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Outlook

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The Plot Thickens

O retire, particularly from mainstream power politics, is a noble thought. A little like a glutton's dietary vow. So, when a senior cabinet minister of the UPA government chose not to contest the last Lok Sabha polls, it seemed he was graciously hanging up his boots to sit, look back in leisure at a long career, reminisce and probably even write his memoirs. But soon after his party's expected rout, he was seen scrambling to get back to Parliament through the Rajya Sabha. True to the dynastic traditions of his party, the Lok Sabha seat vacated by the father had earlier gone to the son, who in turn had miserably failed to convince the electorate.

Now, suddenly the son has taken on Rahul Gandhi, though obliquely. The issue is, of all things, dynasty. Hilarious, it is. But what could the real reason be? It is a fact that the son of the former minister is in the eye of several scandalous storms with the rumble of probes and charges of financial impropriety pursuing him.

Sure, there is a countercharge for every charge and there is a BJP diary for every Congress diary. These veterans know well how to handle a few corruption allegations. Then why attack Rahul Gandhi at this juncture?

Is this an early sign of an imminent implosion in the Congress? Some grandees of the Grand Old Party seem to be extremely impatient with Rahul Gandhi's leadership. While one section wants to set the sister against the brother (a few insiders feel this could be the reason why Priyanka Vadra didn't really turn up for electioneering in Uttar Pradesh despite her promise to Akhilesh Yadav), others have a



grand vision of capturing the party themselves and taking it to victory in 2019.

Well, all their calculations hinge on the assembly poll results. If the Congress party doesn't fare well, that is, if it doesn't win Punjab and if the SP-Congress alliance doesn't make it in Uttar Pradesh, then the knives will be out. All the noise about the dynasty is actually sharpening of the knives. If by any chance, the Congress wins, at the very least, Punjab, then the party and its veteran leaders would all be "back in business", in the true spirit of the term. And if Akhilesh becomes chief minister, then the Congress would be on a roll. But if there is no scope for any self-improvement, if there is no hope of returning to power even in 2019, then these great national leaders will have no option but to plunge their long knives into the leadership and seek alternatives.

Their primary alternative will be to split the party. Herein lies the rub. It's all fine for the ex-minister's son to attack Rahul Gandhi, but who would want to follow his dad? And that question hangs heavy over every so-called national leader of the Congress. Not many can even win their own seats, let alone lead the party to victory in a state. Without the support of the AIADMK or the DMK, a Tamil Nadu stalwart had lost his deposit. And those who can win their seats know well that there is no point in teaming up with the grandiloquent have-beens, they are but a liability. But that may not stop the biggies from making an attempt. Either way, these are interesting days. By the time you get to read this issue, the poll results would have been out and the conspirators would have finally decided to unsheathe their long knives or not.

RAJESH RAMACHANDRAN

navigator



20 More Dragon Trouble

Now, China warns India of 'severe' damage in relations if Dalai Lama is allowed to visit Tawang. Sino-Indian politics has taken a difficult road in the recent past.

22 Expensive Valley Bricks

Unlike the rest of India, real estate is booming in Kashmir

36 Downhill After The Startup

The entrepreneur revolution of the digital age called 'startup', which found strategic space in the PM's plans as well, seems to be in the doldrums now

47 Cars With Brains

In a decade or so, the 'driverless' car will be a common sight. A look at the extent to which automobile companies have developed this fascinating technology.

64 In Front Of A Character Lens

Actor Rajkummar Rao and his engrossing repertoire

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Online



INTERNATIONAL
Could war with Iran be on
Washington's agenda?
by WILLIAM D. HARTUNG



NATIONAL Dear Nitish, Farakka can

wait. Why don't you free up eight rivers in Bihar? by SUDHIRENDAR SHARMA



Last Year, the JNU row sabotaged Lok Sabha debate on foreign funding for parties. Today Ramjas threatens to cover up electoral bonds.

by MEGHNAD S.



Even if Shivji makes a mistake, Varanasi shows him the door, says Sankatmochan's Mahant

by PRAGYA SINGH



POINT AND SHARE

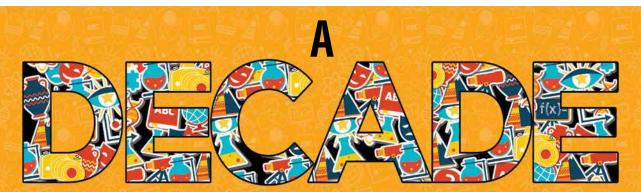
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letters

Make it a Large Scam

LUCKNOW M.C. Joshi: This refers to your cover Story, The Rs 41,000 Crore Trick Called IMFL (March 6). Whisky is not everyone's drink, but milk is the feed equally of babies, children, the young, and the old. India is a country where spurious milk, containing urea, detergents and other ingredients injurious to health, is supplied under tags like 'pure' and 'healthy'. The milk may be from bovines that are administered the banned drug oxytocin, which induces extra (if not abnormal) lactation but also has severely harmful effects: on the health of the animals it is injected into, as also that of humans who consume the milk. Polished fruits and coloured vegetables containing harmful chemicals are openly sold in the market. There is a big racket in even medicines. You have no way to distinguish whether the medicine you are taking, prescribed by your doctor and purchased from the medicine shop, is genuine or fake. Given this dismal scenario all around (and all of this is an open secret among Indians), it doesn't seem like a big deal that Indian spirits are nothing more than fakes and your blended IMFL whisky is nothing but desi daru.

