

PRESERVE RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

Jammu & Kashmir stands as one of India's richest repositories of spiritual and cultural heritage. Blessed with centuries-old temples, shrines, monasteries, mosques, gurdwaras and sacred cultural landscapes, the region's religious heritage is woven deeply into its identity. Yet this inheritance-built through generations of devotion, artistry and community-faces unprecedented challenges today. Preserving it requires not only government action but also active participation from citizens, scholars, faith-based organisations and local communities.

The loss of any such monument is not merely a loss of a religious symbol; it is the erasure of memory, tradition, and the continuity of a shared cultural legacy. What makes J&K unique is not only its diversity but the peaceful coexistence embedded in its sacred architecture. This diversity must be conserved as a testament to the region's inclusive history.

Preservation begins with documentation. Many heritage sites, especially those in remote or conflict-affected areas, remain undocumented or poorly recorded. A comprehensive digital archive-mapping architectural details, oral histories and cultural practices-must be a priority. This can guide restoration efforts and create valuable material for researchers and future generations.

Equally important is scientific conservation. Restoration cannot mean replacing heritage with modernised replicas. It must be rooted in authenticity-using traditional materials, native craftsmanship and architectural methods. The government should strengthen partnerships with the Archaeological Survey of India, INTACH and local experts to ensure that conservation adheres to international standards.

Religious heritage, however, is not only about structures; it is also about living traditions-festivals, rituals, music, crafts and community gatherings. Protecting these intangible elements is vital. Festivals such as Navratra, Urs celebrations, Mela Kheer Bhawani, Baisakhi and monastery festivals in Ladakh enrich the cultural fabric of the region. Their continuity must be supported through cultural grants, community programmes and youth engagement.

Tourism also plays a pivotal role. While religious tourism brings economic benefits, unregulated tourism can cause damage. The government must implement sustainable visitor management-providing proper pathways, waste systems, signage and trained guides-to balance promotion with protection. Eco-friendly pilgrimage routes, community-led tourism models and strict building regulations around heritage zones can minimise harm.

National Integration is the Sine-qua-non for India

■ PUPU JI KOUL

This year National Integration Day falls on Wednesday, 19th November and it will be observed and celebrated with enthusiasm and dedication to the nation in order to foster unity, love, harmony and brotherhood. From the snow-capped peaks of Himalayas to the lush green valleys of Kerala, India is a land of endless diversity. From the deserts of Rajasthan to the beaches of Goa, our country is home to people from all walks of life, who speak hundreds of languages and follow different religions. Yet, despite our differences, we are united by a common thread - the unbreakable bond of national integration. This bond is forged through our shared history, culture, and values. It is the foundation on which our nation stands. On National Integration Day, we celebrate this bond and recommit to working together to build a stronger, more united India. We recognise that we are all Indian's and that we all have a role to play in shaping our nation's future. We commit to respecting each other's differences and working together to overcome our challenges. Together we can build an India that is truly inclusive and prosperous. National Integration refers to the process of bringing together diverse groups of people within a country to create a cohesive and unified nation. It involves fostering a sense of belongingness, shared identity, and mutual understanding among citizens, regardless of their cultural, linguistic, religious, or regional differences. The goal of national integration is to promote social harmony, unity, and a collective spirit among the citizens of a nation, fostering a sense of patriotism and commitment to the well-being of the entire country. India is a country with many different cultures, languages, and traditions. National integration is all about celebrating this diversity. On this day, people are encouraged to look beyond where they come from, the languages they

speak, or their religion and see that, at the end of the day, we are all Indian's. So, National Integration Day serves as a reminder to appreciate our differences and still feel like we are all part of one big Indian family. It is the day to recognise that, even though we might be different, we are all connected, creating a stronger and more united India.

National Integration Day is a day dedicated to promoting unity, diversity, and solidarity among the citizens of India. The general idea is to encourage people from different backgrounds, cultures, and regions to come together as one, fostering a sense of belonging and togetherness within the nation. National Integration in India is not just a phrase. It is a concept that keeps our diverse population united. It binds people of different regions, religions, languages, and cultures into one harmonious nation. National Integration Day is celebrated each year and holds great significance in the country. This day honours the birth anniversary of former Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi, who, during her term in parliament, pushed hard for national integration in India and sought to further the country's diversity and togetherness. Indira Gandhi's political career was marked by her unwavering commitment to national unity and integrity. In India National Integration is indispensable because our country is full of diversities of various kinds such as religious, regional, linguistic and what not? There should be necessary harmony and unity among its citizens so that our march to development will not be obstructed and so there is utmost need for maintaining countries integration as its citizens should belonging to various faiths, languages and cultures and traditions should be one homogeneous whole when any national emergency arises and even otherwise in ordinary days there should be the binding force of national integration in the coun-

