

ACT PRUDENTLY

It is good that Delimitation Commission is afoot to complete the process of fragmentation of constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir as soon as possible but still there are signs that things might take time as the National Conference has sought agenda of meeting called by the Commission on December 20 to decide party's next course of action. The Delimitation Commission headed by Justice (Retired) Ranjana Prakash Desai has called crucial meeting with Associate Members in New Delhi on December 20 to discuss and share with them the progress achieved by the Panel in delimitation of 90 Assembly Constituencies in the Union Territory. In response to this invitation, the National Conference has dispatched a letter seeking agenda of the meeting so that the party could decide whether it will join the party or not. This is a matter of concern for the people who are waiting for long to know what the outcome of the delimitation process will be because the same will decide the future of J&K and its people. The Commission has five Associate Members who have been invited to the meeting through emails sent to them. These include Union Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) Dr Jitendra Singh and Jugal Kishore Sharma, MP Jammu-Poonch Lok Sabha constituency, both from BJP and Dr Farooq Abdullah, Mohammad Akbar Lone and Hasnain Masoodi, all three National Conference Lok Sabha members from Kashmir. The associate members should act prudently and help aforesaid Commission to complete its job sooner than later as it holds much significance as far as J&K's future is concerned. Pertinently, it will be the second meeting called by the Delimitation Commission with five Associate Members. First meeting on February 18 this year was attended only by two BJP MPs and was boycotted by all three National Conference members. It is in interest of all that five associate members become part of this crucial meeting and no one especially NC leaders do not play a spoilsport again. Reportedly, Delimitation Commission is expected to share its findings completed so far with Associate Members.



OFF 'D' CUFF

'Monism in Kashmir Shaivism'

Although the main principle of both Kashmir Saivism and Vedanta is advaita, monism, pure monism, yet there are many important differences in their thinking. For example, Vedanta masters teach that karmayoga means yoga in action. They believe that you must practise nishkama karmayoga, which means that you are to perform all the actions of the world without asking for any reward.

They say that by acting in this way you are directed toward the existence of the Real Being, the Real Nature of Self. From our Kashmir Saiva point of view, however, karmayoga means something else. It does not mean carrying out all of the activities of the world. Yoga in action is pure yoga and nothing else. Pure yoga is one-pointedness, and this one-pointedness must be developed in three ways.

You must develop one-pointedness in the existence of your being. This is one-pointedness in the state of para vak, supreme speech. You must also develop one-pointedness in the state of madhyama vak, medium speech. And finally, you must develop one pointedness in the state of vaikhari vak, inferior speech, in the state of ordinary speech....

The first difference, therefore, between Kashmir Saivism and Vedanta is in their different understanding of karmayoga. This difference, as you have seen, is very great, with the Vedantins believing that karmayoga means doing all actions without asking for their reward and our Kashmir Saivism teaching that yoga in action means doing all actions while maintaining a breakless contemplation of God.

Another difference between Kashmir Saivism and Vedanta concerns the existence of individual being and Universal Being. The Vedantins explain that individual being is manifested only when Universal Being is reflected in the mirror of the individual intellect. They say that Universal Being is reflected in the buddhi, intellect, and that reflection becomes the existence of the jiva, individual being. Kashmir Saivism, however, does not recognize this explanation, arguing that it is without any basis.

As Universal Being is absolutely pure and perfect and individual being

is filled with malas, imperfections and covered by veils, it is not buddhi that will reflect Universal Being, but rather, it is Universal Being that will reflect buddhi. It is the purer and more refined reality which will take the reflection of that which is less pure and refined and not the other way around. Buddhi cannot hold Universal Being. Kashmir Saivism explains that when Siva is reflected by His pure will in the mirror of His svatantrya, freedom, this is the existence of the universe and the existence of individual being.

Furthermore, in the theory of the Vedantins, it is not clearly explained how, if the world were not existing, buddhi, in which Siva is to be reflected, could exist at all. How could the intellect exist before the existence of the world? Therefore, individual being is the reflection of Lord Siva in His svatantrya sakti. This is the existence of the universe.

