

## Ballot humbles militants and separatists

Can it be called as a new turn in the politics in Kashmir valley and for the better and should the separatists and the militants treat it as such a writing on the wall which declares that Kashmiris are feeling exhausted, weary and jaded with the ongoing aimless violence that brings only death and destruction for them? Have people started seeing through the actual game played by Pakistan in the name of religion in Kashmir for over three decades which has resulted in misleading the gullible youth exploiting their credulity and marring their building of very promising future? If the comparative, very encouraging and impressive turnout of nearly 65% in the first phase of elections to the Panchayats in the Valley are carrying any loaded meaning, they are vividly saying so. It is high time, anti India elements and separatists read the emerging mood of the people, who under the fear of gun, warnings of physical harm, abductions and ultimatums braved all these lurking dangers and came out to cast their votes thus lending a hand of strength to the tenets of democracy at the grass root levels. Fearless and brave voters-- you have spoken volumes through your valuable vote and you deserve all the felicitations.

The first phase of polling for the Panchayat elections, considered very crucial and pivotal in Jammu and Kashmir, has recorded a massive turnout of 74.1% - Jammu leading with an impressive 79.4% followed by Ladakh with 65.5% and the Valley with 64.4%. While, out of the total voters numbering 2.95 lacs from Jammu, 2.35 lacs cast their votes, it was 1.05 lac out of 1.63 lacs in Kashmir valley that cast their votes despite as usual those worn out and redundant shutdown calls given by the separatists during which shops and business establishments remained closed in Srinagar City on the day of polling. Kupwara in Kashmir witnessed 72% of turnout while Bandipora 56% and Baramulla an impressive 69.1%, Budgam with 30.1% followed by Ganderbal and Srinagar. Kashmir valley had recorded poor turnout in just concluded Urban Local Bodies elections and the figures of the Panchayat polls are comparatively, thus very significant and encouraging. Those political Parties which boycotted these elections have eaten a humble pie seeing the response of the voters.

Udhampur in Jammu Division topped with 83.6% voting turnout followed by Doda with 80.8% and Kathua with 80% turnout while Rajouri and Poonch both had nearly 79% turnout of votes polled. Kargil in Ladakh recorded 71% while Leh nearly 60% despite severe cold conditions of weather prevailing there.

The most significant aspect of the polls in the first phase of these elections was violence free voting in all the 15 districts in the state including seven in Jammu region, six in Kashmir and two in Ladakh. No violence inviting using of any sort of force was reported from anywhere which not only speaks about the satisfactory arrangements made by the State administrative apparatus but reflects the satisfactory response and the responsible behaviour of the public.

Frustrated, being at their wits ends and marooned in the muddy waters of violence generated by them all these three decades at the behest of Pakistan, militants abducted five people in Shopian (Kashmir) on November 17 and very savagely slit the throat of one 19 year old youth Huzeeef Ashraf while rest of the abducted were released. Such actions in utter desperation were going to boomerang against them increasingly day by day and it was the ballot, the vote and the democratic process which were most powerful means destined to turn triumphant and violence and terror were fated to be vanquished.

## Why open auction of river blocks

Unless there were any cogent reasons for conducting open auction of blocks in rivers, streams, nallahs etc by the Geology and Mining Department, in flagrant violation of standing Government orders, why should otherwise motives not be attributed to those who took such decisions even at the cost of disregarding the court directives. Conducting of e-tenders and e-auction in all the Government departments is to pre-empt and ward off any elements of speculations and ambiguities of various types leading to suspicion of corrupt practices with an eye on illegal pecuniary gains having been resorted to wilfully.

Why should, on account of violations of standing procedures and rules, Government lose its revenue rightfully due to it and why should the same not be recovered from those who took such decisions knowingly on their own? In the instant case, for example, the Government has lost huge revenue in terms of royalty from the rivers and nallahs since open auction discouraged many participants in almost the entire region, speculations are rife that only a "selected" group in complete connivance of and patronage from some insiders from the department "managed" the entire process of auction. In fact, the material auctioned was what we call "grey gold".

It is this "grey gold" mafia which gets undue patronage from the Department concerned to manage take complete control of extraction of 'minor mineral' like sand, stones, gravel etc in the rivers and streams of the region. We urge the Government that an inquiry be instituted to expose, name and shame all those involved in this loot right up to some politicians and bureaucrats who too are part of the nexus.

