

PRAVASI
BHARATIYA DIWAS

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Convention is a flagship event of Government of India which provides an important platform to engage and connect with the overseas Indians and to enable the diaspora to interact with each other. The 17th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention is being organized in partnership with the Madhya Pradesh Government from 08-10 January 2023 in Indore. The theme of this PBD Convention is 'Diaspora: Reliable partners for India's progress in Amrit Kaal'. Over 3,500 diaspora members from nearly 70 different countries have registered for the PBD Convention. PBD Convention will have three segments. On January 8, 2023, the inauguration of Youth Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas will be held in partnership with Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports wherein Zanetti Mascarenhas, Member of Parliament of Australia, will be the Guest of Honour. On January 9, 2023, the PBD Convention will be inaugurated by Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India and will feature addresses by the Chief Guest, Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali, the President of Cooperative Republic of Guyana, and Special Guest of Honour, Chandrikaprasad Santokhi, President of the Republic of Suriname. A Commemorative Postal Stamp 'Surakshit Jaayen, Prashikshit Jaayen' will be released to underline the importance of safe, legal, orderly and skilled migration. Prime Minister will also inaugurate the first-ever digital PBD Exhibition on theme 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav - Contribution of Diaspora in Indian Freedom Struggle' to highlight the contribution of our diaspora freedom fighters in India's Independence. In view of India's ongoing Presidency of the G20, a special Town Hall will also be organized on January 09. On January 10, 2023, President Droupadi Murmu will confer Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards 2023 and preside over the Valedictory Session. Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards are conferred to select Indian diaspora members to recognize their achievements and honour their contributions to various fields, both in India and abroad. The PBD Convention will have five thematic Plenary sessions-

First Plenary on 'Role of Diaspora Youth in Innovations and new Technologies', chaired by Minister of Youth Affairs & Sports, Anurag Singh Thakur. Second Plenary on 'Role of Indian Diaspora in promoting Indian Healthcare Eco-system in Amrit Kaal: Vision @2047', chaired by Minister of Health & Family Welfare, Dr Mansukh Mandaviya and co-chaired by Minister of State for External Affairs, Dr Rajkumar Ranjan Singh. Third Plenary on 'Leveraging soft power of India - Goodwill through craft, cuisine & creativity', chaired by Minister of State for External Affairs, Meenakshi Lekhi. Fourth Plenary on 'Enabling global mobility of Indian workforce - Role of Indian Diaspora', chaired by Minister of Education, Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, Dharmendra Pradhan. Fifth Plenary on 'Harnessing the potential of diaspora entrepreneurs towards an inclusive approach to nation building', chaired by Minister of Finance, Nirmala Sitharaman. All the sessions will feature panel discussions inviting eminent diaspora experts. Forthcoming Convention holds significance as it is being organized as a physical event after a gap of four years and first after the onset of Covid-19 pandemic. The last PBD Convention in 2021 was held virtually during the pandemic.

OFF 'D' CUFF

This new year, realise you are enough

One of the real sources of stress in our life is the insecurity of not being enough. The subconscious feeling that we are incomplete, that there is always something out there that would somehow complete us. It dictates much of our dysfunctional thinking. We have an imagination of a perfect self and falling short of that, or even the prospect of falling short, reinforces this feeling.

Besides, we constantly compare ourselves with others. As there is always someone more successful, more interesting, healthier, better connected or seemingly happier, we feel less about ourselves.

But what if you are already enough? Not when you get closer to your perfect self, but how you are right now. Not when you lose weight, get the next promotion, but where your life is at this very instant.

Each of us is a microcosm of the universe. Our essence is the same as the rest of existence, but our limited mind is unable to relate to it. Water is the essence of both an ice cube and a cloud, but we perceive each of them very differently.

Our essence is our soul. You can break glass into as many pieces as you like, each of them would still be glass. Likewise, our individual soul is the same as the soul of the universe. And it is complete, whole and enough.