PERTH Sanjiv Gupta: Indians drink to get drunk. The day we start drinking to taste, the liquor norms will change accordingly.

CHANDIGARH Dinesh Kumar: It is said that in India anything is possible. Turning desi daru into 'whisky' or 'brandy' is just one of the tricks used by the industry-government combine to fool people into buying inferior products. Millions of people consume IMFL as if it is a fashionable thing to do!

LONDON George Jacob: A report in *The Guardian* says, "Scotch whisky



March 06, 2017

exports rose by 3.1 per cent in the first six months of 2016, driven by booming demand in India, a market that should be a top trade priority for Britain as it prepares to leave the EU, according to the whisky trade body." Your cover story revelations on IMFL may further boost these British exports.

Back home, with people willing to stand in serpentine queues before liquor shops across the country for their daily quota of that precious 'golden liquid', more water will be turned to wine due to the lack of government regulations and corruption. To all the readers who enjoy a drink once in a while, I raise my glass.

NEW DELHI Rajneesh Batra: In the light of your cover story, shouldn't the acronym IMFL be revisited and expanded to 'India Makes Foolish Libations' now?

PATTAMBI V.N.K. Murti: I am

baffled by the very oxymoron IMFL. In Canada too they make whisky, brandy and rum. But they never say Canada made foreign liquor. Why does this happen only in India? Perhaps, we are yet to come out of the colonial hangover.

Guns 'n Stones

PUNE Lt Col (retd) Ranjit Sinha:

This refers to your story Barrels Deter Goodwill Goal (March 6) on the army's efforts to win Kashmiri hearts. Militancy has now taken a serious turn in the Valley with the locals standing in the way of military operations against militants. They also pelt stones at soldiers. The army is perfectly capable of ending militancy, but only with the help of the state government and the local people. This means a political settlement is necessary for a lasting peace. As the army is trained to do something else, not propagate sadbhavana, some say such exercises are a waste of money and fail to win over the locals. To win over the locals, the security forces have to be withdrawn, but then, who will guarantee that the militants won't resume their activities in such a scenario?

HYDERABAD J.N. Bhartiya: I feel the army chief was right in saying that pelting stones at the armed forces is an 'anti-national' activity—and will count as such anywhere in the world. Those who throw stones at soldiers effectively denounce their own citizenship. The army retaliating through pellets and bullets is a valid response. The Kashmir imbroglio has become a Gordian knot and has to be cut a la Alexander the Great. A weak-kneed policy will not result in any solution.

SECUNDERABAD K.R.

Srinivasan: The army chief's stern warning to the separatists and their

one-liner

DEHRADUN Richa Juyal

We just want to get drunk, be it whisky, rum, vodka or simply 'desi daaru' in that bottle!

INBOXED

supporters against interfering in counter-terrorism operations finds favour with me. Finding fault with the army chief's statement, as some regional parties and national-level opposition parties are doing, would help Pakistan foment more unrest in the Valley. The nation cannot watch silently when the army chief's statement is belittled to appease demographies. The opposition parties must uphold India's secular fabric by denouncing retaliation by separatists in the name of azadi and supporting the army's activities.

Lousy Scab

BURDWAN N.M. Mallick: This refers to Misery After Master Strike (March 6), excerpted from The Crisis of 1974: Railway Strike and the Rank and File by Ranabir Samaddar. My grandfather, who retired from the railways as a head fitter in 1979, had not joined the 1974 strike. As a result, he was heckled by the strikers and honoured with the "loyal employee" peerage. This made it easy for my father to get a railway job in 1982, even though grandpa's younger brother and my father's elder brother



IN DEFIANCE Railway strike rally, 1974

Dead 'Buddy'

KANYAKUMARI G. David Milton: When Lance Naik Roy Mathew (in pic) from Kollam, Kerala, paid with his life for featuring in a sting operation carried out to expose the 'sahayak' system in the army, I was reminded of your cover story *Shooting the Brother* (Feb 20). There is no way to verify whether Mathew indeed took his own

life because he felt guilty of having let down his superior officers. It is sad that a soldier from a humble background had to become a casualty of the media's high-risk intervention to expose the orderly system (the "buddy" system is a misnomer as the practice is always one-way service and never mutual help). Soldiers go through an identity crisis when they double up as domestic help. Some army officers think the sahayak system is no big deal as the lower-rung soldiers usually come from humble family and social backgrounds. The tragedy is that a poor family in Kollam had to lose their dear one to the media's efforts to highlight the prevalence of the slavery-like practice in the army. We hope that no one in the army meets Mathew's fate anymore.

had both joined the 1974 strike.

