

frontier

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Founder-Editor: **SAMAR SEN**

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E-mail : frontierweekly@yahoo.co.in
frontierweekly@hotmail.com

Telephone : 2530-0065

[Typeset by THE D-COMLASER, 60 Sikdar Bagan Street, Kolkata-4, Ph : 98361-58319]

Editor: **TIMIR BASU**

Assistant Editor: **Subhasis Mukherjee**

India, China and America

INDIA AND CHINA HAVE AGREED TO STEP UP TRADE FLOWS and resume direct flights in a major diplomatic breakthrough, as the two most populous nations try to rebuild ties damaged by a 2020 deadly border clash and amid US President Donald Trump's unpredictable foreign policy.

The two rivals also agreed to advance talks on their disputed border during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's two-day visit to India.

The rebuilding of India-China ties coincides with friction between New Delhi and Washington, following the recent imposition of steep tariffs on India by the Trump administration.

So why did India and China decide to mend their ties, and what steps were taken to address their border dispute?

Discussions covered a range of issues related to withdrawing tens of thousands of troops that both countries have amassed along their Himalayan border, boosting investment and trade flows, hosting more bilateral events, and enhancing travel access.

The Asian neighbours agreed to reopen several trading routes—namely the Lipulekh Pass, Shipki La Pass and Nathu La Pass. An expert group will also be established to explore "early harvest" steps (i.e. mini-agreements that can be implemented quickly before the conclusion of a more complex deal) to improve border management, a move India had previously opposed.

In the past, India was keen to avoid a situation where China secured partial gains up front, but where its territorial integrity concerns remained unresolved. India's opposition has accused the government of ceding territory to China.

Elsewhere, China has reportedly agreed to address India's concerns over its export curbs on fertilisers, rare earth minerals and tunnel-boring machines, according to media reports.

"As a matter of principle, China is willing to strengthen dialogue and cooperation with relevant countries and regions to jointly maintain the stability of the global production and supply chain".

New Delhi and Beijing also agreed to resume direct flights between the two countries, enhance river-sharing data and drop certain visa restrictions for tourists, businesses and journalists.

During his two-day trip, Wang Yi held meetings with Indian Prime

Minister Narendra Modi and India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, encounters that will pave the way for Modi's first visit to China in seven years at the end of August.

"Stable, predictable, constructive ties between India and China will contribute significantly to regional as well as global peace and prosperity," Modi posted on X after his meeting with Wang.

Meanwhile, Doval said that China and India had achieved a "new environment" of "peace and tranquillity". He added that "the setbacks that we faced in the last few years were not in our interest", and "delimitation and boundary affairs" had been discussed.

Trump's additional 25 percent tariff places India among the most

heavily taxed US trading partners and puts its \$86.5 billion in exports at a disadvantage to rivals such as China, Vietnam and Bangladesh. India's refusal to stop purchasing Russian oil and opening agriculture to US multinationals seems to have tempted Trump to impose 50 percent tariff on Indian exports. In truth China is the biggest importer of Russian oil; China imported a record 109 million tonnes of this product last year, representing nearly 20 percent of its total energy imports, indirectly helping Moscow in its war on Ukraine, now in its fourth year.

By sparing China from high tariff America proves its precarious dependence on China's rare earths No doubt America has upper-hand now

but if the trade standoff persists, the real winner will be China, not America. Unequal treatment reflects a cold combination of political and economic calculations. After all China is a rising superpower with its imperial project of Belt and Road Initiative moving very fast though Beijing has only one military base abroad at Djibouti against Washington's 750 across the world.

Former US President Barack Obama famously predicted that the United States and India would form the 21st century's "defining partnership". With Trump in saddle now the relationship is at its lowest point. The downturn in US-India ties comes amid a spate of high level diplomacy between New Delhi, Moscow and Beijing. □□□ 27.08.2025

COMMENT

Aid Workers Killed

LAST YEAR WHEN THE DATA on killings of humanitarian aid workers for the year 2023 was released, there was a widespread feeling of shock as the killings had risen very steeply to an all-time high. However, recently when the data for 2024 was released by the United Nations, there was a further big increase in these killings. What is no less disturbing, if the trends for this year (2025) are an indication, next year may record a further increase in this highly unfortunate and distressing statistic.

What is more, this is a reflection of the wider and highly worrying reality that the overall humanitarian crisis is increasing, it is being increasingly caused by war and conflict and these conflicts, in turn, are becoming more and crueler. It is this tragic reality and cruelty which is resulting in so many aid workers being killed, injured and kidnapped.

According to the recent data released by the United Nations for the year 2024, 383 humanitarian aid workers were killed, while 308 were wounded and 125 were kidnapped.

Thus there was a big, about 31 percent increase in killings in 2024, compared to the 293 aid workers killed in 2023.

The statistics available for this year (2025) up to August indicate that, unless effective remedial actions are taken, this year the number of aid workers killed may turn out to be even higher. Already about 265 aid workers have been killed this year, and the most violent conflicts like those of Gaza and Sudan are becoming even more worrying.

In 2024, 181 out of the total number of 383 aid workers killed were killed in Gaza, while 60 were killed in Sudan. 20 were killed in Lebanon. 14 each were killed in

Syria and Ethiopia. West Asia and North Africa account for most of the deaths of aid workers. In particular the shockingly high number of killings being concentrated in the tiny territory of Gaza is another shocking reminder of the extent to which humanitarian norms have been violated by the Israeli army.

For millions of Palestinians, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) is more than just a humanitarian organisation—it is a life-line. For 75 years, it has provided crucial infrastructure support and sustained a population facing heavy repression at the behest of Israel. For the past 22 months the organisation has proved as important as ever in the midst of genocide. UNRWA and its facilities have provided schools, hospitals and more for Palestinians when no other help existed. Sometimes it is the sole entity continuing to keep Palestinians alive and this is precisely the reason, Israel targets them and has killed 310 UNRWA staff members so far in Gaza.

At a time when the humanitarian crisis is worsening in the world to levels seldom, if ever, seen in this century, it is deeply worrying that the life of humanitarian aid workers is getting increasingly endangered. If those who are supposed to provide life-saving help are themselves endangered, who'll provide this help?

In a situation of increasing attacks on aid-workers, the availability of humanitarian aid providers in some

seriously affected crisis zones may decline, seriously and adversely affecting the ability of the humanitarian effort to reach out to those who need this help desperately. Then nobody really knows how many informal and voluntary aid givers who are not recorded by any organisation are getting killed or wounded in increasingly more dangerous situations.

□□□

[Contributed by *Bharat Dogra*]

NOTE

A Toppling Tool?

A Correspondent writes:

A BILL TABLED BY HOME Minister Amit Shah in Parliament on Wednesday, 20 August, proposed to give the Centre the power to remove any Chief Minister, State Cabinet Minister, or Union Minister who is facing criminal charges punishable by five years or more of imprisonment, and who has been under arrest for 30 days.

