

# frontier

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## *Changing Weather?*

**S**TRANGELY ENOUGH THE BRITISH ELECTION STANDS IN stark contrast to recent gains by the far right across Europe. 'There is a strong sense that this was a vote against Conservatives more than a vote for Labour'. Labour's victory comes days after Marine Le Pen's far right National Rally (RN) party scored historic success to win the first round of parliamentary election in France. But the far-right finally lost the election to the Left-wing coalition of France. Right-wing parties made similar advances elsewhere. In European Parliament elections German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrats recorded their worst result ever. True, not all European countries are shifting to the right. Economic mismanagement and ignoring real issues can be costly as the British election shows. Whether Indian Prime Minister Modi is learning anything from the Conservative Party's defeat is anybody's guess. Long-term rule, rather misrule is no guarantee for permanent settlement. But this left-right or for that matter centre-left-right divide does hardly affect their foreign policy orientation. In most cases their domestic policies too remain same barring some cosmetic changes here and there. Not that Labour is going to dissociate itself from NATO's expansionist programme while arming Ukraine against Russia. Britain is due to give Ukraine 3 billion pounds (\$ 3.8 billion) worth of military aid this year and the country is expected to continue to need support in the years to come. Labour is not going to antagonise the military-industrial complex. In its party manifesto, Labour said: "With Labour, the UK's military, financial, diplomatic and political support for Ukraine will remain steadfast".

Britain being a trusted partner of America's crimes against humanity across the world is in no position to take any independent decision in international affairs. It doesn't matter whether Tories lose or Labour wins with a landslide majority. After assuming office British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has said he will "deal with whoever is the president", saying the relationship between Britain and the US is "above individuals". In other words Labour is unlikely to oppose Israel's genocide in Gaza, albeit Britain of late, is talking about recognising Palestine state with a rider that such a move would need to become at the right time in a peace process. This 'right time' will come when America will recognise Palestine! In essence Labour Prime Minister, the 'self-styled socialist', is echoing what Biden is saying in respect of two-state solution.

It remains to be seen how the new government resolves the thorny issue of junior doctors. They have held strikes in England over the last 18 months, with the most recent ending on July 2. Doctors want a 35 percent pay-rise because of inflationary pressure and erosion in real incomes, having been offered a package worth 10 percent on average.

Much in the Thatcherite tradition the Conservative government was about to privatise the postal service. Royal Mail, which has delivered letters for 500 years, has agreed to be bought by Czech billionaire Daniel Kretinsky in a 3.57 billion pound deal

at the end of May. Labour has not said anything about it. In other words they are going to pursue the same policy scripted by the Conservative Party.

Surprisingly, communists are virtually non-existent in European electoral politics. Euro-communism is dead. People are asked to make choice between right and far-right. With the collapse of Soviet Union started their decline and it seems irreversible.

Nearer home Modi's far-right Hindutva party-Bharatiya Janata Party—has somehow managed to survive with reduced majority but

factor that worked strongly in favour of change remains. It is joblessness among educated youth. Jobless growth over the years has created a desperate situation. India will not have enough jobs even with the official claim of 7 percent growth according to a recent Citi report. More than half of the 582 million workers in India are self-employed while fewer people are employed in the formal sector now than before Covid. The Modi government during its 14-year rule has failed to fill up about 1 million government vacancies. Mere rhetoric and hate speech won't work. □□□

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## COMMENT

### Conversion Controversy

ARE COURTROOMS BEING “Converted” Into Majoritarian Theatres? The United Christian Forum (UCF) expresses deep anguish over recent remarks by the Allahabad High Court in a bail order dated July 1st, 2024, in the case of Kailash vs. the State of Uttar Pradesh. Kailash sought bail against purported offences under Section 365 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 and Section 3/5(1) of the UP Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021. Justice Rohit Ranjan Aggarwal, while rejecting the bail application, stated, “If this process (conversion) is allowed to be carried out, the majority population of this country would be in the minority one day, and such religious congregation should be immediately stopped where the conversion is taking place and changing religion of citizen of India.”

Christians are as much citizens of India as anyone else and deserve equal protection under the law. The Court should have limited its focus to the criminal law aspect of the case rather than being swayed by majoritarian religious considerations

and making sweeping statements about a specific religious community. If anything these observations could expose the Christian community to further persecution.

Christians in several parts of India, including Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, and Rajasthan, face targeted violence. The High Court failed to distinguish between voluntary and forced conversions and made several statements, such as:

- “It (conversion) is against the Constitutional mandate of Article 25.”
- “...such religious congregation should be immediately stopped where conversion is taking place and changing the religion of citizens of India.”
- “Unlawful activity of conversion of people of SC/ST castes and economically poor persons into Christianity is rampant throughout Uttar Pradesh.”
- “...it (Article 25) does not provide for conversion from one faith to another.”

Article 25 guarantees individuals the

freedom to change their religion according to their conscience. The Court's judgement suggests that conversion is against religious freedom, which contradicts various Supreme Court decisions upholding the right to change one's faith. Additionally, the constitutional validity of several “anti-conversion” laws is currently under challenge before the Supreme Court.

Despite no convictions for conversions via allurements in Uttar Pradesh, many cases have been filed under anti-conversion laws. In 2023, 733 hostile acts against Christians were reported to the UCF Helpline alone, and nearly half came from Uttar Pradesh. A People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) report titled Criminalising Practice of Faith documented police collusion with self-described “Hindutva” groups, noting frequent disruptions of Christian practices. Such mobs typically mobilise attackers, alert police about purported “forced conversions,” and vandalise churches, recording and circulating videos of these actions. A petition calling for stringent measures against such vigilante groups remains pending before the Supreme Court.

Several “anti-conversion” legislations mandate that only an affected person register a complaint. How-

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ever, police often arrest Christians based on complaints from these self-ascribed "Hindutva" groups claiming prior knowledge of "forced conversions."

Article 14, a legal research group, analysed over a hundred FIRs filed under the anti-conversion law in Uttar Pradesh and discovered that of these, 63 were based on third-party complaints, including 26 from organisations affiliated with the "Hindutva" political ideology. Researchers have documented how anti-conversion laws are used to target

religious minorities. False cases can persist for years, justifying brutality and violence against Christians accused of conversion, violating their rights to life and liberty.

The United Christian Forum respectfully urges the Hon'ble Allahabad High Court to suo motu expunge the sweeping allegations made against the entire Christian community from the order dated July 1st, 2024, considering the dangerous ramifications. □□□

*[Contributed by A C Michael who is National Co-ordinator of United Christian Forum, India]*

## NOTICE

We are getting regular complaints from subscribers that they are not getting their copies by post. Postal dislocation is rampant. It is particularly endemic in greater Kolkata postal district. Local post offices don't really deliver in many cases because of acute shortage of staff. We request our subscribers to lodge complaints to the post offices of their localities and send their e-mail IDs, if any, so that we could also send our on-line version. —Fr

## NOTE

### Aasmeen is a Domestic Worker

*Bharat Dogra writes:*

**A**ASMEEN IS A DOMESTIC worker who lives in Haiderpur hut colony in Delhi. Her day starts at 5 am when she still has a lot of sleep left in her eyes but must somehow raise herself from her bed. After all she has to leave for work at 9.

