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February 3, 2019

**Now a Young Ascetic from Kerala
Stakes His Life for Ganga**
Sandeep Pandey

**Issue of Contractual Teaching at
Delhi University**
Prem Singh

**The Motivated Murder of India's
Statistical System**
Jayati Ghosh

**Democratic Accountability in
a Digital Era**
Anupam Saraph, Lalit Kathpalia

**Statement Against Threat of Imminent
Arrest of Prof. Anand Teltumbde**
Students, Faculty and Alumni of IIT
Kharapur

**Venezuela: What Activists Need To
Know About The US-Led Coup**
Kevin Zeese, Margaret Flowers

**Youth March for Climate Justice
in Brussels**
Chantal Verdonschot

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The Music of Humanity

Dilip Simeon

One of the most famous anti-fascist films is Charles Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, which subjected Hitler's fantasies of global domination to withering satire. Less well-known is his first post-war movie, *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), about a genial family man who makes a living by marrying and murdering wealthy widows. Upon being caught, this anti-hero says, "Clausewitz said that war is the logical extension of diplomacy; *Monsieur Verdoux* feels that murder is the logical extension of business."

All distinctions notwithstanding, this is where the common trajectories of modern history show themselves. A large segment of our official elites, businessmen, opinion-makers and middle classes are accustomed to the view that some amount of bloodletting is inevitable in politics, a few thousand corpses and sundry riots and 'encounters' are an acceptable cost in return for the fantasy of progress, prosperity and stability. Market fundamentalists decided long ago that untrammelled capitalism is good for humanity. That it is a fantasy does not matter—fantasies are meant to deflect our minds from intolerable reality. State power is now infused in

criminality; with a brazenly partisan media playing drummer-boy, its fascination with petty crime in contrast to its silence on crime in high places. To cite Verdoux again, "It's all business. One murder makes a villain. Millions, a hero. Numbers sanctify." Let's wait and see where our demented arithmetical imagination takes us.

Many people believe that Gandhi needs a rest. He's irrelevant, except as an icon. Is this true? I do not think so. Ahimsa remains crucial, especially when a growing sense of injustice calls for democratic agitation on a continental scale. It also relates to the ecological impact of militarism. His assassin's accusation that Gandhi was emasculating Hinduism and rendering it impotent points to beyond stereotypes on gender and masculinity. As opposed to rampant consumerism, Gandhi's frugal ideals remind us that fostering ceaseless growth with finite resources is like celebrating cancer. His condemnation of the atom bomb and of the urge to use science for destructive purposes resonates with contemporary concerns. His insistence on *shramdaan* and constructive work are a compass for activist energy. His talisman for

public policy—the suggestion that we keep the humblest of individuals in mind—is both ethical and pragmatic. The warning delivered during his last months—that failure to resolve Hindu–Muslim conflict would result in the sub-continent being doomed to condominium status under the great powers—was prophetic. So was his critique of communally defined nationalism, implicit in his opposition to the transfer of population in 1947. His critical engagement with modernity is surely a necessary debate.

Gandhi's mind worked in tandem with his heart and instinct. He had warned that partitioning India would not solve communal problems and that it would lead to catastrophic violence. He also warned that if the decision was taken and the two parties did not act with goodwill and trust, it would lead to a state of permanent animosity and conflict. In the last months of his life he understood his isolation from the Congress as well as from a large part of public sentiment. He said he felt as if he had been thrown into a fire pit, that his heart burned. About those who combined communal hatred with slogans of *Akhand Hindustan*, he remarked: “There is nothing in common between me and those who want me to oppose Pakistan except that we are both opposed to the division of the country. There is a fundamental difference between their opposition and mine. How can love and enmity go together?”

Gandhi derived his lessons from unremarkable things. Rather, he could see extraordinary truths in small events. He was a philosopher of the quotidian. Asked by his imaginary interlocutor (in *Hind Swaraj*) for historical evidence on soul-force or truth-force, Gandhi

replies that the continued existence of human life despite incessant wars was proof enough. It was war and violence that made news, not the everyday love and co-operation that characterised the lives of millions. History did not record everything that happened but rather, “every interruption of the even working of the force of love or of the soul. . . . you cannot expect silver ore in a tin mine.” But he found his silver where he expected it. In 1947, two refugee women came to see him in Delhi. The first, a Hindu, had lost her son and daughter-in-law and was left with her grandchildren. The second was a Muslim who had no family. They were devoted to each other and wanted Gandhi's blessings for their plan to bring up the little ones as joint grandchildren. The Mahatma was deeply moved and saw them as an embodiment of his passion for Hindu–Muslim unity. And he gave an orange to each of the children.

The one stable feature of communal ideology is pessimism. To insist that people of different faiths, despite being neighbours for centuries are incapable of co-existence, is surely the most pessimistic belief there is. A year ago, the Pakistani writer Mobarak Haider wrote of Pakistan's polity: “War is a tragedy but a society at war with itself and everything around, with no objective and no remorse is more than a tragedy; it is a total disaster.” He went on to characterise it as being “in a state of schizophrenia passing into paranoia.” Whether this assessment fits all of us is a matter for self-reflection.

In October 1947, All-India Radio arranged a special broadcast on Gandhi's birthday, and requested him to listen. He declined, saying he preferred rentio (the spinning wheel)

to radio. The hum of the spinning-wheel was sweeter. He heard in it the “still sad music of humanity”. He refused to release his birthday messages from the world over—it felt futile, when the public seemed to have lost faith in non-violence and truth. As we live through January 30 once more, as we replay the mindless rituals, let us think why, far from becoming irrelevant, Gandhi remains so real. It is because he drew meaning from ordinary things, especially those that signified the persistence of friendship and love amidst hatred and violence. That is why his life and message are so much a part of the “still sad music of humanity”. Today we can only hope that the sadness disperses and the music remains.

Goodbye once again, Bapu. Let's hope we learn to deserve you.

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Now a Young Ascetic from Kerala Stakes His Life for Ganga

Sandeep Pandey

Professor G.D. Agrawal, formerly of Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur and known as Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand since 2011, died on 11 October 2018 on the 112th day of his fast, demanding a law for conservation of river Ganga, at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Rishikesh. 40-year-old Sant Gopal Das, inspired by Professor Agrawal, also sat on fast for the same cause two days after Professor Agrawal began his fast, on 24 June 2018 at Badridham temple in Badrinath. He was kept in the Intensive Care Unit of AIIMS, New Delhi after being moved about to different hospitals in Uttarakhand, Chandigarh and New Delhi. On 4 December he was taken to Dehradun from New Delhi and left outside the office of District Magistrate. He got admitted after that to a hospital in Dehradun, but is untraceable since 6 December 2018. Earlier Swami Nigamanand, then 35 years of age, and associated with Matre Sadan in Haridwar, died on the 115th day of his fast in 2011 in a government hospital in Haridwar demanding curbs on mining in Ganga. Matre Sadan claims that he was actually murdered by a mining mafia associated with the then ruling Bhartiya Janata Party in Uttarakhand. Swami Gokulanand, who fasted with Swami Nigamanand from 4 to 16 March, 1998, a year after Matre Sadan was established, is also believed to have been murdered by the mining mafia in 2003 when he was living in anonymity at Bamaneshwar temple in Nainital. Baba Nagnath died at Manikarnika

Ghat in Varanasi in 2014 fasting for the same demand as that of Professor Agrawal, to let Ganga flow uninhibited and unpolluted, *Aviral* and *Nirmal*, respectively.

