

## A big impetus to Jammu tourism

Tourism development in Jammu and Kashmir has been an important focus of the Government for many years. To give impetus to the tourism industry in Jammu Division, the Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir recently inaugurated the first Tulip Garden at Sanasar in the Jammu Division, which is spread over 40 kanals and contains 2.75 lakh tulip bulbs of 25 different varieties. This initiative is expected to boost tourism and trade activities in the region. The Lieutenant Governor emphasised the unique tourism potential of Jammu due to its natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and warm hospitality and stated that the administration is committed to providing all necessary infrastructure and resources. As part of the "Tourism Mission," the Government is developing 75 new destinations, 75 religious sites, 75 cultural and heritage sites, and 75 new tracks to open up new economic avenues and fulfil the aspirations of the people. The development of water parks and cultural centres in various locations is expected to boost employment and entrepreneurship. The Lieutenant Governor also emphasised the need for people-focused, inclusive, and sustainable development policies to create a better future for generations to come and highlighted that the administration is working for the common citizen with a participatory governance approach.

The administration has taken several measures to promote tourism in the region, including developing infrastructure such as roads, airports, and hotels, as well as promoting adventure tourism, pilgrimage tourism, and cultural tourism. Every aspect of tourism has been taken care of. The Government has also implemented several policies to attract domestic and international tourists, such as offering tax incentives to tourism businesses and promoting the region as a safe and welcoming destination. With this kind of infrastructural development, the UT of Jammu and Kashmir is a hotbed for investments, specifically in the tourism sector.

Jammu and Kashmir has no doubt become the most preferred tourist destination, and the development of unexplored destinations and caravan tourism will further boost tourism growth in the region. A budget of Rs 447 crore has been allocated to the tourism sector this year to modernise and transform Jammu and Kashmir into smart tourist destinations. Efforts are on to revive the cultural legacy by restoring and renovating Samba Fort, Hari Parbat and General Zorwar Singh Palace.

The Mansar rejuvenation plan has already been set up to promote the fusion of religious and nature tourism. Various proposed tourism projects are in the pipeline for Katra as well. Jammu Ropeway Project has been completed, and work is on for the Tawi River Front, Artificial Lake, and Jammu Zoo in Jammu only. The Basohli-Bani Tourism Development Authority is working on several projects, including the construction of tourist facilities and the promotion of adventure tourism. The Shri Shivkhori Shrine Board has been set up to develop the infrastructure around the shrine and promote religious tourism in the region. A memorandum of understanding has been signed for the refurbishment of food kiosks and resting shelters, existing ghats, beautification, the development of four meditation centres, and the construction of a reception centre with refreshment facilities. Mantalai Yoga Centre is also ready for yoga tourism. It comprises a tourist facilitation centre, a yoga and meditation complex, a wellness spa and ayurveda complex, eco-huts with solariums, a polyhouse with drip irrigation, an open-area amphitheatre, a helipad, etc.

Political instability and security concerns are things of the past now. The administration is actively working to promote tourism in the region. Despite various challenges, Jammu and Kashmir continue to attract a significant number of tourists, and the Government is committed to further developing the tourism industry in the region.

## Major High Court initiative for pending cases

With millions of already pending cases and thousands more being added every year, the whole issue has become too big to be addressed in one go. To address the issue of pending cases, the Supreme Court has been actively advocating for increasing the number of judges in the High Courts and improving their infrastructure. In addition, various measures have been taken to facilitate online filing, e-filing, and virtual hearings to expedite the disposal of cases. However, the problem of pending cases in the High Courts of India is a complex issue, and it requires sustained efforts from all stakeholders to resolve it. However, taking initiative on its own, the Chief Justice of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, has issued a set of directives to address the backlog of pending cases in the High Court. Final hearing matters that are over 10 years old will be listed exclusively on Tuesdays and Thursdays as "Target Cases," and any cases older than 20 years will remain on the roster bench until final disposal. Urgent matters will be heard by the roster benches on these days, subject to mention. A fast-track single bench will be constituted periodically in both wings of the High Court to hear the target cases, and the CIS calendar is strictly followed. The directives are expected to help reduce the backlog of pending cases, which has already been reduced considerably in the past three years, as per the official data. Moreover, much attention is being paid to conducting e-Lok Adalats and virtual court hearings by the subordinate judiciary, with a total of 716240 hearings conducted by the J&K and Ladakh High Court and District Courts as of January 31, 2023. Of these, 257708 hearings were conducted by the High Court and 458532 by the District Courts in these Union Territories. All these initiatives are much appreciated and will provide major relief to the litigants. A big step forward in resolving the pending cases issue. Well-intended, out-of-the-box solutions always work.

