

SC’s initiative merits due regard

While Supreme Court of India has criticised the Central Government on many issues in respect of the three Farm Laws vis-a-vis the agitation by farmers, it has at the same time, stayed the implementation of these laws which are demanded by the agitating farmers to be repealed and for which they are agitating by blocking roads etc around Delhi. The Bench headed by the Chief Justice of India has set up a committee comprising four members to hear all the stakeholders on the issue and submit its findings. The members on the committee are experts on agriculture, economics and allied matters and should really find out a way to break the impasse is what is aimed at by such initiative of the Apex Court. Not only this, during the currency of the stay, the Bench has ordered that the Minimum Support Price (MSP) system in existence shall be maintained in the same manner as before the enactment of the Farm Laws.

Having said so, all the hopes pinned in the intervention of the Apex Court after so many round of talks between the Government and numerous "leaders" of the Farm Unions not yielding any results, have plunged into uncertainties because of the adamant attitude of the agitating farm leaders. Prior to this initiative by the Government in agreeing in principle to continue with the MSP system, and extending other measures of relief, farmers did not seem to be satisfied and not agreeing at anything less than withdrawal of these laws. The question, therefore, is what about the status of the four member committee appointed by the court. If the entire stand that has been taken by the leaders of the agitating farmers immediately after the names of the panel members were known and even by the formation of the committee itself is seen in totality, what is made out is neither they were going to put forth their demands and issues before this committee nor would they end the long stir. The alibi under which the committee is decided to be not approached for listening to their views is that they were "all pro-Farm Laws persons" without ascertaining the same. Since it looks a pre-conceived notion, while it is unfortunate, at the same time, it augurs not well from any angle, neither in respect of the cause for which the farmers are protesting nor as law abiding citizens of this country, by not showing an inclination to having regard for and trust in the highest court of the country. If neither in the Government, nor in the judiciary, then through which forum the agitating farmers want a solution, is all baffling.

Farmers who are agitating must see that at least to the extent the application and implementation of these laws have been put on hold by the SC, and provided a channel in the shape of a committee under its supervision and monitoring which could lead to resolution and remedies, should be reciprocated in a positive manner. When these all options are turned down by the leaders of the agitating farmers much before even the start of the very process, how could the impasse be broken? Some leaders in the opposition too do not want a solution as that unfortunately looks to them "politically convenient" looking to spate of the statements given by them.

Let the other side too be analysed, is it not a fact that without going into the pros- cons, advantages and disadvantages of the concerned Farm (Reform) Laws, still the SC put them on hold, though not indefinitely, which should be seen a great favour being done for the farmers. The intervention and the initiative by the SC with intent to find a way towards a solution of the problem, therefore, need to be respected. On the other hand, since these three laws have been passed by the Parliament strictly as per the provisions of the constitution, short of repealing them and settling for more assurances from the Government should be the stand of the leaders of the agitating farmers. The Government has already shown its willingness, it is now the turn of the farmers. Any more hard stand with tightest water compartments by the agitating farmers are feared to be leading to confusion, loss of business in areas hit hard by blocking roads as also waning of public sympathy for their cause.

Long arms of law and Yaseen Malik

Nearly 30 years ago, an FIR was registered against one of the separatist leaders of Kashmir Yaseen Malik in the Rubiya Sayeed kidnapping case including nine others but so far, for reasons not known, charges were not framed against them. However, Special Judge TADA, Jammu has now ordered for the same to be done which reiterates that law can never be taken for a ride, implications and consequences can be deferred but not ruled out. It also has sent a message that in case a law was broken and a crime committed, the culprit had to face the consequences, if not sooner due to reasons unavoidable but definitely later. However, this delay of nearly 30 years points towards blatant interference of political considerations and influence in the process of investigation and framing charges which, however, does not merit condonation. What hampered the process of prosecution all these three decades raises many questions.

All these years, the "case" moved with a snail's pace but during investigations, a few of the accused had made the confessional statement voluntarily before the Magistrate admitting their role in the commission of offence as also disclosing the role of others in that respect and which needs to be taken to logical ends and pointing towards the role of the accused in the crime of kidnapping and hatching a conspiracy to get their persons in custody released. The judge feeling convinced about the crime having been committed by the accused and thus has ordered that charges needed to be framed against them.

Curtailed Army Day Celebration 2021

Col. J. P. Singh

Army Day is celebrated in India on 15th of January every year to commemorate a historic event post independence in January 1949 when Gen. KM Cariappa became the first Indian to assume the Command of the Indian Army. The celebration commemorates yet another turn of historic event when India got rid of British Generals. Gen, later Field Marshal K. M. Cariappa became the first Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army after taking over from last British C-in-C Sir Francis Butcher.

