

MAURITIUS TIMES

• "Struggle is a never ending process. Freedom is never really won, you earn it and win it in every generation." -- Coretta Scott King



Hype v/s Reality

Despite all the chest thumping and self congratulatory kudos, the disquieting reality is that the country is facing a crisis. This is not the time for government to be in denial

By Mrinal Roy 📧 See Page 3

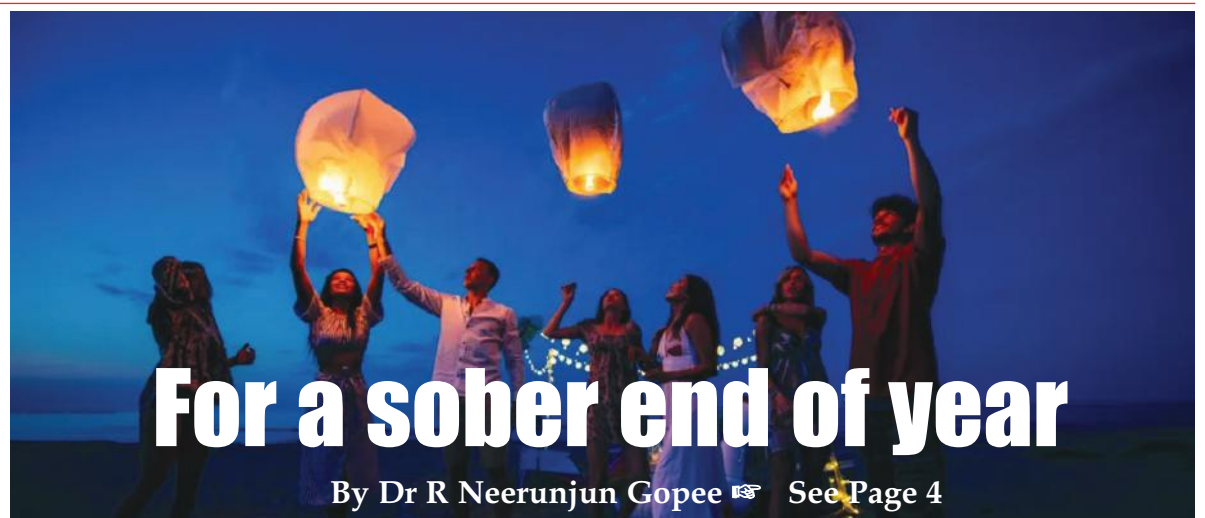
Interview: Catherine Boudet,
Directrice de communication et
marketing - ICTA



**“Dans les débats sur les
amendements à l’IBA,**

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avec beaucoup d’arguments victimaires,
démagogiques voire inexacts”

📧 Voir Page 8-9



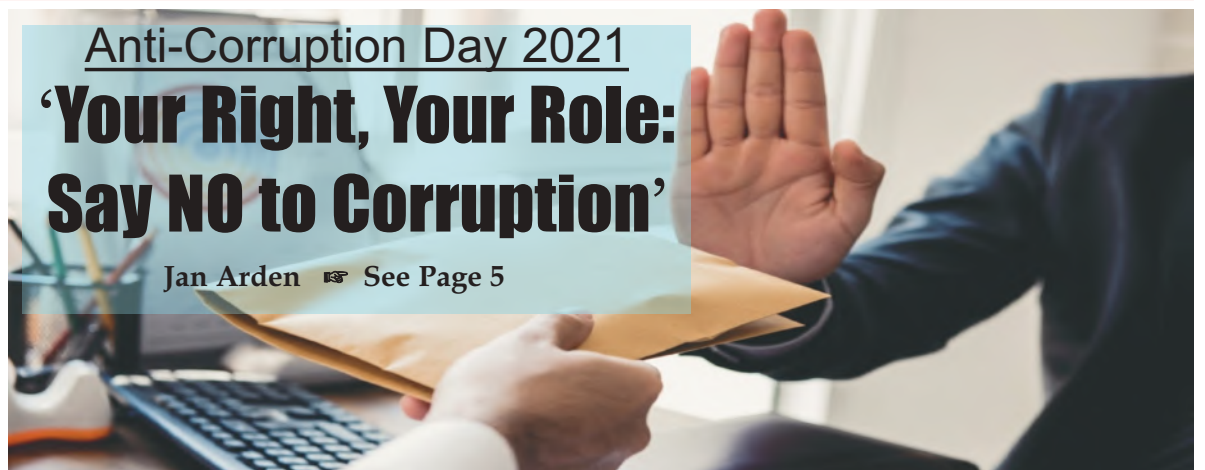
For a sober end of year

By Dr R Neerunjun Gopee 📧 See Page 4

Anti-Corruption Day 2021

**‘Your Right, Your Role:
Say NO to Corruption’**

Jan Arden 📧 See Page 5



We deserve better

The scourge of corruption is neither new nor rare. It has been around for long, since tackling corruption can indeed be difficult, because no party involved stands to gain by disclosure and both investigations and court proceedings tend to drag out over years. Once corruption is allowed to become systemic it's increasingly difficult to eliminate. Worse, should societal values get eroded, a culture of condoning corruption and a cynical view of our establishment develops in the population, making its elimination a very tall order indeed.

A public opinion survey, published by Transparency International ahead of International Anti-Corruption Day on 9 December, found that citizens in countries across the globe continue to see political parties as the institutions most compromised by corruption. In fact, public perception is that nothing really changes whenever political leaders and their parties are changed at the ballot. New faces come in, but the status quo does not change; policies and questionable, corrupt practices, once criticised by the same politicians while in opposition, become tolerated or justifiable when they win power. If the scourge cannot be pinned down to one political party, there is however a matter of degree as to the level to which one particular party/alliance or its leadership would be prepared to go down to collect the spoils and become prone to the control of vested interests, financiers and lobbies more concerned about their benefit than the public's interest.

What we have seen in recent years, besides the long list of irregularities that the Director of Audit signals every year in his report of the examination of various expenses incurred by the government for the running of its different services undertaken in different sectors, is mind-boggling. Billions of rupees have gone into infrastructure, development or redevelopment projects, emergency public procurements in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic tarnished by questionable procedures, favouritism of various kinds to political protégés, etc.

While public procurement processes and protocols can be by-passed by corrupt players some feel that at the core of the corruption scourge is opaque party and electoral campaign financing, with parties relying

on private funding from individuals and organisations and which allows financiers to wield significant influence over the political establishment with regard to policy making and the allocation of resources. Tied to this is the absence of transparency. In most cases where questionable dealings are suspected, there is one common factor: opacity. This is a practice that successive governments have been bequeathing to each other for a long enough time without redressing the situation through the introduction of a Right to Information Act.

There is also the failure of our investigating agencies to go to the bottom of cases where there is a strong suspicion of corrupt dealings. In fact, the record of ICAC leaves much to be desired in that regard. From its inexplicable turnaround in the MedPoint case, to the list of affairs where it is yet to be known where its inquiries stand, such as the Dufry scandal (2015); the Alvaro Sobrinho scandal (2018); the Sugar Insurance Fund Board's highly excessive overpayment of land v/s valuation scandal (2018); the Choomka affair (2017); the Yerrigadoo/Bet 365 scandal (2018); the Glen Agliotti affair (2019), and finally the Serenity Gate/Film Rebate Scheme scandal (2019), the St Louis Redevelopment Project... all of these are blatant examples of questionable practices usually resulting from departures from pre-established norms.

We understand the necessity of caution with regard to information that may prejudice ongoing enquiries, but the absence of public briefings or regular communiqués about the progress of major enquiries are hardly the basis for public or media confidence in our institutions. ICAC may or should take a long cold look at how it could better handle communication about enquiries of obvious public interest rather than let matters drift along under such discretionary cloaks as to allow the worst fears and suspicions to spread in many quarters.

The trials and tribulations endured by the population during the pandemic, the numerous tragedies that have littered our collective memories or the hundreds of millions we pay for wage support, vaccines or ventilators, make the idea of fast and corrupt operators making merry with public funds with barely any consequence is a profoundly galling thought. The country deserves better.

The Conversation

Science changes - and so should rational behaviour

Good science doesn't eliminate uncertainty: it explains it



As the pandemic has progressed, so has scientists' understanding of why masks matter and how best to protect against COVID. James D. Morgan/Getty Images

The world around us, and the way researchers study and understand it, changes all the time. The constant change means that what we know through science also shifts.

Take the airborne nature of SARS-CoV-2: early in the Covid-19 pandemic key advisory groups, such as the World Health Organisation, assumed that respiratory droplets were the dominant mode of transmission. This led to advice on and practices of social distancing, hand-washing, wiping surfaces, wearing plastic face shields, and putting up plastic barriers between customers and servers in shops.

As more research was conducted the evidence emerged that SARS-CoV-2 is airborne. It can be transmitted both at closer and longer ranges. So, while social distancing remained important, mask wearing and air ventilation became other crucial tools to fight the spread of Covid-19.

This shifting of knowledge can lead to uncertainty for people when making decisions based on evidence. But it can be done, if everyone - from ordinary citizens to journalists reporting on big issues and researchers trying to communicate their findings - accepts that science changes, and behaves accordingly.

Citizens need to develop the habit of asking questions about the research evidence and never taking headlines at face value. Journalists need to be well trained in understanding research, asking critical questions and communicating findings in a way that allows the public to understand the whole picture.

Researchers also need to be better at communicating the value of complete evidence bases over single studies. They need to be honest about the uncertainty within findings, and findings that keep emerging from bodies of evidence.

At the Africa Centre for Evidence, hosted by the University of Johannesburg in South Africa, we conduct research about the use of evidence in decision-making to reduce poverty and inequalities in our country and continent. We have published work about the use of evidence synthesis as central to decision-making. Our experiences of working with governments have underscored the importance of considering the body of evidence when making decisions, instead of single studies. We have also seen how important it is to engage users on what is considered as evidence for use in decision-making.

One part of the story

So, why does science shift?

First, because one part of the story is not the whole story. In almost all cases, a single research study can only answer part of the question. And the reliability, validity and ethics of that single piece of research need to be carefully examined to check the accuracy and usefulness of its findings.

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● Cont. on page 11

Mauritius Times

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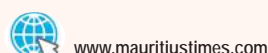
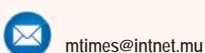
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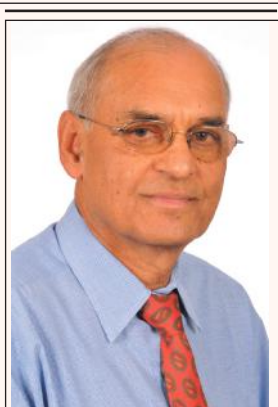
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Dr R Neerunjun Gopee

We are living in the consumerist society, and are therefore expected to consume. What we don't realize is that in the process we may consume ourselves. In former days, the killer disease tuberculosis was known as consumption or consumptive di-sease. The most common form was tuberculosis of the lungs. It literally ate away the lungs; in due course, without effective treatment, the patient would visibly shrink as the disease

took its toll and finally kill: the disease had consumed the patient. Covid-19 is doing a faster job, as it too attacks and destroys the lungs with overwhelming rapidity.

A similar rot currently affects the modern world. Consumerism has gone berserk, whetting appetites to beyond normal satiety levels. And in fact, this pathological social trend is also largely responsible for most of the bodily and mental ailments that are on an upswing, what are known as the diseases of affluence – another kind of epidemic, more insidious but no less a killer by the hundreds of millions. Everybody now knows about them: stress, high cholesterol levels, heart di-sease, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, cancer, depression, dementia and so on.

'How much is enough?' is the title of a book which was published in its 'Alert Series' by the Worldwatch Institute in 1992. Its findings and analyses are as re-levant today as they were then, perhaps even more because we are in materialist overdrive – and overkill. Noting how people have come to measure success by the amount they consume, the author, Alan Durning, draws attention to a neglected conclusion based upon millennial human experience and wisdom: that 'after a point, more consumption does not equal more fulfillment.'

Durning decries our 'expanding appe-tites for the artefacts of society' which do not help us to find 'purpose and meaning in life.' That is why he refers to 'synthetic salvation,' as opposed to the real goal of life which is about finding peace of mind and peace in the heart – and these, as we very well know, have got nothing to do with what we eat or drink, how many objects we possess, how much we can show off and so on. They leave us more in pieces than at peace!

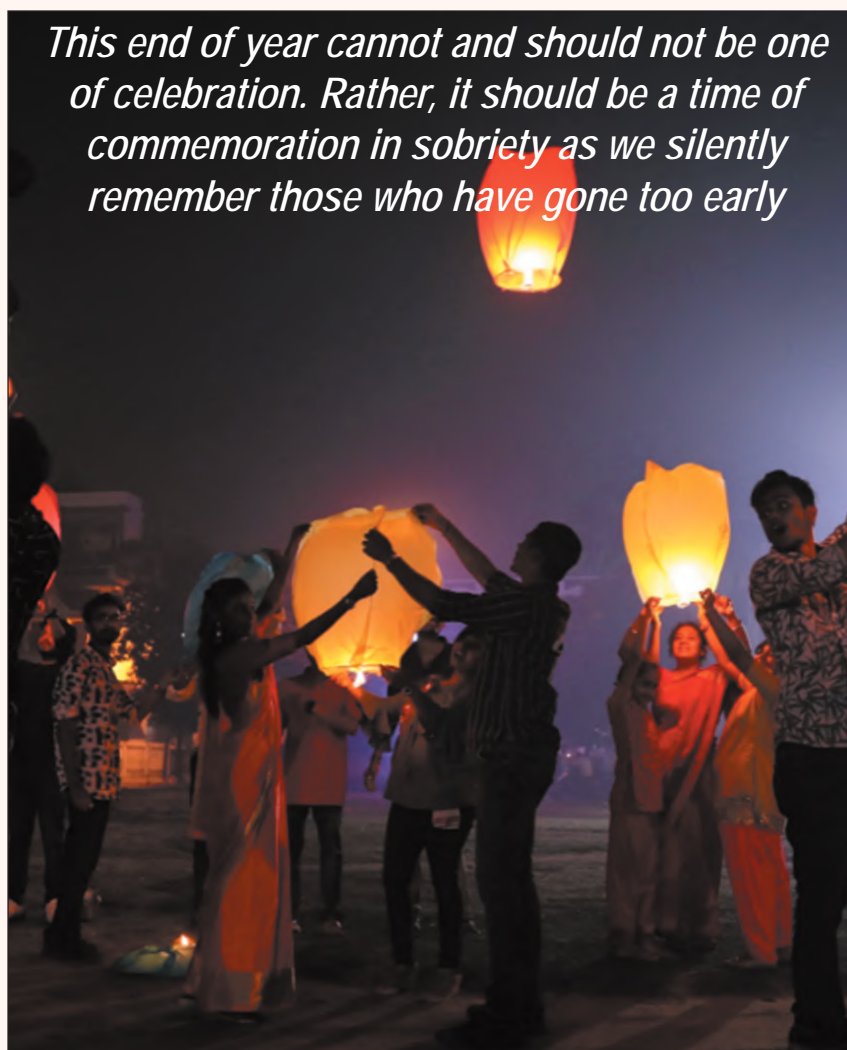
Day and night we are bombarded with messages which stare at us from billboards and are thrust into the privacy of our homes via TV, radio and social media, and which promote a 'restless craving for more by portraying the high consumption lifestyle as a model to be emulated.' We associate social status with whatever is bigger and gaudily brighter. In particular, 'advertisers play on the insecurities and self-doubt of women' to propose many goods of doubtful worth, let alone the prices!

