

UNIQUE NATION

Our country is a wonderful and unique nation in the world both in terms of nature and physicality. The culture and art, civilization and behavior of this country, everything is successful and helpful in making this specialty of its high quality. The culture and art of our country is one of the ancient culture and art of the world.

That is, the civilization and culture of our country was no less than the most ancient countries of the world, Greece, Egypt and Rome. But it is unfortunate that due to their subjugation, all these countries have lost their civilization and culture today whereas the civilization and culture of our country remains the center of attraction despite repeated foreign attacks.

Why so? This is because despite our culture and diversity, there is as much unity based on it as no other culture and art.

Challenges of environmental crisis

■ G.L. KHAJURIA

There are multihued factors directly or indirectly responsible for ever-deteriorating natural quality of congenial environmental globally. As a consequence, therefore, there is ever-escalating environmental crisis. The main cruxes arising out of the environmental degradation are predominantly the effects of green house, (emission of cholouro-flora -carbon-CF'e's, ever-amounting global warming, apart from many more factors. And in the first place come anthropogenic activities giving rise in the air concentration of carbon dioxide (Co2), methane (CH4) Nitrous oxide (N2O) and water -vapours.

The increase in concentration of CO2 is due to fossil fuel burning whereas the rise in the concentration of methan (CH4) is as a result of expansion in the agricultural activities.

However, the ever-challenging crisis on environment is evidenced through the regional manifestation which though, of course, is impacting the entire globe.

The mountainous regions all over globe constitute 20% of the terrestrial area which provide direct support system to around 10% of world population. These as well subside and sustain many other activities such as forestry and agriculture and other energy resources. And in addition, there are active elements of terrestrial environment which provide and play very pivotal role in the global environmental systems at large. The contemporary research insights spare no room any more for scepticism so far as the general rise in mean surface temperature at global, regional and local level is concerned.

Though strange it may sound but too true that global warming in its complex form also to a larger extent impact the climate change-the biggest challenge of the current century. It has also been scientifically proved that the human activities effect six out of seven most predominant factors vig. CO2, CH4, N2O CPC's emissions and water vapours. Apart from these, halocarbons which, of course, are of human origin occuring from cooling agents and other compound pollutants which are the most hazardous . All these halocarbons are responsible for atmospheric warning. And some halocarbons persist over 10000 times more than CO2. These are responsible for trapping heat which gives impetus for global warming. The enviro-scientists have established that halocarbons are long lived persisting for hundreds and thousands of years when once released into the atmosphere. And amongst these halocarbons are virtually immortal , persisting over a period arounding 50000 or so.

Whereas CO2 is measured in parts per million, compared to methane (CH4) which is measured in parts per billion but astonishingly halocarbons are too far ahead being measured in parts per billion. The scenario is pernicious one by all accounts and is quite challenging under the present environmental crisis as most of the enviro-scientists have predicted that earth's temperature shall soar from 1.50c to around 4.50 c by the year ending 2030. If such emissions continue to be so with such a pace, this would be a rather catastrophic globally. Rise of earth's temperature shall to the extent of 1.50C is insignificant as it had rather been together than any temperature change experienced during the last 10000 years. Global warming would thus mean shorter cold seasons and longer warmer ones.

The winter in the northern region will be warmer and the summer longer which consequently would have a very adverse effect on the forests and the agriculture in particular which would rather be disrupted adversely. As a consequence, therefore, extreme weather conditions would be a common phenomenon which as a result would tantamount to destruction of all bioform whether on land or seas. The enviro-scientists have conducted detailed studies and documentations and arrived at the conclusion that carbon induced global warming is a red signal for all the nations across the globe.

The ozone layer encircling this bio-sustaining planet earth, as we all well know is the only protective layer shielding all bio-forms and by the impact of ever-escalating global warming shall tantamount to puncturing and widening its hole with the revolving wheel of time and all living creatures shall be pernicious breeding apocalyptic consequences. Is it not the biggest challenge for the already degrading environment facing the current crisis of catclysms?

Another grave challenge to the environment is consistent with unpredictable weather conditions ensuing from global warming. If there are rains, these are of unprecedented nature resultantly wrecking havoc wind-cum-thunderstorms lightning and fast winds with large scale landslides and mass movement of soil in conglomeration with multihued material that confronts floods furry in rivulets, ravines and rivers which take huge toll of lives together their belongings.

The losses of men and material in the low lying are quite unimag-inative and incalculable. The rivers in spate flow down into seas an oceans causing thereby uprising in their water level.

