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"Order Reigns in Dhaka"

WHAT STARTED AS AN INNOCUOUS STUDENT PROTEST AT Universities against exclusionary quotas for coveted civil service jobs in the government finally became a popular uprising against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her 15 years of authoritarian rule. Her initial reaction was boot-heel violence through the Rabid Action Battalion, an elite unit of Bangladesh's police forces. That resulted in the killing of more than 300, injuring of thousands and then jailing of more than 10,000. And just within 20 days the scenario changed dramatically forcing Hasina to resign and flee the country at the advice of the army.

Not only had the quota system been manipulated against students, but young people as a whole have been facing harsh conditions of life. Some 41 percent of youth are classified as "inactive", meaning they are not in schools, working, or in job training. Some 60 percent of University graduates are unemployed. The quota system makes finding jobs more difficult for most, since it reserves 30 percent of civil service jobs for documented descendents of freedom fighters in the 1971 war of independence from Pakistan.

Hasina's brutal response to the protest transformed a movement focused on quota reform into an expression of profound discontent about common man's life in Bangladesh. The Student Alliance of Bangladesh—representing Bangladeshi students—drew solidarity support from across the world. But an 'insurrection' or mass upheaval without proper political leadership and organisational preparations might ultimately prove to be an act of desperate folly. And the rightists and religious fundamentalists lost no time to siege the opportunity and hijack the movement to their advantage.

While people in Bangladesh are rejoicing the downfall of an autocrat, there is a stunning silence among its neighbours. And India's silence is not surprising as it has been the principal backer of the Hasina government for the past 14 years and practically contributed to the erosion of democracy in Bangladesh. No doubt the abrupt departure of Hasina has been a cause of relief and celebration among the millions of protesters who helped bring about an end to her misrule. But this is not a time to celebrate, as in India earlier. So in Bangladesh now. Rabidly communal and reactionary forces, maybe more manageable for transnational capital, are regrouping themselves under the banner of 'democracy'.

The days 4-5 August, 2024 will be remembered a long time not in

Bangladesh but elsewhere across the world as to witness how autocrats are 'paper tigers' before the will of the people. They always fear people. They all look for ORDER—the capitalist ORDER—scripted by the global leaders of capital. They are talking eloquently about the ORDER in Bangladesh.

It is this return of "ORDER" in Berlin Rosa Luxemburg condemned in her last writing in the night of 14 January, 1919. And she and Karl Liebknecht were picked up and assassinated on 15 January, 1919.

The people of Bangladesh clearly stood up against the 'ORDER' of the autocrat, tragically only to be led by the rightist of the worst kind in the end as it happened earlier in Afghanistan, in Iran, in Eritrea, in Burma, in Pakistan—numerous such turns of events when the fall of one autocrat, rather elected autocrat, makes more stringent grip of another autocrat in the garb of change.

For one thing some of the anti-India sentiment in Bangladesh stems from India's unqualified support for Hasina's government which many

see as interference in domestic affairs. Historical grievances and accusations of overreach also contribute to some of the negative perception. For the moment India doesn't have too many options other than tightening the control on its border. And they have already done it by constituting a five-member committee to monitor the current situation the Indo-Bangladesh border. A peaceful, stable and prosperous Bangladesh is in India's interests. □□□

11-08-2024
[Contributed]

COMMENT

Anti-Immigrant Riots in Britain

EVENTS FROM HISTORY ARE A reminder that racism exists in many forms, often dressed with the biases and policies that make minorities their victims. Intellectuals think these sickening riots have exposed British social model as a fraudulent sham. Rioters clashed with police and smashed windows of hotels housing asylum-seekers from Africa, Asia and the Middle East, chanting "get them out" and "stop the boats"—a reference to refugees arriving in Britain in small dinghies. Shops, including Asian-owned businesses, have been vandalised and looted. They have also pelted mosques with rocks. They had a plan to target asylum centres and immigration lawyers. A black man was punched and kicked by a large group of white men after the far-right riot in Manchester. Riots have been spreading in Northern Ireland as well as in Southport, Liverpool, London and other cities in England.

To share their concerns about racism in Britain, Indian Workers formed the Indian Workers Association (IWA), which eventually helped members of the Asian community voice their opinions.

In June 1976, an eighteen-year-

old boy named Gurdip Singh Chaggar was murdered by racist thugs in Southall. When a young man named Suresh Grover, then twenty-two years old, saw the pavement pooling with blood, he asked the policeman who stood by the scene what had happened. In response, the policeman dismissively said: "it was just an Asian."

Commenting on Chaggar's death, John Kingsley Reid, former chairman of the National Front (NF) party, said: "One down, a million to go." Notorious for demonstrating its racist propaganda, the National Front, which received the support of conservative local authorities, organised flag marches to provoke the Sikhs in Southall. At the time, it was widely believed the NF did all the dirty spade work for them.

The National Front Party announced a meeting at the town hall on 23 April 1979. Over ten thousand residents raised a petition to cancel the meeting. However, it was ignored—a disrespect to Chaggar's memory.

The next day, the National Front meeting was scheduled for 7:30. Police officers began policing the

area at 11:30 AM, and the protest started with a small group at 1 PM. The police had already arrested two or three people in the first hour. The police report claimed that the protesters were "militant," and the police used more force to contain the protestors in the next hour. The crowd grew angrier and began reacting to the police.

Violence had broken out; police were chasing protesters with truncheons, and as per police reports, the protesters were throwing missiles, hand-made bombs, bottles, and bricks. However, the police force was criticised for using strong-arm tactics and violent force against the protest that was initially peaceful.

The force deployed to counter the protest that day comprised 2,876 police officers. The Special Patrol Group (SPG), a specialised force of Metropolitan Police notorious for violent intervention, had joined to suppress the protest.

In all this chaos, a special needs teacher from New Zealand, Clementine Blair Peach, who was trying to get away from the violent protest, became a victim of police violence. He took several blows from the police club and suffered severe head injuries to which he later succumbed. The local people guarded Peach's body until the chaos sub-

sided, and he was carried to the Dominion Centre, half a mile from where he was attacked.

The murder of Peach elevated a local issue to a national story and met with a public outcry.

“The Southall protests started a

bigger political debate that demanded equality for Britain’s immigrant minorities. It ensued a process of reflection over the entire nation that would bring about reforms through the Race Relations Act. □□□

[Contributed by MC]

NOTE

The Ukraine War

Bharat Dogra writes:

THE UKRAINE CONFLICT has very high costs in terms of loss of life and perhaps even higher costs in terms of the kind of escalation that in a worst case scenario can even lead to a nuclear war and WW3.

Keeping in view the great urgency of achieving ceasefire and peace as early as possible, here is a 4-stage path to peace.

