

Traffic Congestion need Urgent Action

Traffic congestion has become one of the most pressing urban challenges of our time. What was once considered a problem limited to metropolitan cities has now spread to small towns and semi-urban areas. Long queues of vehicles, frequent traffic jams, honking horns, rising pollution levels, and frayed tempers have become a daily reality for commuters. The situation demands immediate, coordinated and long-term solutions. At the heart of the congestion crisis lies rapid urbanization and an exponential rise in the number of private vehicles. With increasing aspirations and easier access to vehicle loans, more families now own multiple two-wheelers and cars. However, road infrastructure has not expanded proportionately. Narrow roads, encroachments, unplanned parking and inadequate traffic management systems further worsen the problem. In many cities, roadside vendors and illegal constructions reduce already limited carriageways, creating bottlenecks during peak hours. Public transport, which should ideally reduce dependence on private vehicles, often remains unreliable, overcrowded or insufficient. In the absence of efficient bus networks, metro systems or shared mobility options, citizens prefer using personal vehicles for convenience and time-saving. Unfortunately, this individual choice collectively leads to gridlock. The lack of last-mile connectivity also discourages people from opting for public transport even where it exists. Traffic congestion is not merely an inconvenience; it has serious economic, environmental and social consequences. Hours lost in traffic translate into reduced productivity and financial losses. Businesses suffer delays in the movement of goods and services. Emergency vehicles such as ambulances and fire tenders struggle to navigate clogged roads, sometimes putting lives at risk. Moreover, prolonged idling of vehicles increases fuel consumption and air pollution, contributing to respiratory illnesses and environmental degradation. Poor traffic discipline further aggravates the situation. Jumping signals, wrong-side driving, illegal parking and disregard for lane rules create chaos on the roads. Inadequate enforcement of traffic regulations emboldens violators. Without strict penalties and consistent monitoring, road discipline remains difficult to achieve. Addressing traffic congestion requires a multi-pronged approach. First, urban planning must prioritize sustainable mobility. Expansion and modernization of public transport systems should be at the forefront of policy decisions. Reliable, affordable and frequent bus and metro services can significantly reduce the number of private vehicles on the road. Encouraging carpooling and promoting non-motorized transport such as cycling and walking through dedicated lanes can also help. Second, technology should be leveraged for smarter traffic management. Intelligent traffic signals, real-time monitoring, and integrated transport apps can optimize traffic flow and provide commuters with alternative routes. Strict enforcement of traffic laws through surveillance cameras and heavy penalties for violations can instill discipline. Finally, citizens must play their part. Responsible driving, adherence to traffic rules, avoidance of unnecessary vehicle use and respect for public spaces are essential.

Ramzan-A Sacred Month of Charity, Compassion and Coexistence



■ MOHD. YASEEN

As the holy month of Ramzan 2026 approaches, an atmosphere of devotion, preparation and spiritual reflection has begun to settle across Jammu and Kashmir and many other parts of the country. For Muslims, Ramzan is not merely a month of fasting but a time of self-discipline, prayer, charity and inner purification. Streets, mosques and homes gradually transform to welcome this sacred period, and a sense of calm anticipation becomes visible in everyday life. Across Jammu and Kashmir, preparations for the blessed month are already in full swing. Markets are witnessing an increase in footfall as families purchase groceries, dry fruits, prayer essentials and household items required for the fasting days. Homes are being cleaned and organized, kitchens are stocked with essentials, and daily routines are being adjusted to suit the spiritual schedule of Ramzan. The arrival of the holy month is not just a religious observance but a cultural experience that brings families and communities closer. Sehri and Iftari remain the two most important daily rituals that shape the schedule of every fasting individual. Sehri marks the beginning of the fast before dawn, while Iftari marks its completion at sunset. Between these two moments lies a day of

