

Reading is Believing

Reflections Of A Civil Servant



Aalok Shrivastava



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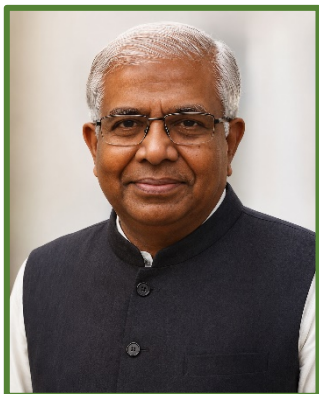
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**Dedicated To the Memory of
Ankoor & Chotka Bhaiya**

About Author



Aalok Shrivastava, IAS (1984:Sikkim), has handled assignments at all levels from D.D.O. to D.C. to Secretary to the Government, winding up his innings as Chief Secretary of the State. He held many crucial positions : Additional C.S., Home Secretary, Transport Commissioner, Tourism Commissioner, Resident Commissioner and headed six other key departments. These reflect his enduring association with the people of the State.

Extending his reach beyond, he also performed senior roles in Ministries of Home Affairs, DoNER (World Bank Project on Livelihood) and National Human Rights Commission. He actively participated in negotiations culminating into several international agreements. An idea of exposure gained is shown in this anthology.

An academic with an M.A., two M. Phils, two Post-Post P.G. Diplomas, a Programme in Sustainable Development from Ranchi University, JNU, Indian Law Institute, TERI, I.I.P.A., respectively, he has also contributed to teaching and research.

Owing to his interest and insight he has become a columnist and prolific author with five books and over 570 articles on national, international, social, environmental & gender issues, with expertise in governance, public policy, and sustainable development.

His notable achievements reflecting lasting significance are: optimum capacity building of Sikkim tourism stake holders, fine tuning natural calamity administration, drug de addiction drives, resumption of Nathu La border trade after 44 years, Mansarovar yatra through Sikkim & construction of first airport of Sikkim.

Upon superannuation, apart from writing, he is pursuing completion of first Rail link to Sikkim by the end of 2027.

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I owe an apology if, inadvertently, a few names have been omitted.

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Part “A”

SIKKIM, DOWN MEMORY LANE

Chapter - 1

Fifty Years of Statehood: My Impressions

In small, beautiful, enchanting and happening Sikkim, peace and tranquillity know no bounds. The towering and majestic Mount Khangchendzonga beams over the attractive land like a crowning glory. Holy, holistic and hospitality are the mantras and way of living of the populace. Almighty created this exotic, mesmerizing and rare Valley of Flowers at his leisure. This hidden paradise has been further blessed with care by Lord Buddha and Guru Padmasambhava. Its hills, mountains, glaciers, waterfalls, rivers and lakes echo with chimes of prayer wheels of monasteries. Colourful prayer flags flutter in pollution free air, welcoming one & all. Lush green carpets of meadows roll out their bounty to welcome tourists, adventure, mountain and bio-diversity lovers.

FIRST ORGANIC STATE OF WORLD

First organic state of India and world with effect from February 16, 2016, it could identify degradation of land owing to pesticides and chemical fertilizers also impacting human health as early as 2003. Issuing soil health cards and gradual switch over to natural and organic manure, followed by setting up Vermiculture hatcheries began reducing contamination of soil, water and air. Conserving environment by supporting beneficial insects, plants and microorganisms became possible. Organic practices also improved storage of carbon and overall production of Large Cardamom, Tea, Orange, Ginger and other cash crops.

United Nations Future Policy Gold Award in 2018 confirmed world wide recognition to the State.

TRADITION & MODERNITY

Sikkim blends tradition with modernity, from carpet weaving shy girls to magnificent wood carvers to painters using vegetable dye, to traditional cap makers to high tech modern processing plants and I. T. centres. Sikkim has

presented some of its finest citizens to the country, namely, Danny Denzongpa to Jaspal Pradhan to Tarun deep Rai to Bhaichung Bhutia.

All Good Things Come In Small Packages Like This Wonderland, Sikkim.

The word Sikkim has originated from Limboo word Sukhim, meaning new house. Bhutias have called this land Denzong, meaning valley of rice. Nestled in Eastern ecologically fragile Himalayas in a small area of 7096 square kilometres, Sikkim is the richest bounty of nature from botanical wealth point of view. It has got spectacular terrain, pristine lakes, gentle streams, roaring rivers and cascading waterfalls. 21 Glaciers, 104 rivers & streams and 221 lakes & wetlands make residents proud.

AMAZING BIO DIVERSITY

State has 4500 flowering plants, 515 types of orchids, more than 36 varieties of Rododendron flowers, 552 types of birds and 690 types of butterflies. 47% of the area of the state is under forest cover. It should be more. Sikkim is one of the 26 bio diversity hot spots of the world. Elevation in the state is in the range of 440 to 8586 metres. It is endowed with extraordinary rich Bio diversity (eco system, plants and animals) in terms of flora and fauna and traditional knowledge systems, whose significance and sustainability can not be comprehended so easily. Not only it has pristine beauty, it also has deep rooted rich heritage.

ALL CLIMATIC ZONES

Most of the climate zones, viz, tropical, temperate, alpine and polar are found in this small and beautiful land. Not less than six mountain peaks above the height of 22, 000 feet make it panoramic. The third highest peak of the World, Mount Khanhchendzonga, the guardian deity of the state, is located at an altitude of 28, 169 feet (8586 mtrs). Extreme altitudinal differences and associated changes in climate and soil composition create a striking variation in natural vegetation of this mesmerizing land.

Biodiversity is not just a matter of scientific, economic or ecological value. It is a capital of inheritance, passed on by generations of the past to the present one which are going to support and sustain our grand children.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Sikkim has seen and experienced many developments and natural calamities, such as, earthquakes, landslides, flash floods, cloud bursts and GLOF during its 50 years of magnificent Statehood. Earlier divided into four Districts- North, East, West and South, now it has six Districts, namely, Mangan, Gangtok, Pakyong, Gyalshing, Soreng and Namchi. Two new districts and seven new Sub divisions have to catch up fast by keeping carrying capacity of terrain in mind. Any deviation will be detrimental to the interest of future generations.

MAGNIFICENT PANCHAYATS

Panchayats with essence had existed even in pre- 1975 era. In the present scenario, there has been further value addition and provision of modern amenities in them. State Panchayats get awards at the national level for their reach, creating awareness and performance almost every year.

WOMEN IN FRONT

Women literacy and empowerment have never been an area of concern. State's Anganbari Workers, Helpers and ASHA's are second to none in terms of service and reach, even when their honorarium is not in consonance with efforts made by them in a tough mountainous terrain. Representation of women in the Gram Panchayats and urban local bodies has already exceeded the desired level. Menstrual hygiene and cleanliness is accorded top priority. Sikkim was the first state to administer anti AIDS and Cervical cancer prevention vaccines. During Covid epidemic, citizens were well protected and looked after.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX

In H. D. I. and Millenium development goals, the state has been performing well and is expected to maintain its appreciable tempo with regard to fight against poverty, life expectancy, health missions, education, overcoming gender disparities, delivery of services and financial inclusion.

NIRMAL RAJYA & O. D. F.

Sikkim became a Nirmal Rajya way back in 2008 and is privileged to be adjudged as the first Open Defecation Free State of the country. Drinking

water is available everywhere- dwelling units, public places, markets, educational institutions, religious and tourist spots.

ROAD & AIR CONNECTIVITY

Communication has never been an area of concern. The happening and vibrant State is well connected by air, both helicopter & aeroplane and many echo friendly and meandering roads. First airport at Pakyong inaugurated by the Prime Minister on September 24, 2018 continues to serve state people and tourists alike. A new 44.86 Kilometres long 85% underground Railway line is expected to be operational by December, 2027. Trial runs have begun already. In addition, final locational survey for rail link between Rangpo and Gangtok has been completed while in respect of 34.7 kms Gangtok – Nathu La stretch it is proceeding swiftly.

In sum and substance, a visitor or tourist gets impressed by the offered attractions. He is also swayed away by its peace, serenity, cleanliness, discipline, well regulated traffic and pollution free atmosphere. Sufficiently aware and vigilant people of the state have to maintain the current tempo of development and begin working for self reliance in view of State having got highest Per Capita income in the country.

Expecting everything from the Government may not be desirable. Supplementing its initiatives is very much called for. More discipline and commitment in civic life would be necessary. There can not be any substitute to the spirit of sincerity, honesty, passion and hard work.

SKY SHOULD BE THE LIMIT.

Chapter - 2

Sikkim's Tribute To Mountain God¹

The Golden Jubilee function of the first successful expedition to Mount Khangchendzonga was organised at Gangtok from September 17-18, 2005. It was carefully chosen to coincide with Pang Lhabsol, the Sikkim's festival to worship the abode of Guardian Deity. annually. The mountain God Khangchen-dzonga, literally meaning the storehouse of five treasures of gold, silver, gems, grains and holy books, is invoked and prayed upon to continue protecting Sikkim. It was aimed at increasing tourist traffic especially to rural and unknown exotic destinations. People of the state were privileged to witness the convergence of many luminaries of mountaineering world under one roof. Main Bazar was full of tourists and mountain enthusiasts.

RESPECT TO RELIGIOUS SENTIMENTS

Respect shown by Mount Khangchendzonga summiteers to the religious sentiment of people of the state by setting the camp six feet below the peak was appreciated. Coming to eco tourism, trekking & mountaineering, various initiatives taken by the state from 1998 onwards were highlighted. Further, two peaks in North Sikkim and one in West Sikkim were declared open for domestic and foreign expeditions.

The Commemoration ceremony, inaugurated by Sri Pawan Chamling, Chief Minister of Sikkim had the presence of R. B. Subba, Minister Tourism, Alok Shrivastava, Commissioner, Tourism, George Band and Joe Brown of U. K. and Norman Hardie of New Zealand, the distinguished mountaineers of the first expedition to the peak in 1955, Alan Blackshaw, President, World Mountaineering Association, Capt. M. S. Kohli and Nawang Gompu, celebrated Everesters, Col. N. Kumar and Major Prem Chand leader & member respectively of the first Indian expedition to the peak in 1977 and Ang Tsering Sherpa, celebrated Everestester from Nepal.

GRAND MEET OF MOUNTAINEERS & MOUNTAIN LOVERS

Over one hundred mountaineers, trekkers, nature lovers, people from adventure sports world and media persons from countries, such as, U. K., New Zealand, Australia, U. S. A., Russia, China, Singapore, Slovenia, Nepal and different states of India brought honour to Sikkim by their presence. Apart from the Khangchendzonga summiteers, a large number of Everesters too took part.

On the occasion, the distinguished guests were honoured with citations, mementos and a white metal plaque depicting Mt. Khangchendzonga. A documentary film on the 1977 Indian expedition was screened and a revised and reprinted version of the book 'Koh Himalaya, Khangchendzonga' by Col. N. Kumar was released.

RELEASES & DISPLAYS

A memorable postal album, a special cover on Mt. Khangchendzonga and a special cancellation franking arranged by the P. M. G., West Bengal & Sikkim were also released. Fruitful exchange of ideas and experiences marked the occasion together with exhibition of photos, equipment and essential items relating to expeditions, organised by the Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute, Gangtok.

The technical session had an interesting and thought provoking discussion on Protection of Environment vis a vis Socio economic Development of the Himalayan region. During the interaction session, specific steps taken by Sikkim from 1989 onwards, such as, do's and don't for tourists by active involvement of taxi drivers, travel associations, hotel associations and other stake holders, use of indigenous resources in nature trails and treks, encouraging trekkers to use K. Oil & LPG, undertaking aesthetically sound and eco friendly tourism projects, a ban on grazing & use of poly carry bags, litter free zone in the centre of Gangtok, door to door collection & disposal of garbage were touched upon.

VIEWS OF GEORGE BAND, FIRST SUMEETER

Describing the ceremony an extraordinary one, George Band stated that climbing Mt. Khangchendzonga was much more difficult than scaling Mt.

Everest. As such, as against two thousand successful climbers to Everest, only 195 had made it to the summit of Khangchendzonga. According to him, some of the reasons for keeping away from Mt. Khangchendzonga were: it was not a famous peak, way to summit was not easy, it could not be tamed with fixed ropes, peak was located in too cold and hard a region and difficulties in climbing down an expedition being expensive.

EMPHASIS ON ECO TOURISM

There was a fruitful discussion on creating more awareness about environment right from primary school level, public private partnership to encourage tourism, earmarked tourist transport, stress on Buddhist circuit, improving connectivity to N. E. region, upgradation of Bagdogra airport to that of an international airport, further improvement in development of adventure tourism in Sikkim etc.

At the end it was unanimously felt that initiative taken by State Tourism department in organising this mega show was going to take Sikkim Tourism to dizzy heights. It looked a daunting task for almost six months but when it ended with a well attended Press Conference, it was like icing on the cake. Undoubtedly, my state tourism team actively supported by stake holders had the last laugh.

Chapter - 3

Resumption Of Nathu La Border Trade²

On June 23, 2003, India and China signed a historic agreement at Beijing to resume international border trade through Nathu La pass in Sikkim. It was inked by Yashwant Sinha, External Affairs Minister during the China visit of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the then Prime Minister. Slow but steady efforts were made by State and Central Government officers to thrash out the modalities and to decide days of trade, permitted and non permitted items, earmark the route to be taken and setting up immigration centres and trading marts.

Push & Slowdown In Ministry of Commerce

Ministry of Commerce was the nodal Central Ministry, while I had the honour to represent Sikkim as Commissioner cum Secretary of Industry, Commerce & Tourism Departments. I was also a member of high powered committee of the State Government. Sri Ashok Kantha, former Indian Ambassador to China and the Commerce Secretary to Government of India was the right man at the right place. While he was positive, forthright and a real go getter, his officers would take this task as a routine one. His absence could be felt more when he had to leave and his successor joined. During each visit to the room of this U. T. cadre officer in Udyog Bhawan, I had to explain the nitty gritty, afresh. Very dissatisfying, at times. But who bothers for small states?

It Was More Than Trade

I would always stress that though Nathu la trade would be low in volume, the issue to be flagged was that historic ties were going to be restored and Tibetan families living on two sides of the border and having affinal links with Sikkimese families were going to be united at last. Present practice of exchange of mails at Sherathang (13,000 feet) under the surveillance of Indian and Chinese Army on Thursday and Sunday was not enough and quantum of letters too had come down drastically owing to advances in technology. B. B. Tamang, a Postman of highest Post office in the world was performing the task meticulously for 22 years.

Delegation To China

When usual bureaucratic parleys did not push the cart further despite relaxation in attitude of China, a high powered delegation led by the new Commerce Secretary of India visited China. It also had one member not directly connected. I was not surprised when I was overlooked. After fruitful talks the delegation took the land route for return through Nathu la.

Beijing-Lhasa Rail Link, A Milestone

It was the time when Beijing-Lhasa super fast train service covering the long distance in 45 hours was inaugurated. It would pass through the highest station in the world located at an altitude of 16, 600 feet. Provision of Oxygen masks was made to provide much needed succour to take care of health issues of the passengers. If Sun Xuxi, the Chinese Ambassador to India was to be believed, Beijing-Lhasa rail link was to be extended upto Yatung in Chumbi valley, just 27 kms short of Nathu La.

Historic Day of July 6, 2006

To witness the historic resumption of international border trade around 8 a. m. on July 6, 2006 there was a beeline of vehicles from Gangtok. Not to miss the occasion, drive of 56 kms began fairly early between 2 and 3 a. m. As I managed to reach a point ahead of venue at 14, 140 feet, I was greeted by Officers of 17 Mountain Division of Army, B. R. O. and 13th Battalion of ITBP. After a cup of tea at minus 4 degree temperature on a bright sunny day we noticed that a new gate had come up on the Indian side and passage too had been widened.

On the Chinese side, relatively shorter men of Border Guards of China vis a vis their Indian counterparts, had taken position. Behind them nicely Bakhu clad Tibetan girls were noteworthy as they were carrying long, pink scarves (Khadas) as opposed to shorter, off white scarves of Sikkim. In no time a fairly large number of people from Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) arrived. Presumably, it included the traders approved to proceed to our make shift trading mart at an Army Barrack at Sherathang. I was told that selected traders from Sikkim had also arrived. It was to be led by Motilal Lakhotia, a senior citizen who had a bank account in Chumbi valley in the thirties of 21st Century.

Historic Moment

Sri Pawan Chamling, Chief Minister Sikkim arrived slightly ahead of scheduled time. When news was passed on, Quiangba Puncog, Chairman of TAR too moved towards the 'Line of Control'. Upon exchange of pleasantries and offering of Khadas, the ice was broken after 44 years. Amid smile and cheer, the ribbon was cut jointly by the two dignitaries and short speeches highlighting the occasion were made. For Chamling, a beginning was made for bigger things to come. People of two countries were to witness the event as a harbinger of flourishing trade, deep understanding, wider co operation and durable friendship.

Walk into India & China

Upon tea & refreshments on Indian side, as a matter of courtesy, Chairman, TAR agreed to walk a few metres into Indian side with the C. M., Sikkim and latter too reciprocated the gesture alongwith many of us. Since by this time the Chinese Ambassador had become somewhat familiar to me, we walked together on the Chinese side upto their Immigration check post. Upon taking permission, I was tempted to take a few photos. Back home, I narrated that I had visited a country without passport and visa.

Walk For Trade With Chinese

Soon about one hundred Sikkim traders began moving into China duly escorted upto International border by the tall ITBP Jawans. We bid them good bye. A new beginning displaying bonhomie was nicely made. Afterall, path started by J. W. Edgar mission of 1873 and Younghusband mission of 1904 had flourished right upto 1962.

Resumption of border trade was to be followed by Mansarovar-Mount Kailash Bus Yatra w. e. f. June 14, 2015.

How swiftly these nine years passed by, one could not imagine. It may be noted that trade has come to a stand still, a couple of times. Mansarovar Yatra too was discontinued for five years and was resumed on June 11, 2025. Even though Yatra through Lipu lekh Pass in Uttarakhand and Shipki La in H. P. also are through, the pilgrims undertaking Nathu La route find it more convenient.

When the C. M, Sikkim had aspired it at the time of resumption of border trade, one never knew that Chinese were going to accede to our request and continue allowing Indian pilgrims even when relation between two nations is not that normal.

Chapter - 4

Mt. Kailash-Mansarovar Lake Yatra Through Sikkim³

Extremely good and pleasing news of resumption of Mount Kailash & Mansarovar lake Yatra from June 11, 2025 through Nathu La after a hiatus of five years, has to be welcomed with a sense of pride and pleasure. To comprehend the nuts & bolts and intricacies involved, it may be desirable to go down memory lane.

A RED LETTER DAY

It was a cool, soothing night on 5th July 2006 when we rushed to Nathu La for resumption of international border trade between India and China. As tourism was to get a certain boost, there was enthusiasm all around. All eyes were glued on Nathu La pass, overlooking Chumbi valley of Tibet from a commanding height. We made it to Nathu La, much ahead of schedule on 6th July, 2006. The hard rock area had all the needed infrastructure. Tall Army and ITBP personnel in their impressive turnouts clearly dominated their Chinese counterparts in terms of height and appearance. The dignitaries arrived shortly before 8 a. m. It was a different Nathu La today. Bright and sunny with azure blue sky all around. Our Jawans, for a change were not tense but looked calm & relaxed. Chinese too looked cool and calmposed.

BONHOMIE AT THE TOP

Apart from Chairman, Tibetan Autonomous Region, his officers and Chinese Ambassador to India too graced the occasion. Since we had met earlier, developing good rapport with him appeared easy. Chief Minister, Sikkim arrived a few minutes ahead of scheduled time. After usual exchange of pleasantries and gifts, short speeches were made by both dignitaries. At last a group of traders from each country crossed over the border lying closed for 44 years.

Per kind courtesy of the Ambassador of China to India, I too crossed over for a brief while on the Chinese side to discover that boundaries were nothing but creation of mankind.

PROPOSAL FOR PILGRIMAGE THROUGH SIKKIM

When a proposal of C. M. Sikkim to permit Nathu La route for pilgrimage to Mt. Kailash & Mansarovar was included in his speech, it did not evoke expected interest among the Chinese. True to their nature, they maintained silence. They are famous for being tight lipped on such issues and have the wherewithal to prolong something for years.

A WAIT OF NINE YEARS

From July 6, 2006 to June 14, 2015, it would appear a long gap of nine years but I suppose, dealing with the Chinese those days was not everyone's cup of tea. There was also a stark difference between avid interest evinced by optimistic and candid Sri Ashok Kantha, Secretary, Commerce, Government of India in 2004-05 and his successors in Commerce and Tourism Ministries upto 2015. However, we in Sikkim held the view that both trade & tourism were crucial for the state.

ADVANTAGE SIKKIM

Pilgrimage through Sikkim, though a long and somewhat boring one, was seen as a comfortable and less tedious one vis a vis land routes through Ship Ki La in H. P. and Lipu Lekh in Uttarakhand. Nepal route, mostly by air, was also used by many wealthy Indians.

NEW ROUTE THROUGH NATHU LA

As regards new route through Nathu La, people, were more than willing to pay Rs 2, 50, 000/ per head as upto 2019. The entire journey takes 21 to 22 days. First batch of pilgrims were to report at Delhi on June 11. They were to undergo comprehensive medical check ups and briefings, prior to proceeding to Bagdogra by air. Then the responsibility of State Tourism Department begins. Yatra would be undertaken by ten batches of 48 yatris each, duly accompanied by Liaison Officers, cooks and supporting staff.

ADVENTURE cum PILGRIMAGE

Upon fitness drills, Yoga and briefing at Gangtok and two days of acclimatization at 16th Mile and Hangu Lake centres, they will leave Nathu La for Kangma (14, 220 feet) on the 6th day. The second day of journey from Kangma to Lazi, altogether covering 295 kms, will be completed in seven to eight hours. Pilgrims will reach an altitude of 4953 metres which is fairly high. But much longer (477 kms) journey from Lazi to Zhongpa (4728 metres) would take 11 to 12 hours. As this will be a real litmus test, pilgrims may have to be mentally prepared.

Again after a night of rest, the 475 kms stretch between Zhongpa to Darchen (4670 metres) would take 11 to 12 hours. From Darchen, one has to go to Yamdwar & thereafter to Diraphuk.

PARIKRAMA of Mt. Kailash-40 kms, Begins Here.

22 kms journey from Diraphuk to Jhunjhui (4780 mrtres) will be a tough one just like Jhunjhui to Darchen and is likely to take six to seven hours.

LONG CHERISHED DIP IN MANSAROVAR

After the 88 kms keenly awaited journey from Darchen to Qugu (4600 metres), one gets a rare chance to take a dip in Mansarovar lake, the highest fresh water lake in the world. It is a spiritual hub of the world, with temperature ranging between 11 degree and 4 degree. One gets stunning views of Himalayas from here. People between the ages 18 to 72 years with regular fitness levels are encouraged to make it.

The Circumambulation

(walking around) of Mt. Kailash, having a length of 53 kms is allowed but not climbing. Considered a sacred pilgrimage, it has to be completed in three days. One should remember this gospel truth. This part of Yatra is very physically demanding and challenging. Not all pilgrims, therefore, opt for it.

RETREAT TO INDIA

The retreat of 1500 kms to India will commence on the 14th day. On 17th day, if everything goes well, one would make it back to Nathula. Though one tends to get tired and exhausted by this time, its worth taking a risk. Both body and mind are bound to be refreshed.

TO CONCLUDE

This rare, awaited and important Yatra to the most holy abode of Lord Shiva is once in a life time experience. Even if one can not afford it, one should utilise savings and pad up pocket by contributions from near and dear ones. It is worth it by any means. Such an adventure right through very high altitudes is possible as a result of flawless planning and monitoring by officers and security men of two countries for days together.

Sikkim is gearing up to welcome tourists and pilgrims with warm hospitality and adequate exposure to art, culture and traditions of the state. Number of tourists to the state will definitely multiply with this fresh development having positive overtones.

Chapter - 5

Nathu La: It Attracts, It Captivates⁴

Undertaking a tour in cold conditions to a hill station is not everyone's cup of tea. Six of us dared to do it. After having traversed to scattered hamlets of Darjeeling District as a part of 25th APPPA Course in 1999, we went down to Siliguri plains to accomplish second part of our charter. At the end of a fortnight, there could not have been a better place than NathuLa to have a change and relaxation. Puri, N. L., Shanti and Savita, all were in high spirits.

Visit to M. G. Marg, Gangtok's high street and a pedestrian delight having flower pots displaying lovely seasonal blooms, fountains, clean benches, variety of food joints and well dressed men and women sporting latest hair do, impressed all of us.

We secured necessary pass and began journey from Gangtok in two sturdy Gypsies. We had not even covered four of 56 kms that we were informed that we had only one set of passes. After all attempts to convince Check post personnel failed, a good one hour was lost in securing the second one. While I had to struggle against time in going down and coming up, rest of the members had a relaxed & hearty breakfast in the most picturesque setting of the check post, so much so that my part was forgotten.

Other Worldly Experience

Once sunny, we resumed our ascent to Tsomgo Lake and Nathu La pass. Going past Fir, Pine and Juniper trees dotting the meandering road was an other worldly experience. Clear weather facilitated a breath taking view of all objects of nature. Occasional glance of snow clad peaks and wild flowers further made us cheerful.

Halt At Kyongnosla

Enroute to Tsomgo we stopped for a while at Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary, a habitat of Red Panda, the State animal and Blood Pheasant, the State Bird. As possibly they were hibernating, they could not be spotted. Temptation to get down to touch things was thwarted by words of caution of drivers,

determined to show us sites in time and ensure return to Gangtok before weather 'packed up'.

Tsomgo, Huge Water Body

Subsequent to a climb of twelve thousand feet, our joy knew no bounds when we came across a huge water body in flat setting. First glimpse of Tsomgo appeared refreshing. From a distance cameras began clicking and rush followed to touch the clear, icy cold water as also to look at Yak, an animal of utility found in high altitudes. Half an hour proved insufficient to enjoy such a beauty. While leaving for NathuLa, we did get another glimpse of the breathtaking scene, though from a different angle- bluish green colour of the lake appeared having competition with the soothing azure blue colour of sky.

What A Scenic Beauty !

Terrain ahead looked more rugged. Vegetation began disappearing rather swiftly. Very few dwelling units and people were to be seen. Extremely tough looking BRO labourers from both sexes undertaking road repairs were noticeable off and on. They were toiling hard to ensure essential supplies to the troops perched on high mountain posts.

Vehicle Off For A While

It was getting colder but brightness of the day and overall scenic beauty kept us in commendable high spirits. At one sharp turn, one of the vehicles began making strange noise. Its speed was reduced. When nothing succeeded, we were more than delighted to settle for an unwanted, yet welcome break. Landing on ankle deep, soft and crunchy snow we discovered a roadside bench mark declaring an altitude of thirteen thousand feet. Our ultimate destination was barely ten kms away.

Play By Snow Balls

While tough and smiling drivers were engrossed in repairs we had an interesting and exhilarating pass time in throwing snow balls at each other. What a pleasure it was to play like kinder garden kids, that too in a tough and unusual setting ! Desire to make a snow man was resisted due to time constraints. All over it was snow and snow with no sign of habitation, yet the

scenario had its own charm and attraction. It was beautiful nature at its best. Such sights could encounter and sustain chill of the air but not for long.

Nathu La, Close To Old Silk Trade Route

Our journey was resumed on getting 'Ready' sign from drivers. The final milestone at Sherathang read Delhi 1780 kms and Lhasa 500 kms on two opposite sides. We began driving closer to the historic NathuLa pass which served as a significant transit point during pre-1962 Silk Trade route between India, Sikkim and Chumbi valley of Tibet. Just before our arrival, we had a magnificent view of twin frozen lakes against the snow covered slopes. Final touchdown was quite an experience. We felt lighter and began having breathing difficulty. We were, therefore, advised by the Army Jawans to walk slow at this height of 14, 110 feet. Within eight minutes of relaxed walk on snow we could reach the spot visited by Pandit J. L. Nehru in 1958. A plaque thus commemorates his visit:

"Jawaharlal Nehru, P. M. of India, accompanied by Maharaj Kumar Col. Palden Thondup Namgyal arrived NathuLa by motor vehicle on 1. 9. 1958."

Unhindered View

After turning around, we touch the barbed wire on International Border and bend to have a feel of Chinese territory. It felt the same. Chinese troops saw us but did not object as it had become a daily ritual. A warm hand shake with one of them enabled us to ignore and forget the coldness in bi lateral relations. Spending some moments with our brave Jawans gave us useful insights into their dedicated lives at such a height. Fortified with Celine tablets, hot Jalebis and Pakoras, we found enough warmth to brave the deteriorating weather.

Final Departure

Within half an hour we had to leave the historical Pass as clouds began hovering and sight of Sun was getting lost. We were so satisfied that a mild headache, nothing unusual at high altitudes, could not deter our spirits. Very soon we began losing height. Another interface with Tsomgo Lake against deep inky glow of evening came our way. As drivers were in hurry, we had to settle for a quick lunch of Thukpa, Momos and Sail Roti. While Yak riders were returning to their villages, sights of young tourists embracing and posing for snaps with lake as the background enlivened our spirits.

Descent from Tsomgo was slow and uneventful. Though it snowed a bit, clouds dictated terms. Gangtok was not far off but it appeared so on account of fatigue accumulated. When clouds cleared up, Gangtok dazzled like a Jewel In The Crown. It was ready to mesmerize all of us still eager for getting some more eternal bliss.

Chapter - 6

Sikkim: Destination Exotica⁵

Nestled in Eastern Himalayas, Sikkim provides an unusual and magical feel akin to a fairy land, boasting an unimaginable variety of flora and fauna.

Nature At Its Best

It's an extraordinary place bearing lush green valleys, snow-fed lakes, verdant forests, cascading waterfalls and age old monasteries. The overall setting is covered with a large number of flowers found throughout the year. It has 515 species of orchids, over 36 types of Rhododendrons, 552 types of birds, 227 lakes and wetlands and 80 varieties of Primula. Overall, the State is blessed with 4, 500 flowering plants and 424 medicinal plants.

Away From Madding Crowd

It is a peaceful land with friendly, smiling and congenial people. In view thereof, visitors and tourists can think of spending days in splendid isolation in many places near the main hubs of Gangtok, Namchi, Gyalshing, Pelling, Mangan, Ravangla and Jorethang

Treat For Nature Lovers

Flora of Sikkim is a treat for nature lovers especially those having inclination in fine tuning their aesthetic and photographic skills. Welcome to Sikkim, get rid of your stress, relax in its soothing surroundings. Do not forget to draw pleasure and take snaps with a purpose..... for posterity. Sikkim as a hot spot of Bio diversity has a variety of plants and animals, both domesticated and wild. They are found in eco systems stretching from humid river valleys to mild weather spots to extremely cold and attractive mountain deserts upto a height of 18, 000 feet.

Plethora Of Birds

Coming to birds, of the 552 types, Blood Pheasant has been adjudged the State Bird. Other important birds are Crested Serpent Eagle, Brown Wood

Owl, Satyr Tragopan, Ruddy Shelduck, Kalij Pheasant, Snow Pigeon, Himalayan Monal, Snow Partridge, White Capped Water Redstart, Yellow billed Blue Magpie, Spotted Forktail / Forktail, Scarlet Minivet, Blue Whistling Thrush, Fire tailed Sun Bird, Vedler Flycatcher, Greet Barbet, Grondala, Himalayan Flame Back (Wood Pecker) and Scarlet Finch.

Combine of Rare & Common Mammals

As regards Mammals, Red Panda, a cute and shy animal has been declared the State animal. Its habitats being Kyongnasla and Khedi areas of East Sikkim. Other animals found in the state are Leopard, Cat, Snow Leopard, Himalayan Black Bear, Jackal, Yellow throated Marten, Dhole (wild dog), Common Langur, Himalayan Palm Civet, Assamese Macaque, Scrow Goral, Himalayan Tahr, Shapi, Musk Dear, Crestless Porcupine, Indian Wild Boar, Blue Sheep (Bharal), Common Giant Flying Squirrel and Barking Deer.

Wild Flowers

In the Alpine meadows of the state, more so, during the Monsoon, countless wild flowers bloom. Some of the important varieties are: Primrose, Travellers Joy, Cinquefoil, Primulas, Androsace, Stonecrop, Blue Puppy, Sandwort, Saxifage etc.

Variety of Rhododendrons

Rhododendron drawing its name from the Greek language has over 36 varieties in Sikkim. They vary in height from a few inches to 30 m. They bloom from Spring to early Summer in all the Districts. These bell shaped flowers are of pink, white, red, purple, yellow and orange colours. Blooming of this unique flower indicates that Spring season is not far off and that snow would melt to herald a warm weather. Famous Rhododendron habitats are: Yumthang, Versey, Singalila, Dzongri, Maenam, Kyongnasla and Thangu.

Tempting Orchids

Any description of floral diversity of Sikkim would be incomplete without mentioning its exotic Orchids, many of whom are in bloom for days to two months. Undoubtedly, they are the pride of State. Of the 515 species, important and popular ones are Vanda, Phalaenopsis, Papilionanthe, Dendrobium Nobile(white), Phaiopedilum, Cymbidium, Venustum,

Rhyncostylis, Retusa, Bulbophyllum, Dendrobium Nobile (pink), Dendrobium Chryseum, Coplogyne, Ceologyne Nidita, Ceologyne Barbata, Papilionanthe Vandarum and Thunia Alba.

Showcasing of Floral Wealth

As indicated above there is no dearth of flora in Sikkim. What has been lacking is their exposure. First organised effort was in form of organising a flower show at Kabi in North Sikkim in 1962. In 1990 State could have a semi permanent venue near White Hall complex at Gangtok out of a meagre grant of Rs. Two lakhs from Planning Commission in March 1990. Since then regular flower shows are being held on annual basis. Similar shows with competitions are also held twice in Namchi and Gyalshing. These also happen during thirteen major or minor tourist festivals spread over an year.

Annual Flower show

This show at Gangtok draws a large number of visitors both from within and outside. Main hall has a capacity of over two thousand pots of extremely colourful and attractive Orchids of over 200 varieties. The surrounding area and close by Ridge Park usually have display of over six thousand flowers of extremely soothing colours. Blooming on a daily basis in bright sunshine, they simply mesmerise the onlookers. Easily visitors, nature lovers and tourists can spend an hour or two. Such a display is made possible by the untiring efforts of State Tourism, Forest and Horticulture Departments and Flower Show Celebration Committee.

Involvement of All Sections

Apart from professional and amateur flower cultivators, school children, tourism stake holders and Police personnel are also involved in flower growing and promotional activities. Whole White Hall and Ridge Park area of Gangtok is white washed, painted, cleaned and spruced up to provide an attractive setting round the year. If needed, area is declared traffic free for a couple of days.

Chapter - 7

Yumthang: Enchanting Valley Of Flowers⁶

Widely known as Valley of Flowers, Yumthang situated at a distance of 140 kms from Gangtok attracts and captivates. Located at an altitude of 11, 800 feet it is a repository of huge bio diversity. Be it Summer or Winter, this huge meadow has a remarkable charm.

Having collected basic information, we embarked upon journey. It was a rather long train journey from New Delhi to New Jalpaiguri station, followed by a refreshing Jeep journey from Siliguri to Gangtok. Once we crossed fifteen kms, the road made a quiet entry into Mahananda Elephant sanctuary. While we did not encounter any elephant, the dense, lush green rain forest was to our liking. At Sevoke a narrow guage railway line going to Cooch Behar and Assam separates the plains from hills. What a sight it was to see the superfast Teesta river finding a flat setting to cool its tempers prior to proceeding to Bangladesh.

Entry Into Hills

It led to a fascinating world. Heat and sweat began disappearing. Speed of vehicle was considerably reduced as it had to negotiate slopes. Sight of waterfalls and rivulets would prompt us to indulge in photography. There was nothing like direct feel of nature. On noticing a few sinking and sliding points of Birik and Lekhobir Jeet Bahadur, our well behaved driver informed about perils of getting stuck for hours and sometimes days due to landslides. No wonder, a few of vulnerable points had tiny places of worship.

Teesta Bazar

At Teesta Bazar, we crossed over to other bank of mighty and clean Teesta river. Within a kilo metre the highway branched off to Kalimpong. Then followed eye catching confluence point of Rangit and Teesta rivers. Like the famous Sangam at Allahabad, two rivers do not actually meet, they flow down on their own. Same is apparent from colour of their water.

Gateway To Sikkim

After leaving behind Melli, the first entry point to Sikkim and on covering 75 kms, we reach Rangpo, a small but lively & developed township. A huge multi coloured gate welcomed us to Sikkim, a hidden paradise, a land of mystic splendour. Comparison with West Bengal becomes but obvious on looking at flurry of activities along the road leading to Singtam and Ranipool. One saw visible signs of development, utilisation of water, production of hydel power, electrification of villages, look of houses etc. At dusk, while negotiating steepest 12 kms climb from Ranipool the whole area looked immersed in light. It looked as if stars had descended on mountain slopes. With the rise in altitude, temperature outside began dipping. It was time to grab woollens.

Gangtok

Members who were misguided by natural air conditioning began coughing while taking a stroll on M. G. Marg, the beautiful Mall. Past dinner at neat and clean Hotel Tibet we heaved a sigh of relief upon being confirmed arrangements on way to Yumthang, much heard of Valley of Flowers.

Mystical Peak

Fatigue of journey ensured our hitting the pillow rather early. A knock at 4 a. m. ensured that we receive blessings of Mount Khangchenjunga, the guardian deity of Sikkim. Early morning glow slowly bathing this mystical peak was not only breath taking, it was other worldly. It was to be seen to be felt from within. Difficult to describe and elaborate. Change of colours over the whole range kept one mesmerized. By half past five it became bright and sunny.

Morning View Of Gangtok

With packed Break fast in toe we began traversing North Sikkim highway. Baluwakhani ensured a bird's eye view of sprawling city. At Burtuk, noticeable change in thickness of vegetation could be noticed. Tall pine trees and two waterfalls ensured good company. Owing to last night showers, hills looked fresh with streaks of clouds here and there. After ten kms Gangtok disappeared from view. At Tashi Viewpoint one could get another panoramic view of Mt. Khangchendzonga.

In a distance of 67 kms between Gangtok and Mangan one has to cross ten bridges. B-2 or Bridge Two separates East Sikkim from North Sikkim. A waterfall of medium height greets us right on road. Jeet Bahadur was amused as he did not get enough time to clean the vehicle at dawn. Another waterfall appears soon.

Kabi Longtsok

Upon some gradual climb one historic village of Kabi Longtsok was reached. Over here Lepchas, earliest inhabitants of Sikkim had entered into a Blood Brotherhood treaty with the Bhutias in 1641.

Phodong Monastery

Subsequent to a drive of about an hour in pristine surroundings we reach Phodong Monastery. Belonging to the Kargyutpa sect of Buddhism it was founded in 1740 during the reign of fourth Chogyal. The first and second Chogyals were installed over here as Chief Lamas. Monastery having colourful prayer flags had a rectangular courtyard full of devotees. In no time, the Cymbals crash, drums roll and the Lamas dressed in ceremonial gear mime episodes from the holy scriptures.

Landslide Prone Areas

After driving past remaining bridges and crossing Namok, Mangshila and Tingchim one comes across B-10 at Rangrang, once one of the highest suspension bridges in the World. Once a beautiful area, it gave a devastating look due to frequent landslides. Entry into Mangan was a quiet affair. Dzongu, the habitat of the Lepchas was closeby. For want of time, we missed visiting Namprikdang, the enchanting confluence point of rivers Teesta and Kanaka.

Meyong Khola

At Meyong, we had to indulge in a tough battle with nature. Our Jeep had to literally swim through a river over distance of a furlong. We were informed that in 1991 a cloudburst had swept away a Bailey bridge below lovely Meyong Waterfall. Entire area had since been landslide prone, so much so that during the Monsoon, people and materials have to be Trans shipped.

Night Halt At Tsungthang

After hurried visual delight of Rail Khola waterfalls and a close view of Teesta river at Tong, we reach Tsungthang, the Sub Divisional town situated at the confluence of Lachen Chu (river) and Lachung Chu. Together they become Teesta river from here. While having steaming hot momos and thukpa for dinner at the well kept SPWD guest house, rain comes pouring down. Soon it became torrential, replete with lightening and thunder. Intensity of cold registered a rise. We had no option but to cover ourselves with quilts.

Direct Democracy At Lachung

The following day yet again, we set off early to negotiate 24 kms drive to Lachung. While gaining height lush green Paddy fields of Tsungthang Gurudwara were visible. As per a legend, Paddy was grown at this height due to blessings of Guru Nanak who is reported to have visited the place and left his footprint atop a rock.

Lachung at an altitude of 8, 500 feet was definitely cold. Little rest and a cup of hot tea was not only necessary to ensure a break but it was to help acclimatization also. The Bhutia village spread on both sides of Lachung Chu retained its unique culture and traditions, most notable being Dzumsa, its self governing body, wherein direct Democracy on the pattern of ancient Greek city states is still practiced.

Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary

By 10 a.m. our last leg of 22 kms began. At the outskirts, community demarcated fields were visible. To our left was a Army helipad. Herds of Yak and sheep would be seen frequently. Upon attaining an altitude of ten thousand feet, first signs of Primulae and Rhododendron flowers were noticeable. Wild flowers were carpeting the floor all over. Further drive took us inside Shingba Rhodo Sanctuary. It was simply a riot of colours: red, pink, white and purple. We gathered that of 36 species of Rhodos, 24 were found here. We halted for a few minutes twice to admire the beauty from close angles and 'feed' the cameras. Slow drive through the Sanctuary was bereft of any strain as gradient was gradual.

Curative Property Of Springs

Thereafter, we hit twin Sulphur springs. A wooden arch bridge over Yumthang Chu looked irresistible. A beeline of tourists meant that we had to wait. Upon getting a feel of warm water, our fatigue disappeared. These springs were immensely popular for their curative properties and healing powers.

Terminal Point

Soon we drive through the final leg of the spectacular Valley of Flowers. In no time Subhash Tiwari, our second driver slowed down to point ahead to the vast, flat and lush green meadow of Yumthang. Its mere glance lifted our spirits. Our joy knew no bounds. We looked left, right and upwards. Beauty appeared irresistible. We decided to have a close look of the majestic snow clad peak behind. Baby Yaks could be seen jumping up and down. As we get down to straighten our body and spread carpets at the base of Yumthang Glacier, the sky is ablaze with a cloud burst of sunset colours.

Nature At Its Best

Suddenly we notice two villagers grazing their Yaks. With their consent we have tea made from thick Yak milk. Next we are attracted to breathtaking Yumthang Chu. Some try to touch ice cold water, others try hand at Angling. Complete round takes over an hour. Terrain was picture perfect. By the time our late lunch is laid, all look exhausted.

Soon sky was overcast. It was time to bid good bye to the enchanting valley. It was a real paradise having marvellous scenic grandeur. As evening approached, we looked back at the mountains, exotic flora and picturesque spots. What a delight the Rhodo Sanctuary gave ! In the years to come this experience may perhaps guide us in our search for peace and tranquility.

Chapter - 8

Air & Rail Connectivity To Sikkim⁷

Sikkim had good road connectivity in tune with its fragile mountains and relatively small population till 1975. A feeder kind of railway line upto Gail khola (approx. 65 kms from Gangtok) in West Bengal, however, existed till thirties of last Century. It, perhaps was swept away by landslides or floods. Latter may have been more valid a reason as the railway line, based on which ever photo, I came across, was very close to ferocious Teesta river. A Truck Department of former Kingdom of Sikkim used to cater to travellers and carriage of goods to and from Gailkhola.

Idea of a fresh rail link to Sikkim gained momentum in 2008-09. A sizeable sum was earmarked for taking up this work as a National Project. But many hurdles, kept surfacing, especially in the West Bengal portion. I will revert once I finish with air link to the State.

AIR LINK TO SIKKIM

Regarding air link to our hill areas, there is an unconvincing thinking that Defence forces have to be accorded a priority. I am talking about H. P., Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. I am not saying that needs of armed forces should be overlooked. But at the same time, civilian considerations too need attention if an area is tough and inaccessible.

H. P. still has only two airports despite such a large tourist inflow. Second airport has not been constructed in Uttarakhand despite the formation of state 26 years ago. Sikkim got an airport only in 2018 after relentless efforts made by me and our Chief Minister for 18 years and Arunachal Pradesh got a civilian airport only in November 2022. It's a different thing that it already had four Defence airports before the demand for a civilian airport was met.

Helipad Managed Sikkim

To begin with, there were two large helipads in Libing, East Sikkim and Pagyong and a few others in North District which were used for V. I. P. visits and during natural calamities. These were completely under the control of

Army. Later civil helipads were added in other Districts. Burtuk helipad was constructed in Gangtok to cater to civilian Heli service from Bagdogra, followed by similar constructions in Gyalshing, Namchi and Mangan.

Foundation Stone for Airport

Discussions during the morning walks in Nehru Park in Delhi are sometimes useful. I was also a beneficiary in the Summer of 2000 when accidentally I met Sri Sudhir Krishna, the Secretary of the then Finance Commission. When he asked about my state's priorities, I indicated need of an airport. He agreed for a meeting between Chairman of the Commission and Our Chief Minister who was fortunately in town. We got a beginner's grant of Rs. 50 Crores. As I could not monitor things effectively sitting in Delhi as Resident Commissioner, the executing Department messed up things. Instead of utilising the fund it was allowed to lapse. Another similar grant of Rs. 50 Crores was utilised but only partly.

Casual approach on both sides had some silver lining when Late Krishna Kant, Vice President of India laid foundation stone for the first airport of Sikkim at Pakyong on February 2, 2002. It appeared that a fresh beginning was afoot.

Before this ceremony, search had begun for a possible site. I was thrilled to have a few meetings with Airport Authority of India (AAI). Sri Ramalingam, Member Planning was very positive. So was Sri Anurag Goel, a senior Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MCA). As latter was formerly in M. H. A., with my prior familiarity, ball picked up momentum.

For the first time, difference between a Greenfield and a Brownfield Airport became clear. Former meant a new one for which we were not eligible as our nearest airport Bagdogra was less than 15 kms away by crow flight. Latter meant renovation of an existing airport. Sri Goel accordingly guided me by asking me to put up a plea for an airport in Sikkim which could serve as a regional hub from tourism promotion point of view between triangles of Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. Not only I saw the logic but began pursuing with the MCA and AAI accordingly.

Four sites were shortlisted: Ranka in East Sikkim, Saddam in South Sikkim, Namchi again in South Sikkim and Pakyong in East Sikkim. Namchi already had a huge newly constructed helipad and it would have meant relatively low

expenditure. But its distance from Gangtok went against it. Saddam too was a good site but long distance from state capital, possibly went against it. Choice zeroed down to Ranka which was relatively flat as compared to other sites. It was right opposite Gangtok and cost wise it was going to be lowest. But existence of North Sikkim highway high mountains right in front would have posed a serious threat to Pilots.

Highest point over here was seven thousand feet. I was explained by Civil Aviation experts that it is not only important for a pilot to land safely. It was equally important to get ready to take off if visibility was not sufficient. This being very risky proposition, approach in front should be clear enough. As high mountain range of North Sikkim highway was going to be a stumbling block, Ranka site was rejected.

Choice of Pakyong

Now AAI officers had no choice but to settle for Pakyong. Distance of 28 kms from Gangtok was manageable/negotiable, the site had a stable location, very few trees were to be uprooted and very few houses had to be shifted and rehabilitated. Five minor streams, however, posed a hurdle initially. These could be managed by keeping them below the airport from approach side. Discharge of water was observed during two rainy seasons prior to taking this decision. In sum and substance, it was going to be a Table Top Airport of 1.75 kms in length.

Proposal was approved by a high powered Committee of Ministry of Finance, chaired by Sri Ashok Chawla, known to me from my R. C. days. Wholeheartedly supported by Sri Raheja, Member, Planning, AAI, I made a passionate presentation before the Committee. At last I was victorious.

With these developments seven years elapsed from date of foundation stone (F. S.) laying. By 2008, Centre began giving priority to state capitals not having an air link. As General election was due in April 2009, there was a rush for starting and renovating old airports. A date in February 2009 was, therefore, fixed for Pakyong. As F. S. was already laid, when AAI approached me, I suggested the expression "Bhumi Pujan" to be performed by Sri Praful Patel, the then Civil Aviation Minister. As it was agreed to and ceremony held ultimately, I had the highest job satisfaction. Yet again, I was overlooked in respect of an INVITE but did not mind as I was engrossed in doing pious public service.

Funding The Mega Project

Next, rather most crucial issue was funding. As grant of altogether Rs 100 Crores had not made any dent, ball was in the court of MCA. They did not commit possibly they being executing agency. It, however, figured in our regular discussions with Ministry of DoNER and Planning Commission. When DoNER too expressed its inability, responsibility fell on the shoulders of Planning Commission, lender of last resort for ten hill states. It finally consented to, but by this time cost had over run from Rs 265 Crores to Rs 365 Crores (Exact figures I do not recall).

Challenges From Land Owners

As it happens in such mega projects, unconcerned individuals, genuine land owners and absentee ones began raising objections. They were adequately compensated in five spells, if my memory does not fail me. When we were ready to clear final round of compensation and as per settlement, fund was kept in bank, none would come forward to receive.

Historic PRAGATI Meeting

In the beginning of October 2015 even the issue figured in the monthly PRAGATI meeting of Prime Minister. He was given wrong impression that I, as Chief Secretary had failed to act. I put up my defence without blaming my predecessor. It was also indicated that concerned Secretary was certain to transfer the amounts to respective bank accounts in view of obstinate land owners. Sri K. N. Chaubey, Secretary MCA not only came to my rescue but also gave an assurance for restarting the work and completing the same within two years.

24th September, 2018, A Red Letter Day

At last this day became a reality after 18 years of wait. It was gathered that Pakyong airport, due to be inaugurated by the Prime Minister was going to be 100th one, coinciding with my 59th Birthday. We in state Government were already at Pakyong ahead of schedule. Police had secured the area and weather too appeared fair.

Prime Minister had already arrived the previous evening. As he was to drive upto Libing helipad, followed by heli flight of few minutes, we had reached

the destination but only after confirming arrangements with the DGP and head of 17 Mountain Division at Libing.

Though weather was clear, yet pilots of three helicopters felt that there was going to be difficulty in landing. P. M., in all fairness did not wait. Rather he decided to undertake a 30 minute road journey upto Pakyong. Though road was clear and safe from security point of view, yet we had to be on tenterhooks as P. M. was not being escorted by senior Civil and Police officers. He arrived at last. We heaved a sigh of relief. Upon ribbon cutting & pulling of curtain, covering inauguration plaque, Pakyong airport was inaugurated at last. Hall was full of clap from officers of State and Centre. I profusely thanked Secretary, MCA, representative of AAI, my State Secretary colleagues, D. M. & S. P., East District, new station Manager of Pakyong Airport and all others for their sincere efforts and support. Later P. M. addressed a public meeting at St. Xavier's School ground.

After a few days when I received the passengers of first Spice Jet flight from Kolkata, my joy and that of late S. D. Negi, the DGP did not know bounds. Tourists could not believe that a 'far off' place- Gangtok had become so near, thus saving their time, money and effort.

SEVOKE-RANGPO RAIL PROJECT

Taking up construction work for a rail link in a tough hilly terrain is not easy. It was very challenging in Western Ghats also when massive 760 kms long Konkan Railway project had to be executed due to a firm commitment of E. Sreedharan under resolve of late George Fernandes, the then Railway Minister. If the area concerned happens to be young Geological formation of the Himalayas, apart from taking care of Bio diversity and protection of thick vegetation to withhold the slope, umpteen care is necessary for regulating drainage. Any hill cutting should not lead to occurrence of landslide or aggravation, thereof.

Once completed by December 2027, the 45 kms long Sevoke-Rangpo Rail Project (S. R. R. P.) is expected to respond positively to many communication, tourism, trade and health related issues. Presently roads get severely impacted during long Monsoon spell and in pre Monsoon phase also.

Progress & Hiccups

Though 85% of the project is underground, having 14 tunnels and 13 bridges, it has seen mild to major protests and stoppage of work a couple of times, primarily in West Bengal. It has been observed that when rival factions among Gurkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) were not opposing, it would be delaying tactics of State Forest Department in the name of preservation of Mahananda Sanctuary. They would ignore the fact that four of five railway stations were going to be in West Bengal. When 75 kms portion of National Highway too was under the jurisdiction of West Bengal PWD, their performance during winter, an actual working season, left much to be desired. Converting the Kalimpong Sub division into a full fledged District about seven years ago is also not making any dent as far as interest of Sikkim is concerned. At the level of Centre, the matter was referred to Ministry of Law and thereafter to Ministry of Tribal Affairs. Latter too was adopting passing the buck technique, though no tribal was going to be affected by the project. When my several visits to Ministries of Doner, Forests and Tribal Affairs were proving ineffective, matter was raised by me in Annual meeting of NEC in Guwahati in September, 2019.

Matter Finally Decided By NITI Aayog

Sri Amitabh Kant, C. E. O., NITI Ayog, thereafter, was requested to intervene. He took a detailed meeting with Secretaries of concerned Ministries and Head of Projects, IRCON in my presence in the third week of September 2019, thereby giving firm directions for starting the work. Though clear green signal was given, work of IRCON actually picked up momentum in 2021. Head office of IRCON should have utilised the time optimally.

Safety Aspects

Tunnels are the safe devices aimed to cause minimum threat to ecology and environment. Traditional drilling machines have been replaced by most modern ones to ensure minimum vibration to the villages. Earlier blasting would not only disturb people and lead to cracks, gradually the affected area would become susceptible to tremors as well. Thus frequent protests have

become issues of past. The project engineers may like to note for guidance that prevalence of fractured rock and water seepage caused trapping of 41 workers for 17 days in the Silkyara-Barakot tunnel of a Char Dham road project on November 13, 2023. This has happened in a few other projects of Uttarakhand also due to sudden seepage of water through cracks. It is understood that to take care of such exigencies, provision of an Escape Tunnel is being made.

Other Protective Measures

More protective measures have to be undertaken in the 'open' areas generally abounding in thick vegetation. Project Engineers are of the view that the SRPP being a linear one, not following any Zig Zag pattern, earth is 'hit' over a much smaller area at a time as compared to a road project. Further, pre stressed Anchors and Bolts are being used to stabilise the slopes for long periods. Also Reinforced Earth Walls are being constructed to make an area strong prior to taking up construction activity.

Regulating Flow Of Drains

As hill areas invariably have drains, waterfalls and rivulets, adequate care has to be taken so that they do not cause concern during Monsoon. Slowly these have to be stream lined and stabilised. Flow is regulated by constructing steps which look like beautiful waterfalls when discharge increases. Height of protection or retention wall is also an important factor. In general, these are in the range of 25 to 30 metres. Height could be more, depending on location.

Approach Road Precautions

Sufficient care has to be taken on both sides of approach road leading to a station. Culverts, causeways and short span bridges are a must to enable unhindered flow of water coming from top. As such, their non existence or broken state damages the passage and there is possibility of their recurrence.

Initiatives Have To Be Sustainable

If vegetation and bio diversity present in an area are ignored by a long gestation project, such as, Railways, expected benefits to the community may

not be ensured or are likely to be delayed. Our aim should be to facilitate rather than impede. Our endeavour should be to give back to nature if unintentionally an act or two has posed short or long term threats. In sum and substance, development initiatives have to be sustainable.

Apprehensions Need To Be Set Aside

Many apprehensions are being expressed about Sevoke-Rangpo project, more so, during the Monsoon. Objections mostly emanate from West Bengal. No doubt, rainy season of 2024 posed challenges and the one in 2025 had been long and devastating but that does not mean that negative stories narrated through 'reels' regularly about the stability of this maiden rail project should be believed.

First Underground Railway Station

One redeeming feature of SRRP will be its under ground Railway Station at Teesta Bazar, which will be first of its kind in India. It is bound to attract tourists also undertaking the land route to Sikkim. During my visit to a few sites (Sevoke to Khani khola) in May, 2025 and on 21st May, 2026, I have advised the engineers not only to expedite the process but also to display Sikkim's art and craft on its walls, entrance and exit. Similar approach would be necessary with regard to over ground Rangpo Station at Khani Khola. Other three stations too should be in tune with culture of surrounding areas.

Experience Of Other Underground Railway Projects

When Darjeeling Himalayan Railway has survived for over one hundred years and similar has been experience with Kalka- Shimla and a few such mountain rail projects in South India, we should have reasons to feel relaxed. Two more cases come to mind. Notable initiatives taken by Indian Railways in tough security environment of mountainous terrain of Jammu & Kashmir has to appreciated. Its a pleasure to see a Vande Bharat train cruising through snow bound areas of J & K. Why should Indians go to Switzerland when similar sights can be facilitated at home? Similarly, 125.2 kms long Dehradun-Tehri-Pauri- Rudraprayag-Chamoli railway line is also under fast construction. Like S-R project, it will have 17 tunnels and 35 bridges. Once

completed, present journey time of seven hours is likely to be reduced to two hours.

To Conclude

Two more phases of Sikkim Railway project are proposed: Phase II from Rangpo to Gangtok and Phase III from Gangtok to Nathu La. IRCON not only needs to speed up needed field reports on priority but also provide an alternative to over burdened highway to Gangtok. Thereafter, 34.7 kms march to Indo-China border has to follow. One has to keep in mind that Chinese are certain to knock from their train at Nathu La very soon.

Part “B”

STATE OF NATION

Chapter - 1

Maha Kumbh: Confluence of Faith⁸

A jumping Sadhu, another concentrating on Damru while doing Vrikshasana. Still another, ash smeared, blowing a bugle. A fellow 'brother' relishing the smoke of a chillum. A Sadhavi deep in meditation, post dip. Sages throwing water from entangled long unkempt hairs, collective jump by the Naga Sadhus at Dawn. Men and women offering prayers while standing in knee deep cold water AND the serene and inspiring Aarati in the evenings.

Where do we see all this?

Obviously at Maha Kumbh at Prayag or Allahabad. A sea of humanity. Of all castes, class, complexions and races. Rituals and superstitions are very much prominent and they are there to stay. A Maha Kumbh held every 12 years at Prayagraj is confluence of history and spirituality. One gets happiness by this divine experience, earliest account of which is of 1881. Kumbh literally denotes a Kalash that came out from churning of sea **following** a war between Gods and demons. Nectar is believed to have fallen from Kalash in Prayagraj, Ujjain, Nashik and Haridwar. Kumbh Mela is, therefore, organised therein, every six years, turn by turn.

After a morning walk of five to six kms by braving cold and dust, dip at Sangam is considered very auspicious. It is supposed to clean body and cleanse sins. Flowing water by taking away all ill feelings puts you in a profound state of mind. Sangam experience is a great leveler. High or low, everyone is equal before God. One gets to see Gurus and Saints belonging to thirteen Akharas from length and breadth of country. Talking of entry and movement, seers use tractors, mini trucks, chariots and horses. Some come with a band, some in procession. A few even ride mobikes and expensive gifted cars, right upto confluence point.

Ash smeared Naga Sadhus decisively dominate. Congregation can not move forward unless they jump into water. Dandi dhari Sadhus, followers of Adi Shankaracharya in normal Sadhu attire too look prominent. If riot of colour

including Siberian Cranes at this confluence of faith is amazing, pull of Sangam is equally perplexing.

Stampede On Mauni Amawasya Day (MAD)

Millions of devotees had converged at Sangam on January 29, 2025, the MAD, stated to be second auspicious day of bath. Though time of 3 a.m. was intimated, a vast gathering was seen gathered by midnight. Around 1:40 a.m., a large number of devotees rushing for 3 a.m. bathing hour began trampling on people sleeping in open. Deadly crush was pathetic owing to unwarranted panic. People began colliding with each other, leading to collapse of many barricades. Many relatives and personal belongings were lost. Many suffered due to suffocation. Several innocent old parents and young sisters lost their lives on a day when silence was to be observed. As per eye witnesses, scattered shoes, slippers, jackets etc spoke of scale of chaos. Within half an hour, Mela ground looked like a battle field. Allegedly devotees did not get needed attention. Had they been allowed to use nearby empty roads, casualty could have been low.

Unfortunate Appeal by Divisional Commissioner (D. C.)

When things settled a bit, it was gathered that an appeal by the D. C. after mid night asking people to proceed to bathing area caused unwanted rush. Also allowing devotees too close to the 'nose' of Sangam proved fatal. Movement could have been staggered. Fair image of organisers was thus tarnished after sufficient widening of 'nose' as compared to last Maha Kumbh in 2013. Coincidentally, on this very day in 2013, 35 devotees were killed when a bridge at Allahabad Railway Station had collapsed.

Arrival of Ambulance & Police

By 2 a.m. ambulances came and began taking injured on stretchers. 58 dead bodies and over 60 injured persons were seen by the eye witnesses at Mela hospital but later it turned out to be a mismatch with the claim of only 30 dead, by the Chief Minister. Police reached the spot slightly later than 2 a.m. and began transferring the dead rather recklessly to waiting ambulances. Perhaps dignity due was not shown.

Gesture of Naga Sadhus & Muslims

Good gesture of deferring their bath and ritualistic procession by the Naga Sadhus was appreciated. By evening when relatives kept searching for their dear departed and administration was counting devotees who kept pouring in, massive shortage of food, water and blankets was noticed. These were promptly arranged by considerate Muslims staying close-by. Thus they cared for humanity even when they were discriminated against by State administration. As gathered, twenty five thousand devotees received free service in various Islamic institutions under guidance of local Imam. It was a timely assistance when arrangements of state had collapsed. Such a humanitarian aid was given when Muslims were prohibited from Mela but Doctors and skilled men from same community are giving yeoman service inside the premises.

Post Stampede Scene

Overall mismanagement seems to have led to the tragedy. Transparency too was lacking. Focus should not have been on VIP movement. Better crowd and traffic control was needed. Fresh face saving devices, such as, barring entry of vehicles, cancellation of VIP passes, no vehicle zone till February 4 and easing curb on Pontoon bridges could have been taken in advance. No vehicle zone at this late stage may not help much. Vehicle in feudal states, like U. P., Bihar and Andhra Pradesh is not only considered a status symbol but power is supposed to "flow" through it.

Press Below Expectation

Members of Press, apart from routine reporting, did not look transparent, either. Easy availability of modern communication devices should make dissemination of information swift. Many lives could have been thus saved. Even one Shankaracharya from South India was emphatic in saying that press was hand in glove with administration.

Death & Injury Figures

List of dead, supposed to exceed one hundred and over two hundred injured, continued to be shrouded in mystery, so was confirmation about another stampede at Jhusi (three kms away), which led to forty deaths and many injuries. Responsible Magistrates and Police personnel need to be acted against. Any further delay or routine transfer may not only complicate matters

but vital evidence is also likely to be destroyed. In our country lives lost in such congregations or accidents get easily forgotten.

Inquiry Committee

Merely to fill up columns, an Inquiry headed by a retired High Court Judge was announced but experience shows that concerned persons buy time, actual culprits vanish and the Inquiry Committee gets extension after extension. If one looks at the whole tragedy, innocent devotees had deaths under unnatural circumstances and State administration instead of being transparent is playing hide and seek. Loose administration openly displaying communal tone, commercialisation of Mela activities, restlessness of a group of devotees and immunity of press, all seem to have led to two stampedes.

Stand of Supreme Court

It is perturbing to note that in a country having freedom of expression, neither Supreme Court nor the Parliament was initially taking note of these sufferings. Apex Court being tight lipped initially, refused to entertain a PIL on the issue but later ONLY recorded statement of a Senior Advocate on behalf of Government of U. P.

Discussion in Parliament

The Lok Sabha too did not entertain a discussion to begin with but allowed a few members to speak on the matter later. As many as eight to ten members of Parliament from both houses spoke about poor functioning of state Government, sought clarity on number of dead and injured and steps being taken as regards suffering being undergone by fresh batch of devotees.

Dismal Scenario

In retrospect, owing to large number of devotees and challenges involved, mishaps have happened in five Maha Kumbhs so far: 1954, 1986, 2003, 2010 and 2013. But earlier mistakes were admitted and moral responsibility was owned. This time something is amiss and there is a tendency to hide facts from public eye. Concerned Government and party functionaries may manage to escape law of land in short run. However, curse of a large number of devotees who have lost their near and dear ones will continue to haunt them.

Chapter - 2

Himalayan Biodiversity & Livelihood Vs Natural & Biotic Meddling⁹

The term Biodiversity was coined first in the eighties of last century. It signifies totality of genes, species and eco systems in a region. Significance and richness of the Himalayan Biodiversity stands apart and same has been comprehensively researched. Vast, rugged, yet pristine Himalayas stretch over 2500 kms from Ladakh to U. P. to Arunachal Pradesh. It has remarkable biological and cultural diversity, umpteen flowering plants, over 800 tree species and more than one thousand medicinal plants.

The North East region alone takes pride in having 850 bird species, of which Sikkim has 552. Sikkim also accounts for 50 percent of Butterflies found in the whole of Indian Sub continent and is also repository to over 500 exotic orchids, 36 types of Rhododendrons, 104 rivers and rivulets and more than 200 clean water lakes. Botanically, Sikkim is richest, as so much of Biodiversity is not found anywhere in world in a small area of 7096 Sq. Kms.

NEED FOR ADEQUATE PROTECTION

Aren't we supposed to ensure adequate protection to such a valuable treasure of Biodiversity and maintain the productive capacity of the Eco System, apart from adding to the tree canopy and recharging the water bodies? Ecologically fragile Himalayan regions having a plethora of plant & animal biodiversity, traditional knowledge systems and sustainable livelihood practices need our continuous and consistent attention. The manifest threats from natural calamities called landslides, floods, flash floods, cloud bursts etc. cannot be ignored in highly sensitive regions of Western and Eastern Himalayas, from Seismic threats point of view. There is, therefore, a fervent need to do all that we can, for protection and preservation of Himalayan Ecology and livelihood patterns.

GREED NOT NEED

To satisfy our greed not need, more specifically, adoption of quick fix, short term remedial measures have been playing havoc with mountain eco systems atleast since 2010.

Natural calamities in Ladakh, J&K (Kishtwar) H. P., Uttarakhand (Kedarnath Cloud Burst & heavy rain triggered Landslides), North Bengal (Teesta Overflow & Landslides) and Sikkim (Earthquakes, GLOF & Landslides), go on to prove how we ignore onslaughts in the name of Himalayan Tourism & Char Dham visits in particular and developments of different 'shades' in general.

UNWANTED BIOTIC INTERFERENCE

As Himalayas are young and relatively fragile, Geological formation, due care and caution has to be taken especially while building roads, colonies, water supply, hydel power projects etc. Parameters and standards suitable for plain areas and sea coasts cannot be applicable to any of the eight Himalayan states. Threats keep cropping up when we play with nature knowingly or out of compulsion. Based on my personal field experience gained in two states, it could be stated that any crack or damage on top becomes a threat to survival of glaciers, rivulets, lakes and rivers. Both push and pull factors ensure unwanted Biotic interference.

CALAMITIES SPEEDING UP SINCE 1988

It has been observed that natural calamities, basically large scale happenings of adverse nature result from earthquakes, glacial lake outburst floods, flash floods, cloud bursts, landslides and above average rainfall. Quantum of these has been showing upward trend since 1988. We may pinpoint following major episodes briefly prior to analysing details.

(1) EARTH QUAKES IN SIKKIM

Though Sikkim is an Earthquake prone area, recent ones took place in July 1988, September 11, 2011 and on the same date and almost same time in the evening of September 11 2012. First two shook and shattered the state and resulted into a number of casualties (50) and injuries, apart from wide cuts in the State Highways and damaging vital bridges in three out of the then four Districts. Narrow village roads, footpaths and Jeeps too suffered immensely.

The last Earthquake, however, did not lead to any damage. Yet high degree of alert was maintained for a month or so. As Sikkim lies in Zones IV and V, earth quakes low on Richter scale keep happening. It may be worthwhile to note that during the Earthquakes of 1988 and 2011, no rescue and relief work could be carried out from evening to next morning due to lack of electricity. Presently artificial light can be created by rescue teams. Lives can not only be saved in darkness but seriously injured can be also quickly identified for transfer to nearest medical facility.

(2) U. T. OF LADAKH

Though very little rainfall takes place in this newly created U. T., natural calamities have been happening for some time. In recent months, both Cloud bursts and Flash floods have been reported in this era of Global Warming and Climate Change. Some international border areas of Ladakh, in addition, have to also remain on high alert owing to persistent threats from China. Afterall, Galwan battle had taken place herein only.

In the recent past, Kargil-Leh Highway has been closed more than once and natural calamities too have happened in Kargil proper. In the same way, a village around Pangong Lake or Pangong Tsu was hit by flash flood. As population is not dense, impact of any natural event is not felt that much but isolation and remoteness factors pose more challenges. When weather is not congenial for an air lift in an emergency, communication through roads has to be resorted to in Ladakh. Hence, maintenance and repair of State and National Highways get primacy.

(3) JAMMU & KASHMIR: Floods of 2014

Generally large spread out floods do not take place in level lands, such as, Srinagar. But these devastated many parts of U. T. in 2014, killing people, destroying houses, Shikaras, Houseboats, markets, vehicles and roads. Tourism suffered badly and for a long duration. In a way, it was an advance warning for natural calamities to take place in future. Again both 2024 and 2025 have been tough for the U. T. from natural calamity point of view. During annual Amarnath Yatra, rain and snow, slippages, as such, pose difficulties to the pilgrims, apart from occasional threat from terrorists.

PAHALGAM

Pahalgam area of the state has also become vulnerable from physical threats and communication challenges as April 22 gruesome incident would reflect. Afterall, for no fault of theirs, 25 Indian tourists and one from Nepal were mercilessly killed allegedly by Pak terrorists. Names of only a few victims and perpetrators were divulged. What do authorities gain on being tight lipped on such grim happenings, perhaps only they would know. Transparency, however, always pays.

RAMBAN

Ramban District, a crucial location on National Highway 44 terminating at Srinagar is a crucial link of mountains and lakes of Kashmir valley with plain areas of Jammu. J & K, is also grappling with tremendous to excessive rainfall. One village of Ramban received Cloud Burst and hailstorm at 3 a.m. on 19th July which subsequently caused landslides, floods and sweeping of several houses and shops. Many local nallahs also began overflowing. Five persons lost their lives initially and over 100 people were taken to safe places.

The incident also created a jam of 10 to 12 kms on the N. H. Total ten houses were completely crushed while forty were damaged. Villagers were so scared that sleeping at night was disturbed out of fear of landslide or flood. After such happenings, District administration was on high alert. Truck Drivers going to Srinagar suffered maximum losses as they had to struggle even to get one meal and their important papers and bills were lost or misplaced due to crisis at Ramban.

KISTWAR

Cloud Burst again hit remote Chosti village in Paddar area of J & K 's Kistwar District on the eve of 79th Independence Day. According to initial reports, over 65 persons expired, more than one hundred were injured and another hundred plus were reported missing. Unfortunate incident took place during annual Machail Mata pilgrimage, for which Chosti is the interim point, wherein Yatris can park their vehicles prior to resuming their journey on foot. District administration with SDRF and Army swung into action to begin picking up injured and held up, thus supervising rescue operations at the drop of hat. Survivors recalled that ill fated site was covered by slush, boulders and uprooted trees. When pilgrims were teeming with chanting, all were

swept away. Such was the power of gushing water that muck, stones and uprooted trees appeared in a large area to damage several houses. Those sitting at the Langar, enjoying the beautiful nature and a CRPF camp were swept away. It was learnt that casualties could have been higher but the boulders swept down by the ferocious flood prevented water from entering Chosti village.

More caution will have to be taken by the District administration during Machail Yatra as fifteen to twenty thousand yatris were, in all, going to participate. Biggest challenge is to trace the bodies as a few might have been buried under the debris. Continued spell of inclement weather was proving to be a stumbling block in relief & rescue operations.

(4) HIMACHAL PRADESH

H. P. is not as infamous as is Uttarakhand in terms of occurrence of natural calamities or quantum of rainfall. The state is also more stable as compared to Geological formation of Uttarakhand and Sikkim. Stable and wide approach to Shimla from Kalka side is a sight to see. Three Districts of H. P. came in the severe grip of Cloud Burst resulting into death of over 240 persons and estimated loss of Rs 2 thousand Crores. The tragedies began with remote Kinnaur and Lahaul Spiti Districts, then gradually took Jakhu in Shimla District and Shrikhand area in Kullu District under its grip. Many people died and houses were swept away in Kullu. In Kinnaur, mishap happened when labourers working on construction of a road of ITBP were trapped under a Cloud Burst. Two hundred of them could be rescued while 500 of them were still trapped.

Interestingly, It was gathered that Cloud burst had also taken place in the areas, wherein no clouds were witnessed. In a latest development, since rain has begun playing villain again, eight to nine Districts of the state have been put on alert.

(5) MEGA CLOUD BURST AT KEDARNATH SHRINE

The Kedarnath, one of the holiest temples under the exalted category of Four Dhams (Shrines) is located at the confluence of holy Mandakini and Saraswati rivers. The largest natural calamity after infamous Tsunami of December 2004 shattered this place from June 14 to 18, 2013 when devastating and very scaring landslide and flood was ignited by excessive

downpour (385 m. m.) or Cloud burst. This ferocious development led to over 4000 deaths, killing of animals (mules & ponies) and destruction of roads, footpaths, dwelling units and other properties on a large scale. Approaches to the temple were all cut off in a confirmed "Rain Prone" area and adjoining rivers also faced high erosion. Not only this, debris from the flood blocked the rivers. Nonetheless, nothing happened to the main shrine of Lord Shiva in the same way as Jagannath Puri temple gets saved each time a Cyclone or Earthquake hits its vicinity.

In regard to Baba Kedarnath also owing to his supreme divine powers, time tested and highly durable ancient architecture and masonry work of the 1500 year old temple, built by Adi Shankaracharya, vagaries of nature come and go but nothing happens to this seat of Hinduism. Tragedy struck the shrine area during a very busy travel and pilgrimage season. Also impacted were Gangotri, Yamunotri and Badrinath. This kind of rain and 'sweep' not only took Mandakini river valley under its grip but altogether 13 Districts of Uttarakhand had to face worst kind of devastation. Districts to suffer maximum were: Bageshwar, Rudraprayag and Uttarkashi. Vandana Sharma 'Diya', a scholar has done a comprehensive study of Kedarnath tragedy and post calamity Eco conscious development.

REMEDIAL MEASURES

Though a sizeable sum of money has been sanctioned by the Government of India for relief, restoration and eco development of the entire complex of Kedarnath, following Remedial Measures need to be also taken on Priority:

- Sustainable travel and pilgrimage tourism has to take the place of haphazard tourism, dominated by middlemen and tour operators.
- Aesthetic & well ventilated housing and reasonable accommodation for pilgrims should be arranged to take place of unmindful and crammed up dinzy structures,
- State Government needs to pull up its sleeve in view of setback from natural calamities. Current casual approach has to be given up,
- A serious thought has to be given to take suitable steps for Waste Management. It will improve health of temple employees and hawkers selling things needed by devotees.

- Preparation of a Disaster Risk Reduction Plan and an Evacuation Plan will be in fitness of things.

(6) TUNNEL TRAGEDY

This tragedy of Chamoli District led to unfortunate death of two hundred persons on February 7, 2021. It killed workers and others stuck inside an under construction long tunnel of Tapovan Vishnugarh Hydro Power Project. Patience, tolerance and perseverance of trapped persons and that of rescuers & medical team not only entered record books but it also set new benchmarks. Rightly it sent shockwaves all over. Gently pushing water, liquid food and Bananas through narrow pipes and day today effort at rescue was shown live on television but despite all this, trapped men could not be saved.

(7) EXTREME RAINFALL FROM JUNE 15-17, 2013, & THEIR IMPACT IN UTTARAKHAND

Uttarakhand is having a pristine but ecologically fragile land, at the same time. Over last two hundred years, large scale deforestation, construction of dams, roads and dwelling houses etc. have been noticed. It is a disaster prone (earth quake) area, figuring both in Zones IV and V. Landslides, floods, flash floods and forest fires keep taking place. It has a large percentage of migrant labour from other states as also Nepal.

Forecasts & Actual Happening

In view of past experiences, a forecast of heavy to very heavy rainfall on June 14, 2013 was made. Subsequently, forecast on June 15 for similar rainfall from June 16 to 17 and normal rainfall from June 18 to 19 was also made.

According to a comprehensive Study entitled "Uttarakhand: Development and Ecological Sustainability" conducted by Ravi Chopra, extreme rainfall from June 15 to 17, 2013 led to floods and landslides in several places. It was the worst disaster of the newly formed state. Six thousand persons were either dead or missing. It included pilgrims and tourists from different states. Animals too perished on a large scale. Revenue loss only from tourism was immense. Besides challenges on the vital ecology and livelihood fronts, the state shall have to review its power development policy immediately. Signing of a record number of agreements for hydel power plants has given the state a bad name. Economic development measures should be such that they

maintain the ecological balance and do not, in any way aggravate the impact of a natural calamity.

In view of the fact that recent Dharali devastation has led to disappearance of sixty numbers of migrant labourers, Chopra has suggested that basic human resource and human conditions of migrant labour from other states and Nepal need special attention. Early warning systems need to be spruced up, if already in place. There also has to be sufficient and fool proof preparedness for any possible disaster, afforestation in fragile zones and reasonable livelihood development. As regards suggestion for good governance being a routine one, does not cut any ice.

(8) GLACIAL LAKE OUTBURST FLOOD IN SIKKIM

A very dangerous happening triggered by Glacier Lake Outburst Flood in the basin of fast flowing Teesta river rattled whole of Sikkim in October, 2023. By the time the manpower incharge of Teesta Stage III 1200 MW hydel power project dam at Chungthang Sub Division were alerted, the unprecedented outburst of river finished half of the dam. Since height of dam was relatively low, water did not enter the town area. Overflow of South Lhonak Glacial lake located above Mukuthang at an altitude of 15, 500 ft. in Mangan District, caused this unthinkable but once anticipated tragedy. This writer had cautioned about impending danger on a few occasions, concerned state Department and Ministry of Central Government in the meetings & discussions.

About two hundred persons, houses, roads & footpaths close to river banks were simply swept away in minutes between Sankalang in Mangan District and Melli in Namchi District. A new arched bridge over Teesta at Singtam too" blew out of winds". Its effect was also visible in lower portions of the river in North Bengal. 200 kms of area was severely affected but bountiful Govt. of India spared only a paltry sum of Rs 50 Crores to take care of rescue, relief and compensations. It raised many pertinent questions from upkeep of ecology angle in the backdrop of continuance and fresh construction of several hydel power projects in Sikkim, North Bengal, Uttarakhand and H. P.

(9) TEESTA FLOODS & LANDSLIDES IN NORTH BENGAL & SIKKIM

Whole of Sikkim state is being catered to, by N. H. 10, only one National Highway since 1975 which passes on both sides of beautiful, yet mighty & calamity-prone Teesta river. An alternative N. H. (180 kms) on the other bank of Teesta is under "construction" by NHIDCL for over 9 years. No body knows its completion date. Its silver line being- it passes through relatively stable areas vis a vis N.H.10.

Darjeeling, a District H. Q., has four roads leading to it, including a National Highway. Its Toy train from Siliguri having a tag of World Heritage is an additional feature. On the other hand, Kalimpong District of West Bengal has access to plains in Siliguri and Bagdogra Airport, courtesy two highways, one of which via Lava, is never impacted by vagaries of nature. Based on my own experience of this tough region for over 35 years, I may say that N. H. 10 from Rangpo in Sikkim to Sevoke in North Bengal (60 kms out of 112 kms distance to Siliguri) has been "fathered" by atleast three road agencies one after another. Without any doubt, it has been happy hunting ground for landslides and sunk and degraded portions of land of all sorts.

Till 1993, if I recall, it was a narrow road or a confirmed apology to a National Highway. Landslides were more and persistent between June and October, when sufficient percolation of water would take place into the steep land mass. Trans-shipment phenomenon, therefore, was all pervading.

ONE ROAD, MANY GUARDIANS

Border Road Organisation used to look after this stretch in its own planning & narrow perspective way. But it used to have Dett. or Detatchments at frequent intervals. These would swing into action during a rock fall or bigger sliding of fragile hill sides. This kind of Detachment or presence of Gangmen was completely lacked by West Bengal PWD which took over N. H. 10, perhaps in 2012.

WEST BENGAL P. W. D.

Modus operandi of slow and less responsive West Bengal PWD was God forsaken from their "regional office" based in Kalimpong. A couple of times PWD Secretary would not respond even to my telephone calls as Chief

Secretary. Once in Delhi for a meeting, I used Cell phone of his senior to speak to him about need to improve bad condition of the highway. Will it be tolerated elsewhere?

SIKKIM P. W. D.

40 kms of Sikkim portion was handed over to Sikkim PWD. But their performance too was below par especially during heavy downpours when shooting stones would come down like bullets from a gun. They lacked necessary trained manpower and machineries, apart from skill and experience to tackle increased workload, all of a sudden.

NATIONAL HIGHWAY & INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

For the last few years NHIDCL has been sole guardian of the entire stretch of road from Gangtok to Sevoke. Apart from introducing upgraded and new machineries, cranes and JCB's coated with professionalism, their best achievement till date has been construction and commissioning of a Via duck and bye pass at Rangpo. This was inordinately delayed due to non commitment and casual attitude of Government of West Bengal as regards vacation of land in their territory by unauthorised obstinate settlers.

CHANGED SCENARIO

One feels sorry to state that width of N. H. 10 has increased over the years and trans-shipment of yesteryears has almost gone into oblivion, due to rise and rapid movement of traffic & mushrooming of constructions along the N. H. However, unjustifiable and beyond the carrying capacity pressure also on land has risen manifold.

PRESSURE OF TOURISM

If domestic tourist arrivals (11 to 12 lakhs per year, more than Sikkim's population) add to GDP and Per Capita Income of Rs. 7 lakhs 7 thousand & 18 of Sikkim, this comes with a cost. Over exploitation and virtual sacrilege of fragile land mass in many places is playing havoc. One sees challenges in respect of traffic, water supply, electricity, waste management and climate change. If there is land slide in majority of the areas, there are also incidences

of sinking zones. Needless to say, insistence on constructions therein prove fatal.

On top of it, during the current Monsoon season, say since May, Teesta river is in massive spate after many years, thus partially submerging Teesta Bazar township. It may be noted that main concrete bridge commissioned in 1995 is the fifth one. Its four predecessors have been swept away starting from thirties of last century.

A steep narrow road from T. Bazar to Darjeeling has been also cut off for more than 6 weeks. It is not only weakening of the hills but loss of substantial livelihood which needs to be addressed to on priority.

Not only purchasing power of area people has been substantially reduced, left over masses also live in a state of perpetual tension on account of changing "mood" of the river. Some do not even sleep at night like a Lepcha woman at Dikchu.

Incidentally, people living between T. Bazar in West Bengal and Melli on South Sikkim side and Melli on W. Bengal side have no "Mai Baap". People of Teesta Bazar and Melli on W. Bengal side depend heavily more on tourists and rafting enthusiasts, than on occasional "local" vehicles. And when Teesta river submerges N. H. 10 several times, livelihood of the people goes for a duck. For the last three days N. H. 10 has been closed again for the sixth time. It also had to be closed for unhindered Landslide clearance on a sunny day by heavy machineries few times in the last two months.

To add further insult to the woes of people, suppose river bank in Melli of Sikkim and its counterpart in West Bengal get impacted by Teesta, people of West Bengal get only half of compensation from their State vis a vis what is given by Govt. of Sikkim (Rs. Fifty thousand in Bengal but Rs. 1.25 Lakhs in Sikkim)

ACTIVATION OF "DORMANT" SLIDE POINTS

Apart from emergence of fresh Landslide points, old and virtually dormant landslides at Lekobir, Birik and Sirwani have got reactivated. Whereas 5 to 6 layers of Ranrang slide at Mangan have been settled in 1991, most difficult 9th Mile slide and sinking zone near Ranipool has been set right by application of fresh knowhow and planting of a special grass by BRO.

I vividly remember walking a kilometre in slush as an I.A.S. Probationer below the Lekobir slide in October, 1985 to the then vibrant Teesta Bazar, when Trans-Shipment did not materialise.

When Seti Jhora slide somewhat close to Coronation bridge emerged, say, seven years ago, it would not be worrisome initially, as it was in hard rock area like Birik. A new slide called Selfie Dhara near Seti Jhora too poses difficulties off and on. Not only at Seti Jhora but elsewhere too, on the N.H., sufficient width has been created over the years which makes One Way Traffic possible but only during the day. But risk is yours.

There is no end to saga of landslides when you live in Sikkim or Kalimpong.

When relatively new slide point above Coronation Bridge at Sevoke is controlled and traffic resumes, one should not be surprised if due to sharp erosion of Teesta at 29th Mile, traffic comes to a screeching halt. Some other slide points viz, Gail Khola, Kirney Khola and Bagey Khola too trouble road users anytime during the Monsoon, which has been very heavy so far.

SHALL WE SAY

An average Sikkimese is perpetually sandwiched between Slide Land and Bengal Land.

(10) DHARALI CALAMITY

A lot has been written, told, telecast, seen and discussed about massive flash flood in Kheer Ganga river at 1. 45 hours in the afternoon of August 5, 2025. Flash flood was possibly caused by heavy quantum of rainfall at 6,700 feet, seven kms up from Dharali.

Leaving aside picturesque and pristine Dharali village (having attractive two storeyed wooden houses, one reportedly 800 year old), commercial pocket which had mushroomed bereft of any planning having over 30 hotels and homestays, sufficient road and parking space, WAS SWEEPED AWAY or damaged beyond repair. Beautiful villages of Harshil and Sukki too suffered.

Rummaging for bodies etc through mounds of muck and debri of the height in the range of 20 to 80 feet is a herculean task. It is happening every day. So far only four persons have been reported dead and 66 are still missing. Their break up being: 25 from Nepal, 13 from Bihar, 8 each from Dharali and

U. P., 7 from Rajasthan and 5 from other parts of Uttarakhand. Missing lot includes 8 persons from one family of Nepal.

It is a hope against hope scenario after twelve days of catastrophe.

There are reports that no effort, whatsoever, is being spared by the dedicated manpower of the State Government and para military forces. Daily search is being undertaken with the help of a hand held machine which is supplemented by a battery of trained and experienced Sniffer dogs of Army. Dedicated and disaster management trained personnel of SDRF, NDRF, ARMY, ITBP and BRO have taken up a herculean task in this acute hour of crisis. Support from Helicopters is also being taken to operate as many sorties as possible to take needy and sick people to District hospital, Uttarkashi and AIIMS, Dehradun. In addition doctors and specialists have been also deputed to disaster zones. Also additional allocations of Diesel and LPG have been made. It will help both the rescue teams and the common citizen.

More or less connectivity to Dharali has been restored and a few irritants on the roads, such as, sinking points, rock blockages and clearance of rubbles and debris have been taken care of. Construction of a 90 feet Bailey bridge by the BRO between Gangnani and Harshil in a record three days has been one of the most notable and appreciable achievements.

In a welcome development, a channel has been made on 15th August to release water from an artificial lake formed after August 5 calamity.

WORKABLE SUGGESTIONS

Following MEASURES are required on PRIORITY:

- People residing along river banks in Uttarkashi, Gangotri, Bhatwari, Maneri, Rudraprayag or similar vulnerable locations in other states shall have to be shifted to safe locations.
- In view of fragility of the belt, insistence on a fixed width of a highway is not needed. Idea is to have a passage, not fast one to attract an accident,
- There should be no scope for unmindful and unregulated construction of any kind,
- Concern shown towards shortages & hoarding tendencies in the middle of a calamity may have to be encouraged,

- Tree plantation as a tool to maintain ecological balance should be propagated and pursued. These shall have to be watered and regularly attended to,
- For tackling natural calamities there has to be a long term plan. Same shall have to be reviewed from time to time by authorised persons,
- Waste Management is a necessity. Only after segregation, garbage has to be disposed off. These should not be dumped, however, into waterfalls and rivulets. Use of polythene shall have to be banned and enforced,
- Preparation of a Disaster Risk Reduction & Evacuation Plan would be necessary,
- Casual approach has to be replaced by a proactive, people centric one.

TO SUM UP

No calamity happens in isolation. These are very much part and parcel of prevailing surroundings. Why only mountain eco systems of two Union Territories and six states, one is witnessing devastating scenes in Delhi, Gurugram, Dehradun, Patna, Ranchi and many parts of Assam as well. A few days ago Rupa river too was overflowing in Barbani and Rajpur areas of M.P.

At a time when hill people are screaming, plainsmen are having unimaginable fears owing to overflow situation. As humans hold the key, it is incumbent upon them to wake up and take viable steps. In the reverse scenario, generations will come and go but situation may remain unchanged.

Chapter – 3

Notable Environmental Issues: Food Chain, Tigers, Stray & Feral Dogs¹⁰

While still being confronted with challenging natural happenings resulting into a large number of deaths and injuries, in a few states, namely, J. & K, H. P., Uttarakhand, Sikkim and West Bengal right upto August end, there is an urgent need to look into some notable environmental issues. These are threats to food chain and tigers on the one hand and dangers on health front, posed by Stray and Feral dogs, on the other.

FOOD CHAIN

To begin with, it may be necessary to throw some light on the mechanism of Food Chain (F. C.). A Food Chain displays how each living being gets its food. Each link in this chain is food for the next one. It demonstrates flow of energy within an ecosystem. F. C. is significant as it illustrates the transfer of energy and nutrients, sustains the balance of eco system, controls size of population and facilitates nutrient cycling through decomposers. It not only reflects interdependent relationship within an ecosystem but it also demonstrates how loss of one mechanism can harm, rather, destabilize the entire community.

F. C. shows a simple, linear path of energy transfer, illustrating who eats whom. It is a linear sequence of organisms, where energy and nutrients are transferred from one organism to another. It has a complex network of many species and their feeding connections. It illustrates that organisms are often part of more than one food chain, leading to complex interactions.

In Ecology a food chain is a series of organisms that eat one another so that energy and nutrients flow from one to the next. Food Chains are crucial for maintaining the health and balance of the eco system. They demonstrate how energy and nutrients flow through an environment illustrating the interconnectedness of the living organisms and their dependence on each other for the sake of survival.

ECOSYSTEM

It is a community of living organisms (plants & animals), which interact with each other and their non- living physical environment, such as, air, water, sunlight and soil in a specific area.

A F. C. is essential for comprehending how eco systems function and how to preserve their stability. It shows how each living being gets its food. While some animals eat plants, others eat other animals. A simple food chain links the trees and shrubs. While the Giraffe eats trees and shrubs, the Lion eats Giraffe. Meaning thereby, each link in this chain is food for the next link.

TIGER, TIGER BURNING BRIGHT IN THE FORESTS OF THE NIGHT

An eminent poet, William Blake wrote these famous lines in his collection 'Songs of Experience'. A renowned piece, it explores different facets of a tiger's beauty, wonder and divine power. Though Blake has questioned God for having created fierce and fearsome animal, such as, tiger, during the course of my analysis that follows, it would be seen that tiger is needed, rather needed badly for managing and maintaining F. C.

More than William Blake, it is our own Ruskin Bond, the veteran writer and story teller, who has the distinction of penning many works highlighting the characteristic features of tigers. One story has rightly raised the pertinent issue of dwindling tiger population (at one time), man-animal conflict and rising encroachment on the habitat of animals.

If both writer and poet were not concerned with care, protection and conservation of tigers, they would not have penned lines about tigers.

Point which I wish to stress is that tigers were and will be always crucial for maintenance of F. C. Unless they succeed in consuming their weak preys, no food grain would be left for the human beings.

A tiger is extremely crucial for keeping us alive and maintenance of food chain, as such. In absence of tiger, smaller animals, such as, deers may get rid of everything by grazing aggressively. And no grain will be left for consumption of baby animals and human beings.

Fortunately, population of tigers has been rising in India over the last 16 to 18 years. At present, India has largest estimated tiger population of 3682

(2022 figures) in the world which is more than double of its count in 2006. Protection of the specie and its habitat has been possible due to Project Tiger and establishment of 58 Tiger Reserves in 20 states. Launched in 1973 the Project is managed efficiently by National Tiger Conservation Authority.

As India is their habitat for twelve thousand years, it must have weighed in their favour prior to declaring them as the National Animal. Unfortunately, they have not been taken out of the list of endangered animals.

Their habitat includes grasslands, mangrove swamps, tropical and Sub tropical forests. They usually hunt Chital, Sambar, Bara Sigha, Wild Buffalo, Nilgai and Gaur. All this is a healthy and welcome sign.

SETBACK IN M. P.

M. P. State, however, has lost its 36th tiger this year, the highest in the country. Is n't it sad and shocking? People of the state need to realise that they are crucial for maintaining food chain and they are not objects of display in Zoos or circuses.

Latest death of tiger has happened due to poaching. The paw of a male tiger was found missing. Only raising alarm and blaming the ground staff for carelessness would not do. Some stern punishment may have to be given after a detailed Police investigation.

While this death has taken place due to poaching, the one, a fortnight ago in Satpura was owing to territorial fight of one tiger with another. Still another tiger was killed in August 2019 due to electrocution. It is suspected to have been caused by farmers who unauthorisedly use live electric wires on their fences to protect their crops.

All these are happening at a time when Forest Dept. in states has accorded highest priority to protection of Tigers & Leopards.

STRAY DOGS

India has largest number of stray dog population in the world. Such an unmanageable population results from many factors, including pathetic garbage management, providing food and milk to them by obstinate dog lovers at odd locations and hours, lack of Animal Birth Control (ABC) measures and sterilization leading to unchecked breeding. Very often, pets are also abandoned, urbanisation is encroached on habitats and peculiar cultural

tendency to favour pure bred dogs over native desi breeds also are strong contributory factors.

