

frontier

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Founder-Editor : **SAMAR SEN**

On Other Pages

Comment	2
Note	3
FIGURES FOR FUN A \$5 Trillion Economy Soon? Neeraj Jain	4
SANGH'S DOUBLE-SPEAK RSS Deceit on Reservation Shamsul Islam	6
RISING FROM THE MARGINS Kudmis Quest for Scheduled Tribe Status Shamayita Sen	8
THE AGE OF TECHNO-FEUDALISM Territorialisation of Land Bhabani Shankar Nayak	10
HEAT WAVES Millions in Informal Sector are at Risk Atanu Chakravarty	11
CEASE-FIRE OR NO CEASE-FIRE Wars End in Frozen Conflicts Bharat Dogra	12
Letters	14

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

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

Website: <https://www.frontierweekly.com>

Telephone : 2530-0065

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'There are no Jobs'

THE CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL LABOUR DAY ON MAY 1 is more like a ritual today. Communists and socialists continue to observe it across the world without showing any resolve to revive the spirit of Haymarket. May Day to millions of workers who toil in most hazardous conditions for 12 hours or more, not 8 hours a day is anything but a utopia still. Even white-collar employees, otherwise better paid in the corporate houses, are not in a happy situation. Frequent retrenchment and lay-offs have made their life miserable. They have no privilege of less working hours either. As per 'a recent survey by the International Labour Organisation [ILO] India ranks 7th in the list of countries with the largest work weeks, with the average working hours being 46.7 per week and 51 percent of people working for 49 hours or more per week'. The persons in authority simply mock at the International Workers Day even in the 21st century and the Haymarket affairs took place way back in 1856 in Chicago.

As labour-bashing is the order of the day under a nakedly pro-corporate government employers even in small-scale sectors are ruthless in dealing with their employees denying them their legitimate and statutory dues. Political leaders, both left and right alike, do hardly raise the issue of labour-welfarism in their poll campaign in the ensuing general elections. They release some manifestos with a lot of fanfare promising the moon only to allow them to gather dust after election.

Meanwhile, Narayan Murthy, one of the top rankers of India's billionaire club came out with a unique proposal of taming labour and increasing productivity. As if the prevailing system of oppressive and staggering working conditions is not enough, Mr Murthy proposed a seventy-hour work week. If it gets implemented India will be a Dickensonian desert even for white-collar workers, not to speak of blue-collar teeming millions sweating in the ever increasing unorganised sector.

Workers in every sector are being forced to accept harsh working conditions and long working hours because of intense competition in labour market. Employees are always on the run, they are running with the speed of machines and in many cases they expend almost half of their day or more towards work to be ahead of in the race in hopes of better pay, recognition and promotion. Today unemployment is a big issue in India but even the left doesn't find any time to organise sustained agitation on it. Modi's promise of 2 crore jobs proved a big hoax and yet the perennially

divided opposition fails to expose Modi's bankruptcy. Instead they are being trapped in the BJP manipulated quagmire of communal and divisive politics. India, otherwise dubbed as the fastest growing economy by some international rating agencies, has not been able to generate jobs enough for its large and expanding population. Millions of well-educated young people from India's middle class families are struggling to find meaningful employment.

Fifteen vacancies for peons, drivers and watchmen in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, had nearly 11,000 unemployed young applicants with graduate, post-graduate, engineering and MBA or PhD degrees. In 2023 in Uttar Pradesh 5.5 millions applied for group D jobs (positions such as peon, watchman and gardener). In the same Uttar Pradesh which is being showcased as development model after Gujarat 93,000 candidates applied for 62 'peon'

posts in the police department which requires a minimum education eligibility till class 5. Tragically, among the jobseekers 3,700 were PhD holders and 28,000 post-graduates. Even in Gujarat, Modi's mascot 1.7 million applied for 3,400 jobs requiring minimum qualification of class 10.

Indian youths are attaining high levels of education but they soon get frustrated as even IIT engineers are driving taxis! □□□

04-05-2024

COMMENT

Student Power

A GAZA-FOCUSED CAMPUS PROTEST movement in the United States seems to have highlighted a generational divide on Israel with young people's willingness to challenge politicians and college administrators on display nationwide.

The opinion gap—with younger Americans generally more supportive of Palestinians than the generations that came before them—poses a risk to 81-year-old Democratic President Joe Biden's re-election chances.

Students at Columbia University in New York set up a Palestine solidarity encampment last week, and they have since faced arrests and other disciplinary measures after the college administration called on police to clear the protest. More than 500 students at US Universities were arrested; many of them beaten and even professors and faculty members are not safe. Students are now facing an increasingly aggressive response from the police, university administrations, and even some political decision makers.

Yet, despite the crackdown, similar encampments have sprung up across the US, as well as in other countries.

Footage of students, professors

and journalists being violently detained by officers on various campuses spurred outrage but has done little to slow the momentum of the protests, which have continued to spread.

The students are largely demanding that their universities disclose their investments and withdraw any funds from weapons manufacturers and firms involved with the Israeli military. They demand complete transparency and amnesty for activists, all students and faculty disciplined or fired in the movement for Palestinian liberation.

Politicians from both major US parties, as well as the White House and pro-Israel groups, have accused the students of fuelling anti-Semitism—allegations that protesters vehemently deny.

In truth younger people are growing increasingly frustrated with the status quo on domestic and foreign policy issues.

"In American history in general, usually the big shifts in public opinion have either coincided with or been triggered by large student movements."

For years, public opinion polls in the US suggest that younger people are more likely to be sympathetic

towards Palestinians and critical of Israel.

But Americans overall have grown more critical of Israel's treatment of Palestinians, including in the ongoing war on Gaza.

Multiple polls suggest that a majority of US respondents back a permanent ceasefire in the besieged Palestinian enclave, where Israel has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians since the conflict broke out on October 7.

But Biden has maintained staunch support for Israel, the US's top Middle East ally, amid the war.

Polls suggest that Biden will need to appeal to his Democratic Party base, which is not as united in support of Israel as the Republican Party.

The student protesters are not getting involved in US partisan politics, however. They instead have stressed that their demands aim to help protect the human rights of Palestinians.

So can the demonstrations help bring about changes to US policy and achieve their divestment demands?

It is unlikely that US colleges will divest from large firms and the defence industry in the short term, but the call for transparency in their investments is reasonable.

Long-term change is possible, but it will not come overnight.

The fact is that when student

May 19-25, 2024

FRONTIER

3

organising rises to a certain level of intensity, it can have a significant effect.

College activism against apartheid in South Africa began in the 1950s and grew over the years.