In the first stage unconditional ceasefire is accepted by both Ukraine and Russia on the basis more or less of the existing line of control while at the same time both sides declare that they will follow this with peace negotiations to resolve all contentious issues.

This involves no material loss to anyone and no loss of face either to anyone as no one is conceding anything to the other side. Whether it is the issue of territory or of neutrality or of NATO membership, all such contentious issues are placed in a separate basket for stage two of the peace process. This separation makes it possible to achieve immediate ceasefire.

On the other hand if the ceasefire is made conditional to such contentious issues as territory and NATO membership, then ceasefire will be indefinitely delayed as there are very big differences in the perceptions of the two sides on these issues. The more the ceasefire is delayed and the fighting continues, the higher will be the human costs and the higher also will be the risk of escalation in most dangerous ways.

On the other hand, if immediate ceasefire is achieved, then immediately hundreds of human lives will start getting saved on daily basis—people who could have died due to the direct and indirect costs of war if the fighting and the bombing had continued. It will become more possible to rush relief to those who need this the most, and to provide proper medical care to those who are seriously injured. Reconstruction and repair work can be speeded up and many displaced people can start returning to their homes. Once ceasefire is in place, within a few months or weeks, with due preparations, the second stage of peace negotiations can start. Here an important effort should be to start with a strong commitment to peace and to try to achieve as wide a domestic consensus for peace as possible, in Ukraine as well as Russia. Both countries should be clear that the maximum efforts will be made to clinch a peace agreement and that there is much to be gained by both sides from an agenda of peace and cooperation as opposed to an agenda of conflict and war.

Hence it does not matter if the peace negotiations do not achieve immediate agreement and are prolonged, as ceasefire is already in place. Phase one of peace negotiations can be followed after some rest by a second phase and so on. What is important is that peace negotiations should not break down and should be continued. Both sides should carefully avoid making any provocative statements aimed at each

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Thirdly, while peace negotiations are on, with even greater continuity efforts should be made to create goodwill by promoting cultural exchange and by emphasising the role of those numerous households who have members and commitments on both sides, and hence are strongly in favour of friendly relations. Films and TV programmes which bring out in human terms the close relations of people, in present and historical contexts, can be co-produced by both countries and circulated widely. Special institutions committed to friendly relations of these two countries can be set up and strengthened to work on a larger scale and with more continuity. These can promote friendship at the level of youth, students, women, artists, media-persons, writers, farmers and at other levels.

Fourthly, economic and trade relations should be strengthened in such ways that people on both sides feel more and more strongly that due to geographic as well as economic factors it is much more in the interests of the common people to have both countries in a relationship of friendship and cooperation with each other. □□□

 HUMRA QURAISHI'S COLUMN

No Halt to Genocide

Humra Quraishi

SEEING THE ANARCHY spreading out as never before, I'm reminded of Gulzar saab's words, commenting on the *halaats* around, along the strain that if one were to pick up the day's newspapers, they'd be so heavily laced with news reports of violent killings that just by squeezing those pages blood drops would spill out! Gulzar saab said so during one of his book launches here in New Delhi, just before 2017 had ended. Today, of course, the situation stands compounded, with violence spreading out not just here but elsewhere too... in so many lands, affecting hundreds and thousands!

The worst hit is Palestine. A nightmare for the Palestinians. The havoc is ongoing. No halt. No sign of a ceasefire. Human tragedies compounding with the situation worsening each single day. Those shots and videos and photographs of the Palestinians dying with injuries and hunger and thirst and acute distress, cling on to you ...your eyes refuse to let go of those images until they penetrate right into you, hitting where it hits the utmost—your soul.

Yet the so-called world leaders seem failing to halt this genocide. Why? Are they blind to these constant killings and bombardments, where even refuge-tents and schools and hospitals and shelter-sheds of the Palestinians are not spared by the Israeli forces!

The two earlier envoys of Palestine posted in India, Dr Khaled Sheikh and Osama Musa had during the course of interviews with me emphasised on the fact that “without American government's support Israel would be zero!”

In fact, the envoys several Arab countries had put across the fact that people's anger was mounting against America, “as our masses do realise that American policies would hit if not kill and destroy us one day”. They had told me that the Arab governments were cautious in their approach but the masses were openly talking of the ‘invisible army’ of the America and Allies more than intruding in their lands... Also, academics seemed to have unearthed the mystery to the surfacing of the well-organised terror outfits! “The basic fact is that groups like the ISIS and the Taliban and also the Al-Qaeda have been set up by the American and Israeli Intelligence agencies in the midst of the so called ‘Muslim world’. With internal strife and civil war accelerating, the leaderless masses have nil resources to fight the masterminds! Ruled that they are by proxy governments!”

When I had interviewed the well-known Arab academic, Clovis Maksoud—who was then Professor of International Relations and director of the Centre for Global South at the American University in Washington and before that he had served as the Arab League ambassador to India from 1961-66 and later ambassador to the United Nations and the US—he dwelt on the fact that people of the Arab countries had come to realise the vested interests of “outsiders”, to destroy their lands... Clovis had detailed why the Arab governments were not taking on American intrusions, “There is a broad strategic dependence of the Arab States on the US, based on the false assumption that the US is the only power that can make Israel

respond to the Palestinian issue. This dependence is flawed because Israel has flouted all international norms. Israel is the only country that has never declared its boundaries since 1967. It has not acknowledged the fact that it's an occupying power and given itself the license to expand its settlements. This has meant violating UN resolution of the 4th Geneva Convention that does not allow any occupying power to alter the boundaries of the country it occupies... At the same time the US has chosen to make Israel its principal ally and this has given Israel the license to defy the UN convention with impunity”.

And the former Libyan leader, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's son, Saif-el-Islam was specific when he spoke of “outside interests” behind the anarchy in their lands. In the autumn of 2001, when Saif-el-Islam (he was also called ‘Engineer’ though he was an architect) landed in New Delhi I had interviewed him for a national daily. He came across as brilliant and well-aware of the changing world order... Saif was probably more critical of the US than his father. To quote him—“It's just that the US being a super power, it considers it to be its right to impose embargoes or bomb and attack another country. And all those small countries who bear the brunt of all this have no choice but to view this as a form of aggression and view the US as an aggressor.”

Today, of course, the ‘outsider’ America has become the ‘insider’ in several of the Arab countries, because of its expansionist plans and strategic policies.

TODAY'S REALITY!

See, today where have we come down to ...Indian government's apparent slant towards Israel and Allies. This pro-Israel tilt has been

more than obvious right from 2014.

What a contrast to India's stand under Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. The fact is that Jawaharlal Nehru's vision and policies vis-a-vis West Asia made the entire 'Arab world' tilt towards India. He was clear about his stand on the Middle East and Palestine, and with that made the Arabs and West Asians strong allies of India. Today there's no Nehru and there's little trace of the connect with the Middle East.

