

## JAMMU-SRINAGAR TRAIN

Connectivity is a major tool of development, social and emotional bonding and business growth. So when Jammu and Srinagar got connected through Vande Bharat, it was a bid day for all the people of the UT. The erstwhile State has suffered or lack of a reliable and full-time connectivity for too long. Sociologists would be in a better position to explain how geographical isolation and poor physical connections spread discontent among populations. It's this anger and emotional confusions, which, at time, is made use of by enemies. Already a fair weather highway has since been replaced by a world class highway connecting the two capitals. The travel time has been slashed to five hours from 12 hours once upon a time. The train is another milestone and brings in major advantages for people and especially businesses. The business community in both the capitals had been waiting for this day as the trucks carrying goods out of the Valley and from Jammu had become an expensive proposition. A direct Vande Bharat train running twice a day between Jammu and Srinagar is a boon to the region. Besides, the service, beginning May 3, would increase the people to people connections, which had suffered to a great level due to three decades of insurgency in Kashmir. The businesses are excited at this service as it would give an impetus to the businesses at both the ends. The movement of good through train would bring down prices of commodities. The train service is going to end the anxieties of the people of Kashmir about closure of highway in extreme weather. Moreover, the hills and valley through which the railway lines passes would see growth of business and tourism and its major advantage would go to Jammu region's unexplored sceneries and historical places.

Firoz Bakht Ahmed

It has been rightly said that history is written on each and every brick of Delhi. However, Delhi is usually known for monuments like Purana Qila, Qutub Minar, India Gate, Parliament House and others, whereas the Central Legislative Assembly building has been evading the historians' eyes. It is a witness to the chequered history of Delhi for a century, covering the Delhi Durbars, building of New Delhi, the present Parliament House, of which the predecessor was this Central Assembly only with also the description of the horrendous laws like, the Rowlett Act, a precursor to the Jalianwala Bagh massacre. This building is witness to the century-old Parliamentary traditions.

Besides, it is also associated with the celebrated freedom fighter, Vithalbhai Patel, whose efforts of excellence and brilliance got shadowed by none other than his illustrious younger brother, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who was one up, as he became free India's first Home Minister and

Deputy Prime Minister! The details of the inimitable history of this monument have also been covered in a coffee table book, "Shatabdi Yatra: Hundred Years of Excellence", immaculately curated and authored by Vijender Gupta, the speaker of the Delhi Assembly, who occupied the same seat as Vithalbhai Patel (1925-1930) and who gathered the related documents and pictures from every nook and cranny possible within India and abroad, including Britain. The historic Central Legislative Assembly not only happens to be a glorious history of governance in India but also accommodates the life and times of Vithalbhai Patel, the savant servant and son of the soil, whose immense contribution for Indian freedom struggle, cannot be forgotten despite not being sufficiently covered. As this monument's present speaker seems to be in love with this monument of Indo-Corinthian architecture, quite impeccably, Vijender Gupta has carved into it all the micro and macro details on the walls, galleries and his book that has been published both in English and Hindi. He is authoring

## From 'reluctant prince' to assertive challenger

Kalyani Shankar

Has Rahul Gandhi become a credible Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha since his appointment in June 2024? With nearly two years having passed, how effective has he been? Has he held the government accountable and changed his party's approach to budget reviews? Has he demonstrated leadership qualities such as strategic communication and coalition-building during this time? These questions are essential for evaluating his influence and effectiveness.

Rahul began his political career in 2004 and has faced both successes, challenges, and failures.

He has worked behind the scenes, guiding the party through victories and defeats, while choosing not to take a ministerial role in the Manmohan Singh government from 2004 to 2014.

Gandhi's rise to a prominent position within the Congress Party was largely expected, reflecting his positioning within the party. He has the final say in party appointments.

While many party members viewed his leadership as a positive development, others expressed concern that it highlighted the party's lack of alternatives and its dependence on the Nehru-Gandhi family. Ultimately, he resigned, and senior leader Mallikarjun Kharge became the party president.

Rahul's role as LOP has included pointing out the government's mistakes in Parliament and outside on behalf of the Opposition and his own party. However, there have been important occasions when he was not present.



Rahul has taken on a more assertive, visible role, focusing on defending the Constitution, addressing income inequality, and challenging the BJP-led government on various issues.

He has rebranded his image to align with the formal role, focusing on job creation, safety for marginalised groups, and the rights of farmers.

This is the first time in a decade that a cabinet-level position has been filled. Since 2014, no opposition party has achieved the 10% of 543 seats needed to be recognised as the Leader of the Opposition. This presents a significant opportunity for the Opposition to challenge the Narendra Modi government.

