

## ANTICIPATE PEACE

With the western neighbour Pakistan launching country's first-ever National Security Policy, which articulates a citizen-centric framework, placing economic security at its core unlike the previous one-dimensional security policy where the focus was on the military, India can now anticipate peace though the previous record of the rogue nation is dismal and unreliable. As per the reports coming out, Pakistan's national security policy articulates a citizen-centric framework, placing economic security at its core and seeking a secure and economically resilient Pakistan. It is known to everyone in the world that the Pak army has ruled the country for more than half of its 70 plus years of existence, but the new policy on cards has reportedly limited the scope. The crux of Pakistan's National Security Policy revolves around national cohesion, securing an economic future, defence and territorial integrity, internal security, foreign policy in a changing world and human security. As far as relationship with India is concerned, the country should not expect much from Pakistan but what is surprising so far is not that bad as the western neighbour has left the front open as far as business and other issues are concerned. The most significant is the fact that despite crying hoarse on the issue of Kashmir, the new security policy of Pakistan bats for making peace with immediate neighbours, including India. What is more promising in the policy envisaged by the country which has fought several wars with India is the fact that it has left doors open for trade with New Delhi even without the settlement of the Kashmir issue provided there is headway in bilateral talks. It has come to fore that peace with immediate neighbours and economic diplomacy is the central theme of Pakistan's foreign policy in the new National Security Policy which if implemented in letter and spirit can be helpful in improving ties with India. Of course, if the Pakistani government will show a little of prudence there would be a possibility of normalising trade and commercial ties. Looking into the stand of India, the ball is in Pakistan's court and if that nation will act sensibly things can take a turn which will be in the interest of both India and Pakistan.



OFF 'D' CUFF

## Cheers to a New Year

We enter 2022 with a prayer in our heart that we may be able to finally leave the pandemic behind us. While no one can say what the new year will bring, let us make a resolve to move forward with optimism and self-confidence, never forgetting the strong warning God and Mother Nature have given us in the past two years.

Life is a storehouse of unexpected events. When we forget everything in happiness, then suddenly our security blanket is yanked away and a bitter, challenging situation comes our way. Asleep in the darkness of poor discernment, we lack the inner strength and courage to overcome such unexpected events. This is why we need to have shradhha — care, alertness, awareness — when facing any situation. The word 'shradhha' is regularly used by all of us: 'study with shradhha', 'walk with shradhha', 'work with shradhha', but true shradhha encompasses love, faith, patience, mindfulness and surrender. Only when all of these unite does shradhha become complete. Only then can we pierce the outer cover and see the true essence of a given thing — be it an object, situation, or experience. It is then that shradhha acquires its spiritual aspect.

The intellect and heart should go hand in hand. While the intellect views the external world, the heart should be able to look within. Real shradhha is in seeing both — the outside and the inside.

Once a man parked his bicycle outside a shop and went in. There he met a friend. After buying a few things, he walked back home with his friend, only to realise later that he had left his bicycle near the shop. He ran back and found it where he had parked it. Elated that it was still there, he decided to go to the temple and offer thanks to God. Parking the bicycle outside, he went in to pray. When he came back, his bicycle was missing. Immediately, he began cursing God. "What kind of god are you? I came here to thank you but look what happened. Someone stole my bicycle. I'll never pray at this temple again."

A friend who saw this asked him, "Where did you

I give people what they want in the hope that they will begin to want what I want to give them!

