

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

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Editor: **TIMIR BASU**

Assistant Editor: **Subhasis Mukherjee**

Recognition and After

THE 80TH ANNUAL UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY (UNGA) held in the last week of September in New York City, created a lot of fireworks as more than 140 world leaders discussed the day's biggest geopolitical flash points. The crucial issue was, however, Palestine, rather recognition of Palestine by more than 145 nations. Then Australia, Canada, Portugal and the UK were the notable backers of a Palestine state. And closely Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Malta and San Marino followed the suit. "The statehood for Palestine is a right, not a reward". That was UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres. But this western recognition is an exercise in escapism. They are unlikely to force UN to implement their will. Then there is a little bit of hypocrisy. While recognising Palestine Britain continues to supply weapons to Israel so that destruction of Gaza goes on unabated.

Set in motion by the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the British Mandate for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine was finally approved by the Council of the League of Nations and came into force on September 29, 1923. And the bloody campaign continues with no hope of amicable solution.

The idea of two-state solution as envisaged in the Oslo Accords of 1993 is again gaining currency. France and Saudi Arabia that are now trying to seek resolution of the Palestine conflict through the framework of Oslo Accords, strongly presented their case before the UN General Assembly. In truth Paris and Riyadh gave the two-state solution a life-line in July by proposing the New York Declaration which calls for a "just, peaceful and lasting settlement of the Israeli- Palestinian conflict based on the implementation of the two-state solution". Then the UN General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration by a wide margin on September 12.

No doubt recognising a Palestinian state, particularly by a dozen of European countries, in defiance of Israel and the United States, is likely to boost morale for those who are fighting for justice for decades, it is largely seen as a symbolic gesture that will do little to deliver much-needed change on the ground, where Gaza is experiencing a catastrophic humanitarian crisis and the West Bank is seeing a sharp rise in Jewish settler attacks against Palestinians and increased Israeli military raids among other challenges.

The problem is Israel vowed to never recognise a Palestinian state. Both

Pearl F

Israel and the United States boycotted two-state solution meeting held at the sidelines of UNGNA summit. Meanwhile, Israeli officials have warned that recognising Palestine could lead to retribution measures, including annexing new parts of the West Bank. Despite international condemnation, Netanyahu forcefully rejected all criticisms during his address to the UN General Assembly. Before Israeli Prime Minister could begin his speech on September 26, representatives from dozens of na-

tions walked out of the hall in protest. But this type of passive resistance to Israel's genocidal action in Gaza cannot advance the Palestinian cause further.

Israel's genocidal war must be opposed on all fronts. And only workers in armament industry in Europe and America can do it by stopping supply of weapons to Israel. But that is not happening as most workers are under the sway of right-wing forces. Amidst a hopeless situation emerged a glimmer of hope

when Italian dock workers threatened Israel cargo ban. No government is bothered about stopping the genocide and mass starvation being implemented by the Israel-USA-UK axis. Workers are quite capable of confronting these criminal establishments and coming to the aid of the helpless people of Gaza. In the wake of the Israeli navy's attack on the Sumud Flotilla, dock workers have started to block Israeli ships in Genoa and Livorno, Italy—to stop Israel's war machine. □□□ 03-10-2025

COMMENT

Stop World War III

WHEN DID WORLD WAR II begin? With the German attack on Poland on September 1, 1939? With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941? In 1936 with the Nazi-Fascist intervention to crush the Spanish Revolution? Or in 1931 with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria?

No one, especially in the historical phases of asymmetric and hybrid wars, will declare the Third World War. The exponential increase in military spending at every latitude is proof that a large-scale conflict is approaching.

The war in Ukraine has a world-historical importance because it is de facto a war in which Russia finds itself fighting not only against the powerful Ukrainian army but also against the entire NATO bloc that supports Kiev—in the times of the USSR this massive confrontation only occurred in 1950-53 during the bloody Korean conflict. In Ukraine, Russia is not only waging an existential war, it is acting as an anti-imperialist obstacle, it is deferring and hindering Western imperialist revanchism. A real peace in Ukraine would be possible on condition that the Collective West or what they call 'Coalition of the

Willing' renounces its hegemonistic aims; this seems unlikely.

This is demonstrated by the arrogance with which the strongest Western European countries (the "willing"), in contrast to the seemingly Pontius Pilate-like attitude of Trump's America, keep the war and their puppet Zelensky alive, continuing to arm and finance him and even planning to provide him with eternal and unconditional support. They refuse to rule out a future large-scale European war. This explains the major rearmament plan decided by the European Union, approved despite much public opinion and some countries' opposition. The rearmament plan, which implies the adoption of austerity social policies, could trigger a major cycle of popular struggles, which anti-imperialists must support by all means, with the aim of dissolving the European Union. Such a result would restore the countries' national sovereignty.

It is wrong to place trust in the US administration to end the war. Trumpism, despite the heterogeneity of the MAGA social base, corresponds to the gesture of someone who needs to take a breather to start running again. North American im-

perialism takes one step back to take two steps forward. This is simply imperialist cunning. This explains both the tariff policy to end globalisation based on free trade, and the willingness to make an accommodation with Putin's Russia in the hope of detaching it from China, in view of the anticipated decisive clash with Beijing. The infallible proof of the irreducible imperialist nature of Trumpism is its unconditional support for the ultra-Zionist regime of Israel, its ignoble support for its genocidal war in Gaza and the final annexation of the West Bank, and its aggression against Iran—which, despite being left on its own even by those who declare themselves its allies, has responded courageously by striking Israel deeply.

In this implacable context, the tenacious battle being waged by the Palestinian Resistance and the people and government of Yemen are two factors of global historic significance, even more so given the serious blows suffered by the "Axis of Resistance" in Lebanon and Syria and the accommodating stance taken by Russia and China toward Israel. Palestine and Yemen demonstrate that with the support of the popular masses, the anti-imperialist torch can exist and endure. Only mass popular resistance can stop World War III. □□□

[Contributed]

NOTE

Generational Panic

Bhabani Shankar Nayak writes:

ACROSS THE WORLD, THE old guards continue to undermine and stigmatise youth by portraying them as *deviants, immoral, drug abusers, directionless, selfish, materialistic, loners, or criminals*. Such stereotypes are used to dismiss the everyday struggles and contributions of young people. Meanwhile, ruling and non-ruling elites, along with their paid intellectuals, reinforce this *generational panic*. They produce empiricist arguments that normalise stereotypes, for example by claiming that early-career workers and young people's jobs are most vulnerable to the rise of generative AI. However, these arguments oversimplify the issue with reductionist numbers. These empiricist and ruling class intellectuals fail to account for the real conditions of automation, and the structural biases embedded in technological development, and the socio-economic data that shape the working lives and career choices of young people in the age of digitalisation.

Geriatric voices often claim that moral decay among young people is the root cause of all their ailments and challenges, using this argument

to absolve patriarchal capitalism and its reactionary religious allies. In reality, these forces produce and deepen alienation, which leads to anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues among young people. Young people suffer under a system they neither created nor chose. So, the younger generation is not inherently at fault; they are victims of capitalist conditions imposed on them and reinforced by the old guards through customs, traditions, and family values, all of which are intertwined with different regimes of capitalism.

