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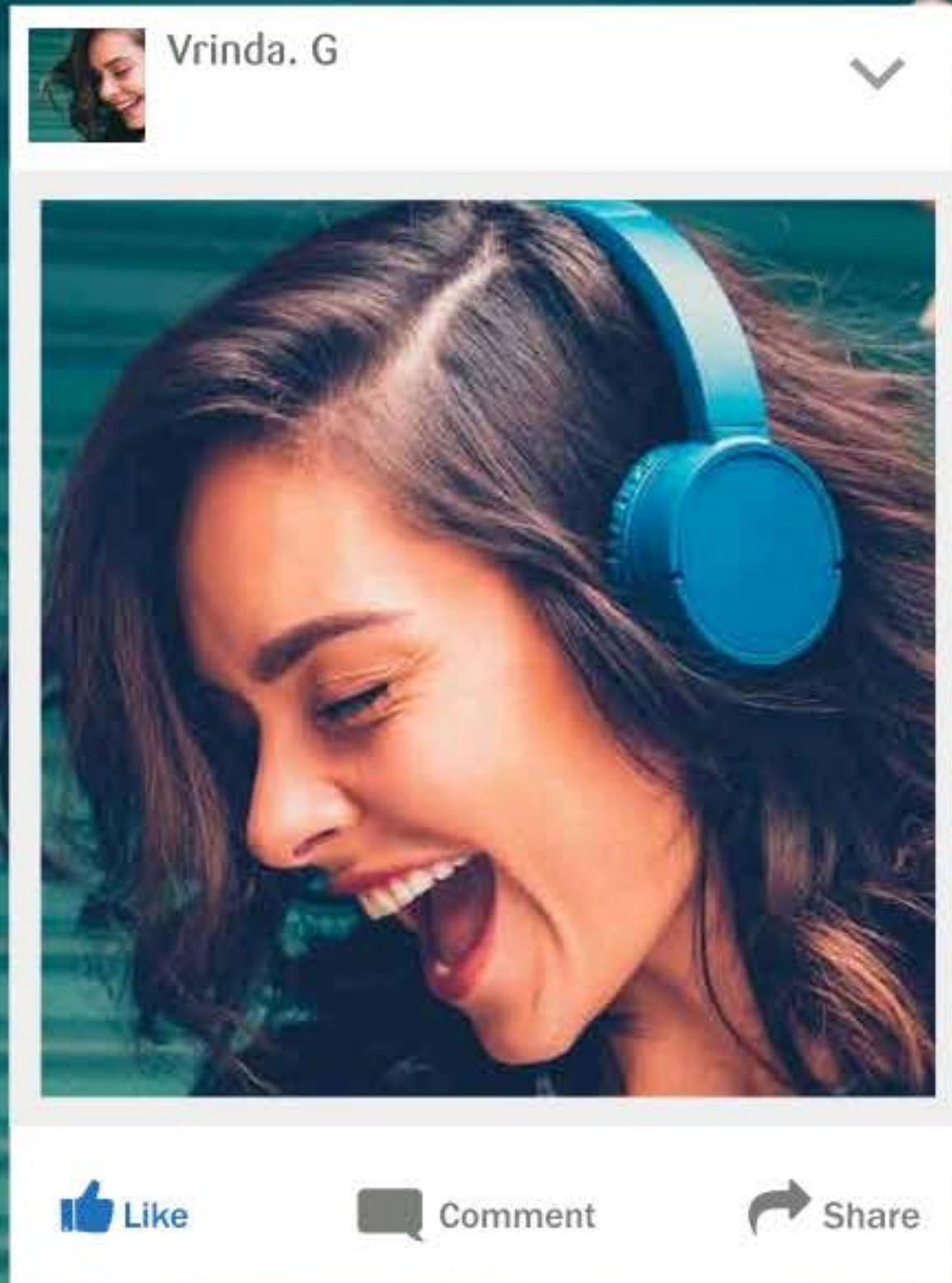
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For decades, American toy company Mattel moulded plastic around the most conventional ideas of beauty. That seems to be changing. More Barbies are going to be realistic.

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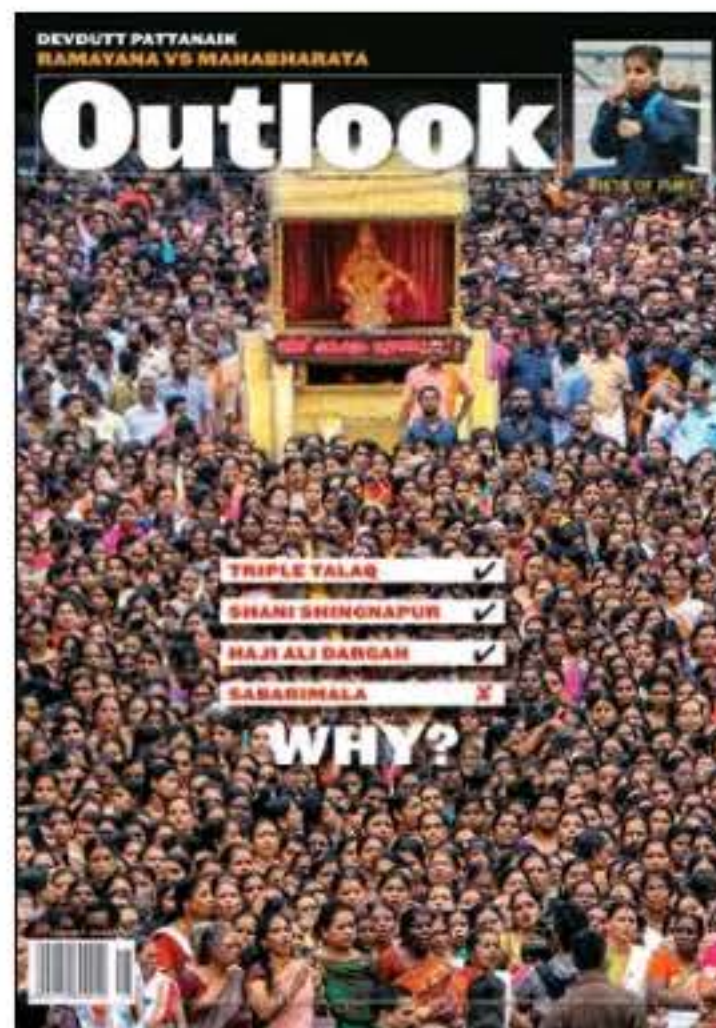
Bitter Bites of Sabari

ON E-MAIL Khalid Alvi: The Sabarimala issue has refused to die out. At first glance, it seems that if someone takes an esoteric stand on a Muslim issue like triple talaq, it is welcomed by many, even in the electronic media (*The Other Mandir*, Dec 3). But when the same approach is employed to critique issues related to the Hindu community, like the Sabarimala issue or the Ram Mandir issue, one is easily branded 'anti-Hindu' and, consequently, anti-nationalist. Of course, this generalisation applies to only some groups and some sections of the media, but these groups are in the majority these days and hence what they say, and how they say it, is very important.

On the other hand, there is another vocal section of society, who are quick to weigh issues like Sabarimala without understanding the complexities associated with these issues. They should understand that matters of belief are sensitive and demand much more thought before rigid conclusions are drawn.

In India, women do not traditionally visit graveyards and cremation grounds. Women were not allowed to visit the Haji Ali Dargah in Mumbai before a PIL was filed by a group of nouveau-feminists in the Bombay High Court pleading that their fundamental rights were being violated through such a tradition. I believe that there is another logic or perspective that can be adopted here. The dargah trust, as a private entity is legally free to frame its own by-laws since it is not funded by public money.

Attukal Bhagawathy temple is a famous shrine dedicated to goddess Badrakali, an incarnation of Mahakali. During the festival of Attukal Pongala, it draws millions of women. At this time, men are not allowed, their entry



December 03, 2018

is banned by convention not by law. The Attukal temple is known as the women's Sabarimala.

There are many traditional and cultural issues which cannot be sorted or untangled within a night. Intellectuals and educated masses should reach out to the general public to help them understand the nuances of gender equality before the law takes its own course to remove gender biases, if that is what they really are.

KANNUR T.P. Sreedharan: The Sabarimala issue cropped up soon after the resilience people in Kerala showed in the face of unprecedented floods. During both periods of crises, chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan showed a steely resolve—first by taking adequate and timely measures to bring about stability in the flood-hit state and then by taking up a brave, rational stand on the 'spiritual' crisis gripping the state. The people of Kerala are all praise for Pinarayi and agree—irrespective of

their political leanings, save a few top-level politicians and their agenda-driven cadre—that he is an able administrator. Those people who had been holding a negative image of him until now have undergone a metamorphosis in their views after witnessing the way he handled the flood crisis. The opposition parties, UDF and the BJP, had even tried to put spokes in the wheels of the administration by exhorting people not to donate money for the distress relief fund of the chief minister. It is not coincidental that these two parties are in the same side in the Sabarimala issue, even as saner minds among the Kerala public are wondering why the supposedly secular Congress should try to take mileage out of parochial Hindu sentiments, which is the wont of the BJP.

MUMBAI S.P. Sharma: Can we really call ourselves secular when the courts of the country consider it okay to interfere in the internal workings of the institutions associated with the beliefs of the majority religion while they look the other way when it comes to the internal religious issues of the minorities? But then, the Constitution was designed by our leaders in such a way that this unbalanced administrative practice is accommodated. For reasons of theoretical fairness, this feature of the Constitution demands a revisit.

ON E-MAIL Sureshkumar Prabhakaran Nair: I am no supporter of the BJP, in fact, I am usually critical of it on many issues. But I have to agree with BJP president Amit Shah on his comments on the Sabarimala verdict—that the courts should not pass unimplementable orders. As Justice Indu Malhotra—the sole dissenting judge in the Supreme Court bench that passed the order of women's entry to

one-liner

DEHRADUN Rakesh Agrawal

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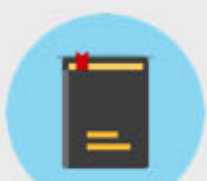
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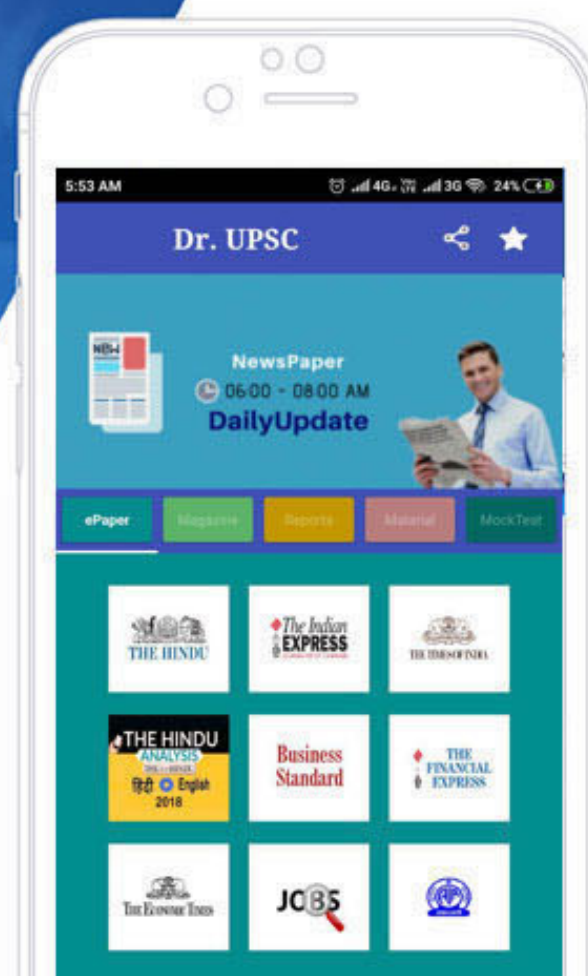


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Sabarimala—wisely said, religion is a matter of faith, and the courts should not ordinarily intrude or intervene in it. To test religion on the anvil of reason is a gross mistake.

It is widely believed that the presiding deity of Sabarimala, Lord Ayappa, is a 'naishthik brahmachari', a celibate, and that is the reason women of the menstruating age are not allowed in his presence. Devotees (Ayappans) abstain from sex, partially fast, wear black clothes, and pray for 41 days before departing for the pilgrimage. All this may be questionable under multiple principles of rationality, but then, it is the belief of the people.

MUSCAT P.A. Jacob: Actually, the whole furore is nothing but a political agenda of Hindu right-wing groups. Both the BJP and the RSS initially welcomed the Supreme Court verdict, but soon saw a golden opportunity to polarise the Hindu community and firm up a votebank. Unfortunately, the so-called progressive nature of the state is slowly declining, in tandem with the slow entry of right-wing elements into Kerala politics. The state seems to be slowly moving towards a new dark age, a pre-renaissance period. This needs to be arrested. A society which sleeps ensconced with archaic rituals and customs will find it difficult to move forward and confront the challenges of the modern age.

BANGALORE H.N. Ramakrishna: Sabarimala was a low-key, seasonal pilgrimage destination. Over the years it has gained immense popularity in the south and millions of devotees now prepare for the austere rituals. The political slugfest currently on is not in the interests of devotees. All devotees ask for a peaceful, safe and spiritually satisfying pilgrimage, instead of this scrimmage.

Global Godzillas Strike

PUNE Anil S.: This refers to the article on Flipkart co-founder's unceremonious exit from the organisation after Walmart brought the company over (*Press Walmart To Clear Cart*, Dec 3). Indian start-up entrepreneurs were having a good run up till now by emulating global models in the e-commerce landscape. But the time has come for the globalisation harvest. After setting up online

INBOXED



Faith On Wheels

GOA M.N. Bhartiya: The story on the Shri Ramayana Express was a winner (*The Train To Hindusthan*, Dec 3)! The launch of this, deploying almost discarded, junked coaches and traversing much of India is a clever entrepreneurial move by the railways. Apart from bringing in revenue, it heightens a thickening Hindu ambience (Ram-Siya chants, use of drummers, actors dressed as characters from the Ramayana) and ties in nicely with the Modi government's mobilisation of Hindutva forces. This also would intimidate the Opposition—they can only accept such a thing. The 800 travellers on the train on their 16-day gruelling tour, fully lost in their Jai Shri Ram routine, are also happily putting up with glaring deficiencies in the ragged sleeper coaches. Such schemes indirectly, effectively, help right-wing forces to strengthen their fight against argumentative rationalists. For peddlers of Hindutva ideology, blind faith is essential. Kulbargi, Dabholkar, Pansare and Gauri Lankesh led a crusade against this, and so were martyred.

stores from scratch in the country, founders of Indian start-ups are being pushed out of the game by the corporate giants of the world. How convenient, the longterm post-liberalisation model is: get the local to painstakingly construct business on the ground and then swallow it whole once the crop is ready. Other Indian entrepreneurs should take lessons from this, but wait, it may already be too late to do that since the global godzillas have entered the city.



WIND WRECK Gaja strikes in TN

Storm Surge

SECUNDERABAD K.R. Srinivasan: Cyclone Gaja made landfall near Nagapattinam in Tamil Nadu, ripped through other districts and claimed several lives (*A Storm With Tusks*, Dec 3). Though the government took measures to protect coastal districts, the severity of the cyclone, triggering landslides, was devastating. It remains to be seen if government machinery deployed in full strength can minimise the loss of property.

India or Ayodhyaastan?

DELHI Anand Malhotra: This refers

to your article on the BJP's name-changing spree (*Welcome to Prayagraj...er Allahabad*, Nov 26). In fact, this practice was started many years ago by other governments—for example, those that renamed Delhi's Connaught Place as Rajiv Gandhi Chowk, Wellington Hospital as Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital and metro cities across the city. These are done with an eye on political gain. The name-changing of cities is only a step further in this direction. It's high time governments realise this is a useless activity. They should instead address unemployment, pollution, agrarian crisis and climate change.

MYSORE M. Jameel Ahmed:

Though the name-changing spree is primarily driven by Islamophobia, there are other motives too. The Sangh parivar is aware of the Modi dispensation's utter bankruptcy on the governance front—skyrocketing prices of essential commodities, falling value of the rupee, failure in generating employment, agrarian distress, farmer suicides and so on. Name-changing may come in handy for the BJP in 2019. The absurdities are mindboggling nonetheless. For example, why are cities being renamed when the country continues to be called by names of Persian and Latin vintage? India is derived from the river Indus, for which the old Persian word was Hindu, which came from the Sanskrit name for that river—Sindhu. Who knows, the global community may take notice of this country as a superpower if it is renamed as Ayodhyaastan? Willing to try? Bravo Sangh parivar, carry on!

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GRADED GURUS

BELOW average, sir," quoth the dread verdict that teachers across Karnataka await with bated breath. Schoolteachers will from now on receive their own report cards from the government, based on how well their students scored in board exams. Scores will range from zero (the lowest) to 10 (the highest), further grouped into four bands: below average, average, good and very good.



Reports based on the SSLC results that came out in May have already been prepared, and will soon be sent to 60,000 teachers in government and aided schools in the state. Officials intend this to be a feedback mechanism, and the reports will come with suggestions on how teachers can improve. Teachers themselves may not take such a rosy view; one told a newspaper that it was unfair to rate a teacher on the performance of students.

SPOOK SQUATS

WHEN out of work, work out. CBI officers, with little on their plates for the time being, with both their number one (director Alok Verma) and number two (special director Rakesh Asthana) out of action due to the ongoing dispute, are keeping themselves busy by hitting the gym at their headquarters on Delhi's Lodhi Road. "Investigations into all



high-profile cases have stopped...so we are hitting the office gym, partly because we have nothing much to do, and partly to stay in shape," one officer said. The SC order on October 26, which limited interim CBI chief Nageshwar Rao's remit to "routine tasks", has served to limit activity further. Vijay Mallya, Laloo Prasad's railway hotel sale, AugustaWestland, Saradha, Narada and other cases stand still, awaiting the officers (and their biceps peaks) on the other side.



A TALLY OF TRUNKS

PERHAPS more daunting than Cold War fears of a 'missile gap', there is an elephant gap between Kerala's districts: Thrissur boasts 145 captive elephants, a veritable regiment, compared to its nearest competitor, Kollam, which makes do with 61, and the apparent pachyderm vacuum of Kasaragode, which has none at all. The state undertook its first ever captive elephant census recently, enumerating 521 beasts across its 14 districts. There were 401 tuskers, 22 tusk-less males and 98 females (also a gender chasm, we see), with the youngest being 9-month-old Kannan and the eldest being 87-year-old Dakshayani, who was awarded the title of *Gaja Muthassi* (elephant grandmother) by the Travancore Devaswom Board. Other details include measurements, shelters, owners and mahouts etc.

FLAB TO FAB

THE fitness bug is everywhere now, and even the bobby's vaunted belly is helpless before its assault. Shankar Uthale, a cop posted in Virar, Maharashtra, realised he had health problems, and worked to shed his stomach's crowning glory over the past six months, going from 92 kg to around 60 kg now—and recently became the first Indian constable to complete the exacting ironman race. The triathlon, which took place in Langkawi, Malaysia on November 17, consisted of an 8.8-km swim, a 180.2-km bicycle ride and a 42.2-km run. You have to complete the lot without any breaks in under 17 hours; Uthale finished in 16 hours and 15 minutes. Two IPS officers—Krishna Prakash, IG VIP securities, in Mumbai, and Ravindra Kumar Singhal, Nashik city commissioner—have achieved this feat before, but Uthale is the first constable to do so.



Illustrations by SAAHIL

BLACK MONKEY BUSINESS

CHURCHILL was wont to refer to his depression as “the black dog”, but Indian astrologers beg to differ. Astrology programmes on TV are touting the act of feeding black dogs or monkeys as a source of good luck, an antidote to the baleful gaze of Shani (Saturn). The popularity of these animals



has consequently shot through the roof. Black monkeys are popular only in holy places, but black dogs are in demand all over. Naturally, creative practices have crept in. One ‘entrepreneur’ says he steals puppies of other colours, dyes them black and sells them for a pretty penny. The police have not deigned to take notice.

BREAKING SEX-ED TABOOS IN MYANMAR

SOUTH Asia has never been comfortable with sex education as a concept. The results of this tendency are, obviously, not positive, with many children growing thoroughly confused about ideas related to sex. A 35-year-old woman in Myanmar is trying hard to change this attitude in her own way in her country. Thet Htwe has been running a sex-education campaign since 2016 under her organisation Strong Flowers. “It used to be almost all women attending my class when I started out. But there is definitely an increase in the number of men coming now,” Htwe says.



Ministering To Hope

PAKISTAN may be reeling from a whopping trade deficit of over \$19 billion; the dollar may have shown a record rise against the Pakistani rupee and PM Imran Khan may well be knocking on various doors for a bailout package. But it will be wrong to call it an economic crisis, says finance minister Asad Umar. Rejecting the very notion, Umar spoke thus at the South Asian Economic Summit in Islamabad: “Those spreading rumours about the economy were not doing any favour to the country.” He claimed the “financing gap for the current fiscal year has been met.”

But the minister’s remarks came, according to *Dawn*, a day after stocks suffered the worst single-day decline in 16 months as the Karachi Stock Exchange (KSE)-100 index tumbled 1,335.43 points (3.30 per cent) and closed at 39,160.60.

However, Umar assured delegates at the summit that “all fundamental economic indicators are improving as a result of the present government.”

He also pointed out that exports were increasing while imports and the current account deficit showed a downward trend.

Referring to the record rise of the US dollar against the Pakistani rupee, the finance minister said though the rupee has been witnessing depreciation since last year, the situation was improving. He also stressed that no compromise would be made on the independence of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). Interestingly, a day earlier, PM Khan admitted that he was unaware of the SBP’s move to devalue the currency against the dollar and came to know about it through the media.

“Please remember, we are trying to autonomise institutions,” Umar said. “We have made SBP autonomous, they took the decision because they deem it fit.” He said the PML-N government had left a trade deficit of \$19 billion, which increased from the previous deficit of \$2.5 billion.

“The PML-N government had spent \$7 billion to [artificially] maintain the value of the rupee,” he said. Umar added that the SBP was compelled to depreciate the rupee in order to preserve the country’s foreign currency accounts, tied as the government was to the \$19bn trade deficit.

Interestingly, though Imran tried to put up a brave front like his finance minister, he did admit that there was a crisis. “We are facing a foreign exchange crisis. Our [macro-economic] indicators are now headed in the right direction; we will not face the issue in the future.”

Hope such encouraging words would also help lift the mood of investors about the economy.

Finance minister Asad Umar painted a soothing picture: the economy was not in crisis, the rupee’s fall was arrested and SBP had a free hand.

SOON, TICKETS TO KAPOOR HAVELI

REMEMBER the Kapoor haveli by the lanes of Qissa Khwani bazaar? The one in Peshawar! Well, it’s likely that Peshawar folk and those visiting the city won’t miss it anymore. The Pakistani government has decided to convert the haveli, the ancestral home of Bollywood’s Kapoor family, into a museum on the request of actor Rishi

Kapoor. “There was a call from Rishi Kapoor and he requested that his family home be converted into a museum or some sort of institution,” Pakistani foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi was quoted as saying. Prithviraj Kapoor’s father Bashesvarnath Kapoor had built the haveli. The Kapoor family had to leave Peshawar after Partition.



MOURNING STAR Sully, the service dog of US ex-president George H.W. Bush, in front of his casket in Houston.

deep throat

GAME OF THRONES

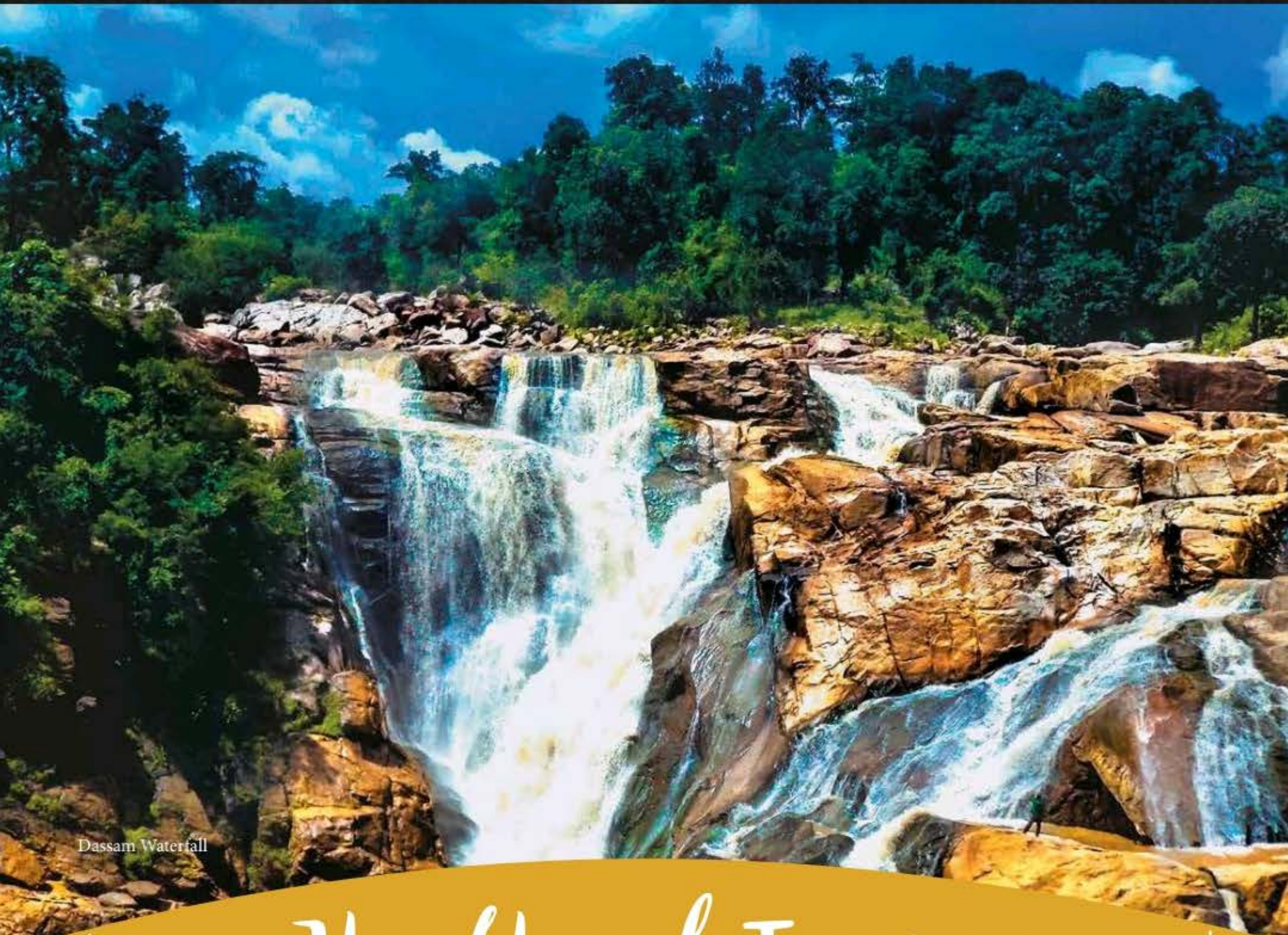
The race for a new Rajasthan chief minister—in case the Congress wins, that is—has taken a new twist. It is not just about state chief Sachin Pilot and former CM Ashok Gehlot. Party president Rahul Gandhi's off-the-cuff remark about the possibility of a woman CM has triggered a race among senior woman leaders. Supporters of Girija Vyas, contesting from Udaipur, are convinced that Rahul hinted at her as a contender. Other Rajasthan Congress leaders say they have their own royalty, Chandresh Kumari of the Jodhpur royal family, who can take over from incumbent chief minister Vasundhararaje.