Col J P Singh

First World War had been the worst ever fought trench war where men lived an unimaginable hell. This war was one of the bloodiest in history. It shaped Europe's politics and demographics. The immediate cause of the war was assassination of the Austrian Duke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo by a Bosnian activist on 28 June 1914. Duke was the heir to the throne of Austro-Hungarian empire. Austrian Govt believed that the assassination was organized by the Serbian Govt. Hence Austria declared war on Serbia. Following which various countries fought the other as part of opposing alliances. The triple alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy were pitted against the triple entente of Britain, Russia and France. The war which started in 1914 ended in 1918. To commemorate the first centenary of the first world war, a grand ceremony was held at Paris. It is a remarkable global tribute to honour those who laid down their lives in 1914-18 bloodiest war. It is also a tribute to the signing of 'Armistice' that brought the fighting to an end at 11 AM on 11 November 1918. Ironically the peace brought about by this armistice was elusive and short lived. French President Emmanuel Macron led the world leaders in an emotional ceremony in Paris for paying tributes to millions killed. Vice President led the Indian delegation. Over 2500 Dogra soldiers fought Britain's war. 76% of them never returned home. I was glad to see a decorated bus with a collage of Indian soldiers and inscription, "Thank You, 1.4 million Indian Soldiers: The Forgotten Heroes of WWI, India.1914.com", going around in London streets to commemorate their glory. Wish similar gesture was displayed in Jammu.

British had less forces in East African theatre as compared to Germany and they made a demand on the State Forces. Maharaja Pratap Singh offered 3 Battalions (Bns) and a Mountain Battery (Mtn Bty). British immediately requisitioned them. Maharaja deputed 2 Kashmir Rifles (KR) commanded by Lt Col Raghuraj Singh and 3 KR commanded by Lt Col Durga Singh. 2 KR had 50% Muslims and the rest were Gorkhas. 3 KR had 50% Dogras and 50% Gorkhas. A Troop of J&K Horses Cavalry under Jem, later Maj Hazra Singh, and 1 Mtn Bty also formed part of the Dogra Contingent. Later 1st KR and two Troops of Kashmir Imperial Lancers were dispatched to Egypt in February 1915. Over 2500 rank and file took part in the 1st world war out of which 76% laid down their lives for their coloniser. They won lot of battle honours and individual gallantry awards. With that casualty rate and awards, valour of J&K State Forces deserve a mention in the media no matter they fought someone else's war.

The State Forces contingent left Jammu in July 1914 for Ferozepur for training as part of Imperial Services Brigade at Deolali. They embarked at Karachi in September 1914 and landed at Mombasa, Africa on 27 September. Mombasa was attacked by the Germans as they arrived. For tactical reasons they were diverted and disembarked at Port Tanga and brought back to Mombasa to repel the German attack. Germans were repulsed but the entire force suffered heavy casualties. On 8 October state force repulsed another attack and helped clearing the Germans from Kilimanjaro and Tanga. State Forces troops suffered heavy casualties in these actions. But they performed magnificently in their first ever encounter with top class enemy.

# Tribute to Dogra Soldiers

After the operation, Kashmir Rifles were rated as 'reliable troops' while many other Indian units were rated 'unreliable'. Credit for this goes to their Commanding Officers. Despite the rout, Lt Col Durga Singh, CO 3 KR was awarded 'Indian Order of Merit' (IOM) Class 1 equivalent of PVC. Being seriously wounded he was repatriated and replaced by Lt Col Gandharb Singh. Sep Devi Singh, Ganga Singh and Hav Madho Singh were awarded

described the action of the troops as 'magnificent'. Lt Col Raghuraj Singh was awarded a Jagir of Rs. 400 per annum and two Marabas of Land of 50 acres to his family. Lt Col Lyall, a British officer, took over the command of the unit temporarily. Lt Col Haider Ali replaced him and commanded the unit for the remainder of stay in Africa.

In May 1915, 2 KR led the advance of 1 East Afrika Division to Dar-es-Salaam. By a



Prime Minister Narendra Modi paying tributes to soldiers who fought in World War I.

Indian Distinguished Service Medal (IDSM). Sub Randhir Singh was awarded IOM, Class 2, equivalent of MVC.

In early 1915, 2 KR, as part of Varga Force, helped in the capture of Umba Valley and itself captured Jasin and when counter-attacked on 18 January 1915, successfully defended it. Lt Col Raghuraj Singh, the CO was killed in action while defending Jasin in which 115 men were wounded, 135 were taken prisoner. Commenting on his death, Brig JL Rose said, "glorious one, falling as head of his men, fighting for his chief, King and the country". He

flanking move Bn surprised the enemy, decimated a German Company, captured their weapons and ammunition and took many prisoners. On 30th July, Bn captured a Brass Eagle, (a German insignia) and their flag. Both continue to be their prized war trophies. Dar-es-Salaam fell on 3rd September 1916. This action was commended by Gen Smuts. By end of the month, German forces were cut off from the sea and by December 1916 beginning, East Afrika was cleared of all enemy. By then 2 KR was left with only 180 men alive having suffered alarming 78% casualties. That was the

sacrifice made by Dogra troops fighting for the Crown and should not remain unsung, is the idea behind telling this story.

