

# frontier

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Founder-Editor : **SAMAR SEN**

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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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## *'Reclaim the Night' March*

**Y**ET ANOTHER BRUTAL RAPE AND MURDER. ANOTHER DAY of realisation that women are not safe anywhere in the country. Another horrific atrocity to remind people that it has been over a decade since the Nirbhaya tragedy. But still nothing much has changed. The rape and murder of a trainee doctor in Kolkata's R G Kar Medical College and Hospital on August 9 demonstrates that women are not safe even at their work place. Since then the medical fraternity across the country has been protesting against the nexus of corrupt hospital authority, unsafe working conditions, failure of the law enforcing agency, rather its dubious role and the TMC government of Bengal.

The Indian Medical Association observed a 12-hour strike by doctors practising modern medicine on August 17. A day earlier the Resident Doctors 'Association in Delhi organised a joint protest march. Also, doctors in Delhi's largest hospital AIIMS staged a protest against the Kolkata incident. Then over 1,000 doctors from private and government hospitals in Goa refrained from providing outpatient department services for 24 hours starting the morning of August 17. Healthcare services at the state-run SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack were disrupted as students staged a cease-work agitation.

Participation of women of all ages throughout the country was unique and encouraging. It signifies the emergence of women power in Indian polity. Tens of thousands of women in Kolkata and across West Bengal walked in a 'Reclaim the Night' March at mid-night on August 14, demanding the 'independence to live in freedom and without fear'. The candle-light march took place just before 78th Independence Day on August 15. Outraged medics across India expressed their solidarity with the agitating staff of R G Kar. They are demanding, and quite justifiably, a federal law to protect persons engaged in medical profession. A 2015 survey by IMA found that 75 percent of doctors in India have faced some form of violence at work. Security in hospitals is almost absent.

For one thing what happened in 138-year-old R G Kar hospital was not an isolated incident. Aruna Shanbaug, a nurse at a prominent Mumbai hospital, who was left in a persistent vegetative state after being raped and strangled by a ward attendant in 1973, died in 2015 after 42 years of severe brain damage and paralysis. More recently, in Kerala, Vandana Das, a 23-year-old medical intern, was fatally stabbed with surgical scissors by

a drunken patient last year. Amidst protest movement and rallies by people engaged in medical profession came the news of murder of a nurse in Uttarakhand.

Government hospitals are living hells lacking adequate infrastructure and staff. They are invariably overcrowded with unrestricted access. The Centre spends less and less on education and health though these two sectors deserve reasonable investment. But the government is more interested in privatising healthcare service and education by continually inviting the corporates to cripple what-

ever remains of public health care system. Now Indian healthcare industry managed by big businesses, both domestic and foreign, reached over \$370 billion in 2022. And it may reach over \$610 billion by 2026. Also, the Modi government has a plan to introduce a credit incentive programme worth Rs 50,000 crore (\$6.8 billion) to boost country's healthcare infrastructure. And government hospitals, otherwise starving of funds for improving service are not going to benefit from government's grandiose 'incentive drive'.

Meanwhile, opposition parties,

particularly the saffron brigade, in Bengal are trying to gain political mileage by way of organising marches and sit-ins demanding justice and resignation of the chief minister, without really hitting the target. The Socialist Unity Centre of India (Communist) observed a 12-hour bandh in Bengal with very little impact on people's lives. Unless infrastructure improves in government hospitals and budget allocation increases in health sector R G Kar phenomenon is likely to recur in every corner of the country. □□□

20-08-2024

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## COMMENT

### Taliban: 3 Years Later

WHEN THE TALIBAN SEIZED power in Afghanistan three years ago, one of the first things they did was paint over the images of women on billboards and murals. Since then, women and girls themselves are being erased. Girls cannot go to high school, women are officially banned from working in most jobs, movement outside the home is heavily restricted and often punished. Many of the women who defied these impositions have been tortured and detained. Others are in hiding. The flogging and stoning of women in public has resumed as a matter of policy.

Yet, the world looks away. There are dedicated journalists and human rights advocates who continue to report on Afghan women, girls, and minorities, but the horrors inflicted on them have long slipped off the front pages. Governments occasionally issue statements of concern but nothing more. It is only on moments like this, the third anniversary of the Taliban's takeover, that people remember Afghanistan. For the rest of the year, Afghans are kept out of sight, quietly abandoned to their

fate, as if nothing can be done.

But there is something that can be done: the Taliban can be held accountable. The militant group is responsible for some of the most serious breaches of international criminal law. Just as the International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued arrest warrants against Russian President Vladimir Putin and five senior government and military officials, it could do the same with individual Taliban leaders. The ICC has the jurisdiction, as there is already an investigation on Afghanistan. The persecution of women and girls constitutes a crime against humanity—one of the most serious categories of crimes, along with genocide and war crimes. The Prosecutor can prioritise the investigation, gather evidence, and request arrest warrants.

The Taliban can also be brought before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), also known as the "World Court". The ICJ decides cases that are brought between states. Very recently it has framed a case as per appeal of South Africa. It is currently hearing important human rights

related cases, including on torture, racial discrimination, and genocide. As the group in control of Afghanistan, the Taliban can be brought before the court to answer for its violations of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the main treaty protecting women's rights, which has been ratified by 189 countries. All it needs is for one country to bring the case. The problem is 'who will bell the cat?'

For the past three years, the international community has pursued a failed strategy of applying economic pressure on the one hand and seeking engagement on the other. Neither approach has worked in restraining the Taliban, and both have made the situation for Afghan women and girls worse. The withdrawal of international assistance and the imposition of sanctions has plunged the Afghan people deep into a humanitarian crisis, with more than 23 million in need of urgent assistance, most of them women and girls. And the talks with the Taliban have prioritised issues like regional security and narcotics, but never the rights of women and girls. There are observers who point to positives, saying there is now peace in a country that has not known it

for 40 years. But for half the population, the war continues, and they are the targets.

Women's rights in Afghanistan have never been a foreign-imposed project, as some claim, alien to the country. It is the women of Afghani-

stan who always fought for them, whether it was securing laws to protect women from violence under previous governments or whether it's resisting the Taliban from exile, on the streets, and even from inside their homes. □□□ [Contributed]

## NOTE

# Draft Broadcast Bill

**A Correspondent writes:**

**A**T A PRESS CONFERENCE in Delhi, the journalists and activists urged the government to hold wider consultations on the proposed law, and to share the draft with digital media organisations and civil society groups. The press conference was organised by Digipub, an association of independent news organisations and journalists.

The draft Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill seeks to create a consolidated legal framework for the broadcasting sector in India. The proposed legislation aims to replace the nearly three-decade-old Cable Television Networks Regulation Act, 1995 and bring under its ambit over-the-top media providers and digital news platforms.

The Centre has not yet made the draft of the bill public and has only shared it with selected stakeholders.

Advocate Apar Gupta, who is a co-founder of the Internet Freedom Foundation, said that going by details of the bills reported in the media, the proposed law will apply not only to digital journalists, but also to other online content creators.

