

DOG BITE SURGE ALARMS J&K

Jammu and Kashmir has recorded over two lakh dog bite cases in the past three years - a staggering figure that reflects both administrative negligence and a growing public health emergency. Behind these numbers are countless stories of fear, pain, and, in some tragic cases, death. The sheer scale of the problem demands more than routine statements; it calls for decisive, coordinated, and sustained intervention.

The rise in dog bite incidents across the Union Territory, particularly in Srinagar and Jammu cities, is neither sudden nor unforeseen. For years, experts and civic activists have been warning about the unchecked rise in stray dog populations, largely due to poor waste management and lack of effective sterilization drives. Overflowing garbage dumps, especially near residential areas and schools, have created a perfect breeding ground for stray dogs. Yet, local bodies have often looked the other way, citing either lack of funds or absence of manpower.

While animal welfare laws rightly prevent cruelty and unnecessary killing, they cannot be an excuse for endangering human lives. The balance between compassion and civic responsibility must be maintained. Sterilization and vaccination of stray dogs, if implemented effectively, can control both population and rabies transmission. Unfortunately, the Animal Birth Control (ABC) programme in J&K has been marred by poor planning, insufficient infrastructure, and administrative apathy.

The health implications of this crisis are equally alarming. Rabies remains a fatal disease once symptoms appear, and timely access to anti-rabies vaccines is critical. However, reports from several districts suggest frequent shortages of vaccines and immunoglobulins, leaving victims-often from rural or economically weaker back-grounds-at serious risk. This is not just a municipal issue; it is a full-fledged public health challenge that requires coordination between health, municipal, and veterinary departments.

There is also a psychological dimension to consider. Fear of stray dog attacks has restricted outdoor activities in many neighborhoods. Parents hesitate to let children play outside, and morning walkers tread cautiously. Such anxiety erodes the sense of safety that every citizen deserves in public spaces.

The solution lies in comprehensive and humane management. Urban local bodies must strengthen waste disposal systems to cut off food sources for strays. The government should launch a time-bound sterilization and vaccination drive, backed by transparency and accountability. Public awareness campaigns, involving schools and community organizations, can also foster responsible behavior toward animals and waste disposal. J&K can no longer afford complacency. Two lakh dog bite cases in three years are not mere statistics-they are a wake-up call. A coordinated, scientific, and compassionate strategy is the only way forward to restore safety, public health, and humane coexistence between people and animals.

Sardar Patel and the Spirit of United India: The Living Legacy of Ekta Diwas

■ ADV AARYAN SHARMA

Every great nation is built not merely by its history, but by the ideals that continue to bind its people together. Rashtriya Ekta Diwas, observed every year on October 31, is one such moment of reflection and renewal for India. It marks the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Iron Man of India, whose unwavering vision and resolute leadership laid the very foundations of our unity.

At a time when the newly independent nation faced uncertainty and fragmentation, Patel emerged as the steady hand that held the dream of India together. His life reminds us that unity is not a given-it is an achievement, born of courage, conviction, and compassion.

The Visionary Who Bound a Nation

When India gained independence in 1947, it stood divided-not by will, but by circumstance. Over 560 princely states dotted the subcontinent, each possessing distinct rulers, loyalties, and identities. The task of integrating these fragments into a single nation was monumental, even perilous.

Sardar Patel approached it with clarity and purpose. Through diplomacy, persuasion, and, when necessary, firmness, he brought together these scattered pieces of land and spirit under one flag. The unification of regions like Hyderabad, Junagadh, and Jammu & Kashmir was not just an administrative feat-it was a defining moment in India's civilizational journey.

Patel's vision was rooted in faith-faith in the people, in shared destiny, and in the idea that a nation's strength lies in its unity. He once said, "Manpower without unity is not a strength unless it is harmo-



nized and united properly." His leadership turned that philosophy into reality.

The Meaning of Ekta Diwas

In 2014, the Government of India dedicated October 31 as Rashtriya Ekta Diwas (National Unity Day) to celebrate Sardar Patel's enduring contribution to the nation. The purpose was not only to honor his memory but to remind citizens that India's unity is its greatest inheritance and its greatest responsibility.

Across the country, people participate in Run for Unity events, pledge ceremonies, cultural programs, and exhibitions celebrating the theme of Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat-One India, Great India. The grand observance at the Statue of Unity in Ekta Nagar, Gujarat-the world's tallest statue-serves as a towering reminder of Patel's vision, symbolizing the collective strength and determination of the nation.

Unity as a Living Ideal

Sardar Patel's wisdom was timeless. His idea of unity was not limited to the merging of territories; it was about harmonizing hearts and minds. He believed that the true strength of India lies in its ability to embrace diversity and draw strength from it.