Similarly, global warming takes its other forms by the melting of snows and glaciers hugly contributing their water in the same fashion thus up rings in seas , oceans and lands.

The enviro-scientists have documented and reported that if the sea level rises accruing from such floods continued , this will tantamount to submergence of sea shores ultimately creating havoc. The latest reports have estimated that sea-level rise upto more than 99 cms.

And if same remains the situation, it is estimated that a third of Florida (USA0, Parth (Australia), parts of Netherlands and almost half of Mumbai would most probably be under sea water. Is it not a challenge of environmental crisis looming large in the years ahead.

Astonishingly enough, Perth in Australia is now afooting all out precautions to show down emissions of green house effects all around coastal areas. Bangladesh, Maldives, Egypt and Indonesia are also apprehended to be plunged in the sea water. All the coastal areas viz. Anglican d the Thames Estuary in united kingdom and most of the low lying cities across the globe including New orleans, Miami an dshanghi will also face the same sort of situation.

Under such an apocalyptic, scenario, major challenging threats seem to be in offing in the apprehending environmental crisis. And now of the latest on the October this year when United States coastal area was bared by deadly Hurricane Mathew which sounded a serious signal around the coastal area and created panic when schools were closed and areas near the coast evacuated.

The challenges of environmental crisis shall further be off shooting major challenges in respect of intensity of rainfall and its variable locations. Some of the areas would be experiencing unprecedented rains, whereas other areas there will scanty rainfall or droughts resulting in boosting of forests and agricultural productivity.

(The writer is Former Dy. Conservator, J&K Forests).

Man needs his difficulties because they are necessary to enjoy success.

-A P J Abdul Kalam

ISRAEL VS HAMAS

A comprehensive analysis of catalytic factors, strategic quandaries & ethical conundrums involved

■ RAHUL KHULLAR

THE STORY SO FAR

On Saturday, October 7th 2023, a "symbolic & a picked up date" - a Jewish Sabbath day, marking the end of the weeklong Sukkot festival, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, a wave of turmoil unfolded in the Middle East. Al-Qassam Brigades (armed wing) of HAMAS (Harkat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya that translates to "Islamic Resistance Movement" -a designated Foreign terrorist organisation or FTO by several countries including the European Union) launched a meticulously coordinated offensive and incursions combining both ground (Vehicle-transported incursions) and aerial assaults (incursions via motorised hang Gliders) across multiple Israeli borders. SUPERNova music festival's people became the very first casualties of this petrifying assault, their night of celebration turned into a day of horror. At 6:00 am, a relentless barrage of rockets rained down on coastal towns like Ashdod, Ashkelon, and even as far north as Tel Aviv, rendering the Iron Dome (renowned state-of-the-art aerial defence system of Israel) overwhelmed and significantly dviding its interception capabilities. This military assault was codenamed "Al-Aqsa Flood" (an attack perceived to avenge Israel's high-handedness of the Al-Aqsa Mosque site). This surprise attack collapsed the current security doctrine of Israel, which was in place for the last 20+ years culminating in an unprecedented attack on Israel's soil in decades (hyperbolically referred to as Israel's 9(11). It's estimated that a staggering 3-5000 rockets were fired on the very first day. In response, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) unveiled Operation "Iron Swords" (Apparently, an operation to obliterate HAMA's physical existence from Gaza), setting the stage for a protracted and dreaded conflict, one that has, since its inception, claimed the lives of tens of thousands of both civilians (approx 60% women & children) and combatants. The present crisis raises haunting questions about potential war crimes and the humanitarian catastrophe which is unfolding.

BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKDROP

The longstanding history of the Israel and Palestinian conflict is the backdrop for the tensions broadly. The Israel-Hamas conflict is deeply rooted in the Israeli-Palestinian territorial and statehood dispute, marked by the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the consequent displacement of Palestinians. Moreover, the illegal occupation of Israeli settlers in Palestinian territories aggravated the complexity of the situation. Over time, Hamas emerged as a prominent player or slowly becoming a hybrid actor-part terrorist organisation & part pseudo-state in the Gaza Strip, actively challenging Israel's presence with underlying objectives as per their Charter viz. "Hamas Covenant" AKA "Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement" which directs to resist Israeli occupation, establishing an Islamic state in historic Palestine, opposing negotiations with Israel & denying Israel the right to exist. The concurrent domestic and regional developments in the political environment set the scene for this latest phase of the conflict to emerge. As we delve into this multifaceted scenario, we must consider the role of not only the historical animosities but also the contemporary shifts in power dynamics, diplomatic relations, and regional alliances which gave the immediate impetus to this dreaded war. The October 7 onslaught undertaken by HAMAS is undoubtedly inhumane, brutal & horrific. Slaughtering non-combatants, mass killing them, taking hostages & parading a woman naked while spitting over her amid the chants of Allah hu Akbar amidst a busy road can never be equated with a liberation movement from any argument whatsoever. That said, what Israel has done historically to the Palestinians also remains to be answered unequivocally. Apparently, there are no clearly defined heroes in this dreaded 'war of attrition'. Unfortunately, the war is being fought at the cost of the lives of those innocent people who were not even the party to this historical animosity. This piece will take up the potential Immediate (not historic) catalytic factors which led to this unprecedented surprise blitz which caught the IDF off guard & aims to analyse the strategic quandaries and ethical conundrums associated with this ongoing conflict.

