

# frontier

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## *The Story of \$21 Million*

**T**HE POLITICAL SLUGFEST BETWEEN THE BHARATIYA JANATA Party [BJP] and Congress over American money in India's electoral politics is anything but ludicrous. They are actually playing with the gallery. American interference in India's internal affairs has a long history. How the first communist government in Kerala was toppled is known to everybody. The Gandhians are not saints as they pretend today. That the United States Agency for International Development [USAID] bribes politicians, journalists and persons having power to influence voters is an open secret. US President Donald Trump has once again questioned the USAID's \$21 million funding for voter turnout efforts in India—an allocation his administration has since cancelled. He also referred to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as his “friend” while elaborating the USAID funding. Reacting sharply, and quite expectedly, to Trump's remark India's foreign ministry described it as “deeply troubling” and expressed concern over potential foreign interference in India's internal affairs. Then a spokesperson of foreign ministry said it was “premature” to make public statements about the matter at this stage and that relevant authorities were investigating it. As they cannot defend the indefensible they are simply avoiding the real issue.

In reality the Trump-Musk engineered initiative to cut USAID funds include \$ 486m in total for the “Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening”, with “\$21m for voter turnout in India” and “\$22m for inclusive and participatory political process in Moldova”. Surprisingly, the pro-establishment media houses in India are down-playing the gravity of the problem while one leading daily said in their so-called ‘investigative report’ that the ‘\$21m was sanctioned for Bangladesh, not India’. All these exercises in escapism are aimed at diverting public attention.

Trump further pointed to another USAID grant—\$29 million allocated to Bangladesh for “strengthening the political landscape”. It was also claimed that the funds were directed to a little known firm with only two employees, casting doubt about the real purpose of the money. As there was no transparency it is not known whether it was utilised by the clandestine organisation to create chaos and political turmoil in Bangladesh, ultimately leading to exit of Sheikh Hasina.

Not very long ago it was widely alleged that USAID was behind India's first mass surveillance, mass spying and unending Census through 12-digit

Aadhaar Number Online Database System. 'India Digital Financial Inclusion: Journey Map Report' [March 2019] by Mobile Solutions Technical Assistance and Research (mSTAR) project of USAID refers to the Aadhaar and Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana scheme.

Not that the extent of USAID's influence over the Union government is unknown to political parties. It issued draft amendments to the Aadhaar Authentication for Good Governance (Social Welfare, Innovation, Knowledge) Rules, 2020 to allow non-government entities to carry out Aadhaar authentication which was restricted to government

actors only. The use of Aadhaar Number authentication by private entities under these rules goes against the Supreme Court's judgement on Aadhaar Number and Aadhaar Act which "limited the use of Aadhaar authentication, for a limited set of purposes, and only by the government". The amendment empowering private organisations to do authentication was done, allegedly under the influence of USAID and its collaborators.

Caught in cross-fire over the foreign funding issue, Congress is now demanding a comprehensive 'white paper' on USAID funds that political parties, NGOs, individuals and

other organisations received. But a white paper is not going to eradicate evils plaguing the administrative apparatus.

India's poll panel has not responded to Trump's allegation, but former election chief S Y Qureshi denied receiving such funding during his tenure, which ran from 2010 to 2012. But BJP's Amit Malviya claimed that in 2012, under Mr Qureshi, the panel signed an agreement with a group linked to George Soros' foundation—primarily funded by USAID—to support a "voter turnout campaign", albeit Qureshi dismissed the charge as malicious.

□□□

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## COMMENT

### 'War is all about Money'

"The (Ukraine) war is all about money. People don't talk much about it. But you know, the richest country in all of Europe for rare earth minerals is Ukraine. Two to seven trillion dollars (worth) of minerals that are rare earth minerals, very relevant to the 21st century... Donald Trump is going to do a deal to get our money back, to enrich ourselves with rare earth minerals. A good deal for Ukraine and us, and he is going to bring peace".—Senator Lindsey Graham in conversation with Fox News host Sean Hannity in November 2024.

TRUE TO WHAT SENATOR GRAHAM foresaw, President Trump has not lost any time in staking claim to nearly 500 billion dollar worth of rare earth minerals of Ukraine, meaning that these will be exploited by US companies, in return for the aid provided in the past and linked also to reconstruction work likely to be taken up by US companies in Ukraine in the near future.

It is strange and unfortunate that peace efforts are being linked to resource grab. While Graham's comments of November 2024 indicate prior planning for this, this may also be the case in the context of the Gaza Riviera plan. Its origin is being traced to a detailed document prepared in the summer of 2024 by a Washington based economist Joseph Pelzman whose proposal included not just hotels and resorts but also airports and harbours. At the same time, he too had stated eerily that

for his plan to work out, first Gaza needs to be emptied out and that Egypt should be willing to take in displaced Palestinians.

Of course the concept of mass displacement of the people of Gaza is completely hostile to any understanding of justice-based peace in this region, and has so far been opposed with rare unity by almost the entire Arab world.

However soon after this Trump's proposal to displace the people of Gaza to create Riviera really shocked not just the Palestinians but all those people in world who believe in justice, particularly as the people of Gaza have already suffered so much and to now inflict mass displacement on them would be the height of injustice.

This injustice appears all the more unacceptable as this would mean that the people of Gaza would be deprived of their quite substantial

gas reserves too. Earlier it was being stated that Israel has its eyes on gaining control over these gas resources of Gaza, but if the Trump project is implemented, then it is more likely that the USA will get control over these gas resources.

What is more, if the people of Gaza are sent elsewhere by arguing that Gaza has become unlivable now, then this creates a highly objectionable model of achieving the objective of ethnic cleansing—first pound a country or region endlessly with so much bombing that much of the place is reduced to rubble, then tell the people who have always lived there that since so much has been destroyed so you also must leave.

Then there is the additional question of what will happen to the Palestinian people of West Bank. If such extreme actions can be taken to displace the people of Gaza on a mass scale, then isn't it likely that something similar will be done to the people of West Bank.

The Israeli motivations for occupying West Bank have been stronger compared to the occupation of Gaza. □□□

[Contributed by Bharat Dogra]

## NOTE

## 'The Confidential Contract'

*Jabed Ahmed writes:*

US PRESIDENT DONALD Trump wants half the revenue from Ukraine's minerals and veto rights over licensing in return for providing security guarantees in the event of a peace deal between Moscow and Kyiv, according to a report of leaked documents.

Trump previously said he wants Ukraine to pay for financial and military support by affording Washington access to the country's vast but untapped rare earth minerals. However, new documents show a deal between the two countries could expand US access to Ukraine's ports, infrastructure, oil and gas.

President Volodymyr Zelensky has said he is ready to do a deal with Trump that includes US involvement in developing Ukraine's huge deposits of rare earths and other critical minerals.

The Kremlin jumped on the comments, saying it demonstrated the US is no longer willing to provide free aid to Kyiv, before adding, that it was against Trump giving any help to Ukraine whatsoever.

However, a new pre-decisional contract, obtained by *The Telegraph*, reportedly states that the US and Ukraine should form a joint investment fund to ensure that "hostile parties to the conflict do not benefit from the reconstruction of Ukraine".

The "Privileged & Confidential" contract, dated 7 February, also reportedly covers the "economic value associated with resources of Ukraine", including "mineral resources, oil and gas resources, ports, other infrastructure (as agreed)".

