

# PRISM

## A PPF Dispatch

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The Policy Perspectives Foundation (PPF) is a non-profit, apolitical think tank on matters of national interest. PPF's activities focus on complex and interconnected challenges to peace, stability and development in India in cognizance of the external dimension. PPF is committed to spreading awareness, building capacity and promoting resilience.

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**Prof. Partha Nath Mukherji, an esteemed member of the Policy Perspectives Foundation passed away on 13th February 2021.**

As a sociologist, he extensively worked on issues related to social movements, including Gandhian and Maoist movements and peasant movements, gender concerns, democratic decentralization, sociology of rural labour and international migration. Prof. Mukherji served as the Director-Vice Chancellor of the Tata Institute of Social sciences, Mumbai and was invited to accept the S.K. Dey Chair instituted by the Ford Foundation at the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi.

He was deeply involved in activities of the PPF and had developed a personal relationship with researchers, who revered him for his intellect and simplicity. The Governing council and everyone at PPF pray for the departed soul. He is deeply mourned and missed by the PPF fraternity.

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There appears to a resurgence of COVID-19 in India with many states witnessing a sharp rise in cases, pointing to the need for a much faster inoculation. India's vaccination programme started with healthcare workers on January 16, 2021. The national effort is to complete the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine to all healthcare workers by February. In keeping with that the second phase of India's Covid vaccination programme has commenced. The primary and urgent challenge is to vaccinate everyone at the earliest, to shield the population and gradual economic recovery from any new wave of infection spearheaded by mutant variants of the Sars Cov-2 virus. India is also keeping up its export grant assistance and its contribution to WHO's Covax programme.

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## Engaging China: Need for An Innovative Approach

— Gautam Sen

Recent agreement to lower the presence of both Chinese and Indian troops in Eastern Ladakh is a welcome step, though the larger questions remain unresolved. India requires to reimagine its way of thinking about the border issues and must move beyond the tactical and transactional responses, by involving its scholars and think tanks to explore innovative options to change the nature of the bilateral relationship. India and China, home to nearly one third of the world's humanity, cannot afford to be engaged in hostility. Yet the fact is that the border skirmishes and indiscretions did happen - mostly provoked by the Chinese and these led to unfortunate casualties and considerable acrimony.

China's political leadership fueled by their ambitions to reinstate the glory of the "Middle Kingdom" has been pursuing a calibrated long-term strategy of economic, technological, infrastructural, and international outreach that aims at dominating the countries in South and South East Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a central driver in its calculus of power to achieve the status of a superpower. It has undoubtedly emerged as a "full spectrum peer competitor of the US in commercial and national security applications of AI." China is also well ahead on its way to be counted amongst the countries having advanced capabilities in manned space programs, deep space related research, quantum communication, maritime technology, and aviation industry. China is simultaneously and assiduously nurturing its policy-making, and influence-peddling capabilities, by promoting a culture of developing soft power to further its interests in international diplomacy. This is aimed at

meeting the critical need to employ the best of her manpower to enable the leadership to formulate strategic and global policies to achieve China's ultimate aim as stated above.

Actions of China indicate that it is the end i.e., the ambition to rise and dominate that matters and not, considerations like appropriate nature of means used, or for that matter the conventional ethics. This is apparent in the way China, through a series of military actions, has been pursuing its objectives since 2019 Doklam incidence and followed now by the Galwan skirmish in Eastern Ladakh.

By taking advantage of the LAC paradigm whose maintenance is based on interpretation by the local military commanders positioned on ground, China has acted in the most inappropriate way. This is bound to impact the geostrategic and geopolitical relationship between India and China as never before. The Indian political structure and leadership has undergone significant change in post 2014 period. Significant paradigm shift has taken place in India's strategic thinking which has resulted in the beginning of a new strategic culture to contain China in her military endeavours in the long and mostly mountainous Sino Indian border across the Himalayan ranges from Ladakh to the North East. China's manoeuvres have made her intentions noticeably clear.

China's military modernisation program embarked during the last seven years has been unprecedented. It has transgressed every known parameter. President Xi's ability to consolidate the entire command structure of the PLA and integrate them with the Naval and Airforce capabilities as well as the reorganisation of the Seven Military Zones to Five Theatre Commands has made even India look like an insignificant competitor - this when India can boast of possessing the third

largest Armed Forces in the world and a nuclear-powered state. China's involvement and expansionist ideas on disputed and undermarked land borders with India, the speed of recolonise border villages on the LAC with India, create newer incursion in the North East even after the explosive situation created in Eastern Ladakh shows the amount of calculated risk China is prepared to take against India which brought the militaries of both countries to an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation on several occasions. China is conscious of her enormous strategic as well as non-strategic assets which would pose a profoundly serious challenge to India. But Galwan episode, however, reveals determination and the grit of the Indian Army.

Whatever the asymmetry, India has no other option but to engage China in order to safeguard her national interest, national integrity, and strategic autonomy. If China really believes that the international borders which for reasons of history has remained unresolved so far, can be settled by force in its favour, it may be in for a surprise. In this regard, analyst Brahma Chellaney described famously the policy of China being "what is ours (China's) is ours while what is yours is negotiable", and/or that "three steps forward in the territory of adversary must be followed by the strategy of taking two steps backward to gain one step" and that "salami slicing is the way to expand the strategic territorial advantage". To counter such a policy, India must pre-empt each of these strategies and move with her own innovative strategic thinking. In doing so India must gainfully use the soft power developed in Indian think tanks, the corporate sector and in Indian Universities. These could, nay, must, be utilised at conceptual levels. It may not suffice to rely only on domain experts as transactional behavior/response or diplomacy will compel

India only to a reactive short-term approach. Such a course of action even while resolving the immediate problem does not contribute towards a long-term innovative response to change the nature of the bilateral engagement. Art of appeasement works, but only temporarily. The asymmetry in strategic and non-strategic assets that gives an edge to China are required to dealt with by jettisoning the traditional and conventional methods. China's current growth or in simpler terms economic power owes a lot to its business and trade relationship with the rest of the world including India. The latter must therefore explore its matching response to meet the challenge. There is need to change the way we look at the problem.

