

Unprecedented Surge In Voter Turnout

The recent elections witnessed an unprecedented surge in voter turnout, marking a significant milestone in democratic participation. Across various constituencies, from urban centers to rural hinterlands, citizens exercised their constitutional right with remarkable enthusiasm and fervor, signaling a profound engagement with the electoral process. In the wake of heightened political awareness and societal mobilization, the turnout surpassed previous records, reflecting a collective determination to shape the course of governance. In numerous regions, voter participation exceeded expectations, underscoring the electorate's resolve to uphold democratic principles and hold representatives accountable. The surge in voter turnout can be attributed to multifaceted factors. Firstly, increased accessibility and outreach efforts by election authorities played a pivotal role in encouraging citizens to cast their ballots. Through extensive voter education campaigns, voter registration drives, and the deployment of mobile polling stations, barriers to participation were effectively mitigated, enabling marginalized communities and remote populations to exercise their franchise. Furthermore, the emergence of grassroots movements and civil society initiatives galvanized voter engagement, transcending traditional political divides and fostering a sense of civic duty. Grassroots organizations, community leaders, and social media influencers mobilized citizens, emphasizing the importance of civic participation and the impact of individual votes on shaping the collective future. Moreover, the prevalence of pressing socio-political issues, coupled with heightened public discourse, propelled citizens to the polling booths in unprecedented numbers. Concerns surrounding economic inequality, social justice, environmental sustainability, and good governance resonated deeply with voters, driving them to express their aspirations and demands through the ballot box. Additionally, the advent of technology played a pivotal role in amplifying voter turnout, particularly among younger demographics. Digital platforms and social media channels served as catalysts for political engagement, facilitating voter registration, dissemination of information, and mobilization efforts.

Enchanting Dudu Valley

■ VARUN KHAJURIA

Dudu Valley in Udhampur district lies amidst the lush green vibrant coniferous forest intermingled with broad leaved trees, shrubs, herbs, climber with multihued variety of other flora. The valley lies around 171 kms from Jammu city itself. The break up journey through local buses, hired/ owned vehicles is from Jammu to Chenani (100 kms), Chenani to Mantalai(50 kms) through various hamlets viz Basti, Bast, Gauri kund, Sudhmahadev (where 2800 years old lord Shivas temple) exists. At Sudhma Dev An annual Shiv mela is religiously celebrated where pilgrim across the country assemble in the form of a pilgrimage in the first week of June every year.

The journey onwards passes through Mantali (12 kms) prominently famous as a beautiful spot amidst deodar, kail and chir forest. Here, late Dharendra Bhramchari raised beautiful structures for yoga center of international fame apart from petrol pump, gaushalla, mini zoo, rosary, and a swimming pool. But unfortunately with the passing away of Yog guru for back around 90s's in a helicopter crash while landing under a dense fall. All his further ambitious planning stood at standstill. It is painful to add over here that many writers have of repeatedly emphasized about the hefty invested money on yoga ashram together with allied developments to warrant their up keep, preservation and further enhancement to restore the beauty of the spot by bringing it under Patnitop Development Authority (PDA) but nothing concrete has so far been materialized.

The writer was posted as a Forest Officer (Headquarter Chenani) had occasionally deliberations with yog guru who used to tell that he had taken up the issue with Hilton Group Of Hotels for the further development of this picturesque spot but unfortunately no head way could be made. (For the visual illustration the photographs of the time) are within this write up.

It would be incomplete to make a mention about the legendary multi starrer movie "Jani Dushman" by R K Kohli, most part of the movie was shot at Chenani and its mesmerizing spots of this area. Dharendra Bharmchari was forest conscious and as requested, he raised a nursery with around one lakh seedling in poly parts which were afterwards were planted out in the vicinity of the area. Apart from that he was a socially very affectionate as he provided employment to the locals of the area who still remember him whole heartedly.

Now, onwards from Mantalai the road winds through various hamlets viz Bap, Srara, Marothi, Koi, Latti, Dhooana, Jakhed and finally Dudu valley. However this road has further extension to seri the main base camping point. And uphill there is suez dhar and further trekking the suez dhar is hazardous. Sauz Dhar forms the northern aspect of the dudu valley.