"Such creators will have to adhere to compliance requirements that would make it impossible for them to function," Gupta said. "They can only function with the permission of the government, and the government will decide the basis on which to grant this permission."

Senior journalist Ravish Kumar

urged the government to provide information about the individuals and organisations with whom it has shared a copy of the bill. He said that in the absence of any official statement, journalists and activists would have to believe that the media reports about the contents of the bill are accurate.

"Going by these provisions, the government will need to create jails for Youtubers in each district, and all Youtubers will need to set up a *thana* [police station] in their homes," Kumar remarked.

Anant Nath, editor of the *Caravan* and president of Editors Guild of India, who was also part of the press conference, said that the Broadcast Bill should be looked at in the context of recent policies and laws such as the Information Technology Rules, Digital Personal Data Protection Act, Telecom Bill, and the new criminal laws.

"The Broadcasting Services Bill is one more step in creating a multi-layered legal system to regulate, control, monitor and censor content in the country, which started from the IT Rules, 2021," he said.

Ritu Kapur, general secretary of Digipub, said that the organisation has reached out to the government seeking to be a part of the consultation process, but has not received a response yet.

Details of the bill reported by the *Hindustan Times* and *Medianama*

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suggest that the proposed law will cover online streaming services, social media accounts and online video creators.

The bill reportedly proposes that online creators will need to conform

to a three-tier mechanism put in place by the Information Technology Rules. Broadcasters will need to appoint grievance officers, set up Content Evaluation Committees and will need to comply with a

Programme Code and an Advertising Code.

Individuals who regularly upload videos about current affairs on social media may be classified as digital news broadcasters under the bill. □□□

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#### HUMRA QURAISHI'S COLUMN

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## Crimes against Women

*Humra Quraishi*

**T**HE 31-YEAR-OLD LADY doctor's murder and rape at Kolkata's RG Kar Medical College seems so brutal that no amount of words or phrases can be adequate to describe that level of barbaric brutality... I was just reading details to the sheer emotional and mental agony her family been through. At first they were told by the hospital authorities that she'd died by suicide but after three hours wait when they saw her battered-bruised-broken body, it got more than writ large the sheer torture she was subjected to by the maniac rapist or rapists.

Safety and survival of a woman or even of a child is very tough ...tougher it gets. Let's not forget the Kuki women raped and murdered in Manipur and also the Hindutva campaigns in favour of the rapists and murderers of the Kathua based 8-year-old Asifa Bano, and also the cover-ups to the Hathras rape victim who was cremated in the dead of the night by the State machinery!

News just coming in this evening is this tragic one—a 14-year-old Dalit girl raped and hacked to death by a sickle, in a village in Bihar. All done in the public domain. Yet she couldn't be protected and saved. There could be hundreds of such victims, where parents are helpless or too weak to protect their offspring. Needless to add that the police machinery just not effective. The administrators and

politicians just too busy distracting the masses, with provocative tactics along the Hindu-Muslim strain!

Even if arrests are made of killers-murderers-rapists, don't overlook the fact that today even convicted rapists are given paroles...out on furloughs. All those 'Who's Who' rapists can be out for long or short breaks. Just to mention a couple of names – Asaram Bapu is out of the jail confines on a seven-day parole. Dera Sacha Sauda's Gurmeet Ram Rahim has been granted twenty-one days furlough... Not to overlook the fact that last year all those 11 men convicted in the rape of Bilkis Bano were prematurely freed, till of course, on Supreme Court's order they were re-imprisoned.

And if one were to question along the strain that why this acceleration in crimes against women, it's best to quote Brinda Karat from her latest book—*Hindutva And Violence Against Women* (Speaking Tiger Books)—"In India, we have, through the experience of our own history and through the freedom struggle, understood women's status including the multiple forms and methods of violence against women within the context of the political, socio-economic, cultural realities, including the caste system. Looking at the issue of violence against women in this broader framework shows us the changing dimensions of violence against women in India today. By change I don't necessarily mean something

'new'—the intensification of existing, negative and sometimes toxic trends which due to a host of factors become the dominant trend, also adds up to change. These changes are occurring as a result of the dominance gained by the right-wing communal and sectarian forces in India's political and social life, leading to the formation of a government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and influenced, if not run by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Let us call it a joint venture of the RSS and its political wing, the BJP..." She furthers, "But in the decade of rule of the present dispensation, we can see a fundamentally altered situation in India, because of the nature of the agenda and the programme set by the RSS from its inception in 1925 – the agenda of building what they term a '*Hindu Rashtra*'."

Yes, today we can't dare call ourselves developed when just last evening those disturbing shots stood out, of a man in Rajasthan tying his wife to his bike and dragging her all around, in full public glare. Why? Because she dared to insist on visiting her sister's home! This is the level of brutality we have reached! And in the midst of these barbaric onslaughts we are told we going ahead ...progressing ...Where to! Only towards disasters hitting the fragile human being, being fed on the stale diet of communal hatred and friction and frenzied onslaughts!

Little point repeating that infrastructures are failing and falling apart, and to compound the gravity, the much hyped assurances by the sarkar of the day too seem failing.

And this holds out in almost every sector. One just has to walk around and see how the masses are surviving, amidst severe disadvantages and violence.

### **DIM RAYS OF HOPE...**

Before I end this column must focus on the dim rays of hope for the humans! Foremost, the statements of the two Olympic stars, India's Neeraj Chopra and Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem and also of their mothers greatly impressed. Their statements dripping with maturity and grace, relaying sentiments along the strain that winning gold or silver medals wouldn't ever come in way of their bonding. The two Javelin throwers worked very hard and so it's okay if one won silver and the other gold...both are like brothers. Nationalities or regions or religions shouldn't come in way of human bonding and definitely not in the lives of true sportsmen!

Saroj Devi, Neeraj Chopra's mother, of course made headlines

when she expressed her admiration and affection for Arshad Nadeem. She referred to him as "hamara ladka," or "our boy," highlighting the mutual respect that exists between the two athletes. In fact, she ought to be honoured at every possible forum. Her words and sentiments ought to be admired and respected.

Then, the interim prime minister of Bangladesh, Muhammad Yunus, also held out some hope for humans, when in his address he dwelt on protection of the Hindu minority population in Bangladesh and his urgent call to immediately halt violence ...refrain from all kinds of violence. And the manner he focused and emphasised on this relayed the much required urgency. Minority population and properties ought to be protected in every civilised country. That should be the top priority of every government. Vulnerable, they find it difficult to protect themselves from mob attacks coupled with destruc-

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tion and loot. It's the establishment's foremost duty to save lives and livelihoods of the minority communities otherwise there's little point in having a government! □□□

### **THE BRITISH GAME-PLAN**

## **Who Partitioned India?**

*Osman Sher*

**I**N 1947 THE BRITISH WERE the strongest link in the chain of three contenders of power; they had 100% authority as the owner of the Government and armed forces. In fact, it was the British Parliament that had ultimately partitioned the country. The Hindus, comprising three quarters of the population, were the strongest voice to decide the fate of the country while the Muslim population of India was merely a quarter, hence the weakest link. A demand for separation is made when the minority community is oppressed by the majority. In this case, the majority had not yet been in power and they never had the occasion to brutalise the minority.

