



Ambedkar Times Weekly

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Sri Guru Ravidass Ji's Parkash Divas celebrated in Fresno (California)



Sri Guru Ravidass Sabha Fresno (CA) with the co-operation of entire Sangat, celebrated 644th Gurburab of Sri Guru Ravidass Ji Maharaj at its Sri Guru Ravidass Temple Fresno on Sunday, March 8th, 2021. The celebrations continued with three days Akhand Path Sewa from March 6th, ending with Bhog ceremony on March 8th, 2021.

The 5th Annual Health Fair for the Sri Guru Ravidass Temple, Fresno was held on Sunday, March 7,

2021. Dr. Satnam Bangar and the staff from Valley Health Team (VHT) were able to provide COVID vaccines to temple members and the local rural community. The COVID vaccines were given based on the current Fresno County guidelines. We believe this is the first Temple (Gurudwara Sahib) to hold a mass vaccination for the COVID vaccine.

The Valley Health Team doctors, Dr. Ronald Dominguez, Dr. Satnam Bangar and Dr. Parmala Bangar

assisted with vaccine administration, while Jeanette Lopez and her team provided education and support. VHT's CEO Soyla Reyna-Griffin encourages community outreach to provide access to healthcare, especially in underserved communities. In addition, the Central California Blood Center had their mobile unit on-site for blood donation collection. It was a successful event with over 120 vaccines given and nearly 40 blood donations collected!

A Booklet bearing the title "LOAG GATHAVE PANHEE" published by Shri Guru Ravidass Mission Prachar Sanstha Punjab (Regd) was released by the Guru Ghar Committee. The copies of Booklet were made available through Prem Chumber.

Prem Kumar Chumber, Editor-In-Chief: Desh Doaba / Ambedkar Times provided professional live coverage and taking pictures of the entire function.

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Dr. Paramjit S Takhar, MD



Goodie Takhar, PhD

American Senior Citizens Group, Sacramento



American Senior Citizens Group of Sacramento is an organization of highly accomplished individuals. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions the group has been conducting meetings on the zoom twice a week on Tuesdays from 11am to 12 noon and on Thursdays from 11 am to 1 pm. The group is lead is by a very dedicated management team under the leadership of the chairman S. Sukhchain Singh.

The meeting on Tuesdays is for the spiritual well-being of the members. Gurbani shabds are discussed in question answer sessions to explain the Gurmat philosophy. The meeting on Tuesday, February 23, 2012 was a discourse on the pauri 19 of "Asa Ki Var" on page 473 of Shri Guru Granth Sahib. The Shabad discussion was conducted by Guralp Singh Khaira. The Shabad dealt with

misconceptions, superstitions, delusions, misgivings and erroneous beliefs created by the priestly classes namely Brahmins and Mullahs. It also explained the reasons for the gender equality. Guru ji strongly stressed that females are not inferior to males. The human race could not propagate and survive without the woman.

The meeting on Thursdays normally discuss current events from around the world but especially in USA and from India as it effects members of the group. These include political, environmental and health issues. Covid-19 and USA general elections have dominated the group's topics of discussion over the last few months. The experts from outside the group are invited to address the meetings on important topics.

The meeting on Thursday February 25, 2021 was a special

event, a brain child of our illustrious chairman, S. Sukhchain Singh. It was strictly devoted to entertainment with singing songs, poetry recitals and telling jokes by members. Guest singers were Bibi Manjit KaurSekhonji and Mr. Malik Awan.

ManjitSekhonji is an author of several short story books in Punjabi. She is also a very serious and philosophical Punjabi poet. She recites her poems in a melodious voice creating a lasting effect on the audience. Her recital this time beautifully pointed that wife (Patni) is not a slave owned by husband (Pati).

She found time from her busy schedule which permitted only one song. We hope she will make herself available in the future for our group's invitations.

Our other guest Malik sahib recited the famous Kafi of Baba Bul-

lah Shah with deep reverence to the workings of the Almighty God. The first and the last verses, of this poem are given below:

ਚੜ੍ਹਦੇ ਸਰਜ ਵਲਦੇ ਦੇਖੈ।

ਬੁੱਝੇ ਦੀਵੇ ਬਲਦੇ ਦੇਖੈ।।

ਬੁਲਿਆ ਜਿਨਾ ਕਦਰ ਨਾਂ ਕੀਤੀ ਯਾਰ ਦੀ।

ਹੱਥ ਖਾਲੀ ਉਹ ਮਲਦੇ ਦੇਖੈ।।

In addition the members Mohinder Singh Sidhu, Sukhchain Singh, Ajaib Singh Dhaliwal and Col. Gurmukh Singh told very hilarious jokes. Our resident Singer S. Biker Singh Mann sang beautiful song from yesteryears. Baldev Raj recited a touching poem about the current struggle of the farmers in India. Guralp Singh Khaira Sang couple of his romantic gazals.