THE BROKEN BRIDGE

When Prashant Kishor joined the Janata Dal (United) and was subsequently elevated to the position of its national vice president by Bihar CM Nitish Kumar, he was expected to work as a bridge between his party and the BJP. He had, after all, designed Narendra Modi's campaign for the 2014 Lok Sabha polls. But he appears to have done the opposite: widening the chasm between the two allies, and that too over the Patna University Students Union polls. Some BJP legislators have accused Kishor of trying to influence the polls to help JD-(U) candidates. Kishor's vehicle was recently stoned while he was returning after meeting the vice chancellor. The final chapter of the BJP-JD(U) alliance probably has not been written yet.

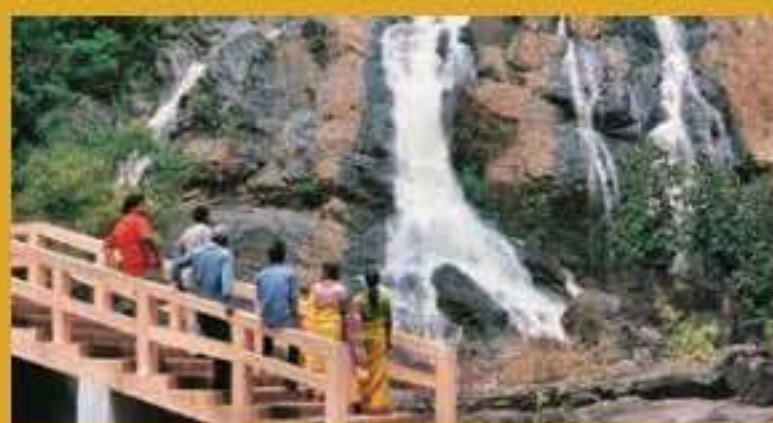
FRIENDS AND ALLIES

DMK leader Stalin had to do some firefighting after his party treasurer Durai Murugan labelled the MDMK and VCK as 'just friendly parties' and not electoral allies. Stalin had to immediately reassure them that they would be part of the seat-sharing exercise for the Lok Sabha polls. Stalin feels that only by roping in more parties, the DMK can keep the Congress's quota to single digit. Meanwhile, minor allies would be presented with a condition—that they contest the elections on the DMK symbol. That would boost the number of its MPs, which in turn will increase its bargaining clout for ministerial berths.



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Jharkhand Tourism



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R.K. VIJ

The Forest Is Alive

There's a new Maoist general secretary, but guerrilla bases have

THE proscribed CPI (Maoist) has now a new general secretary, Namballa Kesava Rao alias Basvaraju alias Gaganna, who was the central military commission (CMC) chief till recently. He replaced Mupalla Laxman Rao alias Ganapathy, the general secretary for about 25 years, who reportedly chose to retire voluntarily due to failing health and old age. The leadership change has brought to the fore an important question: will the organisation become more aggressive and ferocious now?

Till recently, Kesava Rao, as in-charge of the CMC, not only commanded all major offensives against security forces but was also responsible for various developments in the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA). In fact, the strength of the PLGA in Dandkarnaya increased sharply in order to crush the Salva Judum (Peace March) that rose spontaneously in May-June 2005 (against the Maoists as a challenge) in Chhattisgarh. The strength of the PLGA though continued to increase till 2010-12; it couldn't keep pace with the simultaneous advancements made by the security forces. Consequently, not only Battalion Number 2 of the PLGA split into its original two companies, the strength of all other military formations also suffered shortage of militia. By the time the CPI (Maoist) reviewed its 'countrywide movement' at the fourth central committee meet in April 2013 and realised its 'critical situation', many companies had reduced into platoons and then into guerrilla squads. All this happened under the nose of Kesava Rao, then chief of the CMC.

In fact, the latest change in the CPI (Maoist) does not make any difference to the security forces. The Maoists have suffered setbacks in the past years and repeatedly admitted this at their fourth and fifth CC meeting. The CPI (Maoist), at their Unity Congress—the ninth held in 2007—decided to convert guerrilla war into a mobile war, Dandkarnaya (DK) and Bihar-Jharkhand (BJ) into base areas and the PLGA into PLA. Dandkarnaya was one of their priority areas. However, after huge deployment of central and state police forces in the Bastar region, the objectives of the Unity Congress could not be realised but for occasional offensive against the security forces. A number of new camps and police stations have been set up in the Bastar region and advancements made by the security forces. This has not only resulted in a direct decrease of overall distances to be covered by the security forces, but has also reduced their vulnerability to counterattack. The guerrilla tactics as summarised and

propagated by Mao Zedong that 'the enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy retreats, we pursue' hardly remains a challenge for the security forces.

The Maoists have consistently admitted since 2013 that the new recruitment into their organisation has almost dried up. Except for the South Division (one of the nine in Dandkarnaya Special Zonal Committee (DKSZC)), recruitment has almost reduced to zero in most Maoist divisions. Their Chetanaya Nataya Manches (CNMs) are no more able to attract the village youth. In fact, more cadres are leaving than joining the outfit. Most of the cadre have become war-weary and stopped expecting any revolutionary results. The surrender and rehabilitation policy of the Centre and state authorities have shown encouraging results. Even the frontline ideologues of

the party like CC and DKSZC members did not miss to swallow the benefits of this policy when they surrendered before the police in their respective states of domicile.

More surprisingly, though most of the surrendered junior cadres are usually killed by the active Maoists, the surrender of senior cadres is not even criticised by their top body. Even Kesava Rao, the in-charge of all military actions preferred to remain silent. The recent surrender of CC member Jampanna in December 2017 in Telangana and of DKSZC member Pahaad Singh in August 2018 in Chhattisgarh shows that the trend has continued to progress.

Similarly, even the expansionist policy of the Maoist has not worked over the past years. After taking the decision in the 2014 Central Regional Bureau (CRB) meeting, the CPI (Maoist) tried to develop a new war front by sending a bunch of

armed cadres from Bastar to the triangular area of Maharashtra-Madhya Pradesh-Chhattisgarh (MMC) hoping that the security forces deployed in the Bastar region will disperse. However, the state governments took proactive steps to strengthen their security infrastructure, deploying additional resources, and did not allow the Maoists to have their way. Some eastern parts of Chhattisgarh, falling under the Odisha State Committee of the Maoist, have not only shrunk in area, but also reduced in cadre strength. The Maoists are continuously suffering setbacks here.

Further, the top and experienced Maoist leadership has weakened and grown old. While many are in jail, a few have been killed in police action. The killing of CC member Kishenji in West Bengal and fellow member Koppam Devarajan in Kerala was a huge setback for their party and morale booster for the



Will the outfit become more hostile after an ailing and old Ganapathy gave the baton to a new man?

Behind The Firebreak

shrunk, recruitment dried up. Will the change of guard affect the security forces?

TRIBHUVAN TIWARI



ONE ADVICE Don't fall into an ambush, the top killer of security forces in Maoist insurgency areas

police forces. Following the decision 'on the veteran comrades of the party' at the fifth CC meeting, Ganapathy voluntarily withdrew because of ill health and old age. Others in the queue are Kishanda, Anand, Sangram, Kosa and Devuji. However, the security forces must not lose sight of the fact that the Maoists have undertaken to organise plans like leadership training programme (LTP) and military leadership training programme (MLTP) to make up for the shortfall.

DESPITE making huge advances, the security forces cannot afford to sit in camps and relent. Whereas the new general secretary will try to rejuvenate the cadres, our security forces have to march on till such insurgent groups are defeated or brought to the peace table. The Maoists have decided to focus mainly on 'displacement' of tribals and 'exploitation' of the labour and landless class in the rural areas. Though disturbed with the latest arrests, they have also decided to speed up work in urban areas. Organising 'united front' against the government is one of their main agendas.

The Maoists continue to rely on the PLGA as their main weapon of people's war. The three recent attacks in Chhattisgarh, before the assembly elections on November 12 that killed more than a dozen and left many wounded, shows that the Maoists' reliance on improvised explosive devices (IEDs) has not abated and these still remain one of their major weapons. They have also successfully experimented radio operated and

remotely controlled IEDs in a few cases.


Second, the Maoists' expansionist policy has to be checked totally. The MMC zone, a comparatively recent development in Chhattisgarh, must not be allowed to grow and take roots. Any land-related or other potential issue that could be exploited by the Maoists should be timely addressed by the state administration. As soon as any area is secured from the Maoists' influence it must be supplemented by development projects so that the probability of the outfit's revival is eliminated.

Third, the secrecy of anti-Maoist operations must be maintained. The security forces must not fall victim to the Maoists' ambushes, at least the deliberate ones. Though the forces are now equipped with better technology, more attention is required on the tactical side. The CMC, in a circular issued to their party members in July

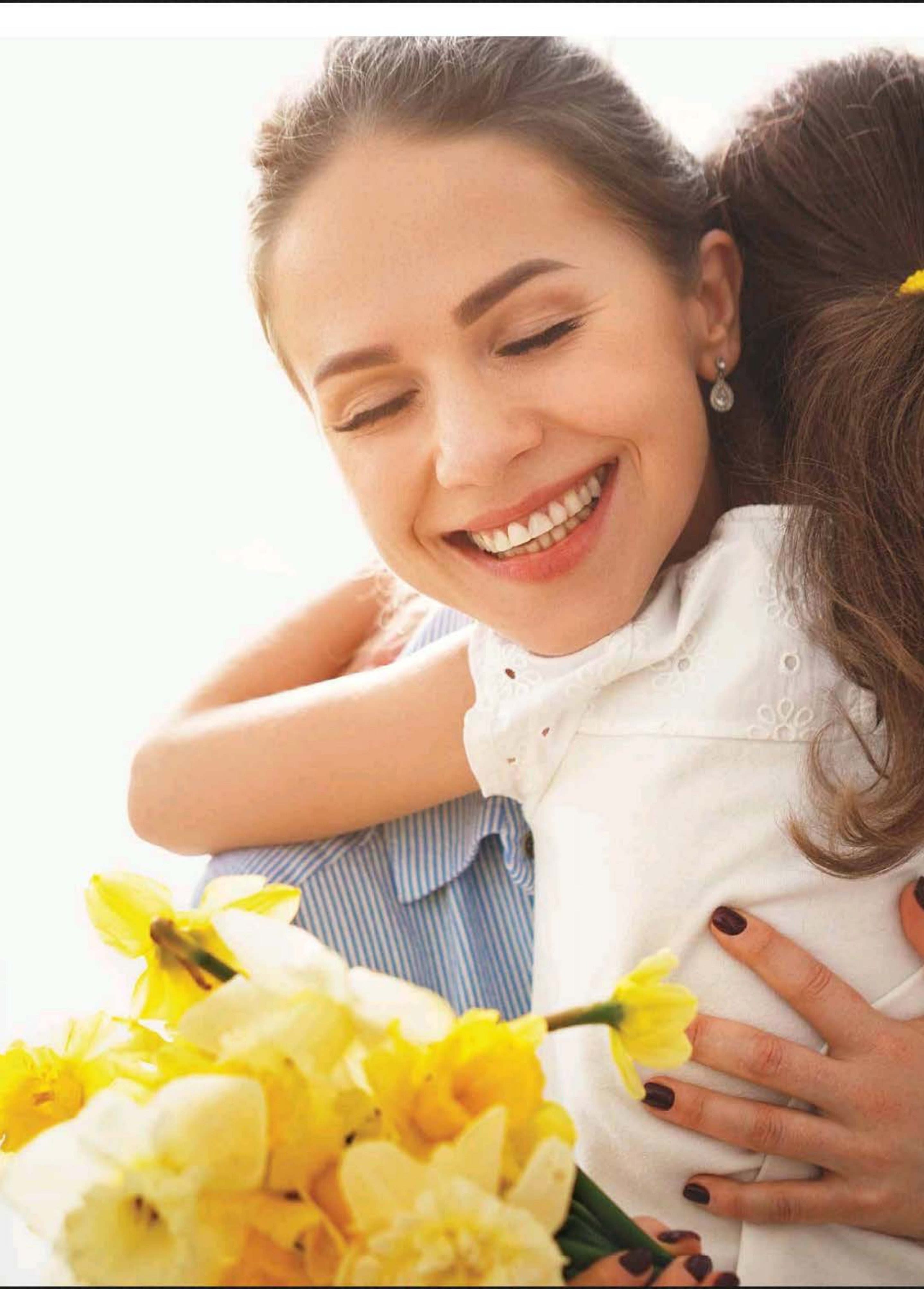
2018, have warned the senior cadres not to choose 'Tumirgunda-Kasanur' (of Garhchiroli) kind of place for meetings since it is not suitable for a hasty retreat. Likewise, the security forces must plan their operations carefully with an objective to defeat the guerrilla tactics.

Fourth, the Maoists are taking advantage of social media to propagate their ideology and gain support of groups having similar leanings. The arrest of techie Abhay Devdas Nayak, a member of the 'Coordination Committee of the Maoist Organisations in South Asia' (CCOMPOSA), in June 2018 by the Bastar police shows that they are quite active on social media. They also use encrypted media to secure their internal communication. Since Kesava Rao is a technical expert, continuous monitoring of social media by security experts is essential.

The incident-free assembly elections, the first phase covering all eight severely affected districts of Chhattisgarh, indicates that the state, if equipped with sufficient manpower and infrastructure, can effectively deal with the Maoists. The killing of nine Maoists in November 2018 near Sakler in Sukma district shows that the guerrilla bases are no longer their secluded dens.

This momentum of the security operations and development work needs to be maintained. The Maoist leadership change will not affect the security forces on the ground. Now that the guerrilla base of the Maoist has shrunk, recruitment dried up, surrenders increased, PLGA and top leadership weakened; it is more of a cause for concern for Kesava Rao than the security forces who are determined to take the fight to its logical end. 

(The writer is Special Director General of Police, Chhattisgarh. The views expressed are personal)





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— S W E D E N —

BY NASEER GANAI IN SRINAGAR

A huge banner outside the main gate of the J&K Bank headquarters in Srinagar reads: "Honour the sentiments of people and stop (playing) politics. Rollback SAC decision." It has been put up by the All India Jammu and Kashmir Bank Officers Federation, which is asking the government to revoke the State Advisory Council's (SAC) November 22 decision to treat the J&K Bank Limited as a public sector undertaking (PSU). The SAC meeting was chaired by governor Satya Pal Malik and the decision was taken without consulting the bank's board of directors, which include five independent directors, a state government nominee and an RBI nominee.

The move has created a political storm with all regional parties and trade bodies across J&K insisting that the governor revoke the order. Raising concern over "politicising the autonomy of J&K Bank", the Jammu Chamber of Commerce and Industry as well as the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry have asked the governor to review the decision.

Inside the bank's corporate HQ, officers are worried about the consequences of the decision. They fear government control would turn the bank into an entity like any other state PSU, most of which are running losses due to alleged political and bureaucratic interference. "Bring the bank under the ambit of the Right to Information Act by all means, but changing its character and making it a PSU is fraught with danger," says an official.

However, bank officials concede that public outcry over recruitments to the bank during the terms of the NC-Congress and the PDP-BJP governments did somewhat mar its reputation. The alleged backdoor recruitments and mismanagement at the top, coupled with the overall economic situation, resulted in bad loans and, in 2016, for the first time in its 80 years, the bank posted losses. The governor alleged that the current bank administration exposed the chinks in the armour by pandering to



Banking on Tight

Governor stirs a hornet's nest over J&K Bank, leading to

powerful politicians in the matter of hiring, giving himself enough room to change the bank into a PSU. That didn't go down well with the parties, which say some cases of alleged backdoor appointments have been used as a ruse to rob the bank of its autonomy.

"I unambiguously reject the changes," says Peoples Conference chairman Sajjad Gani Lone. "The bank needs to be

made bereft of government control, not drowned in it. This is literally the sole lending institution and lending decisions should be commercial decisions outside the ambit of politics."

Urging the governor-led administration to restrict itself to basic governance, "which they are mandated to do, but are, incidentally, not doing", Lone says structural changes pertaining to the bank are

Regional parties say the decision to turn the J&K Bank into a PSU should not have been taken when there is no elected legislature.

"The J&K Bank's operational autonomy will be fairly curbed, which can put a spanner in its growth," says a senior bank official.

Post-protests, the governor told bank employees that the issue of accountability to the legislature will be "re-examined".



SAYING NO A protest by All India J&K Bank Officers Federation

who was CM in the PDP-BJP government that went out of power when the national party withdrew support this June, opening the way for governor's rule, accuses the new administration of plunging J&K into crisis after crisis. She says the governor is issuing orders that would only fuel the crises in the conflict-hit state.

The J&K Bank, an old-generation private-sector bank with a workforce of 14,000, is the only bank in the country with a state government holding the majority stake (59.3 per cent). It has 15 million accounts of 11 million account-holders. Coming under the RBI's regulatory purview and supervision, it is the only private bank designated as the central bank's agent for carrying out banking business for the state government.

Despite having the J&K government as the major shareholder, the bank was fairly out of its control. The government's role is limited to appointment of a few directors and nomination of the chairman to the RBI. The finance secretary, who otherwise is the topmost finance man in the state, is just any other director on the board of the bank, which is headed by the chairman. Making it a PSU can change all that. The government can appoint any official as the managing director, who would be subordinate to the finance secretary. For all major decisions, the bank shall have to seek approvals from the finance department. And like it is for other PSUs, the bank CEO would have to seek permission from the finance department even to move outside the state for normal business. "In a nutshell, the bank's operational autonomy will be fairly curbed, which can put a spanner in its growth," argues a senior official.

Former finance minister Haseeb Drabu is furious. He accuses the government of downgrading the bank by turning it into an entity on a par with any other state PSU such as the J&K State Road Transport Corporation. He says the bank is supervised by the RBI and audited by the CAG, besides having internal auditors. Now that it has been declared a state PSU, the legislature and other bodies of the government would be interfering in its decision-making, Drabu believes.


"The bank will have to submit its annual report to the legislature like all state PSUs must, but commercial banks

owned by the government of India don't have to submit their annual reports to Parliament! Where is this coming from?" asks Drabu. "What makes it unacceptable is that it is done by an administration that is neither elected by the people nor accountable to them."

A former MD of a PSU tells *Outlook* that political and bureaucratic interference will erode the bank's system, on the lines of what's happened with the other PSUs. "Take the State Finance Corporation. It has had a negative net worth for years because of mounting losses and NPAs. All efforts of recapitalisation have gone in vain. Political interference has resulted in a situation where almost 90 of its 160 employees are Class IV employees," says the ex-official, who doesn't wish to be named.

DISMISSING the perception about J&K Bank bailing out people during the unrest in 2008, 2010 and 2016 by keeping its branches open as "simplistic analysis", the former MD explains, "Many factors are responsible for the resilience of the people. For example, the state has always had a large cash-to-deposit ratio, which helps people tide over long periods of strikes. The fairly large number of government employees, the salaried class, is another reason. Strikes don't affect salaries. Also, most of the spending that keeps the economy running comes from the government itself. That money circulates. And the apple economy is largely unaffected by strikes."

And when an unmoved governor Malik told reporters that only people having "personal or political interests" in J&K Bank are opposing the move, Drabu minced no words: "Of course, I have a personal interest in J&K Bank. We have emotional equity in it. Your (governor's) decision is against the state's economic interest, and that's against my political interests. Neither is mala fide. Wish one could say the same about your (governor's) decisions."

After the protests and threats of an agitation by political parties, the governor met the bank employees on Tuesday and said, "In view of the concerns expressed, and to give comfort to employees, the government will re-examine the issue of accountability to the legislature." As of now, the parties seem pleased to have forced a rethink. 

Control

protests and then a step back

not acceptable. "Please don't invent new problems"—that's his message to the governor, who has come under severe criticism for taking a decision that the regional parties insist is the prerogative of an elected government.

Former CM Farooq Abdullah of the NC calls it "highly unbecoming of the governor administration to fiddle with our institutions when a popularly elected government is not in place". "The SAC's onslaught on the prime financial institution of our state, the J&K Bank, is a case in point," he says, asking for a rollback of the SAC decision.

For her part, the PDP's Mehbooba Mufti,



THE HUMINT COST OF COIN

In Kashmir, both sides use the same deterrence tactics, with different results

NOVEMBER saw 37 militants killed in Kashmir, 22 of them in the last 10 days of the month. This intensified counterinsurgency (COIN) response came in the wake of killings of ‘informers’ by militants. The latter had abducted civilians accused of passing information to the army about militant movements. At least two were killed—one was showered with a volley of bullets, and another one had his throat cut. These killings were recorded, went viral on social media and sparked outrage in the Indian media, with many calling the second one an “ISIS-style execution”.

This is not the first time visuals depicting violence have emerged from Kashmir. The army has circulated videos of houses burning, killings of militants and the roadside torture of civilians. The logic is the same for both the militants and the army: deterrence. Both groups are willingly broadcasting the repression—defined here as a group’s capacity to increase its opponents’ cost of collective action—they subject their targets to, and which they deem necessary to threaten and weaken the forces working against their respective causes. The local population on whose behalf the militants claim they fight (and the resources this population controls) is, in Mao Zedong’s words, a “sea” through which militants must “swim like fish”.

But this ecosystem is disrupted by defections in the population, which the COIN regime effects through money, drugs, and blackmail to turn people who are later tasked with gathering intelligence. In Kashmir, this practice is also institutionalised through appointments in the police. At least eight special police officers were killed this year by militants, and nearly a dozen resigned publicly out of fear of meeting the same fate.

‘Human intelligence’ (HUMINT) is at the heart of COIN strategy, as it can provide valuable information that more technologically-oriented assets cannot. This HUMINT grid has been the central target of militant action this year, through abductions of policemen and their relatives, killings and other threats. The security forces have resorted to similar tactics. Destruction of property has become an important part of their standard operating procedure. IndiaSpend accessed official documents, and found that as many as 105 houses were destroyed between 2015 and June 2018 in Pulwama district alone. Nocturnal raids, detention of family members of militant commanders, and torture—besides regular killings of civilians—are routine practices employed by the security apparatus,

and do not signal a significant departure from past, particularly the ‘90s. However, this deterrence-through-repression plays out differently on each side.

Repression by the army has raised the costs of militant action astronomically, but has also facilitated its mobilisation. New recruits are driven to militancy because of overwhelming state violence—though this is not the exclusive cause; in their last phone conversations with their militant sons, many parents encourage them to go down fighting. In the most recent conversation to go viral on social media, militant commander Umar Majeed Ganaie’s mother exhorted him thus: “Do not let them touch you. Fight. I always wanted you to return home a martyr.” This suggests unprecedented public support for the cause and idea of militancy. Since the militant organisations today lack in arms, and their members in training, the only resource that keeps the movement kicking is its people and their willingness to kill and be killed. In the past decade, the total number of militants active in Kashmir has remained almost constant despite hundreds being killed each year.

The army, on the other hand, better organised and trained, and adequately equipped, has not suffered proportional numerical damages—but has lost the battle for control of the streets. November also witnessed a shift in the timing of encounters. Almost all encounters in the last 10 days started before dawn, and were declared over by morning. This is happening because the

harsh weather conditions make nocturnal movement difficult, forcing militants to stay in place. The security forces attack before day breaks and the militants can move, and before civilians arrive to confront the forces. The latter is the second reason for this shift, because of the embarrassment security personnel have to face. Men and women, young and old, come out to rescue militants, and on occasion force security personnel to retreat.

The purpose of HUMINT, as the US counterinsurgency manual puts it, is to provide precise intelligence to help the counterinsurgents eliminate insurgents from the populace “like surgeons cutting out cancerous tissue while keeping other vital organs intact.” In Kashmir, it seems, the Indian state is confronted by a body ‘diseased’ with ‘cancer’ in its entirety. At present, death seems to be the only cure the Indian state is offering, and people are not shying away from accepting it.

(The writer is a research scholar at Jamia Millia Islamia.

The views expressed are personal.)



