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The 'Colonial Question' Returns

THE LEFTISTS IN BENGAL ONCE RAISED THE ISSUE OF HOW the Centre was exploiting states almost in colonial style. They even described the states as greater municipalities in relation to the Centre in terms of financial anomaly. But they abruptly stopped their campaign against the Centre in the middle for reasons best known to them. In other words it was the long-standing demand of revision of centre-state relations, particularly in mechanism of fund disbursement. In recent months people have seen vociferous protests from some of southern states on the issue of devolution of resources from the centre to these states.

The argument about unfairness in the distribution of resources emanates from the fact that southern states contribute more to the union revenues and receive far less as transfer through the Finance Commission route, compared with their northern counterparts. Just on the eve of General Elections some non-Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP] ruled states raised the issue against the BJP's discriminatory policy. The BJP is basically a north Indian party, having social base, mainly among traders—the Bania community. They have reasons to keep their voters happy. Since income generation is a spatially interdependent activity, use of collection for the purpose of tax-sharing would disproportionately benefit the high-income states and seriously undermine redistribution.

Not that Congress regimes were free from centre-state controversy. But the centre-state drift has only widened under the Modi-rule since 2014 despite tall talk of cooperative federalism. The centre's sharing of federal funds through GST and other means has been a bone contention for long. And the Modi government has aggravated it. The southern states reportedly contribute 31 percent of GDP but they get back only 18 percent of funds allotted to them. India is not a federal democracy. Nor will it be in future because the trend is more about centralisation of powers at the centre.

In many ways the Modi government looks like the East India Company, looting resources of some states while ignoring their legitimate demands. Budgetary allocation is not the only area where the centre executes its discriminatory practice. Over the years central investment, rather public sector investment remained the principal mechanism to create jobs on mass scale and favour some states. In this regard eastern states may complain against the centre for its bias for southern states. Being the Border States eastern and north-eastern states are being denied investment in heavy

industry and defence sector. In today's modern warfare the idea of Border State makes little sense. For one thing the Centre's discriminatory policy has been going on since the days of Nehru and in the saffron regime it has been intensified.

Meanwhile another simmering discontent is brewing over delimitation. Come 2026 a major change is expected to take place regarding the size of India's constituencies. The

delimitation exercise was to happen in 2001 but the then Atal Behari Vajpayee government froze it for 25 years. And some south Indian states are going to lose seats. They now blame it on population control. After delimitation, Tamil Nadu may lose 7 seats and Kerala 5 seats while UP may gain 8 seats, Bihar 6 seats and even Rajasthan 5 seats. In electoral democracy what finally matters in parliament is number. And

more seats in north India means more seats for BJP.

If the Centre refuses to allocate funds from out of the revenue collected by it from the people residing in various states in a rational and reasonably proportionate measure the logical conclusion will be the rise of multiple separatist tendencies. The pet theme of terrorism and terrorists won't work.

□□□

COMMENT

Too Many Babas

THE RAPID RISE OF MANY Godmen across the country is a dangerous trend. They did have a social presence earlier also but lately their political clout was quite frightening. Many of them had a dark belly also, but by and large that has been overlooked and shadowed by the large divinity surrounding them. Shakaracharya Jayendra Saraswati was accused of murder of Ashram worker, Shankar Raman. In Satya Sai Baba's Prashanti Nilayam also there was a murder case. Gurmeet Ram Rahim carried on with his activities, one journalist Chhatrapati Ramchandra was killed for bringing forward his black deeds. Finally with difficulty law caught up with him and currently he is in jail, rather most of the time on parole. Asaram Bapu is another one who succeeded in escaping the clutches of law till a

long time and finally he is behind the bars. Currently another one Bageshwar Dham Baba is having a roaring success with devotees. The riches of most of these are enviable.

There are two others who are worth mentioning—Sri Sri Ravishankar, who rampaged the Yamuna for his gala event. He was also associated with Anna Hazare's RSS supported movement. He is in the news generally for subtly supporting Hindu nationalist politics. And then there is Baba Ramdev. He began his career as a Yoga Guru with great success and then made transition to business with the brand of Patanjali. This firm, producing and marketing Ayurvedic products has brought Baba in the line of front ranking business tycoons, with huge assets. He and his close associate Acharya Balkishan have built up a massive empire, un-challenged till lately.

Matters came to head during Covid 19. On one hand the ruling government made hefty donations for the Pune based Bharat Biotech for their Covaccine. On the other hand, within a month of the outbreak of Pandemic, Baba came up with the claim that they have developed a medicine called 'Coronil' for treatment and prevention of the dis-

ease'. The claim was that it has the approval of WHO. When challenged by the Ayush ministry, they corrected themselves to say that it has been developed on the guidelines of WHO. Ayush ministry distanced itself from the claims of Baba. The Combo pack of Coronil was introduced with great fanfare in presence of two Cabinet ministers, Dr Harshvardhan and Nitin Gadkari. There is currently a blind praise of ancient systems.

Overawed with his commercial success, he not only accepted the praise from most of the Godi media, he took a step further to call Allopathic a stupid science. Irked by this the Indian Medical Association (IMA) filed a case against him, which was heard recently. First he apologised to IMA for insulting the modern medicine. Just to recall when he sat on a hunger strike against corruption, he claimed that he has a 'Yoga body' and he can withstand the fast for a long time. Within a few days his condition worsened and was admitted to an allopathic hospital.

Despite Court' warning, his firm continued misleading advertisements. Court summoned him. He apologised profusely. Court refused to accept his apology and asked him to mend his ways and come back again. The Supreme Court has done well to put a small stop to this ascending 'Baba' trend in the field of medicine. □□□

[Contributed by Ram Puniyani]

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NOTE

Revival of Planning Commission

B D writes:

WHILE A WIDE RANGE of issues are being discussed in the ongoing election debates in India, one issue which has not received the attention it deserves relates to the possibilities of reviving the Planning Commission.

The idea of planned economic development was discussed even in the course of the freedom movement of India by such stalwarts of the independence struggle as Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose. Soon after independence the Planning Commission was set up at the Centre while state-level Planning Commissions were set up subsequently in various states. As many as 12 Five-Year Plans were subsequently prepared in the period up to the decade of the 2010s, with only a very short 'planning holiday' in between.

While no one will argue that the planning process was perfect or that it did not have its share of problems and flaws, on the whole this planning made an important contribution to the economic development of the country. However soon after the Bharatiya Janata Party-led NDA government assumed power in 2014, without much ceremony or preparation it abolished the Planning Commission. What was most surprising was the haste with which such an important decision was taken so soon after assuming power, as though this was a pre-determined decision.

Had planning suddenly become less important for economic development? In fact it can be argued that on the contrary, planning has become even more important now with the deepening of the environmental crisis. To give an example, earlier the basic issue revolved around meeting the needs of all people within certain resource constraints. Now there is the additional important issue of how this is to be achieved while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Clearly this calls for more detailed and careful planning, not less.

