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FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

News Bulletin of The Senior Citizens' Forum, Kottayam

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The President's Message

P. I. John

In the first week of October, World Economic Forum organized the India Economic Summit in New Delhi. One of the debates was whether India could become the next Silicon Valley.

Silicon valley was born in the area between San Jose and San Francisco by the San Francisco Bay. Stanford University is situated here. Stanford, under the mentorship of Dean Prof. Frederick Terman, had started a tradition of Faculty Members setting up companies in the 1940s and 50s. Hewlett Packard and Varian are two of the early establishments. Later on Stanford students continued this. Silicon Valley is synonymous with innovation and disruptive technologies. Giants like Google, Apple and Facebook sprang up here later.

India has been a leader for low-cost outsourcing and support services since the late 1980s. Software giants like Infosys and TCS sprang up in this niche. The outsourcing industry was recently valued at Rs. 10 Trillion. Nevertheless, there is competition from other outsourcing destinations, notably Philippines and Bangla Desh. Deglobalization tendencies, especially the increasing tendency for insourcing is another headwind.

Can India dream to become the next Silicon Valley? What are the supporting arguments?

There is a burgeoning start-up and innovation culture. In the Global Innovation Index, India's rank im-

proved from 81 to 52 between 2015 and 2019. It now ranks third in the world in terms of attracting investment for technology transactions.

In 2018 alone, there were 153 new start-ups founded in Bengaluru. Gurgaon attracts multinational companies and global tech giants such as Google, Facebook, Zomato, and Uber.

India has already started to undergo a technological transformation. It has become the second most connected nation in the world, with 560 million internet users, surpassed only by China. This was enabled by the increasing smartphone usage, from 86 million five years ago to 450 million today.

India has the third-largest start-up ecosystem in the world. There are 26 start-up companies valued at more than \$1 billion each. Digital entrepreneurship has become a career path for the young.

India is experiencing tremendous urbanization. This creates a young, middle-class demographic with increased spending power and heightened interest in digital innovation. India is set to become the largest contributor to the world's urban population.

What are the points against India becoming the next Silicon Valley?

India still has a significant skills gap for technological innovation. Less than 4% of graduate engineers have the technical, cognitive, and

language skills necessary for technology start-ups. Only 3% have

exposure to areas like artificial intelligence, machine learning, data science and mobile development.

Policy initiatives are helping. Startup India initiative to support entrepreneurs and build a robust start-up environment has made an impact. Even a state like Kerala which has a non-entrepreneurial history has done extremely well in this field. Make in India was designed by the government to promote self-reliance, foster innovation, enhance skill development and build a best manufacturing infrastructure. Finally, Digital India aims to digitally empower society and double the size of India's digital economy.

The slow down that we see now is worrying. Even then, let us hope that there is a chance to make the transition.



“The mind travels faster than the pen; consequently, writing becomes a question of learning to make occasional wing shots, bringing down the bird of thought as it flashes by. A writer is a gunner, sometimes waiting in the blind for something to come in, sometimes roaming the countryside hoping to scare something up.”

E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*

Editor's Musings

Dhanya Gopinath

Recently, pictures of a young lady carrying a White Cane was splashed all over the pages of newspapers. This was the photograph of India's first Visually-Challenged Woman IAS officer. Her name is Pranjil Patil & she has just taken over as the Sub-Collector, Thiruvananthapuram.

"Never be defeated, never give up, we should never be defeated, we will get that one breakthrough, which we want"; said this young lady, who lost her eyesight when she was six years old. After completing her graduation, she decided to pursue a career in the civil services. When she secured a ranking of 774 at the All India level on her very first attempt; she de-

cidated to better her ranking & made one more attempt at cracking the exam. This time she secured the 124th ranking.

It is because of the achievements of such visually challenged people that the White Cane Day is being celebrated on the 15th of October since the year 1964., when Lyndon Johnson, the President of USA, signed the first White Cane Safety Day proclamation.

In 2011, White Cane Safety Day was also named Blind Americans Equality Day by President Barack Obama.

In India, multiple organizations are coming together to raise awareness on how the white cane aids mobility & independence for people with vision loss, by cele-

brating October 15th as the White Cane Day.

The National Federation of the Blind says that the White Cane Awareness Day is their way of emphasizing the critical role that this tool (the white cane) plays in living the lives the visually-challenged want & informing the public about its true significance.

By lighting a candle instead of cursing darkness, Pranjil Patil has become a role model for all the visually-challenged people of our country.



September Meetings

The First meeting of the Kottayam Senior Citizens' Forum was held on Saturday, the 14th of September 2019 at the Johnny Moose Backwater Farm at Aymanam. The Onam function was celebrated at this venue. Adv. Sivamani Kaimal addressed the gathering and explained the significance of Onam.

