

frontier

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COP 27 and Climate Justice

AT THE TIME OF WRITING FRUSTRATIONS WERE STARTING to emerge regarding the much publicised COP 27 UN climate summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. The bone of contention is the thorny issue of "loss and damage" or financial support for developing countries hit by climate induced disasters—recurring floods and droughts. In truth there had been little progress till date on the technical details of how to deliver on deals and pledges made in previous years. More than 130 climate-vulnerable countries are demanding a new "loss and damage" fund. The big polluters—US and China—however, are not listening. Then the climate and environmental consequences of Russia-Ukraine conflict are yet to be assessed.

So far, Pakistan, Ghana and Bangladesh will be among the first recipients of funding from a G-7 'Global Shield' initiative to provide funding to countries suffering from climate catastrophe, according to a programme announced at the COP 27 summit. But this is no answer to the enormity of the problem.

India, meanwhile laid out the steps it will take to achieve net zero by 2070 releasing its Long- Term Low Emissions and Development Strategies (LT-LEDS) at the COP 27 gathering. Due to extreme weather in some parts of the globe the number of displaced people is expected to grow to about 143 million by mid-century.

India's preparations for COP27 are focused on demanding that the industrially advanced countries pay a fair share of the investments needed for effective and speedy climate mitigation, and adaptation, and compensate for loss and damage that is already happening. India and other countries of the Global South are entitled to an equitable atmospheric space and to resources needed to cope with the climate crisis already underway. After all, the industrially advanced countries have contributed a vast majority to the accumulated stock of GHG responsible for the climate crisis.

The first national report on the state of the climate crisis called 'Assessment of Climate Change over the Indian Region' revealed that India's average temperature increased by 0.7 degrees Celsius between 1901-2018. India is already paying massive economic costs of climate breakdown. As per the Global climate risk index 2020, India suffered an absolute loss of \$37 billion due to climate change in 2018. A recent RBI study predicts that "a persistent increase in temperature in India in the absence

of risk-mitigating policies can cause the per capita GDP to reduce by 6.4 percent by 2100”.

Investments in renewable energy and technology transfer should be geared toward facilitating a society-wide transition to renewable energy and the development of climate-resilient social and economic infrastructure. At the same time, any compensation for loss and damage should be used to address the vulnerability experienced by the most marginalised people within India. India’s climate and environmental policy leaves many a question unanswered:

How does the government of India in association with state governments plan to prepare for climate-related disasters, such as heat waves and floods that have become increasingly more frequent? How does the government seek to protect the most marginalised, who are also most vulnerable to climate impacts and climate disasters? What do the Centre and state governments plan to do about the longstanding crisis in agriculture, specifically, dry-land agriculture, which the climate crisis is making worse? Is the re-

cent entry of the private sector, particularly the Adani group in the mining sector conducive to ensuring a just transition away from coal? If anything the Adanis are acquiring more virgin coal blocks in Bengal and elsewhere.

The hard fact is that political parties, left and right alike, do hardly bother about the gravity of the climate crisis. They have no headache about how coastal India, more precisely coastal Bengal and Odisha, will be under sea due to global warming and sea-level rise not in the distant future. □□□ 15-11-2022

COMMENT

Mid-term Competition in US

CONTENDING PASSIONS AND fences haven’t left the just-concluded US mid-term elections. It’s not a new phenomenon in the very-recent US political history, however. The political domain is imparting lessons to its camp followers and antagonists.

The issues overwhelming the election and politics in the evil Empire now speak of the condition of the economy, and of the economy’s geopolitics.

Elections in bourgeois democracies, in cases, create contentions. But, not all cases experience contentions—a mark of maturity. Usually, contentions and conflicts are exclusive signs of the Third and Fourth World elections conducted by the crude, corrupt neo-ruling elites in those countries. Even, that doesn’t happen in all cases.

But, advanced bourgeois democracies travelling the path of contentions with elections is a rare of the rare case. That rarest sheath is being displayed in the US, the imperial godfather who teaches “democracy” round the globe.

It’s not only a sign of increasing conflict in the society. First of all,

it’s a mirror image of engagement within the ruling elites. Then, it’s a photograph of present condition of the process and institutions organising and conducting the election.

These, the sign, image and photograph, don’t end respective roles abruptly; and these don’t stay suspended from sky. These stand on base; and these carry consequences. Even, these lean heavily on some other pillars of the state machine, and impact those. So, the political incidents—contentions, conflicts, doubts, threats and following incidents—don’t run easy, and not superficial.

Another aspect of the political development is its gradually increasing force and spread. None in political camps in the Empire’s establishment claims that these developments are going to wither away in foreseeable future. The political suit, rather, is the opposite—increase in intensity. This dynamics of the incidents is pregnant.

Institutions and organisations, process and mechanism related to the election are being questioned by faction or sub-faction. The act reaches to the level of near-non-

trust. Threat of violence appears in precincts of election. Election officials in areas felt threatened, which part of the MSM reported. These recite something significant.

Allegations and counter-allegations threw by contending parties were not mere campaign tactics. The speed of counting votes in places, rate of mechanical failure of voting machines and scarcity of printing paper in areas, a few of questionable developments, were gestures of a condition of the process. An economic world power that spends billions of its currency for arming admirers and spreading “democracy”, which includes “gifting” computers and photocopiers, in continents faces scarcity of paper required for voting by its citizens! A world power in the area of science and technology faces failure of many of its voting machines on Election Day! These smell somewhat.

The money-play in the process of the election is an issue exposed and discussed by many for many decades, which some Third World neo-disciples of bourgeois democracy deny comprehending. This mid-term was not without money-play. One approach of analysis of the mid-term is to analyse this play of money power.

There comes the number game. Days passed to have the final number in the competition—who secured how many. That was a question of steering parts of the state machine's steps in the market of economy and politics, at home and abroad. Interests are thumping there. They're counting days for money.

Put all these together; and there surfaces condition of an advanced bourgeois democracy, an inconvenient area for further study essential

for those Third World "Left" politicians claiming to be revolutionary but mesmerised by the bourgeois system.

With the Democrats winning marginally Biden is now doubly encouraged to back his backer--military-industrial complex. If anything Biden is not interested in ending the Ukraine war because it has opened up huge opportunities for the American merchants of death. □□□

[Contributed] 15-11-2022

NOTE

Jeremy Seabrook and the Unprivileged

Bharat Dogra writes:

THERE ARE FEW WRITERS who have displayed such consistency and continuity in their writings on justice and concerns of the unprivileged as Jeremy Seabrook. His writings on these and other issues of high social relevance are marked by deep sympathy for those who deserve and need this the most. Readers are frequently awed by the sheer brilliance of his deep insights, made possible by his extensive travels combined with devoted yet joyful study of several disciplines, which enable him to draw very insightful comparisons from one place to another, or better still, the present times of one place with the past times of another place, and he can easily also quote various authors to make these comparisons!

