

frontier

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A Show in Vilnius

THE RECENTLY-HELD NATO SUMMIT IN VILNIUS WAS A RE-enactment of an old show. There was the question of showing unity in the war alliance as disagreements were surfacing. There was the question of Ukraine—what to do and what not to do with the proxy warrior. There was the question of expansion of the war coalition.

Ukraine's demand was a timetable for full membership in the war club. But NATO was not willing to take the risk. The military alliance's limit came to light. France, Germany, the UK and the USA made commitment to a long term plan to arm and modernise the Ukrainian army. The US-EU axis doesn't want a direct confrontation with Russia. The Kiev regime's demand was rejected. Actually, it was NATO's strong rejection of Ukraine's membership-wish.

To the NATO, the Kiev administration is now appearing a dilemma, if not a burden. Vladimir Zelensky was handed over two consolation gifts—NATO-Ukraine Council and G7's security guarantee. But this guarantee is actually meaningless unless the US provides Kiev an effective guarantee. Once, there was also a NATO-Russia Council. But, that did not deter NATO to organise a war against Russia.

The summit turned out as a frustrating experience for the West's poster boy—Zelensky. At one point, during the summit, he was standing alone. That was a helpless abandoned posture of America's yes-man. Before turning cool, he turned hot, and lost his control with NATO behaviour with his regime. He demanded respect for Ukraine from NATO. Much earlier, he threatened not to go to Vilnius summit. But, he had to go there, as his master turned furious to him.

A puppet has nothing to do beyond his master's command. A beggar has no choice. He turned meek as the master chided him. Moreover, he was seeing shadow of defeat advancing toward him. It is a typical case of a puppet. Now, a part of the Ukraine leadership understands that Ukraine is going to be a bargaining chip of major global powers.

If anything the US-EU war machine will continue its war in Ukraine. The Ukraine people will pay with their blood and destruction of homeland. But NATO's war in Ukraine will continue till the war lobby finds its gains are less than losses. Summit or no summit the American military-industrial complex will continue profiting at the cost of the Ukrainian people.

To NATO, Ukraine is a tool that can be spent out at an opportune

moment. Probably, a part of Kiev regime now understands it. But they have nothing to do, other than fighting “to the last Ukrainian” if their master desires in that way. A tragedy for Ukrainian people!

The summit showed Europe’s limit also. The Europe towing to the USA finds no space for its autonomy. Its independence is now under the foot of its ally from the other side of the Atlantic. Europe now has to dance according to its leader’s script.

The military alliance’s desire–glo-

bal dominance–was reiterated in the summit. To pump logic to this plan for global dominance, the war bond identifies enemies here and there–now Russia, then, China. The alliance creates logic to expand to the Asia-Pacific and the Arctic. The war design is to turn the alliance into Global NATO, which is GTO that brings the entire world under its dominance.

The imperialist alliance has now created a new enemy–China. They always need an enemy to rationalise their unjust activities. The war align-

ment now accuses: China challenges its interests, security and values. This is equal to claiming all in the world must go by the military alliance’s dictation.

As an indication to the alliance’s future march to the Asia-Pacific, the NATO summit was joined by Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. The alliance is planning to open office in Japan. It is the war traders’ eastward move. It is part of the Uncle Sam’s plan for global dominance. □□□

[Contributed]

COMMENT

Wooing the Dalit Voters

WHILE PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi’s attack on Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao occupied headlines during his recent visit to Telangana, a low-key but high-impact meeting may have set the ball rolling on Bharatiya Janata Party’s Dalit outreach in the poll-bound state.

The BJP made its first move to get the Madiga community–belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SCs)–on its side when Prime Minister Narendra Modi granted the Madiga Reservation Porata Samiti founder-president Manda Krishna Madiga an audience during his recent visit.

While Modi met him to enlist the Madigas’ support, the community leader exhorted him to take steps to categorise SCs and to implement reservations for them.

According to Manda Krishna Madiga, in the absence of caste-wise reservations among the SCs in proportion to the population, the Mala community was walking away

with the lion’s share of the benefits, leaving the Madigas, Rellis, and others high and dry.

In fact, the issue has driven a wedge between the Madigas and the Malas.

It may be noted that the decision to implement internal reservation for SC communities was cited as one of the reasons for BJP’s poll debacle in the recently-held Karnataka Assembly elections. Given the BJP’s bitter experience, the topic continues to be a contentious one for any party.

In Telangana, according to the 2011 census, the SC population was 54, 32,680, of whom Madigas comprised 32,33,642 and Malas accounted for 15,27,143.

As no census has been done afterwards, the Telangana government did a comprehensive family survey in 2014, which put the Dalits’ population at 75 lakh, which is about 18 percent of the total population of the state.

In fact, all the major political parties in Telangana are eyeing a larger share of the Dalit pie in the run-up to the Assembly elections in December.

As many as 19 seats in the state

Assembly are reserved for SCs and 12 for STs, while three Lok Sabha seats are for SCs and two are for STs. The total number of Assembly seats is 119 and that of the Lok Sabha in the state is 17.

As there seemed to be an imperceptible but unmistakable shift of the Dalits towards the Congress and the BJP and ruling BRS had initiated several measures to plug the leak.

As there was no party to challenge the BRS till the last two years, KCR had not thought much about the need to woo the Dalits. But over time, the BJP began gaining ground, which worked as a wake-up call for him.

Sensing the lurking danger, he immediately hastened the construction of a 125-ft tall statue of BR Ambedkar and inaugurated it on his 132nd birth anniversary on 14 April, amid much fanfare.

Earlier, in a preemptive move aimed at the Dalit voters, he had named the new Telangana Secretariat, which was still under construction, after Dr BR Ambedkar.

Now, after the rise of Congress in Karnataka, the fortunes of the grand old party too seem to have improved, and Dalits seem to be looking at it with growing interest. □□□

[Contributed]

For **Frontier Contact**

DHYANBINDU

COLLEGE SQUARE

NOTE

Good Work and Revolutionary Good Work

Bharat Dogra writes:

TENS OF MILLIONS OF people are engaged every day in helping others and contributing to family, community and society in various ways. They are the ones who keep alive the faith in human relationships, it is their work that lightens the world, provides not just relief but also cheerfulness and hope, despite many increasing problems.

Despite the evident great value of all this good work, however, in most cases this does not go beyond its limited aim of helping someone or even several people. More particularly, this does not necessarily help to remove or reduce the wider dimensions of the world's problems or to remove their causes.

This happens because while the good work is taken up because of the human concerns of reducing the difficulties and problems of others, this is not informed of and hence not motivated by search of possible solutions of these difficulties and problems in a wider social context, including removing and reducing the causes of these problems. Hence this good work makes its very welcome limited contribution, but does not go beyond this in creating a better society.

On the other hand, if this good work is much better informed of the wider dimension of the problem as well its deeper causes, and if it is

motivated by a deeper urge to take this forward and link it to wider and longer-term solutions in society, then this can make a much more important and durable contribution. If the person who takes up this initiative is also more aware of others who can help to carry the initiative further and tries to link up with them, and if this person is conscious of tackling not just the problem but also its causes, and if this person is motivated by an urge to keep learning in the process so as to be able to make a wider and longer-term contribution, being conscious of the need of wider and longer-term changes in society involving linkages with other work, then the good work taken up by this person does not just remain isolated good work, it becomes a part of revolutionary good work capable of bringing much deeper and wider change, much needed change, in society.

