> "Without peace, all other dreams vanish and are reduced to ashes."
>
> -Jawaharlal Nehru

CHECK ON NARCO-TRAFFICKING

Narco-trafficking, the illegal trade of narcotics across borders, remains one of the most pressing challenges for countries around the world. The consequences of narcotics trafficking are wide-ranging, affecting public health, safety, national security, and the economy. To effectively control narco-trafficking, a multi-faceted approach involving law enforcement, international cooperation, preventive measures, and socio-economic reforms is essential. The backbone of combating narco-trafficking is a robust law enforcement framework. Police forces and specialized agencies need to have the necessary tools, training, and resources to curb the trade. This includes enhancing border security, surveillance technologies, and intelligence sharing between various agencies, both at the national and international levels. In many countries, drug cartels operate with near-military capabilities, and combating them requires state-of-the-art equipment and skilled personnel. Anti-narcotics agencies should be empowered to act swiftly and decisively, conducting undercover operations, sting operations, and tracking cross-border movements. A strong legal framework is equally important. Drug-related offenses should carry stringent penalties to deter traffickers, but there must also be mechanisms to ensure fair trials and the protection of human rights. Additionally, asset forfeiture laws should be used to seize the wealth generated by illegal drug trades, making it more difficult for traffickers to continue operating. Since narco-trafficking is a transnational problem, international collaboration is crucial. Drug trafficking often involves multiple countries in both production and transit phases. For instance, Afghanistan and Colombia are major producers of illicit drugs, while countries in Southeast Asia, the Americas, and Europe serve as key transit points. Multilateral efforts, such as those led by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and regional organizations like Interpol, are critical for tackling the supply chain of narcotics.

Countries must work together on intelligence sharing, joint operations, and the harmonization of drug control laws. The Paris Pact Initiative and the Bali Process are examples of international collaborations aimed at curbing the illegal drug trade. Furthermore, drug trafficking syndicates often fund armed groups or terrorists. Therefore, controlling narco-trafficking is not only about stopping the flow of drugs but also about reducing organized crime and insurgencies.

Efforts to curb narco-trafficking must also focus on reducing demand for illegal drugs. Drug abuse, particularly addiction, drives the market for narcotics. Governments should invest in awareness campaigns, educational programs, and community support to educate the public about the dangers of drug abuse. Treatment and rehabilitation programs for addicts should be more accessible, aiming to help individuals break free from addiction and reduce the overall demand.

The fight against narco-trafficking requires a balanced and integrated approach. While law enforcement and international cooperation play a significant role in cutting off the supply, demand reduction and alternative livelihood programs can diminish the incentive for illegal trade. The collaboration between governments, local communities, international organizations, and law enforcement agencies is crucial in ensuring a sustainable solution to the global issue of narcotics trafficking.

Urban Pollution and its Management

■ DR. BANARSI LAL

Every year 2nd of December is celebrated as the National Pollution Control Day to raise awareness on pollution and its hazardous effects. This day reminds us to take action against the pollution. On this day we also pay tributes to those who lost their lives in the Bhopal Gas Tragedy in 1984. This day highlights the urgent need to reduce pollution, promote sustainable practices and safeguard natural resources for future generations. With a population of over one billion, India supports around 17.84 per cent of world's population on 2.4 per cent of world's land resulting in a paucity of resources that jeopardises growth in the long run. 34 per cent of the Indian population live in the urban areas. It is estimated that by 2030 about half of the Indian population will be residing in urban areas. This rapid pace of urbanization is already being accompanied by air and water pollution, water supply, sewage disposal, municipal waste, transport, lack of open landscaped spaces etc. Most of these problems arise due to unplanned development in cities leading to higher use of natural resources such as land and water. In most cases consensus is not made as to which challenges are more important and how to mitigate them. We all need to have the awareness on India's environmental challenges. Presently urban air pollution is a major issue in both the developing and developed countries across the globe. Increasing population and vehicles in the urban areas have resulted in severe air pollution which ultimately is deteriorating our environment and health. Transport, domestic, commercial and industrial activities mostly contribute to urban air pollution. Urban development in India is going through a very dynamic stage

