

# Indian Currents

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**Barbaric episode of human sacrifice in Kerala is a shame for a State which claims to be the leader of renaissance in the country!**



**Sway of Superstition**

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**Unfortunately, the guardians of the Constitution, who are bound to cultivate scientific temper, are themselves the ones who flout the scientific spirit envisioned in the Constitution!!**

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## SUPERSTITIONS HOLD SWAY



The direction of the Constitution of India that 'it shall be the duty of every citizen to develop scientific temper and the spirit of inquiry and reform' has been made to stand on its head with superstitions penetrating everyday life of the people. Some of the recent brutal incidents make us hang our head in shame.

The latest one comes from one of the most literate States, Kerala, which has acquired, for all wrong reasons it seems, the moniker of 'God's own Country'. The human sacrifice of two women at a small town in Kerala has shaken the conscience of right-thinking people. The fact that it was done to enhance prosperity of a family on the advice of a 'traditional healer' makes it a diabolic stigma; it is nothing less than a slap on the face of a State which was the first to elect a Communist government in the country. The 'most cruellest' and barbaric episode is a shame for a State which claims to be the leader of renaissance in the country.

There is no dearth of superstitious beliefs in India. Unfortunately, the guardians of the Constitution, who are bound to protect the statute, are themselves the ones who flout the scientific spirit envisioned in the Constitution.

When the country was in the thick of fighting Covid 19 pandemic, it was none else but the Prime Minister himself who asked the people to light lamps, torches, candles, etc. for 9 minutes at 9 pm on April 5, 2021 to mark the fight against the epidemic. There is nothing more ridiculous than such measures.

There are still superstitions about menstruation and practice of 'untouchability' related to it. Top leaders of the country have no qualms in making unscientific claims like India is the inventor of plastic surgery, use of internet and missiles many millennia ago. Even more bizarre is that such claims are made in the gathering of people attending the Science Congress. When quacks make claims like cow urine cures cancer, no effort is made to counter such 'unsound' assertions.

Despite the existence of numerous superstitious and unscientific beliefs, no political party or government has made any serious effort to counter them. A nationwide legislation to deal with superstitious practices, black magic or human sacrifice with severe punishment could help contain them to a great extent. Unfortunately, no such law exists, though a few State governments have enacted laws in this regard. Bihar emerged a pioneer by introducing Prevention of Witch Practices Act to address inhumane rituals. Maharashtra and Karnataka too have passed similar laws banning the practice of human sacrifice and such heartless acts. Though the Kerala had initiated a Bill on the above lines, it has failed to take off.

It is true that laws alone may not be sufficient to remove superstitions lock, stock and barrel as they are related to beliefs embedded in human psyche. An unwavering determination to fight superstition can put a stop to irrational, brutal practices. If only our leaders – religious, political and social – have a resolve to promote scientific temper as prescribed in the Constitution, these evils can be wiped out from the society. Or else the country will continue to be mired in such practices.

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

**Dr. Suresh Mathew**  
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Words can inspire, thoughts can provoke, but only action truly brings you closer to your dreams

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• • •



A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies. The man who never reads lives only one

**George R.R. Martin**

• • •



Competing at the highest level is not about winning. It's about preparation, courage, understanding, nurturing your people, and heart. Winning is the result

**Joe Torre**

• • •



Losers quit when they fail. Winners fail until they succeed

**Robert T. Kiyosaki**

• • •



Life has many ways of testing a person's will, either by having nothing happen at all or by having everything happen all at once

**Paulo Coelho**

• • •



Very little is needed to make a happy life; it is all within yourself, in your way of thinking

**Marcus Aurelius**

• • •



The woman who follows the crowd will usually go no further than the crowd. The woman who walks alone is likely to find herself in places no one has been before

**Albert Einstein**

• • •



Life's like a movie, write your own ending. Keep believing, keep pretending

**Jim Hensen**

• • •

# Murders for prosperity

## Whither scientific temper?

BY A.J. PHILIP

**E**lanthoor is equidistant from Pathanamthitta and Kozhencherry in Pathanamthitta district in Kerala. I used to pass through Elanthoor every time I went to St. Thomas College, Kozhencherry from Pathanamthitta where I stayed those days. One day, I did not have 20 paise in my pocket and I did not want to borrow money from anyone. I decided to walk all the way from the college to Valanchuzhy in Pathanamthitta.

That is how I know how difficult is the Bharat Jodo Yatra being undertaken by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. If I remember correctly, I reached home only around 9 pm that day.

Today I would not dare to walk alone through Elanthoor, where on January 20, 1920, Mahatma Gandhi visited to promote Khadi, at the invitation of a local leader who played an active role in the Vaikom Satyagraha.

Elanthoor is now a “tourist” spot, not because of the Gandhi museum which is part of the Elanthoor panchayat office but because of two heinous murders reported from there.

Murder is as old as mankind. The Bible tells the story of how the children of Adam and Eve, to whom all the Abrahamic religions trace their ancestry,



enacted the first case of fratricide.

In the Book of Genesis, Cain and Abel are the first two sons of Adam and Eve. Cain, the firstborn, was a farmer, and his brother Abel was a shepherd. The brothers made sacrifices to God, but God favoured Abel's sacrifice, instead of Cain's. Cain then

murdered Abel, whereupon God punished Cain by condemning him to a life of wandering.

Enmity, jealousy, hatred, covetousness and war are some of the reasons that prompt a person to commit murder. Most murders happen in a fit of rage and they are looked at differently from well-calculated and well-planned murders aimed at killing a person and evading the law.

What Elanthoor witnessed was the worst kind of murders. There is a superstitious belief that while constructing a dam or a bridge a human being should be sacrificed and the body should be buried deep to lend strength to the foundation of the structure.

Some even claim that the Mullaperiyar dam, built 127 years ago, stands strong because it was built on a sacrificed body. When India became independent, the literacy rate was barely in double digits but we had a literate prime minister in Jawaharlal Nehru, who saw superstition as superstition and did not promote it. Nehru invited a Santhali girl named Budhni Mehjan who worked at the Damodar Valley Project to inaugurate the power project at Panchet dam alongside him in December 1959. The story was different at Elanthoor.

A certain person called Bhagaval Singh and his wife Laila lived in a large house situated in a two-acre plot. Many people wonder how he got the non-Malayali name. His forefathers belonged to the Ezhava caste which did not enjoy much social status. They were not even allowed inside temples.

Some Sikhs from Punjab came to Vaikom to provide langar to the participants of Vaikom Satyagraha. The satyagraha was not religious. It was against the temple authorities who decided against



## COVER STORY



Muhammed Shafi, Bhagaval Singh, and his wife Laila

letting the “untouchables” walk on the road around the Shiva temple. The satyagraha was not to let them enter the temple. It was to let them walk on a public road. In other words, it was a civic, not religious, issue. For all his greatness, Gandhi saw the satyagraha differently.

He thought it was a religious issue. He asked the Sikhs to pack up from Vaikom as it was a Hindu affair. Gandhi did not even permit George Joseph, brother of journalist Pothan Joseph, to lead the agitation. By the time Gandhi’s refusal came by way of a telegram, Joseph had already courted arrest. He was so disappointed that he quit politics altogether and went back to his legal profession.

Some of the Sikhs were missionaries. They did not leave Kerala. They went to some places like Ranny, not far from Elanthoor, and tried to proselytise. Some Ezhavas suffering caste discrimination were attracted by the egalitarianism of Sikhism.

Ranny had a small group of Sikhs, who in dress resembled Sikhs but spoke Malayalam. One of the Sikh girls was a friend of my elder sister. I accompanied her to the village where I saw for the first time so many men with long hair and beards enjoying the sun. They treated us well. They were beekeepers and gave us a lot of honey to drink. I never drank so much honey!

Alas, the anti-Sikh violence in 1984 had a deleterious effect on the community. The Sikhs of Ranny were not spared. Many of them were forced to cut their beard and go back to their original caste. Soon after I joined The Tribune, I wanted to do a cover story on the Sikhs of Ranny.

I went there with my wife but I could not find any

Sikh. The one Sikh who lived near Block Junction at Ranny refused to meet us. It was with great difficulty that I could trace one boy from Ranny who migrated to Jalandhar but he too refused to talk. I could not do the cover story I planned.

I am not sure if Bhagaval Singh is from that group. The fact is that there are some people in Kerala who have adopted Sikh and Christian names to hide their caste identity. Today, the Ezhavas are one of the most prosperous

and politically powerful communities in Kerala.

Bhagaval Singh was a traditional massager, who also dabbled in poetry. He was an active member of the CPM. His wife was superstitious but had her husband totally under her control. For both of them, it was their second marriage.

It was at that time a character called Muhammed Shafi entered their life. He had created a fake Facebook page using the name Jayashree. He befriended Singh who fell for “her” charms and started reposing his faith in her. Naturally enough, he told her about his frustrations and how he wanted to have prosperity in his life.

“Jayashree” directed him to a tantrik who could do the rituals that needed to be done to make a turnaround in his life. “She” gave him his own telephone number. As Shafi was blessed with the gift of the gab, he was able to convince the couple that prosperity awaited them if they made a human sacrifice.



Bhagaval Singh's house

He first enticed Rosli by promising money and brought her to Elanthoor. There, the three together sacrificed her. Blood from her pubic area was sprinkled on the floor. Thereafter the body was cut into 56 pieces and buried deep inside a pit in the compound.

When the sacrifice did not bring instant prosperity to Bhagval Singh, Shafi was able to convince the couple that another human sacrifice was needed. This time, middle-aged Padma from Tamil Nadu, who used to make a living by selling lottery tickets in Kerala, was brought to Elanthoor.