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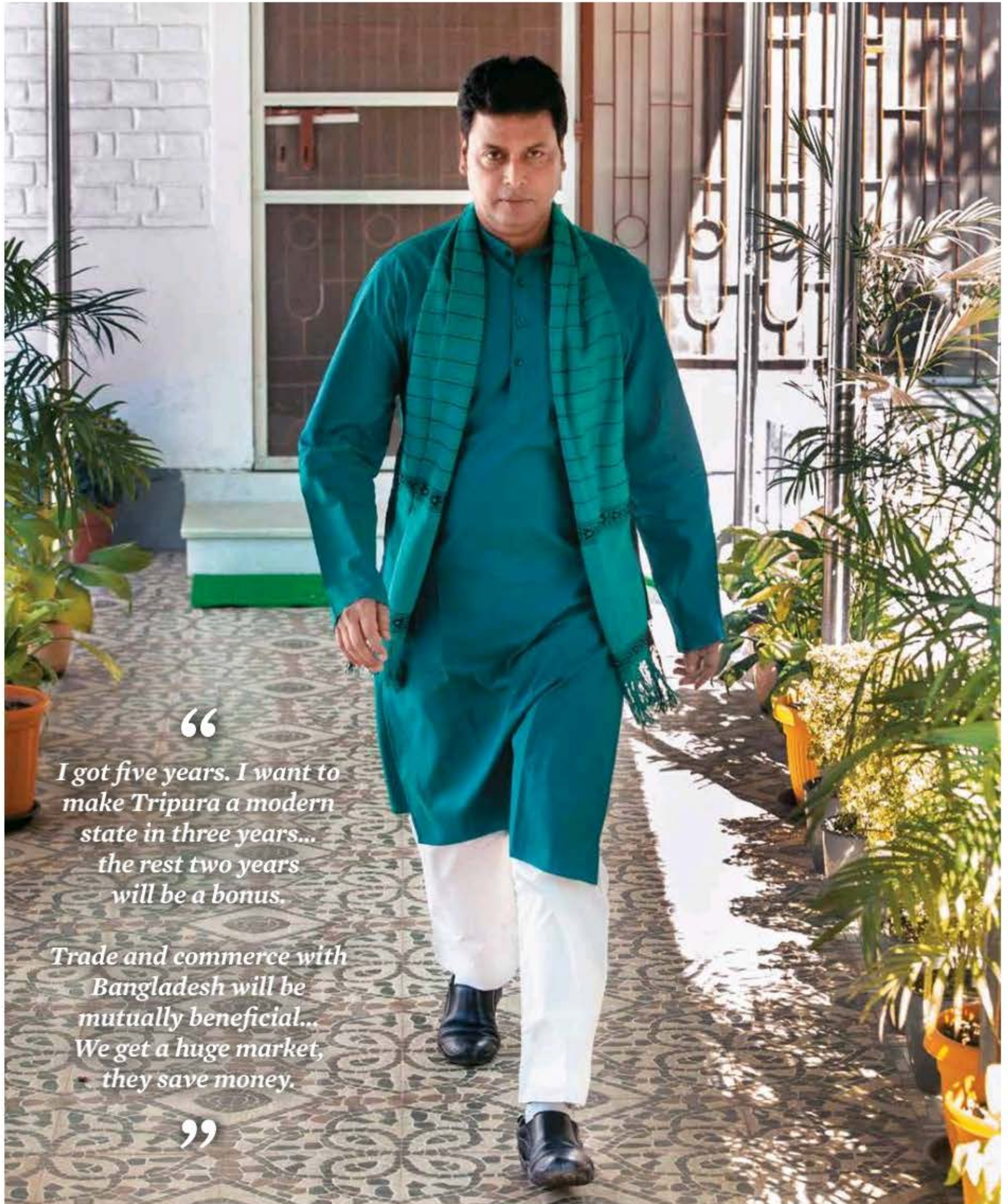


Tamil Nadu GIM



Registration

"I see Tripura as the gat



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I got five years. I want to make Tripura a modern state in three years... the rest two years will be a bonus.

Trade and commerce with Bangladesh will be mutually beneficial... We get a huge market, they save money.

”

Photograph: SANDIPAN CHATTERJEE

eway to the Northeast”

It's easy to mistake Biplab Kumar Deb, 48, as an ordinary next-door neighbour. The chief minister of Tripura betrays neither his age nor the political weight he has come to acquire since his Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition wrested power last February in this northeastern state, routing the long-entrenched Left Front. At the helm of a once insurgency-riddled state, currently plagued by underdevelopment and unemployment, Deb faces stiff challenges. But he, who not long ago regularly trained with weights in the gym, is confident that Tripura will be back in shape soon. He spoke to Editor Ruben Banerjee about his plans. Excerpts...

Your ally, the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) is continuing to call for a separate state for tribals, the Tipraland. Are you in a position to accommodate such a demand?

It's not like that...like every other party, IPFT has a political agenda. But when we formed an electoral alliance, we agreed on certain things. They agreed with PM Narendra Modi's vision of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas. People voted for this and IPFT knows this. So for now, we are busy working for the welfare of the people. Nothing else matters.

But is Tipraland, a separate tribal state carved out of Tripura, a possibility?

I cannot predict as I am no astrologer. I am an ordinary BJP worker and I am busy working for the people.

IPFT can at some point seek to rake up the issue of a separate tribal homeland for political reasons.

Being in the government is something new for both the BJP and IPFT in Tripura. It was during the Left Front's misrule that the issue of separate statehood was raised since tribals, comprising 32 per cent of the population, felt deprived. But since we came to power, we have been jointly working for their uplift. Tribals too feel they are no more being neglected.

Do you think meeting tribal expectations is going to be a challenge? Will you give more autonomy to Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council?

Since PM Modi took office, Tripura has been on the path of development. Con-

nectivity to the region is improving. More funds that cannot be diverted for other purposes are being given. Even if I don't want, I can't stop development, thanks to Modiji. There is neither shortage of resource nor intent. But, of course, we are all for financially developing the autonomous body. A report from the central home ministry is awaited.

Will you increase the number of assembly seats reserved for tribals? At present, 20 of the 60 are reserved.

Reservation has been there for a long time and there's no demand for an upward revision. Plus, Tripura is a small state with each assembly segment having around 40,000 voters. To have even smaller constituencies may not make sense.

Some quarters in your state are seeking an Assam-type NRC since Tripura is a border state. Illegal immigration happens here too. Are you in favour of it?

“

“The issue of a separate tribal state arose during Left's misrule...Tribals now feel they are no more being neglected.”

The NRC is a central government issue and it has been implemented in Assam. A lot of people said it will result in chaos, but nothing of that sort happened. The Assam CM is not worried about it, but strangely the Bengal CM is. So I think we should be patient. If the NRC is beneficial and is implemented in the entire country, there is no harm. If it's bad, let the Centre decide. Let's wait for this experiment's results.

So you don't find anything negative about the NRC?

Yes, not yet. Let's wait for the outcome.

Coming back to development, what are your key focus areas?

My key focus areas are tourism, entrepreneurship development and self-employment. Around 7.5 lakh youth are unemployed and government jobs alone will not be sufficient. We are encouraging entrepreneurs. In the past eight months, around 820 artisans have registered and

they have created jobs for 4,000 people. Tourism can create jobs quickly. Tripura has so much untapped tourism potential. **You share a border with Bangladesh. Are you seeking ways to leverage that?** Of course, yes. Chittagong port is just about 100km from where my home is.

So you'll essentially become the gateway to the entire Northeast?

Yes, gateway to the northeastern states. Bangladesh's economy will benefit in a big way, so will ours. For example, Bangladesh needs 10,000 metric tonnes of tea. They import from other countries. If we sell it to them, they will receive the consignment in one hour at reduced transportation cost. We get a huge market, they save money. The benefit will be mutual.

How about creating education and healthcare hubs in Tripura because Bangladeshis in large numbers are going elsewhere?

Absolutely. Besides improving our own government infrastructure, we are in talks with private players. We wish to create super-specialty hospitals. For Bangladeshis, Tripura will be a cheaper and easier option. My mandate is for five years, but I want to see Tripura as a modern state in three years. The remaining two years will be a bonus. I see no reason why my state cannot develop. We are a power-surplus state. We generate 700-750MW against our requirement of 200MW. We are the nation's second-largest producer of rubber after Kerala.

As you aim to get Tripura into shape, I am told you are a fitness freak yourself. Were you a gym instructor before as many believe?

No, never. I come from a village; I went to a gym when I was young. When I moved to Delhi, I would go to the gym in the evening after work.

Do you still go? At a programme in Delhi, which was shown on TV, you surprised everyone by doing 27 push-ups on the stage.

It's 47 in fact. I don't get time to go to gyms any more, but I still do 100-150 pushups every day. I keep myself in shape. I want my homeland to be in shape as well. Nothing is dearer to me than Tripura. The people have bestowed me with the responsibility of decorating Tripura. ■

मेरा
SWARAJ
TRACTOR

presents



आउटलुक

एग्रीकल्चर कॉन्क्लेव एंड स्वराज अवाइर्स

सम्पन्न किसान, देश की जान

15 दिसंबर 2018, सुबह 10 बजे से



मुख्य अतिथि

श्री राधा मोहन सिंह

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भारत सरकार

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कल्याण मंत्रालय



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- श्रेष्ठ प्राथमिक सहकारी समिति (महिला)
- श्रेष्ठ जिला सहकारी समिति
- श्रेष्ठ जिला सहकारी समिति (महिला)
- श्रेष्ठ राज्य सहकारी समिति
- श्रेष्ठ राज्य सहकारी समिति (महिला)
- श्रेष्ठ सहकारी समिति राष्ट्रीय पुरस्कार
- श्रेष्ठ सहकारी समिति राष्ट्रीय पुरस्कार (महिला)
- श्रेष्ठ संस्थान, राष्ट्रीय स्तर (सहकारिता को प्रोत्साहित करने के लिए)
- श्रेष्ठ एफपीओ (फार्मर्स प्रोड्यूसर्स ऑर्गनाइजेशन)



सिम्योजिअम हॉल, नेशनल एग्रीकल्चर साइंस
सेंटर (एनएएससी) कॉम्प्लेक्स,
आईसीएआर, देवप्रकाश शास्त्री मार्ग,
नई दिल्ली-110012



15 दिसंबर 2018



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Fake In India

Political parties of all hues are twisting facts, figures and photographs to lure voters as India gets ready for Elections 2019

BY SIDDHARTHA MISHRA

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi picks up a child, who leans towards two microphones in front of her and appears to utter a derogatory phrase often used by the BJP to mock Congress president Rahul Gandhi. That's all there is in the 23-second video clip. But wait. There is another clip. The same clip, in fact. Only this time the child ridicules Modi himself, as she repeats what appears to be a Twitter campaign launched by the Congress. It later emerges that the original clip, dating back to 2016, was of a differently-abled child, Gauri Shardul, reciting a *shloka* from the Ramayana during one of Modi's visits to his home state, Gujarat.

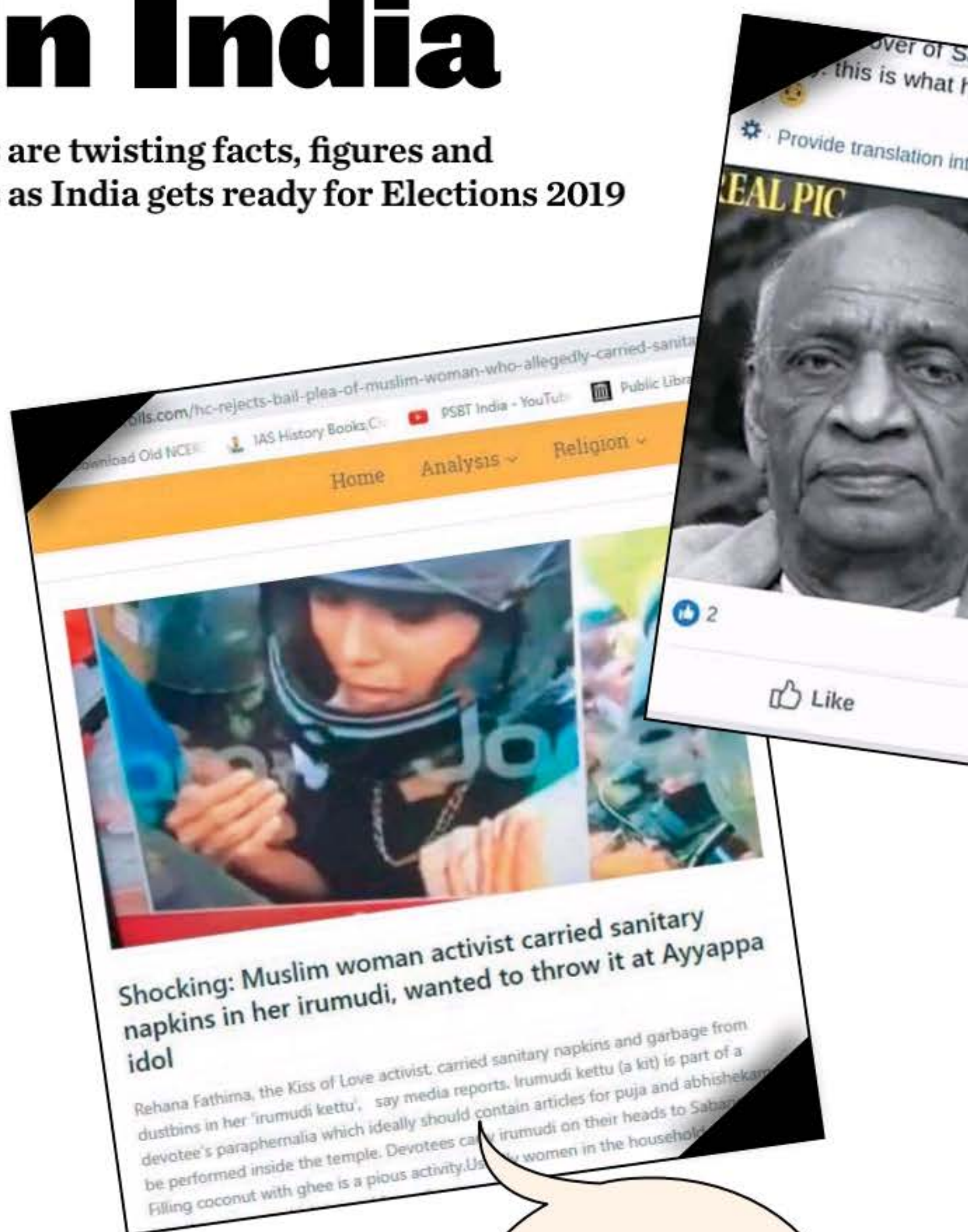
The two versions of the video clip, both doctored and widely circulated through social media and WhatsApp in India, is a classic case study of "fake news", that new global menace described by Collins dictionary last year as a "very real word". Over the past few years, fake news has moved beyond its conventional description of "false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting". It's now mostly a political tool, used to nail rival parties with doctored audios and videos and morphed photographs.

And with general elections in India scheduled for early next year, there are growing indications that fake news will play a big role over the next few months as parties of all hues twist facts and figures to try and influence the voters. And India is one of 48 countries where political parties have "formally organised social media manipulation campaigns", an Oxford study said in July. Many experts believe the BJP harnessed the power of WhatsApp and social media in the run-up to the 2014 general elections that catapulted it to power with an overwhelming majority. Other parties, including the Congress, got into the high-stakes game

very late; now all parties have separate social media groups but the BJP's team, known as the 'IT Cell', is said to be far more organised and with greater reach than all others. It also allegedly dishes out more fake news than the others.

"The right is more systematic and they have a better protocol in place," says Sagar Kaul, founding CEO of MetaFact, an AI-based fact-checker. "For example, if there is a post which has popped up for a right-wing influencer, chances of that being picked up is much higher," he adds, explaining that their distribution networks are much stronger. A highly-controversial recent survey by

the BBC, titled 'Beyond fake news', also says that "right-wing networks are much more organised than on the left, pushing nationalistic fake stories further. There was also an overlap of fake news sources on Twitter and support networks of Prime Minister Narendra Modi". Angry right-wing groups trashed the survey's



Sardar Patel in Chinese style...under Modi's Statute of
happen when Chinese men will work on such projects.

o Hindi



After Congress president Rahul Gandhi said the recently-unveiled statue of Sardar Patel was made in China, Congressmen circulated a photograph of an old statue of the freedom fighter erected in 2008.

findings, especially on its sample size.

Shreya Rajagopalan, a researcher who worked for a fortnight in poll-bound Madhya Pradesh, agrees that the "BJP has a stronger team, a larger support system, more spread out strategy, more FB pages and more followers". Rajagopalan, who researched fake news and the actors and audience involved, says that parties are pushing memes and videos and microtargeting voters who are part-disillusioned and part-distanced from mainstream media due to the ease of swiping through apps on smartphones. "They (BJP) started much earlier and had more research to do this. I wouldn't say the Congress is not doing it though."

Some of the numbers are staggering. BJP insiders say the party has close to 15,000 WhatsApp groups in Uttar Pradesh, the most politically-important state for any party hoping to grab power at the Centre. During the assembly polls in Karnataka earlier this year, the party had created 20,000 such groups. India's population and the number of social media users turn these platforms into happy hunting grounds for political parties. WhatsApp has over 200 million users in India and counting. The country is also home to over 30 million Twitter accounts and close to 294 million on Facebook.

This is precisely the reason the Congress is re-inventing itself on social media with Rahul Gandhi scaling up his visibility on Twitter and Facebook as he leads the party's campaign against Modi. The Congress' social media team, led by former MP Divya Spandana, regularly posts memes and spoofs mocking the Modi government and its policies. And the cell is also accused of its bit of mischief, by tinkering with photos and videos. "If you notice our stories, you'll see there is now more misinformation from the non right-wing side as well, especially pages and accounts that seem to support the Congress," says Pratik Sinha, co-founder of Alt News, an online platform which debunks fake news. He says the change in patterns has become more evident in the past six months. Sinha cites a recent example when photograph of a Sardar Patel statue erected in 2008 went viral with Congress supporters circulating it as that of the world's tallest statue unveiled in Gujarat recently. It was after Rahul Gandhi said Modi's pet project was 'Made in China'. "It is very political in nature. The same thing emanates from the right-wing as well, but the right-wing has this additional misinformation component, which is very significant, of a constant attack on minorities and the demonisation of the minority community using misinformation," Sinha, 36, adds.

The supply chain

But how does the well-oiled ecosystem work? It is a concoction of fake news, social media and data, says Shivam Shankar Singh, a political consultant formerly associated with election strategist Prashant Kishor's IPAC and the BJP until June this year. "What I handled was



The BJP has over **15,000** WhatsApp groups in UP

There were close to **20,000** in Karnataka during the assembly elections.

The Congress and JD-S had **30,000** WhatsApp groups

WhatsApp has over **200 million** users in India and counting

India has over **30 million** Twitter accounts and close to **294 million** people on Facebook

data analytics. The spread of fake news and (the work of) Whatsapp groups were based on the work that we did," he says, adding that "misinformation" was fired with the ammunition of data. Singh says he quit the scene as he did not want to be a part of an upcoming campaign which will be "divisive" and that every party is out to "push a narrative" which thrives on confirmation bias and cherry-picking data to suit their agenda.

He cites an example of the right-wing assertion that the "growing Muslim population" is leading to increase in crimes. Singh says there would be stories in mainstream social media backing the argument. "So they pick up these news stories and mix it up with fake news. News does not intend to incite, the language is not hysterical, so they'll pick up a video from Syria and put it in the copy," he says.

Shivam says those who forward or share these messages do not realise, in most cases, that they are fake. "(But) those who

DIRTY PICTURE

make them, those who design the graphics know that they are fake. These messages are then sent to 500 WhatsApp groups, the people in those groups think these are real...and they spread them as they want to spread the message, not because they want to spread fake news," he adds. Jency Jacob, managing editor of fake news-buster BOOMLive, says the misinformation campaign is not confined to the right-wing. "Parties on both sides of the divide are putting out images and videos with the wrong context and wrong narrative. A lot of these then starts circulating on WhatsApp groups," adds Jacob. BOOMLive was the first in India to work with Facebook to counter misinformation prior to elections.

There is big money involved too. Shivam Shankar Singh recounts his days on the rolls of a right-wing think-tank close to the BJP. He says that if the BJP had to pay someone Rs 20,000-30,000 for social media work it was an informal arrangement. "But if someone has to get a monthly salary of Rs 1.5-2 lakh, there's no other way for the party but to do it formally", which is done by recruiting the person into any of the alaiid think-tanks.

PRATIK Sinha cites the example of "about five-six FB pages" which purportedly backs the BJP. These pages, he says, regularly posts "graphics which seem to be professionally done, all of which are sponsored posts which means somebody is pouring in the money". The page 'Nation with Namo', for example, with nearly 8.70 lakh followers put out a post on November 1 looking to hire "content writers, graphic designers, and video editors". "You'll see the graphics are similar, this is not the work of an amateur," Sinha adds.

Currently, there are even Facebook pages up for sale. Some of these were formed by former BJP supporters who are charging anything between Rs 3 to Rs 5 lakh for a page, depending on the number of 'likes' it had garnered. As these pages already have millions of followers, the new owner can simply start pushing any content. Shivam says these pages thrive because people rarely 'unfollow' pages once they 'like' them on Facebook. "The thing is it's not a bad business model to create FB pages supporting the BJP. You create a website behind it and you keep posting links. So



Images of cracks in the Sardar Patel statue started doing the rounds, debunked by AltNews (Image Courtesy: AltNews)



AAP tweeted the image of a bridge in Rotterdam and tried to pass it off as the Signature Bridge in Delhi. (Image Courtesy: AltNews)



A 2016 video clip of PM Modi holding a differently-abled child, Gauri Shardul, who recited the Ramayana to a crowd was twisted by supporters of both the BJP and the Congress



Bulandshahr police tweeted a rejoinder to Suresh Chavankhe, editor of Sudarshan TV, after the channel reportedly misinformed about the aftermath of the recent violence



ABP news was forced to tweet a clarification after a fake news outlet doctored the channel's template to spread fake news about Rahul Gandhi

you make a decent amount of money just from advertisers' revenue," he adds. To generate a decent number of likes, posts are often paid for in the initial days for greater visibility. He says that the promotion money is sometimes raised from supporters. In others, the party or administrators make the payment.

The latest country to have battled and,

some believe, lost the battle with fake news is Brazil. Results on October 28 declared that the land of samba and soccer voted for PSL's right-wing candidate Jair Bolsonaro, a day when WhatsApp banned more than 1,00,000 accounts. The Brazilian president is infamous for the cringe-worthy comment, "I'm not going to rape you, because

you're very ugly", to Maria do Rosario, the former minister for human rights. Expectedly, the nature of the rhetoric during the campaign wasn't exactly civil. "We got a lot of dirty stuff and people believed the dirtiest things in the world," says Rio de Janeiro-based Cristina Tardáguila, director of Agencia Lupa, one of the largest fact-checkers in the country. "Since it was dirty it spread very fast and it's amazing that people decided to believe the dirtiest things just to sustain their position."

Barely six months later, an estimated 850 million people in India—about six times the size of Brazil's electorate—will vote across 29 states in the biggest democratic exercise in the world. How messy it will be with an avalanche of fake news is anybody's guess. Former chief election commissioner S.Y. Quraishi says fake news spread through WhatsApp groups, with so many members, is "1000 thousand times more dangerous than rumours going out word-of-mouth". He feels that social media platforms need to take measures and EC should sit with them and monitor certain content during election time. "The law and order implications are great," he adds.

Jency Jacob of BOOMLive says there is "much more action" now in Facebook. "And coming closer to the elections, we will see more and more people (profiles) come in and share stuff which will go viral overnight," Jacob adds. One of the biggest challenges for fact-checkers are content in regional languages. Last month, Union minister Smriti Irani waded into the raging debate over the entry of women into Sabarimala temple in Kerala. "Would you take sanitary napkins seeped in menstrual blood and walk into a friend's home? You would not. Would you think it is respectful to do the same thing and walk into house of God?" Her comment was apparently in response to news reports about activists' plans on carrying sanitary napkins inside the temple. BoomLive traced the rumour back to right-wing news websites such as Postcard news and IndusScrolls. Jacob and Pratik Sinha agree that a lot of people will be required regionally to do these fact checks in the future. *Hindustan Times* recently

There are growing indications that fake news will play a big role in the run up to the 2019 general elections.

Ex-CEC S.Y. Quraishi says fake news spread through WhatsApp is "1000 thousand times more dangerous".

'Deepfakes' with artificial intelligence

The latest tool of faking is too realistic and scary

BECAUSE what you guys are doing right now in Belgium is actually worse. You agreed, but you are not taking any measures. Only blablabla. Bingbangboom." This quote is from a video of US President Donald Trump berating Belgium before threatening to pull out of the Paris climate accord, something he eventually did. However, the video, created by the socialist Flemish party in Belgium, was later found to be fake, and so was the quote.

It is being touted as the latest technique in misinformation, with *The Washington Post* reporting this week that Russia is now looking to threaten democratic processes in the US through 'deepfakes'.


Deepfakes are videos generated through an artificial intelligence (AI) algorithm which make them look unquestionably real, especially when created with a specific purpose. They surfaced first in pornography when a user on Reddit created videos where actors like Gal Gadot and Emma Watson were shown performing sexual acts. The videos were outed as fakes and have been banned by Twitter, Vimeo and Pornhub.

In the case of Trump, a Flemish party spokesperson told *Politico* that a professional studio created the content

and it was not intended to dupe their own party supporters, some of whom fell for it.

With trust in the media declining and digital literacy still low, deepfakes could pose unforeseen consequences in a country like India where rumours on WhatsApp alone are enough to incite violence and mob lynchings.

"With deepfakes as of now, the principle is from the blinking system. You need a lot of photos of the person that you need to replicate. So when you see a deepfake video you won't see a lot of blinks," says Sagar Kaul of Metafact, an AI-based fact-checker. Kaul says that moving forward the technology may change but deepfakes would be something where "we would be able to tell 100 per cent if the image or video is fake. Because with deepfakes, we need to understand how the manipulation works and come back, so it's a reverse process. There is no chance of a false positive. And it leaves a digital footprint, you have to pick up on those," Kaul explains.


That said though, with the volume of misinformation at play and the ability of digital content to seep into hidden networks, deepfakes may add a misinformation quotient which will be difficult to get around, experts say. 

carried a report which showed that regional social media ShareChat's story attributing a false quote to preacher Zakir Naik was their most read.

