

# frontier

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## *“War and Theft”*

**T**HERE IS A VISIBLE CRACK IN THE TRANSATLANTIC ALLIANCE as the United States looks determined to bypass Europe in looting post-war Ukraine. At the recently-held Munich Security Conference [MSC], an annual gathering that brings together spy chiefs, national security officials, and world leaders, mostly European, US vice-president J D Vance launched a scalding attack on European democracies, saying greatest threat facing the continent was not from Russia and China, but “from within”. This admission of reality has a far reaching consequence. Taking advantage of the emerging situation Beijing, a close ally of Moscow, began to court frazzled Europe.

Much to the dismay of hawks and doves US Vice-President would use his speech at the conference accusing European governments—including UK’s—of retreating from their values, and ignoring voter concern on migration and free speech. He also repeated the Trump administration’s policy that Europe must “step up in a big way to provide for its own defence”. Only Britain lost no time to announce that they would increase defence spending. Meanwhile, the White House made it clear that Europe won’t be part of the Ukraine deal to be made by Trump with Putin. Panic was so pervasive that European leaders immediately decided to convene an emergency summit on Ukraine in Paris against the backdrop of America’s unilateral move to start Russia-Ukraine peace talks in Saudi Arabia. Vance’s speech came days after President Trump effectively pulled the rug out from Ukraine’s negotiating position that ‘restoring Ukraine’s territory to where it was before 2014 is simply not realistic.’ The EU’s foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, however, characterised Vance as “trying to pick a fight” with Europe, home to some of the US closest allies. For one thing Vance’s remarks were insulting. Then Europeans had to swallow the bitter pill and humiliation.

Poor Zelensky has no option but to accept Washington’s script, even though they have registered their disapproval of any Ukraine settlement without Ukraine’s involvement. At the beginning of the Munich meeting the US secretary of defence was candid enough to rule out Ukraine’s NATO membership. What is realistic now is today’s frontline border is to be treated as the permanent boundary. But this could have been achieved when the war was not even one year old if Kyiv had accepted Moscow’s offer. Zelensky preferred to play the game-plan of NATO and brought in

massive destruction of Ukraine and Ukrainians. As his dream of becoming a member of NATO has faded he is now campaigning for armed forces of Europe as a security guarantee of his country, while promising his battle-tested army as the pivot of the new defence strategy. Tragically enough, the flight of personnel from the Ukrainian Armed forces since middle of 2024 took on the character of an avalanche, threatening to leave the regime without an effective army in the near future. According to Ukraine's office of Prosecutor General, from January 2022 to September 2024, almost 90 thousand criminal proceedings were opened because of such facts. A horrible

scenario of desertion! Russia too is facing desertion but not in large numbers.

Given Trump's history of threatening NATO withdrawal, sidelining European allies, and praising US adversaries, including Putin, the continent's leaders are now confronting the possibility that the US may minimise or abandon its role as a guarantor of European security.

In truth America is now all set to plunder Ukraine's resources and without a peace deal it is not possible. In early November of 2024, Barbara Bonte, a Belgian member of EU Parliament, raised concern about the sell-off of Ukrainian land on a massive scale to US private

equity firms along with some Saudi agro-industrial and investment groups. After Zelensky's 'land reform' was initiated, about five million hectares—the size of two Crimeas—were outright "stolen" by private interests. Ukraine is still regarded as the food basket of Europe. The so-called reform was aimed at driving out small scale farmers to make room for mono-cropping by big agri-businesses. Then Trump suggested that Ukraine sign over half its mineral resources in exchange for past and future US support. Zelensky, however, rejected such a deal, citing a lack of security guarantees. But debtors have hardly any choice! □□□

18-02-2025

## COMMENT

### To Whom Does This Land Belong?

TAMIL NADU CHIEF MINISTER Stalin, based on new research about the pre-modern history, stated that the archaeologists have concluded that the Iron Age first began in Tamil Nadu. Stalin emphasised this finding to be pivotal to understanding the historical timeline of the Indian sub-continent and said proudly that "I'm constantly saying that the history of India will be written from Tamil Nadu," highlighting the research's potential to reshape historical narratives. Should it matter so much to present time?

In a way proving that 'we' were the 'first comers' here many 'nationalist' 'ethnic' tendencies used it to dominate the society in various countries. One recalls that in Sinhala assault on Tamil (Hindus) in Sri Lanka had to suffer a lot at the hands of Sinhala ethnic nationalism, which claimed that Sinhalas are the first comers in that Island so the island belongs to them!

Nearer home Hindu nationalism is no different. It regarded Hindus as

synonymous with Aryans and went on the claim that Aryans are the original inhabitants of this land. This claim was articulated by the second Sarsanghchalak of RSS, M S Golwalkar, who in his book, 'We or Our Nationhood Defined' wrote that, "We—Hindus—have been in undisputed and undisturbed possession of this land for over 8 or even 10 thousand years before the land was invaded by any foreign race" and therefore, this land, came to be known as Hindustan, the land of the Hindus".

This was in contrast to Lokmanya Gangadhar Tilak who had said that Aryans came from the Arctic region. Golwalakar solved this dilemma without contradicting Tilak by saying that the Arctic area itself was here in Orissa- Bihar Region, which later shifted to north

This acrobatics had to be performed to prove that the Aryans are natives of this land. So Hindus are the natives.

Many theories prevail about this. Many European scholars including

Indophile MaxMuller believed that Aryans had invaded India. This theory is baseless as it was the era of pastoral society, where migrations were the norm and not invasion. Invasions came up later with the formation of Kingdoms. The other most logical one, based on linguistics and geological evidence, argued that Aryans came here in a series of waves of migration.

The whole Race theory stands discredited today. It was an attempt by colonial powers to show their racial superiority giving them the right to rule. On similar lines Brahmanical ideology also claimed Brahmins and upper caste to be descendents of a superior race so entitled to have a superior position in society.

The BJP led central Government has formed a committee to document the 12000 -year- old history of India. As things are so crystal clear from the DNA-Genetic studies about the fact which says Indians are all mixed up people; why such a committee? The idea is to prove that Hindus (Aryans) are the original inhabitants of this land. After the result of population genetics not much remains to dig into this issue except for claiming the 'land'. □□□

[Contributed by Ram Puniyani]

## NOTE

## AI: Clash of Views

*Jack Graham writes:*

**I**N THE VAST, IMPOSING EXHIBITION hall of Paris' Grand Palais, world leaders and tech executives met last month to discuss the hot topic of today: Artificial Intelligence. The meeting was a clash of views US Vice President J D Vance told Europeans that "excessive regulation" could kill the AI industry, and along with Britain refused to sign its final declaration. One thing that everyone agrees on, though, is the need for energy. The energy required by AI is increasing all the time, particularly as new consumer products become more popular, from Open AI's ChatGPT to Google's Gemini. "There is no doubt that the high energy intensity of AI needs to be looked into", said India Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his keynote speech. But will that energy supply be green? And could it take energy away from other uses, powering homes?