The empiricist arguments of the older generation against young people are not only rooted in logical fallacies but also in a wilful ignorance of history and a lack of understanding of the conditions in which young people live today. Despite the weight of capitalist and imperialist hegemony, young people hold on to their idealism and confront challenges in their own ways. It is young Ukrainians and young Russians who are sacrificed in the slaughterhouse of imperialist wars imposed upon them. It is young Israelis who resist their Zionist regime and fight for justice for Palestinians. Across the world—

in London, New York, Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Beijing, and Tokyo—countless young people march against war, Zionist occupation of Gaza, capitalist exploitation, and imperialism. Throughout history, it has been the youth who fought against colonialism, racism, apartheid, and gender injustice. It is young people who continue to research, create, and produce new knowledge for a radical and progressive transformation of their societies

Young people suffer under the weight of capitalist alienation, student debt, unemployment, hunger, and homelessness—and for those who do have a home, the burden of crushing mortgages and long working hours. They neither created these conditions of marginalisation nor chose to live under them; these conditions are imposed upon young to contain their youthful spirit. Yet, despite such hardships, they hold fast to the youthful essence and to universalistic values of sacrifice, solidarity, equality, freedom, and fraternity. In doing so, young people reject the reactionary values and the stagnant status quo upheld by the older generation.

The geriatric assault on young people must end to pave the way for a new society grounded in the collective values of equality, justice, liberty, and solidarity. □□□

OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE

Democracy: A Brief Overview

Dilip Hota

[Dilip Hota (79) passed away on August 12, 2025. Meanwhile, his friends and political co-workers organised two memorial meetings to remember his political activities. He wrote this article for *Nayee Umeed (New Hope)* journal, its first issue is only published in April 2025. Dilip was keenly associated with the efforts of OP Sinha and Naresh Kumar and others from Lucknow.]

IN HOMERIC TIMES, A GREAT number of City-States had emerged in Asia Minor and Mediterranean region. One such [region?] was Attica in Greece, with Athens as

its capital. Athens was not large, but it contained a growing population of artisans and skilled craftsmen who desired to dispose of their produce abroad. Also, gradually it was found

more profitable to cultivate vines and olive, rather than grain and import grain. This form of cultivation required more capital and small farmers got into debt. Like other Greek states, Attica had been a monarchy but the Government fell into the hands of Aristocracy which oppressed both the county farmers and urban artisans. A compromise in this direction of democracy was effected by Solon, himself an aristocrat, in order to contain the rising popular discontent.

Almost contemporaneously in the Buddhist Sangh (monastery), one finds a parallel example of self-rule/management, albeit of a limited and less political kind. These institutions were meticulous in their demands for their members to gather together in order to reach unanimous decisions of matters of general concern resorting to majority vote, only when consensus broke down. Such a radical practice was perhaps possible because of Buddha himself earlier belonging to a tribal confederation of chieftains which used to elect their kings (the head of the oligarchy) through such process.

Democracy comes from the Greek term—*Demokratia*. *Demos*—people; *kratos*—rule. In Athens, women (of all class) and slaves were not counted as *Demos* (people), and only 6% of the Athenians constituted as people eligible to rule. In other words, the Athenian democracy omitted most Athenians.

It is evident that everything depends on the senses given to people and to rule. The ascribed meaning in democracy, ranging from “obeying no master, but the law” (Solon) to “of the people, by the people, for the people,” including “a democracy is a state where the freemen and the poor, being in the majority are invested with the power of the state.” (Aristotle).

“Rule” was no less ambiguous whether democracy was a state in which all had the right to and actually did rule, or a state in which there is rule by the representatives, including elected representatives. It was in the former sense that the first political constitution that of Rhode Island in 1641 (America) had understood “popular government” (democracy) —“it is in the power of body of freemen orders”, assembled or a major parts of them, “to make or constitute just laws, by which they will be regulated and the deputies from among themselves, such minis-

ters as such ministers as shall see them faithfully executed between man and man.”

As has been mentioned, interaction of the ‘people’ is as equally vital as in defining democracy. There is some significant history in various attempts to ‘limit the people’, to certain quantified groups: freemen, owners of properties, the wise, white men and so on. Where democracy was defined by a process of election, such limited constituency is claimed to be fully ‘democratic’: the mode of choosing representatives is taken [to be] more important than the ‘proportion of the people’, who have any part in this. The development of democracy is traced through institution using this mode, rather than through the relation between all people and form of government. This is the orthodox interpretation of account for the development of British democracy—where the democracy is said to have ‘been extended stage by stage.’ What is clearly meant by this is the right to vote for the representatives, rather than the sense of popular power. This distinction became critical in the period of French revolution. Burke was expressing an orthodox view when he wrote that ‘a perfect democracy’ was the ‘most shameful thing in the world’, for democracy was ‘taken to be uncontrolled’ popular power under which, among other things, substantial paupers would be suppressed or oppressed. From this point, two other more modern meanings of democracy can be seen to diverge.

In the socialist tradition, democracy continues to mean popular power, a state in which the interest of the majority people were paramount and in which these interests were practically exercised and controlled by the majority. In the liberal tradition (bourgeois) democracy, meant open election and political argument and certain conditions

(such as democratic rights, free speech and free press) which maintained the openness of the election and political arguments and debates. These two conceptions, in their extreme forms, now confront each other as enemies.

If the predominant criterion is popular power in the popular interest, other criteria as often taken as secondary (as in the people’s democracies) as their emphasis were specialised to ‘capitalist democracy’ or ‘bourgeois democracy’. If the predominant criteria are election and free speech, other criteria are seen as secondary or are rejected as attempt to exercise popular power in the popular interests, for example, a General Strike is described as anti-democratic, since the democracy has already been assured by other means; to claim economic EQUALITY as the essence of democracy is seen as ‘leading to chaos’ or ‘totalitarian democracy’, or government by ‘trade union’.

There are two further senses to ‘democracy’ as an adjective. This is the use of ‘democratic’ to describe the conditions of open arguments, without necessary reference to elections or power. In one, freedom of speech and the assembly are the democratic rights, sufficient in themselves, without reference to the institutions or character of political power. This sense is derived for the liberal bourgeoisie which often opposes sustained democratic activities. There is also a derived sense of class reference; to be democratic, to have democratic feelings is to be unconscious of class distinctions or concerns, to disregard or overcome them in everyday behaviour; acting as if all people are equal and deserved equal respect, whether it is really so or not.

Thus a man might be in ‘natural’ terms with everyone he met and simply further believe in free speech and free assembly, yet only following only in this senses could for example, oppose universal suffrage. □□□

T VIJAYENDRA [1943-2025]

'The Cyclist is No More'

[T Vijayendra [82], a long-time associate of Frontier is no more. He was a shareholder of Germinal Publications Pvt Ltd, the owner of Frontier. For some time he was a director of 'Germinal'. He passed away on September 9, 2025. It was a great shocking news to his innumerable friends and well-wishers across the country. Many failed to express their feelings and some reflected passionately on universally admired Viju.

His association with the Naxalite Group 'National Liberation and Democratic Front' in Kolkata didn't get much currency. This group had serious ideological differences with the mainstream CPI-M, on a number of issues including principal contradiction, mode of production, tactical line, proletarian internationalism and CPC and mass organisation.

