

## Election Commissioner's appointment

India is the largest democracy in the world, and the onus of the elections lies with the Election Commission of India, a full-fledged constitutional authority under Article 324 of India. The Election Commission has to hold timely elections for 140 billion people of different religions in altogether difficult terrain, keeping in mind floods in monsoon or naxalite areas or snowfall, among many other constraints. From 1950 until 1989, it was a single-member commission. Till 1989, there were no electoral reforms, and the role of the Election Commission was more one of observation than commanding the elections and framing the borderlines. During elections, there have been allegations of rigging, booth capture, the use of muscle and money power, bribing voters, the use of liquor and riots. Practically, it was free for all, and the use of state machinery to influence voters was a routine exercise. Then came the CEC. T.N. Seshan and the meaning of the Election Commission became altogether different. He used the powers vested in the CEC under Article 324 to transform the Indian election system altogether. He listed 150 mal-practices during elections, including the distribution of liquor, bribing voters, a ban on writing on walls, the use of religion in election speeches, etc. He introduced voter ID cards, and the Model Code of Conduct, and enforced a limit on poll expenses. In the whole process, Seshan also had several rifts with the ruling Government, which forced the PV Narasimha Rao Government in 1993 to introduce an ordinance to appoint two more Election Commissioners, M. S. Gill and G. V. G. Krishnamurthy, under Article 342(2) of the Indian Constitution. Opposing this, Seshan approached the Supreme Court, alleging that the move was introduced to curb his powers. His petition was dismissed by the Court and the rest is history.

In 2009, the then-CEC N Gopalaswami sent a recommendation to the President to remove Navin Chawla as EC on the allegation of bias towards a particular party; the plea was not accepted, Chawla became the next CEC, and the impartiality of the CEC came under suspicion. More recently, the "haste" and "tearing hurry" with which the Centre had appointed ex-bureaucrat Arun Goel as an Election Commissioner led to a PIL with an allegation that his file travelled at "lightning speed" within departments in less than 24 hours. The court pointed out that since 2004, no Chief Election Commissioner has completed the six-year tenure, and during the 10-year rule of the UPA Government, there were six CECs, and in the eight years of the NDA Government, there have been eight CECs. A serious situation keeping in view the huge task of impartiality. The Supreme Court of India has taken cognizance of all these facts and came out with a historic judgement: Government alone will not choose the Election Commissioners in the future; a panel of the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, and Chief Justice of India will make the next selection. Despite clear provisions to make a law for the selection process, nothing has been done till now, and this panel will be making the selections until Parliament makes a proper law. There is ample time for Gol to initiate the process, as the next Election Commissioner will be chosen in 2025 when the present CEC will leave office. This judgement is historic in the sense that it has opened many future doors for reforms, as the selection of Supreme Court judges by the Collegium System is also being debated for quite some time now. Transparency should be the benchmark beyond any doubt for all constitutional appointments. Strengthening democracy is the ultimate aim.

## No place for terrorism

One more property of a terrorist is attached, and this time the terrorist is of the darkest chapter of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, Al-Umar Chief Mushtaq Zargar alias Latram of the Nowhatta area of Srinagar. After joining the ranks of the JKLF, involved in the kidnapping of Rubaiya Sayeed, the daughter of the then Home Minister, and he formed his own terrorist organization, Al-Umar Mujahideen, killed many till 1992, when he was apprehended but was released in exchange for the passengers of the 1999 IC-814 Kandhar Plane hijack. Went to POJK afterwards and kept on with his anti-India activities unchecked. The house attached is just a two-marla house at Khasra Number 182 at Ganai Mohalla, near Jamia Masjid, Nowhatta, Srinagar, but the message is big and it was done without any protests. Till a few years ago, the writ of terrorism was completely unchallenged in Kashmir; terrorists struck at will; stone pelting and shutdowns were routine affairs. The whole scenario changed when the present Gol started calling a spade a spade and gave a free hand to security forces, and the rest is history. Kashmir has changed, and who so ever carried on the anti-India agenda is paying the ultimate price, having been killed in encounters and having properties attached. The NIA, ED, DRI, CBI, SIA, and Jammu and Kashmir Police are all working overtime in tandem to wipe out the last strains of terrorism from Jammu and Kashmir. The rule of law has been restored, and the writ of the Indian state is now running the show. The message is clear-cut: sooner or later, the law will catch you, and the Indian state is not going to spare anyone. All the perpetrators of terrorism operating from Pakistan must understand the reality: there is no place on earth to hide from Indian agencies. The fruits of democracy are being enjoyed by the people here, but as an exporter of terrorism, Pakistan is now a failed state, a harsh and bitter reality.

