

frontier

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Farewell to Arms?

THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR IS A STALEMATE AT THE MOMENT. Last year's counter-offensive by Ukraine failed but it didn't pave the way for Russia's outright victory. Western defence experts say 'counter-offensive failed because its forces had too little time to get trained'. In truth some European countries now argue that it is time to negotiate an end to the war in Ukraine. But the merchants of death and the pro-war media would like to talk in terms of direct investments in defence manufacturing industries in Ukraine. They want war, not peace. The total defence budgets of 54 countries supporting Ukraine will exceed \$100 billion per month. Current support for Ukraine costs those states less than \$6 billion monthly. What all they want is to divert a larger portion of that colossus sum to oil Ukraine's war machine. The bloody conflict, however, continues with sporadic missile and drone attacks on Russian territory, notwithstanding dwindling military support to Ukraine. Amidst war cry by the hawks in western capitals Russia and Ukraine on January 3 announced their first prisoner swap in nearly five months after mediation by the United Arab Emirates. Russia's Defence Ministry said 248 military personnel had been handed over by Ukraine. And the Ukrainian authorities confirmed that they had brought home 230 people—224 soldiers and six civilians. The swap was possible through protracted negotiations by UAE that has cordial relations with both Moscow and Kyiv as claimed by the foreign ministry of UAE. For one thing UAE and Qatar are uniquely placed in geo-political gambling though both are conservative and authoritarian in their political outlook.

As per videos circulated by Russia and Ukraine, POWS on both sides appeared to be in good health. Not that it was the first prisoner exchange. Despite a lack of talks on how to end the 22-month war both Moscow and Kyiv have held many prisoner swaps ever since the war started almost two years ago. 2022 was a horrible year for both Ukrainians and Russians as well. Then 2023 was equally disastrous for them. Also, the coming years will not be better unless they agree not to disagree to make a deal for a lasting peace, the possibility of which seems remote. The global military-industrial complex won't allow that to happen so soon.

At the height of campaign Ukraine was firing up to 7,000 artillery rounds per day. But by the end of 2023, however, Ukrainian forces were firing closer to 4,000 rounds against Russian forces' 10,000 rounds per day.

Warlords in America and NATO camp are worried because Ukraine's stockpiles of munitions are running low. They say Ukraine will need 2.4 million rounds of ammunition per year. With the escalation of war in the Middle East, Ukraine's backers, including the United States, will struggle to provide half that in 2024.

With Israel-Gaza war reaching catastrophic proportions America is in a dilemma as to how to keep its Arab allies in its fold while without jeopardising Israel's barbaric military operations in Gaza. After destroying north and central Gaza completely Israel is now withdrawing some troops, hopefully to regroup them

along Israel-Lebanon border where the Hezbollah is giving them a tough time. Partial withdrawal of Israeli troops from northern Gaza doesn't mean Palestinians are going to get back what they have lost-- their tiny enclave in its original form. Nor will they be allowed to decide their own fate. Israel's Defence Minister Yoav Gallant called for a permanent "buffer Zone" to the west of the Gaza-Israel border. Deeper inside the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) has already bisected the territory and besieged its major cities while avoiding a prolonged presence within them.

What Gaza might look 'the day after' war is still undecided because

Israel's regional and international partners--Egypt and the US--are unlikely to endorse Israel's plan to forcibly resettle Palestinians in Egyptian Sinai Peninsula. The basic issue is war is not yet over. Nor is there any possibility of 'humanitarian pause' or ceasefire any time soon. At the time of writing US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is visiting Middle Eastern countries showing his apparent disagreement with Israel about the future of Gaza's Palestinians. But this much diplomacy of balancing act is not going to alter the ground realities. Peace remains elusive. □□□

08-01-2024

COMMENT

Militarisation of Bastar

THE RAMPANT MILITARISATION of Bastar and southern Odisha, which have a substantial Adivasi population, has been going on for quite some time without being opposed even by left political parties. It does hardly draw attention of the mainstream media. Unfortunately not many might turn up to raise their voice as for most it is 'a solution, not a problem'.

Bastar is one of the most militarised regions in the country after Kashmir. The division has seen multiple uprisings as well as 'encounters' in the years gone. An activist associated with Chhattisgarh Bachao Andolan and a resident of Bastar revealed the grim ground realities of Bastar today: "In the last 5 years, around 65 security camps have allegedly come up in the seven districts of Bastar division". Whether it is Bastar or southern Odisha or Kashmir people are randomly taken from their homes and are beaten up. In India tribals are expendable. So they are terrorised and brutalised by the security forces with impunity.

On being asked about the effect on the day-to-day life of the tribal people, the dejected activist responded, "Adivasis are directly dependent on the forests for their livelihood. They are stopped, asked questions and harassed by the military personnel. This stops many from going to forests, affecting their income. Sexual violence among women has increased with the increase in the number of such camps."

She went on about the consequences on the legal system and said, "Our areas are reserved for the scheduled communities and certain laws have been designed specifically for us. Forest Resource Rights Act, PESA act have been drawn for us, but they are often disregarded by the security officials." Nobody bothers about these laws; they are decorations for the biggest showcase of democracy!

Nandini Sundar, a professor at Delhi University explained during a Press Meet on 'corporate takeover of Natural Resources', "in the region of Bastar, there is a security camp

every 2-3km. The security camps there are surrounded by barbed wires just like concentration camps. Trees are felled and the camps are constructed at night and suddenly start being operational from a random day. When we asked the district collector and Information Bureau about the reason of setting these camps at night without any notice, they used the same old excuse of security."

"Rowghat in north Bastar did not have an atmosphere of insurgency but 22 security camps came up in the region in the last 10 years."

"A young child lost her life due to crossfire on 1st January. If the government send more jawans, more young lives will be lost. It is not like the tribals do not want developed roads and other amenities. But the issue is that their concerns are not taken into account."

It seems the government has money to spend on camps but none to make schools or health centres. The only thing that is worked upon on a speedy process is the security camps while other amenities take years to be made.

For one thing it is not an isolated

case for Bastar. Tribal areas of adjoining Odisha are equally vulnerable to large-scale military presence. The Adivasis of Koraput-Nabarangpur-Malkangiri districts of Odisha are badly affected by the Centre's militarisation drive. "Whenever these security camps come up; cases of atrocities increase. Women are often molested and harassed.

Adivasi people are taken into nearby jungles where unspeakable acts are done to them". Whenever a camp is put up, the population in that area gets scared because they have a history of violence and the fact that most people are not that educated or aware of their rights. □□□

[Contributed by
Ayanabha Banerjee of the Mooknayak]

NOTE

Conflict in Middle East

Bharat Dogra writes:

THE KILLING OF A HAMAS commander in Beirut and an Iranian military leader in Syria (allegedly by Israel), attacks in the Red Sea on merchant ships by the Houthis and the US-led response, the growing tensions on the Israel-Lebanon border and the exchange of rockets between the Hezbollah and the Israeli forces, the attacks on US forces in Iraq and Syria and the US response to this, the US bringing two aircraft carriers and their striking units within the regional waters—all these have been seen by some as signs which indicate the emergence of a wider crisis or even a wider war. However the risks of a wider conflict have increased much more with the powerful bomb blast in Iran, resulting in over 100 deaths, on January 3, on the sensitive occasion of the death anniversary of the Iran General Quassem Soleimani who as Quds leader had played a very important role in taking Iran's influence to a wider Middle-East area, particularly through various militant organisations like the Hezbollah, and who was killed in a US air raid on Baghdad airport in 2020. Although on January 4, it was reported that the IS had taken responsibility for it, there still continued to be other allegations, including of Israeli involvement.

