

frontier

Vol. 56 : No. 46

ISSN 0016-2094

May 12-18, 2024

Founder-Editor : **SAMAR SEN**

On Other Pages

Comment	2
Note	3
A FORGOTTEN ANNIVERSARY 'Muslims Against Partition' Shamsul Islam	4
VIETNAM TO GAZA Columbia Protests Now and in '68 Jonah Raskin	6
H-POP Weaponsing Music Joydip Ghosal	7
REPRESENTATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS The Conundrum of Elections in India Maya John Mudita Singh Kushwaha	9
NO INDUSTRY, NO JOB Modi's 'Make in India' Didn't Make Jobs Anchal Vohra	11
'IT'S A DEATH ZONE' Israel's War on Healthcare Taj Ali Daisy Schofield	13
Letters	14

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

Published weekly for Germinal Publications Pvt. Ltd. by Sharmistha Dutta from 44, Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006 and Printed by her at Laser Aid, 35A/3, Biplabi Barin Ghosh Sarani, Kolkata-700 067.

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

Website: <https://www.frontierweekly.com>
Telephone : 2530-0065

[Typeset by THE D-COMLASER, 60 Sikdar Bagan Street, Kolkata-4, Ph : 98361-58319]

'Infiltrators'

JUST ON THE EVE OF SECOND PHASE OF ON-GOING general elections, one Qurban Ali, an Indian citizen made a complaint to the police station Hazarat Nizamuddin against Prime Minister Narendra Modi for making statements prejudicial to national integration and violative of provisions of the Representation of the People Act 1951, at Banswara, Rajasthan at a public rally on April 21, 2024. Mr Modi deliberately used a derogatory language that insults religious feelings of the minority community, promotes enmity between Hindus and Muslims and creates a super-charged situation for communal flare-up. It brazenly violated the Model Code of Conduct. Who bothers about Qurban Ali's FIR against PM at a New Delhi police station? Nobody. At least PM's cheer leaders may mock at it! As for Modi's party—Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—they do hardly attach any importance to criticism to their supreme leader. They have money power, they have muscle power and overall the central government agencies are at their command to terrorise opponents. So they could do whatever they like.

The brazenness of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vilification of India's largest minority group made clear he sees few checks at home or abroad on his absolute power. Modi called Muslims 'infiltrators' in his election speech to voters in Rajasthan to consolidate their orthodox Hindu constituency. He further claimed that if 'the Congress party comes to power; it aims to distribute even the gold and mangalsutra (a sacred thread for married Hindu women) to the Muslims who have more children'. Even after this communal campaign 'Muslims have more children' had been busted time and again as not only being communal but also having no basis in facts or reality, this communal campaign continues unabated. Modi made a naked communal appeal for polarising the society to derive extra-mileage in electoral race. The speech was inflammatory by any standard and it was circulated widely on-line in addition to being broadcasted on dozens of TV channels with a clear purpose of creating an atmosphere of fear before polls.

With his power at home, almost secured despite some anti-saffron swing in some BJP bastions after the first phase of poll, and his Hindutva-first vision deeply entrenched after inauguration of Ram Temple at Ayodhya, Mr Modi has set his sights in recent years on a role as 'a global statesman', riding India's so-called economic and diplomatic rise. No doubt BJP

stormtroopers and cheerleaders enjoyed his hateful and racist remarks against India's 200 million Muslims and got doubly enthused to carry on election war. Strange it may seem red carpets remained rolled out abroad for this man leading the world's largest elected autocracy.

For one thing he could not have made these comments during election campaign unless he believed he could get away with it. Maybe, it could be sign of anxiety that his

personality cult or for that matter his standing with voters is not as firm as believed. This could be just a reflexive expression of the kind of divisive religious ideology that has fuelled his party's political aggression from the start. He wants to create history of his own by leaving a legacy that is distinctly different from that of the old Congress leaders who made a secular constitution after British colonial rule.

Meanwhile, the Election Com-

mission of India has reportedly taken note of the complaint of alleged violation of the Model Code of Conduct by Prime Minister Modi and forwarded it to BJP President J P Nadda seeking their response. It may sound ludicrous but it is Indian parliamentary democracy. Well, the Commission did a balancing as they would also ask Congress President Kharge to take action against their leader Rahul Gandhi for alleged violation of MCC. □□□ 26-04-2024

COMMENT

'Agnipath' Still Simmers...

THE ANGER AND ANXIETIES over 'Agnipath' scheme have not died down. Gone is the period of open protests by youth and students and other ordinary people which rocked the country when the scheme was hastily announced (June 2022). Silence doesn't mean that the youth are now happy about this scheme. In an ambience of rising unemployment how is it possible to be happy about the fact that "due to the implementation of the Agniveer scheme, around 1.5 lakh candidates selected for the Indian Army, Air Force and Navy between 2019 and 2022 were allegedly denied joining and all future possibilities of such an employment being closed forever."

The Shekhavati region in Rajasthan is called 'Jatland' in informal discussion. A characteristic feature of this area which covers Shikar, Jhunjhunu, Churu and Nagore is that it sends largest number of recruits to Indian army. Apart from other issues the issue of Agniveer is also a hot topic in this region and there are reports that the Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP) is finding it difficult to handle people's anger over it and will face reverses in the ensuing parliamentary polls.

Anyone who is keen to know how Agnipath has literally 'destroyed' thousands of jobs in military can take a tour of Kuchman City in Nagour (Rajasthan), once a hub of more than 200 defence coaching academies preparing students from Rajasthan, Haryana and neighbouring parts of Western UP for entrance exams in Military.

Today, Kuchman City is a 'deserted' town, the number of functional coaching academies is less than 15-20 from the peak of 200, with even lesser candidates preparing there.

Like all other life and death issues the mainstream media that is out and out pro- Modi government has largely forgotten about it, but there are occasions when the truth comes out rather starkly in stray reports here and there.

The anger and discontent of the youth will continue to harm the ruling dispensation--whatever gloss they try to apply over the scheme. A contract-based recruitment scheme in the military which effectively reduces a youth ready to serve in the

army for rest of life to the job a security guard merely after four years of service there is an insulating proposition for the youth.

If one revisits geography of the protest as it happened in 2022 when the scheme was launched then one sees that it has an all India import. And if one tries to take a look at the response of the student-youth in the Hindi heartland to Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nayay Yatra then one can see that the issue of Agniveer resonates especially across the youth-student population of the Hindi belt.

The youth might look silent at the moment but like the people of Shekhawati region it will express its strong disapproval of sudden destruction of 1.5 lakh jobs in the military.