The proposed agreement means the US will take 50 percent of recurring revenues received by Ukraine from extraction of resources and 50 percent of the financial value of "all new licences issued to third parties"

for the future monetisation of resources, according to *The Telegraph*.

The contract, supposedly written by private lawyers rather than the US departments of state or commerce, further states: "For all future licences, the US will have a right of first refusal for the purchase of exportable minerals".

The joint investment fund, according to documents seen by *The Telegraph*, "shall have the exclusive right to establish the method, selection criteria, terms, and conditions" of all future licences and projects.

Rare earths are a group of 17 metals used to make magnets that turn power into motion for electric vehicles, cell phones, missile systems, and other electronics. There are no viable substitutes.

The US Geological Survey considers 50 minerals to be critical, including several types of rare earths, nickel and lithium.

Ukraine has deposits of 22 of the 34 minerals identified by the European Union as critical, according to Economy Ministry data. This includes industrial and construction materials, ferroalloy, precious and non-ferrous metals, and some rare earth elements.

Mr Zelensky recently said that Russia had occupied about half of Ukraine's rare earth deposits.

Ukraine also has significant reserves of coal. However, most of these are also now under the control of Russia in occupied territory.

Ukraine is also a key potential supplier of lithium, beryllium, manganese, gallium, zirconium, graphite, apatite, fluorite and nickel, according to the World Economic Forum.

The war has caused widespread damage across Ukraine and Russia now controls around a fifth of its territory. The bulk of Ukraine's coal

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deposits, which powered its steel industry before the war, is concentrated in the east and has been lost.

About 40 percent of Ukraine's metal resources are now under Russian occupation, according to estimates by Ukrainian think tanks *We Build Ukraine and the National Institute of Strategic Studies*, citing data up to the first half of 2024.

Details of any deal will likely develop in meetings between US and Ukrainian officials.

Zelensky will go down in history as the architect of turning independent Ukraine into America's neo-colony. After using Zelensky as a proxy in a most brutal war since World War 2, against Russia, America is now brokering peace while making rapprochement with Moscow, hoping to regain the lost market in Russia.

At the time of writing Kyiv and White House are said to be in the final stages of negotiations in a deal for Ukrainian rare earth minerals, the Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Olha Stefanishyna said in a post on X. □□

24-02-2025

## WINDS OF CHANGE?

## Politics of Electoral Bonds–II

Maitreesh Ghatak  
Anirban Mukherjee

ONE REASON WHY WE started to think that state characteristics matter to understand the pattern of flow of money through electoral Bonds, was the donations received by the Congress. When Congress was in power in Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, and Himachal Pradesh its total bond contribution was around Rs 206 crore. But when the party won Karnataka alongside being in power in these states, the total bond contribution got almost tripled to make it approximately Rs 600 crore. This could be because Karnataka is much richer than the other three states and has a higher value-added in manufacturing.

We start by looking at the states from where most of the bond money was generated. [Figure 1]

One can readily see that the bonds were mostly purchased in the more industrial states. For establishing this argument more firmly we use data from the RBI website<sup>1</sup> that gives us the manufacturing net value added (NVA) in different states as a fraction of total all-India NVA in 2021-22, the latest year for which data is available for all major states. [Table 3]

In Table 3 the ranking in manufacturing is available for 31 states, while bonds are purchased from only 19 states. We can see that industrial ranking and bond money ranking are positively correlated, with the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient being 0.61 amongst states where electoral bonds were purchased.

The states which rank high in terms of bond purchased also rank high in industrial ranking (in terms of industrial ranking Gujarat ranks 1, Maharashtra ranks 2, Tamil Nadu ranks 3, West Bengal ranks 6, Karnataka ranks 4, Telangana 10 and Andhra Pradesh 12.) Of course, the correlation is not perfect and nor

can one make any causal claims, but it is a pattern that is worth noting.

But why did more bond money come from the more industrialised states? In other words, why did not resource-based states such as Jharkhand and Punjab see more bond purchases?

We conjecture that the following mechanism is driving the result. Donors donate money in exchange for some favour from the incumbent parties. Purchasing an electoral bond is a way of a direct transaction between the interest group and the political party, and does away with the possibility of paying any middlemen. This mechanism works better in the industrial or the service sector where such middlemen are not essential in the process of rent extraction.

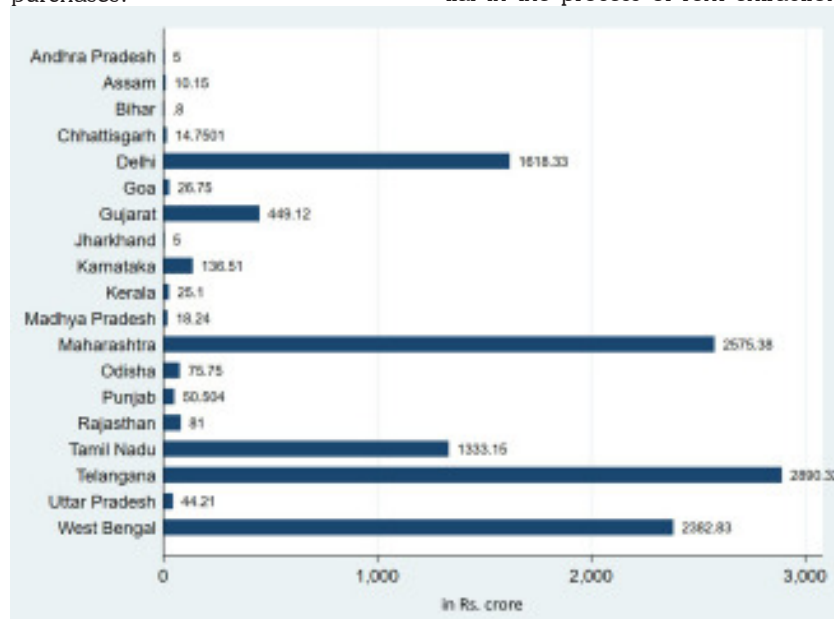


Figure 1: Value of bonds purchased in different states (in Rs. crore)

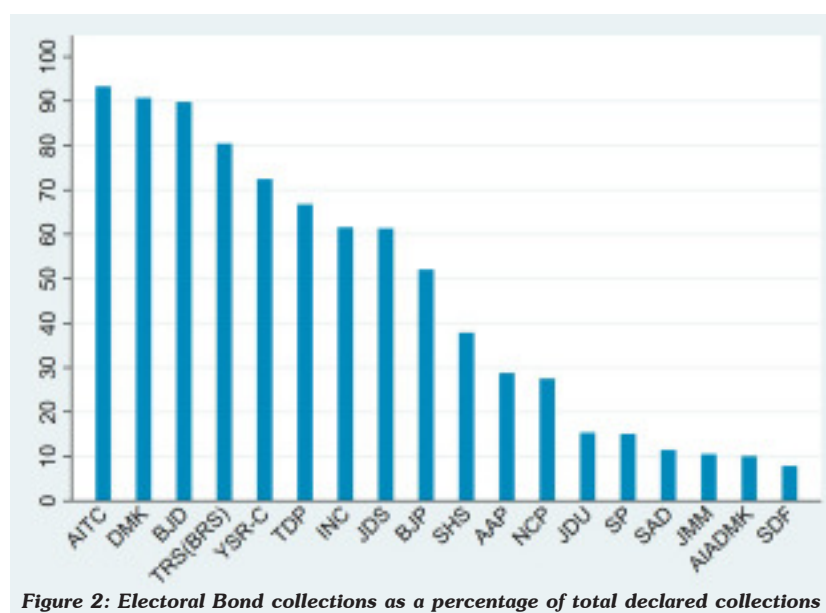


Figure 2: Electoral Bond collections as a percentage of total declared collections



