

LIFE-A BATTLE

Those who view life as an illusion or constantly dream without taking action may not truly understand or experience the fullness of life. Instead, life is a battle or a struggle, and true peace and happiness can only be attained by fully engaging in life with dedication and commitment.

Life as a struggle or a battle, emphasizing that true peace is attainable only when one gives their all to the journey of life.

Merely dreaming won't lead to true fulfillment, and one must take concrete steps to achieve their aspirations.

This phrase "The dream disappears from the dream" suggests that dreams, when left unfulfilled, remain in the realm of imagination and do not become reality.

True happiness and fulfillment are achieved through effort and dedication in the real world.

Frazzling forest cover

■ GL KHAJURIA

The forest is a peculiar organism of unlimited kindness and benevolence that makes no demands for its sustenance but extends protection to all beings offering shade even to the axe man who fells it Lord Buddha.

After independence, the Indian foreign policy was framed in 1952 wherein it was categorically enunciated that India would have 33% of the geographical area under the forests. But ironically, as per survey of Indian's latest report (2015), we continue to have 21% of forests despite population explosion, increased biotic pressure accruing from grazing, encroachments and diversification of forest land for multi-disciplinary purposes. As such, there have been a marginal increase of 1% forest cover.

The overall situation is that the total green covers now stands for 697888 sq mm (21.23%) of the geographical area and upto 5871 sq km (0.92%) from 92,027 sq km as had earlier been existing in the year 2011. As such, there has been a marginal increase of just 31sq km in very dense forest, whereas moderately dense forest went down to 1991 sq km and the open forest accounted for 7831 sq mm.

As per Anmol Kumar, the Director General of Forest Survey of India, the carbon stocks of the country have increased by 4.07% whereas the regeneration capacity is around 48% of the total recorded forest area. It has further been reported that West Bengal and Odisha are in the top slot having forest cover followed by Kerala, Uttarakhand, Bihar and Tamil Nadu. The North-Eastern region accounts for one fourth of the green cover showing thereby a periodic decrease which of course is a matter of utmost concern.

The survey report reveals further that 257 Sqkm of eastern states of the country have mostly been effected arguably owing to shifting cultivation practices. Nagaland with 274 Sqkm is in the forefront followed by Tripura (111 Sqkm), Manipura (100 Sqkm), Arunachal Pradesh (89 Sqkm) and Misoram (63 Sq Km) and amongst other states, Andhra Pradesh has lost the forest cover to the extent of 273 SqKm, Madhya Pradesh (178 Sq Kms), Karnataka (62 SqKms) and Chhatisgarh (53 Sq Kms) of the geographical areas. The Jammu and Kashmir state having a forest cover of 20,230 Hectare (recorded) out of 22, 539 Hectare (Actual). This shows the recorded percentages of the area having per capita forest cover around (0.1796 Hac) ending year 2011 which is dismally jeering.

In view of the seriousness and sensibility accruing from the overall declining forest cover, the scenario is unambiguously dismaying.

And in the same vein, the situation worldwide is also alarming. The scientists, environmentalists and the policy planners around the world are awfully worried about as per the presently prevailing scenario. In a situation like this and if it continues to be the same, there is impending apprehensions of further environmental degradation, tantamount to cataclysm. A clear cut death Knell signal for all the nations if the world.

At this crucial juncture, it is utmost warran for rapid planning and action able strategies to be put in place well before the holo-caustic scenario overshadows this planet and its diversified bio diversity.

Over the years, lot of summits and the conferences have deliberated upon right from stock holm on human development in 1972 followed by earth summit in Rio de Janerio (Brazil) and then earth summit in Johannesburg but in the ultimate analysis, all have proved to be unyielding. In the ongoing process of such summits, conventions, year 1995 unfolded another convention held in Berlin (COP1), wherein it became apparent that Rio was not enough and even in its after math the results were quite unyielding. This was sequenced by a protocol on climate change convention adopted in 1997, known as Kyoto-protocol. The targeted moto was emphatically aimed at to bring down global CHG emision by 5.2% during the period 2008-2012 and its commitment expired ending 2015.

