

A NEW QUEST BEGINS

As IkkJutt Jammu has decided to plunge into the electoral Afroy of Jammu and Kashmir, a new political dynamic has been added to the Kashmir dominated political ecosystem of this UT. IkkJutt underwent a tremendous metamorphosis and emerged as another regional political party in Jammu. This comes on the heels of J&K administration declaring elections for District Development Councils in the UT. Though, on the face of it, this new political party appears to be an oxymoron, but it has definitely rekindled some hopes among the indifferent masses. Kochanek calls this phenomenon as 'Regionalisation of Political Parties'. It might seem a bit ironic but, Jammu, as we know today, has never been a united political entity historically except for some short durations in Pre Dogra-Rule. After independence too, Jammu remained politically emasculated due to the hardwired policies of the Kashmir centric governments which inevitably kept Jammu disempowered and the batons were carried by the Kashmiris at the behest of Delhi

In this respect, IkkJutt Jammu, provided a viable alternative to the people of Jammu, for their agenda typifies the smouldering issues of Jammu region, which the BJP government took no notice of. There is an undercurrent of angst against BJP on many fronts. The foremost being the latter of being highly hostile to the nationalistic people of Jammu, who have left no stone unturned in preserving the Indian ethos and saving the grace of Indian National Flag in those difficult times of late 1980s and 90. The youth of Jammu feel that BJP in its gambit to expand in the Kashmir valley has consistently thwarted any attempt of empowering Jammu. Balraj Puri said, 'Regional disorient took the form of a mass upsurge of a secular nature with the demand in 1978-79 for a 'statutory, political and democratic set up at regional, district, block and panchayat levels.' A faction of the Jana Sangh group condemned the movement. Another section of the Jana Sangh that joined the agitation under popular pressure, sabotaged it by giving up the main demand and striking a deal with the Abdullah...'. Even later, in 2015, when BJP had had a chance to deliver a knocking punch to the Kashmiri hegemony, it prostrated before Mufti led JKDP, and squandered yet another eventful opportunity for Jammu's rightful rise. This was a clear betrayal of the Jammu's electoral mandate. BJP's bravado of using J&K card in cashing votes of other states' election has also not been well appreciated. Admittedly, the BJP's failure to provide employment and thence recruitment aberrations even after the abrogation of Article 370 has landed them in choppy waters with the people of Jammu. In other words, I can say, that Jammu has taken the fall of BJP's badly implemented decisions in this UT.

This new development also challenges the centralisation of Indian politics vis a vis Jammu in particular, as the presence of NC and PDP provided Kashmir a sustainable bargaining chip for New Delhi while Jammu was pushed to the wall, languishing in between the chasm that developed between Delhi and Kashmir over the years. This conundrum was brought to the sharp relief when Jammu repaired itself into the cocooning womb of the Kashmir, losing its character, culture and cohesion. This manifests clearly when we see our Mubarak Mandi crumbling with each passing day. We witness it when we see two-decade old Artificial Lake Project in limbo. We experience it while we visit places like Akhnoor, Ramnagar, Reasi, Bhaderwah, which were ignored at the cost of Kashmir.

Nevertheless, some concerns continue to surface regarding this new political outfit. Firstly, how it's going to bridge the gulf between religious communities, who though seem pacified at the very surface, have deep fault lines. This entire façade is hanging by a very fine thread of gossamer, whose strength is questionable. The coining of terms like Zameen Jihad post Roshni verdict has severely dented IJ's image in Muslim pockets of the province. Secondly, the organisation, as of now, is more visible in the Dogri speaking belts of Jammu province. Thirdly, its growth paradigm shall be challenging given the cramped political space in the region, especially after the rise of BJP post 2014. At present, it can seek votes only by infiltrating the vote banks of the BJP, which lately short-changed Jammu and peddle jingoism and peripheral agendas of the centre. Even the earlier experiments like Panthers Party couldn't sustain the momentum for long and are still lurking into an uncertain existential crisis. Therefore, in order to set foot right in Jammu province, IJ must take into consideration the prevailing fault lines and regional disconnect prevailing in Jammu region. It's a no hidden fact that many in Pir Panjal areas and Doda-Kishtwar have affinities for Kashmir. Therefore, IJ in the meantime, must ask for autonomous regional councils, as an effective mean of power devolution to the far-flung districts of Jammu. Its efforts to bring them into the larger structure of Jammu must be devised in a manner that is not communal, egregious or overpowering. It'd be a major faux pas if everything gets centred around the Dogri speaking belts of the Jammu region. If IJ has to succeed then it must ensure that a sustainable, cohesive and United front comprising of all sub regional communities, linguistic & religious factions and ethnicities are given due representation. Lt Gen Bhopinder Singh says that "Dividing the 'voice' and ease of Jammu by inserting wholly political agendas that addresses only partisan concerns, does unimaginable discredit to the glorious traditions and grandeur of the Dogras". It's a no brainer that once this gets achieved, only then one can hope for Jammu emerging as a major political voice which New Delhi finds worth reckoning.

