

frontier

Vol. 56 : No. 42

ISSN 0016-2094

April 14-20, 2024

Founder-Editor : **SAMAR SEN**

On Other Pages

Comment	2
Note	3
BK-16 "The Incarcerations" Harsh Thakor	4
CURTAILING FEDERALISM 'One Nation, One Election' Bibhudatta Pradhan	6
MORE ON CAA How to Make People Stateless Atanu Chakravarty	7
THE LEGACY OF BRITISH RAJ Plight of Denotified Tribes B K Lodhi	8
'ELECTION PROPAGANDA' Pro-Modi Films Flood Market Hannah Ellis-Petersen	9
DELIBERATE DESTRUCTION 'It's a Death Zone' Taj Ali Daisy Schofield	11
WHERE IS PRESS FREEDOM? Journalists are Killed Caroline Houck	12
Letters	13

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]

UN Resolution

THE AMERICAN STRATEGY OF PACIFYING ARAB ANGER BY way of repeatedly urging Israel to allow humanitarian aid to Gaza is not really working. On March 26, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed a resolution demanding an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and for the first time since the beginning of Israeli military offensive five months ago, the US abstained rather than vetoing it. But this symbolic gesture towards the Palestinians is not going to change the ground reality. Even many concerned Americans think the resolution is still very late and still not enough. UN resolution or no resolution the Israeli Defence Forces slaughtered tens of thousands of Palestinian men, women and children, even after the World Court found South Africa's claim that Israel is committing genocide to be "plausible". America along with its permanently subservient ally Britain air-dropped food packets to ease the famine situation but at the same time the Pentagon sent bombs and fighter jets to Israel to continue its campaign of ethnic cleansing. This is sheer hypocrisy! That a cease-fire resolution was finally achieved was in large part due to the massive pressure being exerted by the Palestine solidarity movement across the world.

UN resolution cannot stop American weapons supply to Israel. They are bombing homes, hospitals, schools and places of worship, deliberately destroying critical infrastructure and blocking life-saving humanitarian aid from entering Gaza even as undeclared famine is already there. For Israel food is a weapon. The weaponisation of food has brought about mass starvation and unthinkable horrors for Gazans.

Aid-drops won't prevent famine and they don't absolve the US government of this genocide. Tragically 12 Palestinians were reportedly drowned while trying to reach air-dropped aid that fell into the Mediterranean.

The resolution demands an immediate cease-fire and unconditional release of all hostages while emphasising the expansion of flow of humanitarian assistance. Palestinians are really tired of hearing the relentless talk of 'humanitarian aid'; it is more like a kind of humiliation for an entire generation. In reality the much talked about UN resolution was vague and the language was watered down to please America and Israel. Then the resolution demands cease-fire only for the month of Ramdan, which however ends in two weeks. What will happen after Ramdan? No promise of extending the cease-fire. The resolution demands the release of all

hostages, but it fails to explicitly name the tens of thousands of Palestinians languishing in Israeli jails.

Though Security Council Resolutions are legally binding, parties simply ignore them. It remained to be seen how many parts of the resolution—including a pause in the fighting, the use of “all available routes” for aid deliveries and the release of all hostages—would be carried out. The situation is so dire that even Israel’s allies, otherwise not supporters of independent Palestine, are against continuation of the war in Gaza, where a humanitarian crisis gets worse daily. The UN has been warning of the risk of famine in Gaza where hunger and diseases are

spreading rapidly and 1.9 million people have been pushed into squalid or forced to live outdoors. They are in overcrowded shelters in the south. Their make-shift tents are apologies of human dwellings.

Gaza is now a shell of its former self, its entire landscape rendered unrecognisable by the Israeli military’s months-long bombing. Over 32,000 Palestinians have been killed. Despite outcry across the world about the human catastrophe of the century 1.1 million people are said to be facing starvation.

The only positive outcome of the UN resolution was that Israel agreed to send delegates to the indirect cease-fire talks to be held in Doha

and Cairo. For one thing Tel Aviv agreed to talk cease-fire following agitation by the families of hostages and missing persons. Israel is unlikely to stop unless they get back all of the hostages and destroy Hamas militarily, notwithstanding Doha or for that matter Cairo Diplomacy. Meanwhile, graveyards in Gaza will multiply with every passing day.

Solidarity movement throughout the world is the real strength of the Palestinian people to fight back. Surprisingly the Indian left-wing forces have done precious little to support the cause of Palestine other than routinely issuing some harmless press statements condemning Israeli barbarism. □□□ 31-03-2024

COMMENT

A New Social Disease

CAN LAUGHTER BE A SOCIAL disease? Yes! Many people may be familiar with Readers’ Digest Column, ‘Laughter: The Best Medicine’. People have been told that in laughing so many more facial muscles are used and so it is healthier. Most people look more attractive when they break into a smile. Some of the great films have a lot of good humour. Many language cinemas have some great humorous actors. Some great books in the world are humorous. People are appreciated because they have a sense of humour. And so on.

So what has changed? Since 2008 the World has been going through a deep economic crisis. At first the reaction was sombre. People began to read serious books that dealt with serious social, political and economic situations. Some new important books came.

However slowly a hopelessness and helplessness began to set in. People were losing jobs, getting depressed, and the future looked bleak. Around this time the artificial humour of stand in’ comedies came. Of course television has a long history

of artificial creativity in terms of serials. But this was a new situation. The attention period became smaller. Smartphone and YouTube allowed the video to reach in every hand everywhere. Forwarding messages (click activism) became common. WhatsApp ushered a new era and the reach became wider.

Finally Covid Pandemic ushered the pandemic of this new disease of laughter. Smartphone became universal. People from all walks of life and diverse age groups got personal smart phones. People got addicted to scrolling’ and to look for something to gratify their restlessness. Where there is demand there is supply. Everyone could produce short videos—family videos, videos of children and pet animals and short episodes and at the other end semi pornographic videos.

The need for it arises because life is becoming meaningless. All kinds of spiritual quests and alternative health care practices have also come up. The market is ripe for any of these meaningless sources of gratification. However some alternative medical practices have genuine pro-

fessional history and training. And people have learned to create their sources of jokes and laughter. They are trigger happy to burst into laughter at the slightest cue!

Social media including ‘fake news’ is ruling the world. It is more like drug addiction. There is a spurt all over the world because the world is going through an election year. Many big countries are having elections this year. So a lot of unaccounted money is also floating around.

The mass yoga class in public gardens was unique for than one reason. It was free and many people welcomed it as something to do along with the morning walk. At the end of the yoga session there was a session of mass laughter. The teacher encouraged participants to laugh louder. To many it appeared as a ghastly and obscene performance.

There is no real movement against this kind of laughter. But a lot of older generation people and serious thinkers and commentators have raised their voice against the frivolous nature of TV and Social Media. Only other serious and more meaningful movements can draw some of these young and not so young people away from this new opium of the people! □□□

[Contributed by T Vijayendra]

NOTE

EB and Corporates

Haaretz writes:

WHILE RUNNING THEIR businesses at a loss, these corporations managed to dish out hundreds of crores to politicians through electoral bonds. At least 16 of the top 200 firms in the electoral bonds list donated even when they ran their business in loss for three previous consecutive years.

While in losses they cumulatively donated a whopping Rs 710 crore to political parties. Of this, Rs 460 crore (over 60%) went to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

These companies did not make money for their shareholders and owners yet generated funds to secretly donate funds to political parties.

The Election Commission and the Reserve Bank of India had shared their fears about such dubious donations when the BJP government introduced the Electoral Bonds scheme in 2017 by amending four laws. They feared that the scheme permitted shell companies and others to funnel unaccounted and untaxed money from India and abroad into political parties.

