

# frontier

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## Cash and Caste

INDIA IS THE BIGGEST 'SHOWCASE OF DEMOCRACY' AS PER electoral panorama and, yet it has the 'privilege of historical backwardness'. All political parties, irrespective of their flag and professed ideology, indulge in casteist politics to win elections. In addition to caste, they now increasingly rely on cash doles to influence voters, specifically targeting women. In the past decade, women have emerged as a new vote bank that appears to be voting on more than just identity and emotive issues.

Before the Assembly polls in Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh, the ruling alliances in all three states were speculated to be facing anti-incumbency. No that didn't happen, The anti-incumbency factor finally had very little impact on the outcome of elections, albeit runaway inflation, price rise and unemployment continue to affect life and livelihoods of population. The INDIA bloc returned to power in Jharkhand while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led NDA won Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh with brute majority. The NDA has put up an impressive show in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Assam bypolls.

In 2021, Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal launched 'Lakshmir Bhandar' scheme that gives Rs 1000 every month to economically disadvantaged women. And it worked despite massive corruption charges against the ruling party. They won all the six assembly seats in bypolls with comfortable margins. In truth women made all the difference and the state is now virtually opposition free. Not for nothing most states are now emulating Bengal model to influence women voters who make up the largest vote bank of all at almost half the electorate.

Every party has been rolling out schemes that either support their empowerment through representation on reservation in government jobs or put money directly in their accounts. In Maharashtra cash handout plans for women announced or tweaked just ahead of the elections played the trick. In Maharashtra where the BJP-led NDA won over three fourths of the seats, the women voting percentage has risen by 6 percentage points. Rural distress was sidelined momentarily. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha government started the Mukhyamantri Maiya Samman Yojana in August this year giving all women in the age group of 18-50 years Rs 1000 per month while promising to increase it to Rs 2500 per month from December 2024. And on 68 out of total 81 seats, women's turnout was higher than that of men.

In Maharashtra, under the Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojna, women between the ages of 21 and 65 years, with an annual family income of up to Rs 2.5 lakh, have been receiving Rs 1,500 per month since July. The majority of the 2.34 crore women who benefit from this Yojana received a total of Rs 7,500 in their accounts before the date of polling. As the Election Commission delayed the assembly elections, allegedly allowing the gov-

ernment enough time to transfer four to five months of installments of benefits to women's bank accounts, women voters didn't disappoint the ruling coalition. Voters were actually looking at more immediate benefits they were getting from cash transfer programme. So the problems of farmers can wait.

The opposition, particularly the Congress failed to convert the grievances of the poor into electoral issues and reaped the bitter harvest.

As for the left the less said the better. At the national level they don't exist. Even in Bengal they have lost deposits in bypolls. Perhaps they are happy that they are still invited to reflect their viewpoints on local TV channels. For the time being the Congress, being the main opposition, may derive some comfort from the fact that they have now three members from the Gandhi family in Parliament!

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## COMMENT

### ICC Ruling

AFTER 14 MONTHS OF SLAUGHTER in Gaza, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has finally issued official arrest warrants on November 21 for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, and Hamas military chief Mohammed Deif. They stand accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity in relation to Hamas's October 7, 2023, attack on Israel and the ensuing Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. But this much-hyped arrest warrant means nothing if governments around the world don't enforce it and there is not time to waste—every 30 minutes a child has been killed by Israel in Gaza. For every child maimed and murdered by Israeli missiles and snipers, for every school and aid truck bombed, for every family searching for lost ones under the rubble Israel must answer.

For Netanyahu and Gallant, the three-judge panel unanimously wrote that, "there are reasonable grounds to believe that both individuals intentionally and knowingly deprived the civilian population in Gaza of objects indispensable to their survival, including, water, and medicine and medical supplies, as well as fuel and electricity". These actions were

part of a "widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population". It's almost a famine like situation. Israel has created a humanitarian crisis in a planned way.

As for Deif, the ICC has accused him of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, hostage-taking and sexual violence. Around 100 captives are believed to still be held in Gaza. But Israeli forces said Deif was killed during an Israeli airstrike on al-Mawasi, in southern Gaza, in July that also killed more than 90 other people. The court, however, was unable to confirm his death. The Israeli response was on expected lines. Netanyahu's office called the allegations "absurd and false". The Israeli foreign ministry has previously accused ICC prosecutor Karim Khan's request for warrants—and the United Nations more generally—of being anti-Semitic. In truth Israel is killing Palestinians with American weapons.

And the United States lost no time to denounce the ICC ruling and express support in no uncertain terms, for Israel's right to defend itself. Meanwhile, Hamas officials celebrated the ICC order as revealing that "international justice is with us and against Israel", but they

failed to mention the warrant for Deif or the court's past allegations against Sinwar and Haniyeh, though Israeli forces have since killed both militants. Netanyahu's and Gallant's ability to travel to countries that are party to the ICC, which are now legally required to arrest the men should they enter the country.

For over a year, most western governments have either supported Israel's massacres or, at best, done next to nothing to stop it. With the ICC announcement the situation may change. And it already is: the Netherlands, France, Spain, Belgium and Ireland have made clear that they would enforce this warrant. The International Criminal Court has no police force of its own—so it is up to member states to enforce its warrants.

Netanyahu now joins a small handful of world leaders sought for arrest by the ICC. Most recently, the court issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin in March 2023 for Moscow's alleged kidnapping and relocation of Ukrainian children. Late Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi and ousted Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo also faced arrest warrants for crimes against humanity for actions during their reigns.

With hope and an unwavering commitment to justice and freedom in Palestine peace-loving people around the world are hailing the ICC decision. □□□

## NOTE

## Much ado for Little Consequence

*Mariana Budjeryn writes:*

**T**HE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION, after a long hesitation, finally allowed Ukraine to use US-supplied ballistic missiles, known as the Army Tactical Missile Systems, or ATACMS, on Russia's sovereign territory. Britain and France swiftly followed by lifting restrictions on the use of their Storm Shadow/SCALP air-launched cruise missiles against targets in Russia.

Biden's decision is perceived as a major shift in US policy. The reason for the turnaround is likely some combination of the deployment of North Korean troops on the Russian side, the mounting Russian counter-offensive in the Kursk region, and the upcoming second Trump presidency, expected to bring US military aid to Ukraine to a grinding halt.

This is not a blank cheque to Ukraine. The use of ATACMS still comes with restrictions—not all of which have been made public.

With Trump's presidency on the horizon and his declared intention to end the war quickly, each side is jostling to put itself in the best position possible before being summoned to the negotiation table. Hedging for Trump's presidential win might have been a reason for Ukraine's Kursk operation in the first place.

Russia, for its part, has not changed its war aims of destroying Ukraine as a sovereign nation—just ask German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who spoke with Russian President Vladimir Putin last week. Russia is going to try and manoeuvre into a position in which negotiations, when they come, could only formalise Ukraine's surrender. Consequently, the next two months will likely be the bloodiest in this war.

Politically, it's a boost of morale for an embattled Ukraine facing increasingly dark times ahead and another salami slice into Russia's impunity. Militarily, Ukrainians could certainly use these longer-range fires to hamper the Russian counter-operations in the Kursk region and possibly beyond. 'The ability to use ATACMS on Russian territory may save Ukrainian lives and impose greater costs on Russia'.