Many think the anti-apartheid campus organising of the 1980s was

a significant piece of what shifted American popular opinion and political opinion on the South African regime. Even if the student movement fails for the time being it would have effects in the long term. □□□

[Contributed by Ali Harb of Al Jazeera]

26-04-2024

NOTE

‘The Hindu is in Danger’

John Dayal writes:

PERHAPS NO ONE WILL BE as anxious about the election results as India’s estimated 200 million Muslims and 30 million Christians. The numbers remain an approximation, extrapolated from the 2011 census. The 2021 census was not held in the wake of the Covid pandemic. It is not known when the census will now be held.

For the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament, approximately 970 million people out of a population of 1.4 billion people are eligible to cast their vote. Among them would be about 22.31 million Christian voters. This is seemingly a large number, but Christians are all but invisible in the election debate.

Expectedly, Mr Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have reverted to their political strategy of pandering to the religious right sections of the country’s billion-strong Hindu community. He has roused them with slogans that their existence is threatened by a sharp rise in the Muslim population through birth, conversion and migrations from neighbouring Bangladesh.

“The Hindu is in danger” was the catchphrase of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the 95-year-old militant Hindu group that launched the BJP.

“The Hindu is in danger” is now also a catchphrase on the WhatsApp

groups run by the ruling party to target the hinterland and the villages as much as they do the high educated segments of society.

Mr Modi has used a tame media—two thirds of it owned by his cronies—and government agencies to build his own image as a savant ruler, a protector of the faith. Government and private media follow him faithfully as he is photographed doing yoga in the heart of the national capital, meditating in Himalayan caves, and most recently, diving to the sea floor off the coast of his native Gujarat state to worship what many believe is the lost capital of Lord Krishna, a major avatar in the Hindu pantheon.

Government funding went into infrastructure after a new temple to Lord Ram was built on the ruins of Babri Masjid, a mosque in the town of Ayodhya, dating back to 1528. The ancient town now boasts of a new airport, a railway station and hotel chains for local and foreign pilgrims and tourists.

Inevitably, Mr Modi’s autocratic rule has sharply eroded constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion and belief. “Anti-conversion laws” in 12 states which once targeted Christian evangelism have been amended, and weaponised, to also target Muslims who marry Hindu women. Penalties are heavy, with sentences that can go up to 10 years in prison.

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International charity to Christian groups has been choked. As a result Church outreach to the poor, the Dalits and indigenous groups has been restricted. In many ways, it also robs these groups, totaling some 23% of the population, of their own freedom of faith. They lose scholarships, jobs, and political representation, if they convert to Christianity or Islam.

Prejudices have infiltrated independent institutions, such as the police and the courts. The impunity empowers Hindu militant groups to threaten, harass, and attack Muslims and Christians with impunity. Christians have documented more than 50 attacks on churches, clergy and schools in the four months of 2024.

The hate finds an echo in the campaign speeches of the prime minister, his home minister, and the senior BJP leaders. It remains to be seen if the dog whistle will work again. □□□

[John Dayal is a former member of the National Integration Council of the government of India and a former national president of the 105-year-old All India Catholic Union]

FIGURES FOR FUN

A \$5 Trillion Economy Soon?

Neeraj Jain

IN 2019, PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi famously envisioned that India would become a \$5 trillion economy by 2024–25. Because of the economic collapse of 2020–21, we are now expected to reach this target by 2027–28 or thereabout—according to our Finance Minister in a speech at the Vibrant Gujarat Summit in Gandhinagar in January this year. The Prime Minister’s Yes-men-and-women have been competing with each other in making even grander claims, of India becoming a \$10 trillion and a \$20 trillion economy in the years and decades to come. NITI Aayog has made a triple jump, and come out with a draft vision document ‘Viksit Bharat @ 2047’ to make India a \$30 trillion economy by 2047.

Modi’s friends too are excitedly chirping in unison. Business tycoon Gautam Adani has come up with this gem, “Following independence, it took us 58 years to get to our first trillion dollars of GDP, 12 years to get to the next trillion and just 5 years for the third trillion. I anticipate that within the next decade, India will start adding a trillion dollars to its GDP every 18 months. This puts us on track to be a \$25–\$30 trillion economy by 2050 ...” Mukesh Ambani has gone one step further, and said that he expects India to become a \$35 trillion economy by 2047.

All these flunkys are also gung-ho about India being the fifth largest economy in the world, and becoming the third largest economy in a few years.

But in an economy with such extreme inequality—India is now

among the most unequal countries in the world, with the top 1% controlling more wealth, more than during the British colonial period, while the majority of the population lives on incomes among the lowest in the world—such overall figures have no meaning. The same IMF, which expects India to become a \$5 trillion economy by 2026–27, also admits that India had the lowest per capita income amongst all large economies. In per capita terms, the Indian economy is at the 138th position in the world. Being the fifth or the third largest world economy is no consolation to the marginalised.

This limitation of GDP data—that it does not reflect how well the ordinary people are doing—is now admitted even by some of the world’s leading economists like Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen. In a study done for French President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2009, these economists called for the adoption of new tools to measure how well the economy is doing, that incorporate a broader concern for human welfare than just economic growth. But let us for the moment keep this aside and consider the claims made by the Modi Government about how well the economy is doing.

In this year’s budget speech, the FM does not make any mention of the country’s projected growth rate for the coming year, or the expected growth rate for 2023–24. The Finance Ministry has not released any Economic Survey for this year, and instead released a booklet “The Indian Economy – A Review” that briefly takes stock of the state of the Indian economy, its journey in the last ten years and the outlook for

the economy in coming years. While the earlier Economic Surveys generally adopted a critical approach towards the country’s economy, pointing out its shortcomings, this Review is more of a propaganda document, eulogising the Modi Government’s economic policies of the last 10 years. Regarding GDP growth, the Review claims that the structural reforms undertaken during the past 10 years of the Modi Government “have led to India emerging as the fastest growing economy among G20 economies. In 2023–24, as per current estimates, it is estimated to have grown 7.3 percent on top of the 9.1 percent (FY22) and 7.2 percent (FY23) in the previous two years.” Since then, the government has further upped the growth rate for this year to 7.6%.

The Modi Government’s passion for claiming India to be the fastest growing economy in the world is not new. It began making these claims during its first term itself. But there are several problems with the Modi Government’s estimates of GDP and GDP growth rates, which raise questions about the reliability of these figures.

The biggest problem with these claims being made by the Modi Government is—it has no qualms about manipulating data to suit its political propaganda. For this, it has proactively destroyed India’s statistical system, which was once one of the best and most reliable in the developing world. It has curbed the independence of the National Statistical Commission, which was originally envisaged as an independent body of experts which would verify and supervise the collection, collation and dissemination of official data, and made it subservient to its wishes. It has pressurised the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO), the body that collects and dissemi-

brates data, which is run and staffed by professional economists and statisticians, to blatantly manipulate official data to glorify the economic record of the Modi Government. This manipulation began right from the very time the Modi Government came to power in 2014. Let us take a brief look at Modi Government's manipulation of the country's GDP data over the past decade.

