

YAHYA SINWAR KILLING

The conflict in the Middle East reached a crucial point today with Israel killing Yahya Sinwar, Hamas chief and the mastermind of the horrific October 7 orgy of violence against civilians in Israel. Will it lead in a ceasefire that the world and the involved parties are desperate to have? Instead of the usual suspects crying about Sinwar's death, it's the right time for the neighbouring countries and the global powers to work out a negotiated settlement of the year plus long conflict. The conflict triggered by the Hamas terrorists killing, raping and torturing innocent Israeli civilians and taking hostage some 250 of them has brought a vast devastation in the region, and led to expansion of the conflict to countries like Lebanon and Iran. Earlier attempts to bring an end to this war failed. However, Sinwar's death is a major achievement for even Israel and its defence forces. May be if sincere efforts are made, and with Israel having achieved major successes against Hamas in its quest to eliminate terrorism, working out a settlement may be easier.

MULWARWUN FIRE

The fire in the village of Mulwarwun in Kishtwar has indeed brought tragedy to families. Supporting the victims of the fire should be the responsibility of the state while the civilians can chip in. However, as is being seen, the support and rehabilitation of the families affected in the fire should not become a ruse for political, social, separatist groups to raise funds from the public with no accountability. All funds should be channelized to the chief minister's relief fund and not given in private hands. Even if the private persons or groups mean well, there is no transparency in utilization of such money and we have had bad experiences in the past. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah should immediately issue guidelines on citizen's involvement in supporting the Mulwarwun families.

Stubble burning crisis needs practical solutions

Biswajeet Banarjee

The Supreme Court has taken a strong stance against the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) for its failure to control stubble burning, a major contributor to air pollution in Delhi-NCR. The court's rebuke, delivered during a hearing on October 3, emphasised the need for effective ground-level interventions and questioned why the Commission had not implemented any provisions of the relevant Act to curb pollution from crop residue burning. Stubble burning, especially in the northern states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, has been a major environmental challenge for years.

Farmers often resort to burning crop residue after harvesting paddy and wheat due to the increasing mechanisation of farming, the use of combined harvesters, a shortage of labour, and rising labour costs. This practice, prevalent in October and November following the paddy harvest, results in the release of large amounts of particulate matter into the atmosphere, contributing to the hazardous air quality in Delhi-NCR.

The Supreme Court's criticism of the CAQM reflects a broader frustration over the Commission's inability to effectively tackle this issue. Despite being set up three years ago to address pollution in the National Capital Region and surrounding areas, the CAQM has been criticised for its slow pace and lack of tangible outcomes. The court particularly highlighted that the Commission meets only once every three months, a frequency deemed inadequate for addressing a recurring crisis like stubble burning.

Moreover, the Commission has issued only 82 directives since its inception, a number that the court described as insufficient to deal with the scale of the problem. A significant concern raised by the Supreme Court is the lack of adequate staffing within the pollution control boards of Delhi-NCR and other affected states, including Uttar Pradesh. The court ordered that these vacant posts be filled by April



30, 2025, to improve monitoring and enforcement capabilities. Effective staffing is critical for implementing measures on the ground, particularly when dealing with farmers who rely on burning crop residue as a quick and cost-effective way to clear their fields.

Despite repeated interventions from both the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and the Supreme Court, stubble burning incidents continue to surge. Last year alone, more than 33,000 incidents of stubble burning were recorded in Punjab, even after explicit instructions to engage with farmers to explore alternatives. The lack of a coordinated effort between the state governments and the CAQM has only exacerbated the pollution crisis during the winter months.

Turning Stubble into a Resource: While the focus remains on the failures of the CAQM and the continued challenges in states like Punjab, Uttar Pradesh has emerged as a notable example of how stubble can be managed more sustainably. The state has successfully implemented initiatives that transform stubble into an energy resource and natural fertiliser, benefiting both the environment and the agricultural community.

The key to this transformation has been the establishment of Compressed Biogas (CBG) plants that convert crop residue into energy and

high-quality compost. This approach has not only addressed environmental concerns but has also created an additional income stream for farmers, who sell stubble as raw material for the CBG process. In this way, stubble has shifted from being a burden to becoming a valuable asset in Uttar Pradesh's rural economy. As of last year, Uttar Pradesh led the country in CBG production, with ten operational plants. Currently, 24 CBG units are active, and another 93 are under construction. The state aims to have more than 100 CBG plants operational soon, a goal endorsed by Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri. During a March 2024 announcement, he highlighted the state's plan to double its bio-coal and biodiesel production by 2025. The success of CBG production in Uttar Pradesh has been bolstered by the Uttar Pradesh State Bio-Energy Policy 2022, which offers various incentives for establishing bio-CNG and CBG units using agricultural waste.