A number of persons come forward to offer help, link the adolescents with these problems to counselors and doctors who in turn provide good treatment and care. All this work is of great value in reducing distress. However in this framework continuing efforts are not made to find the deeper causes due to which mental health problems have increased rapidly among adolescents and to remove the causes of this to the extent possible. As a result even

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as treatment and counseling are being arranged for some, possibly even more new cases of similar problems emerge. Given that social conditions which are at the bottom of these problems remain, it is possible that even those who have received treatment relapse into more or similar problems after a time gap.

On the other hand imagine a different situation in which continuing efforts are also made to understand why such problems are increasing and on the basis of a proper understanding being reached efforts are also made to remove or reduce the factors which give rise to such problems. As a part of this, those who have faced such problems are also encouraged or guided to pursue several highly relevant pursuits in which their creative energies are so well and happily engaged that they become genuinely healthy and happy, leaving behind their depressing past. It is this kind of work which is revolutionary good work, or work of revolutionary potential. □□□

WHAT THE BIG MEDIA WON'T TELL

“Nine Wonderful Modi Years”

Pamela Philipose

SELF-CONGRATULATIONS come easily to the Modi government. On May 30, the prime minister tweeted thus on his

government having completed nine years: “Today, as we complete 9 years in service to the nation, I am filled with humility and gratitude. Every

decision made, every action taken, has been guided by the desire to improve the lives of people. We will keep working even harder to build a developed India. #9YearsOfSeva.”

Congratulating the prime minister comes easily to the Big Media, as they enthusiastically expound on the “nine wonderful Modi years”

theme. Telly thespian-turned-minister, Smriti Irani, seemed to have appointed herself director of this pageant, appearing on channel after channel to glorify these nine years. Anand Narasimhan, the anchor of 'The Right Stand' (CNBC-TV18), allowed the Minister of Women and Child Development a full four breathless minutes on how proud she was about the National Education Policy, PPE production, vaccines, free food grains, toilets for 11 crore families, Ayushman Bharat cards.... As she went on and on, Narasimhan appeared stunned at the exceptional display of lung power, his face frozen in a half-smile.

When it came to Times Now's 'Newshour', Navika Kumar slyly slung a 2024 general election suggestion into the mix, 'Nine years of Modi Govt, stage set for PM Modi in 2024?' She then launched forth with some "hard facts" carefully cherry-picked from the garden of government propaganda, to demonstrate how the nine years of Modi rule delivered so much more than did the UPA's laggard decade... Highway infrastructure: UPA: 9128 km-NDA 1,41,000 km; Under UPA, India was the tenth largest economy-Under NDA, it became the fifth largest; FDI inflows UPA 45 billion dollars-NDA 8483 billion. In this litany that included universities, digital transactions, etc., etc., the UPA was framed as a loser in every respect. Short of telling her audience to vote for Narendra Modi in 2024, Kumar did all she could to further the 'Modi hai to mumkin hai' pitch.

What the Big Media scrupulously avoided telling you about these nine years of Modi rule is that the legacy of communal hatred which had manifested itself very early on, in concepts like the "pink revolution" furthered by the prospective prime minister in his 2014 election campaign, has borne strange fruit...

"blood on the leaves and blood at the root".

Today, almost a decade later, people are witnessing a civil war-like situation in one state and ethnic cleansing drives in another.

What is distinctive about the Manipur situation is the manner in which the age-old ethnic tensions between the Kukis in the hills and the Meiteis in the valley have now come to be undergirded by religious communalism. Burned down churches had never been part of Manipur's political landscape so far, even when economic blockades and intermittent violence shut down the state in the December of 2016. Today they are very much in evidence. An estimated 130 people have already lost their lives in the state and hundreds of thousands have been left injured in body and mind.

The Wire did something that most mainstream media organisations did not bother to do—visit a series of relief camps ('Manipur: Across Relief Camps, Divided Survivors Are United by the Same Anger Towards the Govt', June 12). It discovered that the ethnic-communal divides at ground zero ran through even relief operations: "All the relief camps The Wire visited are being run by local clubs or organisations and cater to just one community."

Meanwhile, in the northern hill state of Uttarakhand, people are witnessing scenes that recall the Polish ghetto under Nazi occupation with markings of black crosses emerging on establishments owned by Muslims ('Cross Marks on Doors, Cries of Extermination: How Uttarakhand Became Our Hate Speech Capital', June 12). The state has been under the grip of a campaign to drive out Muslims, who have been living for generations in this region, for a while now.

The calculated silence of the prime minister to all these develop-

ments speaks loudly of his legacy of nine years. As for contemporary media, they have been so preoccupied with counting digital start-ups that they have neglected to count the human bodies left behind by cow vigilantes and religio-ethnic outfits in these nine years of Modi rule.

When Jack Dorsey, the former head of Twitter, stirred a hornet's nest by claiming that India requested Twitter to remove tweets and accounts linked to the farmers' protest in 2020 and censor journalists who critiqued the Modi government in their work, the Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology, Rajeev Chandrasekhar, responded by calling the statement an "outright".

Nearly a decade of Modi's rule has nurtured a wide and spreading impunity in his juniors ensconced within the safe confines of power. On all major issues, they mimic the prime minister and make sure they don't deviate from the line laid down. It is in the smaller, more localised situations that they feel entitled to their own demonstrations of power. Smriti Irani's berating of a Dainik Bhaskar stringer and his associate is a classic instance of localised tinpot dictatorship. Her parting threat that she would complain to the "malik"—a threat she actually carried out—is totally in keeping with this sense of entitlement. The consequences for the journalists were dire.

Many journalist bodies felt impelled by her abrasive behaviour to condemn Irani ('DIGIPUB and Editors Guild Also Condemn Smriti Irani's 'Threats' to Journalist in Amethi', June 13). The Press Club of India, as well as the Mumbai Press Club, also issued statements. The promptness with which these statements are issued is something new and to be welcomed at a time when journalists everywhere in the country are facing insecurities of all kinds, ranging from job losses to surveillance. It is signifi-

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cant that even a supposedly progressive state like Kerala has been witness to the state police seeking to intimidate journalist Akhila Nandakumar, for having reported allegations made against PM.

Perhaps no other news entity unpacked as thoroughly as did The Wire, the curious story of how some best-known artists helped further the prime minister's pre-election propaganda when they undertook to contribute their work to capture 100 episodes of Narendra Modi's Mann ki Baat ('Modi's Mann Ki Baat and Its Many Themes, as Rendered by Some Well Known Artists of the Country', June 6). Among those

who participated were the prominent artist couple, Manu and Madhavi Parekh, Paresh Maity, Manjunath Kamath, and G R Iranna.

Art partnering with authoritarian politics is nothing new. Hitler's chosen filmmaker Leni Riefensthal demonstrated its unique power to the world in 1934.

Despite regular protest, the aggrieved wrestlers have failed to get justice. Now, under the veiled threats presumably by the rulers, the oppressed wrestlers have virtually ended their protest, although in a feeble voice, they say the protest will continue. □□□

[abridged] [Courtesy: the wire]

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VANISHING GOVT JOBS

'No Vacancy'

The Wire Staff

ACCORDING TO THE LATEST 'Annual Report on Pay & Allowances' by the finance ministry, the number of sanctioned posts are 39.77 lakh, which is the lowest in the last three years. The number of vacant posts are over 9.64 lakh.