In his words, "Take to the path of



Dharma-the path of truth and justice-for that is the correct path for all." These values remain central to the nation's journey. In a world where divisions of language, faith, or ideology often overshadow shared humanity, Patel's message shines like a guiding star-urging us to look beyond differences and uphold fairness, empathy, and mutual respect.

Relevance in Contemporary India

Today's India stands as one of the world's largest democracies-vibrant, diverse, and dynamic. Yet, it also faces challenges of polarization, regional disparity, and social tension. It is in such times that the spirit of EktaDiwas gains renewed relevance.

Celebrations in schools, colleges, and institutions go beyond rituals; they serve as reminders that unity requires effort and awareness. Every oath taken, every run for unity organized, every discussion on national integrity adds a small

thread to the vast fabric of togetherness that Sardar Patel once envisioned.

The Statue of Unity, standing tall on the banks of the Narmada River, is more than a monument of stone and steel-it is a mirror reflecting the strength of a united people and the unbroken promise of India's democracy.

The Enduring Legacy

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's legacy is not confined to the pages of history; it continues to live in the collective conscience of India. His life reminds us that leadership is not about authority-it is about responsibility. His nationalism was inclusive, his patriotism compassionate, and his vision boundless.

He dreamt of an India where no one would go hungry, where every citizen could live with dignity, and where unity would not be imposed, but felt from within. "Work is worship, and labor is divine," he said, reminding generations that

progress comes through effort, not entitlement.

Ekta Diwas invites us all to carry that legacy forward-to work for harmony, to celebrate diversity, and to protect the spirit of togetherness that defines India's soul.

As India celebrates Rashtriya Ekta Diwas each year, we do more than remember Sardar Patel-we revive his message. In every child who learns about unity, in every citizen who upholds peace, and in every heart that beats for the nation, Patel's dream continues to live.

Unity is not a mere word; it is a living force that sustains our democracy, strengthens our diversity, and propels our collective progress. On this day and beyond, let us pledge to preserve that unity-to honor not just the Iron Man of India, but the enduring spirit of an unbreakable nation.

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A Party with a Difference: How the BJP Redefined Leadership in Indian Politics

■ HARDEEP SINGH PURI



For much of independent India's history, politics was shaped by a sense of entitlement that confused inheritance with legitimacy. One family and one party came to believe they were born to rule. Over time, this mindset hollowed out institutions and conditioned generations to treat political privilege as a birthright. That assumption is now being challenged by a new political ethic rooted in merit, accountability and performance.

A recent article in The Indian Express, titled "One Nation, a Few Parivars", raises an important question about the persistence of dynastic politics in India. The issue it highlights is real, but the interpretation is incomplete. Dynasties do exist across parties, including within the BJP. Yet what distinguishes the BJP is that family background does not translate into automatic leadership. This is a party where opportunity must still be earned, where an individual's rise depends on work, commitment and public trust, not lineage. In the BJP, a family name may open a door, but it cannot keep it open.

This distinction is fundamental. Political kinship is not a problem in itself. Hereditary control is. When leadership becomes the property of a single family, when internal debate is replaced by fealty to bloodlines, democracy withers. The contrast between political cultures is stark. Since 2000,

the Bharatiya Janata Party has had eight national presidents, Bangaru Laxman, Jana Krishnamurthi, Venkaiah Naidu, L. K. Advani, Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadkari, Amit Shah and J. P. Nadda. Each emerged from different regions and back-grounds, and each rose through the discipline of organisational work. During the same period, the Congress has had only three presidents, two of them Gandhis. Sonia Gandhi held the post for nineteen years, and even today the family retains the final word.

The Express analysis, by flattening these differences, ends up equating fundamentally different political realities. It counts the number of legislators with relatives in politics without distinguishing between incidental kinship and institutional capture. Out of 2,078 BJP legislators, 84 come from political families, about four per cent. The Congress has 857 legislators, 73 of them dynasts, nearly nine per cent. When measured proportionally, the Congress's dynastic density is twice as high. Yet the article's framing, by citing absolute numbers, creates a false symmetry.

Even beyond the Congress, the concentration of power in family hands defines several regional parties. The Samajwadi Party moved from Mulayam Singh Yadav to Akhilesh Yadav. The Rashtriya Janata Dal remains under the Yadav family. The DMK passed from M. Karunanidhi to M. K. Stalin and now to Udhayanidhi Stalin. The Trinamool Congress revolves around Mamata Banerjee and her nephew Abhishek. The Soren fami-

ly continues to control the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha. These are not examples of plural leadership but of inherited command. Remove the family, and the party collapses.