I have attended Press Conferences of fiery Palestinian envoys to India and the emotions they'd generated amongst the Indian masses. I do recall rather too vividly that warm hug that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat gave Indira Gandhi when she had hosted an elaborate reception

for him at a five star hotel here in New Delhi. Indira Gandhi's office had sent invites to even middle rung Muslim families besides the usual list of the who's who. Of course, those were the days when there were no security phobias. No hyped statements. That was phase of Government of India's close bonding with Palestine.

I recall the receptions hosted by the then Iraqi envoys in the impressive bungalow on the Prithvi Raj Road which was gifted by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to the first Iraqi envoy posted to India in the 1950s. But then Iraq was actually Iraq! When celebrations of Iraq's national day and other significant days were marked with a series of receptions, with Iraqi intellectuals, editors and writers, and

the top creamy brass flying down here, from Iraq to New Delhi ... Of course, that before it was intruded into and ruined by American and Allied Forces on that alibi of 'looking for weapons of mass destruction' but didn't manage to find any! Instead, destroyed that land, its very fabric, its people, an ancient civilisation.

Today several Arab countries are battling for sheer survival, devastated by externally sponsored intruders, who have 'used' the age old Western ploy of creating a civil war like situation, with that the local communities are provoked to kill and destroy each other!

Look what a dark phase we are witnessing... Palestinians are so very brutally killed yet there seems no halt to the genocide! □□□

THEY ARE ELECTED AUTOCRATS

Lessons from Bangladesh

Harish Khare

IT IS THE HISTORIC CONCEIT of every autocrat to think they would be able to bring unprecedented prosperity and peace in their land if only they shut down the nagging voices from civil society and the carping critics in the Opposition. Sheikh Hasina is not the first and will not be the last ruler to fall in this illusionary trap.

It could just be a coincidence. Barely 24 hours before Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was compelled to flee Dhaka, India's home minister was making a statement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's inescapable durability beyond 2029. Just as Sheikh Hasina had come to entertain notions of indispensability, the prime minister's right-hand man appears to have convinced himself—and probably his boss—that India is doomed without Modi at the helm.

On August 4, Amit Shah was

telling an audience in Chandigarh: "The Opposition may try and make as much noise as it wants to. Let me make it clear that in 2029, it is again PM Modi who is coming to power". Such undiluted arrogance. Such a sense of entitlement.

Of course, the Union Home Minister's primary purpose to signal to all the democratic and constitutional stake-holders not to take too seriously the rebuff the electorate has administered to the Modi regime in the Lok Sabha elections two months ago. Of course, with an invigorated Opposition making its presence felt in Parliament, the Modi coterie has every reason to feel worried that many in the judiciary and bureaucracy may not be all that enthusiastic about implementing their agenda of vengeance. Of course, the Modi establishment cannot be unaware that murmurs of unease and defiance within the BJP, starting

from Lucknow, are gathering a critical mass.

Sheikh Hasina was also recently "elected" under an arrangement that lacked credibility. The opposition parties had boycotted the poll process. There was no pretence of any free and fair vote. In India, there were many voices who felt that given the Modi regime's stranglehold over the Election Commission, the anti-BJP parties should stay away contesting the 2024 Lok Sabha poll. It was the Supreme Court's verdict on electoral bonds that persuaded the cynics to have some faith in the overall constitutional scheme of things. Even then, the Election Commission of India failed to earn the *unqualified* respect of all.

And, this precisely is the obligation of the Opposition—to put on notice every stake-holder, from the President of India to the Chief Justice to the Speaker of the Lok Sabha to the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha to every governor, that if democratic voices of dissent are not allowed to be raised, then the only noise that prevails is the crowd in the street.

What happened in Dhaka should sober up the Modi-Shah groupies.

In an interview to the *Indian Express* (August 5, 2024) Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus had observed of the Sheikh Hasina government: “The government is a lie-making factory, continuously lying and lying and lying, and they just start believing in their own lies”. A familiar strain in every elected autocracy.

A similar weakness has marked the Modi government’s approach to fact and figures. It rejects all international reports and opinions; it even dismisses international standards and yardsticks of democratic health. Civil society and its critiques are dismissed as the handiwork of those who want to create instability and/or bring a bad name to Mother India. Refusing to heed the voters’ admonitory slap across their face, Modi’s commissars are now trying to throttle all independent voices in digital platforms. It can only be hoped that the Modi government’s overreach will have to pass the test of judicial scrutiny.

The past ten years have made it abundantly clear that the Narendra Modi project has had no answers to the problems and complexities of national governance. Apart from self-praise and self-promotion, Modi’s decade long tenure in government is one of inefficiency, insensitivity and incapacity because it was premised on the fallacious and arrogant assumption that one honest, incorruptible helmsman could fix the “broken” system.

After 10 years India remains as, if not more, corrupt a place it was before 2014; in 10 years, it has become more unfair, more unequal and more undemocratic a place. In Bangladesh, every good impulse, every healthy tradition, every admirable protocol, every vital institution had been suborned in the interest of the glory and power of one individual. Indians have come very close to flirting with the Bangladesh model. The self-corruption of the establishment has eaten into the Modi government’s pretensions.

The Bangladesh events make it

imperative to remind ourselves that irrespective of whatever Home Minister Amit Shah asserts, democracies do not elect kings or emperors. Democracies choose prime ministers and presidents, all drawing legitimacy and authority from the Constitution. A democratic government is an accountable government. The BJP and RSS will make a terrible mistake if they think that they can get away with misusing constitutional processes to suborn institutional arrangements anchored in democratic accountability.

No one can be confident that the Amit Shahs and the JP Naddas of this world, who traffic in political arrogance, have the wisdom and sagacity to draw appropriate lessons from Sheikh Hasina’s flawed model of personal rule. But one can be confident that India’s constitutional institutions will regain their vitality and assert themselves against the Modi regime’s uncured waywardness. The Dhaka denouement need not be replicated in New Delhi. □□□

[Courtesy: *The Wire*]

A GRASSROOTS UPRISING

The Downfall of Bangladesh’s ‘Iron Lady’

Ali Riaz

IN A MOVE THAT WOULD HAVE seemed unimaginable just a few weeks ago, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina ended a decade and a half of uninterrupted rule on August 5, resigning her post and fleeing the country. The military, which has seized power in Bangladesh on several occasions, urged Hasina to leave as a popular nationwide uprising threatened to overwhelm security forces. In surreal scenes, protesters wandered through the rooms of the prime minister’s residence in the capital, Dhaka, lounging on its furniture, posing for photos, and stealing.