Before the amendments brought in the electoral bonds scheme, a company could donate up to 7.5% of the average profits it earned over three previous financial years. This was done to ensure that only legitimate companies, doing some business, get to donate. It meant the company had to make profits, and there was a cap on how much they could donate.

For example, if a company earned an average profit of Rs 100 for three years, it was permitted to donate only Rs 7.5 in the fourth year. It was common sense that any company donating disproportionate

to their profits are likely to be indulging in laundering black money into politics.

The BJP government struck off a line in the Companies Act in the 2017 Union budget to remove this cap. The scary size of financial juggernaut this amendment unleashed becomes apparent upon scrutinising the disclosures of electoral bonds alongside the corporate filings of some of the largest donors.

Telecom giant Bharti Airtel reported an average loss of Rs 9,716 crore between the financial year 2020-21 and 2022-23. Despite plummeting fortunes in the preceding three financial years, the company donated Rs 197.6 crore to political parties. Of this, Rs 197 crore went to BJP, Rs 50 lakh to the National Conference and Rs 10 lakh to the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD).

DLF Commercial Developers Limited, part of the realty major DLF group, donated Rs 20 crore in the financial year 2019-20 despite incurring a loss of Rs 210 crore in the same period. The company donated a total of Rs 130 crore through electoral bonds, all of which went to BJP.

Apart from the loss-making 16, at least 31 firms donated much beyond their three-year average profits. Kolkata-based liquor distribution firm Castle Liquors Private Limited barely managed an average of a little over Rs 6 lakh in the last three years but donated Rs 7.5 crore—118 times more—to political parties. About 90% or Rs 6.8 crore went to BJP and the remaining Rs 70 lakh to RJD.

The company donated this money in four instalments since April 2023. While the filings for the Financial Year 2023-24 are not available, the

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

company managed to make only Rs 12 lakh in profits in the previous financial year. In the three prior years, the company made Rs 5 lakh, Rs 2 lakh and nil profits.

Lottery king Santiago Martin's Future Gaming and Hotel Services Private Limited, the biggest electoral bonds donor, donated over 16 times its average three-year profits. It donated Rs 1,368 crore in total, of which over Rs 540 crore went to Trinamool Congress (TMC), Rs 509 crore went to Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Rs 159 crore to YSR Congress, Rs 100 crore to BJP, Rs 80 lakh to Sikkim Krantikari Morcha and Rs 50 lakh to Sikkim Democratic Front.

Similarly, Reliance-linked Qwik Supply Chain, which emerged as the third largest donor, donated 15 times its profit. Qwik Supply Chain donated over Rs 375 crore, or 90% of its total donations, to BJP. It donated Rs 25 crore to the Shiv Sena and the remaining Rs 10 crore to the Nationalist Congress Party.

One of the top 10 donors, Madanlal Ltd, a company linked to Kolkata-based Keventer Group, donated over 56 times its average three-year profit. It donated Rs 185.5 crore in the financial year 2019-2020, of which Rs 175.5 crore went to BJP and the remaining Rs 10 crore to the Congress. □□□

BK-16

“The Incarcerations”

Harsh Thakor

THE INCARCERATIONS’ WRITTEN by professor Alpa Shah cuts the ribbons of Indian democracy to narrate the sensational story of the Bhima Koregaon case, in which 16 human rights defenders (the BK-16)—professors, lawyers, journalists, poets—had been fabricated without any trial as Maoist terrorists. Possibly one of the most classical books of modern times in a symmetrical or methodical manner, exposing the ascendancy of neo-fascism or proto-fascist tide and how the very fabric of constitutional democracy is being ripped apart.

Alpa Shah unravels how these alleged terrorists were charged with inciting violence at a public commemoration in 2018, accused of waging a war against the Indian state, and plotting to kill the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. Expertly investigating the case, Shah exposes some of the world’s most shocking revelations of cyber warfare research, which show not only hacking of emails and mobile phones of the BK-16, but also implantation of the electronic evidence that was used to incarcerate them. Through the life histories of the BK-16, Shah penetrates deep into the issues they fought for and tells the story of India’s three main minorities—Adivasi, Dalits and Muslims—and what the quest for democracy holds in store for them.

“The Incarcerations” unravels the mysterious case of 16 human rights defenders—academics, lawyers, jour-

nalists and poets—who from 2018 were framed and then imprisoned on charges of instigating a riot in the small town of Bhima Koregaon, waging war against the Indian state and plotting Modi’s assassination. All of those arrested—Sudha Bharadwaj, Hany Babu, Jyoti Jagtap, Mahesh Raut, Ramesh Gaichor, Sagar Gorkhe, Rona Wilson, Shoma Sen, Varavara Rao, Stan Swamy, Anand Teltumbde, Gautam Navlakha, Sudhir Dhawale, Surendra Gadling, Vernon Gonsalves and Arun Ferreira—have waged a struggle to the last breath for the rights of Muslims and the marginalised Adivasis and Dalits.

“The Incarcerations” reveals how this case is a precursor for the extinguishing of democracy in India. For the first time in the nation’s history was there such a concerted, or organised attack on those who manifested the fulcrum of democracy. Shah illustrates that aspect of democracy today must be not only about protecting freedom of expression and democratic institutions, but also about backing the social movements that challenge global inequalities.

Alpa Shah narrates the spell bounding and soul searching life stories of the BK-16, lawyers, professors, journalists, artists and activists, who were raided and arrested, “without credible evidence and without trial as Maoist terrorists.” During her investigation, Shah found that emails and mobile phones of the BK-16 were hacked, and electronic evidence implanted to put them behind bars. While the octogenarian activist Stan Swamy perished in prison, some like lawyer Sudha Bharadwaj was in jail

from 2018 to 2023 before getting bail, and the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has just told the Supreme Court that teacher and Dalit activist Shoma Sen, who has been in prison since 2018, is not required in custody anymore. Shah writes in the introduction: “Delving into the lives of BK-16, and deep into the history of the causes they represent, I aim to show how in very different ways and in different places, they have persistently defended the social and economic rights of a broad spectrum of vulnerable communities across the wide geographical breadth of the subcontinent.”

In the author’s view work of these activists reflected the whole story of resistance for democracy for India’s most marginalised people—Adivasis, Dalits, and Muslims—with the BK case being the defining moment of what was a fairly well ingrained democratic culture.

What the research of the book revealed, by interviewing cyber forensic experts in the US who have mined the metadata of the BK case, was that it lit its first spark well before the Modi regime. For example, the prisoners’ rights activist Rona Wilson, who is one of the BK-16 and on whose computer various of the incriminating letters were found, including the letter which claimed that the BK-16 were trying to assassinate Modi... his computer was hacked from 2012, two years before the BJP came to power. Possessing the technological machinery to investigate activists is one thing, but utilising it in order to fabricate false evidence to prosecute them is another. Significant lesson for the activists in the book is to wage resistance for Dalit rights or Adivasi rights irrespective of who was in power. The issues remain the same. It was the Congress government that welcomed the big multinational cor-

Readers are requested to note the changed address (new) of our website
www.frontierweekly.com

April 14-20, 2024

FRONTIER

5

porations into Adivasi lands which led to the counter-insurgency operations when Adivasi villages were razed to the ground .So these activists were a thorn in the flesh for the state.

Compared to NGOs or media organisations, which have physical institutions and sources of finance and infrastructures, activists like the BK-16 are based on social movements at the grassroots. Thus they are so dangerous because as they have projected an alternative way of evaluating the country, fighting for a model of India which is in 360 degree contrast to the regime in power. They have the capacity to garner people together and they can disperse them, penetrating social movements as well as the ability to connect to powerful voices. The state can't just kill them, like they do the indigenous peoples in the forests, so it brands them as "Urban Naxals" and incarcerates them.