By Kaladi Mahajan

But where is Mehbooba's PDP?

■ PROF HARI OM

Former Union Home Minister and JKPCC chief Mufti Mohammad Sayeed founded J&K Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in 1999. Many say that it was the BJP-led NDA Government at the Centre which helped Mufti Sayeed with doubtful credentials set up the PDP to create a counterpoise to the unjust and unsettling aspirations of the pro-semi-independence and fundamentally sectarian National Conference (NC) and break the age-old monopoly of Abdullahs. It did mar the electoral prospects of the NC in 2002, 2008 and 2014, dethroned the NC and misruled the state for more than six years - first in alliance with the Sonia Congress and then in alliance with the BJP. Both handed over the crucial state power to the Muftis in what they called 'National interest'. What a paradox? What a wrong judgment of men and matters? What a national interest? All know how these Muftis jeopardised in a most brazen manner the national interest in the sensitive erstwhile border State of J&K.

Anyway, the PDP was essentially a two-district Party (TDP) till 2014. Its support-base was confined only to Anantnag and Pulwama districts. The PDP spread its tentacles across Kashmir region only during the 2014 general elections. That year, it defeated all the three 'unpopular' NC candidates in Kashmir, including Farooq Abdullah. Farooq Abdullah was defeated by the PDP's founder member Tariq Hamid Karra with a huge margin of over 40,000 votes.

No one had expected that the PDP's separatist edifice will collapse so soon and it would become subservient and subordinate to B-team of the already struggling-to-survive NC against which it had taken the political plunge to further widen the already rather wide gulf between Kashmiri Muslims and the rest of the countrymen. The votary of Pakistan, self-rule, joint-governance, soft

borders, supra-state measures, demilitarisation and close links with Central Asia PDP has virtually become non-existent. It has merged its identity with the NC for all practical purposes and left its supporters in the lurch.

The PDP's separatist edifice started crumbling, particularly after the demise of Mufti Sayeed in January 2016. Of course, one of the PDP's founder members Ghulam Hassan Mir had said goodbye to the Muftis as early as in 2006, when the party president, Mehbooba Mufti, suspended him for what she called 'anti-party activities'. It's a different story that Mir had accused another founder member of the party, Muzaffar Baig, of working against the party candidates in three assembly segments during the by-polls.

Where are the founder members of the PDP? Mufti Mohammad Sayeed is no more. Another founder member B L Vaishnavi has also left the world. Ghulam Hassan Mir is out. Tariq Hamid Karra quit the PDP in 2017 and joined the Congress to show Mehbooba Mufti her place. Another founder member Ved Mahajan left the party only on October 26, the day of J&K Accession. He, along with former RSMPT S Bajwa and former PDP state secretary Hussain A Waffa, quit the PDP, saying she 'hurt their patriotic sentiments by insulting the national flag'. Mehbooba Mufti had said, "Our relationship with the flag of this country (India) is not independent of this flag (Jammu and Kashmir's flag). When this flag comes in our hand, we will raise that flag too". Earlier in 2017, she as CM had said in Delhi that 'there would be none in Kashmir to give shoulder to the national flag if any attempt was made by the Narendra Modi Government to tinker with Article 35A and Article 370'.

Interestingly, Ved Mahajan, T S Bajwa and Hussain A Waffa have, like Tariq Hamid Karra, also joined the Sonia Congress. The Congress is part of the Farooq Abdullah-led

Gupkar Gang of eight Kashmiri parties (PAGD) of which Mehbooba Mufti is the vice-chairperson. What an irony?

As for another founder member Muzaffar Baig, he too quit the PDP on November 15. He accused Mehbooba Mufti of bartering the interests of the party, deviating from the path charted by Mufti Sayeed and becoming a B-team of Farooq Abdullah. Baig, who was also the patron of the PDP, had disagreement over the seat-sharing arrangement in the upcoming District Development Council (DDC) elections.