Hasina’s downfall closes an up-and-down chapter in Bangladeshi history. In recent decades, the country had been celebrated as a poster child of globalisation and development, with the economy growing briskly, incomes on the rise, and various social indicators moving in positive directions. And yet all the good news obscured abiding weaknesses, including widening economic disparities, high youth unemployment, and a turn to autocracy under Hasina and her party, the Awami League. Dissatisfaction with the government and economy fuelled protests that erupted in Dhaka in early

July before spreading around the country. As she has done in the past, Hasina suppressed the demonstrations ruthlessly. Security forces killed hundreds of people in just a few weeks, and charity groups were left to gather the unidentified bodies of protesters. Authorities cracked down again on a fresh wave of demonstrations in early August, killing 90 more people. But that carnage was the final straw. The public had had enough, and Bangladeshis flooded the streets, forcing Hasina’s hasty evacuation via military helicopter to India.

The last few days in Bangladeshi politics will be fodder for scholars for years to come. They revealed the fundamentally brittle nature of Hasina’s regime, which had seemed for so long adamant and imper-

vious to opposition challenge but ended up collapsing in a matter of mere hours. Her exit also punctures the cult of personality she wove around her father, the country's founder whose mantle she claimed; amid the tumult of August 5, protesters burned the memorial museum Hasina had built for her father. But most important, the toppling of Hasina came at the hands of a force not seen before in Bangladesh: a mass grassroots movement unaffiliated with any party and yet capable of reshaping the country's political landscape. It is inspiring that genuine people power could do away with a seemingly invincible autocrat. But such an inchoate popular uprising also brings great uncertainties about the day after. Even as Bangladeshis celebrate the end of the Hasina regime, they may also have reason to worry about what is about to come.

Top of Form, Bottom of Form

Hasina, the daughter of the charismatic nationalist Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (called Mujib) who led the country's 1971 war of independence against Pakistan, was until her resignation the world's longest-serving female head of state. *Time* and *Forbes* repeatedly named her one of the world's most powerful people. Also described as "Asia's iron lady" by *The Economist*, she often used that power for ill. Since she started her second stint as prime minister in 2009, Bangladesh has plummeted in various democracy indexes and measures of press freedom. Hasina presided over the removal of key democratic guardrails, the restriction of the independence of the judiciary, and a clampdown on civil society and the press. Bangladeshi opposition parties and young people tried to push back against these trends on several occasions, but Hasina's government met such demonstrations with heavy-handed force.

Hasina's growing authoritarianism coincided with a turn for the worse in the country's economy. In past decades, Bangladesh seemed to have achieved significant economic growth and was held up as a success story. But many economists now question the reliability of government-provided statistics that undergird these claims. And no matter what growth the country has achieved, its benefits remain concentrated at the top. The wealthiest ten percent of Bangladeshis receive over 41 percent of the country's total income, while the bottom ten percent receive just over one percent.

The popular uprising in July reflected the convergence of two strands of discontent. The first was disquiet among students about a quota system that reserved 56 percent of civil service jobs for particular groups of people, including 30 percent of all civil service jobs for descendants of veterans of the 1971 war of independence against Pakistan. The system, which Hasina had scrapped in 2018 after months of protests, was reinstated by the High Court in June. Exasperated students took to the streets, and their protests intensified after Hasina likened them to Razakars—a hated paramilitary force that supported the Pakistani army during the war of independence. This incendiary comment questioned their patriotism, infuriating students and drawing more to the streets. For them, the quota issue was merely the tip of an iceberg, a symbol of a system stacked against them. Youth unemployment has more than doubled since 2010, from around six percent to over 15 percent. More than 40 percent of Bangladeshis between the ages of 15 and 24 are not studying, employed, or training for jobs. Those realities drove hundreds of thousands to join the movement. In response, the police, as well as students who

backed the ruling party, attacked the demonstrators, further inflaming the situation.

The second source of discontent, which brought thousands of ordinary citizens to the streets, was a deep-seated sense of economic and political disenfranchisement. In recent years, price hikes on essential commodities, such as electricity, have hurt average Bangladeshis. Meanwhile, citizens have seen corruption among government officials proceed unabated as the government ordered a proliferation of large vanity infrastructure projects. Bangladeshis and international observers, including the World Bank, are convinced that these large building projects have enabled no small amount of graft as their costs skyrocketed beyond initial estimates. For instance, the Padma Bridge southeast of Dhaka cost twice its original budget. At the same time, citizens felt increasingly unable to influence the country's direction. The last plausibly free and fair election was held in 2008. Since then, Hasina and her allies have found ways to place their thumbs on the scale for the Awami League, her

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ruling party, by changing the ways elections are managed. Local and international observers have also found many irregularities in the staging of elections in the past decade.

The authorities could also just resort to brute repression. Media reports indicate that the government detained and tortured student leaders who spearheaded the recent movement for reforming the quota system. International human rights organisations had gathered evidence that police and other paramilitary forces used AK-47 assault rifles to disperse protesters, in contravention of the Geneva Conventions, to which Bangladesh is a signatory. The government relaxed daytime curfews, allowed offices to reopen, and gradually restored intercity transportation, but those measures could not mask the fact that Bangladesh had witnessed an enormous massacre.

The popular uprising was neither organised nor steered by the opposition political parties, but Hasina resorted to the familiar narrative of blaming the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami party for fomenting the protests. She insisted that “terrorists” had unleashed the violence. By blaming these groups, Hasina tried to cast the domestic crisis as a battle to protect a secular state from Islamist forces and thereby convince the West either to come to her aid or stay on the sidelines. But that gambit failed.

The speed with which Hasina went from being Bangladesh’s long-

time ruler to an exile is just incredible. It suggests that the regime was very brittle. Patronage networks among the bureaucracy and the military kept the regime afloat, but these beneficiaries’ commitment to the regime was abysmally weak. Over the years, the country’s power brokers became alienated from the public and entirely dependent on the coercive institutions of the state. They could not withstand the challenge of the mass upsurge that threatened to overwhelm those institutions.

Hasina leaves not just with her reputation in tatters but with the cult of personality around her father, which she had assiduously cultivated, more or less wiped out. Hasina sought to make Mujib, who was assassinated in 1975, immortal in the minds of the people and emblematic of the valour of her rule and that of her party. But now with Hasina expelled, that cult of personality is shorn of its power and will not wield the same influence over Bangladeshi politics.

What is most remarkable about the end of the Hasina regime is how it came about. Bangladesh is no stranger to political upheaval or mass demonstrations. In large part, however, political contestation in recent decades has been the matter of parties mobilising against one another—chiefly, the Awami League and its main rival, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. That dynamic was not present in the recent protests. Instead, out of seemingly nowhere, a grassroots movement primarily of

young people rose up to occupy the centre stage of Bangladeshi politics. Millions mobilised in opposition to the government, a scale of uprising that no political party could facilitate. The toppling of Hasina is a historic moment, further evidence that even the most implacable ruler can stave off a discontented people for only so long.