Soon after Modi Government assumed power in 2014, the CSO announced that it was changing the base year for all calculations to 2011–12 (from the earlier base year of 2004–05), as well as changing the methodology for calculating the GDP. This magically upped the GDP growth rate by 2 percentage points, making India the world's fastest growing major economy. The following year (2016), the CSO released another set of estimates, further upping the growth rate figures for the BJP years.

Now, there is fundamentally nothing wrong with re-basing the GDP; this is periodically done. But this time, there were several reasons for doubting the new data series. To begin with, whenever the GDP is rebased, the "back series" is also released immediately, going back to at least a decade or more. This time, what was bewildering was that the CSO for three years did not publish the GDP growth figures for the years prior to 2011–12. Finally, in July 2018, a committee set up by the National Statistical Commission (NSC) presented its estimates of GDP back series based on the new methodology. But to the Modi Government's dismay, the new back series showed that economic growth during the UPA years exceeded the

growth during the BJP years (the new series calculated the average growth rate during the UPA years to be 8.0%, while the average growth rate during the 3 BJP years as per the new series was 7.6%). Despite the NSC being an autonomous body, the Modi Government forced the NSC to trash the report, and the government's sycophantic statisticians burnt the midnight oil to come up with a new back series that showed a lower rate of growth during the UPA years as compared to the BJP years. (The new data now lowered the growth rate during the UPA years to 6.7%.) This was released to the press in November 2018 by the Niti Aayog vice-chairman—when actually the Niti Aayog has nothing to do with computation of GDP figures, and the data should have been released by the CSO. Clearly, the Niti Aayog had helped the CSO massage the GDP figures. And then, wonder of wonders, in 2019, just a day before the Modi Government released its last budget of its first term, the CSO further bumped up the growth rate data for the year 2016–17 to show that growth for the four BJP years was even higher than earlier projected, at 7.7%.

There were rumblings of disbelief about the new figures. All reports from the ground indicated that the hastily announced demonetisation in November 2016 and then the badly designed GST in mid-2017 had devastated the economy, especially the informal sector. But the new official estimates claimed that India had grown at a whopping 8.2% in 2016–17, and 7.2% in 2017–18 (see Table 1). These figures were simply unbelievable!

GDP Growth Rate Before the Pandemic, 2015–16 to 2019–20 (%)

	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	Average
GDP Growth Rate	8	8.3	6.8	6.5	4	6.7

Arvind Subramanian, who was the Modi Government's Chief Economic Advisor from 2014 to 2018, let the cat out of the bag after resigning. In a working paper published in June 2019, he admitted that India's GDP was overestimated by 2.5 percentage points per year for the post-2011 period, that is, for the five year period 2012–13 to 2016–17. Instead of the reported average growth of 6.9% for these five years, the GDP growth was more likely to be around 4.4%.

There is a limit as to how much you can manipulate data. As the economic situation worsened during the Modi years, the CSO was forced to admit that the economy was slowing down: the GDP growth rate slowed down for 9 consecutive quarters to touch 3.1% for January–March 2020, and for 2019–20 as a whole, the growth rate fell to just 4%, an 11-year low (Table).

This means that the economy had begun sinking into recession even before the corona pandemic hit the economy.

After that, the pandemic struck. The Modi Government's inept handling of the pandemic led to an unprecedented economic collapse. Official data admitted that the economy contracted by –7.7%. [10] India witnessed perhaps the sharpest

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absolute drop in GDP among the major economies of the world in 2020–21.

With the lifting of the lockdown, the economy began to recover. Once again the Modi Government's trumpeters began to proclaim that India's post-pandemic growth rates are the highest among the major economies—the CSO estimates GDP growth to be 9.75% in 2021–22, 7% in 2022–23 and at 7.6% in 2023–24.

Several mainstream economists have questioned the reliability of the latest figures dished out by the CSO. For instance, in September 2023, Ashoka Mody, a professor of economics at Princeton University, wrote an article in a reputed international publication, accusing the Indian government of conducting a “branding and beautification” exercise on its GDP numbers to make them look better in the run-up to the G20 summit.

In early January 2024, the NSO released the First Advanced Statistics of National Income for 2023–24. In that, it projected the GVA growth to be 6.9% and GDP growth to be 7.3% for 2023–24. Less than 2 months later, in end-February 2024, it came out with Second Advance Estimates of National Income, 2023–24. In this data, the NSO revised the GDP growth rate upwards to 7.6%, while keeping the GVA growth rate to be the same—which makes the upward revision of GDP dubious.

More recently, the well known economist and former Chief Statistician of India Pronab Sen has pointed out another important discrepancy in the data released by the NSO, which indicates that the GDP growth rate is overestimated. According to Sen, private consumption growth numbers correlate very closely with the GDP growth figure. If GDP growth is X percent then consumption growth can at most be 0.5 to 1 percentage points less than X. This means if GDP growth is estimated to be 7.6% for 2023–24, then consumption growth should be at least 6.6%. But official data shows consumption growth to be only about 3%. Sen argues that the only possible conclusion that can be drawn from the fact that the consumption growth rate is less than half of GDP growth is that GDP growth is overestimated.

The Indian economy consists of two broad sectors: the organised and the unorganised. The organised sector produces about 55% of the output, but employs only 6% of the workforce; the unorganised sector contributes to 94% of the employment and 45% of the output of the economy. Of this, agriculture contributes to around 45% of the workforce and 14% of the GDP. The data for the organised sector are produced regularly every year, and so its contribution to the GDP can

be accurately estimated. Of the unorganised sector, data for only agriculture is available. For the remaining unorganised sector, which has 99% of all production units and contributes to 31% of the GDP, data is collected only once in five years. In between these years, the unorganised sector's contribution to the GDP is calculated using growth of the organised sector. The last such survey was carried out in 2015–16; after that, the Modi Government has not carried any such surveys, and also scrapped all other surveys that could have given us factual data about the state of the unorganised sector.

This methodological problem in calculating the GDP is compounded by data deficiencies. Even for the organised sector, only limited data is available. For instance, the corporate sector data representing industry is available only for a few hundred firms. In the case of agriculture, it is assumed that targets set by the ministry are achieved. But that has not been the case in the last few years due to heat or late rains or inability of perishable crops to come to the market during the lockdown and demonetisation, so that it rotted in the fields and agricultural output declined while the government has assumed that it has increased. □□□

[abridged]

SANGH'S DOUBLE-SPEAK

RSS Deceit on Reservation

Shamsul Islam

RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK Sangh (RSS) which claims to be the biggest organisation of Hindus in the world is, in fact, a unique enterprise that trains its cadres in manufacturing and spreading lies in the pure Goebbelian tradition. It functions as a Gurukul; a learning

institution for Hindu high Castes where students also graduate in practising what George Orwell termed ‘doublespeak’ and thus RSS has rightly been described as an “organisation that thrives on political doublespeak”. [Edit, ‘Sangh’s triple-speak’, The Times of India, 26

August 2002.]. It is through lies that poison is spread against lower Castes, minorities and all those who stand for multi-culturalism.