Over three lakhs stray dogs are in news nowadays in the national capital and whole of NCR. As they are found loitering and often attack and bite children and weak persons, a public uproar has been rightly raised and this is not the first time. One may clarify that not all stray dogs are biting kind and that many of them deserve our sympathy for their loyalty.

In response to a petition filed by concerned citizens, Supreme Court heard the matter twice. As per its first order dated August 11, authorities in Delhi and NCR were ordered by a Two Judge Bench to relocate all stray dogs to dedicated shelters. It also underlined that dogs should not be returned to the streets. It led to an uproar among animal lovers who rushed to the Court. Then matter was referred to a three Judge Bench.

In its order dated 22nd August, the Apex Court, terming its earlier order on confining stray dogs in Delhi-NCR to dedicated shelters instead of releasing them as "too harsh", the Court directed that these dogs should be returned to the area from where they were picked up, after sterilization, deworming and vaccination in accordance with the Animal Birth Control Rules, 2023. It was, however, clarified by the Court that relocation of the dogs shall not apply to the dogs infected with Rabies or suspected to be infected with Rabies and those displaying aggressive behaviour. Such dogs shall be sterilized and immunized but under no circumstance, should they be released back into the streets. Further, as far as possible, the stray dogs shall be kept in a separate shelter upon sterilization and immunisation. The Court also directed that all states and U. T 's be impleaded in the matter and all such cases pending in High Courts should be transferred to Supreme Court for a final national policy or decision.

FERAL DOGS

Free ranging or stray or Feral dogs are invading wild life habitats in large numbers, everywhere, including in Uttarakhand and Sikkim. Apart from injuring and sometimes killing Army & State Police Jawans and Forest Guards on patrol duty, they have emerged as a major conservation threat, directly hunting the endangered species in recent years.

Feral dogs exhibit more aggressive and wary behaviour compared to stray dogs. They have a natural instinct to hunt for food and find shelter.

Camera Traps are capturing less of Tigers and more of these (in 17 Tiger Reserves of the country). They have been also identified as a major threat to the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard and Chinkara in Rajasthan.

Further, in J & K, it has been found that a lot of damage was caused by Feral dogs to the eggs and the chicks which impacts and is a threat to the breeding of Black necked Cranes in Ladakh.

Other victims are Snow Leopard in Ladakh, Himalayan Fox, Blue sheep in Sikkim and Ibex Fawns in H. P's Spiti, Golden Langur in Assam, Leopard Cat in Coorg, Karnataka, Mouse Deer in Kerala and nesting Olive Ridley Turtles along the coast from Lakshdweep to Odisha.

Strangely, stray Feral dogs have been also found mating with the Himalayan Wolf in Spiti. Resulting hybrids are known locally as Khib-Shang.

Impact of such attacks may seriously impede the very survival of wild species which are already suffering from serious population decline.

Supreme Court after hearing the issue in Feb, 2024 had referred the matter to Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI). It underlined the severe threat posed by free ranging dogs to endangered species.

All said and done, issue of Feral dogs will have to be resolved before things go out of control. It is felt that the AWBI will be too weak a body to control and enforce measures against Feral dogs.

TO SUM UP

Food chain, optimum presence of Tigers, stray dogs surrounding us in all settings and Feral dogs often in mood to attack wildlife and men on jobs in dense forests, are all part of our large and vibrant spectrum of environment. While tigers will have to be conserved for the reasons stated, stray and Feral dogs will have to be tamed and eliminated, if needed. Animals cannot and should not cross limits beyond a point, but their habitat should not be encroached upon also, at the same time.

For an ideal state of sustainable development, mutual co existence between human beings and various species of animals is a MUST.

Chapter - 4

North East: Perceptions Can Be Deceptive¹¹

Perception is a process by which human beings interpret sensory information to form a meaningful understanding of world. Our attention should not be selective. Often these are not only subjective but deceptive as well. A single negative experience can lead to a biased perception of an issue or a place. It may be true also when "mainline" countrymen perceive a reality of "marginal" North East.

In 1985, I read an article on Sikkim in Frontline. A Union Minister was quoted thus: "When I visit Nepal next, I will come to Sikkim". In a few Central Government meetings, they would be on verge of winding up without listening to Chief Minister, Sikkim & a few others. When reminded, very little time would be assigned. Sometimes undersigned would be shown as having represented Assam or Tripura on record. In 2022, Delhi Government gave an advertisement for filling some temporary posts. One of the specifications was: "Subjects" of Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan could apply. As if this was not enough, an Ex-IPS officer, former M. P. and Spokesman of Congress has stated that neighbouring "countries" of Sikkim, Bangladesh and Nepal were "showing eyes to India", though they had gained from India.

Recently Sikkim observed GOLDEN JUBILEE of its statehood but it did not figure anywhere at national level.

One may say that concerned individuals did not check basic facts and that their utterances resulted from a mistake out of a particular thinking and system. These were not slips of tongue.

Ignored & Marginalised

North East region is ignored and marginalised, time and again in this way and simple people of the region either tolerate or ignore such statements. They have no qualm for unnecessary publicity.

Seven states, viz, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland & Tripura together were known as Seven Sisters. For their rapid

development, NEC was set up in 1972. Sikkim was inducted as 8th member as a special case, without insisting on the criterion of geographical contiguity. All the 8 states, now known as "Asta Lakshmi" are INTEGRAL part of Indian union.

While Arunachal Pradesh is known as Land of Rising Sun, Nagaland is called Switzerland of East, Meghalaya is considered Scotland of India and Assam is called State of Tea Gardens.

While Nagaland agreed to be part of India in 1962, Mizoram and Manipur were carved out from Assam in 1972. Thereafter, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh became separate states. Shillong was the combined capital till Gauhati became capital. Once Gauhati had a High Court to cater to 7 states till Imphal and other High Courts came into being. Sikkim had a High Court of its own right from beginning.

Largest state is Arunachal Pradesh, while Sikkim is smallest in terms of area as also population. In terms of LITERACY, three states of North East figure in top ten states of the country. Mizoram leads the table by having 98.2% literacy. While Tripura with 93.7% literacy holds third rank, Sikkim, in May 2026 has been declared fully literate.

People of the region are environment loving. They take good care of their surroundings. It is apparent from the forest cover in the range of 85.71% to 73.68% in respect of Mizoram, Arunachal, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura. North East is known for its peace & amity, mesmerizing beauty, diverse dialects & languages, culture, unique customs, simple people, rich bio-diversity, hydel power potential, lush green forests, mountains, lakes, waterfalls and rivers. A slow drive anywhere could be very refreshing.

When it comes to poverty & prosperity, Meghalaya is the poorest while Sikkim with Per Capita Income of Rs 7 lakh 7 thousand & 18 is the richest State. Incidentally, Sikkim's Per Capita Income is higher than that of Goa & Karnataka.

TURNING POINT

NER has been historically a ignored and neglected region, looked after by a Division of Ministry of Home Affairs even when NEC came to scene. It is a regional planning & execution body for socio-economic development of 8 states.

A couple of PSU's of NEC, such as, NEDFI, NERAMAC, NEEPCO are nothing but White Elephants.

NEC Meetings

Traditionally Governor of Assam would Chair NEC meetings. Later it was headed by Union Home Minister, then downgraded to Minister, DoNER and again command has shifted to Home Minister. Its Annual and sometimes six monthly sessions neither create any interest nor leave any impact. Only for the sake of formality show has been going on.

NEC came out with an ambitious NEC VISION 2020 document but it could not be felt in any of the states. Vision will succeed in the event of clear visibility on the part of key stakeholders. If North East is seen with a tinted vision or perspective, either things are Not possible or they tend to get delayed.

Ministry for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER)

It started as a Department of Government of India in 2001 and became a Ministry in 2004. Frequent changes of Ministers and Secretaries, however, baffles and confuses people of North East. Except for one or two Ministers and Secretaries, its a time pass phenomenon. According to latest information, 1643 projects have been funded by the Ministry at a cost of Rs. 16, 367 Crores.

A Non Lapseable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR) was created in Planning Commission in 1998 by unspent portions of 10% earmarked for N. E. region in the budget of Central Ministries. As the process for considering schemes was very slow, it was shifted to Department of DoNER in 2001. Idea was to fill up critical gaps in infrastructure sector by taking up projects 'Prioritized' by 8 states. It was on a funding pattern of 90:10 between Centre and State. Fund used to be released in 3 instalments of 40:40:20, based on progress furnished to the Ministry. As it became another source of mismanagement & corruption, guidelines of NLCPR were changed in 2016. State Level Empowered Committee headed by the Chief Secretary of State was formed and funding pattern was also changed to 40:60. Impact of this change remains unknown.

North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS) was launched in December 2017 in place of NLCPR as a Central Sector Scheme.

P. M. -DevINE

Prime Minister's Development Initiative For N. E. Region, a new scheme was launched in 2022-23 as a 100% Central Sector Scheme with an initial outlay of Rs 1500 Crores. To begin with, 35 projects in all 8 states were approved for a sum of Rs 4857. 11 Crores upto 30th November, 2024. These are to be completed in two to three years time.

To Sum Up, there has never been a dearth of funds for N. E. region. What blocks the way is tardy implementation, relaxed or no monitoring and lack of fresh ideas to tap vast human & physical resources.

ISSUES & CHALLENGES OF ASTA LAXMI

CONNECTIVITY

Once for going to some Districts of Arunachal Pradesh, one had to take a de tour through Assam. For going to a few areas of Meghalaya also, one had to cover a long distance through Assam. Situation, however, has improved, over the years.

In addition to better and all weather wide roads, all states are well connected by air from Guwahati, Kolkata and Delhi but inter-capital connectivity is lacking. Also there is rail link everywhere, except Sikkim, wherein it is likely to be completed by December 2027. Dibrugarh in Assam is already connected to a long waterway from Varanasi through Bangladesh.

But hostile developments in Bangladesh since August 2024 have halted bus and train services from North East and West Bengal, earlier passing through it. One can imagine the inconvenience factor apart from increased fare and time taken.

NATURAL CALAMITIES

Natural hazards, such as, Flood, Landslide, Cloud burst, Heavy Rainfall, etc. are perpetual threats in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Sikkim. Due to landslides and occasional flash floods, Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling get disconnected during Monsoon, sometimes for a week or ten days at a stretch. An alternative to N. H-10 (length 180 kms) is under construction for over nine years but one does not know its likely date of completion. This grey area needs to be addressed quickly by Ministry of Road Transport.

CHALLENGES FROM FOREIGNERS & OUTSIDERS

These are experienced very distinctly in most of the states bordering foreign countries. Assam situation has been more than grim for over four decades. In some of its Districts, Bangladeshis have already outnumbered local population. Manipur does not have border with Bangladesh, yet Bangladeshis have influence over the state. Such influence is also seen in Meghalaya and Sikkim. 390 kms of border of Manipur with Myanmar, as such, brings many complications due to regular influx of drugs and illegal migrants.

ROLE OF MISSIONARIES

Large number of Christian Missionaries from Europe were encouraged by the British Indian Government to work in Nagaland and Mizoram in the beginning of 20th Century to cajole people and also carry out conversions. As they seem to have mingled well with local tribal bodies, apart from conversions, they also exercise influence over planning and implementation of Government schemes. It results into tardy and poor implementation process and maybe, duplication.

INFORMAL TRADE

This kind of unauthorised trade often of Barter kind, with neighbouring countries has been going on in border states for ages. No Government can stop it. Apart from goods of daily use, such as cereals, sugar, POL etc, drugs also get exchanged which puts Central Para Military Forces, State Police and Army on tenterhooks.

DRUG ADDICTION & SUICIDE CASES

Such cases are reported off and on, almost everywhere. Suicide cases generally have same origins as elsewhere. The drug cartels not only operate on Indian side but they are in regular contact with their counterparts in Myanmar and Bangladesh and penetrating right upto Laos. Opium is openly grown by Meiteis and Kuki-Zo tribes in Manipur. Drugs originating from Manipur are very often found in Delhi and Northern towns. No dowry demands are seen in any of the states and better respect for women in general are the strong social points.

CORRUPTION & SILENT EXTORTION

It is seen, rather happening in many states. This has become an accepted part of life and people have no option but to get used to it. Payments have to be made to officers and staff regularly to get even routine works done. Exemption from payment of Central Income Tax given selectively in the region, therefore, needs to be reviewed on Top Priority. Phenomenon of easy money has to stop at some point of time.

INSURGENCY & REMNANTS, THEREOF

Mizoram

Historic pact of Mizoram with Government of India in 1988 has resulted in making Mizoram the most peaceful and progressive state. However, pro-Myanmar activities of some Mizo politicians do cause concern. It was the only state to have got a one time Peace Bonus of Rs 20 Crores from Planning Commission.

Nagaland

It was afflicted with insurgency for a long time before agreeing to be part of Indian Union in 1962. Core demand of insurgents has been a unified Naga homeland incorporating Naga inhabited areas of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar. Their ultimate aim was secession of Naga territories from India. Naga National Council set up in 1945 spearheaded the movement with tough and obstinate leaders like A. Z. Phizo. They have indulged in armed clashes, underground governments and military operations against country's security forces. In 1980, a new outfit called National Socialist Council of Nagaland (N. S. C. N.) was formed which broke into two factions in 1989, namely, NSCN (Khaplang) and NSCN (I-Muivah). Though a Cease fire has been reached with NSCN (I-Muivah) in 1997, final solution remains elusive. Extortion and misuse of Government fund continues.

Incidentally, Muivah, the prominent Naga leader of NSCN, who mostly resides comfortably in London, belongs to Tangkhul Naga tribe of Ukhrul District of Manipur. When Nagaland is peaceful for 28 years, Do We Require an Interlocutor? MHA has to furnish an answer.

Bodoland

Demand for a separate state of Bodoland to be carved out of Assam is also fairly old. Bodos are a major plains tribe residing in five northern Districts of Assam, namely, Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Udalguri and Tamulpur. They have been demanding a separate state. Student organisations and National Democratic Front of Bodoland, headed by Ranjan Daimary spearheaded the movement. First agreement was reached between them and Union of India in 1993, which led to formation of Bodo Autonomous Council under the 6th Schedule. Not satisfied with it, Bodos wished to accelerate development works while preserving their ethnic Identity. Hence, another agreement was signed with Government of India in 2003, leading to formation of Bodoland Territorial Council. In 2020, signing of a fresh agreement ensured enhanced executive and legislative powers to BTC.

Current Crisis of MANIPUR

Ever since it attained statehood in 1972, Manipur has seen imposition of President's Rule eleven times. But even after return of popular Government in February 2026, situation has improved only partially. Meiteis and Kukis still can not stand each other and latest are the series of clashes between Kukis and Nagas. State, as such, is in shambles since May, 2023. Issues get complicated due to drugs, illegal arms and 390 kms long international border.

A detailed analysis follows in Chapter 5.

ARMED FORCES SPECIAL POWERS ACT

Allegations of misuse of this Act against civilians continue to be a Bone of Contention between Government and opposition parties on the one hand & between Government and Civil society, on the other in many parts of North East. Looting & Extortion in large scale in some pockets viz, Manipur is a cause of concern. Common man is always the sufferer.

TOO MANY VIP VISITS & TOURS OF CENTRAL OFFICERS

Such visits and tours of N. E. States with a view to fill up columns at State expense needs to be curtailed. It has been happening even at a time when many states lacked meeting and conference halls. Moreover, natural

calamities and constrained working season would become embarrassing factors in front of powerful people from Delhi.

YOUTH OF NORTH EAST

North East youth have proved their mettle from time to time. Many have gone much Ahead, viz, Danny, Mary Kom, Bhaichung Bhutia, S. Mirabai Chanu, Tarundip Rai, etc. Standard of spoken English is very good, rather praiseworthy in Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram & Sikkim. It can be a solid asset for IT and Hospitality sectors. Remaining Youth do have talent but same being latent, needs manifestation.

OUTSIDE OFFICERS

It is not that they are disliked. Honesty, sincerity and getting good intentioned results pay. But their habit to proceed on Central deputation frequently needs discouragement. Gegong Apang, former Chief Minister Arunachal Pradesh had remarked long ago-

"Don't Send Suitcase Bureaucrats From Delhi. "

There is no dearth of money in North East. Problems come with TOO much of money flowing from various Central Ministries. Many a time, schemes are imposed with a view to fulfil national targets. This shall have to be discouraged forthwith.

TAILPIECE

North East Should Not Be Seen With A Preconceived and Misconceived Notion. Reality Is To Be Seen As It Is.

Chapter - 5

Manipur, Land Of Rich Talent & Culture Trapped In Ethnic Conflict¹²

Till recently Manipur was the only state under the President's rule, including the last spell that began on February 13, 2025. This land locked state having a multi cultural society, had to undergo the President's rule eleven times. Decision was taken to tide over uncertainty emanating from resignation of N. Biren Singh as Chief Minister on February 9. It was extended for six months on August 13 as the ruling party could not muster support for a popular Government. Because of historical ethnic differences between majority tribe of Meiteis and Kuki-Zo tribes, no dialogue has been possible. Latter had welcomed President's rule but former looked at it as unjustified intervention.

While J & K and Punjab had the President's rule for fifteen and ten years respectively under exceptional law & order circumstances, U. P. and Puducherry had to face it ten and seven times respectively. Telangana and Chhattisgarh are the only states not to undergo the President's rule thus far. In all, powers under the President's rule has been used over one hundred times since 1951.

Significance of Article 356

This significant article of the Constitution empowers the President of India to impose President's Rule on a state if latter can not function according to provisions of the Constitution. Union Government thus assumes governance of a State mostly based on report of the Governor.

As the power under Article 356 was not being used in an unbiased manner resulting into frequent dismissal of State Governments during seventies and eighties, the Supreme Court in S. R. Bommai vs Union of India vide its order on March 11, 1994 restricted arbitrary dismissal of state Governments. It ordered that if proclamation under Article 356 was issued without approval of both the houses of Parliament, same will lapse within two months and State Assembly was to resume its function.

Further, the floor of the Assembly was the sole authority to test majority of the State Government.

Current Scenario

As we may be aware, President rule was imposed in Manipur following failure of the then Chief Minister to put an end to the ethnic violence between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities. The Assembly continued to be in a state of suspended animation even after extension of the President's rule for another six months with effect from August 13, 2025.

Buffer Zones

It has been learnt that ethnic tension if not conflict has not been contained so far. For 33 months Buffer zones have segregated Meiteis from Kuki-Zo's. It was confirmed by a Congress M. P. in a video interview when he too was prevented from entering a particular area.

Murder of A Meitei

On January 21, a Meitei man living with his Kuki wife for a month in Churachandpur District was shot dead by the suspected Kuki militants. It was video recorded and circulated with the slogan 'No peace, no popular Government'. Some efforts are being made at political level. In pursuance thereof, legislators of two major communities subsequently met at New Delhi. It appeared to be an encouraging development. A reconciliation between two warring groups was considered the need of the hour.

Kuki-Naga Tension

On 26th January when whole nation was celebrating Republic Day, tension was reported between Kukis and Naga tribes in Kanglungpi District following which reportedly, a few houses of Kukis were attacked. A two week blockade of a road by the Nagas is being opposed by the Kukis. As Kukis wish to use this road, Apex body of two tribes have met, condemned the act, appealed for avoiding rumours and false propaganda and called for peace.

While Kukis took a stand to observe 24 hour shut down in the District, Naga leaders too indicated that they would continue with the blockade of the road. Needless to say, such a development was unwarranted.

Save Manipur Rally by COCOMI

In one of the biggest rallies named Save Manipur (Manipur Kanba Khongchat) held on January 31, Coordinating Committee on Manipur's Integrity (COCOMI) showed its strength. The organisation, an umbrella group of many Meitei tribe civil bodies organised the massive rally in Imphal to convey the message that people stood united against any policy to fragment Manipur and to press for settlement of thousands of people displaced (Internally Displaced Persons or IDP's) by ethnic conflict.

Slogans, such as, 'No compromise on Manipur's Integrity', 'stop proxy war', 'long live Manipur' etc were raised. IDP's reportedly also turned up in large numbers, many from far off relief camps. Not only Meiteis, but Muslims among them, local Bengalis, Marwaris, Jains and Punjabis also marched a distance of 5 kms to press for normalcy in a state affected by ethnic strife for 33 months. Obviously business centres, schools and colleges were shut to send what organisers called, a clear message to the Centre.

Resolutions Passed

Following four resolutions were passed at a public convention when rally ended: Immediate abrogation of suspension of operations against Kuki armed groups, A concrete policy for IDP's to ensure their rehabilitation and resettlement within a time frame, To stop cross border activities of Chin-Kuki narco terrorist groups having Myanmar connection and ensure territorial and administrative Integrity of Manipur.

Vigil on International Border

As the state has 390 kms long border with Myanmar it has been always a happy hunting ground for drugs that go right upto Delhi and even beyond. Regular vigilance is also called for in view of reports about participation of Manipuris in actions against ruling Military Junta in Myanmar.

Hostage Like Situation Must End

It would have been proper if a show or rally like one organised by Meiteis was also arranged by the Kuki-Zo tribesmen, inhabiting nine hills surrounding Imphal valley, abode of 50% of people of the state. State Naga tribes too must come forward and speak out their mind in the interest of amity in the State. Observers and right thinking nationalists feel that hostage like

situation for close to three years now, must come to an end in Manipur. Packages announced can not make a dent, nor the VIP visits.

Sudden Turn Of Events

In a sudden development, 30 legislators of ruling BJP approached their top leadership on February 2 to explore the possibility of election of a new leader of the legislature party. Development was significant as current spell of President rule was to expire on February 12. A similar effort six month ago had not succeeded.

Following hectic discussions and assurances, 62 year old dissident former Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh was elected as the new leader. A low profile person, he was Speaker of the state Assembly in the first N. Biren Singh led Government and became a Minister in his second Government. Two MLA's, one each from Kuki -Zo and Naga tribes are likely to be made Deputy Chief Ministers. With this, it is hoped that the three major tribes will have a stake in bringing normalcy and creating a peaceful atmosphere in the state.

Recommended Urgent Steps For New Government:

- (1) Free access to the people all over, as in past,
- (2) Health and educational institutions virtually made non-functional have to be given utmost attention,
- (3) Apart from a fresh drive, latest figures of arms surrendered and looted from Police armouries be disclosed,
- (4) Illegal check posts manned by ' village volunteers' to be dismantled,
- (5) Process of people to people contact to be restarted to get rid of a feeling of fear and Ill will,
- (6) Demand of Kukis for a separate airport in their area can be given a thought when a sizeable chunk is spent in the name of security. In day to day life also, they feel left out, as they hold a few Government jobs AND
- (7) Repatriation Of AIS Officers from Centre to the state. Though it has not been spelt out, there is a shortage of experienced officers.

CONCLUSION

Co-existence has been the source of strength of multi- cultural society of Manipur. It must remain so, rather than creating a situation of uneasy calm, facilitating an ethnic weaponisation. There is a need to find out why ethnic conflict continues to simmer with a view to prevent further blood shed and displacement. Restoring a popular Government may help but doubts remain. In addition to seizure of remaining arms looted from Police armouries, disarming deviant elements of Meiteis and Kukis is also called for. More vigilant and proactive approach is required to restore peace and stability. A dialogue with women community leaders and tribal chiefs may help in return of people to the abandoned villages.

Chapter - 6

S. I. R.: Election Commission Should Not Forget Past Drives¹³

Ever since order of 24 June, 2025 regarding Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Electoral roll in Bihar has been issued, widespread debate has begun, coupled with expression of genuine apprehension. It marks a sharp departure from previous drives & methods, disregards sanctity of existing roll and sets aside self declaration of the voters.

Also never before E.C.I. required existing electors to furnish documentary proof to be a voter. Enumerators were neither required nor authorised to verify citizenship or age. Entries were made solely on the basis of information furnished by head or a senior member of the household. To make information authentic, person concerned was requested to sign or give thumb impression on enumeration pad with an undertaking that information provided was true to the best of his knowledge. Draft rolls were prepared on the basis of such information.

GAUHATI HIGH COURT'S ORDER OF 1993

The Gauhati High Court has held in the case H. R. A. Chaudhury vs E.C.I. & others in 1993 that draft rolls are to be prepared on the basis of statements submitted by heads of households in Form 4 under Rule 8 of Registration of Electoral Rules, 1960. The Court further underlined that such a statement cannot be brushed aside as it has its own value. Further, Rules do not contemplate any inquiry into question of citizenship at the stage of preparation of draft roll. Supreme Court was pleased to uphold above landmark ruling of Gauhati High Court. It needs to be remembered by the ECI.

STAND OF E. C. I. REGARDING SANCTITY OF ROLLS & DELETION

E. C. I. has consistently advised its officers to uphold sanctity of existing rolls and that such names could not be deleted merely on the allegation that concerned individuals were non-citizens. It also has maintained that deletion of names should only be on the basis of production of positive documentary proof obtained by the objector from proper authority dealing with question under law. Even then in such cases, reasonable opportunity should be given to affected elector. Onus, therefore, was clearly on objector, NOT on elector, whose continuance on the roll was objected to.

Interestingly, this stand has figured in the Annual Report of ECI for 1983. It needs to be taken note of.

ECI undertook staggered Intensive Revision of rolls in 1983 & 1984. Further, it went on to clarify that illegal migrant was not its concern. On being approached by Brigadier T. Sailo, former Chief Minister, Mizoram on the issue, it requested him cleverly to approach MHA for effectively dealing with this aspect of the problem.

CRUCIAL ROLE OF E.C.I.

We may be aware that Article 326 of the Constitution provides for adult suffrage for elections to Lok Sabha and state Legislative Assemblies. Meaning thereby, every Indian citizen who is 18 years of age and is otherwise not disqualified under the Constitution or any other law, is entitled to be registered as a bonafide voter. In essence, this article gives a guarantee to all eligible adult citizens to exercise their fundamental right to vote.

Elections to Lok Sabha and Assemblies are regularly conducted by ECI with the help of Chief Electoral Officers, District Collectors, Electoral Registration Officers, Revenue Officers and the Booth Level Officials, now. Whole machinery at State and District level gets fully engaged from the date of announcement of election till completion of the entire process.

REVISION of electoral roll prior to an election should be and is a legitimate exercise to be conducted by the Election Commission of India.

It is of following four types: Annual Revision, Summary Revision, Intensive Revision and Special Intensive Revision (S. I. R). Intensive Revision refers

to the de novo preparation of the electoral roll from scratch through personal house to house field verification by the Electoral Registration Officers (ERO's).

E. C. I. ORDER DATED 24 JUNE, 2025

An order for S. I. R. in Bihar, which is scheduled to have Assembly Elections in November, 2025, was issued by ECI on June 24. SIR is required as per the E. C. I., due to: Rapid urbanisation, Frequent migration of people, Young citizens becoming eligible to vote, Gaps in reporting about deaths and Possible inclusion of foreign illegal immigrants in voters list.

ECI has fixed the date of August 1, 2025 for Draft publication of Electoral Roll. Suggestions for corrections will be invited by September 1 and Final Roll is expected to be published by September 30, 2025. Conduct of this gigantic exercise by Booth Level Officials and ERO's by braving blistering heat and treacherous Monsoon is proceeding slowly. As of July 5, barely 14.18% of voters had submitted filled up enumeration forms.

HEARING IN SUPREME COURT

Many petitions were filed in Supreme Court questioning revision on various grounds, including exclusion of Aadhar and timing of the exercise. A two Judge Vacation Bench comprising of Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia and Justice Joymalya Bagchi heard the matter on July 10. While declining to order a STAY, Court allowed the revision to continue but suggested adding Aadhar, Ration card and Voter's card to the list of documents. It was a big blow to ECI which had become biased if not showing its tilt towards the ruling party.

The Bench told the counsel of the Commission to give reasons if they wished, to discard these. Bench did not comment on very power of ECI to undertake the exercise but procedure and manner in which the exercise was being conducted and the timing fixed, were dealt with. In its opinion, Bench stated that timing being short, was not practical. Justice Dhulia doubted if ECI could meet it with the procedure they had adopted. Personal hearing of voters was also involved. Moreover, it was to be conducted "just ahead" of Bihar Assembly Elections. Further, Justice Dhulia told ECI's Counsel that in the event of large number of voters getting out, ECI was bound to intervene. Justice Bagchi stated that Citizenship was an issue to be determined not by ECI but by Ministry of Home Affairs.

One of the petitioners contended that a kind of citizenship 'screening' was going on. Further, based on a Bihar Government survey, the Court was informed that only a negligible number of people had certificates sought by the ECI. Bench directed that the matter be listed for hearing again on July 28, prior to publication of draft electoral roll. It is a matter of utter dismay that ECI has not issued any order regarding consideration of three additional documents, till last reports came in. Hope they come out with a positive stand on July 28.

IS S. I. R. NEEDED AT THIS JUNCTURE?

Conduct of such an exhaustive exercise for a sizeable number of 7. 89 Crore voters, just four months ahead of elections has been considered too ambitious as also unfair. It has been also called arbitrary or excessive exercise of power. It was certainly avoidable at this point of time. It has been discovered that last such Revision was conducted in Bihar in 2003 but that happened two years ahead of elections to the state Assembly. In order to grasp intent of ECI at the present juncture, it would be necessary to see the SIR order concerning 2003 elections. If that was conducted efficiently, bereft of any complain, one would know the current intention of ECI better. Further, the order of 2003 of ECI has to be displayed. It should be in public domain, so that common man can be also apprised of circumstances at that point of time vis a vis at present.

CITIZENSHIP ISSUE

Since issue of inclusion of foreign illegal immigrants into the voters list has been raised, one would submit it is neither fair nor necessary for ECI to fiddle with this subject. Such a controversial issue does not come under its domain and that MHA was the concerned Ministry. ECI can not take a call on such contentious issues. A former civil servant feels that criterion of Citizenship was never raised by ECI in the past.

PEEP INTO HISTORY

First Electoral roll of the country was prepared in 1950 without any complication. Experts opine that issue of foreigners may have figured definitely then since India had just become independent. It is also possible that it might have been resolved amicably. Further, during the seven decade period or 75 years of independent India, number of voters has registered a

rise from 18 Crores to 99 Crores now but there was nothing called falling in the trap of Citizenship controversy.

Moreover, Annual Report of ECI for 1983 had clearly stated that subject of foreigners does not come under their domain. So by raising it, rather eloquently for SIR, 2025 of Bihar, ECI is blatantly contradicting their own stand taken in 1983.

REQUIREMENT OF DOCUMENTS

Never in the past, ECI has asked voters for any documentary proof for inclusion of name into electoral roll. Failure to furnish the same, may lead to deletion of name of person concerned from the voters list. Majority of voters may not be in a position to furnish the needed documents within stipulated time line. One may note that 20% of Bihar voters are migrants and they can not afford to visit the state in view of floods and deteriorating law and order situation.

Experts, further feel that names can not be struck off on the ground of requirement of documents. Such an action of ECI is nothing but a veiled threat.

BIRTH CERTIFICATES

As regards birth certificates, it has been learnt that barely 2.8% of people born in Bihar between 2001 and 2005 possess these. Even if voters make an effort, same cannot be issued in such a short period. In good old days, date of birth mentioned in Matriculation or School Leaving Certificate was a valid document and was recognised everywhere. Same should suffice in this case also. Besides, most of the people in the State do not have Passports and pre-1987 Identity Cards. Asking for proof of Parents Birth also looks ridiculous. ECI had not asked for such a proof in the last two elections. Observers, accordingly feel that a totally new system was being created which is not needed at all. Even Judges of Supreme Court seem to have stated that they also can not provide proof of their Parent's Birth.

TO SUM UP

*Revision of Electoral Roll should be transparent, not lead to any kind of suspicion. Documents to prove credentials of a person are crucial. Onus is being put on applicant. It was other way round, earlier. ECI no longer is

recognising its own voter's Identity documents but it may be clear that SIR is not about inclusion but exclusion of those who fail to prove their place & date of birth, or in effect, Citizenship. It has been learnt that large number of people are Bangladeshis, Nepalese and Myanmaris. ECI has neither affirmed nor denied it.

Hurried action means more discretionary powers will go to ERO's to take a decision on documents. Even NDA leaders of Bihar seem worried with SIR as it may affect their chances in West Bengal and Assam elections, to be held within a year. As conduct of S. I. R. exercise in West Bengal may mean playing with fire, some tussles and deaths may happen. Afterall, Bihar exercise is being seen as a Pilot study,

Telugu Desam Party, the most vital & reliable partner of the ruling party has stated that exercise should be about votership, NOT citizenship and enough time would be required.

The way SIR is proceeding against time, errors are bound to occur. More complications are also bound to occur when SIR exercise is taken up in crucial states, such as, Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, U. P., etc.

Chapter - 7

Threats To Society From Tentacles of Corruption¹⁴

Every now and then news, features and video clips pertaining to bribe or bribery figure prominently in the media. These negative 'breaking' items attract our attention faster than any health or art or development related subjects. Those among us who think about society or its well being, not only get upset and discouraged but try to discuss also their impact and tentacles with friends and well wishers. Issue of corruption is perennially, rather hotly debated in seminars, close door meetings, social get-togethers and public discourses.

CORRUPTION: CONCEPT PART OF IT

Corruption would mean a deviation from an established or a desired path. Internationally, a corrupt person is considered dishonest, especially the one resorting to bribery. It is nevertheless, an immoral activity, meaning thereby, what ought to be, becomes infructuous vis a vis what it is. Hence it becomes difficult, if not impossible to detect and pinpoint such an unfair means.

Corruption, per se, may not only refer to the practice of giving and accepting cash for a normal day to day work. It also has a dangerous combination of cash as also kind. In addition, in public life, there are individuals who neither take cash nor allow any perceptible flow of goods into their households but they may ALSO resort to a corrupt means of an invisible nature. Still there are people, different from the lots described. Such individuals by their "honest" looking deeds, may guarantee inputs in cash and kind to others, thus ensuring for themselves, a position or rank not normally possible to achieve through fair means. Besides, they succeed in building a good, enduring and usable image. Needless to say, a group of individuals who may not be habitually corrupt also sometimes become occasionally corrupt. Thus the task to locate or pinpoint an extremely fair and honest person is NOT EASY.

AVAILABLE ANTI-CORRUPTION MECHANISM

A dedicated Vigilance Awareness Fortnight is observed by the Central and State Governments in the month of November. Members of audience are not only sensitized about the malaise of corruption but adequately warned also about the consequences of getting involved in such nefarious practices. The show is supposed to go on afterwards also. But we seem to have taken a vow Not To Mend Our ways. In addition, there are offices of Central Vigilance Commissioner, State Vigilance Commissioners, Chief Vigilance Officers in Public Sector Undertakings, C. B. I., E. D., Anti Corruption Bureaus in States etc, but these offices too have not lived upto expectations. They have failed in performing their duties. They mostly do lip service on fixed verbal instructions, trickling down from top.

Mere talking about corruption should not do. It should be our bounden duty to give a clue or more, highlight such cases and extend all possible help to the investigating authorities, so that guilty are brought to book in shortest possible time. As such, rate of conviction of registered and pursued cases is abysmally poor not only in India but in many countries. If one may say so, in a super developed country like U. S. A. also, problem of corruption exists but it may not affect the lower rungs. For bigger set ups, such as, MNC's, huge money is usually spent or demanded in the name of cuts and lobbying. No wonder, one often hears of scandals, such as, Bofors.

Removal of Ambiguities Helps

Reinterpretation of the expression "Public Servant" by the Supreme Court in 1997 in Vineet Narain case (popularly known as Jain Hawala Case) was very much called for. Not only it was a relieving one for the honest and harassed officers, it could simply be considered a remarkable ruling in public interest. Vineet Narain of J. N. U., by his petition put pressure on the C. B. I. as its prosecutions were collapsing. Thereafter, Supreme Court was pleased to issue directions for supervision of the CBI by the Central Vigilance Commission. Further, as an important fallout of this PIL, Supreme Court also ordered that the Director of CBI was to be appointed on the recommendation of a Committee headed by the C. V. C. and comprising of Union Home Secretary and Secretary, Ministry of Personnel & Training. The committee was also directed to take the opinion of the incumbent Director, CBI prior to

forwarding their recommendation to the Appointment Committee of the Cabinet (A. C. C.)

For the first time in Indian history, several Union Cabinet ministers, Chief Ministers, Governors, opposition leaders and bureaucrats were charge sheeted for corruption. In the "old era" mainly officers and staff had to prove their innocence or otherwise and political masters would "escape and skip" the torturous investigations, judicial custodies and Police remand. Prominent cases of recent past, concerned the Ministry of Coal, Fodder Scam of Bihar, Excise irregularities in Delhi, Telangana, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand and scores of others. There are cases and cases.....

EMERGING LATENT INSTANCES OF CORRUPTION

If we, as vigilant citizens bother for public safety and are, therefore, to be cautious, it may be necessary to be aware of following developments. List or instances cited are of immediate past. These are NOT exhaustive but indicative:

- **Protect Your Vote:** this expression is being talked about malpractices involved in securing entry into electoral roll in a few poll bound states as also in the states that have completed the exercise, say one or two years ago. Even on the eve of first phase of Bihar Assembly elections (5th November), such apprehensions are being expressed,
- **Allotment of Government land in lieu of employment in Railway offices.** It happened long ago, was noticed after a long gap but what curative step has been taken, it is SADLY for everyone to see. Matter, at last is before a Court but it is ifs and buts syndrome.
- **Scheme of 5 kg of free rice to people selected at random all over country, not only pampers but spoils them as well.** As It was linked to Covid era (2020-22), it should have been discontinued long ago. However, to secure vote bank it continues,
- **In addition, grant of Rs. 6,000 per year to farmers under a Central Government scheme is nothing but waste of resources and makes the farmers more lethargic.** In poll bound Bihar, there are 85 lakh such beneficiaries alone. As if this amount was not enough, it is being raised to Rs. 9,000 on the eve of Assam, W. Bengal., T. N. and Kerala Assembly elections. Purpose is obvious, Loud and Clear,

- Any Scheme of giving Cash in the name of poverty has to be phased out, as it harms, rather than help.

Lakhs of Crores of Rupees have already gone down the drain in the name of Integrated rural development. Not more than 10 to 15% of the beneficiaries may have got the targeted benefits. There are also doubts about creation and survival of so called durable community assets.

Apart from funds arranged by the Government of India, funds for such purposes are also advanced by Multi- lateral agencies, such as, World Bank, I.M.F., A D.B., F.A.O. etc at a very high rate of interest (30 to 40%), which has to be repaid by the Government Of India after 30 to 40 years of completion of a scheme or project. I have been, unfortunately associated with such a World Bank project for two years. One can not ALSO Imagine the deterioration of value of Indian Rupee by the repayment time vis a vis U. S. Dollar.

*Allocation of dwelling units according to a fixed economic status needs to be discouraged as it is not only leading to misuse but also resale within no time, which defeats the very purpose of the scheme,

*Slogans, such as, free education from K. G. to P. G. are also misleading and harmful as meritorious students depend and excel mostly on the support of limited family income. Any Governmental intervention may boomerang in this domain,

*Talking of students again, support to or ignoring those indulging in Question paper leaks and Recruitment scams are out and out inhuman as these shake the very foundation of our society. So far official stand or a White Paper on the issue has not been issued nor top officers and Politicians have been sacked,

*Flood relief scam can be cited as another instance of blatant corruption. Such relief ordered during flash floods, landslides, cyclones, earthquakes etc. is also misused or often falls in the hands of corrupt lower level officials and crafty Gram Panchayat members,

*Lofty promises of making a place totally "flood free" can be also considered as an exercise in baseless and impractical promise and thus may fall in the category of a corrupt practice,

*Incidence of illegal mining is very much an act of corrupt activity. It is a never ending phenomenon. Apart from severe losses to the public exchequer, it often leads to murderous attacks. Honest officers have to linger in jail while clever ones are “rewarded”.

*Creation of quick fix temporary ventures, such as, Fake Yamuna by the side of main polluted Yamuna may also fall in the category of misleading and corrupt acts,

*In Sum and Substance, owing to money factor direction of political wind invariably changes which has a definite bearing on the Poll Arithmetic. Even Election Commission of India (already tainted) and Vigilant Poll Observers or sincere Media can not make a Dent, AND

*Close association of a few top industrialists of the country with the Central Government and some State Governments is a forgone conclusion. They have an outreach in a handful of foreign countries as well. So many Indians, including a M. P., are enjoying safe havens in European and Central American countries. Deportation and Extradition are meant mostly for ordinary law breakers. People become further suspicious when close businessmen relatives of the top industrialists are raided or acted against.

EARLIER FEAR WAS FROM C. B. I. NOW IT IS WRATH OF E. D.
(otherwise a toothless agency).

Classic Case of K. K. GAUTAM, Former D. S. P. of U. P. Police

All that glitters is not gold. In the same way, all that is reported in media may not be true. Yet there is another saying that smoke can not be without fire. So here is a story reported by Usman Saifi of "Safar Shop" in respect of blatant corruption in U. P. Police.

Having stated so, let us proceed ahead with this case, seen in social media about ten days ago.

Sri K. K. Gautam, Town Inspector, having a good image was heading a "sought after" Police station in a locality of Bareilly. One day he was ordered by C. D. Kainth, regional I. G. P. to call on latter. Having learnt about past dubious activities of his top most officer, Gautam was extra cautious. He heard the I. G. P. patiently. Subsequently, on being asked to 'arrange' a monthly collection of Rs One Lakh from his Police station, he could not believe his ears. He had the audacity to refuse. He left without making any

promise and discussed the matter with his superiors- S. S. P. Gupta and the D. I. G. Both, on being shocked, expressed sympathies with their upright junior colleague.

When things changed from bad to worse, Gautam spoke to I. G. P. and 'struck a deal'. As per mutual understanding, a 'follower' of I. G. P. was to collect "a sum" from Gautam. Latter took all precautionary measures to collect on the spot evidence in his favour.

When the 'follower' came to Gautam's Quarter, he fell in the laid trap and surrendered meekly. The official vehicle of the IGP, used by him, was confiscated and a Warrant of arrest was issued by Gautam against I. G. P. As it was unprecedented, it caused both praise & criticism. Ripples not only were seen all over U. P. but news spread to other states also.

Gautam got an opportunity to be heard by the C. M. Mulayam Singh Yadav, and DGP V. P. Kapoor, who decided to rush to Bareilly to "save the situation". H. D. Rao, the then ADGP too gave a patient hearing to Gautam. Against the promise of ensuring justice to him, one fine morning he was placed under suspension. He was held guilty of misconduct, apart from questions that were put on his integrity. Whole process took one year.

On being advised by his colleagues and good intentioned individuals, he approached top opposition politicians and senior Advocates in Delhi. His detailed petition was carefully drafted and subsequently filed before Allahabad High Court. None other than Ram Jethmalani vetted and settled the draft and late Arun Jaitley argued Gautam's case effectively and secured success finally. Gautam was reinstated with full honours and prior to retirement, was promoted as a D. S. P.

Morale Of The Story:

Never give up even if honest and upright superiors do not go beyond a point to protect you. Option of approaching Court is always open. In this case, it appears some cost cutting and assuaging of feelings were ensured due to involvement of a few top opposition politicians and Advocates. It does not happen in normal cases of unwanted prosecution leading to torture of the whole family of the Aggrieved Government Servant. **Same happens when DoPT, a Crucial Government of India Department also assumes the shape of Department of Prosecution & Torture.**

Needless to say, Courts themselves are being compelled nowadays to hide skeletons inside their cupboards (past case of Justice Ramaswamy, recent cases of Justice Varma and Justice Yadav, lifting Judges out of turn for Apex Court or abrupt transfer of Chief Justices of High Courts are cases in point).

While it should be our bounden duty to help the trapped well intentioned & honest officers, Courts too have to be more proactive in view of Supreme Court's landmark rulings in the case of Vineet Narain (1997) and many other pronouncements.

TO SUM UP

As sensational cases involving Late V. Puran Kumar, IPS & IGP, Haryana Police and H. S. Bhuller, DIG, Punjab Police have been registered barely a month ago and authentic details are yet to be made available, one has refrained from saying a word or two about these cases.

This Author's Word Should Not Be Taken As The LAST WORD.

It Is Just A Sincere And Unbiased Viewpoint In The interest of society and nation. It Has Emerged From over 35 years of Experience. At Times, I was also a Victim Of Whims & Fancies Of Superiors during deputations to Government of India.

Apart From Expressing Nobel Intentions, Nothing Else Is Aimed.

Chapter - 8

Garbage Management Badly Needed In India¹⁵

Garbage management has become a necessity in all the metro cities and the cities having unmanageable population and urban growth. We indulge in throwing our food, vegetable and other leftovers or burn or bury them here and there. But we refrain from thinking that waste thus generated can be harmful to others. And big difference exists between behaviour pattern of we Indians outside and within India. It is the enforcement factor that matters ultimately.

It is desirable that we eat and drink in lower quantity in parties, weddings, festivals, community feasts, rallies and religious functions. These unsustainable habits and happenings create stinking dumps and public nuisance, apart from adverse effect on the environment. Wastes also penetrate into ground water and are capable of entering food chain. Acceleration in pest infestations, air pollution and deterioration of overall public health take place.

Hazardous Matter

Harmful contaminations can be hazardous in the long run. Not only these places stink, but invariably children get exposed as they play over there. In view of the fact that dumping takes place mainly late at night, it is not possible to carry out monitoring and catch the culprits.

Violation of Environmental Laws

It goes without saying that illegal dumping activity violates various environmental laws, such as, Environment Protection Act, 1986, Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, Solid Waste Management Rules, 1986 etc.

Garbage seen over surface can be taken care of but the one buried under the sub soil is not even visible. Also there is no guarantee about these sites, for, removed garbage is likely to be dumped again at a new place. If this is the scenario who will be held accountable?

What is Waste?

Waste is any material that is unwanted, non useful and which has been discarded. It can be solid, liquid or gas. Liquid waste may comprise of dirty water, wash water, waste detergents, organic liquids and rain water. Also we generate solid rubbish, organic waste, recyclable rubbish, and hazardous waste.

Types Of Waste

Industrial waste comes from chemicals, plastics and solid rocks. Agricultural waste, such as, leaves, stubble etc is well understood. Solid waste is from packaging materials, food scraps, clothing and household goods. Organic waste comprises of rotten meat, eggs, fish, garden waste and food waste.

Kitchen Waste

When we talk of waste, waste generated in the kitchen cannot be ignored. It is in form of vegetable waste, fruit waste, spoiled food, waste paper, napkins, polythene, styrofoam, thermocol, glass & metal objects, old wooden objects, flower pots etc.

Household Waste

Examples of household waste are newspapers, magazines and books, plastic items, such as, bottles, bags, envelopes and packets, glass bottles, broken utensils, cans, discarded cloths and wood products.

Waste Management And Five ' R 's

It is the process of handling waste from its creation to final disposal. It includes collecting, transporting, treating and disposal of what is collected. It comprises of landfill, waste compaction, incineration, bio gas production, recycling and vermi composting. Landfill and Domestic Composting are relatively easy and inexpensive methods of garbage disposal.

Recycling converts waste into a new type of usable product through industrial processing. Aluminium, paper, glass, and plastic are commonly recycled materials.

Door To Door Collection

Such collection of garbage is a convenient and the most viable way. But we must segregate dry and wet waste prior to passing the buck to collecting boy. Idea is to reduce, reuse and prevent waste. New idea of Trash To Cash is also gaining ground. Broad objective could be sustainable management of waste. If followed seriously and properly, protection of human wealth and environment, conservation of resources and ultimately, reduction in pollution may be possible.

Five "R"s of Waste Management are:

Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose and Recycle.

Cases of Delhi, Indore And Other Clean Cities

In a vast mega city of Delhi, round about 35 million tons of garbage is generated by 1.80 Crore citizens on a daily basis, of which only 10 million tons are cleared. But population and construction activities are also increasing day by day. As such, its area has become 1,484 Sq. kms. Three prominent Landfills of the city are: Ghazipur, set up in 1984, Bhalswa established in 1994 and Okhla which came up in 1996. Of these, Ghazipur is spread in an area of 70 acres and attains a height of 236 metres, higher than Qutub Minar.

As Indore has been praised for its waste management initiatives and adjudged India's cleanest city more than once, other cities need to draw lessons from their experience. It has also earned its name and fame due to its efficient waste segregation, innovative recycling strategy and citizen participation leading to requisite awareness. In the same way, Surat and Navi Mumbai too have been recognised for their cleanliness, waste management and commitment to eco-friendly initiatives.

Suburbs of N. C. R., such as, Ghaziabad, NOIDA and probably Faridabad, though expanding very rapidly, still do not have proper landfills, even when tremendous domestic and construction waste is generated. Garbage being dumped into Hindon and Yamuna rivers shall have to be stopped immediately. These towns also have large number of hospitals but not all of them have incinerators. One can imagine also about sad state of affairs as regards disposal of bio-medical waste. Woes and struggles of the residents can be very well imagined under such circumstances.

Plight of Aravalli Range

To sum up, it may be necessary to draw our attention to garbage dumping going on along Aravalli hill area in Delhi and Haryana for a long time. A contract only worth Rs 3 Crores had been given to clear 32, 000 tons of household garbage, construction debris and industrial refuse. It may have been added up by now. In addition, rapid construction activity is also worrisome. From this one can make out the damage being done to world's oldest mountain range.

Lately due to hue and cry of interested citizens of the area, issue has drawn attention of the newspapers and the Government. Supreme Court too is hearing the matter rather regularly.

Concluding Remarks

Apart from fining people on the spot, taking action against transporters and contractors, officers & staff have to be held personally liable for grave lapses to the cause of environment. We have to raise our voice against improper garbage management from time to time. Resident welfare associations, builders and citizen bodies need to be sensitized effectively from time to time. If school children could become a force to reckon with against use of fire crackers, they need to be oriented also against unhealthy practices of garbage management.

Can We Give A Slogan?

"CLEAN STREETS, CLEAN PLANET "

Chapter - 9

Road Safety: We Lack Commitment¹⁶

Highways and Expressways are being built in India with a lightening speed but genuine concern over road safety is lacking. Situation on roads is chaotic with mix of cars, trucks, buses, motor cycles, scooters, mopeds, auto rickshaws, cyclists, cows, dogs and pedestrians jostling for space. All users of road are responsible for this state of affairs. Also one finds a critical gap between road safety laws and system of Justice. There are cases of large sized cars involved in fatal accidents. In many of them, drunk drivers have been found behind steering wheels.

The 4 essential 'Es' are not living upto expectation: Engineering, Enforcement, Education and Emergency Care.

Every hour 55 accidents happen, leading to 20 deaths. And every day these numbers are found to be 1317 and 474 respectively. Driver's error contributes to 94% of road accidents in the country.

Golden Hour

First one hour of an accident known as Golden Hour, is very crucial. Many lives can be saved if injured persons can be taken to nearest hospital or trauma centre. In an accident, not all die immediately. Some escape with minor injuries. When an accident happens, police arrives but they are more concerned with recording statements. It can be done later, not at cost of victim's life. Awareness about importance of Golden Hour has to created more so, in hilly tourist spots.

Discouraging Statistics

Statistically, India has the dubious distinction of having highest number of road accident fatalities, worldwide. It is indeed unfortunate to note that 14% of global deaths due to accidents are caused in India. Among the Indian cities, Delhi having best roads in the country, is also worst hit city when it comes to accidents. In one year, 1457 deaths take place as opposed to 915 in Bengaluru and 850 in Jaipur.

Among the states, U. P., again having best of roads and maximum expressways, is the leader in accidents with 23,652 numbers, followed by Tamil Nadu (18,347), Maharashtra (15,366), M. P. (13,798), Karnataka and Rajasthan. Its heartening to note that Nagaland from the NER experiences least number of road accidents.

Rising Fatalities

If one looks at yearly figures, a total of 4 lakh 50 thousand road accidents took place in the country in 2022 leading to over 1 lakh 50 thousand deaths. In 2023, these figures rose to 4.80 lakhs and 1.72 lakhs respectively. It was 2.6% increase over the figures of 2022. Maximum victims were from lower and middle classes. Despite such a large number of fatalities, fear of law is found missing among drivers.

CAUSES OF ACCIDENTS

OVER SPEEDING

This is the main cause on the highways and expressways. Apart from mistakes committed by a driver, upcoming vehicles having relatively easy drive options too tempt those sitting behind steering wheels. We may remember-Speed Thrills, But Kills.

DISTRACTED DRIVING

While driving, people are either talking or looking at video or making calls on Cell phones, which distracts attention.

BREAKING TRAFFIC RULES

Wherever and whenever a loop hole is found, drivers tend to exploit that. This may lead to over speeding, overloading, not wearing seat belts etc.

FATIGUE & SLEEP DEPRIVATION

This may be the cause on the part of bus and truck drivers who undertake long and tedious journeys. Night bus drivers sometimes do not get sufficient rest and are compelled to do duty again.

DRUNKEN DRIVING

It is the main cause both on the part of bus and truck drivers on the one hand and light motor vehicle drivers on the other. They try to escape Police after taking drinks and then try to show their over confidence.

Incidentally, South Africa has maximum cases of drunken driving.

RECKLESS & AGGRESSIVE DRIVING

It is the prime reason at night and along national highways and expressways. Mostly drivers think that there is no one above them.

POOR ROAD CONDITIONS

This is another major cause of concern and it takes a long time to repair or rebuild the roads. Situation worsens during Rainy season.

NOT WEARING SEAT BELTS & HELMETS

These are worn only to avoid fines not as a primary safety measure. Some front seaters keep the seat belts on their lap rather than fixing it. In the same way, two wheeler drivers of NCR working in Delhi, take off their helmets once they cross Delhi border. It is because of strict enforcement of rules in Delhi.

FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND ROAD SIGNS

This comes to light very often. Drivers of trucks and buses need to be properly trained in this regard in a country wherein driving licences can be obtained without requisite briefing and on paying a bribe.

CROSSING OF RED LIGHTS

It's a big issue in Delhi but may not draw so much attention in a city like Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. Who does not want to reach home or workplace in time?

CROSSING ROADS AT WRONG PLACES & JAYWALKERS

It is one of the main causes of accidents on the highways. Unless Highway Patrol Police gets adequate manpower and devices, this issue cannot be resolved. Apart from vehicles criss crossing at will, many Jaywalkers too pose

a serious threat. Strict measures are also needed to discourage bank loans for vehicles. Prevailing gaps in public transport are also to be filled up.

HOW TO PREVENT ROAD ACCIDENTS?

Obeying Traffic Rules:

If all obey, people are bound to be saved from injuries and deaths.

Being Aware of Road Conditions:

Herein onus is on the drivers in the same way as responsibility is on road building & maintenance departments. Getting rid of unnecessary speed breakers too need swift attention.

Avoiding Distractions:

Herein responsibility lies solely on the drivers. Ban on use of Cell phones while driving will have to be strictly enforced.

Road Safety Governance:

- Promoting Road Safety Awareness & Education,
- Installing Speed Governors, in city buses. It was tried long ago in Delhi but was discontinued.
- Suspension of Driving Licence of persons causing deaths,
- Regular Repair of Traffic Lights and Repainting of Road Signages
- Yearly Health Check Up of Drivers Regularly Plying on The Highways,
- Strict measures against Two wheel drivers as they are involved in maximum number of accidents.

HIT & RUN CASES

Whenever one has to discuss road safety, some infamous hit and run cases immediately come to mind. Those driving were invariably drunk and driving and suffering lots belonged to middle or lower classes.

Sanjiv Nanda Case

Six persons including three Policemen were killed at Lodhi Road in Delhi by a over speeding(140 kmph) BMW E38 car driven by Sanjiv Nanda. A large sum of money changed hands and he was acquitted immediately, to be found guilty in 2008. He was sentenced to only 2 years in prison which was also reduced to time served. He had to pay a sizeable sum of money as fine and do two years of community service as ordered by Supreme Court in 2012.

Salman Khan Case

This pending case of Mumbai is also fairly old.

On September 28, 2002, Salman Khan is supposed to have run over five pavement dwellers. He killed one person and injured four by his over Speeding Toyota Land Cruiser vehicle. Case is lingering on and injured are suffering due to leg injuries sustained. Neither the Court nor the concerned authorities are interested in settling the case.

Mihir Shah Case

It happened on July 9, 2024. Mihir's BMW car rammed into a two wheeler killing a 45 year old woman and injuring her husband. Shah was found under influence of alcohol.

Jahnavi Gadkar Case

It took place in 2015. The drunk lady driving a Porche car hit a taxi and a two wheeler and killed two I. T. professionals. One was only 17 years old.

Lamborghini Huracan Crash

It took place on 30th March, 2025 at Sector 94, NOIDA. The over speeding imported sports car ran into two labourers who were having lunch on a footpath. Deepak Kumar, a resident of Ajmer was test driving the car when accident took place. He lost control of speeding vehicle. Two labourers were hit on legs and sustained fracture. Unlike above mentioned four drivers, Deepak was not found drunk. A case has been registered against him but he secured a bail the following day.

Cyrus Mistry Accident Case

Cyrus Mistry, Chairman of Tata Group (2012-2016), died in a car accident on September 4, 2022, along with another person at Palghar, Maharashtra. The Mercedes-Benz GLC car driven by Dr. Anahita Pandole, cruising at 90 kmph hit a road divider. Driver and her husband survived with injuries as they were wearing seat belts but two deceased were not wearing it. Dr. Anahita was arrested after being discharged from hospital and charged with negligent driving leading to death.

ACCIDENTS BY MINORS

Driving by minors has become a rampant phenomenon. Very often such crashes are reported. Sometimes these errant characters do not harm others but themselves when their two or four wheelers hit a road divider or any other object.

Three accidents involving minors on driving seat were reported in 2024 in Delhi. In March incident, a 17 year old Polytechnic student driving a car fatally ran over a woman and injured nine persons in Ghazipur.

Three persons were seriously injured in Geeta Colony in March, 2024, when a car driven by a minor hit them.

Many persons, including a seven year old boy were injured when a 17 year old boy driving a car hit them in Adarsh Nagar in December, 2024.

An 18 month old boy, playing outside his house, died after being run over by a car driven by a 15 year old teenager in Alipur. The minor allegedly lost control of the speeding vehicle which first hit a parked vehicle prior to hitting the baby. He attempted to flee but was overpowered by people of the area.

A two year old girl died after being crushed over by a Hyundai Venue car driven by a 15 year old teenager in Paharganj on 31st March. Police are trying to ascertain how the boy got access to the SUV vehicle. Teenager was apprehended and car was impounded.

PEDESTRIANS

It is also the duty of Pedestrians to walk on pavement, cross roads at permitted points and resort to no walking on a Highway.

CONCLUSION

India has an alarming record as far as injuries and deaths caused in road accidents are concerned. Number of deaths and injuries is multiplying day by day. More and more of expressways would mean more and more of addition. People themselves should decide not to use road space in poor visibility conditions. Vehicles causing most accidents are: BMW, Hyundai i10, Suzuki Swift, Suzuki Baleno & Hyundai. Justice is mostly delayed and punishment awarded is mostly disproportionate to injuries inflicted. A Supreme Court appointed Committee on Road Safety too has not been in a position to make a dent due to casual approach at lower levels. Ministry of Road Transport & Highways too takes requisite steps. But lately the Ministry has been engaged in something else.

However, accidents happen and several lives are lost on a daily basis. This issue needs to be treated as a major issue of social concern.

SURVIVORS ONLY KNOW HOW IT FEELS & WHERE IT PINCHES.

Chapter - 10

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao: A Lot Needs To Be Done¹⁷

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao was launched by the Prime Minister with considerable fanfare in Panipat, Haryana on January 22, 2015. Its Objectives were: Check declining child sex ratio, Stop sex based discriminations, Encourage educating girl child and ensure empowerment of women.

Need for taking care of and respecting individuals from fair sex has been stressed upon in our many religious scriptures, oral traditions, poetry collections, novels and creative arts for ages. Besides, some festivals specially focus on women. Without women universe would come to a standstill. Let us try to analyse whether concerned Ministry and Departments of various states are performing highlighted duties relating to education, safety and security of women sincerely.

At the outset, it may be stated that physical facilities can be and have improved over the years. These have become plus points for the politicians in power to make a claim or two. But we have miles to go in respect of correcting a certain bias or attitude towards a girl child or a young woman. It may be also stated that women in authority in family or educational institution or offices also have dubious distinction to make a contribution in this regard. If it was not so why should we have episodes, such as, gang rape of Bhanwari Devi, Nirbhaya's rape & murder, rape & murder of a teenager in Hathras, similar inhuman treatment given to a Doctor in R. G. Kar Hospital in Kolkata, rape in I. I. M., Kolkata, sexual harassment and death of a woman in Balasore, Odisha or murder of Radhika Yadav, a young Tennis player in Gurgaon.

BHANWARI DEVI RAPE CASE OF RAJASTHAN

Bhanwari Devi, a social worker of Women's Development Programme in Rajasthan had tried to stop marriage of a nine month old child sometimes in 1996. She was called a lowly woman from a poor and Potter community by

the Gujjar caste landlords. Ramkaran Gujjar and his five friends decided to teach her a lesson. They gang raped her repeatedly in front of her husband.

Though their medical examination revealed clear semen marks on her cloths, they were acquitted of their crime by High Court of Rajasthan. A number of women's organisations of Rajasthan and Delhi, therefore, rallied under a voluntary organisation called 'Vishakha' and filed an appeal in the Supreme Court against the judgement of the High Court of Rajasthan.

After hearing the sufferer, accused and women's organisations in detail, the bench headed by the then Chief Justice J. S. Verma and comprising of Justice (Mrs) Sujata V. Manohar and Justice B. N. Kirpal gave a comprehensive ruling in August, 1997. Apart from touching and deciding punishment for offence, the bench was pleased to spell out detailed Guidelines to address and prevent sexual harassment in a work place. These were crucial in shaping the legal framework for protecting women's rights in the country, particularly in the context of employment. These were also a response to the need for a framework to provide protection to women from any kind of harassment.

KEY ASPECTS OF VISHAKHA GUIDELINES

Sexual Harassment was defined including physical contact, advances, unwelcome behaviour etc. Mechanism for Redressal of Sexual Harassment complains was prescribed and responsibility of Employer was spelt out to prevent sexual harassment.

It provided for an Internal Complaints Committee with majority of women members and one member from an NGO working on women's issues and procedural safeguards were spelt out. Provision for Awareness campaigns and sensitivity trainings ensured that no discrimination be made against women. It became mandatory that each office had to file an Annual Report

The Guidelines were the characteristic feature of a landmark judgement of the apex court of the country. Women who were silent sufferers and spectators earlier, began coming forward. Thus complaints could be heard bereft of any fear or favour and justice could be dispensed with accordingly. However, it is also a fact that not all such complaints are genuine and that in some cases male opponents have been put to different forms of harassment, unnecessarily. It should, therefore, be the duty of the trial court to take an appropriate view while admitting a case.

Vishakha Guidelines were subsequently replaced by enactment of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition & Redressal) Act, 2013. Prior to circulation of these guidelines, no formal guidelines existed in the matter and that provisions under Sections 354 (Criminal Assault on Women) and 509 (Outraging Modesty of Women) of Indian Penal Code were used.

NIRBHAYA CASE OF DECEMBER 2012

Nirbhaya, a physiotherapy student of Delhi was given lift in a 'tourist' bus in Munirka locality of Delhi by a driver and his five colleagues. Within minutes, she was raped in the running bus, inflicted severe injuries all over body, including insertion of an iron rod into her genitals and dumped on highway. Of the six culprits arrested, one committed suicide in jail, one turned out to be a juvenile while four were hanged after seven years of comprehensive trial.

The case saw largest ever protests and demonstrations in the country in November- December, 2012 and amendments were carried out in Criminal laws subsequent to recommendations of Justice J. S. Verma Committee. These were significantly amended, primarily focusing on sexual offences against children and women. Attempt was also made to provide quick trials and enhanced punishment for such offences and improve legal framework for addressing sexual violence. A deterrent effect on potential offenders was also attempted.

Provisions were made very stringent so as to deter the deviant persons attempting such heinous crimes. However, later developments show that crime oriented or tilted persons are found as incorrigible as ever.

RAPE & MURDER AT R. G. KAR HOSPITAL, KOLKATA

A 31 year old Lady Doctor, who was pursuing P. G. studies in R. G. Kar Government college & hospital in Kolkata went to take rest in Seminar room of the hospital on completion of her duties late at night on August 8, 2024. A man hiding closeby attacked, raped and murdered her. The incident shook whole of Kolkata and later protests and strikes took place all over country. High Court of Calcutta and Supreme Court took strong note of developments. Lone accused was awarded Life Imprisonment on January 18, 2025. Thus trial in this case moved faster than Nirbhaya case and the accused was finally convicted in 5 months.

RAPE CASE AT I. I. M., KOLKATA

Another case of alleged rape in the hostel of prestigious Indian Institute of Management, Kolkata has happened on July 11. Accused has been arrested alongwith detention of four others and investigations are proceeding in full swing. Mobile phone and apparel of the accused as also woman's apparel have been seized. Accused belongs to Karnataka. As the legal process is underway, it is hoped that trial will begin soon and proper Justice will be done at an early date.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT & DEATH OF A STUDENT AT BALASORE

A young woman student of Fakir Mohan Autonomous College at Balasore, Odisha made a complaint on July 1, 2025 against her head of Department and later staged a dharna regarding her alleged sexual harassment. When college authorities and Police did not take any action, she took an extreme step of ending her life. She had claimed that an Assistant Professor had asked her for undue and inappropriate favours and also threatened to destroy her academic future if she refused. She also alleged that she was being prevented from attending classes.

Seeing no respite, on July 12, she poured petrol and set herself ablaze on the campus. She was rushed to District hospital. She was later admitted to AIIMS, Bhubaneswar with extremely critical 90% burn injuries.

Though accused Assistant Professor and Principal have been arrested and suspended, can such an attitude reflecting dominance of man be permitted?

Odisha Chief Minister visited extremely critical student in hospital. Sensing gravity, National Commission For Women has also directed DGP, Odisha to ensure a fair and time bound probe. President of India not only inquired about the hospitalised student but met her Parents also. Alas, all this was late in the day.

The student ultimately succumbed to her injuries on July 15. Navin Patnaik, the former C. M. of Odisha summed up thus: "Struggling for Justice, the girl ultimately closed her eyes".

CASE OF RADHIKA YADAV

Brutal murder of a 25 year old Tennis player on July 10 at Gurgaon by Deepak Yadav, her own father has sent shockwaves. This promising international player and a popular coach, having good footwork was hit by four bullets. Her uncle and a cousin took her to a nearby hospital but before entering the building she had expired.

The accused, an obstinate, tradition bound and short tempered father was arrested after eight hours which raises genuine doubts over conduct of Police. It may have led to tempering of evidence. Deletion of Radhika's Facebook account too raises doubts. It could have been a crucial piece of evidence. However, mother becoming tight lipped in such a situation is nothing unusual in tradition bound setting of Haryana.

It has been learnt that father could not stand rising success graph of daughter, though not only he invested Rs 2 Crores in her Tennis academy but he would also accompany her during her tournaments and video film shootings abroad.

According to a bosom friend of the deceased, Radhika felt suffocated at home and that her father had made her life miserable. The father seems to have cared more about what neighbours commented on Radhika's income being used for running the house, rather than what she wanted. So one fine day Radhika was told to stop coaching. She did not take it lightly.

Question that is being raised is: How could a loving and caring father be so cruel to his girl child, so as to take her life? Also Why was he carried away by taunts from his local friends over his daughter's earning?

One elderly male visitor rightly summed up the prevailing scenario very aptly: “ You say you love and care for your daughter and then the next day you do something like this. ”

LESSONS TO DRAW

Developments emanating from all the seven cases discussed above and below

WOULD SHOW THAT:

*It requires a great deal of courage to report such cases of mental torture and physical harassment, All limits of inhuman behaviour have been exceeded in these cases, Much hue and cry is made in the streets, social media,

newspapers and periodicals whenever an offence concerning outraging modesty of a woman comes to notice, media trials taking place at regular intervals not only impede and confuse Police investigations but politicians too get additional food for thought.

Procedural pace in police stations and courts do not pick up the desired momentum. Most of such cases are viewed as routine ones after passage of time, Special Investigation Teams, often headed by slightly senior police officers and Fast Track Courts do not make a dent, all the time. Many rape cases happening regularly within the confines of rigid and iron curtained homes, small places and remote areas are not reported at all.

Latest in the list are the fast mushrooming Coaching institutes. Three 'Lecturers' of a private institute in Dakshina Karnataka District have just been arrested for allegedly raping a 19 year old student repeatedly over the last six months. They were blackmailing her as well through Instagram and Facebook. She reported the matter very late to her Parents who approached the State Women's Commission. Police have registered cases against the trio, thereafter.

One can say that innocent girls who are also denied proper nutrition and minimum education in many places, continue to live in a state of fear for long. They lose life at regular intervals.

In view of above facts, how could we say that all Betis have been educated? If yes, is there adequate mechanism for protecting and safeguarding them from men, many times behaving like animals?

CONCLUSION

In sum and substance, educational status of girl child seems to have improved in the country. Child sex ratio is also going up, but on a marginal plane. Sex based biases and discriminations, nevertheless, continue in many places and settings. Extreme step which is causing grave concern to Parents is that more number of professionally educated girls are opting out of marriage. These may crop up in future also even if awareness level multiplies, thanks to Cell phone, Net and Social media.

Many of them, especially in North India do not mind indulging in crime either for quick money or for taking revenge. Imagine the plight of their Parents who invest a fortune with high expectation.

Against This Backdrop,

CAN EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN BE GUARANTEED?

Chapter - 11

Indulgence Of Women In Criminal Acts¹⁸

Crime is an act that violates the law. It is punishable by Government. It is a deviant act, deemed harmful to the society at large. Common crimes are: theft, robbery, assault, sexual assault, homicide etc. To deter these, punishment is given. Idea is to check future occurrence of crime and prevent potential offenders. It may include reprimands, deprivation of liberty, fines, life imprisonment and death penalty. In general, criminals are mostly men.

However, now women too are not lagging behind. When I say so, I am not trying to be biased. Analysis of seventeen cases below would reveal the facts. In addition, latest acts by them to commit suicide on flimsy grounds is devastating middle and lower middle class families. One hears about crimes against women in domestic setting frequently. But women can also take a lead in crimes, such as, pertaining to property, theft, fraud, forgery, cheating, black mailing, dowry deaths and assaults. Though rates and types of crime committed by them often differ from those committed by menfolk.

Pooja Singhal Case

A senior I. A. S. officer of Jharkhand, Pooja Singhal was arrested on charges of money laundering in May 2022. A bright student, she made it to Civil Services after completing 21 years. She was Secretary, Industries & Mining, in Jharkhand at the time of arrest. Her present husband happens to be a co-accused. A high profile officer, having wide connections, she had to stay behind bar for 28 months. Surprisingly, her suspension has been revoked on 21 January 2025. It is bound to send wrong signals to honest lots.

Case Of Puja Khedkar, IAS Probationer

Assistant Collector, Training, Pune, Puja Khedkar confronted difficulties fairly early in career. She has been accused of cheating and wrongly availing O. B. C. and disability quota benefits in the Civil Services Examination. Although she has now protection from arrest from the Supreme Court, she appeared in Civil Services examination twelve times as against permissible

nine attempts. Surprisingly, her parents never discourage her from getting involved in irregular activities. Her conduct as a Probationer has been proved unbecoming of an officer by her Collector right in the beginning.

UPSC has filed a criminal case against her for forging identity papers, misrepresenting and falsifying facts to obtain extra attempts in the C. S. E., 2022. Government of India has discharged her from service after her candidature was cancelled by the U. P. S. C. and registration of a criminal case against her by Delhi Police. Khedkar, aged 32 years, is a trained doctor. Another sad case of a bright medical student spoiling her career.

Nikita Singhania Case

One Atul Subhash, an Engineer committed suicide in Bengaluru on 9th December, 2024 due to continuous harassment, torture and huge monetary demands from his wife Nikita Singhania. Nikita, though was also employed as an Engineer in Accenture, N. Delhi, had demanded an unreasonable sum of Rs. 3 Crores from her husband. It was in addition to Rs. 2 lakhs per month, she was 'extorting' from the deceased. An additional sum of Rs. 10 lakhs was demanded by her family since they were reportedly dissatisfied with what was given to them at the time of wedding. These were revealed in his twenty four page suicide note and ninety minute video message. Not only Nikita had taken away their minor son but she was also putting pressure through her mother, uncle and brother on her husband. Nikita had filed a complaint against the deceased in the Family Court of Jaunpur, headed by Rita Kaushik. She was not only found biased in favour of Nikita but was also indulging in corruption. Though, after a long chase, three family members were arrested, what will happen to this case can be anybody's guess.

A similar case is yet to be decided. Only silver lining is that the concerned harassed husband yet again hailing from Bihar, instead of committing suicide, is fighting it out with his estranged spouse.

Ranya Rao Case

Case of Ranya Rao, a failed actress of Kannada and Tamil films is unbelievable and shocking. She was arrested on 3rd March in a huge gold smuggling case at Bengaluru airport. Gold bars worth Rs 12.56 crores were found tied to her belt. Further inquiries revealed that she had visited Dubai

thirty times in one month. She was never security checked and was boldly using a Police vehicle to get dropped and picked up from airport.

A raid at her residence led to recovery of jewellery and large sums of cash. In all, she was found in possession of Rs 34.58 crores. During every trip abroad, she would manage to earn Rs. 12 to Rs. 13 lakhs. While she is shuffling between Judicial to E.D. to DRI remand, she has alleged torture, being slapped and sleep deprivation in custody. She has alleged that her signatures were forcibly taken on blank and typed papers.

Her Step father, a DGP in Karnataka, who is now keeping distance from her, has been sent on Compulsory leave. Though he too was involved in two cases, he was never arrested. It included recovery of a large sum of money received through Hawala transactions. Another case was concerning encounter killings.

Financial Irregularities By High & Mighty Women

If we begin from top rung, one may mention cases of Chanda Kochar, former M. D. & CEO of ICICI Bank and Madhavi Puri Buch, former Chairperson of SEBI.

Chanda, Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan awardee and once much talked about woman Executive of the country disappointed everybody. As she figured in the Forbes's and TIME magazine's lists of Influential people, she became a role model. Misguided by her husband, she misused her powers and indulged in money laundering, cheating and defrauding ICICI Bank to the tune of Rs. 1730 Crores. She had approved high value loans to the Videocon Group in December 2022.

Madhavi Puri Buch, former Chairperson of Securities & Exchange Board of India is also facing grave charges levelled by Hindenburg Research of U. S. of artificially inflating shares of companies owned by Adani group. Dhawal Buch, her husband is also reportedly involved. She dared to remain absent from a Public Accounts Committee meeting. It is surprising that like Chanda Kochar, she was talented and highly rated, yet her misdeeds are going to cause her downfall and bring disrepute to deserving women.

Involvement Of Women In Heinous Crimes

One can not think of murdering one's own daughter. It happened at Ghazipur. Bindu, the merciless mother, killed her daughter with the help of her partner.

Another case of similar nature happened at Cumbum, Andhra Pradesh, where K. Laxmi Devi, a 57 year old not only killed her son but also cut his body into five pieces.

In Thane, Maharashtra, one Yashasvi Pawar killed her differently abled teenaged daughter. She was poisoned prior to disposing of her body.

In NOIDA, one woman assaulted and dragged a 10 year old boy out of lift and manged to take her two dogs up in the building. The accused living alone was also found having frequent fights with neighbours. Single women can be very dangerous.

One 25 year old woman of Ghaziabad crossed all limits when she filed a false rape case. She fabricated false evidence after alleging that she was pulled into a car and gang raped by three men. After police investigation commenced, her allegations were found false. Two alleged rapists were not found on the crime scene indicated by her. Doctors who examined her, told Police that there were no internal and external injuries to her private parts.

Dowry Death Cases

These are thousands of deaths of married women who are murdered or driven to suicide over disputes concerning dowry. The Act in question is Dowry Prohibition Act Of 1961. Husbands and in laws are identified mostly as primary culprits in such painful cases. It includes younger sisters of husbands as well. In 2024, as per NCRB, there were 6, 400 dowry related cases in the country. Actual number may be more as many cases remain unreported.

Section 498A of IPC is intended to protect women from cruelty in marital homes. However, there is a growing tendency to misuse this provision of law. People who have minimal or no role in the alleged offence are also dragged into long criminal trials causing them unnecessary hardship. It is felt that an accusation like cruelty should have substantial evidence.

Landmark Dowry Act cases are: S. Gopal Reddy vs State of Andhra Pradesh, Reema Aggarwal vs Anupam & Others, Phulel Singh vs State of Haryana, Satbir Singh vs State of Haryana and Nisha Sharma Dowry case.

Crimes By Indian Women Abroad

If we look at crimes committed by Indian women abroad, immediately, recent cases of Shahzadi Khan of Banda, U. P. and Mohammed Rinash Arangilottu come to mind. Former killed a four year old son of her employer, while latter was convicted for murdering an Emirati national. These figured in media prominently. Both have been executed. Former was buried in U. A. E. as per local laws. Her father was trying to get her body through M. E. A. till last moment.

Crimes in Delhi and N. C. R.

A number of young women in Delhi and N. C. R., are found working in fake call centres and invariably fall in the trap of those indulging in bank frauds or luring those seeking overseas employment. Many are also arrested for indulging in nefarious acts in the garb of health centres, massage parlours, beauty parlours or similar joints. Newspapers are full of such stories, day in and day out.

Flapshell Turtle Smuggling

Two women, rather a mother daughter gang have been arrested in a case of smuggling Flapshell Turtles from Mathura to NOIDA, knowing it well that the turtles were Protected creatures under Indian Wildlife Protection Act Of 1972 and smuggling them was a non- bailable offence. These would be brought to NOIDA and sold for sacrificial rituals at a price ranging from Rs. One to Ten thousand.

To Sum Up

An attempt has been made to analyse cases of women who deviated from their normal paths to commit something not tolerated and acceptable to society. Two of them are IAS officers. Perhaps, none of them had any regrets. There is no end to this sad saga.

Even if some women culprits have been charged, arrested and sentenced, others are ever ready to join the bandwagon. There is no end to materialism, no limit to individual greed, more so, by seeing and following others.

Urge for extra marital relationship is growing manifold also attributable to social media.. Due to it one man was murdered by Gulabo Devi, his wife aided by her paramour, in Jaipur while body of Saurabh was cut into several

pieces by Muskan, his wife and her boy friend in Meerut. In case of latter, parents themselves have requested for death sentence for their daughter.

LOOKS KALYUG HAS COME IN FULL SWING.

Chapter - 12

Pahalgam Massacre And Beyond¹⁹

Fifteen major attacks by terrorists killing close to two hundred people since 2015 have shaken Jammu & Kashmir. Of which ten major attacks have taken place since March, 2021. This number may be more. In the last two months, seventy one army men have lost their lives. Places attacked are common.

One may ask- Against claims of normalcy and mind boggling public expenditure, if such incidents are happening, how do we reach the dead end? Is it also a case of intelligence failure and lack of co-ordination between the state and Centre? At the end of such sacrileges, a man hunt is launched. Some result in arrest of actual culprits, some prove futile and some tend to keep the problem alive. Mostly persons belonging to minority community turn out to be the soft targets. At times, it is CRPF or Defence personnel.

PAHALGAM INCIDENT

The latest attack at Baisaran Valley, a picturesque meadow near Pahalgam, has resulted into brutal murder of twenty seven tourists and serious injuries to seventeen. Initial details of the dead indicates that people from almost all states are visiting J & K. However, list of seventeen injured persons has not been divulged even after one week. Is such secrecy desirable? Attackers in uniform, who are reported to have descended from dense forests, were between four to five. They were armed with M 4 carbine assault rifles and A.K.47's. They asked tourists their names and religion before pumping bullets. Though majority of unfortunate victims were Hindus, a brave Muslim and a Christian too sacrificed their lives.

Clad in camouflage outfits, they spread terror for about twenty minutes. 50 to 70 used cartridges were later recovered from the site. Technical intelligence, credible inputs and eye witness accounts are hinting at Pak link. Twelve victims had head injuries while three cousins were shot in stomach, head and chest in front of their family. A 65 year old tourist from Kochi was shot dead while riding a horse while his daughter watched. Screams and sounds of gun shots engulfed the meadow. What a gruesome sight it would have been.

Tough Time For Local Economy

All stakeholders of tourism trade have been affected: tour operators, taxi drivers, Shikara owners, people running hotels and inns.

Between 1,000 and 1,500 tourists were in the vicinity when the gory incident took place. Upon reaching the meadow, the terrorists first held the tourists hostage at gun point and asked women and children to stay away. They began firing from close range after inquiring about identities.

Prima facie, it appeared that terrorists had crossed over from Kistwar and reached Baisaran via Kokernag.

Exodus of Tourists

Immediate impact of the dastardly attack became clearer as tourists clamoured to take the first taxi, flight or train home. As a result, popular destinations of the State, such as, Srinagar, Gulmarg, Patani Top, Vaishnav Devi, saw a sharp fall in footfall. Massive protests and shutdowns were obvious.

It was for the first time in three decades that killing by militants had triggered outrage in public on such a scale. Idea was to convey to terrorists that their attacks can not be tolerated. It is not that their livelihood was hit, but they have felt that it was a sin to be silent. Many auto drivers also provided free service to stranded tourists upto Srinagar airport. A Shikara owner was seen offering fresh fruits to tourists returning to Dal lake. Such acts would have been unthinkable a decade ago.

REACTION OF PAKISTAN

While Pakistan has denied playing any role, India has pointed out cross border attack links. " We have absolutely nothing to do with it. We reject terrorism in all its forms", said Defence Minister of Pakistan. If Pakistan has no role, why is Pak Army shifting Terror Camps from Pak Occupied Kashmir?

Closure of Air Space

Pakistan has closed air space with India resulting into disruption of flights which would mean loss of hundreds of crores to Indian Air carriers. Pakistan has very few flights flying over India.

WHAT LED TO ATTACK?

The Resistance Front (TRF), a shadow group of Lashkar-e- Toiba (LeT) has claimed responsibility for the attack that may have happened due to: Successful holding of recent elections in the state, Steady progress of the state towards economic growth, Extradition of Tahawwur Hussain Rana, Amarnath Yatra about to begin and Visit of J. D. Vance, U. S. Vice President to India.

STEPS TAKEN BY INDIA

After a long time following tough decisions were taken:

- Indus Water Treaty of 1960 put on hold. But its impact has been seen only on Chenab basin. Reduction of water in other two rivers is yet to be ascertained. For stopping flow of Indus, India will have to build sufficient storage.
- Shut down of Attari integrated check post. It may be harmful to India as through it annual trade worth USD 500 Million happens especially of dry fruits from Afghanistan.
- SAARC visa arrangement for Pakistanis can be very well stopped,
- Military Advisors in Pak High Commission to leave- It can be enforced.
- Pak nationals to leave India within 48 hours- May have to be Reviewed as genuine people having relatives on both sides are having tough time. Time limit also is too short.
- Pak High Commission strength to be scaled down from 55 to 30. It is possible.
- Recall of Diplomatic staff from respective missions. It's an usual measure when relations get strained.

ARMY & NAVY ON ALERT

In the light of twenty five Cease Fire violations by Pakistan in eleven days, Indian Army has begun exercises. Idea is to ensure combat readiness of forces.

Indian Navy too is conducting antiship missile firings to have maritime security. As Prime Minister has empowered three armed forces to decide mode, targets and timings, one should expect tough retaliation or possibly a surgical strike.

Villagers located on international border are being sensitized about a possible conflict with Pakistan.

But co-ordination between Centre and the state will have to improve. To make political capital out of such sad occurrences also will have to be avoided.

Symbolic actions would not help at this juncture. Tough and visible steps leading to long term impact are required.

International Response

The U. N. Secretary General has immediately condemned Pahalgam massacre. But will it have any impact as UNSC resolutions are nothing but paper tigers? U. S. President Trump has given a lukewarm support to India so far. His Secretary of State has reluctantly asked P. M. Pakistan to maintain peace in the region. However, U. S. Secretary of Defence has supported India's right to self defence. U. K., Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkiye have offered to mediate. But in view of tacit military support by Turkiye to Pakistan and their dubious mediation between Russia and Ukraine, they can not be trusted.

Impact of Halting of Bi- lateral Trade By India With Pakistan

Recent initiative by India to halt Bi-lateral trade with Pakistan has severely impacted Pak economy. Prices of essential commodities have sky rocketed. One U. S. Dollar is now equivalent to 306 Pakistani Rupees. Its foreign exchange reserve had hit an all time low a few years ago and that there are no positive signs since then.

In such a pitiable condition, they can not risk a war with India, the cost of which will be USD 15 Billion. But they are sustaining terrorism against India as a tool of their state craft.

To Conclude

As iron is hot, we may strike. Well Integrated and unified response of three Indian armed forces may achieve the needful. An average Indian wants visible results.

LET US DEMONSTRATE OUR SHAKTI.

Chapter -13

Role Of Civil Administration In War Situation²⁰

Although officers & staff of Civil Administration have to be alert, active and responsive all the time, yet it goes without saying that their works & responsibility increase during a war or war kind of situation. Not only senior Civil Servants at the level of Commissionerate but those posted at Block and Circle levels belonging to various departments are also required to function and perform effectively.

We are aware that hostilities between India and Pakistan have got escalated for over a fortnight. What was thought to be a low intensity stage is likely to take shape of a full fledged war.

AROUND D. C., EVERYTHING CLUSTERS

First and foremost, a District Collector or head has to take cognisance of developments that may lead to a conflict situation having a bearing on safety and security of the common man. He has to take District S. P. and his team of armed men into confidence. Now he has some A. D. M. s' or officers of his equivalence at his command. So there is no shortage of manpower, vehicles and communication devices.

Apart from briefing and sensitizing his civil staff, uniformed force weilding arms as also the entity, bereft of arms, volunteers of Civil Defence too have to be mobilised and taken into confidence. Help of some active and trusted social workers can be also taken.

CIVIL DEFENCE

Idea is to utilise them for rescuing people and taking them to a safe area in a crisis situation. Civil Defence, afterall, aims to save life and minimize damage to property. It is also an effort to protect the citizens from human made and natural calamities. Indian Army too is trained to extend all help under specific circumstances of natural disasters and emergencies.

MOCK DRILLS

Mock Drills aim at training civilians, students, volunteers and others in civil defence techniques for providing protection in the event of a hostile attack. Idea is to assist in maintenance of peace, amity and order and in protection and rescuing of civil population.

People have to be trained in conducting Mock Drills like testing and operating Air Raid Sirens, seeing and assessing injured persons and learning to perform Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (C. P. R.). Tips for taking injured to hospitals correctly will have to be given, so that such persons do not add to their injury on the way. A list of Government and private paramedics have to be updated and kept in readiness to take care of delays. This may be revised from time to time.

If there is a necessity for a mock drill, sufficient notice shall have to be given to people in general. Readiness of Control Rooms and Shadow Control Centres has to be checked. Other steps are: operationalising Air Raid Warning Sirens, cleaning and restoration of Bunkers and training the civilians. Purpose is to assess preparedness and response capacity.

Weaknesses, if any, could be identified in the initial stages and areas for improvement may have to be highlighted.

OTHER STEPS

Vulnerable pockets and areas and vital installations prone to attacks by enemy should be identified quickly, sensitizing the public to be ready for taking precautionary measures and creating emergency shelters too have to be thought of.

District Collectors are required to prepare a list of schools, community halls, Panchayat Ghars and basements of buildings that can serve as Emergency Shelters. It may be ensured that entrance to basements should have separate entry and exit.

Disaster Management Plan shall have to be invoked, and integrated public warning sirens have to be installed & activated that can be operated in a war kind of situation. Extra security in remote as also densely populated areas, popular tourist spots, bus stands, Railway and Metro stations, Airports etc is very much called for. Extra patrolling and intensive night patrolling can help a great deal in this regard.

The emergency operation centres, Block, District and State Control Rooms shall also have to remain open round the clock. If C. C. T. V. is available, its footage not only has to be seen but same shall have to be analysed 24×7 for taking follow up action. Fresh volunteers should be briefed and trained to help in conducting rescue and relief in the event of fire, building collapses, sudden floods, riot, or any other exigency. Basics of crowd management too would have to be passed on. Also correct and authentic message needs to be communicated to Parents whether it concerns school going children or grown up wards working in offices.

MOCK DRILL ON MAY 7

A widespread Mock Drill was conducted in 244 identified Districts of the country on May 7. Delhi had one of the largest numbers-55. About 500 schools actively participated. Most of the important Districts were covered, but a few important ones from vulnerability angles were left out. Those close to country's capital should not have been left out.

ASSISTANCE OF ARMY

When Army is called during specific circumstances or not so normal situations, Defence forces have to assist the D. C. THEY DO NOT TAKE OVER. The principle of Civilian supremacy shall always prevail in such a situation. Public morale has to be maintained, channels of communication should be clear and there should not be any gap situation.

TO SUM UP

Competence and effectiveness of an officer and manpower available at his disposal is put to a litmus test in an abnormal situation. Things have improved tremendously in terms of quantity and quality. One should make optimum use of what is available and what can be pulled in, in an emergency like low intensity or full fledged war. Such challenges have surfaced, these would confront us in future also. A foolproof documentation may therefore, be resorted to for posterity, in the name of humanity.

Chapter - 14

India & Evolving Landscape Of International Co-operation²¹

No nation could survive on its own, especially after facing the vagaries of infamous and unnecessary World Wars. Efforts were made to forget and forgive by comity of nations after World War I. It led to birth of League of Nations. Before it could thrash out issues, reach a consensus and come to a firm discussion stage, World War II broke out.

For the first time, all pervading U. K. began losing its centuries old imperial hold over World affairs. Way for supremacy of U. S. A. was thus paved, in a cunning manner.

Instead of providing positive leadership to nations at large, USA and four other so called "permanent" members of newly formed United Nations Organisation (U. N. O.) gradually have become Stumbling Blocks. Today a stage has come when U. N. O. can not or refrains from giving command in any situation. AS ALSO no nation wishes to listen to it.

COVID-19 CRISIS

During Covid-19, the biggest crisis of the century which led to loss of millions of lives, UNO & its sister organisations proved utter failures. There have been demands that it is high time U. N. O. is dispensed with. Why only UNO, organisations like N. A. M, OPEC, C. H. O. G. M, European Union, African Union, ASEAN etc came to the forefront, played crucial roles according to demand of times but only three of them are not only 'alive', but are also providing Invitee status to 'other' countries. This being done, by bypassing and ignoring the principle of geographical contiguity.

In addition, new international organisations, such as, BRICS and SCO, started rather late, are attempting to play a "parallel" role. Mostly their members (India being member of both) are opposed to Group-7 and the hegemony of USA and its Dollar in general, by stressing the need for Multilateralism.

RELAXATION OF MEMBERSHIP

In the opinion of undersigned, relaxation in membership of such crucial world bodies weakens a body, thus paving way for super power intervention and makes a mockery kind of situation when the same powers DONOT come forward to support in a crisis situation, such as, Covid.

One burning example: Canada purchased Covid vaccines more than requirement of its sparse and rich population while most of African nations were struggling for it. India did go with a massive consignment of vaccines but W. H. O. faltered in the background of ferocious criticism of its working from President Donald Trump.

ADVENT OF G-7

G-7 or Group of 7 countries, viz, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, U. K., USA and Canada was established in 1975 as a platform for economic and financial co-operation in response to infamous Energy Crisis of 1973. Initially six countries came together, with Canada joining the bandwagon in 1976. It was followed by joining of European Union in 1977. The conglomeration does not have a permanent office or Secretariat like UNO and it does not have any legal status either. It is headed on an yearly basis by one of the Heads of Member States, on a rotational basis. Though European Council and European Commission both are members, neither of them can hold rotating presidency.

Incidentally, G-7 later became G-8 with the inclusion of Russia but its membership was suspended in 2014 following its illegal annexation of Crimea. Gradually countries like India, Saudi Arabia and some others were given Invitee status in this powerful forum of rich nations, but they have presence for name sake only. Accordingly, participation in such useless summits by India needs to be reviewed. G-7, however, appears to have grown in strength from an ad hoc gathering to more prominent forum to address crucial global issues and from 1996, ministerial level meetings of G-7 are also being organised to address important issues and summits and planned accordingly.

GROUP OF 20 & INDIA

An international forum like G-7 having 19 countries and two organisations viz, European Union and African Union, G-20 came to the forefront in 1999

in the wake of Asian financial crisis. But unfortunately, right from beginning, original G-7 members ALSO happen to be members of G-20. Why?

Its objectives are to work for economic co-operation, climate change, health, trade and to take anti- corruption measures. Like G-7, it does not have a permanent office and its chairmanship too is rotated among the Heads of States of Member countries. Decisions are supposed to be unanimous. Two tracks are followed for that: Financial and Sherpa. India is member of this emerging powerful body right from day one. Other prominent ones being, Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Mexico.

India's importance was clearly visible during 18th G-20 summit from September 9 to 10, 2023 in New Delhi, when it played host to perfection. Record number of preparatory meetings and seminars were held at as many as 90 venues. As these were held in many cities and resorts, it ensured publicity to tourist centres and gave solid boost to Indian culture and handicrafts. Similar presence was also reflected when Brazil hosted the summit in December 2024. President L. I. Lula da Silva of Brazil expressed full confidence in tact and expertise of Indian Prime Minister.

Before we discuss what transpired during the G-20 summit in Johannesburg, South Africa on 22nd November, this EMERGING GROUP needs to think and concentrate on relevance of continuance of G-7 members. It may be advisable to gradually phase out/ finish off the membership of countries such as, U. S. A and U. K., to begin with. This may ensure more independence and transparency.

