

GOOD DECISION

Rs 8 per litre cut in excise duty on petrol and Rs 6 a litre on diesel to avoid increase in fuel prices is a much sought after decision of the government as people were facing lot of hardships due to uncontrolled rise in petrol and diesel prices. The cut in price will also help in controlling the prices of essential commodities to a large extent as the common man's kitchen budget has been disturbed due to uncontrolled inflation. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has announced this benevolent move by the government which will help the masses to some extent. Government was facing mounting pressure over the uncontrolled surge in fuel prices which are directly linked with the international price of crude oil. Not only this, the government has also decided to give Rs 200 per cylinder subsidy to Ujjwala Yojana beneficiaries for 12 cylinders in a year to help ease some of the burden arising from cooking gas rates rising to record levels. The unprecedented rise in fuel costs has badly affected food and other necessary items like packaged milk, edible oil and wheat, among others, and has thrown household budgets out of order. The problem in India is that once prices of essential commodities go up, they seldom revert and for sure the higher prices of vegetables, fruits, pulses, wheat flour, etc will become the new benchmark with no chance of cost cutting. Of course the cut in taxes will give a sigh of relief to the people confronting uncontrolled price rise but this move will cost dearly to government which is already under stress due to several factors and is struggling to run the affairs of the country. The decision to stabilize the fuel prices shows that the government is also aware about the people's hardship and wanted to give relief but the compulsions which are obvious were stopping it to take the benevolent decision earlier. Now, when the government has finally paid heed to people's plight and given respite in terms of cutting the taxes, hopefully there will be a relief for some time with inflation witnessing a dip for some time.

GOVT IN ACTION

As promised by the LG Manoj Sinha, the J&K Administration has shifted over fifty Kashmiri Pandit employees to safer places of postings as a Confidence Building Measure because the community was reeling under fear psychosis after broad daylight murder of Rahul Bhat by terrorists. It has also been reported that 150 companies of CAPFs will be deployed in coming days in the Valley to provide security to KPs and also to safeguard the devotees who are about to visit Kashmir to pay obeisance at revered Cave Shrine of Lord Shiva- Shri Amarnath Yatra. It is unfortunate that some Kashmiri Pandits are still staging demonstrations against the government and seeking postings in safer places including Jammu. This demand needs to be revisited as people from across the country are rendering services in Kashmir to restore peace despite many giving supreme sacrifice but the KPs want safe postings in Jammu that too when their appointments were carried out under the scheme to ensure return of these employees along with their families to Kashmir. If all those who have been posted in Kashmir will raise the same demand the time is not far when Kashmir will go out of hands. It is advisable for the KP employees to be reasonable and do not go for things which are difficult to realize for the government. There is no doubt that the government is keen to restore normalcy in the Valley as soon as possible but by staging protests and creating an adverse atmosphere the KP employees are doing no good for the government as well as for themselves. As the J & K government has transferred 56 Kashmiri Pandit employees to safer educational institutes in Srinagar, the rest of the employees should also have faith in the government because sooner than later they will also be placed in less vulnerable areas to ensure their safety. The government which is committed to security of the KPs has also made a provision that the working Kashmiri Pandit couples be either posted in one educational institute or nearby to each other thus making it clear that no one will be left to confront danger.

OFF 'D' CUFF

Dr. John Blanchard estimated that since the dawn of civilization, about 60 billion people have walked planet Earth. Of those, only a handful made an impression that actually changed the world. Of that handful, one stands head and shoulders above all others. His name is Jesus. Socrates taught for 40 years, Plato for 50, Aristotle for 40, and Jesus for only 3. Yet the influence of Christ's 3-year ministry infinitely transcends the impact left by the combined 130 years of teaching from these men who were among the greatest philosophers of all ancient times.

