







KASHMIR OBSERVER<sup>TM</sup>

Wednesday | 07-02-2024

## PM's Speech

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday expressed confidence in the victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. PM Modi's optimism was not just limited to electoral success; he also promised bold decisions and a transformation that would position India as the third-largest economic power globally during his next term.

The Prime Minister, while refraining from getting into specific numbers, confidently asserted that the NDA would surpass 400 seats, with the BJP securing 370 seats in the Lok Sabha. This ambitious prediction reflects the PM's belief in the prevailing mood of the nation, a sentiment he claims to sense without delving into numerical intricacies.

Addressing the economic trajectory of the country, PM Modi highlighted India's remarkable ascent from being the 11th largest economy in 2014 to its current status as the 5th largest. Unleashing a scathing critique on the opposition, particularly the Congress, Modi emphasized their apparent silence on India's economic strides and asserted that his guarantee for the third term is India's elevation to the position of the third-largest economic power. He pledged that the third term of his government would witness substantial decisions, ones that would lay a robust foundation for the next 1,000 years.

The PM highlighted the unprecedented employment opportunities available for the youth today, citing the registration of over 18 crore new subscribers with the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) in the last decade. While the PM claimed success in controlling inflation during his tenure, economic indicators are multifaceted and influenced by a myriad of factors beyond the ruling party's policies.

The PM's criticism of India's opposition raised pertinent questions about the mistakes by the past leaders, it is essential to approach these claims with a nuanced understanding of the complexities of India's political history. A healthy democracy thrives on constructive debate, and the focus should be on fostering an environment where differing opinions contribute to the nation's progress rather than perpetuating a narrative of mistrust and blame.

A robust opposition is vital for a thriving democracy, and constructive criticism should be encouraged. But it is also true that the opposition hasn't been able to get its act together. And as the PM rightly said, unless the opposition changes their old ways of doing politics, its leaders may only be found in the audience gallery of the parliament after the 2024 parliament polls. Considering the state of the much-hyped opposition alliance I.N.D.I.A, which is fast unraveling, the PM's prediction may very well come true.

### OTHER OPINION

## Global headwinds

The Red Sea disruption has raised concerns over reliance on global supply chains, further aggravating the slower growth in global trade. Exporting one's way to growth thus will not be easy. The government of course is mindful that the elevated risk of geopolitical conflicts is an area of concern for the growth story.

The potential risk factors for the economy pertain to higher fuel prices as the country imports 85% of its requirements. Elevated oil prices raise the current account deficit and also hit growth. So far, a fortunate circumstance is that despite the raging war between Hamas forces and Israel's army since October 7, global oil prices have not flared up. Though, in the initial weeks, Brent crude spot prices remained elevated at \$90-plus a barrel, they have now settled down to lower levels of around \$79-80 a barrel. The attacks on shipping in the Red Sea by Yemeni Houthi forces continue unabated. And as the conflict spills over from Israel to Lebanon and Syria and ultimately involves Iran, the outlook on global oil prices cannot be assumed to remain benign. Taken together with the fragmentation and disruption of supply chains, competition for critical minerals and technologies, the difficult global environment does pose serious risks to an important growth engine for the economy, notably exports. The interim Budget and the Indian economy review, however, appear bullish on the country's prospects of dealing with them and growing at a rapid clip of 7%-plus in the future.

It is surprising that the subsidy numbers of the interim Budget do not fully reflect this challenging global conjuncture. Of course, it can be argued that this interim Budget is only meant to provide funding for essential expenditures for the first four months of the financial year before a new government takes over; that these numbers are not cast in stone and can be changed when the full Budget is presented. Yet, the under-provisioning of fertiliser, food and fuel subsidies does raise concerns.