The day is celebrated in the form of Ceremonial Parade accompanied with other military events/shows in national capital Delhi as well as at all Command Headquarters. On this remarkable day Indian Army rededicates itself to become an important part of nation's 'War Winning Team'. The day begins with paying homage to the martyred soldiers at the National War Memorial at the India Gate, New Delhi. It is followed by ceremonial parades and many military shows which feature the technological achievements in the Army. The Army Day parade is typically held at Cariappa Parade Ground, Delhi Cantonment Delhi as a gala ceremonial event every year. Army Chiefs' Unit Citations and Sena Medals are presented for gallantry on this occasion. Basically it is a grand celebration of Indian's military might and glory of its unsung heroes. Army Day Parade enlightens people in the ability

of its army in defending them and provides them with every knowledge of the activities it performs. Army Day Parade inspires youngsters to come up for serving the Country.

This time 73rd Army Day will be celebrated to salute the valiant soldiers, particularly Galwan Warriors, who sacrificed their lives to protect the country and its citizens and those who are doing the same presently, mostly to those who are guarding our frontiers. Param Vir Chakra and Ashok Chakra awardees also participate in the Army Day Parade to display their individual glory every year. (Notable to remind the readers that last year Army Day Parade was commanded by Capt Tania Shergil. She became the first Lady Officer to command an Army Day Parade). On the Army Day, all kinds of military hardware and equipment are displayed as a part of the celebration. One of the objectives of Army Day Celebration is to display all the arms and ammunition to exhibit India's might.

This year army's grandest ceremonial event is being curtailed because of the Covid-19 Pandemic. All the functions will be muted because of the restrictions imposed by the Govt to check the spread of the disease. Hence Army Day Parade 2021 will be shorter, involving lesser participants and much lesser number of spectators.

Indian Army is known as 'war winning machine'. Look around any army of countries around us or anywhere in the world and one would find that

Indian army is most professional and best disciplined. It is the army which operate in all type of terrain, climatic conditions and weather, in India and abroad.

No matter how hi-tech the modern battlefield gets, no matter how powerful the aircrafts, drones and the robots come, mission of the army will continue to be to close-in and destroy the enemy, even by close quar-

Being an army veteran, I am proud of this fact.

Being an Infantry veteran, I am duty bound to talk about the Infantry which is a major component of the army fighting force. Colloquially an Infantryman is called 'Bhoop Singh'. It is because he is considered to be an average soldier. This is the biggest folly we make. Considering him as simply 'non-technical' Bhoop Singh is perhaps the

more sophisticated outfit in recent years since military technology, techniques and tactics have advanced. Today a soldier handles different weapons and missiles, high frequency radio communication equipments, state of the art surveillance and monitoring equipment, fifth generation navigating equipment etc.

Most notable traits of the soldier are; physical fitness, excellent communication skills, ability to think and act fast and stay cool under pressure, capacity of taking and obeying orders, teamwork, self-discipline, self-confidence, initiative and ability to learn local language and customs where posted. That is why officers and men are retired at an very young age even though they are denied of service and financial benefits like their paramilitary counterparts.

Soldiering is not an easy job. It needs extreme courage, grit and determination to serve in the army. Not many would be aware of the risks and tribulations the soldiers face from the biting cold in difficult areas and inhospitable terrain such as of Himalayas. Many a time soldiers may have to share same habitat with sick/dead colleagues for days because of weather and visibility conditions not permitting air evacuation. Soldiers are swallowed by crevasses that suddenly open along a beaten route. Some bodies get recovered next summer with skin peeling-off. Soldiers get buried in avalanches. Patrols caught in sudden blizzards getting chilblains even in eyes.

Limbs are lost due to frost bite. India's wars with Pakistan and China and the never ending counter insurgency/ counter terrorist operations tell this all. But what people witness as a spectator is the army's good life, smart and well turned out officers and men, parties and club life, fun and moving around in military vehicles. But what they don't see are the sacrifices soldiers and their families make. For someone who has always been brought up in the warmth of parents, maintaining a long distance relationship is like walking on a thin thread. Each life has its own share of ups and downs, but army's adventure is definitely not for the weak-hearted.

What armies mean to a nation and what their contribution is in defending the nation, is pitifully understood little less in India whether in peace, no war no peace, or in war. One example of this peculiarity is Delhi High Court's order to Delhi Govt to give insurance cover to 29,000 lawyers who earn lakhs and Centre granting free insurance to doctors combating Covid-19 including those earning lakhs every month in private hospitals while the army soldier guarding the nation pays for his own insurance which is deducted from his salary every month.