"This is a very dangerous time. A region-wide war appears more likely by the day."

Al Jazeera senior political analyst Marwan Bishara has stated that there is 'dark cloud' gathering near the Middle East after several days of escalating regional tensions. He said, "anything could happen now in this region. There is so much pent-up violence, so much pent-up tension, so many conflicts and so many moving parts. From the Red Sea to the Iranian- Iraqi border to Yemen to Gulf, basically everyone in the region now is a candidate to further escalation."

Escalation and widening may be caused broadly in two ways. Firstly, there can be non-intentional widening or escalation. This may happen if and when in an already tense and sensitive situation an event or even at times a statement can have a different or a much bigger impact than was expected or intended. This can also happen when in situations of great tensions and deep suspicions; some action is misinterpreted, provoking a very hostile response that was not justified. Such possibilities increase because of a lot of disinformation being spread.

On the other hand, deliberate escalation or widening can also be caused if one of the bigger forces in

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the conflict, or one of the big leaders of this force, takes actions which are actually aimed in a conscious way to broaden or escalate the conflict.

Hamas may do something that will escalate hostility either between Israel and Iran, or between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Terrorist organisations like the IS may have their own reasons for escalation and widening of conflict.

Some leaders may be guided even by personal self-interest while seeking war escalation and widening. Netanyahu, for example, will face a lot of domestic problems if war ends very soon, including very uncomfortable questions over the failure of intelligence prior to the October 7 attack, but if the war widens and then can end on a note of victory for Israel, then probably his domestic criticism will tone down a lot.

The military-industrial complex of America is generally interested in wider and prolonged wars.

Whatever be the narrow calculations that could possibly instigate a widening of the Middle-East conflict,

what should not be forgotten is that this is like playing with fire, and those who seek to injure others may themselves get very badly hurt in the efforts, as a widening conflict can

also spiral out of control and have consequences very different from those which guided the instigators of the escalation.

The way forward is that of check-

ing and controlling conflict at all levels, with the end as early as possible of the Gaza conflict and the Gaza humanitarian crisis being at the core of such efforts. □□□

FEDERALISM AT THE CROSSROADS

Politicisation of Central Agencies

Ahmed Raza

INDIA IS OFTEN REFERRED TO as a quasi-federal system as it embodies features of both federal and unitary systems, but successive governments with strong prime ministers at the centre and regional political parties in some states created a confrontational relationship on several fronts. The frequent incidents of Enforcement Directorate (ED) raids, Income Tax (IT) raids, and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) interrogations on opposition leaders, governors' pro-active role in state affairs, issues of consent from the state government for making an investigation, etc. have always been heated arguments for federalism in India. On one hand, the run-up to the Lok Sabha election sees yet another round of central investigation agencies descending on opposition leaders in one case or another, and the timing of such raids is always questioned by many, raising grave doubts about its autonomy. On the other hand, the recent attack on four officers of the ED allegedly by the supporters of the Trinamool Congress while searching the house of a local leader in connection with an alleged food grain scam at Sandeshkhali in North 24-Parganas points out that India is moving towards competitive federalism rather than cooperative federalism, which is an alarming situation. Though, in 2022, the Supreme Court allowed the ED to conduct searches and seizures of property without a formal complaint in Prevention of

Money Laundering Act (PMLA) cases, effectively presuming the accused person to be guilty.

The implication of federalism is the division of administrative, financial, and legislative powers between the Union and the States, whereas the implication of cooperative federalism is that the Union and the States cooperate with each other in the larger public interest and share horizontal relations. In recent years, opposition-ruled states claim federalism is at the crossroads because of the trust deficit with the centre on account of 4-fold jump in ED cases against politicians; 95% are from the opposition since 2014. Though overall raids carried out by the Enforcement Directorate during 2014–2022 saw a nearly 27-fold increase to 3,010 as compared to 112 searches between 2004 and 2014. Therefore, the debate begins with this argument: is ED a tool to investigate financial skulduggery or a stick to browbeat opposition leaders in India? On the other hand, in 2021, eight opposition states withdrew their general consent for investigation by the CBI, resulting in the agency requiring case-specific permission. In this context, there appears to be a shrinking trend toward cooperative federalism. The threat to whatever remains of federalism in India in recent years on account of actions by the central agencies and controversies associated with the political vendetta, and the measures needed to revive federalism is real.

Federalism is basically a dual-government system consisting of a central government and several states. Federalism is one of the pillars of the basic structure of the Indian Constitution. Federalism is important for India, as people of different races and religions live there. The government has adopted a secular idea that was added to the Preamble through the 42nd Amendment Act, 1976. Whereas, Modi, as Chief Minister of Gujarat, was always an advocate of states being given greater autonomy and critical of the centre's intrusion into the state's domains. Though several other bills, policies, and amendments, such as three farm laws (which have now been repealed), the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Act 2020, the Government of the National Capital Territory Amendment Act 2021, the Indian Marine Fisheries Bill 2021, and the National Education Policy 2020, by the central government in recent times have also undermined the autonomy of the states, as alleged by the opposition parties,.

The responsibility for enforcing economic laws and fighting economic crime in India is entrusted to the Directorate of Enforcement (ED), which is the law enforcement agency and economic intelligence agency. In recent years, multiple ED raids, repeated summonses, and arrests in cases linked to opposition leaders in poll-bound states have put a question mark on timing and the ruling party's hidden agenda.

Just over a month before the first of eight phases of polls in West Bengal, the CBI knocked at the door of Trinamool Congress Lok

Sabha MP Abhishek Banerjee, Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee's nephew, to summon his wife and sister-in-law in a year-old case of coal theft. In 2021, just four days before the single-phase Tamil Nadu assembly elections, the Income Tax Department raided DMK chief M. K. Stalin's daughter Senthamarai's residence to unearth "cash distribution" based on "complaints and inputs."

In 2019, a month before the assembly polls in Maharashtra, the Enforcement Directorate registered an alleged money laundering case against Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar and his nephew Ajit Pawar in connection with the Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank scam. In 2023, the ED raided the Jaipur and Sikar premises of the Pradesh Congress President of Rajasthan, Govind Singh Dotasra, in the last week of October, when he was busy campaigning. At the same time, chief minister Ashok Gehlot's son, Vaibhav Gehlot, also received ED's summons. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has either raided, arrested, or summoned leaders from the opposition parties in Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Telangana, four of the five states where polls were held.