Over all the meeting turned out to be the most successful entertaining event with participation by almost all members.



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Economic Growth Rate, Farmers and Labourers

According to the financial data released by the National Statistical Office on February 26, 2021, there has been a slight improvement (0.4 per cent) in the economic growth rate. This marks the end of the technical recession that had been going on for the two quarters before this quarter. During the first quarter of fiscal year 2020-21 (April-June), the economic growth rate was reported to be (-)23.9 per cent, which is now 24.4 per cent as per the revised estimates. During the second quarter of this year (July-September), the economic growth rate was (-)7.5 per cent. The data released by the National Statistical Office shows that the 0.4 per cent economic growth rate in the third quarter of FY 2020-21 has offset the technical recession that emerged in the first two quarters. However, the situation is still dire in this financial year.

Economic growth rate is projected to slow to (-)8 per cent during FY2020-21. During the three quarters of this financial year, the agricultural sector of the economy has made a tremendous contribution. The economic growth rate of the agricultural sector has been recorded at 3, 3.4 and 3.9 per cent respectively. While manufacturing and construction in the industrial sector returned to positive growth during the third quarter, the positive growth in this sector was also in the case of large units, while the position of smaller units remained depressing. In the services sector finance, real estate, professional services, electricity, gas, and water supply have returned to positive growth whereas trade, hotels, transportation, and communications which could provide more employment remained in a state of crisis.

There has been a slight increase in household spending during the festive season, but the Covid-19 pandemic has left households strained in terms of employment and incomes due to lack of government support. At present, the growing number of victims of this pandemic seems to be leading to economic despair and adversely affect economic growth rate.

Economic growth figures are loud enough to make you think seriously. Even at such times, the rulers, without leaving any stone unturned to give false consolations to the common man, deliberately use the services of pro-government and pro-corporate economists to weave a web of statistics in which the common man is confused. Claims to fill their stomachs were easy to refute. Despite the fact that these economists are well aware of the reality, they have been fabricating data and conducting conclusion oriented studies in the hope of getting some petty meaningless favours for themselves. They are seen openly propagating these conclusion oriented studies beyond their normal capacity.

Sometimes the concepts of economic growth and economic development are used interchangeably by some people, which is not fair.

Economic growth rate represents an increase or contraction in GDP, while economic development reflects the living standards of the people. The main determinants of economic development are the level of literacy and education of the people, the level and standard of health services including the number of doctors and other paramedical staff per 1000 persons and the standard of services rendered by them, the availability of housing and their readiness, various aspects of the environment and the average age of the people.

A positive or negative economic growth rate in a country is said to indicate the economic progress of that country. Positive economic growth can be significant, but far more important knows how and for what it is doing. If the economic growth rate of a country is higher than the population growth rate of that country, then it can be considered good only if it reduces the eco-



nomical and other disparities amongst different sections of the people and improves the living standards of the common people. In this regard, it is also important to know that in doing so, the interests of future generations must be taken into account.

The performance of the agricultural, industrial, and services sectors of the country's economy during the first three quarters of the financial year (April-June, July-September, and October-December) shows that during this period the economic growth rate of agricultural sector is excellent. The ray of hope of the economy is only agriculture sector. The pandemic of Covid-19 has made it clear to the world that human beings can survive without cars, bungalows, planes, phones and the like, but the lifeline of humanity is only agriculture. Given this fact and the performance of various sectors of the economy during the first three quarters of the current financial year in the country, it is incumbent upon the rulers of the country to ensure that the agricultural sector and its hard-working farmers, farm labourers and rural artisans. Special attention should be paid to protect the interests of the agriculture sector. In fact, in 2020 the country's rulers went in the opposite direction and enacted three agricultural

