

Encroachment Drive

Jammu and Kashmir was one of the largest princely states before partition, even after independence, despite the vast area illegally occupied by Pakistan, now known as POJK. Due to the abundance of natural beauty throughout Jammu and Kashmir, the region should have played a significant role in its transformation into a popular tourist destination. A peek into history will reveal that whoever occupied the seat of power treated the state as personal property. The saner voices of Jammu and Kashmir were stifled by this attitude and special status. Politicians and the bureaucratic nexus played havoc as state land and resources were plundered beyond one's imagination. Jammu City was only limited from Panthirithi to Gumat at the time of partition, with massive gates installed that were closed at night. The same was the situation in Srinagar, at one time both capital cities had one police station each, 'City Thanna' at Jammu and 'Kothi Bagh' at Srinagar. Cities expanded, municipalities were formed, and gradually, the wheel of development should have taken Jammu and Kashmir to dazzling heights of progress and development. But so-called leaders of the masses were busy amassing their assets. State lands were leased for peanuts, and adjacent lands just encroached. When all this was going on, Gol was a mute spectator, just turning a blind eye to every wrongdoing of the state's ruling class. Bureaucrats also plunged into this Ponzi scheme, with the result that lakhs of kanals of land are now illegally encroached upon. Practically, there is no land for development projects. All town planning agencies, including the JDA, Housing Board, Municipalities, and Revenue Department, failed to develop legal colonies, instead working hand in hand with encroachers to create a network of illegal colonies on state land, agricultural land, nullahs, wetlands, and any other land that no town planner will allow for colonization but has been encroached on with impunity. All this has cascading effects; electricity, water, roads, and resources cannot be planned for illegal colonies. Wrong projections result in chaotic results.

Gol and LG Administration have taken the matter seriously; lines have been drawn, and respective DCs and SSPs have been given clear-cut instructions. All DCs have to give daily projections, and by evening, compliance reports are thoroughly vetted by Divisional Commissioners. LG himself is monitoring the whole operation, and clear-cut instructions are there; no poor or rightful owner is made to suffer. The law of the land has to be established, and the efforts of the LG Administration in this direction are very much appreciated by the masses. The affected politicians and influential people are attempting to incite the public with false rumours and illogical reasoning, but this will not work any longer. The public is ecstatic, eagerly awaiting the next big catch. Authorities are punishing anyone who has ever encroached on the land, whether opposition or ruling class and they must now face the music of demolition. Sooner or later, every encroacher will get evicted.

It will be much more appreciated if all the encroachers are also booked as per the law; leaving them scot-free will deliver only part of the justice. Officials involved in this nexus must also be investigated, including how respective DCs, Revenue officials, and police officers in charge permitted these illegal activities. The Government must initiate action against them; an example has to be set for future generations, no one is above the law.

Investigate Doda subsidence

The Joshimath subsidence incident has left the whole nation shocked and perplexed. Can the cost of environmental and ecological degradation be so high? And the answer is yes; nature pays back with time. The same kind of subsidence has now been observed at a colony in Doda, where cracks have started appearing and are widening. Initially, only a few houses were affected, but the number increased overnight. The matter is quite serious, and a Geological Survey of India team has been deputed to ascertain the cause. The granulometric analysis will reveal the type of soil and rock beneath the surface. It is important to notice that there has been no heavy rainfall in the recent past to which this subsidence can be attributed. Practically, percolation intensity in weak murree can be the possible cause, and if it is, then it has to be taken seriously. The matter has to be investigated deeply, is the reason then Scientific reasoning has to be applied and conclusions are drawn. The administration took the matter lightly initially when only a few houses were affected and acted only when more houses also started developing cracks. The government school has been made a temporary safe house, which can never be a permanent solution. Some long-term planning must be devised, and affected families must be given compensation and rehabilitated at an alternative location. We cannot speculate on what has caused the subsidence; the root cause must be delineated, the sustenance of lives is crucial, and a save-off must be assured.

