

Indian Currents

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Belling the Cat

The ICJ's ruling, however impotent or controversial, is the first step in accepting injustice and working towards restoring any semblance of sanity. Will the ICJ be able to shed its image as a tool of the West and provide relief to the people of the war-torn Gaza Strip.



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A GLIMMER OF HOPE AMIDST UNYIELDING ISRAELI STANCE



Amidst the heart-wrenching stories of inhuman murders and human suffering emerging from the Gaza Strip, the ICJ ruling is like a breath of fresh air. Though the court has accepted the plausibility of a genocidal aura surrounding the Israelite offensive as implied in the application filed by South Africa and issued directives to safeguard the Palestinian civilians, Israel doesn't seem too keen to fall in line. The reactions of Netanyahu and his backers seemingly imply rebellion against all precepts of justice that they claim to uphold.

At first blush, the ICJ stands vindicated by its response. It recognized that something was wrong and requested Israeli leaders to protect the Palestinians from harm proactively. But could it not have explicitly called for a ceasefire since that is the only way for further deliberations to bear fruit? It would not have been the first time it did so since it did call for a ceasefire during the Ukraine conflict. Its reluctance does not put it in a favourable light. Indeed, judging from Israel's unyielding stance, they would not have bothered with it anyway. However, they would have voiced the displeasure of the rest of the international community.

Somehow, the court's observations of a doomed generation seem lifeless, and the assurances expected feel empty. As the offensive enters its fifth month, more than 2 million people are affected. Many are dead, the tally much higher than that of the Russia-Ukraine war. Those displaced are living as refugees in undignified and pathetic conditions, surrounded by despair. A whole generation of children is undergoing the trauma that accompanies war, and many are orphaned or lost. Still, some find difficulty in condemning those whose actions brought about this situation. The irony is that those protesting are now divided into different camps, weakening their case.

Sometimes, it feels like the whole world has flown off the handle. Conflicts are visible everywhere; their degrees might vary, but they are conflicts nevertheless. Why go all the way to the Gaza Strip when tensions are brewing close by? Because, as the wise observe, we cannot see what is right under our nose. It becomes crucial to learn by observing others.

We can draw sufficient parallels between all the current instances of conflict. Each has an overpowered perpetrator or one with enough backing and exudes madness but swears to be cultured. Their claims generally only resonate with some of the vast majority. A target group suffers for the fruition of a hidden agenda. Some people who cry foul won't go beyond that because it does not affect them, while others will be satisfied if there is any action.

The takeaway is that things will continue being gift-wrapped to distract from reality unless everyone takes the initiative to stand up and call a spade a spade. South Africa can be proud that it rose to the challenge even though it may have consequences. And while all the requirements it laid out in its application are not implemented, it has at least shone a ray of light amid complete darkness for the Palestinians.

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CALL TO CEASE INHUMAN KILLING OF PALESTINIANS

BY **AAKASH**



COVER
STORY
06

08 OPINION
WHAT A VENGEFUL GOD!
BY **P. A. CHACKO**



10 OPEN LETTER
**OPEN LETTER TO
CHHATTISGARH CM:
CHRISTIANS PUNCH
ABOVE THEIR WEIGHT**
BY **AJ PHILIP**



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This issue of Indian Currents contains
36 pages including cover.

13 **HARD TALK**
Seven Social Sins
BY **JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL**



16 **ANALYSIS**
Interim Budget: Women, children neglected
BY **JASWANT KAUR**

18 **A DIFFERENT LOOK**
Gandhi's Ramarajya vs Modi's Ramrajya
BY **JEEVAN PRABHU SJ**

22 **ON THE GROUND**
Bihar: After the Judas Kiss
BY **FRANK KRISHNER**

24 **CRITIQUE**
Stunting Intellectual Growth in Institutions of Higher Learning!
BY **G. RAMACHANDRAM**

26 **INTROSPECTION**
May They All be One
BY **CHHOTEBHAI**

33 **REFLECTION**
Challenge to be Energetic
BY **P. A. JOSEPH**

34 **BOB'S BANTER**
The Missing Spectacles..!
BY **ROBERT CLEMENTS**

POWER QUOTES



You've got to get up every morning with determination if you're going to go to bed with satisfaction.

- **George Lorimer**

• • •



The true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit.

- **Nelson Henderson**

• • •



Go as far as you can see; when you get there, you'll be able to see further.

- **Thomas Carlyle**

• • •



I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.

- **Thomas A. Edison**

• • •



Build your own dreams or someone else will hire you to build theirs.

- **Farrah Gray**

• • •



Never give up on a dream just because of the time it will take to accomplish it. The time will pass anyway.

- **Earl Nightingale**

• • •



The only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle.

- **Steve Jobs**

• • •



Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.

- **Will Rogers**

• • •



Develop success from failures. Discouragement and failure are two of the surest stepping stones to success.

- **Dale Carnegie**

Call to Cease Inhuman Killing of Palestinians

In a bid to stop the insanity in Gaza, ICJ has implicitly called for a ceasefire, but the response from Israel and its backers leaves much to be desired

BY **AAKASH**

The International Court of Justice, the top court of the United Nations, located in the Hague, Netherlands, on January 26, gave out a ruling that many have touted as a landmark. It offers the first hope of protecting civilians from genocide, sweeping destruction, inhuman conditions and further trauma. The ruling identifies the current situation and acknowledges the decades of Palestinian struggle.

The war between Israel and Hamas began with Hamas' invasion of Israel on October 7, 2023, where they killed over 1,200 people, injured thousands and abducted around 240 people, many of whom are still in captivity. The State of Israel launched a large-scale military offensive in Gaza in retaliation by land, air and sea. It had claimed over 28,000 lives (about 26,600 Palestinians and 1,400 Israelis) by the end of January. As days passed, the offensive garnered attention worldwide, with some in agreement and most against it.

South Africa, on December 29, 2023, filed the application instituting proceedings against Israel concerning alleged violations in the Gaza Strip of obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Before filing its application, South Africa repeatedly and



urgently voiced its concerns in public statements and various multilateral settings, including the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly, that Israel's actions in Gaza amount to genocide against the Palestinian people. It asserted that the response to the initial attack by Hamas was unlawful and that the Israelite leadership must be investigated for war crimes and genocide as they acted with the intent to destroy or displace all Palestinians in Gaza.

Israel vehemently rejected all claims of genocidal intent and claimed that it was Hamas which was putting the civilians in harm's way. It says Hamas operates inside and underneath Gaza's densely populated towns and refugee camps, making it virtually impossible for Israel to avoid killing civilians and that it has gone to great lengths to warn civilians to prevent danger. During oral hearings in January, it further requested the case be dismissed and removed from the General List—a motion that was rejected.

The court observed that some of Israel's acts and omissions amounting to genocide, as alleged by South Africa, could stand ground and could fall within its jurisdiction within the provisions of the Genocide Convention. Supposedly, in recognition of Israel's right to defend itself in the wake of the Hamas attacks, the ICJ stopped just short of ordering a

The court observed that some of Israel's acts and omissions amounting to genocide, as alleged by South Africa, could stand ground and could fall within its jurisdiction within the provisions of the Genocide Convention

ceasefire, a key request in South Africa's application. The court recognises that the situation is catastrophic and precariously perched on the border of rapid deterioration.

The ruling could be consequential as it one-ups the US officials, who derided South Africa's case as "meritless, counterproductive, and completely without any basis in fact whatsoever." South Africa has effectively brought Israel and the Western narrative of rules-based order to the dock. Had the court dismissed the application, it would only have strengthened the view that the ICJ is only a tool for the Western powers to dominate and punish those against it under the veil of justice.

As a result, it made several demands of Israel, broadly in line with most of the nine "provisional measures" demanded by South Africa. The ICJ issued six provisional measures, ordering Israel to take all measures to prevent acts of genocide. Most of the court's 17 judges ruled that Israel should do everything in its power to avoid killing Palestinians, causing them serious bodily or mental harm, creating intolerable living conditions in Gaza, or deliberately preventing Palestinian births. It also said Israel should do more to "prevent and punish" public incitement to genocide, citing examples by Israel's president and defence minister. It also called for "immediate and effective measures" to address the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. It has provided a month of grace for Israel to report back on its actions. The series of calls to action, if implemented, could drastically change the nature of Israel's military campaign in Gaza. Algeria, a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, has requested a council meeting to enforce the ICJ ruling regarding Israel.

Tel Aviv and Washington have not responded



well to the court's verdict. While Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the ICJ's decision to proceed with the case was "outrageous" and that Israel would continue to defend itself, Biden has withdrawn the nominal aid that it was contributing to the UN Relief and Work Agency for Palestinian refugees citing the flimsy Israel's allegation that some of the UN's staff was implicated in the October 7 attacks.

However, two camps have emerged in reaction to this ICJ ruling. One group has hailed the court's decision as a watershed moment. Israel has been finally held accountable after decades for the litany of outrages it has committed against generations of Palestinians. The court's sentence implies that Israel's freedom to kill, backed by the West, is removed.

The other group, predominantly the Palestinians and their supporters, described the court's refusal to demand a ceasefire and halt Israel's latest invasion as a predictable "failure" that has only fuelled their abiding mistrust of the "international community" and the so-called "global justice system". While they did not expect the application to amount to anything, even the thin veneer of hope they held on to was broken for them.

Though the ICJ has accepted that injustice is being perpetrated, it will be a long time, even years, before a final verdict is proclaimed and its perpetrators brought to task. In the meantime, the "war" will persist, and the people continue to suffer. If found culpable, Israel will no longer be the victim of European history but will have to carry the plaque of ignominy as the villain. It might be too late by then, as Gaza and its memory will have been turned to dust. ©

What a Vengeful God!

BY P. A. CHACKO

Israel's genocidal war against the Palestinian nation and its citizens has entered the fourth month. With the complicity, connivance and ammunition support of the Biden administration, Netanyahu is on an annihilation task. He projects and swears by his Abrahamic God, who is vengeful, cruel, retaliatory and merciless. Hence, to weaponise the Bible, he freely quotes it and equates the Palestinians with the Amalekites. He thinks that he is anointed by his Zionist God to pound, pulverise and annihilate the Palestinians. There are no signs of him heeding the warnings and resolutions of the international community.

The more the Palestinian blood he tastes, the more he wants. Already, the blood of twenty-five thousand Palestinian citizens cries out for justice. 70% of them are women and children. Thousands more are traceless or under the rubble. Many thousands are driven out like cattle.

Those who deny the Palestinians their right to exist as a nation are criminals and culprits. For the last 75 years, the Palestinians have been denied peaceful existence. Their land has been illegally occupied by Israeli settlers, aided and abetted by the Israeli army and blessed by Israeli governments. You grab my land and enter my home, pointing your bayonet at me, kill my children, demolish my house, make me homeless and vagrant, and you say you are attacking me in self-defence. Is there any trace of conscience in you? The God you swear by has no



conscience because you say he has given you a free pass to kill your neighbours, grab their land and expand your kingdom. And, then, you declare that you are killing 'human animals' in self-defence. For your self-defence, you need 2,000-pound (about 900 kg) bombs from America.

The heart-searing statement of an American journalist in Gaza should melt even a heart of stone. "Children have been shot in other conflicts I have covered. But never before have I watched as soldiers enticed children like mice into a trap and murdered them for sport." says Christopher Hedges, an American journalist on assignment in Gaza. Now, judge for yourselves who are 'human animals'. Innocent Palestinians or Israeli soldiers and their bloodthirsty masters?

All along, Israeli politicians have treated Palestinians as subhuman, 'cockroaches', 'human animals', and so on. Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, 'the man responsible for translating Israel's declaration of war into an action plan,' stated: "We are fighting human animals, and we will act accordingly." So, his soldiers are strictly acting accordingly by hunting people like animals and finishing them off. In 1983, speaking at an Israeli parliament committee, former Israeli Army Chief-of-Staff, General Rafael Eitan, described Arabs as "drugged cockroaches in a bottle" (Ramzy Baroud in Middle East Monitor).

