

Municipal elections in J&K

The Chief Electoral Officer has initiated the process for conducting the Urban Local Body elections in Jammu and Kashmir. The CEO issued a notification to revise and update the Municipal Electoral Rolls for all bodies. The terms of the Srinagar Municipal Corporation and Jammu Municipal Corporation will expire in November, while the terms of all other Municipal bodies, including Councils and Committees, in the UT will end between October and November. The five-year term of the Panchayats will end in January 2024. Consequently, the elections for Urban Local Bodies are required to be completed before the end of October, and the Panchayat elections should be held in the middle of December this year. The term of the Block Development Councils (BDCs) will end in October 2024, while the District Development Councils (DDCs) will complete their tenure in January 2026.

Democratically elected public representatives from these institutions have collaborated closely with the UT administration to promote the development of Jammu and Kashmir. The developmental efforts have been well received by the people, and even the remotest villages have benefited from the fruits of development. Local public representatives have worked in tandem with authorities, planning and executing various development projects to address the specific needs of their constituencies. These projects have encompassed areas such as irrigation, agriculture, drainage, water management, health-care facilities, and community centres. To improve the functioning of Municipal Corporations, Corporators visited top-performing counterparts in other regions to learn from their experiences and implement successful practices in Jammu and Srinagar. Efforts were also made to enhance waste management systems, with door-to-door waste collection and segregation initiatives being significant achievements. The combined efforts of the elected representatives, local communities, and the administration have played a crucial role in these positive changes in Jammu and Kashmir.

The stage is now set for another round of elections in Jammu and Kashmir, and the process involves various steps such as the notification for upgrading electoral rolls, publication of rolls, objections, and final notification. The upcoming elections will start with Corporation and Council elections, followed by Panchayat elections. One notable change is that parties that previously boycotted the elections will be participating this time. The transformation has created an atmosphere where people are eagerly looking forward to exercising their rights to elect their representatives. Unlike in the past, there will be no dictates of boycotts or hartals this time, indicating a positive shift in the political landscape. The credit for establishing democracy in Jammu and Kashmir goes to the administration, which has worked towards ensuring free and fair elections. As a result, the confidence of the people in the region has been restored, and they are ready to actively participate in the electoral process to shape their future through democratic means.

Upgrade Chanapora's PHC to SDH

The long-standing issues faced by the residents of Chanapora regarding the delayed upgradation of the 50-bed hospital from a Primary Health Centre (PHC) to a Sub-District Hospital (SDH) are a matter of serious concern. The fact that the government has already invested a significant amount, Rs 22 crore, in constructing the hospital building but hasn't taken steps to make it a fully functional healthcare facility is indeed a serious lapse by authorities. The restricted operating hours from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. are inadequate to cater to the healthcare needs of the growing population in the area, leaving residents in distress during emergencies.

A decade of waiting, a significant investment of crores in the hospital's construction, and the presence of essential medical equipment should have warranted a prompt upgrade from a PHC to SDH. Citing a shortage of medical staff as a reason for the non-operational status of the hospital after such a long time is certainly not acceptable. It highlights a lack of proper planning and management in the healthcare system. An extensive audit of the manpower in different health institutions is indeed necessary to identify gaps and areas for improvement. Rationalising the manpower allocation for emergency services is crucial to ensure that hospitals like the one in Chanapora can operate efficiently and serve the community's healthcare needs adequately.

The decision to invest 22 crore rupees in the hospital was taken after consultations and deliberations, to provide timely healthcare services to the people. However, the change of administrative and directorate heads should not lead to the neglect of already sanctioned projects. The continuity and completion of such vital projects should be ensured, regardless of any administrative changes. Higher authorities must intervene in this matter to resolve the issue promptly. They should prioritise the upgrade of the hospital to an SDH, ensure the deployment of sufficient medical staff, and take the necessary steps to make the hospital operational round the clock.

Proposed Jammu and Kashmir Public Universities Bill-An Observation

Prof Virender Gupta

The Bill named as "The Jammu and Kashmir Public Universities Bill" has been sent to the Union Home Minister of India for placing it in Parliament to get its approval as legislation. In the introductory lines of the Bill it has been claimed that it shall ensure the autonomy of the universities, their development to achieve competitive excellence, greater access, opportunities, equity and inclusion for imparting higher education in Jammu and Kashmir. But unfortunately, the proposed bill not only cuts at the roots of the Universities autonomy, but also negates and nullifies the totality of the system of academic evolutionary cosmos. It undermines the authority of the Vice-Chancellor and provides ample scope for the interference by the bureaucracy, pseudo-academics and unauthorized agencies in the university's academic structure which shall be detrimental for the academics, including research methodology and research oriented programs.