Possibly, the government's confidence is because it has dealt with the post-pandemic crises in sky-rocketing fertiliser and fuel prices and, hence, the overall subsidy burden has been estimated to decline from 1.4% of GDP in FY24 to 1.2% of GDP in FY25, led by a 13% decline in fertiliser subsidies, 3% in food and 2.6% in petroleum. It is quite possible that increasing domestic production of fertilisers is contributing to the expected lower subsidy bill. For example, import of urea, the most commonly used fertiliser in India, is at 4.5 million tonnes this fiscal, lower than the 7.5 mt imported in the previous year. Even then, the question still lingers: While there has been an upward revision in the revised estimates of fertiliser subsidies in FY24 to protect farmers from the negative effects of an increase in global fertiliser prices, why then should there be an actual fall in the interim Budget numbers for FY25?

Financial Express

# Design Thinking and Good Governance

Public Policies should be based on empathy which Design Thinking makes possible



Dr Raja Muzaffar Bhat

Whoever has heard about the word "Design Thinking" for the first time might think that one is referring to a house designer or an architect. However, design thinking is anything but that. Infact everyone who has been a successful person in his or her profession, would have practised Design Thinking. When I myself read about design thinking some years back I too thought this was all about designers, engineers or architects. Until recently I too had no clarity about this subject. It was only after my interaction with Prof Anunaya Chaubey the Provost of Anant National University Ahmadabad that I got to understand that Design Thinking is more than just a process and its application is essential in every field of life especially to ensure better governance. With an aim of creating more and more professional design thinkers, the Anant National University which is India's first design X university has launched specialized degree courses of Design Thinking. Design Thinking requires a person to be empathetic and explore things by feeling its importance.

### Panchayati Raj and Design Thinking

Inspite of the fact that the Panchayati Raj system and Urban Local Bodies are empowered enough in many states and UTs of India but the policy making is not decentralized even now. Bureaucrats and civil servants take decisions which are then enforced on ground. Let me quote a small example from Jammu & Kashmir. The 5-year-term of Panchayats came to an end in December last year in Jammu & Kashmir. The fresh panchayat elections have been deferred and would be held after Lok Sabha elections 2024 and the Government decided to make Block Development Officers -BDOs as administrators for village Panchayats. This goes completely against Design Thinking. Ideally, Panchayat elections should have been held even a month before the term of Panchayats was to end. If there are challenges then some brainstorming or design thinking could have been done on this. I am sure instead of BDOs, the District Development Council (DDC) members (Member Zilla Panchayat) whose term will end in 2025 should have been empowered to be the administrators of the panchayats. The DDC Members too are elected representatives and every district in J&K has 14 such councilors (DDC Members) but the way Govt decided to give the Gram Panchayat administrator powers to BDOs makes it clear that our administrators too lack Design Thinking.

In a social context, empathy is often what drives us to take action but that is missing when decisions are taken without considering Design Thinking.

### Design Thinking and Public Policy

In today's complex and changing society, public policy and governance face an increasing demand for effectiveness, efficiency, and above all empathy. Many of our centrally sponsored schemes and welfare programmes are indeed based on empathy. PM Gareeb Kalyan Anna Yojna -PMGKAY or PM Awas Yojana -PMAY, Swachh Bharat Mission, MG-NREGA,

Right to Education Act -RTE or Forest Rights Act -FRA are some of these Govt programmes and rights based legislations which have been formulated emphatically. I am not sure how much has been the role of design thinkers while making these Govt programmes but yes to make these schemes and laws effective a great role can be played by Design Thinkers as conventional policy-making processes often seem disconnected from the citizens. The way prop people legislations or welfare programmes are enforced on ground are mismatching with the real-demands and needs. The only solution to this challenge lies in 'design thinking,' a method typically associated with fields like product design and business strategy. I can give hundreds of illustrations wherein lack of design thinking has spoiled our programmes like the rural waste management programme that is being executed under Swachh

after 15 years of enactment. This means while enforcing the rights based legislations or schemes Govt must involve design thinking professionals.

