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# INDIA TODAY



► BUDGET 2017

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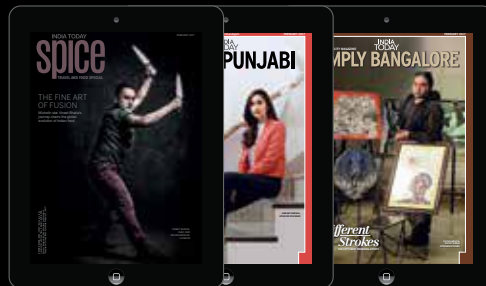
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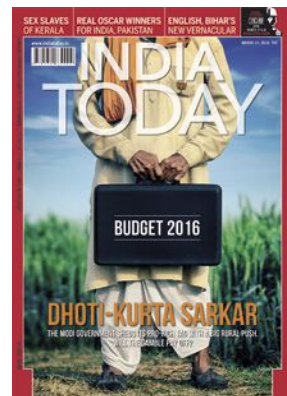
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## FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

After the audacious demonetisation, I was hoping the government was in the mood for some more audacity in the budget. Sadly, it was not to be. Not that it was a bad budget. It was a good one, but it didn't satisfy my own zeal for more radical change. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley was like a good schoolboy who does a fine balancing act to keep the teachers happy and also be the most popular boy in school. The economists were ecstatic that he maintained fiscal prudence, even while increasing capital expenditure on infrastructure by 25 per cent. He pleased the masses with a combination of tax cuts and higher spending, particularly in transport and rural infrastructure, which should have a healthy multiplier effect and spur consumption. The cut in personal income tax rate from 10 per cent to 5 per cent in the lowest tax slab will raise disposable incomes, while a record budget allocation to MNREGA (Rs 48,000 crore) will put more money in people's hands. Higher investment in the transport sector and rural housing, where 10 million houses have been promised by 2019, with the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana allocation pegged at Rs 23,000 crore, indicates that the government has bet big on Bharat. One figure says it all: in this budget, agriculture and allied sectors get a whopping Rs 1.87 lakh crore, 24 per cent higher than last year (over budget estimates). Among the many things this allocation does is address problems of farmers by putting in Rs 40,000 crore into irrigation and crop insurance. Finally, the government is focusing on labour-intensive industries instead of the much-touted Make in India campaign which has yielded precious few jobs. The finance minister cleverly assuaged one of the BJP's major constituencies, the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), by reducing taxes. He's relying on them to spur economic growth and jobs as they



Our March 14, 2016 cover

comprise 37 per cent of the GDP.

But I liked that the government kept to the high moral ground by continuing the black money purge, putting limits on transactions, cash donations to charities and political parties, rationalising real estate capital gains measurement and ways to promote digital transactions. Despite major state elections this year, the Centre has resisted the temptation to go in for populist schemes and freebie announcements, which is commendable. Our cover story analyses the budget in detail and includes an assessment from top experts, who echo many of these views.

All this is good economics and on predictable lines. But it does not tackle the structural problems of the economy. How many budgets have we seen packed with scheme after scheme for farmers, and yet still reliant on a good monsoon to bail out the economy? Every year, we see farmer suicides across the country. The reason, I believe, is that we don't bother to fix the rotten pipeline to deliver these goods and services to the people. In fact, we continue to make it bigger. There was no attempt to rationalise subsidies on food and fertiliser, which take away Rs 2.15 lakh crore and are prone to high leakages. There is a faint-hearted approach to solving the problem of NPAs of PSU banks and similarly lackadaisical efforts at disinvesting in PSUs. If the fervour for radical reform stays with Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the remainder of his term, there is still a lot for him to do. I hope it does. The country desperately needs it.

*Aroon Purie*  
(Aroon Purie)

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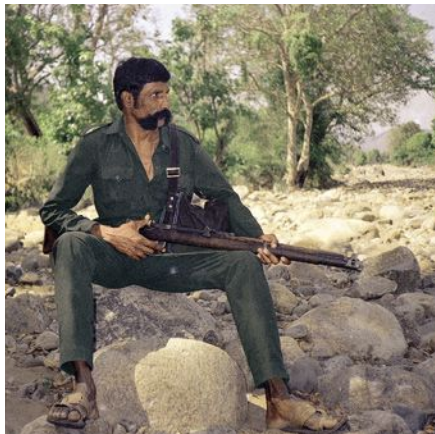
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The real story behind Pakistan's sudden house arrest of 26/11 mastermind Hafiz Saeed

Cover by **BANDEEP SINGH**

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PERSPECTIVE

## FEELING THE HEAT

By **Wajahat S. Khan** *Islamabad*

**P**akistan army spokesperson Maj. Gen. Asif Ghafoor has said Pakistan's decision to arrest Hafiz Saeed, leader of a 'philanthropic' organisation with established militant credentials and suspected links to the Mumbai terror attacks of 2008, is based on a new "national policy and for the national interest".

Saeed, who has a \$10 million bounty placed on his head by the United States, is often cited by India as the "mastermind" of the Mumbai terror attacks, which resulted in the deaths of 166 people, including several Americans. He has been apprehended at least four times between 2002 and 2009, but was let go after a few months in detention. The popular jihadist can still attract large crowds with his anti-America and anti-India diatribes.

But military insiders are saying that Saeed's house arrest in Lahore on January 30 has to do with a fast changing local and international environment, including the new Donald Trump administration in the US and a change of guard in the powerful Pakistan army. Significantly, Saeed has been detained under the stricter Pakistan Anti-Terror Act.

General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Pakistan's new chief of army staff, has a reputation of being religiously progressive and pro-democratic. His boss, Prime Minister

Hafiz Saeed being taken away by the police in Lahore



GETTY IMAGES

Nawaz Sharif, has been trying to normalise relations with India since coming to power in 2013, but has been sidetracked by terror attacks traceable to Pakistan and growing unrest in the Indian-administered portion of Kashmir. Days before he appointed Bajwa in November 2016, Sharif told me, "The contradictory policy of duality—support for some militants and going against others—will soon be finished."

Thus, the arrest of Saeed, a Quranic expert with extreme views about jihad with India and a man who has historically enjoyed state protection, is being linked to the changing factors at home and abroad. "Recent indicators from our friends, the US and China, are that he has to go," said a senior military officer, on condition of anonymity, on the sidelines of a rare military briefing held at the army headquarters in Rawalpindi on January 31, less than 24 hours after Saeed's arrest. "The UN, the Americans etc. have been asking questions about how the state has not been able to control this man."

Maj. Gen. Ghafoor added that the new army chief's

## PADMA AWARDS

# THEY TOO HAVE SERVED

By Uday Mahurkar

Some cynicism and political worldliness have generally been assumed to play a role in the selection of Padma awards. But there will be few who can deny that this year's relatively short list made space to acknowledge the extraordinary work of ordinary people. There has been some disgruntled criticism of the awards process, most notably from the badminton player Jwala Gutta and the multiple-time billiards world champion Pankaj Advani, but the government has put forward a stout defence.

Much has been made of the online process this year, with nominations required to be made on a website rather than sent by post. It is a process that has resulted in double the nominations made in a normal year and more transparency. The prime minister reportedly took a personal interest. The awards, he said, according to those privy to the discussions, "should be an instrument to reward true merit...create a sense of pride in people". Led by a selection panel that had the likes of badminton coach Pullela Gopichand, actor Waheeda Rehman and RSS leader S. Gurumurthy, efforts were made to follow the PM's instructions of ensuring "that the culture of patronage and nepotism is brought to an end". A selection committee member who chose to remain anonymous said past awards were handed out as favours: "The doctors of VIP patients invariably won awards. Too often selection committees were swayed by who'd written the letter of recommendation rather than the nominee's contributions." In election years, the number of awardees swelled to over a hundred.

Satpal Chauhan, joint secretary in the ministry of home affairs (MHA), who played a pivotal role in the process, says "selection was not just about merit, but A+ merit". And so Karimul Haque, 52, a tea garden worker making Rs 5,000 a month, found himself at Rashtrapati Bhavan to receive a Padma Shri. Having lost his mother to a heart attack, Haque made it his life's work to ensure people in need from his

**In a merit-driven selection, unknown names made it to the Padma awards list**

GETTY IMAGES



Police barricade the road to Saeed's house in Lahore

resolve to improve Pakistan's security is clear. "If Pakistan improves, and the army chief goes to his grave, he would think it's still worth it," he says. "For Gen. Bajwa, individuals are less important than the state. National interest must prevail." As for pressure from the Trump administration being a cause for the arrest, he says, "There are all sorts of pressures from within the global system. We don't live in a vacuum. A major decision like this one was not made randomly."

"Of course, the Pakistanis will react to a changing environment," says Shehzad Chaudhry, a former air force officer and popular TV analyst. "This arrest is a win-win decision. The Chinese, our best friends, are going to be happy, for we don't have to embarrass them any more. The Americans will be happy that we've finally heard them out. The Indians will lose a major excuse to complain about us to the rest of the world. And Mr Saeed will understand that when it comes to him or Pakistan, Pakistan will be the obvious choice." ■



## WONDERLAND

Clockwise from above: Padma Shri winners Dr Bhakti Yadav, Meenakshi Amma, Sukri Bommagowda, Daripalli Ramaiah and Karimul Haque





## PULLQUOTE

**“Is Kairana not an issue? Is Kashmir not an issue? If this country’s majority, Hindus, are tortured, is it not an issue? But if a thorn pricks the foot of someone from the minority community, it becomes an issue. This politics is strange.”**

**YOGI ADITYANATH**, addressing a rally in Sahibabad in western Uttar Pradesh on January 30, compared the ‘exodus’ of Hindus from Kairana to the forcing out of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990. Adityanath praised Vladimir Putin for standing up to Muslims, telling them to “go where they like Shariat law”. Will the Election Commission take notice? Or is this the language of development for all?



## INDEX

# Are We the Learning Laggards?

Every year, despite the odd modest increase in learning outcomes, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) makes for sobering, if not depressing, reading. Although India has succeeded in getting the overwhelming majority of children up to 14 into school, quality remains an abiding problem. We spend a fraction of our GDP on education and in the last budget, spending on education was reduced by 16 per cent. Unsurprisingly, our literacy rate lags far behind that of other BRICS countries.

74%

INDIA'S LITERACY RATE, ACCORDING TO THE UNDP

99.6%

RUSSIA'S LITERACY RATE. CHINA'S IS 94.3%, BRAZIL'S 90.3% AND SOUTH AFRICA'S 88.7%

3.8%

OF INDIA'S GDP IS SPENT ON EDUCATION, SAYS THE WORLD BANK; 4.9% IS THE GLOBAL AVERAGE

village in West Bengal could get to hospital quickly. He converted his motorcycle into a rudimentary ambulance for the purpose. Sometimes, a journey of 15 kilometres was required; when the river was in spate, a 45 km detour. In two decades, he has taken 3,500 people to hospital, saving hundreds of lives. “That someone should call me to Delhi to give me an award,” he says, “is like a dream.”

Dr Ram Yadav too thought he was in a dream when he was told that his 91-year-old mother, Bhakti Yadav, a gynaecologist, had been selected to receive a Padma Shri for helping some 88,000 poor women deliver their babies. She was nominated by the MHA's own research team. Other awardees ran from famous politicians and athletes to folk singers Jitendra Haripal and Sukri Bommagowda, the ‘Nightingale of Halakki’, who has been performing for 58 years. Meenakshi Amma, 76, from Kerala, has been teaching Kalaripayattu, one of the oldest martial arts in the world for decades, while another awardee, Daripalli Ramaiah from Telangana, has planted over 10 million trees. This year's list belonged to India's everyman. ■



## RESERVATIONS

# Two Steps Backward for Quota Raj

By Shougat Dasgupta

## NO WAY OUT

Jat protesters  
in Jassia village,  
Rohtak, January 31

In the last days of January, Jats, Patidars and Marathas gathered in separate protests that reprised demands they've been making for over a year, in some cases two. The protests, though they are all independent, share an essential animus—a feeling, however irrational, of being left behind while being described as 'socially advanced'.

Having been banished from Gujarat for six months, Hardik Patel, the face of the Patidar agitations, returned on January 17. But the crowds at the rallies do not seem so enthused anymore. It appears that the time spent in exile had had its effect. The Jats, whose protests in Haryana last year culminated in dozens of deaths and allegations of sexual violence, came out onto the streets again last week. This time, the crowd remained controlled, borrowing from the Maratha playbook and the power of silence.

On January 31, Maratha protesters

blocked roads in Mumbai to make their demands heard. Some organisers said roads had been blocked in up to 2,000 locations across the state. But Virendra Pawar, an organiser, insisted that the protests had not taken a violent turn.

It says something about the lack of political imagination that reservations are seen as the only option to resolve unemployment and poverty. In a column, the academic Christophe Jaffrelot argued that dominant caste demands for reservations would increase so long as economic growth failed to create jobs. India's so-called 'demographic dividend', some experts suggest, requires the creation of some 8 million jobs a year. According to Jaffrelot, not only are jobs in key sectors declining, as Labour Bureau statistics indicate, but

"they are precarious and do not pay well".

Political parties, as they might in any democracy, have taken to disingenuously appeasing protesters, or at least making openly sympathetic noises. But surely even the Jats, who have been demanding

reservations for a couple of decades, the Patidars and Marathas can see that their argument is weak. Certainly, some of the impetus appears to have leaked out of the protests since last year.

The protesters have also failed to make an impact on the ballot box, as Patidar calls to vote against the BJP

in Gujarat's municipal elections were roundly ignored. Jat farmers in UP are promising not to vote for the BJP in western UP and plenty of anger is expressed against the Modi government for "breaking promises". ■

**Hardik returned but the crowds don't seem so enthused anymore**



## UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

# THE HIGH COST OF EQUALITY

By Shweta Punj

**A**nnual economic surveys are dry documents, intended to summarise the year gone by and point at the direction the economy is taking. Arvind Subramanian, the Chief Economic Advisor, has more ambition, as indicated by the sprightly phrasing, the blockbuster quotations, and intriguing chapter titles. What, for instance, to make of 'Universal Basic Income: A Conversation with and within the Mahatma'?

UBI, Subramanian writes, is an "idea whose time has come perhaps not for immediate implementation but at least for serious public deliberation". What would the Mahatma do, he asks, before concluding that he would, despite some philosophical conflicts, endorse the idea that every citizen of the country should receive

the minimum amount needed for basic needs.

According to the economic survey, UBI would cost between 4 and 5 per cent of the GDP. Subramanian is unequivocal that UBI would not be an additional scheme but a replacement. In effect, it would be the only scheme, with beneficiaries receiving money directly. There are some 950 schemes and sub-schemes that account for 5 per cent of the GDP, of which the top 11 alone account for some 50 per cent of the money available. The schemes are labyrinthine and still the poorest are often excluded. An estimate from 2011-2012 suggests 40 per cent of the bottom 40 per cent of the population are excluded from the public distribution system.

Still, just days before Subramanian presented the



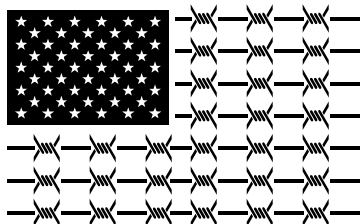
**STATE OF THE NATION:** Arvind Subramanian presents the Economic Survey

## A 2011-12 estimate says the PDS excludes 40% of the bottom 40% of India

survey, Arvind Panagariya, vice-chairman of the Niti Aayog, argued that India did not have the fiscal resources to implement UBI for all citizens. He pegged the cost at Rs 15.6 lakh crore a year. During 2016-2017, the Centre estimates it will spend Rs 2.5 lakh crore on subsi-

dies and a further Rs 38,500 crore on the rural employment guarantee programme.

The results of two pilot projects in Madhya Pradesh have been promising, with the monthly cash payment leading to improved health and nutrition. But other schemes, in Puducherry for instance, have revealed weaknesses. "The irresistible force of even as powerful an idea as UBI", Subramanian cautions, "will run into the immovable object of a resistant, pesky reality." And the reality of India represents a formidable barrier. ■



## INDEX

## The American Nightmare

The proposed legislation to double the salaries of H1B visa holders has caused panic in India. Stocks in tech companies like Wipro, TCS and Infosys fell substantially. The visa is intended for skilled, educated labour while Indian companies have relied on Indians with the necessary skills but lower wage expectations

# 70%

H1B visas that went to Indians in 2015, according to the Department of Homeland Security

# \$108

billion

The estimated value of India's technology outsourcing industry

# \$130,000

Minimum annual salary (around Rs 88 lakh) proposed for H1B visa holders

# \$79,513

Estimated average annual salary in 2016 for an Indian Infosys employee on an H1B visa

# 85,000

Number of visas granted in a year; 20,000 reserved for those with advanced degrees









#### [ EXPOSURE ]

### DUCK AND COVER

The Uttar Pradesh polls starting on February 11 are looking too close to call. The alliance between the ruling Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Congress, a fast fading force in the state as it appears to be in much of the country, has given the BJP pause. The lack of a chief ministerial face is a worry for the latter, still the marginal favourites according to most calculations. The SP now looks firmly in the grip of the younger Yadav, CM Akhilesh, who is said to get along with both Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi. Here the SP boss is seen with Rahul during a roadshow in Lucknow city. As is obvious, there are still obstacles to duck.



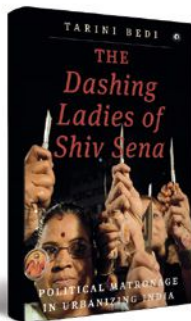
PANKAJ NANGIA

[ REVIEW ]

# The Sena Tigress

The Dashing Ladies of Shiv Sena  
Tarini Bedi; Aleph; pp 291; Rs 699

By Shougat Dasgupta



Kalpna Sate, a Mumbai corporator in charge of one of the city's 227 wards, has been busy all evening. Taking a break from working the phone in a functional Shiv Sena branch office, she asks a young worker if he's seen a new drain she's had installed in her ward. "Yes, madam," he responds, folding his palms together in a sycophantic namaste, "it is a *mast naala*. You are the *malkin* of the area." He is joined by a chorus of young workers, all expressing their approval. It is a scene from anthropology professor **Tarini Bedi's** recent book, *The Dashing Ladies of Shiv Sena*, and it says something about the efficiency of the women of the title and the exaggerated respect in which they are held.

Early in the book, Bedi quotes Durva, a Sena leader in Pune. "The word *mahila* for Shiv Sena women," she says, "means many things"—M for *mahaan*, H for *him-matwali*, and La for being one in a lakh. Durva believes that Shiv Sena women are characterised by their willingness to get involved in the rough and tumble of street politics. Women in other parties, the

self-mythologising dashing ladies of the Sena claim, are pampered in comparison. One woman leader in Pune tells Bedi, "I see women in other parties who will talk very softly.... Here we are women who are shouting... putting black mud to some police officer's face and sending them running away.... We were a cultural shock to

people in western Maharashtra."

Some of this, the resorting to violence, the threats, will seem like bullying Sena-style politics regardless of gender. But Bedi is convincing



in that the Sena's women, while not on par with the men, are not quite subordinate either. She makes the interesting point that "Sena women [see] their homes as important sites of their public service". Conventional domesticity does not suit these women, and the party, to its credit, wouldn't have it any other way. It's refreshing to see women in right-wing parties written about as the feminists they are. But for all the dash of these grassroots workers, Indian politics remains incorrigibly patriarchal. ■



[ THE CHATTER ]

## The week in social media

@mitalisaran

### Trump Walled In

On the ground, the most noteworthy thing about President Donald Trump's order to prevent Muslims from entering the US was the great big beautiful wet blanket of resistance that was thrown over it by legions of ordinary Americans repulsed by Trump's bigotry. They stood outside airports chanting 'Let them in', holding banners that read 'You belong' and 'Free lawyer'. That's right, lawyers—the sharkiest of the sharks in the pool—worked pro bono over the weekend to sue the government on behalf of people affected by the ban. Americans are pissed, and they're showing it. ■



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Good morning everyone except  
@realDonaldTrump.

### Boos for Bollywood

The latest Bollywood project to keel over without a whimper, under pressure from religious fanatics, is Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Padmavati*. After thugs from the Shri Rajput Karni Sena assaulted him on his sets, Bhansali was the one giving assurances that nobody would be hurt by his film. You can't stand in judgement over someone facing a threat; on the other hand, if nobody stands up to brainless intimidation, we can say goodbye to education, the arts, history, truth, creative innovation and individual rights. As Arpita Das posted on FB: "...if you (Bollywood) don't speak up even now, it'll establish you as the most spineless creative industry in India." ■



### A Share of the Mess

Facebook users are sharing this article with a sense of indignation and horror: could it be that Trump's shocking rise to the White House is a product of your FB likes? How did a psychologist's FB analytics, a company that specialises in targeted rather than mass communication and the alt-right get so involved? Big data, used with exact intent, may have given us the toxic mess that is today's White House. As the article says: "[R]eflective Kosinski, carefully groomed Nix and grinning Trump—one of them enabled the digital revolution, one of them executed it and one of them benefited from it." ■



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## GLASSHOUSE

## The Buck Stops There

No police officer from Kerala was on the list for the President's Police Medal awarded on Republic Day. The embarrassment has been compounded by a petty tit-for-tat between the state and central government, each blaming the other for the oversight. According to the Centre, the Kerala government failed to submit its list on time. Nalini Netto, the additional chief secretary of the state's home and vigilance departments, insists that the list was submitted on time. Chief Minister **Pinarayi Vijayan** has ordered a probe.

Netto and the police have been at loggerheads over the Puttingal Temple fire in April last year. There has also been considerable tension between the state bureaucracy and the vigilance director Jacob Thomas. Reports suggest the



power struggle between the IAS and IPS in Kerala resulted in the list not being submitted. Thomas, apparently, didn't attend a screening panel meeting on December 26 as he had taken leave to attend his daughter's marriage. The list had to be turned in by January 4. A petition, meanwhile, has been filed against Netto for helping Thomas escape disciplinary procedures on more than one occasion. These arcane issues aside, it appears the problem was a misunderstanding over how best to file the applications—online or in hard copy. The result is disgruntled officers with a prestigious award and lifelong stipend denied. ■



## FLY IN THE HONEY TRAP

A sleazy sex scandal played out as Punjab readied itself for the polls on February 4. Shiromani Akal Dal MP Sher Singh Ghubaya was allegedly caught on tape in a compromising position with a woman. The man he holds responsible is his own Deputy CM, Sukhbir Singh Badal. Ghubaya claims Sukhbir's handiwork is an act of 'political assassination'. And he made that sensational claim alongside Ravneet Bittu, the Congress nominee challenging Sukhbir in Jalalabad, his home turf. "This [tape] is an affront to the whole Rai Sikh community," Bittu said, hoping to woo the 30,000 voters who share Ghubaya's background. Could Ghubaya be actively seeking expulsion from the SAD by challenging Sukhbir so openly? Will the Badals oblige him? Certainly the Congress is waiting in the wings to pick up the pieces. ■

## Trump's Great Game

In an article for the Hudson Institute, Michael Pillsbury, a China expert and former US defence official who has served as advisor to Donald Trump, noted that one of Beijing's biggest concerns about the new US President was whether he "supports India's claims to Arunachal Pradesh". He wrote that the US "has not taken a position" on the issue,

although since 1962 America has actually recognised the McMahon Line as the border—and so Arunachal as India's.

Trump considering using Arunachal as a bargaining chip with the Chinese? ■



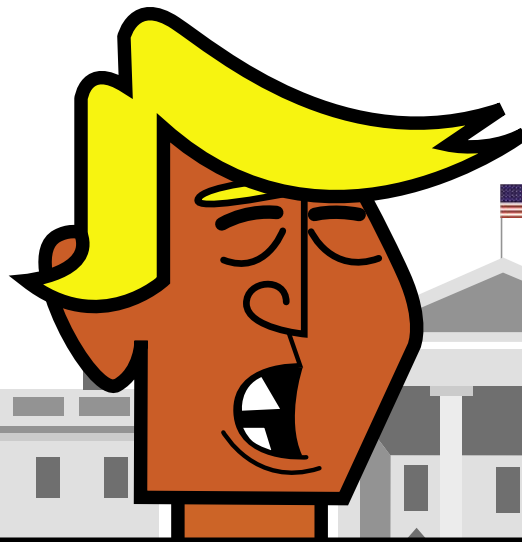
## Renaissance CM

Mamata Banerjee is an almost comically prolific author. Each year, the book fair features several new works by her. Among the half dozen offerings this year was, inevitably, a book on 'Notebandi'. The West Bengal CM is a published poet too. In November, she released a 32-line poem lambasting the PM for demonetisation and, in passing, his authoritarianism. Mamata is also a painter. But the value of her work has nosedived. Much was made over the Rs 1.8 crore Saradha boss Sudipto Sen supposedly paid for her painting. Even the PM mocked the price at rallies. But the Enforcement Directorate has now confirmed that the painting sold for just Rs 14 lakh. What a come-down. ■



—Sandeep Unnithan with Asit Jolly, Jeemon Jacob, Romita Datta and Ananth Krishnan





## STUMPED BY TRUMP

### PRESIDENTS ON PRIVILEGE

Trump trumps the list of US presidents on energetic use of Executive Orders

# 20

Executive Orders by Donald Trump in just 11 days

Average of **9** passed by US presidents over a term

Minimum **1**, by 34th president Dwight Eisenhower

#### JANUARY 20

Scraps Obamacare on the day he is sworn in

#### JANUARY 23

Withdraws from Trans-Pacific Partnership

Blocks US federal funding for NGOs providing abortion counselling

Calls to reduce federal workforce within 90 days

#### JANUARY 24

Fast-tracks cross-border pipelines makes use of American-made steel in these mandatory

Orders streamlining of manufacturing regulations

#### JANUARY 25

Proclaims January 22 week as National School Choice week

Orders construction of the US-Mexico border

Cuts off federal funding to "sanctuary cities", gives immigration officers unlimited discretion

#### JANUARY 27

Bars citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen) from entering the US for the next 90 days, suspends admission of all refugees for 120 days and Syrian refugees indefinitely

#### JANUARY 28

Lifetime ban on officials lobbying on behalf of foreign governments

Gets his chief political strategist, Stephen Bannon, to sit on influential Principals Committee

Seeks to develop plan within 30 days to defeat ISIS

#### JANUARY 30

"One in, two out" order means federal agencies will have to revoke two regulations for each new regulation they create

Sacks acting attorney-general Sally Yates for defying his executive order on the refugee and immigration ban

### SPOOK LIST

#### Worst fears...

- That he might set off global trade wars, especially with China
- That his H1B Visa Bill will spell doom for Indian IT industry
- That he will encourage nuclear proliferation around the world
- That he will change US relations with China, Russia and the European Union profoundly
- That large numbers of Americans will lose their existing health insurance
- That his promised 'tax revolution' will benefit the ultra-wealthy and businesses
- That he will tilt the Supreme Court's balance to his political advantage
- That immigrants will be hard hit
- That climate change policy will see a u-turn

Graphic by ANIRBAN GHOSH

—Damayanti Datta



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POINT OF VIEW

# Fuss over a Fictional Queen?

By Arshia Sattar

In Nandshankar Mehta's 1868 Gujarati novel, *Karan Ghelo*, Alauddin Khilji kidnaps the wife of Karan Baghela, a Hindu king of Gujarat, and marries her. Although this is a historical novel, Mehta fills it with legend, local lore and large dollops of self-conscious fiction. After all, an embroidered handkerchief is so much more attractive than a plain one, no matter how fine its fabric.

But it's another one of Khilji's female conquests that occupies us this week as we are forced to consider the latest tussle in the constant struggle between fact and fiction in our beleaguered public discourse about culture. A few days ago in Jaipur (which had just hosted an unusually calm, even dull, Jaipur Literature Festival), local goons, in the guise of a caste pride outfit, attacked Sanjay Leela Bhansali's film set, where he was shooting for his film *Padmavati*. The film purports to tell some version of the legend of Alauddin Khilji and his love for the Rajput queen Padmini, a love which led him to attack the fort of Chittor. The Rajput Karni Sena was protesting (in advance) the horrific and caste-rendering idea that Bhansali might depict a love scene between the Hindu Padmini and the Muslim emperor.

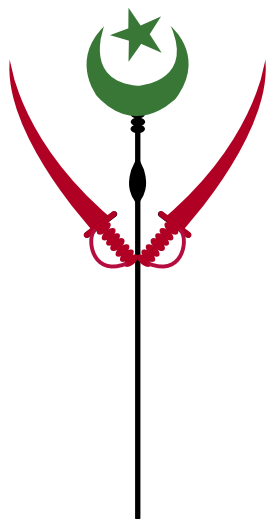
We've all grown up with the story of the siege of the fort, the brave Rajput warriors who laid down their lives to guard the honour of Padmini, their queen, and her companions. When the rampaging, lust-driven Muslim emperor entered the fort, instead of the beautiful queen he sought, he found the charred bodies of the Rajput women who had all thrown themselves into the fire in an act of mass self-immolation. We were taught to call this *jauhar* and not *sati*—this was about public honour rather than about conjugal devotion. This story places Padmini in a long line of mythological heroines who jump into the fire to prove themselves and preserve their husbands' honour—Sita comes most immediately to mind.

This is also a tale about Hindus and Muslims, a story of how the Muslim invaders who settled in to rule northern India were uniformly rapacious, wilful and covetous of Hindu women. In contrast, local Hindu rulers, Rajputs in particular, were noble and courageous, fighting to the last man to defend not just their women but the great land of Hindustan.

Amar Chitra Katha revels in this story, but I also remember it from my social science textbook—a strange amalgam of history, geography, anthropology, legend and patriotic inspirations. But it turns out that this romantic story to which we are all attached is a work of fiction, it comes from a poem by the 16th century Sufi Malik Muhammad Jayasi. In *Padmavat*, Jayasi takes at least one historical figure, Alauddin, and one historical incident, the siege of Chittor, and couples them with Padmini/Padmavati, a figure more likely to be from legend than history. Padmini, the queen of Chittor, might never have existed. If she did, it's possible she was a princess from Ceylon and not a Rajput woman. The business of Alauddin's love and Padmini's heroic rejection of it was apparently invented by Jayasi, to be read as an allegory for the obstacles that stand in the way of the human soul's union with the divine.

In the 21st century, such facts are not important. In the last week, in world-speak, we have moved from 'post-truth' to 'alternative facts'. If Padmini did not exist, we would have had to invent her. And we have. Whether or not she really lived, how ironic that the great celebration of her courageous life and death has come to us from a Muslim poet who turns his coreligionist, Alauddin, into the violator of her person, her gender, her caste, her people and her religion. Dear *bhaktas*, how wonderful that you find truth even in the confabulations of your enemies. ■

*The writer is an author and translator. She has recently published Uttara: The Book of Answers*



**In the last week, we've moved from 'post-truth' to 'alternative facts'. Had Padmini not existed, we would've had to invent her. And we have**



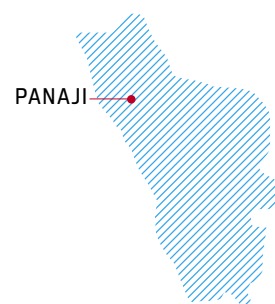
STORYBOARD



# STATES

GOA

## UNEASY LIES THE HEAD



CHIEF MINISTER PARSEKAR IS ON SHAKY  
GROUND WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY

By Kiran D. Tare

Goa chief minister Laxmikant Parsekar arrives at 8:45 pm to address a corner meeting with his neighbourhood voters in Harmal. Parsekar, who is fighting his sixth election, begins on an emotional note. “My schedule has changed since I became chief minister,” he says. I have not even been able to visit my ailing mother in the past six months because there is so much responsibility on me.” Clearly, he was trying to justify the ‘absence’ from his constituency, Mandrem, in north Goa.

Cornered by opponents over his failed promises and vendetta politics, Parsekar also has his own voters to placate. But the former school principal has judged the situation well. He is focusing on the development works his government has carried out and the many social security schemes, especially for women. The two big infrastructure projects—electronics city and Mopa airport—coming close to Mandrem will hopefully be the icing on the cake. “Electronics city

has a capacity to generate employment for the next 25 years. *Tujya bhurgyank sud-dha hancho fudarak faayado jatalo* (Your children will also benefit from it),” he says, amidst huge applause.

Ironically, Parsekar, a tough administrator, has been facing flak within the BJP since he took over as CM from Manohar Parrikar (now defence minister) in November 2014. First, there was a revolt against his elevation from within the ranks, then he was dubbed a ‘puppet CM’ who works at Parrikar’s behest. And now, when the BJP is trying to retain power under his leadership, it is not certain he will be CM after the election. Union transport minister Nitin Gadkari, the BJP in-charge in Goa, has already declared that the party might get Parrikar back from Delhi.

A BJP source says Parsekar alone is responsible for his troubles. He locked horns with three senior leaders, Sangeeta Parab, Ramakant Khalap and Subhash Velingkar. Parsekar does not consider Parab and

# 62

PER CENT  
of the 251  
candidates in Goa  
are millionaires





▶ TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

MANDAR DEODHAR

^ **HE'S BACK** Defence minister Parrikar meeting villagers of Zuarinagar

## THE BJP CAMPAIGN IS ALREADY PARRIKAR-CENTRIC; HE IS NOW BUSY DOUSING PARTY FIRES TOO

at the BJP campaign office in Panaji every morning, reviews the progress, holds meetings with officials before stepping out for meetings. Indeed, the BJP campaign has already become Parrikar-centric. He is busy dousing party fires too. He rushed to Bicholim to pacify sulking leader Shilpa Naik who has stayed away from campaigning for the candidate, Rajesh Patnekar. In Mayem, he's busy mollifying party workers after speaker Anant Shet was denied a ticket (it has gone to ex-Congressman Pravin Zantye). Parrikar has refrained from speaking to the media, though. Parsekar, meanwhile, denies the campaign is Parrikar-centric. "We are all campaigning for the party. We are a team," he says. ■

Khalap (a former Union law minister) as influential leaders and he is accused of creating trouble for their educational institutions. Velingkar, a former RSS chief in Goa who has launched his own party, was also in his crosshairs. "Velingkar served as a teacher in Mandrem for 15 years. He built up the RSS in Goa. Locals still consider him their idol," says the source. But Parsekar is still confident of a fourth straight

victory. "I started from scrap here. I lost my first two elections but never gave up the BJP and its principles," he says. He is also confident of continuing in the CM's office. "We are fighting the election under my leadership. That is why the party has not named a CM candidate," he says.

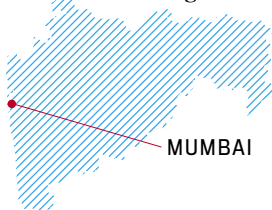
That the BJP is not relying on Parsekar is evident from the fact that Parrikar is camped in the state. He is

MAHARASHTRA

## Uncertain Future

By Kiran D. Tare

On January 26, when Uddhav Thackeray announced that the Shiv Sena would "go it alone" in the February 21 municipal and zilla parishad elections, he seemed confident that his party would retain its 22-year-old hold on the cash-rich Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). But insiders familiar with the Shiv Sena's workings say it was a last-minute decision, that Thackeray had wanted to partner the BJP for the BMC polls but was dissuaded by party veterans (they felt the latter has expanded its base in the state at the expense of the Sena). Ramdas Kadam, environment minister in Maharashtra's ruling coalition and a senior Shiv Sena leader, says, "BJP leaders have repeatedly referred to him (Thackeray) as 'mafia'. We cannot tolerate the use of such foul words against our leader."



MUMBAI

**WE'LL GO ALONE**  
Uddhav announcing  
Shiv Sena's decision >

MILIND SHELTE

▶ TAP TO WATCH VIDEO



Thackeray hopes his party will benefit from the extensive development works executed in Mumbai. “*Je bolato ke karoon dakhavato* (I deliver what I promise),” is his tagline for the polls as he highlights the dedicated tunnels to carry drinking water and improved pumping facilities that have saved the city from the massive monsoonal flooding of the past.

But the party also faces considerable criticism over allegations of massive corruption in road construction works and the gargantuan challenge of disposing of Mumbai’s garbage. Evidently hoping to cash in on this, the BJP’s BMC campaign is focused on the corruption under the Shiv Sena. “Transparency is our motto. We want to develop Mumbai with a transparent administration,” party leader Vinod Tawde says pointedly.

Thackeray believes the outcome of the BMC elections, reflecting the

## THE SHIV SENA HAS BEEN TRYING TO WIN OVER THE STRONG GUJARATI TRADER COMMUNITY

mood of the voters in India’s financial capital, will be a mandate on the Modi government’s demonetisation move. The Shiv Sena has been silently working to win over the influential community of Gujarati traders who have traditionally supported the BJP. This time around, however, they are calling favours by reminding the traders how Shiv Sainiks came out to protect their shops in the 1992-93 riots. Sources close to Thackeray even talk of a move to field more Gujaratis. “Every sixth Shiv Sena nominee will be a Gujarati,” they say.