Most illustratively Alpa Shah narrated how the mob in the Koreagaon riots were all part of the pro-Hindutva forces, how Stan Swamy was murdered which was camouflaged, how Dalits in January 2018 when commemorating bicentenary of heroic battle of Bhima Koreagaon, which was the last battle against the upper castes ,were brutally attacked. Alpa Shah gave illustrative life sketches of activists like Mahesh Raut, Arun Ferreira, Vernon Gonsalves and Sudha Bhardwaj, portraying them as genuine revolutionary democrats.

The book revealed how important international economic and financial organisations patronised weaponising the crushing of democratic rights activists---protection of government supporters committing atrocities, capture of state institutions like judiciary, use of cyber warfare to wipe out democratic dissent, implantation of evidence at a

higher level, complicity of media and highest levels of government sponsoring organised terrorism against activists,

The book salutes the brilliant lawyers that have been fighting the cases of human rights defenders like the ones at the centre of the book, the judges that have been sympathetic to their arguments, and the many independent journalists and researchers on the ground displayed death defying courage, in defending the social movements for justice in spite of facing grave state repression.. She also feels it is imperative to place international pressure on India with the UK and the US having profound influence on people's thinking in India.

The book does not do proper justice to the autocratic nature of the Indian state since 1947 and how only a genuine people's democratic revolutionary alternative or mass revolutionary resistance of the workers and peasantry can overturn the proto-fascist tide. It is an illusion that democracy flourished before and only in BK-16 time it was overturned.

An erroneous understanding in this book is that democracy collapsed in 2018 during Bhima Koreagaon. It forgets the genocidal attacks on democratic rights under the Congress regime on naxalites in Bengal and later Andhra Pradesh, Sikhs in Delhi, Dalit castes in Bihar , civil rights activists in Andhra Pradesh, or on railway workers in 1974. It is untrue that India had genuine parliamentary democracy in the regime of the Congress or that genuine democracy flourished in 1947, or true secularism existed. It was the Congress government under the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that described the naxalites as the biggest threat to internal security of the country. The Modi administration is just maintaining that tradition with medieval brutality. □□□

FRONTIER

44, Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006

Phone: (033) 2530-0065

Mail: frontierweekly@yahoo.co.in

frontierweekly@hotmail.com

Site: www.frontierweekly.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

Make payment by Cheque/Draft
in favour of
GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.
or
FRONTIER [GERMINAL
PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.]

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

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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

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

Beneficiary Name:

GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.

Bank Name: CENTRAL BANK OF INDIA

Address: 8, Lenin Sarani, Kol-700013

Branch: Esplanade Branch

Current Account Number: 3116713216

IFSC Code: CBIN0280098

Swift Code: CBININBBCAL

OR

GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.

Bank Name: PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK

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

Branch: Jorasanko Branch

Current Account Number: 0085050001319

IFSC Code: PUNB0008020

Branch Code : 0008020

Swift Code: UTBIINBBOBC

OR

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

Bank Name: PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK

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

Branch: Jorasanko Branch

Current Account Number: 0085050001378

IFSC Code: PUNB0008020

Branch Code : 0008020

Swift Code: UTBIINBBOBC

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

To

FRONTIER

C/o Durbar Mahila Samanawya Committee

44, Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006

West Bengal, Contact : 8240016324

CURTAILING FEDERALISM

‘One Nation, One Election’

Bibhudatta Pradhan

INDIA HAS MOVED A STEP towards holding simultaneous elections for parliament, state legislatures and local bodies that could end the country’s relentless cycle of voting—about six states go to polls each year.

A nine-member high-level panel headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind on March 15 recommended amendments to the constitution to hold national and regional polls together.

The move, supporters say, will save time and money while allowing political parties and governments to focus on policy and administration. However, critics say it would go against the federal structure and spirit of the Indian constitution, cloud local issues that get attention when state elections are held separately, and potentially turn all votes subsumed in the giant election exercise into a prime ministerial contest.

The panel’s recommendation won’t have any bearing on the national elections which will kick off in a few days—but the coming vote could set the stage for the plan’s execution five years from now.

Simultaneous elections are broadly aimed at ending frequent election cycles—about 30 polls were held for elections to states and union territories from 2019 to 2023, besides the 2019 general elections.

A single election would mean that voters would cast their ballot for electing members for all tiers of the government in one go, or at most on two days.

Elections were held concurrently for nearly two decades after 1951. The practice was disrupted in 1967 with the premature dissolution of

some state legislative assemblies. The practice of conducting simultaneous elections exists in some countries including Sweden, Belgium, Germany and the Philippines.

The idea to bring the practice back to India is not new. The Law Commission, which provides advice to the government, had recommended simultaneous polls in 1999—a quarter of a century ago.

Since he came to power in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been pitching the idea in public forums.

The panel in its 18,626-page report has outlined a phased approach to synchronise elections—beginning first with elections for the lower house of parliament or Lok Sabha and state assemblies, followed by elections to local bodies within 100 days of general polls.

The president of India will notify a date for the first sitting of the Lok Sabha after a general election. This date will mark the new electoral cycle.

The tenure of all state assemblies formed after that date will be curtailed to coincide with the subsequent general elections.

In the event of a hung house and a no-confidence motion, new elections will be held to constitute the new lower house of parliament or state assembly—but only for the remainder of the five-year term.

The move to hold simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and assemblies can be done by amending the constitution, without having to get it endorsed by state legislatures.

But for synchronising votes for local bodies with general elections,

amendments to the constitution will need the ratification of at least half of India’s 28 states.

The elections will also involve common electoral rolls and a single voter identity card for all polls.

Conducting simultaneous elections is possible, but the Election Commission of India will need three times as many electronic voting machines as it currently has, said SY Quraishi, former chief election commissioner.

It will also need many more than the 15 million polling staff and security personnel currently used for national elections, he said.

Of the 47 political parties that gave their opinions to the panel, 32 supported the idea, while 15 opposed it.

The main opposition Congress party told the panel that implementing simultaneous elections would result in “substantial changes to the basic structure of the constitution”, go against “the guarantees of federalism” and “subvert parliamentary democracy”.

The All India Trinamool Congress, which rules in the eastern state of West Bengal, said forcing state assemblies to hold premature elections just for the sake of simultaneous votes would be unconstitutional and would ultimately lead to suppression of state issues.

Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has supported the concept by arguing that about 800 days of governance are effectively lost over five years. Ahead of every election, the election commission announces what is known as the Model Code of Conduct: After that declaration, until the elections are over, relevant governments can’t enforce any new policies that might affect voter choices.

Simultaneous elections will spur growth, cool inflation and avoid disruption of supply chains, while also optimising resources spent on polling

April 14-20, 2024

FRONTIER

7

and encouraging large-scale voter participation, the panel has said.

But Quraishi, India's former election commissioner, argued that if many state assemblies are dissolved early just for them to hold new elections at the same time as the national vote, that would actually increase the total number of elections. And not just in the short run: If governments fall, and new elections are held for truncated tenures, that too would increase the total number of elections.

"It's not a very brilliant idea," Quraishi said.

Trilochan Sastry, founding member of the Association of Democratic Reforms, a group that advocates for greater political transparency and accountability, echoed Quraishi's worries. And if India wants to cut the rising cost of elections, it can do so by capping campaign spending by parties, Sastry said.

Simultaneous polls could also give an advantage to the party ruling at the national level, said Quraishi.

According to a study by the IDFC Institute, a think tank, there is a 77 percent chance an Indian voter would support the same party at the federal and state level if elections are held simultaneously.

Political accountability activists also argue that frequent elections might actually be good—they put

pressure on governments and parties to stay on their toes and remain sensitive to voter concerns.

