

# frontier

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## CAA, NCR and NPR

**A**HEAD OF THE UPCOMING LOK SABHA ELECTIONS 2024, the Ministry of Home Affairs announced the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) on March 11. The CAA, which originated in 2016 and was passed by Parliament in 2019, aims to grant citizenship to people belonging to religious minorities from neighbouring Muslim-majority countries, who migrated to India before December 31, 2014. Muslims are excluded from the ambit of CAA, albeit some Muslim sects like Shia and Ahmedia are equally persecuted in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The government has defended the CAA as a measure to protect persecuted minorities from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, asserting that it does not affect Indian citizens. But the issue is not that simple. There remains a lot to read between the lines. If Assam experience is any guide, there is every reason to believe that the Centre is trying to send a large number of people to detention camp, dubbing them foreigners. It's a matter of time that after CAA, NRC will come into focus. The Assamese chauvinists, however, are protesting against CAA for a different reason altogether. They don't want to see Bengali Hindu refugees from Bangladesh becoming Indian citizens.

The NRC, established under the Citizenship Act of 1955, is designed to identify legal Indian residents. The National Register of Citizens comprises a record exclusively of Indian citizens. The implementation of CAA coupled with the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC), could lead to discrimination against Muslims and Hindus as well. The fate of Hindu refugees from the erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, actually hangs in the balance, notwithstanding what the Bharatiya Janata Party is saying these days. What they are not saying is more important.

Then there is NPR—National Population Register. It is compulsory for every resident of India to register in NPR. It includes both Indian citizens as well as foreign citizens. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs took a controversial step towards NPR and NRC by linking the information in the Aadhaar database in 2015. While the only legal method of linking these two databases involves obtaining informed consent from every resident through a public exercise akin to census, conducted by the Registrar General of India (RGI), the Government's exercise, however, lacked any provision to gather such informed consent for this linkage. This seemingly

unlawful action renders the NPR even greater threat to the common people than previously believed.

The BJP is hoping to gain electoral dividends, mainly from Bengal, by promulgating CAA before the Loksabha polls. They think the Matua community people will vote them enmasse. But voters are wise enough to think twice before applying for citizenship under CAA. They are realising that citizenship as per CAA is conditional. They may have to face a 'from fire to frying pan' situation. Thousands of people will be denied citizenship because the rootless people will never be able to

provide necessary documents required under CAA. They are protesting in different parts of Bengal which doesn't get much coverage in the media. After all the big media houses, including dozens of TV channels are shamelessly pro-BJP, rather pro-Modi. They see in it a conspiracy, better to say a dubious design, to make a large number of people stateless. They are distributing leaflets accusing BJP of betraying them. They are organising meetings to highlight their plight, particularly in districts bordering Bangladesh. Even some BJP supporters are coming out openly to criticise their leadership for betrayal

because their demand was 'granting of unconditional citizenship' but CAA is nowhere near it. In truth the reverse is true and they are trying to hide the bitter truth, apprehending backlash in polls..

Conditions in CAA are so harsh that those who came to this part of the globe after partition, without any possession, will never be able to furnish documents relating to their old residency in the country they have left because of state persecution and communal riots. This is the hard reality but the persons in power are just misleading the public by spreading half-truths. □□□

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## COMMENT

### Threat to Democracy

THE LEADERS OF BHARATIYA Janata Party (BJP), the ruling dispensation have been claiming to be winning more than 400 seats in the forthcoming parliamentary elections of 2024. This is not based on any psephological analysis but purely propagated for political reasons. The BJP intends to change the Constitution for which a 2/3rd majority is needed.

The BJP has a twin-track strategy to undermine the democratic values, the values of equality of the Constitution. Its parent organisation RSS opposed the constitution right from the beginning. After the Indian Constitution came into being RSS's unofficial mouthpiece Organiser wrote, "...In Our Constitution, There Is No Mention of That Unique Constitutional Development in Ancient Bharat. To This Day His Laws As Enunciated In The Manusmriti Excite The Admiration Of The World And Elicit Spontaneous Obedience And Conformity. But To Our Constitutional Pundits That Means Nothing."

When BJP came to power as NDA in 1998 one of the first things it did

was to appoint a commission to review the Constitution. This Commission's, (Venkatchaliah Commission), report could not be undertaken for implementation as there was a severe opposition to any tampering with the Constitution. From 2014, when BJP has been in power; times and over again it has used the preamble of the Constitution by deleting the words Secular and Socialist.

Before this when K.Sudarshan became the Chief of RSS in 2000, he frankly stated that the Indian Constitution is based on Western values and should be replaced by one based on Indian holy books. "Sudarshan said the constitution was of no use for the people of the country as it was based on the Government of India Act of 1935, ...We need not fight shy of altering the constitution completely..."

Not too long ago, the Chief of PM's economic advisory council, Dr Vivek Debroy had also called for a change of constitution in a lead article in Livemint on August 15, 2023. So voices of major stature from within the BJP organisation and state offi-

cial do keep raising such voices while officially the BJP or BJP Government makes the show of distancing itself from such utterances.

On another track; since BJP has been in power for the last decade, what has it done to the core values of the Indian Constitution: Democracy and equality? As far as democracy is concerned, all the pillars of a democratic state, Constitutional institutions ED, CBI, IT, and EC all are being controlled by the executive, and the executive itself is restricted to one person. The Judiciary at various levels has been weakened by various mechanisms. There are numerous examples of this; one such being the detention of Umar Khalid and refusal to hear his bail plea from the last three years.

Freedom of expression is down in the dumps. With the mainstream media under the belt of pro-government corporations, it is the Voice of Ruling Government which is broadcast through major TV channels and newspapers. The independent voices have limited space available to articulate their opinions. Freedom of Expression; the major pillar of a democratic society has gone for a toss.

Freedom of Religion has been declining with many International

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indices. 'India as a country of particular concern,' is the label for India as per the US freedom of religion watchdog. As per V-Dem India ranked 104 on the democracy Index, between Niger and Ivory Coast! This is what has happened during the last ten years, to practically denigrate democratic freedoms through executive actions leading to such a drastic fall in the democratic index.

Not long ago it was Lal Krishna Advani, who had said that India is living through an undeclared emergency. All the components of freedom have been stifled through the

foot soldiers of Hindu nationalists apart from state officials, while the ruling Governments merrily look the other way around, a clear signal to these elements that this regime grants full impunity to violations of democratic rights of minorities and weaker sections of society.

India is joining the club of 'Democracy suppressors' like Pakistan or Sri Lanka. BJP is resorting to twin-track politics, aiming to change the Constitution on one hand and practically undermining it, on the other! □□□

[Contributed by Ram Puniyani]

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#### NOTE

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## UN Combats Islamophobia

*Haaretz writes:*

**U**N SECRETARY-GENERAL António Guterres has repeatedly condemned the continuing acts of anti-Muslim hatred and bigotry around the world, warning on several occasions that this worrying trend targets not only Muslims but also Jews, minority Christian communities and others.

