


LISTEN TO ALL

The arduous work done by the Delimitation Commission in Jammu and Kashmir is worth praise and for this the members of panel deserve special applause. Soon after the draft report of the aforesaid commission has been given to the associate members, the responses of varied nature have started pouring in with opposition parties raking up one issue after another and finding faults in the composition of the changes that have been recommended. The approach of the political parties especially those which have taken no time in opposing the draft made for redrawing the boundaries of constituencies in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir is a bit peculiar as this the draft for the delimitation and not the final document. On the other hand, the panel meant to rationalize things as far as boundaries and other obligations for conducting free and fair polls in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir is concerned, it will be good if the members will listen to the objections or grievances of all the stakeholders amicably and try to placate as many as possible because the reason behind this exercise was only to generate sense of satisfaction among the people of the UT of J&K that there will be no partisan or prejudice in the poll process in the times to come. Reportedly, the Delimitation Commission has reserved nine seats for Scheduled Tribes (STs)-six in Jammu division and three in Kashmir and seven for Scheduled Castes, all in Jammu region including four in Jammu district alone as against three in the last Assembly. There have been many other changes as far as boundaries of the existing constituencies are concerned and there are reports as well that major changes have been made in redefining the constituencies. National Conference and the Congress reacted fast against the draft report issued by the Delimitation Commission though one can gauge with the statements issued by these parties that still these outfits are in process to assess and analyze the draft report. There is no need to nurture any kind of narrow-mindedness over the issue by both ends as the objective of this whole exercise is better electoral reforms and for this all the entities should work in tandem to ensure welfare of the people.

KEEP IT UP

Border Security Force (BSF) has yet again proved its supremacy over the wrongdoers coming from Pakistan side by neutralizing three of them, when they were trying to smuggle narcotics consignment worth crores to this side of the border. A total of 36 packets (approx 36 Kg) of heroin have been recovered from the site making it a big catch in recent times. It is pertinent to mention that BSF has to face many challenges along thousands of kilometers of borderline shared with rogue Pakistan starting from J&K upto Gujarat. It is not the first time when the vigilant Jawans of border-guarding force have eliminated the enemy coming from Pakistan side because this has been a regular affair since decades as Pakistan is consistently indulging in illegal acts of infiltration, smuggling of arms and ammunition and that of narcotics as this is the part of syndicate reportedly operating from Pakistan and having its base in Afghanistan from where the drugs are smuggled to various parts of the world including India. The success of BSF along IB in Samba is a big achievement because this has given a big blow to the narco-terror set-up established by the Pakistan to abet terrorism in J&K and even other parts of the country. There is dire need that BSF personnel should remain alert all the time using the modern techniques to plug in the gaps along border to ensure that drugs, arms and ammunition could not be smuggled inside Indian territory and also to put full stop on infiltration which is also a big headache for the country as in the past Pakistan has denied the interests of India through such modus operandi. For sure BSF deserves kudos for the job done meticulously and in a precise manner leaving no scope for the intruders to act against the country. All said and done, the herculean task which the BSF personnel are doing along the borders is unmatched and the same should be acknowledged by one and all in the country.



OFF 'D' CUFF

Defeat Omicron with a healthy balanced lifestyle

Even though everyone understands that they should prioritize their health, not everyone does. Between job, family responsibilities, children, and demanding schedules, too often, focusing on personal health becomes really difficult. Yet, everyone must think about maintaining good health, especially during this latest Omicron wave.

During these times, developing a robust immunity is of utmost importance. A strong immune system and inner strength are essential to prevent any disease, including COVID. First of all, remember that one's immunity cannot be boosted in one day. It should be a part of daily life and habits.

You can keep your body healthy by focusing on your diet, sleep and lifestyle. Prioritize your health unfailingly to manage each of these well. Here's how.

Practice the Act of 'Mindful' Contact

Everybody is fighting an unseen enemy that is extra contagious and spreading like wildfire across the globe. The first step to protect yourself is to minimize contact with anything or anyone. Be mindful and avoid unnecessary contact and practice proper hand washing practices. Stay at home and reschedule all non-essential travel. Follow the physical distancing and all the preventive measures to keep yourself and others around you safe.