On his first day in the Lok Sabha as LOP, Rahul Gandhi stressed the need for the ruling coalition to uphold the rule of law and for the Opposition to address

issues such as the economic downturn, unemployment, a caste census, and the farmers' crisis. As the Leader of the Opposition, he participates in selecting key officials, such as the Chief Election Commissioner and the CBI Chief, to ensure that the Opposition has a say in these appointments.

Rahul's presence in Parliament has become more confrontational and assertive, reflecting his strategic shift to challenge the government directly. With the ruling party loudly defending the Modi government, noisy scenes have ensued in Parliament. Still, it has also enabled the Opposition to oppose key bills, such as the Women's Reservation Bill and the farmers' bills.

His active participation in legislative debates and initiatives demonstrates his growing influence and impact as Leader of the

Opposition, consistently challenging the Modi government on multiple issues.

One successful step was his Bharat Jodo Yatra, which boosted his image by allowing him to mingle with the public and learn about their problems firsthand.

Educated at some of India's most prestigious schools, he went on to study economics in the United States and gain international experience working in London before returning to Mumbai in 2002.

Gandhi is often referred to as the "reluctant prince" by his critics, who believe he is hesitant to fully embrace the responsibilities that accompany his significant influence. However, many consider him to have been the unofficial number two in the party for a long time. However, some were worried about the party's contin-

ued reliance on the Nehru-Gandhi family for leadership.

Rahul decided to enter politics and won a seat in 2004 from Amethi. In September 2007, he became the party's secretary-general while his mother, Sonia Gandhi, remained president. By January 2013, he had risen to Vice-President of Congress, highlighting his growing influence.

Critics say that even though he is more visible now, the party lost key state assembly elections in late 2024 and 2025. This raises doubts about his ability to turn popularity into votes.

Rahul became the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha in June 2024. As time passes, he could lose support if he fails to secure the backing of regional allies and continues to struggle in local politics.

The Opposition created the INDIA bloc and worked together in the 2024 General Election. As a result, the Opposition won more seats. The Congress Party doubled its number of seats.

Additionally, there has been feedback regarding his attendance at key events and his focus on topics that some critics view as less significant.

He is trying to be more approachable by engaging in activities that demonstrate his commitment to ordinary people's concerns. Different groups view his performance differently.

During Rahul Gandhi's tenure as Leader of the Opposition, he has become a more focused and articulate leader. However, whether he has gained "credibility" is subjective. Supporters see improvement, while opponents argue his style remains unchanged.

## HOW HUMAN CONNECTIONS REDEFINE WORKPLACE STRESS

APS Malhotra

It is my firm belief that workplace stress has been around in one form or another for ages. However, what has changed over time is its structure and intensity - the beast has starkly metamorphosed. Today, amplified by technology-driven jobs and laggard employment rates, stress has become a constant hum of fatigue, dissatisfaction, and the pressure to remain perpetually available.

These anxieties rarely stay within the four walls of the office; rather, they sneak out surreptitiously into the outside world, magnifying personal, emotional, and physiological fault lines like never before. I have witnessed all these changes during my nearly four decades of corporate life experience.

My career - like those of many others - has had its share of tranquillity and turbulence, highs and lows, shaped by hierarchies, interpersonal dynamics, and the often not-too-subtle currents of power and politics. At times, professional strain collides headlong with personal worry, thereby creating an atmosphere of acute self-doubt, as happened with me during the COVID-19 pandemic, when my hypertension spiked sharply, as my daughter, Mehak, a



young doctor, took her position on the front lines of the raging war across the seven seas. The ambiguity took a palpable toll on my health, to an extent that medication that had long been stable had to be increased suddenly.

It was in this state of apprehension that I took up a new assignment - after the lockdown had eased - anticipating the familiar, uncertain phase of adjustment. Instead, I was surprised by what I encountered - something that altered my understanding of workplace stress. There was, to begin with, an unusual lightness in the environment. And al-

though work was taken seriously, the edge of fear that often accompanies it was absent.

Soon, I fathomed that the difference lay largely in leadership, as the team lead laid emphasis on brevity and humility, preferring these over pomposity, exaggeration, and hype. Expectations were clear, but they were not enforced through intimidation, something that resulted in a culture of trust rather than anxiety. These positively charged winds received a further boost recently during a posting I worked on. It was here that I truly understood the equally important

role of relationships.

Within months of taking over, I established close bonds with a small group of colleagues at a similar stage in their careers as me - rushing speedily towards what in common parlance is referred to as 'senior citizen'. What began as shallow banter grew into genuine camaraderie - conversations that extended into shared experiences and reflections.