It will be most interesting and enchanting to make a mention that while the writer with his staff was conducting markings in the dudu valley on the southern aspect, the most of the time stayed at chari forest rest house. It was to my astonishment while viewing northern aspect of the dudu valley where there were twinkling's like glow worms. And on enquiry from the locals, I came to know that there is a vast potential of multi medicinal herbs. Also they told that one can conveniently trek from base camp chari during the day. But with the sunset, the herbs emit fragrance which makes one drowsy and it becomes cumbersome to cross the area.

The top of the Sauz Dhar is just like a small plateau and on the other side there are lush green forests of deodar, kail, coniferous and spruce with broad leaved trees such as maple, rhododendron. And descending down one lands in charming Chenab Valley. So , descending down from the top of Sauz Dhar means to land into Bhadharwah Valley which is still more thrilling and enchanting. One is though indeed lucky to have a view of the valley to have a closer look of the natural bounty.

Concluding, therefore, it is prudent to mention here that nature has all along been worshipped across the globe for its timelessness. The mesmerizing meadows and mountains make for a great home. Everyone experiences richness of nature and all its bounty at least ones in lifetime. Light amongst stars and the open sky, the green grass and towering trees that give us shade, a lake are snow caped mountain all make breath taking moments of feeling of being one with nature.

And William Blake says trees which move some to tears of Joy is in the eyes of others, only a green thing that stands in the way. Some see nature in all ridicule and deformity and small scares see at all. But to the eyes of the man of imagination, nature is imaginative itself.

Let we, there, spend time with nature, accepting the diversity and brilliance of what is really a gift to mankind. Let us learn to revere and preserve nature at all costs and at all times.

■ VIJAY GARG

Some scientific evidence suggests that with rising temperatures, a situation called 'Seasonal Affective Disorder' occurs. This causes rapid changes in the neurotransmitters found in people's brain. These changes motivate people to take suicidal steps like suicide.

In 2018, researchers at the American University of Stanford identified a strong link between hot weather and rising suicide rates. Led by Stanford economist Marshall Work The study claimed that the projected temperature increase by 2050 could lead to an additional twenty-one thousand suicides in the United States and Mexico. Examples of how heat, heat and humidity have become deadly are visible in cities across the world.

Cities in India have been seen as hubs of better infrastructure, excellent public facilities and employment opportunities. People living there expect a good lifestyle. But now cities themselves are becoming a problem for the world. population burden These cities, groaning and facing terrible pollution in the name of facilities, are becoming the center of dilemma instead of convenience for the people living in them due to severe pressure on infrastructure, inflation and increasing distance of residence from places of work. Here in the last few years a new problem has surrounded him.

The problem is that there is more heat in cities than in villages. Scientists have called this problem 'urban heat'. It is also being called urban heat wave. This urban heatwave was noticed in the year

■ G L KHAJURIA

Very few cities are fortunate enough to have a lushgreen vibrant forest in their close proximity.

Jammu as such is having Manda forest, a short distance towards its north, where one can have a sigh of relief with refreshing air both in the morning and evening.

Not only that the forest refreshes the morning and evening walkers, the fresh breeze also whiffs through the entire city of Jammu to keep her ever-refreshing.

Manda is endowed with a rich vibrant and lush green forest of all strata of trees amalgamated with climbers, shrubs and herbs of multihued manifestation.

Apart from being laden with rich flora, Manda is famous for a rich variety of fauna which constitute a kaleidoscopic panorama of wilflife intermingled with rich flora.

Not too distant past, a tiger was sighted on the serpentine Bull cart road(BC road) near Karr Nallaha which drains

■ SURJIT SINGH FLORA

Man is a social being. We need some interaction with other people to avoid loneliness and have some moments in our life to laugh, play, have fun. When our need for social relationships is not met, we break down mentally and physically. Lack of interaction and lack of connection brings about the emotional discomfort we know as loneliness.

Loneliness brings negative emotions and thoughts that play like a soundtrack in our mind. They destroy our health. Despite all this, loneliness cannot be considered abnormal. We all have felt it at some point or the other. According to University of Chicago researcher Dr. John Cacioppo, single adults drink more alcohol and exercise less than those who

2018, when 'US Journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences/Sciences' had published a report on rising temperatures in forty-four cities of the world. In that research report, focusing on the urban heat occurring in six metropolitan cities of South Asia, it was told that between the years 1979 and 2005, the city of Kolkata, which used to experience severe heat waves for sixteen days every year, now has such days.