laws. With regard to these laws, the Central Government is claiming and propagating that these laws will double the income of farmers and increase the welfare of consumers. From the ongoing dialogue in this regard, it is clear that these laws will be against the interests of farmers, farm labourers, rural artisans and consumers and will also pose a threat to the food security of the country. Realizing these facts, the farmers' organizations had urged the Central Government not to enact these laws. After the enactment of these laws, the farmers' organizations have been constantly struggling for their repeal. This struggle was started by the farmers' organizations of Punjab and other farmers' organizations of the country joined the struggle. After the dialogue on these agricultural laws, other sections of the society joined in this struggle and in the present times it has become a mass struggle. Although at some times there

both these sectors. Already about 50 per cent of the country's population, which depends on agriculture for their livelihood, is being given only about 16 per cent of the national income. Research studies conducted in Punjab and other parts of the country have revealed that almost all marginal and small farmers, farm labourers and rural artisans are born into poverty and debt, live their hard life in poverty and debt, leaving behind the mountain of debt and abject poverty, they either die a death of deprivation or when all hopes for their lives are dashed, they are on the verge of suicide. With the exception of the large farmers, the marginal, small, semi-medium and medium farmers and farm labourers are so indebted that they are not even in a position to pay interest on the loans. These sections also have to take loans to keep the stove burning for only two meals a day. The worst of these categories are the farm labourers and the rural artisans as they have no means of production other than selling their labour.

According to the 66th round of the National Sample Survey, 92.8 per cent of the country's workers were in informal employment during 2009-10. The percentage of informally employed workers has increased further in during the last 10 years as the axe is being sharpened on the public sector. Informal workers remain uncertain about whether they will be able to find employment for the coming day. It is very important to know a very sad fact regarding the general consumers that the NITI Aayog has suggested for reduction of food subsidies to reduce the fiscal deficit. If this is done then the already poor condition of ordinary consumers will get worse. Doing so would be neither in the interest of ordinary workers nor of the country.

To accelerate the country's economic growth, the government needs to formulate and implement policies that ensure a minimum level of income for the agriculturally dependent classes and the informally employed workers so that they can earn a living to meet their basic needs in a respectful manner. To do so, the corporate world-friendly economic development model must be replaced by the people-friendly and nature-friendly economic development model. In such a model, tax rates on the rich will have to be increased and tax collection will have to be ensured. It is important to establish and develop public sector undertakings and regularly monitor and regulate the private sector entities.



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Saving Groundwater in Punjab

On March 4, 2021, on the fourth day of the budget session, concern was expressed over the declining groundwater level in Punjab. Recognizing the serious problem of declining groundwater level in Punjab, the Punjab Government has been asked to take immediate steps to address this problem by passing a unanimous resolution in the Vidhan Sabha. Announcing the formation of a high level committee of the House, the Speaker said that this committee would present its status report on the declining groundwater level in Punjab and its proposals on water recharge methods and resources. The committee will submit a report on its proposals within three months.

There are several reasons for the declining groundwater level in Punjab. One of the most important of these reasons is the use of groundwater for irrigation in agriculture. Dr. Gian Singh, Dr. Surender Singh and Harvinder Singh conducted a research study on the declining groundwater level in Punjab, which was published in their book, "Groundwater Development in Punjab". Falling groundwater levels are recorded in the development blocks in which irrigation water is being used far more than its available quantity for crop production. There is a strong correlation between crop-combination and groundwater balance. In Punjab, for example, wheat and paddy are sown in the declining groundwater development blocks. In Punjab, two crops of wheat and paddy account for more than three-fourths of

the total sown area. With the increase in irrigation resources in Punjab, the increase in the area under crops is also one of the reasons for the declining groundwater level. Punjab's statistics show that the development blocks in which the groundwater level has been steadily declining have a higher crop density than the average crop density of the state. The area under paddy planting is of special importance in relation to the declining groundwater level in Punjab. Irrigation requirement for high yielding varieties of paddy is much higher than that of maize, cotton and many other crops. One of the important reasons for this is the prevalence of pond-irrigation system for paddy crops. In Punjab, since 1973, there has been a rapid increase in paddy planting, especially in the traditionally non-paddy areas and in areas with very low rainfall. Almost all the development blocks in which more of the total sown area is allotted for paddy cultivation are development blocks in which there is a negative balance of groundwater. In view of the immense increase in wheat productivity and production as a result of the success of the 'New Agriculture Technology' in Punjab and the conse-