patience, devotion and self-control. Every household organizes its time around these essential practices, ensuring that the spiritual essence of Ramzan remains intact. In many Muslim localities of Jammu and Kashmir, a traditional and culturally rich practice still continues. Before dawn, in the quiet hours of the night, the rhythmic sound of a drum echoes through the streets. The drumbeater, locally known as a Bhand, moves through every nook and corner of Muslim localities, beating the drum and calling out to people to wake up for Sehri. This age-old tradition holds a special place in the cultural life of the region and adds a unique charm to the holy month. The Bhand, with their drums and calls, serve as living reminders of Ramzan each day. As the drum resonates across neighbourhoods, lights begin to glow in homes and kitchens come alive. Families rise from sleep and prepare for Sehri. Though modern alarm clocks and mobile phones have replaced many traditional practices, this custom continues in several areas, preserving a sense of community bonding and heritage that connects the present with the past. Sehri itself is a peaceful and spiritually uplifting moment. Before dawn breaks, families gather around the dining table to eat and drink in preparation for the long day ahead. Despite the early hour, Sehri becomes a time of togetherness and reflection. Many begin the day with prayers, seeking strength and blessings for the fast. The calmness of the early morning adds to the spiritual atmosphere that defines Ramzan. Food during Sehri varies from household to household. Some prefer light meals such as fruits, bread, eggs and yogurt, while others opt for traditional dishes that provide sustained energy throughout the day. Hydration is

equally important, and people ensure they drink enough water before beginning the fast. While the menu may differ, the purpose remains the same - to prepare both body and soul for a day of fasting and devotion. As the day progresses, fasting individuals go about their daily routines with patience and restraint. Ramzan is not only about abstaining from food and water but also about maintaining discipline in speech, behaviour and thoughts. It is a time for increased prayers, recitation of the Quran and acts of charity. The entire environment begins to reflect calmness, humility and spirituality. As sunset approaches, attention shifts towards Iftari, the most awaited moment of the day. After long hours of fasting, the call for prayer at sunset brings relief and gratitude. Families gather together, mosques prepare for collective iftar and community spaces come alive with arrangements for breaking the fast. The atmosphere becomes one of joy and thankfulness. One element remains universally present and almost mandatory at every iftar table - khajoor, or dates. No matter how elaborate or simple the meal may be, the presence of dates at sunset is considered essential. The tradition of breaking the fast with khajoor has been followed for generations and continues to hold deep religious and cultural significance. After a day of fasting, the first bite of khajoor brings both physical relief and emotional satisfaction. It marks the completion of a day of patience and devotion. In mosques and community gatherings, plates of dates are distributed so that everyone can break their fast in the traditional manner. Whether in modest homes or large gatherings, khajoor remains at the centre of every iftar.

In Jammu and Kashmir, this practice is deeply rooted in daily life during Ramzan. Many consider it incomplete to break the fast without eating dates first. Beyond tradition, dates provide instant energy and nourishment after long hours of fasting. Their natural sugars and essential nutrients help restore energy levels and prepare the body for the evening meal. Markets across Jammu and Kashmir witness a noticeable rise in activity as Ramzan approaches. Shops are filled with groceries, fruits and items associated with the holy month. The sale of dates increases significantly, and vendors display various varieties to meet the growing demand. Temporary stalls appear in many localities, adding to the festive atmosphere of Ramzan shopping. Ramzan is also a time of charity and compassion. Individuals and organizations arrange free iftar for the needy, travellers and daily wage workers. Mosques and community groups ensure that everyone has access to food and water for breaking the fast. Offering food to others during Ramzan is considered an act of kindness and spiritual reward. This culture of sharing strengthens the bonds of society and reflects the true essence of the holy month. The spirit of Ramzan in Jammu and Kashmir also reflects a beautiful example of secularism and communal harmony. The holy month is not confined to one community alone; its values of compassion, patience and generosity resonate across all sections of society. In many neighbourhoods, people from different faiths extend greetings and goodwill to their Muslim friends and neighbours. Fruits, sweets and dates are often shared as gestures of respect and friendship. Non-Muslim neighbours frequently participate in iftar gatherings, experiencing the warmth

