

# frontier

Vol. 57 : No. 12

ISSN 0016-2094

September 15-21, 2024

Founder-Editor : **SAMAR SEN**

On Other Pages

Comment	2
Note	3
HUMRA QURAISHI's COLUMN Double Standard!	4
Humra Quraishi	
HYDERABAD CENTRAL JAIL Hunger Strike by Political Prisoners	6
G Jabali	
UNCERTAIN FUTURE AI & Political Propaganda	7
Sumit Bhaduri	
HEMA PANEL REPORT WCC Speaks	10
Varsha Sriram	
RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR Permanent Peace or Frozen Conflict?	12
Bharat Dogra	
VOTING FOR THE LESSER EVIL Workers Never Ruled Venezuela	13
Karyn Pomerantz	
Letters	15

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

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

E-mail : [frontierweekly@yahoo.co.in](mailto:frontierweekly@yahoo.co.in)  
[frontierweekly@hotmail.com](mailto:frontierweekly@hotmail.com)

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

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

## *Shah's Timetable*

**W**HILE ADDRESSING HIGH-LEVEL SECURITY OFFICIALS ON August 24 in Chattisgarh's capital Raipur Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced the timetable for complete eradication of what they call left-wing extremism [LWE] or Naxalism. The deadline is 2026. This is not the first time he looked too eager to write obituary of the five-decade old Maoist movement in India. Nor it would be the last. The four-hour long deliberations involved senior officers from seven states, including Directors General of Police and state secretaries. Chattisgarh remains the most-talked about state in their brutal campaign against the Maoist insurgency. In 2024, Shah's security forces conducted several major operations against armed naxalites resulting in the elimination of 42 Maoist guerrillas in three 'encounters' along the Chattisgarh-Telangana border between January and April. It's now an open secret that their much-publicised encounters are in most cases fake.

Killing reward-carrying maoists in 'encounter' is a lucrative business in Chattisgarh and elsewhere for the security personnel. They simply pick up innocent civilians, having no relation with the maoist movement, and murder them in cold blood. In the 1970s this practice reached its peak but it continues unabated still. They present the dead bodies to higher authorities for reward money. Recently one officer expressed his dissatisfaction over the meagre amount he received after sharing the booty along with his colleagues.

As per home department report altogether 38 districts across the country remain affected by maoist insurgency with Chattisgarh accounting for 15 of these. Another strategy is to terrorise ordinary people by arresting so-called 'suspects' indiscriminately and keep them in jails as Undertrials for years. And everybody knows overcrowded jails in India are in reality living hells designed to dehumanise human beings. At the time of writing political prisoners, mostly Undertrials are on hunger strike in Hyderabad Central Jail. The authorities say they are all 'dreaded naxalites'. So they can be denied basic amenities and medical treatment sanctioned even by archaic Jail manuals of British vintage. Strangely enough even left parties do hardly raise the issue of inhuman treatment of political prisoners in parliament or in any appropriate forum. Nor do they ever demand unconditional release of innocent people falsely implicated in concocted cases. Only a few civil liberties bodies and human rights organisations occasionally agitate over

state's repressive measures. But their voices are too weak to move the persons in authority. As most of the incarcerated people come from poor families they have no legal access; they just rot in black cells year after year.

For one thing it is for the naxalite resistance that they have not yet been able to hand over mineral-rich central India totally to the corporates. This is one reason they have massively militarised the entire region in name of combating naxalite violence. Their hidden agenda is how to depopulate the area, principally

inhabited by indigenous people.

That the maoists despite their huge sacrifices have failed to win over broad masses in their favour is a fact of life. That the government has been successful in isolating them politically from people, more precisely middle class and lower middle class toilers, is equally true. After all India doesn't live in tribal hamlets only. It's an unequal fight between Indian security forces and People's Liberation Guerrilla Army of the Maoists. Then the maoist insurgency is the only insurgency, having no rear beyond the international border

of India. Also, it is the only Marxist insurgency; the rest are non-Marxist and religious fundamentalist. Insurgents in the North East have the advantage of volatile India-Burma border areas and the militants in Kashmir have their solid rear in Pakistan that provides them logistical support as well. So the Shahs are in a hurry to announce the timetable of their demise. The Maoists can turn the table only by adopting a proper mass-line without which they are bound to fail in achieving their target.

□□□

---

## COMMENT

### Israel and Indian Left

IT WAS A CONGRESS GOVERNMENT that in 1992 established full diplomatic relations with Israel. Arafat assented to this Indian shift because he was himself taking the political journey to Oslo. So, the subsequent governments of Narasimha Rao, Deve Gowda, I.K. Gujral, and those of UPA-I and UPA-II, respectively, adopted the basic policy of progressively strengthening their economic, military, technological and political ties with Israel that, after all, was also an important conduit for deepening the post-Cold War political alignment with the US. The Indian attitude towards Palestine and the PLO was now to simply give money and political lip service to the Palestinian cause—even as Israel systematically and cumulatively violated the Oslo Accords, made Gaza the world's largest open-air prison and carried out periodic air and military assaults on it (what Tel Aviv calls "mowing the lawn").

In 2008 the Manmohan Singh government got Israeli material support enabling India to move from targeted to mass surveillance capabilities. In February 2014, a work

agreement was signed between the Israeli Ministry of Public Security and India's Ministry of Home Affairs to obtain, amongst other things, training by Israel of Indian police and security personnel for border management, 'counterterrorism' and crowd control. This was first implemented when the Narendra Modi government took over after the May 2014 elections and such arrangements subsequently further developed and extended.

The BJP-led governments of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Modi added an emotional-ideological dimension to the supposedly strategic contours of this bilateral relationship because of the kinship character of Hindutva and Zionism as belief-systems. But where Israel from inception has legally been a 'Jewish' nation and state, the Sangh Parivar and BJP have still to reach their goal of establishing a proper 'Hindu' nation and state. Moreover, while Israel has made itself the dominant military and nuclear force in the WANA region, India has not been able to do so in South Asia because of Pakistan and China. The ways in

which Israel has contained the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories is seen as providing lessons for what the Modi government should do in Kashmir.

At least some civil society organisations and the mainstream left parties have voiced their condemnation of Israel and taken solidarity actions in support of the Palestinian people and Gazans in particular.

It should be noted that only pro-Palestine groups and the Left parties (not the Congress or other bourgeois parties) have supported the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Campaign against Israel which has achieved notable success in many parts of the world causing a degree of material discomfort to Israel.

Given the ideological kinship of Zionism and Hindutva, the greater the extent to which Zionism is exposed and condemned for its inherently racist and discriminatory character, the better it is for the struggle to discredit Hindutva and its various political advocates. This is why the Indian Left must prioritise solidarity for the Palestinian cause. The latest demand call by the CPI(M), CPI, CPI-ML (Liberation), AIFB and the RSP on the Indian government vis-à-vis Israel has highlighted the need

to prevent Indian military arms and ammunition supplies to Israel, to end Indian exports of arms from Israel and to end all forms of complicity by India with Israel's illegal occupation and genocide.

The Left should go one demand

better. It should call on the Indian government to sever all political, diplomatic, economic, technological, socio-cultural, academic and military relationships with Israel, full stop. □□□

[Contributed by Achin Vanaik. *The India Forum*]

## NOTE

# Rising Islamophobia in India

**Ram Puniyani writes:**

ACCORDING TO THE "Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council and the Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad", minority communities in Bangladesh faced 205 incidents of attacks in 52 districts, since the fall of the Hasina government on August 5. Prof Yunus was the choice of students to lead the interim Government. There was a massive rally of minorities calling for their protection. Prof Yunus immediately issued an appeal. He "...urged the student protesters to protect all minority communities, including Hindu, Christian and Buddhists, from being targeted. Are they not the people of this country? You have been able to save the country. Can't you save some families?" he asked the student protesters.