Political observers say the future of the BJP-Shiv Sena coalition in Maharashtra hinges on the outcome of the BMC polls. In the event of the Sena losing the BMC polls, they say Thackeray will not hesitate to pull the plug on the Devendra Fadnavis government. ■



GUJARAT

## Gujarat’s Sixer Turn

Amit Shah’s management methods have helped craft the Gujarat cricket team’s success story

By Uday Mahurkar

**T**hey all thought it was a bit of a pipe-dream. Amit Shah’s stated aim of making the Gujarat cricket team one of the best in the country when he took charge as vice-president of the Gujarat Cricket Association (GCA) in 2009, was received by other office-bearers with some derision. As was the then association president Narendra Modi’s promise of bringing a new professionalism to the game.

Eight years on, with Shah taking over as GCA president after Modi moved to Delhi as prime minister in 2014, the BJP chief’s words have proved prophetic. The cricketing fraternity was agog on January 14 when Gujarat trumped Mumbai in the Ranji finals to finally take the trophy

home. And this was no fluke, coming close on the heels of wins in both one-day (Vijay Hazare Trophy, 2015-16) and T-20 (Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, 2014-15). In fact, Gujarat is the first team to have won in all three formats of the game.

Before the turnaround, Gujarat had been among the more poorly performing cricket teams in the country, having only ever made it to the Ranji trophy final once and that too over five decades ago (the state has two other teams in the Ranji trophy, Saurashtra and Baroda). Just one GCA player, Parthiv Patel, had made it to the na-

# 359

RUNS

Opener Samit Bahel’s score in the Ranji quarters, breaking a 117-year record





## DEADLY SPELL

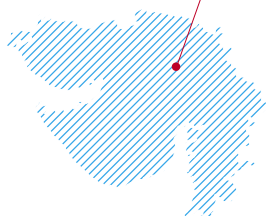
The winning Gujarat team pose with the Ranji trophy

tional squad in the decade preceding Shah's arrival. In contrast, three players—Parthiv Patel, Jasprit Bumrah and Axar Patel—now wear the India cap, five are in the India A team and six in the national Under-19 team.

It was no magic trick. Shah and his GCA team achieved the impossible about-face through a carefully crafted and nepotism-free selection process, an imaginative talent hunt, and a system of accountability that could well become a template for other state associations. Shah's message to the GCA selectors and coaches had been terse: "Not one talented boy must be left out," he had told them. Selection camps organised annually in each of the GCA's 11 districts brought in budding youngsters from remote towns and villages. The GCA also doubled the number of coaches to 17, recruited physical instructors for different age groups, got more bowling machines and installed software to create a performance database of players. GCA vice-president Parimal Nathwani, who was key to implementing Shah's gameplan, is now overseeing the construction of an all-new Rs 500 crore sports stadium with facilities to host 58 sporting disciplines (part of PM Modi's aim to bring other sports on par with cricket in the state). Others on Shah's team include son Jai Shah, a GCA joint secretary, and chief coach Vijay Patel.

Today, some 3,000 young players attend the GCA's annual coaching camps as against 300 earlier. And it is evidently paying off in a big way. Samit Gohel, a youngster from Anand, scored an unbeaten 359 runs in the Ranji quarterfinals, carrying his bat to break a 117-year-old national record. And then there's Navneet Vora, whose pace impressed even cricketing greats like Aussie Glenn McGrath, and Ranji newcomer Kamlesh Thakore, the son of a poor farmer from north Gujarat. Thakore did not even have a pair of shoes when Shah first saw him on the pitch. ■

GANDHINAGAR



BIHAR

# NEW LIGHT IN BIHAR

How one officer has pulled the state out of the dark ages

By Amitabh Srivastava

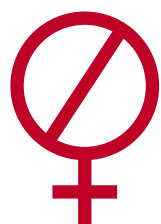


RANJAN RAHI

SWITCH ON P. Amrit (in white) at the Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana site in Bakhtiarpur, Patna

Bihar is ringing in what might be the biggest game-changer since Independence—reliable, uninterrupted electric power supply to even those remote corners of the state that have not seen a working light bulb for the almost seven decades India has been a free nation. It's been an onerous challenge. When Nitish Kumar first became chief minister in 2005, the default power distribution network was in a complete shambles. Most rural settlements had poles without power lines; more than 30,000 transformers were unserviceable, having burnt out years ago. There was ample electric power available from the Eastern Grid but Bihar just did not have the transmission/distribution network to use it. Even urban areas, including Patna, had to make do with 8-10 hours of electricity a day.

In June 2014, Nitish picked Pratyama Amrit, a 1991 batch IAS officer



## No State for Women

Kerala, India's most literate state with 1,084 females per 1,000 males (940/1,000 for India) and the highest human development index (HDI) score of 0.79, has recorded a distressing spike in rapes

1,609

Rapes reported in 2016. Up 25% over 2015 and 100% since five years ago

198

The maximum rapes have been in the capital district of Thiruvananthapuram

8

Rapes per 100,000 female population, compared with 1.3 in neighbouring Tamil Nadu; all-India average: 6.3

with a reputation for turning around near-impossible situations, as his energy secretary. The officer found an incredibly simple solution to Bihar's problematic power situation. Within three months, 30,000 faulty transformers were either repaired or replaced, and several hundred kilometres of new transmission lines were laid to kickstart the dysfunctional distribution network. Amrit introduced a new, streamlined system wherein contractors and suppliers, who earlier had to wait for months to be paid for works they had executed, now mandatorily received payments within 18 days. It is the quickest processing of payments for civil works in the

## **EVEN RURAL HOUSEHOLDS NOW GET OVER 12-18 HOURS OF POWER SUPPLY EVERY DAY**

country, and it has not only helped weed out corruption but has also significantly brought down project costs. "Contractors and suppliers were quoting higher prices to offset losses from delayed payments," the principal secretary explains.

Although still a 'work in progress', the change is visible across Bihar. Consider the numbers: per capita consumption is up to 258 units from the meagre 70 units when Nitish first became CM in 2005; overall power consumption has more than doubled from 1,751 MW in 2012 to 3,769 MW (in October 2016); the number of consumers has more than quadrupled from 1.73 million to 8.1 million households; and even rural households now get 12-18 hours of power supply every day. "Our objective is to connect every household in the state by the end of 2018," says the CM. Of the total 39,073 villages in Bihar, now less than a thousand have yet to be electrified in the state (which means over 98 per cent of villages are already electrified). ■

KERALA

# Babu War in Kerala

The state's top civil servants are at each other's throats

By Jeemon Jacob

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM



▲ **NOT MY PROBLEM:** CM Pinarayi Vijayan (left) with IAS officers at a meeting

Several senior civil servants in Kerala applied for casual leave on January 9 to protest the state vigilance department registering cases against them. The immediate catalyst was a chargesheet brought against additional chief secretary for industries, Paul Antony, in the nepotism case against former industries minister E.P. Jayarajan. The mass leave protest eventually didn't happen. But after six months of the new Left Front government, a bureaucratic dogfight is dragging the administration down in the state.

Senior bureaucrats say vigilance director Jacob Thomas is "misusing the department to trap fellow officers who exposed his own corruption in the past". The latest official in the web is chief secretary S.M. Vijayanand, targeted in a case registered on November 9 last year,

for allegedly delaying a probe against former state intelligence chief and additional DGP, R. Sreelekha. "I'm least bothered about what happens to me in the future. I've served the government and the people with the utmost sincerity and integrity," says Vijayanand. Some of the others facing the 'vigilance witch-hunt' are additional chief secretaries K.M. Abraham and Tom Jose.

**Those  
probing the  
'charges' are  
themselves  
under the  
scanner**

Ironically, those responsible for investigating the 'charges', are themselves under the scanner. Nalini Netto, additional chief secretary for home, for instance, is being investigated on charges of 'manipulating government files' to ensure the sacking of ex-DGP (law and order) T.P. Senkumar. And vigilance chief Thomas faces a 'misappropriation of funds' charge from the time he was ports director (2012-15). ■



ANDHRA PRADESH

# Naidu's Quota Conundrum

The Kapu community's demand for reservations could make things sticky for the Andhra Pradesh CM

By Amarnath K. Menon



▲ **GONE KAPU:** Protests by community members

**M**udragada Padmanabham, the patriarch of Andhra Pradesh's numerically strong Kapu community, wants quotas for them in educational institutions and government jobs, which means including them in the backward classes (BCs). And he's ready to do whatever it takes to get chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu to concede.

In a bind, Naidu ordered for Padmanabham to be placed under house arrest on January 25, just as he was preparing to lead a 116-km protest march from

Ravulapalem to Anataravedi in the Godavari delta. More than 2,000 riot-ready policemen descended on Kirlampudi, his native village, and neighbouring settlements to stall the 'satyagraha'. But Padmanabham is adamant. "If lawful forms of protests are not allowed, we will teach the ruling party a lesson in the next assembly elections," he said. Padmanabham wants Naidu to implement the recommendations of the K.L. Manjunath Commission (the report is expected later this year), sanction more funds to the Kapu Welfare Commission

and establish hostels for impoverished Kapu students.

Changed demographics, owing to the bifurcation of the state, have worked in Kapus' favour. Once just 17 per cent of the population in undivided Andhra, Kapus are now an electorally significant 27 per cent. Aware of the difference they could make in elections, Naidu included five Kapus in his council of ministers, including N. Chinnarajappa as deputy CM. There are 18 Kapu MLAs and two MPs. But the community is far from impressed. ■

RAJASTHAN

# Child's Play

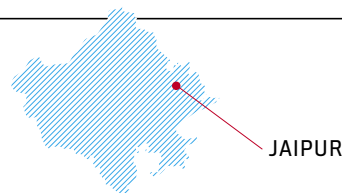
By Rohit Parihar

**C**hief minister Vasundhara Raje's initiative of revamping some 61,000 anganwadis—state-run day care centres that cater to a million pre-school children between three and six years old—is clearly a winner. Launched in June 2016, the scheme involves bringing toys, clothes and books to poor children in the anganwadis through private contributions from individuals,

**0.35**  
MILLION  
Fresh enrolments at anganwadis in the scheme's first six months

voluntary groups and corporates.

According to Rajasthan's women & child development secretary Kuldeep Ranka, 7.5 million items were received and distributed to anganwadis across the state in the first six months of the scheme. "Our focus has been to involve the community as much as possible,"



JAIPUR

the officer says. "So in a lot of villages, locals have also been making small contributions." It's no wonder then that there have been 350,000 fresh enrolments at the centres in the last half year, leading to a revision of the state government's target of children in anganwadis to 1.5 million.

Some district administrations have also extended the scheme to include older children by setting up or strengthening libraries with contributions of books. ■



◀ **JOINT VENTURE:** SP and Congress supporters during a roadshow by Akhilesh Yadav and Rahul Gandhi in Lucknow on January 29

**SURVEY | ASSEMBLY POLLS**

# CLIFFHANGER IN UP

The BJP falls short of a clear majority in Lucknow, yet is a frontrunner in three out of four states, predicts the India Today-Axis pre-poll survey. The Congress is poised for a majority in Punjab

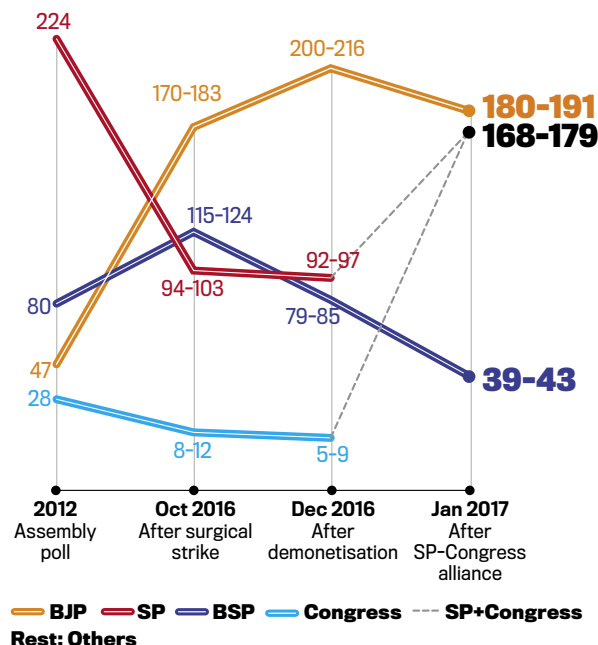
**By Ajit Kumar Jha**



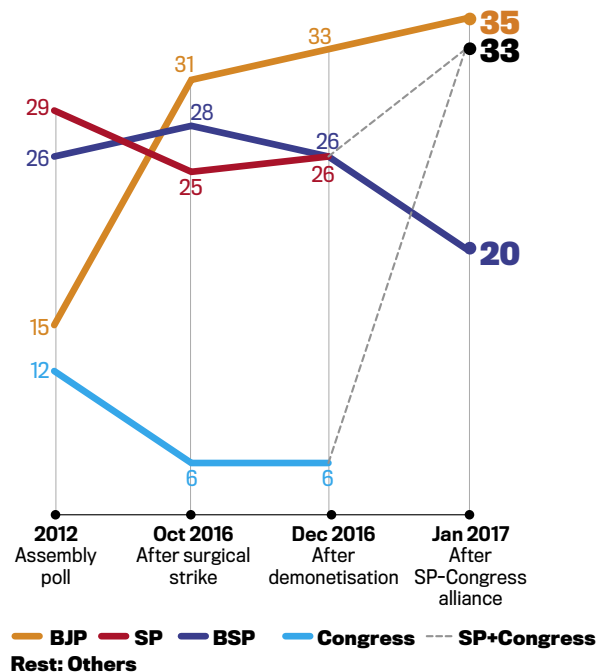
# Game Wide Open

In **Uttar Pradesh**, a surging SP-Congress alliance is snapping at the BJP's heels

## SEATS/TOTAL 403



## VOTE SHARE %



The SP and Congress are in a pre-poll alliance in UP, so the projections are for the alliance. All vote percentages corrected to nearest decimal.

Source: Election Commission for 2012; India Today-Axis pre-poll survey for Oct 2016, Dec 2016 and Jan 2017 projections

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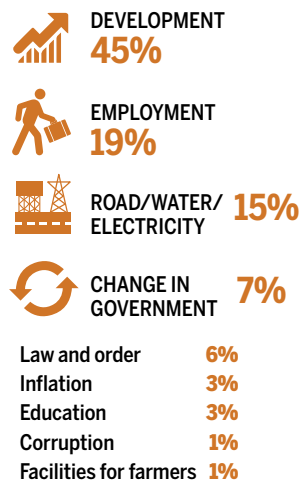
escribe it as a personal chemistry between the 43-year-old Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav and the 46-year-old Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi, or explain it as the geometric progression of the pre-poll Samajwadi Party-Congress alliance.

But the truth is the alliance between the two parties is rapidly reducing the advantage the Bharatiya Janata Party enjoyed till recently, buoyed by the public response to the surgical strike across the LoC and demonetisation being sold as a pro-poor initiative. As UP heads to vote, the INDIA TODAY-Axis pre-poll survey reveals that what started as a three-cornered contest—between the BJP, BSP and SP-Congress alliance—is ending up as a fiercely competitive bipolar fight between the BJP, as the single largest party, and the surging SP-Congress alliance.

The survey shows that the edge held by the BJP in the surveys in October and December 2016 has begun to give way. In the January 2017 survey, the seats projected for the BJP have reduced to a range of 180-191 (out of 403) from 206-216 in December. This despite the party's popular vote share increasing by 1.6 per cent, from 33.2 per cent in December to 34.8 per cent now. Since opinion polls usually have a margin of error of up to 3 per cent, the BJP's marginal lead in India's bellwether state could turn either way in a closely contested election. The SP-Congress alliance is projected to get 168 to 179 seats, compared to just 92 to 97 seats for the SP and 5 to 7 for the Congress in December.

The implications of this late surge by the alliance will surely change political equations in Lucknow after March 11, the vote-count day. With a slender lead, the BJP is likely to end up as the single largest party, prevented by the SP-Congress alliance from forming a government on its own. Or else, the alliance, with 33.2 per cent popular vote, will not only close the 1.6 percentage point gap with the BJP but snatch the number one position from it. The potential of the alliance crossing the finishing line is also indicated by the choice of chief minister among the respondents, 45 per cent of who consider development as the main electoral issue. Incumbent CM Akhilesh Yadav, who has announced a slew of development projects in the state, enjoys 35 per cent popularity

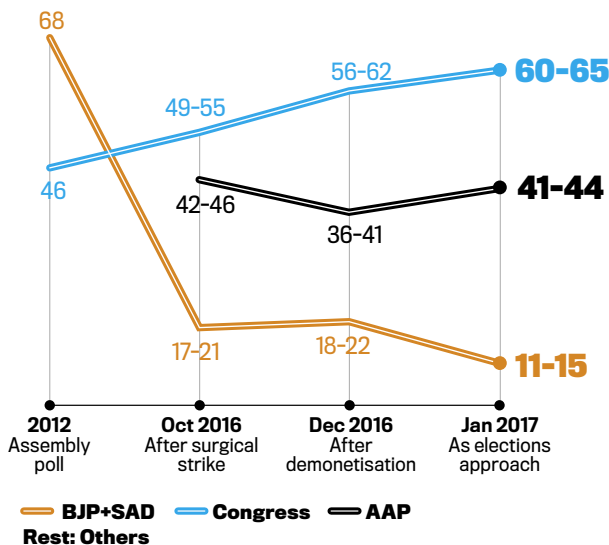
## What is the biggest issue in the UP polls?



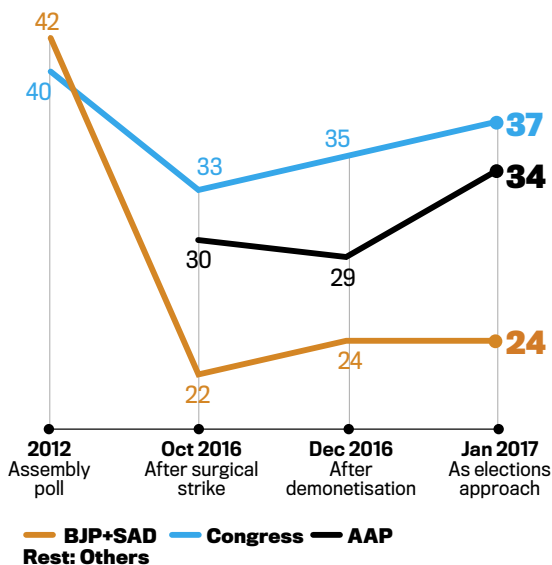
# Congress Comeback

In **Punjab**, anti-incumbency against SAD-BJP is expected to give the Congress a clear shot at power. The AAP comes a strong second

## SEATS/ TOTAL 117



## VOTE SHARE %



The SAD and BJP are in a pre-poll alliance in Punjab as was the case in 2012, so the projections are for the alliance

Source: Election Commission for 2012; India Today-Axis pre-poll survey for Oct 2016, Dec 2016 and Jan 2017 projections

QAMAR SIBTAIN



**TAP TO WATCH VIDEO**

▲ **CAPTAIN COMMAND:** Congress leader Amarinder Singh speaks to the media while campaigning in Amritsar on January 19

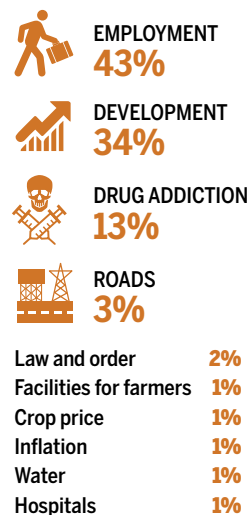
as the next CM. His nearest rival, BJP veteran Rajnath Singh, is way behind at 21 per cent.

While it is practically neck-and-neck between the BJP and SP-Congress alliance, the Bahujan Samaj Party is a distant third with 20 per cent popular vote share but projected seats as few as 39-43. Surveys frequently underestimate the BSP, despite the silent support it enjoys among the masses. The question is whether the BSP's apparent losses will translate into gains for the BJP or the SP-Congress alliance. The answer partly lies in how far the alliance is able to paper over the contradictions in seat arrangements on the ground during the next six weeks of the campaign and how much the Narendra Modi-led NDA government is able to sell Budget 2017 to the voters in India's most populous and politically significant state.

In Punjab's triangular contest, the survey shows the Congress continuing to ride a strong anti-incumbency wave against the 10-year-old Shiromani Akali Dal-BJP government. With a 37 per cent popular vote share and seats projected in the range of 60 to 65 (out of 117), the Congress looks to be in a position to form the government. However, the Aam Aadmi Party is poised to make big gains and finish a close runner-up, with only a 3 percentage point gap with the Congress and a projection of as many as 41-44 seats. The SAD-BJP alliance is hopelessly behind, with 24 per cent voter support and just 11-15 seats.

In both Goa and Uttarakhand, says the survey, the BJP appears to enjoy an edge

## What is the biggest issue in the Punjab elections?



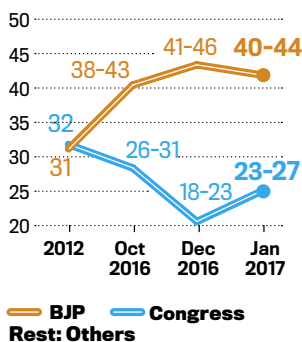
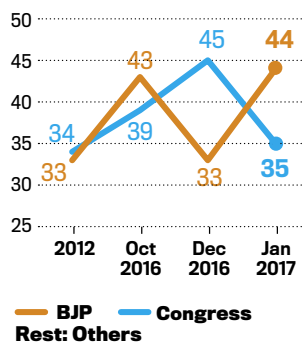



**SURVEY | ASSEMBLY POLLS**

◀ **CENTRESTAGE:** BJP president Amit Shah, flanked by party leaders, at a rally in Dehradun on November 13 last year

## Hill Thrill for BJP

In **Uttarakhand**, the Congress's loss is the BJP's gain. With a 9 per cent lead in popular vote share, the BJP is projected to win hands down

**SEATS/ TOTAL 70**

**VOTE SHARE %**


Source: Election Commission for 2012; India Today-Axis pre-poll survey for Oct 2016, Dec 2016 and Jan 2017 projections

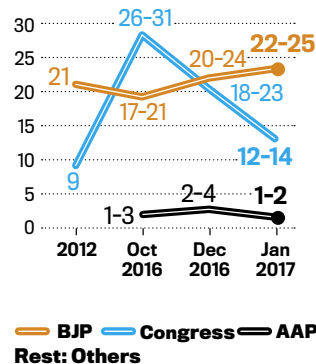
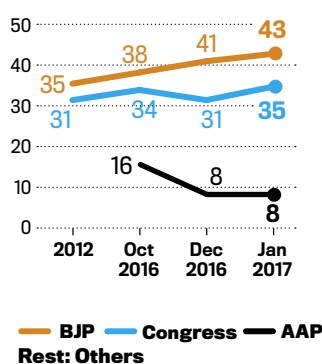
# 35

PER CENT

voters in  
Uttarakhand want  
B.C. Khanduri as  
the next CM

## Goa No Gamble

The BJP is seen comfortably holding on to power. The division of Opposition votes between the Congress and AAP only makes it easier

**SEATS/ TOTAL 40**

**VOTE SHARE %**


There was no AAP in 2012

over its challengers. The BJP's advantage in the 70-seat Uttarakhand is because of the strong anti-incumbency against the Congress. In contrast, the BJP, as the incumbent in Goa, is benefitting from the split in the opposition vote between the Congress and new player AAP. The survey projects the BJP's seats in Goa in the range of 22-25 out of 40 and the Congress's at 12-14. In Uttarakhand, there is a yawning gap between the popular vote shares of the BJP (44 per cent) and the Congress (35 per cent). The BJP could bag 40-44 seats, restricting the Congress to 23-27.

The fierce battle for the throne in UP is the result of a bipolar sociological divide across communities. According to the survey, while the BJP has 68 per cent support among the upper castes and 56 per cent across the backward castes, barring the Yadavs, the SP-Congress alliance draws 82 per cent support from Yadavs and 74 per cent from Muslims. The BSP gets 60 per cent support from the Dalits. Despite 99 tickets distributed among Muslims, the party has only secured 12 per cent support from the community, down from 20 per cent in 2012. In Punjab, the Congress is more popular among the backward castes and Dalits among Hindus. The AAP draws greater support from the backward castes and Dalits among Sikhs. The Congress is more popular among the urban voters while the AAP finds greater appeal in the countryside.

Victories in UP, Uttarakhand and Goa are likely to give the BJP a boost countrywide. But a Congress win in Punjab and the possibility of the SP-Congress alliance in UP beating the BJP could turn the tide. After defeats in the politically significant Delhi and Bihar assembly polls, potential losses in major states like Punjab and UP could dent PM Modi's image as the main vote-getter for the BJP. An advantage for the SP-Congress alliance in UP could definitely change the fortunes of Akhilesh and Rahul for a bigger national role in 2019. ■

COVER STORY

BUDGET 2017

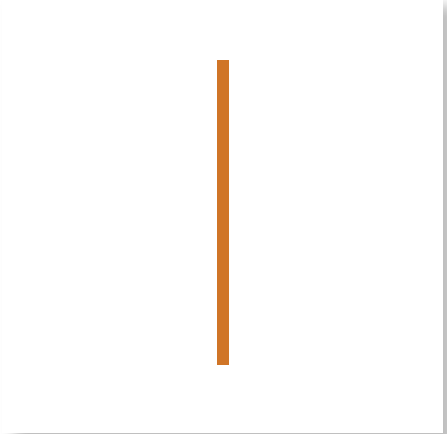
# BETTING ON BHARAT

MODI NOW PUTS THE AAM AADMI AT  
THE CENTRE OF HIS ECONOMIC NARRATIVE

By Raj Chengappa







**IN LIFE OF PI**, the Oscar-winning movie about a shipwrecked Indian's fantastic tale of survival with a ferocious tiger in a boat adrift on the Pacific, the insurance agents have a hard time believing him. So Pi spins an alternative narrative that eliminates the tiger and brings in humans. And then asks: which story do you believe?

After unleashing the demonetisation tsunami, Modi had donned the mantle of the great reformer and moderniser who was unafraid of taking risks and offending his core supporters if he believed an action would result in the greater good of the nation. He had positioned himself as the new messiah of the poor and had also appropriated the role of a crusader against corruption.

Now past the half-way mark of his tenure, Modi was acutely aware that the budget could make or mar his chances of being re-elected as prime minister in 2019. He was also conscious that while there was broad-based support for his drastic moves to root out black money, he had to now provide some balm for all the pain the demonetisation had inflicted. On the immediate horizon were the assembly elections, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, where a defeat for the BJP could mar the remaining years of his tenure.

There were other equally critical considerations. Demonetisation had considerably slowed India's economic momentum and his government was forced to admit that GDP growth would be down from 7.5 per cent to 6.5 per cent. Private sector investment and expansion had almost ground to a halt, with key sectors reporting a drop in demand and profits. Banks, saddled with bad loans even before demonetisation, remained conservative and were cautious about lending to corporates despite now being flush with funds.

The prime minister was also deeply concerned with the job famine across the country, exacerbated by the shortage of cash, particularly in the informal sector. One indication was that there was higher uptake of employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural

Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) in the current year—clearly a sign of distress.

Internationally, there was a worrying turn of events with both Brexit and Donald Trump's victory signalling the beginning of a possible deglobalisation process and a new era of protectionism. There was a global slowdown in demand and economic growth. There was concern that there would be higher outflows of foreign investment from emerging economies like India back to the US. The traditional export-led growth model India had banked on for two decades was beginning to falter.

**MODI WAS FACED** with some tough choices. Everyone expected him to give the economy a booster shot to arrest the downward spiral and bring GDP growth back to 7 per cent levels. While formulating the budget, Modi and Jaitley, however, resisted the temptation of indulging in fiscal adventurism or straightout populism. Instead, they homed in on four critical areas of concern: how to boost investment, how to generate demand, how to create more jobs and, however counter-intuitive it seemed, how to maintain fiscal prudence.

For Modi personally, there were two more imperatives—he was clear the budget should underline his pro-*garib* image. Also, it was important that the budget showed that demonetisation was not a full stop but a comma in his battle against black money. So Modi and his team decided to risk it all and bet big on Bharat—that other India of the less privileged masses in rural and urban areas.

To boost investment, with big capital showing no appetite for expansion, they decided to increase spending on major public welfare undertakings and schemes. But instead of announcing a host of new schemes to win applause, as has been the habit, the team focused on augmenting spending in key sectors, particularly infrastructure, that were already showing good results. The most visible was in the road sector, where Jaitley claimed

that the NDA government had built 140,000 km, or 160 km a day, since they came to power in 2014. His budget provided Rs 64,900 crore in 2017-18 for this sector—a 12 per cent hike. Since the construction sector was largely informal, any surge in investments would see the creation of more jobs, particularly for unskilled workers.

**T**O BOOST DEMAND and employment, Modi and his team then homed in on another demographic imperative in India: apart from *roti* (food), *kapda* (clothes), every Indian desires a *makaan* (shelter) that s/he can call home. The budget and the prime minister's New Year's eve sops contain a raft of measures and incentives designed to boost demand and investment for the housing sector, both in urban and rural areas. Among them was the decision to give affordable housing the infrastructure tag, which would help lower interest rates on bank loans, and also a proposal to build a staggering 10 million houses by 2019 under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.

Then, instead of relying on big business to deliver on jobs, they decided that “small is more beautiful” by backing the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector. MSMEs account for the bulk of economic activities across the country—they are the largest employers. This was also the sector that faced the brunt of the ill-effects of demonetisation. Ironically, these businesses were paying an effective tax rate of 30.3 per cent while the rate for large industries was 25.9 per cent. So, in one shot, Jaitley reduced income tax to 25 per cent for smaller companies with annual turnovers of up to Rs 50 crore.

Somewhat the same approach was taken to provide relief to small wage-earners with incomes of less than Rs 5 lakh and bring back the ‘feel-good’ factor. These constitute as much as 80 per cent of the total tax-paying public of 37 million. For them, Jaitley reduced the tax rate to almost negligible levels, claiming that this would widen the tax base in the future by encouraging more people to file returns. While the high network taxpayers and the middle class may chafe, Modi was able to put money in the hands of the people who faced the most hardship during demonetisation. It also helped in reiterating that his government favoured the have-nots.

Two others pieces completed this finely balanced budget. On curbing black money generated by political funding, Modi knew that he would have trouble modifying the Representation of the People Act to bring in more stringent controls, as his party lacked a majority in the

Rajya Sabha. So he used the budget to turn into law measures that would bring down the volume of anonymous donations and also introduced a system of electoral bonds to keep track of funding.

Finally, Modi resisted the strong push to throw fiscal prudence to the winds. Had he taken that path, it might have won him brownie points at home, but there was the danger of it leading to inflationary tendencies just when the government had boasted that it had managed to keep inflation strictly under check. Also, after the demonetisation drive, which was strongly criticised by many foreign investors, Modi was keen to project to the world that his government believed in consistency, continuity and fiscal consolidation, and as an official put it, “drew a *lakshman rekha* for us that we would not be allowed to cross”. He was also careful not to announce schemes that would make

him fall afoul of the Election Commission.

Jaitley exuded confidence that his fourth budget would be a gamechanger and in his speech said: “When my aim is right, when my goal is in sight, the winds favour me and I fly.” (For an assessment of the budget, see accompanying report.) Minutes before Finance Minister Arun Jaitley presented the budget to Parliament, the Union cabinet met to give its concurrence, as is the norm. At the meeting, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in an unusually stern tone, instructed his colleagues: “Go through the budgetary provisions for your respective ministries with a magnifying glass and see that everything gets under way by April 1.”

Modi is acutely aware that he may falter in the over-reliance on government and its bureaucrats to deliver. The major criticism against the budget is that instead of reducing the government's involvement, it has only expanded Bharat *sarkar's* role in development.

The other failing is that Jaitley did nothing to reduce the amount of subsidies on fertilisers and food, which have, in fact, grown in the new budget. Ashok Lavasa, finance secretary, pleaded helplessness in reducing the food subsidy as more and more states are covered under the National Food Security Act. He said the government had gone a long way in plugging loopholes and ensuring that subsidies reach the people through such measures as the Direct Benefit Transfer scheme.

Modi's critics say that far from thinking of the next generation, the prime minister always has his eyes on the next election. That he is tall on talk and short on action. So, is Modi, the great helmsman, navigating India successfully through these stormy waters to prosperity and glory? Or is he an emperor without clothes who will soon be exposed? Which narrative do you believe? ■

**The PM and FM homed in on four key areas: boost investment, generate demand, create jobs and maintain fiscal prudence**





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Finance Minister  
Arun Jaitley arrives  
with MoS finance  
Arjun Meghwal to  
present the budget



# A FINE BALANCE

**FM JAITLEY PULLS OFF A PLEASE-ALL BUDGET THAT LOWERS TAXES AND STIMULATES KEY SECTORS, WITHOUT COMPROMISING ON FISCAL PRUDENCE**

**By M.G. Arun and Shweta Punj**



## **S UNION FINANCE MINIS-**

**TER** Arun Jaitley rose to present independent India's 87th budget—and his fourth—he had very few options. Hard-pressed as he was to follow the fiscal discipline he had initiated in 2014, he also had to offer a few sops to placate those

who had borne the pain of demonetisation. Union Budget 2017-18, then, shaped up as a well-calibrated, cautious yet pragmatic document. It addresses, to some extent, the stated goals of this government—moving the country towards a more formal structure by widening the tax base, reducing dependence on cash by encouraging digital transactions, helping grassroots businesses develop and create jobs, and systematically curbing black money and corruption.

Apart from the sops to affordable housing and new norms for electoral funding to boost transparency, Jaitley refrained from throwing any surprises, or trying to please investors with the so-called 'big bang' reforms. They seemed pleased all the same, driving the benchmark Sensex up 1.76 per cent or 485.68 points on Tuesday to close at 28,141.64. "This is a growth-oriented budget," said Adi Godrej, chairman of the Godrej group. "Coupled with the implementation of the GST (Goods and Services Tax), this will add to the GDP growth of the country." That should be music to the FM's ears, coming as it did after the Economic Survey, on January 31, had lowered the country's estimated GDP growth rate to 6.5 per cent for 2016-17.

Despite being the auspicious day of Basant Panchami—

when Saraswati Puja is celebrated in many parts of the country—for Jaitley, it didn't start well. Former Union minister and Muslim League (IUML) leader E. Ahamed had passed away the previous day (January 31), and Opposition parties were clamouring for a postponement of the budget. But with the speaker ruling otherwise, Jaitley began his speech, invoking the warmth and optimism of spring. And perhaps that's what Budget 2017-2018 accomplished. The good part was the FM chose to deviate only slightly from the path of fiscal consolidation by pegging the fiscal deficit for 2017-18 at 3.2 per cent of the GDP against the 3 per cent target set under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) framework. "The solid, consistent path of fiscal discipline continues," said chief economic advisor Arvind Subramanian. The move to scrap the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) was lauded by many as it would help ease FDI inflow into the country.

