

BRIDGING AGRI INFRA GAP

In order to bridge the Agriculture Infrastructure gap by empowering agriculture and villages and boosting private investment, the Government of India launched a Central Sector Scheme of financing facility under 'Agriculture Infrastructure Fund'. The Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) is a medium-long term debt financing facility through interest subvention and credit guarantee support on loans for investment in viable projects for post-harvest management infrastructure and community farming assets. It was informed by Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Narendra Singh Tomar in a written reply in Lok Sabha.

Under the scheme, Rs 1 Lakh crore will be provided by banks and financial institutions as loans with interest subvention of 3 per cent per annum and credit guarantee coverage under CGTMSE for loans up to Rs 2 Crores to the eligible beneficiaries include farmers, FPOs, PACS, Marketing Cooperative Societies, SHGs, Joint Liability Groups (JLG), Multipurpose Cooperative Societies, Agri-entrepreneurs, Start-ups, and Central/State agency or Local Body sponsored Public-Private Partnership Projects for creation of post-harvest management infrastructures like Supply chain services including e-marketing platforms, Warehouses, Silos, Pack houses, Assaying units, Sorting & grading units, Cold chains, Logistics facilities, Primary processing centres, Ripening Chambers etc. Community farming assets eligible under Agri Infra Fund includes: Organic inputs production, Bio stimulant production units, Infrastructure for smart and precision agriculture, Projects identified for providing supply chain infrastructure for clusters of crops including export clusters, Projects promoted by Central/State/Local Governments or their agencies under PPP for building community farming assets or post-harvest management projects

Since the inception of the scheme in Aug 2020, loan amounting to Rs. 13681 Crores have been sanctioned for 18321 projects. These sanctioned projects have mobilized an investment of Rs. 27184 crore in agriculture sector. Major projects sanctioned under AIF include 8118 warehouses, 2817 primary processing units, 1936 custom hiring centres, 948 sorting & grading units, 704 cold store projects, 163 assaying units and around 3651 other kinds of post-harvest management projects and community farming assets.

Government is spreading awareness about AIF Schemes by way of sensitising Bankers and other stakeholders through conducting various events, seminars, workshops at various levels to accelerate agriculture infrastructure financing throughout the nook and corner of the country.

Agricultural Marketing Infrastructure (AMI), a sub-scheme of Integrated Scheme for Agricultural Marketing (ISAM) under which assistance is provided for construction/ renovation of godowns/ warehouses in the rural areas in the States to enhance the storage capacity for agriculture produce. AMI is demand driven scheme in which subsidy is provided at the rate of 25 per cent and 33.33 per cent on capital cost of the project based on the category of eligible beneficiary. Assistance under this scheme is available to Individuals, Farmers, Group of farmers/growers, Agri-preneurs, Registered Farmer Produce Organizations (FPOs), Cooperatives, and state agencies etc. The scheme is demand driven. Since 01.04.2001 and up to 31.10.2022, a total of 42079 storage infrastructure projects (Godowns), with storage capacity of 738.34 Lakh MT for beneficiaries including farmers have been assisted under AMI sub-scheme in the country.

National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) scheme, a virtual platform integrating physical wholesale mandis/ markets of different States/ Union Territories (UTs) to facilitate online trading of agriculture and horticulture commodities to enable farmers to realize better remunerative prices for their produce. As on 30th November, 2022, 1260 mandis of 22 States and 03 Union Territories (UTs) have been integrated with e-NAM platform. More than 1.74 crore farmers & 2.3 Lakh traders have been registered on e-NAM platform. The agricultural produce trade with a value of Rs 2.34 lakh crore has been recorded on e-NAM platform. Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH) under which financial assistance for setting up of Post-Harvest Management Infrastructure including cold storage, cold room facilities for horticultural produce @ 35 per cent of the project cost in general areas and 50 per cent in case of hilly and scheduled areas per beneficiary is available. The component is demand/ entrepreneur driven through commercial ventures for which Government assistance is credit linked and back ended. Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY), a Centrally Sponsored Scheme under which the funds are released to the State Governments as Grants-in-Aid on the basis of projects in Agriculture & allied sectors approved in the State Level Sanctioning Committee Meeting (SLSC) headed by the Chief Secretary of the concerned State, which is the empowered body to approve projects under the scheme. In this scheme Sates has flexibility and autonomy in the process of selection, planning, approval and execution projects in agriculture and allied sectors as per their priorities. RKVY is primarily a project oriented scheme, the benefit of which is available to all sections of the farming community.