The third area of difference between Kashmir Saivism and Vedanta concerns the essence, the substance, the basis of this universe. Vedanta holds that this universe is untrue, unreal. It does not really exist. It is only the creation of maya, illusion. Concerning this point, Kashmir Saivism argues that if Siva is real, then how could an unreal substance come out from something that is real? If Siva is real, then his creation is also real. Why should it be said that Siva is real and his creation is an illusion? Kashmir Saivism explains that the existence of this universe is just as real as the existence of Siva. As such, it is true, real, pure, and solid. There is nothing at all about it which is unreal.

The fourth important difference between Kashmir Saivism and Vedanta is that Vedanta does not recognize kundaliniyoga. The Vedantins say that kundalini yoga is meant for those who are treading on the inferior path of yoga. From our Kashmir Saivite point of view, however, kundalini yoga is the most important yoga in this system. Kashmir Saivism explains that there are three paths of kundalini yoga: para kundalini yoga, cit kundalini yoga, and prana kundalini yoga.

Swami Lakshmanjoo

How long will killings continue?

■ OMKAR DATTATRAY

Kashmir is facing the monster of terrorism since 1990 and the people continue to be killed by the so called crusaders of the Jihad. The terrorists continue to kill the innocent people with sadistic pleasure. The naked dance of death and destruction continues in Jammu and Kashmir and people are consumed by the demon of terrorism. Jammu and Kashmir read Kashmir is under the attack of the terrorists from last over three decades and the people young, old men and women get killed. Not only the innocent people have been and are killed by the terrorists but the security personnel also get killed by the terrorists and the terrorists do not distinguish between the police of Jammu and Kashmir and the central forces while executing their nefarious designs of attacking the security forces. The terrorists are dancing to the tune of Pakistan and it is at the behest of that country that the terrorists were and are killing people and security forces personnel. It is the neighbouring country of Pakistan which is busy in training, abetting and exporting the terrorism to Jammu and Kashmir and thus Pakistan is actively engaged in the export of terrorism to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir and is busy in creating mayhem and destruction in Jammu and Kashmir. It is at the behest of Pakistan that the terrorists continue the spree of killings of the people and the security forces day in and day out. It is a sad story that not only the people and security forces are killed by the terrorists but the economy of the Jammu and Kashmir is also damaged by the terrorists. The tourist industry and economy is put to a grinding halt by the terrorists and this is a great loss to the union territory. Besides this the age old tradition of composite culture and coexistence and mutual brotherhood is destroyed by the terrorists. The damage to the communal harmony is a huge loss to the Jammu and Kashmir. Jammu and Kashmir was famous for communal harmony and brotherhood and this has adversely impacted by the onset of terrorism and this loss is difficult to filled and undone. Kashmir is also reputed for 'Kashmiriyat' the world over but the terrorists have damaged the Sufi culture and tradition of Kashmir and therefore it is a great setback to the communal amity and mutual brotherhood. The damaged communal harmony is very hard to repair and it will take year of sincere efforts of the people to build the damaged communal harmony. The misguided youth of Jammu and Kashmir are resorting to the terrorism at the behest of Pakistan and the youth and impressionable minds are brain washed by the hard-core elements and thus they indulge in the killings of the gullible people to satisfy their sadistic pleasure. The innocent people have thus been killed and are still being killed by the enemies of the humanity to satiate their animal greed. The terrorists have been on the killing spree from the last over a decade and there seems no end to the terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir in the near future and this is a serious problem which the people of Kashmir are facing for a long time .The religious sentiments and the emotions of the Kashmiris are exploited by the cunning enemy Pakistan and their passions are aroused. The venom is spewed and the Kashmiris are incited against India and the security forces and this resulted into the killings of the security forces and this continues unabated. Pakistan has been successful in inciting the people of Kashmir against the security forces and thus they indulge in the killings of the security forces who are engaged in protecting the people from the terrorists but it is a sad story that the terrorists are day in and day out continuing the killings of the security forces .There is worst kind of human right violation on the security forces