# Parliament: A Temple of Democracy or Akhara for Dangal?

K B Jandial

Parliament's yet another session was washed as a result of continuous ruckus, frequent adjournments and finally adjourned sine die with almost any work. This is the new normal of the 'highest temple of Indian democracy.' While the world is told that Indian democracy is under threat and needs 'foreign intervention', the most disturbing part of these developments is that the faith of the people in democratic institutions is shaken.

The 'hon'ble' members didn't allow the Parliament to function because of matters which had nothing to do with public welfare. The issues used for the ruckus were JPC on Adani issue, apology from Rahul Gandhi for his uncharitable and demeaning observations in London on Indian democratic institutions and "foreign intervention", 2-year sentence to Rahul in criminal defamation case and subsequent disqualification from Lok Sabha. All these matters had been in the public domain and bitterly debated at all public fora, evening national TV debates and on social media to the point of disillusionment. But, still the MPs from all sides 'contributed their might' to stall the proceedings daily, sparing no one from heckling- the Presiding officers, PM, Ministers, or any other members.

What did they gain out of it? What public good did it finally accrue? All these matters could be important, but don't override the larger public good for which these democratic representative institutions. People wait for redressal of their problems which MPs seek through Questions, Zero Hours, Calling Attention Motions, Short Notice debates, budget debates etc. All these opportunities were thrown away for petty politics or political on-upmanship.

Entering in its last year, the 17th Lok Sabha is in for a record, for lowest number of sittings since 1952. So far, the 16th Lok Sabha had the lowest number of 331 sittings. The current Lok Sabha with 230 sittings so far, is unlikely to cross this figure. It has economic fallout as well. The cost of running Lok Sabha is Rs. 2.5 lakhs to Rs 3 lakhs per minute. So, non-functioning of the highest pedestal of democracy: murder or survival of which many parties keep crying hoarse, has cost the nation to the tune of Rs. 150 crore of public money. Was it worth it?

The disruption and adjournments without any parliamentary work for which the MPs are elected, are the new political achievement. In the parliamentary history of India, the first instance of disruption took place when President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's address to both the Houses on February 18, 1963 was disrupted for not speaking in Hindi. But the next day, MPs cutting across party lines,

condemned the President's heckling and regretted their unsavoury behavior. There was a positive fallout of this unparliamentary conduct. The Lok Sabha issued a reprimand to the concerned MP. Later, political parties resolved to treat the President's Address sacrosanct and agreed not to interrupt it.

The Rajya Sabha on 1 September 1997 adopted a resolution which inter alia stated, "That the prestige of the Parliament be preserved and enhanced, also by conscious and dignified conformity to the entire regime of Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of the Houses and directions of the Presiding Officers relating to orderly conduct of business, more especially by maintaining the inviolability of the Question Hour, refraining from transgressing into the official areas of the House, or from any shouting of slogans."

The next serious disruption was recorded in 1998 when the Women Reservation Bill was introduced and MPs tore it. This was repeated when the Bill was again introduced in Rajya Sabha in 2010.

Perhaps for the first time, eight members entered the 'Well' of Rajya Sabha during Question Hour on 3 March 2008, shouting slogans. The action was dropped after their Party leader expressed regrets. But, since December 5, 2013, parliamentary proceedings had been marred due to opposition MPs coming into the 'well' of the House with banners and slogans in gross violation of the rules of procedure and parliamentary etiquette. This became order of the day during UPA's time with BJP's leaders Sushma Swaraj in Lok Sabha and Arun Jaitley in Rajya Sabha redefining the 'democratic protest' in the House during 2009-2014.

Sushma Swaraj, then leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha, had announced that "not allowing Parliament to function is also a form of democracy, like any other form".

In an article in August 2012, Arun Jaitley, then leader of opposition in Rajya Sabha, too argued in favour of disruptions. He wrote: "If parliamentary accountability is subverted and a debate is intended to be used merely to put a lid on parliamentary accountability, it is then a legitimate tactic for the Opposition to expose the government through parliamentary instruments available at its command." According to Jaitley, disruption should not be described as preventing work from being done, because "what we are doing is very important work itself."

Now, the Congress and the BJP have changed roles. It was the turn of Jaitley to criticise the ruckus. As Union Finance Minister, he hit out at the Congress and other opposition parties, describing them as being "obstructionist" when he was unable to

push through the NDA's key reforms like the insurance bill in Parliament. Similarly, the coal bill relating to the facilitation of auction of coal blocks also fell by the wayside because of disruption.