She was also given the treatment that was given to Rosli. The body was cut into so many pieces and buried. The threesome is believed to have cooked some human flesh and eaten it. The refrigerator was used to store the flesh for some time.



Shafi told them that the full benefits of the human sacrifice could be obtained only after consuming the flesh. There are indications that Shafi was planning to blackmail the couple and capture their property.

Investigations into the disappearance of Padma brought the police to Elanthoor. A CCTV camera in the vicinity recorded Shafi's car arriving there. That is how the whole story unravelled itself. Every Malayali felt ashamed that such an incident could happen in the state.

A few days later, a woman practising sorcery at Malayalappuzha was arrested. In the name of ridding a boy of some disease, she was terrorising him. The pity is that she had a good clientele from far off places.

Newspapers in Kerala carry classified advertisements of persons who claim that they can cure all

kinds of problems like epilepsy, adultery, insomnia, cancer, wayward behaviour, lunacy and impotency. They also promise that they can usher in prosperity for their clients.

People fall for such promises and by the time they realise that they were taken for a ride, they would have lost a lot of money or suffered other indignities. Nobody likes to discuss in public his or her losses. The sorcerers know this weakness of the common man and that is what they take advantage of.

This is not a Hindu-centric problem. There are Christian pastors and priests who claim that they can cure the faithful of various ailments. The Bible speaks about Jesus curing a blind person. These pastors do not treat such patients. All those who claim that they can instantly cure anyone of his disease are outright frauds.

Islam is a scientific religion in the sense that it does not approve of even priestly practices. Of course, every Muslim has certain practices to follow. That is all. Yet, faith in sorcery is deep-rooted among the Muslims. There are Muslim clerics who claim to have divine powers. The fact is that when they themselves fall sick, they go to a hospital for treatment.

This being the case, no religion can claim to be above superstition. Of course, there are atheists who claim that religion itself is a superstition.

Nobody can deny the fact that religion – be it Hinduism or Christianity or Islam or Sikhism or Buddhism or Jainism or Zoroastrianism – fills a gap in man's life. It sustains man when he is down with disease or is old. Everyone knows that life without hope is hopeless. It is religion that provides hope.

The Constitution of India was the creation of leaders like Dr BR Ambedkar and Jawaharlal Nehru who were rational to the core. That is why the Constitution expects the Indian state to promote the scientific temper at all times. In fact, India is the first and only country to explicitly adopt scientific temper in its Constitution. In the 42nd amendment, Article 51 A(h) was added under the Fundamental Duties that states: "It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to develop scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform".

In his book 'Discovery of India', Nehru explains "scientific temper" in these words. "The scientific temper points out the way along which man should travel. It is the temper of a free man. We live





in a scientific age, so we are told, but there is little evidence of this temper in the people anywhere or even their leaders.

“What is needed is the scientific approach, the adventurous and yet critical temper of science, the search for truth and new knowledge, the refusal to accept anything without testing and trial, the capacity to change previous conclusions in the face of new evidence, the reliance on observed fact and not on pre-conceived theory, the hard discipline of the mind—all this is necessary, not merely for the application of science but for life itself and the solution of its many problems”.

Where has India reached? Kerala is one of the most literate states. Yet, it is there that two women were brutally killed for “prosperity”. Why does this happen? Once I shared the dais with a senior faculty at the IAS academy at Mussoorie. What I noticed was the number of rings he wore. A few fingers had double rings, each with or without stones. It is not uncommon to find men sporting multiple threads on their hands.

And we have a prime minister who is never tired of taking part in religious rituals with dozens of cameras capturing them for transmission to the whole world. Where is the scientific temper in such a scenario?

Even Marxist ministers go to religious shrines before taking oath as ministers. Why blame only Bhagaval Singh, who wanted a little prosperity unlike many others who want power and pelf by propitiating godmen and godwomen and do anything suggested by the charlatans who masquerade as priests. ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## Bishops caution against rising occult practices

Catholic bishops in Kerala have cautioned people against rising occult practices in the wake of reported cases of human sacrifices in the southern Indian state.

“No civilized society can image such ghastly murders. We are shocked,” Father Jacob G Palakkappilly, the spokesperson of Kerala Catholic Bishops’ Council (KCBC), told Matters India on October 13, two days after the gruesome murders came to light following investigation into the missing complaint of one of the women.

According to the police, two middle aged women were sacrificed for prosperity and wealth in the past four months in Pathanamthitta district.

“Nothing but shock. It has happened in Kerala,” said Sister Jessy Kurian, a Supreme Court lawyer, reacting to the reports of human sacrifices in a state that boasts of the highest literacy rate and a model women empowerment in India.

Father Palakkappilly said this incident needs to be treated as a wake-up call for everyone in the state.

“The government needs to put its intelligence agencies on high alert against the rising occult practices as part of faith in the state,” the priest asserted.

“Now we see different kinds of occult practices as part of religious faith and in most cases people are unable to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong,” bemoaned the Church official.

The priest also suggested political and religious leaders in the state take proactive steps to save people from getting trapped into superstitious acts.

Sister Kurian, writing on her Facebook page questioned Kerala’s claims to be a progressive society.

“Exploitation of women on the pretext of faith is taking place in every religion but to different degrees. Here too is the exploitation of women but by promising money to act in a film,” she writes.

Some women, she adds, are the easy targets. “The helplessness, joblessness, ignorance, and vulnerability in life lead to such exploitations,” she explains.

She says the accused “deserve nothing but the highest punishment in the land.”

She wants the administration to take steps to end such religious practices. “A proper law to this effect is the need of the hour. Educating the masses against such practices should begin with school education,” she asserts.

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)

# Human Sacrifice: SHAME & HORROR

The Elanthoor case has similarities to the infamous Nithari murders that was reported in 2005 where several children had gone missing over 2 years in Noida

BY **AARTI**

Last fortnight, Kerala woke up to media reports of how two women were sacrificed, sexually mutilated and their body parts eaten by a couple on the directions of their accomplice that it would help them gain wealth and longevity. The two women were brutally murdered in the first week of June and last week of September this year.

Information available about the case according to various reports goes on like an action thriller. Both the victims – Rosli Varghese (50) and Padmam (52) – who earned their living selling lottery tickets in different parts of Ernakulam disappear mysteriously this June and September respectively. Padmam's son lodges a police complaint after he fails to establish contact with his mother since September 26.

Police investigations based on the CCTV footage/call records found that a man had taken Padmam to Thiruvalla from Kochi in a vehicle. The trail further led them to Elanthoor village and stopped at the

house of Bhagaval Singh (68), a poet as well as practitioner of traditional medicine (assisted by his wife Laila (59).

Despite being a Class 6 dropout, Shafi (52), a former truck driver and mortuary worker who had brought Padmam to Bhagaval Singh is believed to have mastered the art of social engineering as well as handling social media. Shafi is said to have created a fake Facebook ID in the name of a woman, urging people to get in touch if they required a puja (ritual) to be performed for wealth and prosperity. Bhagaval Singh and his wife Laila contacted him after seeing the post and Shafi met and convinced them that human sacrifice was the only solution to their many problems and sought money from the couple. He then lured Rosli to the couple's house and murdered her. Shafi approached the couple again and coerced them for another sacrifice after which he managed to entice Padmam who too was murdered. The two



women's throats were slit and their body parts cut into pieces before it was buried in two different locations in Thiruvalla.

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) constituted to probe into the case which has been able to secure the custody of Shafi as well as the Bhagaval couple for 12 days has been able to recover Rosli's bag and her mobile phone. The trio are accused of cannibalism after the remains were exhumed from the premises of the Bhagaval's house on October 11.

On the other side, the three accused have reportedly moved the Kerala High Court challenging the order of the Ernakulam Judicial First-Class Magistrate Court VIII granting their police custody as improper. That the investigators forced them to give self-incriminating statements, the petition argues that the three accused are from reputed families. In the event of such a long period of custody being granted to the police, there is every possibility that they would be ill-treated and tortured physically and mentally by the investigating agency.

The Elanthoor case has similarities to the infamous Nithari murders that was reported in 2005 where several children had gone missing over 2 years in Noida. The sensational killings came to light after the police found human remains in a drain. The prime accused Surendra Koli allegedly lured young girls inside the house, killed them and thereafter ate up their body parts after cooking them. The owner of the house Moninder Singh Pandher did nothing to prevent the brutal killings. Notably 15 skulls and bones were recovered in the drain in front of the said house. A total of 19 cases were registered in connection with the Nithari killings. Of them, chargesheets were filed against Koli in 16 cases. He was convicted in 13 of them and acquitted in three for lack of evidence. Of the six cases against him, Pandher was convicted in three. The trial court awarded death penalty to Koli and 7 years imprisonment to Pandher, under sections of the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act. However, Koli moved a Special Leave Petition before the Supreme Court which was dismissed in 2011. The Apex Court observed, "The killings by the appellant Surendra Koli are horrifying and barbaric. He used a definite methodology in committing these murders. He would see small girls passing by the house, and taking advantage of their weakness lure them inside the house...there he would strangulate them and after killing them he tried to have sex with the body



and would then cut off their body parts and eat them. Some parts of the body were disposed off by throwing them in the passage gallery and drain (nala) beside the house which had become a virtual slaughter house, where innocent children were regularly butchered...This case clearly falls within the category of rarest of rare case and no mercy can be shown to the appellant Surendra Koli".