Let us all pay homage to the brave soldiers who have laid down their lives in service of the nation on this day and celebrate this Army Day as tribute to the soldiers who are all set to teach PLA another lesson, more severe than the Galwan clash.

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Bird Flu and Human infections

Dr Tasaduq Hussain

Bird flu is a highly contagious viral disease caused predominantly by Avian Influenza type A (H5N1) viruses including new sub types, which generally affects poultry birds such as chickens and turkeys. Birds are normally the carriers of the virus, which take it to long distances, thereby affecting large avian population across continents. Wild water birds (like ducks and geese) can be infected with bird flu viruses, but usually do not get sick. Infected birds have virus in their saliva, mucous and droppings (faeces). Bird flu viruses spread easily between birds. Some of these viruses can cause serious illness and death in domestic poultry (like chickens, ducks and turkeys).

BIRD FLU AND HUMANS

Although it is rare for humans to get infected with bird flu viruses, but it can happen. According to WHO, by the end of December 2020, a total of 862 cases were reported including 455 deaths of Avian Influenza A (H5N1) worldwide.

Bird flu viruses can infect people when enough virus gets into a person's eyes, nose or mouth, or is inhaled. This might happen when virus is in the air (in droplets or possibly dust) and a person breathes it in, or when a person touches something that has virus on it and then touches their mouth, eyes or nose. Most bird flu infections in people have happened after unprotected contact with infected birds or contaminated surfaces. In some cases, however, no direct contact has been established. No human bird flu infections have been reported from proper handling of poultry meat or from eating properly cooked poultry or poultry products. Risk depends on exposure. People with no contact with infected

poultry or contaminated surfaces are thought to be at very low to no risk of infection.

POSSIBLE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

As per Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), bird flu illness in people has ranged from mild to severe. Signs and symptoms of bird flu infections in people can include: fever (temperature of 100°F (37.8°C) or greater) or feeling feverish, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, fatigue, headaches, eye redness (or conjunctivitis), and difficulty breathing. Other possible symptoms are diarrhoea, nausea, and vomiting. As with seasonal flu, some people are at high risk of getting very sick from bird flu infections, including pregnant women, people with weakened immune systems and people 65 and older. Human infections with bird flu viruses usually can be treated with the same prescription drugs that are used to treat human seasonal flu viruses. These are called "flu antiviral drugs."

PREVENTIVE MEASURES TO ADOPT DURING AN OUTBREAK

\* You don't need to get panic during a bird flu outbreak, but should adopt preventive measures to stay safe. The best way to prevent catching bird flu is to make sure you are not exposed to the viruses that cause it. The vast majority of cases of avian influenza in humans is caused by contact with infected poultry. Birds that are sick or that have died from avian influenza are often covered with the virus. If enough of the virus is inhaled or gets into a person's eyes, nose, or mouth, they will get bird flu.

\* Stay away from sick or dead birds. Avoid all contact with any bird that appears ill or dead. This applies to domestic birds such as poultry, as well

as wild birds. Observe birds in the wild from a distance. If you come into any contact with birds of any type, wash your hands as soon as possible. Use warm water and soap or hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

\* Prepare poultry safely. Handle and cook poultry safely to kill avian influenza viruses and ensure your health. Use different utensils to handle meat before and after it has been cooked. Wash your hands with warm water and soap before and after you handle meat. Serve meat that is fully cooked and still hot.

\* Cook eggs until the yolk is firm. Consuming runny eggs from an infected chicken can put you at risk of contracting bird flu. Be sure to cook your eggs all the way through so that the yolks and whites are firm. Bird flu may also be present on the surface of eggshells, so make sure to wash your hands thoroughly after handling eggs.

\* Take extreme precaution if you have flu symptoms. Regardless of the type of flu you've caught, do everything you can to help prevent the infection from spreading. For instance, cover your mouth and nose and turn away from others when you cough or sneeze. Dispose of soiled tissues immediately, and wash your hand with warm water and soap. Avoid areas or places with lots of people.

\* Consider taking antiviral drugs. Talk to a physician doctor about taking influenza antiviral drugs to prevent infection. While these drugs are more commonly used to treat different types of flus, they can potentially keep from falling ill.

\* Wash your hands often. Before and after handling your chickens, wash your hands with warm water and soap. You can use hand sanitizer instead, as long as it is at least 60% alcohol. Any clothes,

gloves, or tools that touched the chickens or chicken poop should also be washed with soap properly and thoroughly.

\* Keep designated chicken boots. You should only use one pair of footwear when you're in the chicken's enclosure. Do not use these footwear for any other purpose. In particular, make sure that nothing you use that may come into contact with wild birds ever goes into the chickens' living area. This includes clothing and equipment as well, though boots are the greatest risk factor.

