

THE SECULAR CITIZEN

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A NATIONAL FAMILY WEEKLY

WHY are we Facing Medical Oxygen Crisis NOW?

by Don Aguiar.

For the past couple of weeks India is suddenly facing a big shortage of medical Oxygen supply, while the government and the ministers deny and say all is ok.

A few things which will probably make things clear.

Industrial and medical oxygen are same product produced in same plant, stored in same tanks and filled in same cylinders. For medical oxygen the gas company just have to analyse each batch and certify. No other difference. In fact for industrial the need is 99.5% pure oxygen whereas for medical as per pharmacopeia all over world is 93+-3%.

- 1) There is absolutely no shortage of oxygen product in India. You will be surprised to know that less than 1% of oxygen production capacity is used for medical purposes. Even in corona times it may go up to three times or even 5%. But that's it.
- 2) The estimated total oxygen production capacity in India to be around 100,000 tons per day (or may be more) and around 80% of oxygen production capacities are with steel companies where oxygen gas is produced and used in iron making as well as steel making. Yes, Reliance Jamnagar has 22000 tons per day capacity for pet coke gasification.
- 3) Most of captive plant are in East India, some in west (Mumbai and Gujarat) and some in Karnataka. These plants typically produce 5-10% of product as liquid which is stored in large tanks. This liquid is used by them as back up when plant is down and also to meet peak demands.
- 4) There are several standalone liquid oxygen plants owned by gas companies like Linde and Innox. They are the largest oxygen producers in

India, where they produce liquid oxygen and sell to various customers through tankers and tanks.

- 5) Several re fillers around country buy liquid from gas companies and fill gas cylinders after vaporising liquid
- 6) Oxygen is generally delivered to end user by three means. Directly through pipe line from plant to end user which is say 80% of product. 15% or so is delivered in liquid form through tanks and tankers and less than 5% through cylinders

So why are we facing crisis today? I think combination of followings

- a) Shortage of distribution assets i.e. road tankers, storage tanks and cylinders. Mind you these are expensive. Each road tanker costs 45 lakhs on road and a cylinder costs around 10,000 in which you sell oxygen just worth Rs 300. These assets have been built by gas companies based on normal times. There is only that much one can do with these assets
- b) Logistics management. Most of Plants are located in select geographies. So distribution assets travel fair distance (200-1000 kms) to deliver to customer. Now even with good roads a tanker takes around 7-10 days to make a round trip and a cylinder also takes that much turn around.
- c) Desire of gas companies to focus on what maximises their profits

Last but not least had our Government thought of this impending danger and prepared, a major crisis could have been avoided. But that's easy said than done knowing our democratic set up and the Governments' need to win elections and so on. Now Government is taking steps.

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Judicial ire with a lot of fire

The Madras High Court, in a hard-hitting observation said that the EC should be put up on murder charges for being the most irresponsible institution. The SC advised the EC to take the remark as a bitter pill but said it was a bit harsh. It was not meant for the local election authority but for the Election Commission of India headquartered in Delhi. No doubt the observations were directed at all the political parties but the judges questioned the EC on abdication of its authority. The Constitution has given the EC substantial powers to put its foot down but for some strange reasons handled things with kid gloves. Our political fraternity is thick skinned and unless those in authority wield the stick, it hardly affects them. So long as they can do what pleases them, what the people, media and others say, hardly matters. The message had its effects forcing the EC to announce stringent guidelines for counting. Even victory processions were banned. Stung by the court observation, the EC made a feeble attempt to ask the court to gag the media and failed. In doing so, the Court upheld the freedom of the press.

Elsewhere in UP court pulled up the government there for attempting to browbeat someone for voicing concerns on social media. In Delhi the HC has repeatedly pulled up the centre for failure on the oxygen front and the Delhi government for mismanagement. The Karnataka High Court blamed the government there. All these observations have undoubtedly jolted the BJP leadership prompting its Chief to caution the people in high places to weigh their words. Undeterred, the Delhi HC bluntly told the centre if 700 mts of oxygen is not supplied to the Delhi government on a daily basis it will be forced to pass harsh orders. The government also must have been shaken up but is avoiding a direct response for obvious reasons. The Madras HC observations were in the context of elections rallies. It was worse in Bengal where the "Who-is-Who" of the BJP canvassed non-stop led by Amit Shah and Narendra Modi with 38 visits. Both of them neglected the country allowing it to face its worst oxygen crisis and loss of life as a result. Suddenly vaccines disappeared. Now that the campaigning is over the PM has asked his ministers to reach out to the

IEWS on NEWS

poor. This is a tacit admission that it was not been done yet. But it is too late.

In Jharkhand the HC there pulled up the state government on the Khumb Mela calling it a laughing stock of the world. Grudgingly, the state government suspended the Char Dham Yatra in the face of the court's lashing and surging Covid cases in the state. The whole country is facing its worst crisis but the politicians are oblivious to these developments. Plans are afoot to open the four famous temples in the state in mid-May but courts could step in. The whole wide world is concerned with the developments in India so much so that dozens of countries have come forward to avoid a catastrophic situation that is surely developing here. The shortage of oxygen, beds, ventilators, oxygen concentrators and even ambulances have brought the medical infrastructure to its brink. This has resulted in multiple deaths – something which could have been avoided with proper planning despite prior warning by the National Covid supermodel committee of impending surge. But campaigning in Bengal was a priority then.

The courts across the country are perturbed by the sheer incompetence and negligence all around. They have spared no one. The hardest knock came from the Madras High court when it said that the EC could be charged with murder. The Delhi HC and the SC have both blamed the centre for its failure on the oxygen front leading to avoidable deaths and misery. By the same token, should not the Prime Minister be held responsible for these unfortunate deaths due to criminal negligence? No wonder the PM has suddenly mellowed down. He is silent of late. The courts are nation's saviours. Thank you Judges! Just for a while imagine the situation today without the intervention of Courts.

Cummins deserves a Pat

It had to take a foreign player – Pat Cummins to take the lead and announce donation of 50000 dollars [not a small sum] for the Covid fight. He is unconcerned but showed immense humanity and put our whole lot of cricket demigods to shame. The nation has made our cricketers what they are. The IPL has made them super rich yet none of them came forward to help the nation



by Marshall Sequeira

in this hour of need. Stung by the action of Cummins some of them quickly swung into action but nothing substantial. Apart from the cricketers we have super rich commentators occupying those chairs for decades and yet they have remained unmoved by the national tragedy. A lot of cricketers have reached their pinnacle and they do not have to hold on to their trophies. All these can be put up for auction for a noble cause.

A lot of foreign companies have pledged financial support to the country during this catastrophe. Not much has been heard from our own top industrialists and we have plenty of them. This is the time to show your Corporate Social Responsibility [CSR] and donate substantial amounts to fight this pandemic which if not arrested soon will affect them in a big way. Even political parties [recipients of electoral bonds] should come forward to help. I think the NCP has come forward with a small donation. That is a good beginning for others to follow. BJP must have spent a fortune in Bengal but still have plenty of it.

At a time when the nation is going through harrowing time, the BCCI went ahead with the IPL tournament to 'entertain' the people. What was needed was financial help to the afflicted people in hospitals, on the roads and in ambulances. They do not need to be entertained. Most of them are fighting for their lives and even dying at a very fast pace but the Cricket authorities want to entertain the people. Why not be upfront and say that it is all about money [as it was winning election for politicians] and entertainment is a by-product. Ultimately, they had to suspend the tournament which has put a lot of foreign players in difficulty. Our cricketers must be unhappy but they can look forward to a rewarding three month England tour. Right now, they need to be magnanimous and show they care. That will be the real test. In the meanwhile let us give a big Pat to Cummins.