The Centre seeks these powers by introducing the Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill, 2025, which seeks to amend Article 75 of the Constitution, which governs the appointment and responsibilities of ministers, Article 164 that outlines the provisions related to the appointment of state ministers, and Article 239AA which outlines the functioning of ministers of UT of Delhi.

Simply put, if a minister spends 30 days behind bars in a case in which the charges carry a punishment of at least five years, they will lose their office if the Bill becomes law.

Following uproar in the Lok Sabha, the Bill has been recommended for referral to a Parliamentary Standing Committee.

The Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill, 2025, seeks to alter three key articles. These are Article 75

(Union Ministers), Article 164 (State Ministers), and Article 239AA (Delhi Ministers), granting new removal powers.

Opposition parties unitedly slammed the Bill as 'dictatorial' and 'unconstitutional'. When questioned by Congress' KC Venugopal about his own past arrest, Amit Shah responded in Parliament. He clarified that he had resigned from his post as Gujarat's Home Minister before being arrested and held no office while in custody.

"A Minister, who, for any period of thirty consecutive days while holding office as such, is arrested and detained in custody on the allegation of committing an offence under any law for the time being in force, which is punishable with imprisonment for a term that may extend to five years or more, shall be removed from office by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister, to be tendered by the thirty-first day after being taken into such custody".

It further stated that if the Prime Minister does not tender the proposal to remove the accused Minister on the thirty-first day, "he shall cease to be a Minister with effect from the day immediately thereafter."

The Bill also applies to the Prime

AUTUMN NUMBER 2025

Autumn Number 2025 will be out in the 3rd week of September. This year our contributors include Marcello Musto, Neshat Quaiser, Abhijit Guha, Sumanta Banerjee, Sunil Ray, Bharat Patankar & K J Joy, Asok Chattopadhyay, Nilofar Suhrawardy, T Vijayendra, Arup Kumar Sen, Pradip Datta, Paranjay Guha Thakurta, Ranabir Samaddar, Pranab Kumar Basu, Asis Ranjan Sengupta, Madhu Bhaduri, Pranjali Bandhu, Harsh Thakor, Dhiraj Kumar & Keyoor Pathak, Manas Bakshi, Himanshu Roy, Vinod Mubayi, Alope Mukherjee, Arjab Roy, Pradosh Nath, Arup Baisya, K Murali, Nityananda Ghosh, Arun Kumar Sinha, Maitreesh Ghatak, Sumit Bhaduri, Sumit Chakrabarty, Sushil Khanna & Mritiunjoy Mohanty, Farooque Chowdhury, Sagar Dhara, Ranganayakamma,

Minister of India in the event of their arrest.

The Bill proposes to add a new clause to Article 164 of the Constitution, under which Governors would be given similar powers to remove a Chief Minister or Cabinet Minister of their respective states if they have been in jail for 30 days. In truth governors are tools in the hands of the Centre. At a time when people are demanding the very abolition of obnoxious institution of governor, the Bharatiya Janata party is trying to arming it with extra-ordinary powers.

The Bill is anything but dictatorial and unconstitutional. It is specially designed to cripple whatever remains of federalism while allowing the Centre to centralise powers further. And opposition-ruled states will always be in danger of losing office if they refuse to fall in line.

In today's pernicious political climate where individuals can be easily charged, arrested and detained for extended periods, this legislation is going to be weaponised to target political opponents. In reality it is an attack on opposition, not corruption. □□□

OBSTRUCTING PROGRESSIVE REFORMS

Reactionaries and Scientific Mind in India

Bhabani Shankar Nayak

IT IS THE CONSTITUTIONAL duty of every Indian citizen “to develop the scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry and reform,” as stated in Article 51A(h) of Part IVA of the Constitution of India on Fundamental Duties (Constitution of India, 2024: 25). Despite the 42nd Constitutional Amendment of 1976, which enshrined the ideals of scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry and reform, successive governments have continued to undermine scientific education and have failed to implement policies that nurture scientific consciousness. Religious, political, social, and cultural reactionaries—along with their allies in electoral politics who pander to them—erode both the Constitution and the constitutional duties of Indian citizens. Political parties and their leaders often resort to reactionary methods and propaganda to secure votes and win elections, thereby obstructing progressive reforms in society, the state, and the government.

A stagnant culture serves to protect the conservative ideals and interests of the elites. The Eurocentric theory of cultural relativism continues to legitimise various stagnant and primitive forms of reactionary practices in the name of protecting cultural identity in India. Similarly, community-based laws safeguard practices that are fundamentally reactionary and neo-traditional. Such legal provisions weaken the constitutional promise of reform in India. These democratic and constitutional contradictions call for progressive reform. However, political parties and their leaders exploit social, cultural,

linguistic, religious, and regional identities to mobilise voters and secure electoral victories to govern the country and hinder progressive reforms. Such reactionary strategies in electoral politics give rise to reactionary governance, eroding the very conditions necessary for promoting the spirit of inquiry and deepening of democracy and citizenship rights in India.

Scientific temper means cultivating democratic knowledge traditions and consciousness through debates, disagreements, dissent, and the questioning of all forms of power and governance. It involves democratising and diversifying dominant knowledge traditions, dismantling authoritarianism in every form, and advancing scientific understanding among all the people in India. Scientific temper can emancipate people from blind beliefs and reactionary thoughts and practices in the country. It also requires expansion of investment in science and scientific education, which can accelerate the realisation of the constitutional promise of promoting a culture of scientific temper among all sections of Indian society.

In a diverse country like India, reactionary forces across different spheres of society hinder the growth of scientific temper and obstruct the path of progressive transformation in politics, culture, and the economy. These constitutional duties are further weakened by the budgetary priorities of both state and central governments, particularly in areas such as education, educational infrastructure, teaching and learning environments, training, and research. For instance, the University Grants Commission (UGC), which shapes poli-

cies and allocates funds for research and teaching in higher education, experienced a sixty-one percent budget cut in 2024. Despite being the fifth-largest economy, India spends the lowest percentage of its GDP on science and technology compared to other developed and developing countries. India spends the smallest share of its GDP for education compared to other BRICS nations.

Indian society, the state, and successive governments continue to remain hostages to various reactionary and regressive forces. These forces—through their culture, politics, and social and religious practices—oppose the culture of critical inquiry and reform, as any progressive change threatens the power, privileges, property and authority of both ruling and non-ruling reactionary groups in the country. Therefore, the governing and non-governing elites in India remain fundamentally resistant to progressive reform. Reactionary ideals and practices—such as caste, patriarchy, religious fundamentalism, and social, political, and economic discrimination and exploitation on the basis of class, gender, caste, region, and religion—continue to persist in India. These practices stand in direct opposition to the constitutional ideals of scientific temper and humanism. In such conditions, Indians are deprived of their constitutional duties.