CATALYTIC WAR FACTORS.

Arab-Israeli Rapprochement & Iranian Strategic Stakes. There had been increased efforts by the USA in the recent past to bring Israel & the Arab countries on the negotiating table to normalise their historically strained relations. The Rapprochement effort

started with the signing of the historic Abraham Accord (Israel-Bahrain-UAE peace deal) which was brokered by the Trump Administration, to the recent planned Saudi-Israel Peace Agreement brokered by the Biden Administration is perhaps seen by HAMAS as a 'Containment strategy' to further weaken the Palestinian cause by entering into strategic accords with major Middle east powers like Saudi Arabia, UAE & Bahrain which once stood explicitly for the Palestinian cause. Peace agreements on similar lines had also been signed b/w Israel-Morocco and Israel-Sudan on some mutually benefiting conditions, this too brokered by the USA. The heightened U.S. interest in West Asian affairs signifies the United States' endeavour to restore its lost image of Superpower from a presently perceived image of "Superpower in Decline" in regards to West Asia. The recently planned Saudi-Israeli rapprochement is also being sought by the Biden administration as a Foreign Policy Win for his government as the United States presidential elections are set to take place in 2024. The recent Saudi-Israeli peace agreement is the catalyst in further weakening the diplomatic standing of the HAMAS vis-a-vis the Palestinian cause. Along with the weakening of Hama's diplomatic standing on the Palestinian issue due to these rapprochement accords, a major West Asian power viz. Iran which is an arch-rival of Israel also finds herself in a strategic dilemma with these rapprochement accords. Simply put, the Abraham Accords and the planned Saudi-Israeli peace agreement would mean, in pure geostrategic terms, the creation of a 'US-centred ring of alliances' in the Middle East, controlling the critical Maritime choke points of the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal and the Strait of Bab Al Mandab. This will immensely increase the USA's direct presence in these maritime choke points by virtue of the signatories (UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia) of the rapprochement accords which have their exclusive economic zones (EEZs) & areas of influence in these critical choke points, putting Iran into a 'Maritime containment'. This US-centred ring of alliances has the strong potential to hurt the strategic stakes of Iran in the Gulf region. Furthermore, the proposed ambitious IMEEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor) was seen as the last blow to HAMAS and other radical Palestinian groups which were fighting for the Palestinian cause. This proposed economic corridor involves Israel's land as the transit route which further knits the Arab nations with Israel which is perhaps seen as a jolt to the Palestinian cause by HAMAS.

Given the shared interests of HAMAS and Iran in opposing these developments, it is very much possible that HAMAS at this very point in time decided to launch an unprecedented assault on Israel with the clandestine support of Iran to safeguard the duo's diplomatic and strategic positions by derailing Israel-Saudi peace deal and sabotaging IMEEC. The recent series of meetings between the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Hamas, Islamic Jihad (another Palestinian radical group) and Hezbollah (another FTO) since August 2023 in Lebanon further transforms our doubts into firm conviction.

STRATEGIC QUANDARIES

Since 2005 Israel has followed a "Mowing the Grass" grand strategy to deal with HAMAS in Gaza. Mowing the grass is a sort of Israeli strategy in which Israel considers HAMAS & other radical groups as 'Weeds' that need to be cut back from time to time and they do this by periodic retaliatory airstrikes and in some cases a ground campaign in response to rocket attacks carried out by these radical groups. While it is unequivocal that Israel has an undisputed power in comparison to HAMAS but still till now it never completely obliterated HAMAS from the landscape of Gaza perhaps due to the apprehension that a more radical organisation will take up the place left by HAMAS. So they always maintained them rather than uprooting them altogether. As an Israeli defence analyst put it, "We want to break their bones without putting them in the hospitals. This grand strategy turned into a strategic and intelligence failure when on 7 October 2023, the so-called 'Weeds' undertook an unprecedented attack on Israel killing and slaughtering tens of thousands of civilians and combatants leaving the IDF to rethink its future course of action in Gaza. Now Israel is dealing with a strategic quandary in which she has to go with an option to either completely eliminate HAMAS or continue the periodic 'mowing the grass' approach and risk further such dreaded attacks. But, given the prevailing situations, the latter option doesn't seem viable.