And now recently, a land mark framework agreement on climatic change was enunciated in Paris (2015) to keep and ensure global temperature slow down and this remarkable agreement followed as a sequel to united nations intergovernmental panel on climatic changes (IPCC) in association with world organisation (WHO) and UN Environment Programme (UNEP) scientific, technical and socio-economic information concerning to climate areas changes, its potential effects and opinions for adaptation and migration. This framework was laid down on the occasion of world earth day (22nd April, 2016) where apart from US and China around 120 countries across the global participated. And this agreement was more relevant and of vital importance as a follow up for enforcement of draft treaty' adapted by around 195 countries present at United Nations climatic change conference. It is, therefore, expected that this world conference shall provide the required push in reducing global emissions, to extent of 55% by the most populating 55 countries.

Consequently, therefore, the signing of this agreement on climatic change, particularly when the most powerful countries viz US and China are in the lead is beyond doubt going to have a far reaching impact. This will rather change the glooming picture of the environment at large and shall provide impetus to the most magnanimous wordings of Margret Mead which go as such, " never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizen can change the world, indeed it is the only that ever has."

It is therefore, prudent to throw light on some of the very vital issues of the day and ensure their world wide implementation on larger scale.

► Averting deforestation. Our existing forest cover is frazzling rapidly with the revolving wheel of time and its further declination shall have to be averted by all the nations across the globe.

► Invigorating extensive/intensive afforestations. This shall have to be ensured on gigantic scales as the losses we have already done are not so easily retrievable. And in doing so, we shall have to start from hills/ mountainous tops as these have doubtlessly become more sensitive and fragile and are subject to denudation and huge land mass movements in the shape of landslides, floods fury on an unprecedented scale. So unless our tops are safe , the low lying areas shall always be in peril. While celebrating earth day in 2015, it was pledged to plant 7.8 billion saplings world wide to account for every single person living on earth in a lead upto 50th anniversary of earth day in 2020. Where on the same earth such pledge has so far been initiated ? This invites special attention of the world leaders.

(The author is Former Dy. Conservator of Forest, J&K).

■ DR. SUNITA KUMARI

International Stress Awareness Day takes place every year on the first Wednesday of November and was started in 1998 by the International Stress Management Association. Stress, anxiety and worry are the feelings that everyone faces in their daily life. The present article is aimed at spreading stress awareness among the readers and also to encourage them to relax, practice self-care, and create a stress-management routine.

Stress is the feeling of immense mental and emotional pressure. The word "stress" was derived from the Latin word "stringi", which means, "to be drawn tight". As per WHO, stress is "the reaction, people may have when presented with demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope". Stress and anxiety have become all too common in our fast-paced, modern world. From the pressures of work and relationships to the constant bombardment of information through technology it's no wonder that many of us struggle with the emotional challenges on a daily basis. In the modern era the biggest enemy of good health is stress and most of illnesses can be blamed on psychological forces. Stress manifests itself in the form of many physical ailments like headache, indigestion, acidity, weakened immune system and merciless life-killers like heart attacks. The majority of the problems brought to physicians these days are stress-related, many are the result of stress and others are made worse or last longer because of it. Walter Cannon in 1932 introduced the concept of homeostasis. Stress in general challenges homeostasis. When homeostasis is challenged, allostasis comes into play. Allostasis is the process of adaptation by which an organism varies its internal milieu to match environmental demands to achieve stability/homeostatic balance. Long-term physiological cost stemming out of attempts at adaptation constitutes allostatic load (collective wear and tear on the functioning of the brain and body). Allostatic load accumulates throughout the life of an individual and affects multiple bodily systems.

History of stress: In 1936 Hans Selye coined the term "stress" and therefore he is considered as the founder of the concept of stress. He is also regarded as the "Father of Stress". He defined stress as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change". Since most of the people views stress as some unpleasant threat, Selye created a new word, "stressor", to differentiate stimulus from the response. He also concluded that stress plays at least some role in the development of any disease, and failure of the body to deal with stress can lead to "diseases of adaptation" such as high blood pressure, ulcers, and many more.