Reducing inequalities on a sustained basis is also best achieved in conditions of planned economic development.

The existence of the Planning Commission had also provided a means of increasing possibilities of certain correctives being applied or at least flagged whenever wrong decisions were taken or things started going wrong.

Due to these and other reasons there is a strong case for the revival of the Planning Commission as well as the preparation of Five-Year Plans to guide the process of planned economic development in the country.

Over the decades, the Planning Commission had become too involved in working in a routine way so that truly innovative and liberating economic reforms were rarely on

NOTICE

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its agenda in more recent times. On the other hand, at the international scene, in several countries one sees several exciting experiments being made and some very refreshing efforts of re-imagining economic development which are quite different from conventional thinking.

In particular, the Planning Commission and the planning process should be much more committed to inclusive development and to increasing equality at various levels in more sustainable ways.

In addition there is very exciting work waiting to be done in the context of incorporating various environmental concerns, particularly those relating to climate change, in economic development. As Sunderlal Bahuguna used to say in his inimitable way, ecology is permanent economy (economy of permanence).

This is a time of re-thinking and re-imagining economic development in keeping with the needs, very urgent needs, of contemporary times. □□

'NO' TO EVM-VVPAT

Bring Back Ballot Papers

Sandeep Pandey

AS ELECTION FEVER RISES and political parties get busy with campaigning, one issue that refuses to die even after elections

have been declared is that of the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) and the accompanying Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT). Outside

the government establishment and the ruling party circles, there is widespread disenchantment with the EVM-VVPAT system. An ordinary illiterate villager from Hardoi, Unnao, or Sitapur districts of Uttar Pradesh will tell you that she is not sure where her vote is going after she presses the EVM button. Banarsi, a resident of Village

Chandpur Faridpur in Mehmoodabad tehsil of District Sitapur says that in the last election he pressed the election symbol of the Elephant on EVM but saw Lotus in the glass of VVPAT and therefore doesn't have any faith in EVM.

An Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi and New Jersey trained engineer Rahul Mehta, who also runs a political party by the name of Right to Recall Party, has designed a machine where he demonstrates how the black glass, introduced in 2017, hides how votes are stolen by EVM and VVPAT combine. A voter when casts her vote will be able to see the symbol in VVPAT to which she has voted. But while every vote to the preferred symbol is printed as a separate slip inside VVPAT, for consecutive votes to any other symbol only the first vote is printed, shown to the remaining consecutive voters by a light bulb which goes on for 7 seconds inside the VVPAT for each voter and rest of the votes are printed as the preferred symbol. This is how the machine has been programmed. To make the preferred symbol win the election by stealing votes from other candidates.

Now Rahul Mehta is not claiming that this is what actually happens in the EVM-PPVATs used by the Election Commission of India but he is

just demonstrating a possibility of how votes can be stolen if somebody decides to do that. Neither is he claiming that this is being done everywhere. But if the ruling party wants, with the help of sympathetic computer programmers, systems managers, and officials, it can manipulate the machines in some constituencies, especially where it fears losing by small margins.

There are a range of voices against EVM and proposed alternatives. Right now only five booths in an assembly constituency, which has roughly 300 booths, are randomly chosen to tally the figures from EVM and VVPAT. Some people demand the 100% counting of VVPATs should be done and tallied with EVM figures. However, Rahul Mehta's contraption shows that votes can be manipulated in both the EVM and VVPAT and can perfectly tally without revealing that votes were stolen from candidates who stand opposite to the preferred party candidate. Some others suggest that VVPAT slips should be handed over to the voter who then should deposit it in a box that has no electronic chip and these slips should be counted. Now, if we're going to count slips printed by VVPATs collected in an ordinary box, we might as well count the ballot papers after they have been stamped by the voter and deposited in a ballot box. What is the need to keep the EVM-VVPAT between the voter and the paper slips/ballot paper? EVM-VVPAT becomes redundant in this case serving no purpose like efficiency or quick results for which it was brought in, in the first place. It'll be there merely as a showpiece just to make us feel good that we're using modern technology. Mahatma Gandhi's views on automobiles apply here very well. He said transportation is a human need, not its rapidity. Why can't we spend some extra time and effort but ensure that the elections are free and fair?

Hence it appears that bringing ballot papers back for assembly and parliamentary elections is the most wise solution. The local bodies' elections are anyway held with ballot papers. This implies that bureaucratic machinery to conduct polls with ballot papers is already in place. The Election Commission does not print ballot papers even in assembly and parliamentary elections for government employees who have to vote through postal ballots and senior citizens above 85 years of age who vote from their homes. Hence what is needed is to print ballot papers in larger numbers. Several countries, including developed ones, have gone back to the ballot paper. The argument against ballot papers that they too could be stolen holds less weight now with the availability of cameras. In the Chandigarh Mayoral elections fudging of ballot papers was caught on the camera. Had the same thing been done through the EVM-VVPAT it would not have been caught as what happened inside the machine is hidden from everybody, including the unsuspecting officials overseeing the polls.

However, what may happen if a significant number of citizens decide to participate in the Satyagraha from many constituencies, the Election Commission of India may be forced to think of, if not removing the EVM-VVPAT completely, at least providing the option of ballot paper to people like this writer who have no trust in the EVM-VVPAT system.

There is hope from the court. If the Supreme Court can show the determination it has in the case of electoral bonds and can instruct the ECI to conduct polls through ballot papers or at least provide the option of the ballot paper to those asking for it, the problem will be solved. □

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'A JOINT EDITORIAL'

Nuclear Winter

Bharat Dogra

HIROSHIMA, AUGUST 6, 1945: Father Kleinsorge, a German missionary, heard pathetic voices of people asking for water. When he managed to reach the place from where the voice had come, he saw nearly 20 persons, all of them in similar condition - their faces were wholly burned, their eye sockets were hollow, the fluid from their melted eyes had run down their checks.

It is images such as these from Hiroshima and Nagasaki which lead several people to conclude that the luckiest people in a place hit by an atomic bomb are those who die instantly.

Temperature at the hypocentre of the explosion reaching the double of what it takes to melt iron, the face of a schoolgirl sitting almost a kilometre away from this hypocentre being burnt beyond recognition, skin sloughing off scalded bodies, badly injured starving people unable to swallow anything because of the stench of dead bodies - this was the devastation caused by a 12.5 Kiloton bomb in Hiroshima which killed and wounded as many people as a mass raid of 279 aircrafts, laden to capacity with bombs, striking at a city ten times as populous.

Nearly one hundred thousand people were killed within a few minutes in Hiroshima and Nagasaki after being hit by nuclear weapons in 1945, but if one counts the longer-term deaths, those caused by internal bleeding, leukaemia, various other forms of cancer, then the death toll is likely to be as high as 3,50,000. In addition the next generation continued to pay for this cruelty in the form of children born with mental retarda-

tion, physical deformities and other serious health problems.