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The Prime Minister now announced to the nation that his government will be providing relief by waiving off customs duty & health cess on oxygen & related equipment. Also Covid-19 related vaccines are exempt from customs duty and assured the nation that this will boost availability as well as make these items cheaper. This announcement was immediately praised by the railway minister, for seeking publicity and praise of the Prime Minister Care and concern for the suffering.

However the Railway Ministers publicity stunt was quickly countered by a Major General and many others who said – “That’s his job Mr Minister. If all organisations start doing this kind of worship, where will it end? Please get on with the work without seeking publicity. This kind of idolising has negative impact in times of such national crises.” Please take our suggestion positively.

How long can the PMO muzzle the truth from being spoken out? How can the PMO encourage hoarding and profits at the cost of human life? How can the PMO stop the international press that has covered the hypocrisy of the central govt.? What motivates someone to profit of another human’s

misery? I will never understand this.

However the tyranny of failed governance is heaped upon none but out children: The ruin of their peace and the base oppression of their lives: The imposition of punishment after punishment for the crimes of innocence, trust and hope. It is time to resolve never to enable the grossly incompetent into the hallowed portals of power. What a shame this is.

Exactly. With great power comes great responsibility, it is said. In an unprecedented crises such as Covid-19 pandemic, responsibility acquires greater importance. Do we see any iota of this in our present government?

In hindsight I think Government could have planned followings

- 1) Strict advisory to gas companies to use all distribution assets for medical purpose only from day one. They could provide compensation to gas companies for this just like MSP for food grains.
- 2) Advise all captive plants owners not to use a drop of liquid oxygen from plant / tank for their process use until they are full.
- 3) Using railways to transport through green door track

If we all survive this, as I hope we shall, remember this. That when it comes down to it, we didn’t fight for land or weapons or houses or jewellery. We didn’t fight for concert tickets or fancy designations or religion or politics. We didn’t fight for shares in a company or a seat at the table. We didn’t fight for business class tickets or the keys to a house by the beach. **When all this is over, remember, that we fought for air.**

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Pandemically Speaking

Kudos to Father Michael Pinto, Parish Priest of Our Lady of Lourdes, Orlem, Malad West in Mumbai, for his announcement on the 4th Sunday of Easter, calling for a surrender of 'family graves' taking into consideration the burial space crunch in evidence. May this clarion call that has come not a day too soon, echo from the pulpit of every parish in the Archdiocese of Bombay! And may Bombay show the way to the rest of the country, cutting across all three Rites, viz Latin, Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara!

Benumbing spectre of death

Never before in history has humankind as a whole been brought face-to-face with the spectre of death looming large over all and sundry. The first COVID-19 wave that indiscriminately claimed innumerable lives cutting across all divides has speedily been followed by another that seems to be hell-bent on leaving practically every household grieving. This fact alone is sufficient to send shivers down the spines of diehards with the realization that neither the virus nor death per se knows or even cares for the difference between one human life and another, leave alone perceiving the difference between grave owner, landowner and slum-dweller! Indeed, **whether laid to rest in a mausoleum or a family grave, in a temporary parish/municipal grave or cremated per se, we are all without exception, whether pope or politician, priest or pauper, headed in the same direction: turning into the dust we've all come from, awaiting the Resurrection of the dead on the last day.** What then doth it profit grave owners to sit squat in the safety of their homes and ignore the grave paucity in evidence? Indeed, gleefully priding oneself in 'owning' a grave or two in a par-

ish cemetery (just because an uncle some five or six generations removed had donated the land to the church!), brazenly looking down with contempt on those moving into a given parish as 'outsiders' and banishing their burials to some municipal cemetery is clearly implicit of considering the grave as one's permanent home, with Heaven nowhere in sight, the very concept of eternal life for a Christian thrown to the winds! I strongly recommend that a different burial liturgy confining the grave-owner concerned to the space beneath the gravestone for aye be drawn up and put into use by our parishes!

Another touchy issue . . .



by Ladislaus L
D'Souza

As a matter of fact, the issue concerning the surrender of permanent/family graves is a twin issue, its counterpart being the **graves occupied by embalmed bodies**. If the gruesome dance of death being currently witnessed doesn't serve as an eye-opener to all concerned of the futility of allowing valuable burial space to be blocked permanently, be it by a regular corpse or by an embalmed body, nothing will! Add to this the ignominy of finding a corpse not yet fully decomposed on the reopening of a temporary grave for a new burial and you know that the issue is not a mole-hill but a mountain already! A very delicate matter no doubt, but given the increasing number of permanent entombments of embalmed remains in cemeteries both parochial and municipal, if our Clergy could, in consultation with the hierarchy and others concerned, come up with reasonable ways to convince owners of permanent graves to surrender the same on the one hand and the families of the deceased lying embalmed to have the remains exhumed forthwith and cremated on the other, at least a major part of the grave crisis in

the country can be resolved overnight. **Indeed, what purpose does burying a body in an imperishable state serve anyway? Further, allowing an embalmed body to occupy a grave permanently strikes as injustice to those expected to surrender family graves. After all, a family grave can be reopened ad nauseam for new burials, whereas the grave housing an embalmed body is a dead loss in terms of burial space.**

At the root of all understanding of the issues involved for a believer is the futility of holding on to a pit admeasuring 6'x3'x3' as life's most prized possession, an understanding applicable both to family graves as well as to embalmed remains.

Frankly, if the highly conservative East Indian village-parish of the Holy Magi in Gorai, Borivili West [where this writer's family had an ancestral grave] in Mumbai, could do away with the permanent grave system and streamline all burials in the temporary grave cemetery, why not all other parishes in the archdiocese and the rest of the country, be it in the rural areas or in its suburbs!

And yet another!

While we are at it, even the 'niche' issue needs to be scrutinized thoroughly. **With no canonical sanction per se as to holding back part of the mortal remains of our dear departed by way of internment in niches that can be opened at will, it's time the concept were thrown out lock, stock and barrel by way of having a total stop put to the construction of niches in the future.** It is sincerely hoped that wiser counsel will prevail and the matter concerning all three issues, viz surrender of permanent/family graves, vacating graves of embalmed remains, and discontinuance of the internment of remains in niches, is brought to a logical conclusion for

(Contd.. on p. 6)



What a waste!

Many people in Dombivili have a lot of money to waste. They keep travelling by auto rickshaws even for a short distance of two minutes. And these auto rickshawallas are making a lot of money because they keep charging the passengers Rs 20 per head in share autos, which means Rs 80 per trip from one's residence to the railway station.

If these people do not know what to do with their money, I suggest that they donate it to a charitable institution. At least the homeless and the people who do not have anyone to take care for them will be happy and keep you in their prayers.

—*Jubel D'Cruz,
Dombivili, Mumbai*

Doctors prepare guidelines for safety of clergy

Alarmed by the rising number of Covid fatalities among the clergy, a group of 5 doctors ---all alumni of St John's Medical College, Bangalore---have prepared a set of guidelines to ensure the safety of our clergy. They have sent the guidelines to the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) Cardinal Oswald Gracias who has forwarded the same to the bishops in India along with his recommendation.

The Ten Commandments may be summarised in two commandments; similarly these guidelines may be summarised in two points: 1) Wear the mask to cover the nose and mouth 2) maintain social distancing.

The doctors are very much con-

cerned about the health and welfare of the clergy and while acknowledging that the priests' main calling is to be pastors to the people, looking after their spiritual needs, they must not put their lives at risk. Their lives matter. The church needs them, now more than ever. In order to protect themselves the doctors have suggested that they should wear the mask to cover the nose and mouth during mass, even during the homily. The doctors have said that research has proved that the Indian variant of the virus is airborne and hence merely maintaining social distancing is not enough. Concelebration of masses must be avoided. Live singing should preferably be avoided as the loud singing can spread the virus. Microphones must be sanitized regularly. The doctors are against home visits by clergy and counselling must be by phone.

