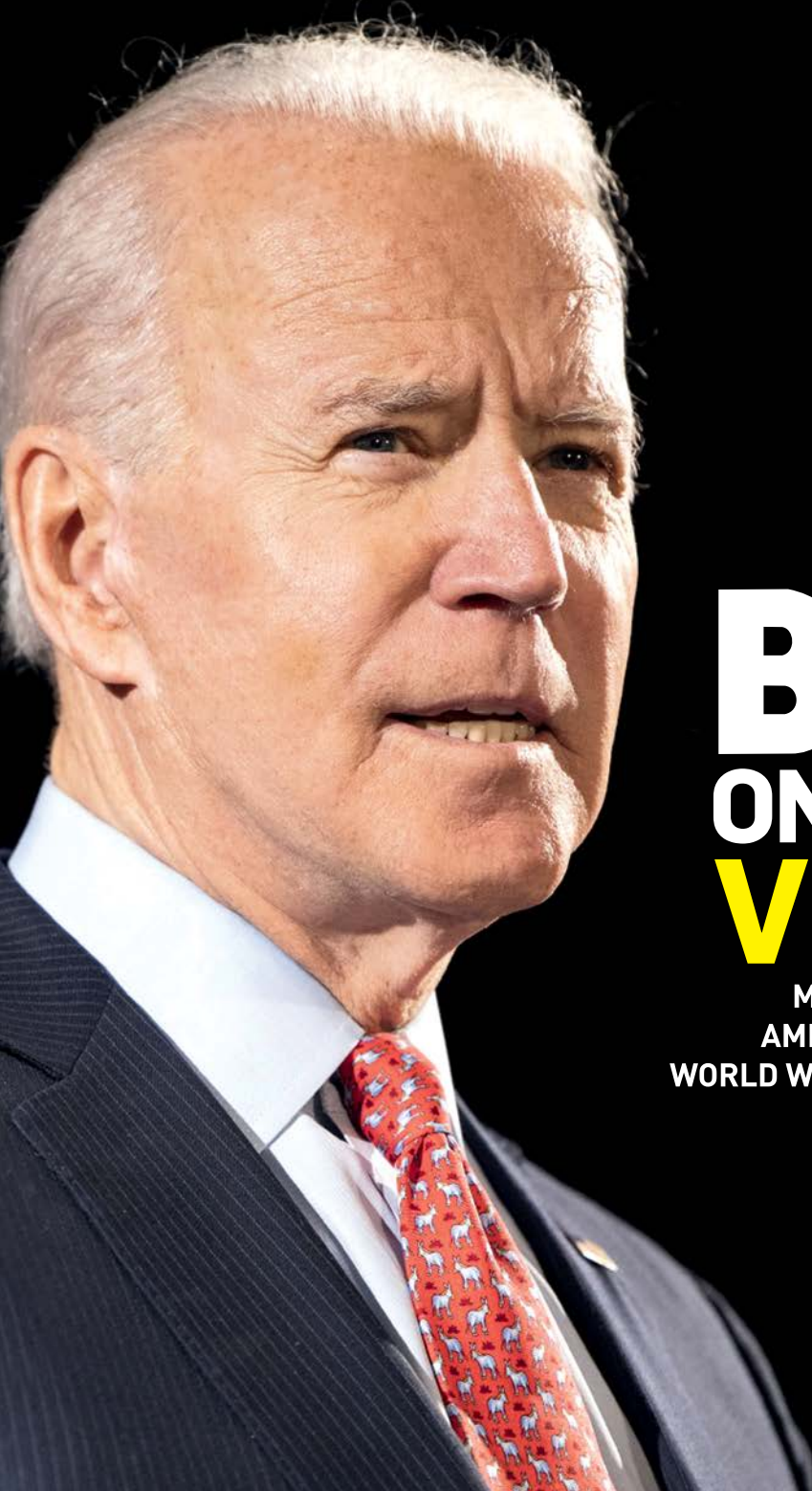


Indian

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JOURNALISM WITH A SOUL

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Health is Wealth

India's health budget fourth lowest in the world

TRUMP THROWS
TANTRUMS

BIDEN ON VERGE OF VICTORY

MAVERICK DONALD TRUMP MAKES
AMERICA A LOSER IN THE EYE OF THE
WORLD WITH HIS LUDICROUS ALLEGATIONS



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Prakash Louis, SJ

TRUMP MAKES AMERICA A LOSER



Democrat Joe Biden is in the cusp of victory. Official announcement of the election result may come later as counting of votes takes days in the US. But maverick President Donald Trump ensured one thing: He made America a loser in the eye of the world with his claim of victory and ludicrous allegations. Trump has always been unpredictable. This time, he stooped to the level of absurdity. He did what no leader in a democratic country would do. He declared himself the winner while lakhs of ballots remained to be counted. He called for stopping the counting without any rhyme or reason. It is nothing but illegal to not count the votes cast.

Trump's act of making a 'victory speech' in the middle of counting of votes is a mockery of election in the oldest democracy in the world. His allegation that victory is being stolen from him is nothing but falsehood. His assertion that he would knock the doors of Supreme Court to get the counting stopped goes to prove his desperation to cling to power by any means. It is pertinent to recall that during the electioneering, even before a single vote was cast, he had declared his intention of going to the apex court to stop Biden from becoming the President. This betrayed his doubts over re-election. Moreover, his over-confidence of getting a favourable verdict from the apex court is based on a conservative majority of Judges with three of them being his own appointees. Luckily, courts in some of the States, where Trump's Campaign filed petitions, have rejected the plea to stop counting.

This election brought out many fault lines in America. The country may not have seen such a polarized campaigning in the last few decades. Trump's speeches were meant to

present himself as the leader of white majority and create a fear psychosis among them. He went to the extent of saying that victory of Biden would lead to the collapse of the country. He forgot that he is the President of the United States of America rather than a section of the people. His speeches were loaded with personal attacks on both Biden and Vice-Presidential candidate Kamala Harris. He unleashed abuses against his opponents. He knew defeat was staring at him. His strategy of winning election was not through democratic means. He thought of manipulating the results. But that has not worked.

The vociferous allegations and counter allegations have once again brought out the drawbacks of America's electoral system. The inordinate delay in counting of votes is one of them. A faster voting and counting mechanism will reduce the chances of manipulation. Another weakness is the electoral college system which denies Presidency to the candidate for whom majority of Americans voted. Democracy loses its meaning when its soul – the electoral system – gets weakened. The system gets further undermined when leaders like Trump unabashedly use strong arm tactics to achieve their outlandish ambitions. Americans have acted with determination to throw out the self-seeking leader lock, stock and barrel.

As always, we would be happy to hear your reviews, comments, and suggestions.

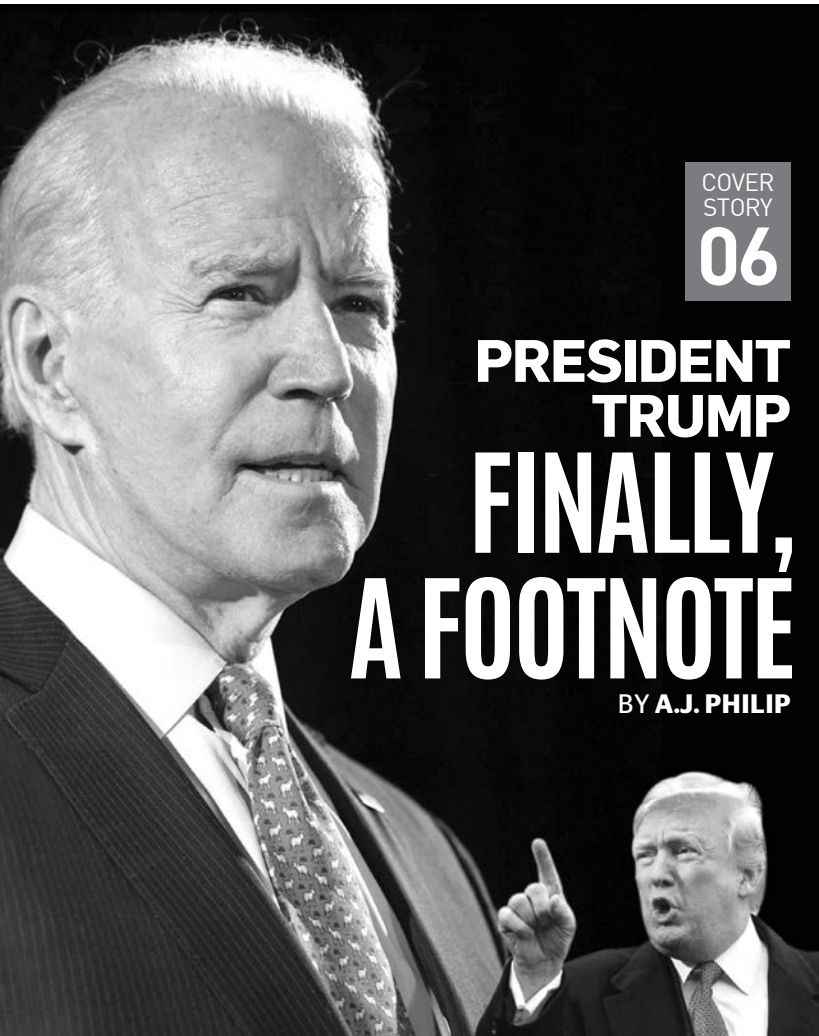
Happy Reading!

Dr. Suresh Mathew
Editor

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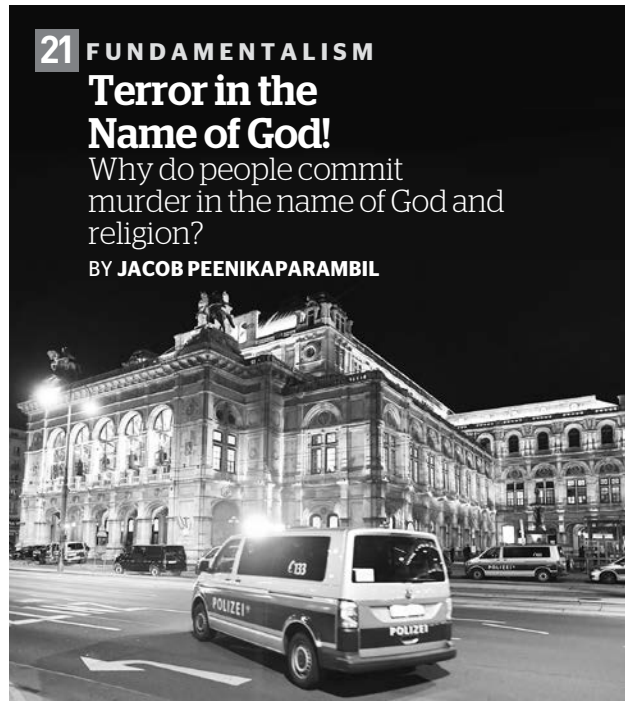


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POWER QUOTES



It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.

Harry S Truman

• • •



When you have confidence, you can have a lot of fun. And when you have fun, you can do amazing things.

Joe Namath

• • •



There are amazingly wonderful people in all walks of life, some familiar to us and others not. Stretch yourself and really get to know people. People are in many ways one of our greatest treasures.

Bryant H. McGill

• • •



Isn't it amazing that we are all made in God's image, and yet there is so much diversity among his people?

Desmond Tutu

• • •



Discussion is an exchange of knowledge; an argument an exchange of ignorance.

Robert Quillen

• • •



For every minute you remain angry, you give up sixty seconds of peace of mind.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

• • •



Anybody can become angry - that is easy, but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way - that is not within everybody's power and is not easy.

Aristotle

• • •



PRESIDENT TRUMP FINALLY, A FOOTNOTE

During Trump's Presidency, the US saw itself being laughed at and mocked at in world capitals for the lies that Trump kept uttering every time he opened his mouth





BY A.J. PHILIP

I had a little political discussion with Molly, a nurse in the US who knows the Bible like the lines on her palm. She is happy to be called a prayer warrior. She often attends meetings of Indian evangelical women as a resource person. I asked her somewhat bluntly how she supported an uncouth fellow, who openly says that he would have dated his daughter, if she was not his biological offspring.

She was equally bold in telling me that she would be voting for Trump, as he was not contesting for the post of Pastor of a Pentecostal church but for the post of President of the US. In other words, she found him morally corrupt to be a pastor but politically savvy to be the President again.