In his message for the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, Guterres warns that Muslims face institutional discrimination, barriers and violations of their human rights and dignity. "Divisive rhetoric and misrepresentation are stigmatising communities. Online hate speech is fuelling real-life violence", he added.

Calling for a strong stance against all forms of bigotry, the Secretary-General urges leaders and individuals alike to condemn inflammatory discourse, safeguard religious freedom and promote mutual respect and understanding, while digital platforms must take a stand against hateful content and protect users from harassment.

In response to the alarming trend of rising hate speech around the

world, the Secretary-General launched in 2019 the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech.

The UN Human Rights Chief also voiced his alarm over the rise in global hatred, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, since the beginning of the Israeli military operation in Gaza (7October) in response to the attack on Israel by Palestinian armed group Hamas.

States have a responsibility to address any hatred based on religion or belief in a manner that complies with human rights, recalls the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Nazila Ghane, in her last report on Hatred on the basis of religion or belief.

The expert stresses that advocacy of religious hatred that leads to discrimination, hostility or violence should be prohibited by law. While international norms and standards provide a framework to combat incitement to discrimination and violence, laws are not enough, and States should also adopt policies and programmes that promote di-

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versity and freedom of expression, especially in multicultural and interconnected societies, proposed Ghane.

Among her recommendations to the States, the Special Rapporteur proposes that countries could collect data on hate speech, take robust action against discriminatory speech, invest in trust-building, review legislation and policies and ensure no impunity for State actors who engage in hate speech.

Another report by the former UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, found that suspicion, discrimination and outright hatred towards Muslims had risen to 'epidemic proportions' following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and other horrific acts of terrorism purportedly carried out in the name of Islam.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution sponsored by 60 Member-States of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which designated 15 March

as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. The document stresses that terrorism and violent extremism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilisation, or ethnic group. It calls for a global dialogue on the promotion of a culture of tolerance and peace, based on respect for human rights and for the diversity of religions and belief.

## **'No' to Special Envoy**

### **A Correspondent adds:**

Calling India "a proud champion of Pluralism", India's permanent Representative Ruchira Kamboj opposed the establishment of the post of "special envoy" on a special religion at the United Nations on March 15. This comes as the UN General Assembly adopted the Resolution on "Measures to combat Islamophobia"

which inter alia, calls for the appointment of a UN Special Envoy to combat Islamophobia. The Resolution titled "Measures to Combat Islamophobia" was adopted by a recorded vote of 115 in favour to none against, with 44 abstentions, including India. The new measures, however, include the creation of the post of a UN High Commissioner on Islamophobia. □□□

## **ALL ARE NUMBERS**

# **The Meaning of Aadhaar De-Activation**

**Suman Sengupta**

**T**ODAY'S PEOPLE NO LONGER have identities, everyone is a number. By the will of the state he is alive; by the will of the state he is dead.

Edward Snowden, a few years ago, said that India's Aadhaar scheme would enslave people by stripping them of their identity. Shouldn't these words be said more forcefully in view of UIDAI's letter to many people of Bengal and the country in recent times?

There is noise all around. Many people are receiving letters from the Aadhaar authorities i.e. UIDAI that their Aadhaar has been deactivated. The letter made it clear that since these people could not fulfill the conditions for living in India, this action was taken in their case. Those who have received this letter have fallen on a hard rock, they do not understand where to go, to whom they can get a remedy. Politicians have also come down to the field. The Bengal leaders of the ruling party at the centre have given three different statements; none of them are similar to each other. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) state president, Sukanta Majumder said he had spoken to the Union Home Minister Amit Shah, that there is no reason

for anyone to worry; everyone's Aadhaar will be reactivated. Union Minister of State for Shipping, Shantanu Thakur, went a step further and said that complaints should be made on his personal email and phone number. Leader of Opposition Subvendu Adhikari, just as he saw through Mamata Banerjee's machinations, saw the same this time. He said that no Aadhaar card has been cancelled; Mamata Banerjee has sent this letter in coordination with UIDAI's Ranchi office. The opposition party leader is still lying; many people have received such letters across the country. In 2020, two youths from Bangalore received such letters, asking them to appear for hearings. They went to that place and saw that many people like them had received this letter. Later UIDAI stopped sending this letter as it was then.

It is known that UIDAI has posted about 1 lakh such letters for now. Many BJP leaders are now trying to say that it is a technical glitch. If that is also assumed to be true, then the question remains, what does the post office letter have to do with the technical glitch. That means it's not a technical glitch, it's done consciously. Another leader of BJP from Bengal, Asim Sarkar has di-

rectly said that if BJP is not voted, many more people's Aadhaar may be deactivated. That means more people can lose citizenship.

Although Mamata Banerjee has said that she will open a helpline and solve these difficulties or problems, that too is not realistic. That may provide some temporary relief, but it is not a complete solution. Actually Aadhaar and citizenship are linked though not directly linked. According to the judgment of the highest court of the country, Aadhaar is not a proof of citizenship, Aadhaar is not a birth certificate, Aadhaar is only an authentication tool, but what is said in Section 28A of the Aadhaar Act brought by Narendra Modi in 2016, can be understood only if one reads a little. Yes, this kind of incident does not happen only in villages, but anyone can get such a letter. NPR is the first stage of NRC i.e. National Register. As a result of NRC in Assam, about 19 lakh people have become stateless. But still the Aadhaar of 17 lakh people in Assam has not been activated. It is also heard that the chief minister will approach the country's highest court regarding the issue. In the coming days, this work of civil registration will be done in a very normal process, because when Aadhaar was updated in 2015, NPR was done for most of the people. Those who have seen it know that NRC is closely related to CAA or Citizenship Act. Anyone



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would be scared to guess what Aadhaar has to do with NPR. What to do then can become a problem for that person. Now is the time to unite, time to say, 'we do not accept Aadhaar, we will not give Aadhaar anywhere'. Government services should be given to people by any

other contact. Mahatma Gandhi led a movement against such an identity card in South Africa. Non-cooperation with the South African government was his method of agitation. If the civil society does not raise the voice of this Aadhaar destruction, and say that the government elected

by their votes, how it can make them non-citizens by switching off a switch, and non-cooperation movement against the government, and if political parties and individuals do not go deep into this issue, then there is danger ahead.

