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If you graduated without Google, we respect you. We know what's Facebook without friends, YouTube without videos, or Gmail without mails, Google with no results...Now, can you survive a day without it?

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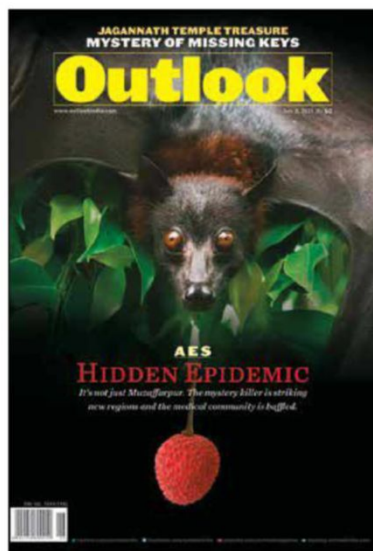
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The System Kills. Fix It!

DELHI Sangeeta Kampani: This refers to your cover story *AES: Hidden Epidemic* (July 8). The picture of Sri Krishna Medical College and Hospital in Bihar's Muzaffarpur is worth a thousand words. It has a vocabulary neglect and colossal deprivation that words may be inadequate to convey. At 1.4 per cent of the GDP, our health-care spend is ridiculously low. Moreover, health is not about hospitals alone. It is also about a wholesome package of clean air, drinking water, sanitation and nutrition. We have to figure out that we are sitting on a crisis and our services are functioning beyond full capacity. Until we make systemic and imaginative changes, a Muzaffarpur is waiting to happen every other day. Augmenting healthcare with paramedical staff for a wider reach in terms of availability of personnel and health education could take the pressure off the big hospitals. A well-equipped primary healthcare system can help us focus on public health better than hospital-centric solutions. The idea is to minimise the need to go to a hospital and to get the most out of it in case one has to.

DEHRADUN Rakesh Agrawal: This hidden epidemic is not so hidden, after all, as about 200 children have died at the altar of carelessness and ignorance in Muzaffarpur, Bihar, is symptomatic of a larger disease that has engulfed India for decades—the scant regard of successive governments for public health and education. India spends just a little over one per cent of its GDP on public health, far below most developed and less developed countries. This forces people into the clutches of the exorbitant private healthcare system, which drains them of their hard-earned income. In fact, a recent report says that Indians spend



July 8, 2019

67.78 per cent of their health expenses from their own pocket, against a global average of 18.2 per cent. The Narendra Modi government talks big, selling the dream of Ayushman Bharat, but a cursory look at the budgetary allocation—Rs 52,800 crore for health in 2018-19, merely 5 per cent higher than the revised estimate of Rs 50,079.6 crore for 2017-18, and 2.1 per cent of the Union Budget, lowered from the 2.4 per cent in 2017-18—shows it is all just so much hot air. The situation is even more pathetic at the state level as in Bihar, the centre of this epidemic, where the public expenditure on health is just Rs 348 per person annually, while the national average is Rs 748. Hence, if the health policy is not turned upside down, the poor, deprived and disenfranchised people will keep being dumped at third-rate public hospitals like animals and their kids will keep on dying year after year without shocking anyone.

KOCHI George Jacob: Strange and hitherto unheard of infectious diseases have been holding India and her medical community to ransom of late. It was the Nipah viral infection that had Kerala by the scruff in May 2018. Recently, it was Muzaffarpur's turn to dance to the death tune of a supposedly highly infectious encephalitic entity. Probably, Muzaffarpur can take a leaf out of Kerala's success story in getting the better of Nipah infection, about which the latter had the slightest inkling at the outset.

BANGALORE K.S. Jayatheertha: Poverty, malnutrition, unhygienic living conditions, unavailability of quality treatment and the apathy of the government are the main causes of the deaths in Bihar. A solution is not very difficult if the government is willing to devote resources for it. But the recurrence of tragedies of such magnitude never disturbs the ruling dispensation. That things were no better in Bihar before Nitish Kumar took over is well-known, yet there is no denying that the conditions have gone from bad to worse. Medical colleges and hospitals are also ill-equipped to deal with the outbreak of such epidemics. Routine compensation will not bring back the children.

The Moulvi Hustle

BANGALORE H.N. Ramakrishna: This refers to *The Hen Faked Gold* (July 8), Karnataka's version of Bengal's Saradha scam. I understand that Mohammad Mansoor Khan, promoter of IMA Group of Companies, used his political clout to rope in local moulvis to issue fatwas in favour of investing in IMA. In turn, they got funds for their madrasas. Actually the scam was an open secret, but fearing the nexus and the backlash from Muslims during elections, nobody tried to blow the lid.

one-liner

MALAPPURAM (KERALA) Indira Krishnakumar

Bureaucracy can't be blamed for our problems when politicians always pick their favourites.



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letters

What is surprising is that after the infamous Ambidant fraud, people could again fall for this multi-crore IMA ponzi scheme. No wonder, as American showman P.T. Barnum who employed sensational forms of presentation like the three-ring circus is reported to have said “there’s a sucker born every minute”, and con artists, scamsters, charlatans, hustlers, snake oil salesmen, swindlers prosper.

Didi vs Modi

CHENNAI M.Y. Shariff: This refers to your cover story *Can Didi Survive Modi* (July 1). Going by the unstoppable march of the BJP and the inroads made deep into West Bengal, it appears that it is not going to be a cakewalk for incumbent Mamata Banerjee’s Trinamool Congress in the next assembly elections in 2021. The TMC won 211 of 287 assembly seats in 2016. The BJP has fixed the target of 250 for 2021, and it looks likely to touch that figure. Mamata has committed mistakes of unprecedented Muslim appeasement that, unfortunately, will not change the fate of



LAST STAND? Mamata Banerjee

Muslims in the ghettos. She also promoted her relatives, ignored corruption and scams, let loose foot soldiers to create anarchy, and suppress the free press. If Mamata can rely on ‘Jai Bangla’, the BJP has ‘Jai Shri Ram’ and Modi’s ‘Sonar Bangla’ vision. Mamata seems to be running helter-skelter, not knowing how to stall the BJP’s progress. The road ahead is not smooth as before.

Clean-Up Time

SECUNDERABAD K.R. Srinivasan: It is shocking and shameful that Mamata Banerjee is defending the

INBOXED



Party Pooped

NOIDA Bal Govind: This refers to your story on whether Sonia Gandhi can “salvage the Congress’s sinking ship” as “Rahul sulks and shies away” (*Mum’s the Word, Again*, July 8). The Gandhis must note that the stepping down of Rahul will not solve the problem as their clan continues to be the glue that keeps the Congress from falling apart. In fact, such a move will further disintegrate the grand old party because there will be no unanimous support for any other leader. This makes it quite unfortunate that neither Rahul nor his sister Priyanka have inspired much

confidence so far, leaving the burden once again to their mother Sonia, who has held the Congress together for the past three decades. Having taken the back seat for a few years due to her illness, she let her son lead from the front, but now such is the shambles the party is in that there is no certainty it will stick together even if she returns to its helm. What ails the Congress is its growing distance from the ground reality that has shifted majorly in the past decade or so. Its regional and local leaders no longer enjoy a fine feel of the pulse of the masses across the country. This is one of the inevitable outcomes of the high command’s failure to trust them with carrying out their responsibilities independently, which has been a bane of the Congress. Revival will be long and painful, demanding a lot of patience and pragmatism, and failure will not just be the Congress’s as a democratic country needs a vibrant Opposition in Parliament.

corrupt in the party. Isn’t it that several TMC leaders have been caught taking bribe from widows for their monthly pension? Sadly, rampant corruption in the party and state has gone unchecked. Mamata asking police to take action against the corrupt, instead of taking the lead by dismissing them from the party, appears fishy as well. The exposure of corruption in the party is just the tip of the iceberg. It is high time Mamata cleaned up the mess and saved the party.

Delicious Descriptions

DURGAPUR Jyotiranjana Biswal: Apropos the snippet ‘Don’t Blink’ in the *Glitterati* column of the June 17 issue of *Outlook*, it is advisable to stay away from dashing divas. But your delicious descriptions of these ultra-modern hotties have kept me hooked to the magazine for years.

Bemoaning Babus

PUNE G.L. Karkal: This refers to *Babus who run India* (July 3). I am an ordinary citizen who unfortunately disagrees with most of leaders and babus. After reading and seeing differ

ent media, citizens like me rue the disheartening aspects of our polity, economy and society. I am compelled to say humbly that the correct expression should have been “Babus, including leaders, who ruin India”. All leaders, including babus, think that they are the ones responsible for uplifting the country, but their actions are leading to India’s downfall.

Closed Minds and Doors

PUNE G.L. Karkal: This refers to *The Mystery of Ratna Bhandar* (July 8). I wonder what is so newsworthy in this story. Is this not common in other temples as well as churches and mosques? The only difference is that such stories are not divulged to the public. Surprisingly, the article ends with the statement that some people believe only a CBI enquiry would bring out the truth. Really? Do they believe in such an outcome? In my humble opinion, when people are solely guided by faith, they will not allow any government or institution to reveal the truth to the public. There will be no proper investigation into this case; only a make-believe one.

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THE GUJARAT CONNECTION SURFACES

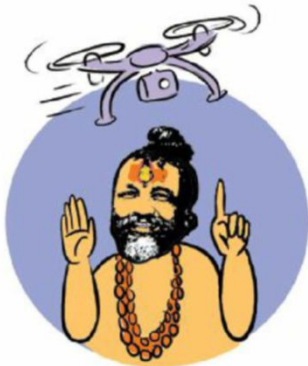
OVER seven months have passed since the Centre was forced to relieve controversial 1984-batch IPS officer Rakesh Asthana from the post of special director in the CBI. He had a running feud with his then boss Alok Verma. Asthana was appointed head of the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security, and the CBI, under its new director R.K. Shukla, had seen a slew of



transfers of officers perceived to be close to Verma. However, the government did not appoint anyone as the agency's special director. Rumour has it that Asthana's replacement could be A.K. Singh, a 1985-batch Gujarat cadre IPS officer who enjoys the blessings of the country's two most powerful politicians. He is currently the Ahmedabad commissioner of police.

COMPUTER BABA, PUSHPAKA VIMANA

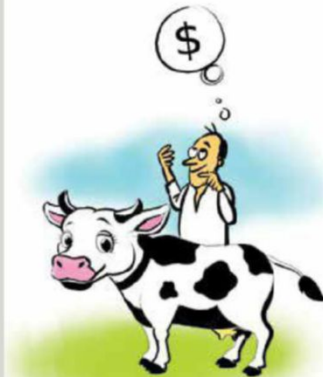
WHEN mere mortals were playing Minesweeper on Windows 98, Namdeo Das Tyagi had already been anointed as Computer Baba because of his alleged passion for technology and gadgets. Over the past couple of years, the baba has



repeatedly pressed Alt+Shift+Tab to jump between different political parties. His latest stint is with the Congress—the Madhya Pradesh government has appointed him as chairman of the Narmada River Trust. The first thing he did was ask for a helicopter. For joyrides over the Vindhya? Nope, to keep an eye on illegal sand mining from the high heavens. The government refused, so he made a modest demand for a drone and a room in the secretariat, claiming he needs “modern astra-shastra (weapons)” to save the river.

CATTLE-CLASS CREDIT CARD

GAUSEWA (service of cows) “washes away all bad deeds” and is the “easiest and best way of purifying good or bad money”, according to Suresh Foods, an online retailer of dairy products. If that hasn't convinced you to buy a cow, know that owning one can have unexpected benefits. In Haryana, it can help you score a credit card. Under the upcoming Pashu Kisan Credit Card scheme, the government will extend credit of Rs 70,825 for an indigenous cow, Rs 76,400 per Murrah buffalo and Rs 92,800 for a brackish shrimp farm. We're curious if the scheme will make farmers moo all the way to the bank.



THE HOTTEST GRENADE

LATHI charges, water cannons and tear gas are passe. The latest weapon against protesting crowds and marauding mobs is the bhot jolokia grenade. Once deemed as the hottest chilli on the planet by the Guinness Book of World Records, bhot jolokia is the latest addition to Assam Police's arsenal. Its seeds are ground and packed into grenades that on explosion release a spicy dust. They even tested it on humans and found that the ‘non-toxic, non-lethal’ substance blinded them for hours and left them with breathing problems. “The effect is so pungent that it would literally choke them,” a DRDO scientist affirmed. It seems protesters are not the only on whom the heat will be turned up. The chilli powder will also be “a tool for women to keep away anti-socials” and “a major repellent against wild elephants” at army barracks.

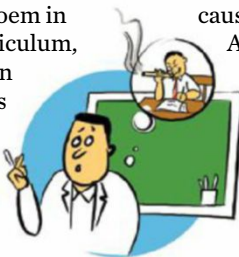
Illustrations by SAAHIL; Test Curated by PUNEET NICHOLAS YADAV and ALKA GUPTA

LOVE THAT SMELLS OF SMOKE

A 200-year-old love poem has riled up the education ministry of Myanmar. But it's not the depiction of romance that's bothersome; it's the allusions to smoking. *Present of a Cheroot*, a poem in the Class-8 curriculum, is about a woman making cheroots for her faraway lover. The government

feared that the passion-suffused verses would encourage impressionable children to smoke. Tobacco use leads to an estimated 65,000 deaths a year. Regardless, the decision caused an uproar.

A startled government relented and added the poem to the Class-10 curriculum instead.



A THICKENING MEDIA QUARANTINE

THE first term of the Modi government was about systematic media isolation. The second promises to be no different. The signs emerge from the finance ministry of Nirmala Sitharaman. Journalists were informed politely that the customary two-month quarantine clamped on North Block preceding the presentation of the Budget has not been vacated yet. Prior appointment is mandatory even for journalists accredited by the Press Information Bureau. Speculation swirled that other ministries are expected to replicate the media quarantine. This surprises many journalists, because a fawning media toeing the government line has been a mark of our times.



An Old European Malady

MUSLIMS had been the target of attack from sections in Europe since 2015. As large numbers of refugees from North Africa and West Asia arrived in the continent, there had been a related rise in Islamophobia. But a new EU report now reveals that Jews have also been at the receiving end of a wave of anti-semitism in recent years.

Anti-semitism has been an inherent part of European history; in the 20th century it led to the Holocaust and death of around six million innocent Jews. But as the European nations rose from the ashes of World War II, it seemed that Europeans had been able to successfully bury their past.

However, the adverse effect of globalisation that led to a socio-economic crisis in many countries in the West had also opened up new fissures, bringing anti-semitism to the fore.

According to a new report issued by the European Union, nearly half of young Jewish Europeans have considered moving away from their home countries out of fear for their safety amid a rise in anti-semitic incidents on the continent.

The report found that 80 per cent of the people surveyed consider anti-semitism to be a problem in their countries and almost half had experienced at least one incident in the preceding year.

The report, compiled by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, was based on a survey of more than 2,700 Jewish Europeans between the ages of 16 and 34 living in 12 European Union member states.

The report said young Jewish Europeans perceive the frequency of these incidents to be increasing.

"Many see anti-semitism in the media, in political life and on the street, and almost all see it online and on social media—it is in these contexts that most consider it to be an existing and growing problem," the report reads.

The Washington Post says western Europe in particular has grappled with a number of high-profile incidents of anti-semitism recently. Vandals painted swastikas on nearly 100 gravestones at a Jewish cemetery in France in February. British police launched a probe into anti-semitic speech among some members of the Labour Party in May. And a government minister in Germany warned Jewish men not to wear the traditional kippah cap in public amid a spike in hate crimes. Around one million Jewish people live in Europe.

Michael O'Flaherty, director of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, says: "These findings make for grim reading. We must fight anti-semitism more effectively by tackling it at its roots, no matter how difficult that is."

According to a EU report, half of young Jewish Europeans are thinking of emigrating amidst an alarming rise in anti-semitic incidents.

THE RAILWAYS' SEX-Y DILEMMA

A letter from a 32-year-old woman has put the Indian Railways in a fix. She asked for family pension after the death of her father, a retired official, in 2017. The problem? She underwent a sex-change operation years ago. While sons over of 25 are not eligible for pension, unmarried or divorced

dependent daughters are after the death of the employee's wife. The woman said she was "living the life of a woman" even before her father passed away and was an unmarried dependent daughter. The request has no precedent; not quite sure how to respond to, has passed on the letter to the central government.



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Mutiny on HD Karna

Can the Congress-JD(S) government survive after the resignation of 14 MLAs?

BY AJAY SUKUMARAN IN BANGALORE

THE cracks that Karnataka's Congress-Janata Dal (Secular) coalition tried to paper over for the past year are widening fast and dramatically, pushing the H.D. Kumaraswamy-led government to the brink. Days after 14 legislators sent in their resignation letters, the future of the Congress-Janata Dal (Secular) coalition is no clearer at the time of going to press, but a full-blown crisis is certainly at hand. Things will likely to come to a head this week—the Karnataka assembly convenes on July 12 and Speaker K.R. Ramesh Kumar will meet some of the legislators to decide on their resignations.

In Karnataka, there is a weary sense of *deja vu*—a decade ago, when state elections last threw up a hung assembly, it was a BJP government which had struggled with rebel MLAs who were shunted to resorts far away from Bangalore. It's a repeat of those scenes now—many Congress and JD(S) MLAs are holding out from a Mumbai hotel where they have been holed up since the crisis began. There are no signs of a thaw yet.

The Congress offered to recast the cabinet to accommodate some of the rebels and asked all its ministers to step down; it threatened to invoke the anti-defection law against some MLAs; and it dispatched senior leader Ghulam Nabi Azad to Bangalore and Karnataka Congress leader D.K. Shivakumar to Mumbai to salvage the situation. Shivakumar, a troubleshooter for the party, couldn't get into the hotel as the rebels not only refused to meet him but also called for police protection.

The BJP is demanding Kumaraswamy's resignation, arguing that he has lost the majority. "If the Speaker accepts the resignations without delay, there won't be any question of holding an assembly session," BJP state president B.S. Yeddyurappa told reporters



SHUTTERSTOCK

SCENE KYA HAI?

A FLOOR TEST

Karnataka's assembly convenes Friday. It will take up the finance bill this July session, which will practically be a floor test for the JD(S)-Congress government. But things could change before that; like the governor can ask the CM to take a vote of confidence.

CM RESIGNS?

If the Congress-JD(S) coalition isn't able to woo back its legislators, CM Kumaraswamy might resign without facing a floor test—a situation similar to what BJP's B.S. Yeddyurappa faced in May 2018 when he resigned as CM.

THE MATHS

BJP emerges single-largest party in 2018 assembly polls but falls short of a simple majority—a party needs 113 MLAs in the 224-member House. BJP's tally is 105, currently. The Congress-JD(S) coalition has 117, plus a BSP MLA. Resignations can reduce the majority mark to 106, giving BJP its best shot. Two Independent MLAs back BJP.

on July 10. "They have no moral right to continue. Their strength has reduced to 103 MLAs, but the BJP has 107-108. That is why I have requested the governor to ask the Speaker to take necessary action immediately."

The Congress, however, is blaming the BJP for the ongoing imbroglio, accusing it of horse-trading in a bid to topple the government. "The BJP didn't get a mandate in the state elections. But they have been relentlessly trying to destabi-

lise the Karnataka government," claimed Congress leader Siddaramaiah. The BJP's top leaders have countered the allegation saying the coalition was crumbling on its own. The Karnataka crisis echoed in Parliament too as Congress MPs staged protests.

Here is a quick recap of the flurry of events: Anand Singh, Congress legislator from Bellary, set the ball rolling on July 1 by sending his resignation to the Speaker. Chief minister Kumaraswamy



Photographs: PTI

CONTOURS OF A CRISIS (clockwise from above) BJP leaders demand the CM's resignation; Kumaraswamy in Bangalore; and the Vidhana Soudha

was in the US on a private trip and due to return by the end of the week. Things started unravelling on July 6 when a motley group of legislators—nine from Congress and three from JD(S)—trooped into the secretariat to put in their papers, taking everybody by surprise. Immediately, some of them went to Raj Bhavan to apprise the governor of the developments. Kumaraswamy was back by the evening of July 7, but by then, most of the rebel MLAs were in Mumbai. On July 9, Congress legislator R. Roshan Baig, who had been suspended last month after he blamed Congress Karnataka-in-charge K.C. Venugopal and Karnataka Pradesh

Congress Committee president Dinesh Gundu Rao for the party's poor show in the Lok Sabha elections, added his resignation to the list, taking the number of MLAs who quit to 14.

SO far, the Speaker has ruled that only five of the resignations were in order and has given these legislators appointments for hearings on July 12 and 15. The others, he said, could send fresh letters in the correct format. "I have to make a conscious decision. Every step I take will become history, so I can't commit a mistake," he told reporters. The coalition government's fate clearly hinges on these proceedings.

It's no secret that the BJP has been smarting since it emerged as the single-largest party in the 2018 Karnataka assembly elections but still fell short of a simple majority. The BJP's tally is currently 105. The simple majority mark in Karnataka's 224-member assembly is 113. The Congress-JD(S) coalition has 117 legislators (including a lone BSP MLA). The resignations, if accepted, can reduce the majority mark to 106, giving the BJP its best shot at forming the government. Two Independent MLAs have been swaying to and fro—they initially supported the Kumaraswamy government, then switched sides, but again swung back to be sworn in as ministers as recently as June. Now, they are backing the BJP.

But the fragility of Karnataka's coalition set-up wasn't lost on anyone, more so after the BJP's formidable sweep in the Lok Sabha elections in the state. Their parties reduced to one apiece out of 28 Lok Sabha seats, Congress and JD(S) leaders pointed fingers at each other for the poll debacle. Kumaraswamy, himself facing flak for being inaccessible, revived his 'village-stay'



programmes in a bid to change tack and seemingly start afresh.

But even while several coalition leaders were privately critical of their parties, only a handful of MLAs—such as Gokak legislator Ramesh Jarkiholi who has been rebellious for most of the past year—appeared to hold out any serious threat to the coalition government.

HOWEVER, the situation changed drastically over the past few days. Suddenly, some unlikely names had turned rebel—chiefly Ramalinga Reddy, a former home minister and a seven-time Congress legislator from Bangalore; and A.H. Vishwanath, who till recently was the JD(S) state president. While Reddy felt sidelined because he was overlooked for a ministerial berth despite his seniority, Vishwanath's U-turn struck many as abrupt—a former Congressman, he had fallen out with Siddaramaiah and joined the JD(S) in 2017. Just last week, he was with party supremo H.D. Deve Gowda to hand over charge and invest the party's new office bearers. But on July 6, he was leading Congress rebels out of Raj Bhavan. Curiously, amongst them was a group of MLAs from Bangalore who were self-professed followers of his bete noire Siddaramaiah.