**DESPITE THE 'HOUSING FOR ALL'** project announced two years ago, there has not been much progress in the affordable housing segment, primarily because there weren't enough incentives for developers. But with affordable housing now accorded infrastructure status, experts feel that the sector will improve. "[The] tax burden on affordable housing projects will now be deferred, which is an incentive," says Gulam Zia, a partner with property consulting firm, Knight Frank. Tax on joint development agreements (between land owners and developers) will also now have to be paid only upon completion of project. "For projects under the 'infrastructure' tag, tax on bank loans will also come down by 3-4 per cent," he says. But on the flip side, the budget does

# THE FIVE THRUST AREAS

Budget 2017 is a please-all mission statement. It proposes no increase in direct taxation and prioritises government spending in five key areas

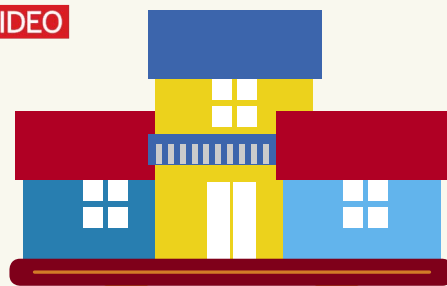
Graphics by Tanmoy Chakraborty

## HOUSING

- Affordable housing has been given infrastructure status
- Government to construct 10 million houses for the homeless by 2019. PM Awas Yojana-Gramin allocation raised to **Rs 23,000 crore** from **Rs 15,000 crore** in 2016-17
- National Housing Bank to refinance individual housing loans of about Rs 20,000 crore in 2017-18

**Benefits:** Government commitment, tax exemptions and a rejig of capital gains tax will boost sentiment. Infrastructure tag means construction firms can get loans at lower rates

**Jobs:** Too early to predict



## ENTREPRENEURSHIP

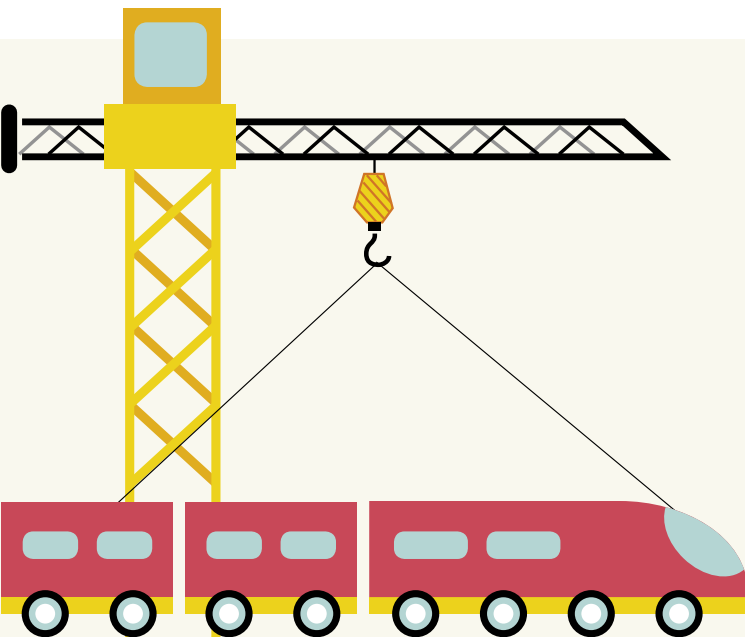
- Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) credit can now be carried forward up to a period of 15 years, instead of 10 years at present
- Income tax for companies with annual turnover up to Rs 50 crore has been reduced to 25 per cent from 30 per cent
- Tax holidays for start-ups extended by two more years

**Benefits:** Boosts market sentiment towards MSMEs, could nudge them towards expansion/ adoption of better technology

**Jobs:** Too early to predict. Many MSMEs sick, other have structural challenges. They also await an exit policy







## AGRICULTURE

➤ Total allocation for rural, agri and allied sectors is Rs 1.87 lakh crore

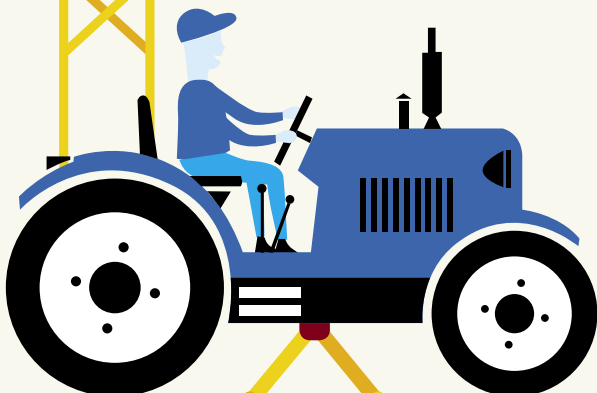
➤ MNREGA allocation increased to Rs 48,000 crore

➤ Nabard fund up to Rs 40,000 crore. Irrigation corpus doubled to Rs 40,000 crore, dairy processing corpus hiked to Rs 2,000 crore

➤ Rs 9,000 crore for crop insurance under Fasal Bima Yojana; agri credit target, Rs 10 lakh crore

**Benefits:** More agriculture credit as banks are flush. Food processing and organised retail to benefit significantly

**Jobs:** New contract farming law could open sector to investments, boost employment



## INFRASTRUCTURE

➤ Allocation of Rs 2.4 lakh crore for roads, rail, shipping in 2017-18

➤ Capital and development expenditure at Rs 1.31 lakh crore

➤ Rs 1 lakh crore rail safety corpus to be created over five years

➤ 3,500 km of railway lines to be commissioned; at least 25 stations to be redeveloped

➤ Budget allocation for highways up to Rs 64,900 crore in 2017-18

➤ 2,000 km of coastal connectivity roads to be developed

➤ 150,000 panchayats to get high-speed broadband under BharatNet

**Benefits:** Will spur demand in cement, steel and transport sectors

**Jobs:** Unskilled labour in construction; more jobs in steel, cement and transport sectors



## DIGITAL TRANSACTIONS

➤ Referral bonus schemes for individuals, cashback scheme for merchants to promote digital payment app BHIM

➤ Merchant version of Aadhaar enabled Payment System to be launched shortly

➤ Target of 25 billion digital transactions for 2017-18 through UPI, USSD, Aadhaar Pay, IMPS and debit cards

➤ Banks to introduce an additional 1 million PoS terminals by March 2017; 2 million Aadhaar-based terminals by September 2017

➤ RBI Payments Regulatory Board to replace Board for Regulation and Supervision of Payment and Settlement System

**Benefits:** Regulatory mechanism, cash expenditure limits and customs and excise duty reductions in PoS machines could lead to explosive growth in the sector

**Jobs:** E-wallet firms to go on hiring spree, jobs in sales, marketing and for engineers

# WAR ON BLACK MONEY

Budget 2017 battles the parallel economy by bringing in government oversight, penalties and restrictions

## Restrictions on daily cash transactions

Limit of Rs 3 lakh (per person per day) on cash transactions. In case of a breach, the **receiver pays** penalty equal to the total amount received

## Penalty on delay in filing tax return

Rs 5,000 fine for returns filed after due date, but on or before December 31 of assessment year. Rs 10,000 fine otherwise (Rs 1,000 if total income below Rs 5 lakh)

## Cashless businesses pay less tax

The use of cash to conduct business will lead to lower tax benefits. Businesses paying out

more than Rs 10,000 a day in cash will not be eligible for tax exemptions

## Tougher PAN rules

New section of Income Tax Act proposed to strengthen PAN mechanism. All payments that are subject to TDS will require a PAN number. Failure to comply will result in double TDS being charged

## Penalty for incorrect information

Accountants, registered valuers and merchant bankers will have to pay a penalty if found to have furnished incorrect information



not address how land can be unlocked and made available for affordable housing, especially in city centres.

The other key aspect in the sector is the government promise to construct 10 million houses for the homeless by 2019, which should boost demand in the cement and steel sectors. Allocation under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana has been raised to Rs 23,000 crore and the National Housing Bank will now refinance housing loans of about Rs 20,000 crore in 2017-18, giving a further push to the sector. To be sure, in his New Year's Eve speech, PM Narendra Modi had promised that in 2017, people from the middle and lower middle classes would get a discount of 4 per cent for home loans of up to Rs 9 lakh, and of 3 per cent for loans up to Rs 12 lakh. That, coupled with the provisions of the budget, should help create new demand for houses.

The time limit for capital gains to be considered a long-term gain has been reduced to two years from the earlier three years. This should also encourage more buying and selling of property. "Affordable housing developers will now be eligible for several government incentives, subsidies, tax benefits and, most importantly, institutional funding," says Neeraj Bansal, partner at KPMG in India.

**INFRASTRUCTURE, ANOTHER AREA** that is often talked about but is riddled with delays and cancellations of projects, was given another push. With the Railway budget being integrated with the main budget for the first time, multi-modal transport was expected to get a special boost. And just as in the previous years, Jaitley did not disappoint—a significant Rs 3.96 lakh crore has been committed to developing infrastructure in the next fiscal. He also unveiled

the largest-ever rail budget of Rs 1.31 lakh crore.

Vinayak Chatterjee, chairman, Feedback Infra, explains that nearly 18 per cent of the total budget outlay is targeted at infrastructure. The major thrust is on programmes related to highways, rural roads, railways and rural electrification. However, there is a catch. The roads ministry was unable to spend the money allocated to it last year—of the Rs 58,000 crore allocated, only Rs 52,000 crore was spent. "The biggest problem was to get private investment up, clean up infrastructure NPAs (non-performing assets) and corporate balance sheets. Not mentioning that in the budget was a big gap," Chatterjee adds.

With rail accidents all too common in India, the creation of a railway safety fund with a corpus of Rs 1 lakh crore, which will be given seed capital by the finance ministry, was long overdue. The Railways will also increase its throughput by 10 per cent by upgrading dedicated corridors that have high traffic volumes. It will also lay down 3,500 km of tracks in 2017-18. A new metro rail policy will be announced, and 25 stations are expected to be selected for revamp in 2017-18.

For the road sector, Jaitley has allocated Rs 67,000 crore for the national highways in 2017-18, while the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana for rural roads gets Rs 19,000 crore and some 2,000 km of coastal connectivity roads are set to be constructed. "The 12 per cent year-on-year increase in budget allocation for the highways sector, notwithstanding an increase of 32 per cent in the previous year, still provides a boost to infrastructure," says Devendra Pant of research agency India Ratings. This is a much-needed push, Pant says, since the sector has seen an increase of 37 per cent



year-on-year in the total length constructed in FY16, apart from the increase in land acquisition. However, timely project execution within budgeted costs will be critical here.

**CONTINUING THE RURAL PUSH** from his budget last year, Jaitley has resorted to steps that put more money into the hands of farmers. The farming sector is looking up after a good monsoon (the Economic Survey sees agricultural growth rising to 4.1 per cent in the current fiscal from 1.2 per cent in drought-hit 2015-16). Total allocation for rural, agricultural and allied sectors for 2017-18 is a record Rs 1.87 lakh crore, an increase of 24 per cent from last year (over last year's budget estimates). Taking a cue from the two consecutive drought years that crippled the agri sector, a micro-irrigation fund will be set up by Nabard for the goal of 'Per Drop More Crop' (initial corpus Rs 5,000 crore). Nabard will also set up a dairy processing infrastructure fund with Rs 8,000 crore. Allocation for the rural employment scheme MNRREGA has been increased to a record Rs 48,000 crore for 2017-18. Adequate credit flow will also be ensured to two under-served areas, the eastern states and Jammu & Kashmir. Farmers will get short-term crop loans of up to Rs 3 lakh at a subsidised interest rate of 7 per cent per annum. For prompt repayment, they get an extra incentive of 3 per cent, bringing the effective interest rate down to 4 per cent for disciplined borrowers. These, along with Modi's December 31 announcement of 3 per cent interest waivers on loans up to Rs 2 lakh for construction of houses in rural India and 60 days' interest waivers for farm loans taken from cooperative banks, should form a strong rural stimulus.

**WHILE THE REDUCTION** in personal income tax should boost disposable incomes, the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector has come in for a big bonanza in the budget. Firms with a turnover of up to Rs 50 crore have had their taxes cut from 30 per cent to 25 per cent. MSMEs had borne the brunt of demonetisation as demand for products dwindled and they struggled to pay salaries due to a cash squeeze. While this is a relief, the move to double the lending target to Rs 2.44 lakh crore under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana will be a boost to the sector. Tax concessions given to the MSMEs—increasing the period of profit-linked deductions available to start-ups from the current three years out of five years to seven years, giving an additional five years to pay Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT), and reduction of income tax for companies with an annual turnover of up to Rs 50 crore to 25 per cent (30 per cent now) could free up resources for MSMEs for modernisation.

Ajay Sahai of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations is hopeful of some targeted stimulus packages, especially towards the gems and jewellery sector, after the budget. Overall, Sahai is more optimistic about the move-

ment on free trade agreements with the European Union where India is losing to competition from Indonesia and Thailand and a more stable currency to give MSMEs a push. Total benefits from tax reduction for the MSMEs come to Rs 7,000 crore in forgone revenue.

**THE HOPE WAS THAT** the budget would give a direct push to job creation, which emerged as a top worry in INDIA TODAY's Mood of the Nation survey published a week ago. Manish Sabharwal, chairman of manpower firm Team-Lease, says the government's clear focus is on infrastructure and formalisation of the economy, and not so much on human capital. "Our problem is not jobs alone, it is good jobs. You have to raise productivity," he says. Sabharwal had urged the FM to reduce what he calls "regulatory cholesterol"—it is not the government's job to create jobs, but to create an environment for job creation, he believes. A NITI Aayog analysis says that among the Make in India sectors, construction generated nearly 50 million jobs in 2011-12,

so a concerted push here should create more employment. But that hinges on new demand. Leather generated 1.31 million jobs in 2011-12, textiles 18.86 million jobs (the sector got a Rs 6,226.50 crore push in the budget), ports, railways, roads and highways created 9.1 million jobs and tourism 8.22 million. These sectors, if rejuvenated, could mitigate the employment crisis. Meanwhile, the Rs 1,555 crore outlay for remission of state levies would help garment exports, Textiles Minister Smriti Irani said. Garments also got a Rs 200 crore boost to generate jobs.

The proposal to reduce corporate tax rates and balancing it out with phasing out exemptions was an idea that found a lot of takers, but was restricted to the MSMEs. The budget makes no

definite push towards increasing consumption. The FM has adopted a clever play of numbers while citing a 24 per cent increase in rural and social spend by comparing this year's budget estimate to last year's. Ideally, this year's budget estimate should have been compared with last year's revised estimate, which yields 7 per cent expenditure growth, experts say. Many felt the FM should have addressed the recapitalisation of public sector banks reeling under bad loans. "The banking sector needed more money for capitalisation and the Rs 10,000 crore in the budget is too little," says Chanda Kochhar, MD and CEO of ICICI Bank.

The budget sidestepped the impact of demonetisation. Many feel the FM's silence was an implicit admission that the government's initial estimates of black money holdings in cash were off the mark. It was also important that the budget didn't ruffle feathers with five states going to polls soon after. Given this, it must be said that Jaitley walked the tightrope well, with some flourish even, in the way that he has managed to put money in the hands of the *aam aadmi* without resorting to any fiscal extravagance. ■

▶  
**Compared  
to last year's  
revised  
estimate,  
this budget  
yields 7%  
expenditure  
growth**  
▶

Reader's  
digest

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# GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?

NINE EXPERTS GIVE THEIR VERDICT ON ARUN JAITLEY'S  
FOURTH BUDGET AND ITS LIKELY IMPACT ON A  
POST-DEMONETISATION ECONOMY



➤ **1. ASHOK GULATI**

Infosys Chair Professor for  
Agriculture, ICRIER

➤ **2. D.K. JOSHI**

Chief Economist, CRISIL

➤ **3. ASHIMA GOYAL**

Professor, IGIDR

➤ **4. SAMIRAN CHAKRABORTY**

Chief Economist, India,  
Citibank

➤ **5. ADITI NAYAR**

Senior Economist, ICRA

➤ **6. RAJIV KUMAR**

Economist and Senior Fellow,  
Centre for Policy Research (CPR)

➤ **7. USHA THORAT**

Former Deputy Governor,  
Reserve Bank of India

➤ **8. N.R. BHANUMURTHY**

Professor, National Institute  
of Public Finance and Policy

➤ **9. NAUSHAD FORBES**

President, CII

# Q WHAT IS THE BEST/ WORST THING ABOUT THIS BUDGET?

A

▶ **D.K. JOSHI**  
(Did not answer)

▶ **ASHIMA GOYAL**

**Best:** Reducing the cash donation limit for political donations to Rs 2,000 and electoral bonds

**Worst:** Not enough done to address growth slowdown

▶ **USHA THORAT**

**Best:** Focus on rural and social spending

**Worst:** No clear prospects for public sector banks

▶ **ADITI NAYAR**

In addition to fiscal consolidation and infrastructure, the focus on ease of doing business is a big positive.

Compared to ICRA's estimate that PSBs require Rs 45,000-50,000 crore of total Tier 1 capital in FY2018, the allocation of

Rs 10,000 crore for bank recapitalisation appears inadequate

▶ **N.R. BHANUMURTHY**

Increasing public investments in the infrastructure sector (both urban and rural), expanding rural housing, focusing on employment intensive sectors such as textile, tourism, leather, MSMEs and, most importantly, focusing on youth, are some of the best things in the budget.

While the government targets 3.2 per cent fiscal deficit, as in the past, it appears that it is again depending on Other Capital Receipts (which is mainly disinvestments). Going by past trends, achieving such high receipts is going to be near-impossible.

Another is the assumption about decline in petroleum subsidy. Given that there are large expectations about higher oil prices, reduction in oil subsidy might be unrealistic

▶ **RAJIV KUMAR**

Best is the ramping up of public expenditure by 24.5 per cent, worst is not raising the income level at which the 30 per cent personal income tax will apply

▶ **ASHOK GULATI**

The good thing is that it addresses the problems of farmers by putting in quite a bit of money into irrigation and crop insurance (about Rs 40,000 crore together), rationalises corporate and personal income taxes for lower ends and puts big money in infrastructure.

The disappointing part is that it failed to bite the bullet in rationalising food and fertiliser subsidies that together take away some Rs 2.15 lakh crore and suffer from high inefficiency and heavy leakages

▶ **NAUSHAD FORBES**

The best thing about this budget is that it maintained control on the fiscal and revenue deficits. The only

thing I didn't like in the budget was the surcharge for incomes between Rs 50 lakh and 1 crore. This seemed inconsistent with the finance minister's welcome principle of wanting to reward the honest. The focus should be on widening the tax net, not taxing the existing net more

▶ **SAMIRAN CHAKRABORTY**

The budget is a good balance between fiscal consolidation and better expenditure mix; it refrained from being too populist and supported a significant increase in capital expenditure while keeping fiscal consolidation in mind. However, more could have been done to promote job growth ■





## Q WHAT'S THE BIG POLITICAL/ ECONOMIC MESSAGE OF THIS BUDGET?

A

### ► D.K. JOSHI

Economic message: The government will balance growth and redistribution

### ► ASHIMA GOYAL

That the government is serious about moving from an informal to a formal economy with modern laws and regulation

### ► USHA THORAT

Appeal to the rural population and lower income strata of society

### ► ADITI NAYAR

The budget has struck a

prudent tone, emphasising public investments and introducing incremental steps to promote schemes like Digital India and Skill India, while abstaining from populist giveaways despite the note ban

### ► N.R. BHANUMURTHY

The budget attempts to send the message that it is pro-poor, pro-farmer as well as pro-states and not necessarily pro-industry as was described in the past. In the aftermath of demonetisation, there were pressures on the government to provide doles. But by resisting these pressures and focusing more on investments, the government has done a great job. Another important focus of the budget is on

improving public service delivery, which, in my view, will help a lot in achieving better outcomes

### ► RAJIV KUMAR

That we are entering a new normal in the use of cash and in the scope of parallel economy and black economy transactions

### ► ASHOK GULATI

It wants to focus on development with a hope to create jobs for the youth

### ► NAUSHAD FORBES

The main message of the budget is consistency of policy and purpose. Much effort is being made to move

to a transparent system with greater tax compliance. Greater formalisation of the economy through digitalisation will lead to these benefits

### ► SAMIRAN CHAKRABORTY

The big message is that growth of the economy will be supported through higher capital expenditure and redistribution. And the fact that the budget did not pander to electoral temptations and lean towards populism gives out a positive signal ■

# Q WILL THIS BUDGET SPUR GROWTH? IF YES, HOW? IF NOT, WHY NOT?

A

## ▶ D.K. JOSHI

Only mild support to growth via tax concessions to the small taxpayer, rural spending and increased capital spending

## ▶ ASHIMA GOYAL

The consumption and government expenditure stimulus will help growth, but the **private investment and credit growth slowdown will take time to reverse**

## ▶ USHA THORAT

Measures for improved consumption and investment expenditure, coupled with lower market borrowing can spur growth

## ▶ ADITI NAYAR

In light of the slowdown in GDP growth after the note ban, the Union Budget

for FY2018 has made a concerted effort to stimulate economic activity, through a combination of modest tax cuts and higher spending, particularly on productive sectors such as transport and rural infrastructure, which have a healthy multiplier impact. The reduction in the corporate tax rate for firms with a turnover below Rs 50 crore to 25 per cent from 30 per cent will improve their competitiveness and level the playing field with bigger firms

## ▶ N.R. BHANUMURTHY

Achieving higher growth and at the same time sticking to FRBM targets was always challenging. In the past, we have seen that while the fiscal deficit target was achieved as per the FRBM, capital expenditure (as % of GDP) declined. This year, even after relaxing the fiscal deficit target of 3 per cent, we see the **capital expenditure target also**

**up to 1.3 per cent from 1.1 per cent last year. This itself should spur growth.**

But, most importantly, the tax and interest incentives given to MSME and agriculture sectors, together with increase in credit allocation, should help achieve growth that enhances jobs opportunities. The only contradiction here is that the government itself says that industrial growth in FY18 will be much lower than in FY17!

## ▶ RAJIV KUMAR

It will surely spur growth because of its 24 per cent increase in rural outlay and push to agricultural incomes

## ▶ ASHOK GULATI

Yes, it should help propel growth as investments are the central piece of this budget

## ▶ NAUSHAD FORBES

Yes, the substantial increase in rural investment and tax breaks at the bottom of the personal income tax pyramid should boost demand widely, leading to a virtuous cycle of demand driving investment

## ▶ SAMIRAN CHAKRABORTY

Total expenditure growth of 7 per cent is not large enough to change our (Citibank) growth projections at the moment. However, if revenue growth surprises are on the upside, then there could be a further expenditure push ■





#### ▶ RAJIV KUMAR

Yes, it will create jobs but more so in the infrastructure, housing, textiles and SME sectors. Both housing and SMEs have linkages that will help generate jobs elsewhere in the economy

#### ▶ ASHOK GULATI

Yes. In small and medium manufacturing units, and in construction (infrastructure)

#### ▶ NAUSHAD FORBES

Jobs may not be created by the budget alone.

Earlier measures such as the textile and apparel policy are oriented towards job creation. Other labour-intensive sectors such as electronics will also create jobs

#### ▶ SAMIRAN CHAKRABORTY

Emphasis on affordable housing as a job creator is a welcome development but more could have been done ■

## Q WILL THIS BUDGET CREATE JOBS? IF YES, WHAT KIND OF JOBS?

A

#### ▶ D.K. JOSHI

Focus on construction (roads and low-cost housing) will generate jobs and support consumption as construction is a labour-intensive activity

#### ▶ ASHIMA GOYAL

It will create jobs in small enterprises, textile, leather and tourism sectors, in rural infrastructure and in

electronic manufacturing hubs

#### ▶ USHA THORAT

Not very sure about job creation, as a lot of it depends on the implementation of the announced projects and schemes

#### ▶ ADITI NAYAR

Enhanced allocations to sectors such as rural

infrastructure, affordable housing and transport will reduce supply side barriers and boost job creation

#### ▶ N.R. BHANUMURTHY

Jobs are expected to be created in the manufacturing sector, especially in textile, leather, electronics, MSME and food processing sectors. However, this could still be much below the demand



**DOES THIS BUDGET PUT MORE MONEY IN THE HANDS OF THE COMMON MAN?**

# Q DO YOU AGREE WITH THE GROWTH ESTIMATES OF THE BUDGET?



## A D.K. JOSHI

They are achievable if we get normal rains. Our estimate is 7.4 per cent real growth and 11.6 per cent nominal growth in 2017-18

## A ASHIMA GOYAL

Yes, 7-8 per cent growth and 4-5 per cent inflation are feasible ranges, adding up to the assumed 11.75 per cent nominal rate of growth

## A USHA THORAT

The Central Statistics Organisation (CSO) has revised upward estimates for last year. The budget generally uses CSO advance estimates, which are not available. Hence, the basis for the revised estimate stated to have been used is not clear

## A ADITI NAYAR

The forecast for nominal GDP growth (11.75 per cent) may be slightly optimistic. ICRA's baseline expectation is that GDP growth will improve to 7.2 per cent in FY2018. Factoring in average CPI and WPI inflation of 4.5 and 3.8 per cent, respectively, we expect nominal GDP to expand by 11.2 per cent in FY2018.

## A N.R. BHANUMURTHY

Yes. **As demonetisation has postponed private consumption demand, one should expect higher private demand in FY18 compared with FY17.** Together with this, increase in public investments should help achieve growth targets

## A RAJIV KUMAR

I agree. Actual growth could be higher

## A ASHOK GULATI

FY18 growth is likely to hover between 6.5 and 7 per cent

## A NAUSHAD FORBES

The budget has been quite conservative in projecting growth for 2017-18. Given the uncertainty about global and domestic economic trends, it is hard to give a definitive growth projection

## A SAMIRAN CHAKRABORTY

The growth estimates are very much in line with our (Citibank) nominal growth assumptions of 11.8 per cent ■



## A D.K. JOSHI

Yes, by doing the following: relief to small taxpayers puts more money in their hands; and the focus on construction (roads, low-cost housing) will generate jobs, support consumption

## A ASHIMA GOYAL

Yes, rural spending and tax cuts for lower income brackets will do this



**▶ USHA THORAT**

Yes, through additional allocation for MNREGA, lower income tax for slab up to Rs 5 lakh, schemes for rural roads, housing, etc

**▶ ADITI NAYAR**

The cut in the personal income tax rate from 10 to 5 per cent in the lowest slab will increase disposable income to some extent

**▶ ASHOK GULATI**

Yes, by lowering taxes at the lower end, and focusing on development expenditure

**▶ NAUSHAD FORBES**

The income tax rate has been reduced quite significantly for the lowest tax slab. The reduction in the corporate tax rate for the SME sector will also help small business owners

SUBIR HALDER

**▶ N.R. BHANUMURTHY**

In addition to increased allocation on various schemes implemented through DBT [direct benefit transfer], if the budget proposals could create more jobs, the common man would have more money

**▶ RAJIV KUMAR**

Yes it does, by reducing income tax on incomes up to Rs 5 lakh by 50 per cent

**▶ SAMIRAN CHAKRABORTY**

About 20 million people will get a small increase because of lower tax and 150,000 people will pay a higher tax. It is more money but might not be a very large amount. The net effect is a consumption stimulus of approximately Rs 12,000 crore—less than 0.1 per cent of GDP. ■



# DOES IT SPUR CONSUMPTION DEMAND?

**▶ D.K. JOSHI**

Only mildly, as mentioned in the previous reply

**▶ ASHIMA GOYAL**

Yes, rural spending and tax cuts for lower income tax slabs will spur demand for mass consumption goods, not just for food, as happened in 2007-11 as food price inflation was very high

**▶ USHA THORAT**

Hopefully

**▶ ADITI NAYAR**

The cut in the personal income tax rate from 10 per cent to 5 per cent in the lowest tax slab will boost consumption sentiment to some extent. The enhanced allocation for MNREGA will improve the social security net in rural areas and protect consumption at the bottom of the pyramid

**▶ N.R. BHANUMURTHY**

With more money going into the hands of people as well as reduction in income tax rates and higher allocation on rural development programmes such as MNREGA, consumption

demand is expected to go up. Further, if inflation stays at the current level or falls a little more, that will also result in higher consumption demand

**▶ RAJIV KUMAR**

Yes it does, by reducing personal income tax. I'd have been happier if the income tax slab was made broader and the 30 per cent tax rate applied to incomes above Rs 24 lakh

**▶ ASHOK GULATI**

Yes, to some extent

**▶ NAUSHAD FORBES**

Consumption demand will be spurred by the increase in spending on rural areas, including through schemes such as MNREGA. Several schemes to increase farmers' incomes will also help in this regard

**▶ SAMIRAN CHAKRABORTY**

The focus of the budget has been more towards supporting capital expenditure than spurring consumption demand ■



## Q DOES THE BUDGET DO ANYTHING SUBSTANTIAL TO CURB BLACK MONEY? WHAT ABOUT CUSHIONING THE IMPACT OF DEMONETISATION?



### D.K. JOSHI

Black money is difficult to measure, and what cannot be measured cannot be monitored. A better measure to look at would be efforts to improve tax compliance.

The budget aims to increase tax/GDP ratio, which means improving compliance and bringing more people within the tax net. It intends to raise the tax/GDP to 11.3 per cent in 2017-18 through a number of steps, including big data analytics.

Enhanced rural spending and some tax relief to small enterprises will cushion the impact of demonetisation

### ASHIMA GOYAL

Yes, it does follow up with measures to curb black money sources such as electoral funding, rationalisation in real estate capital gains measurement. **The impact of demonetisation seems to be reducing, so the cushions provided in the budget are adequate**

### USHA THORAT

Measures to curb political funding and investigation of cases where large deposits were made under the demonetisation scheme... there are some measures to cushion the impact [of demonetisation]. We still need more data to understand whether the increased tax revenues

are commensurate with the pain.

Other areas that could have been attempted are gold, property deals and tax on large withdrawals of cash from banks

### ADITI NAYAR

Limits on transactions, donations to charities and political parties in cash; measures to promote digital transactions as well as palliatives to bring more assessee within the tax net may help curb the generation of black money to some extent

### N.R. BHANUMURTHY

Increase in credit allocation to agriculture and MSMEs

will offer some comfort post-demonetisation. Policy measures such as restrictions on cash transactions above Rs 3 lakh, political funding reforms, implementation of GST and incentives for using digital platforms should help reduce unaccounted-for money

### RAJIV KUMAR

Yes, it takes several steps—curbs on donations to charities and political parties and strong measures against deposits made illegally in banks post-demonetisation

### ASHOK GULATI

**Marginally. Not significantly**

### NAUSHAD FORBES

Demonetisation itself has been the biggest move to curb black money. Other measures included in the budget are restrictions on anonymous political funding, limits on cash payments and spread of digitalisation

### SAMIRAN CHAKRABORTY

Steps taken to streamline political funding are very welcome. Regarding demonetisation, normalisation of the demand situation is more a function of new currency notes than budget-specific measures ■

# Q WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THE BUDGET ESTIMATES FOR REVENUE COLLECTION/ SPENDING TARGETS? DO YOU FIND THIS BUDGET FISCALLY PRUDENT?

A

## D.K. JOSHI

Targets seem achievable. Overall, the budget is fiscally prudent

## ASHIMA GOYAL

There are uncertainties due to GST. Duties on petroleum should also come down. Even so, the budget is fiscally prudent

## USHA THORAT

It all depends on whether the optimism in the revenues for 2017-18 works out. Otherwise, it has stuck to the path of prudence

## ADITI NAYAR

The forecast for gross tax revenue growth (12.2 per cent) may be slightly optimistic, particularly if the introduction of GST brings

with it the complications the Economic Survey warned about.

The experience of FY2016 and FY2017 has shown that disinvestment inflows of Rs 20,000-30,000 crore are realistic, even in years when FIs are not particularly enthusiastic about investing in Indian equity. The disinvestment and strategic divestment target of Rs 72,500 crore for FY2018, which is equivalent to 0.4 per cent of GDP, appears optimistic at this juncture. The ability to meet this target will be critical to achieve the government's fiscal consolidation plan

## N.R. BHANUMURTHY

The budget tried to achieve fiscal prudence, though it is not clear what the N.K. Singh Committee has recommended in terms of FRBM targets. However, there are some unrealistic targets on the revenue side,

especially capital receipts (disinvestment), while on the expenditure side, there may be some underestimation of subsidies

## RAJIV KUMAR

The revenue estimates may be a bit unsure given that we have the GST coming up. Expenditures are okay but their efficient utilisation will be key. Last year, apparently 33 ministries could not utilise their budgeted allocations. This is not good

## ASHOK GULATI

Yes, fiscally prudent... avoided distributing too many freebies

## NAUSHAD FORBES

Yes, I think this is the main feature of the budget. Revenue targets are not inflated and revenue spending has been kept in

control. The only estimate which to me is not credible is the target set for disinvestment. We must aim to achieve this, and the announcement of an agency to list public sector firms in a time-bound manner is positive, but I'd have liked to see more tangible announcements of quick privatisation in the budget, given how long this has been pending.

## SAMIRAN CHAKRABORTY

Budget numbers are quite credible except disinvestment and RBI dividend, which might have been overestimated. On the other hand, we might see an upside in tax revenues, which could have been underestimated in the budget ■



# Q HOW DO YOU RATE THE BUDGET ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10? PLEASE GIVE REASONS.

A

► D.K. JOSHI

**7/10**

It bats for fiscal consolidation and uses limited fiscal space to push capital expenditure

► ASHIMA GOYAL

**7/10**

Because it increases capital expenditure by about 25 per cent and stimulates mass consumption while sticking with fiscal consolidation. It also has some useful reforms for poll funding. **Not enough is done to revive private investment and clean bank balance sheets**

► USHA THORAT

Not sure I can rate. Positive for intention to adhere to fiscal prudence; for boost in public infra spending; steps to boost

consumption, especially rural sector; electoral funding reform; restriction on cash payments; and affordable housing.

Disappointment on unclogging stalled projects, electricity boards UDAY (Ujjwal Discom Assurance Yojana), meagre amount for PSU banks' recap, which will be totally inadequate to enable them to lend, to take advantage of the liquidity, lower interest rates and budget measures, which will generate more income in the spending class.

Also not very sure of the fiscal arithmetic, as there are some large inexplicable items, like huge increase in securities against small savings, etc. Also, the budget estimates for tax revenue have been repeated for revised estimates. Tax revenue for 2017-18 seems optimistic

► ADITI NAYAR

**8/10**

Based on the balancing act between higher productive spending, modestly lower

taxes and continued fiscal consolidation. **Lower than expected funds for bank recapitalisation are a disappointment, while the disinvestment target may pose a challenge**

► N.R. BHANUMURTHY

**9/10**

In the context of existing uncertainties, both in the domestic as well as the global economy, presenting a budget that balances both growth aspirations as well as development concerns, and at the same time undertakes minor policy reforms is laudable

► RAJIV KUMAR

**8/10**

Because it has avoided populism, taken significant steps to promote investment, including a 24 per cent jump in public capital expenditure, given affordable housing a

massive impetus, including giving it infrastructure status, and cut tax on SME incomes to 25 per cent. Also, it has significant employment-generating measures and some targeted to improve infrastructure. Lastly, I appreciate the reduction to Rs 2,000 of individual political donations—a part of the fight against black money

► ASHOK GULATI

**7/10**

► NAUSHAD FORBES

The budget is balanced and pragmatic. The focus on critical areas such as infrastructure and the rural economy is noteworthy. The budget has been able to make adequate allocations and yet continues with fiscal consolidation

► SAMIRAN CHAKRABORTY  
(Did not answer) ■

# [STAY FOCUSED]

*Sourav*

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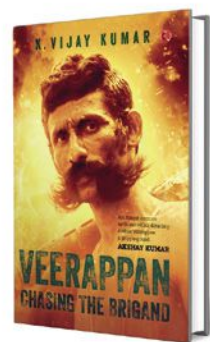
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## October 18, 2004, 2200 hrs T minus 60 minutes

**I**t was the fourth night after the new moon. Poor visibility was worsened by the four massive tamarind trees near the location. If this bothered the well-drilled commandos, they certainly didn't show it. Waiting in the dark for long hours in the hope of getting a single shot to be taken within seconds was part of their expertise. In the past, they had lain in ambush in far worse conditions.

Kannan and I stood next to the one-room school in Padi, around 12 km from Dharmapuri. The school overlooked the road. Its roof provided a perfect field of fire. Six of my crack commandos were squeezed together on the school's roof, weapons at the ready. An undercover police vehicle, masquerading as a sugarcane-laden lorry, was parked in the middle of the road. It was named 'Sweet Box', as it was full of sugarcane supposedly heading towards the sugar mill nearby.

The lorry was actually meant to block the path of the oncoming Cocoon. It also housed three tech experts, who would receive signals from the surveillance camera concealed inside the ambulance. It was their job to confirm that the target was inside the vehicle before we intercepted it.

Another lorry—codenamed 'Mobile Bunker'—packed with sandbags and armed STF commandos was parked on the other side of the road, at an angle of about 45 degrees to the school, partially concealed by a tree. If all went off well, the ambulance would be trapped, hemmed in from all sides by the Sweet Box, Mobile Bunker, the school and Tiru's team. Another DSP waited in the east towards Dharmapuri town. His job was to cut out all incoming traffic. We needed a sterile zone to ensure no collateral damage. Unusually for him, Veerappan was not very alert that day. In fact, his mind seemed preoccupied with memories and regrets. But his natural optimism seemed to resurface despite these dark thoughts. As his mind hatched plans, his gaze fell on the 7.62 mm SLR lying near his feet. Many of his comrades had moved on to the deadlier AK-47, but he still liked to carry the weapon, which he had personally taken from a policeman killed during the ambush with SP Gopal Hosur. Veerappan smiled at the memory and glanced out of the ambulance...

A few metres down the road, Kumaresan, a seemingly nondescript STF old-timer, sat in a shack. He half-heartedly picked at some food, trying to make sure he was well within the shadows. Except for the driver, Durai, Kannan and I, he was the only other person who was aware of

the target's identity. As the ambulance passed by, Durai nonchalantly stretched his arm out of the window, flattened his hand against the side of the vehicle and moved his thumb very slightly. The target, lost in his reverie, didn't notice. But Kumaresan did so instantly. He also spotted two other things—the blue revolving light of the ambulance was on, which meant that the entire gang was inside. So was the fog light, which meant all the gang members were armed.

## T minus 10 minutes

Kannan glanced at me and gave a thumbs-up. Just then, we heard a slight clicking sound on our muffled wireless set. It was a signal from Tiru that our prey had come into view. Kannan uttered the words, 'Cocoon in ten minutes.' My AK was dangling on its sling from my shoulders.

With all the teams watching, I stretched both my arms, turned 360 degrees and chopped the air to mark the exact arcs of fire for all three teams...

The lights of the ambulance appeared to come closer and closer... 'Would they stop at the designated spot?' I asked myself. It was crucial that they did, since a moving target is much harder to hit than a stationary one. 'Brake hard. Switch on the rear cabin lights. The passengers must not catch sight of anything, but must be seen,' Saravanan recited the instructions to himself one more time. Then, with fumbling fingers, he flicked on a switch and Cocoon's three cabin lights came on. He simultaneously stepped

on the brakes with all the force his right leg could muster. Cocoon lurched hard and screeched to a dead stop right in the middle of the designated slot. The smell of burning tyres filled the air. Even as Cocoon shuddered to a halt, a vehicle came up rapidly from behind. Tiru had been trailing Cocoon discreetly, keeping out of sight to ensure he didn't arouse any suspicion. But with Cocoon trapped, he moved quickly into position to block the exit...

