


MISSION RAFTAAR

The Government right from the very beginning has been working relentlessly for providing all basic amenities of life by developing a number of infrastructural projects, which are really appreciable. In a major initiative, Mission Raftaar has been launched, as a 'Mission' envisaged for speed enhancement and to achieve a target of doubling average speed of freight trains and increasing the average speed of Superfast /mail/Express trains by 25 Km per hour and not a standalone 'Project(s)'. The overall allocation and utilization of funds under Mission Raftaar can't be quantified. While giving reply to a query in Rajya Sabha, the Minister of Railways, Communications and Electronic & Information Technology, Ashwini Vaishnaw said that CAG report tabled in budget session 2022 has analyzed the punctuality and travel time in train operations in Indian Railways as a whole. Mission Raftaar is only one of the documents used as Audit criteria for preparation of report. Speeding up of trains is a constant endeavour and a continuous process on Indian Railways which is dependent on constant optimization of the investments made by Railways in modernization of technology, high powered locos, modern coaches and better tracks. To this end Indian Railways are inter alia proliferating Hofmann Busch (LHB) coaches which have higher speed potential, converting passenger trains operating with conventional coaches into MEMU services (which have higher acceleration/deceleration owing to distrusted power). As a part of 'Mission Raftaar' and during the period 2015-16 and 2021-22, 414 passenger train services have been converted into MEMU services. Indian Railway is constructing more than 3000 Km of Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC), which would enable freight trains to run at speed of 100 Km per hour. There is marked improvement in average freight train speed. During financial year 2016-17 to financial year 2020-21, Average speed of freight train has increased from 23.7 Km/hr to 41.2 Km/hr.



OFF 'D' CUFF

Muktinath and Pashupatinath Tour - A Journey of Spiritual Awakening

Muktinath and Pashupatinath Tour – A Journey of Spiritual Awakening-> Over the last five decades, a significant number of people throughout the world have shown interest towards spiritual awakening. The number of such people increased manifold when the coronavirus pandemic struck the whole world. Amidst all this worldly chaos, a simple meditation session has proved to be a life saver for entire humanity.

The limitless benefits of meditation have shown people a ray of hope in these troubled times. Be it mindfulness, maturity in thinking, meeting with God in silence or any kind of physical, mental or spiritual needs; meditation has brought miracles in people's lives. In addition, the flexibility of doing it right in the middle of our super busy lives has increased its popularity like never before. One can meditate in many ways. For beginners, the easiest way to do it is sitting quietly, focusing their attention to the third eye with a soft music playing in the background.

Meditation brings you relaxation and blesses your soul with calmness. A qualified instructor's proper guide to meditation promises good mental and physical changes.

However, people who want more advancement in life materialistically as well as spiritually must opt for best guided meditation programmes in India. These programmes offer guided meditation for relaxation which is sought after by everyone.

But, why exactly do we need a spiritual retreat?

In our fast-paced lives, we have lost our touch with nature and its beautiful aspects. A spiritual retreat offers a much-needed break to the heart and mind. There are many top meditation centres in India where a city dweller can escape this hectic, monotonous and tiring lifestyle. These meditation retreats in India helps one to immerse in the exceptional experience of cosmic spirituality.

The tour packages for Muktinath and Pashupatinath provided by us gives you a chance to connect with the divine energy of Lord Vishnu and Shiva. The tour package for Muktinath guarantees a guided mindfulness meditation. Same way, the luxury tour package for Pashupatinath is a perfect healing retreat where you

