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Politicising Iftars

WHAT STARTED BY HEMWATI NANDAN BAHUGUNA AS AN innocuous attempt to neutralise communal forces is now an all-embracing political culture to mobilise minority votes. Both ruling and opposition parties indulge in this game of 'Dawat'. *Iftar* once stopped riots but today it is public relations exercise aimed at influencing voters, more precisely minority community voters.

In the month of *Ramdan* in 1974 Uttar Pradesh's capital Lucknow witnessed bloody Shia-Sunni clashes for weeks. Ironically Shia-Sunni violence erupted at a time on the Muslim calendar year that represents peace, prayer, reflection and a sense of brotherhood. Bahuguna being the Congress chief minister of the state invited Shia leader Ashraf Hussain for truce and peace talks. Hussain expressed his inability to meet the chief minister because he was fasting. Then Bahuguna requested him to end fast at his residence. And thus began the *Iftar* party. This humble beginning paved the way for *Iftar* political culture. Bahuguna boldly tackled communal riots and his *Iftar* party is now being widely politicised by politicians of all hues. Over the past 50 years, these *Iftars* have become shows of political strength and effective non-political platforms to organise minority community people and forge alliances. *Iftar* opens space to woo elite Muslims for the community's votes. *Iftar* is more like a short-cut for politicians to signal 'inclusion'.

Barring Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), all political parties, national or regional alike, now politicise *Iftars* to gain extra-mileage in vote market. But BJP Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee attended *Iftar* party. In truth Vajpayee had some compulsions to appease his alliance partners in his heterogeneous coalition government.

For one thing political *Iftars* do hardly serve poor Muslims. It is the wealthy class that could mediate with the larger Muslim population, gets focused in the media for their extravaganga.

President Pranab Mukherjee continued with the practice of *Iftars* even under the rule of BJP Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But Mukherjee's successor Ramnath Kovind discontinued it.

Most anti-BJP regional parties like Samajwadi Party, Trinamool Congress etc resort to *Iftars* with a lot of fanfare with the sole purpose of sending message to minority community voters. In a sense *Iftar* is now a time-tested weapon in the hands of smaller parties to prove their secular

credentials. Chandra Sekhar who would briefly become Prime Minister made *Iftar* somewhat official by organising it near the Jantar Mantar in Delhi where senior politicians, bureaucrats and prominent religious leaders would grace the event. Indira Gandhi too used *Iftar* for her revival but failed.

But increasing tendency to utilise government funds to throw *Iftar* party is now being opposed by concerned citizens. In a letter to Mr A Revant Reddy, chief minister, government of Telangana, Justice Chandra Kumar, Retd Judge, High Court, Telangana,

Lubna Sarwath, social & environmental activist and many civic society bodies, expressed serious concerns over diversion of funds from Minority Social Welfare department to state-sponsored *Iftar*. They vehemently opposed the allocation of minority social welfare funds of Rs 70 crore for *Iftar* party. All called for removing corruption from Minority Welfare Department and urged the persons in power to conduct *Iftar* at their personal levels from their personal or party funds. They condemned the grandiose show business and lavish expenditure when the bare

fundamental needs of poor people are ignored. They see no valid reason to allow politicians to feed each other at the cost of taxpayers' money. They are not really protesting against the much publicised one-time 7-star meal but what they are trying to convey to the government that minority welfare fund is for empowering minority community people who need better education, health and job. They need better roads, sanitation, footpaths, pollution control and most importantly corruption free administration. □□□

24-03-2025

COMMENT

50,000 Dead and Counting

THE WAR IS BACK AND WITH IT screams under the rubble. The Israeli bombardment has hardly subsided, targeting everything indiscriminately just as it did before the ceasefire, including schools housing the crippled, residential home, tent encampments and a UN compound in Dier al Balah.

Palestinian men, women and children walking along a dirt road and carrying their belongings in their arms, a recurring scene in a war that has forced most of Gaza's population to flee within the territory often multiple times.

Over 50,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed since Israel began its campaign in the enclave. The grim milestone was reached at the end of a week of deadly strikes by Israeli security forces that upended a fragile cease-fire that went into effect in January.

Gaza's Health Ministry announced that there have been over 113,200 people injured since October 7, 2023, when Hamas attacked southern Israel and took roughly 250 people hostage and killed over a thousand others—prompting Israel's fierce and deadly war.

In January, Hamas and Israel agreed to a cease-fire that paused hostilities and saw 25 living Israeli hostages released in exchange for the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention.

Hamas wanted to open talks for the second phase of the deal, that was supposed to see Israel fully withdraw from the enclave and Hamas release remaining living hostages. Israel instead wanted to impose the terms of a new cease-fire presented by the Trump administration, and refused to hold the talks regarding a permanent end to the war.

"Israel brazenly resumed its devastating bombing campaign in Gaza killing at least 414 people in their sleep, including 174 children, and again wiping out entire families in a matter of hours. Palestinians in

Gaza—who have barely had a chance to start piecing together their lives and continue to grapple with the trauma of Israel's past attacks—have woken up once more to the hellish nightmare of intense bombardment," wrote Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's secretary-general, in a statement.

Since March 18, 673 Palestinians have killed according to the latest update from the Ministry of Health in Gaza.

"It's displacement under fire," said one Gazan in the city.

Israeli political and military leaders are reportedly considering plans for a new ground campaign in Gaza that "could include a military occupation of the entire enclave for months or more."

Israeli forces drew condemnation from all corners of the world after bombing the only cancer hospital in the Gaza Strip. Israel Defense Forces troops carried out an airstrike on the abandoned Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital in Gaza's Netzarim Corridor, where the IDF launched what it called a "limited ground operation".

Despite the on-going genocide Palestinians say they do not want to leave their homeland as ceasefire lies in tatters. □□□

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NOTE

The Ganga Fisher Folk

Bharat Dogra writes:

RECENTLY SEVERAL ACTIVISTS and supporters of the Ganga Mukti Andolan (Liberate the Ganga River Movement or GMA) got together first at Delhi and later at Bhagalpur (Bihar). This has been perhaps the leading movement of river fisher folk in India to protest against several exploitative practices. This was a peaceful struggle.

Despite several difficulties this struggle succeeded in the fulfilment of several of its objectives with some important demands being accepted by the government. This brought considerable relief at that time to tens of thousands of fisher folk living by the banks of the Ganga in its reach in Bihar. Later this movement entered a new phase, which was aimed at helping boatmen.

The first phase of the movement was confined mainly to the area in and around the Bhagalpur district. In this stretch of the Ganga River fishing rights had been arbitrarily given away to certain rich families (called the zamindars of the fisheries sector) who in turn subleased smaller stretches to contractors who exploited the fisher folk by forcing them to pay taxes and extortions.

