



Webinar held on 'Democracy Under Strain'

RONO HILLS, SEP 10:

The third part of the series of events scheduled for observing International Democracy Day by Arunachal Pradesh State Election Commission (SEC) in collaboration with Rajiv Gandhi University (RGU), got underway with the successful conduct of a national webinar titled "Democracy Under Strain : Solution for a Changing World".

The webinar was coordinated by three Departments in RGU, namely, Institute of Distance Education (IDE, RGU), Department of Political Science, and Department of National Security Studies (NSS, RGU).

The programme was attended by dignitaries from all over the country with four distinguished speakers who gave their perspectives on the topic of the webinar.

Prof Amitava Mitra, Pro VC, RGU, gave a brief overview of the webinar. He stated that in 2007 the United Nations General Assembly resolved to observe 15 September as the International Day of Democracy with the purpose of promoting and upholding the principles of democracy and invited all member states and organizations to commemorate the day in an appropriate manner that contributes to raising public awareness.

He recalled that on the establishment of the Indian nation, after it got independence, many political pundits had predicted the inevitability of decline of democracy in the then newly formulated nation. He expressed his pride on where the nation stands today as the largest democracy in the country.

The first distinguished speaker of the programme was Prof (Retd) Surya Narayan Misra. He retired as a professor from Utkal University, Odisha in the year 2010. He took the audience through a historical flashback of democracy. Although democracy may be a western terminology, he said that the concept of 'welfare state' was ever present in the Indian tradition which was reflected in Chanakya's Arthashastra.

He referred to the recent coup in Afghanistan as a threat to democracy worldwide. The apparent withdrawal of the strongest democracy in the world from Afghanistan and its failure to create a smooth transition of power in over two decades of its rule, has set a panic button in the world, as the next target is going to be the largest democracy in the world, he predicted. This, he said, is the greatest strain to democracy in recent times. He expounded on the various waves of democracy as popularized by various political scientists such as Samuel P Huntington.

With the growing threat to democracy from autocratic regimes, Prof Narayan pointed out that the democratic world has yet not found an 'hounourable means' to stop the spread of un-democratic regimes in the world. He referred to the slogan given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi "Sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka viswas and sabka prayas" as the ideal voice of Indian democracy.

He, however, noted that India has to take huge strides in achieving this goal as the world looks towards India to lead from the front. He acknowledged that there are many caveats in Indian

democracy. In order to get past all these and emerge as a proper democracy, he proposed that India needs to have an accountable, transparent and democratically performative governance model. He opined that democracy is the only form of governance that can bring peace to the volatility of the world.

He also opined that some of the autocratic republics in the world are using economic power to justify their model of ruling over democratic form of governance. Narayan has also been a visiting faculty to the Department of Political Science, Rajiv Gandhi University, till 2017. He lauded the organizing committee for organizing this programme on the day when India is celebrating Ganesh Chaturthi, in his concluding remarks.

“My notion of Peace is not devoid of security”, is how Prof. Priyankar Upadhyaya began his lecture to start the second technical session. He also reiterated Prof. Narayan’s view that democracy may be an alien terminology for India but the democratic value system has always been an intrinsic part of the Indian nation. Traditionally, India imbibed the concept of sastratha and acceptance of opposite and multiple viewpoints.

He expressed that an “ideal democracy cannot exist.” The need of the hour is the continuous evolution of democratic values by the stakeholders of democracy. He stressed that even though democracy in the present context may have many shortcomings, there is no replacement to the democratic form of governance. The real world democracy has changed over the course of its long march through the ages.

He expressed his concern over the manipulation of people’s mandate through various social media platforms. Such subliminal narratives, propounded through the digital media platforms raises the query of whether the electoral results as the true voice of the common masses, he added. The excessive involvement of money in elections is also a blot in the way of evolution of democratic values according to Prof. Upadhyaya.

He currently holds the UNESCO Chair for Peace and Intercultural Understanding and serves on the UNESCO/ UniTwin Executive Committee of Inter-religious Dialogue and Intercultural Understanding (IDIU). He has also served in Banaras Hindu University for over four decades in different teaching and research positions. Despite traveling to many parts of the globe, he expressed that Arunachal Pradesh still remains a ‘Romantic Imagination’ for him. He enunciated his desire to visit Arunachal Pradesh in the near future.

Nyali Ete, Secretary, SECAP, gave an administrative perspective to the topic in discussion in the webinar. Being an APCS cadre of 1992 batch and having served as an Extra Assistant Commissioner (EAC) in both West Kameng and Tirap districts of the state, he was specific to Arunachal Pradesh in his address to the online gathering.

He stated that free, fair and timely elections are the key to success of representation of the will of people in the state. Hacking of social media platforms is a serious threat to democratic expression of the common masses, according to Shri Ete. He specified that the erosion of democratic values in the country is a result of degradation of the democratic setup in the country.

He however feels that all is not lost as the administrative stakeholders and the Election Commission of India needs to play a proactive rather than a reactive role in order to revive the faith of people in democracy. Prof. P. K. Panigrahi, Coordinator, Dept. of NSS, RGU, also focused his deliberation on Arunachal Pradesh as he has been a long standing academic witness to the changing geo-political scenario in the state.

He acknowledged that there are many varieties of democracies world over. But he also believes that democracy is the only modus operandi of governance. He lamented on the fact that the

democratic setup in India has lost its politeness over the course of time, which can be witnessed with the unparliamentary activities that one is privy to in the Indian temple of democracy. Partisan press, stressed judiciary, coercion and aggression in politics have shaken the four pillars of democracy.

Speaking about Arunachal Pradesh, he said that the democratic setup in the state needs to focus on ideology based politics, which will prevent mass defection of democratically elected representatives in the state. This, according to him, is essential to restoring the faith of people in democracy.

Prof Saket Kushwaha Vice- Chancellor, RGU gave his regards to all the members present in the webinar. He reminded the gathering about the political thought of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and the sacrifice made by him and Sardar Bhagat Singh. We need to ensure that we guard our democracy in order to truly acknowledge the sacrifices of the people who fought for our freedom. In order to do that he said “we need to rhyme our thoughts in one direction in order to find a common axis of democratic existence.”

Nearly 100 participants attended the webinar form across the country.