Festivities of August & a war on horizon

■ M R LALU

As I write this, war clouds are hovering over the tiny island nation of Taiwan and its giant neighbour People's Republic of China. The world is watching with awe as Nancy Pelosi flies back from Taiwan with the conviction that the dragon is unpredictable and untrustworthy. Would the gigantic dragon spew fire on its tiny neighbour? Can the world afford one more war simultaneously fought as a gargantuan country mercilessly pouncing on its tiny neighbourhood? We need no scholastic definitions to define the catastrophe that a war is capable of unleashing. Between Russia and Ukraine, the modern generation of the day got much of its knowledge as to what a war would look like. Certainly the world is not growing into a better place for human comitance and war draws lines between generations with history gleefully narrating the level of bloodshed that wars have shaken the world with. Though peaceful, India is also susceptible to the tremors of war with their social and economic implications sticking out firm and the geopolitical ramifications surface. Amid the fury of raging wars, for Indians, July month was full of excitement and expectations. They rejoiced at the selection of a personality, who with her umbilical beginning with the downtrodden folk of the country, the tribal communities; could rise to hold the office of the President of India. The great tribal traditions of India are sure to get a boost and a scope of rejuvenation as Drupadi Murmu holds the chair of the highest constitutional office in the country.

August has brought joy unspeakable to the farming folks in India as one among them; a son of farmer has become the Vice President of the country. Jagdeep Dhankar is all set to

hold his noose tight in the upper house of the parliament, the Rajya Sabha. The country would witness mounting distress among the opposition and hullabaloo disrupting the proceedings of the house. Let us expect a great deal of tutoring from the new chairman with his legal expertise strengthening the normal routine of the house. August also brings indescribable happiness as the month is loaded with numerous festivals and the festivities certainly give the people of the country a genuine cause to come together. Independence Day this year comes with a distinct jubilation and splendour. Seventy Five years of India's development as a multicultural, secular and civilized society speaks a lot about its evolution as a nation. This year, with the Prime Minister's appeal to add more flavour of patriotism in the festivities with his Har Ghar Tiranga campaign; India is all set to celebrate the festival with beauty, fervour and tradition. A moment of gathering and recollection of our struggles to walk into the freedom - we as a nation, had probably gone through the cruelest of experiments and the imprint of the wrath that the invasion had on our psyche cannot be easily eradicated and the Tiranga Abhiyan is sure to keep the fire of patriotism burning. The national flag, being hoisted on every rooftop would generate a sense of belongingness breaking the barricades of differences. Adding to the essence of India's oneness, brotherhood and kinship, comes Raksha Bandhan. A ceremony to cement the relationship between brothers and sisters, Raksha Bandhan is celebrated on the full moon day of Shravan month and of course it comes in the month of August. The Rakhi ritual signifies the bond of protection, obligation and care. The eternal love that it invokes between brothers and sisters probably gathers holy

emotions of oneness and the society strengthens its impulse of togetherness, depleting inconsistencies and inconveniences. Like Independence Day, this colourful festival with traditions of yore holds the essential power to transform the country into a unit of connect-edness. Excitement of August does not end with Independence Day and Raksha Bandhan alone. Janmashtami comes with great pomp and gaiety in the month. Across the country festivities will be active to celebrate the divine appearance of Lord Krishna. From Mathura to Guruvayoor, with varying traditions, temples dedicated to Lord Krishna across the country hold different rituals and religious processions. It is a blissful occasion to celebrate the birth of Lord Krishna who dared to advice a mentally retarded Arjuna in the gruesome battlefield of Kurukshetra. The Mahabharata brings a great deal of lessons suitable for the modern times eternally penetrating into the social strides of modernity. The advent of Krishna brings equal amount of jubilation and recognition for being candid on finding solutions to the complexities of life. Little children in the disguise of Lord Krishna and his divine companion Radha walk in tune with the music of a divine elation in the streets of India. Krishna, through his great gestures of attachment and respect towards his childhood friend Sudama, taught us the relevance of equality in a society. The festival that needs no narration is Ganesh Chaturthi. Beautiful Ganesha idols, reminding us with a great amount of wisdom that Lord Ganesha was known for, fundamentally bring us the glory of empathy in life. The clay models of the Elephant God turn out to be the depiction of the great characteristics that he came into the world with - like intelligence, obedience and logical interventions. He still