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**Table 3: Ranks of states in manufacturing value-added and value of electoral bond purchases**

State Name	% of state's manufacturing in all India manufacturing	Rank	Bond Rank
	NVA		
Gujarat	17.56	1	6
Maharashtra	12.93	2	2
Tamil Nadu	11.16	3	5
Karnataka	7.59	4	7
Uttar Pradesh	6.18	5	11
West Bengal	5.18	6	3
Haryana	4.70	7	NA
Rajasthan	3.76	8	8
Odisha	3.63	9	9
Telangana	3.50	10	1
Uttarakhand	3.00	11	NA
Andhra Pradesh	2.79	12	17
Madhya Pradesh	2.54	13	14
Kerala	2.36	14	13
Punjab	2.25	15	10
Jharkhand	2.00	16	18
Chhattisgarh	1.70	17	15
Himachal Pradesh	1.56	18	NA
Assam	1.41	19	16
Delhi	1.13	20	4
Bihar	1.12	21	19
Goa	0.93	22	12
Sikkim	0.46	23	NA
Jammu & Kashmir	0.32	24	NA
Meghalaya	0.11	25	NA
Tripura	0.05	26	NA
Chandigarh	0.05	27	NA
Nagaland	0.01	28	NA
Arunachal Pradesh	0.01	29	NA
Manipur	0.01	30	NA
Mizoram	0.00	31	NA

Sectors such as agriculture and mining, on the other hand, are fixed in terms of geography and the process of rent extraction in these sectors often involves local strongmen and a plethora of illegal activities. As money changes hands between the donors and political parties in these sectors, a significant share of the rent goes to these local strongmen. Donations via bonds, in our view, is a way of bypassing these local networks, which is harder where there is rent extraction in agriculture and mining.

However, caution should be exercised while interpreting our result. The theory we proposed here is largely speculative even though it is consistent with the state ranking data. But we need to analyse the nature of the donor companies, their sectors and their headquarter states before mak-

ing a more conclusive statement, which we hope to take on in future work. It was widely reported in news media that infrastructure companies were major donors. It is possible that infrastructure construction positively is correlated with manufacturing activities. But of course, it may also indicate the possibility of other possible patterns.

#### ***The long shadow of electoral bonds***

We know that the BJP benefited the most from electoral bonds. Besides the BJP, only a handful of non-BJP parties received large share of bond money. The communist parties announced they would not take money through bonds. Amongst the rest, most of the EB money went to Congress, Trinamool Congress, BJD, DMK, BRS/TRS, TDP and YSR Congress. Besides, Shiv Sena has also

received large amount of funds through bonds.

If we look at bond collections as a percentage of the total funds collected as declared by various parties (Figure 2), we see that Trinamool Congress tops the list (93%). It is followed by DMK (90%), BJD (90%), BRS (80%), YSR Congress (72%) and the TDP (67%). The ratios for BJP and Congress are 52% and 61%, respectively. [Figure 2]

We find that for non-bond funding the BJP/non-BJP ratio is 2.02 while for bond funding the ratio is 1.34. This would appear to suggest that the BJP has *absolute* advantage in both bond and non-bond funding, but non-BJP parties have *comparative* advantage in bond funding. Is it necessarily a bad thing from the point of view democratic processes? After all, bonds seem to be creating a strong footing for non-BJP parties and the recently concluded election results do show that despite its huge advantage in funds, the BJP's electoral performance was below par, although that was surely driven by many factors and not just fund-related factors.

While at the outset bonds appear to create more equality, a deeper investigation reveals that bonds are creating an unprecedented inequality: at one level between BJP and non-BJP parties, but at a deeper level amongst the non-BJP parties.[Table 4] Table 4 provides evidence in support of this hypothesis.

Table 4 shows the distribution of bond and non-bond donations amongst several parties. BJP stands at the top of both lists, receiving 57.37% of bond money and 67.23% of non-bond money, respectively. However, amongst parties other than the BJP, the distribution appears to be more concentrated for bond contributions. While non-bond money went to all 31 parties, bond money only went to 18 parties. This pattern is also confirmed by the coefficient of variation (standard deviation divided by the mean), a standard measure of

Table 4: Importance of bond collection vs non-bond collections

Bond Rank	Party	% Bond	Non-Bond Rank	Party	% Non-Bond
1	BJP	57.37	1	BJP	67.23
2	INC	10.36	2	INC	8.25
3	AITC	8.36	3	CPI(M)	5.09
4	BJD	6.77	4	NCP	2.33
5	DMK	4.7	5	SHS	2.31
6	TRS/BRS	4.18	6	JDU	1.87
7	YSR-C	3.60	7	YSR-C	1.74
8	TDP	1.23	8	AAP	1.68
9	SHS	1.10	9	TRS/BRS	1.29
10	NCP	0.69	10	BSP	1.19
11	AAP	0.53	11	SP	1.10
12	JDS	0.53	12	BJD	0.98
13	JDU	0.27	13	SAD	0.78
14	SP	0.15	14	TDP	0.78
15	SAD	0.08	15	AITC	0.77
16	AIADMK	0.07	16	AIADMK	0.75
17	JMM	0.01	17	DMK	0.61
18	SDF	0.01	18	MNS	0.49
19	JJP	0.00000	19	JDS	0.43
20	CPI(M)	0.00000	20	CPI	0.18
21	AIMIM	0.00000	21	PMK	0.14
22	DMDK	0.00000	22	NDPP	0.13
23	CPI	0.00000	23	JMM	0.12
24	MNS	0.00000	24	SDF	0.08
25	AIUDF	0.00000	25	AIUDF	0.04
26	PMK	0.00000	26	JJP	0.04
27	NPF	0.00000	27	AIMIM	0.03
28	BSP	0.00000	28	RLD	0.03
29	KC-M	0.00000	29	KC-M	0.02
30	RLD	0.00000	30	NPF	0.02
31	NDPP	0.00000	31	DMDK	0.00

dispersion – for bond money, the coefficient of variation is 3.2, but it is 3.7 for non-bond money.

The evidence is far from definitive but to the extent it is capturing a certain trend, it is a matter of concern. Concentration exacerbates inter-party inequality, reinforced by the sheer volume of total bond money. The total amount of bond contributions is so high that even a small percentage quickly differentiates a party from non-receivers of the bonds. For example, Congress received 10.35% of bond donations and 8.25% of non-bond donations. In absolute terms, Congress' bond donation receipt is Rs 952.29 crore, was almost one and a half times its non-bond donation receipt of Rs 595.14 crore.

Would this kind of inequality impact the political equilibrium of India? In theory, inter-party inequality

may have two opposing effects. On the one hand, fund concentration with a few parties may lead to other parties failing to contest elections effectively in the long run, thereby reducing voter choice and welfare. On the other hand, the concentration of political funding amongst a few non-BJP parties may enable them to effectively oppose BJP.