Racist and dehumanising terms have been attributed to Palestinians by Israel's political heads and rulers. For Golda Meir, "Palestinians did not exist." For Menachem Begin, Palestinians were "beasts walking on two legs." Eli Ben Dahan, the Israeli Orthodox rabbi and politician, stated: "Palestinians are like animals; they aren't human". It is not surprising that the animal sense of these politicians and leaders is making them treat others as subhuman beings worthy of elimination.

The news item from MEM reveals that US presidential hopeful Nikki Haley told Fox News on 10 October that the Hamas attack was not just on Israel but "is an attack on America". It was then that she made her sinister declaration while looking directly at the camera, "Netanyahu, finish them, finish them (...) finish them!" And, US Senator Lindsey Graham intoned: "We



are in a religious war here. (...) Do whatever the hell you have to do. (...) Level the place." (Source: Middle East Monitor).

Hence, with Biden's diktat and his Senators' promptings, Netanyahu and his team are emboldened to do the 'finishing off' the Gaza civilian population and the 'levelling' thousands of homes, mosques, hospitals, churches, refugee camps and schools. Political observers point out that the headhunters and collaborators are authoring another atrocious Nakba. Justice will be done if there is a God of Justice. That God will question the connivance of collaborating nations, USA, Britain, Germany, and others who openly or silently promote the genocidal war in Gaza and the West Bank. From the blood of Palestinian children will spring up the seeds of a new Palestinian state, vibrant and independent.

The golden calf of power and arrogance that Israel and its collaborators worship will fall to pieces and melt in the just anger of God. From the dust and ashes of the dead Palestinians will rise a nation vibrant and independent! A nation that will not let



the power and arrogance of Israel go the wayward way.

The war criminals of today will one day be dumped into the dustbin of history alongside the likes of Hitler and other political perverts. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Tribal body in Manipur seeks Separate Administration

Indigenous people, mostly Christians, in India's strife-torn Manipur state have demanded a separate administration under the direct control of the federal government, accusing the state of supporting violence against them. "We cannot be under a government who killed and destroyed our churches and properties, who separated us physically and demographically," said a declaration adopted at the Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum in Manipur. The northeastern hilly state bordering civil war-hit Myanmar has been engulfed in sectarian violence between tribal Christians and the majority Hindu Meitei community since May 3 last year.

The 10-month-old strife has so far claimed more than 200 lives and displaced around 50,000 people. Nearly 500 places of worship, including churches, have been set on fire in the state ruled by the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

At the Jan. 27 meeting, the tribal body said the federal government "should administer us directly from New Delhi," India's national capital.

The indigenous body's demand came after a radical Meitei group - Arambai Tenggol - reportedly forced state legislators, including ministers, to take an oath to work for the interest of the Meitei community. In the 60-member state assembly, 40 legislators belong to the Meitei community. Those legislators who refused to fall in line were assaulted and humiliated. Ten legislators reportedly have written to Modi on Jan. 29 seeking his "prompt intervention" to create a "separate administration" for tribal people in the state. The ongoing conflict in Manipur "has turned from bad to worse," they wrote. State Chief Minister N Biren Singh "has maintained eloquent silence on the public harassment of his lawmaker colleagues," they told Modi.

The Indian prime minister has not visited the state since the outbreak of violence, despite repeated demands from the opposition and civil society groups. However, he condemned the assault and humiliation of two tribal women who were paraded naked in a village in May last year after a nationwide outrage. © Courtesy: UCANews

Open letter to Chhattisgarh CM: **Christians punch above their weight**

BY **AJ PHILIP**

Dear Shri Vishnu Deo Sai Ji,

When you took over as the fourth Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, I was happy that a tribal had reached there. I thought you knew the state's problems much better than anyone else and that you would do everything possible to ameliorate the condition of the people, especially the tribal population.

Alas, your recent statement against Christians has shocked me, as no one in authority has used such harsh words against them. You claimed that the educational and health services provided by the Christians were with the intention to convert people, and you would, therefore, stop them from doing so. You also added in the same vein that you would ensure that Hindutva is strengthened.

While saying this, you forgot for a moment that you were sworn in with a commitment to adhere to the Constitution of India. You do not have to read the whole document. You just have to read the Preamble of the Constitution to know that you have to uphold secularism, not Hinduism. You must ask your conscience whether what you said squares with



the Constitutional promise that people are free to believe in any religion and even propagate it.

Long before you were born, the forerunner of the BJP, the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, had demanded that foreign missionaries should be thrown out of Chhattisgarh. As everybody knows, Chhattisgarh was a part of

Madhya Pradesh. There were some foreign missionaries working in Bilaspur and other areas in what is now your domain. The Jan Sangh claimed that people were converting because of the foreign missionaries.

The few foreigners who lived there were Catholic priests. They had left their native places in Europe many years earlier. All of a sudden, when they were forced to leave the state, they did not know where to go. Many of them were old and needed support even to walk. I met one such priest in Delhi.

His wish was to die in Bilaspur and be buried with the people he served. Alas, he had to leave for the Capital, where the church gave him accommodation. His passport had expired long ago. I doubted whether any airline would accept him as a passenger as he was too old. Yes, he died in Delhi, and I attended his funeral.

Yes, the funeral service was in a Catholic Church. The church had to make a change in its practice because the priest wanted to be cremated, not buried. That is what was done. It was said that he was the first Christian priest in India to be cremated. Today, cremation is becoming popular among Christians worldwide for reasons I do not want to go into in this letter.

Today, there is not a single foreign missionary in Chhattisgarh or anywhere else in the country. In fact, they are not needed. Do you know that there are Indians serving as priests and pastors in Europe, Africa, and several countries in Asia? The church in India has come of age.

What you said this week is what the Jan Sangh



leaders in your state used to say some seventy years ago. Madhya Pradesh was ruled by the Congress at that time. It had a chief minister who belonged to the Brahmin community. He also probably believed in Jan Sangh's rhetoric about conversion.

He also found an easy way to mollycoddle the Jan Sangh cadres. They called off their agitation against foreign missionaries when Durga Prasad Mishra, as chief minister, appointed M. Bhawani Shankar Niyogi as Chairman of a large commission that included a "Christian" S. K. George as a member, among four others. Significantly, not one of the members belonged to a tribal or Dalit group. All of them belonged to upper castes who could not understand the deprivations a Dalit suffered from. It is like my grandson, who finds it difficult to understand that his grandfather went barefoot to school.

It was a voluminous report that the committee submitted. Thanks to an RSS theologian, Sita Ram Goel, it was published in book form, and he sent me a copy for review. I read the whole book and gifted it to a church library. The commission had sent a questionnaire to hundreds of people. It suggested that the Christians were dangerous people doing dangerous things.

This is not my opinion. In fact, this is what the High Court said about the questionnaire: It's "a long and searching document... in many places it amounts to an accusation. Some of the questions border on an inquisition, and may well be equated to a 'fishing expedition' on the supposition that something discreditable can be discovered."

After reading the report, I came to the conclusion that it was a case of much ado about nothing. If you have the time and inclination, you should get hold of a copy and read it. One result of the report was that Madhya Pradesh became the first state to introduce the anti-conversion law, euphemistically called the Freedom of Religion Bill.

You were, perhaps, just an idea in the minds of your parents when the controversial Bill was passed and it received the gubernatorial assent. Six decades have passed since the Act came into force. You still talk about conversion. You can do one thing. Please call your Director-General of Police and ask him how many Christians were convicted and punished under the Act. Many were, of course, arrested on false charges.

If he says "nil," will you be convinced that your claim about forcible and fraudulent conversion was



baseless? Yes, the Congress was in power at that time, you may say. That is why the Act could not be implemented.

Do you remember the names of Kalyan Joshi, Virendra Kumar Saklecha, Sunderlal Patwa, Babulal Gaur, and Uma Bharti? They all belonged to the Sangh Parivar, and they were all chief ministers of MP. They also could not punish a single Christian for violating the Freedom of Religion Bill. Taking their cue from MP, chief ministers of 10 other states enacted similar laws. Have they been able to punish a single Christian?

You are totally mistaken when you say that Christians run schools and hospitals to convert poor people. No, Sir, that is not the purpose. I, as president and, later, chief executive of an NGO run by Christians, educated over three lakh children in NCR. Not even one was converted.

I am happy that they are doing well in life. They will not be cheated by showing 10 rupees as a hundred rupees. They also know about their rights and privileges. If you check the antecedents of many people whom we consider successful, you will find a Christian connection.

Recently, the Chief Justice of India, Justice DY Chandrachud, took the initiative to celebrate Christmas. There, he recited from memory the Lord's Prayer. It is arguably the best prayer because it was taught by Jesus himself. There was not one moment when he fumbled or had to turn to the printed text. For your convenience, let me quote the prayer in full:

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil." Can you find anything objectionable in the prayer?

Some time ago, a minister in the Modi government, Piyush Goyal, visited his alma mater in Mumbai. I heard his speech, which is available on YouTube. You should also listen to it. He spoke extempore. He was garrulous about the kind of



affection he received from the school authorities. He attributed his success in life to the sort of education he received from the Christian school.

He was able to recite not only the Lord's Prayer but also the Catholic prayer: *"Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen. Behold the handmaid of the Lord: Be it done unto me according to Thy word."*

By the way, I have not learned this by heart, but I can recite the Gayatri Mantra and the RSS anthem. Once, when I recited the mantra, I was told that I should recite it 108 times to get its full benefit!

Many BJP leaders like LK Advani, Smriti Irani, and Swapan Dasgupta studied in Christian institutions. I have never heard any of them saying that the school authorities forced them to convert. They have only fond memories of their schools, colleges, and the teachers who taught them. It is a surprise that you consider Christians to have an ulterior motive when they do service.

It was a revelation that you studied in a Catholic institution in Jashpur. The school you went to is run by the Jesuits. I do not have to tell you that the Jesuits are known the world over for the kind of education they impart. Unfortunately, I could not study in a Jesuit school.

You are luckier. Once, when we interviewed candidates for the post of Principal of a senior secondary school of which I was chairman, our choice was an ex-Jesuit who left the order after getting married. Now, let me ask you a question? Did any Jesuit compel you to convert? I would like to hear from you.

If all the children who studied in Christian schools were converted, the Christian population in India would have been at least 25 per cent, if not more. I

go to a Catholic hospital for treatment. I find that the patients are mostly Muslims and Hindus. The Christians are too few to count in Delhi. Why do they go there? The answer is simple. They get good service at a fraction of the cost in a corporate hospital just across the road.

It is the poor who avail of Christian services. As Chief Minister, you may be able to close down all Christian schools and, hospitals and dispensaries. Who will suffer? The rich can send their wards even to Britain, Australia, and the US for studies and settlement. It is the poor who will suffer. Please do not think along such lines. Or, is it that you do not want others in your community to come up in life after you have become chief minister?

I have travelled within your state, and I know the condition of the people there. The worst tragedy I ever witnessed was at Chaibasa in what is now Jharkhand. I was standing near the market. I saw an elderly tribal woman bringing a rooster to the market. Just then, two upper-caste boys reached there on a motorcycle. They snatched the rooster away from her. While leaving, they threw a currency note at her.

She took the money after a minute or so. I could see the shock on her face. I could not do anything. It still remains a thorny incident that pricks my conscience. The tribals are one of the most exploited lot in the country. I believe that the tribals are Adivasi. They are the original inhabitants of this country.

But your party leaders consider tribals as Vanvasis, that is, those who live in forests. They will never call you an Adivasi. Why? Because it will disprove their theory that Hindus are the original settlers of this land. Actually, they came from outside the country and settled down on the banks of the Indus.

The tribals have a greater heritage and civilization. Alas, your leaders want to deny this. If the tribal languages have survived, the tribals should thank the Christians for it, not those who force your brethren to chant certain chalisa. I can go on and on, but you have your time constraints. Your town, Jashpur, has the largest church in India. Please include the church in Chhattisgarh's tourism circuit. The state will benefit. May God bless you to work tirelessly for the welfare of your people!