Now 26-year-old Brahmachari Atmabodhanand, who hails from Kerala, is on fast since 24 October as a sequel to Professor Agrawal's fast at Matre Sadan in Haridwar, which Professor Agrawal had chosen as the site of his fast. Even when Professor Agrawal was alive, the head of Matre Sadan Swami Shivanand had warned persons belonging to Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, the ideological parent of the ruling BJP in power both at Delhi and Dehradun, who had visited him that if anything happened to Swami Sanand, he and his disciples would continue the unfinished task undertaken by Professor Agrawal. Professor Agrawal's was the 59th fast by a saint associated with Matre Sadan and Atmabodhanand's is the 60th. Brahmachari Atmabodhanand dropped out of a Computer Science graduation programme and became a saint at the age of 21 years. He has fasted seven times till now for the sake of Ganga, at least once every year since 2014. In 2017, when he publicly protested against the DM of Haridwar Deepak Rawat—who was patronising illegal sand mining in Ganga—being given an award in the name of Madan Mohan Malviya, he was beaten by the DM and his security personnel in a room behind the stage and put in jail for a day. During his present fast, Atmabodhanand was forcibly admitted to a hospital by the district

administration on 29 November 2018, and when his condition started deteriorating on 1 December he left the hospital against medical advice (known as LAMA in medical parlance). When he was in hospital, Atmabodhanand was told that he was suffering from dengue and his platelet count had dropped to 64,000, but when he got it tested outside, it came out to be 1,01,000.

62-year-old Swami Punyanand of Matre Sadan gave up foodgrains and is on a fruit diet since Atmabodhanand started his fast on 24 October, and has announced his intention to shift to a water diet in the event of Atmabodhanand becoming a casualty.

If the government would have been sincere about cleaning Ganga, at least 4 out of 10 people in the country would have directly benefited, whereas nobody's life is in danger if the proposed grand temple in Ayodhya is not built. In Sabrimala, the BJP is taking the society backwards by obstructing the entry into the temple of women of child bearing age, going against the Supreme Court decision. It would have been better if the RSS–BJP combine, which leaves no opportunity to exploit people's religious sentiments, had given preference to an issue which benefits people rather than promoting a retrogressive agenda.

The Namami Gange programme meant for cleaning Ganga aims at abatement of polluting activities in the river through interception, diversion and treatment of waste water flowing into it through drains.

However, the capacity of Sewage Treatment Plants is woefully short of the volume of sewage being generated and we are nowhere near being able to completely treat the whole sewage. A total of Rs 11,176.81 crore, which is more than half the budget of Namami Gange, has been earmarked for creating a capacity to treat 1,178.75 Million Litres per Day (MLD) of sewage, but the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), responsible for implementation of Namami Gange, estimates total sewage generation to be 2,900 MLD. In all likelihood, by the time NMCG meets its target of sewage treatment, the volume of sewage generated would have gone up by several times. It appears to be an almost hopeless task. The only hope is to let the river clean itself, but that will require letting the river flow naturally, a demand for which Professor G.D. Agrawal fasted and died and something with which Nitin Gadkari doesn't agree. There is a clear conflict between the development agenda of governments and the demand of environmentalists and fasting saints. There is also a view that sewage should not flow into water bodies and must find an alternative disposal.

The hydroelectric projects are undesirable in the Himalayas for two reasons. It has been seen that maximum damage was caused at the sites of hydroelectric projects in the floods of 2013. Moreover, by obstructing the flow of river, dams and barrages on the Ganga take away the unique bactericidal properties of flowing Ganga water which is present in its sediments. In 1965, the Calcutta Port Trust had reported 8.92 milligrams per litre of sediments in Ganga water near the Sundarbans, while in 2016–17 the Department of

Forests reported it to be 5.52 mg/l in high tide and only 4.68 mg/l in low tide (according to scholar Supratim Karmakar from West Bengal). A number of researches and expert committees have opined that modern development of the kind which seeks to build hydroelectric projects is an invitation to disaster and should not be pursued. Had the government not released water from Tehri dam by submerging more people before they could be rehabilitated, there would not have been enough water in Allahabad, now renamed Prayagraj, for people to take a dip in Ganga during the ongoing Kumbh. However, the governments have been surreptitiously promoting the dams and their builders and have ignored the sane opinion which is now resonating in the voice of fasting saints.

Support has been received even from Bangladesh for the struggle to ensure *Aviral* and *Nirmal* Ganga which shows that the issue affects lives of people across India's border too.

The boatfolk community, known as Nishad or Mallah, in Varanasi has been protesting against the introduction of a luxury cruise service on the Ganga, owned by a private company. At stake is a population of about forty thousand whose livelihood depends on the three thousand boats in Ganga at Varanasi. While licences of boatfolk have not been renewed by the Municipal Commissioner, the cruise has obtained permission from the Tourism Department of the Government of India. The leader of the community, Vinod Sahni, is in jail on false charges since May 2018 as he was opposing the traditional exploitation of boatfolk at the hands of middlemen as well

as the new projects being launched by the BJP government which are a threat to the livelihood of the boatfolk. The Nishad community is also demanding the restoration of their traditional rights to cultivate on the banks of the Ganga, which is now being threatened by vested interests. People living all along Ganga whose livelihood depends on it face a similar bleak future.

The BJP's hypocrisy related to Ganga stands exposed now. It is apparent that the saints fasting for Ganga or the boatfolk of Varanasi matter little for it compared to the vested interests of private corporations who gain from commercialisation of Ganga. If it has to choose between its core agenda of Hindutva and profits for corporations, it has made its preference clear.

However, this could spell trouble for BJP. Tulsidas in *Ramcharitmanas* has said that if saints are unhappy in a regime then the king may burn even without fire. BJP's fortunes have taken a sharp dip ever since the saints started fasting in Uttarakhand, also known as *Devbhumi*, or land of God. Maybe it's just coincidence . . .

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Issue of Contractual Teaching at Delhi University

Prem Singh

The University of Delhi is replete with ad-hoc teachers. It presently employs around five thousand teachers who work in ad-hoc capacity. Year after year, for every academic session, a hire and fire policy is adopted with regard to their employment by the college administration. In this process, an ad-hoc teacher often finds himself / herself being turned into a guest teacher. There have been instances wherein they couldn't even secure a teaching position in the capacity of a guest faculty in a particular session. This situation has continued in the University for the past decade. During this period, some sporadic attempts were made to make the ad-hoc teachers permanent. But the fact that there are still a very large number of ad-hoc teachers in the University goes to show that the effect of such attempts has been very limited. This also leads to an inference that there exists the necessary workload against which such ad-hoc teachers are being appointed.

There are 90 colleges which come under the purview of University of Delhi. These colleges frequently advertise vacancies for the appointment of permanent teachers. Candidates can only apply after paying an application fee, and each college charges a non-refundable fee of Rs 500 for an application per subject. Qualified candidates from Delhi and the rest of the country apply along with the prescribed fee, but very often the interviews are simply not conducted. Some time later, the same vacancies are

re-advertised, the candidates again submit the application form with the fee, again the interviews don't take place, and the cycle continues unendingly.

Like other universities, Delhi University also has in place definite rules and guidelines for the preparation of question papers for the examinations and also of their evaluation. With respect to evaluation, there are rules as to which teacher is eligible for examining the answer sheets of pass course (now program) papers and honours course papers at the undergraduate level. Owing to the declining numbers of permanent teachers in the University of Delhi, the ad-hoc teachers and even guest teachers have been entrusted with the evaluation of all types of answer sheets. However, what is distressing is that no amendments have been made in the rules by the University administration to this effect.

The issue of ad-hoc teachers has become an important matter in Delhi University's teacher politics. The ad-hoc teachers have taken several initiatives to raise their problems before the Delhi University Teachers Association (DUTA), as well as various active organisations operating in the Association. But, neither the DUTA nor the teacher organisations nor the ad-hoc teachers themselves have been able to eliminate ad-hocism. Ad-hoc, guest and unemployed teachers are sustaining themselves on empty assurances. Due to the prevalence of rampant adhocism, there is a complete lack of

coordination between the student, subject and the teacher, and the brunt of this rift is borne the most by the students. All this is taking place in a University which not very long ago was renowned for the quality of its teaching.