Vijayendra was a prolific writer. Most of his political and thought-provoking articles were published in Frontier, mainly in Autumn Numbers. Even in the Autumn Number 2025, there is a fine piece by Viju on 'Collapse of Capitalism'. It's titled 'A Glimmer of Hope'. He used to dream of a world free from capitalist exploitation.

We publish below some of the reflections made by his friends.—Fr]

SORRY TO CONVEY THE news of passing away of our friend Vijayendra yesterday [Sept 9] afternoon. Just the previous day he was taken to Sangatya farm (a commune) in Karkala from his nephew's place in Honnali. He happily met his end in the company of two of his closest friends. He was buried in the farm and a jackfruit tree has been planted. Messages from huge number of friends of Vijayendra had made are pouring in. He had his faults but he was a great soul with lot of wisdom. His hope and optimism inspired many a young.

Dileep Kamat [10-9-25]

Just when we were remembering Two brave Souls, Dilip Hota and Sher Singh this last Sunday [September 7], another heartrending news.

The ever mirthful T Vijayendra has seen everything on this mother Earth and his final shelter is to *her only*. i came to know the sad demise of

Viju Ji from the email of Dileep Kamat, Belagavi this morning [September 10]

Viju Ji was a regular contributor to *Countercurrents*. He participated off and on in Marx Forum discussions.

Like many of his generation, his baptism in revolutionary politics was through the fire of imagination from

NAXALBARI. Viju Ji graduated from IIT Kharagpur in Electronics Engineering, possibly in 1968. He was in Kolkata in those turbulent days of 'revolution in the air' of Kolkata.

Arun Kumar Sinha

It is difficult to think that Viju is no longer among the living. Of course he lives in our memories (he had a great sense of humour) and in his writings, but we will painfully miss him. His campaign to promote bicycles as a viable means of transport was ecologically very relevant, but was not taken forward with the required energy. We are all outwitted by ruthless motorbikes. His publication of popularising materials on Marxism and on ecology will be remembered, appreciated and hopefully be put into practice by younger generations. We are very sad now, but we remember how much we laughed together. In solidarity,

Gabriele Dietrich

Very sad news indeed! He was an open minded, bold, creative, very intelligent, widely read Marxist who tried to go beyond traditional Marxism in theory and practice.

Red salute to Vijayendra!

Anant Phadke

Very sad news. Our condolences and thoughts are with the friends and family. Who is in their house?

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No personal information is available. But ending it in the dirt is not a good decision for a comrade.

Vinaya Datta

A few days ago Dileep [Kamat] had briefed us about his last days, that had already made us anxious and very concerned. Losing such creative comrades at this moment is a great loss to all of us.

Datta Desai

I spoke with him a couple of times when Dilip [Hota] was not well and kept him updated. Another brave soul!

Ann, Pune

Another sad news [after Dilip Hota]. Biju just passed away in his sleep.

Ranjan Ghosh,

Jan Chetna Manch, Bokaro

My Heart-felt Condolences.

Dr Ram Puniyani

[I] had met him in person perhaps only once—most likely in 2007 December in Bombay. Or maybe twice. Yet, it feels like we were quite known to each other. In fact, I had been sort of familiar with him since. Well, before happening to actually met

him. In terms of age, slightly senior to me. A very earnest and lively person. He was deeply engaged with the issue of ecology. He lived a life in accordance with his ecological philosophy. That's how he was opted to go back to the embrace of "Mother Earth". So, yet another friend and comrade gone.

Sukla Sen

Death is part of life. In the past 4 months Viju's condition went from bad to worse and he was wishing for death so much that one couldn't but join and wish it for him. That in his last moments he was in a place where he has often lived long stretches, written some of his books and was among friends and that he passed peacefully and was buried in Sangatiya... feel like great blessings.

Usha Rao

Esther, Usha S, Mohit, Murali, Shantha, Bhagya, Suresh, Priyanka, Rukmini, Saranga, & I met this evening [10-09-25] and shared our thoughts & feelings about Viju for 3 hrs. People talked about how they first met Viju, his multi-faceted talents, his outrageous bluffs, & the many hilarious moments with him. The evening was very lively & lovely. Outrageous bluffs, yes! That was quintessential Viju.

Sagar Dhara

I'm failing to accept Viju da's absence. It's painful to me. Days back I recollected his works as I saw ad of his book in Frontier. A sorrow has cast shadow in me. Within a short time we turned close, and we're exchanging ideas. He was always active, full of life and activities, and building up a new generation. I had a desire of visiting him. My deep condolence. Please, convey my feelings to family, to his dear and close persons, and if possible, to the young learners he was building up to carry on his work with ecology and environment, for humanity.

Yes, to me, it's a grave tragedy.

I feel—I have lost a friend, a person honest and simple.

I feel the editor of Frontier should write a piece on Vijayendra—the person, the Kolkata of '70s and activism of that turbulent period and with this at least something of the Naxalite group he belonged to—dream, efforts, hardships, sacrifices of those brave souls. These will be raw material for some future historian composing people's struggle.

Farooque Chowdhury, Dhaka

Sorry to hear about Viju's passing away. The last time I met him was a year or so ago, when one day he dropped in at my house in Hyderabad, and we chatted about old times and discussed current politics.

One by one, all my friends are passing away, some of them much younger than me. I am 89, and I am still surviving, like an old Yaksha sitting over a chest of treasures, preserving memories of old friends.

Congratulations on your achievement in carrying on the legacy of Samar Sen, and bringing out Frontier regularly.

Sumanta Banerjee

A good man, a good life and now a good death (Viju passes away in his sleep). I met him first in 1983 when he came to Dalli Rajhara. He was extremely well read, and always willing to share. I wanted to build a toilet. He told me about Bindeshwar Pathak and the Sulabh movement. With that I was able to construct a toilet seat with my own hands, and fix up a toilet in a worker's quarter. A man with varied interests. He first told me about Anton Makarenko—the famous Soviet Educator. Also about a Letter to a Teacher—the school of Barbiana started by Father Don Milani. I learnt a great deal from Viju. I will always remain indebted to him.

Viju introduced me to many wonderful people, because he himself was a wonderful person. Once I

went to meet him in his Barsati in Saket, New Delhi. And look who was there—Mahaswetadevi! After food she said that she wanted to go to the National Book Trust for governing body meeting. I told her that I lived in SDA very close to NBT, Green Park and could easily drop her. The sprightly Mahaswetadevi hopped pillion on my scooter and I dropped her to NBT.

Arvind Gupta

**Remembering T Vijayendra
(1943–2025)**

Sagar Dhara

Every generation produces a few individuals who live so closely to their convictions that their entire life becomes a testament to thought and action in perfect sync. T Vijayendra was one of them.

A social thinker, political commentator, and ecologist, he leaves behind not only his writings on Marxism, ecology, and people's struggles but also his lived example of simplicity, natural farming, and unwavering integrity.

An IIT graduate of the 1960s, Vijayendra could easily have made his way into the nation's nuclear or engineering establishments. Instead, he chose a very different path—a life of questioning, teaching, organising, and living gently on the earth.