Therefore, the Muslims had not been put in such a disparate situation as to make a serious demand for the division of the motherland. It was a *hollow* slogan. The break-up of a country is an extreme measure and the people who wanted it, and those who did not, both had to plunge in blood-baths to achieve their respective objectives. In this case all the concerned parties agreed to the division of the country without undergoing the necessary trauma. Therefore, in the scenario described above, does it not appear strange that the smallest "pistol" (in the words of Jinnah) had won the battle despite the common belief that the Hindus and the British were against it? In fact, had

any of the three parties resisted the division of the country, the Partition would never have happened. So, it seemed all were complicit. Britain divided India to be able to keep a hold as a strategic part in the North i.e. Pakistan. It was important for it in its larger game of keeping Russia/Soviet Union off Pakistan militarily from the beginning.

In their struggle for Pakistan, the Muslims had acted as they were in intoxication of being the ex-rulers of India and were not ready to play a second fiddle, without realising that the days of kingship and colonialism were gone and democracy had dawned in the world as a means of governance. However, despite the Pakistan Resolution of 1940 (repeat RESOLUTION), Muslim League's continued negotiations for more rights and privileges in a united India, and the subsequent acceptance of the

Cabinet Mission Plan clearly demonstrate that they had no conviction for Pakistan, and wished India to remain united. Jinnah had earlier presented himself as a great nationalist, earning the appellation of "Ambassador of Hindu Muslim Unity". When the Muslim League had invited Muhammad Ali Jinnah to join them, he did in 1913 without giving up his membership of the Congress. He joined the Muslim League with a "solemn preliminary covenant that loyalty to the Muslim League and the Muslim interest would in no way and no time imply even the shadow of disloyalty to the larger national cause (Indian nationalism), to which his life was dedicated." (Mrs Sarojini Naidu, *Muhammad Ali Jinnah: An Ambassador of Unity*, See V H Hudson: *The Great Divide, Chapter 2*) Later, however disgruntled with the policies of the Congress, especially, M. K. Gandhi's mixing of religion in politics, he turned an advocate of Muslim interests. However, in the process of extracting more concessions for the Muslims, the project Pakistan materialised when he did not expect it to actually happen. He had, *per force*, to accept what had been thrust upon him: a "a maimed, mutilated, and moth-eaten" Pakistan.

During the internecine fighting in which the Indians had been put by the British rulers, the attitude of the Hindus, even of as liberal and enlightened a person as Jawaharlal Nehru, seemed to be under the exhilaration of conquerors who had before them the sight of wresting their land back after centuries of subjugation and now it was their turn to have full freedom of action, conceding little to others. This sentiment is reflected in his own words. Michael Brecher writes in *Nehru, A political Biography*, "Flushed with success (in 1937 Provincial elections) the Congress adopted an imperious

attitude to all other political parties, a 'Himalayan blunder', for which it was to pay dearly in the years to come. Nehru himself set the tone with his haughty remark in March 1937: 'There are only two forces in India today, British imperialism, and Indian nationalism as represented by Congress'. Jinnah was quick to retort: 'No, there is a third party, the Mussulmans'. History was to bear him out." Further, while rejecting the Cabinet Mission Plan in the press conference in Bombay on 10 July 1946 he had said that the Congress would enter the Constituent Assembly "completely unfettered by agreement and free to meet all situations as they arose". This rejection of the Plan, the last chance to have India undivided, has been described by Abul Kalam Azad in his book, *India Wins Freedom*, as "one of those unfortunate events which change the course of history." Again, insisting the Congress for the last time not to accept the Partition Plan of 1947, Abul Kalam Azad had observed: "The verdict would then be that India was divided as much by the Muslim League as by the Congress".

On March 24, 1947, Lord Mountbatten was appointed as Viceroy with instructions from the Prime Minister Atlee to announce the British intention to leave India in June 1948 and to make the Indian politicians agree on a united India. The Viceroy was directed to report back to the Prime Minister by October 1947. Despite such an instruction, within a span of 5 weeks of his arrival, Mountbatten prepared the Partition Plan and sent it to London, which was discussed by the India Committee of Cabinet in the first week of May, 1947. After discussion, it was approved by the Cabinet and India's freedom was announced by the All India Radio on June 2, 1947, jointly by Mountbatten, Nehru and Jinnah. The

Bill for Indian Independence, was introduced in the House of Commons on July 4, and was passed on July 15. The House of Lords passed it on July 16, and the Bill received the Royal assent by a Royal Commission sitting in the House of Lords on July 18, 1947.

The British policy of "divide and rule" had served its purpose well. They were now leaving of their own because they had reached their strength's end to hold on to India. They did not even wait for their original date of June 1948 despite the fact that such a haste did not give the administration sufficient time for adequate preparation to cope with the subsequent large-scale massacre in Punjab despite the repeated warnings given by the Governor. Here the question arises: why the British broke India and that too helter-skelter? Whatever reason one may advance, but it was an irresponsible behavior on both accounts. The answer may be, firstly, that in June 1948 the British Government would have been fully occupied with another colony, Palestine, as reflected in the concern of the Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin. While discussing the Partition Plan of India he put the condition that he would agree to it provided the British Government took "our lads" (British soldiers) out of Palestine (William Fracis Hare, Foreign Secretary for India, *Memoires of the Earl of Listowel, Chapter 9*). Probably, Bevin intended to facilitate the unilateral declaration of independence by the Jews for Israel in May 1948. Secondly, the British knew about Jinnah's medical condition that he might die by June 1948 (he actually died in September 1948) of acute tuberculosis without whom the idea of Pakistan would fizzle out.

Anyway, Mountbatten was rewarded with the position of the first Governor-General of India and the British got a pre-arranged justification for the creation of Israel on religious grounds. □□□

## IT'S CIVIL WAR

## Bastar—A Slaughterhouse

*Suman Kalyan Moulick*

**I**N THE POLITICAL MAP OF India, there is a central Indian district by the name of Bastar. It seems people have forgotten this fact. The people who stay in this geographic area are citizens of India, they have constitutional rights under the much advertised second largest democracy in the world and they have the right to organise themselves under any democratic banner. Concerned Indians have hitherto kept faith in the corporate media houses who convey the achievements of the state's law enforcers in killing "Maoists" in the interests of the country. Over a hundred Adivasis have been killed in the last five months in what is called Bastar. The civic society, in unquestioning faith in narratives accepts that kids, school students, teenagers, all are a massive threat to the internal security of the country and hence annihilating them is the only way to keep India safe. As the "Rule of Law" is a farce in the tribal hamlets, the administration is careless.