It was a great opportunity for the talented members of our Forum to showcase their talents and entertain the others.

If the morning programme was dominated by members like Dr. Rachel Kurien, Pushpa Annie

Mathew, Mr. John Kunnath, Lizzy Kunnath, little Angela, Mr. P. K. Philipose, Prof. George Koshy and the duo comprising of Prof. K. M. Varghese and Kottayam Baburaj; the post lunch session saw our very own playback singers, Mrs. Soosy Isaac and Dr. Elizabeth Philip take the stage.

The personal anecdotes by Mrs. Omana Abraham was another interesting item. The Quiz programme by Moncy's Musical Group made the members compete for the prizes.

The second meeting of the Senior Citizens' Forum was held on the 27th of September at the SEERI

auditorium with Dr. Jacob Punnose as the main speaker.

Dr. Punnose gave the audience a good idea about the functioning of the Brain. He explained that the human brain has 100 million neurons and that the brain matures by the time we reach the age of 18. He informed seniors about the positive impact created by social networking. He advised all to take care to see that they enjoy sunshine and see that soya and sardines are included in their diets. He stressed on how the spiritual aspect had a positive impact on the human brain.

Five world leaders who drew inspiration from the Mahatma

The Gandhian way of peaceful resistance against aggression would turn into a politically methodology, inspiring several other revolutionaries around the world.

The American civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. referred to Gandhi as "one of the individuals who greatly reveal the working of the spirit of God".

When Nelson Mandela was released from jail after 27 years, his first destination abroad was India. Mandela's strategy of defiance against apartheid followed the path of nonviolent resistance.

Ho Chi Minh is referred to as "half Lenin, half Gandhi". The Communist revolutionary and architect of Vietnamese independence, is known to be largely influenced by Gandhian thought.

In 1969, on the occasion of Gandhi's 100th birth anniversary, Abdul Gaffar Khan visited India and

made an emotional speech in the Parliament. "I came to see the land of Gandhi. I wanted to see what has become of the ideals of justice and socialism," he is noted to have said.

In 1956 the Dalai Lama visited Rajghat. "As I stood there I wondered what wise counsel the Mahatma would have given me if he had been alive. I am sure he would have thrown all his strength of will and character into a peaceful campaign for the freedom of the people of Tibet," he wrote in his memoir.

150 years of Mahatma Gandhi: A remembrance

M.Gopinathan

On 2nd October 2019, India & the world celebrated the 150th birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. Today we have virtually relegated his ideals to the archives, to be dusted & taken out once in a year. We give lip service to his ideals, whenever it suits us. But, we forget that his Life, which is his Message to the World is very much valid even today, if only we care to follow them with sincerity & in good faith.

Here, I must quote the prophetic words of Rabindranath Tagore. In the year 1915, after a meeting with Gandhiji, Tagore wondered "Perhaps he will fail as Buddha failed & Christ failed, to wean men from their inequities, but, he will always be remembered, as one who made his life a lesson for all ages to come."

There have been great reformers before Gandhiji, but his uniqueness is that he always practised what he preached. He did not seek publicity for the public works he undertook in his life, as for him Service to Humanity was Service to God.

The Mahatma's early life was pretty much ordinary & he became a great man during the course of his life. He proved that one can become a great soul during the course of one's life, should he possess the will to do so.

Even as a young boy, there were enough indications that he was cast in a different mould. He revolted against the untouchability practised by the orthodox Hindu families of the time. He used to argue vehemently with his elders against the practices followed in his own family.

The stories of Harishchandra taught him about the importance of truth. Through such stories & his own experiences, Gandhiji realised that Truth & Love were two supreme values in life.

While in London, where he went to study Law, he was introduced to the Bhagawath Gita, by some of his Hindu friends. He was also introduced to the Bible around that time. Later Gandhiji has said that, in his young mind, he often tried to unify the teachings of the Gita with the Sermon on the Mount.

In his later life, these religious texts had a great influence on him. Though a devout Hindu, he always respected other religions. On one occasion, he had said that he is a Hindu a Christian, a Muslim & a Parsi, as all faiths lead to the same ultimate truth.

During his stay in S. Africa, Gandhiji revolted against the racial discrimination practised by the white people towards Blacks & Indians. It was during his stay there that he perfected his ideas of Sathyagraha (devotion to truth) , by organising nonviolent protests, whenever he was faced with injustice. He was also influenced by the writings of Leo Tolstoy & John Ruskin.

The Mahatma's return to India in the year 1915, was the best thing that could have happened to India. There was a vacuum in Indian politics during that time. The country was waiting for a charismatic leader, who could infuse a new lease of life to the Freedom Struggle.