Even children are not left out, being targeted in various ads which are aimed at the pockets of the parents, alas often too obliging. This cultivation of needs is in fact a breeding of wants: whether YOU want it or not, YOU must have it! It is all right if one can afford (up to a point: for just because you can does not mean that you must), but what if one cannot? Then you chase, maim, destroy, kill if need be to sa-tisfy your artificially aroused appetite.

Social boundaries have crumbled. Society is not like a faceless corporation, where in the interest of productivity and profit the 'boundary-less' culture and structure have been found to be best suited. In society, everyone has got

For a sober end of year

This end of year cannot and should not be one of celebration. Rather, it should be a time of commemoration in sobriety as we silently remember those who have gone too early



“It is an interesting phenomenon of our times that the views of scientific thinkers are converging with those of traditional philosophers and thinkers in condemning most vehemently the fallacy that more consumption equals happiness. A reasonable amount of work, adequate leisure and harmonious social relationships are the foundations of a stable and happy life. Our needs can be met by levels of consumption that do not dig oversize holes in our pockets or devalue our lives...”

certain duties and responsibilities. In the pursuit of rights, these have been forgotten. Children are turned into little adults, and adults beget childish tantrums. 70-year-olds want to look and behave as if they were half the age, forgetting the adage *si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait* – 'if only youth knew, and old age could.'

One has only to watch some of the programmes that are shown on TV to appreciate what kind of distortions of the natural cycle of life are being peddled as the norms of so-called civilized living. Instead of aging gracefully and graciously, some people want to live a virtual life of vicarious youthfulness. Pity indeed, at an age when maturity and experience ought to be translated into wisdom for guiding the younger generations towards a more decent, more meaningful life.

All the social ills, symptoms of a profound social disease, that we are victims of are the result of this sustained and excessive multiplication of desires: lust for money and power, drugs, prostitution, rape, theft, breakdown of families, divorces, murders... an endless list. So, if a girl does not respond to your catcalls, you trail her, rape and kill her... whether or not you were ever fit to be her suitor. And then you will find a doctor to declare you

insane at the material time, and a lawyer who will vehemently canvass your human rights, and Rights (but not righteous) International will make sure that in prison you receive the 5-star status appropriate to your expectations... Criminals are portrayed as martyrs and instant heroes. Victims become the guilty, and are demonized. Criminals with loaded pockets hire the best lawyers to extricate them and send them back into society to continue their ensnaring and destructive prowls, targeting youth, the frail and defenceless elderly, women's handbags/necklaces and mobile phones.

If businesses have to advertise to sell, so be it. But it is our duty to educate ourselves and our children so that we maintain a balance when we go out to act on what the TV ads or the billboards try to tempt us with. How many households are in unnecessary debt as a result of the hire-purchase mania? How many times haven't we heard *nou ine alle faire ene ti letour labas, be dans guette-guetter ine achete bannz affaire ki pas ti bizin même à vrai dire...* (we just went to do some window shopping, but while looking around we ended picking up things which in truth we didn't even need). As long as we continue to confuse the pleasure of the senses with true happiness, so long will we go on our useless sprees and steeping ourselves in debt through unnecessary expense. Perhaps the one positive fallout of Covid-19 is that it may put a curb on this mania by limiting people's outings.

It is an interesting phenomenon of our times that the views of scientific thinkers are converging with those of traditional philosophers and thinkers in condemning most vehemently the fallacy that more consumption equals happiness. A reasonable amount of work, adequate leisure and harmonious social relationships are the foundations of a stable and happy life. Our needs can be met by levels of consumption that do not dig oversize holes in our pockets or devalue our lives. And let us not forget the many hypocrisies of modern society: one billboard says *roule brite mort vite* – 'speed kills' – and hardly some metres away another one will be displaying the charms of this or that brand of alcohol. Of course, there is no contradiction here: consumer society, remember?

The tragedy currently afflicting us -- widespread disease and untold suffering, and a mounting death toll as never seen in living memory, should be for us an opportunity for aligning our behaviour accordingly – for this end of year cannot and should not be one of celebration. Rather, it should be a time of commemoration in sobriety as we silently remember those who have gone too early. For the rest of us who have escaped from the mortal spikes of Covid, let us at least choose not to kill ourselves prematurely through consumption overdose.



Mrinal Roy

Hype v/s Reality

Despite all the chest thumping and self congratulatory kudos, the disquieting reality is that the country is facing a crisis. This is not the time for government to be in denial

Nowhere in the democratic world are prime time news basically monopolized by a tedious rehash of large extracts of the Prime Minister's speeches and declarations including his speeches in Parliament, whose debates and proceedings are already broadcast live in a dedicated channel. Cohorts of sycophants are mobilized to unabashedly parrot on State TV the same praise on every contested decision taken by government. Such abusive and partisan use of the national public broadcaster financed from public funds is unprecedented. No wonder people switch off to other news channels. Is this the democratic Mauritius our parents fought for?

No government in the country has gone to such lengths to continuously portray itself, its decried governance, its contested policy decisions, its management of the Covid-19 pandemic and the affairs of the State in a good light through daily spin doctoring and propaganda on national TV at public expense. Every questionable means is used to blow its own trumpet and shroud controversial decisions likely to trigger an outcry, in opacity. A Covid-19 mortality table was even dug out and used recently to morbidly crow, in a context of rising deaths, that Mauritius is doing better in terms of death toll than more developed countries like the United States or Brazil. The rising death toll and the unabated spread of infection in the country has however severely dented the contrived image painstakingly built through daily hype. The hasty rush towards economic normality has taken a heavy toll. The new Covid variant, Omicron, risks upsetting the apple cart.

The government knows better than anyone that spin doctoring akin to fake news is not reality. The reality is that, despite government's self congratulatory rhetoric, its management of the pandemic in the country is facing growing and scathing criticisms. People and in particular the elderly are scared to go out to avoid being infected as the virus and its deadlier Delta variant seems to be everywhere.

Employees are frightened to commute or go to work as so many are infected at the place of work. In general, people do not want to be infected by Covid-19 as they are terrified at the prospect of being treated in hospital as so many infected persons of different age groups have succumbed while being treated in specialized treatment units in hospitals. People are even afraid to go for their booster jabs because of the crowds at the government vaccination centres. An increasing number of people are opting to be vaccinated in private clinics.

Public trust

This adverse public perception of the country's health care services, which is one of the key pillars of our welfare state with a budget of Rs 14.5 billion, has been caused by incriminating first-hand reports from patients treated for Covid-19 in the specialized units in the country's hospitals. This is unacceptable. The onus is therefore on those in charge of the healthcare services in the



Covid-19 - Health services overwhelmed. Pic - Relief Web

“People and in particular the elderly are scared to go out to avoid being infected as the virus and its deadlier Delta variant seems to be everywhere. Employees are frightened to commute or go to work as so many are infected at the place of work. In general, people do not want to be infected by Covid-19 as they are terrified at the prospect of being treated in hospital as so many infected persons of different age groups have succumbed while being treated in specialized treatment units in hospitals...”

hospitals and specialized units to rebuild public trust in the quality and competence of services and care provided through rigorous oversight and the benchmarking of health care centres to world's best practices.

Our hospitals and treatment centres can have all the beds required, the medicine and treatment protocols necessary to treat the various stages of infection as well as the oxygen and ventilators needed, but what comforts and makes a difference to patients and their families is the quality and standards of humanity and care of the treatment provided.

Why not for example use the 'Prevention & Treatment Protocols for Covid-19' successfully used by the US Front Line Covid-19 Critical Care Alliance made of cheaper and easily accessible medicine?

Science driven

Despite all the chest thumping and self congratulatory kudos, the disquieting reality is that the country is facing a crisis. This is not the time for government to be in denial or to underplay the gravity of the virus spread in the country, now exacerbated by the threat posed and economic fallout of the new variant, Omicron, which has already triggered a domino effect in the world. In a pandemic, there is no bio-bubble for individual countries. The pandemic can only be stemmed if it is contained in every country across the world. One of the cardinal lessons learnt from the pandemic is that its competent and apt management must be science driven. It cannot be managed by politicians.

Novel research frameworks and interdisciplinary col-

laboration involving scientists from different fields have been a game changer. A wide range of scientists from a broad range of disciplines such as medicine and pharmacy, molecular and cellular biology, microbiology and biochemistry, genetics, immunology, pharmacology, nutrition, psychology, epidemiology, health and nursing care services, statistics and computational sciences, etc., are actively involved in finding effective solutions for containing and stemming the Covid-19 pandemic.

The research for new vaccines and treatment drugs continues. Doctors, pulmonary physicians, specialists in critical care, emergency medicine and health care professionals involved in the fight against the pandemic must continuously keep tabs on latest research work, data and the latest validated treatments in order to better contain the pandemic and provide patients in the country with the best treatment available. This informed decision making has to be taken by scientists and specialists in the field.

Clamour for transparency and accountability

The state of the pandemic in the world with a fifth wave of coronavirus infection in many countries in Europe such as Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Spain, the Czech Republic and Slovakia and surges in infection in various countries from Switzerland to Russia and Vietnam has brought the Covid-19 response strategies of countries across the world under scrutiny. There is therefore a legitimate clamour for transparency and accountability.

In the UK, the House of Commons Science & Technology and Health and Social Care Committees released a scathing report called 'Coronavirus: Lessons Learned to Date' in October 2021 on the government Covid-19 pandemic response, describing it as one of 'the most important public health failures the United Kingdom has ever experienced'. The report listed a long list of failures. Ministers had delayed implementing the initial response, partly because they were viewing the crisis through 'a veil of ignorance.' Care homes were effectively abandoned. The report described how 'a fatalistic view of inevitable spread and the implicit acceptance of roughly 800 deaths a week far higher than in European countries greatly impacted the pandemic response.' Many UK scientists expressed concern at the time. Politicians who challenged government policy were attacked. This all smacks so blatantly déjà vu.

In Brazil, senators approved a 1300-page report to recommend charging President Jair Bolsonaro over his handling of the devastating Covid pandemic, which caused Brazil's death toll to be the second highest in the world after that of the United States. The report has been handed to the chief prosecutor, a Bolsonaro appointee. Human lives matter above everything else.

● Cont. on page 11

Anti-Corruption Day 2021

'Your Right, Your Role: Say NO to Corruption'

Populations battered by the pandemic are losing trust in vital functions of the State and increasingly cynical of officialdom

Jan Arden

The UN, in collaboration with anti-corruption agencies around the world, will commemorate International Anti-Corruption Day on Dec 9. The global campaign will be advanced under the theme 'Your right, your role: Say NO to corruption'. It rests squarely, in the tryingly morbid period which set in since early 2020, on the immense fraudulent and lucrative financial benefits that the global pandemic has wrought on nations around the world, Mauritius being unfortunately no exception.

Populations had already witnessed, here as elsewhere, how the fabled instruments, the ACAs, or Anti-Corruption Agencies, that were specifically created to prevent, curb and handle expeditiously and with effective results, the risks and threats posed by corruption of public procurement processes through a variety of astute means, turned out to be more akin to hollow drums than feared guard-dogs.

Mauritius has been the signatory of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption since early this century (2003) when, after the urgent dismantling of the Economic Crime Office, the ICAC was set afoot with a legislation that seemed to sit uncomfortably within or atop our Constitution as later required tweaking would demonstrate.

Advice in the form of workshops or commentary on draft laws would therefore have been available during the teething years of that major new instrument to prevent and combat corrupt practices between two complicit actors, an active private sector corrupter and a usually passive beneficiary of the illicit financial gains to be added in thwarting public good governance procedures for that "client".

Advice on bills and regulations, including on whistleblower protection or upgrading integrity in public sector procurement processes would also have been available easily, either through networking or more formal exchanges.

After that teething period, leaving aside politicians who may have their own agendas and possibly, a shifting perspective when in government or on Opposition benches, does the population really believe that our ACA has delivered over the years on the high expectations entrusted on its shoulders?

Other than some high-profile drug arrests brought about by Customs, the MRA or field intelligence of the NSS variety, some unexceptional asset recovery and menial corruption cases of tea-monies, have we obtained deliverables commensurate with the Agency's annual budget or the expertise of its specialized staff?

And when some occasional, again highly mediated major scandals, erupt to prominence, is the population forced to assist as impotent observers, until the matter



subsidies or drifts away in the sublime indifference of the authorities, showing little willingness or zeal to cajole or whip the Agency's leadership and its non-functional Parliamentary supervision into greater agility?

It is perhaps fitting that one of the recommendations of the United Nations Convention against Corruption regarding permits, various applications and public procurements was to "enhance access of general public to information, including through adopting a new law on the access to information that would fill the existing gaps, including grounds for refusal, time frames and an appeal mechanism. In addition, raise awareness among the general public regarding their right to request information". It goes on to recommend - "continue the efforts to engage in consultations with civil society with regard to the development of new laws, such as a law on the access to information and a law on the funding of political parties".

The last self-assessment survey and site audit of our anti-corruption standing, conducted sometime in April 2017 "indicated that at the time of review, Mauritius was compliant to almost all the mandatory provisions of the different articles" except the above two key provisions amongst a few others, where our institutional response was curtly put as "under consideration". We can all gauge whether that "consideration" is still ongoing five years down the road, as this government manifestly is reticent to either freedom of information or public consultations, engagement and participation of civil society.

If that was not enough of a matter for concern, then certainly the pandemic has raised stakes and the gap between what the population should expect and what has been delivered has ballooned to outlandish proportions in an island nation that two years ago was boisterously posturing to the status of a high-income country, with governance, transparency and accountability structures that should, in principle, match such a high calling.

Media and news headlines across many countries

and continents have in the past two years seen bursts of corruption scandals, particularly aggravating when populations and their freedoms, if not their health, livelihoods and lives, were at risk daily.

To its credit the World Bank did react to the inefficacy of ACAs and the Corruption abuses during the pandemic through a comprehensive report ('Enhancing Government Effectiveness and Transparency: The Fight Against Corruption') issued in September 2020 based on dozens of case country analyses.