Shri Sudhanshuji Maharaj

Religious conversions unacceptable

■ OMKAR DATTATRAY

India is the largest secular and plural democracy of the world. The constitution of India guarantees right to religion and belief and provides religious freedom. Therefore the people belonging to various religious faiths coexist and live together like brothers and sisters. Thus people of different religions have equal and same rights and privilege to flourish and have equal opportunity and freedom to practice, propagate the religion of their choice and liking. The citizens are even free to change their religion at their free will and choice and thus can convert to the religion of their choice. But there should be no force and inducement behind the conversion and therefore the conversions resorted as a result of force and inducement of any kind is against the letter and spirit of the constitution and hence the religious conversions en mass or individually by force or inducement of any kind are against the constitutional provisions and hence are unacceptable. Such religious conversions have the potential of disturbing the communal harmony in the plural and secular country and as such these have no place in India as these can lead to communal disharmony and hence it should not take place in the country for the flourishing of the different religions. India is a secular and tolerant country not only because of its constitutional provisions but because of the fact that the culture of the country and its people are tolerant from the ancient times. India is plural and tolerant because of its age old cultural legacy and the constitution only gives legal recognition to secularism while the fact is that the people of the country are tolerant from old times and this is the reason that the original constitution did not have the word secular in it and the secular word was a later incorporation to the constitution by virtue of the amendment. Articles 25 to 28 of the constitution deal with right to freedom of religion. The preamble of the Indian constitution was amended in 1976 by42 amendment act and the word secular was added to the preamble by virtue of this amendment and thus secularism got constitutional guarantee. Every citizen of India has a right to practice and promote their religion peacefully and subject to public order. Article 25 of the constitution guarantees freedom of religion to all persons. The right to freedom of religion also includes the right to change and profess any religion and this it implies that the citizens can embrace the religion of their choice and therefore convert to the religion of their choice. But there should be no force and inducement of any kind for converting to any religion. It is very unfortunate and disturbing that in different states of India the forced and induced conversions are taking place which have the potential of disturbing the communal harmony and amity in the country and therefore such

conversions have no place in India and should not happen and disturb the peace and tranquility in the plural society. Right after the freedom of the country the induced and forced conversions have taken place in the country through the church and the religious missionaries had played their nefarious role in the matter of the induced religious conversions. Such induced and forced conversions are taking place in the various parts of the country under the shield of the right to freedom of religion. The religious conversions through force or inducement are against the spirit of the constitution and as such should not take place in the secular and plural country. But such forced and induced conversions are going on unabated in various parts of the country and this is a serious issue of grave concern. At times under the garb of providing of the education and medical help the conversions are taking place in the country which is the bane of the religious freedom guaranteed in the constitution. While anyone is free to embrace and adopt any religion of his choice but then the religious conversions through force and any kind of inducement are against the constitutional provisions and thus should not take place at all. So, individual or collective religious conversions should be prohibited by law because these are against the constitution and these can disturb the communal harmony. Beside the religious conversions are taking place in the various parts of the country with the nefarious aim of demographic change in country and therefore these conversions should be declared null and void and for this the anti-conversion laws should be introduced in the constitution by virtue of amending the constitution so that the conversions en mass or individual by force or due to inducement are made illegal and unlawful. Therefore, amendment should be made in the constitution at the national level so that the religious conversions are made illegal and unlawful particularly when these are forced or induced. The various state governments should also make anti conversion laws and make the religious conversions illegal. It is so good that some BJP ruled states are enacting and introducing anti conversion laws to fight the unwanted and unconstitutional conversions. The enacting of the anti conversion laws by the BJP ruled states is a welcome development as the anti conversion laws are badly needed in the country to fight the problem of the religious conversions. Other state of the country should emulate the BJP states and also enact the anti conversion laws so that the conspiracy of effecting the demographic change is not allowed to succeed. Thus there is dire need to enact the anti conversion laws so that the forced and induced conversions are put to halt for the flourishing of the true secularism and communal harmony in the country. Thus, to defeat conspiracies to change the