The fact of the matter is that all founder members, barring Mehbooba Mufti (founder member), have quit the party or quit the world. And this speaks for itself and establishes that almost all other bigwigs in the party have abandoned the Mehbooba Mufti's sinking ship. His own brother Tassaduq Hussain Mufti has gone into hibernation. He has not spoken a word for almost two years now. But this is not all. Former Finance Minister, Haseeb Drabu, who was sacked by Mehbooba Mufti in March 2018 for his remarks that "Kashmir should not be seen as a conflict state or a political problem but as a society with social issues", has also resigned from the PDP. He resigned from the primary membership of the party on December 6, 2018. Similarly, former Education and Finance Minister Altaf Bukhari, who was expelled by Mehbooba Mufti on January 19, 2019 for 'anti-party activities', has, along with many former PDP ministers and legislators, formed his own party, styled as J&K Apni Party. It was floated on March 9, 2020. The grapevine is that Altaf Bukhari's party enjoys the backing of the Union Government.

This is the PDP of Mehbooba Mufti. The handful of Jammu-based supporters of Mehbooba Mufti would do well to jump out of the flapping-aimlessly-Mehbooba-boat and defend, support and promote the Jammu cause. The sooner they do it, the better.

Jammu-Srinagar National Highway; A ticking time bomb!

■ KR SWARN KISHORE SINGH

There were times when Jammu to Srinagar journey was a long affair of 12 hours wherein a morning breeze of the Manda hills marked the beginning of journey, followed by the curves of Nandni, pickles of Manthal and brunch of Kulehas in Udhampur followed by Patisa of Kud. The coolness of Patnitop to be pacified by Chai Pakodas in Batote and Rajma Chawal along with a full view of Baghlihar dam in Peerah. Then came a place where throughout the whole stretch of national highway, River Chenab flows the closest i.e., Ramban. Some tea and snacks in Panthyal, dry fruits of Ramsoo, and then the last and steepest raise after crossing Banihal town to reach all the popular Jawahar Tunnel. As the sun starts sliding down, we used to reach the plain fields of Lower Munda followed the crowds of Anantnag and scrawny curves of Avantipora. Finally, as we get closer to Srinagar, saffron fields of Pampore welcomed the passengers and after while plying through the banks of Jehlum, we could finally reach the banks of Dal Lake i.e., Dal Gate. This all used to take almost 12 hours and it was not just a journey but a brief tour of soul of Jammu and Kashmir.

Few days ago, it took me even less than 7 hours from Jammu to reach Srinagar but this time it was with three toll plazas, enormous dust & immense fear of a sliding shooting stones. River Chenab was never dirtier; the adjoining hills were never so very torn, leave aside the beauty. The adjoining markets are devastated, the air is so polluted that you can't even afford to open the windows of your vehicle due to the immense surrounding dust and smog. Prior to widening project of Jammu-Srinagar National Highway, only thing which created problems for the passengers was a week long blockade in Patnitop somewhere in the month December or January but now the blockade isn't just for a week per year but for a fortnight every two months to add to the fury is a day of stillness

every week. Stillness on highway is like putting the economy on ventilator; why doesn't the administration understand this? Somewhere in 2015, the work of construction of four laning of Jammu to Srinagar national highway commenced. And yes, it began simultaneously i.e., in the stretch which lies in Kashmir & Jammu. Two big shot construction companies were awarded with the contracts for four laning of Jammu-Srinagar National Highway from Udhampur to Banihal. People were happy as better and wider roads ostensibly translate into strengthening of economy as the local produce could find better markets in shorter times. But then began the debacle and construction companies did unleash the treachery and the real plunder of the resources of the region commenced. These construction companies were working much like East India Company by dividing the local people and bribing the influential ones while keeping the administration in their pockets by offering them something enticing. In 2017, I remember a top official of a construction company while briefing with the progress of the project said since the construction work of the factory of Forest Minister is going on, therefore some of our workers are busy there. Inquisitively I raised a question over the reason for engaging their workers at work site of the minister's factory; is it because of the rare expertise or what? He replied this is called courtesy in our corporate culture. I was astonished. Similarly bureaucrats ask for plum posting in district Ramban where the maximum stretch of construction work locates; what for? And why only bureaucrats should have all the fun, every local politician of every ideological denomination have had their respective share in the work and consequent booty, not to worry about the expertise in the work. The construction companies delegated the construction work to either politicians turned contractors or contractors turned politicians, what could be probable reasons? It was just to bribe their con-

science and make them believe that the welfare of company and the local polities is mutual and in the meantime the public welfare can go for a walk. And at the end a long time goon has been roped in who brags keeping law under his feet, by the construction companies via a couple of illegal private contracts, while the governmental agencies like National Highway Authority of India & others sly in slumber. He has thrown caution to the winds while greasing the palms of the administration. It is always painful to see a district magistrate talking like a salesman of these companies and justifying their misdeeds. The words like 'uppar se pressure hai', 'roz ka reporting karni hoti hai Delhi' and 'xyz neta ke bete ka share hai is company mein, hum kuchh nai kar skte hain ji' is the common expletive of almost all the bureaucrats posted in district Ramban.