The general setting was evidently about how "Corruption has a disproportionate impact on the poor and most vulnerable, increasing costs and reducing access to services, including health, education and justice. Corruption also impedes investments needed to achieve growth and development objectives while eroding trust in government and undermining the social contract."

But one of the key themes concerned the poor performance of the national ACAs (titled 'Anti-corruption agencies: are they effective for reducing corruption risks?') bringing into the sharper focus of the WB the questions of public procurement failures and the huge associated corruption scandals. Obviously, the context and scale of the scandals rife during the pandemic could not be ignored.

Earlier this year, Transparency International in July 2021 released a survey of some 40,000 respondents spread across the 27 EU countries: the 'Global Corruption Barometer- EU 2021' presents one of the largest, most detailed sets of public opinion data on people's views and experiences of corruption and bribery in the region. It might have come as a shocker to many that more than 50% of EU residents believe that government contracts are awarded through fraudulent and corrupt practices.

To quote, "According to European Anti-Fraud Office, contracts were awarded with 'simplified, accelerated, or restricted procedures, all of which could be open more easily to fraud' during the pandemic. With the introduction of fast-track procedures, risks of mismanagement increased. People watched procurement scandals unfold across the continent, revealing cases of politicians profiting from procurement deals, large contracts being awarded to companies with no known experience in health care or even alleged fraudsters."

A familiar scene here too and some important questions for our body politic and top administrators to mull over. Transparency, good governance and anti-corruption is a growing concern of international bodies. Populations battered by the pandemic are losing trust in vital functions of the State and increasingly cynical of officialdom. What values would parents who enriched themselves through fraudulent and corrupt means transmit? What should we do about such a seriously impaired situation?

Does Omicron pose higher risks for infants than other coronavirus variants?

Data from an area in South Africa hard-hit by the Omicron variant of the coronavirus has shown a high number of hospital admissions of infants under 2 years old, raising concerns that the variant may pose risks to young children.

South African scientists have said they cannot yet confirm a link between Omicron and the high admissions of infants, which could be due to other factors. Here is what we do and do not know about the issue, reports Reuters.

What is causing concern?

The data, released by South Africa's National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), shows that 52 infants under age 2 were among 452 Covid-19 patients admitted in Tshwane - the metropolitan area that includes the capital Pretoria - in the period between Nov. 14 and 28, a higher number than for any other age group.

However, taking into account the size of the populations of the various age groups, the risk of admission was higher for people over age 60.

Have the admissions been linked to Omicron?

No. Only a small percentage of positive test samples in South Africa are being submitted for genomic sequencing to detect the variant due to limited capacity. That means we cannot know for sure whether



South African doctors say the rapid increase in Covid-19 cases attributed to the new omicron variant is resulting in mostly mild symptoms. Pic - AP

the infants in hospital were infected with Omicron, NICD scientists have said.

There is also uncertainty about whether all of the infants included in the data are infected with Covid-19, as not all are tested for the virus, scientists said.

For practical reasons, infants who present with respiratory symptoms are treated as if they had Covid-19, but they could be sick with another disease such as flu.

How sick were the admitted infants?

The data shows that 29% of Covid-19 admissions in the 0-to-4 age group had severe disease - a proportion similar to that in several other age groups, and significantly lower than the percentage of

severe disease among patients over 60.

Among those age 4 or younger, 1% of admissions resulted in death, according to the data. However, the total number of admissions in that group was 70, making it unclear what the 1% figure represents.

The NICD did not respond to a query from Reuters about that and other elements of the data, saying it would issue a new report on paediatric admissions later this week.

Should we worried about a potential Omicron link?

Asked whether people should be alarmed by the infant admissions numbers, Professor Anne von Gottberg, clinical microbiologist at the NICD, told Reuters:

"Not yet."

"It looks like in fact some of those admissions might have started before the emergence of Omicron," she said. "We are concerned enough that we are looking at the data very, very carefully, but at the moment I'm not too sure that we can link it definitively to Omicron."

What else could be going on?

The province of Gauteng, where Tshwane is located, has experienced an increase in flu cases in the past month.

"We need to be really careful to look at the other respiratory infections and diseases to work out why were children being admitted. Were they being tested as they were being admitted or was it precautionary?" said von Gottberg.

NICD scientists also said that parents with sick babies and infants were quick to bring them to hospital, while patients in other age groups were less likely to rush in.

When will we know more?

The NICD said it was preparing a report on paediatric admissions which should be available by the end of the week.

The World Health Organization said on Wednesday it expected to have data on Omicron's transmissibility within days, but scientists said it could take two-to-four weeks to learn more about the variant.

Trump tested Covid positive days before 1st presidential debate, reveals book

Former US President Donald Trump had tested positive for the coronavirus disease, days before his maiden presidential debate with challenger Joe Biden last year, according to a new book which is written by his then-chief of staff Mark Meadows. As per the report by the UK daily -- The Guardian, which obtained an advance copy of The Chief's Chief, a memoir by Meadows, Trump had tested positive for Covid-19 just three days before his September 29, 2020 election debate with Biden.

The initial symptoms were mild and were taken to be a cold, the upcoming book recounts.

Meadows also wrote that the positive Covid-19 test was quickly followed by a negative, shortly before the presidential debate.

On October 2, Trump announced on Twitter he and his wife Melania had tested positive for Covid-19. However, despite the negative test, as claimed in the report, Trump fell seriously sick due to the infection and was flown to the presidential facility at Walter Reed National Military Medical Hospital a day later. He received intensive treatment for three nights there, reports Hindustan Times.

According to Meadows' account, the



Former US President Donald Trump. Pic - i.insider.com

positive result came through just as Trump was leaving the White House for a campaign rally in Pennsylvania on September 26.

A second test, that Meadows said was a more accurate kind, gave a negative result shortly afterwards. Trump took this as "full permission" to continue his schedule, including that night's rally and the Biden debate three days later, Meadows said in his book.

The latest developments have raised fresh questions on Trump about potential safety risks faced by the attendees of the debate. If the claims are confirmed, it would further show that the Trump administration, which has already faced heavy criticism for

showing negligence in managing the pandemic, did not take the virus seriously.

According to the book, Trump's campaign also did not inform the debate organisers about the positive test. "I didn't want to alarm the public," Meadows wrote in the book explaining why he allowed Trump to continue with his schedule after the second, negative test.

Meanwhile, Trump has denied the claims. In a statement issued on Wednesday, Trump said, "The story of me having Covid prior to, or during, the first debate is Fake News. In fact, a test revealed that I did not have Covid prior to the debate," he said.

'Taiwan citizens being deported to mainland under China pressure'

Beijing has pressured foreign governments to deport hundreds of Taiwan nationals to China, a new report found, in what human rights activists describe as a "hunt for Taiwanese".

More than 600 Taiwanese were extradited from various countries to China between 2016 and 2019 in an effort to "undermine Taiwanese sovereignty", rights group Safeguard Defenders said in a report on Tuesday.

China claims self-ruled democratic Taiwan as its territory.

China and Taiwan agreed in 2009 that police from both sides would return overseas suspects to their respective territories. But Beijing began to increasingly ignore this agreement after the election of Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen in 2016, reports Agencies.

Safeguard Defenders said Beijing had pressured governments to extradite hundreds of Taiwanese mostly accused of telecoms fraud to China, despite efforts by the Taiwan government and the UN Human Rights Council to prevent the forced transfers. Those extradited to China faced "arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearances, and forced televised confessions", the NGO said.

Separately, Chinese warplanes made 159 incursions into Taiwan's air defence zone in November according to AFP's database, the second-highest month on record.

*Contd on page 7

World Aids Day 2021: UN calls for ending inequalities to fight epidemic

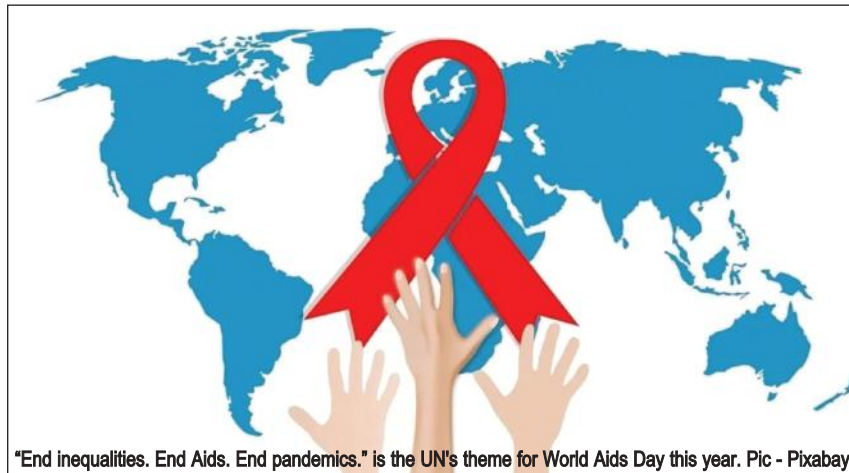
As the globe marks World Aids Day on Wednesday, concerns remain over inequalities and a wait for vaccine to prevent the disease that has claimed millions of lives since discovered in early 80s.

World Aids Day was first observed in 1988. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC) described it as the "first-ever global health day" that was observed. The occasion is meant to serve as an opportunity for the world to turn their attention towards the epidemic, besides creating awareness about the disease and working towards ending the stigma surrounding it, reports Hindustan Times.

The UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations programme on HIV and Aids that is leading global efforts towards ending the disease by 2030, on the occasion called for ending global inequalities that "drive AIDS and other pandemics around the world".

"End inequalities. End Aids. End pandemics." is the theme for this year's World Aids Day as conceptualised by the UN.

"Forty years since the first AIDS cases were reported, HIV still threatens the world. Today, the world is off track from delivering on the shared commitment to end AIDS by 2030 not because of a lack of knowledge or tools to beat AIDS, but because of structural inequalities that obstruct proven solutions to HIV prevention and treatment," said UNAIDS.



"End inequalities. End Aids. End pandemics." is the UN's theme for World Aids Day this year. Pic - Pixabay

UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres also called upon the global community to commit themselves towards ending inequalities and ending Aids. "On this World AIDS Day, we focus attention on the inequalities that drive HIV and AIDS. It is still possible to end the epidemic by 2030. But, that will require stepped-up action and greater solidarity," he said in his message.

Ending AIDS, along with tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases, by 2030 is one of the key targets and indicators of the third sustainable development goal of the UN to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages".

As far as vaccines are concerned, there is still none to protect people

from the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) even after 35 years of the discovery of the disease. Lack of political will and massive investment as seen in developing Covid vaccines, besides the complexity of the virus, are largely blamed for the missing AIDS vaccine research.

Important data

As many as 1.5 million people were newly infected with AIDS and 6,80,000 lost their lives due to related illnesses in 2020, which also saw the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic across the world. Also, as of 2020, 37.7 million people were found to be living with AIDS.

Further, 53 per cent of all people living with AIDS were women and girls, data from the UN shows. Close to 6.1 million people were unaware that they were infected with the disease as of 2020.

Twitter bans sharing images, videos of private individuals without consent in latest policy update

With Parag Agrawal becoming the new CEO of Twitter, the company seems to be making new policy changes.

According to TechCrunch, Twitter has updated its private information safety policy to ban sharing images or videos of private individuals without their consent.

The update was announced on the official account of Twitter Safety.



"Sharing images is an important part of folks' experience on Twitter. People should have a choice in determining whether or not a photo is shared publicly. To that end we are expanding the scope of our Private Information Policy. Beginning today, we will not allow the sharing of private media, such as images or videos of private individuals without their consent. Publishing people's private info is also prohibited under the policy, as is threatening or incentivizing others to do so," the post read.

This policy update will "help curb the misuse of media to harass, intimidate, and reveal the identities of private individuals, which disproportionately impacts women, activists, dissidents, and members of minority communities."

Twitter clarified that it may remove content intended for harassment in line with its existing policies against abusive behaviour, which also ban sharing non-consensual nude images, reports ANI.

The company also said that when deciding whether to remove content about public figures, it will assess whether this information is already available in other public media, like TV and newspapers.

Compiled by Doojesh Ramlallah

Pakistan PM Imran Khan bars ministers from foreign visits: Report



Pakistan's prime minister Imran Khan. Pic - www.geo.tv

Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan has barred members of the federal cabinet from travelling abroad without permission, stating that he himself was not undertaking foreign visits, local media reported on Wednesday.

According to The Express Tribune, National Assembly Member (MNA) Riaz Fatyana's trip to Glasgow for the global climate summit and his allegations of a brawl were among matters that came in for discussion during the cabinet meeting.

The Prime Minister said that when he was not undertaking foreign visits, the ministers of his cabinet should also avoid such visits, reports ANI.

Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry also said that MNAs and senators travel abroad more than the ministers.

Responding to this, Imran Khan said that even the government MNAs and senators should not go on foreign trips. "Government affairs should be the first priority for us," the Pakistan

Prime Minister said.

Meanwhile, alarmed over the Omicron strain of Covid-19, Pakistan has announced a new vaccination plan to counter the global threat under which booster shots will be given to immunocompromised people, healthcare workers and those aged over 50 years, according to The News International.

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Interview: Catherine Boudet, Directrice de communication et marketing - ICTA

“Dans les débats sur les amendements à l'IBA, il y a un discours qui est devenu viral avec beaucoup d'arguments victimaires, démagogiques voire inexacts”

La liberté d'expression est fondamentale dans toute démocratie. Par conséquent, quand des lois sont proposées au Parlement pour réguler le travail difficile des journalistes, des manifestations et des revendications fusent de toutes parts. Étant donné l'appel des manifestants à Maurice contre le projet d'amendement de l'*Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) Act*, voté mardi dernier, nous avons invité Dr Catherine Boudet, spécialiste en science politique, et directrice de communication et marketing de l'ICTA pour nous éclairer à ce propos. Pandémie oblige, cet entretien a eu lieu uniquement par e-mail.

Mauritius Times: En d'autres circonstances, on vous aurait très probablement vu prendre une position ferme contre le projet d'amendement de l'*Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) Act*, voté mardi dernier, ce qui a soulevé un tollé de la part de certains mouvements de la société civile et de l'opposition politique. Est-ce que vos convictions profondes restent les mêmes malgré votre nomination au poste de responsable du marketing et de la communication chez l'ICTA ?

Catherine Boudet : Est-ce qu'auparavant j'aurais pris position contre le projet d'amendement, probablement pas, non. Ceux qui me connaissent savent que je ne hurle pas avec les loups et je ne bêle pas avec les moutons. Dans les débats sur les amendements à l'IBA, il y a un discours qui est devenu viral avec beaucoup d'arguments victimaires, démagogiques voire inexacts. Donc sur cette base je ne pense pas que j'aurais aboyé avec la meute.

