

NATURE CONSERVATION

Nature conservation is indeed vital for the well-being of all living organisms on Earth, including humans. Pollution from various sources, such as industrial emissions, deforestation, and plastic waste, poses a significant threat to the environment. Controlling and reducing pollution is crucial for preserving natural habitats and biodiversity. Protecting trees and plants is essential for maintaining the balance of ecosystems. Trees play a vital role in absorbing carbon dioxide and providing oxygen.

Strict regulations and sustainable practices are necessary to prevent contamination of air, water, and soil.

Clean and abundant water is essential for all life forms. Implementing measures like recycling used water, collecting rainwater, and preventing contamination of water sources are vital for water conservation. Plastic pollution is a major environmental concern. Reducing the use of single-use plastics and promoting recycling and alternatives like cloth bags can help combat this issue.

Roadmap to bring advanced technology to common man

■ VIJAY GARG

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) is creating curiosity all over the world. Chat GPT is an example of this. It's amazing ability to create conversations, art and videos has taken it to 100 million users in just two months. The power of GenAI are technologies like Large Language Models (LLM) and Transformers, which are amazing, but also as disruptive as the Internet or smart phones. Google CEO Sundar Pichai and AIIF compared to fire, Microsoft's Satya Nadella calls it a harbinger of change. Goldman Sachs believes that GenAI will add an additional \$7 trillion annually to global GDP over the next decade. However, fears like employment crisis or decline in individual capabilities dampen this enthusiasm. There is also a fear that AI super intelligence may become a threat to us. Most of the experiments related to AI are taking place in America and China, and both have different world views. While big tech companies in the US are taking a leadership role, in China companies are working with the government and building their own GenAI models with information and security measures. Other big countries are also working in this direction, but their scope is limited. For example, the European Union is pushing for regulations to make it ethical and responsible, while Britain wants to take the lead in AI governance. Amidst all this, India seems to have been left behind. However, here also its own large language model (LLM) is in full swing, but Open AI CEO Sam Altman has openly discouraged it. There is no doubt that our government and industry can create our own LLM, but it is more important to consider its purpose. The question is asked whether India should adopt the Western capitalist system or the Chinese government controlled system? But we believe that there is a third way, which India has shown to the world in recent years. We should make GenAI a digital product that I am fit for man's use. We can call it 'GenAI'. The basis of this thinking is the success of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). We have India Stack, which is truly an integrated software platform designed to bring Indians into the digital age. With its help, many achievements have been achieved like providing digital biometric identity with Aadhaar to 1.4 billion Indians, creating UPI for payments, running the world's largest vaccination campaign. It encouraged inclusive social development across the country. The stack is now even going global, and many countries like Singapore, France, UAE are showing eagerness to use it. GenAI also needs to be as broad as the stack. If India wants, it can create Bharat LLM, which will be equipped with data from India Stack and will be efficient in solving region-specific problems by keeping good coordination with Indian languages. This can be possible only with the mutual partnership of the government, the world's leading IT companies and some leading technical institutions like IITs.

Prevalence of Disability

■ DR. KANIKA GUPTA

Being disabled should not mean being disqualified from having access to every aspect of life" ... Emma Thompson

Over the last three decades, there has been a significant transformation in our understanding of disability. Rather than viewing it solely as an individual impairment, we have come to recognize it as a multifaceted and socially influenced phenomenon. Disability is now seen as the result of an intricate interplay between a person's bodily characteristics and the societal context in which they exist. In this perspective, individuals with disabilities encounter limitations in their daily activities due to a complex web of factors, encompassing personal attributes, environmental conditions, and social and political structures.

The social concept of disability emphasizes that society often constructs barriers, whether physical or attitudinal, that impede the full participation of individuals with disabilities. Consequently, government programs and policies have evolved to address these barriers comprehensively. This includes initiatives such as making buildings accessible to all individuals and providing income assistance or work-related support to enable people with disabilities to engage more fully in their communities and workplaces. Even global organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) have embraced this broader perspective, acknowledging the pivotal role of the environment in either facilitating or obstructing an individual's functioning.

There are over 1 billion individuals with disabilities worldwide, accounting for approximately 15% of the global population. To put it differently, nearly 1 in every 7 people is born with a disability. This diverse group comprises 253 million individuals who are visually impaired (blind), 200 million with intellectual disabilities, 466 million who are hearing and speech impaired (deaf and mute), and 200 million who rely on wheelchairs for mobility.

