

## IDENTITY, REINVENTED: THE NEW AADHAAR APP

India's digital public infrastructure is among the most ambitious governance transformations globally. With the dedication of the new Aadhaar App to the nation on 28 January 2026, the government has taken a decisive step toward a more citizen-centric digital ecosystem-one that places consent, privacy and convenience at its core.

Unveiled by Minister of State for Commerce & Industry and Electronics & Information Technology Jitin Prasada, the new Aadhaar App is not merely a technological upgrade but a shift in philosophy. Developed by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), it reimagines Aadhaar as a privacy-first, user-controlled and consent-driven digital identity, aligned with the expectations of an increasingly digital society.

For over a decade, Aadhaar has enabled efficient welfare delivery and reduced leakages through direct benefit transfers. However, rising concerns around data privacy and misuse demanded a more refined approach. The new app addresses these concerns by embedding selective sharing and data minimisation into its design.

A key feature is the ability for Aadhaar holders to share only purpose-specific information through customised, digitally signed QR codes. This eliminates the need for photocopies or full Aadhaar disclosure, ensures Aadhaar numbers are not stored by verifiers, and aligns with the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act.

Consent lies at the heart of the app. Residents have control over biometric lock and unlock, access to authentication history and one-click consent, ensuring identity verification happens with explicit approval. This strengthens public trust-an essential pillar of digital governance.

The app enhances ease of living through multiple real-life use cases, including hotel check-ins, age verification, hospital visitor access and gig worker verification. Advanced features such as optional face verification, QR-based contact cards and management of up to five Aadhaar profiles under "One Family-One App" further add convenience.

Ultimately, the new Aadhaar App reaffirms India's digital philosophy: technology must serve people. By integrating trust, consent and simplicity, it sets a strong benchmark for inclusive, resident-centric digital governance.

## J&K's mission-mode push towards a 'Nasha Mukh' future

At a time when drug addiction is posing a serious social and public health challenge across the country and when enforcement-heavy approaches have often struggled to deliver sustained results Jammu & Kashmir has scripted a fundamentally different narrative. Anchored in data, transparency, institutional convergence and sustained community engagement, the Union Territory's approach marks a decisive shift in how substance abuse is being addressed in India.

Launched on April 5, 2025, the NashaMukt Jammu & Kashmir Abhiyan spearheaded by the Department of Information & Public Relations (DIPR) with other government departments has emerged as one of the most comprehensive, technology-driven and publicly verifiable de-addiction campaigns in the country. Aligned with the national vision of the NashaMukt Bharat Abhiyan, the J&K initiative introduces governance innovations that distinguish it from similar efforts elsewhere.

From the outset, the campaign has been designed with exceptional institutional rigour, combining strategic planning at the highest administrative levels with disciplined execution on the ground. Outreach activities are conducted across three clearly defined levels-Panchayats, Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and educational institutions-ensuring complete rural and urban coverage across Jammu & Kashmir.

District administrations operate on a structured and pre-approved weekly calendar, with specific days earmarked for activities at Panchayat, ULB and institutional levels. This approach has transformed awareness generation from isolated or symbolic events into a continuous, predictable and sustained process. Special emphasis on schools and colleges reflects a conscious strategy to prioritise early intervention, prevention and behaviour-

change among young populations.

One of the most path-breaking features of the Abhiyan is the NashaMukt Jammu & Kashmir public dashboard updated on real-time basis placing transparency at the heart of governance. Unlike conventional campaigns where progress remains confined to internal files, every outreach event under this initiative is digitally logged, monitored and made publicly accessible.

As reflected on the dashboard as of January 2026, a total of 5,736 Panchayat-level events have been conducted out of 7,193 scheduled, while Urban Local Bodies have completed 630 events against a target of 853. Educational institutions have held 2,319 programmes out of 2,513 planned. Collectively, these activities have directly engaged over 4.35 lakh participants across the Union Territory. This level of real-time, district-wise transparency depicting schedule, execution and even participation sets a new benchmark in public accountability.

Recognising that substance abuse is a multi-dimensional challenge, the administration has adopted a whole-of-government approach, bringing Health, Home/Police, Education, Social Welfare, Rural Development, Urban Development, Youth Services & Sports and Information Departments under a single unified framework. Each department has been assigned clearly defined responsibilities to ensure that prevention, enforcement, counselling, awareness and rehabilitation efforts function in a coordinated manner.

