

Greater Kashmir Editorial

Review and Revise the Plan

Surprisingly, the state government has been passive to the gathering commotion on the ground and now the mayhem in the Assembly.

The politics over the creation of new administrative units in J&K has triggered social tumult in the state with village after village rising in protest against the government decision. Over the past week, Srinagar's Press Enclave has been witness to scores of protests by people from far-off villages who travelled all the way to the city to make themselves heard. The issue is now roiling the proceedings in Assembly, where the opposition parties are demanding the creation of more administrative units for the left out areas. A PDP legislator Mushtaq Ahmad Shah was injured in the process. Surprisingly, the state government has been passive to the gathering commotion on the ground and now the mayhem in the Assembly. Two weeks after the Chief Minister triumphantly announced the creation of 659 new administrative units for the state, the government has chosen to maintain a low profile on the issue. We still don't know the criteria which was used to create new tehsils, blocks and niabats in the state. We still don't know what was the basis for Kashmir getting less number of units relative to Jammu. At least there should have been a scientific explanation for this massive disparity - Kashmir has 63 units less

than the Jammu province. And if nothing, then at least a rational sounding explanation. Instead, the government has chosen to go silent on the issue. But this silence is not lost on the people of the state. For it underlines the bad faith which underpins the creation of the new units: a reckless and needless exercise whose sole aim is to secure the vote-banks of NC and Congress. The only criteria for a particular area securing a tehsil, block or niabat seems to have been its importance as a vote bank in the upcoming polls. The only criteria for a particular area securing a tehsil, block or niabat seems to have been its importance as a vote bank in the upcoming polls. Hence the rush to create three times more units than recommended by Mushtaq Ganai Committee, which had also balanced their distribution across the three regions of the state. The point is that we hardly need an administrative exercise with a prohibitive financial implication whose sole aim seems to be to help the ruling coalition regain power. And if implemented in its present arbitrary shape, the government's plan for creation of 659 new administrative units will pit village against village and more worryingly Kashmir against Jammu, sowing the seeds of a long term polarization. The plan, as such, needs a serious review and revision. And the government has little time to make up its mind.

With no propriety in governance, the Governor's address has been made irrelevant

Speech sans substance



BACK TO BASICS
HASEEB A DRABU

It may have been fortuitous that Governor N N Vohra wasn't able to complete his address to the joint session of the legislature. For an eminent person like him - who I am sure has made some enlightening speeches - it would have been agonizing to go through this particular one.

The Governor's address, which by convention is drafted by the state government, is not only poor in substance, it also lacks style and structure. If anything, it is a long meandering laundry list which has been put together by various departments without any interest let alone inventiveness. The way it is, it is more like an under-secretary's annotations than a Governor's address.

The Governor's annual address, it may be recalled, is the only occasion for the state government to do a formal stock taking of where it stands and where it is headed.

It is all the more relevant in a coalition government especially when the partners have been a logger heads most of time on most issues. As such, it reflects the consensus view of the coalition. Further, being the last one for this government only added to the significance as well as the expectation from it.

By convention, what one expects from the address, which is our version of the State of Union address, is how things are shaping up in the state. There will, of course, have to be a report card; be it on employment, power or security matters. This part is bound to be adulatory, which is unexceptionable. Yet, there also ought to be a discussion on matters that the government has been concerned about.

AFSPA is a case in point. The acronym, which left the Chief Minister and his minions breathless, doesn't even find a mention. Not that a mention here would lead to a repealing of the Act.

Yet, in a democracy a reference in the Governor's

address to the legislature would add muscle to the demand for its removal that has been made by all stakeholders: the government, the opposition, the separatists and the larger civil society.

By not mentioning it, removal of AFSPA has become an Omar Abdullah v/s the Army issue. There can't be private agendas in public politics. It is the state government, representing the people of state, which is seeking its withdrawal.