The elites have created conditions that hinder progressive reforms and suppress critical inquiry, yet they blame the working class as the repository of conservative cultures and traditions. However, the working class has consistently embraced progressive reforms and radical change as a means to fulfil their constitutional duties—duties that are systematically obstructed by the elites in India. Working people have long supported bold reforms and progressive policies aimed at social, po-

litical, and economic transformation. Yet the capitalist classes have eroded the spirit of humanism through the processes of marketisation, commercialisation, and the commodification of human labour, nature, and relationships. Together, these forces undermine the Constitution of India and obstruct citizens from

fulfilling their constitutional duties of developing scientific temper, humanism, inquiry and reform.

Therefore, opposing all reactionary forces is central to upholding the spirit and promises of the Indian Constitution and to deepening scientific, secular, and democratic consciousness among all people in In-

dia. It is essential to promote democratic, decolonial, decarbonised, and non-Eurocentric knowledge traditions to empower citizens by ensuring a culture of scientific and secular ethos—an ethos that can guide India and its people toward a progressive path of inquiry, reform, humanism, peace and prosperity. □□□

WHEN BUREAUCRACY MATTERS

Election Commission and “Politics of Jugaad”

MC

WHEN THE ELECTION Commission of India chooses to flub, it creates a void. And in that void, suspicion flourishes.

The press conference organised by the Election Commission of India was not a moment of virtue. It was avoidance, an instance of bureaucratic opacity woven into the state’s fabric. But to do so on a question so central to democracy—whether citizens have been improperly stripped of their right to vote—was more like a slap on the voter’s face.

Elections, in theory, rest on arithmetic: the number of eligible citizens, multiplied by participation, yields the number of votes. But India, as always, adds its own layer of improbability. In Maharashtra, for instance, opposition leaders point out that the number of votes registered in the state has outstripped its entire adult population. How does a system meant to safeguard legitimacy produce a number so mathematically absurd? It’s as if the scoreboard of democracy is showing runs scored by batsmen who have never stepped onto the pitch.

The Commission insists that the electoral system is multi-layered and decentralised, meticulously constructed by law. The draft rolls are published, shared with parties, and placed on websites; time is given for

objections; appeals may be made to district magistrates and chief electoral officers. Transparency, the Commission likes to say, is its hallmark. Yet that hallmark appears increasingly tarnished.

Opposition leaders insist they did, in fact, submit affidavits pointing to errors—errors that include people alive declared dead, and those who voted in the recent general election struck from the rolls altogether. Akhilesh Yadav, the former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, says his party can even show acknowledgement receipts from the Commission. The Commission’s response? It hasn’t received them. Yadav, dryly, offers a counter: perhaps Digital India itself—the government’s cherished initiative—is now in doubt.

The immediate controversy lies in Bihar, where the Commission launched what it calls a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the rolls this June, despite two obvious obstacles. First, the state was submerged in monsoon floods, its villages marooned, its fields resembling lakes. Second, the Commission’s own guidelines prohibit intensive revisions in an election year.

The logic is simple: changing rolls too close to voting undermines stability. Yet in Bihar, stability was sacrificed to speed. Why the hurry? Why insist that enumerators knock

on doors in villages half-underwater, demanding forms that, in many cases, were filed without documents, or marked by local officers as “not recommended” on bases never explained?

Yogendra Yadav, one of the sharpest critics of the Commission, rattled off a list of ten unanswered questions from that same press conference. Why were parties not consulted before the revision? How many electors were added between June 25th and July 25th? How many **foreigners** were detected? Why the format of the rolls changed after Rahul Gandhi was raised questions in a public press conference? These are not the queries of a conspiracy theorist; they are the questions of a statistician, pointing to cracks in the ledger that should be the foundation of legitimacy.

When pressed, the Commission sometimes replies with flimsy explanations that collapse under their own weight. At one point, the Chief Election Commissioner, Gyanesh Kumar Gupta, remarked that even if the same person was registered in multiple places, they would still only cast one vote. The implication: duplication is not really a problem. But what is duplication, if not an open door to manipulation?

Gupta’s line is remarkable for its candour. It’s the equivalent of a bank manager saying that if someone has multiple ATM cards for the same account, no harm will come—as if fraud is merely a theoretical inconvenience, not a systemic risk.

Critics now ask: is Gupta willing to stand by this argument on affidavit in court?

Other explanations verge on the bizarre. Opposition parties have long demanded access to CCTV footage of polling booths—not to make it public, but to examine anomalies in voting patterns and identify bogus votes. The Commission's response was to warn against "making videos of our wives, mothers, and sisters public."

By that logic, one might reasonably ask, why record them at all? If the very act of filming is defensible, then so too is the act of auditing. To invert that logic is to sound less like a guardian of democracy and more like a hotel manager caught planting cameras in changing rooms, protesting that releasing the footage would be indecent.

It is this inversion of responsibility that most disturbs critics. The Election Commission has always occupied a peculiar space in Indian public life: quasi-sacred, part umpire, part priest. It is one of the few institutions meant to rise above politics, its neutrality the coin of its realm. But in recent years, its credibility has come under siege.

When journalists asked why Devendra Fadnavis, the deputy chief minister of Maharashtra and a senior leader of the ruling BJP, was answering questions about electoral rolls on the Commission's behalf, the symbolism was hard to ignore. An umpire cannot outsource his explanations to a player, least of all to the captain of one of the teams on the field.

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The Commission's defenders argue that much of this noise comes from political parties that neglected to scrutinise the rolls when given the chance. The process, they note, allows a whole month for claims and objections. If parties slept through that window, they have only themselves to blame. Yet this defence assumes a level playing field. It assumes, too, that the publication of rolls in the correct format, at the right time, was consistently executed.

In reality, the Commission has refused to provide machine-readable digital rolls, insisting instead on formats that hinder large-scale analysis. It has declined requests for affidavits verifying digital receipts and resisted inquiries into affidavits filed by parties in past elections. If transparency is its hallmark, then why these smudges on the glass?

Consider also the language used. Critics like Paranjay Guha Thakurta describe the press conference as a "sham." Yogendra Yadav lists questions not as speculative musings but as demands for data: how many enumeration forms without documents, how many marked "not recommended," how many foreigners detected.

Each is answerable with a number. Each was met with evasion. The longer the Commission withholds such numbers, the more the suspicion grows that the numbers themselves are unflattering.

Elections in India have always been messy—what political scientists once described as a "politics of jugaad." But improvisation, in small doses, is different from systemic opacity. When living people are declared dead, when past voters are struck off rolls, when numbers exceed populations, when revisions are launched in flood zones against official guidelines, improvisation becomes distortion. And distortion, at scale, undermines trust.

The Commission insists that its process is robust because it is decentralised. Booth-level officers, it says, shoulder the responsibility for accuracy. However, decentralisation is only as good as accountability. When forms are filed without documents, when local officers "recommend" or "not recommend" entries without explanation, decentralisation becomes diffusion: everyone is responsible, and so no one is.

Akhilesh Yadav's provocation—that the Commission itself should file affidavits verifying its digital acknowledgements—captures the absurdity of the moment. The very institution entrusted with securing the integrity of elections now faces demands to certify its own signatures. It is not simply that opposition parties don't trust the numbers; it is that they don't trust the guardians of the numbers.