To overcome the long-standing problem of fragmented reporting, eight key departments have been onboarded onto a common digital platform, enabling real-time uploading of activity data onto the Nasha Mukh Jammu & Kashmir portal. This institutional convergence has reduced duplication, bridged data gaps and ensured a cohesive and synchronised response to substance abuse across sec-

tors.

To ensure that awareness activities remain engaging and impactful, the campaign has made extensive use of short, theme-based video films during outreach programmes. Screened at Panchayat halls, ULB venues, schools and colleges, these films portray real-life situations involving family distress, peer pressure, addiction cycles and recovery journeys.

By blending compelling visual narratives with expert messaging, the films have transformed routine awareness sessions into immersive community experiences. This audio-visual approach has proven particularly effective in overcoming barriers of literacy and attention span, while generating deeper emotional engagement especially among youth and students.

A defining innovation of the programme lies in its structured post-event engagement mechanism. After every outreach activity, participant details including contact numbers are uploaded to the portal. By the same evening, participants receive personalised acknowledgement messages reinforcing the campaign's core message and reconnecting them with its available support systems.

So far, over 1.12 lakh SMS messages have been sent under this mechanism. In addition, the portal prominently displays district-wise helpline numbers for all 20 districts and enables district administrations to upload grievance summaries, ensuring responsiveness, follow-up and institutional accountability beyond the event stage.

Beyond awareness generation, the administration has placed strong emphasis on strengthening human capacity at the grassroots. District administrations have initiated fresh rounds of training for resource persons, identified dedicated counsellors for schools and colleges, and mobilised ASHA workers and paramedics to reach vulnerable popula-

tions at the community level.

Self-Help Groups have also been actively engaged to deepen community participation and ownership of the campaign. Together, these measures are creating a trained and locally rooted support system capable of sustained intervention, counselling and rehabilitation well beyond the formal campaign phase.

The campaign's reach has been significantly amplified through a strategic mix of print, electronic and digital media, supported by radio jingles and television commercials. A dedicated 'Inspire' podcast series, aired on DD Jammu and DD Kashmir, has featured mental health experts, doctors and eminent personalities, generating over one lakh views and impressions, particularly among Gen-Z audiences.

Cultural interventions such as street plays, folk performances and nukkad natakhs have added a powerful local dimension, enabling messages to resonate in familiar cultural idioms and local languages, and extending the campaign's influence beyond formal institutional settings.

By combining data transparency, institutional convergence, immersive communication and citizen-level follow-up, the Nasha Mukh Jammu & Kashmir Abhiyan has evolved beyond the idea of a conventional campaign. It now stands as a replicable governance model, demonstrating how complex public health challenges can be addressed through planning, participation and public accountability.

As Phase-II of the campaign gains momentum following high-level administrative reviews by the Chief Secretary himself, Jammu & Kashmir's fight against drugs is no longer merely being waged, it is being tracked, tested and trusted by the public itself, setting a new national standard in the pursuit of a drug-free India.

## First Newspaper in Bharatvarsha

ER. PRABHAT KISHORE

The credit for bringing out the first full-fledged printed newspaper in Bharat goes to Irishman James Augustus Hicky. The first issue appeared on January 29, 1780 in Kolkata (then capital of British India), bearing the title, "HICKY'S BENGAL GAZETTE or The Original - Calcutta General Advertiser".

But before Hicky started his paper an attempt was made by William Bolt's in censored servant of East India Company, who had resigned earlier to start a newspaper to give expression to the differences existing between the opposing groups in the East India Company. In September 1766, William Bolt's pasted a paper on the door of Council house of Kolkata. Bolt's attempt to start a newspaper was put down, as he was ordered to

leave Bharat and proceed to Europe by the first available ship.

On Saturday January 29, 1780 appeared "Hicky's Bengal Gazette or The Original Calcutta General Advertiser". People simply remember it as "Hicky's Gazette" on his name, who was founder, editor & promoter-all rolled in one-of that paper. It was a weekly paper and consisted of two pages of size 12"x8". The paper was clumsily printed, the reading material was less and the advertisement more. Also, there were comments on personal affairs of individuals.

When Hicky started his newspaper, he announced his motives "I have no particular passion for the printing of newspaper. I have no propensity. I was not bred to slavish life of hard work yet; I take pleasure in enslaving my body in order to purchase freedom for my mind and

soul". Hicky's Gazette was published in English language and this was the first regular newspaper in India. The first issue carried news bit not fresh and up-to-date like today's newspapers. The news bits were taken from the old European newspapers. In those days due to difficult transportation system, foreign newspapers usually took months to reach the Bharatiya shore. Hicky announced the policy of his paper and declared that his news was a 'weekly, political and commercial paper open to all parties, but influenced by none'.