To engage China on our own terms should be the first objective. By ensuring that each of their decision, detrimental to India's national security and overall national interest is countered in a way that it increases the cost of Chinese involvement in Indian affairs by segregating the strategic military affairs and diplomacy from the much larger mercantile interest of trade, commerce, infrastructural development, self-sufficiency in consumer requirement and "Securitize" the areas of communication, health, education, defence production and even hospitality and tourism. China's attempt at "salami slicing" in border areas must be countered by pre-emptive moves to make China vulnerable along the international border with India and also in other dimensions of our bilateral relationship. Even the massive Chinese PLA supported by their huge infrastructure credibility or their superior economic power cannot look after every inch of the long border with India nor can the Chinese consumer-oriented industries afford to lose, without feeling the pinch, the market for their products in India.



By making China negotiate military matters with military and the political matters with political leaders will polarise its efforts. It is important to understand that the politics of communication should be assisted by astute diplomacy to influence the world opinion against Chinese actions. If China is sensitive and worried about anything in the 21st Century, it is the negative world opinion towards any of their hopes and aspirations. In essence, China 'Has to be managed' as stated by the US President Biden and therefore, the aspiration of the US as the regulatory power needs to be assisted by India in the sphere of interests of China. Essentially it will involve India's effort to tie down China in the Himalayan zone, collective security measures to securitise the Indian Ocean Region, the South China Sea, reduce the furtherance of Belt and Route and deny them access to Arabian Sea.

The withdrawal of troops from Pangong Tso is a welcome development and has lowered the ambient level of hostilities and confrontation in the area. This demonstrates political maturity of India in diffusing a sensitive situation on the border. However, by agreeing that the first set of action to disengage will only be confined to the specific area and not extend to the entire Eastern Ladakh does not leave India in a very advantageous position tactically or strategically.

Lastly, China has proved to be inscrutable time and again, in the past and hence the Government of India would do well not to let its guard down on mere trust in the promises made by China. Constant vigil on the Chinese preparation and every move at the border must be observed. Given the track record of China, it would be a folly to assume that we have returned to the phase when 'tranquility and peace' prevailed along the Sino-Indian border even with unresolved issues related to the

boundary. But admittedly these were different leaders and different times. The present China seems to flex its muscle with neighbours to serve its interests. Thus, while the posture taken by India is in the larger interest of peace in our times, and is welcome, a careful vigilance is critically important.

India, has an immediate task of drawing up a road map to begin the process of engaging China effectively to safeguard her national interest and security.

*(The author, Prof. Gautam Sen is an acclaimed expert on strategic issues and national security. He is Visiting Fellow with the PPF.)*

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## Myanmar: Junta Returns

— Vaishali Basu Sharma

In an unfortunate reversal which was perhaps not very surprising, the Myanmar military has overthrown the civilian government and taken control of the country. The Tatmadaw or military as it is known in Myanmar was dictated by internal political developments. Tensions between Aung San Suu Kyi's government and the military which had persisted for long, came to the fore after the resounding victory of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party in the November 2020 elections. The army insists without evidence that there was widespread fraud in elections. The electoral commission had repeatedly rejected all accusations of voter "terrible fraud" in the general elections.

The ten-year interlude of democratic governance in Myanmar was sharply cut short in the early hours of February 1, 2020 when the military Junta detained the civilian leaders under house arrest and decided to take control of the government. Myanmar is no stranger to military dictators, who have previously run the nation with ruthless authoritarianism, making



it the target of international isolation and economic sanctions and thus plunging it into poverty.

For over 50 years, from 1962 until 2011, Myanmar or erstwhile Burma has been under successive military regimes. Gen. Ne Win, who seized power in a 1962 coup d'état, combined a repressive military dictatorship with a socialist economic program. Ne Win presided over the formulation of a new constitution in 1972-73 that provided for a one-party state in Burma. In pursuance of an ambitious though unsuccessful program of rapid industrialization and nationalization of Burma's major economic enterprises, he demonetized several large denominations of Myanmar's currency, replacing them with bank notes that added up to nine, on the advice of astrologers, wiping out the savings of lakhs of people overnight. By the late 1980s Ne Win's socialist and isolationist policies had turned Burma into one of the world's poorest countries. General Saw Maung who succeeded him, brutally suppressed mass pro-democracy demonstrations in 1988 which earned him the name 'Butcher of Rangoon.' The military crackdown against Buddhist monks set off the 2007 Saffron Revolution, was harsh and led to an increase in economic sanctions against the Burmese Government. In its half a century of direct rule the military Junta in Myanmar has engaged in political persecution of opponents, and minority groups. Dissent among minorities like the Han Chinese, Wa, and Kachin in northern Myanmar was violently suppressed.

Even after Myanmar entered a phase of democratic transition, the army continued to kept control of three key ministries -- defense, border, and home affairs. The 2008 constitution allocated the military a quarter of seats in parliament, giving it effective veto power over constitutional amendments. The transition to democracy was always incomplete and the

generals continued to hold sway. In 2017 Commander-in-chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing oversaw the campaign of violence waged against the Rohingya ethnic minority population which has led to one of the largest refugee crises in the world.

Unlike previous occasions this time the military takeover in Myanmar was bloodless. In fact, the army tried to defend the coup as constitutionally correct by citing the clause wherein power can be transferred by the president to the armed forces chief in a state of emergency declared to address threats to the nation. In keeping with this clause, after President Win Myint, was detained, Vice-president Myint Swe, a former general and member of the previous junta, handed over power to the commander-in-chief, General Min Aung Hlaing. After rounding up the nation's democratically elected leadership the army announced a coup on the military run TV channel Myawaddy, "The state of emergency is in effect nationwide and the duration of the state of emergency is set to be one year." However, which 'threats to the nation' impelled this transfer of power have not been clarified by the military junta.

The military has appointed a new group of ministers, none of whom were identified as "acting" or interim appointments. It has pledged to hold elections "upon completion of the tasks". It is highly unlikely that the military will hand over power after the completion of one year. In 1990 when the NLD won the election, the army desisted from its promised transition to democracy, refusing to cede power for another two decades.

Aung San Suu Kyi's relationship with the military was a tightrope walk. Despite the loss to her reputation over the atrocities committed against the Rohingya, she defended the army at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) where an investigation over the genocide is ongoing.

