

Bizarre story of Ganpat Bridge

If omens are to be believed, one may say that the foundation of Ganpat Bridge was laid at very inauspicious occasion. It is many years when the work on the bridge was started but never completed. Several crore rupees have been sunk and the project remains abandoned. What a callous attitude towards the works of public utility. Prior to construction of Baglihar Power Project people in the region of Doda, Bhadarwah and Kishtwar used to take the vehicular road via Pul Doda running by river Chenab to reach their destinations. The 263 meters span balanced cantilever Ganpat Bridge across Chenab was mooted to provide alternate connectivity to the people of Doda, Bhadarwah and Kishtwar. People of these far-flung areas were happy that a bridge over the Chenab would facilitate their mobility without hassles. But their dream did not come true when the project executing company left the project halfway and disappeared. For many years nobody cared to know why the construction of the work was left half way and what needed to be done to resume it.

Now the Minister for Roads and Buildings, Abdul Majid Wani claims that suspension of the work on this vital bridge has happened owing to interference by vested interests. He even went to the length of saying that some politicians and officials had ulterior motives and sabotaged the work and that he was going to expose them. It has to be reminded that even the Chief Minister paid a visit to the site and wanted to know why construction work had been suspended. Even this did not lead to the resumption of construction work. Are the alleged politicians and officials so resourceful and manipulative that they can manage to swindle the Government and get big projects like the construction of Ganpat Bridge scuttled to suite their interests? It is a sad commentary on the administration and efficiency of the department. If the Minister is satisfied that there have been external elements responsible for suspension of a project like the one under discussion, he should disclose their names and announce constitution of an enquiry committee to probe the matter and come out with a report within the stipulated time.

The apparent reason for abandoning the work on the project was the findings by IIT Delhi and CES Consultancy submitted to the PWD some time back. However, Jammu Kashmir Projects Construction Corporation (JKPCC) appointed T K Basu and V P Singh as Consultants and they presented their report, which rejected the findings of the IIT Delhi and CES. The report of the Consultants brings new hope as it said that the work on the bridge could be resumed with the M45 concrete strength material. Their view is that the bridge is safe and after the further sub-soil investigation, the work can be started. The new findings and detailed investigation by them makes it clear that Ganpat Bridge can become a reality without compromising any safety concerns.

Admittedly this has been a bizarre case of irresponsibility, mismanagement and callousness to have sunk enormous money and left the work half way without accountability. Both State Vigilance Organization and the State Accountability Commission are reported to be conducting enquiries on their respective level into the reasons of abandoning the work. We believe that there are many underhand intrigues going on to sabotage enquiries and probing. The statement of the Minister corroborates this view. As such, the proper thing to do would be that the Government orders speeding up of enquiry into the entire case on the one hand and resumption of construction work on the other. Both activities should continue simultaneously. Now that the Minister has raised the finger of accusation, it is but logical that the case should be properly enquired into. The company that has abandoned the work should be black listed after a case of corruption or negligence is established against it.

Reasi embezzlement case

A sensational embezzlement case against a junior Government functionary in the Municipal Committee, Reasi has come to light. The amount involved in embezzlement is to the tune of 21 lakh rupees. The story of embezzlement reveals the dare devilry of a senior assistant who has been pocketing the money instead of depositing it in the treasury under rules. Authorities stumbled on the case just by chance. The Deputy Commissioner of Reasi had ordered assessment of funds available with the Municipal Committee to take up some urgent developmental projects. This led to the exposure of the embezzlement case.

The Deputy Commissioner has done the right thing to constitute a three-member committee to enquire into the case and report within stipulated time. Why did not the authorities in the Municipal Committee take note of income and receipts and accounts of the Committee into consideration from time to time as per routine and why did they leave the entire matter to a senior assistant's care? It is necessary for the enquiry committee to establish whether the alleged functionary is the only person involved in embezzlement or that it is a network in which other functionaries at higher or lower level are involved. We hope that the Committee will submit its fair and impartial report to the Deputy Commissioner and proper action will be taken on the findings. Corruption is to be fought against at all levels. While we would want to know why immediate officials in the Municipal Committee Reasi overlooked the matter for a long time, we appreciate the action taken by the Deputy Commissioner in the matter.