quent relief to the Union Government from the shackles of importing foodgrains, the Union Government in order to meet the needs of the Central Pool of Foodgrains, through relatively higher MSP of Paddy and its assured procurement by Central Government, the Central Government has imposed paddy crop on the farmers of Punjab. Some of the major problems arising in Punjab due to falling groundwater level can be easily observed. Irrigation was usually done by wells and canals in Punjab before the adoption of the 'New Agriculture Technology'. The adoption of this technique greatly increased the demand for irrigation which resulted in the use of tubewells as the main means of irrigation. The number of tubewells in Punjab during 1960-61 was only 7445 which at present shows a tremendous increase to around 15 lakh. The groundwater level is falling so fast that the submersible motors have to be installed due to the abandonment of the



monoblock motors and the bores of these motors have to be deepened time and time again. This means of irrigation is so expensive that it is beyond the reach of the marginal and small farmers, for which they either take loans or sell some of their already small holdings when the loan is not available. Due to the anti-farmer policies of the Union Government, the Punjab Government has been providing free supply of electricity for agricultural irrigation. As a result, the Punjab Government is facing increasing financial burden. Due to shortage of electricity for irrigation in Punjab, farmers have to run submersible motors on their own or rented tractors and generators, the cost of which is further increasing their debt.

In 1980, there was a shortage of drinking water in 3712 villages of Punjab. In 2007, the number had increased to 8515. At present the number is even higher and the chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides and other chemicals used for agricultural production from the bundle of 'New Agriculture Technology' poisons have dissolved in the groundwater, resulting in As a result, groundwater in most parts of Punjab is no longer directly available for

drinking. Life is not possible without water, so water is the elixir of life. Recognizing the importance of water for all life on earth, this year the United Nations has adopted the theme 'Valuing Water' to celebrate Water Day. The people of Punjab are still suffering due to the declining groundwater level and the problem of severe shortage of groundwater which will be an issue for the people of Punjab in the near future is not easy to predict.

The Union Government and the NITI Ayog have been giving a lot of advice to the Punjab Government and farmers of Punjab on crop diversification, but the Union Government itself has been doing the opposite through its agricultural policies. If the Union Government does not make its agricultural policies pro-farmer, plans growing or planting of crops in accordance with the agro-climatic conditions of different regions, then what to talk about planting of paddy in

Supreme Court of the country. Over time, the rivers have receded. In Punjab, only 27 per cent area is being irrigated with canal water and the re-

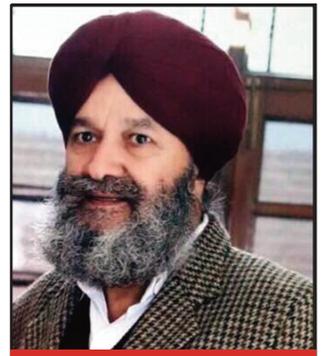
maining 73 per cent area is dependent on tubewells. Justice should be done to Punjab regarding river waters. Therefore, 'The Riparian Principle' of division of river waters should be adopted. The government should invest heavily in canal irrigation to improve the canal irrigation system by constructing check dams on year-round rivers and rivers that run during the rainy season and to improve canal irrigation. Eliminate illegal encroach-

ments on ponds in Punjab and ensure their annual cleaning. Drains should be cleaned and drilled at short distances to allow excess water to seep into the ground. In addition, rainwater harvesting should be done to prevent the groundwater level from falling and old and new wells should be used.

Regarding the efficient use of irrigation water, land reforms in favour of small and marginal farmers and landless farm labourers can be very beneficial as marginal and small farmers use water efficiently by making very small beds in their fields. Increase investment in research and development

work for the development of new economical techniques/methods of irrigation and ensure that preferential subsidies are given to the small and marginal farmers for adopting these techniques and methods.

Apart from the above suggestions, there is a need to strictly curb the misuse of water in industries, cities and villages to curb the fastly declining groundwater level in Punjab. In this regard, people need to be made aware of the need to develop a restrained attitude towards water use so that they realize that even a single drop of wasted water is our unforgivable mistake because this is a matter of governmental/social responsibility as well as individual character and historical role. In order to make groundwater potable, it is necessary for the government to strictly control the use of chemicals/poisons for agricultural production as well as to provide necessary finance and other facilities for research and development works necessary for the development of natural agriculture. The discharge of chemicals, metals, toxic water in industries, cities and villages into rivers, streams, canals, drains, ponds and the like must be strictly stopped.



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