

Road Accidents

Accidents have become part and parcel of life in this jet age. Some are natural tragedies for which nothing can be done, but the rest are manmade and require a scientific approach to look for some viable solution. Our city roads and highways have become death traps with unusually high casualty figures, well above the national average. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the concerned authorities know the root causes but have never taken action to remove the bottlenecks. Over speeding, rash driving, wrong-way crossings, the condition of roads, pot-holes, roadside anti-accident railing, and many other reasons are well known but never taken care of except for meetings and assurances. After every major accident, knee-jerk reactions are there for a few days, and then again, the system of ignorance takes over. After repeated interjections from higher authorities, 100 unauthorised cuts have been plugged, crash barriers along 98.65 km are being built, and 3104-speed limit signage has also been erected since April 2022. These are a few welcome initiatives, but much more has to be done. No doubt all major accidents are due to human error, but the very fact that the condition of some highways is such that these errors from humans are automatically produced long, chaotic conditions on NHs results in waiting for hours on the road, rash driving, over speeding, and wrong overtaking, and the net result is an imminent death trap. The situation is serious; both the LG and the Chief Secretary are monitoring the progress, and some positive results are there. Each department has to work overtime to come out with immediate results. Proper checking for drunken driving, rash driving, and the health of drivers must be initiated regularly. Roadworthiness of commercial vehicles, especially passenger ones, no tampering of speed governors, and proper maintenance of highways should be ensured. Immediate installation of CCTVs and an intelligent traffic management system is the need of the hour.

Centuries old civilisation at Doda

The village of Siwli in Bhallesa's Doda district is the talk of the town after centuries-old remnants of civilisation were discovered there. Eleven stone water pipes, two small ponds, one idol and some ancient stone sculptures depicting Mahabharata characters were discovered at the site. Stone is the only material used, including ponds, and all artefacts seem to be centuries old, requiring proper excavation by ASI to explore what all this is about. This seems to be a historic site, and proper exploration can only reveal the real story behind all this. This whole belt of Doda, Kishtwar and Bhaderwah is part of the Vedic river Asikni basin, now known as Chenab. Similar types of sites are there in the Akhnoor area of Jammu Division, again on the banks of the Chenab. These places in Akhnoor were used to carry timber to the Indus Valley civilization. According to mythological descriptions, the entire Chenab belt is the abode of Naag Devtas, and many Mahabharata time stories are still in circulation. This Bhallesa terrain is surrounded by ancient Hindu places like Mehel Nag Temple in Dhosa, Durga Mata Cave in Khaljugasar, Mehlaara Temple, Kalgoni Temple, etc. Significant things have been found, and now it is up to the District Administration to take them forward and make things happen. This is an invaluable treasure to be preserved at all costs. This will provide a peek into what all our ancestors used to do, how things looked at that time, what traditions were followed, and how advanced science was at that time. Were there civilizations that developed to use modern science? What kind of architect was in use? And is this site in any way similar to Akhnoor's excavated sites? The answer to all these lies in further explorations.

Women leaders bring winds of change across Rural India

Women leaders across rural India are contributing tremendously towards the making of a Swachh Bharat by bringing about behavioural change in communities while inspiring others to be like them. It is the age of Nari Sashaktikaran or women empowerment. It is indeed high time for us to recognize and acknowledge the power of women in our society. But this is not only about women in sports, politics, cinema, armed forces, corporate businesses, or other fields. It is about common women of rural India who despite being devoid of equal opportunities and privileges enjoyed by men, have transformed into leaders and change-makers of our rural communities, owing to initiatives such as the Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen, or SBM-G. As a part of the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, I have had the privilege of witnessing the transformation. SBM-G is currently in its second phase. While Phase I of the programme launched on 2nd October 2014 by our Prime Minister had making India Open Defecation Free (ODF) as one of its prime objectives, SBM-G Phase II aims to sustain ODF along with solid and liquid waste management. This includes Biodegradable Waste Management



