

International Firefighters' Day

International Firefighters' Day, observed annually on May 4th, serves as a poignant reminder of the courageous efforts and sacrifices made by firefighters worldwide. This day holds deep significance, particularly in honoring those who have lost their lives in the line of duty, and in expressing gratitude for the ongoing dedication of firefighting professionals.

The origins of International Firefighters' Day can be traced back to a tragic incident in Linton, Australia, on December 2, 1998. During a wildfire, five firefighters-Garry Vredeveltd, Chris Evans, Stuart Davidson, Jason Thomas, and Matthew Armstrong-lost their lives while responding to an SOS call. This devastating event sparked a global movement to recognize and commemorate the bravery and sacrifice of firefighters and emergency responders. In the aftermath of the Linton tragedy, a proposal was circulated on January 4, 1999, urging countries worldwide to honor firefighters and others who lose their lives while performing their duties. This proposal laid the foundation for the establishment of International Firefighters' Day, with the aim of raising awareness about the dangers faced by firefighters and promoting fire safety measures. One of the central themes of International Firefighters' Day is fire prevention. This includes raising awareness about the importance of fire safety practices in homes, workplaces, and communities. Fire prevention efforts encompass measures such as installing smoke detectors, practicing fire drills, and adhering to building safety codes. By emphasizing the need for proactive fire prevention, International Firefighters' Day aims to reduce the occurrence of fires and minimize the risks faced by firefighters.

Additionally, International Firefighters' Day underscores the critical importance of intensive and thorough training for firefighters. Firefighters undergo rigorous training to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to respond effectively to emergencies. This training includes techniques for firefighting, search and rescue operations, and handling hazardous materials. By continuously improving training programs, firefighters can enhance their preparedness and ability to mitigate fire-related risks. On International Firefighters' Day, communities around the world come together to honor firefighters and express gratitude for their service. Individuals may also show their appreciation by wearing symbolic red and blue ribbon badges, which serve as a visible symbol of solidarity and support for firefighters.

Animal life should also be treated with dignity

■ DR SATYAVAN SAURABH

Animal cruelty includes both deliberate, malicious acts of animal abuse and less obvious situations where an animal's needs are neglected. Violence against animals has been linked to a higher likelihood of criminal violence and domestic abuse. The right in Article 21 is conferred only on human beings; but the expanded meaning of the word "life" now including the right against disturbance of the basic environment must mean that animal life also has "intrinsic value, respect and dignity." should be treated with respect. There is no doubt that the Constitution protects only the rights of human beings, but the word "life" is today understood to mean much more than mere existence; It means an existence that allows us, among other things, to live in a clean and healthy environment.

By amending the penal code, penalties were increased for causing unnecessary pain or suffering to animals and for killing or seriously ill-treating animals. It discusses various forms of cruelty, exceptions, and where any cruelty to a suffering animal involves killing it, to save it from further suffering. The legislative intent of the Act is to "prevent the causing of unnecessary pain or suffering to animals". The Animal Welfare Board of India was established in 1962 under Section 4 of the Act. This Act provides for punishment for causing unnecessary cruelty and suffering to animals. This Act defines animals and various forms of animals. In the case of the first offense, a fine shall not be less than ten rupees but may extend to fifty rupees. In the case of a second or subsequent offense committed within three years of the previous offense, the fine shall not be less than twenty-five rupees. Which may be punished with a fine which may extend to one hundred rupees or with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three months, or with both. It provides guidelines regarding experimentation on animals for scientific purposes. The Act establishes provisions relating to the exhibition of performing animals and offenses committed against performing animals.

Retribution (punishment given to avenge the crime committed), Deterrence (punishment given to deter the criminal and the general public from committing such crimes in the future), Reform or Rehabilitation (to improve and shape the future behavior of the criminal) The poor implementation of the law and the low penalties it prescribes make the PCA Act appear extremely ineffective. Most of the offenses under the Act are bailable (the accused can seek bail from the police as a matter of right), non-cognizable (which means the police can neither file a First Information Report nor investigate without express permission) or The amount prescribed as fine under the PCA Act is the same as that prescribed in its predecessor; the PCA Act 1890. The fine is insignificant (in many cases less than ?10) as they have not been amended in over 130 years. The law is written in such a way that the court dealing with the case has the discretion to choose between imposing imprisonment or a fine on the accused.