# BJP faces challenge in MP and Karnataka

Brij Bhardwaj

Mood of the nation will be tested in two months when elections for State Assemblies takes place in Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. Both States are important as BJP had lost when elections were held in Madhya Pradesh last time and it came to power after members of Congress party defected and helped BJP to capture power. Karnataka is also important because it is the only State in South where BJP has substantial following.

Madhya Pradesh will give indication of mood in Hindi belt where lotus bloomed in early days. In Madhya Pradesh BJP has to decide what to do with present Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. BJP has been in power in Madhya Pradesh since 2003 and Mr Chouhan who led BJP to comfortable win in 2008 and 2013, failed to get majority in 2018 and BJP could capture power only when members from Congress defected and joined BJP.

It is felt that fatigue factor has set in against present Chief Minister and BJP in the State due to long presence in power. There is no plan to change Chief Minister at this stage but many steps are being taken to re-brand him. Many schemes have been launched, including grant of Rs. 1,000 per month to women not paying income tax. It is also taking steps to consolidate its appeal to Hindu voters by undertaking construction of temple in memory of Sant Ravidas. A crucial factor in Madhya Pradesh is vote by tribals' and Schedule Caste who can tilt balance in any direction.

Many voices were raised against Mr Chouhan being made Chief Minister again in 2018 as it was felt that anyone under whose leadership party has lost election should not be given another chance.



Mr Chouhan is now following U.P model of Yogi Adityanath by using bulldozers to demolish properties of those found guilty of pelting stones at religious processions. He has also taken several steps for welfare of tribals who are crucial in the

State. In Karnataka, BJP has changed Chief Ministers' and former strongman S.Yedurappa has announced his retirement from politics and has

porter of BJP, giving them an edge in elections to Assembly as well as Lok Sabha poll. Will Lingayat stay with BJP in coming poll will make a difference to the outcome. Another issue troubling BJP is charge of corruption. BJP is fighting incumbency by raising issues like love jihad, and hijab. They have also announced support for common civil code and are trying to consolidate majority community vote. It may be mentioned that battle in Karnataka will be a three cornered one which gives advantage to BJP as Opposition vote will be divided. In last Assembly elections BJP had emerged as single largest party. The coalition Government installed by Congress with help of Janata Party did not last long as many members belonging to Congress and Janata Dal defected and lent support to BJP. Indications are that in coming poll no party may get simple majority but BJP will emerge as single largest party and will get the first call to form a Government. This will give them an opportunity to win over any independents as well as win over members belonging to Congress or Janata Dal. There is also talk of Janata Dal entering into alliance with BJP instead of Congress as they did last time. In any case all pollsters have predicted a keen contest. BJP will do everything to retain their hold on a State in South where they have large following. They will also take advantage of division in Congress ranks where former Chief Minister and party chief have never reconciled and want to be Chief Minister if Congress wins.

## NSS : Developing personality of students through community service

Dr Shubhra Jamwal

National Service Scheme (NSS) was introduced in 1969 with the primary objective of developing the personality and character of the students through voluntary community service. "Education through Service" is the purpose of the NSS. The ideological orientation of the NSS is inspired by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi—Father of the Nation. The NSS is a voluntary association of young people in the Universities, Colleges and at +2 level. The cardinal principle of the NSS programme is to get a sense of involvement in the task of nation building.

The objectives of NSS are to enable the students to understand the community in which they work; to understand themselves in relation to their community; to identify the needs and problems of the community and find the solution to them; to develop competence required for group living and sharing responsibilities; to acquire leadership qualities and democratic attitude and to encourage national integration and develop the capacity to meet emergencies and national disasters.

The motto of the National Service Scheme is 'NOT ME BUT YOU' and same is being demonstrated in day-to-day programmes by the NSS Programme Officers and volunteers across the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. As NSS provides an opportunity to students in the capacity of volunteers to venture out of their comfort zones and make a difference to society more and more students are coming forward to join this community service programme in the length and breadth of the Union Territory.

As far as regular activities are concerned, the

main focus remains on health awareness, to conduct awareness and personality development programmes, awareness on Swatch Bharat & Road Safety Rules, drug de-addiction, orientation programmes and environmental issues.

Under the guidance of heads of the respective Universities and Colleges of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, the teams of NSS volunteers are conducting special camps to improve the students' personality and make them to participate in social activities and contribute in the eradication of social evils prevailing in the society. In this way, the NSS volunteers are also getting benefited in the form of gaining leadership qualities. Likewise, enough attention is being paid towards extension activities by paying visits to the adopted villages and sensitizing the villagers about various social issues through discussions, debates, talks, seminars, workshops, street theatre and conferences.