## T minus 5 seconds

In the heat of the moment, Saravanan had forgotten to douse the headlamps and the revolving blue lamp on the roof. The burning lights engulfed Cocoon's front in a soft halo. It stood there in the middle of the road in all its majesty, still rocking like a boat tossed by waves, its double beam of lights bobbing up and down. Two men shot out of Cocoon with the speed of discharged bullets—the captain and the navigator had abandoned their ship. Saravanan's voice carried clearly, his left hand pointing backwards. '*Gang yulla irukaangoe* (The gangsters are inside).'

**“The CM has retired for the night,” Jayalalithaa’s secretary told me. “Is it urgent?” “She’ll like what I have to say,” I replied. An instant later, she was on the line. “We got him, ma’am,” I told her.**

Kannan's warning rang out over the megaphone, 'Surrender. You've been surrounded.' Then, the unmistakable sound of an AK-47 emerged from the rear of the vehicle... If the four men had come out of the vehicle with their weapons raised, we would have accepted their surrender. But the moment they opened fire, they closed that window for themselves... Our response was instant and overwhelming. Brass hoses down on Cocoon from every direction. Bullets zipped all around along with the rhythmic flashes of guns... I shuffled to my left, flicked my gun to burst fire mode, and let go. After a few bullets, I paused briefly, as did the others. Another couple of reports of a self-loading rifle and a shotgun came from Cocoon.

**K**annan reiterated the terms for surrender. There were few more shots, followed by a volley of the STF's response. I signalled the teams to stop. Another pause. This time, there was no return fire... Cocoon was engulfed in smoke and dust. I signalled to Rajarajan and Hussain. Another stun grenade was lobbed into Cocoon. There was a flash and a bang. Rajarajan flashed on a torch, which he held below his gun's barrel, as did Hussain. The two beams of light converged. The two men approached Cocoon warily. They heard a gurgle, followed by a hiss—like air escaping from a cycle tube. It is a sound typically made by air trapped between the lung tissue and the chest. Someone wounded was trying to suck in air. Then, silence.

The stillness was finally broken by the cry of 'All clear'. The encounter had started at around 10.50 pm and was over in twenty minutes—a rapid climax to a twenty-year wait! Hussain and Rajarajan saw blood and bodily fluids splashed all over—the walls, floor and seats, food packets and the stretcher. They picked up two AKs, a 12 bore Remington pump action gun and the infamous 7.62 mm SLR. Three persons were huddled together—their final conclave before going down. Men in their death throes, clutching each other! One, later identified as Govindan, was a little distance away. The four men were speedily removed from Cocoon and laid on the ground. I beckoned to Kannan and, ignoring a cramped muscle, hobbled over to where they lay.

It was my only face-to-face moment with Veerappan, if it could be described as such. He was unable to speak and was clearly dying. I noticed that a bullet had gone through his left eye, just as it had with Senthil in Sorgam Valley almost 10 years ago. With his moustache trimmed and in civilian clothes, rather than his trademark green dress and brown belt, he seemed a stripped-down version of his former self. He had been a wily and worthy foe, with mastery over both strategy and tactics. Even at 52, he was sinewy and extremely fit....

I took stock of the encounter. There were no casualties or serious injuries among my boys. I sent up a quick prayer

**A total of 338 bullets were fired by us... Two had pierced Veerappan's body and exited from the other side, while one stayed inside**



GIREESH G.V.

of thanks... A total of 338 bullets were fired by us. Later, seven were found in Govindan's body; two had pierced Veerappan's body and exited from the other side, while one stayed inside. Gradually, I sensed a growing murmur from the boys. Since the identity of the men inside the vehicle had not been revealed to them initially, they began to mutter in disbelief when they recognised the fallen men...

There was a spontaneous eruption of delight and high-fiving. I was hoisted on the shoulders of my men and effortlessly passed around. I noticed that Kannan had been similarly hefted. As soon as the boys brought me to the ground, I bounded up the school's steps, two at a time. Sitting on the parapet with my feet dangling towards the road, I made the call. 'The CM has retired for the night. Is it urgent?' asked Sheela Balakrishnan, Jayalalithaa's secretary. 'I think she will like what I have to say,' I replied. An instant later, I heard her voice on the phone. 'We got him, ma'am,' I said. Then I quickly recounted the operation and informed the CM that Veerappan was on his way to hospital, but survival seemed unlikely. I replied in the affirmative to her brief query on the STF's safety. Though she was her usual dignified self, the elation in her voice was unmistakable. 'Congratulations to you and the STF, Mr Vijay Kumar. This is the best news I've ever had as CM,' she said, before hanging up.

**Monday, October 18, 2004, 11.10 pm**

File on Koosai Munusamy Veerappan closed. ■



**F/A-18 SUPER HORNET**  
**CONTENDER FOR**  
 57 naval fighters.  
 Total project cost:  
 over \$15 billion

DEFENCE | AERO INDIA

# MMRCA REDUX

The scrapped MMRCA contract is in the past. But India's new \$25 billion race for 150 fighter aircraft is attracting global players again at the 11th Aero India exhibition

By Sandeep Unnithan

**N**othing excites the global arms industry more than big ticket multi-billion dollar orders. This is especially true when it comes to India, a country that has been the world's largest arms importer for nearly a decade now.

Ever since India's defence ministry sought global bids for 126 Medium Multiple Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) in 2005, successive instalments of the biennial Aero India—where the six global contenders (RAC MiG, Dassault, Saab, Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Eurofighter) displayed their jets to Indian decision-makers—has thrummed with anticipation over who would win the \$10 billion contract, the 'mother of all defence deals'. The final selection of the French Dassault Rafale in 2012 robbed subsequent Aero Indias of their sheen, but the MMRCA deal was then scrapped

**HAL HTT-40**  
**CONTENDER FOR**  
 100 units for the air  
 force, navy, army  
 and coast guard



in favour of an off-the-shelf purchase of 36 Rafales for 7.8 billion Euros. India, it would seem, had had its fill of fighter aircraft—but for two major events of the past few weeks.

Late last year, the MoD announced it was looking to build a new single-engine fighter in India, as part of its 'Make in India' strategy to indigenise imports. And, on January 17 this year, the Indian Navy issued a request for information from





**LIGHT UTILITY HELICOPTER**  
**CONTENDER FOR**  
 400 units for the  
 air force and the army

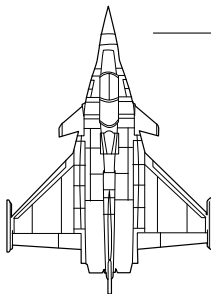


**SAAB GRIPEN 'E'**  
**CONTENDER FOR**  
 57 naval fighters, 120  
 light fighters. Total  
 project cost: over  
 \$20 billion

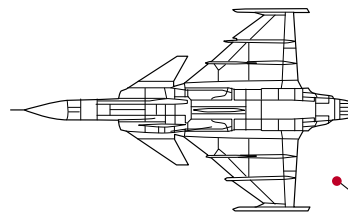
**LIGHT COMBAT HELICOPTER**  
**CONTENDER FOR**  
 200 units for the  
 air force and the army



## THE \$25 BILLION JET BUY



**CARRIER-BASED MULTIROLE NAVAL FIGHTER**  
 How many: 57  
 Cost: Approx. \$15 bn  
 User: Indian Navy



**SINGLE ENGINE LIGHT MULTIROLE FIGHTER**  
 How many: 100  
 Cost: Approx. \$10 bn  
 User: Indian Air Force

manufacturers for 57 carrier-based fighter aircraft. Both these programmes could be worth over \$20 billion.

Five of the six aircraft that were in the original MMRCA fray are now back in the reckoning. The Dassault Rafale, the Boeing F/A-18 and the MiG-29K are contenders for the naval contract, while Lockheed Martin's F-16 and Sweden's Gripen are strong contenders for the 'Make in India' fighter. Saab executives have also hinted at reviving its Sea Gripen programme for the naval contract.

Both the IAF and the navy's contracts, it would seem, are rooted in the delays and disappointments of the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) programme. The IAF feels the LCA won't be able to plug the gap caused by the phasing out of its 230-plane MiG fleet over the next decade, and wants a fighter over and above the 120 Tejas it is com-

mitted to buying. The navy, one of the prime funders of the LCA over two decades ago, feels the aircraft in its present form is unsuited for aircraft carrier-based operations and hence wants a new multi-role naval fighter.

None of these wishes is likely to be granted in a hurry, particularly since the 'Make in India' fighter jet is contingent on a major policy shift—approval for a 'strategic partnership' policy that will allow the MoD to nominate a private sector firm of its choice. The MoD is yet to finalise this policy, a move that could lead to tie-ups between domestic and foreign private sector manufacturers. The snail-paced decision-making process within the MoD is a big concern. It could be close to a decade by the time the naval MMRCA fighters take off. But until then, these two aircraft contracts promise plenty of excitement on the ground and in the air. ■

# Where fashion gets personal



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SOCIETY & TRENDS | G-SHOT

# JAB WE MATE

*HERE COMES AN ORGASM  
INFECTION TO SUPERSIZE THAT  
ELUSIVE KEY TO FEMALE  
PLEASURE, THE G-SPOT, AND  
GRANT WOMEN A SPRINGTIME  
OF EROTIC RENEWAL*

**By Damayanti Datta**





**lank. The sound of metal on metal is oddly loud in the sanitised silence of the clinic. You are lying on your back, legs spread wide, ankles locked in stirrups. The surgeon hovers over you, holding a mean-looking speculum in one hand—similar to a can-opener but with flaring duckbill blades—and a gigantic syringe in the other. As he pokes, prods and peeps at the most intimate part of your anatomy, you yo-yo between fear, embarrassment and pain, frantically trying to think of the wonderful future in store for you: a springtime of erotic renewal. “Congratulations.” The surgeon finally takes off his gloves, smiling mischievously. “You’re ready to rock and roll.”**

Eight seconds. What can you do in that time? Here’s some science: it takes eight seconds for a morsel of food to travel from your mouth to your stomach. That’s how long the brain takes to store a piece of information in your long-term memory. That’s the time needed for a man to fall in love at first sight. And now there’s a new ‘science’ taking shape in clinics of cosmetic gynaecologists across the world, where it takes exactly that long to temporarily supersize the elusive key to female pleasure, the G-spot, with injectables that typically plump up drooping lips and sagging cheeks. The G-shot (medically, G-spot amplification) promises to bring a woman to multiple climaxes during sexual intercourse in minutes. The procedure, given under local anaesthetic, has taken off in India—for about Rs 50,000 a shot, that lasts four months. And going by reports, demand is swelling from a trickle to a torrent.

### WHERE IS IT EXACTLY?


- *Where exactly is the G-spot?*
- *You mean, you don’t know?*
- *I haven’t checked myself that closely.*
- *You’re not supposed to check, you’re supposed to feel. Hasn’t your husband...?*
- *Oh, you know him...*
- *That’s your problem. You don’t demand anything. I just got myself fixed.*
- *Really? How?*
- *Shhh. Don’t tell anyone.*
- *Don’t tell what?*
- *I got myself a jab.*
- *A jab for what?*

For the last 15 years, Dr Deepa Ganesh has zipped through downtown Chennai—Kilpauk, Vadapalani, MRC Nagar, Alwarpet—from one private hospital to another, operating on ovarian cysts, removing uterine polyps, rebuilding damaged fallopian tubes. But in the past few years, the thirtysomething gynaecologist with an easy smile and lively eyes has been coming across patients she could not really help: women facing problems in the bedroom. “Women with overstretched vaginas, perhaps due to childbirth, facing painful intercourse, discomfort and lack of pleasure due to physical or psychological

## DOES THE G-SPOT REALLY EXIST?

1950

SCIENTISTS HAVE BEEN HARD AT WORK TO UNDERSTAND THAT ELUSIVE HUB OF FEMALE PLEASURE FOR THE PAST SEVEN DECADES

 First claim of an erotogenic zone on vaginal wall by gynaecologist E. Gräfenberg. Ignored and mocked

reasons,” recalls Ganesh. Women have traditionally dealt with such problems in silence, she explains. “But now they are more conscious and have the courage to not just talk about it but to do something about how they look, feel and function as a woman, in every way.”

Responding to that, Ganesh started exploring an emerging field in medicine: cosmetic gynaecology. With celebrities, television shows, social media, internet and mobile devices creating an unprecedented level of awareness, the new millennium had ushered in new demands and new procedures in the multi-billion business of beauty: from ‘mommy makeovers’ to return women to their pre-pregnancy bodies in US to limb-lengthening in India, radical facial surgery in South Korea, ‘improvements’ to breasts, abdomens and buttocks in Brazil, nose jobs in Iran and ‘designer vaginas’ in the whole of the western world. “With shaving or waxing pubic hair becoming as common as the removal of underarm hair in the US, decorations, tattoos, piercings and surgical modification of the area has kicked off,” adds Ganesh.

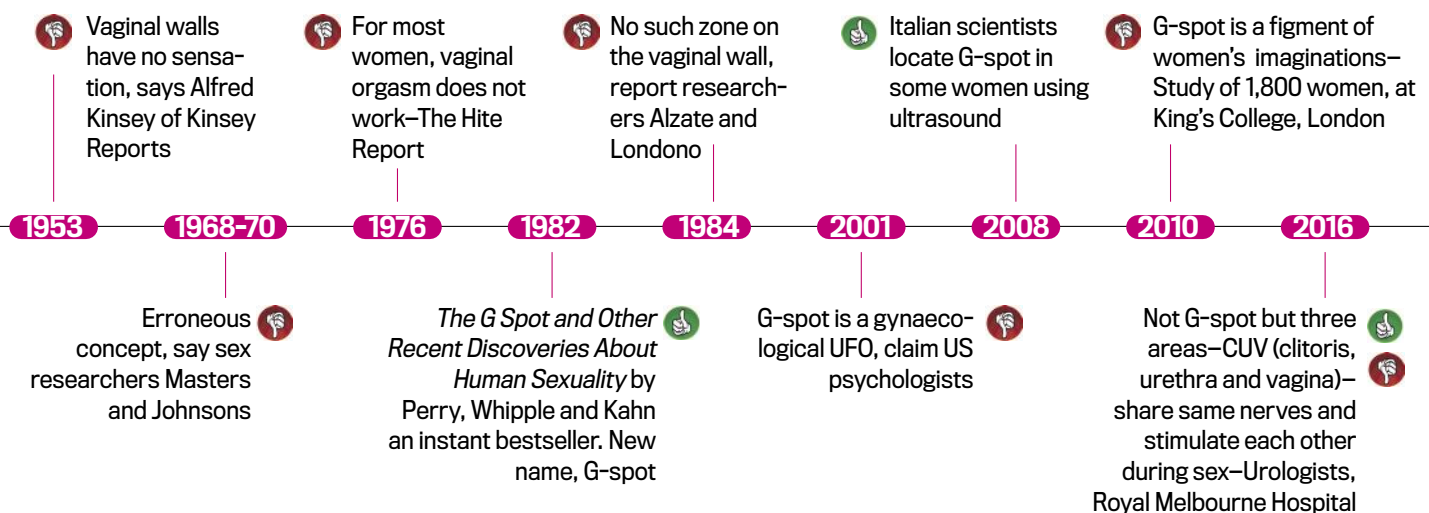
She went to the US to train in vaginal rejuvenation under Dr David Matlock of Beverly Hills, Hollywood, a surgeon renowned for his innovative techniques on the vagina, apart from the ‘Brazilian Butt Lift’ he did for Kim Kardashian. In 2002, he developed a procedure for G-spot amplification that thickened and expanded the G-spot area—from 8.1 mm to 15–20 mm in diameter and 0.4 mm to 5-10 mm in length, as reported in his 2002 patent (pending)—leading to heightened sexual arousal and sensitivity. That year, he had given G-shots to 15 women and reported that while 50.7 per cent reached climax during intercourse earlier, it became 82.7 per cent after the shot. Ganesh finished her five-month training in November last year and started offering G-shots—the first such in India.

## YES. NO. YES?

- *The front wall of the vagina has a distinct erotogenic zone*
- *No. The vaginal walls are quite insensitive to sensation*
- *Yes. Pressing a particular spot can lead to orgasm. Let's call it the G-spot*
- *No. Nothing in the vaginal wall would lead directly to that experience*
- *Yes. Ultrasounds show that some women have a G-spot, some don't*
- *No. G-spot is a figment of women's imagination*
- *Yes. The G-spot is a sac-like structure on the front wall of the vagina*
- *G-spot is just a sensitive area that's part of the larger pleasure complex*

Does the G-spot exist? “That’s like asking if god exists,” says Dr Narayana Reddy, an expert in sexual medicine and a consultant with Apollo Hospital, Chennai, a Fellow of the American College of Sexologists. Purportedly, the G-spot is a spongy, pea-sized area one to two inches inside the wall of the vagina, and can be discerned by touch. Believed to be an erogenous zone, which, when stimulated, may lead to strong sexual arousal, powerful orgasms and even ejaculation for some women. For others, it remains a life-long quest. “Despite all the miracles of modern science, the seemingly straightforward question—‘does the G-spot exist?’—remains unanswered.” Questions about it—where it is, what it does, if it exists at all—have supporters and critics locking horns.

It was psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud who first suggested, in 1905, that there were two types of orgasms, calling a vaginal orgasm the “one true orgasm”. The theory





got a biological basis when, in 1950, German gynaecologist and inventor of the intrauterine device (IUD), Dr Ernst Gräfenberg, reported a “distinct erotogenic zone” on the frontal wall of the vagina. He was ignored and even mocked. In fact, in 1953, zoologist Alfred Kinsey, author of the famed Kinsey Reports, published his *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, calling the vaginal walls “insensitive to sensation”. Forgotten for decades, it attained stardom in 1982, when it got a new name and new legitimacy in a book, *The G Spot and Other Discoveries about Human Sexuality*, that became an instant international bestseller. Researchers John Perry, Beverly Whipple and Alice Kahn had noted swelling in response to stimulation in over 400 women. Yet researchers doubted there was anything to

**“WOMEN ARE MUCH MORE ADVENTUROUS NOW. THEY WANT TO ENJOY POWERFUL SENSATIONS”**

**DR D.J.S. TULLA**

Plastic and cosmetic surgeon, Delhi

stimulate in the first place, calling it a “modern gynaecologic myth”.

In 2008, the G-spot became a talking point again when researchers at the University of L'Aquila in Italy located it using ultrasound. But, they said, there was a catch: some women seemed to have a G-spot, while others didn't. The pendulum continued to swing, until in 2014 new

research concluded that the G-spot was just a part of a larger female pleasure region. In the final analysis, despite evidence that specific anatomical structures correspond to the area defined as the G-spot, its exact anatomical identity in all women, universally, remains inconclusive.

## BELIEVE IT OR NOT

- *After my G-shot I get sexually aroused performing yoga*
- *I had constant multiple orgasms which went on for hours*
- *That first time, the whole thing was so intense I was actually a bit scared*
- *I was riding in the car with my partner and we went on this cobblestone road and I became sexually aroused... guess what happened next?*
- *I have this smile on my face and people think that I am enjoying my workout but actually I am sexually aroused*

The testimonials above are from some of the over 2,000 women who have received a G-shot from Matlock, with a 65 per cent return rate. When she was in the US, Ganesh says she came across women as young as 16, accompanied by their mothers, seeking consultation. In India, it has not been easy to break into the world of conjugality. Despite plenty of inquiries, Ganesh has actu-

ally given the shot to about 15 women so far, the youngest being 30 and oldest 46. “Typically, they come on their own and many don't even tell their husbands.”

Last year, Dr Bharti Magoo, a member of the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery, also launched a similar technique at her clinic in Sion, Mumbai—Golden Touch—where she practises along with a gynaecologist. “Most of my patients are in their 40s and 50s,” she says. Most of her patients are also long-time clients and trust her enough to talk about their sexual traumas. “For most, their sexual lives had plummeted, either due to reduced libido, less satisfaction or a sense of shortcoming, leading sometimes to insecurities in relationships,” she says. “For some, the G-spot was dead, due to abortions or surgical procedures.” For others, the vaginal muscles had become loose, thanks to childbirth. With a more prominent G-spot, it has become possible for most to enjoy uterine orgasms, she says. They are not the only ones. Cosmetic gynaecologists and plastic surgeons across the country



# WHAT WOMEN WANT

*THE SEARCH FOR PLEASURE HAS SPAWNED A NEW BRANCH OF MEDICINE, WITH COSMETIC SURGERY AND GYNAECOLOGY JOINING HANDS. SOME OF THE PROCEDURES ON OFFER*

**The G-shot:** Also known as G-spot amplification, or vaginal rejuvenation, to thicken and expand the G-spot area for greater sensitivity

**Vaginoplasty:** Surgery to tighten and refashion a sagging or ageing vagina

**Labiaplasty:** Surgery to reshape and reduce the labia minora at the opening of the vagina

**Laser perineoplasty:** The area between the rectum and the floor of the vagina made more youthful

**Pubic liposuction:** Surgery to remove unwanted fatty tissue from the pubic mound

**Clitoral hood reduction:** Surgery to improve comfort and sensation during sex

seem to be focusing on the new demand. At the root of it is the new Indian woman, they say. "Women are asserting themselves," says Dr D.J.S. Tulla, plastic and cosmetic surgeon, aesthetic and reconstructive surgery at Primus Hospital, Delhi. "They are much more adventurous now. They want to enjoy powerful sensations. With greater sexual awakening, the demand for this procedure is expected to rise." Doctors are also busy experimenting with the new soft-tissue augmentation 'fillers' that have emerged in the past few years: the human-derived collagen protein; hyaluronic acid (or Restylane), a type of polysaccharide; the brand new Radiesse, made from calcium hydroxide; and Platelet-Rich Plasma (PRP) taken from the patient's blood and then re-injected. Dr Rahul Goyal, cosmetic and plastic surgeon in Mohali, Chandigarh, says permanent results can be achieved by using dermal fat grafts. "More expensive but a one-off procedure that results in permanent improvement, although you'll need to stay off sex for six weeks," he says.

## THAT PILLOW TALK

- *I have a headache...*
- *How can you have a headache every day?*
- *I'm sorry...*
- *What do you mean?*
- *It's just that... I'm not trying to make you feel bad...*
- *What?*

Yes, we know: men are from Mars and women from Venus, especially when it comes to the moment of maximum pleasure. Simply because the male and female sexual systems are different. But, statistically, that translates into frightening numbers. According to non-profit Planned Parenthood Federation of America, which provides reproductive health services globally, some 10 per cent women are incapable of orgasm—due to physical conditions, medication or illness; one in three women typically don't orgasm during sex, due to psychological blocks; and 80 per cent of women have difficulty with orgasms for a range of reasons.

That doesn't surprise Dr Firuza Parikh, Director of Assisted Reproduction and Genetics at Jaslok Hospital, Mumbai. The story she regularly hears from young urban couples is one where both have demanding jobs, come back home exhausted, order in from a fast-food outlet and fall asleep right after dinner, exhausted. "I see a lot of couples in sexless marriages, orgasm-less relationships or with less-than-inspiring sex lives," she says. "Sex works best when we make time for it, turn off our computers and switch off our phones, because it is more complicated for women to orgasm than men."

Female sexual dysfunction (FSD) is yet another story. The World Health Organization defines FSD as "the various ways in which a woman is unable to participate in a sexual relationship as she would wish". Doctors at the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the All India Institute of

Medical Sciences, Delhi, have called for a systematic approach to assessment of FSD, to ensure appropriate treatment. "FSD is something we encounter routinely," says Dr J.B. Sharma, professor, AIIMS, "ranging from persistent and recurring loss of desire or arousal, difficulty or inability to achieve an orgasm, or painful intercourse."

Studies say that 43-76 per

cent of Indian women report some kind of sexual problem.

Culture plays a major role. "Conventional stereotypes about good girls-bad girls inhibit a lot of women," says Kolkata-based psychologist Dr Aniruddha Deb. For many, having orgasms is something shameful, even with some-

## “WOMEN NOW HAVE THE COURAGE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT HOW THEY LOOK, FEEL AND FUNCTION”

**DR DEEPA GANESH**  
Cosmetic gynaecologist, Delhi

one they trust. For others, it's just too difficult to say what they need. "There's the idea a lot of women grow up with, that you have to pander to the male ego," he says. "Many avoid sex, or fake an orgasm, rather than articulating their needs." There's a caveat here: "How does one define wonderful time?" Emotional and physical closeness, warmth and caring can mean a 'wonderful time' even if each sexual encounter does not end in an orgasm, he explains. "The question is of unresolved issues in one's sex life," he says. "And counselling could help."

## ONE THOUSAND QUESTIONS

- Will the G-shot really enhance every woman's orgasm?
- How long can one keep taking the shots?
- How safe are they?
- Can they lead to unforeseen side-effects?
- Will there be long-term effects of injecting a foreign material into the vagina?

There's something oddly choreographed about pleasure at the end of a needle. "I would call it all a gimmick," says Dr Shahin Nooreydzan, chief of the Apollo Cosmetic Clinic at Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, Delhi. He is unconvinced that the G-spot is a distinct anatomical entity. "Under a microscope, vaginal tissues have never shown a huge network of nerve endings." And even if it exists, he doesn't think the G-shot can help women who suffer from sexual dysfunction.

What is worrying is the lack of data about the efficacy of the procedure or its potential complications: from scarring of the vaginal tissue, painful intercourse, infection, altered sensation, decreased lubrication and the reduction of libido. In fact, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has been questioning procedures such as 'vaginal rejuvenation' and 'G-spot amplification' since 2007 for not being 'medically indicated' and for lacking documentation on 'complication rates' and 'safety and effectiveness' (*Obstetrics & Gynecology*, September 2007). The treatment is still based on patient feedback, with the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval still pending. Injecting a foreign substance in the vagina is another cause for concern. 'Off-label use' of approved drugs (or using those for purposes beyond what they were approved for) is not uncommon in medicine, nor illegal. And sometimes they are necessary, especially when it comes to cancers—but the risk remains. "Many of the injectables for G-shots are off-label," points out Nooreydzan. The FDA's approval process for the safety of drugs and medical devices is considered the gold standard worldwide, and it has not approved any fillers for G-spot amplification, or for injection into the vaginal wall. Collagen, hyaluronic acid, Radiesse and PRP have all been approved for chronic wound healing, not as dermal fillers. But then, the FDA

# 1998



**the year Viagra (the 'little blue pill'), the first drug to treat male sexual dysfunction, was first released**

*Works by increasing blood flow to the penis*

# 2015



**the year Addyi ('little pink pill')—medically Flibanserin—was released, to treat weak libido in women**

*Works by altering chemicals in the brain*

does not regulate medical practice, nor has it received any complaints against G-shots as yet.

As for the doctors who introduced the treatment to India, most consider it to be a 'low-risk procedure' that doesn't require peer-reviewed studies or clinical trials. Most of Magoo's patients worry about scarring, about eventual loss of sensation and about the risk of cancer. "Most of these worries aren't true," she says. After so many years in the business, she trusts the ground reports: patient testimonials. "I am yet to come across anyone who is not happy," she says. Tulla thinks it's the dawn of a 'new beginning': of women's right to pleasure. For now, things may appear a bit odd, but soon, he predicts, G-shots will be as common as boob jobs.

## WE WANT MORE

*"May I feel, said he;  
(I'll squeal, said she;  
just once, said he)  
It's fun, said she..."*

If sex is a function of its time, what does it say about the sexual life of the nation's women? What explains their foray into an uncharted territory of pleasure? At its core, is it really about a bundle of poorly-defined tissues, that may or may not—at the end of a scary experience and a big price tag—bring on euphoria? Or is it all about power for women? Juggling high-powered careers with picture-perfect homes, big money with big responsibilities, are they trying to be 'more like men' in that one sphere where biology is largely destiny? To be able to turn their arousal 'switch' on and off just like men, be as genitally-fixated, and enhance G-spots with jabs just as men brandish their erection-enhancer, Viagra?

But the road to Big O may turn out to be bumpy. Despite the debates, doctors agree on one thing: who is an ideal patient for a G-shot? The one who is already having the most fun between the sheets. Ouch. ■



5 MINUTES WITH  
PANDIT JASRAJ  
PG 88

ICONIC  
WATCHES  
PG 92

# LEISURE

RESTORATION DIVA  
ABHA LAMBAH  
PG 90

CRIMINAL ACTS  
WITH SRK  
PG 98



FILM

## Fearless Kangana

Kangana Ranaut's fearless refusal to keep quiet about the pay disparity between male and female stars, or kowtow to Hrithik Roshan, may have earned her some enemies. But it won her at least an equal number of fans—including director Vishal Bhardwaj.

When the time came to cast the heroine of *Rangoon*, his World War II-era drama that releases February 24, the director was convinced Kangana was the perfect choice to play 'Jaanbaaz Julia', a stuntwoman loosely based on Australia-born Mary Evans Wadia, aka Fearless Nadia.

Like many of Bhardwaj's female characters, Julia exemplifies the "duality of a woman—her fragility and stubbornness" and "the complexity of her psyche", Ranaut explains. Ranaut identifies with Julia because she is fierce and not submissive, a mix that she says Bollywood has lost since the days of Nadia. "Now, you can either be sensuous or timid."

Dismissive of commercial awards, Ranaut is hoping one of her two 2017 releases will earn her a fourth National Award. Along with *Rangoon*, she has the title role in Hansal Mehta's *Simran* (September 15). "I would be pleasantly surprised to see



better written characters than Julia and Simran this year,” she says. “In that case if I do not get a National Award, then really, shame on me.”

Despite winning praise for her performance in *Queen* (2014) and generating more than Rs 150 crore in *Tanu Weds Manu Returns* (2015), Ranaut is still an outsider. Karan Johar has never included her in his ‘rank the best actresses’ segment on *Koffee with Karan*. And he offered a cryptic insult in his book *An Unsuitable Boy*, saying that while most actors are known for their magnificent presence “she has a magnificent absence”. The backhanded compliment does not unduly concern her. “I don’t get it,” she says. “Is it a jibe or a compliment? Am I ‘absent’ because I’m missing from his parties or his gossip circle or the WhatsApp group they have? Or because I skip the filmi parties and award shows?”

That frankness doesn’t always sit well with the ‘film fraternity’. Last year marked a particularly low point, as many closed ranks around Roshan and she was accused of everything, from having psychological problems to being a jealous girlfriend who uses black magic.



Ranaut admits that the “malice and betrayal from someone who you have been extremely close to” affected her. But she says she found solace in her work, and she remains proud that she refused to back down.

“I personally feel that women over-identify with the healer and nurturer archetype,” she said. “I don’t encourage bullying. Why should I? The fighter instinct in me dominates every other instinct.”

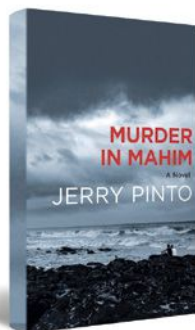
She has her share of defenders—who find nothing evil in her brand of witchcraft. As *jaanbaaz* as her character in *Rangoon*, though, she’s more than capable of fighting her own battles.

“I have been chosen for things that are extraordinary,” she says. “I have had a complicated relationship with my parents. I later fell into the most unbelievable traps that the industry has and then went through a struggle of a lifetime. I have paid a heavy price for that. My life will always be of extremes. But I’m OK with it.” ■

—Suhani Singh

# Men of the World

Two new novels by award-winning author Jerry Pinto and US-based Rahul Mehta investigate what it means to be gay and Indian at home and in America



## Murder in Mahim

by Jerry Pinto

At the beginning of Jerry Pinto’s tightly written crime novel, *Murder in Mahim*, a ‘physical trainer’ is found dead, with a gash in his side and minus a kidney, in a public toilet in Matunga—a locale for clandestine gay sex.

As more bodies turn up, a retired journalist named Peter Fernandes teams up with Inspector Jende (shades of the legendary Madhukar Zende here) to track down the killer. Naturally, it’s the journalist who must walk down the mean *galis* where Jende cannot or will not go. In the midst of all this poking around in the gayer corners of the city, Peter must also figure out what to make of a newspaper caption that describes his perennially absent son as ‘gay activist Sunil Fernandes’.

A brief 232 pages, it is the kind of book where you read five sentences, stop, re-read them because you think you’ve missed something, and then mic-test one of the lines. Then this mic-testing nonsense just takes over your life. Pinto has a superb ear for variation, and social anxiety, and the ways in which people shuffle between what they are thinking and what they want to say.

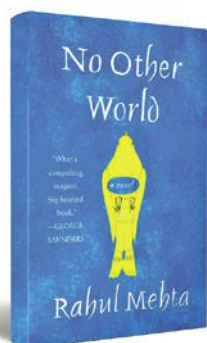
Once upon a time, Dom Moraes complained that the characters in Indian crime novels spoke too much like copywriters in New York. Pinto’s solution to this problem is a fairly ingenious device. His Peter Fernandes speaks English, reads poetry, has forgotten large tracts of his Konkani even while dreaming of returning to Moira. He can hold his own with the city’s patois, and like a good city journalist, is constantly translating and making notes in his head. The reader tends to fall in with him, and trudge the city with him and stop when he does, and shake a mystified head at more or less the same moments. ■

—Arul Mani





Illustration by ANIRBAN GHOSH



## No Other World

by Rahul Mehta

Somewhere between 70 and 80 per cent of Indian Americans hold at least an undergraduate degree. Comprising doctors, software developers, Wall Street analysts and the like, they are also America's richest ethnic group, boasting a median household income of over \$100,000, which is twice the national median.

Correspondingly, Indian American fiction—Jhumpa Lahiri being the signal example—reflects the urbane, largely upper middle class ethos of the community. Rahul Mehta

is distinguished not just by his West Virginia upbringing but by his homosexuality. *Quarantine*, a collection of plangent albeit hopeful short stories, was published in 2010. Since then, he has taught in a small university town in upstate New York, far from the metropolitan areas where most Indian Americans live.

His first novel, *No Other World*, is out at the end of this month. It opens with Kiran Shah, "twelve, almost thirteen" gazing into a farmhouse in rural New York, or rather, at the father of a schoolmate whose house it is. The novel stretches from mid-1980s America to India a decade later, a family saga that is at once transgressive and conventional, that plumbs emotional depths while in other parts barely skirting the surface. It is uneven but compelling, shedding light on little considered aspects of the Indian American experience. ■

—Shougat Dasgupta

## WATCH LIST

# FIRST SHOW



## MACHINES

Debutant director Rahul Jain's Surat factory documentary, *Machines*, earned a special jury award for excellence in cinematography at the Sundance Film Festival. Jain's film depicts nightmarish working conditions—routine for India—at a fabric factory in Surat. A western reviewer described it as "a claustrophobic, haunting vision of the kind of grim workplace traditionally associated with the UK of the Victorian era". Workers speak of low wages, long hours in sweltering heat, and travelling 1,600 kilometres for a chance at a job, where attempts to unionise wind up getting labour leaders killed. Not the sort of 'Make in India' the prime minister had in mind. ■



## TOKYO TRIAL

Irrfan Khan appears in the Netflix mini-series *Tokyo Trial*, an opulently produced if ultimately shifty docudrama on the War Crimes process in Japan after WW II. The fact it was commissioned by the Japanese NHK network may account for some of its moral ambiguity. However, like Amazon Prime's alt history show, *The Man in the High Castle*, the best thing about it may be its eerie opening sequence. ■





## FOOD

## DUM MAARO DUM

After having spent close to 40 years at the ITC chain of hotels, chef **Imtiaz Qureshi** announced his **retirement** as Grand Masterchef on his 82nd birthday on February 2. He began his culinary journey at the tender age of nine, and by 15, he was cooking sheermal, taaftan, korma, gilahti kebabs and shahi tukda for 10,000 people at a time. Qureshi has been credited with bringing Awadh's indulgent menus to the capital at ITC Maurya, and subsequently to the rest of the country through ITC's Dum Pukht brand. "But the delights of India's most decadent dishes," he says, "continue to be reserved for the elite." For his next act, he aims to bring the luxurious cuisine of India's royal courts to the masses—perhaps via a **cookbook**, one that would contain recipes that are between two and two-and-a-half centuries old.