When youth were out on streets demanding the scheme be revoked there were voices of concern from the veterans in the army itself. Whatever might be the claims of the government that the Agnipath Scheme is going fine and now a third batch of Agniveers will be joining training, questions remain. Silencing the voice of the protesters for the time being does not mean that questions just wither away. It remains to be seen whether the Agniveer scheme becomes a major game changer in electoral politics in north India. □□□

[Contributed by Subhas Gatade]

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

www.frontierweekly.com

NOTE

Hindutva and Ethno-Nationalism

Bhabani Shankar Nayak writes:

MR NARENDRA DAMODAR-das Modi, serving as the 14th Prime Minister of India, has successfully completed two terms in office and is now seeking re-election for a third term in the ensuing 18th Lok Sabha elections. Widely recognised as a prominent figure in Hindutva politics, Modi is often viewed as the face of a political ideology marked by division and animosity. Throughout his tenure, Modi has been disseminating misleading information to sway public opinion in his favour. One of the most contentious aspects of his leadership has been his portrayal of Indian Muslims as outsiders or "intruders." This rhetoric not only underscores his divisive approach but also exacerbates religious tensions, leading to increased polarisation and communal strife in the country.

Modi's strategy of marginalising minorities, lower castes, and toilers has created a state of fear psychosis across the country. This marginalisation can be traced back to the core ideology of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is deeply influenced by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an organisation espousing a racist Eurocentric ideology. The RSS's emphasis on cultural nationalism and its hierarchical view of society have shaped the BJP's approach, leading to policies that often neglect the rights and welfare of marginalised communities.

In essence, Mr Modi's remarks reflect a broader Hindutva challenge to India's foundational values and principles. The Hindutva ideology is a foreign import that has intruded into the fabric of Indian politics, society, and culture. While claiming

to represent authentic Indian values, its ethno-nationalistic tendencies and focus on religious and ethnic identity have more in common with European ideologies than with India's rich and diverse history, society, and culture. Rather than drawing from India's pluralistic traditions and composite culture, Hindutva's roots can be traced back to European concepts of ethno-nationalism, religious nationalism and racialised democracy. This imported ideology of Hindutva politics has sought to redefine Indian pluralistic identity in narrow, exclusionary terms, often at the expense of religious and cultural minorities.

Historically, there are parallels between Hindutva and the ideologies that emerged in Europe during the early 20th century. One of the most striking comparisons can be drawn with Nazi Germany, where ethno-nationalism and religious intolerance were central tenets of the regime. The ideology of Adolf Hitler, with its emphasis on racial purity, scapegoating of minorities, and use of fear and hatred to mobilise the masses, seems to provide a blueprint for Hindutva political practices in India. In both cases, fear and hatred are employed as powerful tools to manipulate public opinion and garner electoral support. The Hindutva ideology can be seen as a true intruder in Indian politics, society, and culture, drawing inspiration from European ethno-nationalism rather than India's own rich traditions. Its reliance on fear, hatred, and divisive tactics undermines the principles of secularism, pluralism, and unity that are integral to India's democratic ethos.

Mr Modi's bid for a third term is

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

a continuation of his divisive Hindutva politics, characterised by misinformation, religious polarisation, and marginalisation of vulnerable groups. His leadership style and policies reflect the broader ideological framework of the BJP, influenced by the RSS's racist Eurocentric worldview, which prioritises certain segments of society at the expense of others.

The 18th Lok Sabha elections in India present an opportunity to mend the fractured republic led by the Hindutva figurehead, Modi. The crisis facing Indian democracy under Hindutva politics highlights the urgent need for political transformation to uphold the principles of secularism and inclusivity that are fundamental to India's democratic values. Instead of employing divisive tactics that marginalise communities based on religion or ethnicity, it's crucial to nurture unity. It is time to defeat Modi, BJP, and RSS to steer India away from a destructive path politically, socially, culturally, religiously, and economically. □□□

A FORGOTTEN ANNIVERSARY

'Muslims Against Partition'

Shamsul Islam

THE SEARCH FOR THE real culprits behind the Partition of India in 1947 seems to be an endless exercise. It is despite the fact that there is no dearth of writings on the Indian Freedom Struggle against the British rule in India and specially partition of the country on the basis of religion.

Historians have rightly held the Muslim League, led by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, basically responsible for this unnatural and tragic Partition which became a kind of license for both Hindu and Muslim communal elements to indulge in mass butchery of innocent children, women and men.

However, there has always been a school of historiographers under the influence of Hindutva which has been spreading the canard that all Muslims in pre-Partition days supported the Muslim League's call for Pakistan. Hindutva tries to cover up the fact that it subscribed to the two-nation theory like Muslim League long before the latter subscribed to it and wanted to have an exclusive "Hindu Rashtra" on the lines of "Islamic State" of Muslim League.

Unfortunately, this kind of discourse has secured more credibility specially among the Hindu middle class with the recent upsurge of anti-minorityism led by Hindutva fascism. The crucial fact should not be missed here that Hindutva has mainly succeeded in its attempts because facts

of significant contributions of those Muslim individuals and organisations that opposed Muslim League with all their resources and might remains buried even today.

One such example is of Allah Bakhsh who at the grassroots level among Muslims of India organised an effective and massive opposition to the nefarious designs of Muslim League in pre-Partition days. Allah Bakhsh was the Premier (those days chief minister was known by this designation) of Sind during the eventful days of 'Quit India' Movement of 1942 as head of the 'Ittehad Party' (Unity Party) which did not allow Muslim League to have any foothold in the Muslim majority province of Sind. Allah Bakhsh and his Party were not part of the Indian National Congress but when British Prime Minister Winston Churchill made a derogatory reference to the Indian freedom struggle and the 'Quit India' Movement in a speech in the British Parliament, Allah Bakhsh renounced in protest all titles conferred by the British Government.

While announcing this renouncement he stated: "It is the cumulative result of the feeling that the British Government does not want to part with power. Mr Churchill's speech shattered all hopes." The British administration could not digest this dissent of Allah Bakhsh and he was removed from office by the Governor, Sir Hugh Dow, on October 10, 1942. This great sacrifice of a Muslim leader for the freedom of the country remains unknown even today.

The fact that Nathu Ram Godse, closely associated with Hindu Mahasabha, VD Savarkar and the

RSS killed MK Gandhi on January 30, 1948 is known by all but how many of people know that Allah Bakhsh a great fighter for the independence of a united India and prolific opponent of the idea of Pakistan was murdered on May 14, 1943, in Sind by professional killers hired by the Muslim League. Allah Bakhsh needed to be liquidated because he was able to muster massive support of common Muslim masses throughout India against Pakistan.

It is a well-known fact that dismissal of Allah Bakhsh Government in 1942 and his murder in 1943 paved the way for entry of Muslim League in Sind. One could see the open ganging up of the British rulers and Muslim League in political and physical liquidation of Allah Bakhsh and his kind of anti-communal politics. It is important to remember that after the assassination of Allah Bakhsh Hindu Mahasabha led by Savarkar joined the coalition government in Sind led by Muslim League.