The latest figure for the number of persons in civilian jobs in the Union government is at 30.13 lakh, the lowest it has been since 2010. At 39.77 lakh, the number of sanctioned posts is the lowest in the last three years. Consequently, over 9.64 lakh posts are vacant in the Union government.

The above figures are based on the latest 'Annual Report on Pay & Allowances' brought out by the Department of Expenditure of the Finance Ministry.

Between March 1, 2021, and March 1, 2022, the total sanctioned strength of Central government civilian regular employees, barring Union territories, came down from 40.35 lakh to 39.77 lakh. The dip in the

sanctioned posts is due to the lowering of the number of posts in the Group C cadre.

The number of persons in positions, during the same period, decreased from 30.56 lakh to 30.13 lakh. Due to the decline in the number of persons in position and sanctioned posts, the number of vacant posts are also lower, which is about 9.64 lakh going by the latest figures. Otherwise, this figure could have been higher.

According to The Hindu Business Line, the government hopes that there could be a betterment in the situation by the time the next set of data (until March 1, 2023) is released, due to the government's thrust on improving the employment situation after Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced 10 lakh jobs in October last year.

The decrease in sanctioned posts and occupied posts is witnessed across departments. Railways, Defence (Civil), Home Affairs, Posts, and Revenue departments/ministries

account for around 92% of Central government jobs.

The Railways, which is the largest provider of Central government jobs, had 11.98 lakh persons in position and 15.07 lakh sanctioned posts as on March 1, 2022. This puts the number of vacancies at around 3 lakh posts.

As for civilian posts under Defence Ministry, out of 5.77 lakh sanctioned posts, the number of occupied posts stand at 3.45 lakh, leaving 2.32 lakh vacancies. Out of 10.90 lakh sanctioned posts in the Home Ministry, 9.69 lakh posts are occupied, and there are 1.20 lakh vacancies.

In the Postal Department, the number of occupied posts and sanctioned posts are 1.64 lakh and 2.64 lakh respectively. There are over 1 lakh vacancies. Under the Revenue Department, there are 1.78 lakh sanctioned posts and 1.04 lakh occupied posts. There are 74,000 vacancies.

It is widely believed that the dipping number of sanctioned posts and regular staff is due to the increasing employment of external outsourcing agencies to fill in the roles of permanent employees. The government's reliance on outsourcing and contractual staff has gone up over the years.

[Source: the wire. in]

A CURIOUS BUSINESS MODEL

India Will Pay but Micron Will Own

Prabir Purkayastha

THE DEAL WITH MICRON during PM Modi's visit to the United States has made headlines as a major technological breakthrough and a new dawn for India's electronics chip-making industry. Implicit in this hurrah for the Micron deal is that India has completely missed the bus on the key technologies involved in electronic chip making. And for those who know technology would realise that the Micron deal is only for packaging of the chips, their assembly and testing, a relatively low end of the electronics industry. It does not touch the core technologies of designing and fabrication of chips, let alone the holy grail of chip-making technology: the lithographic machines that are central to chip fabrication.

The US-India ties had hit a rocky patch, with India refusing to sanction Russia or aligning with the West and G-7 on a "rule-based international order." Where the West makes all the rules. With Prime Minister Modi and President Biden both facing what could be difficult elections soon, they both urgently needed a reset in US-India ties. For India, it is getting technology for critical sectors in India and declaring a new dawn. For Biden, India is part of its de-risking and long-term plan to disengage its industries and market from China.

Late as it already is, the Modi dispensation is finally beginning to understand that technology is not something that, if you have money, you can buy from the global market. It is the closely-held knowledge of companies and countries. Today, it is electronics that drive everything: from the battlefield to artificial intelligence, from lowly washing machines

to the most expensive fighter planes. In the Ukraine war, a few dollars worth of chips are at the core of cheap drones to the most expensive aircraft and missiles. In war, tanks and artillery are also integrated with missiles and drones, shaping the modern battlefield, with radar and satellites providing real-time information to those running the battles. Modern electronic chips are the "brains" of all of this equipment, just as it is in almost any industry and device.

If India has to maintain its autonomy in global affairs, it has to start thinking about the future of its electronics industry. What sits at the heart of the electronics industry is the ability to make the latest generation of chips. If not today, then at least tomorrow. The Mohali chip plant, a critical component of self-reliance in electronics, had mysteriously burnt down in 1989.

So, what is the Micron deal? Micron is a major manufacturer of memory chips, and it is this realm of business that has made it one of the world's leaders in the semiconductor industry. It would have the necessary credentials if it decided to set up a memory fabrication plant in India, unlike the Foxconn-Vedanta fabrication proposal greeted with a lot of fanfare, where Foxconn does not have any experience in chip-making. But that is not what Micron is offering. It has offered to set up a plant in Gujarat to only "assemble, package and test" chips that Micron has fabricated elsewhere. Micron has such chip fabrication plants in the United States and also in China, whose products, the chips will be packaged and tested in India. So if chip-making was India's

goal, it would not be delivered through the Micron deal. What India is getting is the lowest end of the chip-making technology, assembling and testing chips that have been made elsewhere. India is not competing with the United States, China, South Korea, and Japan on chip making but with countries like Malaysia. Malaysia is already streets ahead of India in this area, with about 13 percent of the world's in OSAT outsourcing market. Locating such plants in Malaysia and now India would be a part of the de-risking strategy of the US companies, where they shift the low end of the chip production to countries like Malaysia and India while encouraging new high-end chip fabrication to the United States, such as Micron's \$100 billion mega-fab in Clay, Washington.

The total cost of setting up the plant is estimated to be \$2.75 billion, with the central government providing a 50 percent subsidy and the Gujarat state government throwing in another 20 percent. Micron is investing only 30 percent of the total capital! In other words, Micron will hold 100 percent ownership in a plant costing \$2.75 billion, in which they would have invested only 0.825 billion! Even industry reports—e.g., eeNews Europe—calls this an "extreme level of subsidy." In other words, to burnish Modi's image, tarnished by BJP's loss in Karnataka and the continuing riots in Manipur, this is a part of the public relations exercise that his team is doing. In reality India is "subsiding" a leading US manufacturer so that Indians can assemble and test the chips built in Micron's high-end plants in the United States and China.

India is not the only country providing subsidies for technology and setting up plants. So are the United States and China. The United States has a \$52 billion government kitty for subsidizing chip manufactur-

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ing and other core activities. China has a National Fund and another popularly called the Big Fund (National Integrated Circuits Industry Development Investment Fund), both investing \$73 billion in China's chip-making industry. But both these countries are funding the high end of the electronics tech stack, advanced chip making, devices, CAD tools, lithographic machines, etc., virtually nothing (only about 5 percent) in the assembling and testing of chips. Even when they do invest, they do much lower amounts and also as a fraction of the total cost. According to the South China Morning Post, quoted by Yahoo Finance,

China gave \$1.75 billion in subsidies to 190 Chinese firms, with China's leading chip fabricator SMIC, receiving roughly about 20 percent of that amount!