This was a powerful appeal and as per Mahfouz Anam, editor of Bangladesh's *the Daily Star*, the violence against Hindus stopped, to the extent that the right wing Jamat-E-Islami formed teams to protect the temples. The learned Editor, in an interview given to Wire's Karan Thapar also pointed out that rightists in Bangladesh and India feed each other. As per him after fifth day the attack on minorities came to a total halt. He and many other you tubers have pointed out that in India many of the rumours and fake news have been circulated without any fact check.

One major example is the news and visual that cricketer Leepan Das's House was put to fire. The

BBC fact check revealed that it was the house of another cricketer, who is close to Awami League and had been MP for two terms. Similarly another visual shows *burning of a temple in Chittagong*. The fact check showed that what was put to fire was Awami League office, which was near the temple. Such examples abound, showing the burning of Hindu temples and killing of Hindus. "Both, Hindus and Muslims are victims. But they cherry-pick and highlight the politically motivated attacks as communal. When the victim is Hindu, all incidents are widely propagated as communal persecution, which will increase anti-Muslim hatred in India."

Now the two major powers in Bangladesh are Prof Yunus and the students who led the protests. Both these are taking the line of inclusive character of Bangladesh, and strong position about protection of Hindus and other minorities. Undoubtedly Jamaat-e-Islami dreams of an Islamic state, there is Khaleda Zia of BNP, which is also pro Right, pro Islamic state, while the major scale is tilted towards the attitudes which Yunus and Students are displaying. Prof Yunus, true to his pluralism visited Dhakeshri temple (13th August 2023) and met Hindu leaders to assuage their pain and reassure their safety. That is so reassuring.

Here in India the hate mongers and votaries of Hindu Nationalism are spreading Hate and sending inciting messages with gay abandon.

## AUTUMN NUMBER 2024

### Will be out in the first week of October

This year our contributors include Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Sumanta Banerjee, Marcello Musto, Arup Baisya, Vinod Mubayi, Harsh Thakor, Olivia Banerjee, Pranjali Bandhu, Ranabir Samaddar, Himanshu Roy, Arup Kumar Sen, Atanu Chakravarty, Paranjay Guha Thakurta, Ritaiyoti Bandyopadhyay, Amit Bhattacharya, Asok Chattopadhyay, Abhijit Guha, T Vijayendra, Sujoy Prasad Bhattacharya, Farooque Chowdhury, Ranganayakamma, Nityananda Ghosh, Chaman Lal, I M Sharma, Jayanta Bhattacharya, Anup K Sinha, Sohini Sengupta, Manas Bakshi, Joydip Ghosal, Christopher Harding, Sunil Ray.....

BJP's MP, Kangana Ranaut, tweeted, "Peace is not air or sunlight that you think is your birthright and will come to you for free. Mahabharata ho ya Ramayana biggest battles in the history of the world have been fought for peace. Pick your swords and keep them sharp, practice some combat form daily."

On similar lines many trolls and leaders of BJP are spreading such things which incite the people. What is needed at the moment? People must stand with the rights of religious minorities in Bangladesh. As the interim Government is calling for protection of minorities and as minorities could successfully stage a demonstration for their rights, it seems there is some space for the democratic secular values which need to be appreciated and supported.

Tommy Robinson who has been criticised for posting inflammatory messages about the violent riots targeting Muslims and immigrants across the UK, has been sharing unverified videos from Bangladesh, where he says there is 'a genocide on Hindus'. □□□

---

 HUMRA QURAISHI'S COLUMN
 

---

## Double Standard!

*Humra Quraishi*

**H**OW MANY MORE homes will get bulldozed in the country! How many more abodes will get ruined and demolished and destroyed! I'm of the opinion that bulldozing of homes is a barbaric rejoinder to crime, where not just the supposed or alleged or suspected culprit is punished but his or her entire clan. And in the latest case in Rajasthan's Udaipur, even the landlord's home wasn't spared! Was there any valid justification of bulldozing the landlord's home, whose tenants were the family of the school going teenage boy who'd stabbed his class fellow with a knife he was carrying to school? The sarkari version is along the strain that the landlord's house was built on an unauthorised stretch of forest land. But the basic fact that emerged is that it was built years back with the relevant sarkari documents, and in that particular locality many homes have remained untouched, un-bulldozed! Relevant queries do come up: which particular government department gave the valid go-ahead sanction to build that particular house which was bulldozed? And with that supposed sanction, isn't it illegal to pull down a built structure, with a mere one day's notice? Where and how the victim, in this particular case an auto rickshaw driver, is to survive with his entire family, in this roofless-homeless condition?

The big crucial factor that also looms large is that bulldozing of homes is done along a particular political strain, ripe with the Right-Wing slants! Why is it homes of the minority and disadvantaged communities can be so very easily tar-

geted and with that ruined for generations to come! Look around and see that homes of Dalits and Muslims and also Hindus from the disadvantaged socio-economic strata are bulldozed!

In fact, Bhasha Singh, political commentator and U-tuber, raised a pertinent point in one of her recent talks: why homes and properties and abodes of the convicted rapists and murderers with Right-Wing slants are not bulldozed! Double standard all the way!

□□□

During my travels, young Muslims cited one example after another, reeking of double standard. They told me that if the BJP can show 'artificial concern' for 'their Muslim sisters' by harping on a social ill like the 'Triple Talaq', why doesn't it show concern for the widows of Vrindavan and Varanasi and also for women dying on account of dowry related tortures.

What upsets the young Muslim of today is that double standards prevail even where free speech stands. "We Musalmaans can't talk! No question of dissent ...any charge can be thrown at us! We are scared criticising even the mohalla goons, but Hindutva leaders are nurturing their own senas. Who all are stuffed in private senas! Why only Hindus can assemble their brigades? If Musalmaans would have done what Karni Sena or Shiv Sena does, they would be not just arrested but entire families would have been ruined. But nothing happens to them! Have you ever heard of a Musalmaan sena!"

Muslims also pointed out that double standard prevails even where

a serious crime as rape is concerned. Different treatment meted out to rapists if they are connected to the ruling brigades or if they rape during rioting, pogroms. During the Gujarat pogrom and also the Muzaffarnagar riots Muslim women were raped and molested but little justice for the victims. Threatened by the political mafia, the victims and their families sat subdued and quiet; well aware of the ground realities where double standards prevail.

□□□

Double standard gets also writ large, when encounter specialists are set free, whilst doubts still hover around those gunned down in political encounters. During the course of an earlier interview, when I had asked the New Delhi based lawyer activist Vrinda Grover why she had decided to fight for the young woman gunned down in an encounter in Gujarat, Ishrat Jahan, she stated—"As a human rights lawyer I often represent victims of police atrocities and violence... But after meeting Shamima Kauser (Ishrat's mother) and her children, seeing the case file and the reading the truth about Sohrabuddin's murder, it was clear that this "encounter" was not just a crime committed by some trigger happy cops, but rather part of the State sanctioned and planned violence against Muslims, which was unleashed in the genocidal pogrom of 2002." ...Vrinda had also detailed that it was crucial to recognise a clear pattern of targeting Muslims and demonising them as the enemy that must be eliminated, by use of State power, whether through engineered riots or staged fake encounters i.e cold blooded murders by those in State power. "It is very important to bring out the truth behind these fake encounters because in Gujarat there is a criminal



September 15-21, 2024

FRONTIER

5

nexus between the political Executive, the police and even persons in critical positions in the I.B. both in the Centre and State. This is a very dangerous and lethal combination and before our eyes a fascist state is in the making.”

□□□

No end to the double standard! During the 2018 election campaign in the North East, BJP made promises to send senior citizens of Nagaland on religious trips, all the way to Jerusalem! Wooing the majority Christian population of Nagaland by setting up a senior citizen board which would annually select 50 members through lucky draw for a free trip to Holy Land of Jerusalem. Not to be overlooked is the fact that at the start of 2018, the Central government scrapped the Haj subsidy for the Muslim community of the country. And whilst on double standards, why is that Central and State level ministers from the North East can openly talk of their beef -eating traditions and get away with it, but Muslim cattle grazers and traders are lynched in public on the beef alibi!

