

Protecting Dignity of Senior Citizens

As a society that prides itself on values like respect, care, and empathy, our treatment of the elderly reflects the moral health of our nation. Senior citizens, who have spent their lives building families, contributing to the economy, and nurturing communities, deserve to live their twilight years with dignity, security, and respect. However, the growing reports of neglect, abandonment, and even abuse of the elderly point to a worrying social trend that demands urgent introspection and action.

In India, where traditional joint family systems once provided a natural support system for the elderly, rapid urbanization, nuclear family structures, and shifting socio-economic priorities have left many senior citizens vulnerable. While advances in healthcare have increased life expectancy, they have also brought challenges like loneliness, chronic illness, and financial insecurity. Many elderly people, especially in urban areas, find themselves living alone or dependent on unreliable support systems.

Protecting the dignity of senior citizens begins with acknowledging their rights. The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 was a step in the right direction, mandating that children or relatives provide maintenance to senior citizens. However, laws alone are not enough unless accompanied by strong awareness, effective enforcement, and a cultural shift in attitudes. Respect for the elderly must not be reduced to ritual gestures; it must translate into everyday behavior-how we treat them at home, in public spaces, and in policy frameworks.

Government and civil society have a shared responsibility. There is an urgent need to strengthen social security systems-pension schemes, subsidized healthcare, and accessible public infrastructure tailored to the elderly. More old-age homes should be built, but the goal should be to enable seniors to live within their communities with dignity, not in isolation. Technology can also play a role-helpline, telemedicine, and community apps can help bridge the gap for those living alone.

At the family level, fostering intergenerational bonding is vital. Children should be taught from a young age to value and care for their grandparents. Schools and media must promote narratives that highlight the contributions and wisdom of senior citizens. Loneliness is a silent epidemic among the elderly, and often, a simple phone call or shared cup of tea can be more powerful than any policy.

Protecting the dignity of senior citizens is not a matter of charity; it is a matter of justice. It reflects how we as a nation value our past and envision our future. As India progresses, we must ensure that no one is left behind-especially those who once led from the front. The golden years of life should be filled with peace, purpose, and pride, not with fear, neglect, or abandonment. Upholding the dignity of our elders is not just our duty; it is our legacy.

Potential of Public-Private Partnerships (3P) in Rural Development

■ DR. BANARSI LAL

Agriculture is a knowledge and resource intensive sector. This sector is the main source of livelihood in developing nations. More food for more people with less resources and less emissions are the real challenges for sustainable food and nutrition security. Sustainably producing safe, nutritious affordable food and agriculture products for about 10 billion people in 2050 is a formidable task. Producers are the key to mitigate this challenge. They cannot control the extreme weather conditions, market fluctuations and political instability. Production, processing and marketing in agriculture are dynamic in nature due to continuous change in consumers demand and expectations. With the right support farmers can make the world's food and agriculture systems economically viable, environmentally sustainable and socially beneficial. Green revolution made spectacular progress in agricultural sector during 1960s and 1970s. Private and public sector organisations continue to achieve breakthroughs in many fields across the globe that continue to global food security. But still the yields of key crops vary significantly between different farming regions and often remain below their optimal potential.

Public-private partnership (PPP or 3P) is said to be a long-term cooperative agreement between two or more public and private sectors. It is a popular type of collaboration in many sectors of the economy around the world. Partnership between private and public organisations have existed for centuries. Through this agreement, skills and assets of each other (public and private) are shared in delivering a service or a facility for the use of general public. It is cooperative arrangement between one or more public and private sectors especially for a long term basis. It is a contractual agreement between a public agency and private sector entity. PPP can take a variety of forms. In order to make more development such kinds of initiatives are essential. Such arrangements are used by the governments in late 20th century and early 21st century across the globe. Hundreds of different types of long-term contracts with a wide range of risk allocations, funding arrangements and transparency requirements are covered under the public-private partnerships. This concept is closely associated with concepts like privatisation and the contracting out of government services. The

3P cell was set up in 2006 in the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), Ministry of Finance by the Government of India. India is considered as one of the leading countries in terms of readiness for PPPs in the world. As per reports, India ranks first in the world in operation maturity for 3P projects. Maharashtra is the pioneering state in adopting public-private partnership model in case of major infrastructure development projects. The other states like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have also adopted this model and progressing in this sector.

Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for about 70 per cent of India's population. India is considered as one of the fastest growing economies in the world. In order to upgrade the country, infrastructure services are necessary for the economy to grow. In this context the 3Ps have been recognised as one of the most effective mechanisms to achieve this target. Public-private partnerships (3Ps) are essential for advancing agriculture to meet global challenges in food security. They help to access the technology and link farmers to markets. An average annual growth rate of Indian agriculture has been observed around 2.7 per cent during the past years. The challenges faced by the Indian agricultural sector underlines an urgent need for innovations brought via partnerships between private and public sectors. Maharashtra has taken initiative for this innovative path of Public-Private Partnership for Integrated Agricultural Development project to develop an integrated value chains for selected crops. Recently many partnerships have been emerging Public-Private Partnership in agriculture. Successful public and private partnerships are challenged by various issues like high transaction costs of operationalising and coordinating the partnerships, different objectives of each sector etc. To develop the partnerships, policy support and conducive environment are needed. It occurs through five different stages which may also end up in a cyclic form. 3P model can be game changer in the Indian agricultural sector as it can empower the farmers by facilitating them. 3P can transform the sector at multiple levels bringing together the collective power of all the stakeholders in the agricultural ecosystem. Functional and operational factors of the 3P linkage depend on the capability of partners, budget and timeframe.

Various studies on 3P focused on agricultural biotechnology, biosafety regulation, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and ways in technology transfer. Many research programmes implemented through 3P system require adequate incentives and innovations for better co-ordination. The World Bank funded NAIIP project of ICAR established market-oriented collaborative alliances comprising public and private partners resulting in value chains covering different crops. Some of the frontline areas of biotechnology research and development where PPP is visible are vaccines using recombinant technology, Enzyme Linked Immunosorbent Assay testing kits for disease detection, gene silencing etc. 3P is also used for gender mainstreaming in agriculture. 3P can work effectively to market the farmers produce. 3P covers a wide range of areas including extension services which can enhance technology adoption for sustainable development. Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) assisted the commodity-based groups to partner with private agencies in production and marketing of basmati rice and medicinal plants in Bihar, maize in Andhra Pradesh and mango in Maharashtra. Monsanto India Limited (MIL) has many partnerships with state departments for agricultural development. It has made links with lakhs of farmers through 3P and assisted them to improve their production by which they enhanced their incomes employment. Many farmers' of these 3Ps are able to raise their socio-economic status and they increased their farm income and employment. 3Ps are helpful to reach the even in the remote areas. It is very tough to get the immediate results of 3Ps as it is difficult to convince the farmers for the adoption of new technologies and they take time to adopt the innovations. It takes time to have a good rapport with the farmers. Institutions are required to share their knowledge, expertise, technology and resources with others as 3P is a win-win approach. 3Ps are providing a number of services to numerous farmers. 3Ps assist the farmers get the best price for their farm produce and thus help them in financing and marketing. It helps in creating marketing infrastructure, create competition and ensure better service to the farmers. Many small and medium-sized domestic firms are brought together for the purpose of commercializing farm products. National Dairy Development

Board model of public-private partnership provides a viable alternative for small farmers. In order to overcome the challenges in the storage of food grains, the government, through Food Corporation of India (FCI) has adopted a phased implementation plan to build modern steel grain silos with a capacity of 10 million metric tons. 3Ps can help in increasing the area under micro-irrigation in India.

3Ps impact has been observed through marketing of farm produce, reduction of risks and uncertainties, capacity building of farm families, social mobilization and economic empowerment of farmers. 3Ps increased the knowledge of farmers and thus increased their crops production and income. Successful 3Ps brought replacement of traditional varieties of seeds, cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants and organic vegetables. It influenced crop diversification and enhanced the area under potential crops. 3Ps have facilitated to develop the innovations, improved efficiency in management and institutional intellectual property management skills and provided new technologies in the public sector. 3Ps help the farmers to deal with weather shocks and enable them to derisk themselves through insurance etc. Risks of crop failure, pests and diseases infestation, natural calamities and natural resource management can be reduced through 3Ps. 3P has helped to promote mechanised farming. 3Ps can help to form Self Help Groups (SHGs), Farmers Clubs, Farmers Producer Organisations (FPOs) and to develop self-sustaining entrepreneurship among the farmers. The public sector can act as a facilitator and enabler and private sector can act as the financier, builder and also the operator of the service or the facility. Innovative technologies, managerial effectiveness, operational efficiency and access to additional finances can be ensured through successful implementation of 3Ps. Public-private partnerships can play an important role in enhancing the farmers income. There is need of trust between partners. A collective action is needed for the resource poor farmers and food-secure consumers. 3P approach can be adopted in research and development, extension, quality enhancement, crop production and marketing. It can be a useful tool to accelerate development in various areas of agribusiness and infrastructure.