These guidelines are by way of suggestions. I personally feel that some of the guidelines must be made mandatory, like wearing a mask during mass. If the mask has to be removed during the mass it must not be kept on the altar cloth but in the pocket. When lectors are doing the readings the priest must sit on the opposite side of the lectern. The lector must always maintain safe distancing from the celebrant. I have observed that some priests kiss the Holy Book after the gospel. This must be avoided for a few months as the holy book is handled by others including the lectors and even the sacristan. I would prefer that the celebrant reads the gospel from the altar using another Holy Book. I also recommend that a transparent plastic sheet be placed between the choir and altar (as in banks).

— *Prof Robert Castellino,
Malad*

CoronaCare Bengaluru

Fr Sabu John, Provincial of the Bangalore Claretian Fathers handed over 16 Oxygen concentrators to different organisations working for COVID 19 in Bangalore city under the banner of CoronaCare Bengaluru. The Oxygen Concentrators were donated by US based organisation Karmodaya through Coronacare Bangalore.

Volunteers from Good Quest Foundation, Aifo, Vincent De Paul Society and Helpdesk Bangalore were given training at the Project Vision office at Malleswaram for installing and using the Oxygen concentrators. Ms Tresa Jose, Nursing Superintendent of St John's Medical College and Ms Dona, staff provided the training to the volunteers.

CoronaCare Bengaluru has been providing free food for over 1000 COVID patients at home. There are four kitchens in different parts of the city from where the food is cooked. Volunteers are carrying the food to the families. Food is provided for 14 days.

Hundred families affected by leprosy and 55 families of disabilities were provided the Survival Kits by Coronacare Bangalore.

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Father Varghese Paul SJ

By Ladislaus Louis D'Souza

Father Varghese Paul, who was born on 31 May 1943 and passed into eternity on 10 April 2021, will always remain etched in my memory and in that of many Christian journalists as one of the staunchest and most committed members of the Indian Catholic Press Association [ICPA].



Fr. Varghese Paul

A stickler for rules, he strove to get all and sundry to know and understand the Constitution of the association and to observe it in letter and spirit. Firm in his convictions yet persuasive rather than aggressive in his approach, he endeared himself to all, thus making it easier for just about anyone to relate to him comfortably and confidently.

Though I already knew him as a fellow member of the ICPA for a while, my first personal encounter with him was at the Convent of the Daughters of Saint Paul in Ahmedabad where I was conducting one of my earliest formation sessions for the then prospective members of the Association of Lay Pauline Cooperators and he had come there to celebrate Mass one morning. He came through as a genial soul who, with his solid Jesuit background, seemed to understand well the Pauline charism in relation to the media apostolate and spoke encouragingly during his homily.

I was also fortunate that he took to me well and arranged to have me visit with him Jesuit institutions several miles away from the Jesuit house in Ahmedabad, including the by then famous Gujarat Sahitya Prakashan at Anand. At another Jesuit location whose name I forget, I was tickled pink to see huge Peacocks doing the jig!

Father Varghese Paul, though a Keralaite, prided himself in his Gujarati background. Claiming to have written just one book in Malayalam at that

time but some 38 books in Gujarati apart from a few in English, he seemed to take great delight in considering himself more a Gujarati than a Malayalee! And as though proving the truism of this sentiment, the largest language group at most of our ICPA events was generally the contingent

from Gujarat! Could there be a better distinguishing mark of a true missionary, unwittingly becoming as he did, like Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, "...all things to all men" (1 Cor 9:22b)!

The 2020 meet of the ICPA was probably one of the very few without his presence. But little did we know then that neither would there be a gathering in 2021 nor would we be likely to have Father Varghese Paul at the next ICPA event, whenever that happens. May his soul rest in the bosom of peace of the Divine Master whom he served so valiantly after the example of Ignatius of Loyola whose mainstay in the founding of the Society of Jesus were the words of the Lord Himself: "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole wide world and suffers the loss of his own soul?" (Mk 8:36) He may not have been one of those whose 'byline' appeared frequently in national periodicals. But knowing the kind of person he was, **I guess he would agree that writing cannot be an end in itself whereby one basks in the ensuing limelight but must take the writer beyond the written word to spelling out one's convictions in action, action that involves directly confronting those in authority in relation to what one has written.**

Requiescat in pace in nomine Domini dear Father Varghese! And do intercede for us before the Lord for the grace we need to face sincerely the challenges of authentic Christian journalism!

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the sake of the common good to the glory of our Creator to whom all flesh must eventually return (cfr Ps 65:2)!

In conclusion . . .

Finally, speaking from close personal experience and observation [this writer himself having lost a very dear member of his extended family to COVID-19], we do need to seriously change our very attitude in terms of relating to those afflicted with the Coronavirus and other incurable ailments [like AIDS], rather than treat them and members of their respective families like lepers or, worse, like pariahs. And the surefire way to do this is to place oneself in their shoes – for, leave alone a COVID death in the family, no ailment per se is God-given or even sought after or chosen by any individual whatsoever. Strangely, while no one would wish the kind of situation on anybody, the fact remains that certain ostracizers learn only when they encounter it firsthand. Indeed, **no disease ought to allow family bonding to be replaced with the kind of aloofness that makes for abandonment, and good neighbourliness to be replaced with the kind of distancing that makes for ostracization. Indeed, it is in times like these that, with strict observance of governmental SOPs, Jesus' Maundy Thursday mandate, "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34) needs to be shown, seen and sensed in action – Amen!**

It does logically follow then, that to the list of people we pray for, viz doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers, we need to conscientiously include **all undertakers and gravediggers, ambulance/hearse service providers and all those assisting at burials and cremations, not forgetting journalists and Parish Office staff (all of whom are exposed to the vagaries of the virus in various ways) and, above all, our own dear priests who risk their lives each time they preside over any funeral in today's COVID times.**

Ramadan 2021 & Corona lockdown



—compiled : *Ivan Saldanha-Shet.*

The Mumbai and most parts of India Islam has a major following. Islam is the second largest religion in India and Muslims are the second largest community after Hindus in the country. Islam reached India in the very early period of its foundation and it is believed that one of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s companions Malik bin Deenar came to India's western coast in 7th century and a mosque was built there in 629 which still exists. Since then Islam has a very strong root in the subcontinent. Muslims ruled India for over 600 years and contributed in many ways to Indian culture and society. Their contribution to literature, art, culture and architecture are part of India's glorious history. After 1947, after the partition, despite being in large numbers Muslims' role was negligible in many walks of life, in southern India it was better and therefore socio-economic situation of Muslims is comparatively better.

Muslim community is eager to celebrate the red letter day of the Islamic Ramadan Eid on May 14 or so. With the Ramadan month fasting commenced a month ago in April; notwithstanding the ever invading Corona Pandemic. As per predictions and the actual scenario all over India and many parts of the world the coming days and weeks are sure to be a time of holocaust with regard to the Corona

scourge and all out precautions are in place. It is note worthy that the Muslim fraternity has even in the midst of such trying times have maintained the fast and possible traditions of the holy Ramadan month, the religious leaders of Islam have made adjustments giving meaning to the stringent fast so that people are magnified in holiness for the Eid. A 3-day celebration called Eid al-Fitr brings families and friends together in early morning prayers followed by feasts and fun. The 2021 Eid al-Fitr is likely to fall on or after Wednesday, May 12. The Corona regulations are likely to hamper the celebrations but, the understanding and resourceful people will make do as best as possible, Blessings will flow down to earth.

"Ramadan Eid" : Ramadan is the ninth and most sacred month in the Islamic calendar, during the month Muslims around the world fast from daybreak to dusk every day. They start their day by eating 'Sehri' which is an Islamic term referring to the meal consumed early in the morning before fasting. They later break their fast at 'Iftar', the evening meal consumed at sunset. The fasting or 'Roza' during Ramadan is not just about abstaining from food and drink, the real purpose is to attain purity and piety in order to be closer to Allah. Special night prayers called 'Taraveeh' are offered in mosques during the holy month. Ramadan culminates with the celebration of the festival Id-ul-Fitr.