But stocks of ATACMSs, Storm Shadows, and SCALPs supplied to Ukraine are limited, and Kyiv will have to ration and prioritise the expenditure of these scarce and expensive munitions.

Putin has warned that Russia would regard the NATO states' permission for Ukraine to use their weapons on Russian territory as NATO's entry into the war. Now that the permission is granted, even if the effects of such use would be limited operationally, political reasons alone might suffice to justify a Russian escalation of the war in Ukraine.

But Russia is already in full escalatory mode in Ukraine. Since August, Russia has been pushing hard and advancing rapidly along the Donbas front. On November 17, it began another campaign against Ukraine's critical infrastructure with a massive air strike. More such attacks will likely follow in the weeks to come aiming to plunge Ukraine into darkness and cold at the onset of winter and coerce the country into peace on Russian terms..

It is highly doubtful that Russia may resort to "extra" escalation as a specific answer to Biden's decision, including against a NATO tar-

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get. Russia's recent advances in Ukraine, while steady, have also been costly. For Russia to pick a fight with thirty-some NATO states at this point—or any other point, for that matter—would be highly imprudent, although not inconceivable.

No single weapons system or decision has the power to change the course of a war of attrition. Only a shift in the overall balance of human, military, and economic resources might. Ukraine is inherently disadvantaged in this balance vis-à-vis Russia, which makes Ukraine's continued survival and resistance even more incredible. □□□

[Source: *Bulletin of  
the Atomic Scientists*]

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 HUMRA QURAIISHI'S COLUMN
 

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## ‘Just Keep On Living’

*Humra Quraishi*

**T**HE HAZE IS STILL around, in and around the capital city, New Delhi and even far beyond. Affecting lives and livelihoods. Tell me how many amongst can sit indoors, day after day. Can the daily wagers and the mazdoors and the coolies, and the sellers and buyers afford to sit indoors! Can free meals and clothing and medicines be delivered to those forced to sit indoors for weeks at a stretch! Is there any scheme to take care of families and clans affected by the dangerous levels of air pollution and pollutants hitting the fragile humans!

The system is failing to such an extent that hundreds are perishing with severe malnutrition and infections and lack of even the basic facilities, yet there's no one out there to even listen to their woes! Dead or the dying seems to make little difference to the alive! Such is the level of apathy. At best there come up of announcements of enquiry committees to look into a this or that mishap but human lives are already gone... lost... departed and perished!

Instead of trying to find a way out from this deadly mess, the political rulers have been coming up with hate speeches! Yes, amidst the haze, looms large the political pollution. The hate speeches of the political rulers of the day are only accelerating. In fact, a couple of months back, mid-August, the Human Rights Watch had brought out a detailed report focusing on this. To quote, "Human Rights Watch analysed all 173 campaign speeches by Modi after the election code of conduct took effect on March 16. The code forbids appealing to "communal feel-

ings for securing votes." In at least 110 speeches, Modi made Islamophobic remarks apparently intended to undermine the political opposition, which he said only promoted Muslim rights, and to foster fear among the majority Hindu community through disinformation..."

The report gives not just details to those provocative hate speeches but also mentions the particular place and the date when those speeches were made. It also highlights this factor: "Modi regularly raised fears among Hindus through false claims that their faith and their places of worship, their wealth, their land, and the safety of girls and women in their community would be under threat from Muslims if the opposition parties came to power."

As I mentioned this report was released mid-August, and since then the hate speeches of the political rulers have only accelerated. Several of those speeches dripping with communal taunts and provocations and slants. Yet no forum or commission halting them. Leaving one completely and thoroughly disillusioned with the system; on how it works and functions.

Disillusionment has come about in these recent years after one has seen and witnessed disasters taking place. Right from 2014, human tragedies have only been going up the graph yet there seems no halting. Displacements and forced shifts together with targeted lynch killings and assaults. To top it all, the hapless poor could be arrested for stealing a roti or two to settle hunger pangs, but the mighty stealing millions and even publicly accused of dubious bribe-plots are treated as the privileged citizens of the country.

Why? Because they are close to those in power. Such is the reality of the day.

Also, it's time to broaden the very sphere of the very terms- terror and terrorists and terrorising! Ask the vulnerable communities and the targeted citizens who sit terrorised by Hindutva goon brigades unleashed all around. Their partners in crime are the political handlers; sitting at a distance but monitoring each single attack and whatever else goes along with the dubious, well-planned plots. And though on many occasions there were more than pointers to the particular Hindutva outfits responsible for the arson and violence and targeted attacks yet they seem to be moving about freely ...unleashed and on the prowl. Taking you somewhat backwards, to the gruesome attack and killing of Graham Staines and his two young boys it was more than confirmed that the murders were done by a particular Hindutva brigade yet till date it is not banned! This is just one of those examples from hundreds of communal attacks but then nothing really happens ...not only compounding the outreach of these goon brigades but also relaying immense fear amongst the vulnerable communities.

And though civil war rages in Manipur yet there seems no way out. Lives and properties devastated yet we sit un-moved. Coming up with just those typical synthetic speeches. As though that's remedy enough to settle bruises and scars and killings and loot. Immediate focus on the ground realities and the wants of the civilian population, sitting much too affected by the ongoing disasters.

Leaving you with this verse of Nida Fazli whose own life was somewhat affected at least in those initial years because of the Partition upheavals. These lines from Nida Fazli's

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'Just keep on Living' (Translated from Urdu by Baidar Bakht and Lesilie Lavigne).

*Just keep on living/  
Just keep on living like this /  
Say nothing /  
When you get up in the morning/  
Take a head count of the family/  
Slouch in the chair and read the  
paper /*

*There was a famine there /  
And a war raged somewhere  
else /  
Be thankful that you are safe/  
Switch on the radio and listen to  
the new pop songs /  
When you leave the house /  
Paste a smile on your face/  
Pack handshakes in your hands /  
Keep a few meaningless phrases*

*on your lips /  
Be passed through different  
hands like a coin/  
Say nothing /  
A white -collar /  
Social respect /  
A few drinks everyday/  
What else do you need /  
Just keep on like this /  
Say nothing.' □□□*

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#### INVESTIGATING 'ENEMIES', AIDING ALLIES

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## Fascism in Trump Land

**Vinod Mubayi**

**T**HE VICTORY OF DONALD Trump, a man convicted in a New York State court by a jury of his peers on 34 criminal counts, in the US Presidential election signifies a new low for the system of electoral democracy in the country that likes to bill itself as the world's oldest democracy. Trump who has already served one term as President (2016-2020) has made no secret of his contempt for the usual norms of democracy. He tried to overturn the result of the November 2020 election, when he lost to Biden, via the storming of the US Capitol by his followers on January 6, 2021 to prevent the certification of Biden's victory by the US Congress. In addition to his conviction, Trump was accused of and under indictment for other serious crimes such as openly trying to buy votes in the state of Georgia, inciting his followers to forcibly prevent the US Congress on Jan. 6, 2021 from certifying the election of Biden, and mishandling highly classified documents. These alleged crimes were so serious and committed so openly that there is hardly any doubt what the outcome of a fair trial would be. His escape from jail was made possible by a ruling of the right-wing majority of the US Supreme Court that granted the US President, and even a former Presi-

dent, immunity from prosecution for virtually all actions that could be deemed "official." Since there was no clarity in the court's judgement on where the boundary between official and non-official actions lay, the ruling was a blank cheque to a President to commit any act howsoever illegal it may be under the law. As journalist James Risen pointed out the ruling served to protect Trump "from his ongoing criminal cases and to grant him virtually unlimited power if he gets back into the White House. With its ruling, the Supreme Court's right-wing bloc has made it clear: They are tired of democracy. The justices want a dictator." Three of the justices who voted with the majority were appointed by Trump himself when he was President. So, the ruling reeked of corruption of a high order, truly worthy of a judgement passed by a court in a banana republic.