I know many Christians of Indian origin in the US who were strong supporters of Trump, though they do not belong to the core group of Republicans who are white, evangelical and who believe that they represent the soul of America.

In the 16th century when the Puritans from England went to the US and settled down in places like New York, Washington, Boston and Pennsylvania, they were not guided by the thought of making money and becoming rich. Rather, it was the yearning to praise the Almighty in the manner they wanted, not in the manner the Church of England wanted, that took them there.

They were the founders of the US. Wherever they settled down, they set up a church, a school and a newspaper, not necessarily in the same order. Then came the gold-diggers like the settlers in Malabar in northern Kerala, as poignantly narrated by S.K. Pottekkattu in his novel *Vishakan-yaka* (The Poisonous Virgin), comparable in many ways to *The Grapes of Wrath* by the Nobel-winner John Steinbeck.

They set the moral compass. Today's evangelicals are like Molly who are willing to support a person like Trump merely because they think he is a bulwark against the tides of time that will eventually reduce the white in the Bible Belt and elsewhere to a numerical minority in another two decades or so. As of now, about 70 per cent of all the children in the US are non-white.

A columnist in the *New York Times* quoted an evangelical who was clear in his conscience when he voted for the first time. His vote was for Jimmy Carter who represented the ideal Bible-thumping candidate who proudly stood beside his wife and spoke about the upbringing he had from his

mother who worked as a missionary in India. The columnist ended her column mentioning that the same evangelical voter voted this time for Joe Biden, not Trump.

To me, what is most shocking about the elections is that the Americans have not repudiated Trump and Trumpism at least in the manner pre-poll surveys had indicated. I expected the voters to tell the President that they did not want a racist and misogynist, who can't even articulate a grammatically and idiomatically correct sentence in English, to stay in the White House even for a day.

Instead, we found Trump getting more support than he had during the 2016 elections from all sections of people, including the African-Americans and women. True, the increased support was not sufficient to edge past Joe Biden, who received greater support even in Republican strongholds like Pennsylvania and Georgia.

There is something fundamentally flawed in the American thinking that a person whose candidature for the Republican nominee in 2016 was considered a bit of a joke not only defeated Hillary Clinton, who got more popular votes than





Trump might not have done much for Modi but he kept silent when Kashmir was split into Union Territories and Amnesty International was sent packing. That was something he would be eternally grateful to Trump

him, but even aspired to stay in the White House for another four years.

During Trump's Presidency, the US saw itself being laughed at and mocked at in world capitals for the lies that Trump kept uttering every time he opened his mouth. He did not have a good word for anyone. He even hinted at the possibility that the killing of Osama bin Laden was just a show, crafted by his predecessor, and the Saudi Royal could be hiding somewhere in the world. Trump is credited with business acumen. America had such great businessmen as Henry Ford, Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller and Bill

Gates, who made America what it is today. In contrast, Trump made his money by setting up gambling centres and investing in real estate.

Today the industrialists I mentioned are known better for the Foundations that they set up than for anything else. Yes, a skyscraper called Trump Towers is coming up in Noida near Delhi as a symbol of how crony capitalism thrives in the US, as in India. There are even claims that, but for Coronavirus, Trump would have easily won the elections.

The working class is reportedly happy that during the last four years the US economy performed better than was the case during the

eight years that Barack Obama led the nation. What is forgotten is that there are some America watchers like Sashi Tharoor, MP, who feels that China has already overtaken the US as the world's largest economy.

He even hints at the possibility that the IMF office would shift from Washington to Beijing as, under the IMF statute, its headquarters can only be in the world's largest economy. If that were to happen, the dollar would lose its preeminence to the Chinese Yuan.

Of course, statistics will prove or disprove Tharoor's theory but the point is that the US economy might have performed better under Trump but it was not adequate enough to keep it as the world's greatest power. Trump presided over a divisive America, which could not capture the imagination of the people elsewhere in the world.

There was a time when the whole world lapped up the US' bid to send a man to the moon. When Neil Armstrong landed on the

lunar surface, the world saw it as mankind's greatest achievement, not just America's. Also, the world knew that the Second World War was coming to an end when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour for nothing thereafter prevented the US from joining the war.

Of course, one does not forget aberrations like the American intervention in Vietnam. However, for the world at large, America remained the redeemer, who could intervene with decisive power to tilt the balance in favour of world peace and stability. Under Trump, it remained a state which has no ambitions other than keeping itself insular.

Crisis brings out the best or the worst in a leader. Nearly 2.4 lakh Americans were taken away by Coronavirus, pushing the US to the first slot as the worst performer. Nobody knows what point Trump was making when he threw his mask at the Republican audience after alighting from Air Force One. Was he making a statement that

the best way to use the mask is to throw it at a crowd of people?

That is Trump's level of leadership. Even when the whole world saw him losing to Biden in state after state, he persisted with his lies that he had won. The fact is that he was winning till the votes began to be counted. Come to think of it, he was the one evangelicals like Molly counted on. He is a congenital liar.

It is now clear that it was on Trump's request that Prime Minister Narendra Modi organised a mega show for the US President in his home state Gujarat. He might have thought a bit erroneously that such a gathering would help him garner the votes of Indian Americans. Modi wanted to do him a

favour for what Trump did for him in Houston.

At the time of writing this column, with Biden getting the necessary electoral votes to be sworn in President in January 2021, there is uncertainty as Trump has been making wild claims that are otherwise laughable. His only hope is in the US Supreme Court. Come to think of it, it was an American President who defined democracy as "by the people, for the people and of the people"!

Trump, perhaps, counts on the fact that the judges nominated by the Republicans are in majority than those nominated by the Democrats. Alas, the judges, who are appointed for life, do not function on partisan lines.

Even when the whole world saw Tump losing to Biden in state after state, Trump persisted with his lies that he had won





They cannot be expected to support a person who does not want the votes cast against him to be counted. Trump is not Putin and the US is not Russia. There is no way in which he can negate the verdict of the people. That raises the question: How would the electoral outcome impact India-US relations? There is a perception, right or wrong, that a Republican in the White House is better for India.

Despite all the charms that Modi and Co. reserved for Trump, he called India one of the dirtiest places in the world. He would certainly have seen through the wall that Modi erected, almost overnight, in Ahmedabad when he visited India. That did not prevent some Indians from performing puja for Trump's success.

For good or bad, political leaders are elected by the people, not delivered by Gods as when Putrakameshti Yajna was held by King Dasharatha and the people of Israel, who were fed up with judges, asked God for a King to rule them. It is a truism that while America is the oldest democracy in the world, India is the largest. The latter has a more advanced and more sophisticated system of election than the US. What is not commonly understood is that while America was gaining its independence in the late 18th century, India was losing hers. This meant that for the better part of nearly 200 years, the two coun-

tries had practically nothing to do with each other. Oddly enough, the country from which the US gained independence was the country to which India lost its independence.

As former Indian Ambassador to the US, K. Shankar Bajpai writes, "India to Americans was mainly the India of Kipling, of Gunga Din, and the jungle books, the rope trick and bizarre religious practices — or, at the same time, of mysticism and other worldliness practiced to the point of incomprehensibility". It may appear curious that India established diplomatic relations with the US even before it gained Independence in 1947. In fact, six years before Jawaharlal Nehru made his Tryst With Destiny speech, Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai presented his letter of introduction to President Franklin D. Roosevelt as the first diplomatic representative of India.

The Agent General of India, as Bajpai was designated, was listed under the British Embassy. Almost his first act was to sign on January 1, 1942, separately for India, the Declaration of the United Nations. The same year Bajpai presented his credentials to Roosevelt, the US hired the Cochin House in New Delhi, now Kerala House, to set up the office of the Personal Representative of the President, America's first diplomatic mission in India. At that time nobody in India knew much about America.

Educated Indians absorbed British views of their "trans-Atlantic country cousins" as crude, brash and assertive. Today, more Indians travel to the US than to any other country and the US Embassy and its consulates see the longest queue of visa seekers in the country.

Even when India had the best relations with the erstwhile Soviet Union, much to the detriment of the US, ordinary Indians preferred to go to the US for studies, for treatment and for business. When Communist leader Pinarayi Vijayan sneezes, it is to the US that he goes for a medical check-up. Similarly, when Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad's daughter gets admission to an MBA course in the US, he is so happy that he tweets a picture of her sitting beside him on his single-seat sofa.

Trump might not have done much for Modi but he kept silent when Kashmir was split into Union Territories and Amnesty International was sent packing. That was something he would be eternally grateful to Trump. There is no guarantee that Joe Biden, who is more Presidential than the President, would keep quiet, as when goons began attacking Muslims in Northeast Delhi even when Trump was on Indian soil.

Trump will soon be dismissed as a spent force, even by the evangelicals, not to speak of the rest of the Republicans. When television channels stop telecasting him in the middle of his speech because he is telling lies, how can they be expected to turn up when he speaks as just a former President? True, Donald Trump has found his place in American history as a footnote. Nothing more nothing less. ©

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Health is wealth: Dichotomy of medical tourism

Only the rich can afford better health services in India



BY JASWANT KAUR

In the highly charged environment in which the US elections and the Bihar elections have grabbed more attention than the increasing Covid-19 cases, an Oxfam report is worth pondering over. Released a few weeks ago, it speaks about a unique index developed with parameters that are pertinent for a country's growth.

The oft-quoted Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is not the basis for this calculation. Rather, it is based on the budgetary allocation and spending, policy measures and the implementation mechanism for three important aspects — health, education and social protection.

What should shock the authorities is that we spend as much money on health as Afghanistan does! Of course, not in terms of real money but as a percentage of the budgetary allocation.

Both India and Afghanistan spend 4 per cent of their budget on healthcare and share the same position – 155th out of 158 countries – on the health spending index. This is just a quarter of what is recommended to be spent. And is one-third of what Burundi, the second poorest country in the world spends!



India's total government spending on health equated to four percent of the overall government budget. Only half of India's population have access to even the most essential health services

Now one can easily understand why India is about to cross the US in the number of Covid cases. Sooner than later, we will be at the first position. Out of the 158 countries, the report has ranked India at the 155th position.

We can only wish if the two rankings could be swapped with each other; with India becoming the first country with best health facilities and the fourth lowest in terms of Covid cases. But, then, if

wishes were horses, even beggars could ride them!

At the same time, this is not something that India cannot achieve. All it needs is the political will. Medical tourism is a case in point. Over the last one decade, India has become one of the favourite destinations for medical tourism.

A report released by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce (FICCI) in association

with Ernst & Young last year has projected that India's medical value travel (MVT) is expected to touch US\$ 9 billion in a year or so. Covid-19 would have played a spoilsport! Yet, the sector is bristling with promise. It will kick off again after the pandemic. Now what did help India in acquiring a major chunk of this business?

India has made a lot of investment in acquiring the latest technology and health infrastructure. Of course, private players played a major role in this. Its unique selling proposition (USP) has been the affordability and accessibility of services compared to other countries.

The developed nations offer the same services at a much higher cost. Also, there is a long waiting

period. In such a scenario, India emerged as a hub for medical facilities. On the flip side, the nurses and other paramedical staff are paid a pittance. This explains why the cost of treatment is lesser than in the West!

Recently, the government waived off the restriction on medical visa, which was more expensive than tourist visa. In other words, the government is taking every step necessary for making this segment successful. Even the medical fraternity does not have much restrictions while participating in medical tourism. In fact, FICCI in its report had suggested the government to have a regulatory framework for medical tourism.

The pertinent question is, if we can provide services to foreign-

ers, why not our fellow countrymen? Yes, the government views it a good source of revenue. And it brings international prestige as well.

The government should not forget that India is a signatory to the UN's sustainable development goals (SDGs) as well. In fact, India's progress on SDGs will be a major contributor to achieving these goals globally. Also, improvement in Goal No. 3: "Good health and well-being" contributes to an increase in GDP as well.

This can be understood with the simple correlation that healthy citizens would be able to work more, produce more resulting in more revenue. In other words, investing in health is good for the nation's health as well.

The Oxfam report says that only 55 per cent of Indian population have access to essential health services. More than three-fourth of the health expenditure is incurred by individuals from household budgets. This is one of the highest amongst other countries. In other words, you can take care of your health if you have the means to do so. Only the rich can afford better health services.

Those with lesser resources continue to remain marginalised. The report also suggests that most workers in India earn less than half of the minimum wages. Now this makes it even more difficult for daily wage workers/migrant labourers to avail of health services. It is this gap that needs to be bridged.

