

# THE RADICAL HUMANIST



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M.N. ROY

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## How True Today More Than Ever!



Of course you weren't spreading  
rumours - the charge is you were  
spreading facts!

- R K Laxman (Dec 26, 1962)

# India failed to save the living from covid-19. Now, it won't count the dead

**Drone footage shows thousands of bodies buried along India's Ganges river**



*Bodies some Indians believe are covid-19 victims are seen partially buried in sand along the Ganges river in Prayagraj in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. (Courtesy of Mojo Story)*

For the past 10 days, at the peak of India's second covid-19 wave, I have traveled through remote villages in the country's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, documenting corpses that have been dumped in our holiest rivers. I have counted hundreds of bodies abandoned in mass shallow graves molded from the sand and stones of dried-up riverbanks. My count stands at 1,000 bodies at six different towns, spread across a few hundred miles.

A formal audit will reveal many more bodies are out there. But no one will order it.

First, the Indian government failed abysmally at saving lives. Now, it is refusing to count our dead.

The distortion in death data has rendered thousands—maybe even hundreds of thousands—of Indians invisible. India's poor are dying unchronicled, uncounted and unacknowledged.

In Prime Minister Narendra Modi's parliamentary constituency of Varanasi, graves had to be dug for seven half-decomposed

bodies that washed onto the shore, just a stone's throw away from a village Modi adopted under a government scheme.

In Prayagraj, named after the confluence of three rivers and rechristened from its Muslim name, Allahabad, by the Hindu nationalist strongman chief minister Yogi Adityanath, I found hundreds of bodies left by the riverside, with local residents asking, "Will the government ever bother to count our dead?"

And, by the very edge of the Ganges in the town of Unnao, where the waves of the water lashed against empty fields and there was not a person for miles, a local cowherd bore witness to the surge in bodies over the last few weeks, testifying to at least "two dead bodies, anonymously left in the sand, every day."



**Barkha Dutt**

( To be Contd....on Page - 9)

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## **Editorial :**

# **The Villains of the Second Wave of the Pandemic**

**Mahi Pal Singh**

The second wave of the pandemic Covid-19, which began around the beginning of April 2021, has been more devastating and deadly than the first one which had begun more than a year ago. But to say that it came of its own will be a denial of the truth. Last time when it came, it came stealthily along with a few carrier passengers landing in the country from aeroplanes. It was some neglect here and some unpreparedness there against an unknown enemy which made, slowly though, a large population victim of the deadly virus which showed its even more deadlier face in America, Brazil and Italy and many other countries. The sudden and unplanned lockdown throughout the country and its worst possible implementation brought job loss to crores of poor migrant labourers who started migration back to their villages on foot, suffering hunger, illness, misery and death in thousands, on their way back, which became even more painful than the pandemic itself. There was shortage of health infrastructure including hospital beds and doctors were forced to experiment with various medicines. Nobody knew which medicines could help the patients of Covid-19. The medicine Remdesivir came very late and there were no vaccines then. Yet by the beginning of the new year, Covid-19 started coming under control and people and the government started heaving a sigh of relief. Labourers also started returning back to their jobs in the cities and economy seemed to be on its way back to recovery. But in April 2021 the pandemic suddenly returned with a greater force. The vital question is – what happened because of which the pandemic returned as a second wave causing unprecedented suffering and death, and in a deadlier form.

Undoubtedly, it was a lot of negligence on the part of the people themselves which initiated the second wave in Mumbai and Maharashtra as a whole. People did not take due care in observing the Covid-19 protocols like wearing masks and observing social distancing. As a result the number of daily Corona+ cases in Maharashtra reached more than 68 thousands and deaths more than 5,00, on 18th April and in Mumbai alone 11,163 cases and 31 deaths on 4th April. Soon the virus spread its deadly fangs into Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab and Delhi.

In West Bengal, where earlier the number of daily positive cases was less than 100, the rallies and road shows of political parties for the state assembly elections became the super spreaders of the virus and the number of Corona+ cases in the state crossed 18,000 cases daily. As per its own claims, the rallies of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) were attended by lakhs of people and its road shows led by the Home Minister, Amit Shah, the party president, J.P. Nadda, and almost all the big leaders of the party, attracted thousands of people. The crowds did not wear masks and there was absolutely no question of their observing the social distancing as per required norms. Obviously not, because their leaders including the Prime Minister himself, his Home Minister, their party president, Chief Ministers of other states including yogi Adityanath etc. were all flouting the expected norms and none of them was seen with a face mask. If that was the example being set by these leaders, who in fact were responsible for getting the norms implemented in the country, how could the crowds be held responsible for not observing the Covid appropriate behaviour? Of course, it

was the Election Commission which was technically responsible for getting the norms implemented, but did the Commission officers have the guts to question the Prime Minister and the Home Minister of the country? Even the higher judiciary reprimanded the Election Commission for its failure to get the norms implemented during the election campaigns; even it did not speak a word about the highly irresponsible behaviour of the highest leaders of the country. After being rebuked by the judiciary it came out with an advisory that not more than 500 people should gather for attending the rallies of leaders. But that was too insufficient and too late as only the last phase of the eight phase election remained to be completed and by that time the seeds of the highest spread of the virus in the people had already been sowed. It should also not be denied that Mamata Bannerjee's rallies, though far below the number of the BJP rallies, and her wheel-chair road shows also must have paved the way for the spread of the virus, though in its effort to get more than 200 seats in the election, as claimed by Amit Shah and other BJP leaders, these leaders desperately conducted tens of rallies every day to achieve that aim. The Prime Minister himself announced in all his rallies, "2 Mai (2nd of May), Didi gai" (Come second of May – the counting day - and Didi (Mamata Bannerjee) is gone. Of course, it all proved to be tall talk, like all other claims the Prime Minister makes, and the BJP could get only 77 seats, though much higher than the 3 it earlier had, but much less than its tall talk of crossing the two hundred mark and form a government in the state. The BJP, by pitching almost the whole central cabinet and all the Chief Ministers of the BJP ruled states, and in fact the Prime Minister himself, had made it the fight of survival between himself and Mamata Bannerjee but 'Didi' proved to be much more strong to maintain her previous tally of 211 seats and winning the third election after 2011 and 2016. Had she not

won the state assembly election this time, she would really have 'gone', as the Prime Minister was declaring in all his rallies, for at least 5 years. But who should now have gone after the monumental defeat in West Bengal is what the people are left guessing. Of course, such political leaders only take the credit for electoral victories, but not the responsibility for defeats, however humiliating they may be.

In Uttarakhand the 'Kumbh' proved to be the super spreader of the virus. Before the Kumbh the daily number of the Corona + cases was less than 50 and the death rate was 4 or 5. After the Kumbh was called off, the number of daily Corona + cases reached about 9,000. In fact, between April 1 and May 7, the state recorded 1,713 deaths post Kumbh, which was half of the 3,430 total number of deaths in the state till then. The present Chief Minister of the state, Tirath Singh Rawat, declared that Corona cannot even touch those who take a holy dip in the Ganges. "Most importantly, Kumbh is at the bank of the River Ganga. Maa Ganga's blessings are there in the flow. So, there should be no corona," added the chief minister on April 13th, according to ANI. This was even after the death of some heads of various *Akharas* and more than 68 seers having become Corona + after their holy dip in the Ganges, obviously in big clusters ridiculing Covid appropriate norms. Mahamandaleshwar Kapil Dev Das, 65, of the Nirwani Akhada of MP, one of the 13 main *Akharas*, died of Covid complications at a private facility at Haridwar at the Maha Kumbh area. A senior official in the health department confirmed to TOI on 15th April that a total of 68 'top seers' in Haridwar have tested positive for Covid-19 between April 5 and 14 as per TOI report dated 16 April 2021.

Those who went back after attending the Kumbh spread the disease in various parts of not only the state but also in the neighbouring cities of UP like Muzaffarnagar and Meerut. Instead of attending to his duties as the Chief

Minister of the state to control the virus, he was making such irresponsible and ridiculous remarks. A preliminary probe report by the Uttarakhand health department itself said on 15th June 2021 that out of four lakh Covid test results issued during the Kumbh festival at least one lakh which were forged by a private agency were fake. That itself shows the failure of the government as well as the reason for the spread of the virus in the state and adjoining areas.

In Uttar Pradesh (UP), the biggest Indian state, the Panchayat elections proved to be the super spreader of the virus. Just a few days before poll parties were to be sent to various polling stations in Shahjahanpur in UP, many teachers, who were deputed as polling officers, complained that they were not feeling well and had Covid symptoms and requested for being tested. They were not allowed to get tested for Covid for fear that if they tested positive, they would request for exemption from poll duty. For the fourth phase of polling on 29th April 2021 in Shahjahanpur alone as many as 12,200 polling staff members were deputed. A newspaper's heading in The Times of India dated April 24 carried the news, "UP staff asked 'not to get tested' until polls." In the absence of tests, nobody knows how many of them were Covid + and potential spreaders of the virus among the rural voters. It is not difficult to imagine at whose orders they were stopped from being tested and allowed to spread the virus among large numbers of villagers. The result was that at least 1,248 teachers who were deputed for polling duties died of Covid between April 1 and May 31 after performing UP Panchayat poll duty as per the verified list of teachers issued by the Uttar Pradesh director general of school education (DGSE) issued on 9 June. Apart from these teachers, 6 block education officers, 47 class IV employees, 172 *shiksha mitras*/contractual teachers and one class one officer "who contracted Covid during election duty" have also died. Earlier when the *Prathamik*

*Shikshak Sangh* president had claimed that more than 2,000 teachers had died of Covid, the state government had rejected their claim and said that only 3 teachers had died of Covid during the poll duty. It is not difficult to imagine how many thousand, nay lakhs, of people would have got infected at the hands of those polling officers who themselves were Corona +. That exactly is the reason why the infection reached the rural areas, and in very big numbers, during the second wave. As early as May 10, a newspaper report said, "Coinciding with UP rural polls Covid cases rose 120% in a month." On that date the newspapers reported – Record 4,187 Covid-19 deaths, 4 lakh new cases in the country. The worst was still to follow. And the second, and more important question is who should be held responsible for the super spreading of the virus in UP during the second wave. Is it not the top most leadership of the state which is responsible for the spread of the disease and the death of thousands and thousands of those who fell victims to their criminal negligence? During all this period when Covid-19 was lashing the state with all its fury, yogi Adityanath, the UP Chief Minister, who was supposed to put all his energies in improving the health care facilities for the patients of the Covid in the state, he was busy most of the time with all his energies in campaigning for his party in West Bengal for the Assembly elections.

Once the Corona virus had spread far and wide, not only in UP but also in Delhi and also in almost all the other states, what was required was to provide medical facilities to treat the victims. The governments failed in that very badly. On 27th April Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan had claimed that "the country is now better prepared, both mentally and physically to beat the Covid-19 pandemic as compared to 2020." Soon the country was to experience the worst possible preparation to fight the pandemic. There was not even an attempt to take necessary precautions to stop

the virus from spreading. For example at the last Shahi Snan on 27th April at the Kumbh, in Haridwar a crowd of 25 thousand people took a dip in the Ganges. On May 10, Uttarakhand High Court observed, “The scientific community had been warning since January about the second wave of Covid but the government did not heed these warnings and it is due to these unfortunate mistakes and negligence that the pandemic has taken such a gargantuan turn.” Newspapers were full with news like ‘31 die at Lakhimpur Kheri govt hospital in 24 hours’, ‘No O2, 12 Covid patients die at Delhi hospital’, ‘O2 crunch: 25 Ganga Ram patients die’, ‘11 die at Chennai hospital due to O2 disruption’. On May 15, a newspaper carried these headlines – ‘Covid cases double in U’khand hills in 40 days’, ‘13 more Covid-19 patients die at Goa hosp; toll 75 in 4 days’, ‘After 28 deaths in 45 days, village on edge’ (Parwana village in Bulandshahr district), and ‘India adds 3.4 L new Covid cases, 4000 fresh fatalities’. The worst was still to follow. There were no beds in hospitals; there was no oxygen for the dying patients who ultimately succumbed. MLAs, even those belonging to the ruling BJP, were complaining but no one heard. Jasrana MLA from UP said, “My wife lay on the floor for 3 hours, was given no food.” Another BJP MP and Union Minister, Santosh Gangwar complained to the Chief Minister yogi Adityanath highlighting the Covid-19 ‘mismanagement’ and said that he rang up senior health officials but no one even picked up the phone and oxygen cylinders were being hoarded; another BJP MLA from Barauli, Dalveer Singh, wrote to him alleging mismanagement and favouritism in refilling and delivery of oxygen cylinders. Even MLAs were afraid to speak up. Rakesh Rathore, BJP MLA from Sitapur in UP, said, “If I speak up, I face treason and sedition charge.” One can imagine the plight of ordinary citizens who were desperately approaching officers and political leaders to save their dear ones, but no one heard.

The Allahabad High Court on 17th May 2021, seeing the despicable condition of the health care system in the state, where a top Meerut hospital had kept the kin of an ex-Military Engineering Service official in the dark for 10 days, observed that “UP’s state of health was ‘*Ram bharose*’, ‘at God’s mercy’.”

A government appointed committee had said in November 2020 itself that in the coming days there was possibility of the Pandemic increasing its reach and there would be acute shortage of oxygen. But no action was taken on that report. Procurement and distribution of oxygen was in the hands of the central government which failed miserably to supply it to the states where patients were dying for want of the life saver. So much so that the Supreme Court had to order the government to make arrangements to supply the oxygen wherever it was needed, for example 700 MT to Delhi where it was needed very badly. The central government was also responsible for the purchase and supply of vaccines to the states but thousands of vaccination centres were closing down in almost all the states because there were no vaccines. That was the preparation of the central government for treatment of the Covid patients as against the hollow claims of the Union Home Minister. The result was that between 1 May and 26 May, as per government records more than one lakh people died in comparison with the last year’s total tally of 2 lakh deaths during the first wave.