A pseudo-secularist strikes

When Nitish Kumar made his announcement about breaking relations with the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) last week on 'secular' grounds I happened to be driving down the Mumbai-Goa highway in pouring rain. This is one of our major highways but I was in a rural stretch that went past villages that were creeping their way onto the highway as they developed haphazardly into small towns. So the highway has come to resemble a broken, village road. In the rain it becomes a nightmare of clogged traffic that includes all forms of vehicular transport from the most primitive rural kind to modern articulated lorries of vast proportions. The observant traveler cannot fail to notice how hard it is for these lorries to negotiate the endless unmarked speed breakers on a road that is itself an endless speed breaker. Nor can he fail to notice the spreading pools of rotting garbage that line the highway and spill across it with the rains. They pour out of the squalid, ugly villages and towns on either side that in the absence of municipal facilities dump their waste on the edge of the highway.

Why am I telling you all this in a week that I am writing about the very 'secular' Chief Minister of Bihar? What does it have to do with his recent 'secular' drama? In my view it has everything to do with it and with every other political drama that grabs headlines every week when we should be talking of much more important things like our enormous problems of unplanned urbanization. And, our even more enormous problems with waste disposal so inadequate that half of India's diseases spread from rotting garbage and dirty water. If the political dramas gave us a break we would be able to talk of our serious, chronic problems. The dramas give us no choice but to write about the topic of the moment. So here is my analysis of what the supposedly high-minded chief minister of Bihar is

ON THE SPOT TAVLEEN SINGH

Why am I telling you all this in a week that I am writing about the very 'secular' Chief Minister of Bihar? What does it have to do with his recent 'secular' drama? In my view it has everything to do with it and with every other political drama that grabs headlines every week when we should be talking of much more important things like our enormous problems of unplanned urbanization.

Bihar election it was the Bharatiya Janata Party that nearly doubled its seats going from 55 in the 2005 election to 91. It won 36 more seats while the Janata Dal (United) went up less dramatically from 88 to 115. But, to discover this you would have needed to read the fine print because every political commentator in the country projected it as a 'massive victory' for Nitish. Long articles appeared in the national press about his schemes in rural Bihar that had allegedly reduced poverty and increased growth rates dramatically. Almost nobody noticed that Sushil Modi deserved even more

credit for having almost swept all the seats in urban Bihar.

Nitish Kumar then went on to project himself as the creator of what his acolytes started to call the Bihar model in which they said economic development was slower but more effective because it was 'inclusive'. This idea got international currency not long ago when Imran Khan said that he would like to use the 'Bihar model' of development in Pakistan if he ever got the chance. The truth is that there is nothing new about Nitish Kumar's economic ideas. He is an old-fashioned socialist of the Ram Manohar Lohia genre, all

who is sincere about dragging it up by the bootstraps? My problem is not with Nitish Kumar's socialist economic ideas, although I am not a socialist, and nor do I have any problems with him wanting to become prime minister. It is an ambition that anyone who enters a career in politics should have. My only problem with Nitish Kumar's withdrawal from the NDA is with his 'secular' reasons for doing so. He now says that he will return to the NDA if it is put once more in the hands of LK Advani whom he now considers a 'secular' leader.

Has he forgotten that it was Advani who rode his chariot from Somnath to Ayodhya with the specific purpose of building a temple at Rama on the exact spot where the Babri Masjid stood? Has he forgotten the thousands of Muslims who were killed in the Rathayatra's wake? Has he forgotten that the violence was so bad that Laloo Yadav as chief minister of Bihar refused to let Advani's chariot go beyond Samastipur? Has he forgotten that it was Advani during the course of the Ayodhya movement who invented the term 'pseudo-secularism' to denounce the kind of secularism that has been the moral creed of political parties like his own? Speaking of 'pseudo-secularism' it is a good time to revive the expression because if we have seen a recent example it has been in the withdrawal of the Janata Dal (U) from the NDA.