All stressors produce the same pattern (General Adaptation Syndrome/ Three Stages of Stress response)

Alarm reaction/ Fight or Flight response: It is a complex Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) reaction in preparation for emergencies. During stressful events, one has to decide whether to fight or flee. Fear is also a form of stress. When we experience fear, the physiology of stress gets into motion and it may lead to damage/wear and tear to the body at cellular and molecular levels. If stress is moderate and of short duration it is known as Eustress (positive stress or good stress). Eustress is necessary for an active, healthy life. It increases mental and physical alertness, vigilance, and motivation and can enhance certain abilities like more availability and utilization of metabolic energy, improvement in protein folding (chaperone stimulation), favors DNA repair, prevents/decreases free radical accumulation, promotes survival and may delay aging. Eustress challenges us to adapt and grow. Therefore, manageable stress can lead to growth and enhanced competence. No long-term damage occurs if stress is removed/ not allowed to progress further.

The Resistance stage: The stress response system of the body is normally self-limiting. Once the threat is over, the stress hormones (Adrenaline and cortisol) return to almost normal levels. The body attempts to repair itself and restore balance (normalizes heart rate, blood pressure etc.) but remains on high alert.

The Exhaustion stage: When activation in the first two stages continues it leads to a breakdown of balance within the body. The ability to resist stress is gone. More stress hormones are released. Our memory, emotional state, and organs become fatigued. At this stage, the stress is known as distress (Negative Stress or Bad stress) which is uncontrollable, prolonged, overwhelming and destructive. It depletes our energy for life. Distress may eventually

result in diseases, such as hypertension, diabetes, ulcers, heart disease and malfunction of the Immune system.

Signs and symptoms of stress: These vary from person to person but a few of the common symptoms are headache, muscle tension, fatigue, sleep disruption, increased heart rate, digestive problems (physical symptoms), excessive rapid thoughts, constant worry, problem in concentrating, forgetfulness, and decreased decision making (cognitive symptoms), mood swings, irritability, anxiety, depression etc.

Management of stress (Journey from blues to bloom): There are ways to effectively reduce stress and anxiety in our lives. Jonas Salk (a great biologist who developed the first polio vaccine) once said, "If we are to survive as a species, we must move beyond the Darwinian concept of survival of the fittest to a new paradigm, "survival of the wisest". Therefore, be wise and don't let a harried and hectic world snatch the better of you. Make a little time and try below mentioned practical strategies to unwind and de-stress yourself amidst the chaos: -

Stay connected to nature: In today's world, almost all of us are suffering from nature deficit disorder. Various studies have shown that intentional, mindful, and quality time spent around the trees can boost mood and creativity, reduce stress hormone levels, and even help us live longer. Trees/nature has healing properties. Losing ourselves amidst the natural beauty of trees, helps us to reach a state of greater calm and wellness by leaving behind everyday stress. The term, "Shirin-yoku" was created in 1982 by the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. "Shirin-yoku" means 'forest bathing' or absorbing the forest atmosphere (a physiological and psychological exercise). Forest bathing is an opportunity to pause from everyday life for a little while, put your world into slow motion, look at life through a different lens and invite peace and tranquility. Stressful states can be relieved through forest therapy as forest bathing leads to the production of anti-stress hormones in our body and allows it to rejuvenate itself. The simple method of observing nature by remaining calm and quiet amongst the trees and breathing deeply can help both adults and children boost health and well-being and de-stress in a natural way. For effective forest bathing, slow down, move through the forest slowly (so that you can see and feel more), keep your eyes open, be observant and look at nature's small details. Taking long, deep breaths send a message to the body that it can relax. The colours of nature are soothing and various studies have shown that humans relax best while seeing greens and blues. Move your gaze through the canopy of trees, watch the moving branches, and listen to the rustling sounds of leaves. Pause, breathe, and immerse yourself in the woodland bliss. Playfulness, light-heartedness and laughter: Play and recreation go hand in hand. When we play with abandon, we lose track of time and enter into the present moment and this makes us let go of the past and forget about the future. When we are a child, we giggle to the extent that we are not even able to stand or walk. Don't lose that child in you and be playful and light-hearted. A playful and light-hearted person laughs genuinely, easily and with abandon. According to Vedic science, the purpose of life is the expansion of happiness. Creation is a marvellous divine play that assigns each of us a different role. Some people take their role very seriously and miss the magic of life, whereas others reorganise and realise that they are the eternal spirit. This makes them behave as an actor and celebrate the divine play. Not taking life or ourselves too seriously does not mean being irresponsible. It means performing one's duty without attachment to the outcomes. This philosophical aspect encourages individuals to fulfil their responsibilities with dedication and detachment from the results. In fact, if we recognize the cosmic play, we become more responsible and consider every thought, word, and action as an expression of the divine playwright. Relish the magic and the mystery in every moment. Laughter is the nectar of present-moment awareness. Invite lighter heartedness, enthusiasm, playfulness and more laughter to your life. Try to remain a joyful human being with unwavering exuberance in every situation of life. This is how life should be lived.