In her defiant testimony she refused to utter the word "Rohingya," thereby implicitly endorsing the majority view in Myanmar that the victims were "interlopers" from Bangladesh rather than an ethnic minority. This increased her domestic popularity even as she fell from grace abroad, causing unease among the military.

The current takeover was prompted to a large extent by the personal ambition of Commander in chief Min Aung Hlaing who was set to retire when he turns 65 in June this year. He had his sights on the Presidency which took a setback, after the military's proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) performed poorly in the recent elections indicating a robust rejection of the military. As Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD won 83% of the vote, she clearly has the people's mandate.

The military takeover will affect foreign investment and international development support, with the threat of a return of sanctions that made Myanmar among the world's poorest countries. World Bank has said that the coup could hurt development prospects and gains in tackling poverty. While around the world leaders have condemned the event as an assault on democracy, China refrained from supporting the joint statement that the United Nations Security Council was going to issue in condemnation of the military takeover. Expressing hope that all sides would "properly manage their differences" China is keeping its cards close, on the coup. According to Yun Sun, a China specialist at the Stimson Center, "Chinese strategy has always been, 'We will work with whoever comes to power.' I call it China's moral flexibility." Myanmar is important to China as strategic gateway to the Indian Ocean, as it connects landlocked Yunnan province to the Bay of Bengal-a route that Beijing wants to transform into a broader economic corridor with road and rail connections. Over the years Beijing has become

the country's primary trade partner.

The US has officially designated the military takeover as a "coup," which implies that it would have to cut off aid to Myanmar's government under the Foreign Assistance Act - the law states that the U.S. must "restrict assistance to the government of any country whose duly elected head of government is deposed by military coup or decree." The United States had earlier sanctioned General Min Aung Hlaing for serious human rights abuses against the Rohingyas. Imposing further economic sanctions could open the door for unhindered, increased Chinese intrusion in Myanmar. Successive imposition of unilateral American sanctions has already rendered the Generals immune to any profound effects. As it faced isolation and worldwide condemnation over human-rights abuses, Myanmar's military drifted closer to the PRC despite being suspicious of Chinese support to armed ethnic groups like the Wa State Army, Kachin or Shan army in northern Myanmar. Further sanctions and condemnation may only serve to push Tatmadaw closer to the Chinese which has enriched the military elite through investments in such sectors as resource extraction, and defended it by blocking efforts for a resolution in the U.N. Security Council demanding an end to violent treatment of Rohingya.

During the turbulent regime change in 1988, India had signaled its commitment to pro-democracy groups but it has since revised its policies to pragmatically achieve its strategic goals. Myanmar is crucial to its Act East Policy. India has extensive commercial ties with Myanmar. Its engagement of the military junta has helped ease the regime's international isolation and lessen the reliance on China. Last year India gifted the Myanmar navy its first ever submarine, a kilo class attack submarine (INS Sindhuvir). India has often taken the

stance of non-interference in Myanmar's internal affairs be it the 2007 anti-government protests or the Myanmar's government's treatment of its Rohingya people. Maintaining a low-key response to the Rakhine State clashes, India asserted that it had no intention of interfering in Myanmar as it respects the nation's sovereignty. India has rightly expressed concern at the developments in Myanmar, but it should continue to deal with the junta, just as it has done in the past. It should endeavor to further expand its ties with Myanmar despite the change in regime, not only to moderate Chinese influence, but to protect its own national interests and those of Myanmar.

Given these geopolitical realities, as the latest coup unfolded, Burmese historian Thant Myint-U tweeted "I have a sinking feeling that no one will really be able to control what comes next." Meanwhile tens of thousands of people are rallying across Myanmar to denounce the Junta's return to power and demand the release of elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi. As NLD urged supporters to resist and protest, internet access was blocked by the government. Banks remained shut due to poor internet services and not knowing what might come next, people are stocking up supplies. Even as internet was gradually restored in parts of the country, popular social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are still not available. The demonstrations have largely been peaceful, unlike the bloody crackdowns in 1998 and 2007. But as Thant Myint-U says, *"Anti-coup protests show every sign of gaining steam. On the one hand, given history, we can well expect the reaction to come."*

*(Author is an analyst on Strategic and Economic Affairs. She has worked as a Consultant with the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) and is presently associated with PPF.)*

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## Indian Prisons and COVID-19

— PPF Team

This report highlights the preliminary observations of a PPF team which is looking into custodial death in the three states of Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal. Though the inferences are yet to be validated through sources - a process which is currently ongoing - it was considered useful to share the initial impressions of our researchers working on the subject. A primary reflection is that while the country grappled with the worst ever pandemic and adopted various measures to save lives in the society at large, the same concern however, is hardly seen in respect of the inmates of prisons.

As a part of ongoing National Human Rights Commission's (NHRC) sanctioned project, "Custodial Deaths: Trends and Patterns in Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal" (2009-2018)," the PPF organised a series of webinars related to various aspects of custodial death. The discussions also shed light on the impact of COVID-19 on the health of prisoners in the above mentioned three states. The observations in this report pertain to problem areas identified so far. These broadly relate to basic amenities, infrastructure deficit leading to overcrowding, paucity of qualified medical personnel, etc.

Overcrowding in prisons is a common occurrence and it places the inmates in close contact with each other on a near-constant basis, which poses a serious health risk. The state of overcrowding in the jails of Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal can be gauged from the facts enumerated in the table A below.



Table A

State	Prisoners Holding Capacity of the concerned State	Total Number of Prisoners Present	Number of Prisoners in Excess	Occupancy Rate %
Bihar	42222	39814	-2408	94.3%
Jharkhand	16795	18654	1859	111.10%
West Bengal	21772	23092	1320	106.10%
India	4,03,739	4,78,600	74861	118.50%
<b>Source:</b> NCRB; Prison Statistics of India 2019.				