Not even the lefty political pundits in Delhi who despise Narendra Modi have dared say that the Bihar chief minister has come out as a shining example of secularism. Even they have noticed the political opportunism of the move. For me personally I have serious reservations now about Nitish Kumar after this because in my view the most dangerous kind of political leaders are those who are shameless hypocrites. They are impossible to trust.

Return of the natives

Need for consensus

Prof A.N.Sadhu

The return of displaced KPs has been much talked about a subject for several years, particularly after the announcement of PM's package. How seriously the Govt. has sought to implement the package is known to everyone. The community Of KPs remained exercised about various serious aspects of the package even suggested some amendments but could not throw up a consensus in concreting idea that would have engaged the attention of the powers. On the other hand The administration is callously ignoring the just problems of the community whose members are languishing in Jagti, Muthi Purkhoo and non camp areas without any reasonable basic amenities including power and water supply. A small member of employees appointed under PM's package are not getting a fair deal as far as their accommodation, place of posting or other amenities necessary for normal living. The deliberate & serious lapse on the part of the administration has alienated the displaced community and is a question mark to the working of administration in relation to displaced persons.

History bears evidence to the fact that the KP community which has made significant contribution to the valley's society and qualitative politics has been victim of terror and theocracy from several hundred years. The latest Exodus of 1990 in a democratic dispensation has unleashed untold miseries on the displaced families. That in 21st century civilized society, a small ethnic religious entity of historic antiquate is living in inhuman condition is reflection on failure of the State and Central Govts.

Kashmiri Pandits, the aborigines of the valley of Kashmir, have an inalienable right to return to their original habitat and are keen to do so. The adverse and hostile conditions they have witnessed in the past, compels them to think very seriously about the alternatives of their return and aftermath. The workability as also the sustainability of the alternative has to be kept in mind. Last 23 years have revolved around the concept of PK on one hand and return to original places on other. Debates of PK have dominated all discussions related to dignified and secure return of KPs to the Valley. A fair examination of the PK and its Margdarshan resolution makes it an ideal alternative capable of surmounting all the odds that the community faced at different stages of history. But will it happen and how soon? Relaxing some of the premises of PK theory may generate healthy debate on it and some workable frame work may evolve. This is however, for the PK leadership to examine it and involve people in something workable and achievable.

The other alternative is the return to the places of old habitats and living in the same fashion as before. It is neither feasible nor workable. Quite a lot has happened in last 23 years. More over the basic difficulty is that in most of the cases people have dis-

posed of their properties including residential dwellings in distress, in some cases houses have been burned, ransacked, and are under forcible occupation. Then social responses will have to be gauged. Therefore owing to inherent constraints nothing substantial has materialized on ground, even in terms of this alternative.

Recently a third alternative has emerged as a result of interlocutors sessions with a selected meaningful group of KPs. It was in circulation for over an year or so before it received the endorsement of the interlocutors appointed by the Central Govt. to produce an additional volume on Kashmir, the types of which already exists in dozens. It is

A VIEW POINT

immaterial who innovated this idea; what is important is to examine if it holds a greater potential as an alternative for return and retention of KPs. The discussion is all theoretical as there is no official word on it. As an intellectual exercise, there is a need in building a response, positive or negative based on merit. One thing which is clear is the firm stand of all KPS and all KP organizations that Kashmir belongs to them and have to return to their homeland with honor, security and guarantees of their fundamental right, in a democratic and secular setup. In the backdrop of the ugly violence witnessed by them due to rise of terrorism, they will not entertain a truncated arrangement and would wish to live together ide-

ally of their own or in a composite set up with guaranteed safeguards of their fuller participation in polity, administration, society and economy.