This allows perpetrators of animal cruelty to get away with the most cruel forms of animal cruelty by simply paying a fine in most cases. The law itself makes no provision for 'community service' such as volunteering at an animal shelter as a punishment, which could potentially reform offenders. The inclusion of five fundamental freedoms for animals, an increase in punishments and amount of money to be paid as fines for various offenses, the addition of new cognizable offenses, as two options for the court dealing with animal cruelty cases in the draft bill. The provision of imprisonment and fine has been continued.

Fundamental rights have been provided to animals. Article 14 (right to equality) and Article 21 (right to life and personal liberty) are given to individuals. "Person" means a human being or an association of human beings, such as a corporation, partnership, trust, etc. Article 48 Prohibiting the slaughter of cows, calves, and other milk and draft cattle and improving their breed Article 48A Protection and improvement of the environment And to protect forests and wildlife, the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (PCA Act), 1960 criminalizes a variety of acts causing cruelty to animals. It allows the use of animals for experiments to ensure medical advancements.

Even if the draft bill becomes law, it would still be possible for criminals to pay nominal fines and avoid imprisonment for some acts of extreme cruelty. Even with its limitations, the enactment of the draft bill could be a major step forward for animal law in India. "India should set a great example for all the countries of the world. We should set an example, not because I think we are superior but because we have talked about nonviolence far more than any other country. So the more we talk about it, the greater the responsibility to put it into practice so that the amendment to the PCA Act (1960) can finally see the light of day.

The right in Article 21 is conferred only on human beings; but the expanded meaning of the word "life" now including the right against disturbance of the basic environment must mean that animal life also has "intrinsic value, respect and dignity." should be treated with. There is no doubt that the Constitution protects only the rights of human beings, but the word "life" is today understood to mean much more than mere existence; It means an existence that allows us, among other things, to live in a clean and healthy environment.

Is nobility of journalism profession at stake?

Current mess created by a breed of social media influencers ('Facebook journalists') is growing exponentially. The situation makes a fit case of licensing journalists

■ SAJJAD BAZAZ

Cornerstones of journalism ethics - truth, accuracy, and objectivity - are shaking today. Even as Journalists are loaded with responsibility to maintain a degree of detachment from the religions, groups, or countries they are associated with, to avoid biases in reporting, we find most of them violating these ethics creating unrest in societies and communities.

Over a period of time, World Press Freedom Day, observed on May 03, has gained public attention. Even as the day symbolizes the importance of press freedom, the unprecedented growth of digital technologies and emergence of independent media encouraging the unrestricted and unfiltered dissemination of information has complicated the issues facing the journalists. Actually, a breed of so-called social media influencers (popularly known as Facebook journalists) have become a subject of debate for making gross misuse of social media platforms and creating unrest among societies by throwing the journalistic ethics to the wind. This practice has put the professionally qualified journalist fraternity to the wall as the influence of the 'Facebook journalist' is growing in multiple ways on the societies.

There is no denying the fact that social media platforms have emerged as a powerful agent of social change. Among other things, the platform has been proving a fertile birthplace of a breed of social media influencers, who are growing in number uncontrollably. These social media influencers have a vast following in a distinct niche, with whom they actively engage. Over a period of time, they build their reputation among their social media audience for the knowledge and expertise on a specific topic. They are habitual of uploading regular content of their choice on their