Ma méthodologie, étant de formation Sciences Po, a toujours été de prendre le contre-pied des discours dominants afin de favoriser la réflexion constructive. D'ailleurs, vous remarquerez que, dans mes analyses, j'ai toujours donné le pour et le contre ; je n'ai jamais monté de dossiers à charge, contrairement à ce qui se pratique ces jours-ci dans la presse et sur les réseaux sociaux.

Et puisque vous parlez de mes convictions, elles restent invariables : je me situe toujours du point de vue de l'intérêt général. J'ai travaillé comme scientifique, journaliste et analyste politique pour la société civile aussi. Aujourd'hui, je suis honorée de travailler pour une institution mauricienne telle que l'Autorité régulatrice du secteur des technologies de l'information. C'est une suite logique dans mon parcours.

Cependant, vous parlez de «nomination». Or, il s'agissait d'un recrutement. Les entretiens de recrutement se sont tenus devant un panel de professionnels de différents secteurs, y compris des professionnels de la com-

munication du secteur privé. Et je peux vous dire que les échanges avec les membres de ce panel étaient de très haut niveau.

Maintenant ce qui change, c'est qu'en entrant à l'ICTA, j'ai un devoir de réserve qui engage éthiquement ma personne. J'ai d'ailleurs déclaré officiellement que je ne pourrai plus être sollicitée pour des analyses en dehors de mes nouvelles attributions officielles. Et, si j'ai des critiques à formuler, je les formulerai en interne sans avoir à le faire par voie de presse. Mais surtout, je m'engage à représenter, et si nécessaire défendre, mon institution et mon équipe.

*** Nul ne conteste la nécessité de responsabiliser les internautes et les différents médias, mais venant dans le sillage des précédentes initiatives gouvernementales visant à amender la loi régissant l'ICTA ou celui par rapport au 'Cybersecurity & Cybercrime', il y a un fort soupçon que la démarche gouvernementale en vue d'amender l'IBA Act s'inscrit dans une logique**

“ Lorsque la société civile ou les médias refusent ou échouent à s'autoréguler, les autorités gouvernementales sont obligées de le faire...”

politique. Celle-ci vise à neutraliser la force de frappe de certaines radios privées, et à privilégier la communication, sinon la propagande, gouvernementale relayée par la MBC. Comment réagissez-vous à cela ?

Ce n'est plus mon rôle de commenter le volet des stratégies politiques ou gouvernementales. Et puis, je pense qu'on n'a plus besoin de moi pour cela. Il y a suffisamment d'observateurs pour le faire.

Par contre, du point de vue de la gouvernance, il est bon de faire ressortir certains points légaux qui sont restés occultés dans la polémique. Que ce soit la *Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act* votée le 19 novembre dernier, ou les amendements à l'*IBA Act* votés cette semaine, ils témoignent clairement d'un nouveau dynamisme législatif.

Ce sont des textes qui instaurent de nouvelles structures de gouvernance. Par exemple, la *Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act*, en plus de la définition de nouvelles offenses pour répondre à l'évolution de la cybercriminalité, vise aussi à mettre en place des procédures et des structures de protection.

Quant aux amendements de l'*IBA Act*, beaucoup ont



voulu les voir comme étant répressifs. Pourtant, d'un point de vue du Régulateur, l'introduction d'une pénalité administrative, au lieu de sanctions pénales ou civiles, va plutôt dans le bon sens.

De plus, les sanctions sont paramétrées selon des critères administratifs dans la section 29A: lorsque le *licensee* contrevient aux dispositions du texte de loi ou aux autres lois du pays, s'il a commis un crime financier, s'il ne remplit plus les critères requis, ou s'il n'est pas une personne *fit and proper* du concept juridique anglo-saxon reposant sur les qualifications, l'intégrité et la situation financière.

En outre, la pénalité administrative est assortie d'un dialogue entre les autorités et les radios: le *licensee* dispose d'un droit de réponse en cas de sanction [section 29(4)c], il peut faire appel de la décision de l'Autorité, après quoi cette dernière peut modifier sa décision si les arguments du *licensee* sont convaincants. Enfin, la décision de l'Autorité (IBA) est transparente puisqu'elle sera publiée dans la *Government's Gazette*. En clair, il y a donc de l'*accountability* des deux côtés.

“ L'amendement à l'*IBA Act* introduit l'obligation pour les radios de se doter d'un code d'éthique. Fallait-il attendre un amendement pour cela ? On sait très bien que, lorsque la société civile ou les médias refusent ou échouent à s'autoréguler, les autorités gouvernementales sont obligées de le faire pour éviter les dérives...”

● Suite en page 9

'La meilleure protection du journaliste, c'est sa déontologie professionnelle... A condition d'en avoir une'



ments à l'*IBA Act*, s'est tenu au mépris de la déontologie journalistique. La répartition des temps de parole a été très inégalitaire entre les intervenants, traités de façon tout aussi inégalitaire par des journalistes qui étaient ouvertement parties prenantes.

Ainsi, un politicien a monopolisé le temps de parole. Il a parlé librement 36 minutes au total pour un débat d'une durée de 3 heures et 5 minutes. C'est autant que le *chairman* de l'ICTA (15 minutes) et l'*Attorney General* (23 minutes) réunis, qui en plus ont été constamment interrompus. En d'autres termes, les deux intervenants qui sont venus pour expliquer l'amendement au texte de loi n'ont bénéficié que de 20% du temps d'antenne.

Or, précisément, l'amendement à l'*IBA Act* introduit l'obligation pour les radios de se doter d'un code d'éthique. Fallait-il attendre un amendement pour cela? On sait très bien que, lorsque la société civile ou les médias refusent ou échouent à s'autoréguler, les autorités gouvernementales sont obligées de le faire pour éviter les dérives.

*** Le Premier ministre a raison de dire, lors de son 'summing up' des débats sur l'*IBA* (Amendement)**

“ Il nous faut comprendre aussi le rôle et l'importance des institutions régulatrices dans un pays, et pourquoi la régulation est essentielle aussi bien dans l'intérêt de la société civile que du secteur des affaires économiques. Il nous faudra sans doute travailler à faire cette pédagogie pour assainir les bases de notre dialogue...”

• Suite de la page 8

*** Top FM semble être devenu le *black sheep* ou la brebis galeuse de l'actuel gouvernement. L'opposition soutient que l'objectif principal du Gouvernement viserait en premier lieu cette radio privée dont la licence d'opération arrive à terme dans les semaines à venir. Pourquoi serrer la vis alors que les lois existantes devraient suffire pour sanctionner tout écart ?**

D'une part, il faut préciser que Top FM n'est pas un *licensee* de l'ICTA. L'ICTA lui accorde des fréquences en tant que *licensee* de l'IBA mais n'est pas son régulateur.

D'autre part, ce n'est pas le rôle de l'ICTA en tant que Régulateur de débattre du contenu ou du bienfondé des lois ou des amendements, et donc par extension, ce n'est pas le mien non plus.

Par contre, il y a un constat à faire concernant l'émission de lundi 28 novembre dernier, organisée conjointement par Top FM et Radio Plus. C'est Me Dick Ng Sui Wa qui intervenait en tant que membre du conseil d'administration de l'IBA et *chairperson* de l'ICTA.

Or, ce débat qui précisément portait sur les amende-

“ On avance l'idée que ce texte de loi viendrait museler les citoyens. C'est tout le contraire. Jusqu'à présent, l'auditeur n'avait pratiquement aucun recours lorsque ses droits sont lésés ou lorsqu'il est victime d'abus déontologique de la part des médias, en dehors des procédures juridiques longues et coûteuses. L'amendement de l'*IBA Act* augmente le pouvoir de recours des citoyens contre les radios s'ils se sentent lésés...”

Bill, que les amendements vont effectivement permettre à l'*IBA* « d'effectuer son mandat de manière plus efficace » au regard des nouvelles dispositions dont l'introduction des pénalités administratives, la création d'un *Independent Broadcasting Panel Review* avec trois membres nommés par le PM, le raccourcissement de la durée des licences à une année, la prise en compte des sanctions passées pour le renouvellement d'un permis, la divulgation des sources journalistiques... Mais il y a là tout un arsenal pour empêcher toute contestation radio-phonique, n'est-ce pas ?

Il est regrettable que ces acteurs de la société civile et leurs alliés politiques s'appuient sur des coups bas, des déformations et des tricheries pour défendre leurs causes. Qui veut mener un combat honorable, utilise des armes honorables. Je citais tout à l'heure le plateau très inégalitaire de l'émission conjointe des deux radios Top FM et Radio Plus lundi soir.

Un argument déformé, répété en boucle, concerne l'amendement à l'*IBA Act*, la supposée violation du secret des sources journalistiques. Nulle part dans le texte, de façon explicite ou implicite, il n'est question de divulgation des sources journalistiques. L'introduction d'une pénalité administrative concerne les propriétaires de la radio et non les journalistes. Sans compter que, pour un journaliste radio, ses sources ne sont pas si secrètes que ça, puisqu'il doit les inviter sur un plateau...

De plus, un journaliste, un activiste, doivent pouvoir s'exprimer dans le respect de l'éthique et de la déontologie. Le fait que les amendements de l'*IBA Act* introduisent l'obligation pour les radios de se doter de code d'éthique est déjà un garde-fou important contre les dérives journalistiques et donc les risques de suspension ou de pénalité. Car la première et la meilleure protection

du journaliste, c'est sa déontologie professionnelle... A condition d'en avoir une.

Parmi les arguments démagogiques utilisés, on avance l'idée que ce texte de loi viendrait museler les citoyens. C'est tout le contraire. Jusqu'à présent, l'auditeur n'avait pratiquement aucun recours lorsque ses droits sont lésés ou lorsqu'il est victime d'abus déontologique de la part des médias, en dehors des procédures juridiques longues et coûteuses. L'amendement de l'*IBA Act* augmente le pouvoir de recours des citoyens contre les radios s'ils se sentent lésés par certains propos diffusés.

*** En fin de compte, le Gouvernement n'est-il pas en train d'abuser de sa majorité parlementaire pour amender les lois du pays, en particulier celles concernant l'audiovisuel, les plateformes des réseaux sociaux, et cela en vue de sanctionner toute contestation et ainsi dominer le débat politique dans le pays?**

Il ne m'appartient plus de commenter les stratégies ou positions gouvernementales. Il est important de faire comprendre le point de vue de l'Autorité régulatrice. L'ICTA n'a pas de pouvoir législatif, ni exécutif. Ce n'est pas son rôle de faire les lois ni d'en débattre.

L'ICTA est une autorité régulatrice, ce qui signifie qu'elle est là non pas pour jouer le jeu des polémiques, mais pour veiller au bon fonctionnement du secteur des TIC et faire respecter des bases équitables et, si nécessaire, éclairer les termes du débat.

Et cela, c'est un rôle bien concret, au cœur des besoins des citoyens mauriciens. L'ICTA fait beaucoup de choses pour les citoyens, dont on n'est pas nécessairement conscient, par exemple, au niveau du *customer service* ou service client.

“ Quant aux amendements de l'*IBA Act*, beaucoup ont voulu les voir comme étant répressifs. Pourtant, d'un point de vue du Régulateur, l'introduction d'une pénalité administrative, au lieu de sanctions pénales ou civiles, va plutôt dans le bon sens. De plus, les sanctions sont paramétrées selon des critères administratifs...”

Il y a donc une distorsion, voire une injustice à vouloir présenter l'ICTA comme un père fouettard qui serait là pour brimer et fouetter les citoyens, les médias et la société civile. Ne nous y trompons pas, c'est un discours de dénigrement soigneusement entretenu par ceux qui, justement, n'ont peut-être pas intérêt à ce que s'exerce une régulation saine.

L'ICTA a la prérogative de la régulation et la société civile a la prérogative du débat critique. Chacun son rôle, chacun son champ d'action, chacun sa responsabilité. Il est important que les citoyens conçoivent bien cette distinction.

Il nous faut comprendre aussi le rôle et l'importance des institutions régulatrices dans un pays, et pourquoi la régulation est essentielle aussi bien dans l'intérêt de la société civile que du secteur des affaires économiques. Il nous faudra sans doute travailler à faire cette pédagogie pour assainir les bases de notre dialogue national sur les réseaux sociaux.

Will Omicron – the new coronavirus variant of concern – be more contagious than Delta?

A virus evolution expert explains what researchers know and what they don't

A new variant named omicron (B.1.1.529) was reported by researchers in South Africa on Nov. 24, 2021, and designated a “variant of concern” by the World Health Organization two days later. Omicron is very unusual in that it is by far the most heavily mutated variant yet of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

The omicron variant has 50 mutations overall, with 32 mutations on the spike protein alone. The spike protein – which forms protruding knobs on the outside of the SARS-CoV-2 virus – helps the virus adhere to cells so that it can gain entry. It is also the protein that all three vaccines currently available in the U.S. use to induce protective antibodies. For comparison, the delta variant has nine mutations. The larger number of mutations in the omicron variant may mean that it could be more transmissible and/or better at evading immune protection – a prospect that is very concerning.

I am a virologist who studies emerging and zoonotic viruses to better understand how new epidemic or pandemic viruses emerge. My research group has been studying various aspects of the COVID-19 virus, including its spillover into animals.

Why do new SARS-CoV-2 variants continue to emerge?

While the unusually high number of mutations in the omicron variant is surprising, the emergence of yet another SARS-CoV-2 variant is not unexpected.

Through natural selection, random mutations accumulate in any virus. This process is sped up in RNA viruses, including SARS-CoV-2. If and when a set of mutations provides a survival advantage to a variant over its predecessors, the variant will out-compete all other existing virus variants.

Does the omicron variant's greater number of mutations mean it is more dangerous and transmissible than delta? We simply don't know yet. The conditions that led to the emergence of the variant are not yet clear, but what is clear is that the sheer number and configuration of mutations in omicron is unusual.

One possible explanation for how viral variants with multiple mutations emerge is through prolonged infection in a patient whose immune system is suppressed – a situation that can lead to rapid viral evolution. Researchers have hypothesized that some of the earlier SARS-CoV-2 variants, such as the alpha variant, may have stemmed from a persistently infected patient. However, the unusual constellation and numerous mutations in the omicron variant make it very different from all other SARS-CoV-2 strains, which raises questions about how it came about.



Another possible source of variants could be through animal hosts. The virus that causes COVID-19 can infect several animal species, including mink, tigers, lions, cats and dogs. In a study that is not yet peer-reviewed, an international team that I lead recently reported widespread infection by SARS-CoV-2 in free-living and captive white-tailed deer in the U.S. Therefore, we also cannot rule out the possibility that the omicron variant emerged in an animal host through rapid evolution.

How the delta variant became dominant worldwide

Delta is between 40% and 60% more transmissible than the alpha variant and nearly twice as transmissible as the original SARS-CoV-2 virus first identified in China. The delta variant's heightened transmissibility is the primary reason why researchers believe it was able to out-compete other variants to become the dominant strain.