Provocatively communal remarks regularly uttered by the BJP rulers but no question of their arrest or ouster... Though the likes Sangeet Soms ,Sadhvi Niranjans, Giriraj Singhs, Katiyars, Sakshi Maharajas, Togadias, Hedges have been openly and blatantly threatening, abusing, taunting sections of the minority community, yet they move around freely.

Also, though news-reports had surfaced that the VHP and Bajrang Dal were holding arms training camps in Greater Noida, Varanasi, Ayodhya and in other locales, where the young were getting training to attack the 'enemy', yet no bulldozing of the organisers and promoters' properties of these camps!

And one cannot overlook the

fact that the three– LK Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti—who were gleefully hugging each other when the Babri Masjid was getting destroyed by the kar sevaks, were allotted prime slots in the very governance of this county!

□□□

Rulers of the day who harp on the word 'secular 'ought to look what's taught in the RSS schools. I had first heard the former Delhi University Professor Nalini Taneja talk in an open forum of the history taught in the RSS run schools .It was a shocker, as she read out and aloud several of the provocative passages from the text books taught in the RSS run schools. The following years I have heard several academics detail what's getting taught in the RSS schools: To quote—"The history texts are nothing but unadulterated illustration of the RSS view of history and use of history for its sectarian agenda—Aryans are the original inhabitants of India, Indian civilisation is essentially Aryan civilisation ,the ancient period of history when Hindu rulers ruled was golden and India had enormous advantages during this period. The coming of Mughals brought darkness, cruelty... Hedgewar, Gowalkar, Savarkar are amongst the greatest freedom fighters. Muslims as a community are traitors. Hinduism is synonymous with nationalism. Also, caste, child marriages and sati are defended. Muslims, Christians and Parsis are called foreigners. Urdu is referred to as a foreign language.”

And in 2016, during an interview given to me, the former IIT Mumbai Professor, Ram Puniyani, detailed the teachings in the RSS run schools—"RSS has single teacher schools, Ekal Vidyalaya and bigger ones as Shishu Mandirs. The pattern of authoritarianism between teachers-taught, senior- junior is very rigid. The main values which are pro-

moted are those of conformism. Along with this the books in these schools are structured around the mythical history of superiority of Hinduism, that all was well with Hindus till Muslim aggressors came, caste is presented as having given stability to society, Muslim Kings are presented as cruel and so on. The hatred for religious minorities is drilled into the children.”

Today, of course, there is little outcry as ministers in the BJP ruled States of the country pass orders for government school children (including those from the minority communities) to sing Vande Mataram, to do Surya Namaskar, to read religious scriptures of a particular religion.

□□□

There is also growing disgust amongst the Muslims because even before police investigations can take off to blasts or killings, names of Muslim forums and organisations and individuals get splashed in certain sections of the media.

Realities to discriminations are not confined to only one area or sphere or region. All sorts of discriminations are on. Muslims told me they and their families have faced discriminations at various stages of their lives and careers. All sorts of discriminations: whilst buying or renting a home, applying for jobs and placements, to even civic facilities in the Muslim dominated residential areas. And now, of course, the dark reality of bulldozing of homes! □□□

**For Frontier Contact**

**Central News Agency**

23/90, CONNAUGHT CIRCUS  
NEW DELHI 110001

## HYDERABAD CENTRAL JAIL

## Hunger Strike by Political Prisoners

*G Jabali*

SEVERAL POLITICAL PRISONERS of Narmada Block have been on hunger strike in Hyderabad Central Jail, Chenchalguda, since 27 August 2024, highlighting the major demand that they should not be kept in solitary confinement. For some time, the Chenchalguda prison administration has confined the Political Prisoners arrested on the alleged connections with the CPI (Maoist) Party. They are all under-trial prisoners, and the prison administration is trampling the rights of the prisoners with impunity. The Jail authorities have gone against the Prison regulations and various pronouncements of the Supreme Court—like Sunil Batra vs Delhi Admn (1980). Their demand-charter includes among other things unlocking during day time and right to pen, paper, notebooks, books and magazines.

The Political Prisoners have been demanding simple rights—pens, notebooks, and books and magazines to read. Indira Gandhi, then aged 13, asked her father, Nehru, about how he had spent his time there when he was in jail. Nehru wrote: “Reading, writing and reflecting”. Even during the British Raj, the colonial masters did not deny the political prisoners the right to read, write and reflect. But in independent India Chenchalguda Prison Administration wants to trample even the basic rights of the Prisoners worse than the British Raj. What a travesty of justice even after 78 times India’s Prime Ministers have hoisted National flags from the ramparts of Red Fort? Are under-trial prisoners too far from the ‘tryst with the destiny’? Are ‘*acchedin*’ [better day]

aeons away for the prisoners? Like all human beings, does the prisoner’s dignity deserve to be treated as humane and just?

The Political Prisoners are not asking for the moon. They are asking for better food. They are asking for good treatment for their health issues. They ask that all their petitions be promptly sent to the concerned authorities. They are asking for a true copy of their petitions/ letters. In truth they have been urging many simple, legal, humane demands for long. But the Chenchalguda Prison authorities are adamant about fulfilling their just demands. Now, they have gone too far. They started punishing the political prisoners by keeping them virtually in solitary confinement, locking them up for 24 hours. What does the Prison Manual say? Chapter XIX, “259 (a) Telangana Prison Rules” say that all the Prisoners must be kept unlocked during the day time. So, is virtual solitary confinement legal? Absolutely illegal. Prison rules never accept such punishments for the prisoners. No person, including the prisoners, should be punished without due process of law.

The Political prisoners urged umpteen times not to lock them up for all day .As a last resort, they went on hunger strike. Prisoners have too few options to protest.

Who are these Political Prisoners? Who are on the Hunger Strike?

### **Amitabh Bagchi**

Amitabh Bagchi, the alleged Politburo member of CPI (Maoist), is 72 and hails from Shivdas Bhaduri Street, Shyampukur area of Kolkata, West Bengal. His father’s name is

Ranjit Kumar Bagchi. Inspired by the ‘Spring Thunder of Naxalbari’, he has been involved in various political struggles and agitations for social causes since his student days when he was doing his postgraduate course at Jadavpur University.

Amitabh Bagchi and Tauhid Mulla, a West Bengal State Committee member, were arrested by Jharkhand Police from the Hatia-Patna Intercity Express at Ranchi on 19 August 2009. On 23 August 2010, Bagchi was sentenced to life imprisonment by a fast-track court.

The Ranchi High Court granted him bail in Crime Number 166 of 2019 in Chutia, Ranchi District, suspending his sentence.

He was convicted in NIA case R.C. 01/2011/NIA/GAW and served an eight-year sentence.

Despite multiple memos from the magistrate in Karimnagar, the police repeatedly failed to produce Bagchi in court.

After spending time in various jails, he was produced in Karimnagar Court on 12 July 2024 in PRC 69 of 2019.

The II Additional Magistrate granted him default bail on 19 October 2010. After filing the charge sheet, the IV Additional Sessions Judge granted bail on 29 January 2024.

However, on 19 July 2024, the same court reversed its decision without any new facts, circumstances, or violation of Bagchi’s bail order, leaving him in jail as an undertrial for over 13 years in the Karimnagar case.

MD Hussain, who stood as surety for Bagchi, was arrested on 9 July 2024 at his home in Jammikunta Village. Bagchi continues to be harassed by the state.

### **Gangadhara Rao**

An elderly Maoist couple was arrested by a special police team of

the Ramagundam Police Commissionerate from Indaram village in Jaipur Mandal of Mancherial district.