stands as a perfect example of devotion that a child can exercise to his parents. History attributes credit to the founder of the Maratha Empire Chatrapati Shivaji for his beginning Ganesh Chaturthi as a worship ceremony. By transforming Lord Ganesha's birth celebrations into a public event with mass gathering, Bal Gangadhar Tilak wanted the essential oneness of Indians to replicate once again against the colonial dominance of the British. This experiment had laterally transformed the collective imagination of Indians in the direction of a well meaningful mobilization against the cultural invasion of the west. Much has been added to the pomp and gaiety of all the festivals that India has been culturally interwoven with. And the woofs of cultural eminence generated through colourful festivals in the loom of tradition and modernity in India could successfully detoxify the essence of alienating thoughts that India has been deplorably subservient of. Markets and internet are afloat and aplenty with national flags and rakhis. Everything, from clothes to bangles to pen to pencil is a new tricolour design. New trends dominate the social media and profile pictures unequivocally turn patriotic with the symbol of national unity the tricolour becoming omnipresent and forget not - India is changing. The Prime Minister is taking the lead in this pursuit of patriotic jubilation. August obviously makes us recall the Mahatmas, Netaji and Bhagat Singh. Among the rising powers, India is embellishing its embroidery of success with its Atmanirbhar initiatives. The festivities of August should take us further to the realm of extreme efficiency and self sufficiency. War is still looming on the horizon but for India, it is a season of festivities.

Machail Yatra- a trek amid true colours of nature

■ G L KHAJURIA

Jammu and Kashmir as a whole is a land of temples, sacred shrines and of course a treasure trove of pilgrimages of varied hues which occupy almost every nook and corner of the State. There is no denying the fact that 'Chandi Mata' who is popularly known as Machail Wali Mata occupies a prominent place among the devotees. The Chandi Mata is mostly confined to Himalayan region. In Jammu, the temple is at Mahalaxmi Mandir; Paeca Danga and at Bhadarwah from where her Holy Mace (Chhari) starts in. It is situated around 306 Km away from Jammu, (Jammu-Batote) by road and thence on foot to Machail Mata which is barely 30 Km. Though the terrain is too tough to trek but with the grace of Almighty Mata Chandi, one feels joyous in association with enchanting pilgrims echoing Jai Mata Di, Jai Chandi Mata etc. The entire trek remains dotted with Yatriss of all hues in colorful attire. The main stopovers en route are Gulabgarh, Layondee, Kunderpul, Chishoti, Hamori and Machail. The entire area is surrounded by lush green, meadows and flanked by Deodar, Kail, Fir, spruce, oaks, shrubs and herbs. According to ancient sources, Maa appeared in form of Pindi, the same as it is in Vaishno Devi. She came here from the Mindal Bhattas, a small village in Himachal Pradesh to bless the people of Paddar. The Yatra was initially started by Thakur Kulbir Singh of Bhadarwah who was serving in J&K Police department and was posted in Machail. The mention of Machail Yatra would be

incomplete without the mention of 'Trishul Bhaint' Yatra. The 'Trishul Bhaint' Yatra leaves Doda city for Chinote Bhaderwah. It is preceded by a Jagran at Radheysham Temple at Doda city and then leaves for Bhadarwah. After reaching Chinote, the Yatra is received and welcomed by the local people at Chinote. The unique holy mace of the Goddess leads the pilgrims and provides them with strength and inspiration. Amidst nature's ambience, the people trek mountainous route chanting "Jai Maa Chandi", "Jai Maa Chandi". The holy mace is welcomed enroute by thousands of devotees at various villages. These inaccessible hamlets include Matti, Seondi, Hamiddran, Massu, Mao, Garh, Naral, Sugliangadi, Bathree, Mulgo, Shagaani, Kokandran, Rotae, Palalee, Betha and a big village Ligreer having hamlets viz, Doordo, Stangarhi, Thatak, Shahalee, totee, Pondale, Tunkhel, etc. At Machail, a small village, rather hamlet is located at the sacred shrine of Mata Chandi and the devotees throng in queues for hours together to have a holy Darshan of Mata, to pay obeisance and seek blessings. During the trek, one comes face to face with nature in its true colours. One experience the silence of lush green meadows, the music of gurgling streams and that of trees when a whiff of air makes them sway here and there. One only needs a sensibility to experience this. The ambience around makes one spiritually surcharged. One forgets the daily routine life, and remains soaked in spirituality. The journey allows us to dif-