The question still remains the same: is the Modi government using the CBI, ED, or Income Tax departments for political battles, or is it opposition propaganda? Why is the Enforcement Directorate (ED) always in the news and often igniting the debate about the misuse of central agencies by the government? On one hand, the central government has been provided enough power through the Central Vigilance Commission (Amendment) Bill 2021 and the Delhi Special Police Establishment (Amendment) Bill 2021 to extend the tenure of the Chiefs of Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) up to five years, which would help in the speedy disposal of cases and bring down pendency. On the other hand, it may undermine the efficiency and autonomy of the agencies, as claimed by the opposition parties. Existing law governing the federal probe agency has "many limitations," and there is a need to enact new legislation to define the status, functions, and powers of the central agencies.

To sum up, India ranked 85th out of 180 countries (score 40) in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2021, released by Transparency In-

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ternational; therefore, there is a need to take strong, impartial steps to tackle corruption at all levels as per the United Nations Convention against Corruption, to which India is a signatory. Though the government of India is already committed to "zero tolerance against corruption" and has taken several measures to combat the challenges associated with corruption, It cannot be denied by saying that just before any election, central agencies, including the CBI, ED, and Income Tax Department, swing into action, but as time passes, nothing concrete comes of the investigations. □□□

DAYS OF NETANYAHU ARE NUMBERED

Cost of Israeli War on Gaza

V Subrahmanyam

THE ONGOING ISRAELI WAR on Gaza that killed 22,000 Palestinians-most of them women and children-wounded more than 50,000, and ravaged vast swathes of urban dwellings numbering around 1,00,000 and thousands still missing perhaps died under the rubble, would cost the Israeli economy \$54 billion over the current and next year, according to the Israeli National Economic Council. "Israel will likely

bear two-thirds of the total costs of the war, with the remaining portion covered by the United States in the form of military aid".

In October, the Israeli Ministry of Finance estimated that the economic cost of this horrendous war was \$270 million per day. It is equal to 10% of gross domestic product. It was presumed that the war would last between eight to 12 months. It would be limited to Gaza, without

full participation by Lebanon's Hezbollah, Iran or Yemen. It is hoped that 350,000 Israelis drafted as military reservists will return to work soon. As the war is likely to spill beyond the borders of Gaza, already the Houthi rebels are firing rockets from Yemen into the Red Sea, and Lebanon is intermittently disturbing Israel with its rockets; these estimates are likely to go awry. And it is going to be a long-drawn war. The Chairman of the US Chief of Staff said: "Every conflict that I've been involved with throughout my military career, except probably Desert Shield/Desert Storm (US war on Iraq

of 1990-91), has gone a lot longer than most people would have imagined.”

Calcalist, a newspaper from Israel, said half of the cost would be in defence expenses that amount to \$276 million a day. Another \$1.1-1.6 billion would account for loss of revenues, 4.7-5.5 billion for compensation for businesses and \$2.75-5.50 billion shekels for rehabilitation. These estimates are for one year. The Finance Ministry said, “in the event of war, the recovery will be slow, and the economy will not return to its pre-war trend.”

A workforce shortage is pinching Israel's industry. Next to the US, Israel understands that Modi is their close ally. The Hindutva brigade already came out on the streets and expressed solidarity and showed their internationalism by sending signals to Israel that “they would join the Israel forces to crush the Hamas”. Social media is replete with such vows by these Modi followers. But not a single person has joined so far. Israel's Ambassador announced that they would like to recruit workforce from India, as Palestinian workers

from Gaza and the West Bank would no longer be coming to work in Israel.

A spokesperson for the Israel Builders Association, Shay Pauzner, said it was looking to “bring in 10,000 as per government approval” to Israel, and the number of workers might increase to 30,000”. This month in Haryana, 10,000 openings for skilled workers in Israel's construction sector were among the jobs advertised by a government-run employment service. However, all the major trade unions opposed the government willingness to send Indian workers in the conflict zone, and that too when Israel is waging a ruthless war on Palestine. The Construction Workers Federation of India is one of the labour unions that has declared its opposition to sending members to Israel, criticising its “genocidal attacks” on Palestinians.

Tourism has slumped in the aftermath of the Hamas attack and the ongoing war in Gaza. Supply chains are disturbed. Construction activity is low, and the inactivity costs \$ 37 million daily. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly

said the war will last for as long as it takes to destroy Hamas. He and his cabinet have put no timeline to end the war. Government revenues are expected to drop by \$ 9.6 billion due to lower corporate and real estate taxes and a slowdown in private consumption. The document said that if no changes are made to planned taxation, the fiscal deficit would increase to close to 6% of gross domestic product, well beyond the 2.25% ceiling set by law.

The real cost of the war lies in the increasing burden of public debt and hike in taxes. Though people are at present leaning toward far-right ideas in the wake of the Hamas attack on October 7 and the leftist voices became bleak, as the war gets dragged, its impact on the economy will certainly force the people to consider the unjust character of the bone-chilling war on Palestine people. This ghastly war might prove costliest for Netanyahu. Many observers have presumed that his political career will soon end, as Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir did after the Yom Kippur War of 1973. □□□

“PLEASE HAVE MERCY ON US”

A Journalist's Cry from Gaza

Rana Sabbagh

EVERY TIME AN AMBULANCE arrives at Shuhada Al-Aqsa Hospital, the only medical facility in the central part of the Gaza Strip, freelance reporter Wafaa Abu Hajajj holds her breath for a few moments. Could one of her beloved ones be inside this time?

When she finds that it's not unloading a family member or someone close to her heart, she sighs with relief. A short-lived relief.

“The sight of dead children is horrifying. Even the stones weep over them,” she says.

Since the carnage in Gaza began,

Abu Hajajj has been reporting from this hospital about deaths and injuries or the mass destruction and killings the ambulance drivers tell her about.

The 40-year-old, along with five colleagues, occupies a small make-shift tent located on hospital premises. They also share three donated mattresses and blankets.

“Thank God our other female colleagues go home every day to sleep; otherwise, it would be impossible to take a rest,” she tells OCCRP. “Every night, before we go to sleep, we pray for our family and loved

ones to see the sun rise in the morning.”

She uses her friend's laptop to send her reports when the internet comes up. Her laptop and iPhone were smashed when the family home was hit in north Gaza, forcing them to flee.

“We need some help in replacing the cameras, laptops, and smart phones that were destroyed,” she appeals.

Hundreds of women and children, whose homes were destroyed, are now living at the hospital, sharing three toilets. “You have to queue for 20-30 minutes, if not more, to use one,” Abu Hajajj says. She showers whenever she visits her sister's house in the Maghazi camp, where her family has taken refuge.

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Abu Hajajj has lost eight kilos since the war erupted, eating one meal a day if she is lucky. Food prices have doubled, if not tripled, because of the shortages. Unable to maintain normal hygiene, many women are trying to obtain pills that delay periods.

The estimated 1,450 journalists reporting from Gaza are mainly Palestinians, as the only way foreign reporters can get in is with Israeli troops. Many of them have been displaced along with their families after their homes were destroyed.

Like all the other 2.3 million residents navigating life in the confined and besieged Mediterranean strip, the reporters are struggling to find fresh water, food, a place to sleep, a toilet, electricity points to charge their laptops and phones, and even the most basic form of transport.

They are covering the intensifying war even though most of them lack safety vests, power banks, or SIM cards. NGOs say Israel is banning the entry of all safety gear into Gaza.