Yours etc. ©

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Seven Social Sins

BY JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL

On January 30, 2024, Indians commemorated the 76th death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Nation. Aligned with a political ideology diametrically opposed to the vision and values of Mahatma Gandhi gripping the majority of Indians, deliberate attempts are being made to erase the image of Mahatma Gandhi from the collective memory. Reducing Mahatma Gandhi to the Clean India programme is a shrewd tactic to make him irrelevant to the other serious aspects of the Nation's life. Gandhiji, who transcended the boundaries of India and influenced millions of people worldwide, continues to be an inspiration.

In the absence of Gandhian values like truth, non-violence, simplicity, religious pluralism, spirituality, freedom and dignity of the individual, what is flourishing in the society are the Seven Social Sins about which Mahatma Gandhi wrote on October 22, 1925, in his weekly newspaper Young India. The



original author of the list of "Seven Deadly Social Sins" is Frederick Lewis Donaldson, an Anglican priest. Later, Gandhiji gave the same list to his grandson, Arun Gandhi, written on a piece of paper on their final day together shortly before his assassination. Gandhiji wanted the people of India to

be cautioned against the seven social evils.

1. Wealth without Work

Amassing wealth through unfair means harms society. There are various unethical ways by which wealth is amassed by individuals, organisations, political parties and companies. Receiving money as bribes by politicians and bureaucrats for doing their official work, tax evasion through fraudulent means, paying politicians to get favourable contracts, not paying proper wages to workers, gambling, and deceiving banks by not repaying loans are different methods of generating wealth without work.

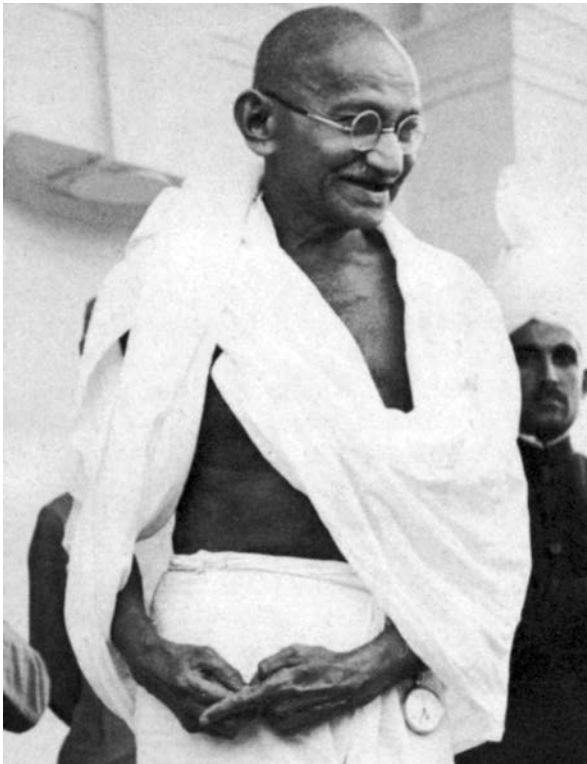
Corruption has been a termite that eats the very vitals of the Indian Nation. Transparency International publishes the Corruption Perception Index every year. In 2023, it ranked 180 countries on a scale of 0 to 100, hundred being very clean and zero being highly corrupt. According to the report, 131 countries made no significant progress against corruption in the last decade. Two-thirds of the countries score below 50, and 27 are at their lowest score. India ranked 93 out of 180 countries.

Human greed is one of the significant reasons for amassing wealth unethically and illegally. In this context, what Gandhiji said is very relevant. "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed." Human wants have no limit, but the needs are limited. An economy based on multiplying people's wants naturally leads to greed and immoral ways of amassing wealth.

Wealth creation through legal and ethical means without inflicting harm to the environment is needed for the progress of any society.

2. Pleasure without Conscience

It means the pursuit of sensuality and gratification without responsibility to God, others and oneself.





It also means enjoyment at the expense of others. People commit many crimes because they want enjoyment at the expense of others. The primary cause of sexual crimes, especially against women and children, is to satisfy one's desire for enjoyment without any consideration for the people who undergo suffering and humiliation. Those who indulge in these crimes fail to listen to their conscience.

Pleasure without conscience can lead to one's own destruction. Drug addiction, excessive consumption of alcohol, and diabetic patients eating forbidden food items are the results of the inability of people to control themselves. Practising self-control is essential not to become a victim of "pleasure without conscience".

3. Knowledge without Character

A person with knowledge but no character is not helpful to society. Sometimes, such persons can become dangerous to society because, in the absence of character, knowledge can be misused and abused for destructive purposes. The character represents a person's value system and the ability to choose between right and wrong. Hence, an education that imparts only knowledge without character can be very treacherous. Humanness is the essence of character. Against this backdrop, a quote from Dr. Haim Ginott, a child psychologist, educationist and survivor of the holocaust in Hitler's Germany, is very pertinent: "I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no person should witness. Gas chambers built by the learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies were shot by high school and college graduates. So, I am suspicious of education. My request is: Help your children become human. Your efforts must never produce learned

monsters or skilled psychopaths. Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human".

4. Business without Morality

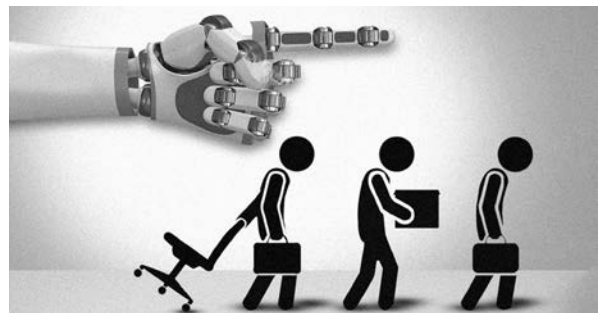
Contemporary society needs business to meet people's needs and provide employment. But business should not be based on cheating and making excessive profits. One of the prime objectives of starting any business by investing one's resources is making a profit. But making exorbitant profits or resorting to cheating is "business without morality".

Using any unfair business methods will ultimately harm the business itself. People may lose faith in the company or businessman if they come to know that unfair methods are being used. For example, the share prices of many Adani companies plummeted when the Hindenburg report accused Adani companies of stock manipulations and accounting fraud. The Adani companies took a few months to recover from their tremendous loss.

5. Science without Humanity

Progress in science and technology has contributed immensely to alleviating human suffering and providing various facilities. For example, a mobile phone with multiple uses is a wonderful gift of science and technology. At the same time, the misuse of science has caused untold suffering to people. Manufacturing mass-killer weapons, including different types of bombs, is an example of the misuse of science.

When scientific and technological inventions are used without considering humanity, they become a curse. What is required is making use of science for the well-being of humankind. Mahatma Gandhi was opposed to mechanisation that displaces human labour, but he supported the use of machines for reducing drudgery. Large-scale mechanisation and automation lead to mounting unemployment in





underdeveloped and developing countries. Experts are hotly debating whether increased use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robots will result in a large-scale loss of jobs.

Science and technology are meant for the well-being of human beings. Hence, any use of them should not harm human creativity and dignity.

6. Religion without Sacrifice

Religions have played antagonistic and positive societal roles. They have motivated and inspired millions of people to find meaning in life and to be altruistic. There are thousands of religion-based organisations involved in various developmental and welfare activities. At the same time, religion has been a divisive force in society. Many wars were fought, and millions of people died in religion-based fights and conflicts. Religion is being misused by terrorists to kill human beings.

Religion becomes a divisive force when it is politicised and commercialised. The core values taught by all religions are the same: love, forgiveness, compassion, honesty, etc. When religions overemphasise rituals, dogmas, prayers and building gigantic worship centres, etc., to neglect the core values taught by them, abuse of religion takes place.

Mahatma Gandhi firmly believed in Hinduism but rarely visited temples to worship God. He conducted inter-faith prayer in his ashrams. When the issue of the reconstruction of Somnath temple was brought to his attention, he said that the government should not spend its money on temple construction; it should be done by the members of the Hindu society.

Practising the core values of religions requires sacrifice from its followers. In the absence of sacrifice, religion becomes a show. In this show-off, religions compete with each other by building gigantic worship centres, erecting gigantic statues and organ-

ising mega-religious events. Often, this competitive religiosity leads to conflicts and violence. The followers of religions have to be on their guard so that vested interests, especially politicians, do not make use of religion for their selfish interests. This requires balancing bhakti with critical thinking or scientific temper.

7. Politics without Principle

Generally, political parties in any country are based on ideologies or principles. The ideological orientation of political parties could be right, left, or centre. Moreover, all political parties in any democratic country are expected to follow the principles and provisions of their country's constitution, as it is the very foundation of governance. Political parties compromising their ideologies and overriding the country's constitution to remain in power leads to misgovernance, violation of the fundamental rights of people and misuse of state institutions and agencies.

Mr Nitish Kumar, the Chief Minister of Bihar, is a classic example of "politics without principles". He had no hesitation in switching sides to join with the BJP party. Within ten years, he changed sides five times. The frequency of change earned him the pejorative "Paltu Kumar".

To capture power, the ruling parties were broken in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and MLAs were purchased in the recent past. The BJP has proved to be adept in breaking political parties opposed to it. This phenomenon exposes the type of political leaders India has. Their only aim appears to capture power and remain in power at any cost. They are least bothered about ideology, principles or ethics. This is the greatest tragedy of Indian politics and the failure of the Indian Nation.

Selfishness and self-centeredness are the root cause of all seven social evils. Unless individuals and communities emerge from their narrow shells of selfishness, the seven social evils will flourish. Spirituality based on the core values of religions can help people to break out of the shell of selfishness and become authentic human beings. The practice of the Gandhian ideals of Sarvodaya and Trusteeship effectively reduces the grip of seven social sins. ©

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Interim Budget: Women, children neglected

BY JASWANT KAUR

In her shortest speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman laid out the outline for the fiscal year 2024-25 during her presentation of the interim budget: "We need to focus on four major castes: 'Garib' (Poor), 'Mahilayen' (Women), 'Yuva' (Youth), and 'Annadata' (Farmer). Their needs, aspirations, and welfare are our highest priority. The country progresses when they progress. All four require and receive government support in their quest to better their lives."

The words would have sounded magical for people who form the "vote bank" of the ruling party. Moreover, the budget speech came across as a vision statement for the next 25 years, popularly called the Amrit Kaal, leading to a Viksit Bharat. More than the budgetary allocations, the finance minister praised the "profound positive transformation" that has happened during the last decade since the Narendra Modi Government came to power. "With the 'whole nation' approach of 'Sabka Prayas', the country overcame the challenge of a once-in-a-century pandemic, took long strides towards 'Atmanirbhar Bharat', committed to 'Panch Pran', and laid solid foundations for the 'Amrit Kaal'. As a result, our young country has high aspirations, pride in its present, and hope and confidence for a bright future. We expect that our government, based on its stupendous work, will be blessed again by the people with a resounding mandate," she said. If you think it was an election speech, you are highly mistaken!

The minister also laid down the core strategy of making India a developed nation by 2047 by empowering youth – the Amrit Peedi, in alignment with the "Panchamrit" Goals guided by the principles of "reform, perform, and transform." With all kinds of flowery words, the minister went on to praise the National Education Policy 2020, the PM Schools for Rising India (PMSHRI) for imparting quality education, the Skill India mission for up-skilling 1.4 crore youth, PM Mudra Yojana for sanctioning 43 crore loans, and so on. The list is indeed long. However,



these figures present a hunky-dory picture of India. But the fact remains that our children still struggle to get quality education.