Forty percent of 15th Lok Sabha was lost in disruptions, mainly due to the 2G scam. And the session was described as the least productive when Congress led UPA was in power and BJP in opposition. After 2014, the situation was reversed with BJP led NDA becoming the ruling coalition and the decimated Congress as opposition party, but the trend of disruption continued, albeit, assumed even higher proportions today.

One of the most disgusting behaviours was witnessed when Congress MP Pratap Singh Bajwa climbed on the table of the officers in Rajya Sabha to protest three Farm Laws. Tearing papers of the House and throwing these towards the Presiding Officers to blocking their view and keep shouting till adjournment was a daily scene of the second half of the budget session. None of them had regret, including Bajwa, over their behaviour, and quickly quoted Sushma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley to justify their rowdy conduct. But intriguingly, they keep calling it the "murder of democracy" within and outside India.

Congress which is spearheading these disruptions, is, in fact, oblivious to the "pain" Pt Jawaharlal Nehru suffered at the heckling of President Radhakrishnan. He had said that such disgusting incidents needed "to be met effectively or else the functioning of Parliament and State Assemblies would become difficult." It is not that in the past the Parliament did not witness harsh remarks, even from the great parliamentarians but there was a difference. Parliamentarians like Atal Behari Vajpayee, L K Advani, Somnath Chatterjee or even Indira Gandhi would next day make suitable amends and express regrets for the language they had used in the House. In that period of parliamentary history, there would be umpteen instances to show members' faith in discipline, decorum, and dignity of the Parliament which represent the will of the people and constitute the fora of democracy. Its principal tasks relate to legislation and scrutiny of the executive.

The Congress leaders who do not get tired of talking of its glorious history, are advised to read and emulate what Pt. Nehru had said on such irresponsible conduct of parliamentarians. At that time, the imprudent MPs had regretted their conduct but today, they take pride in this shameful behaviour and justify it. With backing of leadership, they scoff at the idea of apology - then why not, they are the

followers of an iconic family whose shining star boasted, "Main Savarkar nehi, main Gandhi hoon, Gandhi kisi se maafi nahi maangta." And he put his great grand nana and Dadi to shame, and sent a loud message to Congress cadre. Abusive language within and outside the Parliament and Assemblies has come to stay as an effective political tool to create narratives.

Another factor responsible for this conduct of the leaders in the temples of democracies is that in the sixties, the MPs had come to the House with toiling past some contributions in the freedom struggle and today, most of them have criminal background and hooliganism is their forte.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was concerned with the issue of discipline and decorum in the Parliament. When the Constitution was being adopted, Ambedkar had said, "If we wish to maintain democracy... the first thing in my judgment is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives". Referring to "unconstitutional methods" to achieve the objectives, he called these as "the grammar of anarchy and the sooner they are abandoned, the better for us". He had cautioned that "going beyond scope of rules, procedures and constitutional methods would make us vulnerable to a harsh judgment by history as the authors of the Grammar of Anarchy". The prophetic words of Dr Ambedkar are proving proverbially correct today.

The Presiding Officers should also conduct themselves in an impartial manner which should appear to be so, and allow some space to the opposition respecting the voice of dissent. What is the harm in allowing Adjournment Motion, an extraordinary move to interrupt the normal business in Lok Sabha to draw the attention to a definite matter of urgent public importance. With a brute majority, Modi Govt had nothing to worry about. Instead, it would take away the punch out of the opposition and hopefully the House could run better.

The rules empower the Presiding Officers to 'discipline' the erring Members instead of being the mute spectators to the conversion of the 'Temple of Democracy' into 'Akhara of Dangal.' Time has come to use the whip and discipline them in the interest of democracy and the people.

Some suggest that the size of the 'well' should be reduced to bare minimum. But they forget that we have 'Hon'ble' members like Bajwa who would stand on the table of the staff. The time has come to amend business rules, if needed, to take stringent action like suspension for full session and in case of persistent inappropriate behaviour, disqualification. Soft options are not in the larger interest of Indian democracy.

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## Participation of women in electoral politics

Indu Pawar

The safety of women electoral candidates in Jammu and Kashmir has long been a concern in the region. Women who choose to run for political office face numerous challenges, including intimidation, violence, and social stigma. In addition, the threat of violence against women candidates is particularly acute in areas where there is ongoing conflict and political instability. As a result, the number of women candidates in Jammu and Kashmir remains low, and efforts to increase their representation in politics are often hampered by concerns about safety.

