

SPECIAL CAMPAIGN 3.0

Ministry of Education has been conducting the Special Campaign 3.0. The main focus areas of the Campaign include effective disposal of public grievances, references from Members of Parliament, Parliament assurances, cleanliness drive in the workplace and around the premise, disposal of scrap and weeding out of files.

Department of School Education & Literacy (DoSE&L), Ministry of Education is actively conducting the Special Campaign 3.0 on Swachhata, encompassing both the Ministry and its Autonomous Bodies (ABs) across the country. The initiative commenced with a preparatory phase on 15 September 2023, aimed at identifying specific targets to be taken up for cleaning for the main phase of the campaign, which is being conducted from 2nd October 2023 to 31st October 2023. The primary focus of this campaign is to enhance space management in offices and create awareness among the masses about Swachhata.

Since the beginning of the preparatory phase of the Special campaign, DoSE&L along with its ABs have identified various cleanliness sites across the country.

Polls in J&K will be held at Right Time!

■ OMKAR DATTATRAY

ECI has announced the schedule and dates for the assembly polls in five states which are going to be held as per the announcement of the EC .However the chief election commissioner (CEC) has said in a press conference that assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir will be held at the right time after taking into account the security scenario of the UT and as deemed fit by the election commission .Jammu and Kashmir is under the central rule from the last over five years and the UT is ruled by the center's representative the LG .But the political parties, their leaders and the common people want immediate elections of the assembly so that there can be a popular government in place in Jammu and Kashmir which will heal the wounds of the alienated people and will also come up to the expectation of common masses .With the statement of the election commissioner of India that assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir will be conducted at the right time ,it has become crystal clear that neither the government of India ,nor its election commission is in favor of holding elections in near future.BJP is sensing defeat in the polls in Jammu and Kashmir ,when these will be held and thus is reluctant and indifferent towards the holding the assembly polls .Now the ECI also is not in favor of holding the much delayed assembly polls and so has it said that the elections in Jammu and Kashmir will be held at the right time and one does not understand what the right time means and so it seems that in near future there seems no possibility of conducting the assembly polls .The ECI has said that the decision to hold assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir will taken after considering the security scenario and the elections will be held at the right time .The expression of right time is vague and indefinite .Moreover the definition of the right time is very ambiguous .There is several parameters to define the right time and the right time has many interpretations .What is right time to the centre government and the ECI will not be the right time to the political parties and people both of these demand immediate assembly elections so that a democratically elected government is installed which will prove to be a panacea for all problems and ills of the people .The expression right times implies that the assembly elections will not be held in near future .It seems that the election commission of India is hand in glove with the center government and both talk the same thing that the assembly polls will be held at the right time .The expression right time is impregnable with many interpretations and it points towards the fact that centre government headed by the BJP and the election commission does not favor early assembly polls and thus have the both said that elections will be held at the right time .The expression right time is vague and uncertain because what is right time to the centre government and ECI may not be the right time to the political parties ,regional politicians and to the general public .Centre and the UT government is shouting at the top of their voice and day in and day out that the situation in Jammu and Kashmir read Kashmir is normal and the militancy is counting its days and is at its last leg .If there is normalcy in Kashmir ,then why is the centre government delaying ,dallying the assembly elections .There seems to be contradiction in the statements and perception of the BJP government as on one side they talk that the ground situation post abrogation of article 370 is normal and conducive and then what forces and prevents the centre government and the election commission to hold the much delayed assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir .It seems that either the government of India and the LG's administration is speaking wrong and untruth so far as the security scenario of Jammu and Kashmir is concerned or they do not like to give the orphaned and alienated people of Jammu and Kashmir ,their right to vote and thus denies this fundamental right to them .Centre government wants to perpetuate the central rule in Jammu and Kashmir and thus they are not in favor of the early assembly elections. The centre government has robbed the people of Jammu and Kashmir of their right to vote and form a popular ,democratic and peoples government .If the situation in Jammu and Kashmir is fast returning to normalcy and when the countdown of the militancy has begun ,then the centre government and the ECI should take off their biased blinkers and announce the early schedule of holding assembly polls and this is a good service to democracy otherwise democracy and democratic rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir will continue to be stifled .There is urgent need to restore electoral democracy in Jammu and Kashmir by empowering the people by giving them the right to vote which has been snatched from them from the last over five years .Thus there is urgent need to hold the assembly elections so that the people of Jammu and Kashmir will cast their vote and chose their representatives who will form the democratic government .But the centre government and the election commission seem to be reluctant to hold the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir and thus both state ifs and buts and say that the polls will be held at the right time .People of Jammu and Kashmir wonder when will that right time come so that they will cast their vote and elect the government of their choice in Jammu and Kashmir .Centre government and the election commission is in no mood to hold the much delayed assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir to empower the alienated people of the UT with the right to vote .The constitution has guaranteed its citizens with the right to vote as a democratic right ,but alas the BJP's centre government and the election commission is obstructing and denying them this sacred right and thus the UT of Jammu and Kashmir is without a popular and democratic as well as people's government for the last over five years .The political parties both regional and national except the ruling BJP are very much disturbed by the remarks of the ECI that assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir will be held at the right time by considering the security scenario .That right time will perhaps not come in near future and the UT will continue to be ruled by proxy of the centre government and the democracy and the people of Jammu and Kashmir will have to bear the brunt of continued central rule where there is no connect between the rulers and the ruled .In short the ECI should take an early call and announce the schedule of the assembly polls which political parties and the general public demand most vociferously .Excuses and ifs and butts have no justification and the assembly elections should be held in the sensitive UT .Even the supreme court of the country has opined that democracy cannot be denied to the people of Jammu and Kashmir permanently .The time is opportune for holding the much delayed assembly polls and the ECI should step in and issue schedule of the assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir and restore democracy in the UT.

