


FOOLPROOF ARRANGEMENTS

As the administration of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir has geared up all its men and machinery for hosting the annual Amarnath Yatra, which this year is expected to be attended by a record number of pilgrims from various states and UTs, it is expected that the Yatra will be held in a peaceful and secure environment, with all possible facilities for the visiting tourists. Right from the last more than two months, officers from both civil administration as well as security forces have been making necessary arrangements for the Yatra which this year is going to be held after a gap of two years as in 2020 and 2021, the annual pilgrimage was cancelled keeping in view the safety of people due to COVID scenario at that time. But now as a significant control has been witnessed over the pandemic, due to mega-vaccination drive carried out by the government and active cooperation of people, the administration of J&K is all set to host a mega religious event. But due to some recent targeted killings in the valley wherein the members of minority communities were martyred in broad daylight, an environment of fear and insecurity has developed. Moreover, some terrorists and anti-national elements have also given threats to disrupt the event but looking at the significance and importance of the Yatra, the Government has geared up security forces and other intelligence agencies to tackle any situation at any time. Moreover, for ensuring safety and security of the visiting pilgrims, the security agencies this year have put in place several high-tech arrangements with enhanced number of deployment, to provide a secure and safe environment to the pilgrims. As per the sources, besides taking several new security arrangements, the security forces have also advised all the visiting tourists to carry their Aadhar cards or some other Government identity card with biometric identification. It seems that the agencies are fully alert this time and didn't want to leave any hole unplugged, of which the anti-national elements or terrorists can take benefit for fulfilling their nefarious designs thereby disrupting the Yatra in any way. These out of the box initiatives prove the determination of the administration to hold a safe and secure pilgrimage without any type of risk or threat.

MONSOON WOES

There is no doubt that the people eagerly wait for Monsoon season in J&K to get a sigh of relief from the blistering heat of summer months but the advent of this rainy season brings along many diseases which always wreak havoc as inundation becomes the main cause of many water borne diseases. There is dire need to remain cautious against the diseases which are prevalent during the monsoon season. Already much pain has been caused due to COVID-19 pandemic and therefore the society cannot afford to face more afflictions due to waterborne diseases which are inevitable during the upcoming monsoon season if exceptional care is not taken to prevent the same. Diseases like typhoid, diarrhea, dysentery, Hepatitis A and E, jaundice, food poisoning, malaria, dengue, certain fungal infections and many more come with the inception of rainy season and therefore people should remain very careful to remain disease-free during the months of rains. As monsoon is the breeding season for many insects and worms, and they tend to lay eggs on the leaves of plants, so avoid consuming raw leafy greens at any cost. Also, apart from the risk of ingesting pathogens, raw vegetables can upset the digestive system, especially for those who are susceptible to stomach troubles. Thoroughly washing of fruits and vegetables becomes a necessity in monsoon season because one never knows what he or she might accidentally consume with these items. Best thing is to consult the qualified doctors in case of any infection or disease during these months as the same can prove dangerous if not treated in proper scientific manner. Monsoon is the perfect time for viruses and bacteria to thrive and that is the reason behind viral fevers, allergic reactions and other viral infections becoming rampant during this season. To remain healthy, one needs to boost immunity and the easiest way of doing that is increasing Vitamin C intake by taking a Vitamin C-rich diet. Drinking a lot of clean water is also necessary to remain healthy as a hydrated body has more immunity. The people should take along water bottles whenever they leave their homes as drinking contaminated water is one of the major sources of diseases during the monsoon months.



OFF 'D' CUFF

Power of knowledge makes soul strong

Ashtavakra had a disjointed and clumsy physique. There were eight broken joints in the body and a badly distorted weak personality. Rolling on the ground he reached the royal court of King Janak. Everyone in the court looking at him started laughing at him. They mocked at him. They wondered whether he was a human being or an animal or some other strange creature. He looked as a black disfigured and distorted figure not accepted generally by his looks by the people. However, what kind of power did he possess to enter and be present in the royal court of King Janak and in a short time became the guru of the king. Instantly he became a worshipable celebrity in the same court in which he was joked about and mocked at. What was that power to bring him to such a high position in a short while.

Knowledge and intelligence cannot be distorted.