The urban areas have been expanding exponentially by encroaching the surrounding agricultural lands and forests from the last few decades. Urban areas harbour a variety of habitats such as water-bodies, parks, gardens, forests etc. We observe that urban areas have old monuments and old trees. Now-a-days our cities have millions of vehicles, ever expanding roads and spewing out immense pollution. People are migrating from rural areas to the urban areas and these people carry their poverty along with them to the cities which gets perpetuated in urban areas. These rural people migrate to the cities in search of employment and finally want to settle down in the cities. Urban areas have their own limitations as they too have limited resources. With the increasing urbanization and demand for more houses, transportation etc. does urban forestry today stand a chance? The answer may be yes. With the increase in population the demand for wood has also been increased resulting in the fast degeneration of forests and villages woodlots. Presently India has only 11% of the land area under close forest cover. There can be severe environmental crisis as we cut more trees than we plant every year. Although barren lands are mostly in rural areas but we have a better scope for planting trees in urban areas. Our urban areas need more natural vegetation to check the increasing environmental pollution by purifying the air and improve our microclimate. In cities pollution is very high due to emission of harmful gases produced by the automobiles, factories, sewage etc. The towering buildings in the cities prevent the free circulation of air, absorb a lot of heat and thus increase the atmospheric temperature. Noise pollution affects the peaceful living in the cities and accelerates the sickness among the people. The pollution in cities can be controlled by planting trees in urban areas as the greenery in the cities helps to sustain natural ecosystem and acts as buffer zones against the pollution. These green areas can also provide habitats for a variety of animals and birds and act as rest places for the hectic life styles of urban people.

Tree planting in urban areas is easy because of protection of livestock, availability of water, awareness among the literates' people etc. Water plays the critical role for the trees growth right from planting. Roof top water harvesting, proper water management and recycling of water including that of utilization of sewage and effluents and other untapped sources can be recommended for growing the trees in urban areas. Different trees species can be recommended according to the needs of the people. If a river flows through the city then the ecological and land scape value of the river need to be studied and analyzed. The River Front Development along with appropriate tree species add to the beauty and health of the cities. Selection of tree species for industrial areas is dependent on the nature of industry. It is necessary to select tall evergreen trees so as to reduce the wind velocity around the chemical factories. Adaptability of tree species to hazardous gases and particulates should be the primary criterion followed by the tolerance of effluent water. Species like Neem, Eucalyptus, Mulberry, Guava, Jamun, Ber and Bel can bear Sulphur Dioxide toxicity. In areas having fluoride pollution tree species such as Cashew, Amaltas Casurina, Peepal, Banyan and Jackfruit can be grown. In Cement factories and thermal power plants areas trees like Peepal, Banyan, Neem, tamarind, Pride of India, Oak, Arjun, Teak etc. can be grown. In areas where there is emission of Carbon Dioxide and smoke trees such as Bougainvillea, Shishum, Drumstick, Ashok and Neem can be grown. When pollution is not a serious concern in the area then selection of trees can be done on the basis of rate of growth, utility and flowering habits. People generally visit parks and other recreational sites to relax. The trees having spreading branches with colourful flowers are preferred for such areas. Trees such as Cassias, Bottle brush, Gulmohar, Putravanti, Banyan and most of ornamental trees can be selected for parks. Trees in parks should be planted at a wider distance and maintained with proper training and pruning. Medicinal plants help to cure the common ailments but unfortunately they are vanishing fastly. There is need to create awareness among the people about the scientific use of medicinal plants and to conserve them to make use of Ayurveda popular. Medicinal plants such as Aonla, Asparagus, Cinnamon, Neem, Jamun, Pomegranate, Tamarind etc. can be grown in the herbal gardens. For planting along the roads, the tree species should grow straight with medium canopy. Hardy, evergreen, deep rooted, flowering trees instead of fruit and other valuable species should be preferred. Tree species such as Coral tree, Protea, Plumeria, Raintree and Narra are preferred in these areas. Strong and deep-rooted trees should be preferred in these areas so that they can be protected from fast winds. Many times we observe that trees alongside the roads are uprooted because of fast winds. Proper planning is necessary to facilitate water infiltration around the trees. Fruit trees such as Mango, Sapota, Lemon, Ber, Fig, Apple, Papaya, Guava etc. are preferred in residential premises. Trees such as Bottle brush, Bakul, Champaka, Exorta night Jessamine etc. can beautify our surroundings. Promotion of fruit trees cultivation can also motivate the people to plant more trees and take proper care. Recommended doses of insecticides-pesticides and fertilizers can be used for the utmost care of trees.

