

Akhand Bharat

No one understands the agony of country division more than those who lost everything in the 1947 partition. Refugees from PoJK reached every nook and corner of the country, but those who came and settled in Jammu and Kashmir were the worst sufferers. While one refugee, I.K. Gujral, became the Prime Minister of India, those who came to Jammu and Kashmir were deprived of even voting rights in the state elections. No compensation, no jobs, and left to fend for themselves for almost seven decades. What can be more tragic than the fact they were refugees in their own country? Articles 370 and 35 A ensured that these people had no future for their children and would be treated like children of a lesser god. These include the survivors of the Mirpur massacre who somehow were lucky enough to survive, but the rest of their lives here were also miserable. In the rest of India, fellow countrymen embraced them with open arms, and they held top positions in government as well as successful businessmen. They flourished and gelled out in India like any other citizens. Their scars of displacement healed up fast, but the PoJK refugees of Jammu and Kashmir were left on their own, isolated, and treated destitute with absolutely no vision plan for them. The same was the story of Chamb migrants, who were given alternative land only to till, not permanent rights, with the result that they received no compensation when BSF took certain portions of land to get IB wired. The situation of Valmiki and Gurkhas was even worse, as their children had to do only menial work like their parents, and there was no permanent resident certificate for PoJK refugees, Valmiki, or Gurkhas.

But the abrogation of Article 370 has changed everything. GoI understood their sufferings, and the rest is history. The present government has ensured that every PoJK refugee, Valmiki, and Gurkha gets their due domicile certificates without any trouble. Almost 21,000 such certificates have been issued to people residing outside Jammu and Kashmir. Massive relief worth Rs 1,552 crores was sanctioned, and almost Rs 1,452 crores have been distributed. Almost five thousand applications were submitted late, and the LG administration is attempting to sort through them all. With one stroke of the pen, the history of miseries has been deleted. The government is trying its best to provide every possible help to them to rebuild their lives anew.

This new India is assertive, ready to stand up and fight for their rights, and it is now the right time to claim our PoJK, illegally occupied by Pakistan since independence. The creation of Pakistan was a disaster, as has been proven time and again without any doubt. The atrocities done to minorities are state policies with the simple aim of making Pakistan a heterogeneous state with no religious or social tolerance. Medieval-era laws are implemented to torture minorities, and once sizable, these communities have either disappeared or are on the verge of it. People in PoJK are the worst sufferers; with no democratic rights, Pakistan has installed a dummy government pursuing its agenda. The mineral-rich PoJK is being pondered like anything, and people are butchered if even a whimper of protest is registered. With Pakistan on the verge of failure, the plight of this always-neglected lot can be imagined. "Akhand Bharat" is going to be a reality soon. India is capable of taking care of everyone.

Unique truss arch Wayil bridge

Certain areas of Jammu and Kashmir lacked development, with little to no infrastructure improvement. More than seven decades have passed, but the sight of single-lane tonga bridges remains in some places. The net result is that during peak summer season, long lines of vehicles, including most important Leh Ladakh supplies and tourists and pilgrims of Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra, are stuck up for hours in highway jams. But the situation is fast changing now. DPRs are being prepared on a war footing, funds have been approved, and work is proceeding at breakneck speed. Another important bridge is nearing completion, this time at Ganderbal, with a unique design used for the first time in Jammu and Kashmir. The truss and arch technology is being used in this Wayil bridge in Ganderbal. Once completed, this 110-meter-long and the 10.5-meter-wide bridge will be a game changer for the area. Funded by the World Bank for Rs 23.79 crores, this truss-arch-girder bridge is one of a kind. With the Indus River flowing down it, this engineering marvel has been constructed by Jammu and Kashmir's Road and Buildings Department. It is a proud moment, and engineering as well as other staff members involved deserve much appreciation. The sufferings of the public and tourists will be mitigated now, and most importantly, this major bottleneck has been removed on the Srinagar-Leh highway. Many more such projects are under construction on the entire Jammu-Leh highway and even on state roads. Every effort is being made to reach out to the last man even in the remotest possible area, and this Wayil Bridge is one such effort. It is a symbol of the focused approach of local administration, factually depicting what can be achieved with honest and determined efforts. Step by step, the LG administration is removing stumbling blocks, and what couldn't be achieved in the last seven decades is being done now. This is not the end; much has to be achieved, and the wheels of development will not stop now.

India must brace for an impending severe water crisis

Dr. Gyan Pathak

The unprecedented heatwave conditions in February, touching about 40 degree Celsius in several part of the country, is a precursor to an impending severe water crisis in the summer 2023. India had witnessed such a condition in March 2022, that has occurred a month earlier this year in the month that is technically the last month of winter. Obviously, India needs an urgent action plan for supply of drinking water not only for humans and domestic animals, but also a plan for making water available for wild animals through discharging water to the drying rivers or other water bodies to prevent their coming out of the wild to human habitats in search of water and harming people.