History and Obligations : The Muslims fast the whole month as it teaches them the true meaning of perseverance and tolerance. During this month, Muslims are not only supposed to refrain from eating and drinking during the stipulated timing but they are also required to curb all negative emotions and prove themselves to be the good Muslim. Moreover, the Quran was also completed this month. During these times, Muslims spend generously to make the food available to the whole community, especially the poor and have nots. The plight that citizens are facing today due to the Corona Pandemic that first hit in March 2020 is distressing. A senior Muslim laments bussinessman very clearly said that with the corona chaos faced by all levels of people - this Ramadan is a sad plight - economy has dipped and many people are in dire straights. The hard working Islamic community is shaken by the fall out of the pandemic. Families have been separated by the regulations in force in most countries and communication is limited, fortunately the social media and internet allows some distant contact and remote socialising. This Eid here will not afford public mass gathering for the Eid prayers and festivities. It will all be a nuclear manifestation of traditions - payers and festivities and banquets will be limited to families and homes. However, all will pray for the end of this scourge and that better times will result with God's grace.

Thus Ramadan a time of grace and blessings, will see a truncated format. All religions definitely have and follow such spiritual practices to uplift the soul and body. Such practices bring grace and goodness to all humans of good will; in times of this serious pandemic peace can result, enlightenment, solace, and acceptance will materialize to help the common people be more confident and tolerant with many blessings poured down from the Almighty.

Mulling Over Options In These Depressing Times

As if the consternation of the pandemic is not enough, the country has now to deal with the horrors of hospital mishaps claiming the lives of coronavirus patients admitted there.

Less than 48 hours after a shocking oxygen leakage-triggered mishap claimed the lives of 24 patients at a Nashik civic hospital, as many as 14 COVID-19 patients died when a fire swept through the Intensive Care Unit of a pandemic hospital at Virar in Maharashtra's Palghar district.

While conflicting reports as to the cause of the fire have emerged, the fact remains that a 'maintenance short-coming' was responsible for the unfortunate incident.

Even in the mishap which occurred at the hospital run by the Nashik Municipal Corporation, oxygen supply was disrupted due to a leakage in the main oxygen storage tank.

Timely maintenance of all medical equipment is a vital aspect of hospital management. Any negligence could lead to fatal consequences.

Moreover, such accidents which happen in designated COVID-19 facilities draw all the more attention for the nature of patients who are lodged there. Fighting against the ravages of the disease, they are all in a very vulnerable position. Any lapse from the hospital managements' side will hence prove costly resulting in the loss of lives.

The state administration will hence have to take a stringent view of these mishaps and bring the guilty to book.

As the pandemic continues to rage on, COVID care centers across the country are in the grips of a severe shortage. In addition to the oxygen crisis, hospitals across the country are battling acute shortage of beds, medi-

cal staff and life-saving drugs as well!

If Kerala can, why not the rest of India! This is the question that weighs heavily on everyone's mind as a gasping capital welcomed Oxygen from Bangkok and Paris to save the lives of Delhi citizens.

As the mad scramble for oxygen in most parts of the country continues unabated, it is pertinent to have the nation envisaging ways to enhance its share of the life-saving gas. Without delving into the probable causes that went into the oxygen crisis in India, solutions are the need of the hour.

The move to rope in private hospitals to accommodate coronavirus patients too is yet to yield the desired results.

Moreover, reports of 'waiting lists' in crematoriums in the national Capital should also turn one's attention towards the miserable condition prevalent where the COVID victims are being denied dignity even in their death.

Besides putting the country on international travel red list as COVID-19 cases here burgeon, the deadly coronavirus has further snapped India's link with a large part of the world.

Yet there is no perceptible change in the behavior of the people as they continue to move around flouting the safety guidelines prescribed.

Nor has the government shown the verve to strictly enforce the restrictions imposed. Although undesired, as apprehended, are we rushing headlong into an inevitable lockdown once again!

Although researchers believe that there could be a number of factors at work in the COVID surge, one can't but have a feeling that it has been elections that has spelt doom for the country vis-à-vis the worsening COVID predicament for India.

For the Madras High Court to have severely reprimanded the Election Commission of India over the COVID-19 second wave in the country and holding it 'singularly' responsible for the spread, it would have taken some damning evidence which very strongly suggested that the EC did not take cognizance of the deteriorating situation brought about by the pandemic.

Lacking any kind of exercise of authority, the ECI has been criticized for being the most irresponsible institution over the last few months in not stopping political parties from wanton abuse of the COVID-19 protocol.

Of course these observations were made by the Bench while hearing a plea moved by Tamil Nadu Transport Minister seeking direction to the ECI to follow a slew of measures aimed at ensuring fairness in the counting of votes on May 2 in one of the constituencies where there are 70 aspirants contesting the seat.

But the story of indifference during this last one month of elections in four states and a Union Territory which went to polls couldn't have been more contemptible.

Allowing huge political rallies during a pandemic in which social distancing norms and masking were thrown to the winds, the Election Commission without a doubt is grossly guilty of disregarding the orders of the court in this matter.

If Constitutional authorities are to be reminded time and again that public health is of paramount importance, one can well gauge the emphasis given to this aspect of safety during the pandemic.

As so rightly said, it is only when a citizen survives that he will be able to enjoy the rights that a democratic republic guarantees.



by Pachu Menon

(Contd.. on p. 9)

Hence the warning that the High Court will stop counting of votes unless a blueprint for Covid-safe behavior is in place should serve to remind the ECI that it cannot behave arbitrarily on such matters!

However, while understanding that elections are another way of exerting constituent power, it is somehow difficult to comprehend the manner in which the government has gone about declaring and conducting elections in the recent past with complete disdain for the safety diktats prescribed as regards the Covid-pandemic.

The municipal elections held in Goa pretty much conform to these irregularities.

It is at such times that the mind mulls over various options to tide over the hopeless situation that we appear to be in now.

Is there a better way to manage the entire electoral process in the country! Could the nomination procedures, election campaigns and the polling be carried out in such a way so as to attract the least of crowds!

Ever since the COVID-19 outbreak, governments across the globe have been discouraging large gatherings and encouraging the 'Work From Home' concept to overcome the scourge of the virus.

With 'virtual' platforms being conceived for carrying out virtually everything under the sun, business or otherwise, would it be wrong to conceptualize similar methods to accomplish the not-too-cumbersome task of electing our representatives!

With healthcare, education, business and other aspects of everyday life acclimatizing to the 'online' craze during the pandemic in the country, isn't it time the nation also thought about conducting elections online!



Gasping for breath

The freshness of the air in your environment has a fundamental impact on the quality and length of your life. Air is more a necessity of life than either food or water. Imagine living in a city where a grey brown, noxious haze or smog permeates. Imagine that its streets are filled with jam-packed traffic, a slow moving assembly of vehicles which spew unhealthy exhaust fumes of carbon monoxide and other harmful chemicals. The air is not pleasant to inhale and it gives you breathing trouble, makes you cough and wheeze. Your eyes water, your nose runs and have headaches. Many regular walkers would have experienced all this. Place like parks appoint sweepers to sweep around the time when morning walkers do their daily walkers. Instead of getting fresh air inside the Park we get a share of dust swept out by the caretaker of the park. Similarly, when we travel in public places, the smokers spread smoke and part of the smoke is entering nostrils of the non-smokers as well. That is a pity indeed.



