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Hindutva creeps into US politics

Jenett Jose

BENGALURU: The Indian-American organisations, from cultural groups to political power players, have ignited debates about the ramifications of Hindutva influence within the United States. Prof Malini Ranganathan in a conference, drew attention to how these groups have been actively involved in funding political campaigns, lobbying for policy changes, and revising textbooks to promote Hindu nationalism.

Addressing the All Indian Students Association's (AISA) unit conference on July 26, 2023, Prof Ranganathan deliberated on the topic, "Anti-Caste Activism and the Horizon of Left Politics: A View from the US Diaspora." The conference aimed to shed light on the growing influence of anti-caste movements among Indian-American communities and their impact on US politics.

The speaker raised concerns about the implications of this rising Hindutva influence, particularly in shaping educational curricula and textbooks in the US to align with their narrative. For instance, there have been efforts to expunge certain words related to caste from school textbooks in California, which has sparked debates around cultural representation and historical accuracy.

"The US-based anti-caste activists are working to build alliances with other marginalised groups, including labour unions and racial justice movements," said Prof Ranganathan.

She also shared her research on the neoliberal urban reform agenda in Bangalore and its ties to caste-based land relations. She highlighted the historical immigration of various caste groups to the US and how they brought their unique social and political concerns.

India lacks labour laws in unorganised sector

Sowmya A

The recent increase in crimes against domestic workers has raised concern about the lack of social security benefits for domestic workers and the mistreatment meted out to them by employers, said N V Subhapriya, the vice president of Madurai Bench of Madras High Court Bar Association and an advocate.

On July 19, a couple in Dwarka was thrashed by the locals for physically abusing a minor domestic help. As domestic workers and house helpers come under unaccounted and unorganised labour, they are explicitly included under 'The Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008.'

"The Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act lacks some important laws and rights and the domestic helpers are unprotected under the labour law,"



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Subha stated. She added, that domestic workers cannot claim benefits like maternity leave, minimum ages and compensation under the law.

Though domestic work is an important source of income for illiterate women, they are often abused for various reasons, she said. While talking about the issues faced by domestic helpers, she

expressed that most of the house helpers are exploited to work for low wages owing to their social status and illiteracy.

"Domestic helpers are also expected to work for long hours without rest. The migrant workers who work as live-in domestic helpers are the ones who are often physically abused than

the local workers," Subha lamented.

Subha added that domestic workers should be paid extra if they are working extra hours or during holidays. Only a few states in India have included domestic workers as a part of the Minimum Wages Act.

The minimum wage of domestic workers in rural

areas is around Rs 9000 per month, whereas most workers are only paid half of it or even less than that. "Lack of awareness among the domestic workers is also one of the reasons for exploitation," Subha commented.

Rani (name changed), a live-in house help in Bangalore, said that the house helpers are disrespected and often expected to be available for help all the time. She expressed that sometimes they are treated inhumanely by their employers. As a live-in house help, she is granted leave only twice or thrice a year, she said.

"We are given separate plates and glasses to eat and drink while we cook the food for them often. At times, I am verbally abused for making small mistakes and the children of the employers address us only by our names no matter what our age is," she lamented.

IRCTC launches affordable onboard meals

Priyanka Gond

The Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) launched a new food scheme that provides food at subsidized rates to general compartment train passengers, said Rajiv Ranjan, assistant engineer, IRCTC.

In a bid to enhance the dining experience of economically weaker section passengers and cater to the growing demand for affordable meals on trains, IRCTC has created a scheme as an extension of the existing 'Jann Ahaar' initiative, which provides food worth Rs 20 and Rs 50 for general compartment

passengers travelling through trains.

Speaking to The Beacon, Ranjan said, "Under the older 'Jann Ahaar' scheme, food was made available through hotels located inside stations, serving meals directly from the IRCTC kitchen. The new scheme takes a different approach, introducing food counters near general coaches at train stations. These counters offer the same menu as the previous scheme, providing passengers with two meal options."

The first meal option, priced at a budget-friendly Rs. 20, includes seven pooris, dry aloo, and pickles. The second

option, priced at Rs. 50, offers passengers an assortment of South Indian delicacies such as rajma, rice, chole, khichdi, bhature, kulcha, pav bhaji, and masala dosa.

Currently, around 50 to 55 food counters have been set up and are ready to serve passengers. These counters will be strategically placed at stations with higher passenger footfall to maximize accessibility.

The new scheme is being implemented on an experimental basis for a period of six months. IRCTC aims to gauge passenger response and profitability during this trial period. "If the scheme proves success-

ful, it may be extended to more stations and made a permanent feature of IRCTC's services," he added.

In the future, IRCTC is also considering the possibility of hiring vendors who can directly sell the food packets inside the train coaches, further simplifying the dining experience for travellers.

Passengers are eagerly looking forward to the convenience and affordability offered by the new scheme, which is expected to enhance the overall journey experience for those from economically weaker sections of society and other budget-conscious travellers.

Indian football teams secure positions in ASIAD

Anuja Jose

Indian national men's and women's football teams are confirmed to take part in the upcoming Asian Games 2023, according to Anurag Thakur, Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports of India.

The Asian Games, also known as ASIAD, will be the 19th edition to be held in Hangzhou, China from Sept 23 to Oct 8. The Games are organised by the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA).

Though both teams failed to meet the qualification criterion, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports decided to ease the rules so they could participate in the Games. "The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, has decided to relax the rules to facilitate the participation of both the teams, which were not qualifying as per the existing criterion. Keeping in mind their latest performances in recent times, the Ministry decided to grant the relaxation," tweeted Thakur. Sunil Chhetri is set to lead the Indian men's team.

"I am sure they will put their best foot forward in the Asian Games and make our country proud," read Thakur's tweet.

YAS says yes to rural games

Srijit Ray

The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (YAS) has announced that it will be providing support for the development of rural and indigenous games in India. This support will include infrastructure development, equipment support, the appointment of coaches, training of coaches, and scholarships to athletes, state the press release from the ministry.

The Khelo India Scheme, which is headed by the Ministry of YAS since 2016, has a sub-scheme dedicated to the promotion of rural and indigenous games. This has



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helped improve the development of games such as Mallakhamb, Kalaripayattu, Gatka, Thang-Ta, Silambam, and Yogasan.

According to the press release, "under the 'Khelo India Centres' component of the Khelo India Scheme, as a part of the Govern-

ment's vision to strengthen the sports ecosystem in the country at the grassroots level, a low-cost, effective sports training mechanism has been developed." The state/UT governments will also engage former sports persons as coaches and mentors for youngsters.

Complexion, a criteria for jobs?

Aileen Raju

BENGALURU: In a shocking revelation, a Bengaluru woman, Pratiksha Jichkar, took to LinkedIn to share her disheartening experience of being rejected in the final round of a job interview due to her 'too fair' skin tone. While she refrained from naming the company in question, her post called for a much-needed reform of work culture to eliminate biases and foster inclusivity.

Jichkar's LinkedIn post included a screenshot of the rejection email she purportedly received from the organisation she had applied to. According to the email, she had successfully navigated three

rounds of interviews and completed an assignment, showcasing her competency and matching all the required skill sets. However, the email claimed that the decision not to hire her was made to prevent differences within the team.

According to the Hindustan Times, Jichkar highlighted the paradox of a society that claims to value inclusivity and equal opportunity but still judges individuals based on superficial criteria such as skin colour and religion. She urged other organisations to take a hard look at their work culture and be more open to hiring people based on their talent, skills, and potential rather than appearance.