All we need to do is to replicate this model of medical tourism for the general public. Now many would ask from where would the money come from? The Oxfam report has highlighted a major flaw in our taxation regime. India's taxation regime may look progressive in the sense that the

Currently, India has only 8.5 hospital beds per 10,000 people. This inadequacy was clearly visible during the pandemic when even private hospitals had no beds for Covid patients





tax rate is higher for those who have higher income.

Despite the differential tax rates, those falling in the lower slab end up paying more taxes than those with higher income. This is true in terms of purchasing power. The highest tax rate in the Indian taxation system is 30 per cent and the lowest is 5 per cent.

Effectively, Mr. X having an income of Rs 5 lakh will have to pay Rs. 12,500 as tax. This has been done assuming that the taxpayer has no savings under section 80C of the Income Tax Act. Now this person already had limited purchasing power. Taxes, even at a lower rate of 5 per cent further reduced his purchasing power.

On the other hand, Mr. Y having an income of, say, Rs. 100 crore, will end up paying Rs. 30 crore, which hardly affects his purchasing power. And this person also has the means of saving taxes in not only under section 80C but also other sections like 80G, 80D etc.

In case of medical emergency, Mr. Y can easily afford to avail of

health services in a good private hospital, while Mr. X may have to visit a government facility and wait in long queues. In the process, Mr. Y may lose his life as well. Also, the wealth tax that used to be levied earlier has been abolished. Clearly, this adds to the income disparity and makes basic health services unaffordable to the common man.

Effectively, the government may have a large number of taxpayers but the tax collection may not be adequate to meet its objectives. Also, wealth tax has been done away with. More than the income, wealth is the dividing factor. Abolition of wealth tax has also reduced the government's revenue.

In fact, Thomas Piketty in his book "Capitalism in the 21st Century" suggests levying a progressive tax of 80 per cent on income beyond a threshold limit and a 15 per cent on wealth for equal distribution of wealth. Now this may sound utopian but it is one way of bridging the income disparity and at the same time

having more revenue for social welfare schemes.

This becomes more relevant now as another study suggests that 46 per cent of people in India borrowed money primarily to run their households during the pandemic. And majority of them took money from friends and relatives so that it can be returned with ease. The lower middle-income group has been affected severely due to job losses and salary cuts. If people are cash strapped to this extent, how can the government expect them to take care of their health expenses.

Despite being one of the goals of the national health policy, universal health coverage remains a distant dream. This is very much visible in the Health Index released by Niti Ayog in June 2020.

The report shows how a large number of primary health centres lack basic infrastructure and staff as well. In fact, the number of vacancies for staff nurse was more than 40 per cent in most of the states. And so is the case with medical officers.

Currently, India has only 8.5 hospital beds per 10,000 people. This inadequacy was clearly visible during the pandemic when even private hospitals had no beds for Covid patients. The government should have seen an opportunity during this pandemic. It should have improved its health infrastructure and services. In fact, the PM-Cares Fund should have been effectively used to bridge this gap on a war footing.

The Oxfam report should act as an eyeopener to the authorities. Otherwise, India's story would no longer be exciting enough to gain global attention. ☹

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Child Mica Mines

Dark secret behind beautiful Faces



BY ML SATYAN

A recent investigation by Thomson Reuters Foundation has revealed the appalling state of children working in the illegal mica mines of Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh

Some years ago, there was a mushroom growth of “English Medium Schools” in every nook and corner of urban areas in India. In the similar manner, there has been a sudden increase in the number of “Beauty Parlours” in the urban as well as rural India. Among



the fashion conscious, mineral makeup is all the rage these days. It uses natural minerals and is said to be a healthier for the skin than ordinary products. But the process of extraction of these minerals, particularly mica, using child labour in India is now causing serious concern.

The Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA), an NGO working to eliminate child labour, has estimated that over 5,000 children work in these illegal mines. This number has been confirmed by Suresh Kumar Jain, owner of a Koderma-based mica exporting company. Children as young as five years of age are found working in hazardous conditions. These children work for 5-6 days per week, 7-8 hours per day extracting mica and get a meagre payment. They operate sharp and heavy tools. They are susceptible to inhaling dust from stone-cutting and face the risk of getting injured from falling stones. These children are also made to carry more than 15 kg of mica for several kilometres to the intermediaries in towns. Their homes are often several kilometres away as these illegal mines are located in forest areas.

Death-trap

The abandoned mica mines start shimmering under the rising sun in Koderma, Jharkhand, as a group of sleepy children trudges towards the Charki mine holding their tools. Five-year-old Ajay Das hurriedly slips into a narrow hole and starts his day. His tiny hands can barely balance the hammer, but he still hits the glistening wall accurately. Ajay works six days a week and after labouring for seven to eight hours each day in hazardous conditions, he manages to earn a paltry 20 rupees barely enough to kill his hunger pangs.

“The mines were closed two decades ago. Since then, the poor people from neighbouring areas have been involved in scrap mining. This leads to mishaps every now and then. At times, children working with their parents often get trapped and die when the roof or the mine wall collapses” Ramlakhan Paswan, a school teacher working near the Charki mines, told the media person. Miner Karu Das, 26, lost his wife to an accident in Charki mine five years ago. “She had come to collect mica scraps but got trapped in the mine,” Karu said. “By the time we



Broken bones and injuries are part and parcel of mica miner's life

dug her out she was dead.” But Karu continues to risk his own life and the lives of his children as they have no other source of income. “Legal or illegal, it guarantees two square meals a day”, he said.

Soaring demand

A boom in mica – a key ingredient in products such as face-packs, mascara, eyeliner, lipstick, and nail polish – is being fuelled by soaring demand for natural cosmetics, as artificial makeup made of synthetic chemicals have been linked to illness, including cancer. According to the Indian Bureau of Mines, the country officially produces about 15,000 tonnes





Child labour at mica mines in India appears to be well known - even though the government turns a blind eye to the problem

of crude and scrap mica a year, but surprisingly, in the last few years India exported more than 150,000 tonnes – eight times more than the official figure. About half of India’s export was destined for China, from where it was then routed to several European and US cosmetic giants.

Illegal

It has been two decades since most mica mines were closed on environmental grounds, but the closures prompted many people to resort to illegal mining, pushing children into this hazardous work. According to DanWatch -

an NGO that campaigns against the exploitation of workers - most of India’s exports of high-quality mica-flakes comes from illegal mines – and are produced by undernourished children from poverty-stricken families. Jharkhand lost more than 5 billion dollars to illegal mining in the recent past according to a recent federal government report.

Survey

A report by DanWatch said: child labour is being used in the eastern states of Jharkhand and Bihar to extract mica which is used to add glitter to natural cosmetics,

produced by at least 12 multinational companies such as L’Oreal and Estee Lauder. “In our research we found illegal mica mining often involves child labour, which is a significant problem in India,” said Louise Voller of DanWatch to the media. He then added saying, “This report confirms that most companies do not give the consumers a clear picture of their supply chain.”

The report on the use of child labour in the cosmetics industry by DanWatch examined 16 companies behind 20 brands. Twelve cannot or will not disclose where they source the mica they use. German company Merck, which supplies mica to cosmetic brands around the world such as L’Oreal, admitted to sourcing the raw material from exporters in Jharkhand and Bihar. However, the company said that the minerals were extracted from legal mines. But

research carried out by DanWatch suggests the contrary, pointing out that it was impossible to differentiate between mica extracted from legal and illegal mines. Local exporters have maintained that the number of legal mines has decreased drastically since 1990.

The intermediaries, however, will not name their foreign clients. “We cannot reveal the name of our clients. It is a business secret. All I can tell you is that we process the raw material and ship it to our clients abroad,” said Mohan Modi, an intermediary, who even refused to disclose the name of his company. Merck’s manager of media relations Gerhard Lerch, said: “The Merck Social Charter explicitly bans child labour. We demand that our suppliers act accordingly, stipulating in our contracts with them that they do not employ children. Merck has implemented all necessary steps to ensure compliant-sourcing and to ensure that no children are involved in the processing of the pigment.” Merck said it has reduced dependence on Indian-sourced mica, but it will continue to receive it from mines

in Jharkhand. In terms of efforts to combat child labour in mines, Lerch said the company has a tracking system for the mica, and it constantly communicates with the Jharkhand government.

Responses

United Nations conventions make it illegal for children under 14 years-old to work in mining, which the International Labour Organisation said is the worst form of child exploitation. Yet the fact that child labour is used to mine mica in India appears to be well known – even though the government turns a blind eye to the problem. In a face-saving gesture, the pharmaceutical giant Merck opened schools in the villages to prevent children from working. Bachpan Bachao Andolan’s founder Kailash Satyarthi has called Merck’s efforts “window dressing”. He said, “They do not have a sustainable programme. They started the schools with much fanfare, but we have observed that none of the schools and health centres are functioning properly now.”

As a sustainable response, BBA has created “child-friendly

villages” in Jharkhand where children do not work. Satyarthi said that the innovative approach of creating ‘Bal Mitra Grams’ (child-friendly villages) in Jharkhand has proved that eradication of child labour was possible with the joint efforts. He further said, “I am confident that the lustre of cosmetics, glitter of paints and insulation in electrical appliances will not be tainted with blood, sweat and toil of children in mica mining. The strong and serious statement made by Satyarthi is: “The government does not want to stop illegal mining and cares little about the welfare of the children.”

Questions

The serious statement of Satyarthi paves way to other pertinent questions like:

- Why does the government turn blind-eye to child labour?
- Beti Bachhao-Beti Padhao is the pet slogan of the present Prime Minister. Yet the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has decided to close all ‘child care homes’ in six states (other states to follow). Is this not an irony?
- If the child care homes are closed, these children will be out on the streets. Their vulnerability will increase manifold. Does the government expect the number of child trafficking, child sexual abuse and child labour to grow?
- When will these children see the Achhe Din promised by Modi? A concerted effort of all NGOs, social/human rights activists and responsible citizens is needed to stop child labour in ‘our own locality’ and help the needy children lead a life of dignity. ©



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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MP by-polls

Litmus test for Scindia

People close to the erstwhile royal family underline that Harvard and Stanford-educated Jyotiraditya is neither as accessible nor as modest as his father



BY **MANOJ VARGHESE**

Jyotiraditya at a low in his political career

Jyotiraditya Scindia's future politics and Shivraj Singh Chouhan's chair are at stake in Madhya Pradesh Assembly bye-elections. However, the polls are more of a prestige battle between Scindia, who left the Congress and is eyeing a Ministerial Berth at the Centre, and Kamalnath who is again vying to take over as the Congress Chief Minister (CM). Former CM Digvijay Singh is alleged to be the think tank behind Scindia's exit from Congress, who had asked for a Rajya Sabha (RS) seat and the Pradesh Congress Committee President's post. These two demands could have been easily accommodated to save the Congress Government in MP and the by-polls averted. In fact, later both Digvijay and Scindia have made it to the RS, although from different parties.

The 22 MLAs, who had left Congress along with Scindia are in a fix contesting the polls this time on a BJP ticket, which they have been opposing tooth and nail during their life time. Simultaneously, the BJP leaders and workers are not comfortable with a new entrant, most of them as ministers, being imposed upon them. The general public is seeing them as traitors who have pulled down the Government for their own vested interests and as a plot of horse trading. At the same time, a



The general public is seeing the 22 MLAs as traitors who have pulled down the Congress Government for their own vested interests and as a plot of horse trading

vacuum has been created within the Congress party, at some places, with the exit of these Congress leaders, leaving the organizational structure into shambles.

Along with the Bihar assembly elections, around 54 assembly seats of 10 states went to polls on November 3. The by-polls to the 28 Assembly constituencies in Madhya Pradesh is crucial for the

ruling BJP to reach the majority mark in the House, while in Uttar Pradesh, the polls will help gauge the mood of the voters ahead of the 2022 state elections at a time when the Yogi Adityanath government has faced widespread criticism on the issue of law and order, and Gujarat will reflect on the popularity graph of Narendra Modi.

Jyotiraditya was only one such Congressman who could enter into Rahul Gandhi's room anytime without a prior appointment. He was at par with Priyanka Gandhi, in-charge of UP Assembly polls and always had a prominent say in all the Congress committee decisions. In the recent BJP meetings, chaired by the Prime Minister, Jyotiraditya found a back seat in the third row. There is an old phrase, "Old habits die hard" and the Maharaja maintains even now that royal ambience and culture. People close to the erstwhile royal family underline that Harvard and Stanford-educated Jyotiraditya is neither as accessible nor as modest as his father.

