

CIC acts tough

The Central Information Commission (CIC) has taken serious note of several officers of the Jammu and Kashmir Government deliberately creating obstruction and delay in providing information requested under the Right to Information Act, 2005. The CIC has sought explanations from the Deputy Director, Manager (Personnel), and two other officers of different departments in this regard. The repeated violations of the RTI Act by various government offices in Jammu and Kashmir are a serious matter that requires immediate attention.

The CIC has taken note of these violations and has sought explanations from the officers involved, as it has the authority to impose penalties on public officials found guilty of obstructing the dissemination of information or violating the provisions of the RTI Act. Show-cause notices have been issued to the officers and they are expected to provide explanations for their actions. The CIC needs to address these violations and take appropriate action to ensure that the RTI Act is implemented effectively. By holding the responsible officers accountable, the CIC sends a strong message that such misconduct will not be tolerated and emphasises the importance of timely information disclosure. However, it is ultimately the responsibility of the concerned authorities, including the First Appellate Authorities, to act promptly and responsibly in fulfilling their obligations under the RTI Act. Swift action against those who misuse their authority or cause undue delays is crucial to maintaining the integrity of the RTI process and upholding the rights of information seekers.

There could be multiple reasons why some offices fail to provide information on time. Whatever the reasons, the government must address these issues through awareness campaigns, training programmes, and effective monitoring mechanisms. There should be a culture of transparency and accountability instilled within government offices, with strict adherence to the timelines prescribed by the RTI Act. Regular monitoring and review of the implementation of the Act can help identify and address the bottlenecks and challenges faced by public officials.

More importantly, as the cases point out, multiple officers within the same department have ignored their obligations under the RTI Act by failing to provide the requested information. This pattern of non-compliance indicates a systemic issue within the department that needs to be addressed. When multiple officers in succession fail to fulfil their responsibilities as PIOs and do not respond to RTI applications, it raises questions about the culture of transparency and accountability within the department. To address this issue, the higher authorities in the department and the government need to conduct an inquiry into the reasons behind this repeated non-compliance and ensure that appropriate measures are taken to rectify the situation.

It is expected that the CIC's actions and penalties if imposed, will serve as a deterrent to future violations and encourage a more transparent and efficient implementation of the RTI Act. While the CIC has the authority to take action against non-compliant officers and officials, the onus lies on the local administration to address this issue. The government should prioritise the effective implementation of the RTI Act and ensure that all public officials understand their responsibilities under the law. Ultimately, the commitment to transparency and the effective implementation of the RTI Act must come from the highest offices of the government. It is their responsibility to ensure that the principles of the Act are upheld and that the necessary steps are taken to rectify any non-compliance. It may include disciplinary action against officials who repeatedly violate the provisions of the RTI Act and implementing systemic changes to improve the information dissemination process. By proactively tackling the problem and cultivating a culture characterised by openness, the government can cultivate an atmosphere where in every government department in Jammu and Kashmir values and upholds the RTI.

Ladakh's Vibrant Village Programme

The Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting recently visited Ladakh to have firsthand experience of the region as part of the Government's Vibrant Village Programme. Ladakh has a vast and tough terrain with a scattered population that was devoid of basic amenities for decades in the past. As Ladakh became a UT, things started improving rapidly. Within a short span of four years, the administration has come up with numerous development projects to improve infrastructure, which includes roads, hospitals, schools, colleges, and universities, to name a few. As the population is scattered in remote areas in small pockets, digital connectivity was a big issue. Hundreds of new mobile towers have been installed, and broadband connectivity through fibre optics has improved exponentially. Cable TV connectivity is not possible in the entire Ladakh, as such, the Ministry is trying to ensure the provision of free Dordarshan DTH connections in far-flung areas located in villages along the Indo-China border. The aim is to improve access to television broadcasts in these remote regions.