Dr Varinder Sharma

After the approval of administrative council, the Jammu and Kashmir government is likely to impose property tax, a first of its kind in the Union Territory (UT), from April 1 this year and every political and business organisation is opposing it in their own way, Awami National Conference (ANC) being more vocal than others. This, another family run outfit which is also part of People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) led by its vice president, Muzaffar Shah went on to telling a news portal and I quote, "Nahi Denge Property Tax (We will not give property tax) and on being asked why not when entire India is paying, he added, "India is not Kashmir".

Prior to this, many political stalwarts had tried and tested waters by believing that Article 370 will never be abrogated or 73rd and 74th amendments of the Constitution, that give urban local bodies distinct powers to focus on the grassroots level or encourage self-governance, will never be extended to Jammu and Kashmir. However, those opposed to decentralisation of powers and against giving women, west Pakistani refugees or Valmiki Samaj equal rights themselves saw tables turning on them.

The erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir which became a Union Territory after the smooth passage of J&K Reorganisation Act was in fact known to be a corrupt state with no sign of good governance visible anywhere. Transparency and accountability were lacking which is why employees never filled in their annual property returns or paid property tax, never marked their attendances, Human Resource Management (HRM) was lacking, concept of leaves and annual performances lacked to the core and most shockingly many got government jobs on fake degrees, diplomas and even fake appointment orders.

Similar was the situation with civic amenities. Since there existed no elected Municipal Corporations, Councils and Town Area Committees besides Panchayats and only bureaucrats ruled the system; water, electricity, garbage collection charges, parking charges and all other taxes with which cities and towns are beautified or developed were never paid. Today GST and Income

Why is property tax pinching?

Tax (IT) returns are being filed online and massive computerization of public services have also brought a transparency in the system. Now when people are being asked to mend their ways and stay in an organised manner like everyone else is doing in rest of the country, it's pinching many.

On the other hand, the government is also required to go little slow and make everything known to the common masses beforehand so that they know what's coming their way. Several projects of importance started by Smart City that are irking commoners and especially traders should

be levied on all lands and buildings or vacant lands or both situated within the Municipal limits.

Presently chosen few corrupt, influential and sycophants who had managed to acquire properties without being answerable to anyone are the first ones to feel the heat of these taxes. They are the ones who are making much hue and cry while responsible citizens, who know how Municipal Corporations around the globe work, are preparing to get their properties assessed to pay taxes as applicable.

Today, illegal encroachments are coming



also be made known to people as to how they will benefit them so that they also cooperate with the government. Regarding property tax, government must come clear on slabs for different properties and make a humble beginning by levying a nominal tax so that people make a beginning which at later stages can be increased as per the law of land.

Ever since Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization (Adaptation of State Laws) Order, 2020 was passed, the ministry of home affairs amended the Jammu and Kashmir Municipal Act, 2000 and the Jammu and Kashmir Municipal Corporation Act, 2000. Under this law the Property Tax will be

down in entire UT and on the other hand those in possessions of huge properties, though legally, are being levied taxes to bring everything at par with rest of the nation. To avoid huge taxes, majority people in other metro cities prefer to live in high rise buildings but herein J&K we were all in a never ending mad race with others to build palatial homes and acquire properties knowingly that they will never be taxed, a misconception that people nurtured for the past 75 years.

I remember having awarded Bronze category Certificate of appreciation for paying my taxes in the year 2019-20, which dons my clinic wall. This small gesture from IT department makes tax pay-

er feel important and part of building this great nation. Both UT as well as central government must encourage genuine tax payers and also honour top five tax payers of cities every year and also extend certain privileges to them. These tax payers can also be invited at Raj bhavan during Republic Day or Independence Day celebrations.

Earlier Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in Jammu and Kashmir were not elected and due to that reason a sizeable central grant used to be released. Now when the property tax will be levied the ULBs will get good amount of grant to develop cities. We are planning to have metro rail, build parking areas, develop parks and roads, river view fronts, are laying a network of footpaths and have already have handed certain departments like health centers, schools, Jal Shakti and electrification of roads to JMC which mean we will be requiring more grants to meet the expenses and property tax is one such source that will fill coffers.