OFF 'D' CUFF

The virality of an apparently hard-hitting quote on social media “If you don’t come out of this lockdown with a new skill, more knowledge, better health, and fitness, you never lacked time, you lacked discipline” may seem motivational in the first instance and many might have gone into self-introspection but there’s something quite problematic with this idea. For starters, this lockdown period is portrayed as a sabbatical of some kind.

This pandemic lockdown or any kind of unsolicited confinement cannot be subjected to self-imposed diktats of self-improvement. Humans are certainly about constantly reviewing, redefining, and reemerging as an improved version of themselves, however, to ascribe to it an unwarranted level of anxiety for the same is

Cut yourself some slack

not healthy.

Reports are suggesting that confinement of people indoors and insecurity about survival has put a tremendous strain on their mental health and it may emerge as a parallel pandemic of sorts. To add more to the woes, we live in a system that makes us assess our self-worth with how productive we have been. Productivity is so much ingrained in our lives that the line between work and leisure has faded beyond recognition. Even the supposed leisure activities are nothing more than work in themselves.

In this testing time, to add pressure on how we must be ideally spending this ‘time-off’ will do more harm than good. One cannot learn a new skill, gain more knowledge, or undertake steps for self-improvisation if one’s brain is a landmine of chaos and anxiety.

-Rewati Karan

■ G L KHAJURIA

Union territory of Jammu & Kashmir is beset with a land of Gods and Goddesses in the greater part of Himalayan and sub Himalayan region of the Indian landscape. Likewise the shrine Shaktis of Mata Vaishno Devi (Katra) Chandi Maa (Machail), Sarthal Devi (Kishtwar), Pingla (Ramnagar), Mahakali (Bahu Fort), Chichi Mata (Samba), Chanchlo Devi (Basohli), Sarthal Devi (Bani) and many more other sacred Shrines of Devi Maa Shakti. Mal Mata Sukrala Devi occupies its unique and prominent place of devotion. Devi Maa Sukrala is also most reverentially addressed as Jagat Janani, Rajarajswari Mata where devotees Throng in thousand to have holy Darshan, pay obeisance for blessings.

Sukrala or Sukral is a small village located in Billawar in district Kathua. The spot is located amidst dense chir pines forest intermingled with other borad - leaved trees, bushes, shrubs and herbs. The village is located aside river Naaj where a big slab of rock of historic time exist which is having an engraving of Lord Hanuman which is regularly besmeared on every Tuesday and Sunday both by the locals as well as the outsiders who throng over this sacred spot. Sukrala Mata shrine is reachable by road around 80 Km from Jammu and about 30 Km from district headquarters. It is situated at a height of about 4000 ft from mean sea level (MSL) and commands an idyllic view of mountains and cliffs all around of the vicinity of Shakti shrine. Both roads from Jammu and Kathua are blacktopped and are conveniently approachable by regular buses, private or hired vehicles. The sacred shrine from other destination, Like Bani Basohli and other areas of the country are also reachable through these routes. Through legends and historical record, the name of Sukrala is derived from Sharikalaya, the abode of Sharika which though, of course is another revered name of Mata Sharda. The historical records reflect the narration as to the origin of the sacred spot of Mata

Sukrala Devi. The story goes that used to live a renowned saint at Basohli who had received his education in Kashmir and Kashi there he visited many shrines including those of Shri Amarnath, Sharda, Hari Partvati etc. He was a strong devotee of Gods and Goddesses. During, his arduous penance and devotion, the Mother Goddess was very pleased and so he had holy dream. When asked by Mata ji as to what he wanted. The devotee prayed that he wants that she should be at his place so that with locals can be relieved of the pains and agony and are blessed by her Shakti. Mataji granted him the boon that she will appear at the time of his grandson and so the devotee disclosed to the locals. The devoted Brahmin had number of sons amongst whom two most pious and learned were by name Amolak Ram and Mahadev Shiv Nandan. They preferred and adopted Billawar and Basohli as their residence.

