

Z-Morh tunnel on Srinagar-Leh NH

T rue to its commitment to accelerate the pace of infrastructural development in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir, the Central Government has approved construction of 6.5 kilometres long Z-Morh tunnel on Srinagar -Leh National Highway . An agreement to that extent too stands entered into between National Highway Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) and the executing agency that has to construct the tunnel involving a cost of Rs.2400 crores and is expected to be operational by the year 2024 . This is a landmark decision taken by the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways and loaded with bettering the lot of the region economically and in terms of round the year mobility. Previous Central Governments took half baked initiatives and kept on making announcements only but construction of this strategic tunnel remained elusive and the people of the two UTs must now feel confident with the latest initiative taken by the Central Government.

In addition to this, the utility and importance of this tunnel get enhanced as the area being vital from strategic point of view since that part of the country shares Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China and Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan in Leh and Kargil sectors respectively. Besides, opening up for civilian traffic, this tunnel would be useful in adequate and hassles free movement of our troops in the area especially during five months of the winter. Hence from defence point of view this tunnel was of paramount importance. There was a long pending demand to this end from the people of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh for construction of a tunnel and now decks for the same having been cleared, was going to remove the otherwise looking inherent characterises of this region remaining closed inter-se during the winter months.

The highlights of the signing of the agreement, besides others are that the same was inked in presence of the Union Minister and his senior team and the executing agency in New Delhi with stress on both speed and quality. The tunnel besides construction shall have post construction facilities like maintenance, operation, repairs etc with approaches on National Highway 1 at Srinagar - Sonamarg - Gumri Road on a vast stretch on Design, Build, Finance, Operation and Transfer (DBFOT) Annuity basis. It, in other words means that the project emerges viable and self-sustainable and annuity is one of the forms of Build- Operate - Transfer where the road developer is awarded the project and the cost of building the road is paid to it on a six month basis after the project starts functioning. It is not that all preparation to this effect were not going on as the proposal was mooted earlier and bids re-invited in 2019 and opened in August same year leading to culmination of a formal agreement.

The real test of the pace of construction seen in the light of its 2 lane bi-directional tunnel with parallel escape tunnel and expected completion time of within 3.5 years will be perused as to how in challenging weather conditions and difficult mountainous terrain with all its complications, the project would successfully be completed. The job is not that simple and it is learnt that a dedicated team of professionals, engineers and technicians is expected to be stationed in Ladakh not only for this project but for identification and development of other vital projects in the UT in vital sectors like tourism, solar energy and basic infrastructure.

Oral healthcare in Kashmir

T here is insufficient number of doctors attending oral healthcare in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly in Kashmir valley as the Government has not taken enough measures in augmenting the requisite manpower nor the infrastructure . On the other hand, unemployed dental surgeons whose number as per latest estimates is more than 3000 are there without being absorbed on vacant posts. This all results in the oral health care taking a severe beating as the number of patients is increasing day by day without commensurate infrastructure to take care thereof.

It is unbelievable on the very face of it that for more than 10 years there has been absolutely no addition into existing strength of dental surgeons. On the other hand, district and sub district hospitals depict an absolutely pathetic position as there being acute shortage of doctors while the visiting patients keep on increasing who finding no care and facilities at Government hospitals are forced to consult and get "treated" by quacks thus becoming prone to infections. While there is demand from the unemployed dental surgeons for some employment package, at the same time the Government must address the issue of oral healthcare in its totality.

Why delay 14 per cent contribution under NPS?

Dheeraj Jandial

T he story of Detroit's bankruptcy was simple enough. Allow capitalism to grow the city, campaign against income inequality, tax the job creators until they flee, increase government spending in order to boost employment, promise generous pension plans to keep people voting for failure. Rinse, wash and repeat-Ben Shapiro

It was on December 10, 2018 that the then Union Finance Minister and BJP stalwart Arun Jaitley announced enhancement of the government's contribution to the New Pension Scheme (NPS) raising it from the existing slab of 10 per cent to 14 per cent. The minimum employee contribution stood at 10 per cent.