We are unable to experience this truth because of an ignorant and conditioned mind. Societal expectations condition our mind with the idea that we are incomplete unless we make significant progress on expected goals. The ignorant mind gives birth to ego that drives us towards the futile goal of constantly getting ahead of others.

Rajiv VJ

We believe in peace and peaceful development, not only for ourselves but for people all over the world.

-Lal Bahadur Shastri

EDITORIAL

PROGRESSING J&K

Gram Panchayats earning substantially by raising green assets on vacant state land

Free supply of fodder, fuel wood, timber on equitable basis being provided to people

The active engagement of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in planning and execution of developmental works and efficient delivery of Public Services is essential to achieve the essence of grass root level democracy and decentralised governance. Government of UT of J&K after successfully establishing three tier Panchayati Raj System has taken many decisions to empower PRIs by devolving powers, responsibilities, functions and funds to them. Various essential services having bearing on 'ease of living' of common citizens are now being administered through PRIs. Gram Panchayats (GPs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) are getting fully involved and playing meaningful role in collaboration with functionaries of the Government Departments. One such important mandate which GPs have been carrying forward is raising plantations to establish Green assets by utilizing the vacant Village Common Lands/State lands in their respective Gram Panchayats in collaboration with the Social Forestry Wing under Department of Forests, Environment and Ecology of J&K. The Village Panchayat Plantation Committees (VPPCs) headed by respective Sarpanches, identify land, and take up plantations of multipurpose tree species, with technical support of Social Forestry. These plantations are protected and scientifically managed jointly by Social Forestry

officials and representatives of VPPCs. The households of Gram Panchayat play active role in protection of plantations and in return they derive benefits by getting free supply of fodder, fuel wood and small timber on equitable basis. During 2021-22 year, 32112 quintals of Fodder, 16580 quintals of fuel wood was distributed free of cost amongst 20850 rural households of 1646 Gram Panchayats, and thus rendering valuable support to the livestock based rural economy. Jammu and Kashmir Government has enacted the provisions of transferring 75 per cent funds earned from sale of mature plantations to Village Panchayat Funds. The money deposited in these funds is used by VPPCs for afforestation activities and part of it is also used for taking up other village utility works like village paths and roads, sports facilities, improvement of schools, health facilities, drinking water and other works as per decision of local VPPC. In last few years, many progressive Gram Panchayats have successfully raised plantations on available vacant lands and established 'Village Panchayat Funds' to finance such developmental activities as per needs of their Panchayats. During, July 2021, Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha while handing over cheques to 41 such Gram Panchayats ranging from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 30 lakh, expressed his satisfaction on the successful partnership of Department of Social Forestry and Gram Panchayats and emphasised to involve more and more Gram Panchayats in this process. During 2022, funds worth Rs 30 lakh were transferred to five Gram panchayats and in current year the figure may go up to more than two crore benefiting more than 30 GPs as per official statement of the department. This model of collaborative working is an important milestone in the journey of implementation of Panchayati Raj Act towards the empowerment of PRIs and their active role in transforming the developmental landscape of Jammu & Kashmir. As per Departmental Communiqué that after such success stories, many other Gram Panchayats have been coming forward and offering parcels of lands to raise plantations and silvi-pasture models. With the proactive participation of Gram Panchayats, during 2022-23 financial year; plantation of 32 lakh plants in 3500 GPs is being taken up which marks an increase of more than 60 per cent over the average achievements prior to 2017-18 and it is expected that achievements would further increase in coming financial year; the official communiqué adds. From these Village Woodlots, multiple benefits like fodder, fuel wood, small timber have been accruing free of cost to village households on continual and equitable basis. Harvesting of mature plantations yields raw-material to local

wood-based industries, thereby generating new avenues of employment.

