

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE

In an era marked by complex and evolving security challenges, the need to reinforce a watertight security cordon has become not just a tactical necessity but a strategic imperative. Whether in counter-terrorism operations, protection of critical infrastructure, border management, or safeguarding public events, a robust and foolproof security cordon is central to maintaining law and order and ensuring public safety. A watertight security cordon implies a multilayered, well-coordinated security arrangement designed to prevent any unauthorised movement into or out of a designated area. Such a cordon leaves no gaps—physical, procedural, or technological—that can be exploited by hostile elements. In sensitive regions and high-risk situations, even a minor lapse can lead to serious consequences, including loss of life, damage to property, and erosion of public confidence in the security apparatus. The first pillar of an effective security cordon is intelligence-driven planning. Accurate, timely, and actionable intelligence forms the backbone of any successful security operation. Reinforcing the cordon must begin with a thorough threat assessment, identifying potential vulnerabilities, entry and exit points, and likely tactics of adversaries. Intelligence agencies, local police, and security forces must operate in seamless coordination to ensure that ground-level deployment reflects real-time threat perceptions rather than routine assumptions. Equally critical is inter-agency coordination. A security cordon is only as strong as its weakest link. Multiple forces—police, paramilitary units, intelligence agencies, and local administration—are often involved, and lack of coordination can create operational blind spots. Clear command structures, defined roles, and constant communication are essential to ensure that every layer of the cordon functions in harmony. Joint briefings, rehearsals, and unified command mechanisms can significantly enhance operational effectiveness. Technological integration has emerged as a force multiplier in reinforcing security cordons. Surveillance cameras, drones, thermal imaging devices, motion sensors, and real-time data analytics can dramatically improve situational awareness. Technology helps in monitoring blind spots, tracking suspicious movement, and providing early warnings. However, technology must complement, not replace, human vigilance. Trained personnel on the ground remain indispensable for interpreting data, making quick decisions, and responding to dynamic situations. Another vital component is robust perimeter control and access management. Checkpoints must be properly manned, with strict verification protocols for identity, movement, and purpose. Randomized checks, vehicle screening, and biometric verification, where feasible, can deter infiltration attempts. Reinforcing the cordon also requires attention to terrain-specific challenges—urban congestion, rural pathways, water bodies, or forested areas—that may offer alternative routes to adversaries. The human element of security cannot be overstated. Training, morale, and discipline of personnel play a decisive role in maintaining a watertight cordon. Security forces must be adequately trained to handle high-pressure situations, identify suspicious behavior, and adhere strictly to standard operating procedures. Fatigue management, rotation of duties, and welfare measures are equally important to prevent complacency and ensure sustained alertness. Public cooperation forms the final, often underestimated, layer of a strong security cordon. Community engagement and awareness can significantly enhance security outcomes. Local residents are often the first to notice unusual activity. Encouraging timely reporting, ensuring trust between citizens and security agencies, and avoiding unnecessary disruption to daily life can transform the public from passive bystanders into active partners in security. Reinforcing a watertight security cordon is not a one-time exercise but a continuous process of assessment, adaptation, and improvement.