Well, be it as it may. While the SIT is expected to unravel the mysterious Elanthoor deaths, the cause for concern is why such an incident is happening in Kerala which is the most literate state in the country. Not long ago, 'Nari Shakti Puraskar' winners 106-year-old Bhageerathi Amma from Kollam and 98-year-old Karthyayani Amma from Alappuzha were in news for having taken up online mode of instruction towards clearing the Class X equivalency exam. While Bhageerathi Amma, who cleared the Class IV equivalency exam of the Kerala State Literacy Mission Authority made news as the oldest equivalency course student, Karthyayani Amma also hit headlines after she cleared the same exam by scoring 98 out of 100 and emerging as the State topper. Well, at the society and household level, as a first step a change in mindsets to treat girls as equal partners amongst male children merits consideration.

The Kerala High Court is to hear an appeal filed by the Kerala Yukthivadi Sangham seeking a directive to the State Government to take a decision on the recommendation of the State Law Reforms Commission for the enactment of the Kerala Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices, Sorcery, and Black Magic Bill.

Hopefully, this would help eradicate the menace of human sacrifices. ©

# Supreme Injustice: When Judges turn Prosecutors

Never before has the Supreme Court convened a special sitting to consider an application for stay on a High Court order, that too to keep five people confined in jail

BY **JOSEPH MALIAKAN**

**B**y suspending the Bombay High Court order to acquit Delhi University professor G.N. Saibaba and four others convicted in a case under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) of 1967, the Supreme Court has caused grave injustice.



The manner in which the Supreme Court dealt with the Maharashtra government's appeal against the Bombay High Court order has shocked the legal fraternity.

The order of the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court comprising Justices Rohit Deo and Anil Pansare came on October 14, Friday. The same evening Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, in the absence the Chief Justice U.U. Lalit, approached the senior most judge Y.B. Chandrachud praying for a stay on the order directing the immediate release of the five convicts. When Justices Chandrachud

and Hima Kohli refused to stay the order, and said the matter could be taken up on Monday for issuing notice to all concerned, Mehta on Saturday evening approached the CJI, Justice U.U. Lalit, who referred the application to a bench comprising Justices M.R. Shah and Bela M Trivedi. After a nearly

two-hour long hearing in a special sitting the same evening, the bench suspended the Bombay High Court order.

Never before has the Supreme Court convened a special sitting to consider an application for stay on a High Court order, that too to keep five people confined in jail. The Supreme Court convenes special sittings only when matters of grave consequences are involved, like the country's security, breakdown of governance or matters of life and liberty of citizens. One fails to understand the urgency in the





present case especially when the main accused in the case, 55-year-old professor G.N. Saibaba, is wheelchair-bound and suffers from various ailments due to which 90 percent of his body is disabled.

Justice Shah's remark during the proceedings that the High Court did not go into the merit of the case, but found a shortcut is something very disturbing even to the dumbest law student, considering the fact that the 101-page High Court judgement is very comprehensive, well-argued and will go a long way in reforming the shoddy criminal investigation and trial system that has resulted in arrest and prosecution of hundreds of civil rights activists in the coun-

**One fails to understand the urgency in the present case especially when the main accused in the case, 55-year-old professor G.N. Saibaba, is wheelchair-bound and suffers from various ailments due to which 90 percent of his body is disabled**

try on trumped up charges ever since independence.

Justice Shah, echoing the prosecution argument further, remarked that the High Court did not pass an acquittal but a discharge order and no finding of the trial court was reversed. Whether acquittal or discharge, the convicts were to be freed following the High Court order. At one point during arguments Justice Shah asked Senior Counsel R. Basant whether the accused should benefit where the High Court erred. Has the Supreme Court already concluded that the High Court erred even before the very vital issues of law in the use and abuse of the provisions of UAPA, which the High Court has dealt with in its judgement, is analysed in detail.

When Basant drew the attention of the court to the medical condition of Saibaba and pointed out that he is alleged to be the brain and only ideologically involved, Justice Shah refusing to grant any relief to Saibaba responded that as far as Maoist activities are concerned the brain plays a significant role.



Prof. GN Saibaba

Acquitting Saibaba and the others in alleged Maoist linked cases, the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court had held the entire trial against the accused to be null and void in the absence of valid sanction under section 45 of the UAPA. The sanction to prosecute Saibaba was accorded by the Maharashtra government after the trial began against him instead of being submitted it before, rendering the entire process invalid, the High Court order had observed.

As for the remaining accused, the Directorate of Prosecutions' report seeking grant of sanction was sans reasons, a breach of mandatory provisions of sub-section (2) of section 45 of UAPA, the court held. It rejected the prosecution's argument of egregious defect in or absence of sanction is a curable defect.

"We are inclined to hold that every safeguard, however miniscule, legislatively provided to the accused must be zealously protected... Departure from the due process of law fosters an ecosystem in which terrorism burgeons and provides fodder to vested interests whose singular agenda is to propagate false narratives," the order said.

While the war against terror must be waged by the State with unwavering resolve, and every legitimate weapon in the armoury must be deployed in the fight against terror, a civil democratic society cannot afford to sacrifice the procedural safeguards provided, and which is an integral facet of the due process of law, at the altar of perceived peril to national security, the judges observed.

The siren song that the end justifies the means, the procedural safeguards are subservient to the overwhelming need to ensure that the accused is prosecuted and punished, must be muzzled by the voice of rule of law, the order said.

The HC judgement has cleared a very important aspect that under UAPA a court cannot take cognizance of an offence until sanction is received from the Union or State government. The sanction is to be given within a prescribed time only after considering the report by an independent authority which is expected to review the evidence and give its recommendation.

Sanction serves the salutary object of providing safeguard to the accused from unwarranted prosecution and agony and trauma of trial, and in the context of the stringent provisions of the UAPA, is an integral facet of the due process of law.

Saibaba was arrested on February 16, 2014, the court had taken cognizance of the case, framed charges against him in February 2015 and examined the first witness before the sanction for prosecution was submitted in April 2015. Consequently the High court said: "We hold, on the authority of the

Constitution Bench decision of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in Baij Nath Prasad Tripathi, that if cognizance is taken without complying with the requirement of valid sanction the entire trial shall stand vitiated."

At the end of the day, professor Saibaba and four others who should have been released from the jail on October 15 are still in jail due to the Supreme Court's highly questionable intervention. How much longer the acquitted will remain in jail only time will tell.

In a letter to his students from the prison cell Saibaba wrote to his students in 2018: "I dream of being in my classroom. Day and night fettered behind the strong iron beams of my tiny solitary prison cell. I see you, talk to you and hug you by the force of my frail and challenged life in my unchained mind's eye as the desire for freedom flows through the sinews and veins of my bloodstream even as I am caged far away from you." (Quoted from "Why Do You Fear My Way So Much: Poems and Letters from Prison" by G.N. Saibaba). One can only hope Saibaba's dream comes true very soon. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**JOSEPH MALIAKAN** is a Delhi based Senior Journalist



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# GHI and India

## Hungry, hungrier, hungriest

Hunger is a silent pandemic, affecting our future generations and must be addressed on a war footing

BY **JASWANT KAUR**

**W**e are hungrier than ever. This is what the latest report on Global Hunger Index (GHI) says. India has slipped to the 107th position out of 121 countries when it comes to hunger. Last year, we were placed at the 101st position. Clearly, our performance has gone down. Worst of all, we are behind our neighbouring countries -- Sri Lanka (which is going through a huge economic crisis), Nepal, Bangladesh and even Pakistan!

Published by Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe, the report is brought out every year, based on the official data released by various countries. The idea is to bring the issue of widespread hunger to the forefront leading to policy formulation, implementation of corrective measures and impact measurement. Yet, we have not seen much progress in



this aspect for the last many years. The pandemic accentuated the situation with reduced income levels, leading to scarcity of resources to take care of the basic needs.

This time too, the Indian government has dismissed the report, claiming that it is intended at tainting India's image as a "nation that does not fulfil the food security and nutritional requirements of its population." Not only this, questions have been raised on the methodology that was used for measuring hunger.

It has also been said that three out of the four variables are used for children, so how can it be representative of the entire population? Coming to the fourth indicator – the proportion of undernourished population -- the government claims that it





THE HINDU  
**News**

## Global Hunger Index is out, India in 'serious' category at rank 107

The country ranks below Sri Lanka (64), Nepal (81), Bangladesh (84) and Pakistan (99); Afghanistan is the only South Asian country that lags behind India in the listing

**Jagriti Chandra**  
NEW DELHI

India ranks 107 out of 121 countries on the Global Hunger Index in which it fares worse than all countries in South Asia barring war-torn Afghanistan.

The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is a tool for comprehensively measuring and tracking hunger at global, regional, and national levels. GHI scores are based on the values of four component indicators - un-

**Food for thought**

India's score of 29.1 in the 2022 Global Hunger Index falls under the "serious" category in the hunger meter. It ranked 107 out of the 121 countries analysed below Rwanda and Ethiopia

16.3% in 2019-2021. This translates into 224.3 million people in India considered undernourished. But India has shown improvement in child stunting, which has declined from 38.7% to 35.5% between 2014 and 2022, as well as child mortality which has also dropped from 4.6% to 3.3% in the same comparative period. On the whole, India has shown a slight worsening with its GHI score increasing from 28.2 in 2014 to 29.1 in 2022. Though the

| Score Range | Category           |
|-------------|--------------------|
| <= 9.9      | low                |
| 10-19.9     | moderate           |
| 20-34.9     | serious            |
| 35-49.9     | alarming           |
| >= 50       | extremely alarming |

India's score: 29.1

| Rankings | Country           | Rankings | Country     |
|----------|-------------------|----------|-------------|
| 106      | Sudan             | 107      | India       |
| 102      | Rwanda            | 108      | Zambia      |
| 103      | Nigeria           | 109      | Afghanistan |
| 104      | Ethiopia          | 110      | Timor-Leste |
| 105      | Republic of Congo |          |             |

fall with a total score of 29.1.