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## AADHAAR DE-ACTIVATION

### A Letter to UIDAI

*[The Joint Forum against NRC, a platform of mass organisations, civil society groups and individuals formed in August 2019 at Kolkata, to defend the citizenship of all Indian people from exclusionary processes like the NRC. The Forum is opposed to any nation-wide NRC exercise, which can potentially exclude millions of poor, vulnerable people from Indian citizenship; particularly the post-Partition refugees, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, religious and linguistic minorities, Other Backward Classes and undocumented migrants; rendering them Stateless. Prasenjit Bose, the petitioner on behalf of the Forum in W.P.(C) # 001512/ 2019 has challenged the constitutionality of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019 and Section 14A of the Citizenship Amendment Act, 1955. The petition was admitted and is currently pending before the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.]*

*Prasenjit Bose wrote a letter on February 23, 2024 to Sri Amit Agarwal, CEO, Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to draw his immediate attention, the utter chaos and confusion created by notices issued by the Ranchi Regional Office of UIDAI containing information about 'deactivation' of several Aadhaar numbers to a large number of residents in the State of West Bengal. We publish below a slightly shortened version of the letter written by Prasenjit Bose who is convener of Joint Forum Against NRC.*

*The Forum has received several communications from affected persons whose Aadhaar numbers have been deactivated by the UIDAI, purportedly under regulation 28A of the Aadhaar (Enrolment and Update) Regulations, 2016, stating that the "requirements for your stay in India are not fulfilled.]*

1. Such abrupt deactivation of Aadhaar numbers by the Authority has instilled significant anxiety and fear in the minds of not only the recipients of the notices but also a vast majority of other residents of West Bengal who have enrolled for Aadhaar. The total number of Aadhaar enrolments in West Bengal stands at 10,21,86,948 as on date, as per data provided in the UIDAI Aadhaar Dashboard.

2. It is hereby submitted that Regulation 28A of was not a part of the Aadhaar (Enrolment and Update) Regulations, 2016 till very recently. The Authority vide the Aadhaar (Enrolment and Update) Amendment Regulations, 2023 [F. No. HQ-21026/1/2022-LEGAL-HQ (E)] dated September 29, 2023 has inserted Regulation 28A in the Aadhaar (Enrolment

and Update) Regulations, 2016.

3. The text of Regulation 28A reads as follows:

"28A. Deactivation of certain Aadhaar numbers.—Without prejudice to anything contained in regulation 28, in respect of a foreign national who is seeking enrolment or is an Aadhaar number holder, Aadhaar number may be deactivated—

(a) upon expiry of the period of validity of their visa for stay in India; or

(b) where the Authority is satisfied that such foreign national does not fulfil the requirements for his entry into or stay in India under the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 (34 of 1920), the rules made thereunder and guidelines issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs in this regard from time to time."

4. Thus, the entire Regulation 28A is concerned with foreign nationals, and therefore anybody receiving notices under such regulation is purportedly a foreign national in the eyes of the Authority. However, the process through which the Authority has satisfied itself that a Aadhaar number holder "does not fulfil the requirements for his entry into or stay in India under the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920" is unspecified in Regulation 28A. This makes the process opaque and arbitrary.

5. Regulation 29 of Aadhaar (Enrolment and Update) Regulations, 2016 states that "(1) Any case reported or identified as a possible case requiring omission or deactivation may require field inquiry which may include hearing the persons whose Aadhaar number is sought to be omitted or deactivated...(2) An agency nominated by the Authority shall examine/inquire and submit a report to the Authority as per the procedures as may be specified by the Authority for this purpose. (3) The Authority may initiate necessary action upon receiving the report and the decision to omit or deactivate an Aadhaar number shall lie with the Authority".

6. Several recipients of the recent Aadhaar deactivation notices issued by the Authority have confirmed that the process of conducting field inquiry and hearing the concerned persons prior to deactivation of Aadhaar numbers,

as laid down in Regulation 29, has not been followed before deactivating their Aadhaar numbers. These recipients have complained that their access to several essential services like the public distribution system, banking, life and health insurance, telecommunications etc. besides a host of welfare schemes of the central and state governments, have been jeopardised because of the deactivation of their Aadhaar number.

7. The actions of the Authority have thus led to a severe disruption in the lives and livelihoods of those affected by Aadhaar deactivation, as per the discretion of the Authority, and without any prior caveat or opportunity for the aggrieved person to represent their case. Hence, the entire action is in defiance of the principle of natural justice and amounts to a gross violation of Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.
8. It is further submitted that through the insertion of Regulation 28A into the Aadhaar regulations, the Authority has arrogated to itself the power to determine or adjudicate whether an Aadhaar number holder is a foreign national, which is prima facie illegal and ultra vires of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016 [hereinafter

Aadhaar Act, 2016]. The Aadhaar Act, 2016 categorically describes itself as:

"An Act to provide for, as a good governance, efficient, transparent, and targeted delivery of subsidies, benefits and services, the expenditure for which is incurred from the Consolidated Fund of India [or the Consolidated Fund of the State], to individuals residing in India through assigning of unique identity numbers to such individuals and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto."

Thus, all "individuals residing in India" who are entitled to publicly funded subsidies, benefits and services are to be assigned Aadhaar numbers by the Authority. The determination of citizenship, nationality or legality of any migration is outside the scope of Aadhaar Act, 2016.

10. The Forum wishes to further affirm that the power to determine Indian citizenship and decide whether a person is a foreign national is provided only under the Citizenship Act, 1955 r/w the Foreigners Act, 1946. According to Section 6A(1)(b) of the Citizenship Act, "detected to be a foreigner" means detected to be a foreigner in accordance with the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946, and the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964 by a Tribunal constituted under the said Order. In *Sarbananda Sonowal v. Union of India*, the Hon'ble Supreme Court held that:

"This amendment of the Citizenship Act makes it clear that the question of determination or detection of a foreigner is to be governed by the provisions of the existing Central legislation viz. The Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964." Nothing in the text of the Aadhaar

Act, 2016 grants to the Authority any such power of determining and regulating citizenship. In other words, the Authority is not authorized to determine whether a person is an Indian citizen or a foreign national. As such, Regulations 28A and 29 of Aadhaar (Enrolment and Update) Regulations, 2016, which require the Authority to make such determinations, are ultra vires the parent statute.