Sind Muslim League leader M AKhuhro was put on trial as the main conspirator in the killing of Allah Bakhsh. He was found not guilty, as the state could not produce an 'independent' witness to prove his involvement. Significantly, it was the same ground on which Savarkar secured acquittal in Gandhiji's murder case later.

It really needs a serious inquiry that why powerful anti-two nation political trend led by Allah Bakhsh among Indian Muslims got pushed to oblivion. It suited the British masters and both Hindu-Muslim communalists. They saw India as a land of perpetual conflicts among religions. But the Indian secular state, which has the name of Sind in its National Anthem, became totally unmindful to this legacy which stood

For **Frontier Contact**

PATIRAM BOOK STALL

College Street

May 12-18, 2024

FRONTIER

5

for a secular, united and democratic India. Allah Bakhsh spent all his life countering communal politics of Muslim League and its two-nation theory. In fact he laid down his life for this cause.

Within 5 weeks of the Pakistan resolution of the Muslim League at Lahore, Indian Muslims organised MUSLIM AZAD CONFERENCE in Delhi (Queen's Park, Chandni Chowk) between April 27-30, 1940 (it was to conclude on April 29 but was extended by one day due to tremendous participation and large number of issues to be deliberated) with 1400 delegates from almost all parts of India attending it.

The leading light of this conference was former Premier of Sind, Allah Bakhsh who presided over the conference was one of such heroes. The major Muslim organisations represented in this conference were All India Jamiat-ul-Ulema, All India Momin Conference, All India Majlis-e-Ahrar, All-India Shia Political Conference, Khudai Khidmadgars, Bengal Krishak Proja Party, All-India Muslim Parliamentary Board, the Anjuman-e-Watan, Baluchistan, All India Muslim Majlis and Jamiat Ahle-Hadis. The Azad Muslim Conference was attended by duly elected delegates from United Province, Bihar, Central Province, Punjab, Sind, NWF Province, Madras, Orissa, Bengal, Malabar, Baluchistan, Delhi, Assam, Rajasthan, Delhi, Kashmir, Hyderabad and many native states thus covering the whole of India.

There was no doubt that these delegates represented "majority of India's Muslims." Apart from these organisations a galaxy of leading intellectuals of Indian Muslims like Dr Mukhtar Ahmed Ansari (who was in the forefront of struggle against the communal politics of Muslim League, died in 1936), Shaukatullah Ansari, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Syed Abdullah Brelvi, Shaikh

Mohammed Abdullah, AM Khwaja and Maulana Azad were associated with this movement against Pakistan. Jamiat and other Muslim organizations produced large number of booklets in Urdu against Two-nation theory and in support of co-existence of Hindus and Muslims in India.

The conference resolved that Pakistan scheme was "impracticable and harmful to the country's interest generally, and of Muslims in particular."

While decrying the concept of a theocratic state itself he said:

"It was based on a false understanding that India is inhabited by two nations, Hindu and Muslim. It is much more to the point to say that all Indian Mussalmans are proud to be Indian Nationals and they are equally proud that their spiritual level and creedal realm is Islam. As Indian nationals-Muslims and Hindus and others, inhabit the land and share every inch of the motherland and all its material and cultural treasures alike according to the measure of their just and fair rights and requirements as the proud sons of the soil...It is a vicious fallacy for Hindus, Muslims and other inhabitants of India to arrogate to themselves and exclusively proprietary rights over either the whole or any particular part of India. The country as an indivisible whole and as one federated and composite unit belongs to all the inhabitants of the country alike, and is as much the inalienable and imprescriptible heritage of the Indian Muslims as of other Indians. No segregated or isolated regions, but the whole of India is the Homeland of all the Indian Muslims and no Hindu or Muslim or any other has the right to deprive them of one inch of this Homeland."

He asked the Muslim Leagues and other flag-bearers of Muslim

separatism a question based on Islamic historical experiences:

"Had the imperialistic structure of society been a guarantee of the prosperity of the Muslim masses and had empires not carried the germs of their own decay in them, then the mighty Omayyad, Abbasid, Saranic, Fatimide, Sassanic, Moghal and Turkish empires would never have crumbled, leaving 1/5th of the human race, who live by Islamic faith in the condition in which they find themselves today-disinterested, and destitute in the bulk. Similarly those Hindus who entertain similar dreams, and who out of tendentiously written pages of history or out of the stimulating examples of the modern imperialists select ingredients for the nourishment of their imperial dreams, or dreams of exploitation, imposition and domination will be well advised to discard such ideals."

Allah Bakhsh in his address defended greatly the composite Indian culture. □□□

[For detailed study of Azad Muslim Conference read author's book MUSLIMS AGAINST PARTITION OF INDIA: REVISITING THE LEGACY OF PATRIOTIC MUSLIMS (5th edition published by Pharos Media & Publishing Pvt. Ltd. Delhi with website: www.pharosmedia.com). It is also available in Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Kannada, and Punjabi.]

Subscribe & Read

PURBASHA EKHO

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

VIETNAM TO GAZA

Columbia Protests Now and in '68

Jonah Raskin

THE STUDENT PROTESTS on the campus of Columbia University this April have reminded me of the protests that took place there 56 years ago. Along with about 700 or so other men and women, I was arrested and jailed at the Tombs in Manhattan. Those arrests didn't curtail student protests. Indeed, there were demonstrations later that year and again in 1969, 1970, 1971 and 1972. When push comes to shove, Columbia has called on the police again and again and the police have arrived in force and have made arrests.

The current president of Columbia, Minouche Shafik, an Egyptian-born American economist and a baroness, has surely not acted on her impulses to establish what she might call "Law and Order." Rather, she has surely followed the orders, prayers, and wishes of trustees, deep pockets and alumni who have wanted to see demonstrators punished for exercising freedom of speech and for practising old-fashioned American civil disobedience.

Robert Kraft, the New England Patriots CEO, and a major financial contributor to Columbia—and my classmate—recently said, "I am no longer confident that Columbia can protect its students and staff and I am not comfortable supporting the university until corrective action is taken." He also said, "I believe in free speech, say whatever you want, but pay the consequences." That doesn't sound like free speech, not if it comes with a price tag. Back then, the protests were largely about Vietnam. Now, they're largely about Gaza and Israel. The names have changed, but the underlying story is

much the same. Shouldn't students today have a significant role to play when and where it comes to university investment?