India came face to face with this inherent trait of RSS when its Supremo Mohan Bhagwat in a speech at Hyderabad (April 28, 2024) while reacting to a video (in which a RSS luminary called upon to finish off constitutional Reservation) stated, “Ye galat baat hai, asatya hai (This is wrong, false)... “The

May 19-25, 2024

FRONTIER

7

Sangh has been supporting all reservation as per the Constitution since the beginning. And, the Sangh says that it should continue as long as those for whom it exists feel that it is necessary... It (reservation policy) should continue as long as discrimination exists in society.”

[*Lok Sabha elections: RSS joins BJP quota firefight as unease grows*, *The Telegraph on Line*, Kolkata, April 28, 2024.]

When the founding fathers of the Constitution of independent India made provisions for reservations to Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, the most prominent ideologue of RSS and 2nd Supremo of the organisation, MS Golwalkar strongly reacted by alleging that the rulers “were digging at the roots of Hindu social cohesion and destroying the spirit of identity that had kept all the various sects in a harmonious whole in the past”. [Cited in N. L. Gupta, *RSS and Democracy* (Delhi: Sampradayikta Virodhi Committee, p. 17) He refused to admit that Hindu social system was at the root of the neglect of the lower castes. [Golwalkar, MS., *Bunch of Thoughts*, selection of writings/speeches/interviews, Sahitya Sindhu Prakashana, Bangalore, 1996 [3rd edition], p.363.] When he was asked: “What about the protection to Harijans guaranteed in the Constitution and its subsequent extension?” His reply was:

“Dr Ambedkar had envisaged the special privileges for ‘Scheduled Castes’ for only 10 years from the day we became a Republic in 1950. But it is going on, being extended. Continued special privileges on the basis of caste only, is bound to create vested interests in them in remaining as a separate entity. That would harm their integration with the rest of the society [Hindu society].

[*Golwalkar, MS., Spotlights, Sahitya Sindhu, Bangalore, 1974, p. 16.*]

For Golwalkar, the real issue was not how to undo the injustice done to the lower Castes [Sudras/Dalits] for thousands of years in the past but “take extra care to see that their separateness is not given fillip.” [Golwalkar, MS., *Spotlights, Sahitya Sindhu, Bangalore, 1974, p. 184*] He never accepted the fact that lower Castes were being maltreated in India. While reacting to a big carnage of Dalits in a part of India he wrote on October 14, 1972:

“There is a trend these days to give Harijan-non-Harijan colour even to ordinary happenings, probably out of political motivation and digging a rift in the oneness and solidarity of the people. For immediate benefits—even these doubtful—to sacrifice the lasting good of the people as a whole that is the unfortunate aspect of the trends obtaining now-a-days. In our work, we have to steer clear of this poisonous trend and do our best to clarify the atmosphere.”

[*Golwalkar, MS., Shri Guruji Sanmgr Darshan, (selection of his writings/speeches in Hindi), vol. 7, Bhartiya Vichar Sadhna, Nagpur, 1974, p. 244.*]

Golwalkar’s hatred for Dalits was outcome of his firm belief in Casteism under which they did not enjoy even right to life. For him Casteism was synonymous with the Hindu nation. According to him, the Hindu people are none else but,

“[The] Virat Purusha, the Almighty manifesting himself... According to purusha sukta sun and moon are his eyes, the stars and the skies are created from his nabhi [navel] and Brahmin is the head, Kshatriya the hands, Vaishya the thighs and Shudra the feet. This means that the

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people who have this fourfold arrangement, i.e., the Hindu People, is [sic] our God. This supreme vision of Godhead is the very core of our concept of ‘nation’ and has permeated our thinking and given rise to various unique concepts of our cultural heritage.

[*Golwalkar, MS., Bunch of Thoughts, pp. 36-37.*]

This was nothing but a re-phrasing of Manu’s inhuman anti-Sudra codes. Golwalkar refused to accept that Casteism was a bane to Hinduism or hindered the feeling of unity among Hindus.

“Persons interested in calumniating Hindus make much of the caste system, the ‘superstitions’, the want of literacy, the position of women in the social structure, and all sorts of true or untrue flaws in the Hindu Cultural Organisation, and point out that the weakness of the Hindus lies solely in these.”

[*Golwalkar, Bunch of Thoughts, pp. 61-62.*]

Ambedkar, who witnessed RSS growing and was familiar with its destructive tendencies, was of the firm opinion that the ideology of Hindutva practised by RSS was nothing but a ploy by upper Caste Hindus to maintain control over society and its resources. He wrote:

“They have a trait of character which often leads the Hindus to disaster. This trait is formed by their acquisitive instinct and aversion to share with others the good things of life. They have a monopoly of education and wealth, and with wealth and education they have captured the State. To keep this monopoly to themselves has been the ambition and goal of their life. Charged with this selfish idea of class domination, they take every move to exclude the lower classes of Hindus from wealth, education and power...This attitude of keeping education, wealth and power as a close preserve for themselves and refusing to share it, which the high Caste Hindus

have developed in their relation with the lower classes of Hindus, is sought to be extended by them to the Muslims. They want to exclude the Muslims from place and power, as they have done to the lower class Hindus. This trait of the high Caste Hindus is the key to the understanding of their politics.”

[*Ambedkar, BR., Pakistanor the Partition of India, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1990 (reprint of 1946 edition), p. 123.*]

How shamelessly RSS has been opposing Reservation was made clear in 1981 when its cadres played most nefarious role in opposing Reservation to socially and economically backward Castes in Gujarat introduced by Congress ministry headed

by Madhavsinh Solanki. More than 100 people were killed including 2 police officials. It is interesting to note that like today the debate of Reservation was turned in spreading poison against local Muslims who were killed with impunity. □□□

April 30, 2024

[*Link for some of S. Islam's writings in English, Hindi, Urdu and translations into Marathi, Malayalam, Kannada, Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati and video interviews/debates:*

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RISING FROM THE MARGINS

Kudmis Quest for Scheduled Tribe Status

Shamayita Sen

TRIBALISM, WRITES MAMDANI, is 'reified ethnicity'. The administrative category of 'tribe' is a colonial invention: 'a politically driven, totalising identity' which discriminates in favour of the native over the non-native. In India, caste, religion and tribe were the three administrative canisters into which the colonised were sequestered by the British. Since its inception, the category of tribe, which was later adapted as Scheduled Tribe (ST) by the makers of the Indian constitution was loaded with racist and evolutionist connotations. While initially Hindus were held responsible for the 'savage state of the aborigines, the blame has presently shifted to the shoulders of the modern State. The 'tribal' though continues to remain savage and primitive, always seen through the lens of a 'deficit', as a community that is 'behind, lacking, insufficient'. The

ontology of the modern self to date has as its other in the 'tribe'.