By December 11, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) had confirmed the deaths of 63 journalists and media workers since the militant Palestinian group Hamas launched its unprecedented attack on Israel on Oct. 7, prompting full retaliation.

The organization says that October has been the deadliest ever for media workers since it began keeping records in 1992.

Among the fatalities were 56 Palestinians, four Israelis, and three Lebanese who were killed on their country's southern border with Israel. But the figure could be higher.

Journalists are often told by their editors not to become part of the story they are covering. But the Palestinian reporters in Gaza have no choice, and if death is their fate, there's only one desire: for it to be swift, instantaneous.

"I expect to die every second," says Mohammad Abu Shahma, who freelances for Qatar's Al-Jazeera TV. He is speaking from a small makeshift tent he had set up near the

Rafah border crossing with Egypt.

In the first eight weeks of the war, he moved his wife, five children, and aging mother four times after his house was bombed to the ground by airstrikes. It is impossible, he says, to find any safe place in the densely-populated enclave. His wife and daughter have just recovered from injuries they sustained.

"It is my kids who worry me the most. What will happen to them?" he wonders. "Will they die? Will they become refugees? What will their fate be?"

Abu Shahma, a peacetime investigative reporter, says he has had no time to mourn the death of his sister and her family, his niece, and paternal cousins who have been killed in the conflict. Now he is fighting to survive but often wonders if the risk of reporting this war is worth it.

"There is no food to buy. If we don't die from a rocket we will die from hunger," he says. "People have started slaughtering donkeys and soon they will be eating cats."

Over 22,000 Palestinians have been killed and more than 50,000 injured since the war erupted.

With nearly 85% of the Gaza Strip's population displaced and unable to access any aid, the U N says society there is "on the verge of full-blown collapse," and its ability to protect people is "reducing fast."

"I expect public order to completely break down soon, and a worse situation could unfold, including increased epidemic diseases and increased pressure for mass displacement to Egypt," U.N. Secretary-general Antonio Guterres said over the weekend.

His appeals have so far not changed anything.

"Please find a way to send me some canned food," a journalist colleague asked this reporter on the phone. "We've had nothing to eat in three days," he said of his seven-member family, sobbing aloud.

"We're giving up on life... please have mercy on us." □□□

[Source: OCCRP]

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RENEWABLE PLEDGE AT COP28

India and China in the Same Boat

Sagar Dhara

INDIA AND CHINA REFRAINED from signing the Global Renewable and Energy Efficiency Pledge, a document endorsed by 123 nations in the COP28 held in UAE in the first half of December 2023. The pledge was inspired by an International Energy Agency document titled Net Zero Emissions by 2050: A Roadmap for the Global Energy Sector first published in 2021 and updated subsequently.

The pledge states that “to limit warming to 1.5°C, the world requires three times more renewable energy capacity by 2030, or at least 11,000 GW, and must double the global average annual rate of energy efficiency improvements from around 2% to over 4% every year until 2030 ... and the phase down of unabated coal power, in particular ending the continued investment in unabated new coal-fired power plants.”

India and China have little quarrel with the COP28 pledge’s recommendations to treble renewable power generation capacity and improve energy efficiency. The growth of renewable power generation capacity (without hydro) since 2015 in India (18.1% pa) and China (23.4% pa) outperformed that of developed economies (10.3% pa) and exceeded the 18% growth rate pa recommended by the renewables pledge. And further investments can be made to fulfil the pledge’s energy efficiency requirement. What vexes India and China is the pledge’s recommendation to phase down unabated coal power.

India and China are among the top five major economies of the world and aspire to join the ranks of

the developed countries in the coming decades. As energy use and GDP have a high correlation, both countries must expend increasingly large amounts of energy to boost growth and increase their per capita GDP.

India and China have vast coal reserves and exploiting them is the easiest and most secure way to maintain a high growth rate. Consequently, large investments were made in thermal power to provide the bulk of the electricity generated in India (77%) and China (65%). It is no surprise that both countries were reluctant to sign a pledge to phase down unabated coal power.

India and China’s energy trajectories have serious implications. If these countries use unabated coal till their stated net carbon neutral dates of 2070 and 2060, respectively, they will cause a carbon emission overshoot, unless other countries compensate by becoming net carbon-negative well before 2050, the year that the world must become net carbon neutral to remain within a 1.5oC warming. But no major emitter country has committed to doing this. A significant carbon overshoot will warm the earth beyond the 1.5oC redline, making India one of the severest climate-impacted regions in the world, with frequent extreme weather events, floods, sea rise, crop yield losses, water stress, and glacial lake outburst floods.

If global warming is to be restricted to 1.5oC, India and China cannot become developed countries in the near future. Since the Industrial Revolution began 300 years ago, European and North American coun-

tries powered their material development with fossil fuels and notched up a per capita cumulative emission of 1,200 tCO₂. In contrast, India and China have per capita cumulative emissions of 42 and 178 tCO₂, respectively. If the remaining carbon space of about 100 GtCO₂ for remaining under 1.5oC warming were given entirely to India and China, it would increase their per capita cumulative emissions to 78 and 214 tCO₂, respectively. That is far short of the cumulative emissions (a good surrogate for the amount of fossil fuel used) required to achieve the living standards of the developed countries. Additional renewable energy expected to come into line shortly is insufficient to propel India and China to become developed countries.

Another Fallout of India and China’s development policies, driven by the Trickle-down theory, is the increase in inequality over the last four decades. The income share of the top 10% of India’s population increased from 32% to 52%, and that of the bottom 50% dropped from 21% to 13%. China’s story is similar. India and China’s reluctance to endorse the COP28 renewables pledge so that they may use fossil fuels to power faster growth will further exacerbate inequality. This has the potential to increase social conflict between the poor and the rich in these countries.

India is in a Catch-22 situation. If it accelerates its development by burning fossil fuels the downsides are severe climate impacts and increased inequality without making India a developed country. On the other hand, if India reduced fossil fuel use, its relatively high GDP growth rate will decrease and it will continue to lag behind the developed countries’ material standards.

Intergovernmental meetings—

COPs, G20, etc., have not helped India resolve its dilemma regarding sustainable development. Indian stakeholders who will be impacted by climate change—working people, farmers and farm workers, Adivasis in forests, fisherfolk, and youth, along with other vulnerable sections of the

world's population, must form their independent platform to discuss programmes that can deliver climate justice, just transition, and global sustainability. They must determine benchmarks for the quantity of energy use, its mix, its equitable distribution, and emissions allocation

based on the principles of responsibility (cumulative historic emissions contributing to the climate problem), capacity to contribute to solutions (measured by financial resources above and beyond what is needed to sustain a modest but decent standard of living), and equity. □□

RIGHT TO GRIEVE

Of 'Burning Pyres and Mass Graves'

Joydip Ghosal

IN 'BURNING PYRES, MASS Graves And A State That Failed It's People, India's Covid Tragedy' (Publisher—Speaking Tiger) eminent scholar and social activist Harsh Mander attempted a concurrent comprehensive history of experience in India of the gravest health emergency in a century. This book is on the colossal tragedy and horrors of second wave. In the introduction part of the book he affirmed that this book is an act of remembering of the lives that were lost. Simultaneously it pays tribute to those valiant unsung heroes who laid down their lives to save others. In an interview with Chittajit Mitra published in *The Hindu* he told that he wrote to rescue collective experience of the pandemic from collective amnesia. He also wrote to find hope between grief and rage. Hope because ordinary people rose to the occasion. They helped each other when the establishment failed spectacularly. According to him people treated them as utilities, not in their full autonomous humanity.