So cruel was the devastation that people must not want it to happen even to their worst enemies.

Despite this, the incredibly dangerous and cruel fact remains that humankind now possesses nuclear weapons which are many times more powerful than the ones used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and efforts are constantly on to increase the destructiveness of these weapons.

Some of the most eminent medical journals (including *The Lancet*, *BMJ* and *JAMA*) recently took an almost unprecedented initiative to together publish a joint editorial on August 1, 2023 asking for the elimination of nuclear weapons in view of their unacceptably high risks. What should be particularly welcomed is that they have taken the stand of elimination of nuclear weapons and not just of de-escalation or reduction, for as long as there are nuclear weapons there will be at least some possibility of their actual use as well.

This editorial has pointed out, on the basis of studies, that a large-scale nuclear war between the USA and Russia could kill 200 million people or more in the near term and potentially cause a global 'nuclear winter' that could kill 5 to 6 billion people, threatening the survival of humanity.

This editorial also stated that once a nuclear weapon is detonated, escalation to all-out nuclear war could occur rapidly. This is particularly important to consider at the present juncture when the risk of actual use of nuclear weapons has increased compared to any other period in the past three decades or so.

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This risk has been frequently discussed and serious fears over it expressed by several eminent experts in the context of the ongoing Ukraine conflict. Here four nuclear weapon countries can be involved—Russia, USA, Britain and France. Of course USA nuclear weapons are also deployed in several other European countries as well and to that extent these also get involved but the weapons are under the control of the USA.

USA, France and UK are unlikely to knowingly start an attack on Russia and similarly Russia is unlikely to knowingly attack USA, France or UK because of the huge risks and likelihood of equally destructive retaliation. However the risk of tensions, suspicions and brinkmanship extended over a long time leading to start of unintentional nuclear war, based on misunderstanding of each other's intentions and some accidental event on top of it is possible. As pointed out earlier once this starts this can very quickly lead to a bigger exchange of nuclear weapons. The situation is

not like the one in 1945 where there was to be no retaliation and it was well known by the aggressor also that there will be nothing beyond the use of two nuclear weapons as far as the attack on Japan was concerned. Now the present situation is a very different one as people do not know where it will stop when it starts. Also the speed which the nuclear weapon now travels towards its target also gives very little time to correct very costly mistakes.

The second possibility that has been discussed is whether Russia will at some stage use tactical or relatively smaller nuclear weapons against Ukraine. This is very unlikely today. Russia's security doctrine is that it will use nuclear weapons only if there is serious risk to its freedom, sovereignty and survival. Hence risks of nuclear weapon by Russia arises only if NATO escalates risks for Russia beyond a certain red line. However views can differ on how the red line is perceived or identified, and this is why the risk of nuclear war also remains present in this conflict zone.

In the middle of all the irrational

Russophobia in the West and in particular among the ruling elites there, if the ultimate result of all the efforts to corner and surround Russia proves increasingly successful (which appears highly unlikely just now), the final impact will be only to compel Russia to exercise the nuclear weapon option. Then if this results in the USA or NATO also using nuclear weapons against Russia, and Russia retaliates, again nobody knows where this will end. This brings out also the sheer absurdity, and of course the extreme danger, of the NATO strategy of encircling and bleeding as big a nuclear weapon power as Russia as much as possible, instead of using diplomacy to sort out all differences.

The second highest possibility of use of nuclear weapons will be when the USA shifts more of its aggression towards China at some point in future, as has been widely discussed. If the Korean region is to become a flashpoint of such a confrontation, then apart from China one more nuclear weapon power will be involved here in the form of North Korea.

While this is for the future, the

threat perception in just the Ukraine conflict by itself is so serious as to prompt warnings from several senior experts time and again. When the possibility of destruction likely to be caused is so huge, even a 5 to 10% increase in the possibility of use of nuclear weapons should be taken very seriously, and what has happened recently is a somewhat bigger increase in this possibility. As world leadership does not appear to be fulfilling the trust reposed in it for protecting people all from the worst possible destruction on earth, it is time for the people worldwide to come forward to make the peace and disarmament movement so strong that the leadership also comes under increasing pressure from people to move towards a path of a safer present and future. In the vision of the peace movement, one of the topmost priorities should be for the elimination of nuclear weapons as well as for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction. □□□
[The writer is Honorary Convener, Save the Earth Now Campaign. His recent books include *Planet in Peril*, *Protecting Earth for Children*, *Man over Machine* and *A Day in 2071*.]

DISASTER CAPITALISM

'The Great Nicobar Betrayal'

Pankaj Sekhsaria

[Following is an excerpt from the introduction of Pankaj Sekhsaria's forthcoming book 'The Great Nicobar Betrayal'—a compilation of articles]

IN A SET OF DEVELOPMENTS that have unfolded with unprecedented speed and uncharacteristic co-ordination over the last three years, there has been a huge push for a mega development plan for Great Nicobar, the southern-most island in the Andaman and Nicobar group. The centre piece of the plan, euphemistically labelled the "Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island", is a Rs.40,000 crore transshipment port, with additional com-

ponents being an international airport, a power plant, and a greenfield township spread over more than 130 sq km of pristine forest.

The ecologically rich island is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The project seeks to increase the population of the island from the current 8,000 people to 3,50,000 (a 4,000% increase) over the next 30 years and also envisages the cutting of nearly a million trees in a largely pristine and untouched rainforest ecosystem.

Piloted by the NITI Aayog, the project is estimated to cost a whopping Rs72,000 crore. The process started in September 2020 with the NITI Aayog's request for proposals (RfP) and the subsequent release in March 2021 of a 126-page pre-feasibility report (PFR) by international consultant AECOM India Pvt Ltd. Vimta Labs, based in Hyderabad, was contracted to prepare the environment impact assessment (EIA) report, the draft of which was released in December 2021, marking the completion of the first formal stage of the process. The draft EIA report (not unexpectedly) had many problems, and researchers and NGOs from across the country raised nearly 400 concerns related to ecological, rights

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of the indigenous communities and the tectonic volatility and disaster vulnerability of the island. Not much of this was accounted for when environmental clearance was finally granted by the Environment Ministry in November 2022. A few weeks earlier, in October, the ministry also granted Stage-1 (in-principle) forest clearance to the project via a process marked by a complete lack of transparency and multiple violations of law and due process.

A similar lack of concern is visible in other aspects of the proposal, such as those related to the rights of the indigenous communities of the island via violations of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation (ANPATR) 1956, and the Forest Rights Act, and the deep disaster vulnerability of this island considering it stands on a major fault line.

