

HUMSAFAR POLICY: ENSURING SAFE TRAVEL

As India's transportation infrastructure continues to expand, National Highways (NH) have become vital corridors for trade, travel, and connectivity. However, with increased traffic comes the pressing need for safety and comfort for travelers. The Humsafar Policy emerges as a comprehensive framework aimed at enhancing the travel experience on these highways, focusing on safety, support, and community engagement.

The Humsafar Policy was introduced to address the multifaceted challenges faced by travelers on National Highways. It is designed to create an environment where safety and convenience are prioritized, making journeys not only secure but also enjoyable. The policy encompasses various initiatives that work in synergy to improve the overall travel experience for all users.

The primary focus of the Humsafar Policy is to reduce road accidents and enhance safety measures. Through strict enforcement of traffic regulations and increased police presence, the initiative aims to deter reckless behavior and promote responsible driving.

The policy provides a range of support services to travelers, including emergency assistance, roadside help, and timely information. This ensures that help is readily available whenever needed, thereby reducing anxiety during travel.

A key component of the Humsafar Policy is the emphasis on educating travelers about road safety, traffic rules, and safe driving practices. By fostering a culture of awareness, the policy aims to create informed road users who prioritize safety.

Each section of the National Highway is staffed with dedicated emergency response teams. Trained to handle various situations, these teams can quickly assist travelers facing breakdowns, accidents, or medical emergencies. Equipped with necessary tools and communication devices, they play a critical role in ensuring timely support.

The Humsafar Policy includes roadside assistance services that offer minor repairs and support for vehicles experiencing issues. This initiative helps reduce downtime for travelers, allowing them to continue their journeys with minimal disruption.

The policy emphasizes effective traffic management strategies, especially during peak travel times or following accidents. Humsafar teams work diligently to monitor traffic flow, ensuring that congestion is minimized and travel times are optimized.

Regular safety campaigns are a cornerstone of the Humsafar Policy. These initiatives involve workshops, distribution of informational materials, and interactive sessions aimed at raising awareness about road safety among travelers and local communities.

The Humsafar Policy embraces modern technology to enhance service delivery. Mobile applications provide real-time updates on traffic conditions, emergencies, and route information, empowering travelers to make informed decisions.

A significant aspect of the Humsafar Policy is its commitment to community engagement. The initiative seeks to build trust between law enforcement and road users by fostering open communication. Regular interactions with local residents, transport operators, and frequent travelers provide valuable insights into their concerns and suggestions.

This collaborative approach not only enhances the policy's effectiveness but also ensures that the needs of various stakeholders are considered. By involving the community in the decision-making process, the Humsafar Policy aims to create a sense of ownership among road users.

With enhanced enforcement of traffic regulations and increased awareness, the Humsafar Policy significantly contributes to reducing accidents on National Highways.

The provision of support services and roadside assistance ensures that travelers can enjoy a seamless journey, free from the stress of unforeseen challenges.

The educational initiatives foster a culture of safety among road users, encouraging responsible behavior that benefits everyone on the road.

By engaging with local communities, the policy helps build trust and rapport between law enforcement and the public, making highways safer for all.

The Humsafar Policy is a transformative initiative aimed at revolutionizing the travel experience on India's National Highways. By prioritizing safety, offering robust support services, and engaging with the community, it addresses the pressing challenges faced by travelers today.

As the policy continues to evolve, its impact on road safety and the overall travel experience will only grow stronger. Whether you are a daily commuter, a long-distance traveler, or a tourist exploring the diverse landscapes of India, the Humsafar Policy ensures that your journey is not just about reaching a destination, but about enjoying a safe and pleasant travel experience every step of the way.