**"The delights of India's most decadent dishes continue to be reserved for the elite"**

Credited with the revival of the 'dum' style of cooking—a traditional method of cooking using steam—he's most proud of introducing the single-portioned **Dum Biryani**, which allows for a dish to be prepared in as little as 15-20 minutes. Just last year, Qureshi became the first chef to be awarded the Padma Shri in the culinary category. He has cooked for some of the biggest names in India, from Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi in the '60s, to the Ambanis and the Goenkas and even Prime Minister Narendra Modi. A butcher's son, Qureshi began his career already well-schooled in the art of choosing the perfect cut of meat for a particular dish. However, what makes him really stand out is his innovative use of vegetables in place of meat—such as in replacing chicken with jackfruit, or fish with bottle gourd. ■

—Moeena Halim

## AWADHI DUM GOSHT KACHHI BIRYANI



### Ingredients

- 1 kg mutton, washed and strained
- 600 gm basmati rice, washed and soaked for 2 hrs
- 150 gm pure ghee
- Salt to taste
- 150 gm onion, sliced and fried
- 20 gm ginger-garlic paste
- Juice of one lemon
- Half cup green mint leaves



- 200 gm yoghurt
- 200 ml warm milk
- 10 gm red chilli powder
- 10 green cardamoms, 1 piece mace and 1/4th piece nutmeg, all powdered
- 1 tbsp rose water; 1 tbsp kewda water
- ½ gm saffron, soaked in water and ground to paste in stone mortar pestle

### Whole spices for rice

- 5 green cardamoms, 5 cloves and 2 bay leaves

### Method

**1.** Marinate meat in heavy-bottomed handi with ginger-garlic paste, salt, red chilli powder, powdered green



cardamom, mace and nutmeg, lemon, fried onion and yoghurt, 100 gm ghee; marinate for 2 to 3 hours at room temperature

**2.** Put handi on low heat

**3.** Boil water; add salt and whole spices, cook rice till half done; strain

**4.** Spread mint leaves over meat, add half the rice over the meat, then the saffron and finish with remaining rice

**5.** Mix milk, rose and kewda water remaining ghee and spread over rice

**6.** Seal handi with dough lining

**7.** Cook on very low heat till it starts simmering; cook for at least 30 mins

**8.** Turn off burner and let sit for another 20 mins

**9.** Serve with garlic, zeera raita.

## FESTIVAL

# A Mela of Memories ➡

Currently in its twelfth year, the **Mahindra Sanatkada Lucknow Festival** is a comprehensive mela, featuring dance and music, film screenings, book launches, as well as a food festival. This year, it will be held from February 3-7 at Baradari, Qaiser Bagh, and will feature performances by Tajdar Junaïd and Shahid Parvez, lectures by Irfan Habib, Aman Nath and Gerard da Cunha, as well as book releases by Nadeem Hasnain and Shazi Zaman. Every year, the festival is organised around a theme that is historically relevant for Lucknow. This year, it will focus on 'Lucknow ki Reha'ish', or the **architecture** and lifestyles of **homes** in the city. Sanatkada will also be releasing a coffee-table book titled *Reha'ish: At Home in Lucknow*, which examines the architectural and sociological evolution of Lucknow's homes from the 18th century onward. The book will examine trends such as the refinement of Nawabi housing and the colonial conceptions of space. ■

—Aditya Wig



YASHAS CHANDRA

## KAKORI KOTHI

The 'gol kamra' at Kakori Kothi (1785) is among the oldest extant cockpits in the world.

## Q&amp;A

## Age No Bar

*Age and class were on display in Pandit Jasraj's suite last Sunday: the Nadal-Federer Australian Open final. Jasraj has been a wildly popular star since before Federer was born, and is the oldest of the living greats of Hindustani classical music. He turned 87 on January 28, and, remarkably, is still performing close to his prime. He spoke of his life in music. Highlights:*

### On being in excellent voice at 87

Music is yoga. It focuses the mind inward. That gives strength.

### On what he listens to

Everything playing anywhere: filmi music, qawwali, bhajan. No conscious choice, except when friends insist. Listen in quantity, quality follows.

### On praise from fans versus the admiration of peers

Audiences praise with feeling, musicians with understanding. I remember an old man in a dirty dhoti, trampling his way to the front row, and appreciating the way I filled in a missed sam (principal beat). Or a little girl in a mandir I was singing in, scolding me for not suiting my music to the time of day.

### On spirituality and his style

Everyone is spiritual when they listen to music, even an atheist [points at me].

### On developing individuality

A phrase which haunts and obsesses you; with time, it becomes yours. Anyway, if you are proud of your gharana and people want to listen to you what else matters?

### For the record

Jasraj and daughter Durga support Nadal, who lost. Federer was "lucky". ■

—Itu Chaudhuri



BANDEEP SINGH



# Heritage Heroine

In the midst of putting the final touches to the Central Hall of **Mumbai's Town Hall** and Asiatic Library—the city's oldest public building—architect **Abha Narain Lambah** has been selected to prepare the conservation plan and advise the Chandigarh administration on the restoration of Le Corbusier's Capitol Complex, a UNESCO world heritage site in Chandigarh.

Forty-six-year-old Lambah, who has emerged as one of India's leading restoration architects, spent several years in Chandigarh as a young girl attending school at Carmel Convent. The city continues to have special meaning for her, even though she's now a Mumbai resident. But it's the project itself that truly excites her. When India was at the cusp of modernisation, iconic Swiss-French architect Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, better known as Le Corbusier, gave shape to then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's dream for the city of Chandigarh.

MAHARASHTRA CHIEF MINISTER DEVENDRA FADNAVIS WILL UNVEIL LAMBH'S RESTORATION OF THE CENTRAL HALL AT THE ASIATIC LIBRARY



in Mumbai has been to make the city's art deco and Victorian buildings acceptable as heritage," says Lambah.

Last October she completed an eight-year project to restore Mumbai's Royal Opera House, which was constructed in the Baroque style in the first decade of the 20th century. Later this month, Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis will unveil her restoration of the Central Hall at the Asiatic Library. In its heyday, the space hosted all the civic functions of the city (as well as Bombay University), and even served as a courtroom. When it reopens—decorated with chandeliers and wooden bookcases with lion heads to match the originals—it will again serve as a town hall and public library. ■

—Moeena Halim

"When you talk of modernism as an international movement, Le Corbusier... is one of the absolute greats," Lambah says.

Since she first set up her practice, 22 years ago, her biggest challenge has been to get policy makers to protect living buildings and not just dead sites. "A bulk of my work







## AWARD BUZZ

## GRAMMY MAMMY

Not long after the birth of her second child, sitarist **Anoushka Shankar** is up for a Grammy Award for the sixth time on February 12, with *Land of Gold*—a collaboration with artistes such as British-Sri Lankan hip hop star M.I.A., jazz bassist Larry Grenadier and actress Vanessa Redgrave. Will she break her losing streak? The tie-in to the global refugee crisis puts a bit of political weight behind the album—always a factor in a World Music category that illustrates the parochial nature of the Grammy Awards even as it attempts to show the opposite. But the album faces stiff competition from legendary septuagenarian Brazilians **Gilberto Gil** and **Caetano Veloso**, who together have won three Grammy Awards; 17-time winner **Yo-Yo Ma**; four-time winners **Ladysmith Black Mambazo**, from South Africa; and debutante Celtic Woman, an all-woman Irish ensemble. With such heavyweights in the field, the smart money says Shankar will once again be forced to say, “It’s an honour just to be nominated”—a truism that surely tastes more bitter every time it’s repeated. ■

## FESTIVALS

## Got Rhythm?



## THE SULAFEST

features 120 artistes over its three-day run (Feb 3-5) in Nashik. Big names include Bloc Party, the Raghu Dixit Project, the Ska Vengers and Indian Ocean



## THE MAHINDRA BLUES FEST

(Feb 11-12) in Mumbai will feature Supersonic Blues Machine, Quinn Sullivan, Janiva Magness and India's Blackstrat-blues, among others



## THE KASAULI RHYTHM &amp; BLUES FESTIVAL

(Apr 14-16) will be held at Baikunth Resorts in Himachal Pradesh. Previous years have featured an eclectic mix spanning R&B, Bollywood and Sufi



## THE WORLD SACRED SPIRIT FESTIVAL

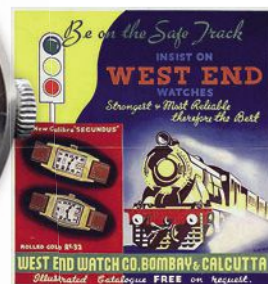
comprises three days of performances in Nagpur (Feb 13-15) and Jodhpur (Feb 17-19), showcasing classical Indian musicians as well as artistes from China and Mongolia





### The Jaz Clock

A hugely popular brand of alarm clock in India from the 1930s through to the 1950s. From early art deco to later Bauhaus minimalism, the clocks were always stylish and featured a chime **tuned to the note 'Re'**. The French company survived German occupation by introducing a logo depicting a songbird, the waxwing (or *jasseuse* in French), to avoid the Boche's disapproval of Jazz. Its presence in India faded with **import restrictions in the 1960s**, but the company still produces watches and its old clocks do a brisk business online.



### The West End Watch Co.

This small Swiss company was a legend in its heyday—the first half of the 20th century. Their watches were favoured by soldiers and adventurers across much of Asia but particularly in India and the **Himalayan region**. Its most famous line, **the 'Sowar'**, invokes the cavalymen of the British Indian Army. Exemplars on ebay will cost you around \$150. But steer clear of refurbished specimens with repainted dials.

## OBSSESSIONS

# A Brief History of (Indian) Time

For a country that has always had a fraught relationship with punctuality...or at least its own sense of stretchable time, India has a surprisingly deep love affair with watches. Watchmakers too have always loved us, if only because we are an 'underpenetrated market'. Apparently only 27% of our wrists are be-watched to this day. While high-end watchmakers continue to peddle their wares to the 1% who can afford them, most of us know that timepieces have become just that: nostalgic talismans. And some watches have much more to do with our life and times than others...

—Jabir



### Favre-Leuba

Titan was the Allwyn of the 1990s. A **Tata brand**, initially in a manufacturing arrangement with Timex, the company has done a little too well to invite sentimentality or nostalgia. Perhaps they realised as much, because in 2011 they bought another **legacy marque** beloved of vintage watch web trawlers: Favre-Leuba... Maked in Switzerland but now Owned in India, heheh...



### Allwyn

The indigenous alternative to HMT, the state-owned company began making watches in 1981 in collaboration with **Seiko** and soon captured 10 per cent of the country's watch market. Despite energetic advertising, including the first jingle **A.R. Rahman** ever wrote, the company did not survive liberalisation. But the watches are increasingly popular on ebay. Except with vintage Seiko fetishists who complain of **Feikos** with Allwyn movements under the 'made in Japan' face.



# PLAYER ONE: POWER UP

Until the late 2000s, few games were developed in India. Those that were, like 'Yoddha: The Warrior', 'Chakravyuh' and 'Bhagat Singh', were unspectacular attempts at replicating popular international fads. However, companies like Bangalore-based Dhruva Interactive were the go-to source for 3D-rendered cars in immaculate detail, such as those in the Forza series. Many of the biggest titles in the last decade, from 'Forza' to 'Call of Duty', had a hidden Indian connection.

But the last few years have seen a generational shift.

This week, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) will be hosting the **India Gaming Show (IGS)**, an exhibition and conference that will attempt to get a bird's eye



## Zenith pocket watch

Mahatma Gandhi is remembered as 'the most punctual man in India' and he certainly liked his Zenith pocket watch, a gift from the young **Indira Nehru**. While the original was recently purchased at an auction for \$1.8 million, not-quite-faithful replicas costing as little as Rs 300 abound on the e-tail market. Call it democracy...



view of what is now a behemoth industry-in-the-making. Kickstarter projects like 'Unrest' (a role-playing game set in ancient India) are gaining ground, and companies like Tiny Mogul are making mobile games for a local audience. Exciting proof-of-concepts are out there on the fringes of games worldwide, such as 'Antariksha Sanchar', which explores the life and work of Srinivasa Ramanujan. Workshops and game jams and code-schools are everywhere. What's missing is the sense of a connected industry.

Still, India has some advantages over neighbouring China—where a (recently lifted) decade-long ban on game consoles created a preference for supremely complex Multiplayer Online Battle Arenas (such as 'League of Legends' or 'DOTA2') and sprawling mobile games (such as 'Yin Yang Story', 2016's biggest hit), that are almost impenetrable to outsiders.

In contrast, Indian gamers' habits and preferences are very close to the so-called 'AAA' industry ideal. That vital difference suggests that with industry support and greater media attention, India is positioned to be the next destination for game design for a global audience. ■

—Krish Raghav



## HMT

Long before 'Make in India' was a thing, these watches were a mark of **national pride** in the days of import substitution. **The 'Janta', the 'Jawan' and the 'Pilot'** were bestsellers and ever since the announcement last year that the public sector company (estd 1961) would be 'wound up', as it were, the watches have become a fetish object for nostalgists, ironists and regular hipsters. The internet is now awash in HMTs, real and fake. Jai Hind!



## ART

## AUDIENCE ART

Inspired by watching migrant labourers from India build mushrooming Dubai, artist duo Jiten Thukral and Sumir Tagra developed *Memoir Bar*, an interactive project at the **India Art Fair's** 2017 edition.

The installation turns the audience into collaborators. Viewers write memories on a piece of paper, marking two out of six colours based on emotion. The paper is then shredded and made into a tile with the person's name on it and put on a wall. "It is like a memory bank. Memory becomes an object. It is like solidifying memory,"

they say.

*Memoir Bar* is one of several collaborative works on display at the art fair in Delhi from February 2-5. More galleries and artists were included from the South Asian region, thanks to new investment from the Swiss-based MCH Group, owner of the Art Basel franchise, says founding director Neha Kirpal.

In *Tale of Two Cities*, another collaborative



ARTIST DUO JITEN THUKRAL AND SUMIR TAGRA WILL SHOWCASE THEIR INTERACTIVE PROJECT, MEMOIR BAR



project, gallerist Renu Modi of Gallery eSpace brought together 11 artists to create disparate works based on the cities of Varanasi and Anuradhapura—sites of sacred pilgrimages in India and Sri Lanka. "In a way, the two cities became the point of departure for us to discuss larger socio-political and cultural landscapes," says Anoli Perara, who contributed to the project. ■

—Chinki Sinha

## EXHIBITION

## SOLID FLUIDITY



## AWAY FROM, BUT NONETHELESS CAPITALISING ON

the frenzy of the India Art Fair this week, Talwar Gallery is showcasing the work of **Ranjani Shettar**, whose sculptural installations have garnered critical acclaim in connection with shows at top international museums such as the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Unlike several of her contemporaries who also work in the field of abstract expression, Shettar looks to the natural world, rather than the urban, for her inspiration. Her sculptures have an **organic quality**, both because of their form and the material she uses to construct them—beeswax, vegetable dyes and wood—and are devoid of ornamentation. The title of the exhibition, *Bubble Trap and a Double Bow*, takes its name from a work that is emblematic of Shettar's commitment to retaining the qualities of her materials—in this

case, wood—while simultaneously incorporating a sense of movement that belies the solidity of the material. The show at **Talwar Gallery** comprises some 15 works of art by Shettar, which were completed between 2012 and 2017. The artworks range from solid objects to immersive environments created using suspended mobile sculptures made of fabric and wire, to complex installations that are made of hundreds of individual components and woodcut prints. One of her most interesting works of art is a 16-foot scroll that Shettar made while on a residency in Qatar. Dyed in henna, the imagery on the scroll is printed using wooden blocks and the abstract 'narrative' can only be viewed a portion at a time. The exhibition will remain open until the end of May, at Talwar Gallery in Neeti Bagh, New Delhi. ■

—Latika Gupta

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**Q:** *Raees* is about a bootlegger. What's your favourite drink?

**A:** I genuinely like colas. Earlier I used to drink 24 of them, but now I drink fewer.

**Q:** As a performer, who is your favourite villain?

**A:** The Joker. And I don't know if he is a villain or not, but I like Walter White (from the American TV series *Breaking Bad*).

**Q:** Are there any real-life criminals you are intrigued by?

**A:** I don't see her as a criminal, but the story of Mata Hari is very interesting. So is the story of Natwarlal. Charles Sobhraj had an extremely eventful and mean life.

**Q:** An occasion on which you usually lie?

**A:** I generally just keep quiet. Maybe a little fib like when somebody asks 'You're reaching na?' and I'm like 'Main nikal gaya hoon. I'll be there in five minutes.'

**Q:** One thing you can't do without on a shoot?

**A:** My vanity van. It has to come with me. It has everything I need.

—with Suhani Singh

ROHIT CHAWLA



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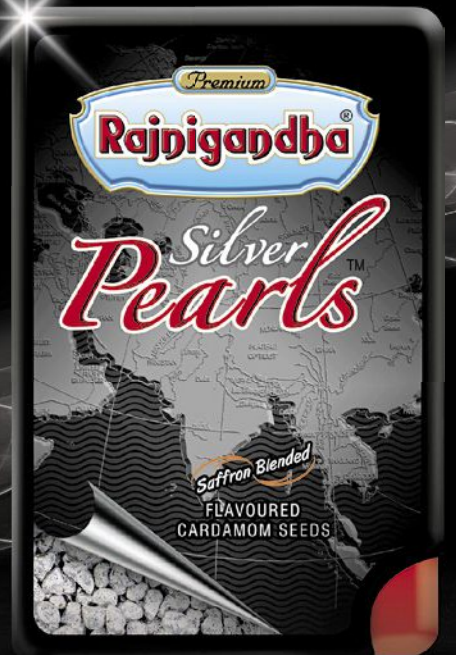


Aries Led





Achchai ki  
ek alag chamak  
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# INDIA TODAY

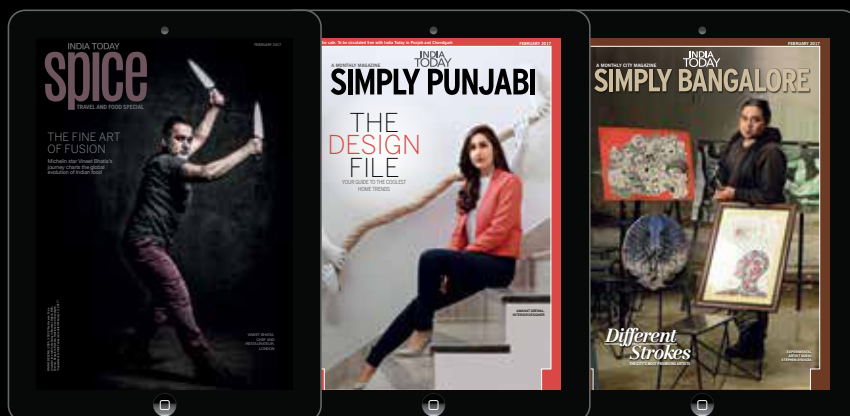


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INDIA TODAY

FEBRUARY 2017

# spice

TRAVEL AND FOOD SPECIAL

## THE FINE ART OF FUSION

Michelin star Vineet Bhatia's  
journey charts the global  
evolution of Indian food



VINEET BHATIA,  
CHEF AND  
RESTAURATEUR,  
LONDON



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ALC  EMY

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# INDIA TODAY Spice

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

In times characterised by disposables, only memories truly defy the calendar's expiry date. So *Spice* dedicates this issue to celebrating those enchanting experiences that will likely clog your memory log. Imbued with the dulcet notes of novelty, *Spice* arms this food and travel special with the distinctive eloquence of imagination to serve as both guide and companion.

For those who choose their own path, need no maps; precisely the reason why seasoned Indian-born celebrity chef Vineet Bhatia makes it to the *Spice* cover this time. He was the first Indian chef to win the coveted Michelin star for his restaurant Zaika, in London. The man, who dreamed of becoming a pilot, ended up piloting the cause of Indian food abroad, transforming the cookie cutter model of British curry houses that served the typical chicken tikka masala to plated fine Indian food that was inspired and innovative. The chef shares his passion for travel around India and explains how some of these gourmet havens made it to his menu, whether it was the kebabs from Lucknow, sonpapdi from Bikaner or the classic Moilee sauce from Kerala that he made his own, while referencing cultural sensibilities.

The medley of travel and taste may have spurred his sensibilities, but we sign up for a walk on the wild side with a private safari company in Kenya. Being guided through an exclusive 30,000 acre wildlife conservancy in Amboseli, we enjoy a rare National Geographic moment with a leopard on a tree, feasting on fresh kill. But if that sounds tame, we have a treat for the truly daring. *Spice* signs up as part of a pioneering group of concerned environmentalists and adventure enthusiasts aboard the Ocean Endeavour, the only ship in Antarctica that is focused on health and wellness. So apart from a spa and a gym, there are internationally trained chefs and a menu that changes every day.

From the austerity of the white wilderness, we discover the warm embrace of excess at five new luxury addresses around the country. With the hospitality sector forging ahead full steam, we bring you the low-down on the finest in high-end hotels. The opulence of luxury hotels may serve the body but to sate the spirit, we prefer the brooding melancholy of the Scottish Highlands. We stop by at the Glenfiddich distillery in Dufftown for a delectable treat. Even those without a predilection for smoked barley, will find much to engage as our gourmet tour of the British isles winds up at the Michelin-starred restaurant Dabbous on Whitfield Street, in London and the hottest Asian fish and seafood restaurant, Sexy Fish located at Berkeley Square in Mayfair.

*Spice* continues with its European sojourn as we travel to Saxony in Germany to the birthplace of the famed luxury watchmaker A. Lange & Söhne in Glashütte.

From the sensibilities of precision watch making to the sensitivities of a contemporary artist, we round up the issue with a quick peek at a retrospective of Jitish Kallat's work at the NGMA, Delhi. It's time to feast on the unexpected as you savour with an open mind and a willing spirit.

(Aroon Purie)

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Vineet Bhatia

COVER IMAGE  
**BANDEEP SINGH**

LOCATION  
**ROSEATE HOUSE, DELHI**



BANDEEP SINGH



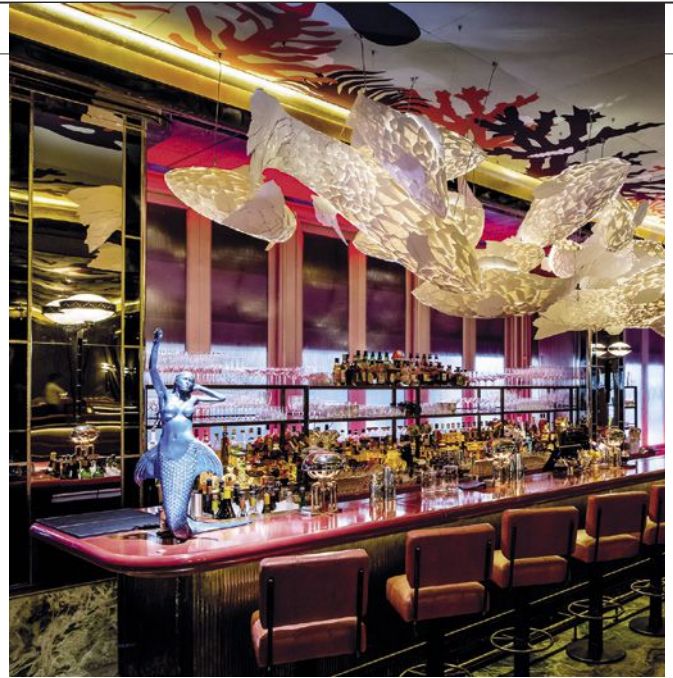
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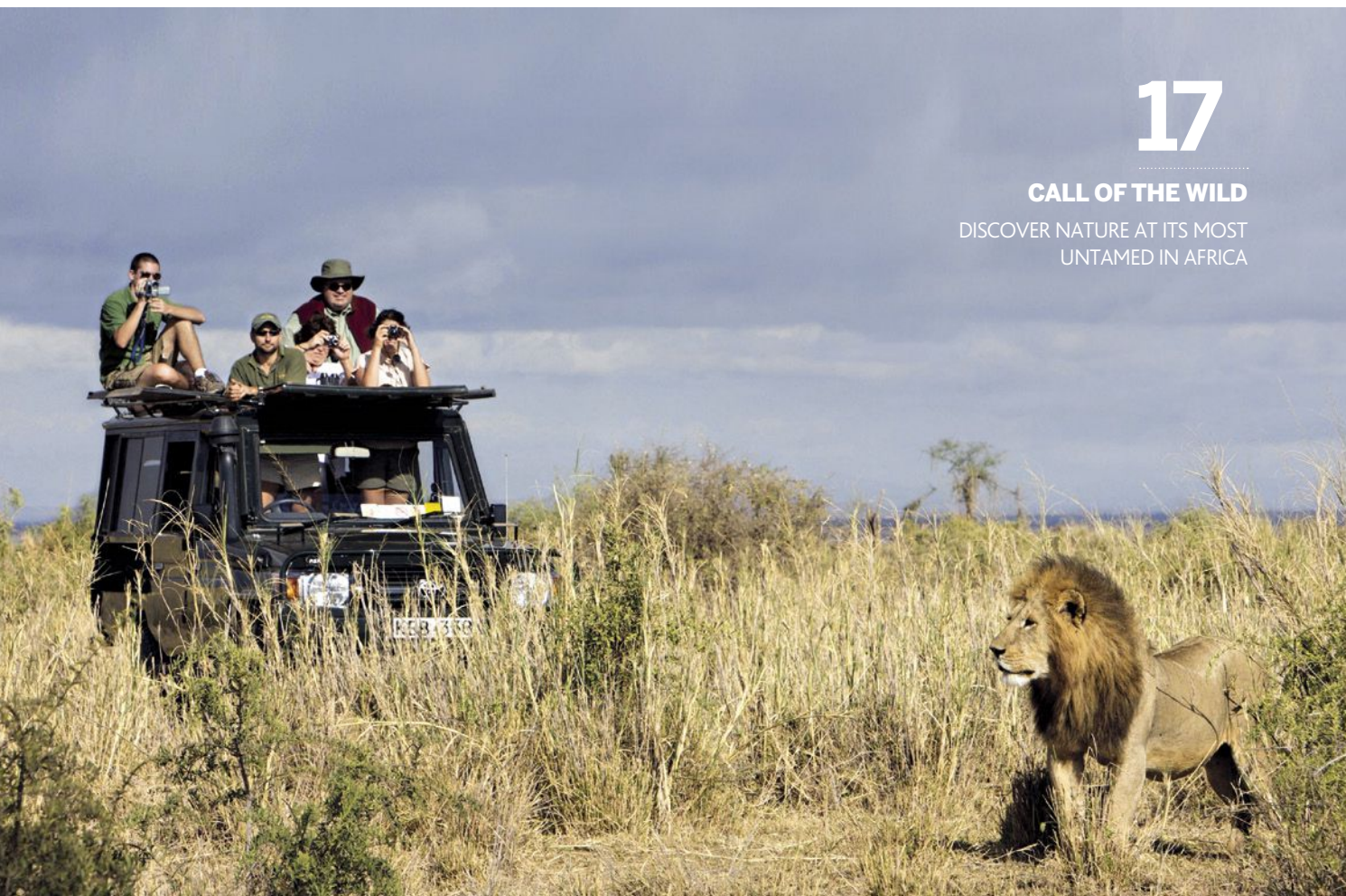
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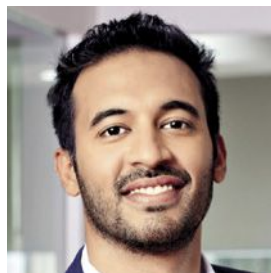
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## HOWARD SAUNDERS

*Safari Guide*

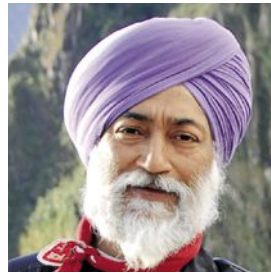
Howard Saunders has been guiding since 1994, originally leading adventurous trips that circumnavigated Lake Victoria through Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda and Congo. He has been a partner at The Original Ker & Downey Safaris since 2001. He lives on the northern edge of Masai Mara with Stephanie, a wildlife biologist and writer, and their two young children.



## VIKRAM AHUJA

*Travel Entrepreneur*

Vikram Ahuja is a serial entrepreneur, a short-film maker and the Founder of Byond Travel, India's largest community-driven travel company, which brings together small groups of like-minded people travelling together to over 50 countries.



## MANDIP SINGH SOIN

*Explorer*

Mandip Singh Soin is a modest, badass mountaineer, explorer and an eco pacifist, whose adventures have taken him to six continents over 40 years. He is the recipient of the Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Award for Lifetime Achievement by the President of India, and the only Indian to receive the Citation of Merit by The Explorers Club, USA. He is also the founder of Ibex Expeditions and founder president of The Ecotourism Society of India.



## TEJAS SOVANI

*Chef*

Chef Tejas is the executive sous chef at The Oberoi, Gurgaon and heads the globally acclaimed Amaranta, the hotel's modern Indian restaurant. Tejas likes his ingredients to be fresh and the method of preparation to be simple to enhance the flavours further. He also likes to play table tennis, which helps improve his concentration in the kitchen.

# TRIBUTE TO ART

Compiled by Srishti Jha



A pair of *aux deux oiseaux* (1973)

British auction house Christie's will offer a group of pieces by Swiss sculptor and designer Diego Giacometti, the son of painter Giovanni Giacometti and brother of the sculptor Alberto Giacometti. What makes this collection special is that it is being offered from the personal collection of Hubert de Givenchy, a personal friend of the sculptor. This exceptional sale will be preceded by a week-long viewing that begins in Paris on March 6, 2017. Inspired by the only exhibition dedicated to Diego Giacometti, curated by Daniel Marchesseau in 1986, at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, this exhibition is Hubert de Givenchy's final tribute to his dear friend. Twenty one objects will be showcased including a pair of magnificent bronze octagonal dining tables *aux caryatides* made by the artist in 1983 (₹5.80 crore-₹8.70 crore each), as well as four bronze stools (₹2.17 crore- ₹3.63 crore) and a third, slightly smaller, octagonal table *aux caryatides* (₹4.35 crore-₹5.80 crore). A pair of andirons *aux deux oiseaux* realised in brown patina in 1973 (₹1 crore-1.45 crore) will also be presented along with a major white patina lantern that hung in the main staircase of the manor, which preceded the one Giacometti created for the Musée Picasso (₹2.17 crore- ₹ 2.19 crore). A pair of photophores *au cerf* (₹2.90 crore- ₹4.35 crore) completes this selection. For more information log on to [www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com)





### SIMPLY PERFECT

Made from stretch cotton, sporting a subtle sheen, these navy Berluti trousers are comfortable enough for a day-to-night look. Pair them with a tailored blazer or a tweed jacket and Oxford shoes.

**Price** £607

**Availability** [www.mrporter.com](http://www.mrporter.com)

### CHECKERED COOL

A statement coat with structure, texture and fit is a must this season. The E. Tautz double breasted overcoat is all-winter glamour. Mix and match with denims or straight trousers and a plain cashmere scarf.

**Price** £1,490

**Availability** [www.etautz.com](http://www.etautz.com)



### SOFT FOCUS

Scarves have always been the first choice for those who love to accessorise. With a precise blend of elegance and style, Corneliani's silk and cashmere scarves lend the perfect finishing touch to a refined, classy presence.

**Price** On request

**Availability** *Corneliani Boutique, DLF Emporio, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi*



### RUGGED CHARM

Flamboyant, edgy and eye-catching, it's time to boot up this season. The Patina Chelsea boots from Mélange by Sartojiva are a winning blend of texture, cut and length. Made with traditional calf leather, these are best paired with leather, corduroys and woollen textures.

**Price** On request

**Availability** *253, 1st Floor, Shahpur Jat, New Delhi*



1



2



3



4



5



1

### **ALICE + OLIVIA JOSETTE JACKET**

Military trends are not just doing the rounds in green but also in patterns. Crafted from black wool-blend with a touch of cashmere, the Alice + Olivia's embroidered Josette jacket has just the right amount of everything.

Price \$1,211

Availability [www.net-a-porter.com](http://www.net-a-porter.com)

2

### **CAROLINA HERRERA MIKADO SKIRT**

Drawing on contemporary sensibilities, this artfully structured and printed Carolina Herrera petal-print Mikado party skirt in Cobalt tone seems right out of a modern-day fairy tale. Experiment with colours for the top and go for classic pumps.

Price \$622

Availability [bergdorfgoodman.com](http://bergdorfgoodman.com)

3

### **EDIE PARKER ACRYLIC BOX CLUTCH**

Vintage never goes out of style. Handmade from matte enameled metal and topped with a multi-coloured marbled acrylic clasp, this Wolf box clutch is ideal for a casual getaway or an occasional evening. Art gets more wearable by the day.

Price £1,695

Availability [edie-parker.com](http://edie-parker.com)

4

### **JOHANNA ORTIZ TRINIDAD TOP**

This Johanna Ortiz top features a contrast hem and an off-the-shoulder neckline. The pattern cutting, fabric and the graphic prints stand out in this piece. Wear it with a mid-length skirt or high waist trousers.

Price \$850

Availability [www.modaoperandi.com](http://www.modaoperandi.com)

5

### **AQUAZZURA DENIM POINT-TOE FLATS**

Inspired by traditional ballet slippers, Aquazzura's embroidered denim-toe flats come with a slender metallic heel. Italian made, these flats are made in light-blue denim with detailed contrasting geometric details.

Price \$935

Availability [www.valentino.com](http://www.valentino.com)





#### GETAWAY GLAMOUR

Modern in design and classic in spirit, this Da Milano bag is elegance personified. Crafted in textured leather with minimal fittings, this piece is perfect for minimal and maximal looks.

Carry it with a formal pant suit or a black dress or mix and match with denim and linen outfits.

**Price** On Request

**Availability** All Da Milano stores across India



#### ART PACK

A statement choice for the day or the perfect evening accompaniment, this work of art by Edie Parker is a beauty. Handcrafted in Italy from raffia with acrylic ends, the soft Lara Luau clutch is embroidered with playful hula girls and fish. The satin-lined interiors are spacious enough to fit your knick-knacks, while the designer-etched mirror is an added advantage for a quick touch-up.

**Price** \$2,195

**Availability** [www.shape.com](http://www.shape.com)



#### COLOUR CRUSH

Timelessly modern with classic shapes and cuts that capture the label's irreverent spirit, the colour palette comes together in this multicolour calf leather Dun Dun tote bag from Paula Cademartori. The luxurious leather and polished metal add to the playful pop art and offers svelte silhouettes with neat lines.

**Price** \$1,269

**Availability** [www.shopstyle.com](http://www.shopstyle.com)



#### BAG IT

Balancing novelty and tradition, Fendi introduces the new member of the Metal Stitch Selleria, the Lui bag. This timeless bag reinterprets the Maison's key codes of refined craftsmanship and researched design, perfectly in sync with modernity and functionality. With manual techniques inherited from Roman master saddlers, the Lui bag is created in black Cuoio Romano leather by Fendi artisans with a luxurious touch.

**Price** On Request

**Availability** All Fendi boutiques across India



## PROVING CARBON'S METTLE

*Richard Mille's signature feature, NTPT Carbon, now extends its base to include women's watches too*

Elegance and endurance may seem like an oxymoron, but luxury watchmaker Richard Mille has it down pat. NTPT (North Thin Ply Technology) carbon, a signature feature of the Richard Mille men's collection, lends watches optimal protection for the calibre. Now, this material has revealed its feminine side as well with the models RM 07-01 and RM 037, which boast gem-set NTPT carbon to ensure elegance as well. This Richard Mille exclusive creates a startling contrast between the sparkle of clear diamonds and the matt carbon contour at the slightest wrist movement. Of course, setting gemstones in NTPT carbon is a new adventure for the brand. Unlike gold that can be worked directly with tools to create the prongs that will hold the diamonds, the hardness and resistance of NTPT carbon requires special machines and equipment. Hand-polished prongs in red or white gold are produced separately and then inserted around the many bearings (0.25mm) that will hold as many as 250 diamonds in the case of the RM 037 Full Set model. Brains and brawn—now that's a winning combination. Price on request; Available at brand boutiques



# SPICEJET HAS RECORDED THE BEST ON-TIME PERFORMANCE IN INDIA. AGAIN.

**ON-TIME PERFORMANCE RATING  
(ALL AIRLINES) DECEMBER, 2016**

OTP RANKING	AIRLINE	ON-TIME PERFORMANCE
1st	SpiceJet	70.0%
2nd	Jet Airways + JetLite	64.3%
3rd	Vistara	64.2%
4th	GoAir	63.6%
5th	IndiGo	61.6%
6th	Air India	59.0%



 [www.spicejet.com](http://www.spicejet.com) |  +91 9871803333

As per DGCA statistics released on 16th January, 2017.



PHOTOGRAPH BY BANDEEP SINGH



# CURRYING FLAVOUR

WITH TRAVEL AND MUSIC AS TWIN INSPIRATIONS, CHEF VINEET BHATIA'S MENU IS LIKE AN ORCHESTRA PLAYING A BALLAD WITH FOOD AS A SYMPHONY OF TASTE AND TEXTURE

BY CHUMKI BHARADWAJ

As a child, I was always the shortest, smallest, youngest; I got bullied, hit. But I learnt to fight. The kitchen became my battleground and food a form of expression. It was my scope for freedom; my space." Food as battle cry, passion and muse, globally acclaimed, London-based, Mumbai-born Vineet Bhatia is a chef and food impresario. The journey of a boy who dreamed of becoming a pilot but ended up piloting the cause of Indian food overseas is one of grit, gruelling hard work and luck, by his own admission. But the aggressive trajectory of his success belies the soft-spoken, diminutive man wearing a gentle smile, burgundy denims, printed jacket and a bowler hat.

It's easy to forget that Bhatia is the first Indian chef-restaurateur to receive the coveted Michelin star in 2001; just one of the many epaulettes he wears ever so lightly. Always one for turning things on its head and taking risks, he shut down his flagship restaurant, Rasoi, almost 12 years after it opened in 2004. The idea, to re-launch it as Vineet Bhatia London. With 12 restaurants around the globe and a name that is a brand to reckon with, Bhatia could well rest on his laurels. "I am almost 50, I could step back and say I have done 32 years of hard work. Do I need to start afresh? Do I need to pull in 18 hours again? I don't need to. But I want to make a statement," he says.