Do the 2024 Lok Sabha election results confirm any of these conjectures? Election outcomes are determined by many factors, and, moreover, chances of electoral success and financing of campaigns affect each other, and so the causality is unlikely to run in any one direction. Still, it may be noted that in states where all major competing parties received bond money, the results were ambiguous. For example, the BJD and BRS did poorly against BJP or

Congress, while the DMK and TMC performed well against BJP. However, in cases where non-receivers (of bond money) competed against receivers, the results often favoured the receivers. Notable examples include CPI(M), AAP, AIADMK, RJD, and JMM. A major exception is the Samajwadi Party, which won 37 seats against BJP in the last Lok Sabha election despite receiving only a small sum through electoral bonds.

### Conclusion

The expression of protest after the disclosure of bond-related information on the orders of the Supreme Court was not in proportion to the outrage that was observed after the introduction of the electoral bond system, and political parties, barring the Left parties, did not make much fuss about it.

Those who saw the danger signs in the bond system, may have thought that some industrial groups, who have influenced government policy behind the scenes in recent times, will give-money mainly to the ruling party at the Centre, the BJP, under the veil of the bond and this will endanger democracy. After analysing the bond data released by the SBI, it appears that these fears may have been somewhat exaggerated. Although the BJP has gathered a large share of the bond money, the names in the donor list did not correspond to the usual suspects. Moreover, apart from the BJP, some other parties have also benefited significantly from the bonds.

Now, theory and data do not always match. Given that, there are two ways to proceed—either to find errors in the data or to accept the data and refine the theory. Anti-bond civil society has taken the first path. They are talking about two possibilities. One, the real player in the Indian system is black money. The role of bonds or other accounted donations is negligible. Two, industrial groups like Adani or Ambani have bought bonds anonymously, through other smaller companies. Another possibility has also been mentioned.

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According to this view, bonds received before the 2019 elections by the BJP capture the real story. The bond data for this period remains sealed in the chambers of the Supreme Court and is not included in the figures released by the SBI.

All these possibilities could be true. But we have no data to prove or disprove these possibilities. So, we will take the second route –namely, to try to refine our theory in the light of released data. The initial hypothesis of our theory was that the anonymity of the purchaser of electoral bonds would encourage business houses to finance the ruling party at the Centre, namely, the BJP. This hypothesis is not entirely wrong because more than half of the bond money has indeed gone to the BJP. But the picture that emerges from the analysis is a bit more complex. We see that under the guise of secrecy, money has entered the coffers of the BJP as well as some non-BJP parties. In terms of the share of bond donations, the BJP has received the most. But in terms of the relative importance of different ways of raising money, these parties are far ahead of the BJP in terms of their dependence on bonds. Whereas half of the BJP's total donations came from bonds, in the case of parties like the Trinamool Congress, the DMK or the Biju Janata Dal, money received via bonds constitute ninety percent or more of their total accounted for donations. But only a few parties have managed to get funds through bonds, while most of the established political parties have been deprived of funds through bonds. In our view, this pattern of flow of electoral bonds money is indicative of a profound shift in Indian politics, which needs to be understood through the lens of a new theoretical framework.

The huge amount of money that has flown into the coffers of political parties through bonds definitely indicates the large importance of big capital in the political economy of India. Two points are to be noted in this regard.

First, it is clear from the movement of funds through bonds that apart from the BJP, big capital is not willing to fund many parties other than a few such as the Congress and the AITC. This will shrink the scope of competition in Indian politics as well as the contours of the political stage, as we have already mentioned.

Second, we see a change in the reliance of regional parties on sources of funds. Regional parties are generally dependent on local, small capital. However, we see that a large amount of capital is being raised through bonds. If big capital becomes a determinant of the policies of regional parties, then there will be various changes in the structure of the economy of the states under the rule of those parties. If the economy is dominated by small capital, the scope of growth and creating new surplus is limited, which is not the case with big capital.

In our view, the main driving force of the Indian economy at present is the clash of these two types of capital. One of them is based on the rents that are generated from various immobile resources (such as land, infrastructure management, and natural resources) and their distribution. The basis of this distribution process is the management of natural resources and infrastructure. If one part of the capital deployed in these sectors shows presence in the list of the richest people in the world, the other part operates in a smaller scale. Take the example of the *promoter raj*, which largely operates in various illegal ways. At the heart of the main charge against parties like the Trinamool, the Rashtriya Janata Dal, or the Samajwadi Party is corruption and extortion, and the main charge against the BJP is “*suit-boot ki sarkar*”.

But the development path of the other component of big capital that is not dependent on natural resources –namely, human resources and technology - is also not very smooth. The rate of growth in their development projects may be high, but at the

same time it increases the income of highly skilled workers and capitalists disproportionately compared to the income of unskilled workers. This generates social resentment of a different kind.

In our opinion, the movement of electoral bonds reflects the competition between these two types of capital in the financing of different regional parties.

But how does this affect the outcome of elections? Money is needed in electoral battles, but it is not the only ingredient for success. The results of the Lok Sabha elections in 2024 bear this out. Many of the parties that received bond money did well, and many of the parties that did not receive bond money did badly. But there are exceptions to both. For example, the Biju Janata Dal has almost disappeared from Odisha despite receiving a lot of money in bonds. And the Samajwadi Party managed to put up a good fight in Uttar Pradesh despite not getting any bond money.

We must remember that bond money is an indicator of what kind of capital is backing a party. But it is not just about supporting the party but the implementation of its development projects with the help of that party. We have already discussed that the development path of small and big capital creates different kinds of social resentment. In addition to money, the social resentment also plays an important role in electoral outcomes. For instance, the case of the Samajwadi Party's decline in Uttar Pradesh in the recent past and its resurgence in the last Lok Sabha elections is worth noting. One of the reasons behind the collapse of the Samajwadi Party was the power of the musclemen, extortion and the general deterioration of law and order. The current Chief Minister of the BJP, Yogi Adityanath's biggest critics also acknowledge that under his rule, these problems have declined, and the state of law and order has improved. But in our opinion, control of

musclemen or improving law and order is a symptom of a less visible force under work, namely, the development projects of big capital. But despite the improvement of law and order, inequality will inevitably increase in the development projects of big capital and in our view, the anti-BJP wave in Uttar Pradesh in the recent Lok Sabha elections is partly a reaction against this. Of course, our discussion is theoretical and to establish the newly described process properly, much more information is needed on economic inequality, the extent of and amounts involved in extortive activities, which are not readily available at the moment.

To sum up, there has been a lot of talk about the fear that electoral bonds will further encourage political corruption. The fear is not unfounded. But in our analysis, the bond data indicates a much deeper shift in Indian politics. Under the influence of market-oriented reforms unleashed by liberalisation, a new structure was created in Indian politics throughout the 1990s by breaking the old structure of capital. In the process, the instability of one coalition government after another resulted. After the 1990s, a balance appeared to have been achieved in Indian politics in the subsequent period. From the preliminary analysis of electoral bond

data, it seems that a new equilibrium point is in the process of being created by breaking that old balance.

After all, we have come a long way since the 1990s. In the last two decades, the balance of world politics has changed, technology based on artificial intelligence and the digital domain has arrived.