Trump's election victory was made possible by a number of factors, such as the mistake made by the Democratic Party in maintaining the aging Biden's candidacy for too long and the failure of the administration to end the Israeli genocide of the Palestinian population in Gaza, coupled with perceived high inflation and Biden's low approval ratings. But the background to his victory is the rampant economic inequality and the

hemorrhaging of stable industrial jobs caused by neoliberal capitalism over the last few decades. The fact that a majority of the working-class population, especially the white workers, voted for Trump reflects not just racism but also the fact that free-market capitalism is not working for them and they are willing to blindly follow an inveterate liar concerned only with his self-interest and a huckster selling a bizarre mix of fascist rhetoric, white supremacy, anti-immigrant racism, and Christian nationalism.

Bernie Sanders, the independent Senator from Vermont, has repeatedly said that the American people understand that their economic and political systems are rigged. They know that the very rich get much richer while almost everyone else becomes poorer. They know that they are moving rapidly into an oligarchic form of society. According to Sanders, while the Democrats campaigned on protecting the status quo, including the corporate interests that fund their party, the Republicans, who are supported by other corporate interests like Elon Musk, sang the siren song of "change" and overturning the existing order. Sanders is not surprised that the Republicans won but the change they promise to bring will "make a bad situation worse, and a society of gross inequality even more unequal, more unjust and more bigoted."

Now that he is due to assume power in less than two months, Trump's actions, guided by his fas-

cist and authoritarian instincts that were recognised by many in his previous term of office, including the retired Army general who was his chief of staff in the White House, are coming into focus. He has announced plans to instantly arrest and deport millions of what he has termed “illegal aliens”, he would allow the US military to put down opponents such as protesters and demonstrators, something that is legally barred from doing inside the country, and generally to recreate a McCarthyite era to intimidate and repress political opposition.

Trump’s selection of cabinet members shows that the only criterion for their choice is their personal loyalty to him and what he perceives as their ability to cause institutional disruption. It has nothing to do with their suitability for the position in the governmental institution as it is currently configured. Thus, Robert Kennedy Jr, an anti-vaxxer and conspiracy addicted crank with no connection to medicine has been chosen to head the Dept of Health and Human Services, Pete Hegseth, a Fox News host who has faced sex assault allegations and has a propensity for Christian extremism and defending US soldiers accused of committing atrocities in wars in Afghanistan and elsewhere, has been chosen to head the Department of Defence, celebrity TV host Dr Mehmet Oz who promoted the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine on his show as a cure for the corona virus has been nominated to administer Medicare and Medicaid programmes, and the wildly inappropriate Matt Gaetz with serious charges of paying for sex with underage girls against him was selected initially as Attorney General until he withdrew when his appointment generated too much opposition even among Republican senators.

In the domestic arena, Trump’s

stated policies are to make America more misogynist, racist, and unequal on one hand and, on the other, to dismantle the regulatory powers of the government and allow corporate polluters, for example, free rein. The most retrograde aspect of the latter is Trump’s and the Republican Party’s complete lack of belief in long-settled climate science. They wish to greatly increase extraction and use of fossil fuels, especially oil and gas, in the US in utter denial of global warming that is threatening to make large parts of the world uninhabitable.”We will frack, frack, frack and drill, baby, drill,” Trump said at an October 2024 rally in Detroit. If there was a functional international court with real powers, Trump and the Republican Party would be indicted for what is, in effect, a crime against humanity that expanded fossil fuel exploration and production would pose.

Meanwhile, Trump’s loose cannon approach of saying outrageous things that are frequently disavowed in the media, masks the more sinister, right-wing forces under him that are laying the grounds for fascism. Project 2025, a blueprint for Trump administration policies prepared under the conservative Heritage Foundation aims at nothing less than creating a framework for a fascist Christian nationalist state in the US. For example, the plan would allow the President to fire most of the non-partisan Federal bureaucracy and replace them with Trump loyalists. It would likely end the separation of church and state, diminish civil liberties, and eliminate or greatly restrict what conservatives consider to be the ‘nanny’ state, i.e., government regulation of private corporate behaviour. A beginning on the path of reducing civil liberties has already begun in the Republican majority House of Representatives with the passage of a bill that would em-

power the Secretary of the Treasury to unilaterally designate any non-profit group as a “terrorist supporting organisation” and revoke its tax-exempt status, effectively killing the group. Critics say the proposal would give presidential administrations especially the incoming Trump administration a tool to crack down on and eliminate political opponents. Representative Lloyd Doggett, a Democrat from Texas, said “This bill is not about terrorism — it’s about giving Donald Trump unlimited authority to label his opponents as terrorists.”

On international issues, Trump’s history of supporting the Israeli right wing, the appointment of Mike Huckabee as the ambassador to Israel, Steven Witkoff as Mideast envoy and Michael Waltz as National Security Advisor, suggests that his policy would be to give Israel even more of a blank cheque than the Biden Administration to let Israel continue with its genocidal policy towards the Palestinians, implement a more aggressive approach to Iran and potentially annex the West Bank and Gaza with US support. Each of Trump’s appointees has a history of close relations with Netanyahu and Huckabee, an evangelical Christian, is an open proponent of a Greater Israel who has suggested in the past that Egypt or Saudi Arabia could offer some of their own territory for resettlement of Palestinians who could be expelled from the West Bank and Gaza.

While Trump made Modi his BFF in the past, whether he would continue to do in future remains to be seen. A test will come in future of whether his administration’s Justice Department will choose to continue the prosecution of Gautam Adani and associates on financial fraud charges that has already begun under the current dispensation.

□□□

## POLEMICS

## A Note on the Crisis and Tasks of the Left

**Bhanudeb Dutta**  
**Sobhanlal Datta Gupta**

*[This is a document intended for the following categories and hence circulated to them only: (a) General Secretaries of all Left parties at the centre and secretaries of the same in West Bengal. (b) Select Left intellectuals. (c) Select Left leaders of the past. The purpose of this document is to engage them in a fruitful discussion and mobilise their political wisdom as a way out of this impasse.]*

**I**T IS UNDENIABLE THAT THE Left in India is at present passing through a crisis which is unprecedented since independence. In contrast to the steady concentration of power in the hands of the Right, the rapid decline of the Left over the years is extremely alarming. This is especially manifest in the marginalisation of the Left in Parliament and their exit from power in West Bengal and Tripura. Only in Kerala the Left is still in power, but it is plagued with many problems. The objective of this document is to highlight the nature of the crisis and suggest a rethinking on how to come out of the crisis.

