


TAME SOCIAL MEDIA

It is the right time to frame strict rules for taming the social media as presently the laxity given on content sharing has taken an alarming turn with even riots and other forms of violence happening around after irresponsible posts making rounds across this relatively new form of media. In this context, the Minister of Electronics & Information Technology, Ashwini Vaishnaw has sought consensus of the Rajya Sabha members to make strict social media rules. He has assured that the Government is ready on the matter. It is a grave issue today because the misuse of social media can have serious consequences as were witnessed in recent past. The recent riots in Maharashtra after provocative posts on social media is a startling example of criticality associated with this most sensitive tool of the modern times because it is dynamic with no instant check on information sharing. Though, there are few websites and apps which help the people to find out veracity of social media posts, the quantum of data which is being shared right now is too much to handle under the right perspective and that is the reason that at times things go beyond control. There is a need to tighten noose around those who are deliberately misusing social media to satiate vested interests. The aforesaid Minister's offer to come out with stricter media rules should be taken up very seriously because if the things will not be tamed in time there is every policy that the society may suffer on many counts including social, moral, monetary, and even at the hands of enemies of the Nation because these days country's foes are misusing this platform to the hilt as Internet has no boundaries and one cannot stop it with conventional walls. It is thus imperative that social media should be made accountable to make this platform safer for the country and its people and also to stop enemies of India from doing anything detrimental towards the nation. One thing is sure that if urgent steps will not be taken in this regard there are chances that country will feel the pinch at a later stage because this medium can go to any extent in causing damage.

RESUME ARTS & CRAFT

The forced closure of schools in J&K due to first, second and third waves of the pandemic Coronavirus has led the students away from their favourite subjects- Arts and crafts, thus marring their creativity on a bigger scale. As the schools are offering online classes that too with a regulated time schedule, the managements of the educational institutions often sideline these optional subjects to ensure that the pupils can cover up their academics fully. Under these circumstances, the students are not getting a chance to utilize their abilities to make drawings, paper-art, and do so many other activities which their art and craft teachers used to guide them to perform to hone their minds and make them dexterous. This is a big loss for the students because the process of giving wings to their creativity has stopped with little or almost no chance to resume same because even if the offline classes will be resumed the schedule or the time table will be so hectic that chances of these subjects will become bleak. This is unfortunate because without trying their skills on drawing pads and making best out of waste, the quest of the brains to use their creativity constructively will remain unfulfilled thus creating gaps in their grooming. As the disease corona is lethal therefore nothing could be done in this regard at the moment but the stakeholders should keep in mind that as soon as the things get back to normal, the students should be given this opportunity to use their dexterity and excellence of mind in creating artifacts as this activity has the capability to sharpen the mind and increase acumen in an individual. The issue is critical and the education bodies of the Union Territory should make it sure that no institution fails to restore these activities which in the long run help in creating meaningful citizens in the country.



OFF 'D' CUFF

Ideal time for us to begin our own moulting

Based on our experience of the past two years, there is one lesson we can definitely carry into 2022: that the need of the hour is a conscious planet. The pandemic has established that the virus spares no one. We are, whether we like it or not, one planet. If we are conscious, we can ride this tumult with minimal damage; if we are compulsive, we will pay a huge price.

Some may consider it morbid, but, as a guru, I am always reminding people of their mortality. Why? Because you don't become spiritual by praying, by going to temples, mosques and churches; you become spiritual only when you understand that you are mortal. The pandemic has placed our mortality squarely before us. This naturally prompts the question: what lies beyond our physical nature? Is there more to us than this body and mind? These questions mark the beginning of the spiritual process. Many creatures undergo a process called moulting. At regular intervals, they shed an outer layer – feathers, hair, skin, an exoskeleton – to prepare for the next stage in their life cycles. For insects, birds, spiders, crustaceans, snakes, even some mammals, this is critical to their survival and growth. For the planet, particularly in the northern hemisphere, the period after the winter solstice represents a new beginning, a fresh lease of life. It is almost like the planet is moulting, preparing for harvest when vegetal life will explode once again into flower and fruit. This is the ideal time for humans to begin their own moulting. Every other creature functions according

Congress ‘Mukt’ Bharat - Is it happening?