In India, out of a population of 1.21 billion, 2.68 crore individuals are living with disabilities, representing 2.21% of the total population. Among the 70.22 crore male population in India, 1.5 crore individuals have disabilities, with the highest prevalence found in the age group of 10-19 years, accounting for 46.2 lakhs. Among the 65.46 crore female population in India, 1.18 crore individuals have disabilities. Notably, 20.3% of Indians with disabilities experience movement disabilities, 18.9% have hearing disabilities, 18.8% are visually impaired, and 8% have multiple disabilities.

The prevalence of disability among children is a concerning issue. In India, 20.42 lakh children aged 0-6 years have disabilities, meaning that one child in every 1000 children in this age group faces some form of disability. Moreover, literacy rates among urban individuals with disabilities surpass those in rural areas. In rural regions, 45% of disabled persons are literate, while in urban areas, this figure rises to 67%. In the region of Jammu & Kashmir, there are 2,04,834 disabled males, of which 1,03,730 are literate. Among the 1,56,319 females with disabilities, 47,239 are literate. Additionally, there are 27,939 disabled children in this region. Furthermore, there are 8,207 disabled male graduates and 3,584 female disabled graduates in Jammu & Kashmir.

(The author has completed Ph.D. in Human Development with special focus on children with special needs [Hearing impaired] from University of Jammu).

NCRB's Crime Report: A call to awaken countrymen to realize dream of a fair and just society

■ DR. SHAFIQ AHMED

The 21st Century and India's Journey for Progress and Curb the Menace of Crime

India has celebrated its 76th Independence Day. If we look back at 1947's India, India has come a long way. The improvement is not restricted to a few domains or regions; it is indeed multidimensional, starting from the development of Indian railways in 1951 to becoming one of the fastest-growing economies in the world in 2023. India is now preparing for cutting-edge technologies, including 5G, Artificial Intelligence, blockchain, augmented reality and virtual reality, machine learning and deep learning, robots, natural language processing, etc. Moreover, the decline in poverty, increase in employment, acceptance of women in workplaces, provision of better education facilities, and enhanced safety and security measures- all point to the progress of India towards becoming a better nation for people.

A Bird's Eye View of NCRB's Report of 2021

According to NCRB's report of 2021 (released in August 2022), compared to 2020, there was a 7.6% overall drop in reported crimes in 2021. The crime rate per lakh population dropped from 487.8 in 2020 to 445.9 in 2021. National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) was set up in 1986, based on the recommendations of the National Police Commission (1977-1981) and the MHA's Task Force (1985), under the Ministry of Home Affairs to function as a repository of information on crime and criminals to assist the investigators in linking crime to the perpetrators. NCRB brings out the annual comprehensive crime statistics across the country ('Crime in India' report). Having being published since 1953, the report serves as a crucial tool in understanding the law-and-order situation across the country. Hence, the NCRB's report is an important document not only for the government and police departments but also for the citizens of the country to come face to face with the reality of the country we live in. Even though the overall crime rate has declined in India, the crime rate in 2021 is significantly higher from 2019. And in a few categories of crime, the situation is the opposite. According to the most recent data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), overall incidents of crime have increased in the following categories-

► THE CRIME AGAINST CHILDREN

Overall, crime incidents against children increased by 16.2% in 2021 compared to the previous year. According to the NCRB report, 53,874 or 36.05 per cent of the 1 49, 404 cases against children reported in 2021 were under the purview of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO). With a rate of 48.6, Sikkim has the highest rate of sexual offences against children, followed by Kerala, with 28.1. In 2021, Uttar Pradesh (7,129) had the most cases under the POCSO Act filed.

Among union territories, Delhi had the highest rate of crimes against children in 2021.

► THE CRIME AGAINST WOMEN

Recent statistics show that crime against women increased by 15.3% from the previous year in 2021. According to the NCRB report, the number of crimes against women grew from 56.5% in 2020 to 64.5% in 2021 (incidents per 1 lakh population). The majority of these situations fall under the category "Cruelty by a spouse or his relatives" (31.8%), which is followed by "Assault on a woman with an aim to outrage her modesty" (20.8%), kidnapping and abduction (17.6%), and rape (7.4 per cent).

The report states that Assam has the highest crime rate against women in 2021.