(The author is a columnist ,social and KP activist).

■ DR. PARVEEN KUMAR

Despite our endeavour of having a just and fair society with equality, equity and a uniform access for all; the women across the globe particularly girls are still being confronted with some basic issues like access to quality education, adequate nutrition, health care, legal rights, political representation, forced marriage, domestic violence and empowerment. A report of the United Nations says that the world is home to more than 1.1 billion girls under age 18, who are poised to become the largest generation of female leaders, entrepreneurs and change-makers the world has ever seen. Many global development plans do not include or consider girls, and their issues become 'invisible'. More than 62 million girls around the world had no access to education, as of 2014, according to USAID. Worldwide and collectively, girls ages 5 to 14 spend more than 160 million hours more on household chores than boys of the same age do. Globally, one in four girls is married before age 18. Worldwide, nearly 1 in 4 girls aged 15-19 years is neither employed nor in education or training compared to 1 in 10 boys of the same age. In the poorest countries, only 13% of girls who manage to enroll in secondary school complete their education. COVID-19 has further deteriorated the things for women. In the aftermath of COVID-19, reports also revealed that in the year 2021 around 435 million women and girls would have been living on less than \$1.90 a day including 47 million who had been pushed into poverty as a result of COVID-19. One in three women worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence. Emerging data shows that since the outbreak of COVID-19, violence against women and girls and particularly domestic violence has intensified. At least 60% of the countries still discriminate against daughters' rights to inherit land and non land assets in either law or practice. Of the two sexes; unfortunately, it is the woman who seem to suffer disproportionately from reproductive health issues. This is despite the fact that sound reproductive health of women is integral to the vision that every child is needed, every birth is safe, every young person is free from HIV, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity. Implicit in this vision is the idea that women will be able to exercise their rights to information on and access to safe, affordable and acceptable methods of fertility regulation as well as quality health care services. Every year millions of girls face unintended pregnancies, exposing them to risks during childbirth or unsafe abortions and interfering with their ability to go to school. As women bear children, and also often bear the responsibility for nurturing them, sexual and reproductive health and rights issues cannot be separated from gender equality. Cumulatively, the denial of these rights exacerbates poverty and gender