India's Achievement in Eliminating Trachoma

India has made significant strides in public health over the past few decades, and one of its most noteworthy achievements is the successful elimination of trachoma as a public health problem. This eye disease, which can lead to blindness, has been a concern in various regions of the country. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognized India's efforts in eliminating trachoma in recent years, marking a monumental milestone in the nation's healthcare journey. Trachoma is caused by the bacterium Chlamydia trachomatis and is primarily spread through direct contact with infected individuals or contaminated surfaces. It is characterized by inflammation of the eyelids and the cornea, leading to scarring and, ultimately, blindness if untreated. The disease is prevalent in areas with poor sanitation, limited access to clean water, and overcrowded living conditions. Historically, trachoma has been a significant public health issue in India, particularly in rural areas where hygiene and healthcare access are limited. The disease disproportionately affected marginalized populations, highlighting the need for targeted health interventions. India's journey toward eliminating trachoma involved a multi-faceted approach guided by the WHO's SAFE strategy, which stands for Surgery, Antibiotics, Facial cleanliness, and Environmental improvement. For individuals already suffering from advanced trachoma, surgical intervention was crucial. India ramped up efforts to provide surgical treatments to correct eyelid deformities caused by the disease. Training local healthcare providers and establishing surgical centers were essential components of this initiative. The Indian government undertook mass antibiotic distribution campaigns, primarily using azithromycin, to treat and prevent trachoma. This strategy aimed to reduce the infection rates significantly. Collaborations with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international health bodies facilitated the wide-reaching distribution of antibiotics to at-risk populations. A key element of the SAFE strategy is promoting facial cleanliness to prevent the spread of the infection. Awareness campaigns focused on the importance of hygiene practices, particularly among children, who are most vulnerable to contracting the disease. Schools and community centers played pivotal roles in disseminating information and educating families about maintaining proper hygiene.

Enhancing environmental conditions was crucial in preventing trachoma transmission. The government invested in improving water supply, sanitation, and waste management in endemic regions. Community engagement was vital, encouraging locals to take part in creating cleaner living conditions.

Rural Migration, Agriculture and Sustainable Development

■ DR. BANARSI LAL

Presently there is growing international attention to the phenomenon of migration, its causes, and the way it occurs. Migration is closely associated with fighting hunger, achieving food security and promoting the sustainable use of natural resources. Rural migration is an important component of migration flows. Rural migration is closely linked with agricultural and rural development in a bidirectional relationship. In order to promote sustainable development, it is essential that causes and consequences of migration are well understood. Many individuals and families migrate from rural areas for economic reasons as they see viable option for moving out of poverty within their own communities. Rural India represents around 70 per cent of the Indian population. It is very important to engage the rural youth in a productive way in tandem by providing them credible opportunities for the growth and development. Agriculture is losing the attraction among the rural youths. If the youths will generate extra income in agriculture then the interests of the youths in agriculture can be retained. There is need to make agri-based industries in the rural areas so that employment opportunities can be generated for the rural youths. India is having the youngest workforce in the world and our nation can become the human resource capital in the world by creating skill among the youths and convert the trained manpower for the growth of the Indian economy. In India around 51 per cent of the households survive on income from manual casual labour, 30 per cent from cultivation and 19 per cent from other sources. Around 35.73 per cent of the rural people are illiterate and about 67 per cent have education below or till primary. Women constitute about 48.5 per cent of the population and play important role in the Indian economy.

It has been observed that around two million people are shifting from rural to urban areas annually. From 2001 migration from rural to urban areas has increased from 27.8 to 31 per cent. Rural migrations to the urban

areas have direct impact on agricultural productivity. Rural India remains in the focus of the policy makers as 10.1 per cent of its labour force is unemployed as compared to 7.3 per cent in the urban areas. Agriculture is the dominant employer in the rural areas followed by construction, manufacturing and community services. Rural areas are also the source of workforce in the adjoining towns and cities. In rural areas income from the agriculture is not sufficient especially for the small and marginal farmers who constitute 85 per cent of the farm holdings and for the dry land farmers who constitute more than half of the cultivated land. There is dire need to increase the employment opportunities for the rural youths to stop the rural migration. Rural youths migrate from rural areas to urban areas in search of employment as the agriculture in the rural areas does not suffice their basic needs. In urban areas they face the problem of housing, language and skill especially in the beginning. Due to these factors they are under paid and their growth is hampered.