► THE DEATHS BY SUICIDE

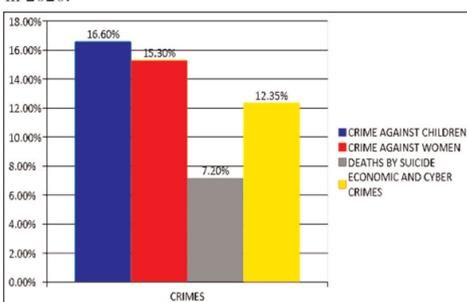
The number of suicide deaths has risen in India by 7.2% compared to 2020, with a total of 1,64,033 deaths by suicide in 2021. Research published in the Lancet in 2021 stated that "India records the largest number of suicide deaths in the world."

The highest percentage increase in suicides compared to 2020 is reported in Telangana (26.2%).

► THE ECONOMIC OFFENCES AND CYBERCRIME

Economic offences, including financial fraud and property fraud, increased 12.35% in 2021. According to the NCRB, the Chandigarh Police has a 77.3% pendency rate for economic offence cases.

There has been a sharp increase in cybercrime cases in Delhi. According to data, the number of incidents of online fraud, online harassment, the publication of explicit content, etc., increased by 111% in 2021 (356 cases) from 168 cases in 2020.



Source: Crime Record Bureau, 2021.

This is only one side of the coin. The actual reality is cruder and harsher than what is depicted by the NCRB's

■ DR. VIKAS SHARMA

Diet is one of the important factors in cancer etiology and prevention. India - called the land of spices has the proud privilege of being the largest producer, consumer and exporter in the world. Spices have been used for thousands of years and are known for their flavour, taste and colour in food. Indian spices not only add aroma and taste to the food, but are known to possess bactericidal, bacteriostatic, fungistatic and antifertility with other medicinal properties. Many Indian spices like turmeric, coriander, cumin, etc. have been proved to cure the diseases ranging from common cold and cough to cancerous tumors. Several spices have been used in Ayurvedic Pharmacopoeia (Indian System of Medicine) for the treatment of various diseases as they contain many bioactive compounds and possess a lot of beneficial health effects. Some antioxidants from spices, such as curcumin (turmeric), eugenol (clove) control cellular oxidative stress and have the ability to block the production of reactive oxygen species.

Coriander: Coriandrum sativum (coriander) also known as cilantro, parsley, dhania etc. originated in Southwestern Asia and North Africa belongs to Apiaceae family. It is one of the oldest spices in the world and has been used as a part of global cuisine for a long time. Apart from adding mouth-watering flavor to

report. Despite so many laws and various special provisions for the security and safety of citizens, the number of crimes in our country is enormous. Even with the presence of a large police force in the country, the relationship between the increase in crime rate and the increase in police force seems to be going parallel to each other, and the statistical data validate this. Uttar Pradesh has one of the largest police forces, not only in the country but in the whole world, having approximately 2.5 lakh police personnel spread across 68 district police departments, but this nowhere has impacted any change in the crime rate as even with such large police force the state tops the list of crimes with the highest number of reported crimes. The same situation is evident in the state of Maharashtra as well. One of the causes of such ineffectualness on the part of the police force can be due to the use of fear and not the proper communication by the police. Fear can only suppress crime for some time; it cannot eradicate it permanently. This is the reason that when police are in action the criminals are just counting down the days and as soon as they get the opportunity, they end up committing crimes. A very recent example of this reality was seen in Madhya Pradesh, where a man who was sentenced to ten years of imprisonment for raping a girl in the year 2012, soon ended up raping another minor girl as soon as he came out. This shows that even after spending so many years in prison, there was no change in the mindset of the person.

Time for Introspection to Understand the Causes of Collateral Damage and Collective Failure

Regardless of the incredible technological development and advancement, we all have failed to bring about a mental revolution in the country. We are still living in a societal where victims are tortured more than the culprits, and this is the reason for the surge in unreported crime cases. As a result of this dismissive and pessimistic societal response, people don't feel free to voice out the injustice done to them, and this paved the way for an increase in the number of crimes and a decrease in the number of reported cases.