That conscious choice defined him, and it set him apart from many of his contemporaries who pursued conventional routes of professional success. For him, the worth of an education lay not in personal gain but in how it could illuminate people's struggles and strengthen the search for justice.

I had the privilege of knowing Vijayendra since the 1970s. Our friendship was built not on occasions but on habits—when I visited Hyderabad, our plan was already fixed. The venue was known, the menu unchanging, and I never planned anything else for that after-

noon. Those lunches were nothing short of rituals, conversations flowing across politics, literature, movements, and life itself.

Our association grew deeper when, from Patna, he wrote urging me to publish *Where There is No Doctor*. It was not just advice but an act of comradeship—grounded in his conviction that people must have access to knowledge that improves their lives. Later, when he joined me at VHAI as a colleague, I discovered that he was more than a collaborator: he was a wellspring of thought, always pushing me forward by reminding me of the books I should have read but hadn't yet.

Vijayendra's intellectual rigor was inseparable from his ethical lifestyle. He didn't just argue for ecological sustainability—he lived it. He cycled rather than drove, planted rather than preached, and practiced natural farming with devotion. What made him extraordinary was his refusal to separate ideas from action.

For me, Vijayendra was not only a thinker but a friend whose presence enriched the common afternoons we shared. His ability to converse across disciplines, his wide reading, and his gentle humour reminded me that true companionship rests as much on silences as on words.

As we bid farewell to T. Vijayendra, we do not merely mourn the loss of a scholar and activist. We celebrate a life that stood as an example: a brilliant mind that could have been a scientist steering machines of power, but chose instead to walk alongside people, grow food with his own hands, and live simply so others could also live.

**T Vijayendra
Sajai Jose**

T Vijayendra, veteran activist, trade unionist passed away on 9th September, 2025 at Sangatya Commune in Karkala, Karnataka. He was 82.

A Mysore-born Kannadiga who grew up in Indore, Vijayendra joined IIT Kharagpur in 1961. Having completed his engineering course, he worked briefly at the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics around which time he was pulled into the swirl of radical left politics that was sweeping the country at the time.

As a young activist, he ended up working closely with several movements and causes in the period that followed, including Shankar Guha Niyogi's Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh (CMSS) in Chhattisgarh, and the fight for justice by the Bhopal gas victims. He was one of the many professionals from prestigious universities and colleges across the country who were drawn to Niyogi's vision of 'Sangharsh aur Nirman', that is, 'Struggle and Build'. His close associates and friends from the time include such highly regarded names as Dr Binayak Sen and his wife Dr Ilina Sen, Dr Asheesh Kundu, Dr Punayabrat Gun, Dr Shaibal Jana, Sudha Bharadwaj, lawyer and IIT Kanpur alumni, Vidyadhar Gadgil and his wife, Mariette Correa, of TISS, Bombay, Arvind Gupta of IIT Kanpur, the trade union journalist, Sitaram Shastri, and the educationist Dr Anil Sadgopal. Later he developed close personal friendships with the writer Mahashweta Devi and the activist Aruna Roy.

While in Bhopal in the late 80s, he along with friends like Lorry Benjamin of the Friends Rural Centre in Hoshangabad, helped found the Sir Albert Howard Memorial Trust (SAHMET). Sir Albert Howard was a Raj-era agricultural scientist who spent many years in India in the 1940s, who is regarded as 'the father of organic farming', and it is this method that the Trust sought to popularise, at a time when most people in India were not even familiar with the concept.

Another Raj-era figure whose

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ideas he sought to popularise was the Scottish sociologist and polymath Patrick Geddes, and a pioneer in people centric urban planning and regional planning. Joining hands with the late K K S Murthy of Select Books in Bangalore, he was instrumental in reviving the conversation around Geddes' ideas when he took the initiative to reprint the volume Patrick Geddes in India.

This readiness to engage with unconventional ideas remained with Vijayendra throughout his life, as his later involvements amply revealed. While he started as a Marxist, and remained a loyal left-winger throughout, he always stayed open to the ebb and flow of history and the constant changes that the political discourse underwent. Describing himself in his typically lighthearted manner as "some kind of political-social activist" throughout his life, his self-declared brief for himself was activist education, specifically "the education of Left wing cadres" for which reason he almost exclusively published his writings in non mainstream publications like *Frontier*, published from Kolkata, and *Countercurrents.org*.

In the later years of his life, he was very much concerned with the structural global crises that have been building up over the decades, particularly that of shrinking resources and the ever worsening conditions of the natural world which he foresaw as bringing about an inevitable end to the fossil fuel driven industrial world of mega-consumption and excess that people inhabit today. His efforts in this area were not confined to raising awareness about these issues through his writings, but also practical initiatives such as the Transition Town experiment in Kinwat, Maharashtra undertaken with a young colleague Yogesh, the series of camps conducted as part of the Ecologise collective in different parts of Karnataka, the attempts to bring back the bicycle as a sustainable mode of transport undertaken as part of Ecologise Hyderabad, and so on. He was also a moving spirit behind such pioneering political initiatives in this area such as the pan-India Platform for Sustainability in Bangalore, and later, the South Asia People's Action on Climate Crisis (SAPACC), a South

Asia wide rainbow coalition of organisations which for the first time managed to bring together trade unions and environmental activist groups under a single umbrella for climate action.

Marxist that he was, an anarchist streak ran through his spirit, which was palpable to all those who interacted with him and read his exuberant writings, which ranged from the origins of Indian languages (A fluent speaker of Hindi, English, Marathi and Bengali, he was very much interested in the history and evolution of languages) to classical music, to long forgotten but vitally important thinkers, to humorous and edifying fictional stories featuring his real life friends and unusual themes which he nevertheless linked to his political imagination.

Ultimately, what will endure in his legacy is his sizeable body of published work. His political writings were a guiding light for many activists who were too caught up with their everyday struggles to pay attention to larger issues. □□□

[*Countercurrents.org*. Sajai Jose is an independent journalist, abridged]

A BRIEF NOTE ON NEPAL

A Potential Future Revealed itself in the Present

Arup Baisya

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE left and revolutionaries in Nepal over the past two decades can be likened to characters from Greek mythology. The resigned Prime Minister, Mr Oli, along with his left-revolutionary predecessors, resembles Phaethon, the son of the Sun God, Helios. Phaethon claims the privilege of driving his father's chariot, and after much insistence, the Sun God finally agrees. However, once in control, Phaethon loses his grip on the chariot. As a result, the sun veers off course, scorching

the earth, killing countless beings, and threatening to incinerate the planet. In response, Zeus intervenes and strikes Phaethon with a thunderbolt. Similarly, the leftists and revolutionaries found themselves in control of the bourgeois state but ultimately lost control of it. In their efforts to preserve the state, the bourgeoisie risked harming the people. However, a popular uprising illuminated a path to save Nepal as a nation.

Following the conclusion of the second uprising in 2006, which en-

abled left-revolutionary leaders to take control of the Nepalese state, they became intensely focused on reconstructing civilisational democracy within a modern framework through the devolution of power. In doing so, they overlooked the fact that they were governing a bourgeois state.

