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THE SECULAR CITIZEN

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Rs. 10

A NATIONAL FAMILY WEEKLY

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ORGANISE your equipment before you start working

NEVER give up, email your teacher for advice

#EPIC FAIL

Symptoms of a Failing System.

by Don Aguiar.

As we are nearing the end of Unlock 1.0, with the easing of restrictions across different parts of the country, I'm feeling a mix of hope and anxiety. Hope of inching back towards normalcy, anxiety about whether we're ready for what's to come.

No matter where you live, you must've experienced a few days of clear blue skies. Multiple news reports have highlighted stories of low pollution levels in the lockdown period, with gorgeous photos of mountain peaks coming into view (like the Dhauladhar mountain range being visible after decades in Punjab!)

The lockdown's come at a great cost -- economy, poverty, starvation and a migrant crisis. And as the government begins to focus on recovery, environmental concerns must not be left behind. We've seen what only a few months of respecting nature can do.

As our government focuses on investments and policy decisions to resuscitate the economy, let's not forget that these decisions will impact how we live, and consume for years to come. Recent catastrophes like the cyclones and the locust swarm are effects of climate change. And as we recover economically, we must also focus on undoing decades of ecological damage.

Relief measures should not come at the cost of the environment -- there must be a focus on clean, renewable sources of energy, pedestrians, cyclists and public transport should be prioritised, and our rivers and skies protected. Clean air should be accessible to all.

The universe is all-rational and we worship nature as one of the divine manifestations. In keeping with the global endeavour to curb the habit of death and destruction wrecked by the novel coronavirus, many at some point wondered "Why is humanity riddled with such cruelty?" because truth gets reinforced ever so often when we hear our own ghastly deeds against God's creations, including ourselves....

There's more evil in the world that we advertently or inadvertently validate or worst witness as mute spectators. We need to wake up and restore the balance with our own acts of kindness, no matter how small. But it will take more than good deeds to restore this balance, as that would still be a symptomatic solution. The root cause of every crime, cruelty and wrong doing lies in an abject lack of respect... a lack of respect for the environment, for our fellow creatures, and for our own species. And what goes round comes around insomuch this pandemic does feel like 'coming around' of this deficiency of respect, which was pretty much on its way to become the new norm.....till we were abruptly slapped with a whole new normal instead.

We need to do a bit to restore the balance for the sake of our own life, our safety and well-being..... Starting out with keeping the social distancing measures and wearing the mask as India eases the lockdown.... And taking it further by unmasking truths that are taken for granted with a renewed sense of respect for all coupled with the commitment to restoring the balance as your very own expression of gratitude to the legacy of mankind.

But the politicians and other office bearers of the world's most demo-

cratic country, the most vaunted Constitution, sit impotently and watch the prime minister and his cohorts destroy it, is chilling. It belies all the comfort, security, and solace the trustees of the great institutions and edifices of the nation have provided the majority of its citizens who've taken them hitherto at face value.

Now, even if only briefly—until it is likely snuffed out by state power, just as the poor migrants ill treatment was—it is the ordinary people who have emerged as the true leaders and upholders of value and ideas and institutions that need not be enshrined in historic documents such as the Constitution nor reside in towering, awe-inspiring edifices to attain an iota of legitimacy.

Fundamental ideas of humanity—universal fairness, justice, liberty, equality—need not be inscribed in fancy verbiage on historic parchments in the halls of government. No. They are more permanently etched and inscribed in the hearts and minds and souls of all human beings who, for that reason, rise against any abrogation of those immutable ideas and aspirations—in unison. For them, the rococo writings on parched palimpsests in the Halls of Congress matter less than the greater truth in graffiti spray-painted on a wall, shining bright, as the sun itself, in this otherwise benighted country: No justice, no peace.

We are trapped in this governments ideology – where luck and caste determines rights and where one person's fortunes depends on another inequality. This is an era of capitalism, competition and industrial revo-

(Contd.. on p. 4)

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**We have not missed
even a single issue
during the
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(Contd.. from p. 2)

lution. The era where profit comes before corruption and everything in counterfeit production. In these times we reward ignorance and sacrifice integrity for acceptance. We will be destroying the environment and glorify idiocy over real intelligence.

The 21st century the century of Instagram and Facebook – you can be ignored for your morals, yet worshipped for your looks because selfishness is portrayed as strength and kindness is mistaken for weakness and the media teaches us to ignore what is important and instead follow what is popular regardless.

We have been taught that to be successful we need to be wealthy, real virtues like honour have become irrelevant and people are now defined by their financial prosperity - but by having the best, makes us the best? Or does it make us robotic culture clones? And are we truly free if we can't spend a full day without the Apps on our smart phones? Do schools do really teach us how to think? Are degrees desired by education or validation?

Are religion and nationalities real? Should they be really taken seriously? After all they are just human constructs so why do we fight over them? Why do ideas make people forget their humanity? All we are is humanity and so person's quality of life should not be determined by skin colour or ethnicity. These things can't be chosen so they should have no power over a person's freedom or opportunity.

Why is cricket worshipped by millions when starving children get little recognition? Why are phones, cars and possessions more important than climate change and animal extinction? Why is Bollywood culture and entertainment prioritised over world injustice and hunger? Why is

celebrities seen as role models for selling corrupt messages? Why do we make stupid people famous for being vulgar? What is it that we care about now, status, Image, titles, perceived values? What if these are illusions and famous people are just people, people who manipulate and trick you.

Why do we keep fracking industrialising, coal mining and burning fossil fuel? That's false innovation, rapid unsustainable infinite growth on a finite planet is impossible. It will lead us to the collapse of civilisation. If you haven't noticed the problem then you haven't been paying attention. We need to wake up because as a species we are not headed in the right direction.

Is it true that humans are intelligent or are we ignorant? Is honesty really a virtue if nobody wants to hear the truth? It makes no sense.

Yes there is still famine, poverty and looming war. Why should we work for a system which makes the selfish rich and the selfless poor? One percent of the country's population owns thirty five percent of all wealth. How can we say that this is fair and working? It is parasitical to our health.

Success depends on who you know. Not what you know. The majority being exploited. This is the reality of every day. The takers of society bathe in greed while the common people slave away.

Can anyone see it? We are living a lie. We are part of the game but we don't realise. Some people win but most people lose because this system only benefits a few. Its lagging and its dysfunctional, capitalism rewards the wrong people. Prosperity isn't earned any more. It's a privileged dependant on exploiting the poor. These are the symptoms of a failing system.

My Dad

A father is the one who maintains strict discipline among the family members and is looked upon with respect by everyone. He shows the right path to his children and motivates them to achieve the goals of their lives through proper education. A father is the one who stands rock solid beside his family and protects them from the evils of society. He acts as the root of his family and binds each member with love and respect.

My dad's name is Jubel D'Cruz. He is a loving and dutiful person who takes care of my entire family.

He is a writer by profession and is a very hardworking person. He is an intelligent person who answers all my questions in a witty way.

My dad respects his own parents, my mother and each member of my family.

He maintains a cordial relationship with our relatives, friends and neighbours.

He teaches me good etiquette, humanity and ethics of life.

My dad is my role model and I want to become like him one day.



— Sweta D'Cruz, Mumbai



Truth About India China Face Off

On Friday The honorable Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi should have frankly admitted to the nation, "Yes, our territory is occupied by China and our jawans are killed as they fight!"

And all opposition political parties would have shown sympathy and United with him as one nation!