Columbia University president Shafik was deputy governor of the Bank of England, and a vice president at the World Bank. She surely knows who has buttered her side of the crumpet and who has poured her cup of tea. Over many decades, Columbia has known very well how to make cosmetic changes and alter its image. It is now, as it was in the 1960s, about making money, expanding and occupying more and more of the island of Manhattan, and mass-producing students to become consumers and citizens loyal to the social institutions that have made the US a global superpower.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, we raised awareness about the university's collaboration with the war machine and with institutions of racism and patriarchy. Columbia began to hire women and Black and brown intellectuals and to revise the curriculum in response to student demands to make education relevant to their own lives and their times.

In 1968, I was not a student at Columbia. I was already a professor at the State University of New York who had graduated from the college in 1963 when it was still locked in the mindset of the Cold War, and McCarthyism and could not be accurately described as an "Ivory Tower." In 1968, my beef with Columbia had its roots in my undergraduate years when I was rebuked for using Marxist sources for essays I wrote for teachers and slammed for thinking critically and questioning academic dogma. In 1969 when

I was arrested again for my role during a campus protest, one of my former professors said that since I was a "Columbia scholar and a Columbia gentleman" I should apologise to the university. When I declined to knuckle under, the powers that be had me arrested and jailed. Who then was the scholar and the gentleman?

My freshman year at Columbia, my classmates and I were required to read Jacques Barzun's tome *The House of Intellect*. It didn't take long for me to see that the house of intellect was a house of cards. In 1968, we didn't blow it down or blow it up, but we rocked it for a time and then watched as it put its house back in order and restored its foundations.

I don't believe it's possible to dismantle Columbia now, much as it wasn't possible to dismantle it in 1968. It's too big, too powerful, too wealthy, and too rapacious. But protesters today can certainly raise awareness about the political and economic ties between the US "power elite," as Columbia professor, C Wright Mills called it, and the power elite in Israel. Things may not improve in the Middle East any time soon, but they won't stay the same way they have been for the past half-century, either. The student protesters with their tents on campus are a sure sign that the times have changed and will go on "a-changin'" as Dylan suggested.

Too bad Columbia is locked in the past. Too bad it has given up on meaningful dialogue with student protesters today. Too bad it doesn't see the handwriting on the wall. Over the past few weeks, I've wondered what Columbia professor Edward Said; the author of *Orientalism*—and for a time an independent member of the Palestinian National Council—would think and say. Indeed, he seemed to

May 12-18, 2024

FRONTIER

7

occupy a kind of middle ground when he observed in 2003, the year he died, that about Palestine, “nobody has a claim that overrides all the others and entitles that person with that so-called claim to drive people out!”

That middle ground seems to have evaporated. Indeed, the ground under our own feet has shifted dramatically. There is less room for dissenting opinions today than there was in '68, near the height of the war in Vietnam. There are also more

virulent anti-Arab and more virulent anti-Jewish voices today than there were then. Better prepare for the rocky road ahead. □□□

[Jonah Raskin is the author of Beat Blues, San Francisco, 1955. Source: countercurrents.org]

H-POP

Weaponising Music

Joydip Ghosal

“Yet in the country of Bismillah Khan and M S Subbulakshmi, Kishori Anankar and Kishore Kumar, music has become an artefact of right-wing propaganda, a vehicle of vindictiveness and violence”.—Ramachandra Guha

AWAY FROM THE WATCHful monitoring of electronic and print media, across India’s dusty and sleepy towns a genre of popular culture is clandestinely seizing the public imagination. Acerbic lyrics laced with vitriolic hatred, foot tapping music and songs along with kavisanelans are shaping the discourse in the hinterland resulting in the formation of the bedrock of jingoism. Kunal Purohit’s path breaking ground level research book H-POP, the secretive world of Hindutva pop stars, published by Harper Collins Publishers India unravels the tapestry of the culture that fosters rift and division. With gripping narrative and in-depth research he lays bare the vitriolic agenda which permeates through the crevice of society. Kunal Purohit has been a journalist for two decades. As an independent journalist he reported extensively on hate crimes, the rise of hyper-nationalism in the country. Through their words these pop stars, poets, social media influencers try to dehumanise religious minorities and dissenters. Majoritarian ideology intertwined with hate-filled agenda hurls a significant challenge to syncretic culture and pluralistic ethos. According to Bilal Gani this book presents a captivating exploration into the intricate relationship between Hindutva ideol-

ogy and realm of popular culture.

Hindutva pop music has emerged as all-pervasive ingeniously extension of Hindutva campaign. Though these songs are little recognised they tend to normalise some of the hardline elements of the Hindu nationalist ideology. These are so hardline that even the most strident votaries hesitate to vet the stances overtly. These lyrics are laced with threats of mayhem and macabre violent reprisal. They dehumanise the ‘other’. These music seeks to reinforce the stereotypes by perpetuating inauthentic images. Deep-rooted fear, anger and hate filled campaigns tend to accentuate the pernicious feelings. These are combustible combination. With in-depth research and extensive field work the author shows that there are growing links between aggressive gestures and consuming hate music. It fuels violence. Kunal Purohit cited several research and studies to put forth this cogent argument. The founder of the group Life after Hate Arno Michaelis said that more than entertaining hate music did a lot more thing. “If you are playing white power music... you are learning how to hate people and you are practising emotional violence against them.” This is not only applicable to white supremacy only. Rather it acts to instigate violence and indoctrinate various hues of ultra-nationalists. In

his path breaking book Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War author Jonathan Pieslac shows how American soldiers listened to rap and heavy metal music. That acted as inspiration to combat enemies. According to Pieslac it facilitated a 'state of mind that was necessary for killing. Kunal Purohit briefly discussed the experience of Rwandan genocide to illustrate the point. For over three months in 1994 the majoritarian Hutu community along with police, military went on a killing spree against the Tutsi people. Every Tutsi became their prey. More than 800000 people lost their lives in the gory genocide. The International Criminal Tribunal established by International Security Council probed the breach of international law and attempted to prosecute the perpetrators. It operated for twenty one years and convicted ninety three people for the genocide. Prime Minister of the interim government Jean Kambanda was also indicted. But, according to the author an unlikely inclusion in the list of indicted figures was the song writer and singer Simon Bikindi. In pre-genocide Rwanda that popularity earned him the moniker ‘Rwanda’s Michael Jackson.’ But his music fanned the hate against the Tutsis’. Three political songs laced with hatred played many times a day on Radio Television Libre des Mille Collins. That radio station was solely operated by Hutu community. Through his songs he valorised the past deeds committed by Hutu community and portrayed the Tutsi community as demons. He tried to stoke

fear among the Hutu community. He was charged with six counts: genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, complicity in genocide, direct and public enticement to commit genocide, murder as a crime against humanity and persecution as a crime against humanity. Apart from this Bikindi was an official in the Rwandan government's Ministry of Youth and Sports. The charges against him specified how his lyrics manipulated the history and politics of Rwanda to promote Hutu solidarity. Kunal Purohit also drew our attention to neighbouring Myanmar. There songs containing hate-filled lyrics targeted the Rohingyas. These songs reiterate that Buddhist people were under severe threat from Muslims. Needless to say these songs conditioned the psychological ambience conducive to pogrom. These inflammatory songs demonised the others. Heather Maclachlan conducted an in-depth research on the hate music and anti-Muslim propaganda in Myanmar. He said "these songs are inciting persecution of Muslim people in Myanmar, and that the creators and distributors of