There is no question that India, having missed the chip-making bus, needs to ramp up its ambitions and bootstrap a chip-making industry. To do this successfully, it has to have a plan, where to invest and how much to invest, and when to invest. □□□

[Prabir Purkayastha is the founding editor of Newsclick.in, a digital media platform. He is an activist for science and the free software movement. This article was produced in partnership by Newsclick and Globetrotter.]

RUSSIA TODAY

"Give Back the Future"

Ardhendu Banerjee

ON JUNE 23, YEVGENY Prigozhin's Wagner army staged a rebellion in the streets of Russia, triggering a western-media frenzy across the globe. They are continually emphasising how Putin is in serious trouble this time. As a result of the "soldier mutiny," Russia is experiencing conditions that are virtually civil war-like. Some have dragged out something that has bothered them for so long in order to spread this deception. One illustration is Lavr Kornilov. Ironically, the 1917 infantry revolution that ignited the five-year civil war has been compared to a protest of just 6,000 troops (Prigozhin claims 25,000, although this is untrue), which was swiftly repressed in 24 hours. Promoting these reversals serves an obvious goal. The Western media is attempting to incite an anti-Russian hysteria by claiming that, in order to end the Russian civil war, Putin must remove his forces from Ukraine, and that, in the alternative, Russia will be completely destroyed. And if brought, Russia would be compelled to accept

a humiliating loss at the hands of the NATO backed Ukraine. So, Russia's approval to defeat is thus nearly a given. The propaganda alleges that the Americans were on the hook for planning Prigozhin's demonstrations. And with these comments, Ukraine is being encouraged to climb the heroism ladder a bit further (Pentagon head Lloyd Austin spoke on the phone with Ukrainian Defence Minister Alexei Reznikov shortly after Prigozhin's march). The intention is incredibly clear: to stop the US economy from spiralling out of control and to let the rest of the world know that they will continue to hold power. But for the time being, the US officials can get complacent, nothing else will be available now.

On the other hand, Narendra Modi's speech during the joint session of the US Congress last week caused a worldwide stir. It was predicted that by collaborating with the US, India would break diplomatic relations with Russia this time. What is it, exactly? It is true that America needs India badly now. The US

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wants to welcome the rise of China's neighbour India as a world power while its enemy, China, is becoming increasingly powerful. That is why America agreed to transfer high-tech to India, start production of General Electric F414 aircraft engines, and sell the unmanned aerial vehicle MQ-9B. Besides, cooperation will also be provided in other high-tech fields like artificial intelligence, space technology, green technology, microchips, and semiconductors. That is, the US is now prepared to provide India with everything that it previously only provided to its closest allies. Does India not need those? Definitely needed. India will appreciate this kind hand as well. But obtaining a permanent place on the UN Security Council is India's top goal. India was nominated eight times in the past as a non-permanent member, but it never received a permanent seat. This time, India has set up the ball for that location despite the limitations of the rules. Has Russia, on the other hand, steered clear of them? Never once. On the other side, Denis Alipov, the Russian ambassador to India, conveyed his country's wish for India's mission success. S Jaishankar, on the contrary, has stated unequivocally that India has no plans to join NATO. That is, there are no signs of cheating with Russia. It is important to keep in mind that India and Russia have a long-standing connection, making it nearly impossible for India to betray a trusted ally. Besides BRICS, SCO, G20, Brahmos, nuclear submarines, S-400 anti-aircraft missiles, etc. cannot be ignored, which testify to the strength of Russia-India relations.

So, the issue is: Is this Russian military coup has no consequence? If anything it is not at all a military coup. Wagner is a private military company, hence its true goal is financial gain. They weren't there to start a revolution. On the other side, Wagner and Sergei Shoigu, the Rus-

sian defence minister, have a troubled history. The conflict has intensified since the start of the war with Ukraine due to a number of factors. Therefore, the stated goal of the so-called "March for Justice" is to ask for the resignation of officials of the Russian Defence Ministry. And for that reason, the soldiers were back at their location within a day. There was absolutely no bloodshed. The Wagner gang, it should be noted, took these actions in an effort to elevate their status and get a few privileges. Dmitri Peshkov consequently declared that Prigozhin will travel to Belarus via Alexander Lukashenko's intervention. Prigozhin and Lukashenko have been pals for almost 20 years, although Belarus is not a NATO member. Prigozhin's agreement prevented what would have occurred to Hitler's Sturmabteilung in 1934. Prigozhin has already been charged criminally with violating Article 279, which carries a 12- to 20-year prison term. Prigozhin is therefore not a patriot, but a traitor. So Putin has no choice but to be tough on him, which is why after the incident Putin said on TV that the special military operation to counter Ukraine was the most important thing for him. And that confirms how internally controlled Russia is.

But what is the source of Russia's confidence? China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang met with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko in Beijing, while Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu confirmed that no one has the right to muddle through Russia's internal affairs, and China-Russia relations will remain intact. That is, he expressed direct support. Also interesting is the position of other allies of the Russian Federation, including Kazakhstan, Qatar, and Iran. Almost everyone is siding with Russia. Turkish President Erdogan has directly backed his Russian counterpart and said he is

ready to help. Following the Western media uproar, particularly CNN and the New York Times, it was revealed that US Ambassador to Russia Lynn Tracy had contacted the Russian Foreign Ministry via e-mail regarding embassy security concerns over the Wagner incident. On the other hand, Lithuanian

President Gitanas Nausėda indicated that NATO would have to strengthen the defence of the eastern border if Prigozhin appeared in Belarus. That's probably what he says, Uncle, first save your life.

Last but not least, has Ukraine been able to take advantage of this commotion in Russia? The New York Times reported that there was no negative impact on Russia on the battlefield, and Ukraine did not benefit at all. It quoted US officials as saying that, there do not appear to be any gaps in the battlefield that Russia could exploit; no Russian units have moved an inch from their positions, and there have been no casualties on the battlefield. So will the war continue forever? No, it won't work. And that's because Putin will be wary this time and will feel that the longer the war drags on, the more likely the US's psychological warfare policy will increase its efforts to drive various cracks inside Russia. No matter how powerful Putin is, he must face some unforeseen events. There is evidence that such fears are not unfounded. On the evening of June 23, the Moscow branch of the Communist Party held an election conference to nominate their candidate for mayor of Moscow. Leonid Zyuganov's name was in it. Nikolai Zubrilin, the leader of the capital's communists, and Zyuganov himself gave speeches under the title "Give Back the Future". So Putin must end the war quickly. And at the same time, Putin will try to strengthen relations with neighbouring countries. But this baseless propaganda of US will not weaken Russia. So these are nothing but a waste of US time.

□□□

POINT OF VIEW

Enquiring the 'Marriage Question'

Paloma Chaterji

THE FIGHT FOR MARITAL rights of the non-binaries is indeed a liberating attempt, but being a feminist what bothers me is whether a romantic and/or sexual relation should always be solemnised in marriage? Although the existence of marriage rights irrespective of one's sexuality does not necessarily mean one must get married, marriage could exist as yet another legal provision which can be exercised if required. However, if legalised would not queer marriage be turned into a societal convention that one must follow if willing to live together especially in a country like India, where one's sexual relationship must be 'governed' and 'granted' by society? Can we really escape the convention? Can marriage in India ever function as a choice? Besides, when one has enough education (not qualification) and strength to recognise one's sexuality as queer and takes the next step to live with one's chosen partner isn't that a slap on the face of patriarchy and hetero-normativity fathered by patriarchy? If so, then why by embracing marriage will one retrace back to patriarchal conventions of societal sanction?