But by hiding facts and telling a bunch of lies that not even an inch of our territory is occupied by China, etc., he irritated army personnel and some political parties! The boldest among them was the Congress which exposed the Prime Minister! It is the right and duty of the opposition to question the ruling government and the government has the duty to answer all questions truthfully. The Congress was truly Nationalist, but BJP shamelessly called the Congress as supporter of China! The TV channels like Times now and Republic in their debates were seen frantically defending Modiji and condemning the Congress! But truth shall prevail! Prime Minister's usual proud and unwise approach to India-China face off in Ladakh is responsible for the division among political parties on the stand against China! When the nation is facing attacks by Pakistan, Kashmiri rebels, Nepal, China, economic disaster in the country and above all Coronavirus, all at the same time(!) what else can we say but 'God save our country!' Om Shanti!!

So unfortunate!

—Fr. Michael G.,
Samaj Shuddhi Abhiyan, Vasai.

Restart PMC bank without further delay.

Lakhs of depositors of Punjab Maharashtra Co-operative Bank (PMC) were keeping their fingers crossed, hoping that they would wake up on Monday June 22 to a pleasant surprise to find the 9-month old moratorium on PMC bank lifted. Unfortunately, this was not to be as the RBI has further extended the moratorium by 6 months till Dec 22, but increased the withdrawal limit up to a maximum of Rs 1 lakh, which includes the Rs 50,000/ permitted earlier. This brings hardly any relief to the hard hit-depositors in these days of lockdowns, rising prices., growing unemployment and dwindling economy. It is not known what the RBI has in mind and why are they dithering and prevaricating on their earlier assurances that depositors' money is safe, and a mechanism is being worked out to revive the bank early. Justice has already been done by convicting all the scamsters and attaching their assets. PMC bank also has sufficient assets and profits of over 100 crore. Why then are the depositors made to suffer for no fault of theirs? Maharashtra Co-operative bank has recently confirmed their desire to merge their bank with PMC, and accordingly a letter of merger has been sent to the RBI governor for his approval. Union minister Nitin Gadkari has also requested the RBI governor to find an early solution to end the depositors' woes. Why then the delay?

— A. F. Nazareth
- Alto Porvorim

Sushant left us too soon

The sudden deaths of iconic Bollywood actors Irrfan Khan, Rishi Kapoor and now Sushant Singh Rajput are a great loss to the Hindi film industry.

Though these actors are no longer with us, they have left behind several memorable films that will be remembered for years to come. May their souls rest in peace.

—Jubel D'Cruz,
Mumbai

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Thriving On Confusions Goa And Its Covid Fight

Goa is turning virulent with each passing day!

But the recent spurt in the number of COVID-19 cases reported does not seem to have deterred the administration from continuously relaxing the norms in a bid to bring back normalcy to the state. In the bargain, a reign of confusion prevails over the region.

Amid a series of Standard Operating Procedures issued, apprehensions that many of the SOPs which are by themselves self-contradictory could lead to a whole lot of misperception have not been unfounded either.

While on paper these sets of instructions promise relief to those affected, the ground reality fails to inspire confidence among them. The state government's latest SOP will see a large number of untested people coming into Goa from other states.

In the absence of a proper vigilance system that largely depends on local bodies to monitor the isolation of an infected individual in their area, it is difficult to comprehend how quarantined persons can be made to follow the protocol.

It is quite evident that the locals feel let down by the inefficacy of an administration which many feel faltered at crucial points in its war against the dreaded microbe and is hence unable to contain its spread in the state.

The government's hesitation over many an issue pertaining to the COVID-pandemic has further prevented people from exuding confidence in their government!

The public cannot be faulted for as-



suming that if the virus has spread to every taluka of the state and has been alarmingly growing to even infect health workers, there must be serious flaws in the government's handling of the pandemic.

With coronavirus cases sprouting in several parts of the state, it is now becoming difficult to understand the modus operandi the state government will resort to to avert dangers posed by the COVID-19 spread.



by Pachu Menon

It would not be wrong at this juncture to state that the state government has lost its way on COVID!

Just a week back we were debating the prudence of having the government acceding to the demands by a couple of political leaders for the lockdown of the port-city of Vasco in the wake of the steep surge in COVID cases at Mangor Hill.

We need to understand that as long as the rampaging virus continues to evade a potent cure, there is bound to be a spike in infections.

The process of declaring 'containment zones' is the administration's response vis-à-vis the seriousness of

the situation and with a view to arrest the spread of the disease.

But does this entail a lockdown of the entire region every time such procedures are followed!

The government's concern for the lives and livelihood of the populace was being cited as the reason for its reluctance to agree for the total lockdown of Mormugao taluka.

For a state struggling to come out of the rigours of a prolonged nationwide lockdown, another forced internment of its populace and the order to shut down all business and commercial activities would only add to its woes, or so it was thought.

The state's efforts to limp back to normalcy economically would also be drastically hampered.

That is not to say that the government can endanger the lives of its citizens by concentrating only on reviving the economy of the state and overlooking the risks of exposing them to the hazards of the deadly virus.

It however remained to be seen as to how steadfast the standard operat-



(Contd.. from p. 6)

ing procedures issued by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs would be adhered to once public movement starts in public eateries and shrines in Goa.

Moreover, considering the local conditions, it was pertinent to have the state authorities mandating their own set of rules and guidelines as Goa addressed the 'Unlock' phase.

So far the state has followed the MHA advisories verbatim without taking into consideration the local concerns. Even otherwise, the haste shown by the state for being declared a 'Green Zone' earlier has not been without its own share of surprises.

With the spate in infectious cases observed, it is all the more shocking that the Chief Minister in recent times has been giving into bouts of perceptual illusion confusing setbacks as rare achievements.

The fact that the CM has also got into the habit of contradicting the Health Minister quite often on matters relating to the COVID pandemic in the state is equally worrying.

Considering the fact that Goa is in a far worse condition than it was earlier, Pramod Sawant's haste to get the state into Unlock-mode emphasizes his indecisiveness and lack of foresight.

With gaping holes in systems and protocols it is all the more worrying to have partisan attitudes deciding the movement of people across the borders.

Moreover, the CM's assertion of preparedness is indeed hollow considering the state's limitations in healthcare infrastructure, testing and quarantine facilities.

Critics of the CM have been quick to point out that he has not been able to grasp the enormity of the situation and has failed to understand the COVID-19 impact in Goa.

As more and more people have begun to doubt the effectiveness of Goa government's anti-COVID plans, it is the almighty the populace will have to turn to for deliverance from the scourge of Coronavirus.

But almost all religious places and shrines in the state have decided to keep away devotees for yet another indefinite period advising them instead to pray from the safe confines of their homes.

Likewise, the voluntary decision by the vendors to close their shops consequent to the virus scare sweeping across the port-city can only be seen as an alarming response to the escalating cases which has made the members of public more cautious.

The clamour for lockdown of the affected areas reflects the concern of the locals who fear for the lives of their families. As more and more people have begun to doubt the effectiveness of Goa government's anti-COVID plans, self-help remains the only option.

For members of the public who have been flippant enough to consider the lockdown as a period of forced hibernation, the unlock phase might well have turned into 'party time'. And this is precisely where the whole problem lies! People will have to strictly adhere to the precautionary norms prescribed in order to mark themselves safe.

'Atmanirbharta' or self-reliance will be achieved when the locals decide on overcoming the difficult situation through their collective and selfless efforts.

A public showdown over the government's failure to 'break the chain' of infections is however no solution to the problem at hand.

With the onset of monsoon, the state will now have to contend with diseases like Dengue and Malaria as well.

Goa is in for tough times ahead!

Day of Conscience!

At the close of his general audience on 17 June 2020, Pope Francis praised Aristides de Sousa Mendes, a Portuguese diplomat who helped tens of thousands of Jews and others like Gypsies flee from Nazi persecution.

"Today June 17 is the 'Day of Conscience', inspired by the noble witness of the Portuguese diplomat, who around 80 years ago decided to follow the voice of his conscience, and saved the lives of thousands of persecuted peoples... May the freedom of conscience be respected always and everywhere on a regular basis. May every Christian give the example of an upright conscience, enlightened by the Word of God!"