The pacy turn of events puts Sidda-

REBEL GANG Dissident MLAs after a meeting with the governor

ramaiah in a spot: MLAs S.T. Soma-shekar, B.A. Basavaraj and Munirathna, who were seen as his loyalists, are amongst those who resigned. “From Day 1, there was a lot of griping and grumbling by several Congressmen, including a couple of top leaders,” says senior Congress leader B.K. Chandrashekar. “Making such unbecoming pronouncements rather than displaying patience and propriety, as repeatedly advised by the high command, provoked a public opinion hostile to the Congress.” Even after the Lok Sabha defeat, there has been no effort within the Karnataka unit towards honest introspection and accountability, he declares. “Instead, a handful of state leaders dissolved the KPCC committee of around 300 office bearers, quite a few of whom were secretaries with 10-15 years of service in the party.”

The fragility of Karnataka's coalition wasn't lost on anyone, more so after the BJP's sweep in the Lok Sabha elections in the state.

The Congress and JD(S) rebels, however, claimed they didn't intend to leave the party and that they were only resigning as legislators, blaming the coalition government's neglect of issues they had been raising. “Some of them have grievances, some are talking about ministry expansion,” K.C. Venugopal told reporters on July 8. “Congress ministers have resigned from their positions. They entrusted the party to take necessary decisions regarding reshuffling and settling of issues in the present scenario.” The JD(S) too, as reports suggested, made similar moves to woo back its three legislators. The offers, however, seemed to have come a tad too late, observers pointed out.

By mid-week, the scenario had taken a turn for the worse: on July 10, the secretariat in Bangalore was abuzz with the prospect of more Congress MLAs turning up to tender resignations. The question is: will the rebels give in? The Kumaraswamy government needs to pass its finance bill, which, observers say, will be the key event now to test the government's strength. Events are unfolding at such a frenetic pace that by the time this report reaches our readers, new scenarios may have emerged. The only thing certain is that Karnataka's shaky politics is heading for a tremendous showdown. 



AMARNATH YATRA

PTI


NO ENTRY An officer stands guard along the Jammu-Srinagar highway

ruary this year.

Anger is growing in the Valley over the restrictions on civilian movement that are impeding livelihood and daily activities. Tourism industry associations met government officials and complained that the restrictions were hampering visitor inflow during the peak season. The food industry is also affected as perishables like fruits and vegetables cannot be transported on time.

Governor Satya Pal Malik justified the restrictions on civilians as a step to ensure the security of pilgrims. "In western Uttar Pradesh, no vehicle plies on the highway for a month during the Kanwar yatra and no one complains. Here, traffic is stopped for two hours and people raise a hue and cry," Malik said after visiting a transit camp for pilgrims on the outskirts of Srinagar. He brushed aside the criticism regarding the dip in tourism by contending that many travellers were vacationing in Gulmarg. Hoteliers in the town, however, complain of a dip in visitor arrivals.

Former chief minister Omar Abdullah says, "It's not that we are unconcerned about yatri security, far from it. It's that Governor Malik's is the only administration in 30 years that closed down the highway and railway line to protect pilgrims. This is the height of incompetence and laziness."

In Srinagar, People's United Front (PUF), the political platform launched by former IAS officer Shah Faesal, organised a protest against the highway closure and suspension of rail services. "Who doesn't know that more than security agencies, it is Kashmiris who make the yatra a success?" asks PUF leader Engineer Rashid, who denounces the curbs as a gross violation of fundamental rights. "By creating issues just to defame Kashmiris and make their life miserable, New Delhi is exposing its colonial approach and hatred towards people of the Valley. It is unfortunate that the yatra is being communalised for political gains and New Delhi is endorsing the notion that Kashmiris are anti-Hindu. Everybody, including students, patients, government employees and the business community, is suffering. People feel caged and jailed." 

Hostage to a Pilgrimage

Curbs on civilian traffic affect daily life in Kashmir

BY NASEER GANAI IN ANANTNAG

CHANDANWARI is a mountain idyll ensconced amidst pine trees, verdant meadows and gurgling streams. However, as one of the two base camps of the Amarnath Yatra, it has been swarming with people this month. More than a lakh pilgrims have already visited the shrine. Over 30,000 officials are on duty, including 1,300 doctors and paramedics. Devotional music from loudspeakers resounds in the meadows.

However, the festive mood here belies the unrest brewing in the rest of the Valley. Bunkers have sprouted along the Srinagar-Qazigund highway and the deployment of security forces has increased manifold since the 45-day yatra began on July 1. Barbed wires and barricades are omnipresent. Early in the morning, CRPF personnel inspect the road. Later, the army's road opening party traverses the highway with mine-protected and bullet-proof vehicles to detect IEDs. Army commandos in black fatigues keep vigil. The Jammu and Kashmir Police is also

assisting the forces in security for the pilgrimage.

On the Anantnag route to the base camp in Pahalgam, the arterial KP road is sealed when yatra convoys move. Before they reach Anantnag, the CRPF and police remove even the civilian vehicles parked on the road. "It is unseen and unheard of. We have been welcoming pilgrims for decades, but now we are being kept hostage during the yatra," says a shopkeeper at KP road. The situation is similar at the Sonamarg route to Baltal base camp.

The government's order says that no civilian traffic would be allowed on the Srinagar-Jammu highway from Qazigund to Nashri between 10 am and 3 pm for the duration of the yatra. During that time, train services on the Banihal-Qazigund line will also be suspended. While there have been militant attacks

during the Amarnath Yatra in the early 2000s and in 2017, this is the first time the highway has been shut for pilgrim convoys. Authorities say the heightened security is a measure to avoid a repeat of the Pulwama incident that killed 40 CRPF personnel in Feb-

"This is the only administration in 30 years that shut down the highway and trains," says Omar Abdullah.



Quotas Against the Quota

The Maratha reservation verdict stokes fears of the dilution of affirmative action

BY PREETHA NAIR

NEARLY three decades after PM V.P. Singh tabled the Mandal Commission report in Parliament, the debates over its recommendations granting 27 per cent reservation to the other backward classes (OBCs) are only getting louder. The violent anti-Mandal protests that rocked the country in the summer of 1990 changed the course of Indian politics and further muddled the complexities of caste. Since then, the purpose of affirmative action—to end centu-

ries of caste discrimination—has been consistently diluted with various politically dominant groups demanding preferential treatment despite having always opposed it in the case of those who need it the most. Now, two recent development threaten to stir the caste cauldron—the Bombay High Court judgment on Maratha reservation and Uttar Pradesh government's move to bring 17 OBC communities under the scheduled caste (SC) category.

The Bombay High Court's order of granting 12 per cent quota in jobs and 13 per cent in education for Marathas,

who comprise a third of Maharashtra's population, have thrown up questions on several constitutional issues. Many lawyers argue that the inclusion of influential Marathas into the 'socially and educationally backward communities' (SEBC) may unsettle the fundamental premises of reservation policies. Calling the judgment unconstitutional, senior Supreme Court lawyer Shekhar Naphade says it breaches the 50 per cent ceiling on reservation fixed by the apex court. The Supreme Court had put a 50 per cent cap on reservations in its landmark judgment in the 1992 Indira Sawhney case, also known as the



MARATHAS Maharashtra

November 2014 HC stays government move to give 16% quota to Marathas	June 2017 Government forms the State Backward Class Commission	July 2018 Violence across the state	November 30, 2018 Assembly passes a bill proposing 16 per cent quota for Marathas
June 27, 2019 HC upholds reservation, but fixes it at 12-13%			

System

against the caste system

Mandal verdict. "It clearly crosses the boundary set by the Supreme Court in several judgments, beginning with the M.R. Balaji vs State of Mysore that 50 per cent is the limit for reservation. Now the high court seems to have held that there are exceptional reasons. Constitutional principles do not recognise such exceptional and extraordinary grounds," says Naphade. Taking exception to the validity of the "extraordinary" circumstances in which the State Backward Class Commission determined Marathas as backward class, senior lawyer Vikas Singh asks,

"If the Marathas can have their own CM, how can they call themselves backward? This is a flawed judgment and I am sure the Supreme Court will stay the order." Senior advocate K.T.S. Tulsi adds that the purpose of reservation is lost by extending it to dominant castes. "In the case of Marathas, there is no social backwardness as they are the ruling class. The Supreme Court has laid down clear rules that there should be contemporary evidence to show backwardness," he says. The high court order has come as a shot in the arm for the Patidars in Gujarat, Jats and Gujjars in Haryana and Rajasthan, and Kapus in Andhra Pradesh—all socially and politically influential communities that have been clamouring for OBC status to get quotas in jobs and educational institutions. Various state governments granted reservation to these groups, but such moves have mostly been struck down by the judiciary in the past, on the grounds of exceeding the ceiling on reservation. And when the central government introduced 10 per cent reservation for 'economically weaker sections' (EWS) just before the general elections, it was panned as pandering to votebank politics by diluting the purpose of reservation. Opposing economic criteria for quotas, P.S. Krishnan, who signed the Mandal notification as social welfare secretary in 1990, says reservation is not an anti-poverty programme. "When the Karnataka government imposed economic criteria from 1962 to 1973, 90 per cent of the jobs went to Brahmins," says Krishnan, adding that affirmative action is meant for eliminating the social imbalance in government services.

Unsurprisingly, Patidar leader Hardik Patel, who has been spearheading the community's agitation for a quota in Gujarat, feels vindicated by the Bombay High Court order. "Just like the Marathas, the Patel community should also get benefits. Why can't Gujarat include Patels in the OBC list, like some other states? We are planning to approach the high court soon in this regard," says Patel, who joined the Congress in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections. Reiterating his demand for a survey to prove the social and economic backwardness of the Patidar community, Patel also calls for a review of the reservation policy and the 50 per cent ceiling. In 2016, the Gujarat High Court had struck down an ordinance granting 10 per cent quota to Patidars. "Former CM Anandiben Patel granted us 10 per cent reservation, but the court struck it down saying the government hasn't done any survey," says Patel. AS the Bombay High Court order has opened the floodgates of reservation, members of the Gujjar community in Rajasthan are also upbeat about their demand for 5 per cent reservation under the 'special backwards category' (SBC). "Reservation for Marathas is justified. We will also go on the path of agitation soon," says Kirori Singh Bainsla, the face of the Gujjar protests in Rajasthan since 2006. The widespread agitation had forced the Rajasthan government to grant 5 per cent reservation to Gujjars in 2015. However, the move was thwarted by the high court as it breached the 50 per cent cap on reservation. In the wake of renewed protests this February, the Rajasthan assembly passed a bill allowing 5 per cent reservation to Gujjars and four other communities after raising the OBC quota from 21 to 26 per cent. However, the bill has hit a roadblock in the high court. "Our demand is very old and we are the most backward. Gujjars don't have any representation at the Centre," says Bainsla, adding that the 1992 judgment on the ceiling needs to be reviewed. As the idea of revisiting the reservation policy and the 1992 judgment gains currency among certain sections, Krishnan says the purpose of affirmative action is yet to be accomplished.

RESERVATION

PATIDARS Gujarat

August 28, 2015 Widespread violence during state-wide protests

October 2015 Police arrest Hardik Patel on sedition charges

April 2016 State government declares 10 per cent reservation for EWS, including Patels

July 2016 High court quashes the government order

July 2019 Patel demands survey after Maratha reservation verdict



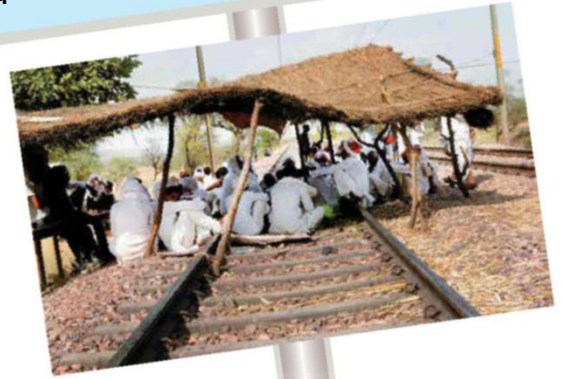
GUJJARS Rajasthan

Sept 2006-May 2008 Protests and violence demanding reservation

2015 Gujjars and other communities given 5% reservation through the Special Backward Class Act

2016 High court quashes the order

February 13, 2019 Assembly passes a bill giving 5% quota to Gujjars. It's being challenged in the SC.



“Revisiting the reservation policy is the dream of the dominant castes who would like to go back to the pre-Ambedkar and pre-Mandal days. The purpose of reservation along with other welfare measures was to bring the sidelined groups into the mainstream by ending socio-political marginalisation. It has not been implemented properly, but here we are saying that it’s time to rethink the policy itself,” says Krishnan, who was also a member-secretary of the National Commission for Backward Classes.

ALONG with the Marathas and the Gujjars, the high court order is expected to bolster the demand of Jats in Haryana for OBC status with 10 per cent reservation in jobs and education. For over a decade, the politically influential community comprising 30 per cent of the state’s population has been on the war path for a quota. The large-scale violence and agitation prompted Haryana to enact a law in 2016, providing 10 per cent reservation to Jats and five other communities. Though the Punjab and Haryana High Court upheld the reservation in 2017, it stayed the order until 2018.

On the validity of the claim made by the agitating communities about their

backwardness, Sanjay Kumar of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in Delhi says the socio-economic indicators suggest that the Patels, Marathas and Jats are as affluent as the elite castes in their respective states. Citing an analysis of a CSDS survey in 2018, he says, “The Marathas, Jats and Patels cannot be termed as backward like the Dalits, adivasis and OBCs. Their aggressive demand for reservation or inclusion in the OBC list could be a result of agrarian distress experienced by these farming communities and the desire for a secure

income from government jobs.”

The reverberations of the Bombay High Court order are felt in the south too. The politically influential Kapus of Andhra Pradesh, also known as Baliya, Ontari and Telaga in various parts of the state, had been enjoying reservations since 1915 during British rule. “After independence, the rulers conspired to take away the reservation,” says Kapu leader and former minister Mudragada Padmanabham. “It’s time for the Centre and the state governments to take another look at all reservations and convince the Supreme Court.”

As the Supreme Court is yet to pronounce its verdict on EWS and Maratha reservation, one can expect more communities jumping onto the quota bandwagon. Reservation experts point out that the identification of backward communities turns out to be a tough task without proper data. The Centre is yet to publish the socio-economic caste census conducted in 2011.

“No census on the socially backward was published after 1931,” says Krishnan. Now that the BJP government is going ahead with a plan to count the OBCs in the 2021 census, the community leaders are just waiting for the new figures to demand their share of the pie—reservation in proportion to their population. [Q](#)

WITH INPUTS FROM M.S. SHANKER
IN HYDERABAD

JATS Haryana

March 2008-11 Violence and rail blockades led by the All India Jat Arakshan Sangharsh Samiti

March 2014 Centre grants OBC status to Jats

March 2015 Supreme Court stays the order

2016 State enacts law to give 10% reservation to Jats

September 2017 Punjab and Haryana HC stays the law until 2018, case pending



BY ABDUL GANI IN GUWAHATI

IN 2015, BJP leader and Union minister Kiren Rijiju had famously rebuked a party colleague for suggesting that those who eat beef should go to Pakistan. “I eat beef, I’m from Arunachal Pradesh...can somebody stop me?” Rijiju had said in response to Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi’s comments. Four years later, India’s Northeast is running short of beef. Not because of the ruling BJP’s clampdown on cow slaughter, like in the rest of the country, but due to rampant smuggling of cattle to Bangladesh.

Beef is a staple—kosher as well despite the raging debate over it—in the Northeast, especially in the Christian-majority Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. In Arunachal Pradesh too, beef is consumed by almost all the tribal communities, besides the large Muslim population in Assam. An estimated 70 per cent of the beef comes from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Gujarat to the Northeast. The rest is sourced locally. The eight NE states need more than 1.5 lakh kg of beef a day.

Beef has not yet assumed religious connotations in the region, though Assam and Tripura—two Hindu-majority states—have seen attacks by right-wing groups on suspected cattle traders and beef-sellers. Even Manipur chief minister N. Biren Singh of the BJP has said his government had no intention of banning beef in the state, where the majority community, Meiteis, are devout Vaishnavite Hindus.

Traders say despite the demand in the region, illegal trade to Bangladesh is on the rise as the smugglers earn a better price—almost double—in the neighbouring country. “It’s getting very difficult. We are getting infirm, ill, and old cattle from suppliers in Bihar and UP. The young and healthy livestock is getting smuggled into Bangladesh via Assam,” says Arun Lyngdoh, president

Beef is a staple diet in several parts of NE, especially in states with a Christian majority



A Menu Too Bland For NE

Cattle smuggling to Bangladesh leads to beef shortage in region

of the All India Livestock Traders and Transporters Association. Assam shares a 262-km border with Bangladesh, a considerable portion of which is riverine and porous.

A major reason for the recent crisis, traders say, is the Assam government’s failure to streamline the legal cattle business. “We want the illegal smuggling of cattle through the Indo-Bangladesh border to be curbed but at the same time, the Assam government should take steps to ensure that legal transportation of cattle is not hampered,” says Lyngdoh.

Recently, the Assam government put a temporary ban on cattle transportation from UP and Bihar as a step towards

curbing smuggling to Bangladesh. The move has aggravated the region’s beef shortage.

Munna Saikia, the general secretary of the traders’ association, says that the cattle smuggling syndicate even lures the local cattle traders to boost their business.

“This is happening because of the lack of awareness among the people and the traders. The government too has failed to create awareness. As a result, the illegal syndicate is running a multi-crore-rupee business and those doing legal trade are in the red. The consumers are victims of this nexus. They are not getting no meat. The government is losing revenue,” Saikia says.

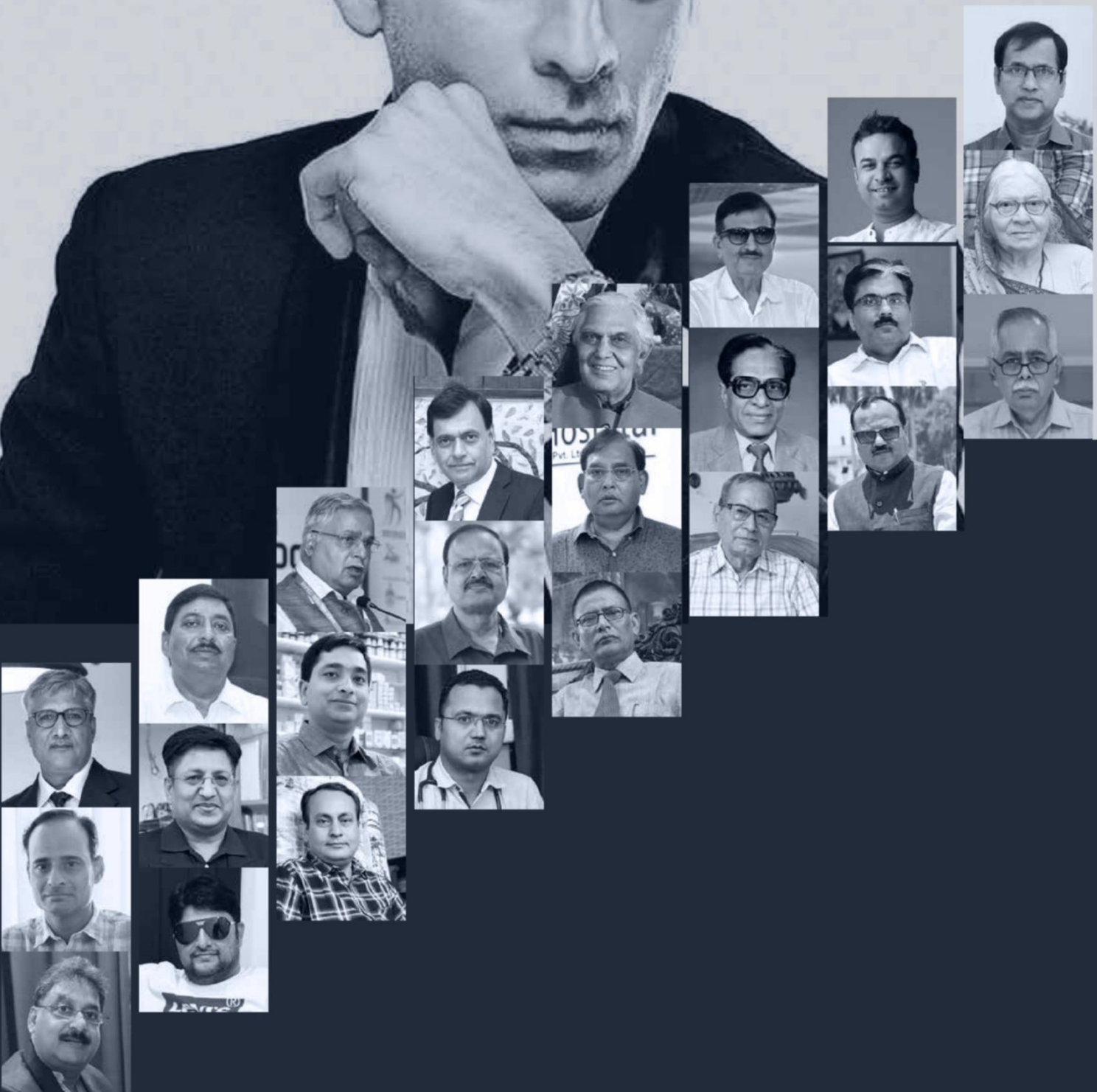
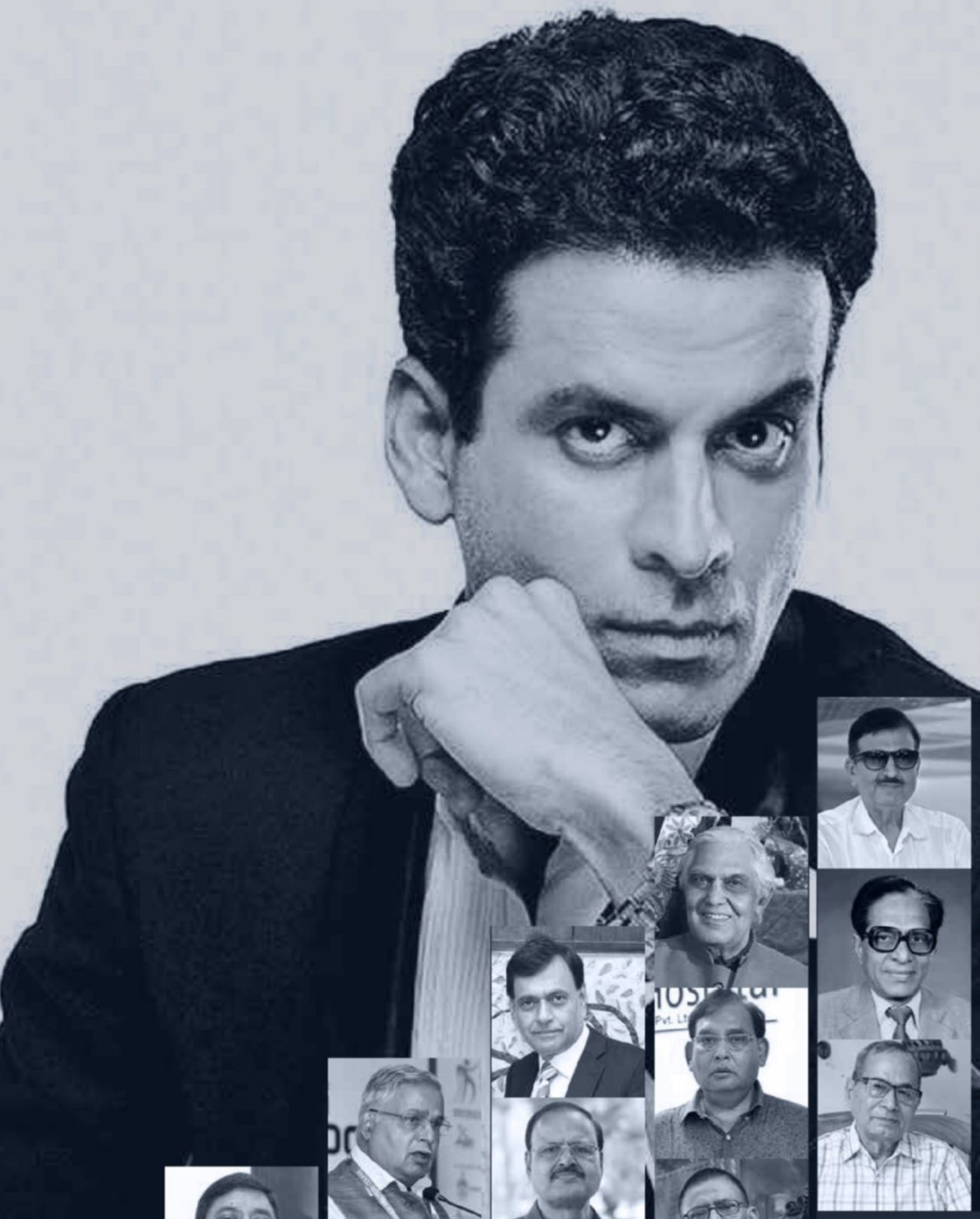
“We support the government’s initiative to stop illegal transportation...But at the same time we demand that legal business shouldn’t be stopped,” he pleads. The association has sought legalisation of cattle trade with Bangladesh to ensure revenue in taxes and levies to the government exchequer.