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'Prioritize Breastfeeding' for the healthiest start in life

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World Breastfeeding Week is celebrated every year in the first week of August. This year's theme, "Prioritize Breastfeeding: Create Sustainable Support Systems," serves as a call to action to establish lasting and fair structures that assist breastfeeding mothers and strengthen families. BWB transcends a mere campaign; it embodies a global movement dedicated to ensuring that every child receives the healthiest beginning in life, while also fostering a sustainable future for our communities and the planet.

Breastfeeding enables the mother to promptly address her infant's hunger cues. This helps to keep the baby calm and content while the mother prepares a bottle, resulting in a more enjoyable experience for everyone involved. The mother may begin feeding the baby almost immediately upon noticing the initial signs of hunger; well before any signs of grumpiness or agitation arise.

Breastfeeding significantly reduces the likelihood of breast cancer in mothers, particularly for those with genetic predispositions to the disease. This is cumulative the more months/years she spends breastfeeding during her lifetime, the lower the risk.

Breastfeeding aids weight loss for most women. Breastfeeding facilitates the contraction of the uterus, enabling it to return

to its pre-pregnancy dimensions.

For many new mothers, the early days after childbirth are filled with a blend of emotions-joy, exhaustion, and for some, uncertainty regarding breastfeeding.

Interestingly, it is quite common for the body to produce an abundant milk supply shortly after delivery, often more than the baby can consume. This natural overproduction, referred to as the milk "letdown," can lead to significant waste of milk if not stored correctly.

However, months later, as the baby's appetite grows considerably, some mothers encounter the contrasting issue of a decrease in milk supply that does not satisfy the increased demand. This discrepancy can induce avoidable tension and may result in premature dependence on alternative feeding methods. However, the positive aspect is that there's an intelligent and feasible approach to address this issue: expressing and freezing breast milk.

Extracting surplus milk in the initial weeks and ensuring proper storage for later use enables mothers to establish a dependable supply. This method guarantees that the infant will keep enjoying the advantages of breast milk, even during supply variations, while also providing mothers with greater flexibility and reassurance.

When handled correctly, expressed breast milk can be securely kept in a freezer for as

long as six months, and in certain situations, it may last up to seven or even eight months in a deep freezer maintained at consistently low temperatures. To begin, it is important for mothers to utilize a clean, high-quality breast pump, whether manual or electric, and to express milk ideally following a feeding session when the baby is satisfied.

The containers you utilize for expressing are suitable for brief storage, like a few hours or possibly until tomorrow in the refrigerator. It's advisable to utilize storage bags for keeping breast milk over extended periods, whether it's a few days in the refrigerator or several months in the freezer. For the best nutritional value, consuming it within 3-4 months is recommended.

Alongside maintaining the quality of your milk, these sanitized containers are suitable for freezing (simply place them in a separate freezer bag or on a piece of cardboard to prevent sticking). They can be sealed similarly to storage bags, and there are even small indicators on the bag to show the amount of liquid contained within. They also offer available times and dates.

For women in the workforce, the option to express and store milk is an essential need, especially for new mothers who encounter considerable challenges in nursing their infants. Every mother aims to provide her child with breast milk, even in her absence.

Many mothers utilize a device to extract and store their milk, allowing them to manage this situation effectively.

The method of storing breast milk can be quite confusing for new mothers; therefore, it is essential to understand the various ways to safely keep your expressed milk.

It is important to cleanse your hands thoroughly with soap and water prior to expressing your breast milk. Ensure that the expressed milk is kept in a container that is free from harmful chemicals, made of durable plastic or glass, and thoroughly sanitized.

For the best results in thawing frozen milk, it's advisable to place the container in the refrigerator overnight or gently run it under warm water. It is important to avoid microwaving, as this can lead to the loss of essential nutrients and the formation of hazardous hot spots. Ultimately, the process of extracting and preserving milk can enable mothers to sustain a sufficient supply during their nurturing experience.