Democracy Shivers: 4th Pillar Invaded in West Bengal

■ MANMOHAN DHAR

Democracy is often referred to as a four-pillar system, with the executive, legislature, judiciary, and media representing its vital components. The media, often regarded as the fourth estate, plays a crucial role in ensuring the transparency and accountability of a democratic society. However, recent events in the Indian state of West Bengal have raised concerns about the state of press freedom and democracy in the region. The invasion of the fourth pillar by political elements has sent shivers down the spine of democracy in West Bengal. A free press is the cornerstone of any thriving democracy. It acts as a watchdog, holding the government and other powerful institutions accountable for their actions. It provides a platform for diverse voices and opinions, fosters informed public discourse, and plays a vital role in shaping public opinion. In

essence, a free press is essential for the functioning of a healthy democracy. West Bengal has witnessed a troubling erosion of press freedom. In a recent development a Journalist was hit by a corporate in the Manta Benarjee regime in the state. The corporate even tried to damage the camera and manhandle the cameraperson. This decline is most notably seen in the heightened political polarization and violence that has engulfed the state. This political hooliganism and interference in the free reporting of media is definitely going to affect the image of West Bengal in particular and that of the country in general. Journalists who dare to report on sensitive issues or challenge the narrative of those in power often face physical threats and violence. Instances of journalists being assaulted, harassed, or even murdered have become alarmingly common in most parts of the country.

This climate of fear inhibits journalists from performing their duties without bias or fear of retribution. The fear of reprisals has led to self-censorship among journalists and media outlets in West Bengal. Many choose to avoid reporting on contentious issues, fearing backlash from powerful political figures. This not only compromises the quality of journalism but also undermines the public's right to be informed. The erosion of press freedom in West Bengal has far-reaching implications for democracy in the state. When the media is unable to function independently and objectively, the public's access to accurate information is compromised. This, in turn, hinders informed decision-making during elections and undermines the principles of a transparent and accountable government. Moreover, it allows those in power to act with impunity, free from scrutiny and accountability. This

unchecked power can lead to corruption, abuse of authority, and the erosion of democratic institutions. A free and independent media is essential for the functioning of a healthy democracy. The invasion of the fourth pillar of democracy in West Bengal is a cause for concern. It not only jeopardizes the fundamental principles of democracy but also threatens the rights of the citizens to access unbiased and accurate information. To safeguard democracy in the country and most importantly in West Bengal, it is imperative that press freedom is upheld, and journalists are allowed to carry out their work without fear of repercussions. Political leaders, civil society, and citizens must come together to protect the fourth estate and ensure that the shivers running through democracy are replaced by a renewed commitment to transparency, accountability, and freedom of the press.

Chanderbagga-free flowing river through Indian subcontinent

■ G.L KHAJURIA

Literally speaking, Chenab acronymises a Persian derivation, Cheen means china and aab means water, annotating thereby China's water. But with the revolving wheel of time, the learned school of thought negated it and attributed that the origin of Chenab is from 'Tandi- a small village or hamlet in Himachal Pradesh (HP) adjoining our state. Even in Sanskrit texts, Chenab river finds its mention as a nectar-clear water having its origin from higher reaches of Himachal Pradesh.

According to our great epics, the Mahabharat and the Harivansha Purana, there is mention of the origin of these two mighty rivers- Chandra and Bhaga from higher reaches amidst the Himalayan region of Himachal Pradesh. And after traversing through longer distances ultimately confluence at Atholi, little below padder (Kishtwar) around 306 kms serpentine is named as chandrabhaga, Chandra literally means Moon and Bhaga Cannotates Luck or virtue. The Chenab or Chandrabhaga as well occupies a very significant place in our revered Rigveda, wherein it has been mentioned as 'Askini'.

Apart from, the Greeks have made a mention about Chenab river in more than many ways. Askelines and Chandrabhaga as Sandropagosviz the man eater or Alexandrapagas as the devour of Alexander the great, who attempted to cross this mighty river and had to suffer disastrously.

The Neelmat Purana, a historical treatise of Kashmir mentions about Chenab or chandrabhaga most prominently. Poster, a well - renowned traveller in 1783 AD extensively journeyed through Kashmir and named this mighty river as chanan. And Vigne, another traveller-cum-explorer in 1783 AD, extensively travelled the vale of Kashmir and recorded in his travelogue the chenab's water from Moon.

And very rightly has as such 'Jean Naudou' a French traveller-cum-author has commented about Chenab as a beautiful, eechanting river having the biggest vibrant, lush green forest in its back drop and explains further regarding the location together with other affiliations as such: 'To the east and the south-east, Kashmir is in communication with upper valley of chandrabhaga and at the foot of frontier ridge which separates the basin of vistasta' the

Jhellum. Kashavata used to constitute an independent principality mentioned one single time in Rajatrangni (Kallhana) but many times in the modern chronicles.