try. In India, National Integration Day is observed on November 19th to commemorate the birth anniversary of its first female Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, and to promote unity, peace, and harmony among all citizens. The day focuses on fostering a sense of national unity across different regions, religions, and castes through various activities like seminars, cultural programmes, debates, workshops, and interfaith meetings. It is also the start of the National Integration Week, which runs from November 19 to 25. Its purpose is to spread the message of unity, peace, love, and brotherhood across the nation and to build a strong and cohesive society. Activities such as seminars, cultural programs, discussions, awareness campaigns, and interfaith get-togethers are held to promote national integration and sense of oneness among the citizens. The day emphasizes social cohesion and aims to eradicate discrimination based on religion, caste, or region. The observance extends into a week-long "Qaumi Ekta" (National Integration) week from November 19th to 25th. National Integration Day is celebrated on a grand scale in India. Various activities and initiatives are organised that aim to promote and celebrate the values of unity, diversity, and communal harmony. The specific ways in which National Integration Day is observed may vary, but here are some common practices---A-Educational Programmes-Educational institutions, including schools and colleges, often organise special events, assemblies, and seminars to educate students about the significance of national integration. They may conduct debates, quizzes, and cultural programs related to the theme.-B-Government Initiatives--The Indian government and various agencies may organise events and campaigns to promote national integration. These activities often involve public figures, government officials, and community leaders.-C-Community and Social

Organisations-NGO's, community groups, and social organisations may hold discussions, workshops, and cultural events to foster understanding and unity among various sections of the society.-D-Media and Public Awareness--The media, including newspapers, television, and radio, may feature special programs and articles discussing the importance of national integration and highlighting stories of unity and diversity. E-Youth Programs-Activities like the Inter State Youth Exchange Programme-ISYEP and National Integration Camp are conducted to encourage interaction among young people from various regions.-F-Interfaith & intercultural events--Meetings, cultural exchange programs, and interactions among people from regions, religions, and linguistic backgrounds are common to promote dialogue.-G-Awards and Recognition -Some organisations may use the day to honour individuals and groups who have contributed to national unity.

Significance and Purpose -A-Celebrates Indira Gandhi's birthday-The date marks the birth anniversary of Indira Gandhi, the first female prime minister of India. ---B---Promotes national unity--The primary goal is to foster a sense of unity, peace, and brotherhood among all citizens, emphasizing the importance of social cohesion. -C---Encourages cross-cultural understanding-It aims to build a strong, unified nation by promoting respect for diverse beliefs, traditions, and customs. In short, the legacy of Indira Gandhi extends to the celebration of National Integration Day on her birth anniversary in the country. Let us resolve to further social harmony, social and national cohesion to promote communal harmony and brotherhood which will lead to national unity and integration. The, best tribute to former prime minister Indira Gandhi is to work sincerely for national integration to foster a sense of oneness and brotherhood in the country.

Bihar Verdict: Are Regional Leaders Fading-or Is It Simply Modi's Era?

■ TUSHI DEB



In the aftermath of the Bihar Assembly results, one question looms larger than seat counts and alliance arithmetic: Are regional political leaders losing their face and, with it, their relevance? The electoral tremors in the state suggest that what once passed as grounded regional clout is now facing a nationalised political tide-one powered by an unmistakable, near-epochal force: Narendra Modi's expanding footprint, especially among women voters. Ever since the debacle of the Bihar Assembly elections, the grand experiment of the opposition now looks like a political fossil!

There comes a moment in the political ecosystem when a coalition stops being a movement and turns simply into a photo album-a memory of leaders who once stood together for the camera, but never for a coherent idea. The INDIA alliance today resembles exactly that: a magnificent announcement with negligible architecture, a grand coalition in theory but a crumbling cookie in practice.

The cracks were visible from the beginning; voters are merely noticing them now. The INDIA alliance was once built on one premise: that strong regional players could collectively counter the Modi juggernaut. But what happens when those very regional chieftains start losing their relevance? In Bihar, Tejashwi Yadav's aura evaporated the

moment the voting booths opened. In West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool is facing the same moral and organisational exhaustion that has eventually led to the sinking of the Lahu Prasad Yadav led RJD. In Tamil Nadu, DMK's dominance no longer feels as unshakable as it did a year ago. In Jammu & Kashmir, Omar Abdullah's territorial influence has shrunk to a sentiment rather than a force.