What is left, then, is irony. As one opposition leader put it earlier, vote theft was done quietly, in hiding. Now it is done openly, in the name of "special revisions." Earlier, citizens worried about ballot-box stuffing in remote villages; now they worry about the official who refuses to answer a question in the capital. Silence, once tactical, now sounds like complicity.

The great strength of Indian democracy has always been its acceptance of noise—the clamour of parties, the cacophony of rallies, and the chaos of election days. But noise is different from silence. When the Election Commission chooses to flub, it creates a void. And in that void, suspicion flourishes.

The real risk is not that one side cheats more cleverly than another; it is that citizens lose faith in the very scoreboard. When the scoreboard itself becomes contested—when the number of votes exceeds the number of players—democracy ceases to be a game worth playing. □□□

MODI'S DEMOGRAPHY MISSION

Citizenship is a test One may never Pass

Samar Halarnkar

FROM MAHARASHTRA TO Assam, India's offensive against "infiltrators" has begun, unannounced and arbitrary.

Many abandon fragile livelihoods to flee homewards to avoid detention and deportation. Some can do little as loved ones disappear or are carted off to detention. Others forsake daily wages for days or weeks to look for documents that might protect their vote and existence as Indians. Lives are upended, trauma is inflicted and families are torn apart.

In this quest for identity, millions face the prospect of being reduced to second-class citizens—or stripped of citizenship altogether.

Why the government is subjecting some of its most vulnerable citizens to fear and displacement became clear on Independence Day, when the prime minister—without uttering the "M" word—announced the launch of a "high-power demography mission," making what was unofficial, official.

"Today, I wish to warn the nation of a grave concern and challenge," said Narendra Modi. "As part of a deliberate conspiracy, the demography of the country is being altered. Seeds of a new crisis are being sown. These infiltrators are snatching away the livelihoods of our youth. These infiltrators are targeting our sisters and daughters. This will not be tolerated." And so on.

Modi offered no details on how the mission would work. But trace the arc from past events to unfolding developments, add in the disparate actions already underway against suspected "infiltrators" and a clearer, if unsettling, picture emerges.

Some of the current battles over

citizenship have reached the courts, but what people hear is not encouraging because the very documents that people are frantically trying to collect may be of limited or no use, if recent court observations are anything to go by.

The Supreme Court said last week that voter IDs, Aadhar and PAN cards are not proof of citizenship but proof of identity to access services. Fair enough, but the Election Commission has now made clear its intention to reject these documents because it treats the verification of voter rolls as a test of citizenship.

The Bombay High Court said the same thing, although here the judges explained what might help prove that you are a citizen—"verification of the process through which these were obtained".

This means one must produce the documents that she/he got the documents in question—a circular nightmare. To update or reconfirm them, one may have to provide proofs that they depend on those very documents: a chicken-and-egg trap, a classic bureaucratic paradox. This is the burden now placed on millions of Indians from Muslim and other disadvantaged communities, desperate to prove they are Indian.

On August 5, a Lok Sabha MP asked the government what identity cards were "admissible proof" of citizenship. This was the government's reply: "The Citizenship Act, 1955, as amended in 2004, provides that the Central Government may compulsorily register every citizen of India and issue a National Identity Card to him. The procedure for the same has been laid down in the Citizenship (Regis-

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C/o Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee
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tration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Card) Rules, 2003.”

On August 12, for the second time in a week, another Lok Sabha MP asked the government to specify the documents required to prove Indian citizenship. Again, the government wouldn't list these documents, only saying, “The citizenship of India is governed under the provisions of the Citizenship Act, 1955, and rules made thereunder.”

In other words, the government wants its most vulnerable citizens to produce documents that prove citizenship but won't accept its own identity documents and won't say what specifically proof of citizenship is.

The national identity card that the government spoke about in the Lok Sabha does not exist. At this time, only a passport appears to be definitive proof of citizenship—although even a passport does not prove citizenship by birth—and getting one involves the same bureaucratic paradox that will collapse under the heightened scrutiny that Modi now promises.

If Modi's “high power demography mission” gets going, expect *everyone* to scramble for documents and line up to bear the mass disruption that his government loves. Remember the queues of demonetisation and the long journeys of Covid. For those already running the formidable gamut of proving citizenship, the legal justifi-

cation is rooted in the days of Empire: if the state suspects you are not a citizen, the law places the burden on you to prove otherwise.

Around 6.5 million in Bihar were struck off the voter list revision, the exercise mutating into a covert citizenship test. In Assam, citizenship trials have pushed thousands into manufactured statelessness. Those excluded from the National Register of Citizenship in Assam are often undocumented Indian residents rather than being traditionally stateless, with citizenship of no country.

Assam, as the home minister made clear in 2019, was never the endgame—it was a rehearsal. “NRC aane wala hai [The NRC will come],” Amit Shah warned, referring to a national deployment.

The Supreme Court agrees with the Election Commission that it must only enroll citizens in its hasty review of voter rolls in Bihar—except it is unclear when the commission became an arbiter of citizenship.

There was some relief to the harried people of Bihar when the court on August 14 ordered the commission to publish the names of all 6.5 million excluded Biharis and explain why they were removed. But that order must be applied to every upcoming voter verification that the Election Commission has planned in the coming months in West Bengal, Assam and elsewhere. Otherwise

arbitrary citizenship tests and mass disenfranchisement by electoral subterfuge will continue.

In any case, here is the Election Commission's list of 11 approved documents for any new voter to be registered (and by default prove citizenship) in Bihar: domicile certificate, passport, birth certificate, caste certificate, Class 10 marksheet, forest right certificate, land/house allotment certificate, family register, national register of citizens (wherever it exists), identity card or pension payment order issued to regular employee or pensioner, and identity card or certificate or document issued by government, local authorities, bank, post office, public-sector companies or the Life Insurance Corporation before July 1, 1987.

Forget, for a moment, the hardship and agony this exercise caused.

If—or when—the government decides to start afresh on citizenship questions, rolls out the national identity cards it mentioned last week in the Lok Sabha, and launches a nationwide National Register of Citizens, hundreds of millions will be forced to unearth birth certificates and who knows what other papers reaching back how many generations to prove they belong to their own country. □□□

[This an abridged version of an article first published in Article 14, of which Samar Halarnkar is the founding editor.]

ECONOMIC POWER MATTERS

Caste is essentially Class in Indian Dress

Manu Kant

IN MY NEIGHBOURHOOD, A middle-class “Dalit” family is loved and respected—no different from us savarna residents. We attend each other's weddings, share sweets at Diwali, and talk to each other when we meet on the street while strolling through the

neighbourhood. It's not tokenism; it's genuine warmth.

This simple, everyday relationship hides a deeper truth: when economic equality exists, caste fades. Prejudices survive not because they are timeless, but because the old capitalist order still stands, with the

same economic base and superstructure that once birthed and sustained them. Change the base, and the prejudices crumble.

Caste and class are not separate universes. Both are systems of hierarchy built on control over resources and labour. Caste dictated who could own land, who would till it, and who would be pushed into degrading labour. Class, in Marxist terms, is defined by relation to the means of production.