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

the songs are therefore complicit in the ethnic cleansing and genocidal violence...". Kunal Purohit stated unequivocally India's hate songs are strikingly similar in terms of intent and content.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 deals with killer beats, poison laced words: Kavi Singh. Part 2 is about weaponising poetry: Kamal Agney and Part 3 is titled as Fighting a Cultural War: Sandeep Deo. He spent over three years interacting with the protagonists of the book. The genesis of the book can be traced back to Gumla in 2019 where the author heard a tragic incident of killing a Muslim youth Mohamed Shalik in Soso village about 4 km away from Gumla in 2017. That incident propelled the author to research about this genre of music which targeted every dissenter, every critic, rival politicians. In district after district similar incidents were unfolding. Mobs were goaded into rampage. The incident of Gumla was not an isolated incident. The author delved deeper to unspool the intricate maze and interact with its creators. What motivated the audience to consume daily doses of bigotry prodded the author to undertake this journey.

Kavi Singh is a Hindutva pop star. She composed some songs that reflected the core belief of Hindu nationalism. According to the author her songs revolved around the major moot point of Hindu right wing circle.

Kamal Agney's poetry revolves around the cause of Hindutva. According to the author he dehumanises and stoke anger against the enemies of Hindutva. The imagined enemies of Hindutva ranged from political critics of BJP to bunch of students who stridently fought against this regime.

Sandeep Deo is the founder of publishing house called Kapot. He

grants legitimacy to some of the deepest biases and fears that Hindu nationalists hold.

Traditional media outlets also come under attack from them. Prime Minister himself coined the term 'News traders'. Kunal Purohit mentioned the book *The Art of Conjuring Alternate Realities* by Shivam Shankar Singh and Anand Venkatanarayanan. They closely analysed the Trump's presidential campaign of 2016. The traditional media houses that were critical of Trump came under heavy attack. "Such attack helped reduce the legitimacy of these media outlets and took the sting out of their investigations against Trump." Vitriolic rhetoric along with insidious propaganda helps the free flowing of disinformation. The author shows how this has facilitated the process to delegitimise any criticism that emanates from traditional media.

This book takes people into the inner and outer aspects of these characters and one concur with the view of Aakar Patel that like Klemperer in 1930s Purohit documents the everyday degeneration and brutality being injected into New India. While discussing the book Christophe Jaffrelot said "Kunal Purohit educates people on the long-term implications of what is not a saffron wave only." Here lies the importance of this book because this hate-filled pernicious culture has acquired a social dimension by creeping into different strata of multi-dimensional society. □□□

For Frontier Contact

ALAIGAL VELIYEETAGAM

4/9, 4th Main Road
Ragavendra Guest House
United India Colony
Kodambakkam
Chennai 600 024

REPRESENTATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The Conundrum of Elections in India

Maya John

Mudita Singh Kushwaha

INDIA IS IN THE MIDST OF her eighteenth general election; a mammoth exercise spanning over 543 parliamentary constituencies that are distributed across nearly 97 crore voters. It is unfolding against a backdrop in which the minimum expected standards of a credible election have significantly dipped, given the ruling party's rampant (mis)use of money, the mainstream media, state machinery, and some would even say the Election Commission. The current ruling dispensation, corrupt to the core, rules by dividing people. This has propelled the liberal opinion that India is on the cusp of the most critical election in her history. Frustration with the growing misuse of institutions and a general repressive crackdown on different movements is palpable. Many then see the 2024 election as a crucial opportunity for safeguarding the country's Constitution and her institutions. Ironically, such views overlook that the present ruling dispensation has come to power by primarily using the electoral system enshrined in the provisions and workings of the very same Constitution and established institutions.

This is not to dismiss the cause for alarm. Capitalising on the electoral machinery, and combining this with the regular use of storm-troopers from multiple Hindu majoritarian mass organisations, the ruling bloc has facilitated the deepening of a totalitarian system. Some are thus encouraged to argue that this may as well be the last election which the country will witness. Deemed as a moment of final reckoning, elections in general are seen as revealing the

unequivocal will of the people.

Notably, in the debates on Indian polity, it has been variously argued that the country lacks substantive democracy in which the interests and aspirations of the economically and socially vulnerable groups can be ensured. However, there appears a general consensus that the country enjoys a well-placed procedural democracy, eliding how periodic elections have actually failed to represent the popular will. A closer examination of election results reveals a deep paradox: even though the vast majority of people usually vote for change, they are repeatedly slammed with continuity and the return to power of ruling regimes in which they have no confidence. To elucidate, on 10 March 2022, the result of the Uttar Pradesh provincial assembly election was declared. By the evening, amidst the cacophony arising from newsrooms in India, the claim was made that Chief Minister Yogi was returning to power with a thumping majority, proving doomsayers and skeptics wrong; that the people of Uttar Pradesh willingly returned Yogi back to power; and so on. A closer scrutiny of the results reveals a completely different picture. Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state of the country, despite divisive casteism and communal politics holding sway, saw a whopping figure of approximately 60 per cent people voting decisively against Yogi's party. So, the majority of people who voted did not want Yogi to return to power; they wanted change. And still, given the peculiar system of first-past-the-post elections, Yogi's party with its limited vote

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

share went onto claim a second term in office.

Long term trends of elections in India reveal the striking fact that despite the larger majority voting against the incumbents, the working of the electoral system prevents people from deposing them from power. The seventeen general elections conducted between 1951-52 and 2019 have secured continuity for the incumbent governments in nearly two-third of cases, while in just about one-third of cases has a regime change materialised. A similar pattern can be seen in most of the provincial-level assembly elections. Further, parties voted into power have never touched even 50 percent vote share in general elections held since 1951-52. Take, for example, in the last 2019 general election, Narendra Modi was returned to power by his party, the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) vote share of merely 37.36 percent. So, around 63 percent voters (the larger majority) did not support Modi, but wanted change.