A key factor in viral fitness is its replication rate – or how quickly a virus can make more copies of itself. The delta variant replicates faster than previous SARS-CoV-2 variants, and a not-yet-peer-reviewed study estimated that it produces 1,000 times more virus particles than its predecessors.

In addition, people infected with the delta variant are making and shedding more virus, which is another potential mechanism for its increased ability to spread. Research suggests that a possible explanation for the delta variant's heightened ability to replicate is that mutations in the spike protein led to more efficient binding of the spike protein to its host, via the ACE-2 receptor.

The delta variant has also acquired

mutations that would allow it to evade neutralizing antibodies that serve a critical role in the body's defense against an invading virus. This could explain why, as multiple reports have shown, the COVID-19 vaccines have been somewhat less effective against the delta variant. This combination of high transmissibility and immune evasion could help explain how the delta variant became so successful.

Studies also show that people infected with the delta variant have a higher risk of being hospitalized compared to those infected with the original SARS-CoV-2 and early variants. One particular mutation on the spike protein of the delta variant – the P681R mutation – is thought to be a key contributor to its improved ability to enter cells and to cause more severe disease.

Will omicron replace delta?

It is too early to say if the omicron variant is fitter than delta or if it will become dominant. Omicron shares some mutations with the delta variant but also possesses others that are quite different. But one of the reasons why we in the research community are particularly concerned is that the omicron variant has 10 mutations in the receptor-binding domain – the part of the spike protein that interacts with the ACE-2 receptor and mediates entry into cells – compared with just two for the delta variant.

Suppose the combination of all the mutations in omicron makes it either more transmissible or better at immune evasion than delta. In that case, we could see the spread of this variant globally. However, it is also possible that the unusually high number of mutations could be detrimental to the virus and make it unstable.

It is highly likely that the omicron variant is not the endgame and that more SARS-CoV-2 variants will emerge. As SARS-CoV-2 continues to spread among humans, natural selection and adaptation will result in more variants that could plausibly be more transmissible than delta.

We know from influenza viruses that the process of viral adaptation never ends. Lower vaccination rates among many countries means that there are still a lot of susceptible hosts out there for the virus, and that it will continue to circulate and mutate as long as it can spread. The emergence of the omicron variant is yet another reminder of the urgency to vaccinate to stop the further spread and evolution of SARS-CoV-2.

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● Cont. from page 4

Shouldn't there be a similar transparent and accountable review of the Covid-19 response strategy of Mauritius?

The Pipe Dream of Controlling Media

The government seems paranoid about criticisms and being faulted. The knee-jerk reaction epitomized by the amended Independent Broadcasting Authority Act and the recent orchestrated build up on a Press Council are tell-tale. Using a government appointed regulator as proxy to regulate freedom of opinion is a non-starter. In an international context where various attempts to control media have been repeatedly debunked, it is patently foolhardy to pipe dream about restricting freedom of speech and opinion. There are potent risks of crossing a sacrosanct red line which could backfire. Those who rashly sow the wind reap the whirlwind.

The media landscape has changed completely. News on, for example, independent outlets on YouTube are generally considered more reliable than on official news channels

Hype v/s Reality

which have repeatedly been faulted for peddling news such as, for example, the Douma chemical attack in Syria or RussiaGate (regarding alleged Russian "meddling" in US elections) which have been proven to be false. The upshot is that news broadcast on official channels have lost their credibility.

Freedom of speech and opinion, the press and assembly are absolute freedoms which are robustly guaranteed in the First Amendment to the American Constitution. This amendment together with nine other amendments introduced in the first Congress in 1789 constitute the Bill of Rights. They guarantee civil rights and liberties to the individual. These are unalienable rights.

Fantasies of dynastic parties

Last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on the

occasion of Constitution Day celebrations that dynastic parties are a threat to democracy. Dynastic parties significantly narrow the democratic space in the country. The democratic space is further limited by nepotism, cronyism and the appointment the coterie at the head of key state institutions, state companies or as ambassadors detrimental to the interests of the country, by government. It is also further restricted by the high-handed manner parliamentary democracy is being muzzled and the national public broadcaster financed from public funds has been hijacked by government for abject partisan propaganda.

Those who rabidly want to control freedom of speech and opinion are basically trapped in their own fantasies. In a true democracy, important policies of national importance such as freedom of opinion, the management of the Covid-19 pandemic, parliamentary democracy, etc., which transcend narrow partisan politics must necessarily be agreed through national consensus involving civil society. To do otherwise as is presently the decried case is anathema to the multitude.

Mrinal Roy

The Conversation

Science changes - and so should rational behaviour

● Cont. from page 2

A research methodology known as systematic review, or evidence synthesis, has been used for decades to ensure that all reliable research relevant to a specific question is carefully collated to provide a comprehensive and transparent answer.



Pic: Omar Vega / Al Dia Dallas

Any time a decision matters, using a systematic review to inform that decision is far preferable to using a single study. A complete evidence base - a synthesis of many reliable studies - gives a more complete picture.

Covid-19 is one example of how an evidence base can offer a fuller picture than a single study. When the pandemic struck in March 2020, the world sought answers quickly. The early days and months were a scramble for understanding: we needed to know fast how the virus spread, how to avoid infection, and what treatments were effective. As the evidence base has grown, so has our collective understanding and behaviour.

Dishonesty and bad ethics

A second reason for shifting science is that, sadly but not surprisingly, scientists can be dishonest.

One recent example is the use of ivermectin as a Covid-19 treatment. Ivermectin is an animal de-wormer that was promoted as a possible treatment for Covid-19. Convincing arguments were made, and anecdotal cases reported, all leading to a black market for the drug.

There was even a systematic review which appeared to show the benefits of ivermectin in reducing Covid-19

deaths.

However, on closer critique of the primary data underpinning the synthesis, it was found that the data from a large trial which had been included in the review was fabricated. This invalidated the findings of the review.

The purported link between the combined measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine and autism is another example of how the scientific process can result in shifts in findings. A 1998 paper in *The Lancet* linked the combined MMR vaccine with the onset of autism. This paper has since been shown to have been entirely fraudulent, and was retracted by the journal in 2010. The doctor who led the work had his licence to practice withdrawn because of his unethical research.

Several systematic reviews have since shown that there is no link between autism and the MMR vaccine. Still, the idea has taken root among many parents, who are reluctant to have their children vaccinated against common childhood illnesses. Increasingly frequent outbreaks of measles, to give just one example, have led to thousands of children dying.

Luckily the scientific industry is set up for analysis, critique and rigorous debate. Proving something scientifically is a process of review by fellow researchers - a culture of critical reflection.

Embrace uncertainty

Good science doesn't eliminate uncertainty: it explains it. Citizens and journalists need to be literate about the nature of science and how to look for bodies of evidence.

Ultimately, it is about deciding what type of information one trusts. If one trusts the scientific method that underpins the development of the cars we drive, then, logically, one should trust that same scientific method that goes into evidence synthesis. People should learn where to look for, then rely on, carefully collected, reliable bodies of evidence.

Ruth Stewart, Professor: Evidence-Informed Decision-Making & Carina van Rooyen, Senior researcher at the Africa Centre for Evidence, University of Johannesburg

MAURITIUS TIMES To Our Readers

65 years ago, *Mauritius Times* was founded with a resolve to fight for justice and fairness and the advancement of the public good. It has never deviated from this principle no matter how daunting the challenges and how costly the price it has had to pay at different times of our history.

We are determined not to abandon this line of action, which is the cardinal principle of our *raison-d'être*. This is what has given *Mauritius Times* a unique standing in the local publishing world.

Our production circumstances have changed since last year with the onset of the Covid-19 lockdown, and we have had to move to the digital platform. We have since March 2020 freely circulated the paper via WhatsApp and by email, besides making it available on our website.

However, with print journalism in Mauritius and across the world struggling to keep afloat due to falling advertising revenues and the wide availability of free sources of information, it is crucially important for the *Mauritius Times* to still meet its cost of production for it to survive and prosper.

Readers will no doubt appreciate that it takes a lot of time, hard work, money and the continued support of our contributors to produce the *Mauritius Times* - as we have done without interruption in these last 65 years. We can only continue doing it with the support of our readers.

We hope you'll continue to support the paper by taking a subscription or by making a recurring donation through a Standing Order to our not-for-profit Foundation. Our future will be secure with the support of our readers and well-wishers.

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You actually can teach an old dog new tricks...

Lifelong learning isn't just about being employable, it's about a healthy brain and overall quality of life



Darryl Dymock
Adjunct Senior Research
Fellow in Education, Griffith
University

Lorna Prendergast was 90 years old when she graduated with a master's degree from the University of Melbourne in 2019. She said her message to others was, "You're never too old to dream."

Nor, obviously, too old to learn.

In the same year 94-year-old David Bottomley became the oldest person in Australia to graduate with a PhD from Curtin University. The great-grandfather said he wasn't yet finished. "I have a great deal yet to work out," he said, perhaps making him the ultimate lifelong learner.

Prendergast's and Bottomley's achievements are examples of the levels of learning some older adults are capable of. In 2019-20, around 73,000 Australian adults aged 60 or more were enrolled in vocational training, community education and university courses. That's enough to populate a mid-size Australian city.

But the term "lifelong learning" has increasingly tended to focus on the period of compulsory education and training across working lives – that is, before retirement.

Professor of adult education, Stephen Billett, argues the concept of lifelong learning has come to be associated with lifelong education, which is more about the institutional provision of learning experiences.

Instead, he says, it should go back to its roots. Lifelong learning is a personal process based on the sets of experiences people have had throughout their lives.

Learning after retirement

According to David Istance, the non-resident senior fellow at the OECD's Centre for Universal Education, a result of this foreshortened view of lifelong learning is to downplay the considerable amount of formal learning taking place after retirement. This means learning like that done by Prendergast and Bottomley. Although much learning also happens in non-institutional settings.

For example, a Scottish study tracked the learning activities of almost 400



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Glaswegians aged 60 or over. Using a broad definition of "learning", researchers discovered an "active ageing" subset in the sample.

This active ageing group was:

socially and technologically engaged ... "learner-citizens", participating in educational, physical, cultural, civic and online activities.

Such findings are particularly significant for a country like Australia where the population is ageing, due to sustained low fertility and increasing life expectancy. The result is proportionally fewer children and a larger proportion of people aged 65 and over.

Over the past two decades, the population aged 85 and over has also increased, by 110% (more than doubled) compared with total population growth of 35%. In mid-2020 there were more than half a million of these "older olds" in Australia.

The nation could have 50,000 centenarians by 2050.

A lifetime of complex cognitive activity

Brain researcher Perminder Sachdev says surviving into older age relies partly on "a lifetime of good effort". Some of that effort is a solid education in our formative years and then ongoing purposeful learning.

Sachdev believes this builds better cognitive reserves and sets us up for a lifetime of more complex cognitive activity.

But what is "purposeful learning"? A Swedish review found older adults do formal learning to maintain or increase quality of life, including through learning new things and sharing knowledge, and to connect through social networks. They

also see classes and courses as a means of developing coping skills that enhance individual autonomy, and as a way of stimulating their cognitive abilities to help stave off mental decline.

But numerous studies in recent decades have shown formal education is just the tip of the adult learning iceberg.

As the Glasgow study reveals, many older adults are continuing their learning in guises other than through formal courses. Communal examples include sewing groups, men's sheds, bird-watching clubs, travel groups, and musical jam sessions.

Few of the participants are likely to perceive their activities in explicit learning terms, yet all four reasons for learning the Swedish study identified can be discerned within such groups.

As in the Glasgow research, the proportion of older people engaged in purposeful learning is likely to be a subset of the larger population. Nevertheless there needs to be official and community acknowledgement that a segment of older people has both the motivation and

capacity to continue to learn, including into their 90s. These people are "active agers".

According to Sachdev, the key to maximising healthy ageing is improving the quality of initial and ongoing education because this impacts positively on our brains.

This is not to say older adults should feel obliged to engage in "purposeful learning". After all, they're not a homogeneous group, and some may decide it's not something they want to do.

David Istance intimates some may also subscribe to the outmoded mindset that "you can't teach an old dog new tricks".

For older people who do want to continue to engage with the wider world and have the capacity to do so, however, we need to ensure "active ageing" is part of any "lifelong learning" agenda.

Let's continue to promote older learning champions like Prendergast and Bottomley, not as outliers but as shining lights in a broader expanse of long-twinkling stars.

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Laughter is the **BEST** Medicine

A woman wants to know if her three future sons-in-law will be trustworthy...

So, she decides to take them one by one on a walk and pretend to slip and fall into the water to see what they will do. And so, it goes.

On the first walk, she pretends to slip and falls into the water. The first son-in-law takes off his shoes & coat and jumps in the water. The next day there is new Family Sedan parked in front of the house. There is a letter for the son-in-law which says:

-- Thank you for saving me, here is your new car. Your mother-in-law.

The next day the woman tries to do the same walk with her other son-in-law. She again pretends to slip and falls into the water. The second son-in-law immediately jumps after her. The next day there is new Mercedes parked in front of the house. There is a letter for the son-in-law which says: 'Thank you for saving me, here is your new car. Your mother-in-law.'

The day after, the woman goes again on a walk but with her third son-in-law. Again, she slips and falls into the water. The third son-in-law looks left, looks right, and sees nobody. So, he continues to walk. The next day there is a brand-new Ferrari parked in front of the house. There is a letter for the son-in-law which says: 'Thank you for saving me, here is your

new car. Your father-in-law.'

A Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) is inspecting his troops on the Parade ground at the end of a day's training....

.... as they line up in front of the Commanding Officer (CO), the RSM calls out.

"Before you are all dismissed, I have an announcement. Private Jones. one step forward ... March!!"

Private Jones steps forward from the first line of soldiers.

"Private Jones... your mother is dead. Fall in!"

Distraught, Pvt. Jones falls back into line.

The CO is a bit concerned about the RSM's treatment and calls him into his office.

"I think you need to address how you deliver bad news to the soldiers, old chap. The way you did that with Jones during parade wasn't the most tactful way to deliver that message. It's bad for morale. I suggest you find a different way to break bad news to the troops in future."

"Yes, sah!" the RSM replies before saluting and being dismissed.

The next day the CO, RSM and soldiers are back on the parade ground after training.

Looking through his notes, the RSM nods to the CO and turns to face the troops.

"Before I dismiss you, I have an announcement. All soldiers who have a father, take one step forward... March!"

As the entire troop steps forward, the RSM suddenly points his stick at a soldier



in the 2nd line....

"Private Smith! Where do you think you're going!?"

I met my future wife today!

My present wife isn't happy

A boy gets a parrot for his birthday

The parrot is constantly swearing, and saying rude things. The boy tries to teach his parrot to stop saying bad words and things like that. He plays calm music to the parrot, he reads stories to the parrot, he tries everything he can to get the parrot to stop but nothing works. All the parrot does is make rude comments and swear at people.