### **Nature of the Crisis faced by the Left**

a. Rejection of the Left or looking for an alternative Left? National and international experiences are increasingly indicating that the mindset of the Left which was shaped in the Soviet era demands a major change. Internationally, the leading communist parties of the West, i.e. French and Italian Communist Parties are no longer visible in their original form. In India, it is evident after the 18<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha election (2024), that the Left has gained primarily in those states where it had alliance with INDIA group partners. Does it mean that people are not ready to vote for the Left as an independent political force but only as the partner of a grand alliance? In other

words, does it indicate that people are not prepared to accept the Left in its present form but in a different form altogether?

b. While all major parties of the INDIA alliance have gained politically (Samajvadi Party, DMK, Congress, TMC, RJD etc), the Left's performance has been dismal. In fact, the biggest gain has been made by the Congress and its extremely intolerant attitude towards the communist parties on the question of seat allocation definitely weakened the Left's position. This happened because of the Left's inability to project itself as an independent and united force on all-India plane. This, however, does not mean that in electoral politics the left should shun its relation with the Congress. Against the ruling right reactionary and fascist party, namely, the BJP, electoral alliance with the Congress, despite its class character, is necessary and efforts should be made to involve them in the struggle on different issues but not at the cost of the Left.

c. This leads to a very crucial question. What will be the core of the anti-Right coalition? The Left or non-Left bourgeois parties, especially the Congress? It has to be recognised that the non-Left bourgeois parties, national or regional, cannot really fight the RSS and BJP, because of their poor organisational and ideological

strength. All of them have a weakness for soft Hindutva and are ultimately not at all reliable forces that can fight the Right. Here the role of the Left becomes crucial, because the Left alone can fight the Right organisationally as well as ideologically. Therefore, it is the Left which has to emerge as the core of the anti-Right coalition.

d. But if the Left has to emerge as the core then the most important condition is the consolidation of all Left parties under a Common Minimum Programme (CMP). It has become a routine matter to talk of CPI-CPI (M)-CPI(M-L) unity. But this is a very complex and time-consuming matter which cannot be settled very easily. So what is necessary is Left consolidation through a coordinating mechanism on the basis of a CMP. Ordinary people are disillusioned and disturbed to find so many Left parties functioning in the political field, all claiming to be the champion of preserving the interest of the ordinary people. They do not understand the pulse of the people who want to see a united Left consolidation. Every effort should be made towards this end. In any field whatsoever, even in the field of electoral politics, the Left parties should act as a Left bloc. It is not enough to form Left coordination, because the need of the hour is Left consolidation.

e. An extremely disturbing problem for the Left is that mobilisation of the poor is slipping out of their fold. How can the poorest sections of society, the tribals, the Dalits and the depressed classes be brought back to the fold of the Left is one of the major challenges now faced by them. It is becoming evident that

it is no longer class politics but identity politics and dole politics which are appealing to them.

f. Since the Left today has to operate within the framework of electoral politics, it has to give priority to organisational issues, the main focus of which is on the politics of alliances with parties with which they have hardly any ideological affinity. The Left's partners in the INDIA group or its alliance with parties in a number of states constitutes such examples. This compromise the Left is forced to accept under electoral compulsion. The problem becomes more complicated for the Left when there is sudden migration of a party from one camp to another. In states where the Left has been in power the problem assumes a more complex dimension which has become a new challenge. This has been especially evident in the cases of West Bengal and Kerala. In order to maintain its organisational hold at different levels and confront its political rivals the Left has accommodated in the past all sorts of opportunist and lumpen elements, which give them organisational leverage but become local power centres within the party and breeding grounds of corruption. As soon as there is a change of government, it is these elements which immediately move to the new camp, severely tarnishing the image of the Left. This is exactly what has happened in West Bengal after the TMC came to power in 2011. In Kerala charges of corruption and criminalisation within the Left establishment more or less tell the same story. In many cases these compromises for the sake of organisational expansion ultimately have an extremely adverse impact on the Left, because as a result of this strategy it is ideology

which now becomes secondary, degrading and eroding the quality and morale of the cadres, if not even the leadership.

g. In the Soviet era, when international communist movement, with all its pitfalls, was a global force, the Left could project before the masses an alternative of capitalism and set an agenda and a goal. In today's world, that possibility is no longer there with the result that it is the Right which is virtually setting the agenda which the Left has to accept as a challenge. Unless the Left is in a position to set an alternative agenda in terms of the present as well as the future, which will attract the masses in the form of a blueprint, it will be a problem for the Left to advance. This is precisely what the BJP and RSS have systematically done by projecting the vision of an alternative India, which has caught the imagination of a large section of the masses, and it is this strategy which has given them political dividends.

h. Evaluation of the class character of the regional parties by the different state units is essential towards forming an objective understanding of the concerned region, which helps the Left parties not only in electoral politics but also in the field of mass struggle. The Left has to explore how the regional parties have struck deep roots in the masses and have emerged as voices reflective of regional aspirations. Every effort needs to be made by the Left parties to effect a tie-up with those regional parties who share common grounds with the Left.

#### **Tasks Ahead:**

(a) **Theoretical :** Many ideas of the Soviet era Marxism have to be seriously reconsidered. Lenin's

understanding of this question can be an excellent guide in this matter. In 1922, at the Fourth Congress of Comintern, Lenin gave the warning that in 1921, at the Third Congress of Comintern a resolution had been adopted which was wrong and which required revision. In that resolution the Russian model had been virtually universalised, which was not correct, because the Russian model was not necessarily appropriate for other countries and each country should develop its own understanding of revolution in its own way (V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 33, pp. 430-432). In 1964, when the Togliatti Memorandum was published by the Italian Communist Party after his death almost a similar concern was voiced by him and he even criticised some of the formulations of the 1960 Moscow Declaration of the Communist Countries where the Soviet model of socialism had been eulogised.

At least three such issues demand serious rethinking.

**One:** While accepting in principle the concept of democratic centralism, the problem that remains unaddressed is : the minority voices do not reach out to the bottom level of the Party and what gets lost is the spirit of democracy. The party members get the false impression that all decisions at the higher level have been taken unanimously and that there is no disagreement anywhere at any level.

**Two:** The concept of vanguard party demands rethinking. In today's world as the struggles of the working masses are becoming increasingly multidimensional, involving gender, caste and community in the case of India, class identity is becoming secondary in many cases. Communist parties are thus becoming partners



in a broader alliance but not as a vanguard. In many cases struggles are becoming issue-based and spontaneous, being launched under the banner of civil society organisations and not any party. In West Bengal, for instance, the unprecedented mass upsurge centring around the RG Kar episode, is indicative of the fact that the movement is unfolding not under the banner of any Left party but the slogans they are using, the songs they are playing all belong to the heritage of the Left. Yet they are not prepared to accept the leadership of any party, including the Left. But here a problem arises. As historical experience illustrates, these spontaneous uprisings (i.e. Occupy Wall Street, Arab Spring, Shahbag protest movement) ultimately fizzle out, if there is no political-organisational-ideological leadership. So, how to resolve this contradiction—this is a new challenge before the Left. These social movements should not be left outside the Left's purview but they should be closely watched. Should such movements fail or fall in the midway, the Left has to carry it forward with a conscious leadership.