Exactly in the time of Mahadev (Shiv Nandan), a Shila (stone slab) miraculously started emerging out from a spring at Sukrala. The people of the area only started realizing the prophecy of the grandfather as had earlier been disclosed. They (the inhabitants) accepted it as an emblem of the goddess and as such started worshipping it regularly. With the passage of time, a prince from Chamba by name Madho Singh exiled by his elder brother was wandering desperately and reached Sukral area. The story further goes that Sukrala village was having dense forest with abundant wild animals and birds, the prince started hunting wild animals and birds but with the passing days, the prince fell seriously ill. Despite application of all treatments, the prince could never be recovered. Ultimately, as suggested by the locals, he approached Shiv Nandan who had a good spiritual reputation and so he asked one of the devotee (Chila in local parlance) of the goddess by name Hira Thakur to dance (locally spoken as Chauki) and when the devotee (disciple of goddess got into trance (a Shakti dance), He was asked to let know the

malady of the prince Madho Singh. As a result, the disciple stated that goddess was very annoyed as the prince had hunted many animals and birds of the forest. Further, the disciple told the prince that he would not recover unless a temple of the goddess is built with material from Chamba. The exiled prince was perplexed as how he could manage to build the temple of Mata for he was ill and for away from Chamba, his native place. He expressed his inability to both Shiv Nandan and Hira Thakur. But the dancing devotee (disciple) replied exiled prince to proceed Chamba immediately and nothing on forwardness would come in his way by grace of the Shakti of Mal Mata.

A few days later, the Prince was well and after vowing before Mal Mata footed towards Chamba, while way towards the desired destination, he came to know en route, about the demise of his brother who had exiled him. Reaching Chamba, all the inhabitants of the vicinity embraced the prince and accepted him as the ruling prince. In due course of time, the prince became obsessed with the routine care taking and administration of his kingdom and in the process, he forgot the promise he had made before Sukrala Mata to build a temple there. One night, when the prince was comfortably sleeping, he felled down from the bed and remembered the promise he had made before Mal Mata and so as such he resolved to make good the promise. On the next day, the prince started for Sukral with a large entourage carrying all short of building material. The temple was as such constructed and an image of Mahishsurmardini was installed in the spacious temple Chamber in later stages a temple was constructed by Raja Brajraj Singh, son of Ranjit Singh Dev around 1755 AD and so such the promise made by the prince redeemed. Later on lot of springs and baolies were constructed in and around the temple complex.

Mal Mata Sukrala Devi is very benign goddess who fulfills the wishes of his

true devotees. According to a popular belief, all wishes to the extent of the birth of child, securing Job for livelihood and for the curing of chronic diseases are fulfilled by the shrine Shakti of Mal Mata. The image of Mata is a Shila (Piece of rock). It is seated on a brass lion with a silver mounted head. And in its backdrop is a figure of Mahishasurmardini (Maa Durga) standing on Mahishasur. The goddess is chaturbhujia, the goddess with four arms with a sword in one of her hands. The eyes are of silver inlaid with dark vermilion. Lord Vishnu is shown reeling under the hoods of Sheshing with Maa Lakshmi pressing lords lotus - like feel. From the navel spring a lotus, on which is seated a four headed Brahma and a five - faced Shiva and the lord Ganesh. There are two images of the lion in front of the temple complex. Mal Mata Sukrala Devi is an important Shrine being revered and venerated by almost all over the state, particularly being a Kul Devi. The devotee across the state also visit this sacred Shrine of Shakti around the year, particularly during Navratras on both the occasions. There are huge Bhandaras and Langars arranged by the locals and other devotees and the social activists. The attention of the government is invited for the up - grading this sacred spot so that more and more devotees visit the shrine so as to boost temple tourism in Jammu region, apart from providing facelift to Billawar town. Beside, afforestation works need to be invigorated so that the area is enhanced. Mal Mata Sukrala Devi and Mata Balasundri atop Billawar and Kathua boundary are both sacred Shaktis in Billawar which are warranted to be brought under J&K Shrine Board so that such sacred Shrine are given their due share of prominence in so far as the sanctity and spirituality of the area is concerned. All such factors in unison promote tourism of the state in general. In this context Dr Nirmal singh, our Deputy Chief Minister has time and again emphasized for the development of both these shrines apart from other such shrines located elsewhere in Jammu region. To cap these all, this will invigorate the economy of the state in a bigger way.