The minister had a three-day stay and visited three remote villages, among other places. The minister's primary objective was to assess the progress and reach of various government projects and schemes to gain a firsthand understanding of the challenges faced by residents and security forces in remote border villages along the Indo-China border. Further efforts are being made on a priority basis for improved digital and road connectivity, enhanced tourism infrastructure, sports facilities, and better access to clean water. The visit signifies that the development of Ladakh is a prime focus of the government; many things have been done, and much more is already in the works. All these collective efforts are significant steps towards empowering rural communities, improving their living standards, and fostering sustainable development in the region. With dedicated efforts and a collaborative approach, the government aims to create vibrant and self-reliant villages in Ladakh that will contribute to the progress and prosperity of the nation.

Abdul Rashid Khan

Menace of drug abuse in Kashmir

some govt; departments by ignoring its disastrous effects on our youth, are also other contributory factors for spreading this abuse. The parents and the teachers have an important role to play for the prevention of drug addiction. With the increasing standard of living and flow of money the parents do exercise very little or some time no supervision on the activities of their children. The same is the case with the teachers in some schools, where teachers do not think it as their moral duty to check and supervise the activities of their students during school hours. The culture of learning in private tuition institutions has made the things worst. The mushroom growth of these private coaching



centres besides becoming traffic hazard, have also turned into business centres. Neither the owner nor any member of their staff working in these coaching classes bother to have any supervision on the activities of students in or outside the premises of these centres.

The heads of the education institutions particularly high and higher secondary school are supposed to check the quality of snacks sold to students in school canteens so that no drugs such as opium or bhang is mixed with the ice cream, parkordas or in any other eatable items. The heads of the institutions also need to keep an eye on the vendors who are selling ice cream or fast food items, outside school premises. Some anti-social elements have now shifted to poppy cultivation in their agriculture land not only in the rural areas but

also in suburbs of district Srinagar, to earn quick and high returns. The concerned officials of revenue and Excise departments have to come into action not only by destroying the bhang and poppy crop but also slap heavy fine on the owners of such land.

The prevention is always better than cure. If we are successful in containing the supply and availability of narcotics drugs we are then almost close to our mission in eradicating this menace. Prevention is better if we try to nip the evil in bud. The trade via URI border has also contributed to this menace as the neighbouring country is always bent upon in disturbing the peace and tranquillity of the U.T and destroying the future of youth of Kashmir. The police need to play a crucial role in curbing this menace by getting the accurate information about the persons who indulge in drug trafficking and illicit peddling. The police should be ruthless in dealing with these anti-social elements. Though the law provides major punishment for such heinous crimes but some time the criminals manage to get themselves freed on bail.

We have seen that it takes lot of time for prosecutors to get cases decided in courts due to legal niceties. The prosecutors therefore need to work hard to make cases foolproof so that the criminals do not go escort free.

The conviction rate in such cases is also not encouraging. Application of PSA in some rare cases on habitual offenders could serve as deterrent for such criminals. It is heartening to note that the police in Kashmir have become very active in recent times while dealing effectively with such crime. The recent press reports regarding crack-down on supply channels by Kashmir police is a good step towards controlling this abuse. The J&K police have earned a good name for its working whether it is crime or militancy or law and order. It is considered as one of the best police forces in the country. The J&K police feel pride in receiving

President's "COLOUR" for fighting militancy and efficient crime work, a rare honour which only few states in country have achieved so far. The award was presented to Gopal Sharma then DGP by the then president of India late A.P.G Abdul Kalam in 2003 at police Academy Udhampur. The society has pinned lot of hope on Kashmir police and therefore they expect from them, an active and encouraging participation in the fight against drug trafficking and illicit peddling.