The attempt to diminish the authority of the Vice-Chancellors of the Universities, empowering the Government officers in the Universities' structure shall weaken the universities and thus the universities would not be able to deliver, what is expected. With some of the proposals made that erode the Autonomy of the University, the status of the Universities in Jammu and Kashmir vis-a-vis other Universities of the country and its grading by the UGC would suffer. There should be uniformity in the matter of selections of teachers throughout the country. If the procedure proposed in the Bill is followed, our teachers, particularly serving in the Jammu and Kashmir universities would be downgraded vis-a-vis the teachers serving in other universities.

Before discussing the other aspects of the proposed Jammu And Kashmir Public Universities Bill, let me take up the recruitment policy for the University Teachers and other officers of the University. At the outset it is required to strictly follow the UGC guidelines in order to keep uniformity vis-a-vis other universities in the country so that the faculty members of our university are recognized at par with the faculty members of other Universities. In the Clause 51, Chapter-VI the Bill asks for all India advertisement, thus desiring to attract the best talent from all over the country. It is not possible to attract the talent from rest of the country by introducing a State level entrance-cum screening test, followed by the interviews at the Assistant Professor and the Associate Professor level; both are to be conducted by the State Public Service Commission. In the interviews 60 percentage weightage is given to the marks scored in the test.

Amit Sharma

The primary necessity for supporting life on this planet is water. Numerous aquatic organisms of all sizes, from microscopic plankton to enormous aquatic animals and plants, can be found in water. Due to the inclusion of numerous organic and inorganic ingredients, freshwater bodies like streams and rivers pose a significant hazard. Pollutants have a variety of direct and indirect effects on aquatic creatures, including fish. According to WHO and UNICEF (2017), 6,000 children die each day from illnesses related to the dearth of access to clean drinking water, inadequate sanitation, and poor hygiene.

The phrase "water quality" refers to how well-suited water is for different uses. Any particular use of water requires measurement against approved water quality standards for its physical, chemical, and biological characteristics. The properties of the ground through which the water flows determine its quality, and the geomorphology of the watershed also has an effect. Given the current situation, water quality has emerged as a very sensitive issue in many parts of the world, particularly in emerging nations where freshwater bodies are dealing with a variety of human-caused issues and improper use. Drinking water, in particular, must meet international criteria for the concentrations of certain components. To do this, water quality has been monitored and assessed, and the most significant efforts have been made to obtain the water quality indexes using various physical, chemical, and biological criteria. Therefore, to identify specific water quality issues, regular water quality assessments are required. It is also crucial to fully comprehend the quality of both groundwater and surface water.

In the UT of J&K, groundwater is a crucial resource for drinking, agriculture, and industrial uses, particularly in places where surface water is insufficient or nonexistent. In recognition of the significance of groundwater in everyday life, the Central Groundwater Board, North Western Himalayan Region (CGWB, NWHR) in Jammu every year observes the chemical quality of groundwater through committed Groundwater Observing Stations made up of dug wells, tube wells, or hand pumps of shallow depth. Water quality in J&K has been significantly impacted by changes to the regional land system, unplanned urbanization, deforestation and forest degradation, tourism-related activities, and careless use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers.

The selections of all categories of teachers and officers (including Financial Officer) should be made as per the UGC guidelines and as the practice followed in other universities. The Selections should be made by the University Selection Committees with Vice-Chancellor as Chairman. There should be no written test for any of the post. There should be uniformity in the matter of selections of teachers throughout the country. If the procedure proposed in the Bill is followed, our teachers, particularly serving in the Jammu and Kashmir universities would be downgraded vis-a-vis with the teachers serving in other universities. The status of the Universities in Jammu and Kashmir vis-a-vis with other Universities of the country and its grading by the UGC would also suffer. As per UGC guidelines and per the procedure followed in other universities, the selections of Assistant Professors and Associate Professors are done through the selection committees. All the selections for the posts of teachers and University officers are conducted under the Chairmanship of the Vice-Chancellor. The candidate appearing for the post of Assistant Professor has to earn eligibility by qualifying NET (National Eligibility Test) or any other recognized national test. The selections are conducted by the selection Committees. Three to four outside external subject experts (not connected with university), selected out of the panel of experts duly approved by the Management Council (presently called as Syndicate) and the Governing Council (presently called as University Council) are present in the selections as members of the selection committees. Selections are only based on the interviews, where appropriate weightage is given to the PhD, M Phil, Research Publications, conferences attended and other academic achievements of the candidates appearing.