**Three:** The present situation demands a serious rethinking of understanding of the Marxian legacy. Many of these questions involving what went wrong with socialism were addressed by quite a few top-ranking leaders belonging to the Marxist tradition. But Marxism of the Soviet era paid hardly any attention to these alternative currents. Similarly standard understanding of Marx-Engels and Lenin, focusing on some of their selected texts, has given rise to a mechanical understanding of Marxism, which does not appeal to today's generation. To be more exact, the left will have to revise its mind set of the Soviet era and seriously address the question with an open mind: what went wrong with Soviet socialism? It is high

time to admit that the Soviet model was an example of party-oriented socialism, which was a betrayal of the real meaning of socialism, as espoused by Marx, Engels and Lenin. Failure to understand this made the Communist Parties blissfully unaware of the importance of democracy, pluralism and humanism and alienated them from the masses. This sense of critical awareness must emerge from within the central leadership of the communist parties.

**(b) Practical :**

(i) In a country like India if the communist parties have to make themselves acceptable to the masses, then issues like religion and morality need to be addressed in the proper perspective. The hallmark of a good communist is modesty and in their personal life they need to be guided by norms and standards of communist morality. Only then they can win over the masses not by dominance but by intellectual and moral authority. These questions have either not been given importance in the mainstream discussion of the communist parties or discussion of these issues has simply been opposed on the ground that they go against the materialist philosophy of Marxism and promote idealism. It is to be kept in mind that after the fall of the Soviet Union in many communist parties of the Middle East and North Africa questions were raised on how to integrate Marxism with the positive elements in Islam.

(ii) The communist parties have paid very little attention to the question of tradition. The way BJP and RSS are hijacking and distorting some of the leading figures of the Indian tradition, namely, Gandhi, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Subhas Chandra, Tagore and many others and presenting them as symbols of Hindutva is a major challenge for the Left. To combat this challenge issues of tradition, history and cul-

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ture need to be addressed in an altogether new perspective. In India Marxism cannot appeal to the working masses unless it integrates Marxism with the positive elements in Indian tradition, while critiquing the conservative elements. RSS is doing just the opposite, and thereby confusing and misleading the masses.

(iii) The Left is an uncompromising critic of Hindu fundamentalism. But it almost remains silent on Islamic fundamentalism, or what is happening in Iran or Afghanistan. In the case of Iran, for instance, the Left keeps mum for the reason that it believes that Iran is anti-imperialist. This is a totally wrong understanding, because Iran opposes US imperialism from a nationalist viewpoint and not from the position of anti-imperialism. Being anti-Western does not necessarily mean that the country is anti-imperialist, because it has nothing to do with anti-imperialism in the Leninist sense. As a result, the brutal suppression of the democratic aspirations of the Iranian people is being severely underplayed. A similar case is Putin. Putin's anti-Americanism has no ideological basis, because it has to be kept in mind that he is opposed to Biden but a close friend of Trump.

(iv) If the Left has to make itself acceptable to the masses, it has to critique all kinds of authoritarianism

across the world, including regimes which the Left normally tries to defend. This includes China and North Korea. The way the communist leaders in these countries either extend their stay in power arbitrarily or promote dynastic rule is a complete betrayal of the core ideals of socialism and democracy. These are uncomfortable questions. But the Left has to take an independent stand on these issues. Otherwise the credibility of the Left will be at stake, leading to its isolation and deepening of its crisis.

(v) It is true that leftists launch many programmes but they fail to convert them into a movement. They are only programme-makers and not

movement-builders. They fail to understand the difference between the writing of a programme and its actual implementation through movement.

(vi) It is high time that the Left should seriously take up the question of culture, especially because party activists are seemingly averse to culture. Two questions become very important in this context: (a) why should the communists be concerned with culture? (b) why should the cultural activists be concerned with Marxism and socialism? If these two questions are not properly dealt with, the interconnection between politics and culture can never be understood in proper perspective. If the two are

considered separate and unrelated, the democratic space in society will be taken over by the fascist forces. To prevent this happening the tie-up between politics and culture can work as a protective wall between the people and their fascist and other reactionary adversaries.

#### **Conclusion:**

- (a) The Left has to strive for replacement of its disintegrated image by a new look in the form of Left consolidation and present itself as a unified Left to the people.
- (b) The Left has to present itself before the public as a dedicated force with new ideas marked by a higher form of ethics and morality. □□□

#### **ADIVASI NATIONAL ICON**

## **Birsa Munda and his Ulgulan**

*Joseph Bara\**

**B**IRSA MUNDA, A LATE nineteenth century Adivasi freedom fighter of Chhotanagpur, represents the Adivasi shade in the variegated freedom struggle of India. Highly adored today by the Indian nation, his stature as a national hero has grown phenomenally in the last few decades. He is unusually honoured by two memorials in the Parliament of India, and his birthday, 15 November, is observed by the Government of India as 'Janajati Gaurav Diwas'. The President and the Prime Minister of India spare time to visit his birth-place to pay him homage.

The Indian freedom struggle was one of the longest in the colonial world, where Adivasis fought relentlessly from the beginning to the end, making them one of most noticeable protesting groups. As they resorted to armed struggle frequently, violence is seen as the Adivasi trademark. Violence was actually an act of desperation since authorities least

cared to communicate with the Adivasis on their grievances. Adivasis, like others, employed other methods as well. The Mundas and the Uraons of Chhotanagpur and the Gonds of central India adopted Gandhian way of protest since the Non-Cooperation movement. Even Birsaite, violent earlier, became Gandhian. Much earlier, since 1858, the Mundas and the Uraons experimented with the constitutional method of agitation, i.e. by petitions, depositions and judicial cases, for four decades under the Sardari Larai movement.

Frustrated with constitutionalism ultimately, the Munda and the Uraon agitators reverted to violence under Birsa Munda-led revolt, called *Ulgulan* (1895-1900). Though violence-based, the *Ulgulan* had also a messianic face. Incidentally, the *Ulgulan* coincided with the mainstream nationalist struggle, led by Western educated elite under the Indian National Congress banner, standardising petitioning to the British authorities as an

agitation method. But the Adivasi had lost faith in it. A decade later, in 1910, the *Ulgulan* resonated in the *Bhumkal* of Bastar, another Adivasi heartland.

While fighting by multifarious means, the Adivasis had their own vision for a *disum* or rule where the society would be just, free from dominance or exploitation. The protest moves were, therefore, premeditated and actions devised accordingly. In comparison to preceding protests in Chhotanagpur, Birsa Munda's *Ulgulan* was a bigger outburst, indicating Adivasis' accumulated anger. Birsa's adroit leadership characterised it a concerted action. Besides moving tirelessly to convince the masses on the Adivasi cause and holding nocturnal meetings at strategic places, he organised three levels of loyal disciples.