So far as de-addiction of the victims of drug abuse is concerned, the J&K police have been the pioneer in establishing the drug de-addiction centre, long back in 1990, at police Hospital, PCR Batmalloo. The doctors in police hospital have achieved a lot of success in treating and rehabilitating number of such patients. This way the police have done a good job as part of their social service. Of late the state health department has also opened de-addiction and counselling centres in various hospitals particularly at SKIMS Medical college Bemina. The Bemina medical college is also doing good work in this regard and have organised seminars and debates, educating people how to treat and rehabilitate such patients. In the month June 2023, they also organised a power point programme in the office of "Help Foundation" for the members of a 'GCC' a non political group of civil society to educate them about causes of drug abuse and its disastrous effects. To warn the youth who fall prey to the peddlers about the disastrous effects of drug abuse need to be given wide publicity through print and electronic media. There should be a complete ban on the sale of disposal syringes and morphine injection to adolescents not having doctor's prescription. Those medical stores and pharmacies who indulge in illegal sale of these items need to be black listed and prosecuted. We have to after all break this supply chain if we are sincere to protect our youth from falling prey to this menace. It can be ultimately controlled by the joint efforts of members of the society, the educational institutes, Excise, revenue, health departments and last but not the least by the police and parents of the children.

(The author is former IPS Officer)

Raman Suri

Consequential 'AI' friendship

India under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has reached a new high, where the world is learning many new ways of life from our country. It was during the pandemic that the world learnt to do 'Namaste' instead of handshake and acknowledged that India's way of greeting is respectful and hygienic in nature. Prior to that, on the proposal of PM Narendra Modi, United Nations declared Yoga as an International Day, making it mandatory for the world to adopt this age-old Indian technique of keeping body and mind healthy.

Now the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to United States of America (USA) again set a new narrative of respecting elders and those whom one keeps in high esteem. Back home, when opposition was maintaining a criminal silence on India's achievements in the US, prominent African-American Hollywood actress and singer, Mary Millben not only sang Indian National Anthem but also touched the feet of PM Modi. This was rare, especially when Modi bowed down and tried to stop her from doing so.

In May 2023, during PM Modi's visit to Papua New Guinea, the Pacific Island nation's Prime Minister touched the feet of PM Modi as a mark of respect. A similar gesture was witnessed during his departure from the country as a man along with a woman bowed down in front of the Prime Minister with their heads touching the ground, as seen in visuals from the airport. PM Modi promptly reciprocated their gesture by bowing with folded hands. That is the humbleness of our Prime Minister.

The crux is that the world is adopting Indian culture, not because anyone is imposing it on anyone but because under the dynamic leadership of PM Modi, India is earning it. Known for his witty quotes and answers, when Prime Minister Modi referred to AI as not just Artificial Intelligence but

America-India (AI) relationship, President Joe Biden was quick enough to get a special T-shirt printed, which had PM Modi's famous quote "The future is AI-America and India" and presented the same to Modi. He even described AI friendship to be among the most consequential in the world.

With technology cooperation between India and the US gaining new heights, addressing the joint session of the US Congress for the historic second time, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that it is an exceptional privilege to do it twice, adding that, "In the past few years, there have been many advances in AI - Artificial Intelligence. At the same time, there have been even more momentous developments in another AI - America and India." This new acronym coined by PM Modi literally made senators applaud and give a standing ovation to the PM.

While opposition parties, which are struggling to come on a common platform are mum over the Indo-US agreements on defence and other sectors, China is worried. This establishes that India has reached a stage where no nation across the globe wants to annoy it or stay out of picture. The fear of China about strong Indo-US relations itself indicates that India is progressing by leaps and bounds. The recent agreements between the oldest and the largest democracies of the world have sent a strong message to other nations that India is no more a country of snake charmers but a nation which is thriving to lead the world in technological advances and economic prosperities.

Having led the Yoga celebrations at the United Nations headquarters in New York from the front, addressed joint session of the US Congress, led Indian delegation and Indian diaspora inside the White House and convinced US entrepreneurs to invest in India besides made US change its H1B visa policies and recognise Indians' contribution in the US economy, Narendra Modi has established that he thinks out of the box and can lead

the nation even in 2024. His matchless abilities have taken India to a place where Indians living in other nations are feeling proud. This will not be visible to the opposition but it hardly matters as long as India is getting strengthened.