Several Gandhian social activists took the lead in mobilising fisher folk against this injustice. They also encouraged the fisher folk to become aware of the weaknesses within their community and to try to overcome these. This process also took the movement closer to the women of the community and several of them started taking an enthusiastic part in the movement

Contractors and their goons attacked fisher folk or activists work-

ing with them on several occasions, but the movement maintained its peaceful character even in the face of grave provocations. Some big and colourful boat processions were organised, defying the threats of the contractors and raising the morale of the fisher folk. Finally the obvious injustice of this situation was accepted and old zamindari rights over a particular stretch of the Ganga river were removed.

At first it appeared that the social activists had bitten more than they could chew. Their new demand threatened contractors and politicians and officials in league with them over a much wider area. Hence the repression unleashed by them was much more than before. Moreover some of these vested interests were operating in the guise of cooperatives so that there were also legal problems in resisting them.

Fortunately at this stage the situation was retrieved at least partially by the timely intervention of some enlightened officials who tried to convince the then Chief Minister that this was a good opportunity to help several hundred thousand fisher folk. The then Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav was quick to appreciate the political advantages inherent in the situation. He went one step ahead of the demand being raised for stopping taxes on the Ganga River and actually cancelled taxes on the other rivers of the state as well. He told the activists, 'In any case you are going to come back after a gap of a few months to recoup your strength, so let me give you the advance benefit for all rivers.'

However, the order was easier to issue on paper than to implement.

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The reason was that there were several legal complications regarding the rights over smaller, remote river systems and even the GMA did not have the relevant information from all areas. Several surveys needed to be taken up to get the detailed information. As a result some areas remained untouched by the new orders of the Chief Minister for some time, but gradually the relief brought by the new orders continued to spread.

According to a study by Professor K.S.Bilgrami and J.S.Datta Munshi of Bhagalpur University in the stretch from Barauni to Farakka, fish had been dying in large numbers within hours of the discharge from some of the big polluting industries.

So the movement now started taking up these issues of pollution and river-valley projects, which in turn took them to still wider issues of floods and flood protection works involving not just fisher folk but also other people living around the rivers.

□□□

MAHMOUD KHALIL'S LETTER

Note of a Political Prisoner

Mahmoud Khalil

[Mahmoud Khalil, a legal permanent resident of the US, who has been detained and targeted for deportation by the Trump administration for speaking out about the atrocities in Gaza, dictated a letter to the public from his detention cell in Louisiana.]

MY NAME IS MAHMOUD Khalil and I am a political prisoner. I am writing to you from a detention facility in Louisiana where I wake to cold mornings and spend long days bearing witness to the quiet injustices underway against a great many people precluded from the protections of the law.

Who has the right to have rights? It is certainly not the humans crowded into the cells here. It isn't the Senegalese man I met who has been deprived of his liberty for a year, his legal situation in limbo and his family an ocean away. It isn't the twenty-one-year-old detainee I met, who stepped foot in this country at age nine, only to be deported without so much as a hearing.

Justice escapes the contours of this nation's immigration facilities.

On March 8, I was taken by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agents who refused to provide a warrant and accosted my wife and me as we returned from dinner. By now, the footage of that night has been made public. Before I knew what was happening, agents handcuffed and forced me into an unmarked car. At that moment, my only concern was for Noor's safety. I had no idea if she would be taken

too, since the agents had threatened to arrest her for not leaving my side. DHS would not tell me anything for hours—I did not know the cause of my arrest or if I was facing immediate deportation. At 26 Federal Plaza [in New York City], I slept on the cold floor. In the early morning hours, agents transported me to another facility in Elizabeth, New Jersey. There, I slept on the ground and was refused a blanket despite my request.

My arrest was a direct consequence of exercising my right to free speech as I advocated for a free Palestine and an end to the genocide in Gaza, which resumed in full force Monday night. With January's cease-fire now broken, parents in Gaza are once again cradling too-small shrouds, and families are forced to weigh starvation and displacement against bombs. It is our moral imperative to persist in the struggle for their complete freedom.

I was born in a Palestinian refugee camp in Syria to a family that has been displaced from their land since the 1948 Nakba. I spent my youth in proximity to yet distant from my homeland. But being Palestinian is an experience that transcends borders. I see in my circumstances similarities to Israel's use of administrative detention—imprisonment without trial or charge—to strip Palestinians of their rights. I think of our friend Omar Khatib, who was incarcerated without charge or trial by Israel as he returned home from travel. I think of Gaza hospital director and pediatrician Dr Hussam Abu Safiya, who was taken captive

by the Israeli military on December 27 and remains in an Israeli torture camp today. For Palestinians, imprisonment without due process is commonplace.

The Trump administration is targeting me as part of a broader strategy to suppress dissent. Visa holders, green card carriers, and citizens alike will all be targeted for their political beliefs.

I have always believed that my duty is not only to liberate myself from the oppressor, but also to liberate my oppressors from their hatred and fear. My unjust detention is indicative of the anti-Palestinian racism that both the Biden and Trump administrations have demonstrated over the past sixteen months as the United States has continued to supply Israel with weapons to kill Palestinians and prevented international intervention. For decades, anti-Palestinian racism has driven efforts to expand US laws and practices that are used to violently repress Palestinians, Arab Americans, and other communities. That is precisely why I am being targeted.

While I await legal decisions that hold the futures of my wife and child in the balance, those who enabled my targeting remain comfortably at Columbia University. Presidents [Minouche] Shafik, [Katrina] Armstrong, and Dean [Keren] Yarhi-Milo laid the groundwork for the US government to target me by arbitrarily disciplining pro-Palestinian students and allowing viral doxing campaigns—based on racism and disinformation—to go unchecked.

Columbia targeted me for my activism, creating a new authoritarian disciplinary office to bypass due process and silence students criticising Israel. Columbia surrendered to federal pressure by disclosing student records to Congress and yielding to the Trump administration's latest

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threats. My arrest, the expulsion or suspension of at least twenty-two Columbia students—some stripped of their BA degrees just weeks before graduation—and the expulsion of SWC [Student Workers of Columbia] president Grant Miner on the eve of contract negotiations, are clear examples.

If anything, my detention is a testament to the strength of the student movement in shifting public opinion toward Palestinian libera-

tion. Students have long been at the forefront of change—leading the charge against the Vietnam War, standing on the front lines of the civil rights movement, and driving the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Today, too, even if the public has yet to fully grasp it, it is students who steer us toward truth and justice.

The Trump administration is targeting me as part of a broader strategy to suppress dissent. Visa holders,

green card carriers, and citizens alike will all be targeted for their political beliefs. In the weeks ahead, students, advocates, and elected officials must unite to defend the right to protest for Palestine. At stake are not just our voices, but the fundamental civil liberties of all.