P. M. MODI IN SOUTH AFRICA

At the outset, P. M. Modi expressed satisfaction over the fact that the historic initiatives taken at G-20 summit at N. Delhi were "furthered" in G-20 at South Africa. Inclusion of African Union in Delhi summit was a reflection of representation of Global South.

NARCO TERRORISM

Old irritant of Narco terrorism or Drug-terror nexus was rightly flagged by him as a serious challenge to global security. It was also a major means for financing the menace of terrorism. Trafficking of Fentanyl, was highlighted. He rightly proposed a G-20 initiative on countering the nexus to weaken the drug terror economy. This is not the first time India was saying so. But the

end result is widely known also in view of the fact that a mechanism of U. N. Drug Demand Reduction already exists. The very existence of Afghanistan and return of Taliban reflect this naked reality.

HEALTH MATTERS

In addition, it was good for the P. M. to propose formation of a G-20 Global Healthcare Response Team, comprising of six crucial ideas. It would be very useful in emergencies, such as, Covid and many challenging natural hazards.

BOOST TO SKILLS IN AFRICA

Specially reaching out to Africa, he went on to propose a G-20-Africa Skills Multiplier Initiative.

A key issue of global economic growth was also touched by the P. M. He was candid in saying that present parameters of growth had left a large population deprived of required resources. In addition, over exploitation of natural resources was causing concern, especially in Africa. In his opinion, there was a need to learn from the communities. Accordingly, he proposed creation of a Global Traditional Knowledge Repository.

Later crucial issues with active participation of India were discussed threadbare:

Role of critical minerals for clean energy, digital public infrastructure, women led development, disaster resilience, climate finance And

Measures To Take under LIFE (Life style for Sustainable Development).

A LOOK AT BYGONE ERA

When India was part of CHOGUM (Commonwealth Heads of Governments) it would be a low profile existence under all pervading the Queen of England. Other members too being oppressed and subdued for centuries, had similar plight & existence. Meetings were for the sake of get together in which mainly one would listen. Therefore, it had to whither away with the passage of time.

When Jawaharlal Nehru, Jamal Abdel Nasser, President of Egypt and Marshal Joship Broz Tito, President of erstwhile Yugoslavia came together firmly,

World was taken aback. Birth of NAM or Non Aligned Movement became a reality in 1961.

Born in November, 1889, Nehru was already a world leader and Tito had proved too tough for Stalin as early as 1948. Never becoming a Soviet puppet, he had maintained a safe distance from NATO and Warsaw Pact signatories till his death on 4th May 1980. Nasser, who inspired and motivated Arab masses with his effective Radio broadcasts from North Africa, was also known for his charisma and Pan Arabic populism till his death on 28th September, 1970. Under this pro active TRIO, NAM grew in strength and was sustained in more strong manner vis a vis CHOGUM. However, this comity too, was destined to bow out.

CONCLUSION

Leaders and their charisma play a vital role in sustaining initiatives, both domestically and externally. But if one is confronted with cunning and revengeful leaders, any nation has to face music under the garb of raised tariff. Thus collectivities are destined to be weakened, if not vanquished.

Show has gone on, it would go on with sustenance of regional entities like ASEAN, E.U. and African Union, together with bigger Groups, such as, G7, G-20, BRICS & S.C.O. But current hyper activity of U. S. A. under Donald Trump has to be toned down in the overall interest of humanity. U.N.O. too may have to be wound up soon, as it had outlived its utility long before the onset of Covid-19.

Chapter - 15

India's Neighbourhood Policy Needs a Change²²

Well, its election time in our neighbourhood: Myanmar, Bangladesh and Nepal. Fed up with slowing down of economy, bouts of violence & unrest and a bleak future for youth, common voter is looking for much needed change and relief in these struggling countries.

Three phase election process has begun in Myanmar on December 29 in 102 townships out of 330. Second and third phases will take place on January 11 and 25. A political party backed by ruling military junta has claimed to have taken a commanding lead in the first phase.

Bangladesh will go to polls on February 12 while in Nepal voters would exercise their franchise on March 5.

Taking off from Myanmar, the country is in election mode after a gap of almost six years, as last election exercise was conducted by country's Union Election Commission, under the clutches of all pervading Military Junta in February 2021. The National League For Democracy Party, led by Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, since banned, had swept the polls but was not allowed to rule. As if this was not enough, more than half of the political parties of that era do not exist now. So it may turn out to be another farce of elections under direct command and control of Min Aung Hliang, head of military junta.

While P. M. Narendra Modi has given him requisite message during S. C. O. Conference in Tianjin in September, 2025, Antonio Guterras, U. N. Secretary General has expressed the view that elections may not be free & fair in Myanmar. Military has not only grabbed power over the years but has been also able to consolidate the same with the tacit and hidden assistance of China. It is no longer a protest or a tirade, it is a case of prolonged Civil war in a country that is perpetually stuck between instability and natural calamities. In short, it suffers from following challenges: Out of a population of 51 millions, 21 millions are in need of financial assistance. Thus, it is one

of the poorest in Asia. As per U.N.O, its a case of most under funded aid operation. Still World Bank has projected a 3% growth of its GDP which should not be believed,

Country faces one of the worst humanitarian crises. Details about last food crisis are still not available due to tight lip policy of ruling junta. Same is the story about devastation caused and rehabilitation given during massive Earthquake in March, 2025. Drug trade continues unabated, rather it is a thriving business with connivance of neighbouring Indians. Those who can not bear repressive policies of rulers are compelled to take refuge in India and Bangladesh, thus becoming a prolonged burden in new habitats. Lastly, freedom of expression is not allowed. Press has been completely gagged in Myanmar for decades.

NEPAL

As announced by Justice (Rtd.) Sushila Karki led interim Government recently, Nepal is slated to go to polls on March 5, 2026 for 275 member Parliament. For 165 seats, there will be direct voting while 110 will be elected through a proportionate system of voting. As many as 64 parties have submitted names of 3424 candidates. Number of parties appears fairly large as Gen Z had compelled key parties to withdraw from any contest during the period of unrest.

Looking into past, after the ouster of Monarchy in 2011, though people of Nepal have tasted democracy, they have not experienced political and economic stability. The erstwhile kingdom has seen 14 Prime Ministers in 17 years, average tenure being eight to ten months. As no party has been able to complete a full five year term, prospects for a long term economic planning and development remain only on paper. It has led to money being confined to a very few families and business houses.

A sincere attempt was made by Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, former Finance Minister & P. M. and a few good intentioned politicians, who were members of the Constitution Committee, to frame a Constitution in May 2008 but fate of its overall impact remains unknown.

Though developments and violent protests, sparked by a social media ban, led by " Gen Z " youth from September 8, 2025 were good intentioned, history has shown that this kind of spontaneous uprising generally does not

lead to stable changes. No doubt, Nepal was in shambles for almost a week, events that emerged were sufficient to give a clear signal against nepotism, financial instability and the corrupt and opportunist politicians. Old elite are, therefore, destined to be replaced by emerging forces and trust deficit between leadership and electorate will have to go at once. Also high rates of unemployment and inflation shall have to be reduced, sooner than later.

Incidentally, K. P. Sharma Oli, last P. M., whose erratic policies led to last uprising, has been summoned for clarifications by a Commission of Inquiry to probe alleged use of force during September 8-9, 2025. Atleast 19 youth had sacrificed their life in Kathmandu and total toll reaching 77, nation wide. Question mark is whether polls be conducted as per schedule? If yes, will new Government move away from influence, if not grip of China? People to people contact with India may also have to be fine tuned in view of centuries old religious and cultural links between people of two countries.

BANGLADESH

One of the poorest countries of Asia again, it has been in turmoil since August 5, 2024 ouster of the then P. M. Sheikh Hasina and her subsequent refuge in India. Though an interim Government headed by a Nobel laureate Economist Md. Yunus is at the helm of affairs, presumably with blessings of " deep state", violence against Hindus and other minorities started at the time of departure of Hasina has got perpetrated. It has increased manifold with the rise of hate mongers like Sharif Osman Hadi, who subsequently lost his life.

Nominations for February 12, 2026 General Elections have been filed but Hindus continue to be targeted by nasty taunts, attacks and killings. One can not forget a long spell of harassment caused to Buddhist monk Chinmoy Krishna Das towards the end of 2024. Due to sealing and strong vigil at the international border, many of suffering Hindus can not now infiltrate into India.

As per one disclosure of the Ministry of External Affairs, more than 2900 incidents of such violence have taken place during the Interim Government under Md. Yunus. Future of two Crore Hindus (comprising 7% population) is thus in a dilemma. Some of them appear determined. They are not giving up.

With a view thereof, they have formed Bangladesh Minority Janata Party (BMJP). Though it may contest all 300 seats of Jatiya Parishad (National

Parliament), it is hoping to win about 40 seats but in pursuance thereof, it needs to have alliance with other parties.

Political situation in Bangladesh seems to have heated up with events following: (a) Murder of Sharif Osman Hadi, leader of Inquilab Manch on December 12 and five Hindus thus far, (b) Return of Tarique Rahman, son of Khaleda Zia on December 25, after a gap of 17 years and (c) Sudden death of Khaleda Zia, former P. M. on December 29. Although 80 year old Khaleda was ailing for long, she had contributed to the process of restoring democracy in Bangladesh, subsequent to a few spells of Army rule, including one led by Gen. Ziaur Rahman, her husband. Head of till recent dormant Bangladesh National Party (BNP), she was three time Prime Minister who distanced herself always from India. Even when she was declared serious by the doctors, she did not respond positively to the offer of P. M. Modi for medical treatment. Instead she availed of such a facility in Europe.

For the first time in four decades, late Khaleda Zia and her arch rival Sheikh Hasina, five time P. M., will not be facing each other. Though latter's Awami League has been barred from contesting forthcoming polls, shadows of both women leaders, however, may be seen very much in a latent manner.

Incidentally, Sheikh Hasina has tweeted that as the first Woman P. M. of Bangladesh and for her role in the struggle to establish democracy, Khaleda's contribution to the nation were significant and will be remembered.

IMPETUS TO NEIGHBOURHOOD

Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Late P. M., drawing from his years of rich experience and wisdom had once stated " You can change friends but can not change neighbours". It is very apt and meaningful in the current scenario of South Asia when Myanmar is having military rule for ages and Pakistan is struggling with its Army dominated if not led democracy. Its Army Chief holding high ranks of Field Marshall and Chief of Defence Forces, latter as a result of a constitutional amendment. What is more worrying is his growing proximity to the U. S. President, his extended tenure and legal immunity from prosecution upon completing his term. Nepal and Bangladesh have had their own share of crippling disturbances. Hopefully post-election scenario may be positive.

Sri Lanka, a country having 22 million population had tasted sustained disturbance and civil war during March to May, 2022. It became so strong that President Gotabaya Rajapaksha, the P. M. and Finance Minister not only had to resign and leave the country for a while but they lost their residences as well in massive fires. Maldives had also political hi-cups once or twice. Both, however, continue to have Chinese influence. Among India's neighbours, only Bhutan has been enjoying fruits of peace & amity, political and financial stability, albeit under a King. Having run through current election infested scenario in Myanmar, Nepal and Bangladesh, one may suggest that:

- India needs stable, peaceful and sovereign neighbours, away from influence of China,
- As regards Bangladesh, India should change its stand from being Pro-Awami League TO Pro- Hindu. It may help the latter. Expecting that sense of neighbourliness will grow once things settle down, may be far away from reality,
- Old elites of Bangladesh and Nepal should give up tendency to stick to power to make way for Youth,
- Soul searching among political parties may lead to democratic discipline. Cycle of vengeance has to go away. Rulers should have patience to listen to the masses,
- Educated Youth may raise voice against corruption, mismanagement, poor economic prospects, unemployment and inflation from time to time.

For further solidifying India's NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY, stability among neighbouring countries is very much called for. There should be no harm in reviving SAARC for such a purpose.

TO WIND UP

We may quote statement dated January 2 of S. Jaishanker, External Affairs Minister at Chennai:

"Countries that deliberately and persistently sponsor terrorism, can not expect the benefits of good neighbourly relations. However, India was willing to

work constructively with the neighbours that demonstrate cooperation and restraint. We have a right to defend our people. Idea of neighbourliness MUST be reciprocal"

Chapter - 16

A Topsy Turvy India & World: Reflections²³

If you have inclination, I had time and reflections on India and world, on the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi & Lal Bahadur Shastri which coincided with Vijaya Dashmi, 2025. We burn effigy of Ravan without fail once a year but refrain from killing Ravan hidden deep within ourselves.

Let us look around, talk about life and share experiences. No harm in divulging something, smiling and laughing until we cry. Hear the music from within and from chirping of birds and laughter from neighbourhood. We may still be left with some time and opportunity ahead of our ultimate march towards Sunset year. Second inning of life can be also relaxing, productive and creative, if we desire so. Let's not mess it up.

WORLD AROUND US

World comprises of hundreds of countries of which not less than 195 are members of God forsaken U. N. O. They are different from each other in terms of size, culture, dance & music, historicity, population, quality of life, incidence of poverty, levels of education & health, rural and urban settings and now, clutches of all pervading social media and corruption.

But certain attributes are somewhat common with some pluses and minuses in regard to public servants and Bureaucracy. And it is this class which rules, confuses, misguides and is responsible for ills of the system that get perpetuated.

World at a distance may look green, full of air to breath, plethora of water to drink but it may turn out to be populous and polluted. It may be also prosperous and troublesome, if not challenging.

One should have worthwhile company, apart from neighbours and relatives to keep you engaged and kicking. When chips are down, when you are in the midst of a crisis, one's presence of mind and mental toughness come handy, it would come to your rescue.

Cute cutlery, cosy chairs, cool dwelling unit, coupled with free flow of pen may always facilitate achievement of a state of relaxation, if not Self Actualisation.

Fire, Fire, Everywhere

We should neither be comfortable nor happy when fires are raging, all around. At times incessantly, from volcanoes or lush green forests or when notorious long range missiles are fired from the Israeli territory at the innocents in Gaza Strip. Many other countries of West Asia and Latin America, a few very close to U. S. A. too are at receiving ends.

ANY THING TAAZA IN GAZA ?

In Gaza Strip having 365 square kms area, a state of acute fear and intimidation prevails even after second anniversary of brutal killings of twelve hundred Israelis by the dreaded Hamas and kidnapping several of them to Palestine settlements.

By way of revenge, Israeli Army has tortured and killed over 67,000 Palestinians thus far. Of these 20,000 are children and 15,000 are women. Every three hours, a child unfortunately, gets 'liberation' from this miserable world.

1500 medical workers too have lost their lives owing to repeated bombardment of Al-Shiba hospital, the largest one. Apart from acute shortage of food grains and completely shattered health and nutrition set up, 95% of the schools have been damaged. One long tunnel discovered recently seems to have helped Palestinians immensely whenever Israelis attack.

Whenever U. N. and other aid agencies attempt to enter the Strip, their personnel are also attacked and killed. Mostly they are held up even after 'mandatory' clearances. Entire area has been rendered unliveable. Twenty thousand innocent children are suffering from mal nutrition. Under these situations, International aid is allowed only off and on. Israeli brutality duly ignored, purposely by U. S. A, is never ending. Most of us keep quiet or prefer to be silent spectators.

Israel had the indecency to bomb even on 'War' anniversary day of 7th October. Their tanks, boats and jets pounded parts of Gaza giving remaining Palestinians no respite. Indirect negotiations at Sharm el Shaikh in Egypt, do

not look promising. Key issues were Israel 's withdrawal from Gaza and disarmament of Hamas.

President "Flamboyant" Trump, however, had expressed the view that "there was a possibility that we could have peace in the Middle East, beyond just Gaza".

It is a fact that for want of a Cease Fire, Israel had succeeded in causing international isolation of Gaza Strip.

Whither Peace Plan?

At present when a so called 20 Point Peace Plan has been proposed by U S, supported unfortunately by India and a few others, Israeli incursion continued shamelessly till last moment. It may be noted that after a long gap when so much negative has already happened, we have the audacity to say that "terrorism in any form is not acceptable" and we also go to the extent of congratulating "Baba" Trump and Bibi, the killer of the century.

Israel being Israel has not abated even after more than one appeal from U. S. President to halt inhuman hostilities and long awaited announcement by Hamas that remaining Israeli hostages would be released and that they are ready to talk, but with conditions.

Temporary Cease Fire (C. F.)

Against all odds fresh round of Cease Fire has taken effect on October 9. Israeli forces in large numbers have begun withdrawing, whereas the poor and upset Palestinians have also begun a cautious march to their shattered homes in their homeland.

Celebrations were seen on both sides. But will they last? Israeli hostages were not to be released before October 13 or 14. Following this, 200 Palestinians, in Israeli jails were to be released alongwith others picked up by Israelis from time to time. An international force having a strength of 200 would monitor C. F. and prevailing conditions. As a precaution, U. N. aid agencies have rightly warned of famine in entire land mass.

NO FULL STOPS IN INDIA

Moving to India, fires also emanate at regular intervals from hideouts of insurgents and Naxalites, streets or small towns of India, out of sheer jealousy

or hatred or between the social groups, political outfits or youth or student bodies.. They may not have a well thought of goal but they hit the road for no rhyme or reason at regular intervals to espouse their unjustifiable cause. Wide spread disturbances in West Bengal, U. P., Delhi, J & K, Maharashtra, Assam, Bihar, Kerala and Tamil Nadu have become regular features.

Tamil Nadu in its one of the worst stampedes at Karur on 27th September has seen death of 60 persons and injuries to equal numbers. Film stars cum political aspirants, such as, Vijay, never miss a chance to wash off their hand when "Ganga Is Flowing".

Babas Never Give Up Their Dhabas

Sometimes it is Dharendra Brahmachari or Chandra Swami or Baba Ramdev or Baba Ram Rahim, followed religiously by Pandit Dharendra Shashtri or Police Baba of Hapur. At other extreme, it may be Jhingur Baba or now fast emerging Chaitanya Baba. All try to be instrumental in influencing and changing public opinion. But deep inside their heart they also have extreme sexual desire and swift inclination to have a following abroad while erecting their real estate empires in a few places within country and not missing a chance to own flats and villas in Dubai like 6000 Indian Billionaires. Religion has been an Opium to masses, it would remain so.

Many a time, these activities impede the expected flow of a town or state or even the country. Who suffers, who benefits, who facilitates, who makes political capital out of it? Are we getting bored or energized or elated altogether?

Manipur Blockade

Manipur facing a blockade since May 2023 due to perpetual clashes between the Meiteis and Kuki-Zo communities on the one hand and between Kukis and Nagas on the other has been separately analysed in Chapter 5 of PART “B” of this book

Situation seems to have become more grim after three hour visit of the P. M. on September 13, when due to inclement weather and adverse law & order situation, he had to undertake a road journey of 70 kms from Imphal to Churachandpur. Clashes have reportedly intensified. As money is no solution, neither Rs 7, 300 crore package nor promise to rebuild houses will make any dent in immediate future.

Demand For Statehood In Ladakh

People of youngest and most peaceful U. T. Of Ladakh had tremendous expectations from the Central Government ever since Articles 370 and 35A were abrogated in 2019. It looks like process of transition was caught in usual bureaucratic wrangle which did not belie expectations, but some key issues were not given the importance they deserved. Things were brewing up since 2007 when Sonam Wangchuk, renowned public figure, Magsaysay awardee and leader of agitationists had to face rough weather from MHA in regard to foreign donations to his NGO, Students Educational & Cultural Movement (SECMOL). Thereafter, U. T. administration, unfortunately, cancelled his Patta of 135 acres on August 21, 2025.

To win public sympathy, Sonam Wangchuk, the 'Govt. of India Expert of all seasons' has started movement in favour of Statehood, Constitutional safeguards under 6th Schedule and distinct tribal identity. They were provoked to indulge in violence on 24th September 2025 at Leh leading to four deaths and injury to over 50. As Sonam Wangchuk continues to be in Judicial remand at Jodhpur, it would be advisable to wait for further developments. He certainly deserves a better deal in view of his intellect, commendable service to the U. T., Border forces and Nation as a whole.

SPECIAL INTENSIVE REVISION

Following a Special Intensive Revision, voter list of Bihar has come down from 7.89 crores to 7.42 crore voters, a 6% dip since June 20. While 21.33 lakh voters have been added, 3.66 lakhs have been deleted.

As learnt on 30th September, Citizenship barely was a factor. As regards deletions, it is good to know that 99% of them were due to deaths, permanent migration and duplication. Direction of Supreme Court to ECI to allow Aadhar card as one of 11 documents was not only crucial but it succeeded in containing 'superfast flow' of latter. It may be noted that last SIR Was under taken 20 years ago. West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala have opposed it vehemently. In West Bengal over 120 B. L. O. 's have committed suicide. As elections to Assam Assembly are also due, C. M. of Assam has welcomed it.

General World Scenario

A full scale war is going on between Russia and Ukraine for three and a half years. The much awaited Alaska Presidential summit too could not lead to a

peace deal. It is sad to note that bi-lateral diplomatic efforts have also floundered with both Moscow and Kyiv launching deadly strikes into each other's territory. President Putin has gone on to claim that his forces have captured 5,000 Sq. kms in Ukraine this year. On the eve of biting winter, Russia has attacked key energy installations.

On the other hand, one after another, each country of the Middle East is getting attacked and devastated. By whom? Prime perpetrator is Bibi headed Israel, fully supported by Donald Trump led U. S. A. Also it is very much a proxy war situation between two Super powers.

CHINESE CHEQUERS

China in the company of its age old and fair weather friends never misses an opportunity to further strengthen and fine tune its position on world stage, whether its policy is with regard to U. N. O., BRICS or S. C. O. Its close ties with Russia and North Korea are by now well known. Presence of President Putin, Kim Jong Un, North Korean head and eighteen other heads of states at the SCO summit at Tianjin and later at Tiananmen Square Grand parade gave a solid boost to China. Apart from latest, massive and lethal arms & ammunition and superior air power on display, a huge vehicle showing 61 war heads was noticeable. It had 60 very long range missiles capable of hitting targets right upto USA and one Hydrogen Bomb. China is the only country to make a Hydrogen bomb so far and that 75% of rare earth minerals are exported by it to U. S. and many developed countries. It is absolute monopoly situation.

Challenge to the hegemony of U. S. A. & its all pervading Dollar by pushing forward multilateralism was inevitable after S. C. O. summit at Tianjin. In terms of latest development, Li Qiang, Chinese P. M. was to visit North Korea to participate in the 80th anniversary celebrations of the ruling party in October. In this regard one also needs to take note of provocation given by U. S. A. to Taiwan against China from time to time.

Struggle of Syrian People

Once a prosperous country under the Assads, Syria witnesses today absolute hunger & poverty owing to its 14 years of Civil war. Its civilization was one of the most ancient, only preceded by Mesopotamia. From 1947 to 1991,

Syria was an ally of Russia and same continued till the end of regime of Bashar-Al-Assad on December 19, 2024.

The new regime under Ahmed el- Sharaa is having tough time with U. S. backed Kurdish outfit in Northern and North Eastern parts. Recent clashes between SDF and Government forces have cast a shadow over a deal signed in March, 2025. Purpose of a bill is to "stich together" the country, devastated by Civil wars. A Special Envoy of U. S. A. is working hard in this direction. In a rare gesture, President Trump felicitated Ahmed el- Sharaa during his Middle East tour from May 13 to 16, 2025.

Softening of Stance of Afghanistan

Emerging effects of changes in Afghanistan for the last four years too need to be analysed. Although Afghanistan was re-grabbed by the Taliban on August 15, 2021 and new regime seems to have gone closer to China, Taliban have now realised that living in isolation may be detrimental to their overall interests. Decision by the Taliban to send Amir Khan Muttaqi, its Foreign Minister to India for important bi-lateral talks with External Affairs Minister and NSA will certainly help India at a time when U. S. A. has wished to take back Bagram air base and when Afghanistan is giving an impression of supporting India against Pakistan.

Muttaqi is the first senior Taliban functionary to visit India with a five member delegation. The visit is a welcome one as it is a significant step forward in country's efforts to forge a working relationship with the Taliban, more so, in view of its U. S. Dollar 3 Billions investment in Afghanistan. Security issues, co-operation for counter terrorism and need to check smuggling of drugs also figured in the talks. Missile attack on Kabul by Pakistan three days ago and similar one in the first week of September should be noted with deep concern.

Pakistan In Turmoil

Power elite in Pakistan had not taken enough rest after four day conflict with India that disturbances began surfacing in POK as also Baluchistan. Islamabad per, se, remains heckled 24 ×7 due to opposition rallies.

While marches against Pakistan Government a few days ago by Awami Action Committee in Pak Occupied Kashmir were reported to be successful, 6th I. E. D. attack in 2025 alone on Jaffer Express (having army men in board)

on Punjab-Sindh border, allegedly by Baluchistan Liberation Army has sent shock waves all over. Both developments are crucial ones in favour of India. Apart from regular attacks on Pak forces more Woman fidayeens are being trained.

Meanwhie former P. M., Imran Khan and his party Tehreek-e- Insaf continue to be targeted by the henchmen of P. M. Shehbaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League party. Ms. Sanam Javed, a member of Social Media team of T-e-I was kidnapped recently in broad day light in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Over six months Pakistan's closeness to U. S. A. is causing some concern in India. Unusually, new Field Marshall, s edge over P. M. Pakistan should normally not happen.

Weakening of Base of French President

Growing political instability and poor state of economy in second largest economy of Euro Zone of France has seen five Prime Ministers in less than two years. French President Emmanuel Macron is also facing pressure to resign or hold a snap parliamentary poll by Marine Le Pen's far right Nationalist Rally, the single biggest party in Parliament. Political chaos must end, that's the demand. Second term of 47 year old Centrist President ends in 2027.

Fragile Situation in Japan

In the same way, quick change of Prime Ministers in Japan has become a regular feature. Shigeru Ishiba, outgoing P. M. had to resign owing to loss of majority of ruling Liberal Democratic Party in the Upper house of the Parliament.

For the first time, Sanae Takaichi, a 64 year old woman leader of ruling Liberal Democratic Party is tipped to take over as Prime Minister. She became M. P. for the first time in 1993. Having close ties with Shinzo Abe, former P. M., she has a tough stance on China. She will be faced with a sluggish economy, economic stagnation, low wage growth, aging population and rising inflation. Political stability in Japan is necessary from trade and economic co- operation point of view as far as India is concerned.

Disturbances in Bangladesh and Nepal

Both these neighbours being crucial to India, situation therein before and after General Elections has been analysed in detail in Chapters 10 & 11 and 12 & 13 respectively of PART “C “ of this book.

Situation in Brazil

Away from Asia, Jair Bolsonaro, former Brazilian President has been arrested and convicted for 27 years in prison. In addition to his dubious background, it appears to be a case of political vendetta. Accordingly, he has obtained support from President Trump. Earlier Dilma Rousseff, Bolsonaro's one time colleague and predecessor, was impeached for indulging in corruption in 2016. With such a background, acute economic crisis being faced by Brazil for over five years and overall meek personality of L. T. Lula da Silva, the current President, it may be difficult for Brazil to host and provide leadership to next Conference of BRICS.

Canadian Affairs

Mark Carney, a top banker, who took over as the 24th P. M. of Canada in March 2025 is proceeding slowly and cautiously as opposed to J. P. J Trudeau, his controversial predecessor. He has pledged to unite Canadians, defend Canada's sovereignty and build Canada as the strongest economy in the comity of G-7. Indians hope that protection given to Sikh terrorist elements in Canada earlier will not be repeated in the new dispensation. As a matter of priority, Mark Carney has to take on the might of U. S. A. in regard to high tariffs already and all other manifestations.

Meddling By U. S. A. In Venezuela

Relations between oil rich Venezuela and U. S. A. have gone from bad to worse. Very recently a number of their vessels were attacked on orders from White House on suspicion of carriage of drugs, therein. As such, democracy in this country has been for name sake for ages. Very few free and fair elections have been conducted. As President Trump is pursuing a relentless tirade against President Nicholas Maduro of Venezuela, latter has written to Russian Representative to UNO to convene a Special session of Security Council to discuss the issue.

When I was writing all this, not in figment of my imagination, I would have thought that a prominent opposition leader from this country was being considered for Nobel Peace Prize, over riding the much publicized claim of Donald Trump.

New Nobel Peace Prize Winner

Yes, Miss Maria Corina Machado, opposition and human rights leader of Venezuela and head of Atenea Foundation scored over mighty or "almighty" Donald Trump, when an announcement to this effect was made on October 10.

With this remarkable announcement, Machado's long struggle for free and fair elections in her country has received International support and attention. As head of her party Vente Venezuela, she had contested Presidential elections, unsuccessfully in 2024. She is known for her famous Quote-"Tool of Democracy is also tool for peace"

This year a record 300 nominations for Nobel Peace Prize were received by Committee in Norway. Trump tried all his means vociferously, even help of non descript Pakistan was taken but at the end, his tricks and threats did not work. These Should Not, in the interest of humanity.

SUMMING UP

Who will limit, who will impede, who will Cap? These are the Burning Questions. Generations come, generations go but ills of the system go on getting complicated. Because we refrain from giving up our casual approach. Because our petty interests in general, override long term steps supposed to reduce miseries and serve people at large.

Therefore, a time comes when we are forced to do compromise with the same norms of the system, which needed modification, earlier.

Chapter - 17

Chhath: My Interface With The Holiest Pooja²⁴

To Begin from beginning, Chhath is the sole Puja in which Setting Sun is worshipped alongwith rising one. Devotees throng various water bodies in large numbers by duly respecting their relatives, friends, passers by and even police men. In the event of ponds and lakes being polluted, these are cleaned by invoking the spirit of community mobilisation and bonhomie. Spirit of co operation and avoidance of jealousy and hatred become the hall marks.

Apart from appreciable state of peace and amity during this period, crime rate too dips in course of this holy spell in the month of Kartick.

Everyone generally refrains from ON LINE. Only Single Line is followed, that is:

Look for a house wherein Chhath is being planned and volunteers help by taking bath every day and getting into fresh clothes to perform tasks, such as, watering and drying of wheat and rice, render assistance in trying "Jata", go to Atta Chakki for grinding of wheat, help in collection of fire wood (Aam Ki Lakri), cooking of delicious Thekua etc.

Notable Role of Muslims

It is the only Puja in which Muslims too take part either as assistants or service providers on the one hand and becoming actual devotees like the Hindu women and men, on the other. In a few interviews, Muslim men & women have been reported to be impressed with Chhath's philosophy of further cementing family bond and welfare of children.

Chhath Maha Parva Is Jeevan Parva

One should NOT comment on sanctity, longevity and ever green significance of Chhath, unless same has been properly verified from our Mythology and History. This is the holiest and most difficult Puja of Hinduism, emanating from the days of Mata Sita.

Goddess Sita is reported to have performed it in a temple surrounded by water in Monghyr District of Bihar. This Vrata was also observed by Lord Ram on his return to Ayodhya, Mata Kunti and Danvir Karan, apart from many other dignitaries, such as, President Draupadi Murmu.

Everyone, even if he or she wishes, can not perform this Maha Parva involving 60 hours of fasting in two spells: 24 hours and 36 hours without water. Its a question of Faith, Astha and Viswas which ensures smooth sail through.

Profound Philosophy & Eco Friendly Approach

It has been felt that Sun sets to rise again. In the same way, if a civilisation comes to an end, another one will spring up. If someone dies, a rebirth will happen. Chhath revolves firmly around this time tested philosophy. Therefore, one should worship End as also Beginning.

Chhath is not only Maha Parva, it is Jeevan Parva. Herein no statue worship is needed. So no question of creation of any dust or air pollution.

Chhath is also eco friendly in the sense that small bamboo pieces or similar products are used for making "Daura" and "Sup". Former is used for carrying essentials for "Aragh" while Thekua and seasonal fruits are kept in latter for making rounds inside water for worshipping the almighty of the day.

Jampacked Chhath Trains Proceed to Bihar, U. P. & Jharkhand

Much before Diwali ends, migrant labourers and office goers alike, begin planning for taking part in Chhath with their families of Orientation. Since it is a sacrosanct annual feature, it requires the attention it deserves.

In view of ad hocism on the part of the Government, many railway stations and bus stands, especially in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai witness confusion, chaos, and helter skelter scenes. Railway stations of a few North Eastern states too have to face such embarrassing situations.

While travellers to three states invest a major part of their savings in this annual ritual, Ministry of Railways is found refraining from advance preparation and pro active thinking.

Excerpts From A National Daily

Following relevant information has been culled out from a report dated October 25, 2025 of D. Tiwari of Indian Express:

*No office boss or head of a real estate or general business set up refuses leave for the period of Chhath,

*Trains may be packed to the brim but that does not become a deterrence factor for determined passengers,

*As it is a matter of profound faith and rejoining with family, Chhath travellers donot mind resorting to sharing of berths and seats,

*In almost all East bound trains, floors, passages, toilets and berths get cluttered with bundles, boxes, air bags etc. These have gifts for the relatives: utensils, blankets, glasses, pressure cookers etc.

*If Railway authorities do their job properly, such a discomfort may not happen, year after year. Dates of Chhath, afterall, are known to everyone in advance,

*A poor old man was right in uttering: Governments come and go but we would keep travelling like this,

Another person blared out, out of disgust: Bihari is used as an abuse in NCR region but we bear it for the sake of our family members (Unfortunate indeed).

*When dinner time approaches, in extreme congested situation, men open their food boxes or packets to begin sharing rotis, sabji and pickles, cutting across barriers of caste, creed, class and religion. Its an unbreakable uniting force that is visible in the name of Chhath.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

When we were children, say in early sixties, we did not have a swanky swimming pool to use for doing Chhath. We would make "Ghats" on the banks of rivers or lakes or ponds and reserve the place in advance. At times, night vigil was also required to avoid encroachers. In absence of these, nearest community well was used on one to one basis.

During Chhath, 2025, I was privileged to perform it for the second time. My maiden attempt was in 2020 when I did half, i. e. 36 hours of water less FAST,

without offering "Aragh" to Sun God. This year by grace of almighty, I not only fasted for 60 hours but also offered Aragh on both the auspicious days. Jayshree, my spouse of 37 years, relatives, friends, well wishers etc had genuine apprehensions about strength and determination of this 67 year old man. But I was able to sail through without having or feeling any headache, hunger, visible tension, loss of sleep etc. Rather, to keep myself busy, I kept pursuing my usual hobby of part Yoga, morning walks & exercises and could also manage to publish two articles.

It is humbly felt that if one is determined, no power on earth can shake, impede or deter you.

Between 6:30 & 6:40 a.m. on October 28, I had the pleasure and privilege to worship rising Sun, a living God closely, bereft of usual service of a Priest. To my surprise, I turned out to be the only male in the dedicated comity of atleast 35 to 40 females to perform Chhath and became the oldest member of my two families to have accomplished this difficult task so late in life. It is said- all is well that ends well.

When I looked around upon getting out of water, the smile, applause, love and affection that I received was simply unimaginable and unthinkable.

I took a vow to repeat my performance if my body permits.

Jai Ho Surya Devta

Jai Chhathi Mata

Part “C”

FAST CHANGING WORLD ORDER

Chapter - 1

Challenges To Cease Fire In Middle East²⁵

A Ceasefire or a truce or armistice is stoppage of a war in which each side agrees with the other to suspend aggressive actions. It can be declared unilaterally or negotiated between parties to a conflict. A third party mediation can also happen.

A Ceasefire to end fourteen months of conflict between Israel and Hezbollah on the one hand and between Israel and Hamas on the other, was being talked about for quite some time.

A senior Hamas Political Bureau member, Bassem Naim had indicated on 15th November, 2024 willingness of Hamas for a Ceasefire in Gaza. Therefore, President elect Trump of USA was urged to pressurise Israel to end war. It came a week after Qatar announced that it was suspending its role as a mediator and urged all parties to show seriousness. Later a spokesman of Qatar indicated that it was ready to resume their efforts when the parties concerned show willingness.

A ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah has begun from dawn of 27th November. Hezbollah has been given 60 days to end its armed presence in South Lebanon while Israeli forces have to withdraw from the area during this period. It is a 13 point agreement stating that Lebanon Government will prevent Hezbollah and other armed groups in Lebanon from carrying out any operation against Israel. Israel too will not carry out any offensive military operation against Lebanese targets, including civilian, military or other state targets in Lebanon.

UNSC RESOLUTION 1701

Basis of Ceasefire is full implementation of U. N. Security Council Resolution 1701 which led to end of last war in the region in 2006. The resolution requires Hezbollah to remove its fighters and weapons from the area between Blue Line (unofficial border between Lebanon and Israel) and Litani river, about 30 kms to the South.

HEZBOLLAH INCLUDED, HAMAS LEFT OUT

As U. S. President Joe Biden had to do something substantial in the Middle East before hanging his boots, he approved a deal for cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah in consultation with France. However, there was no guarantee that it will hasten a deal in Gaza with Hamas. U. S. was to launch a renewed drive for Cease fire in Gaza alongwith a hostage release deal. Nayeem Kasim, new Hezbollah Chief incidentally has termed cease fire as a victory for them.

INTEREST OF ISRAEL

According to Benjamin Netanyahu, P. M. of Israel, there were three main reasons behind the deal: To focus on Iranian threat, Israel's Army needed rest and replenishment of stocks and idea was to separate the fronts.

Before it happened, Israel went for a midnight strike on Deir-el-Balah city in Gaza strip in which innocent people lost defenceless children.

Another strike killed 49 persons in Lebanon and 19 in Gaza. In retaliation, Hezbollah fired over 250 rockets into Israel, wounding seven persons.

After Israeli cabinet approved Ceasefire, it continued air strikes in Beirut and other parts of Lebanon, killing another seven and injuring thirty seven persons.

In fourteen months, 3961 persons were killed in Lebanon and 1.2 million were displaced. Tens of thousands of Israelis too fled from their homes along the border. Even after cease fire began, Israel continued to pound Gaza on 27th November.

REACTION OF HAMAS

Hamas was ready for a Ceasefire and a deal to exchange prisoners. They informed their mediators in Egypt, Qatar and Turkey also. At this moment Netanyahu pointed out "When Hezbollah is out of picture, Hamas will be left alone in the fight. Our pressure on them will intensify. Israel will also focus on the Iranian threat."

Meanwhile, in a fresh push for a Ceasefire in Gaza and a hostage deal, Hamas leaders have begun talks with Egyptian officers. Kuwait's Emir has also urged for immediate ceasefire for Gaza at a Gulf Meet.

REACTION OF DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

While Iran has welcomed Ceasefire, India while backing it, has called for dialogue, diplomacy and de-escalation. Egypt and Qatar have also welcomed the truce. Qatar, in addition, has hoped that it would lead to a similar agreement to end war in Gaza. E. U. President has felt that Ceasefire was very encouraging news. In the opinion of British P. M. it was long overdue and would provide some measure of relief to civilians in Lebanon and North Israel.

French President has opined that deal was culmination of efforts undertaken for months. France would spare no effort to support its implementation by working with U. N. I. F. UNICEF has stated that agreement is an essential first step towards healing the communities affected by conflict. But statement of a U. S. officer may be significant as it hints at Hamas. It says " When they watch the news and realize that Hezbollah has decided to abandon them and delink the two conflicts, there is no one coming for their support anymore."

BREACH OF TRUCE?

Both Israel and Hezbollah have accused each other of truce violations. According to a Hezbollah leader, Israeli Army was attacking those returning to border villages. Israeli tanks had fired on five towns in South Lebanon and Drones were also doing surveillance over this area. 21 Palestinians were also killed in Gaza by Israeli strikes. In retaliation, again Hezbollah attacks killed 45 civilians and 73 Israeli soldiers in North Israel.

According to Lebanon Army, Israel has breached the accord several times by aerial violations and targeting of Lebanon's territories with weapons. The Israeli Defence forces, however, have clarified that it attacked Hezbollah facilities in South Lebanon after identifying terrorist activities and separately opened fire on several suspects. Israel also killed 40 persons in Gaza strip. Many were in a refugee camp.

Monitoring mechanism of Ceasefire is yet to begin, hence violations can not be ruled out. Deadly Israeli strikes on South Lebanon and Hezbollah on 2nd December have, therefore, hit at the very purpose of Ceasefire. Defending its action, Israel has stated that in the event of collapse of Ceasefire, it will not differentiate between Lebanon and Hezbollah. Lebanon officials in the meanwhile, have requested U. S. and France to put pressure on Israel and to

ensure compliance of Ceasefire amid state of tension. To save the situation, the French Foreign Minister has called upon both sides to adhere to Ceasefire.

HUMANITARIAN ISSUES

Israeli Army is capable of targeting even those providing meals to people affected by wars. One such organisation- WCK has become a life line for people in Gaza, who otherwise struggle to feed themselves. An Israeli airstrike on a car in Gaza strip on 30th November killed five persons including employees of WCK. Its aid delivery efforts in Gaza were suspended earlier this year after an Israeli strike had killed seven of its workers, most of them being foreigners. Further, UNRWA is finding difficulty in providing aid to Palestinian refugees through Karem Shalom crossing due to Israeli siege & hurdles.

In Gaza, ongoing war has sparked a humanitarian crisis resulting into displacement of much of territory's 2.3 million population and triggering widespread hunger. If the current trend continues, peace would remain a distant possibility for the Palestinians in Gaza strip and hundreds of Israeli hostages therein also may continue to suffer.

TO SUM UP

a) Violation of Ceasefire has been mostly by Israel. Minutes before agreement became effective, Israel bombed Beirut's suburbs twenty times in two minutes, killing twenty five persons. Another fifty were killed and 160 were wounded in Lebanon on previous day.

Will U. S. and France have any Answer?

b) Why only 60 days? Cease fire should have been forever in tune with Joe Biden's statement that it was designed to be a permanent cessation of hostilities.

c) It shows failure of U. N. O. once again as in the case of Russia-Ukraine war which is going on since 24th February, 2023. AND

Why Resolution 1701 of 2006 of UNSC be the basis? The Security Council should have debated this issue and come out with a fresh resolution in view of complete change in the circumstances.

d) By delinking Hezbollah from Hamas, U. S. and Israel have come out with an infamous 'divide and rule' policy prevalent in British India. Emir of Kuwait has also hit out at such a "double standard".

e) When Joe Biden says Israel retains the right to self defence, basically Israel gets an upper hand in the deal. Further, if one believes the protesters in Israel, agreement is a complete surrender to Hezbollah.

Chapter - 2

Gaza Cease Fire & Hostage Release²⁶

Cease fire at Gaza strip at last has been approved and enforced. It is hoped that it may last and sustain in the name of humanity.

Cease fire (C. F.) literally is a temporary stoppage of war on a planetary scale. It is also known as a truce or armistice or stoppage of a war in which each side agrees with the other to suspend aggressive actions. Often it is worked out as a result of mediation by a third party. In present case, however, three parties, viz, Egypt, Qatar and USA have played the role of mediator.

As far as perennial conflict between Israel and Hamas on behalf of Palestine is concerned, there are many other vexed issues which need to be responded to, discussed and resolved. Though full agreement is yet to be divulged, it has been learnt that there would be three stages of C.F.:

The First Stage, scheduled to last for 49 days has already led to release of three Israeli woman prisoners by Hamas(Harkat al Mukawama al Islamia) and corresponding release of Palestinian prisoners by Israel,

Stage Two aims at permanent end to war, while Stage Three will involve reconstruction of Gaza strip which may take not years but decades, requiring billions of Dollars.

It is not only having a GRIM FACE but it has become a war torn country as well with whole population living below poverty line.

If one foreign woman Sadhvi camping at Prayagraj is to be believed, there is Cease fire in the Middle East due to Maha Kumbh and there may be peace on Ukraine front too owing to same reason. Afterall, Russian and Ukrainian devotees have been seen together in Maha Kumbh, she added.

How far is it true and how long peace would last, that is anybody's guess? P. M. of Israel has expressed the view that C. F. was temporary. He will return to war, if necessary, with more force. He is incorrigible.

Background

C. F. has begun with effect from 20th January to coincide with the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47th President of USA. As is known by now, to stop fighting and bombardment in Gaza's deadliest ever war, efforts were being made by three countries for over an year. Ever since C. F. between Israel and Hezbollah took place about two months ago, speculations were being made for similar solution in this war zone as well.

Initial Hitch

A draft of C. F. was debated and approved by the Security Cabinet of Israel on 17th January and was subsequently followed by clearance of its full Cabinet. Two far right Cabinet Ministers, however, have opposed the deal. Antony Blinken, Secretary of State of USA felt that the Cease fire would go ahead on schedule.

Relief To Come

Israeli hostages held by Palestinians since October 7, 2023 and hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails are likely to be released, thus paving way for fifteen months of tension, hostility and uncertainty. It may be noted that 1200 Israelis were mercilessly killed by Palestinians and over 250 hostages were also taken in custody. However, it is equally sad to note that Israel have also killed 46,000 Palestinians out of their population of 2.3 millions in the Gaza strip.

Unfortunate Israeli Air Strikes

On 17th January, 2025, Israeli air strikes killed 104 Palestinians, including 58 women and children, though the C. F. deal was announced on 15th January itself. Israel, further, hit 50 targets in Gaza strip in 24 hours. Thus till last moment, Israeli forces did not spare the Palestinians. Similar show of cruelty was displayed by Israel vis a vis Hezbollah.

Main Points Of Agreement

As per agreement, under the six week first phase of three stage deal, Hamas have to release 33 Israeli hostages, including all women, children and men above 50 years of age. Israel has taken a stand that 98 hostages were still being held in Gaza and that four of them are being held since 2014. Israel will

release Palestinian women and children under 19 held in Israeli jails by the end of first phase. According to one estimate, total number of Palestinians in Israeli jails could be between 990 and 1650.

Tough Stand Of Israel

Prime Minister Netanyahu has made it clear that Israel would not proceed with C. F. until list of hostages to be released by Hamas was received. Further, according to Justice Ministry of Israel, 737 prisoners and detainees are to be freed as part of the first phase of deal.

As truce was to be implemented from the moment Donald Trump was to take oath, he claimed credit for working with outgoing President Joe Biden's team to seal the deal. The President of Palestine, Mahmud Abbas has added that they had completed preparations for assuming full responsibility in Gaza.

Last Minute Delay

A last minute delay by Hamas, nonetheless, put off the start of truce by nearly three hours. During this brief period also Israeli war planes and artillery pounded Gaza strip and killed 13 people. Israelis did not show even a semblance of compassion.

Release of 3 Israeli Women soldiers

Three Israeli women hostages held by Hamas were at last allowed to get into the vehicles of International Committee of Red Cross. They crossed over to Israel in exchange for planned release of 90 Palestinian prisoners. They were hugged tightly by mothers and relatives. Women were re united with their mother's inside Israel.

Seeing it as a positive development, some Palestinians began returning to their homes. Next group of Gaza hostages were to be freed by weekend to follow. Similarly, the second batch of Israeli prisoners were to be released on the seventh day from the start of C. F.

There is supposed to be a surge of humanitarian aid with hundreds of trucks entering Gaza daily. As per U. N. World Food Program, over 600 trucks began entering through two crossings after C. F. became a reality. One can imagine relief to be ensured to hostages and people of Gaza as a result of such a positive activity.

Celebrations In Gaza

Across Gaza Strip, expected celebrations erupted as people hoped for a long awaited respite after intermittent fighting had killed tens of thousands of people, destroyed large areas of Gaza and also displaced most of its population. While fire works were seen in the sky, the Hamas run Police too became active after lying low and dormant for long.

In Rafal city of South Gaza evidence of massive destruction was noticed. Some people found human remains, including skulls from the rubble. One Mummad Abu Taha upon inspecting ruins of his family home stated that it was like seeing a Hollywood horror movie.

Cease Fire Brings Hope

Palestinians were reported to have burst into streets to celebrate return to the debris of their bombed out home. Over 130 bodies were discovered after C. F. began. They picked their way on narrow roads through a completely devastated landscape of rubble and twisted metals.

One man had built a house piece by piece. He discovered that it has gone forever.

" I feel alive again" said a woman.

According to U. N., over 600 million tons of rubble has gathered which may take over 15 years to clear. There is massive food insecurity in view of agriculture being completely in shambles. International aid would depend upon political stability.

Cheers In Israel

On the other side, Israelis too cheered, embraced as also wept when three female hostages were released. In Israeli occupied West Bank, buses were awaiting release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli detention. Hamas stated that the first group to be freed in exchange for the hostages included 69 women and 16 teenaged boys.

Truce calls for fighting to stop, aid to be sent to Gaza and 33 of the 98 Israeli and foreign hostages still held there to become free over the six week first phase in return for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. As one Palestinian put it "We are in pain. It is time to hug one another and cry".

For Hamas, truce could provide an opportunity to emerge from shadows after 15 months in hiding.

Hamas To Release 4 More Women Soldiers

Four soldiers captured from an Army base in Southern Israel during deadly attack by Hamas on 7th October, 2023 will be swapped during the second phase. It was expected to take place on 25th January.

In six week first phase of the current C. F, Israel has agreed to release 59 Palestinian prisoners for every female soldier's release. Meaning thereby, two hundred prisoners would be released in return of the proposed four female soldiers.

According to Israel, 94 Israelis and foreigners still remain in custody in Gaza. In the first phase, Hamas has agreed to release 33 hostages in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

During the subsequent phase, two warring sides would negotiate the exchange of remaining hostages and withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. Needless to say, Gaza lies largely in ruins after fifteen months of fighting. Gaza's economy is in shambles by 86% contraction due to war.

Meanwhile, the candid, rather a rude statement of U. S. A. that Hamas will never govern Gaza, has to be taken with a pinch of salt or it may be a warning in view of widely known tilt or soft corner of U. S. for Israel. Qatar P. M., however at Davos has made it clear that only Palestinians will rule Gaza and not any outside power.

Not only vibrant market of U. S. arms has to be kept alive and kicking but its presence and dominance in the Middle East too has to be further strengthened.

LET US KEEP OUR FINGERS CROSSED.

Chapter - 3

Fresh Crisis In Middle East: Emerging Patterns²⁷

Middle East is in the midst of a fresh crisis. Unwarranted situations are not the handiwork of local or regional leaders. These are instigated, influenced and very much supported from outside. "Operation Rising Lion" was launched by Israel with tacit U. S. support, targeting Iranian military and nuclear infrastructure. While their Air Force pilots targeted military or strategic assets of Iran, Iranians stuck to their habitual policy of terror by bombarding residential areas, hospitals and civilian centres in general. Any power producing weapons of mass destruction should not claim that these are for peaceful, medical, scientific and civilian purposes.

U. S. A. has willingly or unwillingly inserted itself into a war it had in mind but it spent decades trying to avoid. It was a matter of surprise that very recently President Trump during his visit to Middle East, dashed to three important capitals but purposely avoided touching Israel or Gaza. Latter would have been a necessity in view of ongoing, acute humanitarian crisis.

Also his joining hands with new 'tainted' leader of Syria Ahmed al-Shaara and having a deal with Houthis was unwarranted. Latter was not to the liking of Israel as they have been more than hostile to them all through. Perhaps these things happen in war and love. These may continue to take place.

Conceiving and creating an underground infrastructure for a nuclear programme was going on by Iran for many years. In addition to Pakistan, it was determined to achieve this 'distinction' in the name of Jihad. Iran has long maintained that its nuclear programme was peaceful. But U. S. President and Israeli leaders have argued that Iran could quickly assemble a nuclear weapon.

HOW ISRAEL & IRAN LOOK AT EACH OTHER?

Benjamin Netanyahu (Bibi) has opened a new front by stating that nuclear armed Iran was their biggest existential threat. Iran's 'possession' of nuclear

arms makes it most dangerous regime. He apprehends that the first target of nuclear Iran will be Israel. Besides Israel has accused Iran of harbouring genocidal intentions. Hence, Israel has sought sanctions and military action against Iran to stop it from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Countering it, Iran has accused Israel of perpetrating a genocide in Gaza Strip. Iran has a numerical advantage in terms of man power and land forces. It also has an edge at sea.

But Israel's air superiority is undeniable. Iran has 231 fighter jets, which being old, are difficult to maintain. Israel has 314 fighter jets. Israel also has scores of nuclear weapons but it refuses to be a signatory to NPT. No inspection by IAEA takes place. Such acts in defiance of international law shall have to be checked, forthwith.

ROLE OF NON STATE ACTORS

Houthi rebels of Yemen, the supporters of Iran, have launched attacks on Israel by latest missiles and armed drones, demanding an end to invasion and continued occupation of Gaza Strip. They have seized or bombarded several merchant ships and naval vessels in Red Sea and received hundreds of air strikes by U. S., U. K. and allied forces. This action may be also linked to Israel- Iran proxy conflict.

A Cease Fire was reached between Houthis and USA during the Middle East visit of Trump but it collapsed after recent strike of USA on Iranian nuclear sites. Talking of statistics, during the period October 2023 to March 2024, Houthis have attacked over 60 vessels in the Red Sea. Their persistent threat in Suez Canal region is also not ruled out.

U. N. Security Council has adopted a resolution condemning attacks perpetrated by the Houthis but their nuisance over Red Sea region goes on unabated.

It may be noted that even when President Trump was present in one of the capitals of Middle East recently, Houthis did attack Tel Aviv by missiles.

MISERIES MULTIPLY IN GAZA STRIP

Israel is in habit of being in fighting mode all the time. Even at the peak of their war against Iran they had the audacity to attack and kill scores of Palestinians in Gaza Strip.

A few days ago Israel has halted aid supplies to Gaza for two days to prevent them from being seized by men of Hamas. Palestine Clan leaders, however, have clarified that some masked men on aid trucks were protecting aid, not diverting it to militants. Bibi has made it clear that Hamas has to be prevented from taking control of aid. As it is customary for clans to help in providing security to aid convoys, director of an umbrella body for local NGO's has stated that aid was being distributed to vulnerable families.

A statement made by R. Mansour, Palestinian Ambassador to UNO is significant in this regard. He has stated that since Israel broke Cease Fire in March 2025, over 1300 Palestinian children have been killed and 4000 have been injured. Thus Barbarism was going on. Children suffering from starvation was unbearable. In many places, mothers were embracing their motionless bodies.

Who will tolerate such a horror?

FRESH ISSUES WITH HEZBOLLAH

It is in everyone 's knowledge that functionaries of Mossad had organised killing of Hassan Nasrallah in November 2024 and soon thereafter, Hezbollah had agreed for a Cease fire with Israel.

However, it is in the interest of Israel that Hezbollah is now confined to Lebanon and kept in check. Their Air Force, therefore, was directed to carry out intense air strikes a few days ago on mountains overlooking a southern Lebanon city in an attack that their Military said, targeted underground assets of Hezbollah.

Air strikes were in two waves on the mountains over looking Nabatiyeh. Bunker buster bombs were used by the Air Force. Israeli military sources said that its fighter jets struck a site used by Hezbollah to manage its fire and defence system in the area. As it was a part of a significant underground project, Israel could score a good victory.

WHERE IS SUPREMO OF IRAN?

On the eve of just concluded Israel Iran war as also through the 12 Day bitter war period, Iranian Supremo for 35 years, 86 year old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was conspicuous by his absence. There was a speculation that he was in a safe hide out, away from Iran. Besides, the Iranian President too was

not very visible. Question of P. M. does not arise as the country has no P. M. since Mir-Hossein Mousavi completed his term in 1989. Iran's Defence Minister Abbas Araghchi was quoted off and on in the media.

Ayatollah appeared through short videos thrice on 10th, 18th and 26th June. Through one of these he declared that Iran was not going to surrender. But it appears he was persuaded to agree for a Cease fire on 24th June. Through a video message dated 26th June he stated that Iran would respond to any future U. S. attack by striking U. S. bases in the Middle East. He added that any attack on Iran would come at great cost. Iran had attacked U. S. base at Qatar after U. S. had joined the Israeli strikes. Ayatollah, however, downplayed U.S. strikes on three nuclear sites saying that U. S. President had exaggerated the impact of strikes.

UNILATERAL CEASE FIRE (C. F.)

It is an open secret that President Trump announced truce in the first half of June 24, before Israel and Iran even formally agreed. He appeared furious at Israel initially. He is reported to have laid out an elaborate time table, stating that Iran will start the C. F. and upon the 12th hour, Israel will start it. Further, upon the 24th hour, an official end to the 12 day war was to be 'saluted' by the world. During C. F., each side was to remain 'peaceful and respectful' (?), he added. He claimed that he had first convinced Iran for C. F. and thereafter, 'enthusiastically' encouraged Israel to do the same.

One national daily has rightly reported that absence of details of C. F. did add to confusion about sequence of air strikes and counter strikes that took place in the hours after announcement. Trump did not publicly specify a start time. Time differences too need to be looked at. Iran's time is half an hour ahead of Israel's time, which is 7 hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time. But its true that each side had an inclination for C. F., may be for reasons of fatigue.

Further, as missiles were fired from both the directions, actual response from Israel was reported to be limited and symbolic. Iran, on its part said its 14 missiles fired in the "final minutes" at military and logistical centres in Israel were in retaliation to Israel's pre- dawn bombardment and only before the C.F. was meant to begin.

FATEH MISSILE

Iran's use of Fateh hypersonic missile weighing 350 to 400 kgs and having a range of 1400 kms, was a major decision since it is reported to be 15 times faster than sound. It is a multi headed monster. It might have been used in hitting and destroying important buildings, such as, International Airport, Defence H. Q., Stock Exchange, Mossad H. Q., Bus Terminal, an old Science Research building, power grid in Tel Aviv etc.

NEGOTIATIONS SOON?

Now that its relatively quiet on war front, the bone of contention between Israel and Iran- nuclear programme of Iran, is making news. Iran does not appear to be ready to restart negotiations with the U. S., as it feels that issue has been complicated by U. S. attack on their three nuclear sites, namely, Natanz, Fordow and Isfahan. Earlier it was learnt that no damage, whatsoever was caused by B2 Stealth Bomber that had dropped more than a dozen 30, 000 pound bunker buster bombs. With the passage of time, Iran has conceded that 'serious damage' was caused. Rafael Mariano Grossi, IAEA Director too has termed it 'enormous damage'.

Officially it was learnt from Tehran that time for diplomacy was over and that Iran had every right to defend itself. Condemning the attacks, Iran's President, Masoud Pezeshkian has said "This aggression showed that the U. S. is the primary instigator of the Zionist regime's hostile actions against Iran".

Abbas Araghchi, Iran's Foreign Minister, however, has stated that no agreement has been made for resuming the negotiations and that American military intervention had made the matters difficult.

TO SUM UP

After watching the developments from far, five countries-Russia, China, North Korea, Turkiye and Pakistan have extended support to Iran. A further escalation of situation is not ruled out. That may turn more human settlements into rubble & dust.

Though Iran was consulting Russia since day one, it may not do much owing to its engagement in Ukraine. China will only extend support from behind the scenes. Stand of North Korea will be always dicey. Turkiye may come to

Iran's rescue mainly in the name of religion. Finally, what kind of support a weakened and disheartened Pakistan can extend, is any body's guess.

Like Russia-Ukraine war, NAKBA(catastrophe) in Middle East is bound to affect economies of many countries. Rise in price of crude oil is not ruled out. At the same time, Iran has to explore new buyers for its crude oil, other than China.

Shutting of 3 kms wide Strait of Hormuz by Iran has been desired by the country's Parliament. Located in the territorial waters of Iran and Oman, the Strait serves as an important passage for Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and U. A. E. Even its temporary closure may disrupt China's energy needs, apart from impacting global trade, thus giving rise to shortages and inflation even in India.

Chapter - 4

Situation In West Asia May Deteriorate²⁸

Without any bias it may be stated that at last there is a match, not mismatch in regularly disturbed West Asia. Iran, a vast nation of 90 millions with meticulous preparation, latest arms & ammunitions and tremendous patience, waited for long to register the most devastating military strike against Israel in modern history. It happened even when U. S. forces from far off and 30 bases in the region were on high alert. Latest 510 million Dollars worth of ammunition offer to Israel, too is unlikely to make a dent.

Iran has a defence treaty with Russia. In turn, China too has such a treaty with Russia. Having seen the efficacy of their missiles especially Fateh, Iran is likely to use 2000 more in days to come.

Rebuilding By Israel

Israel, apart from cautioning its civilians about intensity and speed of missile power of Iran which can reach any part of Israel in 7 minutes, had resorted to regular suppression and sacrilege of Palestinians in Gaza Strip during current war with Iran. Israel had to pay a heavy price (\$12 Billions) on initiating attacks on Iran upon instigation, financial aid, intelligence and latest arms & ammunition from USA. This blind follower of American imperialism forgot that U. S. had attacked seven countries of the region on 25 occasions in last 12 years, plan for which began in 2001 according to one top U. S. security expert. Not always there was victory for U. S. They had humiliating departures from Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. It is likely in Ukraine also.

Threat From Triple H. H. H.

Hamas, Hezbollah and Houthis of Yemen too have kept USA and Israel on tenterhooks. While last two non state actors have never been dormant, swift sacrilege of 1200 Israelis and act of taking 250 of their brethren as hostage

by dreaded men of Hamas on October 7, 2023 proves the point rather boldly against U. S-Israel combine.

Further, each inhuman offence against the Palestinians at Gaza Strip and West Bank before and after October, 2023 now draws world wide sympathy and support from Jews and followers of other religions alike, even inside Israel. One happened right opposite residence of Netanyahu. These continued shows of strength against the duo had no nemesis even after so called Cease fire between Israel and Iran.

It is being widely stated that Israel has got a fierce competitor in Iran after 77 years if 1948 war between Arab nations & Israel is to be taken into account. And it becomes 58 years as compared to 1967 war.

Past Wars Of Israel In Brief

- From 5th to 10th June, 1967, a war between Israel and coalition forces comprising Egypt, Syria and Jordan took place. Israel gained control of Sinai, old city of Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza Strip. When Jerusalem was under command of Jordan, Israelis were humiliated and expelled. After getting victory in 1967, Israelis could reunite their divided capital. Thus Jews could return to Western Wall for the first time. Afterall, it was holiest to them.
- After a lapse of over six years on October 6, 1973, again coalition of three countries attacked Israel in Sinai and Golan Heights to regain territories they had lost in previous war. But these were again won by Israel. Since 1973, it's all quiet on Egyptian and Syrian front vis a vis Israel.

Incidentally Egypt, alongwith Qatar, USA and UAE figures in a crucial committee to mediate between Israel and Hamas to resolve the dead lock on release of over 250 Israeli hostages by Hamas in October, 2023 and to ensure a decent life to Palestinians in Gaza Strip.

GAZA STRIP GOING FROM BAD TO WORSE

Gaza Strip was taken away from Egypt by Israel after 1967 war. Israel built settlements and placed Palestinians under military rule. Over the years, it has become an 'open prison'.

Having an area of only 365 sq. kms, its residents are living in trying circumstances, facing severe lack of basic amenities and are permitted only to travel to West Bank. That too under very exceptional circumstances.

Though 90% of dwelling units have been attacked or demolished by Israel, 2.1 million Palestinians are residing somehow and face abject poverty. Old and children alike can not avail of primary health facilities. 80% of youth are deprived of even elementary employment.

FOUR OBJECTIVES CONCERNING GAZA STRIP

Gaza Strip campaign of Israel has following four objectives:

To Destroy Hamas, militant wing of PLO, To Free Israelis taken hostage on October 7, 2023, To Ensure that Gaza no longer poses a threat to them and To Return displaced residents of North Israel.

Thus far, five wars have been fought by Israel against Hamas. These were in 2008-09, 2012, 2014, 2021 and 2024. After Cease fire reached to halt action in last war, Hamas has been quiet but shameless Israeli action continues.

Palestine has been the focal point ever since Jews were settled by Britishers on 14th May, 1948. This territory occupied by Palestinians was purposely chosen as Jews of Europe and USA did not want forefathers of present day Israelis to settle either in Europe or USA.

A country called Palestine never existed prior to establishment of Israel. Though it was historically known as Palestine, it was administered by the British after being under various empires. When Britishers, abandoned the land, U. S. gradually filled up the vacuum through evil designs of Israel.

UNO proposed a partition plan in 1947 to divide the land into Arab and Jewish states. It could not be implemented owing to 1948 Arab-Israel war.

Situation could not improve since then. Rather, with passing of each year, it goes on deteriorating.

When Yasser Arafat was alive, their voices were heard. Once in UNO they staked a claim to become 194th member. But a veto by USA tarnished their hope. As on date, 22 countries including India(1988), have recognised PLO.

Of 20 members of G-20, eleven figure in this category.

12 Day War, Latest Turning Point

A full-fledged war began with Israeli missiles striking Iran nuclear facilities late at night on 12th June. Operation Rising Lion was launched by them in full swing. USA began shifting military resources in the region as Israel prepared for retaliation. While Israel vowed to intensify attacks, Iran called off nuclear deal talks with USA. It was learnt that closing of Strait of Hormuz may be one of vital options for Iran to trouble their adversaries.

Iran, however, has urged Trump to ask Israel to halt war.

Tehran also appealed to Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Oman to press Trump to exercise influence on Israel.

Reports of USA shifting military jets, ships, vessels etc. in the region to protect Israel from further strikes appeared. Russia told USA not to strike Iran. But Iran missiles hit Weizmann Institute of Science, causing damage to multiple laboratories, snuffing out years of scientific research. It was a major blow to Israel.

Houthi rebels resumed attacks on U. S. vessels in Red Sea. U. S. A. entered war by bombing nuclear sites by B2 Spirit bombers at Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan. As war widens on 11th Day, Iran attacked one of largest U. S. bases in Qatar in which 80 persons were killed.

President of Iran hinted that Iran was ready to return to negotiation table. However, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei stated that Iran was not going to surrender.

Around 10 a.m. on 24 June, President Trump announced an unilateral Cease Fire. Both warring nations were surprised. A day after Trump announced C.F., Israeli Ambassador to India confessed that it was brokered in coordination with Israel. Now C.F was stable as per him but Iran was deceiving international community.

Hasty Decision of Trump

Without consent of U. S. Congress, President Trump intervened in the middle of war. He also declared an unilateral Cease fire. Constitution of USA gives Congress, the sole power to declare war. But President Trump acted on his own. His cherished desire to go for more bombing of Iran has not been put on hold. He wants to use further force. In contrast, U. S. law makers have

sought details about country's strikes on Iran and fate of Iran's stockpiles of highly enriched Uranium.

Ayatollah Ali Khomeini has stated that his country had slapped USA by striking at their base at Qatar. In future too such attacks were not ruled out.

218 Gaza Palestinians Killed

Amid growing humanitarian crisis, 218 Palestinians were killed in three spells by Israel amid war. It was an audacious act. Aid trucks permitted into the territory after 3.5 months, began being stopped to tease starving Palestinians and essential food grains/ items/ supplies were thrown recklessly by Israeli soldiers on roads to cause more delay. Issue of Palestine Clan leaders and Hamas activists too entered the fray, which subsequently was resolved.

Ambassador of Palestine informed UNO that ever since Israel broke Cease Fire in March, 2025, over 1300 Palestinian children were killed and 4000 injured. Altogether a total of sixty thousand Palestinians have lost their lives in last two years, 1 lakh 20 thousand have been wounded and 90% of dwelling units have been lost or demolished.

As per UNICEF and report of other aid agencies, pathetic sight of children suffering from starvation and malnutrition can not be tolerated, nor the extremely inhuman scenes of mothers embracing the motionless bodies.

U. N. Secretary General has also remarked that U. S. backed aid operation in Gaza was inherently unsafe. People were being killed while trying to feed themselves and their families.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

*The war has been Israel's biggest military defeat. Efforts are on to hide major damages. Accordingly, Satellite imagery has been blocked and media asked to show damages only to residential areas. It may take a long time before damages to international airport, Defence H. Q., Mossad H. Q., Stock Exchange, Bus terminal, power grid etc are undone,

*In view of tense scenario, Iran has resumed repairs at three nuclear facilities hit by USA,

*Recognising China as world leader in ultra fast advanced broadband technology, Iran has shut down its GPS & begun using Chinese internet. BAIDU Google of China too is likely to be used.

*Now that it is quiet on war front, nuclear programme of Iran is back in news. But nuclear deal with USA has been ruled out. In view of this, Russia, China, North Korea, Turkiye and Pakistan have announced support to Iran. A Chinese cargo plane carrying arms & ammunition has landed in Tehran and several Iranian trucks carrying essential aids, good & medicines have reached Gaza Strip already,

*Crisis of West Asia is far from over. Uncalled for developments are not the handiwork of local or regional leaders, rather, these are caused by those sitting thousands of miles away. Shutting of Strait of Hormuz may disrupt Crude Oil flow, impact global trade and give rise to shortages and inflation,

*It's sad to note that India, despite having friendly ties both with Israel and Palestinians, did not make any statement nor appealed for cessation of hostilities. When Russia attacked Ukraine, its comment was 'this was not the era of war.' What happened when the Chinese attacked or when Pak ISI attacked Pahalgam, is known to everyone.

*Such a vexed issue cannot be resolved unless Israel and USA both change their attitude. Political spin of their kind can not lead humanity anywhere. Delay, therefore, is bound to take place

Chapter - 5

Countdown For U. S. Presidential Elections³⁰

Presidential election in the oldest democracy always generates immense interest. Of the tenure of four years, the incumbent President gets hardly three and a half years of tension free time to function, as invariably last six months are devoted to campaigning for the next tenure. This time, however, the outgoing President Joe Biden was persuaded by his party to withdraw from contest and enable his second in command, Vice President, Kamala Harris to try her luck. The party felt that a strong person was needed to tackle Donald Trump in an aggressive way.

For the second time in the history of U. S. A., a woman is in the fray. Earlier Hillary Clinton had contested against Donald Trump and lost. But this time the candidature of Kamala Harris is historic as for the first time a woman who is also black and South Asian, appears to have come so close to being elected as the 47th President of U. S. A.

In an interview with Fox News of USA, Kamala Harris has candidly expressed that her Presidency will not be a continuation of Biden's Presidency. She added that she would bring fresh ideas and represent a new generation of leadership.

Not only Biden was considered ineffective and fairly old but physically and mentally too he had become weak. When he faltered while getting down from a plane or while cycling or attending a meeting with Ukraine's President and participating in G-7 meet in Italy, embarrassment was caused to the Democrats.

Withdrawal of his candidature happened as late as July. That too after a disastrous performance by him vis a vis his opponent Donald Trump in a widely watched television debate. Trump scored well in view of his having worked as President earlier. So not only time but histrionics too favoured Trump.

Campaign Picks Up

As time passed by, campaigning picked up momentum. Both positive and negative factors were highlighted time and again.

The Harris camp got a solid boost when John Kelley, former Chief of Staff of White House under the then President Trump publicly stated " Trump exhibited Fascist tendencies in White House and also made admirable statements about Adolf Hitler". It came at a time when Trump was leading by one percent. On the other hand, according to Wall Street Poll, Trump was scoring over Harris by two percent (47% and 45% respectively)

Resort To Podcasts

In recent weeks, members of both the camps, apart from addressing gatherings, have appeared on a series of popular podcasts in an effort to reach potential voters who don't rely on traditional media.

Kamala Harris, who according to Trump "was slow and lethargic in answering even easiest of questions " went on to launch a blistering attack on Trump for threatening to use military against internal enemies. She has spoken that Trump tends to demean, belittle and diminish American people.

On another occasion Harris expressed the view that Trump was a threat to democracy, he was a vengeful dictator, a Fascist, unstable, arrogant and boastful. Whatever calm and light hearted Kamala may be, Trump never fails in escalating his verbal attacks on her, due to his extreme views.

Issues Highlighted

While Trump during his campaign has highlighted issues, such as, economy, immigration, law & order and war in Middle East, for Kamala Harris focused areas were social justice, equality, women's rights, health care, climate change and future of Americans. In Addition, following issues were hotly debated during their only T. V. debate on 10th September: Small business, Sales Tax, Inflation, Covid outbreak, Trade deficit, Abortion rights, border security, utterances of former advisors of Trump, rising crime graph, cases against Trump, housing shortage and social security.

Seven Swing States

There are seven key battle ground or Swing States in USA: Pennsylvania, Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina and Wisconsin. They control 93 vital Electoral College votes. Whereas, 270 votes out of 538 are REQUIRED for becoming President. Pennsylvania has maximum 19 votes while Nevada had the least number of 6. North Carolina & Georgia with 16 votes each and Michigan with 15 votes are also very crucial. Hence these states were given due importance and were visited time and again by both the candidates.

Cases against Trump

From the 1970's until he became President in 2016, Donald Trump and his businesses were involved in over 4000 legal cases. He has been tried already for committing national security and election crimes. Soon he has to face trial on federal charges pertaining to 2020 election. Further, in 2025, he is expected to go to trial for federal charges concerning his handling of classified documents. He also has to face trial in Riot case on U. S. Capitol, Jan, 2021, New York Hush money case and Georgia 2020 election case. In addition, a U. S. Special Counsel had reported after investigations that numerous links were identified between the Russian Government and Trump's campaign for Presidency. To make matters worse, a Foundation headed by Trump was found to have committed fraud and misappropriated funds. It was ordered to be shut down.

FINAL ROUND

Though Trump has made all efforts to reach all sections of electorate, say Whites, Blacks, Jews, Africans, Central Americans, Asians, Muslims etc., the fact remains that he gets exhausted after addressing rallies and facing interviews. Probably due to it, he has cancelled second T. V. debate with his main opponent. Kamala Harris, perhaps looking for such an opportunity, was quick to comment that if he was exhausted during the campaign trail, it raises questions about his health. Is he fit for the toughest job in the world?, added Kamala.

Trump is appealing to Muslim voters and non American supporters in New York to vote for him as he feels, under him economy and handling of immigration would be better. A bigger rally by him at Madison Square Garden

in New York aimed at energizing his base, raise more funds and reach undecided voters through media. He was expecting to get a national audience but usual filth flowed about immigrants, people from Puerto Rico, Hispanics, Jews and the Palestinians. Trump built his business empire over here which made him a Tabloid and Reality T. V. star. Tesla and Space X, C. E. O. Elon Musk, who has spent more than 10 million Dollars to boost campaign of Trump was also present alongwith many key supporters. Incidentally, New York has not voted for a Republican for President in 40 years. Even if Trump turns the tide this time, can he get rid of crime ridden people and immigrant gangs of New York?

Talking of Kamala Harris, she has visited Philadelphia fourteen times thus far, knowing very well that Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan happen to be Swing states. Democrats are very positive about their victory in these states. Michelle Obama, former first lady earlier made a concerted plea on behalf of Kamala at a well attended rally in Michigan. Taking no risk, Kamala is reported to have travelled even to non battle ground states for major events aimed at driving a national message. She will deliver her own "closing argument" from the Ellipse in Washington on 30th October. To be attended by big wigs, atleast 20, 000 people are expected to attend.

With the passage of time, Kamala Harris has become confident. More and more rubbish about non Americans emanating from Trump camp may be beneficial to her. She may prove to be a clear choice.

TO CONCLUDE

According to a reputed news agency of U. S. A., five key moments of 2024 election campaign were:

Trump's Felony conviction, Joe Biden's poor debate performance, assassination attempts on Trump, Biden's withdrawal from the contest and Democratic party's nomination of Kamala Harris.

Now that less than a week has been left for the poll, both Harris and Trump have ramped up their campaigns. Intensification of canvassing is in full swing.. As far as rating is concerned, according to latest poll predictions (29thOct.) Harris was leading Trump by a margin of 50% while Trump had secured 47%. A difference of three percent is, however, immaterial. Race remains neck- and neck. 'Close enough' race will have to be decided by voters

of seven swing states. Votes of Indian Americans (2.6 million), who constitute second largest immigrant group in U. S. A. after Mexican Americans, also may be crucial. It has been learnt that 61% of them would back Kamala Harris.

Both the candidates, however, will have to take full precaution of their phones as Typhoon, a Chinese hacker has already intruded into U. S. A. to access phone data of candidates and senior officers. Iranian hackers too are being suspected. Any carelessness may lead to culling out wealth of information.

If Trump wins, nature of American support and assistance for Ukraine may change. USA may push Ukraine to agree to terms of a peace accord with Russia that will entail territorial concessions. But conflict of Israel with Hezbollah and Iran may also get further escalated.

Chapter - 6

Elections In U. S. A: The Final Scenario³¹

Race to White House has entered its final lap. More than six months of hectic campaigning ended on 4th November. Both Kamala and Trump are locked in a fierce fight. To get the magic figure of 270 votes, race has been neck and neck in seven swing states. Every single vote is going to matter. In a razor tight situation, a handful of votes in any of seven states could decide the final outcome. As such, over 75 million voters have already exercised their franchise.

At this juncture, important issues of concern to the voters are: immigration, economy, abortion, crime safety of citizens and Middle East war.

RESULTS: WHEN?

According to some indications, election results can be expected by 8:45 a.m. on 6th November. Counting will begin on 5th November itself.

TRUMP CONTINUES HIS STYLE

Donald Trump continues to be aggressive and restless while seeking a sensational return to White House. He is pursuing a policy of 'America First'. But due to his outlandish persona, many people deeply dislike and distrust him. On the other hand, Kamala, in addition to laying stress on women issues, human rights and democracy, has begun playing emotional card by citing sacrifice, her late mother made in bringing her up and her sister Maya.

While this may strengthen her commitment to women, it may appeal to Asian and Indian voters also. No wonder, hundreds of women marched in her support from Freedom Plaza to White House one day.

National polls too indicate that Kamala is more popular among women than Trump. In remaining days, she has to concentrate on Hispanics, Women and Moderate Republicans. She is being seen as a person who will provide steady leadership.

BOOST FROM JENNIFER LOPEZ

On 1st November, biggest Latino Pop Star, Jennifer Lopez introduced Kamala at a rally in Nevada and made an impatient appeal to her community to back the Democrats. It may prove crucial for Kamala for getting support of Pennsylvania which has over one lakh Puerto Ricans and Arizona and Nevada which have substantive Hispanic population.

As another feather in her cap, Harrison Ford, the former Star Wars actor made a rare endorsement for Kamala. He has stated " these two people (Kamala & Waltz) believe in rule of law. They believe in science. They believe that when you govern, you do so for Americans".

FRESH ASSURANCE BY KAMALA

Encouraged by outstanding support of Jennifer Lopez, Harrison Ford and several other women celebrities earlier, Kamala Harris had a field day at North Carolina. She stated that we are the promise of America. Lets be intentional about building communities. Your vote is your voice and your voice is your power. We are not going back. Ours is a fight for future, for freedom, for fundamental freedom of a woman to take independent decisions. I am looking for progress, not to make political points.

SUPPORT OF OPRAH WINFREY

Oprah Winfrey, T. V. hostess has also backed Kamala passionately by stating that battle was for decency and respect. She has also underlined Kamala's vision of inclusive leadership. As Oprah has a large following, she was instrumental in swaying voters to Barrack Obama in 2008 elections.

Donald Trump with the support of Elon Musk and many others has gone ahead with his fresh campaign in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin and Milwaukee. While seeking votes, he is calling for mass deportations. He says, he will lose only when election was corrupted. Being obsessed with revenge, he has suggested that Liz Cheney should face firing squad for her statements.. In her defence, Cheney has retorted " We cannot entrust our country and freedom to a vindictive and unstable man who wants to be a tyrant."

In the meanwhile, five key Republicans have spoken against Trump and endorsed the leadership of Kamala.

VOTE OF INDIANS

However, Trump's support for Hindus in Bangladesh is a welcome development. Neither Biden nor Kamala have sympathised with Hindus so far. It will appeal to American-Indian community, though 10 percent of Indian voters reportedly have shifted to Republicans.

Barrack Obama continued supporting Kamala by addressing rallies in Arizona, Las Vegas and Georgia. The Georgia rally was jointly addressed with Kamala. Fresh attempts are being made by them through rallies in Texas and Iowa also.

Kamala's campaign in Michigan is critical since two lakh Arab Americans over here are disillusioned by her perceived lack of action in regard to conflict and suffering of people in Gaza strip. Its high time Biden Government reviews its policy towards Middle East and puts a ban on arms supply to Israel.

WHO DECIDES FINALLY?

In a nation of 330 millions, the Presidential election will be decided by merely tens of thousands of voters in seven swing states (out of 50). Among the swing states, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin have traditionally supported the Democrats, except once. As Pennsylvania has been treated as the most important state by both the parties, it had maximum campaigns and advertisements. In the event of a tie, the House of Representatives will choose the winner.

CONCLUSION

Independent voters may be vital in 2024 elections, especially in some of swing states, such as, Pennsylvania. Also a lot will depend on voter turn out. Ultimately, preference of a narrow segment of voters may determine the outcome.

A New York Times/Sienna poll has considered Kamala 's campaign credible. That's why, of the 8% late voters, 55% are likely to go for Kamala and 44% with Trump. It adds that many white men & women who have never voted for Democrats are going to vote for Kamala.

Taking a cue from 2020 Presidential elections, 2024 elections NEED to be concluded in a peaceful manner.

Chapter - 7

India-Canada Relations: Emerging Irritants³²

A diplomatic row between India and Canada is happening over the activities of Khalistani elements in Canada. It is well known that a Sikh separatist movement had sprung up in India in early eighties. Its purpose was spreading terrorism not only in India but elsewhere too if they were opposed. So called independence movement seeking to create a separate homeland for Sikhs was aspired by leaders like Jagjit Singh Chauhan. Illegal outfits, such as, Babbar Khalsa, Dal Khalsa, Khalistan Commando Force, Khalistan Zindabad Force, All India Sikh Youth Federation Bhindranwale Tiger Force etc. played a leading role. Government of India began taking adequate steps to control the situation. In the process, many of their leaders had to be arrested.

The event which became really worrisome was seize of Golden Temple, Amritsar by ultra Sikh terrorists led by Bhineranwale. When Operation Bluestar was undertaken in first week of June, 1984, it drew world wide attention. But non- Indians who expressed sympathies, did not know the miserable ground reality in Punjab and some other parts of country.

With the passage of time, Sikh separatist elements could gather some support in countries such as, U. K., U. S. A. and Canada. In these countries population of Sikhs was sizeable and they had all the money. It was gathered that many of their supporters had not visited India for decades, but were swayed away unnecessarily by false publicity in respect of so called atrocities on Sikhs in India. For Govt. of India, it took a lot of time and effort to REBUT the allegations and ultimately suppress the movement by early 1990's. Conduct of SGPC elections in 1996 after a gap of 16 years ensured return of democracy again for which I too played a crucial part as a Deputy Secretary to Government of India. Later I also observed Assembly Elections of January, 1997 in the state as an Officer of ECI.

Referring to the role of Canada, it may be noted that out of its population of 4.1 crores in ten provinces, there are 8 lakh Sikhs. Many of them have settled

since fifties and sixties of last century. Like in U. K. and U. S. A., gradually they have occupied positions in local, municipal and provincial bodies.

Air India Kanishka Crash

In a shocking development, on 23 June, 1985, Air India Flight No. 182 (Boeing 747)- Emperor Kanishka, while flying at an altitude of 31, 000 feet broke apart, possibly due to a mid air bomb blast, over Atlantic ocean. On Montreal-London-Delhi-Bombay route, all its passengers and crew, totalling 329 were killed. Majority of victims were Canadian citizens of Indian origin. Apart from 268 Canadians, 27 were British and 24 were Indian citizens.

It was deadliest terrorist attack prior to 9/11 blast in New York. Indrajit S. Reyat, a dual British - Canadian national and Talwinder Singh Parmar, a Canadian Sikh separatist and leader of Babbar Khalsa were believed to be mastermind of attack. Later two more terrorists- R. S. Malik and Ajaib Singh Bagri were also identified.

Canada's Casual Attitude

It was gathered that Canada was having intelligence that the flight was a potential terrorist target, yet they did not prevent the mishap. Of the four suspects, Reyat was only convicted. He served thirty years in prison before being released in 2016. Parmar was killed by Police in India in 1992. R. S. Malik was also gunned down in Canada in 2022. Nothing is known about A. S. Bagri. 39 years have passed but probe into this unthinkable bombing remains active. Roles of topmost intelligence agency of Canada and Royal Canadian Mounted Police also remains suspicious. India has criticised Canada on many occasions for failing to oppose pro-Khalistani movement within its territory. As a result, Sikh separatism continues to be a bone of contention between India and Canada.

Events & Developments Of Recent Past

In 2020, Justin Trudeau, Canada's P. M. expressed concern over protest and demonstration by farmers in India, which drew sharp criticism from India.

In June 2023, Hardip Singh Nijjar, a Sikh separatist was killed outside a Gurudwara in Surrey, British Columbia. Four Indians were arrested and charged for killing.

On September 18, 2023, P. M. of Canada stated in Parliament that there was a potential link between Indian agents and killing of H. S. Nijjar. As he didn't produce any evidence, India has dismissed the allegation. Further, one minute silence observed by the Canadian Parliament to commemorate death anniversary of H. S. Nijjar was not to the liking of India.

Expulsion of High Commissioners

Ties between two countries that were in crisis mode have been further strained ever since Canada's P. M. has made the statement.

In mid- October, Canada expelled Indian High Commissioner and five other diplomats after declaring them "persons of interest". India followed suit and expelled Canadian High Commissioner and five other diplomats from India. These developments have happened amid escalating tension between two countries. Current Canadian government's political agenda as also behaviour pattern are causing a lot of concern. Such activities of Canada had serious consequences for bi-lateral ties but there is nothing called mending the ways by Canada. We cannot carry on like this.

India As Adversary?

To add insult to injury, on 1st November, 2024 Canada Government listed India as an "adversary" due to heightened tensions between the two. In their assessment, Centre For Cyber Security, Canada, India was clubbed with China, Russia, Iran and North Korea. It has been alleged that India has sponsored cyber threat actors against Canada for espionage. This being the latest salvo from Canadian Government, India has described it as preposterous and blamed them on P. M. Trudeau, who on October 16 had accused India of violating Canada's sovereignty.

MEA Spokesman has rightly stated that India being named as adversary was another example of imputation being made without evidence.

Canada has not given any evidence to substantiate their various allegations against India. In their defence, they have stated that details would emerge during the trials related to incidents of murder, extortion and other instances of violence.

Continuing with their tirade against India, David Morrison, Deputy Foreign Minister of Canada claimed that Indian Home Minister had ordered targeting

of Khalistani extremists in their country. Allegation was made before members of country's Standing Committee on Public Safety & National Security. Further, such a sensitive information was first leaked to Washington Post.

India has considered these allegations as absurd and baseless. It was part of a conscious strategy to discredit India and that such actions will have serious consequences for ties between India and Canada.

Acts of Harassment & Intimidation By Canada

MEA has conveyed to Canada that some of Indian Consular officials are under audio and video surveillance and that their communications were being intercepted. It was incompatible with established diplomatic norms and practices. Reduction in number of visas by Canada was also a matter of great concern. Talking of students and temporary workers, India was monitoring their well being and was concerned about their safety and security.

Genocide of Sikhs?

Further, for some time Indian diplomats and officials were being intimidated by Khalistani elements, who have issued posters, featuring and threatening diplomats.

It has been further learnt that Jaswant Singh, leader of New Democratic Party of Canada is working to get violence against the Sikhs in 1984, recognised as 'Genocide' in Canadian Parliament.

Attack On Brampton Temple

On 3rd November an attack by Khalistani demonstrators on a Hindu Sabha temple at Brampton took place. It was condemned by Canada's P. M., Indian P. M. and Pierre Poilievre, opposition leader in Canada. Brampton Mayor has promised to introduce a motion of City Council to prohibit protests outside places of worship. While a Police Sergeant Harinder Sohi was suspended for participating in the protest, another Police officer was seen charging at a temple goer and punching him without any provocation.

Subsequently, Gurpatwant Pannun and his Lieutenant, Inderjeet Gosal, both belonging to Sikh For Justice (SFJ) were arrested. Latter was charged with

assault with a weapon. It may be noted that Gosal has taken the place of late H. S. Nijjar.

Views Of Ujjal Dosanjh

At this juncture, it may be prudent to mention the views of Ujjal Dosanjh, former P. M. of British Columbia province and former Minister, Health, Canada. In his opinion, Trudeau has failed to control rising Sikh terrorism and due to him separatist movement has become a major Canadian problem. He hasn't understood that majority of Sikhs are secular and a silent majority of them have nothing to do with Khalistan. They don't speak out as they are afraid of violence by Khalistanis.

Diwali Celebrations

For the reasons best known to it, Canada had cancelled Diwali celebrations at Ottawa. But on a re- thinking, it was held on 4th November. Canada's P. M. for the first time had to say that "Khalistani separatists don't represent Canada 's entire Sikh community." Reacting to it, Ujjal Dosanjh, said "In my memory, this is the first time Trudeau is acknowledging Sikh community as separate from Khalistanis."

With a view to project his slight change in attitude, Canada's P. M. was seen getting religious threads tied on his wrist from three Hindu temples. Also while extending Diwali greetings to Canadians, he acknowledged the contribution of "incredible" Indo - Canadian community.

TO SUM UP

Kanishka bombing, murder of H. S. Nijjar, expulsion of Indian High Commissioner, branding of India as an adversary, baseless allegations against Union Home Minister, harassment of Indian Consular officials, reduction in number of visas and attack on a temple at Brampton are vital irritants between India and Canada. When Prime Ministers of two countries met on the sidelines of a few international conferences recently, it is presumed that atleast some of these issues may have figured in their discussions. But positive signs are yet to emerge. We may keep our fingers crossed till 2025 elections in Canada.

Chapter - 8

Bangladesh Always Prone To Threats³³

Atal Bihari Vajpayee, former Prime Minister was correct in stating 'You can change your friends but not neighbours'.

It was true during his life time and cannot be negated even now.

Gradually India's neighbours are being cajoled to display latent or manifest hostility towards it. Latest neighbour being Bangladesh, a country carved out of Pakistan out and out with Indian support. Erstwhile East Pakistan became Bangladesh because West Pakistan did not permit Awami League to form government in East Pakistan, despite their victory in all the seats. East Pakistanis naturally rebelled against West Pakistan Army.

They were led by Mukti Vahini, trained by BSF and Indian Army. Large scale migration of people into India was also witnessed, compelling India to impose a Refugee tax. Bangladesh too had to face the problem of refugees later. One million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar are staying in Coxbazar District for seven years adding to the burden of a poor country.

REGIME CHANGES FREQUENT

Bangladeshis were feeling contended subsequent to getting liberated from Pakistan. But peace and amity proved a short lived affair. Before Bangbandhu Mujibur Rahman could streamline the country, he was assassinated alongwith a few family members & close associates. Instead of a democratic set up, therefore, the country had Army rule atleast thrice. It had 13 Presidents and 10 Prime Ministers thus far. Khaleda Zia of Bangladesh National Party became Prime Minister twice while last P. M. Sheikh Hasina of Awami League had this distinction five times. But it may be noted that last parliamentary elections were boycotted by major opposition parties and that complains regarding rigging were rampant.

PROTEST OF JUNE-JULY, 2024

Current round of protests began from resentment over a quota system that saw 56% of government jobs reserved for various group's including 30% for the descendants of freedom fighters. Resentment got accelerated in June in response to Supreme Court reinstating a 30% quota, thus reversing the decision of the government in response to the 2018 Bangladesh quota reform movement.

Brutal crackdown and killing of students and politicians was witnessed. By July end, protests intensified into a mass movement against Hasina government. It ultimately led to her resignation and departure for India. After her arrival at Hindon Airport she was shifted to an unspecified location.

As per Human Rights Watch, an NGO, approximately 3000 persons were killed but the Government put these figures at 875. It painted a very bad picture of Hasina Government. It was reported that media coverage was censored and hospitals were told to under report the casualties. Reporters Without Borders too felt that Hasina had become too close to India at the cost of sovereignty of her country.

Amnesty International called for independent inquiry into the killings of students, opposition leaders and civilians.

MAIN CAUSES OF UNREST

Religious polarisation has taken place in the country leading to political instability. Side by side, rise in unemployment and prices angered the common man. Thus protests against quota system in government jobs, in no time, evolved into anti-government demonstrations. Both Police and Army appeared reluctant to enforce law and order. Hindus were a soft target, so, violence against them intensified.

It has been also observed that Hasina government was harsh in crushing the students. Also it was gathered that key issues - education, health and employment were ignored. Opposition parties took full advantage of resentment factor which led to downfall of Hasina Government in just 45 minutes on 5th August. She had no option but to seek refuge in India.

EFFECT ON TWO COUNTRIES

Right from beginning India is having close geographic and economic ties with Bangladesh.

It is not that only Bangladesh is going to suffer in the changed political circumstances. Immediate impact over curtailment of exports has already happened especially in Garment and textile sector which not only contributed to 85% of exports of Bangladesh but Indians too are suffering as 25% of these units are owned by them.

Nothing has been heard about impact on Jute(Golden fibre) industry, another major activity in Bangladesh. Afterall, Bangladesh happens to be world's second largest producer of Jute after India. Products such as, Jute yarn, cloth, bag, rope and Jute handicraft products have a big market in USA, which incidentally is largest consumer of these.

Also bi-lateral trade between two countries is bound to be impacted as Bangladesh was the largest trade partner of India in the sub continent.

TRANSPORT SECTOR

Transport sector in India has already suffered badly as Bangladesh was a huge market for Indian goods. Prior to unrest, about one thousand trucks would go to Bangladesh daily as opposed to 125 trucks from Nepal. More than 1300 trucks from India are reportedly stranded in Bangladesh due to agitation. Negative fallout of it is bound to be seen on Siliguri, Guwahati and Kolkata markets.

ROAD & RAIL CORRIDOR

Road and Rail corridor to and from North East India through Bangladesh shall have a setback as distances had reduced considerably as a result of rapid strides made during the Hasina regime. Investment by India for creating and improving infra structure in Bangladesh was also huge.