Mr Gangadhara Rao hails from Narendrapuram in Andhra Pradesh's B R Ambedkar Konaseema district. His partner Bhavani belongs to the Indaram village in the Mancherial district.

They were arrested and produced in 240 of 2023 before the Chennur magistrate court on 12. 3. 2024. They were granted default bail by the Chennur magistrate court on 10.05.2024 vide CrI.M.P.No 96 of 2024. The bail was stayed by the Principal Sessions Judge at Mancherial. The police did not file a charge sheet even after 8 months since their arrest. The petition is continuously adjoined without an order.

Gangadhara Rao was taken by the Maharashtra police. He was produced in the Etapka police station case. After being produced in court, he was kept in Chenchaguda Central Prison as he had another case in Telangana.

#### **Padam Raj Kumar**

The Kothagudem district police have arrested a CPI (Maoist) State Committee member carrying a cash reward of Rs.20 lakh on his head. Thota Seetharamaiah alias Krishnanna of Chintiryala village of Aswapuram Mandal in the district was arrested along with a Dalam member Padam Raj Kumar alias Amarender of Nerella village of Dharmapuri Mandal of

Jagtial district at Cherla bus station on Thursday.

These three Prisoners along with two other who were recently shifted from Khammam Jail are on the hunger strike. This was morally supported by all the prisoners.

Thota Seetha Ramaiah was granted bail while he was in Hospital. At the time of his arrest, he was already of unsound mind.

#### **Mula Devender Reddy**

The Police arrested CPI (Maoist) Party Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee (DKSZC) member Mula Devender Reddy. The 63-year-old Devender Reddy hails from Babbaru Cheluka village of Mancherial district. The Subedari police arrested him when Devender Reddy was going to Hyderabad to get his eye operated on. He is presently in the Jail Hospital.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday filed a charge sheet against six more CPI (Maoist) cadres in connection with the 2021 attack in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur that left 22 security personnel dead. Devender Reddy was charge-sheeted.

He was transferred from Jagdalpur Central Jail to Telangana Jail. Ever since not produced in Jagdalpur NIA Court in NIA annexed C case 05 of 2022.

He was granted bail in Telangana Cases. However, he was not permitted to send his bail petition himself from jail and was not even permitted to send a letter to the court

stating that he wanted to engage an advocate.

#### **Madakam Kosi alias Rajitha**

The duo—Rajitha of Mulkanapalli in Dummugudem Mandal of Telangana's Bhadrachalam division and Dhani of Konta in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district—are identified as Maoist women cadres.

Madavi Dhani was released on bail. She was not 19 years old but a minor. It was reportedly not mentioned by the police to avoid the juvenile facility instead of jail. The police severely tortured Rajitha. Even when she was produced before the media, the wounds on her face were visible, as Rajitha informed.

Rajitha was produced in Bhadrachalam Court and Hanmakonda Court, the NIA Court at Nampally in Telangana, Ramapchodavaram Court in Andhra Pradesh, and the Jagdalpur NIA Court in Chhattisgarh.

#### **Gotta Bujji @ Kamala**

On 9 July, Police arrested CPI (Maoist) Pamedu local organising squad commander Gotta Bujji alias Kamala at Taliperu dam.

Kamala, a 29-year-old Maoist, belongs to Charpalli village, which is within the limits of Bhupalapatnam police station in the Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh State.

She has had cases in the Bhadrachalam and Nampally NIA Courts.

They want to remain unconfined in jail during the daytime. But the Prison administrators are not listen-

ing. Nor are they ready to grant them they would be A and J. Thanks to pen, paper, book and magazine. In the internet and social media, people have experienced, directly or indirectly, the power of both real AI and metaphoric AI, namely the "Advertisement of Ideology."

AI is not easy to define given the preponderance of acronyms: GAI or generative AI; AGI or artificial general intelligence; LLM, LLaM or large

## UNCERTAIN FUTURE

# AI & Political Propaganda

**Sumit Bhaduri**

**A**I "FILLED WITH PREJUDICIAL, hateful text" is an effective political propaganda tool. It stereotypes social groups, facilitates societal breakdown, and

accelerates economic inequality.

If only two letters of the English alphabet were to be used to capture the fashion and hype of the third decade of the twenty-first century,

language model, etc. Two quotes may be a good place to begin with as they show how AI is a technology where the confluence of politics and profit, both globally and in the Indian context, is most apparent.

The first quote is taken from what the Prime Minister said in June 2023 during his state visit to the USA and his joint address to Congress: "The future is AI – America and India." The second is from two AI experts, both of whom were sacked by Google for publishing a paper that pointed out how AI can be used to promote toxic ideology. According to them, GPT-3, an early LLM, gave outputs that were "filled with prejudicial, hateful text mimicking the toxicity of the internet toward certain groups."

Both these quotes illustrate the deep socio-political dimensions of AI and its many avatars. Basically, like all modern technologies, they all have benefits and risks associated with them. The balance between the two depends on who uses it, for what purpose, and the specific societal context.

All forms of AI can sieve and analyse huge amounts of stored data in a very short time. AI seeks patterns and correlations in such data, much of which is often personal.

### **For Frontier Contact**

## **D.K. AGENCIES (P) LTD.**

Booksellers, Publishers & Subscription  
Agents since 1968

CIN: U74899DL1983PTC017169

"DK" is a registered trademark

Regd. off: A/15-17, D.K. Avenue,  
Mohan Garden, Najafgarh Road,  
New Delhi-110059. INDIA

Metro Station: Nawada (Blue Line)

Web: <http://www.dkagencies.com>

Ph: (011) 25357104, 25357105

Fax: (+91-11) 25357103

Based on the findings, it can produce a summary report, generate new data, and add or subtract a video or audio recording. Search engines like Google and Bing are early examples of AI-aided internet search. Currently, AI is mainly used in marketing, law enforcement, hospital services, and other areas.

The origin of AI could be traced back to that of ARPANET, a programme funded in the 1960s by the USA's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). Not surprisingly, in recent times, AI has been increasingly used in direct defence-related applications. In both Ukraine and Gaza, it has been used for what are called "targeted attacks."

Such AI systems are far from foolproof. In Gaza, the use of AI targeting systems such as "Lavender" and "Gospel," instead of keeping the numbers of innocent civilians killed at a minimum, increased them many times. It is these military applications, however, that make AI a strategic area of interest for many countries.

In the civilian sector, recent advances in AI have been driven by profit. ChatGPT, one of the first large language model (LLM) based AI, was invented by OpenAI, a company heavily sponsored by Microsoft. OpenAI started as a non-profit organisation in 2015 but adopted a "capped profit" model in 2019.

It was catapulted to fame after the release of ChatGPT in 2022. This led to the drama when, in November 2023, OpenAI's CEO Sam Altman was sacked and then reappointed within five days with the constitution of a new board. The transition from "non-profit" to "capped profit" and Microsoft's direct intervention to reinstate Altman triggered the race for market dominance between the internet giants Google, Microsoft, Amazon, Meta,

etc. (Do read the article in Nature, Vol 623, 30 November 2023, p898)

From a business point of view, the obvious question is what the future demand for AI services will be like. A well-researched, recent report summed it up well and concluded that it is far from rosy. It said: "The AI obsessed bosses are about to get a rude awakening." Another report pointed out the considerable legal challenges from the governments that the giant tech companies must deal with.

In the political sphere, the use of computers has a fascinating history. An IBM 704 machine, a primitive form of AI, was used as far back as 1962 in the US presidential election campaign. Predictably, the targeted election campaigning based on the voters' personal data contributed to the outcome of the closely-fought election. (Do read Jill Lepore's article in Nature, Vol 585, 17 September 2020, p348)

More than half a century later, its power to sway elections was apparent once again in 2016, when the use of personal data in targeted campaigning contributed to Donald Trump's victory. Facebook and Cambridge Analytica were the two companies that did it, and they never sought the consent of the individuals concerned. Consequently, Facebook had to pay penalties for violating privacy, and Cambridge Analytica went defunct.