11. The Forum further observes that Regulations 28A and 29, taken together, are not only colorably acting as a medium of determining the citizenship of an Aadhaar holder, but are also doing so in an inherently arbitrary manner. It appears as if the Authority has suddenly discovered that certain Aadhaar enrolments are not valid because such enrolled persons' entry or stay in India does not satisfy the conditions of the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920. The process of identifying such Aadhaar enrolments is undisclosed.
12. The notices sent by the Authority to deactivated Aadhaar holders does not specify which requirement of stay under the Passport Entry Act has been violated or which guidelines of the Ministry of Home Affairs are applicable in this case. In any case, these conditions were non-existent when many of the recipients of the Authority's deactivation letters in West Bengal had applied and enrolled for Aadhaar. To apply Regulation 28A, introduced only in September 2023, with retrospective effect and deactivate the Aadhaar of residents, whose Aadhaar enrollment happened many years ago, is manifestly unjust and arbitrary.
13. It is a settled position of law that when rule-making power is conferred by an Act, it does not

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enable the rule-making authority to make a rule that travels beyond the scope of the enabling Act or which is inconsistent therewith or repugnant thereto. Yet, that is precisely what has happened in the case of Regulation 28A of the Aadhaar (Enrolment and Update) Regulations, 2016. 14. The Authority had clearly held in May 2023 that its mandate was

confined to issue Aadhaar to eligible residents under the Aadhaar Act, 2016 following the due process, and that Aadhaar does not confer any right or proof of citizenship. The Authority had also held in June 2023 that issues relating to "illegal migrants" allegedly being issued Aadhaar are to be addressed by State Governments since "law and or-

der" falls within their ambits. The about-turn from the Authority's stated position in May-June 2023, to the introduction of Regulation 28A in September 2023 and issue of notices of Aadhaar number deactivation to a large number of residents in West Bengal in February 2023, is quite bewildering.

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## MODI IN DESPERATION

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### 'One Nation, One Election'

*Dipankar Bhattacharya*

**E**VEN AS REPRESENTATIVES assembled in Mumbai for the third meeting of the united opposition, now known by the acronym INDIA, the Modi government announced an extraordinary session of Parliament from 18 to 22 September. The way the session was announced close on the heels of the recently concluded monsoon session of Parliament, and that too absolutely unilaterally without any consultation with the opposition and in brazen violation of established parliamentary norms, has understandably raised suspicions about the government's motive. The five-day session will not have either the daily question hour or the customary zero hour and will be used exclusively to conduct an agenda that has not yet been made public. With every passing day, the Modi government is reducing an elected parliament in a democratic republic to the status of an emperor's royal court.

In another sudden move, the Modi government has announced the formation of a High Level Committee under the chairmanship of former President of India Ram Nath Kovind to make recommendations for holding simultaneous elections to Parliament, State Assemblies and rural and urban local bodies. Get-

ting a former President to chair a committee to make recommendations on a constitutionally suspect and politically contentious subject reveals the desperation of the Modi government to impose its political agenda in utter violation of the basic spirit and structure of the Constitution. The committee had only one representative from the opposition, leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, who has refused to join the committee in view of its dubious mandate which is designed to endorse the 'one nation, one election' agenda, and selective composition - excluding the current leader of opposition in the Rajya Sabha while including a former leader of the opposition in RS who is now close to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

'One Nation, One Election' has been a pet agenda of the Modi government for quite some time. From the Law Commission to the Niti Aayog, several bodies have already examined the subject and found it to be a tricky and contentious proposition needing a series of constitutional amendments and broad consensus involving opposition parties and state governments. The current exercise seems to be to find ways to impose the idea with-

out building a consensus. The committee is completely packed with BJP leaders, pro-government members and known advocates of the 'One Nation, One Election' idea and the opinion of the committee is thus a foregone conclusion. By introducing electoral bonds the government has already rendered electoral funding completely opaque and unaccountable. The proposed bill regarding the selection of the Election Commission would rob the EC of all autonomy and neutrality and make it subservient to the executive. And now by imposing simultaneous elections, the Modi government wants to make further mockery of the election process.

The government's basic argument in support of the 'One Nation, One Election' idea is that it will reduce cost and expedite the pace of 'development' by sparing it the pauses imposed by the election code of conduct. Both these arguments are highly spurious. The bulk of the election expenses is borne by the political parties and the BJP which is flush with electoral funds from dubious sources is the principal culprit for the escalating role of money-power in elections. The election code of conduct (which restricts the announcement of new policies and schemes) affects only poll-bound states and there is no nationwide 'pause' on development. The temporary disruption supposedly caused by elections anyway is nothing com-

pared to the long-term havoc played by ill-conceived measures like demonetisation and protracted lockdown.

Till 1967 India actually used to have simultaneous elections to Parliament and State Assemblies. The point is there was no such constitutional requirement, but elections just happened to coincide. The cycle changed after 1967 owing to a number of reasons - the need for mid-term elections as several governments lost power before completion of their terms, creation of new states and rise of regional parties and arrival of coalition era (which changed the erstwhile pattern of single-party domination) and institutionalisation of elections to local bodies as the third tier of representative democracy, to mention three key factors. Even if the clock is once again artificially set back, the cycle cannot be maintained unless mid-term elections are ruled out by denying people the right to have elected governments and subjecting states to President's rule or rule by Governors or Lieutenant Governors. This is precisely what has been inflicted on Jammu and Kashmir since 5 August 2019. Is the 'One Nation, One Election' formula just a ploy to institutionalise over-centralisation of power and applica-

tion of the J&K model to the whole of India?

It is common knowledge that the Modi government is permanently in election mode and addressing election rallies in poll-bound states is always the topmost priority for Narendra Modi. While Modi found no time to visit Manipur, he kept on hopping from Karnataka to Madhya Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh to Rajasthan to address poll rallies, road shows and booth-level cadre conferences. Why then suddenly this desperation for clubbing Assembly and Lok Sabha elections? Clearly it has a lot to do with the growing fear of losing power with more and more states slipping away from the regime's control. Empirical evidence apparently suggests that the party ruling at the Centre has better prospects in the event of simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections than separate elections. It is also clear that the 'Modi factor' works better at the Lok Sabha elections than in Assembly polls. Hence this desperation to leverage the advantage by changing the system.

Driving this project of course is the Sangh-BJP scheme of over-centralisation of power and systematic weakening of India's diverse culture, plural politics and federal

framework. Every election has its own context. Panchayat and Assembly elections are bound to reflect immediate local conditions and not be swayed by the Sangh-manufactured so-called 'national reality' unless the cacophony of the latter becomes overwhelming. By clubbing all elections together, the Modi government seeks to rob elections of their distinct contexts and limit the political choices of the people. Federal India offers the most vibrant opposition and determined resistance to the Modi government's Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan paradigm as can be seen from the growing cultural and political churnings in states beyond the Hindi heartland (as well as increasingly within it). 'One Nation, One Election' is a formula to curb those churnings and subject democratic India to the imperial designs of a fascist regime. This design is of a piece with the whole of range of attempts going on in the spheres of law, governance and constitutional architecture to reduce empowered citizenship to loyal subject-hood and enslave India in a fascist straitjacket. India must defeat this design by all means. □□□

*[Dipankar Bhattacharya is General Secretary, CPI (ML) Liberation]  
[Source: www.cpi(ml).net]*

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## ISOLATION AND ALIENATION

### Loneliness and Capitalism

*Bhabani Shankar Nayak*

**T**HE EPIDEMIC OF LONELINESS is spreading rapidly in the hyper-connected world of social media. Studies by the World Health Organisation suggest that "20-34% of older people in China, India, the United States, and regions of Europe and Latin America experience loneliness. Similarly, there is a crisis of friendship and meaningful connections among young people.

