

# frontier

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## Forever War

**I**N THE RECENTLY HELD CNN PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE BIDEN blamed it on HAMAS for stalling the process of permanent cease-fire deal. But the reality is completely otherwise. Only a few days ago, before the much publicised presidential debate that was telecast live across the world, Israeli Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that he would not accept any permanent ceasefire. He forecasted that the most intense period of Israeli military violence may be drawing to a close, but allowed only for negotiations to continue for prisoner swaps. These are plain lies. Israeli forces have started fresh operations in northern Gaza which has been turned into a 'grave yard'. UN is repeatedly issuing warning that the situation in Gaza is unbearable and it is already a human catastrophe by any standard. 'In truth they have opened the door to hell'. For the Gazans 'The Night Won't End'.

Beyond the nine-month-long genocide that Israel has wrought on Gaza, Netanyahu is now pushing towards full-scale war with Lebanon—which could drag Syria, Iran, and the entire region into the conflict. In other words America will have to depend on Israel to manage Mid-East conflict.

For months, the Israeli government has been dragging its feet and creating impossible conditions during ceasefire negotiations, though HAMAS is being targeted for putting 'impossible conditions.' Militants are on the defensive, no doubt, but Israeli military will not be able to wipe out HAMAS completely anytime soon.

Now that the Israeli government has engineered a total humanitarian crisis in Gaza, it can continue its genocide by attrition, so long as there is no permanent ceasefire deal. Meanwhile, fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, which is strongest in southern Lebanon, has expanded in recent weeks.

Netanyahu is pushing to expand Israel's bombing of Lebanon into a second front of the war, one which could destabilise the entire region. Since October, the Israeli military has been regularly bombing southern Lebanon, including chemical attacks using illegal white phosphorus. But a full-scale war would likely drag in Syria and Iran—and have devastating consequences in Lebanon and beyond.

Netanyahu's fragile coalition government depends on support from ultra-right-wing parties, and will fall apart whenever the fighting stops. Extremist Israeli politicians Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich have threatened to quit if any ceasefire deal is reached, and their exit would

collapse the coalition. If Netanyahu's government collapses, he's not only facing an end to his time as prime minister—but also a corruption trial which could well end up with him behind bars.

When the US sends billions to Israel to buy weapons, those weapons are purchased from US firms. So the US government sends billions in tax dollars to Israel, who sends billions back to the US military industrial complex, to Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and others. Expanding the war means expanding Israeli purchases of US arms.

Israel's entire military strategy, and its ability to continue the genocide, depends on a steady flow of US weapons—so Netanyahu is doing everything he can to keep them coming. Expanding into another front of the war, even if Biden is vocally opposed to this plan, is one way he can force Biden's hand.

For one thing US weapons manufacturers play a massive role in the US economy, with an equivalent amount of influence on the US government, particularly in terms of defence and foreign policy. Following a \$14 billion weapons deal between

Israel and the US in April, they're just as happy to keep profiting off their role in arming a genocide.

Biden's pause on weapons shipments to Israel in May was the first real indication that he could stand up to these pressures and stop funding a genocide that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians. But ultimately Biden cannot do much other than playing with the gallery because his election managers need money and the merchants of death are always ready to oblige the Biden brigade.

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## COMMENT

# Climate Change and Extreme Heat

WITH EXTREME HEAT GRIPPING much of the Northern Hemisphere, authorities and public health experts across the world have issued heat warnings to help keep people safe. Parts of China, India, the Middle East, southern Europe and the United States are bracing for the possibility of new record highs.

Heat affects health in several ways. Heat exhaustion, which can include dizziness, headaches, shaking and thirst, can affect anyone, and is not usually serious, providing the person cools down within 30 minutes.

The more serious version is heat-stroke, when the body's core temperature goes above 40.6 degrees Celsius (105 degrees Fahrenheit). It is a medical emergency and can lead to long-term organ damage and death. Symptoms include rapid breathing, confusion or seizures, and nausea.

As climate change continues to drive temperatures upward in coming years, the danger of humidity is also expected to rise. Warmer air can hold more moisture. And more moisture in the air makes it harder for people to sweat to cool down.

Some people are more vulnerable, including young babies and older people, as well as people who must stay active or are more exposed, such as homeless people and migrant workers.

Many countries do not record heat as a specific cause of death, which means they do not have statistics to gauge this risk on communities. Even in America heat-wave puts homeless at risk. There were 23,000 heat-related deaths across America in 2023.

A 2021 study, opens new tab in The Lancet estimated that just under a half-million deaths can be attributed to excess heat every year—a conservative count that lacks data from many low-income countries.

Many in Europe fear a repeat of the 2022 summer, during which heat-waves killed an estimated 61,000 people, scientists said.

Warmer temperatures encourage the growth of bacteria and algae. So heat-waves can raise the risk of water being contaminated with diseases like cholera, or of water bodies becoming choked with toxic algae.

Heat can also damage crops,

adding to concerns about food security, particularly in the global South.

Starting from 2030, experts expect that global death tolls will increase by 250,000 per year as a result of four climate-related health risks: heat stress, malnutrition associated with food insecurity, malaria, and diarrhoea, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Wildfires fuelled by dried-out trees or shrubs can lead to dangerous levels of air pollution, which can cause lung inflammation and tissue damage. Both extreme heat as well as exposure to wildfire smoke could also be linked with low birth-weight and premature births. Heat stress can also contribute to poorer mental health.

Experts say more deaths occur earlier in the summer when people's bodies have not had a chance to acclimatise to the season. Location matters, too; people are at higher risk in places where they are not used to such heat, including parts of Europe.

As outdoor work becomes dangerous amid high temperatures, some countries and communities have shuttered schools or forced a shortening of daytime work hours for businesses.

Public health agencies from In-

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dia to the United States have issued advice on keeping cool, including avoiding exertion where possible and staying hydrated. Workers should think about having more breaks and changing their clothing too, scientists said. But workers in third world

countries work in Dickensonian conditions—thinking about changing clothes is at worst a luxury for them.

Heatstroke is a medical emergency and requires immediate professional attention. □□□

*[Contributed by a Correspondent]*

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#### NOTE

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## Tragedy of Haj Pilgrimage

*Bharat Dogra writes:*

**M**ORE THAN 1300 HAJ PILGRIMS died last month. They were exposed to scorching heat and other harsh conditions. The Saudi authorities have stated that nearly 80 percent of these deaths affected those pilgrims who did not have the necessary permits, and hence the essential arrangements had not been made for them. Hence most of the blame for these deaths has been placed on illegal tour operators. Nevertheless, those organising the pilgrimage should have been aware of the likely excess numbers and should not have planned for them too.

The tragedy this year should not be seen as an isolated event as several serious accidents have claimed the lives or caused serious harm to thousands of pilgrims in recent years. Several experts have pointed out that most of these lives could have been saved by better management on the part of the authorities in Saudi Arabia. This was pointed out particularly at the time of two serious mishaps and stampedes in 2015 in which nearly 2500 pilgrims are reported to have perished.