The policy aims to set up CBG plants in every district, providing local solutions for managing stubble while promoting energy self-sufficiency. A significant milestone in this journey was the inauguration of a CBG plant in Dhuriyapar, Gorakhpur, on March 8, 2023, by Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and Chief Minister

Yogi Adityanath. The plant, built for Rs 165 crore, processes 200 metric tonnes of straw, 20 metric tonnes of press mud, and 10 metric tonnes of cattle dung daily. It produces 20 metric tonnes of biogas and 125 metric tonnes of organic manure, contributing to higher agricultural yields while reducing dependency on chemical fertilisers. This initiative allows farmers to diversify their income sources and play a crucial role in the energy sector. By reducing the practice of stubble burning, the state is making strides in environmental protection. The Yogi Adityanath government has expressed confidence that the enhanced production of bio-coal and biodiesel will help reduce air pollution in the region over the next five years.

The Supreme Court's critique of the CAQM underscores the urgency of finding a balanced approach to stubble burning that respects both environmental concerns and the practical challenges faced by farmers. Uttar Pradesh's model of converting stubble into a resource could serve as a blueprint for other states grappling with similar issues.

However, the broader challenge remains: implementing such solutions at scale requires consistent policy support, adequate resources, and a willingness to engage with farmers directly. The court's directive for the CAQM to improve its approach and for state governments to fill vacant posts by 2025 is a step towards accountability.

Yet, the real test will lie in translating these directives into action before another winter brings the familiar, suffocating haze back to the skies of Delhi-NCR. The question remains whether the CAQM, in partnership with state governments, can adapt and adopt innovative solutions like those seen in UP. Without swift and sustained efforts, the region risks facing another year of deteriorating air quality, leaving millions to grapple with the health consequences of inaction.

(The writer is Associate Editor, The Pioneer; views expressed are personal)

REVIVING FAMILY BONDS

Rajyogi Brahma Kumar Nikunji

Small family, Happy family (Chhota Parivar-Sukhi Pariwar) & 'Hum Do Hamare', these two jingles coined by the administration had changed the family planning scenario in India over the years. But it's so ironic that despite becoming the first country to adopt a national policy for limiting a great Indian proclivity, India is expected to overtake China in 2034. At the time of independence, there were 345 million Indians. The world took 454 years to go from 345 million in 1310 AD to a billion, but India took just 52 years. Looking at the above facts and figures one wonders as to what would be the societal structure in a country that takes the burden of a population of a billion people. Sadly, the situation is quite grim, because today we see fewer families and more individuals living their lives on their terms with an 'I care a damn attitude' which is quite common in the metropolises.

Our forefathers were brought up with strong family values, but with passing time and ever-changing scenarios, today those core values have been left behind to adopt new so-called modern values. It's so unfortunate that today very few of us know the importance of living or grow-



ing up in a family. One must understand the fact that a family is the first school where the literate and the illiterate have got their first lessons in the art of living and values, traditions, customs and conventions. Also in a family, everyone feels secure and protected. Everyone feels strong because of the strength of the family. Everyone feels that others welcome him or her. Everyone feels a kind of support, sustenance and encouragement. It is, therefore, essential to help and facilitate the growth of good supportive families for foundation as a family tradition rather than promoting an individualistic

lifestyle for the sake of the next Gen & future to come.

There is some kind of magnetic force that holds the members of a family together. In other words, it is a feeling of closeness and belongingness in the mind of every person and the feeling of acceptance on the part of the whole group that gives it the nomenclature of a family. This feeling of

acceptance is always based on the feeling of mutual love, loyalty and trust and also understanding and accommodation. Today we see that families are splitting up.

Certain values like mutual affection, love & genuine caring that make a family work are vanishing because everyone wants to live an independent life without any kind of family interference. However, if the younger ones continue to give regard to the elders and the elders continue to give love to the younger ones, then the family life will continue to be undisturbed and everyone will act responsibly. But, if

each one gives up their responsibility and the feeling of concern for others, then cracks would appear and get deeper. Hence to preserve the family structure & tradition, one needs to have tolerance, sobriety & humility because family is very essential to civilised life, be it a spiritual family or the society as a family or of nations. Hence we should consider family as a place where we can work for physical, mental, moral and spiritual growth and can create an environment where others also can grow. A family can change a person into a great leader, disciplinarian, soldier, criminal or scholar by encouraging or discouraging, supporting or condemning certain positive or negative traits in him.