SECURITY MATTERS

There is also going to be loss of a key partner for India specifically in regard to suppressing terrorism in India. Useful intelligence about Islamic, Assam and North East terrorists and drug trafficking may not be shared now. Security concerns of India may also increase. Earlier Pak I. S. I. was very active inside

Bangladesh during Khaleda Zia's term but the Hasina government with the help from India eliminated these elements. Their leaders were either arrested or deported. With the change in government in Bangladesh, re-emergence of terror camps of I. S. I. may not be ruled out.

In the post- 5th August situation, people of Bangladesh think of India as an ally of Hasina, hence, it may further strain relations with India.

THE U. S. A. FACTOR

Policy of USA towards Bangladesh is also likely to change. It has come to notice that USA was instrumental in placing Muhammad Yunus as Chief Advisor. Hence, President Joe Biden refrained from making comment on changed situation in Bangladesh. President elect Donald Trump has, nonetheless, expressed concern and sympathies with Hindus in Bangladesh. Sheikh Hasina was also quick in conveying congratulations to him upon his victory.

According to Dr. Bharat Barai, one leader of Hindus,, "Bangladesh will approach Trump and U. S. Congress for imposing economic restrictions on Bangladesh. He is also likely to act against Bangladesh over the issue of torture of Hindus."

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST HINDUS

It has become very risky for the Hindus to live, survive and earn livelihood in Bangladesh. In the event of further escalation in Islamist extremism, Hindus will be threatened time and again alongwith other religious minorities.

According to Ms, Tulsi Gabbard, a former member of U. S. Congress, she had introduced a resolution that called for protection of minorities and religious minorities in Bangladesh. Giving a background, she has stated that systematic targeting of Hindus in Bangladesh began in March 1971 and between five to ten thousand Hindu students were killed in one of the hostels of Dhaka in one night. The Genocide that continued for ten months, led to killing of two to three million Hindus and about ten millions of them fled away. They were robbed of their belongings, land, houses and shops. The Islamist prosecution of Hindus did not end with Independence of Bangladesh. It continued. In early nineties, Hindus comprised of 33% population of the country. At present it has come down to just 7%.

Already many Hindu temples have been attacked and Hindus have faced over two thousand attacks since 4th August. Durga Puja celebrations were also a low key affair. But both Chief Adviser and Nahid Islam, Adviser, I & C have indicated that Puja celebration in 32, 000 Puja Mandaps was held peacefully.

In a most shameful incident, however, a crown presented by Indian [Prime Minister to](#) a deity in a temple of Dhaka was stolen. Same is yet to be recovered.

To add further insult, Bangladesh's Attorney General has advocated for constitutional changes including removal of the term SECULAR, given that 90% of country's population comprised of Muslims.

DEVELOPMENTS OF RECENT PAST

On 10th November Bangladesh yet again became tense as a planned protest rally by Awami League in Dhaka was thwarted. It was learnt that activists of Anti-discrimination Students Movement(ADSM) aggressively hunted for Sheikh Hasina supporters. Also activists of BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami party filled up much of space in Dhaka streets. Awami League stated that many of their supporters were detained.

EXTRADITION OF SHEIKH HASINA

Bangladesh Interim government is going to seek assistance of Interpol to repatriate Sheikh Hasina and other' fugitives' to face trial for alleged crimes against humanity. Hasina and her party leaders face accusations of ordering brutal suppression of the ADSM resulting in several casualties in June and July 2024. As per Md. Yunus, 753 persons were killed and thousands injured in protests.. These were considered crimes against humanity, thus a genocide. Over 60 complains have been filed against Hasina and her party leaders with the International Crimes Tribunal(ICT). Tribunal was incidentally created by Sheikh Hasina in 2010 and following its judgements, six leaders of Jamaat - e - Islami and BNP were executed.

After departure of Sheikh Hasina, it is a fluid political situation in Bangladesh. Return of radical Islamist forces, such as, Jamaat-e-Islami and BNP are already threatening country's secular governance system. Further rise in Islamic extremism will increase threat quotient of Hindus.

REFORMS & ELECTION

Three and a half months have elapsed since Sheikh Hasina left and a group of students and opposition politicians took over. By 8th August, Mohammad Yunus assumed the 'position' of Chief Adviser. Subsequently, 14 other Advisers were appointed. Within a month, the 'Interim' Government's talk about reforms began making round. According to a reliable source of the new Government, 'Reforms' were to be published soon after seeking proposals from political parties on various issues.

Mahfuj Alam, Special Assistant to Md. Yunus has indicated that these were being discussed with political parties. As far as duration of Interim Govt. was concerned, that was to depend on reform proposals of political parties. But in the opinion of Alam, no party had questioned the tenure of the government. Political parties are learnt to be willing to be patient for the sake of bringing reforms in Bangladesh.

In the meanwhile, Md. T. Hossain, Foreign Affairs Adviser has contended that in view of mounting of cases (60 already identified) against Sheikh Hasina, they could consider seeking her extradition but that would create an embarrassing situation for India. Indian government knew it and they will take care of it. But Interim Government was very unhappy about the way the statements were coming from Hasina. Md. Yunus had conveyed it to Indian Envoy Pranay Verma. Regarding the possibility of elections, he said that there will be more clarity on the timelines in "coming days". All Advisers were busy in bringing back normalcy, he added.

VIEWS OF B. N. P. PARTY

Mirza F. I. Alamgir, Secretary General of BNP party sounds somewhat optimistic. As per him, a new chapter in the ties of two countries should begin with the extradition of Sheikh Hasina. Her continued stay could further damage bi-lateral relations. If India does not return Hasina, bi-lateral ties will worsen. His party was prepared to move past previous differences and was ready to collaborate. BNP would never permit any activity on Bangladesh soil which may threaten India's security. He however, added that Adani electricity deal signed during the time of Hasina will be reviewed as it was putting tremendous pressure on Bangladeshis.

Evaluation of all Indian projects has begun as per information shared by Adviser (Information & Communication).

On the issue of extradition of Hasina, Government of India has kept quiet so far. India has maintained that it is only a request which was not binding. Md. Yunus has tried to put pressure on India through U. S. A. but with victory of Trump, their hopes will be dashed for the time being. Afterall, Trump in a video message has clearly stated that he was a big fan of Hindus and India and that Hindus were being tortured in Bangladesh.

TO SUM UP

Bangladesh is in bad shape both from polity and economy points of view as also threats to its social fabric. On international front, China may increase its influence over Bangladesh by offering lucrative deals to interim regime, similar to what it gave to Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Maldives.

India, so far, is maintaining a cautious approach, closely monitoring the situation in Bangladesh while adopting a wait and watch strategy. India, at the same time, needs to bolster its existing security measures along 4, 156 kms long border with Bangladesh as also in locations with significant Bangladeshi expatriate population. **Also** India must closely monitor both China and Pakistan, who could exploit present vulnerable situation in Bangladesh.

Seeing the fragile situation in Bangladesh, very recently, a cargo vessel from Karachi port arrived at Chittagong port, marking first ever direct maritime link between the two countries. So far, Pakistan had barred its government and private contractors from using vessels from India, Israel and Bangladesh. It shows softening of Pakistan's stand towards Bangladesh due to change of guard in Dhaka.

It is anybody's guess as to who will ultimately succeed?

Chapter - 9

Will Bangladesh Now Restore Peace & Order ?³⁴

Contrary to widespread apprehensions, Parliamentary elections in Bangladesh were held rather peacefully on February 12 for 299 seats of Jatiya Sangsad, an unicameral legislature. Election could not be conducted on one seat owing to death of a candidate. Rest of 50 seats are to be filled by nomination. Side by side, voters gave their positive opinion on 84 point July 2025 Charter, highlighting four major reform areas which includes limiting the term of Prime Minister, proposals for constitutional amendments, enactment of new laws, expanding fundamental rights, increasing participation of women in political process etc.

Voter turnout was not impressive, at 59.88%, as opposed to 2008 and 2018 elections when it was 87 and 80% respectively. In 2014, 2024 and 2025, it was still lower at 40, 42 and 50% respectively.

Meanwhile, in absence of Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has received 50% of votes while it was 31.7% in respect of Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), an extreme political outfit.

Demand For Recount

Concerns about tampering of results or casting aspersions on the integrity of election process are the usual reactions. But hardline outfit JeI, alleging irregularities, has demanded recount in 32 seats. After stating that results were deliberately altered, they may pursue legal remedies. Their act of boycotting swearing in ceremony of the new government on February 19 was unwarranted.

Accusations of Sheikh Hasina

However, Sheikh Hasina, former P. M. has called elections a farce, which was 'well planned' and had begun in the evening of February 11, involving seizure

of polling centres, gun fire, vote buying, distribution of money, stamping of ballot papers and agents signing result sheets.

It may be noted that election, had non-participation of Awami League for the first time, as it was barred from contesting on account of conviction of Sheikh Hasina in alleged "war crimes" which led to 1400 deaths and injury to over 20,000. Even though Mohammed Yunus, Chief Advisor termed the elections free, fair and inclusive, sizeable minority population felt insecure.

Plight Of Minorities

Murder of fifteen persons in forty five days, ahead of polls and altogether fifty one incidents against them since 2025 is an issue of grave concern according to Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council. In two brutal episodes on the eve of polls, the bloodied body of a young Hindu tea garden worker was found in Kamalganj and a 62 year old Hindu trader was hacked to death inside his shop in Mymensingh. All this may have possibly led to low presence of voters from minority community, particularly Hindus.

Both BNP led by Tarique Rahman and JeI, led by Shafiqur Rahman bagged 212 and 77 seats respectively, their highest ever. National Citizen Party (NCP), an offshoot of July-August 2024 uprising under the leadership of Nahid Islam could manage to win barely 6 seats.

Announcements By P. M. Designate

After confirming his party's clear victory, Tarique Rahman called for national unity and he wanted all to remain united. He also gave a call against organising rallies and meetings. Instead he asked supporters to hold prayers at noon at Mosques.

It may be recalled that Rahman had fled the country in 2008 after a politically motivated persecution was launched against him. He returned recently after fifteen years of self imposed exile in Europe.

Swearing In Ceremony A Good Opportunity To Interact

The elected M. P. 's took oath on February 17 and new P. M. and Cabinet was sworn in on February 19. Idea of inviting Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan and many SAARC Head of states was appreciable, as such a

gathering was going to materialise only for the second time after swearing in of Narendra Modi in May 2014.

Revival of SAARC?

Tarique Rahman, 60 year old son of Khaleda Zia may be justified at hinting to revive SAARC and to decide their foreign policy in keeping with the interest of Bangladeshis in mind. Afterall, the new Government has inherited a weak economy and pathetic law and order scenario even when an Economist of repute was at the helm of affairs for 18 months. Further, constitutional and statutory institutions leave much to be desired. State of Inflation, price rise, unemployment, struggling garment sector and water sharing disputes with India deserve topmost attention.

Foreign Affairs

Four thousand kms of international border of Bangladesh will be an area of concern. As involvement of China through Belt and Road initiative, supply of JF-17 jets and Drone production unit close to Siliguri border had increased during the regime of Caretaker Government, the new Government may consider a review if not scrapping things altogether.

As far as relations with India are concerned, attendance of Om Birla, Lok Sabha Speaker at the swearing in of new P. M. did not cut any ice. It was not expected to be. Yes invitation to visit India extended by P. M. Modi to Tarique Rahman at a convenient date, is likely to make sense. Rahman may be right in saying that he would take up international engagements only after issues stabilise on home front in Bangladesh. His decision to induct two Hindu Ministers looks to assuage hurt feelings of the minorities in general.

Farewell Address of Md. Yunus

In his farewell address, Mohammad Yunus did mention that Bangladesh was no longer a country with submissive foreign policy or dependent on advice of other countries (indirectly hinting India). Knowing it full well that communication and transport in the North East region of India had suffered since August, 2024, he did not forget to mention that his country could provide huge potential for economic prosperity of the region. But he had very little to say on anti-India posturing, rise of extremism and unabated attacks on the minorities. This issue is likely to linger on for a long time.

However, with departure of Md. Yunus, points of disagreement between him and the President of Bangla Desh have interestingly come out in open. Latter may be correct in saying that Md. Yunus had exceeded his brief but he too should have asserted his authority as per country 's Constitution.

Mob Culture in Bangladesh

Touching this highly sensitive issue, Salalhuddin Ahmed, the new Home Minister has 'promised' that the days of mob culture were over and that democratic culture was to continue. But it remains to be seen if the new government will identify the culprits at a fast pace. Yes temporary reprieve has been seen since the day of elections.

Foreign Policy: Promises or Expectations?

Khalilur Rahman, new JNU educated Foreign Minister has hinted that the Government will not stop seeking extradition of Sheikh Hasina from India but at the same time, this issue will not become a roadblock. But will promise for a re assessment of Bangladesh-India relations actually become a reality? It is well known that the bi- lateral relations had been restrained considerably during the eighteen month Md. Yunus led Interim Government.

First Address of New P. M.

In his maiden address, Tarique Rahman has promised to turn his country into a land for all faiths, regardless of party, opinion, religion or ethnicity. He has vowed to strengthen rule of law and strictly "control" corruption. But he did not touch upon rising prices and unemployment.

His assertion that everyone had equal rights in his country, obliquely hinting at pluralism, assume significance as the Hindus and other minorities have been suffering for a long time. Promise for accountability to people is also a positive development, provided it gets translates into reality.

As promised, can he succeed in dismantling all the syndicates of wrong doing and irregularity in every sector of economy? Having said so, will he turn his attention towards skill development so that the country can restore its place in garment sector atleast?

Chapter - 10

Cult Of Violence & Deepening Political Crisis In Nepal³⁵

Social Media (S.M.), a new all pervading phenomenon is gradually becoming necessary or fete accompli for everyone. But human beings are also getting trapped by its tentacles. Its purpose of being interactive, digital internet based channel for creation and sharing of information, ideas and interests through virtual communities and networks is not only being misused but same is also gaining immense, unnecessary popularity.

CORRECT APPROACH NEEDED

Not only one can learn something new, but can also hone up his/her skills. However, its forms, such as, instant messaging, blogs, micro blogs, being part of social networking sites, photo, video & hobby sharing sites etc. are being incorrectly chosen. More and more dependence on it may prove harmful. It may be beneficial, no doubt, but it is also capable of causing a rift in the family, office, friend circles as also society and country.

FIVE DAY OLD NEPAL CRISIS HAS TO BE SEEN IN THIS PERSPECTIVE.

Vide its Order dated September 4, 2025, Govt. of Nepal had put a ban on two dozen S. M. sites, including Facebook, WhatsApp, X, Instagram and YouTube for failing to register with their Ministry of Communications within a given deadline. Ironically, Tik Tok, the Chinese company was not served any notice, nor banned, for obvious reasons.

While Government of Nepal like any other Government has stated that the S. M. sites were banned to bring them under regulation, youth protesters of Nepal, perhaps, without understanding the legal nuances, went on to term it as an attack on their free speech.

To clarify the issue further, the Nepalese Communications Minister had indicated that the Government was following a Supreme Court ruling which

had called for monitoring and accountability of S. M. sites. Not only it was reiterated by P. M. Oli prior to his resignation, THESE WERE TO BE PERMITTED TO RESUME OPERATIONS UPON COMPLIANCE WITH THE ORDER TO REGISTER.

The Federal Government had sent a bill to country's Parliament seeking to ensure that such social platforms were not only properly managed but also held accountable.

In addition to asking the concerned companies to open an office in Nepal (fair enough) the bill provided for restrictive rules, including deletion of any post that the Government wanted to remove, inclusion of 'likes' and 'reposts' as cognisable offences and disclosure of details on users as sought by the Government.

One may ask Whats wrong in asking for it?

COUNTRY WIDE CRITICISM

The bill was widely criticized as a tool for Censorship and Punishing/ Penalizing opponents of the Government who VOICE their PROTESTS ON LINE.

It has been also called as an attempt to curb Freedom Of Expression and violation of Fundamental Rights of already suppressed Nepalese masses.

All this happened before and after mass mobilisation under the banner of HAMI NEPAL, led by Sudan Guru and Gen Z. May be, inspiration came from unfortunate experiences in several other countries.

PASSAGE BACK IN TIME

Nepal decided to become a democratic republic in 2008. Movement for such a transition began as early as 1996, the year this writer visited this beautiful country as a member of a Government of India 'Trade' delegation, led by Sri Tejendra Khanna, Commerce Secretary. One however, did not find any sign of movement or protest either in Kathmandu or in Pokhra.

Upon initial exchange of pleasantries, one discovered that Nepalese speak less during a bi-lateral meeting proper, but invariably stretch the agreed upon time to agree for correct formulation for the 'Minutes'. I had this experience

also as a member of Joint Working Group of India & Nepal on Police Co operation & Border matters on six occasions.

As it happens, two parties agreed after agreeing to disagree twice or thrice, AND at last, the Trade & Transit Treaty between two countries was cleared for renewal for three or four years. This brought immense relief to the Nepalese, especially those located along border with Bihar & U. P.

Imagine, even for Kerosene oil and POL, common man had to struggle for days or pay four or five times the actual price.

The point which I wish to bring home is that even if something lingered on during Monarchy in Nepal, same could be quickly resolved if Indian Government was pro-active or at times, dominating. Same would reduce sufferings of Nepali villagers. As such, they understood their predicament as a land locked country very well.

ROYAL MASSACRE & TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY.

The year 2008 saw end of inconsequential rule of King Gyanendra. A cousin of the former King Birendra, Vir Vikram Shah who was brutally murdered in 2001 alongwith seven family members by his son, the then Crown Prince Paras, transition turned out to be a relatively quiet affair.

The infamous Royal Massacre was executed with perfection and "remarkable time management". It did not get the attention from the politicians and public of Nepal, it deserved. Common subjects certainly looked shocked and helpless. The assailant shot at himself after committing gory murders but managed to survive for three days.

MANIPULATED INQUIRY

Some of the Nepalese expressed doubts about the presence of more murderers inside the Palace. Later, a so called Inquiry headed by the then Speaker of Parliament hushed up the matter in favour of Palace. As such, Prince Paras, a flamboyant driving freak would go scot free even after killing innocents on the tourist filled streets of Kathmandu.

MOURNING FOR THE ROYALTY

While mourning for their popular King at open Cremation Yard next to Pashupatinath temple, the common man cried but were too upset & scared to raise their voice.

Prince Gyanendra took over the reigns after Crown Prince succumbed to self inflicted injuries. But he was to lose power only after a few years of misrule. Incidentally, when Rana family had ousted the Shah family for a few months, latter had left behind two year old Gyanendra in the Palace, prior to proceeding to Calcutta. Since he sat on the throne for a while, he always had a fervent desire to occupy it once he grew up.

Not only he became King eventually but even after transition of Nepal to democracy, he continues to be hot favourite to head the country. Mostly he tours outside the country but does not forget to give his opinion, time and again, while leading life as a private citizen.

PROSPECTS OF AN INTERIM GOVT.

As per media reports, with little bit improvement in Law & Order situation in Kathmandu, the Army Chief called on Sri Ram Chandra Poudyal, the President and later addressed the nation (Actually address should have been by the President). The President has expressed a desire to see formation of a Central Government soon, to be headed by an interim Prime Minister.

A T.V. Channel, has indicated that the Gen Z group comprising of thousands of agitating youth, which burnt public properties and killed political leaders and sustained the protests even after ban on Social Media has been lifted, is giving hints for POST NORMAL SCENARIO.

The following arrangement, as and when situation normalises, may Emerge with the co-operation of all concerned:

- a) Country shall have a Titular head in the shape of former King Gyanendra. Whether it would be a British style Constitutional Monarchy or some other arrangement, it is too early to speculate.
- b) Actual active and prime player would be an officiating Prime Minister, say, Balendra (Balen) Shah, the current 35 year old very popular Mayor of Kathmandu. A Civil Engineer by profession, he won election with a thumping majority in 2022. Incidentally, he came to fame as a Rapper. The TIME

magazine put him in the list of 100 Youth Icons of the World. He aspires to see a Greater Nepal which will include parts of Sikkim, Uttarakhand and H.P.

Name of former first Woman Supreme Court Judge of Nepal, Mrs Sushila Karki has also begun making rounds.

c) Ravi Lamichaney, former Minister and head of Nepal Prajatantrik Party, is being favoured by Gen Z to take over as the Home Minister as he is fully familiar/ knows the misdeeds of his former ministerial colleagues. Arrested on the orders of Oli Government on October 18, 2024, he was rescued by the student activists from a jail in Kathmandu on the second day of protests.

d) Three main parties, namely, Nepali Congress, Nepal Communist Party and Nepal Communist Party (UML & MC) have been proposed to be banned from taking part in future elections. And within six months fresh elections have been promised to be conducted.

Such tall promises were made in Bangladesh as well but even after 13 months, nothing has been heard about elections.

NO POLITICAL STABILITY FOR 17 YEARS

It would be necessary to throw some light on somewhat chequered history of the period from 2008 to 2025. In this long span of seventeen years, an average Nepali had the misfortune of seeing fourteen Governments, with an average tenure of barely 1.5 years.

There has not been a shred of political stability in this beautiful piece of exotic Himalayan biodiversity, having most breathtaking trails, towering mountains and diverse eco systems.

Instability factor has been clearly visible in civil aviation sector also, with Nepal experiencing maximum number of air crashes in the world.

CONSTITUTION OF 2015

A lot was being expected from the new Constitution, however, it has made no difference, as populace of the poorest country, next only to Afghanistan in South Asia, continues to struggle for a decent living, education and health coverage. Very few would know & understand what is called Sustainable Development.

Common man is compelled to hope against hope. Games of power & authority being played by old and haggard politicians always baffle the youth immensely and their helpless parents.

Spoit brats of big shots of Nepal upon enjoying the bounties of poor country, invariably look for green pastures in USA or European countries. Donning branded attire they flaunt their egos, whenever an opportunity arises.

According to an estimate, about 65,000 young persons leave for India and other foreign countries, such as, UAE on an annual basis, in search of jobs. This is against a backdrop of high rate (over 12.6%) of unemployment in the country. This is what the Government says. Actual unemployment would be much more as statistics has no sanctity in Nepal.

Have nots either avail of left over benefits in Nepal or find an easy access to India, an erstwhile Hindu country, which became Democratic Socialist and Secular Republic in 1976, but due to designs and machinations of present Government for 11 years, is stuck between Hindutwa and semi-secularism.

IN A NUTSHELL

Thirty youngsters have been killed and over 450 injured in violence that rocked Nepal. Three policemen too were lynched. These reflect extreme anger and deep frustration of the common man.

To begin with, beating of S. B. Deuba, Ex-P. M., injuring his Minister wife, beating and killing of wife of a former P. M. and stripping a ruling M. P. donot happen anywhere.

K. P. Sharma Oli was compelled to withdraw order on Social Media, prior to quitting. With four Ministers in tow, he boarded an Army Chopper. In all, seven of his Ministers resigned. While Oli was reportedly proceeding to Dubai, Finance Minister was publicly thrashed.

Offices of President, P. M. and Supreme Court were damaged & torched alongwith Parliament and political party offices. It took two days for Army Chief to "request" the protesters to spare heritage buildings.

THEY WENT TO TROUBLE SPOTS TO EVACUATE, NOT TO CONTROL.

One can see similarity with Bangladesh when Sheikh Hasina was ousted in August 2024.

Not only rampant political instability, inflation and corruption have touched new heights. 43% population below the age of 40 years do not wish to see any old politician as they have sucked blood out of people. So many deaths and injuries did not happen in country's movement for democracy.

One by one, elected Governments have fallen in recent past in Myanmar, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and now Nepal. Trouble has been also created in Maldives more than once. China "upon sowing seeds" keeps watching these countries from a distance. Media is hinting at a Deep State conspiracy perpetrated by the U. S. A.

If that is the case how come fresh violence has erupted again in France, a country that has been an U. S. ally and seen four Prime Ministers in one year?

India is keeping a close watch on Nepal. P. M. Modi has expressed his 'anguish' over death of many youngsters.

Though security has been tightened along Indo-Nepal border and alerts issued by Nepal Police, violent incidents keep happening on both sides of border.

Game of musical chair played by Nepal politicians must end. An urge to grab political power too has to be sacrificed. Power, bereft of responsibility and accountability has no meaning. Resignations won't suffice. Hardest punishment may have to be given to erring politicians and officials.

Conclusion

New players would come, they would go one day like their brethren in the past, unless there is a fundamental change in the structure and political economy of Nepal. Uncertainty remains as to how situation would unfold.

One Can See Rubble, Dust, Smoke And Black Sky. Path To Peace, Political Stability & Corruption Free Nepal Is Still Far Off.

Chapter - 11

Will Poll Outcome Herald Change In Nepal?³⁶

At last Nepal seems to have got what it was looking for. Signs of a stable Government looked sure, following securing a two third majority by Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), led by Balendra Shah, hero of Gen Z and Sri Rabi Lamichane.

"Nepal rejects the old, but new is over stated", says one head line in an Indian daily. "Despite majority, RSP will tread a rough road", said another headline.

Old vs New

If one looks at old vs new debate, Nepal is going to follow Sri Lanka when it comes to giving chance of lifetime to new, as opposed to Bangladesh which gave clear signal for revival of old but at a time when ruling party of five times was barred from contesting elections. In all three countries agitation and violence preceded polls but voter turnout both in Bangladesh and Nepal belied expectations. In Myanmar, old military order is continuing, rather, it refuses to honour the mandate of successive elections in favour of NLFD Party led by A. S. Suu Kyi.

Rise of R. S. P.

R. S. P., an erstwhile ally of PKD Prachanda led Maoist Government, was formed as late as July 2022. But under the dynamic leadership of Balendra Shah as Mayor of Kathmandu, it seems to have done wonders. His steps against encroachments and drive at cleanliness won him accolades. His partymen could strike iron when it was hot. I mean at the peak of "semi violent" youth agitation in September, 2025.

Term of Justice (Mrs) Sushila Karki

After K. P. Sharma led government caved in and ultimately quit due to nation wide protests of Gen Z, euphoria had to die down. When semblance of

normalcy emerged, former Chief Justice of Nepal, Sushila Karki took over as interim P. M. Her mandate was to work for normalisation of situation and hold free and fair polls within six months.

Needless to say, she has lived upto promises. Nothing untoward happened and election was also conducted on March 5, very much within the allowed time frame. No major poll related complain seems to have surfaced. Keeping her desire not to continue in power any longer, stage is set for assumption of charge of P. M. by Balendra Shah, a “Madhesia” having Indian roots.

Election Results

Article 84 of the Constitution of Nepal provides for a 275 Pratinidhi Sabha (House of Representatives) which consists of 165 members to be elected directly from single member constituencies via the First-past-the-post (FPTP) system of voting. Remaining 110 seats have to be filled through a single countrywide constituency via party list proportional representational (P. R.) method of election.

Out of 165 P. S. seats, RSP has got a thumping majority by winning 125 while Nepali Congress, an old and formidable party won only 18. CPN-UML and NCP secured 9 and 8 seats respectively.

Looks, with the addition of P. R. seats, RSP is likely to raise its tally to 175 out of a total of 275. Thus Nepal may be out of clutches or syndrome of unfortunate era of coalition governments and that single party rule at last may become a REALITY.

Indian Reaction or View?

Due to old historical, religious and family bonds that India has with "Hindu" Nepal, any development relating to governance or frequent change in Government in the Himalayan nation is looked at with interest and speculation by Government of India. Accordingly, P. M. Modi personally called Balendra Shah and Rabi Lamichane, reiterating India's commitment to work together for mutual prosperity, progress and well being of two countries. New Delhi has also assured its firm support and co-operation for Nepal's efforts at rebuilding the nation.

Hope Nepal will not allow its territory for any anti India activity and that objections raised by Oli Government regarding their alleged claim of some border areas would be set to rest.

A large number of voters urging RSP to restore Nepal's Hindu kingdom status may be to the liking of Indian ruling party.

Expectations & Responsibilities Ahead

Shah faces an uphill task of rebuilding a devastated country having high level of corruption, unemployment, virtually stagnant economy, huge debt burden etc. In addition, abolition of party affiliated student unions, trade unions, civil servant associations and ambitious target of 30,000 M.W. of power within a decade have to be achieved. Last one should be in tune with fruitful initiatives of Government of Bhutan.

In view of youth being catalyst of change in many countries in the recent past, it is hoped that B. Shah Government may perform even if it has to go on a turbulent path, according to Yubraj Ghimire, a senior journalist and commentator based in Kathmandu.

Chapter - 12

Donald Trump In Offending Mode³⁷

Ever since he has taken over, President Donald Trump appears in terrible hurry to take actions internally, regionally and externally. Probably he wants to outshine his predecessors. However, thus far, he is only talking money, probably drawing strength and inspiration from his real estate days. But smell of superiority and offence can not possibly be hidden.

He has signed innumerable Executive orders, many of which have been challenged in the courts as potentially unconstitutional.

One of the principal functions of newly created DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) headed by Elon Musk, his confidant, is making sure that Executive orders of President are actually implemented even if they cause discomfort.

When Trump was finalising his manifesto, he had aspired to cut unnecessary expenditure. Accordingly, he desired Musk to be more aggressive in slashing government spending. He ordered that all U. S. federal employees MUST justify their work or lose their jobs. AFGE, the largest federal employees union has, however, vowed to challenge any unlawful termination. According to them, it is cruel and disrespectful to thousands of veterans.

Deadline given to employees to justify their jobs has already led to fissures. While Drug Enforcement Administration and Federal Communication Commission have told employees to comply, crucial Departments of Defence (including Pentagon), Homeland Security, Education and Commerce have told workers NOT to respond. So its going to be undesirable rough ride.

In a development on 24th February, employees have been given a second chance to justify their jobs. Radical downsizing may lead to 'Lay Off' of over twenty thousand workers. More than twenty Civil Service employees have already resigned from DOGE.

Differences with Judiciary

Fear of Trump vs Judiciary is also looming large as judges have begun blocking Executive orders.. Five federal judges have ruled against Trump's actions on a federal grant freeze, funding for NIH and Birthright Citizenship.

While Vice President J. D. Vance feels "Judges are not allowed to control the executive's legitimate powers", Elon Musk has, rather, harshly called for judges to be impeached.

If we refer to his negative or offending initiatives, beginning with Canada, Trump has threatened to make it 51st State of U. S. A. Gulf of Mexico has already become Gulf of America and another important water body Panama Canal is very much in news.

Panama Canal

If Trump is to be believed, U. S. gave the Canal to Panama, who gave it to China, who are 'abusing' it according to him.

President J. R. Mulino of Panama, however, has rejected U. S. claims of Chinese influence on Panama Canal. As per Trump, influence and control of China over the Canal area was a threat to the Canal and was a violation of Treaty concerning Permanent Neutrality and operation of Canal. Panama President has vehemently denied giving operations to China. It was operated by the Panama Government, he has clarified.

Gaza Strip Issues

As regards Gaza Strip, Trump has warned on 10th February that all hell would break loose if every Israeli hostage is not released from Gaza within days after HAMAS threatened to postpone further exchanges under a fragile Ceasefire deal, it said Israel was violating.

Trump has further said he could conceivably halt aid to U. S. allies Jordan and Egypt if they refuse to take in Palestinians under his controversial Gaza Plan.

Trump, in the meanwhile, met King Abdullah II of Jordan in Washington sometime ago. Jordan's king has stated that Arab nations have planned to counter propose Trump's Gaza Plan. Though his country did not have pleasant

experience with the stay of Palestinians earlier, they were willing to take about three thousand of them purely on humanitarian considerations.

International Court of Justice

Trump has sanctioned I. C. C. as well. He has accused ICC of abusing its powers as it had issued warrant of arrest against Benjamin Netanyahu for war crimes committed by him. One may ask how can a Court of the standing of ICC abuse its powers? It has judges of repute from all the countries and such decisions are generally taken unanimously.

U. N. O. & Its Agencies

Trump has felt that U. N. O. has tremendous potential. So it has to get its act together. But How UNO will function, that has not been explained by Trump or any other Head of State so far.

U. S. A. has in the meanwhile, pulled out of UNHRC and UNRWA. During his previous term, U. S. A. had pulled out from W. H. O. at the peak of Covid pandemic. His personal attack on head of WHO was most unfortunate.

How many more pullouts will be there by Trump in future? That's the question being asked?.

Relations With China

Talking of China, the Chinese Ambassador to U. N. O. has criticized U. S. A. for its tariff policies, stance on Panama Canal and banning use of Chinese A. I., saying" targeting China is not the way forward".

Fu Cong has delivered his remarks on Feb. 3 at the start of Beijing's month long Presidency of UNSC, where he called for cooperation. Fu further has said that the attendance of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at a high level U. N. meeting in New York on Feb. 18 would have been a good opportunity of talks with his U. S. counterpart Marco Rubio.

Trump's Proposed Talk with President V. Putin

Whole world is looking forward to it. Subsequent to their long telephonic conversation, news is very much in air about a possible formal meeting between the two. The Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia has indicated that preparations are going on for Putin-Trump talks on global issues, not just

Ukraine war. U. S. officials have also indicated that they had agreed with Moscow to re-establish diplomatic ties and resume economic cooperation.

According to an expert of international crisis group, in view of Trump's growing disenchantment with Zelensky, he and Putin are likely to 'cook up' a fresh deal concerning Ukraine.

Vassily Nebenzya, Russia's UN envoy makes it more obvious by saying " We acknowledge the constructive changes in the U. S. position when it comes to the Ukrainian conflict".

Talks With President V. Zelensky

President Trump was to despatch Keith Kellog, his Special Envoy to Ukraine to draw up a proposal to halt fighting. He is pressing for a swift end to conflict, while Zelensky is calling for tough security guarantees from Washington. Zelensky was to discuss the matter with the US Vice President at the recently held Munich Security Conference. What transpired has not been divulged as yet.

It is being observed that relations between Trump and Zelensky have deteriorated lately. Trump, according to Zelensky believes that Ukraine was to be blamed for the war. On the other hand, Trump has called Zelensky "a modestly successful comedian who talked the U. S. into spending 350 Billion Dollars to go into war that could not be won." He has been also called highly unpopular and a dictator.

On the third anniversary of Russian invasion on 24th February, President of European Union and one dozen leaders of Europe visited Ukraine's capital to express their solidarity.

There is also a report about recent policy shift by President Trump vis a vis Russia. According to a top Diplomat of European Union, Trump was taking a pro-Russian position. Also USA has sided with Russia twice at the UNO as they sought to avoid any condemnation of Russian invasion. Two votes signify a seismic shift in the balance of power at the U. N. France and Britain could have vetoed the resolution which does not blame Russia.

In the meanwhile, U. S. A. is holding talks with Ukraine on mineral deal even though Ukraine has rejected an attempt by the U. S. team to strike a deal for its vast natural resources. Trump has said that Ukraine was to be blamed for Russia invading it and also claiming that Zelensky was hugely unpopular

among people. Trump wants Ukraine to give U. S. companies access as compensation for tens of billions of dollars of aid delivered under Joe Biden.

Zelensky, therefore, maintains that Trump has succumbed to Russian disinformation.

Zelensky Tells U. S. Not To Pay Any Debt

Zelensky has dismissed Trump's demand for USD 350 billions, insisting that they received only 100 billions as a Grant.

To him, it is grossly exaggerated. Trump has insisted that Ukraine should reimburse to US all the aid provided since 24 Feb 2022. He has argued that if Ukraine is short on cash, it should sign over the rights to its natural resources as a form of compensation.

Zelensky has, however, refused terming it unfavourable. He has claimed that amount in question was not 340 billions but 100 billions and that he had an agreement with the former President Joe Biden that money was being provided as a Grant. Hence no re-payment should be expected.

Trump has gone on to declare that "we are spending our treasure on a country that's very far away".

USD 21 Millions To India: Suspense Continues

Donald Trump has declared that an amount of 21 million dollars was provided to India probably from U. S. Aid to improve their voter turnout. It is not clear whether this alleged amount was provided during his predecessors time or under his orders. Further, when he says that U. S. 's turnout should increase, not India's, matter becomes more grim and complicated. So far nothing has been stated by India. Only the MEA spokesperson has stated that it is a troubling development and that concerned departments are " looking into it".

Trump has also declared that India doesn't need this money as according to him, India imposes one hundred percent tariff. Also it has been learnt that 21 million dollars was not for India but for Bangladesh. Whatever it may be, India has become a laughing stock.

If one looks at history or trend of funding by U. S. Aid to India, it is much less than what has been pumped into by it to countries, such as, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Israel and Egypt. In 2006, an amount of 199 million dollars

came to India, in 2012, it was slashed to 31 million dollars, again it rose to 170 million dollars in 2022, to get reduced to 68.4 million dollars in 2024.

TO SUM UP

One humbly feels that U. S. AID kind of funding to India has to be discontinued. Even we should review funding from World Bank. Mere fact that we are now 5th biggest economy, there is no dearth of fund in our country.

This issue together with maltreatment meted out to deported Indian nationals should have figured in bi-lateral talks during Prime Minister's U. S. visit. Such pertinent issues deserve to be taken up again and again in the national interest.

Chapter - 13

Trump-Zelensky Tussle³⁸

Russian invasion of Ukraine happened more than three years ago. Thousands of casualties have taken place on both sides, apart from loss and destruction of crucial infrastructure. People of Ukraine have migrated to many countries in bulk and those left behind are badly bearing the brunt. People of several European countries are also suffering on account of ego of two Head of States leading to shortages and restricted gas, fertiliser and food grain supplies. Ripples can be felt in India and other parts of Asia as well. But People at lower rungs of economy continue to suffer.

No possibility of a Ceasefire is seen. Volodymyr Zelensky, an accidental President is not in favour of a Ceasefire without security guarantees. He apprehends, if it happens, Russia is bound to violate it. USA, however, wants it under any circumstance.

Amending his recent decision, Zelensky has indicated his willingness to have a deal with U. S. A. on minerals. But same is not sufficient. He has sounded it after his meeting with King Charles III of England and the support he got from European Heads of State. Keir Starmer, British P. M., in the meanwhile, has divulged that he is preparing a plan with the support of France and others to stop war, which will be presented to U. S. A. Italian P. M., Giorgia Meloni, is also in favour of having a meeting between European Heads and U. S. A. BUT WORLD KEEPS ON WATCHING.

Deal on Mineral & natural Resources

U. S. A. was holding talks with Ukraine on concluding a mineral deal even though Ukraine has rejected an attempt by the U. S. team to strike a deal for its vast mineral resources. Trump also wants Ukraine to give U. S. companies access as compensation for tens of billions of dollars as aid delivered during the Presidency of Joe Biden. Zelensky has dismissed Trump's demand for USD 350 billions, insisting that they received only USD 100 billions, that too, as a Grant. Hence, no re-payment should be expected. Trump has argued that

if Ukraine was short on cash, it should sign over the rights to its vast natural resources as a form of compensation.

London Summit of European Leaders

British P. M. hosted this summit very recently on 2nd March. He said that leaders had agreed to draw up a Ukraine peace plan to present the same to USA.

European leaders have agreed for the following: a) Keep aid flowing to Kyiv, b) Maintain economic pressure on Russia c) Make sure Ukraine is at the bargaining table, d) Any peace deal must ensure Ukraine's sovereignty and security and e) Continue to arm Ukraine to deter future invasion by Russia.

Giving his reactions, Mike Waltz, National Security Advisor of U. S. A. has told reporters in a guarded language: ' We welcome Europe stepping up for Europe but they have to also invest in the capabilities to do so'.

French Proposal

Starmer has hinted that there were several proposals for a possible Ceasefire in Ukraine including the French one for a month long initial truce that could pave way for peace talks. French President, Macron has said that he and British P. M. are working on a one month truce in the air, at sea and on energy infrastructure. They are prepared to deploy British and French troops to Ukraine together with other countries to help preserve peace.

Key Observations

Two pertinent comments may be made at this juncture:

Why should a peace plan or a Ceasefire proposal be presented to U. S. A.? European countries who participated in London summit are capable enough to take further necessary action on the peace plan.

Secondly, to maintain peace in the event of a Ceasefire, peace keeping force should have also representatives from U. S. A. NATO may participate in this exercise with a view to attempt normalcy.

If European leaders have taken so much interest in Ukraine, it is felt that they should show some willingness for ensuring continuation of Cease fire in the Middle East and essential supplies to Gaza Strip also. That will be vital in the

interest of humanity. Afterall, this crisis is much more vexed and older than the tussle plaguing Ukraine and Russia.

TO SUM UP

Now that a broad agreement, in a way, has been reached among European leaders regarding the peace plan, Russia and India may have to be also engaged, or else, it will be a meaningless exercise. Also any further attempts to resume dialogue between Ukraine and U. S. A. shall have to be put on hold for the time being. Ways and means may have to be explored to provide financial assistance to Ukraine to tide over their ongoing crisis.

Chapter - 14

Negative Connotations Of International Trade³⁹

International trade is the exchange of goods, services and capital across national boundaries. As it is a vital part of global economy, its significance has been rising in recent times. Global trade may give consumers an opportunity to be exposed to new products and markets. Nonetheless, it is more costly than domestic trade.

Cross border trade leads to additional costs, such as, explicit tariffs, as well as non-explicit barriers, such as, long duration, language and cultural differences.

World Trade Organisation

To ease and justify the process of trade between different countries, international economic organisation like W. T. O. (World Trade Organisation) took shape in 1995. Its precursor was General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT), established in 1947 with coming together of 23 member countries.

As an intergovernmental organisation, W. T. O. regulates and facilitates trade in goods, services and intellectual properties between various nations. Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, it is world's largest international economic organisation with 166 members. Governments use it to establish international trade and revise & enforce the rules that govern international trade in co- operation with the U. N. O.

Its purpose is to reduce tariffs and other barriers of trade. It provides a framework for negotiating trade agreements as also in facilitating dispute resolution. It ensures coherence and transparency of trade policies. However, it maintains silence when some countries cross limits.

What Is A Tariff?

Tariff is a direct tax imposed by a Government on imported goods which is paid by importers. These are trade barriers that raise prices, reduce available

quantities of goods and services and create economic burden on foreign exporters. Tariffs also create market distortions which can harm domestic consumers. Idea should be to protect domestic producers, nothing else. It is a form of foreign trade regulation.

Tariff, also known as a duty or Customs duty provides substantial revenue to any Government but it should not hit trade balance, output and employment. Car tariff of 110% is considered very high. That is why, Donald Trump and Elon Musk are very critical of it.

Ever since Donald Trump has taken over as President, tariff is being used as a weapon, which is unfair. U. S. is pursuing a policy of financial dominance. It is aiming to reduce unproductive foreign expenditures and concentrate on world's most valuable consumer market. It wields its economic power more aggressively to secure trade advantages.

Systematic dismantling of old institutions like US AID is one such step. U. S. had used it as a soft power against poverty and disease. It is also showing open hostility toward European Union which has resulted into E. U. losing its privileged status as America's primary trading partner.

Though U. S., Canada and Mexico are bound by USMCA, a tri-lateral trade agreement, supposed to benefit the signatories, disagreements are surfacing owing to U turn being taken by the U. S. President.

U. S. -Mexico Tariff Issues

While after China, Russia is being targeted by the U. S. A. for raising tariff, Mexico, has managed to win some confidence of Trump with reference to USMCA. Now Mexico would not be required to pay tariffs on any goods in relation to USA. But will this understanding last?

It has been confirmed by Claudia Sheinbaum, the Mexican President after she spoke to Donald Trump. According to her tweet on X, two countries would also work to curb smuggling of guns from U. S. A. to Mexico. Not only they are each other's top trading partners, the automobile sector gains immensely from cross border movement of goods.

U. S. A. -Canada Issues

Apart from Trump's desire to 'make' Canada a 51st province of U S. A., Canada has been threatened on several issues ever since new President has

taken over. A trade war between U. S. A and Canada began on 1st February when U. S. President signed orders imposing near universal tariffs on goods from Canada and Mexico entering U. S. market. Proposed higher tariff rates on Canadian goods and services will lead to price rise in U. S. market. These are being levied to curb flow of illegal border crossings and drugs. Higher tariff on Canadian goods may also lead to job losses and even recession. But with election of Mark Carney as Canada's 24th P. M., things are likely to change. In view of his being a former Governor of Bank of Canada and former Goldman Sachs Executive, Canada is bound to face U. S. tariff threats more effectively. He has chaired a task force on economic growth apart from being Advisor to Justin Trudeau, the former P. M.

In a move on 12th March, President Trump has threatened to increase tariffs from 25 to 50% on steel and aluminium from Canada. Canada is the largest foreign suppliers of these goods to U. S. A. It is planning to come out with its own counter measures.

Melanie Joly, Canadian Foreign Minister has opined that excuse for tariffs shifts everyday. Only constant seems to be President Trump's talks of annexing our country. We will not back down.

U. S. -China Trade War To Heat Up

An economic conflict between U. S. A. and China is not new, going on since 2018. After imposing a blanket 10% tariff on all the Chinese goods in February, U. S. has recently hiked it to 20%. Now China is beginning to levy tariff of 15% on certain U S. agricultural goods in retaliation, with effect from 10th March. Incidentally, U. S. A. is the biggest importer of Chinese goods. Relatively cheap labour in China ensures production on mass scale.

India & U. S. Tariff Negotiations

As far as India is concerned, discussions on tariff and other aspects of trade relations figured in P. M. Modi's visit to USA in the second week of January. A blunt Trump has again claimed that India charges massive tariffs and that it was restrictive to do business with New Delhi. You can't even sell anything into India. It is restrictive. Trump, at the same time feels that India has agreed to cut its tariffs.

U. S. exports to India accounted for USD 41. 8 billions out of a total two way trade in goods worth USD 129. 2 billions in 2024. Trump is becoming critical

of India's entire high tariff and trade policy. Accusations are on several counts. To him, these hinder American businesses. He has clarified at the same time, that India has promised to reduce its tariffs significantly. Slashing of tariff has happened after 'being exposed', as per his sarcastic comments.

According to him, India currently imposes much higher import taxes on U. S. A. products than U. S. does on Indian goods with a gap exceeding 10% points. However, India maintains a trade surplus of over USD36 billions with the U. S. A.

Right now both the countries are negotiating a Multi sector Trade Agreement, aiming to reduce tariffs and non tariff barriers. U. S. is pushing India hard to reduce tariff on car imports (e. g. Tesla electric cars) as it is a major point of contention. Thus a Bilateral Trade Agreement to enhance trade relations between the two will mean a lot.

To ward off a potential trade war, India has signalled wide ranging cuts in imports of cars, chemicals, electronics, pharmaceuticals and medical devices for a multi sectoral bi- lateral trade with U. S. A. Tariff on motor cycles and Bourbon Whisky have been cut already.

India, at the same time, is trying to counter a negative perception in U. S. A. that India is a high tariff nation.

Piyush Goyal, Commerce & Industries Minister is already in USA for this purpose but it is regretted to convey that after his extended stay, he had not been given an appointment with the U. S Commerce Minister.

European Union, U. K & India

European Union happens to be India's largest trading partner. To enhance trade relations, not only it has set up E. U-India Trade & Technology Council, but the recent visit to India by Ursula van der Leyen, President of E. U. is bound to further cement the relations. Negotiation for a free trade agreement has been resumed. E. U. may be prompted to relax non-tariff barriers for Indian goods. India, in turn is willing to reduce tariffs on E. U. 's key requests like automobiles, pharmaceuticals, wines and whiskies, depending on reciprocal concessions.

Apart from E. U., India is prioritizing a Free Trade Agreement with U. K. to expand exports and boost trade and investment by reducing tariff and non-

tariff barriers and improving access to market. Talks begun in 2024 are still going on.

One Bilateral Investment Treaty(BIT) between two countries too has been proposed. It will help promote and protect investments in each other's countries. One key gain will be mechanism for settling disputes.

India, has also resumed trade negotiations with New Zealand and some other countries. New Zealand [P. M. is](#) scheduled to visit New Delhi soon for this purpose.

TO SUM UP

According to a leading national daily, Trump's on- again, off-again tariff threats against India and key trading partners, Canada, China and E. U. have accelerated trade war fears. It has the potential to hurt consumer confidence, raise prices and slow down business investment. Neither transparency, nor element of cohesion is being reflected in any of recent tariff announcements of U. S. A. It is high time, W. T. O. intervened.

President of E. U. too has deeply regretted latest announcements of Trump. According to her, tariffs are taxes, they are bad for business and worse for consumers. Not only jobs will be at stake but prices will also go up.

It is surprising to note that none of the affected / targeted countries have approached W. T. O. thus far against the erratic attitude of U. S. A. Afterall, WTO's mandate is to work for reduction of tariffs and to resolve disagreements and disputes.

With the change of guard in Canada, Trump may not succeed in eying its resources and land any longer. New P.M. has already hinted at using and stressing Canadian values. From China too, U.S.A. may face tough resistance, as former is expected to open its cards only after a 'Wait & Watch'.

Chapter – 15

Negative U. S. Policies: Impact On India, China & Elsewhere⁴⁰

Being very old civilizations, having rich culture and heritage, both India and China had not only people to people contacts but also regular visits by travellers and scholars on a mutual understanding basis.

While one is aware about Confucius and HuenTsang in ancient times, names of Mao-tse-tung, Chou-en-Lai and Deng-Xiao-Ping have fired the shots in the post- 1954 Panchsheel Era, when Jawaharlal Nehru was our P. M.

PATH BREAKING CULTURAL REVOLUTION

If Mao-tse-tung was the most powerful Chinese Communist leader ever from 1949 to 1976, it was Deng-Xiao-Ping who served as a paramount leader of China from 1978 to 1992. He is credited to have kept China 'hidden' from international glare for over a decade. At the end of it, however, China not only appeared stronger politically, diplomatically, scientifically and project management wise but also on art, culture and sports fronts. Performance of Chinese athletes and sportspersons became a force to reckon with, after what is widely known as Cultural Revolution.

Chinese could occupy top positions in Olympics and World championships earlier held by U.S.A., U.K. and Russian sportspersons. Chinese being determined, never looked back.

ERA OF XI JINPING

President Xi Jinping, aged 72 years, is at the helm of affairs both in administration and the ruling party since November 15, 2012. A man of few words, he began slowly to ultimately become the strongest ever President of People's Republic of China and that of ruling Communist Party. He succeeded Hu JinTao. Incidentally, latter was humiliated in an Annual Communist party conference just before his demise.

Close on the heels of Vladymir Putin, Xi has got declared himself as President for Life more than three years ago. He faced tough weather especially from youth during the Covid times in 2021-22 but being a capable administrator, he could suppress criticism and protest rallies which could have proved embarrassing if not counter productive.

DOKLAM TUSSLE & GALWAN WAR

DOKLAM, EAST SIKKIM (NOW GANGTOK DIST.)

On June 16, 2017 during a routine patrol close to tri-junction point (where Indian border touches that of Bhutan and China) at Doklam in East Sikkim, Indian soldiers discovered hectic road construction activity by Chinese soldiers. It was a clear violation of two Bhutan-China agreements of 1988 and 1998 on a land claimed both by Bhutan and China.

A few days of fist fight between the Army of India and China ultimately led to withdrawal of two armies to their original positions.

GALWAN, LADAKH BORDER

What happened on June 15, 2020 in Galwan at Line of Actual Control in East Ladakh was far more serious. In a major shift in its Border Road policy, central government approved construction of feeder road to Patrol Point 14 in Galwan. Apart from providing improved access and support, it was to help civilian settlements and communication in the area. As the prospect of improved Indian connectivity appeared unpalatable to China, its soldiers began throwing stones & boulders. Same was responded to in a tit for tat manner by Indian troops.

When things went out of control, action by guns and artillery followed. While 20 Indian soldiers including Col. Santosh Babu of Bihar Regiment, sacrificed their lives, on the Chinese side, number was 35 to 45.

IT WAS THE DEADLIEST BORDER CLASH BETWEEN INDIA & CHINA SINCE 1967.

Issue was resolved due to our deft diplomatic handling, sooner than expected. However, the fact remains that China continues to forcibly occupy thousands of hectares of Indian land in Ladakh as also Arunachal sectors.

Resumption of Mansarovar Yatra

However, there has been de tant (relaxation of strained relations) after several diplomatic and military level discussions. As a result, Kailash Mansarovar Yatra was resumed in the second week of June, 2025 after a gap of seven years through Nathula in Sikkim and Lipu lekh and Ship ki La in Uttarakhand and H. P. respectively.

LONG STAND OFF

It is well known that there has been a five year military stand off between India and China and that some attempts were made to relax things in October 2024. Ignoring it, P. M. Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping have lately stressed that two countries were partners, not rivals. Looks things may work towards gradual normalisation, which is the need of the hour, more so, in view of misuse of tariff policy and growing discrimination against Indian diaspora in U. S. A.

FIRST VISIT OF P. M. MODI TO CHINA IN 7 YEARS

Prior to first visit of P. M. Modi to China in seven years, he visited Tokyo and Tianjin in Japan. Latter is a Port city which once served the Imperial China. Having spent two days in Japan to consolidate mutual ties by signing of commercial, technological and security agreements, it appeared P. M. Modi was seeking re-engagement with China. In Beijing prior to SCO summit, when Modi and Xi Jinping finally met, it was being speculated that both will agree to end five year CHILL in Bi lateral ties.

They would keep following three Pillars of SCO in mind: Security, Connectivity and Opportunity.

THREATENED WEAPON OF U. S. TARIFF

Talking of U. S. factor, due to imposition of 50% tariff on Indian goods as opposed to only 19% on Pakistani goods, is very unfair. As it is at random, it is bound to hit Diamond, Textile and similar high value sectors of India very adversely.

The trust deficit between both the countries not only has deepened over 50% tariff but imposition of additional 25% tariff on India over purchase of crude

oil from Russia has led to additional complications. As regards China, no such additional tariff has been announced as yet.

Further, Trump administration has asked European countries to impose sanctions and secondary tariffs against India. It has also asked them to stop buying crude oil and gas from India.

It could be said that personal anger of Donald Trump and his whims and fancies, his knack for playing with fire etc, are one day bound to go against him. Many allies of USA fell into his line but INDIA DID NOT, AND RIGHTLY SO.

Trump's open criticism by two of his powerful Mayors and murmuring going on within Republican party are also going to be watched closely and with interest. From 50% in favour nine months ago, now 50% disfavour him. So much of drastic slide in public rating of any U. S. President has never been seen.

Not only Trump has minted millions of Dollars in Crypto currency, he has been found being erratic completely in taking decisions. His illogical desire to get Nobel peace prize and rising softness towards Pakistan is bringing in an element of surprise in international circles. Invitations extended to Field Marshall Munir to visit U S. A. twice certainly raises discomfort level of India.

EXPECTED OUTCOME OF TIANJIN S. C. O. SUMMIT:

It is likely to go against Donald Trump, as apparent from tone and tenor of the heads of Russia, China, Japan, India and North Korea during the Summit and whatever emerged from the sideline confabulations.

Russia, China, India, Japan and North Korea may remain united to show commitment for the time being to prevent any further U. S. attempt to use Tariff as a nasty international weapon.

In the meanwhile, India's engagement and attempt to re-cement ties with Russia and China has already evoked strong criticism and concern from Pater Navarro, U. S. Trade Advisor.

Back to talks between PM Modi and President Xi Jinping, two leaders already met on the sidelines of SCO summit. They are reported to have agreed on a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable resolution of the border issue and

stressed the significance of a multipolar world and role to be played by two economies to stabilise world trade. This meeting, their second in ten months has materialised in the backdrop of deepening crisis between India and USA over 50% tariff imposed by Trump Government.

But when asked if raise in U. S. Tariff figured in the talks between two leaders, Indian Foreign Secretary, as expected only minced words. He stated that focus was on bilateral domain, but international trade situation did come up.

BRICS SUMMIT OF OCTOBER 2024

Last meeting of Indian and Chinese leaders was during BRICS summit in Kazan, in October 2024. P. M. Modi has optimistically felt that after long delayed disengagement at the border, an atmosphere of peace and stability should be in place. Further, he has disclosed that our Special Representatives have also reached an agreement on Border Management. He was perhaps referring to two meetings held between Ajit Doval, Indian N. S. A. and Chinese Foreign Minister in December, 2024 and August, 2025.

P. M. Modi has described these meetings as fruitful.

S. C. O. MEET AT TIANJIN

Addressing the main summit of Sanghai Co-Operation Organisatuon on September 1, P. M. Modi made it clear at the very outset that double standards on terror were unacceptable and that sovereignty and territorial integrity were the KEY factors. Purposely referring to most brutal terror attack at Pahalgam, he said that it was not only an assault on conscience of India but also an open challenge to every nation, every individual having faith in humanity. On the whole, Indian P. M. focussed on the need to oppose terrorism and those supporting it.

Ahead of Modi, President Xi Jinping of China laid stress on his vision for a new Global Security and Economic Order that gives priority to Global South.

IT WAS A DIRECT CHALLENGE TO THE U. S. A.

He went on to add that we must continue to take a clear stand against hegemonism and power politics and practice multilateralism.

LESSONS TO BE DRAWN FROM S. C. O. Summit

*In order to maintain the tempo that was set in motion on the side lines and apparently sustained during the summit proper, President Xi Jinping hosted a banquet in honour of S. C. O. leaders. P. M. Modi could meet the host and President Putin and reiterate commitment for improving bi-lateral ties based on mutual trust and respect,

*India became part and parcel of a big show of anti-West unity. It is a different issue that Putin-Xi Jinping bi-lateral talks also prompted Pakistan to have such talks with Russia,

*Though Putin, Kim Jong Un, P. M. of Pakistan and 24 other Heads stayed back to witness the Grand Chinese Parade on September 2, to mark the 80th anniversary of World War II, decision of P. M. Modi to skip it was a wise one. The Trio of Xi Jinping, Putin and Kim Jong Un upset western leaders so much that parade was considered an anti-U. S. conspiracy by the U. S. President,

*Apart from his forceful arguments against tentacles of terrorism in the presence of facilitators, viz, President of Turkiye and P. M. of Pakistan, P. M. Modi also called for reforms in UNO on the occasion of 80th anniversary of the world body. He could sense that spirit during the summit appeared respectful and non-confrontational,

*When it comes to Sino- Indian ties, China is capable of changing colours like a chameleon. India shall have to move very carefully and cautiously while dealing with them,

*India's very old ties with Russia shall have to get precedence over any disengagement with China or fresh trade treaty negotiations with U. S. A.

*Coming together of Russia, China, India, Japan and North Korea is going to be of disadvantage to U. S. A. Though, it may not pose immediate threat, yet it is a sign of discomfort. It certainly weakens QUAD 'experiment' of U.S.A.

Chapter - 16

U. S. A. Perturbed After Summit of S. C. O⁴¹

Having put Doklam tussle of June 16, 2017 and direct confrontation with the Chinese Army at Galwan on June 15, 2022 in the background, India kept communication alive with the Chinese. Same not only ensured resumption of Kailash Mansarovar Yatra in the second week of June 2025 but also broke a five year military stand off with China.

SEVEN YEAR HIATUS

After a lapse of seven years, visit of an Indian Prime Minister to Dragon land materialised. Idea was not only to seek a re-engagement but also to end a long chill in the bi- lateral ties on the eve of Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) meet at Tianjin.

INDO-JAPAN TALKS

Through P. M. Modi's visit to Japan from 29th to 30th August, not only bi-lateral relations were reviewed but couple of important agreements relating to commercial, technological, security and project management matters also were signed.

On the lighter side, P. M. had a useful Bullet Train Ride with Shigeru Ishiba, Japanese P. M. One did know that Ishiba, a leader of Christian community was going to resign, presumably due to loss of majority of ruling L. D. party in Upper House. But such resignations on moral grounds do not happen in India. Maiden Indian bullet train project is being built with Japanese knowhow. Subsequent to signing of a MOU in 2015, its foundation was laid in 2017. As on date, only 360 kms of line has been laid which speaks of extremely tardy progress.

INDIA & CHINA: ONE TO ONE

Talks between two Asian giants on the eve of and on sidelines of S. C. O. meet led to somewhat fair and mutually acceptable, but partial resolution of the vexed border issue.

These also stressed the need to have a multipolar world and role to be played by two economies to attempt some stabilization of the World Trade. Hot & ticklish Tariff issue did figure in the talks as hinted in a guarded manner by the Indian Foreign Secretary.

From the tone and tenor reflected in interaction between Modi and Xi Jinping, there looked some movement towards "de tante".

Also bi-lateral talks with Russia and others looked positive. Idea was to re-cement relations. Modi and Putin walking hand in hand sent a strong, unpalatable message to Trump. It was a certain indicator regarding movement towards a NEW WORLD ORDER.

As expected, these developments invited unwarranted criticism from U. S. A, as inferred from utterances of Peter Navarro, Trade Advisor of U. S. A. Much more misconceived spice was to be added later by Howard Lutnick, U. S. Commerce Secretary.

One may note that Tianjin summit marked a significant shift in global politics. Leaders of 10 member countries and another ten represented half of the world. So weapons of sanctions and tariff rise shall have to go.

SCO MEET AT TIANJIN

Addressing the summit, President of China laid stress on his vision for a new Global Security and Economic Order that gives priority to GLOBAL SOUTH. It was meant to be a direct challenge to U. S. A. He went on to add that we must continue to take a clear stand against the hegemonism & power politics and begin practicing Multilateralism.

P. M. Modi, made it abundantly clear that double standards on terrorism were unacceptable and sovereignty and territorial integrity should be the KEY factors. Referring to brutal terror attack by Pak terrorists at Pahalgam in April, he said that it was not only an assault on conscience of India, it was also an open challenge to every nation, having faith in human rights. He focused on need to oppose terrorism, its manifestations and facilitators. Besides arguing

against tentacles of terrorism in the presence of its facilitators, viz, Turkiye President and Pakistan P. M., Modi also called for urgent reforms in the working of UNO.

Such a frank talk on the menace of terrorism was not to the liking of U S. A, especially in view of its regular arms supply to Pakistan and two invitations to Field Marshal Munir to visit USA.

GRAND MILITARY PARADE

At a massive military parade at the historic Tiananmen Square, the displays not only highlighted the regional aspirations of China but President Trump was shocked like never before. C. I. A. was reported to be restless with display of latest weapons which could target any part of U. S. A. easily. It showed that China was 15 years ahead of U. S. A.

Flanked by President Putin, Kim Jong Un, North Korean leader, alongwith leaders of Iran (attending for the first time), Pakistan and sixteen other authoritarian countries, President Xi Jinping issued a defiant warning to rivals not to challenge sovereignty of China as its people firmly stood on the right side of history. While saying so, he issued an implicit warning to Taiwan.

USA WANTED TO ISOLATE CHINA, NOW USA LOOKS ISOLATED

As expected, President Trump who was feeling upset with the emerging conglomeration of World leaders, came out with a nasty if not unpalatable comment. He said:

"Please give my warmest regards to Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un, as you conspire against the U. S. A. "

Trump also posted a photo of Xi Jinping, Putin and Modi together and stated: "Looks like we have lost India & Russia to 'deepest & darkest' China, May they have a long and prosperous future together. "

STAND OF GOVT. OF INDIA

No comment, said MEA Spokesman Jaisawal on Trump's remarks, though everything was being closely monitored by the Indian diplomats. He also rejected Peter Navarro's charges outrightly.

Irrelevant & irresponsible comments of Howard Lutnick also appeared. He had bluntly said " Either support the dollar, support USA, support the American consumer, the biggest client or you are going to pay a 50% tariff. Chinese sell to us, Indians sell to us, we are a 30 Trillion dollar economy. They have to come back to the customer. Eventually the customer (U. S. consumer) is always right. "

While attending the SCO, P. M. Modi, apart from talks with Xi Jinping, is also understood to have discussed with President Putin, the Ukraine war and strengthening economic co -operation between two countries.

UNFORTUNATE ANTI-INDIA TIRADE BY TRUMP

As U. S. President has been wrongly targeting India for many months, it is high time we reacted firmly and gave him a befitting reply.

Further, Is Peter Navarro justified in saying" If India, the world's largest democracy wants to be treated like a strategic partner of U. S., it needs to act like one".

Implication of this sentence is that we need to get guidance from U. S. A. (Sad).

MEA has seen these inaccurate & misleading statements. We obviously Reject them.

HOW LONG THESE VERBAL ONSLAUGHTS CONTINUE?

India has firmly stood on a level ground and has rightly refused to indicate any major shift in its policy on Russian purchases. Union

Finance Minister has stated " whether it is Russian oil or anything else, its our decision to buy from the place which suits our needs".

Incidentally, link of 25% tariff with Import of crude oil from Russia is very unfortunate. India happens to be 3rd largest consumer of crude oil. It gets Russian oil at a discount. So India has saved foreign exchange worth billions of Dollars in the last three years.

CLUBBING OF INDIA & BRAZIL BY U. S. & NEXT BRICS SUMMIT

One may note that both India & Brazil have been imposed a U. S. tariff of 50% AND both SCI and BRICS have been viewed as anti-Western Groupings.

In view thereof during the next BRICS Meet later this year, President Lula of Brazil wants discussion not only on Tariff but also on support to the emerging idea of Multilateralism.

USA, by going a step further has called BRICS Anti- American and has threatened to slap an additional 10% tariff on goods imported from BRICS countries from July onwards.

CONCLUSION

Formal and informal discussions prior to SCO, during SCO meet at Tianjin and a daring show of strength at Tiananmen Square, all had a common agenda whether same was latent or manifest. Since signal given to U. S. A. is loud and clear, maintaining present tempo is a must till next round is held under the auspices of BRICS in Brazil, later this year. One need not wait for next SCO meet at Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in 2026.

A lot needs to be done for the good of humanity as present U. S. policies, from Ukraine to Gaza to Middle East to unrealistic rates of Tariff, are spreading nothing but ill will.

Last but not the least, rare earth minerals are used in making of smart phones, electric vehicles, fighter jets, radar systems, satellites, lasers, semi conductors etc AND China controls 80% of their supplies. President Xi Jinping has already restricted their supplies to U. S. and many European countries. (For Indian Cell Phones too, raw materials come from China).

WEST IS NOT USED TO QUESTIONING, NOW IT IS MORE THAN A TRADE WAR AND SAME SEEMS TO HAVE GOT COMPLICATED

Chapter -17

Putin's Isolation & Recent Visit To India⁴²

Vladimir Putin has been ruling over gigantic Russian Federation, bordering fourteen countries and having largest stockpile of nuclear weapons, without a break since the start of current century. Having looked after authoritarian dictatorship presidency for a short period upon resignation of Boris Yeltsin on 31st December 1999, he was formally elected as the President for four years on May 7, 2000.

His first challenge from Chechen insurgents was crushed. He was re-elected President again in 2004 and 2008. Once for four years he exchanged positions with Dmitry Medvedev, his Prime Minister. An amendment in constitution enabled Presidency to be extended to six years. Thus Putin managed to occupy top position twice again upto 2024. Beyond it, nothing is known.

In the second week of August 2008 Russian troops attacked two places of Georgia, namely, South Ossetia and Abkhazia and captured the former. Georgia was accused of committing genocide and aggression. Some portions are still under Russian occupation.

Not being satisfied, Russian army annexed Crimea in 2014 after attacking it. Though it costed Russia, 's membership of G-7, Putin has no qualms about it.

Even when Russia was having crucial issues with Georgia, it went ahead with its aggression of Ukraine on 24th February 2022, an action that has made Putin the second most powerful, if not feared man in Russia after Joseph Stalin, the man who turned the then Soviet Union into an industrial power house from an agrarian economy. He had himself taken over the reins from Vladimir Lenin who had led a historic revolution against the ruling Czar family on March 15, 1917.

However, unjustifiable attack on Ukraine has isolated Russia from most parts of the World. Soon to complete four painful years, millions of casualties on both sides, apart from bringing miseries in non-participating countries, it is the largest ongoing conventional war in Europe since World War II.

ISOLATION OF RUSSIA

Putin is reported to have travelled to 72 countries since becoming President on May 7, 2000. Most of the countries of Europe, NATO & USA are, however, confronting Russia with no solution in sight. China in a way, fully and North Korea obliquely, appear on the side of Russia.

Russia's isolation is apparent from the fact that only six heads of states, viz, of China, Brazil, South Africa, North Korea, India and Syria have had an interaction or two with Putin in the recent past. These were mostly in Russia, that too from March 2023 onwards. Heads of insignificant countries, such as, Slovakia & Hungary have also called on Putin, but as late as in December 2024 and November 2025 respectively.

Sensing adverse world opinion, Putin skipped G-20 summit hosted by India in September 2023 but attended Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meet hosted by China at Tianjin on September 1, 2025. His presence at Grand Chinese parade alongwith 19 heads of states minus India, sent strong signals to U. S. A., his arch rival. Later, a one to one meeting with Donald Trump at Alaska did not bear any fruit. Telephonic discussions, nevertheless, between the two continue to take place. They appear to be on loggerheads yet again due to gradual advancement of U. S. Navy around Venezuela.

23RD INDIA-RUSSIA ANNUAL SUMMIT

Against above background, V. Putin's 27 hour visit to India from December 4 to 5 after a gap of four years assumes significance. It was also his first visit to old friend after declaration of war with Ukraine.

Nothing should be inferred from smile, warm hug and hand shake with the guest at Delhi airport in view of mutual rapport between P. M Modi and Putin. But what transpired during a ride together (this time in Modi's Fortuner as opposed to Putin's vehicle at Tianjin) and later at a " private dinner" apart from presentation of a Russian version of Gita, deserves to be made public.

UKRAINE SITUATION

There was no mention of Ukraine in the Joint Statement issued at the end of Putin's visit,

Change of expression 'not the era of war'(September, 2022) to 'solutions can't be found on the battle field'(July, 2024) to 'India not neutral, on the side of peace'(December, 2025) are one and the same.

Putin has stated that he had the opportunity to speak on Ukraine and that he was for a "possible" peaceful settlement (?)

Apart from usual bi-lateral annual summit, five bi- lateral issues were slated to be discussed between the two countries: trade, defence, technology, nuclear energy and mobility of labour.

Altogether sixteen pacts were signed during the Putin visit:

Trade, Tariff & Economic Co-operation

*International implications of tariff and non tariff trade barriers (with reference to Trump's tariff weapon), tourism and terrorism came up for discussion. Terming terrorism as a direct attack on human values, two sides condemned Pahalgam sacrilege and a deadly attack in Russia. Recent Delhi blast did not figure.

Migration, Tourism & Connectivity

*Proposal of a 30 day e- tourist visa and a 30 day group tourist visa for Russian citizens in India is to be welcomed.

An unified e-visa system for Indians in Russia is already available for shorter trips upto 16 days, within 60 days of issuance.

It is only for tourism, business or cultural events, however.

*A Labour Mobility agreement was signed to facilitate work for 10 lakh Indian skilled workers in labour intensive sectors in Russia. Though aimed at curbing illegal immigration, there are doubts if it will be feasible in view of harsh weather conditions in Russia?

*Agreements were concluded to build an Urea plant in Russia and co-operation in maritime matters, ports & customs.

*As regards a Free Trade Agreement not with Russia but with Eurasian Economic Union, it was stated that work was going on. It may be recalled that a FTA with U. K. was already signed and talks were on with USA, despite existing barriers.

*Offer of Russia to make ships in India was to be welcomed to further push Make In India Initiative.

*Moreover, decision to enhance bi-lateral trade from the present level of U. S. Dollar 68.7 billions to 100 billions is too ambitious. Of the 68.7 billions, imports account for 63.8 billions and exports have a meagre share of 4.9 billions, that too of insignificant items such as, fruits, vegetables, potatoes, pomegranates and pharmaceuticals.

Continuance of bi-lateral trade in Ruble and Rupee, however, was going to be a big blow to dominance of American Dollar.

*It was decided that without any impediment, crude oil, gas and petro chemical supply from Russia would continue. Though India had cut oil imports by 38% in October, 2025.

*Decision to begin work on Chennai-Vladivostok Eastern Maritime Corridor and International North- South Transport Corridor appear to be very ambitious, apart from being time consuming. Consent from countries falling on the way will not be easy.

Security, Defence, Nuclear Energy & Strategic Partnership

Coming to co-operation in military technical spheres, though Putin mentioned it, there was no announcement on the supply of S-400 Air Defence System or the Sukhoi-57 fighter aircraft.

However, the Joint Statement states that two sides agreed to encourage joint manufacturing in India of spare parts and components for maintenance of Russia origin arms and defence equipment.

Similarly, no commitment was given on early completion of fourth unit and commencement of works on units 5 and 6 of Kudankulam nuclear power project. Its two units are already connected to national power grid.

Expected discussion on much talked about Small Modular Reactor (SMR), a floating nuclear power plant did not take place. Two such plants are functional in Russia and China and five are in pipe line. This may be useful for remote areas and can cater to the needs of individual industries.

Departure At Odd Time

Soon after President's banquet, Putin departed from India in the same way as he had done on December 7, 2021. It was indicated that the next annual summit was to take place in Russia. Since both countries share a privileged strategic partnership for 25 years, annual dialogues will go on, though Russia may always have an upper hand. Putin, however, feels that Russia-India relations rest on deep historical foundations.

TO CONCLUDE

On the whole, the visit provided a reasonable boost to the bi-lateral ties. But non commitment of Russia on some issues, such as, more defence cooperation and more clarity on use of outer space, belied expectations

Chapter - 18

Venezuela: Is President's Abduction Justifiable?⁴³

From a non descript driver to a trade union leader and finally occupying the post of President in 2013, the life and times of tall and handsome Nicolas Maduro, aged 63, have been eventful, if not inspiring.

His career seems to have halted due to Operation Absolute Precise (OAP) crafted and executed by elite Delta commandos of U. S. early on January 3. Owing to long standing proximity to China, Russia and some others and nation's vast crude oil reserve (300 Billion barrels), Maduro was perhaps over confident vis a vis U. S. A. He ought to have been aware that such commandos had earlier captured Panama's Manuel Noriega in 1989 and Saddam Hussain in 2003.

As learnt, midnight strike had followed a major build up of U. S. Navy in waters off East Pacific Sea and Caribbean Sea against boats allegedly ferrying drugs. Latest helicopters hovering, Maduro was captured, rather dragged alongwith his Lawyer spouse. It was claimed that only forty casualties(?) took place. Kept in the custody of Drug administration of U. S. A., couple has been charged with narco terrorism and 'possession' of machine guns. Both have pleaded Not guilty. As next date of hearing is March 17, their inhuman torture looks certain and soon Maduro chapter will be closed.

Failed Dialogue

Sensing something fatal, Maduro had extended Olive branch to President Trump on January 2. Co-operation in combating drug trafficking and offering access for U. S. oil to oil fields of Venezuela was on the anvil. But based on 'adverse' inputs of his spies already in Caracas, Trump had made up his mind.

Transitional Government

Upon 'success' of midnight operation, steps for formation of a transitional government were taken in form of assumption of Presidency by the Vice

President, Daley Rodrigues. It could not be ascertained if same was in keeping with country's law. Since episode happened on the eve of new legislative year of nation, all sections of Venezuelan society were alert and have stood united against it.

Further, concerned Committee of U. S. Congress was required to approve overseas military action. It had to be done according to provisions of Article 2 of U. S. Constitution, opined Bill Clinton, former President. If a legal justification is desired, Trump is capable of over ruling / ignoring anything.

World Reaction

Widespread condemnation as in past was observed within and outside U. S. A. Russia called it an act of armed aggression, China while expressing grave concern, asked U. S. A. to release the couple immediately, Britain and Germany insisted on upholding International law. While Israel, Italy and Argentina have supported U. S. action, only Brazil considered it as grave affront to sovereignty of Venezuela. India, surprisingly neither has condemned the action nor invoked respect for International law and U. N. Charter.

UNSC Meeting

An emergency meeting held on January 5 strongly felt that U. S. action was not in accordance with International law and U. N. Charter. But Russia called upon Council to free Maduro.

Role and action of Maria Corina Machado, Nobel Peace Prize winner from Venezuela may have to be observed keenly as she has been critical of Maduro for a long time. But Trump who takes extra interest in such successions, feels she lacks support and respect. At the other extreme, U. S. President may be also interested in change in guard in Iran, at present going through widespread disturbances. He has also warned Cuba and Greenland about his hostile intentions.

TO SUM UP

Colonization, a norm of medieval times, must not be revived. Lust for oil and money may facilitate rule without reason or restraint. But there has to be respect for sovereignty of every nation, however, good or bad its leader was projected to be.

Chapter - 19

If Trump Invades Greenland, Will NATO & Others Respond?⁴⁴

Ever since Donald Trump, the extra dynamic U. S. President got lifted the President of Venezuela in a most daring and discourteous way on January 3, in the name of 'restoring democratic order', news about take over of Greenland by U.S.A. has begun making rounds.

Very soon he has ordered a halt of oil and funds to Cuba from Venezuela, urging latter to strike a deal with them. Cuba, dependent on Venezuelan oil in return of security cover to them and small supplies from Mexico, now faces blackouts and shortages. Incidentally, Cuban Government has confessed having lost 32 of its military personnel during U. S. operation to capture Nicolas Maduro.

Operation Greenland

Trump has said he would seek to acquire Greenland the "easy way", failing which, U. S. A. could pursue the "hard way". He went on to add " If we don't do it, Russia or China will take over. We are not going to have Russia or China as our neighbour". One can feel so much of contempt.

Tough Stand Of Denmark

But before Trump could dare to add another feather to his dubious cap by violation of U. N. Charter and International law, not only Mett Frederiksen, Danish Prime Minister has expressed resistance but NATO too has begun flexing its muscles.

According to an unconfirmed news, both E. U. and NATO have warned President Trump that seizing Greenland could lead to bases of U. S. A. in Europe being taken over which could seriously damage relations between U. S. A. and its allies. Trump may not be ready for such a situation.

We may know that Greenland, with a meagre population of 57,000, having precious oil, gold, rare earth metals & other mineral wealth and providing a short sea route, is an independent self governed territory under Denmark.

As U. S. presence in the region could be a security risk, Danish P. M. has made it clear that she would defend Greenland against any U. S. military attack. She has issued a historic warning that any such move on Greenland could trigger total collapse of NATO and post World War II security architecture.

Trump, on the other hand, has claimed that U. S. absolutely needs the 85% snow bound territory for their "national defence".

Denmark has cautioned that U. S. troops are under standing orders to shoot first and ask questions later, thus Trump was unnecessarily escalating tension in the region. In a latest move, Danish military has participated in a drill in Kangerlussuaq region.

Trump's latest plan received a lukewarm response from 26 of the 27 members of the E. U., except Hungary, their die hard supporter.

Major European countries later rallied behind Denmark clarifying that Greenland belongs to its people alone. 85% are reported to have opposed any annexation moves by U. S. A.

Views Of Italy

P. M. Giorgia Meloni of Italy, on the other hand, does not believe U. S. will make military move on Greenland. At the same time, she has urged NATO to have strong presence at Arctic to protect the two million square kms territory of self governed colony of Denmark.

Strong Feelings In Greenland

Meanwhile J. F. Neilsen, Prime Minister of Greenland has vehemently stated that their Island was not for sale. All the political parties of Greenland, a peace loving country away from international glare, have put up a united front against possible nefarious designs.

Joint Statement of NATO

The statement signed by President of France, Chancellor of Germany and Prime Ministers of U. K., Italy, Poland, Spain and Denmark is bold enough, as under:

*Arctic security was a key priority for Europe,

*We and many other allies have increased our presence, activities and investments to keep Arctic safe and deter adversaries,

*Security in the region must be achieved by upholding principles of U. N. Charter,

*U. S. A. is an essential partner in this endeavour through a defence agreement signed with Denmark in 1951,

*Kingdom of Denmark including Greenland is a part of NATO,

*Greenland belongs to its people. It is for them to decide on matters concerning Denmark and Greenland and it is not for sale, it is under jurisdiction of Denmark.

Stand Of China

Its Foreign Minister, Wang Yi has stated that U. S. arrogance must be brought to an end and colonial mindset has to be uprooted.

German Stand

F. W. Steinmeier, President of Germany after slamming foreign policy of U. S. A., has urged global leaders of Brazil and India Not to let world order disintegrate into a den of robbers. As things are escalating ahead of times in the region, two German ships have been despatched.

India and Germany should discuss this vital issue during the ongoing visit of Friedrich Merz, German Chancellor to New Delhi.

Stand Of U. K.

In a recent development, Keir Starmer, British P. M. has met Danish [P. M. to](#) reaffirm their stand on Greenland. Both are understood to have underscored the need to check Russian activity in the Arctic region. Britain has also begun

talks with NATO to counter threats from Russia and China in the Arctic Circle.

Russia To Watch

After seizure of a Russian oil tanker by U. S. Navy, a few days ago, a Russian II-76 military transport aircraft reportedly linked to Moscow defence circle has landed in Caracas, amidst Russia reasserting Venezuela, as a Sovereign nation. A strong statement from Russia should be in offing any day. However, how long they, China and Iran consider it feasible to use thick and dirty crude oil of Venezuela, that remains to be seen. Oil giants: Chevron, Exxon and Shell seem to be also slow.

TO CONCLUDE

Mett Frederiksen may be P. M. of a small country but due to her being longest serving head of Government (since June 2019) in the E. U., not only experience is on her side but she may be closely aware of nuances of leaders, especially a bragging Trump during his two tenures. As Trump has reiterated to use force to seize Greenland, she, together with Greenland P. M. can not be threatened by unacceptable and imperialistic plans of Trump.

Trump, for a change needs to concentrate on domestic sector if he manages to survive. On fronts of health, employment, erratic tariff, immigration, law & order, mid-term poll etc., Americans not only are suffering but same was highlighted during January 10 'No King Protest' in 26,000 rallies, involving 7 million people. There Is a need to contain such protests in U. S. A., Venezuela and Mexico.

Last but not the least, on personal front, as he continues to be in a hurry, leading to unstable behaviour, he looks to be a dictator. There was no need to withdraw U. S. A. from 66 international organisations.

Chapter 20

Disturbed Middle East: Tentacles Of War All Over⁴⁵

History repeats itself. It has been said and has been found true also. But when Uncle Sam in fresh & ferocious authoritarian ‘Avatar’ desires, history is repeated with an aim to change Geography. Less said about this obstinate incumbent of White House, is better.

Ever since U. S. A. assumed the imperialist role of U. K., several regimes have been targeted, a few have maintained distance, while others did not surrender but allowed their territory for U. S. air and naval bases. Eight Gulf nations have subjugated under this ‘coveted category’.

Those who do not toe the line, lose their leaders one after another, some are still losing. Some may be the likely targets. Who can predict?

Change of Modus Operandi

Earlier toppling games were happening in broad day light. Now killings and kidnappings happen at the dead of night or very early. Hijacking or kidnapping of Venezuelan President together with his spouse is one such gory example.

Hit & Run To Hang On

It’s not only hit & run, U. S. forces also stay back to pursue their long term vested interests. They get land allotted for the temporary bases which ultimately become permanent.

Even after massive setbacks leading to vacation of such bases in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan etc, U S. A. maintains over 19 Air and Naval bases in a number of Middle East countries. These have a gigantic number of 40,000 troops. They are, in addition, eying for a base in an island of Bangladesh.

Current War in Retrospect

If we look at 12 day June 2025 war between Israel and Iran, fresh war spearheaded by Israel with active backing of USA has continued on 18th day also. Tempo may have slowed down but there is no indication of stoppage. This time eight nations have been attacked after a gap of eight months but altogether twenty nations have been roped in, directly or indirectly.

Multi-pronged attacks by Israel against Iran, Lebanon and Hezbollah was expected but in the changed situation, Iran, while retaliating, has hit very aggressively in the first round. Middle East Islamic nations were taken aback.

Silence of Hamas and Houthis of Yemen, staunch backers and beneficiaries of Iran, so far, can not be understood. They may, however, open up, soon, in view of their known hatred both against Israel and U. S. A.

While confirming current U. S. links of eight nations, Iran may not have forgotten inroads made by Israel in having diplomatic ties with atleast two of them.

Major Loss in UAE

Even those countries of Middle East having historical, cordial and diplomatic ties with Iran have turned against it. Iran is, thus, left with only a handful of supporters, such as, Turkiye, Russia, China and possibly North Korea. Ukraine has lately agreed to supply missiles to Iran but on strict monetary terms. In the process, losses of U. S. may not be much but nations, such as, UAE have lost their unquestioned regional leadership, crucial air hub, business position and above all, image. This is apart from attacks and immobility of Dubai, Abu Dhabi and many other airports and attacks on iconic structures such as Burj Khalifa and many hotels. How U. A. E. met the expenses of over twenty thousand stranded foreigners is beyond imagination? Charity beyond a point is not advisable.

Saudi Arabia's biggest Ras Tanura oil refinery has been attacked, Doha and Kuwait have been also attacked many times.

U. S. Navy's Central command, its 5th fleet based in Bahrain, a U. S. site for Air Defence Assets in Saudi Arabia and another U. S. Air Base in Abu Dhabi may again face threats. Iran claimed on the second day that only their 'scrap' missiles and drones were used till then.

More Deadly Missiles Ready

Looking at the success of Iran thus far, one can imagine what was to happen when long range hypersonic and supersonic missiles & drones were to be used. Their range varies from 1300 kms to 1750 kms. It may or may not be true, but some of them may attack cities in U. S. A., admitted even by Trump in a talk.

A clip of long underground tunnel storing facility in Iran has been already released to social media to create psychological scare if not impact.

Loss Of Ayatollah S. A. Khomeini

Unfortunate assassination of Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khomeini on 1st March was no doubt a major success both for U. S. and Israel. On the contrary, it was a vital loss for Iranians who were used to his rule for 37 years, despite recent months of Civil disobedience. He was not only political head since 1989, he was also a temporal head like King of U. K. or King of Bhutan.

You do not kill such a high ranking person, however, bad or good he may be, in the holy month of Ramjan.

Iran has taken over a fortnight to name his son Ayatollah Mujtaba Khamenei as his successor.

Firm Commitment Seen in Trying Times

Even when succession was a slow affair and command structure both in Iranian Army and Air force was weakening, mature signs of resilience emerged leading to re-alignment of forces. Never duplication or clash of role of regular Iranian Army vis a vis more powerful IRGC was seen.

After a long time heads of Saudi Arabia and UAE have decided to talk. Further, lately, UAE and few other countries have made it clear that their territory will not be used for U. S. naval and air attacks against Iran. If it actually materialises, it will be major blow to the evil designs of President Trump.

Dubai and Abu Dhabi airports are not only vital links of Asia with Africa, Europe and America, these are also cosmopolitan business, tourism and hospitality hubs. Dubai, the biggest transit hub of the world with 1200 flights a day has been severely impacted upon getting used to sirens and alerts.

Presently, UAE is bearing all expenses of over twenty thousand stranded hotel occupants but it has to end someday.

Safe Stand of Europe

Though Turkiye has come out in open in favour of Iran, response of Egypt, many Muslim countries of Asia, Africa and Central Asia are awaited.

Though France has not opened cards so far, Germany, Spain and Italy at last, have expressed inability to take side of U.S.A., P. M. of U. K., however, learning from Iraqi experience, has stated that they do not intend to join the offensive “for now”, however, U. S. A. was being allowed to use British bases in the Middle East, but only for limited purposes.

Stand of Government of India

It is not understood why P. M. Modi visited Israel 40 hours ahead of start of war and took more than 36 hours to convene a meeting of Cabinet Committee on Security. India had to take a swift stand in the interest of 10 million Indians in the Gulf and thousands stranded in Universities, construction sites and hotels.

Adverse Effect On Supplies

Also India has to depend on supply of crude oil through Strait of Hormuz (SoH) upto 15% of its total requirement. Reports of closure/partial opening of SoH not only is impacting supply of crude oil but also of CNG & LNG during the current busy wedding and tourist season. Even if a vessel is permitted to pass, news of 13 attacks on ships between 1st and 1st March makes the situation tense.

A number of eateries, hotels, paying guest facilities and restaurants are being severely affected. Rates of Cylinders too have sky rocketed. Rumours about alleged shortages too add fat to fire. Not only Indians hoard but also join such a bandwagon through social media.

Diplomatic Initiatives

P. M. Modi has spoken to a few approachable Middle East heads including President, Iran already. I wish he also speaks to ‘friend’ B. Netanyahu to apply the much needed break to mayhem.

India has condemned attacks by Iran on several Middle East countries and has called for de-escalation, regional peace, security and stability. No condolence message, however, was issued after the demise of Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei. Nothing has been said also about joint attacks of Israel and U. S. A. nor shelter given by a few nations. India, perhaps, has no option but to play safe.

Oil & Air Link Most Vital

Coming to oil requirement, giving up claim on Russian supply under personal pressure of Trump, not of U. S. Government, India should not have distanced itself from old faithful Russia. Now that supply through SoH is being impacted and there being no guarantee of oil from Venezuela, price of POL in the country is bound to rise. International price of oil per Barrel has already gone up beyond USD 118. More shortages of POL, LPG and LNG may emerge. All this may have cascading effects on key sectors of domestic economy. Many eateries, hotels, road side joints and hostels have already been shut and weddings are being severely impacted “in the Season”. Rumour mongers are at the peak of their profession

TO SUM UP

As per utterances of Trump, current war may go on for four more weeks (?) as U. S. plans to destroy Iran’s missile and nuclear programme. “We can’t leave early as we got to finish the job”, ‘Godfatherly’ Trump has declared.

While over 1200 Iranians have died thus far, including 165 innocent school children, over 600 have been killed in South and East Lebanon. Casualties on the side of U. S. A. and Israel can not be found out.

Tehran, Dubai and Beirut coming under rapid fire of Israel has also led to pushing out more than eight lakh persons out of their homes.

How are we supposed to carry forward international trade and flights to various destinations under such trying conditions?

It may not be a Third World War, per se, but something close to it is already taking place. If Russia and China also join, picture may be more grim. Iran is going great guns even under a relatively weak leader but Netanyahu, despite his adverse health indicators, looks to be a beneficiary so far. SoH continues

to be closed/ partially open. However, bombing of oil infrastructure at Kharg island by U. S. A. is going to be a major blow to power and hegemony of Iran.

The unthinkable war has continued even after five and a half months and upon so called signing of MOUs by USA and Iran. As expected, Israel refuses to toe the line. Devastation in Lebanon continues, having ramification on Gaza. So is the plight of economies of many countries due to stalemate over Strait of Hormuz. Silence on part of India is not desirable both from human and financial angles. Loss of Seafarers pinches everyday.

Part “D”
THREATS: FUNDAMENTALISM
& TERRORISM

Chapter - 1

Concept & Meaning With Reference to Middle East⁴⁶

TERROR & TERRORISM

As we may be aware, the word 'terror' has been derived from a Latin word 'terrere', which means to tremble or to frighten from. In other words, it implies intense fear caused to coerce or subduing. For a long time, it has become an act of organised violence for causing chaos and disorder to achieve certain goals, which in normal course, cannot be achieved by a legal and constitutional framework. It is certainly an act of intimidation, a deliberate design to spread terror by using an armed or guerilla or any abnormal force.

In *Kartar Singh vs State of Punjab*, the Supreme Court has considered terrorism as a new crime, far serious in nature, more graver in impact and highly dangerous in consequence. To Apex Court, terrorism may be political in nature, coupled with unjustified use of force, threatening security and integrity of the State.

The TADA (Prevention) Act, 1987 defines a terrorist in a more elaborate way. It says “ whosoever with intent to overawe the Government or to strike terror among the people, does any act by use of bombs, explosives, fire arms or other lethal weapons to cause injuries or death or disruption of supplies or detains and threatens to kill, COMMITS A TERRORIST ACT.

On the other hand, the U. S. A. Department of Defence has defined terrorism as the unlawful use of forces or violence against individuals or property, to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, often to achieve political, religious or ideological objectives.

Terror is spread by State agencies, such as, I. S. I. of Pakistan or Mossad of Israel as also by Non State agencies like Hamas, Hezbollah, and Houthis. However, those motivated by considerations of pure personal aggrandisement are excluded from the purview of terrorism. It may, therefore, exclude common offences like robbery and dacoity. But similar offences committed

by ideologically motivated groups, such as, Naxalites may come under its purview.

Terrorism also has to be distinguished from acts of insurgency in many parts of India. While an Insurgent may enjoy the support of a large section of community a Terrorist need not enjoy such a support or base. An Insurgent is a national of a country, a Terrorist may or may not be.

STATE TERRORISM

It is practised by State against another State. Through State sponsored terrorism, such as, by ISI and Mossad, it has been aimed to facilitate one's foreign policy and put pressure by means of violence not by conventional warfare but a sort of surrogate warfare. While such a low intensity proxy war goes on, economic, cultural and diplomatic relations generally continue between "enemy" states.

FUNDAMENTALISM & COMMUNALISM

According to a definition available on Net, Fundamentalism focuses on strict adherence to main religious texts which aim to 'purify' one's own faith. It often opposes modernity and internal deviation.

On the other hand, Communalism uses religious identity for political ends by encouraging hostility and conflict between different religious groups for power. Often a Communal leader takes recourse to violence and group solidarity against others. A fundamentalist targets internal purity while a Communal person targets external groups.

Due to political inclination, latter aims to unite a community for political, economic or social power. It may lead to hostility and violence also between groups.

Often communalism can inspire fundamentalism. A Communal minded person gains political power by encouraging divisions based on religion and securing dominance of one group over others.

Fundamentalists often resist modernity and secularisation. They work for complete integration of religion into public life. To them, religion should guide all aspects of life including governance. Thus their aim is to establish a Theocratic state, such as, Iran.

USE AND MISUSE OF TERRORISM

Terrorism is also practised by a state against another state. It may denote violence or repression employed by a government in its own interest and same is seen all over the world.

Unfortunately, in post second World War period, it has become a decisive weapon in international politics, more so, in the Middle East. State sponsored terrorism is geared to facilitate one's foreign policy and put pressure on sponsor's opponents by means of violence, which may not be conventional warfare but a sort of SURROGATE WARFARE or low intensity proxy war, having use of Drones and Missiles rather than fighter planes, artillery or infantry.