The teacher community of Delhi University had been harbouring the hope that one day ad-hocism would end and permanent appointments would be made. But the hopes proved to be futile as the Academic Council of University of Delhi passed the rules pertaining to contractual teaching on 16 January 2019. This is despite the fact that Ordinance XII of Delhi University provides for only permanent, temporary and ad-hoc teachers. A rule of recruiting 10 per cent contract teachers against the permanent places has been made by adding Article E to the Ordinance. All the elected representatives of the Academic Council took strong objections to this decision. Aggrieved by this decision, thousands of teachers led by DUTA marched from Ramlila Maidan to Parliament Street in protest and even faced arrests. The next day, the teachers sat on a protest dharna at Delhi University's main entrance. The heavy deployment of police and paramilitary forces on both the days and the lathi-charge on agitating teachers is indicative of the government's unwillingness to take back the decision.

In addition to the 26 representatives elected from the teachers' community, the Academic Council of Delhi University also has more than 150 ex-officio and

nominated members, including the heads of departments, professors and college principals. The ex-officio and nominated members present in the Academic Council meeting neither protested the decision nor did they deem it fit to even debate the issue. Neither did any discussion take place as to what was the shortcoming in the existing rules because of which a new rule to impose contractual practice in the teaching system of Delhi University was needed. The Vice Chancellor came to the Academic Council meeting with the only intention of getting the rule passed.

Neither the Vice Chancellor nor the professors—principals of the University have given a thought to the question that had they been kept in ad-hoc or contract capacity for decades, would they have attained the positions occupied by them at present? Would they have been able to secure their present plush posts, grants, projects, foreign assignments etc.? The manner in which they have been able to settle their children—would it have been possible for them in the absence of their present conducive circumstances? The way they have been able to secure their post-retirement life by way of provident fund, pension, medical facility, insurance, etc.—would all this have been possible if they had been adhoc or guest faculties for most part of their lives? Even more importantly, if the teachers teaching them had been ad-hoc, contract or guest teachers, would they have been able to gain an in-depth understanding of their subjects which has enabled them to receive academic accolades? It seems the responsibility inherent in the profession of teaching has vanished in the vortex of privatisation.

The New Economic Policies that have been implemented since 1991 in the name of privatisation and liberalisation have impacted all areas of our national life over the past three decades. One consequence has been the continuing privatisation of our education system. The employment of contractual teachers in school, college and university systems is a part of this privatisation drive. The present movements of the teaching

community have not been able to stop and reverse the employment of ad-hoc and contract teachers. They will need to find ways of building more powerful movements, involving both teachers and students as well as the common people, to find enduring solutions against these malpractices.

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The Motivated Murder of India's Statistical System

Jayati Ghosh

The attacks by the Modi government on many of India's institutions have been noted, but the destruction of India's statistical system was not adequately recognised or condemned. That is, not until the latest revelations on how the Government is refusing to release the NSSO's employment survey for 2017–18 led to the resignation of the last two remaining independent Members of the National Statistical Commission.

This attack on official statistics is obviously important, because it denies citizens access to reliable data on what is going on in the economy and assess the government's performance. It is sad, because India had managed to build one of the more impressive statistical systems in the developing world, despite having a large informal economy and many forms of economic activity not captured by conventional measures. And it is counterproductive even for the government, because effective policy making requires proper knowledge of existing conditions and problems.

The list of such transgressions is long, and gets longer daily. The messing up of the new series of GDP data became evident when the much-delayed back series was sought to be manipulated for the pathetic purpose of showing the current government in a better light than the previous one. Various other data are simply withheld or sought to be massaged before official release, from the government's own reports about the status of the Clean Ganga campaign to the actual results of initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan or the Ujjwala Yojana or the rural electrification campaign. Fiscal data cannot be trusted because the central government hides its deficits by shifting expenditure off-budget, pretending to sell some PSUs to other PSUs, or simply not paying its dues to programmes for employment or food security. The National Crime Records Bureau has stopped publishing its reports for the last two years. The RBI is refusing to disclose information on banks that are not complying with regulatory guidelines. Even the data on the

supposedly transparent MNREGA website contains a fudge that hides the extent to which the government is not providing work even when it is formally demanded.

The self-created mess is worst for official data on employment. First the NSSO was made to scrap the quinquennial large labour force survey on the grounds that it would be replaced with Periodic Labour Force Surveys that would provide “real-time data”. The report of the 2017–18 survey is ready and was cleared by the National Statistical Commission, but the government is not releasing it! Similarly, the Labour Bureau’s report on the sixth annual employment–unemployment survey, for 2016–17, has not been publicly released by the government, even though it was supposedly cleared by the minister in charge.

We can only speculate about whether this is because these surveys show stagnation or declines in employment in the recent past, as suggested by independent surveys. In an already dismal employment scenario, demonetisation is widely accepted to have wreaked havoc on India’s informal economy and livelihoods of the poor. Employment does not appear to have recovered since then. Indeed, the large survey conducted by the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy (CMIE) suggests a steep fall in employment in 2018, of as much as 11 million jobs, mostly those of rural women and overwhelmingly among less educated workers. While these data are still preliminary, the overall picture is gloomy.

But even as they prevent the public release of potentially incriminating statistics, government Ministers claim that there are no reliable official data on employment in the country. Instead, they—and

the Prime Minister himself—seek to generate hype about employment creation on the basis of completely misleading and even laughable indicators.

One such desperate attempt was that of using the payroll registrations under the Employment Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) as indicative of new employment. As the Director of the EPFO himself clarified, this is wrong for several reasons, and does not give an idea of either new employment generation or even the number of formal jobs. It may reflect existing workers getting registered or moving to enterprises that have such registration; many workers have multiple accounts, which have not been merged; workers’ names are not removed once they are registered even if they lose those jobs and no longer contribute; those registered are not necessarily in “formal” employment in any meaningful sense of the term. The volatility in EPFO numbers point to their limited use in gauging employment levels, while many who are registered get no other benefits of “formality”, even minimum wages.

Despite this, in his speech to the Lok Sabha in July 2018, Prime Minister Modi used this problematic indicator to claim millions of new jobs in the economy during his tenure. He also made some wild guesstimates: assume that all newly registered chartered accountant companies each employ 20 people to get 1 lakh new jobs; assume that 60 per cent of all graduating doctors start their own practices and hire 5 people each to get 240,000 more jobs; assume that three-fourths of the new commercial vehicles sold leads to employment of two people per vehicle to get 11.4 lakh workers; assume that 90 per cent of the autorickshaws sold generate new

employment of 3 people for every 2 such vehicles to get 3.4 lakh new jobs! All these various leaps of faith led him to conclude that 10 million jobs were created in one year alone. This is statistics generation on par with the “science” being peddled by some Ministers, of plastic surgery, in vitro fertilisation and interplanetary aircraft existing in ancient India.

In that same speech, Narendra Modi promised to “present before the country all figures regarding employment present in the system, every month.” Yet, leave alone official survey data, even the figures for public employment are not being released. Budget documents suggest that the number of central government employees actually declined by 75,231 during the tenure of the Modi regime, and projected hiring targets have not been met in any year.

This suggests one immediate and obvious remedy for the employment crisis. There are huge vacancies in existing posts across central and state governments—it is estimated that there are around 2.4 million vacant posts in the central government and many multiples of that for the state governments combined. Just filling these vacancies would provide much-needed employment and ensure better public services as well. Indeed, this is one of the demands of the planned march to Parliament of students and youth on 7 February. Expanding regular employment in crucial social services would also have major positive multiplier effects, generating much more employment indirectly.

So instead of hiding or trying to wish away the problem, a responsive government could actually do something about it. The point is to make sure a responsive government is in place.