Co-hosting the summit with France, Modi and President Emmanuel Macron used the conference to promote their efforts to power with clean energy. Macron joked that he "plug, baby, plug" with nuclear energy to support AI with clean energy, instead of US

President Donald Trump's plan to "drill, baby, drill" with oil and gas.

In the United States, AI data centres are helping to derive huge power consumption which means about half the country is at risk of power supply shortfalls in the next decade. With a new \$ 500 billion AI infrastructure plan, Trump said he would help tech firms produce energy to power the industry. And when the newly elected President says energy, he does not mean solar panels and wind turbines.

Before the Paris summit, a coalition of NGOs, including Amnesty International and European Digital Rights, called on attendees to minimise the environmental harms of AI. They demanded that AI companies phase out fossil fuels, and track things like energy and water use as the infrastructure develops. Tech firms like Google, Meta and Microsoft have made a variety of green pledges, yet experts say the sector is not doing enough to mitigate the rising consumption of resources.

In truth, 'the human brain manages to compose poetry and design spaceships using less power than most light-bulbs'. But the sheer scale

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of the AI industry in the coming decades means these technological solutions may not be sufficient. Analysts predict regulations will be crucial, like requiring firms to report on energy use and be powered by renewable, or even to develop in line with climate goals.

Judging by summit proceedings in Paris, however, the environment is not a top priority in the global AI race. □□□

*[Jack Graham is deputy editor of Climate.Change]*

### WINDS OF CHANGE

## Politics of Electoral Bonds–I

*Maitreesh Ghatak*

*Anirban Mukherjee*

**T**HE ELECTORAL BOND SYSTEM in India has been controversial from the start. Various political parties and civil society organisations had approached the court on several occasions, questioning the morality of the system and its adverse impact on democ-

racy. As a result, a few months before the national elections in 2024, the system was scrapped on the orders of the Supreme Court. Recently, after the Election Commission made it mandatory to give an account of the income and expenditure of political parties, information

about the amount of donations by business organizations and individual donors is now available. Organisations such as the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) has been using the Right to Information (RTI) Act to publish all this information on a regular basis. When the amount of all these donations reaches figures of the magnitude of thousands of crores of rupees, it seems natural to suspect that they have motives that transcend ideol-

ogy and are based on profit calculations.

There is no doubt in the minds of the public that political parties collect large sums of money from industrialists and businessmen long before the introduction of electoral bonds and the government run by them and in exchange, provides various favours and concessions. However, it is difficult to verify who is getting exactly what benefits in exchange for how much money donated as the whole thing takes place bypassing laws and regulations.

But what is the reason behind the protests? If the public is not so much bothered about government favours in exchange of political donations, why is there so much controversy about electoral bonds?

We think there are two reasons for this. The first of is the view that in the last decade, there has been growing resentment about the way some industrial groups have been bypassing the parliament and the democratic system, and so the electoral bond issue throws up uncomfortable questions about the future of democracy in our country.

The second reason for concern about the electoral bond system lies in some of its features. There are two major differences between contributions via bonds and donations through other means: one, the donor's name is hidden in the case of a bond; and two, there is no upper limit on the amount of money that can be given through bonds. That is, any person or organization can buy a bond of any amount and give it to the party of his or her choice and that party can cash the bond and fill the party coffers with it. In the case of electoral bonds, there is no way of knowing whether the money came from the pocket of an industrialist or a lobbying firm or from an ordinary supporter. Taking advantage of these two features of

electoral bonds, the path has been made clearer for big industrialists and businessmen to take unfair advantage of the government in exchange for money. These concerns about electoral bonds cannot be called unreasonable or politically biased against any specific party.

We should note that the rules are different in the case of non-bond donations. For contributions below two lakh rupees the identification of the donor is not required. Also, in the case of corporate non-bond contributions, a maximum limit of 7.5% of net profits of the last three years can be donated and that too with the approval of the Board of Directors. However, it should be noted that this 7.5% upper limit rule was lifted after 2017.

The introduction of the bond system has therefore given rise to fears that the system of government benefits in exchange for money, which had some minimum restrictions, would be made obsolete by this system. The system of giving money through electoral bonds has therefore appeared in the public mind as an attempt to legitimize corruption, and therefore it has crossed the limits of societal tolerance of unethical practices. There are so many things happening around us that we know happens but are unaware of the details, and we learn to accept that there is not much we can do about it. But when suddenly the picture of this dark underbelly of the nexus between businesses and the government becomes visible, the latent discomfort transforms itself into public outrage. The widespread concerns are that the bonds will give undue advantage to ruling parties in the elections and in the current political scenario, a major chunk of this benefit will go to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is in power at the Centre and in a large number of states.

Before we get into the details, let us look at the timeline. The electoral bond system was introduced in 2017 and the sale of bonds began in 2018. The CPI (M), various non-governmental organisations and individuals had unsuccessfully sought a stay on the sale of bonds ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Even after 2019, there were petitions to postpone the sale of bonds before the elections in various states. But the sale of bonds continued until it was scrapped in February 2024 after several legal challenges. The Supreme Court ordered the State Bank of India to disclose information on all bonds after April 12, 2019. Our analysis is based on the data published by the State Bank of India.

The first question we ask in this essay is simple—who gets the electoral bonds money and why? In other words, is it the case that the ruling parties gained the most from electoral bonds? The significance of this question needs to be explained. The main allegation raised against the electoral bond system is that it opens the way for anonymous political donations. As a result, various businesses will use it to their advantage in terms of government favours by effectively bribing the ruling party through legal means. It is difficult, if not impossible, to present detailed evidence in support of this possibility because the link between grants and specific government favours and concessions is hidden in the labyrinth of government documents. But after the release of the bond data, many commentators have shown with statistics that many loss-making companies have bought electoral bonds worth crores of rupees. Many companies have bought bonds worth more than the profit shown on their balance sheets and many companies have bought bonds after the ED or the CBI knocked on their doors.

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There is no doubt that the most plausible hypothesis as to the reason for giving money through bonds is that it is a form of investment - the purchaser must be hoping that the government will pay them back in the forms of favours that will increase their future profits. But as we said earlier, it is difficult to get direct evidence of the quid pro quo, even if the bond donation is accounted for. So, we will present some indirect evidence, one of which is to see whether the ruling party is getting the money, because the party that is in power has a much greater ability to provide benefits. One problem in examining this possibility is that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been in power at the Centre and in many states throughout the period when electoral bonds were in vogue. And, according to various media reports, they alone received more than half of the total bond donations. But it cannot be said with certainty that all this money came from the BJP being the ruling party - at least as a theoretical possibility, that various individuals or organizations have given money to the BJP because their economic policy or political ideology is more acceptable to them. Any person or organization can invest in a political party even if that party is not in power at that moment. For example, in America, either the Democrats or the Republicans are in power in a given year. However, those who are not in power also receive donations and political donations do not stop once a party leaves office. That is why, to examine whether the BJP is getting money because it is in power or because of its policies and ideology, we need situations where there is change of government and the BJP either gains or loses power. That is, if we compare the bond donations of the ruling BJP with the bond donations received by them when they are not in power, it is

possible to shed light on the relationship between the BJP being in power and their bond donations. But unfortunately, all our data is for the period between 2016-17 and 2023-24, when the BJP was in power at the Centre and in most of the states. So, we will need to take a little detour to check this hypothesis.