Many studies have shown that such activities are resorted to with the tacit support and connivance of super powers. These are likely to continue as long as man is alive. It is also seen that during the course of a low intensity proxy war, concerned states do maintain some economic and diplomatic relations.

HAPPENINGS AT PRESENT

At times when 'A' gathers full knowledge of reaction capability of 'B', latter is cajoled to have one to one talks or by involving mediators instead of confrontation. Current examples could be talks between Israel and Hamas, Russia and Ukraine and U. S. and Iran. Prior to show of naked, destructive power, often foul or unparliamentary language is also used.

CREATION OF ISRAEL & P. L. O.

Ever since Israel was created and Palestine Liberation Organisation came into being, two of them have been at loggerheads. Rather, frequent developments indicate that they are staunch enemies. While PLO have garnered support of many Arab countries, Israel has been fighting for its existence with the support of funds, arms & ammunition and moral support from USA.

Some terrorist outfits/ group's in Middle East have played a pivotal role in espousing their respective objectives. As a result, the main issue is always kept alive. The PLO supporting terrorist groups too have their gains and losses but in the ultimate analysis, it is the common man from Israel and Palestine who suffers. He is at receiving end.

Therefore, prior to looking at emerging developments in the region, it may be desirable to throw some light on three prominent terrorist or militant organisations, namely, Black September, Hamas and Hezbollah and an intelligence agency- Mossad.

BLACK SEPTEMBER (BSO)

BSO was most dreaded terrorist organisation of its time. Founded in 1970, it was a breakway faction of Fatah, the Palestinian political party, co-founded and led by Yasser Arafat from 1959 to 2004. Their ideology was Palestinian nationalism and anti- Zionism. Soon Fatah began operating from many Arabian countries to attack Israeli targets.

It was founded after the conflict to carry out attacks against Jordanian authorities in response to the expulsion of Fidayeen. King Hussain of Jordan had no option but to declare military rule. BSO thereafter, moved its base to Lebanon in early seventies.

Besides many terrorist acts, BSO was responsible for assassination of Wasfi Tal, P. M. of Jordan in 1971 as he had commanded military operations against the Fidayeen. They also carried out massacre of 11 Israeli athletes and officials at 1972 Munich Olympics.

These developments led to creation of permanent anti- terrorism forces in many European countries.

HAMAS

HAMAS is a Palestinian nationalist Sunni Islamist political Organisation having a military wing. It has governed Israel occupied Gaza strip since 2007. Committed to armed resistance against Israel, it has been engaged in many rounds of violent conflicts with Israel. Most recent one took place on 7th October, 2023, when it launched a massive surprise attack against Israel, killing 1200 people.

HAMAS “Government”

was led by Ismail Haniyeh from 2007 until February 2017 when Haniyeh was replaced by Yahya Sinwar. It may be noted that he was arrested by Israel in late eighties to be sentenced to four life terms. Although he had Brain Cancer,

he managed to survive. When 1000 Palestinian prisoners were released in 2011 by orders of Israeli P. M. B. Netanyahu, he too was released.

He was 'Face of Evil' according to Israel, as he was chief architect of Hamas's cross border raids on 7th October, 2023. Killing of Y. Sinwar on 17th October in Gaza strip has given a significant blow to Hamas. As long as Sinwar was alive, he would refuse to negotiate. As he was the most wanted man for Israel, he had succeeded in evading Israeli efforts to kill him. For long he was a big target for USA also. No wonder, U. S. has opined that killing him was most pivotal event in one year long conflict. Following this, U. S. has urged Israel to have Cease fire in Gaza. They have also advised against attacking Iran.

Hamas has historically sought out relations with Egypt, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey. These countries have been supporting Hamas. Pakistan, being a staunch supporter of Palestine, does not recognise Israel. Incidentally, Russia has never named Hamas as a terrorist group.

Hamas continues to demand a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, an end to hostilities, transfer of humanitarian aid and reconstruction of war torn territory. These have been rejected by Israel insisting that HAMAS MUST SURRENDER.

HEZBOLLAH

Literal meaning of Hezbollah is 'Party of God'. It was set up in 1982 in South Lebanon. Hassan Nasrallah (assassinated recently) was one of its four founders. Within a few days of assassinating Nasrallah, Israelis managed to kill his successor also.

Hezbollah is a Lebanese Shia Islamist political party and para military group. Its para military wing is known as Jihad Council. While political wing is known as Loyalty to Resistance Bloc Party.

Objectives of Hezbollah are: Destroying Israel, Expelling Western influence from the region, Pledging allegiance to Supreme leader of Iran and Establishing an Islamic government influenced by Iran's political ideology.

The Organisation receives funds mostly from Iran and Syria to take care of rockets, light infantry and anti-armour units. In view of the fact that it has 20,000 fighters and upto 120,000 rockets, its armed strength was assessed to be equivalent to that of a medium sized army in 2016. If we look at its present

level of involvement against Israel, it should be in possession of hundreds of Drones including explosive Drones and precision guided missiles.

USA has designated it as a foreign terrorist Organisation since 1997.

MOSSAD

Established in December, 1949, it is the secret service agency of Israel. It is the second largest espionage agency in the world after CIA of USA. It is supposed to be the best intelligence service, having proved its mettle in four Arab-Israel wars of 1956, 1967, 1973 and 1982. They carry out undercover operations against enemies of Israel and former Nazi war criminals.

Its operations have included some of the most daring one's. Its ability to conduct complex operations on foreign soil has made it one of the most feared and ruthless intelligence organisations. It is also linked with many assassinations of Palestine leaders in Europe, Middle East and Africa. They could capture Adolf Eichmann, former Nazi in Argentina and took him to Israel to stand trial.

Mossad agents tracked down and killed the Arab guerilla leaders responsible for massacre of 11 Israeli athletes and officials at the Munich Olympics.

Further, in another daring act more than 100 Israeli passengers of an Air France plane which was hijacked and taken to Entebbe(Uganda) were rescued from Palestinian and German terrorists. All seven terrorists were killed alongwith one Israeli soldier and three hostages. Whole operation was brilliantly planned and perfectly executed.

EMERGING SITUATION

Israel due to its vulnerable location had to face threats from all four sides ever since it was created in 1948. It could settle issues with Egypt after series of wars but PLO, Jordan, Lebanon and lately Iran continue to pose challenges. Further, Syria, Iraq and Yemen too could become adversaries.

PEEP INTO HISTORY

In 1988, Yasser Arafat, the first President of Palestine state recognised Israel's right to exist. By 1992-93, he also decided to opt for negotiation rather than open conflict with Israel. Series of talks took place to end long conflict between the two. Due to his efforts and that of two Prime Ministers of Israel,

Y. Rabin and Shimon Peres, all three were jointly given Nobel Peace Prize for 1994.

It is felt that initiative like this needs to be taken again on top priority. Appointment of an experienced negotiator will have to be explored.

BURNING ISSUES

With assassination of Hassan Nasrallah and Yahya Sinwar, Israel seems to have given a big blow to two organisations they headed. As they had political vision, they could bolster the terror agenda. It may be necessary to redress the grievances of Palestinians who have lost 42,000 of their brethren. Further, ongoing clashes have destroyed large areas of Gaza and displaced 90% of its population of 2.3 millions. Lebanon has also estimated that more than 2,400 people were killed in one year and more than 1.2 million people have been displaced. Fate of hundreds of Israeli hostages (men, women, elderly and children) in Gaza also will have to be decided.

Global community must also prevail over Israel to stop its operations. U. N. O. has done nothing to diffuse the situation. Instead they are more concerned about demolition of observation tower and fence of their Peace Keeping Force in South Lebanon.

STAND OF U. S. A, U. K. & INDIA

USA has called upon Israel to go for cease fire. U. S. President has expressed the view that death of Y. Sinwar was a moment of justice and an opportunity to seek a path to peace. USA has also warned Israel that failure to end the blockade could trigger a reduction in arms delivery to Israel. Further, Israel has been asked not to strike Iranian energy facilities and nuclear sites.

In addition, Keir Starmer, British P.M., after consulting the German Chancellor and the French President has stated "we can move towards a long term and sustainable peace in the Middle East".

As far as India is concerned, no appeal has been made so far to end the hostility. However, many M.P.'s who took part in a Standing Committee meeting on 25th October, have asked why India has abstained 20 times from a U. N. vote on Gaza and why humanitarian crisis in conflict (6000 women and 11,000 children dead in one year) was not condemned?

Despite such views and positive expressions, neither Israel nor Hamas have shown willingness to put an end to fighting.

Israeli P. M. has reiterated "our war has not yet ended". Hamas too has also made it clear that Israeli hostages will not be released until there is a cease fire in Gaza and withdrawal of Israeli troops.

One can conclude by saying that further conflict and its intensification can have horrifying consequences for the humanity. It is hoped that peace and amity must return to the region.

Chapter - 2

Dreaded Islamic Terrorism⁴⁷

Terrorism is a tendency or bad habit to use violent means against non combatants to achieve certain political or ideological objectives or goals. It is achieved by intentional violence. These are outright fundamentalist, criminal and anti social acts. Such terrorists, over the years, have developed an extensive presence thanks to all pervasive Internet. Insular nature of modern day terrorists disrupt things and targets prior to an attack.

Ever since 9/11 attacks in New York, attack on Indian Parliament in 2000 and 26/11 attack on Mumbai city have happened, Islamic Terrorism has become a pressing global challenge, infecting almost every nook and corner of the world. At the same time, war on terror has accelerated number of individuals seeking asylum, contraction in economy, adverse impact on agriculture and industry, ultimately leading to Food Insecurity.

9/11 DEVASTATING TERROR ATTACK

Till occurrence of 9/11 unthinkable attack on Twin towers in New York which killed almost a thousand people, United States would not believe or get convinced about danger and manifestation of Islamic terror. With their level of security, they could not believe that such a catastrophe could be caused by human bombers coming by two High speed planes.

Their Head of Homeland Security openly confessed before the undersigned during an official interaction in Washington in October 2012 that for them, their own security got precedence over such threat or security in other countries. No wonder, U. S. A.. became more vigilant and cautious, subsequently.

In A Nutshell, Global Islamic Terrorism, now is posing as an unprecedented global threat. It has picked up sufficient momentum.

PAKISTAN, A PROMINENT PERPETRATOR

As Pakistan has not reconciled itself to living or co-existing with India as a peaceful neighbour, it keeps posing challenges to India's internal security set up. State sponsored terrorism has become its bread and butter. Recent developments, therefore, need to be analysed in an in depth manner.

But for creation of Bangladesh in 1971 and demolition of disputed structure at Ayodhya in December 1992, the internal security scenario of India would have been different, rather away from current kind of irritating challenges.

Our unfriendly neighbour Pakistan does not believe in following or practicing peace. Terrorism had been a vital component of its state craft right since inception. Same gets bolstered day by day, irrespective of the political party that rules over Islamabad or the General or Field Marshall who heads Pak Army.

Battle hungry 'dedicated' individuals survive, thrive and fight from one front to another, one country to another. Open support to the terror perpetrators and issuing of provocative statements continue, unabated.

I. S. I. & ITS MODUS OPERANDI

Inter Services Intelligence set up in 1948, goes beyond its defined role of intelligence collection. It is to Pakistan what CIA is to U. S. and is supposed to be a Government within Government. It has so much of clout in Pakistan that it is considered above law of land. Every Government, be it military or civilian, has to depend upon it for its day to day running or even its sustenance. Present Chief of Pak Army, Asim Munir was its Head till few months ago.

Having a big strength of twenty five thousand, it is a well trained and structured body.

SALIENT FEATURES OF PAK I. S. I. India Policy Are: To sustain Kashmir movement at a minimal cost, To weaken India's potential strength and national will by hitting at perceived 'fault lines', To Prevent India from emerging as a dominant power in South Asia And To render Indian borders porous and border states, vulnerable.

Based on these Parameters, I. S. I. has adopted different Modus Operandi These are Code named K-1, K-2 and K-3, all carefully fabricated are aimed at “ Bleeding” Punjab, J & K, and North East.

LINK & GUIDANCE FROM OTHERS

Menace of Islamic Terrorism has been an ever growing negative phenomenon. It was given focused guidance and support from dreaded organisations like Black September and its off shoots, Hamas, Houthis Hezbollah etc. With ‘ entry’ of Al Qaeda and I. S. I. S., pan world Co-operation has been possible. We know how such elements have captured power thrice in Afghanistan and Syria and how nefarious activities of I. S. I. have been also perpetrated.

All the followers of Islamic terrorism, upon deep indoctrination and rigorous training do not mind getting killed in the name of Allah or they are ready to commit suicide on the battle field. They are also seen opting for becoming Suicide Bomber. This includes six to seven Baloch women. This not very old tendency, keeps happening at short intervals. In Urdu, such dare devil persons are called ‘Fidayeens’. They desert their homes rather early to die for a cause put deeper into their brains. Highly educated individuals like Osama Bin Laden remained away from their worldly responsibility even after leaving “active service’. So was the case with head of I. S. I. S. Both were killed mercilessly by the sleuth of U. S. A. As they were living alone, their end came swiftly.

Hafiz Sayeed & Masud Azhar

Most recent cases are that of H. Sayeed, head of LeT and Masud Azhar, head of JeM. Latter lost ten family members and four of his close confidants, very recently. All were given State Funerals by the Pak Army. Not to be surprised, both the dreaded terrorists together with long absconding Dawood Ibrahim have full protection of I. S. I.

The painful saga of Islamic Terror goes on and on due to “hard work & determination” of such “highly trained & committed individuals”. They, invariably get shelter in specially built and safe sanctuaries in many countries.

Pakistan, one of the early dedicated forces, is not only bearing the brunt for over 30 years bur same has been admitted openly by their heads starting from General Pervez Musharraf. Having sown the seeds of hatred in the name of

Islam in many countries, Pakistan is now facing decisive music from the Baloch fighters on the one hand and Afghan Army and Fidayeens on the other. Iranians too are troubling them off and on the Balochistan border. China too has begun fishing in troubled waters of Balochistan.

Will Islamic Terrorism Slow Down Ever ? Only Time Will Tell.

Chapter - 3

Extradition: Concept & Significant Cases⁴⁸

Extradition refers to a process by which a person accused or convicted of a crime in one country but who is currently based in another country, is delivered to that country's law enforcement agency. An Extradition treaty is necessary for delivering an accused or convict to another country. In absence of a bi-lateral treaty, a multilateral convention can be used if both requesting and requested country are parties to it.

Provisional Arrest

A provisional arrest is also possible if there is a treaty between two countries. In absence of that, the foreign country can decide to arrest the person, based on its own domestic laws.

Extradition can be considered for extraditable offences regardless of place, the crime was committed. It is not granted in case of political offences. Such requests have to be submitted through diplomatic channels and must have all supporting documents.

Deportation vis a vis Extradition

Deportation is an easy and less time consuming process but extradition is a long and tedious process which involves court proceedings and appeals. Deportation is generally used to describe the process of expelling a foreigner who is no longer welcome in a country. A foreigner may be deported for entering a country illegally or committing serious crimes or for breaking conditions of visa. Generally speaking, both deportation and extradition refer to processes by which a non- citizen may be removed from that country.

19th G-20 Summit

Recently concluded 19th G-20 summit at Rio de Janeiro provided a good opportunity to the Indian P. M. to discuss some cases of extradition on the side lines. He had used the sidelines of G-7 and BRICS also to raise issues of prime concern and in a way, succeeded in taking some assurance from his

counterparts. During his talk with Keir Starmer, the British P. M., Sri Modi reiterated the need for U. K. to expedite extradition of fugitives Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi, citing their significant financial crimes against India. He also emphasized the importance of resolving issues related to economic offenders.

Case of Vijay Mallya

Vijay Mallya, an Indian fugitive and former businessman is an accused in a bank loan default case of over Rs. 9,000 Crores involving his defunct Kingfisher Airlines. Living in U. K. since 2016, he is subject of an extradition effort by Government of India to return him to face charges of financial crimes in India.

Nirav Modi

Nirav Modi, also accused of a Rs. 13,000 Crore fraud in Punjab National Bank scam, has been in a London jail for five years, having lost his extradition appeal earlier. Under Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT), U. K. and India are legally bound to share information on criminal investigations. Looks U. K. is avoiding sharing it in the case of Nirav Modi. In the same way, U. K. has taken a stand that it can't extradite Vijay Mallya, until and unless a 'confidential legal issue' concerning him is resolved. Same was 'judicial' in nature according to them. Many times it has been reported that Mallya 's extradition was going to materialise but for some unknown reasons it gets 'postponed'.

Consultation With France

The issue was earlier discussed with France in Joint Working Group meeting of two countries on Counter terrorism held on April 15. As Vijay Mallya has properties in France, matter of his extradition came up for discussion. France has been requested to approve his extradition without preconditions. Matter of extradition of Mallya was also raised before Home Secretary of [U. K. by](#) the Foreign Secretary of India in November.

Mehul Choksi

Similar to the case of Nirav Modi is the case of Mehul Choksi, owner of Gitanjali Group who has fled to U. K. Being involved in financial and

economic frauds, he is accused of money laundering, criminal conspiracy, corruption and criminal breach of trust.

Extradition Treaties Signed By India

It may be noted that India has signed Extradition treaties with 48 countries including USA, U. K. and Canada. But no such treaty has been signed as yet with Afghanistan, China, Maldives, Myanmar and Pakistan. Despite such treaty with USA, 61 extradition requests from India are pending. It has been learnt that only 11 Indians have been extradited from USA between 2002 and 2018. However, 23 persons have been extradited from UAE.

Cases of T. H. Rana, Nikhil Gupta & Sanjiv Chawla

A Very important case of Tahawwur Hussain Rana, an accused in 26/11 case of Mumbai is pending in USA. There have been success stories as well. One Nikhil Gupta was extradited from Czech Republic in June 2023. Sanjiv Chawla, an accused in match fixing racket was extradited from U. K.

Case of Abu Salem

Abu Salem, belonging to Azamgarh and a close associate of Dawood Ibrahim (Bombay Blast Case of 1993) was extradited from Portugal to India to face charges in nine criminal cases. He was detained in Portugal alongwith his girl friend, Monica Bedi for having entered that country without any document. He has completed 23 years and eight months in prison thus far. He has applied for release but same cannot be considered in view of ruling of Supreme Court that he can be released only on completion of 25 years in prison.

Bablu Srivastava

Bablu Srivastava alias Om Prakash Srivastava, infamous U.P. gangster of yesteryears and once an associate of Dawood Ibrahim was arrested by CBI and extradited from Singapore on 21st April 1995. He was brought to stand trial in over 60 cases of murder and kidnapping. As he has completed more than 25 years in Bareilly Central jail, he has submitted applications for release before Allahabad High Court and Government of U. P.

Ravi Pujari

In the same way, Mumbai gangster, Ravi Pujari was extradited from Dakar, Senegal on 19th January, 2019. He was also alleged associate of Dawood Ibrahim. An accused in about 30 cases of murder and kidnapping, he was staying in West African countries, posing as Anthony Fernandes. Cases filed against him under Maharashtra C. O. C. Act and Interpol Red Corner notices facilitated his arrest and extradition from Senegal.

Extradition of Terrorists From Canada

Talking of Canada, Khalistani elements have secured a safe haven for many years. It is difficult to get an extradition request accepted even when an Extradition Treaty was signed between two countries, long ago. At present when the murder case of K. T. F. Chief, H. S. Nijjar in Canada is being discussed, India is rightly seeking extradition of Arshdeep Singh Gill alias Dalla, a gangster from Canada but same has not been honoured so far. A close associate of H. S. Nijjar and a fund raiser with Nijjar, he has been declared a terrorist by India for being accused of targeted killings, terror financing and extortion in Punjab.

He was arrested by Canadian Police in Ontario on 28th October alongwith arms and hi tech rifles supplied by I. S. I. A Red Corner Notice was also issued against him. He is likely to divulge good deal of information. According to a retired DGP of U. P., if Dalla is extradited, the minority Government of Justin Trudeau will be exposed.

In all, as per Spokesman of MEA, India has requested for extradition of 26 terrorists from Canada but latter is sleeping over the matter. Even under MLAT, Canada is bound to share proceedings against persons named but Canada remains tight lipped.

In addition, four accused -Karan Barar, Amandeep Singh, Kamalprit Singh and Karanprit Singh were arrested for their suspected involvement in murder of Nijjar. For reasons best known to Canada, hearing of case has been postponed five times and next hearing is slated to take place only on 11th February, 2025. Due to evasive tactics adopted by Canada, this case may further spoil relations between two countries.

Case of Dawood Ibrahim, the Global Terrorist

A drug lord, terrorist, murder planner, extortionist, trader of counterfeit currency and a kingpin of Hawala racket, Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar (DIK) used to head D-Company, a criminal gang of five thousand members in erstwhile Bombay. He fled to Dubai in 1986. Apart from his involvement in a variety of crimes, he was one of the master minds of 1993 serial blasts in Mumbai. He is also reported to have provided logistics for 2008 Mumbai attacks known as 26/11 case. His narcotics trade has spread from South Asia to Middle East to Africa to U. K. and West Europe. He also used to have ties with Vicky Goswami, drug king of South America.

Not satisfied with normal crimes, he began pushing counterfeit currency into India and also took control of Hawala racket and influenced Hindi films. In 2003 India and USA declared DIK a Global Terrorist. Further, In 2006, India gave a list of 38 Most Wanted Criminals to Pakistan, enjoying sanctuary therein. DIK too figured. Wanted both by India and USA since 1993, he has a reward of 25 million Dollars on his head.

Several attempts have been made by R&AW and I. B. to serve Red Corner Notice through INTERPOL on him at his 9 residences in Karachi but Govt. of Pakistan flatly denies his presence every time. However, Chotta Rajan, his former Lieutenant, who fell out in 1992, has confirmed base of DIK in Karachi.

In sum and substance, this case is unique and no deportation or extradition mechanism can work. Even the likes of Osama Bin Laden were finished but DIK through his clout, cunningness or charisma continues to survive for 38 years.

Case of Sheikh Hasina

Generally a person is not extradited on political considerations and offences. But in the aftermath of disturbances in Bangladesh, its Chief Advisor has hinted at requesting India to extradite Sheikh Hasina, former P. M. Now Bangladesh is talking of making a direct request to India but earlier, as reported in media, they were to request Interpol to issue a Red Corner Notice against her.

According to indications, Bangladesh is likely to raise this issue during Foreign office consultations of two countries in Dhaka in December. Hasina

is facing a trial in International Crime Tribunal of Bangladesh for her alleged involvement in mass killings during student led uprising. In view of the fact that India has an Extradition Treaty with Bangladesh, it may be difficult for India to reject the formal request of Government of Bangladesh.

TO SUM UP

Extradition is different from deportation. More and more Extradition treaties ideally should reduce extradition cases. But same is not happening. MLAT and Red Corner Notices are proving ineffective. Talks on margin of international conferences between Heads of States look positive but they have to depend on same bureaucracy for delivery. Both U. K. and Canada remain tight lipped about their processes.

Cases of several Indians in U. K. relate to economic offences but delay caused sends wrong signals. It takes years to sign a treaty but success stories are very few. Extradition of Sikh terrorists from Canada has to be expedited to avoid resurgence of Sikh militancy. Dawood Ibrahim continues to be on the run despite being declared a Global Terrorist. The case of extradition of Sheikh Hasina may need utmost care and attention in view of wellbeing of left over Hindus in Bangladesh.

Chapter - 4

State Terror Or Organisational Fundamentalism: Enforcing Truce Not Easy⁴⁹

A Ceasefire or a truce or armistice is stoppage of a war in which each side agrees with the other to suspend aggressive or provoking actions. It can be declared unilaterally or negotiated between parties to a conflict. A third party mediation can also happen. A Ceasefire to end 14 months of conflict between Israel and Hezbollah on the one hand and between Israel and Hamas on the other, was being talked about for a long time. A senior Hamas Political Bureau Member, Bassem Naim had indicated on 15th November, willingness of Hamas for a Ceasefire in Gaza. Therefore, President elect Trump of USA was urged to pressurise Israel to end war. It came a week after Qatar announced that it was suspending its role as a mediator and urged concerned parties to show seriousness. Later a spokesman of Qatar indicated that it was ready to resume their efforts when the parties concerned show willingness.

A ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah has at last happened from dawn of 27th November. Hezbollah, an outright fundamentalist organisation has been given 60 days to end its armed presence in South Lebanon while Israeli forces have to withdraw from the area during this period. It is a 13 point Agreement stating that Lebanon Government will prevent Hezbollah and other armed groups in Lebanon from carrying out any operation against Israel. Israel too will not carry out any offensive military operation against Lebanese targets, including civilian, military or other state targets in Lebanon.

UNSC RESOLUTION 1701

Basis of Ceasefire is full implementation of U. N. S. C. Resolution 1701 which led to end of last war in the region in 2006. The resolution requires Hezbollah to remove its fighters and weapons from the area between Blue Line(unofficial border between Lebanon and Israel) and Litani river, about 30 kms to the South.

HEZBOLLAH INCLUDED, HAMAS LEFT OUT

As U. S. President Joe Biden had to do something substantial in the Middle East before completing his term, he approved a deal for cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah in consultation with France. However, there was no guarantee that it was to hasten a deal in Gaza with Hamas. U. S. was to launch a renewed drive for Cease fire in Gaza alongwith a hostage release deal. Nayeem Kasim, new Hezbollah Chief incidentally has termed cease fire as a victory for their brand of fundamentalism.

INTEREST OF ISRAEL

According to Benjamin Netanyahu, P. M. of Israel, there were three main reasons behind the deal:

To focus on Iranian threat, Israel's Army needed rest and Replenishment of stocks. Finally idea was to separate the fronts.

Before it happened, Israel went for a midnight strike on Deir-el-Balah city in Gaza strip in which innocent people lost defenceless children. Another strike killed 49 persons in Lebanon and 19 in Gaza. In retaliation, Hezbollah fired over 250 rockets into Israel, wounding 7 persons.

After Israeli cabinet approved Ceasefire, it continued air strikes in Beirut and other parts of Lebanon, killing 7 and injuring 37 persons.

In fourteen months, 3961 persons were killed in Lebanon and 1.2 millions were displaced. Tens of thousands of Israelis too fled from their homes along the border. Even after cease fire began, Israel continued to pound Gaza on 27th November.

REACTION OF HAMAS

Hamas was ready for a Ceasefire and a deal to exchange prisoners. They informed their mediators in Egypt, Qatar and Turkey also. At this moment B. Netanyahu pointed out "When Hezbollah is out of picture, Hamas will be left alone in the fight. Our pressure on them will intensify. Israel will also focus on the Iranian threat."

Meanwhile, in a fresh push for a Ceasefire in Gaza and a hostage deal, Hamas leaders have begun talks with Egyptian officers. Kuwait's Emir has also urged for immediate ceasefire for Gaza at a Gulf Meet.

REACTION OF DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

While Iran has welcomed Ceasefire, India while backing it, has called for dialogue, diplomacy and de-escalation. Egypt and Qatar have also welcomed the truce. Qatar, in addition, has hoped that it would lead to a similar agreement to end war in Gaza. E. U. President has felt that Ceasefire was very encouraging news. In the opinion of British P. M. it was long overdue and would provide some measure of relief to civilians in Lebanon and North Israel.

French President has opined that deal was culmination of efforts undertaken for months. France would spare no effort to support its implementation by working with U. N. I. F.

But statement of a U. S. officer may be significant as it hints at Hamas. It says "When they watch the news and realize that Hezbollah has decided to abandon them and delink the two conflicts, there is no one coming for their support anymore."

BREACH OF TRUCE?

Both Israel and Hezbollah have accused each other of truce violations. According to a Hezbollah leader, Israeli Army was attacking those returning to border villages. Israeli tanks had fired on five towns in South Lebanon and Drones were also doing surveillance over this area. 21 Palestinians were also killed in Gaza by Israeli strikes. In retaliation again Hezbollah attacks killed 45 civilians and 73 Israeli soldiers in North Israel.

According to Lebanon Army, Israel has breached the accord several times by aerial violations and targeting of Lebanon's territories with weapons. The Israeli Defence forces, however, have clarified that it attacked Hezbollah facilities in South Lebanon after identifying terrorist activities and separately opened fire on several suspects. Israel also killed 40 persons in Gaza strip. Many were in a refugee camp.

Monitoring Mechanism

Monitoring mechanism of Ceasefire is yet to begin, hence violations can not be ruled out. Deadly Israeli strikes on South Lebanon and Hezbollah on 2nd December have, therefore, hit at the very purpose of Ceasefire. Defending its action, Israel has stated that in the event of collapse of Ceasefire, it will not

differentiate between Lebanon and Hezbollah. Lebanon officials in the meanwhile, have requested U. S. and France to put pressure on Israel and to ensure compliance of Ceasefire amid state of tension. To save the situation, the French Foreign Minister has called upon both sides to adhere to Ceasefire.

HUMANITARIAN ISSUES

Israeli Army is capable of targeting even those providing meals to people affected by wars. One such organisation- WCK has become a life line for people in Gaza, who otherwise struggle to feed themselves. An Israeli airstrike on a car in Gaza strip on 30th November killed five persons including employees of WCK. Its aid delivery efforts in Gaza were suspended earlier this year after an Israeli strike had killed seven of its workers, most of them being foreigners. Further, UNRWA is finding difficulty in providing aid to Palestinian refugees through Karem Shalom crossing due to Israeli siege & hurdles.

In Gaza, ongoing war has sparked a humanitarian crisis resulting into displacement of much of territory's 2.3 million population and triggering widespread hunger. If the current trend continues, peace would remain a distant possibility for the Palestinians in Gaza strip and hundreds of Israeli hostages therein also may continue to suffer.

Concluding Observations

Developments indicate that violation of Ceasefire has been mostly by Israel. Minutes before agreement became effective, Israel bombed Beirut's suburbs 20 times in two minutes, killing 25 persons. Another 50 were killed and 160 were wounded in Lebanon on previous day.

Will U. S. and France have any Answer ?

Why only 60 days? Cease fire should have been forever in tune with Joe Biden's statement that it was designed to be a permanent cessation of hostilities.

It shows failure of U. N. O. once again as in the case of Russia-Ukraine war which is going on since 24th February, 2023. AND

Why Resolution 1701 of 2006 of UNSC be the basis? The Security Council should have debated this issue afresh and come out with a new resolution in view of complete change in the circumstances.

By delinking Hezbollah from Hamas, U. S. and Israel have come out with an infamous 'divide and rule' policy prevalent in British India. Emir of Kuwait has also hit out at such a "double standard".

When Joe Biden says Israel retains the right to self defence, basically Israel gets an upper hand in the deal. Further, if one believes the protesters in Israel, agreement is a complete surrender to Hezbollah.

Chapter - 5

Gaza & Middle East: Two Countries Vs. Fundamentalist Outfits⁵⁰

Without any bias it may be stated that at last there is a match, not mismatch in regularly disturbed Middle East in general and Gaza Strip in particular. To supplement the efforts of Hezbollah, Hamas and Houthis, Iran, with meticulous preparation and tremendous patience, waited for long to register the most devastating military strike against Israel. It happened even when U. S. forces from far off and 30 bases in the region were on high alert. Latest 510 million Dollars worth of ammunition offer to Israel, too did not make a dent. One may not forget that Iran has a defence treaty with Russia. In turn, China too has such a treaty with Russia. Having seen the efficacy of their missiles especially Fateh, Iran is likely to use 2000 more in days to come.

Rebuilding Efforts By Israel

Israel, apart from cautioning its civilians about intensity and speed of missile power of Iran, had resorted to regular suppression and sacrilege of Palestinians in Gaza Strip during current war with Iran. Israel had to pay a heavy price (\$12 Billions) on initiating attacks on Iran upon instigation, financial aid, intelligence and latest arms & ammunition from U. S. The blind follower of American imperialism forgot that U. S. had attacked seven countries of the region on 25 occasions in last 12 years, plan for which began in 2001 according to one top U. S. security expert. Not always there was victory. They had humiliating departures from Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. It is likely in Ukraine also.

Threat From Triple H. H. H.

Hamas, Hezbollah and Houthis of Yemen too have kept USA and Israel on tenterhooks. While last two non state fundamentalist actors have never been dormant, swift sacrilege of 1200 Israelis and act of taking 250 of their brethren as hostage by dreaded men of Hamas on October 7, 2023 proves the

point rather boldly against U.S-Israel combine. Of course it can not be defended from humanitarian angle.

Further, each inhuman offence against the Palestinians at Gaza Strip and West Bank before and after October, 2023 now draws world wide sympathy and support from Jews and followers of other religions alike, even inside Israel. One happened right opposite residence of P. M. Netanyahu. These continued shows of strength against the duo had no nemesis even after so called Cease fire between Israel and Iran.

It is being widely stated that Israel has got a fierce competitor in Iran after 77 years if 1948 war between Arab nations & Israel is to be taken into account. And it becomes 58 years as compared to 1967 war.

Past Wars Of Israel In Brief

*From 5th to 10th June, 1967, a war between Israel and coalition forces comprising Egypt, Syria and Jordan took place. Israel gained control of Sinai, old city of Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza Strip. When Jerusalem was under command of Jordan, Israelis were humiliated and expelled. After getting victory in 1967, Israelis could re unite their divided capital. Thus Jews could return to Western Wall, holiest to them for the first time.

*After a lapse of over six years on October 6 1973, again coalition of three countries attacked Israel in Sinai and Golan Heights to regain territories they had lost in previous war. But these were again won by Israel. Since 1973, it's all quiet on Egyptian and Syrian front vis a vis Israel.

Incidentally Egypt, alongwith Qatar, USA and UAE figures in a crucial committee to mediate between Israel and Hamas to resolve the dead lock on release of over 250 Israeli hostages by Hamas in October, 2023 and to ensure a decent life to Palestinians in Gaza Strip.

GAZA STRIP GOING FROM BAD TO WORSE

Gaza Strip was taken away from Egypt by Israel after 1967 war. Israel built settlements and placed Palestinians under military rule. Over the years, it has become an 'open prison'. Having an area of only 365 sq. kms, its residents are living in trying circumstances, facing severe lack of basic amenities and are permitted only to travel to West Bank. That too under very exceptional circumstances. Though 90% of dwelling units have been attacked or

demolished by Israel, 2. 1 million Palestinians are residing somehow and face abject poverty. Old and children alike can not avail of primary health facilities. 80% of youth are deprived of even elementary employment.

FOUR OBJECTIVES CONCERNING GAZA STRIP

Gaza Strip campaign of Israel has following four objectives: To Destroy Hamas, militant wing of PLO, To Free Israelis taken hostage on October 7, 2023, To Ensure that Gaza no longer poses a threat to them and To Return displaced residents of North Israel.

Thus far, five wars have been fought by Israel against Hamas. These were in 2008-09, 2012, 2014, 2021 and 2024. After Cease fire in last war, Hamas has been quiet but inhuman & shameless Israeli action continues. Palestine has been the focal point ever since Jews were settled by Britishers on 14th May, 1948. This territory occupied by Palestinians was purposely chosen as Jews of Europe and USA did not want forefathers of present day Israelis to settle either in Europe or USA.

A country called Palestine never existed prior to establishment of Israel. Though it was historically known as Palestine, it was administered by the British after being under various empires. When Britishers, abandoned the land, U. S. gradually filled up the vacuum through evil designs of Israel.

UNO proposed a partition plan in 1947 to divide the land into Arab and Jewish states. It could not be implemented owing to 1948 Arab-Israel war. Situation could not improve since then. Rather, with passing of each year, it goes on deteriorating. When Yasser Arafat was alive, voice of Palestinians was heard. Once in UNO they staked a claim to become 194th member. But a veto by USA not only tarnished their hope but unfortunate stand of U. S. A. was manifested. As on date, 22 countries including India (1988), have recognised PLO. Of 20 members of G-20, eleven figure in this category.

12 Day Israel-Iran War, Latest Turning Point

A full-fledged war began with Israeli missiles striking Iran nuclear facilities late at night on 12th June. Operation Rising Lion was launched by them in full swing. USA began shifting military resources in the region as Israel prepared for retaliation. While Israel vowed to intensify attacks, Iran called off nuclear deal talks with USA. It was learnt that closing of 3 kms wide Strait of Hormuz could be one of the vital options for Iran. Later, however, urged Trump to ask

Israel to halt war. Tehran also appealed to Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Oman to press Trump to exercise influence on Israel. Reports of USA shifting military jets, ships, vessels etc. in the region to protect Israel from further strikes appeared. Russia told USA not to strike Iran. Iran missiles hit Weizmann Institute of Science, causing damage to multiple laboratories. It was a major blow.

Act Of Houthis

Houthi rebels resumed attacks on U. S. vessels in Red Sea. It was unexpected. U. S. A. entered war by bombing nuclear sites of Iran by B2 Spirit bombers at Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan. On the 11th Day, Iran attacked U. S. base in Qatar in which 80 persons were killed. Though President of Iran hinted to negotiate, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei stated that Iran was not going to surrender.

Around 10 a.m. on 24 June, President Trump announced a unilateral Cease Fire. Both warring nations were surprised. A day after Trump announced C.F., Israeli Ambassador to India confessed that it was brokered in coordination with Israel.

Hasty Decision of Trump

Without consent of U. S. Congress, President Trump intervened in the middle of war. He also declared an unilateral Cease fire. Constitution of USA gives Congress, the sole power to declare war. But President Trump acted on his own. His cherished desire to go for more bombing of Iran has not been put to end. He wants to use further force. In contrast, U. S. law makers have sought details about country's strikes on Iran and fate of Iran's stockpiles of highly enriched Uranium. Ayatollah Khamenei has stated that his country had slapped USA by striking at their base at Qatar. In future too such attacks were not ruled out.

218 Gaza Palestinians Killed

Amid growing humanitarian crisis, 218 Palestinians were killed in three spells by Israel amid war. It was an audacious act. Aid trucks permitted into the territory after 3.5 months, began being stopped to tease starving Palestinians and essential food grains/ items/ supplies were thrown recklessly by Israeli soldiers on roads to cause more delay. Issue of Palestine Clan leaders and Hamas activists too entered the fray, which subsequently was

resolved. Ambassador of Palestine informed UNO that ever since Israel broke Cease Fire in March, 2025, over 1300 Palestinian children were killed and 4000 injured. Altogether a total of sixty thousand Palestinians have lost their lives in last two years, 1 lakh 20 thousand have been wounded and 90% of dwelling units have been lost or demolished.

As per UNICEF and report of other aid agencies, pathetic sight of children suffering from starvation and malnutrition can not be tolerated, nor the extremely inhuman scenes of mothers embracing the motionless bodies. U. N. Secretary General has also remarked that U. S. backed aid operation in Gaza was inherently unsafe. People were being killed while trying to feed themselves and their families.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

*12 day war has been Israel's biggest military defeat. Efforts are on to hide major damages, accordingly. Satellite imagery has been blocked and media asked to show damages only to residential areas. It may take a long time before damages to international airport, Defence H. Q. Mossad H. Q. and others are undone,

*Recognising China as world leader in ultrafast advanced broadband technology, Iran has shut down its GPS & begun using Chinese internet. BAIDU, Google of China too, to be used.

*Even when several Iranian trucks carrying essential aids, goods & medicines have reached Gaza Strip, crisis of Gaza Strip and West Asia is far from over. Uncalled for developments are not the handiwork of local or regional leaders, rather, these are caused by those sitting thousands of miles away.

*Its sad to note that India, despite having friendly ties both with Israel and Palestinians, did not make any statement nor appealed for cessation of hostilities. When Russia attacked Ukraine, its comment was 'this was not the era of war.' What happened when the Chinese attacked or when Pak ISI attacked Pahalgam, is known to everyone.

*Such a vexed issue cannot be resolved unless Israel and USA both change their attitude. Political spin of their kind can not lead humanity to anywhere.

Chapter - 6

State Terror Ends in Syria, Humanitarian Challenges Remain^{50A}

Five countries of Asia had an unwanted and irregular change of guard in the last three and a half years. Three of them happen to be Islamic: Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Syria. The last one came in the grip of rebels active in civil wars from 2017 onwards. Several persons were found missing, many were interrogated and tortured and the surviving lot, bereft of fulfilment of basic needs, are bearing the brunt. Accordingly, umpteen humanitarian issues have surfaced with the change of regimes.

Humanitarian Approach & Principles

A humanitarian is concerned with improving welfare and happiness of people. He/she works for making the lives of people better and sees to it that suffering is reduced to the extent possible. These assume importance both during armed conflicts and natural calamities. In general, following problems crop up: Shortage of drinking water, Spike in price of food grains leading to food insecurity, Unsafe sanitation, Water borne diseases, Mal-nutrition, Damage & destruction of schools. Schools also get occupied for non educational purposes.

Syria: No Longer Links To One Of Oldest Civilisations

The country is grappling with the aftermath of multiple earth quakes in 2023 and 27 years of internal conflict. Further, due to internal displacement, families are invariably forced to move to safer places. As it was a harsh Police state, thousands of political prisoners were held during five decades of authoritarian rule of Bashar al Assad family. Imprisonment not only troubled and raised anxiety levels of the held person but also multiplied the miseries of families. Many of them would be kept in dark about locations of their arrested or imprisoned kith and kin. Perpetual conflict in Syria has caused the largest refugee and displacement crisis impacting millions of people. Approximately half of country's population is displaced with an estimated 16.

7 million people needing aid. If one talks about children, around 7.5 million need humanitarian assistance owing to worsening economic crisis, and devastated public infrastructure.

Syrian President Flight To Russia Ahead Of Entry Of H. T. S.

President Bashar al-Assad left for Moscow very early on 8th December and got asylum immediately, which appeared pre-arranged. It was prior to entry of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) militants into Damascus. HTS, an Islamist Sunni political and para military organisation owing allegiance to Syrian branch of Al Qaeda has been involved in a civil war since 2017. Strength of latter from 9/11 days has grown from a mere 500 to 25, 000. H. T. S. is reported to have taken just eleven days to overthrow Bashar al Assad. Process began from November 2024 with the capture of Aleppo town. Hama, Homs, Darra and Sweida fell thereafter. Incidentally, Homs was called 'capital of revolution' during early days of civil war.

Sudden Collapse, Least Resistance

Assad's army succumbed to a sudden collapse as years of conflict with rebels had weakened them. But rebels were well trained. Advantage of HTS was also in garnering support of Islamic State organisation and similar outfits. In Damascus, instead of resistance, common man welcomed them. Sensing freedom people came out, waving Syrian revolutionary flags. Some, however, tried to escape to Lebanon border, others ransacked the President 's Palace. Rebels called it end of dark period and start of a new era.

Like any other dignitary in such situations, Assad did not divulge his escape to anyone. It affected his close associates and two maternal cousins. After being ambushed on the way to Lebanon, one was shot dead while second one was wounded. In his first statement from Moscow on 16th December, Assad has denounced the country's new leaders as terrorists.

HTS, remains classified as a terrorist organisation by U. S., U. K., Canada, UNO, E. U. and others. In a cruel act, Sunni Islami fighters ostensibly backed by HTS, torched Hafez al Assad's mausoleum in Qardaha, Assad's home town. In view of HTS having the support of Al Qaeda, Islamic State (IS) and some other fundamental outfits, 54 soldiers loyal to Bashir al Assad were killed in Sukhna area of Homs town.

Unwanted Israel's Air Strikes

In pursuance of its policy of poking nose everywhere, Israeli forces carried out strikes across Syria on 10th & 11th December. They moved within 400 sq. kms of Buffer zone stating that they were striking suspected 'Chemical Weapon sites ' to prevent them from falling into the hands of terrorists. Here we can see parallel to Iraq wherein no chemical weapon was ever found by ruthless American soldiers. For common Syrian, struggle for life continued under such situations.

Israel with U. S. A., also went on to call this opportunity historic for Syrians. Saudi Arabia in a joint statement with Qatar and Jordan has warned of risks of further instability. They sought for greater humanitarian aid. In the changed situation, Iran may not be in a position to supply arms & other aids to Hezbollah through Syria. It is a big blow situation for Russia as well. After Muhammed al Basher, Ahmed Hussain al Sharaa, senior rebel leader was to take over reign of Syria and focus attention on humanitarian challenges.

GRIM HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

Missing Syrians

During the long reign of Assad a large number of innocent people would be picked up without informing their family members, taken to interrogation centres and would be eliminated then and there. Those who survived would be jailed for an unspecified period. By any chance if family members reached such dreaded jails, no one would divulge any information. Fall of Assad, therefore, has given tremendous hope to families of missing individuals.

Now that people in general are breathing in fresh air, renewed search operations, purely at individual level have taken off. People after gathering courage, have begun digging graves located in several places. According to BBC, in one big grave a few white body bags were found which bore names of dead persons and a number of Jail. Three such bags were seen. Each of them contained skull and human bones. Further, scribbled words indicated that those were the remains of two women prisoners and a man.

Harassed and devastated mother of Mahmud Sayed Hussain is looking for his whereabouts for eleven years. She has been to several jails but of no avail. Similarly, one Khalid's two brothers-Jihad and Hussain were found missing.

Khalid is searching continuously for them in different jails. He feels they were apprehended by the notorious intelligence wing of Air Force. He further mentions that some people were taken to an area called 'Driving School' and possibly all were murdered. He suspects that his two brothers may have met similar fate.

Extreme Cruelty

Human Rights Watch, an NGO is also investigating such bags which may have contained dead bodies. A very notorious and inhuman modus operandi was that anybody found moving through a particular area would be stopped, his face would be covered with a polythene bag and he would be removed to an unknown destination. Such persons would be confined to a notorious prison or Majeh Air Base. In one such centre, the arrested were kept tied and would be connected to electric wires. They would be administered shocks every now and then. Due to such third degree methods, the arrested person would confess and concede whatever the security officer wanted/ desired.

Several Rape Cases

In another place 400 women were reportedly raped and whosoever conceived, their deliveries would be arranged within the detention premises. Imagine compromising with hygiene and sanitation in addition to unexpressed mental trauma. In some places photographs of prisoners / detainees would be mixed and rummaged which will make identification by family members a herculean task. Important records of interrogation centres and jails are now being destroyed by loyalists of Assad regime. These malpractices clearly speak of intent to destroy evidence, tyranny and overall unkind approach of rulers.

Displacement of People

According to United Nations, humanitarian situation in Syria remains chaotic, volatile and fluid with more than 16 million people needing assistance. The Office of UN For Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said on 9th December that one million people were displaced from their homes alone during the period 28 November to 8 December. According to an estimate, around 6% of the displaced are living with atleast one form of disability. Recently displaced were women and children from Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Idib Governorates.

Return of Syrians

Some refugees were eager to return home while others are hesitant as situation in the country was very uncertain. However, OCHA has reported that more than 220,000 people had returned to Syria. In addition, in 250 centres, over thousand displaced people were staying. Further, since December 8, Lebanon had recorded less than 10,000 Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon to Syria. On the other hand, the U. N. Refugee Agency has reported that 30,000 displaced persons had also returned from Syria to Lebanon.

Challenges observed are:

Disruption of transport routes and looting of civilian property, factories and aid warehouses in Damascus has been reported. But North West Syria was relatively calm. Despite such constraints, emergency aid was being provided as three border crossings from Turkey side remained open for delivering aid. 46 numbers of trucks carrying U. N. aid and food had crossed into different parts of country. In Aleppo town, basic assistance including food, water, health and nutrition services was being given. Major hospitals, nonetheless, were operating at limited capacity owing to shortage of staff, supplies and medicines. However, health personnel are still feeling unsafe. Critical services in impacted areas was also being provided. In North West Syria, 24 health facilities have resumed services.

Health & Other Assistance

UNICEF and UNFPA have deployed 16 mobile medical teams and fixed clinics. In addition, UNPF and WHO are also distributing health, surgical & trauma kits to various hospitals. Further, WFP has observed and reported that food grain prices were on the rise across the country which may make matters worse for the citizens. It has come to notice that in the last two weeks, more than 20 partners of U. N. had delivered food to more than 590,000 people in North West Syria. But question arises how long international aid will support the people? There has to be proactive initiative also on the part of provincial heads and those having access to suffering masses.

Role Of UNICEF

UNICEF has begun working to protect children and to enable them to cope with the impact of conflict so that they recover from trauma. The Organisation is also making available safe drinking water, vaccines, other health and nutrition items, improving school facilities, training teachers, repairing water and sanitation facilities etc.

Thus U. N. and its partners continue giving food, water, cash, tents, blankets to needy persons. Medical teams too are being deployed and supplies to health centres was being taken care of. International Organisation For Migration has reported that a fluid situation with fluctuation movements both through formal and informal border crossings was taking place. Further, as per earlier reports Syrian border officials had abandoned their posts following takeover by HTS. U. N. High Commissioner For Refugees has indicated that Syria was at crossroads between peace and war, stability and lawlessness, reconstruction or further ruin. This world body looks determined to monitor further developments.

Although the UNO has done precious little for this part of suffering world, spokesman of the Secretary General has called on donors to ensure that UNHCR and its partners have the resources to respond swiftly and effectively.

Conclusion

Hafez al Assad's rule brought untold miseries to people. And Baser al Assad's administration saw endless civil wars, brutalisation of common man, poverty & hunger, killing of people and desertion of homes. No respect for humanity was seen. A transitional government was to take over but its tenure was to expire on 1st March, 2025. Any adhocism may give a fresh start to multiple human miseries.

Humanitarian situation continues to be grim. UN agencies have chipped into rescue suffering people for a short period. Even if normalcy is restored, threat perception from Israel and ripples from Gaza strip may remain. Super powers have to stop playing games at the cost of humanity. Fear and trauma of common man at last can be very well understood. Peace and stability would come only when minimum needs are taken care of. A greater international humanitarian aid for extended period is, therefore, called for.

Chapter - 7

Trump Blowing Trumpets Everywhere

President Donald Trump has begun blowing his trumpets sooner than expected. Less than a month in office, practically on every issue, he is issuing Executive Orders. These orders outnumber that of past presidents in first hundred days. These concern status of transgenders, withdrawal of U. S. A. from UNHRC and UNRWA (giving aid, health and education services to Palestinians in Gaza, West Bank, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan), a review of aid to UNESCO, a comment on running of U. N. O. etc. His threat to impose higher tariff on imported goods and to take over Greenland and Panama canal are going to bring displeasure and wide repercussions. His negative connotations are by now, well known. But shrewd that he is, he is resisting the temptation to issue any statement on Russia-Ukraine war or on China and North Korea.

Takeover of Gaza Strip

One of Trump's decisions pertaining to Middle East is rather hasty and bereft of human element. It is a reflection of his arrogance. His recent proposal to take over Gaza strip and create a 'Riviera of Middle East' after resettling Palestinians elsewhere, has shattered U. S. policy on Middle East, apart from sparking worldwide condemnation.

Trump wants that Palestinians should immediately leave their land to 'nice homes' in Egypt and Jordan. But how can Palestinians do so as they have waged a 75 year long struggle for their land?.

Rebuke & Condemnation

It immediately drew rebuke from Russia, China and Germany. According to them, it would bring fresh suffering and hatred. Saudi Arabia too has rejected it outright. Critics say it amounted to a call for 'ethnic cleansing'.

Apparent Israeli Interest

It is learnt that the proposal was made while welcoming the Israeli P. M. Benjamin Netanyahu at White House. He has claimed (?) that he and his team had been discussing the possibility with Jordan, Egypt and other regional countries. However, Jordan King Abdullah has rejected any attempt to annex land and displace the Palestinians. Egypt has also said it would support Gaza recovery plans without Palestinians leaving their territory. Legislators from both parties in USA, including strong Trump allies in the Senate have already expressed their opposition. No one in NATO is likely to extend support.

Two State Solution & Genuine Palestinian Protest

World leaders have said they continued to support the two state solution that has formed the basis of Washington's policy in the region for decades. It has held that Gaza would be part of a future Palestinian State that includes the occupied West Bank. Consequences of displacing over 2 million people from their homeland is bound to be catastrophic. It is already triggering comparison with NAKBA, the 1948 mass displacement and dispossession of the Palestinians.

Palestinians, while snubbing Trump have vowed to stay in Gaza's ruins. Trump can go to hell with his ideas, said one Palestinian. We are the owners of this land, said another Palestinian. Trump is crazy, said a lady. Another person has stated 'You have helped Israel in the first place in carrying out this destruction. You have to rebuild for us '.

Reaction of Other Islamic Countries

Jordan King Abdullah has expressed the view that he has rejected any attempt to annex land and displace Palestinians. Egypt has said it would support Gaza recovery plans without Palestinians leaving the territory. The Palestinian Ambassador to U. N. has suggested that if Trump's goal is to send Palestinians to a 'happy, nice place', they would return to their ancestral homes in Israel. Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar have joined Egypt and Jordan in rejecting any transfer plans. Saudis have repudiated the plan almost immediately.

Russian Viewpoint

Kremlin's spokesman D. Peskov has reiterated Moscow's position that the only way to resolve the Middle East conflict was through creation of a

Palestinian State to exist side by side with Israel. This is the thesis that is enshrined in the relevant U. N. Security Council resolution. It is shared by overwhelming majority of countries involved in this problem. We proceed from it, we support it and believe that this is the only possible option.

Israel's Further Move

Israeli P. M. has said that his country was willing to 'do the job' of executing Trump's plan on Gaza. He has publicly hailed it. To him, it is first fresh idea in years and it has the potential to change everything in Gaza. It was the correct approach. When he says real issue was finding a country that would agree to take in displaced Gazans, he is sounding as if he has become 'guardian' of people suppressed and exploited by his forces for years.

One would tend to agree with Ahmed A. Gheit, Chief of Arab League that Netanyahu's remark is unacceptable and reflects a complete detachment from reality. Qatar too has felt that Netanyahu's statement was provocative. As the proposal of Trump being impractical, is bound to ignite further fresh fire in Middle East, it would be advisable to wait and watch future developments.

DEPORTATION OF 104 INDIANS

There are 18, 000 Indians staying illegally in U. S. It has been learnt that U. S. has deported more than 1100 of them between October 2023 and September 2024. In all, 15,700 Indians have been deported since 2009. 586 more Indians are on U. S. deportation list but particulars of only 298 individuals have been supplied as yet. Not only Indians, Military aircrafts of U. S. have taken illegal immigrants to Guatemala, Peru and Honduras also. Those taken in similar way to Columbia were returned. President of Columbia in a bold decision, sent its own civil aircraft and took Columbian deportees honourably. He needs to be followed and complimented. Interestingly, Trump is yet to utter a word about the Chinese, European or Mexican illegal migrants. They must be in large numbers.

Miseries Of Deported Indians

The Military aircraft that brought 104 Indians to Amritsar after a 18 hour long journey on 5th February had 72 men, 19 women and 13 children. They were in chains, had been handcuffed and not allowed to move. To make matters worse, they were compelled to use only one toilet. According to President

Trump, recently deported Indians are the first phase of illegal migrants. Punjab Minister for NRI affairs has urged Prime Minister to take up the matter strongly with President Trump.

Official stand of Govt. Of India is that it opposes illegal immigrants linked to organised crime but it will accept verified Indians who have either over stayed or lack documents.

Prevent Maltreatment

Officially, U. S. has been told to ensure that deportees are not mistreated. Earlier deportations were by civilian aircrafts and there used to be a standard operating procedure. As the deportees knowingly violated law to enter another country, their arrival has led to criticism and a fierce debate in the Parliament. The M. P. 's wished to know whether any action was being taken against the agents involved in human trafficking of any kind. They also wished to know how many Indians were in detention centres and whether they have been provided any Consular access. As images of deportees in chains and handcuffs were worrisome, all members felt that deportation has to be done in a human manner.

As it happens, initial concern and protest over acts of President Trump are waning. It may be back to normal business again unless P. M. Modi raises the issue with Trump appropriately during his forthcoming U. S. visit. Unless the matter is followed up sincerely, end result is bound to be depressive for Indians in general. Afterall, remittance from Indians working in USA is very much on higher side and Indians cannot put the clock back vis a vis U. S. A.

Chapter - 8

Balochistan, Latest Irritant For Pakistan⁵¹

Menace of terrorism has been seen and felt very frequently all over the world since seventies of last century in the Middle East, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Afghanistan, Somalia, India, U. S. A. etc. But what has happened inside Pakistan for a long time may baffle anybody. Since Pakistan is one of the facilitators and perpetrators of this evil phenomenon for ages, it is getting it back from Balochistan Liberation Army(BLA). Founded in 2000, it is a militant organisation regularly targeting armed forces of Pakistan, civilians and foreign nationals. It was preceded by Balochistan Liberation Front, set up in 1964.

Supposedly two former KGB agents, code named Misha and Sasha were among its architects. For them, Sindhis and Punjabis were outsiders or settlers. It targets Chinese as they are involved in China Pakistan Economic Corridor(est. cost 61 Billion Dollars), Belt & Road initiative and development of Gwadar as a deep sea port. An emerging business hub, Gwadar was a colony of Oman for more than a century till Pakistan took it over in 1960's.

Balochistan, the most neglected of four provinces of Pakistan having eight divisions and 36 districts, is an extensive plateau of rough but beautiful terrain wherein dry desert climate prevails. It has many attractive tourist attractions. The 2022 massive floods of Pakistan had impacted it severely. Response of Central Government was lukewarm.

Balochistan Assembly having 65 seats has 11 seats reserved for women and 3 for non-Muslims. Once a Hindu Sewa dynasty used to rule over Kalat division and a Bania would invariably become Finance Minister. Importance of Banias in Balochistan is also clear from the fact that they have been part of economic fabric of Balochistan and are a historically important community taking part in trade, banking and money lending activities.

Balochi people speaking Balochi, Brahui and Pastu languages, are predominantly Sunni Muslims. While there are 59,107 Hindus in Balochistan, three hundred Balochi families also live in Mumbai.

ABUNDENCE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Mainland Pakistan extracts maximum out of Baloch province having 44% area of Pakistan, without bothering for commensurate returns, forget about welfare measures for local population.

Afterall, 36% of country's natural gas production and reserves of coal, gold, copper, silver, platinum, aluminium and uranium are located in this sparsely populated area (5.94% population of Pakistan). It is, therefore, a vast estate to plunder. It has distinct and self reliant Baloch and Pashtun, semi nomadic tribes, used to hardship of isolation and inhospitable terrain. After over 75 years of creation of Pakistan, barely 5% of this land is arable.

KILL & DUMP

Owing to relative deprivation, Balochistan has become breeding ground for unrest and insurgency. Disappearances galore and extra judicial killings are frequent. 'Kill and dump' operations of Pakistan Government continue. According to Pakistan Supreme Court, intelligence agencies and security forces have been involved in such gory acts.

On the other hand, unarmed Punjabi civilians- Professors, School teachers, students and labourers have been also killed by Baloch people as they have a common dislike for exploitation by the outsiders. Resultantly, thousands of Punjabis and Sindhis known as 'settlers' have also fled Balochistan over the years.

CRUCIAL ISSUES

Balochis in general have deeply felt their under representation in politics, bureaucracy and armed forces. They have inadequate allocation of funds as compared to other provinces of Pakistan. Percentage of unemployment is very high. When it comes to poverty, 62% population is below poverty line as compared to 50.9% in 2005-06. People also have low levels of human development indices.

Human right violations happening frequently, are prominent.. Large Army presence in the province has led to occupation of considerable land belonging to locals which is disliked.

MEANS ADOPTED

Means adopted by BLA against Government of Pakistan are: Assassinations, Suicide bombing, Targeting civilians, Attack on para military forces, Kidnapping and ethnic cleansing.

Going on from 2017-18 onwards these have assumed high proportions. One can sense a Bangladesh taking shape sooner or later. People of Pak Occupied Kashmir (POK) too are not lagging behind in asserting themselves.

RECENT INCIDENTS

Balochistan presents a mosaic of conflicts and fault lines with multiple layers of violence. Though Baloch rebels have been active for long, their operations have got a certain boost about eight to ten years ago. It seems to have acquired grass root support and momentum of its own.

ASSAULTS BY WOMEN SUICIDE BOMBERS

Three Chinese teachers and one Pakistani were killed in Confucius Institute of University of Karachi on April 26, 2022, when Shari Baloch, aged 30 years, mother of two, in a daring act detonated explosives wrapped around her body. She was the first female suicide bomber. Later she was to be joined by the likes of Sumaiya Baloch, Mahal Baloch, Zareena Rafiq, Ashifa Mengal and Hawa Baloch.

Till April 2022, women were engaged for routine works, such as, spreading of political messaging, raising funds, supporting families of fighters and participating in right based protests.

Earlier on November 23, 2018, four Chinese nationals were killed at the Chinese Consulate in Karachi. In another attack in 2019 on a hotel, Chinese nationals were targeted.

OTHER ATTACKS

On August 26, 2024, fourteen people, mostly soldiers, were killed in a series of attacks in Balochistan. On November 9, 2024, BLA claimed responsibility

for a suicide bombing at Quetta Railway station in which 32 persons were killed and 62 were injured.

In a most recent episode on March 11, 2025, B. L. A. terrorists dared to hijack whole train-Jaffer Express (Quetta-Peshawar) in which 21 civilians, 26 security personnel and 33 militants died. According to Pakistan authorities, 354 passengers were rescued after a 36 hour stand off. Train services to the region have been put on hold after this incident. It is bound to add to the sufferings of common man.

In a major incident on September 2, 2025, at Quetta, 14 persons were killed and 35 were injured at the conclusion of a public rally organised by Baloch National Party. Suicide bombing was reportedly the cause. The bomber allegedly is reported to have detonated his explosive laden jacket at the parking area. Though workers lost their lives, many senior Baloch leaders were lucky to escape. Further, on January 30, 67 terrorists, 11 civilians and 10 security men were killed in fierce clashes between security forces in Panjgur and Harnal Balochistan province. After a long gap, security forces had an upper hand.

WIDE RANGING IMPACT

Significant and wide ranging consequences can be seen due to efforts to espouse and perpetuate Baloch nationalism, such as, (1) Grievances of common people do not get redressed, (2) Due to effect on agriculture, business & industry, livelihood of people will and has suffered (3)Health & Education sectors have been worst victims, (4) Living conditions are getting deteriorated, (5) There is erosion of human rights and civil liberties and (6) People may be compelled to seek asylum.

FOREIGN HAND?

Pakistan has blamed India and Afghanistan for helping Baloch rebels. But BLA is actually operating from safe havens in Southern Afghanistan for years. Support from Afghanistan is but obvious as Baloch people are also settled in Afghanistan and Iran.

Though India has denied having any hand in the activities of BLA, Prime Minister Modi had expressed concern for the Baloch cause in one of his Independence Day speeches. A few of Baloch leaders are reported to have received medical treatment in New Delhi.

On June 8, 2015, the Home Minister of Balochistan had accused Indian P. M. of supporting terrorism. He went on to implicate R & AW of being responsible for some attacks on their military bases.

It has been lately learnt that U. S. A. is also likely to evince interest in Balochistan affairs. U. S. presence in this troubled area may be a threat to the Chinese activities. U. S. may keep an eye on Iran through land border as also through Gwadar port and Pakistan, per se, may be compelled to review its current Balochistan outlook of neglect. Same may help local population.

CONCLUSION

Balochistan, larger in size than France, has seen co- existence of Dravidians, Hindus, Christians and Muslims. They have lived in harmony unlike in other parts of Pakistan.

It is a glaring example of a situation that military response alone can not bring peace and stability. Locals like people of POK have felt deprived and benefited very little from development projects. Their protests too continue on a daily basis. If Baloch have to be calmed, economic and political issues of its people shall have to be addressed. It is definitely a struggle for economic justice and cultural identity. Even present Prime Minister of Pakistan has acknowledged that lack of development was an obstacle in eliminating terrorism in Balochistan.

All said and done, B. L. A. is a secular entity. It may not succeed in its goals, but its low intensity and unpredictable strikes are likely to continue.

Chapter - 9

Dreaded Bomb Blasts Of March 12, 1993 In Mumbai⁵²

Serial bomb blasts that rocked financial capital of country were unheard of due to their sheer meticulous planning, scale, and devastation. It also turned out to be a turning point in the internal security administration of the country.

Purposely a full chapter is being devoted, though It will be referred to again while analysing similar such episodes.

How It Began?

Demolition of Ram Janm Bhumi-Babri Masjid structure at Ayodhya on December 6, 1992 was a significant development in the contemporary history of the country. It not only exposed fragility of our social structure but it also posed fresh challenges to the internal security set up. Communal riots have taken place in India several times but mostly they were ignited by certain local issues and exploited by petty small time politicians on the one hand and self proclaimed social workers, on the other. Their vision was not only limited and tinted but they also believed in working for quick material and political gains at the cost of toiling masses.

Development on many fronts, however, had led to a substantial reduction in number of such communal clashes. Education, improved economic condition, interface with mass media, exposure to Panchayati Raj, growing political awareness, all have played a decisive role.

Reason & Rationality At Rear Stall

However, events following Ayodhya episode made us hang our head in utter shame. Reason and rationality had to take a back seat and a foreign intelligence agency was immensely successful in disturbing our communal harmony.

Focus was on those pockets wherein Muslims had to struggle hard for a living but, perhaps, neither had the means nor the desire to educate their off spring.

Vulnerable Mumbai Muslims

Mumbai, the commercial capital was one such area, where Muslims, in large numbers, were working mostly in service sectors. Majority was illiterate, poor, partially unemployed and religiously ignorant. I. S. I. began luring them through a few Indian Muslim Mafia dons and Pakistani smugglers and dons operating from Middle East. Relatively unaware Mumbai Muslims were systematically reminded about two rounds of riots in the city which had led to sacrilege of many of their brethren apart from causing a certain fear psychosis about their very existence. Feeling of insecurity and poverty of Muslims was exploited to maximum possible extent by the I. S. I. and their Indian contacts and agents.

Taufique, The Kingpin

Late Taufique Siddique Jaliawala, undisputed 'king' of Karachi underworld, having a base in Dubai was made the kingpin. He was asked to use his close contacts with Indian smugglers and criminals, such as, Dawood Ibrahim and Tiger Memon to spread terrorism in India, engineer communal riots, indulge in wanton killings, destruction of property through bomb blasts and fire arms etc. Also provoking Muslims in the name of religion and imparting disruptive training to Muslim youth became hallmarks. A fund of USD 61, 700 allegedly was 'earmarked ' of which, Rs. 21 Lakh (a big sum those days) was spent in purchasing bomb carrying vehicles.

Taudique is reported to have organised his acquaintances and resources swiftly and established immediate contacts with Dawood, Tiger Memon, Abu Salem and Mihammed Ahmed Dosa, who mainly indulged in a host of smuggling jobs besides having close links with Mumbai underworld. Objectives of the operation were explained clearly to them and volunteers were carefully chosen to perform various acts of destabilisation. A group of 27 poor Muslim youth was especially taken to Islamabad via Dubai and from there to territorial training camps in Afghanistan and along Pak-Afghan border. In addition to training in arms, explosives and ammunition, a fair dose of Islamic indoctrination was given. Group was sent back upon explaining to them the intricacies of causing bomb blasts.

Deadly Combine of Tiger Memon & Dawood Ibrahim

Tiger Memon was made head of operations in Mumbai, while Dawood along with his brother, Anis Ibrahim Kaskar, associates and accomplices, co-ordinated the 'show' from Dubai. Landing of arms, ammunition and explosives was organised in connivance with certain state Police and Customs & Central Excise officers including two I. R. S. officers. A sad day for Indian Civil Service. Help of a few petty criminals, labourers and drivers was also taken.

Three Landings

These were successfully completed, off the coast of Raigad District of Maharashtra on January 9, February 2 and February 7, 1993 respectively. Entire cargo was kept hidden in the garage of residence of Memon in Mumbai.

Upon safe arrival as above and completion of training to Muslim youth, ground was set for causing bomb blasts in crowded places, commercial hubs and Hindu dominated areas as instructed by I. S. I. A suitable date was also to be chosen in immediate future so that anger of Muslims against demolition of RJB-BM structure did not fade away from memory.

Crucial Date of March 12:

Eight Blasts In All

Reportedly a Muslim cleric decided the D day of March 12, 1993. Tiger Memon after briefing his men, flew out of country, his family in toe, hours before the blasts.

The first blast of severe intensity took place at 13:20 hours in the Bombay Stock Exchange building resulting into death of 84 persons and injury to 217. In less than an hour, two more explosions happened near Shiv Sena office, killing eight and injuring seventy one. Before local Police could issue alerts and mobilise its manpower, the severest of explosions took place at Century Bazar, killing 113 and injuring 227. Explosions also took place at Air India Office, a cinema hall, Mumbai airport, a few Five star hotels and markets.

Death & Devastation

Whole shocking operation left 257 dead 713 injured and property worth Rs. 27 Crore was destroyed. As if this was not enough, I. S. I. agents also tried to incite communal violence by throwing hand grenades at Hindu colony in Mahim which caused a minor riot. Several vehicles and houses were damaged and three persons again lost their lives. In a rapid action, Mumbai Police, among other things, recovered 62 A.K.-56 Rifles, 14 revolvers and pistols and 2313 kg. of RDX.

Gory Plan's Partial Success

Sequential nature of blasts and target chosen indicated a meticulously planned strategy and conspiracy to unleash a reign of terror among people as also to disturb communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims. But grand plan of I. S. I. could not succeed in triggering a Hindu reaction or Hindu- Muslim skirmishes.

Back To Normalcy

Mumbai city took the maiden serial blasts in its stride.. Whole mega city was back in action the very next day of blast, something incredible, yet true. The blasts, however, did display and prove the acumen of I. S. I. in engineering some more blasts and acts of sabotage in succeeding months.

I. S. I. Looked Powerful

Perhaps they knew that individual interests do tend to prevail over the collective and community interests when attractive, yet, deceptive material packages are offered to a certain section of society. This was again reflected when 17 bomb blasts took place in Delhi in 1997-98 and the serial train blasts earlier between December 5 and 6, 1993. In the latter case major trains of the country, viz, Rajdhani Express, A. P. Express and Flying Queen became easy targets. Though the blasts left only two deaths and injuries to sixteen, yet, the I. S. I. succeeded in sending a clear and firm message for more devastation attempts.

Chapter - 10

In Memory Of Mumbai Attack Of November 2008 & Other Episodes

Pakistan has not reconciled itself to living with India as a peaceful and friendly neighbour. It has been attempting to create situations that pose serious and consistent challenges to India's internal security. Their evil designs have resulted in unwanted wars in 1948, 1965, 1971 and 1999. Two developments: India aided independence of the erstwhile East Pakistan leading to creation of Bangladesh and Demolition of the Ram Janma Bhumi-Babri structure at Ayodhya appear to have re-ignited fire and hatred against India. Promotion of terrorism in India gradually became a significant national policy of Pakistan, irrespective of change in her political leadership. Successive civilian and military regimes in Pakistan have been led by a misconceived and misconstrued notion that their strength, continuance and overall stability depends on their ability to spread the tentacles of state sponsored terrorism across their borders.

BOMBAY BLASTS OF 1993

The game plan of Pakistan to plan and execute activities to destabilise received an impetus when Ram Janm Bhumi-Babri structure was attacked and demolished on 6th December 1992. A well planned strategy to divide and destabilize India was drawn by Pak I. S. I. Apart from attack on Hindu temples both in Pakistan and Bangladesh, communal riots were instigated and engineered in several parts of the country.

On 12th March, 1993, Bombay was rocked by serial bomb blasts leading to death of 257 innocent persons, serious injuries to about a thousand and destruction of public and private property. Before the country could recover from the shock of such a magnitude, almost simultaneous bomb blasts, once again planned and executed by ISI took place in several trains on 6th December, 1993. It coincided with the first anniversary of demolition of structure at Ayodhya.

OTHER MISDEEDS OF PAKISTAN

Several other acts of disturbance followed in nooks and corners of the country at regular intervals. Beant Singh, the C. M. of Punjab and 16 others were brutally killed at Punjab Secretariat by a human bomb. The country's capital witnessed not less than 17 bomb blasts during 1997-98. Some other states of North India too could not remain unaffected by the senseless violence perpetrated by Pakistan.

ANTI-NATIONAL ACTIVITIES

TRAINING

Intensive training for carrying out subversion and sabotage began to be organised by ISI for the disgruntled, ignorant and misguided youth residing in Punjab, J & K, North East as well as abroad. Leaders of Sikh and Kashmir militant outfits based in Pakistan also had to undergo rigorous training like other trainees. Regular supply of arms, ammunition and improvised explosive devices was ensured from across the border. ISI began spreading its network even in interiors to motivate the Muslim youth in general and entrust them with specific tasks. Fresh networking and alignment between Sikh, Kashmiri militants and North East insurgents was also attempted.

DEMOLITION OF AYODHYA STRUCTURE

Demolition of disputed structure at Ayodhya on 6th December, 1992 proved an important turning point. It not only exposed the fragility of our social structure but it also posed fresh challenges to internal security situation. Reason and rationality took a back seat and a foreign intelligence agency was successful in disturbing communal harmony, more so, in those pockets, wherein Muslims had to struggle hard and had neither the means nor desire to educate their children.

ATTACK ON MUMBAI (26th November, 2008)

On the night of 26th November 2008, financial capital of India, Mumbai was trapped in a nightmare, yet again. Ten fully armed suicide bombers of Laskar-e-Toiba entered the metropolis from Pakistan by sea route and launched senseless attacks in South Mumbai. Prior to entry, they had hijacked a mechanised boat and killed four persons therein. One person was spared as

he was to be utilised as a guide. Gun shots echoed in iconic landmarks-Taj Mahal hotel, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus and Oberoi Trident hotel. Explosions also ripped through Nariman House, Leonard cafe and Cama hospital. All one could hear were gunshots and sirens from Police cars and ambulances. Initially Mumbai Police tackled the terrorists cum suicide bombers. Later National Security Guard and Army took over.

PERSONS KILLED & INJURED

Mumbai was rocked for 60 hours or four days (upto 28th November). 175 persons were killed including 18 policemen and 300 were injured. Two IPS officers Hemant Karkare, IGP(without a bullet proof jacket)and his DIGP also figured in the list of martyrs. Another IPS officer, Vishwas N. N. Patil, Addl. DGP, was one of the first few officers to enter Taj Mahal Hotel during its seize with his service revolver without wearing a bullet proof jacket, when attackers were wielding AK-47 Rifles. He received President's Police Medal for bravery.

Similarly another officer, Govilkar, an Inspector held on to Kasab after chasing terrorists and puncturing a hijacked Skoda vehicle. He too got a bullet injury. However, before he was admitted to a hospital, six of his colleagues had lost their lives. But it was Arun Yadav, a constable, while risking his life, showed tremendous presence of mind by informing Police Control Room about the attacks at two to three places.

AJMAL KASAB, CRUCIAL CATCH

Nine terrorists were killed in different parts of city and one of them, Md. Ajmal Amir Kasab was captured alive by Tukaram Omble, ASI of Mumbai Police with the help of only a Lathi (long stick). Omble himself was killed when hit at point blank range by 40 bullets. As his bravery turned out to be a beacon of hope, he was given Ashok Chakra, highest peace time gallantry award, posthumously. Another person to receive this honour again posthumously was Major Unnikrishnan of NSG, who fought valiantly with terrorists during operation at Hotel Taj Mahal.

Though many dedicated countrymen suffered, got injured and gave their lives, one girl of nine or eleven years, a nurse of Cama Hospital and a Caretaker of Nariman House(an Israeli home) deserve to be mentioned. Devika Rotawan became youngest survivor of terror attack at Chhatrapati

Shivaji Terminus station. Being only twenty feet away from Kasab, a bullet pierced into her leg. But she showed rare bravery while describing the blood shed at station caused by two terrorists and in identifying cruel Kasab in Court in 2009.

Similarly, Anjali, Senior Nurse of Cama Hospital showed fantastic presence of mind in huddling together 20 pregnant women in one small room of 10x10' when terrorists jumped into hospital compound. In addition, she escorted a woman in labour pain through stairs to Labour room. Taking a lift would have been very risky as gun shots were being heard and grenades were being thrown almost nonstop. The pregnant woman safely delivered a baby girl who was appropriately named 'Goli'. Sandra Samuel, an Indian Nanny at Nariman House (Chabad House) Colaba too showed remarkable courage in saving and rescuing Moshe, a two year old Israeli baby, whose parents fell to the bullets of two terrorists-Abu Umar and Babar Imran. Altogether six Israeli nationals lost their lives inside the house.

MASTERMIND OF ATTACK

Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, who was released from an Indian jail in exchange of 150 captive passengers of Indian Airlines flight number IC, 814 (Kathmandu-Delhi), was identified as the mastermind of the heinous attacks. An Islamic preacher and a militant leader based in Lahore, he is a co-founder of Lashkar-e-Toiba. He is India's most wanted terrorist and a Global Terrorist designated by USA with ten million dollars on his head.

For many years India has asked Pakistan to hand him over for his involvement in 13th December 2001 attack on Indian Parliament, 2006 train bombings and 26/11 attack on Mumbai but lack of Extradition treaty between two countries comes in the way. He escaped a massive bomb blast outside his house at Johar Town, Lahore on 23rd June 2021 in which three persons were killed. Pakistan had suspected it to be an India planned attack. Voice of Hafiz as also of some of his LeT colleagues were heard by policemen and commandos when long operation was on at Hotel Taj.

COURAGE & SACRIFICE OF TAJ EMPLOYEES

Not to be forgotten, officers and employees of the hotel showed exemplary patience and courage in saving the life of inmates. Many employees also lost their lives. The management gave ample compensation and support to

affected families. In spite of it, six American guests were butchered by the terrorists. Personnel of Taj hotel received indomitable support from Ratan Tata, Chairman, Tata Sons, who was supervising and observing the whole operation from nearby. It was a rare display by a corporate head.

TO CONCLUDE

Memories of the brutal bloodbath from 26th to 28th November, 2008 will linger on. Horror generated by this unprecedented tragedy may continue to haunt the relatives of persons who sacrificed their lives in the service of the nation. Scars of Devika Rotanian, Moshe, two year old Israeli child, his Nanny Mrs. Samuel, and surviving policemen & commandos may remain. It is not easy to forget the ghastly episode so easily.

Menace of cross border terrorism continues unabated in spite of best efforts put in by BSF, ITBP, SSB and other forces guarding the borders. Pakistan continues to push terrorists into India, despite barbed wire fencing and Cease Fire. Since 2021 alone 33 militant attacks have taken place in Jammu region.

Once a relatively safe area, Bangladesh too may resume giving shelter, sanctuary and training to terrorists and insurgents. It may be in view of change of guard, unexpected rise in anti-Hindu sentiments and growing dominance of BNP, religion centred elements and student activists in new dispensation in Dhaka.

Chapter - 11

Mystery Behind Tahawwur Rana & David Headley⁵⁴

Tahawwur Hussain Rana (THR), alongwith David Coleman Headley(DCH), his school classmate and a few others supported by Pak I. S. I. (Inter Services Intelligence) conspired against India in November 2008. This was not the beginning of a tirade against India. This would not indicate a nemesis of such a painful plan to destabilize India. Our neighbours over the years have scripted several modules through I. S. I. to get deeper into Indian territory and have exploited the sentiments of Muslims, other minorities and disadvantaged sections.

BACKGROUND OF MUMBAI ATTACK

Before we proceed further, it may be noted that Mumbai attack got delayed on account of rough sea conditions and Delhi was also to be targeted in addition to Mumbai. Sea route was planned due to risks involved in land and air travels. Moreover, DCH had done a recon of sea route and same was brought to the notice of Pakistani mentors. Both THR and Daood Gilani(DG) hailed from good families having foreign connections. As D. G. 's mother was an American, he soon migrated to USA. THR after completing his medical education joined Pak Army Medical Corp and got married to a Canadian national. When he was removed from Army in 1997, he went with his wife to Canada. He managed to get Canadian citizenship in 2001 and set up an immigration firm called 'First World Immigration Services' at Chicago. He was in the process of opening its branches in a few Canadian and U. S. cities.

D. G., on the other hand, came in touch with leaders of Lashkar e Toiba(LeT) in Pakistan and even visited their camps in 2002 and 2003. He changed his name to David Coleman Headley(DCH) in 2006 during his stay in Philadelphia. He met THR after many years at Chicago in 2006. First India office of Immigration firm of THR was thus opened in Mumbai as a cover up operation. A plan was worked out according to which DCH undertook five visits to Mumbai between 2006 and 2008. Not only reconnaissance but

extensive surveillance followed. Photos and videos taken during visits were shared with LeT & possibly I. S. I. His last visit was interestingly by sea route. Details of this route were explained by DCH to Pak mentors.

FOILED ATTACK ON DANISH NEWSPAPER

In the meanwhile, DCH developed interest in a Denmark newspaper which had published a defamatory cartoon on Prophet Muhammed. Between January and February 2009, say after 2 months of their Mumbai attack, he alongwith THR planned an attack on their office. Once again, after a visit to this office, photos and videos were taken. It appears Danish authorities got in touch with Americans and thus the attempt was foiled.

On October 18, 2009, both of them were arrested by the F. B. I. and taken to U. S. A. It appears both DCH and T. H. R. confessed to their terrorist designs, following which they were sentenced. DCH pleaded guilty as well.

T. H. R.'s EXTRADITION TO INDIA

As we are aware, THR, has been extradited to India from Los Angeles after sustained initiatives taken by agencies of Government of India(GoI). He has been charged with criminal conspiracy, waging war against India, murder and forgery.

Pakistan has obviously distanced itself from THR as he had failed to renew his documents. In addition, Pakistan does not allow dual citizenship to its migrants to Canada.

Israel, which lost six of its nationals in Mumbai in 2008, appears encouraged to note this notable and long over due extradition.

3 HORRIFYING DAYS

Each time anything concerning 26/11 attack comes to notice, one is reminded of three black days- 26 to 28 November 2008, when only ten dare devil terrorists of LeT & HUJI had "overtaken" India's financial & film capital and created a mayhem at C. S. Railway Terminus, Hotel Tajmahal, Hotel Trident, Leonard Cafe, Cama Hospital and an Israeli centre. Not less than 166 innocent persons were brutally killed and 238 were injured apart from tremendous loss of property. It is but natural that relatives of the dead and survivors are rejoicing and looking forward to conviction of THR.

Horrors of this tragedy are likely to haunt the relatives of those who sacrificed their lives for the cause of nation.

INTEREST OF U. S. A.

THR was arrested alongwith DCH in Chicago on 18 October, 2009 which culminated into a long, arduous trial. U. S. A. Government evinced interest, as six of their citizens too had been killed mercilessly in the attack on Tajmahal Hotel.

A good deal of concerted effort was made by GoI to get THR for more than a decade. It was culmination of serious diplomatic, legal and intelligence initiatives. We may note that unlike deportation, extradition is a long drawn legal process and complicated exercise. It gets more clumsy when there is no extradition treaty between requesting and requested countries. Deportation, on the other hand, is formal removal of a person whose initial entry was illegal (most common reason for deportation is violation of immigration laws).

THR's EXTRADITION ORDER

Extradition of THR was ordered by Central District Court of California on May 16, 2023 but he was finally extradited on April 10, 2025, after having exhausted all legal formalities. It was a major breakthrough for India if we are to remember 60 horrifying hours of Mumbai. Now that we have got THR, we must attempt seriously to extradite likes of Hafiz Saeed(head of LeT), Zakiur Rahman Lakhvi, Major Iqbal, Samir Ali and Sajid Majid also, Pak citizens or others including Sikh terrorists enjoying safe sanctuary in Pakistan.

RECONAISSANCE TOURS

After managing a multi entry Indian visa with the help of THR, DCH had visited Delhi, Mumbai, Jaipur, Goa and 3 other places. He had the audacity to visit India after 26/11 attacks in March 2009. Very sad, daring and shocking. How did it happen? THR, on the other hand, visited India with wife(also a Doctor) from November 13 to 21, 2008. Places in his itinerary were: Hapur, Delhi, Agra, Cochin, Ahmedabad and Mumbai. There is every possibility of visit of other ISI agents also as ethnic similarity between Indians & Pakistanis facilitates such preparation trials.

INTERCEPTED CONVERSATIONS

Intercepted conversations between DCH & THR has revealed that latter had said "Indians deserved it". After interrogation of three days by National Investigation Agency (NIA), it has been decided to take sample of THR's voice to match the same with the recordings of conversations between "two friends" on the eve of the gory incident.

However, one has doubts if voice recorded in 2008 will match with recording to be done. It's a difference of 17 years. Moreover, if the claims of THR prove true, his suffering from Parkinson disease may become an obstacle.

FACE TO FACE ENCOUNTER MAY HELP

A suggestion to be noted by interrogating officers is that both the conspirators should be made to face each other through video conferencing. Thus their reactions and additional information pertaining to conspiracy may be divulged/extracted.

THR has been placed in a highly secured cell of NIA office, guarded round the clock. He will be interrogated further by teams of sleuths of NIA & Intelligence Bureau(I. B.) over the next 10 to 12 days of NIA remand. Next course of interrogation is slated to be in Mumbai, the "Ground Zero". In fact, less time needs to be devoted to interrogation process in Delhi.

TO RECAPITULATE

On January 7, 2013, THR was sentenced to 168 months in prison by a Chicago Court. But how was he found fit to be acquitted, that too on compassionate grounds on June 9, 2020? This needs to be probed. Further, when his extradition case came up, he questioned it on grounds of "double jeopardy". On the same charges, can he be tried?

On May 16, 2023 his plea against extradition was rejected. Then he filed a petition in Central District Court of California, followed by a plea before U.S. Supreme Court, which rejected it on January 21, 2025.

TO CONCLUDE

As Pakistan has not reconciled itself to living with India as a peaceful neighbour, it keeps creating challenges to India's internal security set up. State sponsored terrorism has become Pakistan's bread and butter. Thus, T. H. Rana

and D. C. Headley may be part of a larger conspiracy against India. It may require an in depth analysis. One may ask Why was David Headley kept in an U. S. A. prison after pleading guilty but THR was extradited to India?

U. S. A. took a long time to try and convict T. H. R. Arrest in 2009 and conviction in 2023, how does one explain such a delay? Coming to his extradition, again wide time gap was noticed between its approval in May 2023 and confirmation by the U. S. President on February 13, 2025. Now that THR has been brought, his trial has be expedited as he alongwith DCH was key mastermind/conspirator of 26/11 episode.

Extradition Treaty with U. S. A. was signed in 1997 but very few fugitives have been extradited so far. Will Government be interested in their extradition? Also shouldn't we seriously take up cases of Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi and many others “ ignored” on political considerations?

CHAPTER -12

Will Suicide Bombing Aid Terrorism In India ?⁵⁵

Ahead of early eighties, law & order was not as much of a challenge as it has become now. Disturbances would occur but those were resolved sooner than later due to co-operation of Peace committees & community leaders with the District administration. Places having lingering disputes, such as Naxalism, insurgency in the North East and religious fundamentalism in Punjab and J & K, however, would be kept under close watch because of their longevity and apparent external links. Deviant acts were not planned as meticulously as those are, nowadays. Gradually, these have taken the shape of extremism and terrorism.

THE TERM TERRORISM

Terrorism is a tendency to use violent means against non combatants with a view to achieve some political or ideological objectives. It is an act of intentional violence, perpetrating fundamentalism and criminality. A state of extreme fear, anxiety and insecurity is created by vested elements among the masses. With the collapse of law and order machinery, social order also begins cracking and the terrorists exploit such a situation by projecting themselves as a better alternative. Afghanistan earlier and Syria in recent past could be the burning examples.

THE FACILITATORS

Over the years through networking facilitated by Internet, Laptop, Cell Phone, Social Media sites etc terrorists have succeeded in networking and developing bases all over the world. Even in small urban centres, it may be happening due to easy access to latest means of communication as also growth and expansion of higher education. Access to a computer, Lap top, Cell phone, Whatsapp and social media sites is playing havoc, adding fat to the fire and even perpetrating suicide by youngsters.

Unemployed persons, educated lots, such as, Teachers, Professors and Engineers earlier and Doctors now, are coming under the impact of indoctrination rather swiftly in the "earmarked centres" and subsequently they succeed in using latest, rather, upgraded gadgets, arms and ammunition. But ultimate use of SUICIDE BOMBING in the country should lead to High Alerts and ring the alarm bells everywhere. Sharing of information on such behaviour should be also regular.

A common Indian may think that errant, deviant or disruptive acts graduating into terrorist ones, have been happening in India mainly for four decades or so but in the developed nations it had made inroads long long ago. It would happen prior to or during the World Wars as well.

SMALL ARMS PROLIFERATION

Access to small and medium arms has been found to be a necessity for deviant and lethal acts. These are accessed to relatively easily in many countries. Wherever it has been a reverse situation, illegalities enter the fray. Outside forces study and exploit the vulnerable situation for a while. But a day comes when they begin firing shots from the shoulders of willing lots.

ORGANISED ACTIVITY

If one looks at reach and tentacles of organised crime, in modern times, the advent of Black September, a Palestinian outfit formed in Seventies of last Century against the Israelis comes to mind immediately. Not only it survived for long, it also left its negative impact far & wide. Who can forget the brutal murder of 12 Israeli athletes and officials by it in the midst of Munich Olympics in 1972?

Inter Services Intelligence (ISI of Pakistan), Markaz-e-Dawat-ul-Irshad (MDI), Lashkar-e-Toiba(LeT), Hizbul Mujahideen(H. M.) Tablighi Jamaat, Jamat e Islami (Hind), SIMI, Al Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, I. S., Harkat ul Ansar(HUA), Jais-e- Mohammed (JeM), H. T. S. of Syria, to name a few, have been obstinate, brutal and die hard followers, if not off shoots.

FIVE NEW DEVELOPMENTS ON TERRORISM FRONT IN INDIA

Against the above background if we analyse the unprecedented Suicide Bomb blast at a traffic signal near Gate 1 of Metro Station, Red Fort in Delhi at 6. 58 p. m. on November 10, five New Developments need to be flagged:

- People belonging to a noble medical profession have volunteered to perform the nasty and inhuman act for the first time. With this episode, they seem to have become actively involved on terrorism front. Shockingly, it includes women practitioners as well, who had got through tough medical entrance tests and had completed their education by availing of Government funds. For all of them medicine appeared to be only a cover up, as sufficient supplementary income would come easily from elsewhere,
- For the first time a private University, barely 35 kms away from country's capital was working as a base for nefarious acts. It is high time working of such centres of "high learning" is seriously put under regular scrutiny,
- Phenomenon of Suicide Bombing which had become a favourite or last weapon to achieve unconvincing goals in Middle East, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Balochistan, Sri Lanka, a few European counties, U. S. A. etc, is now taking place in India, that too by influencing and brain washing a 36 year old Specialist Professional.
- No one has claimed responsibility for the Delhi blast, even after twelve days of its happening. Moreover, whereabouts of two other suspects/occupants of the ill fated car is not yet known. Further, contradictory reports have figured regarding the number also.
- New kind of explosives are now being used. It is suspected to be Ammonium Nitrate, NOT RDX. Initial marks and observations on faces and bodies of victims and injured have indicated so.

INTELLIGENCE FAILURE?

Not a single head has rolled thus far (presumably due to political patronage), either in field policing or intelligence set up at the centre. Also some so called Specialists are sticking to their chairs for over a decade. Bringing in fresh blood always adds to the efficiency and sharpness of the investigation and

prosecution mechanism. At the same time, the prevailing practice of giving extensions has to be stopped, forthwith. Not to be FORGOTTEN, like Pahalgam sacrilege on 22nd April, Delhi episode is a blatant example of intelligence failure in the heart of national capital. It happens many a time but concerned public representatives and officers continue to hold on to their chairs and are hardly subjected to any questioning, scrutiny and prosecution.

In this context, common man has the right to know that large sums of public money is given in a regular way to Intelligence and Special Branch officials to collect intelligence /vital inputs from agents, informers and ex-criminals is hardly accounted for. Further, with the rapidly growing crime graph any ruling Government has the right to set up specialised units or agencies in the Police set up but hands get tied when same lot of compromising officers on Central deputation, get circulated into new outfits. Many capable officers posted in states having more expertise and experience, thus miss the bus. It is a matter of utter shame that spot chosen-a traffic signal in a prime location by the 'medical terrorists, ' was hardly two hundred metres away from ramparts of Red Fort, wherefrom Prime Ministers have been addressing the nation on Independence Day. Gauri Shanker Temple, a monument located closeby, luckily survived splinters from suicide bombing blast.

DEATHS & DEVASTATION

Eleven to twelve innocent persons have had unnatural deaths, while over thirty were grievously injured in the massive blast, apart from destruction and damage to four or five cars, a few auto rickshaws, E rickshaws & shops/ stalls. However, number of deaths and damage caused is on much higher side according to informal inputs. Seriously injured persons were rushed to LNJP hospital not in Ambulances or swanky PCR vans of Delhi Police but mostly in E Rickshaws. Thus injuries inflicted may have got complicated on the way.

VIP VISIT TO AVOID

Any high profile visit to the trouble spot, in the same way, must be avoided. Not only dust has to settle first but crucial sample collection time has to be also adhered to. Doctors and paramedics have to be permitted to have only their say under these circumstances rather than being disturbed or answerable to VIP's. If there is distraction, first aid, bandages and operations get inordinately delayed. One is sure it would not happen in developed countries.

ELUSIVE VEHICLES

Impact of the blast emanating out of a White Hyundai i10 car was such that high flames and overall effect could be felt in an area of 1.5 kms. Later when Police, Fire Brigade and Forensic team arrived, it was estimated to be in the vicinity of three kms. To make matters worse, body parts were found scattered all over the place. On the whole, intensity was very high. One was immediately reminded of brutal assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, former P. M. by Dhanu, a woman suicide bomber of LTTE at Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu on May 25, 1991. In Balochistan, as on date, five women led by Sumaiya Baloch from June 2023 onwards have volunteered to be suicide bombers on important missions. All of them appeared very tough and dedicated.

The Hyundai car was not the only vehicle used in the operation. News about a red coloured car is also figuring. Besides vehicles used by five to six suspected Doctors of Al Falah Medical University are also under suspicion.