by the terrorists as the atrocities are committed by the terrorists on the security forces and they are killed continuously by the terrorists at the behest of Pakistani establishment and ISI. The people of Kashmir are peace loving and the common Kashmiri longs for peace and prosperity and it is the narrow minded people who support the terrorists but the majority of the Kashmiris are for peace and development. It is this majority who should join hands to revolt against the terrorism otherwise the terrorists will continue to consume more and more lives in the days to come. So the majority of the Kashmiris and the saner people should unite against the terrorism and frustrate the evil designs of the terrorists .The power of the people is supreme and the guns of the terrorists will silence before the power of the people and so the common Kashmiri should join hands and cooperate with the security forces to give a death knell to terrorism. It is the irony and paradox that when a common man is killed by the terrorists there is muted condemnation of this barbarism and it is falsely taken that the killed innocent man was a Mukhlir-police informer and therefore deserved the killing .As against this when a terrorist and terrorist is killed by the security forces he is given the status of a martyr and great hue and cry is raised on the killing of the terrorists. While the fact is that a killed terrorist is a terrorist and cannot be equated with a freedom fighter and as such a martyr: Therefore the analogy of such people is false and should not be encouraged. There has been enough loss to life, property and economy and now for the interest of the common people the terrorism and the killings of the innocent people and the security forces should now stop. For the ushering of peace and tranquility the common Kashmiri should unite and revolt against the terrorism .Therefore the common Kashmiri should stand up and join hands to fight the terrorism to finish and in this lies the good of all the people otherwise the terrorists will continue to kill the gullible people and the security forces .Thus if the people want peace and development they should rise and fight against terrorism and should help the security forces in catching and neutralizing the terrorists. The common Kashmiri should realize that it is the Kashmiri who is getting killed by the terrorists as well by the security forces and thus it is the Kashmiri who has bearing the brunt of terrorism. Therefore if the people of Kashmir want peace, tranquility and development they should cooperate with the security agencies to fight the terrorism. It is very unfortunate that the terrorists are executing their nefarious plans under new names and manifestations and new Avatars and so the people should unite to foil the dastardly acts of the terrorists .Of late the terrorists have changed their strategy and have killed soft targets and are indulging in the selective and targeted killings of the minorities and Kashmiri Pandits. It is a very disturbing and sad indeed. The terrorists have been successful in the ethnic cleansing as they have hounded out the Kashmiri Pandits and Dogra speaking Rajputs from their homes and hearths and have killed hundreds of them. One fails to understand as to how long will the terrorism and killings continue. There seems no immediate halt to the killings but for real freedom of Kashmir the valley has to be purged of the terrorists and the terrorists should see the writing on the wall that one day they have to stop the killings and be part and parcel of the national mainstream. Let the terrorism and the killings of the people and the security personnel stop and peace, normalcy and development reign supreme and may the Kashmir again become the 'Paradise on Earth'.

(The author is retired Education Officer and Columnist.)

Omicron & effectiveness of COVID vaccine

■ FAYAZ AHMAD PAUL

Omicron, the SARS-CoV-2 variant responsible for a cluster of cases in South Africa and that is now spreading around the world and in India too, is the most heavily mutated variant to emerge so far and carries mutations similar to changes seen in previous variants of concern associated with enhanced transmissibility and partial resistance to vaccine induced immunity. On Nov 25, 2021, about 23 months since the first reported case of Pandemics COVID-19 and after a global estimated 270 million cases and 5.3 million deaths, a new SARS-CoV-2 variant of concern, Omicron, was reported. Omicron emerged in a COVID-19 weary world in which anger and frustration with the pandemic are rife amid widespread negative impacts on social, mental, and economic wellbeing. Although previous variant of concern emerged in a world in which natural immunity from COVID-19 infections was common, this fifth variant of concern has emerged at a time when vaccine immunity is increasing in the world. The emergence of the alpha, beta, and delta SARS-CoV-2 variant of concerns were associated with new waves of infections, sometimes across the entire world. For example, the increased transmissibility of the delta variant of concerns was associated with, among others, a higher viral load, longer duration of infectiousness, and high rates of re-infection, because of its ability to escape from natural immunity, which resulted in the delta variant of concerns rapidly becoming the globally dominant variant. The delta variant of concerns continues to drive new waves of infection and remains the dominant variant of concerns during the fourth wave in many countries. Concerns about lower vaccine efficacy because of new variants have changed our understanding of the pandemic-19 end game, disabusing the world of the notion that global vaccination is by itself adequate for controlling SARS-CoV-2 infection.