During the Lichhavi period in Nepal, there was a certain degree of decentralisation in governance. According to Regmi (1996), the governance structure comprised three levels: the central government, village committees (Gram), and blocks (Tol). Local self-governance was practised at the village level, where a chief known as Talukdar Adhikari, or 'Talaswami,' was appointed. Before the unification of Nepal in 1769, the

region was composed of various small principalities, each functioning autonomously. Following unification, these principalities were integrated, leading to a more centralized political system. However, the central government did not interfere with some local socio-cultural practices. For instance, the Kipat system allowed the Limbu community in the eastern hill region to maintain authority over their land. In contrast, the Rana regime, which ruled Nepal for 104 years, was largely autocratic and heavily emphasised centralisation, focusing on family control within the government.

Since 1990, various social and political movements in Nepal have advocated for state restructuring to address diversity and development at the local level of governance. Key movements include the Maoist insurgency (1996-2006), the Second People's Movement (2006), and the Madhesh Movement (2007). Following the Second People's Movement in 2006, Nepal adopted a federal political system as outlined in the Interim Constitution of 2007.

The Constitution of Nepal, ratified in 2015, grants specific powers and responsibilities to the federal government, the provinces, and local authorities, thereby establishing local governance. The development of this democratic constitution is seen as a significant achievement of leftist and revolutionary movements. Federalism was formally institutionalised in 2015 to embrace Nepal's diversity and promote development in sub-national regions. The rationale for federalisation in Nepal can be understood from three perspectives: first, the nation's social and cultural diversity; second, the need for inclusive development; and third, the importance of decentralisation, devolution of power, and autonomy (Sharma, 2014, p. 101). Under this federal political structure, governance

in Nepal occurs at three levels: federal (central), provincial, and local.

The left remained oblivious to the fact that they were operating within a bourgeois state that is an integral part of the global exploitative capitalist system. This system can undermine any constitutional democracy, perpetuating and exacerbating exploitation for the sake of capitalist profit and accumulation. As a result, leftist leaders and their rank-and-file became accustomed to benefiting from state resources. The dominance of financial capital in the economy and bureaucratic control over state operations have eroded the achievements of constitutional democracy and the devolution of power.

The merger between the standing army and the people's militia has preserved the standing army's structure while effectively dissolving the people's militia, thereby weakening public power in relation to the state. Since liberalisation began in 1984, the banking system has been left to market forces for course correction. The inevitable outcome of this scenario is an increase in inequality and a glaring display of wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, who continue to benefit from state resources.

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) team, led by Ms Sarwat Jahan, visited Kathmandu from May 26 to June 10, 2025. Following constructive discussions, Ms. Jahan issued a statement at the end of the mission: "The Nepali authorities and IMF staff reached a staff-level agreement on the policies and reforms necessary to complete the sixth review under the Extended Credit Facility (ECF). This agreement is subject to approval by the IMF's Executive Board. Upon the completion of the Executive Board Review, Nepal would gain access to SDR 31.4 million (approximately US\$ 42.7 million), bringing the total IMF financial sup-

port disbursed under the ECF to SDR 251.1 million (around US\$ 331.8 million) out of a total of SDR 282.4 million."

The IMF team conducted meetings with several key officials, including the Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, Mr Bishnu Prasad Paudel; the Vice-Chairman of the National Planning Commission, Dr Shiva Raj Adhikari; and the Governor of the Nepal Rastra Bank, Dr Biswo Nath Poudel. Additionally, the team engaged with other senior government and central bank officials. The IMF representatives also met with stakeholders from the private sector, think tanks, and development partners.

Nepal's debt burden is growing rapidly, with the public debt-to-GDP ratio reaching approximately 43.5% as of mid-June 2025, the highest level in 18 years. The country faces a significant challenge in balancing borrowing and repayment, as debt servicing now consumes a large portion of the national budget. Factors contributing to this rise include the depreciation of the Nepali rupee against the US dollar, increased borrowing for infrastructure projects and post-disaster recovery efforts, as well as slower-than-expected progress on capital projects.

The contribution of the agricultural sector to GDP is gradually declining. The contribution of this sector to GDP was 72 percent in FY 1976. Over the last 28 years, the annual average share of the agriculture sector in GDP has remained at 52 percent. The contribution of the non-agricultural sector to GDP is increasing. The share of the non-agricultural sector in GDP increased to 61 percent in FY 2003 from 28 percent in FY 1976.

The new constitutional state has not abandoned the export-led growth model; thus, the growth rate of imports is higher than that of exports,

resulting in an increased negative trade balance and deepening the balance of payment crisis. The left-ruled state has not even considered imposing strong regulatory mechanisms on the financial sector to ensure that Banks are compelled to use their capital for local employment generation and reducing inequality. Instead, the manner in which monetary policy is conducted has a direct impact on the financial sector. After the full liberalisation of interest rates and the elimination of credit ceilings, the monetary policy stance has shifted from direct to indirect. Under the indirect monetary policy stance, there is no direct control on the price or interest, as well as on the volume of loans of commercial banks. Market behaviour is aligned through the use of indirect monetary policy instruments such as bank rate, cash reserve requirement, and open market operations.

The recent uprising associated with Gen Z (A bourgeois ill-defined terminology) in Nepal highlights deeper structural issues within the country. Nepal's economic growth has relied heavily on remittances rather than on domestic investments that could create dignified jobs. In the fiscal year 2024/25, the Department of Foreign Employment issued 839,266 labour exit permits, reflecting a staggering level of out-migra-

tion for a nation of approximately 30 million people. Remittances accounted for around 33% of the GDP in 2024, which is among the highest ratios globally. These figures indicate a struggle for survival rather than genuine social progress; they represent a model that exports its youth to low-wage jobs while importing basic necessities and relies on patronage over productivity.

Similarly, there has been a significant rise in the number of migrant and platform workers throughout Nepal, particularly in Kathmandu and other cities. Many of these individuals are engaged in platform work and face various challenges, including job insecurity, financial exploitation, severe health risks (both physical and mental), occupational hazards, and social disruptions within Nepal. It can be tempting to frame this situation as merely a conflict over digital freedoms. However, this perspective lacks depth. For many Gen Z Nepalis, digital platforms serve not only as sources of entertainment but also as job portals, news channels, organising tools, and vital social connections. Shutting down these platforms—after years of economic stagnation—felt like a form of collective punishment.

This is why the ban sparked such a rapid response. With youth unemployment already high at 20.82% in 2024, frequent changes in government officials, and widespread corruption scandals, efforts to regulate the digital space appeared less like efforts to create order and more like acts of humiliation. The movement took a fast, horizontal, and cross-class form, bringing together students in uniform, unemployed graduates, gig workers, informal workers, and a broader disillusioned public who shared a common discontent with the government's mismanagement.

The immediate trigger for the unrest was a regulatory decision: the

government mandated that 26 major social media platforms must register locally and began blocking those that did not comply, including Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X, among others. Crowds gathered at Parliament in response; the police responded with tear gas, rubber bullets, and, in some areas, live ammunition. By the evening of September 9, at least 19 people had lost their lives, and over 300 were injured. Faced with mounting pressure, the government lifted the ban on social media, and Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli resigned.

The grievance was not solely rooted in the digital realm. Protest signs and chants focused on issues of corruption, elite impunity, and the lack of a credible development plan. Kathmandu is on edge, not because of technology, but because a generation that grew up with the promise of democracy and opportunity is facing an economy and political system that continues to close doors at every turn.