Our second question is, who gives money through bonds and to whom? A related question is, what are the characteristics of the state from which money is given and to whom money is given. Do the local capitalists of any state back the national parties or do the regional parties also benefit from their donations?

We will also try to understand whether a larger picture emerges from our analysis of the data. This is where we take a different angle from other perspectives on electoral bonds. The existing views on the topic all centre on the theme of the exchange of corporate donations for government benefits. But going beyond this, our analysis of the available statistics on bonds points to an emerging political-economic scenario in India and we will turn to this towards the end.

Now we turn to answering the questions we posed above, one by one.

A few stylised facts about funding of parties.

We first look at the basic pattern of sources of funds declared by political parties, showing both how much of a given form of funding is going to a specific party, and how much of that party's funding as declared to the Election Commission comes from bonds as opposed to non-bond sources.

From the ADR report we can see that between 2016-17 and 2021-22, about 56% of the total funds legally received by political parties came from electoral bonds, about 28% came from corporate donations (in-

cluding electoral trusts) and 16% from other sources (private donations, members' subscriptions, collections from meetings, etc). It should be noted that the earliest bond data recorded in the SBI list is from 2019. Therefore, it is expected that over time the relative importance of funds through bonds will increase.

But are bonds making non-bond forms of donations irrelevant? There is no straightforward answer to this question.

The amount of both bond and non-bond donations to the BJP is huge. Between 2016-17 and 2021-22, the BJP alone received more than Rs 5,000 crore through bonds, while all the other parties together got about Rs. 3,000 crores. That is, about 57 % of electoral bond money went to the BJP. But this supremacy of BJP also applies to non-bond forms of donations—Rs. 4,850 crores, while all other parties together got about Rs 2,398 crore. That is, the BJP collected about 66% of donations from non-bond sources. Of corporate donations, the BJP cornered 71%.

#### **The question of incumbency**

Now we turn to the second question: Were the parties that got money through bonds largely those in power? The following table summarises the answer to this question by providing information on party-wise collections from bonds, and their incumbency status.

From Table 1 we find a somewhat loose correlation between bond donation and incumbency status. During our period of data coverage (2019-24), the BJP got the largest amount of money through electoral bonds, and they were in power in the most number of states.

But there are some nuances that are worth noting. For example, Trinamool Congress was in power in one state (West Bengal) but it received more money through

Party Name	Total Money (in Rs cr)	Total Money (%)	States in power defined by Chief Ministers party identity (between April 2019 and January 2024)
BJP	5381.01	45.82	Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, and Manipur (all 2019-Jan 2024) Himachal Pradesh (2019-Dec 2022)Madhya Pradesh (March 2020-Jan 24)Karnataka (2019-May 2023)Chhattisgarh (Dec 2023-Jan 2024)Rajasthan (Dec 2023-Jan 2024)
AITC	1549.67	13.20	West Bengal (2019-Jan 2024)
INC	1301.65	11.08	Chhattisgarh (2019-Dec 2023)Madhya Pradesh (2019- March 20) Himachal Pradesh (Dec 22-Jan 2024)Karnataka (May 2023-Jan 2024)Rajasthan (2019- Dec 2023)Punjab (2019-March 2022)Telangana (Dec 2023-Jan 2024)
BRS/TRS	1169.55	9.96	Telangana (2019-Dec 2023)
BJD	724.50	6.17	Orissa (2019- Jan 2024)
DMK	632.00	5.38	Tamil Nadu (May 2021-Jan 2024)
YSR-C	327.00	2.78	Andhra Pradesh (2019-Jan 2024)
TDP	206.33	1.76	
Shiv Sena	151.30	1.29	Maharashtra (2019-Jan 2024)
RJD	65.96	0.56	
AAP	61.80	0.53	Delhi (2019-Jan 24), Punjab (March 2022-Jan 24)
JDS	40.00	0.34	
SKM	36.50	0.31	Sikkim (2019-Jan 2024)
NCP	24.70	0.21	
Janasena Party	20.00	0.17	
SP	13.21	0.11	
JDU	12.00	0.10	Bihar (2019-Jan 2024)
JMM	11.75	0.10	Jharkhand (2019-Jan 2024)
SAD	7.25	0.06	
SDF	5.50	0.05	
AIADMK	6.05	0.051	Tamil Nadu (2019-May, 2021)
JK (NC)	0.50	0.00	
Goa Forward Party	0.35	0.00	
MGP	0.35	0.00	

**Notes for Table 1:** In our calculations, total bond donation was Rs 11742.6 crores out of which BJP received Rs 5381.01 crores, AITC Rs 1549.67 crores, INC received Rs 1301.65 crores and so on. This calculation is slightly different from some of the calculations published in news media (e.g., <https://thewire.in/politics/top-five-political-parties-saw-electoral-bonds-fortunes-turning-with-election-wins-and-losses>). According to the reports, the total bond money is Rs 12769 crores out of which BJP received Rs 6060.5 crores, AITC got Rs 1609.5 crores, INC received Rs 1421.8 crores etc. The discrepancy is not very large (7.9%) and is coming from the fact that we have only considered bond donation given by organizations and left out individual donations from our calculation. Also, there were around 87 entries in the SBI spreadsheet that did not have party information and 1680 observations that did not have issue state and other information. We dropped these observations from our tables as well, with once exception. AIADMK received all their money (Rs 6.05 crores) through these "unknown" bonds. Even though we did not use bond information from these "unknown" bonds in any other calculations, we report AIADMK and their bond receipts in Table 1 as they were the incumbent in Tamil Nadu.

Party Name	Not in Power	Incumbent in only 1 state	Incumbent in 2 states	Incumbent in 3 states	Incumbent in 4 states	Incumbent in at least one state
AAP		10.1 (0.08%)	51.7 (0.45%)			61.80 (0.53%)
DMK	185 (1.58%)	447 (3.80%)				632 (5.38%)
INC		0.00	174.3 (1.48%)	436.05 (3.71%)	691.3 (5.89%)	1301.65 (11.08%)

Note: Figures in percentages are the share of the total value of EB donations in the country during 2019-24.

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electoral bonds than Congress which was in power in a larger number of states. Another interesting case is the AIADMK. They were in power in Tamil Nadu between 2019 and 2021 but they could only get Rs 6 crore through electoral bonds.