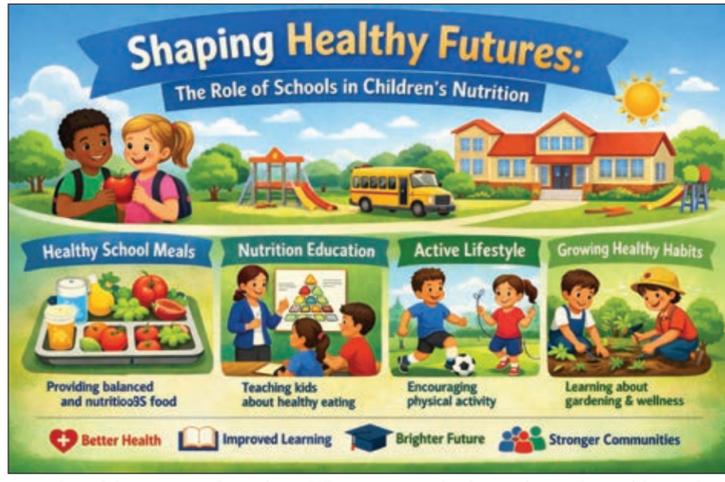
■ MOHAMMAD HANIEF



Children in Jammu and Kashmir spend a significant portion of their day in school, whether in government-run institutions, private schools, or religious and community-based educational setups. Many students rely on school meals, canteens, nearby vendors, or packed lunches brought from home. These food environments collectively influence children's dietary choices. As concerns around childhood nutrition intensify worldwide, schools are increasingly being recognised as pivotal spaces where long-term eating habits take shape. The World Health Organization's recently issued global guidelines on healthy school food environments underscore this reality, calling on governments and educational institutions to take decisive steps to ensure that food available to children during school hours supports their health, learning, and future well-being. For Jammu and Kashmir, where schools remain one of the most consistent public institutions in children's lives, the message carries particular weight.

The region is witnessing a changing nutritional landscape. While undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies persist among children from economically vulnerable households, especially in rural and remote areas, an increasing number of school-going children are being exposed to diets high in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats. The growing availability of packaged snacks, sugary beverages, and fast foods, combined with reduced physical activity, has begun to reshape childhood health patterns. Schools now sit at the centre of this emerging challenge. Globally, childhood obesity has overtaken underweight among school-aged children for the first time, reflecting a profound shift in dietary habits and food systems. Though comprehensive regional data remains limited, similar trends are becoming visible in parts of Jammu and Kashmir, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas. These developments are not merely health concerns but have broader implications for education, productivity, and public expenditure in the years to come. The WHO guidelines stress that schools must go beyond isolated nutrition lessons or occasional awareness programmes. Instead, they call for a whole-school approach, where every aspect of the school food environment reinforces healthy choices. This includes meals provided under government schemes, food sold in canteens, items available near school premises, and the informal food cul-

Shaping Healthy Futures: The Role of Schools in Children's Nutrition



ture shaped by peers and routines. When unhealthy foods dominate these spaces, efforts to promote nutrition through textbooks or classroom instruction lose credibility. Government schools in Jammu and Kashmir already play a critical role through school meal programmes, which have improved enrolment, attendance, and food security for many children. These initiatives remain a cornerstone of child welfare, particularly for students from low-income families. However, ensuring consistent nutritional quality across districts remains a challenge. Variations in menu planning, food diversity, preparation practices, and monitoring can affect the overall impact of these programmes. The WHO guidelines offer an opportunity to strengthen existing systems by focusing on balanced diets, appropriate portion sizes, and reduced reliance on excessive oil, salt, and sugar. Greater use of locally available foods can improve both nutritional value and sustainability. Traditional staples, pulses, vegetables, dairy products, and seasonal produce can be incorporated more systematically, making meals healthier while supporting local economies. Food safety and hygiene are equally important. Poor handling or storage of food can undermine the benefits of school meals and raise legitimate concerns among parents. Strengthening oversight, training staff, and ensuring basic infrastructure can go a long way in improving trust and outcomes. Private schools, which educate a significant share of children in Jammu and Kashmir, have an equally important responsibility. Many operate canteens or allow vendors