The report has given reasons as to why this method is one of the best ways of calculating the severity of a country's hunger crisis. The first indicator actually measures the extent to which people have access to food while the other indicators relating to children not only measures their current nutrition status but also highlights the high risk of their illness, poor physical and cognitive development and even death. This combination "eliminates the effects of random measurement errors", the report says. In fact, the UN's sustainable development goal (SDG) No. 2 (zero hunger) includes all these four indicators. Interestingly, India is also a signatory to the SDGs, which also shows that as a country we have agreed to these indicators.

Not only this, child malnutrition and mortality data have been major indicators for decades for ascertaining the performance of the whole population on nutrition. It is a fact that malnutrition during early years of a child is difficult to reverse during adulthood. A child under five with stunted growth or wasting is less likely to regain its health even if he/she is able to get access to adequate nutrition during the later years. This shows that the questions raised on the calculation of GHI are not appropriate.

Similarly, the report also says that these indicators were calculated based on the data published by the respective governments, including India. In other words, the contention that the data was based on opinion polls does not hold true.

Coming to the government's initiative of providing additional foodgrain and the anganwari initiatives, the fact is but for these schemes India's performance on GHI would have been much worse!

Before refuting the report, the government must revisit its own official records. The data published by the national family health survey (NFHS-5) shows similar results. Interestingly, the indicators used to calculate malnutrition amongst children were the same. The report had presented the poor state of children even in richer states like Kerala, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa and Himachal Pradesh. Gujarat, the model state, was no exception. In fact, the report was based on the data collected during the pre-covid times! How can the post-Covid data present a totally different picture?

If we look at the latest World Bank report titled "Poverty and shared Prosperity", it says that more than 53 million people have been pushed below the

is based on an opinion poll covering a sample size of 3,000 people.

Lastly, the government did praise its efforts in providing additional foodgrain to around 80 crore Indians over and above the entitlement under the National Food Security Act. Even the supplementary nutrition provided to 1.78 crore women and 7.7 crore children through the Integrated Child Development Scheme and the financial help of Rs. 5000 to 1.5 crore women at the time of delivery of the first child. It is like beating your own drum while ignoring the stark realities.

Well, before we actually, deep dive into the claims made by the government, let's look at what the GHI report says and how it is calculated? The index is calculated after taking into account four indicators, which "captures the multidimensional nature of hunger". It focuses on undernourished population (percentage of population having low calorie intake), child stunting (proportion of children under five having low height for age), child wasting (under five children having low weight for their height) and child mortality (children dying before they turn five). All of these indicators have a different composition in the GHI score.

Child wasting and child stunting each make up one-sixth of the GHI score while each of the other two indicators make up for one-third of the score. The index is calculated on a scale of zero to 100. The lower the score the better it is. A score between 20 to 34.9 is categorised as "serious", which is where we





**Have the powers that be ever wondered what would have led to this crisis? After all, every report cannot be ignored and the entire world can't be conspiring against our country to malign its image**

poverty line in India. It means they did not even have \$2.15 (Rs.180/-) a day for meeting their basic requirements. This is despite various schemes announced by the government.

Another report by Azim Premji University shows that people in rural regions were highly dependent on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) for their survival during the pandemic. So much so, 20 to 80 percent of the income loss was met from the wages they earned from this scheme. This was the case for households, who had found work in both pre-covid and during-covid.

For the households, who had no work in the pre-covid world, MNREGA compensated anything between 20 to 100 percent of income loss from other sources. However, nearly 40 percent of the job-card holders could not find even a single day of work under the scheme. It is a testimony to the extent people from the marginalised communities suffered due to the pandemic.

So much so, eight out of 10 households recommended that MNREGA should be extended to provide 100 days of employment to all the members of the household instead of only one person! In case, the unmet demand was to be met, the government would need at least three times the budget it spends on MNREGA! The fact that the report is based on the data collected till December 2021 also shows that stories claiming that India is back on the track as far as its growth is concerned are not true.

Have the powers that be ever wondered what would have led to this crisis? After all, every report cannot be ignored and the entire world can't be conspiring against our country to malign its image. In fact, globally, around 70 million people have slipped below the poverty line. The magnitude is much higher in India as compared to other countries. This could be attributed to the inadequate financial relief packages during the lockdown and subsequent waves of Covid-19 and strict administrative measures.

For example, the government suddenly announced a complete lockdown without any preparation. Resultantly, the Indian economy contracted by around 6 percent while the global economic contraction was only 3.3 percent. In fact, China imposed lockdown only in the areas where the concentration of Covid-19 cases was on the higher side. This did not bring economic activity to a complete standstill. In our case, unemployment shot up to new heights. The supply chain for essential commodities was suddenly disrupted. Limited supply also made these items expensive, making them unaffordable for many.

Coming to the relief packages, India spent only 2.2 percent of its GDP which was way less than the 4.7 percent allocation by emerging markets/developing countries. The developed nations spent close to 8.5 percent of their GDP to help people during the economic crisis.

In such a scenario, if hunger and poverty are on the rise, should we be surprised? Should the government not accept this crucial information gracefully and work on rectifying the situation? At least, this is what we expect from a government that believes in "sabka sath, sabka vikas and sabka vishwaas."

Hunger is a silent pandemic, affecting our future generations and must be addressed on a war footing. ©

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# Poverty Paradox

## Why Hunger in the Midst of Plenty?

World Food Day is more about securing food for all, than enjoying food. Ideally, the entire world should be able to have enough of safe and nutritious food

BY **PRASANT PALAKKAPPILLIL**

“Give us today the food we need” is one of the several petitions in the Lord’s Prayer. It is also an invitation to live in the present – in today! This spirit of a need-based divine economy is not altogether new. In the Proverbs, we pray: “Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread” (Proverbs 30:8). It is a prayer for food security, a primary concern for humans – air usually taken for granted and water also assumed to be available. But water security has indeed become a major threat along with food security, with more than 800 million of the world population being deprived of safe drinking water.

I must confess that for me, like many people, food tops my list of enjoyments. Eating together in fellowship is indeed an energizing experience. I am secretly comforted to observe that Jesus was someone who sensed that with his lifestyle that showed the importance of enjoying food with gratitude, he was likely to be termed a glutton! He relished and promoted fellowship meals. Some of his greatest teachings were shared across such fellowship tables. The Bible describes an occasion when He even prepared a meal ready for his disciples, reaching the shore after their tiring fishing encounter in Galilee. But He was concerned when people didn’t have food. He had compassion for them. And he addressed this primary concern of all beings, not just in the beautiful prayer he taught, but by ensuring food for his exhausted and hungry followers.

And World Food Day is more about securing food for all, than enjoying food. Ideally, the entire world should be able to have enough of safe and nutritious food. But far from it, there are millions in the modern, proud, progressive, prosperous, affluent world who are literally starving, dying from malnutrition and dying from having no food.

Then comes the shocking revelation of Global



Hunger Index (GHI), 2022, jointly published by international voluntary organisations Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe, ranking India 107 out of the 121 nations listed, thereby indicating a serious ‘hunger’ situation in India.

As someone who is involved in the social sector to some extent and has travelled all over the country, my first impression and response is that this ranking appears inaccurate, if not exaggerated. To our minds it might seem like India should be faring far better on the index than its neighbouring countries like Pakistan and Nepal.

The four criteria by which the GHI is calculated are: 1) undernourishment, 2) child wasting, 3) child stunting, and 4) child mortality. The Government of India has protested and has questioned its validity and reliability. In this respect, I feel the



government statistics are to be considered a starting point, though validity checking measures could be employed. I am seriously doubtful if this has been done by those behind allegation regarding the unreliability of their methodology. The existence of a flagship programme called the Integrated Child Development Service Scheme with a wide network, which makes provision for almost all children requiring food in all parts of the country, makes it even more difficult to grapple with India's falling hunger status. It should indeed be a matter of great seriousness if there is involuntary hunger on account of food deprivation or inadequacy for anyone anywhere in the country.

Besides the nationwide ICDS network, which ensures two paid and trained staff for every 1,000 people, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, founded on the principle of entitlements related to right to life and livelihood, is yet another revolutionary initiative by the state, flaws in implementation of both the programmes notwithstanding. The findings by the global agency are indeed a matter of shame for all of us Indians. However, it is important to ask for and question the source of their data to crosscheck with the criteria they have set.

In the past few decades of its growth into one of the largest economies in the world, India has demonstrated that it does have sufficient resources to feed all its mouths. So it's either a matter of missing links because of corruption or the lack of information at the level of the needy that is causing the problems, if any. There is also an issue of prioritisation.

Is the Sustainable Development Goal 2 of achieving 'zero hunger' a priority for the nation? Here the role of individual citizens and households becomes very significant. It has to be a duty of every citizen to ensure that there is no one around oneself who has no food to eat. The right platform would be the local self-government where each locality is represented by a local citizen who knows the small population s/he is in charge of and ought to be ever-ready to present their issues on all available platforms.

From a sustainability perspective, today our focus is to ensure that maximum families take up the responsibility to 'grow food' (SDG 12, responsible consumption and production) to move towards the great goal of 'zero hunger' (SDG 2) by 2030. Besides this, there should be voluntary initiatives (like Organic Kerala Charitable Trust, Kochi, of



which I am proudly part of), focusing on identifying and preserving the food biodiversity of localities, thereby contributing towards addressing the issue of food security at the local level. If we take the example of Kerala, the immense potential of agroforestry can be very strongly promoted. The locally available, seasonal, conventional food crops of Kerala can be rich resources to rethink our food habits and take one step towards creating locally sustainable self-reliant communities.

