

Chaotic railway bus stand

Ministers, MLAs and bureaucrats usually travel by air. They need not travel either by railway or by motor vehicle when on long tours because they are not among the ordinary mortals. Therefore they know nothing about the sordid scenario at the Jammu Railway mini bus and taxi stand. In these columns we have at numerous times reflected on the chaotic situation of the bus stand. It falls on flat ears because railway bus stand is nobody's vote bank. The deplorable condition in which this complex stands is a blot on the name of Northern Railways in general and Jammu Railway Station in particular. Nobody is prepared to own the responsibility of maintaining the entire complex. The police, railway authorities, Municipal Corporation, PWD, in short every organization when approached about the dilapidated situation of the bus stand wants to pass the buck to some other organization and absolves itself of all responsibility. Who then is going to do anything about repairing and remodeling of the entire bus stand complex including the approach road and the footpaths etc? It has become an enigma.

The ground situation at the mini bus stand complex is that casual vendors have illegally encroached upon the main entry link. The footpaths have been occupied by dhabawallahs, and the link has been reduced to its minimum width. The mini bus stands more or less like a cesspool in rains full of mud, slush and water filling it all the time especially during the rainy season. Chaos is let loose on all sides. Mini buses, three wheelers, carriers and private cars are all parked haphazardly anywhere and everywhere. If one day, traffic police allows private cars to approach the main entrance to the railway station, the next day it disallows this access. There is no regular plan of controlling the traffic though traffic police are to be found sticking out their heads at every conceivable place. There is no sanitation, no rest rooms, no restaurants or tidy teashops and no facilities for the passengers. Crowds of people coming as pilgrims to Mata Vaishno Devi are seen scattered or laying down or loitering all over the railway premises as they have no place to sit down and take rest for a while. The hawkers, beggars, handicapped persons and pickpockets all move around like swarms of locust making one feel ashamed of having come to board the train. Fruit sellers have encroached upon half of the main road and carry on their sales without being questioned by the policemen hanging around in numbers. In absence of meters, the drivers of three-wheelers charge exorbitant fares from the passengers especially when they are females with small kids or old parents. Cabmen plying between Jammu railway station and Katra make a pilgrim tourist miserably by virtually dragging him to his vehicle to earn a day's wages. Once out of the railway station and on the bus stand, one feels one is lost in a wilderness where no law and no discipline work.

We have been laying stress on Railways and Municipal Corporation authorities to attend to the urgent need of reconstructing the Jammu railway bus stand complex in a way that it looks a modern attractive bus stand with all facilities for the passengers. We have been highlighting the importance of Jammu railway station in terms of its strategic and scenic location. More than a crore passengers pass through this station year after year as pilgrims to Mata Vaishno Devi and to Swami Amarnath ji Cave in Kashmir. Existing railway station, its complex and the mini bus stand are abysmally inadequate to cope with this huge number of passengers. It is an ugly and untidy complex though with the potential to be an imposing one. Northern Railways authorities did make a survey of this railways station and the complex and layout and promised renovation, which, however, has not materialized so far. It looks a primitive railway station with chaotic approach. One feels saddened by non-responsive attitude of concerned authorities.

Preserving the heritage

Everybody in a position of authority speaks of preserving our heritage. But few care to translate this slogan into practice. Also we often speak of our State as foremost among tourist spots in the country but we are not exploring new tourists destinations. We remain confined to a few destinations in Kashmir and do not explore new sites of which there is no dearth. Mantalai in Sudh Mahadev ranges is one place that carries the twin significance of a tourist resort and a heritage spot. This site of exceptional scenic beauty and of rich mythological background, of which there are interesting visible signs, was developed by late Dharendra Brahmachari with the purpose of making it a leading yoga centre in the country to which tourists and yoga lovers from all over the world would flock. The making of a helipad and raising of multi-storey buildings was an initiative towards that objective which, however, could not be achieved owing to the sudden death of Dharendra Brahmachari ji. The site spread over more than two thousand kanals of land, changed hands after the death of its owner and is now resting with the Patnitop Development Authority. However, so far there are no indications of this Authority intending to turn the site into a real tourist cum pilgrimage destination. Much remains to be done in that direction. We impress upon the State Tourism Department and other concerned authorities to focus attention on developing Mantalai as a significant tourist and pilgrim spot and provide all facilities that would make it attractive. The layout of the infrastructure is already there and a proper plan of how to develop it into a tourist complex and also maintain its mythological attraction is what needs to be taken care of. Development of Mantalai will boost the economy of entire area of Udhampur district, which at present remains a backward area. The passing of the buck culture should stop and only one Government agency should take the project in hand and draw a time frame for its completion.