-Sai Baba

## EDITORIAL

## Assault on religious places of worship

## ■ OMKAR DATTATRAY

It is very unfortunate and disturbing that the Hindu places of worship are attacked by the anti-social elements belonging to the majority community of Kashmir. Some time earlier the Barg Shakha Bagawati Shrine located at the famous spot of Martand-Mattan was attacked and assaulted which outraged the Kashmiri Hindu community and at that time the Hindus demanded the stringent action against the elements who were involved in the dastardly act. But nothing was done to soothe the hurt feelings of the Kashmiri Hindus and those involved in the crime remained at large and were not arrested and given punishment. This indifferent attitude of the then government emboldened the anti-social elements and now they have raised their ugly head again and have assaulted the famous shrine of Mata Tripur Sundri called Khanbari located at Darsar Village in the south Kashmir district of Kulgam. This time the anti-social elements have attempted to set on fire the famous shrine of the Kashmiri Hindus located in the woods of Darsar and in the attempt the savages have been successful as it has resulted to some damage the shrine of Hindus on fire and he has wrongly said that the fire occurred due to the burning of the earthen Diya by the devotees. But this statement of the SSP of Kulgam is factually wrong because the shrine remains locked and not daily Arati is performed in the shrine. The shrine is opened for the Darshan of devotees on the occasion of Zaish Ashtami and Ashad Ashtami when the festival used to be held on the famous shrine of Khanbari before eruption of terrorism. But now the Darshan and Pooja of the Mata Tripur Sundri is performed on the above mentioned occasions by a handful of the Hindus who visit Darsar from other parts of Kashmir and from Jammu. The million dollar question is that how the unfortunate incident has taken place in the shrine and was there no security provided to the famous shrine of Kashmiri Hindus. The fool proof security should be provided to the shrine of Tripur Sundri at Khanbari because the sentiments of the Lakhs of Kashmiri Pandits are associated with this shrine. The government is planning to embark on the plan of the return and rehabilitation of the Kashmiri pandits and Dogra speaking Rajputs to the place of their birth. But when the places of their worship are not safe in Kashmir, then how can exiled Pandits and Dogra Speaking Rajputs resettle in Kashmir were the places of their worship are assaulted. The putting on fire the shrine of Mata Tripur Sundri is a dastardly act and is very condemnable. But it is doubly unfortunate that the mainstream political parties and politicians are silent on the anti-human and anti-religious act of the anti-social elements at Darsar. At the drop of a hat the mainstream politicians of Kashmir raise great hue and cry and they beat their chests if some minor act unintentionally takes place outside Kashmir. But these

very political leaders are mum on the sacrilegious act of the anti-social elements. This is nothing short of the double speak of these valley based politicians. When NC President Dr Farooq Abdullah, the PDP Chief Mebooba Mufti, Omar Abdullah and the Apni Party Chief Altaf Bukhari condemn trifles issues, taking place outside the valley and these very leaders of Kashmiri care too hoots for the acts of assault on the religious places of the Hindus. This double speak of Kashmiri-centric leaders is very unfortunate and unbecoming and this should not take place at all. The political leaders of Kashmir should condemn the acts of assault on the Hindu places of worship unequivocally and with one voice. But this is not happening perhaps because of the fact that such anti-social and anti-religious acts are perpetrated by the elements belonging to the majority community of Kashmir. The dastardly act of putting on fire the famous shrine of Khanbari is perhaps executed by the enemies of humanity for creating communal strife and communal disturbance. Such acts have the potential of igniting communal disturbance outside Kashmir and therefore such unfortunate acts should not be allowed to happen and bring the communal strife and religious disharmony in the country. This unfortunate incident has exposed the tall claims of the government about all is well in Kashmir and thus the normacy claims of the government are false. There is urgent need to nip the evil in the bud before it will damage the communal harmony and communal amity. The balloon of Kashmirety has been punctured by the acts of assault on the places of worship of the Hindus. One fails to understand as to where has the sufi culture of Kashmir gone as the assaults on the places of worship and the barbaric act of attempting to put on fire the shrine of Mata Tripur Sundri is against the sufi traditions and are against the tall claims of Kashmirety. Earlier in year 1992, the miscreants attempted to put on fire the shrine of Mata Tripur Sundri but they failed in their nefarious designs. The same Kashmir valley where Gandhi Jee has seen the ray of hope when the whole subcontinent was burning with communal frenzy is witnessing sordid events of assault on the places of worship of the Hindus. When the places of worship of Hindus are not safe in Kashmir, how Kashmiri Pandits and other Hindus will be safe after their return and this is the moot question and the government of the centre and the union territory administration has to answer it. Such anti-social and anti-religious acts should not happen in the Valley of Kashmir as they bring disrepute to the age old Kashmirety and our Sufi traditions and culture. Therefore what is needed is that such criminal acts should not recur again and for this it is very important that those involved into these heinous acts should be caught and prosecuted and given a stringent punishment after speedy trial. The harsh punishment to those found involved in the criminal acts of assaulting the places of worship of