Jesus Christ lived in the flesh about 2,000 years ago in the small country of Israel, yet His birthday divides history's timeline into "B.C." and "A.D." Jesus' earthly ministry lasted three short years, yet His message travels around the world by every means and mass media. Christ never wrote a book, yet libraries could be filled with volumes written about the Lord Jesus. He never painted a picture, yet the world's greatest artists have painted Him with awe. Jesus of Nazareth has inspired the world's greatest dramas, music, and literature. He had no formal education, yet thousands of schools and universities have been built in His name. The great historian Kenneth Scott Latourette said, "Jesus has had more effect on the history of mankind than any other of its race who ever existed."

Jesus never raised an army and yet, multiplied millions have been martyred for Him.

Who is Jesus?

He never traveled far from His birthplace, yet His testimony has gone around the world. He had only a handful of followers, but they changed the world. He had a public ministry of only three years, yet here we are, 2022 years later, saying "Jesus, your name is wonderful"—because He is the exact representation of the invisible God. The visible Jesus makes the invisible God known. The only way you can ever fully know God the Father is through Him. Jesus, Himself said: All things have been delivered to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. (Matthew 11:27)

To rightly answer the question "Who is Jesus?" we must go to the divinely inspired Word of God. Philippians chapter 2 is a good place to begin because of all we learn there about Jesus. It says about Jesus that "Who, being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men." (Philippians 2:6-7) The Infinite becomes an infant, fulfilling Isaiah 7:14, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son..." Jesus Christ, the sovereign, sinless, supernatural Son of God, born of a virgin, was totally, completely obedient. God calls His Son, the Lord Jesus, "God." He is God the Son. God says it through the prophet Isaiah, "...the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father..." (Isaiah 9:6). He is the sovereign Son of God.

Bishop Lalachan Abraham

Our own self-realization is the greatest service we can render the world.

-Ramana Maharshi

EDITORIAL

Need to conserve Biological Diversity

■ DR. BANARSI LAL

Every year 22nd of May is observed as the International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB) across the globe to increase the understanding and awareness on biodiversity issues. Each year, the International Day for Biodiversity focuses on a particular theme. The theme of this year International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB) is "Building a shared future for all life". The slogan was chosen to continue building momentum and support for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework to be adopted at the upcoming UN Biodiversity Conference. On this day awareness about preserving the endangered habitats is created among the people across the globe. A wide range of events are organized globally to increase the understanding of the important role of biodiversity for our present and future generations. On this day awareness on biological diversity is created among the people through schools, colleges, universities, newspapers, radio, television, internet etc. Exhibitions, seminars and webinars etc. are arranged for the students, professional and general public, movies on biodiversity are telecasted, trees are planted, literature on biodiversity is translated in local dialect, endangered species are preserved, competitions among the children on biodiversity are organised etc. This day is an observance and not a public holiday. At Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992 state and government leaders agreed on a strategy for sustainable development at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as "The Earth Summit". Sustainable development is a way to meet the needs of people all over the world and ensuring that planet earth will remain healthy and viable for future generations. One of the most important agreements reached during the Earth Summit was the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Convention on Biological Diversity came into action on December 29, 1993. Every year each anniversary of this date was designated

as the International Day for Biological Diversity. From 2001 onwards the date of this celebration was moved to May 22 due to the number of holidays that fall in late December.

Biodiversity is the foundation for the life and for the essential services provided by ecosystems. It is a global asset of tremendous value for our present and future generations. The numbers of species have been reduced by the man. The Convention on Biological Diversity is the international legal instrument for the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of the genetic resources. The Convention has been implemented through the vision and leadership displayed by the countries, non-governmental organisations, local communities and the scientific communities. Biological diversity encompasses the variety of all life on the earth. Species diversity refers to the numbers and kinds of living organisms, genetic diversity refers to the genetic variation within a population of species and ecosystem diversity which is the variety of habitats, biological communities and ecological processes that occur in the biosphere. Biological diversity is the natural biotic capital of the earth which affects all of us. Human beings derive the supply of food, medicines, energy and many industrial products from biological resources. The biodiversity we observe today is the outcome of over 3.5 billion years of evolutionary history, shaped by the natural processes. Biodiversity forms the web of life of which we are an integral part and upon which we are fully dependent. Global concern about loss of species and ecosystems found expression in the International Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The CBD, one of the key agreements adopted during the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, is the first comprehensive global agreement which addresses all aspects relating to biodiversity. This Convention, which has near universal membership 193 countries as its Parties, sets

out commitments for maintaining the world's ecological underpinnings, while pursuing economic development. India is the party to the CBD. The Convention, while reaffirming sovereign rights of nations over their biological resources, establishes the major goals such as the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from the use of genetic resources.