Being a heterosexual female, of-

ten considered 'feminine' because of conventionally female features, and thus, easily accepted by society, it is probably easy for me to interrogate the 'marriage question' of the queer. However, it is this heterosexual identity that makes me question as I and many like me are forced and will be forced to follow the course of marriage if willing to live with a partner. We, therefore, irrespective of our sexual preferences stand at the same threshold of freedom. However, if probed from a different angle queer marriage might have the ability to strip the institution of marriage of its patriarchal cloak. Flaunting and celebrating what exactly is forbidden by the traditionalist discourse of marriage, can be a scathing attack on tradition and religion along with being an ultimate cultural shock to moral policing. Nevertheless, what needs to be asked is whether the ostentation of marriage will mean to be redefined by the old parameters of religion and society along with the bourgeois principles or if such 'out of the box' marriage could free the institution of marriage from the restrictive boundaries coloured by every conventional form?

Perhaps the movement for queer marriage rights is the first step to-

wards the ultimate dissolution of the institution of marriage in the years to come since it bears the potential to begin a chronology of movements that subtly, intelligently, and gradually loosen the grip of stereotypes and conventions. These questions however, remain vague if not answered from the perspective of law.

A major function served by marriage is legal bondage. When Menaka Guruswamy, the lawyer fighting for same-sex marriage, highlights the necessity of marriage in order to buy house, medical insurance, and the likes for her family, she rightly insists on the provisions offered if legally married. The question then is how else will such provisions be available without marriage or is the Indian law or law itself needs to be broadened to accommodate such interests? What if two people who do not share any biological and romantic or sexual relationship wish to buy a property, or an insurance together? How does law facilitate it without compromising on security? Can law be considered unbiased if based on certain social conditioning such as marriage? If not, how do we approach and address law and the question of rights without compromising on our respective choices? □ [About the author—Paloma Chaterji is a research scholar at St Xavier's University, Kolkata, India. She also works as a Guest Faculty in English at a university in India. Feminism and gender are some of the key areas of her interest.]

'NO' TO AMERICA

The Global South is Asserting

Vijay Prashad

A NEW MOOD OF DEFIANCE in the Global South has generated bewilderment in the capitals of the Triad (the United States, Europe, and Japan), where officials are struggling to answer why governments in the Global South have not

accepted the Western view of the conflict in Ukraine or universally supported the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in its efforts to 'weaken Russia'. Governments that had long been pliant to the Triad's wishes, such as the administrations

of Narendra Modi in India and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Türkiye (despite the toxicity of their own regimes), are no longer as reliable.

Since the start of the war in Ukraine, India's Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar has been vocal in defending his government's refusal to accede to Washington's pressure. In April 2022, at a joint press conference in Washington, DC with U S Secretary of State Antony Blinken,

Jaishankar was asked to explain India's continued purchase of oil from Russia. His answer was blunt: 'I noticed you refer to oil purchases. If you are looking at energy purchases from Russia, I would suggest that your attention should be focused on Europe... We do buy some energy which is necessary for our energy security. But I suspect, looking at the figures, probably our total purchases for the month would be less than what Europe does in an afternoon'.

However, such comments have not deterred Washington's efforts to win India over to its agenda. On 24 May, the US Congress's Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party released a policy statement on Taiwan which asserted that '[t]he United States should strengthen the NATO Plus arrangement to include India'. This policy statement was released shortly after the G7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan, where India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with the various G7 leaders, including U S President Joe Biden, as well as Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The Indian government's response to this 'NATO Plus' formulation echoed the sentiment of its earlier remarks about purchasing Russian oil. 'A lot of Americans still have that NATO treaty construct in their heads', Jaishankar said in a press

conference on 9 June. 'It seems almost like that is the only template or viewpoint with which they look at the world... That is not a template that applies to India'. India, he said, is not interested in being part of NATO Plus, wishing to maintain a greater degree of geopolitical flexibility. 'One of the challenges of a changing world', Jaishankar said, 'is how do you get people to accept and adjust to those changes'.

There are two significant takeaways from Jaishankar's statements. First, the Indian government—which does not oppose the United States, either in terms of its programme or temperament—is uninterested in being drawn into a U S-led bloc system (the 'NATO treaty construct', as Jaishankar put it). Second, like many governments in the Global South, it recognises that people live in 'changing world' and that the traditional major powers—especially the United States—need to 'adjust to those changes'.

In its Investment Outlook 2023 report, Credit Suisse pointed to the 'deep and persistent fractures' that have opened up in the international order—another way of referring to what Jaishankar called the 'changing world'. Credit Suisse describes these 'fractures' accurately: 'The global West (Western developed countries and allies) has drifted away from the global East (China, Russia, and allies) in terms of core strategic interests, while the Global South (Brazil, Russia, India, and China and most developing countries) is reorganising to pursue its own interests'. These final words bear repeating: 'the Global South... is reorganising to pursue its own interests'.

In mid-April, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs released its Diplomatic Bluebook 2023, in which it noted that the world is now at the 'end of the post-Cold War era'. After the Soviet Union collapsed in

1991, the United States asserted its primacy over the international order and, along with its Triad vassals, established what it called the 'rules-based international order'. This thirty-year-old U S-led project is now floundering, partly due to the internal weaknesses of the Triad countries (including their weakened position in the global economy) and partly due to the rise of the 'locomotives of the South' (led by China, but including Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, and Nigeria). Calculations, based on the IMF data-mapper, show that for the first time in centuries, the Gross Domestic Product of the Global South countries surpassed that of the Global North countries this year. The rise of these developing countries—despite the great social inequality that exists within them—has produced a new attitude amongst their middle classes which is reflected in the increased confidence of their governments: they no longer accept the parochial views of the Triad countries as universal truths, and they have a greater wish to exert their own national and regional interests.

It is this re-assertion of national and regional interests within the Global South that has revived a set of regional processes, including the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa) process. On 1 June, the BRICS foreign ministers met in Cape Town (South Africa) ahead of the summit between their heads of states that is set to take place this August in Johannesburg. The joint statement they issued is instructive: twice, they warned about the negative impact of 'unilateral economic coercive measures, such as sanctions, boycotts, embargoes, and blockades' which have 'produced negative effects, notably in the developing world'. The language in

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this statement represents a feeling that is shared across the entirety of the Global South. From Bolivia to Sri Lanka, these countries, which make up the majority of the world, are fed up with the IMF-driven debt-austerity cycle and the Triad's bullying. They are beginning to assert their own sovereign agendas.

Interestingly, this revival of sovereign politics is not being driven by inward-looking nationalism, but by a non-aligned internationalism. The BRICS ministers' statement focuses on 'strengthening multilateralism and upholding international law, including the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations as its indispensable cornerstone' (incidentally, both China and Russia are part of the twenty-member Group of Friends in Defence of

the UN Charter). The implicit argument being made here is that the U S-led Triad states have unilaterally imposed their narrow worldview, based on the interests of their elites, on the countries of the South under the guise of the 'rules-based international order'. Now, the states of the Global South argue, it is time to return to the source—the UN Charter—and build a genuinely democratic international order.