demography of the country there is dire need to enact the anti conversion laws in the country so that the designs of the foreign powers will not succeed in the country and thus tarnish our image of secularism in the world. There is need for the enactment of the anti conversion laws so that the religious conversions will not take place and the true secularism will flourish. The religious conversions is a threat to national integration and national cohesion and therefore there should be halt to the conversions so that there is strong communal harmony and mutual brotherhood and in true sense the secularism and the right to freedom of religion guaranteed in the constitution will flourish in the country. The forced and induced religious conversions should thus be fought for the sake of national cohesion and communal amity. So there is no place for the religious conversions as they are resorted to effect the demographic change in the country and thus these are against the integrity and secularism of the country more so when these are forced and induced. Therefore without going against the constitutional provisions, the conversions should be banned in the country so that there are no chances of communal disturbance due to the religious conversions. The religious conversions have taken place in the different states of the country. Earlier, religious conversions have taken place in the state of Madhya Pradesh but the state government there has enacted the anti conversion laws so that religious conversions will not take place there and vitiate the peaceful atmosphere. Recently religious conversion has taken place in Tamil Nadu and it is a matter of concern. In fact, there should be ban for the forced and induced conversions in the country and for this the state governments should make initiative and enact the anti conversion laws so that the religious conversions will not pollute the communal harmony and mutual brotherhood. The evil designs of the anti social elements and the foreign powers should not be allowed to succeed as they aim at changing the demography of India. Therefore these forces should not be allowed to succeed in the country and their conspiracies to change the population ratio should be resisted so that the change of the demography will not take place and harm the country. Any way secularism and pluralism should be allowed to flourish and for this there is dire need to stop the religious conversions and thus anti conversion laws should be enacted by the state governments in order to ensure that the religious conversions do not take place in the country. To conclude one can say that religious conversions are unacceptable in the country for the flourishing of the Ganga-Jamnni Tehzeeb.

(The author is retired Education Officer and Columnist).

Tributes to ‘Lata Didi’

■ MAHADEEP SINGH JAMWAL

The news of death of legendary singer Lata Mangeshkar has left not only the film industry and music lovers dumb and despair but every living soul in bewilderment. The government has announced two days of national mourning in the memory of the legendary singer. 'Meri Awaz Hi Pehchan Hai', melodious lines sung by Lata Mangeshkar popularly known as 'Didi', vocally a dominating great power voice and a lovely tone is now silenced. A golden era of the music world has truly ended. With a career spanning in singing almost eight decades, one of the greatest singers in Indian cinema, started as a playback artiste at a young age breathed her last at the age of 92 years on Sunday in Mumbai. Her contribution to Indian music industry gained her honorific titles such as the 'Nightingale of India' and 'Queen of Melody.' Born on September 28, 1929, as the oldest child of a musically inclined family in Indore (Madhya Pradesh), comprising father Dinanath, Lataji, Meena (Khadilkar), Asha (Bhosale), Usha and sole brother Hridaynath, became heart beat for music lovers not only in India but world over. Every female playback singer who entered the film industry has looked up to Lataji as one of the greats. She got her first break from Bollywood film composer Ghulam Haider in Movie 'Majboor' in 1948. Once Lataji sang that song, there was no looking back. From the 40s to the 70s, Lata Mangeshkar sang with the top male vocalists of the time - Kishore Kumar, Mohammad Rafi, Hemant Kumar, Mukesh, and others. Post-70s and during the 80s and 90s, Lata had songs with the late S P Balasubrahmanyam, Shabbir Kumar, Shailendra Singh, Pankaj Udhass, Udit Narayan, Kumar Sanu, etc. During the 2000s and beyond, Lataji graced her voice on songs with Sonu Nigam, Adnan Sami, AR Rahman, Jagjit Singh, to name a few. At 90, Lata Mangeshkar released a song called 'Saugandhi Mujhe Iss Mitti Ki' as a tribute to the country's Jawans. She got her 1st Filmfare Award for Best Playback Singer for the song- Aaja Re Pardesi from the movie Madhumati in 1958. From 1958 to 1966, she monopolized film fare awards for best female playback singer and it was stopped in 1969 only when she gave up the awards in an unusual gesture for promoting fresh talents. She received several accolades and honors throughout her career including Padma Bhushan (1969), Dadasaheb Phalke Award (1989), Maharashtra Bhushan Award (1997), Padma Vibhushan (1999), Zee Cine Award for Lifetime Achievements (1999), NTR National Award (1999), ANR National Award (2009), three National Film Awards and 15 Bengal Film Journalists' Association Awards. She has also won four film fare best female playback awards. In 2001, in recogni-