Social media platforms say they are aware of the rot. WhatsApp, for example, has limited the number of users a message can be forwarded in India to five. But for Twitter it is a much more chal-

lenging job. "It is not possible for us to distinguish whether every single tweet from every single person is truthful or not. We also believe that taking down content simply because it is incorrect would ultimately undermine the open democratic debate that our platform is intended to facilitate," a spokesperson of the microblogging platform says.

A recent case underlines the fault lines and fallibility of social media. Ankit Lal, the head of Aam Aadmi Party's social media team, posted an image from a bridge in Rotterdam, tagging it as the recently-constructed Signature Bridge in Delhi, and was called out on Twitter. "That was a mistake on my part, it's human. I picked it up from a journalist and later I saw the journalist had himself deleted it," Lal tells *Outlook*.

While social media can be as ugly as it gets, WhatsApp forwards can be lethal. Last year, several people were lynched in separate incidents in India by mobs incited by messages about child-lifters on the prowl. It takes just one word taken out of context, one morphed photograph to light the fire. And there are hundreds, if not thousands, of people working behind the scenes to create chaos and confusion for someone else to reap the benefits. 


**PRALAY
KANUNGO**

LAST RESORT, R

Realising that 2014's development mantra works no more, the Sangh

SINCE the BJP's formidable victory in the 2014 general elections, Hindutva's stock has been steadily moving up. After securing political dominance, the Sangh parivar now aims at a repeat win in 2019, aspiring to hegemonise politics and Hindutva-ise India. Just like a booming stock market with a falling rupee does not reflect robust economic health, an upbeat Hindutva does not necessarily indicate its electoral invincibility. Moreover, Indian elections often defy arrogance and predictability, like the ones in 1977 and 2004. Interestingly, the parivar anticipated the challenge well in advance while conceiving its strategy for 2019.

In 2014, a tentative parivar, crafting an enticing electoral strategy, came to power promising development, employment, transparency and inclusive governance under a charismatic leader. Hindutva played a role, but the Muzaffarnagar-like experiments with communal violence were exceptions, while caste equations were manoeuvred in a few states as well. However, it was brand Modi that won by raising the level of aspirations in millions, who were in the midst of despair during the UPA regime's last years. Popular support for Modi, especially from the youth, was unprecedented, cutting across caste and class. And expectations were equally high.

Modi seemed out of the box. He invited his South Asian counterparts to his oath-taking ceremony, initiated measures to remove bureaucratic hurdles for 'minimum government and maximum governance', introduced imaginative campaigns like 'Swachh Bharat' and 'Swasth Bharat', adopted policies to empower citizens through bank access, life and crop insurance, clean fuel and so on. Initiatives like 'Make in India' and 'Startup India', though rhetorical, looked unconventional. But instead of consolidating these initiatives, the government started treading on an exclusivist path, pursued an impulsive economic agenda and chose to be non-transparent where probity mattered. What were the compulsions and strategies behind this deviation?

First, as the RSS had groomed Narendra Modi as a pracharak and got its cadre to toil for ensuring his victory, he had to share the right to govern India with the organisation. His government appointed trusted RSS pracharaks and proteges as cabinet ministers,

governors and chief ministers. The RSS deputed competent organisers in strategic party and government positions, thereby keeping the focus on Hindutva in governance, from the grassroots to the top, besides getting a free hand to decide the nation's cultural and ideological agenda. For the parivar, this is the Hindutva government.

The RSS also began to redefine the idea of India as an exclusive Hindu nation. The 'Demolition Nehru' drive, rewriting of history textbooks, control over educational and cultural institutions, lynching in the name of cow protection and so on are part of that process. Modi, vowing with BJP president Amit Shah to achieve a 'Congress-mukt Bharat', returned to Hindutva jibes in order to polarise Hindus and Muslims to win state elections.

Second, Modi's promises like 'development for all' generated hopes among all classes—from the corporates to the poor. He had proved to be the corporates' darling in Gujarat, and the media projection of his backward caste origins and 'chaiwala' upbringing enabled him construct a pro-poor image for himself across the country. In Delhi, he continued to be corporate-friendly, while also launching many pro-poor programmes. As striking a balance between contradictory class interests was tough, he resorted to some impulsive economic decisions such as demonetisation, which hit the poor hard, and GST, which broke the back of small and medium businesses. Economic growth took a beating, unemployment boomed, inflation soared and investment slowed down. Also, some corporate biggies fled India after siphoning off public money. The RSS, which did not fully share Modi's economic agenda, hoped Hindutva would neutralise failure and misadventure on the economic front.

Third, exclusive governance and directionless development led to authoritarian control of institutions. Institutional autonomy had been a casualty during the Emergency as well, but the onslaught under Modi was more structural, systematic and endemic. Filling institutions with one's cadre and favourites was one thing, but subverting norms and values was ominous. Every key institution came under pressure—from the judiciary to the Election Commission, the media to the university, and the RBI to the CBI. For

Modi could still sell empty promises and hollow dreams, perhaps with a bit more stretching.

UN TO THE TEMPLE

parivar's Mission 2019 brings unabashed Hindutva to the fore—Ayodhya's big again

GETTY IMAGES



Hindutva to prevail, many institutions needed to be purged of the Nehruvian legacy.

Authoritarian control dismantles checks and balances, and harbours sycophancy and non-transparency. The Emergency was a clear example and the RSS was opposed to it. But in Modi's regime, governance became increasingly opaque, and the PM's reluctance to engage with Parliament and the media thickened this opacity further. Deals like Rafale raised doubts on government's moral claim of transparency and brought up its connection with crony capitalists. To counter popular perception on this, Hindutva found a soft target—the corrupt past of the Congress under the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty.


HINDUTVA'S strategy for 2019 was, in fact, laid out soon after the 2014 results. RSS strategists realised that the BJP could get only 31 per cent of votes, at least half of which came from outside its core cadre. As the Modi regime was not likely to deliver on its development promises, they knew the next elections had to be fought by foregrounding Hindutva to consolidate and expand the core constituency. Unlike 2014, development would play a secondary role, if not abandoned altogether.

The parivar then systematically Hindutva-ised governance, enlarging the Hindutva public sphere and encompassing new target groups. Both soft and hard Hindutva flourished under the patronage

**CARDBOARD
CUT PM Modi's
road show in
Varanasi last year**

of the government, the media and the corporates. Print and electronic media were relentless in disseminating Hindutva discourses on nationalism, terrorism, triple talaq, Kashmir, Pakistan and, more recently, 'urban Naxals'. Hindutva army invaded social media with contentious propaganda and trolled with venom. Sangh-affiliated ABVP aggressively campaigned in universities against left-wing students, portraying them as anti-nationals, and enrolled new cadre with state support. Bajrang Dal unleashed a reign of terror in the name of ghar wapsi, gauraksha and countering 'love jihad'. Fringe groups like Sanatan Sanstha went after rationalists and threatened to punish dissent. The VHP kept the Ram Mandir issue alive, and Yogi Adityanath was made CM of UP precisely because he would be ideal to lead the temple agitation before the 2019 elections. Yogi would replace Modi as Hindutva mascot, while the PM would be used sparingly and strategically. Despite failing to fulfil his development promises, Modi would continue as the mascot of development.

Modi's failure had disenchanted many, particularly the youth, farmers and small traders, but he could still claim credit for introducing more than 100 welfare schemes, some of which had benefited the poor, OBCs, Dalits, adivasis and women. Moreover, his humble background and single status would still find many takers. Big businesses would still bet for Modi as pro-business, though with less enthusiasm this time. Modi could still sell empty promises and hollow dreams, perhaps with a bit more stretching than before.

Thus, in 2019, the Sangh parivar is back to basics with an overt preference for Hindutva, which had been underplayed in 2014. As Modi's development agenda looks lacklustre, the parivar may use its last lethal weapon—construction of the Ram temple—to win 2019. The momentum has picked up after the RSS chief announced that the temple will be built, and sent an emergency call to the government asking for legislation to enable it. Shiv Sena and the sadhus have started camping in Ayodhya. Clearly, the battle for New Delhi in 2019 would be fierce. 

(The writer is ICCR chair for the Study of Contemporary India, Leiden University, the Netherlands. The views expressed are personal.)

Friends of Survivors

WHILE SUPPORT GROUPS ADDRESS THE MAJOR CONCERNS OF CANCER SURVIVORS THE PALLIATIVE CARE CENTRES ATTEND TO PAIN MANAGEMENT ISSUES OF THE TERMINALLY ILL, SAY SUREKHA KADAPA-BOSE & HIREN KUMAR BOSE

Support groups counsel and advise others grappling with the trauma of having being diagnosed or under treatment for cancer. These are like a haven for cancer patients and their relatives. They help people to communicate their feelings and experiences—that may seem too strange or too difficult to share with family and friends—with those living with cancer. Presently, all major cities and two and three-tier towns have support groups. These address major concerns of cancer survivors like rising medical costs and a lack of awareness about common symptoms.

A support group active in Delhi/NCR region, the Cancer Sahyog has been working with Indian Cancer Society since 1991 and its volunteers attend clinics in 10 major hospitals. Mumbai has majorly nine cancer support groups, like Cancer Patients & Association, Dream Foundation and others. The city also hosts the non-profit global health organization, Max Foundation. Its Friends of Max is one of the largest patient associations in the world and serves people living with chronic myeloid leukaemia and gastrointestinal stromal tumours. "As the environment is sullied by misinformation, heresy and superstition an exchange of experiences and knowledge between patients, caregivers, and physicians can mean so much," says Viji Venkatesh, the Regional Head of



Max Foundation in India and South Asia and known among patients as "Amma". Her initiative, "Chai for Cancer-Drink To A Cause", a unique awareness and fund-raising campaign raised nearly Rs 25 lakhs last year.

Palliative care is an important part of cancer care. For someone with cancer, the goals of palliative care include treating symptoms, managing emotional and social needs, and addressing spiritual and practical concerns. Only a tiny minority of the needy in India has access to palliative care.

"Unfortunately, for most, palliative care reaches too late because in the minds of the public as well as many professionals, cancer is commonly associated with death and dying," says Dr M. R. Rajagopal, Padma Shri awardee, palliative care physician and the founder chairman of Pallium India, a palliative care NGO based in Kerala. Responding positively to a request from Pallium India, Kerala government created a palliative care policy in 2008.

A landmark research, published in New England Journal of Medicine, carried on patients with a particular kind of lung cancer (one group receiving only anticancer treatment



Make your finances immune to cancer



alone and the other receiving palliative care along with anti-cancer treatment) showed that those who got palliative care along with disease-specific treatment lived for an average of three months longer. In addition, they also had a better quality of life making it clear, that both in terms of longevity as well as well-being, palliative care needs to be integrated into health care.

"In the majority of our medical institutions, modern pain management or palliative care is not available. But the most important reason is simply the lack of access to palliative care. Unless a palliative care centre is available, where can a doctor refer a patient to?" says Dr Rajagopal.

CanSupport, Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) NGO, operates the largest home-based palliative care programme looking after 2000 cancer patients in the region. There are few other centers like the two palliative care centers managed by WHO demonstration centers in Calicut and Thiruvananthapuram run by Centre for Community Based Palliative Care and Pallium India respectively (for more visit <https://palliumindia.org/resources/clinics/>).

Survivor Speak

'I'M NOT CURED, BUT A SURVIVOR'

An unimaginable fatigue and feeling of tiredness made me approach a physician. Initially, I thought it was due to my hectic work schedule. But a regular blood and urine test showed that my WBC count had gone up to 1, 26,000. Normally, WBC count is in the range of 4,000 to 10,000. I also had a urinary infection. Then, 15 years back, I wasn't aware of the implication of increased blood count. A week's treatment brought down the urinary infection but didn't affect the WBC blood count. Meantime my wife delivered our second son. We were happy but tensed due to my reports. On my physician's suggestion, I met haematologist Dr M B Agarwal, who suggested that I repeat the blood tests at Tata Memorial Centre. He told me that I had CML (Chronic Myeloid Leukaemia) and there is a treatment for it and I could lead a normal life but with lifelong medications. The medicines prescribed were valued at Rs 1, 25,000 plus the cost of supplements to be taken every month was beyond our means. I was suggested that I could take the Indian equivalent of the same which would cost me Rs 10,000. This too was much of burden for our family of five even though both my mother and my wife were employed. This was when I came across Max Foundation where I started getting free medicines besides counselling and chance to interact with other cancer victims. It was here that along with a few like-minded people we formed a 'Friends of Max', an NGO which today has more than 18,000 CML patient-members spread all over India. Being one of its trustee members I make it a point to interact with new patients regularly. The moment they realise that they are in the midst of a 15-year-old survivor, their approach to the disease changes and develop hope. I'm not cured, but a survivor. I have experienced side effects, like my skin becoming pale and I regularly go through severe leg cramps. I've developed kidney stones and also have a heart problem. At my office, I have become a reference point for cancer which actually makes me happy!"

Pramod George (47), a marketing professional with the Indian Express Group, Mumbai

DON'T DEMONISE CANCER

When my physician confirmed that I've CML the thoughts about cancer being synonymous to death came to my mind. Now, 13 years later, I realize how wrong the depiction of cancer is. The society at large has stigmatized the disease and many times patients try to hide it with the result they deprive themselves of the support system that this disease needs. I've endured a lot of hardships as we lost our father, a mill worker, very early to alcoholism. Along with my sister I was brought up at an orphanage. With the help of State scholarship, I completed my Diploma in Engineering and got a job at BSES, later taken over by the Reliance Group. I got married and with a loan bought a 1 BHK flat and have two children. When I was diagnosed with CML my salary was a mere Rs 7,000 and I had four dependents. As my wife is unlettered the first thought that came to my mind was will both my kids end up in an orphanage. This is when, the then, director of TMC oncologist Dr. S. H. Advani helped and boosted my morale. I sought help from the Max Foundation and with free medicines offered by them, I'm able to live my life, albeit with all the problems associated with the medicines. But I do make it a point to reach out to other cancer victims.

Suresh Pawar (45), deputy manager (Low-Tension Maintenance), Reliance Energy, Mumbai



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LIC ka ho saath, toh fikr ki chodo baat

An aerial photograph showing a massive crowd of people walking across a wide bridge. The crowd is dense and stretches far into the distance. Many people are holding Indian national flags. The bridge has a concrete railing and is flanked by green trees. In the background, there are buildings and a clear sky. The overall scene suggests a large-scale public demonstration or rally.

COVER STORY

THE MODINO EFFECT

It's time for an audit. How has the Modi regime fared on the economy? Even beyond DeMo and GST, it's a patchwork quilt.

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BY ARINDAM MUKHERJEE AND LOLA NAYAR

EFFECTS are not always presented to us in manifest form. Sometimes they have to be inferred from what's not there. A universal sense of well-being—what was called the 'feelgood' factor in 2004—is now not as perceptually salient among the middle class or other strata as it was then. What else is missing or present? And why this exercise? Because a new economic epoch for India was the central claim the Narendra Modi campaign had made in 2014—the presumed economic miracle of the 'Gujarat model' was to be extended all over. Fifty-four months later, it's a good time to assess the results since the Modi regime's pure policy phase is mostly done, and any big policy rollouts hereafter will likely be election-flavoured. So how does it stack up?

A performance audit of NaMonomics offers mixed evidence of both sorts. Of the manifest ones, the disasters were, of course, spectacular. Demonetisation was a train wreck. The rupee was like Newton's apple. And the farm sector's condition could be read visually too, in front-page photographs of mile-long marches converging on the cities. Things that became conspicuous by their absence? Well, Make in India made nothing. Smart cities did not mushroom. Jobs did not bloom. Bank NPAs did. Jan Dhan accounts ran on empty. GST, the other headline event, was a courageous but difficult reform, with some inevitable mess and pain (and verifiable gain). Then there were things invisible to the urban middle class—because they happened far, far away from its universe. Long networks of rural roads, for instance, qualitatively changing life in India's vast outback. The gifts of the Awas Yojana. The soft light of Ujjwala, where cooking gas connections touched many lives. And the deep effects of something like GST won't be as visible as the trucks running on smooth new highways.

The last day of November, though, these saw spanking new highways inundated, ironically, with the other narrative. It was a significant day for India's farmers. About 10,000 of them had congregated in the national capital to talk about what the Modi government had left unfulfilled in the past four-and-a-half years. Even in their anguish, they built a bridge—apologising to the city-dwellers for causing them inconvenience, and listing the astonishing difference between what the farmer makes and how much a Delhiite pays. The angst resonated also because the aam janata in cities, hit by ever-spiralling fuel prices and straitening home budgets, is taking a critical look at NaMonomics too.

The farmer's rally offered harsh vignettes from rural India. For

Kisan Jam Delhi gets
a glimpse of the crisis
in the countryside

Photograph: TRIBHUVAN TIWARI

70-year-old Ashwini Devi, homeless in Bijnor, western Uttar Pradesh, it's a fight to retrieve her late husband's small piece of land from moneylenders. For Birendra Saini, from Amroha, also western UP, life is at the cross-roads because of the Rs 4 lakh he owes to the bank. Saini lambasts the government for not keeping its promise of loan waivers and better minimum support prices (MSP). "The MSP announced by the Modi government is a total failure. There's a big difference between cost of production and MSP. The prices of inputs have gone up. We buy seeds for Rs 1,700 and sell for Rs 1,100," he says. Siddharama, from the suicide-scarred farmscape of Andhra Pradesh, too juggles vicious debt traps, bad crops and land rights issues. The protest, organised by a coalition of over 200 farmer groups from across India, saw a huge turnout from Punjab, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. The farmers call for a special session of Parliament, and two private members' bills—one to address farm indebtedness, another for remunerative MSPs.

ON farm unrest becoming commonplace, agro-economist Dr Panjab Singh says, "Things are not so bad, but there are many outstanding demands." Singh, who is president of the National Academy of Agriculture Sciences, says production is growing and productivity too is improving in certain cases, but farm incomes have unfortunately stagnated over the past four-five years. This when input costs have gone up substantially—so the farmer is unable to harvest the benefits he should have got. Consumers too pay high prices, while middlemen and retailers reap a rich bonanza.

CRISIL chief economist Dharma Kirti Joshi agrees farmers have reason to be upset as their price realisations have dipped despite higher MSPs announced by the government. "Unfortunately, it's a trade-off—we need to improve productivity, that's the route to sustainability, but when output increases, prices fall and you have a bonanza of low inflation," he says. It's a vicious cycle, marked by little long-term vision, that has been on for years.

WHAT HAS WORKED FOR MODI

ROADS AND HIGHWAYS
Taken off after hiccups

DIGITISATION
Move towards digital payments picking up

TAX NET
Widened by 15-20 per cent post GST and DeMo

GST
Helped to ease business and improve tax administration

HEALTH INSURANCE
Higher health insurance through Ayushman Bharat

Earlier regimes are as culpable (remember the suicide statistics from the UPA era). It's the further deficiency of short-term support that's exacerbating the situation, despite the Modi government's crop insurance scheme.

Beyond the lack of attention to agriculture too, there's more critique than cheer about the government's performance on the economic front from experts and economists across the board. They see a canvas largely of blanks, with some bright spots where the government has excelled and shown work on the ground. With less than six months left of its tenure, one could naturally expect some vote-garnering strategies—creation of employment conclaves, perhaps loan waivers. But experts do feel that, despite the measures it took to boost the economy, the Modi regime's performance has not been stellar as compared to the UPA. They agree things could have been pulled down much further—the government managed to hold it and prevent a real slowdown—but we are much below the optimal rate of growth, by a few percentage points.

Things are on an improving track in some sectors. According to ICRA, a broad-based improvement is visible



High on Infrastructure A total 28,5

in October 2018, comparing year-on-year (YoY) growth performance, in as many as 14 of the 16 early economic indicators. This largely reflects the adjustment of production schedules related to the later start of the festive season, as well as factors such as base effects and the receding impact of floods in parts of the country. Accordingly, industrial growth is likely to display a healthy pickup in October 2018, from the level recorded in September 2018.

But the general feeling among experts is that broad objectives kept changing over the years—no objective was really achieved as such. The oft-repeated joke is that DeMo was for climate change. This is, of course, one initiative that polarised opinions sharply—eulogised or thoroughly dismantled, often by the same economist (follow the Arvind Subramaniam trail here). Partly because the phenomenon, which came almost like a tsunami, a classic Black Swan event, had a complex effect too. Says economist Y.K. Alagh, chancellor of the Central University of Gujarat, "It was done in a clumsy way, but what it did was increase the tax revenue base once and for all. But it did not at all decrease the



31 km of national highways constructed since FY2014-15

process of creating black money as it has started again in great earnest." The latest data shows a growth of 15-20 per cent in I-T returns. India's tax-to-GDP ratio has also increased from 5.5 per cent to 5.8 per cent.

Prof N.R. Bhanumurthy of the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy too is critical. He says DeMo's objectives were never fixed. "The government kept changing the goalposts. The positive outcome is related to the tax base, which has increased significantly both in terms of direct and indirect tax, visible in the buoyancy of economy. But this is not entirely due to demonetisation. It should be looked at together with GST," he adds. Many economists feel the message never went through.

Says Ishwar Hegde, economist and founder-MD of Sun Fan Energy, "It was supposed to bring back currency. However, the narrative went wrong for the government. I agree it was badly planned and badly executed. We could have done much better."

Prof Arun Kumar, economist and an authority on black money, however says DeMo damaged the economy enormously—affecting the unorganised sector disproportionately and reducing the rate of growth by one per cent. The unorganised sector is 40 per cent of the GDP. If that reduced by 10 per cent, even the measurable impact can only have been heavy. Kumar says it's difficult to determine what is black money. When all the money comes back into the system, demarcating the

black money component out of that is tough. "More than 100 per cent of the money came back into the system! Including counterfeit, which has got converted into white money, as has old black money. Demonetisation cannot stop black money generation as under-invoicing will continue with the new notes. This is because cash is only one per cent of black money, 99 per cent is held in real estate, gold and overseas, which has not been affected."

Beyond the unorganised sector, DeMo also left the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector bruised and battered. The micro sector, which accounts for 97.5 per cent of MSME employment, got severely hit. The poor state of the MSMEs is ascribed by many partly also to the

WHAT HAS PROVED DISMAL

DEMONETISATION

Failed to achieve any goals, hit GDP

MSMEs

Hit by DeMo and GST

EMPLOYMENT

Job creation remains a question mark

MAKE IN INDIA


Yet to make an impact

FARMERS

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GST and the credit squeeze. We are at a juncture where the banks' ability to lend is low, which pegs back the economy's ability to grow fast. An anti-globalisation sentiment is also playing out around the world, so the scope of growing via exports too is limited. In this environment, CRISIL has projected an economic growth of 7-7.5 per cent, if we are able to sustain it.

SENIOR CPI(M) leader Tapan Sen, for one, registers a trenchant critique of both policies and outcomes. "I don't find any achievement. Rather, I find they have oriented their policy regime towards destruction of the country's indigenous manufacturing base. They are moving fast in that direction. This government has collectively contributed to the collapse of employment growth," he says. The former MP stresses that employment growth has practically turned negative during the past four-and-a-half years. "To suppress this fact, they have stopped publishing employment and unemployment surveys by the labour ministry from 2016-17 onwards," states Sen. The report published up to 2015-16 shows cumulative labour growth between 2014 and 2016, in the eight most labour-intensive sectors, was hardly 5.5 lakh. Taken together with job loss due to closures and shutdowns in industry, widely seen during these past few years, total employment generation has turned negative during the Modi regime. This is further confirmed by studies done by the CMIE and the Azim Premji University, Sen adds.

Indeed, job creation has lagged *despite* skill development being one of the government's mantras—there's no clear action on the ground. Says Abheek Barua, chief economist and executive vice-president at HDFC Bank, "There was an effort to understand the nature of the job problem, but it continues to be a dry area. Policy-makers are divided over whether we want to revive manufacturing or continue to depend on services."

Hegde talks of a large unfinished agenda—areas where the government has either not done enough or failed. Primary among this is Make in India. A proper boost to manufacturing



Bitter Harvest Farm incomes have stagnated over the past four-five

would have helped push other sectors—exports, for instance, where India's basket remains restricted to traditional items and handicrafts. Even services cannot lead to high-value addition without proper support from manufacturing.

"Manufacturing has to be developed.



"Manufacturing has to be developed. This was initially conceived, but it did not fructify," says economist Ishwar Hegde.

Without that, a country cannot develop. This was initially conceived, but it did not fructify," he says.

The other thing launched with a lot of fanfare but yet to take off is smart cities. Beyond the initial hype, progress beyond the planning stage has been tardy or absent, with very little or almost nothing to show on the ground. "It has remained a concept and has been lost," says Hegde.

That brings us to the vital social sector. For those who comprehend only technology metaphors, this is where the 'software' part of India is developed: enriching human potential is crucial to its future. And it's well-known that the Modi government actually reduced outlay to health and education throughout its tenure, and only started looking at this area in its last budget which, as the last full one before elections, was expected to be populist. Naturally, there has been little development on this front. On top of that, the sector is hobbled by duplication of authority as it's a concurrent subject—so both the states and Centre are responsible for the attrition.

To give the government credit where it's due, a lot of well-intended schemes were conceptualised and launched but, unfortunately, many of



TRIBHUVAN TIWARI

years, with rising input costs

them just lagged in the arduous stage of handling the nitty-gritty of implementation. The money based on Aadhaar, the Jan Aushadhi scheme and the much-publicised Jan Dhan Yojana have all been genuinely good schemes, but slow starters with little progress logged.

Virjesh Upadhyay, general secretary, Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh (BMS), an affiliate of the BJP, cites areas where the Modi government has taken verifiable steps forward. The employees' annual bonus, for instance, was raised 2.5 times in 2015, he says, and minimum wages were raised after 11 years, that too by 3.5 times. He also lists social security schemes like Pradhan Mantri Bima Yojna—insurance coverage for accident and death—or the health insurance scheme Ayushman

Bharat as major initiatives.