Summary Justice

JAMMU Rajiv Chopra: This refers to Manoj Joshi's column *Hammer Of Authority* (February 20) on how "the Indian military is its own police and judge". The columnist correctly writes that the Army Act, 1950, is a successor of the 1911 Indian Army Act—itself a response to the 1857 mutiny in which the British almost lost their empire. They observed there was no mutiny in the Punjab Frontier Force that had a provision of summary court-martial, and that the 1,39,000 sepoys of the Bengal Native Army revolted to a man!

Continent of Light

ON E-MAIL LCRS: *Outlook's* report on the opportunities in East Africa is apt (*A Surti on Lake Victoria*, Mar 6). India has a very old and time-tested

trade relation with African nations—especially Rwanda, Uganda and other nations around Lake Victoria. The sheer number of expat Indians bears testimony to that. Let's not forget, a crucial seed of Indian independence was sown in South Africa.

Spin-offs

MUMBAI C.K. Subramaniam: Outlook's story on the dominance of spin in the long, ongoing home Test season was interesting (Wrist, Finger and Revolution, Mar 6). Indian pitches are anyway conducive to spin bowling and we've had tailor-made wickets to support spinners right from 1971. Touring teams have often vented their frustration about this. Our mediumpacers creating big cracks near the crease for spinners to exploit is an old Indian rope trick. This time, the Pune pitch—later rated 'poor'—came



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letters

of greater help to the Aussies, unlike the notorious Mumbai pitch in the past. The message is clear—we overdo everything. Saying that, the Pune pitch certainly wasn't 'unplayable'. The ball did turn from day one, but the Aussies did cross 250 in both innings. In fact, one reason why late-bloomer O'Keefe turned lethal was that he wasn't turning it square like Jadeja, but just enough to take the edge or go straight on to trap the hapless Indians LBW.

Only Ganga Knows

KARIKKUDI Nasar Ahmed: The poll report from central and eastern UP was quite comprehensive (*Currents Beneath PM's Kashi*, Mar 6). But then, I suspect there is a smirk on Modi's face when he reads such reports. The EVMs all seem to be compromised and Modi will win all elections henceforth.

ON E-MAIL M.C.J.: This is about

Feeling Infy

Outlook's cover story about the new Infosys CEO Vishal Sikka (Obverse of the Coin, Feb 27). Former Infosys CEO V. Balakrishnan's observations ('Come clean on all allegations') about the response of the Infosys board to the concerns raised by its founder N.R. Narayana Murthy means that the board is at the receiving end. The general policy drift at the IT giant is worrisome not only to the promoters and founders but also to its investors. Balakrishnan is not wrong in suggesting that the firm should put the probe report on complaints regarding governance in the public domain and provide it to shareholders. If there are mistakes, the board must admit it.

PUNE G.L. Karkal: I am not a management expert. But, after seeing what's happened in Tata Sons and now Infosys—where promoters have questioned a professionally appointed chairman, and called into question the wisdom of decisions by the management and board—I won't be surprised if such trends aren't confined to only

a few companies. In fact, this might be the norm in all promoter-started firms. I know that there are several stakeholders in firms—shareholders, suppliers of raw material, employees, consumers, working capital suppliers, the state governments, etc. But it is shocking that lavish severance packages are given to CEOs, while all other workers are mostly advised to work hard. Will any expert be kind enough to enlighten readers on the rationale of the above practices?

Casting Away Caste

BANGALORE G. Neelakantan:

This is about the edit (*Kshatriya CEO*?, Feb 27) on casteism in modern India. Truly, in spite of political parties trying desperately to woo voters on the basis of caste, it is becoming more futile by the year. Brahmins today marry non-Brahmins, Kshatriyas marry Vaishyas...a gentle revolution is taking place all over the country. And India's mixed workplaces are at the centre of all mixed marriages. But what would be the caste of the children born of such mixed unions? A cashless society might by a pipe dream, but a casteless society may be knocking at our doors!

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Silo Strike

AHMEDABAD Vinod C. Dixit: This refers to the story on fighting poverty, Garibi Hatao, Now Out Of Silos (Feb. 27). Apparently, Indira Gandhi's slogan 'garibi hatao' has made a comeback. But three-and-a-half decades ought to have been a long enough time in which to make a larger dent in poverty than we have. Gender inequality, limited access to credit, lack of quality healthcare and education have posed a massive challenge for rural women. Women are strong contributors to the economy. If anything has to be done at all, they have to be empowered in order to end hunger and poverty.