According to an article titled 'Saudi Stampede' by John Cherian published in Frontline dated 30th October, 2015 "Every year, two million people from more than 180 countries make the pilgrimage. Many governments in the region have been complaining that the Saudis are inefficient in their handling of this

huge tide of pilgrims, a large number of whom are from Iran, India, Pakistan and Indonesia, countries with the largest Muslim populations. Most of the pilgrims are not conversant in Arabic, while the Saudi police and security personnel speak only Arabic. In 1990, 1,500 pilgrims died in a stampede inside a tunnel linking Mecca and Medina. In 2006, a stampede on a bridge that was identified as a dangerous choke point killed more than 360 people. But the stampede on September 24 this year, according to reports, was by far the worst experienced during the Haj season..... The stampede occurred on the narrow streets of Mina, which is around five kilometres from Mecca. Previous accidents also occurred around this stretch. Instead of widening the road, the Saudi authorities allotted land to real estate developers, and luxury hotels were developed in the area, including the world's largest hotel, where wealthy pilgrims can enjoy a view of Mecca during their stay."

Madawi at Rasheed, a Saudi anthropologist at the London School of Economics, told The New York Times that members of the Saudi royal family have profited handsomely from real estate development around the two holy cities. "The renovation and expansion are done under the pretext of creating more space for Muslim pilgrims, but it masks land grabs and vast amounts

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of money being made by the princes and by other Saudis," she said. "There is no accountability."

Hasan Saroor In an article titled "Bitter Harvest from Mina" published in the Hindu dated 30th September 2015 says "...the Saudis, for all the money spent on organising the biggest show on earth, have not been great managers. Ask anyone who has been on a Haj- Sunni or Shia- and they will have stories about poor crowd management, inadequate facilities, and police "high-handedness". The Saudi government says it has spent more than \$ 100 billion to improve facilities but its logistics management on the ground remains inadequate- and frequently fails to rise to the challenge of dealing with the rising number of pilgrims, which this year exceeded two million."

M Riaz Hasan, Centreville (VA), USA wrote in the Statesman (26th September 2015), "I am aware of the immense task of ensuring the safety of over 2 million pilgrims every year that the Saudi authorities face. But I regret to say that as a pilgrim I hardly saw any safety measures around me on either occasion. Whenever I looked around I saw a solid mass of humanity around me. There were no volunteers, no police and no medical facilities within my sight. Also, there are no emergency access roads for emergency services to reach a pilgrim or a group of pilgrims in distress." □□□

HUMRA QURAISHI'S COLUMN

## NCERT Books

*Humra Quraishi*

**D**ON'T KNOW WHETHER to cry or scream or simply curl up in sorrow, after grasping facts to the grim fact that several deletions have been made in the NCERT published class 12 Political Science text books. Not just vital portions deleted which carried details to the Babri Masjid demolition cum destruction on 6 December 1992, but even references to the Rath Yatra led by L K Advani and the Kar Sevaks—the destroyers of the Babri Masjid, or any of the details to the Gujarat Riots of 2002. Not to overlook the fact that the very word Masjid been dropped from Babri Masjid! Instead, come up another term for it- Three Domed Structure!

Even history not spared! Even the crucial term—Masjid—replaced! History and historical facts are now getting camouflaged or covered-up or quite simply white washed! This is a very serious matter and should be a matter of great concern to the citizens of the country.

On earlier occasions too, RSS-affiliated Shiksha Sanskriti Utthan Nyas, headed by Dina Nath Batra, had sent a list of recommendations to the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) demanding a host of changes in its textbooks. Batra asked the NCERT to remove English, Urdu, and Arabic words, a poem by the revolutionary poet Pash and a couplet by Mirza Ghalib, the thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore, extracts

from painter MF Husain's autobiography... Batra also wanted references to the Mughal emperors as "benevolent", the BJP as a "Hindu" party, the National Conference as "secular", an apology tendered by former prime minister Manmohan Singh over the 1984 riots, and a sentence that "nearly 2,000 Muslims were killed in Gujarat in 2002" to be all removed! News reports also had stated that Nyas objected to the facts that the Class 11 political science textbook mentions the "massive majority of Congress in 1984" but "does not present the 1977 election details", the Class 12 political science textbook "terms National Conference of J&K a secular organisation", and the Class 10 English textbook "places nationalism against other ideals" as "an attempt has been made to show a rift between nationality and humanity by citing thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore". It also wanted that the Hindi textbooks must mention that the medieval Sufi mystic Amir Khusrau "increased the rift between Hindus and Muslims."

Nyas had on earlier occasions demanded the removal of AK Ramanujan's essay 'Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation' from the under-graduate syllabus of the University of Delhi and went to court demanding that Wendy Doniger's *The Hindus* not be sold in India. Their demands were fulfilled! Ramanujan's essay was removed from DU's reading list, and Penguin India, the publisher of Doniger's book, pulled it from circulation.

Relevant to mention here that in 2014, government schools in Gujarat

were given six textbooks written by Batra as "supplementary literature" that claimed cars were invented in ancient India and told children to draw an 'enlarged nation' to include countries including Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

Not to overlook the distortion of the very meaning of certain words like 'Roza' (Muslims' observe Roza or fast during the month of Ramzan) published in text books taught in Gujarat schools. And in the summer of 2017, the ICSE board's class VI text book circulated in schools across India 'blamed' mosques and Azaan for causing noise pollution! A chapter on noise pollution, in the book published by Selina Publishers, focused on the sources that cause noise pollution. Besides images of trains, cars, planes as the usual sources of noise pollution, there was also an image of a man shutting his ears in frustration right in front of a mosque! Quite obviously relaying that the azaan is a source of noise pollution!

### TARGETING MUSLIMS

Where are we heading! Muslims are getting targeted with one alibi after another. Even Muslim owned shop or shops can be targeted by the political mafia under any of the pretexts. Recently, Right-Wing goons targeted Muslim owned shops in Uttarakhand. And last week a Muslim's textile shop was looted by Hindutva goons in Himachal Pradesh's Nahan...loot took place in full public view. Also, lynching of Muslims continues! Where we heading!

And in the midst of this, Sitamarhi Member of Parliament, Devesh Chandra Thakur's highly provocative and communal statement. That he won't work for Yadavs and Muslims as they didn't vote for him! And he seems to be getting away after voicing this bitter-vicious-communal statement. □□

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## CHANGING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

## The Post-1989 Radical Left in Europe

*Marcello Musto*

**T**HE FALL OF THE BERLIN Wall in 1989 brought about a profound change in the European political landscape. The structural political upheavals, together with major economic transformations, set in train a process of capitalist restoration that had severe social repercussions on a global scale. In Europe, anti-capitalist forces found their influence being irresistibly squeezed: it became more and more difficult for them to organise and orientate social struggles, and ideologically the Left as a whole lost the hegemonic positions it had won after 1968 in key areas of many national cultures.