This paper was a primitive one from the point of view of contents, printing and publication. But it has the significance of a historical newspaper. With the first newspaper of Bharat started the era of Indian journalism, which has developed as the agency for the safe-

guard of democracy in the country.

Fighting tradition begins:- The Bengal Gazette had a thrilling and turbulent history despite the fact that it had a sharp life of only two years. It did not educate Indian freedom and published no sermons. On the other hand, it published scurrilous story. But the paper greatness lay in its undaunted and valiant height for liberty of the press. The paper upheld the freedom of conscious of education, of speech and of assembly, which it considered the fundamentals of human existence.

Hicky is remembered as the father of Indian journalism. He was courageous and resolute in his endeavours. He was a poor man, but was bold in every step he took. The paper made a point of challenging most powerful people in Bharatvarsha. He boldly accused

the Governor General Warren Hastings of corruption tyranny and warmongering. An attempt to punish Hicky was thought necessary by Hastings and suit after suit was filed to gag him and strangle his paper. Armed European soldiers and 4000 servants raided Hicky's press to arrest him as per definite orders from the Governor General and the Chief Justice. But Hicky fought them back and voluntarily presented himself before the Supreme Court. He was immediately arrested but allowed to go on bail after he paid a huge sum of Rs Eighty thousand as security money. He was charged by the government for other defamatory and scurrilous writings. He was tried in the court of law and was found guilty. He was sentenced to four months' imprisonment and was asked to pay a fine of Rs 500/-, but he did not frighten.

Antagonists of Hicky, who made up their minds to bring about closure of 'The Bengal Gazette', succeeded in procuring an order for the seizure of the press. The types were seized along with printing plant in March 1782 which marked the premature death of Bharat's first regular newspaper.

Hicky's early life is unknown even as his later life. He was practically a total stranger to the public until the appearance of 'The Bengal Gazette'. He faced trouble after trouble and suffered heavily by counting the wrath of the authority. He lived and died in obscurity. But his name is indelible in the history of the Indian press and he will always be remembered for evolution of this fourth pillar of democracy in the country.

(The author is an engineer and Academician).

## Bio-fencing with Karonda Plant-A Low-cost and Eco-friendly practice to Protect the Crops of Small and Marginal Farmers in Hilly Regions from Monkeys and Wild Animals

N.P. THAKUR, ASHOK GUPTA, VIKAS KOUL, MEENAKSHI ATTRI

Nowadays, it is observed that

small and marginal farmers in hilly regions are not able to cultivate their fields properly. Even those farmers who manage to grow crops often face losses instead of profits. The main reason for this is that the crops grown in the fields are destroyed by monkeys and other wild animals. Due to this problem, many small and marginal farmers have almost stopped farming particularly in hilly regions of J&K. To protect crops from wild animals, the government has introduced several measures, but these measures are either very expensive (costly) or not practical for small and marginal farmers (farmer-oriented), because of which farmers are unable to adopt them easily. Keeping all these problems in mind, a team of scientists from the FSR Centre, SKUAST Jammu has developed a simple and effective agricultural model commonly known as Integrated Farming System Model in which the Karonda plant is used as bio-fencing. This model has proved to be low-cost, sustainable and highly beneficial for farmers. The karonda plant, commonly known as sour karonda, and locally known as kharnu in Himachal and Garne in J&K is easily grown in rain-

fed regions of hill states of India. Since it is a thorny plant, it prevents wild animals from entering the fields and

prevents monkeys and other wild animals from entering the fields and thus keeps the crops safe. The Karonda



provides natural protection to crops. Thus, the Karonda plant is an effective, low-cost, and eco-friendly bio-fencing technique, which can be extremely beneficial for farmers in hilly regions.

If farmers plant the Karonda (Karonda Plant) around their fields as boundary plantation in the form of bio-fencing, it can be observed that it not only helps in controlling the menace of monkeys but also protects crops from other wild animals such as wild boar and nilgai. The Karonda is a plant that has thorny bushes. Gradually, when these bushes become dense, they form a natural fence around the fields, which

plant is a rainfed plant and does not require much irrigation. Along with protecting crops, it also provides farmers with extra income in addition to their main crops. Along with bio-fencing, it also produces edible fruits, which are a rich source of Vitamin C. These fruits can be used to make pickle, jam, jelly, etc. This plant also helps in reducing soil erosion and works as a wind barrier.