This sometimes spills over from his writings even into daily conversation. Once emerging from this writer's home in Delhi after heavy rains to take an auto rickshaw back to his hotel, he noticed the many puddles of water here and there. He stopped awhile to take a more complete look, and then said that this reminds him of England of industrial revolution days, and then referred to some pages from Charles Dickens in support of what he had said!

It has not been easy to continue his kind of work over a long period, and it speaks for the tenacity and determination of Seabrook that he could continue for almost six decades. Starting in 1963 with *New Society* journal, it is only now at the age of 83, living in London with rather acute health problems, that Jeremy Seabrook has slowed down quite a bit.

During this period Seabrook has written extensively for some of the most prestigious publications including *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Financial Times*, *The Times*, *New Society*, the *New Republic*, *Race and Class* and *Third World Resurgence*. In India he wrote a column for *The Statesman* for seven years which made him very popular with the readers of this newspaper, and also contributed to *Outlook* and *The Pioneer* for a shorter time. He wrote several plays for radio, TV and theatre, and for some of these he collaborated with his friend of school days, Michael O'Neil. He also collaborated with Anna Matram and Winin Pereira. His collaboration with Trevor Blackwell resulted in four books on radical politics. Perhaps his biggest

NOTICE

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contribution has been in the form of books which have appeared consistently since *The Unprivileged* was published in 1973, a path breaking work which traced his own family history across two centuries. This was followed by 'A Lasting Relationship' (1976) and 'What Went Wrong', a review of life under Labour Governments which was published in the USA under the telltale subtitle—'Why Hasn't Having More Made People Happier' (1977). A memoir *Mother and Son* appeared in 1980. *Unemployment* (1983) was a critique of Thatcher's Britain. This was followed by 'Ideas of Neighborhood' (1984) and *The Myth of the Market* (1990) and *The Uses of Adversity*. His travels in Thailand led to a long article on sex tourism in *The Financial Times* and subsequently to a book 'Travels in the Skin Industry—Tourism and the Sex Industry'.

He approached the world of children with the same concerns of justice in his books 'Working Class

Children' (1982), 'Orphans', 'Toys' and 'Children of Other Worlds—Exploitation in the Global World'. In this last-mentioned book he compared Bangladesh child workers today with child workers in Britain in the 19th century. At the other end of age-groups he also wrote extensively on elderly people.

A frequent subject of his books was poverty. These books include 'Pauper Land—Poverty and Poor in British History', 'Landscapes of Poverty' (1985) and 'A Guide to World Poverty', (2007), the last one written for the 'No-Nonsense' Series of books brought out by the New Internationalist. In this series Seabrook also wrote 'The Guide to Class, Caste and Hierarchy' (2005). Seabrook's book, 'In the Cities of the South' (1996), was rated as one of the best books by the New Internationalist, while another much appreciated book was 'Victims of

Development—Resistance and Alternatives' (1993).

During the eighties he started coming increasingly to India and Bangladesh, resulting in several books and collaborations, starting with 'Life and Labor in A Bombay Slum' (1987). This was followed by 'Notes from Another India', which consisted largely of reports on several grassroots struggles and was very welcomed by activist groups in India. In Mumbai Seabrook came close to retired scientist Winin Pereira and together they wrote some important books and articles including 'Asking the Earth' and 'Global Parasites'. Jeremy Seabrook also collaborated with Imran Ahmed Sidiqi to write 'People without History'.

In Bangladesh Seabrook wrote a book 'Freedom Unfinished—Fundamentalism and Popular Resistance in Bangladesh Today'. His reports on garment workers from here were

regarded as very significant. He carried this work further with other research on the garment industry to write a remarkable book 'The Song of the Shirt', a book which takes the reader across several countries and centuries and was described by the Guardian as a masterpiece. This as well as another book of his later years 'The Refuge and the Fortress—Britain and the Flight from Tyranny' have been widely appreciated.

As is evident from such a rich collection of work and the remarkable continuity of justice based concerns, the work of Jeremy Seabrook has been one of the most valuable contributions from any writer in recent times. As he copes with several health problems in the middle of increasing difficulties, Jeremy has the good wishes of at least two generations of innumerable readers and admirers spread over several countries. □□□

REVIEW ARTICLE

Jute Workers in Colonial Bengal

Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay

THIS IS A VERY WELL-researched, complex, and theoretically nuanced *book that studies industrial workplace—the mill—as a historically produced and dynamic site formed and transformed by social relationships, labour process, managerial control, subversion and strikes. In much of labour history and history of industrial capitalism, workplace unfolds only in the background, as a stage. In a welcome departure, Workplace Relations in Colonial Bengal presents workplace as a crucial component in materialising capitalist production, exploitation, consciousness, and collective action. A remarkable feature of this book is how it weaves together the everyday rhythm of labour process and its interruptions, and

***WORKPLACE RELATIONS IN COLONIAL BENGAL: THE JUTE INDUSTRY AND INDIAN LABOUR 1870S-1930S**
By Anna Sailer
London, Bloomsbury, 2022
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thus presents the mill as a dynamic and negotiated entity. How was the mill socially produced in Calcutta's jute belt between 1890s and 1930s?

At the heart of this story is how the capitalist regime devised techniques to optimise absolute surplus value by operationalising a multiple shift system of substitution that involved 'excess' employment of workers to ensure a literally restless production process. In the context of low wage—coupled with circular migration and high demand of jute in the

global market—this system of labour substitution worked well for the investors to address labour shortage due to what appeared then to be an Indian habit of taking too many breaks and go to their villages for days and months during festivals and intense agricultural work. This system also allowed the workers to pause in a working day and prepare themselves for another round of 'duty'.

The multiple shift system paid dividend until 1920s. The system was slowly abolished from the 1920s as overproduction hit the jute industry and 'labour shortage ceased to be a problem'. The abolition of the multiple shift system and the introduction of a more individualised single-shift system meant that a substantial section of the jute workers lost employment. It also involved the sanitisation of the workplace. This change elicited varied social responses: from continuation of now informal substitution to unionisation

and general strikes in an overall milieu of mass political formation.

Sailer tells this story via an implicit dialectic of structure and agency—the involuntary social relationships that humans get into, in producing and reproducing their existence within capitalist mode of production, and the histories that humans make—‘the more effective narratives of human belonging’. Her carefully crafted narrative shows how human agency inhered in the structure while actively interrupting and punctuating its course. While talking about resistance and subversion, Sailer displays a very careful approach to structure and agency. Thus, in pages 220, she writes: ‘Whether we can understand workers’ insistence on maintaining their practices of shared work in terms of social continuity, or as an act of resistance, hinges, in the first place, on the concrete moments in which we can identify conflicts over these issues.’

The histories of capitalism tend to focus more (but not exclusively) on the structure—the involuntary tendential aspects of society and the economy, while labour historians—especially those working on trade union movements—often (but not always) privilege workers’ agency over structure. Sailer’s dialectical sensibilities unravel how ordinary mill workers and their kin members negotiated and came to terms with capital’s law of motion. These human negotiations produced the workplace as a social phenomenon, as the workers exposed themselves to surveillance and exploitation. Thus, Sailer shows that agency was not external to structure. Nor was it subsumed in structure. Its relationship with structure, Sailer shows, was multiple, ‘ranging from opposition to neutrality’.