including GOBARdhan, access to improved ways of non-biodegradable Waste Management, Greywater Management and Faecal Sludge Management leading to visual cleanliness. The key perspective of SBM-G was not to merely fund and construct toilets in individual households, but to ensure a change in the collective behaviour of people. Therefore, our approach towards achieving this major feat was based on Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS), an approach tried and tested in several countries over a period of 15-20 years. The CLTS approach encouraged participation from within the community and devised solutions on the basis of their assessment. This led local women to raise their voices against the apathy faced by them since time immemorial. Only the women in our villages can appropriately describe the ordeal of defecating in the open in the early hours of the day especially during menstruation and pregnancy, whether it was during the winters or the monsoons. Lack of a toilet at home not merely jeopardized their privacy and safety but was an

attack on their basic rights. Women being the biggest beneficiaries of the ODF drive led to more and more women coming forward to lead this movement and becoming the key to its success. 30 to 40 percent of women volunteers known as 'Swachhagrahis' triggered the process of bringing

also played an active role in many places. It was established without doubt that the involvement of women led to the success of SBM-G, in comparison to earlier sanitation drives. Women leaders supported by a group performed exceedingly well in bringing changes in community behaviours even in

leader who has inspired many, both inside as well as outside her group. She has been working tirelessly for over the past two decades as a member of a women's Self-Help Group (SHG) towards promoting safe sanitation and personal hygiene practices among rural people. She was promoted to the position of a sanitation master trainer in 2015. She earned the title of a role model Motivator for playing an active role in community mobilization in her District. During the first phase of SBM-G she motivated 1520 beneficiaries in her block to construct and use twin pit toilets which helped in making her Gram Panchayat open defecation free. Her confident approach and strong communication skills made her a key influencer in spreading sanitation awareness and bringing behavioural changes in her village. Under the second phase of SBM-G, Gracy contributed immensely towards the sustainability of the ODF status of her village. As a state level Master Trainer, she has trained over 2000 motivators, representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions, Village Poverty Reduction Committee members, SHG members of various districts and many more. Mrs. S. E. Panghate is yet another example of how a common woman with her steadfast approach, commitment and perseverance can make transforma-

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Foreign acknowledgement!

Sunny Dua

Bill Gates, co-founder of Microsoft and co-chair of Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was assertive in admitting that India as a whole gives him hope for the future because it, despite becoming world's most populous country, is well prepared to tackle big challenges. Gates went on to acknowledge India's what he believed remarkable achievement in eradicating polio, lowering HIV transmission rate, reducing poverty, cutting infant mortality rate and increasing access to sanitation and financial services. The statement holds water for the reason that we are not only doing good in tackling ever growing climate change but are also performing well to enable India become self-reliant in every aspects including defense production, infrastructure development and even managing our finances - Unified Payment Interface (UPI) digital payment acceptance in over a dozen countries and more nations showing interests being an example. India, in fact has come a long way to the extent that foreign nations have started recognizing its capabilities. Until a few years ago we in this part of South-East Asia, facing a proxy war, were terribly engaged in conflict that had taken its toll on our economy and progress. Entire border stretch with hostile neighbors beginning from desert of Rann of Kutch in Gujarat to International Border in Punjab and Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir stayed alive with shelling, intermittent firing, infiltration, and smuggling of arms and narcotics. Engrossed in progress, the western world never cared for this part of the sub-continent and whenever we, engaged in conflict, looked towards the West, it dismissed our resolves describing our issues as bilateral and only to be settled by just the two nations alone. Then the tables turned and today when Ukraine and Russia are engaged in a full-fledged war and western world is throwing its weight behind Volodymyr Zelenskyy, India is negotiating. This could become possible because we stopped entertaining nuisance coming from across the border and concentrated more on consolidating our position viz a viz strengthening borders, overhauling internal security, having a strong foreign policy, launching biggest ever cleanliness drives and meeting minimum basic requirements like potable tapped water, electricity and communication that's now reaching last person in