India is one of the richest nations in the world in terms of biological diversity. India has 15,000 species of flowering plants, 969 species of birds, 389 species of reptiles and 317 species of mammals. India has relatively large number of frogs, salamanders and their kith and kin. Brazil is the most biologically diverse nation in the world. India stands 10th in terms of biological diversity. Some parts of the country are very rich due to a variety of natural causes in biological diversity and some are less. Two of India's mountain ranges, the Eastern Himalaya and the Western Ghats have been designated among the world's eighteen hot spots of biodiversity. The Eastern Himalayas have around 35,000 endemic species of higher plants, 20 endemic species of reptiles and 25 endemic species of amphibians. The Western Ghats have 1,600 endemic species of flowering plants, seven endemic species of mammals, 91 endemic species of reptiles and 84 endemic species of amphibians. Andaman and Nicobar Islands are the third most significant area of biodiversity in India with 144 species of flowering plants and 75 species of land snails that do not occur elsewhere in the world.

The future of biodiversity is highly threatened by the climate change. Loss of biodiversity in all parts of the country has increased alarmingly and many wildlife and plant species are on the verge of extinction. Governments and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) should make the efforts to protect the biodiversity. We should understand that biodiversity is the

foundation for the life and for the essential services provided by ecosystems. It ensures people's livelihoods and sustainable development in all realms of socio-economic activity, including agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism etc.

There is need to priorities prevention of threatened species firstly from becoming extinct by protecting them from threats such as habitat loss due to unplanned urbanization, population growth and pollution. Extinction of different species and gradual changes in ecological communities is a natural phenomenon. With the human activities, the pace of extinction has increased dramatically. Ecosystems are being fragmented or eliminated and several species are in extinction. The fragmentation, degradation and loss of habitats are posing serious threat to the biological diversity. Such kinds of losses are irreversible and pose a threat to our well being. Living beings depend on food crop, medicines and other biological resources. There is need to take effective and urgent action to halt the loss of biodiversity and mainstream the biological diversity. For this purpose appropriate policies, enhancement in capacity building and adequate financial resources are needed.

(The writer is Scientist and Head of KVK, Reasi SKUAST-J).

Kashmiri Pandits caught between two stools

■ OKMAR DATTRAY

There is nothing more unfortunate for a community than the fact that it is caught between two stools and the Kashmiri Pandits are in fact sadly caught between two stools and are on the brink of their extinction like the proverbial Kashmiri Hangul and sincere steps need to be taken to address the problems of the survival of this microscopic minority community. The Kashmiri Pandits stand devastated and ruined in the secular democracy of their own country and the insensitive rulers only use the community of Kashmiri Pandits as a vote bank and do politics over the misfortunes of the community and do only experimentation on them as if they are laboratory objects. The genuine concerns and grievances of Kashmiri Pandits should be addressed but it seems to be the no priority of the BJP government which is busy only in furthering the interests of the party and seems least concerned with the welfare of the Pandit community which has become refugee in their own country and the rulers want to remain leeches to power and has no time or inclination to attend to and address the problems of the uprooted Kashmiri Pandits.

The Kashmiri Pandits remain on two stands and are thus neither of the Kashmiri nor of Jammu and this is the tragedy and the powers should take sincere steps to save the community from extinction and this will be the true service of the government towards the Kashmiri Pandits.