The burning Pyres on city sidewalks, the mass graves, the floating bodies in the rivers indicated the vulnerable state of affairs and cataclysmic failures of the state. This book brings to the fore the gravity of the culpability of the state which failed abysmally its citizens "when they needed it the most." This book

was interspersed with a feeling of rage and grief as one reads the account of tumult of death and sickness. The author aptly said that at that horrific time people were ordained to grapple with regrets, to nurture memories and to chart life anew in a world which was devoid of loved ones. Harsh Mander in this book mentioned a write-up by Anna Kurien where she poignantly asked if the life lost during the second wave were grievable! She quoted Judith Butler who wrote in *Precarious Life* how an obituary marked out a life that was grievable. According to Kurien more people had fell into the category of non-grievable lives. The pandemic swelled the number of those whose life was not worth-valuing. According to Kurien it was tantamount to the death of those in Bhopal Gas tragedy or in Partition. It is nothing but 'erasure of millions.' Harsh Mander unequivocally stressed that one cannot permit the state to drown people into constructed amnesia. He upheld the right to grieve to underline that every life lost was of value.

In order to buttress his argument Harsh Mander cited numerous statistics. Oxfam reported that daily wage labourers topped the number of people who committed suicides in 2020. Oxfam India's 2023 Inequality report titled 'Survival of the Richest' displayed that the chasm between

two classes was widening further. One comes to know from this book the humanitarian crisis offered an opportunity to the super rich of this country to multiply their wealth at a mind-boggling, dizzying rate. In no uncertain terms the author pointed out the astronomical increase of wealth of Adani group. Quite obviously the reference of development economist Jean Dreze came in this book who calculated that it would take a million years for 100 workers with statutory minimum wages to

URGENT APPEAL

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

—Publisher, Editor, LAW

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earn the wealth that Adani had amassed through pandemic years.

Amplified hysterical media reports, flames of hate aided by trolls pervaded the country at that time. Fake videos depicted the minorities in poor lights. In the chapter titled 'Did the corona virus turn Muslim?' Harsh Mander cited the case study of two researchers Soundarya Iyer and Shoibal Chakravarty. They found 11,074 stories published from 271 media sources with the term Tablighi Jamat from 20 March to 20 April. 'Violating', 'terrorist', 'spitting', 'Jihad' frequently cropped up in those stories. According to the researchers these stories fed into the Islamophobic fake stories masquerading as news and hate speech. During the food distribution services the author came across many stories of these vilification campaigns. Muslim truck drivers were roughed

up in Arunachal Pradesh. In Dhankot village in Haryana unknown men fired at local mosque. In Mahoba district in UP two vegetable vendors were beaten up by mob who castigated them of being Tablighis and for spreading corona virus.

Some Muslim volunteers who worked for Karwan-e-Mohabbat in the countrywide feeding campaign reported that they were gruffly turned away from Hindu settlements when they went there to distribute dry rations.

In this book Harsh Mander deftly combined hard data with ground reports and fast hand knowledge. From the fringe of the city, highways, overcrowded quarantine centres he brought out the stories of migrant workers. He traced the causes of oxygen shortage to the dismal state of public health in In-

dia. He categorically pointed out that it was the consequence of the public policy choice made by central government. He made an interesting observation that health inequalities were even more skewed in India because of the historically embedded social inequalities. Citing the observation of The Wire he showed that massive accessibility difference between rich and poor ran much deeper than that created by digital divide. This book showed that traumatic months of the lethal pandemic laid bare India's broken society. According to the author the near complete estrangement of privileged people from the working class people was clearly evident. This book chronicled the horror and colossal apathy of the state. In order to understand the socio-political aspects of the pandemic this book is an essential read. □□□

AGAINST AMERICAN DOUBLE STANDARDS

Award and Degrees Returned

Sandeep Pandey

WHEN I RECEIVED THE Magsaysay Award in 2002, a little controversy was created due to my decision to participate in a protest outside United States embassy in Manila against the impending attack on Iraq, immediately a day after the award ceremony in which the award was handed over by the Phillippines President. The then Chairperson of Magsaysay Foundation had tried to dissuade me from participating in the protest on the pretext that it'll harm the reputation of the foundation. My contention was that the award mentioned my participation in a peace march in India for global nuclear disarmament from Pokaran to Sarnath in 1999 and hence my anti-war position was well known. I had to honour the decision taken at

a peace conference at Univeristy in Manila which, coincidently, concluded on 31 August, the day Magsaysay Awards were handed over, to stage a protest at US embassy as I was invited to the conference as well. After the protest on 1 September, a Manila newspaper, in an editorial challenged me saying that if I was the principled man that I would like them to believe then I should return the award to the US embassy before returning to India, This made the decision easier for me. I returned the cash component of the award from the airport which came from the Ford Foundation of the U S but in a letter to the Chairperson of Magsaysay Foundation I said that for the time being I was keeping the award as it was named after a former popular Phillippines President

and had been given in my country to personalities like Jayaprakash Narayan, Vinoba Bhave and Baba Amte, whom I considered as my ideals. I had mentioned in that letter that if the Magsaysay Foundation ever thought that I was harming their reputation too much, I would be happy to return the award as well.

I think that the time has now come. Magsaysay Award is primarily funded by Rockefeller Foundation and the cartegory in which I received the award is funded by Ford Foundation, both American foundations. Given the role of US in blatantly supporting Israel in the current offensive against Palestinian citizens, more than 22,000 of whom are dead, and still continuing to sell arms to Israel, it has become unbearable for me to keep the award. I, therefore, am deciding to finally return the award too. I would like to apologise to the people of Phillippines if they feel hurt because of President

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Ramon Magsaysay's name associated with this award. My protest is only because of the American connection with the award.

As I return the Magsaysay award I also feel that I should relieve myself of the degrees I have obtained in US. Hence, I am also taking a decision to return my Dual M.S. degrees in Manufacturing and Computer Engineerings to Syracuse University in upstate New York and my PhD in Mechanical Engineering degree to the University of California at Berkeley. Incidentally, I was made conscious of involvement of US academic institutions, especially their engineering and science departments, in defence projects during the protest on Berkeley campus in 1991 against the US war on Iraq launched by senior President Bush. A Professor Pravin Varaiya of Electrical Engineering, whose research area, Control Systems, was same as mine, and who was a participant in the anti-war protests, made me realise that I was also unknowingly part of the war machine of United States.

Thus began my disillusionment with my research area and I decided to change my research area once I began teaching at Indian Institute of Technology at Kanpur in 1992.