C.K. Subramaniam

The suspended particulate concentration of the air has a significant impact on a person's health. Bus drivers, two-wheeler riders and auto rickshaw drivers are those who suffer most with chronic respiratory problems and diseases. Airborne lead from leaded petrol is a major air pollutant, In high concentrations it is known to impair liver and kidney functions and is associated with reduced mental development of infants and children. There are only three mega cities in which suspended particulate matter concentration is, by and large within WHO-prescribed limits: Tokyo, New York and London.

All said and done, vehicular traffic is a major source of pollution in all mega cities. In half of them, it is the

single most important source. It is a major source of four of the six major air pollutants-carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, hydrocarbons and lead. When cities expand into mega cities, more people drive more vehicles, greater distance and for longer periods. In the absence of controls automotive emissions will only increase. Though EURO II emission norms have been introduced for the whole country and EURO III norms for our mega cities, the rapid increase in vehicular traffic makes it necessary for even more strict automotive emission controls.

Another major urban pollutant in cities is noise pollution, which may be defined as displeasing human sound that disrupts the activity or happiness of other humans in a city. Roadway noise is the collective sound energy emanation from motor vehicles. In a growing cities, roadways noise contributes largely to the total societal noise pollution. A car can reach up to 85 decibels, while the noise levels at railway stations can reach up to an average of 110 decibels. Aircraft are more worse. A person exposed to such noise for a long time may grow deaf. Those who live in cities are affected by several ailments that include vegetative vascular dystonia, heart failure, dyspepsia and head aches. It is better to cover the face when driving a vehicle through a high way.

A third concern is water that is so essential for life. Everyone wants clean water to drink. As there is natural water pollution, most Hotels depend on unclean water. Let us not allow the pollutants to allow to enter our body through casual approach and take all the precautions to make a healthy life. Health is wealth is really true.

Murder At The Altar

This title could be shocking. Is it some kind of Agatha Christie “who dunnit”? But such an event did take place about 1000 years ago when St. Thomas Becket was murdered at the altar of Canterbury Cathedral, of which he was the Archbishop, on 29/12/1170. This was at the behest of King Henry II, who wanted to have absolute dominion over the church.

Nevertheless, at this time I am reminded of an Agatha Christie murder mystery “Murder on the Orient Express”, a 2017 movie based on Christie’s 1934 novel by the same name. It is about a man who is stabbed to death on a moving train. There were eleven knife marks with different degrees of ferocity and at different angles. Agatha Christie’s famous Belgium detective Hercule Poirot, who was also travelling on the same train, concluded that eleven different people, who were seeking revenge from the victim, each had a hand in the murder. Each one had his or her own motivation.



by chhotebhai *

I was also reminded of the Bob Dylan song “Murder Most Foul” that he had composed at the assassination of John F Kennedy in November 1963.. All these murders were premeditated. What if we take the lives of others without actually intending to? Listen to this observation by Chief Justice Sanjib Bannerjee of the Madras High Court on 30/4/21. While holding the Election Commission of India (ECI) singularly responsible for Covid deaths in Tamilnadu during the State Elections it had made an oral remark that ECI officials should “Probably be booked for murder”. This set the cat among the pigeons, because it was probably the most scathing remark of a senior court against any Government officials.

Taking a cue from the Madras High Court, the U.P. Teachers’ Association claimed that 700 teachers had died during election duties during the recent Panchayat elections, for which they were on duty.

Social media was aflutter with images of a sage (but not sagacious looking) Prime Minister, permitting super spreader events like the Kumbh Mela at Haridwar, where, as per mela records, 9.1 million had congregated. TV images showed the world how careless and callous we have been about Covid. The PM was crisscrossing the country for election rallies and boasting of the crowds present. Again, it was only at the fag end of the Bengal elections when the Calcutta High

Court reprimanded the ECI that it put restrictions on political rallies. By then the damage was done. I won’t add to multiple political commentators saying that for Modi, elections mattered more than human lives. Should he be called the Butcher of 2021?

Covid became very real to me. Five of my immediate neighbours died. My wife’s niece, a 41 year old architect, died in Pune, just three days after being admitted to hospital. Both her parents were in intensive care, in the same hospital and were only told of their daughter’s death after they had sufficiently recovered.

I myself developed a slight fever and cough on 23rd April. Fortunately I got timely Covid treatment through a family doctor friend. I also had the support of my wife and son; plus the urban luxury of having oxygen bearing Ashoka and Neem trees in my compound. They helped me pull through in two weeks, though I am still very weak.

However, I wish to focus on the stories of those who were not as lucky as me. A family attended the Holy Week ser-

vices in the Delhi NCR region, though that particular parish comes under Meerut Diocese. Shortly after Easter Sunday (4th April) and a crowded church service, the assistant parish priest died of Covid; and our friends two daughters have had to undergo home isolation.

In my hometown Kanpur, I kept warning our priests that they were not following Covid protocols. My pleadings fell on deaf ears. The only restriction imposed was to not touch the cross during veneration on Good Friday. On Easter Sunday one parish priest was boasting about how many were attending the service (in a poorly ventilated church). A few days later the assistant contracted Covid, and he himself was put on a ventilator. Some of the parishioners did die of Covid. Another parish had organized a charismatic healing retreat just before Holy Week. That church is also poorly ventilated, like most modern “match box” churches. The charisma did not work. Both the priests and several parishioners got infected.

The moot question is, “Who is responsible for these deaths?” Is it not murder at the altar, slightly different from that of St Thomas Becket? Is it not like Murder on the Orient Express, with eleven stabs wounds of varying intensity? Is it not Murder most Foul? Let me now come to the tragedy that hit me the hardest.

Some twenty years ago I had helped a childless couple adopt a child from Mother Teresa’s orphanage. His father never wore a mask. We last met in church on Easter Sunday. As usual he was without a mask. When I reprimanded him he laughed saying that there was no need of a mask in Church. The priest standing by said nothing. Two weeks later this couple had succumbed to Covid! The young boy was orphaned again! An army officer, who was standing by when I was reprimanding this friend, phoned me the day he died, “Remember what you said to him, but he did not listen. What a tragedy”. If this is not murder at the altar pray what is?

(Contd.. on p. 11)

(Contd.. from p. 10)

Often my wife and I were the only members in the church wearing masks. Some even made fun of us behind our backs. The familiar refrain was "We have come to church, nothing can happen to us". I kept telling people that this was the sin of presumption. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) terms it a sin against the very first commandment (cf CCC 2091) It further states "There are two kinds of presumption. Either man presumes upon his own capacities, hoping to save himself without help from on high, or he presumes upon God's almighty power or his mercy" (CCC 2092). The best way to put it is to jump in front of a running train, proclaiming "God will save me".

This was the very temptation (trap) which Satan tried against Jesus. When Jesus countered Satan with scripture quotes, Satan resorted to scripture itself, saying "If you are Son of God throw yourself down from here for scripture says – He has given his angels orders about you, to guard you ... They will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone (Lk 4:9-11). Jesus counters Scripture with Scripture itself "Do not put the Lord you God to the test" (Lk 4:12). He was quoting from Deuteronomy 6:16.

Unfortunately, it would seem to me that many of us have put the Lord our God to the test, by our highly irresponsible acts. We cannot bring back lost lives, but we can learn some lessons, to save those still standing. Let us not be accused of murder at the altar.

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Mangalorean RC Bachelor, 31 years belonging to a highly educated and very affluent family with interests in healthcare, agriculture and many other sectors, Tall, Fair, Handsome, Holding Doctorate, managing the family business in Karnataka State. (REF:MM104)

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28 year Mumbai based Goan Roman Catholic Bachelor, Ht. 5' 10", Wt. 72 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.Com., Profession : a Banker (REF:MM109)

Vasai based affluent business family R.C. East Indian Spinster, 33, years Ht. 5' 2", very beautiful and pretty. MS General Surgeon, Doctor by profession. (REF:106)

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Those interested in this proposal :

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Mother: What did you learn in school today

Son: How to write

Mother: What did you write?