\* Never allow wild birds to get close. Wild birds can potentially infect your chickens with bird flu. Especially if you live near a body of water, keep a vigilant eye out for birds that may try to visit your chickens. Wild birds may be attracted by your chicken feed, for instance.

\* Store chicken feed safely. Once you have the feed, keep it in containers that prevent other birds, animals, and insects from getting to it. Large plastic bins work.

Eat carefully. Never eat anything that might have raw or undercooked poultry products in it. Do not eat any meat that is still pink, or that is not served hot. Eat only hard-cooked eggs that do not have runny yolks. Never eat or drink something that includes any animal's blood.

\* Practice good hygiene. Keep yourself clean to help avoid catching avian flu. In particular, wash your hands often with soap and warm water. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and/or mouth. Do not spend time around poultry during an outbreak. Do not visit farms, markets, or other places where birds are raised, kept, or sold. Do not touch any birds, dead or alive.

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A Pheran it was

Decades ago during the days of B. R. Chopra's Mahabharata, a shopkeeper in the Kacchi Chhawni area of old Jammu city had turned his TV screen towards the road and a motley group of labourers, morning walkers, young cricketers and Gujjars had gathered outside the shop to watch the episode of the extremely popular TV serial. The country was ruled by the Congress party and the term "Bhaktis" had not been coined yet but that is what they would have been called today. Soon a tourist bus arrives and stops by the group. A man, a muffler holding his chin and head together, emerges at the door of the bus and asks rather excitedly, "Bhaiya, where can we find the apple trees here?" The "Bhaktis" seemed disturbed, but only briefly, and turned their heads back towards the TV, their chins lifted up. The muffler man repeats his question trying to engage at least someone from the group. A Gujjar finally turns back and says, "Go to Kashmir. We don't have apple trees here." Those were the days of B. R. Chopra's Mahabharata when people had neither "divyadrishiti" nor internet. It was common to come across people who could not tell Jammu from Kashmir. Today there is internet. In fact the rest of India has 4G compared to our 2G. Someone must be too ignorant to realize that there are no apple trees in Kacchi Chhawni or that a Pheran does not epitomize the cultural heritage of Jammu.

Politicians have often given proof of their bias against Jammu by painting it with the colours left over on their brush reserved for Kashmir. But politicians they are, after all, and they have their own agendas and vested interests. But what's with the academicians? Why would they impose Kashmiri hegemony, political or cultural, on the land of Jammu? Why should the students of IIT Jammu be forced to receive their degrees wearing a Kashmiri Pheran? Does the administration of IIT Jammu have a political agenda or is it sheer ignorance? If it is the former, then it needs be nipped in the bud. If latter, then those at the helm of affairs must open their eyes and take a ride downtown and learn a thing or two about the local culture, traditions and ethos.

An IIT draws its students and faculty from all over the country. Although it does not have to be so, an IIT usually, and proudly, lacks connect with the community surrounding its campus. It should be empathetic towards the local culture as well as contribute to the local economic landscape by making more meaningful contributions than merely helping a few restaurants and PGs thrive. Jammu had to agitate for the IIT as well as the AIIMS. AIIMS, once it comes up and becomes functional, is certainly going to serve the local community but IIT does not have any such obligation unless it chooses to step out of its MHRD-approved brief and takes Jammu in its folds of research and technological advancement. In the western countries, universities hold industrial conclave in which the research grads exhibit their problem-solving skills and local entrepreneurs bring to the table their technological bottlenecks. Both the research institute and the local industry benefit from each other's presence on such platforms. In absence of any such initiatives, the minimum the IIT Jammu can do is

remain apolitical. By making the graduating students adorn Phेरans in Jammu, the IIT has taken a side and made a bad start. It shows that either those running the roost are ignorant, as was the man with his chin and head held together by a muffler, or they are a bunch of political scientists trying to establish that J+K = K.

Sensing that the idea of Pheran will ruffle the local sensitivities the MoS PMO Dr. Jitendra Singh intervened soon after the press conference by the organizing committee. The Director of IITJ, Prof Gaur, responded by assuring him that it will only be "conventional" Convocation Gown. No other attire and No cap. Apparently, the professor failed. He failed to keep his word and to do the course correction. And, if one goes by the defense put up by the institute's twitter handle, it seems that he is not even apologetic about the goof-up. Instead attempt was made to invoke the Central Government's Unnat Bharat Abhiyan scheme to pretend that they got the 38 odd Phेरans stitched to bring about socio-economic empowerment of Jammu villages, that Ghotla Patti used in the robe epitomised the craft of J&K and that the finished product represented the cultural heritage of the country. And, yes, the official statement says that it was not a Pheran. It was a cloak. One wonders how they would have defended the cap which was also a part of the original ensemble.

