

# frontier

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## *From Gaza to California*

**T**HE FIRES BURNING IN PALESTINE AND LOS ANGELES TO day are symptoms of the same disease: a system that values conquest over conservation, profit over people and expansion over existence. This is the legacy of a worldview that has sought to silence indigenous people who understood what the so-called civilised people must learn now that the earth's wounds are their own. The Californian flames, in reality, speak the language of destruction—colonial exploitation of people and nature. At the time of writing death toll rose to 24 while the fire fighters were able to contain only 11 percent of fires in Palisades—the most affected area.

The fire consuming America's Palisades isn't just a California wildfire—it's a mirror reflecting a global crisis of connected catastrophes. Hills ablaze in California, olive groves burning in Gaza and historic Palestine, horizons choked with smoke that knows no borders. In just the first sixty days following October 7, the military response in Gaza reportedly generated more planet-warming gases than twenty climate-vulnerable nations emit in an entire year. In a single month—October 2023—Israel dropped 25,000 tons of bombs on Gaza, releasing climate-warming gases equivalent to burning 150,000 tonnes of coal. American cargo flights delivering weapons consumed 50 million litres of aviation fuel by December, spewing 133,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> into the shared atmosphere—more than the entire nation of Grenada emits annually.

But this environmental catastrophe didn't begin with the current Israel-Hamas war. Since 1967, Israel is said to have systematically uprooted at least 2.5 million trees in the occupied Palestinian territory, including nearly one million olive trees, which were a primary source of food and income for many Palestinians. Israel replaced these trees with imported European vegetation, perhaps reflecting their own European roots. This destruction has led to habitat fragmentation, desertification, land degradation, and soil erosion that affect the entire region's climate resilience.

When the climate cost of war infrastructure is included—the tunnels, the walls, the military installations—the total rises to 450,000 metric tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent, exceeding the annual emissions of 33 countries. Each bomb that falls on Gaza sends ripples through humankind's collective future, its impact felt in rising seas, warming temperatures, and yes, in the fires that now threaten California's hills. For all practical purposes the world is moving in

dangerous territory—perhaps more quickly than previously thought.

Earth's average temperature climbed more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels for the first time in 2024. Climate scientists announced the breach recently, signalling that the world has failed, at least temporarily, to avoid crossing the threshold set by the Paris Climate Accord in 2015 to avert the worst impacts of global warming. Now 2024 is confirmed the hottest ever year. It's a physical reality. With Trump in the White House the Paris agreement is likely to get buried.

Ironically, the Wonderful Company, controlling nearly 60% of California's water through the Resnick family, pumps millions into supporting the very territorial expansion that has turned Gaza's landscape into an environmental catastrophe. They are funding the flames that will eventually reach their own doorsteps.

The environmental wounds in Gaza will not heal easily. The reconstruction of Gaza's 100,000 damaged buildings, as per conservative estimates, may generate 30 million metric tonnes of greenhouse gases—equivalent to New Zealand's annual

emissions and higher than 135 other countries, including Sri Lanka and Lebanon. This is a climate debt people all must pay, a fire all must fight.

The flames consuming Los Angeles carry echoes of Gaza's suffering: homes turned to ash, landscapes transformed, lives upended. But they carry something else too—an urgent warning about the humankind's shared fate. When they permit the bombing of Gaza's aquifers and the poisoning of its soil, they accelerate the climate crisis that now sends California up in flames. □□□

[Contributed] 12-01-2025

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## COMMENT

### Murder of a Journalist

SAD NEWS FOR THE INDIAN media fraternity as a young scribe Mukesh Chandrakar was found murdered in Bijapur locality of Chhattisgarh State on January 3. Local media persons informed that the body of journalist Mukesh was recovered from a newly constructed septic tank belonging to an influential contractor based in Chattanpara area. Mukesh (30), who made daring media reports on corruption and insurgency in central India, went missing on 1 January 2025 and his family members lodged a police complaint. A seasoned journalist, Mukesh used to run a YouTube channel named *Bastar Junction*, frequently investigated and reported on corruption, insurgent violence in conflict-hit Bastar. His You Tube channel has 2.8 crore views and 1.5 lakh subscribers. Bastar Press Club condemned this killing. DIGIPUB, an association of digital news outlets also asked the Chattisgarh government to ensure speedy investigation. 'Bastar has really become a junction, a junction where all the routes are closed: the path leading to democracy has been blocked by continually

showing the fear of Maoism'. The persons in authority, politicians and business community are united to loot natural resources of Chattisgarh and evict the tribals from land.

The young media person was seemingly targeted for his string reporting on powerful corrupt people. Incidentally, Mukesh Chandrakar becomes the first journalist to be killed this year across the world. People demand a fair probe to identify the culprits behind his killing and subsequent punishment under the law. Press Emblem Campaign (PEC) urged Chhattisgarh chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai to take personal interest to deliver justice to the bereaved scribe's family as early as possible.

A few months ago an attempt was made to implicate journalist Bappi Roy and his colleagues in marijuana smuggling for reporting against sand mafia. The accused in the Mukesh murder case is said to have been nurtured and nourished by the anti-tribal and anti-human rights state sponsored Salwa Judum. The notorious Salwa Judum militia was created by the state to terrorise poor tribals who were sympathetic to the Maoists. Their legacy continues to haunt the people of Chattisgarh.

The South Asia representative of Press Emblem Campaign Nava Thakuria informed that Mukesh worked in several media outlets including a satellite news channel. He made a mark in investigative journalism while reporting on misappropriation of funds in various government projects in his locality. It was a road project for which he was eliminated. The 52.4 km project on the Nelson-Kodoli-Mirtu-Gangalur route had been commissioned in 2010 at a cost of Rs 73 crore but the cost increased to Rs 189 crore by 2024.

Dissent has no place in this biggest showcase of democracy. The courageous journalist also faced wrath from the ultra-left insurgents, who remained active in Bastar district, and finally Mukesh established himself as a strong voice for the deprived section in the society. There is an unwritten mandate from higher authorities to kill those who raise their voice against the business lobbyist-politician nexus.

The global casualty of media workers reached 179 in 2024 across 25 countries. India maintained the number of journo-murders within 4 which is one more than the casualty reported in 2023. All the media victims reported last year from the central Indian region, where Uttar

Pradesh witnessed the killing of two journalists (Ashutosh Srivastava and Dilip Saini), followed by Bihar (Shivshankar Jha) and Madhya Pradesh (Salman Ali Khan).

203 Palestinian journalists have been killed in Israeli attacks since the start of the war in Gaza. How Israel is killing journalists in Gaza is getting world-wide coverage because of the on-going war in the Middle

East and relentless efforts by the Committee to Protect Journalists [CPJ] but media persons are not safe anywhere in so-called democracies. They are always to work under stress and strain. With the recent upheaval in Bangladesh journalists there are encountering tremendous odds, including threat to life in unveiling the truth. □□□

[Contributed by PEC]

#### NOTE

## Prof Bagchi—A Man who talked Straight

*Abhijit Guha writes:*

**W**E HEARD A GENTLE knock at the door. I was sitting in front of my teacher Professor Surajit Sinha in the room of the Director of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Calcutta. Sinha said, 'Please come in'. A tall, fair skinned and clean shaved man entered and sat by my side. He was Professor Amiya Kumar Bagchi as Sinha introduced me to him and told 'Abhijit has just joined the Centre as a junior ICSSR Research Fellow in Sociology and Social Anthropology'. It was 1984. Professor Bagchi looked at me with a smiling face and asked 'Have you read Marshall Sahlins' 'Original Affluent Society'? Luckily, I had read it and promptly replied, 'Yes'. Amiya Babu reacted by just saying, 'If one writes a book, then one should write like that!' I wondered why of all anthropological pieces he mentioned the name of Marshall Sahlins and particularly one of his trenchant critiques of the capitalist ideologue John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (1958). Later when I was reading Bagchi's *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment* (1982) published by the Cambridge University Press, I found that he cited Sahlins' aforementioned works.