the minorities should be given exemplary punishment so that such criminal acts will not take place in valley again. The present case of putting on fire the shrine of Mata Tripur Sundri should be investigated and probed so that the responsibility is fixed and all those found guilty should be put behind bars so that such unfortunate incidents will not take place in the future. Therefore urgent need is to identify the culprits involved in the dastardly act of putting on fire the shrine of Hindus in Devsar village of south Kashmir District of Kulgam and arrest them and give them a stringent punishment so that the confidence of the few Hindus living in Kashmir is restored and they should not be forced to migrate outside Kashmir. This, if happens, will be a total defeat of secularism and pluralism for which Kashmir was once famous. Therefore the places of worship of the minority community should be provided full protection so that the nefarious elements will not resort to the evil designs of assaulting and damaging the Hindu places of worship. No one should be allowed to tinker with the composite culture of Kashmir and all those involved into the criminal acts should be prosecuted and given speedy punishment so that communal harmony is upheld at all costs. The sole responsibility for protecting the shrines and other places of worship of Hindus lies on the shoulders of the government and the majority community cannot be absolved of their role in ensuring the safeguard of the places of worship of the Hindus. The district administration should assess the loss due to the fire incident of the shrine executed by the anti-social elements on the intervening night of 13th and 14th January and renovate the shrine to assuage the hurt sentiments of the Hindus particularly those few living in Kashmir. The ex-gratia relief in favour of the shrine should be sanctioned at the earliest. The tall claims of the government of rehabilitating the Kashmiri Pandits back at the place of their birth seem shallow and hollow as the ground realities are not feasible for their return and rehabilitation as the places of their worship are targeted and put on fire by the enemies of humanity. There is urgent need to provide security to the Hindus living in Kashmir and their places of worship to build their confidence so that the leftover Pandits will not migrate from the valley. The places of worship of Hindus in Kashmir should be well protected and safeguarded so that the religious sentiments of the minority community are not hurt. For this all confidence building measures should be taken by the government and the majority community of Kashmir has a big role in building the confidence of the minority community. May Mata Tripur Sundri come to rescue of the humanity and save us from the invisible enemy of coronavirus.

(The author is retired Education Officer and Columnist.)

## Decoding variants of coronavirus

## ■ DR WAHIED KHAWAR BALWAN

Viruses are always changing, and that can cause a new variant, or strain, of a virus to form. A variant usually doesn't affect how the virus works. But sometimes they make it act in different ways. Scientists around the world are tracking changes in the virus that causes COVID-19. Their research is helping experts understand whether certain COVID-19 variants spread faster than others, how they might affect your health, and how effective different vaccines might be against them.

How many variants are there? Coronaviruses don't just pop up recently. They're a large family of viruses that have been around for a long time. Many of them can cause a variety of illnesses, from a mild cough to severe respiratory illnesses. The new (or 'novel') coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is one of several known to infect humans. It's probably been around for some time in animals. Sometimes, a virus in animals crosses over into people. That's what scientists think happened here. So this virus isn't new to the world, but it is new to humans. When scientists found out that it was making people sick in 2019, they named it as a novel coronavirus. Experts call these strains SARS-CoV-2. Coronaviruses have all their genetic material in something called RNA (ribonucleic acid). RNA has some similarities to DNA, but they aren't the same. When virus infect you, they attach to your cells, get inside them, and make copies of their RNA, which helps them spread. If there's a copying mistake, the RNA gets changed. Scientists call those changes mutations. These changes happen randomly and by accident. It's a normal part of what happens to viruses as they multiply and spread. Because the changes are random, they may make little to no difference in a person's health. Other times, they may cause disease. For example, one reason you need a flu shot every year is because influenza viruses change from year to year. This year's flu virus probably isn't the exact same one that circulated last year. If a virus has a random change that makes it easier to infect people and it spreads, that variant will become more common. The bottom line is that all viruses, including coronavirus can change over time.

**Omicron variant:** The new variant (B.1.1.529) was first detected in specimens collected on November 11, 2021 in Botswana. Experts in South Africa first reported the Omicron variant to the World Health Organization (WHO) on Nov. 24, 2021. They discovered the variant after COVID-19 infections suddenly began to go up. The WHO grouped Omicron as a 'Variant of Concern'. This category means the variant might have a higher transmissibility, cause more intense disease, and may be less likely to respond to vaccines or treatments. But researchers need more information to confirm these factors. Early evidence suggests that the Omicron variant causes a higher risk of re-infection compared to other variants. Current PCR tests for COVID-19 can effectively find Omicron cases. Experts found that one specific PCR test doesn't identify one of the three target genes (called the S gene dropout) in people infected with Omicron. Because of this, these tests can specifically mark positive Omicron cases and, because of that, can detect this variant faster than with previous surges. According to research, breakthrough infections are possible with the Omicron variant even

if you're fully vaccinated. However, COVID-19 vaccines and boosters are still effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalizations, and death. The Omicron variant is now the dominant strain in the US. Experts are keeping a close eye on how the variant spreads or develops. In the meantime, experts recommend protecting yourself by getting the vaccine or a booster if you're eligible for it. Wear a mask and maintain social distance. If you test positive for COVID or if you've come in close contact with someone who has it, isolate yourself for 10 days. Call your doctor if you notice symptoms.