■ ER P L KHUSHU

By second decade of the 21st century, the resurgent BJP led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee and then with the people amelioration akin policies of Narendra Damodardas Modi, has altered India's political landscape. They dismissed the English-speaking lot as Macaulay's children and replaced the external view of country for adhesive growth, with an internal gauge founded on 'Sab-Ka-Sath, Sab-Ka-Vikas, Sab-Ka-Vishwas' and now 'Sab-Ka-Prayas'. It is now for the saner people of this country to take it ahead. The often-repeated slogan 'Congress - Mukht- Bharat, since 2014, by the majority of Indians, when congress lost its elections and the government badly, is probably now coming as a truth and not a fallacy. It was looking like a joke at that point of time, when one could hardly visualize that the condition of the congress party will be so much implacable that it cannot even have a full fledged congress president and functions with adhoc President at its helm of affairs. Unfortunate for the nation about such a party, which is as old as the independence movement of India, and supposed to deliver better, as a prudent and reliable opposition party both in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Democracy and its intrinsic values demand that for a better governance, by a ruling party particularly with a sizeable majority, that there should be a healthy and a meaningful opposition party to serve as a watch dog for the ruling party, in its disposition of various policies and programs for the welfare of the people of the country. But unfortunately it is squarely missing because of the dissent, chaos, fusion and confusion in the congress party, which is supposed to be a leading opposition party. Unfortunately the high command of the congress party is probably now reduced to 'Raj-Kumars and Raj-Kumaris of Congress Parivar, which is adopted by the Parivar as the designate entity of theirs, since the independence of India. The implied present heads of this Congress Parivar, who are holding the strings of the party as also governing the party and have ruled the nation through implied proxy in the past till 2014, are now obsessed with the fabulous ideas of handing over their ruler ship and dominance to their progenies, to maintain the dynastic rule of the congress party as a perpetual affair. The mishandling of the situation in Punjab by the so called aspirants of the prime minister's posts in congress and in other states of this country, speaks volumes about the incompetent and inexperienced state of their political acumen and vision. But they are retained and allowed to deputize and represent the work of the congress high command to somehow make them the policy planners of congress on the ground of enthusing a fresh blood in the congress party under the sole pretext of making them the Kings and the Queens of congress by proxy, for ruling the nation which is apparently a misnomer and a distant dream now under the circumstances. It may not ultimately prove to be an illusion as per this famous couplet: 'न खुदा ही मिला-ए-सनम न इश्क के हुए न ख़र के हुए, रहे दिल मैं हमारे ये रंज-ओ-अलम न इश्क के हुए न ख़र के हुए'

Congress is facing a countrywide identity crisis with the party not having come up with enough numbers to even qualify as an opposition party in the polls. They are reduced to just almost fifties in the parliament. Congress party has this time, an interim Congress President, as the party is in turmoil due to internal bickering and not able to find a full-fledged President. Six years after the party's electoral rot pushed it into a continuing downward spiral, 23 senior leaders of the Congress, including five former Chief Ministers, many