The South Asian left often overlooks the role of the toiling masses in various uprisings that have occurred across different geographical areas. They also tend to neglect the students' community from a class perspective, failing to recognise that while students may lack a class base, they do possess a class origin. Students may protest due to disillusionment and systemic anxiety, but true uprisings happen when the demands of the working masses transform into a collective desire in a moment of inspiration. In both Bangladesh and Nepal, student protests have galvanised the toiling masses to unite, leading to uprisings. In these cases, the leaders and the ruling parties faltered.

During the uprising in Bangladesh, the toiling masses were primarily rural and Masjid-centric, aligning themselves with the

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Madrassa-centric section of students. This alliance wreaked havoc on Hasina's autocratic police state, as they attacked police stations, weakening one of the state's coercive powers. If this dynamic had not developed, Hasina might have been able to suppress the student movement and avoid fleeing to India.

In this context, Jamaat may find it advantageous to expand its modern Islamic fundamentalist influence within Bangladesh's politics by bridging the gap between the elite student class and the Masjid and Madrassa-

centric toiling masses. However, the uprising has similarly created space for the left to promote their political ideology of radical societal change, driven by the once-subdued and now active toiling masses.

In Nepal, the combination of students and new urban workers conveyed a symbolic message of a future they may not fully grasp; they rejected both the current state of affairs and the past reactionary elements still exerting influence in the present. Foreign players connected to capital, including finance capital,

IMF loans, and Chinese investments in infrastructure and mining, are likely to conspire with domestic reactionaries.

But it is puzzling why the left and revolutionaries should lament this situation instead of diligently working to construct an alternative vision in an objective landscape where workers and students are actively mobilising toward working-class emancipation and the seizure of power to dismantle financial and bureaucratic control of the state, thereby establishing people's control. □□□

BENEATH THE SURFACE

West Bengal—the Showcase of “Franchise Model”

Shamayita Sen

WEST BENGAL'S (WB) political landscape is at a critical juncture. The systematic decline of the Left in opposition role has created a political vacuum, fundamentally reshaping the state's power dynamics. Into this chasm has stepped the Hindu Right, with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerging as the principal adversary to the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC). As the state prepares for another fierce Assembly election in 2026, the rivalry between these two party forces have intensified over a few burning political questions.

Political scientist Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya has characterised the political modus operandi of the TMC in WB as a “franchise model.” This framework, as articulated by Bhattacharyya, posits that the party, under the overarching brand of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, operates through a network of local leaders who function as semi-autonomous “franchisees.” These leaders leverage the party's political power and Banerjee's personal appeal to establish and run their own domains of

influence and, in many cases, “unregulated businesses.”

At the core of this model is the centralised authority of Mamata Banerjee, who acts as the franchiser. Her image and political capital form the brand that the local leaders, or “franchisees,” utilise. In return for their allegiance and their ability to mobilise votes and control their respective areas, these local strongmen are afforded a considerable degree of autonomy to manage local affairs. This includes the distribution of patronage and the control of economic activities.

In truth the BJP governance at the Union and state levels reveals striking parallels, as well as fundamental differences to this Franchise Model.

The most direct parallel lies in the cultivation of a supreme, charismatic leader whose personal brand becomes synonymous with the party and its government. Secondly, both TMC and BJP have successfully created a vast base of beneficiaries, fostering a sense of dependency and political loyalty. However, their meth-

ods of distribution differ. TMC's franchise model describes a decentralised system of patronage. Local “franchisee” leaders control economic activities ranging from syndicates to local contracts which includes the distribution of benefits like jobs, cash, and social welfare scheme access directly. This makes the local leader the immediate patron. The BJP has mastered a model of centralised welfare. Schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN), Ujjwala Yojana (LPG connections), and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (housing) deliver benefits directly to individuals, bypassing ‘corrupt’ state governments and local intermediaries. The credit for these schemes is attributed directly to the central leader, PM Modi, creating a large, national class of beneficiaries who are also called *Labharthis*. This direct benefit transfer model aims to create a direct line of loyalty between the voter and the central leadership. If these are the similarities, there are also differences.

Local TMC leaders are akin to entrepreneurs who run their own political and economic enterprises under the Party's umbrella. They enjoy significant autonomy in their day-to-day operations and in managing their local turf, as long as they deliver votes and remain loyal to the

top leadership. In the BJP's model, state and local leaders, including Chief Ministers and MPs, function more like centrally-vetted "branch managers" than autonomous "franchisees." The BJP's powerful central leadership, often referred to as the 'High Command,' maintains tight control over key decisions, from candidate selection to the appointment of Chief Ministers. While state leaders implement policy, the vision and direction are provided by a pair from the Centre. Their power is derived less from personal enterprise and more from their alignment with the central leadership's agenda.

The foundational structure of the two parties explains yet another difference in their operational models. The TMC is a personality-driven party with a loose, flexible organisation built around a network of loyalists. The BJP is built on the deep, disciplined, and ideological cadre base of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). This provides a rigid organisational spine that the TMC lacks. BJP is supported by an ideologically committed workforce. The "franchise" is not for local enterprise, but for the centrally-directed delivery of welfare and the amplification of a national narrative.

In this kind of a political dynamic, the electorate is the principal loser trapped between two disempowering systems: TMC's network of unaccountable local strongmen and the BJP's highly centralised machinery that diminishes regional autonomy.

II

In *For a Just Republic*, Partha Chatterjee sees the Indian capitalist economy as divided into three inter-related zones comprising of the core growth regions (such as Gujarat and Tamil Nadu), the resource-extracting regions (such as Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh), and the labour-supply-

ing regions (including West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh). While somewhat schematic, this tripartite division offers a useful heuristic to understand the spatial configuration of capital and labour in contemporary India. Most Indian states can be located at the intersection of these zones, depending on the temporality and structure of capitalist development within them.

Chatterjee's analysis of WB is particularly poignant. Once a leading industrial hub, Bengal has, over the decades, witnessed a gradual decline into a labour-exporting region. The collapse of traditional industries, combined with the withdrawal of state investment and the political economy of rent-seeking, has led to large-scale outmigration. While Chatterjee notes the emergence of a new entrepreneurial class, he remains sceptical about their transformative potential because these ventures remain individuated and lack the "stamp of social approval", mostly for their individuated motives.

This background offers a critical lens through which to examine the recent controversy surrounding the Bengali language. On the surface, the dispute appears to be cultural or linguistic (while important as lenses). However, seen through the deeper structural dynamics of WB's political economy, the controversy reveals more complex stakes. With agricultural incomes plummeting, industrial decline accelerating, and the informalisation of the labour market deepening, migration from Bengal has shifted from being largely seasonal to permanent. Migrant workers from the state, often poorly educated due to the crumbling public education infrastructure, overwhelmingly find themselves in the informal sector where legal protections are either minimal or absent.

It is in this context that the BJP's position needs to be interpreted. The party's vocal indifference (or at times

hostility) towards the Bengali language, as seen in statements by figures like Amit Malviya or the Delhi Police's insinuations about "Bangladeshi" language, are not mere linguistic slights. They are as much ideological manoeuvres to obscure deeper economic operations. The BJP does not merely oppose the Bengali language per se. Its strategy is to instrumentalise linguistic and religious anxieties to further marginalise an already precarious labouring population.