The word 'non-aligned' has increasingly been used to refer to this new trend in international politics. The term has its origins in the Non-Aligned Conference held in Belgrade (Yugoslavia) in 1961, which was built upon the foundations laid at the Asian-African Conference held in Bandung (Indonesia) in 1955. In those days, non-alignment referred

to countries led by movements rooted in the deeply anti-colonial Third World Project, which sought to establish the sovereignty of the new states and the dignity of their people. That moment of non-alignment was killed off by the debt crisis of the 1980s, which began with Mexico's default in 1982. What people have now is not a return of the old non-alignment, but the emergence of a new political atmosphere and a new political constellation that requires careful study. For now, one can say that this new non-alignment is being demanded by the larger states of the Global South that are uninterested in being subordinated by the Triad's agenda, but which have not yet established a project of their own—a Global South Project, for instance. □□□

AAKRITI ART GALLERY

'Bengal Beyond Boundaries'

Uma Nair

[From classic Tagores to contemporary works by Anjolie Ela Menon, a curation of Bengal's greatest artists, both past and present, come together at a show by Aakriti Art Gallery in Delhi's Bikaner House.]

THINK BENGAL, AND triumphant tradition to modernity fills one's spectrum of thoughts. Kolkata's Aakriti Art Gallery, led by Vikram Bachhawat, has over 20 years, across myriad mediums and multiple themes, created a historic paradigm of Bengal artists' works that cultivates a documentation that welcomes the complexity of human coexistence as well as struggles in the history of Bengal. Curator Uma Nair gives an insight behind the curation of the show titled 'Bengal Beyond Boundaries' by Kolkata's Aakriti Art Gallery, which ran from July 7- 16 at Delhi's Bikaner House, Centre for Contemporary Art.

Early Bengal

Rabindranath Tagore founded Shantiniketan with the motto: 'Where

the whole world meets in a nest.' History proves that Rabindranath Tagore was the first international modernist artist of India. Arranged chronologically, this series of Early Bengal has stellar works collected in Paris many moons ago. 'Sati and Raja Ram Mohan Roy' is a work that shows a group of well-dressed men watching a widow self-immolating on a pyre. While she burns, the crowd watches and your eyes moisten, as you think of so many Indian Brahmin wives who gave up their lives due to this ritual.

An anonymous work from the Murshidabad School, a watercolour on paper, is a page from nostalgia. The scene of a broken wall, the minaret and the bridge, all create a scenic setting of elusive elegance. Then one comes to the piece de

resistance, an anonymous painter's romantic realist work that portrays a lady sitting holding a copper pot. The transparent gilded sari and her jewels all speak of an age of solitude, beauty and an ethereal silence of longing.

Relating Art to Society

Bengal is about art through a social, cultural and political lens. It is not art made in a vacuum, but an insignia of human experience, memory and literature. At the show at Bikaner House, different works reflect different ages, of senior as well as younger artists. The circle of Tagores and their works have an implicit message as well as its explicit ethos. In Bengal, art is the history of heritage and contemporary developments.

Early Etchings and Prints

A small composite set of prints brings together the brilliant Mukul Dey who studied printmaking and dry point etching at Chicago, at the Slade School of fine art in London as well as Japan. His perfected hand for the contours in portraits of the Tagores and

the girl reading are a treat for tired eyes. Santiniketan Guru Somnath Hore's human figures in lithographs show angst ridden rendition of the human condition. The Famine of Bengal stands alone as a desolate stamp of devastation in its history.

In a beautiful tribute and reverence to the 'Guru Shishya' tradition at Santiniketan there are two prints by the brilliant Rini Dhumal, an MS University professor and printmaker, who went from Baroda to Santiniketan on a National Scholarship to study under Somnath Hore. Rini also studied at William Hayter's Atelier 17 in Paris. Her Sphinx, a multiple colour etching and linocut called 'The Red Print' is a study in colourative strokes, as well as the power of textures in the printmaking process. Her entire evolution was based on Shiva Shakti.

Arpita Singh and Anjolie Ela Menon

More than 200 paintings in the show form an album of both memories as well as a thread of sensibilities that define and create their own distinctions. On loan from distinguished collectors, India's two most-important women artists Arpita Singh and Anjolie Ela Menon are represented by works that elevate the experience of emotive evocations. Singh's untitled work and two smaller water colours are a study in the balance of human

emotion as well as the handling of the human figures in harmony, along with autobiographical details. Men and women with a few flowers strewn around, contemplating the environs, is a distinctive narrative.

Anjolie's 'First Dictator' and 'Lady with fruits', are works that bring together her brilliance at handling still lives and human elements of history within her palette and frames.

Jayashree Chakraborty and Jayasri Burman

Two artists who celebrate the pain and painterly ethos of nature are famed Jayashree Chakraborty who has shown at Musee Guimet Paris, as well as Jayasri Burman who embodies the principle of 'Purusha Prakriti'. While Jayashree creates an elegiac portrait of the loss of lakes and nature's habitat with mixed media work, Jayasri gives a goddess portrait with a musical instrument as she sits in the midst of lush tropicana amongst ochre-toned autumnal accents, as well as a series of monochromatic drawings.

Landscapes

Amongst larger works are Jogen Chowdhury's drawing of 'The Lady with the Mirror', a topic that goes back to Renaissance Masters. Chowdhury is the master of the contour and his work stands as a testimony to his own evolution of finding a sensibility that is Indian wrested in

the tools of Western grammar.

Pareesh Maity's 'Santiniketan', a panoramic work, is an ode to Rabindranath Tagore and his institution. It is the many details of paintings by Tagore and the vignettes and vistas that add charisma to this sun-bathed work.

Bikash Bhattacharjee's 'Salvationist', an oil on canvas echoes the futility of war, and the soldiers and horse all share an elegiac moment on pedestals. Sudip Roy's watercolour is a stirring, dark portrait of a horse looking at the ground, while the nimbus clouds gather in a Kolkata skyline.

Sculptures and Drawings

The sculptures and the drawings add their own charisma of compositional clarity and explorations in mediums. Akhil Chandra Das's bronze of a human figure in 'Monk' is as riveting as Tapas Biswas's Benares Ghats that are a relief pattern in bronze. Sudhir Khastgir's drawing of a dancer and Ram Kinkar Baij's cow and her calf create a mapping that looks like individual pearls on a string.

In the journey of different perspectives, experiences, and personal and private histories that come together, the mapping of 'Bengal Beyond Boundaries' will weave the past and the present like never before, in boundary-pushing experimentation, and a heartfelt ode to humanism. □□□

DEFENDING THE DISSENTERS

Russian Lawyers against War

Lucy Papachristou

SOFIA GOMINOVA WANTED to be a lawyer from age 11. Born after the fall of the Soviet Union, she grew up in a Russia blighted by organised crime and watched police dramas on TV, wanting to "fight evil like they did."

Now, at 29, Gominova believes she is doing just that.

Among a new cadre of young lawyers outraged by suppression of dissent, she has joined OVD-Info, one of Russia's biggest legal defence groups that supports thousands detained for opposing Putin's special military operation in Ukraine.