The recent Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) shows how 14 to 18-year-old adolescents in rural India still struggle to read basic textbooks and cannot perform basic calculations in day-to-day financial decisions. The digital world is preoccupying our youth. Yet, they rarely use technology to enhance their knowledge or read books. Will these children be able to contribute to the growth of our country? Or will they be able to complete higher education or learn any skill to support their family with a basic income? The answer is not in the affirmative. After reading the report, many state governments decided to take action to improve their educational standard. Some of them announced surprise checks and tests in the schools.

What would have been basic expectations from the budget in such a scenario? We will not be able to become a developed nation if we are not focusing on our children's fundamental rights, including schooling. The Department of School Education and Literacy has introduced NISHTHA (National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers' Holistic Advancement) for capacity building of the teachers to improve learning outcomes. Not only this, the department



has also taken steps to strengthen vocational training programs in schools. Unfortunately, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, realigned for implementing the national educational policy 2020, received an allocation of Rs. 37,500 crores, barely 0.12 per cent higher than the previous year.

If one looks at the decade-long budgetary allocation for programs concerning the development of children, it has reduced from 4.52 per cent in 2014-15 to 2.3 per cent in 2024-25. Despite an increase of 8.73 per cent in crime against children, as per NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) data, not much has been done to increase the budget for child protection. The budget does not mention the National Child Labour Project (NCLP) for rescuing and rehabilitating child labourers. It is a known fact that children are often forced to work to supplement the family income of those living in extreme poverty, putting them at a considerable risk of trafficking, jeopardising their well-being, subjecting them to extreme trauma, and taking away their chances of living a healthy and dignified life.

Several educational schemes for children belonging to minority communities have received a drastic cut. The 'Education Scheme for Madarsas and Minorities' was allocated only Rs. 2 crore against Rs. 10 Crore in 2023-24. Similarly, the 'Free Coaching and Allied Scheme' received only ₹10 Crore against Rs. 30 crore last year. The 'Pre-matric Scholarship for Minorities' saw a massive reduction of almost 25 per cent.

In stark contrast, the allocation for post-matric scholarships for minorities was increased by 7.55 per cent. However, the question is, if a child from a marginalised community does not get enough support during primary and elementary education, how can one expect them to reach the post-matric level?

Some of the few schemes that saw a substantial increase in budgetary allocations are Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), PM SHRI, Saksham Anganwari and Poshan 2.0, SAMARTHYA, and the National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child



Development. However, this is within the overall 2.30 per cent budget, which boils to 0.33 per cent of the GDP!

As far as women are concerned, the allocations for the schemes for women's safety have been increased from Rs. 321 crore to Rs. 955 crore. However, the allocations for the Protection and Empowerment for Women scheme have mostly remained the same with Rs 3,146 crore allocated to it. The finance minister's speech did mention the female workforce participation rate, Mudra loans for women, etc. However, the central focus has remained on promoting self-help groups (Lakhpati didis). What schemes are being planned to encourage female participation in the workforce is not clear. Naari Shakti may have been used as a word several times to gain attention, but nothing substantial is there in the interim budget.

While the budget will be presented in July this year, the interim budget reflects the government's intent. It does not make significant announcements/schemes/promises to achieve Viksit Bharat's vision in 2047. Unlike the interim budget of 2019-20, which saw the announcement of several schemes, it is devoid of new welfare schemes. In fact, the allocations for most of the welfare schemes, especially for children, are being reduced with every consecutive year.

The only promise made is that of a white paper focusing on the Modi government's achievements, something not many would be interested in. It is important to note that this or the upcoming generation will not become the 'Amrit Peedi' unless proper investments are made for their future. The dream of a developed India remains only on paper. ☹

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Gandhi's Ramarajya vs Modi's Ramrajya

BY JEEVAN PRABHU SJ

I mean by Ramarajya—Divine Raj, the kingdom of God. Ramarajya of my dream ensures equal rights alike of Prince and Pauper.... Ramarajya is undoubtedly one of true democracy.... (Young India, September 19, 1929)

On January 22 in Ayodhya, the Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi, presided over the Pranapatistha ceremony at the Ram Mandir. In his speech after that, he claimed that the event heralded the birth of a new era. Further, he declared that the foundation for the next thousand years had been laid. The Sangh Parivar, its allies, and sympathisers announced that India is moving towards *Ramarajya*. The term *Ramarajya* was close to the heart of Mahatma Gandhi, and it was his vision for an independent India. This article attempts to understand the concept of *Ramarajya* as used by the Father of the Nation and the reality in India today.

Gandhi's Idea of Ramarajya

According to Gandhi's political philosophy, *Ramarajya* literally means *Rajya* or reign of *Rama*. *Rama* being the seventh avatar of Lord Vishnu, *Ramarajya* could be understood as the 'reign of Lord Vishnu or God'. In the common parlance, *Ramarajya* is a 'perfect democracy'.

Gandhi wrote in *Hind Swaraj* in 1929, "By *Ramarajya*, I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean by *Ramarajya*, a Divine Raj, the Kingdom of God. For me, *Rama* and *Rahim* are one and the same deity. I acknowledge no other God but the one God of Truth and righteousness."

For Gandhi, the state embodies a relationship between the government and its citizens. The state unites its people into a community and provides all possible means for its well-being, security and development. The state functions in the common interest without neglecting the last individual's interest (*Anthyodaya*). Gandhi's concept of *Ramarajya* is inspired by morality, ethics, and spirituality, as *Rama* is believed to embody all these virtues. Therefore, in *Ramarajya*, laws are guided by morality, power is



decentralised, and the interests of every individual are attended to.

According to Gandhi, religion binds one inextricably to the Truth within and purifies one's thoughts, intentions and actions. For Gandhi, there is no religion higher than Truth and Righteousness. Religion and morality go hand in hand. Therefore, one who loses morality ceases to be religious. For India, which is heterogeneous, multireligious, and characterised by inter-caste and inter-religious problems, Gandhi proposed the concept of *Ramarajya*, which is based on morality and virtues. Not one religion's dominance over other religions. *Rama* is the embodiment of morality and virtues. *Rama* is Truth incarnate. Truth is God. Every religion worships 'Truth'. Therefore, the end of all religions is Truth. But the means to achieve this end may be varied. Different religions may perceive the *Ramarajya* in different terms. Muslims may call it 'Khudai Raj'. For Christians, it is the 'Kingdom of God'. Or 'Dharmarajya' may be a more inclusive word.

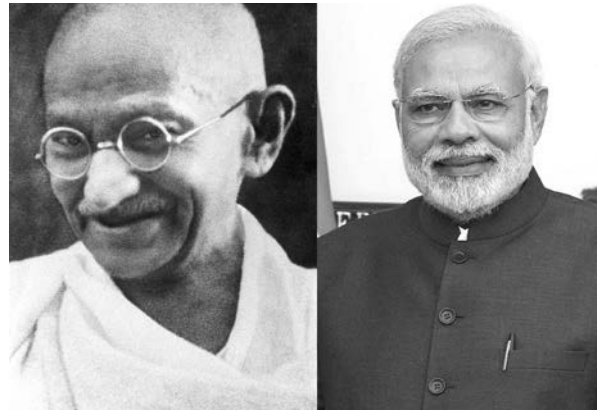
In *Dharmarajya* or *Ramarajya*, every individual is of great value. No one should be discriminated against on any basis whatsoever. Gandhi was against any social discrimination, so he called for eradicating untouchability. *Ramarajya*, of his dreams, ensures equal rights to princes and paupers alike.

Features of Gandhi's Ramarajya:

Gandhi's Ramarajya is a reign characterised by wisdom, compassion, morality and justice. The following are some of its features:

- **Equal status of all:** In Gandhi's Ramarajya, all individuals are equal regardless of their caste, creed or gender and therefore, all must have equal opportunities and rights.
- **Equal distribution of resources:** Gandhi's Ramarajya is where there are no rich or poor, no class conflict, where there is an equal distribution of national resources, and where there is a self-sufficient economy. The nation's wealth is to be used to serve the common good. The prosperity of the country should be shared by all its citizens. In such a Ramarajya, the wealthy and powerful would act as trustees and use their resources for the betterment of the poor and the needy.
- **Decentralised Power:** Ramarajya of Gandhi advocates local self-government and decentralisation of power. Decisions that affect the local people should be made locally, involving people at the grassroots level.
- **Morality and Spiritual Values:** Ramarajya of Gandhi's dreams is governed by morality and spiritual values. Truth, love, compassion, and forgiveness are characteristic values of every citizen, and an Individual's conscience should be his or her guiding light.
- **A Just Society:** In this Ramarajya, no one is above the law, and all should be treated justly. Self-discipline is the most crucial ingredient of justice. A self-disciplined person respects the rights of others as well.
- **Non-Violence:** Non-violence is Ramarajya's mantra. All violence should be done away with, and all conflicts should be resolved peacefully. Non-violence and Satyagraha are the means to press for one's rights.
- **Education for Empowerment:** For Gandhi, education is essential for the development of individuals and the whole society. He emphasised the importance of holistic education, including intellectual and moral development.

In the background of these features of Gandhi's Ramarajya, let us cast a bird's eye view on the Modi' Ramarajya' during the past ten years, its relentless attempts with phenomenal success to communalise and polarise the Indian society and how it has undermined the democratic values of the Indian



Constitution. The Ram Mandir movement catapulted the Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) to power in 2014. Notwithstanding the promises of efficient and corruption-free governance, the country witnessed a gradual and steady onslaught on its democracy and its institutions. The governance was transformed into totalitarianism with religious hegemony. When Gandhi's concept of Ramarajya is juxtaposed with that of Mr Narendra Modi, one may get a fair idea of what the Sangh Parivar and its allies meant by Ramarajya and what to expect in the coming years.

- **Poverty and Unemployment:** Most of India's public enterprises have been handed over to corporates. About 10.1% of people have been affected by unemployment. Rising prices of food grains and commodities of daily consumption are soaring to the skies. The lives of rural and urban poor have been reduced to abject poverty. Many young Indians leave the country to pursue education and jobs in foreign lands.

Demonetisation grounded the economy almost to a halt. Sales, traders' incomes, production, and employment nose-dived. Small producers and traders lacking capital to stay afloat were shut down. India's multitude of daily wage workers could not find employers with the cash to pay them. Local industries suspended work for lack of money. The informal financial sector, which conducts 40% of India's total lending, predominantly in rural areas, collapsed.

- **Socio-Economic Inequality:** According to Oxfam's Report "Survival of the Richest: The India story", the rich have grown richer and the poor poorer over the past decade. The wealthiest 1% in India now own more than 40% of the country's total wealth, while the bottom half of the population together share just 3% between 2012 and 2021. The report also highlighted gender inequality in India, stating

that female workers earned only 63 paise for every 1 rupee earned by male workers.

The Scheduled Castes and rural workers are the worst affected. They earned only 55% and half of what the advantaged social groups earned, respectively, between 2018 and 2019. Oxfam India stated that the country's marginalised communities, such as Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims, Women, and informal sector workers, are continuing to suffer in a system that prioritises the survival of the richest.

Thanks to the implementation of GST, the poor in India are paying disproportionately higher taxes and spending more on essential items and services compared to the rich.

- **Standard of Education:** In an era of science, technological revolution, and artificial intelligence making inroads into daily lives, the country's education system is being taken back to primitive times. Everything from science to history is being mythicised in such a primitive manner that India has become a laughing stock at the international level. The following findings of the latest ASER report titled "Beyond Basics" smack at the face of the country with a pathetic scenario of our educational standard.
 1. About 25% of this age group still cannot fluently read a standard II-level text in their regional language.
 2. More than half struggle with division (3-digit by 1-digit) problems. Only 43.3% of 14-18-year-olds are able to do such problems correctly. This skill is usually expected in Std III-IV.
 3. A little over half of the surveyed group between 14 and 18 can read sentences in English (57.3%). Almost three-quarters of those who can read sentences in English cannot tell their meanings (73.5%).
- **Religious Intolerance and Discrimination:** Ram, who was an avatar of God, is taking the avatar of a destroyer. Hailed as the 'Maryadapurusha' and 'Purushottama', Rama's values have been thrown into the winds. Hatred, intolerance and vilification of minority religions are being disseminated in all possible ways, the media being the leading national channel for this purpose.