Democratic Accountability in a Digital Era

Anupam Saraph, Lalit Kathpalia

Digital India

The government has taken onto itself to become a digital republic. Without a digital ID, the Unique Identity (UID) issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), your ability to access government and private services, your entitlements like salaries, pensions and your rights like education, travel and living in your own home have been increasingly denied. Even with the UID your access to these, and more, is subject to digital apps that need to authenticate your biometric or your access to a mobile that was linked to your UID at the time of enrolment. If apps fail because there is no access to internet, power or because your biometric has changed, as all biometrics do, you can be denied every subsidy, benefit, service, entitlement or right till you get yourself a fresh UID. Until the Supreme Court of India read down the Aadhaar Act on September 26, 2018, if your UID was stolen and used by someone in possession of your biometric or mobile to take over your services, entitlements and rights, you had no recourse as section 47 of the Aadhaar Act prohibited the courts from taking cognisance other than if the UIDAI file a complaint. Most importantly, the UIDAI does not run the delivery of subsidies, benefits and services, nor is it in any way accountable for any failures in these processes. Furthermore, the UIDAI does not take any responsibility for any enrolments, identification and authentication, and the consequent entitlements,

rights, programming interfaces and apps that depend on any of these, but simply licenses out these functions to private parties. The UIDAI does not take any responsibility for even a redressal mechanism itself but simply outsources these functions to private parties.

Digital payments is the next frontier. Not convinced that the Reserve Bank of India and its digital payment systems—the National Electronic Fund Transfer (NEFT) or Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS)—are sufficient or even appropriate to facilitate digital money transfers, the government has been pushing apps built with the Aadhaar enabled Payment System (AEPS) and the Universal Payments Interface (UPI) by a non-government private company, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). These apps, based on the "open" programming interface (API) called India Stack, developed by "volunteers" from among former UIDAI employees who designed the UID and Fintech companies, anonymise money transfers and destroy the trace of money from transfer order to transferee. This loss of trace is similar to what bankers call money laundering. Payment wallets, like PAYTM, also allow unregulated generation of digital money and enable making of untraceable payments.

Not convinced that government's records can be accessed to query for information about documents like birth certificate, driver's license, election card etc. issued by the

government itself, the citizen is asked to upload the copies of these documents to a digilocker and provide them to organisations asking for them.

Even voting has been undertaken by Electronic Voting Machines that are not capable of issuing receipts to voters, not capable of receiving votes through multiple channels like ballot papers, mobile phones and internet, and that are not capable of leaving an audit trail of all votes being counted for a candidate so as to ensure that no genuine votes were rejected and none that were counted were electronically generated.

The government's incessant obsession for digitisation has become pervasive in government. The digitisation of the government is creating the blind belief that anything digital is automatically accountable and desirable. In such times concerns about democratic accountability become even more pronounced than ever before.

Digital Accountability

Indian democracy gets its meaning from the Preamble to the Constitution of India. The Preamble promises justice, liberty, equality and dignity for the people of India. The erosion of any of these can only be of benefit to private interests and not benefit public interest. We can, therefore, consider that the provision of these serves public interest.

The preamble also promises India to be a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic. The erosion of any of these can only

be detrimental to national interest. We can therefore consider that any protection of these would be in national interest.

We can, therefore, conclude that Indian Democracy can be meaningful only when public interest and national interest are protected and furthered. Therefore, in a digital age too, whether democracy is being upheld or not can be judged by whether public interest and national interest are being served or not.

Protecting the citizens: The public interest argument

The government is not about service delivery, efficiency, becoming digital, becoming paperless, presence-less, or even cashless. It is about upholding public interest. Public interest is upheld when the ideas of justice, liberty, equality and dignity that were promised by the founding fathers of the country are upheld by the government and its institutions. Democratic accountability requires that these principles of public interest are not violated.

Justice is destroyed when the misuse of UID is not distinguishable from the use of the UID. The mere use of a number, or the uncertified, unverified and unaudited biometric data associated with the number, being treated as a proof of presence and affirmation of a transaction leaves no recourse to a person whose UID number or biometric data has been misused to commit fraud. Not only does it fail to establish the presence of a person, it fails to establish identity. The recent notice by the UIDAI to various parties accessing its database for authentication, confirms that such misuse of stored biometrics is not only possible but has happened.

The use of the UID as a proof of transaction by a person is as unjust as calling a person to act as witness against herself, if not worse. Furthermore the Aadhaar Act also prohibited access to justice by way of preventing courts from taking cognisance of injustice except when asked by the UIDAI. Similarly, justice is destroyed when EVMs steal votes meant for one candidate, in favour of another. When digital initiatives destroy justice, they usually also destroy access to justice. Those wronged in these instances cannot approach the courts or have limited means available in order to seek redressal under both the Aadhaar Act and the Representation of People Act.

When a digital program like the UID eliminates the choice of alternate identification documents issued by government agencies, that are responsible to deliver subsidies, benefits and services (for example rations, LPG cylinders, licences to drive vehicles, obtain passports, obtain subsidy, benefits, pensions, salaries and jobs), it not only fails to uphold the promise of liberty, it destroys responsibility of these parties to treat every person equally and deliver. When the EVM becomes the only way a vote may be counted, the right to choice has been destroyed.

When a government or a private service provider creates classes and treats those having or not having an UID differently, it violates the promise of equality. As those with UID get increasingly different processes and procedures for obtaining their LPG cylinder, rations, passports, jobs, filing tax returns, obtaining health benefits on pregnancy, getting compensation as a victim of Bhopal Gas tragedy

or even getting meals for mid-day meals, the government creates two unequal classes in society against the promise of equality to we the people by the Preamble.

When the claim of human rights, entitlements and citizenship is subject to a person's biometric matching in a database, and not to her need for the human rights as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, her dignity is violated. When digital initiatives deny the non-digital world, they violate dignity of those with no access, no digital literacy or those who are digitally challenged.

The argument regarding public interest would challenge the non-digital and digital system with questions of justice, equality, liberty and dignity. The digital system will need to demonstrate that it does not undermine the ability of the individual to access and obtain justice. It will need to demonstrate that the right to choice, including the choice to use the digital initiative, is protected by digital initiatives. The digital system will need to demonstrate that it does not create processes that distinguish those using or rejecting the digital initiative. The digital initiative has failed to demonstrate that it does not undermine the dignity of those who opt in or out of the digital initiative.

Protecting the Nation: The national interest argument

National interest is not about economic growth, foreign direct investments, trade, becoming a super-power, digitisation or even technological progress. It is about upholding the sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic nature of the nation by the government and its institutions as was promised by

the founding fathers of the nation.

In order to protect national interest, the State and its institutions must also protect and enhance the promise of remaining a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic. Democratic accountability requires that this promise of national interest is not violated.

The idea of sovereignty is considered to include absolute supremacy over internal affairs within its territory, absolute right to govern its people, and the freedom from external interference in these matters. In a democratic sovereign nation people must have authority over governance, not private parties. Any digital initiatives taken must guarantee all this, must not violate any of these rights.

In practice, by privatising or outsourcing any part of governance, the government compromises its sovereignty.

In the case of the UID number, the UIDAI both privatised as well as outsourced the enrolment in the UID database as well as the authentication of individuals and the generation of beneficiary rolls using e-KYC. The rolls of residents of India and those who are beneficiaries as well as those on the rolls who may be authenticated during a transaction are decided by private and outsourced organisation, no longer by the people of India with authority over governance.

Similarly, in the case of the EVM, the EVM is manufactured by private parties and only assembled in India by Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL). The government gives up its supremacy over something as important as elections to technology companies and manufacturers both inside and

outside the country.

The Smart Cities Program of the government outsources the powers of the Municipal Body to joint-venture companies who have signed MoUs with various government agencies from different countries and multinational companies. This too surrenders the authority of a democratic government to have supremacy over governance.

As a socialist country, India must ensure the socialist nature of delivery of services. This requires that people must own the delivery of services, not private interests.