Similarly, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, though it existed earlier, got a major thrust during this government's tenure. "There's a manifold, measurable difference between the previous government and this government's achievement, if you look at the data of work done," Upadhyay says. The Ujjwala scheme too has seen lakhs of women coming into the clean cooking gas economy, bringing them out of the toxic drudgery of firewood and kerosene.

Schemes like Modicare and crop insurance are designed to bring in private investment to fill gaps on the social front—which many see as a route worth pursuing in straitened times when the State finds it difficult (or is unwilling) to step in. But, for that to work, these schemes have to be nurtured properly. Says Hegde, "The gov-



'Neoliberal globalisation has caused a massive growth in inequality. The agrarian crisis has gone beyond the agrarian. Now it's a social crisis.'

P. SAINATH

EDITOR, *PARI*

ernment has to create an environment for social sector spending by the private sector as the government cannot do it. But that environment is not being created. Social spending is not on the government's radar either."

Some experts believe the lack of focus on the social sector was because of attention being on other areas. Says Barua, "In every government, something gets priority and others do not. A lot of social sector issues are governance issues, but much more could have been done. The need to pay more attention to this side emerged in the middle of the NDA's term. Also, the social sector is difficult to figure out because of Centre-state issues and it's not clear who is responsible for the sluggishness."

Infrastructure is possibly the only area where the government has achieved a lot on the ground, especially in roads and highways, even ports. Says Barua, "The only cure for the balancesheet is for the government to invest actively. The government did it by investing in roads and infrastructure. There has been a coherent macro-economic strategy post the slowdown of 2012 and one can see the elements of a plan."

Helmed by the proactive Nitin Gadkari, highways have seen a lot of visible expansion. Data released by the Union ministry of road transport and highways indicates the Modi government built 73 per cent more highways in its first four years as compared to the last four years of UPA-II. According to reports, 28,531 km national highways were constructed since FY 2014-15, contrasting with 16,505 km by the previous government up to FY 2013-14, a clear gain of an astounding 12,026 km.

On a macro level, though, the economic highway ahead may not be



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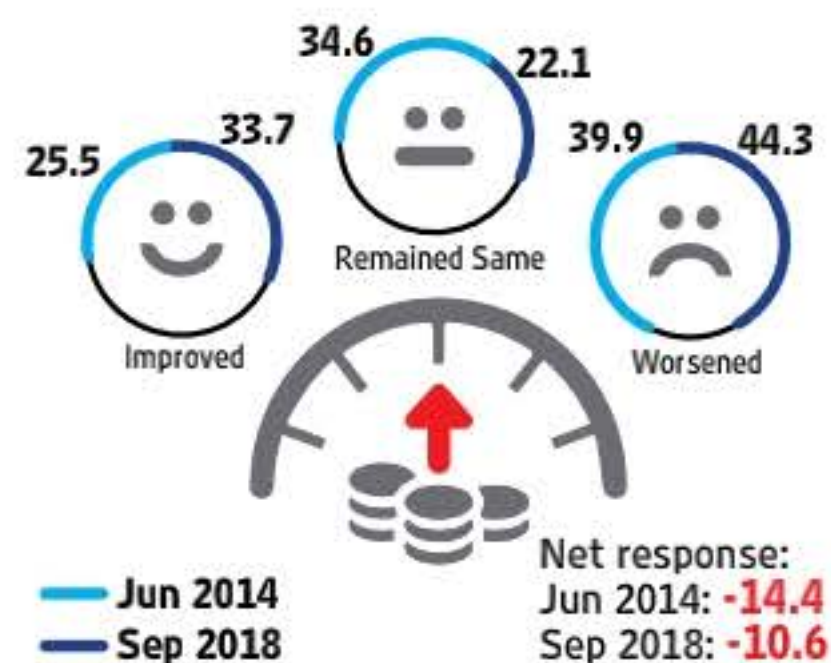
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JITENDER GUPTA



A comparative study of consumer perceptions: 2014 vs 2018



All Figures in Percentage

Source: RBI

DeMo Toll The goals kept changing, the queues were long, the hardships immense

very smooth: a tough fiscal ride is predicted. Says ICRA principal economist Aditi Nayar, "Fears of a fiscal slippage may intensify following the sharp 23.5 per cent YoY rise in the fiscal deficit in April-October FY2019, which has crossed the budget estimate for the full year, despite the relief offered by the recent correction in crude oil prices." The extent of a potential fiscal slippage in FY2019, Nayar says, would be shaped by factors like targets being met for GST, excise duty, dividends/profits and disinvestment, and the adequacy of outlays for revised MSPs, the NHPS or Modicare, fuel and other subsidies.

Tax revenue growth continues to display mixed trends, with a healthy expansion in direct taxes juxtaposed with a contraction in indirect tax collections. The uptick in headline GST collections in October 2018 is likely to have been led by quarter-end adjustments. It remains to be seen whether GST collections continue to exceed Rs 1 trillion in the remainder of FY2019, particularly in the festive months, despite the recent GST rate cuts. Nayar expects a shortfall in indirect tax revenues in FY2019 relative to the budgeted level, driven by CGST and excise collections.

CRISIL's Joshi ranks the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, which he calls

a fundamental reform with a long-term effect, and GST as two major initiatives the Modi government has been able to push. "One can argue these were initiated earlier, but this government has managed to take it forward, so the implementation is associated with the present regime," he says. GST, being structurally complex, did not offer a good narrative initially,



GST implementation combined with demonetisation hit the micro, small and medium industries the hardest.

but the government is learning on the job. Like with the Bankruptcy Code, the virtuous effects will play out over the next three to five years, he says. GST was also affected because the government kept on changing rates. Many other countries too have taken 10-15 years to stabilise GST, believe economists like Barua.


Much has been made by the government of India having risen to 100th place in World Bank rankings this year from the 130th rank in 2017. But many economists and academicians question the nature of the data on which the ranking is done. R. Nagaraj, professor at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research in Mumbai, says the World Bank report is a very subjective index, and done in two cities—Mumbai and Delhi. "It basically manipulates certain procedures. How they translate it to ground reality is open to question. More importantly, it's a highly political index," says the economist, wondering what has changed on the ground. "The question is how do you collect the data? Were employers consulted? Were workers spoken to? Or the actual people who apply for starting business? No!"

Jayan Jose Thomas of IIT Delhi also questions the yardstick, arguing that if it's related to ease in getting clear-

ances for starting a new enterprise, then it's all for the good. But if it means overlooking the rights of the labour force, or environmental degradation, then it's undesirable.

Ravinder, joint secretary, department of industrial policy and promotion (DIPP), disputes this and justifies the ranking as the outcome of four years of hard work. "The entire work of Ease of Doing Business started in 2014, keeping in mind the World Bank criteria. But the government decided to go beyond those criteria and took it to the states also," he says. While the World Bank has a case study approach and looks at 10 areas for starting a business, the DIPP decided to include more areas.

"We found that labour is studied, but not covered by the World Bank. Similarly, environmental clearances and inspections are not covered by them. All these things were in the reforms plans we made for the states," the official adds, saying the rising international confidence in India is showing in a concomitant rise in FDI inflows. The FDI inflow had peaked in 2011-12 at \$46.6 billion, then waning till 2015-16, when it started a continuing graph of growth. Last year, the inflow was around \$62 billion.

The economy is a mysterious compound, though. A lot of it is based on perception, experience and memory. People judge on the basis of tangible factors like remembered pain, or felt comfort. Has the Modi experience matched the promised Modi magic of 2014? Verifiably not. But has its patchwork quilt offered enough warmth to see it through 2019? We will know in a few months. The farmer will also vote, but not necessarily only as farmer. There are also things beyond the economy, stupid. 

WITH PREETHA NAIR

JUMP CUT SURJIT S. BHALLA

Good News in Guna



The writer is a political economist


ON the economic side of things, the general perception is that the government hasn't quite met the *expectations*, which were and still remain quite high. In fact, there is a further, new-found surge in expectations in recent times. I have been going on election trips for the past 20 years with a group of journalists—we're called the 'limousine liberals', because we travel by cars to rural areas. Last month, on one such trip, we stopped in a village near Guna in Madhya Pradesh. It was 2 pm, and the village seemed deserted. No one in sight, except for a woman. We asked her version of what was happening, development-wise.

Soon, other women joined the conversation. Some said they had to bribe the sarpanch to get their toilet built, but that toilets were being built. Some complained they hadn't obtained funds under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna. Despite the notes of discontent, I was happy to see that women were assertive about their complaints. This is a mega transformation. For the bottom 60-70 per cent, India has never had it so good. What do I mean? Look at the LPG *chulhas*, wherever you go, you can see them having replaced coal and wood. Two women in this schedule caste village invited me to see their homes. One of them complained that she was yet to get the funds promised for building a house. But the situation has improved on the whole. What started as Indira Awas Yojna never succeeded as much as it has succeeded now. People are getting benefits and this has raised legitimate expectations.

Coming to India's macro performance, I had developed an index a year ago incorporating GDP growth and inflation relative to the past. I found out that on both counts, this is the best macro environment India has ever had. Tell me, when did we last have seven per cent growth and 3.5 to 4 per cent inflation?

As for farmers, there's no doubting that the past four years have not been the best. However, recall the circumstances. Both 2014-15 and 2015-16 were consecutive drought years, something that has only happened on five occasions in the past 150 years, and not once since the mid-1960s.


Then you had demonetisation, the "self-imposed drought". It brought a lot of good to the macro-economy. For the poor and the emerging middle class (about two-thirds of the economy), the ill-effects of demonetisation were short-lived. But the measure brought the top-third under the proper tax net.

Then came the GST. So, in all, four big events happened since 2014: two droughts, demonetisation, and GST. In response, the government has increased welfare payments and corruption is also down, as transfers are made to the recipient's bank account. The economy is being transformed: tax compliance has improved tremendously, inflation rate is well contained and more welfare payments are going out to the poor than ever before. So what is the 'problem' with the macro-management of the Indian economy? The only problem is that the government started off with high expectations, and these expectations have moved higher because of the successful delivery. 

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AJAY VIR JAKHAR

TO HARVEST A C

The crisis engulfing farmers was built on the back of negligence and bad po

NEVER before in history has the landless seemed to be better off than marginal and small land-owning classes. Farmers, emotionally attached to their lands continue to try, unsuccessfully, to make a living from their meagre holdings while those with no land have little to hold them back from moving to other professions or migrate in hope for better opportunities.

Pent-up frustration has erupted in more farmer agitations across India in the past four years than in the preceding decades. The current times are reminiscent of when Mahatma Gandhi returned from South Africa in 1916 to launch the Champaran Satyagraha. Along with the Kheda Satyagraha in Gujarat, such farmers' uprisings got channelised into beginning the grassroots Indian Independence movement. The current turmoil may well signify the beginning of yet another momentous change.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's larger-than-life image, created by clever marketing, sloganeering, social media and advertising spend raised hopes of millions of people across rural India. Having won an unexpectedly massive mandate, he started off with a huge advantage over the government that his dispensation replaced. Though he inherited a declining farm economy, he was blessed with very low petroleum prices that led to several lakh crores of savings accruing to the exchequer and the nation too was ready to believe and follow the new leader, even on a path of thorns that he set.

Not since Indira Gandhi has India had a prime minister as bold and authoritative as Narendra Modi. The former helped to create Bangladesh out of East Pakistan, nationalised private banks, ended the privy purses but also imposed the Emergency. Modi announced demonetisation that took 80 per cent of the cash out of circulation in the beginning of the sowing season and followed up with a poorly implemented GST. The double whammy, entirely human induced, accompanied the twin mammoth shocks of a back-to-back drought and very low international commodity prices.

This vicious concoction destroyed hopes of millions and dented Modi's infallible image as well. The two-year drought led to a production shortfall and high commodity prices. When farmers responded to market signals of high prices of pulses and oilseeds,

production jumped up, while the country kept importing pulses and edible oil at zero import duty. It took the combined force of cabinet minister Nitin Gadkari, CEA to PM Arvind Subramanian and Niti Aayog member Ramesh Chand to coerce the establishment to stop import of pulses and to take other remedial measures. These came too late as large segments in the countryside went over the edge.

Trying to salvage the situation after the Mandasaur calamity, the Nashik-Mumbai march and other agitations, the government panicked, over-reacted and committed a bigger political blunder by announcing higher minimum support prices (MSPs) earlier this year. The methodology to calculate the MSP was contentious but even that would not have become an issue had farmers been able to sell their crops at the promised price. Unfortunately, neither this nor the next government can purchase all the crop production for which MSPs are announced.

The PM seems to have been isolated from the cacophony of discontent by a party leadership fearful to speak the truth. More importantly, an incompetent opposition seems to have given a high dose of dopamine that kept one out of touch with ground realities. Wary of inflation that had battered UPA-II and propelled the BJP to power in 2014, the government prioritised keeping inflation low for consumers and, by design, farmers became the primary inflation mitigation tool and scapegoats.

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, electronic trading portal eNam, soil health cards, model APLM act 2017 and a slew of other schemes have failed to deliver. As commodity prices fell, agriculture inputs become more expensive and decimated farmer incomes. Doubling farm incomes has become a dark and cruel joke. The National Forest Policy 2018 has been a dampener for tribal farmer rights and those living on the margins. Consequently, the largest migration in human history is underway—that from rural areas to urban areas. The silent migration is resulting in devastating socio-economic consequences.

While the government wisely retreated from its stated position by continuing with MGNREGA, it was forced to abort on the land acquisition bill. Government actions have also had unintended positive consequences, like reducing urea bag size from

Several central farm schemes did not deliver. Commodity prices fell, input prices shot up, thus decimating farmer incomes.

RUEL, DARK JOKE

licy. The resultant migration to urban India has devastating socio-economic consequences.

SURESH K. PANDEY




50kg to 45 kg has reduced per acre consumption by 10 per cent, because the farmer measures the input by the bag, not the weight. The department, however, deludes itself, believing that the introduction of neem coating of urea has led to the improvement.

THEIR PRIDE
Farmers on a protest march to Parliament on November 30

AGRICULTURE is a state subject; when states are not able to perform, the Centre too gets the blame. It is equally true that policies for farmers are made by the central government without consulting states or even the beneficiaries, the farmers. Therefore, central policies look good on paper but cannot be implemented; there is a basic design flaw as policy-makers lack the capacity to make informed choices. In days to come, the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership international trade treaty without taking the opinion of the states and farmer interests into consideration will spell the death knell for the community.


After the 14th Finance Commission, there is a 42 per cent of fund devolution to the states and it would be unfair to blame Modi for reduced allocations for agriculture programmes. The state governments are supposed to utilise the increased resource allocations as they prioritise their agriculture needs, which they do not. Accepting the 7th pay commission recommendations was a gigantic blunder. It strained central government finances and even the states will be compelled to accept it. After salaries and pensions have been paid, the states will have no spare resources for development or for even tapping into central government programs like RKVY and ATMA, which require sharing of costs.

For all his well-intentioned plans to improve farmer livelihoods, the failure may well be attributed to over-reliance on the bureaucracy. Even as farmer suicides take place without let or hindrance, the government is hiding the figures. Broken promises like the Rs 15 lakh in bank accounts is not what haunts the BJP. The unkept promise of providing two crore off-farm jobs and lack of livelihood prospects for farmers' children is the gravest let-down. Over decades the ruling party honed the tactics to blame others for existing problems. This is not an option, as the BJP rules at the Centre and in the states.

Taking for granted disunited farmers and making the blunder of believing them to be of little electoral significance may prove costly for more reasons than one. If the Congress makes substantial gains in the state elections, an all-India farm loan waiver may well be on the cards, because there is nothing left to promise or deliver. The future is frightening in terms of the total vacuum of farmer leadership within the top hierarchy of all large political parties today. 

(The author is chairman, Bharat Krshak Samaj)



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PRONAB SEN

THE EMPEROR'S NEW NOTES

The government has big achievements, but it's in denial over demonetisation

In terms of programmes, the NDA government has continued and upscaled almost everything that was going on before; this is a good thing, for which they should be complimented. But in each of these cases, the hype has exceeded the substance delivered on the ground.

They built up expectations, many of which have gone unrealised. A number of new initiatives were announced, but little has been heard about what these have accomplished. For instance, the Mudra loans were a very good idea conceptually but, so far as I can make out, they are no different in reality from standard MSME loans. Mudra was one of the earliest programmes announced by the Modi government in 2014, but we are yet to see any government assessment of it. One wonders why. Now, four years later, they are talking about banks supporting MSMEs. That was exactly what the Mudra loans were supposed to do—have we come full circle? Mudra was supposed to help micro-entrepreneurs. So, what is happening?

In terms of certain policies, the government has done well. For instance, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)—an absolutely essential step that's been demanded for the past 16 years—was finally instituted, and so far, it has done fine. The question is, will subsequent governments be firm in deploying the IBC's provisions to deal with the NPA problems of banks?

GST was another important move that had been hanging fire for a very long time. This government finally got it done. There were glitches, but such were bound to happen; anybody who expected GST to settle down in less than three years was kidding himself. These, then, are the two major achievements for which, along with Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, the NDA government should be given credit.

My sense is that the overall macro management would have been alright under normal circumstances. However, circumstances were anything but normal. Demonetisation had a major effect on the economy, and to do macro management without taking that into account, and indeed to pretend that everything was normal, was a serious error—an error that continues to be made because

the government seems to be in denial over the effects of demonetisation. That is showing up in a lot of adverse effects; the most obvious is out on the streets in the form of the farmers' protests.

What is also obvious, and can possibly have an even wider deleterious effect in the long run, is the fact that the MSME sector is not doing well at all. In fact, it is doing extremely badly. The government is trying to ameliorate this by saying that it is going to give more loans etc., but that comes a little late in the day. What happens in such a case is that when damage has been done, it is very difficult to rectify.

Think of a person who had set up a business. Then demonetisation happens, and the business goes bust. The owner would have taken out a fair sum in loans to get that business off. All of that goes bad. Nobody is going to touch the business again. Essentially, he is wiped out as an entrepreneur. So, we now have to wait for new entrepreneurs to come on the scene. My sense is that we have lost out on two years of entrepreneurship in the post-demonetisation period, and I am not sure how badly this has affected the entrepreneurial spirit of the nation.

The government has already entered election mode, and is cherry picking in its actions. When farmers protest, the government hikes the minimum support price (MSP). The fact is that you can hike the MSP however much you like; it is just another announcement unless you actually enforce it and the farmers benefit. The government can claim it is providing a higher MSP to farmers, or cash on tap to MSMEs through the banks, but at the end of the day these are lived experiences. The people who are hurting will continue to hurt.

The government can claim that jobs are being created. Yes, perhaps; in the formal sector some jobs are being created. But the fact is that those who are not getting jobs are bound to ask, who is getting these jobs? Why am I not getting a job? How they are going to spin it out, I don't know. That is the real challenge. ■

(The writer is programme director, International Growth Centre India Programme, and is a former chief statistician of India)

My sense is that we have lost out on two years of enterprise after the note ban in 2016.



Odisha sets a new benchmark with Hockey World Cup

woos tourists with other festivities as well!

Odisha dazzled one and all with the glittering opening ceremony for the Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup Bhubaneswar 2018 at the iconic Kalinga Stadium. Bollywood heart-throb Shah Rukh Khan, Madhuri Dixit and renowned music composer AR Rahman dished out enthralling performances. The ceremony showcased first-of-its-kind theatrical production - The Earth Song, which beautifully depicted the theme of the ceremony.

The World Cup was declared open by Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik during the ceremony, attended by all 16 captains. The spectacular fusion dance performances were choreographed by Shiamak Davar. He was joined by 1100 artists who danced to the tunes created by Ranjit Barot. It was one the highlights of

the evening which left the audience spellbound.

The show opened by the earth cracking and Madhuri emerging as Mother Earth, addressing the world at large as her children. Rahman brought to life his and Gulzar Saheb's composition Jai Hind Jai India' with a live performance, which is the official song and tune of the World Cup. Bollywood star, Shahrukh presented over 2.35 crore collected heartbeats to the

captains of the hockey teams participating at flagship FIH event. Meanwhile, Bollywood superstar Salman Khan joined the second phase of the inaugural ceremony of Hockey Men's World Cup at Barabati Stadium in Cuttack where he was welcomed with loud cheers from a crowd of 15,000.

After being dazzled by the Opening Ceremony of the world cup, people in Odisha were further mesmerized by the inaugural ceremony of Odisha Tourism's marquee events -Konark Dance Festival and International Sand Art Festival.

The theme of the International Sand Art Festival's this year is around the ongoing Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup Bhubaneswar 2018 and the participating artists are bringing their interpretation of the same with their sculptures.

Meanwhile, the inaugural performances at the 30th Konark Festival, exhibited the best of India's ancient cultural arts, with the opening performance by renowned Odissi Guru Durga Charan Ranbir and group. Odissi as a classical dance form, while largely performed by danseuses, as per Guru Ranbir, also comprises the Tandava aspect, including items such as Sabda Swara Pata and Sthayee have been specially choreographed keeping the male torso in view.

The curtain raiser to the inaugural edition of .FEST gave audiences a spectacular performance by Bollywood's biggest and most dynamic music composer duo, Vishal and Shekhar. The festival, which coincides with Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup 2018 hosted in Bhubaneswar, saw an astounding turnout of thousands of attendees from different parts of the world and the country on Day 1.



Odisha Tourism



Scenic | Serene | Sublime
The Soul of Incredible India

BY G.C. SHEKHAR IN CHENNAI

LAKHS of Tamils tune into his music before going to sleep. Successive generations swear that his romantic songs will remain etched in the popular consciousness as love anthems. Even today, no live orchestra show in Tamil Nadu is complete without at least a dozen Ilaiyaraaja songs spanning over three decades.

And yet, the 75-year-old doyen recently had to plead openly that he needed to be paid royalties for public performances of his songs. "It is my

creation, and when you earn money from that, should I not get my due share from that?" he asked in an emotional video post. He also cautioned that failure to honour his request would lead to legal action.

Ilaiyaraaja's blunt anger and choice of words had many fuming that the maestro had become greedy in his old age. The outrage on social media was matched only by the silence of other composers, many of whom cite him as their musical inspiration. None of them came forward to back Ilaiyaraaja's allegation that the Indian Performing Right Society (IPRS) had failed in its duty of keeping track of his songs being performed in ticketed shows across the globe, thus denying him crores of rupees due to him under copyright laws.

With the largest ever body of film songs—over 1,000 films and 5,000-plus songs—the Padma Vibhushan awardee was naturally miffed at the inaction of the IPRS, and recently announced his exit from the organisation. Instead, he nominated the Chennai-based Cine Musicians' Union, consisting of film musicians from the south, to monitor his music's ticketed shows and monetise them. He said 20 per cent of the money would go to the union for the welfare of hundreds of instrumentalists who have lost their jobs with the arrival of digitally created music.

Even in March 2017, Ilaiyaraaja had a legal notice served on his dear friend and singer S.P. Balasubrahmanyam (SPB), asking the latter not to sing his songs during a US tour, as the organisers had not sought his permission or paid him any royalties. SPB, who had collaborated with Ilaiyaraaja in over 300 films in Tamil and Telugu, had to hurriedly rejig his playlists by singing compositions of other music directors. "The fans wanted to hear Raaja's melodies, but I had to respect the feelings of my elder brother," says SPB, who reacted graciously to the unseemly stand-off.

PAST BONHOMIE S.P. Balasubrahmanyam on stage with Ilaiyaraaja

A King Without Royalty

Composer Ilaiyaraaja fights for his due, and the industry shows cracks



The two artistes, known for their on-stage bonhomie, have not been on speaking terms since then.

Tamil film music director Dhina, who now heads the Cine Musicians' Union, justifies Raaja's grouse, pointing out that a north-south divide in the IPRS has wrought injustice towards southern composers, especially those who had arrived before the digital distribution of music came into vogue. "Can you imagine that a Hindi composer with just ten films and Ilaiyaraaja with over 1,000 films were both paid 13 lakhs as royalties by the IPRS? One of my hit songs, 'Manmadha Raja', has been credited wrongly to another music director from Mumbai, and its royalty earnings are being paid to him. I've been fighting for four years to get this rectified," says Dhina. Songwriter and poet Javed Akhtar, who is currently chairman of the IPRS, admits that grave anomalies have haunted the functioning of the rights body, but stresses that efforts are on to set things right. (see interview)

Composers like Ilaiyaraaja and his contemporaries, who arrived and made their mark in the '80s, have also felt short-changed by the legal conditions imposed by many music companies that denied them any share from the exploitation of their creations in digital formats. "While the likes of A.R. Rahman, and even Raaja's son Yuvan Shankar and the younger crop of music directors, firmed up their royalties from downloads, streaming apps and mobile caller tunes, Raaja sir had to wage a legal battle for the same. When he approached the IPRS for justice, its agents would show up and demand money to settle the dispute, adding insult to injury. This is no way to treat a genius revered across the world," rues musician Ganesh, an authority on Ilaiyaraaja's compositions.

"Ilaiyaraaja's battle is also bound to benefit lyricists and singers as the 2012 amendment to the Copyrights Act assures the right to royalty to the music composer, lyricists and singers for any use of their work outside the film. The amendment also makes illegal any surrender of the right to royalty through contract," points out Muhammed Faris, a research scholar in intellectual property rights. He also wants to ensure that musical creations are available at an affordable price for performers in clubs, restaurants and other social functions.

To regularise the performance of Ilaiyaraaja's numbers, the Cine Musicians' Union has published a tariff card for the amount to be paid for ticketed concerts, as background music at malls, retail stores, restaurants, pubs and discos, while exempting family functions, village and temple festivals and cultural events at educational institutions. But when asked if it would be possible for the union to keep tabs on shows across the world, Dhina says an expert team of lawyers and technically savvy music lovers can monitor these. "A.R. Rahman has a good management team that takes care of the royalty issue, and we will take their

'I will promise total transparency'

IPRS chairman Javed Akhtar spoke to G.C. Shekhar

Ilaiyaraaja says he has left the IPRS as it has failed him, and has asked the Cine Musicians' Union to collect his royalties.