Notwithstanding the stereotypes that heavily inform the category of ST, a number of communities in India aspire to be categorised as such. ST remains a 'pliable' administrative category for its criteria are not clearly defined. In 1965, the Lokur Commission came up with five criteria of ST recognition: indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large and backwardness. While these criteria have been criticised, (for instance, the Xaxa Report (2014) admits of their 'paternalistic and pejorative connotations', no new criteria have been formulated to replace them. This has prompted scholars like Mayaram (2014) to see the category as a 'mode of violence, pointing to the need to debate afresh the grounds on which tribality is

constituted'. It is here that the struggle of the Kudmi Mahato community becomes important. What follows is a brief account of their struggle for ST status.

The Kudmi-Mahato community, spread across West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Assam is presently mobilising massively for ST status. In West Bengal, they are concentrated majorly in the south-western districts of Bankura, West Midnapore, Jhargram, and Purulia. They have an agrarian economy and control most of the fertile, arable lands in these districts. Kudmis are also politically influential, especially in Jhargram and Purulia where they constitute the demographic majority. During the 34-year Left Front rule in Bengal, they assumed a central role in the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI. By assuming a leadership position in the Lalgargh Resistance Movement (2008-2011), remembered as a watershed movement in the political history of West Bengal, Kudmis also played a crucial role in sounding the death knell for the CPI(M). Although

May 19-25, 2024

FRONTIER

9

initially, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) could mobilise their support, recent trends foreground divided loyalties between the TMC, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Their struggle to gain recognition as ST is the most significant reason behind their party/electoral dilemma.

In colonial India, till 1931, Kudmis were recognised as Primitive Tribe. After 1931, they were de-scheduled from the list of tribes after successful mobilisation by a section of upper-class Kudmis for Kshatriya status. The ST list which was prepared in 1950 too did not mention their name. The Kalekar Commission (1955) proposed their name to be included in the list of Backward Classes in West Bengal. Since the implementation of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission's report in the early 1990s, Kudmi is constitutionally recognised as an Other Backward Class in the state. The struggle for ST status among them has a long history. In Bengal, it has its epicentre at Purulia where in 1987 about a lakh Kudmi congregated to voice their claims to tribality.

While the CPI (M) government made no promises along the lines of recognising Kudmis' tribal status, the TMC chief Mamata Banerjee recognised and endorsed their demand. The Cultural Research Institute (CRI) in West Bengal (functioning under the Tribal Development Department) which evaluates claims of communities to tribality has not assessed Kudmis' demands favourably. While changes to the report have been suggested by Kudmi mulmanta (leaders) leading the agitation for ST status who have given clarifications on several conclusions made in the report, a failure to accommodate Kudmis' demands has created a stir against the State government. The BJP has taken advantage of this situation to reap political benefits. Interestingly in 2019,

BJP candidates won in Parliamentary election from both Jhargram and Purulia. In 2024, while in Purulia, Kudmis have fielded Ajit Prasad Mahato, their veteran and most-influential leader as an independent candidate, in Jhargram which is an ST-reserved Parliamentary constituency, the community is supporting Surya Singh Besra, a veteran leader of Jharkhand movement. This comes as a response to foot-dragging on parts of both the Central and state governments over the community's demand for ST status.

The politics of recognition among Kudmis has not gone down well with communities presently categorised as ST, mostly Santhals and Bhumij. They have organised protest sit-ins both at the district and regional levels to argue against Kudmis' claims which mostly centre on the pervasiveness of Hindu religious practices among them. While their claims are not entirely unverified, it should be remembered that ST is a religion-neutral category. Kudmis present an interesting case in the critical politics of tribality because they defy the archaic markers on the fulfilment of which a community is given ST-status. But, this does not make their claim illegitimate. Kudmis indeed escape the notions of lack and inadequacy that are central to the construction of tribe as an anti-modern community, but their struggle needs to be closely surveyed.

While movements for ST-status generally get 'trapped in the language of the state... constrained by the single demand for reservation', the Kudmis are practising a subversive politics by embodying their critical absence. Instead of framing their history through the lens of an archaic tribalism, by escaping the existing criteria for ST-recognition, Kudmis are 'living the absence'.

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'Unidentifiable by any of the available markers and protocols' of tribality while still demanding ST status, Kudmis are embracing disidentification thereby opening the way for a more nuanced understanding of who constitutes the tribal in modern, postcolonial India, a question that has the potential to also dislodge the modern. □□□

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THE AGE OF TECHNO-FEUDALISM

Territorialisation of Land

Bhabani Shankar Nayak

IN THE EARLY SEVENTH CENTURY in rural England, the process of territorialisation has played a major role in the transformation of land into private property in its institutionalised form. This transformation was facilitated through the implementation of various practices such as surveying, husbandry, and legal frameworks. The rise of territorialisation marked a profound shift in the relationship between communities and the land they inhabited. The transition from communal ownership, often associated with divine commons, to private property rights reshaped the dynamics of land usage and stewardship. Previously, land had been held collectively, with communities sharing rights and responsibilities for its collective usage and communitarian management.

However, as territorialisation advanced, individual ownership emerged as the predominant form of land tenure. Surveying techniques allowed for the precise delineation of property boundaries, facilitating the demarcation of individual land parcels. Concurrently, advancements in agricultural husbandry practices improved land productivity, incentivising individuals to assert control over specific tracts of land for personal

gain. Moreover, legal systems began to recognise and enforce individual property rights, granting landowners exclusive authority over their holdings. This legal framework provided the foundation for the establishment of private property norms, further solidifying the concept of individual land ownership. As a result, the once-shared relationship between communities and the land gradually shifted towards one characterised by private individual rights. This transformation not only altered the economic landscape but also had profound social and cultural implications, fundamentally reshaping the way people interacted with and perceived their environment.

The process of land privatisation in England did not begin solely in the early seventh century but rather unfolded over several centuries, with significant milestones marking its progression. While territorialisation laid the groundwork for the emergence of private property, it was the Norman Conquest of 1066 that initiated a more pronounced shift towards private ownership of land. The Norman Conquest brought about a restructuring of land ownership, as William the Conqueror redistributed vast tracts of land among his sup-

porters, consolidating power and establishing a feudal system. This redistribution fundamentally altered the landscape of land tenure, with large estates granted to Norman nobles in exchange for military service, effectively privatising formerly communal land.