The national BJP leadership is not very keen to retain Shivraj Singh Chouhan as the CM, but for his individual popularity and the majority of MLAs loyalty, he has been retained. Within the party, a new chunk of leaders including, Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, State Home Minister Narotam Mishra,

BJP General Secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya, Union Minister of State for Tourism Prahalad Patel are eagerly waiting for an opportunity to take over the realms in their hand in MP.

None of the National level party leaders like Narendra Modi or Rahul Gandhi campaigned for their candidates this time in MP. Amid portraits of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP president JP Nadda and Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on the hoardings at the party's Bhopal office, the absence of a popular face, whose 19 supporters are in the fray for the 28 by-polls after pulling down the Congress government in March, has been debatable.

Number Game

In the 230-member Assembly, the BJP has 107 seats and the support of four independents, two Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) lawmakers and one suspended Samajwadi Party MLA. The BJP aims to become independent of others to form the government and for that it needs to win nine out of the 28 seats in order to cross the half-way mark. Congress, meanwhile, has 87 MLAs (after one more left recently), and it would need to win all 28 seats to cross the halfway mark which of course is a tough task. But even if the Congress is able to win 20-21 seats, it could stage a comeback as it would overtake BJP's tally and put pressure

The national BJP leadership is not very keen to retain Shivraj Singh Chouhan as the CM, but for his individual popularity and the majority of MLAs loyalty, he has been retained



on the independents, the BSP MLAs and the rebel SP MLA to switch sides.

Out of the 28 seats going to polls, 25 fell vacant after Jyotiraditya's rebellion against the Congress and subsequent resignation of 22 MLAs, which led to the collapse of the Kamal-math government in March 2020. In July, three more Congress MLAs deserted the party to join the BJP. Of these, 16 are in the Gwalior-Chambal region, where Union Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, Jyotiraditya and Digvijaya Singh are fighting for their supremacy. This region has one of the highest intensity of caste atrocities and violence. This was also the epicentre of the Bharat

Bandh against the dilution of the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act in 2018 and the attack on Dalit protesters by privileged castes. The violence had a direct bearing on the Assembly elections later that year, with Dalits voting decisively against the BJP and privileged castes expressing their dissatisfaction with what they called was BJP's attempt to appease Dalits. This region has an influence of BSP, which is contesting all the seats in the upcoming by-polls.

Royal and loyal

Jivajirao Scindia was a patron of the Hindu Mahasabha in Gwalior. Vijayaraje and Jivajirao had five children. The eldest daughter, Padmavati Rajee, married Kirit Deb Burman of the Tripura royal family. The second daughter, Usha Rajee, married Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana from the royal family of Nepal. Vasundhara Rajee and Yashodhara Rajee are both BJP leaders, while Madhavrao was a Congress leader.

Jawaharlal Nehru, then the prime minister, convinced Vijayaraje to join the party and contest from Guna. She did and in the 1957 Lok Sabha elections, defeated the Hindu Mahasabha candidate from the constituency. In 1967, when she went to discuss elections and ticket distribution, then CM DP Mishra forced her to wait for 15-20 minutes. This didn't go down well



and she took it as an insult and left the Congress with 36 legislators. And, the first non-Congress government in MP was formed with Govind Narayan Singh as the CM.

The Scindias' proximity to the British had earned them many rewards. In the Imperial Durbar in Delhi in 1877, Jayajirao Scindia, the maharaja of Gwalior from 1843 to 1886, had received the rank of a general and a 21-gun salute. In 2010, the BJP-ruled Gwalior municipal corporation wrote on its official website that the Scindia family had conspired against Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi and provided her a weak horse to fight with Britishers.

Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader Badal Saroj, who hails from Gwalior, says, "The gun used in Gandhi's assassination was brought from Gwalior. It is shocking that how Nathuram Godse acquired the gun and where it came from was never thoroughly investigated. Although no direct link between Jivajirao and Godse was found, it is true that

people close to the Palace provided the gun. All the accused, including gun-seller Jagdish Goyal and the man who purchased it, Dr D S Purchase, were close to the royal family."

When Jyotiraditya got married, his grandmother was not even invited. The family bitterness later transformed into legal battles, which ran into crores of rupees and continued even after the deaths of both Vijayaraje and Madhavrao Scindia. During the last Assembly elections, Mahanarayan, son of Jyotiraditya led the Congress Campaign in Guna, Gwalior and Shivpuri districts. But, when Jyotiraditya parted ways with the Congress, he tweeted: "I am proud of my father for taking a stand for himself. It takes courage to resign from a legacy."

Only time will reveal, how comfortable Jyotiraditya is with BJP, or vice versa! ©

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Terror in the Name of God!

Why do people commit murder in the name of God and religion?

“All must adopt a culture of dialogue as the path, mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard”



BY JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL



The man who killed three people in a Church in Nice, France on 29th October was shouting Allahu Akbar (God is great) while attacking people with a knife. Many terrorists while executing their plan of violence to take revenge shout the phrase, Allahu Akbar. Naturally peace loving people are compelled to ask the question how the religions, which are expected to make people spiritual, altruistic and compassionate, become sources of hatred, revenge and violence? Why do people commit murder in the name of God and religion?

Close on the heels of the brutal killings in France, a terrorist attack took place in Vienna on November 2, in which 4 persons were killed and several others were seriously injured. According to the media reports, multiple shootings took place indicating that more than one person was involved in the attack.

The French people were shocked by the brutal killings by Islamic extremists twice in the month of October. On October 16, a school teacher Samuel Paty was beheaded by a suspected Islamist radical of Chechnya origin



“We accept all differences in a spirit of peace. We will never accept hate speech and we defend reasonable debate. We will continue. We hold ourselves always on the side of human dignity and universal values”

- French President, Emmanuel Macron



and the second killing took place on October 29. The reason for the killing of Samuel Paty was the supposed offence to Muslim religious sentiments because the teacher had shown his students in the class the controversial cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed earlier published by the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo.

The French president Emmanuel Macron condemned the murder and strongly defended free speech. He said, “We accept all differences in a spirit of peace. We will never accept hate speech and we defend reasonable debate. We

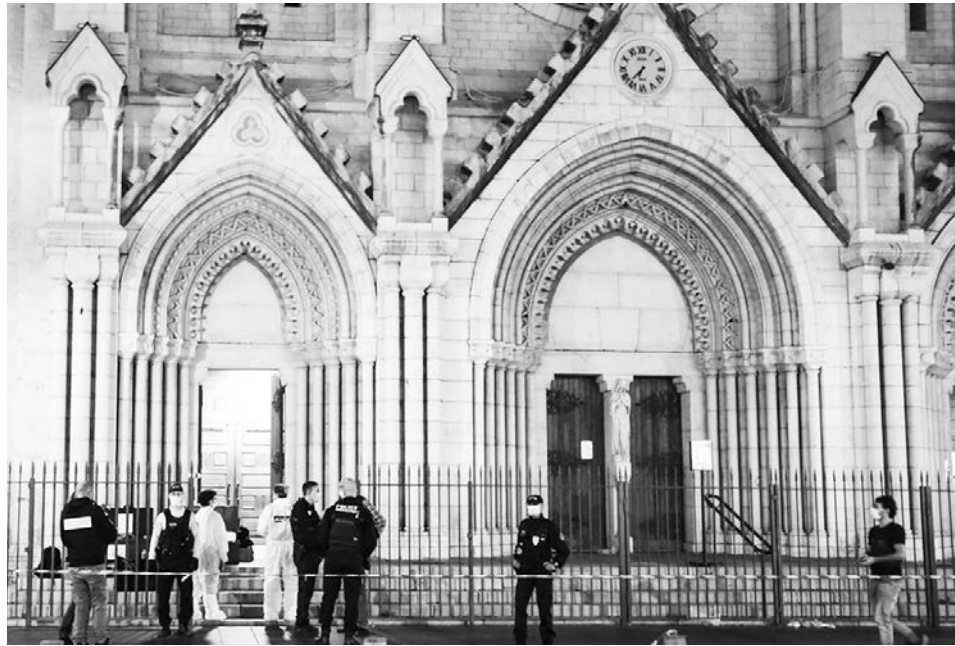
will continue. We hold ourselves always on the side of human dignity and universal values.” After the second murder also the French president reiterated his commitment to protect freedom. “I consider it our duty to protect our freedoms and our rights”, he said in an interview with Qatar-based TV channel Al-Jazeera. “I can understand that people could be shocked by the caricatures but I will never accept that violence can be justified”, he added.

Instead of condemning the murder some leaders of Islamic countries made disgusting state-

ments against France. Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed claimed Muslims had “a right to be angry and kill millions of French people for the massacres of the past”. The Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan called for a boycott of French goods. This was echoed in the protests against France in several Muslim countries. In India also some misguided Muslim leaders led protest rallies against the French President at different places.

It is heartening and encouraging to note that many Muslims intellectuals, writers and activists not only strongly condemned the murder but also criticized the Muslim leaders who justified the murder and protested against the stand of the French President. At a webinar of the Indian Muslims for Secular Democracy, convenor Javed Anand said, “We are here to condemn in unequivocal terms, no ifs and buts, not only the man responsible for this barbaric act but all those who had any role in the instigation of the crime as also all those who seek to justify it.” He also demanded “the abolishing of apostasy and banishing of blasphemy anywhere and everywhere across the world”. Activist Feroze Mithiborwala said, “It’s high time religious people realised one basic truth: every religious text and tradition is offensive, blasphemous and heretical to the followers of other sects and religions.”

The Indian government condemned not only the terrorist attacks but also deplored the personal attacks on the French President. A statement of the Foreign Ministry said, “the personal attacks in unacceptable language on President Emmanuel Macron are in violation of the most basic standards of international discourse.” While express-



By not taking action against the hate mongers the government of India is indirectly encouraging religion based extremism

ing solidarity with France the BJP government at the Centre should have reminded itself that it often failed to take action on those who indulged in religion infused violence like lynching of innocent people by cow vigilantes and hate speech by its supporters. By not taking action against the hate mongers the government of India is indirectly encouraging religion based extremism.

Increasing violence in the name of religion should compel the genuine religious leaders to search for the reasons for using religion and God for committing violence. They should take a firm stand against any kind of religious violence. Pope Francis during his visit to UAE in 2019 condemned violence in the name of religion. “In the name of God the Creator,

therefore, every form of violence must be condemned without hesitation, because we gravely profane God’s name when we use it to justify hatred and violence against a brother or sister. No violence can be justified in the name of religion,” Pope Francis said.

It is also observed that most of the people who are involved in religious extremism are young people. The one who beheaded Samuel Paty was only 18 years old. He was taking revenge against the teacher for offending his God by showing the controversial cartoon on Prophet Mohammad. According to Islamic law prevalent in some countries, the punishment for blasphemy is beheading. That could be the reason for the young man beheading the teacher instead of shooting him. Pope Francis in

FUNDAMENTALISM

the encyclical, Fratelli Tutti states very boldly, “God, the almighty, has no need to be defended by anyone and does not want his name to be used to terrorize people”

Dr. Ram Puniyani in his article titled “Charlie Hebdo Cartoons and Blasphemy Laws in Contemporary Times” states that blasphemy law didn’t exist in Islam till two centuries after Prophet Mohammad. It came up during Abbasid rule, in the beginning of 9th Century. It was to strengthen the ruling dynasty’s hold on power. In recent times, dictators like Zia UL Haq of Pakistan used it to legitimize his regime under the garb of an ‘Islamic state’. This was an attempt by the military dictatorship to increase its hold over the society. Thus religious conservatism or fundamentalism was adopted by the dictators and political leaders to increase their hold on the people by pandering to their religious sentiments.

Religious fundamentalism is religion inspired political activism and it is generally opposed to liberalism, pluralism and freedom. This political activism often takes the form of violence. Cow vigilantism in India is an example for the violent form of religious fundamentalism. Hate speech against the

minorities is another expression of the same phenomenon. Many write ups on the communal riots in East Delhi have brought to light that the violence was triggered by the hate speech delivered by the BJP leaders.