And yet amid the optimism that has greeted Hasina’s downfall, there are several reasons to be concerned. The military now effectively runs the show, as it did between 2007 and 2008. It claims to care for the best interests of Bangladeshis, but it is really intent on ensuring that the state works to its benefit. Its interests are often inimical to the principles of accountability. The military would like to see much of the status quo maintained and will not countenance major reform; in the absence of such reform, Bangladesh may end up in the same place in a few years.

It is more than likely that in a few months, the military could manage to hold fresh elections, and a new elected civilian government could rise to power. But without more meaningful change, that may constitute a return to the past. The problem with the broad, amorphous force that has toppled Hasina is that it has yet to offer a clear vision of the future beyond calls for a new kind of political settlement.

Bangladeshis brought down the Hasina regime. But what now will emerge from the rubble? □□□

August 6, 2024

WANDERING IN IDEOLOGICAL WILDERNESS

Why Maoists are Losing

Sumanta Banerjee

UNION HOME MINISTER Amit Shah has promised that he will eliminate the ‘Naxals’ (otherwise known as Maoists)

within the next three years. He claims that his government has brought down the number of Maoist-affected districts from 96 to 45, and inci-

dents of Naxal violence have gone down by 52% in the past ten years. At this rate of suppression and marginalisation of the Maoists, he estimates that they will disappear from India by 2027. (Re: *The Times of India*, January 22, 2024)

His claim seems to be supported by reports from the Maoist-affected

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districts during the recent assembly elections, which indicate a decline in popular support for the Maoists. Reports of the election campaign and the final results of the assembly elections in Chhattisgarh and Telangana indicate that the voters inhabiting constituencies there, which are officially designated as LWE (Left Wing Extremism) affected territories, have rejected the call of boycotting elections that was given by the LWE's political party, CPI (Maoist). Neither its posters urging them to boycott the polls, nor its threats against the voters, could deter these people from casting their votes in favour of candidates of their own choice. People from the SC (Scheduled Caste) and ST (Scheduled Tribes) communities—who constitute the main base of the Maoist movement in these two states—overwhelmingly participated in the electoral process.

In Chhattisgarh, in the seats reserved for them, 42% of the SCs and 43% of the STs voted for BJP. This indicates not only the weakening hold of the CPI(Maoist) on its followers in these constituencies, but also the much larger dangerous portent of these sections of the poor gravitating towards the BJP, which is alluring them with freebies and promises of integrating them into the fold of Hindutva. This shifting trend among their followers suggest that the Maoist leaders in their campaign never emphasized the wider ideological issue of the need for a long standing struggle to change the basic socio-economic structure of the state, and instead motivated them by raising their immediate self-centred material problems only—which are now being addressed to by the BJP rulers who are satisfying them with freebies.

Similarly, in Telangana, in those areas which are designated as LWE-affected (i.e. controlled by Maoists), 48% of the SCs and STs participated in the elections. Bhadrachalam

and Pinapaka in Bhadrachalam Kothagudem district recorded almost 80% voting. They voted for the Congress. This was a politically progressive option for them, unlike the pro-Hindutva choice of their counterparts in Chattisgarh who voted for BJP. The erstwhile followers of the Maoists in these areas of Telangana voted for the Congress, expecting that Revanth Reddy, would solve their land problems in a peaceful way instead of the violent internecine warfare and killings that the Maoists resort to.

Meanwhile, adding a feather to its cap of successful anti-Naxalite operations, the Union Home Ministry has ensured the unfurling of the Tricolour this Republic Day in those tribal villages in Bastar in Chhattisgarh and Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, which were once regarded as Maoist strongholds where such government-sponsored national celebrations were discouraged by the Maoist Guerrilla squads. The police IG P. Sundarraj, claimed that the latest flag-hoisting ceremony in these Bastar villages was a sign of the death of the Maoist party's hegemony over the villagers. Attributing its death to successful police operations, he said: "The fight against Left-wing extremism has reached its final and decisive phase. We are hopeful of establishing a positive and vibrant identity in the region." (*Times of India*, January 28, 2024). So, are the sporadic acts like the killing of paramilitary forces in Dantewala in Chhattisgarh in April 2023, sound like the parting death rattle of the Maoist movement?

Till about a decade or so ago, in the years of 2008-2010 the main base of the CPI(Maoist) was embedded among these very Adivasi poor in Bastar, and the forest area bordering Chhattisgarh and Telangana, some parts of it known as Dandakaranya. A large number of them joined the

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party-led armed struggle to resist state-sponsored plans to take over their forests to set up industries in the name of development, which threatened their dependence on forest resources. Instead of depending on elections (which invariably brought to power a political elite that collaborated with the private industries in the exploitation of forest resources), they preferred the option of armed resistance to protect their villages from such incursions.

In 2008, even the central government had to recognise the popularity of the Maoist-ruled *janatana sarkars* among the rural poor. An Expert Group was set up by the Planning Commission in 2006, consisting of some senior retired bureaucrats, academics and social activists as well as police officials, who visited the Red Corridor and interviewed the villagers there. They submitted an exhaustive report to the government in March 2008. In their report, the Expert Group acknowledged that "... it is a fact that in some cases the Naxalite movement has succeeded in helping the landless to occupy a substantial section of government land ...In Bihar all the Naxalite parties have attempted to assist...the landless Musahars, the lowest among the Dalits, to take possession of a

sizeable extent of such land... ..have intervened and determined fair wage rates..." The Expert Group went on to state: "...the (Naxalite) movement has given confidence to the oppressed to assert their equality and demand respect and dignity from the dominant castes and classes." ((Re: *Development issues to deal with Causes of Discontent, Unrest and Extremism*. 2008).

Some two years later, the internationally acclaimed writer Arundhati Roy visited Bastar in the forest area of Chhattisgarh in the Red Corridor, and narrated her experiences in an article entitled: *Walking with the Comrades* (2010). She spent several days and nights in the villages that were then controlled by the Naxalites. To her surprise, she found that some 45% of the Naxalite armed outfit PLGA (Peoples Liberation Guerrilla Army) were women, who joined the movement after having suffered brutal attacks by the police. She also gave an eye-witness account of the functioning of the *janatana sarkars* and how they provided economic and social security to the rural poor.

In January in the same year of 2010, Gautam Navlakha, a well-known journalist and civil liberties activist, spent a fortnight in the Guerrilla zones of Bastar. He went into the heart of the conflict—examining every nuance in the functioning of the *janatana sarkars*, and the Guerrilla squads. He came out with a meticulously documented account of his experiences in an invaluable book entitled *Days and Nights in the Heartland of Rebellion* (Penguin Books. 2012). Navlakha was accompanied by the 83-year old Jan Myrdal, a famous Swedish author who gave a separate account about his own experiences in the Maoist Guerrilla zones in a book entitled *Red Star Over India* that was brought out by Setu Prakashani of Kolkata in the same year. These books constitute the most

exhaustive history and prognostic analysis of the Indian Maoist movement. They narrate the achievements of the CPI(Maoist) administration, both in terms of agrarian benefits and social welfare for the rural poor, which are confirmed through extensive interviews with the villagers, both men and women.