On the other hand, the TDP was not in power in Andhra Pradesh and yet, ranks seventh with Rs 206.33 crore bond donation which was much higher than AAP (rank 10) which was in power in two states and the JMM which was in power in one state.

To look at this issue a bit more in depth, we look at the states

where the incumbency status changed during this period (2019–24) so that we can examine if a party comes to power in a larger number of states they start receiving a larger amount of bond donations. For this part of the analysis, most of the parties ranking high in the bond list are not of much use as they stayed in power throughout the period. We look at three parties whose incumbency status changed in the middle of our period of study.

**Table 2: Incumbency and donations from electoral bonds for AAP, DMK and INC (April**

**2019-January 2024, in Rs crore)**

We see from Table 2 that when a party comes to power in more states, the amount of bond money coming its way increases. For example, even though the DMK managed to get bond funding when it was not in power, the bond collections more than doubled when it came to power in Tamil Nadu. But we see that the degree of increase in bond money when a party comes to power in a larger number of states varies across parties, and the states where it comes to power. □□□

[To be concluded]

## THE SECRET VOICES OF HOSTILITY

### From Individual Violence to Collective Violence?

*Prabuddha Bagchi*

**T**HE CRIMINAL DESERVES to be punished after a proper investigation but does that give people the right to decide what punishment will be appropriate in the case? Here is a story of a school teacher from Junglemahal who was much loved by his students. One day, a group of assassins rushed into class and brutally murdered him in front of the students; later they wrote in red ink that he was killed because of his involvement with the ruling party. This was the supposed system of justice among the Maoists and this was the punishment that “criminals” deserved. Among the *sal* and *mahua* forests in Binpur a Maoist squad was hiding and making preparations for armed struggle; in the dead of the night, the Joint Special Forces attacked the guerilla fighters and upon killing them hung them from the bamboo trees and had posed with their dead bodies for photo journalists. It cannot be determined if justice would have been delivered in either of the cases and even if the cases went to court, the verdict cannot be predicted.

The ‘60s and ‘70s were a period of immense turmoil and state-sponsored murders in the history of West Bengal. Many murders had unnecessarily taken place under the garb of political conflicts; young students had been encountered by police forces on grounds of baseless suspicion and none of these victims have been given justice yet. Does that mean that to punish the people involved in these crimes the gallows have to be operated for six to eight months continuously until each and every criminal has been punished? This would set off a chain of events where new narratives would constantly keep on arising and the gallows would never stop operating.

The state has a structure in place for the criminals and multiple provisions are laid down to correctly punish them for their crimes. Under the concept of the welfare state, the term ‘prison’ has been replaced with ‘correctional home’ in the last few decades. This implies that the state will take an active part in reforming the criminals and help them to fix their lives instead of sending them

directly to the gallows. This change also has had positive effects, leading to reformation of some criminals. The infamous Rashid Khan, also known as “Satta Don”, who was jailed for his imprisonment in the Bow Bazar bomb blast case, now teaches painting to the other inmates at the Presidency Correctional Facility. Debjani Mukhopadhyay, the convict in the Sarada Chit Fund Scam acts as a teacher to her fellow convicts at the Dum Dum Central Jail. Those who have read *Itibritte Chandal Jibon* by Manoranjan Byapari do know that when he had been convicted, the first person to give him formal education was a fellow convict who had been sentenced to life imprisonment who also

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happened to be a teacher. If not for the teacher, Manoranjan Byapari would never have been able to become a writer. Before the release of the Bengali film *Muktodhara*, Alokana Roy had surprised everyone by casting convicts punished with life imprisonment in her rendition of the play *Balmiki Pratibha*—the play gained so much fame that under popular demand it was performed at the famous Rabindra Sadan Theatre. Nigel Akkara *aka* Vicky, a convict charged with eighteen murders, got a chance to meet Alokana Roy at her house during this time; he recalls fondly how Alokana Roy had given him an opportunity to turn his life around and how he refers to her as 'Maa'(Mother). He had also told how he had cried his heart out in an empty Rabindra Sadan Theatre and stated his desire to purge himself of his sins. These are not just mere romanticised stories; there hides in all these a sense of humanity and hope for a brighter future. Unfortunately, there has been a constant attempt throughout the socio-political scene to hide this hope for humanity under the garb of vengeance, thus trying to erase any chance of a possible redemption. There has grown a sense of delusion in the minds of the people with regards to differentiating between the nature of the crime and the nature of the criminals. Due to the growing distance between the administrative and legislative powers, have people put more faith in them? In truth people blindly trust the judge to give the correct punishment but if the punishment does not live up to the expectations of they do not even have a second thought before tearing into the decision and start calling for mob justice.

Before the French Revolution, if a person committed suicide their naked body would be hung upside-

down and burnt as committing suicide was a crime. Guillotine and beheading in the medieval times was followed by the method of the electric chair as a form of capital punishment. Mussolini and Hitler had made the capital punishment into a form of display as if it were a 'classical art'- in retaliation; Mussolini was publicly hanged till death. Even in Medieval India there was an established gory custom of 'gifting' someone the decapitated head of an individual either as revenge or announcing the start of a war. The Gods and Goddesses have also been referred to in the Puranas as having doled out gruesome punishments such as incinerating or completely destroying individuals, thus displaying cruel tendencies.

Humanity tends to learn its lessons from history; thus capital punishment has been done away with in most countries post-Second World War- the concept of 'an eye for an eye' acting as a deterrent to major crimes has been done away with by the majority of the world. Although the First Prime Minister of India had proclaimed the hanging of all black marketeers from lampposts, that did nothing to stop it and had zero effectivity. Criminologists have long-since theorised that capital punishment does not play a 'deterrent factor' in the process of curbing serious criminal activity and the biggest example of that are the thousands of crimes taking place against women in the country on a daily basis. Even after this, why are people still crying out for the hanging of criminals? Are they only concerned with the idea of revenge as a form of justice? Do they want the ideas of collective violence to mar the judgements given out to criminals?

The verdict by the court which has caused such a hue and cry has been delivered only after studying all the evidence and forensic reports-

and the conclusion thus drawn is that the crime was committed by a single individual. Commenting on the progress of the investigation, the judge said that the Investigating Officer of the CBI had created a 'chain of events' on the basis of all the evidence gathered and the judge had followed this 'chain' and delivered a 172 page verdict after cross-examination. In the judgement, the judge provided all the minute details and analysis and also referred to a Supreme Court case from 2022(Manoj and Ors. versus State of Madhya Pradesh) where the 'judiciary had become hungry for blood' and opposing it said that although the crime at R G Kar was horrid and vile; he would not deliver the sentence of capital punishment but would rather subject the convict to life imprisonment and path of reformation.