Practise generosity, gratitude, compassion and forgiveness: There is immense power in these tools. Use this power to create a world of vitality, wisdom and joy. Almighty has incorporated our brain with a reward centre over which generosity, gratitude, compassion, and forgiveness have a stimulating effect and definitely create an upward spiral of well-being. Life is all about balancing and home-

ostasis. Giving and receiving support balances itself throughout each of our lifespans. Do good for the simple joy of doing good. If praise comes your way, fine. If it doesn't that's no reason to worry. We need to be compassionate to ourselves as well. When we are awake, a constant stream of thoughts keeps on running through our brains and most of the time, we are strict to ourselves. Compassionate self-talk and a positive attitude definitely help us to calm down and get a better grip on the situation. We need to talk to ourselves in the same encouraging and gentle way that we use to help a friend in need.

Flexibility and creativity: Darwin's theory says those who are able to adapt, survive. Adaptation first needs flexibility and then creativity. Be adaptable and flexible. When we walk on a certain path, we have the intention to reach a particular destination but when more interesting opportunities are present along the way then our attitude becomes a little flexible to go with the flow. Therefore, take the life as it comes and flow with the changing situations and circumstances without resistance. The process itself becomes the goal. A great secret to good health is learning to take life in its stride. Life is as complicated as you want to be. Know that every pinch that we are feeling is for the best, to make us stronger and livelier: Have a sense of humor. Every individual is endowed with certain naughtiness as a child. Keep it alive. Humor has the ability to ease all tough situations. Humor is not just words; it is the lightness of one's being.

Practice Yoga and meditation: The art of being fully present in the moment also helps greatly in getting established in the self. By focusing on the here and now, we can quiet our racing thoughts and alleviate stress. Yoga means the unification of body, mind and soul. Life is so very fast therefore slow down, shift your attention, talk to yourself and try to visit that beautiful place that is within you. Engage in activities that promote mindfulness, such as meditation, deep breathing exercises, or yoga. It attends to all aspects of life, physical, mental, and spiritual. A few quiet moments are sources of creativity. Silence rejuvenates, heals and gives you depth and stability. Exercise and music therapy: Applying physical stress to the body can help relieve mental stress and make us feel uplifted. Physical stress can be a long walk or an intense workout at the gym. Physical exercise helps us clear our heads of negative thoughts gives our mind a space to think, alter perspective, solve problems and take a break from whatever is stressing us. In fact, exercise increases our overall health and well-being by increasing the release of endorphins (feel-good chemicals of the brain). Music therapy also helps us to calm down. Music can make us feel more optimistic and positive about life and lowers the level of stress hormone cortisol.

Avoid over-eating as a response to stress: An individual under stress tends to overeat. We need to be careful and monitor ourselves during these situations. During stressful times, before reaching for a food item we need to ask ourselves a few questions like, Do I need that snack because I am actually hungry? Or Am I just looking for a way to dissipate some anxiety? Taking excess calories and putting on unwanted weight will only drag us into a stress-eating vicious cycle. Instead, we can try other above-mentioned stress relievers like slow, deep breathing, standing up and stretching, taking walks, meditating, staying close to nature etc. Also, take plenty of fluids/water. On an average, an adult person requires two to three liters of fluid every day. Dehydration causes stress and if we are already under stress and not taking sufficient amount of water it may lead to anxiety and further aggravation of stress.