Elections in India are costly affairs—the world's most expensive.

Election expenditure by political parties and candidates for simultaneous polls could be 10 trillion rupees (\$121bn) for five years starting in 2024, said N Bhaskara Rao, chairman of the New Delhi-based Centre for Media Studies. Of these, 1.2 trillion rupees (\$14.5bn) will be spent for this year's general elections. Most of this spending is unaccounted for.

About 3 to 5 trillion rupees could be saved if simultaneous elections idea is adopted, said Rao.

The panel said simultaneous elections could help a 1.5 percentage point increase in GDP, which is equivalent to 4.5 trillion rupees (\$54bn) in the financial year 2024, half of the public spending on health, and one-third of that on education.

Still, some argue that costs alone can't be a determining factor for holding all polls together. The Congress party told the panel that the "argument that cost of conducting elections are extremely high seems baseless" and described it as "the cost of free and fair elections to uphold democracy".

Very possibly, if Modi's BJP-led coalition comes to power with a clear majority after the April and

BOOKS BY T VIJAYENDRA

Just Released

REQUIEM FOR OUR TIMES Rs. 100

AFTER ALL IT IS ONLY HIM!

AND OTHER STORIES Rs. 70

AN INTELLIGENT BIRD'S GUIDE TO THE BIRDWATCHER AND OTHER STORIES

Second reprint Rs. 40

THE LOSERS SHALL

INHERIT THE WORLD

Third Reprint Rs. 60

REGAINING PARADISE:

TOWARDS A FOSSIL FUEL FREE

SOCIETY Rs. 120

THE TEACHER AND

THE CHILD LABOUR Rs. 50

For Copies Contact :

MANCHI PUSTAKAM

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

Secunderabad 500017

Email: info@manchipustakam.in

Cell: +91 73822 97430

May parliamentary elections. Ratification by states won't be difficult as the BJP alone controls 12 of India's 28 states and has allies ruling several others.

The BJP is in pole position for the 2024 general elections. Opinion polls suggest the BJP-led alliance will win with a clear majority.

Simultaneous polls have been an electoral promise of the BJP. And if the party returns to power this year, this transformation of Indian electoral democracy could become a reality in 2029. □□□

[Source: Al Jazeera]

MORE ON CAA

How to Make People Stateless

Atanu Chakravarty

THE MODI GOVERNMENT'S announcement for implementation of Citizenship (Amendment) Act [CAA] after notification of Rules in the cusp of Lok Sabha election has again become a centre of heated debate and discussion all over the country. Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 was enacted four

years ago. The Central Government has now notified the Rules laying down the procedures for granting of citizenship under the Act. Needless to say, this notification is brazenly unjust, violative of India's constitutional secularism, discriminatory and divisive.

Once, the Union Home Minister

coined his infamous 'chronology' when he stated that CAA is a precursor to a nationwide NRC- NPR, aimed at denuding undocumented citizens of their citizenship right. This anti constitutional act will grant citizenship to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian "illegal immigrants" from countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who entered India on or before December 31, 2014. The Act excludes Muslims from its purview and what is highly objectionable, discriminates

against them based on their religion alone. The government wants people to believe that this Act will give fast track citizenship to persecuted persons, but intriguingly, there is no mention of persecution in the statute or Rules nor any proof of persecution is asked for by the Rules prior to granting of citizenship.

Regardless of religion, Indian Constitution confers citizenship by way of birth, descent and migration which are mentioned in Articles 5,6,7, 8,9, and 10. These are the underpinnings of the basic feature, the secular nature of the Constitution. The Citizenship Act, 1955 which was enacted by the Parliament does not make religion a criterion for the grant of citizenship. With the amendment and Rules, citizenship will be granted by naturalisation based on religion and religion alone!

The notification says that a long list of 9 documents have to be submitted with the application to prove that the applicant is a national of Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan. No such document is called for to prove persecution per se.

An applicant who has entered

India on or before December 31, 2014 has to submit any of the 20 documents listed in Schedule 1B. One wonders, whether the same liberal approach would be used for persons claiming to be Indian citizens when the National Register of Citizens (NRC) is prepared.

Prior to these Rules, an application seeking citizenship was to be made to the district collector concerned, but now this federal structure of administration has been highly centralised. Now an applicant seeking benefit of the CAA has to submit his /her application before the empowered committee formed by the Central Government.

More than 200 petitions have challenged CAA in the Apex Court on the ground that it violates Article 14 which upholds that, "the State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of laws within the territory of India". Article 14 applies not just to citizens but to all persons.

The CAA denies equal benefit of fast tracking citizenship by registration or naturalisation to similarly placed Muslims.

The question remains: If CAA was aimed at protecting and granting citizenship for the vulnerable, why not it brings the Rohingyas from Myanmar, the Ahmadiyas from Pakistan or even Tamils from the Sri Lanka under its purview? It is a proven fact that Muslims belonging to different sects in those very countries are persecuted by members of its own community that dissent from the mainstream politics. Ahmadiya Muslims in Pakistan are one of the most persecuted minorities. If the sole aim of CAA is to confer the benefit of fast track citizenship to persecuted minorities, then why the persecuted sections mentioned above are left out?

The past NRC experience of Assam, the ongoing demolition drives across the country clearly shows that poor and vulnerable of every community, the Adivasis, the forest dwellers had to bear the brunt, the tragedy of thousands of 'stateless citizens' was the cruel destiny of NRC-NPR. associated by suicide deaths, detention camps, grievous mental trauma.

This assault on Constitution must be resisted at any cost—come what may! □□□

THE LEGACY OF BRITISH RAJ

Plight of Denotified Tribes

B K Lodhi

[The National Human Rights Commission organised an important Open House Discussion on 19 January 2024 for the protection of human rights of the communities rebelling against British rule, called 'Denotified Tribes'. The Author, Dr B K Lodhi, former Deputy Secretary, National Commission for DNTs delivered a speech as a guest Speaker. Following is an abridged version of the speech.]

THE IDATE COMMISSION has prepared a state-wise list of Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes of 36 States/ Union Territories as per the Letter of Resolution (TOR) submitted by the Government of India. The Commission has identified a total of 425 Denotified Tribes, 810 Nomadic Tribes and 22 Semi-nomadic Tribes

across all the states. Thus, the total number of DNTs (Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-nomadic Tribes) is 1257. Out of these, 269 Communities are not in any category of reservation and 89 DNTs either converted their caste or hid their caste identity due to not getting the benefit of reservation and social stigma was still adhered to them. DNTs are

the most backward and marginalised people of the society. During colonial rule, these communities were notified as hereditary Criminal Tribes under the series of CTA, 1871-1924. After independence, the Government of India repealed the CTA, 1924 on 31 August 1952. Since then these stigmatised communities were called Denotified Tribes.

Entire DNTs may be divided in 3 sections:

1. Settled Denotified Tribes
2. Nomadic Denotified Tribes. (These both are stigmatised communities).
3. Non-stigmatised Nomadic tribes are also in India who have adopted a nomadic lifestyle due to culture and tradition.

April 14-20, 2024

FRONTIER

9

Though after repeal of CTA, 1924 the legal stigma of criminals has been removed from Ex-Criminal Tribes but the social stigma still adheres to them. Because in place of CTA, Habitual Offenders Act was imposed on the so-called Ex-Criminal Tribes in the same year, when CTA was repealed i.e. in 1952 itself. Though many states also repealed the Habitual Offenders Act, but there is no change in the behaviour of society and administration. Due to the prejudices of society and bureaucrats towards these communities, no effective positive policies are made in their favour; even if policies are made, they are not followed.