Before this she must clean up her own home and cook too for her 7-member family. Then she takes a bus to reach her place of employment about 5 km away. Here she has to carry out cleaning and washing work for four households. She finishes the first round by about 1 pm.

Then she goes to the nearest park to eat the modest lunch she has brought with her. This very short rest period also becomes difficult on rainy days and on very hot days. During the recent heat wave conditions this rest time became more of a punishing time as she had to endure really terrible exposure to heat when she sat in the open.

After the short lunch break the work round starts again. By the time she reaches home after finishing the second round it is often over 4 pm. Now she needs to look after her own family needs and look after her children.

In recent times the intensely hot weather did not allow her any proper

rest even at night time. What is more, there is a very serious water shortage in the colony where she lives and so the family has to fetch water from a tap which is some distance away. This has to be done as early as 3 to 4 am, as otherwise they won't get their turn at the tap. So Aasmeen has to worry about fetching water even so late at night, even though children help in this work.

Many of these problems peaked during the recent heat waves, as everyone in the family was having more frequent health problems. Speaking for herself, she says that she has several body pains but during the heat waves things were worse than this. As she tells, she often felt that there is no energy or life left in the body at times, but yet she had to somehow pull herself out of this and attend to her 'normal' work.

Although she works very hard to keep her employers satisfied, the payment she gets is very small. All her earnings from four households add up to just Rs 6000 or so in a month, she says. She realises of course that what she is being paid is very less, but in the absence of any better alternatives that she knows, she continues this work which en-

ables her to make some contribution to the bringing up of her children.

Her husband works even harder as a loader at a fruit market, carrying heavy loads, often in ways that may be risky for his health. What is more he has to leave as early as 3 am as a lot of fruit supplies on trucks reach the market very early in the morning. For all this work, he is able to earn Rs 700 or 800 per day.

A big regret of Aasmeen is that she is unable to give adequate time to her family.

While her life is a life of relentless grind, in the case of some other domestic workers who travel longer distances the situation is even more difficult. This is particularly true of hut dwellers who were relocated to more distant areas and not getting employment at new places, they keep coming to serve the households they had served earlier even though now they are living far away. In the case of several households resettled in Bawana, several women domestic workers now travel about 25 km daily (up and down) to serve in the old areas. So they have to leave very early and return late, spending almost the entire day in work which continues to be very poorly paid.

In these distressing conditions clearly it is very important to enact legislation to ensure fair earnings and various welfare benefits for domestic workers, something that has been pending for a long time. □□□

## HUMRA QURAIISHI'S COLUMN

## Hathras Horror

*Humra Quraishi*

**W**ILL THE SELF-STYLED godman Narayan Sakar Hari, also known as Bhole Baba, go un-punished and un-arrested? He and his followers have already started blaming "anti-social elements" for the deadly stampede during his 'satsang' (religious gathering) on 2 July, at a village in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras which killed 121 people. Many more injured and ruined and devastated!

Bhole Baba and his aides seem hiding in some safe refuge. And till date of my filing this column ( 4 July afternoon) he seems far away from the grasp of the police force! Strange! It seems a certain political lobby and particular politicians are adopting an obvious strategy to protect this controversial man, who has had a tainted past record. It's reported he had to go on compulsory retirement from the police department, where he served as a constable, after facing serious charges.

With this background or foreground, is it safe to let this man go about un-arrested! Also, why label this entire tragedy a "conspiracy"

when the SDM's (Sub divisional magistrate) preliminary report on the stampede is this: "A crowd of more than 2 lakh people was present in the pandal. Around 1.40 pm, when Bhole Baba came out of the pandal, his followers started running towards him for 'darshan' and to collect the soil on which he had walked...Baba's personal security and 'sevadars' started pushing and shoving the crowd due to which some people fell down. The crowd ran towards the open field where most of the people slipped and fell due to the wet slope." Incidentally, this SDM, gave permission for the 'satsang', and was also present at the venue when the incident occurred.

### WORLD REFUGEE DAY

On the just passed by World Refugee Day (20 June 2024) I have been thinking of the sufis who had come from the Central Asian Republics and also from Iraq and Iran, seeking refuge in the Kashmir Valley. They reached the Valley and did not move further. Settling down. The local population accepting them.

Their dargahs and ziarats dotted

in and around Srinagar city, reminds one of the that period in history when these sufis had travelled to the Kashmir Valley. Many reached there as refugees, fleeing their home countries in search of peace. And in all probability must have found tranquility in such abundance in the Kashmir Valley that none of them went back to their homelands.

Look how times stand changed. Today refugees in the world are finding the going to be tough...tougher it gets for them. Ironically, even in a city like New Delhi where those affected by the Partition found refuge, yet most seem to have forgotten those trying times, as there seems little effort to reach out to present day refugees, living in refuge in this very city. Obviously the refugees of today cannot be expected to turn sufis or demonstrate mystical powers but surely they be accepted as they are. And don't overlook the fact that seeking refuge is a state of mind .So many times don't we just close our eyes and mentally transport ourselves, as though finding ways and means of escape, from a one particular situation to the next, which could be a little further away from painful realities and insecurities of the day.

□□□

## EUROPE AND ANTI-POLITICS

## The Threatening Advance of the Right

*Marcello Musto*

**T**HE HARMFUL UNIFORMITY of approach to political and economic questions has helped to produce a second major change (after that of 1989) in the European political context. In the last few years, a profound aversion has developed everywhere on the old continent towards anything that can be described as 'politics'; this has be-

come synonymous with power for its own sake, rather than a commitment to, and a collective interest in, social change, as it was mostly understood in the 1960s and 1970s. In a number of countries, the tide of anti-politics has also washed over the forces of the radical Left. Largely because of their poor performance in government, they are even blamed

for adaptation to the existing climate and gradual abandonment of the militant demands that they used to champion.

There have been significant changes in the European balance of forces. Some bipartisan systems have simply imploded, as in post-dictatorship Spain and Greece. Similar trends have affected the political systems in France and Italy, where for decades the vote was divided between the centre-right and centre-left blocs.

The political-electoral landscape has been modified by abstention-

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ism, the rise of new populist formations, the major advance of far-Right forces, and in some cases the consolidation of a Left alternative to neoliberal policies.

Participation in elections for the European Parliament has also fallen. This reflects loss of interest in an institution that represents an ever more technocratic, ever less political model for Europe. Riding the anti-EU wave, new 'post-ideological' movements have arisen in recent years, guided by generic denunciation of the corrupt existing system.