Finally, after months of this, the boy is so fed up with the parrot that he loses his temper, grabs the bird and shoves it in the freezer and slams it closed. He hears squawking and screaming from the bird

for about a minute until it just stops and all he hears is complete silence. Fearing that he may have hurt the animal, he opens up the freezer and quickly takes his parrot out.

The parrot is frozen but starts to talk. He says "I'm so sorry for all the rude and terrible things I have said in the past that may have hurt you. I promise to be better and nicer in the future." The boy responds "Thank you, that really means a lot."

The parrot then says "May I ask what the chicken did?"

What's the secret to your happy marriage?

The future son-in-law asks his future father-in-law.

He replies: Well son, I took my new wife to the Grand Canyon for our honeymoon. We rented mules to go down into the canyon. About a quarter mile in, the mule my betrothed was on stepped into a hole on the trail and almost threw her. She whispered into its ear: "that's one."

About a half a mile down the trail, the mule stepped on a rock and again almost threw her. She whispered into its ear: "That's two."

About three-quarters of a mile in, the mule tripped over a branch in the trail and my bride was thrown to the ground. She got up, picked up the branch and beat that poor mule to death.

In horror I looked at her and said "sweetheart what the hell did you do that for?!"

She just looked at me and quietly said "that's one"

That was our last argument. Been happy ever since.

That's Life Hard truths about life I wish I knew earlier

1. Everyone you love is going to die.
2. We give our lives meaning. If you feel that your life is meaningless, that's your fault.
3. The perfect partner doesn't exist. Concentrate on finding someone who has a lot of qualities you like and the same values and build a fantastic relationship.
4. Life is a game. Find the games you want to play, learn the rules, and find a way to be successful at the games you selected.
5. Everything ends. Youth, love, life. All will end, and that's what makes them valuable.
6. Be romantic about the little things.
7. Be a realist about the big things. Life isn't a movie; you need to have a plan, have an artist's ambition but an engineer's mindset.
8. Figure out a way or don't complain.



Chitragupta to Yama Dharmaraj :

"You went to the Earth, what happened?"

Yama Dharmaraj:

"People are wearing masks. I couldn't recognize many of them. So, I brought only those who weren't wearing any mask."

😬 **PLEASE WEAR MASK** 😬

Old age now begins at 80

By Tim Radford

Old age has been postponed. Biologically and psychologically, it now begins at 80, according to Ian Robertson, dean of research at Dublin's Trinity College Institute of Neuroscience, reports Tim Radford of The Guardian.

"This leaves 30 leaves – roughly age 50 to 80, a period much longer than youth – for which we have to have a whole new way of living," he told the British Association science festival recently.

Robertson began to study the effect of age on the brain in 1984. Then, the average age of stroke victims was 72.

"By 1999, the average age of my patients was around 82. In just 15 short years, I saw with my own eyes how, in many senses of the word, people had become younger by roughly 10 years."

The human brain, he argued, at all ages was plastic: it was shaped by experience, learning and thinking.

Ancient Romans had a life expectancy of 22, while Europeans could look forward to a lifespan of 50 years at the start of the 20th century.

A woman of 60 in Britain now could expect to live on average to 83. The degree to which people retained their faculties after 50 was influenced by what they did.

He listed a seven-point plan to ensure a youthful old age:

* Aerobic fitness was probably the 1most important. The function and structure of the brain were influenced by activity.

* Mental stimulation was vital. People could reduce cognitive decline by mental training.

* New learning was important. "The more you learn, the more you can learn," he said. "It can have profound physiological effects on the brain."

* High and prolonged stress had negative effects, particular on human memory.

* A rich social life helped. "People who maintain a lot of social interactions maintain mental sharpness for longer period."

* Healthy eating. A diet rich in fruit and vegetables and fish had profound effects on cognitive decline later in life.

* Finally, think young.

Being Mum & Dad

Parenting styles that are the worst for kids

Parents should not adopt extreme parenting

Every parent has a different way of dealing with their kids. A lot of it either comes from their own experiences as a child or what they hear or learn from others. While parenting is not as easy as it seems, it is surely one of the best things that can happen in life.

Having said that, a parent-child relationship needs nurturing. Extremes of anything can destroy the bond and may even drift you away from your child. So, if you really want your children to do well, succeed and at the same time develop a great bond with you, here are some of the parenting styles to avoid and what you should do instead.



Unresponsive, uninvolved parenting

Uninvolved or neglectful parenting is when parents tend to turn a blind eye to their children's needs and wants. Such parents neither listen to their child's plea for help, nor demand or expect anything from their children. They are indifferent and dismissive and almost do not care about their children's future. This type of parenting style can take a heavy toll on the child's mind and his or her future.

Helicopter parenting

As opposed to uninvolved parenting, helicopter parenting is the complete opposite. Parents belonging to this parenting style can be over-involved in their child's life, making sure they do everything perfectly, leaving no space for mistakes or regret. Such parents are also known as "overprotective". While children who are raised with this parenting technique are extremely loved, they might feel a little overwhelmed with the amount of attention they get. It may also make them entirely dependent on their parents.

Rescue parenting

Similar to helicopter parenting, rescuing parents are really helpful, especially towards their kids. Apart from making sure their kids do not make any mistakes, parents belonging to this parenting style do not let their children fight their own battles. This could hamper the way kids deal with problem-ridden situations in the future, especially when they're adults. That said, they could be more care-free, indifferent and may not take responsibility for their actions.

What to adopt instead?

As a parent, you must prioritize your child's development at all costs. While listening to their needs and tending to their demands is important, also helping them differentiate between the right and wrong is crucial. Most importantly, help them become responsible adults, let them make their own decisions in life and make sure they know the difference between 'need' and 'want'.

Things he'll do if it's true love

Finding your one, true love may seem difficult but it's not impossible. Women look for the perfect man but trust issues come in the way, making it harder for women to be in a relationship. And if a man cheats, that becomes the end of a possible relationship for a lifetime. But ladies, worry not. Here are a few things men will do if they truly love you.

Respect

If your man respects you, your decisions and preferences, then he's in love with you. Not compelling you to do things he likes is a sign he cares about what YOU want.

Patience

Being patient with your needs, wants and moods is a quality only your true love will have. If he is patient with what you need, and is not unnecessarily rude, then he's the one.

Protection

Having a protective instinct can largely make you feel loved and cared for. After all, everybody wants to nestle into someone's lap and feel



safe, secure and calm after a day's end.

Humble

Being humble is a star-quality your man should possess. If he keeps his pride down, is humble and selfless, admits his mistakes without showcasing his ego, then know that he loves you.

Healthy competition

If your man challenges you every day to be the best version of yourself, in a positive way, then look no further, he loves you a lot. You may

realise that such a man won't compete with you, instead, he will encourage you to be greater.

Family

If he proudly introduces you to his family and friends, then it's a telltale sign that he's looking for a serious commitment with you. It's a sign he's very proud of you and wants to show you off!

All the above qualities are equally true as regards women who truly love their men.

-- H. 28 years old

People share common mistakes in long-distance relationships

Long-distance relationships are strenuous and hard. It takes a lot of patience, understanding and, most importantly, forgiveness to make a long-distance relationship successful. But such a relationship can't thrive without hardships, problems and mistakes. Every person has a different perspective on relationships. So, let's take a look at what these people have to say about common problems and mistakes in long-distance relationships.

Lack of adequate communication

"Communication for long-distance relationships is like oxygen. You need to communicate with your partner so much, that they understand every word you are saying. The effort to communicate goes both ways, and it matters how much you're willing to understand your partner. And those who don't consider communication as an essential part of relationships, are set to be doomed."

-- P. 26 years old

The little things

"Couples who are in long-distance relationships are so engrossed about doing grand gestures for each other that they forget real love lies in the little things. Doing little things for your partner, who's miles away from you, always brings in the feels."

Dependency

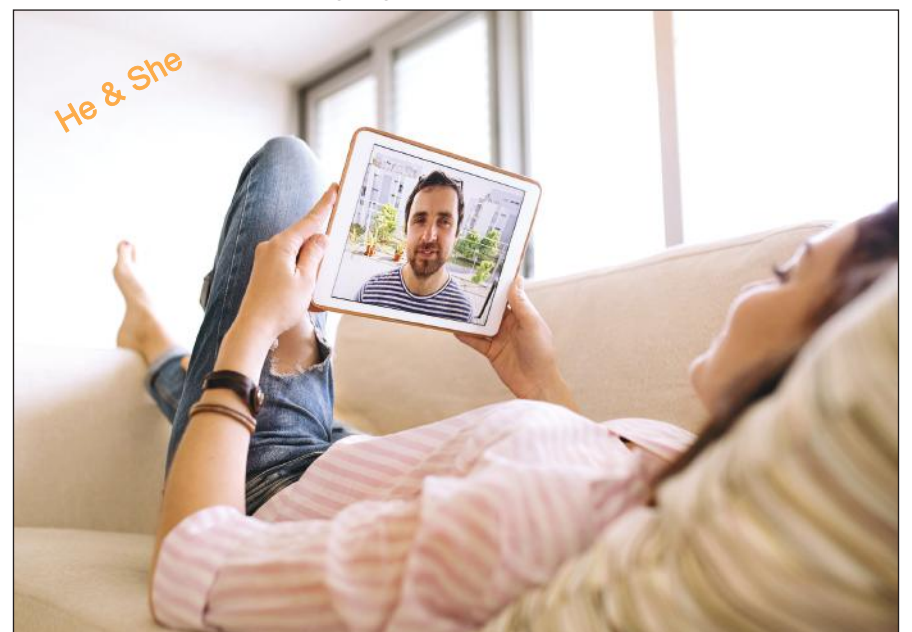
"In long-distance relationships, you become too dependent on your partner to make you feel happy. And as a result, when that person is busy or is involved in something that's very happening, you tend to feel left out. And that makes you moody and sad. Being dependent on your long-distance partner for making you happy isn't going to cut it."

-- S. 31 years old

Issues

"Don't ignore those issues in your long-distance relationship, even if it means resolving it for a day or two. I can't stress this enough. Resolving deep-ridden issues is important to not let any existing anger reside within you or your partner."

-- D. 24 years old



BollyBytes

'I went like a beggar to everybody after Kabir Singh': Shahid Kapoor

Shahid Kapoor had delivered one of the biggest blockbusters of 2019 with Kabir Singh. The film had collected over Rs2.5 billion at the box office in India. While it was an important milestone in his life, Shahid confessed it was a new experience for him, reports Hindustan Times.

As a result, he approached those who previously made Rs 2 - 2.5 billion with their releases. Shahid Kapoor made the confession during the trailer release of his upcoming film Jersey.

"I've never been a part of this club, so it was completely new to me. Having spent 15-16 years in the industry, I never had such a huge grosser. So, when it finally happened, I didn't know where to go, it was all new to me," he said, as reported by Bollywood Life.

"You could say, I tried my best not to do this (Jersey, which he was offered before doing Kabir Singh). So, credit to Gowtam Tinnanuri, the director, for still working with me, waiting for me, and I'm so happy I did this. I can safely say this is my best film yet," Shahid added.



The actor also revealed that he was approached for Jersey weeks before Kabir Singh released and he watched the original movie, which starred Nani in the lead.

"I heard this story and it stayed with me. I saw this film 2 weeks before Kabir Singh was released and I cried buckets. I saw it with Mira and my manager and they were both looking at me," he said, as reported by Pinkvilla.

Jersey is a remake of a Telugu movie of the same name. In the remake, Shahid plays the role of a retired cricketer who hopes to fulfil his son's dream of buying him a jersey. The original film won a National Award.

Saif Ali Khan: Clean family entertainers have become a rarity

Actor Saif Ali Khan says that clean family entertainers have become a rarity and is thrilled that he can take his entire family to the theatre to watch his next *Bunty Aur Babli 2*.

Saif said: "I will definitely take my entire family to watch *Bunty Aur Babli 2*. Clean family entertainers have become a rarity in our industry today and this film belongs to that quintessential Hindi comedy genre that you can take your full family to have a good time."

He added: "It's rooted in the Indian film language yet extremely modern and cool for today's youth and family. In fact, this movie is made for every age group and you can even take your kids to watch this movie!"

The 51-year-old star, who is gearing up watch the film with his children and actress wife Kareena Kapoor, is really happy that he did a film that "can invite families back to the theatres and try and make them smile after 2 years. *'Bunty Aur*



Babli 2 is a film that has something for every age group and that's what makes it special."

Saif believes that people are looking for a reason to smile again.

He said: "In today's environment when people are coming out of the pandemic, they want to see entertainers that they can watch with their families because every family across the world was in a lockdown. People haven't celebrated with each other and they are wanting to now. So, I hope our film entertains the whole country and leaves people in splits!"

Nora Fatehi recalls her 'worst' experience on 'Kusu kusu' set

Nora Fatehi almost choked because of her costume for the number 'Kusu kusu', which features in the upcoming film *'Satyamev Jayate 2'*. She said called it her worst experience on set.

The second look of the song, which features Nora in a veil cape attached to her body-suit. The cape was tied to her necklace. However, due to the weight of the heavy veil, the necklace choked Nora and even left bruise marks.

Talking about the experience, Nora said: "On sets we often have minor incidents like scraping of knees, bleeding of feet, or something like that, but this definitely has been my worst experience on set. The necklace was extremely tight around my neck because of the weight of the cape and since I was constantly moving, it kept brushing more leaving really horrifying marks at the end of the shoot."

She added: "It almost felt like someone has tied a rope around my neck and dragged me across the floor, but because we had limited time for the shoot, I continued to film the song and only took a break after we completed the sequence."

'Satyamev Jayate 2' directed by Milan Milap Zaveri is a sequel to the 2018 vigilante action film *'Satyamev Jayate'* and stars John Abraham in his fight against systematic corruption. The film is all set to release on November 25.



