

The new year begins well, with a ceasefire deal announced between Israel and Hamas, due to start on Sunday, 19th January 2025, and raising enormous hope of bringing the devastation in Gaza to an end. For fifteen months now, the world has watched as Israeli rockets, missiles, and ground forces hammered the territory, killing at least 46,707 Palestinians and wounding another 110,265 since October 7th, 2023, when Hamas is alleged to have instigated multiple attacks in Israel, killing 1,139. The dead till date include more than 40,000 Palestinian children, while the general destruction comprises tens of thousands of homes and public infrastructures, including schools and hospitals; the last remaining hospital in Gaza was recently pulverized and its doctors 'disappeared'.
Finally, hope in Gaza?

Will the ceasefire deal hold? It is difficult to say. Israel actually stepped up its attacks on January 15th, the day when ceasefire talks were in progress; a school-turned-shelter and several homes in Gaza were bombed, killing 62 people over those 24 hours. Since the declaration of the deal - yet to be cleared by the Israeli Parliament - they have killed 101 Gazans, including 27 children and 31 women. It is not for nothing that many in the world refer of Israel as genocide.

It is true that whatever is happening in Gaza is not the only violence in the world today, nor the only one in which civilians are being systematically targeted, nor the only one where the attacker is much more powerful than the attacked. But it is surely the most hypocritical of them all, with the perpetrator of the genocide claiming to be the victim and a number of world powers echoing this bizarre reversal of the truth. How this proclaimed victimhood is actually a hoax is the topic of an interesting - even explosive, given the reluctance to discuss such things - book by US political scientist Norman G. Finkelstein, titled *The Holocaust Industry; Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*. It is not a new book, being first published in 2000, followed by a second edition in 2003. But it is no less important today, especially in places like India, where support for Israel is growing in the political establishment and outside, and the idea of Israel's victimhood is popular among many. For example, the ongoing genocide in Gaza is still being justified as 'Hamas started it', as if the violence by Israel only started after the Hamas attacks of October 7th 2022. The Hamas attacks happened, in fact, after decades-long violence by Israel, viz. the apartheid policy which forcibly dispossessed Palestinians of their homes and lands, and again forcibly segregated them in what are basically concentration camps in Gaza and the West Bank.

Holocaust is the term used for the cold-blooded extermination of people by the Nazis in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s; prominent groups selected for elimination included disabled persons, Communists, Jews, and Romanis (Gypsies). Finkelstein's point is that this actual Nazi holocaust is different from the 'Holocaust Industry'. The latter, led by prominent Jewish organizations in the US, inflates the suffering of the Jews much beyond the historical

record, and is an 'ideological representation' of the Nazi holocaust which bears only a tenuous connection with reality. "Through its deployment, one of the world's most formidable military powers, with a horrendous human rights record, has cast itself as a 'victim' state, and the most successful ethnic group in the US has likewise acquired victim status," says Finkelstein. Thus, when Israel's armed violence gets complete support from the governments of the US, UK, Germany, and other countries, including colossal supplies of arms from the Biden administration through these last 15 months - over 100 arms sales, well-knowing that the weapons are being used against Gazans - the justification is always 'self-defence'.
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Finkelstein also speaks of the hypocrisy of the big pro-Israel Jewish organisations, in repeatedly demanding and getting huge compensation not only from Germany for the Nazi killing of Jews, but also from Switzerland and other countries. Switzerland, which stayed neutral in World War II, was condemned by the Holocaust Industry for holding dormant bank accounts of Jews murdered by the Nazis, for not allowing some of the Jews fleeing Nazi Germany into the country, and for employing other Jewish refugees as 'slave labour' in work camps. Switzerland actually agreed to pay compensation and set up a commission (including prominent US Jews) to work out how much, but the Holocaust Industry refused to wait and also would not budge from its own huge figure. These demands were supported by the US establishment, from Jimmy Carter to Bill Clinton and Madeline Albright, and even resulted in economic sanctions by the US authorities against Swiss companies, until finally Switzerland buckled and coughed up. Most of the money received, however, went not to survivors of the Nazi holocaust (in whose name it was demanded), but to these big organisations, i.e. to the Holocaust Industry.

But that is not the only irony. As Finkelstein points out, US history is full of exactly the same kind of actions that Switzerland was condemned for, or even worse. The US did not just deny entry to Jews fleeing the Nazis and hold on to dormant accounts of murdered Jews in its banks - it also killed vast numbers of innocents in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, South America, and elsewhere, besides holding African-Americans as slave labour on a much larger scale, for a longer time, and in as horrible conditions as the Nazis. But any talk of compensation for African Americans or Vietnamese or anyone else is dismissed as nonsense by the US establishment. Even Israel was in possession of dormant bank accounts of Jews murdered by the Nazis but no big Jewish organizations has ever condemned the Israeli government for this, leave aside demanding compensation.

For those unaware of Finkelstein's background: he is not just a Jew himself, but the son of parents who were both survivors of Nazi concentration camps; most of his extended family, on both sides, died in the camps. But he likens their suffering to today's suffering of Palestinians under Israeli occupation, and to other oppressed people under other oppressive

regimes.



One really hopes that, despite the Israeli attacks that continue today, the ceasefire deal is real and a ceasefire will actually materialise. And one gives thanks to the Palestinians for holding out amidst unimaginable trauma, also to the BDS (boycott, disinvestment, sanction) efforts to pressurize the corporates supporting the genocide, and especially to the tens of thousands across the world who supported the Gazan struggle to survive, including a few governments but many more ordinary people (including Goans, but unfortunately not here in Goa) who protested, marched, petitioned, and demanded a halt to the attacks, and freedom for Palestine. This day has come because of all of you.

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