Finally, World Food Day is not just about food production, but also about the food producers, who tend the earth and create miracles from the earth season after season on which the human world survives. The past few years demonstrated very visibly how they are at the receiving end – there is always 'jai' for 'jawan', and deservedly so for keeping our borders secure, but there is indeed a need for a 'zindabad' for 'kisan' for ensuring food security. It is rightly a day to remember with gratitude the farming community, and the divine engagement they are in. A day to reinforce honour and dignity for the farming community for their work in any given economy. And also, a day to promote a Christian culture in the spirit of 'till and keep' (Gen. 2:15).

I hope the local Christian communities will step beyond their ritualistic Christianity to wake up to the 21st century divine call to be the stewards of our common home, as pointed out by Pope Francis through his encyclicals 'Laudato Si' and 'Fratelli Tutti'. ©

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# Political Decency

With his head on his shoulders, Shashi Tharoor was intelligent enough to read the signs of the times by admitting that it was worth jumping into the fray to demonstrate that there was space for democratic functioning in the grand old Party

BY P. A. CHACKO

Shashi Tharoor's not reaching the winning line in the race to the Power-house base in the recent Presidential election was not surprising to many election watchers. A fake modern-day Tenali Raman may describe Tharoor's performance as, "Shashi did not lose, but the old veteran won by going up."

Whether Raman's quick-heal daub on Tharoor was soothing or scalding, Shashi might have taken everything on its stride. Look at the way he rose to the occasion by riding up to Kharge's residence in haste to congratulate him in gentlemanly fashion.

The way this former U N diplomat reacted to his not getting even an appreciable number of votes was not any exercise in diplomatic duplicity. He admitted that there were miles to go in serving the nation even if he did not get elected to the post of the President. That is gentlemanly on his part.

As a public intellectual, the 66-year-old young Tharoor vibrates with the passion of his heart and the reason of his intellect. That was evident in his election campaign. He passionately hoped that he



would cross the winning line. But, with his head on his shoulders, he was intelligent enough to read the signs of the times by admitting that it was worth jumping into the fray to demonstrate that there was space for democratic functioning in the grand old Party.

This is not a eulogy for Tharoor the politician. But this reflection is meant to point a finger at the way many politicians behave today. Elections come and elections go. What matters is serving the nation as an honest civil servant or a decent bureaucrat. Today we see politicians in many hues and artificially painted feathers. Yesterday they had donned rainbow colours, but a day later, they show chameleon colours. At the time of elections, they crawl before us on all fours with sky-high promises. After their winning, we gauge their wheeling and dealing and rate them as liars and *jumlabajs*.

Such politicians throw all human values and calls of conscience to the four winds and become society's termites or parasites. They can hoodwink the ignorant and the unsuspecting public who get

mesmerized or even dazed by illusions as if in a Kollywood theatre. They are adept in using their blind followers as foot soldiers or mobs to go bulldozing, thrashing, lynching and killing.

It is seen that many take to politics seeing it as a refuge of illiterates, unemployed or wealth grabbers. When they are in positions of power by hook or crook, they sell their conscience for a farthing and become fence jumpers, *jumlabajs* or party hoppers waiting to jump into luxury vehicles to get offloaded in star hotels for the crumbs of crores.





Politicians bereft of values care least for genuine religious tenets and recruit unemployed and criminal-minded people and inject into them the venom of religious fundamentalism. Then their acolytes are given a free reign to unleash terror in prayer centers, shrines, churches or mosques.

The most disgusting phenomenon that shocks men and women of conscience is religious terrorists invading prayer centers and forcing the worshippers to intone invocations of the invaders' religion. One can imagine their fiddling backstage masters chuckling and giggling with impish satisfaction even as they visit minority shrines for a handshake for the sake of photo ops.

The recent incident of Nigerian students chased by Indian students and forced to take refuge in the Nigerian embassy has attracted international mileage and worldwide condemnations. If the Muslim Arab world is angry with such happenings of escalating anti-Islam terrorism, whom are we to blame? People whose values are confined don't realize that, when they point a finger at someone, four other fingers are pointing back at them for their indulgence in homegrown religious fundamentalism and terror politics.

When our politicians are busy with bulldozer politics and political opportunism, they care least for the safety and welfare of the governed. When the nation is getting dragged into the quagmire of poverty and unemployment, the leaders are busy with picking holes on one another and indulging in channel presentations rather than taking appropriate measures.

When the Rupee value has gone down to the dogs, instead of plugging the loophole, the minister in charge of finance is showing that she is in the loop about the American Dollar and praises sky-high the Dollar's high jump with ease and the poor Rupee's sky jump without a parachute.

Should not our political pundits learn a lesson or two from the British Prime Minister Liz Truss who resigned on the ground that she was incapable of managing the country's economic stress. With soaring unemployment and skyrocketing prices, India's common people's purchasing power has plummeted. Thereby poverty is in the driving seat. And our political heads are apparently enjoying their back seat comfort ride.

How is that our governing dispensation does not read the signs of the times when the world outside takes serious note of India's downslide into hate



Liz Truss

culture and minority bashing, and its mishandling of its democratic health?

We cultivate law makers like Nupur Sharmas, Parvesh Vermas and Naveen Jindals for their boundless energy in becoming the nation's hate-spewing ambassadors. We accord honorable place to Puja Shakun Pandey's who, under public gaze, shot and set on fire Mahatma Gandhi's effigy in Aligarh even as the country was observing the death anniversary of the Father of the nation. People graduate to become experts in training social riffraff to function as foot soldiers for lynching, thrashing, gate crashing, and for engaging in overzealous terrorist activities under the very gaze of their drill masters.

In a recent publication, *To Kill a Democracy: India's Passage to Despotism* by Debashish Roy Chowdhury and John Keane {OUP, 2021}, the authors point out that "When democracies rack and ruin their social foundations, they don't just kill the spirit and substance of democracy, they lay the foundations of despotism."

Pointing out that India is the largest democracy by population {33% of the total population of all democracies}, they ask if the alarm bell about India's democratic health is not tolling? "Democracy is much more than elections and separations of powers. It is a whole way of life lived in dignity."

Gorge Orwell had already warned nations about eight decades ago: "A society becomes totalitarian when its structure becomes flagrantly artificial: that is, when its ruling class has lost its function but succeeds in clinging to power by force or fraud." ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# Bulldozing Justice

## Rule of Law in BJP Ruled States

The premature release of 11 convicts in Bilkis Bano gang rape case is a political decision that goes against the spirit of the Rule of Law

BY JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL

**F**ast-tracking the release of 11 men who were convicted in the Bilkis Bano rape case by the union government has raised serious concerns on the Rule of Law as practiced by the BJP governments both at the centre and in Gujarat. As per the information accessed by NDTV from the documents submitted by the Gujarat government to the Supreme Court on the release of the 11 men, the central government gave approval to the Gujarat government within 14 days to release these men. The Gujarat government had sought the approval of the central government on June 28 and the one-page approval came swiftly, on July 11. This is something unusual. The reason given by the Gujarat government is that their behaviour was found to be good.

Secondly, the central government gave the



approval despite the serious objections raised by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Special Judge Anand L Yawalkar in March 2021. The Special Judge had said that the release should be on the basis of the laws of Maharashtra and not Gujarat that would be applicable to the convicts, since the case was heard there.

The special judge had made strong objections to the early release of these men. "In this case all convicted accused were found guilty for rape and murder of innocent people. That the accused had no enmity or any relation with the victim. The crime was committed only on the ground that the victims belong to a particular religion. In this case even minor children and pregnant women were not spared. This is the worst form of hate crime and



Bilkis Bano case convicts were out of jail for over 1,000 days each before release

crime against humanity. It affects the consciousness of society. Aggrieved of this crime is society at large," the judge wrote as reported in NDTV news.

The CBI said the crime committed by the accused was "heinous, grave and serious" and so the "accused cannot be released prematurely and no leniency can be given to him".

Thirdly, these men were out of jail for over a thousand days on parole while serving life sentences as per the information gathered by NDTV from the documents submitted in the court by the Gujarat government. For example, Rupabhai Chandana enjoyed 1,198 days of parole and 378 days of furlough (short-term temporary release of convicts from jail),

## A question arises in the minds of many people why the Gujarat and the central government were in a hurry to release 11 men convicted in a horrendous case of gang rape and murder

amounting to a total 1,576 days outside the jail. Two others were outside for more than 1200 days as per the information NDTV accessed.

Bilkis Bano case was one of the rarest of rare cases in which the Supreme Court had ordered in 2019 to give Bilis Bano the highest ever compensation in a rape case: a job, a house and Rs. 50 lakhs. Bilkis Bano was only 21 years old when she was gang-raped by a mob and 14 members of her family, including her three-year-old daughter, were killed. The convicts were sentenced to life terms in jail by a special court in Mumbai, which was later upheld by the Bombay High Court.

It was reported in the media that the 11 men were welcomed with garlands, and sweets were distributed on their release, as if they had made a great sacrifice for the nation. A question arises in the minds of many people why the Gujarat and the central government were in a hurry to release 11 men convicted in a horrendous case of gang rape and murder. Indian prisons are overcrowded, and more than 70% of the prisoners are under trials. Many of them are in jail for being accused of petty crimes and



Bilkis Bano

they have already undergone punishment more than what they would have got at the time of their conviction. Why are not the governments taking any step to release the under trials of petty cases and decongest our prisons? There was a hue and cry when there was a delay in hanging the men who were convicted for capital punishment in Nirbhaya case. But there was no massive public protest, except by a few individuals and human rights organizations, when the 11 rapists and murders were pre-maturely released from jail.

'Rule of Law' is one of the core principles of democracy. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the Rule of Law as "the authority of and influence of law in society, especially when viewed as a constraint on individual and institutional behaviour; hence the principle that all members of society, including those in government, are considered equally subject to publicly disclosed legal codes and processes". In simple terms rule of law means that all are equal before law, including those who make the laws and who are in charge of implementing the laws. Equal access to all citizens to legal remedies is also part of the rule of law.