In that world, what will be the new equilibrium point of Indian politics? We do not have a definitive answer and only sense the change in the air. □□□ *[Concluded]*

*[Maitreesh Ghatak is a professor of economics at the London School of Economics. Anirban Mukherjee is an assistant professor of economics at the University of Calcutta.]*

## POLEMICS

# Class and Class Struggle

*Arup Baisya*

**T**HE HISTORY OF HUMAN civilization is the history of class-struggle and the pre-history is the classless class-struggle. This law of society is applicable and valid for all systems and histories. However, the concept of class ever remains the point of departure and divergent Marxian politics. In the history of practising Marxism, especially during the post-Russian Revolutionary era, a deterministically skewed concept of class remains in vogue.

While analysing the capitalism of his time, Lenin concluded that the transition from the historically 'undeveloped' form of merchant capitalism to industrial capitalism was a result of the development of class struggle. But it is evident that the concept of class in this deep insightful observation, Lenin considered the class as a certain category. To broaden the scope of identifying class, Lenin later extended the concept of class to include historically determined social categories to the economic categories of class. If the law of society based on class struggle

is valid everywhere, how one can isolate class from its struggle and identify it deterministically?

Lenin erred but still succeeded in leading the Bolshevik party for the Russian Revolution. This was because the social velocity of motion which Lenin identified as much higher than the pre-capitalist society, was still very low to enable the observer to delineate certain phenomena based on economic and social categories as perceptible entities to interact with.

In practising Marxism in India, caste always remains a point of debate. The two distinct streams of thought compete with each other to include caste in the arena of the Marxian practice of class struggle. One stream of thought formulates that communists should lead both class and caste struggle simultaneously. But in reality, simultaneity collapses as soon as the point of reference changes. If the point of reference is class, the simultaneous existence of caste becomes unfathomable and vice versa. Other streams of thought strive

to include caste within the broad definition of class following Leninist principle. But this is also erroneous as class cannot be isolated from its struggle, otherwise, the law of society based on class struggle collapses on such separation. Beyond this Marxian endeavour, there is another Ambedkarite stream of thought. Ambedkarite version of the caste as a feudal class does not fit well with Marxian practice.

In daily mundane affairs, one can adequately explain the behaviour of perceptible objects based on gravitational forces of attraction. But when Maxwell's theory of electromagnetic field was considered along with the Newtonian concept of gravitational forces of attraction for a unified theory, gravitation is defined as Einstein's conception of the Bending of Space. The class struggle which is considered a universal component of the law of society contains such a field surrounding diverse categories. One cannot isolate class from its struggle and identify it to interact and intervene.

Then how can one define class so that one can intervene and interact with the struggle for societal change? One can identify diverse categories. But in reality, they exist as mutually interacting with each



other. So, one can describe this reality as the function of a matrix whose elements consist of diverse categories. Again, this function is part of the changing dynamics of the struggle, and as such, the reality is closely associated with a derived version of that function. So, the class can be defined as a continuous derivative of that function and thus class is identified within its struggle and in motion.

How does such conceptualisation of class influence practice for societal change? Predefined and predetermined classes as certain categories

lead one to establish a mechanical relation between practising Marxists and the specific social or economic category of educator and educated and vice versa. But if one considers individual beings bear a changing field of consciousness in the process of transformation of being to becoming, and similarly class in its struggle with a field of consciousness, then both can interact to change each other and thereby modulate the direction of the systemic change. The class struggle becomes visible only when the field of consciousness represented by in-

dividual thought process interacts with the field of consciousness of class in struggle. Furthermore, such interaction with one category in struggle must similarly influence other categories in struggle as they are mutually interacting and entangled. This vibrant and living relationship can only lead the class struggle for a radical societal change. This becomes the foundation of the Marxian process of concrete analysis of concrete situations and continuous up-gradation of that analysis in any conjuncture.

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## REVIEW

### \*Classes and Castes

*Tamoghna Mitra*

WITH RESPECT TO IN-  
dian societal structure, the concepts of class and caste have been disputed for decades. Marx's theorisation of class had been questioned by Dr B R Ambedkar, as to whether it was applicable in the Indian context, and whether it was sufficient to solve the problem of caste. Literature on this specific topic is immense, and multiple authors have attempted to answer the question of caste through Marxian framework. This book "Classes and Castes" by Ranganayakamma (translation from original Telugu by R Udaykumar, B R Bapuji) also undertakes the same challenge. The book is a collection of essays by Ranganayakamma, compiled in one book, which talks specifically about caste, class, mixing both, annihilating castes and her defence of the framework.

The Brahminic exploitation strategy of castes has plagued the Indian society for time immemorial and continues to do so in modern times. Multiple cases of hate crimes based on castes surface regularly from ev-

**\*CLASSES AND CASTES**  
By Ranganayakamma  
[Translated from original Telugu  
by R Udaykumar and B R Bapuji]  
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ery part of India, whether it be Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu or Manipur. This book focuses on the caste structure present in the southern states. To understand the context, one has to return back to the concept of injustice. 'In the little world in which children have their existence', says Pip in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, 'there is nothing so finely perceived and finely felt, as injustice.' Pip is right: he vividly recollects after his humiliating encounter with Estella the 'capricious and violent coercion' he suffered as a child at the hands of his own sister. But the strong perception of manifest injustice applies to adult human beings as well. What moves people, reasonably enough, is not the realisation that the world falls short of being completely just—which few people expect—but that there are clearly remediable injustices around

the society which is to be eliminated. The previous lines have been taken from the opening paragraph of Amartya Sen's book "The idea of justice", which gives one the motive to rethink the question of castes and exploitation.

Coming back to the book, it can be deconstructed in three parts: first, where Ranganayakamma proposes her framework to tie the question of caste with classes, and second, where she defends her framework which has been heavily criticised, third, where she provides a system through which castes can be eliminated. The author has done a good job in defining the building blocks of Marxian theory, such as abstract and concrete labour, production and expropriation of surplus, in simpler terms avoiding the usual jargons which are used in regular Marxian analysis, making the work understandable to laymen. However, concepts of use and exchange value are somewhat unclear. The Marxian framework in this book follows the mode of production social formation theory, of the orthodox Marxists.

Then comes the most sparkling part of the book; castes. The concept of caste would look ridiculous to anyone who is unfamiliar with Indian society. Therefore, to introduce the topic of caste becomes a

challenge. The author besides providing a formal definition of caste has also vividly shown how the system works and how people from a lower caste are subjected to exploitation. In this segment, the genealogy of caste has been shown very well which reflects the huge volume of research which has gone behind writing the articles. Works of D D Kosambi, Debiprasad Chattyopadhyay have been referred to trace the origin of caste. A detailed description of the caste system has been provided mostly of the southern states. After defining classes and castes the author moves forward to tie the two together. Specifically, the two have been expressed through the relations of production framework existing in orthodox Marxism

and has been done beautifully through figures and charts. The author addresses the issues present in Ambedkar's suggestions to annihilate castes and further moves onto providing a solution to that.

This is where her framework takes help of Marx. Ambedkar's solution of inter-caste marriage to eliminate caste has been brought upon by Ranganayakamma after creating the conditions of existence for the event to occur, through class struggle.

The framework presented can be criticised on a few grounds. First, whether class as a social actor can exist (read Hindess, B. (1986, 1987, 1988, 1990)). Secondly, there are other theories which exist about tying classes to castes which contradict the framework presented by

Ranganayakamma, namely the class focussed theories of Marxism pioneered by Resnick and Wolff (read Knowledge and Class, R&W, 1987).