Research by the Campaign to End Loneliness in the United Kingdom has revealed that "49.63% of adults (25.99 million people) are lonely, and approximately 7.1% of people in Britain (3.83 million) experience chronic loneliness, meaning they feel lonely 'often or always' in 2022." In 2017, the Jo Cox National Commission on Loneliness estimated the cost of loneliness to employers at

£2.5 billion a year in the UK. It is impossible to calculate the social and emotional cost of loneliness. According to the report "The State of Loneliness 2023: Office of National Statistics data on loneliness in Britain, June 2023," published by the Campaign to End Loneliness, there is an alarming rise in loneliness among all age groups. The growing crisis of loneliness leads to deaths, destitution, depression, ill health, mental health crises, crime, and other forms of unsocial and antisocial behaviour in society. Loneliness is a global social and health crisis.



In modern capitalist societies, the notion of loneliness is not solely a product of individual disposition but rather a consequence of broader capitalist structures and processes shaped by new forms of digital capitalism. The ideals and culture of solitude can be a deliberate personal choice, but loneliness often emerges as a result of systemic factors deeply ingrained in capitalist culture. Within this framework, the emphasis on individual success and self-promotion can lead to a pervasive sense of isolation, as people prioritise their own advancement over collective well-being. This narcissistic culture perpetuates a cycle of alienation, where individuals become increasingly disconnected from one another and their communities. The very fabric of capitalist societies, with its emphasis on competition and material gain, cultivates environments that prioritise profit over the social bonds essential for human fulfilment. Thus, loneliness emerges not as an inherent trait but as a by-product of the alienating conditions fostered by capitalist society.

Capitalism thrives on alienation, perpetuating and reproducing all forms of alienating conditions. In the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, Marx discussed four types of alienation: i) alienation from one's own product and labour, ii) alienation from the process of labour, iii) alienation from one's own self, and iv) alienation from other fellow human beings/workers. These four forms of alienation continue to be the foundation of modern capitalism in the age of digitalisation. The technological advancements have accelerated all these forms of alienation. These alienating conditions generate helpless and lonely individuals who lack control over themselves. Their lives and freedoms are dictated by those who control capital and organisations.

Alienation is not an isolated condition; it is an integral part of the capitalist system, where the destruction of meaningful human and social connections is central to the creation of an insidious economy at the expense of society. Society is dismantled to promote a profit-driven economic system based on the exploitation of labour and nature. Such an exploitative system can only sustain itself by fostering disconnected and atomised individuals, thus promoting the growth of a 'loneliness economy' where capitalism becomes the only available alternative.

Capitalism, with its relentless pursuit of profit, often comes at the expense of the collective spirit and innate social nature of humanity. It champions ideals such as individual space, freedom, happiness, utility, pleasure, and satisfaction, which are often portrayed as attainable through material wealth and consumption. However, the pursuit of these ideals within a capitalist framework can be insatiable, leading individuals into a perpetual cycle of labour and consumption, where fulfilment remains elusive. This is because the essence of these aspirations inherently lies in collective experiences and relationships rather than in the accumulation of material possessions or individual success. In a collectivist society that prioritises sharing, cooperation, and empathy, these ideals find fertile ground for realisation, as they are inherently intertwined with the well-being of the community as a whole. Thus, there exists a fundamental misalignment between the individualistic ethos perpetuated by capitalism and the communal nature of human fulfilment and contentment.

Capitalism has eroded the collective foundations of society to such an extent that even the hyper-connected world of social media cannot change it. It is central to the produc-

tion of insecure, lonely, powerless, fearful, and disconnected individuals who grapple with depression and anxiety in their everyday lives. These weakened individuals are unlikely to question the exploitative and unnatural underpinnings of capitalism. There is no threat to capitalism in a society populated by lonely and alienated individuals. The notion of a free, happy, and prosperous capitalism is nothing more than a myth.

Capitalism, in all its forms, breeds loneliness. The digital fantasies of capitalism can't end loneliness. Therefore, the struggle to end loneliness is a struggle against very foundations of capitalism. A society liberated from exploitation and inequality, one founded upon principles of solidarity, compassion, and collective sharing, stands as the sole alternative to the pervasive isolation endemic to capitalist societies. □□□

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“PRABIR PURKAYASTHA’S MEMOIR”

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## Emergency Then and Now

*Joydip Ghosal*

**P**RABIR PURKAYASTHA WAS incarcerated by two regimes. Both are authoritarian and tend to suppress any kind of dissent. Both the incarceration happened half a century apart. His book *Keeping Up the Good Fight From the Emergency to The Present Day* (Leftword) is a personal narrative but it is inalienably linked to the tumultuous events of the time which makes it a compelling account. He is a science activist in software, power and telecom sector. He is the author of *Knowledge as Commons: Towards inclusive Science and Technology*. Along with Ninan Koshy, MK Bhadrakumar he wrote *Uncle Sam’s Nuclear Cabin*. With Vijay Prasad he co-authored *Enron Blowout: Corporate Capitalism and Theft of the Global Commons*. Apart from that he is the co-editor with Richa Chintan and Indranil of *Political Journeys in Health: Essays by and for Amit Sengupta*.

Romila Thapar aptly says “Prabir Purkayastha’s memoir” recalls the past, with thoughtful comments on the present, and hopefully he will be free to project his vision of the future. “Sanjay Hegde wrote that the book was written in the twilight zone between the registration of criminal cases against his news portal and the arrest on 3 October, 2023. According to him the entire case today seems to be as insubstantial as in 1975.

The book began with the quotations by Karl Marx and B R Ambedkar. The quotation by B R Ambedkar “They cannot make history who forget history” resonated throughout the book. Foreword by Lalita Ramdas succinctly summed up the spirit of this memoir – the

personal is political, the political is also the personal. The book helps the readers to traverse the complex maze of contemporary political dynamics. They also witness the warp and weft of different elements that ultimately shaped and define the worldview of a person who wanted to be a committed political activist. Powers-that-be tried to intimidate the person who raised his voices. This book is a saga of relentless fight against majoritarian regimes written in unpretentious style. According to Lalita Ramdas as a techno professional he had used technology and media to tell the most important stories of present times, especially through a visual medium. He holds within himself deeply held convictions about justice and equality for all and it had caused tremendous impact upon him to eschew conventional path and use unorthodox trajectory using media as a powerful tool “to attract those who might not, otherwise, hear many of these stories in any other forum.” Prabir asked a pertinent question when he named his first chapter “Does every generation have to face emergency?”

