



Blood, Sweat and Tears

-Neelabh Kashyap, XI

The boy lies on his bed, his chin propped up by a stack of pillows. A fan whirrs noisily overhead. His pale face is illuminated by the bright glow of his phone screen - a news feed displaying a count of the dead, hitting numbers and figures he has never before seen. He stares at it for a second and, realizing that it has nothing to do with him so long as he is safe inside his refuge, swipes past it. A post on the phone screen suddenly catches his attention - a collage of heart-wrenching pictures of people walking on foot; in torn clothes, starved and haggard; some rolling their luggage bags with their children sprawled on top; some carrying their babies on a balance across their shoulders. Accompanying these pictures is an article written by a certain Mr Kashyap. The boy decides to take out some time from his otherwise "busy" schedule to read it -

The condition of the unskilled labour force in India, as of now, is something that fills the heart of whosoever sees it with sorrow. The nationwide lockdown issued in response to the global pandemic resulted in workplaces with large gatherings such as factories and industries being shut down, and subsequently, hundreds of workers being dismissed collectively. Furthermore, people engaged in activities in the unorganised sector, now found themselves without a job. These people, who had migrated from rural areas of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odissa, U.P., Rajasthan, etc. to cities to aspire and live "the urban dream"; and earn enough money to live a better life, were left unaccounted for. These people, who worked 2-3 shifts a day; lived in slums, more often in groups of 20 in one small, cramped room, just so that they could earn as much money as possible to afford an English education for their children; lost their source of income. Stranded between a rock and a hard place they chose to return to their villages, where life was much better, safer and they could be with their families. Millions of migrant workers trickled out of the cities, treading thousands of kilometres to reach their native states. "And spread the Coronavirus further", curses the boy inwardly, swiping past the post. Scrolling further down, he sees another article written by a reporter named neelabh_official123 - The mass exodus of the migrant workers, in a bid to return to their homes, has led the entire purpose of the

lockdown to blow up in smoke. The shocking pictures are now being fed incessantly and hold the coveted slot on prime time news.

The boy's eyes then wander to a video on the screen of people fighting over packets of biscuits; jostling and squeezing, trying to get their share of food from the distribution centres set up by NGOs and the state governments; the police yelling at them to maintain social distancing all falling to starving deaf ears. Social distancing left at a Distance, read the caption.

The central government has issued a 20 lakh crore stimulus package to boost the stagnating domestic industries and revive the economy, but that is in no way of any direct help to the workers who continue on their flight. Why then is the government not able to tackle this issue? Did they really forget this large section of people that make up a third of the backbone of the Indian economy? No, they didn't. The central cause to this problem is population. The amount of people constituting the migrant worker force in India is larger than the entire population of most European countries. It is simply not feasible for the government to put money into every man and woman's pocket. Yet the government is doing everything within its power to sustain the migrating workers and ensure that they receive the basic necessities. The system of One Nation, One Ration Card will enable migrant workers and their family members to access PDS benefits from any ration shop in the country, which they could only do so from their own states earlier. As for the question of the wages, the lockdown is being lifted slowly. The possibility of major MNCs shifting their bases from China to India, will provide a massive boost to the economy. All this, however, depends on the situation, which continues to remain uncertain. The boy puts down his phone. His sense of empathy is quickly brushed aside by a wave of apathy. His hand reaches inside a bag of chips, already the fifth of the day. Stuffing his mouth with a handful of chips, and his ears with torn earphones that still manage to do their job when held in a certain position, he picks up his phone again with his messy fingers. His face, devoid of emotions, is lit up by the screen's glow.

The walls of the prison creep ever closer.

Weekly Newsletter of The Assam Valley Express

DOES IT WORK?

-Vasuman Lohia, XI

The cliched Indian truth is that reforms are only heard of in times of a crisis, post which the said reforms suffer through an existential crisis. As a matter of interest, you would have noticed that even before something happens in our country, the homebound intellectuals already assess its pros or cons, and then the public is left to calculate its authenticity. It's a blatant feud of two conflicting egos that either hate or support the BJP, the reality is a whole new ball game.

Everyone knows that the prevailing labor-laws have certainly not helped the economy but few realize its obligations and we tend to assume that they serve its purpose. The new laws are aimed at reducing the regulatory processes a business has to undertake. Indias having deluded themselves into chasing a desi version of the American Dream, realize that their true calling is business, race to get a license to fulfill the legalities only to reach a dead end. Time tells no lies, months, or perhaps years, for the marginally lucky, later they comprehend the hints that were always there to know that they were never eligible to start that business. It's known that one cannot give license to a person without knowing if the firm is technically qualified to handle the equipment, this holds all the more significance with what had happened in Vizag. The new law dilutes protections like floor wages, work shifts, and restricts the formation of unions. Investors might not invest due to tax terrorism, frequent change in regulations, poor physical infrastructure, high turn-around time at ports, and poor labor productivity. Then all the talk about companies moving from China to India is at best a pipedream. While the labor-laws in India are indeed serpentine, superficial,

and stringent, should it be done away with entirely? Given the dire state of the economy, workers might continue to be denied basic hygiene, but now, with the backing of the law. Then again, the existing laws only protected the formal, 10% of laborers, not the expansive informal sector. The arguments referring to the security of informal workers are bogus because Parliament had passed the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act in 2008, "to provide for their social security and welfare" but no state has implemented it. The removed laws were "commendable" and were the reason why we have failed our migrant workers, who were forced to recreate the Dandi March, by not supporting them with their dues and abandoning them only to die at the mercy of the rails. Consider the counterfactual, if a greater proportion of labors had enjoyed the basic protections of employment, the migrant crisis might have been less acute. The RSS says it's a "bigger pandemic" yes, they certainly didn't get the memo. Refrain from weighing this as being pro-industry or pro-labor, this is a situation where businesses need to survive for economic-growth. According to the World Bank, with less restrictive laws, India could add "2.8 million more good quality formal sector jobs annually". It is undeniable that without labor reform, India cannot address its demographic dividend challenge as unemployment is at a 45-year high. The result might be a big-bang equivalent explosion of unconstrained creativity and prosperity. Now the question arises that these might be against the International Labour Organisation conventions, ratified by India, which have become the law and won't sustain legally. The problems are known, it is time to find the solutions.