Studies on religious fundamentalism indicate its gradual evolution. It starts with the premise “My religion is the only true religion or the best religion”. The second step is the belief that everything in my religion is perfect and sacrosanct and nobody should question it. The third step is the conviction that I am duty bound to protect it from any dilution or ridiculing or caricature either by the insiders or outsiders even at the cost of my death and the death of others. If

anyone makes a negative comment on my religion I am offended and I will take revenge even by using violence and murder. The fourth step is very dangerous. At this stage ardent followers of a particular religion come to the conclusion that all should accept their religion and violence is used for this purpose. History is a witness to the violence unleashed by the followers of certain religions to convert people of other faiths.

The politicians, especially dictators and demagogues, make use of religious orthodoxy to enhance their hold on the people. They become promoters of religious fundamentalism by encouraging and abetting religious extremists.

"In the name of God the Creator, therefore, every form of violence must be condemned without hesitation, because we gravely profane God's name when we use it to justify hatred and violence against a brother or sister. No violence can be justified in the name of religion" - Pope Francis



Growth of religious fundamentalism is a reality and it has affected and infected almost all religions, including Christianity and it is being profusely used by many political leaders. It has become a great threat to peace and harmony in the society today. All people, especially the followers of Jesus who are called to be peace-makers, have a great responsibility to root out religious fanaticism. The first step in eradicating religious fundamentalism is to differentiate between the primary and secondary elements in religion and



Religious conservatism or fundamentalism was adopted by the dictators and political leaders to increase their hold on the people by pandering to their religious sentiments

stick to the primary elements. The primary elements or the essentials are the core values taught by the religions. The secondary elements include beliefs, symbols, rituals, laws, prayers etc. Even the scriptures are only means to convey the core values. There are many versions of the same scripture considered as valid by different sects within the same religion. For example, there are more than 40 versions of the Bible in English language alone. There has to be flexibility with regard to the secondary elements in one's religions. Obsession with the secondary elements can make a person a religious bigot.

The rituals of one religion could be offensive to the followers of other religions. For example, animal sacrifice is a sacred rite in Islam; but it is something abominable to the followers of Jainism, Buddhism and many Hindus. Many Hindus believe in rebirth

and a person could be born as an animal or even an insect in the next birth, but this is unthinkable for a Christian or Muslim or Jew. Religious co-existence requires tolerance to a great extent of the so called offensive practices in the religions. This is part of respect for other faiths.

The third requirement or facilitating element is sensitivity to the practices and beliefs of people belonging to other religions. For example, I like eating beef and as a citizen of India I have the freedom to eat the kind of food I like. If I am living among the Hindus or Jains for whom eating beef is something abominable, I shall avoid eating beef taking into account their sensibilities. This will definitely contribute to better understanding harmony among the followers of different faiths.

The fourth facilitating element is mutual appreciation. As the core values of all faiths are more or less

the same, there are many ennobling aspects in all religions. There has to be a desire to learn about other faiths and this will liberate one from prejudices and enable him/her to appreciate aspects that can strengthen his/her own faith. Using passages from different religious scriptures for meditation and prayer, celebrating festivals of different religions, exhibiting quotations from different scriptures in public institutions can be antidote to religious fanaticism.

The fifth element could be a firm commitment to promote peace. According to European Community, the global military expenditure stands around \$ 1.7 Trillion annually since 2009. The top five military spenders in 2018 were the USA, China, Saudi Arabia, India and France which together account for 60% of global military spending. A better peaceful climate among the nations can drastically reduce military expenditure and funds thus saved could be used for the development of their people.

Taking inspiration from Pope Francis let the Catholic Church respond to religious fanaticism by committing itself to peace building through understanding and cooperation with other faiths. Let all the dioceses and the religious congregations in India make peace building as their topmost priority in all their apostolic activities. As a means for building fraternity Pope Francis in the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* appeals to the religious leaders "to adopt a culture of dialogue as the path, mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard." ©

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Insulting God?

No! God cannot be hurt by human invectives and insults

The pretext of religious sentiments being hurt by either party (the instigator and those who react) appears to be only an excuse to provoke or indulge in acts of violence and cause harm to others



BY **BISHOP DOMINIC SAVIO FERNANDES**

In the recent past, and currently in France, we have been seeing a lot of protests and anger exhibited by people, sometimes even backed by acts of violence and senseless killings, because their religious sentiments have been hurt. Why? Because someone or some people have said something against God or the religion that they follow. I am of the view that all religions and all persons have to be respected and treated with dignity. Those who disrespect other religions (the instigator), speak insulting words about God and indulge in vile acts – such as burning sacred books, destroying religious places of worship, desecrating statues and icons considered sacred by people belonging to different religions, portray religious figures or gods in satirical form (cartoon, caricatures, disrespectful advertisements, etc.) – are precisely those who do not reflect God nor have the love of God in their hearts.

However, reacting with violence to the deeds of such instigators, by burning or beheading their effigies, indulging in revenge killings or attacking innocent people of the nation or community that the instigator belongs to, equally does not reflect the God whom they worship and in whose image and likeness they were created, nor do they have the love of God in their hearts. How is a nation



or an entire community responsible for the act or actions of one or a few instigators? And by reacting viciously to any instigator, do not those who react and resort to violence truly end up harming and doing damage to the very religion that they claim to follow? According to me, the actions of both, the instigator and those who react, end up hurting religious sentiments as neither of them reflect the God they worship or claim to worship.

God is impassible. God is almighty and all-powerful and does not need human defence or help. On the contrary, we human beings have come into existence because of God and without God we are nothing, absolutely nothing.

Christian teaching tells us that when God created our first human

parents, he gave them human life, intelligence to think, capacity to love and the freedom to choose. Besides this, God also gave them eternal life (life in the Spirit). However, in order to retain this eternal life they had to be obedient to God. But we know that our first parents disobeyed God and lost the gift of eternal life. Yet, the merciful and loving God came out with a plan. God, who is incapable of suffering and death, decided to come into this world in his Second Person, take on the human form and save the whole of humanity by winning back this eternal life through total obedience to God the Father's will.

St Paul tells us that Christ Jesus, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality

with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil 2:6-11)

Jesus, true God and true man, exhorts his disciples to listen to him and to do what he tells them to do (cf. Mt 21ff): “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12); “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven” (Lk 6:37). Jesus revealed his divinity when he forgave people their sins, since only God can forgive sins. And he urged his disciples too to forgive every time the offender asked for forgiveness just as God forgives us every time we sin and ask for forgiveness. And he explains through a parable what



happens if we do not forgive those who trespass against us by saying, “So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart” (cf. Mt 18:21ff). Jesus himself puts his teaching into practice when, hanging on the cross, he says, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” (Lk 23:34)

And on the Sermon on the Mount Jesus informs his disciples, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy ... Blessed are you when others revile and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.” (Mt 5:7, 11-12)

Hence, the pretext of religious sentiments being hurt by either party (the instigator and those who react) appears to be only an excuse to provoke or indulge in acts of violence and cause harm to others. A sentiment is a mental attitude, view or emotional thought. Hence, religious sentiments ought to be hurt when our attitude is not God-like and when we do not obey God’s command to love one another as he did by giving his life to save humanity.

The Bible tells us that God is Love (1 Jn 4:8) and that all of us are made in the image and likeness of God. Hence, when we, the followers of God, live in love, peace, charity and harmony, we reflect God, God’s sentiments, God’s attitude – like God, we should be life-giving and not life-taking. However, when we operate with insensitivity, insult, hatred, wrath, malice, killing, etc., we distort the very image of the God we claim to worship and end up hurting our own religious sentiments not God’s for God is impassible. ©

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Fundamentalism: Religion of Rage

Hindu spirituality of Aham Brahmasmi teaches us to see and honour God who is dwelling in the other irrespective of his/her caste, creed, colour, status, sex and nationality



BY VARGHESE
ALENGADEN

Fundamentalists who are engaged in violence, hatred and murder are enemies of religion. Despite shouting slogans of their respective religions and gods they are causing much damage and disrespect both to their religion and gods.

A militant group, Hindu Sena chief Vishnu Gupta had owned responsibility for defacing the signage outside India Islamic Cultural Centre (IICC) in New Delhi to express anger against the terrorist act and murder in France.

The same group had defaced the road signs in national capital which were meant for expressing honour to the historical Muslim personalities. By such destructive acts they are defacing their own religion and gods.

What is the moral right of Hindu Sena and other fringe groups of Hindutva to protest against the terrorist acts in France when they themselves are engaged in terrorist style of attacks on minorities and dalits in India? Where do they hide the

number of lynching cases of innocent Muslims?

Do the Hindu Sena and other militant Hindutva groups know that the French people have not retaliated against the minority Muslim community despite the repeated terrorists activities of Islamic groups in their land? Though the whole country condemns such terrorist acts, people do not indulge in violence against the Muslim community. They are not led by religious fanaticism.



It is an undisputed fact that France is wedded with secularism which respects liberty of individuals and communities. For them secularism is as sacred as religion to Indians. The national heritage of India is pluralism which is more than western understanding of secularism. It is based on the universal family spirit of Hinduism. Hindutva is distortion of Hinduism which is the very soul of India.

Militant Hindutva forces neither understand nor accept the universal values of equality, justice, freedom, fraternity and dignity of individual. The noble Hindu spirituality of Aham Brahmasmi teaches us to see and honour God who is dwelling in the other irrespective of his/her caste, creed, colour, status, sex and nationality.

Ignorance of the most essential aspects of one's own religion makes people fanatics and indulge in hatred and violence against others. In the past with



Hindu Sena Chief Vishnu Gupta

the patronage of Christian kings and emperors the over zealous Christians committed violence on people of other faith and culture. Crusades and forceful conversions with the support of colonial rulers were contrary to the way of Jesus Christ.

Instead of condemning the terrorist acts and murder by the

fundamentalist Islamic groups in France several Muslims organized protest rallies in India against French president Emmanuel Macron. This kind of reactions will only alienate Muslim community further. By such acts they deface their religion and their God, Allah.

The fundamentalists of all religions betray their founders and distort their teachings. Always the children and the youth are vulnerable to their manipulation and brainwashing. They mislead the innocent youth to commit all kinds of terrorist acts for their political agenda.

It is high time for teachers and all peace loving persons to commit themselves to educate and liberate the youth from all kinds of manipulations and propaganda. This is an urgent mission to save humanity and all the noble values like pluralism, universal solidarity, justice, equality and liberty. Youth and youth alone can save humanity from violence, hatred and polarization. ©

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Ignorance of the most essential aspects of one's own religion makes people fanatics and indulge in hatred and violence against others



The defaced board

Anti-corruption officer in Tamil Nadu applies for voluntary retirement

BY F. M. BRITTO



A Christian IAS officer in Tamil Nadu, who has been admired for relentlessly crusading against corruption, has applied for voluntary retirement from government service (VRS), three years before reaching the retirement age.

News agencies say that it may be because Ubagaram Pillai Sagayam had been demoted, due to his anti-corruption activities, to the insignificant post of the vice-chairman of the Science City in Chennai, where the 57 years old has been kept for the last six years.

The state government has not relieved Sagayam so far, though it is said that he had applied it on Oct .2. But media started reporting it only lately.

Sagayam has received applause for strict action against law breakers, working against the granite mining lobby as collector in Madurai, in spite of threats to his life, conducting fair polls as the special election officer there

Sagayam has received applause for strict action against law breakers, working against the granite mining lobby as collector in Madurai, in spite of threats to his life, conducting fair polls as the special election officer there and sealing the Pepsi plant in Kancheepuram

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Whenever he joined a new post, Sagayam first placed this sign on his office door: "Reject bribes. Hold your head high." By rejecting bribes and taking on the mafias, the IAS officer had collided with powerful politicians and bureaucrats, facing 25 transfers in 30 years. "I know I sit under a dangerous slogan. But I have been the same Sagayam from day one," he said. News agencies also speculate that post-retire-

ment he may get fully involved in his NGO Makkal Pathai (People's Path), to reform the society, where many Retd IAS officers are also members. Some say that he may train the IAS aspirants. Even some guess that since he has the backing of the common people, he may enter into politics, which is due in the state after a few months. But he had stoutly declined the 2016 appeal of the Hundreds of Ezhuchi Tamilagam youth to him to enter politics to cleanse the system.

Sagayam credits his honesty to his housewife mother. He says

as a boy when he picked up the fallen mangoes from their neighbour's mango trees, his mother would make him throw away the mangoes, saying that he should enjoy only what is his.