and discipline of the fasting month. Shopkeepers and vendors from all communities contribute to the festive environment of Ramzan markets. This shared participation highlights the composite culture of Jammu and Kashmir, where festivals and traditions often become moments of unity rather than division. Such gestures of harmony strengthen the social fabric and reinforce the idea that Ramzan is not only a religious observance but also a period that promotes universal values of peace and coexistence. The spirit of secularism becomes visible in everyday interactions, where respect for each other's beliefs and traditions creates an atmosphere of mutual understanding. As Ramzan 2026 begins, families across Jammu and Kashmir are ready to embrace the month with faith and dedication. Daily routines will adjust to early morning Sehri and evening Iftari. Mosques will fill with prayers, markets will remain lively and homes will resonate with gratitude and reflection. From the rhythmic drumbeats of the Bhand calling people for Sehri to the peaceful moments of iftar at sunset, every day of Ramzan carries a message of discipline, compassion and spiritual growth. The holy month offers an opportunity to reconnect with faith, practice patience and extend kindness to others. Through changing times and modern lifestyles, the essence of Ramzan continues to remain strong. It is a month that reminds people of humility, generosity and unity. As the blessed days unfold, the spirit of Ramzan will once again illuminate hearts and homes across Jammu and Kashmir, bringing with it peace, harmony and renewed faith. (The writer is a National Scholarship and Fellowship Holder from Ministry of Culture and Government of India)

Stripes in Danger - The Fight to Save India's Tigers

■ DR. VINOD CHANDRASHEKHAR DIXIT

Isn't it alarming that hunting and killing animals has become a form of recreation? We condemn murdering humans, but wiping out entire species gets little consideration. It's time to rethink our priorities and recognize the value of preserving life on earth. Shouldn't we be protecting these magnificent creatures instead of pushing them to the brink of extinction.



Our country is unique in having a significant number of tigers in the wild, in spite of growing population and resource extraction pressures on their habitat. Tigers are the heritage of our country, evoked in the vedas, puranas and many other literature for their unparalleled strength and aesthetic beauty. India's tiger population has seen a significant increase, with the latest census (2022) putting the number at 3,682, accounting for about 70% of the global wild tiger population. However, despite this growth, tigers in India face numerous threats, including habitat loss, poaching, and human-wildlife conflict. Deforestation, urbanization, and agricultural expansion have led to a decline in tiger habitats, with India losing over 668,000 hectares of forestland between 2015 and 2023. Tigers are hunted for their body parts, with every part of the tiger being sold in illegal wildlife markets. As tigers venture into human-dominated areas, conflicts arise, often resulting in the death of both humans. India's tiger population is thriving, with the latest census (2022) putting the number at 3,682, accounting for about 70% of the global wild tiger population. This is a significant increase from 1,411 tigers in 2006, thanks to conservation efforts like Project Tiger. The upcoming 2026 tiger census is expected to show a further increase, with some estimates suggesting a 10-15% jump in numbers. Madhya Pradesh leads the states with 785 tigers, followed by Karnataka (563) and Uttarakhand (560). The census, conducted every four years, involves over 60,000 forest staff and uses cutting-edge technology like camera traps and satellite imaging to track tiger movements and habitats. The 2026 census will also cover areas outside traditional forest habitats, including agricultural lands and human settlements, to get a more accurate picture of tiger populations. Tiger deaths increased to 127 in 2021 from 106 in 2020. And this is the highest number of annual deaths recorded in a decade, beating the record of 2016 when 121 tiger deaths were recorded in the Indian forests. The number of tiger deaths in 2019 was 96. The destruction of forest coverage by Maoists may be one of the reasons for this decrease. Wild animals deaths were also

reported from Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Kerala, Karnataka and Uttarakhand. No doubt, the world wild life fund is the international agency, which is doing commendable work in promoting the protection of wildlife and there are number of national agencies engaged in the conservation of wildlife. According to research, the average life span of the tigers in the wild is generally 10-12 years and in natural ecosystem, factors like old age, diseases, interecine fights, electrocution, snaring, drowning, road, rail hits, among others, and a very high infant mortality observed in big cats, including tigers, account for majority of the tiger deaths. Madhya Pradesh leads the states in tiger numbers and, per the 2018 figures, counted 526 of the big cats within its territory. Karnataka was a close second with 524 tigers while Uttarakhand had the third-highest population of 444 tigers. We should know that we are not just animals, but that we belong to the same family tree as other mammals, that our physiology and bodily processes are just like theirs, and that our mental processes too are from the same general pattern. The protection of the national animal has been a significant achievement till now. Hope this continues and leads to a significant rise in the coming years. Among animals, some are fewer in number than the others, if proper care and security are extended to them, the rare animals would survive. Only the future can tell whether national animal will survive to maintain the much-needed ecological balance. If we delay now, it might be too late. Tigers play a large role in sustaining the biodiversity of forests, in maintaining healthy ecology, habitat conservation and the livelihoods of rural communities. The tiger population has decreased in the states of Telengana & Andhra Pradesh. The destruction of forest coverage by Maoists may be one of the reasons for this decrease. Wild tiger deaths were also reported from Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Kerala, Karnataka and Uttarakhand. During the first six months of the year, 30 deaths were reported. The protection of the national animal has been a significant achievement till now. Hope this continues and leads to a significant rise in the coming years. Credit must also be given to Aircel for initiating "Save Tiger" campaign, along with New Delhi Television (NDTV), who played an active role in creating awareness among the people on dwindling tiger population in India. A new Tiger commando force should be created to protect tigers from the poachers. Government must try to put in more efforts to improve the arrangements to conserve the national pride - the Tiger.