The Internet became a major platform for election campaigning in the Indian general election in 2014. Social media-aided propaganda, especially among the youth, contributed significantly to the BJP's win in 2014. Ten years later, the massive progress in digital technology was obvious. Generative, AI-created deep fakes were abundant during the campaigning phase of the 2024 elections.

The voice of the actor Aamir Khan, the video shots of Narendra



September 15-21, 2024

FRONTIER

9

Modi grooving to a Bollywood song, and Mamata Banerjee dancing in a saree-like outfit are a few media-reported examples. Less talked about but far more insidious was the approval by Meta, the owner of Facebook and Instagram, of political advertisements that had the potential to incite religious violence. This was precisely the kind of threat that Gebru and Mitchell, the two ex-Google AI experts mentioned earlier, had warned people about.

The U S-India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) was launched in January 2023. The laundry list of key technology sectors included diverse areas such as biotechnology, AI, clean energy, etc. As mentioned earlier, the PM's political spin on AI as "America and India" was primarily to highlight this joint initiative. He discussed AI again in two follow-up meetings: the first with Bill Gates in March 2024 and the second with the media on the day before 19 April, when the general elections began.

Two days after polling started, there was a lengthy newspaper interview with the Principal Scientific Advisor (PSA) to the Indian Government, wherein catchphrases such as "deployment of breakthrough technologies", "vision for 2047", "8-10% or more economic growth" etc. were used.

The PSA may have talked about economic growth and India's science and technology, but he forgot to add two simple facts. First, without jobs, economic growth is just a number and a cruel joke to the unemployed. Second, "breakthrough technologies", in whatever shape or form, do not fall from the sky. To talk about them and self-reliance after being in power for ten years smacks of plain hypocrisy.

It is worth remembering that all the AI-related meetings, the S&T-related policy announcements and

briefings took place a little before and during the polling season. It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that these were part of an image-building exercise; they were to project individuals as visionary technocrats.

In his meeting with Bill Gates, the PM emphasised his commitment to a digitally inclusive India but said that AI should not become a tool for the lazy. What inclusiveness means, or who in India is lazy, was not elaborated upon. Surely, they are not the 1.6 million people in the unorganised sector who lost their jobs between 2015 and 2023 or the 3700 PhD holders and 28000 young postgraduate applicants who were among the 93000 applicants for 62 positions as peons in the Uttar Pradesh police department.

The BJP came to power in 2014 when the ill effects of trickle-down economics and jobless growth – unemployment, the total absence of S&T-driven innovations in the manufacturing sector, rampant corruption, etc., were already much in evidence. Among the BJP's many pre-election promises, creating tens of millions of jobs for the unemployed youth was a central one.

In the ten years that followed, the number of Indian dollar billionaires rocketed, as did the economic inequality. The unemployment problem went from bad to worse. The agricultural sector, in which a majority of the Indian people earn their livelihood, was not just ignored but had the ruling party trying to push the failed corporate-driven growth model down its throat. The farmers' strike was the beginning of a remarkable pushback by the people against authoritarianism of a kind not seen before.

It was the authoritarianism of the state, backed to the hilt by the big corporates, the super-rich, and the mainstream media. Intoxicated with power, the BJP forgot that of

## FRONTIER

44, Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006

Phone: (033) 2530-0065

Mail: frontierweekly@yahoo.co.in

frontierweekly@hotmail.com

Site: www.frontierweekly.com

### SUBSCRIPTION RATES

India [Annual]	Rs.	500
Frontier Associate [Annual]	Rs.	1000
Life Subscription [Inland]	Rs.	5000+

Make payment by Cheque/Draft  
in favour of

GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.  
or

FRONTIER [GERMINAL  
PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.]

MO should be addressed to Frontier  
Please add Rs. 50/- to inland outstation  
cheques towards bank charges, all  
remittances to FRONTIER

\*\*\*\*\*

Payment could be made directly to  
our bank accounts as given below.

Check the bank details before  
transferring money. Also inform us  
through e-mail after sending money.

Beneficiary Name:

**GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.**

Bank Name: CENTRAL BANK OF INDIA

Address: 8, Lenin Sarani, Kol-700013

Branch: Esplanade Branch

Current Account Number: 3116713216

IFSC Code: CBIN0280098

Swift Code: CBININBBCAL

OR

**GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.**

Bank Name: PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK

Address : 223, C. R. Avenue, Kolkata-6

Branch: Jorasanko Branch

Current Account Number: 0085050001319

IFSC Code: PUNB0008020

Branch Code : 0008020

Swift Code: UTBIINBBOBC

OR

**FRONTIER (GERMINAL PUBLICATIONS  
PVT. LTD)**

Bank Name: PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK

Address : 223,C. R. Avenue, Kolkata-6

Branch: Jorasanko Branch

Current Account Number: 0085050001378

IFSC Code: PUNB0008020

Branch Code : 0008020

Swift Code: UTBIINBBOBC

\*For MO, Regd. Post and Speed Post mailing  
address should be written in the following  
fashion :

To

**FRONTIER**

C/o Durbar Mahila Samanawya Committee

44, Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata-700006

West Bengal, Contact : 8240016324

the people who voted in the two general elections of 2014 and 2019, more than or equal to 63 percent did not vote for them. In 2024, that fundamental social arithmetic number remained unchanged, but the opposition managed to put up the semblance of a united front to make the disillusionment of the farmers, unemployed, and ordinary citizens work in their favour.

The net result was that the BJP

got approximately 5 million less votes and lost 63 seats. Projecting the PM as an AI-savvy technocrat and, at the same time, a messenger of God who had doubts about his biological origin did not help. Neither did the advertising of illusory promises titled “Modi Ki guarantee” on a massive scale, nor slogans such as “Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas.”

In this century, data, including personal data, has been added to

the list of commodities. AI’s many avatars have facilitated the process over the years. The enormous power that the Digital-Financial Complex (DFC) wields today results from that, but nobody knows how this will play out in the future.

In the Indian context, the hard economic problems of unemployment and extreme inequality cannot just be wished away. □□□

[Courtesy: Madras Courier]

## HEMA PANEL REPORT

# WCC Speaks

**Varsha Sriram**

*[In the aftermath of the 2017 sexual assault of a prominent actor in Kerala, a group of 18 women from the Malayalam film industry formed the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC) with an aim to make the field a better working space for women.*

*It was based on the WCC’s recommendations that the Kerala government set up a three-member committee, led by Justice K Hema (retired), to look into the problems faced by women in the industry.*

*The 235-page redacted report finally made public on 19 August – 4.5 years after it was submitted to the government in 2019 – revealed the harrowing experiences of sexual harassment, gender bias, and discrimination faced by women in the male-dominated space.*

*The Quint speaks to Bina Paul, film editor and founding member of the WCC, who highlights the “disturbing” aspects of the report, the “feudal” and “regressive” mindset of Indian film industries, and the need for systemic change with consultation with all stakeholders in Malayalam cinema. Excerpts:]*

**Q.** It’s been a long wait for the WCC with respect to the release of the Hema Committee report. Could you take us through what you are feeling at the moment?

**A.** Well, we were very elated when the report did come out. We hadn’t seen it. We still haven’t read the whole report. I think the last four days has sort of been mixed, mainly because, of course, it’s welcome and totally required. But there’s often a missing of the actual essence of what we want to say.

The WCC wants to see systemic change in the working of the (Malayalam) industry. First of all, to take note that there is an issue, and secondly, work together with the government, with the

organisation, with the WCC, with all stakeholders, including women, to see how we can set systems in place.

This is a one-of-its-kind committee formed to study the functioning of the Malayalam film industry. Could you tell me the significance of the report?