On September 25, 1975 the students of Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi had called for a strike. Ashoklata Jain, an elected councillor of students’ union had faced expulsion. The strike was against this expulsion. Three months before an emergency was declared and on the second day of the strike cops in mufti abducted Prabir Purkayastha. He was on the lawn of the School of Languages that morning. A black ambassador stopped near them and a burly man got out. He came up to him and asked him

if he was D P Tripathi, the president of student union. He replied that he was not. The questioner was DIG – range cop P S Bhinder. In broad daylight he and his associates abducted him. He spent next one year in jail. On February 9, 2021 ED raided his home. Their target was the digital web platform News click. He had set up the platform in 2009 and it had grown over the years in terms of viewership and expansion. The raid continued for 113 hours. In truth it was one of the longest raids. Previously in Jaigarh fort of Rajmata Gayatri Devi a raid was conducted which lasted for nearly ten days.

The emergency was promulgated on June 25, 1975. It remained in force till March 21, 1977. Preventive detention and widespread arrests muzzled the existing democracy. A sense of paranoia, persecution was prevalent in the air. In truth fear psychosis gripped the entire society. According to the author fundamental rights were curtailed to the extent that they seemed in those months non-existent. That was a shocking development because till the emergency India boasted of its democratic tradition. The author described it thus “It was as if, in one stroke, dissent, free speech and all the other characteristics of democracy could be struck down by the administrative machinery of the state.” But he stressed that it was not a matter of one stroke which was swift and prompt. Rather a host of matters exacerbated the creation of authoritarian regime. Today when young people asked him how emergency could happen there was more urgent counter question he asked himself. “Are we in the midst of another emergency by another name?” It was like the old emergency in some ways. It had its own unique features. Today with increasing use of

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state machinery against rights activists, progressives and minorities an atmosphere of hatred and threat had gradually built up in the country. Riding on the wave of majoritarian propaganda vigilantism coupled with arm twisting policies made the situation grimmer. In this book he tried to find out how this hatred driven attack, detention, trolling and the spurts of violence began. The politics that is based on hate is restricted to the narrow vi-

sion of society. The diabolical plan of muzzling people is quite different from earlier emergency. The reprehensible plan is to remould the state without any dissidence. Stan Swamy's case is a glaring example. It wants to create a culture of petty subservience. Repressive organs of the state try to control every aspects of life.

In order to discern the changing nature of authoritarian regimes this book is an essential read. □□□

## TIGERS AND GOATS

### 'Parks and People'

*Bharat Dogra*

**W**HILE THERE IS WIDESPREAD and increasing support for the protection of wild life, avoidable obstructions have been created by the insistence of some conservationists and project authorities on pursuing conservation work in ways that involve the displacement of many villagers. Hence an avoidable conflict has been created, ignoring the alternative of pursuing conservation in ways that avoid such displacement and disruption of rural communities.

In fact in some places such disruption of rural communities has been accompanied also by a lot of violence against rural communities, at least partly to increase pressure on them to move out early. Around 2000 people are alleged to have been killed and 30000 driven from homes to create a wildlife reserve in Myanmar or Burma (Panos background paper on 'Parks and People'). Currently thousands more are threatened by displacement caused by expansion of parks in Tanzania, particularly under the REGROW project.

This is extremely tragic, and entirely avoidable. As several experts have been pointing out, conserva-

tion models which are compatible with villagers' sustainable livelihoods are not just possible, but may also have higher chances of success. Ramachandra Guha, delivering the keynote address to the Conference on Wild life and Human Rights in Asia at the University of Oslo said, "The belief in a total ban on human intervention is misguided. Studies show that the highest levels of biological diversity are often found in areas with some (though not excessive) human intervention. In opening up new niches to be occupied by insects, plants and birds, partially disturbed ecosystems can have a greater diversity than untouched areas."

According to David Western, in East Africa, "the ending of human activity in the parks, such as fires and shifting cultivation, has reduced biodiversity. Those human activities created the patchiness of terrain that encouraged more species. By pulling out the human components, and maintaining too many elephants we are losing biodiversity."

In Bharatpur Park area of India (Rajasthan state), some years back villagers protested when the authorities banned grazing. In the ensuing

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conflict seven villagers were killed. Yet the Bombay Natural History Society concluded that here buffalo grazing was “an integral part of the ecosystem, helping to counter the tendency of the wetland to turn into a grassland.” Hence there was no need, even from a conservation viewpoint, to put a ban on grazing in the first place. The conflict, which caused the loss of life of innocent villagers, was thus entirely avoidable.

In some other cases also, including the famous ‘Valley of Flowers’ in Himalayan region, bans on traditional grazing had a negative impact on diversity and required a reintroduction of grazing or grass cutting.

Such research findings indicate that the interests of both human population as well as wild species in most situations can be better served by giving up the notion of parks as areas devoid of human intervention. A more rewarding approach will be to look at how local people can prove helpful in protection of animals and birds, trees and plants, and evolve a system based on involving as well as rewarding the people for their help, making creative use of their impressive knowledge of local forests as well as their various skills.

According to the Panospaper on People and Parks, the Kuikuru people in the upper Xingu valley of the Amazon rain forest can differentiate between 262 kinds of trees or plants and even more forms of animal life.

Forests play an important role in the food security of several indigenous communities by providing free of cost food which is shared much more equally and generously compared to cultivated and market-purchased food. A study by Living Farm organisation in the Odisha says that 121 types of food available from forests are known to the tribal communities which are shared by the community and are particularly use-

ful for meeting needs of several micro-nutrients. During the lean season and during drought years the importance of this forest food increases further.

Several communities of forest dwellers have been living in harmony with wild life. They have self-imposed restrictions on forest-use as well as on hunting or causing any other harm to wild animals. There is much to learn from them regarding the way of peaceful coexistence with wild life. Instead of officials and rangers trying to form such an understanding, more often the highly unfortunate trend has been to follow a policy to remove them from park areas, or at least to curtail their forest and other livelihood rights in a big way, thereby creating pressures on them to move away sooner or later.

When villagers are displaced from park areas, or their livelihood is gravely jeopardised then chances increase that some of them will be trapped by poachers and smugglers to work for them, thereby increasing the risks to wild life as well, and turning protectors and potential protectors of wild life into those who can threaten wild life.

So removal of villagers from park area can be harmful not only for them but also for biodiversity. The approach should be to involve them in the protection of biodiversity. The famous ornithologist from India, Salim Ali, had made a strong pitch for this. He stated, “No conservation laws or measures can succeed fully unless they have the backing of informed public opinion, which in our case means the usually illiterate village cultivator.” He added that we (the conservationists) have to find the right approach for involving the villagers, not excluding them. He added, “We have never really tried enough. Devising a realistic strategy is now a challenge to all conservationists.”