The air is polluted to such a magnitude that in a bright sunny day, the visibility on the national highway is so very pathetic that it seeks the operation of headlights of vehicles. The people who are living alongside the national highway are falling sick with chest and lung diseases and this is not just a stray allegation; it stands further ratified with a report of Medical Superintendent, Ramban. So in a way people are being forced onto a road to death just to make sure some companies earn some extra bucks. Is this China or India?

And it is not the so-called construction work of NH44 which is inviting doom. The stone crushers and hot mix plants on the outer edge of national highway and in midst of the residential colonies is also helping their cause to kill the people of the area. What pains me the most is the fact that while the administration is enjoying its slumber why is the conscience of the political leadership put to auction and that too so very cheaply?

Unfortunately nothing is going to happen as everyone who could have had made something happen is having a portion in the potion.

USCIRF's criticism of India's religious freedom unjustified

■ NANDIKA CHAND

The 21st century is definitely an eventful century, during which the development of all human endeavours reached its peak. Unfortunately, a large group of people choose to abandon the wheel of progress and recede to conservatism. It is sad to see the development of the human race shattered by traditional and conservative ideologies. Religion is deeply incorporated into people's lives to the degree that not a single society or culture is out of its influence. But, ironically, many people are still inclined to become non-progressive traditionalists. Indeed, tradition is not a bad thing, but mankind should continue to evolve by breaking down conservative ideas.

India is a country of many stories and legends. India, like any other country, is looked at differently by different people. It is difficult to explain how these perceptions have come to be as they are, because all such understandings and observations are based on very subjective thinking, in which case we will discuss India's designation as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) in the report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

After reading such reports, many questions arise such as, why would the United States, a country that is historically, demographically, socially and culturally less profound or diverse than India, produce such reports on India's internal affairs, and even expect India to lightly accept it?

The United States is considered to be the most developed country in the world and a multi-ethnic society of more than 300 million people. But its society and culture are far less complex than India's, therefore not qualified to produce any authoritative view of India, one of the world's four major civilisations, where many religious sects and creeds have coexisted for centuries. The U.S.-backed International Religious Freedom Alliance (IRFA) makes the same outrageous and absurd assessment around the world.

It is absurd to criticize India for 'failing' in religious tolerance, which has undoubtedly seeped into the veins of Indian culture: 79.8% of the Indian population are Hindu, followed by Islam (14.23%), Christianity (2.3%) and Sikhism (1.72%). The diversity of religious beliefs and the indigenous religious landscape of today's India are the result of religious and social mixing brought about by traders, travellers, immigrants, and even invaders and conquerors.

Despite being considered a "minority" in the USCIRF report, the number of Muslims in India is approximate to that of Pakistan, an Islamic State. Political parties in India conduct their politics on the basis of ideologies. So almost all Indian social factions face some kind of political and ideological discrimination. We often see disunity among people on various issues.

The BJP-led government enacted the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) in the Indian Parliament based on the historical circumstances of the Indian subcontinent, while the report of the USCIRF classifies India as a CPC, clearly demonstrating the total disregard for historical and cultural background of the Indian subcontinent, and the absence of an objective assessment of the actual situation. The assessment by this U.S. government advisory body is clearly biased. Its concerns with regard to CAA and the incidents of violence against minorities are based on an unjust and narrow political agenda and showcase its indifference to the secular nature of the Indian society.

Non-interference in internal affairs should be a widely accepted principle. But unfortunately, this is not reflected in the USCIRF report. India's democratic system encourages the full range of social and legal issues in India to be openly debated before the public, and many scholars and social institutions have provided a number of solid perspectives on these issues. If we look at all the countries of the Indian subcontinent, in terms of their socio-cultural histories and constitutional forms, India is the only country where all religions coexist and provide legal rights and protection to the followers of all beliefs.

OFF 'D' CUFF

Let us overcome pandemic together

It is of deep concern that there are now over 50 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including the devastating loss of 1.2 million precious lives around the world. As well as being a profound crisis of public health, the pandemic has also caused devastating impact on economies, and is said to have increased the global population of those living in extreme poverty by an estimated 500 million people. It has been 30 years since poverty rose so sharply on such a vast scale. My heart goes out to the numerous families who were doing well but have suddenly been plunged into financial distress due to the coronavirus crisis.