One of the primary challenges facing women electoral candidates in Jammu and Kashmir is the threat of violence. This can take many forms, including physical assault, verbal abuse, and harassment. Women candidates who challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes may be particularly vulnerable to violence, as they are perceived as a threat to the existing power structures. In any case, the male dominated political arena does not accept women politicians very smoothly. First, it is not very easy for women to break the patriarchal shackles to enter politics and even when they are able to do it, they are not encouraged by their male colleagues. They are seen as incompetent and often are faced with male hostility and even abuse.

Social stigma, it may be emphasized, in any case is a challenge that is faced by women electoral candidates in Jammu and Kashmir. With very few women in politics, electoral space is seen to be the exclusive privilege of men, and women who decide to break the norm, are seen to be performing 'unwomanly' role. Like elsewhere, women who run

for office in J&K are viewed as "unfeminine" or "immodest". Character assassination is a fear that women candidates face during election and can be seen as a subtle form of violence. If women succumb to this fear, it can make it difficult for women candidates to campaign effectively, as they may not have the support of their families or communities.

Conflict situation of J&K is another problem due to which political role of women has been ham-

pered. During the period of militancy, women found it difficult even to come out for vote in militancy-prone areas. In some cases, women candidates were targeted by militants or other armed groups, who viewed their participation in politics as a challenge to their authority. One can cite the case of Miss Sakina Ittoo, when she faced militant attacks at least four times during 2002 Assembly election. Women representative in panchayats have faced violence for example Ms. Zoona Begum was shot at in Hardshiva village in 2013.

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It is because of the above-mentioned reasons that despite efforts to increase the representation of women in politics, the number of women candidates in Jammu and Kashmir remains low. While partial-

ity this may be so because politics and public life is still seen to be the domain of men but in part it may also be due to concerns about safety. To address this issue, it is essential to ensure that women candidates have access to adequate security measures, including police protection and safe transport. In the situation in which crimes against women are increasing in the public space, many women find political space to be unsuitable for them. Since contesting

elections means being in the public space for longer time, they may not feel confident about contesting election and facing the hazards of public spaces. There have been efforts to increase the representation of women in politics in Jammu and Kashmir. For example, the Jammu and Kashmir State Election Commission has introduced measures to encourage women's participation in local elections, such as reserving seats for women candidates and providing them with training and support. Similarly, civil society organizations have been working to raise awareness about the importance of women's participation in politics and to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure the participation of women in electoral pol-

itics. First of all, the public space needs to be made safe for women. Till the time women feel safe and secure in the public spaces, they might not choose to be in politics despite their inclination. The minimum that is required is challenging the culture of impunity that often surrounds violence against women, by holding perpetrators accountable for their actions.

Secondly, it is very important to address the underlying political and social dynamics that contribute to the marginalization of women in public life. Much of such marginalization is due to the social and cultural reasons, and may need some more time to be addressed, yet what needs immediate attention is an acknowledgement of the role that women need to play for the country to be fully democratic. A democratic system requires ensuring that women are represented at all levels of government, from the local to the national level. It also requires creating spaces for women to participate in the development of policies and programs that affect their communities. Thirdly, it is important to ensure safety of female candidates when they decide to contest. Electoral officials and civil society organizations must work to raise awareness about the risks facing women candidates and to provide them with the tools and support they need to campaign effectively. Furthermore, to encourage women participation in legislature and law-making bodies, government may consider to declare some constituencies as women constituencies in rotation so that whole of the UT gets representation from women.

By providing women with the support and resources they need to participate in politics safely, we can help to create a future in which women's voices are heard and their rights are respected.

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## AI triggers rapid labour market and workplace transition

Dr. Gyan Pathak

Rapid advances in the development and adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies have also triggered a rapid labour market and workplace transition. At the labour market level, it is likely to increase productivity and create new jobs, but at the same time it is likely to replace or at least alter other jobs, thus increasing reskilling needs and risking the displacement of workers and business models unable to adapt.

Similarly at the workplace level, AI is likely to improve the quality of the working environment, for example, by reducing stress and safety risks. Yet, they are also likely to lower job quality and raise concerns including potential discrimination, excessive surveillance as well as deficits regarding transparency, explainability and accountability of AI-influenced decisions.