Sailer is also well aware of the limitations of this inquiry. A focus on workplace relations often compelled

her to only precisely talk about the neighbourhood and the bazaar that surrounded and often invaded the mill, gender dynamics of control and work, ethnic and communal mobilisations that intercepted and complicated working class militancy of the era. This was a conscious choice she made in the book. Some of these—especially gender and communalism—are also well-researched topics in Calcutta’s mill districts and elsewhere. Hence, no harm committed.

As a historian of her time and an extended neighbourhood, this reviewer is also well aware of certain archival compulsions that must have limited her choice to not further probe into certain categories such as the ‘Madrassis’, the ‘up-country men’, the ‘Hindus’ and the ‘Muslims’ or even the ‘Bengali’ workers. More often than not, the files do not tell about the humans that constituted these social identities or indicate the element of repression that accompanied any such categorical act, or even if all these categories were equally ‘lived’ and ‘experienced’ identities. Readers are told that during the strikes, the Hindu ‘Madrassi’ spinners might often have clashed with the Muslim ‘up-country’ weavers—now being organised by Suhrawardi, undermining the potential of the strike. The very co-existence of riot and strike as two forms of mass mobilisation in the early twentieth-century industrial neighbourhoods is itself an important social phenomenon.

These identities can perhaps be broken into more fundamental pieces only when one consults the archives of the latter day ‘socio-economic surveys’ or conducts ethnographies in the area to track their contemporary figurations. Surely, this exercise is outside the scope of this volume, but only in so far as it does not prohibit people to understand the dynamics of workers’ mobilisations

and participation in work and agitation. For one thing mobilisation does not always imply participation. Who for instance were mobilised by the trade unions and who all participated in its activities? Who were immobilised and who broke mobilising efforts? The Questions of this kind remain only partially addressed due to the lack of adequate social data. Of course, there is some information about Narayana—a ‘Madrassi’ worker mentioned in p. 178—who came out of Prabhatabi Das Gupta’s leadership and joined a more radical wing along with another Bengali trade unionist—‘comrade Bagchi’. The files would not track this man’s journey further.

The book is almost exclusively about variable capital, i.e., the living labour. The machinery installed in the mill remained operative in the background. In other words, there is not much about the technical transformations that intensified the extraction of relative surplus value—and hence absolute surplus value—during this period, although Sailer does mention how electric light prolonged the working day to 122 hours

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per week. This appears in page 1. In page 22, Sailer mentions the introduction of electricity in the mill that enabled multiple shift system to operate round the clock and how electrification privileged migrant workers living in the mill's vicinity and disadvantaged the Bengali workers who used to walk miles to reach the mill in page 37. Still, one does not get much information about crucial technical transformations—if any—in the mill space that impacted on how the workers negotiated capital. Marx says: 'Once the capitalist mode of production is established and become general, the difference between absolute and relative surplus-value makes itself felt, whenever there is a question of raising the rate of surplus-value' (Capital, Vol 1, Chapter 16). It may well be the case that between 1890s and 1930s, technical up-gradation in the jute belt remained

slow, while low wage rates, excess employment and effective managerial control continued to fetch enough surplus value, inhibiting long-term investment in constant capital.

Sailer's analysis is based almost exclusively on an imaginative reading of colonial official sources. Unlike in the West, the mill workers of colonial India had rarely left behind their own narratives, literary works, diaries, and autobiographies. Their access to durable devices of memory was rather limited due to the limited social reach of literacy. Writers here are still too much dependent on imaginative capacity and deconstructive skill to read 'the silence the sounds embedded in the documents of their rulers', while writing working class history. The Royal Commission did document oral testimonies of some of the important bhadralok and bhadramahila trade unionists. But

these narratives do not help much to examine what the masses that they frequently alluded to consisted of. These testimonies became merely a part of the tripartite division of the industrial society into the capitalists, the state, and the masses. In this context, Sailer's occasional logical extrapolations from the available testimonies of the workers become very important to understand both the organisation of workplace relations and trade unionism. Her capacity to logical extrapolation is amply evident when, for instance, she extrapolates the testimony of Shama Charan Samuth, who worked in the weaving department of the Budge Budge Jute Mill in the 1890s. □□□

It is a well-written, well-edited, and well-argued book.

[Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay is associated with Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Mohali]

COP 27

Release Alaa Abd el-Fattah

Amit Sengupta

THE ON-GOING HIGH PROFILE international get together of presidents and prime ministers, top leaders, policy-makers and experts at the climate change conference of COP-27 at the Red Sea Resort at Sharm-al-Shaikh near Cairo in Egypt is turning out to be a big headache for General Abdul Fattah El-Sisi, president and dictator of Egypt, and all his miscellaneous generals and ministers who have found themselves caught up in what has become a lead international headline in the media, with campaigners, celebrities, Nobel-prize winning authors, film actors, and civil society activists raising the pitch to a crescendo. Indeed, Sisi is in a Catch-22 scenario, with the focus having shifted from him as a host, to him as a dictator who has imprisoned

hundreds of peaceful dissidents in jail using cooked charges.

COP-27 is fast turning out to be a life and death issue for jailed blogger, philosopher-author, dissident and civil society activist, Alaa Abd el-Fattah, the Egyptian human rights defender, who has been in and out of jail for long periods since the last 10 years and who has refused to take water in the notorious Tora prison since the summit began.

Ecologists like Greta Thunberg has termed the global meet nothing but 'Greenwashing'. The Greens are calling it yet another dubious white-wash of highly volatile and life-threatening issues when global warming and climate change has become a dangerous reality in everyday life across the world. This has been accompanied by the bloody ravages

of war, mass internal displacement and migration poverty and war, and sharp inequality and mass poverty in the post-pandemic era with a handful of multi-billionaires becoming obscenely super rich.

However, Sisi is perhaps in trouble for the first time since he took over, crushing the dreams of the legendary Tahrir Square mass uprising in 2011 which toppled another long-term dictator, Hosni Mubarak, after 29 years of exercising ruthless power over a restless and oppressed population. Despite the huge upsurge at Tahrir Square, which became an inspiring and integral part of a rainbow of people's peaceful revolutions across the Middle-East, beginning from the streets of Tunisia, the movements were largely crushed everywhere despite creating the hope of a new era of democracy, enlightenment and modernity. Protests were banned effectively at Tahrir Square in 2013, with warnings of severe punishment and long imprisonments

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for those who dare to defy the regime.

Despite the warnings, many simply refused to allow the dreams of the original uprising to die and continued to write, speak and peacefully protest: young Alaa was one of them. Soon, he became an iconic symbol of dissent and freedom in a country which has hardly tasted the fruits of freedom and democracy in its entire post-colonial history.

Meanwhile, the new British Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, under great pressure from diplomats, politicians, media and activists in his own country, spoke to Sisi on the side-lines of the summit, and claimed to have seriously raised the issue of Alaa. Joe Biden is apparently taking up the case of political prisoners and Alaa in jail urgently and immediately. Several former and current leaders across the world and in the West are intervening to save the life of the writer and dissident on what are clearly cooked up charges.