**Other Mutations:** **Alpha (B.1.1.7):** In late 2020, experts noted gene mutations in COVID-19 cases seen in people in South-Eastern England. This variant has since been reported in other countries, including the U.S. Scientists estimate that these mutations could make the virus up to 70 per cent more transmissible, meaning it could spread more easily. Some research has linked this variant to a higher risk of death, but the evidence isn't strong. The mutation on the Alpha variant is on the spike protein, which helps the virus infect its host. This is what COVID-19 vaccines target. These vaccines make antibodies against many parts of the spike protein, so it's unlikely that a single new mutation in the Alpha variant will make the vaccine less effective. **Beta (B.1.351):** Other variants of the virus have been found in other countries, including South Africa and Nigeria. The Beta variant appears to spread more easily than the original virus but doesn't seem to cause worse illness. **Gamma (P.1):** In January 2021, experts spotted this COVID-19 variant in people from Brazil who'd travelled to Japan. By the end of that month, it was showing up in the U.S. The Gamma variant appears to be more contagious than earlier strains of the virus. And it may be able to infect people who've already had COVID-19. A report from Brazil confirms that a 29-year-old woman came down with this variant after an earlier coronavirus infection a few months before. Some early research suggests that the variant's changes might help it evade antibodies (made by your immune system after an infection or a vaccine) that fight the coronavirus. A lab study shows that the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine can neutralize the fast-spreading Brazil strain. But more research is needed. **Delta (B.1.617.2):** This variant was spotted in India in December 2020. It caused a huge surge in cases in mid-April 2021. This highly contagious variant is now found in 178 countries including the US, UK, Australia, and all of Europe. It's the dominant strain in the US and the UK. A study of the COVID-19 vaccine's effectiveness against this variant found that Two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine were 88 per cent effective 2 weeks after the second dose. Two doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine available in the U.K. were 60 per cent effective. Both vaccines are only 33 per cent effective 3 weeks after the first dose. Given the difference in protection between doses, experts recommend getting the second shot as soon as you're eligible.

Research suggests that changes to the spike protein may make the Delta variant up to 50 per cent more transmissible than other COVID-19 variants. For people who haven't had the coronavirus vaccine, the Delta variant may cause more severe illness than the original strain of the virus. Vaccinated people may also get what's

called a 'breakthrough infection', but they're less likely to be seriously sick or to die. The relatively low rate of vaccination in some areas of the country is the main reason that the Delta variant has been able to spread so rapidly and shows no signs of slowing down.

Getting the vaccine is the best way to slow the spread of the coronavirus and protect you against serious illness or death.

**B.1.6121:** Experts first spotted this COVID-19 variant (pronounced m'yo) in Colombia in January 2021. Since then, countries in South America and Europe have reported outbreaks of Mu.

In US, the CDC says Mu reached a peak in June 2021, when it made up less than 5 per cent of variants going around the country. As of early September, it had steadily declined. Still, scientists continue to track Mu. The World Health Organization (WHO) says this variant has mutations that might make COVID-19 vaccines and our immune systems less effective against it. Early data suggests it has certain similarities to the Beta variant, but we need more research to know for sure. In August 2021, the WHO labelled Mu a 'variant of interest'. In general, variants of interest might pose an emerging risk to the world's public health, with the potential to do things like spread more easily, cause worse disease, or evade vaccines or tests. But they're considered less of a threat than 'variants of concern', like Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and Delta. As of September 2021, the CDC hadn't escalated Mu to being a variant of interest in the U.S. The agency intends to keep tracking it along with the other variants.

**R.1:** Scientists first detected R.1 in a number of countries, including Japan. There was an outbreak at a Kentucky nursing home in March 2021, when an unvaccinated health care worker passed it to about 45 other staff and residents. The WHO labeled it a 'variant under monitoring' in April 2021, meaning some of its characteristics may pose a future risk to humans. As of October 2021, the CDC hadn't labeled R.1 as a variant of concern or interest.