As the use of UID is coerced across services, private, outsourced interests determine the delivery of services, not the people of India. Even the move to a cashless economy has been promoted by pushing for use of banking transactions by non-government and non-people owned entities like the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) and PAYTM through instruments that are neither regulated nor auditable by the people of India. The strange promotion of Universal Payments Interface (UPI) and Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS) over the NEFT run by the Reserve Bank of India not only violates the socialist but also the sovereign nature of the banking system.

As a secular nation, digital initiatives must not violate the secular nature of governance. This means that no digital app or initiative must be driven by religious or spiritual considerations. If digital technologies name themselves with religious, spiritual considerations, collect information or undertake religious or spiritual functions they would violate the secular nature of the country.

As a democratic nation, digital

initiatives must ensure they protect democratic norms. This means that no digital initiative must violate social equality. Social equality would be violated if a digital initiative altered the ability of citizens to be equals in making decisions.

The UID number alters the ability of different persons to be equals in decision making as they are not equally treated by the government in their access to justice, liberty, dignity and their demand for equality. The EVM does not give equal ability to citizens to make decisions—it weighs in favour of those with the ability to cast votes through digital booth capture and those with the ability to digitally capture digital vote counting and hijack the elections.

As a republic the digital initiatives must ensure that the supreme power must remain with the people, not any other institutions. This requires that no digital initiative should be able to transfer the power to institutions that do not belong to the people.

The UIDAI has transferred the enrolment and authentication of those who will be granted rights, entitlements and benefits to private parties. The government has transferred the DBT and consolidated Fund of India transfers to a non-government company, the NPCI. The new Goods and Service Tax (GST) will be collected by a non-government private company, the Goods and Service Tax Network (GSTN). All of these digital initiatives erode the republic of India.

The national interest argument will need to challenge the non-digital and the digital system questions of the sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic and republic nature of

the nation. The digital initiative will have to demonstrate as to how it strengthens sovereignty or at least does not worsen it in comparison to the non-digital system. It will need to demonstrate that it does not undermine the socialist nature or the people's ownership of services. It will need to demonstrate that it is free from religious and spiritual influences. It will also need to demonstrate that it does not undermine democracy. The digital initiative will also need to demonstrate that the power of the people for self rule remains undiminished.

Whose role is it to enforce digital accountability in a democratic world?

In September 2018, the Supreme Court of India delivered judgments on over 38 clubbed petitions on digital India, mostly relating to the UID. Paragraph 127 of the judgment of Justice Sikri for himself, the Chief Justice and Justice Khanwilkar frames the 10 issues they considered. Paragraph 100 of the judgment of Justice Bhushan frames 18 issues he considered. Paragraphs C1 and C2 of the judgment of Justice Chandrachud frames the issues he considered. None of the issues framed in the judgment hold accountable the Union of India or the UIDAI or the current implementation of Digital India to protect public interest or national interest as defined in this paper.

The judgment considered "legitimate state interest" and "proportionality" as defined in the Privacy Judgment in the Puttuswamy matter. Paragraph 71 of the Judgment of Justice Kaul in the Privacy Judgment summarises

the test for proportionality and legitimacy:

The concerns expressed on behalf of the petitioners arising from the possibility of the State infringing the right to privacy can be met by the test suggested for limiting the discretion of the State:

- (i) *The action must be sanctioned by law;*
- (ii) *The proposed action must be necessary in a democratic society for a legitimate aim;*
- (iii) *The extent of such interference must be proportionate to the need for such interference;*
- (iv) *There must be procedural guarantees against abuse of such interference.*

'Any sanction of law', however, does not automatically meet the criteria of serving public or national interests as defined in this paper. 'Any action deemed necessary in a democratic society for a legitimate aim' is both vague in defining democratic accountability and unbounded in legitimacy. 'The proportionality of interference' is left to discretion of the adjudicating officer. 'Procedural guarantees against abuse of interference' admits to the possibility of abuse by interference but at the same time fails to prevent interference.

Without a test of the public interest, or ensuring the protection of justice, liberty, equality and dignity of the people, and national interest, or the protection of sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic and republic nature of the nation, there can be no democratic accountability. Not just Digital India, but the legitimacy of every government action should be accountable to

the principle of public interest and national interest.

There is no evidence of the Cabinet Secretary, who is coordinating the executive's drive to use the UID and implement Digital India, having held Digital India accountable to protect public and national interest. The UIDAI also fails to show any evidence of protecting public interest as there is evidence of widespread exclusions, creation of unequal categories and efforts to eliminate choice, and there is also no effort to protect people from injustice. The UIDAI also fails to show any evidence of protecting national interests as evidenced in the destruction of voter lists by including non-citizens, managing of voter preferences by exclusions, the construction of national population registers including non-citizens, the creation of bank accounts without certifying the identity of persons and transferring subsidies to such unverified bank accounts.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology does not have any report indicating whether it has assessed the initiatives of Digital India and held them accountable to serving public interest or national interest. The Parliament has no procedure or criteria to test legislation or demands for grants for their ability to protect public interest or national interest.

The fourth pillar of democracy too has fallen short of giving voice to discussion and debate on the all important idea of democratic accountability or the ideas of public and national interest as a means to hold the government and its actions accountable.

In a democracy, accountability cannot be to institutions but to the

protection of public interest and national interests promised by the Preamble to the Constitution. This responsibility has fallen on the shoulders of Civil Society as the four pillars of democracy have fallen short of their responsibility.

Conclusion

In this paper, we sought to devise tests for democratic accountability. We have proposed subjecting digital and non-digital initiatives to the tests of whether they further public interest and national interest, in order to evaluate their democratic accountability. Using the Preamble to the Constitution of India we have argued that public interest is served when justice, liberty, equality and dignity of the people is protected and enhanced. We have also argued and illustrated how the national interest is served when sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic and republic nature of the nation is protected and furthered. Using examples from the current Digital India initiatives we pointed out that they erode both public interest and national interest. Applying these tests of public interest and national interest, we conclude that the current digital India initiatives do not, therefore, create democratic accountability. Public discourse will need to continuously reiterate the ideas of public and national interest in order to ensure that the institutions that constitute the pillars of our democracy apply the tests of democratic accountability in an increasingly digital world.

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(Both Anupam Saraph and Lalit Kathpalia are with the Symbiosis Institute of Computer Studies and Research, the latter being the director.)

Statement Against Threat of Imminent Arrest of Prof. Anand Teltumbde

Students, Faculty and Alumni of IIT Kharagpur

We, the undersigned students, faculty, alumni and others from IIT Kharagpur are shocked by the threat of imminent arrest of our ex-colleague, Prof. Anand Teltumbde. This comes in the aftermath of rejection of the appeal he filed at the Supreme Court regarding the baseless FIR lodged against him by the Pune police under the pretext of the Bhima-Koregaon incident. He has currently been granted a period of four weeks for seeking pre-arrest bail from the competent Court.

Details of the charges can be viewed in the following link: <http://bit.ly/chargesonanand>.

Prof. Teltumbde has been known as a renowned management professional and a scholar.

He graduated as a Mechanical Engineer from VNIT Nagpur and pursued a degree in Management from IIM Ahmedabad. He did his doctorate in Cybernetics and has held responsible positions in the corporate sector such as Executive Director of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. and Managing Director & CEO of Petronet India Ltd. Even while being in the corporate sector, unusually, he published over 20 research papers in prestigious journals.

Later, he was invited to serve as a Professor in IIT Kharagpur, where he taught business management courses for more than five years before joining GIM. Currently, he heads the Big Data Analytics program of GIM and has launched a post-graduation course this year, the first of its kind in the country.