These connections created a sense of ease long missing in my professional life. Amid this came an unexpected - and most welcome - change: a routine medical check-up showed my blood pressure had dropped below normal levels, requiring reduced medication, while my diabetes indicators recorded their best readings in over a decade.

These are not mere coincidences but pointers to something of greater import - often overlooked in discussions on stress management, which tend to focus on individual coping mechanisms such as mindfulness, exercise, and time management.

While these matter, they are only part of the picture. The environments we work in, the leadership we experience, and the relationships we build play an equally decisive role. Workplace stress may be inevitable, but the way it shapes our lives is not.

## Rediscovering Delhi's Central Legislative Assembly

Firoz Bakht Ahmed

It has been rightly said that history is written on each and every brick of Delhi. However, Delhi is usually known for monuments like Purana Qila, Qutub Minar, India Gate, Parliament House and others, whereas the Central Legislative Assembly building has been evading the historians' eyes. It is a witness to the chequered history of Delhi for a century, covering the Delhi Durbars, building of New Delhi, the present Parliament House, of which the predecessor was this Central Assembly only with also the description of the horrendous laws like, the Rowlett Act, a precursor to the Jalianwala Bagh massacre. This building is witness to the century-old Parliamentary traditions.

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another book on the nuances of the World Wars and role of Indian dominion under the British.

While this book on the Central Legislative Assembly was presented to Narendra Modi, the Indian Prime Minister, he stated that it appears to be the intellectual and administrative legacy of Vithalbhai Patel as an astute nationalist leader and the history of excellent governance in India! This almost blatantly neglected monument, marks a historic milestone and duly pays homage to Vithalbhai Patel, a pioneer of secular democratic traditions in India. The environs of the monument serve as both a historical and visual narrative of India's legislative journey of its excellent governance, that hardly any other country boasts of! It highlights how parliamentary institutions evolved from the manacles of colonial frameworks and clutches of injustice into the vibrant democratic system that has turned India into a bright and brilliant democracy today. The history of this monument is not merely a record of events but a celebration of secular traditions, harmonious society, consti-

tutional values, democratic resilience, and institutional growth.

As one takes a tour of the Central Legislative Assembly, one finds out that while honouring the legacy of Vithalbhai Patel, it also chronicles the evolution of India's democratic institutions over a century in a very appealing style, accompanied by not only unique but stunning pictures, immensely important historical snippets, like the one of the closeness between Vithalbhai Patel and Subhash Chandra Bose, who he made the sole in charge of his will part of his will and to carry out his last rites at Chaupati, Mumbai (Bombay then). Incidentally, on October 22, 1933, Vithalbhai Patel died in Geneva, Switzerland, with Subhash and many doctors and nurses by his bedside during his last breaths. In a letter of October 2, 1933, Vithalbhai wrote, "In the event of my death in Europe, I desire that Subhash Chandra Bose, take charge of my body and make the necessary arrangements for sending it to Bombay for cremation on the Chaupati sands alongside the place, where Lokmanya Balgangadhar Tilak's body

was cremated."

It seemed that he was aware of his death earlier, though he died on October 22, 1933. The last words of Patel were, "I bless all my countrymen in India and abroad. Before I breathe my last, I pray for the Independence of India." Bose duly obeyed that but the British Raj officers created many boulders for him. Nevertheless, with the help of nationalists, KF Nariman, SA Baveri, T Bhawan, Deepnarayan Singh and others, he ably carried out the instructions of Vithalbhai. Lamentably, few people remember Vithalbhai Patel, other than a building named after him at Delhi's Parliament Street. Nevertheless, the first Prime Minister of Mauritius, Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam, in his book, "Our Struggle: 20th Century Mauritius", writes, "My stay among the Indian students thus provided me with a political apprenticeship, especially as developed close friendship with patriotic students like Sidhanand Sinha, who was an able student leader and organiser. But it was Vithalbhai Patel, the elder brother of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the future Home Min-

ister and Deputy Prime Minister of India, who came to be my personal political guru."

Impeccably carved with all the micro and macro details, "Shatabdi Yatra: Hundred Years of Excellence" by Vijender Gupta has been published both in English and Hindi. He is authoring another book on the nuances of the World Wars and role of the Indian dominion under the British. While the book was presented to Narendra Modi, the Indian Prime Minister, he stated that it appears to be the intellectual and administrative legacy of Vithalbhai Patel as an astute nationalist leader and the history of excellent governance in India!

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Firoz Bakht Ahmed is a former Chancellor of Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad and grandnephew, Bharat Ratna, Maulana Azad; Views presented are personal.