Chinese Checker

BATALA P.K. Hanspaul: I write apropos the story about tackling and doing business with China while taking into account its close ties with Pakistan (*Xi Stoops To Conquer*, Feb 27). Every move by India, and concerted attempts by many in the UN security council, to bring Jaishee-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar to account, is being thwarted by China, which wields the veto power. China has also been blocking attempts by India

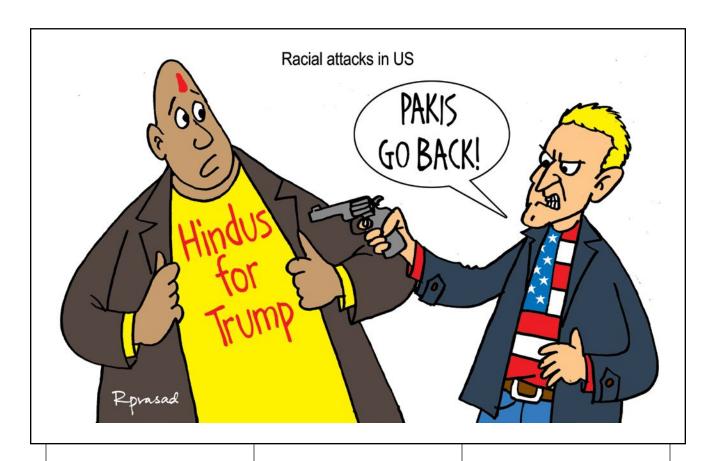
to get a permanent seat in the UNSC. This despite the fact that China got a seat due to Nehru's benevolence in the first place. All this has confirmed that China is officially Asia's bully state.

Cine Predators

CHENNAI M.Y. Shariff:

This refers to Sordid Twist in the Script (March 6). It is a national shame that the Kerala cine-world is replete with beasts, sharks and leeches who prey on female artistes. There have been attempts to abduct and molest the artistes, many of which go unreported. But the same is the case outside Kerala too and what happened in Kochi only reflected that larger reality. Women who join the field do so to make money and become famous, not to sign away their right to live as they want to and decide what is good for them.

deep throat



THE NIECE UNRAVELS

Deepa Jayakumar, who waded into Tamil Nadu politics, hoping to inherit her aunt Jayalalitha's legacy, could be fading out just as fast. The 'MGR Amma Deepa Peravai' that she floated got panned as 'MAD Peravai'. Her husband's driver and his wife were made its general secretary and president, respectively. But outrage over the driver having collected money promising party positions led to Deepa taking over both the posts. And she disappointed women supporters who wanted the Pentecostal Deepa to sport a bindi. Filling Jaya's shoes is clearly not easy as both Deepa and Sasikala have discovered.

NOT JUST DAL AND ONION

There's no stopping 'frenemies' BJP and Shiv Sena from hurling barbs at each other. Now, another BJP ally, the Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana (SSS) led by Raju Shetti, has thrown its hat in the ring of the Maharashtra circus. Demanding minimum support price for onions and better prices for tur dal, the SSS agitated outside the state assembly, throwing onions and tur dal on the road. This protest left Maharashtra's agriculture minister Sadabhau Khot, who belongs to Shetti's party, in a tight spot as he had to defend the government and support the farmers at the same time. He tried to strike a balance without committing anything to either side. The buzz is that the tussle is as much Khot versus Shetti as it is farmers versus the government.

PMO RAP FOR PRABHU

The railway ministry is under pressure as the PMO isn't happy with it over safety issues, slow pace of work and inability to meet targets. The displeasure was evident in a January 31 letter from Nripendra Mishra, principal secretary to PM, to Railway Board chairman A.K. Mittal. The PMO is said to have asked the ministry to "justify higher allocation in the next budget". This is the second such letter from the PMO that was leaked-the earlier one in September 2015 had talked about slow progress of key projects. Apparently worried by the leaks, the ministry has ordered an internal enquiry.

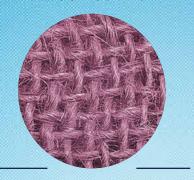
OVERHEARD UP Bhavan staff, who have had an extended holiday due to the seven-phase polls, seem to be dreading a BJP win as it will bring all the new MLAs to the Capital to lobby for ministerial berths.

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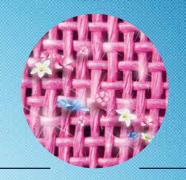
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IN & AROUND

THE SUBCONTINENTAL MENU

UNFLAGGING RIVALRY ALONG THE BORDER

THERE is no dearth of issues between India and Pakistan to rattle sabres over, but both countries seem keen to look for new ones that will keep the pot boiling and allow them to be on their toes. A tall flagpole at the Attari-Wagah border that India has put up to fly the national tricolour seems to have turned into the latest bone of contention between the two sides. The 24-metre-wide flag atop the 110-metre-high flagpole, said to be India's tallest flagpost, is clearly visible to residents in Lahore. But Pakistan, thinking that cameras have been mounted on it to spy on activities on the other side of the border, wants the flag to be removed. Predictably, India has refused to oblige the Pakistanis and stressed its right to fly the tricolour from any part of its sovereign territory. It shouldn't come as a surprise if Pakistan soon mounts an even taller flagpole on its side of the border to keep abreast in this game of brinkmanship, which really is borderline comic.



GRAPANGO IS THE FRUIT OF THE SEASON

COME people drool over mangoes; Other are smitten by grapes. But there is something in the market to tickle the taste buds of the lovers of both fruits. A farmer in Nashik has developed a new variety of grape that smells and tastes like mangoes. Subhash Tidke from Ashahwadi village claims that his grapes taste just like mangoes. "When these grapes are ready to harvest, the entire vineyard smells of mangoes," he says. Tidke had bought the stems of this variety from Pune-based National Research Centre in 2012; the first harvest came in four years. The mango-flavoured grape. called Alphonso Lavellee, is basically a European variety used for wine. Its sample reached the Pune centre through the agriculture university at Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh. The hybrid fruit, which is sold by Tidke at Rs 80-100 a kg. has elicited good response from the malls in Mumbai, Pune and Ahmedabad. Its demand is growing by the day.