Last month, Assam Police arrested the alleged lynchpin of the racket, Mohammed Sharfaraz, in Gopalganj district of Bihar. Director general of police Kuladhar Saikia says all the districts have been put on alert and special teams have been

formed to combat smuggling of cattle to Bangladesh. Guwahati commissioner of police, Deepak Kumar, says Sharfaraz used to be the main man behind this racket. “Police are working to nab the other culprits who have been running the smuggling syndicate,” Kumar says.

The Sangh Parivar too says the government must take strict action to end the cattle smuggling across the border as it is a question of faith. “I think the smuggling has reduced a lot after the BJP government came to power. I would like appeal to the government to bring a complete closure on this. The public vigilance is also important here. No illegal activity should be allowed,” says the RSS’s Samparka Pramukh, Ranjeev Kumar Sharma

On the issue of beef consumption, Sharma says that as the Hindus worship the cow, it’s against their principle to eat the animal’s meat. “In Assam we perform Goru Bihu (dedicated to cattle). Hence, there is no question of killing a cow. We oppose cow slaughter. And everyone must respect it. But at the same time, we are against lynching and attacking someone who eats beef,” he asserts. □



आउटलुक

बिहार की शख्शियतें

फर्श से अर्श तक



In association with



'Outlook Personalities of Bihar' (farsh se arsh tak) is a Coffee Table Book. It is an attempt to present the achievements of 'Heroes' in the state by Outlook Group of Publications. The book will give you a ringside view of the life of personalities from Bihar. These people have made Bihar proud in the field of social service, medical, education, agriculture, industry, and many more. Shri Manoj Bajpai Bollywood actor as the chief guest will unveil this Coffee Table Book at a function. He will also present an award to the Icons. On July 19, in Patna, the book will be unveiled.

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TAKEOVER BID



COVETED The ICADR building in New Delhi's Vasant Kunj

granted by the Delhi HC.

The quest for control of an autonomous institution raises obvious questions on the government's desperation to take over what is essentially a body corporate registered as an autonomous society that operates under the aegis of the SC.

"The ICADR was established to offer an independent platform for arbitration, conciliation and mediation, essentially to corporate entities tied up in legal disputes with the government or other private entities. It received a capital grant of Rs 3 crore from the Union government for construction of its building and has, since, been fully self-sustaining in its expenses. The government now wants to seize its control," former Union law minister and lifetime patron of ICADR, Hans Raj Bhardwaj, told *Outlook* (see interview).

Bhardwaj alleges that the current impasse over ICADR began soon after Prasad took over as law minister in 2016 during the first term of PM Narendra Modi's

Buy Disputes With This Bill

The Centre tries to grab ICADR, the premier body for arbitration. 'Unconstitutional', cry luminaries who run it.

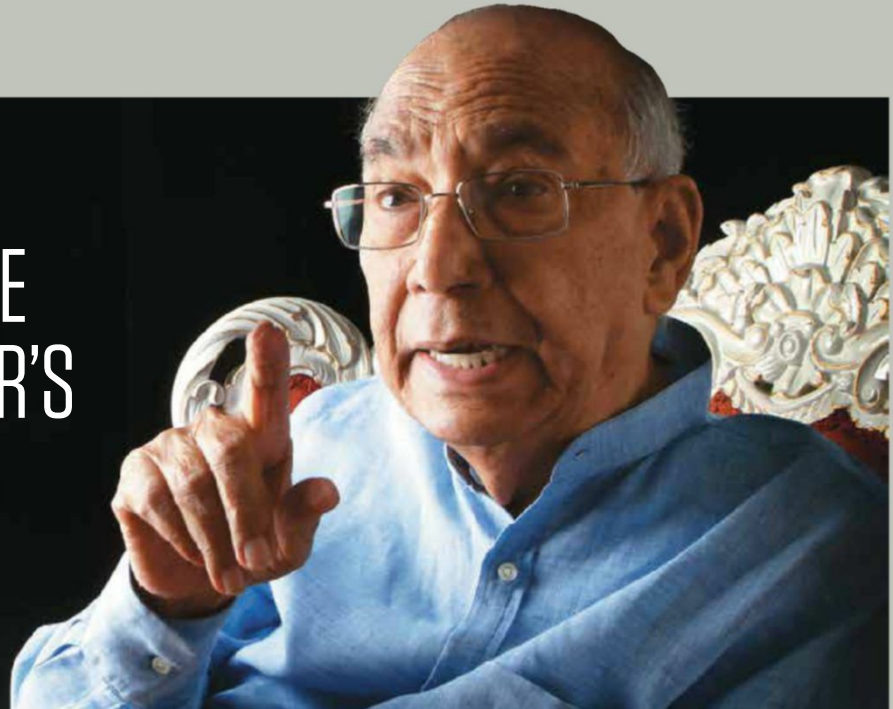
BY PUNEET NICHOLAS YADAV

THE International Centre for Alternative Dispute Resolution (ICADR) may not ring a bell with people outside the legal profession, but control of this 25-year-old institution, headquartered in New Delhi, has become a bone of contention between the Union government and the registered society that has been running it since 1995.

The tug-of-war began earlier this year, when on the intervening night of March 2 and 3, the promulgation of the New

Delhi International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC) Ordinance sought to transfer all undertakings of the ICADR to the Union Law Ministry. The ICADR, which has Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi as its chairperson and a governing council packed with legal luminaries like Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal, challenged the constitutionality of the ordinance in the Delhi High Court and got a stay order. On July 3, Union law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad introduced a bill in the Lok Sabha seeking to replace the ordinance. On July 8, the Supreme Court refused to entertain the Centre's plea to vacate the stay

'THE BILL IS A RESULT OF THE LAW MINISTER'S OWN EGO'



Five months after the Delhi High Court stayed an ordinance that would have allowed the Union government to take over the New Delhi-based International Centre for Alternative Dispute Resolution (ICADR), the New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC) Bill, 2019 has been re-introduced in the Lok Sabha. Former law minister and founder-chairperson of the ICADR, Hans Raj Bhardwaj, tells Puneet Nicholas Yadav that the NDIAC Bill is "unconstitutional" and Prasad's actions are akin to "a hostile takeover". Edited excerpts:

Why do you think the government is so keen on taking over the ICADR?

Let me clarify that I have no problem if the government wants to push for institutionalised arbitration and conciliation. In fact, we had told the government that we have unutilised space in our premises which can serve as the office for the government-run arbitration facility. All we requested was that the ICADR should be allowed to continue its work without government's interference because we have the expertise and the experience of 25 years. My objection is to the NDIAC Bill. I believe this shoddily drafted Bill is the result of the law minister's own ego. I have been telling this government for the past five years that if there are deficiencies in the ICADR, they should suggest ways to rectify them. But, the law minister has refused to meet us. This is a hostile takeover.

What has been the contribution of the ICADR towards furthering arbitration,

mediation and conciliation in India?

The ICADR was an initiative I started as an autonomous, independent society in October 1995 when I was Union law minister. Despite being a member of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), India then lacked an institutionalised platform for arbitration, mediation and conciliation. We roped in luminaries like Fali Nariman, K.K. Venugopal and a galaxy of retired judges from the SC and the high courts. In the past 25 years, we have held 16 international conferences on arbitration, resolved around 55 cases, including four major international arbitration matters. We also opened regional centres in Bangalore and Hyderabad.


The Justice B.N. Srikrishna committee set up by the Narendra Modi government in January 2017 had recommended that the ICADR should be transferred to a separate body corporate. Isn't the government following the committee's recommendation?

The panel had said that the enabling legislation for a takeover must have provisions vesting the properties, assets, debts, obligations, liabilities and contracts of the ICADR in a separate body

'Our annual report is tabled in Parliament and details our work. How then can the government say we have not performed?'

corporate as well as provisions determining compensation to be paid for assets and properties of the ICADR that have not been acquired through grants given by the government. Prasad's Bill says the government will take over the assets, including our building and all its paraphernalia as well as our corpus and bank deposits, which are substantial, but that the liabilities are our own. Secondly, the panel had said that the society that founded the ICADR should be allowed to continue its functions even if the building is taken over. Our society has over 650 members, including a host of retired chief justices, retired high court judges and lawyers. Where are my members going to work if we have no premises?

How do you respond to the law ministry and Srikrishna panel's view that the ICADR has not performed as per expectations?

They are constantly saying that the ICADR resolved only 50 cases in 25 years. This is a half-truth. Our objective was not limited to conducting arbitration. It included holding conferences, sensitisation camps, training programmes and other activities. Our annual report is tabled in Parliament and has details of all our work. How can the government say we have underperformed? Ravi Shankar Prasad would do well to ask Arun Jaitley about the work that we have been doing. Even Jaitley has come to ICADR for arbitration matters. Would nearly every former chief justice of India, or senior lawyers like K.K. Venugopal, associate with the ICADR if it was a defunct body? 

government. “In fact, I had spoken to Prasad’s predecessor, Sadananda Gowda, about ways in which ICADR could be made more efficient, his response was very positive,” Bhardwaj says.

In January 2017, the government set up a 10-member committee headed by former SC judge B.N. Srikrishna “to review the institutionalisation of arbitration mechanism in India”. The panel submitted its report in July 2017, recommending wide-ranging reforms in arbitration mechanism needed to reduce the burden of cases pending in courts. The report dedicated an entire chapter to the ICADR, terming it a “flagship arbitral institution”, but noting that it had received only 53 cases of arbitration and conciliation since

which it is seeking to take control of ICADR is objectionable,” Malhotra says.

Senior advocate Dushyant Dave, counsel for ICADR, believes that the bill doesn’t offer an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanism better than what the ICADR has. “By taking over an institution that has been involved in ADR for 25 years, the government is actually discouraging arbitration. And what are its grounds? A government can take control of an entity it has funded but only if there is a proven charge of financial irregularity. Has there been any such charge against ICADR?” Dave asks.

A former chief justice who has been associated with ICADR tells *Outlook*, “the government was unhappy about two thi-


cio members, including a nominee from the ministry of finance and a CEO. There would also be a representative from a recognised body of commerce and industry, appointed as a part-time member.

Several ICADR members *Outlook* spoke to believed that this proposed composition provides a scope for favouritism by obliging those close to the regime. “The other problem would be that the NDIAC will not be seen as an independent arbitration body but one that functions under the government. Why will corporates move NDIAC for arbitration when most of such cases are against government entities?” an ICADR functionary asks.

While Prasad was unavailable for comment, sources in the law ministry stressed that the Bill was justified because ICADR “has not had a significant case load in over two decades of its existence”; a fact underscored by the Srikrishna panel too.

An ICADR governing council member refuted the charge of ‘non-performance’. “The ICADR was set up with some broad objectives, like promoting ADR through conferences, providing facilities and administrative assistance for ADR, maintaining panels of arbitrators and setting up regional centres...it has carried out all these activities,” he says.

A former high court judge who has handled arbitration matters for ICADR tells *Outlook*, “The charge that ICADR does not have a huge case load does not hold water. Secondly, in most ADR cases different government bodies are also a party, should the government not be answerable for not approaching ICADR with such cases? Why is the government singling ICADR out? If it wants to have a centralised arbitration platform, let it take over every private institution involved with ADR.”

With the Supreme Court now referring the dispute between the ICADR and the Union government back to the Delhi HC, the legal battle is nowhere near closure. Prasad may succeed in having the bill passed in the Lok Sabha, given the BJP’s brute strength there. However, its smooth sailing in the Rajya Sabha, where the Modi government lacks a clear majority, is uncertain. Congress RS members Vivek Tankha and Abhishek Manu Singhvi, associated with the ICADR in their capacity as senior advocates, might also canvas among Opposition members to scuttle Prasad’s bid. The impasse certainly makes for a fit case of arbitration. 



“What are its grounds for seizing control? Only a proven charge of financial irregularity can justify it. Is there any such charge?”

Dushyant Dave
Counsel for ICADR, senior advocate

“Aiming to improve the arbitration mechanism is laudable, but the manner to seek control of ICADR is objectionable.”

P.K. Malhotra
ICADR secretary-general, former law secy



its inception, concluding that “it may be preferable for the government to take over the ICADR”. Justice S. Ravindra Bhat, presently Rajasthan High Court chief justice and K.K.Venugopal, who were part of the panel, had dissociated themselves from the report pertaining to the ICADR.

P.K. Malhotra, former law secretary and ICADR secretary-general, who is the main petitioner against the NDIAC Bill in the Delhi HC, says the government has used the report to justify its “blatantly unconstitutional” attempt to seize the institution. “While the stated objective of improving institutionalised arbitration mechanism is laudable, the manner in

ngs—first, it did not want Bhardwaj as lifetime patron of ICADR because he is essentially a Congressman and second, because ICADR is autonomous, the Centre could not have its pick in deciding its office-bearers or influencing arbitration matters, especially ones against public sector undertakings.”

As per the NDIAC Bill, once the government takes control, a revamped ICADR will comprise seven members with a retired judge of the SC or the high court or a person with experience in the administration of arbitration as its chairperson. It would have two ‘eminent persons’ of substantial experience in institutional arbitration as members and three ex-offi-



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BY LOLA NAYAR

IT'S the D-word that has obsessed the Indian government for the past three decades. But none made disinvestment—the sale of government stake in public sector units (PSUs)—as much a priority as Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his two terms since coming to power for the first time in 2014. Almost perfecting the art of monetising PSU assets, the first Modi government raised Rs 2.8 lakh crore from disinvestment proceeds. For the current fiscal, his government has set the bar even higher, going for an ambitious target of over Rs 1.05 lakh crore in 2019-20. The government has identified more than two dozen central PSUs for disinvestment, including the debt-ridden Air India which found no buyers last year.

Experts and economists, however, say that the disinvestment process has neither helped PSUs whose shares were sold, nor the government which wished to get out of the business of being in business, or the investors, both institutional and smaller ones. In most cases, they point out, various governments sold stakes in PSUs to other PSUs. It became a mechanism for the Centre to raise funds but the money hasn't been used to create infrastructure or make PSUs efficient.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman hopes to focus on strategic sales, i.e. selling shares to private enterprises. The government has announced plans to cede management control by allowing strategic investors to own up to 49 per cent stake on a case-by-case basis. This is because the stake of other PSUs along with government's direct holdings will together form the basis to calculate the 51 per cent majority, in case the government wishes to retain management control. The government has begun the exercise to appoint consultants for the dilution of stakes, as also identify assets of PSUs that may be monetised to raise resources.

Over the years, the contours of disinvestment have undergone drastic changes. The original objective of setting up a national investment fund or a special purpose fund—where the disinvestment proceeds from stake sale or outright sale of loss-making PSUs would be pooled for modernising and expanding profit-making public sector enterprises—seems to have been lost. “Now, disinvestment has

D Company A

Govt goes for Rs 1.05 lakh crore disinvestment target. Will

ONGC buys 51.11% govt stake in HPCL

Acquisition cost: Rs 36,915 cr

Reason: Creation of global oil giant

Reality: Operations remain separate; minimal synergies

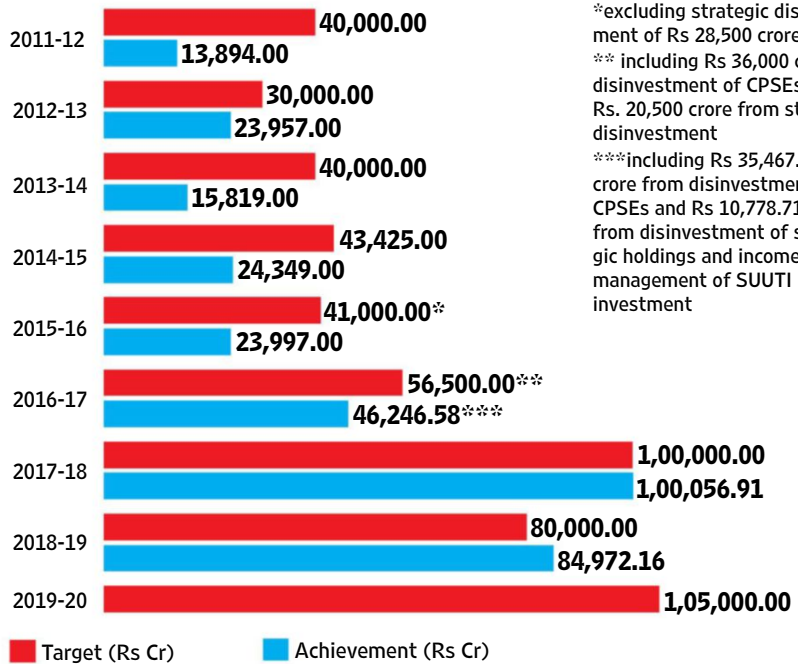
Proposed NTPC-SJVN deal

Acquisition cost: Rs 8,000 cr

Reason: Enhance non-thermal portfolio

Reality: Himachal Pradesh against it

Disinvestment: Targets and Achievements



*excluding strategic disinvestment of Rs 28,500 crore

** including Rs 36,000 crore as disinvestment of CPSEs and Rs. 20,500 crore from strategic disinvestment

***including Rs 35,467.87 crore from disinvestment of CPSEs and Rs 10,778.71 crore from disinvestment of strategic holdings and income from management of SUUTI investment

become a non-debt creating capital receipt (NDCR). The original plan of creating a special fund for improvement of PSUs has been forgotten and the NDCR has become part of the budget,” says Professor C.P. Chandrasekhar, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, JNU. “The disinvestment proceeds are now being used for balancing and keeping fiscal deficit under control and to finance current expenses. The disinvestment money has hardly been used for any restructuring purpose.”

While critics of India's disinvestment programme liken it to selling of family silver to bridge fiscal deficit or rein it, N.R. Bhanumurthy, professor at National

Institute of Public Finance and Policy, likens it to selling old gold to buy new gold jewellery. “What we are seeing in the budget is more than disinvestment,” he explains. “The projected numbers in the budget is indicative of the government resolve to now look beyond disinvestment to monetising land and other assets of public sector companies like in the case of the railways. It is basically selling their assets and increasing their investments. For instance, Rs 50 lakh crore is envisaged as the requirement of the railways. Large part of it is expected to be financed through railways assets sale.”

India has had a mix of disinvestment models—including outright sale, part

nd India Inc.

it really help ailing PSUs like Air India?



ONGC buys GSPC

Acquisition cost:

Rs 7,700 cr

Reason: Strategic and immense value proposition

Reality: GSPC found no gas; its huge debt remains

Indian Oil's share buyback/Coal India's share buyback

Cost: **Rs 4,435 cr/**
Rs 1,050 cr

Reason: Shore up share prices

Reality: Windfall for govt



PFC purchases 52.63% govt stake in REC

Acquisition cost:

Rs 14,500 cr

Reason: Future merger to enable synergies

Reality: Deal helps govt to exceed disinvestment target in 2018-19

sale from 26 per cent to 75 per cent through strategic sale or public offering. With some outright sales and majority stake sales having come in for audit and public questioning, an element of caution had become necessary. But that no longer seems a handicap. Each disinvestment is now being handled differently as the government goes about reducing its share in public sector enterprises. In the banking sector, there has been dilution of government stake of up to 51 per cent. Lately, cross holding by making a profit-making enterprise buy out stakes in another PSU or from the government has proven an easy way for the government

to unlock the sizeable reserves of companies like Coal India and ONGC. It is another matter that while the government coffers have improved, companies like ONGC are now having to borrow funds to monetise oil and gas they are expected to explore and produce to reduce import dependency.

Data from the department of investment and public asset management reveals that in the last five years, the Modi government managed to garner Rs 2.8 lakh crore through disinvestment, substantially more than the amount collected in the previous decade. In the last fiscal, ONGC's forced acquisition of the unprofitable GSPC and oil marketing

major HPCL contributed sizably to the government kitty.

Mahesh Vyas, managing director and CEO of Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, points out that in the case of Coal India or ONGC, acquisition of a sister PSU was not "in the spirit" of disinvestment. "It was just the arm of the control shifting from the government treasury to another PSU. Though called disinvestment, it is essentially preferential dividend allotment or giving government preferential access to the profits of the PSU."

THE finance minister's budget speech has boosted Vyas's hopes of the "Modi government taking a few more steps in the direction of real disinvestment" compared to what it has done so far. He, however notes that the government is still shying from committing to selling off loss-making Air India altogether. "It looks like the government is willing to walk a little more in the direction of disinvestment but it is still not committing that 'we will have only strategic places where we will be involved and hive off the rest'. There is still talk about retaining 51 per cent," points out Vyas.