During the initial six months of life, it is recommended that infants exclusively receive breast milk as their primary source of nourishment. Storing the milk not only allows you to nourish your baby in your absence, but it also guarantees that you maintain an adequate supply.

Emotional growth
Attachment theory indicates that infants

and children who experience a sense of security develop greater confidence as they mature. Toddlers are exploring their environment, encountering challenges, and realizing that not everything comes easily. Tantrums and meltdowns can be swiftly resolved with a brief 1- or 2-minute breastfeeding session, restoring balance effectively.

The child possesses an understanding and trust that this is achievable, which typically fosters confidence in children as they grow. Many individuals believe that breastfeeding fosters dependency in a child; however, research indicates that it actually promotes independence. Failing to nurture a young child can lead to feelings of neediness or, even more concerning, a sense of abandonment.

Benefits for maternal health
The total duration of breastfeeding a mother engages in correlates with a reduced risk of developing breast cancer. This observation is particularly significant among women who have a familial predisposition to this condition.

Breastfeeding two distinct infants for three months each result in a cumulative total of six months. In contrast, nursing those infants for three years each extends the duration to six years, representing a twelvefold increase. This will significantly reduce the risk for a mother:

From a health perspective, breast milk is ideal for babies. However, in resource-rich nations where there are dependable and hygienic alternatives, women with certain diseases, like HIV, should not breastfeed since they run the risk of passing their condition on to their newborn.

Breastfeeding serves as a fundamental mechanism through which nature safeguards the species against various challenges. Breastfeeding enables the maternal immune system to assist the infant in combating these illnesses. Achieving the same outcome without maternal breast milk would incur a cost of \$1 million per pill or higher. Breastfeeding represents an invaluable investment in your child's future, requiring only your time as the currency for this profound gift. What could possibly hold you back from putting forth your utmost effort to provide your child with this invaluable gift? Indeed, breastfeeding is essential. This has the potential to be life-saving for your child. It is projected to enhance your child's IQ by an average of 7 points. Just a mere 7 IQ points can significantly impact whether your child excels in math or faces challenges. Provide your child with the invaluable benefits of breastfeeding. Optimal health is an enduring asset. Your children deserve it.

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Pahalgam Attack and Aftermath: A Turning Point in India's Counter-Terror Operations

■ NIYATI

The counter-terrorism landscape in India witnessed a watershed moment following the brutal April 22, 2025, attack in Pahalgam - a peaceful tourist haven in Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag district. The killing of 26 unarmed civilians, including tourists and local vendors, sent shockwaves across the country. More than just another tragic event in a conflict-prone region, it acted as a catalyst for one of the most sophisticated and multi-layered counter-terror responses in recent Indian history - Operation Mahadev and Operation Sindoor.

This article provides an in-depth, non-partisan account of the events leading up to and following the Pahalgam tragedy. It delves into the operations, examines the political and social reactions, and explores what lies ahead for peace-building in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Pahalgam Tragedy: A Brutal Assault on Civilians

In the morning of April 22, 2025, armed assailants opened fire in the picturesque Baisaran valley, a popular trekking and picnic spot above Pahalgam. The attackers, reportedly dressed in civilian attire, indiscriminately targeted tourists, ponywallahs, and local vendors. Among the 26 killed were children and elderly tourists, while several others sustained grievous injuries.

This was not a conventional terror strike aimed at infrastructure or security forces. It was a cold, calculated act aimed at sow-

ing fear and dismantling the image of Kashmir as a safe tourist destination.

Security forces responded swiftly. The Jammu and Kashmir Police, CRPF, and Army sealed off the area and launched immediate search operations. Preliminary investigations quickly hinted at a well-orchestrated cross-border plot, with militants possibly infiltrating through South Kashmir's porous terrain days before the attack.

Operation Mahadev: A Calculated Counter-Strike

By late May, intelligence agencies - both central and local - had gathered substantial leads on the perpetrators' movement. A covert multi-agency operation, codenamed Mahadev, was greenlit for execution in the upper reaches of Dachigam National Park.

On July 28, 2025, security forces launched a precision strike. The confrontation, which lasted several hours, ended with the elimination of three top militants: Suleman alias Faizal, Afghani, and Jibrail - all linked to the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba.

Forensic reports matched the firearms recovered - including an American M-9 carbine and two AK-47s - to bullet casings found at the Pahalgam site. Among other seized items were Pakistani voter IDs, encrypted devices, and Pakistani-manufactured chocolates - details that deepened suspicions of state-sponsored support.

