

We see you, Joe

Biden's sanctions on Israeli settlers is a convenient cop-out



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In a rare move, Biden dropped "historic" and "unprecedented sanctions" (according to Western media) on Israeli settlers in Occupied Palestine on February 1. Biden's executive order named four Israeli settlers who will immediately be subjected to the sanctions, which imposes financial and travel restrictions to address "extremist settler violence, forced displacement of people and villages, and property destruction." These sanctions, if enforced firmly, can also break the transactional network that perpetuates settler violence, and even limit US groups and individuals who have been financing extremist settlements. At the end of the day, the sanctions' effectiveness to protect Palestinians in the West Bank will depend on enforcement from US lawmakers, and that aspect remains to be seen.

As a gesture on the foreign policy front, this is unprecedented because the US has irrevocably supported Benjamin Netanyahu, doing away with all the values that the nation purportedly champions, from freedom of speech to human rights. But the timing and nature of the sanctions are too transparent to not betray the real intentions behind them. The US president signed the sanctions ahead of his presidential rally in Michigan—a key swing state with the largest Arab-American population in the nation, where Trump is grabbing the lead now. Four years ago, Biden beat Trump in Michigan by a thin margin of three percent. Biden's support within the

Arab-American community has plummeted since October 7, with recent polls marking the first time in 26 years that the majority of Arab-Americans did not claim to prefer the Democrat party. Another recent poll by the American Arab Institute and Rainbow PUSH Coalition of 1,000 citizens found that US citizens are more inclined to support a member of Congress calling for a ceasefire. Biden aides are reportedly fearful that his support for Israel may hurt his re-election prospects, and his campaigning rallies are being routinely interrupted by pro-Palestinian protests.

The recent series of events need to be mentioned as well to make sense of the surprise sanctions. On January 26, the ICJ ordered Israel to prevent acts of genocide in the case brought by South Africa—which went against Biden and Blinken's claim that the case was "meritless." In December, CNN found that US intelligence knew that the munitions Israel is using in Gaza risk high civilian casualties. South Africa's lawyers pointed to these exact munitions as evidence to prove genocide—not to mention that some have also been supplied by the Biden Administration, bypassing Congress. The ICJ order has an implication—even if an inactionable one for now—suggesting President Joe Biden's complicity in plausible genocide on the international stage. Yet, even after what should've been an embarrassing moment, Biden went on to show further blind support for Israel.

Israel surfaced allegations that at least 12 UNRWA workers were



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PHOTO: AFP

affiliated with the October 7 Hamas attacks—coincidentally on the same day as the ruling. The US—the agency's largest donor—cut off aid despite UN officials warning that the funding cut will make famine inevitable in Gaza, where many have also died from starvation. The aid cut was met with criticism from prominent Democrats—including Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez—whose supporters' votes Biden will be needing soon.

Interestingly, Biden also imposed the sanctions on Thursday, the day after a US federal court ruling found—in accordance with the ICJ—that it is "plausible that Israel's conduct amounts to genocide," and implored his administration to "examine the results of their unflinching support of the military siege against Palestinians." The court dismissed the lawsuit—filed by various humanitarian groups, including the Defense for Children Palestine, accusing Biden

of being complicit in genocide in Gaza—on grounds of jurisdiction. In the legal landscape, the dismissal was expected; the case is better suited for the executive branch of government and the preferred outcome is inaccessible for the federal court in California. The granular separation of powers in the US legislature ensured against any indictment of the Biden Administration. But the catch here is that the evidence presented by the plaintiffs was enough for the judge to serve the administration with critical statements. The findings do not legally absolve the Biden Administration from abetting genocide.

The events that transpired, coupled with Biden's nosediving position in polls, point to increasing pressure on the incumbent US president to send a different signal on the Israel issue—an indication that the diplomatic lip service regarding the importance of creating a Palestinian state has a sliver of integrity to it. The motives

behind the sanctions, however, lack that very integrity. Let's be clear: we are talking about the same president who worried that foreign journalists having access to Gaza would reveal the devastating truth of what he knows is going on in Gaza. This is the same president who talks about abortion rights at rallies to return to power, just after slashing aid to Palestine—knowing that the hospital system in Gaza has crashed and thousands of pregnant women are undergoing C-sections without anaesthesia. There is no reason to believe that Joe Biden and his administration cares about the Palestinian people, or for a Palestinian state, over the American Israel Public Affairs Committee lobby's influence.