This is just the analysis of the aggregate results; microscopic studies of constituencies throw up even more bewildering facts. The skewed modus operandi of the electoral system in India renders crores of electors as defeated people. The defeat of candidates who trail behind winning candidates, whatever the margin, translates into the defeat of the large numbers who believed in other candidates than the one declared the winner. To illustrate, in the 2019 general elections, the Machhlishahr constituency in Uttar Pradesh saw the winning candidate claim victory via a wafer-thin margin of just 181 votes; disregarding as a consequence, the choice of 4,88,216 people who voted against him. The case of Dhampur constituency in the Uttar Pradesh assembly election of 2022 is also noteworthy. Here close to 61 percent people

voted against the winning candidate, and yet, their votes counted as nothing due to the peculiar system of 'winner takes it all'. Meanwhile, a party which received a total of 13 percent vote share in the said Uttar Pradesh election ended up getting just one seat out of 403 (a mere 0.25 percent representation)! Taken together, these instances well expose that of the many votes polled in India's elections, a massive number of votes go waste, which amounts to those people having no voice in terms of their representation. So much for an electoral system that is touted as a great conduit of expression of the people's will. The bitter irony being that the entire claim of legitimate rule of the modern polity is based on deriving sovereignty from the people through the medium of elections that transfer power to their representatives.

The farcical repetition of the electoral defeat of large majorities has been justified on grounds of the opposition vote being a divided one, thereby enhancing the propensity for the return to power of the incumbent ruling dispensation. However, whether index of oppositional unity is maximum or minimum, it is impossible to dispute the fact that majority of voters are often not in support of the person/party being installed as their de jure representative. And yet, this long-standing reality of the electoral system in India is downplayed. Taken as eternally given, the process of representation is considered almost like a sacred cow that is beyond any evaluation. Once the electoral system is taken as a given and beyond any reproach, the liberals end up condemning the Indian electorate as being culturally backward, 'irrational', and 'failing' to choose 'better' representatives. This is nothing but a pervasive victim blaming.

Installed as de jure and sole

representatives of both their supporters and non-supporters in an electoral constituency, the 543 'winning' candidates are said to take up their responsibility as representatives of their parliamentary constituencies. However, the concrete functioning of the parliamentary system makes this a false claim. Here again, people are confronted by one of the deepest flaws and paradoxes of the representative system. Elections do not facilitate the right of all elected representatives to make laws for the people, given the dominance of the ruling bloc over decision-making and policy framing. In real terms, India's electoral 'democracy' boils down to the arithmetic by which the political party or electoral coalition with seats amounting to 50 percent plus 1 (272 seats out of 543 in the case of the Lok Sabha, and so on) enjoys a near monopoly over decision-making in the legislature. Consequently, if elected representatives are not part of the ruling bloc, they are distanced from the powers to formulate laws. This apart, the ruling bloc can use their majority to remove the opposition members from participating in the proceedings of the Parliament, as evident in the record-high number of suspensions of opposition Members of Parliament (MPs) during the December 2023 winter session of the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament).

In reality, decision-making power tends to further narrow down as such power slides from the so-called ruling bloc to the council of ministers. Astute political commentators allege that at present in the ruling party only the duo of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah make all the decisions. Moreover, given the oft exposed subservience of the ruling bloc to the interests of economic elites, it is hard to dismiss growing assertions that many of the country's laws are

allegedly made elsewhere, and are simply confirmed by using the Parliament as a rubber stamp.

It is said that under the present representative system, people transfer their power to political institutions, like legislative assemblies and parliaments. Millions of people are simply summoned to cast their vote and then immediately relegated to oblivion and passivity. The hierarchy between rulers and ruled remains fiercely intact. And so has the perpetual possibility of getting betrayed. Ultimately, more than democracy, it is an electoral autocracy that prevails and orients the country's political life. Repeatedly, the winning candidates are propelled to the position to rule over the people, including the large majorities of defeated people who have not voted for them. These representatives become a power unto themselves who represent their constituency, more or less, as they please. In other words, they do not function as delegates mandated by the views of the electorate. A major consequence of such absolute power is the intrinsic tendency to misuse state institutions directly/indirectly, and to clamp down on the rights of the defeated people to resist and oppose.

Indeed, what happens to the defeated people who want to react, who want to oppose certain policies pushed through by the ruling bloc? Worryingly, the people have increas-

ingly seen that their democratic rights like resisting governmental measures and organising public protests are being steadily criminalised. This trend has grown rapidly in the past decade. The country is, in fact, witnessing the growth of a totalitarian system as electoral autocracy effectively combines forces with the tendency of the ruling party to crush dissent by using police forces as well as quasi militias instilled with the spirit of Hindu majoritarianism. Cyberbullying of citizens expressing critical views on ground realities, heckling of teachers and students who question the attack on the academic autonomy of educational institutions, the repeated use of strong-arm repressive measures including advanced surveillance technology against protest demonstrations, multiple FIRs against leading activists and journalists, and so on, appear as the new order of the day. Many arrested in recent years are languishing in jail, awaiting trial under several draconic laws. Ironically, the so-called rights to free speech and freedom of association, which are supposedly fundamental rights, have long existed, albeit with several riders that now increasingly allow the ruling camp to curb these basic freedoms on the obnoxiously flimsy grounds of 'law and order'. Correspondingly, people are 'free' to raise their voice only if their actions do

not amount to real subversion of the order of things which benefits the powers that be.

This situation demands a deep reflection on what is going to be the condition and direction of India in the coming years post this general election. Can people afford the unquestioned continuity of an electoral system that renders the majority of the electorate unrepresented, and fails to provide the ground for social integration in the diverse spectra that is India? What is equally important is an introspection of what will be the fate of defeated people. Will their democratic right to dissent and oppose be further curtailed? Thinking of this large majority, perhaps one can begin to reenvision the polity in ways that do not merely capacitate institutions of rule based on the narrowest definitions of representation, but also enable the Indian masses to react and resist wherever they deem fit. It is to be seen how the Indian voters construct real democracy for themselves; the (im) possibility of which would be visible only in the mirror of the future. □□□

[Dr Maya John teaches history at the University of Delhi, India. She has been part of the Left movement for around two decades. Email: maya.john85@gmail.com]

Mudita Singh Kushwaha is pursuing her doctoral research from the Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, and is active in social movements. Email: muditasinghkushwaha@gmail.com]

NO INDUSTRY, NO JOB

Modi's 'Make in India' Didn't Make Jobs

Anchal Vohra

MEEERUT'S NATIONAL RELEVANCE has until now been based on its large military garrison, but the new road has become a symbol of its population's hopes of future growth and development. Just as the Modi government brought them a new

swanky highway, they now hope it will bring them industry, jobs, and improved quality of life.

Yet other than the highway, not much more has changed in the city in the 10 years since Modi took power, promising 100 million jobs through his flagship "Make in India"

initiative. Just about 50 miles from Delhi, Meerut is still a long distance from the capital's cosmopolitan lifestyle. In that way, it has become its own symbol of India's uneven growth story under Modi.