Role of Village Defence Committees

Shiban Khaibri

It sounds not that convincing that the village defence committees, which were set up to counter acts of terrorism against the innocent and unarmed villagers living in far flung mountainous regions of Jammu division, be dissolved and disarmed. It is also surprising that not only leaders with separatist ideology from Kashmir valley but also many mainstream politicians from the ruling and the opposition parties in the state should echo such feelings. Hurriyat leader Syed Geelani attributes unfounded and baseless motives behind creation of such VDCs and is seeing in it, the aim of crushing the "pro freedom movement" in Jammu region. VDCs are, therefore, seen by him as a "threat" to what he calls as "the freedom movement". The considered "soft liner" Hurriyat leader, Omar Farooq finds creation of VDCs as "unleashing of reign of terror in Muslim belts of Jammu region which could take the shape of communal riots." The other separatist "leaders" too have similar views. The avoidable statements of a few leaders of NC and the PDP in respect of disbanding and dissolving of such VDCs are not conducive to and in consonance with, the ground realities and are perhaps, attempts to highlight alleged sporadic cases of some criminal acts, committed by a few members of the VDCs to make that an alibi and thus build a case for disbanding of such committees. State Congress chief, Saif-ud-Din Soz, however, while being critical of VDCs, opines that let "people of Jammu districts (where these committees are existing) decide about disbanding of such committees.

A holistic view of the issue taken with sincere intentions, can only laud and appreciate the vast contribution of such committees in holding at bay, the militant, read terrorist acts, in Jammu areas of Doda, Kishtwar, Rajouri, Poonch and other far flung areas where these VDCs are operational. That the mechanism and the strategies employed by the militants have been in constant sphere of "periodic reviews and surprises" on the instructions and sponsoring from across the border, should lend more support to continuance of these committees and a hazy "peaceful situation" not in any way, set in an air of complacency which may lead to either reduction or disbanding of such committees. The current deceptive picture of a lull of "no incidents of any fresh terror violence" for quite some time should not be masqueraded as "peace having returned and militant activities having come to an end". Scores of dastardly committed acts of swooping on villages and

killing innocent people in Doda, Kishtwar, Rajouri, Poonch and other areas in Jammu division by Pakistani sponsored, trained and indoctrinated terrorists are still fresh in every body's memory. We also know that in such attacks, the worst sufferers have been the women and the children. These terrorists have been indiscriminate in killing members of the minority as well as majority communities in these places, taking benefit of the nature of inaccessibility of the areas by the security forces being both remote, far flung as well as mountainous. A strong need was, therefore, felt to protect the targeted civilians especially the women folk and hence the VDCs. A total of nearly 445 VDCs are functional in the state where by the male as well as female members have been trained in how to defend from and thwart attacks of militants which usually have a surprise and swift element in their attacks. The VDC members are trained in elementary battle craft and field craft drills including stalking, crawling and firing practices.