But signs of a bleak future were also looming over the movement even in those days of its popularity. Gautam Navlakha ended his book with a note of warning. He referred to 'heinous crimes committed by (Maoist) squad members' like beheading of a trade union leader who belonged to an opposite Left party, and several other such killings of opponents carried out by kangaroo courts in the Guerrilla zones. He drew attention to similar acts of criminality by the Maoist cadres in Jangalmahal (forest region) in eastern India which eroded its mass base. He made a very significant comment while observing the contemporary situation there: "Today if Maoists have been virtually vanquished in Jangalmahal it is not only due to the superior war machinery of the State but in no small measure due to their own conduct which alienated sections of people with some turning against them".

It is surprising that the popularity enjoyed by the Naxalites in certain parts of Bihar and Jharkhand that the Planning Commission Expert Group observed during 2006-2008, totally evaporated over the next two years, as evident from the 'virtual vanquishing' of the movement in the Jangalmahal area.

Some six years later after Gautam Navlakha's book was published, another perceptive observer of the Maoist movement, Bernard D'Mello came out with his book *India after Naxalbari: Unfinished History* (2018). After a sympathetic account of the movement, at the end, Bernard

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came to the sad conclusion: “The movement has witnessed many setbacks, and many mistakes have been made by the revolutionaries...The Maoists are nowhere near winning over the majority of the oppressed and the exploited in rural India.”

Today, looking back at the track record of the Maoist movement in India during the last two decades, one finds that the premonitions and warnings voiced by Gautam Navlakha and Bernard D’Mello have come out to be true. The tragic happenings today in what was once known as the Red Corridor (spread across the forest areas bordering the states of Chhattisgarh and Telangana in the south, and running through Orissa, Bihar and Jharkhand in the east) are a far cry from the achievements that the Maoists made there more than a decade ago.

Some three years later, describing the situation in the party’s base area in Chhattisgarh, the central committee of the CPI(Maoist) had to admit that “the intensity and expanse of the resistance of the PLGA (People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army) and people decreased; non-proletarian trends increased in party and the PLGA, recruitment decreased; [the] number of people leaving the party and PLGA increased.” (Re: *The Hindia*, March 12, 2014).

But at the same time, Ashutosh Bharadwaj noted that by imposing on them the party’s discipline, the tribal cadre was “forced to shun his family, gods and ghotuls (community centres),” leave his home and join the underground.

The only major anti-state operation carried out recently by the Maoists, which perhaps could earn some support from the oppressed tribals, was their offensive in Chhattisgarh’s Dantewala in April 2023, where they killed ten personnel of a paramilitary unit which had earned notoriety among the inhabit-

ants of the area for their oppressive behavior. As for the rest of their acts, they amount to personal vindictiveness against their local neighbours. Their leaders and armed squads have brought down the movement to the level of the criminal underworld “through indiscipline, intolerance and dishonourable conduct,” and are “nowhere near winning over the majority.”—to quote Gautam Navlakha and Bernard D’Mello.

That the Maoists are losing their base is also evident from cases of growing surrender of their cadres, who are escaping from the hard underground life which they have to cope with in the forests, by responding to the alluring appeals of the government which is offering them cash payment and promising them jobs.

When reviewing the recent developments in the Maoist movement as described above, it is important to analyse the changes that had taken place in the nature of its leadership during the last four decades. To start with, in 1980 a veteran Communist leader with experience in mass movements, Kondapalli Seetharamiah (1919-2002) formed the CPI(ML) PWG (People’s War Group) in Andhra Pradesh, which initiated a phase that combined armed struggle planned from the underground, with mass movements organised at the over ground public space. This galvanised the oppressed poor and empowered them with striking capacity to win their rights through legal means also. Seetharamiah, as the general secretary of the CPI(ML) PWG led the movement till 1992, after which he was expelled by his opponents in the party on some flimsy ground of ideological deviation.

Kondapalli Seetharamiah was succeeded by Muppala Lakshmana Rao (known as Ganapathi) as the general secretary of the party. As for

his political background, he was ideologically drawn to the Maoist movement during his days as a science student, and later as a college teacher in Karimnagar in Andhra Pradesh. Ganapathi led the movement for twenty five years from 1992 till 2017. It is significant that during these two decades of his leadership the movement attracted attention and earned reputation both at home and abroad. In November 2018, he was succeeded by Nambala Keshava Rao (known as Basavraj). According to both the police and inside sources in the Maoist movement, Basavraj’s speciality is in making and handling of explosives. This explains the rise in the use of landmines in Maoist operations in Chhattisgarh and other areas in recent times. The guerillas plant them on roads, hoping that they will explode when police jeeps and trucks pass through them. But the police intelligence people are one up above them, alert enough to inspect the roads before any convoy is allowed, and remove the landmines. Not so fortunate are the common pedestrians, mainly villag-

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ers, who unaware of the explosives, tread on them and lose their lives.

Without sounding pompous, I may point out that some fourteen years ago, in an article 'End of a Phase' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, (November 13, 2010) I sounded the warning in these words: "...the indiscriminate violence of the CPI(Maoist) is repelling civil society and alienating its peasant supporters. This makes it easier, and plausible, for the Indian state to stamp out popular protests by unleashing a reign of terror that is more formidable...than the noisy violence of the Maoists." It is sad to find that the Maoist leadership has not learnt from past mistakes, and is still continuing on the same suicidal path, inviting the 'more formidable...reign of terror' by the Indian state, which it is incapable of resisting.

The above developments have also been accompanied by the dwindling number of their ranks, many

of whom being killed by security forces, some surrendering to the police, being allured by offers of monetary rewards, and others leaving the forests to go back to their homes in search of security. These trends indicate (i) the CPI(Maoist) leadership's alienation from the people; (ii) popular resentment against their activities; and (iii) their fast evaporating base in the forests of Chhattisgarh, Telangana and the border areas of Gadchiroli in Maharashtra.

It is time for the CPI(Maoist) leadership to introspect and think about the need for revising their strategy. The current existentialist and circumstantial pressures—both from the state and from within their ranks and followers—require them to adopt a flexible strategy.

What can be the way out for the CPI(Maoist) to overcome the crisis that it is facing—mainly due to the ruthless oppression unleashed by the

state, but also partly caused by its own mistakes and misdeeds that have alienated them from the people? How can its leaders survive and save their cadres? It is time to stop pressing the accelerator and shift to the reverse gear. A respectable face-saving device can be one way.