This reverse was also apparent at an electoral level. From the 1980s on, the parties united around the idea of Eurocommunism, as well as those still strongly tied to Moscow, suffered a sharp decline in support, which turned into a veritable crash after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

A phase of reconstruction then began, in which new political formations often emerged through the regrouping of anti-capitalist elements still in existence. This enabled the traditional forces of the Left to open up to the ecological, feminist and peace movements that had developed in the previous decades. Izquierda Unida in Spain, created in 1986, was the pioneer in this respect. Similar initiatives took shape in Italy and Greece, in 1991, when the Communist Refoundation Party and Synaspismos came into being. In other countries, there were attempts (some only cosmetic) to renew the parties that had existed before the fall of the Berlin Wall, like with the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS),

in Germany, that took over from the Socialist Unity Party that had ruled the GDR since 1949.

These new parties, like others that had not changed their name, managed to retain a political presence on their respective national stages. Together with the social movements and progressive trade-union forces, they contributed to the heightened resistance against neoliberal policies after 1993, when the Maastricht Treaty came into effect and set rigid monetarist parameters for new member-states joining the European Union. In 1994 a European United Left group was formed in the European Parliament.

In the mid-1990s, buoyed up by strikes and large demonstrations against their respective governments (Berlusconi in Italy, Juppé in France, González and Aznar in Spain), some forces of the radical Left even achieved modest electoral breakthroughs. Izquierda Unida scored 13.4% in the European elections in 1994; the Communist Refoundation Party 8.5% in the national elections of 1996; and the French Communist Party almost 10% in the parliamentary elections of 1997.

As the new century dawned, a huge, politically heterogeneous movement of struggle against neoliberal globalisation spread to every corner of the globe. Mass protests at the summits of the G8 and the IMF, together with the birth of the World Social Forum, in Brazil in 2001, encouraged broader discussion of alternatives to the dominant policies.

Meanwhile, with the rise of Tony Blair in the UK, the way was open for a profound shift in the ideology and programme of the Socialist

International. Blair's 'Third Way' – in fact, supine acceptance of the neoliberal mantra masked by vacuous exaltation of 'the new' – was supported in varying degrees and forms by many European governments.

Many countries of southern Europe saw the whittling down of what remained of the welfare state, attacks on the pension system, another massive round of privatisation, the commodification of education, drastic cuts in the funding of research and development, and a lack of effective industrial policies. Similar choices operated in Eastern Europe.

As regards economic policy, it is hard to detect anything more than minimal differences between these social-democratic governments and conservative regimes in power at the time. Indeed, in many cases the social-democratic or centre-left administrations were more efficient in carrying through the neoliberal project, since the trade unions found the government actions more acceptable because of an old illusory belief that they were 'friendly' to the labour movement. Foreign-policy orientations involved a similar discontinuity with the past (see the NATO bombing in Kosovo, the Iraq war, and the intervention in Afghanistan).

The Socialist parties often shunted the ecological question into declarations of principle, but almost never translated these into effective legislation to solve the major problems facing the environment. This was helped by the moderate turn on the part of most Green parties, which, in choosing to ally indiscriminately with parties of the Right or Left, mutated into 'post-ideological' formations and gave up the battle against the existing mode of production.

The shifts in European social democracy, involving uncritical acceptance of capitalism and all the prin-

ciples of neoliberalism, demonstrated that the events of 1989 had shaken not only the Communist camp but all the progressive forces. For these abandoned any reforming ambition and no longer espoused the kind of state intervention in the economy that had been their main distinguishing feature after World War II.

Despite these profound changes, many parties of the European radical Left allied themselves with social-democratic forces. The neoliberal wind

that blew unopposed, together with the absence of large social movements capable of shaping government actions in a socialist direction, evidently represented a negative constellation for radical left-wing parties. The anti-capitalist Left did not succeed in extracting any significant social gains that ran counter to the basic economic guidelines; all they could achieve was an occasional feeble palliative. Most often, they had to swallow a bitter pill and vote for

measures against which they had earlier promised the most intransigent opposition. Yet the results at the ballot box were disastrous everywhere. In the presidential elections of 2007, the French Communists obtained less than 2% of the vote, and the next year Izquierda Unida hit rock bottom with a score of 3.8%. In Italy, for the first time in the history of the Republic, the Communists were shut out of parliament, reaching a dismal total of 3.1%. □□□

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INDIRA GANDHI AND NARENDRA MODI

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## Emergency, Authoritarianism and Neo-Fascism

*P J James*

**T**HE INTERNAL EMERGENCY proposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi following the Allahabad High Court verdict against her was agreed upon by the then President of India with effect from 25 June 1975 which was ratified by the Cabinet and the Parliament during July-August 1975. Till its withdrawal on 21 March 1977, Indira together with her 'coterie' ruled by decree, converting India into a police state imposing inhuman repression including widespread "encounter deaths" and imprisonment of communist revolutionaries, putting political opponents and journalists in jail, suspending civil and fundamental rights, and imposing censorship on media. Obviously, Emergency declaration was Indira Gandhi's last resort to continue exercising full executive powers as Prime Minister. Today when people remember the 49th anniversary of Emergency declaration, all democratic forces have to come forward resolutely condemning it.

However, unlike today's Hindutva fascism, during Emergency, no effort was there to fundamentally alter the basic character and structure of the Constitution and its democratic pro-

visions including those pertaining to citizenship, fundamental rights, caste-based reservation or transforming it into a majoritarian theocratic one. The Constitutional provisions were suspended, or kept in abeyance but not annulled. It was in view of the loosening grip of the Indira regime over the vast Indian society and on account of the lack of popular and societal support, that the Emergency of almost two years was withdrawn on March 21, 1977, followed by declaration of General Election leading to the rout of the ruling Congress.

Revealingly, since his ascendance to power at the Centre, Modi has been very particular to vehemently attack Emergency on all occasions. For instance, in a 2015 speech, he interpreted Emergency as "an attempt at concentrating power in the hands of one family". On 25 June 2017, Modi characterised it as "dark period" when country became a "virtual prison". On 26 June 2018, on the 43rd anniversary of imposition of Emergency, Modi said: "Emergency is a black spot on the golden history of the nation. Observing black day today is not just to criticise the Congress for its sin of imposing Emergency but also to create an aware-

ness for protection of Constitution and democracy." On 25 June 2021 he tweeted: "Dark Days of Emergency can never be forgotten. The period from 1975 to 1977 witnessed a systematic destruction of institutions."

Again, addressing the 102nd episode of the monthly radio show Mann Ki Baat on June 18, 2023, on the eve of his US visit, Modi said: "India is the mother of democracy. We consider our democratic ideals as paramount, we consider our Constitution as Supreme... therefore, we can never forget June the 25th. This is the very day when Emergency was imposed on our country. It was a dark period in the history of India. Lakhs of people opposed the emergency with full might. Many books have been written on these atrocities; the punishment meted out by the police and administration. The supporters of democracy were tortured so much during that time that even today, their mind shudders." And, after facing a severe blow in the 18th Lok Sabha Election and losing majority for BJP, on 24 June 2024, addressing the media at the Parliament House complex on the first day of the first session of the 18th Lok Sabha, he further described Emergency as a "black spot" on India's democracy when Constitution was discarded.