Twin City is not a new concept in our country. The difference is that in other places, it was adopted to demographic pressures forcing decentralized civil administration for better management of the metropolitan cities. If adopted here, it will be for different reason of accommodating all the displaced population in a concentrated settlement to give them a greater sense of security and confidence of free living. The proponents say that this will give them a statutory political space and ensure their participation in decision making bodies. There are many slips between cup and the lip as Habbakadal a largely Pandit concentrated constituency was truncated over time and realignments made to deny the Pandits advantage they enjoyed in that settlement. The concept of Twin City just for the sake of accommodating KPs may need a through debate among Pandits, other stake holders and the policy makers. The choice of alternative is indeed a difficult subject but the community intelligentsia, and leadership is required a respond it rather than react to such alternatives and discuss dispassionately each alternative to arrive at consensus.

On matters touching every Kashmiri Pandit Leadership of the community need to sit together and evolve an agreed approach to its concerns without losing more time.

(The views of the author are personal)

ECHS needs improvement

Brig Amarjit Singh Randwal (Retd)

J&K Sai Star Society, a rural development NGO in association with S P Jain Institute of Management & Research, a top Management Institute of India has carried out a study to find gaps in implementation of Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS) and suggest avenues for improving the same.

The Study report identifies the gaps in the implementation of the ECHS, which was inaugurated in 2003 to provide comprehensive and quality medical care to veterans of the armed forces and their dependants. The report suggests possible solutions to overcome these issues faced while executing the scheme. The report also explores the possibility of reorganizing the scheme as a corporate entity to eliminate multiple stakeholders and facilitate faster decision making.

It was found that there is a lot of dissatisfaction with the present state of the Ex-servicemen Contributory Health scheme. The primary causes behind this can be broadly divided into two categories.

Ground Level Problems, which are due to lack of effective implementation of policies, which include problems such as lack of awareness about the scheme, staffing problems, high lead time in the procurement of medicines, delays in bill processing and absence of effective vigilance and grievance management systems.

Then come macro level problems which include inadequate authorization of manpower and long winded procedure for empanelment of Hospitals. Moreover, the scheme faces the problem of dual control; policy matters are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence, Central Organization ECHS and Regional Centers. However, the scheme is dependent on the existing chain of command of the armed forces for administrative matters.

Due to these issues, the ex-servicemen are unhappy with the service that they are receiving under the scheme. The employees working at polyclinics are also dissatisfied with the state of affairs which negatively impacts the quality of service they render. The inordinate bureaucratic delays are a further impediment to the effective functioning of the scheme as they prevent timely changes to policies.

The Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare (ESW) under the Ministry of Defence exercises Executive Control over the scheme. The Administrative Control is with the Adjutant General (AG's) Branch. The office of the Director General Armed Forces Medical Services (DGAFMS) is responsible for Procuring Medicines for the scheme. The Functional Support is provided by the command chain of three armed forces. This has caused a decision paralysis.

The recommendations in the report are of two types - recommendations that are directed towards specific problems identified and general recommendations to improve the overall efficiency of the scheme. The underlying principle behind all the measures is to reduce the dependence of the scheme on the army chain of command. More powers needs to be given to the regional centers in matters related to clearance of bills, procurement of medicines, vigilance etc. to overcome ground level problems. The ECHS should be reorganized as a corporate entity with a board of directors to aid in the more professional management of the scheme.

The current management structure is wrought with bureaucratic delays and multitude of stakeholders. The Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare (ESW) under the Ministry of Defence exercises Executive Control over the scheme. The Administrative Control is with the Adjutant General (AG's) Branch. The office of the Director General Armed Forces Medical Services (DGAFMS) is responsible for Procuring Medicines for the scheme. The Functional Support is provided by the command chain of three armed forces. This has caused a decision paralysis. Important decisions take months, sometimes years, to materialize that adversely impacts the operational efficiency of the scheme.