The Indian constitution provides for freedom of conscience and the right of all individuals to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion; as a secular state, it requires the state to treat all religions impartially and prohibits discrimination based on religion.

But the ground reality is devastating.

- Thirteen states in the Indian Union have passed laws prohibiting religious conversions for all faiths. Some states have imposed penalties and severe punishments against religious conversions, even for the purpose of marriage.
- The police and law enforcement authorities have been let loose on minorities in the states like Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. They harass, persecute, penalise and even publicly flog men of minority religions based on allegations. Some state governments have bulldozed Muslim-owned homes and shops following communal violence. A report drafted by a Citizens Committee stated that there were "multiple instances of apparent police complicity" in violent actions against protestors, who were chiefly Muslim, in the Delhi riots in 2020.
- In its report, the 'Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC)' said Christians were "increasingly targeted using these anti-conversion laws," as "allegations of forced conversion, no matter if false, have led many Christians to be attacked, arrested and detained by police." In several BJP-ruled states, the Sangh Parivar's foot soldiers disrupted Christian prayer assemblies, desecrated Christian churches and beat up Christian congregations. The police either witnessed the attacks, sometimes joined the miscreants and finally arrested the Christians alleging conversion.
- In its annual report, the NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) said the government "continued its systematic discrimination and stigmatisation of religious and other minorities, particularly Muslims."
- United Christian Forum (UCF) said till November 26, 2022, 511 anti-Christian incidents around the country had been reported to its hotline, compared to 505 in all of 2021. It urged the government to take action in response to these incidents. The Modi administration maintained a deafening silence.
- Religious leaders, academics, political figures, and activists made inflammatory public remarks about religious minorities. The cries of minorities, the anguish of the right-thinking citizens and letters of senior government officials and retired bureaucrats did not cut any ice with the Prime Minister.

Justice for all?

The state violates the Constitutional rights to freedom of speech and the right to dissent daily. Any crit-

icism of the ruling dispensation or public disagreement with its policies is construed as 'anti-national' and an act of 'sedition'. Protests or demonstrations are silenced in the name of national interest, and human rights are violated with impunity. Here are five instances out of the many others that signify the slow but steady withdrawal of the promise of social justice enshrined in the Constitution of India.

I. Public Lynchings:

The public lynching incidents have steadily increased since 2014. Muslims, Dalits and other minorities have been victims of public lynching based on false allegations.

II. Arrests of Journalists

At least fifty-five journalists have faced arrest and imprisonment for practising their profession and exercising freedom of speech and expression on various issues of national concern. Journalists arrested on charges of sedition during the Modi rule include Siddique Kappan, Prashant Kanojia, Rahul Kulkarni, Dhaval Patel and many others.

III. Misuse of the UAPA

The UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act) has been misused as a weapon to subdue social activists or human rights activists. The Elgar Parishad-Bhima

Koregaon case, the arrest of journalists in Kashmir, and the violence against activists in the Delhi riots cases are but a few examples. The incarceration of 83-year-old Stan Swamy and his murder in the police custody has stirred the nation's conscience.

IV. Police Atrocities

The protest of Students of Jamia Millia Islamia against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was brutally handled by the Delhi Police. The police were given a free hand to enter the university campus, to thrash the students and to damage university property. JNU also saw a similar ferocity.

V. The Manipur Ethnic strife

The state-sponsored ethnic cleansing in the BJP-ruled state of Manipur set ablaze the state. The gross human rights violations and wanton killings and pillage are the orchestrated events. The rape, the naked parade and the torture of women of the Kuki tribe are the ultimate blot on Indian democracy. Aren't these the 'Sita Matas' in Modi's Ramarajya?

If this scenario is the foretaste of Modi's Ramarajya, one shudders to think what will be the actual Ramarajya that is envisioned by the Sangh Parivar on the occasion of 'Pranapatishtha' of Ram Mandir at Ayodhya. ©



Sr. Jonita Appointed as Secretary for the CCBI Commission for Ecology

Sr. Jonita Dundung (38), belonging to the Ursuline Sisters of the Congregation of Tildonk (OSU), Ranchi Province, was appointed as the Executive Secretary to the CCBI Commission for Ecology. The CCBI Executive Committee made the appointment in its meeting held on January 30, 2024, in Bangalore.

Born on August 19, 1986, in Jaidega Nawatoli, Odisha, Sr. Jonita pursued her early education at Jhunmur High School in Odisha. She dedicated her life to the Ursuline Sisters of the Congregation of Tildonk, Ranchi Province, making her first profession on December 8, 2007, and solidifying her commitment with the final vows on September 9, 2015.



Armed with a master's in social work from the National Institute of Social Work and Social Science, Bhubaneswar, Sr. Jonita brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to her social and environmental apostolate. Her professional journey includes impactful work with children with disabilities in Purnea, Bihar, from 2013 to 2016, and dedicated service as the in-charge of domestic workers in Delhi from 2016 to 2018.

Since 2018, Sr. Jonita has served as the Director of Asha Kiran Shelter Home for rescued children in Khunti, Jharkhand, demonstrating her commitment to social welfare and the well-being of vulnerable communities.

Bihar: After the Judas Kiss

BY **FRANK KRISHNER**

For the common man walking along the streets of Patna, there is no doubt about it. Despite the thick winter fog on Sunday, January 28, it became as clear as crystal: Nitish Kumar is a snollygoster.

"I resonate with what Shashi Tharoor called the man. A snollygoster. Nitish is a vile, unprincipled politician, and we feel betrayed. Every fellow who voted for the Janata Dal united in the last election, didn't want to see the BJP in power. We didn't press the button in favour of the BJP!" spluttered my colleague over his cappuccino.

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar had just walked out of his alliance with the Rashtriya Janata Dal, ditched the liberal politics of the INDIA tent, and waltzed into the arms of the right-wing BJP. The next day, without shame, he was sworn in as Chief Minister of Bihar for the ninth time, leaning on the shoulders of the people he recently accused of undermining the nation's fabric.

Over the past few months, citizen groups in Bihar have been coming together to devise strategies to counter the right-wing narrative. The overarching concern among social activists, democratic alliances, women's groups, and liberal-minded citizens is the Centre's systemic disregard for ethics and Constitutional values. They pinned their hopes on 'maha-gathbandhan' or The Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance comprised of the regionally strong Nitish Kumar (JDU) and Tejaswi Yadav (RJD) as well as the Congress and the left parties. Several middle-class Christians who favoured the more urbane Nitish and his JDU over the rustic Lalu and his RJD compare him to a Judas who has betrayed the people's trust.

The convenor of the Bihar Nagarik Adhikar Manch (BNAM), a citizen's ecumenical and multi-faith group, spoke to me over the phone, with undisguised disgust, "These fellows in the INDIA alliance, are they just good for nothing? Nitish is a traitor. Congress and the other parties can't seem to come to a proper understanding. Are we just wasting our time trying to organize our people?"

Other political observers persuade us not to lose hope. Nitish Kumar's joining the BJP is not as big a



deal as it is made out to be. Journalist and commentator Deepak Sharma says that the cracks are showing. He says Narendra Modi isn't sure the Ayodhya Ram Temple ploy is working with the masses. He points out that Kumar is seen as a liability within BJP circles. "Modi's guarantee has no guarantee," media commentator Ashok Wankhede declared. He argued that the inner circle knows that the Modi Guarantee is hollow, and that's the reason why it is so important to silence Nitish, Kejriwal, and Hemant Soren and to harass Lalu Prasad.

"Many of our young people will rally around Tejaswi Yadav and Rahul Gandhi because they bring fresh ideas. The minority groups can place their trust in them. They will stand strong against the right-wing forces," says Abhishek, an undergraduate student. Even though it has a stout track record of fighting the Hindutva right wing, the middle-classes generally are wary of the Rashtriya Janata Dal because of the 'Jungle Raj' image and over a decade of non-development during the Lalu Prasad regime.

"Personally, I feel that Tejaswi Yadav is a fine young man, and he is sincere. But he must shed the baggage of the past. Patna cannot forget the anarchy during his father's regime. The party image needs to change in order to gain a following among the educated middle class," says media practitioner and educationalist Amitabh Ranjan. "We are doing what we can," said AICUF mentor and professor Mario Martin, whom I bumped into at a voter enrol-

ment campaign held recently at the Queen of Apostles Parish in Kurji. "We are trying to ensure that all citizens from our parish area, all those who have reached the voting age, are enrolled. We are helping them to fill up the online voter application forms. We appeal to them to use their votes wisely. And then we hope. And pray."

The new BJP-infused regime has worrying implications for minorities. "We have to be on the watch out for the rise of violence against Christians in rural Bihar," Mukund Singh, a worker with the RJD, told me. There was a good chance of a communal flare-up during the Holi season or even earlier,

and the Muslims must be on their guard, another commented. It's going to be an arduous journey ahead. The saffron flags perched atop street lamps and market stalls on January 22 are still fluttering. Snatches of aggressive-sounding slogans and songs can still be heard.

But as one commentator said, a democracy cannot work on blind faith alone. It is time to stand up and be counted. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

FRANK KRISHNER is a journalist, human rights activist, and media educator based in Bihar.



Indian bishops review Rome synod, Manipur, challenges faced by Christians

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) began its 36th general body meeting on January 31 with a solemn Mass at St. John's Auditorium in Bengaluru. The chief celebrant was Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, the Apostolic Nuncio to India and Nepal. In his message, Archbishop Girelli highlighted the importance of zeal, commitment, and joy in following the teachings of Jesus Christ. He emphasised the responsible use of artificial intelligence for the benefit of humanity, highlighting its ethical aspects. He also stressed the necessity to impart such knowledge in seminaries and ongoing clergy formation.

CBCI president Archbishop Andrews Thazhath spoke about the ten-month-old ethnic violence in the northeastern Indian state of Manipur and thanked fellow bishops for responding against human atrocities in a Christian manner.

The second day of the General Body Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) on February 1 saw the participants review the outcome of the Rome Synod on Synodality, the Manipur crisis and the situation of Christians across the country.

Cardinal Oswald Gracias, who played a pivotal role in the Synod in Rome in October 2023, presented the theme, "The Fruits of the Synod on Synodality." The cardinal described the synod as a renewed call of Vatican II, stressing the role and responsibility of God's people in the Church.

He said that one of the synod's innovations was "conversation in the Spirit," a process that involved time to internalise discussions, fostering mature

discernment and consensus.

Archbishop Linus Neli of Imphal, who addressed the present status of Manipur, expressed immense gratitude for the spiritual and humanitarian assistance provided by bishops and NGOs to his strife-torn people.

He highlighted the demographic, historical, and ethnic aspects of Manipur, shedding light on the relief and rehabilitation efforts by the Catholic Church. He explained the devastating destruction of approximately 300 churches and thousands of homes, the closure of numerous educational institutions, and the displacement of thousands of people.

He said the peace process is gradual, and it will take time.

Robin Christopher, deputy director of Strategic Litigation, ADF India, discussed the "All India Situation of Christians," shedding light on the challenges Christians face, including violence and false cases of conversion.

In other significant activities, Father Aloysius Ephrem Raju Alex, secretary of the Catholic Council of India (CCI), presented a comprehensive report on the council's historical development, financial matters, and strategic planning.

Sister Shimy Varghese, a Daughters of the Heart of Mary member and secretary of the newly formed CBCI Office for Environment and Climate Change reported on the National Conference on Ecology held at Dharmaram, Bengaluru. ©

Courtesy: Matters India

Stunting Intellectual Growth in Institutions of Higher Learning!

BY G. RAMACHANDRAM

In recent times, academic freedom in universities across India has deteriorated. We read how the dissenting opinions were crushed in varsities - public universities such as the Central University, Hyderabad, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi University, Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Milia Islamia, Jadavpur University, Visva Bharati, and private universities like Ashoka University and the Symbiosis International University, Pune, to name a few. These universities were in the news for stifling free academic discourse within their campuses.