Historic victory for Congress in Himachal

■ OMKAR DATTATRAY

There was a tough contest between BJP and congress in Himachal Pradesh in the polls and now there is neck to neck position revealed by the counting of votes. As this write up is being written the position is not clear as to which party among the two contenders to power will be in a position to form the government. The congress is leading in 35 constituencies as per the news of the election commission and since 35 is the magic number required to form the government and the congress is near this number and thus there is possibility that congress may to able to form the government. The election results may be significant for the congress as it is for the first time after the assembly elections of 2018 that the congress is trying to muster the magic number to form the government in this small state of India. Since the tally of votes between two parties of the BJP and congress is very near and so it cannot be precisely said which party will stole the show and form government. In the final analysis it is the independent candidates who can play a dominant role in the government formation in Himachal Pradesh and it is the independent candidates who can be game changers and can be the king makers and both the party's will look towards the independents and take their support to gain the power and be saddled in the seat of power. It is good that congress has gained a lot and consolidated its position in HP and there is at the time of writing this article 39 leads to congress and 26 leads to BJP and this seems to be sign

of victory for congress. As the position will become clear soon the congress seems to be set to wrest power from formidable BJP in Shimla and this will be a historical victory for congress and this will be a feather in the head of congress president Kharga as the congress seems to be going to gain upper hand in the polls as the congress may be in a position to gain power. The congress seems to be creating history by gaining margin in the counting of votes. There is very less margin in the voting percentage between the BJP and congress as both have somewhat 43 per cent margins. This is obvious that in the tough and neck to neck contest between the two parties it seems that congress will in the end sweep the elections in Himachal Pradesh. It is clear that the leads will consolidate and give a definite edge to the congress in the elections as revealed by the counting. The BJP at this point of time is lagging behind and the party is now banking upon the independent candidates for its distant chances of forming government. BJP is leading in 26 constituencies and congress is leading in 39 seats and this in fact is showing that congress may wrest power from BJP at the end. It was said of the polls in HP that the election was a three cornered contest but in actual practice it was a two cornered contest between the BJP and congress as the AAP is nowhere in the race and it seems to be more or less clear that congress may form the government in the state surprising all political pundits. It can be said with certainty that the margins are small but still congress can form government in Himachal Pradesh despite

the fact that that the margin of leads is very small and even then the congress will form government in Himachal Pradesh. It obvious that the anti incumbency has played its part and has created havoc in the elections and there is every likelihood that congress will be able to gain power in the state. But inspite of the difference in the lead margins is very small between the two parties, but still congress will be in a position to form government after a long time. The Modi factor has not worked in Himachal Pradesh like in Gujarat and congress will definitely form government in Himachal Pradesh surprising all. The AAP got a severe drubbing as it failed to score even a seat and all talk of three cornered contest was sham and in fact in Himachal Pradesh polls it was a two cornered direct contest between the BJP and congress. However in the end there are chances that congress may be able to gain power in the state surprising all the poll forecasters and poll Pundits. The tall claims of the AAP have failed to have any effect on the voters and the party failed to even open its score. The Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Maan and Chief of AAP Kejriwal could not influence and impact voters and the camping of Punjab Chief Minister did not pay dividends to AAP and the party was disseminated from the state and the tall claims of the AAP leaders proved hollow and shallow and the party failed to register its presence. In any case the election battle was between the BJP and congress and it is the congress which has achieved a historical victory in Himachal Pradesh and proved the poll pundits and psychologists wrong.