To understand the present day reality of Bastar and Chhattisgarh, one needs to talk about the plight of Suneeta Pottam from Korcholi village of Bijapur district who was abducted by the Bijapur police from her temporary residence in Raipur. 25-year-old Suneeta is one of the leaders of the *Moolvasi Bachao Manch* and one of the prominent face of mass movements against eviction in the name of development, construction of military camps in villages, encounter killings, in that region. As an activist of human rights organisation PUCL, Suneeta had filed a case in Chhattisgarh high court, in 2016, against the

encounter of six people by the police on mere suspicion of being Maoists. Because of Suneeta's attempts, the country came to know about the death of a six-month-old baby due to police firing on 1 June. To stop this vigilant action, the police, on 9th February, 2024, tried to arrest her by forcefully taking her to a government hospital in Bijapur. However, due to the vigilance of the local reporters, the operation failed. This time also, she was framed under several cases. This is the present day reality of Bastar. Attacks on rights activists in this slaughterhouse is rampant. All those who have challenged the claims of "encounter", and brought forth the real identities of the people encountered, have faced the wrath of the state. From Himanshu Kumar, Bela Bhatia, Soni Sori to today's Suneeta—it is a repetition of history.

In any democracy, the basic condition premised is the right for existence of different views and the right to know the truth. In Chhattisgarh, an attempt to know the truth is a crime. An important part of the rights movement is fact finding. This very right is prohibited. The Chhattisgarh government has resisted any attempts to find the facts. Co-ordination of Democratic Rights Organisation (CDRO), the most prominent organisation coordinating rights organisations across the country, along with Telangana and Andhra Pradesh based mass organisations and some independent media initiatives, had formed a 50-member team to conduct fact finding operations in all the places where encounters took place recently. On 30.5.2024, the first team was stopped by the CRPF

at Kunta. Some members of the first team joined the second team which was heading towards Bijapur's Gangalur forest. This team was stopped and detained at Tarlaguda, which is 85 km from Bijapur. The Para-military forces, citing security issues, ordered them to leave. The forces even threatened to take legal steps if they didn't leave the place. The rights activists didn't give up. On 31.5.2024, a team of ten rights activists tried to enter Bijapur through a government bus. However, in broad daylight, the bus was stopped at Chintur bus stand and they were made to get down. In the words of a rights activist, the Para-military forces and police in white uniform had surrounded them throughout the day. In truth the Chhattisgarh government and the Central government want to hide their actions.

Notwithstanding the black-out of the corporate media, sometimes the truth comes into light, where the reality of these "ongoing encounters" get exposed. Here, the primary role is played by the united efforts of local journalists and responsible citi-

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zens. On 11.5.2024, Chhattisgarh police published a report claiming the death of 11 Maoists in a clash between the forces and the Maoists. Among them, there were members of CPI (Maoist)'s armed wing's members namely, Budhu Oram, Kallu Punnam, and Bhima Koram. Each one of them had a head price of one lakh rupees. However, the villagers refused to accept this "story". In a report by *Hindustan Times*, it was said that the villagers had started protesting against these killings in front of the Bijapur District Collectorate office. They proclaimed that none of the people killed were members of any guerrilla squad but were residents of their villages. The police had killed them in a cold blooded fake encounter. Gurunanda, from Pedia village, who is a witness to the incident, told journalists that people of the village had went to collect tendu leaves. The police had chased them and killed them. Another witness, Raju, said that Lalu Kunjam, who is a farmer and who was among the people killed, had seen the police and started running. The police forces completely surrounded the villages of Pidia and Tevar and conducted the operation. On 19.01.2024, when a fact-finding operation by Forum

Against Corporatisation and Militarisation (FACAM) was made possible even then, Madkam Soni, from Nendra village and Punem Nangi from Gotham Gram, were labeled as Maoists and killed in the streets by the police, for joining the demonstrations against military camps. Numerous incidents like these are hidden in this death valley of Chhattisgarh. "The Indian state's war against Naxalism is practically a genocidal war on people, particularly the Adivasi peasants."

Today what is happening in Bastar and broadly in Chhattisgarh had started much earlier. One can consider 9th June, 2009 as the commencement of these incidents when the then Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh, had commented in the Parliament that If left wing extremism keeps increasing in mineral rich regions, it will affect the environment for foreign investments. The need to establish hegemony of corporates over these mineral resources is the main reason for the State's war on its own people. It becomes the responsibility of the central and state governments to evict the people of the region and lay bare the mineral rich lands of Chhattisgarh,

Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and the vast area of central India for corporate loot. Felix Padel and Samarendra Das in their book, "Out of this Earth: East India Adivasis and Aluminium Cartel" says that the bauxite minerals in Odisha is worth 40000 crores as per 2004 estimates. The iron resources in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand is worth 6 trillion dollars. In this eastern and central India, there are 28 types of extremely valuable mineral resources like uranium, limestone, dolomite, coal, tin, granite, white stone, copper, diamond, gold, quartz, corundum, silica, fluorite, garnet etc. Then there are thermal power plants,

dams, highways, steel and cement factories, aluminum extraction factories, paper factories and many other infrastructure building projects. The success of investments by Adani, Ambani, Tata, Jindal, Thapar and many other Indian and foreign investors depends on these evictions.

Alongside the notorious Salwa Judum, the Chhattisgarh government created an army with a section of former Maoists, Adivasi and Non-Adivasi youths. This auxiliary unit was named as Special Police Force (SPO). There was no rule with regard to age, educational qualification, training schedule in its recruitment process. Only thing required was agreement to work with Salwa Judum and Para-military forces. In such ways, by bypassing the constitution, they created a condition of civil war. Social activist, Nandini Sundar filed a PIL in Supreme Court against this. The court called this Salwa Judum and the entire process of creating a semi-government security force unconstitutional. Even after this judgement, the state government didn't move from its path. To give the entire thing legality, it passed the Chhattisgarh Armed Force ordinance. Followed by this, more advanced weapons were handed over to these government volunteers. In 2013, it came to be known as District Reserved Guard. Such unconstitutional forces further complicated the situation.

The Indian Constitution recognises 705 Scheduled Tribes. As per the last census in 2011, the population of Adivasi people is 11 crores that is 8.6% of the total population. Out of them, 90% of the Adivasi population lives in village or forest areas. The two states where Adivasis are the most in population are Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. Today, the civil war is going on mainly in 7 regions in Chhattisgarh, where the majority population is Adivasi. These regions

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are Kanker (55.4%), Kudremukh (70%), Nagpur (70%), Panaji (25%), Duvadi (72%), Bijapur (80%), and Sukma (83.5%). According to Article 15(4) and Article 46 of the Constitution, there are various safeguards for the Adivasi people. Along with this, various rights are guaranteed under the fifth schedule for the Adivasis of central and eastern India and sixth schedule for the Adivasis of north-east India. Along with Chhattisgarh, in ten states, self rule through gram sabhas are recognised legally for the Adivasi people, under the fifth schedule. It has been said that the Gram Sabha will take the final decision in a democratic environment regarding

resources and land of the Adivasis. Besides, there are two important laws to ensure self rule in tribal areas. "Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of forest rights) Act-2006" and "Panchayet (Extension to Scheduled Areas)". It also needs to be mentioned that India has signed the United Nations' declaration (ICCPR) to protect indigenous people's rights.