However, it was not until the period of the Enclosures during the 16th century that land privatisation reached its zenith. Enclosure Acts were passed by the English Parliament, allowing landowners to convert common lands into private property by enclosing them with fences or hedges. This process, driven by economic and social factors, led to the displacement of rural communities and the concentration of land ownership in the hands of a wealthy elite. The Enclosure Acts not only solidified the concept of land as private property but also catalysed the transition to more intensive agricultural practices, contributing to the growth of capitalism and the emergence of a modern agricultural economy. Therefore, while territorialisation laid the foundation for land privatisation, it was the Norman Conquest and the Enclosure Acts of the 16th century that played pivotal roles in cementing the transformation of land into private property in England.

The process of territorialisation of land indeed played a crucial role in shaping the emergence of

Westphalian nation-states in Europe. The Peace of Westphalia, signed in 1648, marked a significant turning point in European history, establishing the principles of state sovereignty and territorial integrity. Central to these principles was the idea of clearly defined borders and exclusive control over a defined territory, laying the groundwork for the modern nation-state system with feudal and rent seeking characteristics.

However, the territorialisation of land did not remain confined to Europe; it was also a central feature of European colonialism. European colonial powers embarked on vast imperial projects aimed at expanding their territorial control and extracting resources from colonised lands. This process involved the imposition of Western legal and administrative frameworks on indigenous societies, often resulting in the dispossession of traditional landowners and the establishment of colonial land tenure systems. Colonialism thus globalised the project of territorialisation of land, as European powers sought to assert control over vast territories in Africa, Asia,

the Americas, and Oceania. The primary objectives of colonial territorialisation were twofold: to facilitate revenue accumulation through the exploitation of natural resources and labour, and to extend political and economic dominance over colonised people.

In pursuit of these goals, European colonial powers employed various tactics, including land expropriation, forced labour, and the imposition of property laws favouring colonial settlers. These practices not only entrenched colonial control but also perpetuated patterns of land inequality and social injustice that continue to have lasting consequences in many parts of the world today. The imperialist wars, regional organisations, trading routes, geopolitical and military alliances and organisations are territorial by nature. Moreover, the legacy of colonial territorialisation continues to shape contemporary geopolitical dynamics, as post-colonial states grapple with issues of land rights, resource management, and territorial disputes. The enduring legacy of colonialism underscores the complex

interplay between land, power, and identity in the modern world, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of the historical processes that have shaped our present-day realities, where real estate companies are reproducing landlessness.

The territorialisation of private property has historically accelerated the emergence of individualist and exclusionary societies. Within these societies, the ownership of landed properties has served as a crucial determinant of power and social status for individuals and families. Through their control over these properties, they have exerted influence over both people and natural resources. This phenomenon has laid the groundwork for the feudal system of governance, which has persisted in various iterations worldwide. Consequently, the legacy of private property rights continues to shape social structures and power dynamics in contemporary societies. In the age of techno feudalism, major private and public corporations continue to control vast amount of land in the world today.

□□□

HEAT WAVES

Millions in Informal Sector are at Risk

Atanu Chakravarty

TERRIBLE, TERRIFYING, tormenting summer accompanied by an unprecedented heat wave has engulfed the country. This year, April is considered to be the hottest month and the heat wave is taking its toll all over the globe. ILO declared 28 April, 2024 as "World Day For Safety And Health At Work" and the main slogan was "Safety First". But how safe and secure are the workers, particularly the millions of informal, unorganised workers in India and other parts of the world? What should be the new

demand of Trade Union Movement and workers in this boiling planet in this May Day?

Many Indian cities recorded their highest average temperatures breaching century-old records coupled with numerous heat waves announced by the Met offices. A report by Sustainable Energy For All (SE for ALL), a UN backed organisation working on energy access pointed out that here in India, almost 323 million people are at high risk from extreme heat for a lack of cooling equipment at workplaces. Millions of workers toil

in small enterprises functioning out of sheds, cramped factory premises or old dilapidated buildings with poor or no ventilation at all. Cooling systems like fans, water coolers, sufficient and safe drinking water is scarce in these units. The Indian Labour Market is highly informal—around 90 percent of workers are informally employed; even a significant proportion of regular workers in the formal sector is informal. The persistence of self-employment is another feature in Indian labour market, and self-employment continues to constitute about half of total employment in the economy, which is indeed one of the highest in the world. (India Employment Report 2024 in partnership with ILO).

Demonetisation- GST- pandemic were the economic fallouts and smaller medium units are not in a position to invest in heat beating measures, while the workers face longer hours to meet their targets, putting their health at risk.

Researchers first detected Chronic Kidney disease of non-traditional Cause (CKDnt), which is different than chronic kidney disease caused due to high sugar or blood pressure, in hot rural regions in India, Central America, Africa, West Asia, Sri Lanka affecting large number of workers engaged in heavy manual labour under the scorching heat in physically strenuous occupations employed as sugar- cane cutters, construction workers, miners and port workers. The findings presented in the fact- sheet from research conducted by the Belmont Forum-funded project, "Protection Resilience Efficiency and Prevention (PREP) noted a large number of agricultural workers have died from irreversible kidney failure. CKDnt also drives child labour in affected communities as children enter the work-force to replace sick parents, entrenching the cycle of poverty. In 2020, there was an estimated 26.2 million persons living with chronic kidney disease due to excessive exposure to heat. Another study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health found heat illnesses have a high mortality rate from cardio-vascular and ischemic heart disease.

Heat wave has also told upon the fertility, foetal health, pregnancy duration and lactation. Exposure to intense heat leads to infertility, both in women and men, affecting the men much more. It has been found that heat affects semen in qualitative and quantitative terms; density of sperm, motility, the percentage of spermatozoa with normal form. In terms of foetal health and pregnancy duration, epidemiological evidence showed that ambient heat produces low birth weights, preterm deliveries and development effects concerning the central nervous system. Around 1.6 billion workers are exposed annually to solar ultraviolet (UV) radiations globally with over 18,960 work-related deaths annually due to non-melanoma skin cancer alone, the ILO said. It further added, around 1.6 million outdoor workers face increased risk of exposure to air pollution.

Women workers engaged in construction industry are particularly disadvantaged by extreme heat on two accounts, a report said. One, lack of toilet has forced women to develop a habit of drinking less water holding back urine exacerbating health challenges. Two, rescheduling working hours to early morning or late evening to avoid afternoon peak heat hours often create hurdles for women as they are forced to take care of their children and other household responsibilities.

