

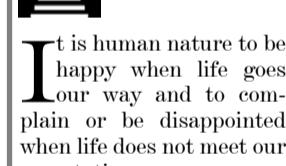
WHY SUBSIDY?

The government has logic in ending the LPG subsidy to households as people having income in crores were also enjoying this facility which is in no way justified because the very concept of subsidy came into existence to help the poor and marginalized people. This was the failure of successive governments that it provided this highly illogical benefit to the elite class snatching the right of those who were in need of government assistance for even getting two meals per day. As the reports have surfaced that the Government has limited subsidy on cooking gas (LPG) for only 9 crore poor women and other beneficiaries who got free connections under the Ujjwala scheme and the remaining users, including households, will pay the market price is a part of government's rationalization of public exchequer because a spendthrift dispensation is not good for the people of the country. With this move the government has ensured that only those who are really deserving get the benefit and others should play the significant role in boosting the economy of the country as end of subsidy to all will save hundreds of crores of rupees annually. The announcement on this has been made by Oil Secretary Pankaj Jain that no subsidy is paid on cooking gas since June 2020 and the only subsidy that is provided is the one that Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced on March 21. Earlier, Sitharaman had while announcing a cut in excise duty on petrol by a record Rs 8 per litre and that on diesel by Rs 6, stated that Ujjwala scheme beneficiaries will get Rs 200 per cylinder subsidy for 12 bottles in a year to help ease some of the burden arising from cooking gas rates rising to record levels. It is to be noted that the government ended subsidies on petrol in June 2010 and on diesel in November 2014 thus paving way for good revenue generation for realizing the dream of developed India. The government has taken many steps which can be called a pragmatic as well as prolific by channelizing funds in a rational way rather than draining them like the earlier dispensations in the country.

BOLD DECISION

The government's decision to hold Shri Amarnathji Yatra as per schedule under the present circumstances is a bold and much desirable decision because under no circumstances this significant Yatra should be deferred or even restricted. Of course the soft target killings is an attempt by the enemies of the nation to spread fear psychosis in the UT of J&K and reverse the success which the BJP Government under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah has achieved in restoring peace and normalcy in J&K. It is the time that KP employees should stand shoulder to shoulder with the government and instead of planning to leave the Valley they should come up and vow to remain in their present places of residence as a matter of right, respect and uprightness because there are many other communities and segments of society which are living in Kashmir despite turmoil since 1990s. The government cannot afford another phase of migration from the Valley as this will complicate the situation and therefore it is significant for the KPs to show faith and spine during this time of crisis or else government won't be able to do much in ensuring return of the entire community to the Valley as is promised by those sitting at helm. The government is clear in its strategy that it will not allow dislocation of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir. This is vital for all those who are standing along with India because repeat of ethnic cleansing in Valley will be the moral defeat of all the nationalists and therefore it is important that KPs should stand with courage and face the situation with valour. The government is resolute in the matter and is confident that the current killings would be stopped like they were in October last and sooner than later Valley will free from the scourge of terrorism as is promised by the Modi Government on many occasions. Under the current scenario, there is a need that the government should take into confidence the regional parties as well because local leadership can help by bridging the gap between the people and the centre.

Count your blessings and Leave it to God



OFF 'D' CUFF

It is human nature to be happy when life goes our way and to complain or be disappointed when life does not meet our expectations.

Life, for each one of us, has its ups and downs. We can be sure that along with the sunny days, there will be rainy days. Along with brightness, there will be darkness; along with the roses, there will be thorns. But if we allow ourselves to only focus on the negative and to be impacted by the rising and falling tides of life, we will be surrounded by turmoil.

There's a place one can go to relax far away from the sadness and suffering. We can renew your spirits and come in contact with a place free from sorrows.

Where can we find that place free of sorrows? That place free of sorrows is within us. It's a place where we can connect with the peace of our soul. We can find relief from the sufferings of life. We can find the peace within us by sitting in meditation.

When we are in turmoil, finding stillness becomes a challenge and this in turn impacts our meditations and spiritual progress.

Saints and Spiritual Masters remind us that ups and downs are a part of our existence, defined by our karmic inheritance. We cannot avoid them. They exhort us to not focus on what we might feel is missing or not working out in our lives and instead, to live by the principle of Sweet is Thy Will.

If, rather than bemoan

Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj

Unless India stands up to the world, no one will respect us. In this world, fear has no place. Only strength respects strength.