When we strip away religious or ritual coverings, caste is essentially class in Indian dress. This is why the Jats of Punjab—once Shudras—rose not by worship or ritual, but by acquiring land. Economic power changed their social position. Ownership, not prayer, turned them into a dominant class.

The old Communist Party of India (CPI), under leaders like B T Ranadive, was clear on this: caste oppression was rooted in class exploitation. They argued that once feudalism and capitalism were dismantled, caste would collapse as a by-product of socialist revolution.

Today many Indian Marxists disagree. They argue that caste is an autonomous force that survives beyond economics. They point to Ambedkar's insistence that political independence meant little without annihilating caste, or Gandhi's defence of caste "harmony" as a moral order. But both Gandhi and Ambedkar missed the decisive point: caste cannot be destroyed by either moral reform or political assertion alone. It must be uprooted by attacking the economic foundation that sustains it.

Over time, I've come to see caste not as an eternal social evil, but as a weapon of class war—a tool for the powerful to safeguard status. Among the affluent, caste today isn't about ritual purity; it's about land, privilege, and gatekeeping. For poor upper castes, caste offers little material gain.

It becomes a mirage—a symbolic superiority that distracts from real economic despair. That's why modern caste discrimination isn't fundamentally moral or religious. It's class conflict in disguise.

Critics say: "But even rich Dalits face discrimination. Doesn't that prove caste is more than class?" Yes, a wealthy Dalit may still face social stigma, especially in marriage

or neighbourhood exclusion. But why does this stigma persist? Because the old economic base that generated it is still alive.

Land concentration, job scarcity, and capital control remain intact. The cultural layer survives only because its material root survives. When those roots are destroyed, the stigma will wither.

My neighbourhood proves this: where class positions are equal, caste prejudice has no soil to grow.

Punjab again illustrates the point. Poor Jat farmers and landless "Dalit" labourers share the same burdens—debt, joblessness, healthcare scarcity. Yet solidarity is rare. Suspicion prevails because caste is weaponised to mask class. The ruling class encourages this.

Media, policy, and politics keep caste alive as a firewall to divide the oppressed. Artificial lines are drawn: poor Dalits resent reservations, poor upper castes resent being bypassed. The anger is real, but its direction is misled. This is the brilliance of capitalism in India: it exploits caste to fracture class unity.

Ambedkar rightly insisted that independence without social justice was hollow. But he did not see that justice required a socialist revolution uniting all workers, Dalit and savarna alike. The old CPI understood this, but later Marxists began conceding too much ground—treating caste as if it were a force separate from class, almost eternal. That shift blurred the revolutionary path.

In truth, caste and class are two names for the same machinery of exploitation. One wears religious garb, the other economic. But both are driven by ownership and labour division.

That's why caste can't be defeated by social reform alone. Representation and tokenism won't suffice. We must attack the roots—land ownership, capital control, institu-

tional power. Only a socialist revolution—led by workers of all castes—can dismantle this machinery.

It must push for land redistribution, public ownership of core sectors, universal healthcare and education, and the end of tools that reinforce caste: private schools, housing apartheid, and unequal access to justice. Poor upper castes should not fear this change. It offers them liberation too—from hollow pride and real poverty.

In a socialist India, rising Dalits won't be competitors—they'll be comrades.

As the movement grows, caste identities will lose relevance—not through laws alone, but because the structures that sustain them will collapse. Surnames will no longer signal status. New identities may emerge—not of "savarna" or "Dalit," but of worker and comrade.

My neighbourhood is a glimpse of that end. A place where caste doesn't matter—not because we've grown saintly, but because we share the same economic space. The warmth we share isn't moral—it's material. And that gives me hope.

Caste, however ancient, is not eternal. It will be dismantled—not by reform, but by revolution. When class walls fall, caste will be rubble in their ruins. □□□

For Frontier Contact

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 "THE GREAT CALCUTTA KILLINGS"

'The Bengal Files'

Debiparna Chakraborty

MIDWAY THROUGH THE recently released trailer for Vivek Agnihotri's *The Bengal Files*, two words boldly stand out: "True Story". The disclaimer does not read "based on a true story" or "inspired by real events," but is a definitive declaration of Truth, with a capital T.

The label is ironic. If Agnihotri's past works (*The Kashmir Files*, *The Tashkent Files*) are any indication, truth is usually the first casualty in all his films. *The Kerala Story* originally claimed that 32,000 women from Kerala had been converted and recruited by ISIS—a figure so fantastical that Agnihotri quietly revised the trailer to describe it instead as "the true stories of three young girls" after massive backlash and fact-checking.

The second is artistic merit, no matter how many times he calls (and includes in the trailers) his own films as "cinematic masterpieces."

But beyond the technicalities of film grammar, Agnihotri referring to his version of the 1946 Calcutta Riots as the Real Story is an assertion of monopoly over historical memory, a proclamation that he alone can and will deliver the "real" version of what happened during the deadly 'Week of the Long Knives'.

He is attempting to sculpt Bengal's memory into a weapon for present-day schismatic politics.

One look at the trailer of *The Bengal Files* reveals the predictable pattern of melodramatised falsehoods peddled in Agnihotri's servings of the "truth". Much like in *The Kerala Story* where three became 32,000, *The Bengal Files* relies on made-up statistics to make divisive

points that can become especially dangerous in a pre-poll season.

It peddles the fantasy that if minorities form 10 percent of the population, they automatically become a "vote bank," and if they reach 30 percent, they inevitably demand a separate state.

This cloaking of arithmetic mumbo jumbo as demographic truth is nothing but an attempt to paint the complex socio-political and religious mosaic of early 20th century colonial and post-colonial Bengal in the binaries of Hindu and Muslim.

Unsurprisingly, *The Bengal Files* has already generated uproar in Bengal's political landscape. It is not so easy to morph the collective memory of a state that takes pride in learning and knowing of its murky history in an attempt to learn from it rather than exploit it.

The film's 'True Story' disclaimer is not 'based on' but a definitive declaration. The author argues this is an assertion of monopoly over historical memory, an attempt to sculpt Bengal's past into a weapon for present-day schismatic politics.

The family of Gopal 'Patha' Mukherjee has sent a legal notice to Agnihotri. They object to his portrayal as a caricature of anti-Muslim bigotry, insisting he saved many Muslims during the riots and was not driven by communal hatred.

Unlike other regions, Bengal developed a culture of downplaying past communal violence, choosing symbolic reconciliation over vengeance. Agnihotri's film is seen as a direct attack on this ethos, aiming to weaponise memory and stoke sectarian anger.

The film's approach is contrasted

with the humanist lens of Bengali filmmakers like Ritwik Ghatak and Satyajit Ray, who explored trauma without sectarian fault lines. Agnihotri is accused of turning cinema from a tool of catharsis into a political weapon.

The Trinamool Congress has called the film pre-election propaganda, but that can be said about Agnihotri's entire recent filmography. More revealing, however, is the response of those whose lives and families are implicated in the narrative.