The concerns with the environmental and forest clearances were taken to the National Green Tribunal (NGT), which failed completely to understand the scale of what is at stake and what we seek to lose if the project is allowed to go through. The NGT did constitute a committee with a limited remit to look into some aspects of the project clearances. Unfortunately, and in violation of the principles of logic and natural justice, it was made up of members representing the very agencies and institutions that have pushed the project and granted the various permissions in the first place. The report of the committee is still awaited but nothing can really be expected from that.

In parallel developments, authorities announced that 10 "notable" agencies, including Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) Ltd, JSW Infra Ltd, Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd (RVNL), Container Corporation of India Ltd, and the Dutch dredging major Royal Boskalis Westminster,

have submitted expressions of interest (EoIs) for the construction of the port.

Concerns over the project, discussions in the media, and questions in Parliament have thrust the remote, little known, and even less understood Great Nicobar Island into the national limelight like never before. The only other time it made it to the headlines in national papers and in primetime news was when it faced the unimaginable wrath of the earthquake and tsunami of December 2004.

It is not even two decades since and it can only be considered Great Nicobar's great betrayal and huge misfortune that this pristine island, its invaluable biodiversity, its original human inhabitants, the thousands of crores of investment, and the more than 300,000 non-islanders who might eventually live here are deliberately and knowingly being put in harm's way. There cannot be a folly more monumental than this.

One of the hopeful aspects in the entire saga is the dogged interest in and coverage about the project in the media. Thanks to this, there is a large body of writing that covers nearly all aspects—environmental and ecological, geological, rights of the local communities, as well as law and due process—of this disaster in the making.

The Great Nicobar Betrayal is a quickly put together compilation of a selection of this writing. The pieces are carried as they were originally published with only minor editing interventions, some small changes to ensure consistency, and in some cases changes in the original titles for purpose of brevity and design considerations.

Needless to say, a compilation such as this can never be a neat one and has its limitations. The hope, however, is that it will give the reader a quick but comprehensive enough picture of this disaster that is being perpetuated in Great Nicobar. □□□

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WHY DEACTIVATION?

Legal Points Regarding Aadhaar

I Mallikarjuna Sharma

PER AADHAAR ACT, "(V) "resident" means an individual who has resided in India for a period or periods amounting in all to one hundred and eighty-two days or more in the twelve months immediately preceding the date of application for enrolment;"

Every resident is entitled to receive Aadhaar card and it is not mandatory for him to be a citizen of India.

However, if a person who has enrolled and has been given Aadhaar card on the basis of his statement and whatever verification by authorities at that time, but he does not actually fulfil the requirements/conditions of residence as stipulated in the Act, would the government/authority take no action against that person?

The Unique Identity Authority of India (UIDAI), is a statutory authority established under the provisions of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016 ("Aadhaar Act 2016") on 12 July 2016 by the Government of India, under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY). The Aadhaar Act 2016 has been amended by the Aadhaar and Other Laws (Amendment) Act, 2019 (14 of 2019) w.e.f. 25.07.2019.

UIDAI was created to issue Unique Identification numbers (UID), named as "Aadhaar", to all residents of India. The UID had to be (a) robust enough to eliminate duplicate and fake identities, and (b) verifiable and authenticable in an easy, cost-effective way. As on 29th September 2023, the Authority has generated 138.08 crore Aadhaar numbers

to the residents of India.

Under the Aadhaar Act 2016, UIDAI is responsible for Aadhaar enrolment and authentication, including operation and management of all stages of Aadhaar life cycle, developing the policy, procedure, and system for issuing Aadhaar numbers to individuals and perform authentication and the security of identity information and authentication records of individuals.

"10. Notification/Acknowledgement of authentication or off line verification to Aadhaar number holder.— (1) The Aadhaar number holder shall be notified by the requesting entity about any authentication, through email and/or SMS and/or other digital means and/or paper based acknowledgement about success or failure of authentication on each request. Such notification/acknowledgement shall include requesting entity's name, date and time of authentication, authorised response code, last 4 digits of Aadhaar number and purpose of authentication, as the case may be. (2) The Aadhaar number holder shall be notified by the OVSE about any off line verification, through email and/or SMS and/or other digital means and/or paper based acknowledgement about success or failure of off line verification on each request. (3) In case of authentication failure the requesting entity should, in clear and precise language, inform the resident about the reasons of authentication failure such as Suspended/Cancelled Aadhaar or Biometric/Aadhaar Locking."

UIDAI framed its principal regulations which have been published in the Gazette of India, Extraordi-

nary, Part III, Section 4, dated the 9th November, 2021, vide Notification F. No. K-11020/ 240/ 2021/ Auth/UIDAI (No. 2 of 2021), dated the 8th November 2021, and were subsequently amended vide Notifications— (i) F. No. K-11020/240/ 2021/ Auth/UIDAI (No. 01 of 2022), dated the 4th February, 2022; (ii) F. No. HQ-13011/2/2021-AUTH-II (No. 01 of 2023), dated the 24th February, 2023 (published on the 27th February, 2023); and (iii) F. No. HQ-13073/1/2020-AUTH.II(E), dated the 29th September, 2023 (published on the 3rd October, 2023). In the principal regulations, Regulation 10 says: "10. Notification/Acknowledgement of authentication or offline verification to Aadhaar number holder.— (1) The Aadhaar number holder shall be notified by the requesting entity about any authentication, through email and/or SMS and/or other digital means and/or paper based acknowledgement about success or failure of authentication on each request. Such notification/acknowledgement shall include requesting entity's name, date and time of authentication, auth response code, last 4 digits of Aadhaar number and purpose of authentication, as the case may be. (2) The Aadhaar number holder shall be notified by the OVSE about any offline verification, through email and/or SMS and/or other digital means and/or paper based acknowledgement about success or failure of offline verification on each request. (3) In case of authentication failure the requesting entity should, in clear and precise language, inform the resident about the reasons of authentication failure such as Suspended/Cancelled Aadhaar or Biometric/Aadhaar Locking." This has been explained in a latest amendment to the Aadhaar Regulations dated 31 January 2024 in the following manner: "4. In the

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principal regulations, in regulation 10,— (a) in sub-regulation (3), for the words “failure such as Suspended/Cancelled Aadhaar or Biometric/Aadhaar Locking”, the words ‘failure, such as “Aadhaar cancelled”, “Aadhaar deactivated”, “Aadhaar locked”, “Aadhaar omitted”, “Aadhaar suspended” and “Biometrics locked”’ shall be substituted; (b) after sub-regulation (3), the following sub-regulation shall be inserted, namely:— “(4) In sub-regulation (3), the expression— (i) “Aadhaar cancelled” or “Aadhaar omitted”, in relation to an Aadhaar number, shall mean that such Aadhaar number

has been omitted; (ii) “Aadhaar deactivated” or “Aadhaar suspended”, in relation to an Aadhaar number, shall mean that such Aadhaar number has been deactivated; (iii) “Aadhaar locked”, in relation to an Aadhaar number, shall mean that such Aadhaar number has been locked as referred to in regulation 11A; and (iv) “Biometrics locked”, in relation to an Aadhaar number, shall mean that the biometric records related to such Aadhaar number have been locked as referred to in regulation 11.”.