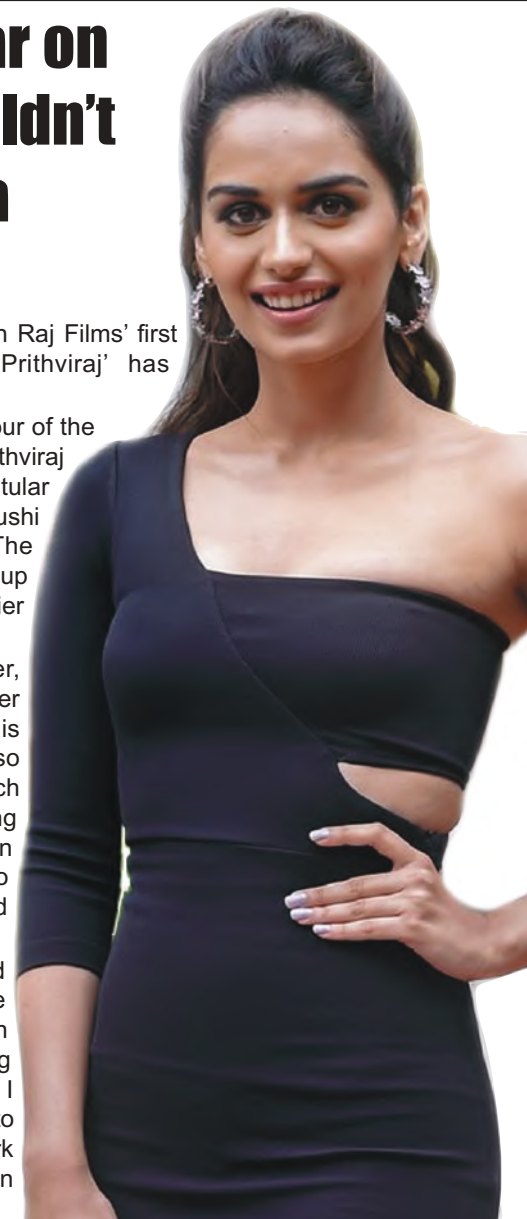
Manushi Chhillar on 'Prithviraj': I couldn't have asked for a bigger debut

The freshly released teaser of Yash Raj Films' first historical epic action drama 'Prithviraj' has grabbed eyeballs.

The film based on the life and valour of the fearless and mighty Rajput king Prithviraj Chauhan stars Akshay Kumar in the titular role alongside Miss World 2017 Manushi Chhillar as Princess Sanyogita. The actress is over the moon as she gears up for her debut with one of India's premier studios.

Talking about her character, Manushi says, "Her life, her values, her resilience, her courage, her honour is what legends are made of and I'm so fortunate that I got to know so much about her in the process of prepping and portraying princess Sanyogita on screen. I hope I have done justice to her and what she stood for. I'm excited for everyone to see her story."

"I have given my heart, soul and tears to this film and I hope that people will like my effort in playing such an iconic real-life legend on the big screen. I'm immensely grateful that I had Akshay sir as a pillar of support to me all through the shoot. His work ethic, his dedication to the craft is an inspiration to me," she adds.





Supriya Pilgaonkar reveals how she feels being back on 'Sasuraal Genda Phool 2'

Actress Supriya Pilgaonkar will be seen essaying the role of a mother 'Shailaja Kashyap' in the upcoming show 'Sasuraal Genda Phool 2'.

Speaking of the show, actress Supriya says: "I have had the privilege to be on the show previously and it was truly a great experience. So naturally, when I was handed the script for the second time, I had to be on board. Coming back to the show is like a homecoming to me. I get nostalgic even when speaking of it," reports IANS.

The actress is essaying the role of a mother of

the lead actor Jay Soni, playing 'Ishan Kashyap' in the show.

"The kind of energy the show has to offer can lighten the mood even on the darkest of days. My co-actors are all extremely inspiring and so fun to be around. The show has brought so much positivity to my life that I am pretty sure it will do the same for a lot of our audiences as well," she wraps up.

'Sasuraal Genda Phool 2' will be starting from December 7.

Anita Hassanandani: 'I was bitterly affected by my early failures'

Ekta Kapoor helped her fight depression

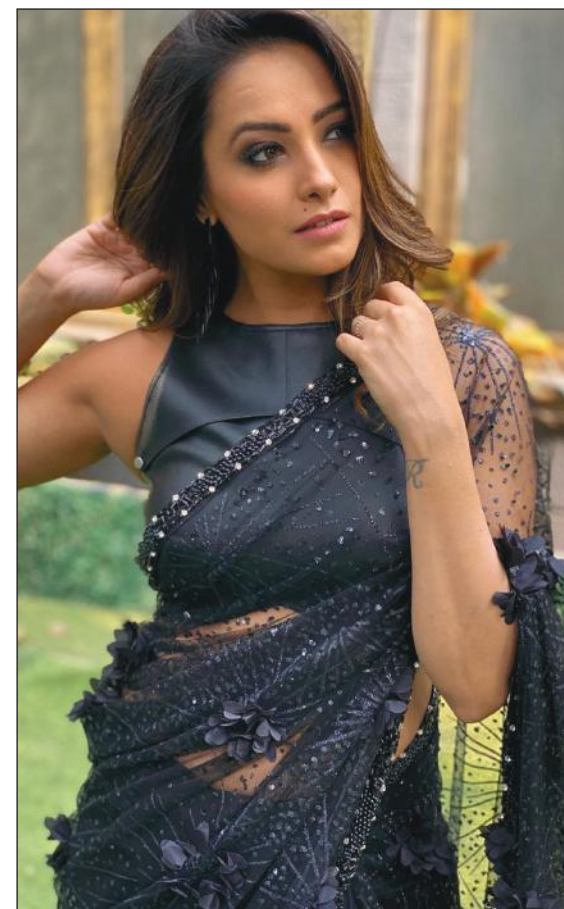
Anita Hassanandani took to Instagram to pen an appreciation note for her husband, Rohit Reddy and friend Ekta Kapoor. In the post, Anita revealed she had battled depression in her early days in the, reports Hindustan Times.

The actor shot to fame in *Kabhii Sautan Kabhii Saheli*, created by Ekta Kapoor, in the early 2000s. Anita then starred in *Kucch To Hai*, also produced by Ekta, and *Yeh Hai Mohabbate* in and *Naagin 3*.

Sharing a selfie with Ekta and Rohit recently, Anita wrote, "Ekta!!! You are a prototype of every strong female character you ever created. You are a true friend and an incredibly strong-willed woman. All these years of friendship have culminated into an indispensable relationship, the one where we could do anything for each other with no questions asked," she wrote.

"I remember those days when I was young, hungry for work but clueless about everything. I was bitterly affected by my early failures but then you came into my life. You not only helped me fight depression but also gave me a new start. That's one of the millions of things I have learned from you, to never give up. That's why even on rough days, I feel secure because of you my guardian angel. You are in every sense of the world, my life's Niyati. Calling Ekta a friend is an understatement. She is a part of my family and she is my Niyati," she added.

"Rohit! My dashing, adorable and loving husband, with the cutest dimple well, and now a super



dad too! I have been at my best and worst with him, but Rohit has held my hands through every trial and tribulation. We have shared so many happy moments that have been etched in my heart forever. Rohit has been the invisible support I have leaned on ever since I fell in love with him, and I know I have him by my side, always! Rohit is a special person who has brought untold happiness into my life, just like Niyati," Anita wrote.

YOUR STARS

Sagittarius: Nov 22 - Dec 21

You'll get the best of everyday life. In love, in order to preserve all your chances to reach harmony, don't impose your will. In work, spare your collaborators and avoid argument.

Lucky Numbers: 12, 16, 20, 33, 36, 39

Capricorn: Dec 22 - Jan 19

Beware: don't lose your sense of realities and don't embark on delicate adventures. Take care of your exterior appearance: it will bring you luck this time. At work, unforeseen modifications are possible.

Lucky Numbers: 9, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20

Aquarius: Jan 20 - Feb 18

Single people will make a very promising encounter. If you continue to lead a disorderly life tempo, you'll quickly feel tired. Don't neglect the benefits of reading. Count on unexpected encounters and contacts with new persons.

Lucky Numbers: 4, 12, 19, 23, 26, 30

Pisces: Feb 19 - Mar 20

Your professional projects will have great chances to be a success. Don't insult fate, convince yourself that each one is the architect of his destiny. Don't count on gambling to get out of your present money problems.

Lucky Numbers: 5, 18, 21, 23, 29, 31

Aries: Mar 21 - Apr 19

You'll get out of difficult situations satisfactorily if you don't lose heart. New sentimental adventures in view, you won't know well where to stop for you'll be always ready to get infatuated with the first person to come.

Lucky Numbers: 1, 19, 23, 27, 31, 36

Taurus: Apr 20 - May 20

In love, you'll easily find the words and gestures that are suitable to ease tensions and install complicity. In work, clashes will hardly be avoidable. In the friendship domain, there'll be solid supports for you.

Lucky Numbers: 11, 15, 30, 36, 38, 40

Gemini: May 21 - June 20

Be very cautious in your spendings, especially if they imply a long-range loan. Take good resolutions for your future. You'll have all chances to bring a project or a work to a successful conclusion.

Lucky Numbers: 8, 11, 12, 19, 23, 25

Cancer: June 21 - July 22

You'll have a great thirst for knowledge and discovery; perfect, begin right away to work! The support and attachment of your family circle and fiends will prove primordial. Even though you don't show your sentiments, your close ones can know that they have a place in your existence.

Lucky Numbers: 7, 14, 19, 20, 23, 29

Leo: July 23 - Aug 22

Single people will find the love of their lives in the course of a trip. Cope with your financial problems without delay, before they become more serious. Consult your doctor right away in case of a health problem instead of treating it with disdain.

Lucky Numbers: 4, 10, 15, 18, 19, 20

Virgo: Aug 23 - Sept 22

You'll be full of ideas and projects, and you'll be in a hurry to implement them. You'll have the bad tendency to take your desires for realities, especially in your sentimental life. Don't get exaggeratedly excited and don't see too big.

Lucky Numbers: 5, 9, 12, 13, 28, 30

Libra: Sept 23 - Oct 22

A very good week for contacts and moves of all kinds. For couples, pleasure and well-being will be present. For lonely souls, an important encounter should take place this time. Don't take into account the counsels of certain near ones who'll try to drag you into hazardous adventures,

Lucky Numbers: 3, 12, 28, 31, 36, 40

Scorpion: 23 Oct - 21 Nov

You'll brilliantly extricate yourself from a very delicate situation. Be careful not to indulge in an excess of self-confidence if you deal with large-scale business affairs. If you're on the lookout for the sister soul, your wishes will be fulfilled.

Lucky Numbers: 1, 9, 15, 20, 23, 30

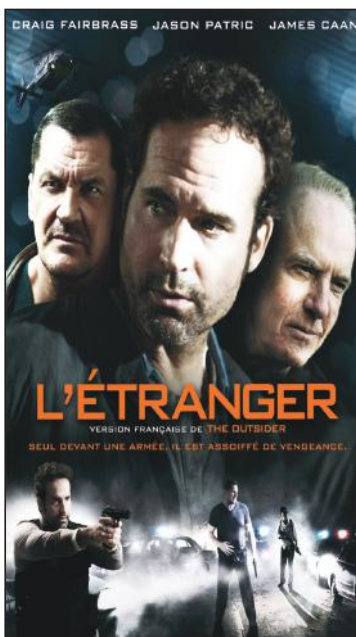
CINE 12

Vendredi 3 décembre - 21.15



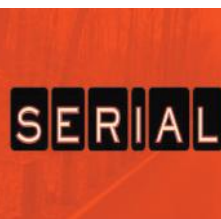
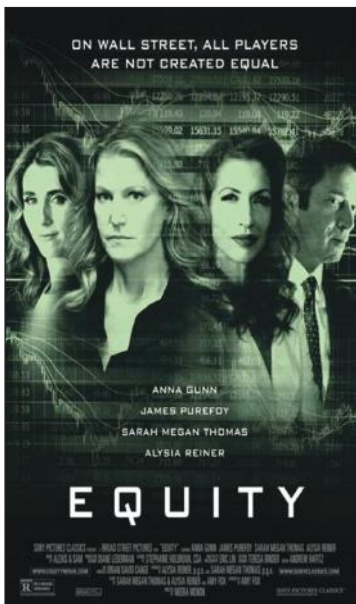
MBC 1

Samedi 4 décembre - 21.20



MBC 1

Dimanche 5 décembre - 21.15



vendredi 3 décembre

MBC 1

07.00 D.Anime: Robot Trains
08.57 Mag: Happy Tales
11.10 Tele: I Forgot I Loved You
12.00 Le Journal
12.30 Tele: Le Prix Du Désir
12.55 Mag: Green Touch
13.55 Local: Glwar Dantan
14.21 D.Anime: Robot Trains
15.20 D.Anime: Les Triples
15.36 D.Anime: Cosmic Quantum...
15.58 D.Anime: Kid Lucky
16.10 D.Anime: The Hive
17.20 Mag: Human Nature
17.50 Mag: Le Saviez-Vous?
18.00 Live: Samachar
18.30 Serial: Surya Puran
19.30 Journal & La Meteo
20.29 Local Prod: Come On Let's...
21.24 Serial: 19-2
23.25 Le Journal
23.35 Mag: Eye On SADC

MBC 2

07.00 DDI Live
10.00 Bisaat-E-Dil
11.01 Tawaan
12.00 Film: Iruattu Araiylil Murattu Kuthu
Starring: Gautham Karthik, Yaashika Annand
15.00 Live: Samachar
15.26 Serial: Aamhi Doghi
15.46 Serial: Bava Maradallu
16.07 Serial: Sondha Bandham
16.31 Serial: Mera Maan Rakhna
16.47 Serial: Imtihaan
17.05 Kullfi Kumarr Bajewala
17.25 Serial: Chhanchhan
18.00 Serial: Colourful Bone
18.30 Mag: DDI Mag
19.05 Zournal Kreol
19.30 Serial: Radha Krishna
20.02 Serial: Aas
20.46 Local: Anjuman

MBC 3

06.00 Mag: Eco India
06.26 Mag: Shift
06.51 Mag: Border Crossing
07.20 Mag: Tomorrow Today
07.46 Doc: Snapshots
09.00 Educa Prog: Grade 5
11.30 Educa Prog: Grade 8
14.03 Doc: Comme Un Poisson...
14.55 Contest Of The Cathedrals
15.36 Doc: A Deadly Legacy
16.47 Mag: Shift
18.00 Doc: Electricity To Go
18.42 Mag: Arts And Culture
19.30 Mag: Euromaxx
20.05 Doc: Volcano Stories
20.30 Local: News (English)
20.40 Doc: Wedding The French...
21.39 Doc: Innovation On Board
22.03 Doc: The Long Way Home
22.45 Doc: Good Virus, Bad Virus
23.28 Doc: Electricity To Go

Cine 12

01.28 Serial: The Bold Type
02.45 Serial: Night Shift
03.27 Film: An Emma Fielding...
04.51 Tele: Muneca Brava
05.30 Serial: Elementary
06.38 Film: Monstre Sur Com...
06.38 Film: Monstre Sur Com...
09.45 Tele: Teresa
10.35 Tele: I Forgot I Loved You
11.00 Serial: Night Shift
12.00 Film: An Emma Fielding...
13.30 Tele: Muneca Brava
14.45 Film: Monstre Sur Com...
16.38 Serial: The Good Doctor
17.20 Serial: Elementary
18.10 Tele: Teresa
19.00 Tele: I Forgot I Loved You
19.34 Mag: Cinemag
20.05 Tele: Les Trois Visages D'ana
20.30 Serial: Last Resort
21.15 Film: Ophelia