When seen from a macro level the figures in respect of Bihar in the above table gives the impression that there is no problem of overcrowding in the jails of the state. The reality however is that there are particular jails that are indeed overcrowded. This has been reflected in the Times of India which on January 3, 2018, observed that 27 out of the 57 jails in the state are overcrowded, forcing the prisoners to live in unhygienic and inhuman conditions. Beur jail, one of the most overcrowded jails in Bihar, has 3500 inmates against a capacity of 2200. The occupancy rate in prisons or 'Correctional Homes' as they are officially referred to in West Bengal is comparatively higher than the national level: Sub-jails (135.54%); Open Jails (114.6%); Special Jails (117.27%) and Women Jail (142.04%). Similarly, Jharkhand state has around 26,000 prisoners against a capacity of 20,000. However, some analysts doubt the

integrity of the statistics given out regarding the prisons and the occupancy. For instance, the 'Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative' (CHRI) report - 'State/UT Wise Prisons Response to COVID-19 Pandemic in India' has termed the Prison Statistics India, 2019 as 'deceptive' as it does not reflect true extent of overcrowding in each of the 1350 prisons in India.

Quality of medical care along with overcrowding is another serious problem in prisons. The Prison Statistics of India Report (2019) which is compiled by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), highlights that 1,775 prisoners died in custody due to various illnesses, including heart, lung, liver, and kidney-related ailments as well as tuberculosis and cancer for the period under report. The problem becomes acute because of the paucity of qualified medical personnel in most of the Indian jails. This is amply demonstrated in the Table B below.

Apart from the usual diseases, the year 2020 brought in the scourge of COVID-19 a highly contagious virus that has killed 2.39 million people worldwide as on by February 13, 2021 with 10.9 million confirmed cases and 1.5 lakh deaths in India. Overcrowding and paucity of medical personnel, as highlighted above, has made the inmates of correctional facilities uniquely more vulnerable to diseases such as COVID-19. A report of the National Campaign Against Torture, an anti-torture platform for

Table B : Medical Staff of 3 states in 2019

State	Correctional Staff: Psychologists/Psychiatrists		Resident/Medical Officer		Pharmacists		Lab Technician/ Lab Attendant		Others	
	Sanction	Actual	Sanction	Actual	Sanction	Actual	Sanction	Actual	Sanction	Actual
Bihar	0	0	226	125	106	18	16	0	107	94
Jharkhand	0	0	48	13	12	10	4	6	123	57
West Bengal	8	3	40	6	41	14	0	0	11	5
<b>Source:</b> NCRB; Prison Statistics of India, 2019.										

NGOs, documented 'The Status of COVID-19 in Indian Prisons' and concluded that out of the 1,350 jails in India, COVID-19 infections have been reported from at least 351 jails in 25 out of total 36 States/UTs of the country as of August 31, 2020. The CHRI report titled - 'State/UT Wise Prisons Response to COVID-19 Pandemic in India' stated that as in October 2020, there were total of 18,157 COVID-19 positive cases including both prison staff and inmates, and a total of 17 deaths occurred in Indian prisons. The status of COVID-19 infection in Indian jails on an all-India basis as well as in the three states of Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal has been depicted below in Table C.

**Table C : Infection in Prison**

State	No. of Cases
Bihar	323
Jharkhand	638
West Bengal	265
India	18157
<i>Source: CHRI Report State/UT Wise Prisons Response to COVID-19 Pandemic in India' 2020.</i>	

With rising concerns over the spread of Coronavirus in the jails, in Suo Motu Writ Petition 'Contagion of COVID-19 Virus in Prisons,' a three judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India directed that prisons must ensure maximum possible distancing among the prisoners, including undertrials. The Bench further directed that each State/Union Territory shall constitute a High-Powered Committee (HPC) comprising of the Chairman of the State Legal Services Committee, the Principal Secretary (Home/Prison) and Director General of Prison(s).

In pursuance to this directive, High Power Committees were set up and they issued directives to decongest the overcrowded jails,

conduct awareness programs inside the prison premises to educate the inmates on preventive measures like social distancing, frequent hand washing, dispersal of masks, soap and sanitizer, maintain strict vigil against detection and follow proper medical protocol in case of corona positive case, explore diversified occupancy and practicability of preparing an isolation ward and nodal treatment hospital for the prisoners infected with the COVID-19 virus. These HPCs were empowered with determining which class of prisoners can be released on parole or on interim bail for such period as may be thought appropriate. Following these directives measures such as early parole of prisoners who have been convicted or are under trial for offences for which the prescribed punishment is up to 7 years or less were considered. Social distancing was encouraged and the Bihar prison department banned visitors and relatives. Jharkhand took measures to decongest prisons by transferring inmates to other prisons where the number of prisoners is low as a step to counter overcrowding and help maintain social distancing. In the state of West Bengal, the prisoners were produced for their judicial hearing through Video Conferencing. Medical camps, supply of multivitamins and immunity booster drink, nutritious diet, and counseling sessions to prevent panic among inmates were some of the steps that were taken in these states.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought out in bold relief the systemic deficiencies in the prisons of India. The need for reforms in prison administration has surfaced as a critically important task. Problems like overcrowding, poor sanitation, deficiency in medical assistance including chronic shortage of medical staff etc. during a pandemic time leads to violation of basic human rights of the prisoners, even though prisoners also enjoy the

same right to life as any other citizens under the Indian constitution.

*(The contributors Pooja Kumari, Nandita Singh, Akoijam Surjit Singh and Prince Kumar Poddar are researchers at the PPF engaged with NHRC sanctioned project.)*

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## कोविड-19 और गरीबी का बढ़ता विकराल रूप

### — सीता

कोविड-19 महामारी ने भारत को व्यापक स्तर पर नकारात्मक रूप से प्रभावित किया है। सम्पूर्ण भारत में लगे लॉकडाउन की वजह से कई नयी समस्याएं व दुष्परिणाम उभर कर आए हैं, जिनमें बड़ी मात्रा में नौकरी खोने से मजदूरों का पलायन, बेरोजगारी, शिक्षा में अवरोध, धीमा विकास, स्वास्थ्य समस्याएं, बुनियादी चीजों की आपूर्ति में कमी के कारण बढ़ती हुई कीमतें, बाजार में मांग-पूर्ति की कमी आदि मुख्य रहे हैं व इन समस्याओं के दुष्परिणामों की वजह से भारत में गरीबी की समस्या विकराल रूप ले रही है।