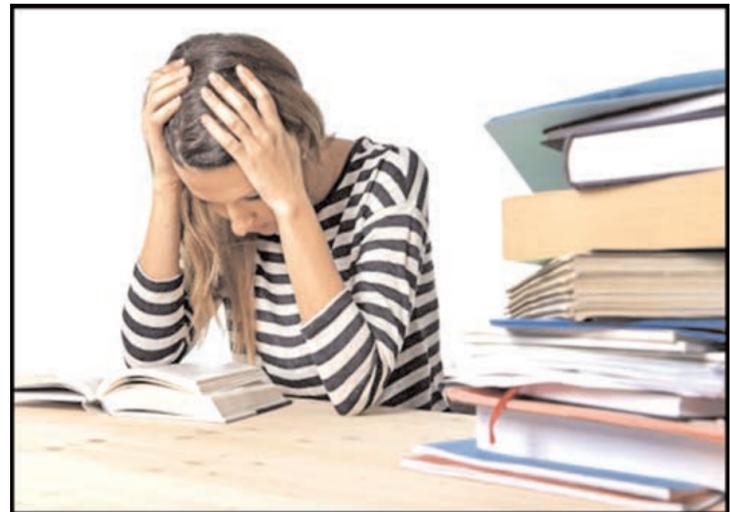
Considering all these facts, it can be said that the Karonda plant is a low-cost bio-fencing technique, through which farmers can protect their crops from monkeys and wild animals and also earn additional income.

## 'Face Examinations Without Fear'

DR VIJAY GARG

If you are a student and are restless and nervous about the Board examinations, you are probably overcome with anxiety and fear. You find it almost impossible to concentrate, worrying that you might forget whatever you have studied so far. In a booklet titled Letter to a Student, Swami Purushottamananda discusses the crucial problem of examination fear.

He says fear of exams is the biggest enemy of students. Under its stress, some even fall physically ill. The word "examination fever" has been coined in this context. Even students who have put in long hours of study become nervous at the time of exams. So, the Swami says, don't lose heart, you can definitely gain control of the situation. To get out of the fear psychosis, Swami Purushottamananda requests students to ask themselves what they would gain by feeling afraid. For, fear brings sickness. But by being bold and brave, even an average student can do reasonably well in exams. But if a student shelters fear, it will deprive his mind and body of strength. "The only results can be this: You will 'forget' all that you have studied while writing the exam. It is this fear that makes you write confused answers". He says, "Root out the fear complex lurking in your mind by combining self-confidence with disciplined study; have faith in your own strength and faith in your



studies... The strong conviction that you would write the exams well, with a calm mind, is self-confidence. If you can develop this, fear vanishes and enthusiasm springs up in its place".

Students can draw inspiration from the encouraging words of Swami Vivekananda, who had great faith in the power of faith. He exhorted the youth to first have faith in themselves. He said: "The history of the world is the history of a few men who had faith in themselves. That faith calls out the divinity within. You can do anything. You fail only when you do not strive sufficiently to manifest infinite power". On different occasions Swamiji emphasised that "whatever you think, that you will be. If you think yourselves weak, weak you will be; if you think yourselves

strong, strong you will be". He would say: "Never say, 'I cannot', for you are infinite. Even time and space are as nothing compared with your nature. You can do anything and everything, you are Almighty".

Vivekananda's prescription for success is: "To succeed, you must have tremendous perseverance, tremendous will. 'I will drink the ocean', says the persevering soul, 'at my will, mountains will crumble up'. Have that sort of energy, that sort of will; work hard, and you will reach the goal...". He further said: "If there is one word that you find from the Upanishads, bursting like a bomb-shell upon masses of ignorance, it is the word fearlessness... Strength is life; weakness is death. Strength is felicity, life eternal, immortal; weakness is constant

strain and misery...".

For students who cultivate fearlessness, and who face the exams boldly, success is waiting round the corner. True, sometimes, unfortunately, even the most hardworking and dedicated of students find that the results are not good. However, even in the worst-case scenario of failure you should not think that it is the end of the world. Swami Vivekananda has taught that there is success and failure in every work. In fact, failures make us even wiser. Constant practice makes one perfect, so no one should lose heart in the process of trying.

For "tomorrow is another day" with fresh hopes and opportunities, and you should look forward to taking up new challenges and responsibilities.

(The author is Retired Principal)