

## Gaza

THE Cover Story ("Massacre of the Innocents", January 30, 2009) was timely, courageous and in-depth. In fact, *Frontline* again unveiled the United States-Israel plot to wipe out the Palestinians.

When so-called mainstream media across South Asia mostly rely on biased Western sources and analysis, this Cover Story is an example of the truth being revealed with a historical perspective. It also brings out the Western media's deliberate concealment of the brutal massacre of people in the occupied territories. *Frontline's* Cover Story "Israel's Terror" (August 11, 2006) was also an eye-opener. Another Cover Story, "The Rise of Hamas" (February 24, 2006), provided an insightful analysis of the reason behind the Palestinians' support for the group. Those who fail to understand the geopolitics of the latest aggression in Gaza should go through these three issues of *Frontline*.

ASJADUL KIBRIA

DHAKA, BANGLADESH

THE cover picture really shocked me. This is the saddest time in the history of our civilisation, when human beings have been eager to destroy their own race. The war in Gaza has taken the lives of the innocent, particularly children, which is shameful.

The U.N. is watching the whole episode as a mute spectator. It should take im-

## Insurance sector

ODDLY enough, the United Progressive Alliance government wants to sail on the troubled waters of neoliberal reforms when the winds are blowing in the opposite direction ("Learning nothing, forgetting everything", January 16). The two Bills tabled in Parliament to amend the insurance laws are clearly intended to destabilise the public sector institutions – the Life Insurance Corporation of India and the General Insurance Corporation of India. It is shocking to see that, barring the Left, the Telugu Desam Party and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, no other political party has opposed the tabling of these Bills. The idea of putting the Employees' Provident fund and pension fund in corporate hands is still on the cards. This shows how our elected representatives have failed to see the writing on the wall *vis-a-vis* the global financial meltdown. The collapse of Satyam, a corporate giant in India, should serve as a wake-up call to the followers of Manmohanomics.

SYED SULTAN MOHIDDIN

KADAPA, ANDHRA PRADESH

mediate steps to stop Israel's aggression.

SYED KHAJA

NEW DELHI

LET us put aside the debate about who ignited the war and who is right. The humanitarian crisis faced by the people who occupy the 326 square kilometres of the Gaza territory should be the prime consideration now.

International law defines war as a contest between two or more states. But what is happening in

Gaza is that people are being targeted. It is pathetic to see children dying. It is not Operation Cast Lead but "Operation Destruction". Let them drop bombs on tunnels but why on schools? What was the purpose of establishing the United Nations and having international peace treaties? The Hague Convention (1907) prohibits unnecessary sufferings being caused to civilians. The Geneva Conventions im-

pose a duty on occupying powers to provide adequate food and medicines. As a member of the U.N., Israel is obliged to obey the Conventions. Why is the U.N. silent?

AKILANDESWARI

NATESAN

TIRUCHI, TAMIL NADU

ISRAEL has always used the U.N. Security Council to its advantage, with the U.S.' help, whenever it deemed it appropriate to charge the Palestinians, Arab nations or Iran with committing war crimes and posing a threat to its existence.

But when the same Council passed Resolution 1860 on January 9 demanding a ceasefire in Gaza, Israel resumed its defiance of the U.N. and called it a biased organisation as it has done for over 60 years with scores of U.N. resolutions. The U.N. seems unwilling to do anything about Israel's intransigence. It is also a fact that the U.S. has used its veto power many times to stop the U.N. from drafting any resolution that would incriminate Israel's war crimes and terror.

DEEPAK JOSHI

MUMBAI

THE photograph of Barack Obama with fired shells of Qassam rockets behind him said it all. Every time Israel extends a hand of peace, it has received violence in return either through terrorist attacks or rocket fire. That was the reason for the economic blockade on Gaza by Israel. The past does not hold out any hope that Gaza

would have received the message Israel tried to give.

Both sides are bent on violence, thereby telling the whole world that there is no concept of love or forgiveness in their religions. Truly, this is bad publicity for the religions followed by both sides.

K. STEPHEN DANIEL  
NEW DELHI

IF the Israeli occupation were half as brutal as the Palestinians allege, they surely would have done everything in their power to ensure that Israel did not reoccupy Gaza after leaving it unilaterally.