Sousa Mendes (SM) is believed to have granted at least 10,000 visas in June and July of 1940, before being recalled to Lisbon. His act of conscience, for which the "Day of Conscience" is recognized, cost him dearly. He was expelled from the diplomatic corps, and his family at times went to a refugee soup kitchen for food.

Yet his suffering did not compromise the clarity of his conscience. Although SM died in poverty in 1954, he has gained attention as an exemplar of a true conscience. In 1966 SM joined the list of the "Righteous Among the Nations", an appreciation by Israel of non-Jews who boldly saved Jews during the holocaust!

Portugal posthumously promoted him Ambassador, and formally apologized to his family. Postage stamps and statues are a tribute to the memory of SM! His last words, "I could not have acted otherwise, and therefore I accept all that has befallen me with love!"

—Dr. Trevor Colaso,
Bandra (W), Mumbai.

WHETHER THE COVID PANDEMIC HAS THOUGHT US A FEW RULES THAT WE HAVE TO FOLLOW AS HUMAN BEINGS, TO LIVE A FAIRLY HAPPY, COMFORTABLE AND STRESS FREE LIFE?

by Eric D'Sa

We in India who stay in cities have lived for almost 3 months of this Covid Pandemic, lockdown in our homes and mostly survived. How well we have done so depends on whether in our life we have followed some of the basic rules we take for granted. Human Sapiens have succeeded to rule the world, as they have more than any other animal on this planet learnt to survive new situations such as the lockdown, for a considerable long period. Our brains are wired to find some happiness in any situation and make best use of it. However to so with some comfort and without stress, the pandemic by now would have thought us the following lessons:

One, we have to invest in health. Persons who have taken care of their health and have no predetermined ailments have irrespective of the age, been able to survive the infection. People who have eaten a balanced diet, exercised sufficiently and slept well have built in immunities. There has to be work leisure balance in life.

Two, it costs very little to live. It must have surprised many how little was being offered by the government to the poor who are at the bottom of the pyramid, in way of rations and money to get over lockdown period. You too must have also realised, when you do not have to travel to work and entertainment is limited to your smart phone, computer, and TV, the costs you incur each month reduce considerably.

Three, we need sufficient emergency funds, food and fresh water at our disposal. Generally it is felt in case of money, depending on ones age, you need between one year to three years of minimum living money for the family. Younger families can target lesser amounts and as you age the amount

has to be kept increasing. This also depends whether the family has single or multiple incomes.

Four, the money should be in cash or in saving accounts or in near liquid ones. These days quick loans can be taken against gold and silver in your possession. Fixed deposits in Banks also help in cases where the amount of money required is large.

Five, stock markets go up and down and if you are ready to stomach the risk, this

YOU THE CITIZENS DECIDE:

is either directly or in mutual funds help. In normal times stocks of good steady large companies are quite liquid. People who have sufficient money reserves and are young enough to be long term investors, will do well taking this risk in having part of their money in stocks and shares.

Six, asset allocation and diversification are not just words—they have meaning. Those with well-diversified portfolios across real estate, equity, debt and gold did not bat an eyelid as pandemonium raged in the markets. The pandemic told us the virtues of having a good allocation and actually staying with it. A rough rule of thumb is to reduce equity as you age, but getting fully out of equity is never a part of diversification. In fact, those with enough elbow room with their asset allocation, had a debt portfolio in place and were able to actually buy more equity as markets fell.

Seven, if you are in business or even otherwise keep your debt low. One of the problems faced by Americans is that they have started living on large amount of debt. The consumer society, and easy access to credit cards has increased the personal and household debt. Social

security and easy mortgage has gradually made the populations in developed country's delay savings for a rainy day. This can be dangerous in the present case when the economies have tanked with lots of job losses.

Eight, write a Will, if you have not done so until now. This is required even in cases of young who have inherited wealth or have earned it. During Pandemic times one never knows when and how you are infected. At the same time the health care system is over burdened.

Even the well to do rich families with adequate insurance cover may not find a bed in a good hospital.

Nine, pick up a few good books and read them. With constant exposure to Computers,TV, and Smart phones, we are slowly losing the practice of spending time reading a good book. Pandemic may be a good time to catch up with our reading as you stay locked up at home. It provides variety to spend leisure time on non social pandemic days.

Ten, finally keep faith in God . Prayer, meditation, novenas and hearing distant Holy Eucharist, greatly help in reliving stress. In the past it was a yearly practice to attend a 3 day retreat where you had to keep silence, pray and meditate. This was to help to get away from the daily hustle and bustle of life.

It is becoming clear that the Covid 19 Virus Pandemic is there to stay for some-time. We are told the vaccine is at least one year away. We will have to gear up for a few rough months ahead as the community transfer of virus rages and the number of covid cases go up, well viral. Our healthcare system looks ready to cave in and the lack of medical professionals and facilities is becoming a reality, even to a section of the population who has thought that it can buy its way out of any situation.

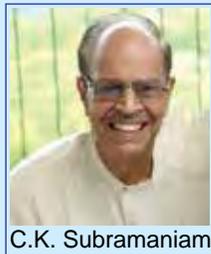
Culture, Craft and Corona

We have all become suddenly more aware of the moments when we cannot avoid touching elements of public buildings. Architecture is the most physical, most imposing and most present of the arts - you cannot avoid it yet, strangely, we touch buildings at only a very few points - the hand-rail, perhaps a light switch and, almost unavoidably, the door handle.

This modest piece of hand-held architecture is our critical interface with the structure and the material of the building. Yet it is often reduced to the most generic, cheaply made piece of bent metal which is, in its way, a potent critique of the value we place on architecture and our acceptance of its reduction to a commodified envelope rather than an expression of culture and craft.

Despite their ubiquity and pivotal role in the haptic experience of architecture, door handles remain oddly under-documented. There are no serious histories and only patchy surveys of design, mostly sponsored by manufacturers. Yet in the development of the design of the door handle we have, in microcosm, the history of architecture, a survey of making and a measure of the development of design and how it relates to manufacture, technology and the body.

The door closer, the door handles have become the talk of the town ever since Corona virus hit almost



C.K. Subramaniam

all the states in India. People fear to touch the door handle fearing that the virus may enter your body. Even going by elevator or lift is avoided to make sure that you are not touching the most used handles and the lift buttons. People regularly wipe out such handles with the wipers to make sure that they are not getting infected as the metal is considered to be a potential bearer of virus.

When someone who has COVID-19 coughs or exhales they release droplets of infected fluid. Most of these droplets fall on nearby surfaces and objects - such as desks, tables or telephones. People could catch COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects - and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. Other corona viruses are capable of causing illnesses ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. The idea that swiping shared surfaces, from doorknobs to gas pump handles, might help scientists learn how to better contain the threat was too powerful to pass up.

In general, good cleaning habits include routine wiping of any surfaces that people frequently touch, like

tables, door handles, light switches, cabinet handles, desks, toilets, faucets and sinks. In North India the grown up girls are given the job of wiping out the household items on a regular basis before proceeding to their schools or colleges. This olden custom is followed only to create awareness about the presence of dust and the need to clean it in a systematic way. Cleaning means you are getting rid of germs, while disinfecting means you are actually killing them. While you might clean surfaces effectively, that does not mean you're disinfecting, and you may run the risk that germs and bacteria could grow.

Household cleaners that have a diluted bleach solution, alcohol solutions with at least 70 percent alcohol, and most common disinfectants should be effective at disinfecting. But make sure you have good ventilation and wear gloves while using them. The key areas you need to worry about are surfaces that are shared by family members and those that come in close contact with bodily fluids. It's OK if you neglect your windows but you better take care of that door handle. If a surface is already dirty, use soap and water to clean it before you disinfect it.

Papa you are my Hero



Dear Papa,
To write about you is the most difficult task for me.
Not because there is nothing
But because I know that these few lines will not express
who you are to me.