Similarly, it would have been appropriate to announce the intent or decision of the state government to incorporate or extend the 73rd Amendment to J&K. After vociferously opposing its extension, suddenly it has been agreed to. Whatever the compulsions - capitulation, compromise or comedown - such decisions that have implications on the autonomous status of the state cannot be private deals between party presidents.

Not only because it is a legislative matter about which the house must be informed first, but also because the house will have a view which needs to be heard if nothing else. Isn't that what democracy is all about?

But these proprieties of governance have been given a quite burial by immaturity and attitudinal arrogance. Reaching out through a mobile device and flashing a 140 character update is great. But let tweets not preempt or replace formal communications and platforms on which democratic institution are built and survive. Nor should these preempt the House.

As things stand, there is no connect between what the government has been saying outside the legislature in terms of its priorities and what the Governor is addressing inside the House.

Politically, there is no better form and forum for the government to reach out to the opposition especially when there has been a bitter acrimonious relationship between the two.

The Governor's address is the route to build consensus on state issues which go beyond the confines of party lines. For instance, one such ongoing issue is the manner in which the Planning Commission has held back Rs 2,000 odd crores of special plan assistance.

Instead of getting the legislature on board on this significant and unprecedented development, the address doesn't even mention the jeopardy in which the state plan is.

The state government is reeling under a liquidity crisis that is threatening to graduate into a fiscal crisis. Yet the Governor's address is made to be blissfully ignorant about it. The legislators are kept in the dark about what everyone on the street knows.

Finally, it is not only a communication between the Governor and the legislators only. It is also a communication between the Head of the State and the people of the state. It is not too much to expect the address to connect with the people and try and address their concerns.

In this context, a statesmanlike address would have made a reference to Afzal Guru. If for no other reason but the fact that the address was to be delivered literally on his first death anniversary. The wound is fresh and can still bleed.

That the entire Kashmir valley had to be put under preventive curfew left no doubt in anyone's mind about where the public sentiment lies. For a Chief Minister who advocates a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, what better and easier step towards reconciliation than this?

Other Governors may have been reluctant to this part, but not Vohra who has been a Kashmir interlocutor. His position is a lot more nuanced and sympathetic than his predecessors.

No one expects the Government of India to apologize, or the Chief Minister to admit that he was in know of it, but the least that address could do was to reiterate the demand to return of his mortal remains.

It may not satisfy the collective conscience of Kashmir but would have assuaged the bruised and battered soul of the valley. Some closure would have happened.

This would have made most people identify with the government which is supposed to be "their own elected" government. Election and getting elected is not an end in itself. It is about representation, which as a process lends legitimacy to the government.

Above all, it would have set an inclusivist agenda which would reach out to the other political or stakeholder, like the Hurriyat. But that was not to be.

In a way, the Governor's address is symptomatic of the biggest failing of this government: a new found lack of maturity and gravitas combined with an inherited disregard for institutions and institutional practices.

REFLECTIONS

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Capital punishment

This refers to an article by a noted columnist Sajjad Bazzaz 'OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT'. There is no doubt that there should be blanket ban on death sentences in India. There is no scope of death sentence in vibrant and civilized society as it reinforces the idea of retributive justice, a medieval concept that has surely no place in the modern and civilized society. The last time the lok sabha specifically discussed the question was in 1983. Then Prime Minister Indra Gandhi stated that she favoured abolition of death penalty, however nothing substantial emerged. In 1956, Britain abolished death penalty and there is a ban of capital punishment in the member countries of the European Union. In 1976, Canada followed the foot steps of Europe and banned capital punishment for good. The constitutional court of South Africa declared the punishment 'unconstitutional' in 1995. The Amnesty International in one of its reports declared capital punishment inhuman to the society. The abolition of capital punishment has been recommended in the second international Civil Contract Papers (1991) in which India is not a party. Virtually no category of offence now involves mandatory death sentence. The chance of an innocent person being sent to the gallows is statistically infinitesimal. If a person who has committed a heinous crime as murder must be like wise deprived of life as some people believe. Does this mean that a rapist should be raped back, or that a torturer should be tortured, that is the archaic concept and has no room in the civilized society.