tion of her contributions to the nation, she was awarded the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour and is only the second female singer; after M S Subbulakshmi, to receive this honour. In 2007, Mangeshkar was awarded the title of Officer of the French Legion of Honour, France's highest order. In 1984, the State Government of Madhya Pradesh instituted the 'Lata Mangeshkar Award' in her honor. The State Government of Maharashtra also instituted a Lata Mangeshkar Award in 1992. In 2012, Mangeshkar was ranked number 10 in Outlook India's poll of the Greatest Indian. She is also a recipient of honorary 'Doctorates' from the 'Sangeet Natak Akademi' in 1989, Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya, Khairagarh, and Shivaji University in Kolhapur.' On January 27, 1963, at Ramliha Maidan in New Delhi, Lata's patriotic song 'Aye Mere Watan Ke Logon, Zara Aankh Me Bhar Lo Pani' written by poet Pradeep and composed by C Ramchandra, brought Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to tears. The song was written in memory of the troops who died in the conflict of 1962, when India lost war to China. She apparently had a permanent gallery reserved for her at Lord's Stadium from where she used to enjoy watching her favorite game- Cricket. She was the first Indian in 1974 to have performed in Royal Albert Hall. Fondly termed as Didi and the Nightingale of India, she ruled a million hearts. Her songs stand recorded in over thirty-six Indian languages and few foreign languages, though primarily in Hindi and Marathi. When we flash back to the album of Lata Jee in Dogri, we come across many folk songs sung by her in Dogri language. Among those that are on the lips of every Dogra, 'Nikkre Phangru, Uchi Udaan', 'Toon Malla Toon, Log Panman Thikriyan-Badam Panne Toon', 'Oodroon Rangi De Lalaria', 'Bhalla Shapaia Dogreya' among others is assimilated with our cultural heritage. Her command over Dogri pronunciation, her musical voice, breath and melody is remarkable. That voice which has made Dogra proud by singing Dogri songs culturally related to Dogras has been silenced by almighty but that voice is and will remain embedded in the hearts of Dogra heritage. The passing away of mythical singer Bharat Ratna Lata Mangeshkar comes as a huge loss for our country. Her voice mesmerized millions, and inspired people all over the world. She has left a void in our nation that cannot be filled. The coming generations will remember her as a stalwart of Indian culture, whose melodious voice had an unparalleled ability to mesmerize people. 'Lata Didi' will be missed by millions of us and the generations coming after us but it is no surprise that the 'Nightingale of India' will continue to enchant us all with her gifts handed down as she has impacted our lives with her voice.

left behind an incredible legacy of timeless songs and her contribution to the Indian culture remains unparalleled. She reached the height of success that no other Indian artist probably ever would. She truly belongs to all of us. Undoubtedly, Lata Mangeshkar was among the successful playback singers in the history of Indian cinema. Literally she cannot be confined to one country, one language and one state. Her contributions were beyond boundaries and are the greatest example of how one human being can unite everyone. Her voice had really inspired everyone and united everyone. However, there was no thought of religion/caste, no thought of nationality or