Coming back to 3 KR, in April 1915, it moved to Nairobi. They fought a gallant action at Nadi Railway Station which was attacked by Germans in July 1915. Lt Col Gandharb Singh, CO was killed in this action. He was awarded 'Order of British Empire' (OBE). Unit took part in further advance and Nairobi was finally captured in December 1916. After rest and refit 3 KR was dispatched to Middle East in March 1918 to join 1st KR which had arrived there in January 1918 under Lt Col Ishri Singh. 3 KR relieved British at Palestine and formed part of 10 Indian Div which was entrusted to defend Suez Canal. Turks assembled 20,000 men & 10 Btys of Arty to march to Ismailia. But the Turks were forced to withdraw. Thereafter 3 KR was put under 75 Indian Div which cleared Haifa, Beirut and Alepo.

Since State Force had fought gallantly, more demands were made by British for the Dogra troops. Capture of Nigasaki was the last action fought by Dogras in March 1918 after which they were withdrawn from the war zone and repatriated. Only 605 surviving soldiers sailed back home. All were given 'special annam' of Rs 25 per person and officers were given 50% pay hike. 114 Jagir Annams were granted for distinguished services. Lt Col Ishri Singh, CO 1st KR, was awarded IOM Class II and a title of Sardar Bahadur. Maj Onkar Singh, 2IC was awarded OBI Class II. Bn won 2 IOM, 2 IDSM & 5 IMSM. It brought 2 captured Turkish Guns as war trophies. Hav Ali Akbar, Nk Teju and Sep Mohd Akram of 2 KR were awarded IMSM. Hav Atta Ullah, Hav

Nanbir, Sep Hafiz Ali, Rahim Ali and Lnk Devi Singh of 3 KR were awarded IOM Class II & Jem Ram Bahadur, Hav Harku, Lnk Indru were awarded IDSM. Lt Col Haider Ali was awarded CIE, OBI and the title of Sardar Bahadur Class I. Sub Surgeon Mohd Din of 2 KR was awarded OBI & title of Khan Bahadur Class II. Maj Sansar Singh of 3 KR was awarded the 'French Croix-de-Grace'. Hav Ballu got Medal of Military Valour. Maj Durga Dutt, medical officer got OBI & title of Sardar Bahadur II. Following Battle Honours were also awarded to the State Force units:- 1st Mtn Bty; Nayangoa & East Africa. 1st KR; Megiddo, Nablus & Palestine. 2 KR; Kilimanjaro, Behobeho & East Africa. 3 KR; Kilimanjaro, Behobeho, Megiddo, Sham & Palestine. Many names may be left out for which I apologise.

These gallantry awards and valour of Dogra soldiers is etched in military history on the basis of which British recognized Dogras, irrespective of caste or religion, as martial race and had 'Dogra Certificate' covenant issued to facilitate their enrolment in armed forces and Assam Rifles. Surprisingly Omar Abdullah led NC-Congress coalition annulled this covenant in 2011. Despite protests, Dogra certificate wasn't restored which is increasing their unemployment. However leadership of Dogra Swabhiman Sangathan has resolved to have it restored early.

Such stories of valour and sacrifices, I think, are precious for coming generations. Hope families of martyrs read this story and celebrate their ancestors. It is my sincere conviction that the Dogra soldiers, without whom the contours of the war might well be different, have got their due recognition at the global stage and their progenies are allowed Dogra Certificate to emulate their ancestors.

feedbackexcelsior@gmail.com

# Horticulture - Repeated calamity losses

Rajan Gandhi

Recent unprecedented early snowfall in November itself has once again exposed the hollow claims of development, upliftment, rights of common people of Kashmir in particular as once again there was least preparedness for natural calamity as administration was caught off guard with the result there was no policy in place to safeguard the interests of orchardists. We have not learnt any lessons from the past be it unprecedented earlier snowfalls or floods of 2014. Our administration has time and again proved that we are a state with zero responsibility, least accountability and no planning. While top to bottom of administration was busy in merits and demerits of Health Insurance cover of Government employees whose interests are always safeguarded but nobody thought of any plan or policy for the fruit growers with the result the largest revenue generators of the state are in a state of shock and distress.