This enhancement and consequent change in the structure of the contribution was evaluated by the financial and political observers then as the effort of the political dispensation to woo over 36 lakh central government employees and their families.

The December 10, 2018 announcement was welcomed by the employees in Jammu and Kashmir too, as it was then expected that the state employees would be brought under the umbrella of this beneficial preposition. This expectancy was bolstered with the August 05, 2019 announcement wherein Jammu and Kashmir was brought directly under the control of the central government and it was announced that the employees of the State (now Union Territory) would get all benefits that are presently entitled to central government employees.

However, sluggish pace in

advancing the benefit to employees in Jammu and Kashmir is reminiscent of the inordinate delay by the political dispensation in implementing the New Pension Scheme. The NPS was made applicable to Jammu and Kashmir after six years of its coming into force by the Union Government. The New Pension Scheme, which replaced the old pension scheme, was rolled out and launched on January 01, 2004 for the central government employees. One of the reasons for delayed launch of the NPS in the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir that those at the helm of affairs does not want to invite the wrath of the youth in particular besides providing the ammunition to the opposition to gird their lions.

Consequently, the NPS was implemented in Jammu and Kashmir on January 01, 2010 wherein all the fresh recruits appointed in the State Service were brought under the ambit of this contributory pension scheme. Henceforth, from the year 2010 the applicability and coverage of the employees in the Government Service under the Old Pension Scheme based primarily upon the number of years of the service rendered and the basic pay at the time of superannuation was obliterated for the fresh recruits.

Under the scheme, the employee and employer were equal contributors to the Pension Scheme which was fixed at the maximum of 10 per cent of the Basic Pay. NPS is being implemented and regulated by the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority. Government Servants till to date have not been able to reach over a consensus as to which scheme is better; the Old Pension structure or the New Pension Scheme. All that can be said about this is that while the Old Pension scheme was 'Benefit Defined', the new scheme is amalgamation of 'Market and Contribution Defined'.

Under the recent changes in the structure of NPS, the subscriber is eligible to withdraw 60 per cent of the corpus. The remaining 40 per cent of the accumulated fund goes towards annuity. The Tax exemption limit for lump sum withdrawal on exit too was enhanced to 60 per cent, it was announced, adding that the entire withdrawal will henceforth be exempt from purview of the Income Tax. Out of 60 per cent of the accumulated corpus withdrawn by the NPS subscriber at the time of retirement, 40 per cent is tax exempt and balance 20 per cent is taxable. The changes were made with the rationale that this will impact augmenting of old-age security at a time of rising life expectancy and by making NPS more attractive, government will be facilitated in attracting and retaining the best talent.

The Tier -I subscribers of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are eagerly awaiting the announcement by the administration of releasing and hiking Government Contribution under NPS to 14 per cent. It is hoped that the wait is not prolonged as to take away the sweetness of the benefit. The words by American President Abraham Lincoln aptly narrate thee yearning, "And in the end it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years."

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If I would make the Budget

Bharat Jhunjhunwala

O ne, reform GST. I would provide that the GST paid by small businesses on the purchase of raw materials would be refunded to them in cash. This would make it possible for them to stand in competition with large industries. I would also withdraw from the move to one single rate of GST. Instead, I would lower the rate for labour-intensive goods like garments and agarbattis; and raise them for capital-intensive goods like cars. I would specially increase the rates for job-eating goods like JCB, excavators, harvesters and robots. That would make it profitable for businesses to employ more labour and less machines. That would generate employment, put purchasing power in the hands of the common man, generate demand in the market and rev up the economy. Within GST, I would allow the States to change the rates to their convenience. The present GST system should be tweaked to allow different states to collect GST at different rates while maintaining the same classification of goods so that interstate trade continues seamlessly. This will help preserve the integrity of the country by following the true federal structure.