Yes he has left us, and it is a sad day for us. Ilaiyaraaja is a true legend, and the quality and quantity of his songs vouch for this. I must admit that when I took over, things were chaotic, but we are setting our house in order. I am truly shocked that he has taken this decision.

The IPRS has been in existence since 1969, and things went smoothly for years. But of late there has been a huge backlog in payments, and the monitoring has also slackened?


Yes, payments were delayed. Since

receipts and payments were made physically, there was pilferage. Now we have made everything online—licensing, collection from end users and payment to the creators and performers. We have put together a team of 20 qualified people to streamline the data and monitoring of concerts and other performances. Let us not forget that we are dealing with over a million songs.

Are music composers being cheated when many concerts happen without the knowledge of the IPRS, or when foreign monitoring agencies fail to report these concerts?

This is a recent problem, and will be rectified. Why talk about foreign concerts when a top TV channel headquartered in Chennai has not been paying royalties to Ilaiyaraaja? Some Indian FM stations are regular offenders. Our own people should show some honour to our musical greats.

Will Ilaiyaraaja return to the IPRS?


I plan to meet him soon and explain the corrective steps we have taken. He must be convinced that the IPRS is the correct legal body that has the wherewithal to collect royalty. I will promise him total transparency in the functioning of this body. 



"It is my creation, and when you earn money from that, should I not get my due share?" asked Ilaiyaraaja.

advice as well," he says confidently.

Those most worried are local music troupes that perform in Tamil Nadu and neighbouring states. Now they or the organisers will have to cough up a percentage of the collection to the union. "Our concerts are incomplete without Raaja sir's songs, which actually form the bulk of our repertoire. You can find live instruments and singing only in orchestras like ours, while even in big ticket events many singers merely lip-sync popular hits played from recordings. If they can concentrate only on foreign tours and spare us, the livelihood of many musicians will be protected," says U.K. Murali, owner of a music troupe.

Ganesh, however, argues that this is not just about money, but about the recognition due to a musical legend: "That Raaja sir has to fight for what is legitimately his creation is a sad commentary on how we treat our artistes. The music industry should look beyond money, and do justice to a national treasure." 

'Killer instinct doesn't mean you show emotions'

Counted amongst the 'fabulous five' of Indian batting along with Tendulkar, Dravid, Ganguly and Sehwag, V.V.S. Laxman, when in full flow, mesmerised fans with his wristy play and silken, effortless touch. Australia, in particular, bore the brunt of his prowess as he piled up 2,434 runs in 29 Tests against them, with six centuries. An Amitabh Bachchan fan, Laxman strode Test cricket like Big B stamped Bollywood, tallying 8,781 runs in 134 Tests, averaging an above par 49.37, though he never played in a 50-over World Cup. He recently launched his autobiography 281 And Beyond (Westland Sport), which "candidly" chronicles his life and times. Excerpts from an exclusive interview with Qaiser Mohammad Ali:

Have you been totally candid in your autobiography?

Absolutely candid. During my career I never expressed myself openly. These days, I give a lot of motivational talks. Two years ago, when I gave a talk to an MNC in Goa, an elderly person told me that my 45-minute talk inspired him and that it would be valuable for his son and grandson. He also said that I should write a book. That was the trigger for this autobiography. I've read a lot of autobiographies of eminent people. I have learned a lot by reading books on Mahatma Gandhi, Vivekananda and Andre Agassi.

You scored 2,434 runs in 29 Tests, including six centuries against Australia—this includes 1,236 runs with four centuries on Australian soil. Why this disdain, or liking, for Aussie bowlers?

I've always enjoyed playing against them. Even when I represented India under-19 against them in 1994, I was the highest scorer. The reason could be their attacking, competitive nature. They were probably the best bowling unit in our generation, and they could do well anywhere in the world. So, their

never-say-die attitude got the best out of me. Also, the Indian team challenged them and raised the bar whenever we played against them.

They were 'competitive', but you were always retained a 'good boy' image.

I never showed my emotions. I believed that being competitive or having the killer instinct doesn't mean that you throw tantrums. It's about showing mental toughness when it matters the most. People relate sledging to Australians, but they didn't sledge me much. It never perturbed me. Smart sledging is all about whom to sledge and how to do it. Zaheer Khan and Harbhajan Singh are the smartest sledgers I've seen. The impact they had was unbelievable.

GETTY IMAGES



“

I thought I deserved a place in the 2003 World Cup team. Hurt, I almost left the game; went away to the US to get over it.

Kohli-led India are the favourites in Australia. But they've to score big first innings scores and win the crucial moments.

Your 281 against Australia in Calcutta was a seminal knock—then the highest Test score by an Indian.

After the first practice session at the Eden, I developed back spasms. When physiotherapist Andrew Leipus made me see my back in the mirror, it was tilted towards one side. I was in tears. But, thanks to Andrew, I played that Test. It was a monumental match because of the situation we were in—India followed on, being 274 runs behind, but went on to win by 171 runs. Rahul Dravid and I didn't talk much during that partnership [376 for the fifth wicket in the second innings]; we just said "one more over" to each other, finished it, and said the same thing again and again. You've to have goals, even in challenging situations; you've to break them into smaller goals to achieve the bigger goal.

In their upcoming four-Test series in Australia, would India have an advantage in the absence of Steve Smith, David Warner and Cameron Bancroft? Yes, without a doubt. India starts as favourites, for they are a settled side. If India play to their potential they can win the series. But it's very important for the batsmen to pile up a big score in



Photograph: JITENDER GUPTA

the first innings. If they do that in overseas conditions, India have the firepower to take 20 wickets. If not, you are always chasing the game, forced into a defensive approach. To start the series on a winning note is crucial. I hope the mistakes India made in South Africa and England are not repeated, as when you are playing in away conditions it's important to win the crucial moments. The team that wins those three-four crucial moments wins the match. In South Africa and England, India didn't win those crucial moments.

But the Aussies obviously know their conditions and pitches better than the Indians.

About pitches, I've realised from my experience that the first tour to a country is always challenging. From the second one onwards, you know what to expect and as professionals you prepare yourself to do well. So, Indian batsmen, with their 2014 experience, will do well even on these pitches.

Do you think a lot of responsibility would be on captain Virat Kohli to help India to big first-innings totals? It cannot be only Virat, because this team has experience and class in its

batting line-up. It's about everyone going out with a gameplan and sticking to it. Virat was so successful in England recently as he didn't repeat his mistakes of 2014, especially the area where he was susceptible was now his strong point. The discipline he showed in leaving the ball outside the off stump was critical in scoring those runs [593 at 59.30 in five Tests]. So every batsman will have to take responsibility.

How do you rate India's bowling attack?

It's a complete bowling attack—there's variety and firepower. The five fast bowlers can bowl quick and are very skilful. In the spin department, again there's variety and quality.


In 2004, when Sehwag broke your Indian record of the highest Test score in Multan with a superb 309, did he say something like "sorry" to you? No. I was very happy for him. Viru is such a confident cricketer, also as a person, and he's unique. His strength is his mind and his approach towards life. After my 281, we played an ODI against Australia in Bangalore. When we reached Pune and were having dinner, Viru suddenly said, "Laxman bhai, you mis-

sed scoring the first triple Test century for India. This is something I'm going to do". And he hadn't played a Test till then. I was surprised. So, when he got the triple in Multan, he said, "I had told you so".

After the prolific 1999-2000 domestic season, in which you amassed 1,415 runs, and after the 2001 Australia Test series, did you think you had it in you to become a successful ODI player as well?

Between 1998, when I made my ODI debut, and 2000, I didn't play too many ODIs. I batted at No. 5 or No. 6. But I understood the basic formula of scoring runs in ODIs after that prolific domestic season.

And you missed the 2003 World Cup—your biggest disappointment—and went to the US to get over it.

I was hurt and disappointed because I thought I deserved a place in the team. I almost left the game. I went off to the US to spend almost two months with my childhood friends—doctors and engineers who didn't understand the game too much. I rediscovered my passion for the game when I missed hitting the cricket ball. 






GOD'S OWN CITY, IN COLOUR

A tide of graffiti talent takes over Allahabad

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS BY
TRIBHUVAN TIWARI

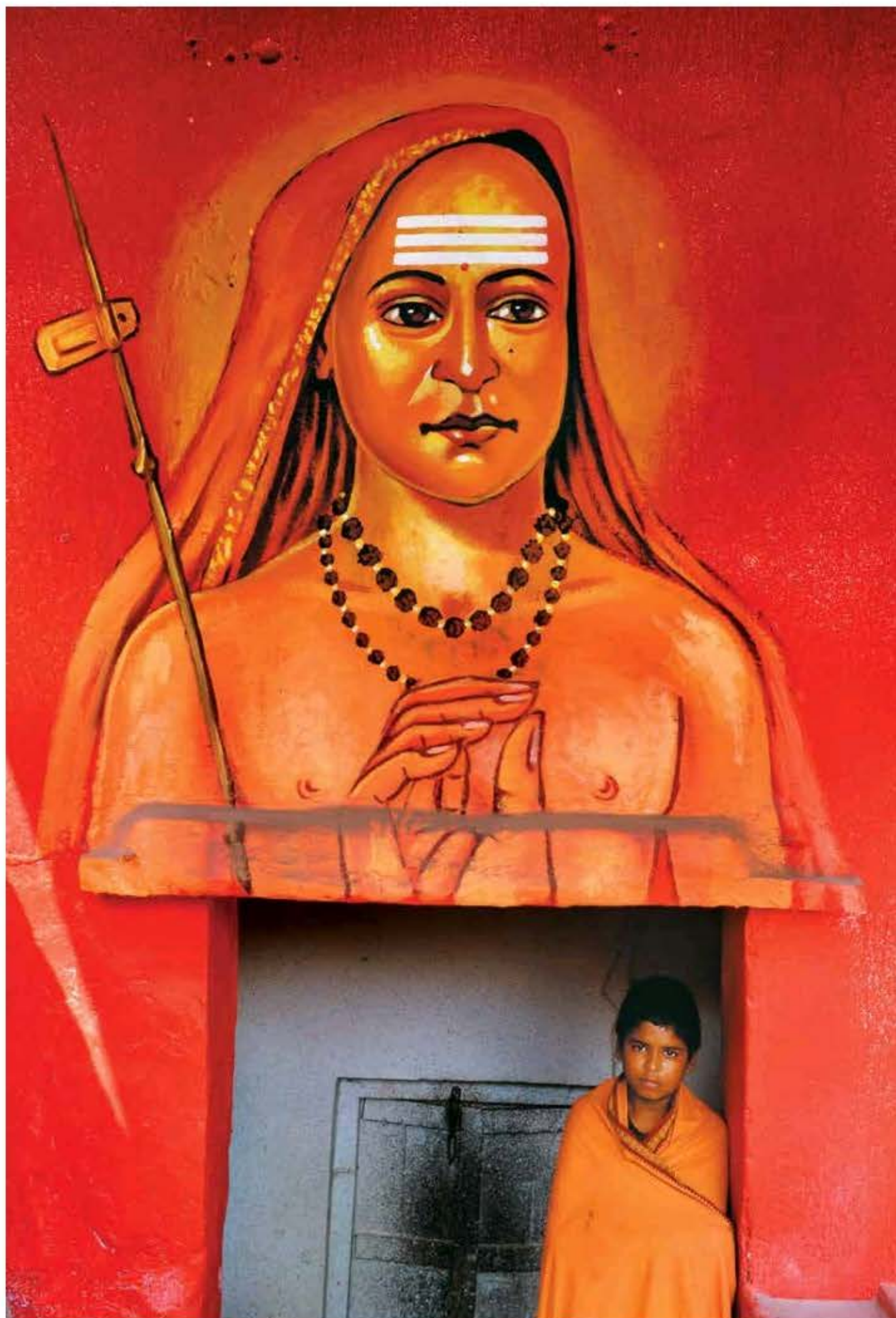
ALLAHABAD has a new name. And Prayagraj has been busy painting a new picture. A 'paint my city' campaign is transforming the recently rechristened holy city with graffiti. The Kumbh Mela organising committee has asked around five art agencies to fill nearly 3 lakh sq-feet of the city with colourful murals. The brief is straight: mythology around Kumbh, the history of Allahabad and social programmes of the government. The budget: around Rs 30 crore. The idea of commissioned graffiti might not go too well with a rebellious Allahabad Banksy, but talented street artists from across cities have interpreted the brief in spectacular ways, adding colour and vibrancy to the city's walls. The painting effort is part of preparations for the Kumbh Mela in January next year.

Here's a peek into some of the artists' interpretations of the mythologies and histories associated with Allahabad. We caught a massive commuting sadhu on a bicycle, a peaceful Hanuman with long curly locks in prayer, false windows and buffaloes with glow-in-the-dark horns watching the buzzing city traffic go by. 

BABA PSY The cyclist sadhu on an Allahabad University boys hostel wall (art agency: Ram Suttar)

MURAL MAGIC

SPECTRUM IN SAFFRON Right, a resting cow foregrounds a vibrant, lost-in-prayer Hanuman at Arail Ghat (art agency: Delhi Street Art); below, a child at the chaukhat of a haloed Shankaracharya in Arail Ghat (art agency: Delhi Street Art)





IN SYNC Left, a sadhu at the door of the newly painted Kumbh Mela office (art agency: Promicare)



ROADSIDE APPARITIONS Above, buffaloes with their fluorescent painted horns on the walls of railway colony (art agency: Ram Suttar); below, a dancer heads for the truck near Shivkuti Ghat (art agency: Promicare)





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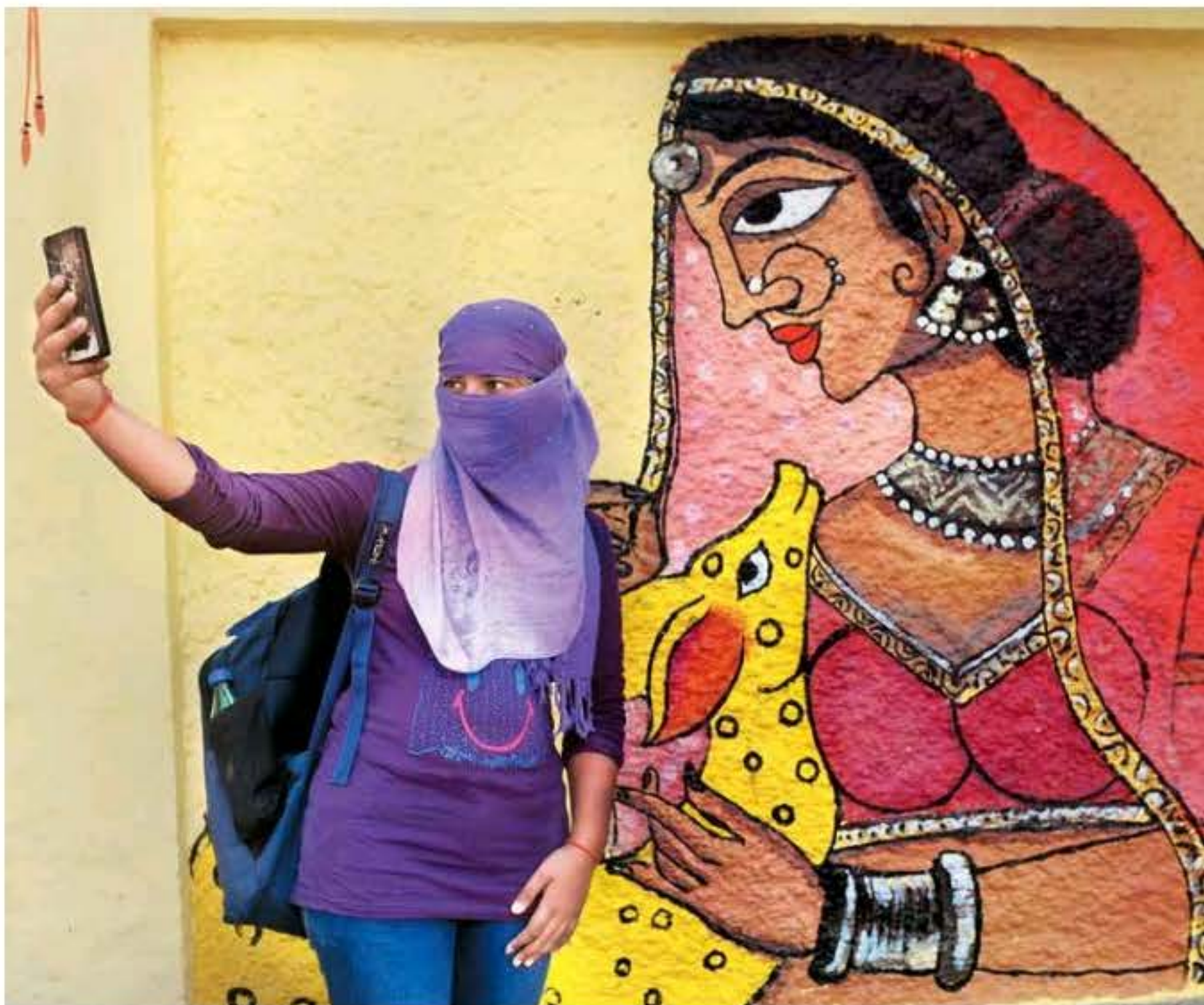
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Home stay facility is also available in rural areas of Himachal.



CANVAS CONTEXT Above, spot the real window on this railway colony wall; below, a selfie with the deer woman (both by art agency: Ram Suttar); bottom left, a coloured sadhu appears on a tree near Sangam ghat



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BEST OF
2018
CROWNED

BEST OF 2018 CROWNED

Here are the top-ten machines of 2018.

photography: KAPIL VASHIST & MUSHTAK MOHAMMAD

60 machines – everything from the Audi RS 5 to the Mahindra Marazzo on the four-wheel front, and the BMW F 850 GS to the TVS NTorq 125 on the two-wheel front – battled it out to be crowned the ‘Best of 2018,’ an accolade reserved only for the absolute best of the year. The top-ten!

Each of these machines proved their mettle at the Buddh International Circuit, as they were evaluated by our experienced team of road testers – who rate each machine out of a total score of 100 for quality, practicality, drivetrain, design, value-for-money, ride-and- handling, and much more.

You can see the full test on our website – autox.com – where we’ve rated all the contenders in the most transparent and objective way possible. We take great pride in publishing the points of our annual ratings, so you know exactly who’s being awarded what – and why.

The awards are reserved for just six four-wheelers and four two-wheelers. Needless to say, these deserving machines are as diverse as they are exceptional.

After extensive testing, the ‘Best of 2018’ in the four wheel category are the Audi RS 5 Coupe, Hyundai Santro, Maruti Suzuki Swift, Mercedes-AMG E63 S, Mahindra Marazzo, and the Ferrari 488 GTB, which is the ‘Performance Car of the Year.’

On the two wheel front, the top-three are the BMW F 850 GS, TVS NTorq 125, Suzuki GSX-S750, and the Ducati Monster 821, which is the Performance Bike of the Year.

In this issue, we sit down with senior personnel from four of these automakers in a high-level panel discussions to get a sense of just what it takes to succeed in the Indian market.





'Best of 2018' Panel Discussion

In the AutoX Best of 2018 panel discussion, we sit down with some of the most senior personnel in the Indian automotive industry to find out just what it takes to succeed in the Indian market.

On the panel is Rahil Ansari, Head, Audi India, Serge Canovas, Managing Director, Ducati India, Y.K. Koo, Managing Director & CEO, Hyundai India, and C. V. Raman, Senior Executive Director, Maruti Suzuki.

We start the discussion with EV's, since that's the buzzword at present. Moreover, both Audi and Hyundai have committed to launching EV's in the coming year.

What does the government need to do to create an enabling environment for more EV launches sooner rather than later?

Rahil Ansari, Audi India

We need to see the infrastructure being developed quickly. The announcement regarding EVs and setting up the infrastructure has been made a long time

ago, and now it's time for some action. We've seen some pilot projects coming up, and some EV charging stations being set up, but that's not enough. On the one hand, the infrastructure set up has to grow rapidly. And, on the other hand, a framework also has to come in. A framework is very important, because it is essential for the OEMs to know what's coming up. How are you going to develop a car, and does it fit to

Electric vehicles are not a choice. This is the direction we have to take. And this is a global trend, including in the Indian market

Y.K. Koo, Hyundai



the Indian environment or not? The risk is that you launch a car, and the policies change afterwards.

C.V. Raman, Maruti Suzuki

India needs to look at energy security, we need to look at the environment, we need to look at the infrastructure, and we need to look at the customer – so these are the four things that need to evolve. Looking at the data, it's very clear that energy security is paramount for India – especially keeping in mind the change in crude prices and the foreign exchange fluctuation at present.

India is a small car market. 70% of the cars that are made in India are small cars, with an average price of 5,00,000 to 5,50,000 Rupees. The absorption ratio for an electric car is a question mark at this point in time for the customer. Plus, if we are to follow the government's 'Make in India' initiative, there is a technology agnostic approach that is very, very important. It could be alternate fuels, it could be hybridization, or it could be electrification. It's not just EVs, but electrification of the fleet.

There's an ecosystem that is available for the IC engine, and there's a transition that's required when you need to

move forward from an infrastructure perspective. Therefore, a long term policy is important. For emissions, where do we want to be in 2020, 2022 and 2027? NITI Aayog has said very clearly – 30% of passenger cars, 100% of two wheelers, and 100% of buses needs to be EVs by 2030. From an energy security perspective, the petrol consumption is the largest in the two wheeler segment – 62% – and so China has gone 100% electric as far as two wheelers are concerned. It's important to look at data, and we need to provide a solution that provides the best value for the customer.

Y.K. Koo, Hyundai

Electric vehicles are not a choice. This is the direction we have to take. And this is a global trend, including in the Indian market. Controlling emissions is very important for India, especially when you look at the air pollution. So, we are working towards developing a new EV product based on the Kona on a CKD basis in 2019, but the main purpose to develop and produce the Kona EV is to test both the product and the market, because India is still not ready to accept some EVs because of the infrastructure. FAME 1 is almost over, and we are waiting

for FAME 2 to see what kind of support OEMs can expect from the government. The government should motivate OEMs to develop EVs – that is most important, so we are asking the government and NITI Aayog to provide more support – perhaps in the form of an incentive, a GST reduction, and the reduction of import duties for the CKD part of an EV product. This will provide strong support to OEMs to start the production of EVs in India.

Sergi Canovas, Ducati

On two wheels, we always follow what's happening on four wheels. As mentioned here, in China, all two wheelers need to be electric. So, we're going to follow what the market is doing. And, indeed, a couple of weeks ago, we presented the first race bike that is electric. So, we are working on this.

Is safety becoming a priority for Indian buyers?

C.V. Raman, Maruti Suzuki

Definitely, safety is becoming important – and the government is bringing in regulation to that end. So, every vehicle, post 2019, will be tested for side impact as well as pedestrian safety. But safety is something which people need to understand. It's not just about making safe cars, but it's about developing a safety culture, where people understand that they need to belt up – whether in the front seat or the rear seat. If you don't, no amount of airbags will help you. Plus, the infrastructure and the traffic management also needs to be improved. This is a progression – it's going to happen, and we're likely to catch up with Europe in three to five years.

Y.K. Koo, Hyundai

There are certain criteria for customers to choose a product. Earlier, it was fuel efficiency, and maybe price, but now the trend is different. Now, it's a case of safety first! Now they are looking at things like ABS, and maybe even dual airbags. Now they are willing to pay for safety features. If the government takes strong action towards safety, this is a very good direction.

Sergi Canovas, Ducati

In our case, the rider is more fragile than in a car, so our bikes come with all the safety features – which is very

important. But, for us, the part that we have to explain to our customers is that they should always wear safety gear when riding their bikes. For example, if someone comes to try our bikes, they also have the chance to try out our gear as well. This is not the flashy part – they come for performance, but our responsibility is to explain the advantage of full safety gear.

What is customer sentiment at present in the Indian market?

Rahil Ansari, Audi India

Customer sentiment pre-Diwali was a bit down. If you look at the financial markets, it's taken quite a drastic hit in the past weeks. This led to a little bit of a hit in terms of confidence, and, of course, customer sentiment. That had an impact on customer plans pre-Diwali. And since cars are quite costly, if you've lost money on the stock market, you tend to postpone big purchases. The good thing is that prior to Diwali there was some strong positive sentiment coming back, which is good. Looking at the outlook for next year, the main topic will be the elections – everything will be driven by how this goes.

Y.K. Koo, Hyundai

The market has grown by 6.4% in the first ten months. But when we are look at the first half versus the second half, in the first half the market grew in double digits, but from July to October there has been negative growth – so, overall market sentiment is not too positive. Oil prices are very high, the Rupee is weak, and overall buying power is down. Considering that, 6.4% is not too bad. And, for 2019, we're expecting 7 to 8% growth, which is not too bad considering the global market trend.

C.V. Raman, Maruti Suzuki

With the Kerala floods, and the crude oil prices, it's a case of trying to make the same numbers as last year, but, at Maruti Suzuki, we've targeted double digit growth, and we're trying all our efforts to ensure that we achieve this. Of course, it's a bit of a struggle the way things are going, but sentiment will pick up.

Is ease of doing business really improving?

Sergi Canovas, Ducati

In general, I think the actions taken last

We need to see the infrastructure being developed quickly. The announcement regarding EVs and setting up the infrastructure has been made a long time ago, and now it's time for some action

Rahil Ansari, Audi India



year make things much easier – GST is one clear example. So, from this perspective, it's positive. There are still things to be improved, like random taxation based on the origin of the product, but I see a positive trend and, indeed, India's ranking is improving.

C.V. Raman, Maruti Suzuki

GST definitely was a gamechanger. Take the simple example of transportation, the kind of changes that are happening in terms of removal of octroi and tolls, these are helping business, as you can actually see more turnaround for trucks. So, with the kinds of interventions that the government is bringing in, certainly the ranking with further improve.

What is the perception of India in global boardrooms today?