Ashtavakra puts a question in the court to everyone's dismay and surprise – “The river is curved but the water which flows in the river is not curved. It flows straight; The sugarcane can be twisted and distorted but the juice inside the cane is not curved;

The world may look to be distorted but the maker of the world cannot be twisted or distorted. The body of the person can be distorted or twisted but his knowledge and intelligence cannot be

Amarnath Yatra-an arduous journey towards peace

■ V K MACOTRA

Kashmir, known famously as paradise on the earth is limping back to normalcy with all time high turnout of over 8 lakh tourists at present. Proper arrangements have been made by the Union territory of J&K for the smooth conduct of the pilgrimage of Amarnath Shrine by placing men and sophisticated machinery at work. The entire Kashmir Valley is bestowed with ancient shrines, mosques and temples. Every shrine has its own prominence and sanctity which is carved out with a legendary tale behind it and is held in high reverence by all the communities irrespective of caste, color and creed even today. The ancient monuments designated and preserved by the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) depict the glorious past of the valley.

The pilgrimage of Amarnath Shrine commencing 30th June 2022 is indeed an amazing, adventurous and arduous endeavour of J&K Union Territory. The pilgrimage is taking place after a gap of two years owing to covid-19 pandemic lockdown. The enchanting Amarnath cave is one of the most revered pilgrimage sites of Hindus. Situated at a height of 12,756 feet above sea level in Lidder valley, Amaranth cave is considered one of the holiest shrines of Lord Shiva. Notwithstanding the constraints, lakhs of pilgrims are expected to throng the site of Amarnath cave to have a glimpse of snow formed, Shivering a symbolic representation of Lord Shiva. The formation of Shivering from melting of ice from the roof of the cave to the floor is perhaps unprecedented in the whole universe where people all across the world turn up to pay obeisance to Lord Shiva. This year the pilgrimage would continue for 43 days starting from the auspicious occasion of Skanda-Sashi and will end on August 11, 2022, the day of Sharvan Purnima (Raksha Bandhan).

The pilgrimage of Amarnath Cave would be incomplete without knowing the history of Kashmir which reveals a beautiful cradle of ancient culture. Ancient India has nothing

more worthy as its early civilization than that of the grand ruins of Kashmir. The remnants of hundreds of temples, stupas, viharas and numerous schools of thoughts would show how in ancient times it has been a nursery of two great religions of India - Hinduism and Buddhism and how these religions met and mingled in the mindscape of the people. Kashmir's own creative contribution to the Hindu thought, particularly to the evolution of the monistic philosophy of Saivism, known as Trika - Sastra, has been truly historic. And when Islam made its appearance in the middle of the 14th Century, it acquired its own distinct hue in the valley. There are good geological and mythological reasons to believe that the Kashmir valley was once a vast span of water; similar to a huge dam, walled by high mountains. There were some habitations on the higher ranges which were not under water. Over the years, as a result of violent geological upheavals such as earthquakes, the mountain walls were breached at a few points and water gushed out forming the valley in its present shape.

According to Kalhana, a Kashmiri Pandit who wrote Rajatarangini - the river of kings in 1149 AD, the history of various dynasties which ruled Kashmir from earliest period described monumental work in Sanskrit literature. Such is Kashmir; the country which may be conquered by the force of spiritual merit but not by armed forces - where there are hot baths in winter, comfortably landing places on the rivers, banks, where rivers being free from aquatic animals are without peril. Amarnath is considered to be one of the major Hindu Dhams (seat of a deity) of Kashmir valley. The holy cave is the abode of Lord Shiva. The guardian of the absolute, Lord Shiva - the destroyer is enshrined in the form of Ice- Lingam in the cave. This lingam is formed naturally, which is believed to wax and wane with the moon. Though there is no scientific proof till now. Along with Shivering, one can also witness two other ice formations which are said to be of Goddess Parvati and

Bhagwan Ganesha.

