RAIL AND ROAD **INFRASTRUCTURE**

he development of rail and road infrastructure is pivotal to the economic growth and social transformation of any country. In India, with its vast geographical expanse and growing population, the need for robust and efficient transportation networks is more pressing than ever. Rail and road infrastructure projects, particularly in the context of India's ongoing modernization, are designed to improve connectivity, ease of movement, and economic prosperity.

The Indian Railways, one of the largest and busiest rail networks in the world, plays a crucial role in transporting passengers and freight across the country. As part of India's push for economic modernization, several large-scale rail infrastructure projects are underway to enhance capacity, reduce travel time, and improve

One of the most ambitious projects is the Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC), which aims to create separate routes for freight transport, ensuring faster and more efficient delivery of goods. The Eastern and Western DFCs are expected to reduce congestion on passenger lines and increase freight handling capacity, boosting trade and commerce. Additionally, the Bullet Train Project connecting Mumbai and Ahmedabad, initiated by the National High-Speed Rail Corporation Limited (NHSRCL), promises to revolutionize travel in the country by offering worldclass, high-speed rail services. The bullet train will drastically cut travel time between the two cities, enhancing connectivity and promoting business opportunities. To ensure better connectivity between major cities, India is investing in modernizing and electrifying its existing rail network. The Electrification of Railway Lines project aims to replace the traditional diesel engines with electric-powered trains, contributing to cleaner and more sustainable energy use. Moreover, the introduction of semi-high-speed trains like the Vande Bharat Express is set to provide faster and more comfortable travel options, thus promoting regional development and tourism. In addition to passenger services, the Railway Station Redevelopment project is a step toward improving the passenger experience by upgrading stations with modern amenities, enhanced accessibility, and world-class facilities. These improvements aim to make the stations more efficient, clean, and safe for travelers. Parallel to rail developments, India is undertaking significant road infrastructure projects to improve intra-city and inter-state connectivity. The Bharatmala Parivojana, one of the largest road projects in India, focuses on the construction of National Highways (NHs), Expressways, and Border Roads. The program is designed to enhance connectivity between states, reduce congestion, and boost economic activity in both urban and

A key component of Bharatmala is the development of Expressways such as the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway.

Dr Ambedkar Row most unfortunate

OMKAR DATTATRAY

rt is most unfortunate ,untenable , distressing as well as disturbing that the futile issue of Dr Ambedkar has rocked both the Lok Sabha and Raja Sabha .This unnecessary controversy has consumed enough precious time of the august parliamentarians and it should not have been raised .Instead the honorable MP's should take people's as well as developmental issues and discuss ,debate and legislate on the important issues concerning the people and abstain from raising frivolous, futile and useless issues and so save the time of the parliamentarians which they can use for productive and purposeful business .But alas! It is not so in our parliament today and thus the precious time of the parliament is frittered in useless controversies. Both the treasury benches particularly the BJP and the opposition party such as the grand old party Congress is busy in raking useless and frivolous issues only to gain limelight and photo captions and advertisements .This time BJP and Congress are leveling charges and counter-charges about the architect of the constitution and the messiah of the dalits ,downtrodden ,lower castes and backwards . The fact is that as the founding father of the constitution and upholder of un-touchability and great advocate of reservations has got the due respect of all most all parties including Congress and BJP,but still both these political parties accuse each other of dishonoring this great leader and it seems that the political parties are doing only dirty politics over Ambedkar, constitution and one party trying to belittle the other and accusing the other for dishonoring the constitution and its archetict .Parliament winter session entered its penultimate day today on Thursday amid the row over Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on Dr BR Ambedkar for which the opposition has been demanding Shah's resignation. For two consecutive days the two houses were rocked by the Amdedkar row. The winter session end on Friday, 20th December and some big business remains amid political slugfest over several issues

