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Printed by K Vijayakumar at Modern Arts and Industries, 151, A-Z Industrial Estate, Ganpatrao Kadam Marg, Lower Parel, Mumbai-400 013 and published by him on behalf of Sameeksha Trust from 320-321, A-Z Industrial Estate, Ganpatrao Kadam Marg, Lower Parel, Mumbai-400 013. Editor: C Rammanohar Reddy.

**Theorising on Anna Hazare: Disaster Tourists from Delhi**

Persuasive and passionate as the argument of Nivedita Menon and Aditya Nigam ("Anti-Corruption Movement and the Left", EPW, 10 September 2011) is for recognising the Anna Hazare movement as "one of the most massive people's movements in 'mainland India' since Independence" and the scathing indictment of the Left, the authors have yet not looked at what is happening in "mainland India".

They have assumed that the "lakhs" who supported the movement in New Delhi were representative of the crores who lived in "mainland India". I can only go by the experiences in Kolkata and Chennai, where the lakhs were missing from the staged demonstrations in support of Anna Hazare's movement. I believe that this experience is as valid as the anecdote about a young working class boy who believed "*Anna Hazare ke chakkar mein pulis saare case khatam kar rahi hai*".

It is convenient to find a whipping boy and unleash pent-up feelings on that symbol, and I as a non-academic do so more than most. It is therefore disappointing that the authors confined their comments to the response of the "broad Left". The deafening silence or lukewarm support of the powerful regional parties is disturbing.

It has always struck me that people who live in the rarefied environment of New Delhi do not bother about how the rest of India lives, thinks, works and responds. Mainland India is that place where events occur. But the microcosm of India based in New Delhi travels to those locations, much like disaster tourists, and draws its conclusions that then become the dominant discourse.

**Shikha Mukerjee**

KOLKATA

**Discussion on Poverty**

The article by Nilakantha Rath on "Measurement of Poverty: In Retrospect and Prospect" (EPW, 15 October 2011) is interesting as it has discussed at length the history of poverty measurement in India.

In a huge country like ours where there are wide social, cultural and other diversities

one single approach may not hold good. I would like to suggest that the central and state governments first identify who the ultra poor are – those who are not getting minimum food, basic health services and education. The focus should be on them. The Hunger Index computed for different states of India shows Madhya Pradesh is at the bottom and others in the same position are Jharkhand and Bihar.

The calorie concept was first introduced in the world by John Boyd Orr (1880-1971), the first director-general of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation. Boyd Orr was one of the first persons to identify the link between low income and nutritional deprivation.

Shankar Chatterjee

NIRD, HYDERABAD

**Black Money and Inflation**

I note with some concern that Kaushik Basu in his article on inflation ("Understanding Inflation and Controlling It", EPW, 8 October 2011) has not seen it fit to discuss the possible role that black money may be playing in fuelling inflation. Though he does mention the massive leakages that are taking place in the public distribution system, he does not elaborate on what the black money generated from such leakages might be doing to drive inflation. Similarly, the leakages taking place from the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme are also increasing the generation of black money, while the real creation of assets is not taking place.

Though black money has been a constant phenomenon in the Indian economy, it is possible that its availability and use may have gone up substantially from 2008 onwards in the wake of the global financial meltdown. There is a strong possibility that the black money parked outside India may have been brought back to the country in the wake of the meltdown and invested in real estate and agricultural commodity trading where a substantial amount of dealing is traditionally done off the record.

Moreover, as the many scams surfacing have shown, the United Progressive Alliance government at the centre and state governments have been indulging in more than the usual corruption. The Lok Sabha elections of

2009 too must have injected a huge amount of black money into the system. No doubt this is an untested hypothesis but if strong measures had been taken to curtail the generation of black money and its use and inflation had come down, then this hypothesis would have been proven and the economy and polity of our country would also have been cleaned up.

**Rahul Banerjee**

INDORE

## Squeezing the Media in Kashmir

On 12 October *Mail Today* carried a story on page 3 that the Union Ministry of Home Affairs had last August sent a communication to 30 odd union ministries and agencies, including public sector units, asking them to stop issuing all advertisements to five newspapers of J&K (*Kashmir Times*, *Greater Kashmir*, *Rising Kashmir*, *Buland Kashmir* and *Ethlaat*). It quotes a ministry official as saying “The (home) ministry has decided that newspapers with anti-national agenda will not be given any government support. If these newspapers change their attitude the ministry can reconsider its decision.”