## Thinking out of the box

"When I opened Zaika in 1999, I was the first Indian chef to do a tasting menu. People laughed at the idea of doing five courses of Indian khana, paired with wine. When I started plating Indian food in London, I did it because I had to survive. I could not call my rogan josh, a rogan josh, so I used to call it slow-cooked shank of lamb with Kashmiri spices to make it sound delectable; chicken tikka became morsels of chicken in a buttery tomato sauce, scented with kasuri methi.

It's not gimmickry he insists. "When your classic butter chicken is pitted against the butter chicken made by Indian restaurants in London, which is deep fried chicken in a yellow sludge, and it gets lapped up willingly, you have no choice but to improvise. It's the same when your gajar ka halwa is told off, because it's not deemed authentic, you write it up as slow cooked carrots with cardamom and pistachios."

When he left India in 1993, he insists he was very classical. No plating. Just typical fare—kebab with some lachcha pyaaz sprinkled with nimbu. "It was perfectly fine. but when I was repeatedly rapped on my knuckles for doing it the right way, I realised that if I had to change them rather than submit to the tyranny of the majority, I'd do it my way."

Naturally, the way Bhatia was cooking in 1993 was poles apart from the food he's presenting now. "London is the centre of the world in many ways, in food terms. So when you want to showcase an Indian menu with



ACCLAIMED CHEF VINEET BHATIA AT THE ROSEATE HOUSE, DELHI

THE PRIVATE ROOM,  
WITTET, AT VINEET  
BHATIA LONDON



15 courses, it takes a thought process. For two and a half hours, you have to remain seated and be entertained, plate after plate. And each time there has to be a wow factor."

It isn't just about the food anymore; it is the restaurant; it's the staff, the service sequence, crockery, and every little detail matters. "For example, the crockery on which I serve my 15 courses costs me around £300 per person. We buy unique pieces. We have a new plate, which is a half plate; it's a broken plate. We serve a wild mushroom momo with a red pepper chutney, garlic raita, porcini powder and makhni ice cream." Why broken? "I just wanted to add something dramatic flair. Fifteen courses on the same plate is boring. Suddenly this comes in the seventh course, and piques your interest."

A menu is a composition; a symphony of flavours, he says. It has to have highs. It has to have lows. The first six courses are childhood snacks. You have pav bhaji and aloo chat, but they are not served in the way that you are used to eating them. Pav bhaji is basically a pao stuffed with the bhaji with butter, flavoured with pav bhaji masala, served on the side. Aloo chat comprises finely cut chips of potatoes, shaped into a ball, and deep fried to a warm crisp. The chutney is injected inside, and a small pip inserted, which when pressed, spurts out yogurt. With each bite, the yogurt and the

chutney mixes seamlessly inside the mouth in a burst of varying textures and flavours. Revolutionising Indian food in Britain, while nurturing its core values, has become a Bhatia imprimatur now. From the way it is presented to the way it is experienced, is a carefully evolved strategy of surprise and enterprise.

### Travel is key to an evolved cuisine

"Fusion is a word I used to detest. Going back 15-20 years, fusion was the confusion. But when you start travelling, you realise there is a lot more to fusion. It is an artful blend; an internal jugalbandi in many ways. But you have to respect ingredients, techniques, the usage, and how you can do it. For instance, if you take foie gras, basically liver, and mix it with kadhai masala, and serve it on a bed of wild mushroom naan, it's still very much Indian. The foie gras protein may not be Indian, but the spices are. If we add kaleji to kadhai masala and toss it together, the flavours are incorporated. But with foie gras, you can't do that because it is full of fat and has a subtle flavour." That comes with an understanding of the cuisine, and style of cooking. "So, we crush the foie gras with spices, cook it in the same style as the kaleji but we don't toss it for 5-10 minute, to retain the delicacy. You need to serve it on something that can absorb the fat, so we serve it on a bed of wild mushroom (gucchi or Kash-







SMOKED SALMON,  
DELICATE YET DRAMATIC



THE DELECTABLE  
MALAI CHICKEN



## FOOD FAVOURITES

### TOP INGREDIENT

Salt; it's the most important. Second, the passion to cook.

### MOST VERSATILE INGREDIENT

Oil. I like flavoured oils; you can add anything and make your own flavoured oils. It's very versatile with multiple purposes; temper, cook, shallow fry, deep-fry.

### MOST MEMORABLE DISH

There are so many, but when I close my eyes and I think, I think of my mother's Sunday haddi wala mutton with aloo and lachcha pyaaz comes to mind.

### MOST MEMORABLE DISH YOU HAVE CREATED

Chocolate samosa, home smoked tandoori salmon, white butter chicken

### MOST ESSENTIAL KITCHEN GADGET

A knife

### FAVOURITE CHEF

Alain Ducasse, Nobu Matsuhisa, Joël Robuchon

### FAVOURITE RESTAURANTS AROUND THE WORLD

Chesa Veglia, Badrutts Hotel in St Moritz; it was a 16th century barn and I was sitting there with my wife and two sons, and we had the most amazing pizza with blue cheese and lobster, paired with a glass of Borello red wine. It was snowing outside and it was magical.

### TOP SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

Inspiration is all around you. People inspire me. Travel is inspirational. Visuals inspire me. The window of an aircraft, where you can see infinity and beyond, offers the best inspiration. Music inspires me to think of food. The music which inspires me the most for Indian khana is Pink Floyd. You can put on Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* and sit in the corner, close your eyes and enjoy the beautiful music and allow it to elevate you. A R Rahman's genius is another game changer.

### FAVOURITE FOOD DREAM

Any yellow dal (moong, masoor mix, with a tadka of jeera and green chillies garnished with fresh dhania) and served with a bowl of dahi—simple but very satisfying.



## FAVOURITE TRAVEL DESTINATIONS

### JAPAN

A favourite with my older son, it soon became ours as well, especially the fish market at dawn is remarkable.

### ZERMATT

Trekking holiday to Matterhorn, Switzerland, was amazing; it's also the land of Toblerone.

### JORDAN

Another strike off Rashima's bucket list; Little Petra is simply out of this world; an ancient connection.

### MAURITIUS

We have a house here now, so it's more home than holiday spot. We hope to settle down here.

### COORG

The weather, the peace and the beauty simply charmed us; the cold and fog just said home.



miri morels) naan flavoured with truffle oil. Is that fusion, I am not sure, but it's very much Indian. It is progressive. That's what my food is: progressive evolved Indian."

The idea is to evolve a cuisine internally within its own ingredients and boundaries, but when you go overseas, you have various proteins that are not indigenous to India. But since you feed a different audience, you utilise local products. "When we were traveling through Venezuela, we came across black corn. We did our own dish, with a moilee sauce, cooked lightly as in Kerala, but added a puree of black corn so the sauce turned black; when you eat it with your eyes closed, it is moilee in the mouth, but when you open your eyes, the moilee is gone."

Whether it is the kebab, biryani or samosa, none is Indian in origin, but has been adapted over the years. Travel blurs boundaries and seeps into food and flavours. Nobu Matsuhisa's food is a perfect fusion of Japanese and Peruvian, but he is a master at it. Similarly LA-based John Shaw, of Steak and Whisky, has perfected the blend of Vietnamese and French. I live overseas but still maintain traditional Indian into which I incorporate imported techniques, flavours and proteins. That's why my food is

not heavy; you can have multiple courses.

### Planning ahead

Since neither of his sons, Varaul, 19 or Ronit, 17, has shown any interest in the food business, does he worry about his legacy? "The legacy will be through our books, our TV shows and eventually through youtube," he says. Both he and wife Rashima launched their second book, *My Sweet Kitchen*, in Paris in November last year. "It was Rashima's idea to do a book, because it will all be lost otherwise. Sadly, Indians don't share, and I love to teach. Naturally, future plans include starting a cooking school: "We want to start a six month-course for junior chefs who know the basics, but need the finesse of a finishing school. Out of these 20 children, we want to take in five from the streets, who will be taught free." This is his way of paying it forward.

In his typical easy going, salt of the earth manner, he maintains: "Nobody is born a cook; you become one. I became a cook purely by error, but I was very lucky that I got into a restaurant that has worked for me. I slogged my butt off, but there are people who are working a lot harder than I do, but don't get recognised. I am just lucky."



THE CHEF WITH WIFE RASHIMA AND SONS, RONIT AND VARAUL (EXTREME RIGHT) ON HOLIDAY IN JAPAN



# BRINGING LUXURY TO LIFE


UNTAMED AFRICA, UNRESTRICTED ACCESS, PERSONALISED IMMERSION; EXPERIENCE THE BUSH IN ITS PUREST FORM



**HOWARD SAUNDERS**

Partner, The Original  
Ker & Downey Safaris



  
A LAZY PRIDE LOOKS ON  
UNIMPRESSED AS THE  
SAFARI VEHICLE  
INCHES CLOSE

**N**ot long ago, my guests and I flew into Kenya's famed Masai Mara national reserve. Within an hour, I had pulled into a favourite gully frequented by an impressive male leopard. As we drove up and saw the big cat perched proudly among the branches of the sycamore fig, totally unaware of the stir he had created, my guests remained stunned by this up close and

personal immersion into wild Africa. Thanks to the secluded nature of this area, we enjoyed the viewing exclusively without the usual tourist hordes. Authenticity of experience and the opportunity to feel the natural world in its purest form comes from insider knowledge. To produce the incredible, an intimate understanding of my adopted habitat—the African bush, has allowed me to deliver these unparalleled wildlife sightings.





THIS SIT-OUT IN THE BUSH IS PART OF THE LUXURY CAMP



A GORILLA IN THE WILD



## WILD LUXURY

A century ago, travel to exotic locations was the preserve of the rich and famous who drew inspiration from the legendary explorers of the time. These early travellers sought out the almost mythical wilderness and in doing so understood that they were accessing places that very few could. Today jet setters may wonder whether such destinations still exist. But an elite network of travel experts attests to the fact that they most definitely do, and hold the keys to unlock its potential.

Where exclusivity is the nuance of luxury, the experiential nature of travel within this select group is redefining travel. The Shackleton & Selous Society has been evolving the very definition of luxury. The society is comprised of fellows who have devoted their lives to crafting the most fascinating travel experiences available today: a private tour of Rajasthan's forts; cruising Australia's Great Barrier Reef; watching elephant herds meander in an exclusive 30,000-acre wildlife conservancy in Amboseli, Kenya;





AN ELEPHANT AT THE  
AMBOSELI CAMP

## KENYA SAFARI FACT FILE

**TOUR DURATION** A typical safari is between 7 and 12 days, although each safari is customised and can be crafted to suit the travellers' interests

**PRICE** Upwards of USD\$1,000 per person per day; safaris are all inclusive with full board accommodation in luxury camps and lodges

**HOW TO GET THERE** Emirates and Kenya Airways operate daily flights out of Delhi and Mumbai

**WEATHER** Being on the equator, Kenya is pleasant to visit throughout the year, though April and May typically see higher rainfall

**CONTACT** howard@howardsaunders.com; www.howardsaunders.com ; www.shackletonandselous.com; ph: +254 722 742 310

exploring Rome's treasures with behind-the-scenes tours of the Colosseum or helicopter rides to a hidden fly-fishing lodge in New Zealand. Sharing the experience exclusively with family and friends, away from busier locations may come at a premium, but with that comes that rarest of finds—authenticity.

### PRIVATELY OWNED, PERSONALLY GUIDED

When I personally take guests into my private safari camp on an African safari, my crew and I ensure that each part of the experience is highly personal and memorable. With my hands-on approach of being involved with the planning from day one, to directing the whole journey as a professional guide, I'm able to facilitate life-changing moments that such travel can provoke. Each trip is made unique as I offer special access to Africa's gems: pulling into a hid-

den acacia grove where I know that elephant family will be feeding; calling in the local lion researchers when we want to know more of the story of our camp pride; relating the story of my place in the prestigious 70-year history of our pioneering safari company that blazed the trail of wild luxury. And who better placed to create, and host any experience of this kind than someone living and breathing this life each day. Countless moments of my life have been spent searching for those treasures within Africa, and determining how best to weave them into the trip of a lifetime.

Every safari I run is tailored to suit the interests and time-frame of my guests; no two journeys are ever the same, and the magic of each trip is found in the little surprises that are built in. For it is often the unscripted moments that bring a safari to life, and Kenya's phenomenal wildlife and a guide's deep knowledge of them,

provides the key.

And then there are the activities that we plan with the utmost precision: the hot-air balloon ride over the vast savannahs of the Masai Mara; the helicopter charter to access fresh alpine lakes, extinct volcanoes and remote tribes; an audience with a pre-eminent wildlife conservationist, in the field. Divine cuisine and fine wines accompany the timeless comfort of sumptuous canvas tents, which provide the ultimate setting for the private safari.

The culmination of these can be a life-changing journey through some of the most photogenic scenery, entrancing peoples with the most diverse wild life that exists on our planet. It took a selection of the finest private guides around the globe to realise the value of highly personalised experiences that are so fundamental to each of our lives. Sharing that with the discerning traveller simply completes the circle.



# FALLING OFF THE MAP

A JOURNEY TO THE END OF THE WORLD IS NOT  
JUST A LIFE-ALTERING EXPERIENCE BUT IT MAY  
JUST ADVANCE THE CAUSE OF SAVING  
ANTARCTICA, THE LAST PRISTINE WILDERNESS







RUBBERISED BOATS CALLED ZODIACS HELP COME CLOSER TO THE ANTARCTICA SHELF, PAST SCULPTED ICEBERGS



## MANDIP SINGH SOIN

FRGS Fellowship of the Royal Geographical Society Explorer & Adventure Traveller

**I**n the month of May 1989, I was studying the ozone hole in the Arctic and the effects of pollutants from the atmosphere onto the pristine icy expanse of the Canadian Arctic at 80 degrees North.

This was as part of the group of Instructors at the International Ice Walk Students Expedition, the brainchild of Polar explorer, Robert Swan. It was with grave concern that we looked at the scientific experiments, supported by our team of American and Canadian Scientists, realising that the Ozone hole was indeed enlarging and that PCB's (PolyChlorinated Biphenyls) had started to pollute the Arctic waters. The one key objective was to get the international students and instructors to become ambassadors of the environment and to start creating awareness.

It is ironic, that now, three decades later, I am embarking on a wonderful cruise aboard the Ocean Endeavour—a comfortable, well-appointed small expedition ship expertly engineered to explore the polar regions—that will show us the stark beauty of the Antarctic. Fortuitously, there is little pollution to worry about now. However, the gorilla in the room is the fact that in 2048 the Antarctica Treaty will come to an end and by 2041 so will the moratorium on mining. The fear ahead is that we may lose one of the world's last pristine wildernesses to development as countries may move in for mining with serious environmental implications.

### A JOURNEY WITH A PURPOSE

To this end, I thought the way forward is to consider ways of conservation by taking a group of motivated civil society persons whose voices would be heard and felt. Fortunately, now, one can do it pretty safely and in comfort, yet allowing for a unique education with an awakening to serve this cause. And what better way than experiencing the Antarctic aboard the Ocean En-



deavour. It is also the only polar adventure ship in Antarctica that is focussed on health and wellness and offers a contemporary approach to cuisine and newly-designed health and fitness features.

Essentially, the ship takes 199 passengers and has six deck levels with not only a spa and a gym but also a couple of lounges, dining areas, bars and even a small heated salt water pool. Most Antarctic journeys would start with a flight to the happening city of European heritage, Buenos Aires, where one can get over jet lag with a tall glass of Malbec and some foot-tapping Tango. From there, you need to fly south to the southernmost city on the Planet—Ushuaia—from where the ship sets sail south-east towards Antarctica across the infamous Drake passage.

Our journey will begin on February 22, 2017, in Buenos Aires (some cabins are still available) the meeting point, after which we fly on the 24th to Ushuaia to set sail to the frozen continent. It will serve well to discover our sea legs for the next two days across the Drake Channel which could involve some rolling and pitching. We hope it's not too placid else it will become the Drake lake nor would we want to be in the eye of a storm where the waves could rise as high as 30ft.

#### THE FROZEN CONTINENT

After having survived the Drake passage, the 32 of us will then embark on the real up-close experiences by making landings on the seventh continent, which will give us a perspective of what it feels like to be standing on 90 per cent of all the world's ice and 70 per cent of all the world's fresh water. From the comfort of a warm cabin, one would come out to sub-zero temperatures. Much like in the movies, one would need to go down to the lowest deck and step out into the Zodiacs—rubberised boats with an out-board motor and propel off towards the Antarctica shelf, past some awesomely sculpted icebergs, only to greet colonies of penguins.

Each day and night would bring out a different kind of magic. Since it is the month of February, we will not only experience night skies with the brilliance of exquisite starry constellations but also amazing icebergs that have cut loose from the main shelf and form objects of beauty reflecting the varying moods of the light.

Other days, we will try to come close and personal with the Humpback or Minke



A COLONY OF PENGUINS  
WADDLING ALONG HUMAN  
VISITORS ON THEIR ISLAND

#### TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

##### GETTING TO ANTARCTICA

Fly to Buenos Aires; from there connect to Ushuaia (southernmost tip of Argentina) and onto the ship

**FOOD** Chefs are internationally trained; the menu changes every day. Breakfast and lunch is usually a buffet. Dinner is plated service, with a choice of three main dishes. A vegetarian choice is always offered; desserts are fabulous. Afternoon tea with pastries or cookies is served at 4 pm every day. Fresh pastries that arrive warm from the oven for early birds can be enjoyed at 6 am.

**COSTS** range between

USD 7000 to USD 17000 per person depending on cabin type

**WEATHER** February's temperatures range between + 10 degrees Celsius to – 15 degrees Celsius.

##### WHEN TO GO

From October to December, it's covered in snow to the water's edge. Penguins build highways as they waddle the same path, from the sea to their nests. During this period, penguins, shags and seabirds court and lay their eggs. From December through February, the snow retreats, exposing rocky headlands. Penguin chicks hatch and their parents spend endless hours feeding their hungry young.

From Mid-February to March, the whales return to feed, seals haul out on the beachheads and penguins. Highlights for travellers are whales, red snow and fledging gentoo penguins.

**CLOTHING** Base layer (long underwear); insulation layer (stretch top and bottoms); loft jacket, pullover or vest; waterproof pants; waterproof trekking shoes; heavyweight socks made of wool or wool blend; sock liners, hats and windproof and waterproof ski gloves and liners.

##### RESERVATIONS

Ibex Expeditions P Ltd., Tel: 91-11-26460246, 26460244. Email: [ibex@ibexexpeditions.com](mailto:ibex@ibexexpeditions.com) Website: [www.ibexexpeditions.com](http://www.ibexexpeditions.com)




KAREN QUIGLEY



PHOTO COURTESY QUARK EXPEDITIONS



 LOUNGING AREAS ABOARD THE OCEAN ENDEAVOUR, A SPECIAL SHIP TO EXPLORE THE POLAR REGIONS

whales that are best viewed between the months of February and March. Other times, there will be opportunities to visit the cunning Leopard seals. But remember, all footfall has to follow strict environmental protocol where special boots are dipped in sanitised liquids and no food allowed as it can be deemed a pollutant.

#### ANIMAL SIGHTINGS AND OTHER PLEASURES

For the more active, apart from the gentle treks and rambles to view the penguins, there are some invigorating activity choices like the Polar Plunge which is a brain numbing dive into freezing waters—often sub zero—for those who wish to use it as a rite of passage to reaffirm manhood or womanhood. For others, there is kayaking and paddle boarding which are all optional. All this happens as the ship sails along the South Shetland Islands along the Antarctic peninsula. The expedition will also have many scientists, and in particular, guest speaker, Jonathan Shackleton, a cousin of Sir Ernest Shackleton, the legendary polar explorer. He will reinforce why Antarctica is important to preserve for science because of its profound effect on the Earth's climate and ocean systems as well as being the world's most important natural laboratory, and a place of great beauty and wonder, of course.

After all, "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", mentioned in our Upanishads, suggests that the entire planet is our home and all living beings our family. In that spirit alone, is it not worth protecting forever?

My son, Himraj Soin, Young explorer and Project 2041 Ambassador, who went on an earlier expedition to Antarctica, writes this: "When you're at the end of the world, the rest of the world stands still. Ordinary problems seem mundane. Untouched by time and humans (mostly), this Terra Australis or "Southern Land" is the harshest, most inhospitable, driest, coldest, and windiest continent on Earth. It is also however, the most pure, primal, peaceful and poignant. It's the only place on Earth that is how it should be, and may it always remain that way."

The year 2017 has been declared the International Year for Sustainable Tourism for Development by the United Nations. This journey will show us the way, and allow us to uphold these very principles of sustainability for now and for posterity.





COVER STORY | TRAVEL | COLUMN

10

# PLACES TO SEE BEFORE YOU DIE

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO DISCOVER THE NEVER SEEN BEFORE





BANFF, IN CANADA, IS A WINTER WONDERLAND WITH SKIING, CHATEAUS AND PLENTY OF ADVENTURES



**VIKRAM AHUJA**  
Founder, Byond Travel

**N**ovelist Pico Iyer famously said, “the best travels, like the best love affairs, never really end.” You bring back a bag full of memories, adventures, a new bucket list. The ultimate bucket list for travel must include those experiences that have the potential to linger on, spurring memories which translate into stories of places, people, and things to do, see and feel. Drawing up this list wasn’t easy, so I focused on possibility and immediacy. Here are my top 10 picks that I would like to do someday and soon.

**1 GO TO BURNING MAN** A kaleidoscope of art cars, outlandish costumes and surreal

exhibits of music and self-expression, Burning Man brings together artists, thinkers and even celebrities (Mark Zuckerberg, Larry Page and Katy Perry) for a week in the middle of the Nevada desert every year. From exploring the maximum of human creativity in arts and fashion, to fostering a cashless, barter-based economy, Burning Man is the ultimate experience for anyone curious about how a utopian society would function.

## **2 CRUISE ALONG THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS**

Charles Darwin’s famous theory of evolution was inspired by his visit to this remote archipelago of multiple islands and their endemic species, where one can encounter





THE PALACE ON WHEELS  
CELEBRATES INDIA'S  
FINEST ROYAL LEGACY

giant turtles, swimming sea lions and penguins, not to mention 27 varieties of birds only to be seen here. Nowhere else in the world will you come face-to-face with more unique species at one place.

**3 THE PALACE ON WHEELS** India's most well-known luxury train transports you to the bygone era of Nawabs and Maharajas for seven days of pure indulgence while discovering some of India's most famous sights along the way, like the Ranthambore National Park and the Golden Triangle.



ARTS, MUSIC, CULTURE  
AND A UTOPIAN SOCIETY  
COMES TOGETHER AT  
BURNING MAN



This is a completely a new way of seeing India by land, the way the royals would have intended us to.

**4 NORTHERN LIGHTS** Imagine the solitude of the Finnish Lapland and the comfort of watching one of nature's finest spectacles, the Northern Lights, while tucked under a blanket with a cup of hot chocolate (and perhaps someone special), looking out into the -30 degree winter wonderland from your glass igloo. Welcome to Kakslautanen, Finland. Also on offer, reindeer and husky rides, traditional Finnish sauna baths and even a visit to Santa Claus's home.

#### **5 AMALFI COAST VINTAGE CAR ROAD-TRIP**

Italy's Southern Coast, from Positano to Amalfi, boasts of some of the most picturesque coastal highways in the world dotted with little towns, olive farms and even wineries on cliffs overlooking the Gulf of Salerno. Top this with a vintage car, such as a red 1973 Alpha Romeo Spider and join the ranks of poets, artists and Hollywood stars who have brought this stretch to life in countless books and films.

#### **6 THE TRANS SIBERIAN RAILWAY**

Criss-crossing the vast and diverse land-





THE AMALFI COAST HAS SOME OF THE MOST SCENIC DRIVES IN THE WORLD



FACE TO FACE WITH A 500 LB MOUNTAIN GORILLA IN RWANDA



THE NORTHERN LIGHTS VIEWED THROUGH A GLASS IGLOO IN FINLAND



scape of Russia, cutting through the Gobi Desert in Mongolia and finally ending up in China, via Manchuria, the world's longest rail route is also one of the greatest travel adventures of our time. The mélange of cultures, food, drink, history and people, all compressed into a seven-day journey, promises to be intense and overwhelming.

**7 ANTARCTIC CRUISE** Long considered the final frontier for die-hard explorers, Antarctica, is today, within reach, with multiple cruise liners operating throughout the year. You will do this only once in your lifetime but rest assured your stories of survival and accomplishment, peppered with giant icebergs, penguins, seals and whales, and perhaps a plunge in sub-zero waters, will be legendary.

**8 STEP INTO THE A TIME MACHINE IN CUBA** The beauty of Cuba lies somewhere between its timeless culture, the classic cars from the 50s cruising through streets filled with the sounds of Salsa music and its complicated and colourful political storyline. And if that isn't enough, there are gorgeous natural landscapes, the world's best rum and cigars and the most hospitable people you will ever come across.

**9 MOUNTAIN GORILLAS, RWANDA** The image of King Kong fighting airlines and causing havoc makes the prospect of coming face-to-face with a mountain gorilla, a slightly daunting one. The most intimate and gentle wildlife experience you can have involves trekking volcano peaks of Uganda to track and observe gorilla families as they go about their natural routines. With only 700 gorillas left in the wild, you have an opportunity to contribute directly to the conservation efforts as well.

**10 WINTERS IN BANFF, CANADA** Snowy mountains, art and music festivals, luxury chateaus with gigantic fireplaces and mugs of hot chocolate or mulled wine—experiencing Canada's best national park, draws you to a parallel universe. Go, if you must, with your closest friends and family and surrender yourself to the vast and unforgettable outdoors.



# LUXURY'S NEW AD



INDULGE IN THE PERFECT COCKTAIL OF ART, HISTORY AND LUXURY AT FIVE NEW HOTELS ACROSS THE COUNTRY THAT PROMISE TO TRANSFORM THE NORMS OF HOSPITALITY

BY PRACHI SIBAL AND ASMITA BAKSHI



# DRESS



## WHERE ART MEETS LUXURY

### ROSEATE HOUSE, DELHI

**O**n entering Aerocity, one sees a network of hotels and malls, almost like a residential colony for those who live a life in transit. One among many such hotels is Roseate House, erstwhile Dusit D2, standing tall in sophisticated brown with a painfully similar exterior to its brethren boarding spots.

But Roseate House is special. It's got the interiors of a hotel built with a modern, 2016 design aesthetic; the furniture is neat and part of the minimal embellishment and the colour tone is a subtle beige and brown, with a hint of grey. The space is "perceived as a book", and has an interesting, but not overpowering labyrinth of artwork and lithographs by Thukral and Tagra. It's uncluttered, fuss-free and doesn't impose regality and largesse, but delivers on taste and luxury.

The rooms are an extension of the rest of the hotel; simple but splendid, contemporary but comfortable. On the top floor is an infinity pool; it doesn't overlook anything spectacular, but it has studded lights built in, which transform the pool into a glorious constellation. On the third floor is the hotel's only (currently) functional restaurant, named DEL, after the Delhi airport code. The menu changes with each meal, but its contents remain innovative and consistently delectable. We strongly recommend the Ying Yang (Japan), a preparation of paprika prawns served with summer squash puree, asparagus shaving, Goma-Dare dressing and Kombu chips. Others high on our endorsement list were the Gosht aur Gucchi Pulao; the scallops and the exceptional breakfast buffet, which seem fairly standard until you navigate the sheer variety of options and the depth in taste.

Roseate House is all about the little details, it's a refreshing mix of art and architecture, the food is inspired and original, yet brings with it the comfort of the familiar; the opulence lies in its tact. And if all this wasn't enough by way of novelty, the hotel has a fully functional movie theatre called Upstage.



THE NEUTRAL PALETTE OF  
THE ROOMS AT ROSEATE HOUSE  
WHISPER QUIET LUXURY

#### GETTING THERE

A 10-minute drive from Indira  
Gandhi International Airport, Delhi

#### CONTACT

Ph 011-71558800  
[www.roseatehotels.com](http://www.roseatehotels.com)

#### PRICES:

Rooms from ₹12,000,  
suites from ₹19,000



# HISTORY IS IN VOGUE

## ORANGE COUNTY, HAMPI



THE HOTEL HAS BEEN  
DESIGNED LIKE A PALACE  
WITH ELEMENTS OF LOCAL  
ARCHITECTURE

**H**ampi is a traveller's paradise; the small town and neighbouring Hospet have always been popular among budget travellers, with little on offer for the luxury traveller. But Orange County Luxury Resorts, newly opened and located in Kamalapura, a few kilometres from the ancient ruins, does more than fill this void. Designed like a palace with the local architecture in mind, the resort makes you feel like royalty. Arched corridors, water bodies and paved paths guide you to your room.

The Nivasa Deluxe Suite, the base category room is much larger than an average hotel room with high ceilings, wooden beams, and antique-inspired furniture with brass accents. The room has separate living and dining areas in addition to a king-sized four poster bed and dressing space. Every room comes with a private Jacuzzi and sit-out. Bathed in soft evening light, the sandstone inspired architecture looks majestic. The property has two restaurants, Samovar and Tuluva. With a candle-lit aura, Samovar offers a North Indian menu, while Tuluva is a multi-cuisine restaurant which overlooks an infinity pool, caters to all palates with a few Vijayanagara specialities drawn from its ancient cuisine.

With weak mobile signals and WiFi connectivity limited to the lobby, it's the perfect refuge from city stresses. Vaidysala, the spa, offers treatments to further the cause of detox. Activities like guided walks along the Raya Trail and the Virupaksha trail allow glimpses into the life and times of the Vijayanagara empire, a journey that may well lead you to discover many a thing about yourself amid the ruins.

### GETTING THERE

The nearest airports are  
Hubli and Bangalore

### CONTACT

Ph 083942 94700  
[www.orangecounty.in/hampi](http://www.orangecounty.in/hampi)

### PRICES

₹24,000 onwards for  
the Nivasa Deluxe Suite



# HERITAGE IS HOME

## SVATMA, THANJAVUR

### GETTING THERE

Closest airport Trichy,  
48 km from Thanjavur

### CONTACT

Phone 04362 273222  
www.svatma.in

### PRICES

Rooms from ₹16,000,  
suites from ₹21,000



THE HERITAGE HOTEL  
IS A TROVE OF ORIGINAL  
TANJORE ARTEFACTS

**N**estled in a heritage bungalow in the temple town of Thanjavur, Svatma is more than a quaint boutique hotel.

It offers travellers an insight into the cultural world of the once glorious capital of the Chola empire. Hence, it isn't a room or a suite that you book, but an entire experience. The property is divided into the Heritage Wing, the original restored bungalow and the Millennium Wing, a newly constructed building. The heritage bungalow has been restored keeping in mind the Chola architecture from the region and is a treasure trove of family heirlooms and artefacts, from original Tanjore paintings to pictures.

The rooms are simple yet comfortable with antique furniture and local accents with silk furnishings and traditional palm mats. The heritage suites are luxurious and come with a terrace that overlooks the garden or swimming pool, which is built like a temple

tank. The day begins with Vedanta chanting and ends with the reverberating sounds of a Veena recital in the central courtyard. Bharatnatyam concerts are organised on request. At the rooftop bar Nila, you could be privy to a breathtaking view of the massive Brihadeeswara temple or you could indulge in a traditional ghee massage or coconut scrub at Soukyam, the spa. Palaharam, the continental café overlooks the garden and is the perfect setting for a laid-back holiday lunch.

For a perfect mix of traditional and local flavours, head to Aaharam, the organic fine food restaurant that serves unlimited mini plated meals like the Thanjavur Thali and the Maratha Thali. The menu changes every day to allow the sampling of new preparations. For breakfast, you could opt for a culinary class and make your own piping hot dosa in the open kitchen.



# STEEPED IN NOSTALGIA

## THE WAVERLY

### GETTING THERE

The Waverly Hotel & Residences, Whitefield Main Road, Bengaluru

### CONTACT

Ph 080 67089000  
www.thewaverly.in

### PRICES

Rooms from ₹6,000,  
Residences from ₹13,000

Just a hop, skip and jump (or let's say, a few elevators) away from leading high street stores like H&M, Superdry and others, The Waverly Hotel & Residences at VR Bengaluru, offers you a chance to literally stay at a mall. Inspired by the culturally rich neighbourhood of Whitefield, The Waverly takes its name from the erstwhile Waverly Inn, frequented by the likes of Winston Churchill. Apart from a suite named after Churchill, they draw on several Anglo-Indian names and references such as the Whitefield Arms, a quintessential British pub with access from the mall and the hotel. With a menu of steaks, leather seating and a map of old Whitefield, it is dunked in nostalgia.

The rooms, The Waverly Room, Studio, Loft and Residences vary in sizes but keep to minimalist theme with bare furniture, wallpaper, neutral drapes and wooden flooring. Everything is geared towards simple, functional and clutter-free. Bathrooms though well-equipped with amenities, have no shower curtains. We did miss the occasional personalisation that comes

with luxury hotels and the soft bedside rug for our aching feet from the mall sprint.

The rooms look out to the mall next door or to the many under-construction high rises that this part of town has come to be associated with. Not a sight for sore eyes, but turn the peepers instead to framed illustrations of old Bangalore by Paul Fernandes neatly mounted on the wall.

The Waverly's USP lies in the maze of lifts through its pretty carpeted corridors that provide direct access to the restaurant, the rooftop bar ALT, Spa La Vie by L'Occitane, The Tribe fitness centre and more. The spa with its luscious aromatic products and earthy décor will make you forget that a bustling mall is your closest neighbour. The Relaxing Aromachologie Massage is a must-try with a blend of Swedish and Balinese massage techniques and Chinese acupressure to relieve strained muscles. The massage blend with essential oils of Lavender, Tea Tree, Geranium and a hint of Lemon Verbana will keep you fragrant and relaxed long after the charm of retail therapy has waned.



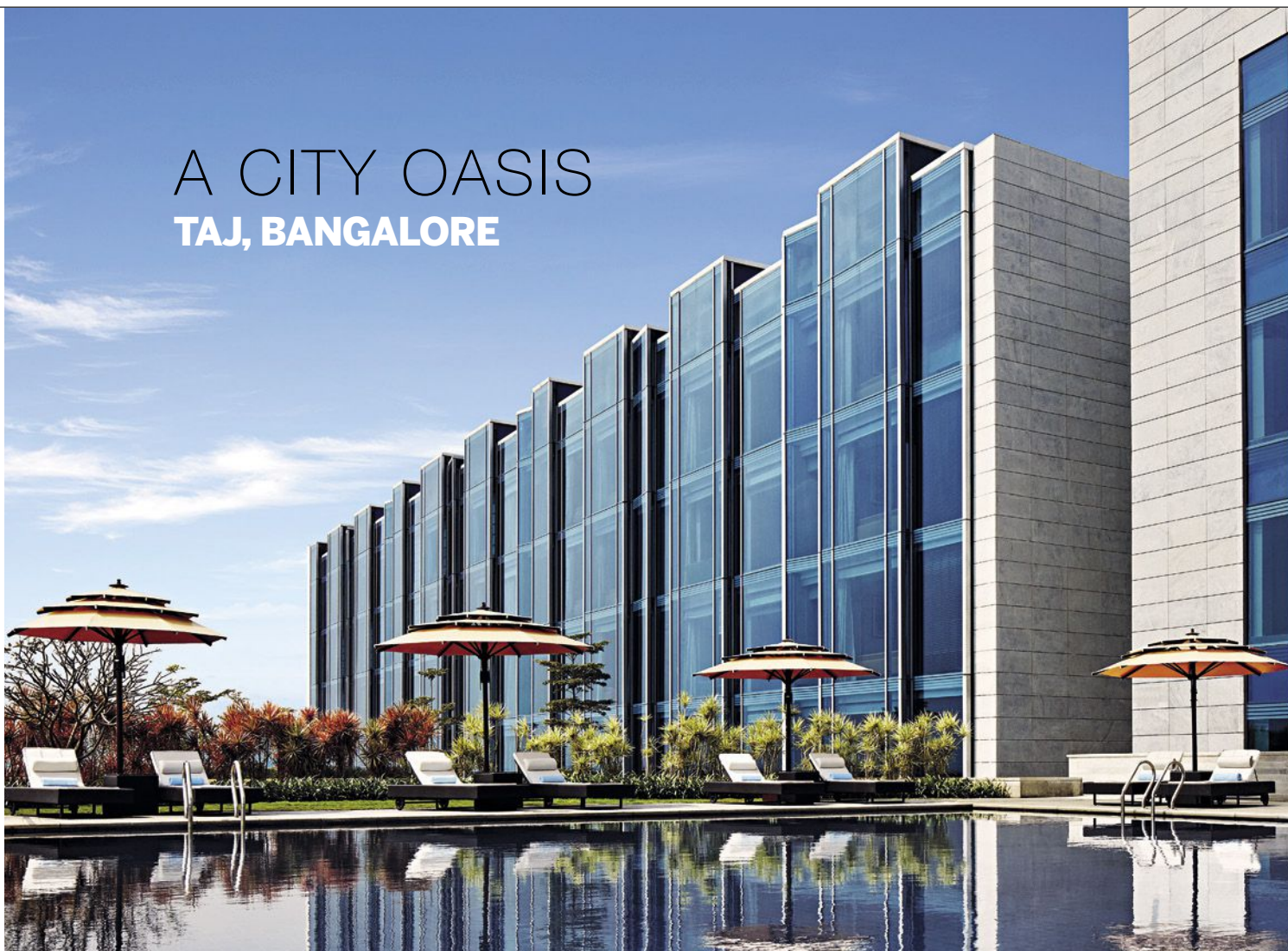
THE ROOMS AT THE WAVERLY ARE CONTEMPORARY YET COMFORTABLE





# A CITY OASIS

## TAJ, BANGALORE



### GETTING THERE

A five-minute walk from the Kempegowda International Airport and 26 km from the city

### CONTACT

Ph 080660 03300  
taj.tajhotels.com

### PRICES

Rooms from ₹8,500,  
suites from ₹25,000



THE GLASS FACADE OF  
THE TAJ BANGALORE

It is mid-afternoon and the floor to ceiling window in my room overlooks a gleaming water body with flowering shrubs; the beautiful calm is a much-needed add on. Welcome to the newest luxury address in town, the Taj Bangalore. The 156-room property with a modern glass façade combines a contemporary design with a sprinkling of traditional elements. The sleek, cavernous lounge bears witness to a traditional lamp lighting ceremony at dusk each evening. The design and offerings keep in mind the weary traveller looking for a good night's rest and a delicious comforting meal.