Turning Daily Habits into Healing

■ MOHAMMAD HANIEF

In Jammu and Kashmir, health is deeply intertwined with geography, climate, and tradition. From the cold winters of the Valley to the temperate plains of Jammu, daily life follows rhythms shaped by seasons, food availability, and physical activity patterns. Yet even in this naturally rich environment, diabetes and hypertension have emerged as silent but growing public health challenges. Once considered diseases of old age or urban excess, they are now increasingly diagnosed among people in their forties and thirties, including government employees, traders, homemakers, and even young professionals.



The reasons are complex but familiar: Mechanized transport has replaced walking, desk-based work has reduced physical movement, and traditional diets have gradually shifted toward refined grains, polished rice, packaged snacks, and sugary tea consumed multiple times a day. Long winters encourage inactivity, while harsh summers limit outdoor exercise. Added to this are psychosocial stressors unique to the region, including economic uncertainty and disrupted routines. Together, these factors have created fertile ground for metabolic diseases to develop quietly and progress steadily. For many individuals in Jammu and Kashmir, a diagnosis of diabetes or hypertension brings fear of lifelong medication, dependency on healthcare facilities, and concern about complications affecting the heart, kidneys, eyes, and brain. However, a growing body of clinical experience and real-world observation offers a more hopeful perspective. For a significant proportion of people, particularly those in early and middle stages, these conditions can be reversed or brought into long-term remission through consistent, practical lifestyle changes adapted to local realities. Reversal does not mean a sudden cure or rejection of medical care. It refers to restoring blood sugar and blood pressure to normal or near-normal levels and maintaining that control

with minimal or no medication under proper medical supervision. This process does not rely on extreme diets or short-term enthusiasm. Instead, it depends on steady, repeatable habits that fit naturally into daily life. When supported correctly, the body often regains its ability to regulate itself, even after years of imbalance. Type 2 diabetes primarily arises from insulin resistance, a condition in which body cells respond poorly to insulin, allowing glucose to accumulate in the bloodstream. Hypertension often develops alongside this process due to vascular stiffness, excess sodium intake, hormonal changes, and prolonged activation of stress responses. In Jammu and Kashmir, these conditions frequently coexist, particularly among individuals with central obesity and low physical activity during winter months. Improvements in metabolic health therefore tend to improve both conditions simultaneously, explaining why a unified lifestyle approach is so effective. Food occupies a central place in Kashmiri and Dogra culture, and dietary habits strongly influence metabolic health. Traditional meals once emphasized whole grains, seasonal vegetables, legumes, and moderate portions. Over time, these have increasingly been replaced or diluted by refined flour products, excess rice consumption, fried snacks, and sweetened beverages. During colder months, heavy meals and frequent tea intake are common, often combined with reduced movement. These patterns contribute to repeated blood sugar spikes and gradual elevation of blood pressure. Reversal does not require abandoning cultural foods, but it does require moderation and balance. When meals prioritize vegetables, adequate protein, and controlled portions of carbohydrates, glucose absorption becomes slower and more stable. Seasonal vegetables available across the region provide fiber that improves digestion, enhances insulin sensitivity, and supports appetite control. Fiber-rich foods are particularly important during winter, when physical activity naturally declines. Protein intake deserves special attention. Many individuals consume insufficient protein while relying heavily on rice, bread, or bakery items for sati-

DIET CHART for REVERSAL of DIABETES & HYPERTENSION

HEALTHY FOODS TO EAT: 1/2 Plate Veggies, Lean Proteins, Whole Grains, Nuts & Seeds.