There was so much under reporting of deaths that the actual numbers could be five to six times as per the crematorium and burial ground staff almost everywhere. Long queues of ambulances with the dead bodies could be seen at the crematoriums for cremation and there was no ground at the burial grounds. There was ‘10-fold rise in pyres at cremation ghats’, said Raj Bhagat, a geo-analytic and earth observation expert and another newspaper heading said, ‘Agra’s lone electric

crematorium stops – with a five-fold increase in workload surge, this is the second such disruption in a week.’ Countless dead bodies of the victims of the pandemic were buried in the sandy river beds all along the Ganges. Videos of the crematoriums, burial grounds and the sandy river bed of the Ganges showed an extremely horrifying picture of the lack of dignified treatment even to the dead bodies. A TOI report from Dehradun on May 3 read , “Long wait, overcharging rampant at crematoriums,” and another one on May 7 read ‘Bodies of Covid dead not burnt properly, dogs at it’. But the governments of Uttarakhand, UP and Bihar were shamelessly covering up, downplaying and denying what everybody was witnessing on their TV screens every day. The Supreme Court had to intervene in the matter when hundreds of dead bodies were found floating in the Ganges, otherwise considered a holy river, in UP and Bihar. A video showed a man removing the shrouds from the dead bodies buried under the sand on the shores of the Ganges in Bihar, perhaps on instructions from above to hide the number of dead bodies lying there.

There can hardly be a person in the country whose relative, friend, neighbour or a known person did not become a victim of the Covid and die, most of them a desperate death, at road or home because of the shortage of beds in the hospital or shortage of medicines and oxygen if lucky enough to get a bed in the hospital. Most of them were victims of the worst possible health infrastructure in the country more than the victims of Covid-19. Fewer of them got a dignified burial or cremation when they were dead and most of them did not even find a place in the government lists of those who had died. We know that no courts will or can punish the villains of the second wave of the Pandemic for their hollow claims and highest possible mismanagement resulting in deaths to the victims and misery and suffering to the dead ones and their family members and friends. But punished they will be – in the court of ‘We the People of India’, the highest sovereign power above all the courts, the executive and the legislature, when time comes for them to deliver their judgement on the deeds of omission and commission of the villains of the second wave of the Pandemic. 

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## India failed to save the living from covid-19...

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party has tried to gloss over these floating corpses by either pretending they don't exist or by offering ludicrous theories about it being an old custom that cannot be linked to covid-19. This is in the face of clear empirical evidence from eyewitnesses who testify to never having seen anything like this.

The flawed morality of this moment is obvious. But the absence of truth-telling in the number of covid-19 fatalities is also pushing the country toward peril again.

In February, self-congratulatory complacency led the Modi government to entirely ignore warnings of a second wave and make a series of fatal errors that has brought India to its knees. The carnage that has followed should have chastened us. Yet, data crunchers are in a hurry to declare the worst of the second wave over. There is talk of peaks moving to plateaus, without any cognizance of either the actual number of infections or deaths. Framing policy based on fudged numbers can only take us down the road of devastation again.

The abandoned bodies, bringing home the absence of dignity in death, are most likely a result of two factors. Many Indians in rural India do not have the money to pay for cremating their dead. In a year when daily wage workers are out of work because of prolonged lockdowns and a ravaged economy, the cost of wood to perform the last rites is simply unaffordable for many.

Stigma and fear around covid-19 are also leading to the dumping of bodies. The government has failed to dispel the misinformation and prejudice that has tailed the virus.

Even more unforgivable is the complete

obfuscation of the carnage in India's villages. In the absence of access to testing facilities or hospitals, Indians are dying at home from what is being described as the "onset of sudden fever" in hamlet after hamlet. From the east to the west of Uttar Pradesh, every village I have been to is reporting a surge in sudden deaths. In Ramana village in Modi's constituency, the elected headman testified to "at least 40 deaths over the last three-four weeks." In Kannauj, villagers speak of "at least four or five cremations every day." And in Basi village, just two hours from the national capital, with a population of 5,000 people, the villagers say "not a single family has been untouched by fever."

Families are being wiped out with covid-19 symptoms without being documented. In Basi, I met the family of a father and son who died within an hour of one another. The father was only in his late 50s and was never tested for covid-19, not even when his oxygen levels crashed.

In Varanasi, 227 covid-19 deaths were reported for the period between April 1 and May 7. But the undertaker at a single cremation site told me he had cremated 2,800 bodies in a week. In Delhi, in the week when between 350 and 400 deaths were being reported as the daily casualty count, at a single funeral ground the undertaker said he was cremating more than 100 bodies every night. Despite the glaring gap in official numbers and overrun cremation grounds, there has not even been a perfunctory attempt to reconcile the data.

Indian citizens are being told they do not matter enough to even be a statistic.

Courtesy **The Washington Post**, 26 May, 2021. 

# Modi Is Worsening the Suffering from India's Pandemic

*An authoritarian apparatus is being turned on wider society with lethal consequences*

Chitrangada Choudhury

On May 8, 2021, as a deadly second wave of the COVID pandemic was ripping through India, an imprisoned doctoral student made an urgent appeal to the Delhi High Court. Incarcerated by the Indian government since May 2020 on dubious terror charges, Natasha Narwal asked for interim bail to see her father, agricultural scientist Mahavir Narwal, who was in an intensive care unit with the virus. The court procrastinated. She would never see her father again: he died the following evening, one among the 4,000 daily COVID fatalities India is currently reporting—undoubtedly an undercount.

Days earlier, a member of parliament, Manoj Jha, had amplified an SOS plea for an oxygen cylinder or hospital bed for the elder Narwal. Jha's tweet was one among thousands of anguished requests for oxygen, hospital beds, medicines and relief that have consumed India's social networks from early April. As the nation reported caseloads nearly equivalent to those of the rest of the world put together, the massive scale of the distress has exposed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's multiple failures. These include prematurely declaring victory in the war against the virus despite scientists' warnings of an imminent "second wave"; helping instead to spread the infection by addressing packed election rallies and featuring in front-page newspaper advertisements that invited devotees to a religious festival, ultimately attended by millions; and neglecting to provision for medical resources and relief needed in a second wave or to put in place a vaccination plan for a billion people.

The pandemic is now ravaging vast areas of rural India, where health infrastructure barely exists, and thousands are falling ill and dying, beyond the reach of social media SOS calls and

far from the public eye. The Modi government downplays the catastrophe by claiming that caseloads are stabilizing. It is left to intrepid local journalists reporting on the hundreds of corpses on the banks of the sacred Ganga River to expose the lie.

As Indians reel under what is undoubtedly the greatest crisis the country has seen since the 1940s, Modi remains fatally aloof and focused on image management. As thousands die, he is spending an estimated \$2.8 billion of public money to demolish and remake the prime minister's residence, parliament and other buildings in the heart of New Delhi, categorizing the project as "an essential service."

Meanwhile civil society organisations (CSOs), activists and ordinary citizens are left firefighting with meager resources to help strangers and save lives. Volunteers track availability of hospital beds, drugs and oxygen cylinders. Doctors offer pro bono telecounseling. Gurudwaras, the places of worship for the Sikh religion, provide oxygen to drive-in patients. A hardscrabble auto-rickshaw driver equips his vehicle with an oxygen cylinder and an oximeter to ferry poor patients to hospitals. Countless groups prepare and distribute food packets to those in need. Some Good Samaritans are even helping families bury or cremate loved ones.

The ruling BJP party's crisis management, on the other hand, has involved clamping down on distress calls—pushing the Supreme Court to admonish that those seeking help on social media cannot be slapped with criminal cases. In the past days, the police questioned an opposition-party leader at the forefront of providing COVID relief. On May 18, BJP leaders tweeted what they described was an opposition party's "toolkit,"

which a fact-checking website concluded was doctored, and Twitter subsequently tagged as “manipulated media.” The so-called toolkit depicted the opposition party as using the pandemic to attack Modi’s image, and multiple ministers, including the Health Minister, amplified its questionable content.

A journalist and an activist were arrested after they said that, contrary to what multiple BJP leaders claimed, cow urine and cow dung were not cures for COVID. When a court granted them bail on May 17, the police immediately arrested them again under a national security law.

The police have also arrested people who merely put up posters in New Delhi questioning the prime minister’s vaccine policy. Freedom of speech has hit such an ebb that in BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh, one of its own legislators said he feared he would be booked for sedition if he “spoke too much” on his party’s pandemic policies. The state, with a population akin to that of Brazil, is among India’s worst hit, and on May 23, when young doctors tried to meet its Chief Minister to voice their concerns, police whisked them away.

By going after those who seek help, or who question or critique the government’s abandonment of Indians during the COVID catastrophe, the regime is extending a repressive apparatus it has finessed through its seven-year rule to target grassroots activists, human-rights defenders, academics and journalists. As an ongoing database by Article 14, a Web site reporting on law and justice whose editorial board I serve on, shows, national-security laws are being increasingly deployed to service political repression. At the receiving end of this abuse of the law are some of India’s most dedicated advocates of social justice.

These include Mahesh Raut, a community organizer in central India, where over 300 villages have asked for his release; Akhil Gogoi, a peasant activist in the northeastern state of Assam who in early May won a state legislative election from jail, where he has been held since December 2019;

Stan Swamy, an aged Jesuit sociologist and Parkinson’s patient who at the time of his arrest in October 2020 was a lead petitioner in a public-interest litigation for the release of Dalit and Adivasi undertrials (people incarcerated without trial, often for years) in the state of Jharkhand; Khalid Saifi, a Delhi-based activist with United Against Hate, a group campaigning against hate crimes; Anand Teltumbde, a leading academic and thinker; and Sudha Bharadwaj and Surendra Gadling, veteran human-rights lawyers who have been in prison since mid-2018 without bail or trial.

India’s Supreme Court recently ordered the decongestion of jails and parole for undertrials to reduce the risk of virus outbreaks in India’s prisons. As per the government’s own data, nearly 70 percent of those in jail are undertrials—many of whom are likely to be innocent of the crimes they are accused of. But activists, academics and social workers like those above can expect little relief because the Modi government has booked them under draconian antiterrorism laws and vehemently opposes their bail pleas in court. Earlier this month, agonized families of several human-rights defenders told the press that the pandemic was turning prisons into death traps with overcrowded barracks, COVID-infected inmates, little access to doctors, medicines or COVID vaccines, and an occasional phone call at the mercy of authorities serving as the only link to the outside world. Many of these jailed activists would otherwise have been at the front lines of the pandemic effort. Natasha Narwal was arrested while engaged in providing relief to workers, millions of whom were plunged into distress by Modi’s decision in March 2020 to impose a nationwide lockdown with no safety net—and with a mere four-hour notice.

The government’s inhumane treatment of the detainees is of a piece with a broader demonization of civil society that has forced numerous groups like Amnesty International to cut back or entirely shut down operations in India. Despite its repression and harassment of CSOs,

the Modi government leaned on them last year to help address the humanitarian distress that ensued from its ill-planned lockdown. But it continues to sabotage their effectiveness. Last September, the government unilaterally issued restrictions that entangled many CSOs in red tape and ended their freedom to channel foreign donations to on-ground partners. These restrictions have severely impaired their ability to receive and distribute foreign aid and relief to grassroots groups working to mitigate the

pandemic's impact on the most vulnerable communities in rural India.

The Indian government must urgently abandon the repression that is intensifying the COVID calamity and instead take steps that will bring all hands on deck to ease the suffering. Releasing the nation's finest activists from prison would be a good place to start.

*This is an opinion and analysis article.  
Courtesy Scientific American,  
May 24, 2021* 

## Prisoners of Conscience

**Sagari Chhabra**

*What would be  
The work of conscience  
In our times;  
Is it to lift the debris  
From those we left behind;  
Assuage their wounds,  
Ask with knees and head bent low,  
O, how did I neglect you so?  
The migrant labour;  
Calloused hands, blistered feet,  
Grief that took to the street;  
How did I leave you alone  
To face this searing heat?  
The man who trudged  
Carrying his mother on his head,  
Searching for a hospital bed;  
Where should he cremate the corpse,  
But give it a burial soaked with tears,  
Down the Ganga now a hearse,  
Carrying dead bodies in its flow,  
This is the way loved ones now go.  
At night he wonders  
Could they have built  
A health centre at his village;  
But we went instead for a global pillage;  
A seat at the high security table,*

*Sans hospitals, pensions  
But a Central Vista stable;  
Free rations up to Diwali,  
Till you are able;  
Some charity,  
But for the sake of clarity,  
Let me say,  
He slaved both night and day,  
All he does now is to pray;  
Give us the India  
That still embodies  
The dreams of those  
Who fought for our freedom;  
For the kingdom of God  
Is where the last child resides,  
She presides  
Over the future of an entire civilization;  
Slowly comes the realization,  
May these poetic lines  
Be prayer flags in the wind,  
Waving inwards:  
If we do not do the work of conscience  
We will remain  
Prisoners of that conscience.*

Courtesy **Mainstream**, VOL LIX No 27,  
New Delhi, June 19, 2021 

# How India's vaccine drive went horribly wrong

Nikhil Inamdar and Aparna Alluri

***It took 31-year-old Sneha Marathe half a day to book an appointment online for a Covid vaccine.***

"It was a game of 'fastest finger first'," she says. "The slots filled up in three seconds." But the hospital cancelled her slot at the last minute: they had no vaccines. Ms Marathe went back to try for another appointment.