Despite his highly active professional life, he has always been intent on giving back to society. His intellectual contribution encompasses studying of various social issues and publishing of hundreds of articles along with a regular column, "Margin Speak" in the prestigious Economic and Political Weekly. He has authored 26 books which have been well received and widely read in India and abroad by prestigious publishing houses such as Zed books, Routledge, and Penguin Random House. Besides this he has also delivered hundreds of lectures across India and abroad for the past three decades thereby carrying out the role of a public intellectual. Various universities have conferred upon him several laurels, awards and honorary doctorates.

Coming from the poorest of the poor family, Prof. Teltumbde passed through the best institutes in the country with scholastic achievements. Just being an alumnus of hallowed IIM Ahmedabad, he could have easily lived a luxurious life only if he had chosen to ignore social oddities around him. However, with a sense of contributing to better the lives of people, he decided to just make enough to sustain his family at a reasonable living standard and devote time to make intellectual contribution, the only thing possible, towards making the world a little more just. Informed by this instinct, the residue of activism during his school and college days

naturally landed him in organizations like Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights (CPDR) of which he is today the General Secretary and All India Forum for Right to Education (AIFRTE) of which he is a presidium member.

He has selflessly fought against caste-based discrimination and human rights violation of the marginalised. Moreover, he has been vocal about the education sector which is adversely affected by the neoliberal policies adopted by successive governments. By closing down primary schools, severely cutting funds to higher education institutes, encouraging private investments in education, funding private institutes by taxpayers' money, forcing institutes to generate their own funds through fee hikes or corporate funded research etc., the ruling dispensation has continually tried to push forth its monstrous neoliberal agenda of liberalisation and privatisation.

These incidents are not be treated as stray incidents, rather they aim towards dissociating the marginalised masses from the fruits of education. These issues of national concern have been constantly brought to the fore by activists and students under the banner of AIFRTE.

Prof. Anand Teltumbde has been a guiding force behind this nationwide movement to save the education sector in India.

There is not an iota of unlawfulness in either his voluminous writings or selfless activism. Rather, his entire academic career and corporate career of nearly four decades have been without a single blemish and exemplar of the integrity of highest degree. Despite all these, the danger of being arrested

looms large over him. Moreover, as regards the insinuation of his connection with Bhima-Koregaon or Elgar Parishad, he has been a critique of the episode and his criticism has been published in *The Wire* [<https://thewire.in/caste/myth-bhima-koregaon-reinforces-identities-seeks-transcend>].

Under the preposterous charges slapped against him, Dr. Teltumbde can only be arrested under the draconian UAPA which can mean years of incarceration. Even a hardened criminal can get away with his crime with a metered punishment of a year or two, but an innocent person merely because the police, invariably acting at the behest of political bosses, claim that they have evidence against him could be kept for years in jail. The arrest for him is not simply the hardship of prison life, it is keeping him away from his laptop which has been integral with his body, from his library which has been part of his life, half-written manuscripts of books committed to various publishers, his research papers which are in various stages of completion, his students who have staked their future on his professional reputation, his institute that invested so much resources in his name and recently took him on its Board of Governors, and his numerous friends and of course his family—his wife, who, as the granddaughter of Babasaheb Ambedkar hardly bargained for this fate and daughters who are already disturbed not knowing what has been happening to him since August last year.

For a person who has devoted almost four decades of his professional life in serving this state apparatus and advocating justice for the marginalised, such

criminalisation is utterly unjust.

With all his intellectual contributions, Prof. Teltumbde has lived his life as an honest truth seeker and has questioned any injustice throughout his life. Whatever criticisms he made, and whatever questions he placed, he has made it with utmost scholastic discipline.

Keeping all his activities and credentials in mind, it is quite unfortunate that a scholar like him is having to face such police actions without any iota of wrongdoing. We stand by Prof. Teltumbde and demand quashing of the baseless FIR against him not only to lend him and his family strength to endure this torture but also to do our part as responsible citizens in protecting the democratic ethos of our country.

**Acharya Javadekar
A Satyagrahi Socialist**



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Venezuela: What Activists Need To Know About The US-Led Coup

Kevin Zeese, Margaret Flowers

Two things stand out about the US coup in Venezuela. First, it is unusually open. Typically, the US tries to hide its coups. Second, the coup is built on a series of obvious falsehoods, yet the bi-partisans in Washington, with a few exceptions, keep repeating them.

First, we will correct the falsehoods so readers are all working from the same facts. Second, we will describe how this coup is being defeated. It will be another major embarrassment for the Trump administration and US foreign policy.

It is important to understand that Venezuela has become a geopolitical conflict as Russia and China are closely allied with Venezuela. China and Russia coming into the backyard of the United States challenges the antiquated Monroe Doctrine.

Venezuela has the largest oil reserves in the world and the second largest gold reserves, as well as diamonds and other minerals such as coltan (needed for electronic devices). And, Venezuela is taking over as president of OPEC and will be in a position to push for oil payments in non-dollar currencies or in cryptocurrencies, a major threat to the US dollar.

Correcting the Record

There are a series of false statements repeated by DC officials and corporate media to justify the coup that are so obvious, it is hard to believe they are not intentional. In his two-paragraph comment on the coup, even Senator Bernie Sanders repeated them.

1. Truth: President Nicolás Maduro is the legitimate president.

President Maduro was re-elected on May 20, 2018, in response to the opposition demanding an early election. The legitimacy of the election of Maduro is so evident that it must be assumed those who say he is illegitimate are either intentionally false or ignorant. The election was scheduled consistent with the Venezuelan Constitution and in consultation with opposition parties. When it became evident that the opposition could not win the election, they decided, under pressure from the United States, to boycott the election in order to undermine its legitimacy. The facts are 9,389,056 people voted, 46% of eligible voters. Sixteen parties participated in the election with six candidates competing for the presidency.

The electoral process was observed by more than 150 election observers. This included 14 electoral commissions from eight countries, among them the Council of Electoral Experts of Latin America; two technical electoral missions; and 18 journalists from different parts of the world, among others. According to the international observers, “the elections were very transparent and complied with international parameters and national legislation.”

Venezuela has one of the best electoral systems in the world. Voter fraud is not possible as identification and fingerprints are required for each voter. Voting machines are audited before and immediately after the election. Venezuela does

something no other country in the world does—a public, citizen’s audit of a random sample of 53% of voting machines that is televised. All 18 parties signed the audits.

Maduro won by a wide margin, obtaining 6,248,864 votes, 67.84%; followed by Henri Falcón with 1,927,958, 20.93%; Javier Bertucci with 1,015,895, 10.82%; and Reinaldo Quijada, who obtained 36,246 votes, 0.39% of the total.

This same voting system has been used in elections that Maduro’s party has lost in governor’s and legislative elections. Venezuela is a real democracy with transparent elections. The United States could learn a good deal about real democracy from Venezuela.

2. Truth: The economic crisis is caused by outside intervention, internal sabotage and the decline in oil prices.

There is no doubt the economic situation in Venezuela is dire. The cause is the economic war conducted by the United States, the major decline in oil prices and economic sabotage by the opposition. In essence, the United States and opposition created problems in the Venezuelan economy and now say Maduro must be replaced because of problems they created.

Oil was discovered in Venezuela in the early part of the 20th century and has dominated the economy since then. The Dutch Disease, the negative impact of an economy based on one natural resource, causes a sharp inflow of foreign currency, which raises the value

of the country's currency, making the country's other products less price competitive. It is cheaper to import products rather than create them. This makes it more difficult for segments of the economy like agriculture and manufacturing to develop.

Chavez and later Maduro sought to diversify the economy. They put in place thousands of communes and hundreds of thousands of people working in cooperatives to build agriculture and manufacturing. When the global price of oil was cut by more than half, it collapsed Venezuela's public finances, undermining these efforts. The economic war by the US made it difficult for Venezuela to borrow and trade with some countries.