In urban areas we generally grow trees and plants in our houses or institutions but now-a-days this is not necessary that we will find open spaces for the plantation in these areas. Multistoried buildings and housing complexes have reduced greenery in the urban areas as apartment complexes do not always offer space to grow trees. We should not despair over this matter and need to find solutions. Now concept of urban agriculture has been emerged through which we can use our roofs and balconies of our buildings for plantation. We can use pots, old discarded buckets, drums, trays etc. for plantation at the roofs of our residential buildings. Besides ornamental plants, vegetables can also be grown at our rooftops. For a good rooftop garden we must waterproof the place and should have proper drainage systems. If we do not water proof the place although our plants may not suffer it may harm our buildings. Seepage can occur in walls which further can damage the buildings. The water on the rooftop should not stagnate at one place and it should have suitable outlets. Many people in the urban areas are often keen to plant trees at their homes but they don't get the proper guidelines and planting material. They can seek the technical guidelines from the agricultural universities, agricultural institutions and concerned department. Print media and television too can play an important role for creating awareness on trees plantations in the urban areas. The NGOs and Municipal Corporations can also help to motivate the urban people in this direction. There is need to make the eco-clubs who can encourage the people in planting trees. Together we can create a safe and healthy future for everyone.

(The writer is Chief Scientist and Head of KVK Reasi)

What is effect of strategies aimed at combating HIV/AIDS?

■ SURJIT SINGH FLORA

With the aim of neutralizing the extremely deadly attack of AIDS at the global level and expressing the commitment to create a healthy world, the United Nations announced the celebration of 'World AIDS Day' on December 1, 1988. 2024 Theme: "Take the rights path: My health, my right!" Today, marking its 35th anniversary, we must assess the extent of success in preventing this epidemic and mitigating its impact.

The HIV virus causes AIDS, a condition that weakens the immune system. AIDS primarily spreads through an infected person's bodily fluids, especially during unprotected sex, affecting all individuals regardless of boundaries, races, colors, cultures, or beliefs. Both heterosexual and gay individuals can contract it, and women may be more prone to infection than men because of their larger surface area and higher moisture content in the genital area. The AIDS bacterium struggles when exposed to the weather.

In 2023, the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) estimated that 3.14 million individuals were living with HIV/AIDS in India. India has the third-largest number of people living with HIV/AIDS globally; however, its prevalence rate is lower than that of many other nations.

HIV can infect a child born to a pregnant woman, but if the child maintains constant contact with a doctor and adheres to medical advice, they can prevent infection. Now, let's discuss this virus. When it manifests as AIDS, the human body naturally possesses the ability to combat various diseases. It's as if the body has its own security forces, ready to defend against any disease.

The virus attacks these same security soldiers and gradually destroys them. When the security soldiers of the body are almost gone or their number decreases so much that they are not able to fight any disease, then a person becomes infected with many types of diseases. We refer to this condition as AIDS, also known as 'Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome.'

Myths about AIDS: A lack of awareness and accurate information has led to numerous misconceptions in society, making AIDS a significant social, economic, and health issue. Many individuals and families are facing this tough situation and enduring hardship. The breakdown of families and loss of jobs makes this virus particularly lethal and harmful. HIV/AIDS is a communicable disease, and there are four main reasons for its spread. Besides these, activities like cooking in the same pot, sharing a fork, living with the same utensils, kissing, shaking hands, hugging, sleeping together, sitting or reading together, using each other's clothes, working together, and travelling together do not contribute to its transmission. HIV doesn't spread easily; if those affected are open about it, they can live without undue stress.

The individual, unaware of the circumstances, becomes overwhelmed with self-loathing. He begins to assign blame to his fate or himself for this virus, which leads him to feel disconnected from society. Society is also aware of HIV. It perceives the individual impacted by it as a villain, a criminal, a scoundrel, a prostitute, or a person devoid of character, which is entirely unacceptable. It is important for everyone to recognize that HIV is a health issue that can impact anyone. Accurate information, along with appropriate medical guidance and treatment, is essential to avoid or prevent its spread.