It is interesting to point out that horticulture sector plays an important role in the state and contributes significantly to the state economy to the tune of 6000 crores annually. Our state is predominantly agricultural and more than 70 percent of the total population still lives in rural area whose main occupation and means of livelihood is agriculture. It contributes nearly 60 percent of the State revenue which adequately explains the over dependence of the state on agriculture. An important part of agriculture is horticulture, which is an old economic activity in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Kashmiri historian Kalhan mentioned fruit culture of Kashmir in his famous book 'Rajtarangini' during the reign of King Nora as back as 1000 B.C. It was however, during the period of Lalitaditya (900AD) that horticulture in the State received considerable patronage. But it is significant to

note here that the great ruler of Kashmir Budd Shah and Mughal Emperors introduced new varieties of fruits in Kashmir by importing the same from Kabul and Persia. Encouraged with the thriving nature of the industry, the Government thought it fit to have a separate department which could be entrusted with the development of horticulture industry in the economy of the State. Thus, in 1962, Horticulture Department came into existence. Following the establishment of this department, a major programme known as Integrated Horticulture Project was launched in the year 1978 in collaboration with the World Bank. The total cost of the project was 27.6 million dollars (Rs. 24.22 crores), out of which World Bank's share was Rs. 14 crores and the balance was to be met from financial institutions, like Agriculture Refinance Development Corporation and Industrial Development Bank of India. Accordingly a number of developmental schemes were introduced for the growth of horticulture with the inception of five year plans. Department of Horticulture Planning and Marketing has been given the responsibility of accomplishing the objectives to organize the orchardists in the Cooperative Marketing and Processing Societies to introduce standardization in the fruit trade, to assist the growers in getting problems relating to packing and transport solved and to collect, compile, analyze and dissemination market intelligence. The developmental schemes were reoriented during 1972-73 so as to develop orchards on five broad lines namely production and distribution of quality plant material, extending the area under fruit cultivation, increasing the productivity of existing orchard areas, research education and protecting plants against ravages of pests and diseases. Departmental orchards and nurseries for production of quality material, registration of private horticul-

ture plant nurseries, establishment of horticulture information service/centre, intensification of research on varietal trials in apples, survey of agro-climatic regions for cultivation of different kinds of varieties of horticulture products and trainings were other timely initiatives which increased horticulture area from 0.12 lakh hectares in the year 1953-54 to 2.02 lakh hectares during the year 1996-97 to 3.38 lakh hectares in 2016-17. This certainly has its effects in the economy in terms of income creation and employment generation. Fact is the fruit production which was 0.15 lakh tonnes before independence, could

ly and indirectly linked with horticulture sector. In fact this sector directly provides full time, part time and seasonal employment to about 7.02 lakh persons. If its dependent sectors like transport, forest, insurance, banking etc. are also considered then this sector provides livelihood to more than 26 lakh of people in and outside the State. In terms of yielding foreign exchange to the State exchequer, the horticulture dry fruits of Jammu and Kashmir State contribute a sufficient percentage. It would be important to note here that the State of Jammu and Kashmir is exporting horticulture products to more than many countries which include Canada,

institutions mainly commercial banks do not provide credit as recommended to them by the Department to the Fruit Growers Co-operative Marketing Societies as a result of which the members of the co-operative sector have felt handicapped and in most cases even the recently organized and registered societies have gone defunct and fallen prey to the money-lenders, middlemen and commission agents.

J&K State has been declared as Agri Export Zone for Apples and Walnut. The total production of fresh fruits in the state in the year 2016-17 is 19,59,351 metric tonnes and that of dry fruits is 2,75,629 metric tonnes. In a positive development the backbone of Jammu and Kashmir's economy - horticulture - has witnessed 36 percent growth in terms of production in a last decade. The Jammu and Kashmir Horticulture Produce Marketing & Processing Corporation Private Limited was established to promote production, packing & grading, processing and marketing of fruits and its related products. The Corporation is presently going through tough times with even plans to merge with parental department itself. With 3 food parks, 10 industrial estates, 6 cold storages, 2 agri export zones and dry port suggested government is trying but despite the best efforts there are still grey areas which have to be plugged. Though approved by Mehbooba Mufti cabinet for insurance of the orchards nothing on ground has been done and it is one of the dreams shown to orchardists never to be fulfilled. During recent snowfall since leave falls of the apple trees was not complete resulting accumulation of snow on leaves thereby increase in weight of branches which ultimately led to broken trees under weight of snow. All this means not only loss of crop this year but for coming years as well as apple trees take considerable time to produce the yield.