The Calcutta Riots, also remembered as the Great Calcutta Killings, broke out in August 1946 after the Muslim League called for Direct Action Day to demand the creation of Pakistan.

For four days, the city was engulfed in violence which soon spread to surrounding regions of Noakhali, Tipperah (Comilla), Bihar, and Punjab. Thousands were killed, Hindus and Muslims alike, as political rivalries, colonial policies of divide-and-rule, and the acute economic devastation of Bengal (still reeling from the famine of 1943) converged into a combustible eruption.

Since the trailer dropped, actor Saswata Chatterjee has been facing flak for associating with Agnihotri's film. In an interview in wake of the row, the actor said that he's not a historian and that as "just an actor", it was not his place to decide if the film is factually accurate or not.

Historians, however, have long noted that to understand these riots, one must consider multiple layers: British negligence, Muslim League mobilisations, Hindu Mahasabha counter-mobilisations, the rise of street gangs among caste Hindus, the collapse of urban order, and the desperate struggles of the poor, in the backdrop of excruciating, engi-

neered famines. To isolate it as a Hindu-versus-Muslim morality play is to flatten an extraordinarily complex event into a communal caricature—something Agnihotri is absolutely not above. In fact, he has earned his millions doing just that.

Another character spotlighted by the discourse around the upcoming film is the controversial Gopal “Patha” Mukherjee, now being crudely dubbed by some as the great ‘Hindu butcher of Bengal who massacred Muslims’. It is exactly the kind of narrative that his kin, and a majority of those who survived the communal violence before and after Partition in Bengal, have avoided thus far.

Nearly three decades ago, in 1997, journalist Andrew Whitehead tracked down an elderly Patha, a once-feared gang-lord of Calcutta. He had been nicknamed “Patha” (the Bengali word for goat) because his family ran a meat shop on College Street in Bowbazar locality. The fact that he was a Brahmin butcher is perhaps an indicator of the complex class-religion-caste identity of Bengal.

According to an archival piece by *The Indian Express*, when Patha met Whitehead, he was a grandfatherly figure with rimmed spectacles, a neat topknot, and a white beard—a visage more saintly than sinister.

Whitehead’s probes revealed a man who had never repented. Patha boasted that in 1946, when Calcutta burned, he ordered his boys to kill ten Muslims for every Hindu murdered.

He relished recounting his access to American pistols bought (sometimes bribed) off Allied soldiers during the Second World War. Even Gandhi’s much-fabled *miracle of Calcutta*, when hardened men surrendered arms at his feet, could not soften Patha’s resolve. He flatly refused, insisting that even a nail blood-

ied in violence could not be given up: “With these arms I saved the women of my area, I saved the people. I will not surrender them.”

Patha’s family has publicly objected to his potential misrepresentation in the upcoming film. Far from being a communal hatemonger, they insist, Patha’s actions were motivated by a desire to save lives, not inflame hatred. In recent interviews, his family has claimed that Patha saved the lives of many Muslims in his neighbourhood during the violence and that he was not a bigot who could be painted with the same Hindu-Muslim binary. The family has, in fact, sent a legal notice to Agnihotri for turning their kin into a caricature of anti-Muslim bigotry.

Bengal has had a peculiar relationship with communal violence. The contradictions of Patha’s legacy encapsulate the moral ambiguity of the riots themselves: a self-styled saviour whose rescue missions were drenched in retaliatory blood.

But unlike in other parts of India, where Partition memory often calcified into sectarian grievance, Bengal largely developed a culture of downplaying what happened in the past, and instead choosing to focus on a future where better things are a possibility.

Bengal has historically chosen symbolic reconciliation over vengeance.

Agnihotri’s film not only wants to undo this ethos but ride a current wave of divisive politics that has been washing over Bengal, worryingly enough, by weaponising memory.

In 2019, filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak’s family—including actor Parambrata Chatterjee—slammed the BJP youth wing for using clips from his Partition films to promote the Citizenship Amendment Act. They called it a gross distortion of Ghatak’s secular vision, insisting his cinema of refugee pain could never be

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weaponised to justify divisive politics.

Ghatak’s films dealt with the wounds of Partition through a Marxist lens—focusing on displacement, grief, and the tearing apart of families rather than religious binaries.

Similarly, Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen’s cinema examined Bengal’s troubled times—famine, Naxalism, urban disillusionment—always through a humanist lens that foregrounded ordinary lives over sectarian fault lines.

It bears noting that Bengali cinema has rarely, if ever, shown communal violence with ulterior agendas. Some have argued that vacuum creates fertile ground for a film like *The Bengal Files*. Because communal grief has long been repressed in Bengal’s public memory and never given full catharsis, a film that claims to finally “express” that grief, however distorted, carries dangerous potency.

The right wing understands this power. Its failed attempts to appropriate Ghatak, laughable to most Bengalis, were nonetheless instructive: cultural memory is a political

battleground. If you can reshape the stories people tell themselves about their past, you can reshape their political choices in the present.

Agnihotri's attempt here is dangerously simple. His attack is on Bengal's unique way of coping with

Partition trauma—through symbolic acts of solidarity. He wants instead a narrative of perpetual Hindu victimhood and this film is his invitation to embrace sectarian anger.

To tell Bengalis that they must now view 1946 not as a tragedy of

a people divided, but as a Hindu genocide demanding political redress, is to fundamentally alter the emotional architecture of Bengal's politics. It is also a blatant attempt to rewrite history. □□□

[Courtesy: *The Quint*]

PUNJAB'S VOICE OF THE VOICELESS

Remembering Gurdial Singh

Harsh Thakor

THE INDIAN COMMUNIST Revolutionary contingent suffered the grievous loss of Gurdial Singh Parampara on July 2. A Central Committee member of the CPRCI (ML) he left an indelible legacy waging a lifelong battle as a stalwart of the world proletarian Revolution. Even if departed he has planted the seeds to illuminate create new lotuses to blossom. Without doubt he carved a permanent niche amongst Indian Communist revolutionary leaders, who were architects of the massline. Gurdial's example is a model for any Revolutionary Communist to emulate.

A well-attended commemoration meeting paying homage to Gurdial of around 400 persons was staged in Lord Rama Hall in Bathinda addressed by various contingents of the Revolutionary Communist camp. Editors of communist revolutionary magazines *Surkhleeh* and *Lal Parcham* along with Harbans Kaur the spouse as well revolutionary companion of Gurdial honoured the departed revolutionary.

Gurdial Singh was the product of the Naxalbari uprising. Most immaculately he diagnosed the axis of agrarian revolutionary content for this uprising, the essence of its mass character and grasped the path of protracted People's War.

Darsan Singh Bagi was the first figure to inspire Gurdial and attract him within the fold of Communist ideology by infusing him with politi-

cal ideology.

81 years of his life journey were concentrated in tempering the role of liberation of mankind through revolutionary class struggle.