It is known that newspapers have strict instructions from the police department in J&K which obliges them not to carry news of any “separatist” leader on their front page and if the news appears on an inside page its length is restricted to a column and a half.

The simple question is that if things are going so well for the government – with militancy down and the interlocutors having submitted their recommendations – why is it going out of its way to crack down on the media in J&K? Who are the authorities afraid of if the people are with them? Above all what does it say about the watchdogs of the Indian media that they have not even responded to this suo motu?

**Gautam Navlakha**

NEW DELHI

## Attack on Prashant Bhushan

The Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF) strongly condemns the attack on Supreme Court lawyer Prashant Bhushan on 12 October. According to Bhushan’s

associates the hooligans claimed to be the members of Sri Ram Sene and distributed pamphlets in the name of this organisation while carrying out the attack.

The attack was purportedly to punish Bhushan for his recent statement that a referendum should be conducted in Kashmir so that the people of Kashmir can decide their future as per their political aspirations. The Sri Ram Sene members were miffed that Bhushan spoke out in favour of the democratic right of the Kashmiris to determine their own future through a referendum.

RDF demands that the perpetrators of the attack on Prashant Bhushan be handed down the strictest punishment. The Indian state must recognise the right to self-determination of the Kashmiri nation, and allow the people of Kashmir to exercise this democratic political right.

**Rajkishore, G N Saibaba**

NEW DELHI

## An Open Appeal to the Chief Minister of West Bengal

For several years the people of Jungle Mahal in West Bengal have been suffering persecution, humiliation and indignities at the hands of the state forces and armed bullies financed by the ruling parties. In the election campaigns made by you and your party, promises were made of the withdrawal of joint forces from the region, and you made the pledge to release all political prisoners unconditionally.

In your election manifesto, you also made the pledge to “suppress state terror” (p 39). However, to our surprise, we find that instead of suppressing state terror your police, the central joint forces and “Bhairab Bahinis” are only perpetuating it. To our dismay, we see that people are being detained illegally, women have been humiliated and a large number of the sons of the soil have been incarcerated. Civil rights activists, scholars and even physicians who went to Jungle Mahal for on-the-spot investigation and for treating patients voluntarily were arrested by your police forces. Your administration is not allowing public meetings organised by local organisations to take place, while your party is being allowed to do so. Democracy for the ruling party and autocracy towards

all dissident voices! Is this democracy, Madam Chief Minister?

We have come to know from media reports that an agreement was signed on 30 September 2011 by your team of interlocutors and the Maoist state leadership of West Bengal regarding the unilateral cessation of armed action on the part of the Maoists for a period of one month on the condition that the state government also would maintain peace by cessation of armed action by the joint forces and the police both in letter and in spirit by keeping them within their camps. We welcome this move as a preliminary step to initiate a dialogue between the two sides.

We do hold that the Maoist movement in our country is rooted in socio-economic deprivation, and is never a law-and-order issue contrary to what the central powers-that-be would try to project, and hence needs to be addressed and dealt with in a totally different manner. The people who have been resisting state repression in the field whom unfortunately the government treats as their enemies, are actually our sons and daughters – much exploited and deprived for decades together. Dialogue should be opened with them without any further delay and a proper atmosphere should be created to facilitate the process. A conducive atmosphere can be created only when arbitrary and indiscriminate arrests and illegal detention by the joint forces are stopped, the forces are withdrawn from the area and all political prisoners are released by withdrawing all cases registered against them. Such steps, we feel, would instil confidence in the minds of the people.

We do hope that you will give our voice a fair measure of consideration and take a political stand to this effect.

**Mahasweta Devi, Tarun Sanyal, Bibhas Chakraborty, Varavara Rao, Subhendu Dasgupta, Arup Dasgupta, Dipankar Chakraborty, Amitdyuti Kumar, Manas Joardar, Meher Engineer, Amit Bhattacharyya, Amit Bhaduri, Sanmatha Nath Ghosh** and others

### Holiday Notice

EPW wishes its readers a happy and silent Diwali/Deepavali.

On account of the Festival holidays, there will be no issue dated 29 October and the next issue will be of 5 November.

– Ed.