To understand why the BJP functions differently, one has to look at its institutional design. The BJP's organisation is layered, collegiate and mission oriented. Cadre are identified early, trained through structured programmes, and tested through responsibility at the booth, mandal, district and state level. Performance at each stage determines the next opportunity. Elections are contests to be won, but they are also audits of the organisation's capacity to mobilise, persuade and deliver. This architecture creates a culture where service, discipline and delivery are the currency of advancement.

The leadership pipeline tells the same story. Since 2014 the party has elevated first generation leaders who reflect India's social mobility. Vishnu Deo Sai, the first tribal Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, built his career through sustained grassroots work. Mohan Majhi in Odisha spent years in organisation and legislature before being entrusted with the chief ministership. Nayab Singh Saini in Haryana comes from a modest background, and Bhajan Lal Sharma in Rajasthan rose through years of constituency work and party responsibility. None of them inherited political office. Each is a case study in how leadership can be earned within a merit oriented party.

The BJP's parliamentary and governmental experience also demon-

strates the distinction between access and ascendancy. Many young leaders are given visibility and responsibility, but they are judged by delivery. Ministers are evaluated on outcomes, reforms and public communication. Party positions are time bound and performance linked. This does not eliminate error or ambition, no human institution can, but it creates incentives that privilege competence over pedigree.

By contrast, hereditary parties struggle to innovate because succession is predetermined. Talent is hemmed in by the need to protect the heir apparent. Internal debate is dulled by fear of contradicting the family line. Organisational networks come to revolve around courtiers and fixers rather than administrators and legislators. The result is not only political stagnation but also a corrosion of public trust. Voters eventually recognise the difference between leadership that is earned and leadership that is transferred.

It is important to acknowledge history. The Congress normalised political inheritance in the national imagination. Many regional dynastic outfits, from the YSR Congress and BRS to the Trinamool, are offshoots of the Congress and have replicated its hereditary structure. Over decades this culture transformed political parties into family enterprises, where ideology yielded to loyalty and succession planning replaced leadership development. That model may deliver short bursts of electoral success, but it rarely builds durable institutions or a

broad bench of capable leaders.

Critics sometimes ask whether the BJP is entirely free of dynastic figures. The honest answer is that it is not, nor is any large democratic party. The relevant question is different. Do such figures enjoy positions solely because of their lineage, or have they earned the trust of the organisation and the electorate through sustained work. The BJP's record shows that family background can be a biographical fact, but it is not a sufficient credential. The pathway to leadership remains the same for everyone, karyakarta to leader, worker to representative, representative to minister; each step earned through performance.

This distinction also explains the BJP's ability to expand its social and geographic base. A merit oriented party can integrate new communities and regions because it offers pathways for participation that do not depend on proximity to a family. It can identify local talent, give it responsibility, and reward results. That is how a party becomes national in character while remaining rooted in local realities. It is also how a party translates ideology into governance, through leaders who have been trained to deliver rather than merely to inherit.

The electorate has recognised this difference. Voters are not impressed by surnames. They evaluate leaders by delivery, not descent. They can tell the difference between legitimacy earned through public service and entitlement acquired through lineage. That is why the debate on dynastic politics should not be framed as a numbers game

alone. The deeper issue is the culture of leadership. Does a party reward service and competence, or does it reward proximity to a family name. On that test the BJP's distinction is clear.

The Express article asked who among India's parties are run by families. The more significant question is who among them are not. The BJP remains one of the few where leadership cannot be inherited, only earned. The party will continue to have leaders from many backgrounds, including those with relatives in public life, but the terms of advancement are the same for all. Work hard, build trust, deliver results, and convince the people. In a democracy there is no other sustainable route.

India's democracy is undergoing a quiet transformation. Citizens are asserting their right to be governed by competence rather than pedigree. Institutions are recovering confidence as leadership becomes more accountable. Politics is beginning to look less like inheritance and more like service. The journey is not complete and will never be. Every generation must renew it. But the direction is clear. Merit matters. Performance matters. The people matter most. In that sense, the BJP is a party with a difference, not because it claims perfection, but because it has built a culture that insists leadership be earned. That is the distinction worth preserving in India's public life, for it aligns power with responsibility and ambition with service.