preferred social media channels to engage more people and force their close attention to their views. These influencers have already influenced multiple brands and they use them to market their products and services. These social media influencers have their own categories. In other words, they can be categorized in multiple ways, such as by way of number of followers, by types of content, and by the level of influence. Of course, YouTubers, Bloggers and Podcasters too fall in the overall category of social media influencers. Do these social media influencers qualify to be called journalists? The mass engagement of people as self-styled journalists on social media channels has not only outnumbered and diluted the credibility of the genuinely professional breed of journalists, but they have on the whole dented the nobility of the profession itself. The public trust on this once noble profession is dwindling fast owing to the freedom of speech and expression observed by these self-styled journalists who shamelessly introduce themselves as reporters, editors and experts of everything. Ironically, these so-called journalists brazenly misuse social media channels where most of the time they run targeted campaigns to malign institutions, communities, societies and individuals, and the trend continues unabated under the nose of authorities. Their activities are widespread and overshadow the genuinely professional journalists.

In this digital era, where the world has in true sense been converted into a global village, flow of information is taking place at lightning pace. Most of the information is mishandled and pushed across geographies in a twisted form to preach hatred and gain the maximum possible audience. Here a breed of professional journalists has also been seen indulging in unethical prac-

tics while reporting or commenting on an event for public information.

Ethically speaking, a journalist should always look at his services with responsibility in the line of duty towards his nation and its subjects. Once a journalist aims to pursue his profession for power he surrenders his sense of responsibility towards the society and sacrifices his professionalism. Precisely, journalists have to exhibit their ability to mold or mobilize public opinion in a positive direction through their write-ups or productions. Let them be opinion makers or analysts enjoying readers' trustworthiness.

Basically, the time demands moral journalism - a journalism that cares as well as it knows. One thing is most crucial. A journalist must be careful not to become more important than the event and he should not even prescribe how the audience should feel and react. Last but not the least; a journalist should be - to the people, by the people and for the people. He should write for society and not for better circulation and money. He should show more concern about social development and not assuming power for money. Once they think of power and not responsibility, then freedom of press is not guaranteed.

Lastly, the current mess created by a breed of social media influencers ('Facebook journalists') is growing exponentially and the situation demands disciplinary approach from its stakeholders, especially the authorities. The tremendous use of digital media channels and their far and wide reach make regulatory measures inevitable to regulate the operations of journalists in a fair way.

Meanwhile let me reiterate, the situation makes a fit case of licensing journalists. A debate on licensing of Journalists has already been ignited where experts have been pitching for a system

whereby individuals would be required to apply to an external authority for permission to practice journalism, which may be refused or revoked. Here accreditation should not be construed as license. Accreditation facilitates a journalist to special privileges, most commonly access to restricted areas such as legislatures, courts etc. While as, licensing will take care of genuine persons with professional qualification and background to practice journalism. For this, there is a need for a regulatory authority where a database of professional journalists would be built up. Once under its ambit, various welfare schemes for the journalist community can be tailored by the government. Even as licensing of journalists is a rough idea, it will axe fake and self-styled journalists who have been on prowl to rob people of their peace of mind and hard earned money. The idea needs brainstorming deliberations as it should not curb the freedom of press.

Meanwhile, when we talk of social media influencers, of course, journalists can also be considered influencers. Here the journalists mean persons who have already gained respect because of their qualifications, position, or experience about their topic of expertise. Often, this respect is earned more because of the reputation of where they work. A journalist may not be an expert on the subjects he/she writes in his/her newspaper or magazine columns, but is respected for his/her writing capabilities to work for such a prestigious media (be it print or electronic) organization.

To conclude, a social media influencer cannot be a journalist, but a journalist can be an influencer. (The author is former Head of Corporate Communication & CSR and Internal Communication & Knowledge Management Departments of J&K Bank).