Knowing fully that this moment transcends my individual circumstances, I hope nonetheless to be free to witness the birth of my first-born child. □□□

WHITHER LEFT-WING MOVEMENT?

Genocide in Bastar

Asis Ranjan Sengupta

THE TRIBAL REBELLION led by dedicated revolutionaries, are now in a critical stage.

The tribal people are facing existential threats right from the colonial period. Time and again they tried to rise against the aggression on their rights over their habitats, forest lands, rivers, flora and fauna. Santhal uprising, Munda revolt, Chuar rebellion, Mopla and similar other resistance wars have glorious history of Democratic movements.

It was expected that after the end of colonial rule, the government of independent India would look after the welfare of its own people. But that dream remains unfulfilled.

All the welfare and economic growth of the newly independent nation, conceived and executed one after another for so-called developmental projects, were/are always at the cost of these indigenous people, by eviction and displacements, without any real rehabilitation or compensation, leaving them at the mercy of their ill fates.

All mining projects, Dams, Barrages, Factories, Cities have been built, without ever taking into consideration the welfare or benefits of these local inhabitants.

The so-called Communist or mainstream political parties, engaged in parliamentary path, elections, ugly TV slufests, Maidan rallies never stood in their side, except occasional paying lip services.

Even British Govt, after brutally suppressing the tribal revolts had felt the need of some protection for them, and framed law prohibiting the free sale or purchase of lands in tribal areas. After long democratic movements and legal battles, Forest Rights Act (2006) came into being, ensuring the rights of the forest people. In 1996 PESA Act (Panchayats Extension of Scheduled Area) was there to prevent transaction or illegal acquisition of lands in notified scheduled area. NALSA Act, 2015 is there for the protection and welfare of the tribal people After the Singur incident, the already existing land acquisition laws were further streamlined, and Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, was enacted. But all governments showed little care and paid scant respect for such civil laws, on the contrary they are more interested in trampling them. The BJP-led NDA dispensation since

2014, just blew away all these in wind in order to let loose naked dance of crony capitalism in the country. The writers, lawyers, poets, activists, who fought for the people and their cause, are killed or imprisoned without trial. From Gauri Lankesh to Mukesh Chandrakar, (Bastar Junction), all are same story.

The proclaimed Maoists are the only organisation that has been fighting lone battle since almost seven decades, in the cause of these hapless people. But the problem is, they are running party only from underground, and by arms only. This strategy is partly out of compulsion and partly by choice. In the past their leadership, at least, a leading segment had tried to arrive at a peace treaty through negotiation, but no government showed any honest intention, on the contrary the negotiators invited were killed treacherously.

The Maoists once were successful in creating a red corridor from Maharashtra to Kerala through Madhya Pradesh (Chhattisgarh),

For Frontier Contact

DHYANBINDU
COLLEGE SQUARE

Andhra (Telengana), but brutal state oppression over such a long period, lack of mobility, and public support, due to absence of any open organisation, confinement to secret outfits, have resulted in shrinkage of operational area, and presently limited to Bastar and adjacent tribal belts only.

The previous and present Governments, be they state or central, have left no stone unturned to label them as 'terrorists', at par with Islamic or insurgent terrorist groups operating elsewhere, although it has a totally different character of protracted war, not sporadic terrorist strikes, and no connection with any religion.

The present neo fascist regime having a toxic home minister, has waged an all out war against India's original people shamelessly. The urban or city based sympathisers, who sincerely expressed solidarity with the legitimate demands and rights of these poor masses, have been branded as urban naxals, thus unknowingly immortalising the glorious history of naxalbari uprising of late sixties. The rulers are still haunted by the nightmare of Naxalbari.

One limitation of sole dependence on secret organisation, and total shunning the path of open mass movements, must be evident today. Naxalbari, the spring thunder, was the culmination of such mass uprisings as Telangana and Tebhaga, predominantly peasant movements, so was Naxalbari, it was peasant outrage. But unfortunately this path of mass movement was totally abandoned by the leaders, being disillusioned by the history of betrayal and backstabbing by self styled petty

bourgeois leadership in the past. Initially it created huge impact by successfully hitting at right targets, but experiences show that such secret armed activism, create isolation and alienation from masses in the long run, resulting in huge casualties. In contemporary history, Irish Republican Army in UK, or the Tamil Ealam (LTTE) battles of Sri Lanka, ended up in unfruitful end, in spite of all heroic martyrdoms. Again sole dependence on legal and official procedures can produce limited results. Example is Narmada Bachao Andolan, under the tenacious and stewardship of Smt Medha Patkar, ultimately could not extract the desired compensation or rehabilitation packages. The prejudiced upper class Judges, just dubbed the fighters as damned 'anti Dam activists' (curiously, not anti eviction activists) and awarded in favour of the project, meant for benefit of corporates operating in Gujarat far away from the massive land eviction areas of Madhya Pradesh, where people lost everything, the meagre belongings they had down generations. They were thrown out homeless, landless, and without means of earning or livelihood, also known as 'development refugees'. a new phrase in the dictionary of corporate style concept of anti-people development, also known as 'growth' in present day macro economics. These victimised masses are the essential by-products of such vicious growth.

With the fall of Bastar, which may not be averted, the last bastion of resistance, is likely to dissolve. All are afraid, entire central India, is going to be left open for free corporate loot of natural resources, putting the indigenous people in endless misery and crisis. So what is needed is a tactful combination of legal and extra-legal methods of struggle. Past records of success stories bear testimony to that strategy. The present

and future active leadership should keep it in mind. It is high time to introspect, probably now or never as the struggle of the people may fizzle out in Bastar, at least temporarily, the future is unknown.

All the prominent writers, poets, journalists, activists, lawyers, spokespersons have been falsely implicated in fake Bhima-Koregaon, case of fabricated threat against state, and imprisoned or killed, thus instituting a reign of terror.

Those brave intelligentsia, students etc, who sympathise with the people in the conflict zones, are neither any 'ist' nor extremists, for all practical purposes. They only sympathise with the affected people, offer legal aids to the harassed people and particularly women, always facing raids, demolitions, unlawful arrests and custodial tortures, they are helpless, poor people who are ignorant of law and rules. Forces take advantage of their helplessness and torture illegally. The sympathy of the selected urban or city activists are not as much for any 'ism' but for the restless masses, who are left with no alternative but to take the path of armed extremism out of sheer desperation. In fact, a number of them have successfully persuaded to come back to mainstream, by none other than these urban activists. But unduly these Samaritans are described in a manner that as if they were against the state, but, on the contrary they are helping the state to establish rule of law, more often violated by custodians and makers of law. It must be understood that world conscience is aroused not in favour of Hamas or its leaders but against Israel who are killing people and destroying civilian establishments in the pretext of negation of Hamas. Same thing is true about the forests and tribal people, security forces are killing civilians and destroying their habitats indis-

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criminally, in the name of eliminating Maoists, that must be condemned and resisted at any cost, that is the call of the hour.