The official tweet goes further to assert that the choice of the Angavastram, the robe, was in sync with other IITs. Such an assertion can only result

from a hasty research. J&K, with its diversity, is unlike any other state/UT of India, and IIT Jammu is set up in very different socio-political surroundings compared to other IITs. Until August 5, 2019, there were three distinct cultures in the state. Post August 5, 2019, there are only two - one anchored in Jammu and the other in Srinagar. A dispassionate study would immediately reveal that the two are not only distinct but also at odds with each other. So, while the whole of Telangana can relate to the "dhoti" worn at the IIIT Hyderabad convocation, Maharashtra can identify with the white "pajama-kurta" chosen by IIT Bombay, Rajasthan with the "Safa" worn at IIT Jodhpur, and Assam with the "Gamusa" worn in IIT Guwahati, a Kashmir-themed Angavastram cannot be used to drape the entire UT without belittling the rich cultural heritage of Jammu. The administration of IIT Jammu has been around for at least 4 years now. If they had kept themselves aware, they would have understood that the slightest of favour shown to either side of the fulcrum destroys the balance between the two regions and that Jammu has long been dealt with unfairly. The decision to go for the Pheran only reestablishes that our fellow Indians still view us through the prism of Kashmir. One feels sorry for their jaundiced eyes, blurred vision and the appalling lack of awareness. It gets worse when they attempt to present the Pheran to the Jammuites as a secular cloak. It is both deceitful and avoidable. They must understand that Jammu has long stopped accepting the proverbial cap and that internet, even though 2G, is still an important means of educating oneself about a region.

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(The views expressed by the authors are their personal)

COVID Vaccination

Sir,

That the Government of India has decided to vaccinate the health professionals and front line workers is a welcome step. Over 700 doctors and many more health workers died during the fight against COVID. Since the health workers are at a high risk they need to be vaccinated on priority. The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) has cleared the use of Covidshield vaccine by Oxford - Astra Zeneca for use in India. The Covaxin vaccine by Biotech India has been kept as a backup.

It is very important to prove the safety along with the efficacy because vaccination is done on the healthy persons to prevent the disease. This is in contrast to the medicines which are given to the already diseased person for cure. Normally it may take 4 to 5 years to roll out the vaccine. Emergency situation created necessity that vaccine should be brought out early. So some relaxations in trials were given. But nevertheless the safety component cannot be compromised. Waiting for a few weeks more would have built more trust on Covaxin.

We have experience of giving vaccine to large number of population, but this vaccine is different. We have successfully vaccinated children under 5 years of age under the Pulse Polio programme which forms about 20 crores population. But the pulse polio vaccine is given orally and any person with little training could do the job. Vaccine against COVID needs to be given in the injection form in two doses. Every vaccinated person has to be observed for 30 minutes after the injection to check for any adverse reaction. Therefore we need a large number of well trained people to give injections and to observe if the person is developing any adverse reaction. They should also have expertise to control the side effects.

Unless the Government takes over whole exercise on its own for all the citizens, the affluent citizens will buy it from market leaving the low income groups unvaccinated. The selective vaccine based on economic status will further accentuate the inequities in health.

Dr Arun Mitra  
New Delhi

Bird flu scare

Sir,

At a time when Covid-19 Pandemic is still hovering, Bird flu fear has stepped in and around the country. As is reported over 12000 birds have been found dead across India. Spread of influenza has been reported among the several states of the country. The states that are effected so far are UP, Kerala, Rajasthan, MP, HP Harayana and Gujarat. In Delhi ban on import of live Birds has been placed and at the same time closure of Poultry market announced. The Central Govt has issued proper guidelines with regard to bird flu and it is pertinent to mention here that states must follow suit. Some states and Union Territories have raised rapid response teams in every district to contain the spread of bird flu. Surveillance in the spread of bird flu stands

now. For the safety of the people in the present situation of monstrous Covid-19 Pandemic District Magistrates have to play an important role in monitoring and avaring the people with regard to bird flu scare. Migratory birds which sustain in wet lands need to be kept under vigilance.

It has been reported that several migratory birds have been found dead in J&K UT wetlands. The agencies viz-aviz wild life and veterinary experts have to conduct proper and prompt surveys in all bird markets, wildlife places and also wetlands across the country. Bird flu scare if not nipped in the bud it will add fuel to the fire because people are now intimidated.

S N Raina  
Jammu