I met Amiya Bagchi much later

at the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata during 2017, while speaking at seminars. He carefully listened to my critiques of the land acquisition policy of his favourite left front government without making any comment in the public. Still later, I came to know of his love-hate attitude towards LFG through his personal communications with me on this issue. He viewed LFG as a "Nidhiram Sardar". On 31 May 2022 in an email to me he stated:

*The LFG suffered from the delusion that it could stop de-industrialisation on its own, when it was only a Nidhiram Sardar, with no control over any aspect of policy - finance, industrial regulation, labour policy and so on. De-industrialisation had started in West Bengal from the early 1950s: one Durgapur could not stop it. The LFG and the people of West Bengal paid a heavy price first with Haldia Petrochemicals and the abortive Nano project in Singur. Its main achievements, the foundation of the three-tier panchayat system, eight years or so ahead of the central government legislation, were over by 1987( Bagchi, 2022, personal communication dated 31.05.2022).*

In response, I did not however, spare Amiya Bagchi. On the same day I replied:

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*The bitter irony and the truth of my research on land acquisition was its timing! When I started my research in Paschim Medinipur in 1990-91 the process of sabotaging the land reforms through the acquisition of fertile land by the LFG for industrialisation had already begun! How then could I live in a fool's paradise praising the goods done by the LFG in the past like a sycophant? Could you just praise Congress party during the emergency or even after saying that Mrs Gandhi and her party did so many "good things" like Bank nationalisation in the past?*

There ended our conversation on land acquisition in West Bengal. Amiya Bagchi will always remain an inspiration to me. His agility to think sharp and his combative mood along with the capacity to remain silent on topics he didn't know is still an inimitable example for me.

□□□

## TRUMP'S QUEST FOR WORLD DOMINANCE

## USA reworks its Imperial Strategy

**Bharat Dogra**

The "only thing worse than being the United States' enemy is being its friend."

—Henry Kissinger

**T**HIS EMBARRASSING statement by one of USA's top diplomats was wished away by saying that it was meant to be a joke. Yet at times it came frighteningly close to reality, particularly in the case of those countries—Ukraine is the latest example—which had the misfortune of being selected to fight the USA's proxy wars. As friends they received billions of dollars from the USA, mostly in military aid, but also suffered terrible devastation in the course of proxy wars which generally also had longer-term very adverse consequences.

Now in different contexts also some of the closest friends and allies of the USA are feeling the heat in unexpected ways, related to their close relations with the USA.

When President-elect Donald Trump first mentioned the possibility of Canada becoming the 51<sup>st</sup> state of the USA, this was also treated by some, perhaps as a way of seeking nervous comfort, as a joke, but as in the case of Kissinger's statement, this may not always remain a joke and may have quite different and serious implications.

The other offer of Trump of 'purchasing' Greenland was taken more seriously from the outset, protests of Denmark and Greenland authorities notwithstanding, because similar offers had been made earlier.

Then Trump's desire to change the name of 'Gulf of Mexico' to 'Gulf of America' invited a sarcastic response from Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum: 'the name Mexican America sounds nice' instead of United States of America.

No major US politician ever demanded it be renamed. In truth Trump targeted US neighbours, from threatening to take control of Greenland and the Panama Canal, to referring to Canada as America's '51<sup>st</sup> Us state.

Of course thinking of Canada as 51<sup>st</sup>state requires excess of imagination as the size of Canada is larger than present day USA, but what may make some imperialists dream of this annexation or merger is that if the USA actually annexes Canada then in one stroke it becomes by far the largest country in the world, leaving Russia and China far behind, and if the easier deal of Greenland is included too, taking USA to about 21 million square km, then the imperial glory expands further, and so do enormous natural resources and strategic assets.

This can be dominance by other means, in fact dominance likely to involve less bloodshed. The dominant thinking so far among the advocates of forever dominance of the USA and its unchallenged number one position had been that at some stage the USA has to defeat the other two great powers of Russia and China in wars or proxy wars to ensure forever dominance and unchallenged number one position.

However in the course of the Ukraine war and in other ways it must have dawned on some of these champions of dominance that this task is by no means easy and is likely to result in wars involving huge destruction and even risking a world war and a nuclear war in which there can be no winners. However

as in this mindset and way of thinking the quest for dominance cannot be given up, so an alternative approach for them can be to imagine the USA as a much bigger and wider country which would be more than double its present size with enormously more resources. The dominance becomes even stronger if the quest for a greater USA is accompanied by the quest for a greater Israel in another part of the world which is of crucial importance from the point of view of natural resources.

Before someone starts appreciating greater USA as a less bloody and less violent route to securing the dominance of the USA, one which avoids direct war with Russia and China, it should be understood clearly that the quest for dominance never fully ends and as long as the same tendencies remain dominant, can start all over again after spending some time in digesting one-time acquisitions.

How will USA's other traditional allies react to its emerging thinking on Canada and Greenland? They may be unhappy about this but their unhappiness may not amount to much as their status as allies[ or junior partners?] is likely to be degraded further beyond what has actually happened in recent times.

There are already indications of such degrading and lack of concern regarding what European allies may say or think. As reported by the *Financial Times* on January 9, billionaire Elon Musk, who will be working very closely with the new US president and earlier made the biggest financial contributions to his election campaign, has held private discussions with allies about removing British PM Keir Starmer from his position before the next general election. The report said that Musk has been weighing how he and his allies



can destabilise the Labour government. Earlier in December Musk had endorsed a German anti-immigration party ahead of German elections scheduled for February.

What appears to be emerging is that the USA's quest for dominance will certainly continue but it will take different forms and the coming in of a new government with a President capable of saying things considered too outrageous by others suits this change.

Some of the upcoming changes may be very troublesome for some of the traditional allies of the USA.

However beyond their troubles what is most important to remember is that merely changing forms of dominance will never bring peace and stability to the world. These can only come when new value systems based on cooperation and protection replace the existing systems based on dominance and destruction. This is why a worldwide peace and disarmament movement involving many millions of people all over the world has become more important than ever before. What is more, it is only in conditions of peace and stability that the many-sided and

life-threatening environmental crisis can be resolved. Hence peace and environment protection must both get the highest priority at world level and millions of people are most likely to join these efforts if these are pursued along with justice and equality. Hence the social movements of peace, environment protection and justice should work together with increasing commitment and come closer to each other. □□□

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

#### REPORT OF A SEMINAR

## Fascism in the 21st Century

**Harsh Thakor**

**T**HE FIVE-DAY-LONG INTERNATIONAL Arvind Memorial Seminar, conducted by the Arvind Institute of Marxist Studies on *'Fascism in the Twenty-First Century: Elements of Continuity and Change and the Question of the Contemporary Proletarian Strategy'* held at the Sundarayya Vignana Kendram, at Bagh Lingampally, Hyderabad, examined the various aspects and features of fascism with the ultimate objective of formulating an effective strategy to confront it.