There is need to address the issue of rural migration. There is need to establish youth hostels in the urban areas which can give shelter to the rural youths especially in the beginning. There is also the need to change the set up of some departments to help the rural youths. The employment office established at each district should be changed for the career guidelines department. Some states in the country have taken initiative in this direction. From thousands of years farming has been sustaining life on the earth. We observe various success stories of the progressive farmers across the nation. Some success stories from Reasi district of J&K where organic vegetables growing, poultry farming, floriculture and diversified farming have transformed the lives of the farmers. These farmers have achieved the great success with the adoption of innovative technologies. With the adoption of innovative technologies they have increased their crops production and productivity. It occurred because of their consistent and arduous efforts. The scientific approach

adopted by these farmers has resulted maximum output with the minimum inputs. There is need to make our agriculture more entrepreneurial and profitable. Value addition in the agricultural crops can create more income and employment for the rural youths. Farmers need to adopt the modern agricultural technologies to make farming more profitable. Protected cultivation is high-tech cultivation which produces 5-12 times higher output than cultivation in open fields. The demand of mushroom is increasing in the market and mushroom cultivation has become the profitable business. Important species of mushrooms are button, oyster, wood ear, shitake and paddy straw. India produces only 0.13 million tonnes of mushrooms out of which button mushroom contributes about 85 per cent of the total mushroom in the country. Out of the total agricultural residue, if one per cent is utilized for mushroom cultivation, the country can produce over three million tonnes of mushrooms and 10 million tonnes of organic manure annually.

Production and supply of inputs required in the agriculture is the commercial ventures with lot of scope especially for the rural youths. Farm machinery can also create employment for the rural youths. In addition repair of farm machinery can also provide commercial ventures to the farmers. Farm machinery on the one hand will benefit the individuals engaged in the different ventures and on the other hand will help to increase our farm incomes. There is need to combine the farm and non-farm income at the household level which will provide resilience against adverse situations. If the present trend of migration continues then it is estimated that over 50 per cent of our population will be living in the urban areas in future. People will prefer to live in rural areas, semi-rural area or a small town if there is good telecom connectivity, a good road network and proper education and health care facilities. Rural areas need to be equipped with technical and educated manpower by expanding the network of industrial training institutes with better facil-

ities. Industries like software, textiles, leather, electronics, pharmaceutical and many others can create such infrastructure. Such efforts can also restrict the migration of rural youths from the rural areas.

Tourism contributes around 11 per cent of the world work force and 10.2 per cent of the global gross domestic product. Our nation has a vast and varied agriculture landscape with natural beauty of blooming mustard fields of the northern India to blooming horticultural trees in the hilly areas to the tulip garden in Kashmir. Our rural areas have immense scope in agri-tourism which can help to create new employment for the rural youths. Tourism industry in India is growing at a rate of 10.1 per cent. Some states are making some strenuous efforts for rural tourism. In Maharashtra, people residing in the rural areas have formed Maharashtra State Agri and Rural Tourism. There are many agri-tourism centres in the state. In Kerala rural tourism is attracting tourists across the globe.

Similarly Rajasthan has also some rural tourism destinations. Our adjoining state Himachal Pradesh is also promoting rural tourism and natural tourism in the hilly areas of the state is attracting the tourists. Gujarat rural areas are also attracting the tourists. Union Territory of J&K has huge potential in rural tourism and govt. is making efforts to develop rural tourism so as to enhance the income and employment in the rural areas of J&K. Promotion of rural tourism needs conceptual convergence with rural tourism, health tourism, eco-tourism, adventure tourism etc. Rural tourism can flourish only when the rural infrastructure such as road connectivity, communication and health sector is created in the rural areas.

There is need to search the potential areas in the rural areas for the rural tourism and infrastructure required in these areas should be made. There is also need to do every effort to make the lives of rural people comfortable and lucrative.

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Historical Introduction of Our Forests

When we chop down those trees more for our greed than our need. Lord Buddha had messaged us as such; "the forest is a peculiar organism of unlimited and benevolence which sustains us by all means. It offers shade even to the axeman who falls it!"

Around 2000 BC, there is evidence of a flourishing Dravidian civilization existing in consonance with the forests that were then in such abundance. The early Aryans were pastoral people interacted in the pursuit of agriculture but they also cleared forests only in the areas where they actually settled down, establishing habitations and institutions in the beautiful surroundings of the forests.

The records of Chinese pilgrims (600BC) refer to dense Indian forests even in the North-West regions where much depletion of forests has occurred now. Records relating to Alexander's invasion (327 BC) mention existence of dense forests. Babur, the first Mughal emperor to real Indian in early sixteenth century is reported to have shot in these forests indicating existence of dense forests and wildlife in that period.