Certainly those who have been informed of such cancellation or

deactivation etc. will have opportunity to protest and establish their true eligibility subsequently, and also the authentication process enables them to change any other information/details mentioned at the first instance.

It is not clear whether such deactivations or cancellations done so far are excessive and so numerous to warrant a suspicion that specific discrimination is being exercised against any community/section of the citizens or such acts are purely arbitrary and so hit by Article 14 of the Constitution".

□□□

ISRAELI JEWS AND PALESTINIANS

They Are ‘Standing Together’

Jon Wiener

['Standing Together' is an organisation of Palestinians and Jews in Israel working not only for a cease-fire and the rebuilding of Gaza but also for equality and security and social justice for Palestinians and Israelis, and for the establishment of a Palestinian state. It's the biggest Jewish Palestinian grassroots movement in Israel. Sally Abed is one of its leaders. She's a Palestinian citizen of Israel, and was recently elected to the Haifa City Council. Jon Wiener recently spoke with Sally Abed. Excerpts:]

Jon Wiener: Everybody wants to know what you would do about Hamas right now. What do you tell them?

Sally Abed: We need to ask ourselves, when was Hamas the weakest? Hamas was the weakest when the Palestinians had the most prospects for peace. That was in the '90s. That's when Hamas was the weakest.

When you talk about Hamas, you also want to talk about who needs Hamas, and the extremism on the other side that in many ways has created Hamas—through the blockade, through starvation over decades, through oppression over decades. That's what creates extremism. So if you really want to talk about Hamas, we also need to talk about the root cause of extremism. For the last decade and a half, Benjamin Netanyahu and the Israeli

government have negotiated only with Hamas, while completely neglecting and overlooking the PA, Palestinian Authority, in the West Bank. That was intentional.

Now, let's talk about Hamas and what can be done. We need to ask ourselves, did military solutions ever work? And the answer, the very simple answer, is, “No. Never. That never happened.” Trillions of dollars were put in the Middle East to eradicate extremism, and that never worked, even after millions of lives were lost and nations were destroyed. That didn't work. We still have ethnic apartheid. We have gender apartheid. We have ethnocracies all across the Middle East.

JW: Standing Together is not just an idealistic vision of a peaceful future for Israel and Palestine. You are organisers. You have a strategy for change. Tell us a little about that.

SA: We're actually not idealistic at all. We're ideological. We have a deep-rooted ideology of equality and social justice. And we have a theory of change, of how we do it. We acknowledge the hegemony of Israeli society and the control and the power differential that it has in this situation.

We understand that we need to build the political will within the Israeli public to end the occupation, to end the military control, and take real steps towards peace. To do that, you need a deep shift in the Israeli public that for many decades has been told that's not possible. “In order for us to be safe, we absolutely need to oppress, incarcerate, control, and kill Palestinians. We have to.” That's what they've been told.

Creating that shift has been almost a mission impossible. But October 7th, in many ways, shattered that conception—or at least challenged it deeply. We are at the point where we see ourselves as the social movement that will lead that shift in paradigm. I don't say that lightly. I don't say that to brag. In order to change reality and change institutions politically, socially, culturally, to shift a society, you need

to build a social movement. And that doesn't only require shouting the ugly truth, but organising people, building leadership, building the communities on the ground.

JW: I was surprised to see a report in Haaretz that "Standing Together's message of solidarity and vision of a shared future has been on a constant rise since the war started." How big is Standing Together right now?

SA: Not big enough. But we are definitely growing. I think in many ways we are operating in a vacuum, which is helping us. It feels lonely in many ways. But we have amazing partners. There is an amazing shared civil society ecosystem, but not a social movement that can compete with the right wing right now. Occupy, expel and resettle: That's their solution. We need to compete with that.

At the moment we are at 5,300 members. However, our support base is tens of thousands of people. There are over 250,000 Israelis, both Palestinian and Jewish, who subscribe to our newsletter. And we reach millions on our social media both

here and abroad. So we are definitely growing. Not enough, but we are seeing positive shifts in the Israeli public and how they receive our messaging.

JW: In Israel, you've been organising what you call Solidarity Conventions. Tell us about those.

SA: The Solidarity Convention was the very first reaction of our movement after October 7th. We understood that we have two main roles. One is to understand how can we build this new alternative idea for the public in Israel and compete against the right; but the immediate task was to de-escalate and create a space of solidarity, a space of shared grief—and shared future.

One of the most powerful things that you can do together, especially if you identify as two peoples that have been in an endless war, the most powerful thing you can do is to grieve together. Then you can also think together. You can dream together. You can act together. So we created a network of Jewish-Palestinian solidarity watches across the country that also led Jewish-Palestinian solidarity rallies. In Palestinian towns, Jewish towns, mixed towns and mosques. Even in wedding venues.

When we started, we weren't allowed to protest. It was illegal. Obviously, now it's different, and now our messaging has escalated and also our numbers have escalated. We were able to get from hundreds of people at the beginning to thousands of people right now that are rallying for a cease-fire agreement to stop the destruction and killing and return the hostages home, and obviously for peace and ending the occupation.

JW: I know you've been especially active on college and university campuses. What are the issues there? What do you do to help?

SA: College campuses are a cru-

cial space. With a segregated educational system, an Arab educational system and then a Hebrew one, younger Palestinian and Jewish students don't meet at all. The university is the very first meeting place in Israel for Palestinian and Jewish youth. In the last two decades, the universities have been depoliticised, while also being taken over by the right—the student unions, the student institutions, the university institutions.

In the last five years, Standing Together has been organising students on campuses. And we were very lucky to be able to have those communities already organised on our campuses in order to be able to tackle the hostility after October 7th. At that point hundreds of students were expelled from university, or were harassed physically and verbally on campus, especially Palestinian, Muslim women and men.

But we created a campus for all, a network of hundreds of students from different backgrounds across the country, and we created support groups there, legal support, social work support, and also the leadership necessary to create the safe spaces for us to work. And one exciting thing is that we have been running people for student union leadership, very much under the radar, with a lot of resistance, a lot of incitement and hate that our students have received.

We have been able to elect 14 different student representatives since October 7th on various campuses. Eight of them are Palestinian. That's amazing. We are getting to a point where we are the group on Israeli campuses with the most elected student representatives.

JW: I saw in The Jerusalem Post that you organised convoys recently to deliver food supplies to help starving Palestinians and Gaza. Tell us about that.