The significance of this viewpoint - of working with people and not against them - can be seen very clearly in the example of van Gujjars, a semi-nomadic pastoral community which is being displaced from Rajaji National Park area in North India. For several years forest and wild life officials have continued to propagate van gujjars’ pastoralism as being harmful for forests and wild life, but this view was contested by voluntary organisations working with van Gujjars like Vikalp and Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra (RLEK).

RLEK also prepared a plan for Community Forest Management in Protected Areas (CFM-PA) to enable van Gujjars, in cooperation with other villagers, to manage a part of the Park area. This plan document, prepared on the basis of detailed, meticulous fieldwork, provided a view of van Gujjars’ relation with wild life and forests which is very different from the dominant view propagated by most officials.

All forest animals, whether fierce or gentle, are seen as interrelated components of the natural world and therefore to be cared for by mankind. “They are our children,” it is said, “for they have the same life as our own.” Moreover, “buffaloes have us to care for them but just because wild animals have nobody to care for them does not mean they should be harmed.”

“Jackals, snakes, leopards and even the irascible elephant are all given a respected place within the moral order of the natural world. Though different, like the five fingers of the hand, each has its part to play in the great scheme of things.”

“Since they are regarded as kin, no creature of the forest may be killed and even injury to one is cause for personal disgrace and discipline before the elders. No forest creature may be eaten or skinned



and if found dead should be buried, preferably with a prayer similar to that used for human or buffalo burials.”

After describing this thinking of van gujjars this document adds, “To walk through the forest with a van Gujjar guide is a lesson in biodiversity; every species of tree is known, its quality as fodder, the timing of its leaf-fall, medicinal properties and so on. Every sound has meaning, every bird known and its habits noted, every fallen branch or tree noted.”

Clearly such communities can be a very big asset for the protection of forests and wild life. Members of such communities can with a little training emerge as barefoot botanists and zoologists. Collectively, these communities can play a very important role on keeping away poachers and smugglers of forest produce.

Unfortunately such potential is not even considered by those officials or managers who approach the entire issue with a colonial or neo-colonial thinking which is ranged

against the communities and the protection of their rights from the outset. They see their role more as policemen out to discipline people and remove them when required, instead of trying to become partners of communities in creative and cooperative efforts to save environment and at the same protect sustainable livelihoods.

Once such possibilities are explored in very creative and interesting ways for such cooperation, it will be found that sustainable livelihoods cannot only co-exist with protection of wild-life but in addition the two can be mutually supportive in very interesting ways. To give just one example, a community in an area where poaching is a threat can be involved in steps to check poaching either in terms of full-time or part time jobs for some of its members, or in terms of an annual collective grant to the community for supporting various welfare activities.

In areas of conflict like the Ruaha National Park in Tanzania from where large-scale displacement is planned and from where reports of terrible

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violence against villagers are already being received, there is a strong case for entirely changing the approach and the existing plans to avoid displacement and disruption of livelihoods, and instead embark on an approach that integrates protection of wild life and forests with protection of sustainable livelihoods of communities. □□□

[The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include *Planet in Peril*, *Man over Machine* and *Protecting Earth for Children*]

## EXCLUSION OF PALESTINIAN WORKERS

### The Double-Edged Sword

**Jonathan Shamir**

*[Israel's far right wants to permanently replace Palestinian workers, but employing them has become key to maintaining the occupation.]*

**I**N FEBRUARY, FOUR MONTHS after Hamas broke through the fence around the Gaza Strip, Israel's military establishment secretly employed hundreds of Palestinian workers from the West Bank to repair it. The incident represented one of the only times that Palestinian workers have been allowed to return to work within the Green Line after the Israeli government revoked almost all of their work permits in October.

The Israeli military establishment's decision to rehire previously-banned Palestinian workers, which bypassed

elected lawmakers on the official Security Cabinet, represents a growing tension between Israeli leaders' divergent approaches to Palestinian labourers. In the aftermath of October 7th, far-right politicians like Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir have insisted that Israel must permanently remove the over 200,000 Palestinian labourers, including those without permits, who work inside Israel and the occupied West Bank. These far-right leaders have positioned Palestinian workers as an unmanage-

able security threat, and given the significant power within Israel, their approach has largely carried the day, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refusing to bring the workers' return to a vote in the Security Cabinet. Instead, Netanyahu's government has resolved to replace Palestinian workers with a massive proposed influx of migrant labourers from countries like India and Sri Lanka, even though it will cost Israeli employers up to three times more to employ such workers.

But a contingent of senior officials associated with the military and intelligence service have vocally opposed this policy, insisting on readmitting the banned workers—not out of concern for Palestinians' livelihoods, but because leaving almost a quarter million Palestinians unem-

ployed and desperate is seen as jeopardising Israel's own security. "Letting them make a living for their families will lower the tension," said Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. "A strong economy and welfare for the Palestinian residents of Judea and Samaria [the biblical name for the West Bank] is in Israel's security interest." In line with this belief, in December, the army permitted 10,000 Palestinian workers to begin labouring in West Bank settlements, in addition to bringing in the workers to fix the Gaza fence a few months later—all despite continued criticism from Israeli politicians.

This ongoing tension between elected leaders and the military establishment continues Israel's longstanding oscillation over whether allowing Palestinian workers in, or forcing them out, is more beneficial to the occupation. Israel has at times responded to Palestinian uprisings by excluding Palestinians and turning to foreign migrant labourers. Yet the economic advantages of exploiting Palestinians have usually pushed Israel to reverse course—and over time, control over Palestinian workers has become an attractive tool of political pacification in its own right. In the post-October 7th moment, Israeli leaders are retracing this familiar debate about Palestinian labour, but the rise of the far right has meant that the exclusion pole is much more powerful than in previous iterations. According to Hussain, a 60-year-old Palestinian labourer and West Bank resident who worked in construction near Tel Aviv before October 7th, Israel's cancellation of almost all work permits has created one of the most dire crises Palestinian workers have ever faced. "The situation was never this bad even during the First or Second Intifada," said one Hussain.

In the long term, however, experts say that the turn to migrant labourers is unlikely to last given the benefits Israel derives from a disenfranchised Palestinian workforce.