The abundance of forests created an impression that resources were inexhaustible and thus there was no organized effort to conserve and maintain the forests. Casual instructions appear to have been issued by different ruler from time to time to regulate fallings and earn maximum revenue.

During the reign of Chandra Gupta Murya (300 BC), a superintendent of forests was appointed to look after the forests. The protection of wildlife was also a part of his duty. Sometimes specified species of timber value were proclaimed by local rulers as "Royal Trees" felling of which was prohibited without permission otherwise the forests were open to all and the public obtained their requirement without restrictions.

The Muslim rulers did not have much special interest in the conservation and organized management of forests. Their main interest

in forests was for hunting. Areas with good wildlife were declared as "Royal hunting reserves" and thus received some protection. But increase in population and need for extension for agriculture continued to make incursions on forest land and its produce.

The increasing demands of land for expanding agriculture and demand of timber for Navy and other constructional purposes made considerable inroads on forests and forest wealth so much so that it was felt that the forests may not to continue to meet the demands for timber unless some concrete steps were taken for their conservation and maintenance.

In 1855, Lord Dalhousie, the Governor general issued a memorandum to the Government of India outlining policy of conservancy for the whole country. By that time, it was clearly recognized by the administration that if the forest were to be conserved, proper scientific management was necessary.

In 1856, Lord Dalhousie, appointed District Brandis to take charge of the forest and after 22 years in 1878, the Government honoured Brandish with the title of companion Indian empire and he served a knight commandership in 1880 in recognition of the meritorious service he rendered during the period of 19 years.

Brandis was truly the founder of Indian forestry and it was always befitting to commemorate his achievements. As soon as Brandis was appointed as Inspector General of Forests Cleghorn was appointed to assist him. They were responsible for methodical system of Management of forests in all states. A separate forest enactment as introduced that time.

Moreover, with the passage of time, the demand of forest officer increased for the better control and Management of forest.

While Forest Research Institute (FRI) came into existence in 1906, the status of forest school was raised to that of college.

■ GL KHAJURIA

Nature has endowed the Indian sub-continent with luxuriant and plentiful forest wealth. The vast and varied climatic and geological conditions bore forests of different types and intensities ranging from dry thorny forests to wet evergreens. The coniferous forests of hilly region and the deciduous types along foot kills conglomerates many valuable species which serve for the use of construction of houses, bridges and score of other purposes.

The original inhabitants of the country had great reverence for forests and a groove of trees around temples were of ample importance of these trees were considered as sacred as our Gods and Goddesses. And cutting or removal of any of such tree was considered a sin. Under some compelling conditions of a tree was removed, five to ten saplings were planted out to absolve oneself of the sin so committed.

As such, the forests played a prominent part in the cultural and spiritual development of our generations.

The Rishis and the Munis in search of salvation and attainment of wisdom had their Ashrams in the sylvan surroundings of these forests.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata give an attractive description of forests like Dandakaranya and Nandavan. The wildlife consisting of svariety of mammals, birds and reptiles also received due attention for their protection and conservation.

When Lord Rama told Laxman to fetch firewood for cooking by his consort Sitaji, He advised him to remove only dead-dried branches of tree. He forbade him not to cut green branches. Even our Gods and Goddess were much conscious of forest whereas we human are always have become lusty and are hell bent to go to any extent to fill our ladder by injury to the vibrant lush green trees.

It is dismaying, painful and ironical too.