Even after having so many safeguards, the Adivasi people are facing rampant exploitation and repression. The only reason behind the civil war going on in Bastar is the heaven and hell difference between the Constitutional rights guaranteed

and the policies taken up. Between 2003 to 2018, Chhattisgarh government has signed 272 MoUs (Memorandum of Understandings) in which the estimate investment was around 16.5 billion US dollars. However, due to the failure in execution, 158 MoUs had to be called off. Again, the number of MoUs signed between 2019 and 2021 is 104, where the estimated investment is 6 billion US dollars. Today, in this slaughterhouse, on one hand there is the fight of the Adivasi people for their *Jal- Jangal - Zameen* and on the other hand there is the government's military operation to facilitate corporate loot of mineral resources under the land. □

#### 64TH ANNUAL EXHIBITION

## Works of Contemporary Artists

*Atanu Basu*

**B**IRLA ACADEMY HAD hosted the exhibition of the works of contemporary artists in their 64th Annual exhibition of Contemporary Artists. There was a time when most of the modern artists in their exhibitions depicting the experiments, twists and turns, modernisation and contemporary aspects offered their viewers much food for thought. Now most of those stalwarts are no more. The Academy showcased 17 contemporary artists and displayed the heritage of modernism that they carried with the group.

For Ganesh Halui's "untitled" and "4", gouache on paper, nothing more can be said; he used various geometrical motifs in dark shades in his landscapes. Aditya Basak's works on canvas in mixed media appeared to be sequel displayed as a series of some sort. His "sheep on yalk" animals donned joker caps. "Approaching the Unknown Territory" is brilliant. He turned out to be master of detailing.

Two big paintings of Soumitra Khamrui, one in tempera on canvas and the other, tempera on board are excellent. "Untitled 2" undertakes a totally geometrical form and the other one had to take recourse to abstract form. Here also one would not miss the emergence of geometry, under the guise of bold fat line division. Two different moods are conveyed by his skillful use of interplay of fade light and shade. This kind of abstraction reminds one of unavoidable influence of European school of abstraction. He created design, a distance by incorporating a dimensional form in his work.

Daviv Malakar's "Good night Calcutta I, II" in charcoal, crayon, acrylic on hot pressed paper is simply beautiful. His search for lone existence had been very aptly emerged by depicting the pain on one hand, inner contradict on the other. His inner eye, as if abstracted out the real as well as the unreal of the situation. He had created his canvas with red, vermillion, brown, black,

yellow colours, with bright and shades, like an epic that was unfolding slowly. One tends to salute his thought process, technique, compositional sense and skill, along with his treatment of the subjects.

"Flower vases with a difference" and "The evening Landscape" by Manu Parekh are two extraordinary pieces of work. One might tend to describe them to be rather quite luminous, at the same time not very much illuminated, so to say. A young sapling, daring to raise her head in a background that varied between black and brown, conveyed a feeling of both isolation and germination- a truly brilliant exposition. His "Smell of Flower", or "Petal", a few hanging ones conveyed the feeling of a throbbing life. On the other hand, the leaf-stalk or leaf bud in a vase, generated a fantastic flowering existence by just a few abstraction. Two oil paintings in oil on canvas board would undoubtedly turn out to be per excellent, because of its specific use of the colour-red.

A series was presented by Manaj Mitra in mixed media on black paper, consisted of eight small drawings. One might, for a moment think that they are illustrations, in reality

though, they are far from it. It captured the tiny moments, articulated by white marker pen, dry and art pastel, dry brush work, line, tone, texture—all of them depicted a space and inversion must be mentioned as striking features. He conveyed an extremely dramatic events that had happened, manifested clash, crisis to joy, fear, life be at rest on in the moving.

Pradip Mitra justifiably would remind about water colour with supreme excellence. That this is not an over statement, one would have

easily realised if and when one would be privileged to view his “System 2 and 3”.

Niranjana Pradhan’s bronze sculpture, “mother and Child” is very much a poetic exercise. Akhil Chandra Das’s realistic sculpture, “Headless”, “Durga”, “Untitled”, “Goat” are all admirable from every point of view.

Late Nikhil Biswas had identified many a worth-mentioning features of modern Bengali art. The Bengali art and culture traversed many an evolutionary path to thrive as one

sees it today. He repeatedly mentioned in no uncertain terms that “we must appraise our experiences in the light of emergence of new ideas—this is the moot point of many persons who are into practising modern art”.

The exhibition also included the works of Bimal Kundu, Atanu Bhattacharyay, Atik Basakrikanyta, Srikanta Paul, Pankaj Panwar, Rajen Mandal and Bholanath Rudra. The viewers would have certainly enjoyed the exhibition as a whole.

□□□

## STUDENT POWER

# Bangladesh—Reclaiming the Republic

**Arun K Sinha**

**I**T IS NOW A WELL-KNOWN fact the deposed prime minister of Bangladesh fled the country at 45 minutes’ notice to neighbouring India on 5 August 2024 afternoon. The government here is pleased to offer ‘safe house’ to the vulnerable lady accompanied with her sister. She is now a declared public offender in her own country charged with genocide. Incidentally, it is her second home coming in Delhi, the first being in August 1975 when she flew to Delhi from Germany along with her near family and sister. This was after her father and the first declared President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with forty one members of the family were wiped out in an assassination attack by Bangladesh military officers. Sheikh Hasina spent six years in her first stint in the ‘safe house’ of Delhi.

Slowly, muted recognition has started now dawning this emergency landing of Sheikh Hasina from Dhaka is due to unprecedented popular uprising led by the students and youth of the country. While there were fantasy, rejoicing and distribution of sweets in the streets of Dhaka

and other cities of Bangladesh, there was stunning silence in the Indian media, government and opposition circles, on the 5 August. Nobody was prepared to issue any statement at the surprising and rapid developments in Dhaka. Except for the brief statement from the foreign minister in parliament on 6 August, no opposition leader including the new avatar of championing democracy issued any statement on the situation in Bangladesh that many people there are hoping to be the second Liberation after 1971.

It is astonishing to find that from 4th August-8th August there was no *State per se* in Bangladesh. The chief of the army General Waker-Uz-Zaman announced the running away of the deposed prime minister on 5 August, Monday afternoon but did not form any military government. Going by the precedents, Bangladesh has witnessed the heads of the State being periodically assassinated, jailed. The State came under repeated military siege, faced upheavals by the population at large. However, this time the General announced the formation of an interim government

advising the president. Soon, by 8th August afternoon the caretaker body of advisers was in place. Dr Mohammad Yunus, the erstwhile chief of Grameen Bank, the microcredit agency and the only Nobel Laureate from Bangladesh was flown in from Paris to head this interim government. He made the first press appearance in Dhaka surrounded by the students’ representatives who must be some six decades junior in age. All sixteen advisers nominated are from the civil society of Bangladesh including two representatives of the students, no serving military person is among these individuals.