ARRESTS MADE

White Collar Terrorism suspects hailing from Faridabad-Pulwama-Saharanpur terror link arrested so far are:

Dr. Muzammil Ahmed Ganai (35 years) Dr. Adeel Majeed Rather, Dr. (Ms) Shaheen Shahid and Aamir Rashid (a plumber).

Dr. Umar un Nabi (36 years old) allegedly volunteered himself to drive the white Hyundai car from Faridabad to blast site at traffic signal near Gate 1 of Red Fort Metro. He altogether took eleven hours, reportedly took out Rs. 76,000 from an ATM on the way, waited at a parking lot and prayed alone at a mosque, before performing the FINAL ACT OF BLOWING HIMSELF OFF.

FOREIGN HANDLERS

Police sources have now revealed that one of the three 'foreign handlers' had sent 42 videos on making a bomb to Ganai. DIY (Do it Yourself) method was to be used. Ganai was arrested ten days ahead of blast and 2500 kg of explosives, including 350 kg of Ammonium Nitrate was recovered from him. Why could not Police follow it as a lead?

Further, one Mohammed Shahid Faisal had co-ordinated with similar terrorist modules in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Faisal, a former Engineering

student from Bengaluru, having been involved in three blasts in South India in 2022 and 2024 had run away to Pakistan, Syria and Turkiye. Another foreign handler in this case is from Turkiye. He uses the pseudonym of Ukasa. Rashid, an associate of late Dr. Nabi(car registered in his name) was arrested from his home in Samboora, Pulwama soon after blast. A few more arrests followed in two states and J & K. Last in the series was on November 20 when National Investigation Agency (NIA) took another four suspects into custody.

FIRST CASE OF SUICIDE BOMBING IN INDIA

A vehicle borne IED blast was " valiantly" triggered by Dr. Umer Nabi, a resident of Pulwama and an Assistant Professor in General Medicine Department of Al Falah University of Okhla (Faridabad). NIA has forensically established his identity. A small piece of his shirt, one shoe, another personal belonging and mangled number plate of car has been recovered. During investigation another vehicle belonging to him has been seized. So far, over 73 witnesses have been examined, including the victims and several innocent persons injured in the blast. State Police of Delhi, Haryana, U. P., J & K, high profile NIA etc. are pursuing multiple leads to unearth the "larger conspiracy " behind the Suicide Bombing. A lady student of Anantnag Govt. Medical College & a senior and many former colleagues of Dr. Adeel Rather, have been also questioned.

SUMMING UP

One can take note of existence of Government of same party in two states and two Union Territories (Delhi, U. P., Haryana & J & K). Yet it appears, requisite Police or Special Branch Co-ordination was lacking even after discovery or suspicion regarding storage of huge amount of explosives. Why no one suspected or put on 'radar' a Medical University working for so long in such a clandestine manner?

Many have recalled the horror of 10th November. Vehicles were on fire, fuel tanks of others were bursting and people were running helter-skelter. For two days a few constables and Head constables of Delhi Police could not go home. Usual cordoning and barricading the roads happened which restricted further movement of the local people.

"Nobody helped, they were making videos", recalled Rahul Kaushik with disgust. Glass pieces too got pierced into the forehead, hands and legs of a few persons. Whose fault will it be?

While survivors recall and cope up with the trauma,

HUNT IS ON FOR Two Phones & 5 Sims used by DR. UMAR un NABI from October 30 to November 10. Their recovery is likely to throw more light on conspiracy and networking angles. Further, details regarding ammunition found & evidence collected at the blast site, too appear shrouded in mystery.

WHY IS GOVERNMENT SILENT AFTER DECLARING AFTER PAHALGAM MASSACRE THAT ACTS OF TERRORISM SHALL BE TREATED AS AN ACT OF WAR?

LETS HOPE & PRAY That There Is No Repetition of:

- (a) Widespread violence in many states, connected to demolition of disputed structure at Ayodhya,
- (b) Mumbai Serial Blasts of 1993,
- (c) Thirteen Blasts that rocked New Delhi in 1997 and
- (d) 26/11 Multiple Blasts & murders in Mumbai Again in 2008.

Chapter - 13

Peace, A Far Cry vis a vis State Terror & Sea Piracy⁵⁶

World peace may mean no conflict or battle and an aspiration for stoppage of all disturbances and encounters. These, earlier emanating from face to face situations, now spring from proxy wars and latest long range missiles and cunning drones.

Ideally, when basic and subsidiary needs are met, there should be no justification for causing hostility or violence. A state of peace at community or State level can be ensured if goodwill, mutual respect and favourable conditions get facilitated.

There are institutions and think tanks all over but of no avail. Every now and then conferences and summits on this vital issue are organised but how many listen, why should they?

Countries Promoting Fundamentalism & Terrorism

Terrorism in bits and pieces was prevalent in a few pockets of Europe, Latin America and Asia prior to world wars but world at large was not affected. It was a localised activity. Such outfits, in addition, were not well organised and lacked the networking ability of present day outfits. Level of education was also low.

When a few militant organisations began promoting terrorism under the garb of religious fundamentalism, especially in West Asia or Middle East, political economy was taken aback. Gradually situation began changing. Such groups spreading like wild fire, could create disturbance, influence and mould public opinion and ultimately also overthrow elected Governments. In a few countries they have managed to rule for many years, for instance, Libya, Syria, Uganda, North Korea, Iraq, parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Some outfits could remain a pressure group even after losing power. They could exploit loop holes from outside the country and stage a comeback after a gap of few years without backing of any super power. After regaining

power, attempts are also made to settle scores with erstwhile friends turned foes in the neighbourhood. Burning example of this trend could be Talibans in Afghanistan vis-a-vis Pakistan. From occasional conflicts they, sometimes turn into short period wars. But these happen at the cost of welfare, education and health of the people. Minimum needs cannot even be met for years.

Women become worst sufferers. They have to be on bondage of Burqa and Hijab. Even technically qualified among them are prevented from working and mixing with male colleagues. Women of Iraq, Iran and Turkiye were fairly modern and forward looking at one point of time.

SEA PIRACY

SOMALIA, A DIFFERENT BALL GAME

Sea Pirates have been there for long. They are different from Sea Robbers as they operate mainly in international waters. Stealing cargo and demanding ransom have been very normal for them. Even as children one could read stories of their heroics and exploits. This high risk profession began as a response to illegal fishing by Non Somalians. Now it has gained adequate motivation ironically from booming business of ransom.

Surfacing during country's civil war in early nineties, it is supposed to have peaked between 2005 and 2011. The Pirates mainly operate from Somalian coast within Horn of Africa, targeting and hitting at vessels and ships in Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. It has sprung up and perpetrated from absence of a strong Central Government, leading to lawless atmosphere. Thus armed groups, upon collecting advance intelligence, attack and hijack ships for ransom. It is a long time activity of local fishermen to tackle illegal fishing and dumping wastes by foreign vessels. Modus operandi being use of small but fast boats to board commercial ships with guns and Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG) to take hostages and DEMAND multi million Dollar worth of ransom.

Poverty & Political Instability

In a long disturbed and least developed Somalia, hardly any infrastructure was allowed to come up by self centred politicians. It also meant no political stability. Only a political outfit headed by Hassan Sheikh Mohammed, secured Presidency from 2012 to 2017 and again from 2022. But it does not

have grip over a major part of the country. Despite such conditions, weak governance and never ending Sea piracy, country has survived. Surprisingly Somalia, at present also happens to be one of the ten Non-Permanent members of U. N. Security Council.

AL Shabab Group

Al Shabab, an Islamist militant group, however, controls parts of central and southern Somalia. They do so by attacking and looting the ships that pass by. International naval forces including Indian vessels, despite upgraded security features are also attacked. But their alertness and vigil have also resulted in the rescue of several vessels and arrest of suspects.

Tie Up With HOUTHIS

Houthis of Yemen belong to Shia Muslim movement following Zaydi branch of Islam. Since September 2014 they have occupied significant portion of North and Western Yemen including its capital, Sanaa. They began from rebellion against Sunni majority Government. Gradually they have become a prominent player in the regional conflict supported by Iran. They are also part of Axis of Resistance which opposes U. S. A., Israel and Saudi Arabia. Houthi leader, Abdul-Malik al Houthie has recently called for a million strong rally in support of P. L.O., Iran and Lebanon. He has asked all concerned to be ready for the next round of confrontation with Israel in view of failure of last U. S. - Iran talks at Oman.

Increasing tie up of Somali Pirates with Houthis of Yemen while having good hold over Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, is adding to maritime insecurity of the region. Houthis, being anti-Israel do not listen to U. S. A, sometimes. U. S. A. also says that Houthis are waging a campaign of piracy, violence and terrorism against their and other ships as also aircrafts and drones. Houthis have gone to the extent of causing a rocket attack once on the residence of Israeli P. M.

Attack of Sea Pirates Distinct From Land Attacks

Since late 2025, there has been resurgence of sea piracy with enhanced attacks on vessels in Somali Basin and Western Indian Ocean. Such terror is different from the one seen on land. By using 'mother' ships and small boats,

armed pirates have been targeting commercial vessels for ransom, thus endangering international maritime security.

Enhanced sea piracy with virtual no attention from U. N. O. is costing the global economy in billions of USD according to the World Bank and BBC. Regional confidence and good organisational capacity have mostly been helpful to pirate groups of two countries. Despite their differences, pirates, who call themselves 'Saviours of Sea', have been opposing illegal fishing and dumping of nuclear wastes along its coasts, going on for decades guided by many rich countries. Illegal fishing by unlicensed criminal vessels has been also a major challenge for country's economy.

PAKISTAN

A Perpetrator of State Sponsored Terrorism Is Waking Up Again. It is well known that ever since Pakistan secured independence, it has not felt living like a friendly neighbour of India. Time and again Kashmir issue has been raked up at International fora without success and branching off East Pakistan as Bangladesh has further added to its woes. Further involvement of Pakistan in two massive bomb blasts in Mumbai in March 1993 and November 2008, serial train blasts, seventeen blasts in Delhi in 1997-98, one on November 10 again in Delhi, murder of a Punjab C. M. etc are not only notorious acts but these make people to people contacts further difficult. Contacts by way of Cricket matches had been almost forgotten till decision of Pakistan a few days ago to play in an India co-sponsored World Cup.

Bangladesh Factor

Growing proximity of Pakistan following change of Government in Bangladesh in August 2024 is to further disadvantage of India from Internal security angle. Prevalence of an almost porous West Bengal- Bangladesh border will suit nefarious Pak designs. Not only fundamentalist elements in Bangladesh are getting further fillip but foreign policy of the country, while moving away from India, is getting more oriented towards China and Pakistan. U. S. A. may also jump in. Terror threat from Eastern border of India, is likely to increase when either Jamat-e-islami or Bangladesh National Party are likely to grab power in February 12 elections in absence of contest from Awami League of Sheikh Hasina.

Will There Be Peace Board For Gaza Strip?

In view of direct or oblique reference to Gaza Strip, U. S. A. and Israel as above, it may be desirable to say a few words about proposed Peace Board For Gaza. Successive U. S. Presidents have ignored and encouraged Israeli tirade against Palestinians and naked use of arms and ammunitions in the Middle East. In retaliation to the 7th October 2023 episode leading to merciless killing of 1219 Israelis, large scale devastation was caused in Gaza strip and West Bank. Innocent adults and mal nourished children continue to suffer despite three Cease Fires in the recent past.

To apply balm to them in a typical Trumpian style, a plan for Peace Board has been floated without much rhyme, reason and justification. While Israel has considered the plan contrary to its policies, Pakistan, despite its involvement in all forms of terrorism, has given its willingness to join. One may, however, ask-do they have any peace keeping experience suited to need in Gaza?

India is not committing ostensibly in view of its interest in energy security and presence of 9 million strong Indian diaspora in the Middle East. France appears aware but no commitment has been given by them. U. K. and Germany have felt its importance but are not giving their consent. President of European Commission was expected to discuss the matter with the member countries. Thus this plan of Trump too has been pushed to the backwaters for the time being. It has happened when U. S-Iran fresh talks also dealing with nuclear issue have failed at Oman after unusual euphoria on the part of U.S.A.

TAILPIECE

If one looks at State Terror vis a vis Sea Piracy, former is older and relatively localised but latter being relatively recent and spread to many countries, looks far more Contagious and Dangerous. It is having unbelievable tentacles.

As far as human if not vexed issue of Gaza Strip is concerned, Two State Solution Appears To Be the BEST one. But Are We Listening, Ready & Alert?

Part “E”

MOTHER NATURE

Chapter – 1

Sun Is All Pervading⁵⁷

Sun is the gigantic star of Solar system. Massive in size, Hydrogen and Helium are its main elements of composition. It is 149, 600, 000 kms away from Earth. No power in Universe can sideline, ignore or beat Sun as it is a symbol of Divine power. As it overpowers all the eight planets and stars put together, it is an indomitable power house of light and energy.

Being massive in size, it allows plants to photosynthesize. It also helps to form Fossil fuels which are burnt for energy.

When days are sunny especially in summer, one does welcome both sun rise and sun set. However, when it becomes scorching by mid-day, our curses come out freely. But with soaring temperatures daily works have to be carried forward. No respite, whatsoever.

Sun Worship

Sun has been an object of unusual veneration in many cultures. Sun or Sol God is worshipped as a special deity twice a year in India, -on Chhath Puja day and Makar Sankranti.

Devotees observe the most difficult CHHATH by keeping a water bereft fast of 36 to 60 hours. Only in Chhath Sun is worshipped first in the evening. Again the next day, very early, devotees offer 'Argya' to the rising Sun. Home cooked Thekua and fresh, raw fruits are offered as Prasaad. This is the only festival in which help and guidance of priest is not needed. Friends and relatives assemble in large numbers to ensure its preparation for days and its ultimate success.

Sun is supposed to enter Makar Rashi from Dhanu Rashi on Makar Sankranti day. This day marks transition of Sun from Zodiac sign of Sagittarius to Capricorn (Makar), marking the beginning of Uttarayan. Sun movement thus shifts from south to north. This results in longer days and a warm temperature. The movement of Sun is believed to bring positivity, prosperity and spiritual growth. It is supposed to signify end of winter and onset of spring. It is hailed

and celebrated all over the world. However, for a change, nowadays cold /cool winter is experienced even after celebration Of Makar Sankranti.

Lhori, Makar Sankranti, Bihu, Pongal & Uttarayan

LHORI is celebrated the night before Makar Sankranti. It is observed with fun and frolic by Sikhs and Hindus having roots in North India. It is dedicated to Sun God. It is essentially celebrating the movement of Sun around a huge fire. Fire is lit in the evening and peanuts, popcorn and local sweets are thrown into fire. Same is distributed among the friends and known people who throng the fire place.

MAKAR SANKRANTI is celebrated with tremendous joy, gaiety and enthusiasm by different names all over our vast country. It is Lhori in Punjab, Bhagi in Andhra and Telangana, Pongal in Tamil Nadu, Utarayan in Gujarat and Bihu in Assam.

BIHU is a 5, 000 year old festival of Assam. There are three Bihu celebrations: On Makar Sankranti day, BHOGALI BIHU is celebrated by eating and rejoicing variety of food items, in which fresh harvested rice is prominent. In April, they have RONGALI BIHU in which several dance recitals mark the occasion involving the whole community. Dances have a certain degree of charm, involvement and fascination. Soon after Deepawali, KONGALI BIHU is observed to denote that food materials have been all consumed and farms & homes have been emptied. A Bonfire in the field is the last exercise. Leaving unprecedented festive mood apart, normal work all over Assam gets impacted for a long period.

Irrespective of regional variations, Makar Sankranti marks pious beginning of a new agricultural season. Freshly harvested Rice, Beaten Rice, Til, Gazak, Gur Badam, Jaggery, Sweet Potato, Reddish, Curd etc are consumed upon taking bath in a river or pond, followed by wearing new clothes. For the dinner, tasty Khichdi with slight variation is prepared.

PONGAL is celebrated with joy and gratitude. It is one of the most sacred harvest festivals of Tamil Nadu. It is a vibrant celebration honouring the Sun God and offering him thanks for a bountiful harvest. First Day of the festival is dedicated to clearing out old and unwanted belongings. People burn out old items in a bonfire, known as BHOGI.

UTTARAYAN is celebrated in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and parts of M. P. It also signifies end of winter and onset of prosperity. During this period Sun rays are believed to be most beneficial, bringing light and warmth. It is seen as a time of renewal and a harbinger of better times. Farmers harvest Sugar cane, closely tied to Uttarayan's celebration. People get warmth from Bonfire and joy from flying kites.

Charm Of Sunlight

All the sane elements like, rather, relish sun light and a bout of sadness if not depression, gets reflected or penetrated during the onset of Sunset.

If days are misty and foggy, one aspires to get a glimpse of Lord Sun. When a streak of it appears on horizon, smile and momentary relief both are felt.

Advantages of Sun

Even if a bit of Fog gets cleared and resultantly, air pollution is reduced and visibility improves, the depth of feeling deep inside our heart, can not possibly be measured.

On a chilly day, which can be both bone chilling and muscle tearing, accompanied by what is termed now a Super Fog day, wind speed of 10 kmph gives the required relief and there is nothing called ray of hope.

Drawing comfort becomes unusual from the warmth of sun shine, even if it is for an hour or two.

Global Warming And Cooling

Over a decade or so, one has been hearing of Global Warming, a worrting phenomenon, fast catching up, resulting directly into rise of earth's temperature by 1 to 1. 6 degrees every year. Emergence of mosquitos and other insects, increased rate of melting of Glaciers, change in the course of rivers, breaking and drifting of Ice Bergs etc. are taking place.

In the midst of warming, at times, one comes across Global Cooling also, that may, or may not be followed by rainfall. Global cooling baffles one and all. However, it is generally a short term process. But scientific evidence, invariably so far, has hinted at more of warming, rather than cooling.

More detailed and systematic analysis of Global Cooling is very much required. It may turn out to be a fascinating field of research. But a beginning has to be made.

TO SUM UP

Disappearance of Sun in winter during the day, is a gradual process but at times, it may be all of a sudden. Woolens that are subjected to a “sunning and airing” process since morning, are picked up one by one. One is compelled to cover up and if needed, take recourse to Quilt, consequent upon a simple and hot vegetarian lunch. Soon darkness heralds nemesis of another winter day. Who knows what will weather be the next day but one has to be prepared to face it?

Above analysis shows that worship of nature and its bio diversity is of prime significance for survival of mankind. Its form may differ from place to place but essence is similar.

Chapter - 2

Global Warming: Fast Spreading Phenomenon Needs To Be Checked⁵⁸

Environment encompasses all living and non-living things that surround us, including air, water, land and various organisms. But we seem to be caring less and less when it comes to upkeep of environment. Record breaking heat is being felt even on hill stations and rivers are experiencing dry spells. Snow cover too is on decline in many places situated close to snow line.

Global Warming(G. W.) may mean a long term rise in temperature of the Earth, primarily caused by human activities. Green house gases, such as, Carbon Dioxide and Methane trap heat and lead to gradual heating of the planet.

In other words, G. W. may denote rise in frequency and intensity of heat waves, drought, flood, cyclone, Tsunami etc. Habitat loss and extinction of species may also happen.

Warming Up In Europe

During 2025, rare, early heat wave is blanketing many countries of Europe: Portugal, Germany, Spain, France and Italy. High alerts are being issued. People and tourists are frantically looking for drinking water during their visits to places of interest. School going children and elderly are getting inconvenienced. As heat wave is also hitting South Europe, forests are likely to get ignited like an year ago. Deadly heat wave in Europe has claimed many lives so far, leading to health emergencies and power plant shut downs. Eiffel Tower in Paris was closed for a few days as maximum temperature in the city hovered between 40 and 41 degrees. In contrast, in India things are almost normal even when mercury shoots to 47 or 48 degrees.

Indian Situation

Jammu & Kashmir has seen its hottest June and July in almost five decades. Average day time temperature has been in the range of 32 and 33 degrees. On

July 5 this year it rose to 37.4 degrees. Owing to soaring temperature, streams are drying up and shortage of drinking water is being faced. Such a scorching Summer was last experienced in 1892.

Condition was similar in hill stations, namely, Shimla, Mussoorie and Nainital.

In Gangtok, capital of Sikkim heat became so unbearable in June that records of three decades have been broken. Apart from preponing Summer break of children, a few more viable measures are being taken in this otherwise cleanest hill station.

National Capital Region

Northern India and major portion of National Capital Region is also experiencing an early heat wave with unusual rise in maximum temperature. During one week it rose from 39 to 43 degrees and minimum one hovered between 20 and 22 degree Celsius. Surprisingly humidity and sultry conditions which used to be characteristic features of July and August, has been felt in the second fortnight of June also. Imagine this happening despite the region recording the wettest Winter in several decades. If situation like this continues for a week or ten days, Severe Heat Wave Alerts may have to be issued by the India Meteorological Department.

In regions, such as, Antarctica, Ice Bergs have not only been found floating but these have also begun cracking and falling. As an impact, there is surge of minus 38 degrees in temperature. This has to be considered very warm from existing parameters of the isolated continent.

All the above situations indicate that G. W. not only has become a reality but it is going to stay. Such a change in weather is bound to take place in future also.

Average temperature of mother earth is likely to get an addition of more than 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels by 2030. It has already risen by 0.5 to 1 degree Celsius. In some parts of world, however, one is also experiencing overall cooling, albeit, for a short period.

Causes of Global Warming

As per updated input of Inter Governmental Panel On Climate Change, Warming of Earth Surface takes place when Carbon Dioxide traps solar

radiation in the atmosphere. In common parlance, this process is also called Green house Effect.

It is mainly caused By burning of Fossil fuel: Coal, Oil, Wood etc.

Other reasons could be:

- a. High emission levels in many sectors and countries
- b. Alarming rate of deforestation or green cover
- c. Unjustifiable consumption of Fertilisers containing Nitrogen
- d. Indiscriminate release of Fluorinated Gas from Refrigerators, Air Conditioners and Heat Pumps
- e. Tremendous rise in number of automobiles
- f. Reduced availability of water vapour
- g. Rise in urbanisation & industrialisation leading to more civil constructions

Vehicles older than 15 years invariably become villain of piece.

These undoubtedly should catch our imagination, sooner than later. We need to be very serious for the sake of future generations.

Suffering has begun, diseases are multiplying, crops and fruits are getting adversely affected but many of us are still in sleeping mode.

Who will wake up or How to wake up, that's the point to be underlined.

Perhaps we may have to follow "Catch Them Young" slogan or campaign.

Little children, once they understand and get convinced, can make any environment related campaign successful and sustainable.

Let Us Ensure That Human Driven Climate Change Is Not Beyond Control.

Chapter -3

Environmental Pollution: Has It Become A Nightmare?⁵⁹

A sheet of grey haze shrouds as I open balcony door at 6. 20 a. m. As I get ready to go to temple and thereafter a walk, one discovers that a thick smog has blanketed the colony. Visibility is hardly 50 metres. Air is dense. Looks pollution is going to be severe today. Until post noon sun light does not trickle down to surface.

Battle with pollution at this time of the year has become an annual ritual. We think about it only during November and December. Don't we think that it is an air emergency or a nightmare that haunts N. C. R. year after year? Further, I gather that air pollution in NCR is over 26 times the limit prescribed by W. H. O. Not only Delhi has the dubious distinction of being most polluted but neighbouring Ghaziabad too has become second city in this regard. Eighty one more towns and cities of the country figure in this category according to W. H. O. This is at the time when Smart City project is in full swing.

All of us are aware of external and internal factors leading to pollution and what could be remedial measures but casual approach of concerned departments, agencies and non co-operation of people comes in the way.

According to an expert "North Westerly winds are expected to continue, so farm fires will still remain a factor. Very dense fog followed by smog is very much possible after November 18".

Fog, Smog, Dipping Temperature

It is not only pollution. Pollution together with fog, smog and dipping temperature become villains. Smog is a toxic blend of smoke and fog. It halts life, schools, offices and travel leading to a grim situation. Children and elderly suffer maximum when it comes to breathing problem, eye burning, asthma, headache or respiratory and cardiac illness. Even healthy young adults become vulnerable. Inflammation and damage to lung tissues may take place leading to premature death.

According to some scientists a kind of ‘ Super Fog’ is also possible. As nearby structures, buildings, trees, roads etc. may not be seen by a cyclist or a motorist, accidents are bound to occur. Incidence of smog intensified in NCR from 15th November and it rose to unimaginable levels on 17th and 18th November.

Health Hazard

Polluted air is a health hazard. It is an ocean of poison for 20 million people of NCR. It is shocking to note that 2. 1 million people died of air pollution in India in 2023 alone. Breathing polluted air shortens life span and deteriorating Air Quality Index (AQI) makes it impossible to ride a cycle or a bike. Smaller the pollutants, the more harmful they are to human body. When pollutants accumulate in atmosphere, wind speed should increase or some rain can also help.

A report of TERI published in 2021 highlights vehicles as main source of pollution. Mostly two wheelers are to be blamed. Further, high levels of P. M. 10 and P. M. 2.5 are attributable to industries and stone crushers. Dust from roads and burning of fuel wood also contribute.

Also, pollution is not abating. rather, AQI is deteriorating. The report finally contends that source of pollution is from within, not from outside.

Burning Of Stubble from Paddy Field

During the pollution phase in NCR, topmost blame goes to Paddy fields of Punjab, Haryana, U. P., Rajasthan and M. P.

A satellite detected 1334 places in six states which were witnessing farm fires on one day.

Harvesting of Paddy crop takes place during October and November. Farmers act hurriedly to clear their fields for next crop of wheat but don't have money to purchase the machine already developed for the purpose.

Smoke that comes to NCR contributes to 17 to 30% pollution of the region on an average. But on 13th November, it increased to 30.8%, on 14th November it was 33.33% and on 16th November it rose to 35.17%. The Decision Support System (DSS) of Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, however, has clarified that some false fires are also recorded by satellites due to fog and large number of weddings in the region.. According to experts, the

thick black fumes are swept into Delhi and NCR by strong transport winds and trapped close to ground by sluggish surface winds.

Maximum smoke comes from Punjab and Haryana and also from Lahore in Pakistan if NASA satellite imagery is to be believed. During the current year, half of Paddy fields in Punjab were yet to be harvested a few days ago.

According to Hindustan Times, Punjab recorded 1251 farm fires on 18th November, a season high, thus raising the total to 9655. Muktsar Dist. reported most incidents at 247, followed by Moga (149) and Ferozpur (130). Total 48,489 farm fires were recorded in the state in 2022. It fell to 33,719 (drop of 26%) in 2023. Let's see if it falls further during 2024.

According to some experts, on 18th November, Haryana had 36 farm fires, Rajasthan had 152, U. P. 133, M. P. 639 and Punjab 1251. On 19th November, Punjab recorded only 20 farm fires.

Air Quality Index (AQI)

It is an index meant to represent pollution. It does not show actual level of pollutants in the air. For fourteen consecutive days till 11th November AQI was 'very poor' in NCR. Between 13th to 19th November, it was 418, 426, 396, 417, 441, 460 and 494 respectively. So five days were "severe" and two days were within "severe plus" range. AQI of 494 on 19th November was season's second highest. A cocktail of slow wind, dipping temperature (12. 3 degrees), poor visibility and farm fires from neighbouring states kept NCR on tenterhooks. According to some authentic sources, between 20th and 22nd November AQI may be severe again.

REASONS & REMEDIES

Well known reasons for atmospheric pollution are: Emission of Carbon Monoxide from vehicles, Smoke from local Industrial units, Construction works, Garbage burning, Use of Generators, Power plants, Dust from roads having pot holes, Smoke from burning paddy fields of nearby states, Crackers of Diwali, Marriage & other festivals.

For checking emission from vehicles, half hearted steps are taken by Police and transport personnel but issue is never resolved. Odd and even system tried earlier did not work in a place which has one crore twenty lakh vehicles. Rather, one day of week needs to be declared as Vehicle Free Day.

Similar is the case in regard to Industrial units that remain. Pollution from construction sites can never be resolved as builders continue to flout orders and instructions and inspecting staff of authorities/departments are found hand in glove with contractors and suppliers. Also construction area is mostly not covered.

Garbage Burning

For stopping or even restricting garbage burning, people have to fully co-operate. In the same way, unnecessary use of generators has to be checked and it should not be allowed during peak hours. Dust emanating from roads having pot holes can be solved easily but it is a pan India phenomenon.

To my knowledge there are no power plants left in the national capital, so it should be a non- issue.

Use of Air Purifier is also suggested. But one may know that it works only for a limited period and that too inside a fully shut room.

For stopping and restricting burning of stubble in five states, discussion takes place and executive as also judicial orders are issued but there are wide gaps in the process of implementation. There is always lack of co-ordination between the Delhi Government and Centre on the one hand and between Delhi government and four state governments on the other. Long term strategies are needed, short term action would not suffice. They only prolong the damage. If concerned Chief Ministers are concerned about citizen's well being, they need to meet and thrash out issues at regular intervals.

Measures like work from home & on-line classes only do lip service. Moreover, Quality becomes a casualty in these circumstances.

Use of Crackers

In regard to crackers, no serious effort is ever made to carry out seizures. Users further spend money because they have good deal of unaccounted and black money. While being guided by whims and fancies, people especially youth forget their duty towards fellow citizens, children and elderly.

Last but not the least, no one can put restrictions on unwanted expenditure during weddings. People have to show that they are someone with name and fame and jewelleries and costly dresses have to be displayed together with crackers. Amount of food that is wasted on such occasions is simply mind

boggling. There being more than 10 lakh marriages in the region till 15th December, one can imagine damage to the environment even when an average of 50 firecrackers are used per wedding.

Conclusion

It should be our endeavour to work sincerely to put an end to toxic days. We seem to have learned no lesson in regard to spike in pollution. As a result, steps taken prove temporary and unsustainable. Current crisis is likely to worsen further. Only after 15th or 20th January one can think of getting some RELIEF.

Chapter - 4

Are Adverse Weather Conditions Creating Havoc ?

WEATHER is the atmospheric condition at a specific point of time, such as, hourly, daily, weekly, monthly or yearly. It can change from minute to minute, hour to hour, day to day and season to season. Its examples could be: rain, snow, cloud, wind, thunder, storm and hail.

CLIMATE, on the other hand, describes the typical weather over a long period of time, such as, a few years or more. Climate changes slowly over years, centuries or millenia. Its examples are: snow in the North East in January, hot & humid weather in South East in July, rise in sea level, melting Glaciers, shifting seasons etc.

Weather: Hide & Seek?

If one was to elucidate the current unreliable and perplexing weather, one would surmise that it was playing ‘hide and seek’ for quite sometime. In view thereof, neither one can put on heavy woollens nor resort to ‘take off’.

Lord Sun, the ultimate source of energy does not show face everyday. When one is lucky, expected glaze and warmth misses out when you get exposed to Sun barely for an hour or two. Light to normal rain on three to four days can bring down Air Quality Index (AQI).

Once difference of 24 degrees vis a vis 4 degrees was experienced but one day, this difference was only 3 degrees between maximum and minimum temperatures.

Factors Causing Deterioration

Deterioration over the last seven days could be attributed to a combination of very dense fog, low atmospheric mixing height, weak winds and unfavourable meteorological conditions.

According to Weather Scientists, these trap pollutants closer to earth surface. Further, they add that situation has worsened because emissions from local sources have added to stagnant air, thus pushing level of pollution to higher levels.

Forecasts of EWS of Govt. of India for NCR indicate that AQI was unlikely to improve before 7th or 8th January and that it would remain in ‘very poor’ category. On 6th January, however, it was the same old story.

Power of Sun

Sometimes it appears that one will be getting the advantage of Sunshine till its setting time. Afterall, the power and glow of Sun is incomparable, something difficult to measure. Warmth emanating from it can easily fail a heater or a blower. Further, basking in Sun provides a sort of eternal energy and ability. It is a rich source of Vitamin D also.

Global Warming Leads To Climate Change

Warming of Earth surface happens when Carbon Dioxide traps Solar radiation in the atmosphere. Changes in global climate caused by irregular and unsustainable human activities are already affecting many weather and climate extremes, practically in every region across the planet. Human beings are responsible for creating conditions for changing climate by emitting green house gases and pollutants from industry and businesses, growing use of chemical fertilisers, release of Fluorinated gas from refrigerators, air conditioners, air purifiers and heat pumps, transport and homes or due to vast changes in land use pattern.

Global climate is heating up day by day by 1.5 to 2 degrees every year. Nevertheless, sometimes one gets a false feeling as if “Global Cooling” instead of warming is taking place. Whatever it may be, it is added by self interest, intolerance and ignoring the interest of others. Moderate to heavy fog hovering around, one comes across, every day in Delhi and parts of North India. Rain on three to four days did bring down pollution levels but chill too seems to have intensified in a big way. It is well known that winds of any speed improve a city’s pollution levels. Western disturbance impacted Delhi between 22nd to 23rd December and again between 26th to 27th December. Rain was to lead to more improvement in pollution levels. But less said should be better.

Air Quality Index

Air Quality is classified into six categories:

Good, Satisfactory, Moderate, Poor, Very Poor and Severe. Dropping of air quality leads to decrease in wind speed. When wind is slow, dispersion of pollutants becomes hard as pollutants keep moving in a circulatory motion.

AQI during the period 17 December to 24 December in Delhi was above 400. It was 433, 445, 451, 429, 370, 427, 417 and 466, respectively.

Meaning thereby, it was severe or very severe. It was an alarming situation, altogether, but none of us BOTHERED.

Importance Of Forest

Forest becomes a key determinant in such tough circumstances.

In India, there has been slow reduction in forest cover. But same has now increased to 25% as per India State Of Forest Report, 2023. Between 2013 and 2023, it increased by 8.3%. However, decline has been recorded in some states of North East, such as, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram.

With a total forest area of 1,483 Sq. kms, Delhi has maximum forest area among the mega cities. Mumbai comes next, followed by Ahmedabad.

Degradation of forests, however, is becoming an area of tremendous concern. Unless attended to on priority, it may cause unimaginable havoc.

No Escape From Biting Cold

View of India Meteorological Department

Defines a 'Cold Day' when the maximum temperature is at least 4.5 degrees below normal, even when minimum temperature is below 10 degrees. Over twenty days, no respite from cold has been experienced which becomes, at times, bone chilling, muscle tearing and nose watering. It causes diseases, such as, Cough, Cold, Bronchitis etc.

Whole of North India is shivering as cold wave has further intensified and more and more of snow is falling over the hills of J & K, H. P. and Uttarakhand. In such situations people from plains rush to the hills to have a feel of snow. Their unusual fun, frolic and running around, at times becomes dangerous. Landslide is also not ruled out even in snow infested conditions

but accidents also happen due to skidding of vehicles in the highway or their sliding into a Gorge.

26th December was a very cold day in Delhi when day temperature plummeted to 14.6 degree and lowest minimum temperature was 4.5 degrees on 16th December. On a very cold day, difference between maximum and minimum temperatures is MINIMAL.

Rains In Winter

Talking of rain, total quantum this year has reached levels not seen in three decades. Last time such intense December rains were in 1997. It may bring more cold but it is considered very good for winter crops. According to IMD forecast, on 28th December, more rain was expected. Relief from pollution definitely due to rain has to be welcomed.

Rain in the morning, that too in winter, however, catches school going children and office goers or residents off guard, thus hampering their study and work schedules and leading to brief snarls. IMD had issued Yellow Alerts for cloudy sky and light rain for 6th January. This spell was to lead to cloudiness and soon after, wind speeds were expected to pick up. These cold North Westerly winds were to impact temperature leading to drop in both maximum and minimum temperatures. Daytime temperatures were also going to hover around 16 to 17 degrees while night time lows were to range between 8 to 9 degree Celsius. But upto 5 p. m. neither rain happened nor there was drastic reduction in fog.

National capital went on to log zero visibility for fifth consecutive day on Monday. It was over three hours between 4 and 7. 30 a. m., impacting flight and train operations again. The Vice President of Skymet had also opined that intensity of fog was expected to reduce marginally on 6th January. As per a Scientist of IMD, fog conditions on 6th January were far better as Delhi was assisted by a 'Fog Hole' formed over the city. It was due to local factors and heating, specific to Delhi. Moderate to dense fog was likely to prevail over Delhi on 6th January again, according to IMD.

As mercury drops further, orders are issued to shut schools every now and then. At times 'hybrid schooling' is also permitted, which increases the burden of teachers, especially women teachers. Cold day together with dense fog reduces visibility and makes morning travel extremely unsafe for children

below 12 years of age. Authorities, while issuing orders do rightly mention that safety and well being of students was their top priority.

Water logging too takes place which increases the burden of people, apart from causing jams and accidents.

On 28th December, Delhi received highest single day of rain (41.2 mm) since 1923. But the capital could also breathe its best air in nine years.

Cold Wave Conditions

According to IMD, North Westerly winds were likely to start impacting the region leading to a sharp dip in minimum temperature as they bring cold wave from mountains. IMD had also forecasted clear sky from 30th December onwards but same has not happened at all.

At present biting very cold conditions are gripping North India especially in the states of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Western UP and NCR. IMD says that cold wave conditions were to continue for one more week. Such winds provide a chilling effect during the day even if Sun shine graces us. Fresh Westerly disturbance from 2nd January was likely to slow down the strong North Westerly winds again. This too has not happened.

NOIDA Situation

NOIDA holds an important place in NCR, not only due to its gigantic growth potential but also as a clean, planned & vibrant satellite city to the national capital. It has recorded its best and lowest annual average AQI since 2017. Thus favourable weather gave NOIDA its best year since 2017.. Air also improved when compared to permissible limits of PM 10 and PM 2. 5 particulate matter. The official data also indicates that District experienced only two high pollution “severe” days in 2024, which is the lowest since 2017. Same was five in 2023.

NOIDA, however, still has irritating issues of dust, large number of construction sites, dumping yards, vehicular emissions and many instances of garbage burning which need to be acted upon priority. Resources like manual cleaning of streets, mechanised road sweeping machines and water sprinklers have to be used in a big way. The city, alongwith Ghaziabad also badly needs more Air Quality Monitoring Stations as compared to huge numbers in Delhi.

First Week Of January, A Very Challenging Phase

Delhiites woke up to a thick blanket of fog between 2nd and 6th January as visibility dropped down drastically. Hence, flights, trains and vehicular traffic were disrupted in several places in the N. C. R. More than 300 flights were delayed on 3rd January due to very dense fog over Delhi airport for two hours between 6 a. m. to 8 a. m. As regards trains, 43 of them were delayed due to poor visibility.

On 4th January, over 350 flights and 24 trains were delayed. Average delay time of flights was 41 minutes but so far none of the flights have been diverted. On 5th January again over 300 flights were delayed and 18 were cancelled.

Trains too were impacted in the early hours. 51 trains were delayed by over 30 minutes in the entire region. One can imagine the plight of train passengers and relatives who go to pick and see them off.

WORST FOG SPELL

4th January saw season's worst fog spell in terms of intensity and visibility which was Zero for nine hours between 11:30 p.m. on 3rd January and 8:30 a. m. on 4th January. Its cascading effect was felt for hours. Also, there was not even a remote indication of any rain, though sky had remained cloudy during major parts of the day.

Drivers of vehicles and Cyclists faced challenges as visibility dropped sharply in the early hours of all the above mentioned five to six days.

Explaining this phenomenon, IMD Scientists are of the view that fog was happening as a result of cold morning temperatures mixing with high moisture and pollutants in the air.

AQI was recorded at 318 (very poor) on 3rd January which rose to 378 on 4th January and fell to 339 on 5th January. Again it fell to 315 on 6th January. AQI of NOIDA, on the other hand, was 365 and 236 on 5th and 6th January respectively. Hence slight improvement does take place but but it is back to square one situation again. AQI was likely to be very poor till 7th January as conditions will remain adverse for the dispersal of pollutants. As there has been improvement in air quality, commensurate fall is expected in maximum and minimum temperatures. On 6th January, minimum and maximum temperatures in Delhi were 9. 7 and 17. 6 degrees respectively. As 6th January

was another semi dense fog day, 25 trains were delayed but information relating to delayed flights was not available.

However, weather in North West India was expected to clear up with an anticipated steep fall in minimum temperature. As per IMD forecast for 7th and 8th January, both days were going to be cold with dense fog conditions. Minimum temperature was going to hover between 8 and 9 degrees while maximum temperature was going to be in the range of 18 to 19 degrees.

RAIN, RAIN, COME AGAIN

As regards long awaited, badly needed rainfall, as mentioned above, there was nothing on 6th January despite cloud cover. Now rain has been predicted for 11th and 12th January not only in Delhi but also in NCR, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana and Western U. P. In addition, isolated Hailstorms are not ruled out during this period. Rain as in immediate past will no doubt clear up pollutants from atmosphere but more cold wave will also follow. Impact of such conditions will be swiftly on Lohri and Makar Sankranti festivals.

No respite is expected even till 14th or 15th January in this way in the entire NCR and neighbouring states.

Conclusion

We fondly realize that life was very simple and devoid of worries when there was nothing called AQI, Climate change, air or water pollution. There was no system of forecasting weather three or four decades ago. Before going to bed, one would never talk of weather nor plan the next day by looking at sky. As school students in early Seventies, we never knew who was District Magistrate or was there an authority to check pollution or its threshold. Once a year, declaration of a rainy day in school would take us to seventh heaven. For this also we had to go to school, getting fully wet on the way.

As time has passed by, struggle for life has begun and new challenges have been emerging. Apart from contribution of natural agents in causing either water or air pollution, man made reasons are more to blame as these can be contained but due to our whims and fancies are left to become dominant.

Will cool, soothing wind with azure blue sky soon become a reality? While all of us see, hear and feel everything, who will dare to bell the cat for an unbiased, sincere work in the current deteriorating weather scenario? Seeing

rampant dust and water pollution and inhaling of toxic air for days together, was never thought of or expected. AQI goes up and comes down but we seem to be still in a debating and discussing mode.

To make matters worse, HMPV Virus has also arrived from China to India and nine child cases have been identified already. It has been a tough, long, challenging and very severe winter so far. We need, therefore, to take sustainable and viable steps soon for common good, so that interest of future generations is adequately protected.

Chapter - 5

Global Warming Must Be Taken Seriously⁶⁰

Maximum temperature showing 32.4 degrees on 27th February 2025 reflected the hottest day in New Delhi in February in last two years. Similar temperature has been felt on a day in January. Only respite was that Air Quality Index was in 'Poor' category. As if this was not enough, minimum temperature too recorded its highest (19.5 degree) on the same day. Being 7 degree above normal, it was highest in February since 1901. Temperature surge was also recorded in NOIDA, with maximum temperature rising significantly to 38 degrees and minimum temperature shooting upto 17.3 degrees. While light showers took place in New Delhi on both the days, in NCR, it was apology to rainfall.

Whatever it may be, sudden disappearance of winter in this way is bound to have adverse effect on health. A country like USA, having very good health indices is facing Measles now. These developments reflect that warming of earth is not only taking place, same is rising and it may not subside.

According to WHO, this kind of change in climate is one of the biggest threats to global health in 21st century. Global Warming (GW) became a popular expression since its use by a NASA scientist, James Hansen in 1988.

Upper Atmosphere

Upper atmosphere of earth has been found cooling because green house gases are trapping heat near the earth's surface. As a result, less heat is radiating into space. Such a warming leads to greater evaporation from the ocean leading to more atmospheric humidity.

Impact on Northern & Southern Hemisphere

It has been noted that different regions of world warm at different rates. Northern hemisphere has warmed much faster than the Southern atmosphere.

Incidentally, northern hemisphere not only has more land but also has more seasonal snow cover and snow ice.

IMPACT OF WARMING

Due to GW, not only heat waves are rising but wild fires are becoming more common. We have seen recently devastating wild fires in California, Spain, Australia and many other vulnerable areas.

Deserts are expanding in all the continents. Retreat of glaciers has been witnessed leading to decline in sea ice. More intense storms and high speed cyclones are happening, resulting into loss of mankind, livestock and habitat. Oceans are heating, leading to rise in sea level. This is as a consequence of thermal expansion and melting of glaciers and ice sheets. It is being apprehended that a few islands of Bangladesh and Maldives are going to be submerged.

It has been observed that plants are flowering early, say in spring and birds and animal species are moving closer to cooler areas of earth. A climate change of this kind may result in extinction of many species. Almost half of global wetlands have disappeared owing to climate change and other human impacts.

Yield of crop has been reduced, fisheries has been affected and stunting among children is taking place. All this leads to further rise in extreme poverty. Extreme weather events also impact public health, food and water security. More illnesses and frequent instances of Dengue fever and Malaria are being observed, even on hills.

Global Warming In India

India's average temperature has risen by 0.7 degrees between 1901 and 2018. Intensity of heat waves is increasing. Droughts, floods, cyclones and landslides are becoming more frequent and severe.

Crop yields are expected to fall significantly. Extremely high temperature in North India is having substantial negative impact on yield of wheat. There is, therefore, need to grow drought resistant crops.

Water Shortage

Decrease in flow of water with rise in temperature will pose serious risk to innumerable thermal power plants. Increased flow of water in the run of river

projects too poses dangers to those living on the banks. Further, water stress has already begun due to rapid urbanisation, fast building of highways and overall pace of economic development.

Impact on Health

There is going to be rise in malnutrition and child stunting. Latter is projected to increase by 35% by 2050. Heat wave is also likely to result in very substantial rise in mortality.

Migration of people from disaster prone areas has also begun.

Risk to Mumbai & Kolkata

Ever expanding mega city of Mumbai runs the risk of sea water intrusion as large parts of city is built on reclaimed land. Kolkata in the same way, is also vulnerable to the impact of rise in sea level for many years. Few islands too are threatened in India, Bangladesh and Maldives.

Conclusion

An attempt has been made to highlight above impacts of global warming as also climate change. It is for the human beings to think and show immediate interest in taking mitigation measures in the interest of future generations. Or else, future of mankind appears Doomed.

Chapter -6

Environmental Pollution: Manifestation & Combat Mechanism⁶¹

In good old days, air would be pure, water would be clean, soil would be free of chemical substance and noise pollution would not be heard. Following urbanisation, industrialisation and construction boom, situation has undergone a rapid change. Enactments and redressal mechanisms have taken shape slowly but a casual approach prevails all over country.

Environment is the sum total of all living and non- living elements and their effects that impact human life. Former includes animals, plants, forest, fisheries and birds while latter comprises of water, land, sunlight, rocks and air.

Key Environmental Issues

These are: Pollution of air and water, Solid Waste, Deforestation, Global Warming, Climate Change, Extinction of Species etc. Needless to say, these are caused as a result of man's interaction with his surroundings. We should, therefore, try to reduce negative impact of issues flagged to ensure sustenance to the future generation.

AIR POLLUTION

Air gets polluted due to dust, smoke, gas, fog, emission from vehicles, factories, garbage burning, constructions etc. Apart from burning of eyes and dirt accumulating on cloths it results into heart ailments, Asthma, and Allergies.

Air Pollution (Prevention & Control) Act, 1981 is a key legislation in respect of air pollution.

Its purpose is to prevent, control and reduce air pollution through the boards established to carry out spelt purposes.

Under the Act, Central and State Pollution Control Boards are established to implement the Act after related functions are assigned to them.

A Central Pollution Control Board was constituted in September, 1974 to look after both air and water pollution. It has a Central and nine regional offices.

Penalty for violating provisions of the Act:

Whosoever contravenes provisions of the Act or the directions issued there under is punished with imprisonment for 3 months or with fine extending to Rs. Ten Thousand or with both.

For Control of Air Pollution, reduction of emissions, energy efficiency, use of renewable energy, maximizing use of public transport and more investment in electric vehicles is called for.

WATER POLLUTION

It denotes release of substances into water bodies that makes water unsafe for human consumption and disrupts aquatic ecosystems. In sum and substance, it is contamination of water over the surface and that of Ground water. It can be caused by industrial waste, agricultural run-off, sewage & household waste, plastic waste, oil spills etc.

It can lead to Cholera, Typhoid, Hepatitis among human beings in addition to affecting plants and irrigation systems. Pollution of Yamuna River in Delhi is a burning example of water pollution.

Water (Prevention & Control) Act, 1974

It was enacted to address water pollution, aiming to prevent & control and restore water quality through establishment of Boards and setting water quality standards. An officer of the Board has the power to take for the purpose of analysis, samples of water from any stream or well or samples of any sewage or trade effluent which is passing from any plant or vessel into any stream or well.

PENALTY: Whosoever contravenes provisions of the Act is punished with jail upto 3 months or a fine upto Rs 500 or both.

NOISE POLLUTION

Noise or sound pollution has been there for ages due to our long and elaborate festivals, marriages, celebrations and election campaigns. At times, it crosses all limits. Excessive or unwanted sound has harmful effects on humans, animals, birds as also marine life. Under water noise also happens. It can be unwanted when it interferes with normal activities, such as, sleep or conversation. It can cause health as also behaviour problems which can also lead to serious psychological stress. In addition, cardiological problems, hyper tension and hearing loss too are not ruled out.

It is necessary to use self protection devices, such as, Ear Plugs or Ear Muffs. Shutting doors while using noisy machines and lowering the volume of T. V. and Music systems should be always resorted to. At the level of State, Noise barriers be erected, Speed of vehicles be reduced and serious awareness campaigns be undertaken.

Legal Status & Regulation

Government issues rules and notifications against use of fire crackers every year but these are mostly violated. Also violations take place when loud speakers can not be used after 10 p.m. In West Bengal, loud speakers are put up all over town when a political meeting is in progress.

SOIL POLLUTION

Soil is loose surface material that covers a piece of land. It has both organic and inorganic matters. Pollution of soil is basically contamination of soil with harmful chemicals, pesticides, spilling of oils and waste materials. Salts and toxic compounds adversely affect animal health and growth of plants. Vegetables grown in contaminated soil can be injurious to human health. But this practice is rampant on the banks of Yamuna river in Delhi & N. C. R.

EFFECT of Soil Pollution may lead to reduced soil fertility, soil degradation and contamination of ground water and loss of bio- diversity.

Control Of Soil Pollution: Following steps may be taken:

Promotion of Organic farming, Soil Conservation, Reforestation, Proper Waste Management and Raising the awareness level of the community.

STEPS NEEDED FOR PROTECTING ENVIRONMENT

- Reduction of consumption,
- Reusing various items,
- Recycling, Carrying out conservation of water,
- Spreading message of energy conservation,
- Support environment friendly businesses,
- Clean up community,
- Carry out effective Awareness campaigns including among children,
- Cut down on use of plastics, vehicles, A. C.'s, cell phones etc.,
- Shop wisely and

*Carry out tree plantation drives which should also have regular watering & guard against biotic interference.

How To Maintain Cleanliness?

We should focus on regular personal hygiene, take bath everyday, wash hands properly, brush teeth twice a day, keep home and surroundings tidy with regular cleaning and decluttering.

Chapter-7

Global Warming By Two Degree By 2047 ?⁶²

The burning topic of Global Warming (GW) keeps surfacing time and again and rightly so. James Hansen, NASA Climatologist had announced it before the U. S. Congress in 1988. He had specifically indicated that GW was underway.

But in a new analysis, he and a few others have stated that Earth's climate was now more sensitive to rising Green House Emissions than previously believed. Accordingly it was not possible to hold on to long term GW to 2 degree centigrade per year, the fall back target of Paris Climate Accord.

AEROSOLE POLLUTION ON RISE

Further, it has been argued that decline in recent times in Sunlight-blocking Aerosole pollution from the Shipping industry is compounding the GW crisis. They have reiterated that enhanced warming of Earth was now guaranteed in view of tremendous amount of Green House gases pumped into its atmosphere by burning of Fossil fuel.

As a result, temperatures may stay at or above 1.5 degree in the coming years. Thus Coral reefs may be devastated and more number of storms would take place prior to rising of temperature to 2 degree Celsius. Polar ice will also melt and level of sea will rise by several metres. Virtually, there will be point of no return.

PARIS CLIMATE ACCORD

It may be recalled that during landmark Paris Climate Accord of 2015, members had agreed to try to hold, end of century warming to 1.5 degrees temperature. But fact of the matter is that this target has already been breached in the last two years as per Climate Monitoring System of European Union.

COP 29

Further, during recently concluded COP 29 at Baku in Azerbaijan, by understanding the importance of G. W. and Climate Change, the conference agreed on plans for finance to mitigate the effects of Climate change and help the developing countries in their transition to more sustainable energy sources. India, while participating actively, rejected the decision of COP as it did not, somehow, reflect the priorities of Global South.

It was decided to mobilise at least USD 300 Billion annually for this purpose. World Bank decided to mobilise adaptation and mitigation measures. With European Investment Bank, it also pledged to raise climate related lending of USD 120 Billion annually for low and Middle income economies. ADB too pledged some amount.

Further, economic resources were to be mobilised to tackle challenges emanating from emissions, mostly automobile and disasters caused by Climate Change.

IMPACT OF G. W. & G. C.

In a situation of world temperature rising to 2 degree celsius, tremendous impact is bound to be seen on Glaciers, Ice Sheets, Snow, Snow Ice and Permafrost.

Apart from G. W., Global Cooling (GC) accompanied by unexpected rainfall is also being experienced in North India but cooling phases are generally short lived. Weather fluctuates rapidly in this spell. Sometimes temperature rises, sky becomes cloudy, making people feel cold. This February too weather will change with the possibility of rain and fog, happenings otherwise unusual for this time of the year. As G. C. is also temporarily impacting weather, this may have to be researched comprehensively.

THREAT TO SIKKIM

South Lhonak, a glacial- moraine-dammed lake located at an altitude of 5200 metres (17,100 feet) in North West Sikkim is one of the fastest expanding and potentially dangerous lakes, susceptible to Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF). Formed due to melting of Lhonak Glacier, it was identified in 1977. Between 1977 and 2008, due to GW, the surface area of lake has registered a

rise by 81.1 hectares. Earlier its area was 1.98 kms x. 45 kms with a depth of 79.24 metres.

On October 4, 2023 owing to an outburst accompanied by heavy rain, the swollen lake breached its embankment and triggered a massive flood in the basin of Teesta river. Over flow through a small river reached the dam of Teesta Stage III hydel project at Chungthang (50 kms away from Thangu) on the intervening night of October 4 and 5. It destroyed the dam in minutes. Efforts were made to open the gates upon getting a communication but of no avail. As project in question was a run of river kind, damage was on lower side.

UNTHINKABLE DAMAGE

Water level downstream of Teesta rose upto 20 feet resulting into widespread damage. As many as fifteen bridges were swept away in minutes. It flooded parts of Chungthang, Dikchu, Singtam, Rangpo and Melli in Sikkim, Teesta Bazar and Sevoke in Kalimpong District, Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar District in West Bengal and some areas of Bangladesh. Forty persons were killed, twenty two were injured and seventy two were missing (all declared dead later, except one). Widespread property, trees and livestock were drifted away at a supersonic speed. Three thousand stranded tourists had to be evacuated by State, Army and Air Force helicopters, batch by batch. It was deadliest flood after 1968 mega floods when a staggering figure of one thousand persons had lost their lives.

IN RETROSPECT

Undersigned feels very upset over the gigantic nature of episode. I should not say but as Head of S & T and Climate Change department and later as Chief Secretary, I had drawn the attention of State Government and concerned Ministry of GoI, a couple of times, regarding imminent danger. State teams had visited the site and pipes were also air dropped to suck extra water from lake but sustained effort, perhaps, was missing. There was no follow up. Based on my own familiarity, I would submit that there is no guarantee that episode will NOT be repeated.

Tailpiece

Are we ready for such irreversible losses? We need to think, plan and ACT on Top Most Priority.

Chapter - 8

Is Sangam Water Polluted ?⁶³

Despite the success of Maha Kumbh 2025, controversies hit the headlines off and on. When, for a change, no second untoward incident has come to notice, fresh debate has begun and rightly so, over purity and potability of holy water at Sangam. When Rajya Sabha M. P., Jaya Bhaduri had stated that dead bodies were flown into Sangam and that water at this holy point had got contaminated, many individuals and institutions heard it but few probably believed it.

Faecal Bacteria Too Injurious

Devotees with their families are still rushing to Maha Kumbh even after National Green Tribunal (NGT), headed by Justice (Retd) Praksh Shrivastava has been informed that taking bath in Sangam water is injurious as it has high level of Faecal Bacteria (FB) and that primary water level was far from being maintained.

During the period 16 January and 29 January, Biochemical oxygen Demand (BOD) level had exceeded the prescribed limit with maximum being 5.09 mg on January 16 and minimum being 3.26 mg on January 29. All this was likely to lead to occurrence of several diseases.

Nowhere water is fit for bathing, according to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

Further, as per Environmentalists and Doctors specializing in water born diseases, interviewed by media, Faecal Coliform Bacteria are found in the intestines of warm blooded animals and humans. They are commonly used as indicators of potential contamination in water.

In addition, they contain harmful Pathogens, such as, viruses, parasites or other Bacteria which originates from Faecal matter or stool. It can also lead to Nausea, Vomiting, Diarrhoea, skin rashes, eye irritation, Typhoid and Hepatitis A.

Biological Oxygen Demand

Apart from F. B. findings, CPCB has reported that Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) at Sangam was 3.94 milligrams per litre (mg/L) on 13 January when the festival began. Water now is UNSAFE for bathing as it exceeds the prescribed limit for BOD. A key parameter to determine water quality, BOD refers to amount of Oxygen needed by aerobic micro organisms to break down organic material in a water body.

While a high BOD level indicates more organic content in water, river water is considered 'fit' for bathing if the BOD level is less than 3 milligrams per litre. Needless to say, CPCB report shows that Sangam water is CURRENTLY EXCEEDING the limit.

High bacterial presence in Sangam water can have grave consequences for public health. Both NGT and CPCB, therefore, should give proper guidelines for the remainder of Maha Kumbh.

The report filed by the CPCB before the NGT has to be considered as an eye opener. Such pollution, according to a leading national daily, needs to be addressed by Science.

Much more inputs were likely to be placed before the NGT during hearing on 19th February.

Even the SUPREME COURT has taken cognisance of the matter. It has been pleased to consider Sangam water as dirty and perverted.

Dismal Reporting By UPCB

The NGT has pulled up UP Pollution Control Board for not submitting adequate information and asked why data pertaining to pre-Kumbh period was submitted. It also asked the Board as to how people were taking bath in water having both human and animal excreta. U. P. Board, it is learnt, is playing it down. The Board has been asked by NGT to submit a detailed report on Kumbh water. Matter has been now posted for 28 February.

Looks the State Government too does not want people to know it.

Thus, it may be turning to be a very serious issue.

Opinion of Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh

The U. P. Chief Minister has declared Sangam water FIT for ritual drinking and not just bathing a few days after UPPCB was pulled up by the NGT for permitting thousands of people to bathe in severely polluted waters. C. M. has not spared the CPCB even for reporting presence of Faecal Coliform. To him, it is nothing but false propaganda to defame success of Maha Kumbh.

As per him, Sangam water was fit for drinking. State Pollution Control Board was regularly checking water to maintain its quality.

Sangam Water To Jails

On the other hand, instead of resolving the issue, publicity conscious U. P. Government is planning to messenger holy water to 68 District Jails and 7 Central Jails in the state to enable prisoners to bathe in the sacred water. This initiative is a brainchild of State Prison Minister, by which 800 inmates of Unnao Jail have already taken bath in Sangam water in view of spiritual reasons.

No End To Rush

It is sad to note that despite facing hardships and relatives being lost or missing, people are rushing to Maha Kumbh venue in large numbers. At least, they should believe the finding of scientific analysis and listen to the appeal made by the experts and doctors.

Health hazard at Sangam has to be controlled by any means. Unholy dip in water having high levels of BOD and Faecal coliform in the name of faith has to be stopped. Rather, it must come to an end.

Only a few days to go before conclusion of Maha Kumbh, devotees seem undeterred. What to talk of over stretched trains or road transport, they are rushing even by boats more than before. Sangam has witnessed dip by more than 60 crore devotees thus far.

One can conclude by quoting from a leading national English daily:

“Faithful have the right to bathe at Sangam, State has the responsibility to ensure that. ”

Chapter - 9

Pollution In Ganga & Yamuna Rivers⁶⁴

Every now and then we read, view and hear about pollution in two important rivers of India-Ganga and Yamuna. Latter stole the limelight during just concluded Maha Kumbh. Both have religious significance apart from purifying powers. But both are encountering acute pollution levels for a variety of reasons, namely, disposal of human sewage, animal waste and industrial effluents. Thus, their water becomes unfit for drinking and bathing. Health challenges, such as, Dysentery, Cholera and Hepatitis naturally emerge.

While Ganga rises from Gangotri Glacier located at a height of 4100 metres, Yamuna originates from Yamunetri glacier and passes through seven states.

A Look At Religiosity

Both Ganga and Yamuna being sacred are revered in Hinduism owing to their purifying powers. Despite negativity, Ganga Jal is still used in homes and temples for Puja & purification. Devotees may not know that its water is no longer pure due to pollution. Ganga holds immense spiritual importance with self purifying properties. But studies suggest otherwise.

Has surge in pollution overtaken its natural purification abilities?

Ongoing pollution in Ganga is a serious threat to human health & environment. Afterall, it passes through 11states and caters to 500 million people. So many past initiatives did not have the desired results.

YAMUNA, HELL IN DELHI

Barely a flow of 22 kms through Delhi (Wazirabad to Okhla) leads to 75% of Yamuna's pollution level. National capital gets 70% of its water supply from Yamuna but also dumps 58% of its waste, giving it the dubious distinction of being called a 'Black River'.

Municipal, animal & industrial waste, things thrown by motorists & pedestrians, all get dumped into river, rather indiscriminately. Further,

fertiliser content in its water has lowered level of Oxygen, apart from high incidence of Faecal Coliform Bacteria. Resultantly, Yamuna water is not fit for drinking. It is not fit even for bathing animals. It can be used only for industrial cooling.

Yamuna is more in news, mostly on the eve of elections and the sacred Chhath Puja. Later it goes into oblivion.

Many Lt. Governors and all the Chief Ministers have witnessed the awful sight of Yamuna and have made positive promises but nothing has changed since 1978 since when I am familiar. Erstwhile State Government promised moon but what was delivered is not unknown.

New Government began with an Yamuna Aarati.

Will something substantial be done in VIEW OF FOLLOWING?:

- 90% of domestic waste water flows into river,
- Content of Phosphate forms layers of Froth,
- Heavy pollutants from two huge drains-Shahdara & Najafgarh,
- Large amount of untreated sewage flow,
- No check on Idol immersion & Puja accessories,
- Significant high presence of Chromium and Iron,
- Dumping of even recyclable products and
- Rampant plastic pollution. Delhi produces 2,51,674 tons of plastic per year of which, 50% is single use.

ACTION CLEAN YAMUNA

1. Yamuna Action Plans

I, II & III, 1993-2003, 2004-2011 and 2018 onwards,

2. Yamuna Purification Drive, 2018,

3. Community Initiatives,

What More Can Be Done?

- Construction of new toilets and Cremation grounds,
- Educational Programmes,
- Strict Measures with Industries & Hospitals (Don't Dump),

- Upgradation of Sewage Treatment Plants,
- Better waste management systems,
- Recycling waste and
- Create more parks to use treated waste water.

GANGA ACTION PLAN (GAP)

It was announced by the then P. M. Rajiv Gandhi in 1985 at an estimated cost of Rs. 863 crores. Formally it was launched in 1986 in 25 towns, 6 in U. P., 4 in Bihar and 15 in West Bengal, with OBJECTIVES, such as, improving water quality, preventing pollution in river and rejuvenating the river.

Activities or components were:

- Sewage treatment,
- River front development, River surface cleaning, Afforestation,
- Biodiversity Conservation & Public Awareness.

Phase II of GAP was launched in 1993 covering 59 towns at an expenditure of Rs. 5053 crores. Scope was expanded to include major tributaries, Yamuna, Gomati and Damodar.

NGRBA, a Ganga Basin Authority was set up on February 20, 2009 with One Billion Dollars assistance from World Bank.

Phase III known as National River Conservation Plan covered other major rivers.

NAMAMI GANGA PROGRAMME

This mega programme or long term project was launched by the P. M. Modi in 2014 at an estimated cost of Rs. 2037 crores. Upto July 2016, Rs. 2958 crores were spent.

Further, an outlay of Rs 20,000 crores was agreed for next five years (many industrial units had to be shut on river bank). Also many new Sewage Treatment and Effluent Treatment Plants were to be set up.

Main Components of GAP are:

- Sewage Treatment Infrastructure,
- River Front Development, River Surface cleaning,

- Biodiversity & Afforestation,
- Public Awareness,
- Monitoring of Industrial Effluents and
- Setting up Ganga Grams.

National Ganga Mission -II Will be Effective till 2026 and an outlay of Rs.22,500 crores has been earmarked for same.

TO SUM UP

If we browse through above analysis, we may know that money is not an issue. It is not a constraint either. Necessary political and bureaucratic will is somehow missing in India. Also employment and re-employment of above 70 years officers and academicians does not make any sense. Neither they have physical ability to go to field nor do they have audacity to speak truth.

Ever since Supreme Court gave priority to protection and conservation of environment, a number of schemes and plans have been taken up in respect of both Ganga & Yamuna. But the reality is before our naked eyes.

Dumping has become a national pass time, STP's and ETP's are set up but neither maintained nor monitored, fines for violations are not realised or realised casually, river planes are being occupied in rampant fashion and middle & high income families are getting used to vegetables and fruits grown on banks of two rivers, having high iron, phosphate and chromium content.

GOD SAVE US.

Chapter - 10

Pre-Monsoon Weather Challenges⁶⁵

In April maximum temperature has begun shooting unbelievably for the last few years. During 2025 so far, this ‘transition’ month did heat up but by and large, it was tolerable. Month of May also has been reasonable. Two days, however, 17th May & 23rd May saw somewhat intense winds and heavy downpour for this time of the year.

On 23rd May, first it was arrival of strong dust storm around 8 p. m., leading to uprooting of 200 trees in the NCR alone, apart from lopping/ falling of umpteen tree branches. Five persons and two children lost their lives also. Maximum temperature was 42. 6 degrees as compared to 41 degrees on 17th May.

17 MAY DISTURBANCES

Four persons lost their lives and a few were injured when a sudden dust storm followed by heavy rain took place on 17th May. The freak weather also led to some infrastructural damages. A portion of tin roof of New Ashok Nagar Metro station could not bear the intense windstorm. According to Safdarjung Observatory, wind speed of 46 kmph was recorded while Palam Observatory recorded it at 74 kmph.

However, there was one silver lining on national capital’s Air Quality Index. On 23rd May, it came down to moderate category with a reading of 157. Air operations, surprisingly, were normal. No flights were cancelled according to flight tracking website, but atleast 300 flights had to be delayed.

SHARP FALL IN TEMPERATURE

There was also sharp drop in temperature on 23rd May. In Palam and Safdarjung weather stations, falls of 14 degree and 10.7 degrees respectively were recorded.

On 23rd May, when velocity of storm (as per IMD, 80 kmph) subsided, power lines were cut off as a precautionary measure. Such a normal step, however,

inconvenienced Government servants returning from offices. Traffic became erratic and cyclists and pedestrians were put to a lot of difficulty. Dust would get accumulated on face, cloths, specs and wind screens. One had to brave all this when rain began. Same lasted for more than half an hour.

SQUALLS & HAILSTORMS

As if this wrath of nature was not enough, squalls and hail storm hit the streets for fifteen to twenty minutes. Not only roads had lesser number of vehicles, Metro services too slowed down or were affected. Wall collapse cases too came to notice.

MOIST WINDS

According to IMD, such storm activity aligns with long term climatological patterns. It was more in May in terms of frequency and ferocity. Further, more moist wind days have contributed to surge in storm activity. Moist winds carry moisture from Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal into North West India. The heated land mass becomes conducive to formation of thunder storm.

SIGNS OF DEVASTATION

While finally making it home, one saw signs of devastation all over-uprooted trees and plants, fallen branches, crushed vehicles, water logging, garbage and slush on footpaths, damaged roofs, breakage of water supply and what not?

FORECASTS OF IMD

If system of forecasting is fool proof and method of communication is timely, persons, livestock and properties can be saved to a considerable extent.

Electronic media and Social media, instead of ensuring healthy dissemination of information, mostly add to confusion.

IMD has come out with scientific forecasts of not one day but for a bunch of three to five days on many occasions in 2024 and 2025. But except once or twice, there was fluctuation in temperature or rainfall pattern. If such a situation prevails, one loses faith in the system of Forecasts.

SIKKIM SITUATION

Coming to Sikkim, never before it has snowed so heavily in April and May this year. We had snowfall on way to Nathu la and Changu right till 23rd May. Many areas, rather, most of high altitude tourist locations of North Sikkim are either cut off or still experiencing snow fall.

Not only this, heavy downpour in April end and throughout first twenty days of May has led to breakage of communication, jamming of drains, uprooting of trees, lamp posts, landslides in villages, including agricultural fields. Not only tourism has suffered immensely, but large number of tourists were also stranded from time to time.

LONG TERM PLAN NEEDED FOR TOURISM

Given the adverse impact of the last named development on bubbling transport and tourism trade, State Government is advised to swiftly launch a long term plan coinciding with the 50th Anniversary of the State. It may lead to some durable solutions. Also Government may give instructions for carrying out repairs on roads damaged during recent rain and popular tourist spots in and around Gangtok.

ACTION AT CUTTING EDGE HOLDS THE KEY

Needless to say, State Dept. of Land Revenue & Disaster Management has to be also spruced up and activated further, apart from being fully alert during possible emergencies or downpour in off season or cloud burst situations. Regular partnership with Gram and Nagar Panchayats and Tour Operators can do wonders. A lot can be done if we have the will and commitment to herald action with an honest intention.

Chapter – 11

Saga Of Monsoon – I: Shall We Say Wah It Is Raining ?⁶⁶

What is a Rainfall?

As per an Internet source, it is the amount of precipitation in form of water from clouds that descends to earth surface-land or water. It develops further when the air mass travels over warm water bodies or wetland surfaces.

DATA OF RAIN

It is measurement and recording of the amount of precipitation, such as, rain or snow that falls in a specific area over a period of time. By having access to such data, one can understand patterns, trends and variations in precipitation.

TYPES OF RAIN

Usually these are four types: Convectional, Orographic, Cyclonic and Artificial. Last named is also known as Cloud Seeding. It is tried sometime over a limited area.

CATEGORIES

Intensity wise, there are five categories:

- Average Rain- When rain is below 2.5 millimetre (mm)
- Light Rain-When it is 2.5 to 7.5 mm a Day,
- Moderate Rain- In this situation, there is 7.5 to 36 mm of rain a Day,
- Rather Heavy Rain- Between 36 to 55 mm a Day and
- Heavy Rain- rain is called so when it is in the range of 65 to 125 mm a Day.

LOW RAINFALL areas, on the other hand, are known so, as they receive 150 mm or less of rainfall in a year.

Also it is important to know that DRIZZLE is not rain, rather, it is light rainfall falling in small drops over earth.

RAIN SITUATION: PAN INDIA

Coming to India as such, its a complete free fall situation this year, with fresh records being set and old ones being broken especially in North India, H. P., Punjab, Uttarakhand, NCR etc.

Top five rainiest states of the country are:

1. MEGHALAYA:

As the name itself will reflect, it abounds in rainfall. The state receives between 2000 and 4100 mm of annual rain. Mawsynram, located in East Garo Hills District (69 kms from Shillong), not only receives highest rainfall in India (11,872 mm or 467.4 inches annually) but it is also wettest place on earth. In 1985, it created an all time high record of 26,000 mm or 1000 inches of rainfall. Prior to it, this coveted position was held by Cherapunji.

Next in the category are Hilo in Hawaii and Londonderry in North Ireland.

Other areas receiving heavy rain in India are: Udupi, North And South Kannada, Hassan, Kodagu, Chikmagalur and Shimoga.

On the other hand, Jaisalmer, Bagalkot, Chitradurga and Koppal are among the places, receiving least rainfall.

2. SIKKIM:

Receives 3737 m. m. of annual rain. It rains almost ten months a year.

Among all six districts, Mangan should take a lead in this regard. Despite so much of rain, landslides during Monsoon and sinking zones, roads are in shape and better maintained vis a vis their counterparts in the NCR. Incidentally, even as on 2nd September, threat to N. H. 10, the lifeline of Sikkim, continues. In October rain may subside but threat from landslide may remain.

3. KERALA:

The green state having the distinction of welcoming South West Monsoon, receives 3000 mm of rain in a year. Many times Kochi and many other Districts have been flooded.

4. ARUNACHAL PRADESH:

The Eastern most state of the country getting first rays of Sun, receives over 2000 mm of annual rainfall. Though incidence of landslide & flood is on lower side as compared to Assam, Sikkim, J & K, Uttarakhand etc.

5. WEST BENGAL:

Also gets tremendous rainfall throughout the year but complete data in this regard is not readily available. Flood including flood water gushing, from Bangladesh is a perennial feature. It is a threat to Border fence as well.

CHALLENGES FROM CURRENT SPELL OF RAINFALL

It is excess rain situation in 2025 thus far, stretching right upto September 2. As per IMD's recent forecast, free bounty from top is likely to spill over to mid September. For Delhi, it was almost fully wet July and the wettest August in 15 years with Yamuna flowing above danger mark of 205.33 metres from 27th to 29th August and from 31st August to 1st September. Total rainfall recorded in August has been 405.5 mm

GURUGRAM

In this millennium city, due to incessant rains since 31st August evening, a 8 kms long jam was caused on road to Delhi. Therefore, Work from Home has been ordered and schools also shut or partially closed. 100 mm of rain in 3 to 4 hours has shaken the confidence of citizens. Knee deep water in many important localities and use of boat instead of automobiles is pointing at severe dangers ahead from health and sanitation points of view.

SITUATION OF DELHI

It is worsening day by day. Yamuna has crossed danger mark of 205.33 metre for the third time since August 27. It was 204.02 metre in the evening of

September 1. Fresh alerts have been issued and leftover people have been taken away from banks of the river. Release of 2,72,000 cusecs and 4,29,000 cusecs of water from Hathinikund and Wazirabad barrages respectively, is going to add to the prevailing crisis. It is not only stagnation of water in many prime locations but accumulation of heaps of garbage that has emerged as a fresh and nauseating challenge both in Delhi and Gurugram.

With active Monsoon likely till 5th September, official closing date of Monsoon may, therefore, be also extended like extensions given in mystic and secret domain of Bureaucracy.

A HAYWIRE SITUATION

Current spell of rain may not be very drastic as compared to 2024 in terms of quantum but in regard to “shake and sound” and damage caused, it is uncontrollable so far. It is a haywire scenario in terms of visibility as well. Deluge of this kind caused in five of the eight Himalayan Union Territories and States, is catastrophic.

In a latest development, there has been inundation of large tracts of farmlands and villages in Punjab due to worst floods caused after 1988 by Sutlej, Beas, and Ravi rivers.

In the same way, flood waters and landslides have left a trail of death and devastation in Jammu & Kashmir. Jammu alone has recorded 380 mm of rainfall on 26th August, maximum since 1910. 45 pilgrims on way to Vaishnav Devi were killed by cloud burst leading to landslides. The Chief Minister, J & K wondered as to why they were not warned in advance? Officers on the spot had no answer.

There are similar reports of heart wrenching natural calamities in Doda, Reasi and Srinagar. While Tawi river has been a cause of deep concern for some time in the Jammu region, it is Jhelum river which is flowing close to danger mark in Srinagar.

Authorities do not want to take any risk in view of 2014 flood in the capital city and surroundings. Not only National Highways are getting damaged owing to landslides in Punjab and J & K, break down of communication is not unusual due to damage to optical fibre cable lines.

ANA BRISTI vs ATI BRISTI

Shall we say, instead of “ana-bristi” situation, it seems to have become “ati-bristi” scenario? Women inhabiting in Arid and dry belt areas may have certainly got a welcome temporary respite from fetching water, bare footed from sources located miles away from their dwelling units. But woes of little school going children and senior citizens may have multiplied manifold. Similar may be the plight of petty businessmen and office goers, not having access to any mode of transport.

OVERALL EFFECT

Kharif, a few other crops, fruit and vegetable growers etc. may have gained or may be still gaining. But not the animals and birds. While animals do not take initiative in drenching themselves on their own, some birds, such as, Pigeons and Crows are often seen playing and enjoying pool of rain water, from our well positioned balcony. Rather, it becomes a relishing full body bath, they fervently look for. For such an experience or cleaning process, rich men, women and pets have to cough up pretty big sum of money in beauty parlours/pet on move vans.

WELCOME RELIEF FROM NAUSEATING HEAT

On the positive side, urban dwellers welcome normal onset of rain situation as they sweat less upon getting relief from scorching and sweltering heat, have to drink less of water to quench their thirst and they are also supposed to save electricity when it drizzles, to get transformed into rain and finally it is downpour.

Thank You, God of Rain, Indra Bhagwan.

CONTINUING HAVOC IN 5 HIMALAYAN STATES

Officially 14 states are in strong and solid grip of rain, thunder and flood caused by Cloudburst in several places.

In many parts of Jammu & Kashmir (Ramban, Kistwar, Kathua, Jammu, Vaishnav Devi etc), H.P. (Mandi, Chamoli, Manali, Kullu etc), Uttarakhand (Dharali, Rudraprayag, banks of Alaknanda, Bhagirathi), Rajasthan, M.P., West Bengal (Kalimpong) and Sikkim (Gangtok & Pakyong Districts), rivers

are back in spate killing atleast, close to one thousand persons this year and injuring equal number of people.

In H. P. alone over 300 persons have died so far. 66 odd persons missing in Dharali devastation on 5th August are still untraceable. Painful game of death and devastation, it seems, is likely to continue atleast till mid September. Although on 31st August weather had cleared a bit but it rained heavily on 1st September. In view of latest IMD forecast, rain is likely to take place on a daily basis upto 4th or 5th September in Delhi, NCR and many parts of North India.

Chenab, Sutlej, Jhelum, Tawi, Rispera, Beas, Alaknanda, Bhagirathi, Ganga, Teesta etc are now creating havoc kind of situation. Even holy spot of Sangam in Prayagraj has been almost inundated. Earlier rain & slides were “gulping” roads, schools, temples, shops, vehicles, cattle etc, Gradually ferocious current in their water has begun weakening & sweeping bridges, entering hotels & resorts, damaging fields and lately begun entering dwelling houses and cattle sheds in a ferocious way. If reports are to be believed, due to rampant corruption, roads, hotels, resorts, vacation spots etc have been permitted in hazardous zones and many of them are collapsing one by one.

LINE OF FINISH?

A “line of finish” looks invisible, if not uncertain at the moment. Will it be a never ending flow? When we prick our brain to find out the reasons of such a devastating situation, popular myth that seems becoming vocal is that these outbursts are as a result of our sins of past or may be, immediate past. However, it may be just one side of the Spectrum.

IS GLOBAL WARMING ALL PERVADING?

At a scientific level, change in ‘mood’ of mountains and glaciers and possible change in the course of rivers could be on account of Global Warming or GLOF or Climate Change.

Reasons of breaking of Ice Bergs in Antarctica and other Arctic regions has already been ascertained. It is a strong case in point.

CONCLUSION

Not only 14 states of the country, unprecedented rain and release of excess water from India has swelled Sutlej, Ravi and Chenab rivers in Pakistan also. Flood water has entered Lahore after 40 years and severe flood has affected 1700 villages so far, including the Sikh shrine of Kartarpur.

C. M., Punjab has demanded a huge sum of Rs. 60, 000 crores from Centre to tide over the flood crisis.

Has Nature Taken Over As Man Seems To be moving On a Slow, If Not on a Failing Track?

We may have to continue facing the onslaught if we do not improve/mend our ways. Viable and workable long term steps shall have to be taken. There is no way out.

Finding a solution is urgently needed in the interest of humanity. GREED will have to go and element of Need only should prevail.

Chapter - 12

Saga Of Monsoon – II: Animal Care During A Calamity⁶⁷

For three months much of the country has been reeling under the havoc of incessant rain. Most towns and villages are recording above average downpour. Hill rivers are in spate and Glacier Lake Outbursts are becoming alarmingly frequent. Sheer outpouring of water is posing challenges rarely faced before. People across nine Himalayan states barring Arunachal Pradesh continue to bear the brunt.

Our vast nation of 145 crores is blessed with varied climates shaped by its diverse terrain. Monsoon brings highest rainfall. In July alone country received 294.3 mm of rainfall, 4.9% above normal. Delhi too recorded 259.2 mm —24% higher than the long period average. With this trend likely to intensify, total for August could reach nearly 300 mm.

According to IMD, most regions experienced normal to above normal rainfall, barring a few pockets. While such rains benefit Kharif crops, they also cause closure of highways, disruption to train and air travel, power and water shortages, loss of livelihood and widespread slowdown in daily life.

Some regions, such as, Mawsynram and Cherrapunji receive heavy rainfall while places like Jaisalmer in Rajasthan and a few Districts of Karnataka, such as, Bagalkot, Chitradurga and Koppal remain dry. Mawsynram in Meghalaya with an annual average of 11,872 mm (467.4 inches) is the wettest place on Earth, followed closely by Cherapunji. Yet in terms of rainy days, Hilo in Hawaii tops the list with 211 days, followed by Londonderry, Northern Ireland with 147 days.

Stakeholders Of Monsoon

Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea and the Himalayas remain the principal drivers of India's Monsoon. South West Monsoon which usually reaches Kerala by June 1, has been arriving early for the last few years. Similarly, its retreat has

been extending beyond the usual schedule since 2023. Retreating and Winter Monsoons, though secondary, benefit mainly the Southern states.

Current Spell

In 2025, Monsoon has created a pathwork of extremes. While North, East and Central regions have seen heavy flooding, other parts are still receiving scattered or delayed showers. Floods in Srinagar, Jaisalmer, Dwarka, Junagarh and Porbandar are now showing a different reality.

Animals Crucial To Our Survival

When a natural calamity strikes, focus of administration naturally falls on saving human beings, property, vehicles etc. We often ignore and neglect animals, who are equally vulnerable. Videos of people rushing to save humans from raging waters abound, but how often do we see such a care and concern for animals? Sadly, human instinct in course of a disaster is more about material gain than compassion.

Animals As Advance Warning Systems

Tribal Communities like Jarwas of Andaman & Nicobar Islands for ages have been displaying unusual, yet positive behaviour before natural disasters. So do some animals. Stray dogs can sense landslides or Earthquakes before these actually strike. Unfortunately, these very animals are increasingly being pushed out of our neighbourhood by vested interests without even thinking about their alternative food or shelter arrangements.

Lion & Crocodile Sightings In Gujarat

On August 20, a Lion was spotted struggling against fast moving flood water in Gujarat. Instead of helping, bystanders chose to film it. Earlier a Crocodile was seen crawling across a pitch road in Vadodara prior to arrival of Forest officials. Such pathetic incidents happening in urban areas underline our apathy towards distressed animals trapped in a calamity. In remote jungles or water bodies one can only imagine the degree of suffering of animals.

Elephants of Dehradun, Kerala, North Bengal and Kaziranga

Wild but well behaved Elephants are often seen crossing highways in the vicinity of Dehradun or Railway lines in Assam and North Bengal leading to

severe injuries and casualties. Dedicated animal crossings, bridges and underpasses are now being planned along the upcoming Expressways. But much more is needed.

In World Heritage Site of Kaziranga, Rhinos, Tigers Elephants and Wild Bisons are compelled to flee without fail during the Monsoon. Yet neither the Centre nor the State Government seems inclined to go for any long term solution. Result: Needless animal deaths, loss of vegetation and Tourism revenue and threats to local livelihood.

So Called Menace Of Elephants

Media often labels Elephants a ‘menace’. But whether Lion, Crocodile, Monkey or Elephant, when they enter our settlements, especially during calamities, they are exercising their bona-fide rights, their right of way. It is humans, not animals, who encroach upon their habitats for years.

Instead of ignoring and suppressing animals we should give due credence to the principle of co- existence. When animals are hit and displaced by floods or landslides, they deserve care and temporary shelter until safe habitats or enclosures are ready. Waiting for distress signals may perpetuate a crisis.

To Conclude

Animals have rights-in normal times and in midst of calamities. Mega projects and reckless developments often encroach upon these rights, just as natural calamities devastate flora. A renewed commitment to co-existence is called for. Only then can we move towards genuine sustainable development.

Chapter - 13

Tree Transplantation Needed For Balance In Environment⁶⁸

Sufficient tree cover is essential for survival of mankind. In a vast country like India, of the total geographical area, it is only 25.71%. Still seventeen states have a forest cover of over 33%. M. P. has maximum forest cover, followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Maharashtra.

Plantation of saplings is carried out every year with a view to maintain a balance in environment. Nonetheless, a large number of trees are cut to facilitate building of roads, power projects, dams and what not. To compensate the lost forest cover, fresh plantation in a new area is taken up. However, good deal of saplings do not survive due to carelessness of concerned employees.

Transplantation of mature trees can be tried as an alternative. Transplantation or translocation of trees is a process of unearthing the trees and replanting them from their parent location to a new location. It requires, however, time, patience and expertise.

Not all trees can be transplanted. While Peepul, Ficus, Semul and Sheshum are tolerant to transplantation, species, namely, Dak, Palash, Arjun, Shahtoot and Jhilmil are not.

One is aware of transplantation of heart, liver and other organs of human body but transplantation of mature trees is generally unheard of. This process began in U. S. A. in early seventies.

Method Of Transplantation

As opposed to fully mechanized uprooting operation practised in U. S. A., in India uprooting is generally done manually. To make a root ball, the area around a tree is dug up carefully to isolate the roots. Then big branches are lopped off, leaving only small shoots for regeneration. Process takes a couple of days. Sufficient care is taken to prevent the roots from getting any shock and maintain sufficient moisture in the soil. As soon as portions of root are

cut, Fungicide is sprayed by a hand sprayer, followed by application of rooting hormone in the form of a paste. Thereafter, tree is left undisturbed for a few days. Fungicide controls infection from harmful Fungi and insects on the exposed and injured roots of tree, while rooting hormone ensures healthy growth of tree after it is transplanted.

Careful Tying Of Tree

Once the root ball is made, the root system is covered with wet gunny bags to protect the roots and to keep the tree hydrated.

Tree is tied carefully by a chain either from bottom or is held by its branches depending upon the root system and type of soil which holds the tree. Uprooted tree is slowly uplifted by a hydraulic crane and taken to designated spot. This is done mostly at night as many of the earmarked trees are situated in busy and congested areas.

Chemical Treatment Of Tree

Prior to transplantation, pits have to be chemically treated. To begin with, 400 litres of water is poured which is reduced gradually as the roots start adjusting to new soil conditions and environment. Consequent upon the change of place, the transplanted tree begins shedding its leaves. Sprouting takes place when the roots completely adjust to the new environment. Appearance of new leaves would indicate that transplantation operation was successful.

Cost Of Transplantation

Cost of transplanting a tree would vary according to distance. Once upon a time, its average cost was Rs. 4,000 per tree. It may appear high but obvious benefits emanating from a tree in the long run cannot possibly be weighed against money.

Survival Rate

A survival rate of 80 to 90% is claimed. It depends on sufficient water level as it ensures moisture content of the soil. It may be ensured that branches of tree are not lopped off prior to shifting them to new places.

Precautions To Be Taken

Root ball of an uprooted tree should be preferably covered by a jute bag material instead of tarpaulin type of thick cloth. In addition to covering and gripping the soil attached to roots, jute cloth helps in retaining moisture and proper treatment of Fungicides and Insecticides. It protects the roots from being exposed to unnecessary light as well.

It would be necessary to take sufficient soil from the original place as it keeps roots intact. In addition, soil being a living medium contains beneficial mycorrhiza and bacteria, which in turn establish a viable and strong link between the roots and soil. It ultimately assists in absorption of minerals and water by tree from the soil.

Site of transplantation should be in close proximity to the earmarked tree so that root ball does not get damaged and lose moisture in the process of shifting.

Sufficient water, extra nutrients and manure should be provided subsequent to transplantation. Effective awareness programmes need to be organised through print and electronic media to encourage and persuade people and institutions to adopt a tree for transplantation. Mandatory permission to shift a tree should be taken in advance.

Delhi Experience-Work of PWD

Transplantation of mature trees was first undertaken by the Forest Department in December 1998. A number of Sheeshum trees were shifted from Yamuna Vihar to Loni Road. It was followed by the PWD. Idea was to salvage the gigantic city from pollution. As many as 516 trees came in the way of construction of flyovers and widening of roads at five congested and polluted points. Majority of 331 trees were transplanted while 185 trees had to be cut after obtaining forest clearance. Among the species transplanted were Peepul, Neem, Sheeshum, Kaner, Saptati, Ashok, Kikar, Shatut, Tamarind, Karnail, Pakar, Jamun and Ioshora.

Transplantation By D. M. R. C.

In the same way, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation had to go for transplantation when hundreds of trees were discovered along the construction site of 8.3 kms long Shahdara-Tis Hazari Section. 1300 eco-friendly trees belonging to

28 species were identified. A total of 385 trees were uprooted from five localities and these were transplanted at Shastri Park and banks of Yamuna river. DMRC also gave an undertaking to the Forest Department that for every tree that was to be cut, atleast 20 trees were to be planted. Further, in anticipation of trees to be cut, 26,000 saplings were planted by DMRC in Najafgarh area.

Conclusion

During my service career, I have not only added to number of trees whenever an opportunity came, but have always maintained that it is more necessary to water and protect the saplings after such a noble exercise. But in actual reality, we are, perhaps far away from it.

In a fully hilly and ecologically fragile terrain, such as, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, North Bengal, Uttarakhand, H. P. and J & K, importance of well rooted tree cover can not be ignored.

Fresh plantation or transplantation, both need adequate care & attention.

Rather, a transplanted tree needs more of it.

Chapter -14

Forest Fires: A Burning Issue⁶⁹

It is very well known that for sustainable development and very survival of mankind, minimum 33% forest cover is required. It is not so in many countries. India, once upon a time had reasonably good forest cover but it went down over the years due to myriad types of biotic interferences. As a result of renewed emphasis, followed by many focused drives, now it has become 27%. However, it is still far behind expectation. If some portion of it gets lost or degraded every now and then due to fires, it will take years to recoup the same.

Lowered Soil Moisture

Lowered soil moisture creates what is known as a vapour pressure deficit. When the air is not saturated, it sucks out moisture from plants as well. That in turn leaves the vegetation even drier. Then there is El Nina (unusually warm Ocean temperature that affects climate) that adds to dryness and heat. In such a situation, even a Cigarette Butt thrown carelessly can lead to a large forest fire. Now I understand, why notices discouraging this bad habit were displayed prominently in dry Zones of West and South Sikkim forests, whenever I would tour the area.

Care Needed In Summer

Forest fires mostly happen in dry Summer months. Vegetation becomes dry due to reduced winter precipitation. These are, however, noticed rather late. As per experts, heat waves have contributed to fire incidents. In 2023, country experienced some of its worst heat waves on record since 1901, with temperature in parts of country even touching 45 degrees. This year IMD has already declared multiple heatwave, with New Delhi to record temperature as high as 52. 9 degrees in May, resulting in more than 100 people dead.

Man Made Fires

Many forest fires are man made. Those who enter forest to collect some fire wood also get involved sometimes. People get arrested but situation does not change. Let us not forget that forest was not always this much dry. Locals and animal herders are often seen to burn the stubble that remains on ground after harvesting of grain. Devastation caused on account of air pollution in Delhi and NCR due to stubble burning for two and a half months in neighbouring states for atleast 5 to 6 years in a row, has already caused umpteen worries and national debate. Dry grass is also burnt in the grasslands that dry out in Summer and villagers set fire to the husks hoping to grow more lush pastures for their animals. Increase in heat thus adds to the challenges that officials face in controlling wild fires. Human activities alongwith worsening and changing climate patterns make for a fatal combination.

Role Of Rainfall

Without rain, humanity can not survive. Excessive rain, however, leads to flood and landslides impacting the area for a long period.

Less of rain also becomes problematic as rain very much serves as a Fire Extinguisher. Thus good rain saves a good deal of human effort, which can be used for many productive activities. Insignificant rainfall for a long period too does not help.

Fire Prone Zone

Such zones are declared abundantly prominent in all the states, based on past experiences. According to Forest Survey of India, nearly 10.66% of India's forest cover is under extreme to very high Fire-prone Zone. Human activities alongwith worsening heat and changing climate patterns make for a fatal combination. Fires are very common in Pine forests during hot and dry months. Air gets heavier with smoke leading to burning of eyes. Breathing also gets affected, at times.

Fires In All Hill States of India

Hundreds of large fires have ravaged forest in the states of Uttarakhand, H.P., J&K, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Telangana and West Bengal. Construction of hydel projects and wide roads too leads to destruction of forest. Dangerous

and strong winds also aid and abate the inferno. Winds also weaken at times to pick up speed again.

Frequency and intensity of fires have worsened in recent years. These are getting closer to dense human settlements. When it happens, panicked villagers mobilise themselves and begin to beat down the fire. But one can not throw a bucket of water on a burning tree. If it is a Pine tree, they secrete Resin which is used to make Turpentine. As it is highly flammable, people need to exercise utmost care.

Atleast 1,313 large fires have ravaged the hilly state of Uttarakhand. With high intensity winds shifting fast, issue becomes grave. Since a lot of trees are of Pine, these are highly inflammable. These factors contribute to fire spreading faster and also it becomes very challenging to control. These fires have damaged nearly 1100 hectares (2718 acres) of land already. In this context, just think about much larger areas affected by devastating forest fires in Los Angeles or in Australia and a few European countries in the past.

Devastating Forest Fires In USA In January 2025

It was nature's harsh emergency. Forest fires created havoc disrupting normal life, breaking water and power lines and disconnecting homes from work stations. Fire fighters were helpless due to intense winds and disruptive winter storm increasing the possibility of heaviest snowfall in decades. Hollywood stars too were among the hundreds who flew frantically.