भारत गरीबी को कम करने में निरंतर प्रयासरत रहा है। परन्तु इस महामारी ने नए गरीबों की श्रेणी पैदा कर दी है। जिससे गरीबी के स्तर में बड़ी तेजी से इजाफा हुआ है। भारत में गरीबी अभी भी तेंदुलकर कमेटी की सिफारिशों (नागरिकों के स्वास्थ्य की स्थिति, नागरिकों के शिक्षा का स्तर एवं नागरिकों का जीवन स्तर) के अनुसार ही मापी जाती है। वर्तमान में नीति आयोग को बहुआयामी गरीबी को मापने व सुधार की जिम्मेदारी दी गयी है। नीति आयोग द्वारा जनवरी 2020 में जारी एक आकलन के अनुसार, गरीबी में कमी को प्रभावशाली नहीं बताया गया है। रिपोर्ट के अनुसार भारत 2030 तक 'शून्य गरीबी' के लक्ष्य से बहुत पीछे है।

महामारी के दौरान अलग-अलग संस्थाओं द्वारा प्रकाशित गरीबी से जुड़े निम्नलिखित आंकड़ें भारत के लिए चिंता का विषय बने हुए हैं। अक्टूबर 2020 में विश्व बैंक (World Bank) की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार महामारी 15 करोड़ लोगों को, अगले एक-डेढ़ साल में गरीबी की गहरी खाई में धकेल देगी। विश्व बैंक के अध्ययन के अनुसार कोविड-19 के असर के कारण भारत की आधी आबादी का स्तर गरीबी रेखा के निकट हो सकता है।

कोविड-19 महामारी के कारण जिनकी आमदनी कम हुई है, बंद हो गई या नौकरियां चली गई हैं। उन परिवारों के गरीबी रेखा के नीचे जाने का जोखिम ज्यादा है।

सीएमआईई (सेंटर फॉर मॉनिटरिंग इंडियन इकोनॉमी) अप्रैल 2020 के आंकड़ों के मुताबिक कोविड-19 के कारण 10 करोड़ से ज्यादा लोगों का रोजगार छिन गया है।

श्रम संगठन (आईएलओ) द्वारा रोजगार पर अप्रैल 2020 में आई एक रिपोर्ट के अनुसार भारत में कुल कर्मचारियों की संख्या 50 करोड़ है, जिसका 90% हिस्सा असंगठित क्षेत्र से है। इसी रिपोर्ट में अनुमान जताया गया है कि इस कोरोना संकट के कारण 40 करोड़ से ज्यादा कामगार गरीब हो जाएंगे। नौकरी जाने से लॉकडाउन में मजदूरों का पलायन एक बड़ी त्रासदी के रूप में उभरा था जिसको देखते हुए इस साल के बजट में असंगठित क्षेत्रों के मजदूरों के न्यूनतम मजदूरी व ई पोर्टल का प्रावधान है जो भविष्य में उनकी समस्याओं को हल करने में प्रभावी भूमिका निभा सकती है।

विश्व बैंक के आय मानकों के अनुसार अप्रैल 2020 में आई एक अन्य भारत में महामारी के चलते करीब 81.2 करोड़ लोग गरीबी रेखा से नीचे जा सकते हैं। जो कि देश की कुल जनसंख्या का 60% होगा। इस रिपोर्ट के अनुसार लॉकडाउन बढ़ने के कारण भारत में गरीबों की संख्या बढ़कर 91.5 करोड़ हो सकती और अगर ऐसा हुआ तो इस आर्थिक संकट के कारण पूरी दुनिया में पैदा होने वाले हर नए गरीबों में 10 में से 2 लोग भारत से होंगे। गरीबी के यह नए आकड़ें पिछले 25 वर्षों में सरकार के द्वारा गरीबी दूर करने के प्रयासों को विफल कर सकते हैं।

सेंटर फॉर इंडियन इकोनॉमी व शिकागो यूनिवर्सिटी द्वारा लॉकडाउन के बाद 27 राज्यों के ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में किये गए एक सर्वेक्षण के नतीजे बताते हैं कि 88% ग्रामीण परिवारों की आय में कमी आयी है। तथा 34% ऐसे परिवार हैं जो एक हफ्ते से ज्यादा बिना बाहरी मदद के अपना गुजारा नहीं कर सकते हैं। केवल 30% ही ऐसे परिवार हैं जो एक महीने तक अपना गुजारा कर सकते हैं, परन्तु उसके बाद उन्हें भी बाहरी मदद की आवश्यकता होगी।



सितंबर, 2020 में जीडीपी का -23.9% होना, बाजार में मांग-पूर्ति की कमी, बढ़ती हुई मंहगाई, ऋण की समस्या, बेरोजगारी, आर्थिक गिरावट की समस्या, प्रत्येक तबके को नकारात्मक रूप से प्रभावित कर रही है, जो कि भारत के लिए बड़े आर्थिक खतरे की ओर संकेत करती है। साथ ही कई राज्यों में असंतुलित मानसून, बाढ़ जैसी समस्याएं गरीबी व कोरोना संकट को और भी विकट बना रहे हैं।

बेरोजगारी की समस्या इतनी बुरी स्थिति में आ गयी है कि युवाओं में तनाव, गुस्सा व आपराधिक/आत्महत्या प्रवृत्ति को साफ देखा जा सकता है। चाहे प्राइवेट नौकरी हो या सरकारी नौकरी। नौकरियों में कटौती, आधी आय, काम के घंटे में असंतुलन एक अलग समस्या है। वहीं कोरोना काल में, युवकों द्वारा प्रधानमंत्री के जन्मदिन को बेरोजगारी दिवस के रूप में मनाना उनमें व्याप्त आक्रोश को साफ दिखलाता है।