Meanwhile there was no government from 5-8 August and a few days after, no state administration was in place. Police personnel fled their places of duty, police stations were torched and later they were guarded by the students’ volunteers who faced indiscriminate firing from the same police in the preceding weeks. The *Daily Star* from Dhaka reported on 7 August, “These correspondents saw Mirpur and Pallabi police stations, from where arms and ammunition were looted, being guarded by students yesterday afternoon..... Around a dozen students guarding the police station put a bamboo fence at the main

gate.”[1] The new chief of police, Md Mainul Islam is publicly apologizing to the students for murdering around three hundred of them at the insistence of Sheikh Hasina. There was “internet blackout for 10 days. During the blackout, there were reports of government helicopters shooting indiscriminately at people....”[2] Several prominent student coordinators were picked up and tortured at “Aina Ghar”, the torture chamber at Directorate General of Forces Intelligence ( DGFI ), Dhaka where dissenters and protesters against Sheikh Hasina government were abducted, tortured and gone missing. The new icon of student protest in Bangladesh, Abu Sayeed, a student of Rangpur’s Begum Rokeya University flung his two hands while facing direct police bullets on 16 July, undaunted and standing erect. Dr Yunus visited the family of Abu Sayeed on 10 August morning. He declared, “Abu Sayeed is a son to everyone in Bangladesh, regardless of caste and religion. Whether it is a Hindu family, a Muslim family or a Buddhist family, this Abu Sayeed is a son to all.”[3]

There were no courts, no judges, no lawyers in Bangladesh for a week. The empowerments of the students was such a force the chief justice of Supreme Court Obaidul Hassan resigned along with five other top judges on 10 August, Saturday being given an ultimatum by the students to resign by 1PM, Saturday. The new chief justice was duly sworn in the next day, Sunday 11 August. While there are widespread reports of vandalism and riots against the minority Hindu community, there are very few reports published that student volunteers of Madrasas stood in vigil in Syhlet district in the night to guard the temples. The student volunteers took control of traffic, cleaned garbage in the streets and urged discipline to restore normalcy.

The military rulers of Bangladesh in spite of series of coups and assassinations could not continue Martial Law regime for long. Soon after declaring themselves as presidents they launched political parties of their own and legitimised their rule by holding sham rigged elections. General Zia launched the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in September 1978, General Ershad announced his Jatiya Party (JP) in January 1986. Such overtures of military generals with popular representation is primarily due to the rich history of revolutionary terrorist movements, popular peasant movements, general strikes of workers, mass demonstrations on the soil of Bangladesh during the British and later under Pakistani rule. This eastern part of undivided Bengal saw huge peasant movements against the zamindars of Rangpur, Dinajpur districts in 1944-46 historically known as the *Tebhaga* movement. The heroic sacrifice of the students of Dhaka University in February 1952 led to the *Bhasa Andolan* in East Pakistan and recognition of *Bangla* in the national assembly of Pakistan, 16 February 1956 as the official language along with *Urdu*.

*The metamorphosis of the State under Sheikh Mujib towards an autocratic rule was apparent soon after installation of the government in December 1971. Sheikh Mujib introduced Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL) in February 1974 after amending the Constitution the fourth time in the January month declaring him the president. This BAKSAL was an umbrella front of Awami League (AL) in association with the Communist Party of Bangladesh, National Awami Party (Muzaffar) and Jatiya League. It disbanded existence of all other political organisations, brought the administrative services of the State under control of such front, and*

outlawed all newspapers except four state owned newspapers by an ordinance in June 1975[4]. During this regime, the nation witnessed the first political assassination of Siraj Sikdar, 2 January 1975 of the Sharbohora (Proletarian) Party, allegedly in ‘crossfire’ in police custody. Sheikh Mujib soon paid with his life and his family on 15 August 1975 because of the huge discontent brewing in the nascent army grown out of the Liberation war.

Sheikh Hasina exactly toed the footsteps of her father in her second stint of one and half decade (January 2009 – 5 August 2024) as prime minister. She has supervised blocking every political opposition and discontent against her rule. She put Begum Khaleda Zia, the former prime minister of BNP, widow of General Zia to jail in 2018 on corruption charges, She repeatedly held sham and rigged elections in 2014, 2018, and mostly recently in January this year that opposition BNP refused to participate. Hundreds of activists were routinely rounded up under Digital Security Act and Cyber Se-

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curity Act and later found missing. She forced the well-known rebel author against fundamentalists, Taslima Nasreen a *persona non grata* in Bangladesh. Asad Noor, the atheist blogger met the same fate. Several such atheist bloggers including the American citizen Avijit Roy were slain in Dhaka consecutively in 2015 by the fundamentalists.

Above all, she made Bangladesh a vassal state of India, as a mark of gratitude to save her and her sister by providing shelter for six years. Sheikh Hasina made a public acknowledgment of this unequal and uneven relationship with India in 2018, "Whatever we've given to India so far, they will remember it forever"[5]. It is evident in unlimited usage of ports of Bangladesh by India's freight carriers, or keeping the contentious issues of water sharing of Teesta River long pending. The most blatant favour that Hasina government offered to Indian monopoly businessman Goutam Adani is regarding the power purchase agreement. Adani Power produces electricity at Jharkhand state of India, transmits that to the power grid of Bangladesh that is already having surplus power capacity and is forced to buy every kilowatt in dollar terms.

A huge narrative is manufactured in this sub-continent that Sheikh Hasina and AL are the best bet to protect the Hindu and other minority population in Bangladesh. The statement has credence given the legacy of AL during the 1971 Liberation war. Large scale migration of population with Hindu belief in India produced this minority bashing syndrome within this sub-continent. The AL leadership always considered the Hindu minority population as their pocket borough, and always exhorted the population with the bogey of fundamentalism. As recent in August 2022, the foreign minister Abdul Momin made state-

ments in a Janmashami festival in Chittagong as Hasina's departure would be dangerous for Bangladesh, India, and Bangladeshi Hindus[6]. On the contrary, the AL leadership systematically weakened the presence of Hindu community in the social life. They promoted the Islamists Hefazat-e-Islam established in January 2010 to demand Islamic governance, took little action against the systematic fundamentalist killer attacks against the bloggers, pressurised the minority population to sell off their properties and opt for migration and grabbed their properties.

The events in Bangladesh in July-August 2024 remind one the immortal words of Rosa Luxemburg in a debate with Russian social democracy on organisation issues in 1904. Her work published simultaneously in *Iskra* (Russia), and *Neue Zeit* (Germany) has these words, "Let us speak plainly. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee." [7] It is very difficult for people used to thinking in terms of schema, conspiracy, involvement of foreign hand, doubting what follows in the future, etc. to recognise the energy in the spontaneity, in the creativity of the millions of people looking for a new lease of life. They shudder at the sight of the plebeians invading the residences of autocrats, vandalising, looting, and rejoicing at Ganabhaven, Dhaka just as the scene was at the presidential palace in Colombo two year back. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled Sri Lanka on 9 July 2022 also at the sight of invading rally of the protesters. There are elements of truth that the people who are at the helm of affairs in Bangladesh have many dubious records of exploiting the poor in the name of micro-credits, they have close relations with

many super powers eager to seize strategic locations of Bangladesh islands. Such geo-political interests of international capital always are uncomfortable to adjust with popular uprising aspiring to reclaim the republic, capturing the fruits of sacrifice of lives by extending the limits of *liberty*. The students, youths and civil society of Bangladesh are currently passing through such momentous exercises—let us put hope and confidence in their stupendous effort. □□□

Pune, 16 August 2024

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## CALL FROM BANGLADESH

## A Bangladesh Built on the Dreams of the Youth

*Bidhan Chandra Pal*

IT IS EVIDENT, AND INDEED natural, that people in Bangladesh as well as across the world are concerned about the dire situation in the nation. The revolution has received immense support from around the globe: Bangladeshis, foreigners and Bangladeshis living in other countries have all raised their voices against the atrocities committed in the nation. A friend in need is a friend indeed. It must be said that all who have been keeping Bangladesh in their thoughts, regularly keeping track of the situation, writing about it, analysing it and trying to find a solution are the ones who are honestly working towards a better future for Bangladesh. They are the true patriots. All of these efforts would not be possible without one's true love for the country, and a deep sense of compassion and empathy for Bangladesh.