remotest of the village in India. Interestingly, this is being acknowledged by foreign nations and individuals like Bill Gates who himself appreciated three major spheres where India is doing well and contributing in strengthening world economy, fighting environmental challenges and eradicating hunger. According to Gates, India's innovative approach in increasing yield of next-generation chickpea, making rotavirus vaccine that prevents virus due to which fatal cases of diarrhea increase and efforts of turning waste into bio-fuels and fertilizers are three major areas in which India is going to change its fate and contribute in world programmes. In another such move, Karan Faridoun Bilimoria, a British Indian businessman and life peer in the UK House of Lords, and a university chancellor about a month ago too had recognised India's growing leadership qualities and said in the house, "India has a vision to become, within 25 years, the 2nd largest economy in the world with a GDP of \$32 trillion. The Indian Express has left the station. It is now the fastest train in the world-the fastest-growing major economy. The UK must be its closest friend and partner." This recognition of India's ability was made known to the world only especially when we have become 5th largest economy in the world. Bilimoria also admitted in the House that India is the fastest growing large economy in the world. He had said and I quote, "India with 1.4 billion people, 75 years of democracy, a young country, a growth rate of 8.7% in the last financial year has contributed one out of 10 unicorns with over 100 unicorns". He also recognised India as the 4th largest producer of renewable energy and solar power adding that The UK India Free Trade Agreement is well advanced and India is only the 12th largest trading partner of the UK. Describing India as "India an Express" train, he went on to add that today everyone wants to do business with India which has the Presidency of the G20 and is poised to become second largest economy in next 25 years. Impressed by our efforts, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have invested in the project wherein we are able to develop high yield chickpea varieties that are more resistant to even droughts. This, according to gates will help farmers earn money, end hunger and also help in tackling climate issues that were destroying our crops. Gates in his article published in leading dailies

have while appreciated development of this type of crop, he is sure that increasing heat on planet will not affect this variety and everyone will be in a win-win situation. His second area of interest and India's effort is vaccine manufacturing. Knowingly that a virus that causes diarrhea amongst children and aged and also causes deaths needed a vaccine that was costly and not available in abundance, India decided to manufacture its own rotavirus vaccine. Gates pumped in money and enabled collaborators and developers besides researches in India to develop this vaccine and saved many precious lives. India has today reached a stage where its exporting this vaccine and saving lives in other nations as well. He was also appreciative of India's efforts of turning waste into bio-fuels and fertilisers for which Gates Foundation has also pumped in money. This development will lessen our dependency on crude oil imports, oust combustion engines, encourage green energy and enable us to reach our targets of meeting our fifty per cent energy requirements from renewable energy by 2030. Today, we are fast switching over to solar energy and replacing combustion engine automobiles with electric vehicles. This is India's contribution towards environment protection in no time and an overseas appreciation strengthens this resolve. India, in fact is leading from the front when it comes to tackling climate change. Knowingly that a meager one degree Celsius increase of temperature that has been observed after industrialization is coming heavily on our health, water management, agriculture and allied spheres, we are already on the path of reversing this trend. Adoption of more efficient and cleaner technologies in thermal power generation, promotion of renewable energy generation and increasing the share of alternative fuels in the overall fuel mix are some of the initiatives that have started yielding positive results in our fight against climate change. The way people are switching over to electric vehicles, we are on the right path of reducing emissions coming from transportation sector that's currently dependent upon combustion engine. Government's initiative to introduce electric vehicles as public transport system in big cities as part of smart city projects too is contributing in a bigger way. We are collectively promoting energy efficiency in the economy, industry, transportation, buildings and even appliances of daily use. Efforts to reduce emissions from waste, development of climate resilient infrastructure, imple-