The first sequenced omicron case was reported from Botswana on Nov 11, 2021, and a few days later another sequenced case was reported from Hong Kong in a traveller from South Africa. The earliest known case of omicron in South Africa was a patient diagnosed with COVID-19 on Nov 9, 2021, although it is probable that there were

unidentified cases in several countries across the world before. COVID-19 cases are increasing rapidly in the Gauteng province of South Africa; the early doubling time in the fourth wave is higher than that of the previous three waves. The principal concerns about omicron include whether it is more infectious or severe than other variant of concerns and whether it can circumvent vaccine protection. Although immunological and clinical data are not yet available to provide definitive evidence, and can extrapolate from what is known about the mutations of omicron to provide preliminary indications on transmissibility, severity, and immune escape. Omicron has some deletions and more than 30 mutations, For example 69-70del, T95I, N679K, and P681H overlap with those in the alpha, beta, gamma, or delta variant of concerns. The effects of most of the remaining omicron mutations are not known, resulting in a high level of uncertainty about how the full combination of deletions and mutations will affect viral behaviour and susceptibility to natural and vaccine-mediated immunity. The impact of omicron on transmissibility is a concern. If the overlapping omicron mutations maintain their known effects, then higher transmissibility is expected, particularly because of mutations near the furin cleavage site. Various epidemiological evidence suggests that cases are rising in South Africa and that PCR tests with S-gene target failure are also rising. Although omicron is likely to be highly transmissible, it is not yet clear whether it has greater transmissibility than delta, although preliminary indications suggest that it is spreading rapidly against a backdrop of ongoing delta-variant transmission and high levels of natural immunity to the delta variant. If this trend continues, omicron is anticipated to displace delta as the dominant variant in South Africa.

In the absence of data on observational vaccine effectiveness and antibody-neutralisation studies on vaccine sera, preliminary data from the national PCR testing programme could provide some clues. Data on positive PCR tests in people with previous positive tests suggest an increase in cases of reinfection in South Africa. However, the increased use of rapid antigen tests and incomplete capturing of negative results have

complicated the interpretation of test positivity rates, which have risen to about four times the previous rate in the past week. Notwithstanding this limitation, the increase in cases of re-infection is in keeping with the immune-escape mutations present in omicron. Although there are conflicting reports on whether COVID-19 vaccines have consistently retained high efficacy for each of the four variant of concerns preceding omicron, clinical trials have reported lower efficacy for some vaccines in transmission settings in which the beta variant is dominant. Previous variants have lowered vaccine efficacy; for example, the ChAdOx1 vaccine was 70 per cent effective in preventing clinical infections for the D614G variant in the UK, but this efficacy decreased to 10 per cent for the beta variant in South Africa. However, the efficacy of the BNT162b2 vaccine in preventing clinical infections was retained across both the D614G and beta variants. Given that omicron has a larger number of mutations than previous variant of concerns, the potential impact of omicron on the clinical efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines for mild infections is not clear. Thus far, most COVID-19 vaccines have remained effective in preventing severe COVID-19, hospitalization, and death, for all previous variants, because this efficacy might be more dependent on T-cell immune responses than antibodies. In terms of diagnostics, the omicron variant is detectable on widely used PCR platforms in South Africa. There is no reason to believe that current COVID-19 treatment protocols and therapeutics would no longer be effective, with the possible exception of monoclonal antibodies, for which data on the omicron variant's susceptibility are not yet available.

Importantly, existing public health prevention measures like mask wearing, physical distancing, and avoidance of enclosed spaces, outdoor preference, and hand hygiene that have remained effective against past variants should be just as effective against the omicron variant. The basis of data from previous variant of concerns, people who are vaccinated are likely to have a much lower risk of severe disease from omicron infection. A combination prevention approach of vaccination and public health measures is expected to remain an effective strategy.

unfair that bothers and baffles and the ever-impatient nature of drivers further added to it. It is too hard for those riding two-wheelers to consider not getting into breathing space. They don't feel triumph that comes with convenience of having a two-wheeler in traffic. On other side, there are few swanky drivers who have all the pride to drive-out of showing all other foolish rule followers that they have got it in them to cross line of vehicles and go ahead of many.