Congress Working Committee members, sitting MPs, and several former Union Ministers, have, in an unprecedented push-back, sent a letter to party chief calling for sweeping changes, from top to bottom. The letter, learnt to have been sent some time back, details a reforms agenda that is, in effect, a stinging indictment of the current leadership. This letter of dissent mentions that the revival of the Congress is 'a national imperative' fundamental to the health of democracy. The letter, sources said, underlines how the party's steady decline comes when the country faces its 'gravest political, social and economic challenges since Independence'. It is now a situation of leadership crisis in the Congress, which is now manifesting in a farcical battle of the generations. Their letter calls for a sweeping range of reforms, decentralization of power; empowerment of state units, elections to the Congress organization at all levels, from the block to the CWC and the urgent constitution of a Central parliamentary board. The leaders, it is learnt, have pointed out that the 'uncertainty' over the leadership and the 'drift' in the party had demoralized workers and weakened the party. Importantly, they are learnt to have said that the CWC is not 'effectively guiding' the party anymore in mobilizing public opinion. The leaders, it is learnt, said that even over a year after the Lok Sabha election defeat, the party has not undertaken any 'honest introspection' to find out reasons for its continued 'decline'. They have argued that it was time to establish an 'institutional leadership mechanism' to collectively guide the party's revival. While calling for collective leadership, the letter interestingly said the Nehru-Gandhi family will always remain an 'integral part' of it. (That is dynastic rule). The deepening crisis facing the Congress since it was trounced in the 2014 general elections is indeed multifaceted. Ideologically, it has lacked clarity on issues like the Ram Temple and the abrogation of Article 370 and, organizationally, its mass party structure has been unable to combat the strong cadre-based model of the Sangh Parivar. Add to that a growing number of defections and limited success in overcoming the various contradictions in India's political mosaic to make concrete the idea of 'opposition unity'. The fact - whether for good or ill - is that India's Grand Old Party seems unable to look beyond 'the family' for the top party post, though in recent months a few leaders have openly expressed dissatisfaction with the manner in which the party is run. Last year, a group of 23 senior Congress leaders - including former chief ministers, Union ministers and party general secretaries - called for ideological clarity, an overhaul of the party's organization and addressing the leadership vacuum. In public, at least, the national leadership seems only to have addressed these issues with references to 'party discipline' and 'unity'. In the recent Congress Working Committee meeting, these issues were not discussed; rather those pointing them out were accused of undermining the party. It is unlikely that India's this oldest party can hold a powerful majority government to account without a renewed ideology and organization. That feat is unlikely if the national leadership, the Nehru-Gandhi family, rather than assuming responsibility lets it roll downhill. This is the time for the Congress to rethink. If the Congress party is firing prematurely for national leadership now, it comes from the misplaced confidence that the victories by irrelevance and crafty formula affected earlier can be repeated. The biggest social media company around has changed its name and focus. And Indian farmers have shown that a campaign can succeed through grit, without recourse to high profile consultant or strategist, which Congress party would consider in all such anti government protests. The winner takes it all. So is the case with 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections when Narendra Modi tsunami dismantled the entire opposition barring a couple of states where regional satraps still rule the roost. The mandate was not only for Prime Minister but also a referendum on Rahul Gandhi's leadership

and acceptance as a leader who cannot replace Modi. The mandate shows that people not only rejected Rahul Gandhi but also the top brass of the Congress. BJP on the other hand, barring Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Tamil Nadu, has performed impressively. It has swept both rural and urban areas. Has Rahul Gandhi become a liability for this grand old party? With this degree of performance, can Rahul Gandhi continue to successfully function as the leader of the biggest opposition party? Should he quit and make way for some other deserving candidate? Congress will also have to grapple with these issues intensely, if it wants to remain relevant in the political process. Congress will also have to grapple with BJP's gains in West Bengal, North East and Odisha where Congress has come third and BJP has occupied the space of the opposition party. Congress has lost states consistently since the 1960s and BJP on the other hand expanded into non-traditional areas like South and East India. There are many reasons why Congress failed. It looks like that the immature anti-Rafale campaign against an honest government led by an unblemished Prime Minister and 'Chowkidar Chor Hai' campaign did not work at all. More than that, Congress in comparison with BJP-RSS combine lacked a clear ideological core. After 2009, BJP switched back to the idea of undivided Hindu vote. Congress, on the other hand, shifted from one issue to another. This election was an electorate mandate of the people of India between Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi. While people invested faith in Modi they also opted for rejecting the Congress candidate Rahul Gandhi as the Prime Ministerial candidate. Losing to Smriti Irani in Amethi has dealt a major blow to the credibility of Rahul Gandhi. For long he would be considered a non-performing MP. His massive lead in Wayanad would never ever compensate for the loss in Amethi. To put it neatly, Narendra Modi has defeated Rahul Gandhi with a resounding mandate both in India and in their family bastion. The victory has proven that BJP's support base is both urban and rural. It has become truly a pan Indian party, removing Congress from its hegemonic position. This change will have a profound impact on Indian politics. Jitin Prasada's, Jyotiraditya Scindia's and RPN's exit is a major setback to the Congress party's leadership and existence. Veterans in the party having been sidelined are on the fence watching the doom of their party due to dynastic holds of this party. 35 per cent MPs/ MLAs who switched parties between 2014-2022 joined BJP; when the prominent defectors were from Congress party. The Congress, since the demise of Mahatma Gandhi, has not managed to extricate itself from the overwhelming influence of the Nehru-Gandhi family. Non-family members like Narasimha Rao or Manmohan Singh took charge because they had the blessings of the Nehru-Gandhi family. When Narasimha Rao decided to play otherwise, annoyance from the family was quick and Sitaram Kesari, who was also ingloriously replaced by Sonia Gandhi herself, removed him. Manmohan Singh survived for ten years when the secret of his success lay in his non-assertion, which did not annoy the family. It is on record when the present Congress president of Punjab has recently said publicly that it is the Congress, which will defeat Congress. What a joyous simile for the doom of Congress. The problem with Rahul Gandhi is that he thinks he is giving Modi a spirited fight on each and every issue, and that the Congress, sooner rather than later, will be the default choice. He forgets that India has changed; the default setting has been replaced by a new political algorithm. Capturing the mind space of the voter is not a weekend game but is 24x7 live streaming. It can be very well said about present Congress party as- घर को आग लग गई घर के ही बिगार से.