Establishment of plantations on lands outside natural forests is contributing to increase the Forest and tree-cover in Jammu and Kashmir to achieve the goal of having 2/3rd of area under Forest and tree cover which is around 50 per cent presently. The PCCF/Director of Department of Social Forestry, J&K, Roshan Jaggi has expressed optimism and confidence on this evolving working relationship. He disclosed that department in consultation with Gram Panchayats has drawn up plan to establish 4 mega pilots to establish block plantations in the coming plantation season using commercially important clonal varieties. The pilots are expected to motivate and inspire more and more progressive farmers to take up commercial plantations on their proprietary lands under farm forestry land use. The promotion of tree-farming outside Natural Forests is a win-win situation as it would reduce dependence on imports and ensure sustained supply of raw-material at cheaper rates to Wood Based industries, increase income of farmers, meet the bonafide needs of local people and will also help meet international obligations on account of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Climate Change by adding Forest cover and creating carbon sinks.

Denial of Hindu genocide

■ OKMAR DATTATRAY

It is a great irony that the international community, international agencies and the government of India have not acknowledged that genocide of Kashmiri Hindus had taken place. More than three decades have passed since 1989-90 and the world as well as the Indian government is in no mood to recognize the genocide of Hindus in Kashmir. The bitter truth is that the Kashmiri Hindus had been forced to leave the place of their birth - Kashmir and had also left their movable and immovable properties in Kashmir and they took refuge in Jammu and other hot places of India. The minuscule minority that the Kashmiri Hindus are had been warned and threatened to leave their homes and hearths way back in 1990's and thereafter under a well planned way by the terrorists abetted and supported by Pakistan. It is very painful experience to abandon ones home and place of birth because, 'Janani Janam Boomi Swarg Se Mahan Hai' - meaning that birthplace is more pious than heaven. Thus the Kashmiri Hindus had not left Kashmir out of their will but most involuntary they were made to flee Kashmir. The slogans of Challive, Galleve, Rallive which in English means leave, be murdered or be converted and these slogans and warnings as well as the killings of the prominent Kashmiri Pandits scared and terrified the Kashmiri Hindus including Dogri speaking Kashmiri Rajputs and ninety nine percent of them left their homes and hearths. Leaving ones place of birth and home is a very painful experience which they digested very involuntarily and with a heavy heart. It is in the fitness of things to know the meaning of term genocide to have a proper idea about the genocide of Hindus in Kashmir. The deliberate killing of a large number of people from a particular nation or ethnic group with the aim of destroying that nation or group. It also implies racial killing, massacre, wholesale slaughter, mass slaughter, wholesale killing, indiscriminate killing and mass murder. Genocide is an internationally recognized crime where acts are committed with the intent to destroy in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. These acts fall into five categories. Killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to the members of the group. Genocide thus means the deliberate killing of people who belong to a particular racial, political or cultural group. Testing on this touch stone it can be safely said that the genocide of Kashmiri Hindus had happened and there is need to recognize this reality. Now 33 years of their forced exodus have passed and their generations have made to suffer in their own country and secular democracy. During these more than three decades of their exile they have suffered economically, socially, politically and culturally and the secular rulers looking as