It is in this backdrop, an OCED recent working paper titled "Shaping the transition: artificial intelligence and social dialogue" has said that the overall impact on labour market and the workplaces will depend on how AI is implemented-which includes both the role of regulation in governing AI adoption and the extent to which workers and employers are involved through social dialogue at workplace, firm, sectoral and national levels.

It should be noted that in the 2019 OECD AI Principles, governments agreed to take steps to ensure a fair transition for workers as AI is adopted, including through social dialogue. However, the progress is much slower than the speed of development of AI and its adoption.

The paper has noted that AI adoption will bring both benefits and risks for workers and employers and provide new opportunities but also noted the raising fears about disruptive labour market and workplace transitions. Practical challenges have emerged in course of transition, and hence there is a need for social dialogue to support social part-

ners' efforts in shaping AI transition, it emphasized.

The paper presents new descriptive evidence together with ongoing initiatives from social partners showing that social dialogue has an important role to play in the AI transition. It discusses how AI adoption may affect social dialogue itself, eg by adding new pressures on weakening labour rela-

framework, ranging from no rights (such as voluntary and informal exchanges of information) to information, consultation co-ordination and finally bargaining rights.

Social dialogue is an important instrument for involving and building consensus among the main stakeholders in the labour market. As such, social dialogue can for instance help employers find flexible and pragmatic - yet fair - solutions to labour market challenges, and collective bargaining can shape the design and definition of new and existing rights, and complement government efforts to strengthen labour market security and adaptability.

At the same time, social partners face ongoing challenges like declining representation of their members, which new forms of work and new business models, enabled by organisational and technological changes, risk to exacerbate.

AI adoption will bring both benefits and risks for workers and employers at workplace and labour market levels. Reviewing these from unions' perspective indicates that their concern is increasingly shifting from risks of job destruction towards other risks of AI adoption in the workplace, linked for example to potential discrimination, excessive surveillance and violations of human rights.

At the same time, AI technologies may also affect social partners' capacity to promote and mit-

igate benefits and risks of AI for workers and employers, for example by increasing information asymmetries between bargaining parties.

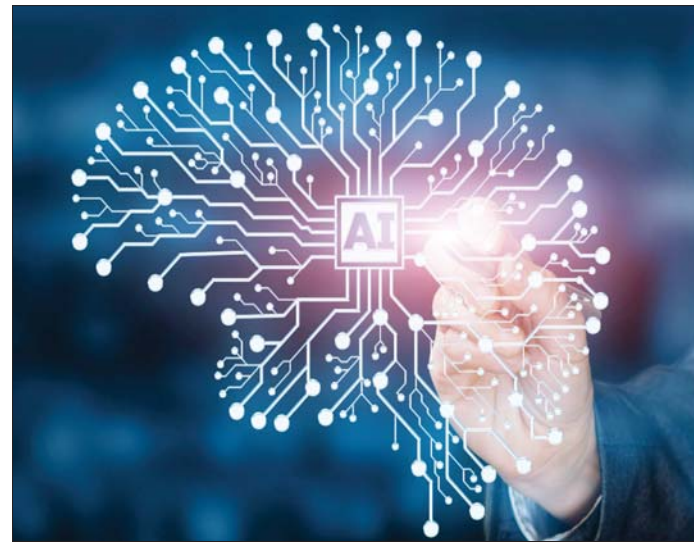
New descriptive evidence based on cross-sectional European data suggests that social dialogue might contribute to mitigate AI's impact on risks relating to working conditions. Additional questionnaire insights and ongoing activities from social partners show that they are already engaging in raising voice, advising policy and negotiating their first AI-related agreements.

However, most ongoing activities stem from a few very active unions and employers' organisations. In this respect, the lack of AI-related expertise among social partners is one of their major challenges to support their members in the AI transition.

Overall, workers union's priority appears to shift from macro-economic concerns (notably AI's impact on job destruction) to more micro-economic ones (notably the trustworthiness of AI, changing skill demands and job quality at the workplace level).

While each country's situation and labour relations differ, the paper says that policymakers could consider promoting consultations and discussions on the AI transition with social partners and other stakeholders. They could also support social partners' efforts to expand their membership to non-represented forms of work and employers like in the platform economy, as well as promote AI-related expertise, and digital education more generally, in the workplace for management, workers and their representatives.

In the future, more data and analysis at the individual and firm levels will be necessary to understand how social dialogue shapes the AI transition, also between different occupations and sectors. In particular, this would require having firm-level panel data that combines information on AI adoption, social dialogue and labour market outcomes or working conditions at the same time. (IPA)



(The views expressed by the authors are their personal)

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