Although the existence of the Holy Cave is mentioned in the Puranas as well, as per a Hindu legend; it is believed that when Parvati asked Shiva the secret of life and eternity, at first, he refused but she insisted, so he decided to reveal the secret to her. He left Mount Kailash along with Goddess Parvati and left his belongings at various places. For instance, Nandi, the Bull at Pahalgam, Moon from hair at Chandanwari, and snakes on the banks of Lake Sheshnag. Lord Ganesha was left at MahagunasParvat also called Mahaganesh Mountain. Plus, the five elements of nature - Earth, Water, Air, Fire, and Sky were left at Panchtarni. As he sacrificed his belongings, he performed the Tandava Dance and later, enter the cave with Parvati. To ensure no one was listening, he created fire to demolish all the life around him. But a pigeon under Lord Shiva remained and heard the secret of immortality. They were born and even today, devotees who visit Amarnath Temple can see a pair of pigeons inside the cave nesting. And because the secret of immortality was told here by Lord Shiva, the cave was called Amarnath. Shiva followers thus, take the Amarnath Yatra with true hearts and feelings and present to Lord Shiva in a hope of a righteous living, health, prosperity, and purity from the sins. Families, friends, and companions are often seen traveling together to Amarnath Temple in Jammu and Kashmir despite it being 36 Km to 48 Km long and difficult to enlighten themselves by Shiva's true light. Amarnath Yatra is organized every year. There are 2 routes to the cave - Pahalgam and Baltal. This can be covered in 4 to 5 days via Pahalgam and 2 to 3 days via Baltal. Most devotees prefer the longer and more traditional route from Srinagar though. Elderly citizens can choose to a pony ride too. Buta Malik - a local shepherd first discovered the cave as per references of Rajatarangini, which has a mention of Amarnath Temple (Amareshwar) and people believe that Queen Suryamathi gave a pres-

ent of Trishul, Banalingas and sacred emblems to Amarnath temple back in 11th century AD. Buta Malik rediscovered the present cave in about 1850. Malik received a bag full of coal from the saint & when he got back home, he was overwhelmed to see gold coins instead of coal. Malik rushed back to thank the saint at the site but found the cave with Shivering inside instead. This led to the discovery of Amarnath Cave. Since then the site has become one of the major pilgrimage centers of Hindus. There are some other epics also one of them is focused on Bhriгу Rishi who visited the Himalayas and was first to have the Glimpse of Holy Amarnath cave which became Shiva's abode and a center of Pilgrimage.

The Pilgrimage of Amarnath shrine is still one of the most difficult - pilgrimages of northern India till date. The devotees trek through the daunting mountains to Amarnath shrine in south Kashmir every year to pay obeisance. At present the shrine is managed by Shri Amarnath Shrine board (SASB) with the Governor of the UT of J&K as its ex- officio chairman. The shrine board is entrusted with the task of making the pilgrimage hassle free for devotees besides upgrading of facilities all along the route.

SASB and administration have made commendable efforts for comfortable pilgrimage of devotees and tourists by way of providing transport, accommodation, medical, telecommunication and Langar facilities. To avoid any threat of security, all roads, trek routes leading to the holy cave are being sanitized. The services of drones are being put in place for the first time for safety and security of devotees. For the first time helicopter services from Srinagar to Panjtarni and vice versa are being introduced for completion of Holy Yatra in a single day. Sadhus - female monks in large number have started pouring in Jammu well before commencement of pilgrimage.

(The author is retired Media Officer from the Ministry of I&B, Govt of India).

PROGRESSING J&K

Playgrounds constructed in every Panchayat to nurture talent of budding sportspersons

J&K Sports Policy 2022 a step towards bringing excellence in Sports

To encourage and motivate the sports-loving youth of J&K to choose sports as a profession, J&K Government is constructing one playground in each Panchayat of UT to nurture the talent. For the promotion of sports at the grass-root level, each panchayat has been provided with sports kits during the Back to Village-3 as per the local requirements. The rapid promotion of sports in J&K, especially in the rural sector, has developed a sense of hope that the J&K will bring laurels from national and international tournaments.

The sports policy of J&K has laid a vision for promoting excellence in traditional sports like Kho-Kho, Kabaddi, Archery, Mud Wrestling & Tug of War. Emphasis is laid down on developing

facilities for coaching of these sports across the UT. The talent of rural youth is scouted and nurtured in coaching camps for national competitions. Financial assistance is also being provided for achieving excellence in these sports. According to the policy, opportunities would be provided to all citizens - urban and rural to participate in sports and games and organize sports competitions at the Panchayat, zonal, district, State / UT, National & International levels.