Water crisis in India is not new. It is yearly phenomenon. Surface and ground water resources dry up or greatly deplete. Ground water level goes down every year. People greatly suffer during the summer. Governments at the Centre and the states promise to put secure water management systems in place. However, little is done. On the very onset of monsoon, everything is forgotten, every year.

It is despite the fact that water is fundamental to life, livelihood, food security and sustainable development. Ground water serves as the backbone of India's agriculture and drinking water security, since India does not have sufficient irrigation canals and reservoirs to supply sufficient quantity of water. Despite all assurances by the government, majority of our households do not have even piped water connection, and those who have connection are not getting enough water. The quality of water supplied is also found in numerous cases to be of not up to the safe prescribed standard for human consumption.

People by and large depend on the ground water, but its levels have been depleting for years in several regions of the country. This situation calls for a prudent management of ground water resources of the country to ensure its sustainability. It has always been said that the management of ground water resources requires a structured scientific approach starting from monitoring of water level and quality, assessing the resources, use, analysis of hazards and developing management strategies for their control. Every year we hear

such things from the government, but water crisis on the grassroots level has been going from bad to worse.

The Dynamic Ground Water Resources of India for the year 2022 is the latest present a state-wise latest position. The assessment has been made jointly by Central Ground Water Board and State's Ground Water Nodal Departments under the guidance of State Level Committees and over-

per cent, semi-critical 12 per cent, critical, 3 per cent, over-exploited 17 per cent and saline 2 per cent. This data shows that India is not working enough to recharge the ground water resources.

In the years 2020 and 2021, ground water levels could not be monitored due to COVID-19 disruptions. However, ground water level date of pre-monsoon 2022 reveals that the general depth to water level of the country ranges from 5 to 10 m



all supervision of Central Level Expert Groups.

The situation at a glance gives a dismal picture on availability of groundwater. Total annual ground water recharge in the country is 437.6 bcm, 398.08 bcm is extractable, actual extraction is 239.16 bcm which is 60.08 per cent. It only shows how heavily our country is depending upon ground water.

The categorization of assessment units which includes blocks, mandals, firkas, taluks etc show that only 67 per cent are safe, 12 per cent are in semi-critical position, 4 per cent are critical, 14 per cent are over-exploited and 2 per cent are saline. The recharge worthy area in safe category is 66

bgl (below ground level).

Very shallow water levels of less than 2 m bgl is observed in few states, such as Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya, Karnataka, Kerala, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu in small patches. Ground Water level in the range of 2-5 m bgl is seen in Assam, northern parts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Coastal parts of Odisha, few pockets in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Major part of the country shows water level in the range 5-10 m bgl, especially in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra,

Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Karnataka. In major parts of north-western and western states, especially in the states of Delhi, Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan, depth to water level is generally deeper and ranges from about 20 to more than 40 m bgl. The peninsular part of the country recorded water level in the range of 5 to 20 m bgl. The deepest depth to water level of 130.77 m bgl is observed at Khara in Jodhpur district of Rajasthan. It means major part of India urgently needs action plan to assure supply of drinking water to people and livestock, apart from releasing water from reservoirs into rivers for wild animals.

The main source of replenishable ground water resources is recharge from rainfall, which contributes to nearly 61 per cent of the total annual ground water recharge. India receives about 119 cm. of rain annually on average, with high spatial variation. A major part of the country receives rainfall mainly during SW Monsoon season, spread over the months of June to September, except in Tamil Nadu, where the major contribution is from NE monsoon during the period October-December. There are also States such as Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand which receive significant rainfall in all seasons. Over 75% of the annual rainfall is received in the four rainy months for June to September only thereby leading to large variations on temporal scale.

In comparison to the earlier assessment of 2020, extractable water resource increased only a little from 397.6 to 398.08 bcm, while the ground water extraction has marginally decreased from 244.92 to 239.16 bcm. Overall stage of groundwater extraction has marginally decreased from 61.6 per cent to 60.08 per cent.

The present assessment has proposed separate ground water assessment for urban areas with population more than 10 lakhs, because urban areas are sometimes concrete jungles and rainfall infiltration is not equal to that of rural areas unless and until special measures are taken in the construction of roads and pavements. In the present assessment 30 per cent rainfall infiltration factor was proposed.

In the present circumstances, an emergency plan of action for water supply in both urban and rural areas must be in place within a month, before the crisis turns severe with expected rise in temperature to unprecedented levels. (IPA)

Poonam I Kaushish

Violence is the rhetoric of the times. Pick any newspaper. Any day. Splashes of social schism gore into news headlines. Massacres, murders, gang rapes, and dowry deaths. Even the most gruesome violence shocks no more. Wherein, brutality and bestiality have become synonymous in modern India.