ferentiate between bad and good. The Yatra also allows us to know how faith brings people of different denominations closer to each other. The artificial barriers created on caste or region basis vanish here. The Yatriss who throng here from different parts of the country have just one thing in mind -to get blessings of the Mata, and nothing else. It is also an opportunity to know the lifestyle of people living in far-flung areas where there are no basic amenities of life available. Chandi Dham Machail has both Shiv and Shakti. On the one hand, the Goddess Chandi (Shakti) is blessing her devotees at Machail village while on the other hand there's a Shiva Lingam on the opposite high mountain where the pilgrims visit to pay obeisance on the pious occasion of the Shakti Yatra. The mountain is called Shiv Pahad. The devotees describe it as a unique union of Shiva and Shakti at Machail. The Chhari as such culminates at shrine Shakti where a Maha Yagya is held. Machail yatra attracts a vast number of pilgrims. Now with the increasing focus on Bhadarwah as a pilgrim and tourist spot civic amenities for this religious spot need to be undertaken on a war footing. The toilet blocks, road upgradation, plantation, rain shelters, retaining walls at steep points have to incorporate in the development plan for Machail Mata Shrine. Then increasing number of people will visit it to get spiritual peace. It will give boost to local economy, which is hard pressed at present, apart from boosting tourism. (The author is former Deputy Conservator of Forests, J&K).

PROGRESSING J&K
Parvaz: A market linkage support to boost J&K farmers' economic conditions

The innovative Market Linkage scheme- PARVAZ possesses tremendous potential for uplifting the economic conditions of the farmers across the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The scheme was launched by the Government with an aim to create market linkage support for the shipment of Agriculture and Horticulture perishables being harvested in Jammu and Kashmir through Air Cargo. Under the scheme, 25 per cent subsidy on freight charges is given for carrying perishable fruits harvested in Jammu and Kashmir for shipment through Air Cargo. The subsidy is provided to farmers through DBT mode. JKHPMC, the implementing agency of the scheme is regularly creating awareness among Farmers about the significance of this scheme so that ample number of them can take benefit out of it. The documentation work related to the scheme has been made easy besides the subsidy for the farmers provided under the scheme is timely paid to the farmers. An official said that this scheme tends to easily transport the perishable produce to domestic as well as international markets besides covering a wider market for the produce harvested locally in Jammu and Kashmir. "This scheme will boost employment opportunities for the locals. It also aims at increasing the overall income and living of the farmers", he added. The official highlighted that the scheme would also enable the fruit and vegetable farmers to earn a good amount of income and Marketing of produce harvested in Jammu & Kashmir would have a separate impact. This scheme tends to benefit the farmers by doubling their income thereby ensuring their economic and social welfare the scheme the farmers will get the price of their produce directly in their bank account with no intermediary in between. Further, 25 per cent subsidy as provisioned under 'Parvaz' scheme notified vide Government Order No. 49-JK(Horti) of 2021 dated 08.07.0221, shall be provided on the air cargo rates on horticulture/agriculture perishable vis-a-vis cherry, strawberry, plum, peach, pear, litchi, and exotic and organic vegetables only. The organic/exotic vegetables eligible under the scheme would be identified by an expert committee.

Hold assembly elections in J&K

■ OMKAR DATTATRAY

Democratic Government or people's Government is definitely far better than the presidential or governors rule. For so many years Jammu and Kashmir is reeling under central rule through or Governor's rule and people have no access to the corridors of power as there are no peoples representatives and as such there is big void between the rulers and the ruled in a central dispensation. The assembly elections are long overdue and there is urgent need to hold the assembly elections so that people will be vote in favour of their own government and the void between the rulers and the ruled is bridged. The political parties of the regional character and the national political parties are all in favour of holding the assembly elections so that people can elect a government of their choice which can heal the wounds and scars of the alienated people and peoples' alienation will come to an end. It is important for the establishment of the peoples rule in a democracy, that the elections of the assembly should be held to give a right to the people to elect their own democratic government. The people who are the real sovereigns in a democracy cannot and should not be denied their right to cast votes and elect their own government. It is undemocratic and unconstitutional to deprive the people of their right to elect the government of their liking and therefore it is necessary that the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir should be held at an earliest date. Thus the election commission of India should take a call and declare assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir so that there is a democratic and peoples government in place which can satisfy the urges and aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The gullible people of the Jammu and Kashmir have faced much difficulties and inconveniences in the absence of a duly elected