■ OMKAR DATTATRAY

Finally the impatient wait of the political parties and the gullible people has come to close with the final count of votes in Jammu and Kashmir and declaration of the results of the assembly polls which were crucial and historical in more than one way. The outcome of the polls has more or less been as predicted by the exit poll and opinion poll and at the end of the political churning a fractured mandate has come to fore and this churning has produced the political nectar in the form of win to NC-Congress and thus the din and dust of election has given rise to the full chance of NC-Congress coalition government in the mountainous region Jammu and Kashmir which is rightly called the crown of India. Despite the claims and counter claims of NC-Congress pre-poll alliance and the BJP of forming the coalition government in the UT, at the end of the counting, it is NC-Congress alliance towards which the balance of power is tilted and it is this pre-poll alliance of NC-Congress which is now in a comfortable position to form a coalition government in Jammu and Kashmir after a long wait and spell of governors rule. The BJP and its leaders both UT's and national were over-confident of forming government in Jammu and Kashmir. But it does not pay to be over-confident in politics and more so in elections. The BJP though failed to gain power but its performance in elections can be called historical as in the electoral history of Jammu and Kashmir, for the first time BJP has won 29 seats and thus it is no ordinary thing though the party has been short of the magic number to stake claim for the government formation. BJP has performed well in Jammu region and as expected it has not won a single seat from Kashmir region. The election results in Jammu and Kashmir did not sprang any surprise as the outcome of the elections has been at the expected lines and the results of the assembly polls did not even surprise the political pundits and poll stars. All speculations about who will win the crucial Jammu and Kashmir assembly polls has come to end with the emphatic win of the pre-poll alliance of NC-Congress. The NC-

Congress alliance will form a coalition government in the UT on its own as far as the election arithmetic is concerned. NC-Congress pre-poll alliance has a definite edge over the BJP as against 29 seats of BJP, NC-Congress pre-poll alliance has got 48 seats and it is the magic number in the new assembly given the fact that LG is going to nominate 5 seats from KPs and P&JK refugees and thus including the nominated seats the tally of the assembly seats comes to 95. Given this magic number of 48 seats, the NC-Congress alliance has not to beg for support before the independent candidates whose number is significant ten. PDP which has almost faced rout in these polls has got merely three seats and Mehbooba Mufti has already pledged her support to the NC-Congress alliance for government formation. Congress has not fared well in these polls as it has only got merely 6 or 7 seats despite the high pitch campaigning of Rahul Gandhi and Prayanka Gandhi. The mainstream regional party National Conference which has a mass base and following across Kashmir valley has performed extremely well because its political rival BJP has no base in Kashmir and the PDP's base and following has shrunk after it has entered into alliance government with BJP in 2014.

It is also a fact that a big number of independent candidates also could not dent the political fortune of the NC given the fact that these independents were not successful in making division of votes. Even Engineer factor has done little damage to the prospects and political harvest of the NC. In this crucial poll Kashmiris have voted as Referendum on the Modi's overriding decisions of August 2019 whereby the center had revoked the special status and position of Jammu and Kashmir by scrapping Article 370 and having downgraded the state into Union Territory. On 5 August 2019 center had unilaterally stripped the Jammu and Kashmir of the statehood and bifurcated the erstwhile state into two UT's that is Jammu and Kashmir & Ladakh. So the election result shows the resentment of Kashmiris on these decisions. Moreover NC has been successful in creating suspicion and fear among the Kashmiri Muslims that if

BJP wins it will create troubles for them by giving the examples of UT. But it is a false and negative narrative created by the NC and thus it has been successful in weaning away of Kashmiris from voting in favor of the saffron party despite the spectacular development of Jammu and Kashmir post abrogation of Article 370. Besides peace and normalcy and change for better BJP failed to win seats from Kashmir thanks to the negative campaigning and false narrative woven by the NC. Now that NC-Congress alliance is all set to form coalition government in Jammu and Kashmir in few days, the new government should try to fulfill its poll promises and fulfill the promises given in its poll manifesto. The NC-Congress government should earnestly try to address the issues, concerns and problems of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. This government should come up to the expectations of the people who have reposed trust and confidence in NC-Congress.

The coalition government of NC-Congress should wipe tears from the eyes of the public and heal the hurt psychic of the alienated people of Jammu and Kashmir. It should try to deliver on its promises and try to provide some relief to the people of Jammu and Kashmir who faced disconnect with the governors/LG administration. There was political vacuum in J&K for the last ten years and this election has ended this vacuum as the people now will have a democratic and popular government which will care for the interests and aspirations of the people. Omar Abdullah who is the potential chief minister should slum vendetta politics and treat all friends and political foes equally and try to address the genuine issues and developmental matters of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Irrespective of which alliance has won these elections, one thing stands tall and that is democracy has once again triumphed in Jammu and Kashmir as people has shown trust and confidence in democratic governance and have overwhelmingly took active part in the polls and it is a big thing indeed.

(The writer is a columnist, social and KP activist)