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Tainted ministers

In the present situation someone with serious charges continues as minister and takes major public policy decisions. If later charges are proved and the person is penalized decisions taken by him/her can't be negated. Political parties also carry some responsibility for this. It is surprise why it should not be possible for political parties to find sufficient number of well qualified, experienced and honest candidates to fight elections on their behalf. Why parties are compelled to give tickets to the tainted?

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MESSAGE FOR GK READERS

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Editor

The last hug

Denying a son one last chance to meet his father. Unbearably painful!

PAIN

HISHMA NAZIR

My heart is pained as I merely try to share this sea of abstract feelings I am drowned in. My pen drags itself today against the friction of the paper to record this state of shock and pain with nothing but remorse. If such is the pain of an ordinary Kashmiri who knew nothing of this man locked in his peak youth for a crime he himself was unaware of and who shares nothing with this man but this piece of 'the land of martyrs'; what would be the pain of the mother who gave birth to this man and shared everything with him; from her womb to her milk - one can only imagine.

To pave way for retention of power, the Indian government tries to blind the people, exploiting their emotions in an effort to satisfy their 'collective conscience' deluding that they have punished the 'culprit'.

Leaving aside the political and legal aspects of this case, there is yet another aspect which pulls the heart of every person understanding little or more the delicacy of this issue and that is the emotional trauma which the government could have avoided. A woman who left her parents abode, her siblings, her home, her little circle of happiness to start a new life of glory experiences a gory world of shattered dreams. She leaves her kith and kin to spend the rest of her life with a man she chooses to be her life partner, little unaware that she is going to spend a life full of everlasting tragic memories of this partner without his company. A child who opens his eyes only to introduce himself to an incomplete family; short of the head - the father, who knows nothing of this world but the gloomy reflection of an aging face which he little knows belongs to his 'young' mother and an equally happy picture of his father smiling to its extent in his prime youth hanging by the wall. He can't understand why the now picture of the same man attached on the letter top today suddenly appears dark and gloomy to match the shade of his sad mother. The Granny by the bedside doesn't narrate fairy tales during his bed time, he instead gets to hear of February, 2001 and the 9th of some month; something he never could understand the significance of. He has lived a decade and needs to live a decade more to understand what had happened in the February of 2001 and why it blew a storm to leave his family shattered and destroyed. This child is little known to the man who was supposed to be his father and live under a common roof with him.

Are we really 'punishing' the culprits or murdering humanity? Even if Gooru was the culprit, what was and what could be the fault of this 10 year old kid? He was denied one last opportunity to meet his father: someone he never had the fortune of living with. Maybe that last hug could quench the thirst of the dying heart of this son and earn him the comfort of ever having a father. Maybe the tears shed by him against the chest of his father; he knew he was seeing for the last time, could lighten his heart and satisfy him for lifetime. Maybe that one last whisper between the father and son could make the conversation the duo would have made all their life. Maybe a single word of advice that the father would offer at that delicate moment could change the destiny of his son.

Exploding the myth of a 'developed' Gujarat

Modi going Advani way

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During 2004 elections BJP ran the Shining India campaign, which evaporated in the face of reality. Before the 2009 elections it was the 'iron strong man' campaign projecting Advani which also failed. Now heading to the 2014 elections, the BJP is talking of 'Vikas Purush - man of development' and policies of so called 'Vibrant Gujarat' under the leadership of Narendra Modi, as the future model for India. The corporate media shows and twitter campaigns, mobilized crowds, breathless spokespersons heralding of Modi as saviour, are all part of the massive public relations exercise which we are being subjected to. A public relations firm called APCO Worldwide, has been especially hired for a reported fee of 25,000 dollars a month, to project Modi as the one-point solution to all the social ills and political maladies afflicting India. On the board of directors of APCO are retired officers of the Israeli diplomatic and security forces who have been hired in different countries by various dictators trying to whitewash their crimes. Today it is here in India to promote the cancerous politics represented by the communal agenda of the Modi-led BJP, in its most virulent avatar. The first Himalayan blunder of such public relations exercises which thoroughly exposed the Modi craze for what it is, was the claim that Modi had "saved" 15,000 Gujarati pilgrims by hiring 80 cars to bring them down from the hills, during the terrible calamity which hit the Kedarnath and Badrinath hill areas of Uttarakhand.