The role by the brave female members of the families like that of the young Rukhsana has reinforced the hope of the authorities that when it comes to defend one's family, the village etc, the females do not lag behind their male members. Rukhsana grappled with a well trained top Lashkar -e- Toiba terrorist as if she herself was a trained commando and killed the attacker who had barged into her house in Sept 2009, heading a group of three, to kill Rukhsana's family and abduct her. She was honoured and given awards by the Government and various social organizations for her act of exemplary bravery. Rukhsana, while taking the main National bravery award, said that women living in remote areas where it was not possible for security forces to keep round the clock vigil, should be imparted training so that they can protect not only themselves but even other families. It was around that time when three young girls were kidnapped by terror outfits from Bhaderwah in Doda district and taken to the other side of the LOC to be later used for terror activities to further the so called "freedom movement" and also be their targets of physical assaults. The first women village defence committees had been set up in the twin villages of Marah and Kulali in Poonch district. It may be recalled that in Katha in Poonch district in 2010, terrorists had barged into the villagers' houses and killed 12 women and children as male members were out for their routine work. A strong need was therefore felt that innocent villagers be provided with some basic type of

a self defence system so as to take on the invading criminals. VDC of Marah has virtually become a role model for others.

These committees have worked wonders and any body can guess the likely situation in these areas in absence of such committees at the hands of the ruthless militants, out to destroy and damage the peace, prosperity and the progress of the people living in such far flung areas. It is a proud spectacle to find women, mostly from the Muslim community, sporting rifles on their shoulders while grazing cattle in deep forests or keeping a vigil on their roof tops. Those who advocate total disbanding of such committees must not forget many massacres committed by the Pakistan trained terrorists in these hilly areas. Many people including the terrorists were killed in the remotest Hill Kaka bowl of Surankote in 2003 as the area was heavily fortified and large stocks of arms and ammunition kept here, bunkers and hide-outs built by these terrorists.

In 2004, the militants attacked Kalali village and killed 14 women and children followed by attack on village Thawa of Kulhand near Doda where 22 were killed and 15 wounded, out of which one more with as many as 36 bullets fired on his legs, died in the hospital. The heartlessness of the militants can be gauged by their swooping on a sleeping village in the dead of night in July 2006 in Magnar - Poonch, where they indiscriminately fired on the sleeping children, killing four on the spot and wounding many. If there would have been no VDCs, many civilian killings would have taken place in Nov 2003 at Gool, Arnas in Udhampur Jammu as the committee members repulsed and rebuffed strong terror attacks.

It is not at all advisable or feasible to take any step towards winding up of these committees as it might prove suicidal looking to the contours of the proxy war unleashed by our neighbour against this country. This also has to be seen in the perspective of the escalated terror activities in the state especially in the valley, now almost with more frequencies laced with border violations and infiltration attempts near LOC in Jammu and Kashmir made by Pakistan. Let the gains of whatever small magnitude achieved by VDCs be not lost to invite more trouble in this state, especially in the hilly mountainous regions. Any misadventure or committing of any illegal act by any one associated with any VDC must be dealt with firmly as a deterrent for others. Let narrow politics be abandoned and not prove as a potential risk for the soft and innocent targets any more.

Food Security Ordinance

Dipankar Bose

The promise came on June 4, 2009 with then President announcing in the Parliament that India needs food security and a National Food Security Act would be formulated. It took two years for the UPA Government to prepare its first draft, which came in 2011.

Another two years went by and finally, the Union Cabinet gave its nod to the draft Food Bill only in March this year, which has been followed by promulgation of an Ordinance, with only weeks ahead of the Parliament's Monsoon session, raising many eyebrows and drawing sharp criticism from several corners including the opposition that the Centre was trying to avoid any constructive debate on an important legislation like the Food Security Bill.

The argument that Congress party, which heads the UPA coalition at the Centre, wants to rush the Bill ahead of the election season, kicking off from end of this year with Assembly polls in some states and ending with the general elections next year, is also being strongly posed.

The Opposition's frequent stalling of Parliament proceedings might add fodder to UPA's counterargument that there was no way other than taking the Ordinance route to put the Food Security legislation to effect, but there are several problems and unanswered questions with the Bill in its present form.

And that is why, it needs to be deliberated and debated upon and appropriate forum of that was the floor of the Parliament.