Similarly the Associate Professors are selected through a University Selection Committee with Vice-Chancellor as its Chairman in the presence of external experts. The candidate applying for the post of Associate Professor is not required to appear in any of the screening or qualifying test. Selections are made on the basis of experience and academic achievements of the candidates.

It is obvious that a person from the rest of the country be discouraged to apply for the post of Assistant or Associate Professor under the proposed selection process in the Bill. The persons who have qualified NET or any other equivalent Test (by putting a extremely hard work), would not prefer to apply for the post of Assistant Professor in the State Universities/ Colleges, where he has to go through the proposed screening test. Whereas he has otherwise ample chance to get admission in

other universities of the country, with his NET qualification.

In case of colleges, the Government if wants to hold screening Test for the selections for the posts of Assistant Professors for the benefit of those who have not qualified National level Test (NET) or any other such like Test, it should only conduct the test for the short listing the candidates. No weightage of marks be scored in the test. The candidates who have qualified the requisite nationally recognized Tests should be exempted from appearing in the test conducted by State PSC.

All the selections of teachers and officers (including Financial Officer) should be made as per the Guidelines provided by the University Grants Commission. The universities should be allowed to adopt the existing procedures for the employment of other employees; the existing procedures are well established and foolproof. In a very rare case a writ-petition is filed in the court against the selections of the employees in the universities.

The role of Vice Chancellor in the University is very important; he is executive head of the university. The growth and progress of the university both in the matters of academics and administration depends on how much freedom he enjoys in decisions making, with regards to university matters. While looking at the proposed University Act the following observations are made and modifications suggested:

* Keeping future structure of the Jammu and Kashmir UT in mind instead of mentioning Lieutenant Governor as Chancellor of the University, it should have been written Lieutenant Governor/ Governor

* The composition of The Jammu and Kashmir Higher Education Council has not been defined. It should have the proper representation of the Vice-chancellors of the State Universities, Principals of the Degree colleges, Minister/Advisor connected with Higher Education and the Secretary/Commissioner of Higher Education Department, and a few nominees of the chancellor selected out of the eminent educationist/ scientists of the country.

* Dean Academic Affairs and Dean of Research Studies should be included in University Officers category and their status needs to be defined. The Dean Research Studies should also be included in the Academic Council of the University.

* Clause 13 should be re-drafted as The Governor/Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir shall be the Chancellor of the University.

* The Vice-Chancellor is the immediate officer, after the Chancellor; therefore, he is the first per-

son who has to be consulted in the matters concerning the University and not the Government.

* The ultimate decisions on the matters pertaining to academics or administration should be taken in the appropriate bodies of the university; the Governing Council or Management Council.

* The financial powers of the Vice-Chancellor have not been define in Clause 19. There is need to specifically define his financial powers.

* The Finance Advisor/ Finance Secretary should be Co-Chairperson of the Finance and Audit Committee with the Vice-Chancellor as its Chairman. The Dean Academic Affairs should also be included as member of the Finance and Audit Committee.

* In Governing Council, the Minister of Higher Education/Advisor to the Government in Higher Education should be its member in place of Chief Secretary to the Government.

* Clause 31, pertaining to the members of the Governing Council, section (h) should be modified as "two persons nominated by the Chancellor, out of the panel submitted by the Vice-Chancellor who are.....".

In the case of Mata Vaishno Devi University or Islamic University of Science and Technology or Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University, same procedure be followed in the matter of nomination of two persons by the Chancellors out of the panel submitted by the respective Vice-Chancellor.

* As per the UGC, the Cluster Universities have the same status as the other normal Universities have. These have been created to reduce the academic and administrative burden that the universities are facing. These are full-fledged universities in themselves. Therefore, Cluster Universities of the State should have the same statutes, Rules and Regulations.

* Clause 28. The Committee for the selection of Controller of Examination should have the following members:

* The Vice-Chancellor (b) The nominee of the Governing Council (c) Two eminent academicians having more than 10 years of experience as a professor to be selected out of the panel submitted by the Vice-Chancellor.

It is hoped that the concerned authorities would take a positive view about the analysis made and suggestions forwarded. It is appealed that the Bill Submitted to the Government of India should be withdrawn and resubmitted after having a thread bear discussions with the Vice-Chancellors and other academicians of the country and the state.

(The author was a member of Jammu University Council and Karukhetra University Council)

Water quality in J&K

As per report published by CGWB, NWHR "Groundwater Year Book", 2021-22 physical-chemical analysis of water sample has been done using various parameters like Electrical Conductivity, pH distribution, chloride, fluoride, nitrate distribution, sulphate, total hardness, calcium, magnesium, uranium etc. These parameters determine the quality of water for various purposes like drinking, irrigation etc. Let's elaborate these parameters as per report.