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As is obvious, this consistent and no holds barred rhetoric against Emergency coupled with sermon on democracy and Constitution on the part of Modi and the entire RSS/BJP Parivar is a ploy cunningly used by them to consolidate their position in the madding pace towards the establishment of a fascist Hindu theocratic State despite facing reversals in the latest parliamentary election. As everybody knows, among other things, when India was adopting its Constitution, the RSS had no qualm in proposing Manusmriti, according to which Dalits and Women are subhuman, as India's Constitution. Therefore, it is the solemn task of all democratic forces to expose this diversionary tactic used by RSS/BJP forces to whitewash the corporate-fascist offensives on broad masses of working and oppressed people and the horrors already committed on minorities, especially targeting the more than 20 crore Muslims in India. At the same time, it is also the task on the part of all democratic forces to clearly state that Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi prompted by her desire to hold on to power was not fascism, since Indira's authoritarian move conspicuously lacked the essential material and ideological prerequisites of fascism or neo-fascism.

For, while Emergency has its roots in the global and Indian transformations of the 1970s, being devoid of an ideological and political-economic backing, Indira had to withdraw her short-lived authoritarian regime. Hence equating today's still-continuing Hindutva fascist regime with Emergency or stamping it with such labels as "undeclared Emergency" is merely academic and apolitical. Unlike Emergency, Hindutva fascism, though apparently weakened at the parliamentary level through setbacks in election, still has its firm hold over state power and street power.

With its unholy nexus with the most corrupt corporate capital and roots in the entire administrative institutions and through a whole set of extra-parliamentary means, corporate-saffron fascism is still having its stranglehold over India's polity, economy, culture, education, science research and even in history-writing.

At the same time, when one looks back, it was the Emergency that enabled RSS' sudden and dramatic shoot-up from relative obscurity to the political lime-light in the 1970s, in consonance with the dictum that fascists are very adept in transforming crises into opportunities. Being banned three times, it was its so-called 'laudable action' during the Emergency that created the favourable situation for RSS to enter into mainstream politics from its relative obscurity till then. In that sense, while Emergency was a "dark period" for the people, the same was a godsend opportunity for RSS. For taking advantage of the ideological-political weakness of parliamentary Indian Left including both CPI and CPI(M), who had a 'soft' approach towards Emergency on the one hand, and the anarchic and sectarian approach of the then non-parliamentary Left, it was very convenient for the far-right and pro-US RSS to carry on its anti-Emergency campaign with the support of Western media.

Further, RSS' repeated denunciation of Emergency and boasting of the sacrifices on its part are mainly intended for public consumption and hoodwinking the people. During Emergency, the leaders of both RSS and Jan Sangh were grovelling before the Congress to win reprieves from jail terms and have the ban lifted on their organisation. As noted by the renowned writer, AG Noorani, the RSS Chief Balasaheb Deoras, based on his correspondence with Indira Gandhi, had convinced RSS cadres to sign a

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standard form prepared by Indira regime that included the promise: "I shall not indulge in any activities which are prejudicial to the present emergency." Following this, large number of RSS cadres came out of jails submitting mercy petitions (mafinamas). This unholy relation with RSS became more explicit after Indira's return to power in 1980 and her tilt towards US, seeking a huge Extended Fund Facility loan based on stringent far-right, market-friendly conditionalities from IMF, the neo-colonial-neocolonial arm of US.

It was during this period that RSS transformed Jan Sangh into BJP and floated it as its political tool, effectively taking advantage of the facilitating role of Congress' 'soft Hindutva' that the latter started openly pursuing since Indira's comeback to power in 1980. The post-Emergency period unravels the long drawn-out, steady and systematic trajectory of RSS leading the Sangh Parivar with BJP as its political tool along with hundreds of secret and open organisations thereby widening and deepening its tentacles across

space and time. As such, with its far-right neoliberal economic orientation and unwavering servility to US that leads the Western imperialist camp; today RSS has grown into the largest fascist organisation in the world having many overseas saffron extensions and affiliates with immense corporate-backing.

To be precise, the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and 'Liberation of Ayodhya' campaign by Dharam Sansad that started immediately after assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, performance of shilanyas at the very site of Babri Masjid under the regime of Rajiv Gandhi, BJP's 1989 Palampur Resolution for Ram mandir, demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992, Vajpayee-led BJP regime in late 1990s, Gujarat Pogrom in 2002, and ascendancy of Modi.1 and Modi.2 respectively in 2014 and 2019 and again a third term though without a majority mark for BJP in 2024, are decisive landmarks towards the goal of a majoritarian Hindu Rashtra. And as part of this, as reflected in Modi's election campaign, stigmatisation of Muslims and spreading hatred towards them are inherent components of this Hindutva majoritarian consolidation.

In spite of the electoral reverses, as manifested in the recent lynching

of three Muslim youth in Chhattisgarh, assaults and street attacks by Hindutva goons, including the 'prairie fire' in Manipur are continuing without any let up. Right from the start of Modi's first term in 2014, Muslims have been systematically targeted according to the diktats of 'Bunch of Thoughts' that described Muslims as Enemy No. 1. Even during his election campaign, keeping the Election Commission as an executive arm, Modi went for an unprecedented insult and humiliation calling Muslims as "infiltrators" and threat to Hindus while the process of categorising them as second class citizens and thereby disenfranchising them through CAA, etc., are still in vogue in fascist circles. No ruling regime in India's history, including the British even after the First War of Indian Independence, has ever surpassed the criminality unleashed on Muslims by the BJP governments, both at the centre and states. Meanwhile, as the most corrupt corporate billionaires are left scot-free, targeting of liberal intellectuals and journalists and unleashing of investigative agencies against opposition leaders are still continuing.

When one discusses about the Emergency of half-a-century back, and while resolutely condemning it, one should also be cautious of the

depoliticising associated with equating Emergency with RSS fascism or even labelling the latter as "undeclared emergency"- a theme prevalent not only among intellectuals and liberals but also among a wide spectrum of self-professed Left today. This will lead to a diluted understanding of the pernicious and horrific designs of neo-fascism in India and a weakening of the resolute political interventions for challenging and overthrowing it. Modi's own consistent and repeated characterisation of Emergency as "dark period" is with the malicious intention of diverting people's attention from the horrific fascist menace that Indian people are confronting now. This diversionary tactic, backed by Godi media and a whole set of apologists of fascism is also part of fascist propaganda blitzkrieg to camouflage the origin, development and transformation of Hindutva fascism which is now in its madding pace towards the ultimate goal of establishing a Hindu Rashtra serving the interests of a tiny corporate-Brahmanic elite. Therefore, clarity on the concrete working of Indian fascism in the broader global neo-fascist context is indispensable on the part of all anti-fascist democratic forces today. □□□

[P J James is General Secretary, CPI-ML Red Star]

## FIVE HEROINES

### "The Group": the 40th Annual Exhibition

*Atanu Basu*

**A**BOUT 41 YEARS AGO, IN one November winter, "the five heroines of Art" held their first ever exhibition, signaling the birth of "The Group". Their 40th exhibition was recently held in the Academy of Fine Arts. The 40th exhibition was held after all the five of those "heroines", namely Mira Mukhopadhyay, Karuna Saha,

Shanu Lahiri, Santosh Rohathgi Moitra, and the new-entrant (in 1983), Shyamashree Basu, were no longer with us.