As Aurobindo Ghosh the great sage, intellectual & revolutionary said in 1909, "All great movements wait for their God- sent leaders, the willing channel of force & only when he comes , move forward triumphantly to their fulfilment."

Before getting fully involved with activities of the Indian National congress he went around the country, to understand the people & their problems. In 1920, he took over the leadership of the Congress party & in no time, converted it from an Elite Group to a party of Mass Appeal.

He led many agitations. Whenever the agitation turned violent, he without hesitation, called off the movement much to the unhappiness of other leaders. For

Gandhiji, Nonviolence was an Inviolable Article of Faith.

Finally, the British Empire was brought to its knees. The British had no choice but to offer Independence in the year 1947. This was accepted by the Congress against the advice of Gandhiji, who did not favour the partition of India. It was Sardar Patel who convinced the Mahatma that there was no alternative. The ensuing communal violence upset Gandhiji very much, that he launched his final Fast Unto Death in Delhi and asked people to stop violence. Ultimately all parties conceded to his wishes and Gandhiji broke his fast.

Alas!, his inspiring life was brought to an end on 30th January 1948, when a Hindu fanatic shot him dead in Delhi, as he was proceeding to his prayer meeting.

Every Act of Gandhiji was a rebellion against Unsustainable Age old practices, but his methods were gentle persuasive & patient. His simple advice & solutions to problems were rooted in truth which is eternal. He was a Revolutionary in every sense of the word, without the violence normally associated with it. Even when he fought the British Rule, he held no enmity towards the British people.

Gandhiji had a dream for India. He said "I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel it is his or her country, in whose working they have an effective voice, an India, in which there is no High Class or Low Class of people; an India in which all communities will live in Harmony. Women will enjoy the same rights as men. That is the India of my dreams, he said.

Many historians hold that Mahatma Gandhi is the most prominent personality the world has seen after Buddha. He was a Saint & a Politician rolled into one body.

Famous scientist Albert Einstein said, "Generations to come it may well be, will scarce believe that such a man as this ever in flesh & blood walked upon the earth."



Rev. Dr. Koshy Mathews speaking on "Perspectives in Bi-cultural Living" (Photo: Minnu John)

Membership Request

Rev. Dr Koshy Mathews, residing at 1C, Palazzo, Muttambalom, Kottayam 686004 has applied for membership of the Senior Citizens Forum. He is being sponsored by Prof. P. I. John.

He had served as the Rector at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Phoenixville, Penn., US. After retirement, he intends to spend time in both India and the US.

He is married to Susan Koshy and they have two children.

This is for the information and approval of the members.

Congratulations

The 2019 Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel has been given to Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Michael Kremer of Harvard. Esther Duflo becomes second woman to win the Economics Nobel.

All three were recognised for their "experiment-based approach" to tackling global poverty, and using randomised control trials to discover which economic interventions help in poverty alleviation. Duflo and Banerjee are most well known for their work through the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, known as J-Pal, which has pioneered the use of randomised controlled trials to find out what

works in development.

The Economics Sciences award is a massive recognition for academic achievement - and comes with 9 million Swedish krona (£720,000) to share.

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences declared: The Laureates' research findings - and those of the researchers following in their footsteps - have dramatically improved our ability to fight poverty in practice. As a direct result of one of their studies, more than five million Indian children have benefitted from effective programmes of remedial tutoring in schools.

Another example is the heavy subsidies for preventive health-care that have been introduced in many countries.

Innovative ways of adopting eco-friendly lifestyles

Two-tier cities like Ranchi, Guwahanti, Lucknow & Bhopal have innovated ways to avoid single-use plastics.

Here people have started using plates & cups made from leaves. Plastic straws are being substituted by cane ones. Bamboo stirrers are replacing plastic ones.

Coconut shells are being used to plant saplings. Very soon they are planning to make pots made from cow dung.

In Bhopal people have been requested to donate old clothes at collection points. These clothes are then made into bags.

WISH YOU A VERY HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

May your birthday and every day ahead be filled with the warmth of love, the joy of good health and blessings in abundance!

Mr. K. I. Philip - 2 Oct

Engr. Joseph Thomas - 6 Oct

Mrs. Dhanya Gopinath - 13 Oct

Mrs. Ann Jacob - 17 Oct

Mr. M. J. George - 17 Oct

Mr. Jacob Kuruvilla - 20 Oct

Mr. P. K. Philipose - 21 Oct

Prof. P. C. Varghese - 22 Oct

Mrs. Elizabeth Isaacs - 24 Oct

Prof. Lila Joseph - 26 Oct