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Basant Panchmi-Festival of growth, fertility & abundance

■ MAHADEEP SINGH JAMWAL

India is a land of festivals and rituals. We celebrate more than anywhere else in the world. Each festival pertains to different occasions, and Basant Panchmi is a festival that welcomes the spring season of the year. Basant or Spring is considered the king of all seasons, not just because it heralds the end of winter but also because it is associated with growth, fertility and abundance. The festival of Basant Panchami is dedicated to the Goddess Saraswati who is known as the Goddess of Learning; encompassing all knowledge, music, and the fine arts and is also called Saraswati Puja. Basant means spring and Panchami means fifth. Basant Panchami is celebrated on the fifth (Pancham) day of the month of Magha in the Shukla Paksh. The Sun is in Uttarayan during this period and is believed to usher in warmer days and nights. Basant Panchami is made up of two words Basant and Panchami. Saraswati originated from Sattva Guna and bestows creative energy and knowledge to those who worship her on this day. It is a festival that marks the preparation for the arrival of spring. The festival is celebrated by people in the

Indian subcontinent in various ways depending on the region. A few lesser-known facts of Basant Panchmi, which is celebrated on the fifth day of the bright half of the 'Magha' Lunar month, can be summarized as, Matsya Purana narrates the story of Kamadev and his wife Rati. According to the story Kamadev was burnt to ashes by Lord Shiva for his wrong doing. Consequently distraught Rati has to undergo 40-days strict penance to please Lord Shiva. It was on the auspicious day of Basant Panchmi that Lord Shiva finally granted her wish and brought Kamdev to life. From that day Kamdev and Rati are worshipped in many parts of India. According to popular beliefs, Goddess of knowledge, art, music and science was born on this day and people worship her to achieve wisdom. A popular folklore goes that poet Kalidas before attaining knowledge was a simpleton who was tricked into marrying a princess who did not respect him. A dejected Kalidas tried to commit suicide but the goddess Saraswati appeared before him and asked him to take a dip in the river. On doing what he had been asked to do he emerged from the water as an intelligent, knowledgeable and cultured person,

who would eventually become a renowned poet. It is believed that the Goddess is worshipped so that she may bestow similar gifts on her devotees on this day. Another historically placed legend is that the observation of the festival started with the arrival of the Aryans. It is believed that the Aryans travelled through Khyber Pass and crossed the Saraswati River to reach India. When they settled in, the Saraswati River became an important source of life for them, so the celebration became a routine. The arrival of the spring season always brings joy on faces. Basant Panchami is celebrated across the nation for the arrival of the spring season and the festival is dedicated to Goddess Saraswati. As per Hindu mythology, Rituraj, the king of the spring season is welcomed during the festival of Basant Panchami. It is said that during the season of spring people are filled up with happiness due to good health and wealth. Goddess Saraswati is a symbol of learning, arts, and music, so educational institutions arrange prayers and Pooja, they worship books and instruments. The Sun God, Surya is also worshipped on this day. Surya symbolizes light and an end of darkness. The sun is

also considered essential for all life to exist. The day is considered important for students. As said that Goddess Saraswati will bless them for their career and education. Some people also celebrate the Basant Panchami as a day when goddess Parvati approached the Kama to wake up Lord Shiva from long yogie meditation. This day is also called as Basant Panchami and observed in Maharashtra and parts of Gujarat. People mainly from Punjab celebrate the day as the Basant Festival of kites. The color of Basant is yellow which symbolizes peace, prosperity, light, energy and optimism. This is why people wear yellow clothes and make traditional delicacies in yellow hues like all festivals; it is marked by many traditional delicacies. In Bengal and Bihar; Goddess Saraswati is offered Boondi and Ladoo. Sweet rice with saffron and dry fruits is made in almost every house on this occasion. Mango wood, Shripal (coconut), Ganga water, and Baer are also offered, particularly by Bengalis. Traditionally, in Punjab, Makki ki Roti and Sarso Ka Saag are savoured. In Bihar; people celebrate Saraswati Puja by offering delicacies like Kheer; Malpua and Bundi to the Goddess.