जहाँ एक ओर कोरोना के कहर से 2021-2022 के सत्र में ही स्कूल खुलने की उम्मीद है वहीं निजी स्कूल वाले बिना फीस लिए ऑनलाइन क्लासेज नहीं दे रहे और न ही वक्त पर अपने शिक्षकों को सैलरी दे पा रहे हैं। एक शोध के मुताबिक हर पांच में से दो माता-पिता के पास बच्चों की ऑनलाइन पढ़ाई के लिए जरूरी सामान ही नहीं है। दूसरी ओर सरकारी स्कूल की स्थिति भी बदहाल है। सरकार ने ऑनलाइन लर्निंग वेब पोर्टल स्वयं, स्वयं प्रभा, रेडियो और चैनलों द्वारा 24 घंटे छात्रों हेतु शिक्षा के कार्यक्रम चलाए गए हैं, परन्तु संसाधनों के आभाव के कारण कुछ वर्ग इस सुविधाओं से भी अछूते रहे हैं। यूनेस्को के अध्ययन के अनुसार भारत में लॉकडाउन की वजह से लगभग 32 करोड़ छात्रों की पढ़ाई प्रभावित हुई है। पैसे की कमी के कारण कुछ बच्चे अपनी पढ़ाई छोड़ बाल-मजदूरी करने के लिए मजबूर हो रहे हैं, तो वहीं कुछ नाबालिग लड़कियों कि कम उम्र में शादी का आंकड़ा भी बढ़ा है, जिससे कि बच्चों के शिक्षा के अधिकार का हनन हो रहा है। वहीं आने वाले बजट में ऑनलाइन शिक्षा के लिए ज्यादा फंड के कयास लगाए जा रहे थे परन्तु पिछले साल की तुलना में फंड की कटौती से निराशा हाथ लगी है।

ऐसी ही हालत हेल्थ सेक्टर की है जहाँ एक ओर अस्पताल कोरोना सेंटर बने हुए हैं, वहीं ना तो कोरोना ट्रीटमेंट की सुविधा पूर्ण रूप से मिल रही है, न ही अन्य

बीमारी के मरीजों को, जिससे की उनकी हालत पहले से गंभीर हो रही है। परन्तु इस बजट में स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं के लिए 2.38 लाख करोड़ फंड का प्रावधान है जो कि एक प्रशंसनीय कदम है। हाल ही में जारी की गई है ग्लोबल हंगर इंडेक्स रिपोर्ट-2020 के मुताबिक भारत की करीब 14% जनसंख्या कुपोषण का शिकार है व भारत में भूख का गंभीर संकट है। वहीं बढ़ती हुए मंहगाई की बात करें तो आम आदमी खाने-पीने से लेकर हर मूलभूत चीजों की बढ़ी हुए कीमतों के बोझ में दब गया है।

आजकल ऐसी धारणा व्याप्त है कि सरकार मीडिया को अपनी कमियों को छुपाने और नाममात्र खूबियों को उजागर करने के लिए इस्तेमाल करती है व विश्लेषण करने की बजाय आंकड़ों को तोड़-मरोड़ कर, अच्छी स्थिति दिखाकर जनता के समक्ष समस्या की गंभीरता को उजागर करने से बचने की कोशिश कर रही है।

कोरोना पीड़ितों की गरीबी को दूर करने के लिए, सरकार द्वारा किये गए प्रयास उतने व्यापक, क्रमिक व पर्याप्त नहीं हैं। वित्त मंत्री निर्मला सीतारमण ने बजट सत्र के दौरान बताया कि सरकारी आंकड़ों के अनुसार 80 करोड़ लोगों को मुफ्त अनाज दिया गया है, 40 करोड़ महिलाओं के खातों में पैसे भेजे गये व मनरेगा की मजदूरी में बढ़ोतरी करने जैसे कदम प्रशंसा के योग्य है। परन्तु यह कदम अन्य देशों व व्याप्त गरीबी की तुलना में अपर्याप्त है। जहाँ एक ओर जनता कि एक श्रेणी को आधार कार्ड के बिना सरकारी लाभ को प्राप्त करने में मुश्किलों का सामना करना पड़ा। वहीं ऐसे वक्त में तकनीकी समस्याएं आम जनता की परेशानियों को और भी विकट बना देती है।

बजट 2021-2022 में स्वास्थ्य और कल्याण, भौतिक और वित्तीय पूंजी, और अवसंरचना, आकांक्षी भारत के लिए समावेशी विकास, मानव पूंजी में नवजीवन का संचार करना, नवप्रवर्तन और अनुसंधान एवं विकास और न्यूनतम सरकार और अधिकतम शासन इन 6 स्तम्भों के आधार पर देश के विकास पर बल दिया गया है। इस बजट को आपदा में अवसर व देश की आर्थिक वृद्धि को गति वाला बजट माना जा रहा है जिसमें सरकार ने सबको शिक्षा देने, किसान की आय दुगुना करने, नौकरियों के अवसर पैदा करने वाला बताया है। भारत में सर्विस सेक्टर का 55% जीडीपी तक का योगदान रहता है, परन्तु बजट में इस वर्ग के बारे में कुछ नहीं कहा

गया। वहीं कुछ विशेषज्ञों के अनुसार इस बजट में आम आदमी को बजट के आलावा कुछ नहीं मिला व मध्यम वर्ग को स्वयं आत्मनिर्भर बनने के लिए छोड़ दिया गया है। हम भारत को तभी आत्मनिर्भर और शक्तिशाली देश बना सकते हैं जब इस महामारी से जंग जीतने के साथ-साथ गरीब तबके की जरूरतों पर भी ध्यान दिया जाए।

*(लेखिका पीपीएफ के साथ एक शोधकर्ता है।)*

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## **Book Launch - "Engaging China: Indian Interests in Information Age"**

Policy Perspectives Foundation published a monograph titled 'Engaging China: Indian Interests in the Information Age' authored by Pavithran Rajan on December 10, 2020. Pavithran Rajan, a former Army officer is a specialist in cyber and information warfare.

The book launch was chaired by Prof. Akshay Aggarwal, Professor of Information Technology, and former Vice-Chancellor of Gujarat Technical University. The event was also graced by an eminent panel of former senior functionaries of the government who during their careers have dealt with issues relating to national security including technical aspects, namely Shri Rajiv Jain and Shri Satish Jha along with Lt. Gen. Deependra Singh Hooda.

The monograph comes at a time when India is grappling with a growing challenge from China. While our attention is mostly focused on the border, the quest for economic and global power is mainly playing out in the domain of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Pavithran writes, "Domination of ICTs and related technologies is increasingly determining where power lies, as technological capability and economic prowess are now inextricably linked to the control of data."