Previous Mayor of JMC or the incumbent had been telling people that property tax will not be levied which is nothing but misguiding people. Instead, they should tell the truth that how these taxes will bring an order into the system and also make cash starved ULBs rich enough to become self-sufficient. In any way, the government is planning to first levy taxes on commercial buildings. Later on when residential buildings will come under the purview of property tax but the government must exempt certain homes so that poor are not affected. The heritage homes that depict Jammu's typical architecture should also be exempted from the property taxes.

Property Tax Board before deciding slabs must consider these points in mind to save our heritage and also help small businessmen who are running from garages or homes and are generating employment by not taxing them. Ex-servicemen, widows of ex-servicemen, crematoriums and graveyards besides charitable buildings must also be given exemptions in property tax. Mean-time people are also required to cooperate and not act like they are living in a Jungle. In a civilised society, we are all required to contribute to develop our cities. This is for the first time Jammu as well as Srinagar is seeing massive development and paying taxes honestly will boost this development by all means.

(The writer is practicing Ultrasonologist)

Communalism, Casteism and Pol Violence

Ram Rattan Sharma

Among the diverse challenges that Indian democracy is facing today, not only for the survival of the system, but also of the people and community, quite serious challenges are those of communalism and casteism. They are afflicting our national life, social relations, disrupting the bonds of unity among the people and affecting the process of development, communal and caste tensions are disturbing the social peace and order, diverting the state resources from developmental activities to unproductive expenditure on maintenance of law and order. What is more disturbing is the fact that these phenomena are affecting even those sections of society, which are generally, considered to be modern, tolerant and liberal. It is generally said, that technological and economic development leads to the decline of traditional, irrational beliefs and integrations and the emergence of new bonds of socio economic roles, under estimates communal and caste identities. But in India even after more than 75 years of independence, in spite of modernization and industrialization, tremendous expansion of education and urbanization, it is, important to cope with these challenges. And for that, it is necessary that we understand what these problems are. What are the causes for their emergence and growth and what can be done to tackle them.

Communal is a multi dimensional complex, social phenomena. There are social, political, economic, cultural and religious factors, which account for the genesis of communalism and communal violence. It has generally been seen that determining the role in creating communalism is not played by religion but by non-religious forces. Careful scrutiny of the demands which have been and are made by communal leaders will reveal the true channel and objective of communal politics under the mask of religion, tradition and culture. Seen in historical context, British imperialism used it as a divide and rule policy. The same has been continued by vested interests after independence using various factors. The British administration was more interested in the exploitation of India and not in its welfare. Reaction to this was

the emergence and growth of nationalism posing a serious threat to the continuation of colonial rule. It served the colonial administration to divide and rule. They therefore nurtured and promoted religious differences. They first projected social and cultural variations and then promoted Pol divisions by playing up social, economic and political claims of Hindus, Muslims, Tribals and lower castes. The communal award, separate electorates, recognition of communal demands, etc, in fact the type of politics approved, tolerated and encouraged by the British imperialism was solely communal politics. It is in this historical context that communalism came to acquire the meaning of being opposed to national identity of being against secularization process, of being too narrowly and negatively attached to one's own religious community and use of religion for Pol purposes. Response to colonial rule was nationalism and national movement, unfortunately, it could not counter the British policy of divide and rule. As such, both the policies of British colonial administration and failure of the national movement to counter that on a firm social and secular basis, helped consolidating communal, caste, Tribal and linguistic identities. The most serious consequence of this was the partition of India and its after math in Independent India.

At the time of Independence, as a result of British colonial policies and other factors mentioned above, there was an atmosphere of various religious, linguistic, caste and cultural groups having gone into narrow sectarian loyalties. In this situation, the partition of the country on religious basis and consequent violence surcharged the communal situation. Minorities were feeling a bit insecure and worried about their future position in independent India. The new government and the framers of the constitution were very much concerned for unity and integrity of the country. All these were the values to which the national movement was committed. Farmers of the constitution, therefore rightly decided to establish India as a secular state. It means respect for all religions and no support or favour to any religion by the state. Along with secularism were adopted democracy and a commitment to eco-

nomical development. It was expected that in a secular democratic set up Government and people would get involved in an economic development collectively thereby building a new Indian society. What was expected was a new Pol culture based on full respect for human liberty, justice and equality.