People were puzzled as to how such a claim could be made when it took the army and defence forces ten days of constant helicopter sorties and transport to rescue around 40,000 people. Analysts made calculations with the number of pilgrims in each car, the number of kilometers to be travelled and so on and came to the conclusion that it would take, with non-stop driving without a second's rest, 233 hours or almost ten

days to manage this feat which Modi's PR team said was completed in one day! But it is not just the foolishness of the claim, it is the desperation to use every opportunity even the most tragic plight of the yatri, to score a goal for Modi. In the event, in the face of the exposures, Modi had to backtrack and the President of the BJP Rajnath Singh then denied that such a claim had ever been made in the first place! In fact all the Modi claims are filled with similar such falsehoods. But the packaging of Modi is not just a PR exercise to promote the agenda of an individual relentlessly pursuing his personal ambitions. It is an exercise which is backed by corporates both domestic and foreign who see in the Modi model an opportunity to fulfill their dreams of a corporate led "reformed" India. It has the backing of the RSS, impatient of the restrictions put by NDA allies on its core Hindutva agenda which it believes will be best safeguarded under the leadership of Modi. The role of Modi in the 2002 genocide is known to all.

The Gujarat Model of development has been cited by the BJP and its supporters as an example for India. But the reality is that there is higher malnutrition levels in Gujarat compared to other States including Uttar Pradesh. Child malnutrition levels in Gujarat are the same as in Chattisgarh and Orissa. A recent UNICEF report states that "almost every second child in Gujarat is malnourished and three of four are anemic. One mother in three in Gujarat struggles with acute under-nutrition". According to the Government of India's Children in India report (2012) infant mortality rates considered one of the basic indicators for social advance, is high in Gujarat at 44 per every 1000, giving it a low rank of 11 among States. This reflects the diet and health care system operative in "Vibrant Gujarat".

Gujarat has a very poor record in infrastructure for the poor. The vast majority of the rural population is denied sanitation and water facilities with 67 per cent having no access to toilets, only 16.7 per cent have safe drinking water. In social terms the Gujarat

model has been discriminatory against dalits, adivasis and women. The adivasi areas for example have seen no development with all social indicators showing the discrimination against these sections. The recent Planning Commission review of educational and health facility show the failure of the Modi Government on both these spheres. UNDP statistics show that Gujarat ranks 18th when it comes to success in keeping children in school. The Gujarat gross enrolment ratio in higher secondary schools was three percentage points lower than the national average of 39.3 per cent. The Gujarat school dropout ratio for SC/ST of 57.9 per cent was much higher than the national average of 49.3 per cent which in any case is shamefully high.

In Gujarat inequality among the poor and the rich is among the highest in the country. According to Planning Commission, per capita income of Gujarat in 2010-11 stands at 8th place among top states. It can be said that the per capita has increased faster than in any other state, but the inequalities have also increased. In high growth Gujarat, the quality of employment is mainly in the informal sector with 89 per cent men workers and 98 per cent women workers in the unorganized sector with no guaranteed minimum wage or protective legislation.

For corporates the Gujarat model is generosity personified. If India's top industrialists sing Modi's praises it is not for nothing. Huge tracts of land which should have been distributed to the landless, have been given over to corporates at throw away prices - an example of robbing the common people of Gujarat to help the corporates. This includes forest land. But at the same time the Forest Rights Act is blatantly violated. Gujarat has the worst record in implementation of the Act. As many as 1.20 lakh claims of tribals for land patta was rejected arbitrarily by the Government. On 9th February 2013, Modi also advocated the privatization of education in India so as make his foreign and national masters happy.