Son: I don't know, they haven't taught us how to read yet!

Student: The brain is a wonder full thing

Teacher: Why do you say that?

Student: Because it starts working the second you get up in the morning and never stops until you get asked a question in class!

TEACHER : What is an island ?

Pupil : A piece of land surrounded by water except on one side.

TEACHER :On one side ?

Pupil : Yes, on top !

TEACHER : Why does your geography exam have a big zero over it.

Pupil : It's not a zero, the teacher ran out of stars, so she gave me a moon instead !

TEACHER :What's your name ?

Class : Ravi

TEACHER : You should say "Sir"

Pupil : OK, Sir Ravi !

The health service in this country is miles away from home.

TEACHER : Ravi, can you find me Australia on the map please ?

Pupil :There it is

TEACHER : Now, Ravi, who discovered Australia ?

Pupil : I did !

TEACHER : What is the plural of mouse ?

Pupil :Mice

TEACHER : Good, now what's the plural of baby ?

Pupil : Twins !

Some parents got letters from the principal of the school that their children were behaving like animals..

One parent wrote back...

Sir,

You expect our children to...

Wake up like roosters



Carry bags like donkeys
Run to the school like deers
Work hard like ants
Copy from the blackboard like monkeys

Be quiet as fish
And after all this you are surprised they behave like animals???

In a Nursery School Canteen...

There's a basket of apples with a notice written over it :-

"Do not take more than one, God is watching"

On the other counter there's a box of chocolates.

A small child went & wrote on it.

"Take as many as U want, God is busy watching the apples"...

NEVER ACT SMART WITH Today's Generation..!!

In the class teacher said
Teacher: "The first person to answer my question will go home early"
Santa threw the bad outside
Teacher asked: Whose bag is that???
Santa answered:It's mine... i am going home bye..bye...
Teacher:!!!!

Teacher: What is the chemical formula for water?
Student: H I J K L M N O.
Teacher: What are you talking about?
Student: Yesterday you said it's H to O.

Teacher : Millie, give me a sentence starting with ' I . '
Millie : I is...
Teacher : No, Millie..... always say, ' I am.'

Millie : All right... 'I am the ninth letter of the alphabet'

Teacher: How old is your father?

Student: He is 6 years.

Teacher: What? How is this possible?

Student: He became father only when I was born.

A letter from a teacher to a parent:

Dear Parent,

Kumar doesn't smell nice in class.

Please try to bath him.

Parent's answer:

Dear Teacher, Kumar is not a rose, Dont smell him, Teach him.....

Teacher to a grade 2 student : Who is the youngest member in your family?
? Student : Papa

Teacher : Beta youngest, sabse chota kaun hai ?

Student : Papa

Teacher : How ?

Student : Because he still sleeps with mummy!

Teacher: Chand par pehla kadam kisne rakha?

Pappu: NEIL ARMSTRONG.

Teacher: Aur doosra ?

Pappu: Doosra bhi usi ne rakha hoga Langdi khelne thodi gaya tha woh!!!!

Teacher :What happened in 1809?

Student: Abraham Lincoln was born.

Teacher :What happened in 1819?

Student: Abraham Lincoln was ten years old.

Teacher: What are some products of the West Indies?

Student: I don't know.

Teacher: Of course, you do. Where do you get sugar from?

Student: We borrow it from our neighbor.

Teacher: "what's the further away, America or the Moon?"

Student: "America!"

Teacher: "America? Whatever gave you that idea?"

Student: "Simple, We can always see the moon from the india, but not America!"

'Conscience' of the Executives in Question!

The Allahabad High Court pronounced a landmark judgment on the 4th day of May 2021 and it has major moral implications for the entire 'executive sector' of the country, from top to bottom or bottom to top, across the states and other units. The verdict was in the wake of the 'acute shortage of medical oxygen for patients who were afflicted by covid-19' and the ensuing tragic death of the humans.

The ruling of the court reads, "Death of covid-19 patients just for non-supplying of oxygen to the hospitals is a criminal act and not less than genocide". The clear reference is to those responsible for ensuring the continuous procurement and supply of medical oxygen. Obviously, the words 'criminal act' and 'genocide' attracts serious attention by one and all.

A Bench of Justices Siddhartha Varma and Ajit Kumar were addressing the District Magistrates (DMs) of Lucknow and Meerut. The Bench asked them, "How can we let people die in this way", when 'medical science has advanced so much that heart transplantations and brain surgeries are now a reality'. The Bench made these remarks in response to a PIL, seeking 'immediate remedial measures to be taken by the government', at all levels.

The judges strictly ordered the DMs to do an 'immediate homework' of verifying the news of covid-19 patients dying of oxygen shortage and of submitting reports within 48 hours by Friday, the next date of hearing. The officials were also instructed to appear in person for the hearing.

The court had taken cognizance of the stories of oxygen shortage going viral on social media, which blatantly challenges the brutal "harassment meted out" by the district administrations and the police "to those poor citizens who

were begging for an oxygen cylinder to save the lives of their near and dear ones". The court also found these news items 'showing a quite contrary picture to the one claimed by the government'.

The court had also cautioned the 'Election Commission', saying 'any slackness from its part will not be tolerated' with regard to its responsibilities. This warning was at the rear of the news published in Hindi daily, Amar Ujala, on 27 April, about 135 teachers (shiksha mitras) and investigators on duty at 'panchayat polls' who allegedly had to succumb to covid-19.

The court gave direction to the SEC to produce before it CCTV footage in print and in a pen drive from designated counting areas and centres, like Lucknow, Prayagraj, Varanasi, Gorakhpur, Ghaziabad, Meerut, Gautam Buddha Nagar (Noida) and Agra, along with an 'action plan' against the flouting of covid-19 procedures. This was following the failure in complying with the covid-19 protocols and guidelines by Election Officers and Police administration at the counting of votes for the gram panchayat polls.

Coming back to the chief point in question, failing to supply medical oxygen to the hospitals is declared a 'crime'. Obviously, medical oxygen is a question of life and death for the patients who have become extremely vulnerable. Allowing human beings to die out of shortage of medical oxygen is equal to 'genocide', which is mass murder. These charges apply to administrators and executives at all levels, who are supposed to make provisions of all sorts, of course, medical requirements on a priority basis. This, by the Allahabad High Court, is a brilliant assessment of the malfunction of those who have opted to be within the administrative machinery, indeed so. In fact, by holding the 'executives' of

the country, centre, state, district, panchayat, and the like, responsible for the collapse in making the basic provisions for the wellbeing of the people in their respective area of operation, the court has, in fact, articulated the 'conscience of governance'. Along with defining the 'sense of right and wrong' of the administration, the court has underlined also the 'super conscience' of the judiciary, especially during times when the executives barefacedly fail in their primary duties that are stipulated by the Constitution of India.

The cutting question of the court 'how can we let people die in this way', as against the huge modern developments and facilities, especially in the medical sector, is a matter of million dollar concern. The entire superlative claims and boasts collapse miserably in a spur of the moment. It simply re-winds the human civilization and puts it back to the primitive times, perhaps in a much worse way. All the revolutionary progress of science, technology, thinking and culture get defeated, mournfully so.

The razor sharp question that emerges is how could 'crime' and 'genocide', whatever be their type, be ever accommodated with governance? Being part of the government is not a licence for having a super leisure time, enjoying power and money and all the best of what the world could offer them. It is not for exercising authority in a wholesale manner and for celebrating a magnified ego either.

In point of fact, governance has to be necessarily 'good governance' that is proactively oriented to the wellbeing of the people. It calls for 'qualities of the mind, of the heart and of the spirit', which amounts to a 'conscientious behaviour' in planning, being prepared for any eventuality, being available to people and in performing, all in a transparent mode. To say the least,



Fr. Dr. M. D. Thomas

(Contd.. on p. 15)

The Bharat Mata Bear With You?