The Guardian reports that On the sidelines of the COP-27 climate conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, the Egyptian president, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, reportedly told the French president, Emmanuel Macron, that he was “committed” to ensuring the democracy activist’s health “is preserved” and that “the next few weeks and months will bring results”.

Indian writer Arundhati Roy, in a video message which has gone globally viral, has sent a message to Alaa, filled with angst: “Wondering what our freedom means when you don’t have yours. Wondering what life means when you are going to die. Wondering what climate change conferences mean when countries which are hosting them are incarcerating and killing people.”

Several Nobel laureates have asked world leaders at the summit not to forget about the thousands of political prisoners held in Egypt’s

prisons—“most urgently, the Egyptian-British writer and philosopher, Alaa Abd el-Fattah, now six months into a hunger strike and at risk of death”.

In an open letter they have written, “Alaa has spent the last ten years—a quarter of his life—in prison, for words he has written. For his essays, social media posts and speeches and for the ideas he has put forward into the world, ideas about democracy and the law, technology and labour—ideas that should be celebrated, but instead have cost him his freedom. As Nobel laureates, we believe in the world-changing power of words and the need to defend them if we are to build a more sustainable, genuinely fairer future. We urge all representatives of governments, environmental groups and businesses to use the means at their disposal to help those most vulnerable, not just to the rising seas, but to the imprisoned and forgotten. A just transition cannot solely concerned with bringing down emissions, but must be a transition away from exploitation and coercion.”

Their letter says: “If the world gathers in Egypt and leaves without even a word about the most vulnerable, then what hope can they ever have? If COP-27 ends up a silent gathering, where no one risks speaking openly for fear of angering the COP Presidency, then what future is it that will be being negotiated over? We understand well what is at stake with the negotiations and their urgency. But it is not through compromise with authoritarianism that crises are averted. We believe that it is through more democracy, more transparency and more civic participation that the truest route to sustainability lies. We ask you to raise their names, to call for their freedom, and to invite Egypt to turn a page and become a true partner in building a

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different future: a future that respects human life and dignity. We ask everyone support the call from Egyptian and international human rights groups for a prisoner amnesty. We ask you to read the words of Alaa, whose powerful voice for democracy is close to being extinguished. If words are to hold their importance, then we must all stand up for them.”

The laureates have quoted Alaa: “As he wrote in 2019: ‘The crisis is not one of awareness, but of surrender to the inevitability of inequality. If the only thing that unites us is the threat, then everyone will move to defend their interests. But if we collect around a hope in a better future, a future where we put an end to all forms of inequality, this global awareness will be transformed into positive energy.’”

“Hope, here, is necessary. Our dreams will probably not come to pass, but if we submit to our nightmares we’ll be killed by fear before the Flood. Indeed, we cannot surrender to the inevitability of inequality. We cannot yield the possibility of a different future to an amoral managerialism of crisis. We must ensure that our words are spoken in defence of the most vulnerable—because we know that our silence puts them at greater risk.”

The open letter has been signed by Svetlana Alexievich, JM Coetzee, Annie Ernaux, Louise Glück, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Kazuo Ishiguro, Elfriede Jelinek, Mario Vargas Llosa, Patrick Modiano, Herta Müller, Orhan Pamuk, Roger Penrose, George Smith, Wole Soyinka and Olga Tokarczuk.

Several international human rights organizations, among others, have appealed for the immediate release of political prisoners and Alaa. They include, Amnesty International, PEN international, Human Rights Watch and Reprieve. Film

organizations include Sundance Institute, International Documentary Film Festival, Amsterdam, the European Film Academy and Société des Réalisateurs de Films, among others.

They have appealed to the Egyptian regime to release activists, journalists, lawyers, writers and artists who are rotting in prisons and detention centres. They have called upon Sisi to immediately end the illegal and abusive practice of pre-trial detention that is reportedly being used routinely, including reported stories of torture in detention.

Meanwhile, The Washington Post has reported on November 8, 2022, that “the small space afforded to dissenters in Sharm el-Sheikh is proving costly to Egypt’s regime. On Tuesday, Egyptian lawmaker Amr Darwish interrupted a news conference featuring Sanaa Seif, Fattah’s sister, with an outburst from the crowd. ‘You are here summoning foreign countries to pressure Egypt,’ Darwish said in Arabic, berating Seif in front of dozens of international journalists. ‘You are here to call for a presidential pardon for a criminal inmate.’”

Darwish was escorted out by UN security personnel. “His disruption may have been an attempt to defend the government’s jailing of Abdel Fattah,” wrote Siobhan O’ Grady and Sarah Kaplan of The Washington Post. “Instead, human rights advocates said it perfectly exemplified to a crowd of foreign observers a side of Egypt that officials here have tried to conceal from COP-27 delegates.”

“This kind of intimidation and harassment is the least we have to experience. The only reason we actually had the press conference at all is because it happened in the area under UN control,” Hossam Bahgat, Executive Director, Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights,

told the newspaper.

Climate campaigners agree. “There is such an intrinsic connection between human rights and climate justice,” Jean Su, a board chair for Climate Action Network International, told The Washington Post. “The credibility of COP-27 and its outcomes will be at stake if Egypt fails to respond to the call for the release of Alaa and other prisoners of conscience.”

Allison McManus, research director at the Freedom Initiative, has appealed to US President Joe Biden to intervene immediately. “There is something truly perverse in Sisi’s assumption that the world would ignore Alaa’s plight because we were so impressed with Egypt’s ability to hold an international conference,” he said in a statement. “As we are seeing, he grossly miscalculated: this COP will be remembered as Alaa’s COP.”

Alaa’s family has raised fears that he might be tortured in the prison, and force-fed against his will, even as he is handcuffed and reportedly in solitary confinement.

Said Sanaa Seif, Abd el-Fattah’s sister, in a press conference at the venue of the summit: “We need proof of life. The scenario I imagine is that Alaa is handcuffed somewhere and put on an intravenous drip against his will. That would be torture, and he shouldn’t be living that. The solution is simply just to let the British embassy see him. This has to end. It can end. There are three ways: let the British embassy visit him; put him on a plane out of Egypt today; or he will die, and be relieved of this nightmare. Whatever happens, I feel Alaa has won – I just hope that he is not sacrificed for it. He’s in prison because he’s someone that believed the world can be a better place.” □□□

[Amit Sengupta is a senior journalist. Source:countercurrents.org]

EWS JUDGEMENT

'Destroying the Spirit of the Constitution'**CPIML Liberation**

THE RECENT SUPREME Court judgement upholding Modi government 10% quota for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) aimed at providing reservation for forward castes clearly violates the objective and purpose of reservation embedded in the basic spirit of the Indian constitution. The judgement only solidifies the historic injustice against deprived sections. The same was reiterated by Justice S Ravindra Bhat, who gave a dissenting judgement, along with CJI UU Lalit in the EWS reservation judgement who held that: "...this court has for the first time, in the seven decades of the republic, sanctioned an avowedly exclusionary and discriminatory principle. Our Constitution does not speak the language of exclusion. In my considered opinion, the amendment, by the language of exclusion, undermines the fabric of social justice, and thereby, the basic structure."