However, what is still more disturbing is how free expression of academic views is suppressed by an elite institution of India - the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay. The elite Institute, having invited a month ago Prof. Ganesh Devy, a recipient of the Padma Shri Award - has, at the last minute, cancelled his lecture on *The Crisis Within: On Knowledge and Education in India*, scheduled on 31 January, "due to unforeseen circumstances". They also recently cancelled a lecture on Palestine: The Historical Context by Prof. Achin Vanaik and a conference on Cultures of the Political Left in Modern India.

Per the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings, 2023, IIT Bombay ranks 1st in India

and 172 globally. The Institute has a score of 86.5 in employer reputation, 55.1 in citation per faculty, 53.3 in academic reputation, 76.7 in employment outcome, 25.8 in faculty-student ratio, 3.9 in international faculty, 58 in international research network and 1.6 in international students, all scores out of a maximum of 100 points. Among these nine parameters, Employer Reputation indicated the strongest one for IIT Bombay, with a global rank of 86.5.

There is a mismatch between the world rankings and academic autonomy and freedom of expression in the institutions ranked; the extent of academic intolerance is not reflected in the ratings. These ratings are calculated based on specific parameters, which are not rational and universally true and partial to the Western concept of higher education that primarily caters to the requirements of the corporate world. It is inexplicable why Indian universities are so crazy about chasing these ratings when the education ecosystem in India is vastly different.

The IIT Bombay, of late, has gained notoriety. It is the first Institute that recently segregated the students in the hostel mess based on their vegetarian and non-vegetarian food preferences. And now it has come out with a gag order curbing freedom of academic expression on campus.

A scheduled lecture on 'Israel-Palestine: The Historical Context' by a retired Delhi University Professor Achin Vanaik, organised by the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), was cancelled at the behest of a protest by some right-wing students. Professor Sharmishtha Saha of the Department organised a documentary screening and guest lecture by theatre artist Sudhanva Deshpande. A PhD student, Omkar Superkar, recorded the guest lecture on the Palestinian situation on his mobile and posted it online. It led to a protest by an obscure right-wing outfit - Vivek Vichar Manch. Subsequently, a group of students from the Institute filed a complaint at the Powai Police Station, alleging that





Deshpande praised Zakaria Zubeidi, associated with the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, a coalition of Palestinian armed groups. Anonymous phone calls and posts on social media platforms called Professor Saha a traitor, and death threats were issued to her.

Subhasis Chaudhuri, the Institute's Director, instead of taking action against the student who recorded the lecture, despite objection and shared it with the outside extreme right-wing outfit and the other students for sullyng the image of the institution, the Institute has now issued draconian guidelines for the faculty and the students. According to the guidelines, public events organised by faculty should be approved by the head of the academic unit; hereafter, authorities will clear invitations to external speakers and screening documentaries, even for academic purposes. Students cannot organise any event except through the bodies recognised by the Institute. Protest marches or gatherings on campus require prior permission from the Institute and police. Violation of these guidelines will invite disciplinary action.

What is happening to our vibrant academic culture in institutions of higher learning? What is the use of getting a high ranking when the institutions do not understand and acknowledge the importance of different points of view? What is the purpose of higher learning if the mind is controlled and not allowed to express freely? How can students grow intellectually if they cannot express a contrary view? What will the students do? "Bury their heads in the computers and never look up!"

Evidently, the national premier institute - IIT Bombay - prioritises political patronage over the pursuit of knowledge. What is its purpose if the humanities and social sciences department cannot invite guests who speak on burning national and international issues, irrespective of political connotations?

This conditioning of thought processes and intolerance of opinions contrary to that of the political establishment spells doom for our Higher Education. Irreparable damage is already done to HEIs, with persons owing allegiance to a particular political ideology appointed to run them. The academics and professional organisations are occupied with organising seminars and conferences to glorify the virtues of NEP, extending unquestioned support to its votaries - UGC and Education Ministry - and preferring to remain silent on the real issues afflicting higher education. The nation will pay a heavy price for this indulgence. Higher learning is reduced to a farcical exercise of an unimaginable magnitude.

The IIT Bombay has brought disrepute, a blot if considered a serious institution for exchanging ideas and intellectual discourse. Its authoritarian streak demonstrates poor academic and administrative leadership and a lack of vision. It is sidestepping the objective that "an institution of higher learning must be a safe place where students must not be intellectually mollycoddled or corralled.

Different views can only widen their worldview and sharpen their cognitive process. Taking the easy way out - making political discussion verboten will hurt the Institution". The institution should remain the centre of authentic learning, where students can access different views, examine them and question all assumptions. After all, politics is part of any intellectual exchange.

Students in many US universities and elsewhere have protested against Israel's bombing and killing of civilians in Gaza. It is unthinkable that an elite Institution in India doesn't even allow a free discussion on the Israel-Palestinian conflict, uncharacteristic of an academic institution. This is McCarthyism-using McCarthyist tactics against Palestinian sympathisers.

And "when even elite institutions succumb to prohibitions so easily, it speaks very poorly for the prospects of free inquiry, that should, in fact, thrive in the scholarly ecosystem. Think about how unpopular the ideas of Galileo Galilei and Charles Darwin were in their own time. At a time when extreme polarisation is doing widespread harm to the social good, universities are uniquely placed to teach young citizens how to listen to discomfiting opinions instead of only occupying echo chambers". Our institutions of higher learning are stunting the intellectual growth of students in their attempt to be politically correct, doing a disservice to their profession. ©

May They All Be One

BY **CHHOTEBHAI**

A person's dying wish is sacred. Jesus' last desire, when "he raised his eyes to heaven" (Jn 17:1), was "that they may be one like us" (v11) and again "May they all be one" (v21). Jesus' call to oneness (unity) of his disciples was based on his deep relationship with the Father. That being so, can Christian unity be an optional extra for his disciples?

Ecumenism is rooted in the Greek *oikoumene*, which means "the whole inhabited world". It is not just about unity among Christians, even though that is what it is usually associated with. We have just concluded the Christian Unity Octave (CUO), which is celebrated every year between the 18th and 25th of January. This is a joint effort of the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. Is it an annual ritual or something deeply spiritual, like the Father-Son relationship?

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) took ecumenism seriously with its decree "Unitatis Redintegratio". It affirms that "Promoting the restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the chief concerns of the Second Vatican Council" (UR 1). "The Catholic Church accepts them with respect and affection as brothers" (UR 9). "Worship in common is not merely possible but is recommended" (UR 15).

This is because the "Dogmatic Constitution of the Church" (Lumen Gentium) minces no words when it states, "The Church recognises that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptised, are honoured with the name of Christian ... Likewise in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy

Spirit ... In Christ's disciples, the Spirit arouses the desire to be peacefully united" (LG 15).

Perhaps the most beautiful expression of unity is found in the Psalms, "How good, how delightful it is to live as brothers all together. It is like fine oil on the head, running down Aaron's beard onto the collar of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon falling on the heights of Zion, for there Yahweh bestows his blessings, everlasting life" (Ps 133:1-3)

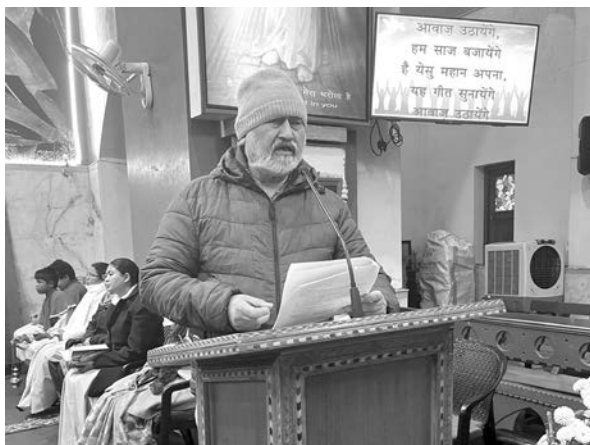
The saddest day in church history is probably July 16, 1054, when two papal legates left a papal bull (notification) on the altar of the church of Patriarch Michael Cacrularius in Constantinople (Istanbul today), ex-communicating him and his followers. The bull was signed by Pope Leo IX, who ironically died on April 19, 1054, while his legates were still on their way to Constantinople. In a tit-for-tat move, the Patriarch ex-communicated the Pope and all the Western churches. This came to be known as the Great Schism of the East.

I have two questions. How could a papal bull be executed when there was a *sede vacante* (the chair was vacant)? The death of the Pope at such a time could also have meant that the Lord of love and unity was not pleased with this divisive act!

This mutual ex-communication (I have never been comfortable with the term) between the Catholic and Orthodox churches took 911 years to be revoked when Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagorus embraced each other in 1965. That is one long wait. Can we allow any rift to drift for so long in today's fast-paced world of instant and breaking news?

If I understand correctly, the Catholic Church's earlier attitude was that of the Father looking out for his prodigal son(s) to return to the fold in organic unity. In India, this found fruition on September 20, 1930, when a part of the Malankara Church in Kerala, led by Metropolitan Archbishop Mar Ivanios, was received into full communion with the Catholic Church by the papal legate Bp Maria Benziger of Quilon. It is now known as the distinctive Syro-Malankara Rite within the Catholic Church. This re-unification apparently was the fruit of 300 years of strenuous efforts.

After Vatican II, I suspect the emphasis or goal



changed from organic to sacramental unity, especially with the Anglican, Episcopalian and Lutheran Churches, which seemed doctrinally closest to the Catholic Church. Here in India, members of sister churches are permitted to receive communion in the Catholic Church under certain conditions, like belief in the Holy Eucharist, being free from grave sin, and the non-availability of their own pastor. These are positive signs of a thaw in earlier frosty relations couched in a superiority complex.

Christian ecumenism has moved a step further. It is no longer restricted to organic or sacramental unity. The emphasis now is on unity of purpose and action and solidarity in times of crisis, the need of the hour. If not now, then when?

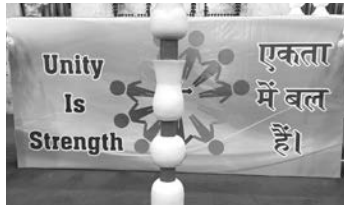
Like the 13th-century saint St Francis of Assisi, his namesake Pope Francis is firmly committed to ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. During this CUO, he invited the head of the Anglican Communion, Abp Justin Welby of Canterbury, to Rome. The latter celebrated the Eucharist in St Bartholomew's Church in Rome.

This got the hackles up of some supercilious Catholics. They termed this a heresy (another word that I detest), claiming that in 1896, Pope Leo XIII had declared that Anglican Orders were "absolutely null and utterly void", as reported by Robert Mickens in *La Croix International* this January 27. These supercilious beings used derogatory language against the Pope and the archbishop, sarcastically referring to the latter as "Mr Welby"!

This reminds me of the superciliousness of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were reprimanded by John the Baptist. "Brood of vipers ... do not presume to tell yourselves - We have Abraham for our father - because I tell you God can raise children for Abraham from these stones" (Mat 3:7,9). This is a sinister warning to those who consider themselves doctrinally or chronologically superior.

I was again chosen as the coordinator for this year's CUO in my hometown, Kanpur. We had 5 services, 2 in Catholic and CNI churches each and one in a Methodist one. I share some interesting sound bytes.

We ensured that the newly consecrated Bishop of Allahabad, Louis Mascarenhas, was present for one of the services. He gave two beautiful examples of lived ecumenism. In Allahabad, now Prayagraj, there



is a Bible Seminary with scholars from 32 different sister churches. In Etawah, also in UP, there is St Mary's Church that is used for services of both the Catholics and CNI. Even their pastors live together on the same campus.

This year, the organisers of the CUO chose "Unity is Strength" as their caller tune. Rev Nitin Cutting of All Souls' Church (CNI) said that unity did not mean uniformity; there could be unity in diversity. Rev Nitin Lal of the Methodist English Church gave an example of the NCC, whose motto was "Unity & Discipline". Unless we discipline ourselves, we will never be united.