He is the youngest of five sons of farmer Ubagaram Pillai of Perunchunai village, Pudukottai, Tamil Nadu. After his primary education in the local Tamil medium government school, Sagayam went to the Government Higher Secondary School in the nearby Ellaippatti. He did his M.

A. in Social Work and in Law.

After qualifying in the Civil Services Exam, Sagayam joined the Central Secretariat Service in 1989. After working in N. Delhi for seven months, he voluntarily resigned it. Having passed the Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission exams, he was appointed in the Tamil Nadu State Civil Service. Then he was promoted to the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) of 2001 batch.

As the district revenue officer cum additional district magistrate in Kanchipuram, Sagayam sealed the Pepsi bottling plant and forbade its sale since dirt was

the tarnished image of civil servants. He was the first IAS officer in Tamil Nadu to do it. He also sent his children to the government schools, instead of the elite English medium convent schools.

When he learnt that the Village Administrative Officers (VAO) were living in the cities, instead of staying in the villages, he began to reform the system. But the existing VAOs and the local politicians attempted Sagayam's transfer. But his transfer was protested by over 5000 villagers and it was withdrawn.

To fairly conduct the 2011 Legislative Assembly election in

de-promoting him as the managing director of Co-optex handloom weavers' cooperative in Chennai.

Because he protested the assault of a superior, the state textiles minister S. Gokula Indira transferred him to be the commissioner of Indian Medicine and Homeopathy in Sept 2014. And within 48 hours again he was demoted as the vice-chairman of Science City in Chennai, in which trivial post he has been kept for the last six years.

There was public outcry since the government did not pursue the illegal granite-quarrying. The Madras High Court appointed Sagayam on Sept 11, 2014 as the Special Officer-cum-Legal Commissioner to investigate all mining operations in Tamil Nadu state and ordered the government to relieve him of his Science City post.

Since it involved many officials and politicians, they gave little cooperation and goons were sent to attack him and his team. When the police slowed in exhuming the alleged victims of the human sacrifice, allegedly performed by a granite quarry operator, Sagayam spent the night in the graveyard at Mallampatti village to ensure that no one tampered with the evidence.

Recognised as a friend of the poor, Sagayam started Uzhavan Unavagam (farmers' food court), where farmers could sell their traditional dishes. He helped to rehabilitate the three grandchildren of the freedom fighter V.O. Chidambaram, who were in abject poverty.

"Standing up against corruption is not for a season. Nor it is a fashion. It is forever," he had said.

T. Udhayachandran, a fellow officer, appreciated him, "Sagayam is an iconic IAS cadre who takes pride in being honest. He is an enthusiastic officer in whatever he does." ©

"Sagayam is an iconic IAS cadre who takes pride in being honest. He is an enthusiastic officer in whatever he does"

- T. Udhayachandran, a fellow officer

found in several bottles. He also took on the sand mafia for unauthorized mining of sand from the Palar river bed, which created erosion and flooding. He declined to rescind his order, though he was threatened of physical violence.

As the deputy commissioner of civil supplies in Chennai in 2004, Sagayam discovered that restaurants were illegally using the subsidized domestic use gas cylinders, leading to the loss to the exchequer. Within three days he confiscated 5000 such cylinders.

When he was appointed the District Collector of Namakkal in 2009, the 47 years old Sagayam posted his personal assets in the district website: a bank balance of Rs 7,172 and a house worth of Rs 9 lakh in Madurai, jointly owned with his wife. As the district collector, he wanted to set an example of honesty and to repair

Madurai, the Election Commission posted him as the ex-officio District Election Officer. Earlier elections were allegedly purchased with money power by M. K. Alagiri, a union minister and a son of then DMK Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi. Educating the voters to reject bribes, he confiscated Rs 20 lakh intended for distribution. Burning Sagayam's effigy, DMK loyalists twice filed cases, which were dismissed. The rival AIADMK finally won the election. Then Chief Election Commissioner S. Y. Quraishi awarded him an appreciation certificate for conducting free and fair elections.

As the district collector of Madurai, he investigated in May 2012 illegal granite quarrying in collusion with several senior officials, costing more than Rs 16,000 crore losses to the state. This resulted in his 19th transfer,



Coronavirus

Economy amid Pandemic

Global economic and political outlook during the COVID-19



BY CHRISTAL FERRAO

The COVID-19 pandemic is an eye-opener to world economies and politics that wanted to follow systems of restriction

Love for one's country is one of the many forms of love people learn as children. It stems from the love for family and heritage. It gained significant momentum when some regions served as colonies to certain super power nations.

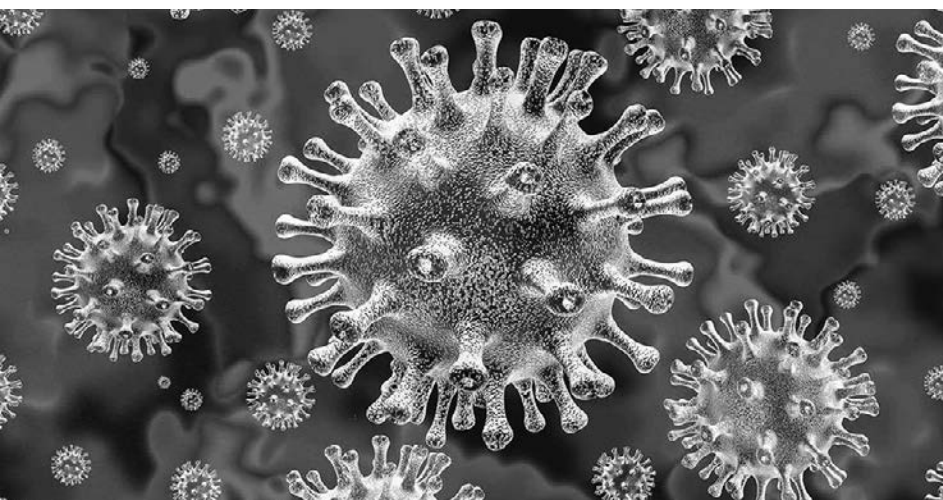
Love as an emotion served to encourage people to participate in movements to work for an independently governed nation. Such a form of love is practiced with great

pride as a value system taught to young children. As a post-colonial strategy, countries focused on self-sufficiency in production and distribution as external and trade relations were seen as a threat to internal progress.

Green revolution, industrial revolution and technological revolution were incorporated as methods for growth and development. However, countries later realized that relying on internal resources

was not enough to handle the growing demands. Economies opened to allow foreign direct investment and opportunities for employment to foreign nationals. This contributed to sustaining economic progress. The world became a global village. Love for country changed to the need to love every person irrespective of his/her nationality.

But this idea of a global economy that accepts everyone and



The COVID-19 pandemic is an eye-opener to world economies and politics that wanted to follow systems of restriction

gives them equal opportunities to grow has been challenged in the recent past. A shift in political thought and preference is the underlying factor. People are encouraged by politics of majoritarianism and cultural homogeneity and want to restrict access of resources and opportunities to certain members.

Diversity is discouraged and seen in opposition to the idea of development. World leaders want to exit from current collective economic systems, implement laws to ghettoize minorities and construct structures and follow the same age old divide and rule policy. Unlike the previous attempt to liberalize means of production to satisfy all, the current thought promises to make some happy at the cost of dissatisfaction of the other.

This restricted flow of income and opportunity has also restricted possibilities of development. And amidst this struggle, this year the

world is witnessing a pandemic due to COVID-19, which has caused things to take a turn for the worse. But COVID-19 has an important life lesson for world economies and politics. What is this lesson?

COVID-19 began as an epidemic that infected people in certain countries. Later it spread to every continent except Antarctica and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. It did not restrict its share of suffering to certain parts, but everyone had to collectively witness the scare and problems that followed. This seems to remind us that despite all our differences and need to restrict access for our own people, a virus has infected everyone in similar ways.

Every country has now been relying on the World Health Organization and other medical research organizations to collectively find solutions and ways of precaution to prevent

rise in number of cases. But even as this is being done the political and economic responses have not changed. In fact, it seems to have become worse. Instead of helping one another collectively by identifying strengths and weaknesses, countries have been convinced by the term of social distancing in the sociological sense by distancing minorities and foreign nationals with policies like jobs only for locals and economic independence and self-sufficiency.

Countries want to move to their old habits of competition through restriction, rather than liberalization and cooperation. This kind of attitude will only increase the possibilities of economies to contract rather than expand and grow.

Restricted access can also be a problem to natives of a country. It will discourage positive competition and promote monopoly. Monopoly means that power is in the hands of few individuals or groups. This might do away with local versus foreign goods, but will lead to a class struggle of big players versus small ones and the bourgeoisie (business owners) and proletariats (working class) as seen in history.

The COVID-19 pandemic is an eye-opener to world economies and politics that wanted to follow systems of restriction. It is a call to inform people that we are a global world and have to learn to work together rather than resort to blaming and comparisons if we have to grow as one home of humanity. Post-pandemic recovery can happen only when it is done together rather than separately in isolation, because progress of one is progress of none, but progress of everyone is progress of the world. ☺

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CHRISTAL FERRAO is a Freelance Journalist based in Goa



Cycle of Corruption

Can we put an end to it?

Corruption in our country not only poses a grave danger to the concept of constitutional governance, it also threatens the very foundation of Indian democracy and the Rule of Law

BY AARTI

Is there any solution to a complicated problem like corruption? No easy answers.

Well, it is a big menace which has to be eradicated.

If an estimate made by Global Financial Integrity, is to be believed, as much as \$1 trillion vanishes from the developing world's economies every year.

Yes, corruption obviously is the cause as there are black sheep everywhere.

Certainly you cannot cheat all the people all the time and time

and again the unlucky ones seem to get caught red handed as it happened a few days back when the nation observed the birth anniversary of Sardar Patel, more popularly known as the Vigilance Awareness Week.

Every year, the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), created in 1964 to address governmental corruption, observes the occasion during the week in which the birthday of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (October 31) falls urges the citizens to shun corrupt practices.

Lakhs of government and public sector employees participate in the Integrity Pledge taking ceremony to their commitment for highest standards of honesty and integrity at all times and to support the fight against corruption.

But what did a 59-year-old Tehsildar in Kota, Rajasthan who was to retire in about two months do. The State Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) apprehended the corrupt official while he was taking a bribe of Rs 25,000/- from a farmer. He had allegedly demanded

Rs 50,000/- as a bribe for measurement of the farmer's agricultural land.

More recently, ACB sleuths of Odisha Police arrested an assistant executive engineer for possessing assets disproportionate to the known sources of income. Valued at about Rs 6.53 crore, his properties included 48 one-bedroom flats, two double-storied buildings, one single room house, eight plots, two four wheelers, deposits in different banks, investment in insurance policies, gold/silver ornaments and cash.

After Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose was appointed as the chairperson of Lokpal, India's apex body to inquire and investigate into allegations of corruption against public functionaries, a total of 55 complaints, including three against Members of Parliament have been reportedly received by it between April and September period of this fiscal.

Of the total complaints, 22 were against Group A and B category central government officials, 26 against chairpersons, members and employees of different boards/corporations/autonomous bodies wholly or partially financed by the Centre and four were in other categories. Lok Pal closed 28 complaints after preliminary examination and ordered preliminary inquiry into 13 complaints — 12 by the CVC and one by CBI. Similarly during 2019-20, Lok Pal received a total of 1,427 of which 613 were related to state government officials and four against Union ministers and members of Parliament. 245 complaints were against central government officials, 200 against those in public sector undertakings, statutory bodies, judicial institutions and autonomous bodies at central level and 135 were against private persons and organisations. There were six complaints against state

ministers and members of legislative assemblies and four against Union ministers.

In India there are adequate laws to tackle corruption. Even in private organisations an ethics committee is to be in place in order to ensure transparency. Let's briefly revisit some of the observations made by the Supreme Court while deciding corruption related cases.