The cosy contemporary rooms come with little embellishments like silk throw pillows, exquisite lamps and pampering treats like a DIY soothing foot soak with detailed instructions on a personalised note. The large bathrooms have separate shower and toilet cubicles, a bathtub and space for vanities.

The suites also have a selection of local snacks from Karnataka for midnight munching in addition to an all-day-breakfast menu at Café 77 East, the 24-hour coffee shop that draws its name from the longitude it stands on. For an authentic Indian meal head over to Tamarind that brings you cuisines from Punjab, Rajasthan and Awadh. Soi and Sake, the Asian speciality restaurant has a Sushi bar, Teppan grill and an exclusive wine tasting room.

The hotel is also a great venue for weddings and events with a 9400 sq ft banquet hall and indoor locations for smaller soirees including one that overlooks the gleaming airport lights. Jiva, a holistic spa offers Ayurvedic treatments and steam rooms and traditional Indian massages like Champi (head massage) and Sammardana, a relaxing and invigorating deep tissue massage. Compact, comfortable and contemporary, it's the ideal city hotel.





# A HEDONIST'S DELIGHT

EXPLORE THE HIPPEST PLACES TO EAT AND THE TONIEST CRIBS TO STAY AND MAKE MERRY IN LONDON AND SCOTLAND

BY RADHIKA BHALLA

A heightened sense of life surrounds London, with its towering architecture and imperial references that offer a sense of familiarity. Yet the river-side city shakes the ennui ever so often, with a new hang-out mushrooming in a different part of the capital, ever so often. While there is much to discover, here's our pick of the best.

## PARISIAN FLAIR

Tucked in a quiet corner of the posh Mayfair district, The Beaumont Hotel is a luxurious treat for those who enjoy Art Deco and Parisian vintage flair. The five-star boutique hotel was originally built in 1926 by the famous architecture firm, Wimperis, Simpson & Guthrie, with 23 studios/suites and 50 rooms. The Roaring Twenties are reimagined in many rooms and corridors, and the guests-only Cub Room houses exceptional

oil on canvas paintings and photographs from that era. The rooms spell comfort and indulgence, from the heated marble-and-mosaic tiles in the bathroom to bespoke toiletries by D R Harris (chemists to the British Royal Family since 1938). Be sure to try the pastries and almond croissants for breakfast that are specially prepared in the wee hours of the morning every day.

The most unique part is the 'room without a view' that sits above the entrance of the hotel. Built in cubist style by British sculptor Sir Antony Gormley, the suite resembles a man seated on his haunches. It's simply called the ROOM; it's bereft of furniture, save for a bed and costs about £1,250 (₹1.2 lakh) for a night.

The complimentary drive in the vintage black Daimler car feels right out of a James Bond movie. It's an experience unlike any another, as you slip back in time and



THE BEAUMONT HOTEL AT MAYFAIR IS A PEEK INTO PARISIAN LUXURY FROM THE ROARING TWENTIES



THE COPPER DOG AT CRAIGELLACHIE SPELLS DELIGHTFUL RUSTIC CHARM



SEB JONES (LEFT) AND MALT MASTER BRIAN KINSMAN, AT GLENFIDDICH, DUFFTOWN HAVE CRAFTED A BRAND NEW IPA WHISKY





LONDON REINVENTS ITSELF EVERY FEW MONTHS, AND THERE IS MUCH TO DISCOVER IN THIS HAPPENING METROPOLIS



enjoy the ride.

**Room for two** ₹39,207 for two per night

**For more details** The Beaumont Hotel, 8 Balderton St, Brown Hart Gardens, Mayfair

[www.thebeaumont.com](http://www.thebeaumont.com)

### SPLIT OF THE SEA

You may bump into Kate Moss, Harry Styles or Goldie Hawn at the hottest Asian fish and seafood restaurant, Sexy Fish located at Berkeley Square, Mayfair. It's frequented by UK's rich and glamorous, including former Prime Minister David Cameron and his wife. But the décor is far from opulent; it is smart, casual and the intention is to let the diner concentrate on the food.

Luckily, there is a lot of good food to focus on, such as the delicate yet wholesome sea bream fillet and the most delicious rhubarb crumble ice cream whose flavours linger long after the ice cream melts.

Art lovers have much to fuss over too, as it has one of the most expensive artworks ever commissioned for a restaurant. A massive wire and silicone crocodile by Frank Gerhy (who designed Walt Disney Concert Hall and Guggenheim Museum, Spain) stands at 13 feet on the main wall. Meanwhile, two enchanting bronze mermaids by Damien Hirst adorn the corners of the bar top while the partially nude blue patina figures are caught in a delightfully ecstatic moment. The aquatic theme is echoed in the private dining room in the basement called The Coral Reef that even boasts a wall aquarium.

**Meal for two** ₹6,500 without alcohol

**For more details** Sexy Fish, Berkeley Square

[www.sexyfish.com](http://www.sexyfish.com)







RELIVE THE DAYS OF THE GENTLEMAN'S CLUB WHILE AT THE COLONY GRILL ROOM AT THE BEAUMONT HOTEL, MAYFAIR.



### SIMPLICITY AND FLAVOUR

Michelin starred restaurant Dabbous on Whitfield Street, London is the place to go for a modern take on dining. The food is delicious yet simplistic, while the décor is industrial with metal, steer and wooden beams running across the two-storey set-up. The basement houses Oskar's Bar that serves interesting cocktails like Sugar Plum Fairy with BarSol Pisco from Peru and Kamma...kammeleon with limited edition Kamm & Sons Islay cask and melon liqueur. The flavours are complex but refreshing with names inspired by 80s pop hits. The food is beautifully curated and the fact that one can taste the ingredients individually is testament to the chef's mastery.

**Meal for two** Set lunch—three-course meal at £28 (₹2,321 approx) and four-course at £35 (₹2,902 approx), set dinner—£59 (₹4,892 approx)

**For more details** Dabbous, 39 Whitfield St, Fitzrovia

[www.dabbous.co.uk](http://www.dabbous.co.uk)

### SCOTLAND

It's surprising how Scotland often gets overlooked on a typical itinerary, especially when its capital Edinburgh or Aberdeen are well within a two-hour flight from London.



A 13-FT-LONG WIRE AND SILICONE CROCODILE BY FRANK GERHY ADORNS THE MAIN WALL AT SEXY FISH





This northernmost stretch of the UK is truly a visual spectacle with magnificent landscapes that refresh the senses and leave you in awe.

### RUSTIC CHARM

The Craigellachie Hotel is a delightful boutique property in Speyside that offers the quaint magic of rustic Scotland. Great pains have been taken to restore the building to its former glory, which was built in 1893 with only 26 rooms and an unrestricted view of the forest. Classic comfort are key words here, from the stay to the soul food served at Copper Dog. This resto-pub with crackling fires, wooden seating and live music is the perfect place to practice your Highland fling.

The pride of the hotel is the famous whisky bar, Quaich Bar, that is home to over 900 single-malt whiskys from around the world. Get there between 6pm and 7:30pm to try the traditional Scottish punch, inspired from 18th and 19th century recipes. Meanwhile, the private dining hall is an exercise in aristocratic elegance with its beautiful pink, red and gold décor. Walk to the cast iron bridge, crossing lavender and crop fields along the gently gushing river Spey. You can go boating, biking or try clay pigeon shooting. The last week of April is a great time to visit when the Spirit of Speyside whisky celebrations are in full swing.

**Stay for two** ₹13,675 per night

**For more details** The Craigellachie Hotel



THE FOOD AT  
MICHELIN STARRED  
DABBOUS IS A MODERN  
TAKE ON TASTE AND  
PRESENTATION

Victoria Street, Speyside  
[www.craigellachiehotel.co.uk](http://www.craigellachiehotel.co.uk)

### THE SPIRIT OF THINGS

A drive through the Scottish countryside is simply idyllic—lush green hills dotted with grazing sheep and local ‘coos’, and the crisp fresh air is the perfect balm for aching souls. The only way to complete it is by visiting one of the world-famous whisky distilleries. In fact, the Glenfiddich distillery is a must-visit brewery at Dufftown. The venue is open for tours, which include several tasting sessions; in fact, you can even craft your own version of a 15-year-old whisky, just the way their Malt Master does it.

Currently, the two most exciting concoctions available there are the new Project XX and IPA Experiment single malt whiskies from their Experimental Series. Try and set up a meeting with Seb, the zany young beer brewer who has collaborated on the Indian Pale Ale concoction. If you’d like to flex some muscle, head down to the cooperage where wooden casks are still made by hand, hammer and all. Later, satiate those hunger pangs at the Malt Barn restaurant that serves some local favourites with freshly sourced ingredients.

**Meal for two** ₹3,000 without alcohol

**For more details** The Glenfiddich Distillery,  
Dufftown, Banffshire

[www.glenfiddich.com](http://www.glenfiddich.com)

# A LEAP OF FLAVOURS

AMARANTA AT THE OBEROI, GURGAON, OFFERS A FRESHLY ENGINEERED MENU, DEEPLY INSPIRED BY THE ICONIC, MICHELIN-STARRED NOMA IN COPENHAGEN, DENMARK



**TEJAS SOVANI**  
Executive Sous Chef,  
Amaranta, The Oberoi, Gurgaon

Chef Tejas Sovani, executive sous chef at Amaranta, The Oberoi Gurgaon has been Noma-fied—that's how we describe him after his three-month stint at Chef René Redzepi's two-Michelin-star restaurant Noma in Copenhagen, Denmark. The young chef is back in his kitchen cooking up an exciting storm of Indian flavours with a delicious contemporary twist. So while at his restaurant, don't be surprised when you hear fancy culinary terms such as sous-vide, flash-grilled and dehydrated. Expect minimalist plating and maximalist flavours.

## MY FOOD STORY

After graduating in hotel management from the Oberoi Centre for Learning and Development (OCLD), I was inspired to give cooking my all; it became a passion, an obsession. I wanted to showcase the best of Indian flavours to an ever-evolving audience in a way that would wow them. All the executive chefs that I have worked with during my career have been my mentors. I feel there's something I have learnt from each one of them—unique and inspiring—that has made me who I am today, a bold, playful and confident chef.

## INDIAN WITH A TEJAS TWIST

At Amaranta, we believe in personalising each interaction with our guests. We spend time explaining the menu and the finer nuances of the dishes such as the ingredients, method of preparation and the cuisine philosophy to them so that they feel for the food like we do. My personal style is what I call a







'play-ted menu', blending authentic regional recipes and unusual flavour pairings to curate a truly memorable experience. A meal here is like a culinary journey in itself, where stories are told via food that is rooted in the familiar but plated to play with your senses. The menu is brimming with modern techniques and ideas such as dehydration, sous-vide, fermentation and dehydration (things that I picked up during my training years) but we make sure that the flavours are easily identifiable and not lost in transition.

### DIVERSITY IS THE NAME OF THE GAME

The inspiration for the menu we have carefully crafted is diverse—from havelis in Lucknow and traditional "gams" in Saurashtra to the rarified classics of the Jain Paryushan to the 'deras' of Punjab. So on the new menu you can find dishes such as Kolkata Street Bento Box, Lal Maas Kachodi with Aloo Subzi, a Farsan medley with Dabeli Bao, Khakra Crisps, Dhokla Pakodas and Chilli yogurt dip.

### THE NOMA EXPERIENCE

To say that I enjoyed working with Chef René Redzepi at Noma would be an understatement of the century. Rene is a visionary and always breaks down a dish from its grass-root level to dig deeper into the history of the flora and fauna of that particular region, and we present our menus at Amaranta in much the same way.



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A CONFIT OF KING  
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GREEN AND BLACK  
GRAM AND CURRIED  
COCONUT SAUCE



GHIZAAYAT—MEAT  
PATE CROQUETTES,  
LAMB IN PICKLING  
SPICES, SPICED LAMB  
BRAIN GOUGERS

Inspired by him, at Amaranta I have a team of six regional cuisine specialists from Goa, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Bengal and Rajasthan who have been hand-picked from small-town eateries, to protect the authenticity and simplicity of their cuisine. Their repertoire spans century-old recipes to recently evolved runaway successes.

Attention to detail is everything. Foraging at Noma, for example, meant starting very early in the morning to source a list of ingredients for the menu. We used to head out in our jumpsuits and gum boots accompanied by a few chefs who have a degree in Botany, for our daily visits, so that they could help us procure the best possible herbs and ingredients. Our discoveries included wild berries, exotic varieties of plums, wild mushrooms, garlic flavoured Chantrelles and nettles that are grown in the wild. It was quite an experience and made me realise how important fresh ingredients are for a chef.

### CHANGING TIMES

Today, the world has a whole new understanding of Indian food, where individual regions are claiming the spotlight. I keep exploring small town markets in search of key seasonal ingredients and authentic regional recipes that are coupled with constant experimentation for our menu. Chefs today have refined recipes, create new dishes, pay more attention to the quality of ingredients and sophisticated



**THE KOLKATA STREET BOX WITH JHAL MURI, ALOO KABULI, PHUCHKA, RADHA BALLAVI AND GHUGNI**

presentation. One must know that no matter how successful you are in adapting your cuisine to suit foreign palates, all revolutions have to be indigenous. Indian chefs are inspired to curate menus primarily keeping Indian guests in mind and are looking beyond the usual dishes to create a revolution.

### BITE-SIZE EXPLOSIONS

There's a certain rhythm that underlines interesting storytelling with each dish in a tasting menu. Right from the fusillade of starters, one can enjoy bite-sized portions high on flavour, texture with elements of surprise, each designed to give the guest a glimpse of what's to come. At Amaranta, our culinary philosophy is everlasting freshness, with an ability to put a twist on recognisable Indian flavours, and we want that to be the highlight in a guest's dining experience.

### GOING AHEAD

Everyday cuisines are being discovered and re-discovered. For example, the curry has adapted to whichever environment it has been exposed to. And in a way, it has

managed to grow beyond India. Marrying ingredients and creating something new will always be the motto. And like all experiments, there has to be a right mix of instinct and intelligence. In the last 100 years, there have been multiple lifestyle changes, in the way the climate has changed, agriculture, farming and so on. It is important that we care for our ingredients. It's crucial to pay attention to the freshness and authenticity of the produce you work with.

### FAVOURITE DINING EXPERIENCE

I have immense admiration for Chef Rene Redzepi of Noma for his food, for he has a passion for experimentation and a love for local seasonal ingredients like no other chef in the world. His playful deconstruction of dishes and the classical fine dining approach to fresh ingredients is awe-inspiring. My all-time favourite restaurant in the world is the renowned restaurant Mugaritz, tucked away in a quiet corner of Spain. The dining experience there is unlike any other —simple, thoughtful use of ingredients and gorgeous presentation. That is my food philosophy too.

*As told to Mohini Mehrotra*



Elegance is an attitude

*Aishwarya Rai*  
Aishwarya Rai

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CONTEMPORARY  
ARTIST JITISH  
KALLAT'S  
RETROSPECTIVE  
EXHIBITION SPANS  
20 YEARS OF HIS  
WORK INCLUDING  
AQUASAROUS,  
EPILOGUE AND  
SYZGY AMONG  
OTHERS AT NGMA



# ODE TO A CITY

ROTIS, COMMUTERS, ANGER, FRUSTRATION AND GRIDS MAKE UP  
JITISH KALLAT'S BODY OF WORK, INSPIRED BY A LIFE WELL LIVED

BY CHINKI SINHA

**E**ight weary, sleeping men, their faces resting on each other's shoulders, while their hands hold on to their bags. They are strangers. Their eyes never stop darting around, in between that suspended moment of sleep and wakefulness, a city dissolves. It then becomes the stage.

You see them at shoulder level, which is what the focal range of viewing the world is, according to the artist. Part of his retrospective exhibition called *Here After Here After* at the NGMA, opened in New Delhi last week. The installation called *Syzygy* that means alignment of celestial objects, is an attempt to immortalise the city scenes that he grew up witnessing. Jitish Kallat, one of India's biggest contemporary artists, says it was the subtle and peculiar tension between being

asleep and wakefulness in the eight commuters on a local train that inspired the installation. Even though he always witnesses the commuters on the local trains, yet the artist insists his work isn't about the city, although it is located in a city. Even as they sleep with bent heads, the figures clasp their bags, revealing a degree of restlessness and awareness of their surrounding even in a state of near-surrender, reads the curatorial note.

## A CITY IN TRANSIT

"They are partly under surveillance. We think they are travelling but there is a peculiar tension between being asleep and holding on to their things. Here, it is not about the train but things that we don't see. Therefore, the work is about the themes of life that unfold in a city—

✓  
THE 42-YEAR-OLD ARTIST HAS DELVED INTO THE LIVES OF COMMUTERS, LABOURERS AND SECURITY GUARDS AS A PART OF HIS LIVED ENVIRONMENT

time, death, mortality and sustenance,” he explains. There are grids represented in the scaffolding, which are indicative of change.

“It is either going up or going down. It is about transition. Cities are nothing but many, many people, more than what the land can hold. Here, themes get exaggerated,” Kallat adds.

Therefore, cities also become the playground for human endeavour to immortalise things like bridges and trains. These are products of imagination too. A city is a repository and has its own language, which is what the artist is trying to communicate. This is located in many cities. This is also from one city, as a child wakes up to a city in a suburban neighbourhood and witnesses daily life of ever-changing rhythm and cadence and tries to make notes through drawings,

scale at which we see the world. One might look at the roti which could become the star fields or galaxies, a dense narrative of lives. It has got everything to do with that question—where do we come from?”

## NOSTALGIA AND METAPHYSICS

Kallat's emphasis is on returning hallucinations to the world. In *Conditions Apply*, which traces the phases of the moon, the artist has used nostalgia in order to immortalise what his father, who is no more, witnessed. In *Eternal Gradient*, 365 rotis document the waxing and the waning of the moon. They span the lifetime of his father. “It is the life and death epilogue through the moon my father saw. It permeates the self, the city, the nation and perhaps the cosmos,” he says. “This kind of cyclical interplay of time continues.” The exhibition features Kallat's vast oeuvre ranging from his paintings, photographs, drawings, videos and sculptural installations. These represent 20 years of his work.

Kallat grew up in Mumbai in the suburb of Borivli. But cities expand and distances close in. At 14, he was interested in metaphysical questions about life and death.

“I might say I am trying to convey nothing. Objects are forms of inquiry,” he says. It is the gaze of the artist that defines his work—the different focal lengths co-exist in his work. Like most, he is also interested in the question of time. He is interested in its collapse, its density, its co-ordinates.

In his 2005 work titled *Artist Making Local Call*, a 34-feet-tall, 360-degree panoramic view of a street in Mumbai, one can see him standing in a phone booth. In the photo, two people are crossing the road. There are two shadows in the image as well. The point is to show the collapse of time. “It is am and pm at the same time,” he says. “There is a rickshaw and a taxi colliding or seeming to collide. The panorama was made of many pictures. It is an urban march. It is condensed time. Hence, collisions.”

Catherine David, the curator, says it is the permanent tension between the prosaic and the other themes that mark the works of the artist. “They mean many things. It is all about the subtlety,” she says. If nothing else, the exhibition truly makes you wonder about the burden of the universe. The works conjure those people in our heads. They make for our cities in our memory.



paintings and sculptures like when he freezes a child selling magazines on the streets and instead of his feet, there are blocks to indicate the homelessness and at the same time, there is a sense of belonging to the street, where he lives and works. That's how elemental and sensitive his work is. Impeccable in its documentation of the mundane and searching for metaphysical themes in a lived environment, a city offers anonymity.

And then there is the burden everyman carries in his pocket. Bulging with phones, IDs, money and who knows what else, these commuters carry them along.

“All these images come from my lived environment,” Kallat says. “These are images that come from shoulder height. That's the





THE FIRST  
LANGE 1 WATCH

# A TRYST WITH TIME

WITH A PROVERBIAL PHOENIX-LIKE RISE, LUXURY WATCHMAKER A. LANGE & SÖHNE'S STORY OF REDEMPTION IS A LIVING COLLUSION OF HISTORY AND HOROLOGY

BY CHUMKI BHARADWAJ

History is always partial to victors; leaving those on the losing side to carve out their own narratives of redemption and resurrection, much like in a Martin Scorsese movie. The German city of Dresden, almost all destroyed during World War II is a fine example. But the city has proudly preserved its battle scars and blackened buildings, expropriating catastrophe as cultural reference. Mirroring the grit of this great city is German watchmaking brand A. Lange & Söhne. No wonder the brand chose to open their first boutique in Dresden in 2007. But that was the second coming.

For the back story, rewind to Ferdinand Adolph Lange, a Dresden watchmaker, who established his watch manufactory in 1845,



THE LANGE 1  
MOON PHASE IN  
PINK GOLD



making precious pocket watches (considered a highly coveted collectible to this day). But, the company, much like the city was appropriated after World War II, and nearly fell into oblivion. It was only in 1990, following German reunification, that Walter Lange, Ferdinand A Lange's great-grandson mustered up the courage to relaunch the brand.

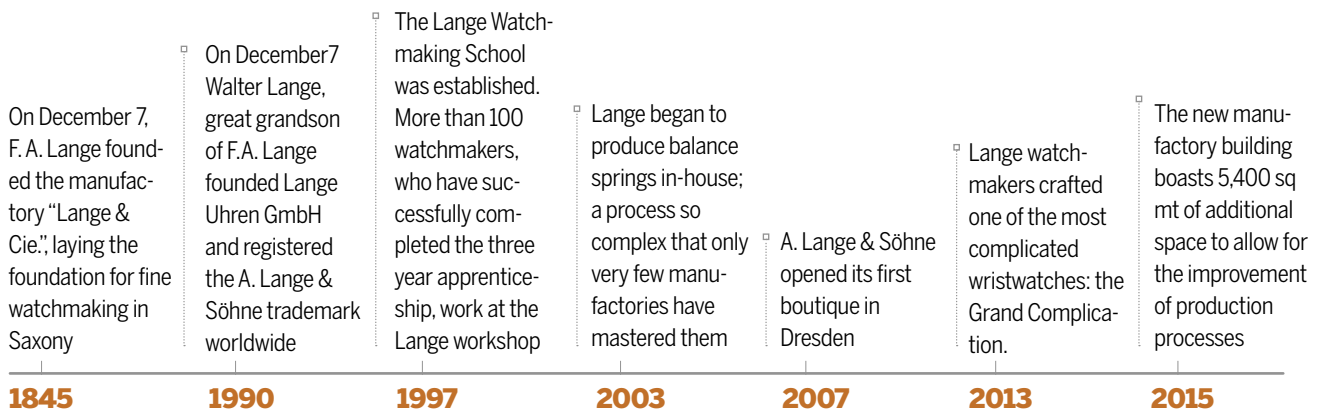
## GERMAN HERITAGE

But he chose to blaze his own trail and despite all the prominent watch makers being based in Switzerland, Walter Lange decided to manufacture in its home of Glashütte, to commemorate his ancestors. He named the new company A. Lange & Söhne (meaning sons) and, together, with a group of watchmakers, began to produce fine timepieces introducing their first range just four years later. Today, in just over 22 years, Lange crafts a few thousand wristwatches only in gold or platinum a year, but their lavishly decorated proprietary movements, almost entirely assembled by hand, ensure their position among the watchmaking greats.

In order to compete with the historic brands of Switzerland in such a small time frame, the brand has focused a great deal on producing complicated timepieces. One of the biggest assets Walter Lange had was that he had inherited his great-grandfather's notebook—A virtual roadmap—that contained the drawings for a number of his inventions and never-produced ideas as well. Perhaps it was this great partnership between the book's traditional craftsmanship and technical advancement and design that has produced the ripples in haute horology.

Deeply attached to their German heritage, the brand also took another detour

## DEFINING MOMENTS







and in an arc formation, signed their watches “Glashütte i/SA” meaning “in Saxony”; a bold move for a previously unknown watchmaker since the only watchmakers who indicated where a watch was produced were the ones in Switzerland that famously marked their timepieces with the “Swiss Made” hallmark.

In the year 2000, the brand became part of the Richemont Group now employing close to 500 people, half of whom are watchmakers. “We have 60 apprentices training to become watchmakers to ensure that there is a future for fine watch making because without watchmakers there would be no watchmaking,” says CEO, Wilhelm Schmid.

### A LEGACY OF PRIDE

It is this obsessive attention to detail and craftsmanship that has distinguished the brand and established its reputation of unparalleled technical ingenuity and a degree of perfection that can only be achieved by hand. “Every single little part of our watches, whether you see it or not, is decorated, hand polished, and treated with our love for detail. To the best of my knowledge, this is not done anywhere else so there is no distinction in quality whether it is the Grand complication or the Saxonia thin, the level of involvement and craftsmanship is the same. Of course, the level of complexity will rise with the price but not the quality,” claims Schmid.

Some of the brand’s greatest successes that have become icons include models such as the Lange 1 (the most important and representative of this German manufacture) with the first outsize date in a series produced wristwatch as well as the Zeitwerk (Lange’s first watch with a digital display) with supremely legible, precisely jumping numerals.

All of the movements produced by the marque are made from German silver, an alloy of copper and nickel, as opposed to plated brass used by the well known Swiss



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IN GLASHÜTTE



**Producing fine men’s watches is what keeps us ticking in the morning and helps us sleep at night. We do produce women’s watches but they are not our target group. We are a very masculine brand.”**

*Wilhelm Schmid, CEO*

manufacturers. The best thing about this difference is that it lends the Lange watches a visually distinct sheen. Lange prides itself on a very distinctive German appearance that’s focused on a simple aesthetic, clean lines and asymmetric stylings. Schmid explains: “Our brand has two faces; when you see a highly complicated watch, it is legible, technical, with a clean design; if you consider that it is a perpetual calendar, has an outsized date, and a flyback chronograph, you need a bit of space. So it’s clean and very engineered in a way. The entire picture changes when I turn it around. Now you see the opulence of the movement; the decoration, tiny little details and you understand how complex and difficult the watch is. We don’t produce watches for people who need products to tell others how important they are. Our customers immediately know what a Lange stands for; they don’t want to show off. An American once told me, our brand represents ‘stealth wealth’. You can have 300,000 euros around your wrist and no one will recognise it.”

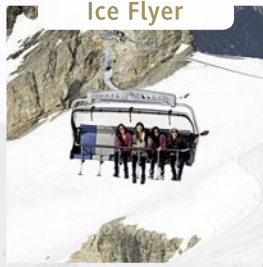
Discreet yet distinctive, the brand added another accolade in December 2016 during their Jubilee event, launching another model of the Lange 1 Moon Phase, one of the most successful watch families, with a model featuring the popular astronomical complication. It has now been endowed with a new movement that combines the moon-phase display with a day/night indicator. On the disc, the different times of day are represented by varying hues of blue; during the day, it shows a bright sky without stars, while at night it depicts a dark sky with prominently contrasting laser-cut stars.

While aiming for the stars has long been a Lange ambition, the brand remains proudly rooted in its heritage. Trek the untracked by all means but forgo the past at your own peril, for legends deliver the final verdict on history.





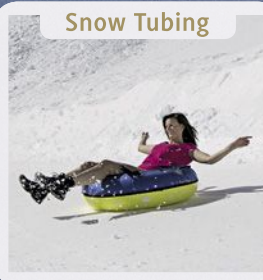
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## POWER OF BLACK

Black, matte, and bold, this watch is sleek and masculine at the same time; a tall order for any accessory for men. What's more, this is the first time that TAG Heuer has introduced a full ceramic chronograph, including the bracelet, for men. The TAG Heuer Carrera Heuer-01 was first presented at Baselworld two years ago, for this 2017 version, this fine chronograph has been entirely produced using matt black ceramic. Apart from unparalleled scratch-resistance, this material offers a micro-blasted finish for a flawless deep black design. To compliment the contemporary look, the ceramic bracelet comes with H-shaped links and matt finishes, and is comfortable to boot. the best part about ceramic is that it is incredibly hard, yet soft to touch and highly scratch-resistant, keeps its original colour, and does not oxidise. Also, it is hypoallergenic and lighter than steel.

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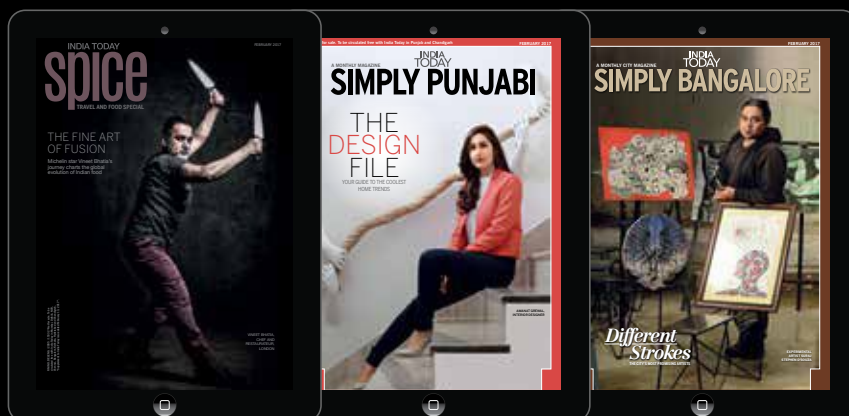


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## COVER STORY

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Region's prominent architects and interior designers on the latest trends that are ruling the home decor scene.

## THEATRE

**Striving for Excellence 8**  
The importance of keeping mediocres away from theatre.

## BUZZ

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12 things to look forward to.

Cover photo by Sandeep Sahdev

# OUR PICK of the month

## One for the Bibliophiles

**February 9 to 12**  
Bookworms rejoice! The Chandigarh Book Fair is back with a wide range of books from all the leading publishers. This book bonanza has something to offer to all age groups, students, teachers, scholars, authors and book lovers alike.  
**At Parade Ground, Chandigarh**



**Want to tell us about an event? A new store? A restaurant? People doing interesting things? Anything newsworthy? Please email us at: [simplypunjabi@intoday.com](mailto:simplypunjabi@intoday.com)**

# MY SPACE





REGION'S PROMINENT ARCHITECTS AND INTERIOR DESIGNERS REVEAL THAT PEOPLE ACROSS THE REGION WANT TO BE ENVELOPED BY SPACES WITH SIGNATURE DESIGNS REFLECTING THEIR PERSONALITIES AND NOT RUN-OF-THE-MILL IDEAS INFLUENCED BY FADS ■ By **SUKANT DEEPAK**

# , MY MIND

## RUNWAY IN THE ROOM

### Early Years

Bachelors in Interior Design  
from Raffles Design Institute,  
Singapore, 2011.

### Why Design?

Design brings out the artist in  
me. It inspires me to push the  
creative boundaries. To me, it  
is a limitless medium to realise  
my true potential.

### Been Around For

Six years

“Clients are  
forcing us to push  
our boundaries by  
asking for more  
originality.”

AMANAT GREWAL

Photograph by SANDEEP SAHDEV



**TRENDING NOW****Amanat Grewal, 26**

Interior Designer, Chandigarh

**G**rewal feels that trends in interior design now seem to mimic those on fashion runways, translating themselves on to fabrics, wallpapers, and cushions, etc., thereby transforming homes into style statements. “The entire plethora of green, from lime to emerald, is highly visible. Textures are in and can be seen across mediums—from furniture, fixtures, fabrics to wallpapers. Marble and brass continue to dominate as materials of choice for both kitchens and bathrooms,” she says. The interior designer says that an increasing number of house owners are asking for quirky lighting, vases and lamps. Grewal is happy that designers are getting to assert themselves. “Thankfully, uniqueness is becoming a norm and

**BACK TO THE SOIL****Early Years**

Commerce graduate from MCM, Chandigarh (1996) design course Exim, Chandigarh in 2006.

**Why Design?**

“The satisfaction of deciphering someone’s abstract ideas and fine-tuning them with your own sensibilities.”

**Been Around**

For 14 years

“People are moving away from accessories and materials that shout ‘I am expensive.’”

MONITA BHARDWAJ



Photograph by SANDEEP SAHDEV







Photograph by SANDEEP SAHDEV

## DESIGNS OF AN ARTIST

### Early Years

Studied Masters in Fine Arts from Kent University, England. Graduated 2002.

### Why Design?

"It completes me and makes me feel alive."

### Been Around

For 15 years

“I don’t give them what they want, but what they need.”

GAURI SHARMA

nobody is asking for design ideas that are indiscriminately repeated in home after home. This helps us push boundaries of interior design,” she says.

## TRENDING NOW

### Monita Bhardwaj, 41

Interior Designer, Chandigarh

Bhardwaj is witnessing a detox from digitised expressions in design to embracing of naturalness and imperfect forms, both in terms of materials and spaces in contemporary times. “And thank God for that. I always have clients who are asking for signature interiors. I am glad that more people are approaching me and asking me to experiment with materials that are earthy and close to nature in their living spaces.” Pointing out that many people in Punjab and Chandigarh are moving away from materials that shout ‘I am expensive’ and are looking for age-old patterns and



## DESIGN DETAILING

### More About Me

Studied Bachelors in Architecture from Giani Zail Singh College, Bathinda.

### Why Design?

“The fact that historic reference, context and design intervention are key ingredients that work in tandem to create an experiential design fascinates me no end.”

### Been Around

For 14 years

“It is encouraging to see clients asking for a sustainable and ethical approach to design.”

NOOR DASHMESH SINGH

weaves incorporated in fabrics and art work divorced from over-the-top elements.

## TRENDING NOW

### Gauri Sharma

Chandigarh/Andretta (Himachal)

She makes it clear that she is an artist first. That she does not take instructions from clients. That design is an offshoot of art. “I don’t give them what they want, but what they need.” The artist/interior designer says that more and more people are now divorcing run-of-the-mill ‘pretty ideas’, and want spaces that reflect their personalities. “Shades of pink, greys are ruling in more eco-friendly spaces which boast of organic structures, less material and more of nature. Clear backgrounds and intense colours thrown around are popular. I like the fact that people are open to bohemian and poetic display and want to create a page straight out of romanticism. Frankly, surreal





Photograph by SANDEEP SAHDEV

spaces flanked by individually crafted pieces are what people are looking out for," she says.

## TRENDING NOW

**Noor Dashmesh Singh, 36**  
Architect, Chandigarh

Singh says that over the years, he has noticed a shift in the way people are making design choices. "People have developed an appetite for environmentally-conscious designs which are rich by virtue of their design detailing and not just expensive materially." Stressing that even the cash-rich belts of north India are now open to letting go of expensive wood veneering on wall surfaces, Italian and other imported stone claddings, etc, Singh adds, "As compared to a decade ago, it is encouraging to see clients asking for a sustainable and ethical approach and local sourcing to creating soft, soothing and rich spaces rather than a mere assembly of brands."

## BACK TO BASICS

### Early Years

Bachelors in Architecture, CEPT, Ahmedabad. Graduated in 1987.

**Been Around For**  
30 years

### Why Design?

"Because it promises such an exhilarating experience when you watch something that only existed in your head come to life and become an integral part of someone else's life. It offers an opportunity to create something beautiful as well as something that is of tangible use."

**"Living working spaces are not just structures but things which meaningfully touch all sensory impulses."**

PREETI AGNIHOTRI

## TRENDING NOW

**Preeti Agnihotri, 53**  
Architect,  
Chandigarh

"I have a no fluff approach with integrity towards the process of shaping an idea realised through the understanding of the essence of the project at hand. So, I am not really sure if I am the right person you have approached," says Agnihotri. The architect laments that many clients come with their own outsourced designs treating architects like draftsmen. However, she adds that the saving grace is that today, many of the clients are looking beyond fads and understanding that any building which is conceived and realised in response to its location, surroundings, and the needs of the people who are going to use it will be the in vogue and remain 'fashionable' for all times to come.