All 18-44 year-olds in India have to register on the government's CoWin platform to get vaccinated. With demand for jabs far outstripping supply, tech-savvy Indians are even writing code to corner elusive appointments.

Ms Marathe can't code, but she is among millions of Indians who are on the right side of the country's digital divide - unlike hundreds of millions of others who don't have access to smartphones or the internet, currently the only route to a jab.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's federal government has opened up vaccinations for some 960 million eligible Indians without having

anything close to the required supply - more than 1.8 billion doses.

Worse, the severe shortage comes amid a deadly second Covid wave and warnings of an impending third wave.

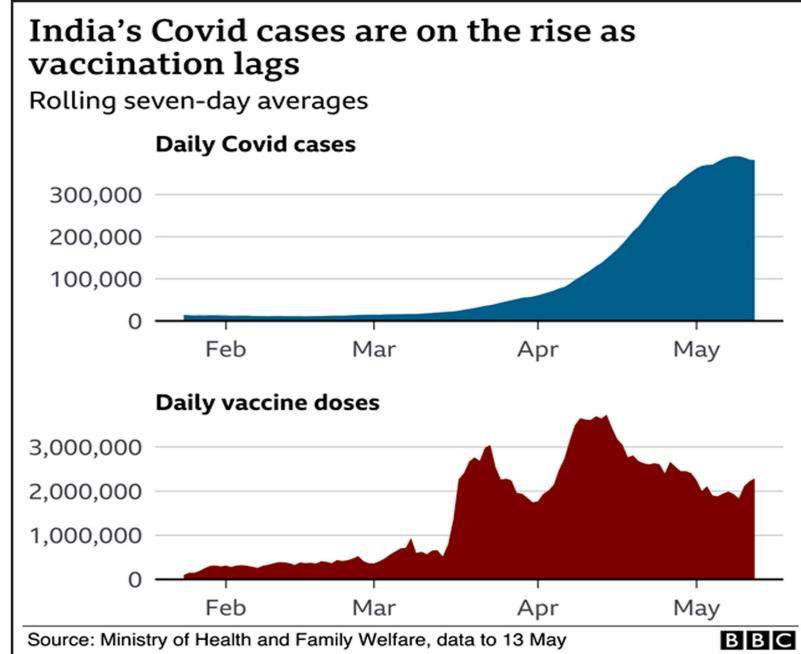
A cocktail of blunders - poor planning, piecemeal procuring and unregulated pricing - by Mr Modi's government has turned India's vaccine drive into a deeply unfair competition, public health experts told the BBC.

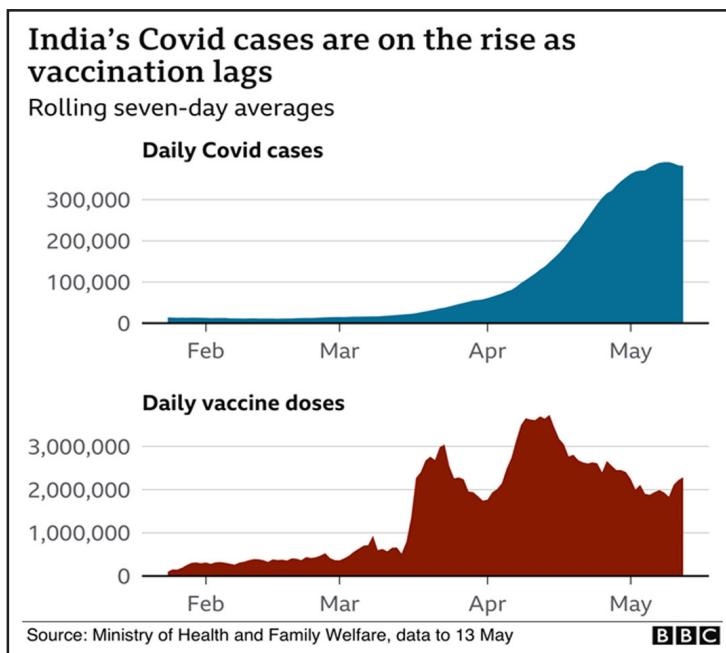
How did the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, often dubbed the "pharmacy of the world" for generic drugs, end up with so few vaccines for itself?

## ***A piecemeal strategy***

"India waited till January to place orders for its vaccines when it could have pre-ordered them much earlier. And it procured such paltry amounts," says Achal Prabhala, a co-ordinator with AccessIBSA, which campaigns for access to medicines in India, Brazil and South Africa.

Between January and May 2021, India bought roughly 350 million doses of the two approved vaccines - the Oxford-AstraZeneca jab, manufactured as Covishield by the Serum Institute of India (SII), and Covaxin by Indian firm Bharat Biotech. At \$2 per dose, they were among the cheapest in the world, but not nearly enough to inoculate even 20% of the country's population.





Declaring that India had defeated Covid, Mr Modi even took to “vaccine diplomacy”, exporting more jabs than were administered in India by March.

Contrast that with the US or EU, who pre-ordered more doses than they required nearly a year before the vaccines became available for immunisation.

“This guaranteed vaccine manufacturers a market, gave them certainty to forecast supply and sales, and ensured that some of these governments got large quantities as quickly as possible, once the vaccines were ready,” Mr Prabhala says.

Unlike the US and the UK, India also waited until 20 April - well into the second wave - to extend a \$610m financing line to SII and Bharat Biotech to boost production.

Another failure, according to Malini Aisola, co-convener of the All India Drug Action Network, was the decision not to enlist the vast swathe of India’s manufacturing capabilities - biologics factories, for instance, that could have been repurposed into vaccine production lines.

Again, four firms, including three

government-owned ones, have only recently been given rights to make Covaxin, which is partially publicly-funded.

On the other hand, by early April, Russian developers of Sputnik V, had inked manufacturing deals with a host of Indian pharma companies, which are set to produce the vaccine.

#### *A fractured market*

As the sole buyer initially, the federal government could have held far greater leverage over pricing, Ms Aisola says.

“Centralised bulk procurement would have allowed the price to come down from \$2.

Instead it has gone up,” she adds.

This is because since 1 May, it has been up to individual states and private hospitals to broker their own deals with manufacturers.

Opposition parties have called it a “scam”, saying the federal government had abdicated its responsibility, opening up “debilitating competition among states”.

States have to pay double - \$4 - the federal government’s rate for a dose of Covishield and four times as much for Covaxin - \$8. This was after the two companies lowered prices for states as a “philanthropic gesture”. States are also competing for scarce stocks alongside private hospitals, which can pass on the costs to customers.

The result: a veritable free market for vaccines that have been developed and manufactured with both public and private funding. At private hospitals, a single dose can now cost up to 1,500 rupees (\$20; £14).

Several states have now announced plans to import other vaccines from Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson. But no manufacturer is able to guarantee supply in the next few

months since richer countries have pre-ordered stocks.

Sputnik V has been approved, but it's still unclear when the vaccines will be rolled out.

#### **Should India's vaccines cost so much?**

Some have accused SII and Bharat Biotech of "profiteering" during a pandemic, especially after receiving public funding.

But others say they took substantial risks and that the fault lies with the government. India is the only country where the federal government is not the sole buyer, and one of the few where vaccinations are not free.

But public health experts agree that SII and Bharat Biotech need to be more transparent about their manufacturing costs and their commercial contracts.

Ms Aisola says SII needs to disclose how it spent the \$300m it received from the international Covax scheme and the Gates Foundation, funding which was meant to finance vaccines for low-income countries. SII has failed to do so, partly because India banned exports. The company is also fielding a legal notice from AstraZeneca for defaulting on its promise to

send 50% of its supply to low-income countries.

Public health experts are also calling for scrutiny of the Indian government's contract with Bharat Biotech, especially since the Indian Council of Medical Research has said it "shares" intellectual property (IP) for Covaxin, which it developed along with the company. But the jab costs more - often double - than Covishield.

"They say they share IP but what sort of an agreement did they sign? Does it give them [the government] the right to override any clauses in case of an emergency?" asks Dr Anant Bhan, a public health expert.

While India has supported waiving the patents on foreign-made vaccines, it has made no move to suspend it for Covaxin.

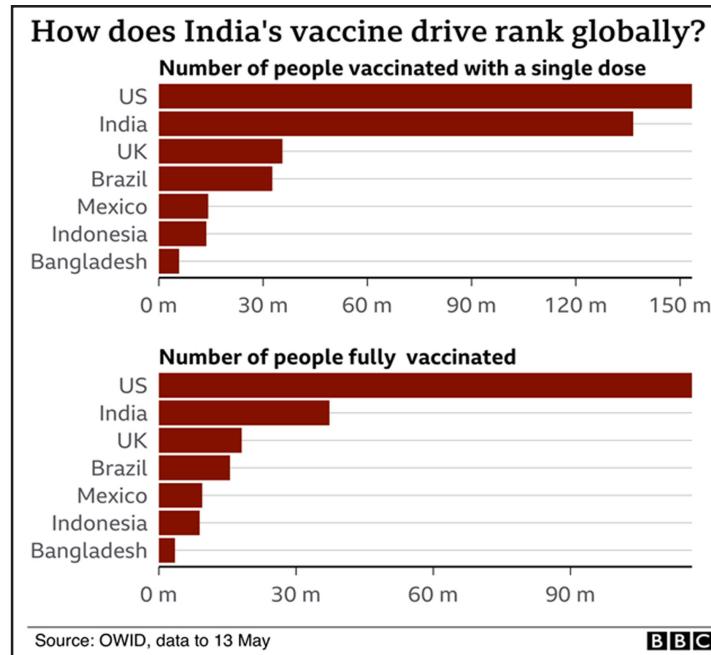
Contrary to its international position, it has opposed suggestions from opposition leaders to invoke compulsory licensing and allow other pharma companies to manufacture the approved vaccines, saying these measures would prove "counterproductive".

Dr. Bhan agrees that at this stage it would take time to transfer technology and build capacity in other pharma companies - but he also says it's unclear why none of this was attempted earlier.

Vaccinating even 70% of India's 1.4 billion people was always going to be a long exercise in planning and patience. But given the country's strong record on immunisation, it was not an impossible task, Dr Bhan says.

However, why the government chose to rely on just two companies who can now control supply and dictate prices is a question that few have answers to.

*Charts by Shadab Nazmi  
Courtesy BBC News* 



# Terrorising dissent: On bail for student activists

## *Terrorising dissent: On bail for student activists*

Caught between a statutory bar on grant of regular bail and a judicial embargo on any close examination of available evidence at the bail stage, those arrested under the country's main anti-terror law have been languishing in jails without trial for extended periods. The Delhi High Court orders granting bail to three student activists jailed for over a year for their alleged role in the February 2020 riots in Delhi represent a clear-headed effort to get around such impediments. Sound in legal reasoning and interpretation, the judgments of Justice Siddharth Mridul and Justice Anup Jairam Bhambhani have made a salient distinction between those accused of offences against the country's integrity and security on the one hand, and protesters or dissenters roped in unjustifiably under the rubric of 'terrorism' on the other. The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act has been invoked by the Delhi Police against activists and others who were among those organising the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, on the claim that they had also fomented the riots. Under Section 43D(5), there is a legal bar on granting bail if the court is of the opinion that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the accusation against those held is *prima facie* true. Adding to this onerous burden on the accused to demonstrate to the court that the accusation is untrue is a 2019 Supreme Court judgment that bars a detailed analysis of the evidence at the bail stage and rules that bail can be denied on "the

broad probabilities" of the case.

The High Court has ruled that the bail court can look at the available evidence to satisfy itself about the *prima facie* truth of the case. In other words, there is no statutory invincibility to the prosecution case merely because the UAPA has been invoked. It has found that none of the three — Asif Iqbal Tanha, Natasha Narwal and Devangana Kalita — was specifically or particularly accused of any 'terrorist act', 'funding of a terrorist act' or an act amounting to a conspiracy to commit a terrorist act or something preparatory to it. Once the UAPA charges were not seen to be true, it was open to the court to admit them to regular bail until conclusion of the trial. Further, with 740 witnesses cited, there is no scope for early conclusion of the trial. Riots are matters concerning public order, and not the security of the state. The court's observation that the state, in its anxiety to suppress dissent, has blurred the line between the constitutionally guaranteed right to protest and "terrorist activity", is a stern indictment of the establishment. The Delhi Police has gone to the Supreme Court on appeal against the verdict, possibly in the fear that the ruling may foil its design to paint protesters as 'terrorists'. If the High Court's approach to grant of bail is upheld, it would help secure the liberty of other dissenters held under the UAPA elsewhere without sufficient basis.

Courtesy **Editorial, The Hindu**, June 17, 2021. 

### **The Radical Humanist on Website**

'The Radical Humanist' is now available at <http://www.lohiatoday.com/> on Periodicals page, thanks to Manohar Ravela who administers the site on Ram Manohar Lohia, the great socialist leader of India.

— Mahi Pal Singh

# Judgment on all of us: Not just UAPA, Delhi HC bail for activists also puts society & system under spotlight

Arghya Sengupta

Orders granting bail should ordinarily not be front-page news. They should neither warrant opinion columns nor celebratory editorials. Bail, not jail, is the default rule for undertrials and such orders ought to be routine. Yet the judgments of the Delhi high court granting bail to Natasha Narwal, Devangana Kalita and Asif Iqbal Tanha, who are accused in a conspiracy related to the riots in northeast Delhi last year, are seminal.

They are seminal not because they are extraordinary. Like all good criminal law judgments, they have carefully analysed the facts, dispassionately applied the law, refused to be swayed by vague allegations made by the police and bluntly spoken truth to power. It is the sign of the times we live in that these

judgments are seminal simply because the judges did their job.