HUMOUR THROUGH A TORTUOUS ROAD

IGNBOARDS are invariably hilarious along hilly roads but the ones in Bhutan take the cake. "Be Mr Last than Late Mr" reads one. "If you are married, divorce speed," warns another. Other signboards, like "Be gentle on my curves" and "Faster will see disaster", written in English and Dzhongka, Bhutan's official language, strive for the gross domestic happiness of its people for its all-round growth, instead of petty economic parameters. These signages, intended to keep drivers alert through their journey through the Himalayan kingdom, are part of a project called Dantak-an initiative of the Border Roads Organisation of the Indian government, which has helped Bhutan on its steady path towards modernisation through infrastrucure and development schemes for nearly five decades.

FIGHTING FOR FITNESS

7RITER Shobhaa De's tweet, casting aspersion on Mumbai police's overweight constabulary, appears to have galvanised them into action. It has joined hands with celebrity nutritionist Rujuta Diwekar to bring its personnel back into shape. Diwekar has been helping them reduce their weight and deal with other health issues, such as acidity and insomnia, by offering them tips on food, exercise and rest. A booklet consisting of her tips is also being distributed among the policemen to make them aware of the need to remain fit. Though the cops are generally sceptical about its efficacy, given how the understaffed Mumbai police functions, they have to thank De. The writer had uploaded a photo of an obese police inspector, Daulatram Jogawat, with the caption "heavy bandobast" to poke fun at Mumbai's cops. Though the man in the picture turned out to be from Madhya Pradesh, her tweet prompted Mumbai police to look into the issue.



Illustrations by SAJITH KUMAR

A LEADING LADY WITH A DIFFERENCE

ALAYALAM cinema Licon Mammootty may have worked with scores of leading ladies, but this one is different. Anjali Amir, who is starring opposite him in a Tamil-Malayalam bilingual, Peranbu, became a woman after undergoing a sex reassignment surgery two years ago. Anjali, said to be the first transsexual to act with such a big star, has Mammootty to thank. The 65-year-old actor recommended Anjali's name after seeing her in a TV show. Ironically, the offer came shortly after she had been dropped from a serial for her orientation. Anjali, who plays a Malayali girl, feels it was a blessing in disguise. "Had I done that serial I would not have got this opportunity to act in a film, that too opposite Mammootty," she says.



A GRASSROOTS BRIDGE NOT TOO FAR

One does not always need uber-cool gadgets to make life easier. The living root bridges created by the Khasi and Jaintia communities in Meghalaya, connecting remote villages, is an example. They are built by connecting local rubber tree (Ficus elastica) roots over betel-nut tree trunks, till they fuse together as bridges over gushing streams. They were lauded at the National Biennial Award for grassroots innovators and traditional knowledge holders, organised by the National Innovation Foundation-India.

WHAT THE POLICE SORELY NEED

NANNA Zerlang, a retired policewoman from Denmark, is using her 30 years of experience to train police personnel in Sri Lanka. As part of the International Committee of the Red Cross programme, Zerlang has been training Lankan cops on international standards of policing and is the only

woman in this role for the ICRC. She calls for an adequate representation of women in the police and says their presence is grossly disproportional to their population globally. "Police represent the population and over 50 per cent of the world's population are women. So we need more women in the police," she says.



Still Daggers Drawn

THE "cold war" between Bangladesh premier Sheikh Hasina and Nobel Laureate economist Muhammed Yunus is still on. As founder of the Grameen Bank, Yunus received international renown for introducing microcredit to alleviate poverty in his country.

But the country's prime minister begs to differ. Hasina recently pulled up her finance minister, A.M.A. Muhith, for praising the role of microcredit and Yunus in eradicating poverty in Bangladesh. "If poverty was reduced due to him (Dr Yunus), then why was the poverty rate 60 per cent (then) and 22 per cent now?" she asked.

The Daily Star reported that while addressing the women's wing of the ruling Awami League, Hasina claimed that poverty was reduced because of her policies. "I would like to request the honourable finance minister to look at the statistics during which period poverty had reduced. This, of course,

happened during the tenure of the Awami League government. Poverty rates came down due to steps taken by the Awami League government in which the finance minister was involved," she said.