On the first day of the seminar, a paper was presented by Marxist theorist and editor of a workers' newspaper *'Mazdoor Bigul'*, Abhinav Sinha, titled *'Fascism in the Twenty-first Century: Elements of Continuity and Change.'*

Eminent Supreme Court lawyer Colin Gonsalves gave the keynote on the second day of the seminar. He said that the country has been witnessing a steady deterioration in the Indian judiciary over safeguarding people's rights, which peaked during the Modi-Amit Shah-led BJP regime. He placed blame

on the capitalist system squarely for the destruction of life and livelihood in the country, he added.

On the same day, a paper written by Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Red Star leader PJ James was presented, titled "On Global Neo-fascism including RSS Fascism in India and the Anti-Fascist Task."

In the second session of the day, a Hyderabad-based political activist Anand Singh presented his paper titled *'The Rise of Fascism in India: Origin, Evolution and Present Stage and the Question of Proletarian Strategy of Resistance.'*

Anand critiqued those who ignored fascist tendencies in India simply because concentration camps and holocausts have not emerged. History does not repeat itself identically; but its motion is spiral, not circular. Therefore, locating a phenomenon requires focusing on its essential defining features rather than searching for exact historical parallels.

The paper explored the development of Hindutva fascist ideology and how revivalist currents within

Indian nationalism contributed to its foundation.

The third day of the seminar featured a paper presentation and discussion on *'Marxist Historiography of Fascism: A Critical Reassessment'* by Shivani Kaul, president of Delhi state aganwadi workers and helpers union.

In her presentation, Shivani Kaul addressed the imperative task to theoretically diagnose the phenomenon of fascism, to scientifically evaluate the link between the existing politico-economic conditions and historical situation to combat it.

The third day of the event also featured the paper presentation by Nicolai Messerschmidt on *'Post-colonial Fascism: An Analysis of Hindu Nationalism through Critical and Postcolonial Theory'*.

The research paper analysed how fascism's appeal to the masses originated in social alienation, authori-

**For Frontier Contact**

**DEBABRATA SHARMA**

Jatiya Bhavan Malow Ali, Jorhat  
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tarian personalities, and mass psychology. It drew parallels between the rise of fascism in 20th-century Europe and the contemporary political climate.

The fourth day featured the paper presentation by Delhi-based activist Sunny Singh, titled '*Understanding of Fascism and the Strategies for its Resistance within the Indian Communist Movement: A Critical Analysis*'. Sunny expressed that, at a time when the menace of fascism is leading to, formulating a correct diagnosis of it becomes imperative for formulating an effective strategy of resistance.

Jiselle Hannah, the secretary of Australia Asia Worker Links (AAWL) presented her paper on the topic '*The Rise of the alt-right in Australia and How We're Fighting Back*'. In detailed fashion an in-depth analysis of the socio-political conditions enabling the growth of far-right movements.

Jiselle noted that fascism tends to rise during periods of economic crisis. Currently, Australia is experiencing economic instability marked by rising unemployment, falling wages, and soaring prices.

In such conditions, the far-right, racism, and xenophobia are escalating through organisations like the United Patriots Front, which propa-

gate anti-immigrant sentiments and Islamophobia

Day four also saw a discussion critiquing the Indian Marxian economist Prabhat Patnaik.

KG Ramachandar of CPII (Massline) was one of the very few in the ML movement to recognise that Fascism is not any type of far-right reaction but a specific type of reactionary social movement of the petty-bourgeoisie.

The final day of the seventh edition of the International Arvind Memorial Seminar in Hyderabad witnessed a prolonged debate on the characterisation of Fascism in India. The day was featured by the participation of a New York-based political activist Eric Schmidt. He said that Donald Trump is a product of the capitalist crisis, as he gave a presentation on the Trump phenomenon. In his view Trump manifests a quasi-fascist reaction in the US which is an outcome of the crisis of capitalism.

The research paper titled '*Fascism in Our Times and the Front of Art and Literature: Some Important Inquiries*,' was presented by Revolutionary Hindi poet and political activist Katyayani. The paper summarised on how fascism monopolised art and literature in their favour and the cultural strategy

of Hindutva forces.

In its concluding sessions, two papers were presented in the afternoon session; "Exploring the politics of performance through the 'Social drama' and 'aesthetic drama' by a Kolkata-based researcher Dishari Chakraborty and "Resurgence of Fascist ideologies in the 21st century: analysing the impact of state aggression and human rights in the middle east by Adil Kadavath, a student from Kerala.

While recognising the laudable efforts of the organisers in stirring a debate imperative to save the future of mankind on the verge of peril, and initiating a wide spectrum of viewpoints to invite rational debates, which is complementary, the seminar had important weaknesses. It negated factors of agrarian unrest and revolution, completely deriding the farmer's movement of MSP. It also made an erroneous analysis of the Indian bourgeoisie by awarding it bargaining power and giving no recognition to existence of national bourgeoisie and a progressive section of the peasantry. The seminar gave no scope to those linking anti-feudal struggle with fascism. Question of Brahmanical caste oppression or link of caste with fascism was untouched. □□□

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## NIGHTMARE OF A BOOKSTORE OWNER

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### An Appeal to my Hindu Brothers and Sisters

**N Venugopal**

**F**OR THE PAST FEW DAYS, some politically motivated forces have been circulating videos about me, drawing superficial conclusions, and launching a vicious campaign of abuse. They are urging people to beat me, kill me, douse me in petrol and burn me alive, and put an end to me. Hundreds of social media posts, comments, and videos are inciting violence and crime against me.

I humbly request you to pause for a moment and reflect on whether your anger is truly justified in connection to what has transpired. Forgive me for stating that your anger is misplaced. Please find it in your hearts to read this explanation patiently for just five minutes. Also, consider for a moment whether the language some of you have used—filled with harsh and abusive words—

is appropriate for the grand tradition you claim to uphold.

You may be devout followers of Hinduism. I, however, do not adhere to any religion and critique all religions. My criticism is directed solely at the inhuman aspects of religions, not at those who practise them. You have every right to believe in and practice your faith. But if someone points out flaws, errors, weaknesses, or injustices within a belief system, silencing them does not erase those issues. Instead, you should introspect to see if their words hold truth and attempt to rectify them if they

do. If the criticism is false, you can counter it through writing, speeches, or other civil means of expression.

It is easy to threaten those with differing opinions with violence or death. Throughout history, in every country and even in India, dissenters have faced persecution. Famous examples like Socrates, Bruno, and Galileo aside, in our own land, Charvakas, Lokayatas, Buddhists, and many others who expressed dissent were subjected to violence, their writings erased, and their lives taken. Even in recent times, voices like Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare, Prof. M.M. Kalburgi, and Gauri Lankesh have been silenced through murder. But violence and death may claim individuals, not their ideas. Questions suppressed today will sprout again, confronting society once more.

If you kill me, so be it. But can you eliminate a bookstore owner's right to sell a diverse range of books in this country? Can you erase questions raised against Manusmriti, which propagates untouchability, caste hierarchy, and unjust ideas about women and Shudras?

A bookstore contains a variety of books. Demanding that only those you like be sold, and banning others, is sheer ignorance. I believe you understand this basic principle. The video that incited your anger begins with such an incident. Someone entered my store and questioned why a particular book was being sold there. Reflect on whether such a question is reasonable. There were 350 stalls in the book fair, each selling different publications and books. Isn't it rude and unlawful to enter any stall and question why a book you dislike is being sold? Isn't it against the Rigveda's adage, "Let noble thoughts come to us from every side"? Isn't it contrary to the ideals of tolerance and harmony that you claim to uphold?