This unfortunate and hapless community of Kashmiri Pandits feel insecure and frightened as well as alienated in the place of their birth and the government does not take required steps to remove the fear psychosis in the Pandit community and fail to instil confidence and trust among these people so that they live and work in peace, security and tranquility. Day in and day out the youth of this community are made the soft targets and are killed by the enemies of humanity in broad day light without any remorse.

The Kashmiriyat and the sufi culture as well as the communal harmony and brotherhood for which Kashmir was famous throughout the world stands destroyed beyond repair and this is the great misfortune and it has brought bad name to Kashmir which is very unfortunate. The targeted killings of the Kashmiri Pandits, other Hindu minorities and the patriotic and nationalistic Muslims is a big stain and slap on the secular democracy of the country.

The Kashmiri Pandits stand devastated and destroyed being on the two stands and their culture and identity is under perpetual threat and they are on the brink of extinction and steps should be taken by the powers to ensure their survival in Kashmir which is under threat. Therefore the government should take a serious note of the sad plight of the Pandits and the package employees who are performing their duties in Kashmir under duress, oppression and threat

to their precious lives and the BJP government remaining as a mute spectator to all the sad happenings and killings in the valley. The ground conditions today in Kashmir resemble to the hay days of militancy of 1990 as the fear and insecurity has gripped the valley and the rulers looking the other way and only giving fake and false sermons of normalcy. The normalcy of BJP is nowhere in sight and the balloon of normalcy of the BJP has punctured because of the killings of the soft targets and selective killings. One fails to understand as to what is the definition and parameter of normalcy to the government which only parrot the normalcy paradigm. The Kashmiri Pandits and its package employee stand churched in the mill of the militancy and there seems no one to come to the rescue of this unfortunate community. The tall claims and shallow declarations of the powers to rehabilitate the KP community in the land of their birth are utopian and there is no substance in these declarations of the government and the Kashmiri Pandits attach no importance to these hollow claims of the rulers. The Kashmiri Pandits and the package employees stand sandwiched between the bullets of the gun tottering militants and the total apathy and insensitiveness of the BJP government towards the problems of existence of the Kashmiri Pandits. There seems no one on whom the hapless Kashmiri Pandits can bank upon as their faith and confidence on the rulers has been totally shattered. The majority community of Kashmir has totally failed to stand by the Kashmiri Pandits and have abdicated their religious and moral responsibility of protecting the minuscule minority community of Pandits. Therefore on whose faith the Kashmiri Pandits will live and work in Kashmir. This is the big dilemma. The government has failed to provide the fool proof security to the Kashmiri Pandits and the Package employees who are targeted at their sweet will by the militants. It will be sane that the government should relocate the Pandit package employees to Jammu division so that they are saved from the cruel jaws of the militants. The package employees are so much scared that they are reluctant to perform their duties in Kashmir valley as the package employees are killed by the militants with sadistic pleasure.

The government should come to the rescue of the Package employees and relocate them to Jammu division for the time being so that they are saved and their life, limb and honour is also saved. The insensitive BJP government of centre and the LG administration should wake from the deep slumber and take sincere steps to ensure the survival of the Kashmiri Pandits whose very survival is at stake in Kashmir because of the brutal killings of the community members and more so of the package employees. The government wants the minuscule minority community Pandit package employees to work in Kashmir against all threats to their