In Subramanian Swamy versus Manmohan Singh and another (2012), the Apex Court observed that "Today, corruption in our country not only poses a grave danger to the concept of constitutional governance, it also threatens the very foundation of Indian democracy and the Rule of Law. The magnitude of corruption in our public life is incompatible with the concept of a socialist, secular democratic republic. It cannot be disputed that where corruption begins all rights end. Corruption devalues human rights, chokes development and undermines justice, liberty, equality, fraternity which are the core values in our preambular vision. Therefore, the duty of the Court is that any anti-corruption law has to be interpreted and worked out in such a fashion as to strengthen the fight against corruption..." In K.C. Sareen versus C.B.I.(2001) it stated "Corruption by public servants has now reached a monstrous dimension in India. Its tentacles have started grappling even the institutions created for the protection of the republic. Unless those tentacles are intercepted and impeded from gripping the normal and orderly functioning of the public offices, through strong legislative, executive as well as judicial exercises the corrupt public servants could even paralyse the functioning of such institutions and thereby

Corruption has become deep rooted and has spread like Cancer



hinder the democratic polity...” In *Manoj Narula versus Union of India* (2014), the Court maintained that “corruption erodes the fundamental tenets of the rule of law.... It can be stated without any fear of contradiction that corruption is not to be judged by degree, for corruption mothers disorder, destroys societal will to progress, accelerates undeserved ambitions, kills the conscience, jettisons the glory of the institutions, paralyses the economic health of a country, corrodes the sense of civility and mars the marrows of governance.”

What about petty corruption? Although the judiciary has held that the punishment should always be proportionate to the gravity of the misconduct, when it comes to deciding cases of corruption or misappropriation, the strong message that has been sent is dismissal from service. The Supreme Court, while ordering dismissal of a municipal corporation employee who was involved in petty corruption in *Municipal Committee, Bahadurgarh versus Krishnan Bihari and others*, held that, in a case of such nature - indeed, in cases involving corruption - there cannot be any other punishment than dismissal. Any sympathy shown in such cases is totally uncalled for and opposed to public interest. The amount misappropriated may be small or large; it is the act of misappropriation that is relevant.”

More recently, a Division Bench of the Madras High Court, while hearing a case in which a petitioner who sought additional facilities for the benefit of farmers like adequate centres in government to procure paddy directly from farmers also alleged that officials took a bribe of Rs 40 for a bag of paddy in procurement centres. The Division Bench noted

NATIONAL FOOD

BRIBE



“...People are compelled to accept corruption as normal one. Corruption has become deep rooted and has spread like Cancer. Every day, it is reported in the media that many officials are caught red handed, while taking bribes. Hence, the punishment needs to be enhanced. Therefore, this Court is of the view that there should be a re-visit and the Act should be strengthened and stringent penalties should be imposed to curb the menace of corruption. The Central Government may consider imposing punishment, such as, “hanging” or “death penalty”, for corrupt practices or for demanding and accepting bribes, like in China, North Korea, Indonesia, Thailand and Morocco.

Various studies have shown that the use of information and communication technologies provides a new approach to create transparency and promote anti-corruption, leading to improved transparency and accountability in the functioning of public organisations. Further, most of the principles of good governance are expressed in the roles of e-government, where the

focus is on transparency, openness, citizen participation, effectiveness, efficiency, accountability etc. That electronic government initiatives have reduced corruption worldwide is encouraging. From data analysed for about 187 countries over a period of six years (2002-2005 and 2008).

In India, several efforts have been attempted to eliminate corruption and many seem to be paying rich dividends. Notably, as a part of Digital India Initiative, several technological interventions like for instance “Government e-Market place” (GEM) are intended to establish contactless, paperless, cashless system of public procurement by bringing transparency, fairness and competition

Can we put an end to corruption? Certainly. It is an onerous task, but the fight must go on.

While anti-corruption approaches which strengthen democracy will certainly go a long way in exterminating corruption, it also merits consideration to take a leaf from New Zealand which has succeeded in curbing corruption through good governance. ©

Jesuit University in Meghalaya

The Meghalaya cabinet on November 4 approved the St Xavier's University Bill, Shillong 2020.

The draft bill was brought by the education department and the same was approved by the cabinet.

The bill was introduced in the autumn session of the State Assembly on November 5 and will be cleared in this session.

Speaking to media persons, Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong said, "St Xavier's universities are the most successful universities in the country. The Calcutta Jesuits have established St. Xavier's University, Kolkata at New Town in Kolkata in 2017. It is run very successfully."

When asked about the concerns of allowing another private university to enter state, especially when Meghalaya did not have a good experience with CMJ University and other private universities, Tynsong said the proposal to set up the St Xavier's University in the state had gone to the regulatory board under the Meghalaya Private Universities (Regulation of Establishment and Maintenance of Standards) Act, 2012 and the board has strongly recommended for the University.

The St. Xavier's University Meghalaya will be run by the Jesuits of Kohima Region working in the North East. Before submitting the Letter of intent to the Government, a team of Jesuits visited other Jesuit universities in the country. This is the third Jesuit University in the country after XUB Orissa and SXUK West Bengal.

The Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Conrad Sangma, son of P. A. Sangma, former Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Chief Minister of Meghalaya, has been a great inspi-



It is wonderful to hear the positive response from the Jesuits on the proposal and idea of setting up a university in Meghalaya

- Conrad Sangma, The Chief Minister of Meghalaya

ration behind the venture. In one of his letters, he wrote to Father Felix Raj, "It is wonderful to hear the positive response from the Jesuits on the proposal and idea of setting up a university in Meghalaya... It is great to know about Jesuit relation with my father. He had immense respect for the Jesuits, and I share the same respect and feeling which, he had. I am sure this relation will continue..."

The Meghalaya government has set up a regulatory board under the Meghalaya Private Universities (Regulation of Establishment and Maintenance of Standards) Act, 2012.

The regulatory board will ensure that private universities maintain the standards of infrastructure, teaching, research, examination and extension of

services, fee structure, and safeguard the interest of the state.

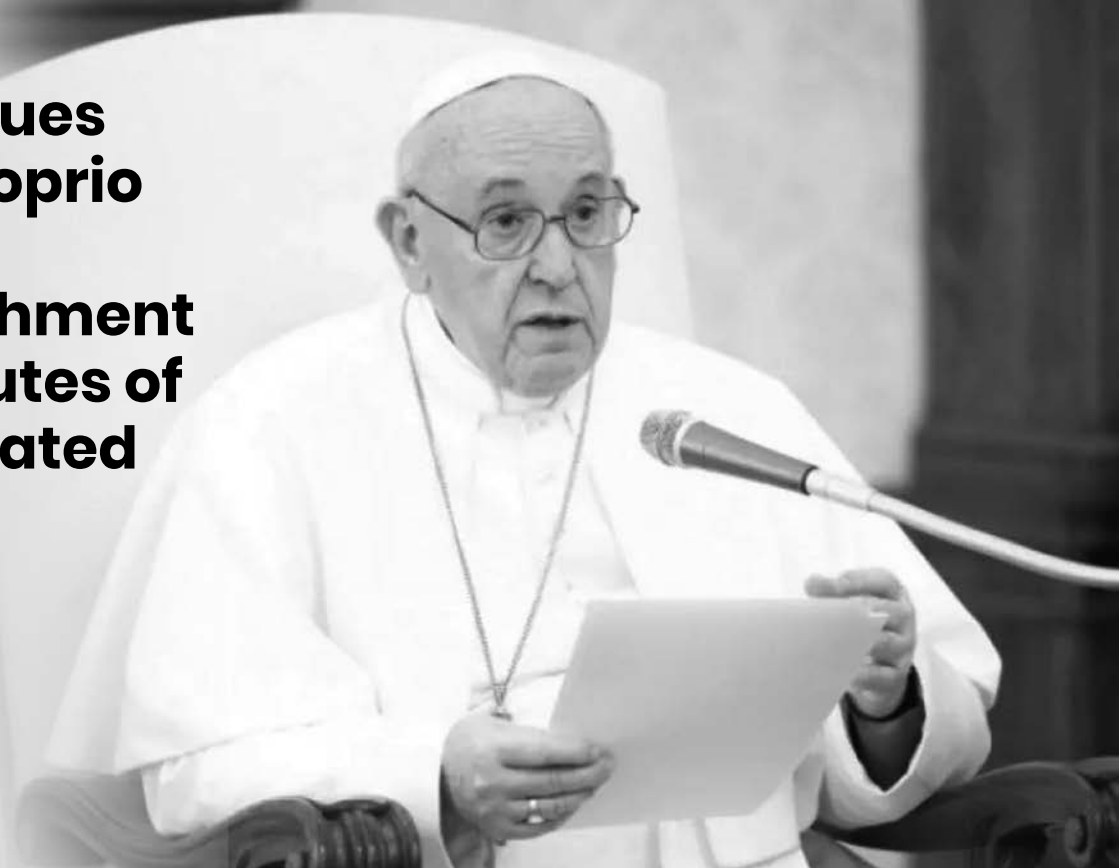
The board will ensure that the student community gets quality education and avoid commercialization of higher education.

Tynsong said the proposal to set up the St. Xavier's university had gone to the regulatory board and the board had granted its recommendation.

With the setting up of the St Xavier's University, Shillong is set to compete with Assam and Nagaland that have the Assam Don Bosco University and St. Joseph's University respectively.

The North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) is the only central university in Meghalaya that students look up to but no other private universities that have mushroomed in the state. ©

Pope issues Motu proprio on the establishment of institutes of consecrated life



Pope Francis, with an Apostolic Letter issued motu proprio, and entitled *Authenticum charismatis*, has modified Canon 579 of the Code of Canon Law concerning the erection of institutes of consecrated life. With this amendment, new institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life must receive written approval by the Apostolic See, which alone has final judgment as regards their erection. Previously the law stated that Diocesan Bishops could establish new institutes with prior consultation with the Holy See.

The Apostolic See has the responsibility to accompany the Pastors in the process of discernment leading to the ecclesial recognition of a new institute or society of diocesan right. This is in line with the Apostolic Exhortation

Vita Consecrata §12, which affirms that the vitality of new institutes and societies “must be judged by the authority of the Church, which has the responsibility of examining them in order to discern the authenticity of the purpose for their foundation and to prevent the proliferation of institutions similar to one another, with the consequent risk of a harmful fragmentation into excessively small groups.”

“The act of canonical erection by the Bishop transcends the diocesan sphere alone and makes it relevant to the wider horizon of the universal Church,” the Apostolic Letter notes. Though established in the context of a particular Church, they serve as a gift to the Church which “is not an isolated or marginal reality, but deeply a part of her. It is at the heart of the Church, a decisive element of her

mission” (Letter to Consecrated Persons, III, 5).

The amended canon 579 reads: *Episcopi dioecesani, in suo quisque territorio, instituta vitae consecratae formali decreto valide erigere possunt, praevia licentia Sedis Apostolicae scripto data.*

A rescript of the same law which was promulgated on 1 June 2016 stipulated that prior consultation with the Holy See was to be understood as necessary for the valid erection of a diocesan institute of consecrated life, on pain of nullity of the decree of erection of the institute itself. The new motu proprio makes explicit that Diocesan Bishops can only validly erect institutes of consecrated life by a formal decree, and only when written permission has been given by the Apostolic See. ©

(Courtesy: Vaticannews.com)

John Dayal, Consulting Editor of Indian Currents, Appointed Special Invitee of the Editors Guild of India

John Dayal, a veteran journalist and leading human rights activist, has been invited in a special way to the executive committee of the Editors Guild of India. The guild was created in 1978 in the post-emergency period, to protect the freedom of the press and raise the standards of editorial leadership of newspapers and magazines.

The first meeting of the committee was convened November 2, where the members addressed various issues ranging from media freedom, ethics to protection of journalists' rights.

The guild's president is The Citizen editor Seema Mustafa.

The new members of the guild's executive committee are Sakal Media Group consulting editor (Delhi) Vijay Naik, Dainik Bhaskar group editor Prakash Dubey, NDTV editorial director Sonia Singh, The Quint editor-in-chief Raghav Bahl, Scroll editor Naresh Fernandes, Malayala Manorama executive editor Jayant Mammen Mathew, and India Today former managing editor Dilip Mandal.

The committee also includes Professor M D Nalapat; The Telegraph national affairs editor Sankarshan Thakur, Madras Courier editor-in-chief Shrenik Rao, Nai Duniya chief editor Shahid Siddiqui, The Hindu (Delhi) resident editor Amit Baruah, Satyahindi.com founding editor Ashutosh, Hindustan Times' Kumkum Chadha, Nai Duniya (Delhi) former resident editor Suresh Bafna.

Besides Dayal, Indian Currents consulting editor; the list of special invitees includes The Tribune



former editor in chief Harish Khare.

Dayal is a veteran journalist and human rights and Christian political activist. He is a member of the National Integration Council of India, secretary-general of the All India Christian Council and a past president of the All India Catholic Union. He is currently the spokesperson of the union. He has been outspoken in opposition to communal polarization, bigotry and the spread of hatred between religious communities.