According to the United Nations (UN), "the rule of law is a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards. It requires measures to ensure adherence to the principles of supremacy of the law, equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, separation of powers,



Supreme Court reverses Bombay High Court order of bail to G N Saibaba

participation in decision-making, legal certainty, avoidance of arbitrariness, and procedural and legal transparency”.

In the context of India, the rule of law is very much related to the criminal justice system that consists of passing laws by law-making bodies, law enforcement, adjudication, (prosecution and courts), and correctional agency. Corruption and political interference can distort the criminal justice system. It happened in the past and it is happening in the present also. The premature release of 11 convicts is a political decision that goes against the spirit of the Rule of Law.

Current Indian political scenario is characterized by polarization based on religion. The religion-based polarization was witnessed in its cruel form in the 2002 Gujarat riots. Many independent reports had found that the Gujarat government under the leadership of Narendra Modi failed to stop the riots. Ashish Ketan in his book, “Under Cover: My Journey into the Darkness of Hindutva” has uncovered the

**The judiciary is expected to be the protector of the Rule of Law and of the fundamental rights guaranteed to citizens by the Indian Constitution. But some of the decisions of the judiciary send confusing signals**

omissions and commissions of the state along with other stories of cruelty and injustice during and after the 2002 Gujarat riots. When one observes the hurry with which the Gujarat government and the Union government released prematurely the 11 convicts of Bilkis Bano case, he/she is reminded of what Ashish Ketan has written in the introduction to his book.

“Even though I went there a few years after the events of 2002, the riots have always been a reminder to me that an ideology built on hate can persuade ordinary people to become part of a murderous mob, can get them not only to kill but to kill with relish and then justify it as a long overdue assertion of communal power”. No wonder the 11 men were accorded hero’s welcome when they were released on 15th August on the day of India’s independence.

The judiciary is expected to be the protector of the Rule of Law and of the fundamental rights guaranteed to citizens by the Indian Constitution. But some of the decisions of the judiciary send confusing signals. As the editorial in ‘The Hindu’ on October 27 has stated, “The instant stay on orders of acquittal or discharge of G.N. Saibaba and others in an alleged Maoist conspiracy case by the Supreme Court raises critical questions. The SC seems to have shown extraordinary zeal in fulfilling the Maharashtra government’s wish to have an immediate hearing. It is doubtful whether the Court should have responded with such swiftness just to suspend a judgement that has given detailed reasons for discharging the accused”.

If people lose faith in the Rule of Law because of the discriminatory approach of the law enforcing authorities and those involved in criminal justice delivery system, the result will be disastrous for the nation, and the image of India at the international level will be sullied. Hence governments should sternly act against all those who take law into their hands without any discrimination, and the judiciary should be impartial in its verdicts. The premature release of 11 convicted men in a brutal gang-rape and murder case like Bilkis Bano case does not instil faith in the citizens regarding the impartiality of the government, the very foundation of Rule of Law. ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## Jubilee Assembly of the FABC

# To 'Renew and Revitalize' Let Not Such Labour be in Vain!

Our hope from the FABC meeting also raises certain concerns that the bishops need to address so that they do not belie the expectations of the people of God in this continent

BY **FELIX WILFRED**

The bishops gathered in Bangkok for FABC jubilee celebrations are spending a considerable time together from 12 – 30 October. So then, we could reasonably expect some substantial results from their deliberations. Time-constraint cannot be here an excuse.

Cultural performances, receptions, and bonhomie among the bishops are important to create an atmosphere for joint reflection on the future of the Church in Asia. Hopefully, their prolonged stay in Bangkok will not be the mountain in travail bringing forth a mouse. Will the bishops bring forth something more than worn-out pious platitudes and many a déjà vu?

Our hope from the FABC meeting also raises certain concerns that the bishops need to address so that they do not belie the expectations of the people of God in this continent.

Today for an effective and meaningful pastoral practice, it is absolutely necessary to respond by considering the geopolitical situations in Asia. What is called for is not simply reporting on what is happening in different countries – information readily available on Google, but the response by



taking a stand. Obviously, the situations are different. However, that need not be a reason to abdicate the shared responsibility as Asian leaders to jointly address some of the converging critical socio-political issues and developments. These cannot be simply relegated to National Conferences.

In most countries, the political situation is precarious and volatile, raising many serious issues for pastoral practice, mission and engagement of the Church. The evolving situation needs to be addressed by the FABC, which will inspire the people of God and provide orientation and direction for the future.

Will the bishops prove themselves to be courageous leaders of their flock in critical times or behave like spineless and evasive ones? An Asian cardinal – the 90-year-old Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong – a longtime advocate of democracy and human rights and the “conscience of Hong Kong” – was arrested and brought to trial by the Chinese totalitarian regime of the Communist Party.

Will the FABC conveniently ignore this, and the bishops disperse from Bangkok without a word on such developments? Who will believe if the bishops claim any commitment to democracy and the dignity of human persons in Asia? Would they ever address the issues of migrants, refugees, and the war/customal crimes of the repressive states? Would they wake up conscience of the nation states to respond immediately and decisively to the ecological crisis that has devastated the lives of millions of people, especially the poor of Asia?



A mega event like the one in Bangkok and the deliberations there should have repercussions at the local level in everyday life. As often happens, when an Episcopal Body is as large as the FABC, we note a lot of openness on the part of the bishops, and it shrinks at the level of National Conferences. It gets narrowed down at Provincial and Diocesan levels. Unfortunately, as of now, there is no juridical mechanism to make the implementation of FABC's deliberations mandatory. But we do need it. Otherwise, we could only go on relying on the moral responsibility of the leaders to put into practice the vision and pastoral proposals of this Continental Body. Will the bishops bind themselves to practice in their dioceses what they will declare in Bangkok? Will this much required development happen?

The seriousness of translating the vision of the FABC will depend upon what it will have to say on Synodality in the Asian Churches. This should figure as a major issue and a source and point of reference for the renewal of the Churches in this continent. The reflection should bear upon the common responsibility of the people of God and their shared participation in the life and mission of the Church, which would naturally bring in the question of the current mode of the exercise of authority in the Asian Church, and to the extent, the Christian faithful are allowed to share in the three functions of Christ (teaching, sanctifying, and governing), especially in the function of governing. What will the FABC do to turn the Asian Churches into truly Synodal Ones? Could we expect some response from Bangkok Jubilee Assembly?

Then there is the question of the bishops' freedom to speak their minds frankly and earnestly. The presence of Roman Curial officials and nuncios is often justified on the ground that such Continental Meetings offer the opportunity for them to learn more about Asia and familiarize themselves with the situation. Often the border-line between learning and control is thin! For, an excessive concentration of these representatives could also inhibit the bishops and their freedom. This is all the more so, given a misunderstood Asian trait of deference and obsequiousness to authorities and the colonial heritage



Cardinal Charles Bo

of meekly acting in accord with the expectations of higher-ups.

This is what happened at the FABC Plenary Assembly of Bandung (1990), which marked the beginning of a clouding moment and overcautious phase in the FABC and its working. With the fresh wind of Pope Francis blowing in the Church, we could hope that the FABC will find encouragement and staunch support

in these representatives for its vision and pastoral involvement. How likely is this to happen?

That brings me to the next issue. Asia is a continent of youth brimming with life and energy. This contrasts with the gerontocracy – the rule of the old – in the FABC. Several leaders are on the verge of retirement – some within days and months – waiting to go for rest in the evening of their life and smoke their pipes in tranquility, perhaps! Many of them will not be attending the next Plenary Assembly of the FABC. Maybe some of them have already delivered their swan-songs; if not, they will do so during the current Jubilee Assembly.

It is important for the future of the Asian Church that the baton of leadership is passed on to a new generation of younger people, which should happen without delay. Changing over to young leadership to revitalize the FABC is required at all levels, including the chairmanship of various Offices. How will the FABC respond to this urgent and vital concern in this continent of the young?

Yet another critical question that the Plenary Assembly in Bangkok should grapple with is clerical

**The seriousness of translating the vision of the FABC will depend upon what it will have to say on synodality in the Asian Churches. This should figure as a major issue and a source and point of reference for the renewal of the Churches in this continent**

sexual abuse. There is a tendency to consider it a western issue and claim that our situation in Asia is different. Then there is the argument that in Asian culture, we do not discuss such scandalous matters in the open. These, I think, are convenient excuses. The wounds must be opened if they are to be healed. There are an increasing number of instances in different countries

of Asia of clerical sexual abuse and growing allegations by the victims against perpetrators as well as the authorities who try to cover up. Denying this uncomfortable fact would be like the proverbial ostrich that buries its head in the sand and believes that the world does not exist. It is a boiling issue in Asia, and no lid can stop it.

If we follow the Social Teachings of the Church, there is the question of human rights violations in these instances, which the leaders are bound to respond to. Moreover, there is the question of the credibility of the Church, its mission and its engage-



Cardinal Oswald Gracias

ment. What will have the Bangkok Assembly of the FABC to say on this increasing clerical sexual abuse in the Asian Churches?