The Sacred River Vitasta

■ OMKAR DATTATRAY

River Vitasta is a sacred river of Jammu and Kashmir and it flows through capital city of Srinagar as it is situated on the banks of this river .The river Vitasta has a great spiritual ,cultural and religious significance and Kashmiri Pandits still celebrate with truva and pay obeisance to this holy river .It is believed that Vitasta originates from Vith Vutur Verinag in south Kashmir district of Anantnag which is a famous tourist spot visited by a large number of tourists every year .For the people of Kashmir in general and Pandits in particular Vitasta occupies an important place and they revere and respect it .In good olden days and not long ago it was brimming with clean and cool water and its width was in consonance with its deepness and water capacity .But alas the greed of man has exploited it and today its width has shrunk and its water has become dirty as well as scant! We should pay attention towards the safety of this river and save it from degradation and exploitation .With the efflux and passage of time this sacred river came to be called by the name of Jhelum and therefore in present time it is known Jhelum but this does not diminish the cultural ,spiritual and religious significance of this great river with which the past of Kashmiris is associated and it falls in central Kashmir and flows into Pakistan .There is great cultural ,religious and spiritual significance of river Vitasta .According to Nilmatpurana it was Sati daughter of Himel Parvata consort of Shiva who was called Uma in Viasra Antra and is the same goddess as Vitasta and same is Kashmira. The goddess Vitasta is verily the holy river remover of all sins .People who offer their bodies to or die within its waters in their bellies reach heaven without any hindrance. Those people who take bath in Vitasta do not see even in their dreams the tortures of hell .Vitasta gives protection with her hands to the evil doing sinners falling into hell .Fire of hell is pacified with cool pourings of the drops sent from the waves of Vitasta carried by wind .A person merely listening to the glory of Vitasta goes free from sins .The only thing Ganga has more than Vitasta are heaps of bones of human beings but all other things are equal .The river draining the entire Kashmir valley called by Kashmiris as Vyath is the direct derivation from original Sanskrit name Vitasta .Vitasta is also mentioned in the river names of Rigveda .In Vayupurna ,Vitasta has been referred as Biloda .The present name Jhelum river has been adopted from the city of Jhelum besides which it flows in Pakistan .The name was brought to Kashmir by European travelers and found its way in official use otherwise this river is still known by the Kashmiris as Vyath .The river Vitasta can be considered as the confluence of Harashpatha -Arapat ,Bringra -Bring and Sandran .But the old holy scriptures have traced the origin of Vitasta to a more specific source .As already stated in Nilmatpurana Harearitchintamani and subsequently quoted in later references Vitasta is a manifestation of goddess Parvati .After Satisar (Parvatis lake) was drained of its water and demon Jalodhava destroyed by Vishnu ,Bhrama and Maheshvera ,at the request of sage Kashyap ,Maheshvara persuaded Parvati to show herself in Kashmir in the form of a river to purify the humans from the unholy contact of Pisachas .The goddess assumed the form of underground river and asked Shiva to make an opening by which she could come to the surface in the form of a river .Shiva by striking the ground