The *Ulgulan* lasted only five years. Adivasis' fight by primeval means like bow and arrow did not stand the mighty British arms. Yet, it shook the colonial hold and sent a strong message to the authorities that the century-old Adivasi problem needed urgent redress. A 'thorough' survey of land tenure holdings and related

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matters was ordered and, as 'final' settlement, a slew of colonial measures ensued, culminating in the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, 1908, considered the Magna Carta of Adivasis' traditional agrarian rights. In vogue even today, the Act signified a model measure for protecting the Adivasis elsewhere.

Birsa's intervention gave a new twist to the Adivasis' destiny. The settlement actually deprived them of most of their fertile land. The situation pushed the Adivasi mind to explore life beyond agriculture. Administrative expansion in Chhotanagpur and Bihari-Bengali wrangle over education-based employment sensitised the Adivasis for this option. Pressure was put on the government and the Christian missionaries to revamp education, hitherto restricted to middle schooling, which led to regeneration of the Adivasi society in the following years.

Birsa Munda was a true grassroots leader, acceptable to Adivasi masses of indigenous faith, Hindu and Christian following. Beginning from the Munda belt of the present Khunti district and with Birsa's religious agenda of healing and preaching, the Adivasis' land issue, the mainstay of Adivasi cultural life, became the central cause and the *Ulgulan* spread far and wide among other Adivasi groups. Besides influenced by Christian teachings, popular Vaishnavite Hinduism and Adivasi belief swayed Birsa's personality, which reflected in his leadership style and action.

Birsa framed his foes clearly. While Whiteman authorities and the missionaries, who informed them about Birsa's activities, were the arch-enemies, the zamindars and their associates, called *Dikus*, were considered frontline agents of colonialism. Neo-Christian Adivasis, initially attacked as enemy missionaries' minions, and ordinary non-

Adivasis masses living in Adivasi villages were assured no harm.

Such significant role and legacy of Birsa Munda is poorly treated in history. For half a century since his demise in 1900, Birsa Munda was in the nation's limbo. Only local Adivasis cherished his memory and admired his leadership and heroics for protecting them from British injustice. He appeared before the nation only in 1939-40, somewhat dramatically, afforded by the launching of Adivasi Mahasabha, an Adivasi movement for administrative autonomy of Chhotanagpur and Santhal Parganas, and the annual session of the Indian National Congress at Ramgarh (near Ranchi). The Adivasi Mahasabha invoked Birsa Munda as a cult figure to strengthen the Adivasi movement, whereas the Congress wanted to use him for expanding its base among the Adivasis.

The episode stirred historian's curiosity on Birsa Munda. Within general neglect of Adivasis' role in the freedom struggle, Birsa Munda is privileged. A volume by the Government of Bihar, K.K. Datta (ed) *History of Freedom Movement in Bihar* (1957), contained a chapter on Birsa Munda. The first by a historian, Datta's chapter stoked detailed investigation in the life and work of Birsa Munda. The Bihar Tribal Research Institute conducted a study, resulting in the publication of *Life and Times of Birsa Bhagwan* by S P Sinha (1964). Another poetic title *Dust-storm and the Hanging Mist: A Study of Birsa Munda and his Movement in Chhotanagpur* by Suresh Singh (1966) followed, emerging from author's doctoral study at the University of London.

These publications fixed the place of Birsa in the annals of freedom struggle of India. However, knowledge and understanding of the persona of Birsa remains incomplete. The volume by Datta gives Birsa

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Munda an appendix treatment, sparing him only a tiny space. Datta, and Sinha likewise, attempt to dovetail Birsa's role to the mainstream nationalist struggle, neglected so far and now impelled by the presence of assertive Adivasi voice, led by Jaipal Singh, in the national politics. The works essentially show Adivasi revolt in the mainstream nationalism's shoe. Like in nationalist political consciousness, a forerunning socio-religious movement is fallaciously explained paving way for the Adivasi political move. The fact is that whatever socio-religious fermentation occurred in the Adivasi society was locally fashioned and intertwined with the protest sequences.

Supported by a medley of local primary data, Suresh Singh's *The Dust-Storm and the Hanging Mist* presents intimate details on Birsa's life and the *Ulgulan*. It describes the uprising's local origin and own direction, but abjures to put the subject on the anvil of historical critique. No attempt is made to relate it to the broader concept of nationalist struggle. This key question becomes pertinent since a stream of later scholarship either denies Birsa Munda the status of an anti-colonial freedom fighter, rating him instead only as a fighter for mundane agrarian rights of the Adivasis; or, while recognising his nationalist face, estimates him as a leader of secondary importance.

The literary-type diction of Suresh Singh's story elicited literati's interest on Birsa Munda. Distinguished writer Mahasweta Devi was inspired to publish a Sahitya Akademi award-winning novel on Birsa, *Aranyer Adhikar* (in Bengali, *Jangal Ke Dawedar* in Hindi) (1977). Even film makers came forward to produce Birsa Munda documentaries. By the turn of twentieth century, Birsa was a prominent freedom fighter figure of the country. Raja Dasgupta and Anish Dasgupta produced a documentary—'**A Song of Birsa**', 'possibly in 1978.

Meanwhile, even as he is a freedom fighter ideal historiographical gap on Birsa Munda lingers. Later writings either iconise Birsa Munda or reiterate subordinate status of his role. In the first case, noted theorist historians, Michael Adas and Ranajit Guha, cite Birsa Munda case liberally to explain millenarianism and subaltern school respectively. This tweaks Birsa as an international historical figure. In the other case, historians first depict Adivasi protests as constituents of nationalist struggle and even commend the Adivasi agitators as pioneering and indefatigable. But soon they turn to question the Adivasi protest method and leadership quality and argue that Adivasi protests were in need of Congress model of coordination and stewardship. Adivasi protests, including Birsa's *Ulgulan*, are, in other words, shown playing second fiddle to the mainstream freedom struggle.

The stance stems from the prejudiced racist view of Adivasi people being backward sub-humans.

Sandwiched between the two and hyped politically, today Birsa Munda is improperly appreciated. Various interest groups scramble to use the name as a political windmill. Historical facts are distorted blatantly for partisan ends, sully Birsa's salient persona as a secular mass leader. The earliest commentators described Birsa as a religious 'fanatic', and when first noticed by the mainstream nationalism at the time independence, he was portrayed as anti-Christian staunch Hindu. Somehow the tendency continues today.

In reality, Birsa was not partisan. When the question of protecting the Adivasi land and society came, Birsa's first followers were the Sardari Larai cadres, mostly neo-Christian Adivasis. Under Vaishnavite sway, Birsa was non-vegetarian and wore *janeyu*. But in 1898, he did not hesitate to sacrilege the Ram Temple of Chutia (Ranchi), the official shrine of the Maharaja of Chhotanagpur, at midnight. He did this for seizing a copper plate there, supposedly the Maharaja's authority of *Zamindari* in Chhotanagpur. Today, Birsa is recognised as a national hero, but, simultaneously, assigned a communal tag. The whole honour he receives day in, day out by the nation is, this way, hollowed. □□□

[\*Formerly with Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi]

## UPHOLDING CASTE ENDOGAMY

### "Love Jihad"—Conversion through Marriages

**Tushar Ghadage**

THE ILLUSION OF 'LOVE Jihad' has led violence and intimidation by police and non-state actors. The 'Love Jihad' laws legitimise un-constitutional, anti-minority and misogynistic beliefs, and

help further the hateful, communal agenda of extremists.