Prime Minister Modi, on his first-ever state visit to the United States in 2014, had received a ceremonial welcome upon his arrival at the White House. In 2016, he returned to attend the Nuclear Security Summit and held a meeting with the then-US President Barack Obama at the White House. That same year, PM Modi made another trip to the US and addressed a wide range of topics, including terrorism, climate change, and the strong Indo-US partnership, in his first speech to the US Congress. Ever since he assumed the office of the Prime Minister of India, he is going strong to make India get its long-awaited due recognition and it is happening on the global stage now.

During the recent visit of PM Modi to the US, the atmosphere with regards to India, its culture, and its strengths was so surcharged that even the US Vice President Kamala Harris couldn't stop herself from remembering her visits to her grandparents in India. She said, "India's history and teachings have influenced and shaped the world", asserting "the country has inspired millions of people through its philosophy." India, according to her is a "very important" part of her life and that she is deeply connected to the country. She went on to add, "the history and teachings in India and of India have not only influenced me, they, of course, have shaped the entire globe."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's power-packed state visit to the US, with an address to the Indian community in Washington, remained historic. Earlier he had attended the State Department luncheon with Vice President Kamala Harris and US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and, also attended the State Dinner at the South Lawn of the White House hosted by US President Joe Biden

and First Lady Jill Biden. The dinner was attended by big names in the tech world and billionaire industrialists such as Mukesh Ambani, Google CEO Sunder Pichai and Apple CEO Tim Cook.

India under PM Modi is shining because shared values of democracy, equality and diversity are at its core. Our fast-growing economy, rapid digitization and commitment to the environment is also acknowledged by the world. These are not mere assurances, but the spoken words at international forums are getting translated on the ground with India fast-switching over to green energy and erasing its carbon footprints as soon as possible.

Having received a 19-gun salute, PM Modi was prompt in telling the world that the constitutions of both countries begin with the words 'We The People'. Now that India and USA are getting to collaborate in artificial intelligence, semi-conductors, space, and telecom, a first has been made by General Electric's aerospace arm which has teamed up with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited to make fighter jet engines for the Indian Air Force in India. Micron Technology, a prominent American chip maker is going to set up an assembly plant in Gujarat with total investment of \$2.75 billion.

Talks on stopping the Russia-Ukraine war besides fighting cross-border terrorism had also come up for discussion and it is for sure that no good nation would allow any terror activity to grow on its land. In a way the message is clear for those who are aiding and abetting terrorism that they will have to choose between prosperity and terrorism. While India and the US are entering into an agreement for space exploration, back home our opposition leaders are trying to forge an unholy alliance to stop this government from doing good and are continuing to indulge in petty politics that revolves around just regions or religions.

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Sudhanshu Tripathi

UCC: Its Philosophy and Vision

That recent Uniform Civil Code (UCC) initiative by the PM Modi has indeed stirred up the hornet's nest. There is clear polarization of almost the entire Muslim community in India, divided into numerous sects and sub-sects, against the proposed Code on grounds of interference into their personal laws, and violating their long held and so practiced distinct way of life style and religious faith and the related common practices pertaining to marriage, divorce, succession, minority rights etc.

In fact, the proposed UCC has to rationalise some of the most important areas of personal laws with respect to the Muslim and other communities viz. Marriage & Divorce; Adoption & Maintenance Succession & Inheritance; and Minority Rights & Guardianship. Because these have already become very much archaic and even brute in certain respects due to not conforming with the fast changing aspirations and needs of the modern and liberal progressive age in our national, international and global life, interacting with the fast moving globalized world. Today the mobile and internet has become the utmost necessity and the buzzword too for all, irrespective of caste, religion, community, language, region etc..