Without addressing such momentous questions, the FABC Assembly could come across even to well-meaning people as "all sound and fury"...We will continue to pray that the Jubilee Assembly be filled with God's blessings and the inspiration of

the Spirit and that it will bear abundant fruits. Let us also hope that the expectations of the people of God in Asia will not be lied and that the great efforts to prepare and conduct such a mega event will have much bearing for life of abundance in Asia. To quote from the medieval Dies Irae of Friar Thomas Celano – tantus labor non sit cassus – let not so much labour be in vain! ☪

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**FELIX WILFRED** writer is a former secretary of the Office of Theological Concerns of FABC

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# Peter Unchained

## (A SEQUEL TO “Generally Speaking”)

Missionaries also need to beware of those who oppose their mission, the High Priests and the Kings – those who irresponsibly wield enormous religious or temporal power over their followers or subjects

BY **CHHOTEBHAI**

In February 2017, I was in Rome to attend the marriage of my niece to an Italian. The nuptials were held in the church of San Giuseppe Dei Falegnami constructed above the Prigione Dei SS Apostoli Pietro e Paolo, near the Roman Forum. This is where Peter and Paul were imprisoned by the Romans.

This September I met another Peter who had been in jail. He was Peter Shivdas Menon (68). Our conversation took place in the dining room of Matridham Ashram, Varanasi, just below a sign that read “Silence please”. Not one to easily follow such impositions, I learnt about Peter’s amazing story. Had I obeyed the rules I may have missed it! I subsequently invited him to my room to record his testimony.

Menon was working in an international bank in New Delhi when he was arrested in 2003 for alleged fraud and misappropriation and thrown into jail. The court was willing to enlarge him on bail against a security bond of Rs 60,000/-. His wife, herself a lawyer, did not come to the court room, and having nobody else in Delhi, he was sent back into judicial custody.

Two months later, a Vincentian priest and a sister belonging to the Sister Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament visited him in jail, as part of their prison ministry. The priest told him that he had a dream in which they had been directed to an under-trial in Jail No 4. That was Menon. They told him to believe in Jesus and his travails would end. They gave him a New Testament, a rosary and a Malayalam prayer book. In sheer disgust he threw them in a corner of his cell.

Within a year Menon had 12 more cases arraigned against him. His wife also filed for divorce on the specious grounds that he had been incarcerated. Menon was shattered and decided to end his life by banging his head against the metal grill of his cell.

But the jail warden noticed this and sat outside his cell telling him that if every prisoner thought



like that then the prison would become a graveyard. Menon was livid with rage. A fellow prisoner had placed a cross and a picture of Mother Mary on the wall of the cell. After defiling them he noticed the prayer book and rosary lying in a corner of the cell.

He picked up the rosary and started chanting the name of Jesus. He now saw a piece of paper falling on which was transcribed “Isaiah 41:10”. It read, “I have chosen you, I have not rejected you, do not be afraid, for I am with you, for I am your God. I give you strength, truly I help you, truly I hold you firm with my saving right hand”.

After multiple readings it now dawned on Menon that indeed there was a blessed assurance. It reminded him of what his prison visitors had earlier told him: “Become a believer in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

The transformation had begun. Simultaneously, the jailor asked him to assist in computer work in the jail office. He felt like Joseph in Pharaoh’s prison, where the jailor asked him to care for his fellow prisoners (cf Gen 40:4).

Maundy Thursday had special significance in Menon’s story. On that day in 2004 he had a dream of walking in a dark lane, when a white Ambassador



car drew alongside and he was pulled in by a person with long hair and a countenance shining like the sun. Like a Tesla, the car had no driver.

The next day, Good Friday, while reading the Bible he found himself burning in a fiery well. Then on Easter Sunday he felt somebody holding him from behind and shaking him vigorously. These experiences were driving Menon crazy.

When they were narrated to the prison visitors at their next visit they told him that indeed it was Jesus calling him. In a plea bargain, Menon said that he would believe in Jesus only if he was exonerated and released from prison.

Over the next year there was no real progress in his cases. As often happens in our judicial system, all he got was multiple adjournments. Come Maundy Thursday 2005 and he had another dream, this time in the lap of the same person that he had “met” in the car. He touched Menon’s forehead. There was a wound mark on his wrist. He said to Menon, “Before Easter Sunday next year you will be out of jail”. This was hard to believe as thirteen cases were still pending trial.

But the Lord was true to his promise. One by one, the cases against him were dismissed. By October 2005 only the original case remained. In that he was convicted to 5 years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rupees One Lakh. He did have the option of appealing to a higher court. Though offered an amicus curie, he chose to plead his own case.

Ten days before Maundy Thursday 2006 the appellate hearings were completed. On subsequent days he was taken to the court for the pronouncement of the judgement; but the judge was not available. The countdown to the Easter 2006 release had begun. The 13th April was Maundy Thursday. He was back in court but the judge was not there. In the afternoon the judge said that he would pronounce the verdict in his chamber at 4.00 p.m. The cops accompanying Menon told him that this was the end of the road as this was a very strict judge. It was easier to escape from the jaws of a lion than from the clutches of this judge.

But miracles never cease. At the appointed time the judge pronounced him “Not guilty”, absolving him of all charges and ordering the bank to pay him compensation for filing false and fabricated cases. On 15/4/2006, the eve of Easter, Menon walked out of jail, a free man. The Lord’s promise had been fulfilled. Alleluia!

On Easter Sunday Menon entered a church to attend Holy Mass for the first time. Seven years later he was baptised in the Bishop’s House, Faridabad, taking the name Peter. He decided to dedicate his remaining days to bearing testimony to the God of love and mercy who was faithful to his promises.

Had I kept “silent” in the dining room and followed the rules, I would never have known Peter’s amazing story that I am now sharing. This was déjà vu, history repeating itself. In the Acts of the Apostles we read of Peter, Jesus’ chosen successor, being incarcerated twice, once by the jealous priests and then by King Herod.

“The High priest intervened with all his supporters ... Filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and had them put in the public jail. But at night the angel of the Lord opened the prison gates and said as he led them out – Go and take up position in the Temple and tell the people all about the new life” (Acts 5:17-20).

“On the night before Herod was to try him, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, fastened with chains, while guards kept watch at the main entrance to the prison. Then suddenly an angel of the Lord stood there and the cell was filled with light. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him. Get up he said. Hurry; and the chains fell from his hands ... He followed him out, but had no idea that what the angel did was all happening in reality; he thought he was seeing a vision” (Acts 12:6,7,9).

Was Peter’s life a dream or a vision? I am reminded of what former President APJ Abdul Kalam said: “A dream is what you see in your sleep at night. A vision is what keeps you awake all night”. Missionaries are called to be visionaries.

Missionaries also need to beware of those who oppose their mission, the High Priests and the Kings – those who irresponsibly wield enormous religious or temporal power over their followers or subjects. Missionaries and visionaries, “Arise”. Break the laws of silence. Speak out. Stand up and be counted. Break the shackles that keep you enslaved and experience “the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). ©

*(Menon’s testimony was recorded in Matridham Ashram, Varanasi, during the writer’s recent spiritual journey there)*

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**CHHOTEBHAI** was invited to participate in this seminar in his capacity as Convenor of the Indian Catholic Forum.

# Memories of Soccer World Cup

A random recollection of the most tumultuous World Cup of all, the 1994 soccer fiesta that had everything – scandal, tragedy, exquisite football, joyousness and heartbreak

BY **MATHEW JOHN**

*“Everything I know about morality and the obligations of men, I owe it to football (soccer).”*

- Albert Camus

*“Some people think football (soccer) is a matter of life and death. I don’t like that attitude. It is much more serious than that.”*

- Bill Shankly



over time, mutated to being called “soccer”, again a word conceived by the British for reasons too tedious to explain and not worth knowing, but the newer term has certainly helped the Yanks distinguish their brutal game called “American football” from the sublime sport celebrated in the civilized world.

**A**s a few billion fans chomp at the bit in anticipation of the greatest show on earth – the World Soccer Cup 2022 in Qatar that is just weeks away -- it’s time we put a lid on our abiding tragedies, namely the apocalyptic corona virus and the putrescent political class, and instead focused on the world’s most popular spectator sport. Etymologically called “football” in its pristine form, it has,



**FIFA WORLD CUP  
Qatar 2022**

My theme, in essence, is an aged fan’s random recollection of the most tumultuous World Cup of all, the 1994 soccer fiesta that had everything – scandal, tragedy, exquisite football, joyousness and heartbreak. But allow me a precursive disclaimer. Now that I am pushing 74 years and not always there, my memory has started playing tricks, so much so that reality and fiction are



sometimes indistinguishable, even when a particular field of activity has been a lifetime obsession, like World Cup Soccer has been and is.

In my current state, what happened in my childhood and youth is remembered like it happened the other day; the middle years are dodgy but still close to the real thing; today I don't always recall what happened yesterday. My friends, that's what happens when you've been here very long; things begin to fall apart but more on that some other time. For now, it's about football! So, let's go, or to evoke that resounding Spanish football chant, *Vamos! Vamos!*

The 1994 World Cup was the swansong of the incredible Diego Maradona who was the consummate footballer in physical skills, soccer intuition and vision. The great Brazilian, Zico, once said that he "saw Maradona do things that God himself would doubt were possible." If Maradona had even an iota of good sense, he would have been proclaimed the official God of football, instead of being one of the two joint winners (along with Pele) of the FIFA Player of the 20th Century award. Sadly, his off-field excesses caught up with him in the 1994 tournament, where his superb finish against Greece turned out to be his last international goal. Days later, he was kicked out of the World Cup for failing a drug test, and with his exit Argentina, one of the pre-tournament favourites, sank ignominiously in the round of 16.

A few days ago, the world was jolted by the horrifying news from Indonesia of the death of over 125 football fans in a stampede that some of them provoked in maniacal rage. It hurts to say it but there is no more crazed fanatic than the football fanatic. We got a taste of this ugly truth in that frenzied 1994 World Cup.