Every year, 7-8 million young Indians enter the workforce. But many never find a job. The unemployment crisis in India is particularly acute among the young and the educated, including Manu Chaudhary. On a recent day in

Meerut, in a shop only a few feet away from an open drain filled with waste, Chaudhary was sticking thin plastic covers on laptops at a cubicle-size computer repair shop. This is not what he dreamed of when he studied for a bachelor's in computer administration at a local college. He had hoped to get a well-paid job with a multinational company but never managed to, not in Meerut or Delhi or Bengaluru, India's IT hub.

According to a recent report from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), being educated is no guarantee for employment in the country. On the contrary, those without university degrees or even full schooling have a higher employment rate.

Nearly 83 percent of those unemployed in India are young, and among these unemployed young Indians, nearly 66 percent are educated. In 2022, the unemployment rate was nearly nine times greater among graduates, at 29.1 percent, than those who could neither read nor write, at 3.4 percent. The ILO report states that the "youth unemployment rate has increased with the level of education, with the highest rates among those with a graduate degree or higher" and that it is "higher among women than men."

Further illustrating the mismatch, the report says that while the ratio of educated youth went up from 18 percent in 2000 to 35 percent in 2022, their participation in economic activities went down from 52 percent to 37 percent over that same period. While the overall youth unemployment rate in India reduced

from 88.6 percent in 2000 and 82.9 percent in 2022, the ratio of educated young Indians facing unemployment grew from 54.2 percent to 65.7 percent.

There are multiple reasons behind the country's unemployment crisis, including poor quality of education, insufficient government investment in education and health, and a desperate need for the government and the private sector to invest in more labor-intensive industries.

In Meerut, banners advertise private schools and professional courses on nearly every street. They charge a fee that the middle classes in such cities can somehow scramble, but the quality of education they provide is rarely up to the mark. Those who study there either cannot afford more prestigious and expensive private institutes, which have a higher placement rate, or didn't manage to clear any competitive exams for top public-funded educational institutes, which, among ace intellectuals and professionals at home, have also produced the likes of Google CEO Sundar Pichai and other Silicon Valley minds.

Raghuram Rajan, the former governor of the Reserve Bank of India and widely known in the West as the banker who predicted the 2008 meltdown, recently spoke about the poor quality of such education as a problem for long-term economic growth in India and called for higher government spending in education and health. India needs to, firstly, make the workforce more employable and, secondly, create jobs for the workforce it has, Rajan told Bloomberg in an interview last month.

The ILO analysed data for a period of more than 20 years, which included the reign of the Indian National Congress, now an opposition party. According to a March

paper by four economists at the World Inequality Lab, however, inequality in India is worse under Modi than it was under the British. Between 2014-15 and 2022-23, the rise of top-end inequality has been particularly pronounced in terms of wealth concentration, the paper says, and India's top 1 percent income share is "among the very highest in the world, higher than even South Africa, Brazil and [the United States]." Modi came to power in 2014.

In 2016, when Modi demonetised 500 and 1,000 rupee notes, 86 percent of Indian currency became illegal, Ghosh noted. The scarcity of cash led to a crunch in jobs in an economy that was still largely informal and operated primarily on printed money.

A new goods and services tax also "created disequilibrium," said Aasheerwad Dwivedi, an assistant professor of economics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University. "Producers needed to adjust to the new system, which was difficult given the informality in India." The two interventions were a major shock to the Indian system further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Agriculture still "employs roughly 43.7 percent of the country's workforce, reflecting that job creation in India is slow," he said. "The share of workforce employed in agriculture is larger than it should be due to ineffective demand for skilled employees in the non-farm sectors."

Modi's Make in India was supposed to have created demand for jobs in manufacturing, but that, too, is progressing slowly. "When manufacturing or even services cannot generate the kind of employment they are looking for," the young and the educated "prefer to remain unemployed rather than underemployed." □□□

[Courtesy: Foreign Policy]

Frontier is available at

SARBODAYA BOOK STALL
HOWRAH STATION

'IT'S A DEATH ZONE'

Israel's War on Healthcare

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 a 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 employees 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. 'He described all of [Abu

Silmiyeh's] limbs having been broken. They forced him to crawl on the ground with a chain around his neck and eat food off the floor in front of people like a dog. Naked.'

Since last Monday, Al-Shifa has once again been targeted by Israeli forces, and the same tactics are being used. 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.

Preliminary reports indicate that at least 200 Palestinians have been killed since latest assault on the hospital, many of whom were extrajudicially executed. Survivors from the hospital siege and its vicinity have been sharing horrific testimonies indicating that the Israeli military conducted executions and killings against Palestinians, including some being run over by tank treads. One survivor said Israeli forces detained him and another eight Palestinians at Al Shifa for around three hours before they shot and killed the entire group, including his father, brother, and a 67-year-old man. Another witness said he saw Israeli forces taking around ten Palestinians into the hospital's morgue area before he heard heavy gunfire and saw the Israelis leaving without any Palestinians.

Earlier this week, the Palestinian Red Crescent reported that Al Amal Hospital was taken out of service after Israeli forces forced hospital crews and the wounded to evacuate and closed its entrances with dirt barriers. The hospital was besieged for more than forty days and shelled several times. The same fate befell Al Quds Hospital in Gaza City, which was taken out of service a few months ago.

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 Birsan 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. Birsan 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, Birsan could hear the explosions and see clouds of smoke just a few kilometres away. When she arrived in Gaza, Birsan 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 Birsan. '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. Birsan 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 fractures, head injuries—one of them had lost an eye,' says Birsan. 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, Birsan said that they had 'severe complications.' She is unsure if they will survive.

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', says Maynard.

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.

Along with infectious disease,

medics are now increasingly having to treat malnourished patients. Starvation is being used as a weapon of war, with the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) forecasting imminent famine in northern Gaza. Birsan says that during the two weeks she worked in Gaza, three of her patients died of starvation. 'Most of my patients, especially children, were definitely malnourished'. According to Birsan, MSF couldn't supply food, but the NGO World Kitchen fed staff and patients once a day. This was just rice, occasionally with some sauce. 'It was definitely not adequate; not a nutritious meal,' she says.

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 Birsan. '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.'

Another major problem is reaching medical care. Medics say that Israel is directly and systematically attacking ambulances in a clear contravention of international law. In addition to being bombed, ambulances are blocked from accessing areas because it's too dangerous for them to reach. □□□

[Courtesy: Tribune]

LETTERS

Protect the Girls!

Girls in The Gambia as young as four months old are blindfolded, pinned down, and forced to have their genitals cut off—and soon this horror could be completely legal. Gambian politicians want to reverse the country's ban on female genital mutilation. FGM survivors are trying to save the ban and protect the girls who haven't been

cut yet. Those brave women are asking people to join the fight with a massive global outcry.

They never had a choice. Almost a million girls in The Gambia have been forced to have their clitoris cut off, and sometimes their vaginal opening sewn up. And they were warned that if they told, they'd be cut again.