Last week a little known Amritpal Singh, erstwhile truck driver from Dubai now pro-Khalistani leader hit national headlines for all the wrong reasons. His band of followers who call themselves 'Waris Punjab De' stormed the Ajnala police station despite prohibitory orders, broke through security cordons, clashed with police, fought pitched street battles using kirpans, spears and swords and laid siege: all for an extraordinary demand: Release Amritpal's aide Toofan accused of abduction, rioting, criminal intimidation etc. Worse, it was done leveraging Guru Granth Sahib carried by protestors which forced police to hold fire.

Amritpal's sudden rise is mysterious and ominous. He styles himself as Jarnail Singh Bhindranwala, separatist leader who was killed in Operation Blue Star 1984. Vocal on social media since 2015 he made joint appearances on Clubhouse with Deep Sidhu who too flirted with Khalistan idea and set-up 'Waris Punjab De' but died last year. Post his death, Amritpal took over reigns of the organization, gathering a following via his radical Khalistan talk calling Sikh youth to get ready for the "next war," through his Amrit Prachar.

This is unsettling for Punjab with a stormy past of violent insurrection and separatism where the primacy of rule of law was re-established at great cost and sacrifice. Today radical elements are trying to make a comeback riding on public disaffection on joblessness, rising poverty and drug menace.

Next, Delhi's Civic Centre descended into hooliganism, vandalism and chaos as AAP and BJP councillors pushed and exchanged blows, hurled plastic bottles, threw half-eaten apples, chairs, mikes at each other, broke the podium,

Asad Mirza

The slew of anti-women measures adopted by the Taliban government in Afghanistan has essentially gone against them, further isolating them globally and making them a pariah.

Reportedly, a handful of Afghan women courageously held a demonstration in the Afghan capital, Kabul, on 8 March, calling on the international community to protect Afghan women.

This was the second International Women's Day observed under the Taliban-led government in Afghanistan, which swept back to power in August 2021, and more or less marked a year-and-a-half of increasing misery for Afghan women.

In a statement to mark the International Women's Day, the head of the UN mission in Afghanistan, Roza Otunbayeva said it has been distressing to witness the Taliban's methodical, deliberate, and systematic efforts to push Afghan women and girls out of the public sphere.

The UN mission said the crackdown was a "colossal act of national self-harm" at a time when Afghanistan faces some of the world's largest humanitarian and economic crises.

The anti-women Taliban decisions have faced international condemnation, including by some Muslim countries even. The State of Qatar, earlier this week expressed deep concern over the Afghan caretaker government's decisions which negatively affect Afghan women and girls' rights, especially suspending their studies in secondary schools and universities and banning their work in non-governmental organisations.

The Qatari condemnation was conveyed in a statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations Office in Geneva, HE Dr. Hind Abdul Rahman Al Muftah during an interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, within the framework of the 52nd regular session of the Human Rights Council.

The deputy foreign minister of Türkiye, Mehmet Kemal Bozay, has said that the international community must not allow the situation in Afghanistan to deteriorate "even further." The Secretary General of the Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Hissen Ibrahim Taha, spoke in Geneva and, reiterated the OIC's condemnation of Kabul's edicts banning women from education and

Violent Sense Vs Moral Sensibility Where is Society Heading

smashed glass paper-stands, tore ballot papers during election of MCD's Standing Committee entire night Friday.

Blistering scenes which strip India of all balance, open-mindedness, equilibrium and tolerance. Am I shocked? Not at all, graze a car and you could be shot dead, nobody sees red at the sight of blood. Even if some blood is spilled in an over-populated nation, what difference does it make? Recently, three women were brutally murdered, their body parts cut and stored in a freezer to be scattered or burnt, two others dragged 10 kms by drunk men in cars, yet not a wimp of a public outcry.

Seven rapes occur every minute across the country so what's the big deal? Murders are committed in broad daylight in busy thoroughfares, it's difficult to distinguish between a bahubali, mafia don and a neta as all are rolled into one, an 80-year-old grandpa deflowers an innocent five-year-old in Haryana et al.

Clearly, the level of poison and aggression coursing through political and social India injecting venom in citizens is worrisome and fraught with serious ramifications. Certainly they have plenty to be angry about. Unemployment, rising prices, inflation, lawlessness etc. Two, polarization thanks to technology and social media is more extreme than any physical ghettoisation.

Underscoring, violent inputs across society starting with rabid politics of hate, communalism, religious hatred leading to mob violence online and offline creates a domino effect destroying innocent minds and turning them into monsters of venom and hate. Pointing to society's utter moral bankruptcy where aggressive elements openly target, vilify and perpetuate sexual violence against

women and minorities with alarming impunity.