The moment you detected my presence in Mama's
womb
You were enthralled!
You took care of me even before I faced the world
Even to this day you have never failed to care.

You held my little hands everywhere and taught me my
first words
You held me tight and protected me from all evil eyes.

In my growing years, you were not just a Dad
You were a friend, a guide and gentle philosopher.

You corrected me without nagging me.
You patted my back when I excelled
You smiled and cheered me up even when I failed.

You encouraged my talents and supported me to pursue
my passions
My dreams became yours
My worries became yours

You spoke less but your life became an example for me.
You showed me what it meant to be sincere towards
work.
You taught me how important it was to talk in front of
people
And not behind their backs.

No matter how gloomy my life turned at times,
You always helped me restart my life.
Without any expectations

When I cried in times of despair
You hid your tears in your eyes,
But your swollen red nose told me that you had cried.

When the world pointed fingers at me,
You held my hands tight

Papa, no matter how old I am
I always find comfort on your lap
And happiness in your words

You have done a lot of things for me
But the greatest gift you have given me is the gift of a
happy family.

You loved and respected Mom which taught me what
family was.
You struggled hard and taught me what self-reliance
was.
Your life speaks of simplicity.

You never failed to appreciate my talents.
Even today no matter how little I achieve,
You always swell with pride and make me believe
That I am capable of winning whatever I seek

The best gift God has given me is you.
Papa, when the world celebrates Father's day in many
ways
I wish to celebrate this day with my words as a gratitude
to you.
Your selfless love and care has never failed to impress
me.

If I am something today, it is all because of you.
Your loving daughter just wishes to say:

You are my inspiration Papa,
You are indeed my hero!



by Sonal Lobo

The Spell Of The Emerald Statue

A Short Story – By Melvyn Brown

It was hard for an English gentleman from Yorkshire County to believe in the power of spells and magic. He had been stationed in Calcutta during the time of the Indian independence movement. Captain Oliver Bruce at that time was group Captain of the Royal Air Force. Captain Oliver was in his early forties and a confirmed bachelor. He had decided to stay back in India till he looked into the mystery of the emerald statue. The group Captain owned a large estate on fertile land in the suburbs. On his vast land, under a banyan tree was a simple hollow where the mystical emerald statue was worshipped by people in and around Vrindawan Junction.

Oliver was a tolerant man forever amused at all the things other people took seriously. He was patient, calm but could be a terror to control if he discovered discrepancies and challenges. He permitted the villagers and those from the nearby railway colony to enter his property, perform their rituals and leave; one could say thanks to Shanti, his personal maid who took care of his needs and supervised the other staff members in the mansion. Because of her request to let the people worship he had given his approval. It was hard to refuse Shanti as she was young, dynamic and full of vibrant energy. But, of course, she was attractive in her own special way. Oliver empowered her in authority over the servants. This made a few of the workers upset seeing her closeness to the captain.

“Shanti, tell me something about the emerald statue,” he asked her one evening at the dinner table.

“The statue has been in the hollow of the tree since before the land was taken over by you. It has worked

many miracles for the people, or so they say”. She said in a serious tone to her voice.

“The reason I asked you”, Oliver said “is because the statue looks expensive, weighs a lot, perhaps, more than a 100 carats. How did it come to be in the hollow?”

“No one knows and no one wants to know” she grinned, and offered him a warm, freshly made potato chop, at the same time pouring a large amount of port wine in his glass, the way he liked it.

“Thank you Shanti, you do so much for me. Do you know I like you”.

“I also like you equally as well.” They both laughed.

As the sun crept out of the lip of the horizon, splinters of light rested upon the landscape and lit up the hollow under the old banyan tree. The emerald statue glowed eerily throwing out its own beautiful rays of rainbow colors.

Early next morning the household staff in commotion rushed into the room and woke Captain Oliver with disturbing news. “She is missing, Sir – Shanti is not to be found anywhere on the...”

The group Captain was ablaze with fury and ordered the men to go out and hunt for the young woman.

At the end of the day the search was futile. Shanti had vanished. The blanket of darkness snubbed the faint light of the full moon as dark clouds angrily raced across the heavens. Late that evening Oliver could not have his wine and dinner. He was very upset.

In the still of the night the Captain went down to the banyan tree, picked up the emerald statue and took it back to his mansion. Next morning a large number of villagers assembled, worried and disturbed that the emerald statue had disappeared from the hollow.

The Captain stepped out on the veranda, stood tall, red-faced and shouted at the crowd: “I have removed it and it will be replaced when Shanti returns!” without a word of protest the people dejectedly went back to their homes.

The search and rescue team, after a whole days exhausting efforts, returned without the slightest clue. “Master! Raju the gardener is also missing”, cried out one of the house staff members. “Raju has kidnapped Shanti, Sir.”

“How can you be so certain?”

“Master, the man was jealous of her position and the good treatment you always gave her with the authority to order us”.

After two days of anxious moments, the unexpected happened. It was the sight of Shanti rushing up the flight of stairs and into the open arms of Captain Oliver. She was breathing heavily. “What happened woman?” asked the Captain in a calm tone of voice.

“I was taken by force... it was the gardener who wanted to demand a ransom from you!”

“How did you escape?” He asked Shanti.

“Last evening in the jungle near Vrindawan Junction the man sat down to eat the meal he had taken with him, when suddenly, I told him that the Spirit of the emerald statue would punish him. He choked on his meal, grabbed his throat and dropped to the ground dead.

“Thank the Lord you are safe”, whispered Oliver, as he drew her closer to him in a warm embrace.

Captain Bruce returned the statue to its original place inside the hollow. No one would ever know if it was due to the emerald statue’s power or was it sheer coincidence the statue had been brought back.



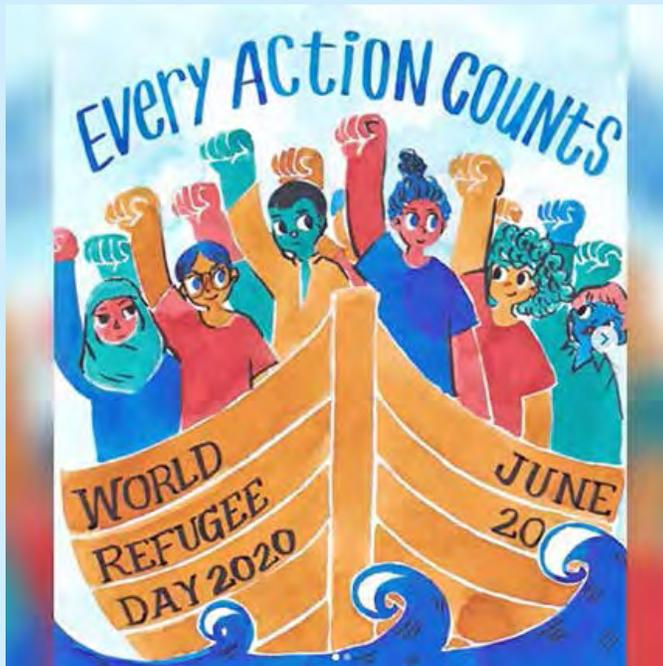
BY MELVYN BROWN

Refugees Matter!

On 20 June the United Nations observed yet another 'World Refugee Day'. In a statement for the day the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said, "We are marking this year's World Refugee Day against a backdrop of a dramatic global crisis. Not only are record numbers of people forced to flee their homes, but the world is grappling with COVID-19, a disease that is still very much affecting us all. What started as a health crisis has expanded, and today many of the most vulnerable – refugees and the displaced amongst them – face a pandemic of poverty.

Yet, throughout this challenging time, we have also seen a connectedness that transcends borders. Ordinary people have stepped up to help. Host communities – especially those in low- and middle-income countries where nearly 90 percent of the world's refugees live – have continued to demonstrate a remarkable welcome".