This job was done well particularly on two counts – the extraordinarily wide definition of the term ‘terrorist act’ under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) has been seemingly perceived by policemen across the country as an invitation to pass off ordinary crimes as terror offences. In this case too, the worst the trio could be accused of is being part of a WhatsApp group that organised protests against CAA that later turned violent. Perhaps that is why, the police insinuated “a larger conspiracy” with “the potential of tumultuous consequences”, and “undermining the security of state” to justify their charge of terrorism.

The judges wisely saw beyond such fear



Illustration: Uday Deb

mongering, plainly stating that their actions could not be considered terrorist acts unless they produced a prolonged psychological effect on society. Being part of a WhatsApp group, no matter how incendiary its contents, is ordinarily not a crime, let alone instilling large-scale fear in society. Any self-respecting police force in the country ought to read the judgment carefully. Pressing cavalier charges against protesting students only trivialises terrorism.

The judgment is also a timely reminder that the purpose of a bail hearing in criminal cases is modest – to assess whether the accused can be set free till the trial begins, without prejudicing the trial itself. The judges were perceptive in noting that with the second wave of the pandemic and the slow functioning of judicial institutions, their trial is likely to be further delayed.

The process of waiting in jail for the trial to begin cannot become their punishment, especially as they were neither flight risks nor habitual offenders.

The judgment has widely been hailed as a flag-bearer of democracy. This praise is well-deserved. But it would be myopic to celebrate it without introspecting how we got to a place where routine bail orders are now causes for celebration. This is a direct consequence of government lawyers vigorously opposing bail even in innocuous cases, presumably under instructions of their clients. If lawyers of repute bearing a duty to uphold the law as officers of the court try to twist the meaning of terrorism and distort it out of shape to oppose bail, the rule of law is on thin ice.

Lawyers take such chances because courts themselves have been inconsistent in the past. In this case itself, the lower court had earlier denied bail on specious grounds; in the case of Safoora Zargar, a pregnant MPhil student jailed for making a speech against CAA, the judge initially denied bail saying that she was playing with the embers and couldn't blame

the wind for starting a fire. Even in cases which have no national security implications, like the arrest of comedian Munawar Faruqui, courts have often plainly ignored the law and denied bail. This is not to absolve lawyers and governments of their own independent responsibility to be bound by the law, but one can easily see how they might pass the buck.

In matters relating to bail, which always require the exercise of discretion, governments, lawyers and judges ultimately take their cues from what society might consider reasonable. This is where, we as a people, must turn our gaze inward to reflect on what kind of society is being created in our name.

The provisions in the UAPA under which bail is next to impossible have been on the statute book since 2008. They joined a long list of similar provisions in anti-terror acts, both central and state, chipping away at the presumption of innocence and the fundamental rights of free speech and assembly. Barring some exceptions, judges have routinely upheld the legal validity of these draconian laws. Each of these laws and judgments are reflections of the paranoid society we have become over time. Denial of bail is greeted either with widespread indifference or quite often with a platitude that good students should never have been out on the streets, they were asking for it.

The Delhi HC judgment is an invitation for us to find our higher selves – for lawyers to give advice without fear or favour, for policemen to follow the rulebook, for governments to disagree with its dissidents without imprisoning them, and for citizens to not remain indifferent to injustice meted out to others. It is only then that the opinion of the Delhi HC judges that 'foundations of our nation stand on surer footing than to be likely to be shaken by a protest' will ring truer than it seems to today.

Courtesy **The Times of India**,  
June 17, 2021. 

# Arrests of TMC leaders show that the parrot is now securely caged

*In Bengal, the Central Bureau of Investigation has sunk to a new low.*

Julio Ribeiro



*A man in Kolkata herds a flock of sheep in front of the governor's residence on May 18 to protest against the arrest of four Trinamool Congress leaders. | PTI*

## Modi-Shah's War of Subversion on Bengal (and "India")!

Sukla Sen

Regardless of the specific merits of the charges against the arrested four - which would, in due course, get dissected in the court rooms in full public view, the latest move of the CBI is just not only an act of ferocious retribution, on the part of the Modi-Shah duo, against a gutsy woman politician who made it bite dust in an highly unequal electoral battle which the duo had fought with enormous money power and deploying various coercive organs of the state and the Election Commission as well, on its side, but also the spirited people of Bengal - who made it actually happen.

It's a fiendish design to severely derail and sabotage the life-and-death battle of the state against the raging pandemic - for which a huge share of responsibilities rests squarely on the shoulders of the duo via its various acts of omissions and commissions, by maiming the state administration at this critical juncture.

(The split in the concerned High Court bench over the conditions of bail to be granted also points to such a plot.)

To teach the "anti-national" people a true "nationalist" lesson.

So as to cow down the Indian people as a whole.

We'll overlook this glaring central aspect only at our own great peril.

<<A compliant "caged parrot" , as the Supreme Court described the Central Bureau of Investigation in 2013, and an anxious occupant of the Raj Bhavan have joined forces to deprive Banerjee of two of her ministers and two other supporters loyal to her and the Trinamool Congress party. These four, as also two others, were caught on tape seven years ago in 2014 accepting cash in a sting operation. The two other Banerjee loyalists who were also involved in the bribe taking crossed over to the BJP just before the elections. They have bought their freedom.

Perhaps that was the quid pro quo for the defections. Otherwise, why did the Central Bureau of Investigation wait so many years – seven – to take action? The agency had been set up to ferret out the truth in corruption cases but it just bides time to repay debts to political masters. Shame on the parrot, even a caged one, for stooping so low.>>

Mamata Banerjee is a street fighter. That is the role in which invariably she comes up trumps. That is how and why she won the recent Bengal

assembly elections. The margin of her party's victory was huge. It should have intimidated any ordinary opponent but not the Bharatiya Janata

Party's Amit Shah. He is not one to accept such wide margin defeats, which do not give him the option to purchase the weak.

In Delhi, where Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his Aam Aadmi Party triumphed decisively in last year's election, the law had to be altered to clip Kejriwal's wings. A friendly lieutenant governor has been empowered to douse any move that boosts the Aam Aadmi Party's fortunes. In Bengal, a partisan governor will transcend the role ascribed to him by the Constitution to embarrass Mamata Banerjee to the brink of mental despair, forcing her to take to the streets instead of tackling the Covid-19 pandemic and slaying it.

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#### **A tearing hurry**

Amit Shah is in a tearing hurry to punish Mamata Banerjee in any manner he can conjure for humbling him at the hustings. He had spent so many nights planning and plotting. He had spent so much time making weekly visits to each of Bengal's 40-odd districts. In Bengal, he had spent so much of the electoral bonds money his

party had so assiduously collected. He had lured so many of Banerjee's aides to the BJP in the days leading to the elections to create an atmosphere of rats abandoning a sinking ship. Only, the ship did not sink.

The humiliation was too much for a proud man to bear. There was urgent need to demonstrate power and strength and grit and determination to the doughty lady in the simple white sari. What better way then to use all the instruments available in South Block to unleash a tsunami of the unexpected when all that Banerjee and even his own boss, Narendra Modi, were engrossed in at this moment of time was the havoc caused by the super-spreaders of Covid-19 during the election rallies and the Kumbh Mela?

Amit Shah also should have been occupied with the ravages of the Covid-19 but he seems to be fixated on revenge on Banerjee. First it was the induction of the paramilitary to provide security to the 77 MLAs elected on the BJP ticket to the Bengal assembly, knowing full well that these men would be like fish out of water since they were not trained for duties outside their remit. But what he, Amit Shah, intended was not really providing security but to provoke the street fighter in Mamata Banerjee.

In the process, he has pitted the Central paramilitary against the state police in an adversarial role, whereas they had all these years been deployed as aids to forces striving to preserve law and order.

And so, after seven long years of repose, the CBI wakes up like a Rip Van Winkle and arrests four Trinamool Congress leaders in a bribery case entrusted to them for inquiry in 2014. Suvendhu Adhikari, the designated leader of the opposition BJP, and Mukul Roy, another of those elected on the BJP ticket, who had crossed over from the Trinamool just before the elections, had also received bribe money and were captured taking the cash on tape.

( To be Contd....on Page - 22)

**Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia wrote three letters to Ravela Sommaya, two of them dated 3 June, 1957 and 25 June 1958 written from Himayat Nagar (Hyderabad), the Central office of the Socialist Party. Both these letters were about M.N. Roy's book 'Humanist Politics'. Dr. Lohia wrote the third letter about two years before his death from 7, Gurudwara Rakabgang Road, New Delhi which was his official residence as a Member of Parliament. The first two letters are being reproduced below:**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Lohia through Letters</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">GRAM: ESPEC</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>SOCIALIST PARTY</b> CENTRAL OFFICE 3-6-19, HIMAYATNAGAR, HYDERABAD (D.K.)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">3rd June 1957.</p> <p>Ref: 4949.</p> <p>Dear Comrade Somaiah,</p> <p>I am indeed very sorry not to have read your letters earlier or dealt with them personally. I have now read your letter of the 17th December fully. I have not yet been able to read the book that you sent me, M.N.Roy's Humanist Politics. I am asking for the book. As soon as I have read the book, I will certainly write to you what I think of it. For the time being I have only this to say. That I sometimes clothe my philosophical views in a language which appears to be exceedingly concrete. This I do in order that I may not become victim to vague and meaningless thought. Therefore, you must not make the mistake of thinking that I have not written enough on philosophical subjects.</p> <p>What are you doing now? Are you still studying? Write to me more about yourself. If I take a long time in writing of M.N.Roy's book, do not become angry.</p> <p>Yours sincerely,</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rammanohar Lohia</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Sri Ravela Somaiah, P.O. TULLURU, Via. Tadikonda, Dist. Guntur (A.P.)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>M.N. Roy's Humanist Politics</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">GRAM: ESPEC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SOCIALIST PARTY CENTRAL OFFICE 3-6-19, HIMAYATNAGAR, HYDERABAD (D.K.)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">D/- 25-6-1958.</p> <p>Dear Ravela,</p> <p>I can understand your irritation with me. But I <del>now</del> <sup>have</sup> now read the book "Humanist Politics" by M.N. Roy which you sent me. I must disappoint you again. While I agree with some of the motivations of M.N. Roy, I am unable to understand his modes of action. In fact, I do not know whether there are any modes of action; they are not there at least in the book you have sent me.</p> <p>The sole concrete mode that M.N. Roy has suggested is to have some people throughout the country who would "begin the task of awakening the urge for freedom in the individuals" and who would tell people not to be carried away by election speeches but use their brains and would teach people "to examine the promises that are made to them in a critical spirit". I fail to see how this work can be done by a group of people who stay outside of and above political parties. Even if such a group should come into existence, which is itself almost impossible, it will soon turn into a political party with its own <del>problems</del> promises or a pack of high brow and superior people whose capacity for action is completely blocked. In such a situation, they would either become cynical or seek for a <del>just</del> <sup>adjustment</sup> accommodation with all kinds of important people.</p> <p>The critical spirit is absolutely necessary. My own appeal to the electorate is based precisely on this critical</p>
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spirit. That is why presumably I have so far been failing. But there is a firm belief that sustains me. Some day the electorate will examine programmes. But that it will do not because of the doings of ~~the~~ non-party people but because of an honest political party that assists them to this critical spirit as also to the enthusiasm needed for all political ~~parties~~<sup>action</sup>. Enthusiasm and criticality must go together if they are effective and useful. In M.N. Roy's way there is no possibility of enthusiasm and criticality by itself must necessarily become cynicism/~~contempt~~<sup>truth</sup>. The way of the Socialist Party awakens hope that enthusiasm and criticality may emerge in combination. Even if the Socialist Party should fail, I am certain that only another party of similar aims but with better people or different circumstances would succeed.

Mr M.N. Roy has talked of the "original democratic doctrine of the freedom and sovereignty of the individual". He believes that this original doctrine has been way-laid by Communism or Fascism and also that at the time of its first birth it could not be realised due to lack of knowledge. Now, <sup>with</sup> better knowledge and information available, rebirth of this doctrine is necessary and this is what Roy calls "New Humanism". While much of this historical presentation is open to doubt, the need for the freedom of the individual is incontestable. Such freedom requires a more thorough examination than European scholarship has so far been capable of. The freedom of the individual would seem to depend as much on external as on internal conditions of equality, also the

mental and the material. That is why I have tried to examine the four conditions of equality: (1) internal material, (2) external material, (3) external mental, and (4) internal-mental conditions of equality. Kinship, which is the word for external mental relationships, and tranquility, which is the word for internal mental condition, would be better words to use. Unfortunately, the world is not yet ready for scholarship that would go to the whole <sup>a</sup> truth and not only that part of it which has been seen <sup>by the ancients</sup> particularly by ~~the~~ ancient Indians or that other part which has been seen by Europeans.

Ellen  
Give my warm regards to Mrs M.N. Roy if you are still corresponding with her.

yours sincerely  
Rammohan Lohia

(RAMMANOCHAR LOHIA).

To  
Sri Ravella Somayya,

## Arrests of TMC leaders show that the...

But the governor does not seem to have inquired from the CBI how and why they have been left out of the net when the papers were placed before him for sanction to prosecute. In fact, Adhikari received Rs 5 lakh whereas the others got only Rs 1 lakh.

It also needs to be established when exactly the governor signed the order sanctioning prosecution. It is alleged that he did it after Banerjee was sworn in as chief minister and not in the interregnum between the two governments. But even if it was in the interregnum, what was the hurry about? Of course, Banerjee would not have signed but

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she will surely sign Adhikari's and Mukul Roy's papers if placed before her. Why are these being delayed?