Crucially, Bengal, as a "labour-supplying region", competes with other such regions like Bihar, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh. All these states are currently under BJP or allied governments. WB remains the only significant labour-exporting state outside the BJP's political stronghold. This makes it both a site of contestation and a laboratory for ideological experimentation. The mobilisation around the Bangladeshi refugee issue and the communalisation of the Muslim identity are not isolated phenomena. They can be read as part of a larger strategy of discrediting the region's labour force by casting them as suspect—culturally, linguistically, and religiously.

While elite, upper-caste/class Bengalis often interpret these developments as an affront to their cultural identity, migrant labourers, many of whom are from backward castes and religious minorities, experience these attacks as part of a broader regime of economic marginalisation. A close reading of their testimonies reveals anxieties not just about language but about work, dignity, and survival. These migrants are often those engaged in non-specialized, replaceable forms of labour. Precisely the kind of workers most vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, and displacement.

Interestingly, in other regions of India, Bengali-speaking migrants who are engaged in specialised labour—be

it in skilled construction, tailoring, or service industries—face relatively fewer attacks. This distinction highlights the selective nature of exclusion. The logic is not merely ethno-linguistic but also economic: surplus, unskilled, informal workers are the ones primarily targeted. Occasional incidents of discrimination against upper-class Bengali professionals, such as denial of service at hotels, while problematic, are largely symbolic. They serve more as performative acts to veil the systematic exploitation and dispossession of poorer, working-class Bengali migrants.

The Bengali language controversy must therefore be situated within the broader transformation of WB into a labour-exporting zone within India's capitalist framework. The BJP's politics of linguistic and religious Othering are as much about culture as it is about consolidating control over a floating, mobile, and vulnerable labour force.

III

The rise of TMC has actively sharpened the fangs of communitarian politics in WB. While the public discourse is dominated by a monolithic "Bengali identity", beneath its surface, the most critical fault lines are no longer just about religion or language. They are about caste and community associations. This is the new currency of political negotiation, a deliberate fragmentation that serves the powerful.

The weaponisation of borders and the figure of the "Bangladeshi" can be seen in this context. The debate is maliciously framed as a simple binary: a minority Hindu from Bangladesh is a refugee deserving of a safe haven, while a Muslim is an infiltrator. This narrative is a dangerous oversimplification. It willfully ignores the complex reality of intersectionality. What place does this framework have for a Muslim from Bangladesh who may also be

fleeing oppression based on their caste, their indigenous Adivasi identity, or their dissenting political beliefs back home? Their identity is not singular; their experience of oppression is layered. Yet, here in WB, these crucial nuances are erased, and their entire existence is flattened into a single, 'threatening' religious identity by mostly the Hindu Right.

The core issue however is more insidious. This narrative, by artificially spotlighting the predicament of one community through a distorted lens, systematically downplays and delegitimises other; more politically potent subaltern affiliations. The grand, all-encompassing debate about "Bengalis" is an inevitable lure. It is a hegemonic project designed to manufacture the most noise from the Brahmanical class, effectively subsuming and silencing the nascent voices of a potential Dalit-Adivasi-Muslim-Backward Class coalition. If there is a genuine way forward, it must be routed through this collective, however difficult this might sound as a political project. The approach to politics cannot be top-down; it must be vetted and built from the bottoms-up.

IV

To speak of complexity, the political discourse in the state remains saturated with references to *Moulobaad* or Fundamentalism. In the deeply polarised political landscape of WB, a potent narrative advanced by the Hindu Right posits that the state government, under the TMC, actively promotes minority fundamentalism while simultaneously combating its majoritarian counterpart. This accusation, however, simplifies a far more complex and cynical political game. In response, two distinct arguments have emerged. One camp, engaging in a comparative ethics of bigotry, contends that majoritarian fundamentalism, by its very nature and scale, poses a more significant threat to the

pluralistic fabric of the nation than minority fundamentalism. Another camp points to the TMC's own strategic overtures to the majority community. They argue that the WB government engages in a parallel form of majoritarian appeasement. They cite substantial state funding for local clubs to organise Durga Puja, the construction of a grand Jagannath temple in Digha amidst nosediving state economy, and the annual state-sponsored Durga Puja carnival on Red Road as clear evidence of this strategy.

The TMC, for its part, demonstrates a calculated indifference to these critiques, continuing its intricate game of community-based politics. Its strategy is twofold and deceptively simple. On one hand, it works to maintain the consolidation of the Muslim community as a reliable vote bank. On the other, it actively sharpens and exploits pre-existing social and caste-based cleavages within Hindu and Adivasi communities. This is more than a mere tactic of "divide and rule".

This fraught dynamic of majority/minority communalism was recently thrust into the spotlight when organisations like Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind and the Wahyain Foundation objected to the participation of Urdu poet and lyricist Javed Akhtar, a self-proclaimed atheist, in a programme organised by the West Bengal Urdu Academy. While the event was not cancelled, its postponement to a time of reduced controversy speaks volumes about the state's capitulation to fundamentalist pressures. Crucially, this incident elicited sharp criticism from within the Muslim community itself. Progressive voices warned that such acts of minority fundamentalism directly strengthen the hand of the Hindu Right, providing it with the very justification it seeks.

This entire imbroglio points to a

more profound crisis. It indicates the brazen failure of secular politics in the state. The preceding Left Front regime, in its ideological commitment to bracketing religion from public life, effectively pushed faith under the doormat. Their emphasis on class politics presumed that primordial identities like caste and religion would wither away. But opiates have their own seductive power. These identities merely lay dormant, breathing beneath the surface of secular rhetoric. Upon assuming power, Mamata Banerjee opened these Pandora's boxes, and they erupted with a force that proved too powerful to administer effectively.

Indian secularism, as articulated by political theorist Rajeev Bhargava, is not about a strict separation but about maintaining a "principled distance". This distance, however, is not fixed. Its application is a political assessment made by those in power. WB offers a powerful case study of how both extremes—the Left's attempted effacement of religion and the TMC's cynical instrumentalisation of it—are perilous. On the ruins of a secularism that was either too neglectful or too opportunistic, communalism inevitably blooms.

Finally, the path forward demands the cultivation of what Dr B R Ambedkar called "constitutional morality". It calls for a deep-seated public commitment to the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity that overrides sectarian loyalties. This is a long-term cultural project. It requires nurturing progressive, reformist voices within all communities who

can challenge their own fundamentalist elements, thereby breaking the symbiotic cycle that fuels "competitive communalism". Without this deeply introspective and institution-building approach, WB's politics will remain trapped in this dangerous and ultimately self-defeating spiral of rising fundamentalist and communal assertions.

V

The rise and rise of competitive communalism in the state points to a deeper structural impasse. WB's socio-political landscape is undergoing a profound, yet under-analysed, transformation in its civil society leadership. This shift is defined by the gradual displacement of the educator, the respected *Mastarmoshai*, by a new stratum of religious and communitarian leaders.