Do they want a person to be hanged or do they want the proper investigation and correct punishment and subsequent incarceration of all criminals involved? Strangely enough R G kar agitationists still continue to ask for people to be given capital punishment even when they have the examples of Dhanonjoy Chattopadhyay's 'wrongful punishment'. There was no proper investigation held before sending Afzal Guru to the gallows to be hanged which people have learnt from Kobad Ghandy's book *Fractured Freedom*. It has also happened that the capital punishment ordered by a lower court has been overturned by the higher court. It also must not be forgotten that the rapists of Bilkis Bano were given freedom by the efforts of the state and commemorated with garlands upon their freedom. In the recently released Feluda web series based on Satyajit Ray's *Bhushorgo Bhoyonkor*, people see a retired judge facing a sense of guilt with regards to certain cases of capi-



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tal punishment he had delivered. In the renowned Bengali film *Sabar Uporey* people are told the story of a wrongful incarceration; thus one sees that even in literature there is a presence of 'unfair' judgement and after a point these judgements stand on minute personal observations. In such cases, close scrutiny becomes the utmost priority for proper judgement to be delivered and the judgement by the lower court shows the strictness of close scrutiny followed by the judge.

Nobody is in favour of minimising the crimes of the main culprits and subsequently judging them; people want the criminals to be deservedly punished but the rise of public courts and how they have jumped to push-

ing for capital punishment of the convict is a matter worth raising a concern about and finding the answer to it seems very difficult. At one point in time, mob lynching had become a serious issue all across the state and keeping that in mind Kabir Suman had penned the song *Kandte De*. In that song there is a description of a match being lit in the eyes of a boy after having been severely beaten up by the public. Violence promoted by the entire community is much more harmful than individual violence as it turns an entire mass of people against a few thus having the potential to swing even the court's opinion in some cases. The champions of collective punishment, in reality, look willing to forgo

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even their humanity for the sake of "justice". □□□

[This is a slightly shortened version of an article originally published in Bengali on-line magazine *Ekak Matra*.

Translated by **Aryaveer Das**]

### SOFT HINDUTVA DILEMMA

## The Rise and fall of AAP

**Subhash Gatade**

*"Do Not Put Each Foot in a Different Boat." — Chinese Proverb*

**A** DEFEAT IN ELECTIONS should not be The End of politics for a political party. There are examples how parties who were humbled in one election could bounce back with huge majority in next elections.

It is a different matter that with AAP (Aam Aadmi Party) things seem to be unfolding in rather unpredictable ways, thanks to its rather unceremonious exit from the citadels of power in Delhi and defeat of all its top leaders in the recently held elections to the assembly.

Nobody would have imagined that its Supreme Leader would feel so insecure after the loss that he will summon all MLAs of his party—which is leading the government in neighbouring Punjab—to the national capital the very next day for consultation or may be sweet talk.

No doubt it did give way to speculations about increasing dis-

gruntlement within his party and its legislators and their being in search of greener pastures. It also rekindled debate about the personality centric functioning of the AAP or how a close confidante of Kejriwal was appointed on a key post under Bhagwant Mann—Chief Minister of Punjab—last year itself which was construed as clipping of his wings by the opposition.

Kejriwal has formally accepted the verdict and has congratulated BJP for the win and has also promised cooperation with the government.

Allegations of manipulation of electoral lists—and inflating the actual number of voters fraudulently—or deletion of voters, who would be voting for the opposition in any case, did find mention in AAP leaders' immediate reaction to the results. In fact, a web magazine had provided details of a survey about this issue in a high

profile constituency and even a section of AAP leaders themselves had held a press conference before the day of the voting.

Former leaders of AAP—Prashant Bhushan and Yogendra Yadav—have blamed Kejriwal for AAP's loss, they have said how Kejriwal's controversial "Rs 45 crore Sheesh Mahal" and the party's departure from its original vision of alternative politics led to this debacle. According to them AAP has turned into a leader-centric organisation.

Ashutosh, formerly associated with AAP felt that it is too early to write its obituary and is still hopeful that it will learn right lessons from its debacle and make necessary course correction. He seems hopeful that the party will be able to retrieve its 'moral veneer' and reinvigorate itself.

Undoubtedly most miserable are its die-hard supporters, who are finding themselves in a blind alley. Many of these supporters had also joined or had been sympathetic to the RSS inspired Anna movement which had laid the basis for formation of Aam Aadmi Party.

There is a sprinkling of such elements even among the intellectual circles—who were hoping against hope that ‘Mufflerman’ will be able to make a hatrick this time and would be able to consolidate himself further much on the lines of 30 plus year old regime of the Left in Bengal.

Looking at the fact that the fight had become triangular—with Congress also in the rings—and the challenging road ahead before AAP, they had unleashed an attack on the Congress Party and its ‘clowns’ for ‘playing spoilsport’. They seem unmindful of the fact that it was AAP only which had unilaterally closed the door for any adjustment with the grand old party in Delhi, for the assembly elections immediately after the elections to the parliament.

Merely on this count they had no qualms even in questioning the sincerity of the Congress in fighting the BJP. Perhaps they had developed a sort of selective amnesia about the recently held elections to the Haryana assembly as well where AAP had fielded candidates from all seats. Their ‘strength’ in Haryana could be easily gauged from the fact that barring one seat, their candidates had lost deposits in all these seats. No doubt, they were ‘successful’ in Congress losing 4-5 seats. For posterity it need be mentioned here that most of the pre-poll surveys had also said that Congress would triumph the BJP led NDA government there.

The path AAP followed in Haryana was no exceptional. It was a continuation of its strategy of field-

ing its candidates from those regions where Congress was in contest and they had practised this modus operandi in Goa, Uttarakhand as well as Gujarat. This tactics has objectively weakened Congress in its relative strongholds, helped gain AAP some foothold and directly / indirectly strengthened BJP at the national level. A division in anti-BJP votes has always helped BJP

The motley combination of AAP supporters has been so enamoured of its slogan of ‘clean politics’ that they not only refused to see AAP’s slow metamorphosis into just another political party or alleged involvement of its leaders in scams and its trying to imitate BJP on the Hindu turf.

What is further surprising that the way AAP tried to transform into Hindu first party gradually, how it refused to address the stigmatisation and marginalisation of the minority community under BJP rule, how it refused to stand by the Muslim community in the North East Delhi riots of 2020 or the way it used the gathering at Nizamuddin Markaz—much like the rightwing forces—to put a blame on the Muslims for spread of Corona, etc and never became their concern. What is more Kejriwal had supported abrogation of Article 370; and when AAP’s chances of an alliance with Congress fizzled out prior to a previous election, he had then made claims in a press conference which were clearly construed to polarise voters.

It is now history how Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal had announced distribution of “‘legally permissible weapons” in Delhi on the eve of elections. AAP—despite being in power in Delhi—did not deem it necessary to oppose such sectarian mobilisation and arming of ordinary Hindus.