near school premises, often without clear nutritional standards. As a result, children are frequently exposed to highly processed foods and sugary drinks during school hours. Over time, these patterns normalise unhealthy choices and influence preferences beyond the school environment. The WHO guidelines emphasise that all schools, regardless of management, must actively shape food environments that make healthier options the easier and more attractive choice. This involves setting clear school-level food policies, regulating what is sold on campus, and engaging parents in promoting nutritious lunchboxes. Consistency between school messaging and practice is essential if children are to internalise healthy habits. Rather than relying solely on restrictions, the guidelines highlight the value of subtle, evidence-based strategies that guide behaviour. Small changes in food placement, presentation, and affordability can influence children's choices without removing autonomy. Ensuring easy access to clean drinking water, prioritising healthier foods in visible locations, and avoiding the promotion of unhealthy products can collectively make a meaningful difference. Yet policies and good intentions alone are insufficient. Effective monitoring and enforcement remain critical. International experience shows that while many regions adopt school food policies, far fewer succeed in regulating the marketing and availability of unhealthy foods around schools. In Jammu and Kashmir, vendors selling packaged snacks and sugary drinks are a common sight near school gates. Addressing this issue requires coordinated action by educa-

tion authorities, local administrations, and municipal bodies. Nutrition education must also be strengthened. When children understand the relationship between food, energy, learning ability, and long-term health, they are better equipped to make informed choices. Integrating practical nutrition education into school curricula, supported by teacher training and community involvement, can reinforce healthy behaviours. Schools can also serve as platforms for reaching families, extending the impact beyond the classroom. Equity lies at the heart of the WHO's recommendations. For many children in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly those from marginalised communities, school meals may represent the most reliable source of nutritious food in a day. Improving school food environments is therefore not only a public health measure but also a step towards reducing social and educational inequalities. Well-nourished children are more likely to attend school regularly, concentrate better, and achieve improved learning outcomes. Local adaptation will be key to successful implementation. Jammu and Kashmir's diverse geography, climate, and food traditions demand context-specific solutions. Drawing on local dietary practices and seasonal availability can help design school food programmes that are culturally acceptable, nutritionally sound, and economically viable. The WHO has committed to supporting governments in adapting these guidelines through technical assistance and knowledge-sharing. For Jammu and Kashmir, this support can complement national initiatives and encourage collaboration between health authorities, education departments, school managements, and civil society organisations. Such coordination is essential to ensure that policy commitments translate into meaningful change on the ground. Ultimately, schools in Jammu and Kashmir are uniquely positioned to act as agents of change in addressing malnutrition in all its forms. By shaping daily food environments and reinforcing positive behaviours at a formative stage of life, schools can influence not only individual health outcomes but also the long-term well-being of society. Ensuring healthy food in schools is an investment in the region's future. When children are well-nourished, they learn better, grow healthier, and are better prepared to contribute productively to society. The WHO guidelines serve as a timely reminder that education extends beyond classrooms and curricula. It includes creating environments that protect children's health, dignity, and right to a better future. (The author is a senior analyst)

Senior citizens to play their role in uplifting the society

■ SHIV KUMAR PADHA

According to Melehor Lim, "Listen to your elder's advice. Not because they are always right but because they have more experience of being wrong." In every society the senior citizens are considered as the deep wells of wisdom, repositories of knowledge and experience and omniscient. A senior citizen is a quiet pillar of wisdom, a living library of resilience, joy, and lessons learned, a guide to the younger generation. Being aged and seniors they help solve family disputes, teaching life values through stories acting as anchors in turbulent time of the society. Despite of their values, they face neglect, loneliness physical difficulties, underscoring their need for family and societal support. Traditionally, in India, elderly people have always been revered by the younger generations by touching their feet. However, in the modern society of 21st century, not only has the number of elderly persons increased, but also the cases of the elderly being abused, harassed, and abandoned in India has soared up. More children are now leaving their parents alone or sending them to the old age homes. Senior citizens are crucial for society as living repositories of wisdom, mentors, and cultural preservers. They provide inter-generational continuity, help navigate challenges, and contribute significantly through volunteering and sheering skills, enriching younger generations. In India, a senior citizen is generally defined as a resident individual aged 60 years or older, while a super senior citizen is someone 80 years or older. These age thresholds determine access to financial incentives, tax deductions, pension schemes like IGNOAPS, and specific provisions under the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act 2007. Often, we confuse determining as who is worth calling a senior citizen, a retired government or semi government employ or a person involved in the profession of trade, marketing, shop keeping, a vendor or a labourer? As regards the senior citizens belonging to the first category, they are almost literate, educated, from variety of professions like teaching, technocrats, doctors, educators law experts and other important trades and latest vocations and skills, there is no doubt regarding the capability, potential, and capacity to reform, transform and educate their contemporary societies by disseminating the little they have acquired during their active life span. India is both a developing and fast improving economy in the world unyielding before the belligerent opposition, international, diplomatic, geopolitical pressures and sanctions, under such circumstances it becomes the moral duty of every senior citizen to come forward voluntarily to extend their helping hand and fullest co-operation in the fields, where their role is fundamentally important they or where they feel capable of and share the responsibility of the governing at the home front because each moment dedicated for the nation goes a long way in making the nation strong and awakened. There is a vast number of fields and fronts like education, health care general awareness about the current problems gripping and enveloping the present society. Education: - In fast moving society the resources are falling short as compared to the requirements of citizens. There is a vast network of schools, high and higher education institutions in the country. Due to the economic and financial constraints, it becomes difficult for the governments with the limited resources to cope with the fast-increasing requirements of the society.