including Ambedkar row .Both inside as well as outside parliament ,the Ambedkar row raised its ugly head and this controversy rocked not only the august parliament, but it was in full play outside parliament .The situation outside the parliament went out of control and the BJP and congress MP's used barbs and insults upon one another and thus insulted the great parliament of yore Ambedkar who had full respect to the dignity and decorum of the parliamentary proceedings. There was high voltage drama outside parliament as BJP ,Congress accuse each other of jostling.BJP MP Pratap Sarangi was taken to hospital after getting injured in the melee .The relationship between opposition and the treasury benches hit a new low on Thursday December 19,2024 with both the sides accusing each other of resorting to violence .The scenes outside parliament were most unfortunate and uncivilized and the situation resembled a fish market and a wrestling match and it eroded the decorum discipline and sanctity of the highest legislative gathering . While the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi alleged that BJP MP's were pushing him and stopping him and other opposition MP's from entering the parliament ,the BJP accused Mr Gandhi assaulting two of their MP's. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju accused Mr Gandhi of assaulting and injuring two BJP MP's Parapt Sarangi and Mukesh Rajput and enquired about their health after they sustained injuries in the parliament complex. MP Nishikant Dubey also accused Mr Gandhi of resorting to "goondagradi" -hooliganism .Mr Rijju said that appropriate action will be taken ."Parliament is not the place to show physical strength .It is not a wrestling ring ,"Mr Rijju added. Mr Sarangi was taken to hospital after getting injured in the melee when the protesting INDIA bloc and the BJP MP's came face to face in front of Makar Dwar in parliament.NDA, INDIA bloc MP's hold protest marches over Ambedkar issue .While Congress leaders including Rahul and Priyanka marched from Ambedkar's statue

within Parliament complex to Parliament house,BJP -led NDA MP's too carried out a march raising slogans and carrying placards demanding an apology from the Congress for allegedly insulting Ambedkar .Dressed in blue ,a color associated with B.R .Ambedkar Opposition INDIA bloc members on Thursday took out a protest march in parliament premises demanding the resignation of Home Minister Amit Shah for his remarks related to the architect of the constitution .Amit Shah said that his words were twisted and Congress is anti-Ambedkar, anti-constianti reservation and anti-Savarkar.BJP said Congress Prime minister Nehru conferred upon himself Bharat Ratna way back in 1955 and Indira Gandhi awarded herself Bharat Ratna in 1971.But the Congress government did not confer Bharat Ratna on Ambedkar as it is anti-Ambedkar and anti-his ideology .It was only in 1990 when there was non-Congress government at the centre in which BJP was a partner Bharat Ratna was conferred on Ambedkar posthumously. It shows Congresses' inherent hate and hatred for Ambedkar and his philosophy and then accusing BJP of insulting and dishonoring Ambedkar and what he stood for .It seems it is a clear case of pot calling kettle black .Earlier as the remark over Ambedkar row escalates leading to adjournment inside the house Congress and BJP MP's accused each other of heckling during protest .Few days later a scuffle broke out outside the parliament on Thursday further escalating the political row over Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on Dr B.R .Ambedkar.While the LOP in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi alleged that BJPMP's were pushing him and stopping him and other opposition MP's from entering parliament ,BJP accused Mr Gandhi of assaulting two of their MP's .Both houses were adjourned till 2pm ,within minutes after they assembled .After protests erupted in the Lok Sabha, speaker Om Birla adjourned the house till 2pm.Meanwhile in the Rajya Sabha,the

proceedings continued until the papers were laid on the table .Soon after ,Chairman Jagdeep Dhankar said he would not allow the adjournment notices to be taken up .Amid constant sloganeering from the members ,he adjourned the proceedings till 2p.m.After the parliament resumed proceedings at 2 p.m ,both houses were quickly adjourned for the day amid continuing chaos .Both the houses were adjourned on Wednesday 18th December as opposition MP's continued to raise slogans against Home Minister Amit Shah 's alleged derogatory remarks against B.R,Ambedkar .In the upper house TMC also moved a privilege motion against the HM .No business was transacted in either of the houses .Rajya Sabha has been adjourned for the day on 19th December.BJP leaders condemn Rahul Gandhi's behavior saving he engaged in violence.DMK MP Triuchi Siva says this is one side's version of events.BJP MP S.Phagnon Konyak says that Lok Sabha Lop Rahul Gandhi came close to her ,pushed her and shouted at her ,and that she felt uncomfortable .It is in the fitness of things to mention that HM Amit Shah has said in Parliament the other day that it has become fashion for Congress Ambedkar, Ambedkar. Ambedkar, Ambedkar many times only for politicking and by doing so the Congress is insulting Ambedkar .Congress including its president Kharge demanded resignation from HM Amit Shah