mute spectators and this is very unbecoming and disturbing. Kashmiri Pandits were persecuted under the foreign rulers, Phatans and Mughals and it is recorded in Kashmiri history that in the past the KPs had been forced to leave the valley eleven times and then only 11 families of KPs were left in Kashmir and so they faced untold sufferings and hardships through their chequered history at the hands of the foreign rulers and it was only under the Dogra rule that they got relief and their sufferings and exploitation was removed to a great extent. Then under the rule and freedom they faced migration again in 1989-90 and afterwards due to terrorism and terrorism and so these hapless Hindus were persecuted in their own country and democratic rule because they faced penury as the land holdings of the petty land owners which was the main source of their livelihood was snatched from them by the state government under the garb of so called socialism by the congress government headed by Mir Qasim and they were reduced to landless citizens and this had given a big jolt to the Kashmiri Hindus. Then during terrorism, the Kashmiri Hindus faced the worst kind of atrocities at the hands of Islamic terrorists and they had to part with their movable and immovable properties. Hundreds of Kashmiri Pandits were killed and the rest were forced to take refuge outside Kashmir in hot and humid climate to which they were not acclimatized but they heard this and had to face the harsh climate because of forced migration. It is very unfortunate that the successive state governments instead of mitigating their woes added salt to their scars and wounds and they were given the bad name of migrants and thus they are looked down upon. During the long period of more than three decades many of them under compulsion made houses but they cannot be called homes because home lies where heart lies. They faced neglect and apathy of the governments during all these years of forced migration. Hundreds of them died unnatural deaths by sun stroke, snake bites, depression, frustration, tension and because of the ailments of diabetes, high blood pressure and other life style diseases. Culturally they stand devastated as their culture, language, traditions and even the community itself is at the brink of extinction if the steps are not taken to save this community of Kashmiri Pandits. In fact the Kashmiri Hindus face the worst kind of genocide in their own democratic and secular country, but disturbing and ironic is the fact that the genocide of the Kashmiri Hindus is not recognized by the government and the international agencies and they have kept the genocide under carpet and this is the tragedy for the victims of genocide. The massacres of hundreds of Kashmiri Hindus and rape of their women flock and their annihilation is enough to declare their genocide but it has not still

been recognized by the international organizations and the government of India. The rape and cutting of the body of one of its women in the band saw and tying of a couple with the running vehicle and other such atrocities should awaken the conscience of the international community and Indian government so that they recognize and declare it as genocide. The Kashmiri Pandit organizations have been demanding and appealing to the international agencies to declare genocide of the Hindus but to their dismay till now they have not been declared as the victims of genocide and this is the tragedy. Unparallel and unprecedented atrocities and worst kind of human right violations had taken place with this hapless community but that those which matter did not declare genocide of the Kashmiri Hindus. However ICHRRF has officially recognized the Kashmiri Hindu genocide. US-based non-profit, international commission for Human Rights and Religious Freedom (ICHRF) has recognized the 1989-91 atrocities on Kashmiri Hindus as an act of genocide. The ICHRRF has called upon the government of India and the government of UT of Jammu and Kashmir to acknowledge and recognize the 1989-91 atrocities on Kashmiri Hindus as an act of genocide. The commission exhorts other human right organizations, international bodies and governments to step up to the plate and officially acknowledge these atrocities as an act of genocide. The world must listen to these profoundly moving stories, seriously introspect on the impact of their past silence and inaction out of political expediency and make proper recognition of the reality of genocide of Kashmiri Hindus. The ICHRRF said it is profoundly heartbreaking that several Kashmiri Hindu victims of genocide, ethnic cleansing and exile from their homeland, courageously shared their traumatic stories of endurance, survival and recovery from the atrocious human rights violations at the hands of Islamic terrorists that mirrored the Jewish Holocaust. Thousands of homes and temples were destroyed. Over 4,00,000 Kashmiri Hindus men, women and children were forced into exile by the Islamic terrorists at gunpoint, ejected from their homes. Women were gang-raped cut into two pieces with saw and killed in most brutal way. Now their culture is on the brink of extinction. Is not this all enough for declaring the genocide of Kashmiri Hindus? The better sense and sanity should prevail on the international organizations and they should take a call on the matter and acknowledge the genocide of Kashmiri Hindus. It is hoped that in the near future Kashmiri Hindu community will be recognized as the victims of the genocide. In short this will help to balm the wounds of Kashmiri Hindus.

(The author is a columnist, social and KP activist).