Again let me make it clear that I am not against the American people or even the country. In fact, I think the US is one country which respects the human rights the most and offers the best freedom of expression, but sadly it is true only within the country. Outside the US, it seems to have little regard for human rights, especially of the third world countries. If it respects justice then it should stand with the side facing oppression in any war. It took the correct position in the Russian war on Ukraine but when it comes to Israel against Palestine it is inexplicable why the US chooses to turn a blind eye to the misfortunes and sufferings of the Palestinians and overlooks the crimes of Israeli defence forces. Had it been any other country, it would have imposed sanctions against it, like it did along with the rest of the world against South

Africa, when apartheid was still practised there.

I have to take the hard decision because I think US is singularly responsible in encouraging Israel to continue its aggression against Palestinians contrary to the popular world opinion. It could have played the role of mediator, like it once did, and tried to negotiate peace between Israel and Palestine. Creation of sovereign state of Palestine and its recognition by United Nations as a full member is essential towards the solution of the problem. But it is strange that US, which not very long back handed over Afghanistan, much bigger in area, to Taliban on a silver platter knowing very well that it was jeopardising the civil liberties of common Afghans, especially the women, parrots the Israeli position about Hamas being a terrorist organisation ignoring the fact that Hamas has won an election in Palestine, unlike the Taliban. I feel that it is time to call out the double standards of US government. □□□

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BJP'S GAME PLAN

Mosque to Temple—A Long Journey

Ram Puniyani

THE 'TEMPLES OF MODERN India' phrase was the underlying theme for conceptualising the public sectors, educational institutions also promoting the scientific temper, health facilities, and academies for promotion of culture. The nearly four-five decades' journey with this undercurrent of 'Modern Temples' was to be turned upside down from the decades of 1980s when on one side the response to Shah Bano fiasco of dealing with minorities opened the floodgates of divisive politics. The communal forces unleashed a massive propaganda war against the religious minorities. At

the same time the affirmative action for downtrodden, the Mandal Commission implementation gave the fillip to temple politics which was already in the strategy books of Hindu nationalists.

RSS Combine was able to create a perception that Lord Ram was born precisely at the spot where the Babri mosque is located. Ram Rath Yatra, got more muscles after the Mandal Commission implementation. This yatra left a series of trails of violence. In the wake of L K Advani's Rath Yatra, nearly 1,800 people died in communal violence in different parts of India around

1990. This Yatra was aborted when Lalu Yadav arrested Advani in Bihar, reportedly at the advice of Nitish Kumar, the present chief minister of the state..

The mosque was demolished on 6th December 1992, by the Kar Sevaks, some selected ones of the brigade had well rehearsed the demolition. After demolition violence did follow in Mumbai, Bhopal, Surat and many other places. To cut the long story short, the legal system bent over backwards to give the verdict of the case based on 'faith', while naming those who led the demolition, but not giving them any punishment for the crimes they committed. The judiciary in all its wisdom gave the whole Babri Mosque land to the "Hindu Side".

In the glee of this 'success' by

RSS combine; large funds were collected from home and abroad and a huge temple is ready to be inaugurated by the Prime Minister himself with all Hindu rituals. This will be a ceremony undertaken by the head of a 'formally secular' state. Babri Masjid was a regular election plank till it was demolished and after that building of 'Grand Ram Temple' was the part of BJP's election manifestos and electoral promises. The communal violence shot up on a regular basis along with the ghettoisation of Muslim community, the polarisation and the rise of the electoral might of (Bharatiya Janata Party) BJP. And the saffron camp thinks they will get enormous dividends from the politics of temple in the coming parliamentary elections.

The present plight is well summed up by A M Singh, "Since coming to power, much of the BJP's political discourse has exacerbated communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims. Their actions have followed suit, with the abrogation of Article 370 in the Indian Constitution and the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in 2019... By redefining and remanufacturing Indian citizenship on the principles of Hindutva, the BJP government has broken the fate and legacy of

India's secularism enshrined in its constitution." For all practical purposes a ghettoised Muslim community has been pushed to the margins as second class citizens.

Now as the temple is to be inaugurated all round efforts are on to mobilise the large section of Hindus around this. In America and other countries, a large number of NRI's are preparing for the occasion by organising different programmes. Here at home all the progeny of RSS has been activated to mobilise the Hindus for the occasion, either by visiting the new temple or to visit the local temples and perform rituals. The government has made massive investments by way of modernising the Rail Station of Ayodhya--it has been renamed as Ayodhya Dham with a little bit of religious flavour--- while upgrading the small airport there to an international one. It is now Maharshi Valmiki International Airport Ayodhya Dham. The persons in authority have a plan to convert the temple town into an international tourist spot. Meanwhile, PM Modi laid foundation stone of 46 infrastructure projects worth Rs 15,000 crore. He also flagged off six Vande Bharat and two new Amrit Bharat trains.

There are minor controversies about who has been invited and who is left out. Lal Krishna Advani, the Chief architect of demolition movement and his close aide Murali Manohar Joshi were initially advised by the temple trust, not to visit the inauguration due to their old age and biting cold in Ajothya, on second thought VHP, the overarching organisation has invited them.

As Babri demolition helped this sectarian politics to come to power, the inauguration of the temple seems to be yet another mechanism to consolidate the polarisation and to reap electoral dividends. Large number of special trains and buses are being planned for the occasion. Temple politics has reached its acme.

Currently religiosity and blind faith are being heightened. As India started coming out of the colonial darkness it also ensured a direction where the 'last person in the line' was to be the primary focus. With the politics revolving around Ram Temple, to be followed by temples in Kashi and Mathura, the deprivations of 'last person' and Nehru's 'Tryst with Destiny' promises have been dumped along with holding him responsible for all the ills of the country!

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SIVAKASI'S FIRECRACKER FACTORIES

Feudalism beyond the Farmland

Azeefa Fathima

THE DEATH OF MORE THAN a dozen workers at a fire cracker factory in Virudhunagar in November, 2023 was yet another reminder of the hazards of working in this sector. But the horrific incident, which is the latest of many, did little to deter thousands of mostly Dalit workers like 40-year-old Mariammal (name changed) who work in firecracker factories in the district.

There are other industries such as food processing units in the region but casteist notions of purity and impurity ensure that Dalits are not hired, forcing them to seek out cracker factories for employment. The principal breadwinner of her family and single mother of two school-going children, Mariammal had no option but to put away her fears and return to work.

"Witnessing charred bodies and individuals living with burn injuries has been a part of our lives since childhood. We are left with no alternative for earning a livelihood," she said.

Workers like Mariammal not only have to live under a constant threat of fire accidents but also lack basic employee benefits such as leave days, insurance or a provident fund. In addition, there is also uncertainty over cracker bans being imposed by some states. For close to a decade now, activists have been demanding that they be rehabilitated and given alternate livelihood options.

While an overwhelming majority of the workers are from Dalit and other lowered caste communities, the factory owners hail mostly from the powerful caste Hindu communities, particularly the Nadars. Observers say that successive governments have chosen to ignore safety and working conditions because of their proximity to the owners and the caste-capital interests they represent.

Pointing to the control by Nadars and Naickers, Mariappan, 42, a Dalit resident of Meenampatti near Sivakasi, says, "They have full control of raw materials. If, for instance, I want to start a small-scale production of firecrackers, I have to approach them for raw materials. After manufacturing the product, I have to go back to them because they are the agents, wholesalers and dealers of crackers. It is from them that all retailers and other shops purchase goods. They fix the rate of the raw materials, as well as the end product. So, they hold the power in two critical junctions in this supply chain."