lives from the militants and these unfortunate ones have become cannon fodder to the guns of the militants. The government only wants that the return of Kashmiri Pandits should not be sabotaged and it makes the Kashmiri Pandits and package employees as sacrificial goats and is least concerned with their safety and dignity. The package employees are agitating from the last ten days and are genuinely demanding their temporary adjustment anywhere in India and the government is trying to divide the package employees and are giving them the lollipops of solving service, promotion matters but during the last ten years the government did nothing to address the service related matters. This is only done to distract the attention of package employees from their main and genuine demand of relocating them outside Kashmir valley. It is very sad that different Kashmiri Pandit organizations are maintaining stoic silence on the unfortunate killing of KP employee Rahul Bhat. It seems that there shops will be closed if the demands of the agitating Package employees are met. Jammu and Kashmir is not a state but is a Union Territory and as such the government employees can be transferred to any place in the UT and so the package employees can be adjusted in Jammu province and there is no harm in it and on wonders as to why is the government indifferent to adjust these package employees in Jammu province? The BJP government which has overwhelming majority in Parliament should pass Kashmiri Pandits' Return and Rehabilitation bill so that seven lakh Kashmiri Pandits can be resettled back in their place of birth and the government should sincerely take steps to make the plan of the return and rehabilitation a success on the ground. It is only after the return and rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits in valley that the package employees can live and perform their duties without fear and duress and only then they should be ordered to perform their duties across Kashmir. The Kashmiri Pandits existence and survival is at danger because of the gun wielding militants and Islamist Jihadists and their very culture and identity is at stake and they will continue to be annihilated and their rehabilitation seems to be their annihilation and the government seems hell bent on false return and rehabilitation of the Kashmiri Pandits which in effect seems to be synonymous with their annihilation.

The Government if it is interested in the welfare of the uprooted Kashmiri Pandit's should take necessary and sincere steps so that the existence and survival of the Kashmiri Pandit's is not threatened but made possible. To conclude the following poetry of a poet is apt to describe the condition of the uprooted Kashmiri Pandits, "Na Khuda He Mila Na Visalay Sanam Na Eder Kay Rahay Na Uder Kay Rahay".

(The author is a columnist and social activist).

Progressing Jammu and Kashmir
JK Govt promoting
gender-inclusive ecosystem
ensuring women enhanced access
to education, economic growth

Jammu and Kashmir government has embarked upon numerous initiatives to create a gender inclusive ecosystem in the Union Territory for ensuring women get an enhanced access to education besides socio-economic growth.

The government led by Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha, is providing all opportunities to J&K women to progress and prosper in all fields of life ensuring their equal role in development pursuits.

The administration is leaving no stone unturned to ensure social and economic equality for women in the UT which is integral to achieve rapid growth and development.

Women empowerment and their equal presence in the technical sector is important to build a strong community, a resilient state and a stronger country.

For the first time, the government took a historic decision that spouse of a Jammu and Kashmir domicile shall also be deemed as a domicile. Earlier, spouses of Permanent Resident Cardholders were considered at par but not domiciles.

In this regard, Jammu and Kashmir administration added a clause to J&K Grant of Domicile Certificate (Procedure) Rules, 2020, allowing the spouse of a native woman married outside the Union Territory to apply for a domicile certificate.

The order has also modified the application of domicile condition to all levels of jobs in Jammu and Kashmir government, as the newly added clause has been brought under the Jammu and Kashmir Civil Services (Decentralization and Recruitment) Act as well.

Lieutenant Governor recently during a meeting with members of Jammu and Kashmir's first women cycling club 'Women do Ride' said the government is making proactive intervention to create facilities to encourage women participation in governance, business and other sectors.

He appreciated the role of women in society terming their complete empowerment as a game changer in the development world of the UT.

J&K government is taking necessary steps so that our girls are well equipped with knowledge, skills and self-confidence and included at all levels of governance.

The AICTE's scholarship program and UT government's initiatives like Hausla, Tejaswini, Umeed, LG Super 75, Parvaaz and Mumkin are some of the major steps taken up by the government towards women empowerment and bridging the gender gap.

The focus of J&K government is on effective implementation of policies and programmes tailored for women emancipation which is pre-requisite for progress and prosperity of the UT. Focus is being accorded on skill training and re-skilling of women so that they have equal share in future economic opportunities.

Collective efforts are yielding tangible results and it is important to notice that during Kashmir University's convocation, there were 94 gold medalists in 2021, of which, 77 per cent or 66 were girls. Similarly, during the convocation of Islamic University of Science and Technology, the majority of gold medalists were women which is a clear sign of women empowerment.

The J&K government has made headways in strengthening industry-academia partnerships and skill development of students at higher secondary level also.