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- ❖ **Peace in Afghanistan**
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INSIDE

Editorial	
Challenging Times!	5
<i>B.K.</i>	
Afghanistan: No Peace without a Clear Vision	7
<i>Prof. Dr. Djawed Sangdel</i>	
Role of Indian Diaspora in the Development	9
<i>Bijay K. Pratihari</i>	
Understanding Hydropolitics in Central Asia	14
<i>Dr. Sanjeda Warsi & A. Q. Mallah</i>	
Mahatma Gandhi's Views on Western....	19
<i>Dr. Rajneesh</i>	
Covid-19 Pandemic & Online Education	23
<i>Dr. Mukund M. Mundargi</i>	
Paulo Freire's Educational Philosophy	27
<i>Dr. Bonnie Amonge Crerer</i>	
NPAs in Priority Sector in Indian Banks	30
<i>Prof (Dr,) Abhijit Pakira & Sri Prabir K. Dutta</i>	
Chronology of calendar and reforms	34
<i>Dr. Mallikarjun Shetty</i>	
National Rural Health Mission	37
<i>Basalingayya Swamy & Dr. Jaikishan Thaku</i>	
Perspectives on Affective Commitment.....	39
<i>Hanisha Bhagat & Dr. Mahima Thakur</i>	
Indu Sundaresan's Fictional Representation.....	47
<i>Ms. Pooja P. Halyal & Dr. C. A. Langare</i>	
Inter-Caste Marriage: the stigma and the law	50
<i>Reshma Basanna & Dr. Shanta B. Astige</i>	
Kuruba Community in Karnataka	52
<i>Narayan Ramanna & Dr. Sindhe Jaganath R</i>	
Social Intelligence Among the Male.....	54
<i>Mrs. Mamoni Hazarika & Dr. Mukut Hazarika</i>	

Challenging Times!

Currently, India is passing through one of the most crucial phases of its post-independence history, especially in the wake of havoc wreaked by two waves of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of loss of human lives and economic losses and the third wave is staring at us to happen, alarming rate of youth unemployment, failure of governance almost at all levels, economy witnessing unprecedented decline, controversy over Pegasus snooping and its resultant impact on national security, agrarian unrest with farmers protesting over eight months along with host of other socio-cultural issues assuming serious proportions. The cumulative impact of all these developments has rendered India to be pushed into the throes of the most challenging times

Callousness, inefficiency, poor health infrastructure to be coupled with lack of vision and any long-term health policy have proven to be major chinks in the armoury of India's health system that have been unraveled by the two waves of the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020 and first half of 2021. The havoc wreaked by the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in April-May 2021 that claimed lives of over two lakh people, and even by the end of July 2021 media reports indicate that number of persons daily infected has exceeded 30,000 with over 500 deaths reported daily, and with probability of third wave staring at us, we have not seemingly not learned any lessons. Union and State governments are courageous enough to declare that no deaths were reported due to lack of oxygen. What a wonderful example of governance!

India's economy is witnessing unprecedented crisis. Official circles attribute this to the two waves of COVID-19 pandemic, which can be true to some extent but not the whole truth because even prior to the visitation of the first wave of COVID-19 in early 2020, economy had already been treading a path of decline in almost all sectors and the rate of unemployment had already reached the zenith. Insistence of the present ruling dispensation in pursuing wrong priorities at the expense of strategic priorities designed to boost consumption, distribution and production have directly contributed to the decline of nation's economy. With shrinking fiscal resources to boost official revenue from taxation and GST, government has found an easy way of earning the revenue by hiking prices of petrol and diesel without realizing its impact on prices of essential commodities.

Eight months is a long period for the continuity of the protests being staged by the farmers around the nation's capital and these protesting farmers are determined to continue to press for the fulfilment of their demands of withdrawal of three anti-farmers' bills and demanding legal guarantee on MSP (minimum support prices) as per the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission. Central government's reluctance to accede to the demands of the protesting farmers is the major stumbling block. The prevailing deadlock is not in India's national interest. Democracy demands continuity of the dialogue and not imposition of monologue. Wisdom lies finding a solution and not prolonging it.

Interestingly, the revelations emanating from Pegasus snooping allegations have taken a serious turn just within a week of its appearance in the media on 18 July. The first week of the ongoing Monsoon Session of the Parliament has gone haywire, with ruckus and uproar in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha each working day and suspension of the session. This issue has afforded an opportunity for non-BJP Opposition parties to be united and insist on the Modi government to let the nation know the truth. Thus far, government has been in a denial mode and sheer wastage of public money on non-functioning of the Parliament is bad for the future of democracy and the Parliament. The dispensation at the helm is nurturing the hope that this issue will fizzle out like Rafael issue in 2019. However, it is interesting to wait and watch the fall-out of these developments, especially in the wake of forthcoming state assembly elections in 2022.

Mamata Banerji, the third-time chief minister of West Bengal had camped in Delhi for the first four-five days of the last week of July to get united non-BJP Opposition Parties against the BJP in the forthcoming state assembly elections and ensuing 2024 Lok Sabha elections. If she succeeds in this mission, it could be a wake-call for the BJP.

— BK