Studies have shown that up to 60% of crimes go unreported in our country, with sexual assault and harassment of women being on the top in the list of unreported crimes with a percentage of 99%, followed by child abuse with 98%. There are many other categories of crimes in which the rate of unreported cases is also high, such as crimes against scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, poor, cyber-crimes, gender discrimination, caste discrimination, etc. However, due to the lack of availability of information, as FIRs are not registered properly, or the victims feel fruitless to approach the police, it's hard to estimate the number of unreported cases in the categories mentioned above.

The crime rate shown by NCRB is not completely unerring; the reason being that it is calculated using the 'Principal Offense Rule', as a result of which the actual count of each crime head may be under-reported as among many offences registered in a single FIR case, only most heinous crime (maximum punishment) will be considered as counting unit. On top of this, the NCRB doesn't collect the data for the report through its independent survey. Instead, it furnishes the data from various police stations across the country, which also questions the accuracy and absoluteness of the data presented in the report.

Even when cases are filed, after facing so much hustle and gathering much courage from the victims, only a few are presented in court, and only a handful of people get justice. The backlog or the 'pendency rate' with India's courts and police reached its highest level since the turn of the twenty-first century with more than 5 Crore pending cases across the country. The reason behind the increase in pending cases is the low strength of judges and judicial staff and various vacant positions of judges. Despite the sanctioned strength of judges, courts in India have often not worked at full capacity due to vacancies of judges. This puts much burden on the efficient operation of the judiciary, which delays the courts' judgments. Even when some cases get immediate attention due to the seriousness of the matter, the lengthy decision-making process makes the judgment, even though in the favour of the victim, ineffective. Our judiciary took seven years to give justice to Nirbhaya, and in some cases, for instance, the 'Hathras case', the court failed to do complete justice in the eyes of the public.

This raises the question of how a country can maintain law and order and protect its citizens when one of the three pillars of the nation is not functioning properly. Indeed, the judiciary alone cannot be blamed for the high crime rate, high pendency of cases, high rate of unrecorded cases, high injustice, high distrust between public and executive bodies, high discrimination based on caste, religion, region, gender, financial status, etc. All three organs, i.e., the legislature, the executive and the judiciary, are to be equally pointed out and held responsible for their failure to assure the safety and freedom of the citizens in the country.

The legislative body is responsible for formulating various laws and regulations and for the time-to-time amendments of such laws to keep them up to date. There is always some or other disruption in the proper working of the legislative body due to unwanted political issues and controversies. All these undesirable acts delay the actual work of the legislature because India is still following specific laws that don't fit in present scenarios and are debat-

able, such as the Indian Penal Code Section 309 and the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (Section 497). So, it is the responsibility of our elected representatives in the parliament to address the common issues of the public, to formulate fair and just laws and to redress constituent grievances to create a nation where freedom is not curtailed, and crime cannot be sustained. The role of the executive body of our country cannot be neglected in the path of creating a crime-free society as it fills the gap between the legislature and the judiciary by implementing all the rules and regulations to maintain law and order in the country. The role of the executive body, which includes the President, Vice President, Cabinet Ministers, other Ministers and civil servants, is indispensable as it creates a direct impact on society since the police and the civil servants are working on the ground and are in direct contact with the public and know the needs of the people better. Very often, we hear that the people in power for the public become the biggest threat to the people. The question and the concern are not only about the increased crime rate. The concern is also about the rights of the people. Whenever a crime takes place, there is a violation of someone's freedom.

It's not that we are facing this state of affairs due to the lack of resources at the disposal of the government. Union Budget 2023-24 includes Rs 1 27,757 Crore allocation towards the Central Armed Police Forces, the Intelligence Bureau, and the Delhi Police. This is an increase of 7% over the revised estimates for 2022-23. While in most of the states, the expenditure on police, on average, accounted for 3-5% of state expenditure. However, we are still unable to grasp the problem because we are spending time on physical development, looking the other way on the road to mental development and change. In large part, this mental development and change is the responsibility of our education system, and the fact that India is a country of grand and glorious cultures that emphasizes moral values and ethics, it becomes more critical to impart a few characteristics of our cultures in our education system as well. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, India's guiding policy document on achieving equitable and quality education for all, has reiterated the need for increasing public investment in the education sector to a minimum of 6 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at the earliest. However, in 2022-23, the budgetary allocation for education spending by the Union government and the states combined was far less at 3 per cent of the country's GDP against the recommended 6% by the Kothari Commission in 1964, which has not been achieved so far. And the quality of education provided is also questionable because it seems that our education system is only making students literate, not educated. This is why Kerala, even after being the most literate state of our country with a 94% literacy rate, topped the list of crimes against children.