Turn off your devices at times and have a detox time: People with higher screen exposure time, especially just before sleep may suffer from delayed onset of sleep. It also affects their socio-emotional and cognitive development. Note: When we are seeking calm and relaxation, we don't have any one-size-fits-all solution. It differs from individual to individual. The idea is to find a combination of strategies that work for individual needs and lifestyles. By experimenting with different coping tools, an individual can build her/his own calming toolkit (choose the stress remedy that fits a particular individual best). Stress is a natural part of life but with appropriate management techniques, it can be managed more effectively and distress can be converted into eustress. The power to convert distress into eustress lies in the way we look at our lives and it is well within our control.

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Karwa Chauth -the festival of Love and bonding

■ OMKAR DATTATRAY

Karwa chauth is an important Hindu festival celebrated by the married women especially in north India .On this auspicious occasion ,married women keep fast till the rising of the moon and break the fast by drinking water from the hands of their husband .This festival is celebrated to pray for the long ,happy and prosperous life of the husband and thus Karwa Chauth is dedicated to the well being and longevity of the life of the husbands .As the name indicates it falls on the fourth day of the first fortnight of the Hindu month of Kartika and is celebrated with great fanfare and devotion to ones husband by all the married women .It in fact is the celebration of the intense love and respect to the husband .This year Karwa Chauth falls on November 18th which is Wednesday .This auspicious Hindu festival of Karwa Chauth is marked with zeal across the country ,especially in North Indian states of Himachal Pradesh ,Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh ,Haryana ,Punjab ,Gujarat and Rajasthan . It also known as Karaka Chaturthi or Karwa Chauth .It is celebrated during the Chaturthi tithi of Krishna Paksha in Kartik month .Married women observe this festival by keeping a difficult nirjala vrat (fasting without water and food) for their husband's long life and prosperity .They break the fast after the moon rise by sighting it through a sieve and then looking at their husband through it .After which ,the husband gives the wife a morsel of food and sip of water .While the fast is special for all married women ,it holds special significance for the newlywed brides observing their first Karwa Chauth fast .For any married women ,the first Karwa Chauth holds significance .Both the husband and wives family see it as a special day .Every family friends and relatives drop by to wish the newlywed couple and the bride gets gifts from everyone .Newly married women celebrating their first Karwa Chauth receive thoughtful gifts from their in-laws and their maternal home and this makes them feel special on this day .The newly married daughter -in-law usually gives her mother-in-law a specially curated Baya dings containing clothes ,jewelry ,food items ,and wedding items .This ritual is performed to receive blessings from the mother-in-law .Sagri is another important ritual of the festival .On the first Karwa Chauth ,the mother-in-law gives Sagri to her daughter -in-law .The Sagri plate consists of fruits ,matri ,sweets ,dry fruits and other food items .Both mother -in-law and daughter -in-law should eat Sagri together before sunrise .The newly married women wake up early in the morning and take a bath .Then ,they clean the temple ,light a diya ,worship Maa Parvati ,Lord Ganesha and Lord Kartikeya ,take a pledge for a nirjala vrat and listen the Karwa Chauth Katha .Newly-married brides wear traditional clothes in red ,do salah sringar ,and apply mehendi on their hands and feet .They should avoid wearing black ,brown and white colors .While white and black are not considered auspicious ,brown represents Rahu and Ketu .Apart from red ,they can wear ,pink ,yellow ,green and maroon .On this day married women keep nirjala fast which literally means fasting in which even water is not consumed from sunrise till moonrise .Women fast on this day to pray for safe and long life of their husbands ,though these days many husbands too observe fast along with their wives for similar reason and it is