Need to re-visit retirement age

■ MAHADEEP SINGH JAMWAL

Retirement, long viewed through the lens of being a set date and age one needs to reach, is evolving among millennials who have a different vision of retirement. Without casting any aspersions on the serving government employees' feelings, I reflect a view point for wider discussion both at government as well as at employees' level. The employees will definitely take it as a viable solution for their children and the government will find it as a measure to curb unemployment. When we speak of retirement age from government jobs, we find that the debate between private jobs and government jobs has been a long standing one. Government jobs have long been a preferred source of employment. It is a fact that the government officers in India enjoy considerable power without corresponding responsibility. Government officers also enjoy other benefits like: Job security, less pressure at work place, better work-life balance (except a few jobs in uniform) etc. Serving in Government departments' up to the age of 60 years (Presently) in no way is justifiable, when we have life expectancy at present of 70.9 years. The statutory retirement age at present 60 years is not an effective policy to curb the un-employment because by increasing the retirement age the employment opportunities of young become delayed and their advanced technological proficiencies cannot add to the advancement

of the country. So what should be the age for retirement from government services needs to be looked at with a prospective approach and in view of the unemployment that is at the alarming stage. The highly educated youth are adding to the kitty of unemployed Indian population at a jet speed. And finding no jobs for sustainability are frustrations and diverting to the anti-social platforms. The youth unemployment rate in India has been rising steadily over the years, aggravated due to the Covid-19 impact on recruitment drives. In the April to June quarter of 2021, the youth unemployment rate stood at 25.5% for the age group of 15 to 29 as per the 'Periodic Labour Force Survey'. The government has time and again come up with laughable alternatives and with the suggestions to look to the private sector for the jobs. As presently being employed in the corporate sector, I can vouch with authority that it is not an easy cake to get jobs in private sectors as mostly the private sector look for hiring skilled employees and a decimal number of freshers. The private sector is the part of the economy that is run by individuals and companies for profit and is not state controlled. Therefore, it encompasses all for-profit businesses that are not owned or operated by the government. The government has surrendered and has shown its helplessness in providing government jobs to all the unemployed. When the 2014 promise of Modi Jee for providing two

more jobs every year has proved to be just a fuss and has clearly been declared by Amit Shah Je as 'Election Zumba', there is need to think of other measures to provide jobs in the government sector. Here I suggest to re-visit the policy of retirement age of government employees. This is the right perspective that has the potential of providing employment if the retirement age is re-considered. A government servant joining services in between the age of 20 to 30 years would be rendering 40 to 30 years in government jobs in the present scenario. And at the same time if he marries in-between 20-30 years and blessed with off-springs at due time, his off-springs will be of the age of somewhere 38 to 28 years at the retiring age. Normally during the span of this age in turn, the children of the employee should have married and should have been in a position to be self-sustainable. But having no job they are neither a support to their family nor they can think of their future prospects and this situation continuously worries the parents and it becomes a source of stress and strain both for the unemployed educated youth in the family and his parents. By the time employees reach their 50 or 55 years of age, they start worrying about the future of their children. Finding no job, parents have to spend a lot on their children to settle them but devoid of practical experience in any sector, parents' remains always stressed about their investments and especially those who provide education to their children by obtaining bank loans. There are a number of departments where employees are selected on the basis of their academic qualifications and in such departments there should be an option if an employee obtaining retirement somewhere at the age of 55 years, his son or daughter if falls within the parameters of selection should be given priority in place of his retiring guardian. This will also not create a burden on the state exchequer as the difference in-between salary and pension of the retiring employees' will add on as full salary of his incumbent. This way there will be no shortfall in the income of the family. This will also bring smiles in the family as the retiring employee will relax fully in his family to manage family affairs and his son/daughter will be becoming a responsible earning member of the family. Retiring early has its own pros also. Where it is potentially good for health, the more years we will have before health issues begin to limit our mobility. It also provides an opportunity to become boss of our own venture by starting a new career and a business if any we launch at age 50 to 55 years, could easily keep us intellectually challenged and out of mischief for another 20 to 15 years. That means up to 70 years, the life expectancy at present. Retirement is not the end of the road. It is the beginning of the open highway. The first 10 to 15 years of retirement are considered the best as people are generally younger and healthier.