Socio-Eco causes:- At the time of independence resources were limited and expectations were very high. In this situation planning was introduced to maintain a balanced development. But the planning could not achieve the desired goals as a whole. Soon, there emerged a competition for limited resources. In this competition the vested interests found an easy way to mobilize people on caste, communal and regional basis to demand better share. Similarly, the Pol parties and governments have failed to fulfill the expectations of people, used religion and tradition as diverting tactics. Almost all political parties have failed to keep their promises for removing inequalities or poverty and afraid of people's wrath in elections to create and raise communal issues. While the constitutional framework provides a strong basis for the separation of democracy and religion, the actual practice of democracy has revealed that the political parties and governmental functionaries have not been able to internalize the constitutional framework, religious rituals are being used at state functions. Needless to say, the introduction of the universal adult franchise was a bold and revolutionary step on the part of the founders of the Indian constitution. But unfortunately, soon after independence, political parties and politicians rather than strengthening democratic traditions of competing on the basis of programmes and ideologies, started looking for easy ways of mobilizing voters. They found in religion and caste easy factors to strengthen their vote banks. The law in India does not debar political parties to be organized on the basis of caste or religion. The use of religion in electoral politics and in nomination of candidates and campaigning on communal appeal has accentuated the process of communalism to a serious level. The marriage of politics and religion has

led to the growing accidents of communal hatred. Mosques, temples and Gurudwaras are being used not only for political mobilization, but also to stockpile arms and weapons. Communal and quasi-religious groups are emerging as Pol organizations. Religious passions are being whipped up for the sake of Pol power. Communal issues are being given importance and the real issue of socio-economic development and transformation are being sidelined.

Measures to combat communalism:- Communalism should be dealt with an iron hand. The Government should not yield to communal pressures. The formation of Pol parties on communal lines should not be encouraged. Pol parties should either evolve a code of conduct not to use religion for electioneering or let the election commission or parliament enact such a code, we need State machinery which is efficient, strong and impartial enough to put down communalism and communal violence and ensure safety to all sections of the society. Pol, religious or other compulsions should not be allowed to come on the way of this. Educational system must be reconstructed to emphasize the composite nature of our culture and in calculate secular and scientific temper among young students. We have to realize that communalism hinders social and economic change, which is so essential for all of us. If the Pol process is not de communalised then democracy itself is likely to perish. The alternative to democracy is fascism or dictatorship. The history of many countries is proof that fascism and dictatorship are good neither for the majority nor for minorities.

The need of the hour is to face this challenge to democracy, development and social harmony in a proper way.

Those who are exploiting ordinary people's emotions, their religious beliefs and ignorance need to be exposed. Since religion teaches respect to others and tolerance. It never teaches violence. Existence of different religions, therefore, does not lead to communalism. It is fundamentalism and communalism which is distorting it.

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Blueprint for India @100

Arvind Gupta

The critiques might say it is sedative for the people till the next general elections, and label it a pre-election budget. But mind it budget making is a complex task and interpreting the same is more hazardous given the amount of fine print that one has to pore over. It is the first Budget of Amrit Kaal and the blueprint for India @100.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is the sixth minister in independent India to present five consecutive budget, joining a select league of legends likes of Manmohan Singh, Arun Jaitley and P Chidambaram. Sitharaman's budget for the fiscal year starting April 2023 is her fifth straight since 2019. Other ministers who have presented five straight annual financial statements include Arun Jaitley, P Chidambaram, Yashwant Sinha, Manmohan Singh and Morarji Desai.

Union minister Nirmala Sitharaman chose a bright red saree with a black border for her 5th Budget on Wednesday. The finance minister's love for handloom saree is nothing new, but her choice of attire on the Budget day always remains a subject of interest for experts looking for any hint about the overall mood of the budget for the colour she chooses to wear.

This first Budget in Amrit Kaal includes overall development that ensures prosperity for all, especially the youth, women, farmers, Other Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, a focus on infrastructure and investment that serves as a multiplier for growth and employment, policies to enable green or environmentally sustainable growth, the rationalisation of direct taxes, including a raft of concessions to the middle and salaried classes, and pensioners. The

Budget speech of Finance Minister started in the backdrop of the achievements since 2014, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi first assumed office. Per capita income, she said, had more than doubled to ₹1.97 lakh as a result of the economy's growth to being the world's fifth-largest and the government's efforts to ensure a better quality of living for all. She also cited an increase in formalisation of the economy and the widespread adoption of digital technologies, especially in the payments sphere, as other significant achievements.