WOMEN AND CYCLE IN INDIA

**Joy, Mobility, Freedom
and Empowerment**

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SA: We tried to do that a couple of times. What's happening in Gaza with hunger is not being reported in Israel. So we wanted to deliver crucial aid to Gaza, but also create a wave of solidarity within the Israeli public around what's happening and increase the awareness of what's happening.

Unfortunately, the first time we were stopped 10 kilometres before the borders by the Israel Border Police. They announced it was a military area, so we weren't allowed to go in. At the same time, dozens of buses with hundreds of settlers from the West Bank travel every day from the West Bank to Gaza to block the aid trucks. Obviously, they have a free pass from the police. They are organised by the same minister who is in charge of the police.

We tried again the week after that. We got a little bit closer. We got into some altercations with the settlers, and the police did not have any intention of protecting us from these settlers, who are armed. We didn't want to put our activists in jeopardy. Instead we sent the food to the West Bank, where there are tens of thousands of families right now who are being collectively punished and not being able to come to Israel to work. They are heavily dependent economically on coming into Israel, and Israel revoked their permission to come. So we see a wave of unemployment and poverty and food insecurity in the West Bank right now as well. So we sent food there.

JW: Can you tell us a little about your own personal history? You are a Palestinian citizen of Israel. Did

you grow up in a political family? Did you learn about activism as a kid from your parents?

SA: I think there are very few Palestinian political families in Israel. My father was quite active with the Communist Party in the '80s, and then he got arrested. And then when he had us, he got a job, and he said, "OK, I'm done." Same with my mom. Both of them are government workers, so they submitted to the conditions. They assimilated completely, and that meant depoliticising completely.

I remember when I first started my activism; they were extremely worried about me. I think it's gotten better. I think they understand my passion for it. It's not even passion; it's like I don't know what else I would do. □□□

[Source: *The Nation*]

FACT AND FRAUD

Misinformation is a Strategy

Bhabani Shankar Nayak

IN THIS ERA OF AN ARTIFICIAL Intelligence-fuelled digital revolution, misinformation has emerged as a potent weapon wielded by both ruling and non-ruling elites. Their aim is often to undermine truth, dismantle democracy, sow division among people, and exert control over various aspects of life and resources on the planet. The reach of Deep Fakes extends far beyond celebrities, politicians, and industrialists; they now infiltrate everyday services and commodities that are consumed by the masses. This pervasive spread of deceptive information threatens not only public figures but also the trust and reliability of the information people rely on in their daily lives. As technology continues to advance, the challenge lies in distinguishing fact from fiction and ensuring that digital landscape

and society remains a trustworthy source of information for everyone.

Misinformation is not merely an accidental mistake; it is a meticulously crafted strategy designed to exploit the masses. This deliberate dissemination of false information serves to divert attention from the harsh material realities of capitalism, steering people towards a culture fuelled by emotion and falsehoods. In such an environment, it becomes increasingly challenging to engage with fact-based information that has a tangible impact on everyday human lives. This shift towards an emotional and misleading narrative undermines the foundation of informed decision-making, making it crucial for individuals to be vigilant and discerning in their consumption of information. As people navigate this complex landscape, the impor-

tance of promoting critical thinking and media literacy cannot be overstated, empowering individuals to distinguish between reliable information and deliberate deception.

Misinformation is disseminated widely across all mediums of communication, intentionally blurring the lines between fact and fraud. This strategy serves to amplify deception, foster misgovernance, and create a climate where accountability is sidelined. The pervasive nature of this misinformation campaign contributes to shaping a narrative where individuals are constantly confronted with false challenges and distorted realities. By muddying the waters of truth, those behind these campaigns aim to sow confusion, manipulate public opinion, and undermine the foundations of a well-informed society. This deliberate strategy to disengage with accountability not only erodes trust in institutions but also hampers the ability of individuals to make informed decisions that affect their lives. It fosters a culture where

misinformation thrives, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish between genuine information and deliberate falsehoods.

In such a deceptive environment, tobacco companies exploit the narrative of smoking being associated with smartness, while alcohol companies promote the supposed health benefits of drinking. Similarly, pharmaceutical companies market numerous unnecessary drugs under the guise of securing a healthy life. This false propaganda follows in the tradition of Goebbels, who famously stated, "if you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it." The fraudulent and misinformation campaigns orchestrated by these industries have little regard for truth; their primary objective is to weaken the foundation of truth and undermine the realities of life. By perpetuating falsehoods and manipulating public perception, these entities prioritise profit over the well-being of individuals and society as a whole. This insidious manipulation not only distorts public understanding but also erodes trust in legitimate sources of information. As a result, it becomes increasingly challenging for individuals to make informed choices about their health, contributing to a cycle of misinformation and exploitation.

For Frontier Contact

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Misinformation fuels all forms of authoritarianism by undermining democracy and leaving citizens ill-informed or misinformed. This deliberate spread of false information serves the interests of both ruling and non-ruling elites, enabling them to govern the masses without facing democratic accountability. In this context, misinformation acts as an escape route for the elites, allowing them to manipulate public opinion and maintain control over societal narratives. By controlling the flow of information and shaping public perception through misinformation, these elites can influence elections, suppress dissent, and consolidate power without the checks and balances that a well-informed citizenry would demand. This erosion of democratic principles and practices poses a significant threat to the fabric of democratic societies, as it undermines the fundamental rights of citizens to make informed decisions and hold their leaders accountable. So, combating misinformation is not just a matter of correcting false information; it is a crucial step in safeguarding democracy and ensuring that governance remains transparent, accountable, and responsive to the needs and wishes of the people. By promoting media literacy, fostering critical thinking, and holding purveyors of misinformation accountable, people can work towards creating a more informed and resilient democratic society.

Misinformation serves as a tool for demagogues and dictators alike, exploiting the trust of ordinary people who often lack the means to verify the authenticity of information shared on digital platforms. In an age where information is readily accessible but not always reliable, the hardworking masses find themselves at the mercy of false narratives propagated by those with ulterior motives. Meanwhile, some intellectuals lazily label

this era as one of "post-truth," suggesting that truth and realities have become obsolete concepts. However, post-truth has little to do with truth; instead, it is a deliberate strategy employed by both governing and non-governing elites to shape public opinion and delegitimise factual information. By manipulating the narrative and spreading misinformation, these elites seek to maintain their grip on power without facing scrutiny or accountability.

This deliberate distortion of truth not only undermines the public's ability to make informed decisions but also erodes the foundations of democratic society. It is essential to recognise the dangers posed by the deliberate spread of false information and to actively work towards promoting a culture of transparency, accountability, and factual integrity. By doing so, one can help safeguard democracy and ensure that the voices of ordinary people are not drowned out by the cacophony of falsehoods propagated by those who seek to manipulate public opinion for their interests. The power of misinformation campaigns based on fake news is undeniably potent in today's digital age, capable of undermining both life and truth. However, it's crucial to remember that this influence is not insurmountable nor permanent. While misinformation and fake news may obscure the truth, they cannot ultimately destroy it.