"I have always had a keen sense of justice," Gominova told a Reuters

reporter based in Poland.

"I realised that a lot of injustice is created by the hands of the system ... that violates the rights of citizens, illegally arrests them, inflicts physical damage, and issues absurd decisions and decrees."

As protests against last year's invasion broke out, Gominova found herself waiting in freezing weather for hours in St Petersburg to be let into court, then dashing from room to room as dozens of cases of arrested demonstrators were processed.

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Arriving home exhausted, she would start work on appeals.

"Defending protesters in court is my version of protest," said Gominova, who began representing anti-war activists in court almost immediately after the war started.

Russian authorities say they are applying the law legitimately against troublemakers encouraged by the West to destroy their nation. They deny abuse of detainees and have sometimes cast human rights lawyers as public enemies.

Defending Kremlin critics comes with considerable risks in wartime Russia, where even schoolchildren and pensioners have been punished for dissenting over the war.

Some lawyers have been prosecuted for speaking out against Russia's action in Ukraine, dozens have been stripped of licences, and several prominent attorneys have fled the country.

Despite the risks, 120 lawyers have joined OVD-Info—three times the number that has left Russia—swelling its ranks to 442, according to Violetta Fitsner, a lawyer and spokesperson for the group.

With numerous civil society groups disbanded by the state, many other lawyers also defend anti-war activists independently, but it is hard to determine how many.

The St Petersburg Bar Association said 222 lawyers had joined since last March, bringing its total to 4,692, but said it did not have information on how many defend activists. It said seven of the new lawyers have since had their memberships suspended or discontinued, without citing reasons. The Moscow Bar Association did not reply to a request for data.

Acquittals in Russian courts are extremely rare overall, and critics say the country's justice system is highly politicised.

Yet legal advocates play a vital

role in publicising the crackdown, which by OVD-Info's count has seen nearly 20,000 people detained for anti-war activism since last February.

Russia's Interior Ministry did not respond to a request for comment on the detentions.

Asked about courts' independence, the judicial department of the Supreme Court said "...judges are independent and subject only to the Constitution of the Russian Federation and the law."

Most high-profile opposition figures that have not already fled Russia are now in prison. Alexei Navalny, Putin's most prominent critic, was jailed before the war.

In April, Vladimir Kara-Murza was sentenced to 25 years in prison for treason after he condemned Russia's leadership and the war in Ukraine. The term was the harshest of its kind since February, 2022.

Lawyers are sometimes protesters' last communication conduit during lengthy trials held behind closed doors.

"Lawyers continue being their voices, smuggling information out of prisons, being these prisoners' connection to the world outside," Evgenia Kara-Murza, wife of Vladimir, told Reuters.

Her husband's lawyer and long-time friend Vadim Prokhorov—a critic of Putin—fled Russia days before his client's sentencing out of concern he too might face a criminal case.

"Right now in Russia, an attack is being waged not only against journalists ... but also against lawyers," Prokhorov told U S broadcaster Voice of America after he left Russia, adding that several of his colleagues had already been arrested.

Several Russian lawyers have attracted the attention—and condemnation—of authorities, not only for defending critics of the invasion but also for expressing their own opposition.

Dmitry Talantov, whose former

client, the prominent journalist Ivan Safronov, is serving a 22-year sentence for treason, faces up to 10 years in prison himself after he wrote on Facebook that Russian forces were engaging in "extreme Nazi practices".

Maria Bontsler, who has worked with OVD-Info, was fined twice last year for "discrediting the army" after she uttered the word "war" in court while defending anti-war protesters.

And Anastasia Rudenko, a lawyer in Ivanovo, a city northeast of Moscow, was fined 30,000 roubles (\$355) in June for "discrediting the army" in videos posted to her Telegram channel entitled "It's not so scary with a lawyer."

She uses the channel to inform roughly 400 subscribers of her ongoing trials, which include a criminal case against a soldier wounded in Ukraine who refuses to return to active duty.

Rudenko, who has family in Ukraine but whose husband and brother are both soldiers in the Russian armed forces, attended a few anti-war rallies and handed out copies of George Orwell's dystopian and anti-authoritarian novel "1984" to passers-by.

Rudenko, who does not explicitly state her views on the war in her videos, said she was shocked when authorities launched a review of her channel for anti-war content earlier this year.

"Why are they doing this? I think just to show: we are all-powerful, we will destroy you," she said. "Well, go ahead, destroy me."

In interviews, some younger lawyers with fewer years of experience of Russia's justice system said they were determined to represent anti-war dissenters but found the work exhausting.

Yuri Mikhailov, a 25-year-old public defender in the Moscow region, joined OVD-Info early in March last year.

Most of his clients have been arrested for small acts of protest, such as one man who wrote "365 NO" in the snow in a Moscow park on the one-year anniversary of the Russia-Ukraine war.

But Mikhailov has also defended ordinary citizens "going about their business" in public places, who were arrested, he said, simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"I can argue persuasively to the judge that two times two is four—and he may even nod his head. But in the end he decides two times two is five."

Before the Ukraine conflict, Gominova, in St Petersburg, worked mainly on civil cases ranging from family disputes to consumer rights. While a few acquaintances consider her a traitor, she said, most friends

and relatives are proud, albeit worried for her.

"Sometimes I leave court with such anger that I feel a great surge of strength to keep fighting. Other times, I close the courtroom door and tears flow from helplessness," she said. □□□

"As long as I have the strength inside me, I will remain in Russia."

[Source: Reuters]

PENSION REFORM

Macron vs the French Workers

John Mullen

THE 13TH DAY OF ACTION to defend pensions, on 1st May, brought 2 million people onto the streets, and every day for weeks before and since, there have been energetic protests around the country. Strikers occupy motorway toll booths and let drivers through free, while collecting large amounts of money for strike funds. Ministers, down to Macron's most lowly assistant secretary of state visiting the most out of the way village, are greeted by rapidly organised demonstrations, with crowds banging saucepans and chanting 'Macron, resign!' In recent weeks, at least 80 ministerial visits have been disrupted, and a couple of dozen have been cancelled for fear of disruption, according to activist organisation ATTAC. And many ministers suddenly find the electricity has been cut off by power workers in the places they are visiting.

On 6th May, the radical left France Insoumise organised 'the March of all our Anger' in Marseille. On the same day, activists bricked up the entrance at the headquarters of the bosses' federation, the MEDEF. On 8th May, Macron was only able to do his Second World War victory celebration on the Champs Elysees by banning all spectators from the zone, while later the same day he laid a wreath in Lyon, in homage to resistance hero Jean Moulin, while banning all demonstrations in the

centre of the town. Macron is humiliated, isolated, lost. Polls show that 82 percent of the population considers that 'he is not close to the concerns of ordinary people'. Although he announced three weeks ago 'a hundred days to calm things down', this has not been a wild success so far.

Under pressure, no longer able to count on his traditional right-wing allies who are scared by his stunning unpopularity, Macron has had to shelve many of his planned attacks and make minor concessions too. The racist immigration law is being postponed, a new crackdown on tax fraud by the very rich is being put into motion, and money was found for student grants. In a war of position, Macron is having to retreat in a number of small ways.