Deven R. Choksey, CEO and managing director at KR Choksey, feels there are better ways to divest PSUs. "Probably they need to invite strategic investors into these companies. In turn, the government should be a minority stakeholder in the divested companies and in a leisurely manner they should gradually reduce their holdings. This will help the strategic investor to bring in capital and expertise and also bring out the best in the government companies, which though good are suffering due to lack of consistency in the management."

Citing Hindustan Zinc, VSNL and Maruti as some of the examples of successful disinvestment, Choksey emphasises that while the government's purpose of bringing down fiscal deficit through divestment is being carried out, whether the enterprise's value is increased is open to question. This speaks of the failure of the disinvestment programme. The case is worse when the government strips a profitable company of its financial resources, required to carry out its core duty, and then talks tall about protecting national resources and reducing import dependency. □


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(SOURCE: Q1 IRS 2019. COMPARISON: WITH IRS 2017.)





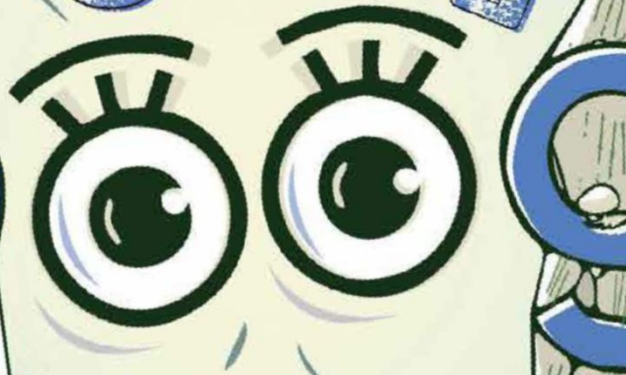
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COVER STORY

What if Google suddenly ceased to be? What would going back to an older time look like? Is life without Google even possible anymore?

BY JYOTIKA SOOD

GOD...or Google. Someone actually makes that comparison in this story: “We don’t know God, but Google.” As you’d notice in its slightly odd phrasing, it could mean either of two things, depending on whether you’re using the noun or the verb. “We don’t know God, but we know **SOMEONE/SOMETHING** like God...as omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent...that’s Google.” Alternatively, “We don’t know God, but of course we could always Google for him/her.” Either way, the name looms like some rival cosmic force. The kind of ambition it expresses is not new in human history—to know everything that exists. They’ve all partaken of that fantasy, from medieval encyclopaedias, to

Illustration by RAJAT BARAN

Kapil Sibal Lawyer and politician

The advent of Google or other internet search engines has certainly made access to information much easier than what it was when people like me started our legal practice. Of course, before Google, it wasn't as if it took lawyers weeks and months to cull out information for building their arguments in a case. There were other systems that were in place to source information, like the SCC journals and research digests. Particularly for lawyers practising in the Supreme Court or the high courts, these digests were of great help because whatever precedents or reference material we were looking for



Illustrations by SAAHIL

was available in them. Since law, unlike science, is not a universal subject and is jurisdiction-specific, lawyers did not need to wait endlessly to get foreign research journals. In any case, the frequency with which foreign judgments or foreign law needed to be quoted was far less than it is now. Yes, for trial court judgments, access would be more difficult, but then we wouldn't need these for every case in the higher courts.

The more you read, the more knowledge you gathered and the richer your arguments would become. There were many incidents when we would argue a case based on certain information that was not easily available in the public domain and our arguments would leave our opponents completely stumped. The same, of course, would happen to us too. Researching cases was surely a lot more fun.

For our generation, it required a lot more investment of time because we had to read a lot, and then decide what to use for our case and what to discard. That is not the case today because young lawyers, aside from all the tools that were available to us, also have access to free-flowing information on the internet and practically every judgment, court order or research material is available at the click of a button. Perhaps, the pre-Google era made for better lawyers because we did not have the luxury of short cuts. ●
(As told to Puneet Nicholas Yadav)



“Each time I am in India, I notice how quickly it changes. India will keep helping us build products for everyone.”

Sundar Pichai
CEO, Google

the part-comic *Book of Lists*, to the inexhaustible catalogues of the US Library of Congress. Or should that be Borges's Library of Babel, which contained: "Everything: the minutely detailed history of the future...all that is given to express, in all languages."

But it's Google that has come closest to fulfilling that frightening mandate. Forget God, you can Google yourself. It knows what you did last summer, where you plan to eat tonight, where you're reading this sentence right now. You have practically outsourced your memory to the machine, also the "detailed history of your future". Imagine, then, a life without Google! Would bridges collapse and the skies come crashing down? For those who grew up in the past two decades, such a life would be well-nigh inconceivable. But for even those from the other side of the millennial wedge in time, it's becoming a little hard to remember how we

got around with life those days. What did we do, for instance, when there was a fork in the road somewhere out in the country? Duh.... Or needed to find the nearest Decathlon...oh wait, there was no Decathlon either. No FitBit. Before Google, there was only Govinda.

Okay, back to the thought experiment...you're the protagonist of your own work of fiction. It's titled 'Ungoogleed'... You are suddenly bereft of the whole enchilada, that alarming array of products from the Page-Brin stable. Things you take for granted. That calm, simple white screen with minimalist design where you track everything from the

progress of the monsoon, to the cricket score, to the reverse repo rate (if you do swing that way), to your own current location! So out goes Google Search, which used to be a revolution before algo-rigging and AdSense and all that. Out goes Gmail. Phew! There goes your Android phone! And all the little apps you keep downloading on Google Play. Out goes YouTube! And no Google Maps! Going back to 1995 is almost as radical as time-travelling to 1595. The rest of the frills—Google Duo, Google Pay, the voice search, Google Assistant—are yet to become indispensable, while making serious incursions on our time and mindspace. Those who type in Indian languages, for instance, do not type anymore—the keyboards were always a mess. Now they speak to the phone, and Google’s speech recognition software does the hard yards.

So how does day one go? You wake up and glance at your mobile...what, no notifications! It’s a dumbphone. An hour late to office, because no Yankee girl told you via satellite that Hosur Road was chock-a-block. Your boss calls you and says something that sounds “exasperating farrago of distortions...” You can’t even Google that! There’s a short news piece online on how Virat Kohli ges-


Naresh Trehan Cardiologist

I deal with many peculiar cases every day, but the ones that amuse me are the ‘Google patients’. That’s not the name of a novel psychological condition; they are the ones who consult me after googling their symptoms, armed with prognoses and diagnoses. Sometimes they are right and often not. But I do enjoy these interactions. Google is the first point of reference for medical conditions today. Many people upload their experiences and videos online. But the problem is that internet searches do not present an accurate answer, which causes confusion and unnecessary anxiety.

It takes extra time to convince people when they come with preconceived notions based on online searches. However, it has emboldened patients and their families as it helps them be mentally prepared before an appointment. Whenever I come across anything new, I first search it online and then consult a WhatsApp group of doctors. The reference books that graced the tables




of doctors until the 1990s have now been replaced with a laptop or desktop; the books have been consigned to libraries.

Way back in the 1970s, when I returned to India to start my practice, I would first consult my colleagues or call up an expert in case of a doubt. Google has made the dissemination of medical facts and breakthroughs instantaneous. Moreover, there is a plethora of visuals—a luxury in the 1970s and ’80s. While Google has helped the medical fraternity double check hunches and facts, there should be filters on the information that search results throw up. 

(As told to Jyotika Sood)

Those who type in Indian languages do not type anymore. They speak to the phone, and Google does the hard yards.

tured to Steve Smith, another on Piggy Chops and Nick Jonas’s beach photographs. But, alas, no video, no photo.... Fingers itch for a search engine. It’s 1 pm, lunch time. Zomato’s delivery boy gets lost...no Maps, remember?

 Of course, Google Search was a god-send. Aditi Verma, a 27-year-old who works in Bank of America, says it’s her first-hand info-guide and she doesn’t know any other search engine. “There are many things you don’t want to talk to your parents about, or family, friends or colleagues. Google fills in. Studies, jobs, relationships, puberty, sex...Google takes you wherever you want. It doesn’t ask you questions nor judges you like people.” What would she do if Google vanishes one day? Aditi laughs: “Good idea, Google should experiment. One day it should switch off its products all over the world, let’s see what chaos follows.” She would just binge on food and TV that day. “What a relief it will be!”



WE GOOGLED ALL THESE

Google may be the most popular, but it isn't the only search engine out there. Many other players live up to the tasks that Google might not do for you...



Bing is perhaps the second most popular search engine. Powered by Microsoft, Bing has almost all the bling that Google offers, although it is unlikely that Bing is going to dethrone Google. It is definitely worth a try.

Y

Yandex is the most popular in Russia and fourth largest globally. Founded in 1997, it serves over 150 million search queries a day. From mail to maps, Yandex provides almost every service that Google does and facilitates cross-lingual searches.

5,500,000,000

That's the number of search requests on Google every day. The company doesn't officially release the data, so some estimates peg the number at over 2 trillion.



China's Google, **Baidu** is the largest search engine in China that lets web searches in Chinese languages and Japanese. Baidu has indexed almost a billion web pages along with more than **80 million** images and 10 million multimedia files.



WolframAlpha is a computational knowledge engine that gives facts and data for wide-ranging topics from externally sourced 'curated data', instead of caching web pages. It tends to the needs of the knowledge-hungry kid.

Y!

Yahoo used to power its own web search until recently. Now that it has partnered up with Microsoft, it uses Bing search results for its web engine. Yahoo Finance is by far the best financial news aggregator currently available.



DuckDuckGo is the first choice of incognito users. DuckDuckGo doesn't collect browsing history, social media profiles or emails to give you personalised search results, unlike Google. Also ad spam is much less than Google.



Like DuckDuckGo, **Ixquick** takes privacy issues seriously. No cookies, no prying into search history. It collects no user-specific details. It is supported in 17 different languages and serves around six million queries a day.

\$749,160,000,000

The market cap of Alphabet (Google's parent company)

blekko

Developed by ex-Googlers, **Blekko's** unique interface serves results by category—

slashes, a /slash character precedes the text just like #hashtags in Twitter, to search in its database. It calls itself a spam-free search engine.



Formerly Clusty, **Yippy** is a metasearch engine for exploring the deep web—pages that are harder to locate as they are hosted in private networks. It locates buried webpages that traditional search methods cannot find.



100,000,000 GB
The storage size of the billions of web pages that Google has indexed

YOURS ODDLY

▶ The name Google is a misspelling of the number googol, that is, 1 followed by a hundred zeros. It certainly beats the original name, 'Project Backrub'.

▶ "I'm 01100110 01100101 01100101 01101100 01101001 01101110 01100111 001000 00 01101100 01110101 01100011 01101011 01111001 00001010," was Google's first tweet. It means "I'm feeling lucky" in binary code.

▶ How does a giraffe clean its ears? Is it healthy to eat boogers? Why isn't 11 pronounced onety one? My cat looks like Hitler? Wonder what these are? These questions feature on the lists of weirdest searches on Google.

▶ Google rents a herd of 200 goats to maintain the lawns in its Mountain View headquarters. It is their eco-friendly alternative to mowers.

▶ "Don't be evil" was the company's unofficial motto since 2000. It was such an integral part of company culture, *Gizmodo* reported, that the phrase was the password of the office shuttle bus WiFi. However, in 2018, it removed most instances of the phrase from the code of conduct that the company's employees receive.



Formerly Ask Jeeves, now **Ask** is based on a question/answer format. It is popular for accommodating the natural, colloquial language. Most of the questions are answered by other users.



Adswish follows the Google search engine model for classified ads. It is the one search engine that promises to deliver just the right product or service online.

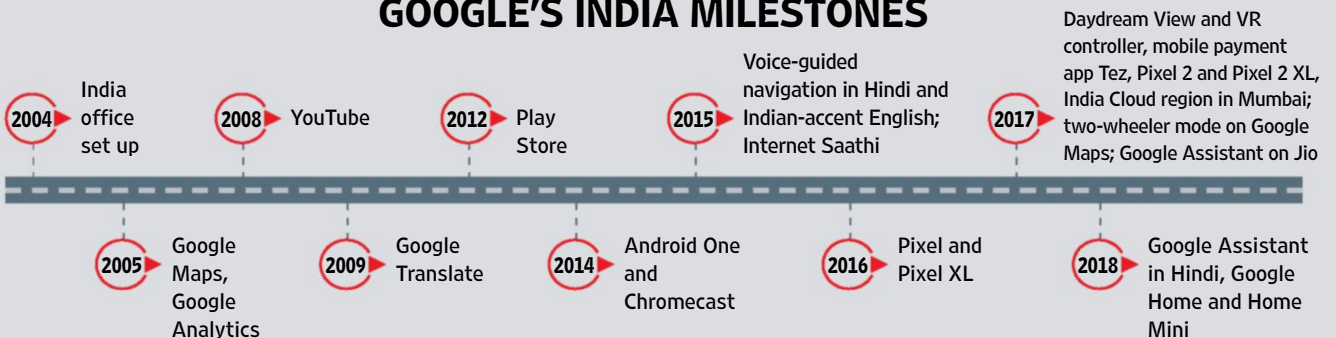
19,605,052

The number of shares Google sold when it went public. On its debut, it was valued as much as General Motors.



ChaCha is a lot more like Ask, where users can ask any particular question that gets answered by independent contractors called Guides. Alexa ranks it as the eighth most popular search engine.

GOOGLE'S INDIA MILESTONES



Google voice searches in Hindi grew 400 per cent in 2018, while overall growth across the world was 270 per cent.

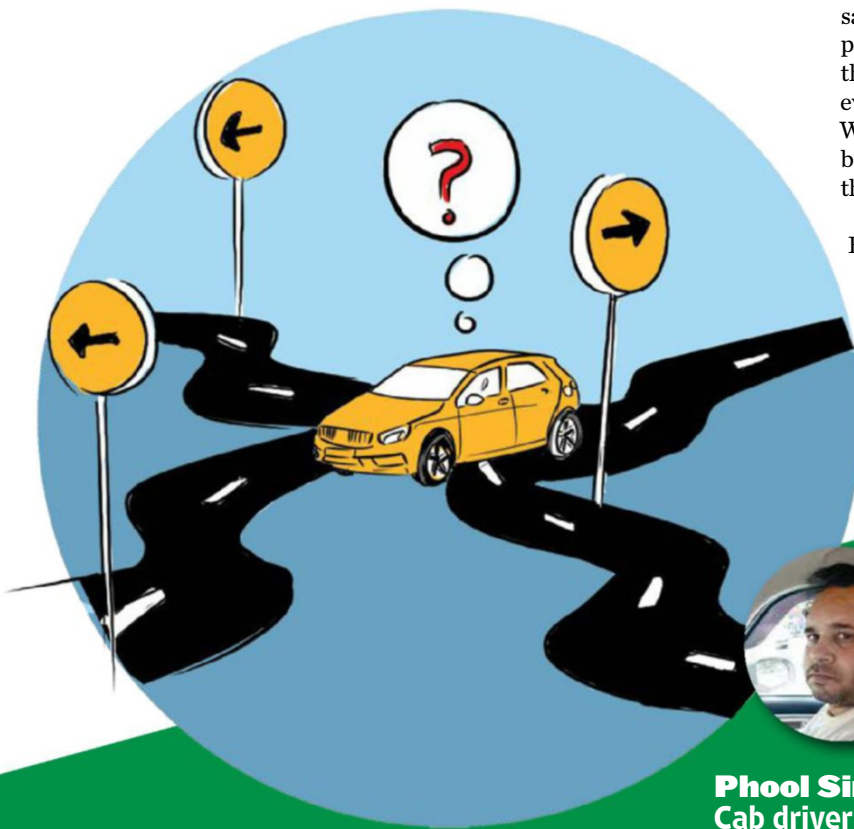
But the idea seems scary to Indian language journalists—since most of them have abandoned typing, Indian journalism now leans heavily on Google. Its penetration in India is so high that voice searches in Hindi grew 400 per cent in 2018, while the growth overall in the world was just 270 per cent. “It was torture to type Hindi,” says Arvind Singh, who works with Hindi daily *Hindustan*. “The font system was difficult to learn, and many symbols like *aadha la*, *aadha pa* were not available.” Naturally, he has migrated to voice-typing his stories and doesn’t want to migrate back. It all seems like some *Ali Baba Chaalis Chor* fantasy to him right now, where no hands are required to work. Life without Google? “A vacation to

Switzerland would be best,” he chuckles. “As of now, work and Google are synonyms.”



LCHIKI Gboard? Yes, unbeknownst to English users, Google’s Indian-language space is exploding like a supernova. Gboard, the Google keyboard, can handle 50 Indian languages and voice-input supports 10 of them. Map voice navigation comes in seven: Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam and Gujarati. That’s millions and millions of people. And Google Assistant works in 10 languages. A majority of India’s 400 million active internet users work in Indian languages, not English. No wonder Caesar Sen Gupta, vice president, Google’s Next Billion Users initiative, says: “We have launched a number of India-first products. By building for India first, we build for the future—creating apps that work great for everyone, everywhere. Maps Offline and Two-Wheeler Mode are great examples—products built for India, but now being used elsewhere in the world.”

So no getting away from Google, it seems. Except in your fiction...well, not even in fiction,



Phool Singh Chauhan
Cab driver

What will a world without GPS look like? “*Sab thapp ho jayega* (Everything will stop),” replies Phool Singh Chauhan with a hearty laugh. “Young people completely rely on GPS locations and are clueless about the streets.” Chauhan, 39, has been driving taxis for the past 15 years, well before the smartphone revolution. He bought a car—Swift Dzire—a few months ago and has just begun working with app-based taxi services. Until May, he was employed with a traditional taxi-fleet owner.

He remembers the days when navigation could be quite cumbersome. “When I was new to the profession, I ferried an old couple to Patna following a family death. Mobiles were a luxury at that time. We entered Patna at midnight and the couple was clueless about the directions. STDs and PCOs (phone booths) were closed. We kept wandering on the streets for nearly two hours as there was no one to guide us to the destination.”

However, things have changed with the

logistics, taxi and home delivery services that have sprung up on the back of Google Maps. “Both Ola and Uber use the app and if their network is down, we switch to Maps to reach the destination. WhatsApp location also uses the service,” he says. “I wish these apps had come earlier. I missed seeing my daughter grow up and the pranks that my son played. I wasn’t with them when they were sick and my wife alone took care of them.”

(As told to Jyotika Sood)

'New internet adopters have different expectations'

A majority of the 400 million active internet consumers in India use Indian languages to navigate the web. They are the focus of technology behemoths such as Google. **Caesar Sengupta**, VP, Next Billion Users and GM of payment at Google, talks to **Jyotika Sood** about the corporation's work in India and the controversies it is embroiled in. Edited Excerpts:

What innovations is Google working on for the Indian market?

In a world where the mobile phone has rewritten the rules of access, new internet adopters have different expectations and experiences of connecting with the world—it's very different from the earlier users of the internet. 44% of new internet adopters between 2013 and 2017 came from just 11 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Next Billion Users is our initiative to steer the internet from a one-size-fits-all model. We are seeing more and more searches in Indian languages—not only in Hindi, but also in Bengali, Tamil, Telugu and Marathi. Google is transforming Search to respond to the needs of a multilingual audience and deliver high-quality information to them. We are focusing on products which work across devices, stay steady with network fluctuations and can be used through voice or text in the

user's first language.

India is planning to tax digital enterprises.

How will it impact your free services?

We comply with tax laws in India and pay all applicable taxes. The government implemented the equalisation levy in June 2016 and we are complying with that too. As the rules evolve, we will continue to follow them.

If major countries decide to tax Google, will you make the search engine a fee-based platform?

We are committed to building products for everyone and are proud that billions of people use these. Easy access to information through Google Search is hugely empowering. It helps you learn new things about the world, have fun and get inspired. Another example is the Internet Saathi programme, which helps thousands of women in rural India use

information found on the web to help improve their lives and that of their families and communities. This has a huge socio-economic impact. So it's not just about paid and free products; there is a huge incentive to make these services accessible to everyone. The subscription model works for some of our products, but most are available for free to users all over the world.


Are you working with the Indian government on any project?

Google is committed to India's growth story for the long term. Apart from the partnership with Indian Railways to offer free public Wifi at railway stations, we are also working closely with the Indian banking and financial sector to facilitate digital payments in the country and contribute to the government's vision of making India a cashless society. We are cooperating with the Central Water Commission to improve India's flood forecasting systems by generating accurate inundation maps for flooding events.

Privacy is a serious concern. What are you doing to address it?

We have always taken privacy and security very seriously. And we work hard to help keep the web safe for everyone. We feel privileged that billions of people trust products like Search, Chrome, Maps and Android to help them every day. We don't take users' trust for granted. We give users clear, meaningful choices regarding their data. Google will never sell any personal information to third parties. We use data to make products and services more user-friendly. For example, traffic data in Google Maps reduces gridlock by offering people alternate routes. Queries in Google Translate make translations more accurate for billions of people.

The European Commission has imposed fines totalling more than \$9 billion on Google since 2017. Why are more countries viewing the company with suspicion?

We disagree with the EC's Android decision and are appealing to the EU General Court. It will be the first time that an independent judicial body will assess the merits of the case. 



Read the full text of the interview
www.outlookindia.com 

“Writers shamelessly use Google, researching facts, details, adding meat to that first draft,” says author Meghna Pant.

come to think of it!

GBOARD is nothing...think Gliterature. Last year, the erudite radio presenter HrishiK was interviewing Meghna Pant, an award-winning author who had recently published *How to Get Published in India*. How could a person like her, who had grown up in South Mumbai, write about people in villages and small-towns in her short stories? Meghna took a deep breath, paused to survey the 100-odd people in the audience, and said cryptically, “Imagination.” Yes, of course, a writer needs imagination. Well, very few will admit it, but a writer could also use some help from Google.

Meghna gradually lets on: “I’m not a

navel-gazing writer, so I often write about worlds I haven’t occupied, like an orgy in an ashram, a Dalit garbage collector, or an old man with a hooker. That’s when Google comes to my rescue. For those brief moments, it allows me to inhabit a new world that comes alive with details,” says Meghna. In *How to Get Published in India*, she advises aspiring writers to chuck the thesaurus. “Perhaps I should’ve also added how writers shamelessly use Google...researching facts, detailing, adding meat to that first draft!”

While a writer’s mental mapping of unknown worlds proceeds with a bit of Googling, the humbler Ola driver would be totally lost in a new city. “Our company uses Google Maps for most of our 110 cities,” says an Ola executive, on condition of anonymity. “No Google Maps



K.S. Dakshina Murthy Journalist

The musty smell, typical of books stored in ill-lit spaces, hit my nose. I peered through the dim light in the JNU library, trying to locate a book for an urgent assignment. I pulled out some books, disturbing the dust. Coughed and sneezed before I dusted them carefully and set them on a table.

I was doing my MPhil in international studies and not many places offered information on an esoteric subject like Latin America. This was just 32 years ago. 1987. Yet, looking back, it seems like the Dark Ages.