HARD FOUGHT

-Asmita Kakati, XII

She loved and she hated,
She cared and she aided.
She fought but was put down,
Yet she smiled and always was around.

She was wise and strong,
She was beautiful like a song;
And with her weapons could she swing
The whole world upside down without a king.

She raised her voice and was independent now,
To all the wrongs done to her she took a vow
Never ever to bow down,
Not to any crown.



-Humraj Singh Jassal, XII

In this day and age where technology has seeped into the crevices of human existence, the fate of Icarus is perhaps reversed reality. The essence of the phenomenon that is, Artificial Intelligence is yet to be unveiled in its entirety. Once what was a paroxysm, is a part of the mundane. As we deliberate the truth behind the many assumptions surrounding AI, and if whether the human species is to make way for the world of an evolved human in the shape of a Robot. The technological aspect of AI makes it very clear that the probability of an AI rule is almost negligible. AI at its core is a program that can self learn and perform certain commands that have been encoded in it as per instruction of the programmer, AI however is still not sentient. AI can take inputs however its level of input cannot be classified as a true perception. If SIRI were asked for life advice then it would offer merely redirect the seeker to a web portal on mental well-being and how to keep going ahead in life or just another motivational speech, it won't revert back with the beginnings of a conversation that will soothe the woes and serve as a gentle push towards your destiny. It lacks the capability of perceiving the most important factor that true intelligence can, emotions. AI can be programmed to perceive all the parameters of a situation

and adjust accordingly, however, it fails at anything more than what is not taught and made to learn otherwise, any parameter that has not been set by the programmer will be taken as an input, however, it would have no use until the programmer classifies it. AI is also incapable of making any moral decision whatsoever since morality is not objective and is a fickle mistress, capriciously vying for complexities that make one human. By the time AI would be developed to a possibly threatening stage humanity will cease to exist, hence we hereby rule out the possibility of an AI takeover.

In our times of need AI has acted as a savior from great perils. With AI lending a helping hand, science has discovered medicine, made surgical machinery with zero error in operation, and has further achieved great feats in space exploration. This goes a long way to show that AI is not only artificial however it is not truly intelligent.

The only question that remains is how having AI can affect our capabilities, it is almost as accurate as depicted in various Sci-fi movies, people will surrender themselves to the comforts of sloth when we truly are dependent on AI. At its core, AI strives to bring out the best in itself and the humans that it was made to serve.

THE OUTPOST

A major terrorist attack was thwarted by the police in J&K's Pulwama as they intercepted a vehicle moving with "huge quantity" of explosives. PM Oli's attempts at securing validation for the new political map was put on hold in the face of shaky numbers in the Parliament. After Rajasthan and MP, India's locusts nightmare haunts the farmers in Maharashtra, UP and Punjab. Eastern Ladakh is witnessing a standoff between India and China around the troubled waters of the Pangong. Amphan has left, but India still has its hands full as the natural onslaught continues with heatwaves.

The Quarantine Watchlist

Ripple #129

-Jeremy Jahau, Editor-in-Chief

*He found himself at
the old counter
Toasting his brothers
of the battlefield
But as he drowned
away his sorrows
The drink was
not the only spirit
bothering him*

Feeling sick and tired of the same four walls at home? Well grab your popcorn and immerse yourself in the world of media, here is a list of some of our suggestions:

DARK: Plunge down the rabbit hole written by Ronny Schalk into a small desolate German town as you witness the secrets of this town slowly be revealed through its mysterious past.

OUTLANDER: If mystery is not your taste, follow the tale of Claire Randall who during her honeymoon in Scotland is transported to 1743 where her life is endangered until she meets a charming Scottish warrior.

VIOLET EVERGARDEN: Japanese animation has a beautiful way of storytelling this series is a shining example. Join Violet in her new life as a 'doll' as she tries to piece together the meaning behind her former commander's parting words.

HOSPITAL PLAYLIST: Maybe you want to go on an emotional rollercoaster in the comforts of your home? Well then, this Korean-Drama about five childhood best friends and their journey as medical professionals will sure do the trick.

Keep It Reel!

Remember Then?

-Nomera Ibnat Alam, XII



Editor-in-Chief: Jeremy Jahau

Deputy Editor: Letminlun Haokip

Associate Editor: Anoushka S. Rabha

Correspondents: Ojas, Lavanya & Ssara

Design & Layout: Moom Lego & Jeremy Jahau

Illustrator: Takhe Tamo Reela & Eloziini Senachena

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Mistress-in-Charge: Ms. Sarmistha Paul Sarkar

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E-mail: ave@assamvalleyschool.com

Telephone: 09678074320/08812009627 Website: www.assamvalleyschool.com

Patron: Dr. Vidhukesh Vimal, The Headmaster of The Assam Valley School

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