A broad look at the Ordinance promulgated by President Pranab Mukherjee shows that the UPA aims to give

right to subsidised food grain to 67 percent of India's 1.2 billion people and will ensure food and nutritional security.

The ordinance specially focuses on the needs of the poorest of the poor, women and children, provides for grievance redressal mechanism and penalty for non-compliance by public servants or any authority.



Up to 75 percent of the rural population and up to 50 percent of the urban population will have uniform entitlement of five kg food grain per month, at highly subsidised prices of Rs 3, Rs 2, Re 1 per kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains, respectively.

The poorest of poor households would continue to receive 35 kg food grain per household per month under the Antyodaya Anna Yojna at subsidised prices.

State-wise coverage will be determined by the Central Government and work of identification of eligible households has been left to the states and Union Territories (UTs), which may frame their own criteria or use Social Economic and Caste Census data.

There is a special focus on nutritional support to women and children. Pregnant women and

lactating mothers, besides being entitled to nutritious meals as per the prescribed nutritional norms, will also receive maternity benefit of at least Rs 6,000 for six months. Children in the age group of six months to 14 years will be entitled to take home ration or hot cooked food, as per prescribed nutritional norms.

The Central Government

will provide funds to states and UTs, in case of short supply of food grain from central pool. In case of non-supply of food grain or meals, state and UT Governments will be required to provide food security allowance to the beneficiaries as prescribed by the Central Government. But critics have questioned the elements of nutrition and the delivery system of food grains to the actual need.

If statistics on malnutrition are to be believed, India is in the grip of a severe crisis. But, many have questioned the malnutrition statistics itself and have pointed out that malnutrition figures could be biased by genetic factors as they are based on a worldwide norm that does not take into account ethnic differences. The symptoms of malnutrition can also be caused by poor

public health, especially abysmal sanitation and lack of basic facilities, mostly to those who are targeted to be covered by the Food Security Bill.

And above all these, experts have pointed out that the cure for malnutrition is not more nutrition, but better nutrition.

Another bottleneck for the success of Food Security is that UPA proposes to roll out the scheme through PDS and Food Corporation of India, considered as two most inefficient institutions in India with average estimated leakages ranging from 40 to 55 per cent.

With a legislation solely emphasising on food grains, it is bound to cause rise in inflation, especially agri-commodities like vegetables and dairy products, experts say. With the country's fiscal deficit continuing to be a problem with the UPA, it's anyone's guess as to where will the Government look to cut its spending to keep the deficit within manageable limits and yet dole out the scheme.

Economists have already pointed out that "Without fixing the food distribution system, without fixing constraints on food production, on spoilage and on storage, just upping the demand suddenly could create a whole new wave of inflation."

Another important aspect would surely be the final outcome of the ongoing Socio-Economic and Caste Census being conducted across the country, which will be a benchmark for identifying households eligible for the Food Security scheme.

There could surely be angry voices from many corners of India, when the actual distribution of food grains begins.

Colleges without infrastructure

Sir, Apropos, 'Colleges without infrastructure' (DE July 16, 2013) you have rightly highlighted the plight of newly opened colleges in the State.

In case of newly opened colleges in our State political considerations are prominent rather than academic compulsions. The result is colleges without infrastructure.'

Central Govt has started collecting education cess on income tax. Money so collected is disbursed to the States with good intentions. But the academic colleges at tehsil level and below are not going to help the students in countryside. The higher education should expose the students to wider experiences in the field of education which leads to the development of the personality of a scholar apart from knowledge. Academic colleges are supposed to produce scholars. A person, who is not exposed to outside world and gets the academic degree at his own place will not prove to be a successful

person when exposed to the outer world.

It would have been better, had there been training institutions offering training in agriculture, horticulture, floriculture, apiculture, sheep rearing, dairy farming, poultry farming, fish farming, rabbit farming etc. etc. in place of academic colleges. This would have helped the youth to improve their economic condition and also develop the countryside.