With an eye on 'India at 100', the Budget proposals, Ms. Sitharaman said, were aimed at actualising a "technology-driven and knowledge-based economy with strong public finances, and a robust financial sector". PM VIKAS or Pradhan Mantri Vishwakarma Kaushal Samman, for instance, would for the first time offer traditional artisans and craftspeople, or Vishwakarmas, a package of assistance aimed at helping them improve the quality, scale and reach of their products, she said. Similarly, a 'Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Incomes' or 'MISHIT', aimed at undertaking mangrove plantation along the coastline and on salt pan lands leaves the funding to a "convergence between MGNREGS and a compensatory afforestation fund". With the rural sector's mainstay employment guarantee scheme, one that was introduced during the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government's term, itself increasingly being starved of budgetary support, it is hard to fathom how the new initiative to protect and regenerate the ecologically sensitive mangroves will be funded. The decrease in outlay comes at a time when the rural economy is still to regain vigour from the ravages of the pandemic, the fallout on incomes from the uneven distribution of last year's

monsoon rainfall, and the relatively greater impact of high food inflation on hinterland households.

FM's seven 'Saptarishi' mantras

Among the key takeaways includes Budget estimate for expenditure on rural development in 2023-24 is pegged at ₹2.38 lakh crore, a marginal 0.1 percentage point increase when measured as a proportion of overall expenditure at 5.3%, compared with the 5.2% in the previous Budget Estimate. Food subsidy too has been sharply pared: at ₹1.97 lakh crore, it is almost 5% lower than the 2022-23. To be sure, the government's resolve to stay the course on fiscal consolidation, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic had led it to spend more even as revenue receipts dipped amid the unprecedented economic contraction. Capital expenditure has been allocated ₹10 lakh crore, a 33% jump from this fiscal's Budget estimate. If one adds the almost ₹3.7 lakh crore set aside for grants-in-aid to States for the creation of capital assets, the Minister's laudable intent to apply the force multiplier of government capital spending as the primary lever to spur economic activity becomes clearly evident. With global demand uncertain this year on account of the slowdown in the developed economies, as the Economic Survey pertinently pointed out, India's domestic market will necessarily have to serve as the economy's bulwark. Ms. Sitharaman has also attempted to woo the middle class with a raft of changes in personal income tax that would, in combination with tweaks to customs duties, in total cost the government ₹37,000 crore in foregone direct tax revenue. Some of these changes are aimed at leaving more money in the hands of the salaried and pensioners, cash that the Budget planners hope would find its way back either as savings or increased spending

on vital consumption. The biggest beneficiaries of the income-tax changes though are likely to be those in the highest income bracket, where the effective rate has been cut by 3.74 percentage points reinforcing a perception that this government bats for the affluent.

Five big things one can't miss

* FM announced an increase in the income tax rebate limit from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 7 lakh stating that the new tax regime will now be the default tax regime. She also proposed to change the tax structure in this regime by reducing the number of tax slabs to 5 and increasing the tax exemption limit to Rs 3 lakh.

* FM proposed to raise the capital expenditure target by 33% to Rs. 10 lakh crore for the next fiscal year starting April 1, which is 3.3% of the country's economic output.

* Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman provided an outlay of Rs 35,000 crore to achieve energy transition and net zero objectives and listed green growth among seven priorities of the government.

* Government said that a capital outlay of Rs 2.4 lakh crore has been provided for railways, which is highest-ever allocation since 2013-14. Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that the capital outlay was fixed for 2023-24.

* Government will target a budget deficit of 5.9% of GDP for 2023/24, compared to 6.4% for the current fiscal year.

Commenting on the Budget, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said "...India's budget will not only fulfil the hopes and dreams of the common man of India, but the ray of hope which the world is seeing should be seen more brightly..."

(The author is State Secretary & Prabhari District Reasi, J&P Jammu & Kashmir UT)