Gurdial stood at the forefront of the revolutionary practice in Punjab. With relentless spirit and courage, he withstood and battled against the tide of left adventurism to uphold the current of Massline of T Nagi Reddy in the early 1970's. His spade work laid the foundation for the historic resurrection of the revolutionary student's movement in Punjab. Gurdial played an integral role in re-organising the scattered forces to reunite into a coherent body by re-organising the Punjab Students Union in 1971. With unflinching resilience, he countered the liquidation and negation of mass organisations. With meticulous craft he steered Punjab Students Union to the path of mass revolutionary line. A tiny core guided by his leadership not only safeguarded the organisation but chalked out a manifesto to resurrect the organisation.

For six decades of practice, with unwavering resilience he waved the banner of Mao Tse Tung Thought. Representing the leading team of the UCCRI (ML) in Punjab head and shoulders combated the right deviationist trend seeking path of collaboration with faction of political forces under Jayaprakash Narayan. During the dark fascistic period of emergency, with meticulous craft, he

organised mass resistance through secret operation of mass organisations.

After the grave reversal in China with an iron hand he defended the Maoist legacy of the Great Debate and Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Being an ardent follower of Harbhajan Sohi, he orchestrated the repudiation of opportunist currents of the right like RCP, and Enver Hoxha and the revisionist current of RCP USA. His critique of the RIM was a masterpiece, showcasing the mass line.

Gurdial played a pivotal role in steering the Communist Revolutionary organisation in different phases withstanding the most adverse situations or gravest twists and turns. The manner he resolved the theoretical, ideological, political, organisational and practical problems faced by the revolutionary movement served as a testament to his comprehensive role in concreting the central policies for practice bearing the conditions and supervising the documentation of policies to nurture party work.

No Communist Revolutionary played as considerable a role in executing or giving a shape to the path of Harbhajan Sohi as Gurdial Singh. In that respect he even overshadowed Harbhajan Sohi., playing an even bigger role in putting the massline into concrete practice. Gurdial was one of the finest exponents of waging political struggle against deviationist currents and giving the cutting edge to the Leninist party. □□□

[Harsh Thakor is a freelance journalist. Thanks information from Pavel Kussa and SurkhLeeh]

BACK FROM DHARALI

Save Trees, Stop Disaster

Bharat Dogra

WHILE FLASH FLOODS and landslides have devastated several parts of the Himalayan region in recent times, the extreme destruction suffered in Dharali settlement in Bhatwari block of Uttarkashi district (Uttarakhand) has been particularly distressing. This township has been almost completely wiped out, despite frantic efforts made by people of another settlement, who could see the flood coming, to save at least some human lives by blowing traditional warning whistles.

Following this tragedy several reports and comments have highlighted the possibilities of these beautiful but vulnerable settlements being threatened again by disasters, possibilities that have also increased due to increasing impacts of climate change as well as indiscriminate construction activities in fragile areas.

In this context various precautions which can reduce the possibilities of future disasters or the harm caused by them are being discussed. A very important issue is that of about 6000 deodar trees in the same vulnerable region which have been marked for felling for widening a road. This writer has emphasized the urgency of saving these trees time and again. What needs to be highlighted now is that with the very tragic experience of the recent experience of the devastating floods before us, the already strong case for saving these trees has become even stronger. Several scientists and experts very familiar with this region have also expressed this view.

A geological scientist Dr Nalin Juyal has stated that it would be a big mistake to cut these trees which

will increase threats from avalanches and floods. If it is unavoidable to have wider roads, then options other than cutting trees should be explored. It is important that such options have been suggested by local social and environmental activists.

Several other top experts who have been spoken recently regarding the important protective role in reducing the harm from disasters include D P Dobhal, senior glaciologist and N Bala, climate scientist.

The threatened trees are located within the Bhagirathi (Ganga) Eco-Sensitive Zone and as it contains a lot of loose glacial debris the vulnerability to hazards and disasters is high. The Uttarkashi-Gangotri area near the origin of the Ganga River in the Himalayas is also known for its unique spiritual significance, and hence the protection of trees is significant in this context too. This is also close to the Gaumukh glacier. It is of the highest importance to protect trees and other precious vegetation and herbs of this area.

Solutions are available, if only the highway authorities agree to work in cooperation with local people who have much more detailed knowledge of local conditions and so can suggest alternatives which can protect trees.

The Raksha Sutra (Threads of Protection) movement, which traces its legacy to the Chipko (hug the trees) movement, and others have in fact suggested an alternative possibility in the form of a new road which will cause minimal loss of trees while at the same time improving the connectivity of several remote villages. This new road can take some of the traffic burden and

hence the need for excessive widening of the highway, which is threatening thousands of trees, can be avoided.

On the other hand if the government goes ahead with the excessive widening of the highway leading to the felling of a very large number of trees, then the environmental harm will be on a huge scale. The promises of planting these threatened trees elsewhere is least likely to be realised as natural forests cannot be re-created in this way. While generally it is being said that about six thousand and odd trees (mostly deodar trees) have been marked for felling, the past experience has shown clearly that when a big tree is felled several nearby smaller trees, plants, herbs etc are also uprooted and ruined.

All possibilities to avoid this ecocide should be explored in close cooperation with local villagers particularly women, panchayats (local elected village councils) and social and environmental organisations.

In a region which has witnessed highly destructive floods and landslides leading to the loss of many precious human lives in recent years as well as other large-scale harm, people are understandably worried regarding the impact of the felling of so many trees and the destruction of so much vegetation. In fact people here, as in several parts of the Himalayan region, are very apprehensive regarding the overall impact of several big construction projects including dams, tunnels and excessively wide highways, particularly when the due precautions are not exercised in the construction work. The construction rubble and waste thrown in rivers increases their capacity to cause destruction in a big way but after the floods have passed, all this is forgotten and precautions are ignored again. Common people, small shopkeepers and villagers are

also troubled and worried regarding the impact of such indiscriminately taken up work on their farms, springs, irrigation channels, other water sources and small shops or vending spaces.

In addition there is also the impact of tree felling and related environmental harm on glaciers, as well

as in downstream areas, as the excess as well as scarcity of water in different seasons in the densely populated plains below is also influenced by what happens in the ecologically crucial catchment areas of the Ganga River and its various tributaries.

The government authorities can still act wisely even at this late stage

to work out alternative arrangements in cooperation with the local people in such a way that massive environmental harm can be avoided and the base of sustainable livelihoods is protected instead of being harmed. □□□ [The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include *Man over Machine*, *Protecting Earth for Children* and *A Day in 2071*]

LETTERS

Destroying Universal Adult Suffrage

A collective of former civil servants has issued a strongly worded open statement warning that the Election Commission of India's (ECI) Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar threatens the very foundation of Indian democracy—universal adult suffrage.

In their statement, the Constitutional Conduct Group (CCG), comprising retired members of the All India and Central Services, said the revision exercise risked disenfranchising millions of citizens, particularly the poor and marginalised, who lack adequate documentation to prove their citizenship. The group emphasised that it has no political affiliations and is guided solely by constitutional values of neutrality and impartiality.