Prize in Economics, note that "not only do the poor lead riskier lives than the less poor, but a bad break of the same magnitude is likely to hurt them more." They stress that we should not blame those suffering from poverty for the situation they are in, emphasizing the need to always seek to appreciate the actual conditions in which people live.

Buddhism has, at its root, an emphasis on responding to the real suffering of human beings. Born into a royal family in ancient India, Shakyamuni enjoyed high political status and material abundance. His youthful years were spent in an affluent environment where large numbers of people directly served the royal family. One day, however, Shakyamuni stepped outside the palace gates where he saw people suffering the damaging effects of illness and old age.

By Daisaku Ikeda

YOUR COLUMN

Stay motivated to clear UPSC Civil Services Exams.

Dear Editor,
If you are an aspirant civil servant preparing to take the UPSC civil services exam chances are quite high that your UPSC preparation would be in full swing by now. The IAS exam is one of the most challenging exams in the country. Roughly 50% of those applying to write the prelims do not appear for it. And an even lesser percentage of people make it as civil servants of our country. I will try to bring to you all such factors and reasons which will motivate you for the exam.

You must be feeling enthused about UPSC Prelims which is going to take place on 2021. You will be following your dreams and would be leaving no stone unturned in your efforts to make it till the UPSC board interview.

Preparing for civil services exams seems like a colossal task. The syllabus to be covered is vast and diverse. A successful candidate is not just the one who is better prepared but also the one who is able to sustain his/her motivation levels throughout the process. Read on to get a few tips to be and remain motivated until you reach your ultimate goal.

Ask yourself, "Why do you want to be a civil servant?" The answer to this question should be motivation in itself. If you want to change the system; if you want to serve your country and people; if you really feel you can use your talents and help steer your country towards development, just think that by clearing the civil services you get the opportunity to do just that. Having your goal firmly in place will motivate you to

propel further. Think about the benefits to yourself and to society.

IAS aspirants should be confident enough for the exam. Just in case, they find themselves in doubt, they can refer to the following tips and bring back the lost confidence for the UPSC exam.

An unknown quote says, "Push yourself because no one else is going to do it for you." This quote is right on the money. The goal is yours, so must be the efforts. Tell yourself, no one is going to study for you. To attain your goal you must buck up and back yourselves. Don't wait for external stimuli. Stop procrastinating.

If expectations wear you down, the best way to deal with it is to break it down. Have mini-targets and strive to achieve them. Not only does it make your work less scary, but it also makes it look more achievable.

Why do most of us love watching movies? It is because we enjoy them. Remember, it can even be a torturous process to endure a bad movie. The same thing goes with studying. If we enjoy studying, it becomes less work and more something to be enjoyed. Choose subjects that you are genuinely interested in. Generate interest in topics that you know nothing about. Be curious to learn. Treat studies as an opportunity to learn and not as a chore. Curiosity can be a great motivator to keep you going.

Understand what topics bore you and try learning those parts by a different method. Be creative while dealing with these topics. Instead of books, try watching videos. Try teaching these subjects to an audience. Remember you will encounter topics that bore you as the UPSC syllabus is vast. But you can get through them by these innovative methods. Don't let uninteresting topics lower your motivation for the IAS exam.

Many times during the course of your civil service preparation, you will feel that you are not up to it. The UPSC exam study can take a year, and it is natural to

feel a little low at times. At these times, remind yourself of your strengths. If you are good in mathematics but weak in English, tell yourself - 'I am a good mathematician. I can deal with English too.'

Regularly record your progress. If you are feeling down and out, go through this chart. You will feel good about what you have achieved and get that boost required to move on.

It is not human to go on without breaks. A good break can refresh your body and mind. A change of scene can also give you a fresh perspective, thus giving you better ideas and pointers for your answers.

Do not get demotivated when you see a hurdle. There is no race without hurdles. The successful person is not someone who didn't face any obstacles but the one who faced obstacles and overcame them.

Preparing for the IAS exams would mean sitting for long hours in your study room. Ensure that your room is peppy and clean. Having the right 'mood' to study goes a long way in maintaining motivation. Have proper lighting and comfortable seating. Have a picture of your icon or an inspirational saying on the wall or study table.

You can't be motivated unless you are healthy. Have a healthy diet and regular exercise to be fit and fine.

Imagining yourself as a top civil servant can work wonders if you are not feeling motivated. But avoid day-dreaming. Avoid any negative people - people who constantly put you down or those who doubt you. Just don't be around them. Their negativity can rub off on you.

Gratitude gives happiness which in turn is a motivator. Be grateful for your blessings and express gratitude to those who support you.

Get inspired from other greats.

Vijay Garg, Malout Punjab.