I know now why the former police commissioner of Mumbai facing a spate of allegations of extortion in the company of former encounter specialists, years ago dismissed from service but reinstated and placed under his care, wants the charges against him to be inquired into by the CBI. He knows who owns the cage that holds the parrot.

*Julio Ribeiro served in several senior positions as a police officer and was India's ambassador to Romania.* 

# How long would we continue punishing mere accessories to Rajiv's murder?

Faraz Ahmad

Thirty years ago former Prime Minister and the then Congress president Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a Sri Lankan woman carrying explosives under her Salwar Kameez dress at Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu around 10.30 pm.

The recently elected chief minister of Tamil Nadu, M K Stalin, leading the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhgam (DMK) has written to the President of India Ramnath Kovind demanding immediate release of seven persons incarcerated for last thirty years for Rajiv's assassination, namely S Nalini, Murugan, Santhan, A G Perarivalan, Jayakumar, Robert Payas and P Ravichandran convicted for their involvement in the said assassination. Political parties and opinions are sharply divided and polarised in Tamil Nadu along adversarial lines with no agreement on almost any major current issue, be they allies of the Congress party led by Rajiv's widow Sonia Gandhi or now to the ruling BJP at the Centre. But the one issue on which all of them are united and agreed upon, is their desire to see the release of these seven hapless individuals, who had a peripheral role, if at all, in the assassination of the former Prime Minister, even going by the charges levelled by the CBI in its charge-sheet.

I support this demand too I am convinced after thorough study that the entire planning and execution to kill Rajiv was restricted to Sivarasan and his two women accomplices. First the woman who bombed herself to kill Rajiv, whom we call Dhanu for convenience sake and the other, her companion Subha, also no one knows her real name or identity and of course those who gave the contract to Sivarasan. Meanwhile Dr Subramaniam Swamy, who also happens to hail from Tamil Nadu, has opposed this appeal. But Dr Swamy

being a proud Brahmin has always been at loggerheads with Dravidian forces in Tamil Nadu. Moreover, there are those, once close to Dr Swamy, who have questioned his role in the conspiracy. To acquit himself of the charge Dr Swamy wrote a book not providing any evidence to disprove the charge. Instead, he hurled charges at others.

I believe that those who ought to have been probed and punished for their involvement overt or covert in enabling killer 'Dhanu' reach upto Rajiv to kill him (to date we have no evidence to establish her real identity) have been happily let off without so much as being questioned. A few whom the CBI, investigating that heinous crime, wilfully and deliberately overlooked were former Congress leader Margatham Chandrasekhar contesting Lok Sabha elections as the Congress candidate from that constituency; Margatham's daughter Lata Priyakumar, who was also contesting the assembly elections from one of the assembly segments of this Lok Sabha constituency; R K Raghavan, the then I G of Tamil Nadu Police who turned his back and walked away, (by his own admission in his affidavit submitted to the J S Verma Commission) and who also tampered with crucial photographic evidence; or N K Singh, the then Joint Secretary (Police) in the Union Home ministry who was responsible for denying adequate security to Rajiv, even when Rajiv faced Z category threats, assessed by the Home ministry. Rajiv was accompanied by a single unarmed Delhi Police Inspector Mr Pradeep Kumar Gupta for proximate security who died with the Congress president. Instead of being questioned and penalised both Raghavan and Singh in fact have enjoyed plum postings and positions in the Indian establishment,

whoever may have ruled in Delhi even to date nearly two decades after retirement from government service.

That is because the official narrative about the conspiracy theory behind Rajiv's assassination has remained unchanged, though without any credible evidence. The Verma Commission of inquiry appointed by the then Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar with a brief to ascertain security lapses if any, causing Rajiv's death, turned a blind eye to so many, in your face, security lapses which enabled the assassins to succeed in their mission, evidently for no other reason but to save Chandra Shekhar and his four-month long government. In the process, Justice Verma, considered as one of the most upright judges, virtually acquitted N K Singh, R K Raghavan and others responsible for wilful negligence in providing fool proof security to Rajiv, despite repeated reminders to the Government by P Chidambaram, a Minister of State for Home in Rajiv's council of ministers, expressing fear of a terror attack on Rajiv.

The Jain Commission to probe the conspiracy angle remained mired in controversies with court cases filed to put spokes in its progress and thus obstructing its assigned task. In 1998-99 under the premiership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Parliament took up the Jain Commission report together with the Action Taken Report (ATR) of the government. The government then set up a CBI-led Multi-Disciplinary Monitoring Agency (MDMA) to probe further the charges levelled by the Jain Commission implicating several top men including the then well-known godman Chandraswamy with proximity to successive prime ministers, ministers and bureaucrats. The MDMA exists to date at the expense of Indian tax payer but has not filed a single word of report, citing some vague stay order by some sessions level court for over two decades. We neither know nor are allowed to ask what work if any they have done in all these

21 years. It implies that even 30 years after Rajiv's death there must be enough explosive material pointing fingers not at LTTE but those within the country whom even this right wing establishment seeks to protect. Who could these be? It also needs some explanation how come Nandu Singh and Raghava Raghavan are the apple of successive regimes. It surely is not competence, proven by their intentional or unintentional involvement in Rajiv Gandhi assassination. Then what is it that endears them to successive regimes?

What are the compulsions and whose interests were served that the two officers whose wilful negligence in this case has not only gone unpunished but even rewarded, with both enjoying eminence to this day? The only logical reason appears to be that once the truth comes out (which may never happen) the entire thesis of LTTE involvement in Rajiv Gandhi assassination might have to be debunked and those who keep harping on LTTE role may have to face the music, while the needle of suspicion may point closer home. The establishment may be unwilling to admit that but frankly speaking the official narrative of LTTE killing Rajiv is so bogus and fallacious that any right-thinking person would dismiss it out of hand (Rajiv Gandhi Assassination: An Inside Job?)

The entire premise was built on the thesis, extended by the CBI then that Rajiv led Congress was thunderously rushing to power in the 1991 general elections and LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran, fearing that Rajiv on return would send back the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to Sri Lanka to liquidate the LTTE and Prabhakaran, conspired to get him killed. This is in fact the version of the Intelligence Bureau (IB), as against that of Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), as the then Law and Justice Minister Dr Subramaniam Swamy admitted in his book on Rajiv Gandhi assassination. that while in the first cabinet meeting held early morning on May 22, he

promptly announced that LTTE was behind Rajiv's assassination, the R&AW chief immediately disputed this and ruled out LTTE involvement.

That apart, returning to the reasoning extended by the CBI and accepted by successive courts as well as the mainstream media, was that LTTE chief Prabhakaran was terrified of the prospect of Rajiv Gandhi returning to power and sending back the IPKF to liquidate him. So, in his desperation to rule out such a possibility, he hatched this conspiracy and assigned the task to a trusted lieutenant Sivarasan. Any one having even a rudimentary understanding of international affairs knows that Sri Lanka is a sovereign nation and India could never send its troops to Sri Lanka, except at the invitation of Sri Lanka, Rajiv Gandhi or no Rajiv Gandhi. In 1987 the then Sri Lankan president J Jayawardene had urged Rajiv to send his troops to cool down the rising temperature of the LTTE. And Rajiv himself was forced by Jayawardene's successor Premadasa to withdraw the Indian troops, even before he went out of power in 1990.

So even if Rajiv wanted, he could never send his troops to Sri Lanka and Prabhakaran being aware of all these nuances knew this too well to fear or imagine the return of Indian troops to Sri Lanka. So that argument holds no water. Second, the LTTE enjoyed a comfortable relationship with the DMK government in Tamil Nadu and therefore it doesn't require some genius to imagine that the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi would create such hostility against Prabhakaran and the LTTE as to shut the doors of this sanctuary for Prabhakaran and his men forever. That's exactly what happened eventually. The CBI stated that Sivarasan had with him a video recorder and would listen to TV news every day and despatch these videos to Prabhakaran in Jaffna regularly. While we have no evidence that this was actually happening, but assuming this was, it means that

Prabhakaran was keeping a keen eye on political developments in India during the 1991 mid term general elections. Even without this he must be keeping a watch. It would have been in his interest to ensure the return of DMK-V P Singh to power in Delhi. So, he would have had a stake in the return of V P Singh government. Why would he want to jeopardise the prospect of DMK/V P Singh returning to power, which did happen finally, consequent upon Rajiv's assassination? Any body with a little understanding of Indian politics and Tamil Nadu would have estimated that killing Rajiv would have the reverse effect which it did. In that election while V P Singh's Janata Dal-National Front was badly mauled post Rajiv assassination, DMK was wiped out in Tamil Nadu which was going for both Lok Sabha and state assembly polls. Prabhakaran had lived off and on in Tamil Nadu so often and interacted so frequently with Tamil Nadu leaders and journalists that there is no way he did not understand the adverse consequences of killing Rajiv in Tamil Nadu of all the places.

I have worked as a crime reporter in three major cities of the country in the Indian Express, Mumbai (then Bombay), Chandigarh during the height of Punjab militancy and Delhi. I earned some degree of respect from the police officers in all three cities, for only one reason. I never accepted the police version on its face value and always tended to probe the story behind it, rarely with any success though. In the process I did lose in getting exclusives or shall we say police plants which take the reporters to great heights and earn the endearments of the editors. The police version is that Sivarasan was despatched by Prabhakaran to execute the assassination and for that he was given a free hand to plan and organise the entire act. Sure, enough Sivarasan had joined the LTTE. But when and what was his background? That's when the version of the police needed to be questioned which none of our great editors cared

to do. Sivarasan was originally from TELO, even his father was a supporter of the TELO. In fact, the people of his town were largely averse to the LTTE for several reasons not necessary to mention here, but which is there on record. The LTTE and TELO were competing forces in which the LTTE wiped out TELO. Only after that Sivarasan joined the LTTE or perhaps made a show of joining it while working on the sly for others. One thing is on record, that he was an employee of the Sri Lanka electricity department and thus also had government connections. Premadasa was then the Sri Lankan president and while he did come together with Prabhakaran to oust IPKF from Sri Lanka he was no less inimical to Rajiv than Prabhakaran. Besides if Rajiv was assassinated by Tamil militants, perceived to be LTTE it would be killing two birds with one stroke, which did happen eventually. No one cared to follow that lead even though it was so obvious.

Third, Sivarasan came by boat to Chennai along with a couple of LTTE men in June, 1990 and killed the entire Politburo of EPRLF including their leader Padmanabha living secretly in Chennai. After killing them in indiscriminate firing, the four men hijacked a Maruti van and drove to the coast some 60 kilometres away hid till late night. Then took their motor boat and sailed back to Jaffna. But after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination from where the coast was a mere walking distance and the police was too stunned to notice any escape, they could easily take the boat back to Jaffna. They didn't do that. They went back to Chennai, taking a lift in an auto and after reaching their temporary quarters, slept peacefully. The next day too they did not stir. Then the third day when the newspapers carried Dhanu's photo they decided to move out and still they made no attempt to sail back to Jaffna by sea. They went to Tirupati even though the LTTE was an atheist organisation and Prabhakaran did not approve of his men breaking party discipline, consuming

alcohol, womanising etc.

Eventually instead of trying to sail away from Chennai/Tamil Nadu long coast back to Jaffna Sivarasan was moving in the direction of Delhi. One of his men had come and even rented a house in South Delhi's Moti Bagh area. In this effort Sivarasan succeeded reaching Bangalore undetected when one of his confidants betrayed him and reported to the police. Logically then it means from day one Sivarasan was avoiding going back to the safe haven of Jaffna which remained out of bound for the Indian security forces till the LTTE was liquidated and Prabhakaran was killed by Sri Lankan forces. Why? On the other hand, he was trying to reach Delhi?

The MDMA and the CBI have not disclosed to date what, if at all they discovered anything in all these years. But till Chandraswamy died a couple of years back they kept his passport and won't allow him to travel abroad pleading before the court that he was being probed for involvement in Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. Despite that Chandraswamy was not arrested or jailed even for a day.

On the other hand, these seven men and women who had, if at all, a very tertiary role. For instance the charge against one of them was he bought a 9 volt battery cell on Sivarasan's orders. Nalini for instance did not know till the date of the assassination that they were planning to go and kill Rajiv Gandhi. Nor did poor Haribabu, the photographer who died on the spot, had he known of the actual conspiracy, might have maintained a safe distance from Rajiv like R K Raghavan and Margatham Chandrasekhar and her son and daughter did, though they were the main organisers and the daughter was also contesting the assembly seat.

None of this is unknown. Yet the great stalwarts of journalism, many of whom have personally interacted with Prabhakaran, though much before that assassination, are willing to question the IB plant. 

# Despite being arrested and assaulted, Myanmar journalists say they won't be intimidated by army

*The Tatmadaw has now started targeting the families of the journalists.*

Nandita Haksar



**Police arrest 'Myanmar Now' journalist Kay Zon Nwe in Yangon on February 27, as protesters were taking part in a demonstration against the military coup.** | Ye Aung Thu / AFP

It is now more than a hundred days since the people have been out on the streets protesting against the coup by the Tatmadaw, as the Myanmar military is known, a day before the country's Parliament was due to swear in the members elected at the November 2020 general election, thereby preventing this from happening.

The resistance to the coup started with the people in the cities centres such as Yangon striking pots and pans in unison every evening as a symbolic act to drive away evil. But the protests spread very quickly and became a civil disobedience movement that has touched every corner of the country.

From the second day of the military takeover, healthcare workers joined the national civil disobedience movement. By February 9, Covid-19 vaccinations had been suspended, the country's testing system had collapsed and most hospitals in Myanmar had shut down.

Employees of banks, including the Kanbawza

Bank and Central Bank of Myanmar, joined the movement along with the 100,000-strong Myanmar Teachers' Federation.