mentation of Green India Mission and massive afforestation besides India's Net Zero Pledge at Glasgow Climate Summit are all aimed at protecting the world from climate change. At a very micro level, we are rejuvenating our water bodies scattered across the length and breadth of India and also replacing bulbs at homes and on streets energy savers. Rejuvenation of water bodies will not only help in tackling heat waves but will also help stray animals and aquatic life get their food and water from. The world today is marred with unavoidable and irreversible floods due to heavy rainfall, cyclones, degradation of terrestrial ecosystems, draughts, cloud bursts, earthquakes, melting of sea ice and glaciers besides rise in sea levels. Being the second largest populous and disaster-prone country in the world, our 59 per cent land is vulnerable to earthquakes, 8.5 per cent to cyclonic storms and 5 per cent susceptible to river basin floods. Jammu and Kashmir has already faced several floods, landslides, earthquakes and cloud bursts leaving many dead and homeless. As such we need to be more cautious of climate change and try not to add more to the damages done to our environment. As part of National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), India has been able to harness a cumulative 57 GW solar energy till last year and intends to tap more solar and wind energy through renewable energy corridor and roof top solar panels which can now be installed because of altered building bye-laws in smart cities. Solar radiation monitoring stations have been set up across the country to facilitate people know about power of this green energy. India has been able to replace old sources of light by 366.85 million LED bulbs, 7.207 million LED tube lights and 2.340 million energy-efficient fans through Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All (UJALA) scheme till 2020 besides Street Lighting National Program (SLNP) for the same time period has achieved a target of installing 11.25 million LED systems across the nation. Constructing energy efficient complexes is also in pipe line for which Energy Conservation Building Code programme has been launched which will enable us to depend more on natural lights and save environment. To sum up, India is doing it right, as said by Bill Gates and this righteousness for sure is in sync with global efforts that are getting acknowledged. (The writer is senior journalist)

Poonam I Kaushish

Fatigued and bored of the volatile cacophony of accusations flying thick and fast over American billionaire George Soros's comments on the Adani Hindenburg saga with BJP alleging he wants to "destroy" Indian democracy? Flip attention to the Supreme Court's Constitution Bench hearing issues arising on the Speaker's role vis-a-vis disqualification of MLAs under the Anti-Defection Law by him while a notice for his removal is pending. Recall, in Maharashtra last June Dy Speaker (NCP MLA officiating as Speaker) became a convenient tool of MVA by issuing disqualification notices to 16 Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena rebels post him toppling Uddhav Thackeray led MVA Government. In a tit-for-tat the Shinde group served a no-confidence motion against the Speaker. Both sides moved Supreme Court which held: "Any change in the strength and composition of the Assembly, by disqualifying sitting MLAs, for the period during which the notice of resolution for the removal of the Speaker (or Dy Speaker) is pending, would conflict with the express mandate of Article 179(c)." "A member holding office as Speaker or Dy Speaker may be removed from office by an Assembly resolution passed by a majority of all the then members of the Assembly clearly suggest that all those who were members of the House at the time when such a resolution is moved should have the right to vote on it." Significantly the Constituent Assembly debates reveal that the phrase "all the then members" was preferred to 'members present and voting' as it was precise. This, the Court averred means even MLAs who are liable to be disqualified have a right to vote on the resolution to remove the Speaker, hence he cannot prevent such members from voting on the resolution by disqualifying them beforehand thereby restricting him from going ahead. Furthermore it cited its verdict on Nabam Rebia vs. Dy Speaker, Arunachal Pradesh Assem-

Speaker's Crown of Thorns For Better or worse?

