited by the state government?'

What lays behind the denial of her participating in the said conference in such a manner? By birth Prof Kaul is an Indian. She was born in Srinagar of Kashmir. She graduated herself from the Sri Ram College of Commerce at the University of Delhi and did her masters and PhD from the University of Hull in the UK. She authored her first novel residue being one of the five novels 'shortlisted' for the Man Asian Literary Prize 2009. She had served as a Visiting Research Fellow between 2007 and 2015, and as a Fellow at the 'Centre for Bhutan Studies' from February to May 2011, even as an Honorary Fellow with the Department of Politics at the University of Bristol, UK in November 2008.

She had written in her 'X' handle: 'I am a globally respected academic & public intellectual, passionate about liberal democratic values. I care for gender equity, challenging misogyny, sustainability, civil & political liberties, and rule of law. I am not anti-Indian; I am anti-authoritarian & pro-democracy.' Even she proceeds to assert:

'Decades of my work speak for me. The officials informally made references to my criticism of RSS, a far-right Hindu nationalist paramilitary from years ago. I have travelled to India numerous times since. I was invited by a state government, but refused entry by the central government. Rightwing #HindutvaTrolls have for years threatened me with death, rape, ban etc. In the past, authorities have sent police to my elderly ailing mother's home to intimidate, even though I live in UK & my work has no connexion to her, a pious temple-going dezhor-wearing retired Hindi teacher & my sole surviving parent'.

And herein lays the cause of her being denied and debarred to participate the pre-scheduled event in Bengaluru in spite of her valid documents a. And herein lays the facet of the fascist government of India. Not a bit of opposition can they tolerate. The hindutvawadi fascists had trolled her for years to threaten her rape, ban and even death! Despite her residing in UK, her aged and ailing mother had been intimidated by the police for her connection with her mother in India! Her 'anti-authoritarian & pro-democracy' stand is enough to have a bad name and be treated in such a manner. A few days later she left India and returned to her country she resides, it has been reported from the government sources that Dr Kaul had been deported due to her anti-India and pro-separatist stand on Kashmir. The Kaul episode illustrates the real face of Indian democracy. □□□

LETTERS

Durbar and International Sex Workers Rights Day

The Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee observes International Sex Workers Rights Day every year on March 3. This year too they marked it by organising mass meeting and a rally. This is the only organisation of its kind that fights for the rights and dignities of sex workers while doing everything possible to prevent women trafficking in this part of the globe. 'Durbar also counsels the minors and unwilling women not to enter into the sex trade', said Bishakha Laskar, secretary of the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee. She was addressing a gathering on the occasion at Sonagachi, north Kolkata. Durbar started its journey three decades ago with the inspiration and guidance of late Dr Smarajit Jana. She also elaborated the rights sex workers are entitled to.

Sex Workers are equal before the law and no criminal case should be foisted on any adult woman who voluntarily provides sex services. The police and media should take utmost care not to reveal the identities of the sex workers in public. Many dignitaries from different walks of life namely Dr Bhagwan Das Mahapatra and Dr Joydeep Shaw from Safe Hands, Amitava Choudhary from the rights group were present at Durbar's March 3 mass meeting. Dr Mahapatra said they would provide the medical support free of cost to the sex workers without hesitation.

After the meeting a march was organised from Sonagachi Sheetal Mandir to Barnaparichay (near College Street). The purpose of the rally was to visibly express their support for sex workers rights and draw atten-

tion of the public to the plight of sex workers. The rally displayed colourful banners and posters, placards to show the collective commitment of advocating sex workers rights. Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee is working relentlessly not only for the sex workers but it works also for the marginalised communities like Shabar, Mundas, and Nachnis.

Dipa Joardar, Kolkata

Water

Few years back water was free, but fear has promoted packaged drinking water culture, resulting in more plastic waste. Like oil, now water is a scarce resource over which many wars may be fought. No doubt it is a universal solvent but the authorities have to resolve issues amicably before it reaches boiling point.