YOUR COLUMN

Save nation's future, reopen schools

Dear Editor,

I am not a think-tank but a person who would like to highlight the miserable condition of students due COVID-19 by closure of school s throughout the length and breadth of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir through the medium of your esteemed daily newspaper. Online learning cannot emulate the experience that in-person classes provide. Let's admit it: the time for debate on school reopening is over. It's time to stop treating education as an afterthought, as if it's not a priority. Observing the COVID infection peak-plateau curve to decide whether schools should be open or not, while treating education as a secondary sector in the matrix, has done enough damage-not only to the students and their parents, but also to the entire nation. The short- and long-term effects of the ever-evolving pandemic on the education sector are yet to be measured. But if we don't rethink education as a frontline sector, there will be nothing to measure in the long run. As a practising academic administrator, my observation is simple: if banks and hospitals can stay open, schools can too. Once we put the same safety measures that we expect other institutions to follow, once we pursue the five key pillars of pandemic control: masking, social distancing, hand-washing, cleaning, and contact-tracing when exposures occur and quarantining those exposed, I don't see any reason why we shouldn't let our students out of the Zoom boxes and back into their classrooms. The accessibility to vaccines gives us additional hope.

We will never reach a consensus on whether schools can be made safe from the coronavirus. Health experts will always have their own measurement sticks. There's no reason to

doubt their scientific explanations. But to think schools are the only places where our young ones are exposed to the risk of infection is a fallacy that we cannot afford to entertain. The other parts of society have started to pick up their regular tempo, and the chances of getting contaminated in the communities are equally high for those attending their classes online. The sooner we accept that in-person instruction is essential and physical presence in classrooms is important for the overall learning environment, the easier it will be to reopen our schools. The delayed return to classrooms will only prolong the emergency mode that we adopted at the start of the pandemic. In last two years, we have learned to live with the disease. It's time that we re-learn to live offline. Researches show that COVID infection rates in schools have not been higher than in communities. In fact, tracking cases in schools is relatively straightforward as we are dealing with a controlled environment. But the problem arises the moment we are asked to adjudge whether students, teachers, and staff are spreading the virus on campuses or just carrying in the disease from elsewhere. The answer gets convoluted. Hence, instead of treating campus communities as potential vectors, we should weigh up the risks and benefits. Online teaching has repeatedly brought forth the issue of educational equity. The government intervention for data supply and aid for gadgets came in too little, too late. Meanwhile, we witnessed disproportionate recourse to online teaching platforms and accessibility. We can gloat over the commercial aid in which a father makes a bamboo mobile holder for his daughter's online classes in a peripheral village. The reality is: there is a limit to that particular student's access to a virtual classroom. The internet speed required for video streaming, class participation and presentation is far from ideal. The affordability of services soon becomes an issue. The urban-rural and the rich-poor divides become a reality. Add to that the mental health issues that plague students exposed to exces-

sive screen time without any human interaction.

From my interaction with parents and colleagues, I can tell how social isolation affects our students as they struggle to stay focused on their online lessons. Many students in remote-learning situations are falling behind academically. Their work ethics are changing. They are often taking advantage of the home environment to cheat in their examinations. Many do other things while leaving their devices logged in to virtual classes. The overall monitoring that schools provide serves as a safety net for many students. A school is a safe place for students to spend the day with their peers. Teachers are often the first to notice if a student is suffering depression, or exhibiting abnormal behaviour caused by domestic, sexual or drug abuse. School closure has put many working parents in a very difficult position. They struggle to balance their regular jobs and parenting. They are forced to give their wards undue access to the internet in the name of virtual schooling. Once we factor in all the damage that school closure has done to our children-and, by extension, to the education sector-we realise that there is no reason to suspend school services every time there is a twist in the infection curve. Panic responses will keep on sending mixed signals to all stakeholders. Online education served its purpose as a stop-gap arrangement. I think it's time to return to school with a renewed understanding of education. Education is as important as other frontline sectors. The massive vaccination drive undertaken by the government gives us some comfort in welcoming our students back to classrooms. We just need to insist on mask-wearing, physical distancing, and other mitigation measures to ease the process. These are the children who will probably make the best of the education, and come up with solutions to protect us from a similar pandemic in the future.

Mool Raj,
Doda.