Electrical Conductivity- The EC values determine the suitability of groundwater for drinking, irrigation and industrial purpose. In most part of Jammu & Kashmir UT the value is generally low. Majority of samples (66.8%) are found to have specific conductance less than 750 µS/cm at 25°C suggesting that the groundwater is fresh and potable.

pH Distribution- In Jammu & Kashmir UT, groundwater is neutral to alkaline in nature. Most of the samples collected from shallow groundwater of Jammu & Kashmir are alkaline in nature. The pH values range between 6.15 to 9.04. 37.6% samples are dominated with carbonate type in nature.

Chloride- Chloride is present at mostly at low concentrations. The Chloride concentration varies from 5.4 to 216.8 mg/l. The concentrations in all the wells are within the maximum permissible limit 1000 mg/l as prescribed by Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) for drinking water purpose.

Fluoride- The fluoride element is required in the small amount for the human body but it is dan-

gerous in large amount. The concentration of fluoride ion in majority of the samples (93.2%) is within acceptable limit of 1.0 mg/l.

Nitrate Distribution- Nitrate concentration in 88.8% samples is low, but high values are also reported in some of the samples (11.2%). The overuse of fertilizers, bacterial nitrification of organic nitrogen, seepage from animal and human waste, and atmospheric inputs are the most likely causes of nitrate pollution of groundwater.

Sulphate- Sulphate concentration varies in all the sample varies from 2.8 to 181.5 mg/l, and in all locations are within the permissible limit (400 mg/l) prescribed by BIS for drinking water purpose.

Hardness- It can be caused on by the carbonates, bicarbonates, sulphate, and other calcium and magnesium minerals found in groundwater. According to the classification of hardness, Out of 200 samples analysed, 175 samples fall in the hard group (200-600 mg/l), while 3 samples are classified as very hard (more than 600 mg/l). 70 samples, or fewer than 200 mg/l of hardness, are found to be in the soft category. The BIS Standards, 200 and 600 mg/l is the acceptable and permissible limit respectively for total hardness in drinking water.

Calcium- In UT of J&K, the calcium concentration varies from 10.2 to 158 mg/l. The concentration in all the wells are within the maximum permissible limit up to 200 mg/l as prescribed by BIS for drinking water purpose. It is among the substances found in natural water most frequently. The neurological and muscular systems, the heart, and blood clotting all depend on calcium. Higher calcium content can result in kidney, bladder, and other stone formation as well as irritation of the urinary tract.

Magnesium- The Magnesium concentration varies from 4.9 to 105.5 mg/l. In 205 samples Mag-

nesium concentration are less than 30 mg/l i.e. within desirable limits whereas 43 samples are with high values than the acceptable limits but are less than the 100 mg/l permissible limits prescribed by BIS. Only 2 samples have shown magnesium concentration >100 mg/l.

Uranium- All samples that were obtained have also had their uranium analysed. The World Health Organization's permitted limit of 30 ppb was not met by any of the samples, showing that uranium contamination is not present at shallow water levels.

From the samples analysis collected from various part of UT of J&K by CGWB, it is concluded that Jammu & Kashmir's groundwater is deemed to be of drinkable quality. The chloride concentrations are well within the BIS-recommended range, indicating that salinity is not a problem in J&K UT. Concerns about pollution include the presence of nitrate in groundwater. Nitrate concentrations in groundwater can rise as a result of septic tank and sewage discharge combining with other groundwater sources, among other things. The majority of the groundwater falls into the hard to very hard category, which might cause digestive issues. Groundwater pollution issues include those involving iron (Fe) (Pir Panjal and the Kashmir valley), swampy gases (in the shallow and deep aquifers of the Kashmir valley), and fluoride in certain locations including parts of the Doda district.

Some important steps need to be taken in collaborative efforts at societal level in order to improve the quality of water- (I) In order to prevent bacteriological contamination such coliform bacteria suitable well head protection measures must be adopted. (II) Proper sewage and sanitation should be done all over the UT. (III) Improper disposal of domestic and industrial solid wastes should be treated separately with specific arrangements. (IV) Research initiatives on groundwater contamination, particularly geo-genic contaminants such iron, gases, and fluoride, need to be launched right now. (V) A complete data base must be built and the already-existing quality data base with various organisations, including the CGWB, PHED, State pollution control board, academic institutions like Jammu University, and Kashmir University, needs to be connected.