More often than not, the books I wanted would be missing, especially those that had been borrowed, most probably, by a

colleague working in the same area. It was the classic case of the early bird, finders keepers, first come first served. Friendships paused at the library doorstep. Once in, you had to use your ingenuity, mislead your competitor and grab the book when you spotted it.

Even in a top-notch university like JNU, it was difficult to get all the information. To bone up on an issue, country or any godforsaken thing, location was important. Big cities with large libraries were a prerequisite if one had to succeed in research.

A job that had anything to do with information was not easy. As journalists, one had little option but to seek out experts to get the lay of the land. It would

not be easy sitting in Delhi to write about, say, an event in Sudan. One had to go to the experts—foreign ministry mandarins or a JNU professor.

The perspective would always be from one main source. I chose to write my MPhil thesis on the “United Nations response to the Nicaraguan conflict (of the 1980s)” as the bulk of the primary material was available at the UN library in Delhi’s Lodi Estate. One had to hunt out information like a Rottweiler, swallow and regurgitate the material as analysis, perspective or narrative. Now Google that if I am wrong. ●



JUMP CUT SATISH PADMANABHAN

Duh, Google



Executive editor, *Outlook*

THE cab hailing app says Harinder will be there in three minutes. And he is. He taps his phone smartly and asks if we shall proceed. I nod. “Go on straight for two kilometers,” the lady in his phone twangs. Harinder is chatty. “Arre wah, sirji, what is this gol building?” he asks. It’s the Parliament. “Ah, even bigger, what’s this?” he wonders. Rashtrapati Bhawan. Is he new to Delhi, I ask? “Yes, sirji, came the day before yesterday from Hoshiarpur. My brother asked me if I want to drive a taxi. I said why not.”

I would always be filled with envy whenever I saw the sequence in a Hollywood film noir when on a rain-drenched night the hardboiled gumshoe dodging the hoodlums would hail a taxi, give a chit of paper to the driver and ask him to hurry. In India, it is unthinkable. First, there will be no taxi. If you found one, he would refuse. If all went well, chances are the cab driver would ask the chasing hoodlums for directions when you gave him the chit with the address. But Google Maps takes the cabbie’s ignorance streets ahead. Harinder, for instance, could be driving in Boston or Bosnia.

“Arre, her professor looks like that American actor,” says a friend looking at a photo her daughter has sent from the University of Chicago. “You know, that big blonde guy who used to boast of dating all the leading ladies; the one couldn’t act much, but had great

screen presence?” We look askance. “The one who was there in the movie about the comic character, it was partly animation?” she implores us. “There was Madonna as Breathless Mahoney?” The actors’ name is on the tip of all our tongues, but nobody can remember. A Google search would have told us she is thinking of Warren Beatty and the film she is referring to is *Dick Tracy*. But if we don’t Google, like we did not that balmy evening as it was a ‘phone-off’ dinner, the conversation takes us to other places, to films made of graphic novels, to Alan Moore’s *From Hell*, was the identity of Jack the Ripper ever proven, is it

okay to cheer Lector Hannibal to escape from prison...

Google kills any conversation that begins with who was that who wrote, or sang, acted, painted, performed, invented, created, won or lost. The search engine is Jeeves to the power of infinity and makes a woolly-headed Bertie Wooster of all of us. It takes the juice out of any discussion where the mind wanders; it’s like this abominable cousin who used to be called a ‘walking

encyclopaedia’—it piles on fact over fact to bury imagination. It nullifies the experience of age; it dulls the exuberance of youth. Google is post-debate, post-curiosity, post-ponder.

An unexamined life is not worth living, Socrates had quipped long ago. Google is the nemesis of Socrates, it makes examining too lazy. ☒

Google is like this abominable cousin we used to call a ‘walking encyclopaedia’. Piling on fact over fact to bury imagination, it nullifies experience of age, dulls exuberance of youth.

means no company. Maps of India has no such presence.” A whole economy is flourishing on Google Maps and, if it were to disappear one day, many businesses would come to standstill.

“Even network hiccups cause us trouble, but imagine if the main app disappears—we would have to pack our bags and go back home,” he adds. Ditto for Zomato, which tracks orders on Google Maps. Again, the executive didn’t wish to be identified. Neither company offered a formal response.

For all this, interestingly, no one remembers when they started using Google in India! Even Google is quite clueless about its usage in India—although, technically, Google set up its first office here in December 2004. “Developing maps was fun in the 1980s-90s,” says Swati Mitra, executive publisher of Eicher Goodearth Private Limited, who formerly also headed Eicher’s map division. “We would travel hundreds of kilometres and study hundreds of maps to come out with city guides and maps.... Now one app gives you all that.” Even a decade

ago, maps and travel guides were a must-have. But Swati confesses she herself has switched to Google Maps; Eicher's map division was closed around seven years ago.

LIFE before Google? Well, it's not just those in their teens and early '20s who are hooked to Google—for the older ones, it affords a kind of creative luxury, replacing what used to be donkey work back in 1970s-80s. For an IPS officer with the CBI, who aptly prefers to stay undercover, life before Google recalls the days of the fictional Byomkesh Bakshi, Karamchand et al. All that crackling genius and logical riddle-solving needed a lot of grunt work alongside...“dialling over 100 numbers from the printed BSNL directory, poring over paper cuttings in libraries, tracking down khabris (informers). Today, Google has become our khabri,” he laughs. He doesn't remember when exactly he started using Google—he recalls those old dial-up connections, where “two telephone symbols got connected through a dotted line, with a weird sound”, and transiting through Hotmail, Yahoo, AoL, MSN, before settling down with Gmail. But the paper trails, the FIRs, filthy rooms filled with dust, rats... how nostalgic can you be about real spider webs!

Sebi Joseph, CEO, Otis India, recalls when “newspaper ads, word of mouth and the employ-

For the older ones, Google affords a kind of creative luxury, replacing what used to be donkey work in the 1970s-80s.



Raghunath Mashelkar, Teacher



Just a few days ago, I was interacting with some six-seven-year-old kids. I asked them, “Can one of you tell me how to convert this dirty water in this glass in my hand into nice clear water that I can drink?” I thought I would get dozens of answers. The first child I selected said, “*Aap google kar lijiye (Just google it!)*” and they all started laughing.

I was surprised. In my early years as a teacher, several hands would have gone up, and there would have been many answers. Now Google has become the new Guru for the young generation and rather than applying their mind, Google is their first step of inquiry.

Frankly speaking, we scientists were outperformed simply due to the fact that we had to depend on outdated information, which reached us so late. I remember spending hours browsing hundreds of pages of journals, just to find one answer!

We did the hard work of actually reading, absorbing and writing, while today in Google-age the

vast library and repository is in your pocket. In the past two decades especially, the newer generation has forgotten that the human brain is a big repository with a great capacity to store information and more.

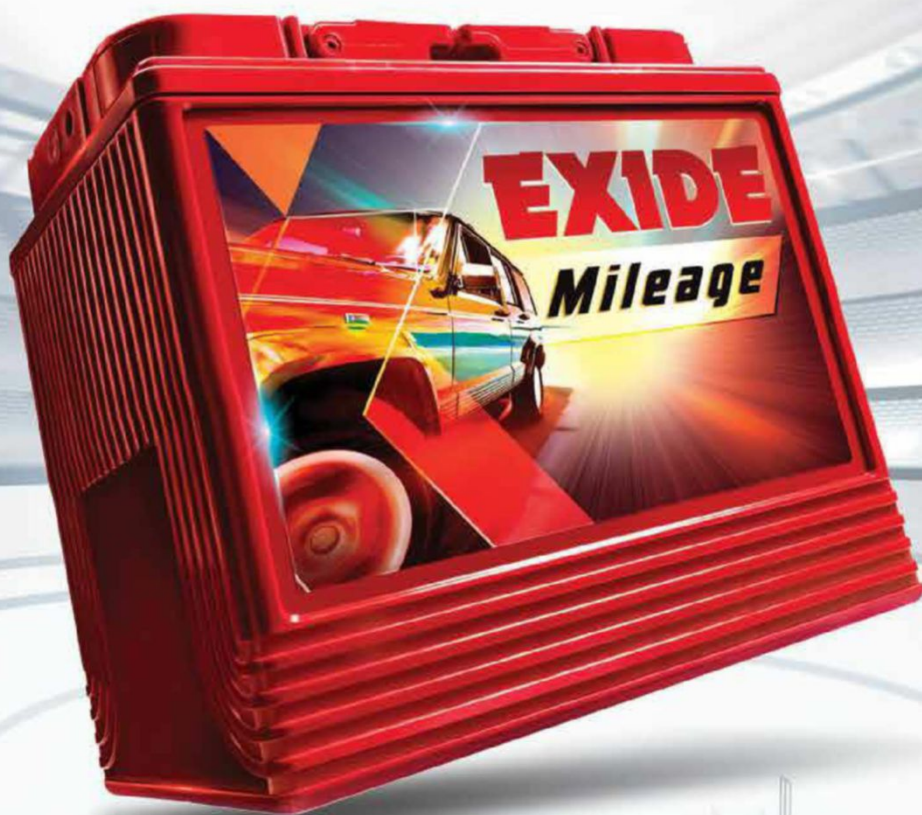
Google has converted the brain from a storage repository to a processor. That's the big revolution it has brought. You pick up the specific piece of knowledge by searching it on Google and then process it the way you want.

It may be an easy solution, but what is lost is the power to read and learn from thousands of words and just depend on a couple of keywords. This means the joy of wandering and observing before discovering is lost.

The important things in life are observation, analysis and synthesis. So you and I observe something, then we do analysis and synthesise the new from it. Google has changed all that. It is life's yin and yang today! 📱

(As told to Jyotika Sood)

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Baijayant Panda, Politician

For many of us who can remember the world before Google, the past two decades have gone by at break-neck speed, changing much about the human experience. There are still billions of people who have not yet experienced the internet, but their numbers are rapidly shrinking. To younger millennials or denizens of the population cohort after that, Generation Z, who grew up in the post-Google paradigm, anecdotes about life earlier can sound quaint. When I first became an MP in 2000, for instance, preparing for a speech involved submitting a written query on the topic to the parliament library. Several days later, a thick sheaf of papers would come back with everything they could dig up from their archives and hundreds of publications. Browsing through that file would be cumbersome, with no links to click for something related. More often than not, the exercise would be futile, for even then parliamentary disruptions were commonplace. Within a few years, I stopped disturbing the diligent librarian's assistants, as gradually researching topics online became a viable alternative for those who were comfortable using the new technology.

Smartphones, mobile internet and maps have brought about other big changes. Long before Uber and Ola became household names in urban India, Google maps became the go-to app for early adopters of technology to find their way around town. I remember being amazed at being able to do away with the rigmarole of planning ahead to get to an appointment, guesstimating the traffic, and sometimes sending someone ahead to help guide me and save time.

The ability to find all kinds of information on a whim is fun, but

the ways it has impacted our lives is profound. Take emails—the need to be organised, to arrange correspondence in a manner that it can be referred to in the future, has undergone a sea change. The ability to search through thousands of old messages in a millisecond has lifted a huge burden off those for whom organising is a chore.

But, as with everything else in life, there is no free lunch. The privacy we voluntarily surrender to avail these services means Google and its peers often know more about us than we do ourselves. Though many online marketing offers can irritate, there are plenty that cause us to at least pause and look, and sometimes be thrilled. Crunching of big data by global tech giants to figure out our individual needs, wants and weaknesses has given them godlike powers. It is worth pondering the costs and benefits, and the road ahead for society. **o**

ment exchange” were how you landed jobs. “I remember an ad appeared in *The Hindu* about vacancies in Otis back in 1987. I had cut that out, typed out my CV and application, and posted them.” Sounds like a period movie already? *Employment News* was on Fridays, to-let ads helped you find a home...Sebi, who loves to keep himself updated with technology, sometimes gets nostalgic and doesn't mind going back to a Google-less era. Did it have an inner coherence of some sort, a world that was the way it should be...only partly known, only partly knowable, inherently mysterious? Is that why someone quipped, laconically, “We don't know God, but Google.”

eXCEPT, Nietzsche isn't around to proclaim “Google is dead” yet. Out in the greens of the JNU campus, some of the old ways of voyaging through the world survive. “When it comes to JNU, it's still the library,” says head librarian Manorama Tripathi. “Be it the 1980s or now, the library is always full.” Googling isn't any sort of replacement for serious research; it can at best be a facilitator. Her 50-year-old, nine-storey library works like Google, open 24x7. Free WiFi via Google across 400+ railway stations, the poor Indian getting rich on data, and being turned into data themselves, could be some kind of technocratic uto...heck, what's that word? **o**



SELFIE OF SUCCESS



“Success has many fathers, failure is an orphan”, has remained as valid today as before. There is no dearth of books on success, but Mr Burra Venkatesham’s maiden attempt with *Selfie of Success* is novel and neoteric. The author takes the inquisitive reader on the road of success, and introducing Mr Success”. The narrator is Success and is present in first person gives this book a distinct identity and has the grains of a masterpiece.

The book introduces Success as a living thing in first person resonates compulsive and comprehensive snapshots of such stories that many people can easily identify with. Success takes us through its company, its actions and speeches giving an insight into its own story. This innovative attempt by the Mr Venkatesham offers a gripping read from the page one.

The author prepares the us to learn about every facet to meet ‘Success’.

Author, IAS Burra Venkatesham, talks about his personal experience of this illusive patterns of success and how he has employed it in his personal space. The book will reveal the fact that there is no one better than him with his vast wisdom in an easy and inspiring way.

Selfie of Success is not only unique in many ways but also gives the reader an insight to this successful man who rose from the humble and rural backgrounds. Through the lens of personalities ranging from Mahatma Gandhi to Escobar, Jack Ma to Ramoji Rao, Oprah Winfrey to Michael Jackson, Success speaks its own language and scope, a reason why this book is stand out from the rest of its genre.

Success story is told in segments giving the reader an option to choose. While the book will certainly serve the purpose of inspire and motivate it will also forewarn the reader from its negatives. The language is lucid and crisp. The book has something for all age groups.

The author is an Indian Administrative Service officer. He has served as Sub Collector and Sub Divisional Magistrate, Collector and District Magistrate, Joint Secretary, Managing Director, Commissioner, Home Secretary with various Government departments. He is presently Secretary, Youth Advancement, Tourism and Culture, Government of Telangana. His humble beginning from the village background to Indian Administrative Service to these postings in various capacities have given insight and wisdom to the author to produce such an unputdownable work.



THE TOURISM MINISTER PRAHLAD SINGH PATEL ASSURES AN EARLY RESOLUTION

Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a tourist paradise that can be visited round the year, has seen its tourist traffic double in the last four years to reach 6 lakh. But curiously there are hardly any repeat visits by tourists, says M. Vinod, President, AATO, who met Tourism Minister Prahlad Singh Patel on June 25 in New Delhi to help resolve issues that are affecting the tourism industry, particularly on the Andaman for the last eight months.

The main culprit is the sighting of a crocodile in the Andaman waters leading to a ban on swimming on most of the beaches, which are the main attraction for tourists.

“Since the sighting of the crocodile eight months back, the authorities have banned swimming on most of the beaches instead of putting safety measures to safeguard the swimmer,” says Vinod. “The sad part is that the administration closes all the activities during peak season without any intimation, which affects the industry very badly.”

There are several other factors inhibiting the rapid growth of the tourism industry on the islands including the fact that no new vehicles are being granted tourist license.

Everything has a solution but there is no attempt to hold talks with the stakeholders with the result tourists go away with bad memories due to inconveniences. Vinod claims this can easily be done by phasing out 15-year-old and older vehicles and granting license to new vehicles this will address fears of overcrowding.

“If there is proper coordination between authorities and the hospitality industry much can be resolved for the benefit of the island economy,” says Vinod, stating that many fears on unregulated tourism could be addressed if the long awaited Andaman Tourism Trade Regulation, pending since 2011 was to be implemented.

AATO is happy that Tourism Minister Patel gave their grievances a patient hearing and assured them an early resolution. For the islands, tourism is a major revenue earner and job generator.



PHOTO ESSAY

On the Edge of Age

A burgeoning elderly population poses challenges for predominantly young India



TEXT: SIDDHARTHA MISHRA
PHOTOGRAPHS: JITENDER GUPTA

A LPHA, omega, tau, proclaim the signs on the highway. Beyond the Greater Noida sectors named after Greek alphabets, a dirt underpass branches off from the spanking Eastern Peripheral Expressway to the dusty village of Bisaich. It is located on the fringes of the National Capital Region, but is a world apart from the neighbouring upscale sectors.

However, Bisaich, which gets power supply for only half the day, has something in common with Japan and Scandinavia—many of its residents are old or getting there. In the courtyard of a house close to the Baba Mohan Ram temple, eight men between 50 and 70 sit around a hookah, immersed in animated conversations. When asked about the elderly population, they estimate that three out of 10 people in the village are above the age of 60.

Sadi Ram, a 74-year-old farmer who has



lived here since he was born, is reclining on a khaat. He is a proud father of six children—five boys and a girl—all of whom are married and don't stay with him any longer. "If they don't work, how will they fend for themselves and feed us," he says. Two of his sons have set up a car-repair shop in Delhi and send Rs 8,000 every month for his expenses. Three to four bighas of land isn't enough to feed him and his wife, who was in Noida at that time with her daughter-in-law. Sadi Ram didn't go there—he can't move like he used to because of a spinal condition.

Four houses down the alley, 70-year-old Desh Raj sits on a charpoy. His house is not cemented and there is not even a ceiling fan in the room despite the temperature edging to the mid-40s outside. Smoke from a hookah suffuses the air. He doesn't respond much to questions, but breaks into a chuckle when asked if he puffs on the hookah regularly. A farmer all his life, he grew jowar and wheat, but is unable to anymore. "*Inko is taraf lakwa maar gaya hai* (He's paralysed on this side)," his nephew says, pointing to his uncle's right. Desh Raj is a bit of an outlier for his time—he

STRIVING SENIORS
(clockwise from top)
Sadi Ram, 74, is a farmer in Bisaich, Uttar Pradesh; Pradeep Vashisht, 64, is a doctor; Rajkumari, 75, works as her daughter's assistant

didn't get married. His brother's children now look after him.

Bisaich presents a microcosm of what is happening across the country—although more than 50 per cent of Indians are below the age of 25, the population of baby boomers is significant. Children are migrating to richer pastures while parents fend for themselves or rely on money sent by their kids. Healthcare is expensive and awareness about problems that creep up in old age low. An RBI report from August 2017 says that in 2016, a mere 23 per cent of the population was saving or planning for retirement.

It is a problem which will only get worse as life expectancy continues to increase. According to the National Policy on Senior Citizens 2011, the demographic trends indicate that between 2000 and 2050, the overall population of India will grow by 55 per cent whereas the population of those above 60 will increase by 326 per cent. The number of 80+ will swell by 700 per cent, making them the fastest-growing group. According to census data, 10.7 crore people were above the age of 60 in 2011, that is, 8.6 per cent of the population. This figure will rise to 21.1 per cent in 2050.

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

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PHOTO ESSAY

old people or clean anybody. They just want white-collar jobs,” explains Mishra. Government policies should be ‘ageless’, he says, citing the 18 per cent GST on eldercare services and the recent draft of the education policy. “The government of India stops the policy at 40. There are millions of illiterate people above 60. Why can’t they learn? Sports policy in India is for the youth. The policies of the ministry of women and child development don’t talk about older women,” he says.

AT the Anugraha centre in east Delhi’s Shahdara, people have gathered on a Saturday to celebrate the birthdays and marriage anniversaries of the month.


Children and grandchildren provide back-up entertainment as the elderly croon Bollywood hits from the sixties.

One of them is former educationist Rajkumari, 75, who is an invaluable asset to her daughter Aabha. “I work as her assistant,” she beams. The centre assists its members with facilities like legal aid and a clinic, aside from being a community space where everyone participates in day-to-day activities. As we speak, music can be heard in the community hall outside. “If they dance in their homes, people will say *buddha pagal ho gaya hai* (the oldie has gone senile),” she smiles.

“I started coming to the centre in December and nowadays I’m here daily,” says Pradeep Vashisht, 64, who lost his wife last year. “We were both doctors,” he smiles. He lives alone and runs a clinic where he attends to patients between 7 and 11 in the morning and evening. His son works in Mumbai and they meet about every two months.

Another regular visitor is 78-year-old Bimla Sharma, who comes for two hours in the morning. Her husband died when he was 45. Her son resides in Canada and her daughter, who lives nearby, often visits her at the centre. “Never be scared of anyone. Be afraid of fear,” says Bimla, making mock-fear gestures.

However, old-age homes are not a solution as many consider these a place to die rather than live. Most geriatric homes do not have any activities for community-building, regulatory standards or monitoring procedures. Another problem is that senior citizens collectively lack a political voice—they are not as organised as an interest group, nor have they made a consolidated push for their demands.

To truly empower the elderly community, there should be daycare facilities, 24-hour healthcare centres as well as services at home like meals and doctor visits. That is what will help the old folks of Bisaich, who now sit idle on charpoys and puff on hookahs, watching time slip by. 

The social dynamics in Bisaich reveal another aspect of this issue. When a woman in her fifties tried to interrupt the hookah fix, the men told her to buzz off. This is self-entitled patriarchy. In this society, women have less resources and support to deal with the problems of old age. Those who married older men have it worse. Government data reveals that widows outdo widowers by a ratio of 3:1. “Women, especially widows, have no social and financial security,” says Aabha Chaudhary, founder of Anugraha, an NGO which runs three elderly daycare centres in Delhi. “About 80 per cent of the aged live in villages and about 70 per cent have not been educated. Those who live in far-flung areas have less access to healthcare.”

“Women live longer and have different health issues,” says Sailesh Mishra, founder of Silver Innings Group, which has several offerings for senior citizens. “When a man makes a will, he often divides it amongst his children but forgets his wife. Women sometimes don’t possess basic skills like how to withdraw money. They need joint accounts and property rights.”