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Towards Greening the Blue

■ DR. BANARSI LAL

Ecosystem services are the ecological functions and processes through which ecosystems contribute to human-well-being. Loss of ecosystem services is a serious concern in the present era with urbanisation and globalisation being key drivers that have transformed landscapes across the region. Deforestation and forest degradation are fuelled primarily by commercial logging and agriculture. Rural communities globally have livelihoods that are deeply entwined with the surrounding natural environment-whether farming, fishing or in forests. Soil is finite natural resource. Soil is a critical component of the natural system and as a vital contributor to the human commonwealth through its contribution to food, water and energy security and as a mitigator of biodiversity loss and climate change. The nutritional value of the food we eat is directly associated with the soil health. Soil high in organic carbon content enables better rainfall infiltration and retention and provides greater resilience to drought. Soils are vulnerable to carbon loss through degradation but regenerative land management practices can build and restore soil health. It is estimated that natural processes take more than 500 years to form 2 centimeters of topsoil. Soil stores around 10 per cent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions. Microbial activities controls and

manipulates the chemistry of the soil. Living organisms in the soil control water infiltration, mineral density and nutrient cycling. Fungi and bacteria help to break down organic matter in the soil and earthworms digest organic matter; recycle nutrients and make the soil surface richer. In a handful of fertile soil, there are more individual organisms than the total number of human beings that have ever existed on the earth. Although soil plays an essential role for the human livelihoods but there is worldwide increase in the degradation of soil resources due to inappropriate management practices, population pressure driving unsustainable intensification and inadequate governance over this essential resource. Healthy soil is the key to sustaining life and the adoption of sustainable land management practices are becoming more and more important. Increase in the soil carbon builds a precious reservoir and helps to offset greenhouse gas emissions. It also contributes in the fertility of the soil, the foundation for all land-based natural and agricultural ecosystems which provide a major part of the world's food supply, natural resources and biodiversity. More than 10 million people have abandoned their homelands because of environmental issues including drought, soil erosion, desertification and deforestation. Soil improves our resilience to floods and droughts. Majority of the known antibiotics originated from

soil bacteria including penicillin.

Agriculture is a tool for poverty eradication. The government of India is making strenuous efforts not merely as a tool to feed the country but also as a means to uplift the socio-economic status of the farming community of the country. The government has initiated a number of developmental schemes and programmes which have the potential to immensely benefit the farming community by strengthening the roots of agriculture. On 19th February, 2015 the Prime Minister of India launched the nationwide Soil Health Card Scheme from Suratgarh, Rajasthan. The government has announced that 14.5 crore farmers would get the soil health cards within three years across the country. Soil Health Card Scheme is a national movement across the country. Under this scheme the soil sample is taken by the experts from the farmer's field and tested in a soil health laboratory. Then the soil health card is issued to the farmers regarding the ingredients and deficiencies in the soil. On the basis of the results of the soils of respective farmer field, he can add the plants nutrients in the soil accordingly. This scheme may not only maintain the health of the soil but will also reduce the cost of cultivation. This will also help to identify the best crop suited in the respective field.

Total geographical area in India is 329 million

hectares, out of which 68 million hectares is critically degraded and another 107 million hectares is severely eroded. A total of 175 million hectares area is subjected to serious erosion problems such as wind, water, water logging, soil alkalinity and salinity etc. It is expected that around 61 per cent of soil is displaced from one place to another. In steep land farming areas such as Western Ghats, topsoil losses are very high. An unscientific way of farming in sloppy lands may cause large scale soil loss by erosion. High intensity of monsoon rainfall on steep slopes contributes to high erosion rates. Soil conservation programmes have been disseminated by the Government and also Non-Governmental agencies in our country. Major objective of soil conservation is to keep everything in the soil in its place. It manages the soil erosion and process of sedimentation. Soil fertility needs to be restored in order to allow a satisfactory and early return on the capital and labour invested. So there is need of improved sustainable production through different soil management practices. Land husbandry considers management of soil, water and vegetation as an integrated approach. For example, frequent failures to several water management schemes are attributed to the non-consideration of the interrelationships between soil, water and biomass. A new strategy needs to be developed taking into account the needs of those in

direct charge of the land. By improving the overall soil conditions for plant growth, better conservation of water and soil can be achieved. Better land husbandry is more relevant when the land is under active crop production. These apply to land use, crop management, tillage methods, integrated nutrient management etc. Land husbandry relies strongly on agronomic and biological methods in combination with a realistic soil management. The intensity of the soil conservation treatments depends primarily on the steepness of the slope. The establishment or maintenance is very important. The physical characteristics of erodible soils can be improved with mulching materials. An integrated approach should be taken to land water and its uses to avoid undesirable effects from human activities. Most of the soil conservation programmes emphasize on soil degradation than on the top-down approach in recommending and disseminating practices. Soil conservation programmes that aim to reduce soil degradation problems need long-term bottom-up approach. It should be remembered that erosion is a consequence of how soil and its vegetation are managed and not itself the cause of soil degradation. Thus, prevention of soil degradation is more important than attempting to develop a cure afterwards.

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