The book in question does not demean Hinduism. It is a historical work where a historian, based on research, proposes that the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple was once a Buddhist site. Many books presenting such alternative views have been published, supported by evidence. Furthermore, considering that Buddha is included among the Dashavatara (ten avatars of Vishnu), how does suggesting this connection insult Hinduism? This book was first published in English 33 years ago and has been translated into many languages. The English edition is still available online for purchase and reading. It has now been translated into Telugu for the first time. Declaring it offensive and objecting to its sale only after its Telugu release, while it has been available for decades in other languages, exposes ulterior motives.

The person who questioned the book in my store recorded the incident from the outset, indicating a premeditated intent to use the conversation later. Recording someone without their consent and using it to incite hatred is a criminal act under Indian law.

During the exchange, this individual demanded to know my views on Hinduism. While I could have refused to answer, I chose to respond respectfully. As a history student, I expressed the opinion, shared by many reformers and thinkers over centuries, that Hinduism is flawed. I elaborated by pointing to untouchability, caste discrimination, and the doctrine that some people are born inferior and destined only to serve. When I tried to explain further, the individual insulted me by saying, "Your face is your writing."

The statement "Hinduism is flawed" is being weaponised to incite you against me. But pause for a moment and think. Isn't it wrong to regard some humans as inferior,

untouchable, and born to serve others? Isn't it cruel to deny people education, social status, and dignity based on birth? Manusmriti contains appalling declarations about women, Shudras, and Dalits. If someone points out these truths, should they be killed for doing so?

These issues are not trivial; they are grave societal evils that have oppressed millions for centuries. From the Charvakas and Lokayatas to Buddha, Babasaheb Ambedkar, and Periyar Ramasamy, countless reformers have fought against these injustices. Writers and artists have highlighted these flaws in their work. Many saints and reformers have strived to reform Hinduism itself. My opinion is a continuation of this great tradition of dissent.

India has thrived as a pluralistic society that respects and accommodates diverse views. Those inciting you to suppress questions and dissent today are the true enemies of this pluralistic heritage. They are using religion for their selfish political and economic agendas. Please recognise this and reflect on their real motives.

Once again, I urge you to reconsider your actions. You may succeed in killing me, but my ideas and questions about caste discrimination will not die. At most, you will end up in prison as a murderer, bringing suffering to yourself and your family. Meanwhile, those who provoked you will continue to exploit others for their gain.

For over forty years, my writings and speeches will remain. What will remain of you? □□□

*[January 3, 2025, on the birth anniversary of Savitribai Phule]*

**For Frontier Contact**

**DHYANBINDU**

COLLEGE SQUARE

## THE OTHERSIDE OF THE FENCE

## Bangladesh: A Flood of Misinformation

*Ramakrishnan*

FRONTIER, DECEMBER 15-21, 2024, published a “Note on Sammilita Sanatani Jote” by SS, the focus being the arrest of ISKON functionary Chinmoy Krishna Das. “But what dozens of TV channels in India are showing day in and day out betrays Yunus government’s ignorance,” it says. In fact, this has been a quite common view, given the flood of misinformation and deliberate dis-information, also by Delhi. Dr Yunus met on Dec 5 leaders of all religions, regarding violence against minorities. He wanted them to give ground reports that were not reflected by the govt. 32 attended, and 26 spoke. RK Mission Swami Premanand and Avinash Mitra co-director of Harichand Temple are among them. Mitra said: “discord is fueled by those who fan the flames. It is crucial to prevent *outside forces* from targeting Hindus in our country,” (Asia News, Dec 6 reported. It belongs to minorities). Bangladesh media commented: It has been an “industrial scale” misinformation that was drawing parallels with Gaza and Ukraine, ever since Hasina’s ouster. That served to further strain bilateral relations. Trump used it to gain votes, by promising to protect Hindus, together with Jews. It was embraced by MPs in UK, some of them misrepresented Bangladesh as an “Islamic state” reflecting Indian misinformation, and Bangladesh is the “next Afghanistan. This article presents some notable points in this regard.

Delhi witnessed a rally on Dec 10 World Human Rights Day, in which former top bureaucrats, diplomats and judges joined apart from Sangh Parivar. They demanded an

end to “persecution” of Hindus, and “immediate” release of “Pujya” Chinmoy Das. Ironically, on the same day, about 20 EU diplomats were in Dhaka, inaugurating an exhibition and a book hailing the Revolution there. Top leaders from over 20 other countries had met Dr Yunus at UN sessions, and supported the new regime. Obviously, few outside India believed the misinformation (At least 97 cases have been filed and 75 people arrested by the interim govt, for attacks on Hindus up to Dec10). One speaker at an RSS conclave on Bangladesh (reported *Organizer*, Sep4) advised not to put all eggs in Hasina basket. Modi met many at UN in Sep, but shunned Yunus. But Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri rushed to Dhaka the same day, the first high-level contact, after Hasina fled Aug 5, and hinted it would do business with Yunus regime, and its policy would be “people-centric”. Misri made a counter-proposal of a BIMSTEC meet, after Yunus conferred with Pakistan to re-activate Saarc, cold-storaged by Modi.

“Pujya Chinmoy” was arrested under sedition charges etc, on Nov 25, and produced in court the next day. His bail plea was rejected. Charges included hoisting a saffron flag above the Bangladesh flag, reported Economic Times. Rule of law, interference in internal affairs of another country did not matter to those in Delhi rally. Chinmoy was expelled in July, weeks before Hasina fled, amid “serious and heinous” allegations, by Iscon Bangladesh. Iscon announced that fact, reported *Prothom Alo* Nov 28, with a photo of the press meet. He and 11 others

were expelled “for breaching discipline, and they do not represent Iscon.. some children brought out allegations of misconduct (common to many Babas in India) against Chinmoy, who was asked to refrain from any activities of the organisation and Pundarik Dham for 3 months, which he defied... hence his permanent expulsion last July.” Calls were made to ban Iscon Bangladesh as Chinmoy supporters protested, hacked assistant public prosecutor (APP) Saiful Islam to death, in the court premises, soon after his bail plea was rejected, Chattogram Bar Association president Nazim Uddin Chowdhury told *Prothom Alo*. 2000 protesters blocked police vans taking him away from court. The notoriety of Iscon of 1960-80 period is forgotten by many today.

“In the statement, Charu Chandra Das said a coordinated smear campaign has been launched against Iscon Bangladesh centering the recent movement of Bangladesh Sanatani Jagran Mancha, of which Chinmoy is a spokesperson. “We want to unequivocally declare Iscon Bangladesh does not have any involvement with such *nefarious* incidents or the ongoing movement.” Iscon’s official statement on Oct 3 itself stated ‘Chinmoy is not our spokesperson, and his statements are his own’. “Iscon Bangladesh urged the govt to ensure exemplary punishment for the killers of lawyer Saiful...” “Replying to a question about a remark of Suvendu Adhikari, BJP leader in Bengal Assembly, they said Iscon is an international organisation which is not run from India.”

Why was Chinmoy arrested? He addressed a massive rally in violence-stricken Rangpur on Nov 22, spoke on Hindu grievances, besides the flag episode. Republic TV falsely reported, “Muslim lawyer representing Chinmoy was killed,” which went



viral, to further demonise Bangladesh. Alif's assailants, Zia Uddin Fahim and Rajiv Bhattacharya were affiliated with Awami League's student wing. It is a replica of the notorious Chatra Parishad of 1970s Kolkata, nurtured by Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi etc.