Behind the meticulous task of monitoring and verifying hate crime cases compiled by Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), integral to the

organisation's 'Hate Hatao' programme across India, a trend can be discerned over the past four to six years. This regular monitoring is reflected in the *Nafrat ka Naqsha (map)* that meticulously depicts such classified incidents for ready reference. There have been multiple cases of crimes related to disrupting interfaith marriages, attacking Muslim men for "hanging out with Hindu women,"

and vice versa by accusing couples involved in this association of “love jihad.” For instance, on January 20, 2023, in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, a 24-year-old Hindu woman was celebrating her birthday with her friends when a mob, allegedly comprised of Bajrang Dal men, barged into the house and started assaulting the Muslim men on allegations of “Love Jihad.” These Muslim men were later taken to the MIG Colony police station, where they were put in custody. The video of this incident went viral the next day.

In another case, on June 30, 2024, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal members created a disturbance outside a Police station in protest against an interfaith marriage between a Hindu and Muslim couple after they applied to register the marriage in Uttar Pradesh’s Bijnor. A Hindu woman and a Muslim man had decided to get married and followed the appropriate legal procedure by applying for their marriage registration under the Special Marriage Act of 1954. As soon as the news of the couple’s application to register their marriage spread, an appropriately readied mob hit the streets, staging aggressive demonstrations and making inflammatory statements to stop the marriage. The mob accused a couple of engaging in ‘love jihad,’ a conspiracy theory propagated by Hindu right-wing organisations to convey that Muslim men are luring Hindu women into both marriage and conversion. The mob threatened the police with aggravating communal tensions in the city if the marriage was not stopped! This incident also highlights the fragility of communal relations and the deep-seated biases that persist within Indian society.

The narratives surrounding interfaith marriages often referred to as “love jihad,” and the associated anti-conversion campaigns aim to restrict

social mobility by opposing conversions that arise from these marriages. Stemming from Hindutva ideology and its non-missionary religious practices, the antipathy of privileged sections to depressed castes who have historically converted (aspiring to a life of dignity) is evident. Historically, religious conversion among marginalised communities has been problematised and questioned. Though an act of active real and spiritual affirmation, ‘conversions’ have been reduced to acts of allurements.’ Caste being a brute reality of Hindu faith and practice, the historical notion of conversion is anathema as the act of conversion would snatch away the power of dominant caste hierarchies to maintain a cruel and exclusivist status quo. At the root of the resonant insecurities and accusations stems, therefore, from the non-missionary nature of the Hindu religion.

In the Hindu fold, there is no option of becoming part of the faith through conversion, and the only way to be Hindu is to be born in one of the thousands of castes that are segregated and placed in vertical hierarchies. Any individual leaving this religious order by quitting their caste membership and joining some other religious order directly affects the existence of Hinduism as a religion. Therefore, the religious conversions to other missionary religions, such as Islam and Christianity in the Indian context, are termed “violent acts” and are accused of “disturbing the social fabric and age-old traditions and culture in local communities.” Conversion has also been described as a conflict between “local and foreign religions.” These arguments try to portray Hinduism as a peaceful, non-missionary religion that never disrupts the socio-cultural fabric of other religious faiths, as it is alleged that other missionary religions do to Hinduism.

Arguably, however, defending the non-missionary nature of Hinduism is like effectively enforcing caste-based hierarchies, as there is no other way to transcend these caste boundaries within Hinduism. These narratives position Hinduism as a “non-missionary” religion and portray missionary religions as violent disruptors of local culture; they, however, conveniently overlook the violence and oppression inherent in enforcing caste and the social order it sustains. The claim of Hinduism as a non-missionary religion, rather than being peaceful, serves as a tool to confine individuals to their birth-determined caste and religion. The politically coined ‘ghar wapasi’ (return to the fold) concept coined by a militant Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) is a product of the 1990s. It is also an effort to bring back converted Hindus to their “home” religion, but again to their respective caste. Inter-caste and interfaith marriages are ways people could transgress these rigid boundaries. Therefore, this rigidity of opposing inter-caste and interfaith marriages favours those born into privileged castes, as it reinforces their social advantage while keeping lower castes in a disadvantaged role.

In this context, Hindutva’s stance against “love jihad” and religious conversion extends beyond claims of cultural preservation; it represents a deliberate strategy that limits individual freedoms, mainly targeting those seeking dignity and equality outside the traditional caste framework. By framing interfaith relationships and conversions as threats, this stance works to preserve the status quo of caste hierarchies, blocking pathways for social mobility and preventing individuals from escaping their designated social roles. This restriction is incredibly oppressive for women, who are often cast as the bearers of the family’s honour.

Both interfaith and inter-caste couples present a challenge to entrenched social structures, facing hostility and violence for asserting their autonomy. This hostility symbolises the fundamental resistance to individual freedom, irrespective of reli-

gious affiliation. The framing of “love jihad” as a threat allows for the selective targeting of Muslims while deliberately ignoring genuine issues of social and caste-based discrimination. In reality, the “love jihad” narrative serves as a political tool rather

than a social issue, designed to fuel division, incite fear, and demonise Muslim communities while concealing the systemic caste-based hierarchies that restrict social mobility and perpetuate inequality. □□□

[abridged] [Courtesy: CJP]

## LETTERS

### **COP 29- an “Optical Illusion”**

The UN climate conference in Baku ended with the Azerbaijani hosts announcing a “deal” after intense negotiations that continued *well beyond the scheduled close* of the meeting, but the developing countries rejected the outcome, with India leading the criticism. *On the table* was the commitment of a specific sum of money from the developed countries, who are *primarily responsible* for the climate crisis, to help poorer, developing countries make the transition to cleaner energy and cope with the impacts of climate change. The rich countries, who have been *notoriously dodgy* about paying for the mess that they have created, pledged to increase the flow of money to \$300 billion from the current target of \$100 billion by 2035. This remains grossly inadequate—developing countries are estimated to need at least \$1.3 trillion annually in order to keep average temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius from preindustrial levels. Under the Baku deal, the tripling of the target is based on a call to private companies and international lenders to ramp up their efforts, an arrangement that the Indian representative has described as an “optical illusion”.

**A Sinha**

### **RSS Hooliganism at Udaipur Film Festival**

The CPIML unequivocally condemns the cowardly disruption by RSS goons

of the screening of *Had Anhad* at the Udaipur Film Festival. This brazen attack on democratic spaces and progressive art reflects the growing attack on freedom of speech under the fascist regime, which seeks to stifle any voices critical of exploitation and injustice.

The Udaipur Film Society organised this 3-day festival (15-17 November) as part of the Cinema of Resistance initiative to promote critical and socially important cinema. This year’s festival, dedicated to the memory of thousands of Palestinian children brutally murdered by settler-colonial Israel, and to Professor G.N. Saibaba, a tireless advocate for people’s rights, was disrupted on its second day. The RSS thugs demanded the removal of these dedications, spewed vile abuse against Palestinians and Professor Saibaba, and unlawfully halted the screening of *Had Anhad*.