Dry and warm weather in December 2024 fanned wild fires by strong gusts of the speed of 138 kmph and blaze spread very swiftly to Los Angeles, California, Palisades, Eton, Hollywood, Ohio Valley, Kentucky, Indiana, Santa Monica and many other areas.

Never stopping winds aided and abated the fires, engulfing large tracts of land. Towering clouds of smoke were visible all over. Flames would move so quickly that many persons barely had time to escape. While Police had to take shelter inside patrol cars, hundreds had to abandon their vehicles and begin moving on foot.

Most destructive fires were recorded in Hollywood and Palisades. Period of 5th to 14th January, 2025 was the worst due to lightening, power lines touching high winds, arson, burning of debris, fireworks and some manmade causes.

At the end of the day, only 24 casualties took place but charring of large areas happened. Film industry suffered immensely but evacuation and relief was of top order.

Climate Change

Climate change predictions are inadequate in helping countries like India to prepare for such calamities. It should be desirable to know about change in climate in advance to plan actions ahead of time.

While ignition of a wild fire can be deliberate, they are natural and a vital part of an environment's life cycle. Since many of the fires are man made or man created, more efforts are needed for raising level of awareness.

Improved forest conservation would help alongwith minimizing activities, such as, stubble burning. When it comes to a conflict between humans and animals, human interests mostly take precedence. It should not be. One should not forget that it is our bounden duty to look after forest, its exotic flora and the wild life also therein.

Chapter -15

Issue Of Sharing River Water Based On Riparian Principle⁷⁰

We know it very well that river is life for us.

All through human history civilizations have survived along the banks of rivers, viz, Mesopotamian, Indus Valley, Egyptian and the Chinese. It has a significant role in enabling development, well being and prosperity of ancient, medieval and contemporary world.

When we tend to discuss water development and management, four river valley civilizations as mentioned above were well ahead of times through advance Canal irrigation system or could be, rain water harvesting. Unfortunately, Farhat and Siruwan rivers in Mesopotamia region have now become lean and thin.

A river is an important source of drinking water, trade, irrigation and several other uses. During its three phases- young, mid course and old, rivers serve us immensely. As rivers have fresh water and Sea has salty water, former's water is SHARED.

The term Riparian, comes from Latin language, meaning bank or shore. It refers to things that exist alongside a river, namely, wetlands, habitats, vegetation etc. These zones are transitional areas falling between rivers, lakes, streams etc. and the land around them. Even soils are shaped by water and accumulating sediments.

In Indian context, the term 'Doab' has gained significance. It means riverine island wherein two streams converge. Or it is a tract of land lying between two confluent rivers between India and Pakistan.

INDUS & INDIA

India is a riverine country like Bangladesh or Pakistan or for that matter, countries in the Middle East and Europe. Very decisive role has been played by Himalayan, Deccan, Coastal and North Eastern rivers in shaping the

Geography and culture of the country. We have gigantic Kumbh Mela organised on the banks of Ganga and two other rivers turn by turn.

Even the very name of our country has sprung up from the great and mighty Indus River. Not only this, our vast landscape is criss crossed by minor and major rivers which are lifeline for various communities, flora and fauna.

RIPARIAN RIGHTS

These are the natural rights for the use of river water to cater to human needs. These can not be taken away nor can these be granted. A person or body may not own the flowing water but nevertheless, he or she has the right to use it. These include rights of ingress, egress, bathing, boating, fishing etc. These rights can not be proprietary under any circumstance.

Riparian areas are tracts of land situated along streams, lakes and rivers and that there is something called Stream Corridor.

DO's & DO'NTS

In the context of Riparian principle, if there is not enough water to meet the demands of all users, allotments have to be made in proportion to frontage on the water source.

Under International Law, an upper riparian state can NEVER stop the flow of water to the lower riparian state or country. All land owners on either of the river banks have the right to make reasonable use of flowing water. Also one must have access to free flowing water without any obstruction, such as, a dam.

EMERGING ISSUES

River water sharing issues between India and Pakistan, on the one hand and between India and China, on the other, have to be looked at from this angle or perspective.

Even the often talked about and inconclusive river water sharing issue between India and Bangladesh too has to be viewed accordingly.

RECENT DECISION OF GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

Government of the day is within its rights, rather, can go ahead with putting on hold or suspending the Indus Water Treaty(IWT), signed on September, 19, 1960, following nine years of negotiations, between India and Pakistan.

India has full rights over Eastern rivers, namely, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej while Pakistan has rights over Western ones, such as, Indus, Jhelum and Chenab.

Further, Union Jal Shakti Minister has declared that ‘not even a drop of water from Indian rivers would go to Pakistan’.

This is not the first time that matter of distribution of water between two countries has been raised. In 2016, in the aftermath of attack by terrorists in Uri, the Prime Minister had declared that “Blood and water can not flow together”.

However, it is desirable that swift, sustainable and long term arrangements shall have to be made for storing Indus river water on Indian side.

If aim is to cause drought on Pakistan side, steps proposed to be taken should not lead to flood on Indian side. Besides additional issues linked to erosion and submergence are bound to crop up, if we decide to play with nature. Currently India lacks needed infrastructure to use the Indus system as an effective hydro disciplinary tool.

As on date, the concerned Ministry is looking at the available options to use Indus basin water in the short, medium and long terms. All legal and technical aspects including diversion of water is being examined. This decision to pause the IWT was one of the key measures announced after inhuman attack on innocent tourists in Pahalgam on 22nd April.

RESPONSE OF PAKISTAN

Pakistan has stated that India’s proposed action will be considered as an act of War. On their side, Pakistan Government has decided to halt their contentious Canal project. It has been learnt that their project will remain suspended until a consensus on the issue could be reached in Pakistan ‘s Council of Common Interests(CCI). A flood alert has been issued after Pakistan has accused India of release of water from Jhelum river. Declaration of water emergency has led to panic among residents living near river banks. 90% of irrigation in Pakistan depends on water from India. Pakistan has also

announced suspension of Shimla Agreement signed in 1972, as a retaliation measure.

HOW LONG ARE WE SUPPOSED TO WAIT AND WATCH?

Chapter -16

Perpetual Issue Of River Sand Mining⁷¹

A river is vitally important entity for survival and sustenance of human beings. It is a natural stream of fresh water generally originating from mountains or hills. It flows due to gravity from high to low elevation. These take shape owing to precipitation, melting of Glaciers or seepage from ground water sources.

They carry many sediments, such as, silts, stones, clay and sand. River sand gains importance because sand found in abundance in desert regions is not found suitable for the purpose of construction. As rivers play a decisive role in the water cycle, human settlements down the ages from ancient period have come up along the fertile bank of perennial rivers.

Mesopotamian, Indus Valley, Nile valley and Chinese civilisations, all had advance water management skills and effective water regulatory mechanisms to show. As a result, people in these civilisations enjoyed a high level of wellbeing.

Rivers—whether seasonal or perennial—are crucial for sustaining human life. They are vital for drinking, washing, irrigation, producing electricity and supporting livelihoods.

Sand Mining

Sand is granular material comprising of finely divided mineral particles. Yellowish-Grey in colour, sand is an environment friendly material created through natural weathering and erosion of rocks, primarily by water and wind. It is essential for construction, laying roads, brick laying, masonry and manufacturing works. Its dry mining is the most commonly used method for extracting mineral sand deposits.

Matter of Concern

Sand mining from river beds or banks has emerged as a principal environmental issue / challenge due to rampant illegal activities and a lack of

proper and effective regulation and monitoring. Most states face it. It has also gradually become a lucrative business activity, particularly in upcoming urban centres and mega infrastructure projects, such as, Gurgaon, Faridabad and NOIDA.

Needless to say, Panchayat functionaries and lower level politicians are often found acting hand in glove with Government officials. Such a nefarious nexus perpetuates the crisis.

Impact of Sand Mining

It is, apart from river banks and beds is also resorted to from wet lands. Removal of primary natural sand leads to coastal erosion, soil destabilisation, saline water intrusion, loss of bio- diversity, lowering of ground water table in the vicinity, water pollution, weakening of flood barriers, change in course of rivers, destruction of nesting sites of Turtles and greater vulnerability of coast lines to rise in Sea levels.

It also threatens endangered species, such as, Gharials, Crocodiles, Turtles, Otters and River Dolphins. While visiting a Gharial sanctuary and many zoos one has understood the necessity of river sand for the endangered species.

Legal Framework

Sand Mining can only be carried out upon obtaining a valid permit from authorised office of the Government. However, due to poor regulation, unending lust for making money, influence of Mafia elements and lack of sustainable alternatives to river sand, the system is frequently twisted and exploited.

Under the Mines & Mineral (Development & Regulation) Act, 1957, illegal sand mining is punishable by imprisonment of upto 5 years and a fine of upto Rs 5 Lakhs per hectare of the affected area. Both these limits need to be raised in the interest of upkeep of environment.

Concluding Lines

Humankind depends significantly on the health of rivers. Each one not only has its own uniqueness but also tells its own story. This becomes evident when a revered and mighty Ganga or Brahmaputra is compared to a relatively

small river. One may say—if mankind has to survive, rivers must be kept in a healthy condition.

Another solution could be giving priority to scientific extraction of river sand and development of a viable alternative to river sand.

Both objectives can be taken care of by Mega river Projects, such as, Namami Ganga and Yamuna Action Plan. These may have to be taken up in Mission mode by employing young officials and scientists on contract.

Retired persons manning such projects at present do not serve any purpose. They are a certain burden on exchequer.

An effective enforcement regime is also called for. Officials failing in their duty while supporting local Mafia have to be punished without any further delay. In addition, provision of fine and imprisonment under MMDR Act, 1957 has to be scaled up from time to time to effectively deter illegal sand mining activities.

Chapter -17

Rain Triggered Landslides In Sikkim⁷²

Torrential rain in the entire state for three to four days, ahead of 50th Anniversary of Sikkim becoming 22nd State of the Indian Union, caused widespread disturbance and havoc in all six Districts. Areas of concern have been roads between Chungthang and Lachen, Lachen and Gurudongmar, Chungthang and Lachung and Lachung and Yumthang, Meyong Khola, Naga area, Namok Khola, etc.

In a Nutshell, following has been observed:

- Overflow of water in residential and market areas,
- Damage to roads & assembling of slush and mud,
- Emergence of pot holes leading to skidding of vehicles & minor accidents,
- Overflow of seasonal Kholas and Jhoras,
- Stoppage & break in traffic leading to repercussion on Tourism,
- Choking of foot paths, culverts, & causeways,
- Slipping off of small & big vehicles to valley side,
- Damage to Bailey bridges,
- Choking of Urban drainage system and
- Dungas or huge boulders precariously hanging over roads & residential areas.

Torrential rain mostly during thick of Monsoon, often leads to landslides or rockslides or mud flows. Such a down slope movement is nothing unusual. It is taking place for years due to naturally occurring vibrations loading with weight, change in water content in rocks or water bodies, blocked drainage pattern etc.

It may occur in a variety of environments. Landslides do not occur in isolation. These are very much part of human environment.

In good old days, one had to send a wireless signal after such a disturbance, requesting for a Bull dozer or Earth Mover from the state capital. In the current scenario, JCB's are available at many construction sites or even next door. So repair and restoration works not only become easy but precious lives can be also saved.

On the one hand, a Landslide may be caused by intermittent or torrential rainfall, earthquake or constructions of roads, power and irrigation projects, On the other, over exploitation of resources of earth, such as, mining and deforestation may not only cause, these may aggravate the situation as well. Global warming could be also one of the accelerating factors.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS?

Landslides generally take place when there is sufficient percolation of rain water into the earth mass. In such a situation, drainage of water gets affected, leading to severe damage to agricultural fields, houses, schools, roads and cattle.

In the event of a landslide, rise in both surface and ground water takes place. Also developments like rise in hydrostatic pressure in cracks, erosion of top of slope etc is caused by suddenly created waterfalls or rivulets.

CAUSES RESPONSIBLE

For knowing the natural ones one has to go fairly up and see the layers of rock together with discharge pattern of water.

Incidentally, many old slide points, such as, Lekho bir and Birik in Kalimpong District and 9th Mile, Rangrang, Sirwani, Bimbong, Yangyang and few between Melli and Jorethang have stabilised over the years.

The man created causes of landslide could be deforestation, cultivation works, construction activities, blasting, vibration from use of machinery, mining activities etc.

IMPACT OF LANDSLIDES

- Tremendous loss of life and property,
- Damage to key expensive infrastructures,
- Alteration of landscape,

- Disruption of transport & communication services,
- Damages to Ecosystems and habitat of wildlife,
- Adverse impact on agriculture, horticulture, floriculture & animal husbandry activities.
- Umpteen economic losses in all six Districts,
- Displacement of people and sometimes institutions,
- Changes in sources of water and
- Enhanced Flood risks.

HOW TO PREVENT & CHECK LANDSLIDES?

- Making use of Satellites & Thermal Imaging,
- Installation of Early Warning Systems with or without installation of monitoring cameras,
- Better Land Use Planning,
- Carry out stabilisation of slopes sincerely,
- Fixing Rock Bolts & Ground Anchors,
- Timely diversion of surface water,
- Absorption of Excess water,
- Keeping drains clean & ensuring their regular maintenance,
- Creation of Piles and strong retaining walls,
- Planting trees, shrubs, grasses etc. with a view to bind the soil,
- Proper preservation of existing vegetation to maintain stability of soil and
- Minimise alterations to natural slopes especially over upcoming urban areas.

RESPONSE AT NATIONAL LEVEL

A natural disaster, such as, landslide was responded to once upon a time by the Ministry of Agriculture. Only cash would be sanctioned to the needy. Soon this responsibility was taken over by the Ministry of Home Affairs, as one had to work in tune with ongoing scientific developments and deliberations in this field. THUS Focus SHIFTED from Relief to Mitigation.

By 2005, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was set up under the auspices of Home Ministry. Subsequently, State Disaster Management Authorities and NDRF & SDRF too took shape in a big way.

WORK AT MANGAN

Due to interest & initiative of NDMA and concerned Ministry, Mangan Bazar could be saved from further sinking. Piles, bolts and latest methods to make retaining walls and diversion of water were tried and implemented.

Thus disasters of past, caused by rise in water in Raphong and Lanthé Kholas are no longer taking place. Mangan, Ringhim and Singhik seem to be stabilizing also.

NATIONAL DISASTER RESPONSE FORCE

With a view to respond swiftly or within hours of a disaster, a National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) with counterparts in all the states, came into being. Regional offices too came up to take immediate care of emergencies. Now one does not have to depend on electricity for rescue and relief. Equipment & support systems made available at village level can be activated manually in no time.

SO NOT ONLY RESCUE & RELIEF ARE QUICKLY POSSIBLE NOW, MITIGATION MEASURES ARE ALSO UNDERTAKEN ON PRIORITY.

Well equipped highly trained and dedicated NDRF personnel are also rushing to countries such as, Turkiye, Myanmar and Nepal at short notice. They have the expertise to fabricate Field Hospital within three days.

They have worked very hard during the challenging days of Covid as well, in close co-operation with the Ministry of Health and affected States.

TO SUM UP

Landslides are natural processes but rising biotic interference is also responsible for causing such hazards. Ways and means, therefore, for co-existence of nature and human development have to be explored.

Scenario is not grim but it is not bright either. We need to slash our needs, desires and material requirements for the sake of sustainability AND leave enough for our grand children.

Chapter -18

Adverse Weather & Its Under Reporting Both Harmful⁷³

It is very tough weather situation in Delhi and N. C. R. nowadays. Almost all sections and groups are facing breathing difficulties, visibility issues and cardiac complications. Air pollution is at its peak but to make matters worse, A. Q. I. (Air Quality Index) is not being measured properly.

Based on figures quoted in a national daily, Air Quality Index (AQI) of Delhi and also of N. C. R. for a period of three days was 404, a week ago. It denotes 'Severe' category of pollution. And it was found in 28 out of 39 Monitoring stations, as per figures released by Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

Wazirpur (458), Chandni Chowk (453) and Bawana (452) were the worst and across the country only Bahadurgarh (466) and Rohtak (430) had recorded worse A. Q. I. than Delhi.

As on November 14, A. Q. I. recorded at key monitoring stations showed more depressing figures, such as, 556 at Wazirpur, 500 at Sonia Vihar, 477 at Burari, 473 at Rohini, 469 at Satyawati College, 459 at Indirapuram, 450 at Chandani Chowk, 449 at Ghaziabad (Vashundhara) and 446 & 444 at Sectors 125 and 116 respectively of NOIDA.

CONSISTENT RISE SINCE OCTOBER 16: WORST EMISSION ON DIWALI

It may be recalled that A. Q. I. has been on the rise almost consistently since October 16 (245) and that it had risen to 345 on Diwali night to ultimately record 351 by the next morning.

According to earlier reports, Diwali of 2025 was worst in last five years in terms of causing discomfort. Emissions from crackers, used mostly by rich, obstinate and crazy sections of N. C. R. contributed to 40 to 70% of pollution on Diwali night. The time set for use of crackers by the Supreme Court was 10 p. m. but ironically, maximum crackers were used by Richi rich Delhi-tes,

thereafter. They had no civic sense, no concern for the health of fellow citizens. Pets like Bloomy, Ecko, Ela and Jaimie get very scared under these nauseating circumstances. Not only it affects their normal activities but their appetite also goes for a duck.

Haze covered most of the places next morning of Diwali. P. M. 2.5 level of 675 was highest on October 20 night as compared to 728 on Diwali night of 2021. This shows aftermath of affluence.

Fortunately, there was slight dip in fire related emergency calls and much fewer instances of stubble burning due to delayed harvesting in the neighbouring states of Punjab, Haryana, U. P., Rajasthan and M. P.

It has been learnt that pollutants are still trapped close to the ground so there may not be any sign of improvement in immediate future. Less of wind movement at night too adds to the crisis.

Slight variations of A.Q.I. however, do not matter much. As such, adverse situations affect healthy persons also apart from putting to inconvenience the children and senior citizens.

MEASURES UNDERTAKEN

As A. Q. I. is worsening in many areas of NCR and air pollution is tightening its grip with slowing down of wind, breathing complications are likely to get worsened. P. M. 2.5 and P. M. 10 levels too have gone up substantially.

Doctors have advised people especially the elderly to stay indoors but of no avail.

Declaring On line classes for children upto Standard V is a good decision as opposed to advisory for the hybrid classes issued ten days ago. But children would continue to be in the vulnerable category as one cannot control or prevent them from playing in the open.

The Commission For A. Q. Management (CAQM) have come out with an unusual idea of installing Dust Sensors over the main roads to monitor dust. It is felt that it is not the time to monitor, it is high time we began acting against the key factors causing and perpetrating air pollution.

As such, exposure to toxic air will be very much possible, air will continue to deteriorate and thick smog will continue till last week of January. It would

not be easy to brave the current level of smog in severe or very severe conditions.

Use of water sprinklers in selected VIP areas, asking people to use N 95 masks or air purifiers at home are nothing but exemplification of lip service.

As pollution can not deter the work of many sections, which may lead to Sinus, difficulties in breathing and cardiac issues, Government has to come out with quick and workable solutions.

ONE MAY ASK:

Have constructions in the NCR been slowed down /stopped?

Is garbage being removed on a daily basis and dumped at earmarked places?

Are roads being cleaned regularly?

If answer is NO or evasive, situation is bound to worsen. One may never know, it may be GRIM in days to come.

UNDER REPORTING OF POLLUTION

Apart from failure to check air pollution, A. Q. I. figures too are found misleading, many a time. So a revamp of its reporting system is being rightly demanded by Environmentalists and Meteorological Scientists. It has been brought to notice that CPCB figures of A.Q.I. never cross the mark of 500 in their final calculation, while on several occasions, A. Q. I. has actually risen upto 1000. Thus Very Severe conditions are also unfortunately reported as Very Poor.

Further, C. P. C. B. puts a cap on A. Q. I. by limiting it to 500. So according to experts, there is a clear difference between such official readings and report of Global Pollution Monitoring systems.

Globally accepted groups such as, I. Q. AIR report A. Q. I. values consistently above 1000 with some readings going as high as 1500.

We, therefore, need to adhere to global system of A. Q. I. calculation for better solutions on health front.

Present reporting is bound to impact health of people especially those working in the open on a daily basis says Ruchika Sethi of Clean Air Bharat.

Another observation is that why should Air Quality Monitoring System be centralised by CPCB? One should have state level or regional centres as well. These must not work like any other casual Government office.

The system of reporting of C. P. C. B. too needs upgradation.

Further, calculations of C. P. C. B. are based on 24 hour average concentrations, while an international organisation, such as, IQ AiR reports A. Q. I. more frequently leading to more significantly higher readings.

No doubt, citizens and more specifically, the workmen, such as, Guards, Delivery boys, Milkmen, Newspaper hawkers, Rehriwalas, Maids etc are being confused and misled by the C P C B.

This premier central organisation also needs to give a clarification whether M. C. D. workmen are used to spray water near pollution monitoring posts with a view to show low figures of air pollution.

Also there are reports about fluctuation in pollution levels around sensors installed at one of the pollution monitoring posts.

Dr. Manoj Kumar, Air Quality Analyst of Centre For Research in Energy and Clean Air has rightly opined that artificial rain or sprinkling around monitoring stations or surface wetting can only temporarily suppress dust and lower Particulate Matter reading. Sharp fall observed at a particular station does not reflect actual reduction in pollution load across the whole area.

Artificial reduction in level of pollution does not last long and that after sprinkling of water, concentration of pollutants may increase.

In sum and substance, our work in the domain of air pollution control should reflect the reality as it is. It must not encourage any exalted, therefore, misleading exercise in Data Management.

Chapter -19

Crucial Weather Watch: Air Pollution Most Harmful⁷⁴

In a relative comfort of study room, bereft of a purifier or a blower, I plan to scribble a few lines pertaining to adverse weather in N. C. R. (Min. Temp. & AQI hovering between 6-7 degrees and 422-431 respectively). To have an appropriate feel, I shift to 'green' balcony. A friend later informs that a difference of atleast 120 to 170 was generally found between Official A. Q. I. and one shown by an Air Purifier.

Visibility is poorest ever between 7:45 and 11:45 a.m. Few are seen walking or escorting tiny tots and children to school but security guards, newspaper hawkers, delivery boys and maids do not have a free day in such trying conditions, yet to be termed "biting". For the novoeau rich, however, limits of air pollution and visibility seem to have been crossed. When wind blows a bit, both visibility and pollution levels improve.

Come mid November and fruitless discussion about challenges relating to onset of winter begin. One is tempted to say so in the current era of social media when majority join the band wagon without feeling the pinch. Not a bad phenomena. What is there to talk: same issues crop up year after year, same unconvincing assurances with little or no impact on ground reality are given.

To begin with, pollution emanating from stubble fires was prevalent in pre-mobile and social media era too. One would live with it without a hue and cry, which is, in a way, good both for the elderly as also future generation.

In good old days, as one T. V. anchor put it, one would look for 'Raashi Fal' (What the stars foretell), first thing in the morning newspaper, now it is A. Q. I.. Even if the feel good factor is on positive side and AQI shown is poor/very poor or severe, one would believe what is 'SHOWN'. Is'nt it psychological?

A man or woman who cycles to work, drops milk packets or reaches kids to school or sets up a vegetable or essentials sale counter very early, has no

qualm about adversities of nature UNLESS he/she experiences breathing or Cardiac issues, that too upon examination by a Physician. Such a check happens incidentally after enough damage is done.

AIR POLLUTION: DELHI VS TEN OTHER CITIES

According to a recent study by CLIMATE TRENDS, Delhi, air pollution has affected North Indian cities more than South and West Indian cities during the period 2015 and November 2025. Annual Mean AQI of 11 cities were studied: Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai, Pune, Varanasi and Vishakhapatnam. Bengaluru had the BEST AQI among all.

Delhi was found to be MOST polluted city. It was followed by Lucknow, Varanasi, Ahmedabad and Pune. Compared to these, Chennai, Chandigarh, Visakhapatnam and Mumbai had better air quality.

CENTRE FOR SCIENCE & ENVIRONMENT, Delhi has studied pollutants from vehicular fumes in early winter (Oct. -Nov.). Their study indicates high impact of local sources after seeing strong co-relation between traffic congestion and rise in Nitrogen Oxide levels. Further, worse Smog episodes were found during high intensity pollution days. The study also points out that N. C. R. towns witness worse Smog during such days.

MOST EXPOSED LOTS

Among the most exposed from fumes of vehicles are the Traffic constables and pavement shop keepers. Even if they wear masks, they feel suffocated while using these for long periods. Nurses had similar experience in Covid time. Four to five traffic junctions of South Delhi exceed AQI levels 300 plus even in the mild month of November. Further, as per Police, impact of orders for staggered working hours and Work From Home are NOT seen on use of roads. It has been rightly found that standing on road is far more tougher than sitting or working inside offices.

A Study by AIIMS, Delhi and TERI conducted in 2022 has shown that most of the Auto drivers, street vendors and sweepers suffer regularly from issues, such as, redness of eyes, headaches and limited functioning of lungs. Further, cough and throat pains were very common. One traffic constable, having 7 a. m. to 10 p. m. schedule, felt that their life span may reduce due to daily

inhaling of toxic air. He could see the difference after feeling lighter, when he had a break of a fortnight at his sister's place in H. P.

The study, further found that water tankers with mounted sprinklers donot make any difference. Instead of once or may be twice, these have to be put on duty atleast four to five times daily in an area witnessing congestion and heavy traffic.

CAUSES OF POLLUTION

These could be many but the one caused by dust from constructions and emission from vehicles could be the prime ones. It leads to accidents on highways especially in the early hours, time and again.

During a massive collision ten days ago on Yamuna Expressway, involving 9 vehicles, 19 persons lost their lives and over 80 received injuries. It began when a Maruti vehicle hit a bus with visibility reportedly being zero. This or other expressways too are prone to accidents, as rash and drunk driving continues to thrive despite enforcement measures.

REACTIONS FROM VARIOUS QUARTERS

Increasing danger and stress from air pollution has been highlighted on T. V. channels and through demonstrations several times. While no action has been taken thus far against any of T. V. channels, 23 persons, mostly students were arrested by Delhi Police for demonstrating against air pollution at India Gate on November 23. Most of them were granted bail in two spells, after a Court of Judicial Magistrate I felt that custodial detention was NOT necessary in such matters. But think of the trauma undergone. Yet again, a demonstration against rising air pollution took place at Jantar Mantar on December 3.

FRESH INITIATIVES OF DELHI & CENTRAL GOVERNMENTS

Chief Minister, Delhi has announced setting up an Expert Committee with 'special' powers to monitor and strengthen Government's pollution control efforts. While spelling out that pollution was to be treated as an 'emergency mission', she has hinted that no lapse by agencies responsible for maintaining air quality and cleanliness standards would be tolerated.

What will happen, remains to be seen.

Further, directions given after a review on December 3 to states of U. P., Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and civic bodies of NCR by the Union Environment Minister to submit Annual Action Plan for 2026 to tackle pollution appears to be an exercise in filling up columns. Announcement regarding CAQM forming an Expert Committee on vehicular pollution at this late stage is not at all encouraging. It should have been done long ago.

As far as factories and industries polluting Delhi are concerned, one thought that all such units were already shifted. So announcement from V. V. Yadav, Chairman, Central Pollution Control Board that 2254 such industries were asked to install pollution cutting and online emission monitoring devices would surprise if not shock, at a stage when pollution level is very alarming.

Time has come to take stern action against violators. One will have to come out of Committee syndrome.

Apart from being raised and discussed in State and Central Government meetings, the genuine issue of air pollution has rightly drawn attention of the High Courts and Supreme Court several times. But current stand of Apex Court appears to be more focused.

COGNISANCE BY SUPREME COURT

Sri Surya Kant, Chief Justice of India, himself had a direct feel of toxic air for 55 minutes before hearing the matter for the first time. When a few senior Advocates desired virtual hearings due to their old age, they were permitted. A few days ago all Courts of Delhi have been permitted to ensure virtual hearings to tide over the crisis, as a temporary measure. No one, however, thinks about the plight of senior Class I or II officers, not provided with a vehicle.

The C. J. I. during a hearing on December 1, was emphatic about blaming stubble burning for the present air pollution in N. C. R. while questioning an Additional Solicitor General, He wondered how stubble burning, being a seasonal issue, could become a political one when NCR and surrounding areas were bereft of any air pollution during the Covid period. Justice Bagchi, in addition, contended that construction being a major contributor, had to be banned.

Making her submission based on research of Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), Aishwarya Singh, ASG, informed the Court that main

CONTRIBUTORS to air pollution were: Stubble Burning, Vehicular Pollution, construction dust, road dust and burning of Bio mass.

Supreme Court asked Union of India for taking suitable preventive steps within a week and also to show if they have brought any change. It may be recalled that after giving due importance to the issue on November 27, the apex Court had desired clear identification of reasons.

TO SUM UP

Debates, discussions and conferences on the vexed issue have happened. These would continue also. Time has come when Commitment should take precedence over Committee.

At individual levels too steps and remedies will be more meaningful than expecting everything from the Government. Leaving a confirmed polluted area permanently or temporarily, if convenient and affordable, may not be a bad proposition. A few senior citizens are already resorting to latter, once a year.

Chapter -20

Looking For Relief From Coldest Winter ?⁷⁵

In North and East India people are waking up to a bone chilling cold for over a fortnight. Delhi-N. C. R. and North India is facing coldest winter in decades as minimum temperature dropped to a shocking 0.6 degrees once, lowest in 60 years. While Gurugram recorded minimum temperature of less than one degree on January 10 and 11 and Delhi had a three year low of 3.2 degrees on January 12, NOIDA recorded 2 degrees on January 15. As per IMD, due to minimum temperature of 0.6 degrees on January 11, Gurugram was coldest in 47 years. Unconfirmed visuals of snowfall or thick frost too were seen.

Adjoining areas of Muzaffarnagar, Meerut and Bareilly also had minimum temperatures of 2.1, 2.9 and 3 degrees respectively. In the last couple of days, temperature has hovered between 6 and 8 degrees in Lucknow, Prayagraj, Kanpur, Bulandsahar, Sitapur, Faizabad and Gorakhpur as well.

Fog, First Obstacle Of The Day

There is no respite from very poor to severe A. Q. I. also. Earlier Delhi had recorded highest P. M. 2.5 pollutants in December 2025 vis a vis December 2018. Dense fog reducing visibility, freezing winds of slow speed and very low temperature has made the life of common man extremely difficult.

Moderate Fog or the dense one at isolated places during morning hours is not unusual in extreme winter. So, steps and precautions at individual level are very much called for. Driving has to be minimum.

Weather reporting and analysis, however, in the national media or social media, mostly focuses on North India, covering East or North East rarely. Situation is equally alarming in many places in winter but people therein, brave the cold without seeking attention.

Air Quality Index (A Q I)

The A Q I, over the years has been worsening.

It has crossed 300 on many days and gone up even upto 450. December 14 witnessed the season's worst air in the N. C. R., when the AQI surged to 461. But are these figures reliable?

According to the Centre For Science & Environment (CSE), it was higher than the peak during the Stubble burning phases between 2022 and 2024. Sadly, it has now been in Very Poor category for almost over a month. At times, it has become severe also.

Stubble Burning

It too adds to the regional nature of the crisis but its instances were found on lower side this year primarily due to delay in harvesting of Paddy crop in Punjab, Haryana, M.P., U. P. and parts of Rajasthan. Winter Smog has intensified, however, even when farm fires have subsided, according to the CSE.

No Winter Rain

Absence of winter rain this year is adding to the woes of workmen, such as, guards, milk suppliers, delivery boys, newspaper hawkers, maids etc, who begin the day fairly early. Rain, undoubtedly clears dust and improves visibility on the roads. Each time when there is IMD forecast pertaining to rain and same does not take place, people simply feel that there is something wrong with the system.

According to an IMD report quoted in a national daily, Uttarakhand received no rainfall at all in December and January, H. P. recorded the sixth lowest rainfall in December since 1901, whereas J & K received very little snow and rain in January, thus far.

It may be noted that precipitation caused by winter rain is crucial for growing Rabi crops. On the other hand, in high altitude regions, snowfall and rain both are necessary for recharge of ground water Aquifers. Further, as per SNPP satellite, decreased snowfall is also leading to forest fires in Uttarakhand (Valley of Flowers), H. P. and J & K.

I. M. D. Forecasts

Weather may deteriorate further over next ten to fifteen days in H. P., Uttarakhand, J & K, Punjab, Haryana, U. P., M. P., Jharkhand, Odisha and

Chhattisgarh. In addition to cold wave and light rain, snowfall may occur in J & K., H. P. and Uttarakhand.

Delhi yet again was in severe grip of cold when its minimum temperature a few days ago was first found lower than Shimla, thereafter, lower than Manali.

Intensity Of Cold

When it comes to intensity of cold, 31st December was the coldest for the region when maximum temperature was 14.2 degrees, 6.2 degrees below normal. Minimum was recorded at 6.4. degrees, 0.4 degrees below normal. The last time a lower maximum temperature recorded for December, was on December 31, 2019, when the N. C. R. recorded a whopping LOW of 9.4 degrees.

6th January was officially declared a Cold day. People did not get any relief even on January 7. Like in past, common man in places like Amritsar and Bhatinda shivered and temperature recorded in many places in H. P., J & K and Uttarakhand was expectedly below zero degrees.

9th January yet again became extremely cold in the first half, though maximum and minimum temperatures recorded were 15 and 8 degrees respectively. Not only it was windy and accompanied by a drizzle for an hour, it posed problems for everyone. School children were fortunately spared from the wrath of nature as schools in almost entire North India had been closed upto January 15. This date needs to be extended atleast by a week.

Advisories On Driving Prove Ineffective

Despite issuing of advisories and warnings by the District and State authorities to avoid movement locally and travel for tourism and adventure, people simply do not listen which leads to fatal accidents due to poor visibility caused by moderate to dense fog.

In the third week of December when winter had just set in, in a collision involving nine vehicles on Yamuna Expressway, 19 people lost their lives and over 80 received injuries.

This is apart from large number of deaths and injuries that occur on the internal roads of metropolitan cities and other major centres during night and early morning.

Roads to hill stations too look hazardous in extreme weather. Many obtaining driving licences by strength of money power clearly get exposed when visibility reduces drastically.

Precaution From Extreme Health Hazard

Unless people mend their ways, no Government can ensure fool proof measures to avoid or contain inconvenience under such trying natural conditions. People venturing out unnecessarily should know that invisible pollutants are more toxic and persistent, penetrating deeper into their lungs and thus worsening public health risks.

To facilitate updated and transparent weather information in the current phase of rapid climate change, 50 new Automatic Weather Stations (AWS) will come up “soon” in national capital. These will be set up later in Mumbai, Chennai and Pune. It would be in fitness of things, however, if these are installed in many vulnerable locations in northern and eastern states as well.

Chapter -21

Let Us Not Blow Off Glow & Glitter Of Diwali⁷⁶

Deepawali, one of the prominent festivals and an extremely significant event, once was symbolised by delight, elation and happiness of the residents of Ayodhya when Bhagwan Ram returned from 'Banwas' after a lapse of fourteen years.

However, charm and sanctity of the festival has been diluted over the years. It is not the same as it used to be, say five decades ago. It has seen and withstood innumerable tests of times and turbulence of historical currents. It is no longer reflecting cultural and environmental harmony. Does it reflect our cultural consciousness as claimed by certain vested interests?

If we glance through Puranas & Shastras, this festival, characterised by soothing glow of earthen diyas in the evening hours, is being celebrated for centuries, as indicated.

Change In Ways of Celebration

It is a matter of deep concern that omnipresent earthen diyas are now being sidelined or being replaced by candles and designer candles. Even then few diyas are definitely bought by households believing in continuing the tradition. In a swift turn of events, electric lights of different colours and dimensions have taken over the show when the celebrators and revellers do not forget to indulge in unwanted pomp and show. High enthusiasm on the part of children and adolescents is understandable but similar behaviour pattern on the part of ladies in the age group of 25 to 45, perplexes.

Nouveau rich among us also cross limits in buying expensive silver bars and jewellery made both of silver and gold on the one hand and highly priced home utensils, broom sticks, air purifiers, air conditioners, latest gazettes, limousines etc, on the other.

It may be noted that price of ten grams of gold which was Rs 1 lakh and 21 thousand in the morning of October 19 touched a high of Rs. 1 lakh 34

thousand by afternoon and was expected to touch an all time high of Rs.1,41,000 on the Diwali day.

One should not forget that our rapidly changing habits and display of errant behaviour on the Diwali day do us more harm, apart from causing accidents both in firecracker zone and thoroughfares. Element of artificiality becomes more flagrant and discernible. But are we in a mood to ponder over and take care?

Fire Crackers Never Are Pro People

One should not also undermine the immense damage and sacrilege caused by the Patakas or Fire Crackers to the ecology & environment. It has become our regular habit to violate Government orders and advisories of Central and State Pollution Control Boards. AND NO punishment is meted out to violators, that is besides the point.

Slogans Become Ineffective

Following and sanctity of often heard and relevant slogans, indicated below, seem to have become irrelevant:

Save Our Earth, Earth Day, Clean India, Green India, Swachchata Abhiyan, Van Hi Jiwan Hai etc.?

Silver Lining Raises Hope

In this dismal and depressing scenario some silver linings are aiming to make an impact, such as:

- a. Use & displays of 27 lakhs earthen diyas for atleast three days on the banks of River Saryu at Ayodhya. Supposedly, the aura and visual delight of the gigantic number has already entered the Guinness Book of World Records.
- b. As a follow up, the event was replicated at Kartavya Path in N. Delhi by lighting 1.5 lakh diyas. Drones also lit up the evening sky with a Ramayana themed laser show. As it was on display for two days (October 18 & 19), it was for the people to visit to have a feel of cleanliness, power of Diya and reflection of a resolve to do something positive which may have long term implication.

For centuries, diyas used during a Pooja symbolized purity, goodwill and freshness. No wonder this adorable habit or practice has not only seen test of time but its sustenance power has been simply unquestionable.

Green Crackers & Supreme Court

Let us not spoil Diwali by our strength of owning and showing off either normal or so called Green crackers, even if Supreme Court has revised, if not reversed its 2018 ruling in the case Arjun Gopal vs. Union of India, on October 15, 2025.

One Ph. D. housewife (Delhi resident) known to me for four decades has rightly remarked: “whether a cracker is red or green, both equally harm the environment”

It may be pertinent to note that the present Chief Justice of India has hinted at adopting a “balanced approach”, instead of a complete ban on fire crackers. Hence sale was fully in open through so called licenced traders but damage to environment was devastating. Even if the apex court has banned joining of fire crackers in series (laries), traders have “suitably” applied their brains. Rather, noise and air pollution has multiplied tremendously this year.

If we look at figures, Air Quality Index (AQI) in Delhi & NCR was 345 on Diwali night as opposed to 328 in 2024 (Oct, 21), 218 in 2023 (Nov. 12) and 312 on Diwali night (Oct. 24) in 2022.

Another important issue is Who was there to monitor restrictions or regulations in regard to directions of Supreme Court or executive orders issued from time to time?

What about quantum of penalty or punishment for violations and who will identify, impose, monitor and evaluate?

Obviously same corrupt Policemen (who take from “both” sides) and a few ineffective, if not non- descript Magistrates and their assistants.

Diwali Day Pollution Always High

Experience of last fifteen years shows that incidence of pollution registers a quantum rise together with sky rocketing of Air Quality Index (AQI) on the eve of, on the Diwali day and a few days after Diwali. It causes tremendous

pain and suffering to senior Citizens and children alike. Cases of breathlessness register a sudden rise. Whole locality becomes a gas chamber.

On October 18th, the Dhanteras day, national capital was already gasping for clean air. According to a national daily, while Anand Vihar area had fared worst in terms of air quality, areas that had also hit hazardous levels were Dwarka, Wazirpur & Ashok Vihar. Throughout the first half of 18th, P. M. (Particulate Matter) levels at Dwarka and Wazirpur were higher than the national 24 hour limit ($100 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$). The 24 hour safe limit of WHO had been also exceeded by 20 times at many locations.

Further, according to medical and environmental experts, small particles can penetrate deeper into lungs and blood streams thus aggravating asthma, heart disease and respiratory conditions. As per them, air pollution levels are further going to shoot up even further and make breathing very difficult.

Diwali day forecast of pollution was much more serious. It did reach the upper end of “Very poor” category. Further, the air quality index became 351 on October 21 not only due to enhanced emissions from the fire-crackers but a kind of free for all situation was also experienced. Thus it was both pathetic and painful.

Pollution From Paddy Stubble Burning

By this time, air pollution caused by burning of Paddy stubble increases. This year, however, due to floods in Punjab, Haryana, parts of Rajasthan, harvest season is yet to end. Hence, barely 888 stubble incidents were reported in six northern states during the period September 15 to October 16.

According to IARI, U. P. had maximum 403 cases, followed by 188 in Punjab, 171 in M. P., 91 in Rajasthan 28 in Haryana and 3 in Delhi.

- **AIR QUALITY INDEX**

As such, level of AQI in Delhi and NCR had gone up from Poor to Very Poor category between 15th & 17th October. Average AQI of Delhi stood at 233 on October 15 which rose to 245 (Poor category) on October 16, 268 on October 18, 345 on October 20 and 351 (very poor) on October 21.

AQI of NOIDA which was 288 on October 15, rose to 318 (Very Poor) on October 16 but came down marginally to 293 on the next day. This figure for

Ghaziabad was 307 on October 16, 306 on October 17 and all time high, this season of 324.

As pollutants are trapped close to earth surface due to calm winds and rise in humidity, pollution build up in a place like NOIDA peaked between 7 p. m. and midnight on two days. Situation may have been similarly awful in New Delhi and Gurugram. Infact, due to madness on account of crackers till 2 a. m. on October 21, night temperature had surprisingly registered a rise.

IMD FORECAST

India Meteorological Department's latest forecast shows that there will be mist and haze in the mornings during next two to three days, with average AQI expected to be in the 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' range across New Delhi and whole of National Capital Territory Region. Hence, residents may kindly note and "prepare" themselves to save themselves OR face the situation as it develops.

AN APPEAL IN PUBLIC INTEREST

Let Us, therefore save our offsprings, relatives and friends from further onslaught of firecrackers, their prototypes and duplicates. One day, these may become more lethal than the missiles, for, latter may strike once or twice. But the damage, akin to slow poison, caused by the firecrackers is likely to last long. These can not be calculated nor remedied very easily.

TO CONCLUDE

How many of us know that on a high risk day of Diwali day, only one Burn Specialized hospital of Delhi, i. e. Safdarjung Hospital works round the clock, apart from dedicated personnel of Delhi Police and Delhi Fire Service? Can't we have such wards in one hospital each of NOIDA, Ghaziabad, Gurgaon and Faridabad?

Let us concentrate on glow of Diyas, rather than being over powered by the glamour, glitter and blow of patakas. Diwali should not only reflect love and compassion but it should give us sufficient strength to move forward in life.

Part “F”

TRAVELOGUES

Chapter -1

Caught In Thin Air⁷⁷

The place is departure lounge of Jaipur Airport. Flight Number CD 492 for Delhi scheduled to arrive at 9:40 p.m. is nowhere in sight. I am the first passenger to be given security clearance. I came here out of my own choice, so that I could relax, ponder over the marvellous paintings and hoardings of Jaipur and also scribble a few lines about the world renowned Pink city.

Waiting here, I am reminded of a word of pleasant caution by a colleague that I should not be surprised if I land up spending the night in the irresistible Rambagh Palace Hotel owing to further delay of the aircraft.

Each visit to this enhancing city impels me to think about our rich cultural heritage and the efforts to preserve the same in view of onslaught of so called modern civilisation. Ever since I came here first, rapid changes have been noticed. Yet it remains as attractive, rather, exotic to a man from East or West, as it was, may be fifty years ago.

Time is now 10:25 p.m. Yet there is no sound of the flying machine touching the quiet, serene runway of the Pink city.

Solitude of the modest hall is suddenly broken by an announcement that the passengers travelling by CD 492 are requested to proceed for the security check up. I heave a sigh of relief. It is a pleasing sight to see a beautiful young foreign mother with her chubby infant to make an entry. Slowly, others also follow suit.

A deafening noise draws attention of all. It is now 10:35 p.m. Plane appears to have arrived. Not to play further with our sentiments, an announcement confirms it. We are elated to proceed to the tarmac.

Whole air strip is beautifully lit. Its beauty is enhanced by the gentle, cool breeze. Getting fresh air is more than a welcome and refreshing feeling. It overcomes fatigue accumulated during the day.

Once inside the flying machine, one comes across the usual cold and official reaction of the heavily made up air hostesses.

I attempt a nap but fail. An effort to browse through a newspaper also is an exercise in futility. As flight to Delhi is a relatively short affair, a walk down the aisle is completely ruled out. As such, plane passengers, generally, do not indulge in any conversation.

My boredom gets over with the sight of sparkling and twinkling lights of the historical city of Delhi. The Qutub Minar, Red Fort, India Gate, Lotus Temple, all present a marvellous and breath taking sight.

One wishes that the plane should not land to enable me to continue my visual romance with monuments, structures and flora of the national capital. An announcement in English, followed by an atrocious anglicized version in Hindi, however, shatters my wishes.

Once on the ground, it is a long wait for the luggage. Thereafter, I begin searching for the vehicle. I manage to ultimately find it but as expected, the driver is traceless. Hidden in a corner, he may be smoking like a chimney.

It is well past midnight when I reach Pragati Vihar Hostel. Call bell disturbs the slumber of Jayshree, who opens the door with the usual query ‘ Is it the time to return? ’ I ignore her sound and fury while looking at our son, sleeping to glory. Element of displeasure on the part of my life partner turns out to be a momentary affair when she grabs the sparkling plane dinner packet, which I often ‘save’ for her.

While she is fully engrossed in getting gastronomical delight, I jump on to bed, touch Ankoor, feel his innocent face, his quiet breathing and finally hit the pillow.

Sojourn with Jaipur is over. One is reminded of ‘ Black’ Monday after a well spent, cheerful and meaningful Sunday. I close my eye lids while thinking of the inevitable encounter with heap of files, letters, endless telephone calls, over expecting bosses, irresponsible peons and last but not the least, the defiant struggle of we donkeys compelled to work in the company of North Block monkeys.

Chapter - 2

Ramleela To Broadway: Magic Of Theatre

Theatre as opposed to cinema is not very popular in India. I was drawn to the world of listening only to music and occasionally watching the same, more by accident than by design. It was possible during the ‘off hours’ through the vintage Bush radio, an exceptionally polished wooden beauty of our home. We did not have the privilege of a record player or a tape recorder. But quality of life was much better.

From class VII to B. A., mostly one would watch a semi classical musical concert at Durga Puja ‘Pandals’. While characters playing Gods and Goddess would inspire and encourage, those of demons, birds, animals and flying objects, would mesmerise. Ultimately, Lord Hanuman would justify his existence as the living God.

Ranchi being influenced by rich and vibrant Bengali culture will have full five days of festivities, duly facilitated by traffic free roads. In addition, once in blue moon, one would witness a play in Hindi or English at St. Xavier’s College, my alma mater.

Mother of all the acts was, nonetheless, ten day long concert of Ramleela with its myriad and memorable characters. It would leave an indelible impact. Post dinner otherwise also, same would appear warm, fun filled and full of delight.

October, 2012, New York

It was a long break from the Durga Puja and Ram Leela days when in October, 2012, I was exposed to the amazing charm and glamour of Broadway at the Winter Garden Theatre, one of the 30 theatres of New York, the financial capital of U. S. A. It was a welcome wind of change after our Sarkari attachment at Washington.

Thanks to Vicky, my nephew, I managed to get the paid entry (USD 76) into a packed Broadway show. It was subsequent to an awfully expensive Indian meal. It was a true grand finale to a five day tight official visit to most famous and happening city of U. S. A. Most noteworthy features of Broadway were:

light, sound, acting, setting, melodramatic effects and the speed and proficiency at which the artists would perform. Perform, leave an impact, bind and try to mesmerise the audience.

Mama Mia Based On ABBA

Inspired by the musical super hit ABBA of yesteryears, Mama Mia was in store for us. Directed by Phyllida Lloyd, it was one of the longest running shows on the Broadway. Among the fifty odd dedicated and professional cast, it was heartening to find Monica Kapoor, an Indian in the ensemble/ understudy category, even though it was not possible to notice her presence instantly.

Three Parts of Play

My reading of the Playbill and interactions revealed that the play was divided into three parts: Prologue (3 months prior to wedding), Act One (Day Before the wedding) and Act Two (Day of Wedding).

There were 22 musical numbers. Some of super hits included: Gimme, Gimme, Gimme, Honey, Honey, I have a Dream, Mama Mia, Mama Mia, Money, Money, Money.

It was all about a remote Greek Island, wherein a wedding in Sheridan family was about to take place. The opening scene itself featuring the prospective bride and her two friends was not only superb in terms of song, dance and light effects, it left a positive impression in terms of make up, choice of colour and period costume. The backdrop was simple, yet marvellous. The swiftness with which it leads to enthusiasm on the part of bride (Christy Altmere) that sets the ball rolling from the very first scene. Though her hero looked tall and handsome, she outclassed him both in singing and acting. Judy McLane, who played mother rather brilliantly, had a clear and inimitable voice. Her singing and acting, both were splendid. A class apart.

Audience Response

Audience behaviour, if in terms of viewing and listening was praise worthy, it became outstanding with the cast towards the end. Ultimately, artists got a standing ovation. In the closing moments, three to four times it appeared as if pinnacle was being reached. But pleasantly it would swing back.

Long live the show ! Long live the actress playing the bride or the lady with a true golden, melodious and distinct voice who was selected as a bride. It was providence if not an act in the genre of predestination.

Lavish Victorian Setting

It was a real freedom from feeling suffocated or claustrophobic, sandwiched between women of all sizes, mostly obese, after a long time. It was not easy to leave the Victorian style lavish hall, having a capacity, close to 1500 seats. May the magic of Broadway linger on to perpetuate and preserve the spirit & essence of theatre. It was truly once in a life time experience.

Postscript

Once the show ends, exit doors are flung open on the side of 7th Avenue. Tall pullers of Rickshaws not usual taxis, all lined up with hand bells ringing, evoke the sweet memories of a bygone era. I begin taking a walk to my 50 storeyed hotel of a mega city that does not sleep.

Chapter -3

Fabulous Japan

Even though one was tired, having overseen second General Election in five years, one had to take part in urgent consultations in Japan pertaining to a few schemes of JAICA in Sikkim. Departure from Gangtok was smooth, in Delhi it was somewhat hectic. It was Airport to Airport scenario. After frugal lunch, early dinner at Executive lounge felt satisfying. Air India flight, late in the evening of 13th April, 2019 was fairly comfortable. Two of us managed nice sleep upon tasty dinner.

First Day

Seeing bright sun shine through window at Tokyo, world's biggest city had its own charm. Maiden visit to this exotic land was a positive experience for two of us. It may not have been so for my colleague and his spouse, as they were frequent flyers. There was some mismatch as few members of team would disappear to reappear. But Cell phones with local Sims kept us in touch. Even then waiting became painful. From airport to mini hotel (Indian hotels are far bigger with breathing space at Reception) we had to manage in two buses and a taxi. A direct taxi should have been arranged.

We had not even settled down in our tiny rooms with super tiny wash rooms that call came from our co-ordinator to rush for first official meeting with JAICA. We made it in time but representation on the other side was at lower level which meant that they were completing only a formality. I and Mukund were fully prepared and we delivered.

Round of Dream City

Visit to some parts of the gigantic city was enthralling, especially Cherry in blossom, overall discipline, good behaviour of pedestrians and Taxi drivers, very eye catching building of Tokyo Railway station and busiest zebra crossing of the world. The Palace of the Emperor was good from outside but it could not stand before any palace of India. We had a round of main city and a few other vital spots but had no time to have a brush with ethnic snacks. No

one could also indicate the spot wherein the famous film “Love in Tokyo” was shot.

Second Day

Eight of us were in time to catch our first bullet train to Fujinomia. We thanked our Tokyo woman co-ordinator for the excellent care taken. Packed Breakfast (@ Rs. 1000/ each), arranged by her partly filled our belly and same was not to our liking, either. South Indian B. F., in contrast, near our hotel, previous day was far superior and appetizing. In one of the fastest trains, we enjoyed the ride, took photos and looked at the clean and organised countryside. But personally to me our Shatabdi appeared better.

We reached our destination on time to be received by another energetic woman co-ordinator who was going to be with us for two days. That evening we relaxed and saw shops etc. closeby. Very nice to witness teenaged school boys and girls returning home on cycles after tuitions Dinner was at an Indian Restaurant located next to a Metro or Railway station. Though we were off our kind of food for three days, food served over there was to our liking. We liked Tampera, their version of Pakora. Met two Indian Engineers who were on a short assignment to Japan. We walked back neat & clean streets without encountering any garbage, drunk fellows, honking or stray dogs. Our Homestay looked comfortable.

Third Day

Left Home stay to shift to a hotel. It was a nice experience to have a feel of Japanese hospitality. Their dining table was unusual. One had to put legs much deeper to feel comfortable. Bathing area was outside our room. We were informed that some water would come from Mt. Fujinomia and if couples took bath with that together, that was considered good omen for their conjugal life and family.

Visit to nearby areas and a village or two were very nice. We saw an ancient temple and traditional huts after simple lunch cooked with care by a 80 year old woman in a village. We also came across some green belts and a wine factory. Jayshree met an American lady by chance who liked her red coloured Chinese silk Kurta. Perhaps on this day only we saw two World Heritage Sites. To our delight, Mt. Fujinomia was 'staring' at us all through. We also learnt the art of making sweets and had an interesting interaction with a knife

maker. For over 2 hours we were in Japanese attire, but slippers were heavy & painful.

Fourth Day (From Fujinomia To Sheen Osaka)

It was a two night halt at this bubbling and high end business District. Hotel had much bigger room than previous places. Very welcome change it was. We went to Kyoto to have a heritage walk and visit to many tall Monasteries and monuments. One was reminded of the aura of old Sikkim. Also saw the area of Japanese kind of Devdasis, who were a force to reckon with once.

We did mini shopping only as things were expensive and no payment in USD was acceptable. In the evening we sat down here and there, ate some snacks, missed our members. Like Tokyo airport they would reappear. Ha ! Ha ! Our guide was an American, a Vegetarian with good local knowledge skills. Twice we ate Indian food in a Nepali Restaurant. Indian food only sells outside not Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Nepali.

Sixth Day

While returning to India our plane was at Hongkong airport for 45 minutes. I had a desire to take a transit permit to roam around & have a feel of another country. But Jayshree was against it. She felt I would be left behind. May be, by this time she was feeling homesick.

Thank You Japan, Sayo Nara, Sayo Nara.

Chapter -4

The Russian Saga

To an Indian, Russia normally attracts despite its long distance and hostile climate. Scores of developments having repercussions elsewhere have taken place here, a country peculiarly falling both in Asia and Europe. Its vast expanse has given rise to several languages and religions. India and Russia have had close ties which were cemented further by signing of Treaty of Friendship in 1971 and frequent organisation of festivals and programmes. These are apart from intense people to people contacts.

When, by way of a reciprocal gesture, an Indian delegation led by D. G., BSF was to visit Russia from May 20 to May 25, 1997 and I was chosen as a member, I was thrilled. Raj Kapoor's movies hit my imagination.

Aeroflot Flight SU 536

Aircraft taking us to Moscow was old, having barely 50% occupancy. As it was flying low, one got glimpse of terrain of Pakistan, Afghanistan and some other Central Asian countries. Long flight enabled to make us familiar with each other. Delayed lunch served by immune air hostesses had only one notable feature-delicious Alphonso mangoes. Following lunch, crew occupied vacant passenger seats. Strange but true.

Arrival In Moscow

Around 13:20 hrs, local time, the delegation was warmly received by a Deputy Director, Federal Border Guards Service (FBGS). A. K. Patnaik, First Secretary, Indian Embassy in Moscow was also present. Latter tasked to co-ordinate our visit, turned out to be Son in law of Manmohan Singh. We had to face a bit of embarrassment in the sense that an Indian Westernised woman, on the pretext of looking after her baby in arms, very smartly handed over her trolley to late E. Rammohan, the then Additional D. G., BSF. It took us nearly ten minutes in locating her. She had no qualms about her irresponsible conduct.

Drive To City

Airport avenue was full of huge, colourful hoardings. Even though we were tired and sleepy, the changing sight of this famous country kept us occupied. In vacant patches, it was an awesome Alpine scenario. Landscape looked different from U. S. A., Switzerland, Egypt and U. A. E., the nations I had visited earlier. There was no question of locating any single unit accommodation for miles. Traffic was fast but not furious like India.

Russians in period of boom or recession were used to, if not destined to live in flats in multi storied edifices in tune with Communist spirits.

Getting Familiar With Russian Scene

Following a long & tiring drive, we arrived at Hotel Soyuz at 12, Universitet Prospect. Everything was cold, including the official lunch. Only Soup appeared warm. As all five of us were hungry, there was no question to check whether it was veg or Non veg. The fact that we were to be paid only 25% of our per diem being State guests, dampened our spirits. A quick nap in the regal surroundings helped.

Evening Visits

A visit to Central Museum at Poklonnaya Gora was very informative even when we had to face cold winds, each time we came out in open. We could see the magnificent Railway Station from inside and a few monuments, statues and historical places from outside. Though we passed by Kremlin, Lenin's Mausoleum and Moscova river, we did not stop as these were to be seen, some other day. The L. O. who sported a BSF tie and the lady Protocol officer, both were courteous and helpful.

Sunny At Night

When watch showed 9 p. m., it was time to attend Dinner at First Secretary, 's place. It was still sunny but absorbing interaction with P. S. Haer, Dy. Chief of Indian Mission and Sri Khatuwa, an IRS officer kept us engrossed. We were informed that sunset in Moscow would take place around 10:30 [p. m. at](#) this time of year. After a mix of sumptuous continental and Indian food, we prayed to God- " Bless us with some sound sleep in this challenging time zone. "

Official Confabulations

Next two days were devoted to delegation level talks and courtesy visits to Deputy Interior Minister and Director, FBGS. Impressive and spacious interiors took us back to old era. Head of Russian delegation prior to coming to brass tacks recalled his visit to India. They, touched upon prevailing situation in borders with eight countries. A few of key agreements also figured in talks. Obliquely China and U. S. A. too were mentioned, off and on.

From our side, an idea ONLY was given about Indo-Pak, Indo-Bangladesh, Indo-Nepal and Indo-Myanmar border challenges. It was stressed that incessant attempts were made by Pak [I. S. I. to](#) infiltrate terrorists as also to smuggle drugs and arms into India. It was impressed upon that against heavy odds, fencing and flood lighting of Western and Eastern borders was being undertaken and that India looked forward to learn from rich Russian experience of border management. It was added that the team was keen to see modern border surveillance equipment of Russia at their North Western borders.

Sidelights

Russians, unlike the Americans, the British or the French did not appear to be a tough nut to Crack, though they looked serious to begin with. Mini glasses of Vodka and black Russian 'Chai' would occasionally break the monotony. The Deputy Interior Minister was no different from his Indian counterparts when it came to mincing words but Director, FBGS, a tall, officer, duly aided by his charming women assistants appeared more candid and forthcoming. During official dinner, he desired on gulping a green soft drink by those who were yet to be acquainted with 'kicks' of Vodka. Talks were not confined to only the leader and next in command. Each one of us after offering toast of Vodka had to say something.

Two sides expressed a desire to exchange information and experience on the area of combating illegal migration, smuggling of weapons, illegal economic activities and contraband. In addition, they were also to further explore areas of co-operation in regard to border control and management systems and surveillance equipment.

Sight seeing & Shopping

A break from monotony of talks always comes when you have shopping followed by sight seeing. We wanted but could not go to Ostankino Tower and Tretyakov Art Gallery. We took a stroll in cold conditions yet again along a busy business street, followed by visits to F. B. G. S. House and their Museum. Due to time constraints, I had a hurried purchase of a compact box containing Russian mini plastic toys for late Ankoor, then a student of Std. III. Later I somehow also managed to get a set of crystal mini toast Vodka glasses together with an attractive jar.

Marvellous Railway Station

Prior to our departure by a night train for exotic St. Petersburg, we were briefed about further field visits and exposure trips along the Finland border. After a rush through packing stint, we managed to reach the grand Leningradsky Railway Station. Its imposing architecture reflecting an element of rationality had to leave a lasting impression. Usual Indian kind of crowd, noise and bonhomie were not to be seen. Only five of us plus Lady P. O. were lucky to occupy the spacious sleeper bogie, efficiently managed by an old Woman attendant.

Entry Into St. Petersburg

After having a feel of comfortable and clean train ride, we woke up to witness partly snowy conditions of the Alpine countryside. Fog would come and go at frequent intervals. Indulging in photography was a natural corollary. One had seen beautiful images of this land in illustrated publications and had read vivid descriptions in the history books but seeing a bit of same by naked eyes was a different ball game.

At Moscovsky Railway station of St. Petersburg, we were received warmly by a Colonel and a Senior Lieutenant. Drive to hotel in the nerve centre of the typical European style heritage city was a short affair as compared to Moscow. This place had more of greenery and a large number of tourists. Following a quick wash and dull breakfast, we were given a briefing by a Colonel General & Commander of the region. It was followed by visits to world famous Hermitage Museum and a Buddhist temple. Meeting Sri Bhattacharya, Consul General of India gave us an opportunity to talk to our

family members. Amma and Indu Bhabhi could not believe that I was not very far off from the North Pole.

Charm of Vyberg & Finland Border

Left to ourselves, we would have spent the whole evening at St. Petersburg. But being bound by commitments we had to undertake a three hour drive to an international border post at Vyberg. An invisible sensor device was seen. Same was found effective. No one stopped us when we spent ten minutes inside Finland, duly escorted by Russian border guards. Very thought of close proximity to North Pole led to little shivering.

Sunset At 11. 40 p. m.

By the time we checked into an old villa kind of hotel at Vyberg, day was still very bright. We had pleasure in getting photographed next to two gigantic boats on the banks of a clean river. Later dinner in the cosy, well lit dining room was a soothing affair.

Seeing sunset between 11:30 and 11:45 p.m. through room window was one of the most fabulous and memorable experiences. Body clock, on the contrary was yet to get used to the tough Russian conditions. Yet again one could manage barely four to five hours of sleep.

Visit to a Frontier Post to have familiarization with the engineering equipment was a dull affair. Journey to Torfyanovka to peruse the efficacy of special frontier control means was good. A short halt at a guest house overlooking a clean pond took us to a western movie kind of setting. In the same way, seeing the raising of water level to enable steamers to get entry into a port was something, I would, perhaps, not forget.

Elusive Midnight Sun

The missed evening of the previous day at St. Petersburg was in a way 'restored' to us. Having completed official engagements, we were on our own, enjoying the glow and glitter of the beautiful city at night. We had heard versions and versions of the spectacle of Midnight Sun in this area. Having missed this golden opportunity, we felt sad. Today being our penultimate day, a few small souvenirs were picked up from downtown. Most of the items looked expensive.

The Retreat

Next morning was a relaxed affair. I relished a brisk walk in the cool, enchanting surroundings. Off and on it would rain. 14:00 hours was the time intimated for our departure from Pulkova airport. The Lufthansa flight LH 3197 to Frankfurt in Germany was dot on time at 15. 05 hours. When A. K. Patnaik and E. V. Savina from FBGS shook hands with us, we were rightly reminded of a scene in the movie Mera Nam Joker, featuring Raj Kapoor and Kseniya Ryabinkina, his Russian heroine. And we were on to a new country.

Chapter -5

Unforgettable Switzerland

Switzerland or Helvetia is not only a paradise but it is also one of top most tourist destinations. Who does not wish to visit it atleast once? I had this opportunity four times. First one was in February 2000 but the last one in March 2006 was the most memorable. It began with a tourist touchdown to international city of Geneva to culminate with official business at Zurich, the biggest and most populous city.

However, visits to Sion, Vissoie, Interlaken and Scilthorn were very special from beauty and adventure points of view.

Charming Sion

Enjoyable two hours drive from the capital Berne to the wine hub of Sion was worth taking note of. There were high and low mountains, lakes, castles, beautiful clusters of traditional houses and apple orchards.. Our arrival at Hotel Pierre Christine, Sion at 15. 06 hrs gave us enough time to relax and explore. Heritage looking hotel itself had a lot to offer as regards traditions and local charm. Lounge and sit out near the fire place were fine specimens of design. Staff looked smart and courteous. Gentle strolls in the vicinity gave us a feel of the living and business acumen of the populace. Best quality white and red wines were produced over here.

Subsequent to a sound sleep I was ready for soothing morning walk. Weather was tolerable. An effort of fifteen minutes put me in the midst of a typical clean and quiet Swiss village, having vineyards on both sides. A small river emanating from nearby high mountain took me back to Chungthang, North Sikkim. After picking up some drift wood, I began walking along the quiet river. Suddenly watch was seen. As the departure time was close by, I had to jog back to the hotel.

Complimentary White Wine

Time saved from skipping bath was used in having a hearty breakfast. Even though I had a desire to exchange pleasantries with the reception staff, yet, I

had to rush to my room to collect key. To our pleasant surprise, upon handing over keys, each one was given a return gift of bottle of complimentary white wine. While thanking them, I bent down to pick up two Sikkimese woolen caps and put them over the heads of a male and female receptionist. They were elated. When noticed by the Manager, he lost no time in bringing six miniature wine glasses to reciprocate my usual tourism trade gesture. I was moved. Was simply overwhelmed by their fine specimen of professionalism. No where in world I had such an experience while checking out. Perhaps I will never have.

Memorable and touching send off by the Sion Hotel staff set the ball rolling for the day. Upto Vissoie it was a gradual climb. Patch of Alpine forest was thin but snow was visible behind hard rock area. A few wine factories were seen in the valley. Villages located on the either side of the meandering road had attractive log houses. It appeared as if those were not used regularly. One could also notice the efforts made for containing landslides by the use of nets and bolts, such as, in fragile Eastern Himalayas.

Dairy Plant, Vissoie

In two hours we climbed sufficient height to reach Raiffeinsen Dairy Plant at a snow covered village of Vissoie. Its setting and of the Cheese plant looked fabulous. During the PPP, we gathered that only 13 milk producers were contributing 3,50,000 litres of milk every year leaving aside the period of mid- June to October when healthy Jersey cows would be left for grazing up in the mountains. After being used to Sikkim's Alpine cheese, we were amazed on having a bite of Swiss cheese. Semi literate Supervisor informed that 50 litres of pure milk could produce 5 kg of cheese. While we thanked him profusely for sparing his time, Franziska our group Co-ordinator presented him a Cake packet in lieu of half an hour delay caused by us in reaching the plant. It was Swiss way of saying Sorry.

Fun of Snow Covered Village

View outside offered an excellent photo opportunity. We had a soothing walk in the quiet snow covered village having a Church, school, post office and only one policeman to cater to 2200 people. After lunch at Hotel Manor de la Poste, we indulged in a sort of comparative analysis of bounties of nature offered by Switzerland vis a vis Sikkim. A number of initiatives over here

were worth replicating. While departing, we appreciated the gesture of woman owner of restaurant in giving us some souvenir items. Thereafter, we had a brain storming session with the President and members of the Municipality of Vissoie. It was educative to know about their system both at grass root level and the financial autonomy enjoyed in respect of many key issues. It was equally heartening to know that surplus power generated by them was sold to a few border areas of Italy. A proposal was mooted to amalgamate 6 area municipalities into one to take better care of area population which swells from 2000 to 15,000 in the tourist season of February.

Zinal Ropeway ?

Next we took a steep climb to the base of Zinal Ropeway, perched at an altitude of 1600 metres. Magic of fresh snow lifted our spirits. The system having two Gondolas of 40 persons capacity each, going upto the summit at 2000 metres, appeared professional and stated to be put to good use. We were, however, unfortunate in not availing of the facility due to sudden illness of one of our elderly members.

Upon taking a U turn, we began driving on the lovely road leading to irresistible Interlaken. Though most of us were feeling sleepy, some did notice a tunnel, an arched coronation bridge, a Bungee Jumping point, a satellite signal receiving centre and a hydel power station. Further, beauty of willow trees near a motel at Vellesia was worth taking note of.

24 Kms Railway Tunnel

We were really thrilled to know about next exciting experience of going through the longest (24 kms) tunnel of Switzerland, situated near Richberg and Lotschberg. To have a feel we were not required to get down, instead, the vehicles were to get into huge railway wagons on payment of 20 Swiss Frank's each. Twelve minutes of this exciting train journey in darkness cheered us up. Hats off to the Swiss Technology, such a difficult task could be accomplished in most inhospitable terrain.

Down To Plains

Once free from 'lift' of the mountain railway, we began moving towards Berne Canton. A huge cluster of log houses at Kanderstag looked impressive. By

the time we reached Speiz in another half an hour, we almost touched flat surface. Shift from gentle slope to drive along a river reduced chill in the air. Close to 18:00 hours we came across gigantic Brienz Lake, a neat water body.

Enter Famous Interlaken

Soon we were to relish the ravishing beauty of Interlaken, literally meaning 'between the lakes'. Located in a valley between Brienz and Thun lakes, being close to three famous peaks of Jungfrau (4158 mtrs), Monch (4099 mtrs) and Eiger (3970 mtrs), Interlaken is one of the sought after tourist spots of world. It was also stated to be a popular destination for Bollywood producers. While driving slowly through the town we look at everything curiously. We could not believe that a brown and impressive Gothic structure called Royal St. George's Hotel was going to be our temporary abode. As check in process was taking time we used the opportunity to see a few lovely blow ups of the area. Swiss tourism looked far more modern and proactive. After getting the room key there was no option but to sleep for an hour on the colonial looking bed.

Dinner In Downtown

Dinner time, I decided to go solo in the now dazzling and flat Interlaken. I walk upto the Railway station having a shopping mall and an open relaxing area. While moving towards the West End, one could notice plenty of souvenir and garment shops along with fair number of eating joints. After a survey, I entered a small restaurant managed solely by a teen aged girl. She was soft spoken and courteous. After ordering an ethnic cuisine and Soup for dinner, I used my time in saying Hello to four "cowboy types" and in appreciating the local tools and artefacts displayed nicely on walls. Going through an illustrated map also kept me busy. Waiting was worthwhile in the dimly lit surroundings, Food was tasty. While clearing bill, I had a word of appreciation for the food and the decor. Lady Manager could not suppress her smile when I uttered a French equivalent of 'Thank You'.

Beauty of Lake Thun

It was 22:30 hours and fairly cold when I returned to hotel. Next morning I had a good four kms walk upto Lake Thun. Thoroughly enjoyed the pollution free atmosphere even when visibility was poor. One could see a few eating and boat hiring joints. An elderly man was engrossed in fishing. While

returning, I was so engrossed in admiring beauty of nature that I would have missed our group proceeding to Scilthorn but for timely lift given by a generous factory worker. He did not know English but could understand my sense of urgency. I thanked him profusely.

Sojourn To Scilthorn

Sharp at 10:50 hours a small group of ours led by Karen Lauener of Swiss Inter-Cooperation began our journey for the famous 007 Peak of Scilthorn. A drive of half an hour gave us a privilege of seeing a thick carpet of snow. We were informed that apart from gleaming whiteness of many peaks, we would see scores of glaciers and waterfalls.

Glory of Heights & Open Spaces

Our cable journey began at Stechelberg (altitude 900 mtrs) soon after a bright orange coloured Gondola having a capacity of 100 persons descended. An individual ride upto 2970 metre high Scilthorn was to cost 72 Swiss Franks. Four section cableway commissioned in four phases between 1962 and 1967, provides the tourists and skiers a life time experience in just 34 minutes. It passes through the villages of Gimmelwad, Murren and Birg.

As we negotiate the first section between Stechelberg and Gimmelwald, we see beautiful Fir trees. On gaining height these towering mountains appear more stable as compared to geologically young Himalayas. Within no time we could realize that this cable way was a fine specimen of man's will power, endurance and fertile imagination. But for this device one cannot have a feel of glory of heights and surrounding open spaces. As we gain height, patches of forest and grass begin disappearing. It is a pleasant surprise to get a well deserved halt of five minutes at Gimmelwald village(1377 mtrs). We utilise the time in looking up and down and in taking photos. We also interact with a group of young skiers. A few of them had skiing experience in India.

Fluttering Swiss Flag At Top

Soon we enter the second cable car and complete the journey upto Murren in exactly seven minutes. This stretch was steepest. Scores of people were skiing down the steep slopes. Apart from preventive fence, one could notice separate chair lifts for the use of skiers. The ride between Murren and Birg looked more challenging. Gap between two towers was too much. Of all the things I

could see an Altimeter inside the cable car. It showed 2200 metres, then 2600 metres and finally 2970 metres at Birg. Scilthorn at this height looked simply gorgeous. We shivered on learning that the minimum temperature had plummeted down to minus ten degrees. Our walk in snow had to be slow just like advised at Nathu La (14, 110 feet) in Sikkim but hardly complied with. We were amazed to see a wide open terrace, a revolving restaurant, a bustling tourist shop, close circuit T. V., telescopes and surveillance camera at this height. A fluttering Swiss flag completed the picture.

Upon being satisfied with the breathtaking scenario, we enter the restaurant. It was baptized 'Piz Gloria' during the shooting of superhit movie 'On Her Majesty's Secret Service'(OHMSS) in the winter of 1968-69. Driven by a 1.5 horse power motor, the rotating fun joint turns full circle in an hour. After ordering Vegetable Soup, Poached Fillet of Salmon with white wine sauce and butter rice, we resume admiring the awesome view of Jungfrau, the highest peak of Europe and some other peaks- Wetterhorn, Monch, Eiger etc. Delicious lunch is followed by telephone calls to Jayshree and Amma. I was reminded of similar conversations in May 1997 from Vyberg, North Russia with Amma and Bhabhi close to Finland border.

Rajen Lama To James Bond

At the souvenir shop while I look for some literature on the longest aerial cableway, Karen narrates an interesting tale of Rajen Lama, an orphan of 12 years of Nepal, her foster son, who was never seen by her, yet she was meeting his annual expenses amounting to 700 Swiss Franks for the last seven years. Upon being exposed to such a strange relation, we venture into 'Touristorama' to view a five minute version of OHMSS. The action packed crime thriller had superb acting by the then James Bond, his heroine and nine other made up beauties. The film, apart from giving immense publicity to the location, provided all the needed money to the builders of the cableway.

The Descent

In the process of coming down, we had a short halt at Murren.. Three senior villagers wearing blue and black dresses were found playing long musical instruments in the courtyard of Hotel Alpenrub. These were akin to such playing or blowing of Gelling by Lamas of Sikkim. We clapped in unison and

rushed to cable car. While descending further in the fast deteriorating weather, I had full satisfaction and joy. On going through this exhilarating experience one did not mind having missed the ride at Zinal Ropeway.

Chapter- 6

Egypt: Fascinating And Historic

Well in 1997 it was my rare fortune to visit this land of rich and ancient civilisation. It was one of the four great river valley civilisations alongwith Mesopotamian, Indus and Chinese. When it came to water development and management, all of them were reported to be ahead of times through canal irrigation system or could be, rain water harvesting. But my desire to see a portion of the Great Nile river during day time could not materialise. May be next time.

As a member of Government delegation to negotiate an agreement gives you a good opportunity to read, collect, learn and interact. One's mind has to be receptive.

Due to terrorism in Punjab and J & K and remnants thereof, the networking of country's terrorists with Islamic and Palestinian elements was rising from 1995 onwards. Deviant and ill informed elements based in U. S., U. K., Canada and a few European countries had a major role to play in the contact and mis guidance process.

Egypt, due to it being largest Arab country had always played a cardinal role in Arab and Middle East politics right after World War II. In addition, it had also taken a reasonable if not firm stand vis a vis Israel on Palestine issue.

Coming to Bi-lateral matters emanating from mutual trust, understanding and rich civilisations in both the countries, India always has maintained good relation with this country. Credit also goes to Nasser-Nehru friendship and their unquestionable role in building and sustaining Non Aligned movement alongwith Marshall J. B. Tito of the then Yugoslavia.

Continued respect and understanding with each other, irrespective of change in leadership in India and Egypt need to be mentioned. Also one can not ignore that Egypt has been leading trading partner of India in Africa.

With such a backdrop, a need was felt to have a treaty or agreement with Egypt focusing on Police co operation, drug and arms control and sharing of

intelligence in the matter of organised crime. As per prevailing practice, a draft was given, same was commented upon in consultation of all concerned and response of Government of Egypt was solicited, thereafter. Preliminary negotiations in two to three rounds were held in New Delhi and finally a date for initialling the final draft in Cairo was fixed.

Amazing Dubai & Emirates Flight

Four member delegation was ready after a drill to fly to Cairo. As there was no direct flight, we landed up in mesmerizing Dubai first. It was a different world altogether. If Abu Dhabi was a vast oasis in desert, Dubai was certainly New York in making. Those among us who had not visited Dubai, vowed to do so on return journey.

After rest for a few hours and enjoying hospitality at the magnificent airport executive lounge, we took off again by Emirates Air. What an experience it was ! Apart from sumptuous food, comfort, care and good behaviour, our photos were also taken by Air hostesses and prints promptly handed over prior to landing.

Egypt In Brief

Egypt like Russia falls in two continents-Africa and Asia. Being largest Arab country, its role for and on behalf of Muslims in Gulf region has been crucial. It has been involved in three wars with Israel and has continued to play role of a mediator on Gaza issue.

Though it has second largest economy in Africa, it is a middle income country and that large scale poverty prevails despite booming tourism. Again tourism and travel is confined to Cairo, Luxor, Alexandria and Aswan. Visitors, nevertheless have to be careful on account of several lethal attacks in the past. Pyramids and Sphinx of Giza are most visited monuments of the world, museum at Cairo is one of the largest in the world and river Nile is not only a lifeline here but also in six other countries of Africa.

Reception At Airport

Reception at the vast Cairo airport in the evening was memorable. Drive to hotel was smooth. Traffic appeared to be well managed. Afterall, in 1997, Cairo had multi layered fly overs ahead of many metropolises of the world.

When we felt our vehicle was slowing down near a Qutub Minar type round building, we were told by the L. O. that this lovely hotel was going to be our abode for the next four days. Past attractive reception, when we moved towards our respective rooms, it was a Bhul Bhulaiya kind of feeling. Corridor being circular would amuse and confuse at the same time.

Rounds of Meetings

Meetings from the next morning were systematic and gave ample scope for knowing prevailing conditions, constraints and seeking clarification of doubts. Our counterparts were friendly and candid, better than our experience with delegates of a few European countries. In such bi-lateral settings Chinese, Pakistani, Nepali and American officers donot open up that easily.

Egyptian Coffee

During the break, apart from tea and snacks, typical Egyptian Kahwa or Black Coffee would be offered.. To begin with, it would taste strong but later some of us would like, if not relish it. This Coffee known for its rich and robust taste is often made with or without sugar. Sometimes Large cardamom or other spices are added for extra aroma and flavour. We gathered that it has a special place in Egyptian culture from quietness of homes to bustling road side eateries.

Great Pyramids

We had rare privilege to visit Great Pyramids on the second and third day of our stay at Cairo. Our joy knew no bounds even when weather was warm. We would walk slowly, looking at the three gigantic Pyramids adjacent to each other.

Built around 2580-2560 B.C., these were reported to be the oldest and only surviving wonder of the ancient world. Known as Great Pyramid,

Khafre and Menkaure, they attract and mesmerize. They are unique. Except one or two Arab countries, these are not found anywhere else.

We gathered that there were 118 Pyramids in Egypt, all built in ancient times. Great one is located on the West Bank of Nile river on the Giza plateau. It is 146.5 mtres (481ft) in height, reduced to 455 feet due to air erosion over the years. It has millions of stone blocks weighing two to fifteen tons each. These

were carried to the site manually as during those times crane and bull dozers would be unthinkable.

Great Pyramid was stated to be a monumental Tomb for the 4th Dynasty Pharaoh Khufu. Inside Great Pyramid we came across: a Descending passage, an unfinished chamber, Grand Gallery and King's Chamber (different from others as it has a Granite lining)

Giza has six Pyramids, three are main ones, then are Queen Pyramid and unusual looking and gigantic Sphinx.

Key Aspects of Pyramid Are: *These are ancient tombs for Pharaohs (Kings), *These depict incredible feats of organisation and engineering and *They Symbolise Egypt's power as also mystery.

Only one Earthquake so far has affected one Pyramid. A quake of 6.5 on Richter scale on August 8, 1303 had impacted many stones. These were loosened. Structure may have shaken but overall stability was intact. During the Light & Sound Show on the next evening many unanswered questions could be answered about the Pyramids and ancient Egypt as also some additional inputs could be obtained about this amazing land.

Seeing this World Heritage Site was worth it as one was impressed with its vast area, high level of maintenance, endurance of the structures and their power to withstand air erosion and other natural calamities.

SPHINX

Situated in Giza burial ground area, this mythical creature is a limestone statue of reclining Sphinx, showing head of a man and body of a lion.

I could recollect that we have a similar God Narasimha in India, who was fourth and strongest re incarnate of Lord Vishnu. Half of his body is of a robust man and other half, including face is shown to be of a Lion.

Sphinx is a Greek word. It was explained as having been associated with power, protection and sacred life. Carved around 2500 B. C., it was supposed to guard the Pyramids. It is world's largest monolithic statue. Famous for its mystery and enduring presence, wind erosion may have impacted it like the Pyramids but it remains where it was. Its nose and beard may have got eroded over a period of time.

Interestingly, it is carved from a single piece of rock. Its face resembles that of Pharaoh Kafre.

Main Egypt Museum

Located in Tahrir Square area of Cairo, it is the largest archeological Museum in the world as also largest in the Middle East. One had visited many Smithsonian museums in Washington, Luvre in Paris, Rijks & Van Gogh museums in Amsterdam, Indian Museum, Kolkata but this one was simply amazing due to its 170,000 artefacts from Pre Dynastic to Greco Roman periods.

Most important relics of ancient Egypt can be seen here. Biggest attractions off course were the Royal Mummies and statues of builders of three main Pyramids of Giza. One can see variety of jewelery and statues inside this unique neo classical building. Many of royal mummies were reported to have been relocated from here to two other city museums. Only two of the three sections having statues and busts could be seen due to our tight schedule. As far as Mummies are concerned, ten museums of Egypt in all have such period displays.

Handicrafts of Egypt

Most popular ones are miniature Pyramids made of light metal with filling of sand and black Granite ones. Next popular objects are Bust of Queen Nephtratus and Paprus paintings. As market setting was akin to India and prices reasonable, we could purchase some of them. Indian kind of spices and salty snacks were also available in plenty. Bargaining was also possible.

Nile River Cruise

The last evening of our visit was reserved for this fun and frolic experience. Nice To know that this cruise was being run by the famous Oberoi group of hotels of India. As the steamer began moving on the Nile river, welcome song in Spanish language was sung by a good looking short Egyptian girl. Next we could also see a Belly dance for the first time. What a performance it was ! What a timing and co-ordination of music, movement and culture !. This perfect blend of Arabian charm with modern flair is fast catching up in India, but confined only to elite gatherings. One more dance display of ancient or medieval period performed efficiently by a short man followed. The way he

moved his costume in a round about fashion, it would take the shape of a tent. An applause was bound to follow.

Both the dances left a mark. Finally we could speak to the middle aged but slim Belly dancer, smoking like a chimney, away from hustle and bustle of lounge cum dining area. We finished the day with a sumptuous meal and took the morning flight yet again for Dubai.

Chapter -7

Six Nations In Six Weeks

Pursuing the vision of a happening Sikkim, a six nation tour of Europe for six weeks in March-April 2006 was planned. Series of meetings taken by the C.M., Sikkim ensued, before two sectors were identified for focus: Horticulture and Tourism.

Scope to boost floriculture, especially Orchids and cut flowers was immense but for want of publicity, regular market and reasonable price, farmers were struggling.

In addition, aim was also to take active part in International Tourism Bourse, Berlin, the World's biggest tourism fair. An interface with the functioning of Swiss system of local governance too was part of agenda. An Alpine Cheese plant at Dentam, West Sikkim set up with Swiss Co-operation, was a resounding success story. Not only it had ensured production of Gouda Cheese, it had also paved the way for durable capacity building in a remote area.

GERMANY

This was my second visit to Berlin. This traditional centre of art and culture is the second biggest city of Europe. My First visit was in February 2000 with APPPA friends. As former was barely for 24 hours, one saw very few spots, such as, Brandenburg Gate, Parliament building and Berlin Wall & Memorial. Metro ride was not eventful as compared to Moscow or New York.

This time it was strict business from first hour of the first day. We could not see snow/ ice properly, though it had snowed heavily soon after our arrival. In our huge Marriot hotel, Sri Manmohan Singh, P. M. had stayed once as a State guest. It was not befitting status of a P. M. But in western countries you do not have large hotels with lawn or garden as in Delhi, Mumbai, Jaipur or Kolkata. Nor will they give you the kind of out of way treatment we give to VIP's in India.

We were lucky to be ready on time for the inauguration of I. T. B. As we had 45 minutes to spare, on the advice of Embassy L.O., we entered a Zoo somewhat chose by. Exhibits were usual except two noticeable features: A giant Panda and a bunch of reddish orange Flamingos. While former was more than comfortable in snow, bunch of latter too looked awesome. Wearing overcoats we decided to click group photos. As there was no India kind of paraphernalia at the inaugural function, we decided to stick to our little stall prior to moving to a small hotel to begin our show. We had two Ministers in addition to the C. M. and his wife and three Commissioners including myself.

First item was a short Video film: New Sikkim, Happy Sikkim, made with care by Delhi based Anuradha. It was followed by a short talk by me on prospects of Sikkim as an Ultimate Eco Tourism destination. And then came the moment I was waiting for: Release of my first Coffee Table Book- "Sikkim, Small & Beautiful" by the Chief Minister. As I had finished the book containing 246 coloured photos at the nick of time after a hard work of barely three weeks, only a few copies were displayed at the I. T. B. and distributed to selected individuals. It included Mrs Renuka Chaudhary, Tourism Minister and Sri A. K. Mishra, Secretary, Tourism Ministry. Later I had the privilege of attending an exclusive presentation of Ministry of Tourism.

Rest two days were used by our members in going around the fair and the city. For many this being first foreign tour, opportunity was thrilling. But many of them had not collected their luggage from conveyer belt thinking that some protocol chap would do the needful.

I alongwith P. K. Dong, Executive Director of STDC had tough time in retrieving those pieces as those were already sent to unclaimed baggage enclosure under the surveillance of sniffer dogs. In the lobby of hotel, thanks to tips from a German woman volunteer for India Tourism, one learnt playing Table Soccer, which I pursued in Netherland. Very absorbing & thrilling indeed.

SWITZERLAND

We began from the capital Berne, a medium sized city, moved on to Geneva and Interlaken and departed from Zurich, the biggest Swiss city and financial hub. It was a very rewarding tour, vivid description of which has been attempted in Chapter (5) of this Part on Travelogues.

ITALY

In this land one feels very comfortable. Not only Indians like visiting it but Italians too fall for India rather easily. A young Italian girl visiting India for the third time through Paris airport had remarked "Each time I come to India, it changes rapidly".

It is ancient, yet modern, glorious yet lovely and eye catching, yet not monotonous. Its cuisine being popular in India, is very tasty and Italians make incredible style statements.

During two visits, we stayed in the same hotel in Rome. Taking two rounds of adjacent park was like home coming. Getting familiar with ancient part of Rome and Vatican city and modern parts of Milan, a renowned fashion District is not a difficult proposition. A tour by train too enabled us to see many spots we would not have imagined to come across. Witnessing snow at a low altitude as compared to Sikkim was unbelievable. Two things were common with India: Graffiti on the wall and Noise in the streets. You can consider Italians being in jovial and festive spirits most of the time. Third thing I wish I could hide: incidence of pick pocketing. Women led from front in some parts of country. Pocket of one of our Ministers too was attempted.

Number 13 is considered lucky in this country. It is supposed to bring prosperity and ensure liveable life.

Italy is small, longish country touching Mediterranean Sea and boundaries of France, Switzerland, Austria, Slovenia, Vatican City and San Marino. Being third biggest country of Europe, population wise, it has one of the oldest civilisations, fabulous buildings, art works and paintings. You can not have enough of these. You have to visit this fairy land, time and again to have a feel of its rich history, world class art and architecture, high fashion, luxury sports cars and World Heritage Sites.

We began with gigantic Colosseum, very old arena which is similar to a modern amphitheatre. Having such a facility in ancient times was unthinkable. Since it was located at a central place, we would bump in several times. Vatican city was a marvellous experience. This headquarter of Roman Catholic Church is mesmerising. Its interiors bring in Bhakti in you. Its paintings reinforce life spirit within you. You can easily spend two hours seeing the St. Peter's Basilica and Sistine Chapel. Hearing about the process of selection of Pope is very interesting.

Walking on the streets of Rome gives you a different feeling. We drove to and took a stroll around Piazza da Namona, an eating and fun place of repute. Being full of life, it caters to a variety of food. It also had four giant statues depicting four great rivers. I was touched when I heard that Ganga was one of them. I was very happy to have a cartoon portrait of mine drawn by a typical Roman artist after paying Rs. 500 in Indian currency.

Milan was also seen to witness star and style, though we did not have time for its famous fashion shows. Visit to Duomo di Milano, a 108 metres high cathedral was worth it. Its architecture was unique and attractive. It took 600 years to build. Closely located is Galleria Vittorio Emanuel II, a 19th Century four story double arcade shopping gallery. Built between 1865 and 1877 it is Italy's oldest and active shopping mall. It houses almost all high end luxury and branded stores.

N E T H E R L A N D

This country too was visited by me twice. First one was in Feb. 2000 at the fag end of APPPA Course. We had a technical session at Maastricht while excellent road journey to Amsterdam and suburbs was to satisfy our interest as tourists. Our boat journeys were very thrilling especially when one would be underneath innumerable arched bridges.

Netherland also known as Holland has two capitals: Amsterdam is the 'constitutional' capital, while the Hague is the administrative one. It has International Court of Justice as well. Because of holiday we missed going inside its impressive structure at a time when an Indian was one of its ten judges. Though Rotterdam as a busy port and international trade hub is second biggest city, Amsterdam is trade and cultural hub and largest city known historically for its 17th century canal system and Rijks and Van Gogh museums. We saw comprehensive display of the latter.

A Cyclist Paradise

Country is a cyclist paradise. Not only it would make people slim and fit, element of pollution, both air and noise are also substantially reduced.

I tried and got one from the hotel for the duration of our stay. Cycle would be light and sturdy and many would have gears as well.

Brake would be invariably in the peddle. Initially, therefore, one may lose balance and fall or hit a passerby. In India as long as we were using cycle, say, regularly till 1986, left hand brake would stop rear wheel while the right hand one would stop front one. I cycled once again in 2006, using the old mould alongwith a few tourist competitors in West Sikkim.

Now in India too very sophisticated cycles with gears are available which have transformed the scenario of mountain biking in ten hill states. Needless to say, they add charm to adventure tourism.

WIND MILLS

These being historical are seen all over. This small country teaches you how to make use of wind and waterways for trade. It also teaches you mantra of fitness through rapid use of Bi cycle. Not only there are separate lanes for cyclists, there is a good deal of significance attached to it.

Floriculture

A striking feature of Netherland is its devotion for the cause of Floriculture. It is the world leader in floriculture, controlling 60% of World flower trade and producing maximum number of 'cut flowers' owing to its hi tech, green house technology and centralised auction system.

Tulips, Daffodils, Hyacinths, Gladiolus, Dahlias, Orchids, Esters are grown everywhere. Tulip is an icon of Dutch heritage since 17th Century. It is famed for its rarity and beauty.

60% of country's land is used for agriculture, Horticulture and growing of bulbs. Congenial North Sea climate favours floriculture on a big scale.

All this makes Netherland flower capital of the world and the biggest global exporter of fresh cut flowers. It is on top of list of 140 countries engaged in commercial floriculture. Germany happens to be biggest importer.

Keukenhof Gardens

When you enter this one of largest world renowned gardens, it not only appears amazing and magnificent, it inspires one to do lot many things.

Most famous and eye catching flower fields and Tulip gardens are located in the vicinity of Keukenhof, 40 kms away from Amsterdam.

Flower growers from distant Africa and Asia cater to its international market. It's so vast that two days would not suffice if one has to see length and breadth of it.

We tried a tie up between Dutch and Sikkim flower growers but it could not go beyond one or two consignments.

FRANCE

One had the privilege of visiting this fairy land four times: 1998 to negotiate Extradition treaty, February 2000 in connection with last round of APPPA course, November 2005 with Tourism Minister of Sikkim and as a member of Chief Minister's entourage in April 2006.

Paris being Paris, you can not have enough of it. You simply fall in love with it. Unlike state of congestion, political instability and disturbance now, it was once very peaceful, if not cosmopolitan.

It is sad to note that local Christian population is only 40% while that of Islam followers has risen to 15%. Colours of communalism have been also reflected in a few law and order episodes. Move of banning Burqa and Hijab has been also resisted.

During the first and last visit I had the privilege to stay in a hotel located at a walking distance from Eiffel Tower. It would be a facilitating factor. One football stadium was clearly visible from my room balcony.

During the second visit we were put up in the outskirts with the Appa team. Thus commuting and time management were grave issues.

First day during the second visit we were so tired due to Jet lag that we were dosing off when our Ambassador Kanwal Sibbal spoke at French Administration Academy, a poor counterpart of our LBSNAA, Mussoorie. It was surprising to note that serving French officers could resign to join politics and vice versa. There may be a few ex civil servants among the present bunch of politicians.