One expert on the government's civil service system estimated that the country had about one million civil servants and that about three-quarters of them had walked off their jobs. The staff in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, formerly led by Aung San Suu Kyi, have also joined the strike.

## Transport hampered

All public transport by air, land and sea has been affected by workers strikes: the Myanmar National Airlines employees, the Myanmar railways workers and truck drivers are all on strike. Truck drivers have refused to transport goods from the docks at Yangon's four main ports. The Myanmar Container Trucking Association said they would deliver only essential items such as food and medicines.

Myanmar's largest labour union, the Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar, has

announced its total support for the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Hundreds of thousands of youth in every corner of the country has been carrying their placards, singing their songs, shouting their slogans and giving their three-finger salutes. Poets have been writing their poems even as they get killed on the streets while protecting the younger protestors.

Myanmar's Civil Disobedience Movement against military rule includes mass street protests and a public boycott of military-linked businesses. There is also another aspect of the movement called the "social punishment" campaign against the families of senior members of the regime.

Protestors have been using social media to identify the relatives of the military generals, announcing where they live, what they do for work, and what foreign universities their children attend. They then urge people to shun and shame the individuals, and to boycott their businesses. Among those targeted thus far include Ma Khin Thiri Thet Mon, daughter of Tatmadaw chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and a producer of big-budget movies, as well as the senior general's daughter-in-law, Ma Myo Yadana Htike, founder of the TV soap opera and beauty pageant producer.

The country's ethnic minority nationalities such as the Kachins, Shans and Karens and Mon have made alliances with sections of the pro-democracy activists. These ethnic minorities have decades of experience of armed resistance against the Tatmadaw.

The Myanmar military has been bombing the stronghold of these ethnic minorities. According to the Phil Thornton, journalist and senior adviser to the International Federation of Journalists in South East Asia, from March 27 to May 5, the Karen National Union report its soldiers were involved in 407 armed battles with the Burma Army.

Fighter jets have flown into Karen-controlled territory 27 times and dropped 47 bombs, killing

14 civilians wounding 28 and forcing as many as 30,000 people into makeshift jungle camps. The videos posted on social media of the bombings and battles shows that that the Tatmadaw is at war with the citizens of Myanmar.

### **The power of the press**

In the midst of the daily protests, shootings, arrests, detentions, raids and air strikes are the Myanmar journalists risking their lives every day to bring accurate and reliable reports of the tragedy and heroism they witness. Many of these journalists are young with little experience of having to work in secret from hide outs, ensuring not carry anything which can give away their identify as a journalist, such as mobiles or SIM cards.

The working conditions have got more difficult by the day.

The military government announced its decision to cancel the licences of five independent media houses in March first week: 7 Day News, Democratic Voice of Burma, Khit Thit News, Mizzima and Myanmar Now. The decision was announced by state-owned MRTV during its evening news broadcast on March 8. The announcement stated that these media would no longer be allowed to publish or broadcast articles, programmes or reports or transmit messages via social media.

On March 9, the military and police broke open into the offices of four other independent media houses: Mizzima, Democratic Voice of Burma, Khit Thit Media and 7 Day News. The military took away computers and documents but there were no journalists – most had already gone into hiding and some crossed across the border.

However, many of those who crossed the borders into Thailand and India were not welcomed by the host Governments. In the past, both India and Thailand had allowed the refugees to stay. But this time, Thailand succumbed to pressure from the Myanmar junta and arrested three journalists of the Democratic Voice of Burma and two of their associates in San Sai

district of Chiang Mai province on May 10th.

The Foreign Correspondence Club of Thailand has expressed concern over the arrests. They are being charged for illegal entry and also for violating covid protocol.

More than 70 journalists have been arrested since the coup in Myanmar. Often the family members are not informed and lawyers too are not given access. Most of them have been arrested while they were covering the protests such as Min Nyo (51), a reporter with the Democratic Voice of Burma, was arrested while covering protests in town of Pyay and beaten causing serious injuries. He is under detention.

Journalists cannot wear helmets and jackets with press logos on them when they go to cover demonstrations as they become easy targets for the military. However, if they do not wear them the demonstrators suspect them of being police informants.

### **New laws**

Within the fortnight of the coup, the Tatmadaw brought changes to the laws to make it easier to frame and charge activists, especially journalists.

New section 505A prohibits causing fear, spreading false news and agitating crimes against a government employee, all punishable by up to three years' imprisonment.

Other such amendments include:

1. Expansions of the scope of high treason and sedition, which make it easier to convict individuals simply for criticising the military (sections 121 and 124A).
2. New sections 124C and 124D that make it a crime to hinder the work of the military or government employees.
3. A new section 505(a), not to be confused with 505A, which makes it a crime to make a statement undermining the morale of military or government employees.

Martial law, imposed in some locations since March, allows cases involving these offences to be heard by military tribunals and increases the maximum sentence to death or life imprisonment

with hard labour.

Despite the arrests and detentions, the threat of imprisonment and torture journalists continue to work under impossible conditions. With the economy in ruin, banks closed and many have no regular income and low budget rice and curry shops closed many journalists who are doing free lance works have no regular source of income.

The success of today's civil disobedience movement comes from decades of experience of the independent media working under military dictatorship – from the time of the national uprising in 1988 to the coup of February 2021. The tactics used by today's protestors and dissident hackers are direct descendants of the post-1988 underground communication system.

The expertise and infrastructure built by media veterans like Mizzima, Democratic Voice of Burma and ethnic nationality media covering earlier crackdowns. In addition they have forged international alliances and got training so that they have been able to provide accurate information and analysis under these conditions.

Platforms like Facebook and Twitter are instrumental in allowing the people of Myanmar to coordinate and communicate with each other and the outside world. Social media sites are key weapons in Myanmar's current struggle, facilitating strategies such as the Social Punishment campaign that shames and ostracises family members and supporters of the Tatmadaw.

### **A new generation**

And another generation of journalists are being trained even in the midst of the protests and crackdown. "When I saw young trainees today, I was convinced that the military regime will have to go back to the barracks," said Soe Myint, the founder of Mizzima. "I was their age in 1988 and it took me more than two or three years to get the skills and expertise that the trainees got within three months."

A woman journalist in Myanmar agreed with this assessment. She told a Fojo, a Swedish media

institute: “I have high confidence in Generation Z and their Spring Revolution. They have strong organising powers and unity – they have everything but a gun.”

She said she has gas mask in her backpack along with medicine and a few contact numbers in case of an emergency. She studies the situation in the area and decides on an escape route when she goes to cover the country wide protests calling for a Spring Revolution against the military coup.

Another woman journalist said in an interview she lived with the fear of a raid in her home where she lived with her two children. As a single mother she worries what will happen to her children if she is imprisoned.

The Tatmadaw has now started targeting the families of the journalists. They have visited the families of Mizzima journalists trying to intimidate mothers and fathers and forcing wives and children to go into hiding. But this has failed to intimidate Mizzima, which has started its second channel despite the ban on satellites even as the military knocked on the doors of their parents' homes.

Mizzima produced a short documentary on how it is working under such dangerous conditions. Two million viewers inside Myanmar watched the video documentary within seven

days. Despite the ban on Facebook, the readership is ever increasing.

One viewer sent a short video to Mizzima to show how she and her friends watch the banned television in bunkers; another sent a photograph of how they have hidden their satellite under their lungis inside their homes ever since it was banned.

Myanmar's journalists draw strength from their people and the people support independent media. Soe Myint, a veteran of the national uprising of 1988 says all this shows “what we are doing is absolutely right. It shows the military regime is very afraid of what we are doing – just a free to air TV channel.”

Journalist organisations in India have issued statements of solidarity for the Myanmar journalists who have taken shelter in India. But it would be even more meaningful if the act of solidarity was followed by a sustained campaign for the journalists from Myanmar taking refuge in India. They should be given long-term visas and accreditation like other foreign correspondents who have been living in the country for a long time.

*Nandita Haksar is a human rights lawyer and author, most recently, of The Flavours of Nationalism.*

Courtesy [Scroll.in](#), Jun 04, 2021. 

## All Party National Government – Need of the Day

The President of India should replace the present government with an all-party National Government to save India from the present crisis and to save lives of millions of Indians.

Lancet COVID-19 Commission India Task Force calls for INTERNATIONAL ACTION.

India's current COVID-19 surge is an unprecedented public health crisis. With exponential growth in the number of daily COVID-19 cases since March, 2021, India reported more than 400 000 new cases daily on May 1, 2021.

This number is likely to be an underestimate of the true burden of COVID-19 cases, given reports of backlogs of test results, poor access to testing, and many people not getting tested due to fear and stigma. Without mitigation, estimates suggest India could reach more than 1 million COVID-19 cases per day with over 1 million cumulative COVID-19 deaths by Aug 1, 2021.

The Indian Government and health authorities must act fast to flatten this second wave.

**Dr. Ramesh Awasthi is Chairperson, Indian Renaissance Institute (IRI)** 

# India abstains from voting on UN's Myanmar resolution

**NEW DELHI:** India joined China and Russia in abstaining from a vote on a UNGA resolution seeking to delegitimise the Myanmar military junta and to prevent flow of arms into the country. Justifying its decision to abstain, the government

Myanmar," India's permanent representative to the UN, TS Tirumurti, said.

India's neighbours like Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan were also among the 36 countries to abstain. In the explanation of the vote in the

General Assembly hall, Tirumurti said as Myanmar's immediate neighbour and close friend of its people, India is cognisant of the "serious impact of political instability" and the potential of its spillover beyond Myanmar's borders. India has been calling for greater engagement with the objective of peacefully resolving all issues. "We already have such an ongoing initiative under the aegis of ASEAN. It is important that we extend support to the ASEAN efforts," Tirumurti said.

Mindful of Myanmar's ties with China and its own security interests in the northeast, India has walked the diplomatic tightrope on Myanmar since the military coup

said the resolution, which was adopted with 119 votes in favour, was introduced hastily and without enough consultations with Myanmar's neighbours and regional countries.

India said the resolution, described by many as the strongest condemnation of Myanmar's military commanders since the coup, didn't reflect its views and that it didn't believe the resolution was going to aid the joint efforts towards strengthening the democratic process. "This resolution was tabled in the UN General Assembly without adequate consultations with neighbours and regional countries. This is not only unhelpful but may also prove counter-productive to the efforts of the ASEAN to find a solution to the current situation in

earlier this year. "During the discussions on this resolution, we had engaged in a spirit of finding a constructive and pragmatic way forward and had accordingly shared our suggestions to those who piloted this resolution," he said.

"However, we find that our views have not been reflected in the draft being considered for adoption today. We would like to reiterate that a consultative and constructive approach involving the neighbouring countries and the region remains important as the international community strives for the peaceful resolution of the issue," Tirumurti said.

Courtesy **The Times of India**,  
June 20, 2021. 

# Quotes on politics: relevance to present times

**P.A.S. Prasad**

1. Religion: People believe, wise discard and the rulers use it.

This all time crystallised wisdom quote is by Seneca the b.c. era Roman senator and philosopher.

The truth of the quote has been manifest since ancient times to this day. In modern India after independence, Rajiv Gandhi had let down the entire Muslim women of India in the Shah Bano case to appease the Muslim majority for electoral gains. Arif Mohd. Khan, the present governor of Kerala, who opposed the move, resigned from the cabinet in protest and disgust.

Later the BJP has been playing the religious card for electoral gains and staying in power. The Babri Masjid demolition, Ramjanambhoomi case and the construction of the temple, and the recent Kumbh mela Shahi *snan* by lakhs of people, while the whale of corona, opened its mouth blessed by the rulers to the extent of showering rose petals on the people taking the holy dip. It is tragic that the CM encouraged the ritual assuring that sacred mother Ganga would protect and purify them. All religious festivals blessed by the concerned state rulers are only for personal popularity and election gains.

Of late we are witnessing and suffering the catastrophic consequences.

In some Muslim countries youngsters are being groomed to become human bombs, suicide squads of terrorists, to operate in various countries and are patted as Jihadis and assured of divine pleasures after their death in the causes of religion. This is being done with the covert and overt approval of the

rulers for their political power games.

2. In politics stupidity is not a handicap, quote of Napoleon Bonaparte. This quote is a simple clear truth which we suffer bearing the torture of political biggies uttering absurdities, non scientific bombast and so on. They are so boorish and ignorant but still they go up in the political hierarchy. Their stupidity is never in the way of their reaching high positions. Politics is the only field where negative qualities are nurtured.

3. And it is one of the reasons why the train robbing profession is not so pleasant as one as either of its collateral branches—politics or cornering the market.

This quote is the bottom line of the short story, holding up a train, by the early 20th century great short story writer O. Henry. Here the train robber expressed his opinion that politics is an off shoot of train robberies, less risky, pleasant and more rewarding.

This revelation is apparent in present times also. Paupers have become princes in politics, comfortably, of course cornering the market. We have seen examples of Harshad Mehta and others who became super rich in a very short time.

4. Here richly with ridiculous display the politicians corpse was led away, while all his acquaintances sneered and slanged. I wept for I had longed to see him hanged. The above quote is by Hilaire Belloc, the early 20th century Anglo -French poet. This amply illustrates the contempt in which politicians are held.

5. The union of govt. and religion tends to destroy the govt., and degrade the religion.

The above quote of Hugo Black is very much evident under the present govt's dispensation. Predictably the fall of this govt. is likely to happen for this reason, the majority religion of this country has already been sought to be degraded. The ideals and ethos of Hinduism, of plurality and debate are dying slowly. Only the ritualistic façade is maintained for garnering votes.

6. It is said that after George Bush became president, he observed that politics is not the oldest profession but comes next, as it is well known that prostitution is the world's oldest profession but it is as murkier and sinful to be ranked second.