Those interested in academic advancement may come to well established colleges. The State has established separate hostels for students from Ladakh. Some more hostels can be established for the students from far flung areas.

A graduate from ill equipped college may not be able to come upto mark in comparison with outside world. Thus well intentional effort may go waste.

Yours etc....
A. Singh
Digiana

Mantalai as tourist spot

Sir, This refers to the article 'Heritage village Mantalai DE Aug 4. The author deserves kudos for writing such an informative piece. It brought to fore certain unheard aspect of the place. Being a beautiful spot, the Government and people associated with tourism industry should frame plans to develop it as a tourist spot. The road network in this area should be given a top priority. The roads need to be widened and black topped. This will allow tourist to throng the place uninhibited. The other problem that stares the people here is lack of communication facilities. For this purpose, the telecom agencies should erect more towers. There is also urgent need to set up a string of hotels where people could stay for some days. Arrangements should also be made to divert Vaishnodevi pilgrims to this place, so that they can explore the majestic beauty of lush green fields and evergreen pine trees.

Yours etc....
Ashok Sharma
Chenani

Let's work for country

R. S. Pathania

I am a Hindu nationalist. 'Garv se kahon hum Hindu hain'. This is the much-talked-of title-trail of king-size hoardings of Narendra Bhai Modi, Chairman of Campaign Committee of B.J.P., hogging 'nukkads' and 'chowks' in metro-cities of India.

While on the other hand, fundamentalist zealot from Kashmir, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, at his histrionic best, has issued a clarion call to Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir to unite and observe 26 July as 'Day of Muslim unity'.

Right from Ramayana to Mahabharata, Ashoka to Akbar and from British subjugation to an independent India, much water has flowed under Ganges. Bharat, as a country, civilization and a cultural cache has oldest roots and history in the world. It is the only nation in the world where different religions, castes, creeds and clans, speaking different languages, wearing different attires, and having different customs, cultures and usages, bask and breed under one sky. I am reminded of a famous Bollywood number, 'Hai Preet Jahan Ki Reet Sada...'

Having successfully withstood incests and invasions, calamities and catastrophes, communalist and disruptive forces, at their worst, spirit of oneness and brotherhood in India is as agile as ever.

And amongst all parrot cries and chest-thumping about Hindu orthodoxy on the soil of civilization having flourished thousands of years ago on the banks of Sindhu river, we could not easily overlook the epoch-making crusade of Raja Ram Mohan Roy against 'sati' system, Jyoti Rao Phule's fight against untouchability and caste-system in Maharashtra, Netaji Subas Chandra Bose's concept of lingua franca and Uniform Civil Code, Nehruji's tryst with destiny and stiff resistance to making of a 'Hindu Rashtira' in the backdrop of creation of Pakistan in 1947 and Gandhiji's and Ambedkar's contribution to the Indian socio-political scenario. Gandhiji's gospels of Hindu-Muslim unity and egalitarian, socialist and a caste-free India continue to be trail-blazers for powers-that-be in our country. 'Ishwar Allah tero Namm....' continues to quiver the spirits of Indians, right from Kashmir to Kanyakumari.

Nonetheless, the torch of nationalism and secularism handed over to the people of India by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Mullah Hasrat Mohani and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai which was preserved and rather was made to sparkle with added grace by Dr. Zakir Hussain, Fakruddin Ali Ahmed & APJ Abdul Kalam, former Presidents of India. The bold rejection of Jinnah's two-nation theory by these Muslim leaders was a living example for the entire world and a candid rejection of parochial politics in India.

And in the state of Jammu & Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh's stance against child marriage, sati system and untouchability had been a source of inspiration and self-esteem. He opened up temples, public wells and schools for scheduled castes and had to face stiff resistance from Hindu clergy but he stood like a rock and banished all those Hindi fanatics while ensuring actual compliance of his orders on the ground. He as well as his ancestors successfully ruled this Muslim-majority state for more than a century until the powers-that-be in Independent India decided to hand over power in J & K to Sheikh Abdullah-led National Conference in 1947.