-A P Abdul Kalam

EDITORIAL

‘Only One Earth’

■ DR J P SHARMA & DR VIVAK M ARYA

The year 1972 marked a turning point in the development of international environmental politics, the first major conference on environmental issues convened under the auspices of the United Nations was held from June 5-16 in Stockholm (Sweden), known as the Conference on the Human Environment or the Stockholm Conference. Its goal was to forge a basic common outlook on how to address the challenge of preserving and enhancing the human environment. World Environment Day was first time celebrated in 1973. Since 1974, the celebration campaign of the world environment day is hosted in different cities of the world. It is a big annual celebration started by the United Nations General Assembly to engage millions of people from different countries across the globe as well as draw attention of political and health organizations to implement some effective actions. World Environment Day which is observed on 5th June every year across the globe is the largest annual event for positive environmental action. Since its first celebration on 5 June 1974, millions of people across the world have taken part in thousands of events to raise awareness and generate political momentum around growing concerns such as the depletion of the ozone layer, toxic chemicals, desertification and global warming. This year theme is Only One Earth. The Day has developed into a global platform for taking action on urgent environmental issues, driving change in our consumption habits as well as influencing national and international policy. Every year celebration is planned according to the particular theme and slogan of the year to bring effectiveness in the campaign all through the world. It is celebrated to successfully get carbon neutrality, focusing on the forest management, reducing greenhouse effects, promoting bio-fuels production by planting on degraded lands, use of hydro-power to enhance electricity production, encourage common public to use solar water

heaters, energy production through solar sources, promoting coral reefs and mangroves restoration in order to get prevented from flooding and erosion including other ways of environmental preservation. Being a developing nation, India is more vulnerable to the effects of climate change due to its dependence on climate-sensitive sectors like agriculture and forestry. A 2002 study indicated that the temperature over the country increased at around 0.57° C per 100 year. The rapid economic growth experienced by India over the past decade and a half has come with some unwelcome

World Environment Day

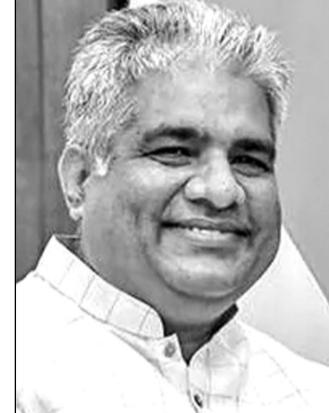
consequences. The rapid industrialization and economic growth has resulted in unhealthy air and water pollution affecting infant mortality rates and life expectancy rates. From longstanding to emerging hazards, environmental factors are a root cause of a significant burden of death, disease and disability globally and particularly in developing countries. They range from poor water quality and access, vector-borne disease and air pollution to toxic chemical exposures, climate change and degraded urban environments. The resulting impacts are estimated to cause over 25 per cent of death and disease globally, reaching nearly 35 per cent in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa. Much of this burden rests upon the shoulders of the poor and vulnerable. Definitely air and water pollution and climate change are more global issues that require a concerted effort by all nations to solve. A report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on climate change suggests that the world will be experiencing more of ocean acidification, ice-sheet melting, sea-level rise, and so-called tipping points in climate affects much sooner than ever thought off. The existing environmental laws, although cover a wide spectrum of environmental concerns, they

seem to be ineffective due to lack of enforcement, the lack of resources, and technical challenges faced by a large number of Indian companies. Under these conditions, India has to adopt some sustainable actions that need to address the myriad issues facing the country including environmental degradation in order to sustain its prospects for continued economic growth. Sustainable development, that is, both a prosperous economy and a healthy environment. Agriculture University Jammu has developed many climate smart agriculture practices which are having the potential to reduce the carbon footprints without comprising the yield of crops. Author have popularized Leaf Colour Chart (LCC), a climate smart agriculture tool which can save up to 30 kg of urea in coarse variety of paddy and up to 6 kg of urea in Basmati per hectare. They have also proved and demonstrated that cover crops, run off control measures along with climate smart natural resource management practices can reduce the soil and water erosion. Our UT being situated in Himalayan range is very prone to soil and water erosion. But the good news is that we have developed and demonstrated many scientific technologies and modules which are climate smart and environment friendly. As Mahatma Gandhi had said, "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed." Holistic and climate smart development are the keys for our sustainable growth. Let's work jointly step by step to protect our Mother Earth.

(The authors are Vice Chancellor SKUAST-J and Scientist).

Decriminalization of existing Labour Laws, securing Shram Yogis

■ BHUPENDER YADAV



2021 Independence Day speech made lowering regulatory cholesterol a policy priority.

He said, "We want such an India where the government doesn't interfere with the lives of citizens. Every rule, every process that has stood before the people of the country as a hindrance, as a burden, we have to remove it."

The new labour laws are thus designed in a way to ensure that interests of both businesses and people who work for the businesses are protected.

The new laws are in tune with the changing labour market trends and at the same time accommodate the minimum wage requirement and welfare needs of the unorganized sector workers, including the self-employed and migrant workers.