T S Karthik, Chennai 10

Waqeel Hasan's House Bulldozed

Waqeel Hasan was a part of the team of 12 workers who rescued the 41 entrapped workers in Uttarakhand's Silkyara Tunnel in November last year. He along with his associates worked tirelessly to save fellow workers who were trapped when the tunnel collapsed. After returning from the rescue operation he said that they took the risk for their fellow workers, it was a duty to the nation that they served.

After three months, the central government agency Delhi Development Authority (DDA) bulldozes the house of the Nation's Hero in Delhi's Khajuri Khas.

On 28th February, a team of DDA and Delhi police reached Waqeel Hasan's house in the morning. At that time, only the children of the family were present. Despite that, the DDA and Delhi Police continued thrashing his door forcefully. It is to note that all officials forcing

the children to open the door were male officials. When Waqeel and his wife returned home and clarified to DDA that they have bought the house and have been staying in the house for more than a decade, Delhi Police arrested Waqeel and his wife and kept them at Khajuri Khas police station. In the meantime, bulldozers ravaged Waqeel's house to the ground.

A team of CPIML-AICCTU-AISA-AILAJ consisting of Sucheta De (CPIML CC Member), Ramabhilash (CPIML Delhi), Aditya, Vikash (AISA) and Amarjit (AILAJ) visited Khajuri Khas and met Waqeel and his family. We have extended all kinds of support including legal support.

The team got to know that Waqeel was not served any notice before the demolition. DDA and Delhi Police officials acted completely illegally and forcefully bulldozed his house.

The present BJP regime takes pride in its bulldozer governance. People know how BJP's MCD Councillors were marking colonies to be bulldozed. Thousands of people living in Khori Village, Jahangirpuri, Tughlakabad, Gyasur, Mehrauli, Dhobighat and Priyanka Gandhi Camp and several other areas in Delhi have been made homeless within one day. Their lifelong investment in the form of their houses were destroyed forcefully. The present law in Delhi prohibits any demolition without prior notice. The DDA almost never bothers to give notice before demolition. The government is mandated to provide rehabilitation. In the case of Waqeel Hasan, the entire demolition was a criminal act performed by DDA and Delhi Police.

It is a shame that be it Dr Kafeel Khan, the women wrestlers or the rescue miners, today's government targets the nation's glories.

*Ravi Rai, State Secretary,
CPI-MI Delhi-NCR*

March 24-30, 2024

FRONTIER

15

Ambedkar and Du Bois

The article "Ambedkar and Du Bois" published in Frontier's February 18-24, 2024 [Vol .56, No. 34] issue is valuable.

There is a little misunderstanding about the Dalits and the 4-tier Varna hierarchy. The Dalit is not even at the bottom but located outside and below the four layers to be declared untouchable.

Sivanandam Sivasegaram
sivasegaram@yahoo.com

Ameen Sayani

Ameen Sayani was like a family member who visited your home every week with stories and songs. He was the voice of Radio Ceylon. Sayani was immensely popular with his Binaca Geetmala programme. The entire family gathering around radio, before television era was the happiest moment of radio listeners and best example of connecting people. For four decades, his voice united millions of Indians for an hour every Wednesday as he brought Hindi cinema's greatest songs in an unparalleled radio broadcast. Ameen Sayani passed away on February 20, 2024.

T S Karthik, Chennai

Aaron Bushnell

Immolates Himself

On Sunday [February 26] afternoon, an active-duty US soldier immolated himself in front of the Israeli embassy in Washington to protest against the genocide in Palestine.

In a video posted on social media, 25-year-old soldier Aaron Bushnell is seen dousing himself with flammable liquid and setting himself on fire until engulfed in flames. While he performs this act that would lead to his death, the US soldier shouts "Free Palestine".

"I'm about to engage in an extreme act of protest, but compared to what people have been experiencing in Palestine at the hands of their colonisers, it's not extreme at all.

Free Palestine!" he said in the video.