An investigation by Bangladesh fact checker, *Rumor Scanner* found that between 12 August and 5 December, some 13 false reports were run in Indian media after Hasina's fall. A total of 49 Indian media outlets were identified for spreading these fake stories. Among them, Republic Bangla led the list, broadcasting 5 rumours. Hindustan Times, Zee News, Live Mint, India Today, ABP Anand, and Aaj Tak were also named. Incidents of UP Hathras stampede, a Bangalore incident of violence against a woman, a temple incident from Bengal were among reports exposed. But almost none reported the fact check, endorsed also by BBC. A post on X reported an attack on Nobogroho temple in Chattogram, but a later image showed it undamaged.

Indian agencies, official and unofficial including RSS, expressed concerns about 'plight' of minorities: An article in countercurrents.org of 01/11/2024 on 'Hindutva itching for gross interference' reported a massive rally in Chittagong, with tens of thousands, on Oct 25 by Sanatan Jagran Manch, with 8 demands: apparently reasonable but some obviously strange slogans, and coupled with "warnings" by Hindu minorities... they will not cease their mass demonstration until the govt fulfills them: 1.The formation of a tribunal to speedily try those involved in crimes against minorities.2. Appropriate compensation to victims and their rehabilitation. 3. Enacting a minority protection law immediately. 4. Formation of a ministry of minority affairs. 5. Building

of prayer rooms or places of worship for minorities in educational institutions and hostels. 6. Hindu Buddhist and Christian welfare trusts should be elevated to foundations. 7. The 'Property Recovery and Preservation Act and 8.transfer of Entrusted Property Act' should be properly implemented. They also demanded that a 5-day holiday (!) be announced for Durga Puja. On Oct 10, Bangladesh minister Syeda Rizwana Hasan put out a statement saying that they hear the demands, and as a show of assurance enacted a 2-day Puja holiday for the first time in history. In India, mostly only one is declared holiday.

#### **UN intervention sought!**

Mohan Bhagwat, in his 'Vijaydashami' speech, Nagpur, Oct. 12, 2024 (PTI), made a reference to Bangladesh: "being unorganised and weak is like inviting atrocities by the wicked". Hindus should take lessons from there. "For the first time, Hindus united to protect themselves, taken to the streets to defend themselves, not just Hindus, but all minorities are in danger. They need support from Hindus from the entire world and India's government must step in," the RSS chief said, fanning *global Hindutva* frenzy as against Muslims. He said "deep state", "wokeism" and "cultural Marxism" are topics of discussion nowadays. "In fact, they are the declared enemies of all cultural traditions... capturing educational institutions and spreading their distorted philosophy. He "urged Indian govt to take a more active role in protecting minorities." All this suits the global Zionist lobbies that are backed by imperialists, America in particular.

Compare the ground reality of Bangladesh with the situation in India, marked by lynchings and arson by hooligans (called vigilantes), and worse, bulldozing of homes and businesses of Muslims and other

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minorities, and Dalits, collective fines – by Govt agencies. RSS winked at such atrocities, if not encouraged them. What is meant by “more active role”? RSS and Delhi make a big issue whenever its “democratically” USA points out some incidents against minorities in India, not to speak of Pakistan raising questions about Kashmir, Muslims being the victims. It is “gross interference” they scream. ‘One rule for you, one for me’ is brazen hypocrisy.

RSS leader Dattatreya Hosabale on Oct 26 said: “The Hindu community of Bangladesh should not flee, they should stay there. It is their motherland (It does not apply to Indian Muslims?) India played an important role in that (1971 independence from Pakistan). We say there is a ‘shaktipeeth’ there, and that contributed a lot in the history of our independence.. For this, they should be protected.” Hosabale “added that UNO and other organisations would have to make arrangements for their security..” Mamata Banerjee also suggested it should be referred to the UN, and said she would support Modi, as it is a Central subject.

A student-leaders’ round-table at *The Daily Star*, Sep 4, 2024, critically examined the influence of religion on political dynamics in Bangladesh. It throws some light on the student revolt. Participant leaders included women and Hindus. They emphasised, ‘while Islam teaches tolerance and protection for all faiths, religion-based politics often leads to extremism and exclusivity, challenging the principles of secularism...political parties exploit religious sentiments for electoral gain; called for an inclusive approach to politics, one that transcends religious or ideological divides; It is the government’s duty to ensure that individuals of all faiths are protected’.

“Banning religious parties has

been ineffective; repression can unintentionally strengthen their appeal.” (Meghmallar Basu, Organiser, Dhaka University.) ‘In theory, religion-based politics could be progressive, as illustrated by the Maulana Bhashani’s politics. However parties like Jamaat-e-Islami which engage in religion-based politics, often present themselves as protectors. In the 1980s, (RSS like Islamic) Shibir was not banned outright but was challenged through a collective agreement among active student parties, despite their differing views’. They reached a consensus to exclude such politics from campus, and any attempts by Shibir to enter were collectively thwarted. It represented both a social and political struggle.

The religious parties are not fundamentally different from the Awami League or BNP, aside from some linguistic differences. Since most people are religiously inclined, these parties exploit religious rhetoric to build their voter base. .. it seems that religion is being weaponised by parties to suppress others through its rules and rituals. Labeling groups as majorities or minorities fosters a sense of otherness, impacting indigenous people, Dalits, and others. In 2024, mass murders occurred, where students, youths, and the elderly people were killed by the Awami League govt. While condemning them, it’s also important not to forget Jamaat-e-Islami’s role as war criminals in 1971.

“Bangladesh’s Hindus mull canceling Durga Puja amid security concerns,” media rumoured (*Times of India*, Oct 4, 2024), ahead of the festival. Reality:

“A 5-day long Sharadiya Durga Puja, biggest religious festival of the Bangladesh Hindus, ended peacefully with the immersion of deities, on 2024 Oct 13. It was celebrated at 31,461 (some said 33,000)

mandaps (pandals), including 252 in Dhaka, per Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad. Dr Yunus visited the renowned Dhakeswari temple. 3-tier security was arranged, and enabled lakhs of Hindus to participate. Muslims are opposed to idolatry, but here it is Bengali nationality, rather than Islam, that is dominant.

Hindus are victims of 200 incidents in 50 districts since Aug 5 (*First Post* Dec 6) reported PTI, just before India’s Foreign Secretary visited Dhaka on Dec 10. Canards were earlier spread about “2000 plus incidents”- an “industrial scale of exaggeration”, Bangladesh media commented. Yunus repeatedly said they were more political, targeting Hasina-supporters, than communal. Mostly they took place in first 10 days after Hasina fled, when administration, including police, was paralysed. (Data in *Organiser* inadvertently supported it.) “Hasina’s was a farce of an election, but was used to delegitimise the democratic movement that saw the end of the fascist govt. Hasina had unleashed deadly violence on peaceful protesters, shooting them on sight, killing up to 1000 students etc. A Judicial commission submitted an interim report on more than 3500 “disappearances” during Hasina regime over a decade.

The December 2 attack on Agartala Mission, followed a protest by Bongio Hindu Jagran group. As per *The Hindu*, Acharya Sanjay Shastri said, after submitting a memorandum, the Assistant High Commissioner “listened to our grievances, assured us that they will carry our voices to the govt.” Indian media mostly left out such facts, like the burning of Bangladesh flag in Kolkata Nov 28 in police presence, like in Agartala later.