Moreover, the NSS volunteers are undertaking numerous projects that focus on a broad spectrum of issues in different social spheres which include education for underprivileged children, caring for the elderly, intervention techniques for the differently-abled and intellectually challenged, working health centres associated with patients suffering from AIDS and cancers of various kinds, social entrepreneurship and women empowerment.

The activities of NSS volunteers are also focused on the empowerment of women. The women empowerment can be categorized into five parts—socially, educationally, economically, politically and psychologically. Social empowerment addresses the social discriminations and education, which is an instrument of personal

development. Likewise, political empowerment helps the women in active participation in the decision making bodies and until and unless women are mentally strong and psychologically sound, they will not be able to overcome the hindrances in the path of their empowerment. The volunteers of NSS are regularly undertaking activities to make sure that women contribute to the growth and development of society around them and at the same time become aware of their rights in every field.

As per the studies conducted in the country, a significant difference has been found in the adolescence girls empowerment (power and entitlement) between NSS girl volunteers and non-NSS girls students; significant difference in the adolescence girls empowerment (autonomy and self-reliance) between NSS girl volunteers and non-NSS girls students; a significant difference has been found in the adolescence girls empowerment (capacity building) between NSS girl volunteers and non-NSS girls students and significant difference in the total girls empowerment between NSS girl volunteers and non-NSS girls students.

In majority of the activities of NSS, the women empowerment remains on focus in one way or the other as while society grows and develops; women seem to be left behind particularly in the rural areas despite the fact that no community, business or organization is complete without women. Every woman has so much to contribute. The volunteers of NSS undertake activities to make sure that women contribute to the growth and development of society around them. We work to bring women to the forefront by organizing activities like self-defense workshops, health camps, skill development camps,

generating awareness about social security schemes and their rights enshrined in the Constitution of India.

Further, NSS volunteers generate awareness among women about how and what role they should play to prevent crime against them—be it within the four walls of their houses, in the society and in the whatever field they work. Even regular events are organized particularly in the rural areas to discuss gender equality and the most interesting aspect is that majority of the NSS volunteers are the female students and this helps a lot in comfortable interaction with the women in the rural areas who otherwise shy from discussing issues with the males.

Women become the first victim of drug abuse in the society, which already has assumed alarming proportion even in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, as such NSS volunteers educate them about how to check this menace from spreading further and how to handle the drug addicts—be within their family or in the society, by timely seeking the help of Governmental agencies. It is really a matter of pride that we have large number of women Sarpanches, Block Development Council and District Development Council members and NSS volunteers are rubbing shoulders with them to make the women empowered in all the fields.

From my experience as NSS Programme Officer, I can easily claim that students who have joined and experienced NSS activities found personality integration in the areas of conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, optimistic, uniqueness and openness to experience.

(The author is Asst Prof Higher Education Department, J&K and NSS PO)

## Involve NGOs in City Greening projects

C M Sharma

As elsewhere in India, people of Jammu and Kashmir also have a disposition to work in participatory mode for betterment of the environment, individually or by organizing themselves into voluntary organizations and NGOs. However, the recent anti-encroachment drive by JMC has demonstrated the necessity and urgency of preparing and unfolding official policy for NGOs and individuals to indulge in greening, beautification and other philanthropic drives, campaigns and efforts at public places and in Government and private institutions, so that their resources and investments do not go waste.

A number of NGOs, voluntary organizations and individuals have been organizing and participating in well intentioned awareness programmes, promoting urban agriculture through vertical gardens, terrace gardens, roof-top gardens, organising community langars, establishing composting units for managing biomass waste, planting trees and promoting green areas for improving air quality, mitigating urban temperatures, encouraging physical activity and improving overall health of the people besides aesthetic appeal. Even the governments are keen to promote direct marketing by the producer farmers to facilitate them in getting higher profits from every rupee spent by the consumer in purchase of agricultural produce, through other type of organizations like FPOs, SHGs, etc.

There are other NGOs and voluntary organizations and philanthropists that are actively helping the cause of education, women and child

development, culture, arts and crafts, the voiceless animals and birds and supporting the destitute, the handicapped the sick and the poor.