On the other hand, the management bodies of ECHS, the Central Organization and the Regional Centers have not been given adequate powers for managing and implementing the scheme. For example, the Central Organization lacks the power to make any policy changes without the approval of the Ministry of Defence. Minor administrative issues also need sanction from Ministry of Defence, i.e., reimbursement for Air travel in emergency cases for life saving treatment to a Military/Empanelled Medical facility is required to be sent to the Ministry of Defence for its consideration and sanction. All these factors have led to inefficient implementation of the scheme which has led to a lot of dissatisfaction among the various stakeholders - the ex-servicemen, the employees at polyclinics, the civil/empanelled hospitals and administrators at Central Organization.

The ECHS currently has over 40 lakh beneficiaries. This number is going to steadily increase in the future and is expected to stabilize at 65 lakhs by 2020. The present day dynamics of an increasingly demanding clientele coupled with rapidly changing technology has made a paradigm shift in healthcare management. All these factors are bound to make the management and implementation of the scheme more complex. Thus, there is an urgent need to carry out a reorganization of the executive control of the scheme.

(The author is former Dy. Commandant of Officers Training Academy & Director of AGI Medical Benefit Scheme at Army Headquarters)

Readers Write

Delay in ULB elections

Sir,
Arguments and justification put forth by Govt. for not holding much delayed after ULB election at this time have well been elaborated in the editorial in D.E. May 30. The editor has fully refuted the first two pretexts i.e. tourist season and the Amar Nath Ji Yatra being hurdles in holding elections at this juncture.

So far as security scenario is concerned, tight security measures shall have to be adopted whensoever such elections are held.

Since the Deptt of ULB alongwith the concerned Minister have declared their having been fully prepare for holding such elections at anytime, the Govt on its part should also consider and rethink to fix tentative month when they can conveniently hold them as it is being thought the primary need for development of our infrastructure.

The public opinion as well as that of their leaders need to be given due weightage in a democratic set up rest indefiniteness should prove detrimental both for Govt as well as for voters.

Yours etc....
S.C. Gupta
Udhampur

Pension for seniors

Sir,
Many State Governments were compassionate enough to sanction revised basic pension for seniors aged from 80 years to 100 years and above from 20 percent to 100 percent with effect from different dates. These orders follow those issued by the Govt. of India for Central Govt employees with retrospective effect from 01.01.2006.

The State Govt of J&K has not yet issued the order even after a gap of six years. The plight of elders among senior pensioners is such that they look forward to the order being given effect from at least 01.01.2007 when orders on the Pay Commission recommendations were issued if not earlier. After all the number of such elders will not be too many.

Yours etc....
Prof. K.K. Gupta
Moti Bazar, Jammu

Bifurcation of ration cards

Sir,
In response to the notification issued by the Directorate of Consumer Affairs by the Directorate of Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution Jammu in the month of June, 2012, about 150 to 200 persons submitted their claims for bifurcation of ration cards alongwith all the necessary documents, but I am sorry to say that nothing has been done so far.

It is pertinent to mention here that ration card today is a mini state subject which is invariably and indispensably needed for various purposes like L.P.G connection and to get the benefit of State/Central Govt. schemes meant for the poor public.

Therefore, to avoid further hardships to the poor public for want of ration cards, the Minister for CA&PD is requested to kindly look into the matter and get the needful done at the earliest.

Yours etc....
O.P. Gupta
Trikuta Nagar, Jammu

Ban on evil of child labour

Sir,
India has the largest labour force in the world. These children work in shops, hotels, dhabas, industries, factories, companies and in the mines. These children sell newspapers, repair our vehicles and clean our utensils. The main factor of child labour is the poverty prevailing in the villages and some urban areas. Engaging children as labourers is a social evil and sin also.

But mere passing of bills and making of laws is not enough. Education should be given to children and Government should ban on evil of child labour.

Yours etc....
Lekh Raj
Laxmi Nagar,
Sarwal, Jammu