Given the caliber of its present leaders, as described above, one can hardly expect them to rise up to the occasion. They appear to be a bunch of stubborn ostriches burying their heads in the dry sands of an outmoded and anachronistic tactics of so-called Maoism – which is in-applicable in present day India. They are experts only in making bombs and exploding them – and that also in an inexpert way – which instead of targeting the police, kill innocent people. The explosives will soon implode within their party, putting an end to their actions that betray the cause of Communism. □□□

(abridged) [source: countercurrents.org]

FAKE ENCOUNTERS

Extrajudicial Killings in Yogi Raj

Saurav Das

ON JANUARY 26, 2018, AS India was celebrating its Republic Day (commemorating the adoption of its constitution), Mukesh Rajbhar, a 17-year-old laborer in eastern Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), was killed in a police shootout near his home in Mutkallipur village. The police claimed that he was a wanted criminal evading arrest in an attempted murder case and that he had opened fire along with his associate. Thus, they had shot him in self-defense, and he succumbed to his injuries. They claimed that, in addition to this murder case, Rajbhar had a history of criminal activity: two cases of robbery and theft, and one case under the Gangster Act of 1986, the state's special law to curb

organised crime and antisocial activities. Hence, he was a "dreaded criminal."

Rajbhar's family alleged, however, that the police had implicated him using cases that are commonly described as being "kept in cold storage"—that is, cases that are originally filed against unknown persons but are later used by the police to "create criminal histories" to use against people they want to portray as "dreaded criminals". Consequently, the family was not convinced about the police's version of events and claimed that their son's death was extrajudicial. "He was only 17", said his father, Nandlal, a tall and sturdy but aged man.

The family received news of

Rajbhar's death the day after the incident from local residents and newspaper reports, even though the law mandates that the police must inform the family when a person is killed in a police shootout (called an "encounter" in popular parlance). "Mukesh was in Kanpur until a day before his death [a city almost 250 miles from the site of the incident]. CCTV footage from his house corroborated this. The local police picked him up from the city and brought him here to kill him", Nandlal claimed.

"The family wrote letters to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the country's human rights watchdog, seeking a federal bureau probe into Rajbhar's death, but their pleas were not heeded. On the contrary, the local investigations absolved the police of any foul play.

Official investigation did not ad-

dress these findings, and for the past six years Rajbhar's family members have grappled with the bitter reality of India's broken justice system. The constitution's guarantee of the right to life, equality and redress for violations has rung hollow for them as they have struggled to find justice for possible extrajudicial violence at the hands of the state.

Over the years, these encounters with the police have emerged as a common practice in some parts of the country, like UP. The police engage in what appears at first glance to be spontaneous, defensive gunfire with the alleged criminals—all to maintain the state's semblance of law and order. The accused either sustain or succumb to their firearm injuries.

Since 1997, when the NHRC began maintaining a database on police killings, at least 3,584 people have died in police shootouts in the country. The state of UP tops this list, with 1,114 killings. From January 2017 to April 2023, the UP police said, 183 people were killed in 10,900 police shootouts throughout the state. The state also witnessed an exponential rise in "half-encounters", a practice in which police inflict non-life-threatening injuries on alleged criminals, for example, by shooting them in the leg. Over 5,000 people were injured this way during this period.

Official versions of police shootings often parrot the same script: The injured or the deceased was a "dreaded criminal", with an apparent record of misdeeds, who resisted arrest by opening fire at the police "with intent to kill," so the police had to fire back in self-defence.

However, many human rights activists and families of victims have claimed that most of these police actions are "fake encounters", a term used to describe extrajudicial killings. Contrary to the police's claims that these incidents were

"spontaneous confrontations," most of them were planned, they allege. Most victims have only been accused of crimes (mostly petty offenses) and are not convicted criminals on the run.

The 2014 guidelines issued by India's supreme court on investigations into police shootouts had proved ineffective. Moreover, the police used loopholes in the laws and guidelines to grant themselves impunity. Rajbhar's death was one of these cases.

The highest court has mandated an independent investigation into the cases, to be carried out by the state's special police unit or a police team that was not involved in the incident. This investigation was to be followed by a magisterial inquiry that was to be completed within three months. An intimation, or summary of the incident, was to be turned in to the NHRC within 48 hours of the death for the purpose of analysing the case files and intervening if necessary.

The supreme court's 2014 guidelines also extend to shootouts resulting in "grievous injury cases," but the subsequent wording in the judgment—that the guidelines be followed "as far as possible" in such injury cases—allows the police enough discretion to decide which guideline requirements to follow and which to ignore.

The majority of victims killed by police were from marginalised classes, lived in poverty and hailed from religious minority communities, especially Muslims. When families of victims insisted that their deaths were extrajudicial, they had to deal with a broken legal system that seldom operates in their interests. They also faced tremendous police intimidation and failed to find quality legal aid because so many of them were unaware of their rights, leaving them without meaningful recourse.

In 2019, United Nations experts expressed alarm over the allegations of at least 59 police killings in U P — most concerning individuals from Muslim communities living in poverty— and raised concerns that the supreme court's guidelines had not been followed since March 2017. They said evidence indicated that the killings took place in police custody and during encounters and that the victim was acting in self-defence. "We are extremely concerned about the pattern of events: individuals allegedly being abducted or arrested before their killing, and their bodies bearing injuries indicative of torture," the UN experts said. They sent detailed information to the Indian government on 15 of the cases.

As the most populous state in the country, UP retains a central position in India's politics. Eighty of the 543 members of the lower house of Parliament represent UP. More than half of India's prime ministers have been elected from this state. The state's other claim to fame is its culture of gun violence and gangsters, which has persisted for decades, with various criminal syndicates operating in the region. Consequently, law and order in the state is a highly contentious issue that often turns national, given the state's significant political influence.

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Although police killings occurred during the rule of previous state governments, since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rose to power in UP in 2017, led by Hindu nationalist strongman Yogi Adityanath, official policy now embraces police shootouts. The policy has emboldened the po-

lice, and they realise that they will not be held accountable, regardless of the evidence against them. Adityanath has made several public statements in support of the police, and his government has often honoured the officers involved in the shootings. In 2017, he said, "If you

commit a crime, you will be knocked off." In 2020, he reiterated that "criminals would either go to jail or to Yamraj [the Hindu god of death]", and in March of this year, he said: Criminals' "right to live will be snatched" if they interfere with others' right to live. □□□

VIOLENCE AND NON-VIOLENCE

Quit India Movement

Prem Singh

THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT, also known as the *August Kranti* (Revolution), was a pivotal chapter in India's freedom struggle. This movement was country-wide in which the people of India participated on a large scale and showed unprecedented courage and tolerance. Dr Ram Manohar Lohia, while quoting Russian revolutionary thinker Leon Trotsky, stated that in Russia's revolution one percent of the population took part, while in India's August Revolution, 20 percent of the country's people participated.