Labour reforms have been completed by subsuming multiple laws into four Labour Codes which have addressed existing central labour laws, encompassing a plethora of authorities, burdensome compliances, registrations, inspections, licenses, and registers/forms. The reforms will strengthen workers' social security in both the organized and unorganized sectors. Transformative and game-changing aspects of the Labour Codes include freeing India's entrepreneurs from the burden of unnecessary and excessive compliances and imprisonment provisions under old labour laws.

Consider some of the clauses in the old regulatory laws:

► Imprisonment between 3 months and 1 year for not maintaining records of colour washing, varnishing/painting of canteens under Factories Act and related rules

► Imprisonment between 1 and 3 years for not furnishing annual return of holidays to Inspector, under Factories Act and related Rules

► Imprisonment between 3 months and 1 year for not displaying Notice showing date of payment of wages under the Payment of Wages Act, 1936 and similarly for several other minor omissions which emanate from various laws framed in the past 100 years.

Considering the old laws to be a hindrance in India's growth story, Parliament passed the four Codes in 2020 viz, the Code on Wages, 2019; the Industrial Relations Code, 2020; the Code on Social Security, 2020; the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020.

In doing so, the government addressed the issues of excessive criminal provisions in labour laws.

The root cause of such excessive regulatory cholesterol of criminalising minor offences stems from a particular section in almost all Acts and referred to as 'General Penalty for Offences'.

For instance, the Factories Act provides in section 92, under General Penalty for Offences, "If in, or in respect of, any factory there is any contravention of any of the provision of this Act or any rules made thereunder or of any order in writing giving there under, the occupier and the manager of the factory shall each be guilty of an offence and punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend up to 2 years or with fine which may extend to 1 lakh rupee or with both...." Similar 'General Penalty' clauses exist in most Acts in the country including Environment Protection Act, 1986 and Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act.

Imprisonment provisions under such General Penalty Clauses have been removed under the new Labour Codes.

At the same time, to ensure that an employer has a functioning and well-oiled internal organisational and operational mechanism to check non-compliance, monetary fines have been increased multifold.

The reason why this has been done is that imprison-

ment is too severe a consequence for economic offences that do not involve mala fide intent.

These reforms will significantly contribute to India's ease of doing business index.

On the other hand, there were concerns that the Labour Codes would not adequately provide for the prosecution of employers, and it may be lenient towards employers committing offences. However, appropriate safeguards have been incorporated in all the Labour Codes to ensure that there is no leniency in dealing with the malafide intent of employers where ever it exists.

It is relevant to note that prosecution for certain offences such as insurance and provident fund contributions which have been deducted by the employer but not paid are construed as intentional and willful default and have been strictly dealt with under the law. The Codes do not allow employers' grave and intentional contraventions to go unpunished.

The grounds for prosecutions have however been restructured to ensure that an unintentionally errant employer or a one-time offence committed by an employer does not lead to unnecessary and undue harsh consequences.

A statutory provision has also been introduced in the Labour Codes which states that an inspector may give an 'Improvement Notice' to an establishment or to a delinquent employer to amend mistakes and make good the losses suffered by the worker or improve the situation/default which the inspector/assessing officer has noticed.

Such an approach not only promotes principles of natural justice but also strengthens the relationship between an employer and the worker as the aim and objective of the improvement notice is to redress the grievance of the workers, be it non-payment of wages or not providing certain information to the Government, rather than invoking the prosecution procedure. It also unburdens courts from the pressure of handling minor issues.

For the first time, compounding of offences, except for offences grievous in nature, has also been introduced in all Labour Codes.

If punishable with imprisonment of up to one year, crimes committed for the first time can be compounded by an authorised officer. Compounding of repeat offences is also possible after a 3-5 years gap. Procedures for compounding the crimes have been made simple.

Money collected from the composition of violations shall be credited to the social security fund maintained by State Governments and Central governments. Such funds can be utilised for welfare of the unorganized workers.

Labour being on the Concurrent List, decriminalisation of offences in Central labour laws will automatically apply to the areas falling within the jurisdiction of the State Governments and Central governments. The four Labour Codes have reduced the number of sections from 1,228 to 480, a 61 per cent cut.

On the initial assessment of imprisonment, there will be only 22 Sections in Labour Codes which will contain imprisonment as a penalty for a first-time offence.

The Government has demonstrated its seriousness in reducing criminalization for non-serious offences and allowed it to focus on universalizing various benefits such as minimum wages and social security for all the country's workers.

Criminal penalties, especially the risk of imprisonment for minor and often unintentional offences, are a significant deterrent for today's young entrepreneurs. The decriminalization of certain unintentional corporate crimes is desirable as far as possible because they deter both domestic and international investors.