7. The following quotes are so manifest and evident that they need not have any comment as the present political phenomenon is degenerative and sick, the people have become cynical. The rural hinterland of India has fully realised the games the parties and politicians are playing. Govts. are made and felled in India by the rural India.

8. a. A nation of sheep will beget a govt. of wolves (this is exactly what we are) quote of  
- Edward R.Murrow.

b. In order to be a master the politician poses as the servant.  
- General Degaule.

c. Politicians all over the world are the same; they promise bridges eve when there is no river  
-- Nikita Khruschev

c. A politician thinks of the next election, the statesman thinks of the next generation

- James Freeman Clark

d. The word politics is derived from the word 'poly' meaning many, and the word 'tics' means blood

- Harry Hardiman.

e. Some men change their party for principles, others change their principles for the sake of their party

- Winston Churchill.

f. Politics is the gentle art of getting votes from the poor and campaign for funds from the rich, by promising to protect each from the other

- Oscar Amariger.

g. In politics nothing happens by accident. You can bet it was planned that way.

- Franklin D Roosevelt

h. Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired is a fraud on some, a theft from them who Hungersnot, are not fed, those who are cold are not clothed.

- Dwight D. Eisenhower

#### **Bottom line:**

When Lohia met Einstein in America, during conversation Lohia remarked, all politicians are liars. Einstein retorted saying, no they are all criminals.

Mhatama Gandhi considered that politics without principles is one of the seven deadly sins. 

**Press Release :**

**CITIZENS FOR DEMOCRACY (CFD)**

*(Set up by Loknayak Jayprakash Narayan in 1974 in  
defence of democracy & democratic values)*

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**PRESS RELEASE - 1st**

Dt. 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2021

**SEVEN DEMANDS OF CITIZENS FOR DEMOCRACY (CFD)  
WHICH SHOULD BE PURSUED BY THE GOVERNMENT TO  
TACKLE PRESENT PREVAILING CRISIS ALL AROUND**

Keeping in view the prevailing dismal situation in India due to ongoing pandemic, the Citizens For Democracy (CFD) in its recent meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2021 has decided to raise seven demands as mentioned below as well as to observe 5<sup>th</sup> June 2021 as ‘Sampooran Kranti Diwas’ on which day webinars will be held in different parts of the country to popularize the same as well as to garner support for them.

**Demands are:**

1. In view of the considered opinion of the medical experts that vaccination is the only effective remedy to fight the present corona, the Central Government must arrange free vaccination of all citizens as early as possible, free treatment of corona patients and free testing so that lives and health of the citizens are protected while steps are taken to prevent black-marketing of life-saving drugs and oxygen;
2. As unemployment has abnormally grown due to lockdowns and continuous pandemic, large number of poorer sections are suffering due to lack of cash, the Central Government must ensure an un-employment allowance of Rs.7500/- per month to each unemployed and also assure wages at the rate of current minimum wage to each MGNREGA worker;
3. The Central government must take immediate steps to settle the demands of the agitating farmers and forthwith scrap the three controversial farm laws so that issue is amicably settled.
4. All examinations must be postponed so that the students do not become susceptible to Corona disease;
5. Newly enacted Labour Code must be scrapped and policy of privatization of governmental assets & Public Sector Undertakings must be withdrawn;

6. Judicial commission under a retired High court or Supreme Court judge ought to be set up :
  - a) to find out the identities of the dead bodies found floated in large numbers in the rivers of UP and Bihar or dumped on the river bank;
  - b) to find out cause of their deaths,
  - c) To find out the circumstances and reasons which made the concerned persons to throw the dead bodies in the rivers or dump them on the river bank;
  - d) To take appropriate steps to determine the actual number of deaths and their causes which took place since the inception of the pandemic as doubts have been cast over the data released by the different governments from time to time relating to number of such deaths.
7. Scandal in the purchase of ventilators out of PM Care Fund should also be judicially investigated.

**TWITTER CAMPAIGN:**

***'MODI MUST RESIGN'***

It was also decided to initiate a twitter campaign at 12 noon on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2021 asking resignation of Prime Minister Modi for his colossal mismanagement in handling the corona crises leading to deaths of thousands of citizens who could be saved with better health infrastructure which was totally neglected.

We therefore urge upon the Central Government to implement above demands at the earliest and hope that Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi will step down gracefully from his post.

S.R. Hiremath  
President

N.D. Pancholi  
GeneralSecretary  
(M) 9811099532,

Anil Sinha  
Secretary  
9582015779 

***PRESS RELEASE - 2nd***

*Convening virtual Parliament session and building consensus to fight Covid unitedly*

**NATION NEEDS NOW 'NATIONAL GOVERNMENT'**

**S. R. Hiremath, President, Citizens For Democracy (CFD)**

We in India are facing the worst health crisis since independence, due to the present Covid-19 catastrophe. We, in Citizens For Democracy (CFD), have written to President of India and five\* others, holding important Constitutional positions, requesting them **to initiate urgent steps for the formation of a 'National Government', with a broad political vision, that can bring all sections of India together to effectively deal with the Covid Catastrophe.** This is in view of the colossal failure of the present Central Government to deal with the present crisis. As the first step in this direction, **we appealed to them to urge the Central Government to convene a virtual special session of the Parliament to discuss the national crisis and build consensus for the formation of a National Government** to (i) to overcome this grave national crisis, (ii) to

better prepare the nation for the third wave and (iii) for providing sustenance to the vulnerable sections of society like the adivasis, migrant workers and other deprived people. **It is strongly feel that such a National Government alone, with cooperation of all sections of society, can deal with this unprecedented crisis effectively.**

#### **I. Why we need a National Government?**

As the second wave of COVID-19 rages across the nation as tsunami and overwhelms our Public Health System, we are witnessing very tragic and heart-rending scenes of suffering and death all across the nation. While, we see some people crying for oxygen and other medicines (e.g. Remdesivir) and dying in large numbers both in the hospital and outside without getting hospital bed, we are also seeing black marketing, profiteering for the same oxygen cylinders, medicines. **In the midst of the mounting challenges of covid tsunami, the present Central Government, remains ill-prepared and clueless to handle the situation and still worse, at India's gravest hour, it has increasingly become part of the problem and not the solution. Hence this appeal**

#### **II. What is a National Government?**

This is a government, with a broad political vision, representing all the political parties and all sections of India including resourceful persons, that works together to effectively deal with the crisis. Two examples of successful National Governments, one in United Kingdom and the other in India are: (i) On the eve of the second World War, in May 1940, when the Great Britain was in a difficult situation, the then Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, convened the Special session of Parliament and volunteered to resign and pave the way for the formation of a National Government. The Parliament chose Winston Churchill as the new Prime Minister of the National Government who led the country to victory in World War II and (ii) At the time of the government of UK was thinking of granting independence to India, A National Government, with Jawaharlal Nehru, as the Prime Minister, was formed in 1946 when the government of UK was thinking of granting independence to India. This National Government represented all political sections and experts; For example: Dr. B R Ambedkar, John Mathai, Shyama Prasad Mookherjee, C D Deshmukh, Sardar Baldev Singh etc were part of the National Government. **If India needs a National Government, time is now to deal with the challenges we are facing now.**

#### **III. Background for the CFD call for a National Government:**

We in CFD strongly feel that there are compelling and historic reasons for having a **National Government**, at this critical juncture in our history.

##### **1. Where the present Government failed miserably and became part of problem?**

The Union Government, instead of learning from the experiences of last year- first wave of Covid-19 and heeding the warnings, well in advance, of experts about the second wave and preparing well to face the same, it allowed large gatherings like the *Kumbh Mela* and the huge political rallies for Assembly elections in several States, particularly in West Bengal, where both Prime Minister and Home Minister participated actively, **thereby contributing significantly to the second covid wave becoming a tsunami, with all its serious implications.**

**2. Abandonment of time-tested Free Universal Vaccination Policy and burdening the States:** The present Union Government, has not only abandoned the decades-long policy of free universal vaccination, but also has unduly placed half the burden of vaccination on the already financially-crippled States. Still worse, it is making them float global tenders and one State competing with other State in international market for vaccines. We, in CFD, had to remind the central government by our recent national campaign for the Free Universal Vaccination, launched on 01.05.2021

**3. No effective support for suffering and needy people and leaving people to fend for themselves:** The miserable failure of the Central Government has created such an unbearable environment that as people lie on pavements outside hospitals seeking medical help, the market feels comfortable to engage in price gouging of the suffering needy people. This government does not feel it necessary to show any compassion for those who are suffering or to reach out to them with messages of comfort. The political leadership in power is arrogant, totally insensitive and incompetent.

**4.**

**5. Abusing the Opposition all the time and undermining the efforts of Scientists:**

**6.** The Union Govt has persistently not sought cooperation and support from the Opposition and taken them in confidence during such grave crisis. What is perhaps worse is that when a former Prime Minister sends his suggestions, it pays no attention at all. Further, there is no effective coordination and sharing of vital data with the scientists. Over nine hundred scientists had to write to Prime Minister for access to data of Indian Council on Medical Research (ICMR) so that they can help identify the new mutations of corona virus etc to evolve effective ways of dealing with the crisis.

**7.**

**8. Urgent measures to help the vulnerable sections of the society:** All this miserable failure of the present central government is affecting, most adversely, vast sections of the people of this country particularly the marginalized communities like the migrant labourers, farmers, dalits, workers and women. There is an urgent need to enhance the number of days in MGNREGA from 100 to 200 days per family and provide the same to both urban and rural poor, as their livelihoods have been devastated by the covid crisis including lockdowns. It is necessary to think seriously about meeting the resource crunch by levying 2% wealth tax on the richest persons and entities to deal with the challenge of providing sustenance to the vulnerable sections of society for their very survival.

**9.**

**10.**

**IV. Some silver linings in this unprecedented national (and international) calamity are:**

- (i) The **Covid warriors** especially the frontline health, sanitation and other workers are fighting the covid virus courageously and saving lives by taking great risks to their own life;
- (ii) The **Civil Society organizations and individuals** who are helping the citizens in distress in this crisis and groups like CFD, need to further strengthen the same;
- (iii) The third pillar of democracy in India, viz., **the judiciary** particularly several

High Courts across the country, supported in some cases by the Supreme Court, are trying to play their constitutional role with courage and conviction in this crisis. For example, the Karnataka, UP (Allahabad), Delhi and Madras High courts have passed very timely and courageous orders against the way the governments, both State and Central and also against the Election Commission of India (ECI), who are mishandling/not handling at all, the covid crisis. Further, the Supreme Court (SC) Bench headed by Justice M Y Chandrachud issued timely and firm warning that any attempt to stifle the people's voices would attract action for contempt of Court in the context of Govt of India and also the Uttar Pradesh CM: Yogi Adityanath's attempt to clamp down on the dissemination of information about the serious health crisis in the country or call for help. It is equally heartening that the SC has upheld the just and judicious order of the Karnataka High Order regarding the oxygen allocation to Karnataka from the Centre and also has taken pro-active action to constitute a National Task Force to streamline the oxygen allocation;

- (iv) The fourth pillar of democracy: **the Media**, at least some sections of mainstream media, is openly saying that it has failed in its duty earlier and has blood on its hands. Further, it is recognizing that the Central Govt has miserably failed in handling this crisis and urgent need to be with the people and fearlessly holding up the mirror to the government and other authorities about the realities on the ground and
- (v) Further, **at international level**, it is heartening that **many countries in WTO** are coming and asking for the waiver of some clauses of the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement for COVID-19 vaccines. The purpose is to accelerate the manufacturing and distribution of enough vaccines for all countries to undertake vaccinations of a high percentage of their citizens all over the world and by doing so, deal with this pandemic effectively.

The letter concludes: “*Again, we request you all to urge the present government to call a special session of the Parliament at the earliest for only one agenda: Discussion of the Covid Catastrophe and urgent need for formation of a National Government with a broad political vision that can bring all sections of India together to effectively deal with the crisis. This will help the States to emulate the same at State level*”.

**V. Signatories to the letter dt.12.05.2021 to President** and five other Constitutional Functionaries\* (CJI, Speaker, Lok Sabha, Chairman, Rajya Sabha, Opposition Leaders in both Houses) with copies to Prime Minister and Chief Ministers of All States: S.R. Hiremath, Devanura Mahadeva, Professor Anand Kumar, N. D. Pancholi, Dr. Ramesh Awasthi, Mani Mala, Dipak Dholakia, Ram Sharan, Professor Ramendranath, Mahi Pal Singh, Badagalapura Nagendra, Ghanashyam, Dileep Kamat, Anil Sinha, Chandrashekhar Meti, Jayanthi Patel, Anil Nauriya, Raghavendra Kushtgi, Syeda Hameed, Ravi K. Raddy, Amit Srivatsav, V. Nagaraj, B. S. Mallikarjuna, Rupa Hassan, Prabhat Kumar, Dr. T. R. Chandrashekara, Putul, Sandeep Pandey, H.S. Anupama, Lubna Sarwath, Arun Maji, Venkanagoud Patil, Thomas Mathew, S.A. Makkabi And many others. 

**Appointment of Justice Arun Mishra as Chairperson, NHRC:  
Another Move to Subvert & Destroy Democratic Institutions**

**JOINT PRESS STATEMENT**

**2nd June, 2021**

We, the members of various Human Rights Organisations and Concerned individuals, condemn the appointment of former SC Judge, Shri Arun Kumar Mishra, as the next Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India by the selection Committee headed by the Prime Minister.

What is troubling is that the decision to appoint Justice Arun Kumar Mishra as NHRC Head was despite the objection raised by the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Shri Mallikarjun Kharge, who suggested that a person representing Dalits, Adivasis, Minorities or other marginalised sections instead be appointed as Chairperson, considering that the bulk of victims of state abuse comes from these communities. The suggestion was ignored and no reasons for discarding the same have been placed on record by the government.