History stands as a silent yet steadfast witness to the ebb and flow of power and the enduring nature of truth. Time and again, the inherent resilience of truth has prevailed over deception, and the efforts of those who sought to manipulate public opinion have been exposed and defeated. □□□

Readers are requested to note the changed
address (new) of our website

www.frontierweekly.com

Of Drug Prices and Super Profits

Arun Mitra

PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES have been a bone of contention around the globe. Exorbitant profiteering in this industry should not be a priority. But around the world, these companies are making huge profits at the expense of people's health. There is enough data to support super profits by the pharmaceutical companies. During the COVID-19 pandemic when people were dying in large numbers, the vaccine-making companies made huge profits. Not only that, they forced many developing countries that do not have the resources or technical know-how to make vaccines, to accept the conditions laid down by these companies. These included the clause of no civil liability of the company in case of any adverse reaction to the vaccine. They also made the governments mortgage their properties as a guarantee.

India has been no better. Aparna Gopalan in an article in *The Intercept* published on 19th June 2021 has pointed out that for each dose sold to private hospitals, Serum made profits of up to 2,000 % and Bharat Biotech up to 4,000 %, what might be considered as "super profits". In India, 38 new billionaires minted enormous money in the first year of the pandemic, while the combined wealth of the country's 140 billionaires went up by 90.4 %.

After much outcry on the drug prices by the health activists the Government of India formed a Committee on the High Trade Margins in the Sale of Drugs on 16th September 2015. The committee submitted its report on 9th December 2015. The committee pointed out that on some medicines the profit margin

was up to 5000%. As a remedy, it recommended capping the trade margins and came out with the proposal of graded trade margins concerning the Price to Trade (PTT). According to their proposal, no capping of the trade margins was recommended on the product with a value of Rs 2 per unit i.e. per tablet, capsule, vial, injection, tube, etc. But at higher unit prices i.e. on the product from Rs 2-Rs 20 per unit a capping of 50% and from per unit price Rs 20-Rs 50 a capping of 40% and above Rs 50 per unit it recommended a capping of 35% on the trade margins. Even though the committee submitted the report in December 2015, the government has been just sleeping it over to date.

The World Health Assembly recommended in 1988 that Pharmaceutical marketing practices should be controlled, checked, streamlined, and made ethical. As a follow-up, the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Government of India formed a code for pharmaceutical companies named as Uniform Code for Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices (UCPMP) on 19th March, 2012. This made recommendations for the Pharmaceutical companies so that they adopt ethical practices like promoting only evidence-based drugs desisting from over claims and avoiding irrational combinations which can be harmful. However, the UCPMP mentioned that the code will be voluntary for 6 months after which it will be reviewed and made mandatory if it is found to be not being followed properly by the pharmaceutical companies. The worldwide experience however has shown that voluntary codes are hardly practised. They have to be made legally binding.

Now the government has come up with a new UCPMP on 12th March 2024. Even this new code is not mandatory. It has again asked the companies to voluntarily implement the rules of the code. Companies have been asked to form ethical committees. Their associations too have been asked to form ethical committees. However these committees have a conflict of interest. So it is only a window dressing. Interestingly the punishment to the companies is simply losing membership of the association.

Sensing the need for cost-effective drugs, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru went ahead to establish drug manufacturing in the Public sector. While inaugurating the Indian Drugs and Pharmaceutical Ltd.(IDPL) in 1961 he cautioned "the drug industry must be in the public sector.... I think an industry of the nature of the drug industry should not be in the private sector anyhow. There is far too much exploitation of the public in this industry". The IDPL played a major role in the strategic National Health Programmes. Recognising its role, the World Health Organisation commended that "IDPL had achieved in 10 years what others have in 50. IDPL products have been examined for quality very carefully by the developed countries and many of them want to buy from here".

All this is being reversed now. In 2016, the government decided to close two Public Sector Units (PSUs) of the five, namely the IDPL and RDPL. The government had also decided to strategically disinvest HAL, BCPL, and Karnataka Antibiotics & Pharmaceutical Ltd (KAPL).

It is well known that the people in the country have to spend on healthcare from their pocket. Nearly 70% of this is on the purchase of drugs. It is therefore imperative that

the prices of medicines should be within the reach of the common man. But the government's indifference is a cause of concern. There is a strong suspicion that the government has a nexus with big pharma magnates. No wonder some pharmaceutical companies and some healthcare facilities purchased elec-

toral bonds for 800 crore rupees. This strengthens scepticism over the nexus between the government and the big Pharma magnates.

It is time to review the policy and strengthen the public sector units in pharmaceutical industry to save corrupt practices and super profiteering at the expense of people's

health. A free market approach to drugs and vaccines will only help the big pharma magnates and add to profiteering while ignoring the people's health needs. □□□

[Dr Arun Mitra is a Practicing ENT Surgeon in Ludhiana, Punjab. He is also the President of Indian Doctors for Peace and Development (IDPD) www.idpd.org]

[Source: counter currents.org]

LETTERS

'Bail is the Rule, Jail is an Exception'

To

Sri Hon'ble

Dr Justice D Y Chandrachud

The Chief Justice of India

Supreme Court of India

New Delhi

(through proper channel)

Dear Sir,

I often wonder as to in what sort of democracy we are in, and how miserable our justice delivery system is. The glaring examples are the recent arrests of Aravind Kejriwal and others in the so-called Liquor Scam and the denial of even release on bail to them. If such was the case with the British imperialists or American ones, we could not even have a M N Roy and his radical humanism now in the world. Nor could we have our freedom struggle promoted with innumerable freedom fighters like Madam Cama given shelter and liberty in foreign lands though obviously they were targeted with graver criminal offences at home and even abroad. It is very painful for us to see in independent India even a sitting Chief Minister languishing in prison on dubious charges without even being released on bail and prior to him his deputy Chief Minister in the same or similar case. Please intervene urgently and see to it that "Bail is the rule, Jail is an exception," is not an empty phrase but a steel framework saying which should strictly work for all citizens/persons in India, especially reputed public servants and political

activists, who represent various sections of the masses.

Hope you will ponder seriously over this letter message of mine and do the needed justice.

Thank you,

Yours sincerely,

I Mallikarjuna Sharma,

Advocate

Editor, Law Animated World

(now being published online only)

Demonstration against Wars

The collective organising the May Action Week in Prague is calling for an anti-war demonstration to take place on Friday 24 May 2024 at 5pm on Palacký Square.