Visits, Shopping & Entertainment

Visits to important landmarks of Paris were conducted in a routined way. Evenings and shopping stints are always very interesting in Paris, hence, we

could manage well. Seine river rides especially at night are worth it. A number of Bollywood films, viz, An Evening In Paris, have utilised such locations.

PLACES VISITED:

Eiffel Tower

Located in the centre of city on the Champ de Mars, this 984 feet high tower was built between 1887 and 1889 by a team led by Gustave Eiffel. 180, 000 metal pieces are held together by 2.5 million bolts. Due to its height and effort to keep surrounding areas clear from encroachment, the world famous unique tower is visible from most parts of Paris. Many campaigns get launched from here. On reaching first floor landing, excitement begins. By the time you reach the top by lift, you can not believe that it can be an exhilarating experience. Whole of Paris and surrounding areas can be viewed. Tough people can use a stair case to the top also.

During Covid period its closure twice had resulted into a loss of 145 million Euros. It is also periodically closed otherwise for painting and repairs. Though this edifice received 6.3 million visitors in 2025 and 7.3 millions are estimated by 2031, significant maintenance costs and revenue losses are involved in running of this iconic tourist attraction.

NORTRE-DAME

It is an iconic Gothic Cathedral located in the heart of city. Constructed between 1163 and 1345, it is a huge structure, unique in shape, especially its rose windows. One gets desired peace and tranquility on entry. My inquiries revealed that it gets eleven million visitors in a year.

Following a fire in 2019, massive repair and restoration efforts had to be undertaken involving hard work of two thousand artisans. It finally re opened in 2024.

LOUVRE MUSEUM

My three visits to this world's largest art Museum having famous masterpieces, such as, Mona Lisa and Venus de Milo have not been enough. You get mesmerised on entry but begin getting tired while going through the corridors and inspiring halls of exhibits of this erstwhile Louvre Palace. Its vast collection is from Middle ages to 1848. Many exotic pieces from ancient

times are also on display. As you inch closer to Mona Lisa to see her enigmatic smile, your excitement increases. Finally you come across a non-descript and small painting of Leonardo da Vinci. But Mona Lisa is supposed to be a class apart, the most photographed painting in the world. The modern glass Pyramid entrance to the Museum, was not in existence when I visited it first in 1998.

VERSAILLES PALACE

During the second visit in 2000 one got a chance to witness this marvellous Palace of Louis XIV times, located 20 kms away from Paris. Architecture was different but lay out resembled some of the palaces of India. A World Heritage site, this former hunting lodge is famous for its hall of mirrors, unique gardens and Baroque architecture. Three kings occupied it until it was overpowered by French Revolution in 1789. Marie de Antoinette was the infamous Queen associated with it.

CHAMP DE ELYSEE

It is a historic and breathtaking avenue having a length of 1.9 kms. It's a pleasure to take a slow walk in the evenings and come across luxury boutiques, such as, Lafayette and Louis Vuitton, Coffee joints and theatres. Beauty and utility get enhanced as night progresses. Bastille Day parade is annually held here.

UNITED KINGDOM

I was fortunate to have toured this 'Vilayat' four times. In February 2000 it was touch and go around Heathrow airport. In November 2004 and 2006, World Trading Mart (a venue much smaller than Pragati Maidan) at London provided a very good opportunity to have an interface with countries excelling in tourism. In April 2006, I accompanied C.M. Sikkim on a familiarization cum promotion venture. It culminated with screening of our promotional film and my talk on prospects of state tourism at the prestigious Gandhi Hall of High Commission of India. Interaction with Deputy High Commissioner and a few of his officers gave us useful insights about bilateral relations and a few European issues. U. K. comprises of four nations: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Having seven Kingdoms, England has rich history and culture, iconic landmarks, quality education

facility and famous sports tournaments. It is also birthplace of industrial revolution.

In November 2006, I participated in a memorable function organised by Ministry of Tourism at Oval Cricket Stadium. Being a famous Cricket venue, it was appropriate that function was hosted by Farokh Engineer, a wicket keeping batsman of fame. My desire to see venues of Wimbledon and All England Badminton championships never materialised. Yet, we saw Tower Bridge, East India company, exterior of Buckingham Palace, Parliament building, Hyde Park, Oxford Street etc. British Museum was very good but many exhibits were from India. London Eye was seen but was never used as it was awfully expensive. British Parliament located right on a busy road can be a security risk. One man was on strike for years like a group outside White House, Washington.

Oxford University, King's College, shooting places of Harry Potter film etc were a good change from routine activity at WTM. Saw Display Gym for the first time in 2004.

Our stay twice was at Washington hotel. It was a matter of pride in 2004 that it was owned by an Indian. Many Indians had begun owning property at London & suburbs ahead of 2004. Now this number has multiplied many times.

Who can ignore the fact that England had a P. M. of Indian origin- Rishi Sunak for eight months. A Conservative M. P., he was Chancellor of Exchequer (Finance Minister) under Prime Ministership of Boris Johnson. Thus an Indian ruled over England much against apprehensions expressed by Churchill against the ability of Indians on the eve of Independence in 1947.

Chapter -8

Shikaras & House Boats Of Kashmir

Justifiably it is acclaimed as a paradise on earth, a land of exotic scenic beauty and a nature lover's wonderland. Located in a valley at an altitude of 1730 metres, Srinagar has everything to offer to a visitor or a casual tourist around its serene, lively and out of world Dal Lake.

Innumerable exquisitely decorated Shikaras, sometimes bearing outlandish names float. Legendary Houseboats parked in a row on the banks and key locations also make a definite statement by creating a colourful panorama. Generally they attract visitors from entire globe even when situation may not be congenial. Mere sight of these from famous Boulevard, lifts one's spirits and gives much sought after succour to tired minds and ruffled feathers.

According to a rough estimate of 2008, there are more than 1300 houseboats in the city, of which 800 alone brighten up the scenario of Dal lake by becoming its crowning glory. Rest 500 are on Nagin lake and Jhelum river, flowing in the exalted company of Pine, Deodar, Chinar, Willow and Poplar trees.

Its a different world once you venture to step into a houseboat. These are mostly accessed to by the Shikaras. While approaching them, day to day life of an average Kashmiri can be noticed. One also gets to see Shikaras selling flowers, Kesar, vegetables, fruits, handicrafts and imitation jewelery. Of all the things, Shikaras having floating studios steal the show. Poses suggested remind of Shammi Kapur and Sharmila Tagore of Kashmir Ki Kali fame. Occasionally fishing freaks, moody hookawalas and the gorgeous housewives try their hand at the Shikaras in the somewhat huddled up colony of houseboats.

Parked Floaters

Apart from providing affordable accommodation at a relatively competitive tariff and luring romance minded nature lovers these 'parked floaters' house grocery shops, handicrafts, cloths, studios and beauty parlours. While passing

through one 'water driveway' having a sizeable number of houseboats one gets an impression as if the typical romantic scenario of Venice has been transplanted. While one desires to spend more time in a slow motion Shikara-Harmony, Washu Sheikh, the boatman desires to be excused to attend to his mundane priorities.

Nuances of Make, Alteration & Renovation

While ultimately getting closer to a houseboat owner through another Shikara, one is greeted by a typical Kashmiri smile of the owner/caretaker. Its attractive signboard and distinct balcony stand out. Washu Sheikh informs that the average width of a houseboat is 18 feet while length varies from 100 to 120 feet. Height of ceiling is barely seven feet. It takes years to make, develop and launch the special 'craft'. None of the owners, however, divulge the exact time and cost involved in construction. Improvements, additions, alterations, change of curtains etc take place from time to time. These are also impacted by interaction with the tourists.

Occupancy Factor

Those managing the boats appear encouraged with the rapid inflow of the tourists, rather tourists, actually spending a night or two. In the ultimate analysis, occupancy has to depend upon prevailing security scenario.

Nomenclature

Talking of names, Manhattan, owned by tall and handsome G. Q. Karnai and New Manila, managed by shy but shrewd Bashir were reportedly inspired by the tourists from USA and Phillipines respectively. More often than not, names of famous places are considered simply because they are in news or the owner hears spicy tales about those places from T. V., films or newspapers.

Environmental Concerns

Houseboats appear protected vis a vis vagaries of nature but most of them don't have a terrace, a feature which could possibly augment their grandeur. Unfortunate and sickening flow of used water and night soil into already shrinking Dal lake, apart from rising water pollution, is very much capable to cause insurmountable environmental hazards. A weed removal scheme on for

many years apart from early morning clearance by the petty boatman is hardly bearing expected fruits. Nevertheless, it is heartening to take note of voluntary efforts of a few former foreign tourists in this regard.

As we slowly climb up the narrow wooden ladder by leaving aside memories of a gentle Shikara ride, intricate carving over the Deodar wood in the balcony greets us to a historic watery abode. Owner is conspicuous by his presence. Upon mincing selected words of pleasantries in a few Indian and European languages, he displays his infectious smile and hospitality.

Special Balcony

Balcony of the boat has sufficient space to get fresh air and admire the beauty of Char Chinar, Shalimar Bagh, Nishat Bagh and slopes of Zabarwan mountain. Sofa sets and benches made of Walnut wood add to its charm. Endemic birds and animals, bunches of Cherry, Apple, Peach, Pansies, Daisies etc are nicely shown. Adjacent to the balcony there is a large drawing cum dining room having beautiful pieces of Walnut furniture, sleek racks, attractive cupboards containing ethnic cutlery & chinaware. Curtains highlight local designs and embroidery skills. These are, no doubt, eye catching experiences.

Books In Middle of Lake

In another houseboat, one came across attractive Crewal embroidery over bed covers, sofa and curtains. One is also pleasantly surprised to see a couple of books in one corner. Mudashir, the owner who has studied only upto 8th Standard, gets embarrassed when praised about the range and subject of his collection. He divulges that these have neither been purchased nor is he in position to read them. These have been left behind by some magnanimous foreign tourists and domestic visitors.

Running Hot Water & Kashmiri Kahwa

A round of carpeted corridor, master bedroom and another room turn out to be enriching experiences. Double bed looks nicely laid out and attached bath has running hot and cold water. Tiled walls, latest shower, good looking wash basin and a bath tub are not to be missed. While taking note of these one feels windows being old fashioned need to be re designed.

Subsequent to a satisfying round of the complex, sipping of clear and green Kahwa with Hide & Seek biscuits becomes an unforgettable experience.

Summing Up

One marks a sizeable dip in the evening temperature while getting off the houseboat. A reasonable 'bakshish' is offered to Ahmed Khan, the Caretaker. Bond of temporary camaraderie comes to a sweet end with utterance of Shukriya and Shabba Khair.

Back to the congested banks of Dal lake, its life as usual at the onset of dusk. One does not forget to buy a graceful Kashmiri coat and two pieces of paper machie items to add to my collection. While fun loving tourists struggle in the sudden drizzle to win over clever vendors and auto drivers, one hears sound of Ajaan emanating from the holy and historic Hazratbal shrine. Sound of evening Aarti of the Shankaracharya temple is also audible, almost simultaneously.

Entering a hotel at Lal Chowk, one does not refrain from feeling the plight and expressing sympathies for the Shikara and Houseboat men. Aren't they ignored and often left rudderless by immune attitude of the persons responsible both for maintaining and disturbing public order? I ask myself while switching off lights.

Chapter - 9

Arrival To Witness Departure

Contrary to the assumption that Asansole in West Bengal would be a lifeless railway station, one was privileged to be placed amidst its lively setting. A quick bath in the open enclosure refreshed me.

Kick Of Jhaal Murhi

While waiting for beleaguered Burdwan-Hatia Passenger, I can not resist the temptation to try famous Jhaal Murhi of Bengal. Its ingredients being puffed rice, soaked Gram, green Moong, boiled & cut Potato, Green Chillies, Lemon Juice, Coriander leaves and liberal sprinkling of Dalmot. Before it takes its toll, I grab a bottle of 'authentic' mineral water.

Even though train is reported late, no stress is visible on the faces of prospective passengers- daily wage earners, Government employees, happy go lucky kind of youth, power showing Cops and responsible old couples. They appear enjoying this state of affairs in their own ways.

Jostling For Space

When arrival of train is imminent, hectic activity gets generated. As it came to a screeching halt, 'rush ins' and 'push ups' materialise on the expected lines. Once inside the crowded compartment, my instinct for survival is spelt out. Afterall, I was in journey mode for good fourteen hours from NJP. Luck favours me when I occupy a portion of upper berth.. Unlike fellow passengers in the previous train, 'neighbours' over here appear spoilt brats of big shots. Each one was fiddling with latest Nokia mobile for chatting, not for photography. Soon I confirm their fast, flexible & furious I. T. connections.

Strange Behaviours

While the behaviour pattern of a middle aged and a young couple could be termed tolerable, the third 'live in' kind, began displaying rather shamelessly, bold, beautiful and mischievous behaviour, fit for bedroom. They were lost in their own world, totally oblivious to the presence of 'conscience keepers'

like me. While a tradition bound soul attempted to smile at such an open display of emotions, passengers in general preferred ignoring the act. Who will not like such free entertainment, that too, in a slow moving train?

When A Bold Scene Became Cold Scene

When a kissing and tight hugging scene was on, the unwelcome appearance of a fat and perspiring TTE takes place. Bold show immediately became cold show. Situation worsened when scores of passengers were found either ticket less or having exceeded permitted limits of a particular length of journey.

Filthy Wash Room

Having shown my ticket with a beaming look, I look forward to ease myself. I donot have the courage to attempt a discharge on seeing the filthy Loo. Absence of water at the wash basin adds to my woes. Nevertheless, sipping two cups of apology to tea and quietly breathing fresh air from lush green jungles, I manage to reach Gomoh, recently rechristened Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Junction.

Search For Transport For Hazaribagh

Thanks to misguidance of a railway employee and one of the Paan chewing mischievous characters, I am shown the correct way to a make shift bus stand. As I was the lone passenger to be catered to, I get surrounded by a gang of middlemen. Since time was running out, I was to pay inflated taxi fare. Afterall, only bus of this route had left for the day. Prevailing Naxal threat was to further complicate things if a decision was delayed. A timely intervention by Manager, Bank of India, Gomoh put me in safe hands. I consented to pay Rs. 950 for the ride against the demand of Rs. 1100.

Safety & Comfort of A Taxi

Once inside the comfortable new Ambassador car, I look for elusive sleep. When the car picks up speed on the beautiful highway, a man suddenly attempts to occupy the vacant front seat. Mohammed Harry, stylish driver introduces him as his 'cousin'. I firmly resist and see to it that the fellow does not travel with me.

Smooth and fast drive through the thick Teak forest turns out to be very pleasant. One hardly feels impact of Summer or the humidity of Monsoon

around Bagodar, more so, on hearing old hit songs from the bygone era. The opening song of Hero (1980)- 'Tu Meri Jaanu Hai, Main Tera Dilwar Hoon' reminded one of the innocent charm of Meenakshi Sheshadri and robust Jackie Shroff. A few more chart busters kept me occupied.

Fabulous Lunch Break

Lunch break at Tati Jharia, 35 kms short of Hazaribagh was an eye opener. Before enjoying an appetizing lunch at a 'Brahmin Dhaba' I did not mind responding to a short call of nature in the 'open bathroom'. As per custom, cool water was poured over my hands from a sparkling Lota, followed by free service of a 'gamchha' to wipe my face. When I sit down, I was amazed on being offered five types of green vegetables, a bowl of Dal, many chapatis and a handful of rice for just Rs. 18. More than low rates it was the warmth of the bearer and his Dhoti clad owner which won my heart. While departing I was advised to carry some hot Gulab Jamuns. Being Sugar conscious, I politely declined.

Development & Change On The Way

Back on road, a few more songs from hits of sixties prevent me from sleeping. Villages of Daru, Meru, Amritnagar, Sunghani, Lakhey and Korrah look somewhat transformed.

First view of outskirts of Hazaribagh is possible as soon as historic Cannery Hill is seen on my right. It would be visited frequently by Late P. Mama (P. M.) and Mami (S. M.) in the early sixties.

Time and Tide Wait For None.

Time passed by. Time and tide wait for none.

They did not wait for him also. These simply moved with a supersonic speed. P. M., after tasting considerable success in Football began to fade slowly. His friends and well wishers forgot him sooner than expected. He was destined to confront financial hardships following his decision to give up a Government job to explore green pastures of the then booming coal mine industry. He was misled by his own 'firm' calculations.

Influence of Old Habits

Instead of being a leader of his charming family, he soon became a disgruntled follower of his innocent, teenaged offsprings. A decision not to give up smoking and drinks led to gradual loss of his stamina. It ultimately forced him to withdraw from the 'main team'. Instead of seeing the budding football talents (his youngest child included) to sprout and grow, he became a sort of vegetable. Frequent trips to Ranchi to avail of specialised medicare could not prevent him from further onslaughts.

Unwanted D Day

His D day came on June 29, 2009, when doctors advised his family members to take him back to his hometown, wherein not only he had learnt the ABC of football but he also went on to play at the State level championships. By grace of Almighty he survived for another three days. Temporary miracle of Homeopathic medicine too contributed. A real life drama akin to closing sequence of Anand film got enacted. He could regain some strength, gulp liquid food and speak to near and dear ones. I too was lucky to converse with him briefly from Gangtok on June 30.

Final Struggle & Liberation From World

On July 1, he got a ray of hope in morning. Onset of afternoon proved fatal. He seemed to have slipped into a kind of end approaching silence. Though his intake of food improved, he could hardly utter a word. He left for his heavenly abode at 2:45 p.m. in the afternoon of July 2, 2009. Children were at bed side but he surrendered and rightly so in the most comfortable and secure lap of Mami.

While some newly married couples may have been thronging the surroundings of Cannery hills, the end came slowly but painfully for P. M. Death is a harsh and hard reality. Everyone has to believe and take it in his stride.

Arrival To Witness What Caused Departure

Thinking of all this, I gather enough courage to enter the abode of now "late" P. Mama. His last few incomprehensible words spoken in the evening of June 30 still echo in my ears. True to my nature, I do not weep nor do I lose heart. One by one, I meet Garima, Mahima, Naresh and Jagesh first.

Thereafter, I spot Mami in semi dark corner of the house. Expectedly, tears begin rolling down her cheeks. I bow and hold her affectionately. Console her profusely. What else was needed in this hour of grief? Her cheerful and once vibrant life had come to a stand still. She was destined not to move on the main line any longer. She was to be shunted to the side lines of life as per our wretched Hindu customs.

Such noble souls deserve a better deal. Thanks to the considerate attitude of her immediate family members, life as a low profile person in a slow motion should be a safe course of action for her.

Remembering Old Guardian & Others

I try to recollect the bygone era of my Nanihal (Nana's Abode) at Rabindra Path while hitting pillow in the erstwhile drawing room of late Chotka Mama. He was once our family's Guardian. Before closing my eye lids, I look at his garlanded portrait and fold my hands to seek his blessings. I want him to understand that two of his brothers, a sister and a sister in law had bid farewell to the mystical world to give him 'company' in heaven.

Next morning, snow white Seine greets me by wagging his tail. Behind him is Shyamli, synonymus with selfless service. As expected, she is gracefully holding a glass of fresh, sparkling water. One more person has departed, others have to carry forward the journey of life. Perhaps that is the silent message from her. While looking at the rising Sun, I see a glimmer of hope.

Chapter - 10

Waiting For Amma's Jharkhand Express

In 2008, after six years I was visiting Old Delhi Railway Station. As regards volume of traffic, there was no perceptible change contrary to claims made by civic and Railway authorities. Old fashioned animal pulled carts still compete for space with Jet age Toyota, BMW and Suzuki automobiles. In this part of national capital, Jay Walkers show no regard to traffic lights. Getting closer to station there is hardly any board welcoming private or Government vehicles. Most of entry points are in reality NO ENTRY POINTS. Driving therefore, becomes challenging.

Station Getting Renovated

On gaining entry, a typical Gothic style imposing structure welcomes you. Place is full of visible signs of renovation. Newly installed flex and electronic boards give a hint of preparedness for 2010 Commonwealth Games. But what a mismatch they have with upkeep of platforms !. They are not only dirty and uneven, some of them have pot holes also.

Hunt For Platform Ticket

First and foremost information I sought was the expected time of arrival of 2817 Jharkhand Express, the train Amma had boarded from Ranchi. A grave and uninterested voice at the INQUIRY informs that same was delayed by more than an hour. It was more than what I was told at my office. Nothing unusual in India. What exactly shocked me instead was flat refusal of platform ticket. I presumed Railway was pre empting inflow of unwanted visitors.. When my turn came at HELP counter, reason given was expected rush on the eve of Chhath Puja. I keep my fingers crossed as it was getting irritating being in Que for twenty minutes. Alongwith a fellow 'receiver' I could convince the Babu that both of us were genuinely intending to help our respective female relative, who looked forward to our help on account of age and safety grounds.

Nothing Short of Dominance of Few

Having secured a platform ticket at last, I looked for a bout of relaxation. Looking for a cup of tea, I escape being hit by a hand pulled cart carrying sealed parcel sacks, a scene one is familiar with since childhood. I had not finished thanking my stars that I was disturbed by a group of middle aged men chasing a train that had picked up speed. Being pushed aside by this rapid fire action, I watch with a degree of amusement.

While half of them could succeed in their efforts, a few hit others. This included a petty hawker, who appeared to have lost eatables worth Rs 50/. For him it mattered a lot in 2008 specially when he had to pay a daily bribe to get entry and remain on platform.

No One On Time

Why can't they be on time? Why can't they have some consideration for receivers like me or passengers booked for other trains.

Upon being witness to what I have tried to describe I manage to reach platform 10. A wait of 15 minutes ensures a sort of seat for me. I prefer to call it this way as the person sitting next to me was reluctant to remove his bag on the false plea that another person was occupying it already. I pleaded but he would not budge. It was too late when he realized his mistake.

Heap of Garbage With Each Arrival

Couple of trains arrive and depart in the next half an hour. Each time a platform would be free, sweepers will be at their sweet will to clear or not to clear the trash on track. Passengers are always advised not to use lavatory when train is at a platform. But who does not know the actual reality? Shame.

Scene At P. C. O.

In order to overcome boredom, I decide to go to another P. C. O. to establish contact with Amma through a Cell number held by her immediate neighbour inside her compartment. First attempt was futile. So I made a local call to pass on the message regarding further delayed arrival of train.

Soon dull platform became alive with a minor scuffle between PCO operator and a dirty urchin selling unlicensed, king size Sabudana Ka Papad. Former had taken away one piece apparently without paying. Being hefty and in

command of bigger business outlet, he was in a position to dictate terms. Boy ultimately gave up after churning out choicest abuses even by naming his parents one by one.

P. C. O. Operator A Tough Nut To Crack

When it quietened down, I wished to pay for local call. Somehow PCO owner got an impression that I had made two calls but was willing to pay only for one. I did not surrender when he tried to charge extra. Thereafter, he insisted on accepting only change. I was, on the contrary, possessive of same to make sundry payments outside the station. Seeing no other PCO, I had to relent. Afterall, I was more than eager to speak to Amma in this hour of extended wait.

Good Samaritan

I tasted success in my second attempt. Not only could I hear her voice but was equally relieved to hear the reassuring voice of her caring 'neighbour'. He appeared cool and unperturbed. Normally in seventies and early eighties this sort of help would be forthcoming in the Second class Sleeper bogies. Most of the A. C. kind, however, would not only act snobbish but they would be also insensitive to the fellow passengers. Maybe, the magnanimous behaviour in question was indicative of the enhanced purchasing power of the Middle class or Amma's neighbour was actually nice, helpful and considerate.

When the electronic clock shows 15:55 hours, I get up and look for area wherein A1 coach was expected. Finding no Railway staff, old trusted Coolie comes to rescue. All half asleep relatives of passengers come back to 'life'. Catering stalls and the roving hawkers begin doing brisk business.

R. G., An Interesting Character

Rescheduled time of 16:00 hours passes by but the train is nowhere in sight. To add insult to injury a train began departing from adjacent platform number 8. Within no time R. G., a middle aged Bengalee gentleman giving me company all along, shows a ray of hope. He notices an approaching engine but it was not of 2817. Instead, it was bringing in a local over overcrowded rake. R. G. was justified in making a scathing attack on Railways. He was to collect a packet from his younger sister coming by 2817 and same was to be

handed over to his brother, departing by Awadh Assam Express at 16:30 hours. Thus position was very tight. While imagining his state of tension, I forgot my own. To console ourselves we decide to sit down over a piece of huge Railway parcel. A tetra pack of fruit juice gave us needed relief.

Train Finally Arrives

Soon God appeared kind to us. Time was 16:12 hours. The sought after announcement relating to arrival of Jharkhand Express was audible. We take positions like an Army man on the front. This time the Engine and coaches being tagged along do not deceive us. Exactly at 16:18 hours, that is two hours and 18 minutes behind schedule, the train comes to a screeching halt. I have to run about 300 metres for locating A-1 coach. While doing so, I curse a coolie for misguidance. In the process, I lose contact with R. G. I pray to God for the success of his "mission transfer".

Meeting Amma After A Long Gap

It takes me barely five minutes to locate 76 year old Amma. She sounds positive and shows a beaming face despite her extended journey. While leaving the compartment she tries to overcome pain emanating from her upper back. I lean forward to touch her feet. Seeing her after more than two years amuses me. She reciprocates.

Agarwals, The Great Helping Pair

As expected, behind her are Sri and Smt. Jayant Agarwal of Ranchi, gently carrying her two bags. At very first glance I perceive them to be very fine and benevolent. After Amma alights from bogie with difficulty, I take her to a vacant bench. While thanking Agarwals profusely for their kind help during long journey, I ask if they need a lift to any point in the city. Apt comes the response that their brother, a resident of Gurgaon was already waiting outside the station.

Warmth In Saying Bye & Taking Amma Home

I lose no time in warmly shaking hands and exchanging addresses. We also convey to each other the normal courtesy to be in touch in future.

While I begin walking towards the congested staircase leading to Exit, I sincerely try to forget the sweet and sour experiences undergone at Old Delhi Railway Station for close to two hours.

Focus of attention rightly begins shifting from the platform to more mundane things engaging my attention at our home in New Sikkim House. I never knew that not only she was going to see Ankoor for the last time but this was also going to be her last visit to my family of procreation. This is how life goes on.

Chapter-11

Lok Tarang: Dance & Music Enable A Full Round Of India

In one of the coldest evenings of January 2008, an unexpected invite from Bhagwan Shanker greeted me and Ankoor at Lok Tarang, a Cultural extravaganza at Pragati Maidan. Process began with Pong Cholam (P. C.) dance of Manipur after Mrs Pratibha Patil, first Woman President of India beat a huge Nagara ceremoniously.

Intricate rhythm played on long and sleek drums with good movement of body and foot work was typical of North East. Performed during Holi, P. C. is a part of Manipur's Sankirtan tradition.

This brief but effective item was followed by Mungyanta harvest dance of Nagaland. It could hardly leave any impact. What they could not, was achieved by flower dance from Nubra valley of Ladakh and Solakia dancers from Mizoram. Colourful attire and soothing sound of drum, gongs and cymbals were simply mesmerizing. Kud dance of J & K and Panthi dance of Chhatisgarh, however, left much to be desired. Accompanying musicians on Narasingha, Talli, Mridang, Dhauns & Cymbals came to their rescue.

Depiction of Radha & Krishna

What restored the attention of viewers were Gotipua dance of Orissa and Ghasiyari dance of Uttarakhand. Not only movements were precise but images of Radha and Krishna were displayed by quick acrobatic yogic postures. These were adequately backed by support of Pakhawaj, Mini Cymbals, Violin and Flute. Mayur dance, showing greenery of U. P. in Monsoon, Gidda, a dance performed by Punjabi women at Child birth & weddings and Dholu Kunita, a dance of Shepherds of Karnataka were usual colourful affairs with good momentum and coordination.

Dances that turned the tide on way to a memorable climax were Lavani from Tamasha folk theatre of Maharastra, Kummi Kolattam an artistic harvest dance of Tamil Nadu and colourful Yakshgan of Karnataka. Ghode-Modeni

dance depicting exploits of Goan warriors with effigies of horses did leave an impact, though the viewers were expecting usual folk music of Goa akin to Western culture.

Yet again focus shifted to North East India with Rongali Bihu dancers of Assam and moved on to highlight reverberating dances of Kalbelia women of Rajasthan and Siddhi Dhamal men performers of Gujarat.

Chhau Dance of Purulia

In between came the most memorable Chhau dance drama of Purulia, West Bengal. Wearing colourful masks and elaborate headgears, dancers depicted scenes from Ramayana and Mahabharat with immense concentration. Eight dancers posing as Goddess Durga, accompanying Gods & Goddesses and Mahishasur left an indelible mark. Elaborate clapping together with foot tapping was to be seen and felt, not to be described.

Siddhi Dhamal Too Good

Similar responses also witnessed at the conclusion of Semi African Siddhi Dhamal dance not only lifted our spirits but also helped in regaining concentration and in reaching new heights of elation.

Anhad Naad

Ultimate opportunity of getting exposed to indomitable spirit of India's cultural heritage came in the form of Anhad Naad, a symphony of musical instruments of all 22 dance forms brilliantly choreographed by Sri Taneraj Singh Sodha.

This musical ensemble was true grand finale to dance and drama forms, meticulously passed down the ages. It was the remarkable essence to our Unity in Diversity.. The event not only reduced chill of the air but I was also tempted to say that the festival had grown in leaps and bounds than its 2002 version.

Part “G”

MEMOIRS

Chapter -1

In Memory Of Dr. Rajendra Prasad⁷⁸

Many of the stalwarts of freedom movement have been or are being forgotten nowadays and new 'old' heroes are being placed in public domain. Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, the Iron Man of India alongwith Dr. Rajendra Prasad, both close associates of Mahatma Gandhi during freedom struggle belong to a bygone but very distinguished era.

Prestige and honour of Sardar Patel has been restored to some extent in terms of his birthday, 31st October being observed nationally as Rastriya Ekta Diwas and subsequent erection of his 597 feet high statue, highest in the world, at Kevadia (100 kms from Vadodara) in Gujarat. Incidentally, the mammoth statue was inaugurated on October 31, 2018, the 143rd Birth anniversary day of first Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister of India.

But NOT many would remember the sacrifice, patriotism and greatness of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who first served as the President of Constituent Assembly and later as the President of our Republic twice for over twelve years.

It is sad to note that no function either at national or Bihar state level is held in his honour on his Birth or Death Anniversary.

Babu Rajendra Prasad, as he was affectionately known, was an epitome of humility, integrity and simplicity. He was born on 3rd December 1884 in a non descript family of Ziradei village of Siwan District of erstwhile Presidency of Bengal.

On the day of his 141st Birth Anniversary TODAY let us go down memory lane and attempt to remember this brilliant leader and extraordinary scholar son of Mother India.

He was the only President of new Republic of India to have served two consecutive terms as President from January 26 1950 to May 13, 1962. It is also the longest term for any President.

Educational and Legal Pursuits

Erstwhile Calcutta due to its heritage, health, educational opportunities and cosmopolitan make up would attract students from present Bihar, erstwhile Orissa, entire North East, Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. So arrival of Rajendra Babu in pursuit of higher education and a worthwhile career was no exception.

Always A Topper

After securing first position in entrance test of Calcutta University in 1902, he went on to top Graduate and Post Graduate examinations, both of Calcutta University by 1907. Prior to studying Law at Calcutta and practicing at Calcutta High Court, he taught at famous L. S. College, Muzaffarpur. He went on to become Professor of Law at a relatively young age at Law College, Calcutta in 1914. After securing first class first rank in Master of Law examination in 1915 he contributed to setting up of Patna High Court in 1916.

Attempt At Journalism

In 1918, in view of his deep knowledge, developing rapport with masses and command over English language, he tried his hand also at journalism when he set up Searchlight, an English daily at Patna in association with Sachidanand Sinha and Hasan Imam.

Foray Into Freedom Struggle

During 1917-18 his association with Freedom struggle began when he joined Mahatma Gandhi at the famous Satyagraha at Champaran District of North Bihar. By 1920, he gave up legal practice completely to work in Non- Co operation Movement on a full time basis.

Arrest For The Cause of Freedom, Presidency of Congress

His first arrest was on July 5, 1930 when he was taken into custody during the famous Salt Satyagraha led by Mahatma Gandhi in Gujarat.

His political career received a remarkable break on January 6, 1933 when he was made the Executive Chairman of Congress Party. His talent and devotion to Freedom struggle was further recognised when he was elected as full fledged President of the Congress party on October 26, 1934.

He presided over the crucial and tumultuous All India Congress Committee (AICC) in Bombay.

He was privileged to become President of the party again when Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose resigned as the President over his differences with Gandhi jee and others.

Second Arrest

Rajendra Babu was arrested for the second time on August 9, 1942 for his active role in Quit India Movement and was put behind bar upto June 15, 1945.

Distinction As First Food & Agriculture Minister

On September 2, 1946, he had the honour to be appointed as the Food and Agriculture Minister in the national Interim Government. Not only he showed his prowess, he gave the famous slogan " GROW MORE FOOD" during this important assignment. Prior to it, India was faced with severe challenges, such as, famine and drought.

Head of Constituent Assembly & First President of Republic of India

His march towards coveted Indian Presidency was paved smoothly when he took over as President of Constituent Assembly from Sachidanand Sinha on December 11, 1946 and continued in this capacity till January 24, 1950.

It is unfortunate that role of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, as Chairman of Drafting Committee of Constituent Assembly is highlighted more nowadays but contribution of Dr. Prasad and twelve other distinguished members of the Assembly is rarely mentioned.

As is widely known, Dr. Rajendra Prasad took over as the first President of Indian Republic on January 26, 1950 and continued in this capacity upto May 13, 1962.

After finishing his two terms, he lived life as an ordinary or frugal man at Sadaqat Ashram, Congress party office in Patna.

He did not own a house of his own. It is rare to get such a down to earth and well meaning Statesman.

He was posthumously awarded Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour.

When he expired on February 28, 1963, at the age of 78 years, the then Prime Minister of India did not even attend his last rites. Similar shabby treatment was given to Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel when he too breathed his last on December 15, 1950 at the age of 71.

Here was a generation that never worked for self promotion or for the sake of family. They only worked for the country. It is rare to get such parallels in the annals of history, anywhere.

Legacy of Rajendra Babu as a student, lawyer, journalist, and scholar, par excellence and later as a Freedom fighter, statesman and India 's First President should inspire and motivate all Indians, specially youth.

His humility, simplicity, dedication to public service, profound commitment to democracy will remain the characteristic feature of public service in India.

We may conclude by his another famous QUOTE:

"In attaining our ideals, our Means should be as pure as the End."

Chapter - 2

Lee Kuan Yew, Father Of Singapore⁷⁹

Lee Kuan Yew, maker of Singapore and its longest serving P. M. for over thirty years died at the age of 92 years on March 23, 2015. World renowned P. M. is survived by two sons, including Lee Hsien Loong, present P. M. His lasting legacy was a multi racial nation having a small area of 716 sq. kms which got fully developed within a decade of getting freedom from British in 1956. City nation had nothing but thanks to this visionary statesman available manpower was utilised to get basic raw materials from outside and convert that into value added export items.

To name a few, crude oil, drinking water, mineral products, tapping of tourism potential etc figured prominently in bolstering the struggling economy. The nation inculcated the art of exporting high end goods to the advanced countries. Emphasis was laid on encouraging both saving and investment, keeping inflation under control while ensuring low taxes and currency as stable as possible. Side by side, quality education, health care and basic social benefits were not undermined. Soon its points of interest: Sentosa island, Universal studios, Night Zoo, Singapore Flyer, Jurong Bird Park, Little India, its Universities etc went on to leave an impact.

By putting his heart and soul together, Lee is reported to have identified priorities, such as, housing, building minimum infrastructure, having English as common link language, tree plantation and lifting an economy out of recession. Common man was encouraged to have a strong heart and not to fear anything while doing duties. A new nation was built brick by brick out of mud flats in a terrain which was once a swamp. Soon one of the smallest countries could have institutions with extremely solid foundations.

By his hard work and persistent efforts, Lee made a mark and became a source of inspiration to many leaders of developing world. His views and perspective on economic management were respected and world leaders would often seek

his guidance on growth and governance. He was also considered a great strategist of Asian Affairs.

Someone has rightly said “ When Lee became P. M. in 1959, Singapore was a newly independent nation with an uncertain future. By the time he demitted office after 31 years, the island nation had been transformed. ”

Even though the new country was eased out of Malyasian Federation in 1965, it is due to Lee’s noble intentions, high degree of sincerity and dedicated approach that he could manage to get support and blessings of all. His excellent people’s management has led to practice of having an Indian as President and a Chinese as Prime Minister for over four decades. Similar is the unflinching loyalty of the Chinese and the Malyasians to this great island country.

Singapore’s economy has thrived beyond imagination due to discipline, hard work, sincerity and relative honesty of an excellent mix of its multi- ethnic people. An average Singaporean continues to be candid, pragmatist, and free from usual menace of corruption or religious intolerance.

We may wind up by quoting David Cameroon, former U. K. Prime Minister “Singapore has been a great success story of modern world. It is prosperous, secure and successful. ”

Chapter -3

Dr. Manmohan Singh, Who Put India On Fast Track⁸⁰

Demise of Dr. Manmohan Singh on 26th December, 2024 is an irreparable loss to all Indians. A simple & noble soul, father of liberalization, an economist & reformer par excellence, he was receiving treatment at AIIMS for age related complications subsequent to unconsciousness at home. He is survived by his wife and three daughters. Incidentally, he was born also on 26th day of month.

A photo of Manmohan Singh (MMS) began being flashed on T. V. and Social media from late night onwards. But it was a black and white photo of a beaming MMS taken in his erstwhile North Block chamber, which stole the show. It reminded the countrymen of the selfless service rendered by this frail looking but mentally sharp and intelligent bureaucrat turned Parliamentarian of 33 years standing.

Humble Beginnings

Rising from humble village level origins, he had his Graduation from Punjab University, followed by a degree in Economics from Cambridge University. He also secured a D. Phil. degree from Oxford University. One of his early achievements was to teach at Delhi School of Economics. By his avid and diligent performance, he was able to get the country rid of years of tepid growth and substantial deficit. Thus India could open up to the world, at last. The dreaded and mischievous Inspector Raj went away for ever.

A Reluctant Politician

Although he was honourably invited by P. V. Narasimha Rao to be the Finance Minister in 1991 and 'pushed' into the coveted chair of Prime Minister in 2004 by Sonia Gandhi, the Prima Donna of Congress party, yet he could survive and thrive despite not getting involved into the nuances of politics. Known for his humility, he wore many hats during his long and distinguished career.

Many Roles

He had the capability to withstand the currents of turbulent waters of Indian politics despite his simplicity, sincerity and high integrity on the one hand and his vast administrative experiences as a senior officer with UNCTAD, Chief Economic Advisor, Finance Secretary, Advisor to P. M. and Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, on the other. He also served as Secretary General of the prestigious South Commission.

Background of Pakistan Village, Gah Begal

A noble soul, an extraordinary economist, and a reformer, he would inspire many Indians, especially from vulnerable sections who possessed requisite education but owing to lack of resources and guidance, did not have the means and access to the positions they desired.

Son of Gurmukh Singh Kohli, a private Clerk, he was born in Gah Begal, a backward village of Chakwal District of Punjab province of Pakistan, which neither had drinking water & electricity nor any health centre. His mother died when he was barely five months old. His grandmother looked after him, thereafter. He had to walk a long distance to school. At night, he had to study under the dim light of a Kerosene oil lamp. As a sign of gratitude, MMS got the village school renovated, built a hospital and played a role in bringing solar light to the village.

Commanded Respect

Though he was not a publicist, he was respected even by his opponents and leaders all over the world for his knowledge, virtues and knack NOT to get involved into games of connivance and controversies. Wherever he was, his name and fame carried him forward.. In bi- lateral meetings and international conferences, delegates looked forward to listen to him.

Initiatives In Citizen's Interest

Life of Indians has become rather easy and uncomplicated owing to the liberalisation drive he fathered in 1991 but these were also supported point blank by his shrewd leader. So part credit should go to the latter. No reform can be undertaken unless there is a strong and sustained political will.

He was also responsible for National Rural Health Scheme, enactment of Right to Information, Right to food to citizens, Right to Education Acts and for launch of long lasting MNREGA, which boosted rural wages. The ambitious AADHAR scheme was also launched in September, 2010. However, it is having some demerits relating to identification of beneficiaries.

Dr. Singh also received global praise for his competent handling of 2008 global financial crisis.

Tributes Paid

In the corridors of power, qualities of MMS were talked about and T. V., Social Media and newspapers were flooded with news and images of MMS. President Draupadi Murmu has said that Dr. Manmohan Singh will always be remembered for his service to the nation. His passing is a great loss to all of us.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi who learnt as also was critical of policies of Dr. Singh at one time, paid rich tribute to the departed soul. He said "As Prime Minister, Dr. Singh left a strong imprint on economic policy. Rising from humble origins, he made extensive efforts to improve people's lives. ' According to a former Chief Economic Advisor to Government of India, he was a combination of sharp intellect, innate modesty and personal integrity.

One of the best tributes, however, was paid by the former U. S. President Barack Obama. According to him, "Singh was a man of uncommon decency and wisdom who was a fitting emblem of the progress made by India".

Summing Up

In retrospect, MMS through his academic acumen, thoughts and actions has left a strong imprint on India's economic policy and liberalisation process. His service to the nation will long be remembered. He was a man of few words but was always driven by action. He lived his life full of dignity and self respect. A rare specie in public life, he was a silent doer apart from being an exceptional leader. As he was a remarkable human being, he was in a position to break the shackles of Licence Raj.

Chapter - 4

Ratan Tata's Notion Of Social Responsibility⁸¹

During childhood one would always hear about three companies, rather distinctly: Birla, Bata and Tata. Bata appears to have become almost non visible, while Birlas are playing a somewhat subdued role as compared to many, that have emerged. The Tatas, however, have remained a prominent group. It is a force to reckon with, both in country and abroad. Credit for it goes to Ratan Naval Tata (RNT), Chairman Emeritus of the group, who unfortunately breathed his last at the age of 86 on October 28, 2025.

He was a visionary business leader, a compassionate soul and an out of world human being. He worked on a daily basis for rapid development of his group as also nation. A proud son of India, his acts for development of society, innovation, philanthropy, education, health and animal welfare touched the lives of millions. His landmark initiatives having depth and sincerity are bound to benefit future generations.

Early Life, Education & Jamshedpur Connection

A nephew of JRD Tata, he had an unhappy childhood due to separation of his foster parents. He was brought up by his Grand Mother. Schooling in Mumbai was followed by Graduation in Architecture & Structural Engineering from Cornell and an MBA from Harvard Business School. He was also a trained Pilot.

He began his career as a Junior Executive in 1963-64 at TELCO, Jamshedpur (now Tata Motors). A rare combination of humility and humanity, he visited this steel city 26 times. He gave up car and used to cycle to work like fellow employees. Tatas had excellent reputation in this part of erstwhile Bihar, so much so that a job seeker would prefer joining Tatas as opposed to a Government set up. Thousands of citizens and employees of Tata Group at Jamshedpur gathered to pay their rich tributes to RNT, who considered Jamshedpur his “second home”.

Challenges & Reforms Within- Takeover Abroad

His gradual rise to top was not liked by many of top heads of Tata companies, viz, Russy Modi, uncrowned king of Jamshedpur at TISCO, Ajit Kerkar at Indian Hotels and Darbari Seth at Tata Chemicals. Famous legal brain Nani A. Palkhiwala too was a force to reckon with. In addition, he was successful in tackling umpteen challenges that surfaced in the wake of economic liberalisation. RNT succeeded in increasing the share of Tata Sons in Tata Steel by 34%, Tata Motors by 36% and in TCS by 72%. Due to his efforts, Tata Motors could become market leader in manufacturing electric vehicles.

As a successful captain of Indian industry, not only he could strengthen his companies in India but he also recorded success in taking over some companies abroad, such as, Tetley, Corus, Jaguar-Land Rover and Brunner Mond. As British banks refused to finance his ventures, he had to rely on SBI for the needful. Tata Motors also bought the South Korean Daewoo Motors commercial vehicle arm. Soon the company started making dyes for Toyota, Jaguar and Ford. Tatas supported research on Sustainable Development at Oxford India centre for Sustainable Development.

Ginger Hotels, Nano Cars, Aviation Interests

RNT was deeply committed to customer satisfaction and service. As a philanthropist, he could touch the lives of millions in India and abroad. He decided to make the cheapest car on seeing a family of four getting wet in torrential rain in 2003 in Mumbai. Thus Nano car came into being. Very soon the car project had to be moved from West Bengal to Gujarat due to hostile conditions. Even after shifting things did not improve. Frequent electrical challenges to the new car compelled the company to finally shelve the project in 2018.

RNT did not forget to fulfill his promise of setting up a world class Tata Medical Centre at Kolkata.

His Ginger hotel project was, however a success story. This budget hotel could become functional in small towns and remote places.

RNT played a crucial role in developing the groups' aviation interests. When they could not launch an airline of their own due to Red Tapism, Air Asia and Vistara, both having foreign collaborations were supported and pushed

forward. Ultimately, they took over Air India owing to its large force and mounting losses.

Crisis Management

He was known for maintaining calm and fostering decisive leadership especially in the event of crisis. During 26/11 terrorist attack on Taj Mahal hotel, he personally was present and focused on ensuring safety of employees and trapped occupants. He energised the staff to resume hotel's operations within 21 months.

A Lonely Man

He never married and kept his personal life private. He longed for a spouse and a family at times. A pet dog Goa gave him company for the last 11 years. Santanu Naidu, one of youngest G. M's of Tata Group was seen being close to him since 2022. He was cremated (not left at Tower of Silence as per Parsi customs) with full state honours. Lakhs of people from cross section of society paid floral tributes.

With his departure, an era has come to an end. It would be difficult to find such a polite, unassuming and helpful person with a clean heart. He was a firm believer in the dictum: 'Action speaks louder than words'. He once said "SLOW SUCCESS BUILDS CHARACTER, FAST SUCCESS BUILDS EGO".

May His Pious Soul Rest In Peace.

Chapter – 5

Raj Kapoor, Thoughts On Birth Centenary⁸²

Raj Kapoor (R K), a legend, a performer par excellence and a film genius, was reputed for his emotional, musical and introspective masterpieces. Or else, he may not have donned the roles of a director and producer at a young age.

Tryst With Experiment

Most of the movies of this great showman were received well in the country and outside. These would mirror a social issue, viz, love, family, friendship & enemy, struggle of a bullock cart driver, social inequality, facial disability, widow remarriage etc. He had the ability to capture aspirations and struggles of common man. His songs were enough to lift an upset mood. He experimented with dream sequence for the first time in Awaara, a risk which ultimately turned out to be a Block buster.

Awards and Prizes

As RK gave many mega hits, he received several awards during his long career:- three national film awards and eleven Filmfare awards. He was conferred with Padma Bhushan in 1971 and bestowed with Dada Saheb Phalke Award in 1988. While receiving it he became indisposed, so much so that President R. Venkataraman, in a rare gesture, walked to him to give the award. Raj Kapoor did not live long, thereafter.

International Honours

Immensely popular in Soviet Union and a few Asian and European countries, he was a two time nominee for Palme d'or Grand Prize at Cannes for Awaara and Boot Polish. His performance in Awaara was ranked as one of top ten greatest performances of all time by the Time magazine of U. S. A.

Pakistan Connection

Born in Peshawar on December 14, 1924, this worthy son of Prithvi Raj Kapoor was an unusual soul. As a towering figure he went on to register himself as a beating heart of Hindi cinema for full four decades. Incidentally his paternal house is still looked after well and Peshawar residents too observed his birth centenary recently.

Early Start of Career

He began acting at the age of ten years. His first film was Inquilab (1935), followed by Neel Kamal (1947). Famous R. K. Films banner was founded by him in 1948. Poster of 1949 movie Barsaat, featuring R. K. and Nergis later became its logo. Through this memorable movie he introduced Shanker Jaikishen, Music Director and Shailendra & Hasrat Jaipuri, Lyricists. Later they became synonymous with Hindi films.

Unthinkable Bonding with Shailendra

Lyricist Shailendra (Shankerdas Kesri Lal), whose father hailed from Ara in Bihar, wrote first lyric for R. K. for his film Aag for which he was paid only Rs. 500. A big sum those days, it was used for delivery of Shailendra's first child. Earlier he had refused to join films even when he had impressed R. K. with his poetic skills. Together, due to their ideological & creative partnership, they influenced Hindi cinema for sixteen years. Shailendra's 800 songs during 1950 to 1966 became an effective tool for raising voice against social and economic inequality. Sadly on being highly indisposed with the commercial failure of his own film "Teesri Kasam", he died prematurely at the age of 43 years on December 14, 1966. This master piece became a hit after his death. His career fetched only three Filmfare awards.

Plethora of R. K. Films

R. K. made his debut as an actor and director with Aag in 1948, followed by Andaz, Barsaat, Awaara, Shri 420, Boot Polish, Chori Chori, Sangam, Jis Desh Mein Ganga Bahti Hai, Teesri Kasam, Anari, Mera Naam Joker and Kal Aaj Aur Kal.

Among his remarkable films, one can mention Jagte Raho (J R), Teesri Kasam (T K), Sangam and Mera Naam Joker (M N J). In 1956 film J. R., he had only two or three dialogues. As a homeless farmer he impressed through

his remarkable facial expressions. In 1963 film T. K., he stole the show by his natural acting of Hiranman, an innocent Bullock cart driver. Sangam, released in 1964 was his finest romantic film which depicted bonding & jealousy and drama & dissonance effectively. R. K. gave one of the most memorable performances as Raju in 1970 magnum opus M N J. He portrayed a clown who cared for laughter and joys of audience while concealing his own miseries. Despite a strong story line and fine acting by most of the cast, the film bombed at box office. R. K., after being upset and shattered financially, made Bobby in 1973. Success of this saga of teen age love helped him immensely.

Festival In His Honour

Most of the films mentioned above were screened during the Grand Festival held in his honour in 40 cities and 135 cinema halls from December 13 to 15, 2025. This was to coincide with his Birth Centenary.

No description of R. K. would be complete unless his close association with Mukesh, Shailendra and Shanker Jaikishen is highlighted. He would confess with pride that Mukesh was his soul. R. K, originally Ranbir Raj Kapoor, apart from showing, was also a magician who could mesmerize the audience with his camera, acting, songs etc. He gave soulful melodies through his timeless classics.

One may wind up by mentioning the first line of a song penned by Shailendra in T. K.: “Sajan Re Jhoot Mut Bolo, Khuda Ke Paas Jaana Hai (O man, Don’t lie, all have to go to God one day)”.

Chapter -6

Shyam Benegal, A Director Par Excellence⁸³

Born in Alwal, Andhra Pradesh on December 14, 1934, Shyam Benegal, a forerunner of parallel cinema and master story teller who always showed concern for society, breathed his last in the evening of 23rd December, 2025 at Mumbai. Aged 90, he is survived by his wife and a daughter. He was son of a professional still photographer.

Foray Into Film Making

In the difficult domain of film direction, he was far ahead of his colleagues and was second only to great Satyajit Ray. He was a cousin of Guru Dutt but never rode on his shoulders. After trying his hand on copy writing, advertisement, commercial and publicity short films (Dalda and Rexona soap), his first feature film Ankur, starring Anant Nag, Shabana Azmi and Sadhu Mehar was released in 1973. It was followed by Nishant (1975), Manthan (1976), Bhumika (1977), Junoon (1978), Mandi (1983), Susman, Zubeidaa, Trikaal, Kalyug(1981) etc. In most of them women were shown as crucial, rather decisive characters. Most of these were played by Shabana Aazmi and Smita Patil.

Major Works, Issues Raised

He also made films on Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Satyajit Ray and Mujibur Rahman.

Ankur showed agitated mind of a deaf and dumb man vis a vis a landlord. In the last scene, a kid is shown throwing a stone at the landlord's house. Apart from being touchy, it reflected a sign of possible revolt.

Kalyug was a modern take on Mahabharat, wherein two business families destroy each other after cruel fights. Herein too Rekha left an impression akin to Shabana.

Trikaal, Susman, Junoon etc.

On the other hand, Trikaal was a complex inter generational story of love in a Goan family of Portuguese origin. Shyam Benegal yet again dealt with a Cooperative in Susman but this time, it was handloom. Junoon showed hidden love story of a married Pathan and a teenaged Anglo Indian girl in the grim backdrop of Revolt of 1857.

True Inheritor Of Art Cinema

Benegal was a true inheritor of art cinema, pioneered by Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen and Bimal Roy. He directed the magnum opus serial " Bharat Ek Khoj" spread over 53 episodes for Doordarshan in 1988. It was based on the famous book Discovery of India, authored by Jawaharlal Nehru. It was a truly monumental work. Also Samvidhan was made by him for Door Darshan.

Grooming Of Actors

He groomed several directors, actors, music directors and photographers to enable them to make a mark in Mayanagri. Prominent among them were: Shabnam Azmi, Naseeruddin Shah, Anant Nag, Smita Patil, Om Puri, Pankaj Kapoor, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Sadhu Mehar and Govind Nihlani. But for his support and guidance these film personalities may have been struggling in the turbulent waters of film world. In a way, Stars were created by him out of great actors.

Awards & Honours

He was recipient of 18 National Awards in a career spanning six decades, got Padma Bhushan in 1991 and Dada Saheb Phalke Award in 2005. He was nominated for Palme D'or Award at Cannes for Nishant.

He was also M. P., Rajya Sabha from 2006 to 2012.

He was a State Cycling and Swimming champion. As he held his own in the midst of entertaining cinema, he had countless admirers. He had two successful stints as Director of Film and Television Institute of India.

Commitment For Social & Economic Justice

Through his films, he showed a sincere, out of way, commitment to social and economic justice. He was able to highlight exploitation of villagers at the lowest rung by the feudal lords, women's contribution to dairy movement, chikan workers, workers involved in handloom and making of Kanjivaram saris etc. These showed his avid concern and care for social issues. Overall, Shyam Benegal had a glorious career.

End Of An Era

It may be appropriate to conclude by quoting from Girish Karnad's speech on completion of 25 years of film making by Shyam Benegal.

He said “Shyam Benegal was not just a director but also a doctor, a psychiatrist, a father figure and a banker.”

With Benegal's death, an era has come to an end. He was a true legend in the domain of film direction.

Chapter - 7

Mohammed Rafi: Birth Centenary Of A Singing Legend⁸⁴

Mohammed Rafi (MR) took birth on 24th December, 1924 in Kotla Sultan Singh village of Punjab. He began singing at a young age of eight years and later got training in classical music. None of his family members were singers. He started singing for Radio stations as also gracing the stage shows. A maestro, he began his singing debut in Hindi films from *Gaon Ki Gori* (1944). But M. R. 's actual break through was with the song 'Tera Khilona Toota Balak' in the film *Anmol Ghari* (1946).

Songs In 20 Languages

Rafi Saheb (RS), as he was fondly and popularly known, sang for a variety of heroes and worked with prominent music directors of his time, viz, Naushad, Shanker Jaikishen and Laxmikant Pyareylal. Gradually, he attained popularity and could secure wide influence. In a career spanning three decades, he sang over seven thousand songs in Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali (total 13 languages) and seven foreign languages: English, Arabic, Persian, Sinhalese, Dutch and Mauritian Creole. These songs were recorded in over a thousand films.

Versatile Singer

His voice had versatility, a wide range and depth. His songs had a range from fast peppy numbers to patriotic ones, sad to romantic and Bhajans to classical. MR possessed the unique technique to mould his rich voice to the personality and style of the actor concerned. No other male singer was privileged to have this quality.

Voice Through The Ages

His exceptional legacy continues to inspire new generation of singers and music lovers. During his formative years, his voice was high pitched with a nasal tone. Next during the golden era of 1950-1960, it developed maturity

and gained in depth. During the mid career of seventies, MR's voice began to show signs of wear, losing some of his earlier suppleness. In later years, however, it retained its emotional intensity and expression.

Incredible Vocal Control

Rafi Saheb (RS), despite facing emerging changes, could adapt to various singing styles due to his incredible vocal control. He maintained this quality throughout his long career. His melodious songs would leave a lasting impression on film goers. His songs for films Chaudavi Ka Chand, Janwar, Suraj, Baiju Bawra, Mother India, Mughal-e-Azam, Hum Dono, Dosti, Kashmir Ki Kali, Aradhana, Hum Kisi Se Kum Nahin, Amar Prem, Padosan, Kanyadan, Teesri Manjil, Guide, Yadon Ki Baraat etc. will be always remembered apart from being heard and relished time and again.

Away From Controversies

M. R. would be generally away from controversies of tinsel world, emanating from gossip sessions or from printed features on films. But on the question of share of singers in the success of a film, he developed differences with Lata Mangeshkar, the Nightingale of India.

Awards & Accolades

In 1963, RS was voted as the greatest voice of Hindi cinema in a T. V. poll. He received numerous awards- 6 Filmfare Awards, National Film Award for the Best singer and Padma Shree in 1967. Surprisingly, he was not found fit to move up the ladder in Padma category of awards. Further in 2001, he was honoured with the Best Singer of The Millenium Award given by Hero Honda and Stardust magazine.

Contended Family Life

MR was first married to Bashira Bibi, his first cousin. However, due to partition of country, she preferred living in Lahore. Subsequently, a sad Rafi Saheb had no option but to marry Bilquis Bano in 1945. He had one son from the first wife and three sons and three daughters from Bilquis Bano.

End Of Life At 55 Years

Although, RS was a tetotalter and throughout his life he abstained from smoking and attending hi fi film parties, he succumbed to a heart attack on 31st July, 1980 at a relatively young age of only 55 years. No one can predict death as it is natural to die. But when near and dear ones like RS are involved, one simply refuses to believe. None of the seven children of MR became playback singers. So, his grand and widely spread legacy could not be carried forward.

Conclusion

An incredible, ego less, devoted, family loving and God fearing human being, MR was an iconic singer who gave countless unforgettable songs to the movie lovers. He was a gentleman to the core. RS was not just a name but a feeling of love for vibrant life. He would help the needy through charity and noble deeds. His notable contribution to Hindi cinema will be always celebrated and cherished. His outstanding legacy will continue to inspire generations of singers and music lovers. In a communally divided and Mafia infiltrated Maya Nagri, his was a sane and truly secular voice, a voice that could assert and inspire.

Chapter - 8

Kishore Kumar, Singer Versatile

To set the tone, I began surfing the Net. In about few minutes, came across a marvellous compilation, something beyond my expectation - A to Z of Kishore Kumar. And the Audio began from a beautiful song: Aane Wala Pal, Janney Wala Hai. Other soothing melodies came: Bachna Ae Hasino, Ek Ladki Bheegi Bheegi Si, Gaata Rahe Mera Dil, Mere Sapno Ki Raani, Roop Tera Mastana, Ye Shaam Mastani and several other jewels followed. Till I was satisfied. These renditions made my evening.

Scribbling a few lines about a genius, originally named Abhash Kumar Ganguli is not everyone's cup of tea. It requires years of listening, contemplation, thought and observation.

I am hinting at a genius singer who holds a record of eight Filmfare Awards but was not considered fit enough for any of the top four civilian awards of the country. Incidentally, he was bestowed with a remarkable Lata Mangeskar award given by M. P. Government. In a rare gesture, the same state instituted another award in his name.

Epitome of Singing

An epitome of singing, he sang with a distinct style. Same is yet to be emulated. He sang 16, 000 songs in nine languages: Hindi, Bangla, Marathi, Assamese, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya and Bhojpuri. Of these, 700 songs were in non-Hindi languages. Creditable. Unimaginable.

Prior to his arrival, Hindi film singing domain was dominated by Mohammed Rafi, Mukesh, Talat Mahmud, Mahendra Kapur and Manna Dey.

He sang for Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor, Devanand, Balraj Sahni, Guru Dutt, Rahman and many other renowned actors.

One should not ignore that he also acted in 81 films and succeeded in directing 18 of them. Wasn't he Versatile?

He first tried his hand at acting in 1946 with Ashok Kumar in the film Shikari and his first singing debut was for Devanand in 1948 in the film Jiddi.

Khandwa Connection & Siblings

Born on August 4, 1929, Kishore Kumar (K. K.) belonged to the famous Ganguli family of Khandwa, a town of the then Madhya Bharat. He studied at Christian College, Indore. His eldest brother Ashok Kumar, renowned singer and actor needs no introduction. Next one, Anup Actor too dabbled in acting but could not proceed beyond a point.

Unusual Married Life

K. K. married four times. First wife Ruma Guha Thakurta gave him company for a decade from 1950. Amit Kumar, also a Singer in his own right, was an offspring from this wedlock. Next he married Madhubala, one of the most beautiful actresses of the world. Blind love made him convert to Islam. However, her perpetual sickness and some other issues led to her unfortunate demise in 1969.

His marriage with Yogita Bali, another actress in 1976 lasted less than two years. Later, she found a new life partner in Mithun Chakravarty. Leena Chandrawarkar, yet another heroine became his fourth wife in 1980 and remained with him till his death on October 13, 1987 at a relatively young age of 58 years. His second son Sumit Kumar, not a singer was ravishing Leena's gift to K. K.

Initial Years/ Struggling Phase

As he was an admirer of Kundan Lal Sahgal, his first song recorded for Devanand followed former's style. In 1951, he tried his hand at acting in a film named 'Andolan' but it bombed at Box office.

He also acted in Naukari, (1954), Bap Re Bap, Nai Dilli, Miss Mary and Asha.. The 1958 film 'Chalti Ka Naam Gari' with two brothers and Madhuba gave him instant fame.

Interestingly, Mohammed Rafi used to lend voice to K. K, to begin with. A break from S. D. Burman in Pyar(1950) and Bahar turned to be real boosters. But songs of Fantoos (1957) gave him recognition, if not established him.

Burman Duo Transformed Him Forever

Father-son duo of S. D. Burman and R. D. Burman turned tide in his favour decisively with hits in films, such as, Munim Jee, Taxi Driver, Nao Do Egarah, Paying Guest, Guide, Jewel Thief, Prem Pujari and Tere Mere Sapne.

Ban & I. T. Raid

Sometimes even celebrities like Kishore Kumar cannot escape political vendetta and narrow mindedness. The then Information & Broadcasting Minister V. C. Shukla implicated him in a case and got issued an order banning his songs from official mediums. As if this was not enough, a raid was also ordered by Income Tax Department against him. Certainly a highly accomplished artist of international fame like him deserved a better deal.

Chapter - 9

Sharda Sinha: Memories Of A Folk Legend

Popularly known as Bihar Kokila (The Cuckoo of Bihar) and Begum Akhtar of Mithila, Sharda Sinha is no more. A golden period of folk songs has concluded with the departure of this titan. Born in Supaul District of Bihar on 1st October, 1952, she breathed her last on 5th November 2024 at the age of 72 at AIIMS, New Delhi.

Suffering from multiple Myeloma, she did not lose heart. Rather, she had the audacity to record a song from hospital bed. Having a unique and sweet voice and style, she was a famous singer of Indian folk music, specializing in Bhojpuri, Maithili, Magahi and Hindi songs. But it was her rendition of Chhath devotional songs which gave her maximum publicity & following. She also sang a few Ghazals, Holi and marriage songs. Gradually, through her eight hourly daily 'riyaz', she became very popular in the country and abroad.

Significance of Chhath

In her long and illustrious career, she sang 62 Chhath songs. Undoubtedly, through these she attempted to save and promote rich culture and tradition of Bihar. When people of state working or studying outside the state would hear her Chhath songs, they would be tempted to visit the state during the Chhath festival, which has taken the shape of a Maha-Parv now.

Early Life

She made her singing debut in the courtyard of her paternal house. Through a song she had to ask for some offering (Neg) from her newly married brother. Her right was understandable as she was the only sister to eight brothers. An improved version of the "Neg" song was converted to a record by H. M. V. Encouraged by her positive Father, she received her initial lessons in singing from Pandit Ramchandra Jha and Pandit Raghu Jha.

Break In Hindi Films

Upon getting a foothold on classical music, she tried her hand at folk songs in Bhojpuri and Maithili. Her singing of 8 songs based on lyrics of Vidyapati gave her instant publicity. It drew the attention of the famous filmmaker Tara Chand Barjatya, who wrote to her conveying his intention of giving her a break in Hindi films. Her song "Kahe Tose Sajna, Ye Tohri Sajania", rewritten by Asat Bhopali for the film *Maine Pyar Kiya* turned out to be a memorable hit.

Auditions Amidst Hurdles

She actually became known and more popular owing to her participation in Basant Mahotsav at Allahabad, wherein she sang many songs based on the theme of Spring season.

Her success in H. M. V. audition at Lucknow and recording of her song by Ti Series gave her the necessary impetus to sing further, far and wide. Her singing journey 50 years ago in a society, wherein women generally were not allowed to sing and perform in public, was not easy. But she was determined to go up and up even when her mother in law vehemently opposed her singing. Soon she became a heart throb of masses.

FAMOUS CHHATH SONGS of Sharda Sinha are: a) Supawa Na Mile Maai, b) Pahil pahil Chhathi Maiya, c) Kelwa Ke Paat Par Ugalan Suraj Mal Jhake Jhuke, d) Hey Chhathi Maiya, e) Ho Dinanath, f) Bahangi Lachkat Jai, g) Roje Roje Ugela, h) Suna Chhathi Mai, i) Jode Jode Supawa and j) Patna Ke Ghaat Par.

More Film Songs

Together with her normal folk songs, she began singing in Bhojpuri films. Also in four more Hindi films she got an opportunity to sing. These were:

Gangs of Wasseypur 2 (Tar Bijli), Hum Aapke Hain Kaun (Babul Jo Tumne Sikhaya) Chharrfutiya Chhokare (Kaun Si Nagaria) and Deswa.

Due to these developments, many musicians and singers used to share a special bond with this legendary vocalist.

Sharda Sinha was a regular artist at functions abroad and Chhath Puja festivities at home. Her deep voice would echo everywhere. The veteran folk

singer said once "Folk music and Hindi film music compliment each other. Also folk music gets benefited by film compositions".

She performed with command when Navin Ramgoolam, the Prime Minister of Mauritius visited Bihar.

Awards

During her illustrious career, she was awarded Padma Sree in 1991, Sangit Natak Akademi Award in 2000 and conferred with Padma Bhushan(third highest civilian Honour) in 2018.

Prime Minister, Modi paid his tribute thus " A Goddess of vocal music, she knew our culture well. Bereft of her voice, Chhath and marriages would not be same. Chhathi Mata may give her a place in heaven. ”

Sudeep Banerjee, Music Composer felt that she was a true Goddess of Sound. The world will deeply miss one of the most exceptional voices in folk music.

Sharda Sinha has left this world forever but her songs will remain immortal. An era has come to an end.. Hope her son, daughter and disciples carry forward her tradition.

Chapter -10

Asha Bhosle, Outstanding Queen of Melody⁸⁵

One is EXTREMELY SHOCKED to learn about demise of another remarkable legend of Hindi film industry. How many know that Asha Bhosle was more distinguished and versatile singer as compared to Lata Didi?

If Lata was unquestioned reigning queen of the singing industry for a very long period, Asha Jee could certainly be considered her number two, when both would be together, if not compete with each other.

When their Father died (Asha was barely nine years old), burden of, or responsibility of running the large family fell on the feeble shoulders of Lata Jee, the eldest of the lot. She would struggle through hustle and bustle of Bombay local trains to earn little bit of money, that came her way.

How many of us know that Lata Mangeshkar began as a small time actor in Marathi films but kept doing RIAZ at their home alongwith sisters Asha, Usha, Meena and one brother?

Born on 8/9/1933, Asha Ganpatrao Bhosle was admitted to Breach Candy Hospital, Mumbai with complains of chest congestion. She was shifted to I.C.U. a few hours prior to breathing her last. Ultimately, she succumbed to multi organ failure. She was 92.

Her second husband Rahul Dev Burman had expired on June 4, 1994, say 32 years ago. Their on stage chemistry and resultant performances would leave an indelible mark, all over the world. While she was compelled to come out of her first wedlock due to her confirmed abusive husband, first marriage of R. D. Burman with Rita Patel, too lasted barely five years, from 1966 to 1971.

She sang for the versatile genius R. D. Burman for the first time for the block buster Teesri Manjil. Rest is history. A life long relationship or bond evolved. It was based on mutual respect and unparalleled passion for the world of song and music.

Her love and dislike relationship with O. P. Nayyar, another top Music Director for eight years gave her a number of hits. Not only that, this mother singer of repute would not mind partying with her married partner without any inhibition late into early mornings. Quite a bold step for tradition bound Mangeshkar family.

With the departure of Asha Tai, another golden era has come to an abrupt end. If she was unquestioned Queen of erstwhile Cabaret genre, she was equally at home with normal lyrics and not so easy devotional numbers. Altogether she sang with command, over 12,000 songs in twenty languages during an illustrious career. Sadly in her large family only Zinaï Bhosale, one of the grand daughters, has been able to make little bit of mark as a singer.

Here was Mangeshkar family, brimming with music, positive feelings and above all, dedicated to devotional numbers. They were true protectors and preservers of traditional Indian songs and music traditions. Same was reflected very much through the way they would drape a Sari.

We will miss her very much when we hear her following unforgettable Superhit numbers:

- Dum Maro Dum,
- Ure Jab Jab Zulfe Teri,
- O Mere Sona Re,
- Kajra Mohabbat Wale,
- Pia Ab Tu Aajaa,
- Aaiye Meherwan,
- Ein Ankhon Ki Masti Hai & other numbers from Umraon Jaan,
- Jara Sa Jhoom Loon Main,
- Radha Kaisey Naa Jaley,
- Sharara, Sharara,
- Yeh Vaada Raha, La La La.

MAY HER PIOUS SOUL REST IN PEACE.

Chapter - 11

Mahendra Singh Dhoni: Cricket's Captain Cool

He is Ranchi's Uncrowned King since 2004-05. This small town boy's commendable foray into arena of Cricket began with a Run out and it ended same way in 2017. He continues, however, to have his say in IPL at the ripe old age of 44 years due to his consistent hard work and unusual talent.

He was born to Devki Devi and Pan Singh on 7th July, 1981. His is not a typical rags to riches story but the struggle of five persons with the meagre earning of a Plumber of MECON can be very well understood. Having inculcated skills of a Cricketer, Mahi or MSD gave up studies after finishing Std. XII. In clubs surrounding him, however, it would be difficult to get a break. He had no option but to become a TTE at Kharagpur.

Time passed by and he was noticed one day in under 16 or 18 Cricket category and he made it. He accompanied many talented cricketers to Kenya to play in a couple of international one dayers. His first big hit was 148 probably against Bangladesh, followed by 184 against Pakistan. Thus 1983 World Cup record of 175 of Kapil Pa Jee against Zimbabwe was broken. He also had highest score of 224 runs to his credit, later.

Dhoni is a rare Cricketer to have begun with Badminton and Football at school level and excelled also as Goalkeeper of his Club team. A five feet eleven inches in height, his rise has been a remarkable, rather, stupendous example of hard work, patience and perseverance. While at DAV Jawahar Bal Vidya Mandir, Ranchi, he was fortunate to have got valuable coaching from K. R. Banerjee, later Deval Sahay of C. C. L. too fine tuned his skills. While his Parents and elder brother did not have any interest or impact on his game, his elder sister Jayanti always encouraged and supported him before Sakshi, his wife entered his life in 2010. Tragic death of his first fiancée did not deter him from pursuing his vocation.

Beginning his international debut in 2004, he played for India for sixteen long years, maximum times as captain. Incidentally to date, he is the most successful

captain of the country. Apart from being the best finisher in one day matches, he had 195 stumpings in international matches and he also went on to hit 204 sixers as captain.

Famous for his fabulous helicopter shots, his maximum wins as an Indian captain (42 wins in 72 matches) remained for a long time till Rohit Sharma broke it (50 wins in 62 matches). Flamboyant and aggressive Virat Kohli too had 32 wins as Captain out of 50 matches. Records are meant for being broken. Even Sachin Tendulkar, considered God of Cricket has been eclipsed.

Dhoni or Mahi holds the record for having lifted three prime championships of Cricket world for India: T-20 World Cup in 2007, One Day World in 2011 and Champions Trophy in 2013. Due to his cool and focused approach, selectors instilled confidence in him in record six world cups.. Having played so frequently, he holds a world record of 332 matches in three formats of the game. He Holds the distinction of having captained the country in 200 one days and succeeded in winning 110 of these. Altogether he represented the country as an electrifying Wicket Keeper in 300 one day matches and his record of fastest stumping in 0. 08 seconds of a West Indies player in 2016 remains UNBROKEN till date.

His eighteen year participation in IPL even at the ripe age old of 44 years is longest thus far and five times the Chennai Super King under his able captaincy has succeeded in winning the championship. His leadership and empathy have always done wonders to his youngsters. So much so for his focus, grit and stamina.

Like any other top sportsperson of the country, Dhoni too had to bear the brunt when his under construction house in Ranchi was vandalised by errant supporters of a regional political party immediately after Indian One day Cricket team had crashed out in first round of a One Day World Cup event. He did not react, took it in his stride.

To Sum Up, owing to his hard work, sincerity and remarkable grip over the game of Cricket, M. S. Dhoni has received two of top Padma Awards: Padma Shree and Padma Bhushan as also Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award. By earning an estimated annual income of Rs. 120 Millions in 2024, he continues to be highest Income Tax Payer of the Jharkhand state.

TO PUT THE RECORD STRAIGHT

As Thala or Mahi has not done anything for the talented and budding sportspersons of the region, it would be in fitness of things if a major Sports Academy is set up by him as also sustained from all angles with sufficient financial cushion.

Chapter -12

Tale Of Pets: Own & Of Colony

Pets are domestic or tamed animals, kept for pleasure or company. While evoking warm and nostalgic memories, they make us smile and work as stress busters. Unlike human beings, they are more trust worthy and loyal. They have been part and parcel of human civilisation. If one is away from them for long, our attachment becomes noticeable. But we need to spend quality time with them. They begin asserting and demanding in a reverse situation.

On being familiar to one environment, it is hard for them to get used to an alien setting. In the event of any change, they express their anguish, which may be silent at times. It may be in form of giving up food or frantically looking for old mates or masters.

TIPU SULTAN

Earliest memory of a pet I carry, concerns Tipu Sultan, a locality dog of Line Tank Road, Ranchi. He could not be considered a pet in usual sense as he was fed by more than one family. Our family of seven had a special fondness for him. A black and white dog of medium built, Tipu would occasionally turn ferocious at other animals daring to enter his territory. But at the same time, he would resist entry of strangers at night. Thus his loyalty to area families earned him goodwill. He was entitled to the delicious meals during festivals and weddings during years 1974-76. Even when fed properly by other Quarters, he would be present at our C/15 main door twice a day.

Tipu had unusual strength to face vagaries of nature. He was fond of running behind speeding vehicles, more so, during Durga Puja holidays when town buses would be diverted through our locality. One by one, Tipu's legs would get hurt during chase and run. Though he was not taken to a Vet, by grace of God he would get cured in a natural way. When he would limp, all of us would feel for him.

A time came when Tipu became old and weak to carry forward his antics. While chasing a heavily loaded truck on a misty winter evening, he received

irreparable injuries. Fracture in two of his legs made him immobile. Even in this condition he would refuse to vacate a portion of road.

A time came when his health deteriorated. His pots would be full of milk and food but he stopped even looking at these. Early in morning on a Sunday, prior to Holi, Tipu was found dead. He lived an active life of twelve years. Though he was THE GUARD, very few persons assembled when we arranged his burial in the adjacent Jail field.

TIGER

Tipu was replaced by Tiger with the passage of time. A light brown coloured creature, he was a cute puppy. By nature he was shy but performance wise, he fell short of our expectations. He could never fit into the shoes of Tipu. In order to hone up his skills, Dabloo, my younger brother would take him for running every now and then. But Tiger was slow and less responsive. Resultantly, unwanted animals and ruffians began having gala time. His fervent desire to grab food without performing any duty in return made him a parasite. No one, therefore, expressed grief when he was crushed one day by a high speed bus.

LUCY

Lucy, in contrast to Tipu belonged to a superior pedigree. She was our exclusive pet at Morhabadi. Born to an Alsatian father and an Indian mother, good care was taken in bringing her up. More affection and extra care made her Roly poly. She was advised a balanced diet. Same improved things.

Each time we would enter the compound, Lucy would bark. Upon establishing identity she would jump in jubilation, at times upto chest level. It was a pleasure to throw balls at her and wait for her reaction. Once she was exhausted, she was entitled to tasty sweet biscuits.

On a few occasions, theft and house breaking were prevented due to her alert nature. Her strong olfactory sense worked to our advantage.

Once she fell sick which led to loss of appetite and stamina. Upon thorough check up, something wrong was discovered in her stomach. She was prescribed liquid medicines and restricted diet. Though she recovered, administering her medicines was a herculean task.

To brighten my career prospects I had to shift to Delhi. With this change contact with Lucy became a six monthly affair. Her welfare would, nevertheless, be conveyed through weekly letters of Amma and C. B.

In summer of 1980 when I visited home, familiar jump of Lucy was missing. Something appeared amiss. In no time, on my insistence the sad news of Lucy's demise two days ahead of my arrival was broken by Amma. Upon being deeply upset, without having water or tea, I rushed to Lucy's den. Pin drop silence greeted me. Closing my eyes, I prayed for well being of her departed soul. Late in the evening, unwillingly I gulped something to overcome fatigue of 36 hour journey.

TOM SYLVESTER

It was after a lapse of almost 28 years since the demise of Lucy that Tom, the mini cat entered our life. She was, incidently, the first pet of our family of procreation. On 30th July, 2008, she was sighted wandering aimlessly behind the Kaveri Hostel, J. N. U. She showed no sign of resistance upon my contact with her. I was tempted to lift her. With my old buddy, Thaks, Warden of Periyar hostel, a gentle stroll began. When she began making little bit of noise, I could feel her sharp nails. I retreated and succeeded in convincing Jayshree and Ankoor to adopt the cute quiet cat. Though they nodded, it was not acceptance from within. Thaks too felt that my unilateral act was certain to separate little creature from her familiar surroundings. I ultimately put her in Swift car and began driving.

Although she gave tough time to Ankoor on the way, it was he who named her Tom on being reminded of the famous cartoon serial 'Tom and Jerry'.

Like any other living creature, she took time to adjust. After refusing to drink a bowl of milk on first night, she appeared to have finished eating some eatables subsequently. Ankoor began surfing Internet to find out food habits, likes and dislikes of cats. We also began interacting with some cat owners. Each passing day became full of curiosity if not activity.

Gradually our spacious balcony in New Sikkim House became her happy hunting ground. She would get to see the developments in the neighbourhood as also have an interface with the newborns of the Pigeon family. Soon we would get excellant photo opportunity from her. Her snaps would be shared with friends and well wishers all over world.

The first day she had to be left alone, we were not only concerned, we were tense as well. Thereafter, Tom had to be left bereft of company, at frequent intervals. But on such days we could read feeling of loneliness in her. All attempts to project her to outside world were failing. As such, she would hate noise and heavy traffic. Despite our sincere attempts we were unable to arrange even one interaction session between her and elderly cats of our premises.

We became positive gradually but she would display her discomfort at the same time. One fine evening after eight month of stay she did not return. We went for frantic search. But there was no success for a week. We got a hint that she had taken the tough decision.

Jayshree summed up the behaviour pattern and persona of Tom in the following words:

"Tom was cute, beautiful, sweet and loving. She was not rude. She was a kind being. Now that she is away, we miss her. She was obedient with a good soul. If she would sleep late, she would wake up early. She would eat whatever was given to her. She was not fussy. She had pristine touch of heaven. Being pious, she was like a saint. She was the only being in the World who loved me. May God give her a Happy and Long Life."

QUARTRATE OF BLOOMY, ECKO, ELA BELA & CHAMP

We are having maveulous pleasure with these Pomeranian beauties. Their sweet and soothing company for four years has been possible due to Sumedha & Mangesh, their proud 'Parents'. Feeding tit bits, playing Guitar, Mouthorgan and Bongo to them, running behind them, picking them up, taking part in their Birthdays etc. are funs of special variety, something beyond description.

One poem specially composed by me, encompassing their unforgettable activities and idiosyncracies is placed below:



Bloomy Bloomy Booma
Ecko Beeko Seiko
Ela Bela Umbrella
Cute Tiny Champ
Live In G. Floor Camp

Bloomy Fond of Eating
Ecko Loves Beating
Ela Prefers Hiding
Champ Seen Sleeping

All Have Fun While Eating
Chunks, Potato or Puding
Its A Play Whole Day
Monday, Friday or Sunday

Mummy Gets Tense
When Fellows Fall Sick
When Bloomy Runs Out
Cute Ecko Holds Fort

Naani Comes Off And On
Each Time New Dress On
Sees Them Engrossed With Sabudana
Dry Fruits, Cookies & Makhana

Sun Rises, It Sets
Moon Rises, It sets
Time Passes Well
No Fear Of A Bell

TRIO OF JAIMIE, KUKI & TINNI

This sub part on Memoirs was almost complete. But not mentioning a word on three adorable and loyal Doggies of Apex Athena at NOIDA would have made me guilty.

Jaimie, a very cute, milky white, affectionate & loveable Doggy of German Spitz breed mixes very well, yet he is pampered when it comes to eating. Similarly Kuki, the yellow fellow and more alert, never misses his jump at

me in a routined way to express his emotions. Like Tinni, his Blackish friend, this healthy fellow from a good breed, appears to have been abandoned by former masters.

Qualifying to be called Society dogs, last two are unfortunately chased away by Watchmen at the drop of hat. Once they were seen regularly in the mornings and without fail, on the weekly Haat Day. Their meals are catered to and winter cloths are also provided generously by a kind hearted Dog lover & his dedicated spouse of E Block. May Almighty give them a long and fruitful life.

EPILOGUE

Are Technological Developments Impacting Behaviour Patterns?⁸⁶

At the turn of century, looking at the rapid pace of developments in telephony, I attempted to coin the concept of “Tele- Socialisation”. It emerged from a conversation with a friend. Both of us were not introduced to the habit or addiction of Cell phone culture by then, though it had been introduced in India in 1997-98. Another new term- “Land line” spread like wildfire, so as to distinguish the traditional heavy but sturdy phone from the new hand held, carry anywhere, device. In such a situation, one managed rather comfortably till 2009. In my Mother’s house also after a good deal of ‘expenditure’ and running around, we could manage to install a ‘landline’ under Tatkaal scheme, only in 1997 with the kind help of my batch mate, who was the D. C.

Based on my experiences of such technological impact on offices, private life, reading & writing, I published an article in March, 2003.

HIGHLIGHTS ARE REPRODUCED BELOW:

- Man’s desire to have quick connectivity with his fellow human beings is playing havoc with his sense of creativity. While connections have registered a remarkable improvement leading to increased pace of responses, man’s desire to write and challenge someone’s might has gone for a ‘duck’,
- He has, perhaps, become berserk. He is in a way, clean bowled by the technological discoveries, innovations and improvisations,
- His propensity to convey his feelings, wishes and aspirations by taking recourse to power of pen is being confined to ‘ pavilion ‘,
- In addition to writing being a victim of the bouncers of improved and upgraded communication, man’s basic desire to react, interact and contribute has been relegated to the status of a 12th Man in Cricket,
- Googlies, Swingers and Yorkers coming from the ‘ Silly Point ‘ of telephone or mobile are having a decisive bearing on the interaction

in physically proximate situations. Very soon, man will be in a position to see the fellow converser by a cursor from a distance of thousand miles but he can not possibly feel, sense, shake and embrace,

- Emotional bonds may continue but medium will be perhaps always in air without giving a feel of someone's "air",
- Warmth of hand shake, or hug or kiss, the cultural attributes of varying social systems will soon become subjects of tribute in daily newspapers,
- No one seems to be thinking. Effort is on blinking (use of finger tips) and surrendering to agents of materialism that leave a deep scar on body and mind. Such a change is bound to have severe impact on coming generations,
- Gulf between family of orientation and family of procreation will slowly become wide and wide. "AND
- Only time will tell who will be actual winner- the man or the instrument or for that matter, the machine. "

READERS MAY FORM THEIR OWN OPINION WHETHER I WAS RIGHT, 23 YEARS AGO.

PROS & CONS

As on date, there are 950 million Net users in India of which 57% are rural but barely 57% children in 14-16 age group use cells for educational purposes.

As 85% of households now own atleast one Smart phone, digital addiction can not be ruled out.

If one only highlights demerits of the telecommunication revolution which is further improving or getting updated, I suppose I will be unfair if not inhuman.

Innumerable positive impacts in the fields of transport, communication, food grain distribution, education, health, delivery of services, rescue during accidents and calamities, policing, checking corruption, social welfare, bringing transparency etc may not have happened if devices, such as, Xerox, Computer, Cell phones, Internet, WhatsApp, Social Media etc. were not in existence.

PERSONAL FRONT

On personal front not only one has learnt & gained immensely but the positive learning process is on, on a daily basis. Possession and optimum use of Cell phone has many advantages, such as:

- It works as a writing pad with unlimited capacity, having correcting, saving and retrieving device,
- As a Camera, Video, messaging & storing device. But Deleting should be done regularly,
- Can be used for making payments for vegetables, grocery, power, water, medicine, maintenance bills, EMI etc,
- Use in hiring Taxis, Three wheelers or any transport and
- Booking Bus, Train, Ferry, Metro & Air tickets,
- On line purchases in emergency. But quality may suffer.

ATTITUDE OF YOUTH

But fact of the matter is that human beings especially the young generation or Gen-Z looks mostly for convenience and quick results. He /she has strong conformity with his or her Peer group. Antoganism towards the elders is rising. Needless to say, the devices of recent past or upcoming ones only appear reliable to youth. In the process, they are not only evasive vis a vis elders but latter do not get attention and respect they deserve from offsprings or in neighbourhood.

Further, thanks to new devices, unthinkable and unbelievable methods of mischief and crime are also being reported. Such deviant and lingering minds are not only intelligent but are also creative for self interest.

Ghost Names & Encrypted Apps Lure Jobless As Shooters

A mobile from abroad instructs shooters to collect firearm from a particular spot and return it to another spot after the act. This is how gangsters based abroad are carrying out murders and extortions. These operations have become so highly technical and meticulously planned that the shooters on the ground never come to know who they are communicating with.

Also gangsters operating from abroad create multiple Media profiles,

They ask new followers if they are interested in joining the gang. As per Delhi Police, this is how Lawrence Bishnoi gang had expanded its network to 700 associates.

By posting messages, claiming responsibility for an attack, gangsters not only target one businessman but create fear among others also.

IMPACT ON GROWING CHILDREN

Why only youth, nursery stage and growing children too are getting neglected, pampered and spoilt. Earlier it was T. V. and Net, now it is Cell phone which decides whether even a tiny tot will eat or play or make fun.

NO WOODEN TRI CYCLE NOW

Instead of a wooden hand pushing tricycle in good old days, tiny tots walk with battery operated or easy to push devices not requiring any physical effort. In old days if child would lose balance, he would make an attempt to get up on his own. Now he cries to glory and elders or Parents RUSH.

In worst possible scenario, some parents leave kids above the age of four in parks unattended and they are monitored through tiny smart phones attached to wrist watches worn by kids. One also sees children three years of age talking to their parents or maids on phone or taking photos and video. Are these not unfair and cruel?

NORMS OF PARENTING

Many Parents in Nuclear families are not fully aware of norms of parenting as they were also children, say, thirty years ago. A few only believe that learning is an every day activity.

Talking of Parents, either due to advancing age or poor health or misbehaviour on the part of children, many Parents are compelled to stay away or separately in the same town. When it comes to worse, they are put in Old Age Homes. Such grand parents are provided with Cell phones by their children but these are not found useful all the time. If a call is made by them, that is ignored or diverted also many a time. So technology or no technology, its your attitude that matters. Rather, your taste and preference, likings and dislikings are becoming preponderant.

One can go on and on. There can not be end to it.

Its like school debate sessions-Whether Science is a Blessing or a Curse.

ON LINE CULTURE: GIG WORKERS NEEDED AT BECK & CALL

Majority of families staying in so called ‘societies’ get addicted to On line culture. These lead to highly restricted or no contact with neighbours. Neighbours are no longer members of extended family. So not only there is compromise on quality and quantity of delivered items, they are also aloof from new arrivals in vegetable, fruit and grocery outlets. Add to that, the tag of delivery within 10 minutes by the ‘gig’ workers even in scorching heat and dead of the night.

They are on the run all the time, risking their lives on old rotten mobikes. They have to respond through their Cell phones both to their masters and delivery family at the same time. Once they reach their destination they have to face errant guards to park their two wheelers. In the event of delay of even five minutes, they are not only pulled up but also abused by the novo rich characters. Such a hurry culture always leads to worry. It must end.

MENACE OF WORK FROM HOME (WFH)

During two dreadful waves of Covid, WFH had become ‘New Normal’. With advent of ‘normalisation’ it was supposed to be dispensed with. But it continues to linger on during extreme weather situations. Its impact on work output is doubtful if not pathetic. But school children in such a situation definitely suffer.

Adults due to being engrossed to Lap tops and Cell phones for hours

- Find that home becomes office,
- Line of separation between work & personal life is very thin or mostly non existing,
- One is flooded with missed calls and unread messages even if one goes out to attend to something urgent,
- He /she may work from home but may hardly get to spend time with family and
- Fear of losing job prevails if there is negligence.

ADVENT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Obviously in late nineties only human beings were intelligent or otherwise. There was nothing called Artificial Intelligence. Like Cell phone, Net, Whatsapp or Social Media, this new discovery or innovation is going to stay for long unless some alternative acceptable to human beings is discovered and put successfully to use upon proper experiment and verification.

Though one has begun hearing and watching about its application, its present level of interference or intervention has to be restricted. It is a different thing that a few selected countries are now having national policies on A. I..

If it can improve things to promote levels of education, fine tune professions, transport, work culture in developing societies etc., we should have reasons to support. But use of A. I. tools for relationship advice, marital disputes and emotional support may have to be discouraged. These are typical issues and challenges of metro cities afflicting a small segment of our vast nation. Over expectation, lack of faith and patience need to be focused on issues leading to mental anxiety and illness.

If a report of February 2025 of Ministry of Health is to be believed, 70 to 92% of such people donot get proper treatment due to stigma and lack of awareness. Idea should be to evolve A. I. tools that are safe and helpful to the actual needy.

TO SUM UP

Clear channels of communication are pivotal, whether it is home or office. Both need trust and transparency. Unless there is a certain level of confidence, technology or its further advancement may be meaningless.

Baring souls to strangers on social networking sites, such as, Facebook, X, Instagram etc. is rampant.

Living in unreal world by forging friendships and unnecessary networking can be harmful emotionally in the long run.

Digital addiction affects academic performance & workplace productivity due to distractions. This may be clear to all. An urge to achieve something ahead of time by defying time tested laws of nature can become counter productive.

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- 37) TEW, 17/3/26
- 38) Indian Century, 4/3/25
- 39) Sikkim Express, 5/3/25
- 40) Indian Century, 16/3/25
- 41) Indian Century, 9/9/25
- 42) Sikkim Express, 14/9/25
- 43) TEW, 10/12/25, Also in TEW Magazine (Dec. 16-31, 2025)
- 44) TEW, 12/1/26
- 45) Sikkim Express, 5/3/26 AND Indian Century, Dt. 20/3/26

PART“D”:THREATS:FUNDAMENTALISM & TERRORISM

- 46) Sikkim Express, 24 /10/24
- 47) Indian Century, 30/11/24
- 48) Indian Century, 25/12/24
- 49) TEW, 10/7/25
- 50) Sikkim Express, 23/4/25

- 51) Indian Century, 17/4/25
- 52) Indian Century, 6/12/24
- 52A) Sikkim Express, 17/4/25
- 53) Indian Century, 6/12/24
- 54) Indian Century, 23/4/25
- 55) TEW, 22/11/25
- 56) Sikkim Express, 12 /2/26

P A R T “E” : MOTHER NATURE

- 57) Indian Century, 27/1/25 & Sikkim Express, 2/2/25
- 58) Indian Century, 14/7/25 & Sikkim Express, 6/7/25
- 59) Sikkim Express, 8/12/24
- 60) Sikkim Express, 2/3/25
- 61) Sikkim Express, 23/3/25
- 62) Sikkim Express, 10/2/25
- 63) Indian Century, 24/2/25
- 64) Sikkim Express, 13/4/25
- 65) Sikkim Express, 25/5/25
- 66) Indian Century, 4/9/25
- 67) Sikkim Express, 24/8/25
- 68) Sikkim Express, 6/3/25
- 69) TEW, 15/3/26
- 70) Sikkim Express, 28/4/25
- 71) TEW, 11/3/26
- 72) Sikkim Express, 19/5/25
- 73) Sikkim Express, 16/11/25
- 74) Sikkim Express, 21/12/25
- 75) TEW, 20/1/26 & Sikkim Express, 18/1/26
- 76) TEW, 24/10/25 & Sikkim Express, 19/10/25

P A R T “F : TRAVELOGUE

- 77) PIONEER, NEW DELHI, 4TH OCT. 1999

PART “G” : MEMOIRS

- 78) Grihswamini, 4/12/25 & TEW, 4/12/25
- 79) Sikkim Express, 9/4/2015
- 80) Indian Century 29/12/24
- 81) Indian Century, 16/10/24
- 82) Sikkim Express, 25/12/25
- 83) Grihswamini, 29/12/25
- 84) Indian Century, 3/1/25
- 85) TEW, 14/4/26 & Sikkim Express, 16/4/26

EPILOGUE

- 86) TEW, 1/2/26