Bastar region is in this way suffering from total isolation. All reporters are banned, the sole brave heart who had been reporting through an you tube channel, 'Bastar Junction', has been killed. By creation of such a cordoned zone, where entry or exit is prohibited, the forces have been deployed to unleash horrors of drone bombardment, 24 hour surveillance, manhunts, everyday raids, destruction of homes, molestation of women, and indiscriminate killing of men-folk, including children. In the name of neutralising so-called maoists, a total genocide, is being carried out in cold blood without any scope of resistance or protest from any corner.

Everyday mainstream media is rejoicing the success story by publishing the death-counts of 20 yesterday, 30 today etc, claiming to be

maoists. In reality, along with maoists, innocent villagers are being murdered ruthlessly. For one thing the 'Maoists' are never captured or injured but killed always. Deadly sophisticated weapons are found on display as seizures, lying beside the corpses, in photographs published as success of para Military forces, but very few or none of them is/are wounded or killed significantly. Hence the fictions of long chase, fierce clash, prolong gun battle, exchange of fires and bullets, dangerous encounter etc, stand exposed. These are but cold blooded mass murders, nothing less or more.

The proud Home Minister is exulting over near possible fulfilment of his assurance to end Maoism by 2026, for that he is running deadly assault in the pattern of 'final solution' of his icon Hitler whose target were Jews, and here it is the poor tribals.

Official progressive parties, and social media platforms, are so

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touched by the plight of Palestinian sufferers, and Gaza victims of Zionist vengeance, genuinely of course, situation in Bangladesh, but are conspicuously silent over the ongoing genocide of Bastar today.

All the rulers and the autocrats in history had/ have dreamt of finishing just and popular uprisings always by brutal means, but ended up in inviting destruction of themselves and their draconian regimes. History repeats, maybe, in a different way. □

POLITICS OF RENAMING

"What's in a Name?"

Fahad Zuberi

MAHARASHTRA HAS been enflamed in recent weeks by deeply concerning rhetoric about the 17th century Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Violence was reported in Nagpur over demands that Aurangzeb's grave should be demolished.

The attempts to obliterate the memory of the Mughal emperor are not new. In 2023, after a campaign that lasted decades, the city of Aurangabad was renamed after the Maratha ruler Sambhaji.

The Nagpur incident brings back into focus a Bombay High Court judgement last year and the Supreme Court's refusal to intervene in a petition against it that could have

been the opportunity to judicially resist the violent politics of renaming in India. Also lost was the chance to protect Muslims from being criminalised as historical perpetrators of violence.

On August 2, 2024, the Supreme Court dismissed a plea challenging the renaming of Aurangabad to Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar and Osmanabad Dharashiv.

The renaming had been proposed by the Uddhav Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi government and upheld by the Bombay High Court in a judgement in May 2024. This High Court judgement created an unusual line of reasoning around renaming of towns and cities in

India, couching the polarising politics of renaming in the polite confines of judicial interpretation.

The judgement began with Shakespeare's famous quote where Juliet, emphasising the irrelevance of a rose's name to its fragrance asks, "What's in a name?"

Acknowledging the lack of statutory provisions for renaming Indian cities, the judgement was based on two arguments. Firstly, legal provisions allow for state governments to alter the limits of, or abolish and name "revenue areas". Secondly, if a government has the power to abolish an existing area or name a new one, it can rename existing areas also.

This dispassionate line of reasoning has shown itself to be very dangerous. With no mention or reference to the politics of renaming in India, the judgement completely ig-

nored the socio-political context of renaming towns and cities.

Towns and cities can be renamed for a multitude of purposes. In the case of Chennai, formerly Madras, it was to acknowledge local tradition. In the case of St Petersburg, the changes reflected changing political realities. During World War I, the Russian city was renamed Petrograd because St Petersburg was deemed “too German”. In 1924, it was rechristening Leningrad after the leader of the Bolshevik Revolution. In 1991, after the collapse of Soviet socialism it reverted to its old name.

In contemporary India, however, renaming follows a more divisive and dangerous agenda. It premises itself on the false narrative of history where Muslims are claimed to have invaded the “Hindu” subcontinent, destroyed its glorious ancient culture

and then ruled India for a thousand years as fanatical despots.

This version of history first paints today’s Indian Muslims as descendants of these medieval Muslim “invaders” and presents Hindus as their victims. The changes in the names of cities and streets are projected as an act of reclamation – a Hindu conquest over destructive Muslims.

This variety of politics burdens Indian Muslims with imagined historical guilt. It also positions Hindus against Muslim citizens of India and uses distorted histories to fan communal sentiment.

Therefore, the act of renaming, as procedurally sound as it might be, is a direct attack on the constitutional principle of fraternity and a violation of Article 51A (e) of the Constitution that calls for the promotion of “...harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious diversities”.

Besides, with its interpretation of urban areas as legal entities with revenue-based boundaries, the High Court judgement treated cities and towns as mere units of governance. It reduces the inhabitants of cities to being mere subjects who are governed. This is grossly incomplete.

Cities are not just units of administration. For their citizens, cities are places of birth, places of memory, of lived histories, identities and of familial connections.

When the name of a city is changed from its “Muslim-sounding” one to a “Hindu” one, it sends a clear message that Muslim inhabitants of the city cannot count themselves among the “original” members of its community. They are either descendants of the invaders who conquered the city and changed its name or are converts to Islam who got polluted and are an aberration to the true nature of the town.

Hence, Aurangzeb – after whom

Aurangabad was named – despite being born in Gujarat and dying in Maharashtra is viewed as a foreigner who must be erased. On the other hand, Sambhaji – after whom the town got its new name and who also lived and died in the subcontinent – is viewed as an Indian and must be revered.

In March 2023, the Supreme Court had itself rejected a plea that sought the establishment of a renaming commission to maintain a list of “original names” that were changed by “foreign barbaric invaders”.

The Supreme Court had criticised the petition, noting that “...history cannot haunt its current and future generations...” Recognising the insidiousness of renaming, it demanded to know if the petitioner wanted to “...keep the country on boil?”

The Bombay High Court acknowledged this precedent but ignored it, concluding that renaming cannot be judicially regulated unless the name proposed is “atrocious”. Sadly, the courts ignored the fact that the act of renaming itself is harmful – as the Supreme Court had said, even if the new name is glorious.

It is best if Juliet’s beliefs are kept limited to personal gifts like Romeo’s rose. The current campaign to give Indian cities named after Muslim figures Hindu names establishes that Muslims do not belong in India the way Hindus do. These ghosts have come back to haunt Maharashtra. □□□

[Fahad Zuberi is a Doctoral Scholar at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.]