for the remarks against Ambedkar.JP Nadda the of the house ,has said that the information about how the Congress has misused the constitution has reached the public ,that is why the Congressmen are incensed .They are behaving in an undemocratic manner ,he says. This house strongly condemns the actions of Rahul Gandhi .In brief the row over Ambedkar is very unfortunate and what has happened in and outside parliament is enough to surmise that the sanctity of the temple of democracy has been eroded by the actions of both the treasury benches and the opposition.

Chinar-The real beauty of Valley

■ GL KHAJURIA

hinar is virtually a person derivation meaning thereby 'chi' 'naar' having affiliation to what is so called 'fire' or owing due to 'fiery colour of leaves when leaves fall in autumn and in their turning out as golden yellow manifesting flaming red 'leaves. Basically, this beautiful, giant and majestic tree is not only indigenious but exotic one. The mention of chinar as boin'is found in the folk lore of Kashmir.

The Chinar tree is the real beauty of the Kashmir valley where many films have over the years bear affiliations to this majestic trees as for example the most prominent films like 'Azroo' and 'JabJab Phool Khiley have beenshot in and around Dal lake and the mostmagnificent 'Parks' and Gardens of Kahmir. The picturesqueand kaleidoscopic beautv of the Kashmir valley over the years have attracted and haunted the foreigners from China and western countries and they have described it as the 'Paradise on earth. The environment that surrounds the valley is unambiou ously enchanting and enthralling more and more so due to these largely spreadenchanting greenery of the flora and

'Chinars' amongst other salubrious and lush green deodars. kails, oaks, spruce and fir with altitudinal variations apart from Pinus gerendana (chilgoza) which is richly found next to Paddar in Jammu region. But the majestic Chinar finds its rich and unique placement in Kashmir Valley. The 'Charchinari' admist 'Dal lake' can most conveniently be attributed as a 'heritage' of velvet Kashmir valley and the more you praise, the less it is and this valley is in no way less than Switzerland of Europe over the mother earth which having other enchanting and bewildering spots on the other parts of globe, yet the enchanting beauty of the velvet valley has got its own significance of rarety of beauty.

The magnificent and majestic 'Chinar' tree attains a gigantic height more than a 100 hundred feet with 40-50 feet girth and with a round spreading crown, leaves are mostly heart shaped 10 to 25 cms and 12 to 30 cms in length and breadth deeply cut in triangular toothed lobes which give an appealing grace from long distance and provide abundant shade to the tourists and visitors alike. The bark of the tree is with silvery flakes.

The tree is propagated less by see sowing, but it is preferential if it is propagated through cutting which yield success-oriented results and as the locals go in far propagation through cuttings. At times, it is reported that there were as many as 70 garden in the velvet valley of paradise' which have now reduced to few and all those gardens were well flour-



ished with majestic chinar with kaleidoscopic variety of flowers of multihued nature but ironically now only few survive in their resplendence. The attention of the Govt. is invited to bring it to the pristine grandeur and glory to ensure and further invigorate more and more influx of tourists, pilgrims and cinestars. These will in unison boost tourism which is the dire demand of the day and we can yield hefty dividends apart from providing job to the local populace and

improve their socio-economic condi-

Shah Jahan amongst the mughals was gardens and parks and as such he introduced the magnificent and majestic tree in the velvet valley of Kashmir in various parts and gardens extensively in Nishat Bagh, Shalimar, Harwan, Verinag, Hazrat Bal, Char Chinar, and on other prominent locations such as Tulmula, Avantipura, Mansabal, Sopore, Bara-