A vibrant discussion brought out various relevant aspects of the book in context of the future of IT in India. The R&D sector of IT in

our country needs both a structural change as well as financial aid especially for Indian venture capitalists. Lamenting the lack of innovation a panelist observed, 'if innovation has been killed in this country, it is because of the behemoths we have created'. The discussion brought out the current technical dominance by China, and its technological competition with the US. To avoid getting caught between the two giants India must develop its own capabilities in ICT.

China is deeply entrenched in the Indian smartphone market. Chinese smartphone brands with domineering market share, have surveillance capacity over smart phone users in India. Analysing the behavior of Chinese mobile companies the Indian government has banned several Chinese apps, on the grounds that they collect of unauthorised data of Indian subscribers. This fortified the general suspicion held in many countries globally that China has weaponised its existing manufacturing processes by leveraging its controls over the OEMs. There is a need to sensitise Indian public and the entrepreneurs further about the nature of threat emanating from persistent and increasing use of Chinese hardware in our telecom companies. China is entering the 5G race in India with companies like ZTE, Huawei, etc. This highlights the criticality of the need for a strong and effective 'Data Protection Act' in India.

The monograph points out that China has embarked on an ambitious Digital Silk Road that has four interrelated components - investments in ICT infrastructure abroad, developing advanced technologies that will underpin economic and military power, e-commerce through digital free trade zones, and influencing the global digital environment through a combination of digital diplomacy and multilateral structures.

India is still underprepared to deal with the challenges on the geo-economic front. Senior

politicians and bureaucrats should also be cognizant about the threats and the critical need to bolster indigenous capacity in Information Technology domain. The matter though under discussion in the government circles for quite some time, has not seen much progress. There is a need to drive this agenda further. If required, the R&D organisations in India like the defence PSUs, Department of Science and Technology, ISRO and DAE could be restructured with a focus on strategic requirements of the country in security and technology related matters.

The monograph points out the lack of enabling environment in India for budding innovators and entrepreneurs and the role of bureaucrats in inhibiting indigenisation of technology. Angel tax funding is charged at 30% which leads a lot of Indian entrepreneurs to register in Singapore instead of India. It makes a strong case for towards achieving greater indigenisation of fifth-generation networks to safeguard our national interests. The critical need for India to be completely self-sufficient in its ICT infrastructure & Data protection, with indigenous end to end solutions like the smart phones, fiber optics, data localisation, hardware/ software & apps can be achieved using a strategic venture fund incentivizing Indian talent, which is among the best in the world & since decades being tapped both by the west & China for their own ICT development.

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## **Inter-Faith Harmony in the Modern World**

World Interfaith Harmony Week is an annual event observed during the first week of February. Honoring this practice PPF organised a webinar on February 7, 2021 to discuss 'Inter-faith harmony in the modern world.'

Inter-faith harmony goes beyond tolerance and embraces acceptance, and inclusion of diversity. Illustrious speakers shared their views on the challenges to inter-faith harmony

and cited profound teachings from various religions to uphold inter-religious harmony which is facing conflicts in the modern era. Inter-faith harmony should be promoted for personal spiritual and intellectual upliftment and for maintaining peace in society.

A member of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality International, Dr. Maria Khan, explained that today inter-faith harmony exists in pluralistic societies where people not only live together but work and cooperate with each other for materialistic or financial interest. People of different religions collaborate at workplace keeping aside their sacred beliefs and philosophy. Historian Yuval Noah Harari posits that money has been the greatest unifying factor throughout history. People of different cultures and civilisations came in contact and lived with each other through trade and economic links. However, coexistence with one another is also professed by Islam - one of the verses on 49<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Quran says that we have made humankind differently. This essentially means that it is a fundamental belief in Islam that human beings have been created different by the creator and so people should not be compelled to follow one belief system. According to Islam, difference and diversity is the natural order of the world which cannot be demolished.

A story from the life of the Prophet of Islam where a group of people entered a dialogue with him signified importance of embracing diversity. These people told Prophet about the beliefs of their forefathers who were not Muslims. Two among these beliefs were patience in times of adversity and gratitude in moments of prosperity. They also shared several other moral injunctions with the Prophet. Upon listening to them attentively, the Prophet said with great surprise, the people who are your forefathers are men of wisdom and very similar to messengers and Prophets of Abrahamic tradition. The story aptly depicts



how differences between us and others should inspire us to discuss and learn from one another. Inter-faith harmony establishes a peaceful atmosphere which allows serious intellectual discussion between people leading to constructive contributions rather than fiery debate and rhetoric.

The holy book Quran also explains the necessity of inter-faith harmony to the Muslims. The Sixth Chapter forbade the Muslims to insult or revile the gods of the polytheists whom the latter worshipped besides Allah. It is a very important principle of multi-religious society where people should not only respect each other as human beings but also their beliefs and fundamental philosophies which they hold sacred.

Canon Brian Cox spoke of inter-faith harmony from a Christian perspective. An ordained episcopal priest and a trained professional in conflict resolution he serves as a senior official of a Washington DC based non-governmental organization and is an adjunct professor in an academic program devoted to faith-based diplomacy.

He noted that while dealing with issues of harmony and peace, policy makers and diplomats particularly in the West often have an underlying paradigm that religion is the problem. Therefore, religion should be kept away from secular matters as much as possible. This is a mistaken premise which drives many policies of today. There is a need to look at religion as a solution rather than a problem and acknowledge that it has both sides. This is true for all the religious traditions across the world. A second problem that inhibits inter-faith harmony is the tension between supremacy and coexistence. Every religious tradition has an element of supremacy - a desire to conquer and looking at the other as the pagan, the heathen and the kufr. Sharing his experience of working with Muslim Brotherhood of Jordan,

Mr. Cox recalled that he worked to address their sense of supremacy. He challenged them to become peacemakers, reconcilers and problem solvers which was not a role they normally associated with themselves.