### Policy & planning is design activity

Public policy making is a design activity but this isn't taken up that way. The 'design thinking' is a problem-solving approach characterized by empathy and curiosity to explore more and more. This further opens ways to interpret how target populations engage with their world. For a huge and diverse nation like India which had distinct geographies and diverse cultures the design thinking plays a crucial role. The policies that are formulated by NITI Ayog or some other national level institution can't be uniformly implemented from Tamil Nadu to Tripura or Kashmir to Kerala? During my interaction with Prof Chaubey the

Provost of Anant National University I discussed the issue related to snow clearance work not being included in MG-NREGA. For last many years this author has been writing about it and doing advocacy for including taken up snow clearance works in villages under MGNREGA as many Himalayan states like Himachal, Utrakhand, J&K and Ladakh get snowfall in winters and during the same time people are jobless. This would have been the best thing to make MNREGA workable but the policy lacks design thinking? There exist gaps between how governments operate and what the citizens expect from the government.

A new approach of Design Thinking has to be applied by governments across the world that involves engaging with citizens, by creating effective policies and ensuring better service deliveries in a time bound manner. Tim Brown who is CEO & President of US based design company IDEO says that Design is one of the most important drivers of the quality of experience for users of services. He adds that for governments to remain credible to their citizens, they must treat the design quality of their services as seriously as the best businesses.

### Role of Design schools

According to the United Nations Development Programme -UNDP, Design Thinking is a problem-solving approach and a human-centered innovation. The United Nations System Staff College -UNSSC in its report has said that innovations and system thinking plays a great role in achieving sustainable development goals -SDGs. In the future, like the AI professionals, all the sectors would require Design Thinking professionals. Do we have enough institutes that prepare our youth to take up Design Thinking as their career?

In India there are only a handful of institutes which offer courses in design thinking and Anant National University -ANU India's first DesignX university which was established in Ahmedabad Gujarat in 2016. This university is dedicated to train students to devise solutions for global problems through creative thinking. The core of ANUs pedagogy is sustainable design multiplied by a host of knowledge disciplines and technology to make problem solving more impactful.

### Conclusion

Design Thinking gives us creative solutions that come from thinking outside the box. It is based on five important things which are listed as: Empathize : research your users demands and needs  
Define: state your users' needs and problems.  
Ideate: challenge assumptions and create ideas.  
Prototype: start to create solutions.  
Test: try your solutions out

Are these things considered by the engineering departments when they prepare tender documents? Did Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin Mission Director in J&K involve Design Thinkers before rolling out the Rural Waste Management programme? Did Srinagar Smart City Corporation involve Design Thinking professionals while taking up different works in Srinagar?

Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer  
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Bharat Abhiyan Gramin (Phase 2). The laws like RTE Act, RTI Act or Forest Rights Act are not benefiting large sections of society and the reasons can be understood through design thinking.

### Forest Rights Act

Design Thinking is a methodology that provides an innovative approach to problem solving and is characterized by focusing on solutions rather than the problems. Sometimes at the policy level we realize that the traditional way of addressing issues was better than laws enacted by the legislature around these issues. Let us take an example of the forest related laws enacted from time to time in India. The Indian Forest Act of 1865 was the first legal framework which systematically introduced State's control over the forests in India. This law was amended in 1878 and after some decades the Indian Forest Act of 1927 was enacted repealing the previous laws. The Indian Forest Act 1927 is still applicable in India and it was extended to Jammu & Kashmir as well with effect from Oct 31st 2019 soon after article 370 abrogation. The Indian Forest Act of 1927 didn't give the rights to tribals or other traditional forest dwellers. It took the Govt of India at least 60 years to enact a legislation that granted forest dwelling scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers the rights that existed before the British Rule. In 2006 Govt of India came up with Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 also called Forest Rights Act -FRA in 2006. This law was enacted on 18 December 2006 and the preamble of FRA says that this law was enacted to rectify the mistakes committed by Govt in the past. This law is indeed based on design thinking as its preamble is empathetic and seeks forgiveness from people for committing historical injustices with forest dwellers and tribals.