As the last member of the group, Shyamashree Basu was active in her 85 years of life. In her last days, canvas and brush and pallet was her perhaps the only companion. Not only in painting, this group ex-

celled in many other forms and created and left behind many a work that would pass the test of ruthless time. This exhibition aptly documented the creative thought, feminine urge of expression that made the visit to the exhibition a real memorable one. Shyamashree Basu's two beautiful works were showcased in this exhibition; there she had demonstrated her forte—that is, her passion for abstract art. After finishing her Art school course in the sixties, Shyamashree Basu completed an Art appreciation course



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conducted by Calcutta University. In 1960-61, people like Arun Basu, Shyamal Dutta Roy and Sanat Kar founded the SAC group and Shyamasree joined them. Later on, she discontinued her association with this group; she left the said group as she wanted to hold her solo exhibition. She took part in many exhibitions throughout the country. While travelling in Darjeeling to Kashmir and Kullu-Manali, she relentlessly sketched. Her Europe trip also imparted a new dimension in her thought process, grasping many aspects while she visited many exhibitions there, not only painting, but other art forms, for example, art forms like sculpture.

Till 1962, her paintings displayed an atmosphere of realism, the form she started breaking in course of time. This breaking of form in her work gradually led to abstraction. One increasingly finds in her paintings greater use of brushing, use of bright colours, new stylisation.

This exhibition showcased 11 painters and 3 sculptors. Most probably to catch a tuff deadline, some of the artists might have been racing against their time as extreme haste was quite visible in some of the exhibits. This trend had reduced the

quality of some of the exhibits, which would have appealed to many viewers had this haste been overcome.

Special mention must be made about the works of Alakananda Sen Gupta, Seema Ghosh Bhattacharyay, Banasree Khan, Madhusree Muchhal, Tamalika Das Gupta and Nilima Goel—they did an excellent job. Mahua Bhatteerjee's work centred around Mythology, the ideas taken from epics are more like an illustration; she might have to go an extra mile or two and must muster the art of using the forms like space, tonal variation, to name a few.

Seema Ghosh Bhattercharyay used acid-free paper to present her worked named "An Eternity III", which was very attractive. While her painting quality was commendable, but here and there one would encounter glimpses of graphic quality as well. "Big Vase with Handle" must be her principal object; its treatment and style attains a high standard.

Alakananda Sengupta's media was coloured terracotta and ceramics. Her work, "I stand for Palestinians", a very contemporary theme, deserves a special mention, as it captured the mood of the present day anguish that the humankind was going through.

Tamalika Das Gupta's canvas in mixed media are very attractive, particularly the piece, "Peace" is distinguished for its depth, which was presented in a simple fashion. Banasree Khan's bronze sculptures are uniformly charming; a special mention must be made for her work, "Steps Together II", which was very attractive. Rina Mustafi's prowess is best reflected in her stormy brushing—but one would be a little disappointed that some of her old self appears to be missing a bit. Minati Nath and Sudakshina Das did a good job.

In this exhibition, the sculptures of Nilima Goel are all uniformly elegant; particular mention must be made for her work, "Folk Memorial". This piece is modelled in an ancient sculpture.

Madhusree Muchhel showcased her works on oil on canvas; a special mention must go to the piece named "Passion", which was extremely stimulating. Santwana Dutta, Maitreyee Chatterjee and Anjali Sengupta also presented their work.

Last, but not the least, the viewers were delighted to see a two dimensional relief work done by none other than Shyamasree Basu.

□□□

## BENGAL POLL RESULTS

### Myth or Freebies—What Worked?

*Amartya Banerjee*

**I**T SEEMS UNBELIEVABLE that despite being in power for more than a decade now, the establishment of Trinamool Congress in the state of West Bengal seems unrelenting as ever, and the charisma of Ms Mamata Banerjee is growing equally unchecked, keeping aside all the controversies emerging at regular intervals around her. The two primary controversies expected to affect the party's performance in

this year's Lok Sabha elections, were the SSC recruitment scam and the Sandeshkhali incident where the mass-accusation of exploitation of women came up just before the polls and that has even caused quite a stir at the national capital, thanks to the enthusiasm of the ruling BJP and their representatives at the centre. However, none of the issues seemed to influence the Bengal voters by the least, and the TMC safely

secured 29 out of 42 Lok Sabha seats of the state. One can argue that Mamata Banerjee or better known as 'Didi' (meaning, sister) for everyone has gradually grown into a cult-like figure, whom the people will trust despite her party's numerous faults and failures. Further the argument goes, that a larger section of the population believes ardently in the 'myth' of her being the perfect example of the hallmark of honesty till today, whereas a number of her party-members have gone rogue on their own and got involved in multiple schemes of corruption.

However, as far as the logical

interpretation goes, the aforementioned political events or allegations, namely the SSC recruitment scam or the Sandeshkhali incident were both destined to fail themselves, and that's what has happened quite predictably during the elections. First of all, a learned justice from the Calcutta High Court, while passing the judgment on the SSC recruitment controversy, invalidated the recruitment of the entire panel for the year concerned, even in sheer absence of any concrete evidence that may justify an order of this magnitude. He further treated all the persons recruited by the same panel with equal contempt, directing them to return all their earnings over these years to the government with accrued interest! It is to be noted that the SSC itself submitted a list of 5000 candidates, whose recruitments they have found to be illegal and thus rested the matter with the judiciary at that juncture. The verdict of the court seemed to violate the very first principle of modern law, where the objective of a judicial system is to ensure that no matter what, the innocent should never be at the receiving end of corrective justice, even if that means letting go of a criminal on the basis of doubtful evidence. The way the learned justice cancelled the entire panel,

without an iota of concrete evidence and also the fact, that the previous person who was hearing the matter during his judicial tenure, Justice Abhijit Ganguly resigned very recently from his chair and joined the BJP camp – it all raised serious questions about the transparency and independence of the judicial process. Also in a most unprecedented manner, Mr Suvendu Adhikary (BJP), leader of the opposition in the state assembly, quite accurately commented on the nature of the judgement that was to come for the SSC case, at least 48 hours before the actual verdict was announced. All these events entirely jeopardised the social fabric surrounding the case, and people's emotion predictably shifted towards the 'honest' appointees, whose appointments got cancelled for this 'politically motivated' judgment triggered by the BJP at the centre.