In many European countries, xenophobic, nationalist or openly neofascist parties have made big advances as the effects of economic crisis have made themselves felt. In some cases, they have modified their political language, replacing the classical Left-Right division with a new struggle specific to contemporary society: what Marine Le Pen calls the conflict 'between those at the top and those at the bottom'. In this new polarisation, far-Right candidates are supposed to represent the 'people' against the establishment (or the forces that have for a long time alternated in government) and against the elites who favour an all-powerful free market.

The ideological profile of these political movements has also changed. The racist component is often shifted to the background and economic issues brought to the fore. The blind, restrictive opposition to EU immigration policies is taken a stage further by playing on the war among the poor, even more than discrimination based on skin colour or religious affiliation. In a context of high unemployment and grave social conflict, xenophobia is raised through propaganda asserting that migrants take jobs from local workers and that the latter should have priority in employment, social services and welfare entitlements.

In both France and Italy, some historical fortresses of the working-class and Communist vote have mutated into stable electoral bases of right-wing parties. The near-uniform advance of these parties, in regions where the organisations of the workers' movement had exercised undisputed hegemony for a very long time, may also be attributed to the fact that they have taken up battles and issues once dear to both social democrats and communists.

The Right has made its breakthroughs not only by means of classical reactionary instruments, such as campaigns against globalisation, but also through the arrival of new asylum-seekers and the spectre of the 'Islamisation' of society. Above all, however, they have called for social policies traditionally associated with the Left, at a time when the Social Democrats were opting for public spending cuts and the radical Left was gagged because of its support for, or actual participation in, government. The rightist 'welfare' is of a different kind, however: no longer universal, inclusive and solidaristic, but based on a principle that has been described as 'welfare nationalism'. In other words, it involves the offer of rights and services only to members of the already existing national community.

In addition to its widespread support in rural areas and the provinces, which are often depopulated and hit by high unemployment because of the economic crisis, the far Right has been able to draw on a significant number of workers who have yielded to the blackmail of 'either immigration or the welfare state'.

One of the most alarming cases was Hungary. After the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) government had imposed severe austerity measures at the behest of the Troika, causing a lurch into deflation, the

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Hungarian Civic Union/Fidesz took over the reins of office. Then in 2012, having purged the judiciary and brought the mass media under control, the government introduced a new constitution with authoritarian overtones that took the country a perilously long way from the rule of law.

In recent years, therefore, the parties of the populist, nationalist or neofascist Right have considerably broadened their support in almost every part of Europe. In many cases, they have proved capable of dominating political debate and have sometimes entered government in a coalition with the more moderate Right. It is a disturbing epidemic, to which it is certainly impossible to respond without fighting the virus that caused it in the first place: the neoliberal mantra still so fashionable in Brussels. □□□

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## Paper Ballot Only

*[Not only Germany, but US, UK, EU countries etc. almost 120 or more countries in the world to this day are using paper ballot only. We publish below some excerpts from the German Constitutional Court decision.]*

Judgement of the Second Senate of the Federal Republic of Germany at Berlin Tuesday, 3 MARCH 2009

**RULING:**

1. The Ordinance on the Deployment of Voting Machines in Elections to the German Bundestag and of the Members of the European Parliament from the Federal Republic of Germany is not compatible with Article 38 in conjunction with Article 20.1 and 20.2 of the Basic Law insofar as it does not ensure monitoring that complies with the constitutional principle of the public nature of elections.
2. The use of the electronic voting machines of N V Nederlandsche Apparatenfabriek (Nedap) {Dutch Apparatus Factory} of type ESD1, hardware versions 01.02, 01.03 and 01.04, as well as of type ESD2, hardware version 01.01, in the elections to the 16th German Bundestag was not compatible with Article 38 in conjunction with Article 20.1 and 20.2 of the Basic Law".

"Manipulations were said to be possible both by politically or financially motivated "insiders", in particular employees of the manufacturer, and by external third parties who gained access to the computers used by the manufacturer... no suitable regulations in force that were able to guarantee protected storage of the voting machines...

"...interests of the manufacturer in protecting its business secrets should be subordinate to the principle of democracy. ... non-publication of the control reports and documents and of the source code was ...said to constitute an electoral error.

"...not ... compatible with the "principle of the official nature of the elections" that the functionality of the voting machines could only be examined by the manufacturer...

"...tests carried out by the district returning officer in the context of preparation for the election and by the returning committee in the polling station were said not to be suited to recognise any manipulations..."

"...voting machines were said not to be compatible with the "Guidelines for the Construction of Voting Machines" (Annex 1 to § 2 of the Federal Voting Machine Ordinance). They neither complied with the general state-of-the-art, nor were they constructed in compliance with the rules of technology for systems with grievous consequences in case of misconduct... software used was said not to be clearly identifiable..."

"...objectionable that § 35 of the Federal Electoral Act only calls for the ballot to be held in secret, but not for adherence to the other electoral principles..."

"In a republic, elections are a matter for the entire people and a joint concern of all citizens. Consequently, the monitoring of the election procedure must also be a matter for and a task of the citizen. Each citizen must be able to comprehend and verify the central steps in the elections reliably and without any special prior technical knowledge. ... An election procedure in which the voter cannot reliably comprehend whether his or her vote is unfalsifiably recorded and included in the ascertainment of the election result, and how the total votes cast are assigned and counted, excludes

central elements of the election procedure from public monitoring, and hence does not comply with the constitutional requirements..."

"...voter himself or herself must be able to verify—also without a more detailed knowledge of computers—whether his or her vote as cast is recorded truthfully as a basis for counting..."

"...principle of secrecy of elections is not to restrict the principle of the public nature of elections for the ballot act. It also does not justify a restriction of public monitoring in the casting of the—previously secretly marked—vote carrier or in the ascertainment of the results..."

"...Federal Voting Device Ordinance is unconstitutional on grounds of a violation of the principle of the public nature of elections from Article 38 in conjunction with Article 20.1 and 20.2 of the Basic Law..."

"...Federal Voting Machine Ordinance violates the principle of the public nature of elections under Article 38 in conjunction with Article 20.1 and 20.2 of the Basic Law because in the use of computer-controlled voting machines it guarantees neither effective monitoring of the election act nor the reliable verifiability of the election result. This shortcoming cannot be remedied by means of an interpretation in conformity with the constitution..."

"...voting machines did not provide a possibility to record the votes independently of the electronic record on the vote storage module enabling the respective voter to check his or her ballot.

"The essential steps in the ascertainment of the results by the voting machines also could not be verified by the public. Since the ascertainment of the results exclusively formed the object of a data processing procedure running inside the voting machines, it was possible for neither the election bodies nor the citizens participating in the ascertainment of

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the results to verify whether the valid votes cast were correctly allotted to the electoral proposals and the votes accounted for by the individual electoral proposals in total were correctly ascertained. It was not sufficient that the result of the computing process implemented in the voting machine could be taken note of using a summary paper printout or an electronic display. A public ex-

amination by means of which the citizen could have reliably verified the ascertainment of the election result himself or herself without prior special technical knowledge was hence ruled out."