Even today, these people are an additional source of income for the police administration and an easy way to arrest these innocent people and send them to jail instead of catching the real criminals. Most of DNTs are in the SC, ST & OBC but being extremely backward they could not compete with other SC, ST and OBC. DNTs' shares are exhausted by others. The Justice Rohini Commission was constituted to sub-classify the OBC quota and the commission has also submitted its report to the Hon'ble President of India. Similarly, for the DNTs; SC, ST and OBC quota should either be sub-classified in proportion to DNT's population or a third 'Schedule for DNTs' should be created. Such a recommendation has already been made by the Idate Commission.

Government of India and State Governments are running various schemes for upliftment of DNTs. To avail benefits meant for them they need first Denotified Tribe Caste Certificates / Domicile or residence Certificates / Identity Cards / Voter ID / BPL card etc. Strangely enough the governments of U P and M P do not issue a Vimukta Jati Certificate to the DNTs.

The DNTs are facing social discrimination and atrocity by the police and denial of legal documents by the administration. Most of them are voiceless, landless and homeless. Representation of Nomadic and Semi-nomadic Tribes in the parliament and in the state's legislative assemblies even in the local panchayats is almost zero.

Amalgamation of Denotified (both settled and nomadic) Tribes and non-stigmatised Nomadic Tribes in one class is impractical and against the will of each other. The Non-stigmatised Nomadic Tribes sadly say that their ancestors were innocent; they never committed crimes, so they should not be included amongst the Denotified Tribes; they raise the objection to being called Denotified Tribes.

On the other hand, stigmatised Nomadic Tribes and settled Denotified Tribes do not like to be included in the same category. Whereas both the communities were notified as criminal tribes by the colonial rulers. Nomadic Tribes fear

that the entire benefit of government schemes will be taken away by the settled Denotified Tribes because they are comparatively more powerful. The Settled Denotified Tribes also believe that their ancestors were actually freedom fighters. They were fighting against British rule and not ordinary suspected criminals like the nomadic tribes.

The biggest challenge faced by DNTs is that there is no constitutional commission at the national level to hear their complaints and problems. Technical Advisory Group-2006, Renke Commission-2008, Idate Commission-2018 and NITI Aayog have recommended to the Government of India in June 2018 for the formation of a permanent and constitutional National Commission for DNTs. Since the Chairperson of NITI Aayog is the Hon'ble Prime Minister himself, DNTs hope that a National Commission will be constituted for them likewise NCSC, NCST, National Commission for Minorities, NCBC. At present, Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Community Development and Welfare Board (DWBDNC) has been constituted under the Society Registration Act 1861 under the Ministry of Department of Social Justice and Empowerment.

Till the formation of the National Commission which is pending, a separate powerful wing should be formed in the National Human Rights Commission to hear their cases on priority basis. □□□

'ELECTION PROPAGANDA'

Pro-Modi Films Flood Market

Hannah Ellis-Petersen

THEY ARE FILMS THAT claim to tell the "real story" of India's history, taking aim at the evils of "leftists" and "intellectuals" and even the freedom fighter Mahatma Gandhi.

As Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) seek a third term in April-May elections, a feverish pro-government momentum has gripped 'Bollywood', blurring the lines between entertainment and

political campaigning in India's largest film industry.

Almost a dozen new films promoting the prime minister and his government's Hindu nationalist policies and ideology have been released or will come out at cinemas in coming days and weeks. The election, which will determine the direction of the country for the next five years, begins on 19 April and will run for six weeks.

Film critics and analysts have accused several titles of pushing Islamophobic narratives and debunked anti-Muslim conspiracies, and targeting “urban naxals”—a derogatory term some Hindu right-wingers use to describe leftwing activists and intellectuals. Some in the industry have raised concerns that these films will be used to further divide India along religious lines.

One film produced by a BJP MP is so incendiary in its portrayal of Muslims that it has faced court action to try to prevent its release.

The flurry of pro-government films is reminiscent of the build-up to the 2019 election, when a biopic of Modi was deemed to be so positive about the prime minister that the election commission halted its release before the polls.

Sayandeb Chowdhury, a professor of literature at Chennai’s Krea University who has written on Indian cinema, described the films as “brazen propaganda which are deliberately creating wounds and fault lines to serve the government’s political agenda”.

He pointed out that Modi and

WOMEN AND CYCLE IN INDIA

**Joy, Mobility, Freedom
and Empowerment**

Author: Bicycle and Women Collective

Editor: Karnika Palwa

Production: Hema Vaishnavi

Price: Rs 80

Copy Left: All Rights Reversed
Publishers: Ecologise Hyderabad
110, Ramanaiah Apartments,
Road No. 2, Jyoti Colony,
Secunderabad-500026,
Telangana, India

Email: t.vijayendra@gmail.com

Mobile: +91 94907 05634

For Copies:

MANCHI PUSTAKAM

12-13-439, St. No. 1

Tarnaka, Secunderabad 500017

Email: info@manchipustakam.in

Mobile: +91 73822 97430

other government officials had directly referenced many of the films in their speeches. “Cinema has become a form of political mobilisation” he said.

One of the prominent titles about to hit Indian cinemas is a biopic of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a divisive Hindu nationalist leader and activist Modi has lauded and who fought against British rule. His writings, however, promote violence against Muslims and express sympathy for the Nazis and Italian fascists.

Article 370, released last month, is an unabashed celebration of Modi’s decision to strip Kashmir, of its statehood, portraying him as a decisive figure saving India from violence and corruption. Modi praised the film while critics called it “factually incorrect”.

Another film takes aim at Jawaharlal Nehru University, an institution known as a hub of leftwing thought and activism. The film, Jahangir National University, which comes out in April, tells the story of a campus where “leftists waging love jihad”—a debunked conspiracy against Muslims—and “urban naxals are trying to divide the country”.

Chowdhury said the releases spoke to a larger trend in Bollywood in which the film industry had been aggressively co-opted over the decade of Modi’s rule, despite historically remaining apolitical.

He lamented that Bollywood, which had long united people across India’s vast religious and cultural differences, was being weaponised to sow discord, to great effect. “If cinema itself becomes a tool of division, one of India’s more cherished unifying symbols is in danger of being lost forever,” he said.

While films propagating the BJP’s narrative are being released with increasing regularity, streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon have faced legal threats and had

series and films removed for being seen to be critical of the government.

Chowdhury said the turning point had been the 2022 release of *The Kashmir Files*, which claimed it would tell the real story of the expulsion of Hindus from the region. Despite its negative portrayal of Muslims and accusations that it was a polarising distortion of history, it was the biggest blockbuster hit of the year.

It has prompted a number of similar films claiming to portray history, largely involving the demonisation of Muslims, which have been seen as part of a wider BJP project to rewrite the narrative of India’s past.

The most recent release is *Razakar: Silent Genocide of Hyderabad*, which was accused in a court filing of being Islamophobic for its distorted portrayal of a Muslim leader. Similar to the *Kashmir Files*, the producer has claimed the film is “100% accurate” with no commercial embellishments.

Raja Sen, a film critic and Bollywood screenwriter, told the Associated Press that many filmmakers were jumping on the bandwagon, realising the potential for major box office success of polarising films that generate public discussion.

“The scary part is that these films are being accepted now”, Sen said. “It is truly frightening”. □□

[Courtesy: *The Guardian*]

Subscribe & Read

PURBASHA EKHON

A Monthly Literary &
Progressive Bilingual International Magazine

SUDHU PURBASHA

A Bengali Fortnightly Tabloid

Chief Editor

NIRMAL BRAHMACHARI

Published from:

INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATION

85, B.B. Ganguly Street, Kolkata-12

Phone: 7980937798

Email: nirmal_brahmachari@hotmail.com

News.purbasha@gmail.com

DELIBERATE DESTRUCTION

'It's a Death Zone'

Taj Ali

Daisy Schofield

IT'S A DEATH ZONE,' SAID Athanasios Gargavanis, a trauma surgeon for the World Health Organisation, upon reaching the now defunct emergency department of Nasser medical complex. There were dead bodies in corridors, no tap water at all and no electricity beyond a small backup generator. At least eight patients had died due to lack of oxygen.