*[As per understanding, this will surely cause an unprecedented negative effect over the nature of judicial activities in future where people will have the chance to cry foul and label the judgements as 'political' with much ease and impunity than before.]*

On the other hand, the incident at Sandeshkhali suffered a similar fate when the ruling TMC could uncover more than a few documentary evidences, which showed a section of women, who were local residents, agreeing to voice dissent and falsely implicate the local Trinamool leadership with serious allegations of sexual exploitation – to help the BJP synthesise large-scale political unrest around it. Thanks to the relentless campaigns raged by many on social media platforms in order to bust the hegemony of fake news around the world today – every false information that's peddled by some mainstream political organisation, once exposed in some manner, it

starts to impact the party's social standings as soon as the exposure happens. That a portion of the Sandeshkhali women took bribes to falsely implicate the TMC in that region, miserably took away all the political advantage from the opposition. This also provided the ruling TMC a clear opportunity to label themselves as the victims of false narratives and thus reap from the obvious political implications that followed.

Last but not the least, came the issue of dole-politics, or the 'freebies' controversy, in which the entire opposition force in Bengal went on to attack the government for distributing free money under different welfare schemes presently established in the state. It is to be noted that apart from very few, the welfare schemes functioning presently in Bengal are provided in exchange of some or the other token contributions/commitments on the part of the beneficiaries in real terms. Like for earning the 'Kanyashri' scholarship one needs to show that the girl child concerned is pursuing education up to a certain standard. Corruption exists at every level of the society and it will be easy to point out that there remains the reason to establish further auditory procedures on the part of the government to precisely validate each and every beneficiary's honesty - but, while attacking the government, if suddenly the opposition goes out in a frenzy and starts name-calling the entire beneficiary population as 'thieves' or 'beggars' in public, in simple psychology their votes will be lost forever and that's precisely what has happened conclusively in this election.

Most unfortunately, not only the BJP but also a section of the Left supporters in Bengal resorted to this name-calling of the beneficiaries over social media platforms, exposing their pseudo-feudalistic mindsets - thus

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ruining every opportunity that remained for the ideology to survive in the state. The Left should have remembered the fundamental teachings of John Maynard Keynes or more recently that of Prof Amartya Sen and Abhijit Banerjee, who repeatedly advocated for giving more money to the hands of the poor in order to envision a cyclic reversal of the economy, that's already spiraling out of control towards depression. They could have at least remembered the fact, that even the MNREGA scheme, that was first proposed by Sharad Pawar in the '80s and later popularised by the UPA I government under the leadership of Dr Manmohan Singh, generated little or no economic benefits in terms of GDP numbers, but to combat poverty and to create a stable economic state for the general population—the scheme's effectiveness remains even today unchallenged.

It's a known fact through numbers, that the economic situation under the present BJP government

went in a free-fall since well before the pandemic and the latter only provided a credible excuse to the government to come clean, putting all the blame on the virus and situation that followed. At that time only, economists like Abhijit Banerjee suggested in unambiguous terms, "the government needs to disburse more money to the poor in the short run" and "spending is the easiest way to revive the economy", highlighting the immediate importance of 'Nyaya' scheme or proposals like 'Laxmi'r Bhandar' for the survival of the people. Indeed the opposition in Bengal interpreted these very schemes as 'doles' in the most unrealistic manner possible, thus distancing themselves from the beneficiary population. The reason for the opposition's debacle in West Bengal therefore lies solely on them, and as the results clearly highlight—unchecked pride was not at all taken lightly by the voter population, let alone they digested the insults from anybody lecturing from above. □□□

#### 'BOMBARD THE HEADQUARTERS'

## Evicting Hawkers? Not a Chance!

*Anindya Bhattacharya*

**S**HORTLY AFTER THE DECLARATION of the Lok Sabha elections, WB Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee convened a high-level meeting at Nabanna. While that meeting saw her express dissatisfaction over some matters, in the meeting that followed on the 24th of June, the CM assumed the very form of fury—fury which spared none, from her party, her government, to the bureaucrats and the police. In an unforeseen change of tune, Banerjee seemed to take on the role and rhetoric of the Opposition, issuing rapid and unexpected orders.

While the opposition forces were still hesitating over their response to

this undoubtedly novel phenomenon, administrative actions as per instructions were rapidly underway. Demolition of illegal structures began in Howrah, and the TMC block president in Dabgram-Phulbari was arrested on charges of encroaching and running business on government-owned land. The BJP party office in Taratala and Trinamool party office in Manton were bulldozed for encroaching upon government-owned land and the road respectively. Besides, there has been a massive, state-wide police operation to clear roads and footpaths—temporary shops have been bulldozed, hawkers have been driven back to occupy

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one-third of the footpath through push backs and miking by the police. The bulldozer operation was entirely uncalled for, and in the face of rising protests from the hawkers' unions, the Chief Minister called another meeting at Nabanna on June 27 to review the situation. This time, representatives of the hawkers' unions were invited to attend the meeting.

In the June 27 meeting, the Chief Minister stated that she was against the two-facedness of the police, who would receive bribes from the hawkers and allow them a place, and yet now turned to evict them under government orders. Clarifying that eviction of hawkers was not her objective, she assured that the evicted hawkers would be allowed to relocate under legally approved conditions. Accepting the demands of the hawkers' unions, she gave all hawkers a month's time to move their hawking spaces to the legally sanctioned one-third of the footpath. To implement these conditions, she directed the formation of a high-level committee which would include representatives of hawker unions, with the decision to review the situation after a month.

Meanwhile, Godi media and a group of opponents have begun singing the gleefully false tunes of "Hawkers are being evicted" (evictions did, however, take place in a few loca-

tions) out into the news—claims which have been debunked by the hawkers themselves. Their attempts at rabble rousing by weaponising the isolated cases of bulldozing led by the overzealous police, have not really gained much momentum. It goes without saying that the incidences of bulldozing that took place—however few or isolated—are unfair and doubtlessly excessive. They ceased after the clarifications of the June 27 meeting.

In the last few days, over the chaos of hawker eviction, all the fight and fury that the Chief Minister had demonstrated about a series of problems in the state during the June 24 meeting has been somewhat overlooked. She did not just express concerns over encroached roads and footpaths. She spoke of sand mafia, coal mafia, land mafia, deficiency in municipal services, extortion by leaders and police, illegal construction, grabbing of government land, greed and money-making by public representatives, cut money, etc. The question that she raised was: why, after the numerous wellness schemes and public subsidies, after the general economic improvement, should the state carry the stain of corruption, mismanagement and administrative failure! The Chief Minister's concern, fervour and protest against her own government and party, may remind one—in spite of perspective and ideological differences—of the ineffable rallying cry of the Cultural Revolution of 1966: 'Aim the cannons for the headquarters'!

Needless to say, the Lok Sabha 2024 elections proved to be a tough fight for the TMC. Pinned by attacks from various fronts—accusations of corruption, ED-CBI raids, arrests or daily summons of leaders, constant (targeted) harassment or (legal) defeats in courts, the lawlessness of Sandeshkhali leaders, the shrill cries of the Godi media—considering all of this, the struggle to

win was considerably difficult. Nevertheless, they won beyond all hopes, riding on two factors— 1) flagship programmes like 'Lakshmi Bhandar', 'Swasthya Sathi', 'Kanyashree', 'Rupashree' etc which served the masses and their livelihoods, and 2) the overall economic health of the government was not too poor. According to NITI Aayog, the percentage of the population living below the multidimensional poverty index (2023) across the country is 11.28, while in West Bengal it is 8.6 percent. And despite all the narratives about development, it is 9.03 percent in Gujarat. That is, poverty is higher in Gujarat than in West Bengal. Additionally, West Bengal's GSDP (or state income) is growing and the debt-to-income ratio has reached a sustainable level, although it can't be said that the dangers are entirely over.