No analysis of this electoral moment is complete without acknowledging the gigantic, structural impact of Narendra Modi-particularly in mobilising and converting female voters. For decades, women were treated as appendages to the male vote. Modi inverted that logic. By addressing household needs-fuel, toilets, housing, healthcare, and cash support-he created a direct political relationship with women, cutting through caste equations and regional loyalties alike. In Bihar, this translated into a decisive shift: villages where women queued at dawn to vote overwhelmingly tilted toward the NDA. Regional parties, lacking a comparable multi-year welfare architecture, were simply left gasping.

With the poll bugle of Bengal clearly heard, the big question arises: is the Trinamool headed the RJD Way? A collapse of governance, the simmering cauldron of corruption and a dictatorial hegemony of 'Parivarvaad' with Mamata and her nephew Abhishek Banerjee ruling the party, where prominent senior leaders have been shrouded under the dual-deadly clout of the Aunt and her nephew! Whispers in Kolkata's political cir-

cles today sound eerily similar to the murmurs that once drifted through Patna's corridors: Has a once-dominant regional powerhouse begun to lose its identity? What the Rashtriya Janata Dal experienced in Bihar-an erosion of credibility, the rise of fatigue around dynastic succession, and the inability to counter a nationalised BJP machine-now seems to echo, with unsettling precision, in the Trinamool Congress.

It's a clear picture today, when the pillars weaken, the tent collapses. So, is the INDIA alliance a coalition without chemistry? The INDIA bloc attempted to simulate what UPA once had-but UPA had two things this alliance never enjoyed: A national anchor, however limited, and mutual ideological accommodation, however fragile. But the present alliance has neither. It is a collective of parties united not by purpose, but by their shared anxiety over Narendra Modi's political permanence. So has the Modi Factor turned into a 'One-Man Disruptive Force'? No coalition in India has successfully countered Modi because they've tried to oppose him, not out-think him. Modi's dominance has altered the political gravitational field in decisive ways: The BJP has become the national pole, drawing voters across caste, region, and class. When a national mood rises, regional coalitions fall flat, and the INDIA alliance is simply a collateral damage of this phenomenon.

So is the INDIA bloc now decimated into a mere coalition of Prime Ministerial Aspirants? One of the more ironic features of the INDIA bloc is this: Everyone wants the

throne, but no one has a kingdom. The Congress dreams of reviving its national scope, Trinamool Congress supreme Mamata Banerjee sees herself as the natural challenger. Arvind Kejriwal imagines himself as a reformist giant. DMK wants southern veto power. RJD wants relevance and survival! This isn't a coalition-it's a waiting room where each leader hopes the others will exit first.

At its core, the INDIA bloc depends on a Congress revival. But Congress itself is in a slow-motion implosion, shedding states, cadres, and credibility with alarming consistency. Its moral leadership has dimmed; its organisational strength is skeletal; its electoral instincts are rusted. A weak anchor doesn't hold the ship-it sinks with it. The Verdict: The coalition cookie of the INDIA alliance has crumbled beyond relevance and recognition and what remains now are the minuscule crumbs across the political bedrock of India. With regional parties debilitated, the Congress adrift, and no common minimum programme beyond anti-Modism, the INDIA alliance today appears less like a political bloc and more like a WhatsApp group that has muted itself! It hasn't just lost momentum-it has lost meaning. The 2025 election cycles, including Bihar's verdict, have made one thing clear: The INDIA alliance is not the alternative India sought; it is the reminder of how opposition politics failed to reinvent itself in the face of the giant 'Karmayogi' Narendra Modi himself!

(The columnist is a writer and senior journalist)

Ladakh Leads the Nation: PM-JAY Zero-Pendency Milestone achieved through LG Kavinder Gupta's Dynamic Governance

■ SAHIL VERMA

Ladakh's remarkable distinction as the best-performing Union Territory during the Zero Pendency Month of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana (PM-JAY) has reinforced how visionary leadership and disciplined administration can deliver impactful welfare outcomes even in India's most challenging terrains. Despite its rugged mountains, scattered settlements, and limited health infrastructure, the UT succeeded in clearing every pending PM-JAY insurance claim within the designated timeframe-a rare achievement that underscores its commitment to public health delivery and administrative precision. Central to this accomplishment is the proactive leadership of Lieutenant Governor Shri Kavinder Gupta, whose emphasis on zero pendency, transparent processes, and timely reviews across departments has driven a culture of accountability and efficiency. For a region where long distances and harsh weather often limit access to healthcare, PM-JAY's cashless coverage of ₹5 lakh per family is a lifeline, and the clearance of all pending claims has significantly eased the financial burden on families while ensuring hospitals are paid on time. The success resulted from coordinated efforts among hospitals, the UT Health Authority, district teams, and digital platforms that streamlined claim processing and minimized delays. Prior initiatives to expand coverage through Golden Card saturation had already brought most households under the Ayushman Bharat umbrella, enabling smoother operations during the Zero Pendency Month. While Ladakh continues to face hurdles such as infrastructure gaps and the need for strong fraud-prevention mechanisms, its achievement under LG Kavinder Gupta stands as a national model. It demonstrates that with clear vision, strategic oversight, and a citizen-first approach, even the most remote regions can deliver governance outcomes that resonate across the country.