Thus to achieve the SDG goal 6 -Safe and affordable drinking water, sanitation facilities, and hygiene for all by 2030, the above mentioned steps need to be implemented with utmost sincerity and responsibility need to be taken by each and every individual.

You talk about Manipur I talk about Bengal

B L Saraf

Manipur is in the news for nearly three months. The state has been burning in sectarian violence since May and the orgy goes on unabated. Over 150 persons have been killed and thousands displaced since the onset of madness. The worst sufferers have been the women folk. Irrespective of caste, color and creed, they have been subjected to worst kinds of sexual crimes. The tragic part of the story is that, by and large, people in the mainland haven't shown commensurate indignation, as if Manipur was not part of the country. The lack of sensitivity on the part of people matches only with the callousness of the state and central authorities displayed by not addressing the issue. It took a disturbing video clip of two women from the Kukli-Zomi community being striped naked and forced to walk naked, allegedly, by Meiti men for country to shake up. Even PM Narendra Modi was moved to come out with a strong statement.

It has become the most disreputable tale which political parties of all hues make us - the miserable mortals - hear every day. And, the tale is "Your crime versus my crime." The parties waging the battle are, BJP (NDA) on one side and the Congress) I.N.D.I.A on the other. This has turned into a competition in absurdities which we have been witnessing for quite a time now. Three years back it was the " Hathras Shame " where a 19 year old girl of the village Hathras, in State of

the UP, was allegedly raped and then murdered by some young men of the locality. Her dead body was surreptitiously disposed of in dead of the night. The heinous act caused a widespread anger among the countrymen. UP CM Yogi Adityanath and his administration came in the firing line. Finding itself cornered, the BJP soon shifted the scene to Rajasthan where, incidentally, the graph of crime committed against women was also on the rise, as it is today. So, then INC and CM Gehlot had to face the music. Today again CM Rajasthan and his administration is in the dock on similar kind of charges. The Congress and I.N.D.I.A cannot be selective in showing indignation. They too will have to answer some unpleasant questions.

Similar pattern is revealing. When asked to explain the worsening Manipur situation the BJP spokesperson bring in West Bengal, where violence broke out in run up to the latest local body elections and in the aftermath. True, Kolkata has done no good to its name when it comes to stem crimes against the women. Mamata Didi must explain. She should be reprimanded on her laxity to curb incidents of sexual assault on the women. Centre must instruct state Government to enforce law and order, strictly. Who is stopping them? But, given the humongous nature of the death and destruction it would be wrong to draw parallel between Manipur situation and that of West Bengal. Women in former case have become an easy

object to settle the sectarian and political issue. Rape has been weaponised and, in away, used to subdue people of a particular sect in the state.

Leaving party politics apart, the question begs answer: will a crime committed against women in one state, ruled by one political party, get condoned by a commission of similar kind of crime in other state, ruled by other political dispensation? Does it behove great nation like India to see crime of rape through a politically colored glass? Be it Manipur, West Bengal, UP or Rajasthan -these are the Units which together with others make India a great nation. Therefore, these petty minded politicians must understand that, no matter, wherever a crime against women takes place it brings shame to the whole country. Manipur incidents have, indeed, invited world attention to the sordid happenings. And when an element of caste and class is interjected in the sordid drama the society at large gets lacerated. We have been repeatedly saying that a rape is not only an assault on the physical body of the victim but also it totally destroys her emotional and psychological being.

There should be no hesitation in accepting that ours has become a decadent society. Such abhorrent crimes don't prick our conscience, anymore. Some people tend to find comfort in commission of a crime in one state only to set off the hue and cry generated by the same kind of crime in other state which is liking to their preference. It is vice-

versa for others on the same perverse reasoning. Parallels are often odious. Perhaps, that explains our indifference and shrug off attitude towards these diabolical offences: with the result the perpetrators walkout scot free with a sense of impunity.

Our moral fabric has worn out, thanks largely to a cunning and manipulative politician. The most shameful side of the story is that in order to evade responsibility and accountability we tend to draw false equivalences even in the commission of crime.

A present day politician doesn't see anything beyond his narrow interests. That is why rather than discussing the humanitarian problem of Manipur in the Parliament some archaic Rule is resurrected to play adversarial politics and scuttle the debate. In this sordid drama of one upmanship every political actor plays a role which suits his own and his party's script. These days men in politics do not rely on agenda of social reconstruction, or for that matter any agenda, except the manipulative one which ensures their hold on political and administrative power. Political parties believe in event management and distraction from the real issues confronted by the people. Someone has very aptly said that people get what they deserve. What we have been witnessing since decades on the political theatre, the adage rings true in our case.

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