One of the most shameful episodes in the AAP’s journey to

legitimise its soft Hindutva politics was its competing with the Bharatiya Janata Party to decide ‘who can hate and oppress Rohingya refugees more in election season’.

Perhaps the special message for the migrant children—particularly Rohingya children living in her state—shared by the ex Chief Minister of Delhi Ms Atishi Marlena (25 December 2025) on X, would always remain as a testimony to the party’s moral bankruptcy:

“On one side are the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] people who bring Rohingyas to Delhi by making them cross the border from Bangladesh and give those EWS [Economically Weaker Section] flats and facilities meant for Delhiites.

On the other hand, there is the Aam Aadmi Party [AAP] government of Delhi which is taking every possible step to ensure that the Rohingyas do not get the rights of Delhiites. Today, the education department of the Delhi government has passed a strict Order that no Rohingya should be given admission in the government schools of Delhi.

We will not let the rights of the people of Delhi be taken away!” (Translated to English from the original Hindi post). Examples galore.

Its Hindu first policy in a multi religious country found its reflection in its announcement of the policy of honorariums for temple priests and granthis in Gurudwara per month to the tune of Rs 18,000 on the eve of elections but had not made similar announcements for priests of Ravidas Mandir, Valmiki mandir or Buddhist priests.

Questions have also been raised about this ‘opportunistic’ approach of AAP—wherein—despite all its talk of respect of Dr Ambedkar, it had forced one of its ministers to resign

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from his post just because he had read out the 22 pledges uttered by Dr Ambedkar [which were then repeated by millions of people gathered there].

### **Where does AAP go from here?**

Whether it will further its journey on the slippery path of soft Hindutva politics with more vigour and passion to regain its lost support

If history can be a guide before the party, it can learn how its *bete noire* namely Congress party had tried its own soft Hindutva politics in late eighties and how it ended up strengthening the BJP only

Well-known journalist Ravish Kumar has made a video on AAP's defeat in Delhi elections, it raises a question which takes the debate further. According to him AAP—which rode to victory thrice in Delhi and is now ruling neighbouring Punjab as

well, now has to ask a question to itself 'what is its ideology'. Ambiguity on this issue will not serve it anymore.

The battle-lines of a different kind have already been drawn and any political formation has to make a choice, where does it stand.

On one side of this 'battlefield' are all those individuals, organisations, political parties who want to save Constitution—who cherish its principles and values and who are keen that the India envisaged by the founders of Constitution—where there would not be any discrimination on the basis of gender, caste, religion etc anymore survives and it says a final 'No' to politics of hate / exclusion and on the other side are all those individuals, formations, political parties who are keen that this great country—with a history of

composite heritage—ushers into a Hindu Rashtra.

AAP's record of ambivalence since a decade and more is clear and of late one is witnessing growing fascination for this soft Hindutva politics, among avowedly secular parties also seem to fall prey to it under mass pressure on occasions.

Perhaps all these new entrants to this experiment may consider themselves smart players in the Indian politics—who are supposedly able to retain their identity but also expand their footprints in the region but they forget the fact that by not defending secular principles and values and trying to imitate Hindutva politics in their own way, they are basically furthering and consolidating the Hindutva project itself. All their so called smart moves further accelerate the dynamic of this project to rebuild India into a Hindu Rashtra. □□□

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### **PLAGIARISM OR COINCIDENCE?**

## **Ray's Alien & Spielberg's E.T. the Extra Terrestrial**

*Staff Writer*

[In the 1970s, Satyajit ray wrote a script for a science fiction film called Alien. The script—extraordinary for its visual flourish and thematic brilliance—captured the attention of international filmmakers. Two middlemen who sniffed an opportunity to make a fortune took Satyajit Ray to the United States.

The met with Hollywood producers, but nothing much happened, and the script remained on the shelves, unproduced. Decades later, Steven Spielberg made a film called E.T. The Extraterrestrial, which bore an uncanny resemblance to Satyajit Ray's Alien.]

**S**ATYAJIT RAY'S UNPRODUCED film, Alien; scripted & shared with Hollywood honchos in the 70s, bears an uncanny resemblance to Stephen Spielberg's E.T. the Extra Terrestrial. Was this purely coincidental?

Tell Satyajit, I was a kid in High School when his script was circulating in Hollywood.

Spielberg announced amidst accusations that the E.T. director had plagiarised Satyajit Ray's work. The work in question was the script of Ray's 'The Alien'. In 1967, the film was supposed to mark a turning point in Indian cinema. Instead, it

was lost in the winding channels of Hollywood. Ray later said in an interview:

"I knew all along that I was being taken for a ride, but the funny thing was that the desire to experience the whole thing was also irresistible".

Ray was fascinated with science fiction. The man was known, especially among his Bengali audience, as the creator of Professor Shonku, the fictional swashbuckling scientist. His pieces, Shades of Grey and Abstraction, graced the Amrita Bazaar Patrika in the 1940s.

Yet, The Alien's journey started

on the sets of 2001: A Space Odyssey. There, he met science fiction author Arthur C Clarke and shared the idea for The Alien based on his Bengali story Bonkubabur Bondhu or Bonkubabu's friend. At Clarke's behest, Ray crafted the screenplay for The Alien.

Set in Bengal, Ray envisioned the film as an English-Bengali bilingual called The Alien in English and Avatar or Mangal Kavya (or the Martian Tales) in Bengali. The film tells the tale of Haba, an orphan boy who lives with his arthritis-afflicted grandmother. One day, an alien ascends to the God-forsaken village of Mangalpur, where his spaceship is taken to a submerged temple.

The mischievous creature—with its large head, sunken cheeks and three-fingered hand—dances with fireflies, blooms, lotuses and heals bleeding wounds.

The film explores various themes—from childlike wonder to narratives of society and religion. Its bustling

cast of characters: the businessman Bajoria, who tries to drum up a tourism business surrounding the 'temple,' the sceptical newspaper reporter and his new wife, Kalyani and the American Engineer or 'Mr America,' flanked by a Christian missionary and the Santhal tribesmen. They lend a quality to the script that can only be described as quintessentially Ray.

Impressed with the screenplay, Clarke sent it to his friend Mike Wilson. Wilson was a character—a diver who had discovered a chest of Mughal Coins and the producer of the Sri Lankan James Bond, or James Banda.

The man soon reached Calcutta with an introduction from Clarke and took Ray to Paris, where they negotiated with Peter Sellers for a role in the film. The duo landed in Los Angeles, where Wilson took Ray for a ride in a Lincoln convertible and put him up at the Chateau Marmont on Sunset Boulevard. But he forgot to mention that a hefty advance was paying for the extravagances.

Wilson had received a letter from Columbia, where he had put his name on the script as a co-author. But blaming Wilson alone for the project's failure would be hasty, as Seller, too, decided against playing the businessman Bajoria in the movie.

Ray dissociated himself from Wilson, and the prospects of the film ever being made faded as quickly as they had gained momentum.