When the Indian constitution was taking shape and form as people know today, the reservation policy for deprived sections was woven into it to build an egalitarian India. The same is reflected in the preamble to the Indian constitution which assures "Equality of Status and Opportunity". Thousands of years of caste based discrimination had pushed deprived sections like OBCs, Dalits and Adivasis into the periphery of the society stripping them of all rights and access. In fact, the word reservation translates to representation, with the spirit to provide representation and equal access to those who have been left out due to historic injustice and discrimination. The same was reiterated in the dissenting judgement

as follows: "the total and absolute exclusion of constitutionally recognised backward classes of citizens—and more acutely, SC and ST communities, is nothing but discrimination which reaches to the level of undermining, and destroying the equality code, and particularly the principle of non-discrimination".

The skewed SC judgement is clearly aloof from the ground reality of Indian caste system and its manifestation in everyday lives of deprived communities. The affirmative action or reservation for "backward" communities as mentioned in the constitution and discussed at length in the constitutional assembly debates of November 1948, was intended not as a method of poverty alleviation but for achieving social justice. The SC judgement thus squarely violates the basic spirit of Indian constitution.

In January 2019, just before the general elections Modi government had introduced the move to implement the EWS reservation with parliament enacting the Constitution (One Hundred and Third Amendment) Act, 2019. This enabled the State to make reservations in higher education and matters of public employment on the basis of economic criteria alone. The Act amended Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution by inserting 15(6) and 16(6) to include reservation for the forward castes.

This aimed at undermining the SC/ST/OBC quotas, as the RSS has been demanding for long. In fact, Justice Bela Trivedi and Justice Pardiwala, who formed the majority opinion with Justice Dinesh Maheshwari, have both in their con-

curing opinions called for reservations to be reviewed and time limits are prescribed for their continuation. As it is, the system of reservations has been increasingly marked by delays, loopholes and non-implementation, and is now being undermined by sweeping privatisation in education and employment.

The Constitution recognises social and educational backwardness alone to be the criterion for reservations. In other words, the Constitution recognises the principle that reservations are not a tool to address economic deprivation—they can only address (to an extent) systematic social and educational discrimination and exclusion. The claim that the upper castes, even those who are poor, face systematic discrimination, exclusion, and under representation in education and jobs does

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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not bear scrutiny. Joblessness and poverty are a separate problem that can only be addressed by the creation of jobs and better wages - and the Modi Government has signally failed on this front.

The 10% EWS reservation is in reality a misnomer, it is reservation solely for forward castes aimed at diluting the affirmative action policies for deprived sections. Indeed Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs are explicitly excluded from claiming EWS reservation. Even the eligibility cut-off itself is sham. According to the rules framed for implementation of EWS reservation in education and jobs, the eligibility is annual income of 8 lakhs i.e. Rs. about 67,000/- a month. This makes a mockery of the immense poverty of oppressed communities caused by the historical injustice of caste. The criteria render the definition of 'poverty' meaningless, and fails to effectively target the poor and unemployed among the upper castes.

Modi is by far not the first to moot the idea of a quota for the economically deprived in the non-SC-ST-OBC quota jobs and educa-

tional seats. The Narasimha Rao Government introduced a similar measure in 1991, reserving 10% Government posts for "other economically backward sections of the people who are not covered by any existing schemes of reservation". A nine-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court struck down that measure, observing that poverty alone cannot be the test of backwardness, and holding that social and educational backwardness was the only Constitutional basis for reservations.

The question of social justice and reservation are intertwined and thus can't be viewed as separate entities. The idea of affirmative action or representation for SCs and STs was core to Dr. BR Ambedkar's vision of social justice and social mobility for deprived communities. On one hand, the Modi government and RSS are busy appropriating Ambedkar, while on other; they reject his basic thinking on the need for reservations for oppressed castes.

The EWS reservation thus creates a parallel structure inside the reservation mould, with the clear purpose of introducing a caste sys-

tem and solidifying the discrimination against historically deprived sections of the society.

The Modi government, which completely failed in generating new jobs and reviving the economy, is using EWS reservation as a desperate deflection tactic. The jobs are not eaten away by affirmative action, as Modi and RSS want people to believe. The jobs, like people's lives, are being sacrificed by the government at the altar of corporate profiteering and their looting of the country's resources. Today, the unemployment rate in India has surged to 7.77%, with more people being daily rendered jobless and pushed into poverty.

We must strongly oppose the 10% EWS reservation, as it is a gross violation of the spirit of the constitution and a mockery of the principle of social justice. The fight against poverty requires more jobs and economic revival that can only be achieved by putting a halt to the Modi government's pro-corporate and privatisation spree. □□□

[Source: Editorial, ML Update Vol. 25 No. 46, 8-14 Nov 2022]

PLACHIMADA NIGHTMARE

Anti-Coca Cola Struggle

To,
The Secretary General,
The United Nations Organisation
Headquarters, New York, NY 10017
Sir,

Sub: Request to remove Coca Cola from sponsorship for COP 27
Ref: Report of the High Power Committee constituted by the Government of Kerala to assess damages caused by the Coca Cola plant at Plachimada, Palakkad district, Kerala, India. We are grateful to the United Nations for its major role in addressing the climate crisis since the formation of the IPCC in 1987.

On numerous occasions, you have personally come forward with strong appeals to world rulers and people to initiate serious actions to tackle the climate crisis.

Despite the big role played by the UN in addressing this biggest existential crisis for humanity, we are very sad to note that intervention by international corporate bodies at the annual Conference of Parties is jeopardizing the success of the COPs. Being the victims of a plant of Coca Cola in a remote village of Kerala in India, we are particularly disturbed and agitated

to learn that Coca Cola is the official sponsor of the COP 27. We request you to remove Coca Cola from the sponsorship of the critical COP 27.

The social and environmental impacts inflicted by the operation of the Coca Cola plant at Plachimada is narrated briefly below for your kind perusal. Plachimada, a remote village in Palakkad district of central Kerala is situated in the Palakkad gap of the Western Ghats mountain ranges. Hence, the place receives substantially less rainfall compared to other places in the state.

The state has very low ground water potential and the available resource is over exploited in the Palakkad gap region due to semi-

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arid conditions. The Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages Pvt Ltd (HCBPL) plant at Plachimada started its operation in 1999. In the five years of its operations until the plant stopped functioning in May 2004, it had badly destroyed the social and environmental fabric of the region.