Since 2013, at least 3,600 such attacks have taken place, per *Ain o Salish Kendra* (ASK), a Bangladeshi

Human Rights Organisation (*the print.in*, 21 Oct, 2021). Abhijit Majumder, Prominent Journalist revealed “a disturbing trend of about 450 (anti-Hindu) attacks *per year over the past 8 years.*” He urged to avoid over-reliance on Hasina and called for “alternative approaches.” “*Hindu organisations need to mobilise street power by rallying people and funds.* Simultaneously, treat Bangladesh as an Islamic country and try to open channels with all stakeholders but not solely relying on the façade of peace.” (*Organiser, webdesk, Sep 4, 2024*). Hindutva forces were at it, in 2021, as now: During 2021 Puja days, reported *The Daily Star*: “101 religious sites including Hindu temples, puja mandaps and 181 shops/homes were attacked in six days, sparked by video of a *Quran being placed at the feet of a Hindu statue* during Durga Puja (Cumilla). Six were killed, including two Hindus... *Iscon was active at that time too.* *aljazeera.com*, 12 Dec 2024 reported attacks on Hindus, blasphemy again: Akash

Das, had allegedly posted an *insulting comment about the Quran* on Facebook, escalating tensions, particularly in Dowarabazar, 270 km from Dhaka.

In a letter she wrote to greet President-elect Trump, Hasina was still shown as the “Prime Minister.” What does it imply? Sheltering in Delhi, she addressed virtual meetings in New York and London, blamed Yunus of genocide, asserted the interim govt would collapse. Bangladesh on Dec 23, sent a formal *Note Verbale* to India, seeking repatriation of Hasina for judicial proceedings, under a bilateral extradition treaty, signed in 2013 when Hasina was in power. It was later amended in 2016, providing a legal framework. There have been informal requests by Bangladesh for quite some time. Reports appeared that India is in no mood to respond, and hence the formal note now.

On Nov 26, International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) Bangladesh issued arrest warrants against Hasina and 45 others. ‘Dhaka Tribune’ reported

Hasina is accused in over 100 cases and faces a number of charges, including ‘murder, mass killing and crimes against humanity, genocide’ over killings during the July uprising that ousted her. Others too had been likewise implicated. (*First Post, December 25, 2024*).

In the 1970s, “secularism” was removed from the Bangladesh Constitution, and Islam was declared the state religion of Bangladesh in 1988, under Ershad. During the 2021 protests against communal violence, calls for a secular constitution were made, including by Awami League minister Murad Hassan. The Hasina clique was quick to dismiss it, saying there was “no need at this moment.”

*Hindutva is sought to be injected into foreign policy, and people see that in relation to Bangladesh, where Indian Big Business has big stakes.*

Misinformation and Hindutva in foreign policy are undermining India’s friendly ties with Bangladesh. □□□

[Ramakrishnan is a political observer who published a series on Bangladesh in *countercurrents.org*. This is an adaptation from that.]

## CLAIMS AND REALITY

### A Glimpse into the Assam Economic Survey

*Arup Baisya*

THE HON’BLE CHIEF MINISTER of Assam has recently brought two economic indicators into the limelight as a success story for the Assam government. The first is the rise in Assam’s GDP growth rate; the second is the increase in capitalists’ interest in investing in Assam.

The Assam Economic Survey indicates that Assam’s nominal economic growth in the financial year 2022-23 was 19.9%, while it was 16.1% on the national level. For the same period, Assam’s real growth was 7.9%, while the all-India growth was 7.2%. Per capita income, which

was Rs 80,440 in constant prices in 2011-12, has increased to Rs 1,35,787 in 2023-24. On the surface, this is a praiseworthy state of affairs for the Assam government.

But the real secret lies elsewhere. An increase in real growth should mean increased production. The agricultural production index numbers in 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23 were 144.22, 133.79 and 163.57 respectively (whether any change in the base period was made for these calculations has not been verified). These three fiscal years saw a production of 52,14,000, 43,83,000 and 6045000 tonnes of rice respectively.

In the fiscal year 2021-22, production seems to have somewhat recovered from this dip, and has seen a slight increase. Considering the increased population and low crop prices, it is conceivable that the income of farmers has decreased in terms of per capita income growth.

The contribution of industrial production to GDP was 29.55% in the fiscal year 2022-23, and in 2023-24, it decreased to 27.63% in constant price terms. This means that the income of industrial workers has decreased.

The credit-deposit ratio of recognised commercial banks was 48.62% on March 31, 2022, which increased to 51.9% in 2023. The participation of local entrepreneurs in Assam in the production of goods in this recessionary market is utterly

negligible—bank loans for commercial and productive activities are, as before, next to none.

In 2022-23, the unemployment rate in rural areas was 7.69% in Assam and 2.4% in the all-India context; 13.32% in urban areas of Assam and 5.4% in the all-India context. The number of educated unemployed individuals has increased by a huge margin from 1,37,860 in 2021 to 9,83,093 in 2022, and is still on the rise. And these figures do not even include those who have given up applying for jobs, plagued by the trauma of prolonged states of unemployment. This indicates a decline in the income of the lower-middle class and the middle class.

Behind the growth in non-productive sectors like infrastructure, transportation, etc. that has taken place for the benefit of investors lurks cheap labour. There is no indication of any government initiatives to implement a holistic increase in wages.

The real income of the vast majority of the common people has hit rock bottom.

At a glance, I could not find the Gini index—that would indicate the measures of inequality—anywhere in the entire report. But it can be said without doubt that such an abnormal growth in GDP and per capita income indicates extreme inequality and social imbalance. At the same time, there has been an abnormal increase in a portion of income from socially harmful sources.

It is true that Assam's revenue income from the state and central sectors has increased, but a large part of it is central grants. On the other hand, revenue expenditure is estimated to increase by 17.44% in the fiscal year 2023-24—growing from the total of Rs. 82,547.96 crore in the fiscal year 2021-22 to Rs. 1,11,336.59 crore in 2023-24.

This increase in revenue expenditure is not being spent on reducing

inequality or increasing the income of the marginalized, but is being hoarded by a small number of people at the top of the economic pyramid.

Only a small part of the increased revenue expenditure is being spent on so-called welfare schemes—this expenditure is not harmful to the economy in any sense, but is useful, albeit slightly, in creating demand for consumer goods. No records have been taken of the development of social parameters such as education, health, etc. In truth, government expenditure on them has decreased and the actual situation in these parameters is very pathetic. Expenditure on laws and schemes in various social security sectors is either being reduced or the schemes are not being implemented, such as those for the welfare of construction workers, transport workers, etc.

No importance is being attached to the agricultural sector; rather, the forested territory is decreasing due to indiscriminate deforestation, which will endanger the environment and adversely affect agriculture and tea production. The average land area in agriculture is only 1.09 hectares, which shows that the agro-economy is mainly dependent on small-scale farmers. This idea that small land is not suitable for increasing production is erroneous: in fact, it is useful for cooperative-based production. The government's attention and support towards agricultural production would also be useful for the development of agro-based industries—if the government does adopt such a development policy.

But the Hon'ble Chief Minister is painting for people dreams of domestic and foreign investment. The real secret behind that dream is that the government will provide land, communication system, electricity, etc. to the capitalists for free and will put the burden of responsibility on the shoulders of the people of

Assam. It will arbitrarily enforce evictions on prime land to provide big capitalists with convenient space. The CM is promising to make arrangements so that the big capitalists can tap all possible opportunities with the help of state generosity, and is also allocating the funds needed for this from the government treasury.

Everybody probably can remember that when the North-East was made tax-free, the big capitalists shifted their factories to Assam just to enjoy the tax benefits and then withdrew them again. The capitalists who will fry the proverbial fish in their own oil during new investments will burden the government if they do not reap the desired profit, as the government will be forced to save them by providing more money on the logic of "too risky to fail".