The significance of this report is that post the #MeToo movement, post the formation of the WCC, lot of complaints (from women), there has been a feeling of disbelief. We are labelled as troublemakers, too. #MeToo was very often dismissed. What this report has done is, through numerous interviews with women and men (in the field), it has created a very comprehensive

landscape of what this industry is.

So, whether it is sexual harassment, whether it is pay parity, whether it is facilities for women, whether it is dignity... all these things that we have been talking about are now sort of vindicated in a sense.

“It is not only, I think, for the Malayalam film industry, it is for all industries across India. We do know that the Indian industry is very feudal and almost sort of regressive in a lot of its attitude.”

**Q.** Do you feel that the report should or would be an eye-opener for film industries across India?

**A.** I really think and hope so. I really think that Malayalam cinema which is really considered one of the strongest film industries today in terms of the kind of films that are coming, the stories that are being told.

“I think instead of looking at it as a kind of a blackening of the name, we should think of it as a torchbearer really.”

**Q.** When you read the report, how disturbing was it? What were you feeling then?

**A.** It is very disturbing. It is in fact far worse than we even thought. Basically, I am really sort of respectful of the courage that all these women have shown.

“You cannot imagine when you are in a power structure that they are handing out favours to

you, how difficult it is to come, speak, and question and put out a point of view.”

**Q.** A few men who appeared before the committee claimed that women face these experiences only when they fall for “fake advertisements.” In addition, they’ve also claimed that these issues are not restricted to just the film industry, but in industries across. Your thoughts?

**A.** My thoughts are that these are the systems that we are talking about. You know, it’s like you are denying a dream. The second thing I’d like to say is that it’s not only about actors. This report is about technicians. It is about us as a labour force. What are the issues and how do we address them? That is the question.

**Q.** Ever since the report was made public, there has been a lot of public discourse around why the names of the perpetrators have not been released in the report. Your comments?

**A.** My comments are that this is not a witch-hunt, this is not our purpose. Who did what is not our purpose. To say that this exists is our purpose and that has been amply proved.

That is a different area. That is for people who think they need to or feel concerned enough etc. We are not interested in who did what 20 years ago or 5 years ago. Of course, we know, and it is very horrible. But that should not become our focus.

“It is a very difficult thing to ask women to come out and talk again. I think if people want to take action, then there maybe things to take action. But to expect that that the women will come out again is a bit difficult. I think it’s too painful, quite hurtful, and a little insensitive to think like that.”

The report overall speaks about

the plight of the women and men in the industry, whether it’s actors, technicians, make-up artists, junior artists so on and so forth. But one important aspect that it does cover is the presence of a “power group” of 10-15 people who allegedly control the industry.

**Q.** Would you believe that now that the report has come out, there could be some difference in how this power group functions?

**A.** I don’t even know if there is a power group. This is what the committee says. We believe that there are power structures. Whether it comes from one or two group or 15 people or 20 people... we do know that these structures exist.

One of our important points is let all these (film) associations also react. Tell us what you think. How do you counter this. Is there a counter? Are you going to take measures?

We (WCC) are not concentrating on... we do know that there are power structures, and we do hope that they are listening or hearing.

**Q.** Though the report was given to the state government in 2019, it was made public in 2024. As someone who has worked in the field for decades now, do you think there has been a change from when the report was actually sent to when it has been made public?

**A.** I think very slightly, yes. We got a judgment for IC’s (Internal Committee). The very fact that gender has come on to the table as an agenda. All these are small changes. Women and ladies who work in the field are telling us that they do feel slight differences.

“You see, the point is not the slight difference. It’s a kind of thing that has to get built into the system. And also, to make sure that more women enter this

industry. That is another thing. Why is it that there very few women technicians in the Malayalam film industry? Again, we have seen a slight increase, but there should be a sense that when there is presence, there is a difference. We know that.”

**Q.** Now that the report is out, what is the way forward for the Malayalam film industry?

**A.** Working together. We need to say that this is not some blackening, and pulling back, but pushing forward.

Today we are living in 2024. We cannot believe that we are in the 1950s, 40s or 30s. And therefore, all of us together should pull our weight... not only the women.

And it’s not only women in this industry. I would say that this has repercussions for women in society to say don’t be frightened, don’t be quiet. If you face an injustice, speak about it. That’s the only way to encounter, resist, and change.” □□□

(Source: The Quint)

#### BOOKS BY T VIJAYENDRA

Just Released

**REQUIEM FOR OUR TIMES** Rs. 100

**AFTER ALL IT IS ONLY HIM!**

**AND OTHER STORIES** Rs. 70

**AN INTELLIGENT BIRD'S GUIDE**

**TO THE BIRDWATCHER AND**

**OTHER STORIES**

Second reprint Rs. 40

**THE LOSERS SHALL**

**INHERIT THE WORLD**

Third Reprint Rs. 60

**REGAINING PARADISE:**

**TOWARDS A FOSSIL FUEL FREE**

**SOCIETY** Rs. 120

**THE TEACHER AND**

**THE CHILD LABOUR** Rs. 50

For Copies Contact :

**MANCHI PUSTAKAM**

12-13-439, St. No. 1 Tarnaka,

Secunderabad 500017

Email: info@manchipustakam.in

Cell: +91 73822 97430

## RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

## Permanent Peace or Frozen Conflict?

*Bharat Dogra*

**A**NOTHER UKRAINE SUMMIT  
 So soon will be Wasteful.

Following the visit of India's Prime Minister to Ukraine, there is ongoing discussion about whether India will be involved more actively in peace efforts, perhaps even in a peace summit.

In a report titled 'After Zelensky proposes peace summit in India, New Delhi examines possibility'. The Indian Express reported on August 26, "Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has told Prime Minister Narendra Modi that India can be a possible venue for a peace summit, and New Delhi is examining the offer to bring together the warring parties of Russia and Ukraine, The Indian Express has learnt. At a media briefing for visiting Indian journalists in Kyiv on August 23, Zelenskyy said he told Prime Minister Modi that the peace summit could be hosted in India...Modi on August 23 conveyed to Zelenskyy that that both Ukraine and Russia should sit together without wasting time to end the ongoing war and that India was ready to play an 'active role' to restore peace in the region."

Thus there appear to be two quite different proposals on the table. One is for a peace summit, as mentioned by the Ukrainian President. As one peace summit was recently held in mid-June in Switzerland, one would imagine that what is being proposed is something on a similar pattern, even if not exactly a follow-up of this. The second proposal, as mentioned by the Indian Prime Minister is for the leaders of the two sides to sit together for meaningful talks, a meeting which can be facilitated and hosted by India.

The second proposal of meaningful talks between two sides being hosted by India in a rather quiet way is eminently reasonable. Surely only something good is most likely to emerge if senior leaders of both sides can engage in discussing various aspects of clinching peace over a period of three days or so, perhaps a week, to start with, and if India can provide conducive conditions for this.

As this writer has been arguing persistently, the best way forward for the two sides is to agree to immediate ceasefire on the basis of the *existing lines of control* while all the other contentious issues including territorial ones can be resolved later in the course of prolonged peace negotiations. This way further loss of human lives can stop immediately and big reconstruction and rehabilitation work can start.

Anyway, all this is for the leaders of the two sides to decide. However as the mediating and hosting party, the Indian government should try to ensure that at least some meeting ground is agreed upon by both sides before their representatives come over to India for talks.

If there is at least some progress, India can also agree to host the next round of talks, if a request for this is received from the two sides.

In this rather quiet way, India can help to take forward the peace process.

On the other hand, the other proposal of a peace summit on the lines of the June peace summit in Switzerland should be firmly rejected by India, particularly if this is seen as a follow-up of the summit in Switzerland. This was a very expen-

sive summit which failed to achieve anything significant. With Russia not invited, it was a very strange peace summit to start with and its limited possibilities were narrowed down further as it unfolded.

This is not to say that issues like food trade and safety of nuclear plants taken up by it were not important, these are certainly important but everything at the summit was one-sided. Proposals and decisions to be meaningful have to be discussed and advanced from the perspective of both sides.