More than a decade later, on a visit to London, Arthur C Clarke watched the critically acclaimed E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial. To him, the similarities were unmistakable: the bulbous head, skeletal structure, slow-moving three or, in ET's case, four-fingered hands, and the ability to make flowers bloom. The similarity also seemed to seep into the base plot: the friendship between the young boy and the friendly alien.

Struck by the resemblance in visual depiction and plot points, Clarke called Ray and asked him to speak to Spielberg. In an interview with Aseem Chhabra, Arthur Clarke said:

I told Satyajit that he should write politely to Spielberg and say, 'Look—there are a lot of similarities here,' but don't make any charges or threats.

However, Ray was not in a vindictive mood and said that Spielberg could simply deny it, and he was in the midst of another movie at that time. Despite this, the director sounded dejected to Aseem Chhabra. He revealed:

'Sometimes I feel I ought to do something about it, but here I am in India in the middle of a film myself. I can't do anything by correspondence. Besides, he (Spielberg) can deny it. What he has done is ruin my chance of making the film because then people will say it came from Spielberg'.

He also said that neither E.T. nor

Spielberg's 1977 film, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, 'would have been possible without my script of *The Alien* being available throughout America in mimeographed copies.'

Chhabra went on to write the story, which caused a flurry of action in Hollywood, with many speculating about whether it would affect the chances of ET getting an Oscar. Others presumed Chhabra had written the piece to help Gandhi (ET's opponent in the Oscars) win. Some sources revealed Spielberg was unhappy with the accusation and responded strongly. However, the director was not one to hold on to grudges as he and Martin Scorsese were the figures responsible for Ray's Honorary Oscar in 1992.

Despite the unfortunate turn of events that led to *The Alien's* shelving, it would be appropriate to end the piece with its opening scene as an ode to Ray's genius.

"A lotus pond in the village of Mangalpur in West Bengal. The camera holds on a part of the surface of the pond with lotus leaves and limp lotus stalks, lit by soft moonlight.

A point of light appears as a reflection in the water, grows bigger and bigger until the pond itself is lit up. The chorus of frogs, crickets and jackals grows in volume, and is joined by a humming sound. In a blaze of light something descends on the pond, shattering its placidity." □□□

[Courtesy: Madras Courier]

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## 55 YEARS LATER

# Remembering Arrikad Varghese

*Harsh Thakor*

**F**EBRUARY 18, 2025 MARKS the 55th anniversary of the first encounter killing in Kerala and also one of the earliest encounters in independent India. Arikkad Varghese was mercilessly tortured and executed fifty-five years ago at a

young age of 32, being born on 14th June, 1938. He played a central role in revolutionary struggle in Kerala and organised resistance of the Adivasis in Wayanad against the exploitation of the feudal lords. He left his stamp on the bloodiest chapter of

the Naxalite movement in Kerala.

In the 1960s, the Adivasis and Dalits of the Wayanad region in Kerala faced severe exploitation by feudal elements. Rape of the women who worked for the feudal lords was a routine feature and suicide among these communities in the region was rampant. Varghese started out as a CPI-M leader, working among the Adivasis of his native Wayanad district. The Naxalbari uprising stirred

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him and he soon emerged as the leader of a group of progressive young men and women committed to the revolution. In Kerala, Varghese made a departure from the CPM to toe the line of communist revolutionaries who were upholding the banner of Naxalbari uprising.

Varghese steered the leadership of a movement with the objective of eradicating the brutal exploitation and oppression in the region. The feudal base in Kerala turned the landless peasants into bonded labourers, who were robbed of a substantial share of the grains they harvested.

Varghese played a key role in eradicating the bonded slavery system of tribals in Wayanad. Till then, the tribals were sold to feudal landlords during the annual festival at Valliyoor kavu temple in Mananthavady. Varghese and his co-activists in Kerala strived to improve the material condition of the poor by redistributing the wealth of the landlords among the oppressed groups.

Following the murder of landlord Vasudeva Adiga and a suspected police informer Chekkoo at Thrissileri in Wayanad in 1970, and the subsequent police crackdown, Varghese and his followers retreated into the Thirunelli forests.

By 1970, the Indian state executed the fascist offensive tactic under the name of *Operation Steeplechase*. This operation aimed to extinguish the entire movement, not only in Kerala but all across India. Intense police suppression forced Varghese into hiding. Unfortunately, an informant betrayed the movement by informing the police and he was arrested. Varghese's body was later found near the Pulpalli police station.

Twenty-eight years later, a police constable by the name of P Ramachandran Nair admitted that Varghese was killed under the orders of I.G Lakshmana. Nair stated that he picked up Varghese from a house

and hand-cuffed him. From there, Varghese was taken to a forest where he was shot dead by Nair, who claimed that he was forced to follow the order facing the threat to his own life by his superior officers. After more than five decades, in 2012, the state government decided to give Rs 50 lakh as compensation to Varghese's four siblings.

This money was planned to be donated towards the activities of Varghese Memorial Trust, which was set up jointly by CPI (ML) Red Flag P C Unnichekkann faction and family members. A 70-cent plot was allocated with the objective to start a research centre for social studies.

The encounter killing of Arikkad Varghese was a testimony that democracy in India is a façade. The state violated fair judicial process and Varghese did not get the opportunity to present his case before the court, leading to unarmed political prisoner to be murdered by the state. The murder of Varghese also illustrated the true character of the so-called anti-fascist Parliamentary left and the Congress Party, which ignited *Operation Steeplechase* in the first place, wherein the state extinguished countless revolutionaries like Varghese.

What stemmed as the fascist *Operation Steeplechase* during Varghese's times germinated into *Operation Greenhunt* and has now adopted the form of *Operation SAMADHAN Prahar* under the current BJP dispensation.

The death anniversary of a martyr resurrects memories of the larger struggle he was a part of. The revolution undertaken by Varghese did not complete the mission of installing a genuinely democratic social order. The conditions of oppression that Varghese fought against continue to hold a firm grip over Indian society. □□□

[Harsh Thakor is a freelance journalist Thanks information from Mulkundan in Nazariya blog and Rediff]

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## LETTERS

**The Kumbha Stampede**

No doubt the Kumbha Mela is the biggest gathering of humanity in the world—where families, devotees and elderly pilgrims gather at the meeting point of rivers Ganges, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati once every 12 years. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has long been trying to utilise the event as an occasion to reenergise their Hindutva ideology. At least 30 people have died and dozens of others have been injured in a stampede. The BJP government of Uttar Pradesh expected around 100 million people to visit the site and yet they didn't make adequate safety arrangements while spending lavishly for propaganda to derive political dividend in elections. The authorities were so inhuman that they sent back the dead bodies to the respective states without death certificates and post-mortem reports. As a result relatives of the deceased faced enormous difficulties in cremation. Too much attention to VIPs seems to be the main reason for inadequate arrangement for common people.