"...complainants rightly complain of the unconstitutionality of the use of computer-controlled voting machines, the necessary expenses which they have incurred are to be refunded

to them according to §§ 18 and 19 of the Law on the Scrutiny of Elections in conjunction with § 34a.3 of the Federal Constitutional Court Act in this respect. Accordingly, the complainant re 1. is to be refunded the necessary expenses in full, and the complainant re 2., whose complaints are partly unfounded, is to be refunded three-quarters of the necessary expenditure." □□□

## A DOCUMENTARY

### 'The Night Won't End...'

*Somrita Som*

**T**HE NIGHT WON'T END—Biden's War on Gaza' is a Fault Lines Documentary presented by Al Jazeera which not only talks about the indiscriminate massacres and war crimes committed in Gaza but the consequent slaughter of humanity and the resounding silence of the world.

Israel's declaration of an unrelenting war on the Gaza strip in retaliation to a Hamas attack, soon took the form of one of the largest humanitarian crises of the century, claiming numerous civilian lives in military operations. One such military operation was the one on Jabalia refugee camp where Israeli forces caused heavy bombardment killing more than a hundred civilians in an attempt to kill one Hamas commander.

The documentary thus, traces such investigations along with individual accounts to provide viewers the rough image of the scale of dissemination of Palestinian lives.

The Palestinians were faced with large scale displacement, continuous bombing, field executions, airstrikes and complete shutdown of humanitarian assistance—with no food, no electricity, no water, nothing but despair and death. One of the many heart-wrenching stories recorded by the documentary is perhaps that of Hind Rajab, a 6-year-old girl who was shot in a car with all her family members. The little girl clung on to a phone call requesting aid for three hours. However, the ambulance dispatched was bombed and Hind eventually died due to lack of assistance. This is sadly not an exception but one of the millions of cases many of which remain unrecorded. The Israel authorities have denied involvement in such cases, even though satellite images and several evidences prove otherwise.

The United States of America, a global super-power and an unwavering supporter of Israel have over-

looked all allegations of war crimes and continues supplying military assistance claiming that Israel was defending herself. The leniency of USA towards Israel is said to have upended the system of international laws that had so far bounded the international community. Even though there were several evidences of US weapons being used for humanitarian violation, the denial of accountability of the White House has led the world to the verge of probable ruin.

The bombing of designated safe zones, the obliteration of Palestinian life, indiscriminate killing of paramedics, journalists, civilians and children, all have led the Palestinians to believe that there is no hope. It has transformed the nation to a huge graveyard where even memory of better times remains constricted to old photographs, blood-stained walls and the surrounding ash and rubble that was once a home. The documentary through its haunting images of reality showcases that the night of fear experienced in Gaza grows darker where hope dwindles with every passing day. □□□

## ICAI CONFERENCE

### War against Women

*Subhash Gatade*

**I**SRAEL'S UNENDING WAR against Palestine—with due support from the Western World—is widely known.

Less known is the fact that rep-

resentatives of extreme patriarchal Judaism have unleashed a war of a different kind against women.

With their growing ascent in social life their emphasis has been

increasingly on segregation of women in public domain—prohibiting their participation in religious or other gatherings, discrimination with them in jobs and employment, including their being bundled to the back side of public transport buses.

Much has already been written about situation of women in Muslim majority countries.

Right from they being denied right to education, one can cite numerous examples about the laws and customs which prohibit or restrict their participation in education, job or other professions or they being prohibited from mixed gatherings.

India, which claims itself to be a tolerant country—which is celebrating 75 years of its ushering into Republic this year and which abolished discrimination on the basis of caste, gender, race etc with adoption of the Constitution—had a glimpse of what it means to be women in a set up dominated by extreme patriarchal notions.

At first glance the incident may appear unbelievable but it happened in an international conference of CA students held in Kolkata.

The programme was held under the auspices of ICAI (Institute of Chartered Accountants of India) (icai.org), a statutory body established by an act of Parliament where this alleged humiliation of women took place.

Details of the sequence of events and the later developments have already appeared on social media—so one can as well have a look at the links or videos shared there to get a feel of the whole incident.

As can be expected the students and other invitees gathered at the programme had a good proportion of women as well. Few of very bright women CAs were also present there who—as per the Organiser himself had carved out a niche for themselves in the profession.

Little did most of them—including the other male participants could have a premonition that—within flash of seconds there would be total reshuffling of seats where women—who were sitting in the front rows—would be instructed to move to back benches.

What looked rather ironic that moments before the Chief Organiser

of the programme was praising women CAs for their achievements and within few seconds he allegedly 'ordered' from the stage itself that they immediately shift to the back portion of the hall.

This reshuffling was done basically to satisfy the condition of the Chief Guest—a motivational speaker—one Swami from BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir who it appears to have very conservative, exclusivist understanding about women which disallows presence of 'polluting women' in vicinity. The speaker had threatened that he will leave the meeting if his condition is not met and the organisers instead of ensuring women's dignity present there bowed to his demand and instructed the women attendees including few members of the organising committee as well to move back.

On further probe one learns that it was not the first time that he had made similar unjust demand and put the organisers in an embarrassing position but the organisers of that programme handled the programme far better than the ICAI fellows. In fact then "[h]e left an event without delivering a speech after seeing women in the front row. However, that incident was handled with more dignity, and the pride of the women present was not compromised".

A cursory glance at various news items or reports make it further clear that the sect allegedly practises gender segregation in their programmes as well.

Question arises what prompted the Organisers of the programme which are part of a statutory body formed by an act of the parliament to invite such a person to their programme.

Was it because the ruling dispensation at the centre has a very cordial relations with the organisation?

Should not the organisers had done a background check of the proposed chief guest and know further details about him. And even if they failed to do a background check but why they finally acquiesced to his demand which essentially meant insulting not only women present there but also expose the organisation which represents four lakh members for its double standards. One does not know whether the Ministry of Corporate Affairs takes interest in the case or not or issues a notice of clarification to the organisers.

Last but not the least, since the event has not been covered in the mainstream media—it is not clear whether any of the women participants to the programme or other male members left the whole programme in protest or not to show their disagreement and express their dissent.

If none left and all kept sitting listening rather sheepishly to Swamiji's sermons about Vikasit Bharat then perhaps they also failed the occasion and it is time they reflect on their own docile behaviour before the authorities.

Hope the call from the podium itself allegedly announced by a committee member through his microphone. "No ladies, no girls, no girl volunteers should even stand during the session, please hurry up as he can come anytime" and sheepishly followed by everyone there is not forgotten easily. □□□

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## A FORGOTTEN ANNIVERSARY

## Che Visited India 65 Years Ago!

*Chaman Lal*

**I** ADMIRE CUBAN REVOLUTION of 1st January 1959, led by Fidel Castro as one of the most unique revolutions of world history, where just 82 determined revolutionaries, sailing from Mexico on a ship *Granma*, made the historic revolution with the support of Cuban peasants and workers, against very powerful army of dictator Batista. Out of 82, only about 15 survived after the brutal attack by Batista forces, but these fifteen in the course of just two and half years organised an army of many thousands of peasants and defeated the dictator Batista, who fled the country! Among these Cuban liberation heroes, Che Guevara fascinated me most, as I find his personality traits similar to our south Asian revolutionary Bhagat Singh! So on the occasion of 65th anniversary of Che Guevara's only visit to India in 1959, I am tempted to write a small memoir.