so good and positive and it should be encouraged .On this day ,married women dress up in new clothes (preferably red which signifies a happy married life) and apply mehendi on their hands and feet as a part of the festivities .Women observing this fast get together on this day and celebrate it by narrating folk tale ,reading Karwa Chauth Vrat Katha and singing folk songs -all of which make it a lively festival .Women also worship Goddess Parvati in the Karwa Chauth Puja followed by Lord Shiva ,Lord Ganesha and Lord Kartikeya .The fast is later broken after having a glimpse of the moon .Though this Hindu festival is celebrated across India ,it is particularly celebrated in north Indian states .If we talk about the literal meaning of Karwa Chauth ,it means offering Arghya to the moon using earthen pot known as Karwa on the Chaturthi of the Karthika month .A woman named Karwa was deeply devoted to her husband .Her intense love and dedication towards him gave her shakti (spiritual power) .While bathing at a river ,her husband was caught by a crocodile .Karwa bound the crocodile with cotton yarn and asked yama (the god of death) to send the crocodile to hell .Karwa is another word for pot (a small earthen pot of water) and Chauth means fourth in Hindi (a reference to the fact that the festival falls on the fourth day of the dark -fortnight ,of Krishna Paksha ,of the month of Kartika) .In Sanskrit scriptures ,the festival is referred to as Karaka Chaturthi ,Karaka meaning an earthen water pitcher and Chaturthi denoting the fourth day of the lunar Hindu month .One hypothesis is that military campaigns were often conducted by men in far off places whereby men would leave their wives and children at home to go off to the war .Their wives would often pray for their safe return .The festival also coincides with the wheat -sowing time (i.e. the beginning of the Rabi crop cycle) .Big earthen pots in which wheat is stored are sometimes called Karvas ,so the fast may have begun as a prayer for a good harvest in this predominantly wheat-eating Northwestern region .Another story about the origin of this festival relates to the bond of feminine friendship .With the custom of arranged marriage being prevalent ,the newlywed is supposed to reside with her husband and in-laws .Being new to the family ,the custom arose of befriendng another women as her friend (kangan -Saheli) or sister (dharma -behn) for life .The friendship would be sanctified through Hindu ritual during the marriage ceremony itself .The bride's friend would usually be of the same age or slightly older ,typically married into the same village (so that she would not go away) and not directly related to her in-laws (so there was no conflict of interest later) .This emotional and psychological bond would be considered akin to a blood relationship .It is said that Karwa Chauth festival evolved to include celebrating this special bond of friendship .Husbands should reciprocate and show the loyalty and obedience and total love and faithfulness to their wives .In brief it can be safely said that Karwa Chauth is the festival of celebration of love and bonding between the husbands and wives in Indian culture .May Indian wives and husbands uphold priority of mutual love and bonding and this is the best tribute to the married couples on Karwa Chauth .

(The author is a columnist and KP activist).

YOUR COLUMN

A Long Journey From State To Union Territory

Dear Editor,

As we commemorate the 5th anniversary of the Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir, it is crucial to reflect on its journey, challenges, achievements, and the way forward. Five years ago, on October 31, 2019, the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir was bifurcated into two Union Territories - Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. This move, as intended by the Indian Government, aimed to streamline administration, improve governance, spur economic growth, and secure the region's long-term stability. The past five years have witnessed significant changes. The region has seen an increase in developmental activities, including infrastructure projects, tourism promotion, and economic packages. The direct control of the Central

Government has helped to fast-track various projects which were earlier stalled due to various reasons. The implementation of central laws and schemes, has brought the region closer to the mainstream narrative.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that the journey has not been without its challenges. The security situation, although improved, remains delicate. Incidents of terrorism and violence continue to plague the region, albeit at a reduced frequency. The Internet shutdown and communication blockade, which followed the reorganisation, was a significant setback for the region, affecting businesses, education, and the daily lives of people. It is also essential to note that some sections of the population still harbor apprehensions and resentment towards the decision of 2019, yearning for the restoration of their special status. It's crucial that the government, while maintaining necessary security measures, ensures that the voices of dissent and concern are heard, and their grievances are addressed. Building trust among the local populace is a crucial step towards long-lasting peace and prosperity in the region.

The way forward should focus on ensuring more transparency, increasing engagement with the local population, and fostering an environment conducive to growth and development. It is also crucial to focus on job creation, as increasing employment opportunities will play a major role in ensuring the region's stability and prosperity. As we look back on the 5th Foundation Day of the UT of Jammu and Kashmir, let's hope for a future that is marked by peace, prosperity, and development. Let's hope for a future where every individual in the region feels heard, valued, and equal. The journey has been challenging, but every challenge presents an opportunity for growth and progress. The UT of Jammu and Kashmir has immense potential, and with concerted efforts from all stakeholders, it can surely reach new heights. The 5th Foundation Day of the UT of Jammu and Kashmir should serve as a reminder of the journey so far and a beacon for the path ahead. It is a day of reflection as much as it is a day of celebration. Let us all come together and strive to make Jammu and Kashmir a beacon of peace, unity, and prosperity.

Mool Raj