There is shortage of teaching staff and the equipment in the schools which badly tell upon the academic careers of the youth. In such and similar situations the retired teachers should come forward and manage free classes for the students at their own, render their volunteer services in the schools, open free tutorials for both the school going students and for those preparing for the competitive examinations. Their role becomes more crucial in fostering moral, national and ethical values among them. The teachers can undertake this herculean job through the educator guilds visiting the schools where there is shortage of teaching staff. They should resolve not to keep any school without the subject teachers by pooling the resources. Combining assets, capabilities from multiple sources like individuals, organizations into a shared pool to achieve greater efficiency or to maximize students benefits and minimize the costs. Health: Retired medical personnel can provide immense value to society by leveraging their decades of experience, knowledge, and wisdom through flexible, nontraditional or volunteer roles. Offering their services to fill the gap created by the active physicians on a short-term basis particularly in rural or underserved areas. Providing remote consultation and care from home which increases access for patients with mobility issues or those in remote areas. Under free clinics and medical mission, they can volunteer at local free clinics, community health centers or international medical mission to treat under privileged population. They can provide their services in medical, nursing or physicians schools. Their role becomes crucial when they conduct workshops in schools, work places to educate the public on health hygiene and disease prevention. They can support community health during disasters by collaborating with the agencies like Red Cross to assist during the emergencies. These and many more opportunities allow retired doctors to maintain a sense of purpose while contributing to make a positive, lasting impact on patient care and public health. Undoubtedly the persons retiring from Police revenue, engineering, social welfare, rural development, judiciary and many can play their role in educating, apprising and sensitizing the society, making people more aware of, sensitive to and responsive towards specific social issues, problems and the feeling of others. Breaking down the habit of following the beaten paths, breaking down the stereotypes, changing the mindset, fostering empathy to address deeply rooted biases. Sensitizing about the problems gender discrimination, feticide. Understanding and help solving local issues like health services, HIV awareness curbing social stigmas, inclusive sensitization about disability, educating the society regarding their rights, educating the masses regarding the hazards of pollution, need for protection of environment and global issues. The retired technocrats have very special and crucial role to play, in the process of developmental and execution of the projects. They are the technical persons who can monitor the construction works to ensure quantity and quality of work in order to save the money going waste in the shape of commissions and bribery. The persons retiring from the judiciary, revenue and the police department can guide the society regarding the rights and duties of citizens because majority of them fall prey to corruption because of the lack of knowledge about the laws and rules framed for the welfare of the society. In short, the serving and those retired senior citizens, if work sincerely can prove a boon and saviour for the society being dragged by the vested interests.