Educated youth pursuing degrees use tech and Internet to wage online ideological wars against communities. Targeted violent contents are openly shared across Twitter, Facebook, Telegram, Instagram, WhatsApp.

Raising a moot point: Which way is society heading? Tragically, it is not a question of Amritpal or MCD violence but a much wider and larger national problem --- of increasing anger. This has resulted in a total breakdown of institutions, society, culture and ethical values. Replacing moral rules with naked force, hypocrisy and fraud.

Killing yet another signpost of an increasingly feeble system. Symptomatic of complete lawlessness that has gripped the country. A new cult establishing an order of hatred and rage. An eerie stillness filling the senses with smell of death, mayhem and brutal carnage held hostage by rampant goondagardi.

Who is responsible? The onus lies on all sides --- politicians, bureaucracy, police, 'protected' criminals etc. Politicians and police are two sides of the same coin. Both viewed nowadays as venal and incompetent. Fake encounters. Torture deaths. Want to get rid of somebody? Call up the "Police-wala Goonda".

Criminals in khadi herald the new dons of tomorrow, hustling and muscling is the way to fulfil people's aspirations. And what should one say of hot young blood? Who will rape for kicks and kill for a drink. In this milieu can criminalized mafia dons be far behind? Who now have taken recourse to "out of court settlements" and extortions. And what about the new intolerant rage sweeping across the country? Turning religion into burning embers of hatred?

Anti-women Taliban

work, saying: "It is against our religion." **Anti-women diktats**

The biggest crackdown on teenage girls and university students, came just days before Women's Day, when earlier this week the authorities banned them from secondary schools and higher educational institutions. No country has officially recognised the Taliban government as Afghanistan's legitimate ruler, with the right to education for women a sticking point in negotiations over aid and recognition.

According to UNESCO, currently, 80 per cent

Friday that a delegation headed by UN Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohammed to Afghanistan recently, found that some Taliban officials were more open to restoring women's rights, but others were clearly opposed.

Mohammed, a former Nigerian Cabinet minister is the UN's highest-ranking woman, she was joined on the trip by Sima Bahous, executive director of UN Women, which promotes gender equality and women's rights, and Assistant Secretary General for political affairs Khaled Khari.

The UN team met with the Taliban administration in the capital Kabul and talks focused on the restrictive measures the Taliban government has imposed on women and girls since they re-took power.

The UN has stressed that Afghan women are crucial to delivering humanitarian help to civilians, the majority of them women and children.

The Taliban government adheres to an austere interpretation of Islam and has imposed severe restrictions on women's lives that the United Nations called "gender-based apartheid".

Notably, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Human Rights Commission in Afghanistan have been erased under the Taliban regime.

According to the UN Mission in the country, nine out of 10 women in Afghanistan experience physical, sexual or psychological violence from their partner. Divorce, however, is far greater a taboo than the abuse itself and women who part with their husbands sustain many atrocities at the hands of society.

The United Nations' special representative for women in Afghanistan, Alison Davidson said the implications of the government's policies "impact all Afghans and will resonate throughout generations". Meanwhile, a prominent group of Afghan and Iranian women are backing a campaign calling for gender apartheid to be recognised as a crime under the international law.

The campaign, launched on International Women's Day, reflects a belief that the current laws covering discrimination against women do not capture the systematic nature of the policies imposed in Afghanistan and Iran to downgrade the status of women in society.

The authors of the open letter, including international lawyers, argue that the legal definition of apartheid as a crime against humanity, adopted by the UN in 1973 and supported by the 1998 Rome Statute, does not fit the case of Afghanistan and Iran, even if the descriptive term does.

Taliban Mindset

Initially, when the Taliban 20 took over power in Afghanistan in August 2021, there was some euphoria that now they might be a changed Taliban, looking forward to mend their earlier ways and chart a new course of development for their country.

However, starting with their first diktat in September 2021, urging for segregated classrooms for boys and girls at schools, the caretaker Taliban government has followed it up with a slew of anti-women measures.

What perplexes one is that though the Taliban describe most of these decisions as Islamic, in fact they are completely unIslamic. Islam gives equal rights to men and women in all spheres of life, including, education, inheritance, right to work, say in marriage. Yet, in action Taliban goes completely against the spirit and teachings of Islam.

Instead, if they had adopted a new pragmatic and forward looking approach towards reorganising the Afghan society, it would have gone in their favour and would have helped them to consolidate their power in the country. As currently there seems to be no political force in the country, which could counter the Taliban. In addition, it would have provided them legitimacy and support from the so-called Islamic countries, if only they would have chosen to uphold the Islamic teachings, which in reality, they have failed to do.

(The author is a political commentator based in New Delhi.)

(The views expressed by the authors are their personal)

feedbackexcelsior@gmail.com