War is a phenomenon that not only theoretically, but also very concretely intrudes upon everyone's life. Under the current social order, there is no boundary separating life in war from life in peace. We are all at war. Only the ways in which the reality of war affects us differ. Some are living on the home front in bombed-out cities, others are sent to the front to serve as cannon fodder, and some others are forced to sell their labour force, which turns the wheels of the war economy. We are all also targets of war propaganda designed to induce us to engage in one form of war or another. Finally, we are also all indoctrinated with the so-called duty to sacrifice ourselves in war for the sake of the country, the nation, the people, the economy, democracy, religion...

We don't want to demand for this

or that State's army to be better equipped in the name of supporting the "lesser evil" because history has taught us that de-escalation of wars is brought about by subverting the war machine, not by fuelling it.

Wars are a global phenomenon to which we respond with internationalist mobilization. We do not limit ourselves to one region and language, so the demonstration will feature voices in Czech, English, German, Russian, Ukrainian, and possibly other languages, which we can use to articulate our positions and argue for collective anti-war action.

Anti-War Congress, Prague Yuva Sankalp 2024

Yuva Sankalp 2024 is a resolution adopted by different student and youth organisations from across India, which holds the ruling party accountable for the issues concerning the students and the youth, including expensive education and extensive joblessness.

The resolution outlines various issues affecting the youth, including expensive education, widespread unemployment, and the spread of hate and violence orchestrated by ruling party to further its agendas. It highlights the decline in the education budget, the shutdown of scholarship schemes, the increase in fees in government colleges and universities, the saffronisation of education, and the replacement of scientific and historical facts with propaganda.

The resolution notes the failure of the Modi government to fulfil its promise of creating two crore jobs, with government jobs being privatised and

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casualised, and unemployment rates reaching their highest levels in decades. The resolution also condemns the government's handling of paper leaks in exams and its failure to address rural livelihood challenges.

The resolution denounces the repression faced by youth protesting for their rights and the erosion of fundamental rights and democratic values. It accuses the ruling party of prioritizing the interests of big corporates over those of the common people, selling national assets and natural resources at bargain prices and engaging in corruption and money laundering through electoral bonds.

The resolution calls upon the Young India to recognise their historic responsibility and punish and defeat the BJP in the ensuing parliamentary elections and secure the future of India.

Napm India
napmindia@gmail.com

Nepal—Another Hindu Rashtra?

Recently thousands of people in Nepal mobilised on the streets of Kathmandu in an anti-government protest organised by the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP). The protesters favour the restoration of Nepal's constitutional monarchy and the return of a Hindu state—both of which came to an end in 2008, when Nepal became a secular republic, ending a long-running civil war.

Royalists are loyal to King Gyanendra, the last king of Nepal, who has largely stayed out of the public eye since he stepped down. The RPP is the fifth-largest party in Nepal's parliament, and pro-monarchy sentiment isn't widespread in the country. But the protest is a reminder of the disillusionment harboured by some Nepalis toward the country's current political system; since 2008, Nepal has been beset by political squabbling and instability.

Thirteen governments have ruled

in the last 16 years, and political tensions have compounded Nepal's inability to rein in corruption and economic stress. Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party has allegedly exerted influence over the RPP and pushed it to advocate for the restoration of a Hindu state in Nepal. RPP leaders have rejected this allegation.)

Michael Kugelman

[Michael Kugelman is the director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Centre in Washington.]

Hate Speeches in Maharashtra

In the relentless pursuit of justice and communal harmony, Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP) persists in its fight against hate speech. Over the past months, our efforts have intensified as we confront the scourge of divisive rhetoric that threatens the fabric of our society. Since the dawn of 2024, we have been vigilant witnesses to a distressing trend: the proliferation of hate speech by influential figures across Maharashtra.

In our latest stride, CJP has taken decisive action, lodging police complaints in a total of ten instances where leaders have unabashedly propagated messages of animosity and division. Among those implicated are individuals whose words carry weight in public discourse: Kajal Hindustani, T Raja Singh, Nitesh Rane and Ashwini Upadhyay. These individuals, through their repeated communal speeches, have contributed to the erosion of communal harmony in our communities.

Incendiary remarks by Nitesh Rane and Ashwini Upadhyay span multiple locations in Maharashtra. CJP sends 3 complaints to Police.

7 Complaints urge police to invoke stringent hate speech provisions, including IPC Section 153A, against repeated communal speeches delivered by Kajal Hindustani, Raja Singh, and Nitesh Rane.

Our complaints, submitted to law

enforcement authorities, emphasize the gravity of the situation and urge the invocation of stringent provisions such as IPC Section 153A. It is imperative that those who sow seeds of discord face the full force of the law. CJP stands unwavering in its commitment to uphold the principles of justice, equality, and unity, and we will continue to be at the forefront of this crucial battle against hate.

CJP

'Jai Bhim Wala'

This is a case of Goregaon Mumbai, wherein a Buddhist youth was made aware of the reality of caste. The said youth joined an Event Management Company as a Marketing Executive three days before the 14th of April 2024. On 14th April, he received a message on WhatsApp from his employer asking if he was a "Jai Bhim Wala" which is commonly used for identifying SC people. The young boy replied in affirmative to which the female owner put out flatly that she doesn't hire people from the Jai Bhim community.

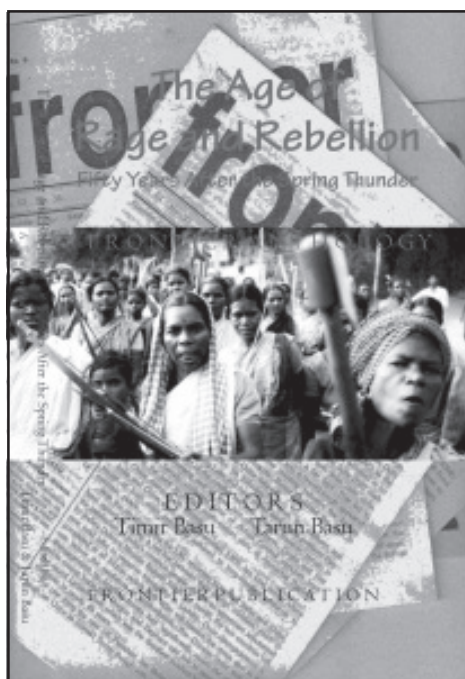
The youth, in all his understanding, didn't put this out for all to see but waited till the Jayanti celebrations were over. He understood that this might lead to tensions all over leading to a law and order situation. He then contacted the team of advocates and social activists to file a report under the Atrocity & Protection of Civil Rights Act at the Goregaon Police Station, Mumbai.

Adv. Deepak Sonavane, Buddhahushan Shinde, Sanjay Kirtikar, Baba Shinde, Santosh Gangawane, Vivek Shirke, Ambedkarite activists and the family of the victim were present at the police station to file this report. The report has been filed. But the question that remains unanswered is, will the naysayers acknowledge this monster of caste that lives amongst us?

Himanshu Khobragade,
Mumbai

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