Operation Sindoor: Broader Strategy, Global Messaging

In parallel with Mahadev, the government launched Operation Sindoor - a strategic mission focusing on border surveillance, disruption of local terror logistics, and diplomatic outreach.

Addressing the Lok Sabha, Home Minister Amit Shah confirmed that the neutralized terrorists had been positively identified with help from local facilitators arrested in Anantnag and Pulwama. These individuals had reportedly sheltered the terrorists before the Pahalgam attack and played a key role in tracing their movements.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while discussing the security situation in Parliament, recounted a conversation with the U.S. Vice President who had raised concerns over potential regional escalation. Modi responded firmly: "We do not seek conflict, but we will not hesitate to act when Indian lives are lost."

Strategic and Political Ramifications

1. Stronger Inter-Agency Synergy
Operations Mahadev and Sindoor showcased an evolved counter-terror infrastructure. Real-time satellite surveillance, improved HUMINT (human intelligence), and joint task force coordination marked a significant leap from previous reactive models. The swift execution - from identifying suspects to their elimination - underscored the system's growing maturity.

2. End of Hurriyat Engagement
In a rare blunt statement, the Home Minister categorically ruled out any future

dialogue with the Hurriyat Conference, branding it a "front for secessionist ideology." With its major leaders either arrested or facing charges under UAPA and NIA investigations, the separatist platform now stands politically defunct - a key development in the Centre's Kashmir strategy.

3. New Political Rhetoric on Terror

While opposition parties criticized the government over the intelligence failure that allowed the attack, the Centre responded with the success of the subsequent operations. Yet, a significant consensus emerged across party lines - that terror should not be politicized, and national security must remain a shared responsibility.

Local Sentiment and International Response

The killing of high-profile terrorists was met with cautious approval internationally. Most Western democracies acknowledged India's right to defend itself but also urged for transparency and adherence to international human rights standards. India responded by involving the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to ensure impartial probe and procedural accountability.

The Parallel Youth Narrative: Culture over Conflict

Interestingly, even as security forces engaged in high-stakes operations, cultural and youth engagement programs continued across the Valley. Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, speaking at a literary event in

Baramulla, emphasized that a secure environment is essential for creative expression.

In an impressive show of civic participation, over 20,000 students engaged in calligraphy workshops, poetry readings, and Ladishah storytelling events organized by the J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages. These programs - often overshadowed by hard news - form the heart of a parallel peace-building process unfolding silently yet steadily.

Pakistan's Role: Renewed Spotlight, Familiar Denials

The discovery of Pakistani goods and IDs from the Dachigam encounter reignited familiar debates on Islamabad's role in destabilizing Kashmir. Indian officials reiterated claims about active terror launchpads across the LoC and the complicity of Pakistan's ISI in nurturing non-state actors.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh didn't mince words when he stated in the Rajya Sabha: "India is not just ready to respond. We are ready to prevent. If needed, action will be taken even beyond our borders." Though diplomatic in tone, his message clearly hinted at a doctrinal shift: from containment to deterrence.

Veterans and Families: An Ongoing Commitment

As operations intensify, the Jammu and Kashmir administration is also focusing on those on the front lines. Plans are underway to operationalize Sainik Sahayta Kendras (SSKs) - special grievance cells for soldiers,

their families, and veterans. These centers aim to offer counselling, employment support, and pension-related assistance - a long-overdue initiative to support the silent sacrifices behind every operation.

The Road Ahead: Guns and Grassroots

The challenge ahead is not just tactical, but philosophical. India now finds itself balancing military preparedness with cultural healing. While operations like Mahadev offer immediate tactical wins, true and lasting peace in Kashmir will demand patient political reform, economic investment, and educational empowerment.

As of now, the Valley remains calm but cautious. The scent of fear still lingers in the pine forests of Pahalgam. Yet, in Srinagar's calligraphy halls and Baramulla's poetry gatherings, one can detect the faint fragrance of hope.

The Pahalgam attack will be remembered not only for its brutality but for what it set in motion - a robust, coordinated national response and a renewed focus on local empowerment. Security forces displayed strength. Political leadership showed resolve. And most importantly, Kashmiri youth showed that their dreams remain unbroken.

If India can sustain this dual approach - hard on terror, soft on society - it may finally script a new chapter in the region's long and troubled history. One where headlines speak less of bloodshed and more of books, brushes, and bridges.