The name of Andres Escobar, the Colombian captain, is forever etched in my memory, not for his footballing prowess but for an error on the field of play and its ultimate denouement. His team, Colombia, the hot favourite of Pele to win the title and with the talismanic, lion-maned Carlos Valderrama leading the attack, was up against the USA in a do-or-die group stage match. With the score 1-1 late into the second half, Escobar etched his name in football-



ing lore with -- what I jokingly told friends -- the most exquisite interception and goal that completely wrongfooted the goalkeeper but, tragically for him and Colombia, it was his "own goal".

Colombia lost and crashed out of the World Cup. A week later, back home in a Medellin parking lot, he was shot a dozen times and as each bullet was pumped into him, the assassin shouted

"goal"! Yes, football can be as ghastly as it can be beautiful, because it is, after all, about humans and their capacity to scale the heights and plumb the depths.

Having the benefit of the omnipresent YOUTUBE helps jog the memory and revive invaluable gems from the past that were disregarded when they happened. Did you know that the greatest goal of the 1994 World Cup was scored by a little-known Saudi, Saeed Al Owairan in the first-round encounter between Saudi Arabia and Belgium? Even at the cost of committing footballing blasphemy, I would put Al Owairan's goal almost on par with Maradona's breathtaking goal against England in the 1986 World Cup, deemed "the goal of the century". Maradona, in a breathtaking run from his half, fainted and steam-rolled past four opposing players and the goalie before flicking the ball into goal. Now watch Al Owairan's mesmeric 69 metre run, winding past

**If Maradona had even an iota of good sense, he would have been proclaimed the official God of football, instead of being one of the two joint winners (along with Pele) of the FIFA Player of the 20th Century award. Sadly, his off-field excesses caught up with him in the 1994 tournament**

one opponent after another – four in all -- and then smashing it past the goalie for an amazing goal; possibly not as speedy and controlled as Maradona but thereabouts, no?

Following the dreary, goal-starved 1990 World Cup where most games were defensive battles of attrition, with -- you guessed it – stodgy, soulless Germany lifting the Cup, important rule changes were introduced in 1994 to encourage attacking play including three points awarded for a win instead of two and a ban on picking up back-passes to goalkeepers.

These amendments had the salutary effect of increasing the number of goals scored from the record-low of 2.21 per game in 1990 to 2.73 in 1994. Even better, we were treated to a spectacle of great attacking footballers in full flight -- the supremely gifted, egotistical Romario ('God created me to delight people with my goals'), the 'gunslinger' Bulgarian Hristo Stoichkov, the 'Regele' Romanian Gheorghe Hagi, the 'rocking-baby' celebrant Bebeto, the deadly German striker Jurgen Klinsmann. But for me personally as for millions of other fans, the World Cup 1994 was illumined by the 'divine ponytail', Roberto Baggio.

In this tournament, Baggio stirred the emotions of the fans like no other footballer could, ambushing them with his drop-dead good looks and his consummate artistry. Combining the technical virtuosity of the European with the inventive joie de vivre and flair of the South American, he had the world at his footballing feet. Otherwise, a diehard fan of Brazil, I switched allegiance to Italy midway through the tournament, partly because I was put off by the braggadocio of Romario but more on account of Baggio's mesmerizing play. The bare facts speak for his overarching impact from the knockout stage when every game mattered.

After barely scraping through the group stage, winning only one match, Baggio and Italy turned it on. Against Nigeria in the quarter finals, he got the winning goal in the dying minutes of the game. He poached both goals against Spain in the semi-final,



proving beyond a doubt to football experts that he was the most technically gifted and 'big occasion' Italian player ever, ahead of Gigi Riva, Totti and Del Piero. Fantasy took off and, in the lead-up to the Italy-Brazil final, a story started doing the rounds that at the tender age of three, Roberto Baggio had vowed to his father that he would one day win the World Cup for Italy. We were convinced that the pony-tailed wonder would deliver on his promise.

We girded our belts for the grand finale. If you believe that the sporting arena has largely overcome the cultural imperialism that informs other aspects of the North-South asymmetrical relationship, then think again!

I have no doubt that the match timings of the 1994 World Cup were programmed to suit the TV viewers in Europe, which meant that for the most crucial matches, we, dupes in the Third World, had to stay up through the hot nights. Even the wellbeing of the players was sacrificed for the convenience and comfort of the TV viewers in Europe.

The final kicked off in Pasadena, California on 17th July 1994 at 12.30 PM, in searing 100 degrees Fahrenheit temperature, in contravention of the age-old convention that all important matches are played in the evenings of the chosen venues. For me personally it was an unforgettably traumatic night for I dozed off half-way through the second half and woke up only when it was all over. I was in a bacchanalian stupor when that dramatic penalty shoot-out happened! In retrospect, I thank God for that spell of unconsciousness, for had I been awake, the sheer tension of the shoot-out would have killed me.

Both teams played so cautiously that even after extra time, the scores were locked at 0-0. In the penalty shoot-out, after four takes, the scores were 2-2. In the final round, Brazil scored, and it was left to Baggio to score in order to keep Italy in the game. He missed and the world was plunged in grief! ☹

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**MATHEW JOHN** is a former civil servant. Views are personal

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# In Mumbai, UN Chief's Strong Comments On Human Rights in India

"As an elected member of the Human Rights Council, India has a responsibility to shape global human rights, and to protect and promote the rights of all individuals, including members of minority communities," Mr Guterres said in a speech in Mumbai

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres criticized India over its human rights record during a three-day visit.

Since PM Modi came to power in 2014, campaigners claim persecution and hate speech have allegedly accelerated against religious minorities.

Pressure has also grown towards government critics and journalists, particularly women reporters - some have suffered relentless campaigns of online abuse including death and rape threats, reported news agency AFP.

"As an elected member of the Human Rights Council, India has a responsibility to shape global human rights, and to protect and promote the rights of all individuals, including members of minority communities," Mr Guterres said in a speech in Mumbai. Though he praised India's achievements 75 years after leaving British rule, Mr Guterres also said that the understanding that "diversity is a richness... is not a guarantee".

"It must be nurtured, strengthened and renewed everyday," he said.

Citing Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, Mr Guterres said their values need to be guarded by "condemning hate speech unequivocally".

India must do this "by protecting the rights and freedoms of journalists, human rights activists, students and academics. And by ensuring the continued independence of India's judiciary", he said.

"India's voice on the global stage can only gain in authority and credibility from a strong commitment to inclusivity and respect for human rights at home," he said, adding that "much more needs to be done to advance gender equality and women's rights".

"I urge Indians to be vigilant and to increase your investments in inclusive, pluralistic, diverse communities and societies," Mr Guterres said.

An official response from the Government of India is awaited.



## Climate goals

On climate change, Mr Guterres echoed New Delhi's assertion that advanced economies must take the lead in cutting carbon emissions and provide money to countries like India to develop renewable energies.

But the UN chief also said nations like India need to "take an extra step to close the mitigation gap", referring to efforts to reduce or prevent the emission of greenhouse gases.

While setting goals for renewable energy, coal still makes up 70 percent of India's energy needs. India and China had, in the final summit declaration at last year's COP26, insisted that the language was changed from "phase out" coal to "phase down".

Mr Guterres also said that as home to one-sixth of humanity India can "make or break" the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Some of the most fundamentals of these have "gone into reverse" due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis "accelerated by the war in Ukraine", he said. © (Courtesy: ndtv.com)



## Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

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# Lizzy and Our Own Throne Sitters..!

**P**oor Liz Truss, just forty-five days on the PM's throne and she was out! In India too, the chief minister's throne has become so temporary that political leaders now occupy just a portion of the royal chair as if they are wondering if they have any right to sit on it. I thought I'd do an interview with one of them on the same subject:

"Chief Minister sahib, what gives you the right to sit on your throne?"

"Right?"

"Yes sir, right!"

"Guards beat this man up!"

"You should beat me up yourself sir!"

"Why should I dirty my hands?"

"Aha therein lies the problem Mr Thronesitter!"

"What problem?"

"That you won't dirty your hands! May I tell a story sir?"

"Entertain me!" says the uncomfortable political leader on his throne.

"A poor villager was coming home from the town market with his cart laden with purchases for his family. Suddenly his old horse slipped and the whole cart slid into a swamp. The villager cried out for help and a rich man who was also returning from town, ordered his horsemen to help. So, his men pulled and pushed and tried their best, they even tried to unload the battered cart but it just sank farther.

Finally, the rich man got down from his own grand carriage and pushed himself and got the cart back onto firm ground!"

"Silly fellow!" mutters the leader.

"Oh no sir! Many years later this rich man died and at the entrance of the pearly gates he was stopped. "What good have you done on earth?" asked the keeper of the heavenly gates. "Ah well," said the man and tried to recount the few times he had helped people, but the scales weighed heavily in favour of his bad deeds. Finally, an angel of mercy



walked in and put something on the scales, immediately the scales tipped in favour of the rich man entering heaven.

"What did he put?" asks the curious leader looking closely at me.

"A bit of dirt from the rich man which had got stuck onto him while pushing the poor man's cart!"

"So, what are you trying to say?" asks the leader, looking more uncomfortable on his throne.

"That you get down from your throne sir, and work for the people who have elected you, that you feel the sweat and grime and filth of your constituents! Shed tears as you see their hardship and let them feel your strength toiling for them!"

"Are you mad?"

"Then, and then only sir will you find the throne a perfect fit for you, for you have earned the right to sit on it!"

"Guards throw this man out!"

"No sir, why don't you do so yourself?"

"And dirty my hands?" ©

#### 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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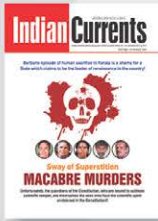
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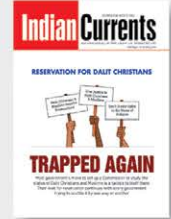




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