While the customary laws of the Hindu Community has been reformed continuously with changing requirements ever since the independence of the country, such laws in other communities obviously need to be reformed to make them join the national mainstream so that none may remain deprived of and excluded from the fruits of growth and development. If we look at the years immediately after the independence of India, the Land Ceiling Act, Zamindari Abolition Act and Abolition of the Privy Purse, Abolition of SatiPratha and more were implemented in the interest of making the country an egalitarian and progressive society for all citizens. And that continues with pace with several such codifications in various areas of necessity like Hindu Succession Act with recent amendment providing for married girl/s to inherit their due share in paternal property at par with her brother/s,

Hindu Marriage Act providing for Monogamy and such more.

Though not keeping direct connection with the UCC yet supporting the rationale behind it, the provisions of Right to Information and Right to Education are the much needed progressive laws to let the citizens accomplish the accruing benefits of socio-economic progress and prosperity, instead of remaining rooted into retrograde and archaic customs and traditions. This is why, the Prevention of Untouchability and Abolition of Titles were purposefully incorporated into the Constitution of India as Art. 17 and 18 respectively with this view in hand.



All these steps were welcomed by the entire countrymen as these were the desirable duty of the state in India. And that is enshrined into Part IV of the Constitution under title Directive Principles of State Policy. Though not justiciable as Part III regarding Fundamental Rights, the aforesaid Part IV directs the state to perform its solemn duty to carry ahead the nation towards the desired trajectory of overall growth and progress while inculcating scientific temper and modern outlook among all citizens thereby leading to a homogeneous, equalitar-

ian and egalitarian society.

That obviously demands bringing the other communities including Muslims, Jains, Buddhist, Christian, Iranians and other fringe sections of society in accordance with the above-mentioned goals and objectives so that they can amalgamate with each other to forge a strong bonding thereby leading to a strong and consolidated national whole. However, it doesn't mean that their personal preferences and likings based on religion, customs and conventions including language and dialect, dress, food and drink and community entertainments etc. will be sacrificed for the sake of national unity. In fact, that will add beauty to the consolidated whole

as unity in diversity. The unity in diversity is well-enshrined into our Constitution and that reflects the sagacity and visionary goals of our founding fathers in the Constituent Assembly who passionately championed the cause of national unity and social solidarity, that the evolving Indian nation has to consistently go through amidst stark dissimilarities and differences on aforesaid grounds among different communities constituting India as a nation.

That obviously brings into forefront the ques-

tion of tradition and modernity with each struggling with the other ever since independence. But it has never damaged our national unity so far in any way howsoever and that will never happen in future: thanks to the wisdom of our founding fathers. Indeed, this looks as the glaring philosophy behind the proposed UCC that all other communities including Muslims must understand as that inevitably comes into the way of the nation building process. Indeed the modern and progressive-liberal societies of today like England, France, Germany, America and more have already passed through such traumatic experiences that India is undergoing through.

Thus all Indian citizens, particularly Muslims, must come forward to make the country strong and consolidated as a modern and progressive nation, instead of remaining entrapped into obscure and orthodox religious and communal moorings, being interpreted and dictated by the hardliner Mullahs and Maulvis. These hardliners don't want to let the community progress and prosper as a modernational-social grouping of progressive citizens just for their own vested interests due to claiming themselves to be the harbinger of the community for accomplishing overall prosperity and well-being.

Unfortunately the unholy nexus between these self-imposed harbingers and partisan political parties in the country has already wrecked-havoc by sowing the seeds of antagonism between two communities either in the form of appeasement or deliberately engendering infightings or communal riots during the past many decades, so as to draw political mileage to win elections. This has unfortunately become a common fashion among political parties in India which are consistently reaping the dividends arising due to mutual differences between the two communities and others as well.

Against this backdrop, PM Modi's clarion call for the UCC has again provided them a golden opportunity to encash their narrow and partisan political interests, while keeping an eye over the forthcoming Lok Sabha Elections in 2024. This must stop forthwith as being contrary to the philosophy and vision of the UCC as well as our Constitution.

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