Importance of Soil Health in Achieving Food and Nutritional Security

■ DR. BANARSI LAL

India is a fast-growing economy with abilities to contribute to global food security. Inclusive economic growth in India faces the challenges of balancing between urban and rural areas amid the daunting task of feeding an ever-increasing population. About 18 per cent of GDP comes from the agricultural sector and 58 per cent of its total population depend on agriculture and allied sectors for their livelihoods. Agriculture has remained the major focus of the Indian economy since the Vedic period. Healthy soil plays significant role in human health. It is an essential resource for the global farming, food security and energy. Soil provides living space for the living organisms as well as the ecosystem services which are essential for the water regulation, biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration etc. In fact, the soil is under tremendous pressure due to increase in population at an alarming rate and higher demand for food. It has been observed that around 33 per cent of global soils are degraded. Soil is constituted of organic remains, clay and rock particles found on the earth's surface. Soil helps in food production, biodiversity and energy maintenance. Soil health is being deteriorated by the unhealthy agricultural practices, deforestation and pollution. The government of India is contemplating on agriculture 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. Agriculture is a tool for poverty eradication. The govt. has sanctioned 100 mobile soil testing laboratories across the country and approximately 2.53 crore soil samples would be collected during 2015-16. 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.

Growing population and increasing living standards, industrial development and urbanisation are putting pressure on our finite natural resources. Global trading and climate change further complicate local challenges. Soil and water are recognised as parts of five eternal elements in ancient Indian literature. The greatest challenge for populous country such as India is to secure food, nutrition, livelihoods, clean water and sanitation from much of its already degrading land and water resources. Soil and water are the

two basic resources which are under intense pressure from increased population and degradation has already set in at many fragile watershed ecosystems. These two natural resources management greatly affect the social and economic structure of our rural areas and the whole nation. It is expected that there will be the need to produce around 64 per cent more of present level of agricultural production to feed the estimated 800 million population upto 2020. The problems in management of these resources are continuous soil erosion and runoff inflicting permanent damage to the soil and water systems. Soil erosion, the displacement of soil particles from soil surfaces is a serious problem in our country. This process ultimately loses the productivity of soil as a whole causing some other problems like environmental issues. But soil erosion enriches valley bottoms and forms the rich plains. Although erosion is considered as a natural process but it is also caused by human beings. The activities like deforestation, farming of slopes, road construction, overgrazing etc. increase soil erosion. Soil erosion can be a slow process but it can be very fast causing serious loss of topsoil. Many nutrients and organic matter of soil is lost by soil erosion. The loss of topsoil certainly affects the production of crops. It affects the surface water quality and the drainage system of soil is also disturbed.

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 erodable soils can be improved with mulching materials. There are certain concepts in land conservation. These are (a) Loss of productivity is equally important than the loss of soil. (b) Soil degradation should be prevented before it arises, instead of attempting to cure it afterwards. (c) Crop yields are reduced due to shortage of water than by soil erosion. So the emphasis should be given on water conservation than soil conservation. (d) Runoff can be prevented by increasing infiltration. (e) Soil and water conservation should be promoted as an integral part of a productive farming. (f) In order to increase the fertility of soil, organic

matter should be added in soil. (g) Soil conservation activities should be bottom up rather than top down in approach. People participation is must in the soil conservation activities. (h) Indigenous technical knowledge of the farmers in soil conservation should also be encouraged. Farmers can adopt the technologies which are available on subsidies basis. It has been observed that when the implementing agencies withdraw from scene, these technologies are not sustained or likely to fail in long run.

In rain fed farming it has been observed that crop yields are reduced due to shortage of water than by loss of soil. Therefore, more attention should be paid on rainwater harvesting. In India mostly the rainfall occurs in 3-4 months. So, water conservation is very important in these months. The water stored in these 3-4 months can be utilized throughout the year. Soil and water conservation are always considered together. Reduction in surface run-off by changes in soil management or by structures helps to conserve water. Many water conservation activities also conserve soil. Contour bunds can be used to conserve the soil and water by increasing infiltration and percolation. Water and soil are linked together and this linkage may cause water problems in a watershed. Water is an integral part of land use. Also land use influences water characteristics by water partitioning at the soil surface and in the subsoil and by the role of water as a carrier of solutes and sediments. An integrated approach should be taken to land water and its uses to avoid undesirable effects from human activities. An economic development is

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