The "historic" sanctions present no reason to believe that the US is turning on Israel. It is not. The US will still refrain from calling a ceasefire in Gaza, knowing that each day they let this go on, more innocents will be

killed. The US can sanction the Israeli Defense Forces, or the soldiers who are dropping deadly bombs on civilian neighbourhoods, or the government officials who are making the decision to murder thousands of people. But instead, the US continues to supply weapons that will kill children in Gaza. Although Biden could even reverse the aid cut to the UNRWA, he will not. At the dawn of a rally, settler violence in the West Bank suddenly seemed "intolerable" to the Biden Administration. The severity of the problem could have been recognised years back—but it was not, by choice.

It is true that settler violence has mushroomed to disturbing levels in the West Bank since October 7 and needs to be addressed. But Israel's inhumane military operations in Gaza are the root of the problem right now. Over 26,000 civilians have been killed, and thousands are missing under the rubble. So what's the point of sanctioning the sideshow while actively aiding the main show to go on? Biden can address the immediate crisis in Gaza, but he has chosen to take punitive steps in the West Bank, pursuing a cop-out instead of a real solution.

To applaud this bare minimum of an action as an "important step" holds the United States to the lowest humanitarian standards. Praising the US for this step is contentment on the ground that something is better than nothing, when it's not. Praising Biden for taking some action finally is fundamentally disrespectful to all the people in both Gaza and the West Bank who have been killed and those who are suffering because of his utter failure to put pressure on Netanyahu and call a ceasefire. The sanctions signify nothing but insincere optics of false solidarity with Palestinians, and they are also unlikely to reach their main aim: to sway Arab-American voters and young Democrat voters who want a ceasefire. There's too much horror that people have seen in Gaza for Biden and the Democrats to get away with a convenient cop-out this time.

Bring back our sarees

The intellectual rights of the Tangail sarees must rest with Bangladesh, not India

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The Government of West Bengal in India has just got the geographical indication (GI) rights for the famous Tangail sarees of Bangladesh. The announcement came from the official Facebook page of India's Ministry of Culture on February 1. The post claims: "The Tangail saree, originating from West Bengal, is a traditional handwoven masterpiece. Renowned for its fine texture, vibrant colors, and intricate Jamdani motifs, it epitomizes the region's rich cultural heritage." Following this, Bangladeshi netizens expressed their outrage towards India on social media for getting GI rights of Bangladesh's own products on various social media platforms. According to Indian media sources, India also got the GI rights for the Sundarbans' honey last month.

The Tangail sarees are a significant cultural heritage of Bangladesh, not India. In the late 18th century, the zamindars of Tangail invited some muslin weavers from Dhaka to settle in Tangail and develop a new cloth. Many weavers migrated to Tangail and produced sarees which have a fine and smooth texture. Now, it is true that after the partition of India in 1947, many weavers migrated to India from Tangail and other parts of Bangladesh. They were resettled mainly in West Bengal. Phulia Tangail, near Shashipur, has become the new home of these weavers. In any case, this does not take away from the fact that the true origin of the Tangail saree is the Tangail region of Bangladesh, not West Bengal. But India has acted and it now has the GI rights, whereas the Weaving Board of Bangladesh had no idea or plans to get GI rights for the saree.

GI rights can be very important for many reasons. The benefits that a country gets for registering items as GI products are primarily that, after recognition, that country becomes the owner of the associated product's intellectual property (IP). It raises the recognition and soft power of the country. That country also comes to own a massive share of the business profits of that product. No



Although Bangladesh is rich in terms of history and tradition, since there had been no GI law for a long time, there was no opportunity to protect the ownership of GI products.

IMAGE: STAR

other country can claim ownership of the IP in the international arena. Also, a differentiated reputation of the product is created. Producers get better prices for their products in the global market.

Geographical Indication Products or GI is one of the main branches of intellectual property. In general terms, a GI is a country's ownership or intellectual property of a particular product. According to Section 2(9) of the Geographical Indications Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 2013, the soil, water, climate, and altitude in a particular territory of a country and the culture of the people there play the most important role in the production of a product. It is then recognised as a GI product of that country. Chamcham of Tangail, rasmalai of Cumilla, khaja of Kushtia, and the Black Bengal goat of Bangladesh have been recognised as GI products most recently. With this, the total number of GI products in Bangladesh comes up to 21.