The symptoms of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) can differ significantly from person to person, and their appearance is influenced by various factors, including the stage of the infection. HIV advances through three primary stages: acute HIV infection, clinical latency (chronic HIV), and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). This provides a summary of the onset and timing of symptoms in each stage:

1. Acute HIV Infection (also known as Primary HIV Infection or Acute Retroviral Syndrome)

The onset of symptoms typically occurs 2 to 4 weeks following exposure to the virus.

Symptoms frequently mimic those of the flu or other viral infections and may encompass: Elevated body temperature, Enlarged lymph nodes , Throat discomfort , Rash, Muscle and joint discomfort , Migraine , Loose stools , Shedding pounds , Night sweats and Exhaustion

The duration of these symptoms can range from a few days to several weeks, and they are frequently confused with other viral infections. This phase exhibits a significant level of infectiousness owing to the elevated concentrations of the virus present in the bloodstream.

2. Clinical Latency (Chronic HIV)

Timeline: This stage may persist for several years, frequently extending to 10 years or more without treatment, and potentially even longer with effective antiretroviral therapy (ART).

Symptoms: At this stage, the virus remains active, though it reproduces at minimal levels. A significant number of individuals show no symptoms or experience only mild ones. Certain individuals might encounter:
· Persistent generalized lymphadenopathy (enlarged lymph nodes)
· Frequent respiratory infections
· Additional mild or non-specific symptoms

If left untreated, the virus will ultimately compromise the immune system, advancing to the subsequent stage.

3. Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS)

Timeline: Usually happens when the CD4 cell count falls below 200 cells/mm³ or when specific opportunistic infections or cancers arise.

Symptoms: This stage is characterized by significant damage to the immune system and encompasses a variety of symptoms and conditions, including:
· Quick weight reduction
· Recurrent fever or excessive night sweats
· Intense and unaccounted fatigue
· Extended swelling of the lymph nodes in the armpits, groin, or neck
· Diarrhea persisting for over a week
· Lesions in the mouth, anus, or genital area
Pneumonia
· Red, brown, pink, or purplish spots on or beneath the skin or within the mouth, nose, or eyelids
· Cognitive decline, mood disorders, and various neurological conditions

At this stage, individuals are particularly vulnerable to opportunistic infections and specific cancers, which significantly contribute to morbidity and mortality in AIDS.

Overview

Acute HIV infection: Symptoms typically begin 2-4 weeks post-exposure and mimic those of a flu-like illness.

Clinical latency: Symptoms may be subtle or absent, persisting for several years.

AIDS: When the immune system is greatly weakened, severe symptoms and opportunistic infections can arise.

Timely identification and intervention with antiretroviral therapy (ART) play a vital role in handling HIV infection, enhancing quality of life, and minimizing the likelihood of transmission to others. Consistent testing and medical attention are crucial for individuals at risk of or living with HIV.

Treatment Centres: Both government and significant non-government hospitals have ICTC centres, where anyone can access information about viral infections. These institutes provide counseling. Additionally, all large government hospitals feature ART centres, where they periodically examine the sick individual and initiate medication if the CD4 falls below the recommended level. Other AIDS groups are also helping continue awareness efforts. Anyone may contact these groups for factual information.

Summary: We can easily combat the lethal impact of HIV/AIDS. Accurate information about the virus, ongoing medical advice, access to nutritious food, facing challenges with determination, and maintaining hope for the future are key tools to prevent the deadly impact of AIDS.

Note: This information is intended solely for educational purposes and should not be interpreted as medical advice. If you think you might have been exposed to HIV or are showing symptoms, it is crucial to seek advice from a healthcare professional for accurate diagnosis, testing, and treatment. Timely identification and intervention are essential for effectively managing HIV. It is essential to consult a qualified healthcare provider for advice on any medical condition or treatment.

(The author is a veteran journalist and freelance writer based in Brampton)

Silent Tears of Society: The Cries We Refuse to Hear

■ MAHADEEP SINGH JAMWAL

My poignant reflection on the "silent tears of society" is a call to awareness and empathy. It captures the essence of hidden suffering, those struggles that go unnoticed and unaddressed amidst the clamor of our fast-paced lives. To truly progress, society must measure its success not just by wealth or advancements, but by its ability to uplift the most vulnerable.