He also noted that after the Charlie Hebdo terror attack, he met the senior leadership of Muslim Brotherhood of Oman and told them that it was a dangerous moment for them as the conversation in the West is beginning to shift from identifying the enemy as global terrorism to radical Islam and when that would happen, they would be right in the crosshairs of Western nations. He said that they had the ability to show the noble side of Islam. The challenge was that the Brotherhood was driving the debate rather than moderates. In many situations, moderates may outnumber the extremists but it is generally the latter which shape the larger public debate. In such scenarios, inter-faith reconciliation becomes even more challenging.

A common vision is required to move forward, based on the eight core values of faith-based reconciliation present in all the religious traditions. These values of pluralism, inclusion, peace-making, social justice, forgiveness, healing, God's sovereignty, and atonement. In this context, inter-faith harmony should proactively be sought as it paves the way for working together positively to create reconciled societies.

There is also a need to distinguish between tolerance and love. While the United Nations standard of civic engagement is tolerance which implies merely putting up with one another, Jesus talked about love of neighbours and took it a step further to love for enemy.

One of the important developments of 20th Century was inter-faith dialogue but problems of 21st Century really required inter-faith reconciliation through changed hearts and problem solving.

There is a difference between Track 1 diplomacy - official state to state diplomacy and Track - 2 diplomacy which brings together unofficial representatives on both sides, with no government participation. One of the things that Track 1 diplomacy cannot accomplish is change of hearts. Faith-based peacemakers can contribute by facilitating people's change of hearts by bringing them together. Citing an example of a reconciliation workshop Mr. Cox held in Kashmir with Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits, he explained how initially the two groups were hostile towards each other but once the Muslims were encouraged to patiently listen to Kashmiri Pandits pain and agony with a humble and open heart, the process of constructive dialogue began. The Muslims then asked for Pandits' forgiveness in all their humility for their role in driving them out from the valley and the Pandits broke down weeping. The workshop thus brought a change of heart in the people of these two faiths. This process began healing of the Pandits and Muslims and cherishing Kashmiriyat together. Kashmiri Muslims holding leadership position in Pakistan were also closed to the idea of talking about Pandits coming back and settling in Kashmir valley. However, with similar activities their attitudes also changed. Later, an international inter-faith conference was organised in Pakistan on return of Pandits to the valley.

Basit Jamal talked about inter-faith harmony for an ideal modern world. Social activist and Ashoka Fellow he is the founder of the social action group 'Brotherhood of Humanity' dedicated to promoting peace by re-purposing the power of religion. He said that regions which witness inter-faith disharmony do not have vibrant and strong societies, in fact they witness social division which weakens and disintegrates nations. Economic investment and human resources move away from places which are conflict-ridden such as Afghanistan.

Different faith groups are in power in various parts of the world but they are not thinking of the history they are creating.

India-Pakistan conflict has led to deep resentment for the other community for generations to come and for people who were not even born during the conflict. These divisive tendencies are potent in present times and gaining strong foothold in various parts of the world. Thus, there is an even greater need to make conscious efforts to bring inter-faith harmony for creation of an ideal modern world which is peaceful, inclusive, and most importantly happy.

Chairman of 'Sarva Dharma Samvaad' and former Vice president of 'World Council of Arya Samaj' Manu Singh put forth the Hindu perspective on inter-faith harmony. In the modern world everything can be savoured only when there is harmony. The shloka '*ayaṃ nijaḥ paro veti gaṇanā laghucetasāṃ | u d ā r a c a r i t ā n ā ṃ t u v a s u d h a i v a kuṭumbakam*' means that it is minuscule beings which fight or quarrel, the larger beings consider entire world as a family. This shloka can also be viewed from the perspective that a person who is sad will always indulge in self-focused approach and a person who is happy will consider all other approaches.

The Gayatri Mantra in Hinduism also gives a subtle but clear message of inter-faith harmony. Varaniyam in the Mantra means that a person chooses the form of force or relationship with supreme in whichever form one wants to. It is clear message for inter-faith harmony.

Another parable of the blind men and an elephant, depicts that humans tend to claim absolute truth based on their limited, subjective experience as they ignore other people's limited, subjective experiences which may be equally true. Only when one takes in the ideas and concepts of all people in consideration will one get the exact picture.

He cited the Persian poet Rumi who said that the truth was a mirror in the hands of God. It fell, and broke into pieces. Everybody took a piece of it, and they looked at it and thought they had the truth. Only when each piece is taken and joined together the entire picture or absoluteness of mirror is clear. Going beyond inter-faith harmony, the philosophy of integral spirituality should be aspired for. Integral spirituality not only gives space for combining various philosophies based on their commonalities but it also respects and loves the differences that are there in the kaleidoscopic existence of our cultures. It is critical to understand that there may be differences in ritualistic paradigms of various religions but they have a common spiritual core of truth, love, compassion, justice, and non-violence that all of us must connect to. It is not only important to have inter-faith harmony for human-societal existence but it is necessary for individual human happiness.

Former Director, Intelligence Bureau Mr. D.C. Pathak presented his thoughts on the role of religion in the political sphere. Inter-faith harmony is important from national perspective in India but also from international perspective as horizons of faith related conflict have gone global. A turbulent domestic scene - created primarily by the projection of religion into politics - is keeping the progress of democratic India stunted. Political leadership appropriates religious supremacy. As a result,

it has become a challenge to keep religion out of politics in multi-religious society like India. India has several religious minorities but the malady of communal conflicts here seems to revolve round the Hindu-Muslim divide.

In a democratic setting there are three domains of life of a citizen - 'religious' that defines the personal sphere of relationship of any body with his or her God, 'social' that encourages harmonious relations with other citizens, and 'political' that gives the same freedom to every body to elect the rulers of the country. If the leadership of the community allows religion to create socio-political 'exclusivism' it is not democratic. We have examples of Muslim leaders successfully leading the Hindus politically. Appropriating religion in the name of politics is also in play in international arena. The Kashmir dispute was a territorial dispute which aggravated when it gained religious colours with the ouster of Pandits.

Hegemonic and egocentric political approaches need to be countered with alternative paradigms hinging on common grounds of living and respecting one another which are motivating and visionary to promote inter-faith reconciliation. The onus of creating inter-faith harmony cannot be left to our leaders, each one of us must be engaged. In order to promote a harmonious future inter-faith religious education must be incorporated in educational curriculums.


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