Given the grim reality which most of the world (particularly the refugees and other displaced people) faces today, the theme this year 2020 very appropriately was 'Every Action Counts.' Grandi's statement echoing the mandate of the UNHCR went on to state, "On this World Refugee Day, I call for greater global solidarity and action to include and support refugees, internally displaced and stateless people as well as their hosts. **Whoever you are. No matter where you come from. Every one of us can make a difference. Every action truly counts.** The COVID-19 pandemic



and the recent anti-racism protests have shown us how desperately we need to fight for a more inclusive and equal world. A world where **no one is left behind.** It has never been clearer that all of us have a role to play in order to bring about change. **Everyone can make a difference.** This is at the heart of UNHCR's World Refugee Day campaign. This year, we aim to remind the world that everyone, including refugees, can contribute to society, and **Every Action Counts** in the effort to create a more just, inclusive, and equal world".



BY FR. CEDRIC PRAKASH SJ

For India, this theme is particularly significant because in the last few months the spotlight in the country has been on internally displaced and stateless people, besides of course refugees. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) which was passed by both Houses of Parliament early in December 2019 is blatantly unconstitutional and patently discriminatory. It has come in for much criticism and plenty of protests from every quarter both from Indian and the world over.

The Human Rights Council of the United Nations in a statement said, "the amended law would appear to undermine the commitment to equality before the law enshrined in India's constitution and India's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, to which Indian is a State party, which prohibit discrimination based on racial, ethnic or religious grounds. Although India's broader naturalization laws remain in place, these amendments will have a

discriminatory effect on people's access to nationality." The UN Human Rights Council also wanted to be party in the petition before the Supreme Court of India. Several leading legal luminaries from all over the world, and even the UN Secretary -General have called for the immediate revocation of the CAA saying that it could render large number of people stateless!

The pandemic has also brought to focus the plight of the internally displaced people, particularly of the migrant workers. Ever since the lockdown was announced, with just about four hours' notice on the night of 24/25 March, a humanitarian crisis unprecedented in India's modern history, has severely disrupted the lives of India's migrant workers. Millions of migrants have found themselves stranded without food, cash, and shelter, trying to get home. They have been subjected to violation of their fundamental rights under Articles 14, 15, 19, and 21 and often to severe police harassment on interstate bor-



(Contd.. from p. 12)

ders. Many have reportedly died as a result of the lockdown, due to exhaustion en route home, starvation, suicides, police excesses, illnesses, and rail and road accidents. As per reliable sources, as many as 667 non-COVID deaths have occurred across the country. 205 of these have occurred among migrant workers en route on foot, and 114 due to starvation and financial distress. Meanwhile, the current response strategy with the provision of shramik trains, has been inadequate at best. Over 2,000 'shramik' trains have reportedly carried over 300,000 migrant workers in the last week of May. This accounts for about 30% of the total population. Further, this does not include those who are en route and on foot, or those who are stranded in shelters or on interstate borders, or elsewhere. As of this moment, the government of India does not seem to have any estimates on the total number of people stranded and/or en route home across the country nationally as revealed in a recent RTI. Their condition is still pathetic. In an extremely belated manner, the Supreme Court on 28 May finally gave a detailed interim order regarding the transportation of the migrants; (earlier two High Courts also highlighted the pathetic situation of the migrant workers)

The way India has been treating the tiny group of Rohingyas who have sought refuge in India in the wake of their persecution in Myanmar, is a textbook case of how inhospitable we have become as nation, which over the years has prided itself of having internalised that Sanskrit phrase from the Maha Upanishad, '**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**' ("the world is one family"). Today xenophobia, jingoism, false-nationalism and exclusivism seems to have become the order of the day! This is clearly written all over particularly when one looks at the way the minorities, the Adivasis, the Dalits, the poor and the vulnerable like the migrant workers are being treated in the country today.

In his Angelus message on Sunday 21 June Pope Francis said, "*Yesterday the United Nations celebrated World Refugee Day. The coronavirus crisis has highlighted the need to ensure the necessary protection for refugees too, in order to guarantee their dignity and safety. I invite you to join me in praying for a renewed and effective commitment, on the part of us all, to the effective protection of every human being, especially those who have been forced to flee as a result of situations of grave danger to them or their families.*" Earlier, (on 13 May) in an advance message for the **106th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2020** (which will be observed on 27 September) Pope Francis focuses on 'Like Jesus Christ, forced to flee: Welcoming, Protecting, Promoting and Integrating Internally Displaced Persons'. He says, "*I have decided to devote this Message to the drama of internally displaced persons, an often-unseen tragedy that the global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated. In fact, due to its virulence, severity and geographical extent, this crisis has impacted on many other humanitarian emergencies that affect millions of people, which has relegated to the bottom of national political agendas those urgent international efforts essential to saving lives. But "this is not a time for forgetfulness. The crisis we are facing should not make us forget the many other crises that bring suffering to so many people".* He gives us, "six pairs of verbs that deal with very practical actions and are linked together in a relationship of cause and effect". These are (i) you have **to know** in order **to understand** (ii) it is necessary to be close in order **to serve** (iii) in order to be reconciled, we need **to listen** (iv) in order to grow, it is necessary **to share** (v) we need to be involved in order **to promote** and (vi) it is necessary **to cooperate** in order **to build!** The sixteen verbs given to us by Pope Francis need to be seen as directives and even apps to ensure that every action count for the refugees, the stateless and other internally displaced

persons. The COVID-19 pandemic and the recent anti-racism protests have shown us how desperately we need to fight for a more inclusive and equal world: a world where no one is left behind. It has never been clearer that all of us have a role to play in order to bring about change. Everyone can make a difference. This is at the heart of UNHCR's World Refugee Day campaign 'Every Action Counts' in the effort to create a more just, inclusive, and equal world.

In his message for 'World Refugee Day', the UN Secretary-General António Guterres said, "*Nearly 80 million women, children and men around the world have been forced from their homes as refugees or internally displaced people. Even more shocking: 10 million of these people fled in the past year alone. On World Refugee Day, we pledge to do everything in our power to end the conflict and persecution that drive these appalling numbers. This year, the COVID-19 pandemic poses an additional threat to refugees and displaced people, who are among the most vulnerable. My recent Policy Brief on COVID-19 and People on the Move called on Governments to ensure that they are included in all response and recovery efforts*".

So, responding to the plight of the refugees and other displaced, in the midst of the pandemic is certainly a major challenge. Not much will be achieved, if Governments abdicate their role of responding to the cries of this people. Only when we demonstrate that unflinching courage and transparent political to ensure that these the least of our sisters and brothers, these strangers, are made to feel welcome, protected, promoted and integrated; only when we have truly made every effort to know in order to understand them – only then we can say whole-heartedly that, 'every action counts!' In the final analysis, **Refugees do matter!**

**(Fr Cedric Prakash SJ is a human rights and peace activist/writer.
Contact: cedricprakash@gmail.com)*

Stitch In Time Saves Nine

Presence Of Mind Plays Pivotal Role

Presence of mind play a pivotal role in saving time and acting with prudence. It all happened when my school going son locked himself inside the bathroom at a young age and he could not come out by removing the bolt from the hook. Somehow, he struggled for sometime and started weeping when his attempted efforts did not yielded any result. My wife started crying along with the boy and I was desperate in getting him out in time. My son has to attend school and I have to rush to office after dropping him in the school. But presence of mind played a pivotal role and my patience and perseverance played a key role in rescuing him from the bathroom. Instead of just panicking around and making others also worry about a typical situation, I did a very clever act. Instead of just breaking the door or the glass panes in the door, I made a sincere attempt to unlock the bathroom door. My presumption was that the boy was young and so he could not have locked it fully and few part of the bolt would have gone inside. By taking all my confidence level I started tapping the door slowly from outside for few seconds hoping that the lock will give away as it was not bolted fully. To my

surprise and that of my wife, the bolt gave way and my son came out weeping realising his fault. Thus I saved my son in time without breaking bathroom doors and thereby helped him to go to school within the stipulated time and I could also attend office in time. Thus presence of mind could help out in the right of time and the parents should apply their mind at the time of danger instead of just panicking around.