Unfortunately, this law also isn't giving us better results even

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**Did Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin Mission Director in J&K involve Design Thinkers before rolling out the Rural Waste Management programme? Did Srinagar Smart City Corporation involve Design Thinking professionals while taking up different works in Srinagar?**

Obituary

# Kaka Ji's Watan

*Kaka Ji's life is a tragic story of love for his motherland*

Hakeem Rouf

**B**ansi Lal Pandit, our beloved neighbour, fondly called Kaka Ji, stuck to his roots through thick and thin no matter what turn did the circumstances take in the strife-torn Kashmir valley.

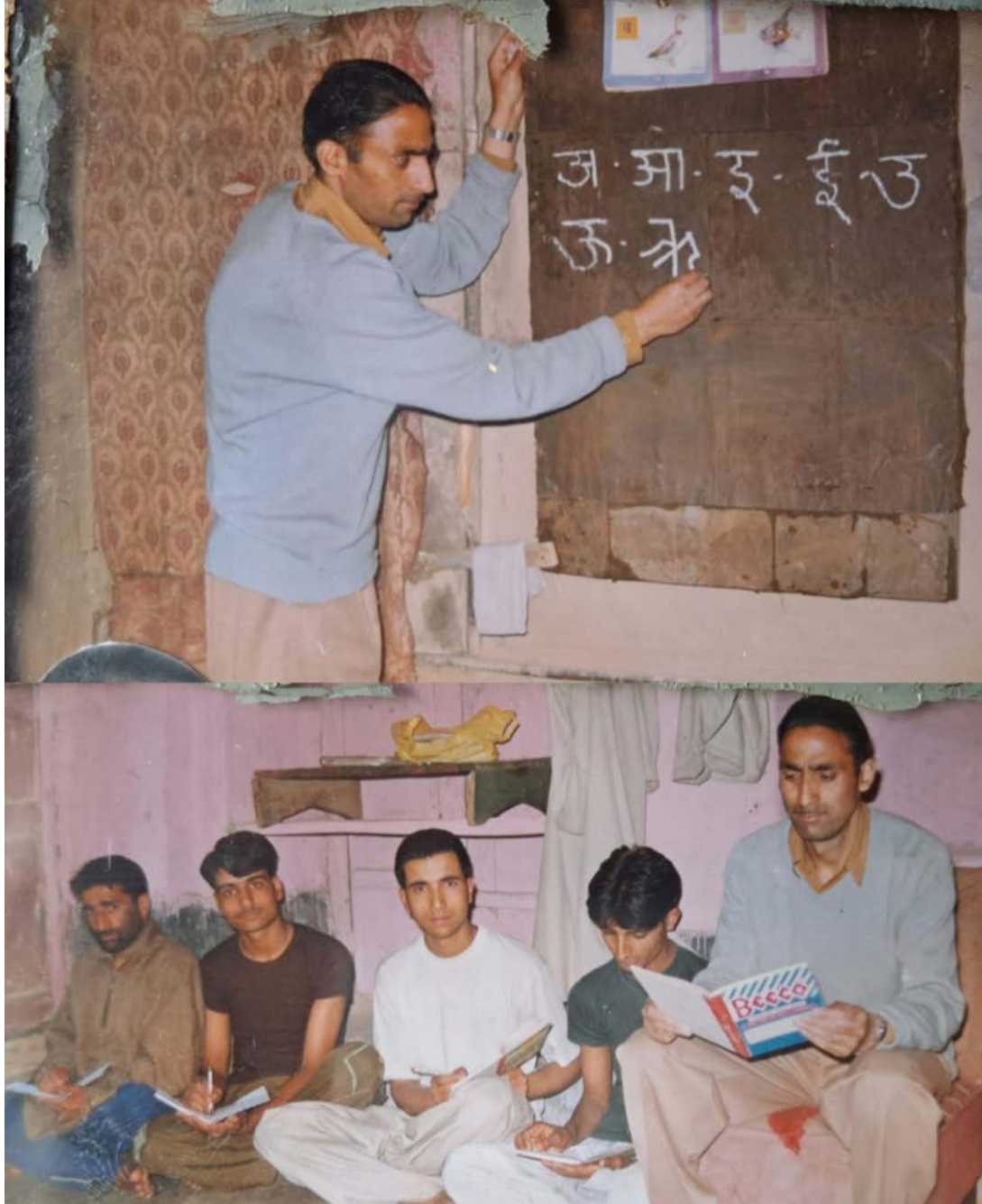
Concerned about his safety in Kashmir, his family including his affectionate and ailing mother, managed to take him to Jammu a couple of times during the peak of the turmoil. But distraught Kaka Ji, like a kid snatched from her wailing and longing mother's lap, braved odds and escaped from what felt like a cage to him - a somber and scorching Jammu where his family had taken refuge like many other Kashmiri Pandit families in early 1990s.