Economic sanctions against Venezuela began under President Obama, and the Trump administration escalated them with financial sanctions. United States sanctions have cost Venezuela some \$6 billion since August, according to a recent article published at *Venezuela Analysis*. Measures against the nation's oil industry have prohibited the Venezuelan majority-owned company, CITGO, from sending profits back to Venezuela, a \$1 billion loss to the government yearly. Now, the Bank of England is refusing to return \$1.2 billion in gold reserves after US officials, including Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton, lobbied them to cut Venezuela off from its overseas assets.

The US economic war and sabotage of the economy by business interests has been exposed as part of the effort to remove Maduro by creating social unrest and lack of confidence in the government. This

has included hoarding of goods, storing essentials in warehouses and selling Venezuelan goods in Colombia.

In September 2018, Venezuela pointed to a false media campaign exaggerating migration from Venezuela. They highlighted statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to affirm that Venezuela has the fewest volunteer migrants in the continent. They pointed out that 5.6 million Colombians have fled violence in their country and live in Venezuela. Venezuela has programs that have helped thousands of Venezuelans return home.

Socialism strengthens economies, as demonstrated in Portugal. Indeed, one criticism of Venezuela is that the Bolivarian Process is moving too slowly to put in place a socialist economy. There is a need for more sectors to be nationalised and put under democratic control of the people.

3. Truth: The opposition is violent, not the Maduro government.

Opposition protesters have been extremely violent. One tactic of the opposition was to be violent and then film the government's response to make the government look violent. When Abby Martin (an American journalist and presenter, founder of independent media site *Media Roots*) was confronted by opposition protesters, they told her, "Do not film anything that we do. Just film what the government does to us." She reported on the violence saying, "the vast majority has been caused by either indirect or direct violence by the opposition."

Martin reports the opposition attacked hospitals, burned down the Housing Ministry, assassinated

Chavistas and attacked citizen communes such as an art commune that gave free dance and music lessons to local children. Afro-Venezuelans were burned alive. Protesters pulled drivers out of buses and torched the buses. When photos and videos of opposition violence were put on social media, Martin and her colleague, Mike Prysner, became the target of a false media campaign on social media. The opposition did all they could to prevent them from reporting the truth using hundreds of death threats and threats that they would be lynched.

In 2017, *Venezuela Analysis* reported that violent opposition protests included an attack on a maternity hospital endangering the lives of more than 50 newborn babies. Another report described the opposition using snipers to shoot government officials and civilians. Opposition newspapers urged that blunt objects be used to "neutralise" pro-government protesters, resulting in serious injuries and death.

Steve Ellner, writing for the Australia based *Green Left Weekly*, also reported that violence was coming from the opposition. He pointed to attacks at grocery stores, banks, buses, and government buildings. Other commentators described specific incidents of violence by the opposition including killing people. Maduro ordered the arrest of a retired general who tweeted how to use wire to decapitate people on motorcycles, which happened, and how to attack armored vehicles with Molotov cocktails.

Documents show that violence was the opposition's strategy. They sought to "Create situations of crisis in the streets that will facilitate US intervention, as well as NATO

forces, with the support of the Colombian government. Whenever possible, the violence should result in deaths or injuries.”

The tales of government violence are rooted in lies. The government’s response was Maduro calling for a peace conference describing it as “a national peace conference with all the country’s political sectors . . . so we Venezuelans can try to neutralise violent groups.”

4. Truth: The National Assembly acted in violation of the law and is in contempt of court.

The National Assembly is not the only democratic body in Venezuela. Indeed, its actions since the opposition won a majority have violated the law and protected the violence of the opposition with an embarrassing amnesty bill.

On December 6, 2015, the opposition won a parliamentary majority in the Assembly. There were allegations of vote buying in Amazonas state that were investigated by the National Electoral Council, another branch of the government. The Supreme Court barred four legislators from Amazonas taking office, two from the opposition, one allied with the opposition and one from the ruling party. The National Assembly allowed three candidates to take office. The Assembly has been held in contempt of court since July 2016 and its decisions were nullified.

Before the court ruling, the Assembly passed an amazing amnesty law, which granted amnesty for crimes the opposition has committed since 1999 (Chavez’ election). The law is an admission of guilt and provides a well-organised catalog of crimes including felonies, crimes committed at public rallies,

terrorist acts involving explosives and firearms and undermining the economy. They essentially admitted exactly what Chavez/ Maduro have claimed—crimes to overthrow the government for 17 years. Venezuela’s Supreme Court ruled the amnesty law was unconstitutional. Inaccurately, the Trump administration calls the Assembly Venezuela’s only remaining democratic institution.

This January, a subsidiary of the state oil company asked the Assembly to intervene claiming the president cannot make reforms to mixed public–private oil businesses without the prior approval of the National Assembly. On January 16, the court ruled that the Assembly was still in contempt of court and could not act. This is also when the Assembly elected Juan Guaidó as their president, who would later appoint himself President of Venezuela, as part of the US-led coup. Guaidó’s election to head the legislature was illegal and nullified by the court.

The Assembly still exists but remains in a state of contempt of the judiciary. It can rectify the situation by removing the lawmakers accused of electoral fraud. The Assembly refuses to do so because their goal is to remove Maduro from office and they need a super-majority to do so.

A Timeline of the US Coup in Venezuela

In “Anti-Maduro Coalition Grew from Secret Talks,” the *Associated Press* explains the coup was “only possible because of strong support from the Trump administration, which led a chorus of mostly conservative Latin American governments that immediately recognised Guaidó.”

Since August 2017, Donald Trump has been saying that military intervention against Venezuela was a distinct possibility. AP describes this as a “watershed moment” in the coup planning. They report Trump pressuring aides and Latin American countries to invade Venezuela. In September, the *New York Times* reported that the Trump administration had been meeting with coup plotters since mid-2017.

The *Wall Street Journal* reports Trump has long viewed Venezuela as one of his top-three foreign policy priorities, with Iran and North Korea. Trump requested a briefing on Venezuela on his second day in office, talking of the immense potential of Venezuela to become a rich nation through its oil reserves. AP reports that Trump “personally sparked” this as he brought up regime change in Venezuela in every meeting with Latin American leaders.

After Maduro was re-elected, administration plans began taking shape, driven in part by key members in the National Security Council and anti-Maduro advocates in Congress like extreme interventionist Senator Marco Rubio.

On November 1, John Bolton zeroed in on Latin America, calling Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela a “troika of tyranny.” On January 2, Bolton met with his Brazilian and Colombian counterparts to collaborate to “return Venezuela to its democratic heritage.”

On January 10, when Maduro was sworn in for his second term, Pompeo spoke with opposition leader Guaidó, pledging support. Canada also played a key role, AP reports that Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland spoke to Guaidó the night before Maduro’s

inauguration offering Canada's support. This was 13 days before Guaidó announced he was president of Venezuela.

On January 12, the State Department backed Guaidó's move to invoke his authority as president of the assembly, saying, "It is time to begin the orderly transition to a new government." On January 15, the National Assembly declared Maduro as illegitimate. The Trump administration worked to get allies lined up to support Guaidó'. By January 18, the Venezuela Foreign Minister was describing a US coup in progress.

The night before Guaidó's announcement on January 23, Vice President Mike Pence put out a video message encouraging Venezuelans to overthrow their government, saying, "We are with you. We stand with you, and we will stay with you." Guaidó also received a phone call from Pence the night before he appointed himself president where he pledged that the US would back Guaidó.

Guaidó declared that Maduro's government was illegitimate and he was assuming the presidency. In a well-coordinated charade, almost instantly, Trump recognized Guaidó as the country's rightful leader. To further demonstrate the preconceived, tightly coordinated and efficiently carried out the coup, US allies, among them Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Chile, and Peru, quickly recognised the coup president.

The Trump administration is claiming Guaidó represents the lawful government and is entitled to all Venezuelan revenues. The State Department notified the Federal Reserve that Guaidó is the agent for access to Venezuelan assets in

US banks.