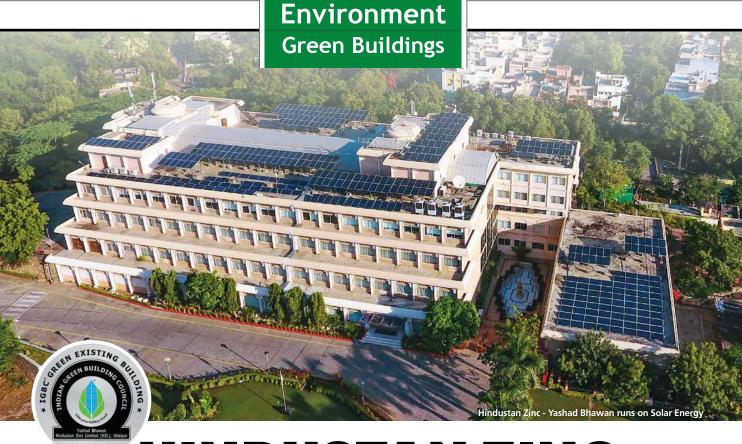
The history of Hasina and Yunus's estrangement goes back over a decade. Some Awami League supporters always believed that Hasina, "a relentless fighter of Islamic fundamentalist forces who had managed to keep Bangladesh together", should have won the Nobel Prize, and not Yunus. Whether the Bangladeshi PM also

Hasina and Yunus fell out when the military proposed his name as a caretaker president. Yunus, too, was not averse to it.

believes in this is a matter of debate. But relations between the two soured further when the celebrated economist's name was floated by the military generals of Bangladesh to head a caretaker government some years back. Since Yunus was not averse to the idea, Hasina saw this as her detractors' attempt to scuttle her chances of attaining power.

Subsequently, when she came to power, Hasina even criticised Yunus when US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton came to Dhaka, ignoring the fact that Yunus was a personal friend of the Clintons and her disparaging remarks against him led to a long-lasting and strained relation between her and Hillary.

But even after so many years, there has been no dilution in her attitude towards Yunus. The hard-earned money of rural women was used in repaying debts to microcredit organisations with high interest rates, observed Hasina. "They live from hand to mouth, but cannot come out of poverty and those who do microcredit business don't want poor people to get out of poverty as it would stop their business," she commented on Yunus's life's work.



HINDUSTAN ZINC BECOMES RAJASTHAN'S FIRST CII-IGBC Platinum Green Building

Setting benchmark through policy of reduce, recycle, reuse and reclaim...

Taking cognizance of green initiatives by Hindustan Zinc, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)-Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) awarded Platinum rating to the Company in a ceremony on January 10th, 2017 at Yashad Bhawan-Hindustan Zinc's Head Office-Udaipur. The award has been constituted by CII-IGBC and the Platinum rating is the highest rating which has been given to the Registered Office of Hindustan Zinc at Udaipur popularly known as Yashad (Zinc) Bhawan. Hindustan Zinc is one of the few CII-IGBC Platinum rated buildings in India, the first Company in Rajasthan and also setting the benchmark across other Vedanta companies in India.

he CII-IGBC Platinum Green building certification was presented by Mr. K.S. Venkatagiri - Executive Director, CII Sohrabji Godrej Green Business Centre, Hyderabad and was received by Mr. Sunil Duggal – CEO, Hindustan Zinc.

On this occasion, Mr. Venkatagiri said, "Hindustan Zinc is the 1st building in Rajasthan to receive the Platinum Rating in existing building category and commended to achieve the same in the very 1st attempt. With about 3900 projects built over 3.59 billion sq ft, India's green building footprint has emerged as the second largest in the world. Hindustan Zinc has set an example for other industries to follow across India."

While receiving the award, Mr. Duggal said, "Hindustan Zinc aims to make its buildings world class structures with zero carbon and zero waste with an objective to create more and more examples for others to follow and with that the management and the employees are committed for the same".

CII-IGBC Green Existing Buildings O&M rating system addresses green features under the categories - Site & Facility Management, Water Efficiency, Energy Efficiency, Health & Comfort and Innovation. Corporate Office of HZL – 'Yashad Bhawan' was awarded with CII - IGBC (Indian Green Building Council) Platinum Rating under IGBC Green Existing Building Rating System. Several





green features are implemented at HZL to enhance the building performance. The project has achieved energy savings by 27% and water use reduction by 37%. Fresh air ventilation system is integrated with active cooling system to improve indoor air quality, which would enhance occupant comfort. On-site renewable energy of 100 kWp is installed that would generate 1,62,000 units every year. Online energy monitoring system is installed to track the energy performance of the project and would help in identifying energy use by various building components such as lighting, UPS, air-conditioning, exterior lighting usages, etc. Air Handling Units (AHU) are integrated with Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ) monitoring sys-



of indoor environment thereby thermal comfort conditions. Similarly, Water meters are also installed at several places to record water usages. This particular monitoring system would segregate energy usages and take appropriate action to further optimise energy performance.

HZL and IGBC would work together to further enhance the building performance and would play greater role in green building movement led by IGBC.

Hindustan Zinc has developed a lush green belt across its corporate office and residential colony. Hindustan Zinc has already installed solar roof top projects. The Yashad Bhawan, Head Office of Hindustan Zinc too runs on Solar Power. The Company is also looking to develop solar energy projects in other parts in the State of Rajasthan. Hindustan Zinc has been working progressively towards setting-up 115 MW of solar energy projects with an investment of Rs. 630 crores. Hindustan Zinc also has over 1.3 million green plantations across its business locations.