SECOND INCIDENT

Small child died on Feb 11, 2019, due to electrocution while playing. He got electrocuted, freezed and died on the spot. This was due to sheer negligence of the maintenance section in the society. This happened in Hyderabad, in a so-called posh and hi-fi housing society. Despite repeated complaints from the residents for the past 2 years, no action was taken by the maintenance department. And this innocent child had to bear the brunt. This video is so disheartening. The video has gone viral and it is time for housing societies to have a watch on children playing inside housing complex and the maintenance section will have to plug all the loopholes to prevent such mishaps. On the part of parents, it is high time to take care of children playing outside instead of just chit chatting or working

hours on Whats App or going to ladies club and to gymnasium leaving their children all alone.

Presence of mind could have saved the boy from dying.

In a similar incident was witnessed in Syndicate Bank quarters (DOWA) in Sector 17 Vashi. The boy got struck up with an electric pole meant for shuttle court light. But the presence of mind of a lady helped out the boy in removing his hand from electric pole in time. The lady got hold of a wooden plank from nearby and acted in time by hitting the boy's hand with a wooden plank or a stick and that made him to remove his hand and saved him from fatal end.

—C.K. SUBRAMANIAM

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THE SECULAR CITIZEN,

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Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini: Patron Of Immigrants Canonized July 1946

By Melvyn Brown

The compatibility of miracles and sainthood has been given considerable attention in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. The Vatican believes that sanctity needs integrity in the sense that a person's desire for self-sacrifice should be proportionate to the mind's equilibrium.

Frances Xavier Cabrini, without doubt, had the mental fitness for religious life, to dedicate her being to Jesus in chastity, poverty and obedience. Frances Cabrini in 1877 took her vows and religious habit, along with the name 'Xavier' taken from St. Francis Xavier.

Frances was born in Lombardy, Italy on 15 July, 1850. She was a premature baby and the youngest of thirteen children. At the time of her birth a flock of doves circled her house and flapped their wings on the front door, refusing to be driven away. From the time of her birth, Frances was always fragile and weak physically throughout her life, yet, she had the energy, grace and stamina to establish schools, hospitals, churches and to be the founder of The Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Her devotion and strong will would take her across the sea 23 times in her missionary efforts.

Italy, in the 1870's was under unbelievable national duress. The political system was breaking down, the economy had fallen, unemployment, depression and fear of hunger had driven over 50 million Italians to America and England, in the hope of peace, food and shelter. They took their families with them, on ships, living under the most terrible conditions. These were the first Italian immigrants to the US and the UK.

Back in Italy, Frances Cabrini, 18, was refused admission to a convent because of her poor health. She did not give up and under the direction of her parish priest, Fr. Antonio Sarati she taught children at the House of Providence Orphanage at Cadagore.

Some time later the local Bishop asked Frances and her six associates to found the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, to help teach, feed, shelter and introduce the faith to poor children.

Six years later in 1877 she took her vows and put on the religious habit, taking the name 'Xavier' from St. Francis Xavier. She was now known as Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini. At this juncture of time the call to go to China and spread the word of God became a priority in her life. It was not to be. Mother Cabrini went to America and as a final attempt decided to visit Rome and meet the pontiff.

Frances went to Pope Leo XIII and asked for permission to go to China. The Holy Father told her to stay in America where thousands of Italian immigrants and their families were treated like slaves and earned half the wages normally paid to Americans.

Mother Cabrini did as the pontiff advised her. In a few years she had established several Orphanages (2 in Rome. And 2 Mother Houses), Hospitals, 18 Convent schools, and a beautiful church and Orphanage on Jesuit property donated to her by the Jesuit Provincial.

"Remember, remember always, that all of us, and

You and I especially are descended from

Immigrants and revolutionists."

-Franklin D. Roosevelt

On December 22, 1917 Mother Cabrini, the frail woman of indomitable courage and spiritual strength left this earth to meet her Maker. She was 67 years of age. Frances died at one of her own hospitals in Chicago, Illinois.

In 1931 her body was exhumed for the canonization process. Her head was sent to Rome and is preserved at the national Shrine. The rest of her body is in a shrine at New York.

Seven years later, on November 13 1938, she was beatified by Pope Pius XI.

Eight years after her beatification, Pope Pius XII canonized her. She was announced as the first United States citizen to become a saint. Her feast day is celebrated on November 12.

Through her intercession there have been many miracles. She restored the sight to a child and healed a terminally sick nun in her Congregation, and hundreds more across Europe and America. Frances Cabrini is the Patron Saint for immigrants.



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Ex Covid-19 Patient

Today I saw a sticker on a car, "Ex.Co-vid-19 Patient".

I was amused to see this sticker & out of curiosity, I enquired when it stopped at the signal.

He said, "Sir, seeing this sticker no Police man now dares to do Alcohol Breath Analysing Test".

Indians convert adversity into opportunity..

Hair cutting technique

While cutting hair, the Barber asked the Minister :-

"Sir, What is this Swiss Bank issue?"

Minister shouted,
"Are you cutting my hair or conducting an inquiry?"

Barber said:
Sorry Sir, I just asked.

Next day, while cutting the hair, he asked the Top Minister:

"Sir, what is this Black money issue?"

Minister shouted, "Why did you ask me this question?"

Barber said:
"Sorry Sir, I just simply asked you"

Next day, CBI interrogated the Barber,

CBI Officer -
"Are you an agent of Pakistan?"

Barber: No Sir.

CBI: Are you an agent of the opposition party?

Barber: No Sir.

CBI: Are you anti National?

Barber: For God's sake, No Sir. I am an innocent and simple Barbar.

CBI : Then, while cutting the hair, why did you ask these VIP's about Swiss Bank & Black money issues?



Barber:

Sir, I do not know why, but when I ask about Swiss Bank or Black money, their hairs stand up straight; & that helps me to cut hair easily. That's why I keep asking.

The Prominence of 'C' in Covid-19 era

Did you notice that the alphabet 'C' has shot to prominence in this Covid-19 era?

See the Sea of Change that the alphabet 'C' has brought!

No one expected that the alphabet "C" would play a Completely overwhelming role compared with any of the other alphabets...

Cough (C)
Cold (C)
Corona virus (C)
Covid-19 (C)
Case (C)
Confirmed (C)
Confinement (C)
Contamination (C)
Containment (C)
Curfew (C)

Two most serious 'C's are,
Cemetery (C)



Cremation (C)

The possible remedial drug is, Chlo-roquine (C)

The beauty is, it started from China (C)....

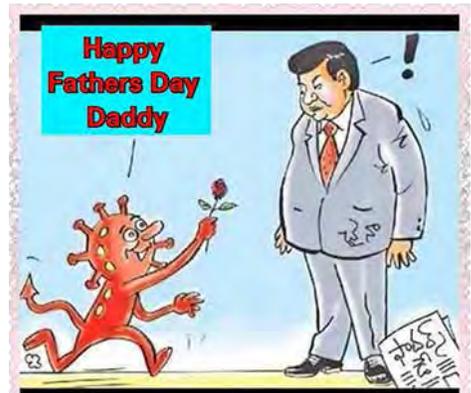
But at the same time,
GOD smiled, and said...

Cleanliness (is the remedy...)
Courage (is the need of the hour...)
Compliance to the expert advice...
Contention to overcome the crisis...
Clarity of thought...
Cooperation with the fellow beings...
Caring for the needy..

and finally....

"Clearance" is awaited and in a Short while..