government as there is no democratic and peoples government from the past so many years and this has resulted in the alienation of the people and the people have no access to the powers. Therefore it is necessary that the people be given a right to elect their own government which will be responsive to the people's problems and can wipe tears from the eyes of the masses. There is a big void and gap between the people and the government in a Presidential rule or Governor's dispensation and to eliminate this gap, there is need for the installation of the peoples government so that the problems and sufferings are resolved and addressed. Thus the elections of the assembly should be conducted and held to give people their own government which can come to the expectations of the general people. Therefore the assembly elections should be held so that the people are in a position to cast vote and elect a government of their choice which is responsive to the demands and aspirations of the gullible people. The common people of Jammu and Kashmir feel neglected and alienated because of the absence of the elected and democratic government and they stand robbed of their fundamental right to cast vote and elect a peoples government which will address the genuine problems of the people. The elections are the essence of democracy and we cannot think of a democracy without the elections and therefore the need is to hold the assembly elections so that the people will chose a government of their choice which will be responsive to the demands and problems of the people. The states or the union territories cannot be run through central rule or through governors rule for a long time and so holding of the much overdue elections will help the people to come closer to the powers as in such a case the people will have their government in place which is more responsive to the needs and demands of the electorate. Thus

there is pressing need for holding of the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir so that the alienated people will be in a position to cast vote and elect a democratic and peoples government which will wipe tears from the eyes of the public. No further delay should be made in announcing of the elections to Jammu and Kashmir assembly as it will further alienate the people of Jammu and Kashmir from the national mainstream. It is clear now that the government of India is mulling to conduct elections at the appropriate time perhaps at the end of the year because the election commissions and the UTs election department and the district election officers are busy in updating electoral rolls and the new constituencies have been set by the delimitation commission and in accordance with the decisions of the delimitation commission the election department is making electoral rolls so that the people will have no difficulty in knowing their election booths. The Governor's rule or Presidential rule is only an adhoc arrangement and it is no alternative for a democratic or People's Government and therefore the elections of the assembly should be held to give the people choice to elect their own government which will be more responsive to the needs, demands and aspirations of the people. So what is needed is that the assembly elections should be held very soon to give the alienated people the right to cast their vote and elect their own government which can solve the problems of the people at large. The prime ministers and home minister of the country has made it clear that the statehood will be restored at an appropriate time after the assembly elections and therefore there should be no doubt about the restoration of the statehood to Jammu and Kashmir. Some regional political parties are making the restoration of the statehood to Jammu and Kashmir as a precondition for taking part in the assembly elections. But the

political parties should not make the restoration of the statehood to erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir as a condition for taking part in the assembly elections. The assembly elections and the restoration of the statehood to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir are two separate things and these should not be mixed to create confusion. The fact is that the government of India will restore the statehood to Jammu and Kashmir after the assembly elections at an appropriate time and so such impractical demands of restoration of the statehood before the assembly elections should not be made and it should be left to the centre government to restore the statehood at the appropriate time. Thus the political parties of the UT should jump in the elections whenever these are held but as far as the activities of the election commission and the state election department is concerned it is foregone conclusion that the assembly elections will be held somewhere in the month of December; if the weather conditions permits. Therefore there are indications that the assembly elections will be held soon to mitigate the problems of the people and the election commission and the state election department is making electoral rolls and other arrangements for the conduct of the much over due assembly elections when same will be announced by the election commission. It is proper time that the election commission should take a call and announce the assembly elections to Jammu and Kashmir assembly at an earliest date so that the alienated people will be given the right to cast vote and elect the government of their choice which will be a peoples' government through and through. To conclude one can say that the holding of assembly elections to elect the government of the people will be a panacea for all the problems and ills of the people. (The author is a columnist and social activist).