It is expected that decriminalization of labour laws will remove the fear of criminal prosecution from the minds of entrepreneurs, which would unleash the entrepreneurial spirits of our youth and will encourage them to set up more businesses; paving the way for a generation of employment which is the top-most priority of the Government.

A trust-based approach towards employers will encourage them to align their business practices with Labour Codes and incentivise companies to ensure better compliance with our laws while promoting better human resource practices.

Once in force, the Labour Codes will ensure that India moves confidently towards Aatmanirbharita as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, by removing all obstacles from its way.

(The author is Union Minister for Labour & Employment).

We can live only if Nature does not die

■ DR RANI MUGHAL

We have heard many times that forests are the green lungs of the world. But the reality is that we have driven holes in our 'collective lungs' so to say, by reckless industrialization and consumerism. During the last sixty years, this issue has reached a point where it cannot be ignored anymore. In these 60 years, rapid and haphazard urbanization and industrialization has led to a drastic and devastating environmental degradation. The situation has become so alarming now that we have to earmark several days in a year on one pretext or the other to create awareness and to remind ourselves about dangers related to environmental destruction, a destruction on such a scale that it is bringing us closer to the doomsday with each passing day. The world environment day on June 5 is one such day when we come together and brainstorm different ideas, strategies, and tactics that we can adapt and implement to save our planet. The burning environmental issues which need to be addressed are the destruction of forests and wildlife, the depletion of ozone layer, ocean acidification, dwindling plant diversity, animal diversity, the loss of habitat, and extinction of species. There are animals and plant species that have gone extinct due to human vandalism. Humans have driven nearly 600 plant species to extinction since 1750 at an average of more than 2 plant species a year since the middle of the 18th century. I would like to remind everyone about the tragic story of the common house sparrow, Passer domesticus, that have disappeared in the urban areas because of habitat issues like rapid urbanization, diminishing of ecological resources for sustenance, and high levels of pollution, and emissions from microwave towers. A few days ago we celebrated the world sparrow day on March 20 and it occurred to me that there was a time when we as kids woke up listening to the chirping sound of the sparrows in the wee hours of the morning, but I fear that our children and their subsequent generations would be able to read about them in books or watch them in television documentaries. As per holy Quran, at different times in a day, our prayers are answered and one such time is the crowing of the roosters as dawn breaks out. It is a pity that nowadays it is only in books and poems that our children read 'cock a doodles doo'. This is a sad story of what we have done to our environment. Isn't this a high time that we get back and connect with our Mother Nature? Is it very difficult to do so? In my view, yes it may be but it is not impossible. And connect we can if we know about what is going on around us and what we can do and what we must do. One such step forward is to discuss environmental issues, to familiarize ourselves and our youngsters with what's happening, what has been lost so far, what would be the consequences if we do not do anything about it, and what can be done to help combat various burning issues related to conservation and preservation of our environment. In Japan, if a tree is in the way of a road or building plan, the Japanese people bind the roots of the tree and move it to another place. But if we look at India or Jammu and Kashmir in particular, we don't see any such concern among the people and the government. If we specifically talk of Jammu and Kashmir, the forests have suffered much damage in the recent decades due to an increase in construction, armed conflict, and political turmoil. It is my firm belief that the root cause of all problems including these, is ignorance and lack of awareness. It is not difficult to understand that generally, we do whatever wrong we do because we do not know the cost or consequences of our actions. The reason we have not been taking up the issue with our governments is that we don't know how serious this is. Therefore, it's imperative that we discuss these issues. That's the least we can do when days like World Environment Day roll around. They help us to know about what is going on around us. It creates noise and gives rise to debates and discussions. We all must make our efforts to be a part of this discussion and debate and make our voices heard. As for me, I would like to take this opportunity to make a call to all to make the following pledges for preserving a healthy planet for our future generations:

1. Let each of us pledge to plant 3 trees for every 1 cut down.
2. Let's change the way we all get around by using public transport unless it is very essential to use private vehicles. Try to switch to EV.
3. Let's promote food from plants.
4. Let's embrace second-hand shopping which is buying recyclable and recyclable products.
5. Let's replace polluting products with energy-efficient versions.
6. Let's all plant a garden in our backyard.
7. Let's stop dumping plastics in the water bodies which if not stopped now will outweigh fish in the oceans by 2050.
8. Another small effort can be to stop using plastic water bottles.
9. Finally, let's take a walk each day to admire the beauty around us and also take note of actions that subvert the environment. And in the end, a message: When reality is staring us in the face there is no point living in denial. We must take action, now. Big changes start with small steps. Let us take the first step and work together for change.

(The author is HoD Botany, SKCGDC Poonch).