All high courts in the country are up against you Modiji. One of them said that due to the scarcity of hospitals, vaccines, and oxygen, you have caused Jana-samhar (Annihilation of humanity) in the country! No place at the Ganges to burn the last remains of the Hindus! Hence our question to you: Modiji, how long will the Bharat Mata bear with you?

Mamata Banerji Still Harassed.

Banerjee, who has been unanimously elected as the legislative party leader, was sworn in as the chief minister of West Bengal for a third term on May 5 and the newly-elected (legislative) members took oath in the Assembly on May 6. According to the final results announced by the Election Commission, the TMC romped home in West Bengal, pocketing 216 of the 292 assembly seats that went to polls and secured a third straight term in office. The Mamata Banerjee-led party's main challenger, the BJP, bagged 77 seats, while the ISF, which contested with the symbol of the Rashtriya Secular Majlis Party, and an independent, managed one seat each. Modiji, allow Didi to rule peacefully now? No! Your party started riots in the state! No wonder that this is the first time that a prime minister did not call to congratulate her after winning the Assembly elections!

Your one aim is to establish BJP rule in all the states by hook or crook. Where you cannot win elections you buy MLAs. In West Bengal you could not buy enough MLAs, you started riots! Nearly a week after the result of the bitterly contested West Bengal Assembly poll was declared, post-poll violence continues in different parts of the State. Who caused it? Why should the Trinamul cause it? They have won the majority and they are keen on ruling the state peacefully. It is your defeated BJP is creating an impression

that there is so much unrest that the President's rule has to be imposed! Even after Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee appealed for peace, announced compensation for those who died and the Union Home Ministry sent a team to take stock of the situation!



Fr. Michael G. Vasai

But by now it is clear that BJP has created a string of posts and videos, including fake ones, surfaced on different social media platforms!

Social media posts by verified Delhi-based handles about BJP polling agents allegedly in Birbamul were called out as fake by West Bengal police as early as May 4. On May 6, the Kolkata police busted another fake post in which a pro-BJP handle claimed that a party worker Mainak Moitra was killed in Sitalkuchi. But soon a message came: "... BJP IT Cell is now claiming, I am Manik Moitra and died in Sitalkuchi. Please don't believe these fake posts and please don't worry. I repeat: I am (still) alive," a social media user said. Kolkata police said that legal action is being taken in this regard. A scroll on the timeline of official handles of the police forces refers to at least half a dozen or more posts and videos of violence, burning of houses or vehicles being called out for being fake. The West Bengal Police Criminal Investigation Department has arrested a youth from Deganga in North 24 Parganas for spreading fake information and attributing it to post election violence. Police officials admit that they are constrained to act in many cases, as the handles peddling the misinformation are operated by people outside the State. Not only supporters of political parties but also key functionaries of quasi-judicial bodies have posted videos on social media, claiming they were linked to post-poll violence in the State. Political observers and organisations working for conflict resolution are of the opinion that the "amplified, opinionated campaign

on social media" is making the situation murkier.

There can be no denial that post-poll violence is happening in the State. The Chief Minister has herself come forward, appealed for peace and announced compensation for the victims. Biswanath Chakraborty, political observer, said that an amplified campaign by the BJP, which in certain cases is resorting to doctored videos, is great injustice to the people affected by the violence. He also said the nature of violence after the just-concluded election is different as, instead of threatening political opponents, anti-social elements have indulged in killing and looting. In West Bengal, where politics is intrinsically linked to area dominance, violence after elections is a tool to establish political dominance, he added.

Amid reports of violence following TMC's victory, she urged her supporters to maintain peace. "I appeal to everyone to maintain peace and not indulge in any violence. We know BJP and central forces have tortured us a lot but we have to maintain peace. At present, we have the fight Covid-19 than BJP!" she said.

Nandigram Results Are A Suspect.

On Sunday 5th May, it was initially reported by the EC that Banerjee had won by a margin of 1,200 votes. Even Rajypal congratulated her, but the returning officer subsequently announced Adhikari's victory by 1,956 votes! A day after leading Trinamool Congress to a historic victory in West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, at her Kalighat residence in Kolkata on the same day vowed to move court over the Nandigram result where she lost to her former protégé-turned-rival Suwendu Adhikari. The Election Commission has to explain why he reversed the Nandigram result after formally

(Contd.. on p. 15)

announcing it! After the returning officer turned down its plea for an immediate recounting of the votes polled in Nandigram, the TMC wrote to the Chief Election Officer asking him to reconsider it.

Mamata has another proof of a mischief on the part of the EC. She says, "I received an SMS from someone wherein the returning officer of Nandigram seems to have written to someone *if he allows recounting then his life would be under threat.*" Besides, how come the four hours server was down on a busy election counting day?

(Indian Express with inputs from PTI and ANI)

Modiji enough is enough!

In spite of your crooked ways Mamata has defeated you and your central Ministers' team! The Telegraph writes: *Over seven years, even as Mr. Modi has preened in name-embroidered suits and plumed headgear, the virtually projected garments have fallen off him, one by one. Even as his 'brand expansion' has grown to mind-boggling levels, his promises have crashed and burned. Under this regime, corruption has been rocketed into another dimension, so much so that the word itself becomes inadequate to describe the massive network of interlocking institutional lying and criminal law-bending. Over seven years, lunatic servility to oligarchic interests along with other monumental cock-ups has played havoc with our economy. has under Mr Modi's leadership, we have been made a laughing stock by Pakistan with the famed Balakot bombing raid on a clump of trees and the capture of our pilot; and we have been repeatedly humiliated by China. And, now, finally, despite having had a year to shore up the basic defences against the biggest natural calamity faced by independent India, we are on our knees, physically and mentally. The full roster of this regime's intentional and unintentional misgovernance will become horrific lore in the annals of history.*

governance is not the place for 'criminals and murderers', as the esteemed high court has sensibly articulated, not at all.

In line with the Constitution of India, the parliamentary system has 'legislature, executive and judiciary', as three facts of the 'conscience of the nation'. They have to work together and walk together. Their functions are not independent of one another. The 'Constitutional culture' they are professed to when they were sworn in is one that is deeply grounded in a 'spirit of collaboration'. All the three entities together, sharing in the 'collective conscience of the nation', have to deliver the best of the wellbeing to the citizens of the country. A breakdown in this constitutional culture is manifestly a criminal act that is equal to genocide.

As it is too obvious, 'politics and party politics' of the country have taken the country almost to the street levels, not only to the visibility of citizens of our own country but also to the entire world. As representatives elected by the people, the ministers, MPs, MLAs and Parshads, along with the appointed bureaucrats of all levels, have to join their minds, hearts, spirits and hands with each other for doing their sacred duty to the citizens of the country, irrespective of affiliation to various parties. Until this happens, politics and party politics cannot be thought of supplying 'oxygen' for the citizens.

Mamata didi in West Bengal, poverty in the country, terrorists in Kashmir, China on the borders and Corona in the whole world has declared you a failure! It is high time that you go into prison and allow the nation to regain its original splendour!

PM Narendra Modi on Sunday congratulated Mamata Banerjee for TMC's performance in the Assembly polls and said BJP will keep serving the people of Bengal

JAI HIND!

What's more, 'public space' is a 'sacred forum', which only those who have 'a sense of sacred' in life should opt for. Only then, they will be able to deliver anything worth the while, considering the citizens and the nation 'equal to the sacred'. But, they say, 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread'. Such an ironical adage should never be the reality of the governance and of the executives. Instead, 'take off your shoes, the ground you tread upon is sacred' has to be the reverential sentiment of the executive sector. Only then, our country can be saved from 'crimes' and 'genocides' of any sort.