Dwaipayan Bhattacharya informs says that when the Left Front was consolidating its rule in Bengal, from around the 1970s, teachers, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, were indispensable to its efforts at spawning hegemony. Functioning as organic intellectuals, they served as a vital interface between the state and its citizens. With considerable social capital and public trust, they translated the complex language of governance into a vernacular the masses could understand, while also articulating local grievances in a formal language the state could process. This mediating function made them secular anchors of their communities and pillars of the 'party-society', embodying an institutional form of local leadership that could bridge social and political divides.

The current political regime under the TMC has fundamentally altered this arrangement. The institutional leadership represented by teachers has been progressively undermined, replaced by an ascendant class of religious and community-based figures. The state now fre-

quently engages directly with imams, priests, and other sectarian leaders, positioning them as the primary interlocutors for their respective communities.

A clear illustration of this new political alignment is the nature of recent protests concerning The Waqf Act, 1995. In previous eras, discourse on such matters would have been led by jurists, academics, and retired judges. They framed the debate in secular, legal-constitutional terms. Today, the most prominent voices are politicians and religious leaders from within the affected community. The Chief Minister's highly publicised meetings with imams to strategize opposition to central policies exemplifies this shift, where leadership has moved from the courtroom and seminar hall to the pulpit and political rally.

Concurrently, the public standing of teachers has plummeted. The most damaging blow has been the massive School Service Commission (SSC) recruitment scam, where allegations of corruption led to the court-ordered cancellation of over twenty-thousand appointments. When those who lost their jobs held protracted demonstrations in Salt Lake and prominent places in Kolkata, the state capital, they garnered media attention but failed to inspire any significant public solidarity. This palpable apathy contrasts sharply with the reverence teachers once commanded.

The path ahead is indeed fraught with difficulties with the society lying fractured and fragmented. While the fragments have to be defended, the faultlines that are being usurped and widened by politicians to turn one fragment against another, have to be identified, addressed, and if possible, mended. Ultimately, the transactional nature of the monetary politics now rife in Bengal must give way to a principled politics of genuine ideological underpinnings. □□□

For Frontier Contact

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LETTERS

Dr Ram Puniyani 80

I am two days late in congratulating Dr Ram Puniyani as he crossed eighty springs on mother Earth. I came to know by a Post from Dr Suresh Khairnar, Nagpur on the 26 August about this cheering news.

Dr Ram Puniyani is in one sense our *collective conscience keeper*. I met him personally only once till NOW, in Ghataprabha, Karnataka, July 2023.

It was an assembly of civil rights activists preparing themselves for the ensuing electoral campaigns. Dr. Ram was the maiden speaker there. Hearing him was a privilege for me in understanding the deep social roots of communal passion, legacy of *Hindutva* in this land of *Hindustani Society*, carrying the festering aching wound of Partition among us along the communal lines of religiosity.

Dr Ram spoke on these subjects in the Marx Forum sessions, his was the maiden presentation when we held a series of discussions on "Religion, Spirituality, Secularism, Communalism" spanning over a year from May 2023. Overall nineteen speakers presented their views in eight such virtual sessions. Dr Ram is relentless in his struggle against communal passion, firm on his interpretation of *secular* ideals that do NOT eschew or abandon religious culture, beliefs just for the sake of accepting *modernity* as it is interpreted by the prevailing culture under the rule of *Capital*.

Dr Ram is a spiritual Human among us.

Arun Kumar Sinha

East Bengal Football Club Protests

Identity has always been central to the football universe. Team allegiances have the power to unite nations, divide societies, and spark rivalries that fuel passion as much as they unleash violence. The Italian Marxist philosopher and politician Antonio Gramsci famously described the sport as an "open-air kingdom of human loyalty".

This sentiment was vividly echoed in a massive banner put up in the colours of East Bengal Football Club at a recent Durand Cup match in Kolkata. It read: "*Bharat swadhin korte shedin porechhila phaansi/ Maa er bhasha bolchhi bole aajke Bangladeshi?*" (That day we wore the hangman's noose for our country's independence/Today we are being labelled Bangladeshi for speaking in our mother tongue?). It highlighted not just the burning issue of migrant Bengali-speaking labourers being targeted as "Bangladeshi" in different parts of the country but also the deeply wounded sentiment of people whose forefathers bore the pains of Partition less than 80 years ago.

A Reader

Recognising Palestine

Keir Starmer and the 150 other states have recognised the State of Palestine. But this is an overdue act of reparation. As Starmer himself acknowledged it was the British mandate that allowed the establishment of the state of Israel 75 years ago. We must remember the Sykes-Picot documents, easily available online, whereby on January 3, 1916 the Holy Land was the only area allowed to bear arms, by the very European nations that are involved in today's recognition. We must place this within a broad geopolitical rhythm that has existed millennia. What the Sykes-Picot merely organised was the resettlement of the map of West Asia (Middle East) after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire at the conclusion of the First World War. That story of power reshuffling is broader than Israel and has not come to an end. We must all strive to preserve the possibilities by Britain, Canada, Australia, and the European Nations today, recognise that it is not Palestine that wishes destruction of the state of Israel, but rather the policy of Prime Minister Netanyahu in Gaza that makes it clear that it is the other way around: in his view, Palestine

must not exist for Israel to survive. We must undo this. There is of course a great deal written on specifically the history and tradition of Palestine, but for the best impartial account we go to the work of Rashid Khalidi. For a quick catch up for those who need it, I recommend Khalidi's "The Neck and the Sword" [*The New Left Review* 147, May-June 2024].

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak FBA
University Professor
Columbia University

'The Bengal Files'

"Although I haven't seen 'The Bengal Files' film, I can make out from the reviews that it is a one sided narrative heavily weighted against the Muslim perpetrators of the Great Calcutta Killings, while ignoring the equally notorious role of the Hindu fanatics in the massacre of innocent Muslims. I as a ten year old lad in August 1946 was an eye-witness to the events of those days in our neighbourhood Ballygunge in south Calcutta. Following the Muslim League call for Direct Action, the Hindu religious organisation Bharat Sevasram Sangh held a public meeting at Ekdalia Park opposite our house. A saffron clad sannyasi gave a fiery speech asking Hindus to rise and take revenge against Muslims. Soon after that, a crowd from that meeting raided a shop of an old Muslim woman on Ekdalia Road from where she used to sell eggs and other provisions, and set it on fire. Luckily, the old woman had earlier left the shop closing it fearing attacks. What followed was worse. The next morning, some Hindu goondas of our area, led by one Chitta, gathered around the railway lines of Ballygunge station. From our balcony I could see them beating with their lathis some people lying on the railway lines. Later, we came to know that the victims were Muslims, who were trying to cross the railway lines to escape to the other side.

Sumanta Banerjee
Hyderabad

জ্ঞান ভক্তি যোগ এবং কর্ম—
মুক্তির এই চারটি পথ।
প্রত্যেকের কর্তব্য তার উপযুক্ত
পথটি অনুসরণ করে চলে।
তবে এই যুগে কর্মযোগের উপরেই
বিশেষ গুরুত্ব দেয়া উচিত।
—স্বামী বিবেকানন্দ

অপর্ণা মৌলিক
পৌরপ্রধান
বরানগর পৌরসভা

দিলীপ নারায়ণ বোস
উপ-পৌরপ্রধান
বরানগর পৌরসভা