Rahil Ansari, Audi India

GST was a good move. Unfortunately, for the luxury segment, there were some other changes afterwards – such as the cess hike in September last year – that led to higher prices. And this is not really a fair approach because we consider ourselves 'Make in India.' Having established a local assembly and invested in the country, we're adding value and generating a lot of tax revenue here.

As far as the global boardroom is concerned, the luxury segment has not grown to that extent that it should, because the taxes are not favourable for the luxury industry. You're looking at a 1-1.2% market share for the entire segment, so it's very small as we're looking at a market that has just 35,000 to 40,000 units only. Yes, the revenue impact is big, but if you reduce the taxes you can increase the number of cars that are being sold and the amount being invested into the country in terms of products, dealerships and hiring. So, the expectation of the development of the Indian market in the luxury segment was much higher than has been the case. Fortunately, we all know that India is a strong and a strategic market, and will grow at some stage. So, we're still very positive, but we expect a certain change in the framework because the investments that have been made are substantial and it's clear that there have to be returns at some point in time.

Sergi Canovas, Ducati

When you talk about the headquarters, the first thing you need to do is make them understand what is India, and what are the challenges of India. Once you've done that, then it's much easier, because, sooner or later, the market will grow exponentially. In our case, we have more of a leisure product, so you need to create the environment to use these bikes. Nevertheless, it's very important to be positioned properly because the potential is there. So, you need to work with the government and the authorities to make sure that safety improves – then you give people the chance to spend money on luxury cars and bikes.

How is the customer changing in India?

C.V. Raman, Maruti Suzuki

India is a market where you have a lot of youth today – it's one of the youngest countries in the world with an average age of just about 23-24. So, there is an aspiration there, and, of course, with connectivity and the Internet, the geographical boundaries have gone. So, the aspiration is to have whatever is available in the rest of the world – whether it's design, technology or performance. And people today are becoming brand conscious, not only in regards to their attire but also with respect to their vehicles as well. After all, if you consider the kinds of vehicles that were in the market in 2000 and the vehicles that you see now in 2018 – whether it's a small or a large car – a lot of change has taken place. You can see that change in the design, or the way that the customer is looking for features, comfort, convenience and performance – so we're maybe just a couple of years behind Europe, and perhaps even at par in luxury segment.

Y.K. Koo, Hyundai

In the car industry now, sharing and the connectivity has become very important. This is a global trend, and India is no exception. The customer now has a different profile and the buying criteria is also different. They like infotainment, connectivity and touchscreens – these kinds of features are very important to the young generation. **OK**



If we are to follow the government's 'Make in India' initiative, there is a technology agnostic approach and a long term policy is very important

C.V. Raman, Maruti Suzuki

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Frying Pan *to the* *Fire*

What are the basic components of a good road trip? Well, a great car and good food! So, join us as we drive thousands of kilometres through multiple states in search for some mouth-watering delicacies.

words: ISHAN RAGHAVA // photography: KAPIL VASHIST



It's not everyday that you get a dream road-trip handed to you on a platter – literally. In the midst of our crazy Anniversary issue schedule, the Editor came up to me and asked if I would be willing to undertake a week-long road trip to discover some good food in Kashmir, Himachal and Punjab? My reply to this ludicrous question was something to the effect of – does the sun rise from the east? Is it hot in summer? You get the idea – right?

The next step was to figure out the logistics for the trip. Anyway, the idea was simple – take the new Audi A4 for a drive to Kashmir and find some good Wazwan, and then head to the next destination.

It was, on a sunny morning, that we were on the way to our first night halt for the trip – Jammu. The night stay at Jammu was uneventful, as was our early departure to Srinagar. The real trouble began at Udhampur – well before the Chainani tunnel, which is an engineering marvel. As a result of some road widening work, the traffic was chock-a-block.

Consequently, we spent four-and-a-half hours covering just 13-kilometres. However, here the A4 proved to be a godsend. Thanks to its comfortable seats, the auto hold function and the automatic gearbox, my nerves were fairly calm for the extended period that we were forced to sit in traffic. Once we crossed the Chainani tunnel though, the progress was swift.

Feast fit for a king

Venturing into the centre of downtown Srinagar demonstrates that this is, essentially, a perpetual conflict zone. There's unbelievable security everywhere. But the moment you enter *Ahdoo's*, you forget everything, amid its slick décor and mood lighting. Trusting the recommendation of the wonderfully patient manager, I finally ordered for myself what they call Tarami.

Served in an elaborate, and engraved, silver plate, Tarami comes with a portion of steamed rice, Mutton Seekh Kebab and a piece of Tabak Maaz as standard. On top of that – as you can see in the pictures – you can add another five dishes from the Wazwan menu. To keep it balanced, I ordered three

non-vegetarian and two vegetarian mains – Rista, Karam Saag, Nadroo Yakhni, Mirchi Qorma and Gushtaba.

When you finally look at platter, you can't but get intimidated by the sheer amount of food that you have on your plate. I slowly and gradually sampled everything on the menu, but I can't say that I preferred one dish over the other. But, if I were to recommend three things that were outstanding, they'd be the Rista, for the fantastic quality of the mutton meatball and balanced use of spices, the Karam Saag, for its distinctive Kashmiri flavour, and the Tabak Maaz for how delicious these the double fried mutton ribs are.

Fate plays its hand

However, as fate would have it – it usually does – the next morning greeted us with some bad news. There had been a landslide on the Jammu-Srinagar highway the day before, and all outgoing traffic from Srinagar had been stopped. Now, this was a serious impediment to our already tight schedule. After some phone calls, I learned that we could take the Mughal Road to reach Jammu, but there was the rub – the distance was much longer and the roads much worse. In short, a formidable challenge for the Audi A4.

After a couple of hours of state highways, we finally hit the Mughal Road and soon ascended to the famous *Peer Ki Galli*. A part of the original road, it's truly beautiful and picturesque. The lack of traffic helped of course, but the natural beauty of the Pir Panjal range, accentuated by light snowfall, really set the tone.

Less Tibetan, more 'Chindian'

Most of you would know about McLeod Ganj – it's famous for being the residence of the 14th Dalai Lama, and has a pretty impressive monastery too. Our target was to find some authentic Tibetan food, but, alas, my plans failed here. After trying a couple of restaurants, we found very little authentic Tibetan food. What we did find was more of what one would call 'Chindian' cuisine. Soon, we learned the reason. Apparently, to cater to tourists that come here from all over India, the cuisine has been adapted

and there's hardly any authentic Tibetan cuisine available in restaurants.

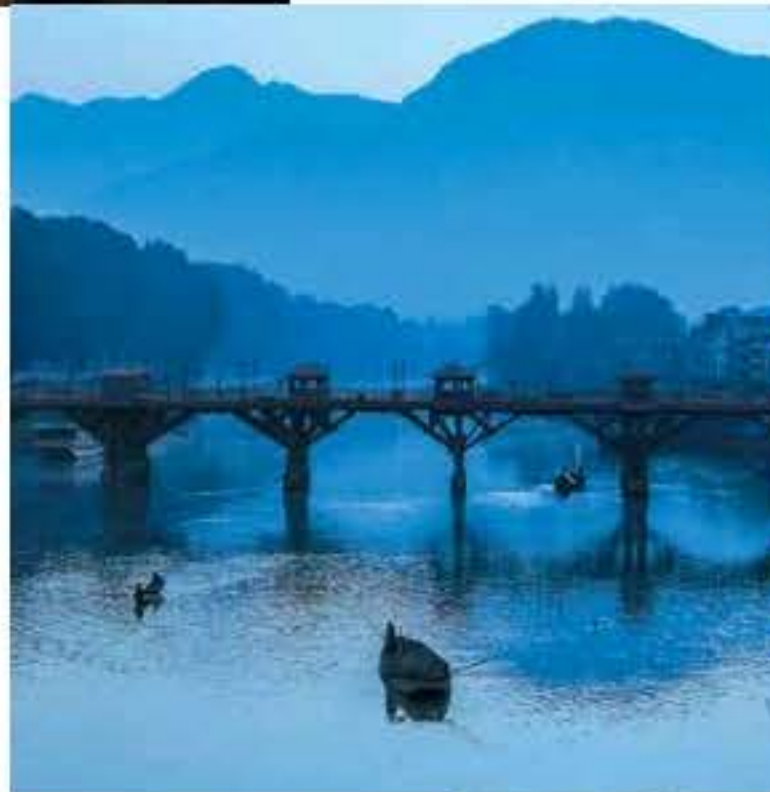
Having finished our scouting at McLeod, and after a truly average lunch – our first disappointing meal of the trip yet – we set off for Amritsar to dig into a meal that I would remember for various reasons.

Embracing butter

The lunch in Amritsar proved to be truly memorable, but for slightly different reasons. All my sources told me that this hole-in-the-wall shop in Chungi, in Amritsar, serves the finest specimen of what is arguably the most famous dish of the town – the *Amritsari kulcha*. Made fresh in a tandoor, the multi-layered Kulcha is then slathered in butter and served with *chole*. Let's just say that it lived up the hype – that fresh *kulcha*, with its layered construction, coming straight from the tandoor to your plate, proved to be a deeply satisfying meal. The freshness of the food, the simplicity of the service and a restaurant without any embellishment, all of it together made our time there truly memorable.

Now, after a week on the road, all the while gorging as if we were about to run out of food, and tasting as many things as we could, did I learn anything? Yes, quite a few things actually. Firstly, between the *Wazwan* of *Ahdoo's* in Srinagar and the *Amritsari kulchas* of Chungi's, what I learnt was that, most of the time, the traditional ways are the best. Sure, the chefs might be old-fashioned and the antithesis of a celebrity chef, but that doesn't mean that the food can't be spectacular. And, secondly, when you're out for a full week, driving for thousands of kilometres with the sole aim of eating some great food, having a companion like the Audi A4 helps. It's discreet, capable and very efficient. In short, it's all that you can ask for from a car during a road trip. With the varied terrain, the long hours, the increased load because of all our gorging, the A4 delivered not only reliably, but also spectacularly. **OK**

The Wazwan Tarami at *Ahdoo's* (top) was truly outstanding, as were the *Amritsari Kulchas* (bottom). The Tibetan meal in McLeod Ganj (middle), though, was a letdown.



BY LACHMI DEB ROY

LIFE in plastic, it's fantastic—but it was never meant to be realistic. With her stick-thin body and poker-straight hair, Barbie hardly looked the part of the everywoman. Inspired by the mid-century German doll Bild Lilli—sold by bars and tobacconists and popular among Dutch sailors as a sex toy—Barbie doll was launched in 1959 by American toy company Mattel. She took the second half of the 20th century by storm: the Barbie culture now spans cultures and continents, with her image stamped on the minds of generations. Her impossibly perfect image. The critics would not be silenced: Barbie promoted an unrealistic and unattainable body image, leading to body perception issues and severe eating disorders among kids.

Enter imperfect Barbie. Mattel responded—to the more plastic problem of plummeting sales, with a reported 20 per cent fall from 2012 to 2014, as well as the criticism—through a secret endeavour with a cryptic yet hopeful code-name: Project Dawn. Dawn broke in January 2016; Barbies with normal body types, cellulite, acne and stretch marks, Barbies of different ethnicities, hair textures and skin colours now populate the shelves.

The new range appears to be doing well. “Today, Barbie is the most diverse doll line in the marketplace, offering a variety of body types, skin tones, hairstyles and eye colours. Currently, everything on Barbie is selling—the variety we offer is resonating, igniting more opportunities for storytelling and imagination through Barbie play,” says Lokesh Kataria, head of marketing, Mattel, India and South Asia, adding, “Over the past four years, the Barbie brand has been undergoing a transformation to maintain relevance with today’s parents and children and the world girls see today.”

Kataria further mentions that Barbie the brand has been performing well across India: “The preference of the brand has seen a considerable spike from both girls and their mothers due to both the evolution of the marketing message to focus on the type of play Barbie enables, and the addition of

more variety into the line to include a more diverse offering.” Rivals too have arisen: Lammily, the ‘normal Barbie’ created by the evidently imaginative Nickolay Lamm, is the new ‘it doll’. More anatomically correct than your garden variety Barbie, she boasts an athlete’s figure. Makeup? Minimal. Her acne and stretch marks? She’s not bothered.

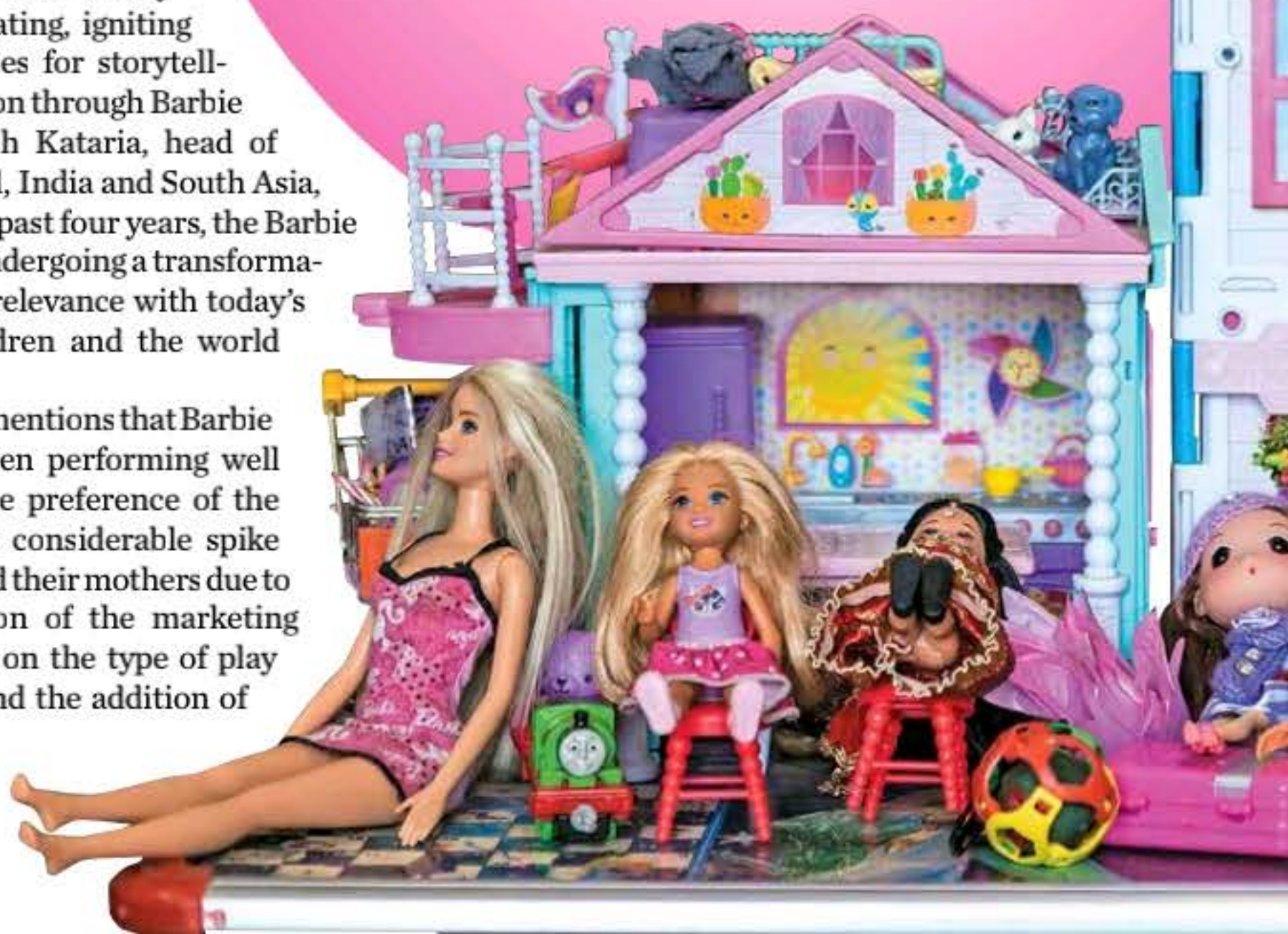
So, what has the orthodox Barbie wrought to provoke such a revolution? “Kids are impressionable, and are bound to pick up subtle hints and make their own assumptions, which could be faulty. Dolls act as companions, making it easy for the child to emulate the physical characteristics as well, be it the stick-thin figure of a Barbie or the muscular body of an action figure,” Mumbai-based psychologist Dr Anjali Chhabria tells *Outlook*.

Girls, Warts and All

Barbie—a bad influence? A new range of ‘normal’ dolls may offer a remedy.



Following Project Dawn, Barbies now come in different ethnicities, hair textures and skin colours.



Kavita Devgan, a Delhi-based nutritionist, concurs: "It teaches children to aspire for a skinny body, as that doll has been made exceptionally thin with completely unrealistic measurements. They project an inappropriate and potentially dangerous representation of what the human form should be for young children." Coming with makeup, clothes and other accessories, the dolls also put pressure on children to aspire to a certain lifestyle.

And what do children and young adults do to 'emulate' these plastic bodies? Nandini Raman, an academic in Delhi, says, "I see a lot of kids at school and college go through this identity crisis, sometimes even leading to eating disorders. Barbie is really far from what any woman looks like. Kids, at this impressionable age, end up self-harming, growing up with low or no self-esteem, lack of confidence and a poor body image." Early on, Barbie's manufacturers poured oil on these flames: in 1963, the doll came with a book titled *How to Lose Weight*, with strict instructions to eat little. Research has shown that Barbie, with her 36-inch chest and 18-inch waist, would lack the 17 per cent body fat required to menstruate.

Another dimension to Barbie's global hegemony is that it reinforces an American, specifically a white American, conception of beauty, in an exercise of soft power. A 2003

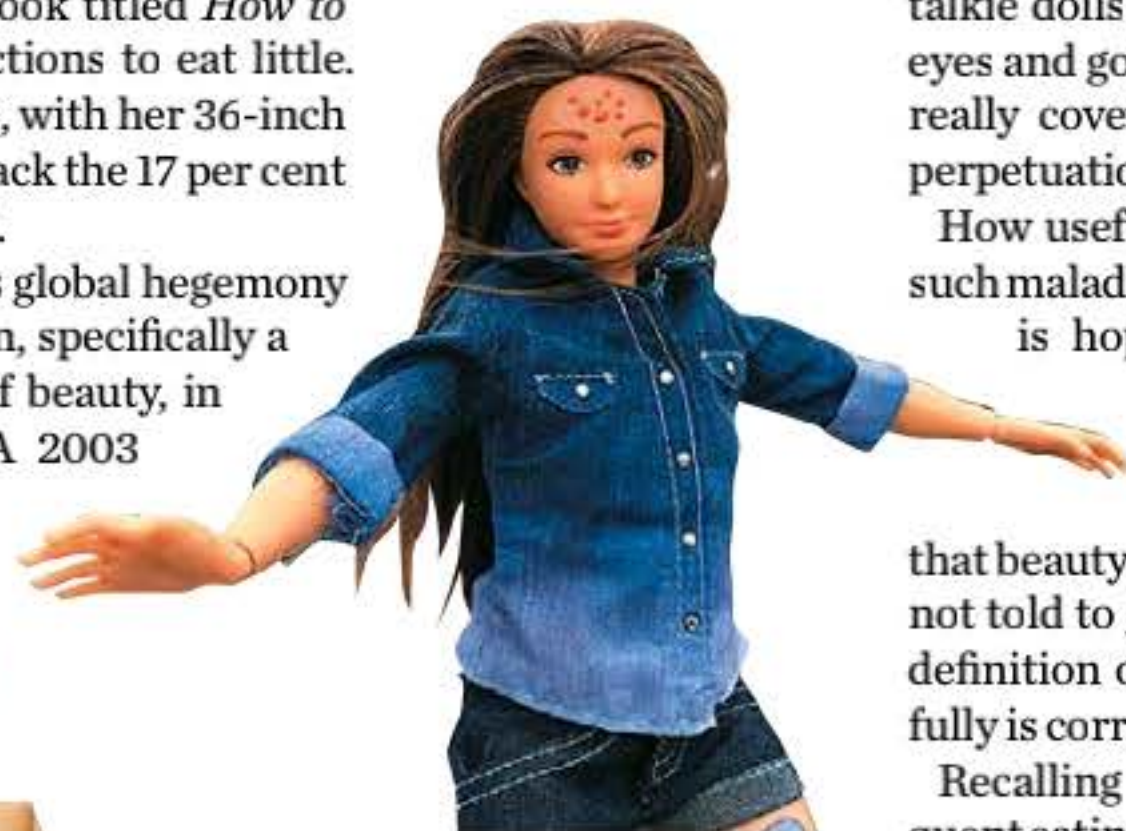
study (*The wonder of Barbie: popular culture and the making of female identity*, by Lenore Wright) argues that Barbie embodies an American zeal to legitimate their country as a superpower—an aspiration that's largely been fulfilled, as seen in the pop-cultural legitimacy of other American creations like Superman and Batman. With an ascendant Barbie, the terminology of 'pretty'—a limited lexicon consisting of 'white', 'slim' and 'blonde'—gained a fresh bulwark. And this exclusive whiteness exemplified another American phenomenon, claims the study: the marginalisation of other races in that country.

In the Indian context, such aesthetic compulsions help drag the colonial hangover into the afternoon; memsahib is alive and well. Swati Pal, principal, Janki Devi Memorial College, Delhi, recalls, "Not just the Barbie doll, but all the walkie-talkie dolls I saw as a kid, were fair and had blue eyes and golden hair. Owning a doll like this was a really coveted thing, an aspiration. And what a perpetuation of a stereotype."

How useful is imperfect Barbie as a remedy for such maladies? Psychologist Dr Seema Hingorany is hopeful: "The new range of imperfect Barbies helps us understand that we are not plastic, and hence cannot be perfect." She adds, "The truth was that beauty was what the aura depicted, which was not told to girls. For generations, the concept and definition of beauty were distorted, which thankfully is corrected now."

Recalling the psychological effects and consequent eating disorders, Devgan says, "If for nothing else, then to help undo the damage the earlier impossibly thin (almost anorexic-looking) Barbie had inflicted on the psyche and thought process of an entire generation or two of growing children. Hopefully, the curvy Barbie will give girls a more accurate and realistic view of body image." The new range's inclusiveness may also be a plus, although even this reinstates stereotypes—perhaps it's only that there are more of the latter to choose from now. "I appreciate the effort the makers are putting into the way they are bringing the dolls about now: pilot, gymnast, doctor, rock star, the doll can be anyone. And yes, now she can also be fat and dark, curly and freckled, in jeans and wearing keds," says Anubhuti Krishna, a mother of two girls who otherwise has a strict anti-Barbie policy.

It's been nearly three years already, and Mattel seems upbeat. The realistic Barbies look like a tribe of young girls who children of all appearances can relate to—and this seems part of a wider trend. Nowadays, challenging the traditional catwalk, we see fashion shows for women with dark skin, acid burns and disabilities, and plus-size women. Only time will tell whether all this is merely an intellectual exercise or a real social movement. ■



Lammily, a rival 'normal Barbie', has an athlete's figure, minimal makeup, acne and stretch marks.



Bastions Of Unreason

Education, labour, healthcare, credit...A Rural Manifesto ponders over all these. In this extract, it focuses on the human and ecological costs of those vaunted 'temples'—dams.

BY FEROZE VARUN GANDHI

INDIA is gifted with a bouquet of 20 perennial and non-perennial river systems, with several tributaries. Our rivers, mostly originating from the Himalayas, the Chhotanagpur Plateau and the Western Ghats, receive a significant run-off, from glaciers and precipitation, accumulating an average annual flow of 1,953km³, while replenishing groundwater resources of around 432km³. This enables the formation of a perennial utilisable water resource, one expressed in surface water (690km³) and ground water (396km³). In particular, Himalayan snow and ice melt offers a significant boon, with water yield in such river basins nearly double that of the peninsular rivers. Groundwater, wherever available, remains a significant source of water, particularly for domestic consumption, contributing 80 per cent of the household requirement and over half of the irrigation requirement.

India's rivers undergo a series of changes across their route and through seasons—turning into a slack pool during winter; raging as torrents during the monsoon, awing us with its destructive potential. While rivers are often described in a feminine sense, as nadi, beautifully coursing across Jambudvip, as dividers of solid land, they can also be dangerous. After all, the Ganga descended from heaven, bringing with it fertile soil for good crops, but also destruction in its wake. Sustainably managing such mercurial rivers to meet the challenges of rural India can hence be a hard task.

To combat this risk, and to provide irrigation to millions of marginal farmers, modern India has sought to build dams. Starting from 1947, when there were just 300 large dams across India, the government has built around 4,900, with the majority built between 1971 and 1989. The primary purpose of these dams has been to further



irrigation, in addition to control floods, ensure water supply and generate hydroelectricity. Large dams, termed as “temples of modern India” by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1955, were encouraged post-independence to jumpstart industrialisation and establish a scientific outlook.

However, this love affair with big dams didn't last long. As Nehru said, within three years of those famous words, on ‘Social Aspects of Small and Big Projects’: “For some time past, however, I have been beginning to think that we are suffering from what we may call, ‘disease of gigantism’.” The economic gains associated with dams can accrue to different population segments. Most of India's irrigation dams are actually embankments in nature, with a wall built across a valley to impound water, creating a reservoir upstream and in many cases, displacing villagers and livestock; a large dam can easily displace up to 10 per cent of an average Indian district. While dams can provide large productivity benefits in aggregate, particularly for irrigation and recharging the water table, they also incur significant social costs, with the economic benefits accruing disproportionately to people living in the command areas; the average dam displaces 31,340 people, while submerging 8,748 hectares; scheduled tribes typically are amongst those most affected, constituting 47 per cent of those displaced. For those whose agricultural and grazing land is flooded, the government's compensation is often significantly delayed and a pittance at that; such compensation is typically insufficient for replacing lost land by an equivalent land with similar quality elsewhere.



Dams displace people, many of them tribal; flood grazing, agricultural land; the government's recompense is a pittance. And they are marginally effective.