Constraints and Opportunities in Horticulture Sector

■ DR BANARSI LAL

Horticulture sector contributes significantly to the society in terms of healthy foods, vitamins, minerals and recreational activities. According to the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), India ranks second in fruits and vegetables in the world after China. India's advantage lies in being a low-cost producer of fruits and vegetables because of combination of factors such as congenial agro-climatic conditions, availability of labour and low input costs. Horticulture contributes about 30.4 per cent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) while using only 13.1 per cent of the gross cropped area. Recently, the total horticulture production in India has even exceeded the total production of food grains. Horticulture contributes not only to the nutritional needs of the people but also creates additional employment opportunities and generates higher income of the farmers. The productivity of horticulture has increased substantially from 8.8 tonnes per ha in 2001-02 to 12.10 tonnes per ha in 2020-21. In 2021-22, the total horticulture production was about 341.63 million tones, with fruit production at around 107.10 million tones and vegetables production at about 204.61 million tones. There is an ample opportunity for export with fresh fruits and vegetables being a major contributor. But despite the fact that India's horticulture sector is growing, the country's share in global trade remains insignificant accounting for only 1 per cent of the global trade in fruits and vegetables. There are production challenges, inadequate transport infrastructure, fragmented supply chains and insufficient storage facilities. Small size of land holding, lack of irrigation facilities and poor soil management are the major challenges in production of fruit crops. The limited outreach of farm insurance and farm mechanization combined with a lack of institutional credit for small and marginal farmers, contribute to lower investment in this sector. Climate change such a floods, droughts, changing weather patterns and other natural disasters is another challenge that sometimes leads to crop failures. Horticulture marketing chain faces its own set of challenges due to the perishable nature of fruits and vegetables. Lack of cold storage and warehousing facilities contribute to delays and wastages of fruits and vegetables. About 15-20 per cent of the fruits and vegetables in India area wasted contributing to greenhouse gas emissions (CHGs). Despite the numerous constraints faced by the horticulture sector, there are several opportunities for improvement. The Indian Government is working on reducing crop losses through the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) which provides comprehensive crop insurance coverage from sowing to post-harvest losses against non-preventable natural risks. Another key initiative is the Centre's Cluster Development Programme which has the potential to revolutionise the value chain by enhancing its scale. This programme helps to promote the integrated and market-led development of pre-production, production, post-harvest, branding and marketing activities by leveraging the geographical specialization of horticulture clusters.

India contributes about 10 and 13.4 per cent of fruits and vegetables in the world. India is the largest producer of mango and banana in the world producing 65 and 11 per cent of mango and banana of the world. India is the largest producer of cauliflower in the world. India is second in onion production and third in cabbage production in the world. India's varied climate is suitable for the cultivation of more than 30 fruit trees and 40 vegetables. Horticulture is important in creating the employment, enhancing the profits and providing the nutritional and economic security to the farmers. It is estimated that 6.7 per cent growth rate in horticulture sector is must in order to achieve 4.0 per cent growth rate of agriculture. Government of India has strengthened the research and development activities in the horticulture sector. There is an increase in the