The movement has brought into action millions of people, many of whom were not in the habit of protesting, and this radicalisation has helped the working class on other issues. A number of protests to defend the environment against huge new roads, to defend farmers against multinationals stealing their water, and so on, have been tremendously dynamic. Antiracist and antifascist protests have been larger than usual. And strikes over wages are breaking out in many workplaces, sometimes with rapid success.

Meanwhile, Macron's police have

stepped up violence and repression, claiming that the activities of the Black Bloc leave them with no choice. Interior minister Gérard Darmanin claimed that thousands were coming to demonstrations 'with one aim: to kill cops and damage other people's property'. Apart from the fact that he seems incapable of counting as far as two, the reality is that practically all those gravely injured at demonstrations are protesters attacked by the police. The government is planning a new law to make it easier to harass protestors (though, in the present atmosphere of political crisis, even some of Macron's own MPs are objecting).

The government is also very much playing the racist card, with a series of declarations from interior minister Darmanin about immigrant 'spongers'. The racist police are getting ever more confident – last month a police car in Paris deliberately rammed a scooter with three black teenagers on it, gravely injuring them.

Macron's attack on pensions has been signed into law and, in theory, will apply from September. A 14th union day of action has been called for 6th June; two days before a vote in parliament on an opposition motion to cancel the pensions reform (a vote which has almost zero chances of being successful). But even the slowest among demonstrators is thinking 'if we have tried a tactic thirteen times without success, perhaps we need a new one!'

The national union leaderships have refused to go further than single days of action. The obvious option

of organising a 24-hour general strike, followed by 48 hours, 72 hours and so on, in a context of unheard-of levels of public support, did not fit with the perspectives of these professional negotiators. And now, the leaders of the biggest unions have announced they will meet the prime minister for talks next week, where previously they had rightly refused to do so until the law was withdrawn. In theory the meeting is to discuss other matters, but it is bound to give the impression that relations are on their way 'back to normal', an idea

which can only help Macron.

Some sectors of the working class are keen to move beyond the national leaders' playbook: there are still regularly one day sectoral strikes or school blockades against the pension reform, a few workplaces have been on strike for months, and demonstrations continue.

Faced with the intransigence and disdain of the government, a section of young people is tempted by Black Bloc rioting, and such rioting is approved of by more and more people, despite it being fundamentally a dead

end whose main effect is to help the government build up repression.

Most revolutionaries here are convinced that single days of action will not bring victory. In general, however, they believe that their role is just to do as much as they can, each in their own workplace, to encourage further strikes. What is missing is a determined mass attempt to pressure the national union leaderships into escalating the strikes. □□□ May 21, 2023

(Courtesy: Counterfire,
a British Socialist Organisation)

LETTERS

2.2 Million Assamese are Stateless

Behind every (human) rights violation is a name, a person, a human being whose life gets violently ruptured when the basic right to live with dignity is snatched away. Assam's citizenship crisis is a humanitarian tragedy of unspeakable proportions affecting a third of the population. A discriminatory and ill-thought through, documentary test of being is bringing into question an individual's relationship with the land of his/her birth. Arbitrarily being declared non-Indian (un-Indian) has meant a civil death for 2.2 million Assamese and their families. Since 2017, CJP's Team Assam has worked in faraway villages and districts to provide real paralegal, legal and psychological assistance.

In many of the cases the CJP team has handled in Assam, the lives of detention centre inmates change significantly by the time they are released. Many go back to empty homes and memories of loved ones who have passed. The story of Purnima Biswas too, had a bittersweet ending. She hails from Juilaga village near the Bhutan Border in Chirang district. She was arrested by the police when she had gone to offer prayers at a Shiva temple.

Simon Nessa's husband Jobbar Ali died in the Tezpur detention camp in Assam under mysterious circumstances.

The denial of citizenship is much like a civil death as the 'right to have rights' is arbitrarily snatched away by an unfeeling State. CJP Team came across many instances of mysterious deaths of detention camp inmates. Seemingly healthy

people, suddenly dropping dead. Then there were people who succumbed to a bout of ill health brought about by poor hygiene and over-all bad conditions in the detention camps.

Women, marginalised, have been disproportionately targeted in the citizenship crisis of Assam. Declared 'doubtful foreigners' and 'D-voters' regularly, these women's overwhelming struggle to prove their citizenship is often heart-breaking. From battling in the courts, to developing a personal connection with these women to helping them get reintegrated into society, CJP's team Assam has ensured that none of these women have been ignored.

Citizens for Justice and Peace
info@cjp.org.in

Panchayat Elections in West Bengal

Political violence is nothing new in West Bengal. The curve of political violence reaches its height during the panchayat elections in the State. This violence took ugly turns in the new millennium, both under the Left political regime led by the CPI(M) as well as during the TMC rule. A report carried in The Indian Express quoted an analyst in this context: "According to unofficial statistics, approximately 80 people died in the 2003 panchayat elections, 45 in 2008, and in 2013, the toll was 31. The toll increased to 75 in 2018." (indianexpress.com) According to the latest estimates, more than 50 people died in poll-related violence since the panchayat elections were declared in the State in 2023.

It is quite natural that the party in power gets an advantage over the op-

position parties in terrorising/influencing the voters to cast their votes for the candidates affiliated to the ruling party.

In the current panchayat elections, the party in power, the TMC, registered a landslide victory in the three-tier panchayat elections and strengthened its domination at the grassroots level. There are different dimensions of this poll verdict.

One important dimension of the current panchayat polls in West Bengal reported in the media is that the rural women voted in large numbers for the TMC compared to males. The opposition parties fared comparatively well in places where the number of female voters was less than the males. (See the report carried in Times of India, July 12, 2023)

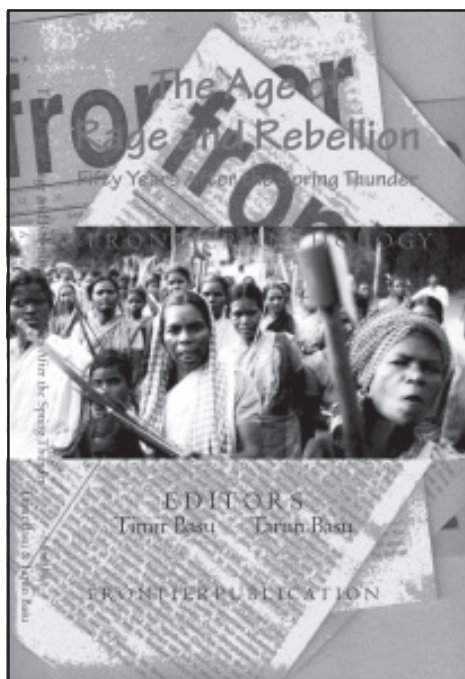
Another important development noticed in the current panchayat poll verdict is that the BJP's hold over the Matua community in North 24 Parganas and Nadia and Rajbanshi community in the districts of north Bengal witnessed substantial erosions.

Multiple reasons may be attributed to the political violence noticed during and in the wake of panchayat elections in West Bengal. One major structural reason is that the panchayat bodies have now access to huge financial resources and the political parties are getting engaged in bloody battles to establish their control over those resources and ensure political loyalty of the villagers. Moreover, lack of employment/livelihood opportunities in the age of neoliberalism is pushing the rural footloose people to become foot soldiers of the political parties in fighting bloody battles in the streets.

Arup Kumar Sen, Kolkata

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