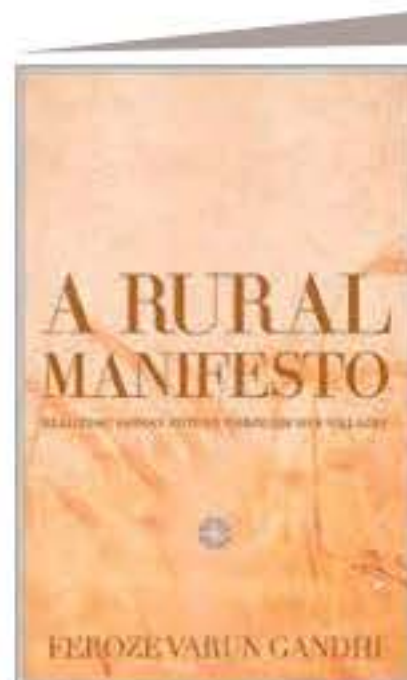


Cost benefit analysis studies have highlighted that dams are mostly marginally effective, offering a rise in agricultural productivity of just 9 per cent (the World Commission of Dams estimates a 10 per cent average). A dam can increase net irrigated area by 0.7 per cent in its own district and around one per cent downstream, when accounting for displaced agricultural areas and a ban on upstream canals to maintain flow downstream. A Planning Commission estimate highlighted that the development cost per hectare of dam irrigation was Rs 16,129 in 1985 (incorporating capital and maintenance costs, and Rs 18,807 per hectare if fertiliser costs are added in). As highlighted in E. Duflo & R. Pande's seminal analysis (2005), comparing this with a purported present discount value of net increase in irrigated area of Rs 13,686 and an overall lower irrigation cost (vs groundwater irrigation), gives a marginal net present value; a return of just 1 per cent. In addition, dams can induce waterlogging and raise soil salinity—by 1991, around 2.46 million hectares of land associated with the command area of dams was suffering from waterlogging, while 3.30 million hectares was suffering from salinity; 10 per cent of the total area actually irrigated back then. Maharashtra has over 40 per cent of India's large dams; even so, over 82 per cent of the state continues to be rainfed; Maharashtra pushed large dams, not irrigation (Devendra Fadnis, July 21, 2015).

In comparison, other forms of water harvesting (eg: dykes, groundwater) can prove to be more cost-effective, if given due attention. Maharashtra has over 70,000 small irrigation projects

(each with a potential to irrigate at least 250 hectares), costing over Rs 4,600 crore, but just 12 per cent of their total irrigation potential is actually utilised (2 lakh hectares of 16.25 lakh hectares). While such small bunds and percolation tanks could make a significant difference to drought stricken villages, most of them have fallen into disrepair, choking with silt or simply vandalised. They have simply been built and forgotten, with no manpower or budget allocated for maintenance and management.

THE unfortunate impact of this spate of dam construction on river flow is slowly coming to light. The Chambal is one of the few pristine rivers still remaining, offering a pristine habitat to the endangered Gangetic river dolphin, the critically endangered gharial, and the red-crowned roof turtle, along with host of birds and fishes. It offers a critical linkage in a fragmented forest landscape, providing a vital corridor to Ranthambore, Kuno-Palpur, Madhav, Darrah-Mukundra and Keladevi. However, since independence, its isolation was disrupted, with a cluster of dams built to provide solace to arid districts in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Over six major irrigation projects, 12 medium and 134 minor projects came up across its basin, leading to a steep decline in its pre-monsoon water flow (Only 10 per cent-15 per cent of the Chambal's length now has the minimum depth required for gharial and dolphins to survive during summer). The Chambal, a serene and yet isolated river, cursed in Hindu mythology, has been disrupted, with its famed ravines (where the dacoits used to roam) being flattened by sand mining and industrial water usage reducing water levels. While the Central Water Commission issued a guideline in 1992 outlining that a dammed river must contain a minimum flow of an average of 10 days in its natural state, the Chambal has been stripped of its natural sheen. This has had consequences, even for agriculture—the average quantity of Chambal water used for irrigation in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh from the Gandhi Sagar dam and the Kota Barrage declined by 22.6 per cent and 41.4 per cent respectively, between 1990 and 2007; all while industrial usage increased by over 300 per cent. Villages are increasingly running short of water in irrigation canals—at Bhakto ka Ghat, near Kherli village, in Rajasthan, the Chambal's depth is usually just knee deep during the winter months; nonagenarians in the village recall the days when the river could only be crossed on boats. The overall flow in the Chambal has been declining by 3.4 per cent annually since the 1990s, with the gharials losing over half their existing habitat, leading to potential starvation. This river, once cursed, is likely to remain so. ■



**A RURAL
MANIFESTO:
REALISING INDIA'S
FUTURE THROUGH
HER VILLAGE**

Feroze Varun Gandhi

Rupa Publications



books Anna L. Dallapiccola,
with Kuldip Singh and R. G. Singh
Thanjavur's Gilded Gods | Marg Publication | 180 pages | Rs 2,800

Gods Spoke To Them

A collection of Thanjavur paintings is seen afresh as objects of worship, not as mere things of beauty

BY GEETA DOCTOR

Amidst the roar of popular images of Hindu gods and goddesses in the style known as “Thanjavur paintings” that now flood the market, it’s almost a shock to discover the subdued richness of the originals.


They do not shout. They signal. They do not behave like garrulous tour guides crudely displaying nuggets of information for the entertainment of multitudes. They create multiple interpretations that call for repeated viewings. At times there is no explanation.

The Marg issue devoted to *Thanjavur's Gilded Gods* examines the extraordinary journey of one collector, Kuldip Singh, an architect and town planner whose interest in the genre happened almost by accident. As Nayanjot Lahiri says in the introduction, Singh was at first reluctant to accept two Thanjavur style paintings that had been sent to him by a dealer. Gradually, he began to feel intrigued by them. “The paintings seemed to grow on me,” he reports. Soon, Singh asked to see more. Some four decades and over 350 paintings later, Kuldip Singh’s collection of “South Indian paintings”, including related specimens from the Mysore school and from Andhra, with an essay by R.G. Singh, has been recognised by scholars and museum conservators as being a unique record of one man’s passion. His home is at Bhogal, in

one of the older localities of New Delhi, is a house-cum-museum.

In his own introduction, Kuldip Singh situates the paintings as central to the religious arts of South India. He is at the same time acutely sensitive to suggesting their inclusive nature. Explaining the reasons for not just sharing the images but creating a context for them by situating each one in a particular temple, or iconic space, that has been extensively researched by scholar Anna L. Dallapiccola, Singh sets out his plan. “The majority of scholarly works are primarily concerned with the aesthetic qualities of religious art; its function is less often analysed or commented upon. What follows below is an attempt to view and to analyse Thanjavur paintings as objects of worship and as an inspiration for devotion, and to understand their crucial position as a bridge between the ‘classical’ aesthetic and the development of ‘calendar art’ in the 20th century.”

What lifts the collection into the realm of a pilgrimage of words and images is Dallapiccola’s energy. There does not seem to be a single temple that she has not visited or painting that she has not studied. She is the ‘shakti’ in this enterprise who has merged her scholarship into each image Singh has collected with a brevity that manages to elevate each portrait into an icon.

Singh has the last word when he describes how the once grand paintings are now made into calendars. “Viewed from the side of the gods, it appears that they have transmigrated from the physical body of exceptional purity of the ancient dhruva bhera and have acquired an ephemeral paper body to become closer to their poor, selfless devotee, the common man. Thanjavur art is surely the bridge that enables this divine transmigration.” 

Explaining the reasons for sharing the images and creating a context for them by situating each one in a particular temple, Kuldip Singh sets out his plan.


ON THE RACKS



Atul Khanna

Between You and Me | Bloomsbury

Manifesto as conversation. This is a book brimming with ideas for the transformation of society, politics, democracy, administration and the economy, all couched in a discursive format through which the author, an entrepreneur, analyses problems with how things are done at present and then presents his suggestions. He is not short of suggestions on issues from Article 370 to income tax assessments, and calls for a new constituent assembly to change what he sees as an outdated and inefficient system of governance, which he considers the root of many of modern India’s problems.

Not exactly a systematic treatise of political philosophy, this book is more focused on a number of specific policy ideas—some of which are, to put it mildly, radical. For example, Khanna’s thoughts on universal franchise: people’s votes should be proportionate to the share of the vote that they or their ancestors had during independent India’s first census in 1951. So, if two people had one vote each in 1951, later got married and have two children, the family as a whole continues to have two votes, with each person having half a vote. If they have three children, each person will get two-fifths of a vote, and so on. And each child’s half-vote gets factored in when calculating what their future children will have. But having an only child will add a new vote to the family’s tally. “Everybody gets something, nobody gets more for population explosion or to subdue those who exercise restraint and have respect for [the] nation’s growth....” It gets more intricate: “Now, say the state throws in another 100 votes. One-third to the poorest, one-third to achievers and social contributors and one-third to taxpayers. You may not like this as mediocrity loses, but that is OK, we can come up with another scheme. Basically, I don’t want to condemn anyone only to their birth forever.” We believe that speaks for itself. 

Celebrating the Self, Blenders Pride Fashion Tour 2018 kicks off a striking new concept

Blenders Pride Fashion Tour 2018 Preview unveils 'Pride'

As a modern iteration of what is new and fiercely sui generis, the 14th edition of the renowned Blenders Pride Fashion Tour will celebrate the self and the individual through its extraordinary new concept- 'Pride'. Far removed from the traditional confines of mere success, the tour defines 'Pride' as an inner sense of achievement, of uniqueness and of individuality, all the things that are, in fact, meaningful for this generation. These are not mere words; Blenders Pride Fashion Tour 2018 will delve into the idea of 'Pride' through one's choices, style and legacy, decoding this journey through the vision of some of India's most blazingly talented, world-famous fashion designers.

Be it the grandness of vision and breathtaking beauty of Tarun Tahiliani's creations showcased by his muse Mehr Rampal, or the bewitching spunk and deep glamour of Rohit Bal epitomized by actress Diana Penty, or the mannered and stylish decorum of Ashish N Soni represented by Rajiv Makhni, or indeed the innovative, futuristic enchantment of Gaurav Gupta personified through the immersive theatre act curated by 'Crow', each designer unveiled his stunning interpretation of their 'Pride' at Blenders Pride Fashion Tour 2018.

Blenders Pride Fashion Tour 2018 believes in celebrating 'Pride' which is a hallmark of today's generation, as a meaningful expression of their success. While their distinct choices define their individuality, the taste of pride which comes from this self-earned achievement is one for these individuals.

Kartik Mohindra, Chief Marketing Officer, Pernod Ricard India, added, "Instilled with a strong sense of positive pride, individuals today are driven by confidence and belief for attaining success. Pride therefore takes a centre stage in defining their individuality, creating their own choices, and self-earned achievement. Blenders Pride Fashion Tour 2018, in its 14th edition brings alive this exclusivity, by rejoicing in individuals who have created



their own unique tales of pride and success."

Rohit Bal, designer, talking about his curation 'My Heritage, My Pride' said, "I am a traditionalist and that too, a pure, classic, undiluted traditionalist. I am deeply rooted in my culture, my origins and the incredible heritage of India. From the Lotus to the Peacock, I think tradition and I live my heritage. There is mystery, mysticism and sheer magnificence in our Heritage and it has become an essential part of my soul. I take immense pleasure in my association with Blenders Pride Fashion Tour 2018, as it lets me celebrate this Heritage, with Pride."

Speaking about his concept 'My Blend, My Pride', designer Tarun Tahiliani said, "This show for me is a real blend of my journey and the myriad and varied influences that have made this up. From India, the world, cyber space, our heritage and dreams of the future. This is a dream of the future, where inclusivity and tolerance blend to create an inclusive world that allows individuality while celebrating the past and the new world. All that we were and more! Blenders Pride Fashion Tour 2018 for me is the perfect foil, a platform to show this new exciting expression of India modern."

Designer Gaurav Gupta, while showcasing his creations 'My Expression, My Pride' said, "In this age of technology,

where everything is instant and our desire for immediate gratification is the only thing greater than our egos, the value of the 'bond' you have with yourself becomes increasingly important. I believe in celebrating one's individual personality and choices through their distinct style, and creating a unique identity. Staying true to yourself, can constantly and consistently surprise both yourself and the world by your achievements, which then become a true expression of who you are. Through my association with Blenders Pride Fashion Tour 2018, I take pride in showcasing my expression like never before."

Speaking of his view of 'Pride', designer Ashish N Soni, said of his presentation 'My Identity, My Pride' "In human existence, there is nothing more important than a sense of identity. In fact, identity is more than can be expressed within the bounds of my beliefs. I take great pride in narrating what has made me what I am today; therefore, it's an absolute honor to be associated with Blenders Pride Fashion Tour 2018, as it provides a stage to bring forth individuality in the most unique fashion."

Starting November 2018, Blenders Pride Fashion Tour 2018, will travel across four cities, starting from Gurgaon and then moving to Hyderabad, Mumbai and Kolkata.



PTI

Ode To Joy

You'd believe if someone told you this was a frieze, frozen in time, of a particularly opulent celebration. That painterly quality of Priyanka Chopra-Nick Jonas's sangeet at Jodhpur's Umaid Bhawan owes much to the rich raiments of the bride, soon-to-be-wed Isha Ambani and Parineeti Chopra. National, international artistes performed, Bollywood numbers thumped about and the light reflected from the assembled jewellery blinded many a man.

Moral: Labels Are Slippery

Angela Ponce, standing at a statuesque 5' 11, had to struggle, faced morale-corroding bias, steeled herself up and vowed that "to be the best is a must". Why, you wonder, should a girl as lovely as that be treated with such cruelty in modelling. Because Angela, we're told, is a transgender. Now she's on her way to the Miss Universe pageant, trouncing 20 other Spanish contestants. We love this baby.



Pricelessly Golden

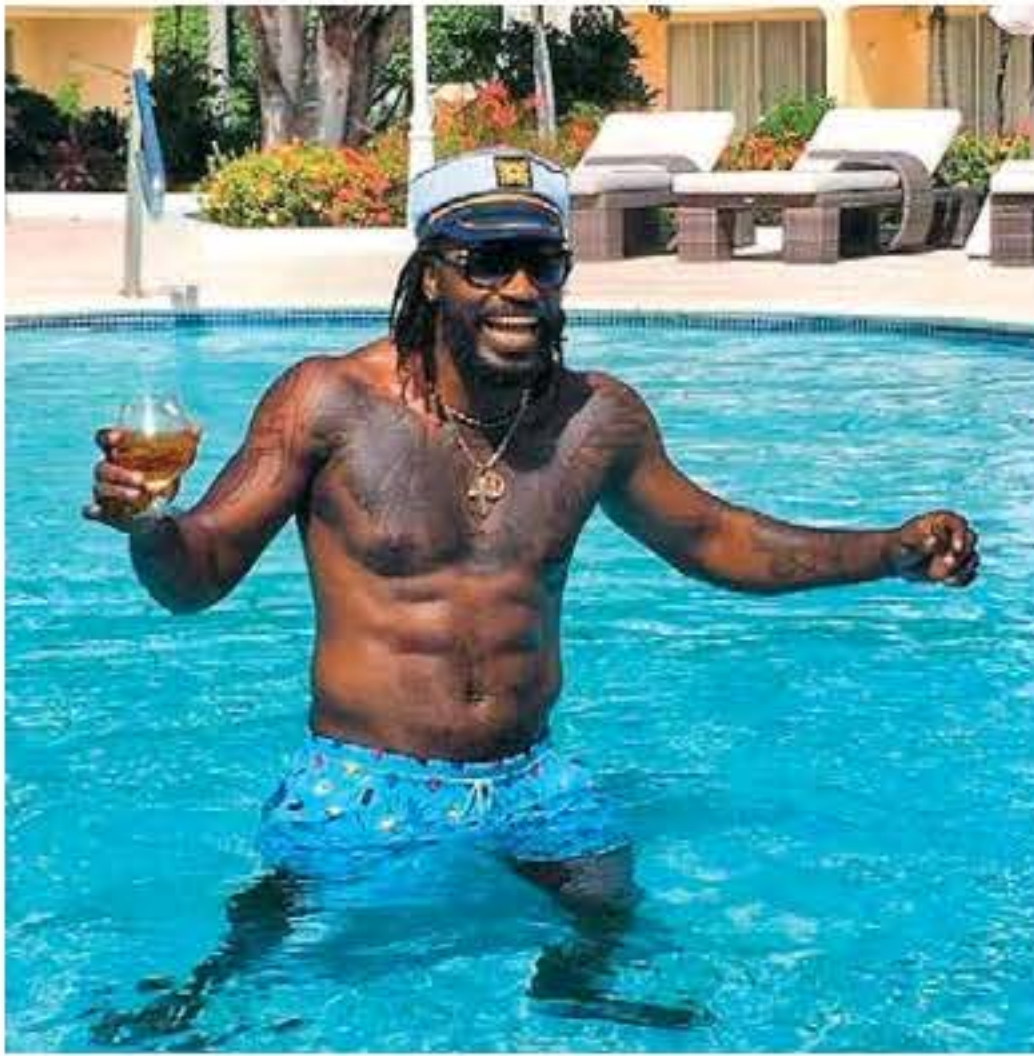
We talked about Sonali Bendre sometime back, lauding her spirit at staring down the 'emperor', and of the unflinching support she gets from husband Goldie Behl. She's back in Mumbai, having richly earned that thumbs up.



THIS TOO
HAPPENED

Called the 'worst alphabet book ever', a picture-book by rapper Lushlife and programmer Chris Carpenter made No. 8 of *The New York Times* bestseller list, leaving publishers scrambling for more copies. 'P' is for pterodactyl; 'T' is for tsunami in the book, which is about the quirks in the English language.





Six Over The Cow Corner

Yeah, it's time to rejoice, big Chris! Wrongly accused in Australia's Fairfax media (oh, those boorish, lying kangaroos!), including *Sydney Morning Herald*, of a gross act of sexual harassment, a Sydney court has finally ruled in Gayle's favour. A neat sum of \$220,000, as damages, falls into his pocket. Cheerio!



PTI

Completely Planned

Sachin and Anjali posed with son Arjun at the wedding reception of Deepika-Ranveer. That was enough for sharp-eyed wags. The sight of the lanky fast-bowler beside his diminutive dad took them to the Boost-peddling youth of Sachin. The preferred health drink of Arjun? Complan, they tittered!

She Don't Need No Gun

Yami, as pretty as the first flush of pink that colours the eastern sky, led a contingent during the army's surgical strike across the border. Or so *URI: The Surgical Strike* would have us believe. Stretch your credulity brothers, and imagine Yami in a fatigue. One fierce look from those dreamily determined eyes, and poof, the enemy dissolves into rubble and dust.

"Many hoped that I died during ill health. Some reached out to the vice-president to present themselves as his deputy, assuming I was dead.... It's the real me, I assure you," Nigerian President MUHAMMADU BUHARI denying rumours of death, and of a clone.



Ticket to a Tale

This could happen! China inviting me—the long-time sceptic of the country's policies—for a visit to Tibet! A four-day trip to Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture organised by China's foreign ministry was probably meant for influencing perception, to ensure China's "Tibet story" reaches the world outside. The full-time security detail never prevented us from walking out of the hotel to talk to ordinary Tibetans, despite our tightly packed day itineraries. The chalked routine was more of a leisure trip, exciting sightseeing tours to religious sites, herdsman dwellings, schools, hospitals, scenic spots, Tibetan delicacies et al.

The Walls look Fine

Our official briefs, as opaque as the Chinese internet firewalls, talked mainly about achievements in Tibet. But there was scope of some affable smoke passing through: a lone Lama of the *Bon* sect present at a meeting smiled when I gifted him with a packet of Indian sandalwood incense sticks. Also, there wasn't full scope for entirely disagreeing with the 'achievements'. There is no doubting the impressive economic progress the region has made. Ganzi's capital, Khanding, is like any other modern Chinese city, with high-rises, hotels and department stores, all finished with a traditional Tibetan touch. And Khanding has a growing middle-class population. Ganzi's major revenue comes from hydro and geothermal power, mining and tourism sources. The world's largest methyl card lithium ore (3 million tonnes) reserve is found here.

Holy Ganzi! A Seller Scheme

The Ganzi officials say the 'Holy G' brand brings in billions—of dollars—in revenue. Han tourists flock from all over to enjoy the breathtaking landscapes and the stunning engineering marvels of tunnels dug through those mountains. It took just three hours to reach Khanding from Chengdu, which is almost 400 km away. But the traffic on the Sichuan-Tibet Highway was very heavy. However, the planned Sichuan-Tibet Railway will reduce travel time to Lhasa from 48 to 13 hours.

One could feel the churning in Tibet—the ethnic Chinese own shops everywhere and Tibetans are moving in every direction, buying properties in Chengdu and other cities. I got the sense that Tibetan esotericism was gradually failing against China's development reasoning.

Mild Mystery Cousins

My wish to visit Khanding's Jili monastery couldn't be realised, but on the way upwards next day, I got a chance

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to see the ancient Lhagang monastery of the Sakya sect. In Daofo, the 300-year old Gathar Shangbaling monastery where the seventh Dalai Lama spent seven years from 1728-1735, was a sight to behold. The head monk pointed out to me the birthplace of the 11th Dalai Lama, Khedrup Gyatso (1708), located a little away from Gathar. The house in which Gyatso was born is being rebuilt now, said the monk.

In another monastery in Danba country—the 17th century Song'an—I stumbled upon some preferential treatment too. The Lama in-charge from Amdo stopped all foreign

tourists but me from entering the *Palden-Lhama* (Kali Devi) temple. Could it have been my accent in Tibetan that warmed me so to the lama, I thought, since I was told by some locals that my spoken Tibetan was closer to the Amdo dialect.

Whatever it was, I cherish the moment, because I thought before my trip that Tibetans would be generally excited to meet an Indian Buddhist. But I got a somewhat mild response. I had even brought some sacred items from the Tibetan shops in Delhi, including *chin-labs* (blessed items) of high lamas, to gift people in Tibet as I had heard they really liked the holy objects available in India. But, nobody seemed too impressed.

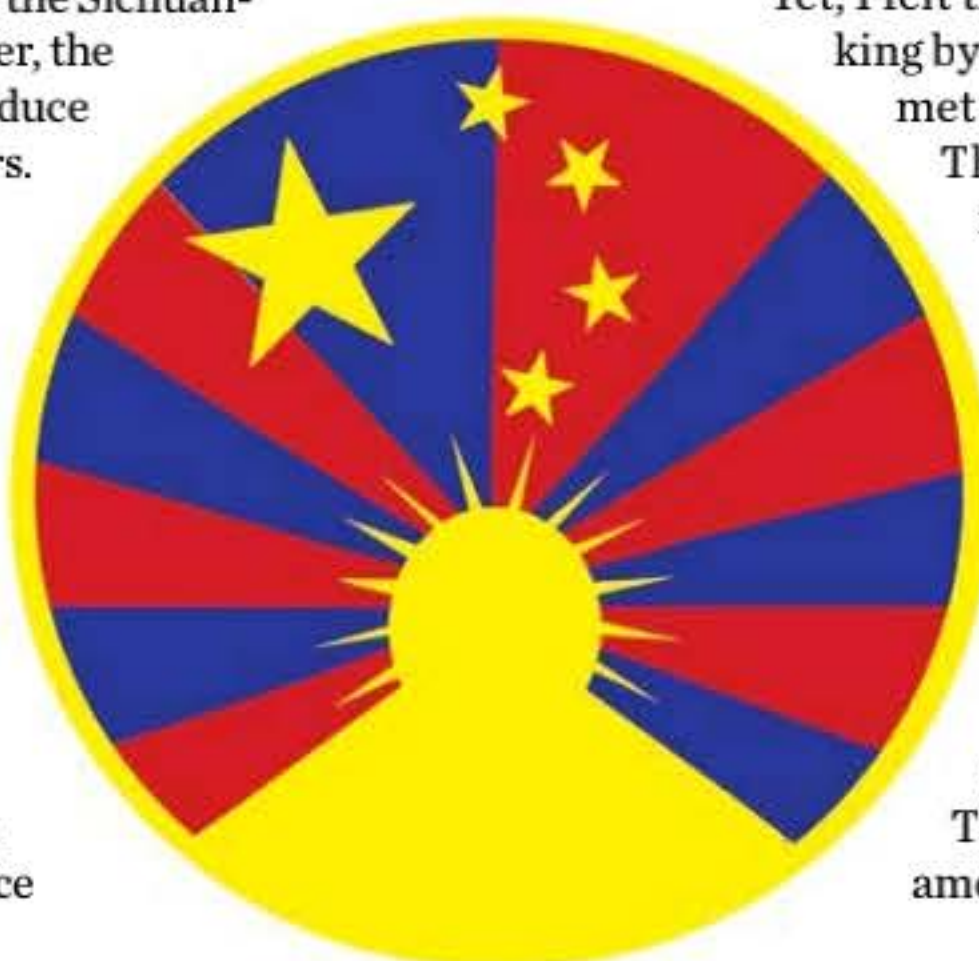
The Policy Plateau Chamber

I felt whenever I spoke in Tibetan with locals, the officials listened with keen ears. The Tibetans I met were very discreet in making political comments. A lama I met in the town of Xiede told me that President Xi Jinping was referred to as "lingxiu"—a wise man. "People in general are very respectful towards Xi," he said.

My ears caught some criticism of the Dalai Lama too. When I discreetly asked someone why they aren't inviting the Dalai Lama to return home, the reply was: "Why should we invite him, he left the country by himself?" In the past, the Chinese have said that all doors are open "if he gives up the call for independence." This line is not repeated now.

Yet, I felt the Dalai Lama is still revered as god-king by local folks although this question was met with polite reticence by local officials.

Though, nobody I spoke to in Ganzi or in Beijing thought reconciliation is coming anytime soon. I wasn't sure about my takeaways from the trip. To be sure, I was amazed by the area's development and natural beauty but a bit of self-censorship in observation was needed to neither highlight nor undermine China's successes in Tibet. The rhetoric apart, I felt neither any sense of exuberance among the Tibetans nor any sense of nervousness among the Chinese.



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