Downstream, Bhadaravakasa was attached to champapura, while more to the south and west campa, vallapura was an independent state where Biksakra were taking refuge, and of whom, a princess was forming a part of harem of Sussala, mentioned many times by Kalhana.

The river Chenab or chandrabhaga after confluencing at Atholi sweeps down surpentineally taking turns and twists on sharp bends sometimes too narrow and deep and at places oftenly with broader width all along its under lying bed -rocks of sub-Himalayan , pre-cambrian region relatively unchangeable in its entire route. The river, of course, accumulates various rivulets, Nallahson its either side of the catchments thereby enhancing its quantitative flow like fiery flames. The river as such forms a narrow gorge cut out of hard rock filled up with perpetual flow of water and is locked up in the rock forming a dam-like shape. And a mega Dul Hasti project generating huge

power potential is the first of the formation in the history of the Charming Chenab.

And still down below , the river has been dammed at Baglihar hydroelectric power project near Batote. The damming of these two hydro- electric projects have provided an ample scope of power generation. But at the same time has indeed lost its natural beauty, its enchanting tones and charming white foaming watery upheavels forever and ever.

The mighty and majestic Chenab or Chandrabhaga is having a nectar-like crystal water with very fast flow spanning its either bank, debouches from hills down and travels hundreds of thousand kilometres in the land-locked mountainous terrain and the plains down below. The river as such emerges out at Aknhoora after passing through Salal and Sawalakot power project and the river flows to Pakistan inter-mingling Tawi, Ravi, Satluj, Beas and other rivers, rivulets and streams. The river as such confluences other mega rivers, en route, with gushing flow and finally drains down into Arabian sea.

(The author is former Deputy Conservator, J&K forests).

YOUR COLUMN

Why do we need tests and grades?

Dear Editor;

Marks and rankings are the currency of education and advancement. But they are flawed and unfair assessments. Off the Mark: How Grades, Ratings, and Rankings Undermine Learning (but Don't Have To) by Jack Schneider and Ethan L. Hutt, is set in the US, but analyses this global dilemma.

Why do we need tests and grades? To motivate learners, to succinctly record their abilities, communicate these to other institutions, and signal to employers. But they don't work that way: grades goad students, but not their learning. Students don't waste time on anything that won't be tested. Grading skews incentives, as students cheat or game the system. Marks also sharpen inequalities. The strongest predictor of marks is a student's family and neighbourhood; affluent parents exert more pressure and provide more support.

Then comes the standardised test, first devised in 19th century America for a uniform diagnosis of varied student popu-

lations. Unfortunately, they have been used as snapshots of ability that become lasting portraits of inequality. The test-takers did not ask whether the content of the test measured biological intelligence or social opportunities. The standardised test became educational destiny.

But what blanket critiques of standardised tests miss is that they are not all the same. 'Norm-reference' tests, meant to place a student in a particular distribution, can identify those who are very advanced and those who need special assistance. Meanwhile, 'criterion-reference' tests are used to check if a student has reached a particular standard.

This targeted assistance for identified weaknesses can make all the difference to students and can be a tool of educational equity. If someone is near sighted, then they are not told they have a permanent deficiency, they are prescribed glasses. It's when a result is treated as the end of the story, rather than the impetus for intervention, that there's a problem.

School is supposed to be the great equaliser of social opportunity, but it doesn't work that way. Standardised tests do take away the high-stakes pressure of school grades, but both are correlated with socioeconomic status. But then again, so are student essays, for which they often rely on their net-works.

Recommendation letters can be hard to parse, a mess of adjectives and writing styles. There is no easy fix for fairness, the only way is to use nuanced judgments, knowing that these useful tools can also be weapons.

The predicament of marking and testing is a wicked problem, the whole world struggles with similar frustrations. Countries experiment with different elements and weights. Zambia assesses students with 75% on national exams and 25% on school grades. New Zealand measures progress in secondary school through a pass-fail system, not grades, reducing both competition and gaming. At higher levels, it adds distinctions for merit and excellence, to let students compete. Singapore has recently flattened its ranking systems, after deciding it was unhealthy. Another way is to peg tests to practice: for instance, instead of multiple-choice questions for history, it makes sense to do what historians do, piece fragments from the archive to offer an interpretation of the past.

The book shows that we need to go beyond the usual either/or framing about marks and exams. We need to look at the specific uses of each tool, and within the context of broader goals. We need to recalibrate rather than reinvent

Vijay Garg