mula, Anantnag so on and so forth. It is added over here that this majestic tree occupies its prominence in almost every corner of the beauteous valley of Kashmir also nomenclaturised as the "Paradise on earth". The majestic and magnificient treegains an attitudinal height upto 2600mtsbut however in the lower belts of altitudethis tree is cultivable and now in Jammuand its vicinity it is successfully flourishing to the exremes of Kud, Batote, Katra, Reasi so on and so forth. The wood is as good as anything likemanufacturing of plywood, apart from its multihued usages for the manufacture of furniture and its ilk. The tree as well find its usefulnesses in the firewood which mitigate problems of local populace of firewood in multitudinal ways. The timber is as well used for building construction and also used for the manufacture of furniture. It is, therefore, urged upon the Govt. to invigorate and boost 'chinar plantation extensively and intensively not confined to the Kashmir valley but elsewhere too where t is well suited to site so as to enhance the beauty of the state and haunt more and more tourists apart from improvising the environment of the State. In other words, this will yield and boost the socio-economic status of the local populace and help in mitigating the firewood, timber and other related

Since the vale of Kashmir'falls under temperate zone soextensive efforts should be accelerated to enhance maximum plantation on the occasion of 'Arbor's' day as is beingdone in the sub-tropical region of Jammu on Vanamahotsava. Tree culture had been a ritual inour old scriptures if we unfold the pious pages of Ramayana, Vanupurana, Mahabbarta, these echoe that each part of the tree has most reverentiallybeen prayed. Let us, therefore, pledge to carry this message to the posterity to come by so as to ensure our state ever-flourishing with trees like chinar andits allieds so that the beauty of the velvetv valley of Kashmir enchantsthroughout every nook and charmingvalley. Elsewhere too, where the sites are well suited in chenab valley which is the biggest forest area of the state theinculcation of this majestic and beautifultree shall occupy its own place of prominence. The 'pride chinar apart frombeing of mag ity of beauty is having medicinal properties too. The bark ofthis majestic tree is boiled as vinegarwhich is curative to multihued diseaseseg. Dysentery, dirrhoea, toothaches,hernia and many more of its allieds.

(The author is Former Dy. Conservator of Forest, J&K)

Quality STEM Education for Tribal and Rural Girls

VIJAY GARG

artnership with BMW Group in India, aiming to transform the educational landscape for 100,000 children in four states with a focus on foundational learning and STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) skills from early years through adolescence. The partnership will provide access to quality STEM education to adolescent girls from Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas and Tribal Ashramshalas, belonging to the most marginalised groups in hardto-reach rural areas in the states of Assam, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

The partnership is part of a global long-term partnership to reach more than 10 million children and young people each year through education and training, including learning in STEM subjects in five countries including South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, and Thailand.

UNICEF today announced their partnership with BMW Group in

In India, partnership will focus on nurturing foundational literacy and numeracy skills in rural primary schools to build a solid cognitive foundation for children. As they progress into adolescence, children will have access to innovative, engaging learning experiences through low-cost maker spaces to nurture curiosity, creativity, and imagination in young minds.

Together with the Government of India, and the four state governments, the partnership aims to create an inclusive learning environment that supports national goals for gender equality and education.

"Current employment opportunities come with greater demands for competencies in STEM. Girls particularly miss out on opportunities to learn and practice STEM. Thus, UNICEF is proud to support building a strong foundation for critical thinking in the early years of learn-

The BMW-UNICEF partnership makes this possible by investing in making education more accessible and inclusive, especially for girls. The result is greater economic and social self-reliance leading to more opportunities," $_{
m said}$ Cynthia UNICEF McCaffrey, Representative.

Vikram Pawah, President and CEO, BMW Group India said, "BMW Group sees itself as an integral part of the society and through impactful initiatives, we want to drive deep-rooted social change. BMW Group's partnership with UNICEF harnesses the most powerful tool for empowerment - education.

STEM knowledge is crucial for smart thinking and innovation in today's competitive, interconnected environment. Merging this educa-

tional initiative with gender equality and inclusion, especially for underprivileged girl child in India, enhances its effectiveness exponentially.'