Epsilon, Theta, and Zeta were at one point listed as variants of interest and were downgraded by the WHO. They are still being monitored. Earlier coronavirus variants: Earlier in 2020, when the pandemic was new, you might have heard that there was more than one strain of the new coronavirus. Is it true? The answer appeared to be yes. The theory about different variants of the new coronavirus came from a study in China. Researchers were studying changes in coronavirus RNA over time to figure out how various coronaviruses are related to each other. They looked at 103 samples of the new coronavirus collected from people, and they looked at coronavirus from animals. It turned out that the coronavirus found in humans weren't all the same. There were two types, which the researchers called 'L' and 'S'. They're very similar, with slight differences in two places. It looks like the S type came first. But the scientists say the L-type was more common early in the outbreak. What to expect: The virus that causes COVID-19 will probably keep changing. Experts may find new variants. It's impossible to predict how those virus changes might affect what happens. But change is just what viruses do.

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## YOUR COLUMN

## Technology affecting education

Dear Editor:

It has played a big role in improving education and has clearly introduced flexibility in the sector. Technology has a significant impact on education. It is useful for every aspirant irrespective of age, economic background or gender. It is the ax used at every step to cut the rock and reach the summit. The technology is useful for the learners from primary to higher education. A dedicated student uses technology as a weapon that helps them achieve their goals. You can look for education app development service to make educational apps. There is a huge demand for these apps due to its important use in this e-learning era. The service providers are well versed in the techniques and skills to build an effective educational app. Here we will first look at some common and useful effects of technology on education. Technology helps to carry oceans of information on a single app. Students can easily learn whatever they want. There are different types of educational apps available in the market. Some have knowledge of only one subject, others have class wise material. You can have an app that focuses on competitive exams or an app that takes care of board exams. Technology has helped to surround a student with knowledge. I would recommend you to look for e-learning application development services. They have highly skilled service providers who know about the right technology stack to be used in an educational app. You can interact with

them and share your thoughts. They will provide you the best possible apps for online education. There are no constraints available, a student should just be eager to gather knowledge.

Technology has facilitated access to content anywhere and anytime. All you need is an internet connection. In most cases where an offline facility is available, you don't even need a connection. Technology has increased the reach of education. An inquisitive learner can acquire knowledge even at a remote place. It has reduced the burden of education by increasing access. You can use an app at your preferred location and learn. Now, you don't need to wait for your tutor to come and teach you if you want to study you can start immediately at any time of the day. Technology also gives students a wide range of options for selecting teachers. A student can learn from any teacher around the world, there is no dimension that compels students to learn only from the regional teacher. You do not need to be physically present in online learning, so you can choose the teachers as per your satisfaction. Technology has played a huge role in reducing the age-old method of spoon feeding. A student need not depend on the teacher at every step. For effective learning, efforts made by a student to access a different source to acquire knowledge are appreciated. Technology reduces dependence but stands as a support during the process of acquiring knowledge. Android application development companies can help you build educational apps. Educational apps are in great demand these days. Developers are highly capable and skilled in developing an app. A student must be self-aware to learn and increase knowledge. It provides open ways to learn new things as per the interest along with a proper

e-learning platform for the entire curriculum. It enhances self-engagement towards learning.

Technology plays an important role in introducing innovative teaching techniques in the education system. A teacher can enhance his/her learning by using quick quizzes, games etc. Technology provides various sources of learning. Eagerness to learn is the best way to acquire knowledge. Technology brings out that urge in students. A teacher can use a number of techniques to explain the material. Audio and creative videos that explain the content are a common and effective way to increase interest. Besides these animations there are new interesting ways to keep students interested in learning. Animation is slowly making its way into educational content. This makes the whole learning process interesting. Search android app Development Company for educational apps. Developers will understand your needs and use skills and knowledge to build the best possible educational app. Here, it is a major impact of technology on education. Usually, a student is completely immersed in learning only the subjects of the course. They don't get time to explore a new course. Sometimes the education system focuses on imparting knowledge of the basic subject only. Now is the time to introduce many career-based courses as well. E-learning also helps a student to gain knowledge in the field of their interest. Some students want to learn graphic designing; others would like to learn video editing or painting etc. Technology helps in imparting knowledge on these courses. Some may excel at this and find a new carrier.

Vijay Garg.