What they do with this achievement is unknown given that this adventure of their ends up jeopardizes possibility of traffic opening up. Further, there are streets vendors adding to the

Healthy soil for a healthy life

■ DR BANARSI LAL

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. Presently the soil is under tremendous pressure due to increase in population at an alarming rate and higher demand for food. Problems like deforestation, bad agricultural practices and soil pollution have degraded soil. It has been observed that around 33 per cent of global soils are degraded. Soil is the greatest reservoir of biodiversity. It is the critical component of the natural system and as a vital contributor to the human commonwealth through its contribution to food, water and energy security and as a mitigator of biodiversity loss and climate change. It is the top layer of the earth which is familiar to everybody. It is a finite natural resource. It is non-renewable in nature. Although soil plays an essential role in human livelihood but there is worldwide degradation in soil due its inappropriate management practices, population pressure and inadequate governance over this essential resource. The nutritional value of the food we eat is directly associated with the soil health. Soil high in organic carbon content enables better rainfall infiltration and retention and provides greater resilience to drought. Soil helps in food production, biodiversity and energy maintenance. Soils are vulnerable to carbon loss through degradation but regenerative land management practices can build and restore soil health. Soil is constituted of organic remains, clay and rock particles found on the earth's surface. Soil health is being deteriorated by the unhealthy agricultural practices, deforestation and pollution. There is urgent need to create awareness among the farmers on soil health and technical and scientific advice should be provided to them.

A healthy soil is a living ecosystem in which the dead organic matter forms the base of a food web consisting of microscopic and larger organisms. Soils supply nutrients and water which are vital for plants and are home to organisms that interact with plants. Healthy soils are needed to produce the healthy food and zero hunger. Healthy soil is the key to sustaining life and the adoption of sustainable land management practices are becoming more and more important. It is estimated that natural processes take more than 500 years to form 2 centimeters of topsoil. Soil stores around 10 per cent of the worlds carbon dioxide emissions. Microbial activities controls and manipulates the chemistry of the soil. Living organisms in the soil control water infiltration, mineral density and nutrient cycling. Fungi and bacteria help to break down organic matter in the soil and earthworms digest organic matter, recycle nutrients and make the soil surface richer. In a handful of fertile soil, there are more individual organisms than the total number of human beings that have ever existed on the earth. Although soil plays an essential role for the human livelihoods but there is worldwide increase in the degradation of soil resources due to inappropriate management practices, population pressure driving unsustainable intensification and inadequate governance over this essential resource.

Increase in the soil carbon builds a precious reservoir and helps to offset greenhouse gas emissions. Soil improves our resilience to floods and droughts. It also contributes in the fertility of the soil, the foundation for all land-based natural and agricultural ecosystems which provide a major part of the world's food supply, natural resources and biodiversity. More than 10 million people have abandoned their homelands because of environmental issues including drought, soil erosion, desertification and deforestation. Majority of the known antibiotics originated from soil bacteria including penicillin. Soil pollution affects food security by reducing the crop yield and food quality. Soil holds three times as much carbon as the atmosphere and can help us to meet the challenges of a changing climate. About 815 million people are food insecure and 2 billion people are nutritionally insecure but we can mitigate this through soil. About 95 per cent of our food comes from soil and about 33 per cent of our soils are already degraded. Soil acts as the filter for many contaminants but its buffering capacity is finite. If the latter exceeds then contaminants can seep into the environment and enter in the food chain.

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. 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. Soil conservation programmes are organised by the Government and also Non-Governmental agencies in our country. Major objective of soil conservation is to keep everything in the soil in its place. It manages the soil erosion and process of sedimentation. Soil fertility needs to be restored in order to allow a satisfactory and early return on the capital and labour invested. Most of the soil conservation programmes emphasize on soil degradation than on the top-down approach in recommending and disseminating practices. Soil conservation programmes that aim to reduce soil degradation problems need long-term bottom-up approach. There is urgent need to promote the practices for maintaining the healthy soils. Healthy soils are the solutions of our many problems.

(The author is Dr Banarsi Lal, Scientist and Head, KVK Reasi).

mess. I have nothing against them as long as their stalls don't keep increasing and taking up most space of road meant specifically for vehicles. Another baffling sight is the newly installed streets lights. They shine with so many signals that it can put an adolescent's existential dilemma to shame. Truly they make one wonder at the purposelessness of life with arrows going in all possible directions. I hope that necessary measures would be take for reducing these so that everyone of us can have a pleasant experience on roads.

Mool Raj,
R/o Village Bhagota, Doda.