And yet, in spite of this fairly solid economic base and the effectiveness and outreach of public wellness schemes in the state, why does TMC's vote count in the urban areas look far from promising? This is the question that has been bothering TMC leadership. Firstly, a section of the upper-class, upper-class voters had planned to vote for BJP on religious grounds. That aside, secondly, another large section of the urban voters turned away from TMC this time, mainly because of rampant corruption and malfeasance of the leaders, and various failures of the municipalities. The deep and widespread corruption prevalent in the education sector, and the non-recruitment of primary teachers, in spite of adequate qualifications and even after prolonged protest demonstrations, has sparked outrage among the middle and lower-middle class.

The common people did not take well to the arrogance and bigotry of many local leaders. Along with this, a large section of the people are

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furious due to mismanagement of basic services: roads, electricity, drainage, and drinking water supply, and increasing promoter-perpetrated violence. The Trinamool leadership has belatedly realised that corruption and negligence in public service is causing significant damage to the party. And driven by that epiphany, the Chief Minister has fired cannons against her own party and government, which may perhaps be seen as justified at least to some extent. TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee has already declared—perform or perish.

Now, the question is—now that the disease is diagnosed, will there be a cure? There are two aspects to this question, or rather, two opposing views. The first is to perceive TMC as baser than a political group and Mamata Banerjee as lower than a human being. There is a staunch

group of self-proclaimed pundits, intellectuals and 'pure' gentlemen, who are blind believers of this perspective, and are constantly stricken at the prospect of Mamata Banerjee completing her three-term chief ministership. They are perpetually plagued by Mamata-phobia. This kind presently comprises an increasingly dwindling number of outliers.

But the second group is diversely constituted. There are some that worship Mamata; but putting them aside, there is another strong current of a similar purview, carried by those that consider Mamata Banerjee as a very strong and mature political leader. Some say that she has introduced a new political-economic current not only in West Bengal but across the country. Leaders like Bratya Basu compare Mamata Banerjee with the leadership of the

Latin American Left. Today, following the footsteps of 'Lakshmir Bhandar', schemes like 'Ladli Bahin' and 'Mahalakshmi Bhandar' have been introduced in other parts of the country. Of course, this does not mean that Mamata Banerjee is above criticism. Over the years, TMC too has remained silent on the issue of corruption, and would perhaps have remained so, had they not faced the brunt of it. Today, perhaps shaken by the blows they suffered during the elections, they are making some attempts to correct themselves.

Now it remains to be seen if the cannons fired by the Chief Minister from Nabanna can really destroy the lawlessness rampant in the state! Possibilities of both hope and despair remain. □□□

[Translated from original Bengali by Sohini Sengupta. Courtesy: Ekak Matra]

#### 'KASHMIR PANDIT FILES'

## 'Living Between the Enemy Lines'

**Syed Firdaus Ashraf**

[No Kashmiri Pandit returned after Article 370 repeal'. So said Sanjay Tickoo, president of the Kashmiri Pandits Sangharsh Samiti. Recently Sayed Firdaus Ashraf of Rediff.com spoke with him. Excerpts:]

□ **What we saw in the film Kashmir Files, how far were those incidents true?**

● I feel the film should have been named Kashmiri Pandit Files or Pandit Files. The film-maker had not taken (into account) the frustration of what has happened in Kashmir to the majority (Muslim) community.

Secondly, the writer or director had no interaction with any of Kashmiri Pandits who stayed back in the valley. We could have given a clear picture as to what happened to us at that time to him.

Had he done that Kashmir Files would have become a very big film for all those people who live or lived in conflict zone areas

like the North East or Punjab of the mid-1980s? Unfortunately, he did not do that because it would not have benefited the film-maker commercially.

I also disliked how Prime Minister Narendra Modi promoted this movie and other BJP MPs too promoted it.

And what did us as the Kashmiri Pandit community gets in return for Kashmir Files, a film that was made on us? Nothing. The film-maker earned Rs 400 crore from our miseries.

□ **In the movie there was a scene where Hindus were segregated from the Muslims and killed in the villages of Kashmir. Is it true?**

● No, this never happened. It dis-

turbed me and I issued a statement too then.

□ **Was your home ever marked with a cross in the 1990s to show that it is a Kashmiri Pandit, Hindu, home and it needs to be targeted like the Nazis did with Jews?**

● It was not marked like that. They pasted posters on the main door to leave the Valley if you work for the Indian security forces.

□ **Were these posters put on Kashmiri Muslim homes too, of those who were pro-India?**

● No, because at that time every Kashmiri Muslim wanted azaadi. And it is also true that 60 percent of Kashmiri Pandits' lives were saved by their neighbours who were Kashmiri Muslims.

□ **And what about signs like 'Indian dogs go back'? Was this not pasted on Kashmiri Pandit homes?**

● No, they were posted only for Indian security forces.

□ **What is your opinion about**

### **Prime Minister Modi's stance on Kashmiri Pandits?**

- I recall when he became prime minister in 2014, a year later there was a show on NDTV where I was asked what hopes I had with Modi and I replied, 'Big zero'. I said just wait and see.

I have personally met all the prime ministers from H D Deve Gowda to Narendra Modi to discuss the Kashmir Pandit issue and I realised that all prime ministers do only lip service. When I met Modi after he became PM I realised in my first meeting that he will also do only lip service for Kashmiri Pandits.

### □ **Who was the best prime minister for Kashmiri Pandits?**

- Dr Manmohan Singh.

### □ **Now you are sounding like a Congress supporter.**

- I am not a Congress supporter. I am saying so, why Dr Manmohan Singh? Because he started the return of Pandits with a rehabilitation package which the present regime claims they gave. The present regime has not done anything for Kashmiri Pandits.

The Modi government abro-

gated Article 370 which is a big step, isn't it? I as an Indian feel today that I can buy land in Kashmir.

### □ **Earlier too you could buy land on lease for 99 years in Kashmir. How many did that? And tell me, how many people have bought land in the Kashmir Valley?**

- 185 people bought land in J&K by 2023, according to government figures.

These are only businessmen who are buying. An ordinary Indian cannot buy land in the Valley because you cannot afford it as the land prices have shot up.

These businessmen will buy land for five-star hotels and this is not going to help me as a Kashmiri Pandit.

### □ **Will you not give credit to Mr Modi for the peace that has been restored in the Valley?**

- Tourists are coming in large numbers and there are no incidents of stone pelting and hartals.

There is no peace in the Kashmir Valley. It is the lull before a big storm. BIG STORM. Mark my words.