For the BJP the 'Kumbha' of 2025 symbolises Hindu renaissance under their leadership. After Ram temple in Ayodhya, they are marketing 'Kumbha' with religious ferocity, both here and abroad. The banias know how to capitalise on religion. By organising such a mammoth mass mobilisation, one saffron ideologue showed his audacity to mock at Marx's famous 'opium' comment.

Despite restrictions on Muslim participation in the Kumbha and opening of businesses, the tragedy of stampede on Mauni Amavasya (January 29, 2025) proved to be a pivotal

For Frontier Contact

**DEBABRATA SHARMA**

Jatiya Bhavan Malow Ali, Jorhat  
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moment, bringing people together across religious divides. In the spirit of unity and compassion, prayers were offered at Dargah for wellness of those injured in the stampede. In a heroic act, Farhan Alam saved the life of devotee Ram Shankar with CPR. Sikhs and Muslims selflessly served by providing food to Kumbha devotees, while Mosques were opened for shelter with beds and blankets to thousands of helpless devotees.

**A Correspondent  
End Violence in Manipur**

Biren Singh's resignation presents in Manipur the opportunity for the authorities to uphold and ensure human rights for everyone, break with the violence and impunity of the past and work towards ending the ethnic violence in the state which has claimed the lives of more than 250 people in the last two years. The (BJP)-led governments at both state and central level have utterly failed to end the violence in Manipur, impunity of vigilante groups, and the divisive rhetoric that has flamed the ethnic violence. Their actions have led to repression of dissenting voices and an abject humanitarian crisis in the state.

By the continued failure to hold to account those suspected to be responsible for serious human rights violations, the government risks sending the message that the impunity for these violations will continue. This in turn will fuel further violations. Unlike the emblematic cases taken over by the Central Bureau of Investigation, like the case of the gang-rape of two Kuki women in May 2023 that found the Manipur police complicit – many lesser-known ones continue to struggle for attention of the state and central governments. This must change.

Since May 2023, more than 60,000 people have been displaced in Manipur due to the ongoing violence between the dominant ethnic community, the Meities and the other minority ethnic communities including the Kukis. Homes, business, vil-

lages and places of worship have been burnt down, attacked, looted and vandalised.

The resignation of Biren Singh comes after the Supreme Court of India earlier this month ordered for a sealed-cover report from the Central Forensic Sciences Laboratory into audio tapes that allegedly had him saying that the ethnic violence in the state had been instigated at his insistence.

**Aakar Patel  
Amnesty International, India  
Peddling Fantasies  
as "News"**

Over 50 crore people taken dip in Mahakumbha. Just think of it. India's total population is estimated to be 145 crore or thereabouts. (Don't bother too much that it's now 14 years or so since the last Census.) So, "over 50 crore" means more than one in every three. But, had you and your family members been there? How many among your acquaintances? That's a very simple test.

So, that's the *Times of India*, the largest newspaper group in India having large footprints in the electronic media too, for you. And it's not only the TOI alone. It's the Indian MSM today.

**Sukla Sen  
BSF Brutality**

Fatema Bewa, 70, widow of Late Hachen Ali, a resident of Seuti-II village, Dinhata-II Block, Cooch-behar, West Bengal. on 06/02/2025, around 11:30 AM, while returning from the fair price shop with her grandsons, was brutally assaulted by BSF personnel near 17 No. Gate. BSF Constables Ashok Kumar, Rajesh Mallik Kumar, and a female constable without a nameplate stopped them, citing previous disputes over land. Despite her repeated pleas, the BSF personnel began beating her with sticks, grabbing her hair, and throwing her to the ground. When her grandsons tried to intervene, they were also assaulted. Fatema Bewa sustained severe injuries to her head,

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forehead, back, and limbs and lost consciousness.

She was taken to Dinhata Sub-Divisional Hospital, where she received treatment for two days. After discharge, she lodged a written complaint at Sahebganj Police Station on 10/02/2025, but no FIR has been registered yet nor police / BSF enquiry initiated. This inaction raises concerns about police - BSF collusion and attempts to shield the accused. The victim remains in pain and requires further medical / psychological attention.

Banglar Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM) has urged the Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission, to intervene and take immediate action.

**Kirity Roy,**  
**Secretary, MASUM**

## Protest in Delhi University

On 27th November, AISA along with other organisations of Delhi University held a protest at the gate of the Vice Chancellor's office demanding immediate termination of the Principal of Shaheed Bhagat Singh College, Arun Kumar Attree. Since there has been a complaint filed by Sumit Chauhan, a Dalit student of SBSC of physical assault and casteist abuse, the police are yet to file an FIR. Even after ten days.

Students and teachers demanded that Attree be removed from a position which gives him access to tamper with evidence and inquiry. At the protest, AISA DU President Shantanu spoke, "We have filed the complaint more than a week back. The police are shamelessly delaying the inquiry giving enough time to Attree to play his move. We demand that he be immediately removed from his position of power which he is known to abuse."

Prof Abha Dev Habib, Faculty at Miranda House said, "our University has been surrendered to casteist lumpens who feel that they have complete immunity. We stand with Sumit and we will make an example

out of Attree that DU will not tolerate casteism!" Prof Rudrashis Chakraborty, faculty at KMC said, "we salute Sumit and his brave fight against casteism. The VC must answer how Attree gets this liberty to do so to a student."

A delegation consisting of Prof Abha Dev, AISA DU President Shantanu and Sumit along with other students submitted a memorandum at the VC Office demanding the removal of Arun Kumar Attree from SBSC and aid in the police inquiry.

### ML Update

## Sumoud

Palestinians' future is going up in flames. Ancient olive groves are being set ablaze in the West Bank. In Gaza, parents still search for their children's bodies beneath the scorched rubble.

I've been beaten, shot, and put in jail for defending my people's right to be free, but I've never been more terrified for Palestine.

Trump wants to drive two million of Palestinians into the deserts of Egypt and Jordan—he's even suggested Israel should take over the West Bank. If he succeeds, Palestine will be erased.

But he's underestimating one thing: Sumoud. Sumoud is defiant resilience—in Palestine, it means forging an unbreakable spirit; planting hope in the ashes of destruction. This is how Palestinians endured for generations—and with global support, it is how they will continue.

Avaaz has identified Sumoud networks—brave grassroots leaders developing brilliant ways to defend their communities—emerging across Palestine. They bring seeds into Gaza to fight starvation, guard olive groves from arsonists, turn motorcycles into ambulances when bombs rain from the sky, and much more. With the support of peace-loving people across the world Avaaz can scale these networks, saving lives, land, and Palestinian future.

Extremists like Trump seek to radicalise everyone with every tragedy, every loss and every act of hate—pushing Palestinian people deeper into a spiral of violence. Activists who are risking everything to build a different future with every seed planted, arson stopped and community fed, need help now.

**Fadi Quran, Avazz**

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