URGENT APPEAL

This unique world law fortnightly—perhaps the only law journal in India which regularly publishes important foreign and international courts’ decisions—as also provides copious information regarding the socio-economic/political conditions of various countries the world over and invites/publishes thought provoking articles on the pressing problems and crises faced by the people of the world in various spheres—is running on heavy losses and is IN DANGER OF BEING CLOSED DOWN SOON unless subscribers, admirers/well-wishers rise to the occasion and render crucial help in the form of causing many more subscriptions, advertisements (Rs 15,000 or more) and donations at the earliest and regularly. Hope and request all such sympathetic persons/institutions would chip in with their precious aid.

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MUSK'S STARLINK IS COMING

“A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing”?

Atanu Chakravarty

IN A SURPRISING TURN OF events, India’s two largest telecom companies, Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel, have finally partnered with Elon Musk’s SpaceX to provide satellite-based internet services to Indian consumers via Starlink’s technology. This development is particularly striking given that just a year ago, these very telecom giants viewed Starlink as a formidable competitor and strongly opposed its entry into the Indian market.

It is noteworthy that this rapid shift in stance comes soon after Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s state visit to the United States, where he held closed-door meetings with Donald Trump and Elon Musk. The timing of this development has raised numerous questions, debates, and concerns.

Despite being fierce competitors in the domestic market, Mukesh Ambani of Jio and Sunil Mittal of Airtel were staunch opponents of SpaceX’s entry into India. They argued that allowing satellite internet services like Starlink would create an unfair competitive landscape for traditional telecom players.

At the India Mobile Congress 2024, in the presence of Prime Minister Modi, Sunil Mittal publicly supported Mukesh Ambani’s stance, asserting that satellite-based companies should be subject to the same licensing fees and spectrum charges as traditional telecom firms. They emphasised that foreign satellite service providers must operate under the same regulatory framework as domestic telecom operators to ensure fair competition.

However, beyond the licensing and competition issues, serious concerns

regarding national security and sovereignty have now come to the forefront.

When news broke last year about Starlink’s plans to enter the Indian market, the Indian think tank Kootneeti Foundation had warned the central government that Starlink’s arrival could be akin to “a wolf entering in sheep’s clothing.” They suggested that under the guise of a ‘harmless’ private company, Starlink could pose a serious risk by exposing India’s sensitive data to foreign powers and imposing American influence on Indian affairs.

This warning came at a time when Donald Trump had publicly stated that if he returns to power, he would offer Elon Musk a key position in his administration. Today, Musk’s immense influence and growing political power are evident worldwide.

Unlike conventional mobile telecom providers that rely on underground optical fiber cables and terrestrial towers, Starlink will function through a network of thousands of satellites orbiting the Earth in low Earth orbit (LEO). As of January 2024, SpaceX has already deployed nearly 7,000 satellites, with Musk indicating plans for further technological enhancements.

A major national security risk stems from the fact that Starlink’s operations and control will remain entirely outside India’s geographical borders—under direct US jurisdiction. This means India will have no control or oversight over how Starlink operates within its territory.

Unlike traditional internet services, Starlink’s satellite internet network transcends geographical boundaries and operates without any local over-

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sight. This could result in direct communication between Indian users and American authorities, bypassing Indian regulatory frameworks.

The Kootneeti Foundation has further raised alarms about Elon Musk's deep ties with the US Department of Defense and intelligence agencies, which could have grave implications for India's internal security.

Since Starlink's satellites and operations will be controlled from outside India, there is a high probability that Indian user data could be accessed directly by US authorities. The Kootneeti Foundation's report cites examples from Brazil, Iran, and Ukraine, where Starlink allegedly exploited sensitive national data.

Moreover, Musk has close business ties with Palantir Technologies, an American data analytics company with deep connections to US intelligence agencies. These advanced technologies are increasingly being used for geo-political control, and the US government is expected to leverage Starlink to expand its strategic influence worldwide.

This relationship between Musk, the US government, and powerful intelligence networks has been described by Kootneeti Foundation as an emerging "Intel-Industrial-Military Complex", reinforcing America's digital and strategic dominance.

Canada was the first country to expel Starlink from its territory, followed by Mexico shutting its doors to the satellite internet service. South Africa has also blocked Starlink's entry, further limiting its global reach.

In Latin America, a major shake-up occurred when Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim severed ties with Elon Musk's Starlink, leading to a significant realignment in the region's telecommunications industry. Slim has announced plans to forge new business relationships with major telecom companies in China and Europe,

dealing a severe financial blow to Musk.

Additionally, this move has resulted in a significant loss of influence for the US in Latin America, as other global telecom giants have stepped in to fill the void left by Starlink. It appears that after facing repeated rejections from multiple nations, Musk set his sights on India's vast market—and under pressure from Trump, Modi quickly granted Starlink the necessary approvals.

It is to be noted that former Indian government secretary E A S Sharma has raised serious concerns about Starlink's entry into India. In December 2024 and February 2025, he wrote multiple letters to the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), warning of the grave risks to India's national security and sovereignty if Starlink were allowed to operate in the country.

He pointed out that Starlink had requested relaxations on specific security-related regulations, which, if granted, could expose India to external surveillance and influence. Given Starlink's deep ties with the US Department of Defense and intelligence agencies, Sharma cautioned that allowing Starlink to acquire spectrum licences would give the US a strategic military advantage over India—a move that could severely undermine India's national interests.

Recently, Trump issued a warning to Ukrainian President Zelensky, threatening to shut down Ukraine's Starlink services unless Ukraine handed over its natural resources to the US and agreed to a ceasefire with Russia on American terms. Since Ukraine's defence infrastructure is heavily dependent on Starlink's satellite internet, such a shutdown would cripple its military operations.

Sharma highlighted the danger of handing over critical strategic satellite spectrum and orbital resources to an American corporation, stating that this

would grant the US an unparalleled level of dominance over India's airspace, posing a severe threat to national security and sovereignty.

Beyond defence concerns, Starlink's satellites would also gain access to India's crucial agricultural data, including information on food grain reserves, crop yields, and extensive national resource databases.

Following the 2G spectrum scandal, the Indian Supreme Court had warned the central government that spectrum is a rare national resource, and any allocation to private companies must adhere to strict transparency standards through public auctions.

Sharma has strongly opposed the Jio-Airtel-Starlink alliance, describing it as a dangerous, regressive cartel that could result in a corruption scandal far larger than the 2G scam, potentially the biggest in India's history.

There are reports that the Indian government has instructed Starlink to set up a control centre within India. Allegedly, this is being done under the pretext of maintaining law and order in sensitive areas.

The government has reportedly imposed certain security conditions, one of which grants administrative authorities the power to monitor and intercept telephone communications whenever deemed necessary. However, detailed information on these conditions is yet to be disclosed.