The government does not have the courage to confront and combat these big capitalists with the economic and political policies of developing Assam's agriculture and local enterprises. This dependence will increase further with the policies of the Hon'ble Chief Minister. However, states like Karnataka have created their own brand by challenging big corporates like Amul, which has had a visible impact in the last elections.

Therefore, for the sake of Assam's political economy, there is no alternative but to develop a united struggle demanding land reforms, land pattas [i.e. record of rights], social security, wage raise, unemployment elimination and unemployment allowances, and local initiatives and welfare projects for all.

Otherwise, malnutrition, starvation, and dependency are bound to become part and parcel of the daily lives of the people of Assam. It is important to prepare for a mass struggle so that mass discontent does not turn into surrender. □□□

[Translated from original Bengali by Sohini Sengupta]



## REVISITING GLF AND CR

## Qi Benyu's Memoirs: Banned Thought.net

*Charles Andrews*

**T**HIS ACCOUNT BY QI Benyu (1931-2016) of the Great Leap Forward (GLF) and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (CR) is an important contribution to the history of socialism. Soon after Liberation in 1949, Qi was assigned to the staff who selected and compiled newspaper items and letters addressed to Mao Zedong; later Qi served as a deputy leader of the Cultural Revolution Group. Qi reflects on the GLF and CR from the standpoint of moving socialism along the road to communist society. The anti-communist left in the West mocks the Great Leap Forward, claiming that “hugely exaggerated reports of grain harvests were taken seriously at high levels, and food was moved from the countryside to the cities while millions of farmers started to die of starvation...”. (Mitter 2012) Qi found out otherwise. Mao received reports of harvests surpassing 10,000 catties of rice per mu, when peasants normally got from 200 to 500—and he did not believe them. No wonder: a cattie, or jin, is 500 grams, and a mu is about one-sixth of an acre; hence, the claim was 33 tons per acre! (California rice fields today yield five tons per acre.) Mao told Qi Benyu’s supervisor to take his staff and go down and work with the peasants and learn from them. When you go down there, you have to find the best piece of land, measure the area, use the best seeds, use the best methods of the peasants, plant the seeds yourself, manage it yourself, don’t let others interfere, do everything yourself from planting to harvesting, and see how much grain you can get. You must

also weigh the grain you have sown yourselves, and you must not add a single jin more or less. (169) Qi went to Sichuan early in 1959 and grew rice (169-172). Seeking guidance from veteran peasants, he harvested just over 500 catties per mu, approaching what the most skilled peasants got. Where did newspaper photos showing 10,000 catties come from? Old farmers told Qi that “the so-called ten thousand jin of grain was by digging out the fast-ripening rice from other fields and putting them together on one mu of land, which is a satellite test field. So much rice was stuffed into the field that children could stand on it and step on it. The situation was almost identical to what Lin Ke had told this writer he had seen in Tianjin. More important, what was the political source of the wild claims? William Hinton reviewed many cases over the years. Again and again, Liu [Shaoqi] came forward with ‘left in form, right in essence’ lines that, under super revolutionary rhetoric, repeatedly targeted the mass of cadres down below.

There is no better way to discredit an action than to carry it to absurd lengths. Would it not make sense for these forces, once they failed to stop any movement, to jump in and steer it toward disastrous ends? (Hinton 1990: 154) Qi’s memoirs support Hinton’s indictment. For example, in September 1958, Deng Xiaoping went to the Northeast for an inspection. The local leaders reported that the grain production plan for the second year would increase by 20-30%. Deng Xiaoping criticised them: ‘Others have increased production several times,

but you are only increasing by 20%. It is like a turtle crawling’.... His words were published in the People’s Daily in October 1958.

The historic achievement of the GLF was the people’s commune, a step beyond the collective farms created by the Soviet Union. Local officials seem to have initiated them as an institution with enough scope, for example, to build a small dam and irrigate the land of ten or twenty cooperatives. (Strong 1964: 14f.) With Mao’s support, communes swept the country in 1958. The commune broadened the peasants’ income base and therefore their outlook. It could shift distribution of grain and other staples from family purchase to free supply as conditions permitted. It invested in workshops and factories, which brought peasants into industrial work, introducing them to mechanical and other techniques. To be sure, the progress of the communes could raise new political-economic problems later. When their factories began to produce more than the communes needed, would they sell surplus output within a state plan? How would commune investment coordinate with nationally planned investment? Members’ education, work, and social benefits were tightly integrated into the commune; what would happen when people moved around the country? Thanks to the abrupt turn to capitalism after 1978, these issues never arose. The GLF was over by 1961. The communes were the last big advance in China’s socialist relations of production. Mao Zedong, while always a beloved national hero, was isolated at the top of the Party. In 1965, Qi relates, “Liu Shaoqi did not allow the Chairman to speak at a meeting and Deng Xiaoping told the Chairman not to go to a meeting.” Mao had to barge in holding copies of the Constitution and Party

Charter.” The struggle between the two lines within the Party was thus formed”(304). Qi does not explain how the capitalist-roaders kicked Mao upstairs. However, historians will find a treasure in Qi’s anecdotes of twists, turns, crises, and showdowns of Party politics (sometimes repeated throughout the memoirs, which Qi obviously wrote in spurts).

After semi-secret preparation Mao launched the Cultural Revolution. It is a canard to label it a factional power struggle. Mao Zedong and his supporters, including Qi, had watched the Soviet Union turn off the communist path, and the same thing threatened China. “The struggle did not start with the Cultural Revolution, but with socialism. Should we engage in socialism or capitalism? After Liu Shaoqi, this struggle is still going on”. The issues of the Cultural Revolution were almost entirely about the super-structure. People denounced old superstitions, reformed wedding and funeral ceremonies that reinforced Confucian rules of obedience, and created new operas and songs. Individual party and state officials came under fire. People demanded that an official exercise authority in a more democratic style. They exposed treasures and privileges that an official had grabbed. Beginning with the Red Guards in the colleges and schools, the CR spread into factories and the countryside. The foci of struggle, however, remained the class line and behaviour of individual officials, cultural practices, and evaluations of Chinese history. Institutional change in the relations of production was not on the agenda, nor for most of the CR was the structure of the state. As for the economy, Mao’s staff knew that in a country as large as ours, production cannot be stopped for a moment.... I remember where Engels said that when production stops for two days, a

society will be in chaos and will not be able to sustain itself. This is a matter of common sense.... That is why Chairman Mao always told the Premier [Zhou Enlai] to take charge of production, and asked the Central Cultural Revolution and the Premier to work together well, with the slogan ‘Grasp revolution and promote production’, so that both the revolution and production could not be lost. In some areas peasants seized democratic freedoms, reined in overbearing officials, and reorganised their labour. More collective work increased output and improved their living standard (Han 2008). It appears that such initiatives were local efforts, encouraged by slogans of the CR but not part of a national plan or campaign. In 1967 institutions and whole cities divided into factions, usually coalescing into two coalitions between which everyone had to choose. Mao and the CR leaders had called on the people to sort out dedicated communist officials from “representatives of the bourgeoisie who have sneaked into the communist party and who wave ‘red flags’ to oppose the red flag” (Communist Party of China 1966). However, factions did not divide cleanly between communist orientation and capitalist-roaders. Sectional interests were at play, too, as well as contention to oust an official and take his place. Worse, factions turned to violent struggle.” They ignored the policy of the ‘sixteen Articles’, which stated that they should fight with persuasion and not with arms”. Worst of all, violent struggle seeped into the military.” Soldiers are armed with guns, and if you mobilise them to rise up in rebellion, their antagonists will also take up guns, so isn’t that the same as calling for armed struggle? In July, armed conflict between factions in Wuhan, led by conservative military commander Chen Zaidao,

almost set off a civil war in the country. Qi gives a blow-by-blow account of the watershed event. This led Mao to instruct in October, “There is no fundamental clash of interests within the working class. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, there is no reason whatsoever for the working class to split into two big irreconcilable organisations.... The revolutionary Red Guards and revolutionary student organisations should realise the revolutionary great alliance” (Peking Review 1967: 17). Qi underscores that Mao called for “a ‘grand coalition’ of the revolution, that is, all factions should take part in taking power, instead of supporting one faction to overwhelm another. This was in fact a major change in strategic thinking”.