This was the time when there were no mobile phones. Communication wasn't so quick. The anxious family through the local police came to know that Kaka Ji is where his heart was - his ancestral and abandoned home in Tulmulla - a modest/quiet hamlet of glaring pluralistic and syncretic culture. In this village in Ganderbal district of Kashmir, the two communities lived in harmony since ages. Here a devout Muslim has been lighting the pyre of Hindus for decades.

Kaka Ji sacrificed his family, his relatives and friends from his community who fled Kashmir just for his only love, his *watan* (motherland). He swam against the tide and preferred not to migrate from Kashmir but to live and die among Muslims in his village left almost bereft of his coreligionists.

Kaka Ji's emotional bonding with his Muslim neighbors, with whom he would eat, and drink like a family member, was as intense as it was for his home and homeland that he never betrayed.

What endeared us all to him were his virtues, honesty and affable nature. He would mingle with elderly and younger alike. He religiously delivered the duty he was



his home, a welcome place for all. It was our sanctum, *thak e paend* or resting spot.

gup-shup and cinema lovers..

In these good old days, when a black and white television, backed by a ruby battery, was a prized possession in our homes, men and children gleefully would throng to this home spending endless hours watching movies and other entertainment programmes on his television donned in an intricately woven and tidy *meez posh* (a decorated piece of cloth). The ambience of the dimly lit room was akin to that of a mini cinema hall.

When the *Khel* (a movie in the local dialect), was about to start

People would celebrate Kaka Ji's birthday, the festivals of two faiths together, gossip and play cards or chess in a room filled with mirth.

A man, with a grey beard and a needle in his hand sat in one corner. Least interested in the movies, he with a great skill embroidered floral designs on a shawl spread over his legs with multi-coloured threads, a bunch of which dangled across his a bit wrinkled neck.

Downstairs, steps in a faithful shopkeeper to perform *wazu* (ablution) in a small washroom wherein a gold-plated brass tap delivers cold and clear water. With a gushing flow, the water fell into a mortar carved out of a stone with a hole drilled in the center, a sort of basin used to prevent the clothes from sprinkling.

On the walls of the Kaka Ji's room from where one got a splendid view of the kitchen garden abuzz with the melodious chirping of birds and insects, hung framed Quranic verses, photographs of revered Muslim saints besides Hindu, and of Muslim shrines like Charar-i-Sharief and Dargah,

where Kaka Ji would regularly pay obeisance even in harsh winters or on strike days when transport on roads was quite scarce.

Besides celebrations and festivities, the house was like Rabinnder Nath Tagore's *Shanti Niketan* where Bansi Lal taught Hindi language to local students or anyone interested in learning the language. The classes were held under a shady tree in the lush green lawn or in a makeshift classroom in his home with an old worn out charcoal smeared chalkboard fixed on the wall.

As I write this piece, I'm filled with immense nostalgia with a smile on my face, I'm reminded of a pleasant but touching post-

Translation: "Shift to Jammu for some time, find a good match, get married, and come back with her to Kashmir," Aunt suggested.