with his trident on13th of Badar Shuklapakasa from which the river gushed forth receiving the name of Vitasta .Since then the birthday of Vitasta is celebrated on 13th Badar Shkula Paksha .The spring from where the goddess flowed in river form became known by several names Nilganga, Nila Kumda ,Sulaghata or simply Vitasti .According to a legend Vitasta made her second appearance at Vitavtru close to Verinag .Clear mention of Nilganga (Verinag) as the birth place of Vitasta by Kalhans leaves no doubt about the tradition prevailing in his time .The course of Vitasta has not changed during the historic times except at Vitasta Sindhusangrama where it was altered by Suyya the able engineer of King Awantivarman in 19th century .It is believed that as soon as Lord Shiva struck his trident and made a hole equal to a Vitasti ,about four inches long ,water sprouted forth .Lord Shiva named the river as Vitasta as it was formed by a Vitasti .The place where the spring was formed came to be known as Vitasatra and with the passage of time it became vyeth Vathur .Vedic civilization flourished along the course of the legendary river Sarasvati .The people of Kashmir valley lived on the banks of river Vitasta ,flowing across the entire valley from the foots of Pir Panchal mountain range ,where its source is located at Vrinag ,to its confluence at Jhelum village ,with the river of Krishen Ganga ,flowing in the territories of Jammu and Kashmir under the occupation of Pakistan .The Kashmiri Pandits very much like Sarasvat people ,built their Tirthas and their places of worship along the banks of river Vitasta .The Vedic people venerated rivers ,worshipped them as the embodiment of the divine mother Bhavani and praised them as the source of life and means of sustenance .For Hindus of Kasshmir ,Vitasta is the embodiment of Goddess Parvati ,consort of Lord Shiva .Vedic literature refers to Vitasta as a prominent river of north India .Vitasta also finds mention in Mahabharata as well .Vitasta is also called by the name of Jhelum and it is the river of northern Indian sun continent .It originates at Vrinag and flows through the Indian Jammu and Kashmir and enters into Pakistan administered and POK .It is the westernmost of the five rivers of the Punjab region and flows through Kashmir valley .It has a total length of about 725 Kilometers .The river Jhelum was called Hydaspes by ancient Greeks .Alexander the Great and his army crossed the Jhelum in BC 326 at the battle of the Hydaspes River ,where he defeated an Indian King ,Porus .The river Vitasta is the Gods gift to the people of Kashmir and it is not less than a blessing for them as it irrigates and gives sustenance to the Kashmiri .But it wrecks havoc in floods .The memory of devastating flood of 2014 is fresh in our memory as it had damaged the Kashmir in a big way .It is the greed and selfishness of man which is responsible for the flood in the river Vitasta otherwise this river is the real gift of God to Kashmiri .The Vitasta ,Vyath ,Jhelum whatever we chose to call it will not diminish the religious ,cultural and historical significance of this sacred river .Let us maintain the sacredness ,holiness and sanctity as well as the beauty of Vitasta .May we continue to venerate river Vitasta so that it will continue to sustain us .In brief river Vitasta is most sacred ,holy as well as economically beneficial for the people of Kashmir .Pranam to maa Vitasta.

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

Diwali: The Festival of Lights and Spiritual Enlightenment

■ DR. SHIBEN KRISHEN RAINA

India is a vast country where people from diverse religions and backgrounds co-exist. This richness of cultures and traditions has given rise to a number of festivals and celebrations, each with its unique significance. While every festival holds its special place in our society, Diwali, also known as 'Deepavali', stands out as a celebration that radiates happiness, enthusiasm, and cultural heritage. Diwali, the Festival of Lights, is a time when we illuminate our surroundings with lamps and candles. Beyond its visual splendor, this festival carries a profound message. It encourages us to dispel the darkness of ignorance and the evil that may hang around in our hearts and society. Diwali is a festival for everyone, transcending age, gender, and social status. People of all walks of life come together to celebrate it with great enthusiasm. On this day, it's not just about the external lights but also about kindling the virtues and goodness within our-

selves. We should make a pledge to not only focus on the external radiance but also to illuminate our hearts with positivity. It's a time to reflect on the world around us and strive to eliminate poverty, hunger, illiteracy, and other societal evils including religious frenzy and fury. The idea to illuminate our environs on the occasion of Diwali is to spread the light of goodness in a world where darkness still persists. The couplet "Diye jalao par rahe dhyan itna, andhera dharti par kahi rah na paaye" (Light lamps, indeed, but ensure that darkness finds no place on the Earth anywhere) carries a profound message. It urges us to be the beacons of hope and change, not just within ourselves but in the world at large. Diwali is a festival that conveys a message of goodwill, righteousness, and unity. It should be celebrated with unwavering devotion and purity to ensure that no unpleasant incidents mar the festivities. Let us create an atmosphere of joy and exuberance all around, spreading happiness and unity. From

a spiritual perspective, Diwali symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness. Just as a lamp dispels the darkness around it, the inner light of knowledge can remove the ignorance within us. The lamp represents the flame of self-realization that can awaken the inactive wisdom and consciousness within us. In conclusion, Diwali is more than just a festival of lights; it is a festival of joy, goodwill, and spiritual awakening. It encourages us to embrace the light within and spread positivity and kindness in a world that often grapples with darkness. Let us celebrate Diwali with deep devotion, purity, and a commitment to make the world a better place for all. As we light our lamps, let us also ignite the light of knowledge and compassion within ourselves, ensuring that the darkness of ignorance, intolerance, rigidity and negativity finds no place around us and on the Earth as a whole.

(The writer is Ex Senior Fellow, Ministry of Culture).