demand of fruits and vegetables. So there is need to increase the production of fruits and vegetables. There is need to strengthen our research and development efforts on increasing the production, productivity and quality of fruits and vegetables, besides paying undivided attention to reduce the cost of production. Declining shares of fruits and vegetables in terms of area and production and exports in horticulture and plantation crops need to be arrested. We should utilize our research and development to increase the fruits and vegetables production. In order to increase the production, productivity and quality of produce and reduction in the cost of production, our research institutes/centers have identified certain key areas and have generated current knowledge in this area which needs to be transferred to the farmers in a systematic way so that farmers are enabled to increase the area under fruits and vegetables, adopt the scientific technology, use the optimum inputs and achieve the demand of fruits and vegetables. Production of fruits and vegetables can be increased by increasing the area and by applying the scientific production technology. It is difficult to increase the area under these crops but still there is possibility to increase the area by adopting the methods such as (a) By utilization of land through inter-cropping/mixed cropping in existing orchards, growing crops in the vacant areas and growing shade loving crops. (b) Development of suitable varieties of crops and agronomic practices to suit reclaimed wastelands and dry land region in the country. (c) Adoption of cost effective polyhouse technology. (d) High density planting by reduction in planting by reduction in planting distance or by use of plant growth inhibitors and dwarfing rootstocks in crops like mango, citrus, banana, apple and some other fruits. (e) Use of protected cultivation under controlled conditions for growing fruits like strawberry and some vegetables. Productivity can be increased by bringing maximum possible area in a systematically drawn plan of five years under high yielding or rejuvenating the already existing orchards along with full package of scientific practices. This will help in improving the quality of produce and reduction in the cost. In the conventional methods of crop improvement both desirable and detrimental genes get transferred from parents. The modern biotechnology system helps to insert single or more than two desirable genes into the crop. Traits can be modified through the genetic engineering that helps to increase productivity and improve the nutritional quality. This technique helps production of uniform size, shape, size and colour of products. Micro-propagation is the most popular technique for production in the world and supply of identical plants. Propagation technique through tissue culture and molecular indexing for culture of diseases are immense use in making available healthy planting material. Micro propagation protocol has been developed in banana, grape, ginger, turmeric, strawberry and betel vine. Farm mechanization now-a-days is very much helpful in reducing the labour cost and conducting timely farm operations and efficiently. For mechanizing cultivation of some fruits and vegetables some implements have been designed for distribution to the horticultural crops growers. The implements such as mango harvesters, potato diggers, automatic potato planter, potato ridger, potato grader, soil crust breaker, fruit peeler, fertilizer application-cum-line marker etc. are very important for the horticultural crops growers. These equipments must be widely demonstrated to the fruit growers to establish their suitability, cost-effectiveness etc. and then make them available. Integrated pest and disease management aims at judicious use of plant protection methods viz. cultural, biological, chemical, physical/mechanical or regulatory control methods. Biological control assumes significant importance and calls for the development of natural enemies tolerant to multi-pesticidal groups. Integrated nutrient management refers to maintenance of soil fertility and plant nutrient supply to an optimum level for sustaining

the desired crop productivity. It aims at achieving the highest level of productivity with efficiency at economically acceptable limits in environment friendly way. Use of organic manures and biological fertilizers helps in restoring soil health, reducing quantity and cost of chemical fertilizers. Awareness on natural farming and biological nitrogen fixation, phosphate solubilizers and micorrhizal fungi must be created among the farmers. Micro-irrigation and fertigation techniques must be popularized among the farmers. Under this system, water is applied at allow rate for a longer period at frequent intervals. It has been successfully tried in banana, mango, pomegranate, citrus, cucumber, okra, brinjal etc. Now emphasis must be given to apply the fertilizers through micro-irrigation. Micro-irrigation and fertigation helps to save the fertilizers up to 30 per cent and save water up to 70 percent. Moreover this system helps to prevent the growth of weeds, saves energy and improves quality of produce. Greenhouse technology is a capital intensive, sophisticated and high-precision technology which facilitates intensive cultivation of vegetables throughout the year. Greenhouse technology can modify the environment for optimum plant growth and production of uniform and high quality produce. Fan and pad cooled greenhouses are suited for hot and dry climate and heating system greenhouses are suited in cold climate. In greenhouse technology wind and thermal buoyancy obviates the need for electric power or generators for maintenance of temperature and relative humidity. This technology should be demonstrated to the Indian farmers. This technology is more suited for the cultivation of vegetables in the Northern hilly regions during summer season. Organic farming contributes in improving the quality of fruits and vegetables which have potential export market. Major components of organic farming are addition of organic manures, adoption of crop rotations and enhancement of soil fertility through biological fixation of nitrogen. Crop residues are utilized to make compost along with farm-yard manure and biogas slurry. Incorporation of green manure or green leaf manure helps to convert the crop residues into the organic matter in the soil. Insects-pests can be controlled by the combination of crop rotations, inter-crops, mechanical cultivation and use of biological pest control. Proper post-harvest management reduces the post-harvest losses by proper handling and packaging and adoption of suitable low cost storage infrastructures. Use of pre-cooling units, controlled atmosphere and refrigerated containers is recommended to increase the shelf life of horticultural crops. Indian farmers need to improve the quality of crops to make them qualitatively competitive in world market. There is need to establish the quality control laboratories to ensure the exporters that commodities being exported get international standards. In order to boost the horticulture crops production state/UTs governments need to prepare a vision and mission on horticultural crops, define states role clearly and mobilize the financial resources to invest in this sector. Agricultural universities should take lead role in providing the proven technical guidelines to the horticultural crops growers and demonstrate effectiveness of technologies on growers' fields for adoption. Adequate and timely credit aid by financial institutions/banks is called through proper estimation of credit at growers/village level, assisting Self Help Groups (SHGs), Farmers Producer Organizations (FPOs), providing Kisan Credit Cards, providing post-harvest facilities and linking the growers with the Agricultural Universities for demonstration of proven technology. By the introduction of new interventions horticulture sector can expand even further and generate more income for the farmers. A participatory-based approach is one of the effective ways to develop solutions in collaboration with local horticultural crops producers and to promote technology adoption.