He adds that only those who remain loyal to them would be allowed to survive in the field.

Suresh, an activist based in Sivakasi, says Dalits are not expected to sit on a chair or even enter the same room as the dominant caste dealer.

"It is not like they will be thrown out or shouted at. They might even be given a chair and treated properly. But this act of defiance will be punished in other ways," he says. "They would fix a very high price for the raw materials and a very low price for the finished products. They can easily reduce a Dalit manufacturer to bankruptcy. This will not explicitly look like caste discrimination, especially to the concerned Dalit person because he was treated 'equally' each time he visits the dealer."

"We have been doing this work since the 1920s, when the infamous Nadar brothers – Ayya Nadar and Shanmuga Nadar – started building the cracker hub in Sivakasi," says Muniappan.

The brothers, A Shanmuga Nadar and P Ayya Nadar, are credited with setting up the cracker industry in Sivakasi in the 1930s. They went to Kolkata and got to know the technique of making safety matches initially, and later went back again and learnt the process of making firecrackers.

"Now, we have the necessary skillmanship. No one can do our job, as each step of manufacturing a cracker requires specialisation. For manufacturing a single piece of seeni vedi (the smallest unit of the long sara vedi), we need 13 labourers. A small deviation in one of the steps would lead to a disaster. But, we don't have money, land or other resources needed to own a unit," says Mariappan.

This makes apparent the fact that caste and class disadvantages are combined to keep these labourers in perennial economic backwardness, which also translates to social backwardness.

According to the RTI data available with Vidiyal Veeraperumal, a Dalit RTI activist, between 2011 and 2021, a total of 309 persons have been killed in accidents at firecracker units in Virudhunagar district alone. However, there is no disaggregated data on how many of them were Dalits. Veeraperumal has the caste data of two particular fire accidents that happened in Sippiparai in 2020 and Achankulam in 2021 that throws some light into the issue.

In the Sippiparai accident of March 20, 2020 that killed nine labourers, eight were Dalits and one was from the Vadugar community, an extremely marginalised community classified under Backward

Classes in Tamil Nadu. In the Achankulam fire accident that happened on February 12, 2021, a total of 28 persons were killed and nearly 20 injured. Out of the 57 victims (injured and deceased), 35 were Dalits, four were Dalit Christians, and the remaining 12 mostly belonged to other lowered castes. The caste details of some victims have not been provided in the reply to Veeraperumal.

According to the data with Veeraperumal, between 2011 and 2021, the cracker industry in Virudhunagar district has witnessed 194 fire accidents, in which 302 persons were killed and 250 injured. "However, relief amount has only been paid to 139 families of the victims, between 2009 and 2019, which is a little more than one-third of the total deceased," Veeraperumal points out.

"As soon as an accident is reported, the owner of the fire unit tends to abscond. The foreman and supervisor – who are employees and not owners – are handed over to the police. The owner is usually caught after the initial anger of the people dies down. The district administration then enters into negotiations with the factory for compensation which includes only a small sum for performing the funeral. The compensation is given in post dated cheques which most often bounce. When the owner is taken to court for the default, they say they have no money. They finally agree to pay some money in installments. These installments seldom get paid," explains Vidiyal Veeraperumal.

While several people across the country are talking about the environmental impact of firecrackers and the need to bring green crackers, Bhimrao says that the lives and deaths of the workers are sidelined completely.

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MISPLACED PRIORITIES

Odisha under Naveen Raj

Bhabani Shankar Nayak

PEOPLE IN ODISHA FACE A myriad of challenges, ranging from economic uncertainties, unemployment, illiteracy, homelessness, illness, underdevelopment, and regional tensions to environmental crises and public health emergencies in both urban and rural areas. Navigating these complex realities demands the streamlining of resource allocation to prioritise the welfare of the state's people. This crucial aspect of governance takes a backseat to the pre-electoral propaganda of the Odisha government, led by Mr Naveen Patnaik. His politically inexperienced advisors and technocratic interventions by trusted bureaucrats result in the implementation of controversial programmes that prioritise the welfare of the people in a secondary position before the populist politics of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) led by Mr Naveen Patnaik. This recurring issue has plagued his government for more than two decades. The phenomenon of misplaced priorities shapes the managerial politics of Mr Naveen Patnaik, but it fails to contribute to and address the development needs of the people in the state. The focus and resources are directed away from pressing issues such as education, health, livelihood generation, and social development that require immediate attention.

The Government of Odisha, un-

der the leadership of Mr Naveen Patnaik, has launched a programme called "AMA ODISHA NABIN ODISHA" (Our Odisha, New Odisha), modifying the earlier initiative "Ama Gaon Ama Bikash" (Our Village, Our Development). Unfortunately, the BJD government in Odisha, has only recently recognised the need "to transform rural Odisha, taking measures to augment rural infrastructure, leading to accelerated growth, as well as to preserve the rich cultural heritage" after ruling the state for the last two decades. The development of primary schools, banking, sports, and Mission Shakti infrastructures represents crucial steps toward the social and economic empowerment of the people. The development of heritage sites is a well-intentioned move to uphold the rich cultural legacies of the state. However, unequal resource allocation highlights the misplaced priorities of the Odisha government. The crumbling health and educational infrastructures lack basic amenities, yet this government is allocating resources to develop amenities near places of worship.

The government directs resources to preserve the Lord Jagannath culture, even though the people of Odisha have preserved this cultural heritage for centuries without any form of state patronage or government funding. It is challenging to understand why this government is investing public money in religious activities and infrastructure. This expenditure raises concerns about the secular credentials of Mr Naveen Patnaik and his government in Odisha. While giving equal importance to all places of worship is one aspect of secularism, the separation of the state from religion is central to the secular ethos of

a modern constitutional state like Odisha.

The project-wise sectoral analysis of the budget for "AMA ODISHA NABIN ODISHA" reveals disturbing realities. A significant portion of public resources is earmarked for spending on religious infrastructure that does not contribute to rural development or the welfare of the people. Investments in religious projects do not alter the material realities of the populace; instead, they restrain the growth of scientific temper and impede the development of a secular and inclusive culture.

In the age of artificial intelligence, the Odisha government is prioritising religious infrastructure over health and education. It is evident that the ruling elites of the state are not inclined towards fostering scientific, secular, and inclusive consciousness for the deepening of democracy and the empowerment of citizens. One of the key areas where misplaced priorities become apparent is in the balance between populist cultural and religious considerations and social welfare under the vaguely defined project of "AMA ODISHA NABIN ODISHA." The narrative of the Odisha government often finds itself preoccupied with short-term electoral gains, neglecting long-term investments in education, healthcare, and social services. The emphasis on religious and cultural infrastructure results in the growth of a reactionary society where illiteracy, unemployment, income inequality, inadequate social safety nets, and a compromised quality of life for the most vulnerable segments of the population in the state define its future. The future of Odisha is intricately linked to the future of its people. Therefore, Mr Naveen Patnaik and his government must shape the present with progressive politics and welfare policies that aim to secure Odia culture and the overall well-being of the state. □□□

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LETTERS

Big 'Landlords' of India

Land prices in India are skyrocketing every day. In metropolitan cities there is very little land left for residence. According to a recent World Bank report, by the year 2030, India will need 40 to 80 lakh hectares of additional land to meet the housing needs of its citizens. In such a situation, there is sure to be more chaos for land in the coming days. Who is the biggest 'landlord' in India?