Online Higher education in post-pandemic world

■ VIJAY GARG

Unemployment issues weren't new when COVID-19 pandemic struck which only aggravated the job insecurity faced by the Indian youth due to the regressive job market in 2020. A series of lock-downs imposed due to the Coronavirus outbreak forced graduates to face the dreary prospect of unemployment this year as well. This vulnerable employment was further accentuated by the lack of quality higher education, limited resources and looming skill shortages due to technological advancement. After the second COVID-19 wave that broke in May 2021, India's unemployment rate stood at a dangerous 11.8 per cent, according to data released by the Center for Monitoring India's Economy. On one hand, unemployment was soaring due to job losses and business collapse, leading to the speedy emergence and adaption of new technologies. On the other hand, these emerging technological skill-sets kept widening the skill gap among the job seekers with traditional credentials. As a result, the unemployment rate has skyrocketed. We had a massive wave of jobs that went online, in a work from home mode that still continues to be online. The majority of these jobs such as sales, data analytics, digital marketing and web development, were available for early career professionals. However, skills match led to a lot of open positions. Large IT companies are unable to close even half of their positions leading to a major revenue loss. To close this widening skill gap, a market-oriented education system had to evolve. This gave way for job-seekers to adopt ed-tech solutions and become job-ready by opting for bite-size certification courses. These bite-sized courses were revolutionary in nature. Firstly, the delivery mode was technology-led and could replace existing class environments. Secondly, there was unbundling of skills and only the most relevant ones had to be pursued.

Unlike a traditional degree which is a stack of credentials that don't serve any purpose, these courses were able to help in what the industry needed. Thirdly, the delivery took more engaging shapes as well - live classes, cohorts, peer learning and more, previously unavailable in large MOOC platforms.

A new wave of platforms shaped up which connected learners to recruiters posts these courses as well. The trend was seen not just in technology-oriented courses, but finance, law, accounting and general management. These alternative credentials help individuals up-skill themselves in emerging technologies in a short time and apply for jobs in available career domains.

The best part was talent suddenly becoming borderless. People from India were being staffed in Europe, with youth in India from Tier 2/3 towns connected to companies in Tier 1 cities. So, apart from skilling becoming primarily online, employment methods became online as well. Companies had to do their training online to upskill them after hiring and onboarding. As a result, alternative credentials are now becoming increasingly available to offer short-term upskilling opportunities for job-seekers and, in turn, help businesses thrive by leveraging emerging technologies.

Alternative credentials include micro-credentials, digital badges and industry-recognised certificates are being provided by various institutions and business organisations. Adoption of these credentials is helping people qualify for the available job roles, making them competent for the future job market.

Nowadays, the online education market is largely driven by courses in artificial intelligence, data science, cloud computing, the Internet of Things (IoT), virtual reality and machine learning, according to a study by KPMG India and Google. These career fields are in high demand in the current job market, but the lack of skills among job seekers has prevented them from gaining employment.

A bite-sized certification course is the only way to solve this problem in time! Online certification courses have shown us the way to boost our economy through quality higher education. In a convenient and affordable format, these courses fill the skill gaps created by the fast proliferation of new technologies.

Through this transformation in education, those at high risk of losing their jobs regardless of their academic backgrounds, will be able to transition into relevant roles. As opposed to traditional education, which puts academic history into much consideration, these certification courses provide an egalitarian space for professionals by allowing people from all backgrounds to pursue these courses. Consequently, if we look at the numbers now, Michael Page India, India Inc. reported increased employment of 14 per cent from Q3 2020 to Q3 2021, based on sectors like engineering, manufacturing and technology.

In the midst of the fourth industrial revolution, technology is advancing at an unprecedented pace, making it difficult for long-term courses to keep up. Therefore, a demand-driven and skill-based alternative to the traditional degree system is created. This trend has led several companies to offer alternative credentials instead of training employees. Additionally, most of these employers have created their own curricula, expanding their publicly available credentials quickly.

Thus, this form of higher education will prevail in the future and continue finding a wider acceptance.

The list includes organisations like Google, Microsoft and Infosys, among others.

Throughout one's career progression from a newly qualified entrant to mid-career professional to expert, alternative credentials aid in developing technical, behavioral, domain and analytical knowledge. It also inculcates leadership and soft skills.

Thus, these courses will enable unprecedented opportunities for millions of people who might otherwise be left behind by the 4th industrial revolution.

As we shift toward a culture of lifelong learning and skill development, the landscape of higher education will be reshaped in order to provide better employment opportunities for the youth.

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