"Cure" is definitely going to "Come"....



THE SECULAR CITIZEN

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Delhi Minorities Commission Awards Fr Dr M. D. Thomas for 'Communal Harmony and Interfaith Dialogue'

Fr Dr M. D. Thomas, Founder Director, Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies, New Delhi, has been selected for 'Communal Harmony and Interfaith Dialogue Award' by Delhi Minorities Commission for the year 2019. The citation quotes Fr Dr Thomas as 'Promoter of Religious Harmony and Good Interfaith Relations'. The award, along with other awards, was announced by DMC Chairman Dr Zafarul Islam Khan in a press meet on 09 June 2020. Fr Dr Thomas is a specialist of languages, cross-cultural perspectives, religions, cross-scriptural values, interfaith relations, communal harmony, national integration and social fellowship and he has been committed to these areas in diverse areas, as a lifetime mission, for the past nearly 40 years.

Born on 01 June 1953 in Kerala, Dr M. D. Thomas holds Ph.D. in Hindi Literature on 'Kabeer and Christian Philosophy' from Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi. He has done Pradhma, Madhyama and B. Mus. (7 years) in Hindustani Classical Music from Indira Kala Music University, Khairagarh. He holds B.Th. in Christianity and Comparative Religion from Urban University, Rome, as well. He was Founder Director of 'Institute of Religion and Culture' at Ujjain for 5 years and National Director of 'Commission for Religious Harmony' at CBCI (National Association of the Catholic Christian Community), New Delhi, and Editor of half-yearly multi-faith journal 'Fellowship' for 9 years.

By way of literary and cultural contribution in the above areas, Dr Thomas has 4 books to his credit by now and they are original and award-winning contributions in the area of communal harmony and interfaith relations. They are 'Kabeer aur Eesaayee

Chintan', 'Moolya Bible Ke', 'Desh Ek, Ek Hein Hum Sab' and 'Fellowship of Religions'. His musical albums on 'universal ethical values' are 'Samanvay Dhaara' and 'Moolya Bible Ke'. He has contributed some 350 articles, in English and Hindi, to books, journals and newspapers, as well.

Besides, Dr Thomas has delivered by now some 60 keynote lectures, over 100 lectures at universities and colleges, addressed nearly 300 research conferences and some 1,200 multi-faith and civil programmes, along with over 50 special lectures and some 250 regular lectures at Christian institutes and seminaries. He has also been to views and interviews at TV channels, some 50 instances, and thus making a total of nearly 2,000 appearances by now on public platforms, all in the areas he is currently awarded for.

The current award comes to Dr Thomas after 19 awards and certificates of honour. A few of the main awards he has received for outstanding contribution to language, literature, education, culture, communal harmony, interfaith relations, peace, social service, etc. are – 'Saahityik Kriti Sammaan', 'Swami Devanand Hindi Award', 'Manav Bhooshan Sammaan', 'Himalay and Hindustan Ratna Sammaan', 'National Excellence Award' and 'Icon of India', 'Culture and Peace Award'. What's more, he received 'Life Time Achievement Award' recently from Institute of Oriental heritage.

Among those awarded for their life-long commitment to promote communal harmony and interfaith dialogue are Janab Mohammed Iqbal Mulla, National Secretary of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, Baba Hardip Singh of Gurudwara Gobind Sadan, Gadaipur, Mehrauli, and Fr Cedric Prakash, noted human rights activist.

IHPS Office, New Delhi

Sister Thea Bowman!

On 18 June 2020, Catholic News Agency reported the sainthood cause for Sister Thea Bowman who had joined the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (FSPA). It was initiated in 2018.

Sister Bowman - SB was the granddaughter of a slave, an advocate for racial justice, and the first African-American woman to address the U.S. Bishops' Conference. She was an outstanding teacher and speaker, and had a voice like an opera star.

SB was born in Yazoo City, Mississippi in 1937. Although raised a Protestant, she decided to become Catholic, being moved by the generosity of the FSPA. She joined their novitiate at the age of 15.

SB taught about racial diversity and the importance of mutual love. She instructed children to use their hand; and how the five fingers symbolized five different colors – white, black, red, brown and yellow. Also that we are more like a salad, wherein we don't lose our identities and characteristics; we remain as individuals.

SB helped establish the National Black Sisters Conference; and advocated for an increased representation for Afro-American people in Church leadership. She died on 30 March 1990 of breast cancer.

Sister Smith who knew SB for 35 years co-authored a biography, "Thea's Song: The Life of Thea Bowman!" After her death, schools and events were named and held in her memory, and memorials established in her honor.

"What does it mean to be black and Catholic? – It means that I bring my black self, history, traditions, experiences, culture, song and dance, as a gift to the Church!"

**Dr. Hazel Colaso,
Bandra (W), Mumbai.**

School Bag Burden - policy in place but there is no end solution

It is Corona time and we are slowly learning how to go about with virtual learning and by the click of the mouse our children go through the pages of text books and find it somewhat adjustable to present day pandemic and slowly coming to terms with distant learning. Slowly and steadily we should also try to reduce the number of books and note books and reduce the school bag burden of children.

The government's policy mandates that school bags should not be more than 10% of the child's body weight. In July 2015, the state education department clearly laid down a list of guidelines for schools to reduce the weight of school bags. Even though there is a policy in place, the children carry most of the books thereby carrying heavy school bags. Three years after the Maharashtra government came up with a policy to reduce the weight of school bags, little seems to have been done to implement it.

It is indeed a right step in the right direction to make school bags lighter for Children. The Human Rights commission is there to look into the problems of the people including school going children. Present day education system is taxing. School fees are very high and the school bags have become a burden. There is no doubt about it. So, the State Government's policy in place, but kids still carry heavy school bags. After the introduction of computers in schools, colleges and offices, there is a need to reduce paper work and hence the school bags should weigh lightly. Instead of reducing the weight of the school bags, school authorities add more weight to these bags by adding more books and in the pro-



cess more note books as well.

Parents have to bear a major share of the cost of books/note books as well the weight of the bags as the parents feel pity on their children and carry the schoolbags to the school. Maharashtra State Human Rights order is a right step in the right direction. It is up to the State Government to follow the order in the right spirits and provide the best solution to the school going children. School Authorities and the Parent-Teacher Association are ready to monitor the weight of the bags and bring it down with an amicable solution. The end solution to the problem is that the policy in place should be implemented in total and proper monitoring is the need of the hour.



Jayanthy Subramaniam

School children will go through motions with great difficulty till the time a better council prevails and put a block on the weight of these school bags. School children undergo more stress and strain because of the increasing weight of the school bags. The life of school children is for enjoyment and getting valuable education. By carry-

ing bulky bags, the school children carry a heavy burden on their shoulders and it is up to the State Government to reduce the load by introducing the order in letter and spirit. And that is my clarion call. Other schools must follow in reducing the size of school bags in the next academic year.

The familiar sight of spindly school students staggering under heavy, bulging school bags may soon be a thing of the past, at least in some states. The government has thrown the ball, or rather the pen, back in the students' court by asking them for suggestions on how to ease the load. The students' suggestions include introduction of locker systems, canteens for unaided schools so that students don't have to carry their lunchboxes, and ensuring that managements adhere to a timetable. Students have also asked to be allowed to keep all items that are not academically-related in lockers. By introducing CDs and DVDs you can still reduce the burden and the children will be able to become computer savvy from their young age. Corona pandemic should provide a new order of learning for our children.

Virtual learning is a virtual reality

The re-opening of schools will be the worst decision by the Government if taken in haste. The current academic session should continue in e-learning mode. If schools are already following virtual teaching, then why not continue it for the rest of the academic year. It is time to protect our children. It's like playing with fire when we ought to douse it with full force. The parents should fight and not a single child should be sent to the schools for their own safety. The current academic session should continue in e-learning mode. If the schools claim that they are doing a good job via virtual learning then why not continue it for the rest of the academic year.