Nearly as quickly, Maduro drew statements of support from Russia, China, Turkey, Mexico, Cuba, Bolivia, and others. The Venezuelan Supreme Court called for an investigation into the National Assembly and Guaidó, regarding the illegal usurpation of Executive power. The Venezuelan military announced it supported Maduro and Russia warned the US not to intervene militarily.

On January 25, the Organization of American States, which is traditionally a US tool, rejected a resolution to recognise Guaidó. Medea Benjamin of CODE PINK interrupted Pompeo at the OAS holding a sign that said: "a coup is not a democratic transition!" Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza thanked Benjamin, saying, "With her protest, she revealed the macabre coup plan against Venezuela, we will always prevail, thank you!" Eighteen countries defeated the proposal.

At the UN Security Council meeting on January 26, Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia accused the United States of attempting "to engineer a coup d'état." He demanded to know whether the Trump administration "is ready to use military force" against Venezuela. European countries gave Venezuela eight days to hold an election, a suggestion Venezuela rejected. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called Venezuela an "illegitimate mafia state." He accused Russia and China of trying "to prop up Maduro."

Both China and Russia have told the US not to intervene in Venezuela's internal affairs. In December, Russia sent two nuclear-capable strategic Tu-160 bombers

to Venezuela along with an An-124 heavy military transport plane and an II-62 long-haul plane. As of December, Russia has one brigade in Venezuela and was discussing sending a second military brigade to Venezuela even before the coup due to the continued threat of intervention from the United States.

China has lent over \$50 billion to Venezuela through oil-for-loan agreements over the past decade and has become a partner in the Venezuelan oil industry. In December, seven months since signing a financial business venture with China, Venezuela's oil production has doubled to 130,000 barrels per day. The take-over of Venezuela's oil would also be an attack on China. China and Venezuela signed 28 bilateral strategic cooperation agreements on September 14 in the areas of oil, mining, security, technology, finance, and health.

Demonstrating the nature of the coup president, the first acts that Guaidó took were to seek a loan from the International Monetary Fund, which would put Venezuela in debt to western bankers and under their control, and to privatise the Venezuelan oil industry, which would rob Venezuela of the funds being used to lift up the poor and working class.

The appointment by Mike Pompeo of Elliott Abrams as the person in charge of overseeing operations "to restore democracy in Venezuela" is an ominous sign. It is scandalous and demonstrates the most extreme elements of the US establishment are leading the charge. Abrams was convicted during the Iran-Contra scandal, supported US-backed death squads in Guatemala and El Salvador in

the 1980s, played a key role in the Reagan administration support for the murderous Contras in Nicaragua and was the person who gave approval for the US-backed coup in Venezuela in 2002.

Analyst Vijay Prashad writes the coup violated the charters of the United Nations and of the Organisation of American States and describes efforts to call on the military to rise up against the government have failed. The Trump administration is now threatening a total oil embargo on Venezuela and is leaving the “military option” open.

The concerted campaign by the US and Canada to install Juan Guaidó as the new ‘self-declared’ interim President of Venezuela has been met with initial failure. Unfortunately, the illegal and undemocratic attempts to destabilise the country and overthrow the democratically-elected President will continue with harmful consequences. The people of Venezuela are rising once again to defend their country against hostile foreign intervention. It is essential that we support them in this fight. Many groups are holding solidarity rallies and issuing statements of support.

While Sanders got all the facts wrong about Venezuela, he did reach the right conclusion: “The United States has a long history of inappropriately intervening in Latin American countries. We must not go down that road again.” People in the United States have an important role to play in supporting Venezuela and defeating the coup.

(Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers are directors of the US news website Popular Resistance, and were among the organisers of Occupy Washington DC in 2011.)

Youth March for Climate Justice in Brussels

Chantal Verdonshot

The last few Thursdays, Brussels’ streets have been flooded with students. They carry signs and chant phrases such as ‘climate justice now’. Belgian youth is fed up with a system in which their future is put at risk and politicians make all kinds of promises in order to be elected, while the biggest contributors to climate change go unpunished.

The outrage of youth was sparked when Belgium voted against new EU energy efficiency guidelines after 75,000 people attended a climate march in December. Soon, a movement called ‘Youth for Climate’ emerged, which called for students to skip school and march for climate justice. While its first marches were small, their size has been quickly growing. Today, during the third climate march, approximately 32,000 young people marched.

Luna Bauwens, one of the organisers and forerunners of Youth for Climate explains why it is so important to her to mobilise her peers to march for climate justice. “I really want us to be heard. 75,000 of us marched in December, but it did not make a difference. Our climate ministers did not even show up to the EU meeting about the eco pact. I am very angry at the Belgian government because it does not take any initiative to tackle climate change.”

While climate change does not affect Luna personally yet, she is afraid that it will be a problem

for her future children. “There are solutions, and still, we do not tackle the issue because we are too lazy, or because it will cost money to do so.” She hopes that Belgium’s new government, which will be elected in May, will make tackling climate change a priority and will invest in solutions.

At the same time, she is also afraid that politicians do not take this youth movement seriously. In her experience, adults think they need to explain to young people how things work. They think they can reassure them by showing some data and making some new promises. We will have to wait until after the elections to see whether politicians take youth seriously or not. But if the new government proceeds to neglect climate change policies, Luna predicts that there will be more protests by Youth for Climate.

When asked if the young generation is sufficiently active in politics and activism, Luna says she thinks it is. She is amazed by the fact that 32,000 people marched for the climate today, only because two teenage girls encouraged them to. To her, it seems that more and more young people start to realise that something is wrong with our capitalist system. “It is nice to see that more people realise this. I have faith in our generation.”

(Chantal is from the Netherlands and has a background in human rights, social studies and public health.)

Letter to Editor

Difference Between a Nationalist and a Patriot

Uday Dandavate

The term nationalist has acquired a new meaning in the context of its use (or misuse) in current day politics around the world.

Often nationalism is positioned as a reaction to globalism. Protecting the interests of a nation under attack from international economic, ideological and terrorist forces is often cited as the patriotic duty of citizens.

Appeal of Nationalism is enhanced by stoking the fear of losing sovereignty and security. Nationalism is often promoted by authoritarian leaders / parties who seek to consolidate power by stoking parochialism, majorityism and anti-minorityism. There is always an enemy for those promoting nationalism. Someone has to lose in order for nationalism to win. Nationalism surreptitiously breeds hero worship of a supreme leader and encourages subservience to the authority over expression of dissent. Under the garb of nationalism, state violence is justified as a means to protect sovereignty of a nation.

In a nationalistic atmosphere, the creative class, which often thrives on alternate and often dissenting perspectives, is suppressed and condemned as traitors. Ideologies that encourage the underprivileged to protest and assert their rights are condemned as anti-national. Secularism is damned. And liberal thinkers face mob attack by blind

followers of the nationalistic ideologues. In a nationalistic regime there is no place for multiple perspectives—only one vision prevails.

On the other hand a true patriot is an exact opposite of a nationalist. A patriot recognises his/her duty to contribute to the building of a nation. Towards that goal, he/she is willing to sacrifice, experiment with ideas, challenge authority when powerful people impose a view that is not in the best interests of a free society. A patriot stands up for the downtrodden. A patriot is curious and hungry to create prosperity for his/her people by tapping into the diversity of the world. A patriot's creativity stems from empathy for the pain of the suffering brethren and anger against oppressive establishment. A true patriot is not parochial—he/she thrives in a multi-cultural environment. A true patriot is not subservient to the state. He/she takes democracy seriously and assumes responsibility as a watchdog and acts with courage. He does not hesitate to resist oppression of the state.

The world will be a better place if there were more patriots than nationalists. The world would be more creative and happier if we open our minds and embrace others who are not like us. Our nation will be safer if we build bridges rather than walls.

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