But before critiquing this book based on facts that are theoretical, one must consider the objective behind writing this article, that is to enlighten the mass, the oppressed about their own condition. "a bird in a cage doesn't know what the skies are", a famous metaphor is pretty applicable in this context. Therefore, one must judge this framework in eyes of a layman.

In general, this book is a must read in this times, for one to know about the reality of their society and to change what is necessary to survive in a world which is amicable for all and all future generations. □□□

#### POINT OF VIEW

## Of Organisation and Movement

**Pon Chandran**

*[The document below is drafted by the author for a wider discussion among communist revolutionaries, based on the inspiration and inputs received from the late SN Nagarajan, a leading communist revolutionary from Tamil Nadu over a period of time, say last three/four decades.]*

**T**HE OPPRESSED PEOPLE have nothing without an organisation. The author also subscribes to the Leninist principle of organisation that a revolutionary party is to be led by professional revolutionaries. A professional revolutionary is one who's thought and action centres entirely on how to carry out the revolution in the given context. Lenin insists on this because only such people can lead the revolutionary party as their only pre-occupation with revolutionary work without prejudices. But Lenin's organisational principle has been reduced to uncritical organisational discipline in the name of "democratic centralism". Another inseparable part of Democratic Centralism is the minority submitting to the majority; the lower committees to the higher committees.

Why a decision cannot be taken by way of consensus in a committee of professional revolutionaries?

In practice, this writer has found that the division of votes inevitably leads to manipulation of numbers. Moreover, it is invariably assumed that the majority represents and 'reflects' the opinion of the majority of the people in the Society. This "Reflection Theory" was vehemently criticised by Lenin as dogmatic and authoritarian as the minority is condemned to submit to the majority and implement the decision of the majority.

The majority is not bound to respect the minority, although the minority is bound by the majority. Owing to such a grudging relationship, each section will strive to prove the other wrong. If this perpetuates,

it will only lead to split in the organisation only to weaken the functioning of the Party. Earlier days the split was deemed as dialectical, as it goes by the logic "One divides into two".

These days this logic has been changed. "One divides into three" is the Rule.

The historical writer K Mohan Ram who wrote the history of Communist Movement in India, particularly after the break of Naxalbari uprising rightly named his book Maoism in India as "Splits within Splits". Some may defend it as inevitable for political reasons. But it is essentially Organisational. The intolerance or mutually disrespectful relationship!

If anything Consensus is the remedy for this malady. If the number in the committee is unwieldy to reach a Consensus, then, the committee could go for division of votes without branding or ridiculing the other. Total transparency and all accepting Democratic Process shall be the precondition for such a process. Any decision has to be collective by way of con-

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sensus by the nominated Committee for the purpose.

On the contrary, if the cadres are forced to submit, in the name of organisational discipline, this is more of submission than voluntary association, which is the bedrock of a Communist Party.

In order to carry forward the revolution the party organisation has to take the form of a movement, which is intrinsically dynamic. Whereas the organisational method followed in the context, particularly in the Indian context, has not evolved itself as a movement. A movement is one which is not static, which is organically evolving and all encompassing. While the communist parties which should have evolved as a movement continue to run as static organisations; whereas paradoxically, there are other political organisations which are for maintaining the status-quo evolved themselves into a movement.

Dravidian movement is one such experiment in India. While the communist parties inspired the toiling masses to organise themselves in trade unions, Dravidian parties inspired the people to get organised as Cultural and later as political movements. It transformed every domain of the Tamil society, be it language, belief systems or other cultural practices. A Tamil family inspired by the Dravidian movement evolved its own unique practices from cradle to grave.

Some of the prominent practices like naming a person, organising self-respect marriages without any bar/discrimination became a sort of inspiration among the masses. However, it has to be noted a section of this movement got degenerated into Casteist and anti-Dalit dogma, owing to its class- collaborationist/ opportunist Electoral Politics.

This is not to debunk communist movement altogether. The working class families inspired and influenced by the early communist movement did have their own cultural pursuits which were basically progressive and non-discriminatory. The communist movement worked among the most oppressed people and inspired the so-called untouchables into its fold.

In Tamil Nadu in the very beginning, as the movement offered them self-dignity., and at least in Tamil Nadu the party earned the name as the party of Dalits (Pallar & Paraiyars) but it was not able to sustain this momentum when it did not pursue the land question to its logical end. And finally it got bogged down in Trade Unionism and crass Economism.

Institutionalisation is inevitable, if the core of the main values cherished by a movement has to take roots and spread among the targeted masses. Paradoxically, many a time the institutionalisation itself becomes an impediment against the

very spirit of dynamism. One classic example is the Church. Churches of all denominations have become institutions against the ideals of Christ, while it did play a role in spreading the religion as a dogma. Liberation theology tried to break this fetter to some extent.

Institutionalisation leads to beauracratism. Unfortunately, institutionalised Communist movement is not an exception. Communist Parties will have to resurrect themselves as a movement, if its ideologies and philosophy have to “grip the masses and to become a material force,” eventually, as Marx envisaged in the beginning. Communist Internationals and later Cominform played a determining role in spreading the idea and the need for communist revolution the world over. Whereas, the current trends of more and more institutionalisation and beauracratism are contrary to the vision of Marx.

In the context of the Indian sub-continent, what is needed is to evolve a Communist movement in each nationality which can jointly form a federation to accomplish the New Democratic Revolution, with socialist content and liberate the oppressed from the hegemony of neo-colonialism and the imperialist order. □□□

*[Pon Chandran is associated with Anti-Fascist School, Coimbatore]*

## A TRIBUTE

### Pratul Mukhopadhyay

(1942-2025)

*Nityananda Ghosh*

**T**HE SINGER OF “AMI BANGLAY GAN GAI/AMI BANGLAR GAN GAI” [I sing in Bengali/I sing about Bengal] is no more. Pratul Mukhopadhyay, the mass singer, poet, composer and a beautiful performer who mixed po-

litical cause with artistic expression in his very own inimitable style passed away on February 15, 2025 at the SSKM hospital in Kolkata. He was 83. All his friends hoped that he would recover and return soon as he survived a similar medi-

cal ordeal in 2024. No, that didn't happen. The WB chief minister who happens to be the health minister as well arranged a medical board for his treatment. But this time all the efforts went in vein.

He was a life member of frontier. Last time in the year 2024, this writer along with the editor of frontier Timir Basu met him at his Kankurgachi residence and discussed a lot of things for hours.. He told many untold stories regarding IPTA,

Salil Chaudhury and shared his experiences. Hospitality of Sorbani boudi will never be forgotten.

This writer acquainted with Pratulda in the early eighties of the last century. There are so many sweet memories of taking part jointly in cultural functions, be it in the Paschim Banga Gana Silpi Parishad [ it became Paschim Banga Ganasanskriti Parishad in course of time], 'Nabanna' [ organ of Paschim Banga Ganasanskriti Parishad] or 'Madhyana'- organised May Day programme. 'Madhyana', a Bengali little magazine, used to observe May Day in an exceptional way by breaking all traditions. Instead of May 1, Sailen Bose, editor of 'Madhyana', preferred May 31-the last day of May—to mark the international working class solidarity day while the inaugural song would be invariably an Indian classical one by the editor himself. And Pratul Mukhopadhyay would always be the chief attraction of the event.