Two, exit WTO. The original incentive for us joining the WTO was that the markets of the developed countries will be opened for our exports—agriculture, in particular. The developed countries had committed that this matter will be resolved in the ten years following the commencement of the WTO. This commitment has been belied. We have suffered from cheap imports and from having to follow the international patents regime that favours large Multinational Corporations against small businesses

who copycat the technologies. Our pharmaceutical sector owes its global presence to the earlier patents regime that our companies to copy the drugs evolved by the MNCs. In any case, our future lies in exports of services that are outside the framework of the WTO. Hence we should quit the WTO, increase import duties on imports—especially of labour intensive items like garments and sports goods—and amend out patents act to allow our businesses to copycat the technologies developed by the MNCs. This save the monies being remitted by us towards royalties being paid to MNCs.

Three, privatization of PSUs. I would privatize all Public Sector Banks and all other Public Sector Undertakings—whether running in profit or loss. Only selected PSUs in critical areas like defense and research should remain in the hands of the Government. In my reckoning our Government can generate a huge revenue of about 2000 thousand crores—almost equal to the annual budget of the Central Government. I would create a Special Purpose Vehicle to invest this huge amount in the creation of new technologies like space tourism, robotics, artificial intelligence, new generation of internet, patriot missiles, big data analysis, facilitating export of services, etc. The last is very important. I would establish a PSU that will supply Indian teachers of English and mathematics, for example, to the entire developing world. The generation of new technologies would lay the foundation of the prowess of India in the coming decades.

Four, I would freeze the salaries and dearness allowance of government employees. The government employees are appointed to serve the people of the country. It a beyond com-

prehension why the one who serves should be paid more salary than the average income of one who is served. One who serves should get less salary than the one whom he or she serves. The present salaries of government employees today are many times the average income of the people. Ideally, these should be reduced. However, that may not be politically feasible hence the least that can be done is to freeze them at the present levels. I would remit the money saved directly to the bank accounts of the citizens of the country. I would also end the large number of welfare schemes that are allegedly made for the welfare of the people but actually mostly serve the government employees. I would consolidate this amount and remit that to the bank accounts of our citizens. That will place huge incomes in the hands of the people and jumpstart the economy.

Five. Cleaning up the Government. I would create a system whereby the officers of a department would themselves rank their colleagues. For example, the Sub-Divisional Officers of the electricity board of a district would be asked to rank their colleagues. Those getting the lowest 10 percent ranks would be compulsorily retired. This will help clean-up the inefficient and corrupt officers.

Six, I would take loans from the domestic money market or from the International Monetary Fund and invest in the creation of pro-common man infrastructure. For example, would provide free Wi-Fi in small towns and make roads in the villages. This investment would not only create demand for cement, steel and labour, it would also act like mobil oil for the grassroots economy.

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Shiban Khaibri

T hinking about choosing a theme befitting the occasion of celebrating 70th anniversary of our Republic - motivated, galvanised, persuaded and provoked protests against the Citizen's Amendment Act (CAA) not stopping, decidedly under a deep rooted and orchestrated conspiracy aimed at destabilising this country, needs to be continuously analysed hence a bit about that becomes necessary herein to deal with. As more and more inputs to that end keep pouring in from non-designer media circles even though their number is very little as also from social media, it is mandatory to keep on opposing the very basis of these protests till they stop altogether. If the present scenario in the country, the deriding role played by some opposition parties and some select leaders who, as a habit, have their foot in the mouth, is analysed, I feel that it is the duty of each and every writer, reporter, journalist etc who cares for and loves this country, to give preference to writing lucidly about the said burning issue, expose the elements behind opposing an Act passed by the Parliament and unveil the shoddy and inglorious role of those behind these protests. It is high time they are described in their true colours.

Article 1 in the constitution of India states that "India that is Bharat..." which in other words means that "India is in fact Bharat" and it becomes extremely important to clarify as the very origin of India is now disputed by some overzealous but motivated 'secularists' and 'progressive liberals' and traced only to the period post Muslim invasion of Sindh and Multan in 8th century when invader Mohammed Bin Qasim invaded Sindh. The word Bharat is a Sanskrit word with reference to Hindu religious scriptures like Puranas, Mahabharata and the Rigveda. Rigveda is the oldest Hindu Holy scripture and perhaps the oldest in the world. So, 'Bharat' has a religious significance for Hindus and the architects of our constitution could not afford to not recognise it hence made a mention of and duly recorded it at the very start of the constitution itself.