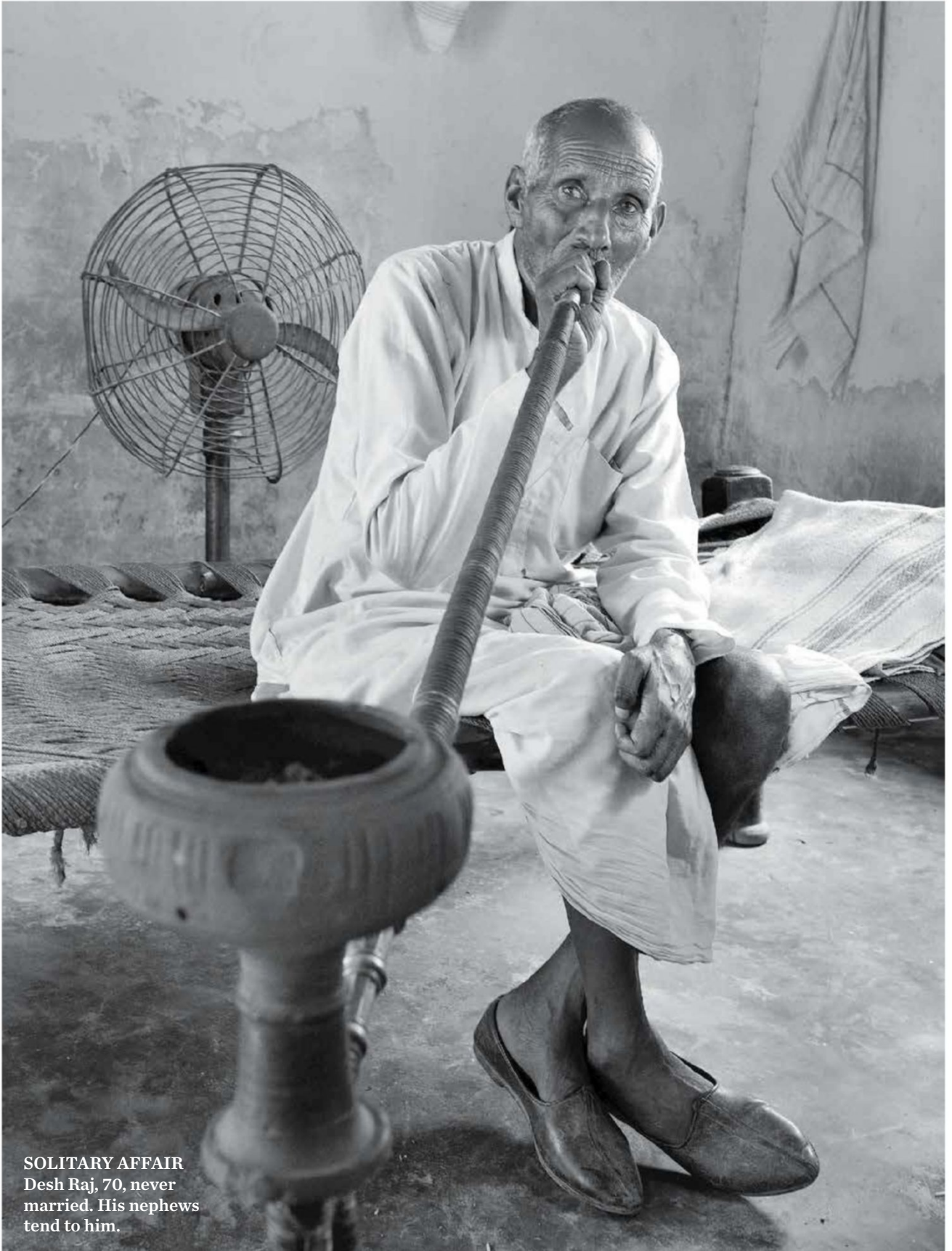
Under the Integrated Programme for Older Persons (IPOP), the government provides aid to over 400 old-age homes. However, Subash C., the general secretary of Indian Red Cross Society’s geriatric home in Faridkot, Punjab, isn’t enthused. He says that people can’t afford privately-run old-age homes. Others aren’t able to maintain standards or manage the bare minimum. “*Jeena hai toh jee rahe hain* (The people are somehow surviving),” he remarks, referring to the elderly there.

His facility hosts about 20-30 people at a time, three-fourths of whom are women and need female attendants. “We haven’t been getting funds for the past five-six years (from the government). When we began 20-25 years ago, it was regular. Then it got late and stopped altogether. We have applied again this year. For now, we make do with Red Cross’s funds,” he says.

The lack of geriatric care in the country is an acute problem. “People don’t want to work for

SITTING STRONG
Bimla Sharma, 78,
visits the Anugraha
daycare centre every
morning

Old-age homes are not a solution for the aged as many consider these a place to die rather than live.



SOLITARY AFFAIR
Desh Raj, 70, never married. His nephews tend to him.

She Ate Bricks For Breakfast

In Poshan, hope rises for babies and mothers—malnourished, low on basic minerals like iron

BY RAMA DIWEDI

LAXMI had seen childbirths in her village, assisted midwives, and helped expecting mothers. But she was unable to understand the possible reasons for her own ordeal—excessively swollen feet and hands, protruding eyeballs and loss of appetite. She suffered it all. Eight months pregnant, this woman in her mid-twenties used to live alone during the day as her husband worked in the field. “I thought we were being punished for our bad deeds; nobody faces such troubles during pregnancy,” she says. She had developed an unusual habit: “I started liking the taste of red bricks and sand; didn’t know what was happening to me.”

It was only in her third trimester, after attending community dialogue sessions by Prerak Vandana Pandey of Poshan (the PM’s Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment), she understood what was ailing her. “She was ignorant of her diet through a major part of the gestation and became deficient in important nutrients,” Pandey recalls. She suffered from severe oedema that caused a bloated body. Her unawareness led to a complicated delivery and poor health of both mother and child. Her child was delivered safely, though, and is in good health.

Another woman, Pushpa, from the same village gave birth to a stillborn last year. This happened despite a “normal” pregnancy and diligent adherence to mother-in-law’s home remedies. She is scared to conceive again.

Such cases are not rare in Sarai Mubarak, a village in Uttar Pradesh’s Ghazipur district, where children are born with under-developed brains and other birth defects; mothers are ignorant of proper maternal healthcare. These women are malnourished, as are their children—even those in the womb. For a healthier society, the pregnant and lactating women not only need dietary nutrients, but counselling to undergo



behavioural changes. This is where DigiPoshan, a Digital Empowerment Foundation and UNICEF initiative, aims to make a difference. It strives to improve nutritional outcomes for children, adolescents, pregnant women and lactating mothers by leveraging technology. With the help of a trained cadre called Preraks, community dialogue sessions were conducted at 187 locations across 10 Indian states.

They use tools such as short films, collaterals, digital storytelling and interactive devices to pass on information on nutrition. They act like agents of change during the six-month tenure of the programme, mobilising and addressing issues such as antenatal check-ups, diet care during pregnancy, iron and calcium supplementation, benefits of institutional delivery, importance of breast milk and early initiation of breastfeeding.

In Laxmi’s case, the village ASHA worker is monitoring the pregnant woman’s cravings for red bricks—an offshoot of calcium and iron deficiency in her blood. Lack of these two minerals is a common maternal health issue in the countryside. Laxmi has been given supplements. “*Humare liye to Prerak didi vardan roop thi* (For us Prerak was like a boon),” she says. And on her balanced diet: “I now know that iron and calcium supplements help increase the haemoglobin level. It makes their bones stronger.”

Not just pre-birth care, initial days are crucial too for the baby’s health and for a better immune system. But a lack of day-to-day knowledge, ignorance of first-time mothers, and home

It is common in villages to have stunted children as most women aren’t aware of a good diet in pregnancy for a healthy, strong baby



and risk factor for low birth weight. It is the primary cause of prolonged health issues in child and mother. This is a major factor determining morbidity, mortality and long-term impact on health outcomes in adult life. Evidence suggests antenatal care and institutional delivery as key health interventions to reduce maternal and child deaths. Short-term effects on foetal and infant health are increased risk of morbidity, infection, prematurity, possible birth defects, cretinism and possible damage to brain function.

LACK of awareness, illiteracy, early marriage and patriarchal norms—like, the self-sacrificing custom of women in the family eating last, after everyone’s eaten and whatever little food is left—are factors that often keep women from adequate nutrition. For this, it is important that a sustained dialogue is initiated, engaging all stakeholders. DigiPoshan made sure that along with women, their husbands and elderly members of the family were also addressed through the community dialogue since they are the decision-makers in most households.

In rural pockets where talking openly about pregnancy and maternal health—especially in community gathering—is taboo, Preraks had a challenging task. Apart from identifying the problems and helping create awareness on maternal health, they would often have to counter incorrect practices and dogmatic family patriarchs. “We were asked by elderly members of the community, ‘*Humse bhi zyada jaante ho kya?*’ (Do you know better than us?). Short films and dialogue cards, posters proved to be helpful in such situations,” recalls a Poshan Prerak.

Aware and informed, participants of the programme are now responsible mothers and have learnt to ask questions. “The community dialogue has busted age-old myths on pre- and post-pregnancy practices. Now I know what to do for my child’s health,” says Varalaxmi, a young mother from Visakhapatnam. During interactions, she learnt the correct way of breastfeeding and the importance of colostrum (mother’s first milk) for newborns.

Such drives made women aware, empowered Preraks, and induced a level of confidence in them. “I have not only become an agent of empowerment but have also moved a step ahead in transforming other women of my village for them to reach out to their peer groups with the knowledge that they have acquired” says Manju Khedi, a worker from Rajasthan’s Alwar. Only healthy mothers can lay the foundation of a healthy society. The initiative strongly believes that educating a woman, not only means educating a family but the community at large as well. **□**

(Some names have been changed)

medication keep them from proper nutrition. A majority of women interviewed during or after the session hardly knew about the benefits of a mother’s first milk and that newborns should not be fed anything else for at least six months.

“Honey-ginger *ghutti* or iron syrup should be given to the newborn within first hour of birth. I gave my children cow milk and look how healthy they are,” says Ramkali. She is a mother of two and attended a community dialogue in her neighbourhood. Though Ramkali’s children are healthy, her year-old daughter has not developed a strong digestive system and discharges occult blood sometimes in her stool. A check-up revealed her child was lactose intolerant and cow milk, powdered barley and other tough-to-digest items worsened her stomach.

“If I had not attended this session, I would have never known that we all were following a myth; feeding our children the incorrect things comes from unawareness,” Ramkali says. Now, she is conscious of what she is feeding her children and never misses a chance to let others know that: “A mother’s first milk acts as immunisation for the baby. It provides the strength to fight from diseases; mother milk is a balanced meal as it has all the nutrients in right proportion.”

According to the Global Nutrition Report 2018, India still faces major malnutrition crises as it holds one-third of the world’s stunted children. It accounts for 46.6 million children who are stunted and 25.5 million children who are wasted.

Anaemia is a known cause of maternal deaths

TABOO-BUSTING
A Poshan workshop
at a village in
Murshidabad,
West Bengal

Poshan has
assists called
Preraks who
are busting
myths and
spreading
the good
word on
nutrition in
rural areas

QS FOR THIRU MANGAT RAM SHARMA



Mangat Ram Sharma, I.A.S
Principal Secretary
Higher Education Department,
Government Of Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu has been one of the pioneering states in higher education. In fact, Tamil Nadu government runs nearly 100 colleges in the state. Can you throw some light on the ongoing efforts in the state?

As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, it achieved 48.6 GER which is quite an achievement. State will achieve the GER goal (50) in a year or two, much before others. The reasons behind this success are as follows:

- 51 Universities (including State and Deemed universities), 8 Institutes of national importance and 2423 colleges are providing higher education. Further, 181 colleges have attained autonomous status and 498 institutions have NAAC accreditation.
- Considering the trends in Arts, Science and Education, government has opened 29 new colleges in last five years. Currently 112 colleges are now running to

ensure that higher education reaches Rs.1.5 lakh students from all social strata.

- Free education, fee exemption for first-generation graduates, welfare hostels, merit scholarships, study-abroad program, young scientist awards, scientific awareness programs, remedial coaching classes, funded workshops, seminars and conferences are the numerous efforts taken by the state which make it a pioneer.

Tamil Nadu is one state where enough emphasis is put on quality of education. The colleges and students both place high importance on research and innovation. Can you explain the latest progress in this direction?

The State is encouraging research and innovation programmes at all levels. PG Degree colleges are also facilitated to do research activities. Recently a huge grant was sanctioned by Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to State Universities under RUSA schemes.

In Phase-1, Rs.200 crore was sanctioned to 10 Universities to upgrade basic infrastructure. In Phase-2, Rs.400 crore has been approved for research and innovation.

How does Tamil Nadu higher education board work in tandem with Ministry of Human Resource Development? What is MHRD's contribution to education in State?

Alagappa university	Rs. 100 crore
Anna university	Rs. 50 crore
Annamalai university	Rs. 50 crore
Bharathidasan university	Rs. 50 crore
Bharathiyar university	Rs. 50 crore
Madurai Kamaraj university	Rs. 50 crore
Madras university	Rs. 50 crore

MHRD has been providing liberal financial grants and critical policy support to the state. For example, MHRD has almost doubled our grants under centrally supported schemes. To supplement these efforts, Rs.200 Crore for construction of additional class rooms and labs in 62 government colleges was provided by State Government.

How does the state government work with NAAC to grant funds, since

THE STATE IS ENCOURAGING RESEARCH AND INNOVATION PROGRAMMES AT ALL LEVELS. PG DEGREE COLLEGES ARE ALSO FACILITATED TO DO RESEARCH ACTIVITIES. RECENTLY A HUGE SUM OF GRANT WAS SANCTIONED BY MHRD TO STATE UNIVERSITIES UNDER RUSA SCHEMES.

the idea is to ensure quality of institutions? B) How does NAAC accreditation work in the state?

- Above 500 institutions in our state are NAAC accredited and rest of the institutions are also under NAAC accreditation process.
- Acquiring valid NAAC is mandatory to receive grant under RUSA schemes. We have encouraged the Institutions to apply early and improve the grading. Government is also

providing some financial incentive in this regard.

- The institutions who fulfil the requirements and standards prescribed by the NAAC will be accredited. Hence the accredited colleges can render quality graduates to country.

What is the role of higher education council in a state, especially in the state of Tamil Nadu?

The main function of TANSICHE is “to coordinate and determine standards in institutions for higher education or research and in scientific and technical institutions, in accordance with the guidelines issued by the University Grants Commission, from time to time. The Council has been providing excellent support by framing syllabus and for equivalence of degrees”.

The state has several universities with multiple campus. How feasible is it to run such campuses?

It is a great challenge for the government to facilitate & co-ordinate activities of large number of universities. It also has an onerous task of running a multi-disciplinary University which has engineering, medical & arts and science stream. However, this is a good model to be replicated in future.

It is known that Tamil Nadu places high emphasis on quality of education. The state has model syllabi. Can you elaborate on the efforts higher education department takes to maintain top quality?

State Integrated Board of Syllabus (SIBOS) is the Board which formulates standard syllabi in par with UGC recommended syllabi. The board of studies chairman of each subject from all state universities collaborate to arrive at the standard syllabi. This brings uniformity in syllabi while providing enough space for recent trends in each area which preserves the autonomy of the institutions.

SIBOS formulated syllabi helps in the migration of students from one university to another university during the course of their study. These is also useful to settle the equivalence related issues.

Soundproof Echo Chamber

Commentators aren't immune to vitriol anymore. Armed with social media, fans and the odd player are tearing into them.



BY QAISER MOHAMMAD ALI

BOLLYWOOD legend Amitabh Bachchan had questioned the loyalty of “an Indian TV commentator” in a midnight tweet on March 24, 2016, following India’s providential one-run win against Bangladesh in the T20 World Cup. Although he hadn’t named anyone, Harsha Bhogle, a commentator in that match, sent a reply to Bachchan via a direct message on Twitter. He hurriedly put together 499 words on Facebook to explain the nuances of a cricket broadcast.

“It would be really worthy of an Indian commentator to speak more about our players than others all the time,” Bachchan had tweeted. But Bhogle, the articulate chemical engineer, on “some people’s” guess ‘assumed’ that Bachchan was referring to him. So, he felt it was incumbent upon him to expatiate on the complexity of a cricket telecast.

Significantly, within minutes of Bachchan’s tweet, M.S. Dhoni wrote on Twitter: “Nothing to add.” It was interpreted as support for Bachchan and a criticism of Bhogle. And, lo and behold, an avalanche hit Bhogle that tumultuous night. Yet, till now, no one has explained for sure who Bachchan’s target was. The result of that midnight mayhem: Bhogle’s lovers and haters were split vertically.

A similar incident of a sharply divisive cricketing remark was witnessed after India’s 31-run defeat to pre-tournament favourites England on June 30 in the ongoing World Cup. Players-turned-commentators Sourav Ganguly, Sanjay Manjrekar, and Aakash Chopra questioned the ‘intent’ of Dhoni (42 not out off 31 balls) and Kedar Jadhav (12 not out off 13 balls) for not going for big shots in the last few overs as the required run rate mounted. Subsequently, a theory was floated—its origin unknown—that the Indian team had an eye on its run rate, thinking it might come handy for the semi-final qualification equation. In the event, India

BACKCHAT Commentators Michael Vaughan, Ganguly, Manjrekar and Bhogle

qualified as the top team of the league phase.

During the World Cup, Manjrekar had also made a comment on Ravindra Jadeja, the left-handed all-rounder. “I’m not a big fan of bits-and-pieces players which Jadeja is at this point of his career in 50-over cricket,” he said. Jadeja reacted sharply: “Still i have played twice the number of matches you have played and i m still playing (sic). Learn to respect ppl who have achieved. i have heard enough of your verbal diarrhoea,” he tweeted.

The slow scoring rate of India’s middle-order had been flagged earlier, after India’s narrow win against Afghanistan, when Sachin Tendulkar told a news channel: “I was also not happy with the partnership between Kedar and Dhoni.... We batted 34 overs of spin bowling and scored 119 runs.... There was no positive intent.”

However, passionate cricket fans venting on social media went only after Manjrekar, with a few saying they muted the sound of their TV sets when he came on air. Curiously, in this fevered heat of the World Cup, no one questions the integrity or capabilities of Dhoni or any other player. But, as expectations soar impossibly in cricket’s biggest show, a player or the team’s failure to live up to those creates incredible frustration and hastily pronounced harsh criticism.

Former India Test batsman Abbas Ali Baig and TV/radio commentators Narottam Puri and Ravi Chaturvedi feel intolerance towards commentators is increasing. “A commentator has the right to say what he feels like, according to his judgement, as long as he’s not being mean. He shouldn’t be penalised for that. There are too many views on social media, it’s inevitable. The situation is getting out of hand,” the once-debonair Baig tells *Outlook*.

Puri, an ENT surgeon-cum-commentator, agreed with Ganguly’s views after the loss to



Since a BCCI code of conduct is in place, it is to be seen if any action will be taken against Jadeja.



Photographs: GETTY IMAGES

England. “He was absolutely right when he said there was no point in saving wickets. You [Manjrekar’s detractors] were not worried about that part, but took on Manjrekar, who is a little more vocal about everything. Nobody is criticising Ganguly while Manjrekar maybe guilty of his choice of words,” says Puri.

Compared to Indian commentators, those in other cricketing nations have much more freedom to criticise, and express strong opinions. Still, compared with the government’s instructions for commentators on Doordarshan about 30 years ago—a list of do’s and don’ts that barred them from criticising team selection and umpires—those describing the game now on private channels have much more freedom, says Puri.

“Before the 1987 World Cup, the government instructed us to refrain from calling it Reliance World Cup, the chief sponsor. But we argued that if tournaments could be called Benson & Hedges series in Australia and John Player League in England, why not Reliance World Cup, and won the day,” says Puri.

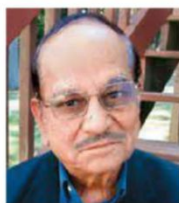
Veteran commentator Ravi Chaturvedi points out how TV commentary changed drastically after the rebel Kerry Packer series in Australia in 1977 as it became “more chatty”. “Before Packer, there used to be one commentator and one expert. Packer brought two commentators on Channel 9 and they talked even when the action was on. Earlier, commentators would stop as the bowler started his run-up,” recalls the professor of zoology. But he defends present-day Indian commentators: “It has become the norm that you can’t criticise players, who anyway don’t take criticism sportingly.”

If it was the Indian government earlier who tried to control commentators, in 2019 the International Cricket Council’s (ICC) rights partner reminded them midway through the World Cup that their “duty is not to judge or



“They were not worried about Ganguly, but took on Manjrekar, who is a little more vocal.”

Narottam Puri
Veteran commentator



“It’s the norm now that you cannot criticise players, who don’t take it sportingly.”

Ravi Chaturvedi
Veteran commentator

highlight mistakes” of umpires. It came after Michael Holding criticised the umpire for failing to spot a clear no ball that eventually led to Chris Gayle’s dismissal in the West Indies-Australia match (Australia won by 15 runs). When the ICC rights partner wrote to Holding about his comments, the West Indian fast bowling legend delivered a thunderbolt in his letter, writing that “commentators are being more and more compromised by controlling organisations to the point of censorship”.

While the ICC employs commentators for its tournaments, the BCCI hires them for bilateral series at home, the IPL, and domestic tournaments. That’s why when Bachchan tweeted against “an Indian commentator”, and Dhoni endorsed it, the BCCI may have been swayed/influenced to drop Bhogle for the 2016 IPL. Bhogle’s detailed explanation was not just to defend himself, but can be seen as a statement on behalf of all Indian commentators.

ATER, Bhogle wrote: “The pictures are largely the same but the telecast goes to a fairly well-defined geographical zone. And obviously, to people who understand Hindi. There the commentary can be India-centric, but not biased. You can look at every situation from an Indian point of view; that is acceptable... something you cannot do on a world feed.”

Bhogle, a well-mannered Hyderabadi, even addressed passionate Indian fans: “I have always felt that people take commentary, and commentators, too seriously. We are merely storytellers, the players create the story. We don’t influence the game and our role is no more than to be a guide....”

Yet, Jadeja did take Manjrekar very seriously when he made his “bits-and-pieces” comment, while ignoring what he said in the same breath: “In Test matches, he is a pure bowler. But in 50-over cricket, I would rather have a batsman and a spinner.” Since Jadeja’s “verbal diarrhoea” tweet, there has been no reaction from the BCCI and the Indian team management, maybe because no one wants to distract the team’s focus till it was a World Cup title contender. But, since a BCCI code of conduct is firmly in place, it remains to be seen if any action would be taken against Jadeja, now that India has ended its WC campaign after losing the semi-final against New Zealand by 18 runs.

Manjrekar, who played 37 Tests and 74 ODIs, would not have had to face a royal roasting from fans had there been well-defined, strict guidelines for users of social media. In its absence, it is a chaotic free-for-all out there. Is it a surprise that Manjrekar, who proved to be a more successful commentator/writer than a Test batsman, trended for days on Twitter? Unsurprisingly, commenting on the furore, he tweeted: “Criticism, abuse?...I see only love for me on Twitter.” 📌

Ω OMEGA

THE GOLDEN MOON

With 2019 being the golden jubilee year of the time mankind set its first steps on the moon in 1969, Omega is celebrating the occasion with a brand new limited edition of the iconic Speedmaster which was part of the legendary story, as a tribute to astronauts, the legacy of the Apollo 11 mission, and the watches that will never be forgotten.