In the late nineties actor-writer

Ramanuj Sengupta became seriously ill and Pratul Mukhopadhyay helped him by raising money through a concert organised by Nabanna patrika. He was popular for his solo performance without using any musical instrument. He transformed popular poems of Birendra Chattopadhyay, Arun Mitra, Cherabanda Raju and many others into songs and sang them in meetings after meetings.

Before joining the present ruling dispensation of Bengal, he was associated with political third stream i.e. naxalite politics. For some time he was associated with a cultural wing of CPM, despite his political difference with the party.

Pratul Mukhopadhyay was born on 25th June, 1942, in Barisal of undivided Bengal. He later shifted to Chinsurah of Hooghly district of West Bengal along with his parents after independence. He served as the chief statistical officer at United Bank of India which is now Punjab National Bank. In the late '60s he was actively involved in naxalite

movement and became a popular mass singer. He took voluntary retirement and devoted most of his time to compose new songs to reach broader masses of society.

He had no formal musical training. The self-trained mass singer mesmerised Bengal audience for decades. He was the singer of toilers. People used to sing his popular songs at factory gates, in the fields to motivate the oppressed.

He composed songs for some stage plays. Then Sankho Ghosh's 'Baborer Prathhna', Sukumar Ray's 'Abol Tabol, 'Joy Jatayu' on the occasion of 30th anniversary of 'Feluda' were his remarkable creation. He lent his voice to a documentary on Bihari migrant labour of Posta bazar. This film was made by late Ashoktaru Chakraborty. The voice-over of Satyajit Ray's 'Gosaibaganer Bhoot' was also by Pratul Mukhopadhyay. Both political left and far left will remember him as one of the best mass singers of Bengal of present times. □□

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## AN ENVIRONMENT CRUSADER

### Vimla Bahuguna

*Bharat Dogra*

**V**IMLA BAHUGUNA, WHO dedicated herself at a very young age to leading her life in accordance with Mahatma Gandhi's teachings of serving people, breathed her last at her home in Dehradun on February 14. She was 92. She leaves behind her daughter Madhu Pathak and sons Rajeev and Pradeep. Her husband, the famous environmentalist SunderlalBahuguna, had died in 2021 at the age of 94.

Although often remembered by people for her work taken up in close partnership with Sunderlal, Vimla was a great social reformer, advocate of justice-based concerns and an environmental activist in her

own right. She herself participated actively in Chipko (hug the trees to save them) movement in remote forests as well as in anti-liquor and other social reform movements.

A firm believer in the rights of landless people, she started her social activism, under the guidance of SarlaBehn, as a bhoodan (gift of land movement) activist, going from one remote village to another to get land for landless people.

VinobaBhave, the famous leader of Bhoodan movement, had closely observed the way Vimla used to work in these early days and the impact she was creating in remote villages which she was visiting for

the first time sometimes in very hostile conditions to collect land gift commitments. Vinoba's secretary wrote to SarlaBehn conveying these feelings, "I have not seen a girl activist like her. She is not just a girl from the hills; she is a devi (angel) from the hills."

SarlaBehn also mentions on the basis of her feedback from these villages that despite working in a new area Vimla would often spontaneously get the leadership role in her group which included more experienced local male members.

A firm believer in equality of women, Vimla held her ground firmly at the time of her proposed marriage to Sunderlal, who was at that time the rising star of provincial politics, saying that she would agree to marriage only if Sunderlal agreed to give up political party member-



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ship in favour of Mahatma Gandhi's path of serving people directly.

She had her way. Sunderlal gave up all political ambitions. Soon after their marriage the young couple worked hard to build themselves a very modest Ashram in Silyara, a remote village in Tehri Garhwal (now in Uttarakhand state).

Here she became a support and inspirational figure for a generation of social activists who worked for protecting rivers and forests, for equal rights of Dalits, against the increasing problems of alcoholism and also promoted a host of constructive activities.

When an earthquake destroyed a

substantial part of the Silyara ashram Vimla courageously faced the difficult times till some reconstruction could be taken up.

The most difficult and prolonged struggle was the one against the Tehri Dam Project. In the course of the struggle Sunderlal took a vow to live in a hut on the banks of the river near the dam site. Inseparable companions that they were, Vimla joined him even there.

This writer met Vimlaji first when he, as a 22-year-old journalist writing on Chipko movement and related issues, visited the Silyara ashram around 1977 or so. She soon became an inspirational figure.

She used to be very involved in catching up with recent developments.

Hers was a life of truly great commitment to creating a better world and she never wavered from her path no matter how great the difficulties.

Her work will continue to inspire people for a very long time.

The writer has been involved with several concerns and efforts of Vimla and Sunderlal Bahuguna for nearly 46 years. His books include 'Vimla and Sunderlal Bahuguna-Chipko Movement and Struggle against Tehri Dam Project in Garhwal Himalaya' and 'Planet in Peril'. □□□

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BACK FROM MAHA KUMBH

## Bathing in Polluted Water

*Vivek Mishra*

**W**HILE UNBOTHERED crowds have been eager about taking holy dip at the ongoing Maha Kumbh gathering at Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj, a report filed by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has raised serious concerns.

On February 16, 2025, the principal bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) issued stern remarks, reprimanding the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board (UPPCB).

"You have made 500 million people bathe in polluted sewage water, water that was not fit for bathing, and people had to drink that water," the bench said.

The bench, headed by Justice Prakash Srivastava, also criticised UPPCB for failing to submit a comprehensive report.

"It seems you are under some kind of pressure," the bench noted.

The NGT bench further questioned as to why no significant action was taken to address pollution in the river before the start of the

fair. It was clearly visible that sewage was directly flowing into the rivers.

"Two weeks have passed and no concrete steps have been taken by UPPCB. This is very serious," referring to a report filed by the CPCB on February 3, 2025, the NGT said.

According to the CPCB's report, the water quality at several monitoring sites was found to be sub-standard during inspections on January 12 and subsequently on January 23, 2025.

The data included readings from significant sites such as the Shringverpur Ghat, Lord Curzon Bridge, Shastri Bridge, Nagvasuki Temple Pontoon Bridge, Sangam, Deha Ghat, and the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna near the Old Naini Bridge.

The report stated that, especially on the auspicious bathing days, the biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) levels were found to be higher than the normal standard of three milligrams (mg) per litre at multiple loca-

tions, including Lord Curzon Bridge on January 19. A high BOD indicates a high level of pollution, as microorganisms require more oxygen to decompose the organic waste in the water.

The report also highlighted a critical issue regarding the excessively high levels of faecal coliform bacteria, which mainly come from human and animal faeces. The presence of these bacteria indicates that the water is contaminated with sewage, leading to the potential spread of waterborne diseases such as typhoid, diarrhoea, and cholera.

Despite these alarming findings, the CPCB's report indicated that the river water at several locations was not suitable for bathing, as per primary water quality standards. The report noted that the heavy presence of faecal coliform, particularly during the large crowds bathing at the Maha Kumbh.

Moreover, during the NGT hearing on February 16, 2025, the CPCB's lawyer informed the court that all STPs were receiving sewage far beyond their capacities, making effective treatment impossible, leading to untreated sewage flowing directly into the Ganges.

In villages near the Ganges, treated water from STP outlets was being discharged into the river, where it was used for irrigation and religious purposes by the locals. The investigation

at the Kodra STP outlet near Neewav village confirmed this.