This was the grim outcome of Israel's brutal siege on the barely functioning hospital in the Southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis. Two weeks earlier, 14-year-old Ru'a Atef Qadeeh was shot dead by Israeli snipers in front of the Hospital gate while desperately trying to fetch water from a nearby location. A further twenty-one Palestinians in the vicinity of the besieged hospital were killed by Israeli snipers in the days that followed.

During a raid on the hospital, medical personnel were interrogated, and more than seventy healthcare workers were reportedly detained by Israeli forces. 'I have lived three days of hell, along with my patients', said one surgeon. 'What happened to doctors, patients and internally displaced people here is unbelievable, even in your worst nightmares.'

Doctor Ahmed Moghrabi, who was forced to leave Nasser Hospital in the middle of the night with his family, described families being chased by Israeli military dogs as they evacuated. In an interview with Al Jazeera, he detailed how the Israeli military abducted his head nurse, demanding that he take off his clothes. 'At midnight, it was

cold... He was screaming because they used to beat him.'

Gaza Medic Voices, an organisation set up by international medics to provide first-hand accounts from Gaza, shared the following testimony from a nurse at the time: 'They tied our hands behind our backs, on our knees, our heads on the floors...thirteen hours without food, water, or the bathroom even.'

Far from being an isolated incident, Doctor Rebecca Inglis, an intensive care doctor and co-founder of Gaza Medic Voices, says that the attacks on healthcare workers are systemic. 'The use of violence and degrading treatment against doctors, nurses and paramedics are recurring themes in the testimonies we have collected.' Inglis says detainees are being denied family contact, medical care and legal counsel. 'There is a complete lack of transparency regarding their whereabouts. This is in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.'

She describes horrific examples of torture and doctors being 'specifically targeted' by Israeli forces. 'They were forced to strip. There were a variety of forms of humiliation. They were getting hit in the face, there were dogs involved, there was electricity involved—absolutely horrendous things were happening,' she says.

Inglis says she has been in contact with a colleague who was held in detention alongside the head of Al-Shifa Hospital, Doctor Mohammad Abu Silmiyeh, who was abducted while supporting the transfer of ambulances and buses of patients from the hospital to southern Gaza.

IDF soldiers reportedly undressed the male medical staff and left them in the cold for hours. Many were arrested and taken to an unknown place. Soldiers assaulted medical staff and left them without food or water during the month of Ramadan when they were fasting.

Today, there are no functional hospitals in Gaza. Just twelve remain partially functioning and they and the staff who work in them remain under constant attack.

Before embarking on a medical mission in Rafah last month with Doctors Without Borders (MSF), anaesthesia specialist Doctor Birsen Gaskell was briefed about such dangers. 'I was told [by MSF] that I might be hit by shelling or be a victim of an explosion,' she recalls. Birsen was also told multiple times that she could 'change [her] mind' and leave the two-week mission even after she'd crossed the border into Rafah. 'This increased my anxiety levels,' she says.

Approaching the border, Birsen could hear the explosions and see clouds of smoke just a few kilometres away. When she arrived in Gaza, Birsen says her 'whole reality changed'. 'I'd mentally prepared, but when you see it in real life, it's a lot more intense than you expect.'

'There is no clean water. There is no sanitation. There is no electricity. There is no schooling—kids are everywhere. There is no vaccination. There is no primary health care,' says Birsen. 'The order of life as we know it has just completely collapsed.'

As they endeavour to treat patients in these catastrophic conditions, medics say they feel especially vulnerable to attacks. Birsen had to treat two of her colleagues who'd been attacked in the hospital that they worked in, leaving them severely wounded. 'They had limb frac-

tures, head injuries—one of them had lost an eye,’ says Birsen. The staff were then arrested—one for forty-five days, the other one for two months—during which time they had received no treatment other than paracetamol tablets. When they reached the hospital, Birsen said that they had ‘severe complications.’ She is unsure if they will survive.

Deliberate Destruction

Under a brutal siege for over sixteen years, operating in Gaza with limited resources has always been a challenge. Israel controls the electricity going into the strip and can therefore cut off the supply when it chooses, leading to frequent power outages in hospitals. It also limits medical supplies reaching Gaza. At the end of 2021, 40 percent of essential drugs and 19 percent of medical disposables were reportedly at ‘zero stock’, meaning less than

one month’s supply was available at Gaza’s Central Drug Store. Since October 7, these conditions have worsened ‘a thousand fold.

Medics in Gaza are also contending with severe overcrowding: there are reports that some hospitals in southern Gaza are operating at over 300 percent of their bed capacity. ‘[Patients] were literally put on the floor in the corner of the emergency room and left to die because there was nowhere else for them to go.

The overcrowding in medical facilities is contributing to the soaring rates of infectious disease in Gaza. The World Health Organisation has reported at least 369,000 cases of infectious diseases since the war began—a staggering increase from before October 7.

The scarcity of food poses additional risks for patients recovering from burns and trauma injuries.

‘They need a lot more calories in order to heal because they need to regenerate skin,’ says Birsen. ‘Maybe more than half of [the people we were treating] actually had old injuries, but they were just not healing well, and we were just treating the complications.’

Inglis sees the torture of medical staff as part of a wider, deliberate effort to restrict life-saving care for Palestinians in Gaza. ‘The systematic destruction of the healthcare system in Gaza appears to be a central tenet of the Israeli government’s military strategy,’ she says. In the words of a doctor from Al Shifa when asked why he thought the hospital was being targeted: “Al Shifa Hospital is the heart of Gaza’s healthcare system. You stop the heart, and starve the population, you kill Gaza”. □□□

[Source: *The Tribune*]

WHERE IS PRESS FREEDOM?

Journalists are Killed

Caroline Houck

EVAN GERSHKOVICH, A Wall Street Journal reporter and the first American journalist to be arrested in Russia on espionage charges since the Cold War, woke up to his second year in prison on March 29..

“Russia is ranked 164th out of 180 countries in the last Press Freedom Index,” Cavalier pointed out. “It dropped another nine places last year, in the worst category of the ranking where the press freedom situation is classified as ‘very serious.’”

But it would be short-sighted to think that brazen attacks on the media stop at Russia’s borders.

The most egregious example of what happens when there’s a sense of impunity over attacks on journalists is the Israel-Hamas war.

As the Committee to Protect

Journalists (CPJ) noted in December, 68 journalists were killed in the first 10 weeks of the war—more “than have ever been killed in a single country over an entire year.”

That tally has only grown since.

Gaza was already a difficult place to conduct independent journalism, given Hamas’s harassment, intimidation, and physical abuse of reporters. And war zones are obviously dangerous for all civilians, reporters included.

But Israel has said it cannot guarantee journalists’ safety in Gaza and has denied international reporters access to the territory. Even more concerning: Critics say the Israel Defence Forces also appear to have a pattern of targeting journalists.

“In at least one case, a journalist was killed while clearly wearing press

insignia in a location where no fighting was taking place”, CPJ reported. “In at least two other cases, journalists reported receiving threats from Israeli officials and IDF officers before their family members were killed”.

This builds on years of broader restrictions and harassment of the media, including 20 killings of journalists by Israeli fire over the last two decades. Israel has opened investigations into many of these deaths, to be sure, but no one has ultimately been held accountable.