In most of the cases, these individuals, organ-

But, the latest anti-encroachment drive has shown that the plantation and urban agriculture efforts that were put in by quite a few reputed, sincere, dedicated and society oriented persons were



isations and trusts are funded and involved by the Government departments, private institutions and corporate houses (as a part of the Corporate Social Responsibility), but many others are self motivated and self driven, one may say - religiously.

dismantled and brought to a naught. Their physical, financial, psychological and time investment on landscaping, plantation and beautification of their lanes and bye-lanes, was delivered a fatal

blow by yellow paws of the mighty JCB demolition machines of the Jammu Municipal Corporation within no time.

The JMC has a justifiable reason of decongesting the city and creating genuinely motorable and walking space for the commuters for this decisive action, but what has been highlighted in the process is the lack of any policy, guidelines and also very inadequate publicity on behalf of the government and institutions, both private and public, to channelize the creativity and philanthropism of NGOs, volunteers and individuals for putting the right work at right place.

Occasionally, it is seen that the plantation on a piece of land or even any other good and well intentioned work done by one department is usurped by the owner department or any third party within a few days, months or years, rendering the whole good intentioned investment wasteful.

Therefore, the Government departments and institutions, like different wings of the forest department, agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, sericulture, irrigation, roads and buildings, parks and gardens, panchayats, schools, colleges, universities, industrial complexes, hospitals and other land use departments like the revenue, etc. must come out with policy guidelines and well publicized plans and also earmark spaces and time where the NGOs, Voluntary Organisations and individuals may invest/off their money, material and/or knowledge so that their efforts do not go waste in future.

(The author is Retd. Dy. Director of Agriculture, J&K Government)

## Take steps for inclusive growth in J&K

Dr Firdous Ahmad Malik,

Dr Shahid Amin Trali

The Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir currently has 13.62 million people living there, and the poverty rate is around 12 percent (NITI Aayog, 2021). According to a report by the Center for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), 21.3 percent of unemployed people were in January 2023. Of the seven union territories, Jammu & Kashmir ranked sixth with a health index score of 47 points. In 2021, Jammu & Kashmir received a 41.6 on the NITI Aayog education index. According to the statistics, Jammu and Kashmir performed poorly in several vital sectors.

Throughout its history, Jammu & Kashmir's economy has seen several shocks. The main reason for the crisis in Jammu & Kashmir has been the last three detrimental shocks. First, there has been significant harm caused by the valley demonstrations. The number of fatalities was in the thou-

sands, which had a detrimental effect on Jammu and Kashmir's education sector. Every six months from 2008 to 2017, curfews, hartals, and protest-related school closings caused an average loss of 32 working days. You may now easily visualize the losses to the State's business, health, and educational sectors. The flood of 2014 worsened the situation in Jammu & Kashmir and all but eliminated its informal economic sectors.

The second shock for the economy in Jammu & Kashmir was in 2019 due to the abrogation of Article 370, the state's closure, the suspension of significant economic activity, the internet shutdown, and the loss of students' qualitative learning etc. The people in the UT were highly dealing with anxiety related to stress, sadness, and emotional breakdown.

When the COVID-19 outbreak in China spread to almost every country worldwide, it caused a shock to the entire world and a third shock to the economy in Jammu & Kashmir. There was an enormous loss of precious lives worldwide and

Jammu & Kashmir is not an exception. Suddenly, state authorities were forced to increase investment in health services and other support and relief packages.

Understanding the effects of the shocks that have caused significant destruction in Jammu and Kashmir in their wake is urgently required. There is great demand for urgent development initiatives in Jammu and Kashmir. The administration of the UT must make earnest attempts to assist students in all areas of their development. The UT should have effective planning and procedures to foster job growth and advancement opportunities. The political parties seeking office should publish a manifesto emphasizing infrastructure development, job creation, advancement and development, and peace. They also need to put in more effort to make proposals a reality.

All of these shocks need to be addressed immediately; otherwise, they could have a disastrous effect on the generation currently enrolled in schools, colleges, and universities, leading to low

productivity, increased inequality, and social unrest. There are possibilities that conflicts, political instability, and financial instability could result from this, among other disturbances, creating a condition resembling a poverty tarp with frequent oscillations. Thus, it is imperative for the UT of J & K to move quickly to invest in infrastructure, health sector education, and job development to compensate for these shock-related losses. The government should establish new institutes/Universities of repute in Jammu & Kashmir. The existing Universities and institutions should roll out new initiatives to support research and development. The most promising bank in Jammu & Kashmir namely Jammu & Kashmir Bank Ltd. should create at least two research institutes in Jammu and in Kashmir. Besides the government should allow taxi aggregators from outside to expand the transportation industry. These initiatives can prove a game changer and will lead to inclusive growth and reduce poverty and inequality immediately.