The key-components of this collaboration include:

Recognizing that children who struggle with basic reading and numeracy are likely to face challenges in school, the programme focuses on foundational literacy and numeracy in primary grades. The initiative provides a strong cognitive base by facilitating these skills upon which STEM knowledge can be built.

UNICEF will develop a tailored curriculum to train teachers, enhancing their skills in STEM instruction.

This training will also address gender stereotypes and focus on empowering girls through skills development and leadership programmes. By creating a dedicated cadre of STEM-trained teachers, BMW-UNICEF partnership will help elevate the quality of STEM education in classrooms in the four states.

The establishment of low-cost maker spaces within these schools will allow adolescent girls to explore design thinking, computational analysis, adaptive learning, and physical computing.

(The author is Retired Principal Educational columnist)

On Dogri Day, applauding Theatre's role in cultural preservation

problems of the locals

MOHD. YASEEN

anguage and culture are the lifelines of any community, reflecting its identity, values, and history. The Dogri language, an integral part of Jammu's rich heritage, has stood as a witness to the region's vibrant traditions and cultural evolution. As we celebrate Dogri Day, also known as Dogri Manyata Diwas on 22nd December, 2024, it becomes imperative to shed light on the role of theatre in preserving and promoting this beautiful language. Theatre, being an expressive and impactful medium, holds the potential to revitalize Dogri culture and bring it closer to the modern generation.

Theatre has always been a powerful tool for social commentary, capable of capturing the subtleties of societal change, both positive and negative. It serves as a mirror reflecting the virtues and vices of society. Through their craft, theatre artists have the unique ability to address societal issues and inspire constructive change. However, it is not just about storytelling; theatre is also about preserving the cultural ethos of a community, which is especially significant in the case of Dogri.

Dogri theatre, like its counterparts across the world, has the power to connect with audiences deeply and evoke emotions that resonate long after the curtains fall. This makes it an ideal medium for promoting Dogri language

and culture. Dogri theatre traces its origins to the

patronage of the Dogra rulers, who encouraged various performing arts. Traditional folk styles such as Geetru, Karak and Haran were integral to the region's theatrical expressions. Over time, these forms were refined, and Dogri theatre gained prominence, becoming a cherished aspect of

Jammu's cultural identity. Prominent institutions like Natrang Jammu have been instrumental in preserving Dogri theatre. Their iconic plays like Bawa Jitto and Ghumayee have not only created ripples in the local community but also achieved national and international acclaim. Bawa Jitto has been staged over 200 times across India, leaving an indelible mark on audiences. Meanwhile, Ghumayee, directed by Balwant Thakur, has been presented at prestigious platforms like the Frankfurt International Theatre Festival, 8th Theatre Olympics and the

Commonwealth Games Another hallmark of Dogri theatre is Balwant Thakur's Suno Eh Kahani. which has been performed over 300 times, setting a benchmark in Indian theatre. These productions not only entertain but also educate audiences about Dogri traditions, values, and

Despite its rich heritage, Dogri theatre faces several challenges, including dwindling institutional support and audience interest. Limited funding, a lack of platforms, and societal perceptions of regional arts as less significant than mainstream ones have hindered its

growth. Additionally, modern audiences, especially the youth, often gravitate towards global or mainstream influences, overlooking the treasure

trove of local culture. The younger generation holds the key to revitalizing Dogri theatre. Aspiring artists need to embrace the language and its folk styles as the foundation for their creativity. The community must also come together to support local artists, attend performances, and promote awareness about Dogri culture.

Theatre is more than just entertainment; it is a cultural bridge that connects people to their roots. Dogri theatre, with its rich heritage and storytelling traditions, has the potential to strengthen the identity of the Dogra community. It can serve as a medium to educate, inspire, and unite people, ensuring that the language and culture continue to thrive for generations to

On this Dogri Day, let us pledge to support and celebrate Dogri theatre. By doing so, we not only honor our past but also lay the foundation for a vibrant cultural future. As the saying goes, "A language dies when its last speaker is gone, but a culture dies when its stories are forgotten." Let us ensure that Dogri stories live on, echoing through the halls of theatres and the hearts of peo-

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