On the other hand, the word "India" is derived from the word Sindhu which flows in the north west of the country. Greeks and others, later started calling us 'Indoi' meaning the people of the Indus. Let History be not cut to such a size by the monopolists of its writing in India that Bharat is given no importance, let alone due preference in speech, writings and in official communications. When China has no other name, Japan, Iran, America, Australia, France, Germany or any other country in the world, why should our country be unique in this respect and continued to be called India when in fact, it should be called by its original name Bharat only? Is not the very basis of the country, its basic original name disregarded and its total willful neglect a quagmire of mysteries and denial of historical facts? Perpetual neglect and that too knowingly functions as a double edged knife cutting on both the sides. One, that people tend to forget the history and make with what is fed to them. Two, the same people later serve as antidotes to those few who would raise certain questions and shout them down. The results are horrifying to the extent that cheeks are gathered in saying that Shree Ram is a myth and no historical fact, that Ram Setu is not (divine) man made but natural

and affidavits are presented in the courts. But why are such mischievous goofs knowingly made and for what purpose? Who are being appeased by such distortions to the extent of being blasphemous? Our original constitution-manuscript was penned by hand by PremBehariNarainRaizada in flowing italic style at the specific request of JawaharLal Nehru and it took PremBehari, a Graduate from St. Stephen's College, Delhi and a Master in calligraphic art, more than six

The time has come to forcefully resist lies, misinformation, misleading and twisting of historical facts. Do not keep people of this country bereft of its glorious past, culture and its true history. It is well known fact that a people without the knowledge of their past historical origin and culture is a tree without roots.

comprising AlladiKrishnaswamiAyyar, N. Gopalaswami, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, K.M. Munshi, Mohammed Saadullah, B.L. Mitter and D.P.Khatri were all in agreement in one voice about the manner and the form of the first ever manuscript to be handwritten. Imagined can be a situation if, any important document of national importance was to be written today with such Holy images of Hindu gods and deities that being the ancient basic culture of Bharat, all hell would break

loose, thousands of 'Shaheen-Baghs' and 'JNUs' would be "arranged" by pseudo secularists against that move which would be termed as "Constitution taartaarhogaya" because anything even in the remote, connected to ancient religio-culture of this country, is never ever tried to be even mentioned let alone recorded officially, all under peculiar type of secularism. The established convention of distorting facts and history for the last nearly six decades is tried to be cemented and strengthened but for what reasons is very crucial.

This trend of playing with history and distorting it, twisting it and manipulating it has assumed alarming proportions in this country not only in respect of ancient history but even in respect of an event well recorded in our Parliament just 16 years back. We all know how much violence took place and loss of property caused in the garb of opposing the CAA. It is not those who at once take the refuge under religion, manufactured and illusive discrimination, feigning victimhood at the hands of the RSS and other so called Hindu organisations, assumed notions of some policies "dictated" from Nagpur but the oldest political party Congress giving a clarion call to "people" to come on roads and offer sacrifices for repealing of CAA forgetting that they were the architects of this Act themselves and they oppose this Act just to find an opportunity, being fully frustrated and exasperated, for coming to power. That is the main issue.

It is pertinent to note that Parliamentary Committee on Home affairs constituted by the Congress led UPA government submitted its 107th Report which was presented to RajyaSabha on December 12, 2003 and tabled too on the same day. This Committee had Pranab Mukherjee as its Chairman and other members on it comprised KapilSibbal, HansrajBhardwaj, Moti-LalVohra, AmbikaSoni, Janeshwar Mishra and other Congress stalwarts. It had Lallu Prasad Yadav too as its member. The Committee recommended to the Parliament and the government as under specifically that

* Indian citizenship should be granted to Bangladeshi and Pakistani minority refugees. Not only that, National Identity Cards (NIC) should also be issued to these refugees.