The direct answer to this is the Government of India. According to the data given on the website of Government Land Information System (GLIS), as of February 2021, the Government of India was the owner of about 15,531 square kilometers of land. This land is with 51 ministries and 116 public sector companies.

If one looks at ministry-wise figures, Railways has the maximum land. Indian Railways owns 2926.6 square km of land across the country. After this comes the Ministry of Defence (Army) and Ministry of Coal (2580.92 square kilometers). Ministry of Energy is at fourth place (1806.69 square kilometres), Heavy Industries is at fifth place (1209.49 square kilometers of land) and Shipping is at sixth place (1146 square kilometers of land).

The Catholic Church of India acquired a large amount of land after the Indian Churches Act of 1972, the foundation of which was once laid by the British government. The British would lease out the land they captured after the war to Churches at cheap rates, so that they could spread Christianity. After the central government, the Catholic Church has the most land.

The Catholic Church reportedly runs 14429 schools-colleges, 1086 training institutes, 1826 hospitals and dispensaries across the country. The

total land value of the Catholic Church is more than Rs 1 lakh crore.

Waqf Board is at third place in terms of land. The Waqf Board is an autonomous institution formed under the Waqf Act of 1954. It operates thousands of mosques, madrasas and graveyards across the country and owns these lands. The Waqf Board has at least more than 6 lakh immovable properties (Waqf Land). They got most of the Waqf lands and properties during the Muslim rule.

A Correspondent, News 18 Discrimination in Prisons

In response to the petition filed by journalist Sukanya Shantha, alleging caste based discriminations in prisons; the Supreme Court has issued notices to the Union government and eleven states. Notices have been issued to states including Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Punjab, Odisha, Jharkhand, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra.

The plea alleges that caste-based discrimination persists in prison barracks, extending to manual labour assignments, and adversely impacting denotified tribes and those categorised as habitual offenders.

A bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra recognised the gravity of the raised issue and summoned Solicitor General (SG) Tushar Mehta to assist the court in addressing it.

The petition seeks the repeal of discriminatory provisions found in various state prison manuals. Senior Advocate S Muralidhar, representing the petitioner, highlighted instances where Dalits are segregated into separate prisons, while individuals from other castes are held in different areas.

"Such discrimination based on

caste exists from the moment one enters the prison," he added. The petition sought the removal of discriminatory provisions in the prison manuals.

The Court, having acknowledged the gravity of the issue, called upon Solicitor General to assist in addressing the matter, emphasising the need for joint efforts in tackling the unacceptable situation. SG Mehta condemned the situation as 'unacceptable' and stressed the necessity for collaborative efforts to address it.

Mooknayak

Climate Migrants

Millions of Bangladeshis are projected to be internally displaced due to environmental disasters in the coming years. Climate-induced migration is presenting huge challenges for the country's already overcrowded cities.

Mahima Begum moved to the port town of Mongla in southwestern Bangladesh after a natural disaster struck her village and destroyed the home her father had built.

The 32-year-old is one of the millions of people in the South Asian country who have been forced to relocate due to climate-related disasters.

Historically, migrants have made their way to the country's capital, Dhaka. But the city is already one of the most overcrowded places on Earth and it's poorly equipped to accommodate the waves of people moving from climate-impacted areas of the country into urban centres, seeking residence and employment.

Mongla, located around 30 miles (50 km) from the Bay of Bengal, is emerging as an alternative for climate-displaced people.

The town's seaport and export processing zone have turned it into an economic and employment hub, attracting people from parts of Bangladesh ravaged by environmental disasters.

Raftiqul Montu, DW



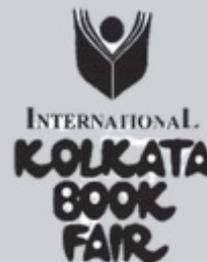
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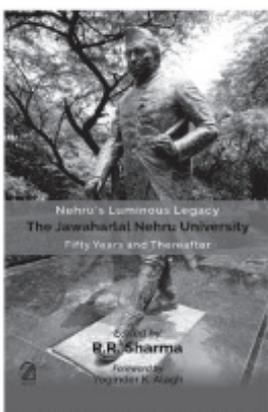
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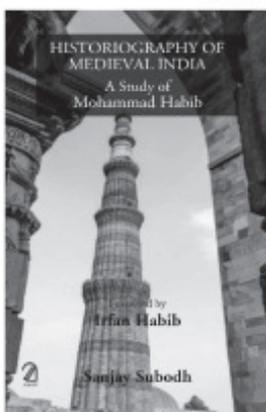


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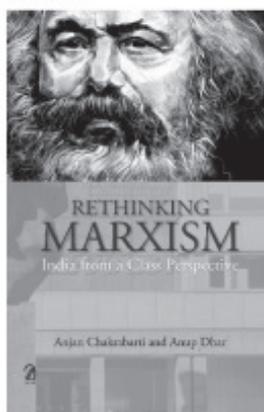
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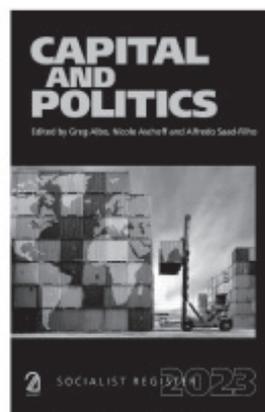
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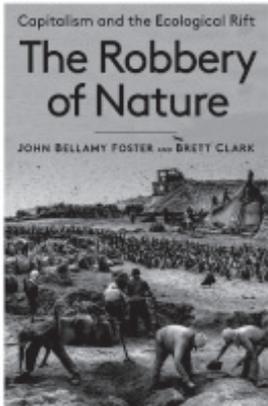
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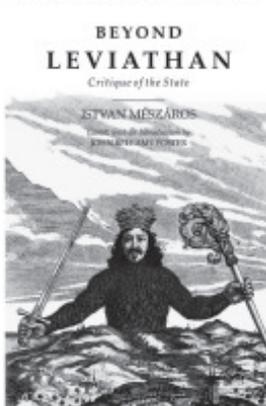
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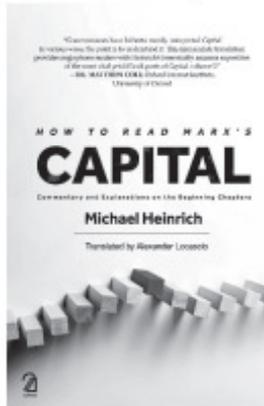
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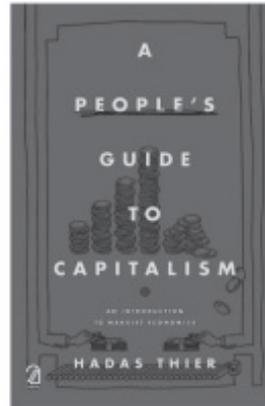
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