We must, therefore, pay attention to the transformation of families because families are the breeding grounds for good or bad human beings. So, let us awaken people to observe family values such as mutual love, trust, acceptance, accommodation, consideration and care for the wellbeing of others, the spirit of adjustment, tolerance, responsibility and cooperation because if these family values flourish, the nation and the whole humankind will flourish too.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)

Urbanisation and youth: Building a healthier future amid rapid growth

Ashwajit Singh

Urbanisation, an engine for economic prosperity and resources, sits at the centre of modernity and impacts health outcomes. With rapid urbanisation, the UN projects that by 2050, 7 of 10 people will live in cities, and the youth will likely be the most dominant population. The future will be forged by the ever-increasing global youth, who are integral to playing a dynamic and revolutionary role in creating and building strong, prosperous, sustainable, and vibrant societies. In recent years, international organisations have emphasised the meaningful involvement of youth as vital to accelerating progress towards the SDGs while development continues to grow globally.

The approach also coincides with this year's message of World Habitat Day, which focuses on "engaging youth to create a better urban future." However, while we work towards engaging the new generation in planning their urban present and future through participatory processes and local leadership opportunities, ensur-

ing their healthy livelihood is imperative. Urbanisation's positive attributes also mask the inequalities that exist within it. Not all city residents experience or can access these benefits equally. For instance, 40 per cent of India's population will reside in the urban setup by 2030, with 24 per cent being the youth (15-29), making it a relatively young country. Although rapid urbanisation will continue to improve India's average household socio-economic condition and child health status, it is expected to disproportionately affect the health of urban youth, who are likely to become more vulnerable to health challenges.

Urbanisation without accounting for the primary healthcare amenities results in significant health disparities. As gentrification grows with urbanisation, a large chunk of the youth is likely to reside in urban slums and low-income areas. These areas carry distinct health challenges that are influenced by broader socio-economic determinants such as poverty, education and employment.



ers to accessing education, which in turn limits job opportunities and perpetuates a cycle of poor health outcomes.

These informal settlements may sit adjacent to an affluent neighbourhood. Still, the people living there lack access to safe water and sanitation infrastructure, becoming hotspots for waterborne and vector-borne diseases due to flooding, open

sewers, and overcrowding. With such poor hygiene, increased rates of malnutrition among children and young adults worsen the burden of diseases.

In addition to infectious diseases, urban youth in lower-income areas are increasingly exposed to non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and hypertension, which are often exacerbated by poor diet, stress, and lack of access to early diagnosis or

regular health checkups.

These substantial regional disparities affecting urban youth's living and health conditions are also caused by the inequitable distribution of clinics and healthcare centres, which limits care options. According to NFHS-3, only 39.9 per cent of urban poor children get full immunisation compared to 65.4 per cent of urban non-poor children. Lower vaccination rates and a lack of awareness of ongoing health issues negatively impact school attendance and cognitive development.

The National Urban Health Mission (NUHM), launched in 2013, has been instrumental in meeting the regulatory, reformatory, and developmental public health priorities for urban settings. Over the years, NUHM has improved access to healthcare, allowing the urban poor to choose public over costly private services. Among the other initiatives to focus on urban youth health, the National Youth Policy (NYP) 2021 outlines a 10-year vision for youth development by 2030, aligning with the United Nations' SDGs.

The NYP prioritises youth health as

essential for India's holistic growth and progress by addressing critical health components of urban youth and acknowledging mental health. Further, India's pioneering step towards building inclusive health that benefits all and focuses on the youth also found prominence in the recent G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration in 2023.

The report encompasses ways to eliminate hunger and malnutrition and advance with more health collaborations, especially when facing challenging mental health. While policies like NUHM and NYP have made strides in addressing urban youth health, more needs to be done and implemented to improve primary healthcare.

Many urban healthcare centres still struggle with understaffing, lack of resources, and accessibility issues for slum-dwelling youth. To ensure that India's urban youth thrive, it is crucial to increase investments in health services, prioritise mental health care, and continue engaging youth in the decision-making process for urban development.