The J&K Sports Policy 2022 paves way for an inclusive mandate for prescribing universal wellness and fitness through sports & fitness activities, at the panchayat, zonal, district, division, UT, national & international levels. According

to the policy, DYSS shall develop and maintain sport & fitness zones at the Panchayat, village and block levels. The Government has taken a number of steps in this regard such as ensuring at least one playfield in every Panchayat, establishing over 4500 Youth Clubs and organising of number of sporting activities to enable the youth of the J&K to participate in sporting activities. The youth of Jammu and Kashmir have immense sports potential with many players from the UT representing the country in different sports. J&K is witnessing a new revolution in Sports Sector. The UT is equally equipped as other states of country and has potential to produce world-class sportspersons.

Acknowledging this sports potential of

J&K, GoI sanctioned Rs 200 Cr under the Prime Minister's Development Package for the up-gradation of sports infrastructure and encouragement of budding talent in the field. The package, which was aimed at boosting sports infrastructure, training facilities and providing professional coaches, has brought a revolution in the sports sector of J&K. With the combination of world-class facilities, coaches and continuous monitoring and mentoring, J&K Govt is creating an environment of empowerment, leadership and self-esteem among youth. The recently established sports infrastructure and facilities in J&K are historic. In addition to infrastructure and resources, world-class training is indispensable for producing world-class talent.

Supreme Word versus Street War

■ MANMOHAN DHAR

Shiv Sena in Maharashtra is not in a state which Bala Saheb Thackeray would have wanted it to be in. When elections to the Maharashtra state assembly were held in October, 2019 it was a clear cut mandate for a natural alliance of Shiv Sena and BJP. And accordingly a Govt. was formed with Devinder Fadnavis as the Chief Minister. But, in a very dramatic twist the Fadnavis Govt. had to resign after a few days and Uddhav Thackeray with the support of Congress and NCP became the new CM of Maharashtra. As the people of Maharashtra wanted BJP and Shiv Sena to be sharing power for the next five years, it was nothing but sheer thirst for power which led to the most unnatural political alliance in Maharashtra. Shiv Sena entered into an alliance with Congress and NCP sidelining the single largest party with 106 MLAs, the BJP. This was something which must have definitely stunned the people of Maharashtra. In fact Shiv Sena had fought the elections under the auspices of BJP using the name of PM Modi. And when it came to supporting BJP for the formation of Govt. Shiv Sena played stubborn and wanted the CM's position for Uddhav Thackeray. This illogical and unreasonable demand could not be accepted thus resulting in confrontation which prompted BJP to sit in the opposition rather than succumb to the unethical demand of Shiv Sena. Shiv Sena was a party created by the fire brand Hindutva crusader Bala Saheb Thackeray in 1966. The party originally focussed on the regional issues concerning the Marathi people in the state of Maharashtra. But, later Bal Thackeray transformed the party into a very strong political entity with broader vision and ideology of Hindutva as its essence. Bal Thackeray never looked an eye to eye with Congress on the basis of differing ideologies. In fact he was of the opinion that Shiv Sena would prefer to abandon politics than to ally with

Congress at any step. He in fact went to the extent that at least during his life time it was not possible. And, later if anyone from Shiv Sena allies with congress or like-minded political party it would hurt his soul. And, if this is known to every Shiv Sanik it must be known to his own son Uddhav Thackeray and the entire Thackeray family. Then what must have been the urgency that made Uddhav Thackeray forget the very basic and fundamental principle of the party. Not only Uddhav Thackeray ally with Congress and NCP but within a period of two and a half years as the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, he almost diluted the entire perception and philosophy of the party created by his worthy father Bala Saheb Thackeray. 2/3 This must have been very painful and hurtful for all those staunch Shiv Saniks who would not like to give up to the Anti Hindutva stance of Uddhav's allies. And when it became very frustrating and suffocating for the hard core Shiv Saniks they thought of parting ways with Uddhav. Eknath Shinde along with two thirds Shiv Sena MLAs was forced to take a hard decision. He drew a line between the basic Hindutva and the compromising policy of Uddhav Thackeray. It really must have been very compelling and pains giving decision to walk away but Eknath Shinde while giving his version said his decision was only for upholding the basic ideology of Shiv Sena and for the highest esteem of the Party. The aftermath of division in the party fold has been very disturbing and astonishingly awkward and embarrassing not only for the people of Maharashtra but for the entire country. Political vandalism in the financial capital Mumbai is tarnishing the very fundamental principles of Democracy. Political stalwarts of the left over faction of Shiv Sena under the leadership of Uddhav Thackeray are spitting venom and almost all the limits of decency are being crossed and open threats are being given to the Eknath Shinde group. Ugly and un-parliamentary