Russia was not present. China also was not present. Other important countries like India, Brazil, Mexico and Saudi Arabia did not sign the joint communique that emerged at the end of the summit.

Switzerland did not exactly live up to its reputation of neutrality by hosting this summit. Indonesian President-elect Prabowo Subianto voiced the feelings of a lot of people when he said — many countries feel that in a peace summit all sides should be present, particularly Russia in this context. India's diplomat Pavan Kapoor said that India could not sign the joint communique because "only those options acceptable to both parties can lead to abiding peace."

Saudi foreign minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud said, "it is essential to emphasise that any credible process will need Russia's participation."

Colombian President Gustavo Petro wrote on X that the summit's "conclusions are already predetermined".

Hence the Swiss Peace summit can by no means be considered as a model to be followed, and it will certainly not be advisable for India or any other country to organise a follow-up of this.

Clearly the basic task ahead is



for Russia and Ukraine to have a number of meetings to repair their relations on the basis of the understanding that it is inherently more beneficial for the two neighbours to have a relationship based on friendship and cooperation. The war should

end as soon as possible, and end on a note of friendship, and not frozen conflict. This understanding has to be on both sides and any third party like India can only facilitate the further peace process in various ways. Meanwhile, recent Ukrainian in-

cursor deep inside Russian territory makes things difficult to start any peace initiative at the moment. □□□

[The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include Protecting Earth for Children, A Day in 2071, Planet in Peril and Earth without Borders.]

## VOTING FOR THE LESSER EVIL

# Workers Never Ruled Venezuela

*Karyn Pomerantz*

WITH THE ELECTION OF Hugo Chavez in 1998, workers and students in Venezuela and around the world rejoiced in thinking Venezuela created a socialist state. The new government under Hugo Chavez supported popular participation in the economy and government. It promoted communes to produce goods collectively and the Councils to make decisions democratically.

Chavez, a military officer and a social democrat, took power with elections, not by a working-class revolt. In 1998, he won by a slim margin that enlarged in subsequent elections through 2012. He led and championed a radical Bolivarian government with social spending and nationalization of industries that countered the austerity, neoliberal policies of the time. (Bolívar was a Venezuelan general who led revolts that liberated people in South America from Spain in the early 19th Century). Chavez denied he was a Marxist or communist but asserted that he was not anti-Marxist or anti-communist. He believed in a mix of capitalism and socialism and relied on voting to maintain control.

Chavez died from cancer in 2013; he chose his vice president, Nicolás Maduro, to replace him as president. Today, twenty-six years after Chavez' initial election; Venezuelans are experiencing a massive decline in economic security.

*Neither Maduro nor his opponents serve the working class.* Favouring the enemy of my enemy, Venezuela over the US, leaves people with evil whether it is lesser or greater. Billions of workers, predominantly black and brown, already live under the precarious and fascist conditions that US voters fear from Trump. Voting for the “lesser” evil will not change that.

Venezuela has a population of 28,405,543 (about the population of Texas); all living in urban areas. It has an average life expectancy of 76 years but a large infant mortality close to 15 per 1000 live births. Over half of its inhabitants are mestizo or “mixed,” a combination of black and indigenous traits. Over 42% of people of European and Arab descent are labelled white. Spanish colonialism enslaved black and indigenous people leaving inequitable conditions with mestizos more exploited and oppressed than the better resourced whites.

After Chavez died of cancer in 2013, the US challenged Maduro's elevation to the presidency and created an American puppet, Juan Guido, to replace him. They failed, and Maduro assumed the office as the economy tanked. The July 2024 presidential election has thrown Venezuela into more chaos as the current president, Maduro, and the rival US-backed candidate, Edmundo González, claim victory.

The US led the opposition, vigorously opposing Maduro's claim that he won 51.2% of the vote. Until 2024, the government election body published the machine-by-machine vote counts within three days. Now close to a month after the election, Maduro refuses to release the ballots.

At a glance, it seems all too familiar. Another hotly contested election in Venezuela, another victory for the long-besieged Chavista government, another round of fraud allegations by the US-backed opposition.

Against this backdrop, it may be tempting for those who backed or still back what Chávez called a **Bolivarian Revolution**—a movement that aims to make Venezuela and later the rest of Latin America more responsive to popular needs—to dismiss opposition claims that Maduro stole elections for a new six-year term of office. All the more so when the US government announced that it will recognise the opposition victory even as most countries in the region withhold making that call.

But the reality is that this time is different. Ten days since the vote, there can be little doubt that Maduro lost his bid at reelection and that his government intends to remain in power, defying the will of Venezuelan voters. The evidence is partly in the continued refusal by electoral authorities to release precinct level data for public scrutiny, as it has speedily done in previous elections and as the law requires, or to offer proof of what it claims is a “brutal hacking campaign” targeting its election system.

To be sure, US sanctions have

exacerbated Venezuela's crisis. But they are not its cause nor do they explain why sectors loyal to the government for 25 years turned away from it at the polls. Austerity, corruption, repression, and dollarisation under Maduro have decimated Chavismo's historic bases of support.

On July 28, Maduro lost. If revolution is to win in Venezuela, its supporters at home and abroad must first recognise defeat and the many missteps that led here, then begin the work of supporting Chavismo in opposition, not in power (MLT).

Venezuelans continue to fight to see which wealthy group will win: the imperialist US or the home-grown Venezuela elites. *Clearly, the working class is losing.*

The US has imposed sanctions against the government, industries, and individuals identified as terrorists and human rights abusers (as if the US can talk). The US hopes to initiate a popular uprising that can replace Maduro with a US friendly ally.

Health problems have increased dramatically. The Center for Economic Policy and Research estimates a 31% increase in overall mortality with 300,000 people at risk for illness and death, including 80,000 with HIV, 16,000 who need dialysis for kidney disease, 16,000 with cancer, and 4,000 with heart disease. One-third of the doctors have left the country. In addition, inadequate food, electricity, clean water, and sanitation contribute to high rates of premature deaths.

Flush with the world's largest oil reserves, Chavez continued nationalizing the oil industry run by the PDSV, the state-owned oil company, and parts of the agricultural, mining, and banking sectors. The wealth from its oil exports financed social programs that improved the standard of living for its working class.

Many of us may remember Venezuela funding heating oil for poor families in the US and exporting oil to Cuba suffering under US trade embargoes.

Venezuela's economic prosperity and collapse follows the history of its oil industry. When times were good, the petrodollars allowed Chavez to establish social services, the *misiones*. He established medical clinics staffed by Cuban doctors in exchange for oil, free compulsory education, and successful literacy campaigns. Poverty fell from 40 percent in 1996 to 7.3 percent in 2013, and infant mortality dropped to 13 per 1,000 live births from 25 per 1,000 by 2013. He opened discount stores, food banks, restaurants, and increased housing for low-income groups. When the petrodollars dried up as the price of oil fell and the US applied sanctions, Venezuela workers lost this safety net and became desperate for jobs, food, education, and health care. Saddled with debt, Venezuela owed billions to the IMF that required cutbacks in social spending.

Rivalries among the world's imperialist powers for oil and minerals, trade deals, pipelines, and geopolitical positions, such as access to seaways, intensify the threat of wider wars. The need to profit from oil in the Middle East or cobalt in the Congo drives these capitalists to fight for dominance and influence through diplomacy, tariffs, tax policies, and war. The US and the Soviet Union battled for supremacy after WWII during the Cold War. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the decline of US power, other countries have formed alliances to counter US imperialists and its G7 allies. Many so-called leftists support these alliances because they oppose the US although the coalitions include countries with repressive governments, such as Hungary and Egypt. The

adage *that the enemy of my enemy is my friend*, anyone opposed to the US ruling class, steers people to support groups like Hamas, Iran, and China. It is a losing nationalist idea if there ever was one.