AVOID THESE FOOD: Sugary Foods, White Bread & Rice, White Bread & Fried/Processed.

DAILY HABITS: 1 tsp Soaked Methi in the Morning, 30-40 Min. Walk, Early Dinner by 6:30-7 PM.

SMART TIPS: Reduce Sugar & Salt, Eat Home-Cooked, Sleep 7-8 Hours.

ACHIEVE! Blood Sugar In Range, BP Under Control, Weight Reduced.

ety. Adequate protein supports muscle mass, stabilizes blood sugar, and reduces cravings. Locally available sources such as lentils, rajma, curd, paneer, eggs, fish, and lean meats can be incorporated easily into daily meals without altering cultural identity. Balanced meals create a metabolic environment that supports healing rather than progression of disease. Meal timing is another factor especially relevant in this region. During winter, late dinners are common due to shortened daylight hours and delayed routines. However, eating late keeps insulin levels elevated during the night, leading to higher fasting blood sugar levels and poorer blood pressure control in the morning. An earlier, lighter dinner allows the body to process glucose before sleep and promotes overnight metabolic recovery. Even a shift of one to two hours earlier can produce meaningful improvements over time. Physical activity patterns in Jammu and Kashmir vary sharply by season. In summer and spring, walking, farming, and outdoor work are common, while winter often brings prolonged inactivity due to cold temperatures and snow. Yet movement remains one of the most powerful tools for reversal. Regular walking improves insulin sensitivity, lowers blood

pressure, and enhances vascular health. Indoor movement, household activity, and short post-meal walks can compensate for limited outdoor exercise during colder months. Consistency matters far more than intensity, and even modest daily activity produces cumulative benefits. Weight management plays a crucial role in metabolic recovery. Excess abdominal fat increases insulin resistance and places strain on the cardiovascular system. Studies show that losing even five to seven percent of body weight can significantly improve blood sugar and blood pressure levels. This degree of weight loss is achievable through gradual dietary adjustments and regular activity rather than restrictive diets. As fat decreases in the liver and pancreas, these organs regain functional capacity, accelerating recovery. Sleep and stress have particular relevance in the region, where long winters, disrupted schedules, and psychosocial pressures are common. Inadequate sleep raises cortisol levels, which elevate both blood sugar and blood pressure. Maintaining a consistent sleep routine, even during seasonal changes, is essential for metabolic balance. Chronic stress further worsens vascular tone and glucose regulation. Simple

daily practices that promote mental calmness can have measurable physiological benefits over time. Many people in Jammu and Kashmir also rely on traditional remedies such as fengreek seeds, bitter melon, and herbal preparations. These may offer supportive benefits by improving insulin sensitivity and digestion, particularly in early stages. However, they are most effective when combined with balanced nutrition, physical activity, and regular monitoring. Natural remedies should complement, not replace, foundational lifestyle changes. Monitoring progress reinforces success. Regular checks of fasting and post-meal blood sugar levels provide immediate feedback, while home blood pressure monitoring helps identify trends across seasons. Long-term markers such as HbA1c confirm whether improvements are sustained. Monitoring transforms abstract intentions into measurable outcomes and strengthens motivation. Medication should be viewed as a supportive tool rather than a failure. Early use can protect organs while lifestyle changes take effect, and doses can often be reduced or discontinued safely as health improves. Reversal prioritizes long-term well-being and prevention of complications rather than avoidance of treatment. What defines successful reversal in daily life is not perfection, but persistence. Simple habits adapted to local conditions, including home-cooked meals, regular movement despite weather challenges, early dinners, adequate sleep, and routine monitoring, form the foundation of lasting success. These practices may appear ordinary, yet when followed consistently, they restore balance and resilience. Diabetes and hypertension are not inevitable outcomes of aging or geography. They are signals that the body requires correction and care. For many people in Jammu and Kashmir, especially those who act early and remain consistent, reversal is achievable and sustainable. With informed choices and daily commitment, everyday life itself becomes the treatment, allowing health, confidence, and quality of life to return steadily, season after season. (The author is a senior analyst)