According to the CCG, India's electoral system historically functioned on the principle of inclusion, presuming citizenship unless disputed, with the ECI proactively ensuring that even those in remote and marginalised communities were brought into the electoral process. The current exercise, they argue, reverses this principle by placing the burden of proof on voters themselves.

The former bureaucrats noted that earlier a liberal approach to documentation was adopted, acknowledging the widespread lack of official papers among the poor. By contrast, the SIR has introduced rigid requirements that could strip voting rights

from millions who have been registered in successive elections since 2003.

Particular concern was raised over the ECI's decision to privilege the 2003 electoral rolls. Electors included in that year's roll are exempted from providing fresh documentation, and their children are also eligible through this route. The CCG said this created an "untenable, unjust and discriminatory" hierarchy, ignoring all subsequent rolls published in the last two decades, including those used in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

The statement accuses the ECI of effectively introducing the controversial National Register of Citizens (NRC) "through the backdoor" under the guise of sanitising voter lists.

The CCG cited multiple media reports, particularly video investigations by journalist Ajit Anjum, showing widespread irregularities. Evidence allegedly includes forged signatures, bulk-filling of forms by Booth Level Officers (BLOs), enrolments of deceased individuals, and staged photographs of villagers holding voter forms, which were later confiscated by officials.

The CCG said the "breakneck" pace of the SIR, combined with inadequate infrastructure and opaque procedures, has vitiated the entire process. The group warned that the continuation and possible expansion of this exercise beyond Bihar could become "one of the biggest threats Indian democracy has faced, from the very institution that is meant to

uphold the system of universal suffrage".

Stating that their petitions to the ECI in earlier matters had been "ignored and casually dismissed", the civil servants addressed their letter directly to the public, urging the mobilisation of opinion to pressure the Commission into corrective action.

JW

Fencing at Indo-Bangladesh Border

On 20 August 2025, the Minister of State for the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Mr. Nityanand Rai, informed the Upper House of Parliament about fencing and infiltration issues along the India–Bangladesh border. We strongly reject this statement as unrealistic and naïve. The Minister has unfortunately overlooked the important recommendations of the Report No. 203 on Border Security made by members of Standing Committee and was tabled before the Parliament of India. The report (para 2.4.5) clearly recommended urgent action regarding houses of villagers situated directly along the international border.

But the present MHA has failed miserably to address the issue of shifting villages and/or villagers who are forced to reside between the International Border (IB) and the border fencing (para 2.4.7). When the question of fencing arises, it is not merely about the issue of land acquisition, but also about ensuring the safety, security, dignity and rights of Indian citizens who live in these bor-

der villages. The lands located between the fencing and the International Border Pillars (IBPs) are owned and cultivated by villagers. If such lands are required for national interest, the government must come forward with a clear and transparent proposal for compensation, rehabilitation, and resettlement of the affected population (para 2.4.8).

These issues have been raised for decades, yet it is disheartening that neither the Government of India nor the Government of West Bengal has taken them seriously. A rough estimate suggests that erection of border fencing will directly affect 20–30 lakh Indian citizens of the villages near I-B border, whose lands lie along the border.

Thousands of petitions from villagers questioning the fencing have been submitted to district, state, and central authorities, as well as to human rights institutions, but most remain unheard. In many areas, fencing and even Out Posts (OPs) have been constructed 5–6 kilometers inside Indian Territory, effectively cutting cultivators off from their own land. Such policies are not only denying farmers their livelihood, but also forcing large numbers of people into distress and forced migration.

Though international border is a fragile issue, the principle should be maintained uniformly. Buildings of modern fencing with acquisition of fertile and cultivable lands lying behind the fence are irreparable loss of the farmers. The parliamentarians also thought of such condition (para 4.1.2.). But such issues were not considered by the heads of the governments.

Banglar Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM) strongly urges before the MHA, GOI and Govt WB to think about those people.

Kirity Roy, Secretary, MASUM
Halt Bulldozer Rampage

Hundreds of slum dwellers from 13 slums and Jhuggi Jhopdi (JJ) clusters

across the capital gathered on Sunday [August 10] at HK Surjeet Bhawan, Delhi, for a mass convention on housing rights. The convention, held under the banner of the *Awaas Adhikar Jan Andolan* (People's Movement for Housing Rights), gave a final warning to the BJP government to immediately stop the bulldozer rampage on the homes of the working class.

Over the past several months, the capital has witnessed a continuous spate of demolitions, displacing thousands of working-class families who toil daily to keep the city running. Government agencies have branded slum dwellers' homes as "unauthorised" or "illegal," even as official data shows that more than 73% of Delhi's residents live in unauthorised colonies. Instead of ensuring dignified housing with basic civic amenities such as water supply, toilets, sewage lines, and roads, the "triple engine" BJP government has continued to unleash bulldozer action.

Residents of colonies that have either faced demolitions or resisted legally—including Wazirpur, Indira Camp, Dhobighat, Madras Camp, Bhumiheen Camp, Jai Hind Camp, and Lal Bagh—participated in the convention.

Bibi Akhtari from Dhobighat said, "We constantly live under the threat of bulldozer action by the DDA. A flyover is being constructed on the Yamuna floodplain, but the poor appear to be a problem for the government."

Shreya from Jai Hind Camp highlighted the dire conditions: "Residents have been living without electricity for more than a month now in this humid Delhi heat. In 2025, thousands of slum dwellers in South Delhi are being punished for being Bengali-speaking workers."

Speaking at the convention, Sucheta De of CPI (ML) said, "From bulldozer action to vote-chori through

SIR, the BJP Government has unleashed an all-out attack on the citizenship rights of Indians. The collective strength of slum dwellers in Delhi will guarantee that all slums and JJ clusters are brought under the protection of law."

The event was jointly organized by CPI(ML) Liberation, CPI, CPI(M), RSP, Forward Bloc, and CGPI, who pledged to intensify the struggle until dignified housing rights are ensured for all slum dwellers of Delhi.

ML Update

Israel suspended from IOAA

By a significant majority, the Board of International Olympiad on Astronomy and Astrophysics (IOAA) voted to suspend Israel from the Olympiad. From next year, Israel will not be recognised as an official national team although students from Israel can participate as individuals.

This is a tiny victory towards the larger objective of halting the genocide in Gaza and ending the occupation in Palestine. It is a significant one, and hopefully it will set a precedent for other Olympiads and scientific and cultural events.

The Olympiads are seen as significant in Israel. So everybody hopes that this will convey a message to the Israeli government and society: the world is outraged by what is happening in Palestine, and Israel must immediately change its behaviour.

Peace-loving people around the world greatly appreciate the president of the IOAA, Prof Aniket Sule, for his integrity and commitment to democratic values and for placing the letter written by concerned citizens before the board for an open discussion and vote.

Suvrat Raju

For Frontier Contact
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GERMINAL BOOKS

The Age of Rage and Rebellion Fifty Years After The Spring Thunder [A Frontier Anthology]

Edited by : Timir Basu & Tarun Basu
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