Narendra Modi, who has cloaked himself in ultra-nationalism and hardline Hindutva, has now bowed down before another authoritarian figure—Donald Trump—by opening India's doors to Elon Musk's aggressive expansionist ambitions.

The emerging Starlink-Jio-Airtel cartel threatens to monopolise India's entire telecom sector, leaving little room for competition or independent oversight.

With India's telecommunications and national security at stake, there is an urgent need for collective resistance against this growing corporate-political power grab. □□□

WHO IS THE 15TH DALAI?

Why is the Dalai Lama in Exile?

Yuanyue Dang

[The exiled Tibetan spiritual leader has hinted his successor may be born outside China, setting the scene for intense controversy]

THE DALAI LAMA HAS been in exile in India since the People's Liberation Army (PLA) crushed an armed uprising in Tibet in 1959.

As he approaches his 90th birthday in July, the controversy over his successor is expected to reignite, with possible implications for social stability and China's relations with the United States and India.

According to Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the Dalai Lama will be reincarnated and he has repeatedly said he would resolve the issue this year.

In a new book published this month, he hinted that his successor would be born outside China – a proposal swiftly rejected by Beijing which described him as “a political exile who uses religion as a cover for anti-China secessionist activities and has no right to represent the Tibetan people”.

Here is the background to the controversy and the likely implications for the future.

According to Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the Dalai Lama is the political and spiritual leader of Tibet. When a living Buddha such as the Dalai Lama dies, he will be reincarnated as a young child, who must be found through a series of searches and rituals.

Traditionally, the selection was made by respected Tibetan monks. In the 18th century during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), the Qianlong emperor attempted to use a lottery style ceremony known as the “golden urn”.

The ceremony was revived by the Communist Party and incorporated into official regulations in 2007,

along with a clause explicitly banning interference by overseas individuals and parties.

The current Dalai Lama, the 14th, was selected using different methods in 1937, a period of war and turmoil inside China.

There have long been fears that the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama could lead to social unrest in China's Tibetan areas.

Dalai Lama says his successor may be found in India.

Beijing insists it has the right to approve the appointment of all senior Tibetan Buddhist figures – something strongly contested by the Dalai Lama and his followers – and it is not expected to accept a reincarnation from outside its borders.

According to tradition, the next Dalai Lama must be recognised by the current Panchen Lama, whose own selection in 1995 was highly controversial with two rival candidates emerging.

The whereabouts of the boy recognised by the Dalai Lama are not known, although Beijing has said he has graduated from university and is now working and “living a normal life”.

Meanwhile, the one chosen by Beijing holds the position and is now a member of the Standing Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body.

The Dalai Lama briefly ruled Tibet as a young man and for a time tried to work with Beijing.

According to China's State Council Information Office, Tibet has been under China's rule since the 13th century, with the Yuan, Ming and

Qing dynasties all stationing officials there to manage local affairs.

In 1950, a year after the Communist victory in the civil war led to the foundation of the People's Republic, the PLA entered the region after a victory over Tibetan forces in the Battle of Chamdo.

The following year, Beijing signed a 17-point agreement with local political elites that promised autonomy for the region and a commitment to retain its political system and cultural practices. It also agreed to keep the Dalai Lama as Tibet's leader and merge his army into the PLA.

In 1954, the 19-year-old spent five months in Beijing studying Mandarin and Marxism. He not only met Mao Zedong, but also developed a good relationship with another senior official, Xi Zhongxun, the father of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

He also attended the first session of the National People's Congress, China's top legislative body, and was elected vice-chairman of its standing committee.

But five years later, relations between the two sides broke down after the PLA put down an armed uprising and asserted full control over Tibet's political system and religious practices.

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The Dalai Lama went into exile in India along with thousands of others and he has never been able to return to China.

Instead, he became an enemy of Beijing, accused of creating chaos in Tibet – including waves of unrest in the late 1980s and 2008 – and being a separatist.

Although the two sides held several rounds of talks between 2002 and 2010 to resolve the tensions, they achieved little.

In 2011, the Dalai Lama stepped down as head of Tibet's administration-in-exile but retained his religious role.

Washington was deeply hostile to the Communist takeover of China and helped the Dalai Lama escape. Declassified documents show that the CIA also supported Tibetan guerrilla forces at the time.

Several US presidents have met the Dalai Lama, the most recent being Barack Obama in 2016, while US officials have also made regular visits.

Beijing opposes any such contact from any country's government

as interference in China's internal affairs.

The US State Department recognises the Tibetan autonomous region as part of China, but Beijing has been angered by a number of acts that it sees as challenging its sovereignty.

For instance, the Tibetan Policy and Support Act, passed in 2019, stipulates that the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama should be determined solely by Tibetan Buddhists and that Chinese officials who interfere in this process will be sanctioned.

The Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Dispute Act, passed last year, aims to fund increasing support for Tibet and counter what it describes as "disinformation" from Beijing about the region's history, people and institutions.

India has provided a haven for Tibetan exiles and the Dalai Lama has been based in the hill town of Dharamsala for decades.

However, New Delhi's stance has

varied over the years.

In 2003, it recognised the Tibet autonomous region as part of China and promised not to allow Tibetans in India to engage in activities aimed at splitting China. In return Beijing recognised New Delhi's rule over Sikkim, which it annexed in 1975.

But Beijing and New Delhi have never been able to resolve their long-running border dispute, which led to a war in 1962.

Much of the disputed territory is along the Tibetan border, which was drawn up during the British colonial era.

Following the most recent deadly border clash in 2020, India stepped up contacts with the Dalai Lama, including a phone conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2021.

More recently China and India have been trying to improve relations and New Delhi has not expressed a clear position on the Dalai Lama's reincarnation. □□□

[Courtesy: South China Morning Post]

HINDUTVA VS DRAVIDIANISM

The Language Controversy

Kamala Ganesh

TAMIL NADU CHIEF MINISTER MK Stalin and leaders of other political parties in the state have opposed the requirement of the New Education Policy 2020 that students learn three languages in school, at least two of which are native to India. They contend that this is an attempt to impose Hindi on the state.

They assert that the two-language formula in Tamil Nadu, by which students learn Tamil and English, is pragmatic and has a successful track record. At the heart of their opposition is the Dravidian ideology that the residents of India's southern states are culturally different from their

compatriots in the Hindi-speaking North.

The Tamil language is the ideological fulcrum around which Dravidianism revolves. Tamil literature considers itself as more than a language. Its self-image is that of a culture.

Attempts to introduce Hindi in schools in Tamil Nadu have been made since 1937, emanating at that time from parts of the Congress leadership. But it is worth recalling that during that period, Hindi was the symbol of anti-colonial protest. Nonetheless, it was resisted firmly in Tamil Nadu.