Che Guevara along with his team landed up in Delhi airport on late evening of 30th June 1959, just six months after Cuba liberated itself from Batista's dictatorial oppressive regime. The then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru entertained him and his team to lunch on July 1, 1959 at his Teen Murthy residence, now turned into Prime Ministers Museum changing name from Nehru Memorial Museum and Library recently. Cuban leader Fidel Castro actually sent his closest comrade Che Guevara to afro-Asian nations to establish diplomatic and economic relations with Cuba. Interestingly the official record of Che Guevara's visit to India was found with some difficulty as he was not yet famous and iconic figure as

Che. Indian official records have name of Commandant Ernesto as leader of Cuban delegation visiting India. No Minister received him at airport; an official of the foreign ministry D S Bagla received him and was seen in most of photographs taken in Delhi and around. R Bhanumati, an Indian journalist recorded his interview at All India Radio, which later she included in her book *Conversations*. In 2007, Om Thanvi, editor of Hindi daily *Jansatta* from Delhi, travelled to Cuba and found out more about Che visit and also got Che Guevara's report on Indian visit submitted to Fidel Castro, which he got translated from a Spanish scholar Prabhati Nautial and wrote a series of articles in his edited daily *Jansatta*. Che Guevara might have visited few cities more other than Delhi and its neighbourhood areas, but references and photographs were available only of Calcutta, now called Kolkata. In Calcutta, some leaders of United Communist Party might have met him. Perhaps some public meetings were organised in his honour. But they did not satisfy Che's curious nature of knowing the revolutionary history of India. The only names mentioned by Che in his memoirs of India are Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, but nothing about Bhagat Singh and Netaji Subhash Bose, the radical socialist leaders of freedom struggle. Che Guevara perhaps would have been happier to know from Communists, their version of freedom struggle; he would have found in Bhagat Singh a fellow and a comrade like his own brave and fearless self.

During year 2010-11, I was on an

ICCR assignment to The University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine campus in Trinidad and Tobago as Visiting Professor of Hindi from JNU, New Delhi. There are many chairs of Hindi in various Universities in all parts of the world. I chose Trinidad, due to my interest in Cuba and Venezuela especially, also in Suriname and Guyana having Indian background population in large numbers like Trinidad itself. These countries were close to Trinidad. In Trinidad capital Port of Spain, I had close relations with Cuban and Venezuelan embassies with both ambassadors as friends. I was part of almost every public event in both the embassies. I was fascinated by socialist revolution made in Cuba with just 82 sailors including Fidel Castro, his brother Raul Castro and Che Guevara on a ship *Granma*, which is now displayed in Havana as an iconic historic item!

So, during my vacations in the UWI, I planned trips to Cuba and Venezuela. In Cuba I landed up in Havana first, visiting revolutionary museum, Jose Marti memorial. Che Guevara study centre in Havana was closed for renovation, so I missed visiting that. I had gone on my own, but I was helped by ICAP, the international body of Cuban people's relations with people of other countries. I stood in solidarity with Release of 5 Cubans in US prison in those days, and was taking part in solidarity meetings in Trinidad capital Port of Spain. I also addressed an ICAP meeting held in Santiago in solidarity with Cuban 5, where a Bolivian music troupe also came. In Santiago, I visited the house from where Fidel Castro led his 129 men to attack Moncada garrison, in which 61 persons were massacred and Castro got 15 years Jail, but which also produced the best political document of the world history--Castro's court statement--History will

Absolve me"! As I was keen to visit Santa Clara, the city liberated under Che Guevara's command, the last day of my visit to Cuba on 17th December 2011 was spent in Santa Clara. It looked to me like an old Indian city, quiet but sober. Look at my note on that day from my diary:

I reached Che memorial at 11.30, spent three hours there, saw Che grand statue, tall, Museum and memoirs of 220 fighters, 29 Bolivians compasa memorial where Che and Tania remains are kept, very sober atmosphere, Museum interest-

ing, but could not click. Gifted my book and articles for Museum. Professor of history came along to city centre, saw new National library. Santa Clara is like an old Indian town, with old houses, railway station. Saw train, now memorial, killed on 29th December, three days before victory, saw another memorial, where armoured train was derailed and 400 Batista army men surrendered with armoury before 23 of Che's men! Action train compartments also kept in museum. A rare Che statue with child in the city

fascinated me, where I got clicked with Professor of history, whose name I could not pick up properly!

I surely would like to visit Cuba again for a longer period and do some research in Che Study Centre in Havana. I met Che Guevara's daughter Dr Aleida and granddaughter in Delhi recently and hope to see them in Havana again! □□□

[Chaman Lal is a retired Professor from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi and Honorary Advisor to Bhagat Singh Archives and Resource Centre, Delhi Archives New Delhi. He can be contacted at [chamanlal.jnu@gmail.com](mailto:chamanlal.jnu@gmail.com) and whatsapp no +919868774820]

## THEY ARE RENT SEEKERS

# Of Techno-Feudalism and Capitalism

*Jayakosh Chidabaran*

**Y**ANIS VAROUFAKIS, THE distinguished economist and former Greek finance minister, coined the term techno-feudalism.

His book, *Techno-Feudalism: What Killed Capitalism*, published in 2017, stirred up controversy not only among high priests of capitalism but also among Marxist ideologues. For Marxists, proclaiming the death of capitalism is anathema, which leaves them with no mortal enemy in bourgeois to wage an unending war of liberation.

In the eighteenth century, the commodification of land, labour and invested capital paved the way for the capitalist modes of social systems. The owners of machinery capital, steamships, steam engines, electricity and telephone, who assumed risks and controlled the labour force, quickly became the new lords of the present, much more powerful and ruthless than feudal masters of the past.

Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, in their book, *The Communist Manifesto*, eulogised the virtues of capitalism in the first three pages. The Manifesto could also be regarded as a brochure for globalisation, where

the bourgeois effectively dismantles the Chinese walls of superstitions with the advent of technology and employment of the means of production.

Workers lived in squalid conditions with appalling wages and gross human rights violations. In response, the first libertarian movements, the first trade unionists, sought to truly emancipate the proletariat from the clutches of oppression of the bourgeoisie.

Though Marx was never a 'statist,' communist regimes didn't eschew the domineering state control and operated as bourgeoisie regimes in disguise.

Capitalism required democratic structures and independent secular institutions, and their relationship was more symbiotic. It warranted an educated and healthy workforce, preservation of workers' rights, universal adult suffrage, competition and efficiency to drive free markets and thwart monopolies. Double-entry book-keeping and joint stock corporations conjured up the two pillars of capitalism, namely markets and profits.