And again in J & K, the bold and forthright, Mirwaiz Mohd. Yusuf Shah, grandfather of Mirwaiz Umer, tooth-and-nail opposed Muslim Conference's theory of 'self-determination for Muslims in J & K'. The nationalist and secular out-turn of stalwarts like Bakshi Ghulam Mohd., Maulana Syed Masoodi, G. M. Sadiq and Syed Mir Qasim is also a living role-model for the posterity in J & K to emulate and inspire themselves.

All said and done, and despite all the constructive work done by these towering leaders, Gandhiji, at one point of time, had to face signature campaign by Shankaracharyas declaring him as non-Hindu. He even had to face assassination at the hands of radical Puritans. And so does two former Prime Ministers, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

The brutal assassination of her mother-in-law and husband could not deter Sonia Gandhi to pick up the gauntlet and challenge these divisive forces on the political arena of India. And so does her son, Rahul Gandhi, who has off-late jumped headlong into the maelstrom of Indian politics while earning the sobriquet of 'upsetter of apple-carts' in Congress as well as on the Indian political scene. And till date both the mother and son have restrained themselves from power politics while refusing to accept any prime position in the government.

B. R. Ambedkar was so fed-up with this priestly orthodoxy in Hinduism that he had renounced Hinduism in last days of his life. J. L. Nehru, the architect of Modern India, was called a Satan as he had never been to a temple in his life. For all their departures from orthodoxy - Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Jyoti Phule, Gopal Krishan Gokhale, Ishwar Chand Vidya Sagar, Gandhi, Ambedkar, and Nehru were the tallest 20th century figures who tried their best to rid Hinduism of its ills and excesses, who worked most heroically to nurture the spirit of egalitarianism that the Laws of Manu sought to deny. The constructive work that they did constituted what India and Indianism is.

And not much surprising, these religious Puritans called Maharaja Hari Singh in J & K a 'tyrant', Sheikh Abdullah a 'traitor' and Tritons like Bakshi Ghulam Mohd., G. M. Sadiq and Syed Mir Qasim as 'agents of Delhi'. But fact remains that tiring efforts by these towering personalities set the tone and tenor for setting of a federal, democratic and secular setup in J & K which has kept Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh as one entity till now.

The million-dollar question which arises now is that does these eccentric outbursts of left-wings constitute the mood and pulse of India. Answer is a big no.

Modis and Geelani cannot be allowed to muddle the atmosphere of India. Saner voices have to take better of their parochial sloganeering.

Forces that are still harping on the 'perverted' concepts of Hindu India and Muslim India have to be fought tooth and nail. Liberalism and modernity require a vision for future. A section of Hindus as well as Muslims may claim themselves to be liberal but have they asserted themselves? Have they ever spelt out any vision for the future which heralds uniformity in the society?

Antidote: 'Garv se kaho hum Bhartiya hain'. And let the people of entire Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh unite to face challenges posed by such narrow-minded hawks.

Let's hope and pray, the jinx breaks at the earliest. As the maxim goes, 'the churning is always for the nectar to rise' (The columnist practices law in the J & K High Court)

Readers Write

Vote bank politics

Sir, If India is in a mess today, it is because of vote bank politics. Politicians in India can go to any extent to further their diabolic designs. No State of the country has remained untouched by dirty politics. If it is caste politics in one State, it is communal politics in the other State. The politicians in India have mastered the art of creating fissures in the society on one pretext or the other. If regionalism and communalism are gaining ground in the country, it is courtesy these political parties who have nothing at stake. Where the country goes, it is not their concern. The only concern that matters them is that people should vote them to power. From Budgam to Bengal, Tamil Nadu to Telangana, politicians will keep on playing these dirty game unless people wake up from slumber and fight against these tendencies.

Yours etc....
Virinder Kumar
Kachi Chowni
Jammu