blly, where it held that it would be Constitutionally impermissible for a Speaker to adjudicate upon disqualification petitions under the Tenth Schedule, while a notice of resolution for his own removal from the office of Speaker, is pending. It queried how Speaker Rebia preemptively disqualified rebel MLAs on grounds of defection before the Assembly could meet. The focus of Thackeray's lawyers was whether the 2016 five-judge Bench ruling in Nabam Rebia case should be reconsidered by a larger Bench. And, if the Rebia verdict was applicable to the Maharashtra case. Pertinently, in November 2015 when 21 MLAs of Congress's 47 rebelled and joined hands with 11 BJP legislators in the 60-member House, Arunachal Chief Minister Tuki closed the Assembly gates so rebel Congress-BJP MLAs held an extraordinary session in a community hall and removed Speaker Nabam Rebia who had disqualified 14 of the 21 legislators. The Governor acting without the Chief Minister's advice advanced the Assembly session from 14 January 2016 to 16 December and listed Speaker's removal on the legislative agenda. On 15 December Speaker Rebia preemptively disqualified the rebel MLAs on the grounds of defection before the Assembly could meet. The following day the resolution to remove Speaker Rebia was adopted. The Speaker challenged his dismissal in Gauhati High Court which stayed the disqualification of Congress MLAs and dismissed the Speaker's plea. Subsequently, an appeal was filed before a 5-Judge Bench in the Supreme Court whether a Speaker could disqualify MLAs while a motion for his removal was pending before the

House? The Court concluded that Speaker Rebia's decision to disqualify rebel MLAs was an attempt to overcome voting by 'all the then members' and evade disqualification. And he could not initiate disqualification proceedings under the anti-defection law when a resolution seeking his removal is pending. In January 2016, while the matter was being argued before the Apex Court the Centre dismissed Tuki's Government and imposed President's Rule. The Court for the first time in its history nullified President's Rule and restored Tuki's Government. However, Tuki was soon voted out of power in a floor test and the Court's decision was reversed through political means. Against this background and in our "Aaya Ram Gaya Ram" political milieu the Speaker's job has not only become all the more important and demanding but today is the cynosure of all eyes. Given Parties have used Constitutional posts as lollipops to reward or oblige Party workers, the Speakership is no exception. Think. Although the Rules of Procedure are largely based on the Westminster model, the all-important issue of having an independent Speaker was overlooked. As a former Lok Sabha Speaker confided, "We are elected on Party tickets with Party funds how can we claim independence? Moreover, even if we resign on becoming the Speaker, we would still have to go back to the same Party for sponsorship for the next election." However, few appreciate his key role without whom, according to Erskine May, "the House has no Constitutional existence." Although the Rules of Procedure are largely based on the Westminster model, the all-important issue of having an inde-

pendent Speaker was overlooked. Under the Westminster system of Parliamentary democracy in Britain, an MP resigns from the Party on his election as Speaker. Moreover, the Speaker is re-elected unopposed to the House of Commons in subsequent elections. Sadly, barely a handful follow the premise that a Speaker is expected to be above Party politics, not a play thing of the Party. Consequently, most Speakers have been Party members, especially after laying down Office or prior to it. From second Speaker Ayyangar who became Bihar Governor on expiry of his term to GS Dhillion and Manohar Joshi who switched roles from Ministers to Speakers, Balram Jhakar never concealed his identity as a Congressman, Rabi Ray lived up to his Janata Party's expectation and Shivraj Patil who post Speakership, lost the re-election, but was nominated by Congress to the Rajya Sabha and anointed Home Minister. Sadly, today eyebrows are not even raised. Against this backdrop Speakers have to walk a tight rope. Play fair and ensure the Opposition has its say even as the Government has its way. He has to set healthy and gracious conventions for the high Constitutional office he holds which calls for fairness, uprightness and adherence to Constitutional values and conventions. Consequently, rules have to be drastically changed to ensure the Speaker's Constitutional post is respected as it is sacrosanct. Legislators and Governments must desist from reducing his office in to a Constitutional extension of the Government. Thereby, converting the post in to a monument like Taj Mahal or Qutab Minar. We know what pigeons do to them. Remember, a Speaker is an honoured position, a free position and should be occupied always by men of outstanding ability and impartiality as what matters are not men but institutions. We must recognize a Speaker's key role in our democracy by adopting the British maxim: "Once Speaker always a Speaker." (INFA)