But, every now and then, it is at the centre of a debate on whether it was a non-violent or a violent movement. Gandhi's speech on August 8, 1942, the eve of the movement's launch, has its own place in history. An excerpt from the speech goes: "Here is a mantra, a short one, that I give you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The mantra is: 'Do or Die'. We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery. Every true Congressman or woman will join the struggle with an inflexible determination not to remain alive to see the country in bondage and slavery. Let that be your pledge."

It is clear Gandhiji, let alone direct violence, never even hinted at

any form of provocation. This call for non-violent resistance was unique at a time when humanity was engulfed in the fire of World War II. The All India Congress Committee passed the Quit India resolution on August 8, 1942. By the following night, top Congress leaders had been arrested. Thanks to their arrests, an action plan for the movement could not be prepared and communicated. The relatively young leadership of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) became active but had to work underground. Jayprakash Narayan (JP) wrote two long letters while in hiding to guide the revolutionaries, and to explain the character and mode of action of the movement.

Despite facts to the contrary, Viceroy Lord Linlithgow alleged that the Congress had tried to overthrow British rule through armed resurrection during the movement. Ram Manohar Lohia wrote a long letter from jail to the viceroy on March 2, 1946. The letter brings out the brutal and conspiratorial character of British imperialism during the Quit India Movement. After playing an underground role in the movement for 21 months, Lohia was arrested in Bombay on May 10, 1944. He was first imprisoned in Lahore Fort, and then in Agra. He suffered inhuman torture at the hands of the British police in Lahore. He was released in June 1946. In the interim, his father passed

away, but Lohia refused parole on a matter of principle.

In his letter, Lohia refuted Linlithgow's accusations and spoke about the latter's administration committing horrific atrocities on unarmed participants. He said that the British suppression of the movement led to many Jallianwala-Bagh-like incidents, but the people of India persevered non-violently for their freedom. He wrote, "If we had planned an armed insurrection and our crowds were asked to resort to violence, believe me, Linlithgow, Gandhiji would today have been securing a reprieve for you from the free people and their government."

Confronting the viceroy over the barbarism of his administration, he wrote, "You talk of fascist reprisals; your men have raped and killed wives of patriots you could not seize. Yes, the time will soon be ripe for you and your people to face this evidence." In those moments of distress, Lohia was still filled with hope that the sacrifices of tens of thousands of Indians during the movement would be paid for, and wrote, "But I am not unhappy. It has ever been the destiny of India to suffer for others and to take man away from his erring path. The history of the unarmed common man begins from the Indian Revolution of August 9." He further clarified, "We are curious about the future. Whether you win or the Axis, there will be gloom and darkness all around. There is a glimmer of hope. Free India might be able to bring this war to a democratic termination."

JP's two letters to "the soldiers of freedom" were written in December 1942 and September 1943. In both his letters, especially in the first, he raised, and deliberated upon, the question of violence and non-violence at length. He slammed the British government, saying it did not have the right to weigh in on what was the method the people of India used to fight for their freedom. He said that at the core of the Quit India Movement was the resolve not

to kill or hurt.

He wrote, "To create hurdles for the British Raj, to overthrow it by paralysing it by every non-violent means, is the basic mantra of that programme and 'you can do everything within the realm of non-violence' is our pole star. There is no doubt that the intellectual basis of the programme which has been followed by the Congress bodies since August 1942 till now is non-violence –non-violence in the sense which

has been suggested by its masters during this period."

How a non-violent movement was made possible amidst a raging World War certainly demands serious analysis, if only to give those intellectuals who fixated on the Indian role in violence in 1942 (and also in 1857) a much-needed perspective. □□□

(The writer associated with the socialist movement is a former teacher of Delhi University and a fellow of Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla)

LETTERS

Bangladesh Today

Bangladesh down the fundamentalist drain a la Iran of 1979? Hasina has fled. Now what? Prolonged military rule or this would be just a prelude to Islamic fundamentalist-BNP-Jamat ('democratically') ascending the throne?

Sukla Sen Military Rule in Bangladesh

This is not the first time that Bangladesh witnesses intervention by its military leaders. The country had been under military rule from 1975 to 1990.

1975 Coup

- In 1975, a significant coup took place in Bangladesh, resulting in the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the nation's founding father, along with most of his family members.
- This coup was orchestrated by junior army officers, leading to Major General Ziaur Rahman taking power and declaring himself President.

Two mini coups

- The initial coup leaders could not sustain power for long, leading to further instability.
- On November 3, Brigadier General Khaled Mosharraf and Colonel Shafaat Jamil led another coup to remove the previous mutineers and restore order.
- This coup resulted in the killing of four national leaders in Dhaka Central Jail and the house arrest of Ziaur Rahman.

The return of Ziaur Rahman

- On November 7, another coup happened. It was led by Left-wing army personnel and politicians from the *Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal* (JSD). It resulted in the death of Brigadier General Khaled Mosharraf.
- This coup freed Ziaur Rahman from house arrest and set him on the path to eventually becoming the president of Bangladesh.
- Ziaur Rahman ruled Bangladesh until his assassination in 1981, marking a period of military dominance in the country's politics.

The 1982 coup

- Lieutenant General Hussain Muhammad Ershad led yet another coup, seizing power in a bloodless takeover.
- Ershad declared martial law, suspended the constitution, and consolidated his control over both military and civilian structures.
- During his rule, Ershad implemented several development initiatives but also faced criticism for repression and authoritarian practices.
- His regime ended in 1990 following a popular uprising demanding the restoration of democracy.

Since the 1990s, Bangladesh has seen its political landscape dominated by the Bangladesh Awami League of Sheikh Hasina, and the

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of her arch-rival Khaleda Zia, the widow of Ziaur Rahman.

FP

Gauri Lankesh Case

The Karnataka High Court on Tuesday, July 16, granted bail to three accused in the murder of journalist and activist Gauri Lankesh, who was shot dead in September 2017. The bail was granted to Amit Digvekar, KT Naveen Kumar, and HL Suresh by a bench headed by Justice S Vishwajith Shetty of the Kalaburagi bench.

A key witness in the murder case –46-year-old Madetira Thimmaiah–turned hostile and told the court that he was forced to make a confession by the police that he was in contact with some of the accused in the case.

In his confession statement in 2018, Thimmaiah had said that he had given his office space in Madikeri to Amit Digvekar and three other accused to meet and discuss various matters.

HL Suresh is accused of giving shelter to the accused in Bengaluru, while they were planning Gauri's murder. In Jan-Feb 2017, months before Gauri's murder, Suresh was asked to identify where Gauri lived, her home and office address, among other things.

Although the chargesheet in the case was filed in 2018, the trial in the case began only in 2022, citing reasons such as the COVID-19 pandemic and because of a series of petitions that were being filed by the defence.

Korah Abraham

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