* Granting of Indian citizenship to migrants who entered India in the wake of 1971 war should be considered.

* Citizenship should be granted only to Bangladeshi minority refugees and not to refugees belonging to majority community.

* Every citizen should be given a National Identity Card (NIC). These are the major and important recommendations given not for consigning the same to official records but for implementation because Parliamentary Committees are carrying utmost weightage and importance in our Parliamentary democracy system. Just mark Congress stalwarts stressing on "Only Minorities" and not "from majority communities" from those countries. How can the Congress change its colours now like a chameleon is not difficult to comprehend but is most unfortunate when a senior member having remained a Union Cabinet Minister returns from Lahore sojourn read 'yatra' and goes direct to ShaheenBagh to incite and spread misinformation simply because nursing hatred for Modi. Why not have gumptions to declare that Modi Government was doing it now practically backed by the full strength of the Parliament what Congress Government proposed 16 years back?

The time has come to forcefully resist lies, misinformation, misleading and twisting of historical facts. Do not keep people of this country bereft of its glorious past, culture and its true history. It is well known fact that a people without the knowledge of their past historical origin and culture is a tree without roots. Those who watch turbulences and conspiracies hatched against the soul of this country silently whether in media or in intellectual arenas are equally culpable. We, the people of Republic of Bharat are passing through a transition for betterment where tough decisions, innovations, reforms and changes have to be taken and we all must cooperate.

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Challenges for country

Sir,

This has reference to the writeup 'Challenges for the coming decade' (DEJan7, 2020). There is no doubt that the main challenges of the coming decade would be robots and Artificial Intelligence and Climate Change. Artificial Intelligence is probably the only technology that has the potential to replace humans as rulers of the world. The way the robots are being used more and more, it is but natural that jobs such as medical diagnosis, determining which crop to be sown as well as analysis of medical reports will be done by robots. It will invariably lead to huge decline in jobs.

The writer has rightly suggested that adverse impact of Artificial Intelligence can be combatted either by making these cutting edge technologies and supplying them to the other countries or by capitalising on the use of smartphones and do such jobs as providing online education and translation of books from one language into the other. But for this what is required is a good command over the subject which they provide online education. But most of the students don't have adequate knowledge and skills of the subject they pursue and the degrees they earn hardly help them to get employment. So our education system need to be such as provides sufficient opportunities to the stu-

dents to develop their skills and acquire knowledge by spending more and more time in libraries and laboratories rather than resorting to memorisation of facts and figures. The suggestion of the writer to provide education vouchers to the students, making the government funded higher education accountable is appreciable and if put into practice, may certainly revitalise higher education.

Similarly the second challenge of the coming decade is climate change which if not tackled can lead to many low lying cities being submerged and consequential displacement of millions of people from such regions to safer places and their rehabilitation. Then there is biotechnology which, though getting better and cheaper, has the potential to fall into the hands of wrong people. So proper and safe use of biotechnology and nanotechnology may also be a challenge for the next decade. In other words, the coming decade will demand our youth, leaders and planners to be more cautious, competent, vigilant, alert and equipped with sound knowledge and higher order skills if they have to get success in an environment greatly influenced by Artificial Intelligence and other growing technologies with the danger of climate change looming large over the world.

Ashok Sharma, Udhampur.

Readers Write

Road safety

Sir,

Now a days, the movement of vehicular traffic on roads is increasing day by day. Every year thousands of people die in road accidents due to their or others fault. Consequently, there is a growing concern for the road safety and thrust upon the knowledge of traffic rules in civil life. By doing this we save our life and the lives of others. While on road, we should always look ahead and judge the speed of the traffic. Accidents occur if one is unmindful of other users of the road. Vehicles should be driven at specified speeds. At higher speed, the stopping distance exceeds the visual distance and therefore accidents are caused. Sudden use of brakes should be avoided as it is risky. The best way to stop quickly is to drive slowly or to keep speed under control or to keep a safe distance from large and heavy vehicles.

Sanjay Dhar Jammu