Media and people in Bangladesh and abroad are also passing various judgements with regards to the present scenario, oftentimes criticising the movement, the turn it has taken and the conclusion it has reached.

The new generation (although like me, many others have not had the opportunity to meet, know and understand them) in a courageous effort—some even at the cost of their lives— have pulled out the older generation from their hidingholes and have brought them up onto the surface. This exposed to the people the rampant corruption that had been sweeping through the nation and also revealed a way to escape from it. The cool wind of change has blown through the country and

instilled a breath of fresh air on the citizens. There is a hope for a better and brighter future which is spreading across Bangladesh.

Is this truly “independence?” There has been much apprehension over this question, because, over the years, the members of the society had become increasingly nucleated, isolated and apathetic. The core administrative, social, cultural and various other institutions had grown to become weak and fragile. This became even more evident when, after the revolution received its desired goals, various unexpected and unacceptable events took place causing massive death and destruction. There were attacks on minorities, police forces, people from opposing political parties and beliefs, a spree of torture, murder, theft, destruction of statues and places of worship of minorities swept across the nation. Without a doubt these actions were despicable and shameful and were a show of ugly mentality.

Truth be told, the people of the country had not been able to even imagine such immense political upheaval, one which would shake the foundations of Bangladesh. It indeed happened very suddenly and swiftly. But this change was doubtlessly necessary for Bangladesh and its citizens, sooner or later.

Although the people were pulled out of their filth hidey-holes, the scum and dirt of the past will stick to them. To rid them of these, apart from the essential forces, one has to allow them some time to adjust. The wound of uplifting the society as a whole is so intense, that many

may have to carry this burden throughout their lives. Post-emancipation, there might ensue a struggle among the people as they do not immediately find what they seek, and slowly come to terms with the new life and how to properly live it. This might lead to a certain direction of anarchy causing brawls or incidents far worse and fear-inducing—this is, of course, undesirable. Years of subjugation has pulled out a howl of impatience and intolerance from the people; in the end, they crave for peace; they wish to have the security to lead happy lives—not just for themselves, but also a secure future for generations to come. And so the commoners have accepted the revolution brought in by the young generation and have put their hopes for a better future on the changes that they have been able to bring about.

At the present moment, the newly formed interim government has instilled a sense of hope in the minds of the people, even if there are some doubts and concerns regarding certain members of the government. This is, however, natural in a democratic structure. The greatest sense of hope stems from the fact that the leader of the interim government is Nobel Peace Prize win-

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ner. With this the new society is looking for progress towards a safe, sound and prosperous future. Not just Bangladesh, but the entire world looks on in hope to see what the new age brings.

Hope for a widespread reinstatement of law and order in the nation is being looked forward to. People expect a change in societal dynamics where men and women can live equally and freely without fear. Everyone, irrespective of caste, creed or religion, will have an environment where they can survive happily and peacefully. Better economic conditions, education and healthcare system is also something the citizens of Bangladesh are eagerly waiting for. Only when all of this is achieved can the nation move forward. Proper reforms in the electoral system and its functioning are also something that can be hoped for in the near future.

With the immense transformation in the trajectory of national history and politics, the entire state and its functionality has more or less collapsed. The process of resurrection has already begun, but it must be understood that this is neither easy nor a small undertaking. The changes being brought about will face criticism; but instead of criticising the new approaches, people must accept and bring about reforms following the path laid down by the constitution and following the "Doctrine of Necessity". The new interim government will need time to bring about proper and acceptable reforms, which the people will have to provide them with. The people must also provide the government with all the necessary help so that the entire country can grow together. If everyone works together, it will make sure to bring about swifter stability in the nation, or at least pave the way for it.

It has to be kept in mind that

this generation (termed Gen Z: those born between 1997 and 2012) has neither witnessed the Bengali Language Movement, nor the Bangladesh Liberation War, nor '90s uprising. Naturally, these people will only be able to raise their voices and protest against the leaders whom they have seen behave like dictators after they were born. It would be unrealistic and indeed unfair to expect them to speak about revolutions which happened before their lifetime.

Thus, to progress, old generation will have to seriously pay heed to the things the new generation has to say and the reforms they suggest. It is imperative to understand the psychology of the young generation and not allow for them to be maligned and manipulated on religious or economic. The previous generation will have to guide the younger generation so that they do not lose their purpose midway and indulge in actions which will cause collective harm to society. Experienced individuals will have to contribute their own teachings to increase awareness of the new generation so that cohabitation and coexistence can be achieved. Praise and guidance must be imparted to the new generation; but this cannot be one-directional, as one too has much to learn from them. It is possible to develop such healthy practices of communication, otherwise—or even in the event of this process going wrong—this may lead to dire consequences for the entire nation.

It must be remembered that over the years, Bangladesh has seen a lot of cultural, social, political and constitutional changes. As a result, people must understand that fundamentalist, fascist, militant or religious groups have not emerged over the course of a day. Hence, a complete change in the structure of these groups suddenly cannot be expected. Bringing about change will be diffi-

cult, but despite all difficulties, it is not impossible.

To conclude, the change which the young people have brought about in Bangladesh must be lauded and their contribution for a better future is immeasurable. The change that has taken place must be used to bring positive reforms. In the midst of all the negative news, there is a sign of positivity from the people of all ages. They have been infused with the vigour of the youth and in the absence of law-and-order forces have taken it upon themselves to ensure the safety of people all across Bangladesh. They have brought order back to the streets, returned stolen objects back to the owners. These incidents offer a sense of security. They also prove that the future is in safe hands, and even in the height of disorder, the youth of the country can strive to successfully reinstate order.

The people of Bangladesh do not want any more discord or discrimination, whether political or religious. Neither do they want to sink back into the vicious cycle of corruption and political malpractice. The nation has begun a journey of rising and starting anew, and in this journey lies success and a newfound freedom to live prosperous and peaceful lives. With the safe and strong participation of each and every individual, Bangladesh will move to greater future. A strong, positive and fruitful future for Bangladesh—let this be the collective desire of all. □

[Translated from original Bengali by Aryaveer Das. Courtesy: Ekak Matra]

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## LETTERS

**"No Manual Scavenging"**

The Safai Karamchari Andolan has demanded that the Prime Minister bring out a white paper on the work done by the government for manual scavengers in the last 10 years and release a special package for the liberation and rehabilitation of manual scavengers.