In 1967, amid discussions about

the National Education Policy, the anti-Hindi plank was crucial in the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's electoral victory.

This time around, the push for the three-language formula is coming from the BJP-ruled central government as an assertion of its overarching political dominance. Hindi fits well into the BJP's Hindutva project, which has geographical and cultural antecedents in the Hindi-speaking North Indian region. A descendant of Sanskrit, Hindi is deeply rooted in the canonical Hinduism of the Indo-Gangetic plain.

As in Hindutva, in Dravidian politics too, Hindi is viewed as the direct offspring of Sanskrit. The distance between Tamil and Sanskrit in linguistic structure and the perceived historical slighting of Tamil by San-

skrit and the southern region by the North are at the core of this anti-Hindi sentiment.

Intrinsic to Dravidianism is the opposition to the structures of caste. In Tamil Nadu, Brahmins who were traditionally custodians of Sanskrit were seen as migrants from the North. This contributed to the antipathy towards Hindi.

Nonetheless, as the composite culture of India evolved – and not just through harmony – Tamil stood its ground. The major temples of Tamil Nadu, bastions of canonical Hinduism, include both Sanskrit and Tamil prayers, a status not easily conferred on vernaculars in other regions.

Only under colonialism, the romance of European orientalist with Sanskrit and the increasing Brahmin dominance in administration and professions was there a dent in Tamil primacy. Dravidianism built its argument on this premise.

But after it became a political movement in the 1920s, a phase of polemics inevitably set in. Populist interpretations of Tamil's primordiality ignored historical fact, the anti-caste ideology was diluted in practice, leading to caste violence between members of the Other Backward Classes and Dalits, creating polarities between North and South that disregarded the processes of exchange and accommodation that was prevalent in the subcontinent, across re-

gions. But that phase is fading somewhat.

To those unfamiliar with the biography of the Tamil language, the Tamil Nadu government's argument against the three-language formula sounds petulant and unwarrantedly political. After all, the New Education Policy does not name Hindi as one of the languages that must be taught. It apparently leaves the choice to the states.

However, Tamil Nadu, as the state's Deputy Chief Minister, Udayanidhi Stalin explained, believes that the Centre aims to use the New Education Policy "as a backdoor entry for Hindi".

Five decades after the last anti-Hindi agitation, Tamil Nadu is a well-integrated part of India with two official languages. The other Dravidian languages are part of its popular culture, as is Hindi. Tamil Nadu has managed pretty well all these years with Tamil and English.

The state is ranked high among Indian states on many parameters, including education. According to the Union government's Performance Grading Index in 2019-2020, the state was among the top five achievers on key educational parameters such as access, governance and equity.

There is no reason to believe Hindi not being a compulsory subject has in any way hurt the performance of students in Tamil Nadu.

Students who wish to learn Hindi may and do join schools in the state that follow the Central Board for Secondary Education or private educational institutions.

There are many Tamils in Tamil Nadu who have a working knowledge of Hindi, often through Hindi films and songs. Those who have business dealings in North India or have relocated there, learn Hindi. At that level, there is no anti-Hindi sentiment. The Tamil experience demonstrates that the best way to spread Hindi is not to enforce it: popular culture and commerce will do the job.

In 2023, the Hindutva party attempted to appeal to this constituency by installing in the new Parliament a *sengol* – a scepter symbolic of the transfer of royal power for the Cholas, an ancient dynasty that ruled over this region.

The Constitution did not designate any national language for India. That is a powerful indication not just of the diversity of national identities but of the right to choose how to practise them. Not making Hindi a compulsory school subject would in no way lessen Tamil Nadu's commitment to the nation. India's unity and identity are not dependent on the entire population knowing one particular language. □□□

[Kamala Ganesh is former Professor of Sociology, University of Mumbai.Scroll.in]

CPI-100

'Communists Demanded Constituent Assembly'

D Raja

THE CPI'S FOUNDATION DAY, December 26, 1925, is etched in the history of India. India's Independence struggle and the drafting of the Constitution are intertwined with diverse ideological movements, among which the

Communist movement played a significant role. There were concerted efforts to form an all-India level organisation to voice the issues of workers, peasants, women and other marginalised sections from the late 1920s. Even before the Kanpur Con-

ference (1925), the British were intolerant of Communist ideology. However, hardships like the Kanpur, Meerut and Peshawar conspiracy cases failed as Communists upheld people's causes.

Early Communists focused on the plight of workers, peasants, and the oppressed classes, condemning British colonial rule as an exploitative force. At the same time, they targeted the oppressive social struc-

tures of caste and patriarchy. In the Kanpur Conference, the Chair, M Singaravelu, condemned the practice of untouchability. The CPI was the first organisation to refuse membership to members of any communal organisation. One of the central contributions of Communists to the independence movement was their early, steadfast demand for Poorna Swaraj. Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose adopted this demand later. Communists demanded the formation of a Constituent Assembly that would represent the will of the people. They argued that any new political order should be based on the sovereignty of the people, reflected later in the Preamble's invocation of "We, the People of India".

Communists' influence can be seen in the Constituent Assembly debates over land reforms, workers' rights, and the protection of backward classes. The Telangana Rebellion, a major peasant uprising in the Nizam's Hyderabad state, exemplified the CPI's commitment to land reforms and social justice. Communists took the lead in mobilising people through organisations like the All India Trade Union Congress, All India Kisan Sabha, All India Students' Federation, the Progressive Writers' Association, etc. These revolutionary movements, coupled with

the CPI's ideological commitment to liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice helped reshape the post-Independence political discourse. The experience of popular uprisings and workers' resistance underscored the need for a constitution that would guarantee social and economic rights alongside political freedoms.

The RSS, also founded in 1925, played a dubious role during India's freedom struggle. It maintained an ambivalent, and at times, openly hostile stance towards the struggle. It was primarily focused on promoting a vision of Hindu nationalism and, unlike the Congress and the Communist Party, did not participate in the anti-colonial movement. In fact, its ideological position aligned with elements of the British colonial state, as they shared a common contempt for the secular, inclusive vision of an independent India. Instead, the RSS focused on consolidating a narrow majoritarian identity and found a friend in British colonialism. It still advocates a divide-and-rule policy.

Communists took an uncompromising stance against both colonial rule and the communal tendencies of the RSS. They recognised that imperialism was not the only challenge facing India; the struggle for justice, equality, and social liberation was just as critical.

As the CPI observes its cente-

nary, the ongoing attack on the values enshrined in the Constitution by the RSS is a matter of deep concern. The RSS and its affiliates consistently called for a reimagining of India's identity as a Hindu Rashtra, which B R Ambedkar called a calamity for the nation. Efforts to alter or dilute provisions related to reservation for Dalits, backward classes, and minorities as well as attempts to rewrite history, redefine Indian nationhood and reinterpret constitutional values, reflect the RSS's broader agenda.