The Company's mining and smelting operations are based on environment friendly technologies that led the plant to conserve water and energy. The operations are working on zero discharge principle and the Company is putting all efforts and research for gainful utilization of waste generated at its mines, smelters and power plants.

Hindustan Zinc has installed Adiabatic

1. Adiabatic Cooling Tower. 2. Sewage Treatment Plant 3. Effluent Treatment Plant.



Hindustan Zinc is
the 1st building in
Rajasthan to receive
the Platinum Rating
in existing building
category. With about
3900 projects built
over 3.59 billion sq ft,
India's green building
footprint has emerged
as the second largest
in the world.

Cooling Towers (ACTs), air cooled heat exchangers for minimizing loss of water through evaporation. ACT installation has resulted in overall reduction in usage of water.

The Company has also installed Effluent Treatment Plant (ETP) for treating the 'Effluents' generated by different processes at smelters. The ETP with reverse osmosis plants installed at all smelting locations is resulting in reducing fresh water footprints of the Company. The treated effluents are recycled in the process ensuring 'Zero Discharge'.

Hindustan Zinc has commissioned Udaipur's first Sewage Treatment Plant (STP), with a capacity to treat 20 MLD of sewage, under the public-private-partnership model. This STP has effectively addressed the growing problem of pollution in Udaipur city's water bodies and contributed towards enhancing the overall aquatic life and aesthetic looks of lakes. Hindustan Zinc is now considering to enhance the capacity of current STP from 20 MLD to 40 MLD.

The Company also has green wind energy farms with 274 MW of power generation capacity located in Gujarat, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.

Red Blobs On The Rainbow

Rising attacks have suddenly made well-assimilated Indians in the US acutely aware of their foreignness

BY SAIF SHAHIN IN OHIO

HEN Swathi Narayanan made the move from Chennai to California in the summer of 2013, deep waters and sunny weather were not the only reasons why she felt very much at home. The Bay Area, home to the Silicon Valley, the hub of the US infotech industry, hosts a large Indian community. Moreover, Swathi found it very easy to make friends among her American neighbours. Six months later, she shifted to Austin, Texas, where she found people to be equally welcoming.

"Everyone in both these places has been so open and cordial that I never felt I was someone from outside," says Swathi, 30, who is now a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin. "I strike random conversations with people crossing the road, inside buses or elevators. I never felt like a foreigner."

But all that changed last month when Swathi heard about an Indian engineer, Srinivas Kuchibhotla, being shot dead in Olathe, Kansas. Another Indian, Alok Madasani, was injured in the shooting inside a bar, with the suspect, a US Navy veteran, reportedly shouting, "Get out of my country."

Swathi says her Facebook wall was inundated with posts about the shooting. She herself became glued to her television set, watching Indian news channels as they went to town with the coverage. She also read everything she could find

online about the incident—from details of Kuchibhotla's life to the tearful pleas of his wife for the safety of Indians in America. It touched her deeply.

The February 22 shooting was just the beginning. Harnish Patel, an Indianorigin convenience storeowner, was shot dead outside his home in Lancaster County, South Carolina, on March 2. A day later, much the same fate awaited Deep Rai, a Sikh, in the Seattle area of Washington. The masked gunman reportedly exclaimed "go back to your own country". These attacks have come in the wake of last November's election of President Donald Trump, who rode to victory on a vicious campaign targeting immigrants and minorities. A general spike in hate crimes followed his win. The FBI is investigating the Seattle and Olathe shootings as hate crimes.

Indians are among the most well-to-do and well-assimilated ethnic minorities in the country. Hate crimes against them

> are so rare that civil rights groups don't even track it as a separate category. But that may be changing.

"Suddenly, I am more aware of the fact that I am not from here," says Swathi. "I look different, speak different. I am scared, worried. Austin is a very liberal city and the chance of something like this happening here is negligible. Yet that doesn't stop me from thinking, 'What if something happens?"

The emotional trajectory hasn't been different for Radhika Gajjala, an Indian-origin US citizen and a professor at Ohio's Bowling Green State Uni-

versity. Gajjala says she is now more aware of her "brown body"—and those of her son and husband—in the company of white people. "We have been so happy here, we have never felt anything weird about our neighbours," she says. "But now, there is this hesitation between us, especially on my part, because of this heightened awareness of difference. Like, when I step out of our home and see them or their kids walking away, I ask myself, 'Are they trying to avoid me?'"

For Gajjala, though, this sense of being an outsider didn't begin with the recent attacks, but rather when she returned to the US in August last year after an extended stay in Norway and India. That was the time when Trump's campaign was reaching its xenophobic crescendo. Her sensitivity, Gajjala believes, has increased since his victory. "For me, this fear as a mother and wife of brown men is reminiscent of the day after September 11," she adds, referring to the 2001 attacks



Harnish Patel was among three men of Indian origin to be killed by xenophobes in nine days from February 22.