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

Patel commanded BJP's top leadership's trust

■ VINOD CHANDRASHEKHAR DIXIT

Bhupendra Patel fondly addressed as 'Dada' by his supporters took oath as the 18th Chief Minister of Gujarat for second consecutive time, which was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in Gujarat and many other top leaders. Patel was administered the oath as the 18th Chief Minister by Governor Acharya Devvrat in Gandhinagar. Bhupendra Patel had in 2017 won the seat with a huge margin of 1.17 lakh votes and BJP had announced that Patel will be given the top post again after this election. Patel has credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for it and said the people of the state have rejected the anti-national elements in the Assembly election. BJP has won Gujarat under the leadership of Bhupendra Patel. Patel is a dedicated BJP party worker who rose through the ranks of state politics from the municipality level. It was a surprise choice for the top post when the BJP decided to implement a regime change, replacing the entire ministry a year before the elections. Patel has managed to remain away from the spotlight, shun controversy and, largely, get the work done - in other words, prove the man the party wanted him to be in the run-up to the elections. The BJP's seventh consecutive Assembly poll win in Gujarat is its biggest since the founding of this state in 1960. Patel scripted history by winning Ghatlodia constituency by a record margin of about 1,92,000 votes. Patel is known as BJP's silent troubleshooter in Gujarat who has his unique way with the people that he can take everyone along. In just one year, he has solved a lot of problems without any publicity. Gujarat is the home state of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah and a big win in the state is what the BJP expected. has rightly said that every person of Gujarat now has a strong feeling of ownership in transforming the state. "Looking at the remarkable progress over the last 20 years, the inner voice in every Gujarati proudly proclaims 'Aa Gujarat Mein Banavyuche'. The saffron party, which has not lost a single Assembly

election in the state since 1995, is all set for a landslide victory and has been leading in 156 seats out of 182 Assembly seats. While it has been in power for the last 27 years, the party has never won an election with such a massive mandate. While addressing a press conference after the legislative party meeting, Patel said the implementation of promises made in the BJP's poll manifesto, including the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code, will be the priority of his government. Bhupendra Patel is, however, not a new face in politics and has served as the Ahmadabad municipal Councilor. Patel, who holds a diploma in civil engineering, also served as the chairman of the Standing Committee of Ahmadabad Municipal Corporation and Ahmadabad Urban Development Authority (AUDA).

The Patidars are a dominant caste in Gujarat, with a sizable control over electoral votes and a stronghold over education, real estate, and cooperative sectors. Before that, Patel was also the standing committee chairman of Ahmadabad Municipal Corporation (AMC), the largest urban local body in Gujarat, between 2010 and 2015. He is also a trustee at Patidar organizations Sardar Dham and Vishwa Umiya Foundation. The Patidars are a dominant caste in Gujarat with a sizeable control over the electoral votes. The community also dominates the political economy with a stronghold over education, realty and cooperative sectors. The high points of Patel's tenure included the Narmada waters reaching the farthest end of Kutch, the signing up of a contract with Vedanta-Foxconn for a prestigious semiconductor facility, Gujarat winning the bid to host the National Games for the first time, and getting to host the Defence Expo - all seen as having the blessings of the Modi government at the Centre. The party under Bhupendra Patel's leadership won 156 seats which secured a straight second term for Bhupendra Patel as the Chief Minister. Further, criticised as 'puppet Chief Minister' by the opposition, Bhupendra Patel broke the 2002 record of Narendra Modi in BJP's historic win in Gujarat Assembly Election 2022, Bhupendra Patel will be the best Chief Minister of Gujarat.

PROGRESSING J&K

Admn rejuvenating agriculture sector with multi-pronged approach

J&K among top five States/UTs of country in terms of farm income

J&K Administration took several measures to rejuvenate Agriculture and allied sector by filling credit gaps, diversification, high-density plantation, building storage capacity, market linkages and extension services. The continuous deliberations among eminent agricultural scientists, policy planners, policy makers, academia and farmers led to the formulation of a futuristic roadmap for rapid growth in agriculture and allied sector. Dairy, Livestock, Poultry and Fisheries are becoming engines of high growth, and Government is doing massive efforts for creating awareness amongst the farmers to tap its tremendous potential and benefit. In the last two years, government has come out with a viable strategy to achieve the historic task of ensuring higher incomes to farmers. J&K Government is taking steps to exploit untapped opportunities offered by horticulture and ensuring end-to-end approach from plantation to post-harvest management and processing to marketing in order to increase the quality production and exports. Transformation in the agriculture and allied sectors is not just about productivity but also about food security, empowerment of farmers and prosperity of small farming families. The Government is determined to translate the benefits of growth into the financial security of farmers. UT Government is providing as many benefits to the agriculture sector as available to those in the manufacturing sector, like, easy access to credit, infrastructure, pre and post harvest facilities, covering risks & uncertainties and various interventions and schemes for the benefit of farmers. Notably, the UT of J&K is now among the top five States/UTs in terms of farm income with a monthly income of Rs 18,918 per farmer. A renewed thrust is also been given to organic farming to bring about a paradigm shift in agrarian policy, rural prosperity and improving the incomes and the quality of life of the farmers.