Instead, the Palestinians did everything they could to make sure that Israel did reoccupy it. This is not the first time that Israel has left the territory only to return in response to Palestinian terror. Clearly, the Palestinians have something to gain by being an occupied nation.

The ones who would benefit most from the end of occupation are the Israelis. Israelis honestly have better things to do than see the conflict continue – Israel has a successful economy and, for such a small country, excels in the fields of technology, medical research and much more. The Israelis do not want to see young lives wasted in the army and in continued conflict. Admittedly, Israel is back in Gaza – having reluctantly reached the conclusion that the time had come to do something about Hamas' attacks.

MICHELLE MOSHELIAN  
GIVATAYIM, ISRAEL

WHY is it all right for Israel to be bombarded day after day, month after month,

year after year (for eight years)? No other nation would accept this. Especially when Hamas makes it clear it is seeking annihilation of Israel.

Israel gave up Gaza and removed its settlers. Why does Hamas still claim there is an occupation? Why does Hamas not recognise Israel? Hamas was, and is, the biggest enemy of Yasser Arafat's secular legacy, and it is unwise to support it.

AMIT KUMAR  
BANGALORE

THE message was well conveyed by the contents of your hard-hitting Cover Story. The gory cover photograph was an unnecessary "embellishment".

R. RAMACHANDRA RAO  
HYDERABAD

## Sri Lanka

THE LTTE is a good example to study the difference between a terrorist organisation and a liberation force ("Cornered Tigers", January 30). A liberation force may use terrorist methods to win political gains but will grab any opportunity for peace, whereas a terrorist organisation gets its thrill by indulging in indiscriminate killing and will spurn opportunities for peace.

The moment the LTTE chief decided to kill Rajiv Gandhi, he lost the world's sympathy. The LTTE has spent time and resources to kill its rivals rather than fight Sri Lankan forces.

S. RAGHUNATHA PRABHU  
ALAPPUZHA, KERALA

## Harold Pinter

"DISTRUBING talent" (January 30) was a poetic trib-

ute to the memory of Pinter. A champion of true democratic values and a vocal critic of the imperialist machinations of American and British political powerhouses across the globe, Pinter made a glorious and resounding Nobel acceptance speech in 2005 that slammed the warmongers.

The creator of the Pinteresque pause in plays provoked the moral sensibilities of those who were witnessing in silence heinous crimes against humanity. He declared that George Bush and Tony Blair ought to be tried before the International Criminal Court of Justice, terming them mass murderers. His heart-rending reference to the innocent civilians killed in the Iraq war as "deaths not counted, not even existed" is an example of his truthful and fiery prose.

S.V. VENUGOPALAN  
CHENNAI

## Mumbai terror

SINCE "Anyone can kill a trussed up foe", conventional wisdom has it that even an enemy, however we may abhor him, should be vanquished in a fair and manly manner ("Due process", January 30). Kasab's right to legal aid ought not be withheld because we are a democracy, and any execution without trial will only bring disrepute to India. ANANDFO

BHAKTO  
PATNA

## Bangladesh

MANY believe that politics in Bangladesh can only reform if both the begums step down from power

("Landslide win", January 30). The interim government wanted to keep them in exile, but its "minus two" formula has clearly not worked, proving the enduring popularity of both leaders. Now that Sheikh Hasina has been welcomed back to power, it is important for the Awami League to remember its exalted inheritance and do justice to the public goodwill that has been bestowed on it so unconditionally.

M. MEGHA  
BRADFORD, U.K.

## NREGA

THE Cover Story on the NREGA ("The battle for employment guarantee", January 16, 2009) was informative and objective. An ambitious programme like the NREGA is bound to suffer from some shortcomings, especially when implemented by different authorities.

Nevertheless, it has set in motion an empowerment process among the unorganised and unskilled rural poor. Let us hope that the planners take into consideration the shortcomings experienced and plan the next phase of the programme with provisions for moderate doses of scientific and technical inputs, and enhance the durability of the NREGA outputs, activating participatory planning at the gram panchayat level and for an effective vigilance mechanism. I hope that *Frontline* will continue to bring out analytical assessments of major programmes like the NREGA.

M.O. PETER  
NEW DELHI

SOME of the statistics reported in "The battle for employment guarantee" are apparently incorrect. The statistics seem to overstate achievements in States such as Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

On page 4, the authors say that "In Rajasthan, in the very first year of the NREGA (2006-07), the average rural household worked for as many as 77 days under the programme". Table 3, however, shows that it was 77 person-days a household employed in the NREGA and not 77 person-days a rural household.