Rev Antony K. K., Parish Priest of St Patrick's Church, fervently appealed for compassion and service to others to attain this goal. Dr Clarence Daniel, Principal of Christ Church Inter College, said that our ego is the biggest stumbling block to unity.

It reminded me of this little formula: EGO - E + D = GOD. Sometimes, just a minor course correction can work wonders. There is another course correction that I had proposed - to refrain from using the term "denominations", customarily used for currency notes. It was a term used by the colonial British to differentiate Christians. I always use the term "sister churches", which is more scriptural. "Let anyone who can hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (Rev 3:22). Notice that the word is used in the plural, not singular.

Kanpur has had a long ecumenical history. My experience dates back to 1971 when we organised a united Christmas carol programme. Thousands of Christians came out onto the streets in the 1970s against the draconian OP Tyagi Bill. In 1990, we took 13 buses to New Delhi for the rally at the Boat Club Lawns in support of Dalit Christians. During the floods on the banks of the Ganga, we organised a three-day medical relief camp. During the Kargil War in 1999, a large collection was made for the army welfare fund.

I am now reminded of the words of Rev Kenneth Sharp of the Brotherhood of the Ascended Christ, an Anglican religious order. "We may be divided on various issues - doctrinal, sacramental or ecclesiological. But we can always be united in service (diaconia). So be it (Amen). ☪

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CHHOTEBHAI is a social activist and civil rights crusader

The Indian Diocesan Clergy Pledge to Uphold the Constitution and Democracy in their Pastoral Engagements



The twentieth National Council of the Conference of the Diocesan Priests of India (CDPI) of the Conference of the Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) was held at the Diocesan Pastoral Centre, Jaipur, and Rajasthan from January 23-25, 2024. The theme of this path-breaking meet was 'Upholding the Constitution and Democracy: The Responsibility of the Diocesan Clergy of India Today'. One hundred fourteen diocesan priests from 51 dioceses from 12 regions participated in the event.

Retired judge of the Supreme Court of India, Justice Kurian Joseph, who delivered the keynote address, emphasized the need and importance of the Church (and particularly the clergy) to connect with mainstream Constitutionality, to help build communities and to shed our fears by keeping our faith firmly rooted in Christ. He lamented that too much of the Church personnel's time and efforts was spent doing 'maintenance' work. We are all called to preach, practice and propagate our religion. Sadly, he said, that as a Church, we spend very little time being witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus. He challenged the participants to get more involved in responding proactively to the cries of the people. He asserted that Democracy gives "space" and "voice" to the citizens, respects the dignity of the individual, and gives the freedom to assent and dissent. Democracy is more about "weighing heads" than "counting heads".

He also cautioned about some of the drawbacks prevalent today in the Church of India, includ-

ing (i) the lack of inter-faith communities, (ii) divisive tendencies, (iii) lack of Christian unitary leadership, (iv) counter-witnessing (v) corrective steps on the inside rather than on the outside and (vi) slow response to developing a humane and human society (vii) need to develop a Constitutional conscience along with a Christian conscience.

He concluded his keynote address by emphasizing today's prophetic call of diocesan clergy to integrity, which includes "becoming a sacrifice", "becoming a disciple", and "giving to God His due" and inspiring all the people with whom we associate, rather than a handful of parishioners, through Christian values widens the scope of our mission. Evangelization is the invitation to go closer to Christ, to build a community inspired by Christ's teaching and His disciples' example.

The participants also had the opportunity to listen to some powerful testimonies from Fr Bisu Benjamine Aind (Jharkhand), Fr Dileep Nanda (Gwalior) and Pastor Rajkumar (Jaipur). All three of them were persecuted because of their convictions and were imprisoned. Fr Francis Vialo of the Imphal Diocese shared about the current situation in Manipur, and it was cautionary for all Christians. Fr. Jaison Vadassery, the Executive Secretary of the CCBI Commission on Migrants, highlighted the pathetic situation of the migrants in our country and urged the diocesan clergy to be pastorally more responsive towards the migrants.

The Council also had meaningful inputs/homi-

lies from some of the hierarchy. These included Archbishop Raphy Manjaly (Archbishop of Agra and Chairman of ARBC) Bishop Varghese Chakkalakkal (Patron of CDPI and Bishop of Calicut), Bishop Joseph Kallarackal (Bishop of Jaipur), Bishop Athanasius Rethna Swamy (Bishop of Ahmadabad and Member Bishop of CCBI VSCR) and Bishop Emeritus Oswald Lewis of Jaipur.

The entire programme was highly participatory. There were opportunities for interactions and feedback. Well-known human rights and peace activist Jesuit Fr Cedric Prakash, as the Chief facilitator, ensured that the entire meeting was focused on the theme through his various interventions and skills and was enabled to arrive at a concrete plan of action in response. He presented his non-compromising stand for truth and justice during his deliberation on "Contextual Analysis of the Indian Situation: Concretization / Choice Process". He cautioned that Power, Privilege, Possession, Position and Pride

could be the death knell for priests. He stressed the need for a unified mission and vision. In a word, COMMITMENT is an absolute necessity because the journey ahead is long, rough and tough.

The result was a significant statement, which was unanimously passed by all the participants with a doable action plan.

The new office bearers were elected for 2024-2029 and are Dr. Roy Lazar of Vellore as President, Fr. Varghese Chakkarakadan of Jalandhar as Vice President and Fr. Kanauj Roy of Baruipur as joint secretary cum treasurer.

Fr Charles Leon, the Secretary of the CDPI, together with the outgoing office-bearers, the Agra Regional Team and the Jaipur Diocesan Team of the CDPI, went all out to make the XX Council of the CDPI a memorable and meaningful one for all! 🙏

Fr. Charles Leon
Secretary, CDPI



XXth CDPI National Council 2024 Statement

Date: January 23-25, 2024

Place: Diocesan Pastoral Center, Jaipur, Rajasthan

Theme: Upholding the Constitution and Democracy: Responsibility of the Diocesan Clergy of India Today

Facilitators: Justice Kurian Joseph and Fr. Cedric Prakash SJ

We, the 114 diocesan priests from 51 dioceses of the twelve regions of CCBI, deliberated on the theme "Upholding the Constitution and Democracy: The Responsibility of the Diocesan Clergy of India Today". We discussed, discerned and resolved an action plan statement for ourselves to make our Pastoral Engagements more fruitful and effective.

As citizens of this nation, we are engaged in various activities that relate to our mother land. We uphold the values enshrined in our Constitution, containing our duties along with the promise to safeguard our rights and to provide 'democratic space' and a 'voice' to everyone and guaranteeing justice, liberty, equality, fraternity in this secular and socialistic society.

The citizens of our country also get opportunities to elect their leaders who are expected to uphold the aspirations of society and fulfill their dreams. We realize that today we live in difficult times where communalism, fundamentalism, casteism, consumerism, clericalism, polarization and criminalization hold sway. Several serious realities grip us and our country today. These include the ongoing violence on the tribals of Manipur and Jharkhand, and the atrocities on the minorities, particularly Christians.

Our loyalty is first to Triune God whom we revere and we unequivocally refrain from any compromise. We have been taught to give to God what belongs to God and to Caesar what belongs to Caesar.

In the above context, we commit ourselves to:

- Comply with all the requirements mandated by law that do not go against our Christian conscience; to ensure transparency, accountability and justice in all our transactions and dealings.

- Remain vigilant and address the dangers arising from fascism, fanaticism and fundamentalism.
- Go in search of the last, least and the lost ones.
- Take a stand against the criminalization of politics and the corporatization of natural resources of the indigenous and marginalized people which rightly belongs to them.
- Internalize and actualize servant-leadership through prophetic priesthood in the service of the excluded, exploited and the deprived of society,
- Collaborate with all women and men of goodwill, civil society movements and organizations, for the promotion of more just, equitable, dignified, fraternal and humane society.
- Strive to equip our people with the knowledge of their rights and duties enshrined in the Constitution,
- Motivate the eligible voters to get them enrolled and to exercise their franchise conscientiously.
- Uphold our pastoral response to welcome, protect, promote and integrate the migrants in our parish and diocesan communities.

Trusting in the Almighty God who provides wisdom and strength and in our Mother Mary who intercedes on our behalf, we commit ourselves to earnestly fulfill our resolution.

Fr. Roy Lazar
President

Most Rev. Varghese Chakkalakal
Patron

Fr. Charles Leon
Secretary

Christians refute 'conversion' allegation by Indian politician

Christian leaders have termed as "baseless" the allegation of religious conversions made against missionaries by the chief minister of a central Indian state. Vishnu Deo Sai, the new chief minister of Chhattisgarh state, accused Christian missionaries of converting poor people through their charitable works in the education and health sectors.

Sai, an indigenous tribal leader, assumed the post in December 2023 after his pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party won the assembly elections on November 17. While addressing a gathering in the state capital, Raipur, on January 28, Sai made a scathing attack on Christians. "Missionaries are in dominance; they are a dominant force in education and healthcare, and their ramifications are that they promote conversion under the pretext of providing health and education facilities," Sai said, as reported by the Organiser, a mouthpiece of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an umbrella forum of pro-Hindutva groups. "It [conversions] will be stopped," the magazine further quoted Sai.

Father Sebastian Poomattam, vicar-general of the Raipur archdiocese in the state capital, said the chief

minister's reported statement is "totally baseless." "It is not expected of a person holding such an important constitutional office to make allegations against a religious minority community without checking the real facts," he told UCA News on January 31.

The priest said there is no denying that Christian missionaries tirelessly work among the poor tribal people to provide them with education and health-care. "But that does not mean we are converting them. The allegation is absurd and disappointing," he added. Poomattam said Sai has studied in a missionary school and continues practising his religion. He urged the chief minister to introspect whether there is truth in the allegation he levelled against Christian missionaries on a public platform.

Chhattisgarh has seen a surge in violence against Christians after the pro-Hindutva party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in India in 2014. In November 2022, over 450 churchgoers from 16 villages in Narayanpur and Kondagaon districts fled their houses following large-scale violence and a social boycott of the community. ©

(Courtesy: UCANews)



Conference of Catholic Bishops of India

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All India Press Release

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30 January 2024

'Foster, Maintain and Strengthen Communion' Urges Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle

Bangalore, January 30, 2024 (CCBI): His Eminence Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization, delivered a message urging Bishops in India to foster, maintain and strengthen communion, particularly among the diverse Churches in India. Cardinal Tagle conveyed this special message to the Bishops attending the 35th Plenary Assembly of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) in Bangalore.

Emphasizing the importance of true fraternal communion, Cardinal Tagle stated, "It is essential to act in the spirit of genuine fraternal communion so that the Good News could be effectively and fruitfully preached. There should not be any room for disharmony or rivalry; the only aim of each Church is to give testimony to the life of Christ by being faithful disciples of the Master."

The message was eloquently conveyed by Archbishop George Antonysamy, Vice President of CCBI and the Archbishop of Madras Mylapore.

The 35th Plenary Assembly commenced with a solemn Eucharistic celebration on Tuesday, 30 January 2024, at the Nursing College Auditorium of St. John's National Academy of Health Sciences, Bangalore. His Excellency Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, Apostolic Nuncio to India and Nepal, presided over the celebration. Special prayers were offered for global peace and for the people in Manipur facing hardships.

The inaugural meeting, following the Eucharistic celebration, commenced with a prayer to the Holy Spirit, marked by the chanting of the traditional hymn 'Veni Creator Spiritus.' Dignitaries lit the traditional Indian lamp symbolizing the beginning of the Assembly.

Presiding over the meeting was His Eminence Filipe Neri Cardinal Ferrão, the President of CCBI and the Archbishop of Goa and Daman. Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, the Apostolic Nuncio, inaugurated the Assembly.