Adam Smith, in his book, *The Wealth of Nations*, written in 1776, together with 'The Theory Of Moral Sentiments,' entrenched capitalism as the predominant social system, extolling its virtues. But, capitalism in its truest form existed only in theory and in the imagination of Adam Smith, citing the baker, the butcher and the brewer analogies.

Capitalism, in practice, has always relegated itself to cronyism and lobbying, which was oligarchic and corrupt. The baker, butcher and brewer were replaced by Ford, GE, Edison and Krupp.

Just as capitalism was brewing under the ethos of feudalism, so was a new phenomenon taking shape in the consolidated democracies of the Americas and Europe. It goes under the moniker techno-feudalism, exacerbated by the 2008 Great Recession and the adoption of extraordinary monetary policies in the form of quantitative easing. Its undercurrents are strong and have feudal undertones. The west coast of the US in Silicon Valley and the east coast of China, which gave rise to China's Big Tech, were the geographical torchbearers of this revolution that later spilt over into geopolitical frictions.

The software technology companies thrive on network effects; the

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more subscribers and users are added, the higher their engagement, stickiness to the platform and high switching costs. When Facebook users or X (formerly Twitter) spend inordinate hours on these platforms, they add to these companies' capital stock by serving paid advertisements or selling subscriptions.

Elon Musk doesn't pay the users, but users pay for the valuation of his company with their time and user-generated content.

Unprecedented in the history of humanity, the vassals or subscribers/users in the 21st century are producing capital, which, in medieval fiefdoms, those vassals produced agricultural commodities by toiling in pastoral lands.

A digital trading platform like Amazon or Alibaba charges approximately 30-40 per cent fees or rent per transaction on their platform. And these software infrastructure companies don't produce goods and services, similar to traditional brick-and-mortar capitalists. The proliferation of smartphones and quantum advancements in telecommunications and broadband technology have enabled these tech leviathans to harness the massive power of network effects.

Airbnb, Lyft, Uber, GrubHub, Instacart and Zomato are software infrastructure companies that don't own real estate, taxis or restaurants but capitalise on the power of network effects and digital scaling to extract rents, both from the demand and supply side of the platform for each e-commerce transactions on it.

An antique shop in Mumbai, an Uber driver in Los Angeles, and factories in Dongguan increasingly rely on digital platforms to find customers. By removing a URL, these tech giants have unfettered power to remove any individual or commercial entity from the face of the earth. Community standards and

sanitised tech-error are new instruments of control and subservience.

Just as in the nineteenth century, capitalists depended on feudalism for food supply, today; techno-feudalists depend on capitalists to perpetuate a rentier economy. The profits from goods and services produced by capitalists are siphoned off in the form of rents. Yanis calculated the drainage to be in the range of 35-40 per cent of the GDP from the circular flow of income, with the consequences of decreased investments, lower incomes, and depressed demand and spending in the economy.

The multiplier effects from high investments spurring higher income and demand are lost in a tidal wave of rent-seeking machinery of techno-feudalism. 'Cloud Proles' are another category of people, synonymous with the cloud proletariat, who work in Amazon fulfilment centres and are constantly monitored by CCTV cameras and algorithms, thus curbing their privacy and autonomy.

Perhaps the most harmful effect of this new feudalism is that the entire cloud capital, comprising software programmes, data centres, availability zones, servers, and optic fibres, is designed to act as a behavioural modification machine. They aid in democratic recession by spreading disinformation and discontent through the disappearance of quality jobs and reduced economic investments. This failure of the market economy is perceived as a failure of democratic polity, which causes disillusionment among the masses.

The world is fast accelerating towards a 'technological singularity' that is cloud-based and algorithm-driven. The unsuspecting masses are the 'cloud serfs,' the addicts toiling with their time and attention—manipulated by sophisticated and intelligent software programmes—to create massive wealth for the neo-

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techno-feudal lords, who don't produce anything, unlike classical capitalists. Time is money under capitalism driven by profits, markets and competition. But the new techno-feudalists have successfully diverted that time onto their alluring platforms, creating a generation of doom-scrolling, vulnerable and virtual communities.

The real identities of citizens are now defined by and retrogressed into digital identities on these networks.

Little did this generation know that they are caught up in a vicious triad of engagement-behavioural modification-addiction sequences, over which they have lesser and lesser control. Conventional markets are analogous to Hegelian Dialectics of thesis, antithesis and synthesis that, in real life, found expression in understanding one's true self by being able to deliberate freely for price negotiations and consensually agreeing on terms.

Now, such synthesis is not the result of rational, autonomous thinking but is replaced by algorithms owned by a few powerful individuals. Free choice is subdued. This subjugation has historical precedence, that of feudal lords of the past. The only difference is that if those serfs and vassals in the medieval era were coerced and intimidated into submission, in the 21st century, surrender is voluntary. □□□

[Courtesy: Madras Courier]

## MEANING OF DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

### 'Unemployment Is Higher Among Educated Youth'

**Shobha Warriar**

[In March 2024, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Institute of Human Development (IHD) jointly published the India Employment Report 2024. The highlight of which was the unemployment crisis the country experienced. The report stated that 83% of India's unemployed workforce is young people, and the unemployment rate for young people with secondary or higher education is six times higher than the rate for those who can't read or write. It said, 'A large proportion of the population is of working age, and India is expected to be in the potential demographic dividend zone for at least another decade. But the country is at an inflexion point because the youth population, at 27 percent of the total population in 2021, is expected to decline to 23 percent by 2036. Each year, around 7-8 million persons are added to the labour force whose productive utilisation could lead to India reaping a demographic dividend.' Though unemployment is the biggest worry for young India, sadly, it was not a priority for the politicians during the elections. Shobha Warriar of Rediff.com recently spoke with Professor Kodoth Prabhakaran Nair, former National Chair of the Science Foundation, The Royal Society, Belgium and a Senior Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Research Foundation of The Federal Republic of Germany. Excerpts:]

**Q. You wrote recently that India was in the demographic dividend zone where the working age population exceeded that of the very young and the old.**

**What happens when a country is in that zone?**

**A.** If you take India's demographic dividend, it has an age group which can work. And this demographic dividend will be there for another decade and a half, at the most.

But the tragedy of this is that they are not in any meaningful employment.

If you take a state like Kerala for example, because the employment opportunities are very less here, this demographic dividend migrate from here.

What will happen when you treat only the symptoms and not the cause of the disease you suffer from?

Now, why I gave the analogy of disease is because the cause for the disease here is the educational system that is followed in India.

Unfortunately, our educational system does not meet the needs of the emerging society. Here, irrespective of what the child's aspirations or capabilities are, he or she is forced to learn many things. A child's real capabilities are not tapped or explored.

When nothing is forced upon a child of 5 in Germany, here a child of 5 carries a big bag full of books to school.

**Q. You mean the disease you spoke about is India's education system?**

**A.** Exactly. It is like a doctor treating the symptom without looking into what caused the disease when a person is sick.

Having worked all over the world, I feel pushing a child into the system at the primary level itself, is harming the child.