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YOUR COLUMN

HINDU MARRIAGE ACT

Dear Editor,

The Supreme Court ruling that mere registration of marriage in the absence of a proper ceremony would not be valid under the Hindu Marriage Act sounds good. The Supreme Court has found that the Act recognizes 'Samskara' subsumed in the Hindu Marriage customs and traditions. There are a large number of people who have bid adieu to the customs and traditions. This is not only from among the people belonging to Hindu community but also by people hailing from other religions. The amazing part of the customs and traditions is that for consummation of marriages, religious rituals are employed and the presence of priests is sine qua non of the Hindu marriage. But for dissolution of the marriage the intervention of courts is necessary. The intervention of courts is necessary to get the maintenance from the spouse in the event of breakdown of marriage. The dissolution of marriage through courts is licence for the next marriage, not necessarily it should be for the second one only. Every marriage in the case of an individual should be dissolved through court only before passing on to next marriage. The court rightly says that

Hindu marriage is not just an occasion for "song and dance" and "wining and dining". There was a time when dining in the Hindu religious functions was with the attendees to sit on the floor only. Chair-table culture came into practice after the officials with their attires found it uncomfortable to sit on the floor and the health issue started cropping up. Even today, there are people who are unaccustomed to sit on chair and dine. The ability to sit on floor has been vanishing with even youngsters unable to squat. Old-aged people sitting on floor raises the eye-brows with astonishment. The court has made it abundantly clear that in the absence of any marriage in accordance with Section 7 of the Hindu Marriage Act, a certificate issued by any entity is of no legal consequence. If a marriage not in accordance with Section 7 of the Hindu Marriage Act is not a marriage, and the man and woman do not acquire the status of husband and wife, how come the live-in relationship is recognized to accord status of husband and wife? As per the Supreme Court of India, a man and woman living together for an extended period are said to be married and thus they are permitted to enjoy legal rights. Section 16 of the Act allows the children to enjoy the rights over the self-acquired property of their parents. A live-in relationship is not buttressed by the observance of rituals of any caste or religion by those living together. But it has legal support as far as payment of maintenance is concerned in the event of the 'assumed wife' separating from man. It is a matter of pride that the Supreme Court holds

in high esteem the 'samskara' in Hindu Marriage Act. The court has rightly deprecated the practice of some people going for registration of marriage with intention to solemnise marriage at a later date. Registration of marriage before the marriage in accordance with the religious traditions and customs is like putting the cart before horse. There are several cases where the marriage has been registered without observing religious practices. The Madurai branch of the Madras High Court has observed "mere registration of a marriage between a couple, without undergoing any marriage ceremony as per their respective personal law, would not confer any marital status upon the couple". The views expressed by the Supreme Court as outlined in the opening sentence of this article are quite analogous to the judgment delivered by the Madurai branch of the Madras High Court. The judgements given by the Supreme Court and Madurai branch of the Madras High Court are quite meaningful and appropriate. But how fair it would be to recognize the man and woman living together in the live-in relationship as husband and wife even if they live together for a fairly longer period without practicing religious ceremonies? Not recognizing the registered marriage without observing religious ceremonies before registration conflicts with the recognition of the live-in relationship which is not backed by religious ceremonies? No less a court than the Supreme Court should take a look at this issue.

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