The wisdom of the Allahabad High Court makes a clarion call to those who are wedded to the governmental machinery, small and big and all over, to 'awaken their conscience'. The rulers have to become humble leaders who are capable of serving the people of the country, especially the needy. That would necessitate 'sharpening the sense of right and wrong' of those in the governmental system, boost up the 'ethical fibre' and be on their feet to serve the citizens, as a pure devotion to God himself.

The author is Director of Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies, New Delhi, and has been committed to cross-cultural perspectives, inter-faith relations, social ethics, constitutional values, national integration and social harmony, for the past over 40 years. He contributes to the above cause through lectures, articles, video messages, conferences, social interactions, views at TV channels, and the like. He could be contacted at 'mdthomas53@gmail.com'.

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Buddhism and Christianity: An Exposition!

—*Dr. Trevor Colaso, Vienna, VA, USA.*

Buddha Jayanthi or Vesak is celebrated in India this year on 26 May 2021. Siddhartha Gautama was born around 563 BC in Lumbini (Nepal). At 35 years he attained 'enlightenment' or an awakening under a Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya; and was thus called the "Buddha"! At 80 years he died at Kushinagar, India. The chief principles of Buddhism are enshrined in four groups representing twenty core values! Allow me to expound these essential living from a Christian perspective!

Three Refuge Accords!

*Buddha: An enlightened person – "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you // You are Christ! The Son of the living God" (Ephesians 5:14 // Matthew 16:16).

*Dharma: Ethical Standards of the 'Middle Way' – "Enter through the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it // I AM the way, the truth and the life! No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Matthew 7:13 // John 14:6).

*Sangha: Buddhists community of monks, nuns and laity – "I appeal to you dear brothers (and sisters), by the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with one another. Let there be no division in the Church; but rather be of one mind, united in thought and purpose" (1 Corinthians 1:10)

Five Moral Precepts!

*Refrain from taking life! *Refrain from taking what is not given! *Refrain from misuse of senses! *Refrain from wrong speech! *Refrain from intoxicants! – "In a nutshell they follow the 'Ten Commandments' – Refer Exodus 20:2-17!"

Four Noble Truths!

*Dukkha: The existence of sickness, old age and death – "After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace Who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you" (1 Peter 5:10).

*Samudaya: Desire or attachment – "Everyone who wants to live a Godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. So take care" (2 Timothy 3:12).

*Nirodha: Its progression, and how to liberate oneself through 'Nirvana', by extinguishing greed, delusion and hatred – "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind; so that by testing you may discern God's will - what is good, acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

*Magga: The way to the cessation of all suffering and disease; which is set forth in the 'eight correct behaviors' (see below). They support and reinforce each other, and are not to be taken in their respective order – "But we also glory in our suffering; because we know that suffering produces a lot of perseverance, molding one's character, resulting in hope" (Romans 5:3-4).

Eightfold Righteous Path!

It is also referred to as the 'Astangika-Marga'!

*Right Understanding: "To love God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength; and to love also your neighbor as yourself. This is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mark 12:33).

*Right Intent: "For we are created in Christ Jesus for good works which God has prepared beforehand; so that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

*Right Speech: "Let your speech be always gracious, seasoned with salt; so that you may know how to answer each person // A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness breaks the spirit" (Colossians 4:6 // Proverbs

15:4).

*Right Action: "Be doers of the Word, and not just hearers only by deceiving yourselves ... For just as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead" (James 1:22;2:26).

*Right Livelihood: "Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I am working too!' // So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, perform it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

*Right Effort: "Do all things without grumbling or disputing ... holding fast to the Word of life; so that in the Day of Christ, you may be proud that you did not run in vain, or labor without gain" (Philippines 2:14; 16).

*Right Mindfulness: "For to set your mind on the flesh is death, but to set your mind on the Holy Spirit is life and peace! For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to the law of God. Thus, those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:6-8).

*Right Concentration: "Concerning this salvation which the prophets who predicted about the grace that was to be yours, searched and inquired carefully what time the Spirit of Christ in them prophesied the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories" // So be sober-minded, and set your hopes fully on the grace that will be disclosed to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:10-11; 13).

Conclusion: Aspects of Christian Meditation!

In a document, titled, Jesus Christ the Bearer of the Water of Life, it discusses the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7-29). This should characterize our engagement and dialogue with other religions – "For we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16).

Jesus Was Taken Up Into Heaven

Ascension Sunday

This day, the unimaginable happened; “Jesus was taken up into heaven”. (Mk. 16:19) The Ascension of Christ put colors to the magnificent true history of the world’s greatest living faith. The Jewish Messiah had carried out all the predictions of the holy prophets; he had fulfilled the Word of God, and gifted humankind with wisdom, protection and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Consider the spiritual blessing to be a witness; to have the power of the Holy Spirit, and to receive the Lord’s command. This was the greatest commission, “Go into the entire world and preach the gospel to the whole creation”. (Mk. 16:15)

In today’s reading we reflect on the words of Jesus. “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witness in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth”. (Acts 1:8)



BY MELVYN BROWN

It was a surprisingly bright day on Mount Olive, northeast of Bethany, when Jesus stood tall and in clear view of all the people gathered before him. It was the perfect scenario for his ascension. This was the fortieth day since His Resurrection. The apostles, in their simple, spotless tunics and discolored robes, moved forward to be closer to Christ, especially to absorb whole-heartedly every word of the Messiah.

Earlier, after the Resurrection Jesus had appeared to his disciples and he had drawn their attention to the kingdom of God, telling them all that was needed for the establishment of his Church. But even as Christ spoke, others listened, observed and remembered; “And these signs will accompany those who believe in my name they will cast out demons, they will speak in new tongues, they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly

thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover”. (Mk. 16: 17-18)

And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight. (Acts. 1:9)

Christ has ascended to his Father. The final chapter was closed. Eternity would bear witness to his suffering, pain and sacrifice. He had won victory over death. He had died for our sins: Jesus Christ, Incarnate God. The divine gift of Christ is a challenged mystery in their Christian faith.

We recall at this point what St. John wrote; “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God... and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”. (Jn. 1:1,14)

Earlier, Jesus had known about his ascension which was yet to come. He had asked his disciples, “What if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?” (Jn. 6:62).

It is interesting to note that in Jerusalem there is a Chapel of the Ascension where a place is marked with a stone foot imprint, many claim to be the footprint of Jesus. By reading Holy Scripture, by implementing what the gospels teach us, we usher a new chapter in our lives; we keep ourselves open to the non-believer, and help him to meditate on the faith we live by. We mix in the society we happen to be in and radiate Christ.

We plant seeds along the way, and bear witness to Jesus when we travel, or move from one place to another. The power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit emerges, often without us knowing it. The sign becomes apparent in the course of time, and by the fruits of our actions.



You become the testament to inspire those around you. The Resurrection and the Ascension are the forte of the faith. In a mancentric earth, the ego-centric person should try, in his quiet moments, to be Christ centric.

I agree, this is not always easy. This reminds me of certain men who questioned the human consciousness of Jesus. The question they raised of Christ’s fallibility of human knowledge was truly baseless.

Years after the Ascension of Christ, the Council of Chalcedon (451) stated: “We declare that he is perfect, both in his divinity and in his humanity, truly God and truly man composed of body and rational soul, that he is consubstantial with the Father in his divinity, consubstantial with us in his humanity, like us in every respect, except for sin” (Heb. 4:15)

The liturgy this Sunday declares, “Jesus was taken up into heaven”. (Mk. 16:19) Not surprisingly, we read of how two men in shining white robes were present in the crowd. They spoke of the Beatific Vision, saying: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven”. (Acts. 1:11)

In the Old Testament, the psalmist had cried in joy when he correctly predicted; “God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet”. (Ps. 47:5) In the First Epistle of Timothy (3:16) states that Jesus was taken up in glory.

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