The Gambia has banned this hor-

ror since 2015, but now politicians want to make cutting little girls legal again. And its men making the decision—91% of Gambian MPs are men.

Legal protections are massively important in stopping the horror. Just last August, three women were convicted in The Gambia for performing FGM. And this is why some politicians are trying so hard to kill the ban—they know it has a real impact.

Twenty percent of The Gambia's

May 12-18, 2024

FRONTIER

15

economy is based on tourism and it is building its image as an emerging democracy. So the government is desperate to protect its positive international reputation.

Working with groups on the ground, Avaaz has a plan to show Gambian leaders that reversing the ban and making it legal to cut little girls would tank The Gambia's international reputation and endanger its tourism revenue.

Nate, Huiting, Antonia and the whole Avaaz team

No Vote to BJP

Unity Centre of Communist Revolutionaries of India- Marxist-Leninist, UCCRI (ML), founded by Comrades DV Rao (1917-84) and T Nagi Reddy (1917-76), is fielding candidates for Loksabha elections in both Telugu states: in 11 constituencies in Telangana and four in Andhra Pradesh. In AP, having simultaneous elections to Assembly, UCCRI is having 12 candidates, polling day being May 13 for all seats.

- Defeat the BJP and its allies which are pursuing reactionary internal and external policies!
- Oppose the various other forces practising and supporting such reactionary policies!!
- Support the Communist Revolutionaries who are fighting for land, democracy and independence!!!

The UCCRI (ML) will participate in the ensuing general elections to the 18th Lok Sabha and the AP Assembly with the above slogans.

The BJP is pursuing policies of plundering the people of the country to enrich the big business, pro-imperialist foreign capital and landlord classes. It is pursuing a reactionary foreign policy of serving the US super power in its drive for global hegemony, war and plunder while pursuing a policy of regional hegemony, expansionism and war in India's neighbourhood and beyond.

The Congress claims to be the real Opposition to the reactionary

BJP. But it has practised basically the same reactionary policies over decades of its rule at the Centre.

There are some parties like the TDP and Jana Sena who have allied with the BJP by joining the NDA. It is necessary to defeat them as they will only reinforce the reactionary rule of the BJP.

The BRS claims to represent an alternative to the BJP and the Congress. It speaks of its Telangana Model. But ten years of its rule has only enriched the big business, landlords and foreign capital.

Vinod,

Secretary, UCCRI(ML)

Campus Protests

[An Open Letter to President Shafik, Columbia University]

We are a group of scientists and academics based at universities across the world. We are writing to express our dismay at your decision to invite the New York Police Department to arrest pro-Palestinian protesters on your University's campus.

These protesters were demonstrating against the brutal Israeli offensive in Gaza, which has now entered its seventh month. During this period, Israel has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians, most of whom are women and children. The International Court of Justice has found that Israel's campaign could plausibly amount to genocide. The international community has repeatedly called for Israel to halt this war; in December 2023, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution with an overwhelming majority calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. In spite of this, the United States has continued to bankroll this violence and has shielded Israel from diplomatic repercussions.

The US media has failed to accurately portray the horrific impact of the war on ordinary Palestinians, and this has allowed the US government to continue its indefensible policies. We applaud the protesters

at Columbia and elsewhere in the United States for looking past this smokescreen. We commend their willingness to stand up to their own government in defence of Palestinian human rights and demand divestment from the military industrial complex in Israel. We are impressed by their efforts to build an inclusive coalition to peacefully advocate for these demands. Columbia should be proud of those members of its community who joined these protests. The protests at Columbia and other campuses are precisely the empathetic, informed and courageous actions that are required at the time of a crisis.

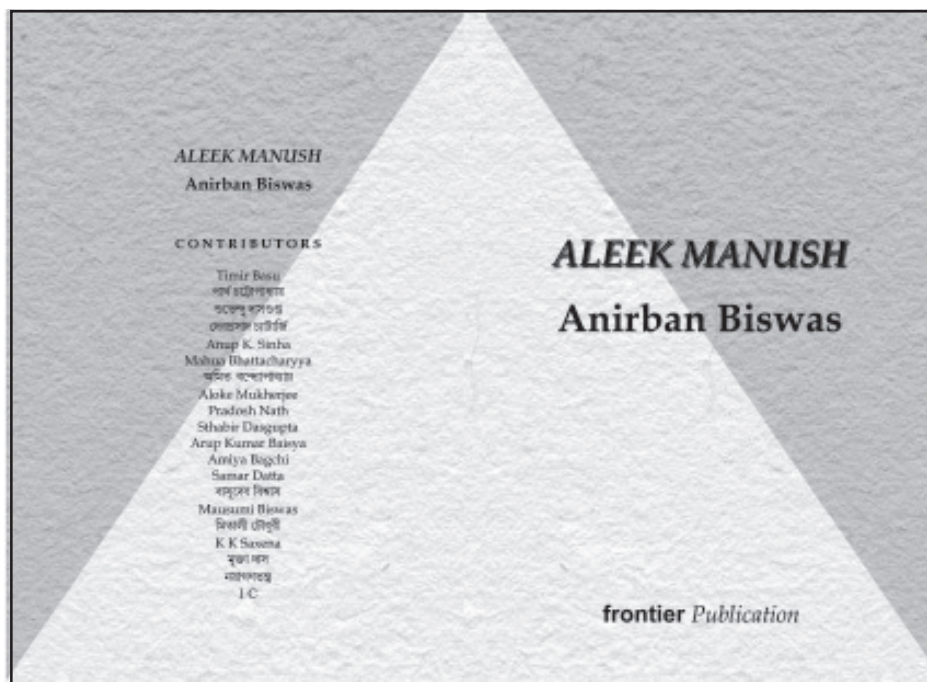
Even if Columbia's administration disagreed with the protesters, it was your responsibility to protect their rights to express their views. We understand that the protests were disruptive; however, this is the nature of protests, especially those concerning such serious issues. As Columbia University Professor Edward Said once wrote regarding his advocacy for Palestinian rights from inside the academy: 'Our role is to widen the field of discussion, not to set limits in accord with the prevailing authority.'

Your actions have weakened democratic norms within the university and undermined the university's standing in the international academic community. We urge you to immediately revoke any disciplinary actions taken against the protesters and to take immediate steps to ensure that charges are dropped against those who were arrested.

Tarek Anous,
Queen Mary University of London
Philip Argyres,
University of Cincinnati
Cyril Closset,
University of Birmingham
Anne-Christine Davis,
Cambridge University
Suvrat Raju, International
Centre for Theoretical Sciences,
Tata Institute of Fundamental
Research and 9 others

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), Dhyanbindu
and other book stalls selling issues of frontier.

Contribution: INR 100