Archbishop George Antonysamy, Vice President of CCBI and Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore, welcomed the gathering. The annual report of CCBI was presented by Archbishop Anil Couto, Secretary General of CCBI and the Archbishop of Delhi. Rev. Dr. Stephen Alathara, the Deputy

Secretary General of CCBI, proposed the vote of thanks. The inaugural session concluded with a prayer led by His Eminence Anthony Cardinal Poola, Archbishop of Hyderabad.

During the Assembly, recently appointed Bishops were welcomed as members and a moment of silence was observed as a collective gesture of respect and remembrance for departed members of the Conference.

A particularly heartfelt tribute was offered to the memory of Cardinal Telesphore Toppo, the esteemed former President of the CCBI, who departed from this world on October 4, 2023. The Assembly stood united in honouring the life and contribution of Cardinal Toppo, a luminary whose presence continues to resonate in the hearts and minds of all who were touched by his person.

The 'Catholic Connect,' a Mobile App Platform designed to connect the Indian Catholic Community globally was officially launched. The app offers access to Spiritual Resources, Relevant News Information, Catholic Life Services, such as Health Insurance, Education, Jobs, etc., besides Emergency Assistance. Additionally, users can find nearby churches and avail services provided by the Church in India.

Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão released liturgical books, including the Weekday and Sunday Missals, along with User Guides for Canon Law and Complementary Norms of Canon Law.

The one-day meeting of CCBI dealt with several matters affecting the Latin Catholic Church in India, which comprises 132 dioceses and 196 Bishops.

The CCBI, through its 16 Commissions, 7 Departments and 4 Apostolates, animates the Church in India. The main Secretariat is in Bangalore, with extensions in Goa, Delhi and Pachmarhi in Madhya Pradesh.

As the Canonical National Episcopal Conference, the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) stands as the largest in Asia and the fourth largest in the world." ©

Rev. Dr. Stephen Alathara
Deputy Secretary General, CCBI

CCBI Releases Complementary Norms to the Code of Canon Law and User Guide for Book VI of the Code of Canon Law

The Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) releases two books: "Complementary Norms to the Code of Canon Law" and "User Guide for Book VI of the Code of Canon Law". His Eminence Filipe Neri Cardinal Ferrão released the two books during the 35th Plenary Assembly of the CCBI held on January 30, 2024, in Bangalore.

The 34th Plenary Assembly of the CCBI held on 24-30 January 2023, unanimously voted on the updated Complementary Norms prepared and presented by Rev. Prof. Dr. Merlin Rengith Ambrose (the Executive Secretary of the Commission for Canon Law and Other Legislative Texts in the CCBI and the Professor of Canon Law at St. Peter's Pontifical Seminary, Bangalore).

The revised Complementary Norms consist of 43 general decrees and were approved by the Dicastery for the Evangelization on August 8, 2023. Canon 455 authorises Bishops' Conferences to enact or adapt certain canonical provisions to suit the specific needs of their local Church. Building on this, the CCBI initially promulgated its own set of Complementary Norms in 1994.

The many recent modifications in the Code of Canon Law involved a meticulous revision of existing Complementary Legislations by the CCBI's Commission for Canon Law and Other Legislative Texts. The revision process was executed by Most Rev. Antonsamy Savarimuthu, the Chairman of the Commission, Rev. Dr. Merlin Rengith Ambrose, the Executive Secretary of the Commission, and Rev. Dr. Stephen Alathara, the Deputy Secretary General, with dedication, erudition and diligence. The insightful guidance of Cardinal Oswald Gracias steered the project towards precision. All these efforts and canonical erudition culminated in the revised legislation receiving the "recognitio" – official approval – from the Dicastery for Evangelization at the Holy See.

This extensive revision ensures that our Complementary Norms of CCBI remain aligned with the latest developments in the universal Church while addressing the specific context of the Catholic community in India. CCBI is grateful to the tireless



efforts of the Commission members, whose expertise and dedication were instrumental in bringing this project to fruition. The revised Complementary Norms cover many areas, including ecclesiastical governance, pastoral ministry, and the administration of Church property. It provides clarity and guidance for dioceses, parishes, and individual members of the faithful in navigating various legal matters.

This significant update marks a new chapter in the legal framework of the Catholic Church in India. The revised Complementary Norms will serve as a valuable resource for Bishops, canonists, chancery officials, and pastoral ministers in ensuring the smooth functioning of the Church and effectively responding to the pastoral needs of the faithful, always remaining faithful to the magisterium of the Catholic Church.

"Complementary Norms" and "User Guide for Book VI of the Code of Canon Law" stand as authoritative resources reflecting the comprehensive efforts of the CCBI, assisted by the Commission for Canon Law and Other Legislative Texts. The meticulous crafting of these documents stems from the collective wisdom and dedication exhibited during the assembly.

For those interested in obtaining copies, please contact ccbipublications@gmail.com or call +91-9886730224. ©

Rev. Dr. Stephen Alathara
Deputy Secretary General, CCBI

Challenge to be Energetic

BY P. A. JOSEPH

Here comes a man carrying on his shoulders a bundle of firewood. Someone asks him: "what is it that you are carrying". "I am carrying the source of energy; I cook my food with this; I make warm water to drink and to bathe; This keeps my room warm; I light up my house with this; this is the source of doing so many things around me; I have the power of energy with me". Albert Einstein, the great scientist, said that everything is energy. According to him, the whole universe is composed of energy. Whatever exists in the universe is energy. In that way, everything is due to energy; energy has no beginning, no end; it is eternal, so to speak. Einstein's reflection is fantastic.

Energy is the gift of the universe. We come across many dimensions and aspects of energy, and being energetic is one of them. We come across people, women and men, who exude energy; we also meet others who are not energetic. Of the latter, the epitaph is meaningful: "She/he was born in 1950, died in 2024, but never lived". We experience physical energy, mental energy, spiritual energy, etc. Also, we experience subconscious energy, which has much to do with our lives. Even subconscious energy is produced by our conscious energy. Being fully conscious, aware, creative, and interested in my work creates subconscious energy. I write, sing, play, and dance, and all these are influenced by my subconscious energy. In this way, conscious and subconscious energy work in close collaboration for a brilliant person.

Even when I sleep, my subconscious is functioning to support me. I must be energetic in thinking, working, or doing whatever is at hand. If I keep a positive vision, I will keep growing in my energetic life. This is led by my positive and optimistic attitude. Similarly, if I engage in negative actions like worry, hate, fear, suspicion, anger, and rage, I lose energy and harbour miserable conditions. I ruin myself. But I can remedy this through a positive mental attitude.

Our mental battery needs to be recharged when we feel that we are unduly sleepy or tired, unfriendly and suspicious, insulting and hostile, irritable, sarcastic or mean, nervous, excited, hysterical, worrisome, fearful, jealous, rash, ruthless,



excessively selfish, too much emotional, depressed, frustrated etc. In these mental situations, I must be action-oriented and develop a positive life attitude. Change of place, change of work area, willingness to ignore much of the tense issues, and sticking to one's own duty, etc., would help. In that way, energy is regained by physical strength, vitality, mental understanding and acceptance of the situation, etc.

One must experience the joy of a loving mother, a caring father, an affectionate son, and a lovely daughter, and all these extended to the friends in the neighbourhood. Apart from these, constantly examine the energy level, whether it is directed to proper channels or is short-circuited and wasted, the source of physical and spiritual atmosphere, how to avoid neutralising fatigue, reading inspirational books, and thus be energetic and act energetically. The energetic person that you are is your magnificent gift to the world. ☺



Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

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The Missing Spectacles..!

On silver sands on a beachfront, my pair of reading glasses looked myopically at the sea. I discovered they were missing only after reaching home. Couldn't find my spare pair either, nor the ones made for the computer screen. I could do everything but read. The morning papers arrived the next day:

"Don't strain your eyes!" said the wife. I did and smiled, how different the news was, "Awesome!" I shouted as I read the headlines, "Modi has said that with Ayodhya over, no more mosques or churches will be touched!"

"Your eyes seemed to have gained positive vision," said the wife, "I don't seem to have read anything like that!"

"You better be careful, you're not wearing your spectacles!" said my wife, "I don't need broken limbs and a blind husband!"

"Who needs glasses!" I shouted jubilantly, "Peace is round the corner!"

I switched on the television and watched the prime minister speaking about the Constitution of the country, "He says it's the best constitution in the world, and there's no need to change a single word."

"He said that?" asked the wife.

"Yes," I said, "Even without my glasses, I can lip-read and see him saying those words! And he looks very sincere without my glasses! What a beautiful world this is becoming!" I whispered as I walked over to the window and smiled just as the door-



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"Just take off your glasses," I said, "He's also going to focus on the rising rate of unemployment and look on the third page, it says he's going to heed the international hunger index and freedom of press listing!"

I held the newspaper closer to my eyes, and my eyeballs nearly fell out in sheer astonishment, "India and China are going to form a union like the European Union!"

"Aiyo!" said the wife.

"Why Aiyo?" I asked pleasantly.

"All India Yellow Organisation!"

"I don't think the Chinese like being called yellow anymore," I said, "We should be careful not to hurt each other! And look what it says here, China is willing to talk to Taiwan! They're willing to have peace talks and discuss the issue threadbare. This will herald peace in the region!" I shouted, waving the newspaper and jumping around the room.

bell rang and two men stood outside, "Sir," said one of them smiling, "Are these glasses yours? We found them on the beach!"

"Thank you!" I said and put them on, then looked at the newspaper, "Putin bombs Ukraine!"

I ran to the TV; the newscaster had tears as she showed bodies piling up in Palestine and one of the bodies of an Israeli who was kidnapped. I stared at the newspaper again, "Bulldozers raze shops in Mumbai!" read the headlines.

I threw the glasses on the floor. "Why didn't you leave my glasses where you found them?" I cried as reality hit me, and I dared not read what was written about my country...! ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ROBERT CLEMENTS is a Newspaper Columnist, with an estimated readership of 6 million. He also conducts a short-term Writer's Course. Contact him on bobsbanter@gmail.com for more details

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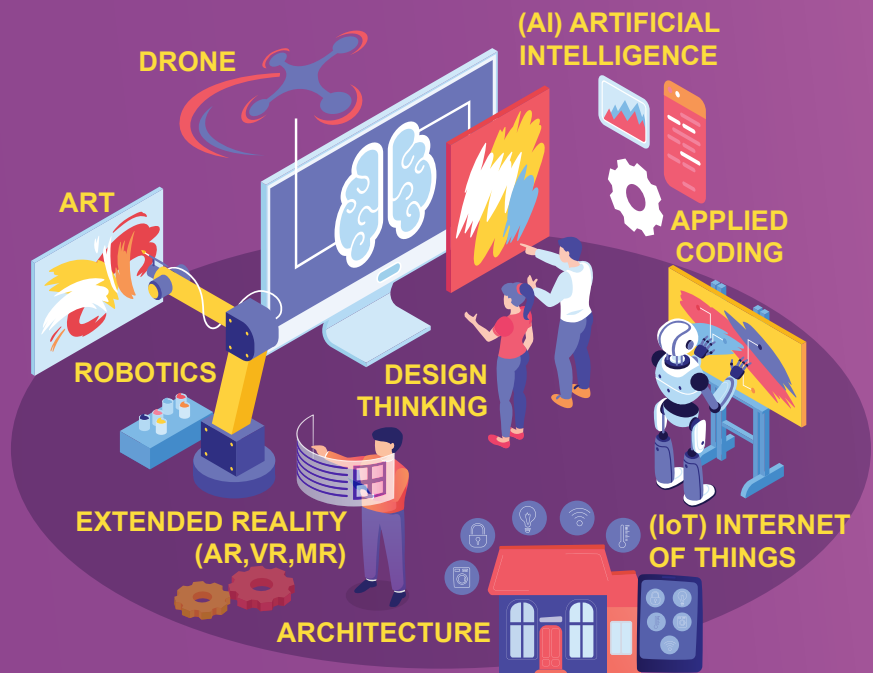


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