One notable example: In 2022, Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was killed as she was reporting for Al Jazeera on an IDF raid in the West Bank. Independent media investigations indicated it was a deliberate attack by IDF soldiers.

Israel says there is a “high possibility” a soldier shot Abu Akleh but there was “no suspicion that a bullet was fired deliberately.” (The US response to the killing of one of its

citizens was slow to materialise; only six months after her death did reports break that the US had opened an investigation into her killing).

Yes, wars are dangerous to report from. With one exception, “the countries with the highest number of journalists killed for their work in any given year”—Syria in 2012, Afghanistan in 2018, Ukraine in 2022, and Somalia in 2012—were at war or amid an insurrection, per CPJ data.

But this isn’t exclusive to war zones.

Anywhere there’s a struggle for power or even just a lot of money at stake, the media is at risk—be that from the state, non-state actors (like cartels, terrorist groups, or business interests), or an unholy union of the two.

Nowhere is that clearer than in Latin America and the Caribbean.

- In Guatemala, for example, Q’eqchi’ Mayan journalist Carlos Choc has been subjected to years

of legal intimidation and persecution in response to his reporting on the country’s mining industry.

- In Haiti, there are questions over whether a powerful prosecutor covered up—or even ordered—the murder of a popular radio journalist.
- In Ecuador, where gangs have been fighting over a newly lucrative narco industry and defying the government with increasing impunity, letter bombs were delivered last year to at least five TV and radio journalists. (Thankfully, no serious injuries were reported).
- In Mexico, right before Abu Akleh’s killing, three journalists were killed in the span of three days. I’m highlighting it as a stark example of the dangers that reporters, especially those who cover politics or organized crime, face in Mexico—the most dangerous country for media workers for three years running before the

outbreak of the Ukraine war.

- In Brazil, British journalist Dom Phillips was murdered alongside a Brazilian activist while reporting for a book on the destruction of the Amazon. It is part of what the Guardian described as “the increasingly violent atmosphere that has gripped Brazil since the 2018 election of a president who has overseen what activists call a historic assault on Indigenous rights and the environment”.

This profession has never been safe. But until a decade ago or so, there was at least a sense that journalists had a recognized role in reporting from even the world’s worst conflicts—and that role afforded them some protection.

The last couple of years have felt particularly grim, and the outbreak of two wars by two governments, both known to operate with impunity toward reporters, is an obvious turn for the worse. □ [Source: VOX]

LETTERS

Red Wave in JNU

The United Left Panel has emerged victorious in the JNUSU Elections held after a gap of four years on March 22. The results are a decisive mandate against the right-wing ABVP and the politics of communalism and hatred.

The President, Dhnanjay of AISA, won with a total of 2,598 votes in his favour, and a lead of 922 votes. Avijit Ghosh of SFI won the post of vice president securing 2409 votes and for the post Joint Secretary, Md Sajid of AISF won with 2574. Meanwhile, Priyanshi Arya of BAPSA was elected as General Secretary securing 2887 votes. After the last-minute cancellation of candidature of left panel candidate Swati Singh of DSF for the post of Joint Secretary, the United Left issued the call to support Priyanshi to ensure 'Not an Inch to ABVP'.

At a time when the BJP government along with the ABVP had been constantly attempting to destroy JNU’s democratic ethos and idea of inclusive education, the result of JNUSU elections have reverberated across the country. The election witnessed highest voter turnout of 73% with 5,656 students participating in the voting process.

ML Update Women Behind Bars

The number of women inmates in Pakistan’s prisons is rising. Accusations of blasphemy and limited economic opportunities for women are among the reasons behind the increase.

Bricklayer Rafiq Masih and his four children have been living in fear since August 2021, when his wife was arrested in Islamabad for allegedly committing blasphemy.

Having lived in Pakistan’s capital for many years, the Christian minor-

ity family had to move to the adjoining city of Rawalpindi to live a low-profile life for their own safety.

Shagufta Kiran, 48, a nurse, was moved into detention on the charge of making derogatory remarks about Islam in a WhatsApp messaging group.

“During a discussion, some Muslim members of the WhatsApp group found Shagufta’s words about the teachings of Islam blasphemous, made screenshots and reported them to police”.

Like Kiran, most women prisoners in the country are awaiting trial, according to Pakistan’s Ministry of Human Rights. Women make up 1.5% of the prison population in Pakistan.

Jamila Achakzai, Pakistan NATO 75

Hastings Ismay, the first Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, or NATO, once quipped

that the goal of the alliance was "to keep the Soviets out, the Americans in, and the Germans down".

Today, the Soviets are out, the US seems here to stay, and the Germans are weaker by the day. Yet NATO continues to exist. Since it was founded on 4 April 1949, it has been a force for reaction, division, and war—both in Europe and beyond.

NATO's mission was never just about "containing communism". From Angola to Guinea-Bissau, Western Sahara to Palestine, NATO's fingerprints been found on the frontlines of major colonial wars—working to preserve and expand the US and European imperial reach further afield.

At the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru condemned the alliance as "one of the most powerful protectors of colonialism". Years later, after NATO destroyed Libya, Cuban revolutionary Fidel Castro called it "the most perfidious instrument of repression known to mankind".

That is why, as NATO prepares to hold its 75th anniversary, progressives are calling for a Global Day of Action Against NATO — and joining forces with other progressive organisations planning events around the date. As of today, there are 12 actions planned across six countries scheduled between 30 March and 7 April, with more on the way.

Pawel Wargan
Campaign Coordinator
Progressive International
March 29, 2024

Arvind Kejriwal

The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) strongly condemns the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the alleged excise scam. This marks another chapter of the Modi regime's unbridled emergency and the conspiracy to stifle opposition and democratic voices in the country.

Arvind Kejriwal is the second elected Chief Minister after Hemant Soren of Jharkhand who has been arrested under politically motivated allegations which are far from being proved. In Delhi, other leading Aam Aadmi Party leaders—Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and Member of Parliament Sanjay Singh—have also been arrested in the recent past under the same allegation as the Chief Minister. As is the norm these days, none of them have got bail and remain in jail despite no charge-sheet or trial in sight.

Since 2014, when Modi came to power, around 95 percent of the ED related cases have been against opposition leaders. Clearly, this pattern reflects the politics of vengeance by unleashing ED against those who speak against the Modi regime's anti-people policies.

Over the last few years, the Bharatiya Janata Party led union government has brazenly used the federal investigative agencies like the ED and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to harass and intimidate opposition leaders across the country. Leaders of non-BJP state governments have been key targets. Recently, bank accounts of the Indian National Congress have been frozen.

Arvind Kejriwal's arrest comes at a time when the BJP government is under the scanner for its use of electoral bonds to acquire vast amounts of wealth from big corporations. The Supreme Court recently declared these bonds unconstitutional and their details have been recently made public. Kejriwal's arrest seems like a desperate but draconian method to try and flip the narrative.

The arrests, intimidation and harassment of the opposition in the weeks preceding the Lok Sabha elections show how little the government cares about democratic processes. Given the scale of unrest in the country due to discriminatory and undemocratic laws, state-sponsored

majoritarian violence, soaring inequality and unemployment, and unprecedented accumulation of wealth and power by big corporations, the government fears that peoples' anger may upset their applecart in the elections. Hence, it is leaving no stone unturned to eliminate any effective opposition.