Therefore, it is imperative that Bangladesh maximises its GI-recognised products. However, because of the

geographical proximity between Bangladesh and India and a shared history pre-partition, there has been cultural exchange between the two countries. This creates confusion about the origin of some products. These products are called homonymous GIs. Both countries

the Ministry of Industries has been given the responsibility of registering GI products of Bangladesh from WIPO. Article 27.3(b) of the WTO's (World Trade Organisation) Agreement on TRIPS provides legal rights pertaining to patenting biological processes. In this agreement, there is a provision to register the geographical indication laws to establish ownership of the respective country over the natural and man-made and agricultural products which have been produced for a long time in different countries of the world. According to the rules, in order to get the GI registration of a product, it is necessary to present historical and credible evidence that the product originates or is produced within the borders or territory of the country. The state agency responsible for granting GI registration must publish an article in its own journal with that credential.

If no objection is raised by any organisation or group from another country or no other organisation claims registration of the product within two months of its publication in the journal, then the product is registered in the name of the country that has published the article and sought GI registration. However, if the same product is produced by more than one country, the country that produces the product the most and the country in which the product is most popular will have priority in getting the rights. In the case of the Tangail saree, both conditions should apply to Bangladesh.

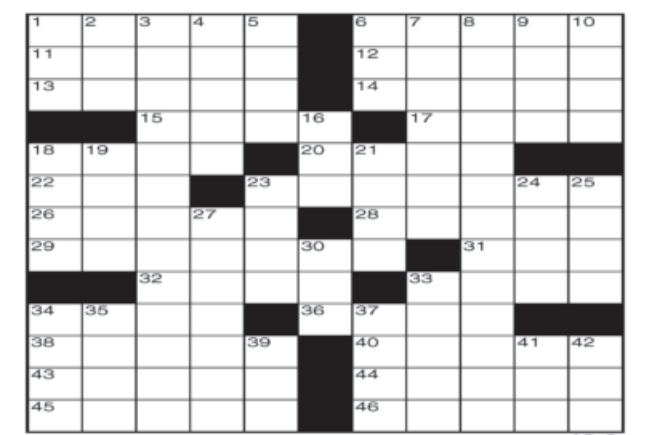
Although Bangladesh is rich in terms of history and tradition, since there had been no GI law for a long time, there was no opportunity to protect the ownership of GI products. Later, after the enactment of the Geographical Indications Products (Registration and Protection) Act, 2013 and the Geographical Indications Rules, 2015, the road for GI product recognition in Bangladesh was smoothened. Due to our lack of sufficient awareness and appropriate legislation, India has taken off around 66 GI products including nakshi kantha, Fazli mango and rasgolla.

The government should identify and register all our GI products immediately, otherwise we may see our intellectual rights and our heritage products being snatched away. The Tangail saree must be credited to the region it is named after and its intellectual rights must rest with its rightful owner: Bangladesh.

CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
1 Reviled
6 Cellist Casals
11 Colleague of Spock and Sulu
12 Peer
13 Tie the knot
14 Race prize
15 Snowman's carrot
17 Crumb carriers
18 Commotion
20 Truck stop sight
22 Fancy vase
23 Peculiar
26 Aerie builder
28 Steaming
29 Damascus natives
31 Wish undone
32 Pinnacle
33 Saloons
34 Flank
- 36 Dollop
38 Cake cover
40 Shady spot
43 Scoundrel
44 Public outburst
45 Start
46 Tear into tatters
- DOWN**
1 Rhythmic sound
2 "That's it!"
3 U-turn measure
4 Slip
5 Calendar units
6 Vitality
7 Hero from Atlantis
8 Driving really fast
9 Endure
- 10 Flamenco cries
16 Id—
18 Takes to court
19 Waiter's aid
21 Important times
23 Jeans joint
24 Eats
25 Looks over
27 Driver's need
30 Not pos.
33 Welcome mat site
34 Farm sight
35 Clickable picture
37 Highlands girl
39 Acquire
41 Afternoon hour
42 Bright hue



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

T A F T R E B O O T
E U R O O V E R D O
A R A L S O R B E T
L A N D F A L L
K O I V I S T A
G A F F E E N T E R
A S U U T E
G E R M S G A T E S
S A T U P A N T
M A L I C E N E G L I G E E
M A L I C I A M A T A
A L I C I A U R N S
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