I will give you another example from my experience. When I was heading the National Chair of Science Education in Belgium, I had to guide research students too, and I had students from all over the world. One of them was an Assistant Professor from India.

There I was discussing a science problem with a European doctor student on what had to be done, and after that he was on their own.

On the other hand, the assistant professor from India had to be spoon-fed at every step.

Why is it so? The rot starts at the primary school level itself.

The problem with India is, we have a vast number of the so-called educated people in India. Unfortunately, they are not employable.

**Q. Industry in India has been complaining for a long time that engineering graduates in**

**India, for example, are unemployable...**

**A.** Yes, they may be educated but they are not employable.

It clearly shows education does not make a person eligible for a job.

And unemployment is higher among the educated youth, who account for 66% of the country's unemployed people.

The more educated a young person is, the higher the chances of him or her remaining unemployed.

As per a study, 29% of the educated youth are unemployed.

**Q. Then, what is the demographic dividend or advantage we are talking about?**

**A.** Take Kerala for example. Notwithstanding what (Kerala Chief Minister) Pinarayi Vijayan is saying, a huge percentage of the young population from Kerala is migrating to other states. That's because there are no jobs here.

Now, it is not the case of Kerala alone. According to the World Bank's latest report Jobs for Resilience, South Asia has the highest outflow of migrants among the emerging markets and developing economies. It includes India too.

And because of lack of job opportunities, Indians are migrating to other countries.

And 90% of the global youth population resides in the developing and poor countries, including India.

It is because these countries cannot generate enough employment opportunities to meet the growing aspirations of the youth that they are migrating.

Because these countries are not creating employment, they will not be able to take advantage of the demographic dividend they have.

Has any politician spoken about the high unemployment the country is facing, or lack of employment opportunities? Was it a topic of discussion during the elections? Has any politician made any suggestion on how India should move forward? No.

90% of the newspapers write about what every politician said. Did we see a single concrete idea written about in any of the papers?

Unless radical changes are made right from the primary education level, you are not going to solve the problem.

**Q. When most of the developed**

**countries are aging, we have a huge young population, but we are not able to give them employment and take advantage of the situation.**

**What will this lead to?**

**A.** They will migrate where they are needed. Kerala is a classic example of the migration of the working age population.

If you take countries on the European continent, a very large number of migrants are working there. That's because these countries are aging and there are no young people to do the jobs.

These young migrants are replacing a working population which is above 70 and are not able to work. They live long but are not able to contribute anything to the economy.

The migrants fill the gap so that the system works there.

So, if India which has this demographic dividend advantage right now, needs to take advantage of the situation, the planners sitting in Delhi or any other place who are writing the destiny of this nation, has to start changing things at the base level, at the educational level. □□□

[Source: Rediff.com]

#### 4 LABOUR CODES

## Labour Bashing—Modi Style

**Dinkar Kapoor**

**A**T PRESENT, 95 PERCENT of the workers in the country work in the unorganized sector. During the Corona epidemic, everyone had seen the plight of these workers closely and it also became a national issue. At that time, the e-Shram portal was created after the order of the Supreme Court. It includes farm and rural labourers, MNREGA, construction, domestic

workers, vehicle drivers, porters, paladars, rickshaw pullers, weavers, and workers in the cottage and small industries including chikankari, Anganwadi workers, Asha workers, workers working in mid-day meal, brick kiln, mining, etc. These are the workers who do not come under the purview of EPF and ESI. About 28 crore such labourers in the country have been registered on the e-Shram

portal. In Uttar Pradesh, this number is 8 crore 30 lakh. Despite the Supreme Court's instructions for the social security of these labourers, the government has not done anything yet. The situation is that for the social security of such unorganised workers, a social security law was made by the Parliament in 2008, which is still waiting to be implemented. 93 percent of these workers are running their family's livelihood on less than 10 thousand rupees per month. Apart from this, in the organised sector, there are many contractual or outsourced

workers, who are also running their livelihood on meagre wages. In Uttar Pradesh, due to the lack of wage revision of minimum wages for the last five years, the wages of workers are very low and, in this inflation, it has become very difficult to run the family's livelihood.

Just on 20 June, Sumita Dawra, Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Employment of the Government of India, held a meeting in Delhi with Labour Secretaries and Labour Commissioners of all the states and union territories across the country. As reported, in this meeting, the Central Government has directed all the states regarding the implementation of 4 Labour Codes made by abolishing 29 labour laws. States have been asked to make rules in their states by the Labour Codes made by the Centre. There are states and union territories like West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Lakshadweep, Sikkim, Andaman Nicobar and Delhi which have not yet made a complete rule book. The recent report of the government's V V Giri National Labour Institute states that the rules made by many states are against the basic spirit of the Labour Codes and their rules made by the Central Government. Therefore, they have to be changed and made following the Centre. The central government is engaged in implementing these codes passed by the Parliament in 2020 as soon as possible. The central government has also kept it in the 100-day agenda and task.

In these new Labour Codes that have been made, there is a clear provision that 12 hours of work will be introduced. Due to this, workers working in about 33 percent of industries will be compulsorily laid off. Not only this, after 12 hours of work, the workers will have to work for about 17-18 hours for their daily chores. Due to this, their physical

condition will also be adversely affected and at a very young age, they will have to suffer from many diseases like high blood pressure, sugar, hypertension, and tuberculosis. It has been provided in these Labour Codes that floor-level wages will be introduced in place of the current minimum wages. This means that the minimum wages fixed for food and clothes for a family of four units which includes husband-wife and two children will also be reduced and floor-level wages will be fixed. Due to this the life of a labourer who somehow manages the livelihood of his family in this severe inflation will become very difficult.

In the 33 years of implementation of new economic and industrial policy, the contract system has assumed a huge form in the entire country. From the Parliament of the country to factories and even in the professional field of teachers, doctors, engineers, nurses, computer operators, etc., the contract system is being implemented. The only purpose of this system is to carry out a terrible loot of labour force. The work was done by paying more wages than a permanent worker and ensuring his life security, the same work is being done at very low wages under the contract system. In the new labour code, fixed-term employment, which is even worse than this contract system, has been introduced. This means that the workers will be employed for some period and they will not have the facilities like EPF, ESI, bonus, pension, gratuity, etc. in such work. The ban on getting work of a permanent nature done through contract system, which was in place since the Contract Labour Act 1970, has been abolished in the codes. Even the provision of equal pay for equal work has been removed.

The provisions in the Labour Codes to form a board and implement a scheme for the social secu-

rity of workers working in unorganised sectors like construction, bidi, mining, etc, are also under threat. The enforcement powers of the labour department have been changed to facilitators. Naturally, the role of the labour department will be to facilitate the facilities of the employers. Many legal hurdles have been created in the Labour Codes for workers to go on strike etc. Forming a trade union will also become extremely difficult and it will become easy to cancel the registration of registered unions. An example of how the government and its institutions are making the path easy for the owners and corporate houses is in front of us. As soon as it came to power, the government changed the rules of EPF and reduced the amount of penalty imposed on the owners who do not deposit EPF.