The Stolen Sun: Lost Childhoods in Kashmir

■ SAMIKSHA MISHRA

The shikara glided through the glass-like waters of Dal Lake, but for the first time in my week-long journey through the valley, I wasn't looking at the majestic Zabarwan range. My eyes were fixed on a young girl, perhaps no older than ten, sitting at the edge of a wooden porch in a lakeside hamlet. Her fingers moved with a blurring, rhythmic speed across a carpet loom, weaving intricate patterns of silk and wool. "She has 'nimble fingers,'" the boatman whispered, noticing my gaze. "It's a gift. They say children weave the finest knots". I felt a cold shiver that had nothing to do with the February breeze. Behind those "nimble fingers" was a global crisis I had been reading about a world where millions of children are still denied their right to be just that: children. As a traveler, I came to see the "Paradise on Earth," but I found myself witnessing the "Red Card" moment for humanity. Earlier that morning, I had scrolled through the latest 2024 ILO-UNICEF estimates on my phone. The numbers were staggering. There are currently 138 million children trapped in labour worldwide, representing approximately 8 percent of the global child population. Even more sobering is the fact that nearly 54 million of these children are subjected to hazardous conditions—tasks involving toxic chemicals, dangerous machinery, or excessively long hours that permanently jeopardize their physical and mental development. While the international community saw a glimmer of hope as the number of child labourers fell by 22 million between 2020 and 2024, the momentum is still too slow. We have officially failed to meet the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 8.7, which mandated the total eradication of child labour by 2025. Now, the global pace must accelerate 11 times faster if we hope to meet the new 2030 roadmap. "Why aren't they in school?" I asked Meher, a local social worker I met at a cafe in Srinagar. She explained that in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), child labour is deeply integrated into the traditional and informal economies. In the carpet weaving sector, a study revealed that female child labourers often outnumber their male counterparts, with most falling into the 11-14 age group. Employers often justi-



fy their exploitation with the myth of "nimble fingers," paying these children meager wages that can range from as little as Rs 1 to Rs 12 per day. The struggle isn't limited to weaving. In the Jammu division, the brick kiln industry is a major site of hazardous work where children often work alongside their parents as bonded labourers to repay high-interest loans. These children endure 12-hour shifts in extreme temperatures, exposed to toxic fumes. Even in the beautiful apple orchards, children are pulled from school during peak seasons to pick fruit and carry heavy boxes, a practice that directly contributes to long-term dropouts in rural areas. Meher pointed out a "hidden" burden that the data often misses. Globally, boys are overrepresented in formal child labour statistics, but this gap reverses when you include unpaid household chores. Girls often perform 21 hours or more of domestic work per week, a "hidden" toil that anchors them to the home and excludes them from economic statistics. The transition from the workshop to the classroom is the primary goal of regional reforms, especially since the Right to Education (RTE) Act was applied to the region in 2019. However, J&K faces a "deep crisis" at the secondary level. While primary enrollment has improved, the UT

recorded a secondary school dropout rate of 13.42 percent in 2025—the 3rd highest in northern India. In remote border districts like Rajouri, Poonch, and Gurez, poverty and difficult terrain create massive barriers to keeping teenagers in school. As I prepared to leave the valley, I saw a group of students near the Tourist Reception Centre participating in the relaunch of the "Red Card to Child Labour" campaign. They were taking photos with vibrant red cards—a universal sporting symbol signifying that a boundary has been crossed and that the "game is over" for exploitation. This movement, coinciding with the 6th Global Conference in Marrakech this February, aims to mobilize everyone from world leaders to local citizens. In J&K, the government is also stepping up, with substantial funding approved for the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan to improve school infrastructure and digital learning. As my flight took off, I looked down at the snow-capped peaks. Kashmir's beauty is undeniable, but its true strength lies in its future generations. The "nimble fingers" of the girl I saw on the lake shouldn't be tying knots for twelve rupees a day; they should be holding a pen, writing a future where every child is in a classroom, not a workshop. The game must be over.