The number has increased to forty-four. Research had claimed that the risk of facing urban heat wave has increased by four times in metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata with a population of crores. It has aA warning was also given that now the cities will have to learn to live with this 'urban heat' and bear its constant threat.

Here, 'Centre for Science and Environment' has revealed this problem in a detailed report in its magazine 'Down to Earth'. In this, the question has been raised that how much heat can humans bear in the greenery-less cities turning into concrete jungles. The question is also that what is there in big cities or metros that produces many times more heat than the naturally occurring heat waves?Has been.

The serious side of this is that urban heat wave can show its effect not only in May-June but also in severe winter.

A research paper titled 'Urban Heat Island over Delhi Punches Holes in Widespread Fog in the Indo-Gangetic Plains' was published in the 'Geophysical Research Letters Journal' of the 'American Geophysical Union'. It was

down into Tawi flowing alongside jammu city.

Though, of course, with the passage of time and other factors, Manda has in many ways lost its prestine grandeur and glory with the result that the richness of both floraand fauna has lost luster.

The Pea-cock, our National bird and the tiger our National animal which once were in abundance have now reduced to a very few numbers.

Similar is the fate of other colourful animals and birds such as Jackals, wolfs, Mongoose, creepers, Jungle fowls and so many of their allies.

Manda's entire forest falls within the scrubland which is mostly dry, arid and quite thorny.

The trees are short of stature and crooked in limb and their branches are wavering out.Amidst clumps of these malformed trees are the shrubs which form the undergrowth of these dry and arid lands.

do not live alone. Their diet is high in fat, they sleep less.

In addition, it has effects such as increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, increased stress levels, poor decision-making, impaired memory and learning, and changes in brain function.

To avoid loneliness, try to do the things you like the most, talk to your loved ones and call them if necessary. Loneliness is a burden and a pain in the heart.

Fear of social isolation even when you are in a social gathering. Loneliness affects the best parts of your life and forces you to notice their profound absence.

Being alone is a substitute, and loneliness is utterly helpless. Therefore, loneliness can affect memories, cause confu-

sion, and cause insomnia. Everything has a consequence. Whether good or bad. Loneliness doesn't affect anyone immediately. But, in the long run, it leads you to depression which leads to severe depression.

And remember, in the beginning, you are shy and worried that you will say something unusual. Gradually, you isolate yourself thinking that you are not capable of social interaction. Although you want to talk to people, but are unable to reach them.

Because now you have built a wall between yourself and society. Breaking the wall seems impossible now. You want someone to reach you now, but obviously no one comes to save you. Now, you become restless with loneliness.

Today's truth is that urbanization taking place in view of the needs of about 12-15 crore population of twenty-three cities of the country including Delhi-Mumbai, has turned the cities into such 'heat' and 'gas chambers', which cause extremes of weather. Are being made.

Why have these cities become like this?There are some obvious reasons. Like, building large numbers of tall buildings in less space and indiscriminate use of electricity to keep them cool, bright and clean. Be it home or office,

Thick and unyielding, these are armed with interlinking thorns designed by nature to tear flesh off the unsuspecting passerby.

The Plants are waxy, thorny and occasionally hairy and all thesecombined in unison, which don't conform to the image of the well behaved potted green.

Mighty beasts are seldomfound in the scrubland of Manda to enchant the onlooker and make them fall in love with the habitat which houses them.

The very symbols of nature that endear are absent and instead in the tough and hardy survivors of relentless ecosystem of Manda forest, its flora and fauna.

Over the years, Manda was thickly covered with a rich variety of flora and fauna. But with the human interference ad intrusion has deteriorates its vibrancy to alarger extent.

There is a complete silence of songs which were being echoed by the wild birds both at sunrise and sun-set.

Break your mental barrier

Gradually, when this frustration does not break through your mental barrier, you go into deep depression. Social anxiety, mood swings and wanting to be alone in your room and never come out are some of the symptoms of loneliness.

To live a better life, you need to break your mental barrier. It is difficult but not impossible. If you don't try to make friends there, loneliness will eat away at your soul. This is your way of doing or living anything in life Desire will be eaten. Try to fill all kinds of colors in life to make it full of fun. laugh and play, take it seriously and enjoy your life to the fullest and live a healthy life.