The most precarious workers—

migrants, those on temporary or engaged without any written contract in low-tech risky manual and unskilled jobs, known as 3D jobs (dangerous, dirty and demanding work) are at higher risk due to over exertion and dehydration.

ILO has reported, every year an estimated 22.85 million occupational injuries, 18,970 deaths and 2.09 million disability - adjusted life years (DALYs) are attributed to excessive heat alone. Out of a total global workforce of 3.4 billion workers, at least 2.41 billion workers are exposed to extreme heat, the report further added.

A paper published in Nature mentioned, India already loses around 101 billion hours a year due to intense heat wave, the most in the world! The paper even apprehends this number might rise to 230 billion hours a year when global warming reaches 2 degree C over pre-industrial levels.

The trade union movement is confronting multiple challenges across the globe, and in India, the labour laws are brazenly bulldozed favouring the corporates. As climate hazards are evolving with unbelievable intensity, it would be proper and necessary to re- evaluate existing legislation, create new legislation and guidance to provide the teeming million wealth creators a conducive safe workplace. Let the pledges of May Day incorporate these demands hitherto ignored, unnoticed. □□□

CEASE-FIRE OR NO CEASE-FIRE

Wars End in Frozen Conflicts

Bharat Dogra

CONVENTIONAL UNDER- standing is that when wars end there should be peace. Only this can create the conditions in which the enormous damage caused by any war can be repaired,

in terms of recreating the infrastructure and rebuilding the devastated lives of many people, as well as create confidence and reassurance among people on both sides that all this devastation will not be repeated.

However increasingly it appears that wars have less and less chance of ending in peace. When the shooting stops, often much later than it could have stopped, a frozen conflict is likely to be the more likely result. Although some sort of ceasefire is of course anytime better than no ceasefire, a frozen conflict is hardly likely to create conditions of hope and goodwill, of a new

May 19-25, 2024

FRONTIER

13

dawn that is expected when a war, however bitterly fought, ends in conditions of genuine peace.

In Ukraine there was a very real chance of ending the war within just about two months of the war starting if peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine which had already reached an advanced stage, with contentious issues resolved, had been allowed to reach their logical conclusion. As not much harm had been done till then, if the war ended then, it would have ended on a note of genuine peace, reminding both Russians and Ukrainians of the importance of living as good neighbours. If the war had ended then on such a note, there would have been hope also of increased cooperation in many-sided activities contributing to the prosperity of both nations and people, conditions for which are rooted in geography, history and culture.

However, this was not to be, as western powers, the USA and the UK in particular, were determined not to let the negotiations succeed and Prime Minister Boris Johnson flew in specially to convey this message to Ukrainian ruling elites. After this peace possibilities have been going downhill all the way and each day of conflict with all its ruin and devastation has further hardened the attitudes on both sides. Now whenever there is ceasefire, there are much higher chances of this leading to a frozen conflict rather than to real peace.

In the conditions of a frozen conflict, hostilities of a different kind are likely to continue, with open conflict not being ruled out whenever things go out of control again. This will create avoidable distress and costs for both sides, and these are likely to be particularly high for Ukraine.

This frozen conflict can no doubt extend to other neighbouring coun-

tries as well, with many dangerous possibilities.

In the case of the Gaza conflict, it is even more difficult to talk about the possibilities of genuine peace. Given the kind of cruelties that have been seen in Gaza, how can one expect this to end on a note of peace and goodwill? Of course immediate and permanent ceasefire is urgently needed here to stop further loss of human lives, but even then genuine peace will be far away. The future here is full of many uncertainties, but some sort of frozen conflict will persist, with possibilities open of things getting out of control and conflict re-erupting in various ways.

Despite the long and unhappy history of conflicts here, very few persons could have imagined about a year back that the situation in Gaza will deteriorate so rapidly in so short a time, and to such an extent. In fact, very rapid deterioration in a very short time has also been seen in some other parts of the world like Sudan. When things deteriorate so rapidly and there is enormous violence, cruelty and the resulting distress and suffering, the chances of establishing genuine peace are also reduced rapidly.

Hence it is very important that in such serious conflict situations, the intervention of internal and external forces of peace must be much stronger. Just now these forces of peace are very weak and the prospects of causes of conflicts and tensions being reduced as a result of continuing work of peacemovements are not strong. After conflicts break out, then these prospects are reduced further.

The task of reducing misunderstandings and tensions among countries and adversarial groupings, creating goodwill among them and removing real or imagined complaints and grievances is very important, but this is not getting the due

attention. Some of the big powers work deliberately to create conflicts among neighbouring countries or among groups but this is also often not checked by the forces of peace at an early stage. As a result misunderstandings and tensions keep increasing for too long and then it becomes very difficult to restore goodwill and understanding among divided people.

The way things are going on in several parts of the world regarding several new conflicts being precipitated and new gulfs being created among groups of people and among countries is deeply disturbing. The most serious remedial actions are possible only if worldwide peace movement becomes stronger and more active. Of course the United Nations should also make a much more important and significant contribution but due to a number of factors it has not been able to make the very significant contribution that is expected from the biggest peace organisation. One can only hope that if the peace movement becomes stronger worldwide, this can also create conditions for the United Nations to make a much more important contribution to world peace.

If this is possible, then the possibilities of genuine peace emerging at the end of wars will increase. Even in conditions of frozen conflicts, it will be possible to work among people in such ways that gradually there is progress towards genuine peace. □□□

[The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include Planet in Peril, When the Two Streams Met, Man over Machine and A Day in 2071.]

For Frontier Contact

PATIRAM BOOK STALL

College Street

LETTERS

Appeal to Election Commission

Hon'ble CEC & ECs of ECI,

This has reference to Violation of (a) the Model Code of Conduct, (b) Sections 123(3) and (3A), 125 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, and Section 153A of the Indian Penal Code by Shri Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister, in a speech in Banswara, Rajasthan, on April 21, 2024.

I am Lalita Ramdas, aged 84, a concerned senior citizen of this country and a registered voter in Alibag Taluka, Raigad, Maharashtra. My husband and I have been casting our votes at the Kamarle Village School.

I am also an active community educator and have worked for over four decades with literacy, adult education, and awareness building on the Constitution in urban and rural areas.

I also happen to be a Fauji daughter and Fauji wife.

My father, the late Admiral Ram Dass Katari, was the first Indian to become Chief of Naval Staff in Independent India.

My husband, late Admiral L. Ramdas, who passed away a month ago, has written letters to the ECI-CEC—in the past few years, expressing his concerns and anguish at the violations of the Constitution of India, to which all Servicemen take an oath of loyalty.

I am deeply disturbed and distressed by reports and visuals regarding the serious violation of the above-mentioned provisions of the Model Code of Conduct—which also represents a violation of the Constitution.