Photograph by PURNESH DEV NIKHANJ

## SUSTAINABLE ARCHITECTURE

### More About Me

Completed B.Arch from IIT Roorkee in 2009

### Why Design

"I love the concept of balance. For me, design is about understanding need, desire and requirement of the client. Finding the fine balance between the three and understanding my responsibility to fulfill the same is what keeps me excited about this profession."

**“People are fast opening up to sustainable architecture.”**

**BADRINATH KALERU**

## TRENDING NOW

### Name Badrinath Kaleru, 30

Architect, Chandigarh

"People are fast opening up to sustainable architecture. Clients are demanding courtyards in their spaces and asking for inter-linking of inner and outer spaces to provide fresh air and break-out spaces for the users in terms of both visual and functional break," says Kaleru. The architect also says that more people are demanding multilevel car parking's for commercial malls, etc. "Thanks to the fact citizens in this part of the country are well-travelled." Kaleru adds, "Building designs are no longer monotonous with single tones but boast of options for cladding systems ranging from vertical gardens to natural stones in different finishes to clay tiles and exposed brick facades."



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/SwagathChd



Theatre director  
Anuradha Kapur



# STRIVING For Excellence

SANGEET NATAK AKADEMI AWARD RECIPIENT, THEATRE DIRECTOR ANURADHA KAPUR TALKS ABOUT THE NEED FOR POROUS BORDERS BETWEEN VARIED ART FORMS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING MEDIOCRES AWAY.

■ By **SUKANT DEEPAK**

**V**aried hues from different art forms come together in her work. Poetry of painting effortlessly comes together with a gush of words and silences. It is clear that she likes to see herself in uninformed spaces, dysfunctional meetings. And that is where she feels essentially alive.

Delhi-based theatre director Anuradha Kapur, a two-time (2007-2013) director of the prestigious National School of Drama in the country's capital, says that she has always liked art forms where there is no single authorship, where there is an expanded field of dialogue and no comfort. "Porous borders between different art forms, observing how they come together with their similarities and stalk differences, takes the work to a level where meanings emerge in multitudes." This, she says, is what has been keeping her excited all these three decades in theatre. "From 1990 onwards, I have collaborated extensively with visual artists, filmmakers and sculptors. I just don't want predictability as the end result," says the 2004 recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademi award for Theatre Direction.

And the criticism from 'puritans' that follows her work is brushed aside with a smile. "What is new about it? I am quite used to it. The problem is that Indian realism has predetermined the nature of the hut. It has also done its interiors. Yes, I believe in excess, and not the so-called modern business," she says during the Serendipity Arts Festival held in Goa in December 2016, where she presented the contemporary reinterpretation of

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THE GREATEST  
THEATRE ALWAYS  
COMES WITH STATE  
SUPPORT. NOT  
CORPORATE  
NONSENSE.



A CERTAIN  
ATMOSPHERE OF  
FEAR IS BEING  
CREATED—A WHOLE  
ARMY OF TROLLS  
WILL BE UNLEASHED  
THE MOMENT YOU  
MAKE A STATEMENT  
AGAINST THE  
GOVERNMENT.



THE BEST THEATRE  
HAPPENS UNDER  
STATE'S PATRON-  
AGE. CORPORATES  
NEEDS TO UNDER-  
STAND THAT THERE  
IS MUCH MORE TO  
THIS THAN MERE  
ENTERTAINMENT.

”

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* along with Lillete Dubey. All for small theatre repertory companies in different parts of the country, Kapur, the author of *Actors, Pilgrims, Kings and Gods: The Ramlila of Ramnagar* (University of Chicago Press (2006)), feels that people must go back to their own roots after adequate training. "A huge number of trained theatre people from different regions want to stick it out in Mumbai or other metros. Where is the space?"

While agreeing that it is exciting to see large number of theatre festivals burgeoning in India, the director well-known for her works like *Sundari: An Actor Prepares*, *Ghar aur Bahar*, *Umrao* and *Romeo and Juliet*, adds, "But it is important to remember that several young and promising directors are seldom invited there. Let us stop playing safe by inviting only major directors. We have to encourage the brilliance of the young."

Mention all the talk by several Mumbai-based directors about the indispensability of corporate support in theatre, and she is quick to say, "Not that I am against it in principle. However, the best theatre always happens under state's patronage. Not under corporate nonsense. Corporates need to understand that there is much more to this than mere entertainment. It gets on my nerves when these young corporate types, who can't even spell literature, talk in that I-know-all tone."

Kapur, who has always been vocal about the appointment of under-qualified heads to various art institutions under the present central government, says, "It is the business of institutions to ask difficult questions. You can't have a person there who, like in a guru-shishya parampara expects his feet to be touched constantly."

# For the LOVE OF ART

SATINDER SATTI, CHAIRPERSON OF THE PUNJAB ARTS COUNCIL ON THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST HER APPOINTMENT

■ By **SUKANT DEEPAK**

**P**oet and anchor Satinder Satti, who took over as chairperson of the Punjab Arts Council in October 2015 has managed to convince the Punjab government to pass an order that makes it mandatory for multiplex owners in Chandigarh and Punjab to screen at least one show of Punjabi films in a day. “This will be instrumental in giving a boost to young filmmakers who are not backed by powerful producers. The younger generation of Punjabi filmmakers have been pleading for a long time for dedicated shows in multiplexes,” she says.

However, for this 39-year-old poet and anchor, originally from Batala in Punjab, who has represented the state in different international artistic forums, taking over as chairperson of the Punjab Arts Council in Chandigarh was marked by much criticism. “Many so-called established Punjabi artists complained that I was too young for this post. They insisted that I would not be able to do justice to the position. All this, even before I entered the office. I just don’t understand how can talent and intelligence be directly proportionate to age? Hasn’t this organisation seen several

so-called experienced people who have failed to do anything for the artists? I was deeply hurt. Everybody just brushed aside my 16 years of contribution. Where is it written that only those who have crossed their prime are equipped to handle a responsible position?”

Stressing that her aim is to make the Punjab Arts Council a bridge between artists and the state government, Satti says that



“Many so-called established Punjabi artists complained that I was too young for this post. They insisted that I would not be able to do justice to the position.”

SATINDER SATTI,  
CHAIRPERSON,  
PUNJAB ARTS COUNCIL

as soon as she came in, her priority was to get a system in place. “Staff members were reintroduced to their responsibilities and a team of experts from different fields was put into place. For example, theatre director Kewal Dhaliwal was made president of the Theatre and Folklore Department, and photographer Diwan Manna president of the Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi. Also, when I came in, the Council didn’t have enough funds. In just a few months, I ascertained that our annual grant was released.”

Planning to introduce fellowships for budding artists and providing space for free workshops, Satti is all set to build a computer room and meeting room for artists at the premises. Talk to her about the lack of cultural policy in the state, and she is quick to say, “I have been exhorting the government for quite some time for this.” The poet and anchor says that the same will help in clearly defining the government’s role and responsibilities towards art and culture and its practitioners. “We will soon have a panel from different fields—theatre, film, dying arts, budding and experienced artists and experts in translation, who will come forward with their suggestions.”





Satinder Satti

Photograph by SANDEEP SAHDEV

# “I AM NOT IN THE

PUNJABI SINGER JASBIR JASSI FEELS THIS IS THE PUNJABI MUS





# RACE”

## IC INDUSTRY’S DARKEST HOUR

Singer Jasbir Jassi

### MUSIC HAS BEEN MY COMPANION EVER SINCE I WAS 16 YEARS OLD.

It has ruled my sensibilities, made me smile, given me solace in the darkest phases of my life. But what I have been witnessing in the past 10 years in the Punjabi music industry has been nothing short of traumatic.

There was a time when music from this state was associated with great verses of masters like Bulle Shah. It would always touch you somewhere deep. Folk ruled everywhere. Music was about stories of everyday life in the hinterland. About innocence lost and found.

Not anymore.

Contemporary Punjabi music is a classic example of what is wrong with the Punjabi society. From vulgar lyrics to men brandishing revolvers and swords in videos, not to mention the scantily clad women, this is Punjabi music industry’s darkest hour. Sadly, nobody is bothered. No one wants to do anything about it. There has been so much talk about drugs in this state. Now we have a mainstream film on this too. But has anybody heard the lyrics of contemporary songs played in houses and clubs in Punjab where chitta is glorified, smack is the shortcut to nirvana and alcohol consumption is the only sign of being a true man? What have we come to?

All that the new-age pop singers want is instant fame. And they know that this is going to bring them under the spotlight immediately. Yes, thanks to Google, they have an idea about who Waris Shah was. The question is, have they read *Heer*? Do they understand the multiple dimensions of legendary texts of our folk music? How much time and energy are they willing to spend on lyrics that go beyond the frivolous?

I would attribute the

continuing decline in the quality of music sung by new-age Punjabi singers to lack of training, zero exposure to the lives and works of masters and aimless existence where fame and money takes precedence over everything else. Not just singers, music companies are to be blamed equally. There seems to be a competition between them to present vulgarity and glorify drugs. They pressurise people like us to sing the kind of songs that will be ‘popular’.

No, I am not competing with anyone. I am not even in the race, not because I consider myself superior. Just that, in the Punjabi music industry it has become all about touching new depths of being crass. In today’s times, I feel ashamed of being called a Punjabi singer.

The young here love Bhagat Singh and put his posters everywhere. But it is the one in which he carries a revolver. Ask this generation of people who listen to contemporary Punjabi pop about the books the freedom fighter quoted from and you will draw a blank. One should attend the parties and weddings of the so-called cultured in Punjab. I can bet no DJ will miss playing Honey Singh.

Take my word for it, this is just the beginning. Things will worsen. In the years to come, we will witness a steep and continuing decline. I am just worried about the children. The kind of books and music we listen to shape us and remain with us our entire lives. Ever wondered the kind of youngsters we will have a decade down the line roaming in the streets of Punjab?

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*As told to Sukant Deepak (Jasbir Jassi is a well-known Punjabi singer who quit engineering to study music. His popular albums include Dil Le Gayee (1998), Kudi Kudi (1999), Nishani Pyar Di (2001), Bhangra (2011) and Dhol (2014)*

Photograph by SANDEEP SAHDEV

Dancer and  
choreographer  
Mandeep Raikhy



Photograph by SANDEEP SAHDEV

# STEPPING UP FOR A CAUSE

DANCER AND CHOREOGRAPHER MANDEEP RAIKHY ON HIS LATEST  
PRODUCTION *QUEEN SIZE* ■ By **SUKANT DEEPAK**



A woman dressed in black, with cropped hair and no make-up is part of the audience. She keeps smiling at the two actors who display no inhibitions about their anatomy. Shirts and trousers come off and male bodies in all their glory move on the rickety *charpai* placed in the intimate auditorium at theatre director Neelam Mansingh's house in Chandigarh. There is rhythm and also an intelligent lack of it. While she watches Delhi-based dancer and choreographer Mandeep Raikhy's *Queen Size*, a choreographic response to Section 377, she almost bursts out laughing as soon as Arnab Goswami's voice booms in the background as part of the fantastic sound design. Anti-climax?

A few hours earlier, sitting in the glorious January winter sun, 36-year-old Raikhy, who completed his BA in Dance Theatre from Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, UK, in the year 2002, says that he shares a complex relationship with dance. "I think I am able to articulate best through the body as I am deeply connected to it. It has become my language to speak in, my sense to decipher what goes around," he says, almost dreamily.

To Raikhy, the idea of *Queen Size*—a reaction to Section 377 that makes homosexuality criminal in India—came when a number of major writers returned their awards in the face of growing intolerance in the country. "That was also the start of agitations at JNU. I felt dance must respond to social context. It is really sad that dance as an art form has always been clinically apolitical, maybe because it bears the burden of 4000

“  
I THINK I AM ABLE  
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CULTURAL HISTORY.**

”

years of our cultural history.” Talk to him about the fact that the protests mostly saw writers returning the awards and speaking out against the government and he is quick to add, “I can speak only for dancers. But yes, that is what happened. Maybe it is to the fact that they are heavily dependent on the state for resources. And when we talk about dance in India, what comes to mind is the classical tradition, something not really associated with dissent. I wanted to change that with *Queen Size*.”

Lamenting the lack of professional training facilities in contemporary dance, Raikhy says that those interested either have to go in the classical fold or shift abroad. “There is nothing in the middle, something which is highly problematic. When we come back with a different skill set, we also imbibe alien metaphors, making it tough for us to translate them into local means to reflect the social reality here.”

Raikhy smiles when ‘art in the time of Modi’ is brought up. “It is really surprising that the present regime has managed to induce so much fear. However, I believe that the only way one can truly be an artist is through resistance?”

While the conversation shifts towards his much-talked about previous play *A Male Ant Has Straight Antennae*, a project that explored masculinity, he elaborates, “Through dance, we constructed and deconstructed many layers of masculinity—looking at the body and scanning it for gender construction. It was about how slight changes in the human body—touch, gait, and glance define gender; how it is shaped by the society and at the same time very personal to an individual.”

**1 RUN FOR FITNESS****February 12**

The much-awaited Punjab Half Marathon is here. Dust your running shoes and do your health a favour by being part of this event. Organised by Thrill Zone, this marathon aims to promote the running culture in Chandigarh.

**AT** Chandigarh Club **TEL** 01722743388

# 12 THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO

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**2 SHOP IN STYLE****February 25 and 26**

Get ready to usher in the summers with a big bang. Fashion Fiesta Summer 2017 promises to have an amazing display of summer clothing, footwear, bags and lots more.

**AT** JW Marriott Hotel, Chandigarh  
**TEL** 01723955555

**3 HOUSE PROUD****February 10 to 13**

If you are looking for the best premium and branded home decor products, head to the Home Decor exhibition. This event will showcase upholstery, framed artworks, wooden artefacts, metal sculptures, lamps, curios and much more.

**AT** Parade Ground, Chandigarh



## 5 CUPID COMES CALLING

**February 14**

Make this Valentine's Day truly special for your loved one. Head to Hyatt Regency Ludhiana to enjoy a special poolside dinner or buffet at Kitchen at 95 with mouth-watering dishes for the occasion. **MEAL FOR TWO** Rs 3,999 **AT** Hyatt Regency Ludhiana **TEL** 91 8284000249 **TIME** 7 p.m. onwards



## 4 DIY DESSERTS

**February 8 to 10**

Gift your loved ones decadent chocolates and desserts made by you at Black and Tan Chocolatiers. So grab your apron and whip up strawberry heart cake, blueberry cheesecake, wine truffles and more.

**AT** Black and Tan Chocolatiers, 1154, Sector 36C, Chandigarh



## 6 STITCH IN TIME

Looking for a pie-de-resistance in your house? Get hold of this multi panelled umbrella from 1469 to grab eyeballs. Made out of 365 patches of Phulkari, this hand embroidered antique baagh, called Maavan Thandiyan Chhavan, speaks of Punjab's rich culture, togetherness of the region.

**PRICE** Rs 25,000

**AT** Bridge Market, 17D, SECTOR 17D, Sector 17, Chandigarh



## 7 WAKHRA SWAG

**February 10 to 13**

Wakhra Swag, as the name suggests, is a Punjabi theme based fashion and lifestyle exhibition where people can shop for western and traditional wear, jewellery, fashion, accessories, bags and footwear. **AT** Himachal Bhawan, Sector 28, Chandigarh **TEL** 09417441468





## 8 WEDDING WOWS

**February 11 and 12**

Are the wedding bells ringing in your family? Then make sure you head to the wedding event at Chandigarh Club. Choose from a large variety of traditional products and services that will take care of all your wedding related needs.

**AT** Chandigarh Club,  
Sector 1, Chandigarh



## 9 DATE WITH DESIGN

**February 24 to 27**

Wanting to redo your home? Head straight to the Interior and Exterior Show. The event will showcase products like murals, shades and curtain accessories, carpets, rugs and floor coverings, furnishing fabrics and accessories, etc.

**AT** Parade Ground,  
Chandigarh

## 10 ROLL WITH ZAKIR KHAN

**February 10**

Just Comedy 2.0 is hosting 'Zakir Khan Live'. This 'confused desi' serves up his take on modern India. Known to tackle issues that effect people, Khan's charm lies in the fact that his content is highly relatable.

**AT** Tagore Theatre,  
Chandigarh

**TEL** 01722724278

**TIME** 8 p.m. to 9 p.m.

## 11 LUXE VIBES

**February 15 to 16**

Vintage Fair, a two-day exclusive luxury lifestyle exhibition will showcase high-end luxe lifestyle products. The event promises to offer exclusive deals on all high-end products such as designer wear, jewellery, home décor products, furniture and accessories. So get ready to go on a decadent shopping spree this February.

**AT** J W Marriott Hotel,  
Chandigarh





12

**NEW IN TOWN** / PEDDLERS  
UNDER THE BREW ESTATE

## A GRUB FEST

Peddlers Under The Brew  
Estate is the place to be  
in Tricity

When two giants join hands, the result can be lethal. "Considering the emerging demand for a multi variety lounge in the city, Peddlers and The Brew Estate have got together to launch a premium outlet for the youth of the city. From live music to freshly brewed beverages and exciting food menu, we have it all. We are excited to share this new space with our guests to experience two different brands under one roof," says Sehajbir Singh Sidhu, managing director, The Brew Estate. Peddlers Under The Brew Estate, which has opened in Chandigarh's Sector 26 promises to offer a never-before experience to patrons—from interiors inspired by English and Irish architecture to an interesting amalgamation in food. Peddlers is also offering MRP\* nights every Monday and Tuesday for its guests to enjoy alcoholic beverages at discounted prices.

"We are really excited to bring Peddlers Under The Brew Estate to the residents of the Tri-city. The new outlet is all about new and exhilarating changes. It is time to experience a whole new level of madness in the city. So get your party shoes on, because we have a lot in store for you," says Vipul Dua, managing director, Peddlers. AT SCO 25, Basement, Sector 26, Chandigarh  
AT 01723349387

# THE FITNESS FIX

Yoga asanas that will keep you hale and hearty

**Y**oga continues to be the hottest fitness trend amongst health enthusiasts, with people across age-groups immersing themselves in this ancient Indian healing science. Its widespread popularity can be attributed to the fact that not only does it lead to a physical metamorphosis, but is also instrumental in lowering stress levels, something which everyone in the contemporary times desperately needs. Think carefully, we contract diseases when we ignore the body and mind. The practice of yoga is all about focussing one's attention on his/her body and ensuring that the inner self starts taking care of the external and vice-versa.

For centuries, regular practitioners of yoga have been speaking about its ability to make body flexible and we all know that a flexible body is inherently attentive and can therefore carry out important functions like breathing, sleeping and walking more effectively.

When it comes to yoga, there is no pre-condition of age or gender. All you need is a yoga mat, loose clothes and a well-ventilated environment. Remember, an experienced and passionate teacher can inspire dedication and discipline, something that can be of enormous benefit to anyone wishing to tread this path. India, like the rest of the world is witnessing a great boom in yoga studios, not just in metros but also in smaller towns. However, one

## GUEST COLUMN



MEENAKSHI

Yoga Instructor

does not really need a huge wad of cash to understand and practice this form. Commitment and honesty are the key. If you prefer the privacy of your home, there are several asanas you can do on your own. Regularly practicing the below mentioned ones will not only increase your flexibility but also help maintain weight, lower blood pressure, normalise heart beat and calm the nerves.

- ▶ **Tadasana** Stand upright. Feel your weight on both legs. Keep your chest open and raise your arms, interlocking the fingers and allowing yourself to stretch to one side. Repeat on the other side.
- ▶ **Gomukh** Sit in a simple cross-legged position feeling the weight of your torso on the legs. Raise one arm over the shoulder and the other under. Hold and repeat with the other arm.
- ▶ **Konasana** Stretch your legs as wide as possible. Rest your hands on them and allow the head to drop forward. Do not push forward. Hold, relax and repeat.
- ▶ **Sethu Bandha** Lie on your back creating as much evenness as possible between your left and right side. Stay until you feel comfortable. Now bend your knees, and with feet firmly pressed, raise your hips off the floor. Repeat as many times as possible.
- ▶ **Bhujang** Lie on your belly and make yourself comfortable. Place your hands mid-chest with forehead on the ground. Now raise your head and chest off the floor. Hold for a few seconds and slowly take your head back to the floor.

Photograph by SANDEEP SAHDEV

A model doing the Gomukh asana





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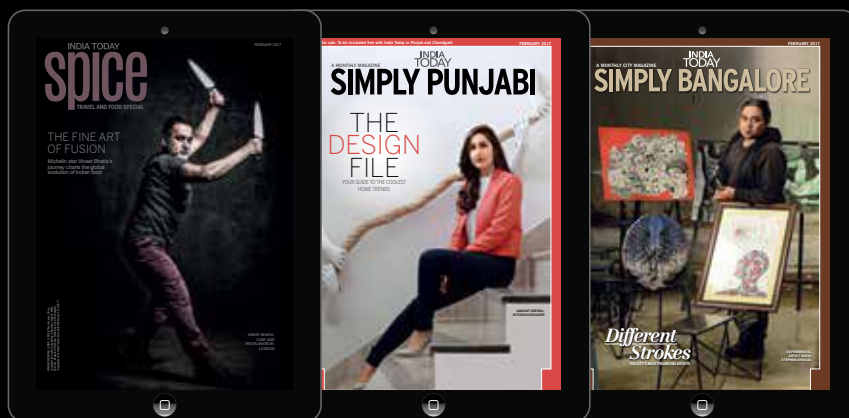


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Strokes*

THE CITY'S MOST PROMISING ARTISTS

EXPERIMENTAL  
ARTIST SURAJ  
STEPHEN D'SOUZA



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## COVER STORY

**Matters of the Art s-4**  
Comic artistes, theatre practitioners and vintage dance music bands, Bangalore is nurturing new talent like no other city.

Cover photo by NILOTPAL BARUAH

# OUR PICK of the month

## Sounds of Adventure

**February 12**

If adventure and music excite you, then head to Zero Gravity Hampi Bouldering and Music Festival, which is about unifying international and Indian climbers, artistes and musicians all under one roof, with the idea of creating an atmosphere where people from all walks of life can come together and experience the magic of Hampi.

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# Matters of THE ART

COMIC ARTISTS, IMMERSIVE  
THEATRE PRACTITIONERS AND  
VINTAGE DANCE MUSIC BANDS,  
BANGALORE IS NURTURING NEW  
TALENT LIKE NO OTHER CITY.

By PRACHI SIBAL

## Experimental Art

SURAJ STEPHEN D'SOUZA

**DOODLING AWAY** in his notebook in second grade and often being punished for it, Suraj Stephen D'souza, 25, never imagined it was something he would make a career out of. In fact, until he left school he didn't know one could actually go to an arts college. "My brother got admitted to Chithrakala Parishath and that's when I discovered the existence of a new world, of art colleges and the atmosphere in them", says D'souza. He completed a five-year long course at Ken School of Art and began experimenting with mixed media, photography and sculpture. While art remained his first love, D'souza needed a job to manage his finances. That's when he decided



Photographs by NILOTPAL BARUAH







to become a part-time bouncer at Geoffrey's Pub, Royal Orchid Hotel. "Since I was well-built, it was a rather natural choice," he says. "But to my luck I met a lot of interesting people at my job and even got to put up my own stall at an exhibition at the hotel. My artwork actually started to sell," he adds.

It is in November this year that D'souza finally quit being a bouncer and turned a full-time artist. An exhibition at Kala Niketan, Mysore and a nomination for the Lalit Kala Academy Award had a lot to do with that he admits. He spends his days painting and is keenly exploring sculpture as a medium now.

## Music for the Soul

PARVAAZ

ENTHRALLING MUSIC lovers in Bangalore for nearly six years, Parvaaz is known for performing Urdu and Hindi poetry with classic rock sounds. Started as yet another college band by two Kashmiris—Mir Kashif Iqbal, 29, and

Khalid Ahmed, 29, old friends who met in college in Bangalore and began jamming, Parvaaz released their first full-length album *Baran* in 2014.

All self-taught musicians, their influences range from Radiohead and Aracde Fire all the way to Indian Ocean and city-based Thermal and A Quarter (TAAQ). The band has been through a few line-up changes and now includes Sachin Banandur, 26 on the drums and Fidel D'souza, 29 on bass guitar. From being relatively unknown to having a steady fan base that even travels for their gigs, Parvaaz has come a long way. "We are still more appreciated for our live performances and are going through a more rigorous recording process for our new album due for release in 2017," says Kashif Iqbal. "We are also recording live songs and releasing them as EPs," he adds. Their song writing process is rather fluid, starting off with a jam or ideas or pieces of old poetry. "We still share music with each other but end up following more Indian bands than International ones now," says Fidel D'souza. Between five to six gigs a month through the season and an album in the offing, Parvaaz is well on the road to stardom.

Members of the band Parvaaz







Performing artist Nithya J Rao

## Many Talents, Many Mediums

NITHYA J RAO

ALL OF 24 YEARS of age, Nithya Rao could be spotted doing as many as five different things during the day. From directing to acting, conceptualising a research fellowship all the way to consulting patients as a trained psychologist, there isn't a dull moment in her life. It is no surprise then that she is bubbling with energy and eager to talk about her work and we try to keep up. "I come from a family of artists. Every child had to learn at least one art form. For me, it was Bharatanatyam at first, then Carnatic music until I began volunteering at Ranga Shankara where I watched a lot of plays", says Rao. It was then that she decided to pursue a degree in performing arts over medical college.

Rao proceeded to work as an actor for several

city-based and national theatre groups including The Actors Collective and Ranga Shankara Productions. She also co-founded Lahe Lahe, a newly launched expression space in the city that hosts performances. However, Rao's deepest interest lies in sharing real life stories through theatre leading her to cofound the theatre group Katharsis Productions. "I am very interested in using art to better family relationships. The idea is to invite people to share stories which can then be performed. The experience is truly cathartic," she explains talking about the idea behind Katharsis and a series of performances titled Katharsis Karicatures.

Besides bringing her knowledge of psychology into theatre, Rao is also determined to break the fourth wall and perform museum style theatre in the future, where the audience moves around the space to experience different performances.

**Comic Relief****MADHAV NAIR**

A GRAPHIC DESIGN student at Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology, Madhav Nair, 21, was always looking for a reason to draw. It was as a part of an exchange programme in Netherlands that he got to study illustration and began looking at comics. "It was like an epiphany", he says. Nair proceed to intern at Kokaachi, a comic publishing house based in Kochi where he worked on a 30-page graphic novel that is due publication.

It was on a visit to a bookstore that Nair bumped

into his artist hero, graphic novelist George Mathen aka Appupen. "We spoke and George saw my work. When he was working on some graffiti as part of ST+ART festival, he invited me to join him", he says. Ever since, Nair has been working on Brain Ded, Mathen's Facebook page of comic strips and is in the process of creating a ten-episode series titled Room Service. "As a comic artist, there is often a lot of pressure to lean towards political satire. But that doesn't interest me now and I stick to fiction," explains Nair. "I am still trying to find a voice and experimenting with different things because you need to be able to draw everything before you decide on a style," he adds.

Comic artist Madhav Nair ■





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AND GREAT CHOW

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## Vintage Love

CLOWN WITH A FROWN

**WHAT DO A** bunch of teenage music lovers do when caught in a single room? Dig out their parents' old favourites from the 70s and begin jamming. That is literally how the city's best known funk rock band Clown With a Frown came to be in 2011. "We were literally blown away by some of the music from the 70s. We realised there was no band doing retro music and we started jamming", says Jonathan Reuben, 24, Guitarist and one of the only two members from the band's original line-up. Jam sessions brought them together regularly and the CWAF had soon carved a niche for itself winning as many as 28 college band competitions at a time. They graduated to playing at prestigious music festivals in the country such as the NH7 Weekender and Strawberry Fields at NLSIU. The band with five permanent members, has since gone through 22 changes in its line-up and often plays as 10-piece with a full horn section.

Their debut album *Love Intoxication*, released in November this year is a collection of their songs produced between 2011 and 2016. The five members, all full-time musicians include Pramod Pratap on the drums, Pradyun Manoj on the keyboard, Jonathan Reuben on the guitar, Keerthana Sudarshan on the vocals and Aashish Paul, the youngest member of the band at bass guitar.

Besides playing to a large audience of fans in the city, the band is busy touring around the world playing at festivals and working towards an album release in March. "Our new material will be a little more towards crossover music, with more modernised sounds and no horn section," Reuben explains.

(Top right)  
Funk rock band  
Clown with a  
Frown; (below)  
Performance  
artist Aruna  
Ganesh Ram







## Drama of the Senses

ARUNA GANESH RAM

SHE BEGAN HER theatre journey in school with a single line in the play *Twelfth Night*, but it was performing arts beyond the proscenium that always intrigued her. Aruna Ganesh Ram, 31, Creative Director, Visual Respiration, once a well-known theatre artist in Chennai is now breaking barriers to create a new body of work in the city. Armed with a degree in Advanced Theatre Practice from the Royal Centre of Speech and Drama, Ganesh Ram specialises in Immersive Theatre, a form that engages all your senses during a performance. Her 2013 production *Replay* about traditional Indian games saw the audience being placed in a large ludo board

and be part of the performance itself. *A Moment of Memory*, her second production, brought audience into the performers' world and ended with a serving of tomato chat. "At a re-run of one of my earlier plays *Swami and Friends* in the city, we tried to recreate the smells of the household in the performance using coffee and incense," she says. She calls her form of expressive, experimental performance 'experience' and recently concluded a solo show on food memories at the Serendipity Arts Festival, Goa in collaboration with chef Manu Chandra. After photographs, smells and stories, Ganesh Ram is keen on exploring gender through performance. "I want to explore how gender bias creeps into children at an early age. I am working with Nirmala Menon of Interweave Consulting that addresses gender bias in workspaces for that," says Ganesh Ram.

# 5 THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO

## 1 FOR THE TRAVELLER IN YOU

Inspired by the island destination, Nicobar, the lifestyle brand from the house of Good Earth has opened its doors in Bangalore with a flagship store. Quirky home décor, flowy maxis, traveller bags and more, you'll find it all here.

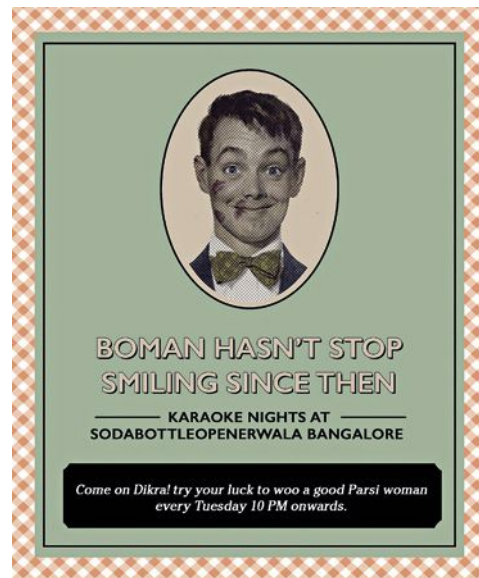
**AT** NICOBAR, NO.4 WALTON ROAD, OFF LAVELLE ROAD  
**TEL** 22112878

## 2 YOUTH CONNECT

**March 4**

The Creative Monks 2017 promises to be bigger and better as it brings together creative people and entrepreneurs under one roof. The event will feature game changing talks, gala rounds, dine-in experiences, parties, and networking zones for writers, video bloggers, photographers and will include musical events as well.

**DETAILS** [EVENTSHIGH.COM](http://EVENTSHIGH.COM)  
**TICKETS** RS 900



Fresh Beer to be Rs 55/- per Mug during the same hours. 1 + 1 on select beverages. Contact number for details: 7022255299 & for Corporate bookings : 7022256728



## 3 IT'S TIME FOR KARAOKE

Want to party on a Tuesday night? Head to SodaBottleOpenerWala, where you can sing your favourite Hindi and English songs at the Karaoke Nights. KJ Santosh plays host as you gulp down beer at only Rs 55 (plus taxes) per mug.  
**AT** SODABOTTLEOPENERWALA, LAVELLE ROAD

## 4 HEALTHY MEALS

Head to the Cubbon Pavillion, a 24-hour-restaurant for a new menu inspired by Swasthya cuisine which features local ingredients, fresh mezze platters, stacks and wraps and an exclusive kids menu all focussing on your wellbeing.

**AT** CUBBON PAVILLION, ITC GARDENIA, NO.1, RESIDENCY ROAD







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VOICE is yet another demonstration of this commitment towards cancer patients

**Mrs. D A Kalpaja**  
Director, VIMS & RC

## COMPETENT CARE

The 200 bedded Oncology centre "VOICE" has been conceived by late Sri. D.K. Audikesavulu with the principle that "Competence has no compromise". The centre has the best technologies available under its roof to manage wide range of cancers-adult and paediatric alike and a highly trained staff of full time Cancer specialists, Assisting Cancer physicians, Registrars and Nursing staff.

Cancer patients have the support of a large multispecialty hospital under the same roof with literally every service available round the clock.

Now VOICE proudly announces the opening of a new designed radiation facility, operation theatre complex, outpatient zone and a full fledged paediatric oncology wing.

## COST EFFECTIVE CARE

Cancer treatments are prolonged and require multimodal interventions. Treatment costs are high.

Services and infrastructure at VOICE have been designed to match and better any corporate cancer centre, while treatment costs are at par with Government centres, made possible due to detailed cost and treatment planning. VOICE provides free high quality cancer treatment to patients eligible under the hugely popular Vajpayee Arogya Sri scheme of Govt of Karnataka

# Competence meets Cost-effectiveness in Cancer Care

Since its inception a decade ago, Vydehi Oncology Institute and Centre of Excellence (VOICE) has been working relentlessly to evolve into a high class tertiary care cancer centre leveraging SUPERCARE. Supercare of cancers is a goal oriented motive, conceived and executed by the management and staff of Vydehi, with a refined treatment approach consisting of **cutting edge technology, evidence based management and cost effectiveness** delivered over a decade with a human touch.

VOICE introduces a new integrated oncology outpatient complex-the **DKA ONCOLOGY COMPLEX** and the commissioning of **VERSA HD-stereotactic precision radiotherapy unit**. A dedicated paediatric oncology wing is a surprise gift to all childhood cancer patients. A modular and hybrid dedicated Operation theatre (OPERA by Drager) is being introduced to aid in high end cancer surgeries

## CORE SERVICES

- Stereotactic precision Radiation Surgery (SRS), Stereotactic Radiation Therapy (SRT & SBRT)
- Volumetric modulated arc therapy
- Image guided Radiation Therapy
- Intensity modulated Radiation therapy
- High dose rate brachytherapy with image guidance
- Comprehensive surgical oncology procedures
- HIPEC for peritoneal surface malignancies
- Dedicated Limb salvage surgery program for extremity sarcomas
- Most cost effective haematological malignancy treatment
- Pain and Palliative care
- Hospital based cancer registry/ social work/ preventive oncology

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- One of the most cost effective cancer centers of the country
- The most affordable bone marrow transplant program in India
- Multitude of central and state government schemes covered
- Full time cancer specialists available round the clock



and also NTR Arogya Seva scheme of Govt of Andhra Pradesh.

VOICE is recognised by a multitude of Governmental schemes - the Prime Minister's and President's fund for cancer patients as well as the Chief minister and Governor funding for cancer patients from various states. It is also recognised by all major insurance agencies and TPAs for cancer treatments.

Special allowances are made for paediatric cancer patients to complete treatments.

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RESTAURANT REVIEW / TAMARIND

## 5 AN AUTHENTIC TOUCH

TRADITIONAL FLAVOURS RULE AT TAJ BANGALORE'S INDIAN RESTAURANT

■ By PRACHI SIBAL

**T**amarind, the Indian restaurant at the newly launched Taj Bangalore is more than just a pleasant surprise amongst the flood of fusion restaurants the city has been churning out. There's Punjabi (a majority), Rajasthani and Awadhi food on offer, with a few dhaba recipes that have made their way to the menu. What sets Tamarind truly apart is the fact that Chef Alok Anand has kept all the traditional ingredients and flavours intact, playing only with presentation. "Every Indian curry uses a different spice mix and has a certain order of ingredients. And everything is with a purpose. I want people to stop believing Punjabi food is the greasy, heavy kind they often eat at restaurants," he says. Instead of a bread basket, a meal here begins with assorted 'fans'—a flaky, savoury snack often paired with tea from North India. The basket comes with a variety of chutneys and the spring onion chutney served in a mortar and pestle with its sharp and

sweet flavours is a good introduction to the meal that is about to be served. The menu is organised on the basis of cooking methods and ingredients and is a welcome change. The bakli salad, made of soft wheat in a tangy tamarind chutney and a crescent-shaped *namak para* (crunchy savoury snack) on top is deliciously soothing. The sheermal tart mein galouti is a galouti kebab with a twist—the sheermal comes shaped as a tart and the safed masale ki dum biryani flavoured with light masalas like cardamom is densely aromatic and yet light. The meal ends with a baked gajrela, a modern take on the gajar ka halwa, baked in a tandoori roti crust.

All in all, the ingredients and flavours remain consistently authentic and impressive.

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