"Many of us like to ask ourselves, 'What would I do if I was alive during slavery? Or the Jim Crow South? Or apartheid? What would I do if my country was committing genocide?' The answer is, 'you're doing it. Right now'", Bushnell posted on X hours before immolating himself.

The Metropolitan Police of Washington responded immediately to the incident. The US Air Force confirmed that a member of its ranks had been involved in the incident but did not provide further details.

The fire department and emergency services indicated that Bushnell was rushed to the hospital with "critical" injuries. The US soldier died a few hours later.

In recent weeks, opposition to the Israeli offensive in Gaza has spread across the United States, where human rights activists demand an immediate ceasefire.

"This isn't the first incident of self immolation in the US over the ongoing Gaza war. In December, a protester set herself on fire outside Atlanta's Israeli Consulate", the Indus Times recalled, referring to Rachel Corrie, a peace activist who also chose self-sacrifice as an extreme form of protest.

Many in the United States are angry over Biden administration's 'insensitive stand' with the nation vetoing a ceasefire resolution at United Nations Security Council.

Jose Cabañas Rodriguez **Harassment by BSF**

There was a case of grave violation of the fundamental right to livelihood of Dalit fishermen in the village of Barnaberia, under Jhaudanga Gram Panchayat, Gaighata Block, North 24 Paraganas district, West Bengal—as perpetrated by BSF personnel of the 5th Battalion posted at Barnaberia Border Outpost on the river Ichhamati. The Indo-Bangladesh border in this region

passes through the Ichhamati River—and part of the river is in India while part of it is in Bangladesh.

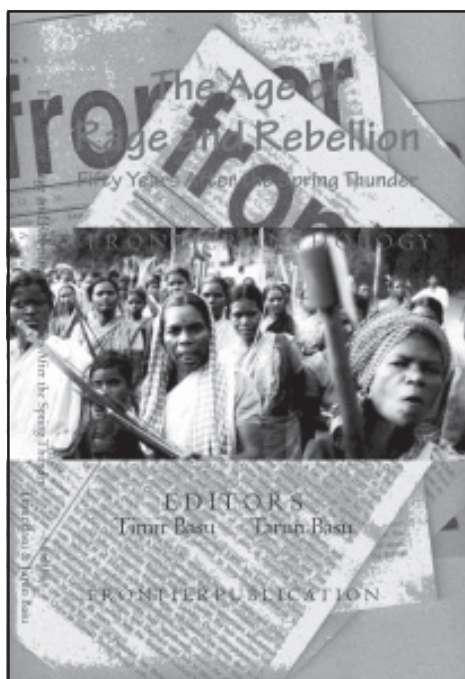
Said fishermen belong to the Rajbanshi community (Scheduled Caste) and reside on the banks of the river. They depend largely on their income from fishing, for survival, and also work as agricultural labour seasonally. They are all terribly poor.

They are registered as fishermen with the Department of Fisheries, Govt. of West Bengal, and have fished in the Indian part of the Ichhamati River for their entire lives; until about 4 months ago, when BSF imposed an ad hoc and abrupt restriction on their fishing. In fact, their Bangladeshi counterparts still continue to fish in the Bangladeshi part of the Ichhamati on the other side of the International border. According to the 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution, the matter of governing pisciculture in rural areas comes under the jurisdiction of the Gram Panchayat, as listed in the Eleventh Schedule, and BSF has no jurisdiction whatsoever in this matter. However, on 18th January, 2024, 28 affected fishermen went along with the Gram Panchayat member to appeal to the BSF to lift this unlawful restriction on fishing in the part of Ichhamati River in Indian Territory – but their requests were denied by the BSF Company Commander at Barnaberia BOP who had no jurisdiction to do so. Thereafter, they collectively complained about this persistent and illegal violation to the District Magistrate, North 24 Paraganas, on 22nd January, 2024. No initiative has been taken yet to reinstate the fishermen to their rightful livelihood.

Kirity Roy, Secretary,
Banglar Manabdhikar
Suraksha Mancha (MASUM) &
National Convener, (PACTI)
Programme Against Custodial
Torture & Impunity

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.