China has used its Belt and Roads Initiative (BRI) to make loans for infrastructure projects in less industrialized countries. It allows China to profit from its loans and ownership of companies, including cobalt mines in the Congo where young, impoverished kids extract the toxic mineral in extremely hazardous conditions. More importantly, China uses its Belt and Road Initiative projects to extend its sphere of influence against the US. It has made significant headway in Africa and South America.

Venezuela suffers from internal and external threats. Its reliance on one source of income and its maintenance of profit-making labor practices belie its reputation as a Bolivarian socialist state. When it reaped riches from oil under Chavez, government reforms created prosperity – but not socialism. As the communist Progressive Labour Party wrote about Chavez' reform programme:

“The reform will facilitate state expropriation of private companies for the “social interest.” But this maintains “just payments” to private owners for their holdings.

This is just a “change” from one form of capitalist property to another. It will guarantee “mixed-capital” ventures like those PDVSA (the state-owned oil company) now has with big international oil corporations — again another form of capitalism. The reform will institute a 6-hour workday and “popular councils,” supposedly organs of “people's power.” But these councils will be limited to the municipal level. In Venezuela, these “popular councils” will have no power over national policies, the state budget, the

PDVSA, the armed forces or the judicial system.

The constitutional reform fight is one about which kind of capitalism will rule Venezuela, not one about destroying capitalism and putting workers in power under a system based on workers' needs not on profits.

The communist party of Venezuela, the PCV, also criticised Maduro's United Socialist Party of Venezuela, the PSUV:

*"(The government) often talks about "Bolivarian socialism" which is absurd for us as no socialism exists here. To talk about socialism here is mere propaganda, because*

wages are below extreme poverty levels, and our healthcare and education sectors are destroyed. We made huge achievements under Chavez, but we are in complete rollback now; come visit our schools and hospitals and you will see the real, disastrous state of our public services which should guarantee people's wellbeing. But the concept of Bolivarian socialism or socialism of the 21st century is still used (MLT, 2022).

The left parties in Venezuela, including the PCV, rely on elections to take power. It is unclear whether there is any revolutionary organising for a seizure of power. *Socialism or*

*communism has never been achieved through negotiations or the ballot box. It appears that Maduro lost the election. Whether Maduro or Gonzalez won the July 2024 election does not change the capitalist nature of Venezuela.*

Creating a socialist or communist society requires a violent overthrow of the government led by workers, students, and the military. It means ending the wage system that creates hierarchy and disparities in income and wealth. It means prioritising equity to erase the effects of racism, sexism, and other means of discrimination and division.

□□□

## LETTERS

### **Mother of a Hostage Speaks**

The mother of an Israeli hostage Matan Zangauker calls on US mediators to pressure Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to agree to a hostage-ceasefire deal with Hamas, accusing the premier of holding up an agreement for personal and political motives.

"It appears this is the last chance," says Einav Zangauker during her weekly press conference outside the Kirya military headquarters in Tel Aviv, referring to the negotiations in Cairo.

Zangauker decries "the new conditions that Netanyahu has pushed," particularly regarding the so-called Philadelphi Corridor along the Gaza-Egypt border.

"This isn't the Philadelphi Corridor, it's the Philadelphi spin," she says.

She then addresses her remarks to US President Joe Biden.

"Netanyahu is systematically thwarting the deal. Don't believe Netanyahu. He will again lie and deceive you." she says.

### **A Reader**

### **UGC-NET Retest Cancelled**

The retest of the June UGC-NET (University Grants Commission Na-

tional Eligibility Test)—scheduled for 21 August—was cancelled again for students at a centre in Varanasi. The National Testing Agency (NTA) couldn't conduct the exam due to 'a technical glitch'—and now a new date will be announced for the same.

As a candidate who was set to appear for the exam at Dr Ghanshyam Singh College of Education in Varanasi, the centre where the exam was cancelled, I find it extremely distressing to say the least.

My exam was scheduled from 3 pm to 6 pm in the second shift. Since the reporting time was 1 pm, I arrived at the centre around 12:30 pm. Upon arrival, we were informed that the first shift exam had been delayed by 45 minutes due to 'a technical glitch', but no information was provided to us, the second shift candidates.

The entry gate for us was supposed to open at 1 pm, as mentioned in the admit card, but we were only allowed to enter the examination centre at 2:30 pm. During this time, we waited outside in the heat, without any shelter. We had no recourse as the centre is located over 30 km from the city on the Varanasi-Azamgarh highway.

Between 200 and 250 candi-

dates, including myself, were asked to sit in Labs 1 and 2, where we couldn't find any staff members for registration, verification, or system allotment. We raised the issue with the examination officials, but no one was willing to listen.

Worried, some guardians called the police. Upon their arrival, the police tried to calm the students, opened the gates for us, and asked us to return home.

### **Gurpreet Kaur, Varanasi Wiping Maasai People**

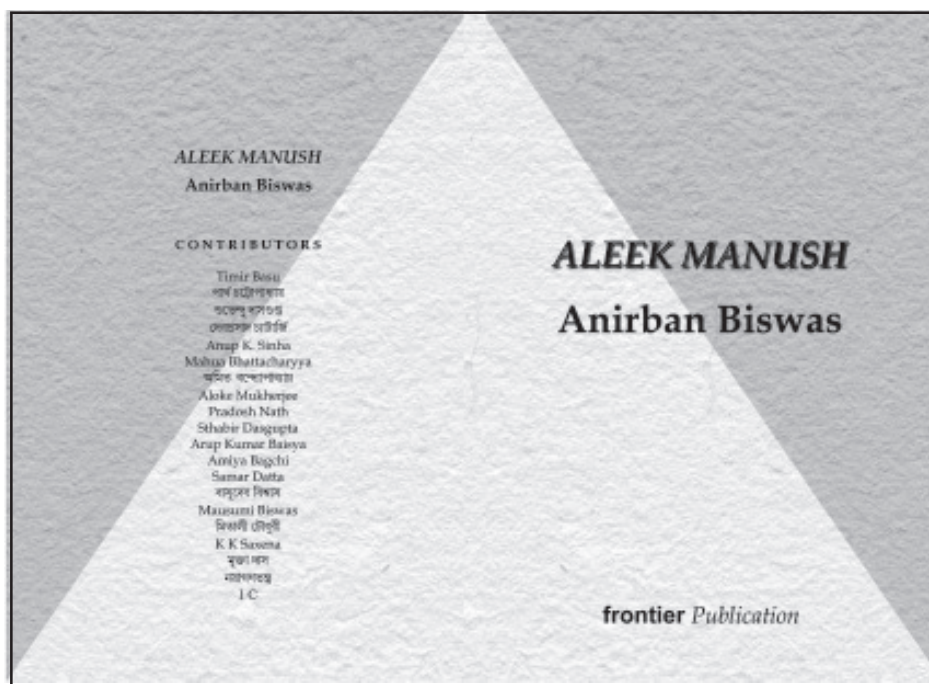
100,000 Indigenous Maasai citizens have been forced from their land to make way for wealthy tourists—and now they are being wiped from voter rolls in a government attempt to get the remaining brave few to leave. The Tanzanian President is successfully keeping this quiet so it won't impact international funding—but people can change that by joining the urgent global call to restore Maasai voting rights ahead of key elections.

Stripping the Maasai of their voting rights is the latest horror in a years-long government campaign to marginalise, displace and impoverish the Maasai pastorals in Tanzania.

**Liliana Harrington and  
Avaaz team**

# A **frontier** Publication

Just Released



## ALEEK MANUSH

Anirban Biswas

COMPILATION TEAM:

TIMIR BASU, ARUP SEN, NABINANDA SEN, TARUN BASU

CONTRIBUTORS:

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

Available at:

Frontier Office, Patiram Stall (College Street), Dhyانبindu  
and other book stalls selling issues of frontier.

Contribution: INR 100