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

YOUR COLUMN MISUTILISATION OF MPLAD FUND

Dear Editor,

Member of Parliament Local Area Development (MPLAD) Fund, non-lapsable in nature, is given to the MPs to spend the amount for the development of their constituency by executing developmental works of capital nature for creation of durable assets to meet the local needs. Reports of misutilization of the MPLAD amount have been surfacing at regular intervals. But no serious note of it has been taken to curb it. Utilization of this amount to improve the prospects of electoral gains for the party is the betrayal of trust. People of the constituency irrespective of the caste or religion they belong to, are betrayed by denial of the need-based development of the area. Union Home Minister Amit Shah has alleged that the amount sanctioned for Raebareli has been spent on the minorities. The veracity of the truth must be unearthed. Shah has claimed that he has been in possession of the details. If so, it should not be held in wrap. If the allegation levelled by Shah is true, the amount that has been misutilized has to be deducted in the next instalment of MPLAD amount to be sanctioned. Otherwise the amount so spent by the MP has to be recovered from the pay of the MPs concerned. Necessary amendment has to be made in the Constitution to empower the government to recover the amount from the erring MPs. MPLAD scheme was introduced by the Government of India on 23 December 1993. In the MPLAD scheme each MP is allocated Rs. 5 crore per year and it is being released in 2 equal instalments to the MPs. Since 2011-12 the amount has been raised Rs. 5 crore from Rs. 5 lakh in 1993-94 and Rs. 2 crore from 1998-99. The amount not released in any year is carried forward to the next year. With every MP getting Rs. 5 crore every year, in the term of five years, a sum of Rs. 25 crore is given to each of the MPs to improve their areas. A.

Suryaprakash, perspective Parliament watcher and author of "What ails Indian Parliament (1995)" is said to have thrown light on the gross violation of guidelines of the scheme by many members. Many MPs are keen to invest these funds in private trusts and societies created by themselves. They are seen to have recommended for the projects that are prohibited. The Comptroller and Auditor General has reportedly examined this scheme but the auditors and surveyors have expressed concern over the lack of supervision at the district level and gross violation of guidelines by MPs.

Report says that the surveyors have not been able to trace "the Assets" allegedly created under this scheme. Community halls have been allegedly created in the vicinity of religious places. Computers bought for schools have been allegedly diverted for commercial purposes. MPLAD Fund has become boon for the MPs to utilize the amount for promoting their political and personal interests. Tax payers' money is being squandered away. As per a report, there is a case of an advance amount of Rs. 8 lakh collected for installing solar pumps by a company in Jharkhand and later the company is said to have vanished. Officials of the National Rural Employment Programme have reportedly duped the government by claiming MPLAD funds for roads already constructed.

There are innumerable instances of defalcation of funds. Unless each of the cases is strictly audited, the misutilization of funds continues making big hole on the pocket of public exchequer. Tejswi Surya has reportedly emerged as the top performer among the Benghaluru MPs. If every MP sincerely and honestly utilizes the amount to the development of their constituencies, the face of India can be changed for still better.

K.V. SEETHARAMAIAH

Heat waves on the rise

Dear Editor,

I am writing this letter to express my deep concern about the extreme heat waves that have been plaguing the city of Mumbai and elsewhere in the country since the last two months.

The scorching temperatures have had a devas-

tating impact on the residents, posing serious health issues and affecting the overall well-being of the community.

The frequency and intensity of these heat waves have been alarming, making it very difficult for the people to cope up with the extreme conditions.

The lack of proper infrastructure and limited access to reliable electricity exacerbates the situation, leaving many vulnerable individuals without access to cooling systems or adequate shelter.

The consequences of these heat waves are far-reaching. Heat-related illnesses, such as heat-stroke and dehydration, have become all too common. The elderly, children, and those with pre-existing health conditions are particularly susceptible to the dangers posed by the extreme heat. It is crucial that immediate measures be taken to protect the most vulnerable members of our community.

In order to address the pressing issue of extreme heat waves in the country, urgent action from the governments of various states and relevant authorities are essential.

Prioritizing proactive measures are crucial, including improving urban planning to incorporate more green spaces and increasing shaded areas city wise.

Moreover, investing in public awareness campaigns to educate residents on heat-waves safety measures and establishing accessible cooling centres during extreme heat events are vital steps to alleviate the impact on the community. Furthermore, addressing the underlying factors contributing to climate change and global warming is paramount. Encouraging sustainable practices, such as promoting renewable energy sources and reducing carbon emissions, can help mitigate the long-term effects of extreme heat waves.

Jubel D'Cruz