The report of the High Power Committee (hereinafter referred to as the Committee) constituted by the Government of Kerala to assess the damages caused by the HCBPL states that "It is evident that the damages caused by the Coca Cola factory at Plachimada have created a host of social, economic, health and ecological problems, cutting across different sectors." The Committee had looked into the impacts on water, agriculture, environment and health of the public. It had conducted several studies including those of the Central Ground Water Board, Supreme Court Monitoring Committee, Legislature Committees, State Ground Water Board, State Pollution Control Board and the Department of Health. It had also looked into study reports by reputed agencies from outside the government including that of University of Exeter (UK). Some excerpts from the Committee report on presence of heavy metals are reproduced below. They are self-revelatory. "The presence of toxic metals cadmium (Cd) and lead (Pb) in the sludge generated by the plant was noticed for the first time in an analysis of the sludge by the University of Exeter (UK) on behalf of BBC in July 2003 when a sample of sludge dumped on a farm near the Cola factory was found to have 100 mg/kg cadmium and 1100 mg/kg lead..... The well water collected near to the farm where the sludge sample was collected also showed unacceptable level of lead. The sample had 65 micrograms/litre (0.065 mg/l) of lead, which is well beyond the permissible maxi-

mum of 0.05 mg/l set by the Bureau of Indian Standards for drinking water and way beyond the WHO guidelines of 0.01 mg/l." "A study conducted by the Kerala Agricultural University at Plachimada during 2004- 06 on the level and impact of heavy metal pollution in the village found consistently and significantly higher levels of cadmium and lead in the well waters and in the samples of soil, fodder, milk, meat and egg collected from the area."

"An extensive study of the presence of heavy metals in the ground water was conducted by the New Delhi based Hazards Centre and Dehra Dun's Peoples Science Institute in November 2005, the results of which were published in June 2006. The analysis done at PSI's lab has found the toxic metals cadmium, lead and chromium at levels far higher than the permissible levels in nearly all of the 9 well water samples it had collected from Plachimada." The report quotes various studies to establish reduction in drinking water availability. It also points to reduction in crop productivity and heavy metal presence in livestock. On health impacts, the Committee report says, "A systematic study of the health issues arising from pollution at Plachimada was done for the first time in November 2003 by a medical team led by Dr. M. N. Anuvarudheen, Dr. K. Muralidharan and Dr. T. P. Jayaraman. The team has found the prevalence of symptoms like hair loss, burning of eyes, cough, vomiting, pain in abdomen etc. which the team has attributed to the pollution caused by HCBPL." HCBPL had scant respect for the law of the land and it was repeatedly ignoring various directions from concerned authorities. The Committee report says, "The KSPCB constituted a Local Area Environment Protection Committee (LAEPC) on 14.9.2004 that included two repre-

As Timir Basu is still seriously ill, he is not in a position to communicate with contributors and subscribers. Please bear with us.

—Fr.

sentatives of the HCBPL, following the direction of the SCMC, to ensure, among other things, that the Company provides uninterrupted piped supply of safe drinking water to the affected people and directed the Company to take immediate measures to provide this (Annexures VI). The Company blatantly refused to comply with this direction which was originally issued by the Supreme Court Monitoring Committee. They wrote to the SCMC on 20.11.2004 arguing unconvincingly and rather naively that they have not caused pollution.The Company not only refused to comply but also refused to divulge to KSPCB the source of cadmium in the sludge (667% above permissible limit) on the ground that the information they had submitted did not contain any material likely to have cadmium content and the Company has claimed that its intake water was free from cadmium."

We can quote a lot more from the Committee report and from several other reports, but refrain from doing so in order not to burden you with too much material. We are willing to present our case in details, if required. Based on the assessment of impacts on water, soil, agriculture, environment and health, "The Committee has come to the conclusion that the Company is responsible for these damages and it is obligatory that they pay the compensation to the affected people for the agricultural losses, health problems, loss of wages, loss of educational opportunities, and the pollution caused to the water resources."

The Committee arrived at a very

conservative figure of Rs. 216.26 crore (26.14 million USD at current rate) as compensation to be paid by HCBPL. Unfortunately, the company has refused to pay even this meagre amount. We request you to remove Coca Cola from the sponsorship of COP 27 as they are gross violators of all environmental norms and to restore the integrity of the decisive environmental conference. We also request you to kindly use your good

offices to impress upon Coca Cola of their duty to compensate for the damages caused, as per the reference report along with interest at prevailing rates. The report of the High Power Committee is attached for your ready reference. We take this opportunity to extend our whole hearted support to your efforts to address the climate crisis and to ensure survival of the human race beyond this century. We thank you

in advance for looking into the matter raised.

We anticipate just and reasonable action from you,

Thanking you once again,

Vilayodi Venugopal,
Chairperson, Plachimada Anti Coca Cola Struggle Committee
Plachimada, Kerala, India.
K Sakthivel, General Convenor,
Plachimada Anti-Coca Cola Struggle Committee, Plachimada, Kerala, India

IT IS PLAIN TYRANNY

At the edge of the Abyss

Hiren Gohain

THE COUNTRY IS LUMBERING towards an abyss, what with the reckless government caught in the toils of its own rash policies, and brazening it out with more and more incredible lies. Society still foundering in the terrible wilderness of divisive and hate-filled campaigns, and the opposition still unable to unite in their intoxication with imagined electoral triumphs.

Not unexpectedly Rahul Gandhi's bold initiative in the form of the Bharat Jodo Yatra has come as a whiff of fresh air into this murky and toxic atmosphere, and alarmed BJP spokesmen have sought to drown it under filthy invective. People have joined with enthusiasm and radiant hopes seen on their faces. But over buoyed with the growing success of the March Rahul Gandhi now and then seems to take a false step. For example his avowed aim is to rouse the people from confusion and torpor, and he should leave such remarks as that on the possibility of alliance with TRS to the new Congress president. Besides while he seems to be succeeding in his aim of mobilising the people to rescue the country from a dangerous slide towards chaos, he is yet to get their hopes and fears, impulses and ener-

gies concentrated into a clear focus on certain general but concrete goals.

The price-rise is no figure on the tables in a document. It has become a grim drain on his already poor resources for bare survival. The crowing from government circles that GST has raked in more than 1 lakh and 50 crore rupees is poor consolation as quite a lot of it has been squeezed from taxes on essential commodities including some vegetables and milk and curd. Medicine prices are jumping through the roof. Employment figures have dipped dismally in spite of bombastic boasts on government advertisements. The clamour about IT and ED raids has dimmed in volume as the public has become disconcertingly aware of the sins of the canonized saints. The Morbi disaster has had louder and more lasting reverberations than saintly rulers cared for.

At this twilight hour the Delhi Police appear to be chucking their constitutional duties and turning themselves into a troop of robotic warriors programmed to execute the most irrational orders like raiding newspaper and portal offices and seizing alleged incriminating documents. It will be no surprise if it pulls out of its hat yet another

mind-blowing story about Urban Naxals out to ruin the nation.

Naturally the only source of relief and possible succour for peaceful citizens from the fury of a demented state remains the higher judiciary. But as has been already hinted in the past this has become elusive as the courts at crucial times are prone to shy away from a direct confrontation with a crazed executive.