Beneath the glittering surface of progress and the quiet corners of our bustling lives lies an unsettling truth-a silent symphony of pain, neglect, and resilience that too often escapes our notice. These are the silent tears of society, a haunting testimony to the struggles we choose to ignore, the anguish we fail to acknowledge. These tears narrate stories of despair and quiet fortitude, drowned out by the clamor of indifference. They remind us of a world that glorifies success. They are a haunting reminder of a world that glorifies success yet turns away from suffering, a society that measures its triumphs in wealth but remains bankrupt in empathy.

Have ever we imagined the hidden pain and cries we refuse to hear? What is more heartbreaking than suffering in silence? Behind every silent tear lies a story waiting to be heard. These are not just stories; they are mirrors reflecting the cracks in our society. In every corner of society, countless lives are overshadowed by indifference. Picture the woman trapped in an abusive relationship, bound by societal judgment that forbids her from seeking help. Visualize the child whose dreams of education, whose laughter fades under the crushing weight of hunger and poverty. Envision the elderly, who gave their all to society, once the cornerstone of their families, now abandoned, their days marked by solitude and longing for a visit, a hug, a kind word. Consider the plight of the laborer, his hands worn and back bent from relentless toil, returning each evening to a home that offers no solace. Picture a mother skipping meals so her child can eat, her sacrifice unseen and unspoken. These lives exist all around us, like faint shadows on the edge of our bright, vibrant self-contained worlds. If progress is truly our goal, it cannot be defined by skyscrapers or technological marvels alone. It must be measured by our ability to see, to hear, and to act. Empathy must be the cornerstone of our civilization-a bridge between privilege and pain. Let us not turn away. Let us listen to the silent tears of society and let their haunting stories compel us to build a world where no pain goes unnoticed, no voice unheard, and no life unvalued. These stories are not rare exceptions; they are woven into the fabric of our lives. A homeless man huddled against the winter cold, invisible to the warm crowds rushing by, a refugee mother clutching her child, fleeing war only to face rejection at every border, a young student bullied for being different, retreating into a world of loneliness. Each tear is a silent scream-a plea for recognition, for compassion, for change. Yet, these voices are lost in the cacophony of a society too consumed by its own ambitions to pause and listen.

How did we become so blind? How did we, a society built on the ideals of community and care, grow so indifferent? The answer lies in the barriers we have constructed-of judgment, stigma, and apathy. We live in a world where vulnerability is shamed and asking for help is seen as weakness. Victims are often blamed for their plight, their suffering dismissed as self-inflicted. And so, they retreat into silence, their pain growing heavier with each ignored cry.

The consequences of ignoring these tears are far-reaching. A society that fails to care for its most vulnerable is a society that risks losing its soul. Neglect breeds mistrust, fuels inequality, and sows the seeds of unrest. When we silence the cries of the suffering, we allow broken spirits to fester, perpetuating cycles of pain and despair. The child we ignore today may grow into an adult who has lost faith in humanity. The voices we dismiss now may one day rise in anger, demanding what could have been offered in compassion.

The silent tears of society are not just a result of individual neglect but also systemic failure. When politicians prioritize self-interest over public welfare and NGOs falter in their responsibilities, the most vulnerable are left without hope. Politicians, as the architects of public policy and custodians of societal welfare, hold a profound responsibility in addressing these tears. Yet, the neglect of this duty often exacerbates the plight of the vulnerable. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), often heralded as the champions of change, lacks accountability and have misplaced priorities. The proliferation of NGOs in recent years has diluted their credibility, with some becoming mere vehicles for personal or financial gain rather than genuine instruments of change. Empathy is the strength that holds society together. But empathy cannot function in isolation; it must be accompanied by accountability. When we choose to listen to the silent tears of society, we choose to build bridges instead of walls; we choose to heal instead of harm. As we walk through life, let us remember: every person we pass has a story we don't know. Every smile may hide a tear. Let us not turn away from the whispers of pain.

It doesn't take much to make a difference. A kind word, a listening ear, a small act of generosity-these are the seeds of change. It begins with each of us. Let us not wait for tragedies to awaken our humanity. Let us look beyond the surface, truly see the people around us, and respond to their silent cries. In the words of Kahlil Gibran, "The most massive characters are seared with scars." Let us honor those scars, acknowledge the pain, and transform society into a place where no tear goes unnoticed and no voice goes unheard. For in every silent tear, there is a call-not just for change, but for humanity to rise above indifference and reclaim its heart.