### □ **Why are you sounding so pessimistic, considering that you have been so optimistic about staying in the Kashmir Valley when almost all the Kashmiri Pandits left?**

- I have been here for the last 35 years and I have seen the militancy graph going up and down in my lifetime.

This time people are not coming on the roads it is because of the fear of the gun. And the fear of the gun is not restricted to security forces alone but fear of the Enforcement Directorate, National Investigation Agency, the local station house officer and that is the reason they are not coming on the roads to protest.

The public is keeping patience right now, but in future anything can happen.

### □ **You mean protests like what we saw after Burhan Wani's death?**

- It will be worse than that. Just check out after 2019 the Poonch-Rajouri belt and find out how many security forces have been martyred by non-State actors.

□□□

## MODI MODEL

# 'Nalanda': Net Zero Academia Campus

*Murari Kumar Jha*

RECENTLY PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi inaugurated the new campus of Nalanda University campus with a lot of fanfare. He gave a speech and peppered his X account with a series of posts. The media, without ever asking how much taxpayers' money was being spent on this uncertain project, began to flash images of the buildings, the artificial ponds, and the so-called net-zero campus. It is well known that all the construction costs are being borne by the Indian treasury.

In 2016, after the Modi government undermined Nalanda's autonomy, former Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo resigned as its chancellor. Soon after, international faculty began to leave or were kicked out. International collaboration was envisioned at the East Asian Summit to revive Nalanda University in 2007 and again in 2009. However, after 2016 contributions by the participating countries became "Net Zero". A parliamentary committee report found this out in 2019.

Narendra Modi's X post boasts that the Nalanda University campus is based on a "Net Zero Energy, Net Zero Emissions, Net Zero Water and Net Zero Waste model". Perhaps he should have added that it will also be a "Net Zero Academia" campus. The University has not had a regular vice-chancellor for more than a year. Most members of the Governing Board, the apex decision-making body, come from the government bureaucracy with a few from academia. It is chaired by an economist known more for making casual and insensitive statements such as "unemployment is not a problem".

Unsurprisingly, a majority of faculty profiles on the university's website

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are opaque. Very little is known about their degrees, publications, awards and recognitions. All these should be more open to public view and scrutiny. For the students who wish to pursue their Master's degree, such limited information does not help. Opacity, or lack of transparency, has been a hallmark of the Modi regime. It also reflects in the functioning of the University. The recruitment of faculty members on a temporary or contractual basis further discourages qualified faculty from joining the University. In 2014 and 2015, Nalanda had done remarkably well in attracting high-calibre scholars and faculty from across the globe. However, most of these "founding faculty" have already moved on because of a lack of transparency, breach of contract, and authoritarian approaches.

Since the Modi government appointed a Vice-Chancellor in 2017, students have turned away from the University. The University's flagship Master's programmes struggle to find adequate students. There are not many who are willing to enroll at the university and pay the fees. After all, a university is known for its academic reputation, built up over many years. The quality of its buildings and campus infrastructure is not all that makes a university.

Nalanda may still have a few good faculty members, but the academic environment as a whole appears to have deteriorated. This impression emerges from a website that conducts a university ranking survey. This website says Nalanda University ranks 19 out of 24 universities in Bihar. This means that 18 poorly funded universities in Bihar are ranked above Nalanda!

If the above survey is correct then it is an alarming situation. In such a scenario, it is not hard to see why Nalanda University may be a reluctant destination for regular full-time students. Nonetheless, it draws a good number of monks from countries like Bhutan, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos.

The University has started diploma and certificate courses, perhaps to increase the number of Indian students so that no one complains about low enrolment. However, as a research university, Nalanda was primarily meant to provide post-graduate education, conduct advanced research, and produce knowledge. By handing out diplomas and certificates, Nalanda has become indistinguishable from the predatory institutions that are mushrooming across the country. These institutions hand out a useless piece of paper as a certificate without adequately back-

ing it up with academic rigour, good training, and skills required by students for employment. Unfortunately, the ritual of handing out certificates is contributing to an increase in the number of unemployed youths. But many people in responsible positions peddle the idea that unemployment is not a problem.

Perhaps Nalanda University is a good example of the Modi Model. Things appear bright and shiny, but there is a dark truth lurking underneath. Asking why there has been no convocation of full-time regular students at Nalanda University ever since the first batch of students graduated in 2016 sheds some light on the dark truth. Convocation is a public ceremony. It will expose the university's failure to attract a reasonably good number of students to study on campus. The failure to attract students has its roots in the way the university prioritises mundane things over academics.

In 2010-11, the UPA government sanctioned Rs 2,710 crore for ten years. The Indian taxpayer deserves to know whether the University has managed to educate 2,710 full-time students. □□□

*[Murari Jha is a historian. He has held research positions at the National University of Singapore and Harvard University. Courtesy: The Wire]*

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## LETTER

### **'Appeasement' Fear**

**Dear Leaders of Opposition**

**Shri Rahul Gandhi and Shri Kharge**

Are you not aware of the atrocities happening against the Muslim population of the country? You talk about every issue—exam paper leaks, stock market manipulation, electoral bonds, Adani plunder, and quite rightly so but avoid speaking against the atrocities inflicted on the Muslim community even as they have voted for you enmasse in the hope of

protecting their right to life (yes, you also carefully avoid talking about EVM manipulations on platforms that matter).

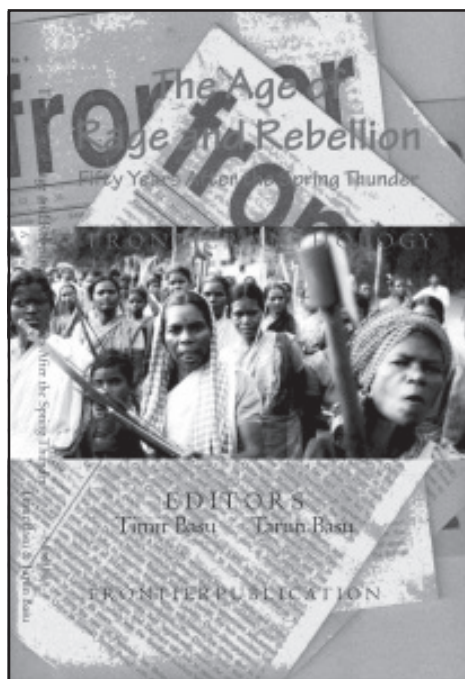
Your silence is due to the fear of 'Muslim appeasement' allegations. Your silence in Gujarat genocide was also for the same reason, but what gain you made there you may ponder— you didn't even speak when a Congress leader, MP and freedom fighter himself was charred to death. It was your party's silence that

brought the forces of genocide to rule over this land of the Mahatma. Shri Rahul Gandhi has said that India's democracy is a global public good, but your silence on the atrocities against Muslims is as deplorable as the atrocities themselves. By falling for the appeasement fear you are gravely mis-estimating the world view of the millions of Hindus who voted for you, and betraying the millions of Muslim and secular citizens that voted for you.

**Best regards**  
**S Faizi, Ecologist, Trivandrum**

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