In the first two decades after it occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, Israel opted to integrate a Palestinian labour force in the hopes that ensuring a basic level of welfare for Palestinians would maintain calm. But Israel changed tack with the onset of the First Intifada, the late 1980s Palestinian uprising against the occupation. In that period, Israel's repeated closures of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which intensified following a wave of Palestinian militant attacks, barred tens of thousands of Palestinians from reaching their workplaces. This created a crisis for employers in the construction sector, where the dependency on Palestinians was most acute, and since Israeli workers were unwilling to work in these hazardous jobs—which also became socially stigmatised due to their association with Palestinians—the government had no option left but to bring in workers from elsewhere. As a result, by 1996, the Israeli government had granted 106,000 permits for foreign migrant workers.

The shift to supposedly pliant and depoliticised foreign labour was seen as not only a way to keep the Israeli economy going, but also a strategy to quash the Intifada, which leveraged Israel's dependency on Palestinian workers to put forward political demands through frequent strikes. "When the working Palestinian population rose up and threatened the interests of the state and employers, migrant workers were brought in as a sort of strike-breaker population," said activist and anthropologist Matan Kaminer, who researches migrant workers in Israel. Bringing in a non-Palestinian labour force was also seen as preparation for an imminent two-state agreement: "The Oslo years also represented the most significant attempt to wean Israel off Palestinian labour because the government genuinely believed that there would be political separation."

For right-wing Israelis, however,

the potential replacement of Palestinian labour with foreigners triggered other latent anxieties. "The Israeli right was worried about foreign workers because if they were given rights and equality as non-Jews, it could create a liberal society where the first and most important marker is not the fact that you're Jewish."

Despite these measures, Israeli leaders remained concerned that this population would naturalise, a problem they didn't have with Palestinian workers.

Far-right politicians are now calling this established regime of labour management into question. After October 7th, Smotrich has argued, "the notion that money can buy peace has collapsed," signaling that Israel must chart a course forward without Palestinian workers.

But despite its loud opposition to the status quo ante, the right wing has been unable to commit to actually removing Palestinians from an economy built on their exploitation.

The influx of migrant workers will give Israel even more leverage over Palestinian workers, which will mean worse working conditions and more surveillance." Indeed, the military establishment's recently proposed pilot for a partial reentry of Palestinian workers explicitly suggests the use of "advanced monitoring systems that have never been used before" as a way to address the far right's concerns about Palestinian militancy. In crafting this harsher version of the previous system, Israel looks poised to draw from the precedent of both the Intifadas, bringing in a migrant labour population to depress Palestinians' power as it did in the '90s while also heightening surveillance on Palestinian workers as in the 2000s. For the Palestinian workers on their receiving end, these emergent re-entry policies constitute a bitter lifeline, offering a short-term improvement on months of unemployment, but a long-term erosion of their already precarious rights. □□□

[Source: *Jewish Currents*]

## LETTERS

**'Cloud of Dictatorship'**

Anantkumar Hegde, BJP MP from Uttari Karnataka, is again in the news.

Close on the heels of his controversial statement about demolition of a mosque and his invoking of Hindu community who would not rest 'until more mosques are reclaimed', he has delivered another explosive statement.

This time the whole edifice of Constitution is under his attack, which according to him has 'distortions introduced by the Congress to suppress Hindu society'.

Critics have rightly said how this suggestion exhibits real intentions of the saffron regime which dreams to usher in Hindu Rashtra, end reservation for scheduled and backward communities, reinforce caste system and also replace Constitution drafted by Dr Ambedkar with a worldview inspired by Manusmriti. The main opposition party Congress has expressed fear that all such statements, steps just go to vindicate how a 'cloud of dictatorship' now hovers over India.

It is a different matter that neither BJP top guns nor PM Modi—who had famously declared way back in 2014 that for him 'Constitution is the most sacred book' deemed it important to condemn Hegde's statements or ordered him to seek apology for his claim.

**Subhas Gatade**

**Aadhaar Card Cancellation in WB**

The fact-finding delegation, which visited Krishnaganj area of Nadia district on February 20 to investigate the reports of Aadhaar Card deactivations, stated that these revocations are not merely a procedural matter, but an issue which will have perilous impact on the people.

The delegation said that in this

region, around 700 people's Aadhaar cards have been deactivated by the UIDAI office. Those whose cards were cancelled are mostly from marginalised Namoshudra (SC) communities, and most of them are unorganised labourers or agricultural workers. Due to the deactivation, the victims couldn't perform banking transactions, and issues like financial problems, helplessness, and fear have taken grip among the people.

In the past 10 years of Modi regime, availing basic services has been linked to the requirement of functional Aadhaar. Furthermore, the Election Commission, despite severe opposition, has added Aadhaar seeding for Voter ID cards. In this backdrop, there will be a disastrous impact on the poor and their lives and livelihoods with revocation of Aadhaar cards. The delegation noted that the country has seen the dangerous impact of mandatory Aadhaar was seen when Eleven-year-old Santoshi Kumari of Jharkhand died of starvation in 2017 because her family's ration card was not linked to their Aadhaar.

The majority of Aadhaar cards cancelled in the region belonged to non-Muslim marginalised communities. With the BJP government notifying the divisive and discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Rules on the eve of Lok Sabha Elections, clearly the Aadhaar cancellations is a major political conspiracy not only against the Muslim population but against the entire poor and working class.

**Central Committee,  
CPIML Liberation**

**CAA-A Major Political Conspiracy**

The notification of rules for implementation of the patently unjust, discriminatory and divisive Citizenship Amendment Act passed in December 2019 signals a major politi-

cal conspiracy just ahead of the notification of the 2024 poll schedule. The CAA, as indicated by Amit Shah in his famous 'chronology' explanation, is a precursor to a nationwide NRC-NPR exercise aimed at stripping undocumented citizens of their citizenship rights. CAA clearly seeks to polarise citizens on the basis of their religious affiliation, deceptively promising citizenship to non-Muslim 'refugees' while threatening Muslims with loss of citizenship and possible deportation. But going by the experience of the NRC exercise in Assam and the ongoing demolition drives across the country, the poor of every community including Adivasis and forest-dwellers are going to be particularly vulnerable.

The democratic opinion of the country and the equal citizenship and constitutional rights movement have rejected the CAA-NRC package as an assault on the Constitution. The notification of the CAA rules just ahead of the elections underlines the urgency of the people's movement to defend the constitutional foundation of democracy and the need to vote out the Modi regime in the coming elections.

**Central Committee,  
CPIML Liberation**

**Bitcoin**

Bitcoin is gaining traction once again. Bitcoin, touted as the 'King of Cryptocurrencies,' is being hailed as a 'superior asset.' Financial analysts have started singing its praises in mainstream newspapers. Pink newspapers are publishing reports that are uncritical and borderline promotional.

Bitcoin is not an 'asset.' It has no inherent value. It is, at best, a speculative gambling tool, a technically sophisticated pyramid scheme. Those who 'trade' or 'invest' in it could make or lose a fortune, just as one does in gambling.

**Team Madras Courier**

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