The CPCB's lawyer mentioned that all ten STPs were processing sewage far beyond their capacities,

and consequently, they were unable to effectively treat the sewage, resulting in untreated sewage being discharged directly into the Ganges. □□

[Source: *Down to Earth*]

## LETTERS

### Plight of Ranghat Villagers

Ranghat village, located under Mouza Ranghat, Gram Panchayet Ranghat, consists of 602 families with a total population of 2,941 individuals—1,490 males and 1,451 females. The villagers predominantly belong to OBC Muslim and Scheduled Caste Hindu communities and depend on farming and fishing in the Kodalia River for their livelihood.

Ranghat village is virtually surrounded by the Kodalia River and Bangladesh (Chowgacha Upazila) on its northern, eastern, and western sides. The only access to India is from the south through a narrow corridor, which is heavily monitored by BSF personnel stationed at a naka check post at "Van More." Beyond this point, the border remains unguarded due to the absence of border fencing by the CPWD and a lack of consistent BSF patrolling, making the area highly vulnerable to cross-border infiltration and criminal activities.

Intruders from Bangladesh frequently cross the Kodalia River to commit crimes such as theft, robbery, destruction of crops, and dacoity in this Indian village, freely. The villagers live in constant fear for their safety and property. The absence of a secured border and the failure of the authorities to ensure effective surveillance have left the villagers exposed to continuous threats from cross-border criminals. This situation has severely affected their livelihood, particularly for farmers whose crops are frequently destroyed.

The restrictive measures imposed by the BSF have resulted in the social and economic isolation of Ranghat village. Neighbouring villages avoid any interaction or relationship with the residents of Ranghat out of fear

of being harassed or implicated by the BSF. This has led to the marginalisation of the village, depriving the villagers of essential social and economic connections that are vital for their development and well-being.

The BSF's conduct towards the villagers is marked by arbitrary searches, harassment, and intimidation, often targeting women, children, and students. Frequent searches and unnecessary restrictions on movement have made daily life unbearable for the villagers.

Women and young girls are subjected to humiliating treatment during security checks, violating their right to dignity and personal security under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. Children and students face interruptions in their education as they are often stopped, questioned, and harassed while travelling for education located outside the village. The freedom of movement guaranteed under Article 19 is being systematically curtailed, resulting in psychological trauma and a deep sense of insecurity among the residents.

Banglar Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM) has urged the Chairperson of National Human Rights Commission to intervene and protect the villagers of Ranghat.

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

### Women Raped in Prison Cells

Nearly 3,000 people were killed in the last weeks as a vicious rebel militia captured Goma—a city of a million people in eastern Congo. Militia members allowed a prison break, and escaped inmates raped hundreds of women in their cells then burned the prison down with them still inside. This may be the most horrific atrocity

yet in Congo's brutal conflict—and local faith leaders are risking their lives to speak out against the violence and launch a grassroots call for peace.

For years, the M23 militia waged a campaign of murder, rape, kidnapping and looting. Even before the latest atrocity its soldiers had raped scores of women and girls. In 2022, they massacred 300 innocent villagers. M23 is reportedly backed by Rwanda as part of a plan to annex parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Rwanda has denied it. But the governments of DRC, France and the United States, as well as the UN, have politely called on Rwandan leaders to stop supporting the rebels. But neither the UN nor most western governments have done anything more than ask politely.

Now the people of eastern Congo are taking it upon themselves to end the killing. Doing this is beyond dangerous—without international backing the negotiations could fail and the region could be plunged once again into senseless bloodshed.

Join the local leaders' call to governments in Europe and Africa to back their plan, support a ceasefire, and demand immediate access for humanitarian responders.

The Avaaz movement has helped victims of war from Gaza, Ukraine, and Syria to Myanmar, Sudan and Yemen. All humans everywhere deserve to live in peace.

**Nate, John, Mo and the rest of the Avaaz team**

### 1 Crore Drop-outs

The drop of 1 crore students enrolling in schools is alarming. It poses a significant threat to the future of the nation. An educated populace is the backbone of nation-building; a decline in enrollment dilutes the country's collective potential. The government must urgently focus on

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enhancing educational accessibility, quality, and relevance to ensure that every child can contribute meaningfully to society. Investing in youth means investing in India's future. The Centre should create an inclusive education system that fosters hope and opportunity for all.

TS Karthik, Chennai

### Targeting bsCEM

Four student activists (Gaurav, Gauraang, Kiran and Rahul) of Bhagat Singh Chhatra Ekta Manch (bsCEM) from Delhi University were detained by the police and taken to Vasant Kunj police station at 3am on 4th February and their phones were seized. They were doing wall paintings against *Operation Kagar*—a genocidal military operation undertaken in Bastar by the BJP government which is claimed to be the “final solution” to the Maoist insurgency but murdering numerous adivasis as well as the revolutionary communists. The wall paintings also condemned the recent Tolimeta fake encounters in Bijapur district of Bastar and wrote the famous Supreme Court verdict given upon fake encounter of Maoist leader Azad—“A Republic must not kill its own children”.

The activists were kept in illegal detention for more than 12 hours and were not allowed to contact anyone. Around 12 pm the police lied about releasing them but they were still not picking up calls. After further enquiry, it was discovered that the activists were still kept in Vasant Kunj police station and were being illegally investigated by the same NIA and IB team that had carried out the previous illegal investigation of bsCEM in May 2024. The four had been brutally assaulted by the police and intelligence officers for hours before and during the investigation. Gauraang had been beaten up so much for more than half an hour that his ear was bleeding.

The walls of JNU are everywhere adorned with wall paintings by ABVP, NSUI and even left student groups. But it is because of the content of the wall paintings that bsCEM is being targeted and attacked by the government and its repressive agencies like

NIA and IB. There is a complete suppression of any news of the genocidal war being waged by the government in Bastar to facilitate corporate plunder of the land, forest and water of adivasis. More than 300 people were killed in 2024, most of them being adivasi civilians killed in fake encounters. Even the maoists that were killed were killed in staged encounters and mostly were unarmed combatants. In fact, during the illegal investigation, the officers tried their best to establish bogus links between the banned CPI (Maoist) and bsCEM. During the times of Operation Green Hunt, the walls of JNU were filled with slogans by the erstwhile JNU Forum Against War On People against the operation. However, the difference in treatment of students doing the wall paintings between then and now reveals the attack on democratic space in the country by the fascist government.

**Gurkirat Kaur**

**Executive Committee Member  
Bhagat Singh Chhatra Ekta  
Manch**

### 'Incomprehensible Brutality'

He was just 21 years old. Gaza resident Adel Tayseer al-Subaih was detained by Israel for nearly a year during the war on Gaza. Throughout his detention, Adel was physically tortured and psychologically abused - most of all when his leg was forcibly amputated, causing a kidney infection and crippling him for life. After his release in a recent prisoner exchange, Adel shared details of his treatment by Israeli guards in prison, and his first reaction upon returning to Gaza.

The testimony of survivors from Sde Teiman, Israel's torture camp for Palestinians based in the Negev Desert, paints a *consistent portrait of inhumanity and savagery* with few parallels in modern history.

Meanwhile, hostages who have been released from the captivity of Hamas also narrate their harrowing tales of torture and inhuman treatment.

**S Shankar**

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