Despite the organisers securing all necessary permissions, the administration failed to stop this undemocratic and unlawful act of RSS. Even the intervention of the District Collector proved ineffective in curbing the RSS’s hooliganism.

The CPIML stands in firm solidarity with the Udaipur Film Society in its brave stand against fascist intimidation. The refusal of the organisers to remove their dedication to Palestinian children and Professor Saibaba is a courageous assertion of democratic rights.

The Sangh Parivar’s fear of progressive cinema like *Had Anhad*,

which exposes the politics of religion through Kabir’s poetry, underscores their broader fear of a growing popular consciousness. Art, especially people-centric cinema, challenges the exploitative status quo and inspires resistance against injustice.

### **CPIML-Liberation Manual Harvesting**

Although mechanisation of harvesting has started in the Atarra region of Uttar Pradesh’s Banda district with some harvesters being brought here all the way from distant places, most of the harvesting is still done manually. For most of the landless workers this was the highest priority work during the harvesting season and they were declining to go for other work. Most of them were eager to take up this work compared to any other work. The reason was clearly that this contributes a lot to food security as workers are paid in kind (a part of the harvested crop).

By harvesting the crop on one bigha of land (one acre is equal to 2.5 to 3 bighas) it is possible to earn about 50 kg of paddy which works out to about 30 kg of rice. Husband and wife often working together are generally able to harvest one bigha in three days. Now harvesting season may last for almost a month but typically a couple may get employment on only 15 out of 30 days. Nevertheless, for 15 days work this couple will get 150 kg of rice (good quality local rice), which they consider very important for their food security. In addition there would be other earning like for carrying/gathering the harvested paddy.

In the case of harvesting wheat a couple is more likely to harvest a bigha in two days and get about 37 kg from a bigha. So on the basis of 15 days' work and harvesting about 7.5 bighas, they are likely to get 277 kg wheat.

Keeping in view this important role of employment obtained in manually carried out paddy and wheat harvesting for landless farm workers, the relentless increase of mechanisation of crop harvesting should be questioned. If crop harvesting is mechanised the employment and food security of farm workers will be affected very adversely.

In the area where manual harvesting is still taking place, even if the paddy-wheat rotation is followed, there is no problem of *parali* burning.

On the other hand in those villages of this region where harvesting is being mechanised, the problem of *parali* burning has also started appearing.

The policy of relentless mechanisation of harvesting should be discarded to avoid very adverse impacts.

### **Bharat Dogra Warrants of Arrest**

On 21 November 2024, Pre-Trial Chamber I of the International Criminal Court (ICC), in its composition for the *Situation in the State of Palestine*, unanimously issued two decisions rejecting challenges by the State of Israel ('Israel') brought under articles 18 and 19 of the Rome Statute (the 'Statute'). It also issued warrants of arrest for Mr Benjamin Netanyahu and Mr Yoav Gallant.

As to the first challenge, the Chamber noted that the acceptance by Israel of the Court's jurisdiction is not required, as the Court can exercise its jurisdiction on the basis of territorial jurisdiction of Palestine, as determined by Pre-Trial Chamber I in a previous composition.

The Chamber also rejected Israel's request under article 18(1) of the Statute. The Chamber recalled that the Prosecution notified Israel of the initiation of an investigation in 2021. At that time, despite a clarification request by the Prosecution, Israel elected not to pursue any request for deferral of the investigation.

The Chamber issued warrants of arrest for two individuals, Mr Benjamin Netanyahu and Mr Yoav Gallant, for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed from at least 8 October 2023 until at least 20 May 2024, the day the Prosecution filed the applications for warrants of arrest.

At the outset, the Chamber considered that the alleged conduct of Mr Netanyahu and Mr Gallant falls within the jurisdiction of the Court.

With regard to the crimes, the Chamber found reasonable grounds to believe that Mr Netanyahu, born on 21 October 1949, Prime Minister of Israel at the time of the relevant conduct, and Mr Gallant, born on 8 November 1958, Minister of Defence of Israel at the time of the alleged conduct, each bear criminal responsibility for the following crimes as co-perpetrators for committing the acts jointly with others: the war crime of starvation as a method of warfare; and the crimes against humanity of murder, persecution, and other inhumane acts.

### **Fadi El Abdallah, ICC State Terror in Bastar**

This year, Bastar has witnessed an intensifying militarisation, significantly heightening violence against Adivasi communities as security forces target them under the guise of anti-insurgency operations. Over 300 security camps have been established, creating an overwhelming security presence that has transformed Adivasi lands into zones of fear, marked by arbitrary arrests and ex-

trajudicial killings. These actions further suppress peaceful protests against land dispossession and environmental devastation. The state's approach appears to prioritise military control over indigenous rights and welfare, deepening cycles of violence and repression in the region. Sharing a link to a recent citizens' report on the region for further context—<https://cgnarratives.github.io>.

Of particular urgency is the fact that the whereabouts of the 44 detained Adivasis remain unknown, raising concerns about their safety and well-being.

Campaign for Peace and Justice in Chattisgarh[CPJC] calls upon the state to release all arbitrarily detained individuals, initiate independent investigations into alleged staged encounters, halt militarised 'development projects' infringing on Adivasi lands, and comply with the Supreme Court's 2011 ruling against the deployment of tribal youth in paramilitary operations.

### **Campaign for Peace and Justice in Chhattisgarh**

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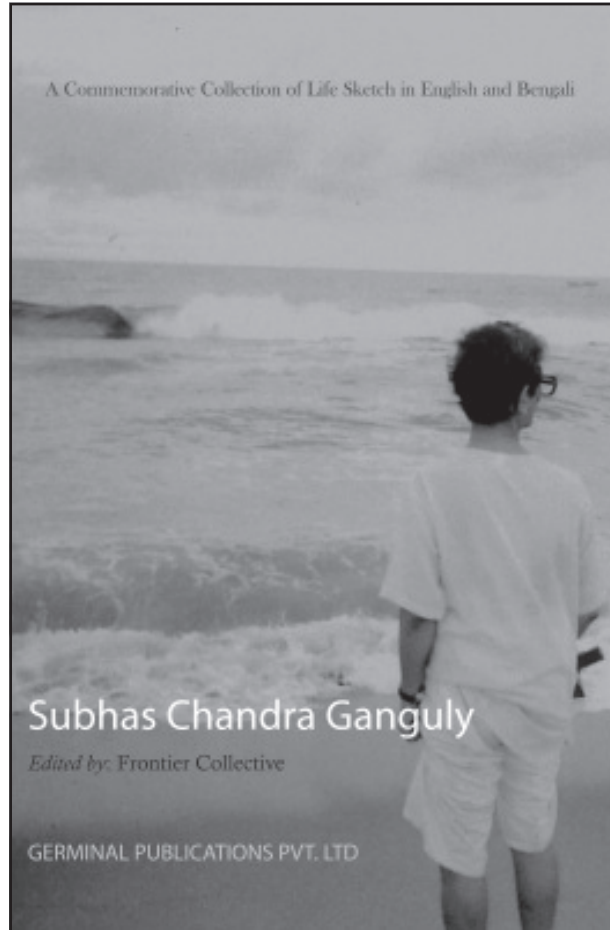
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