Along with many other citizens of this country, I hereby urge the ECI, especially the Hon Chief Elec-

tion Commissioner Shree Rajiv Kumar and other Honourable Election Commissioners to kindly respond to the public demand for taking action in this case.

Thank you in anticipation as a citizen representing, 'We the People of India',

*Yours Faithfully,
Lalita Ramdas*

'Gaza Solidarity Encampments'

All India Students Association (AISA) has issued a letter of solidarity to the thousands of students, staff and faculty across the United States in their struggle and rallying cry for divestment from Israel and an end to the Gaza war. These students, staff and faculty have been organising the 'Gaza Solidarity Encampments' (sit-in protests) at Yale University, New York University, Harvard University, Stanford University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Michigan University, Boston University, American University, Columbia University, among others, where, from coast to coast, they are braving unprecedented police crackdown, demanding an end to the complicity of the US government and the US universities in Israel's genocidal war in Gaza and Palestine.

In India, the fascist Modi regime has also unleashed a wave of repression against any voices that stand with Palestine. In fact, USA Ambassador to India HE Eric Garcetti was invited to JNU's School of International Studies for a talk, to which the JNU Students' Union held a protest demonstration on April 29th, vehemently condemning the invitation to the Ambassador, stating the US's complicity in the on-going atrocities against the Palestinian People. A statement by AISA JNU unit read—"We refuse to host HE Eric Garcetti and call upon the ad-

ministration to retract the invitation.

'From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be Free!'

AISA

Congress Manifesto

BJP has nothing left to offer to people so they are trying hard to scare people by spreading multiple fake news—

- Congress will implement Sharia Law—CM Adityanath
- Congress will redistribute your wealth to minorities—PM Modi
- Congress will bring inheritance tax—HM Amit Shah

All these claims are 100% fake.

BJP's top leadership is not just trying to confuse or distract people anymore—they are straight-up LYING. Congress manifesto mentions none of this.

Let's have a look at what the Congress Manifesto promises to the voters:

- Congress will provide jobs by filling up 30 lakh vacancies in govt posts. (Page 30 of Manifesto)
- Congress will not increase any tax on the middle class throughout its term. (Page 31 of Manifesto)
- Congress will support small businesses so all the nation's resources don't get sold to billionaires like Adani. (Page 28 of Manifesto)

It is Modi's policies like Electoral Bonds which have stolen the wealth from the people of India and given it to billionaires. That's why one will not find any similar promise in BJP's manifesto.

Dhruv Rathee

Killing by BSF

In the night between 1st and 2nd August Mithu Hoque, S/o Abdul Rahim, aged 35, a resident of Vill: Tutiya Kuthi, GP: Nayarhat, P.S. Sahebganj, Dinhat II block, was killed by BSF firing. He was killed

May 19-25, 2024

FRONTIER

15

by BSF personnel attached to 179 Bn BSF posted at Chongar Khata BOP in Mathabhanga I block, which comes under the jurisdiction of Mathabhanga PS, Cooch Behar. The victim sustained three rounds of firing by the said BSF personnel. Mithu Hoque was allegedly associated with cross border smuggling.

The victim could have been apprehended by the BSF personnel and could have been brought to the court of law for his alleged involvement in smuggling. But, instead the BSF personnel involved took the brutal path of summary execution and creation of a fictitious story about self defence. When the Chief Minister of West Bengal is repeatedly condemning violence in the Indo-Bangladesh border area and the prime minister of India is pledging to bring down border killings to zero, why does the Border Security Force involve in such gruesome acts repeatedly?

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

World Press Freedom Day

May 3rd marks World Press Freedom Day.

Two years ago, regular Guardian contributor—and my friend—Dom Phillips was murdered in the Brazilian Amazon, with Brazilian indigenous expert Bruno Pereira. Guardian reporters have previously been kidnapped in Iraq and Afghanistan, beaten in Pakistan, expelled from Russia, and arrested in Egypt, Zimbabwe. I myself was arrested in China on multiple occasions.

The search for the truth can come at a horrific cost. Last year saw 99 killings of reporters, up 44% on 2022 and the highest toll since

2015. That high toll was almost entirely due to Gaza, where a Guardian editorial noted, “no war has killed so many journalists so quickly.”

The vast majority are Palestinian reporters who, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, appear to have been targeted by Israeli forces.

Reporting on the war against nature may generate fewer headlines than Gaza or Ukraine, but it is also high-risk with little legal protection.

On the first anniversary of Dom and Bruno’s killings last year, the Guardian joined an international collaboration to amplify their work, while a group of Dom’s journalist friends, including myself, are also currently working on a crowd-funded project to finish the book that he was working on at the time of his death: *How to Save the Amazon: Ask the People Who Know*, which will be published next year.

The number of environmental journalists being attacked or killed is rising and it continues to be one of the most dangerous fields of journalism after war reporting.

Without the courage of correspondents to continue working in conflict areas, press organisations warn the world will start to see “zones of silence” where the risks are so great that important stories go unreported.

This is much more than a matter of principle; solidarity is a matter of survival.

Jonathan Watts
Global Environment writer,
the *Guardian*

Ukraine Pulls Back

Ukraine's top commander said on April 28 Kyiv's outnumbered troops had fallen back to new positions west of three villages on the eastern front where Russia has concentrated significant forces in several locations.

The statement by Colonel Gen-

eral Oleksandr Syrskyi reflected Ukraine's deteriorating position in the east that Kyiv hopes it can stabilise once it takes delivery of U.S. weapons under a \$61 billion aid package approved this week.

"The situation at the front has worsened," Syrskyi wrote on the Telegram app, describing the "most difficult" areas as west of occupied Maryinka and northwest of Avdiivka, the town captured by Russian forces in February.

President Volodymyr Zelensky issued a fresh plea to international partners to speed arms deliveries so Kyiv could maintain its positions and disrupt Russian plans.

He said he spoke on Sunday with US House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries and "underscored that Patriot systems are needed, and as soon as possible."

Syrskyi said Kyiv's troops had taken up new positions west of the villages of Berdychi and Semenivka, both north of Avdiivka, and Novomykhailivka, further south near the town of Maryinka.

"In general, the enemy achieved certain tactical successes in these areas, but could not gain operational advantages," he said, adding that Russia had committed four brigades to the assault.

Freshly rested Ukrainian brigades were being rotated in those areas to replace units that had suffered losses, he said.

His statement did not mention the status of Novobakhmutivka, another village near Berdychi, that Russia's defence ministry said its forces had captured.

Moscow's troops have been slowly advancing since capturing the bastion town of Avdiivka, taking advantage of Ukrainian shortages of artillery shells and manpower.

A Correspondent

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