In response to these attacks, a broad-based resistance movement has emerged, with various groups, including Communists, playing a role in defending the Constitution's values. The Communists are amongst those at the forefront. The Left has been particularly vocal in opposing attempts to erode the constitutional protections, emphasising the need for social and economic justice in a nation still grappling with deep inequalities. This ongoing battle remains critical in preserving the democratic fabric of India against the forces of communal fascism and crony capitalism. This is the task—to protect and expand the legacy of a hundred years and to play a glorious role in fighting for a new India: Classless, casteless and socialist. ooo

[Courtesy: Indian Express. The writer is general secretary, CPI]

LETTERS

Hidden Casteism in West Bengal

After nearly three centuries, Dalit devotees have finally been allowed to enter into the Gideshwar Shiv Temple in a West Bengal village, marking a historic victory for all those who have been fighting against the caste system. On March 12, representatives of 130 Dalit families finally stepped into the Gideshwar

Shiv Temple in Purba Bardhaman district's Katwa subdivision, making history with each step. This historical breakthrough came after weeks of resistance, economic boycotts, and subsequent intervention by the local authorities.

Around 10 AM, five members from the Das community—including four women and one man—climbed the temple steps in Gidhgram's

Daspara region. Under the protection of police, they poured milk and water on the Shivling and offered their prayers to the deity without any resistance.

Generations of Dalit families walked past the Gideshwar Shiv Temple knowing that they couldn't enter to pray to the deity they revered. For the Dalit community, this was more than just about worship; it was about their dignity, respect, and the right to exist in the same sacred

spaces as everyone else. Now, after centuries of discrimination, in a long-overdue moment, the doors of the temple have finally opened to them.

A Reader

Letter Box for Students

The innovative initiative taken by a school in Jalpaiguri, in West Bengal to install a letterbox for students to express their thoughts and feelings anonymously should be appreciated. This thoughtful programme not only provides a safe space for young minds to unburden themselves but also fosters a culture of openness and trust. By encouraging students to articulate their emotions, the school empowers them to navigate their challenges more effectively. Such initiatives can significantly enhance mental well-being, teaching children the value of expression.

T S Karthick, Chennai

Who is Raghu Midiyami?

The Campaign for Peace and Justice in Chhattisgarh (CPJC) strongly condemns the unlawful and politically motivated arrest of Raghu Midiyami, former President of Moolvasi Bachao Manch (MBM), by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), Raipur, on February 27, 2025. His detention under sweeping anti-terror laws represents yet another instance of the state's increasing reliance on criminalisation to suppress Adivasi-led movements in Bastar. The circumstances of Midiyami's arrest underscore the shrinking of democratic spaces and the systematic dismantling of indigenous political assertion in Chhattisgarh.

At just 24 years old, Raghu Midiyami has become a key voice against land dispossession, militarisation, and the violation of constitutional safeguards, including PESA and FRA. As the former Presi-

dent of MBM, he played a central role in mobilising his community against state-led displacement and repression, representing MBM in filing complaints, submitting representations, meeting government officials, and documenting state violence. Beyond Bastar, he represented MBM, and amplified Adivasi struggles on national platforms, exposing state-sponsored repression and constitutional violations. His arrest serves as a clear warning that even lawful and democratic resistance will not be tolerated.

The MBM was formed in response to the Silger firing of 2021, where security forces killed four unarmed Adivasis protesting the illegal and overnight construction of a paramilitary camp. It quickly became a critical platform for indigenous assertion, leading over 30 protests across South Bastar. More than just a movement, MBM was a vital democratic space where local communities publicly and collectively demanded accountability and asserted their rights. The movement opposed the militarisation of Adivasi lands, extrajudicial killings, and illegal land grabs. Instead of addressing these grievances, the state criminalised the movement, targeting its leaders with arrests, detentions, and harassment.

CPJC

They are Monsters

Two vulgar, power-hungry men have announced that they plan to throw out the people of Gaza from their homes and build a 'world class' Riviera. The idea that they can publicly say such things, the fact that they can kill people without any consequences, shows how men who call themselves leaders are indeed monsters.

And, what about the United Nations, that hallowed institution? Is it impotent, a mere paper tiger that has no teeth? Is it all bark and

no bite? What about the other nations, the so called champions of democracy and human rights? How can they side with Ukraine while ignoring what is happening in Gaza?

A Reader

Water is Life

As people celebrate World Water Day 2025, it's vital to reflect on the importance of protecting precious water resources. Water scarcity affects millions, yet people often take this life source for granted. What is urgently needed is to promote sustainable water management and conservation techniques. Together, people can ensure clean water for future generations. Water is life.

Meanwhile, the United Nations has released a startling report ahead of World Water Day on April 22 saying glaciers around the world are disappearing faster than ever, as scientists struggle to find new habitats for creatures including Chile's Patagonian Ice Dragon threatened by rising temperatures.

The dramatic ice loss, from the Arctic to the Alps, from South America to the Tibetan Plateau, is expected to accelerate as climate change, caused by the burning of fossil fuels, pushes global temperatures higher.

T S Karthick, Chennai

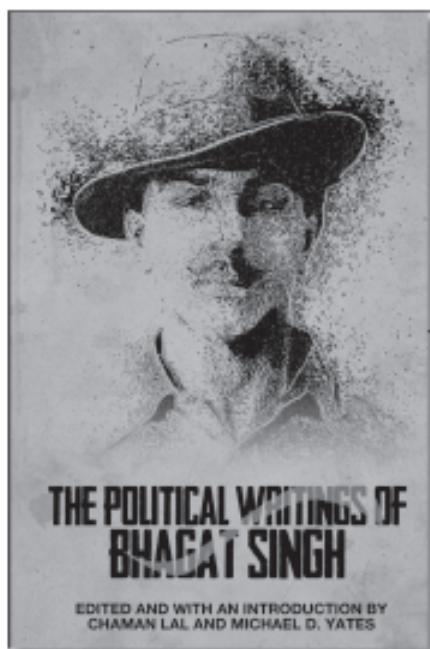
'Wars are Manufactured...'

Apropos report by SIPRI, India is second-largest arms importer.

When countries are at war, only weapon sellers win. No country wins any wars; only private weapon manufacturing companies benefit from wars as they make huge profits. Only peace is the most powerful weapon in the world. All countries should strive to make the world peaceful. One is reminded of Arundhati Roy's quote, "Once weapons were manufactured to fight wars, now wars are manufactured to sell weapons"

TS Karthik, Chennai

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THE YOUNG MARTYR BHAGAT SINGH IS A LEGEND OF THE INDIAN ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLE, AS MUCH A PART OF THE INDIAN RADICAL TRADITION TODAY AS HE WAS ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

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