Online classes have become a must for every child in this Covid-19 pandemic period. Online classes have become a go-to solution and have helped educational institutions to an extent to mitigate the consequences of Covid-19. Overuse of digital devices and too much exposure to the Internet, experts and psychologists fear can harm young minds. Even UNESCO and UNICEF have expressed concern regarding this. UNICEF has stated that millions of children are at increased risk of cyber menace as their lives move increasingly online during the lockdown in the Covid-19 pandemic. They can be exposed to all sorts of cyber crimes particularly, cyber-bullying and even fall into the hands of sexual predators as children, especially teens.

While travelling in a train I saw a lady sitting opposite to me with a 6 year old kid. They both were reading books seriously. Astonished by seeing them, I curiously asked the lady; mam nowadays even smaller kids are playing with smart phones but this kid is reading. How did you make him do that? The Lady calmly replied that most of the kids are not listening parents, they only copy us. And this is what I adopted. A small sentence...



but a deep meaning. We all parents must think and try to follow.

Reading is one of the most fundamental skills children need to learn to be successful. Not only do good reading skills benefit students academically, they are also a skill required for lifelong success. Reading develops vocabulary, increases attention span, and promotes stronger analytical thinking. The key to encouraging reading habits in kids is reading with them at home from a young age.

Increasing interest in the Internet is very much intruding and the youngsters fall prey to the web world. Even advertisements are screened showing a youngster sitting and operating his mobile. So the online culture is groping the children to darkness. The young generation sit late hours to browse through the net and gather good as well as bad information through their search and thus losing valuable sleep in the late night hours.

In the high competitive world students are striving hard for success. As the stakes are very high the younger generation vie for top honors and social media is playing a pivotal role in making their dreams come true. So, blam-

ing the youngsters for their inclination to operate the Internet is given a chance in the days of virtual learning is not proper. Misuse of Password and hacking are part and parcel of the present day working. A number of cases are referred to the Economic Offence Wing to get clarity and justice of such financial frauds taking place in the Banking Industry. In this context, the young generation should mind it, not to enter into such cyber crimes and lose their credentials in the society just to make a few thousand rupees. The greed may land them behind bars. Diverting the children's mind for different options can give them a better prospect.

—Jayanthi Subramaniam

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7113. POONA : Tamilian Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in December 1982), Ht. 5' 6", Wt.65 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. B.Com., working in Logistic Co. in **DUBAI**. Contact email : shantasam1955@gmail.com

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Streamed Education Is Goa Adept At Approaching Learning Digitally

All along Goa has only looked at the fiscal consequences of the pandemic as it makes efforts to come to terms with its bitter struggle against Coronavirus.

But we forget that in the midst of these trials and tribulations, the student community too has come in for a lot of hardship. The nationwide lockdown has disrupted a generation's education. COVID-19 has posed challenges in the educational sector as well!

With an eye on keeping the youngsters safe and curb the spread of the infection, schools and higher educational institutions across the country continue to remain shut.

Examinations have been postponed and with a fair amount of uncertainty over the dates of commencement of the next academic year, the students are as skeptical about their future, as are their parents.

Though the state has got into a

gradual easing of restrictions after the lockdown, it is expected that social distancing norms will persist preventing congregation in classrooms.

Considering that shifting to a digital mode from the traditional methods of teaching is the best option left, many of the educational institutions have thus begun providing uninterrupted education online for their students.



by Pachu Menon

For quite some time now it has been fun watching the 'BYJU'S - The Learning App' advertisements during commercial breaks on TV where celebrities do not hesitate to endorse the fact that learning is indeed fun with BYJU'S, the online tutoring firm.

E-learning is a growing industry in India. By providing online learning platforms, similar ventures by enterprising Indians are being hailed as innovations in teaching.

However, in the absence of physical classrooms and proper digital infra-

structure, apprehensions over both teachers and the students facing unprecedented challenges cannot be dispelled either!

As so very rightly observed, the disparity in access to electricity and internet connections will no doubt hamper the smooth functioning of the e-learning initiative. Most of the households in the rural belts of the country continue to languish in darkness even in this age of advanced technology. In the urban areas too, power cuts, fluctuations and outages are very common!

Besides, BSNL, the Indian state owned telecommunications company is riding the rough weather and is practically in doldrums. As private telecom providers struggle with unexpected spike in demands for network connectivity from various quarters stretching their supply limits, there could be technical glitches that could hamper smooth functioning.

Although the contention that every student needs a teacher in a physi-



(Contd.. from p. 22)

cal form warrants respect, the willingness to change with the times and situations makes the search for alternatives all the more relevant.

Many schools and other educational institutions have already switched to virtual classes through different through various digital and social media platforms.

But it is observed that not all students can avail the 'new mode' of education. With many wards from impoverished families finding it difficult to avail online facilities, chances are that e-education will be limited to privileged students at the exclusion of those who have no access to internet.

With the less fortunate being sidelined, there is bound to be a widespread perception of grave injustice built into the educational system.

So will e-learning remain an elite concept! Will it bring about an academic divide in the country with the 'haves' far outnumbering the fortunate few?

There is hardly an Indian today without a mobile phone. More than a luxury, it has become a necessity, an inseparable part of one's persona. The social media is as much an engrossing factor for the rich as it is for the poor. Various apps downloaded have amused the common man as much it has the scholarly for completely different sets of reasons.

Yet possess a mobile set they all do; and irrespective of the social standing many flaunt costly smartphones!

But, it will always be the computer that will be preferred for online classes as the phones are not really suitable for carrying out lengthy assignments or research.

But how qualified are the teachers to approach the new modality of education. Will they be able to do justice, to their students - and themselves!

Government-aided and government schools in cities and villages have neither access to computers and internet. Yet the new-found love for online learning has hastened the search for alternatives.

However, the news that the Directorate of Education in Goa is mulling internet hotspots in villages for e-learning and has accordingly sought information from headmasters of the schools located in Goan villages as regards availability of internet connectivity in the respective panchayats in view of the proposed online learning sessions for the schools comes as a rude shock.

As has been rightly pointed out, panchayat halls are vulnerable areas for the spread of COVID-19 and any intend to carry out the online learning exercises from their precincts will be harmful for the children. The DoE needs to be censured for its impractical approach!

Online learning has widened the scope of education and transcended it beyond classroom boundaries. But it should not be at the cost of the lives of the students!

Amidst these confusions however, news that some schools have decided to take it upon themselves to tackle the connectivity and other issues related to e-learning brings a ray of hope for the underprivileged.

It has been observed that with most of their students living in rural areas or coming from economically weaker sections, government schools have a tougher task when it comes to conducting teaching online.

But if reports in a section of the press are to be believed, some of the government schools are rising to the occasion by overcoming the problems using creative methods.

Some of the schools are involving the panchayat and other community members and encouraging the teachers to

visit the students' homes. Teachers of Government High School, Nadora, Rivora, for instance, are taking the class to the students!

Making lesson videos and sending them to students on Whatsapp to be accessed where they have access to the device and connectivity; teachers visiting the houses of students who have very poor or no internet connectivity by taking strict precautions to ensure that social distancing is maintained; and reaching out to students who cannot afford smartphones personally and providing them printed study material - impartial efforts are being made to ensure that the youngsters are not denied education.

Various departments of the government primarily concern themselves with the implementations of programmes announced without actually considering their feasibility and the drawbacks that make some of them unviable. The Directorate of Education in Goa treads this path.

Citing 'explicit' reasons, when the CM himself is of the opinion that poor connectivity in several parts of the state has made online education impractical and won't be compulsory, there is obviously nothing much that can be done, is there!

In the throes of a viral disaster, the state faces unprecedented challenges. Education as one would require innovative thinking and innovative methods of learning by educationalists. ●

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