language is being used to demean and defame the MLAs of Shinde camp, which needs to be taken a very strong cognisance of, by the Chief Minister of Maharashtra Mr. Uddhav Thackeray. Loss to public property is not something that would solve the political crisis. A strong message should go from the state administration that violence of any kind won't be tolerated at any cost and that all political issues need to be settled peacefully through a political dialogue and if need be by the court of law. In a democracy there should be no room for political vandalism. All issues should get settled politically and the law of land should prevail wherever necessary. Return of Shiv Sena MLAs from Guwahati to Mumbai has been to some extent hampered by the threats given by the Uddhav faction of Shiv Sena. Some top leaders of Shiv Sena Uddhav group are even giving threats of holding the returning MLAs hostage for 72 hours at the Mumbai airport itself while some of them will be straightaway taken to Shiv Sena Bhawan. This political outrage cannot be allowed at any cost. This is nothing but an ugly face of political hooliganism and if not checked at the very onset will burst like a volcano engulfing the complete political set up in the country. Political ethos manifested in the country since independence needs to be revisited by the law makers so as to emanate a standard guideline and a yard stick to define the parameters of behaviour and political limitations obligatory in a democratic set up. Now that Supreme Court has already made it amply clear that there is not going to be any disqualification of MLAs till 12th of July'2022. And that ample time need to be given to the Eknath Shinde group to reply to the notice issued to them by the Dy. Speaker of the 3/3 Maharashtra assembly. All factions and political parties need to exercise restraint and settle the issue peacefully in a democratic manner. Law should take its own course and street war in politics should be dealt with sternly.

Invisible Women, Invisible Problems

■ VINOD CHANDRASHEKHAR DIXIT

June 23rd marks International Widows' Day-and the United Nations outlines just how fraught the life of a widow can be. To become a widow is to experience profound personal tragedy. For many women around the world, the devastating loss of a partner is magnified by a long-term fight for their basic rights and dignity. Despite the fact that there are more than 258 million widows around the world, widows have historically been left unseen, unsupported, and unmeasured in our societies. The ordinary term for a widow in India is "Vidhva" which originates from the Sanskrit word "vidh" which means "to be destitute". There are around 55 million widows in India.

It is well known that in India widows tend to face many difficulties and deprivations because of negative social attitudes towards them and social restrictions that are placed upon them and their activities. Indian family as a social institution is well known for the emotional and physical support that it provides, for its extended members, many a time but it fails to respond to the needs of women, especially for women in difficult circumstances e.g. for widows.

The widows are the unacceptable face of India, many leading agencies including Central and Local Governments have failed them, Politicians with rare exceptions have ignored them and wider society continues to exploit them.

As widows move through their own experiences of grief, loss, or trauma after the death of a spouse, they may also face economic insecurity, discrimination, stigmatization, and harmful traditional practices on the basis of their marital status. It is observed that a widow from a relatively well-up family may be subject to greater cruelty and abuse by her in-laws than a lower caste widow who free enough to work outside in the public space and to remarry. It is well known that in India widows tend to face many difficulties and deprivations because of negative social attitudes towards them and social restrictions that are placed upon them and their activities. They are subject to patriarchal customs, religious laws and widespread discrimination in inheritance rights. Many suffer abuse and exploitation at the hands of family members, often in the context of property disputes. Many widows have flocked to the city of Vrindavan - a city that has become internationally recognised. Many continue to hold myths and stigmas against widows. Sometimes, widows are believed to be witches who have dark supernatural powers. On other occasions, they are accused of having committed a grave sin in their previous birth for which they are punished with widowhood. A widow not only deals with the loss of her husband but also faces numerous physical and socio-economical hardships that can cause psychological trauma. These women are susceptible to depression, anxiety, loneliness, helplessness, and loss of self worth and confidence. Empowering widows to support themselves and their families also means addressing social stigmas that create exclusion, and discriminatory or harmful practices. The stigma surrounding widows endures today and ought to be addressed. It is undoubtedly good that governments, NGOs, and other entities are working to support widows - but there is a broad societal need, one no less than a moral and social imperative, to end the stigma surrounding widowhood.