Well, the gentlemen in wigs and robes are not impassioned revolutionaries, nor are expected to be such. They find it distasteful to desert the chosen and customary ground for exercise of the powers granted by the constitution. Nobody blames them for it. But these are very changed times, and the stress on sobriety, decency and legality may not quite rub off on people who are determined to defy such norms when it suits them. Remember the situation when the then CJI had demanded a clear answer from the government whether it had purchased the malware Pegasus and used it against civilians. The government had bluntly said it won't respond and the court could do whatever it liked! Actually, it was like a turning point laying bare the most unpalatable truth about the present uncertain position of the judiciary. It will require the highest level of integrity, courage and grit on the part of the judiciary to survive such an ordeal. It will no longer do to secure fundamental civil rights under threat

and allow the government to get away with the most glaring violations of constitutional norms under the guise of 'policy'.

The government's chilling claim to overriding powers in transgression of basic democratic norms has come out in the affidavit by the Centre in response to petitions by civil society groups challenging CAA at the sitting of the Supreme Court on 31st March. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta defended the affidavit that went on to question the locus standi of civil society groups on the ground that parliament alone had the authority to consider, pass and discuss citizenship laws, and civil society groups had simply trespassed. But laws are made ultimately for the

good of the people and if they threaten or harm their interests they have as much scope to approach the high courts and Supreme Court to find redress. Denial of that right is plain tyranny

The country has noted with some relief and expectation the steps initiated by CJI Ramana to pull back the institution of the judiciary from the brink of collapse. Looking back on the tenures of other CJIs who had either passed instant judgments in favour of the government with the most incredible alacrity or the scandalous genuflection before governments in cases of most flagrant failures of governance, one felt one's spirits rise a little from stupor. Justice U. U. Lalit had continued the

trend, and one hopes the flame won't flicker out. But both the judiciary and the people banking on their morale and grit, should cherish no illusion about the realities today.

War-drums are sounding again in different parts of the globe, with an America crazed with fears of losing its supremacy and the defensive paroxysms of states it is threatening with veiled signals. The world economy has already started rocking under the impact of their moves and counter-moves. Rulers in India seem to be turning towards them as a last resort against incalculable explosions of popular rage. Keen alertness on part of citizens is what matters most in this hour of crisis. □□□

[Source: countercurrents.org]

'ALEEK MANUSH'

A Man of Unrelenting Dreams

Omar Rashid Chowdhury

ANIRBAN BISWAS, ASSISTANT editor of Frontier and one of the directors of Germinal Publications Pvt Ltd, passed away on April 4, 2021 at the age of 69, in his home in Birbhum district, West Bengal. He was also a regular contributor in the bilingual monthly Purbasha Ekhon, and editor of its English section. Anirban Biswas, a staunch, devoted practitioner of communist ideology, a veteran revolutionary and a brilliant economist with vast knowledge of Marxist Economics, had been remembered in an anthology of reminiscences, published by Frontier Publications (44 Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata 700006, WB, India, May 2022), titled Aleek Manush Anirban Biswas.

The anthology is an accolade of loving memories and venerated recollections on the ideology, work and life of Anirban Biswas. It also recollects a time of fire and blood that shaped persons like Anirban Biswas,

persons who had been absolutely devoted to a singular cause for the ultimate emancipation and recognition of dignity of the toiling masses.

The anthology includes reminiscences by Timir Basu, editor of Frontier, Amiya Bagchi, professor of Presidency College, K.K. Saxena of Aakar Books of Delhi, among other friends and loved ones from Anirban Biswas's political and personal life.

During the Great Naxalbari Movement in 1968, Anirban Biswas became a sympathiser and activist of the CPI (M-L). He wanted to be a professional revolutionary during those early days of the Naxalbari, and went to rural areas to organise the poor peasantry. He was later imprisoned and tortured for his political activism in 1971 and 1975. In 1981 he joined as a professor of economics in Hetampur Krishnochandra College in Birbhum. He was also elected to the central committee of the Marxist-Leninist

party PCC CPI (M-L). Anirban Biswas joined as assistant editor of Frontier in 2012. He was also affiliated with editing the English manifesto of PCC CPI (M-L) titled For a New Democracy.

A prolific writer with in-depth knowledge of Marxist studies, Anirban Biswas regularly contributed commentary and analysis in Frontier. As Anup K. Sinha, a friend of Anirban Biswas recollects, "His clarity of thought and his commitment to making the world a better place was unquestioned. The hard work he did for keeping the periodical Frontier going was something rare." (Anup K. Sinha, 'Miss You Anirban')

An "erudite writer" with profound articulation, Anirban Biswas had been hailed by his friends and co-workers in the party for his lucid memory and exceptional knowledge of economics and Marxist studies. His books, "The Cowrie Currency and Monetary History of India" (Camp Publications, 2006), and "Money and Markets from Pre-colonial to Colonial India" (Aakar Books, Delhi, 2007), are well recognised.

Born in Chittagong district of

Bangladesh in 1952, Anirban Biswas had been remembered as a humble person, with vast knowledge and exceptional brilliance. But his greatest identity had always been of an active, staunch, unwavering, passionate revolutionary till death.

The person Anirban Biswas, as had been remembered by many, was 'unkempt' and 'oblivious' when it came to material gains, a person impervious to the Earthly fetters that constitute of money, lavish homes, cars, high-paid jobs. And yet he was far more humane, closer to earth than many, as his dreams and fight were borne of the soil, borne of toil, borne of blood and sweat and borne of a relentless fight for people, for peasants, for workers. He was a revolutionary, and to him revolution was not just another fancy hobby for fanning a flickering flame of fame, it was a profession.

As Pradosh Nath remembers: "For Anirban anything other than transformation of the society we are living in has been uninteresting pastime.... When revolution remained elusive, Anirban created and inhabited a surreal world of which we sometimes caught fleeting glimpses when his passion got the better of our pragmatic self. It was a world where revolution is an imminent reality, where every one of his friends is giving their best towards realisation

of the dream. It telescoped the revolution and the post-revolutionary promised land of peace and harmony. It was the becoming and being of a paradise which was forever lost to us, immersed as we were in our worldly pursuits." (Pradosh Nath, 'Alik Manush Reminiscing Anirban Biswas')

When a section of leadership of the CPI (M-L) asked its activists not to read *Frontier*, Anirban Biswas, then an activist of CPI (M-L) remained affiliated with the weekly, with his contributions and later his active involvement as an assistant editor, as he understood the necessity of a non-sectarian way of adopting revolutionary tactics.

Words of Anirban Biswas in one of his pieces for *Frontier* reflect his continuously dynamic adoptive revolutionary attitude: "As I went on reading *Frontier* without, however, understanding much of the contents, I came to develop a fascination for the paper. It might be that the sharp language and brilliant style of editorial pieces offered an additional attraction.... I however continued to read *Frontier*, sometimes on the sly in order to avoid taunts and sneers from my firebrand revolutionary friends. Looking back I am convinced that had the ideologues of the CPI (ML) and their firebrand followers read *Frontier* with a non-

sectarian mind, while keeping the scope of disagreement wide open, they would have benefited much, and the excess committed in the name of 'revolution' could have been contained and much unnecessary bloodshed avoided". (Anirban Biswas, 'My Association with *Frontier*', *Frontier*, Vol. 49, No. 13-16, Oct 2-29, 2016)

The 84-page anthology of reminiscences is a glimpse into the Great Naxalbari Movement and its definitive dedication towards people's causes. Despite the said 'failure' of the movement, it nourished and created revolutionaries like Anirban Biswas. Revolutionaries who had functionally devoted their life for a singular humane cause and ideology.