Fifty years ago, when Neil Armstrong became the first human to step on the Moon on July 21, 1969 at 2.56 GMT, the world rejoiced in pride and celebration. Buzz Aldrin was 15 minutes behind him and the Speedmaster Professional became the first watch to be worn on the Moon. Story goes that the tests that NASA performed on the chronographs that were submitted to the agency in 1964 were designed to destroy the watches. In the end, only one watch survived: the Speedmaster. Since then, the OMEGA Speedmaster has been the choice of astronauts and space agencies for more than half a century. In fact, it has been associated with some of humankind's greatest extra-terrestrial adventures and has been one of the most famous chronographs in the world ever since it became the first watch worn on the Moon in July of 1969.

The watch returned to the moon for all of the future lunar landings. This included Apollo 12, Apollo 14, Apollo 15, Apollo 16 and Apollo 17. To this very day, only 12 men have walked on the moon, and the Speedmaster has been there for every step.

In November 1969, just four months after the Apollo 11 landing, a unique OMEGA Speedmaster was launched to celebrate the mission's success. This was the brand's first numbered edition Speedmaster and only 1,014 pieces were produced between 1969 and 1973. Numbers 3 – 28 and 1001 – 1008 were gifted to NASA's serving astronauts and the watch has become a highly sought-after timepiece in Omega's famous collection.

GOLDEN TIME

In celebration of its 50th year, this year, Omega has now created a special edition that is a tribute to Speedmaster aficionados and to the era that created the Moonwatch. Needless to say, it has a golden touch to it, as is customary for golden jubilees. The brand is revisiting the golden design, with a Limited Edition of 1,014 pieces, which carries many of the same historical touches as the original, but also introduces some pioneering features of its own.

Still 42 mm wide, the Speedmaster Apollo 11 50th Anniversary Limited Edition comes with a new Omega-exclusive 18k gold alloy, 'Moonshine Gold', in place of the original 18k yellow gold, a unique new alloy whose colour is inspired by the shining moonlight in a dark blue sky. Paler in hue than yellow gold, Moonshine Gold is notable for its high resistance to fading of colour and lustre over time and is composed through a blend of gold, silver, and palladium.

On the other hand, the bezel is now rendered in ceramic with a scale printed in Omega's Ceragold. The dial comes in solid gold, with black onyx and black varnished chronograph hands, making for an elegant finish, and bears Omega's vintage logo.

The polished and brushed 42 mm case of this timepiece features the asymmetrical caseband of the 4th generation Speedmaster. Around the wrist, the brushed-polished bracelet bears the five-arched-links-per-row design and a grooved clasp with an applied vintage Ω.

Following the first generation of the Speedmaster tachymeter scale, which graduated to 500 units per hour, this new model features a marker dot above 90. What makes the outer caseback unique is that it features mechanically-engraved '1969-2019' with the Limited Edition number highlighted in burgundy. The inner decorative ring, also created in 18K Moonshine™ gold, has undergone two separate laser ablation processes, as well as two PVD (Physical Vapour Deposition) colour treatments in blue and black, that accentuates polished markings such as 'APOLLO 11-50th ANNIVERSARY' and 'THE FIRST WATCH WORN ON THE MOON'. Finally, a domed lunar meteorite inlay representing the moon has been delicately set into the cavity of the ring, to make for the perfect lunar watch.

THE UNIQUE MOVEMENT

For its 50th Anniversary edition, Omega was determined to produce a movement that could be Master Chronometer certified, yet perfectly match the dimensions of the 1861. That meant finding a way to fit all of the new state-of-art componentry into a space more suited to an older movement. A challenge certainly, but Omega's engineers were up to the task, improving power reserve, chronometric performance and magnetic resistance. As a tribute to the 1861, the new movement's frequency remained the same (21,600 v/h). However, the jewel tally was increased from 18 to 26, as eight extra jewels were needed for the upgrade. Half of them to ensure the smooth running of OMEGA's revolutionary Co-Axial escapement, which had replaced the more traditional Swiss Anchor - and four more for general technical improvements. Another significant change was the complete removal of the frequency regulator. As a moving part, the tiny lever added to the risk of accidental frequency shifts, so the decision was made to do without it. On the new 3861, this was replaced by four adjustable screws on the balance wheel. A stop second function was also introduced, allowing the wearer to stop the seconds hand with a pull of the crown and reset the time with absolute precision.

Thanks to the inclusion of OMEGA's Co-Axial escapement and silicon Si14 balance spring, the 3861 offered extraordinary levels of magnetic resistance and was able to pass the industry's toughest tests and achieve Master Chronometer certification. The use of Moonshine™ gold-plated main plate and bridges marked another first for the pioneering brand.



The Basics

Diameter: 42mm
Case Material: 'Moonshine' 18k gold
Dial Color: Gold
Indexes: Onyx
Strap/Bracelet: Solid 'Moonshine' gold

The Movement

Caliber: Omega Master Chronometer 3861
Functions: Hours, minutes, second, 12-hour chronograph
Power Reserve: 48 hour
Winding: Hand-wound
Frequency: 26,100



The OMEGA Speedmaster Professional Moonwatch of today



The OMEGA Speedmaster 50th Anniversary Limited Edition Moonwatch



A close-up of the Moonshine Gold Detailing on the Limited Edition Moonwatch



TRIVIA



One of the biggest fans of the Speedmaster happens to be none other than Omega ambassador George Clooney himself. George Clooney was eight years old in 1969. He remembers gazing up at the moon, hoping to see the astronauts. By his side was his father, an Omega wearer, and that special moment cemented his love for space exploration and the Speedmaster. Ever since he was a child, Clooney has said there were certain elements that reminded him of the space programme and Omega was one of them. "The astronauts were our heroes. We knew all the astronauts' names; we even ate the food that astronauts ate. Our whole lives revolved around space, and Omega was the watch that went to the Moon," Clooney said.

So, when the actor met two of his childhood idols, Buzz Aldrin and Charlie Duke as part of two exclusive Omega documentaries, it went on to become a film viewers would treasure forever. In the documentary, George is heard saying, "As a kid, everything was about the space programme.. We ate space food sticks and we drank Tang. Everything was about the possibility of the imagination." Buzz sums it up perfectly when he says, "It brought the world together."

Tell Me A Story In Sherdukpen

make a movie in a language which has never had a flourishing film industry of its own and currently offers zilch by way of commercial returns? Unbridled passion to tell stories in one's own language, one might say. "Wherever I screen my film, I reassure the audiences that I will not take rest until I help Maithili cinema stand on its feet," Sharar tells *Outlook*. "All I need is support of Maithili-speaking people."

The 43-year-old auteur sounds confident about a turnaround in the fortunes of Maithili cinema. But facts speak otherwise. Cinema in Maithili, a language listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution and spoken by more than 1.35 crore people as per 2011 census (excluding Nepal where it is the second official language),



Movies in little-known languages are sparking a new wave in India

BY GIRIDHAR JHA

RUPAK Sharar remains undeterred despite facing a setback late last year. *Premak Basaat*, his maiden directorial venture in Maithili, may not have set the cash boxes clinking, but he is not demoralised to give up his mission for reviving cinema of his mother tongue. The filmmaker has since been taking his movie to different cities, from Guwahati to Bangalore, organising screenings for people interested in watching his labour of love—the first Maithili film in a long time.

What is it that drives someone like Sharar to

has not really taken roots despite its inception in the early 1960s. Even a National Award conferred on actress-producer Neetu Chandra's *Mithila Makhaan* in 2016 failed to resurrect the industry. The film directed by her brother Nitin Chandra, and shot entirely in Mithilanchal of Bihar, is still awaiting release. That pretty much sums up the state of Maithili cinema.

And yet, a band of passionate filmmakers is going where most others fear to tread. *Premak Basaat*, touted as the costliest-ever Maithili film, was produced by Vedant Jha, a Mumbai-based textiles trader. "I had cautioned my producer that financing a Maithili film would be a gamble and he should be ready to lose money," says

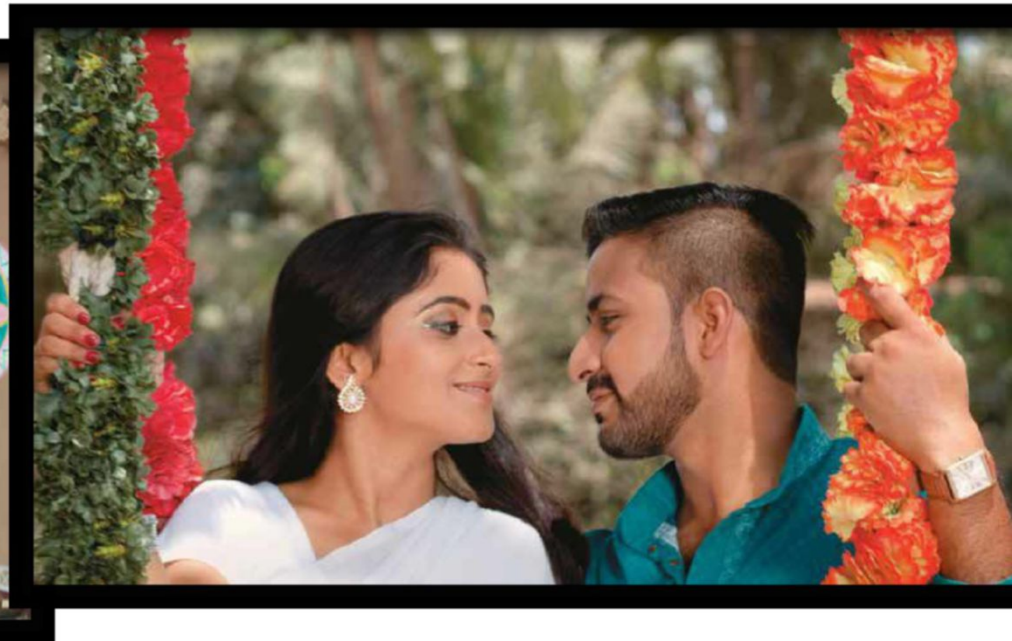
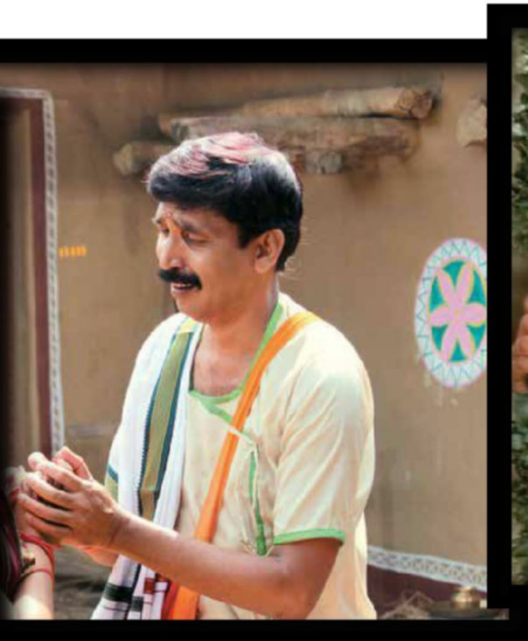
Sharar. “But he gave me the go-ahead.” In an era when it is difficult even for small-budget Hindi movies to get screens at multiplexes, every regional film-maker is not lucky to find a generous investor. Mithilesh Singh, for one, had to rely on crowd-funding to produce *Devan Misir* in Magahi, a language spoken by over 1.27 crore people, primarily from Bihar. The first Magahi film since 1965 to hit the screens, *Devan Misir* was publicised as “*jugan baad pahli baar*” (first time after ages).

Mithilesh tells *Outlook* that *Devan Misir*, a biopic of the legendary wit from Magadh, was only the third film ever in Magahi cinema. “Few people know that famous Hindi filmmaker Phani Majumdar (who also made *Kanyadan* in Maithili

thili and Magahi film industry cannot prosper unless movies are made regularly to create a niche for themselves a la Bhojpuri films. “*Sasta Jingi Mahag Senur* was a huge hit in 1999 but no Maithili film could later emulate its success,” Sharar says. “Still, I don’t see any reason why Maithili cinema cannot make a similar impact and create its own audience.” Mithilesh concurs. “At Tekari in Gaya, *Devan Misir* ran to a full house for a week before it withdrawn to make way for a big Bhojpuri movie. But two days later, the locals forced its owner to bring *Devan Misir* back on screen.”

That may well be an exception because films from any fledgling industry have not had many takers at the box office over the years. But that is

FREEZE FRAMES
(From left) Stills from *Walking With the Wind*, *Devan Misir* and *Premak Basaat*.



in 1965) was the first person to make a Magahi movie, *Bhaiyya*, in the early 1960s,” he says. “Girish Ranjan’s *More Man Mitwa* (1965) was the second. More than five decades later, *Devan Misir* has hit the screens.”

Mithilesh, a theatre veteran from Bihar, says that he had originally written the script for a TV serial but he could not complete it. “I later developed it into a play,” he says. “Wherever I would stage this play, people would ask for an encore. It gave me the idea to make a film.” Without support from the state government, he collected donations to realise his dream. “*Devan Misir* elicited tremendous response though it did not have any big regional star,” he points out. *Devan Misir* is, however, still awaiting wider release in the state.

Regional cinema-watchers believe that Mai-

A new breed of intrepid directors is travelling the extra mile to make movies in diverse languages of the country

no deterrant since since commercial success is not the prime motivator for passionate filmmakers who want to channel their creativity regardless of the language. Praveen Morchhale, a talented film-maker from Madhya Pradesh, chose to make *Walking With The Wind* in Ladakhi, which won three National awards in 2018. The film has since travelled to many international film festivals, winning several awards, including the UNESCO Gandhi Medal at the International Film Festival of India in Goa and a special jury award for direction and story at SAARC Film Festival in Colombo.

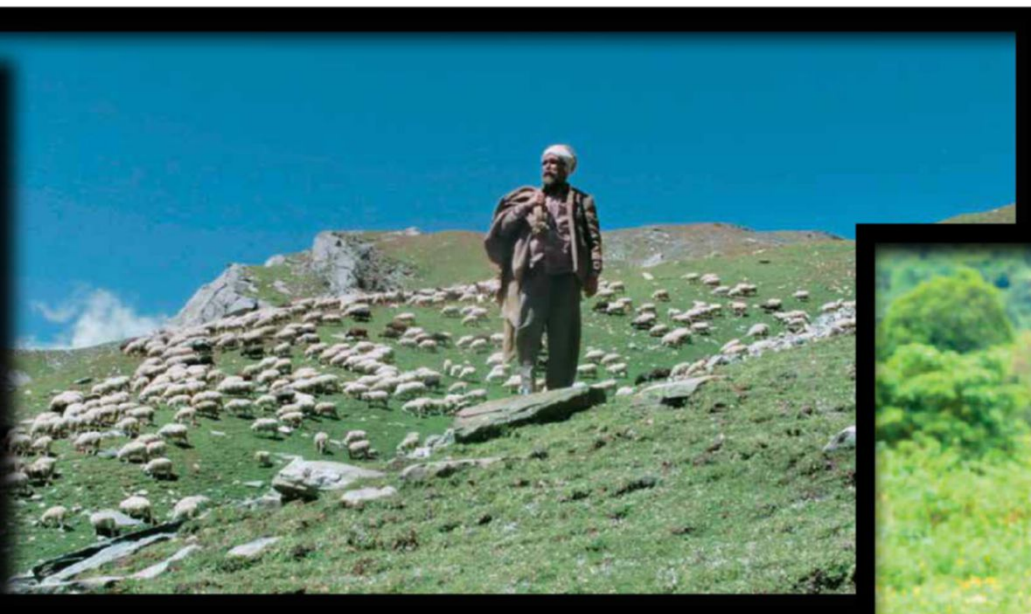
Since *Walking With The Wind* is about a 10-year-old boy from a mountainous region, Praveen chose to make it in Ladakhi even though he himself is not a native speaker of the language.

"I am inspired by my observations of life, which form the basis of my stories," he tells *Outlook*. "I observe real people and their lives which generate many stories in my mind. *Walking With The Wind* is one such film."

Of late, there has been no dearth of intrepid filmmakers such as Praveen who are travelling an extra mile to make movies in diverse languages set in the regions where they are spoken. Debutant Ridham Janve made the brilliant *The Gold-Laden Sheep & The Sacred Mountain* in Gaddi dialect, spoken primarily by shepherds in Himachal Pradesh. It is about an old shepherd who leaves his herd to find the pilot of an aircraft

Tulu, won the National Awards. This year, Priya Ramasubban's *Chuskit* in Ladakhi and Bobby Sarma-Baruah's *Mishing—The Apparition* in Sherdukpen, the language spoken by a tribal community of the same name in Arunachal Pradesh, have made an impact though none of them is likely to have a regular theatrical release.

Utpal Borpujari, National Award-winning critic and director, says it is not the commercial aspect but the urge to tell stories in their own languages that motivates these filmmakers. "In any case, when you are telling a story about a particular community, it is best told in its own language so as to capture the cultural and soci-



MOVIETONE Still from *The Gold-Laden Sheep & The Sacred Mountain* (left); and *Kanthan: The Lover of Colour*.




Director Utpal Borpujari says that filmmakers are pushed by the urge to tell stories in their own languages

which has crashed in the upper Himalayas. "I had spent some time in the mountains and wanted to make a movie in their language," Ridham says. "I also chose not to hire any professional actor but the locals for my film."

THE outcome was an amazing film with breathtaking visuals and outstanding performances. Similar was the case of another debutant auteur Shareef Easa, who made *Kanthan: The Lover of Colour* in Ravula language spoken by the Adiya community of Wayanad in Kerala. It won the Kerala State Film Award for Best Film this year.

The tribe of such filmmakers has been growing steadily of late. Last year, Sandeep Pampally's *Sinjar* in Jasari, a dialect of Malayalam spoken in Lakshadweep, and Abhaya Simha's *Paddayi* in

etal nuances in the best way."

Borpujari, who made the acclaimed Assamese film *Ishu* (2017) on the social evil of witch-hunting seen through a child's eyes, says that theatrical release of these films is near impossible because they cater to small audiences. "Many films have been made in the ethnic languages of Arunachal Pradesh," he says. "But such movies will hardly draw an audience even in Itanagar because few will understand the different tribal languages." The only silver lining, according to Borpujari, is the advent of digital platforms. "These streaming platforms may provide a global audience for such films," he says. "I don't know how much a movie streamed on those platforms will earn for a filmmaker but telling a story in their own languages shall remain his prime motivation." 

DESIGN AND CREATIVITY TO DRIVE FUTURE GROWTH

Design and creativity have changed our lives, like never before. New opportunities, collapsing boundaries, unpredictability, technology and changing attitudes are redefining the academic, social and industrial ecosystems today.

As unimaginable opportunities are increasing, the boundaries between disciplines and career paths are blurring and sometimes disappearing completely. The big question is: How can education institutions provide direction and innovation for a comprehensive learning experience for students of tomorrow?

The World Economic Forum has identified Creativity as one of the top 3 skills required in the future along with complex problem solving and critical thinking. The future of work report says that in 2022, 9% of the available jobs would be new and those that do not exist today. 60% of the new age jobs will fall under analytics, design and artificial intelligence. This explains the worldwide increase in demand for design and creative education graduates.

In this scenario, creative thought leaders like Pearl Academy are focused on innovation, creative excellence and fostering a global, vibrant learning ecosystem. Pearl is at the forefront by creating flexible, multi-disciplinary curricula that encourage thinking beyond the walls and facilitate global exposure.

At a recent event What's Next – The Creative Spark hosted by Pearl Academy, Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog too voted for design and said “There can't be Make in India without Design and Innovation in India. The real value in manufacturing is added by design. The real value in any form of growth is added by design. If India has to become an advanced country, design needs to be the essence of its thinking.”

Anup Sasidharan, VP Academic Operations at Pearl Academy says, “It's no longer about becoming a graduate with certain critical skill-sets. Increasingly, recruiters want employees who are team players, collaborators, empathetic innovators, with creativity, problem solving and analytical abilities. Our academicians work towards creating an individual who is socially responsible and a creative professional, who has the capacity to design for ‘the greater good’ of communities and eventually the nation.”



Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog, Addressing the gathering at What's Next – The Creative Spark hosted by Pearl Academy in Mumbai recently.



Niti Aayog CEO, Amitabh Kant releasing the book What's Next - The Impact Of Design Towards Nation Building. Others present include Ramneek K. Majithia, Dean, Academic Design and Innovation, Pearl Academy; Sharad Mehra, President, Creative Arts Education Society; Prof. Vikas Satwalekar, Former Executive Director, NID and Prof. Nandita Abraham, President, Pearl Academy



Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, Hon'ble Vice-President of India being greeted by CA. Prafulla P. Chhajed, President and CA. Atul Kumar Gupta, Vice-President, ICAI on the occasion of Platinum Jubilee & 70th Chartered Accountants Day of ICAI on July 1st, 2019 at New Delhi.

ICAI CELEBRATES PLATINUM JUBILEE & 70TH CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS DAY

The 70th Chartered Accountants Day of ICAI was celebrated on July 1st all across the country with great enthusiasm and zeal.

July 1st is a landmark day in the history of ICAI as on this day ICAI was set up to regulate the Profession of Chartered Accountancy in India in the year 1949. This CA Day was more special as the Institute has reached a significant milestone i.e. Platinum Jubilee of its glorious existence.

The 70th Chartered Accountants Day in Delhi was inaugurated by Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, Hon'ble Vice-President of India. The event was also graced by Shri Injeti Srinivas, IAS, Secretary, Ministry of Corporate Affairs & Dr. In-Ki Joo, President, International Federation of Accountants (IFAC). Present were CA. Prafulla P. Chhajed, President & CA. Atul Kumar Gupta, Vice-President, ICAI and over 1200 CA Members and stakeholders.

While addressing the gathering Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, Hon'ble Vice-President of India said “Indian accounting professionals have been working relentlessly working to fulfill the dreams of the founding fathers of their role of quality services envisaged by them.”

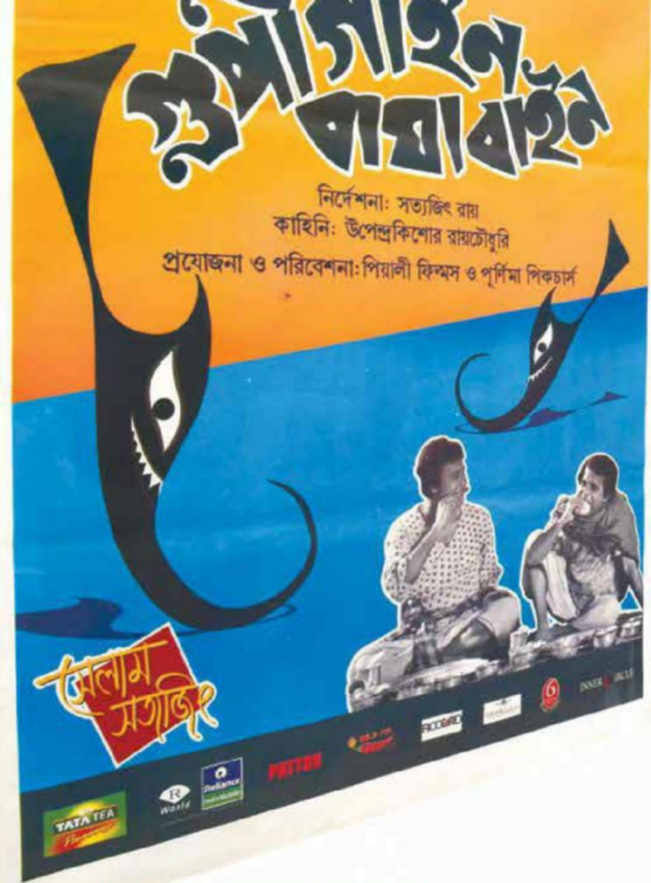
Shri Injeti Srinivas, Secretary, Ministry of Corporate Affairs while addressing the participants remarked “I acknowledge the big work ICAI has done over the years. It is because of the inherent strength of this great institution that has helped it sustain all these decades with such greatness.”