CPIML demands that Arvind Kejriwal, Hemant Soren, Manish Sisodia, along with other opposition leaders, must be immediately released. CPIML appeals to all opposition parties to strengthen their unity in this difficult hour and with the support of the Indian people give the ruling party a fitting rebuff in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

CPIML-Liberation NRC in Assam

For those entangled in the NRC process and facing exclusion, it's a profoundly life-altering experience, irrespective of the outcome. CJP has been acutely attuned to this reality since the inception of Team Assam over five years ago. Our approach extends beyond offering crucial legal aid in foreigners' tribunals and courts. The CJP team engages in dialogue, counseling, and delivers both paralegal and direct legal counsel to those in need. This is how we endeavor to mitigate the hardships faced by individuals caught in the upheaval of the citizenship crisis.

A total of 18 success stories in 2023 alone, with all being declared Indian by Assam's Foreigners Tribunal through the year. But what does it take, for a paralegal and legal team to achieve this? CJP's Team Assam, as this detailed document reveals shows grit and dedication in collating and submitting authentic documents, presenting cogent Written Statements and finally vital Witnesses, in person!

Meet CJP's Team Assam: their determination, authentic documentation, compelling statements, and crucial witness testimonies made it happen!

April 14-20, 2024

FRONTIER

15

Key Achievements: Our dedicated team of 8 District Volunteer Motivators (DVMs) operate across two dozen districts in the state, reaching out to 5/6 affected families every week.

Services provided include psychological and legal counseling, documentation assistance, para-legal aid, and connecting with our team of five district-level lawyers, each supported by two junior lawyers.

Geographical Reach: Our DVMs are actively involved in 12 districts, collaborating with a wider network of community volunteers in three additional districts, including the Barack Valley.

Success Rate: Through these concerted efforts, we have achieved an impressive success rate of 15/20 cases annually, with individuals successfully obtaining their Indian citizenship.

Explore the most common queries surrounding the Assam citizenship conundrum with our Frequently Asked Questions. Delve into Understanding the Citizenship Crisis in Assam for clear insights.

Citizens for Justice and Peace Crackdown on Opposition

“The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led Indian government’s crackdown on peaceful dissent and opposition has now reached a crisis point. The authorities have repeatedly exploited and weaponised various financial and terrorism laws to systematically crackdown on human rights defenders, activists, critics, non-profit organisations, journalists, students, academics and political opposition. The arrest of Arvind Kejriwal and the freezing of Indian National Congress’ bank accounts a few weeks before India holds its general elections show the authorities’ blatant failure to uphold the country’s international human rights obligations.

“The growing crackdown clearly

shows the authorities’ blatant disregard for human rights and rule of law. Authorities must respect, protect, promote and fulfil the human rights of everyone in the country including human rights defenders, activists, and opposition candidates before, during and after the general elections which are due to begin in April 2024. Authorities must also ensure access to justice and effective remedies for victims of human rights violations.

“State institutions must be allowed to function independently and effectively. Authorities must stop weaponising the criminal justice system to intimidate and harass human rights defenders, activists and opposition candidates”.

The AAP and INC are together part of the I.N.D.I.A. group forming the main political opposition in the country.

On 31 January, Hemant Soren, now-former Chief Minister of Jharkhand state and member of the opposition party Jharkhand Mukti Morcha was also arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on charges under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act and continues to be in jail.

India’s deteriorating human rights situation, in particular the crackdown on government critics ahead of the upcoming General Elections has been criticised by the United Nations and its special rapporteurs and most recently by the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission in a hearing held on March 21.

**Amnesty International
22 March 2024**

Justice News & PMARC

It is a crucial time and we need your support.

We are approaching you all after a long gap due to unfortunate situations before us which may compel us to temporarily suspend our intervention for a while.

We are facing acute crises for resources and suffering debt also.

Since 2007, we have successfully continued our interventions with the support and contribution of people committed to social justice and Democracy.

Justice News (justicenews.co.in) and Dalit Media Watch are our major interventions that played a major role and contributed to the issue of social justice and democracy.

Our interventions played a major role in sensitizing and making awareness to civil society, HR mechanisms, mainstream media, academics, and political parties. Due to our interventions thousands of victims got relief from different commissions, particularly from NHRC.

We are also playing a major role by coordinating and disseminating discussions and information on mainstream struggles.

It is a very tough time for all democratic and social justice forces. It is our collective responsibility to save and allow our intervention to continue.

Therefore we appeal to you all to please consider some contributions that allow us to continue our interventions.

Your support will strengthen the process of social justice and democracy.

Our Bank details:

PEOPLES MEDIA ADVOCACY & RESOURCES CENTRE-PARC

Account No. 0302010179713

Punjab National Bank

IFSC code: PUNB0030220

Hazratgang, Lucknow, UP, India

Arun Khote

Dalits Media Watch Team

(An initiative of “Peoples Media Advocacy & Resource Centre-PMARC”)

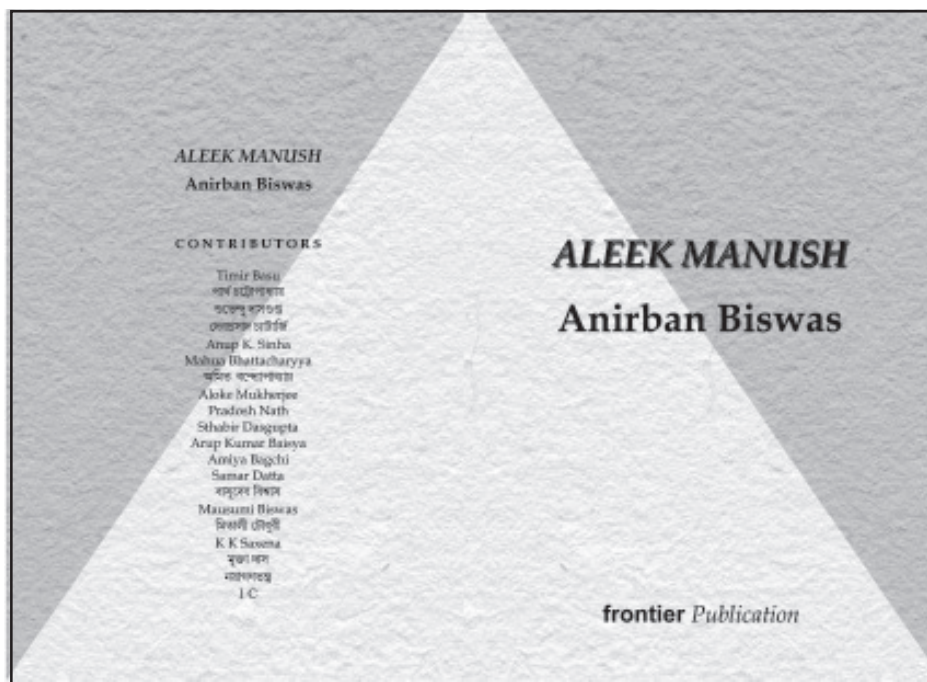
For Frontier Contact

PATIRAM BOOK STALL

College Street

A **frontier** Publication

Just Released



ALEEK MANUSH

Anirban Biswas

COMPILATION TEAM:

TIMIR BASU, ARUP SEN, NABINANDA SEN, TARUN BASU

CONTRIBUTORS:

TIMIR BASU, PARTHA CHATTOPADHYAY, SHUBHENDU DASGUPTA,
DEBAPROSAD CHATTERJEE, ANUP K. SINHA, MAHUA BHATTACHARYYA,
AMIT BANDYOPADHYAY, ALOKE MUKHERJEE, PRADOSH NATH, STHABIR
DASGUPTA, ARUP KUMAR BAISYA, AMIYA BAGCHI, SAMAR DATTA,
BASUDEB BISWAS, MAUSUMI BISWAS, MITALI CHOWDHURY, K K SAXENA,
MUKTA DAS, NAYAGANATANTRA, I C

Available at:

Frontier Office, Patiram Stall (College Street), Dhyانبindu
and other book stalls selling issues of frontier.

Contribution: INR 100