A number of personalities like Anirban Biswas, those who had truly, absolutely been devoted to the revolution not just in words, but in their practices, were borne out of the Great Naxalbari Movement. Those fiery times created professional revolutionaries like Anirban Biswas, now rare in the subcontinent, against the continuous onslaught of a juggernaut system ensnaring and corrupting all that is good and true.

□□□

[Omar Rashid Chowdhury is a civil engineering graduate from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) and learner, from Dhaka, Bangladesh]

LETTERS

Digital Currency

A new era of slavery has begun the Reserve Bank of India has launched its own digital currency. Like every case, digitalisation is being imposed on us in financial sector: closing bank branches, cash pushed back, it's important to understand what concept works at the root of digital currency. Its root is, cash end, cash transaction end.....

Indeed, cash, cash, is the end of

personal autonomy.... It has a power that the government cannot control, so it needs to be eliminated. Obviously, the government won't tell us our true intentions because it might react.

We will be told this is for our 'good'.

Now this 'good' can be defined. This will be sold as our profit....

News of looting will be published. Crime has finally been defeated. But

it won't say hacking incidents will increase, bank scams will skyrocket, the poor will be told that the rich can no longer hide their income and will be forced to pay fair taxes on their income... . Though the middle class will be slit....

We live in a society that is dominated by a very small group of very rich and very powerful.

Their biggest interest is to maintain their prosperity and power. So digitalisation is not for our benefit, but for the benefit of this small group.

You must have understood it well that digitalisation in every sector is basically increasing the wealth and control power of those small groups and the same is now going to be true with currency.

Digital currency will be the core of a compelling social governance that will mainly manage without violence because it can suppress any opposition without targeting people.

This would prove to be an inevitable way of population control, carcassing and conditioning.

The establishment of a Cashless Society is very important for the New World Order. The real purpose of the Cashless Society is complete control, universal control... And it will be presented to us as a simple and effective way to free us from crimes i.e. fascism will be presented by drowning in sugar vine.

Fascism ! Twenty first century fascism... What started with Corona, digital currency is its next biggest stage.

Henry Ford once said, "It's enough that the people of the country don't understand our banking and currency system, because if they do, I believe there will be a revolution before tomorrow morning".

Mili Mukherjee, Kolkata

Ela Bhatt

All India Trade Union Congress sends its deepest condolences on the demise of Ela Bhatt, a Gandhian, labour rights activist and the founder of self-employed Women's Association (SEWA). She [was] 86 and remained actively associated with SEWA activities till very recently. Her death is a loss to the labour rights movement in India. AITUC dips its flag in salute and honour of Ela Bhatt and shares the agony of the bereaved members of her family and SEWA who suffer the loss.

Committed to the cause of workers and women's rights, Ela Bhatt

has won accolades for her contribution. She was a member of 'The Elders', the group of world leaders that was formed by Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu to contribute wisdom to some of the international issues including the Palestine issue. Her hard work won rewards and recognition. Millions of women got their identity recognised through the committed works of Ela Bhatt.

At this juncture when the labour rights and women's rights are being denied and snatched away, at this important time of history when the trade union movement in this country is waging a struggle to retain the hard-won rights while also pursuing for the rights to sustain and grow, Ela Bhatt's loss is indeed a great loss.

Her legacy may be carried forward by SEWA with all commitment and conviction.

Amarjeet Kaur
General Secretary

All India Trade Union Congress

The Sacred and the Scared

This is apropos to "An Appeal" by Yogendra Yadav, (dated September 4) that appeared in this much-respected journal: Frontier Weekly, Vol 55, No. 13, Sep 25-Oct 1, 2022 in the "Letters" section. Readers can detect the earnestness conveyed by the author regarding present conditions in India, "...when the constitutional values and democratic norms are being brazenly undermined and the very idea of India has come under a systematic assault. "Never before have had the values of the Republic faced as heinous an assault as they have in the recent past. ..." etc. And the author emphasised the importance of the "Bharat Jodo Yatra" by Indian National Congress and "like minded political parties [and] civil society groups." Incidentally, this appeal started with a note in Brackets, "This appeal is addressed to all

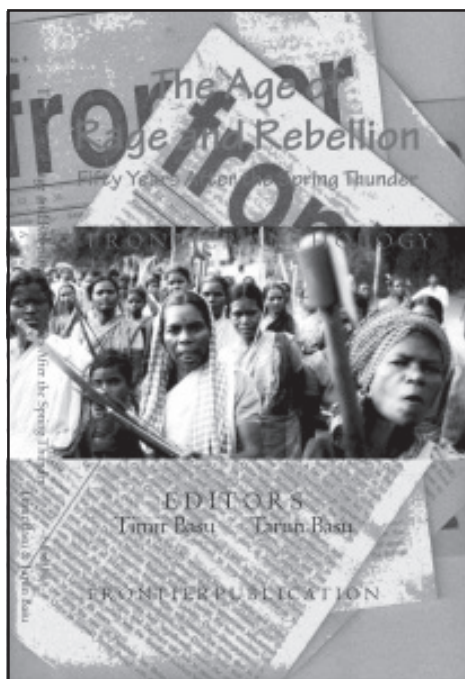
peoples' movements, organisations and activists, all civil society organisations, public intellectuals and all who hold the Constitution as the most sacred text ..." and precisely that necessitated this rejoinder.

Frontier Weekly (and its readers) in its first decade of existence got some taste of Indian democracy. Article 356 of that mentioned sacred text was practised twice in West Bengal (a decade after its use in Kerala) to dislodge a democratically elected government. Frontier and many such journals could not see the light of the day due to some provisions in that sacred text that enabled declaring emergency. All the constitution makers, whatever might be reasons, by some schedules, sanctified continuation of draconian 'codes' and penalties of the British colonial era, never bothered about undemocratic land acquisition acts, acts like those related to Electricity transmission that gave extraordinary power over citizens and their landed property to curtail their rights (people saw recent episodes near Farakka where Mango Orchards were destroyed) and the company was not at all and/or government had no responsibility to hear alternate proposals of 'path' in their 'right of way'. The colonial forest act helped uprooting Adivasi people, nature and also altered the balance of nature. (Even the word 'aboriginal tribes/peoples' were rephrased so that never in future any tribe/people demand some extra power based on the part-word 'original', like the First Nations in some countries.) Only through prolonged fight, acts like FRA came into existence but there are so many provisions in many sacred texts which can jeopardise its true implementation. There are sections of CrPC permitted by those sacred texts that enable unelected officials to disallow people's protest assembly; unelected officials can do many anti-people actions with impunity.

Sandeep Banerjee

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