Rein in the CR—or set off a civil war? That was the choice Mao faced in 1967, and civil war was an unthinkable alternative. Qi was put under house arrest in January 1968 and imprisoned a few weeks later. He says he “failed to understand” Mao’s strategic turn, but he apparently does not know exactly how he came to be arrested and then imprisoned. Qi endured twenty years in prison; to his dying day he remained committed to Mao and efforts to advance socialism through the GLF, the CR and further communist projects. Qi recognises, “The Cultural Revolution was a tragedy, and Chairman Mao did not achieve the aims he originally envisaged. Deng Xiaoping came to power and proceeded “to clear the way for his so-called ‘reform and opening up’, which in essence was the restoration of capitalism”.

The GLF and CR teach that socialism is a series of communist projects. Each project aims to communise something of the relations of production. Each must win popular support. The majority will want to move forward, but some

will resist in defence of their privilege. Westerners give much more attention to the CR than to the GLF. For socialists, this is a mistake. One has much to learn if one compares these two communist projects. From Marx and Engels, revolutionaries knew the first job was to smash the exploiters' state and then to abolish the main class relation—the exploitation of labour. Following that, socialist regimes did such things as investing to provide health care for all. They set limits on the inequality of incomes; they instituted equal or communist distribution of some goods and services. It remains to liberate labour in all respects. The

division between those who plan the work and those who do the job must be overcome. The split between giving orders and taking them must be changed so that everyone does both—in group forms to be discovered, in leaders rotating to work on the floor, etc. It is essential to transform the boundaries and timelines of occupations, especially lifelong isolation in one. And how can one shrink the contradiction between the toil of labour and the delight of work? The Soviet and Chinese revolutions undertook socialist industrialisation of their agrarian country. They created an alternative to polarised, dehumanising

capitalist industrialisation. Today, socialist currents in the developed capitalist countries lack a broad yet concrete vision. They fall back to a clutch of reforms of education, health care, housing, and so on. They do not see beyond a goal of humanising capitalism. Study of China's GLF and CR helps prepare for the task of revolution in present time: break up the mode of production that is killing people and bring the new mode of production to life. □□□

[Source: *Cultural Logic: Marxist Theory & Practice Volume 27(2023)*, pp. 162-166  
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## LETTERS

### **Sahara Victims' Struggle**

A Sahara Victim's Conference was held January 5 at IMA Hall in Patna, demanding the release of funds for nearly 3 crore Sahara investors whose hard-earned savings remain stuck due to massive Sahara fraud. The conference witnessed the participation of thousands of investors who have been tirelessly fighting to reclaim their money and formation of *Sahara Victims' Struggle Front* to intensify their struggle.

CPI (ML) leaders, including Ara MP from Sudama Prasad, Legislative Party leader Mehboob Alam, and MLC Shashi Yadav participated in the conference.

Speaking at the conference, MP Sudama Prasad declared that the Sahara payment issue is no longer confined to Bihar but has emerged as a national crisis. He lambasted the BJP, saying, "Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, the BJP promised Sahara investors they would receive their payments. But after coming to power, they have remained silent on the issue. Sahara victims are running pillar to post to retrieve their hard-earned money. Millions of families are now facing severe crisis

and government is showing callous attitude."

The MP also criticised the sluggish pace of proceedings in the Supreme Court, where the matter has been pending since 2012. He added, "The slow judicial process has disheartened investors and activists alike. However, we will not remain silent. Our struggle will continue until investors get their money back." He called upon all investors to assemble in large numbers at Gandhi Maidan in Patna on 9 March 2025 to raise their voices.

Between 2008 and 2011, Sahara's two companies—Sahara India Real Estate Corporation Limited (SIRECL) and Sahara Housing Investment Corporation Limited (SHICL)—illegally raised around Rs 24,000 crore from nearly crores of investors. This was done through optionally fully convertible debentures (OFCDs), bypassing the norms of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI). The Supreme Court of India upheld SECI's decision of declaring the Sahara's scheme as illegal in 2012, ordering Sahara to refund the money to investors with 15% annual interest. However, the refund has been slow

and many investors, mostly from rural and semi-urban areas, have yet to receive their money.

With slogans such as "End the Portal Drama, Ensure Payments Now!" and "Establish District-Level Payment Offices!", the participants expressed their commitment to intensify the struggle in the coming days.

### **ML Update**

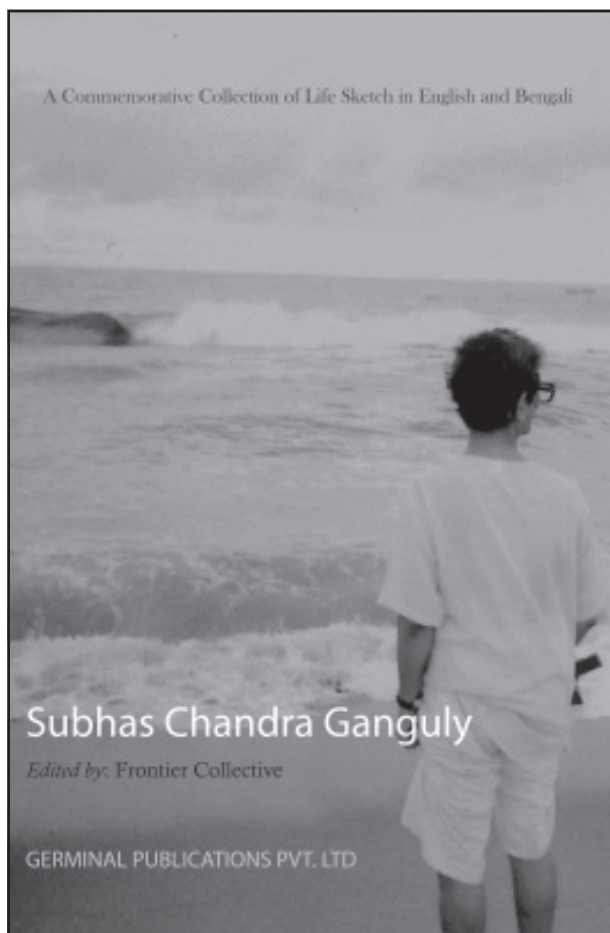
### **Earth Breaches 1.5 Climate Limit**

Earth's average temperature climbed more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels for the first time in 2024. Climate scientists announced the breach recently, signalling that the world has failed, at least temporarily, to avoid crossing the threshold set by the Paris climate accord in 2015 to avert the worst impacts of global warming. For the time being, it's just one metric and one year, but researchers say that it nonetheless serves as a stark reminder that the world is moving into dangerous territory—perhaps more quickly than previously thought. "It's both a physical reality and a symbolic shock", says social scientist Gail Whiteman, who studies climate risks. "We are reaching the end of what we thought was a safe zone for humanity."

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