There is no planned survey of orchards with digital record of type, age, quantity and quality of trees in orchards by which compensation can be fixed instantly. This has been achieved by our neighboring state of Himachal with the help of Y.S Parmar University.

Though Horticulture University has been announced for Kashmir but it is too late. Proper guidance to repair damaged trees should be provided to the orchardists immediately and even local Doordarshan Kendra can play an important role with relevant documentaries for orchardists. Compensation is always marginal as compared to actual losses as such immediate interest free loans should be provided to orchardists. Another major area of concern is transportation as Kashmir highway along with Mughal road is playing hide and seek throughout the season with no respite and woes are further complicated by frequent highway jams when opened and as such with night landing facilities available with Srinagar airport government should seriously think upon airlifting the yield at subsidized fare with special focus on more cold storages as any long delay in carrying the fruits means degradation and less profit. Direct transfer of immediate relief should be provided along with new plants free of cost.

Last but not the least plan for future disasters; don't make main revenue generators of our state as sitting ducks who have to suffer time and again with every natural calamity be it floods or snowfall or highway blockade. "A stitch in time saves nine" to express in detail, it's better to spend a little time and effort to deal with a problem right now than to wait until later, when it may get worse and take longer to deal with. Options are there and it is just application of resources at right place and time.

feedbackexcelsior@gmail.com

## Death of a dream

Sir,

Refer to the recent disconsolate news of utterly odious murder of a man on the day of his daughter's marriage has brought me into tears. The monstrosity of such magnitude is inconsolable and the perpetrators deserve the rigorous exemplary punishment. The sad part is that the disaster could have been averted had the police been informed on time by the staff on duty at the bar or in the banquet hall. Before committing the outrageous act, the criminal in arbitration had created mayhem openly and the bystanders as well as the onlookers did not bother to alert the police on time, thus resulting in the untimely loss of a precious life. Moreover, taverns adjoining banquets or any other place of celebrations should have their own effective security arrangements, owing to the risk of alcohol related violence. Jammu is a very peaceful city and the rarity of such heinous crime is relatively very low as compared to other parts of the country. It is a wakeup call for all law abiding citizens, social groups and law enforcement agencies to take notice to deter such horrendous acts of goondaism like the senseless murder of a father who was otherwise busy in making his daughter's dreams come true.

Dr Vikas Jamwal  
(Kamdheni Homz) Jammu.

II

Sir,

A few years ago, the administration warned the owners of the marriage halls against their negligence for providing parking space to people. Until today most of them have been running the marriage halls the same way as their owners wish. How they are continuing with the same, administration knows well. Recently, a very unpleasant and shocking incident took place in the premises of a marriage hall where the marriage celebrations were on and a daughter who was going to be married lost her father who was murdered. The marriage hall has bar in its premises. How the State Administration has given license to the owner for running a bar in the premises of the marriage hall is really a matter of concern? The marriage hall is a public place. One cannot run a bar in it. And, if someone runs, then it does not remain a marriage hall. It is the gross violation, not on the part of the owner only but the main culprit is Administration itself. The matter should be thoroughly investigated who has given the license to the owner to run the bar.

Sunil Sharma  
Sainik Colony, Jammu

## Readers Write

### Ballot Vs Bullet

Sir,

From the dawn of militancy in the State, Nationalistic forces have been in the hit list of terrorists. We are living in a country where democracy is deeply rooted. We are free to express our ideology. It is ballot and bullet that can alter any political structure in the country. When we go through the pages of history we understand that ballot has negated bullet. Gun cannot silence the nationalistic forces of the country who's conviction is strong enough to uphold the unity of the country.

The recent killings in Kishtwar where two brothers succumbed to bullet injuries is an eye opener for the people living in Jammu and its surroundings. Jammuites cannot afford to remain in a deep slumber so far as the situation prevails in the State. All the political and social organisations need to shun their political differences and stand one and united against militancy. Govt alone cannot fight this menace, people have to stand by the Govt. as has been shown by the people of Kishtwar who stood one in this incident. The Central and our State Govt is fighting menace of militancy at various levels for the last many decades in which good number of innocent people got killed. There are also external forces outside the country working to weaken India and continue funding the anti-national elements of the State. In this connection people at the borders have to face the brunt of infiltration and then. These people deserve liberal and substantial aid from the Govt so that they could withstand the onslaught of infiltration and cross border firing.

S N Raina  
Jammu