Dayal was born in New Delhi to Christian parents from southern India. He studied Physics at Delhi's prestigious St. Stephen's College, before deciding to become a journalist. He served as war correspondent or foreign correspondent in the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and Europe.

He became editor and CEO of the Delhi Mid Day, an afternoon newspaper, and treasurer of the Editors' Guild of India. Dayal has headed the governing boards of several colleges of Delhi University, and has taught as a visiting teacher at several universities in north India.

The Editors Guild was founded after eminent editors of 1970s realized that the lack of an organized forum of editors was a reason for the sustained suppression of press freedom during the 21-month Emergency the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi imposed in 1975.

The Editors Guild took up the issues of abuse of press freedom with the Parliament and Executive, and campaigned hard for restoring the press freedom and other freedoms which had been taken away by amendments to the Constitution, executive orders and judicial pronouncements. The freedom to report of proceedings of Parliament (Feroze Gandhi Act) which was taken away in 1976 was restored. The Guild continued to take up the threats to press freedom when the governments of Tamil Nadu and Bihar attempted to bring draconian defamation laws. Similarly, when the central government proposed an even harsher anti-defamation act in 1986, the Guild led the nationwide protests which forced the executive to shun its plans.

In 2001 when the then government brought the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance, it had provisions like preventive detention on basis of mere suspicion of journalists. The guild protested and ensured that when the ordinance was converted into an act of parliament, these threats to press freedom were not there.

The threats to media freedom from non-governmental sources have been resisted strongly by the Guild, especially in militancy affected regions of North, East and North Eastern regions. ©

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)

‘Overreach, Paranoia’: Newspaper Editorials criticise BJP over its ‘Love Jihad’ moves

EDITORIAL

Uncivil proposal: On laws to curb ‘lovejihad’

Chasing phantoms: Outlawing something that doesn’t exist would be a novelty since love

Court verdicts in unrelated cases shouldn’t be a ruse to curb personal freedom to marry

Laws against love jihad under consideration by Uttar Pradesh and Haryana betray an obsession with

Law of prejudice

A proposed law against ‘love jihad’

Special target: Interfaith marriage

Targeting a particular community and keeping

daughters and sisters under control as though they are the community’s property are two of the BJP’s favourite activities

A proposed law against ‘love jihad’ degrades women – and is unconstitutional over-reach

Newspaper editorials have slammed four BJP-ruled states and have pointed out how the MHA itself told Lok Sabha that there was nothing defined as “love jihad” under current laws in the country

The announcement by four BJP-ruled states about the intent to bring in laws on ‘love jihad’ has invited severe criticism. Editorials published by several mainstream English newspapers denounced the move as “dangerous overreach and a paranoia about inter-personal relations that has no place in a democracy” and an attempt to “enshrine such toxic prejudice in law”. Various national dailies, in their editorials, also raised the issue of the “love jihad bogey” being a negation of women’s rights as it treats them as “gullible, defenceless participants in relationships”.

The newspaper editorials have also accused the BJP of indulging in such announcements to target

a particular community and to portray women as property, stating that these are two of the party’s “favourite activities”.

‘Allahabad HC order in a case involving Hindu man, Muslim woman was used as a trigger’

The sharp response from the national media was triggered by a slew of announcements from BJP leaders in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

The recent comments by the BJP leaders came after the Allahabad high court judgement on October 30 in which it said that conversion just for the sake of marriage is not valid. Incidentally, as one of the newspapers, while referring to the Allahabad high court case which was made a basis

by Adityanath to announce a new law, pointed out: “Funnily enough, in that case, a Muslim woman had converted to marry a Hindu man.”

In 2014, the court had in a different case stated that conversion for the purpose of marriage alone was unacceptable. Before this, the National Commission for Women chairperson Rekha Sharma had kicked up a storm in mid-October by alleging that there was a “rise in love jihad cases”.

UP, Haryana, MP, Karnataka propose new laws

Latching on to the noise around “love jihad”, around which the party had centred its 2014 Lok Sabha election campaign in Uttar Pradesh, state chief minister Adityanath declared on October 31 that his government “will bring

an effective law” to deal with issue and promised that posters of those found involved would be put up on all crossings.

The following day, Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar echoed the statement, saying his government was also contemplating a law so that the “guilty” would not escape. A day later, it was the turn of Madhya Pradesh CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan to say that his government too would be making legal arrangements to ensure that “there will no jihad in the name of love”.

Finally, on November 3, Karnataka tourism minister and BJP national general secretary C.T. Ravi said that the state would “enact a law banning religious conversions for the sake of marriage”.

The announcements by BJP leaders, which several legal experts have termed “unconstitutional” on the ground that they violate Articles 14 and 15 of the constitution, which guarantee equality and no discrimination on ground of caste, creed, colour, and religion, have also come under attack from leading newspapers.

Proposals display ‘obsession with excessive legislation’

An editorial in the Times of India raised questions around the very concept of “love jihad” in a piece titled “Chasing phantoms: Outlawing something that doesn’t exist would be a novelty since love jihad remains unproven”.

It recalled that “the Union home ministry told Lok Sabha earlier this year that no ‘love jihad’ cases were reported by central agencies in Kerala, where the pejorative phrase is believed to have originated in 2009. This is despite NIA probing two suspected cases.”

The editorial also cautioned that “laws against love jihad under

consideration” display an “obsession with excessive legislation” but may have “no perceptible benefits”. To the contrary, it added that they may lead to “ample scope for harassment and rights violations.”

The editorial wrote that “the love jihad bogey is no less a negation of women’s agency. It treats women as gullible, defenceless participants in relationships”.

“Targeting a community, keeping women under control are BJP’s favourite activities’

The Telegraph editorial too stated that while “the government admitted last February that this phenomenon does not exist,” this has “not deterred the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Adityanath, from announcing a law that will ban marriages pointing to love jihad, and threatening with death, indirectly, those men who allegedly lure ‘daughters and sisters’ into marriage by disguising their identities.” It termed targeting a particular community and keeping ‘daughters and sisters’ under control, two of BJP’s “favourite activities”.

The newspaper also pointed out that “the Special Marriage Act exists in case an interfaith couple wants a civil marriage; if not, it is up to the couple if one wishes to convert to the other’s faith” and that it was the duty of the State and the courts to protect the pair if they seek help”.

“But under the Narendra Modi-led government, love jihad has become a way of persecuting such marriages — as though honour killings and khap panchayats were not enough,” it charged.

‘Love jihad’ smacks of dangerous over-reach, paranoia’

The Indian Express too claimed that the “proposed law against ‘love jihad’ degrades women. It said it is “exceptionally bad news for Indian women.”

Also, the newspaper editorial cautioned that the “law against what they call “love jihad” smacks of dangerous over-reach and a paranoia about inter-personal relations that has no place in a democracy.”

Stating that such a law does not have “any basis in the constitution”, it too reminded how “as recently as February, the Union home ministry told Parliament that there was nothing called “love jihad” under the existing laws in the country and that the Constitution gave everyone the freedom to practise and propagate any religion.”

As for the announcement by BJP leaders, the editorial said the issue has been “used to delegitimise inter-faith love and unions, and pit Muslims and Hindus as others in a zero-sum game of demographic domination that has little correspondence with reality.”

It also charged that “by attempting to enshrine such toxic prejudice in law, both Adityanath and Manohar Lal Khattar do disservice to their constitutional responsibilities.”

As for conversion, it said, “there are enough laws on the statute book that are adequate to convict those accused of the crime or tackle coercive conversion”.

‘There can be no legislation based on an extra-legal concept’

The Hindu termed the proposal to enact laws a “vicious mix of patriarchy and communalism”. Its editorial, titled “Uncivil proposal: On laws to curb ‘love jihad’,” said “the ostensible reason for bringing in such a law seems to be that the “honour” of Hindu women is under threat from zealous Muslim youth seeking to win over girls from other communities for religious conversion in the name of love and marriage.” ©

(Courtesy: *The Wire*)



Baby Trump Throws a Tantrum..!

As Trump, hees and haws about letting go of the presidency, Liberty, the statue calls out to him, “Baby Donny, now give your toy white house to Joe, you’ve had four full years of living there!”

“No, I won’t! See I’m younger than he is, and tougher. Look at my broad shoulders and head full of hair, I will fight him, and not allow him to come in!”

“But you have to Donny boy!”

“They told me I could stay for eight years!”

“I know but the landlord got fed up after four!”

“Let me meet the landlord!”

“You just did Donny, you just met your landlord at the polls! It’s the people of America, they’ve had enough of you!”

“I’m not going!”

And from the distance, many hundreds of miles away, that separates Washington from New York city Liberty laughs, a laugh that resonates in the house Baby Trump doesn’t want to give up, “Why are you laughing?” asks Trump.

“Get your Limousine’s ready baby boy!” yells, the female voice of the statue that had it’s origins in France, “Get onto one of your fancy sedans and go back to one of your fancy towers, that bear your name!”

“I told you, I don’t want to leave this house Liberty, I want to stay here another four years and maybe more if I can change the constitution!”

“Hey Trump Baby!”

“Yeah?”

“There are immigrants who are coming past me who have taken a ship or plane, left their lands ruled by tyrants and dictators, and reached this land of freedom!”

“So what?”

“They have come to learn the meaning of liberty. I stand at the entrance to America, and tell them, there is fairness and justice here, unlike lands they have run away from and you like a baby fighting tooth and nail not to leave that house, even after the landlord has told you to vacate is sending the wrong message to them!”

“I’m not bothered!” cried Trump, “I will fight with lawyers! My favourite judge is now in the Supreme Court and will support me till I win!”

“You’re throwing a tantrum!”

“Who cares!”

“Do you know what that is called Donny? Do you know what a tantrum thrown by an adult is called?”

“I am not...”

“It’s called terrorism! And we don’t want that kind of home-



grown terror in our own backyard do we? So baby, get in your car, not the presidential one, but one of your fancy private ones with gold plated handles, and say goodbye to the White House, before you are branded the very thing you were elected last time to fight; a terrorist..!” ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ROBERT CLEMENTS is an author and newspaper columnist

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— Dr. John Romus

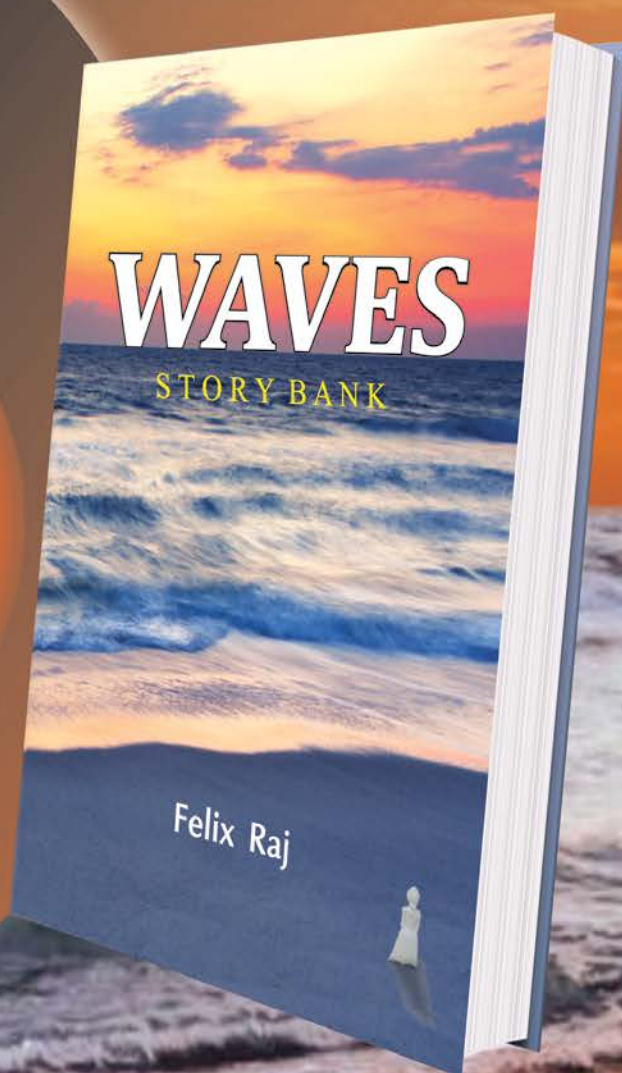
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