Very clearly, the decision shows open contempt for the mandate of the NHRC which places emphasis on independent functioning and autonomy. This was an opportunity to nominate a retired CJI or retired justice, with a proven track record of a concern for human rights thereby augmenting the reputation of the NHRC as an institution serious about redressing human rights violations. The public have a right to know the basis for the decision of the Selection Committee.

This decision made by the Modi-led Government smacks of brazen arrogance and indifference to public opinion and once again highlights the cynical disdain of the government for democratic norms and constitutional proprieties. By appointing Justice Arun Mishra, whose tenure as a former Supreme Court judge was very controversial, the Modi government has demonstrated once again, that the basis for their selection is not guided by the requirements of a Head of the NHRC or even the track record of defending human rights by the person so selected. Instead, what matters is whether the person selected was close to the ruling dispensation.

We would like to point out that in matters involving critical right to life and livelihood issues of people from the margins of society, Justice Mishra as SC judge had scant respect for their plight. He was much criticised for ordering the eviction of millions of poor forest dwellers in a PIL challenging the Forest Rights Act and the order was kept in abeyance only after numerous nation-wide agitations launched by affected tribal communities. In personal liberty matters, he tended to prefer a hard line, favouring state action over charges of violation of individual liberties. In land acquisition matters, a study of the dominant pattern in his orders indicated a tendency to favour the state as against individual land owners who challenged the land acquisition. In short, in all politically sensitive cases he always sided with the Central Government or acted in a manner to help some of the top leaders of the Central Government. These include Loya Case, Sahara Birla Corruption Case, Sanjiv Bhat Case, Haren Pandya Case, the tussle within CBI case, bail for Anand Teltumbde and Gautam Navlakha.

We highlight only cases relating to human rights. His record in deciding land acquisition cases involving compensation claims indicated a clear bias to dismiss the appeals filed by private individuals in favour of the respondent-state. In contrast, in matters where the appeals were filed by the state (Governments) and its instrumentalities, invariably he either allowed the appeals or partly decided them in their favour. He infamously presided over a 5-judge Bench on land acquisition, set up to reconcile a conflict in opinion between an earlier 3-judge Bench and a Bench presided by him. Requests that he should recuse himself as there was conflict of interest with him heading the 5-judge Bench which was examining his previous judgment, not only fell on deaf ears, but brushed aside.

It is very clear that Justice Arun Mishra seems to have been rewarded for having declared his fealty to Prime Minister Modi in a Judicial Conference involving judges from 24 countries on 20th January, 2020. Notwithstanding that he was still a sitting SC judge, Justice Mishra unabashedly described PM Modi, in glowing terms, in his presence, as “an internationally acclaimed visionary... (a) versatile genius who thinks globally and acts locally ...”. The supreme irony of a sitting Supreme Court Judge openly describing the PM, as the Head of the Executive, in such flowery terms indicating his closeness to the ruling regime was not lost on discerning jurists, lawyers and concerned citizens. How can a person who made an improper and unwarranted statement praising the PM in his very presence, be trusted by people to act without fear or favour to protect their human rights violated by the government?

Few have forgotten the unprecedented action of 4 of the senior most SC judges consisting of Justice Gogoi, Chelameswar, Madan Lokur and Joseph, conducting a press conference in January, 2019. The immediate trigger for the press conference was the assignment of the Judge Loya case to a Bench headed by Justice Arun Kumar Mishra. The 4 judges also pointed to how cases were being fixed and sent to particular Benches - and people inside the judicial system knew that the court was of Justice Arun Mishra – for favourable orders.

It is therefore not strange that throwing democratic proprieties to the wind, the Government has appointed Justice Arun Mishra as the Chairperson of NHRC. Equally troubling is the appointment of former Director of Intelligence Bureau, Rajiv Jain as a member of the NHRC, when he has no human rights qualifications to speak of.

Through such arbitrary and partial action, the government has demonstrated their scant respect for the foundational principles of good governance and constitutional rule – which requires independent institutions which remain autonomous from the control of the executive; impartial institutional leaders who exhibit allegiance not to a leader but to the Constitution of India; and in whose working ethos embody the principles of transparency, accountability and responsibility.

The appointment is one more brazen and deliberate blow by the Central Government to the Constitution, rule of law and human rights.

It is important to point out that the NHRC was created as an independent body which would enquire into complaints of abuse and violations of human rights by the State and its agencies. The NHRC, created by the PHR Act, is guided by the Paris Principles.

What stands out is that the appointment of Justice Arun Mishra is a flagrant violation of the ‘Paris Principles’ which govern the recognition of the NHRC in international law. The Paris Principles mandate the international minimum standards that all National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) have to meet – irrespective of the size of the NRIs – if they are to be ‘legitimate, credible and effective in promoting and protecting human rights’.

Of the 6 foundational principles, the appointment of Justice Mishra directly violates 3:

- (1) Independence: International law recognises that even though NHRI's are State institutions, set up and funded by the State, NHRI's must be independent from government and from NGOs. As one international document points out, NHRI's must have legal independence, operational independence, policy independence and financial independence.
- (2) Pluralism: ensuring that the composition of the NHRI's reflects the social forces (from civilian society) who are the targets of social discrimination, inequality and rights violations.
- (3) Accountability. The NHRC's are morally accountable to the larger citizenry who is at the receiving end of the brazen rights violations committed with impunity by state forces confident that they are always immune from being held accountable for their actions. While the NHRCs may comply with the legal accountability of placing reports before Parliament, the issue of owning up to their moral and ethical accountability is of utmost importance.

The NHRC itself has acknowledged their responsibility to comply with the Paris Principles and accreditation by GANHRI (Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions set up by the UN Human Rights Council). They have declared in their website that they have complied with the above principles sufficient to be re-accredited as an "A" Level NHRI by GANHRI in 2019. The appointment of Justice Mishra seriously repudiates the Paris Principles and has to be questioned.

There can be no iota of doubt that effective NHRI's should have "independent members who exercise independent thinking and leadership". As the judiciary never tires of saying, justice should not only be done, but seen to be done. A big casualty of the appointment of a person like Justice Mishra will be the trust and confidence of people, especially victims of rights violations in the independence of the NHRC.

This apart, the other request of Mr. Kharge who suggested that there be greater diversity in selection of NHRC members by appointing Dalit, Adivasi or Minority communities, was also summarily rejected by PM – headed Selection Committee who reportedly finalised the appointments of the former Director of Intelligence Bureau, Mr. Rajiv Jain, and former J&K HC Judge, MK Mittal as members.

Once again, the Selection Committee has shown the scant respect it has for Dalit, Adivasi, minority and marginalised communities by appointing former police/ security officials who

were seen to be close to the ruling dispensation thereby ignoring the demand for ensuring diversity in appointment of NHRC members.

It is a moot question as to whether in a nation of 1.38 billion people, there are no independent thinking, credible, constitutionally sensitive members from Dalit, Adivasi and minority communities. When repeatedly, only government officers, especially police officers are appointed as NHRC members, it confirms the suspicion that the Government is rewarding such officials for their loyalty to the ruling regimes.

Similarly, it is a valid question raised by members of the Dalit, Adivasi, Minority and other marginalised communities as to why members of their communities, who have been former judges of High Courts and Supreme Courts, leading academics and professionals amongst them are seldom appointed as members of the NHRC. This too highlights the claim of the government of respecting diversity as bare tokenism, and that too in bad faith.

It is time the voices of the silent majority are heeded and non-officials from these communities are recognised and appointed to the NHRC. It will greatly help assuage the feeling of alienation and frustration that many such communities feel today and make them feel confident about constitutional democracy in India.

We are,

1. Ravikiran Jain, President, PUCL; 2. Dr. V. Suresh, General Secretary, PUCL; 3. Mihir Desai, VP, PUCL; 4. Karen Coelho, Academic, Chennai; 5. Prabhakar Sinha, PUCL, Ex-President; 6. Malika Sarabhai, Dancer and Cultural activist, Ahmedabad; 7. Rohit Prajapati, PUCL, National Secretary, Vadodara; 8. Apoorvanand, teacher and writer, Delhi; 9. Aakar Patel, Human Rights Activist and writer; 10. Harsh Mandar, writer and human rights activist, N Delhi; 11. Nandini Sundar, academic, Delhi; 12. Amar Jesani, health researcher, Mumbai; 13. V S Krishna (Human Rights Forum), Vishakhapatnam; 14. Vipul Mudgal, Writer and Human Rights Researcher, Delhi; 15. Natasha Badhwar, Author and Film-Maker; 16. Abha Bhaiya, feminist activist, Dharamsala; 17. Sundar Burra, Member, (Constitutional Conduct Group), N Delhi; 18. Nivedita Menon, teacher and writer, Delhi; 19. Pamela Philipose, Writer and Journalist; 20. Meera Sanghamitra (National Alliance of People's Movements), Hyderabad; 21. Fr. Cedric Prakash, SJ, Human Rights Activist, Ahmedabad; 22. Arundhati Dhuru (NAPM), Lucknow; 23. Sandeep Pandey (Socialist Party India), Lucknow; 24. Prafulla Samantara (NAPM), Bhubhaneshwar; 25. Anuradha Talwar (Poschim Bonga Khet Mazdoor Samiti), Kolkata; 26. Syeda Hameed, Writer, Former member (Planning Commission), N Delhi; 27. Bela Bhatia, Advocate and human rights worker, Chhattisgarh; 28. Dr. Sunilam, ex MLA, working group member AIKSCC, Multai, MP; 29. Shabnam Hashmi, Cultural and Human Rights Activist, ANHAD; 30. Medha Patkar (NAPM and NBA), Badwani, MP; 31. Kavita Srivastava, National Secretary PUCL; 32. Kalyani Menon Sen, Independent researcher and feminist activist; 33. Salil Shetty, Human Rights and Policy thinker, Bengaluru; 34. Kavita Kurughanti, social activist, Bengaluru; 35. Henri Tiphagne (People's Watch), Madurai; 36. M G Devasahayam, IAS (Retd.), TN; 37. Bhanwar Meghwanshi, Dalit writer and PUCL NC, Bhilwara; 38. Anand Bhatnagar, writer and poet, PUCL, NC, Ajmer; 39. DL Tripathi, trade unionist, PUCL, Ajmer; 40. Uma Chakravarti, academic, Delhi; 41. Smita Chakraburty Prison activist (PAAR), Jaipur; 42. Aruna Roy (MKSS, Rajasthan); 43. Nikhil Dey (MKSS, Rajasthan); 44. Shankar Singh (MKSS, Rajasthan); 45. Nityanand Jayaraman (Chennai Solidarity Group); 46. PL Mimroth (Centre for Dalit Rights), Jaipur; 47. Suman Devathiya, Dalit women's movement, Jaipur; 48. Nishat Hussain (National Women's Welfare Society), Jaipur; 49. Radhakant Saxena, prison expert & PUCL, Jaipur; 50. Aditya Srivastav (Right to Food Campaign), Delhi; 51. Zakia Soman (Bhartiya Muslim Mahila Andolan), Delhi; 52. Smita Gupta, researcher and feminist artist, Delhi; 53. Amita Joseph, advocate, Delhi; 54. Ashish Ranjan (JJSS and NAPM), Araria, Bihar; 55. Janaki Abraham, academic, Delhi; 56. Vimal (NAPM), Delhi; 57. Dipa Sinha, academic and (Right to Food Campaign), Delhi; 58. Anjali Bhardwaj (Satark Nagrik Sangathan), Delhi; 59. Amrita Johari (Satark Nagrik Sangathan), Delhi; 60. Lara Jesani, NC member, Mumbai; 61. Y Rajendra, PUCL, Karnataka; 62. Arvind Narrain Advocate, Bengaluru; 63. Rita Brara, Affiliated Fellow, Institute of Economic Growth; 64. Kathiyayini Chamraj, concerned individual, Bengaluru; 65. Fawaz Shaheen, Quill Foundation; 66. Ulka Mahajan, Anna Adhikar Abhiyan Maharashtra; 67. Gautam Mody, NTUI; 68. Amitabha Pande, IAS (retired), Former Secretary Inter State Council, Government of India; 69. Gauhar Raza, Scientist, poet and film maker; 70. Meena Gupta, Former Secretary to GOI & member of the Constitutional Conduct Group; 71. Gopalan Balagopal, Retired Civil Servant, Wayanad India; 72. A C Michael, Former Member of Delhi Minorities. 

## We Stand With the Farmers

Some photos of those who joined Protest Day on completion of 6 months of farmers struggle: S.R. Hiremath, Dharwar; N.D. Pancholi, Delhi, Mr. & Mrs. Ramkishore, Lucknow; Avinash Mishra, Allahabad; Syeda Hameed, Delhi. A very successful webinar was also organized on the same day (26 May) jointly on behalf of CFD & PUCL, Delhi to pay tributes to farmer martyrs and to celebrate Budhpurnima as part of protest day. S.R. Hiremath, President CFD, Anil Sinha, Secretary CFD, Syeda Hameed, former member Planning Commission, Boota Singh & Bakhtawar Singh, both farmer leaders and President and Secretary of Bhartiya Kisan Manch (Ekta); Vertika Mani (PUCL), Amit Srivastav (PUCL & LAWYERS FOR DEMOCRACY) and N.D. Pancholi spoke. T.S. Ahuja (PUCL) moderated the meeting.



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# Salute to the Farmers!

On Completion of Six Months of their Relentless Agitation on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2021



*Pouran Poonolil Antony, a Prominent Human Rights Activist, Kerala*

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