Bollywood TV

07.00 Film: Chhote Sarkar
Starring: Govinda, Shilpa Shetty
11.30 / 20.30 - Radha Krishna
12.00 / 21.00 - Anupamaa
12.30 / 21.30 - Mere Sai
13.00 / 22.00 - Agnihera
13.33 / 22.03 - Yeh Teri Galiyan
14.00 / 22.30 -
Bade Acche Lagte Hai
Chhanchhan
15.00 / 21.46 - Sethji
15.25 Film: Naqaab
Starring: Bobby Deol, Urvashi Sharma, Akshaye Khanna
18.00 Live: Samachar
18.30 Kundali Bhagya
19.00 Ishaaron Ishaaron Mein
19.31 Serial: Bhakharwadi
20.00 Serial: Siddhi Vinayak

samedi 4 décembre

06.27 D.Anime: The Hive
06.42 D.Anime: Boule Et Bill
06.56 D.Anime: Booba
07.15 D.Anime: Sabrina
07.35 D.Anime: All Hail King Julien
09.05 Mag: Human Nature
10.00 Local: Zafan Nou Zil
10.30 Mag: Urban Gardens
12.00 Le Journal
12.35 Tele: Teresa
14.45 Mag: Sur Mesure
15.20 D.Anime: Robot Trains
15.35 D.Anime: Pet Alien
16.00 D.Anime: Cosmic Quantum...
16.20 D.Anime: Kid Lucky
17.13 Serial: Hi Opie!
17.40 Mag: Le Saviez-Vous?
18.00 Live: Samachar
18.30 Entertainment: Dance
19.30 Journal & La Meteo
20.10 Local: Autour Des Valeurs
21.20 Film: L'Etranger

07.00 Film: Sharafat
09.20 Mag: DDI Magazine
10.00 Bade Acche Lagte Hai
11.03 Serial: Dikri Vahalno Dariyo
12.00 Serial: Nanda Saukhya Bhare
12.17 Serial: Mooga Manasulu
12.40 Serial: High School
13.02 Annakodiyum Aintu Pengalum
13.27 Anu Pallavi
15.00 Live: Samachar
15.25 Film: Malaal
Starring: Meezaan Jafri, Sharmin Segal, Chinmayee Surve
17.36 DDI Magazine
19.00 Live: Zournal Kreol
19.30 Serial: Radha Krishna
20.06 Serial: Vikram Betaal Ki Rahasya Gatha
20.28 Serial: Bitti Business Wali
21.01 Film: Action Jackson
Stars: Ajay Devgn, Shahid Kapoor

06.00 Doc: Electricity To Go
06.42 Mag: Arts And Culture
06.55 Mag: Our Voices
07.50 Doc: Volcano Stories
09.08 Doc: Innovation On Board
10.16 Doc: Good Virus, Bad Virus
11.00 Doc: Electricity To Go
11.56 Mag: Our Voices
13.00 Doc: Wedding The French...
14.56 Student Support Prog...
18.33 Mag: Science Ou Fiction
19.04 Magazine: Trendd Book
19.34 Mag: Check In
20.30 Local: News (English)
20.40 Les Montagnes Du Monde
22.20 Doc: Craft Chocolate
23.02 Mag: Fungal Empire
23.44 Mag: Future Mag
00.13 Mag: Science Ou Fiction
00.40 Mag: Trendd Book
01.06 Mag: Check In

01.27 Film: Ophelia
03.17 Serial: Series
03.59 Serial: The Magicians
04.41 Serial: Hawaii Five-0
05.22 Tele: Tanto Amor
06.03 Serial: Last Resort
06.44 Serial: Absentia
08.30 Serial: Macgyver
09.56 Serial: Hawaii Five-0
10.40 Film: Monstre Sur Com...
12.15 Serial: French Series
13.32 Serial: Night Shift
15.05 Tele: Muneca Brava
16.34 Mag: Cinemag
17.00 Serial: Last Resort
17.45 Film: Little Women
20.05 Tele: Les Trois Visages D'ana
20.30 Series: Last Resort
21.15 Film: Jeepers Creepers
Starring: Gina Phillips, Justin Long, Jonathan Breck

04.05 Radha Krishna
04.36 Anupamaa
05.03 Mere Sai -- Shraddha Aur...
05.33 Agniphera
06.00 Yeh Teri Galiyan
06.30 Bade Acche Lagte Hai
06.38 Chhanchhan
06.57 Ishaaron Ishaaron Mein
07.18 Siddhi Vinayak
08.02 Yeh Teri Galiyan
10.12 Motu Patlu
10.01 Siddhi Vinayak
11.54 Serial: Bhakharwadi
14.00 Anupamaa
16.00 Pavitra Rishta
18.00 Samachar
18.30 Film: Pal Pal Dil Ke Paas
Star: Karan Deol, Sahher Bhamra, Kallirroi Tzafeta
20.54 Serial: Namah
21.58 Yeh Payaar Nahi Toh Kya..

dimanche 5 décembre

06.00 D.Anime: Robot Trains
06.27 D.Anime: The Hive
06.41 D.Anime: Boule Et Bill
07.00 D.Anime: Booba
09.06 Mag: Human Nature
10.00 Local: Zafan Nou Zil
11.00 Local: Nu Rasinn
12.00 Le Journal
12.40 Tele: Teresa
14.10 Local: Elle - No 169
15.20 D.Anime: Robot Trains
15.49 D.Anime: Pet Alien
16.01 D.Anime: The Twisted...
17.10 Serial: Project MC
18.00 Live: Samachar
18.30 MBC Production
19.30 Le Journal
20.30 Prod Inden: The Mic Africa...
21.25 Film: Equity
Starring: Anna Gunn, James Purefoy, Sarah Megan Thomas

07.00 Film: Shankar Shambhu
10.00 Local: Excerpts From Govardhan Pooja
11.00 Serial: Oru Kai Osai
11.22 Jag Jaanani Maa Vaishnodevi
12.00 Film: Banarasi Babu
Stars: Govinda, Ramya Krishna and Kader Khan
14.05 DDI Magazine
15.20 Serial: Mooga Manasulu
15.45 Serial: He Mann Baware
16.12 Serial: Sondha Bandham
17.05 Serial: Siya Ke Ram
17.40 Kisna
18.00 DDI Magazine
18.30 Local: Tipa Tipa Nu Avance
19.00 Live: Zournal Kreol
20.05 Serial: Mann Mein Vishwas..
20.48 Serial: CID
21.33 Serial: Naagin Season 2

06.00 Mag: Future Mag
06.55 Magazine: Trend Book
07.21 Mag: Check In
08.57 Doc: La Ville Passe Au Vert
09.49 Doc: Craft Chocolate
10.35 Fungal Empire
11.46 Mag: Science Ou Fiction
12.15 Magazine: Trend Book
12.41 Mag: Check In
13.32 Les Montagnes Du Monde
14.15 Doc: La Ville Passe Au Vert
18.33 Mag: Future Mag
19.00 Doc: Garden Party
19.33 Doc: Comme Une Envie...
20.30 Local Prod: News (English)
20.45 Doc: Japan From Above
21.37 Doc: The Neanderthals
22.19 Doc: Cholitas
23.00 Doc: The World's Biggest Family
23.43 Mag: Magnifique

01.40 Film: Jeepers Creepers
02.58 Serial: Midnight, Texas
03.39 Film: L'Etranger
05.14 Tele: Tanto Amor
06.04 Serial: Last Resort
06.45 Film: Sox: A Family's Best...
08.30 Serial: Macgyver
09.12 Film: L'Etranger
10.52 Film: Little Women
12.46 Serial: Midnight, Texas
13.27 Serial: Night Shift
15.38 Tele: Muneca Brava
16.55 Serial: Last Resort
17.45 Serial: Midnight, Texas
18.30 Film: Sox: A Family's Best...
20.05 Tele: Les Trois Visages D'ana
20.30 Serial: Les Proies
21.15 Film: Encounter
Avec: Luke Hemsworth, Anna Hutchison, Tom Atkins
22.44 Tele: Le Prix Du Désir

01.00 Serial: Siddhi Vinayak
02.38 Bhakharwadi
04.31 Anupamaa
06.34 Pavitra Rishta
08.00 Motu Patlu
08.11 Ikyawann
10.00 Jaana Na Dil Se Door
12.00 Piya Albela
14.00 Agniphera
16.29 Punar Vivaah
18.00 Live: Samachar
18.30 Film: Drona
Starring: Abhishek Bachchan, Priyanka Chopra, Kay Menon
20.40 Entertainment: Dance
21.29 Bade Acche Lagte Hai
23.24 Serial: Piya Albela

MBC 2

Samedi 4 décembre

- 21.00

Stars: Ajay Devgn, Shahid Kapoor



Dimanche 5 décembre

- 18.30

Stars: Abhishek Bachchan, Priyanka Chopra, Kay Menon



Barbados: after four centuries under the British crown, former slave island looks to bright new republican future

The move to a republic has been gathering pace for many years.



Matt Qvortrup
Chair of Applied Political
Science, Coventry University

Fifty-five years after gaining independence from Britain in 1966, Barbados has become a republic – and other Commonwealth countries, where support for the monarchy is becoming more volatile than ever, could well follow in its wake.

The change to a republic has been a long time coming for the 300,000 citizens of the small Caribbean island nation. Mia Mottley, Barbados' centre-left prime minister, has long advocated the change. As far back as 2005, Mottley – then deputy prime minister – said that the Barbadian Labour Party was committed to holding a referendum on the issue:

We feel that it is the right thing to do to have a Barbadian head of state. We accept that there was a concern that the Government alone should not make that decision in this day and age and we are therefore committed to expressing our views to the public and having them pass judgement on it.

The vote was planned for 2008. Then the financial crisis hit and the cost of holding such a vote was considered to be too expensive, so it was postponed.

There has been some speculation that the removal of the Queen was associated with the Black Lives Matter movement, and a new confidence. Certainly, Mottley has used this as a way of drawing attention and gathering public support for the issue – but, in truth, a republic has long been on the agenda.

Despite her party losing office between 2008 and 2018, the issue remained on the table. In 2015, then prime minister, Freundel Stuart – from the Centre-Right Democratic Party – said that Barbados was moving towards a republic. He said:

We respect [the Queen] very highly as head of the Commonwealth and accept that she and all of her successors will continue to be at the apex of our political understanding. But in terms of Barbados' constitutional status, we have to move from a monarchical system to a republican form of government in the very near future.

Mottley's BLP won a landslide victory in the 2018 election, securing all 30 parliamentary seats, giving her administration carte



PA Images/Alamy Stock Photo

blanche to proceed with plans to become a republic. In truth, this was not a contentious issue as both sides had espoused the republican cause.

This time, the decision was made without holding a referendum. Unlike the Pacific island of Tuvalu in 2008 and the neighbouring St Vincent and the Grenadines in 2009, the voters were not given a say. Perhaps because the citizens of these two island states voted "no" to having an elected head of state, which was the preferred model in Barbados.

This was an issue that divided the republican cause in Australia in 1999. When the country voted on the republican movement's "preferred model", which was for a head of state to be nominated by a two-thirds majority of parliament, rather than holding a direct election, 54% of Australians voted "no", many of them thought to be republicans who wanted a directly elected head of state.

In 1996 a Constitution Review Commission was given the job of exploring Barbados' link with the Crown. In 1998 it recommended that Barbados become a parliamentary republic. In 2005, the country replaced the London-based Judicial Committee of the Privy Council as its final court of appeal with the Caribbean Court of Justice in Trinidad and Tobago.

Section 49 of the Barbados constitution states that: "Parliament may, by an Act of Parliament passed by both Houses, alter this Constitution." So it didn't take a great deal to alter the legal basis of the constitution from a monarchy to a republic.

Could it be catching?

Barbados' decision could prompt a wave of other countries deciding to adopt the republican model. In Jamaica – the largest of the Commonwealth nations in the region – both political parties have spoken in favour of becoming a republic. In 2003, the then prime minister, P.J. Patterson of the centre-left People's National Party, pledged to abolish the monarchy by 2007, telling a party conference:

I love the Queen dearly, but the time has come when we must have a head of state chosen by us.

Opinion polls taken in 2020 found that 55% of the Jamaicans want to end the country's association with the Crown.

Republicanism is not confined to the Caribbean – as recently as March 2021, a Canadian poll found that 45% of respondents wanted to move to a republican model and only 24% were committed to remaining a monarchy. Even in Britain support for the monarchy is falling, especially by the youngest voters, who favour an elected head of state by a 10% margin according to a YouGov poll which found 41% of 18- to 24-year-olds favoured a republic.

New beginnings

The Prince of Wales, who flew to Barbados for the handover ceremony, cut a dignified figure when congratulating the country on its decision, telling Barbadians:

The creation of this republic offers a new beginning. From the darkest days of our past and the appalling atrocity of slavery which forever stains our history, people of this island forged their path with extraordinary fortitude.

So, are we seeing the writing on the wall for the British Crown in former imperial possessions? The Queen is still head of state in 15 nations, including the UK, Canada and Australia – and support for republicanism is reportedly waning in the latter country. In neighbouring New Zealand, meanwhile, a recent survey showed that 50% of respondents favoured retaining the monarchy, even after the death of the current queen, compared with 44% who favoured a republic. This is a turnaround from a similar poll taken two years ago, when 55% said they wanted to become a republic.

The only thing these polls can tell us is that support for the monarchy in Britain's former imperial possessions remains volatile and the chances are that the Sun will set on the Crown elsewhere before too long.



Tree of Knowledge

Madisyn Taylor

A World in Confusion

When the world is in chaos, we can still have our own inner peace and maintain a sense of calm in sea of unrest.

People who maintain their sense of calm when things around them are in a state of flux and confusion are always wonderful to be around. We feel calmer just being near them, as if they have activated our own sense of inner peace. From them we learn that we can be calm, even when everything around us is in turmoil, because we know that no matter what happens, this inner sense of calm will help us to function well. Often, times of confusion are the times that enable us to find that part of ourselves that knows how to cope, and how to be a light to others in the storm.

If we allow ourselves to be thrown off balance by every piece of disturbing news that comes our way, we may be relying too much on our emotions. On the other hand, our thoughts may also be unreliable at times like these, as they chatter on endlessly about what might happen next. If our feelings and thoughts activate one another in a hectic way, then we become caught up in the confusion that surrounds us. However, if we can locate the stillness at the center of our hearts, we can find composure in almost any situation. In addition, we provide a safe place for our friends and family, who are also prone to taking on the confusion of a world in flux.

It helps to remember that we don't need to completely understand what's happening right now, nor do we need to be able to predict the future. Most of us just want to find our way to being at peace with whatever happens, and we can find this peace inside. Cultivating our inner clarity with meditation, journaling, and reading words that inspire us, will lead us to that place inside us that's already there, just waiting.