Dr. In-Ki Joo, President, IFAC said “I congratulate ICAI on this great day. ICAI has done a great job in implementing GST and tax reforms in India. Since the very beginning, ICAI has been contributing immensely to the CA Profession not only in India but also globally.”

CA. Prafulla P. Chhajed, President, ICAI said “Since beginning ICAI has been contributing to national & global economy. Chartered Accountants are constantly making positive effect in business & industry.”

CA. Atul Kumar Gupta, Vice-President, ICAI said “Every CA of this profession is like a soldier of Indian army who acts not only as a catalyst to the growth of Indian economy but also ensures the adoption of prudent practices & standards that safeguards the interest of common man.”

ICAI has achieved significant milestones in the field of accountancy and is poised to play a greater role in changing the global landscape and strengthening the foundation of resurgent India by taking the profession to the newer zeniths.



SANDIPAN CHATTERJEE

CINEMILESTONE

RAY'S CANVAS ON CELLULOID

Fifty years after Satyajit Ray made the cult classic, its anti-war message remains relevant

BY RAJAT ROY

*...Wars between neighbours
Wars between nations
Only lead to death and destruction...
Why then are you fighting this war?
Yes, why then are you fighting this war?*

AS film stories go, this is one of the simplest. Two bumbling musicians—a singer and a drummer—come together in funny circumstances and become friends; they travel to strange lands, occasionally intentionally and are granted three wishes by the “*bhooter raja*” (king of goblins), one of which gives them mas-



FILMY TRIVIA (Top) Visitors at an exhibition on the film; and a still from the movie.

tery over their crafts. They move kings and commoners alike with their songs, prevents a war, marry two princesses and live happily ever after. It was essentially meant to be a children’s film, like the story it was based on.

But *Goopi Gynne Bagha Byne* by Satyajit Ray, one of India’s most influential film-makers ever, turned out to be much more—a cult classic with its stark anti-war message that remains relevant 50 years after *Goopi and Bagha* embarked on their epic adventure. When it was released in the summer of 1969, the fantasy-adventure film laced with beautiful music was an instant hit with children. But what came as a surprise, perhaps, was the resonance the film found with adults. Bengali film thespian Soumitra Chatterjee, who

acted in 14 of Ray's films, says *Goopi Gyne Bagha Byne* ran for 100 consecutive weeks, a record that remains unbroken. Ray was encouraged to do a sequel *Hirak Rajar Deshe* in 1980. Later, his son Sandip Ray made the third film of the series, *Goopi Bagha Fire Elo* (1991).

But what made *GGBB* such a classic? The story revolves around the two villagers Goopi and Bagha, both tone-deaf yet aspire to become singer and drummer respectively. After obtaining three boons from the king of goblins, they embark on an adventure that takes them to distant places. Finally, they arrive at the kingdom of Shundi and were accepted as court musicians. When the king of the neighbouring kingdom Halla plans to attack Shundi with the intention to occupy it, Goopi and Bagha foils it with their magical power and brings peace in the two countries.

S OUMITRA Chatterjee points out that while the story line was a fantasy, the strong anti-war message was ingrained artistically in the story that made its appeal universal. However, he reminds that to make it acceptable to the audience, Ray rooted his film firmly on Bengal's soil. The village from where Goopi begins his journey, the forest where he and Bagha are forced to spend the night and first meets a tiger and then the king of goblins, all portray Bengal's rural ambience. The dance of the ghosts was craftily designed to portray the society and its hierarchy. On top of that the music he composed for the film also gave it a quintessential Bengali flavour. "The king of goblin and his three boons should be taken metaphorically. The fantasy film took help of symbolism to move forward with the story and its subtext. The moot point is that even if these two village youths are otherwise weak and daft, through their adventurous journey they could overcome their weakness and transcend into better human beings," observes Chattopadhyay. "The story line and its treatment, backed by high quality music that struck a chord with not only children, but also with the adults," he adds.

To commemorate 50 years of its release, the Society for the Preservation of Satyajit Ray Archives held an exhibition in Calcutta this April. It showcased various sketches of characters, sets, court scenes, posters, score sheets of songs, and photos of actors and Ray.

Goutam Ghose, another filmmaker from Bengal with international repute, points to some of the subtext underlying the storyline of *GGBB*. In the



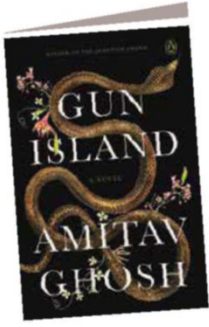
FRAMED MEMORIES
Sketches showcased at the exhibition

“Satyajit Ray’s classic *Goopi Gyne Bagha Byne* ran for 100 consecutive weeks, a record that remains unbroken.”

1960s, the Vietnam War was dominating the global narrative. The strong anti-war message in Ray's film could be seen through the prism of Vietnam War. Incidentally, in 1970, Ray made another film *Pratidwandi* (*The Adversary*), a commentary on the politically turbulent times of that period. There the protagonist faces a interview board as a job aspirant and asked the simple question: What is the most important event of the world today? His answer was Vietnam War. He was further asked a question: Don't you think men landing on moon is much more important? He shrugs and says: Don't think so. Thus, Ray took a clear stand on the question of war and it was not surprising that his position was artistically woven in the children's movie without unsettling the main theme of the film. "Ray's adaptation of his grandfather's story was so timely, even if it was a fantasy for children, its latent message was missed by none," says Ghose. He further explains, "Look at the sequel Ray made later. *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (*In the Land of the Diamond King*), made in 1980, speaks of the tyranny of a bad king, who tries to brainwash his subjects with the help of scientists, in his desire with to continue his rule. With extraordinary prescience, Ray portrayed wizard Borfi and his magic potion in *GGBB* and hinted at the realistic possibilities of rulers trying to subjugate people by gagging them. During the Emergency (1975-77), India had experienced similar things."

In 2017, actress-turned-director Aparna Sen had said that Ray political attitude was reflective of a typical rhetoric of political parties. In 1966, he was at the forefront of a silent protest march against police brutality. Many tend to forget that Ray was one of the signatories demanding the release of political prisoners languishing in various jails from before and during Emergency. Also, in 1989, when the Chinese army brutally suppressed students at Tiananmen Square, Ray had joined a worldwide protest by issuing a statement condemning the crackdown, causing much heartburn in the ruling Left in Calcutta.

Half-a-century later, *Goopi Gyne Bagha Byne's* anti-war message finds resonance in today's political climate. Contrast it with the growing drum beating for war and the popular jingoism that is sweeping across Indian society and one gets the right language to counter it: *Rajye rajye paraspare dwande amangol/ Tora juddho kore korbi kita bol* (Wars only bring misery/What will you gain by going to battle). ☐



books Amitav Ghosh

Gun Island | Penguin RandomHouse | 286 pages | Rs 699

A Bullet With Manasa's Name

Ghosh deploys myth and history to focus on the scary maw of a violated nature and the digitally-aided transfer of people. And we carry on, in denial.

BY SUDHIRENDAR SHARMA

AMITAV Ghosh's anxiety on the subject of climate change had come out clearly in *The Great Derangement* (2016), wherein his conjecture on our collective inability to fathom lurking dangers of climate change was united with an absence of serious literature on the subject. The world has changed too much, too fast and so profoundly that not much sense can be made of it in non-fiction. Therefore, the conventional cause-effect narrative on the emerging environmental catastrophe rarely engages a large section of the affected and elicits a collective response.

It is only through stories that the universe can speak to us, contends Ghosh, and our failure to listen may invite punishment. It makes sense as we are the only species gifted with the faculty of storytelling that helps us capture the inward mysteries of our existence. *Gun Island* provides the mythical backdrop that connects the past with the present in Dinanath or Deen's journey in tracing the footsteps of the gun merchant who had supposedly traversed the world in search of a safe haven to evade the wrath of the goddess of snakes, Manasa Devi. Deen's travels from the marshes of the Sundarbans to the gradually sinking Venice via fire-ravaged California is intermeshed with flights of imagination over dots of reality in building a compulsive story of contemporary relevance.

Plotted over a span of three centuries, from the little ice age to the current phase of global warming, the story remains alive to the unfolding ecological crises. The alarming decline of Irrawaddy dolphins in the Sundarbans and the invasion of venomous brown recluse spider in Venice provide evidence of shocking things happening around us. Ghosh brings to life non-human, silent, characters in the

story—essentially a heady cocktail of myths, folklore and legends. “The primary literary challenge of our time is to give voice to the non-human”. *Gun Island* succeeds in integrating the non-human into an absorbing, partly thrilling, novel that blurs the lines between the real and the imaginary. Kneading past with present, connecting the human with the non-human, and coupling myth with reality emerge as its most striking feature, an essential prelude to looking beyond the obvious in making a sense of the pervasive crisis looming over us all.



In the mist hanging over the Sundarbans, Ghosh blurs lines between real and imaginary, kneads past with present, human with non-human and myth with reality.

Resting on the undercurrents of migration, a theme that has engaged the author since the *Ibis* trilogy, *Gun Island* provides astute observations on migration—posited here as function of poverty as well as a quest for connectedness. One of the most urgent and fraught themes that our political structures have sought to evade has fuelled tales of escape from destitution and persecution. But Ghosh's essential point is that the theory of deprivation is insufficient to explain the advent of the ‘people-moving industry’—one of the world's biggest and still growing enter-

prises. More than freak cyclones, smartphones and computers are stoking the desire for connecting with a perceived world of opportunities elsewhere. Does this notion of interconnection, while expanding small worlds, not play back on the abandoned rivers and fields?

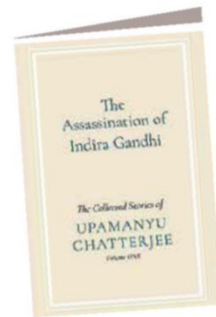
The exceptionally gifted Ghosh creates an imagery we may not have sensed before. Rising temperatures and shifting habitats are inextricably linked to our past, things humans have lost control over. It follows that we do not recognise the problems created by our way of life. As every individual is incentivised to improve his/her standard of living, with states driven by the capitalist model of growth, what will drive us to exit the comfort zone of this ‘new normal’ remains a vexed question.

Gun Island has all that which draws attention to the symptoms of demonic possession that the world of today presents. Towards the end of the novel, the glamorous Italian historian lets Deen get a sense of her predicament:

“everybody knows what must be done if the world is to continue to be a livable place...and yet we are powerless, even the most powerful among us. We go about our daily business through habit, as though we are in the grip of forces that have overwhelmed our will; we see shocking and monstrous things happening around us and we avert our eyes; we surrender ourselves willingly to whatever it is that has us in power.”

As public response to climate change is caught between the polarities of widespread denial and overt activism—which is also under surveillance by the military-industrial complex—fiction has the power to knock society free of the shackles of cultural cognition and motivated reasoning. Ghosh argues that there can be no compelling period in human history to recognise the urgency for such an engagement. [D](#)

(Sudhrendar Sharma is an independent writer, researcher and academic)



It Rains Futility In August

The gallows humour is dulled, but Chatterjee's habit of framing at unusual angles helps a dark whimsy. From Thomas Roe to Art. 377, his canvas is wide.

BY ANJANA BASU

IN this book people jostle, styles jostle and times jostle in a melange of history, literature and old tales revisited. Ever since he began writing, Upamanyu Chatterjee made his mark with a certain type of Rabelaisian humour that rushed through Indian homes and libraries in the shape of *English August*. Agastya Sen is, of course, part of this collection of a dozen stories, returning in *The Killings in Madna*, which first appeared in the *London Magazine* in 1987.

Time has mellowed Chatterjee's gallows humour somewhat, though his habit of looking at things askew persists. For him, things are always out of joint, no matter whether it was during Thomas Roe's visit to the court of Jehangir or the unfortunate sparrows that proliferate in Ronald Ross's cages. Of course, unlike Hamlet, he does not attempt to put it right, but merely observes.

The title story is not really about the assassination of Indira Gandhi but more about Bunny's state of mind as he takes refuge from the fall-out with his family in Mussoorie. Similarly, *Girl* is about the effects of that unsolved murder on Aarushi's classmates—Chatterjee has followed the case in detail, though whether this makes it a successful work of fiction is debatable. However, much of life is about outsiders looking in on actual events and comparing points of view—most people do not take centrestage in murders, but populate the wings.

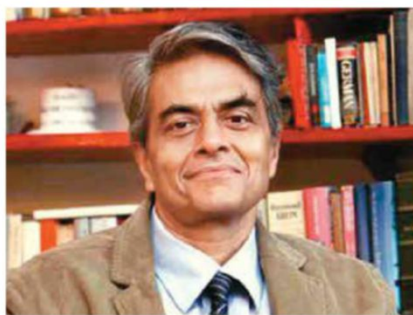
Directness comes from *Can't Take This Shit Anymore*, where the insiders are actually the outsiders, the children of manual scavengers cast aside by the nature of their work—the true untouchables. However fecal the story, the end is optimistic against all odds.

History Lesson was possibly slotted first to set the mood—through Sir Thomas Roe's struggles it carries the under-

lying message that diplomacy is a matter of Chinese whispers and that everyone is not what they portray themselves to be, occasionally recalling I Allan Sealy's world of Zelaldinus, though that was a masque. The echoes of other writers and other times dovetail in and out of the stories but the main irony comes from the fact that the Conqueror of the World has no idea about this island far, far away, thus the seeming futility of Roe's efforts. Chatterjee cocks a snook at the short-sightedness of the Mughals who he feels were too busy bestowing titles on themselves or buildings to focus on a world beyond their boundaries.

Chatterjee's own experiences with bureaucracy inform his explorations of Sir Thomas Roe's mindscape and of course, that of Agastya Sen's—among the files and dust of a remote district far removed from urban sophistication, where all effort seems futile.

Two stories take their context from poetry, Coleridge and Robert Browning. *Journey to Constantinople* is set in 1807 with a beautiful ship's boy and an inso-



Styles jostle throughout, some flowing with literary allusions to baffle the general reader, something that is made fun of in *Othello Sucks*—naturally, the most accessible story here.

maniic passenger who gazes at the phosphorescence of the waters all night and whose identity one can take an educated guess at—presumably Chatterjee did not intend his readers to be mystified for long. *Robertus Heimric, Welcome Back* takes off where Browning ended with a tale in a medieval inn not far from the River Weser and with dreams of rats scratching in the wainscoting. In these two stories, the interest is heightened if one knows the context.

Sparrows also steps into history to deliver a message of conservation, though whether the fact that sparrows are incestuous adds anything extra to a story of birds on the brink of extinction or not is debatable. However, the story of Ross's helper, the Indian sparrow-whisperer, gives it a touch of dark whimsy, especially when linked to the declaration of National House Sparrow Day.

Even Lord Macaulay makes an unexpected appearance in *Three Seven Seven* and the *Blue Gay Gene*, which is about Section 377 and the parents of a gay teen.

Styles jostle throughout the collection, some of them overflowing with literary technicalities that may have the non literary-minded reaching out for dictionaries to look up 'varlets' and 'iambic pentameter'. Something that Chatterjee makes sly fun of in *Othello Sucks*, a father-daughter and family scenario that very possibly has roots in real life, judging by what it has to say about the play and the nature of prejudice. Of the stories, *Othello Sucks* is probably the most entertaining and accessible to the general reader who is suspicious of Shakespeare and iambic acrobatics in any case.

Different perspectives and viewpoints also serve to keep the reader constantly off balance, wondering what next. Though on the cards is volume two of the short stories and another tilt of the scales. **Q**

Bonding, Aaj Kal

She takes after her mother in so many ways: the shape of her face, that smile, the way her hair tumbles back.

He, as you all can see, is an image of his dad (has he inherited that two-generation-old dimple?) Saif and

Amrita Singh's children Sara and Ibrahim Ali Khan are holidaying in England.

This casual, happy chat over some Earl Grey does confirm what they say—the siblings are inseparable.



Deserves A Smash-Hit

Indians had an emotional courtride of an Olympic silver in badminton through Sindhū's Rio effort. Someone (along with Saina) who raised the profile of badminton in India, Sindhū—all determinedly pursed lips and steely eyes—certainly deserves a biopic. But who can provide a fair imitation of those springy leaps and staggering lopes? Filmmaker Sonu Sood's firm choice, for obvious reasons of heredity and interest, is Deepika. Nothing, though, is decided.

Here's Looking At Her

Kabir Singh, though fiercely damned for supposed 'misogyny', must be a pistol of the highest calibre, for the redoubtable products it threatens to overtake in commercial success—*Bharat* and *URI: The Surgical Strike*—are bearers of the national zeigeist. In three weeks, its collection is expected to touch Rs 250 crore! What has it, then? Shahid's jerky, handsome energy? We suspect it's Kiara Advani's effortless classiness and a certain shyly bold look she has in those eyes.

PTI

THIS TOO
HAPPENED

After a hiatus of 33 years, Japan will resume commercial whaling. It exited the International Whaling Commission, which had put a moratorium on the practice, except for research purposes or by indigenous communities. The move helped whale populations recover, but several species are still vulnerable.





A New Over

Even for a player who has the world's best batsmen flailing for cover, 'liking' and friendship happens in the arena of social media! Thus the connect between Jasprit Bumrah and actress Anupama (*Premam*). Speculators frothed at the mouth, but Anupama scotched all, astutely playing the 'friends' card.



On The Drinks Break

With his (possibly precious) 'talk' done at a lifest, Shashi Tharoor settled down to watch the Ind vs Eng match at Edgbaston. Unbeknownst to him, camera-wielding snoops were taking a break, staring at him, snapping him at a selfie-snapping moment with a lady friend. 'Who is that', screamed Twitter. This, it appears, is Deana Uppal, business-woman and former Miss India UK. Left—an example of the kind of attitude that made the judges' work really easy.



"This is a flagitious and unjustified proposal. It is never acceptable...we are happy with our 54,000 sq mile territory." Bangladesh PM **SHEIKH HASINA** on a US Congressman's proposal to incorporate Rakhine state of Myanmar into Bangladesh



Perestroika, Ahoy!

It's three in the morning. The cab pulls up at a red light on a pedestrian crossing. There is no traffic; no one's crossing the road either. But the cabbie waits patiently for 70 seconds for the light to turn green. That's Moscow for you. Everything is in order, from traffic signs on washed roads to nearly identical apartment buildings and glass-fronted shops. From the ultra-modern underground metro rail to river ferries taking tourists up and down the Moskva.

The clockwork precision of life in the northernmost megapolis is a Soviet legacy. Many Muscovites look back at the fall of the Soviet Union with a trace of sadness and fondly remember the "great country" that it once was. Russian old-timers still discuss conspiracy theories about the "capitalist and expansionist" West's hand in the collapse of the USSR—same as the Cyrillic acronym CCCP on Olympic jerseys. The 50-something driver Dmitri definitely believes the *Amreekaans* were responsible. *Da, Da* (yes, yes), he asserts when I ask him if he truly believes what he told me.

But Dmitri loves his iPhone and iPad, like most Muscovites do. They love to show off their Mercs, like to eat out at McDee and KFC, find their Levi's comfortable. Youngsters zip around in Harley-Davidsons. The fruits of Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika, sown last century, are visible across Moscow. It's a city proud of its rich past. It is confident about the future as well. And the old and the new are in perfect harmony in the Russian capital.

Sizzlin' summer

Muscovites will tell you this summer is unusually warm. So warm that the mercury has risen to breaking a 100-year-old mark. Moscow recorded 36.8 degree Celsius in 1920—perhaps the heat from the just-ended World War One was hanging around. Nobody complains about the heat in this city where the Celsius plunges below minus 20 on a good day, and goes down to minus 42, like that bad one ever recorded in 1942. The Russian winter, you know, Stalin's greatest ally. Muscovites will say it's just "warm", never hot. Tell that to an Indian suffering a 47-degree furnace called Delhi through this summer! Imagine my surprise, and indignation, when I find men and women bathing in the sun in parks across Moscow; roller-skating kids out with their parents to enjoy the sun. Bah!

But there is a reason for this joy de vivre. Summers in the far north are the best part of the year. The winters



**ANUPAM
BORDOLOI**

(Author is Associate Editor, Outlook)

are harsh and unforgiving, snowed out for months. The damp, dark nights are long. "It's the best time of the year to be in Moscow," my new friend Nikita says. "You can't imagine how bitterly cold it gets in the winters." The summer days are long; by mid-July, it can be nearly 20 hours of daylight. In end-June, the sun goes down by 10 pm. By 4 am, it's already a new day!

Give Me Red

The name on the plaque is quite a mouthful: "The Cathedral of the Protecting Veil of the Most Holy Mother of God on the Moat". The shortened Saint Basil's Cathedral is better. It is that iconic, onion-domed structure that provides the backdrop to any tourist booklet on Russia. Standing on one corner of the Red Square in Moscow, the church is magnificent up close, its many-coloured facade glistening in the warm glow of a June sun. The Red Square, now a Unesco world heritage site, is a mirror to Russia's past—it's the foundation of Moscow's political legacy, the grandstand of Soviet might. The paved courtyard of the Square has hosted leaders from across the world and concerts by headline acts such as Linkin Park and Scorpions. Paul McCartney performed here once, though the Soviets had banned The Beatles for its 'bad influence'.

For most Russians, as well as foreigners, a trip to the Red Square is a pilgrimage when they walk past the embalmed body of Lenin in his mausoleum. Photography is prohibited and visitors are asked to follow a strict set of etiquette while doing a parikrama of his body. That includes not putting your hands in the trouser pockets.

A Job In Hand

Since the fall of the USSR, Russia has made significant progress in the social sphere—improving social security, better care for the elderly and lowering unemployment. All these advances and much more were showcased at an annual conclave titled the Forum of Social Innovations of Regions in Moscow. The third conclave saw many thought leaders, scientists and activists speak on various subjects over three days.

It was at this conclave, I found out that Moscow has an unemployment rate of 1.4 per cent and that the government provides 7,000 roubles a month to each registered jobless person. Government-run job centres evaluate the skill sets of the unemployed, train them and connect them to prospective employers.



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