The same table says that in Rajasthan on average 68 person-days of work a rural household was provided. A simple calculation would suggest that, for both these figures to be true, more than 88 per cent of households in Rajasthan would have done some work under the NREGA. Similarly, if the reported figures were true, over 82 per cent of rural households in Madhya Pradesh would have worked under the NREGA.

Since these figures looked too high, I searched for other sources of information to cross-check them. An article by Jayati Ghosh and C.P. Chandrasekhar in *Business Line* suggests that in 2007-08 only 24 per cent of households in Rajasthan and 47 per cent of households in Madhya Pradesh did some work under the NREGA. This would imply much lower days of employment a rural household than the figures reported in *Frontline*.

VIKAS RAWAL  
NEW DELHI

#### Jean Dreze writes:

THE figures mentioned on page 4 and Table 3 pertain to different years (2006-07 and 2007-08 respectively), so they are not inconsistent. The proportion of rural households employed on the NREGA in Rajasthan is indeed very high, according to official statistics, in districts where the NREGA applies. The reason that the figures given by Jayati Ghosh and Chandrasekhar are lower is that they refer to households employed as a proportion of the total State population, including districts where the NREGA was not in force in 2007-08.

### Social issues

THE article on reservation for Arunthathiyars made for interesting reading ("Separate slice", January 16). The caste system by itself is the biggest curse and the sooner it is destroyed, the better for India.

However, instead of eliminating it, the state has only been perpetuating it for the sake of political gains. Further, though caste-based reservation in employment and education over the last 60 years has put the constitutional provision of equality under strain, the thinking of all political leaders that still more castes need it shows the futility of reservation itself. By continuing this pernicious practice, the state has only tried to divide people, escalating tension time and again.

History bears testimony to the fact that reservation within reservation quota already in existence for the

Scheduled Castes has only created ill will and widened the rift between the communities as was seen in the Madiga case in Andhra Pradesh.

K.R. SRINIVASAN  
SECUNDERABAD

KUDOS to both the photographer and the writer for bringing out in a telling way the working conditions of sewer cleaners ("Clean-up order", January 16).

While the country prides itself on its technological advancement seen through projects such as Chandrayaan-1, it appears to be least concerned when it comes to developing a technology or putting in place effective legal and social policy frameworks to end the obnoxious practice of manual scavenging or sewer cleaning. The judgment of the Madras High Court has given an easy way out for the polity and bureaucracy to continue with the practice with the conditional clause "except under exceptional circumstances".

DR H.S. SHYLENDRA  
ANAND, GUJARAT

### Bureaucracy

BHASKAR GHOSE is critical of the officers who man the bureaucratic barriers ("Systemic Barriers", January 16). It would be better to remove the barriers themselves and leave the bean-counters to do what they are best at: counting beans. While it is an unquestionable tenet of democracy that the armed forces must be subservient to civilian authority, in India it has come to mean "civil service" authority, with attendant ills.

If doctors, lawyers, vet-

erinarians, and others can be in uniform, there is no reason why defence accounts officers cannot also be commissioned.

The author does not mention that delays in major decisions, sometimes running into decades, are at the political level.

CHUDAMANI RATNAM  
NEW DELHI

### India & China

I WANT to congratulate A.G. Noorani on his essays on the India-China boundary dispute ("Maps and borders", October 24, 2008; "Truth & Tawang, December 19; and "Strategic differences", January 2, 2009).

We lost an opportunity in 1960 to solve the dispute. Though one can comprehend that the solution will require adjustment on both sides, the changed circumstances and India dragging on the boundary talks makes it doubtful whether China will concede any of the territory it acquired during the 1962 war.

AKASH MOHAN  
PUNE, MAHARASHTRA

A.G. Noorani's essay on the long-standing India-China border row ("Strategic Differences", January 2) was excellent. Contentious issues need to be resolved in the interests of both the countries as well as Asia. High-level talks alone will not find the way out. A conciliatory approach is a must.

BHASKAR PEGU  
GUWAHATI

#### ANNOUNCEMENT

Letters, whether by surface mail or e-mail, must carry the full postal address and the full name, or the name with initials.