"Dakh karsi. Gar trawne khutei che behter anhorai marun."

Translation: "It is better to die unmarried than abandon my home."

This was his unfathomable level of attachment and fondness for the home where he was born some six decades ago, where he lived alone with no one from his family for more than three decades now. It is where he silently breathed his last in the dark and cold December night last year with nobody around at the



lunch moment of rest with Kaka Ji in autumn's paddy harvest season, beside our paddy field just adjacent to his. One of my aunts perhaps jokingly asked him.

"Kaka jiya che chuk shakle te aklhi asel, zameen makan te che khudayas hawaleh, karezeha nether. woenkya che zurath?"  
Translation: "Kaka ji, you should marry. You are smart and wise enough and have this land and also a good house to lead a content married life. What else do you need?"

"Yete kus batte gar roud woen, yem me nether den."  
Translation: "There is no Pandit family left to give me their daughter. Almost all have migrated," he replied with a wit.

"Ade tar teli tamath Jum te kar khander, pateh tar wapas,"

parting moment but just a *kanger* (an earthen firepot filled with hot embers) that warmed his body on his last night at home.

His lifeless body was found on a cold mattress with one palm under the head as if he was in a peaceful sleep.

As the bier carrying Kaka Ji's bathed and scented body sat on the perron of the house that seemed to be wailing the most among us for having lost the only occupant, people which included a handful of his relatives showered flower petals and candies, offered shawls amid soothing hymns like a groom being groomed to meet his awaiting beloved.

Tann, mann, dhan sab hai tera Body, soul, wealth, everything is yours

Swami sab kuch hai tera Oh Lord, everything is yours Tera tujhko arpan

I'll give everything yours back to you

Kya lage mera Nothing is mine Om Jai Jagdish Hare

O Lord of the entire universe.

As we rowed the boat carrying the bier to the cremation ground for consigning his mortal remains to the flames, the eerie silence was being broken by the murmur of the gently flowing stream as if symbolizing the transitory nature of creation.

In my head reverberates the philosophical couplet from one of the Bollywood songs that often played on Kaka Ji's old Zeenat Radio.

"Aadmi musafir hai aata hai jata hai Aaatay jatay rastey main yadein chod deta hai..."

"Man is a traveller, he comes and goes Leaving behind a trail of memories..."

The cremation marked an end to Kaka Ji's heroic and extraordinary life. A life lived for the pure love of his roots-his beloved homeland, his *kashir*-till his last breath. His life was a tragic and moving story of love for the motherland transcending/surmounting everything. Rest in Peace, Kaka Ji! We will always miss you and forever remember you.



entrusted with with utmost sincerity making sure that every mail reached the receiver well on time without fail. Nothing remained undelivered, even if it meant walking several kilometres on foot in the cold evenings. This was his temporary postman job for which he was paid a meager amount. Still, he was fully committed to it.

A wave of nostalgia sweeps over me as I recall my childhood and the fond memories of him and

The beautiful three-storey house laden with magnificent wooden balconies on the railings of which parched the bulbs and ate the rice and bread crumbs left on an extended wooden shelf attached to one of the windows. This special exterior shelf - a hallmark of our good old homes - was meant for feeding the birds.

This home with inhabitants across the religious divide would be a favourite and cosy place for

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at 4 on Saturday and Sunday evenings, the curtains of the windows were drawn followed by a pin-drop silence. Anyone chit-chatting or munching anything during the *khel* would get his due share of scolding, at times mild punches also from Kaka Ji like a strict father does to his kids. A jolly and chubby boy peeing a lot would go out during the ad break and bring the good news of the fresh snowfall in winters.

People in the room cracked jokes amid sips of steaming *nun chai* (pink salted tea). Some relished freshly plucked juicy pomegranate fruits plucked from one of the trees in the sprawling and serene lawns. One of the trees like a relic is still there outside the main door and continues to bear fruit.