Education and Moral Values

Education is a decisive development factor that not only affects the present but will also decide the future of our country because today's students are going to be future voters and leaders. NCRB's report has shown that a total of 31,170 cases were registered against juveniles in 2021, showing a 4.7% increase over 2020. Most of them - 76.2% or 28,539 in absolute terms - were in the 16 to 18 age group. Juveniles who went to school committed crimes more than those who did not. Even if the students get possessed by these heart-wrenching illegal activities, then what is the point of having advanced technology like 5G and infrastructure like metro trains when the country will be grasped by social distress? What kind of education are our schools, colleges, and various prestigious institutions giving to the future of our country if they are unable to teach them the basic moral values and their fundamental duties? Education holds a great power; it shows the way from darkness to light, and it is very rightly said by the great leader Nelson Mandela that "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". We need an education system that imparts values in the students to make them responsible and accountable for their actions. Legal awareness about the fundamental rights and duties must be added to the curriculum of every educational institution, irrespective of the streams or courses it offers.

Collective Efforts to Save, Secure, and bring desirable change in the Society and Polity

There is a call for action to everyone because we all are in the same boat now, and no one can whistle a symphony; it takes a whole orchestra to play it. As citizens, we are not only responsible for demanding our rights and fighting for them but also, at the same time, responsible for fulfilling our duties as well. We need good politicians who work towards the development and prosperity of the nation, not for their personal gains, by giving voice to the needs of citizens in the parliament, formulating policies in the favour of public interest and proposing laws and orders that promote equality, justice, peace, harmony and growth of all. The role of citizens, especially the youth, cannot be overlooked or neglected here because we are the ones who are obliged to elect a government that truly follows the essence of a true democracy -of the people, by the people and for the people. We all cry for change. It's time to be the change we want to see in the world.

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HEALTH BENEFITS OF SPICES

The dishes, it also increases the nutritional value of the food. All parts of the plant are edible, but the fresh leaves and dried seeds are most commonly used. It's dried seeds and the fresh leaves are used for culinary and medicinal purposes in Ayurveda. The culinary applications of coriander have a medicinal background to balance the food properties and facilitate digestion.

Fenugreek: Trigonella foenum graecum (fenugreek), one of the subtle Indian spices, is native to Southern Europe and Asia and is an erect annual herb with white flowers and hard, yellowish brown and angular seeds. This Indian spice is what people say "smells like curry". Commonly known as "Methi" it is a popular ingredient in many North and South Indian dishes and home remedies. It has been used traditionally in India, China, and Middle East for thousands of years to treat many ailments and conditions. Fenugreek seeds and leaves are strongly aromatic and flavorful. The seeds are bitter in taste, but lose their bitterness if lightly roasted. The seeds are added as preservatives in pickles and dried leaves are used for flavoring meat, fish and vegetable dishes.

Tej Patta / Bay leaf: Laurus nobilis (bay leaf) belonging to the family Lamiaceae is a popular leafy spice used in seasoning food. According to the USDA's Nutritional Database, a one pinch of crumbled bay leaves weighs

just 0.6 g. Within that amount, bay leaves have 0.45 g carbohydrates, 0.05 g proteins and 0.2 g dietary fiber. The remaining portion is made of other nutrients and water. Bay leaf has medicinal property that helps in curing outside infections and skin diseases. Tejpatta has strong and distinctive fragrance, repelling unwanted bugs away from the room. Application of bay leaf paste is the best medicine for curing minor cuts and insect bite. In case of muscle soreness, bay leaf oil relieves from soreness plus enhances the blood circulation too.

Curry patta: Murraya koenigii (curry leaves), the quintessential aromatic ingredient, found in the Indian households have innumerable health and therapeutic benefits. This tree being indigenous to India, Sri Lanka and many Southeast Asian countries is known by several vernacular names such as Kadi Patta or Meetha Nem in Hindi, Kariveppilai in Tamil or Karivempu in Malayalam. The leaves are not only sought after for their aromatic flavor in the foods, but also enhance the health benefits of the meal making it more appealing. Packed with a multitude of nutrients like carbohydrate, fiber, calcium, phosphorous, iron, magnesium, zinc, multivitamins and flavonoids, curry leaves are an arcade of health benefits.

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