On July 24, while responding to unstarred questions raised by TMC MP Saket Gokhale in the Rajya Sabha on the number of total manual scavenging incidents Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Athawale replied that 'there is no report of manual scavenging in the country in the last five years' and that out of the total 6,256 cases uploaded on the mobile app from 114 districts, all cases were verified and none was found credible!

Thus, the Union Minister turned a blind eye to the increasing deaths of Safai Karmacharis due to hazardous and manual cleaning of safety tanks, sewers, etc. This is an attempt by the Union Government to hide the data related to deaths due to manual scavenging to escape the responsibility of rehabilitation of the dependents of the deceased workers.

Recently in May, Uttar Pradesh witnessed 8 deaths in a short period of 10 days due to manual scavenging. On May 2, Shrobbhan Yadav, 57, and his son Sushil Yadav, 30, died while checking a sewer line without safety equipment in Lucknow's Wazir Ganj area. On May 3, two daily wage labourers, Kokan Mandal, 40, and Nuni Mandal, 36, died while cleaning the septic tank of a private residence in Noida Sector 26. On May 9, four people died from inhaling toxic gases while cleaning the septic tank of a house in Mughalsarai, Chandauli. Three of the victims, Vinod Rawat, 35, Kundan, 42, and Loha, 23, were informal sanitation workers, while the fourth victim was the house owner's son, who died while trying to save the workers. Colin Gonsalves, senior Supreme Court advocate and founder of Human Rights Law Network, remarked, "It is appalling that workers are forced to get down into sewer lines without any protocol, machine or oxygen gear

to clean sewer lines.

Centre says 400 people died due to manual scavenging in 2023.

It is urgent to hold the Union Government accountable for failing to protect the lives of these Dalit sanitation workers.

HN

**Girls under Taliban**

As Afghanistan's rulers mark three years in power, the future of an entire generation of girls is 'in jeopardy'.

Afghanistan's Taliban government has "deliberately deprived" at least 1.4 million girls of their right to an education during its three years in power, according to the United Nations.

About 300,000 more girls are missing out on school since UNESCO last carried out a count in April 2023.

Taking into account the number of girls not going to school before the Taliban came to power in August 2021, the UN's educational and cultural agency said 80 percent of Afghan school-age girls—a total of 2.5 million—are now being denied their right to an education.

"UNESCO is alarmed by the harmful consequences of this increasingly massive drop-out rate, which could lead to a rise in child labour and early marriage," it said in a statement.

Afghanistan is the only country in the world to stop girls and women attending secondary schools and universities.

Since the Taliban came to power, it has barred education for girls above sixth grade, arguing that it does not comply with its interpretation of Islam — although no other Muslim country prohibits girls from being educated.

UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay urged the international community to remain mobilised "to obtain the unconditional reopening of schools and universities to Afghan girls and women".

The Taliban administration, which is not recognised by any other country, has imposed restrictions on women that the UN has described as "gender apartheid".

The number of primary pupils has also fallen. Afghanistan had 5.7 million

girls and boys in primary school in 2022, compared with 6.8 million in 2019, UNESCO said.

It blamed the drop on the authorities' decision to ban female teachers from teaching boys, adding that parents also lacked incentives to send children to school.

Enrollment in higher education is equally concerning, it said, adding that the number of university students had decreased by 53 percent since 2021.

A Reader

**MCC merges with CPI(ML)**

The unification of Jharkhand's two leading Left forces, CPI(ML) Liberation and Marxist Coordination Committee (MCC), was announced on 10 August 2024 in a press conference at Ranchi by CPIML Politburo member and MP Raja Ram Singh and MCC Executive President and Ex-MLA Arup Chatterjee. This will begin a new chapter in the anti-fascist resistance and struggles against crony capitalism in Jharkhand and will also be a decisive factor in the forthcoming Assembly elections in the state.

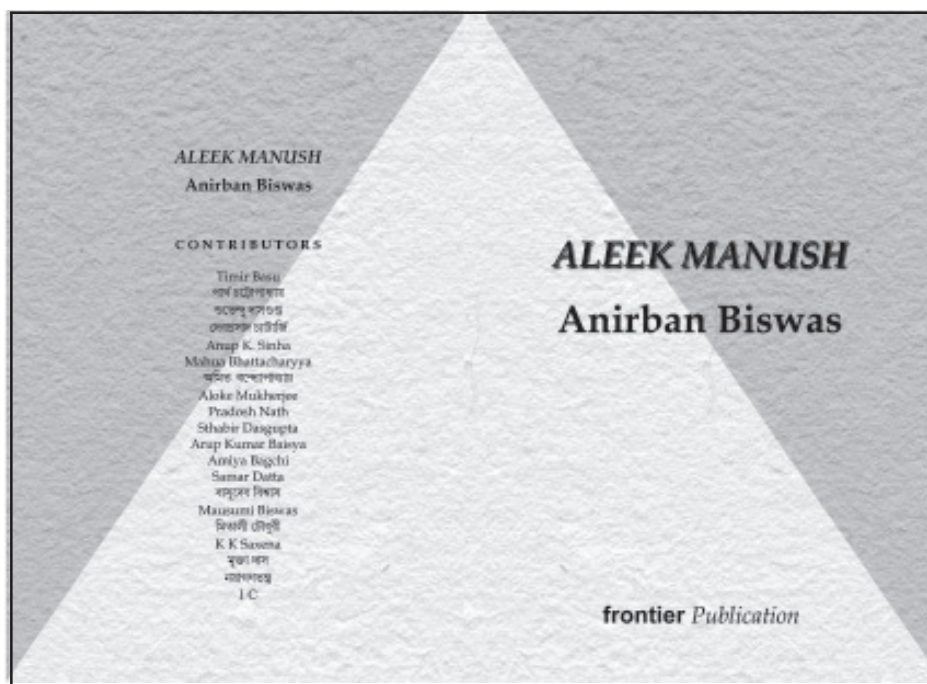
Earlier the CPI(ML) Polit Bureau in its meeting held on July 31- August 1, 2024 at New Delhi adopted following resolution welcoming the unification: "The Polit Bureau of the Central Committee of CPI(ML) heartily welcomes the decision adopted by the Central Committee of Marxist Coordination of Jharkhand, founded by AK Roy and other leaders in 1972, to merge with the CPI(ML). Under the inspiring and iconic leadership of AK Roy, MCC played a key role in the Jharkhand movement and also in the struggle for nationalisation of India's coal industry. The unification of this significant trend of the Communist movement of Jharkhand with its glorious legacy of struggles against injustice and oppression with the CPI (ML) at today's critical juncture will energise the fighting forces of Jharkhand in intensifying the ongoing struggles against the fascist onslaught of the Modi government and the Sangh brigade and defending the rights and unity of the working class, Dalits and other indigenous communities and deprived people of Jharkhand.

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**Anirban Biswas**

**COMPILATION TEAM:**

TIMIR BASU, ARUP SEN, NABINANDA SEN, TARUN BASU

**CONTRIBUTORS:**

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

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