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Being Simple is Harmlessly Beautiful

How high the cost you pay for being a simpleton

HUMAN NATURE

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Often I find my well wishers advising me to be smart and never ever take what others say on its face value. This advice, I feel, is aimed at convincing me that the world is full of hypocrisy, falsehood, suspicion and mistrust. In other words I am cautioned that by trusting everybody very easily and by opening my heart to them readily I am bound to suffer material and emotional damages. Sometimes these well wishers remind me also of the 'wisdom quotes' and 'poetic verses' against spontaneously and blindly trusting people.

Nevertheless, I still love to be a simpleton. I have loved to be guided by a minimum and art-

less common sense in my day to day dealings with the fellow human beings. I have never been able to convince myself to love complexity and thank God I have done reasonably well till date. I have been longing to spot, albeit without any success, the fortunes my friends and acquaintances have been able to make by being complex, concealing, alert, artful and shrewd in handling their lives

I realize that some people do secretly or openly indulge in wrong doings of grudge, corruption, elbow pushing, falsehood (harmful as well as harmless), jealousy, dishonesty and immorality. I have, however, an honest confession to make. I have never found myself willing to resort to the first grade (jihad) action, as Islam would call it, against these wrong doers. I only pity them and have an unflinching belief that they shall either revert to the good or shall face the stick of law Here as well

as in the Hereafter. With this instinct I have never considered this section of society something more than ignorable and pitiable.

Unfortunately falsehood, stubbornness and gimmickry also are perceived to be smartness in our times by a school of individuals. This complexity of conduct, at one time, would be only expected of and associated with our diplomats and politicians only. In the context of J and K, politics, for example, even the staunch supporters of total integration with the rest of the country and actually having a history of snooping the champions of the 'Special Status' sentiment, at the time of necessity make their voters believe that they are 'Separatists' at heart. That might be a legitimate trick of democracy so no further elaborations on that. I instead pity the trend of us the common men becoming diplomatic and complex and resorting to this perceived smartness even in our

day to day dealings and errands. It pains to notice a person in Lal Chowk swearing to his caller on the mobile phone that he is speaking from Anantnag. Writers and columnists toeing completely opposing lines on some issue, in the passion of sounding smart, promote a trend of analyzing data and facts in a manner that is close to manipulation and scribal maneuvering. Did all the 110 lives we lost in 2010 fall solely to the gun of a particular side is an issue that is analyzed on this 'debating methodology'. All this can nurture negativity of thought and action in our lives and lead to the fragmentation of our society on intolerant and non accommodative lines.

My friends lament my being indifferent and passionless to stories and gossip about the private lives of others. Yes my simplicity defuses my fascination and I instantly succeed in concluding that since the gossip is concocted

so why think about it. I believe that discussing the private lives of people and gossips attached to them is unethical and the act can never enhance the quotient of anybody's intellect. Although the gossip has the likelihood of just being a baseless grapevine of notoriety, however, its circulation is destined to incite and encourage someone to actually indulge in the wrong. Somewhere I have written about the ill effects of glorifying the dark aspects of human life in our circles and at our social gatherings. It is potent of enlarging the ambit of viciousness and so unclothing the ugly and uncovering the filth is never advisable. I am also reminded of what my faith as a Muslim ordains me to refrain from doing: *don't take a stand (blindly) on what you have no knowledge of.*

Sometimes I am very humbly inclined to feel that I am somewhat close to being a *mutawakkil* (trusting supremacy of truth,

justice and God) of sorts. Often, if not always, I have, rather somewhat foolishly, preferred to believe that nobody shall ever lie to me. I have consciously chosen to be a simpleton and believe that virtue always has the last laugh and vice can never outsmart and overpower it as long as one, even unilaterally, clings to the principles of truth and justice. I also have been having a strong belief that no one shall ever harm, and in no case succeed, in harming me. Thankfully I have still no anecdotes and encounters of my suffering (on account of anyone's deceit or harm) to tell although I have since attained the average human-age span of my times. So remaining naive and childlike and thinking straightforward and simplistic, my friend is harmlessly beautiful indeed.

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