The new Labour Codes that the government has brought for the immense profits of domestic and foreign corporate houses will bring about a radical change in the life and social security, working conditions, salary, etc of the working class working in the country. Due to this, the already increasing unemployment will increase further. Not only this, this path will also create major industrial unrest in the country. Because the role of Labour Law and Labour Department was very important in establishing industrial peace. Overall, the path on which the Modi government is moving forward is the path of primitive accumulation of capital. This is sure to lead to the destruction of the workers. Due to these policies, the working class will be forced to live a life of modern slavery by turning from human beings to objects.

To protect the lives of workers, this path will have to be changed today. The government has to ensure the share of the working class in the resources. Today the per capita

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income in the country is Rs 1 lakh 70 thousand per annum. But 93 percent of the working-class families of the country survive on less than Rs 10 thousand per month. Whereas the country's treasury is filled by the taxes of the common people. According to the PIB report, 97.6 percent of the tax on GST and petroleum products is paid by 90 percent of the poor and middle class of the country. At the same time, 10 percent of the upper class of the country pays 2.4 percent only in taxes. That is, out of the total amount of

Rs 27,48,718 crore received, 90 percent of the Rs 26,82,748 crore is paid by the common man and the upper class contributes only Rs 65,969 crore. Out of the money received from the common man, the government spends only Rs 5 lakh crore on social security sectors like MNREGA, free ration, education, etc. A large part of the country's income is being usurped by corporate houses. This has increased inequality in the country on a large scale. According to the report of the World Inequality Lab, the inequality

that exists at this time is even more than the inequality that arose in 1922 and the top 10 percent of people have 65 percent of the country's wealth and 57 percent of the income. Therefore, in the coming times, the working class will have to prepare itself for a major political initiative for social and life security, abolition of the anti-worker new Labour Codes, protection of democratic rights, and share in the country's income and resources. □□□

[Dinkar Kapoor, President, UP Workers Front. Source: counter currents.org]

## LETTERS

### Sanskrit in 'Mann Ki Baat'

In 111th Mann Ki Baat PM praised All India Radio for celebrating 50th anniversary of its news bulletin broadcast in Sanskrit, whose motto—Bahujan Hitaya Bahujan Sukhaya (welfare and happiness for all) is taken from RigVeda. Sanskrit is used by NASA because communication can be done in shortest possible way. People in 'Mattur' village in Karnataka speak in Sanskrit. India has given the world gift of Sanskrit.

**T S K, Chennai**

### Leftists Win in France

Preliminary results from France's parliamentary election on Sunday [July7] show that strategic collaboration between the left and allies of President Emmanuel Macron has succeeded in preventing Marine Le Pen's fascist National Rally from winning an absolute majority.

According to projections released shortly after polls closed, Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP)—a coalition of left-of-centre parties formed ahead of the snap elections to counter the far-right—is on track to secure the largest number of seats in parliament.

Le Pen's Rassemblement National (RN) is expected to finish third with between 120 and 150 seats.

Following the first round of vot-

ing last weekend, hundreds of candidates from Macron's alliance and parties within the NFP dropped out of three-way runoff races in a strategic bid to defeat RN candidates—an effort that appears to have paid off in a major way.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of the leftist La France Insoumise party, called the early election results an "immense relief for a majority of people in our country" and urged Macron to resign and allow the left to govern.

"The united left saved the republic," said Mélenchon. "It can begin the ecological and social work that our people, our time, our world, [and] our Europe so badly need."

**Common Dreams Staff**  
07-07-2024

### Personal Political

*[As news of Noam Chomsky's failing health makes the rounds, a journalist and peace activist from Pakistan shares some of her learnings from interactions with a trailblazing public intellectual whose moral compass has impacted the world.]*

I once asked Noam Chomsky how he manages to remember so many facts and figures and hold audience attention. He replied that he didn't convey any new information, that his talks are based on materials already in the public domain, and

that he simply joins the dots—providing context—and repeats the information consistently and in different ways.

His response was typical of his humility as well as his courtesy towards a much younger person to whom he owed nothing.

Chomsky teaches us that it is not necessary to be loud and sensationalist in order to be heard. This, together with the clear and courageous moral compass he has provided over decades, is a most valuable lesson.

Noam Chomsky was already a legend when I first met him over two decades ago in December 2001 when he visited Pakistan for the inaugural Eqbal Ahmad Memorial lecture series.

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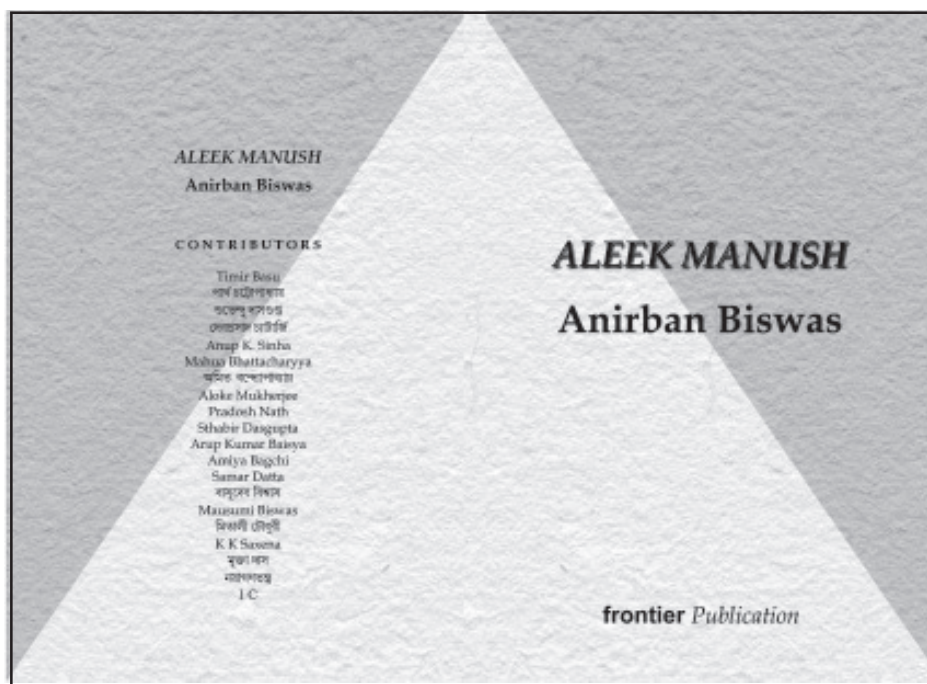
### Bonded Slavery

India is one of the world's largest producers of silk. Silk sarees, silk curtains, and clothes command a premium globally. However, Sericulture in India has a dark side—bonded slavery, particularly child slavery. It is an aspect yet to be acknowledged, let alone addressed. The problem is severe and needs much attention. Most people employed in these industries are children of Dalits, people belonging to socially and economically marginalised communities.

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