Immigrant blues

- Three Indian-origin men in the United States were shot down between
 February 22 and March 2
- The attacks come in the wake of the presidential election of Donald Trump, whose poll campaign targeted minorities
- Top administration is tardy in response, but calls for concern have emerged from other official quarters
- Indians are among the most well-to-do ethnic minorities in the US
- Yet the community is fragmented along regional lines, especially in places like the Silicon Valley

SOLEMN Services on at a gurudwara in Renton, Washington for Deep Rai, a Sikh

on New York and Washington DC by terrorists from West Asia. "At that time, we kept hearing reports of incidents at the Toledo mosque, Sikhs being shot at and so on. I hadn't felt that vulnerable since. That fear has re-emerged now."

"The community is on the edge," says Rishi Kumar, an Indian-origin Democratic city council member in Saratoga, California. "We're going through an emotional upheaval. There is outrage and a climate of despair. Indians are wondering how they'd get through four or eight years. Where will all this lead to?"

Kumar points out that while the three shootings have drawn global attention, smaller incidents of bullying have also become common. "One of our friends, a woman, was at a street light when a Caucasian guy started making aggressive movements in front of her. She was taken aback. Another person I know, a PhD in physics who has lived here for 41 years, had parked his foreign car at a strip mall

when someone asked him, 'Are you an American? Why are you driving a foreign car?' These are minor incidents that I know about in my area; they are perhaps happening all over the country."

Indeed, several such incidents have come to light from other parts of the US. An Indian girl posted a video of being racially abused—by an African-American—on a New York train, who told her to "get out of here". Meanwhile, a right-wing website posted photos and a video of Indian families at an Ohio park to suggest that foreign workers were taking over American jobs—drawing shocked reactions from Indians on social media.

Swathi attended a vigil in Austin for Kuchibhotla. "People were talking about how Srinivas's death is an act of terrorism and how we should stand against hate," she says. "There is fear within the Indian community that Trump's rhetoric against immigrants, though not targeted specifically at Indians, can lead to

more hate crimes against us. I don't know if the man who killed Kuchibhotla was motivated by Trump or felt emboldened to act out because of Trump's speeches. What scares me is that little is being spoken about how much immigrants contribute to this country, that immigrants are not to be feared of. We want to be a part of this society and participate in every way we can."

Kumar says Indians need to do a better job of engaging politically and organising for action. "When the shooting in Kansas happened, President Trump did not immediately acknowledge it. Many of our elected leaders did not acknowledge it. If other ethnic groups are targeted, they have organisations that step up to highlight it and engage with elected leaders. Other ethnic groups have done a good job of creating a process that addresses their needs," he says.

"We need to have a concerted action plan for how to address the needs of the

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Indian-American community," Kumar adds. "We need to have a political group. We need to make sure that we are out there, that we are getting people to invest in taking care of us. We are very good at writing cheques and getting photos with politicians, but engaging ourselves has not been part of our culture."

Although the top US administration was a touch tardy in its response, calls of concern and sympathy have emerged from other official quarters. Ami Bera, a Democratic Indian-American Congressman from California, issued a statement after Rai's shooting. "This disturbing crime is an outrage that goes against everything we stand for as a nation of immigrants," he said. "On the heels of the Kansas shooting, crimes motivated by hate are on the rise. Xenophobia and racism have no place in America, and we as a nation need to stand up to these hate crimes—starting with the President."

Swathi feels the recent spate of assa-

ults has indeed prodded the community into reflecting and acting. At an Indian community dinner she attended, "a large part of the conversation was about what we should be doing, who we should be writing to, how we should be reaching out and so on," she says. "People wanted to know how they can engage with lawmakers."

VEN at the Kuchibhotla vigil she went to, Swathi was gladdened to hear people talk about what they should be doing to prevent violence from spiralling. "I am very happy that the Indian community in Austin is becoming more organised. People from the local government came to speak. It was reassuring to know that Indian organisations are thinking of engaging like this, and that others who are not Indians are con-

Kumar is helping organise a peace rally in Palo Alto, California, on March 12. "We'll be talking about what's going on in the country. We will have a call to action on what we have to be doing," he says. "The tenor of the country has changed between late last year and now. I think it comes from the leadership of the country. The leadership has to make a statement that we are all in this together. We need



Growing fears
have not yet led
Indians to mull
over returning

to collaborate and make
America better."

But the biggest hurdle to
political organisation,
Yuman fools like within

home. Efforts

in community

action are on.

to engage them

political organisation, Kumar feels, lies within the community. Indians in America are deeply fragmented along regional lines, especially in places like the Silicon Valley where they are in sizeable

numbers. "There is a pretty large population of different regional groups. We don't always see eye-to-eye on issues. That can be challenging. There is fragmentation and that needs to go away, so we can move forward," he says.

Kumar gives the example of the "Hindu New Year" he organises annually in March, meant as a common celebration of various spring festivals from different parts of India. "We try to mark seven or eight different celebrations under one umbrella. But attendance is not great as people go to their own regional celebrations. There is a Telangana celebration that happens, and also a Gujarati celebration. Bengalis have their own celebration."

Both Kumar and Swathi say that despite growing fears, Indians were not thinking of leaving the US and returning home. "That is not the predominant thought," Kumar says. Adds Swathi: "People here have children, they have

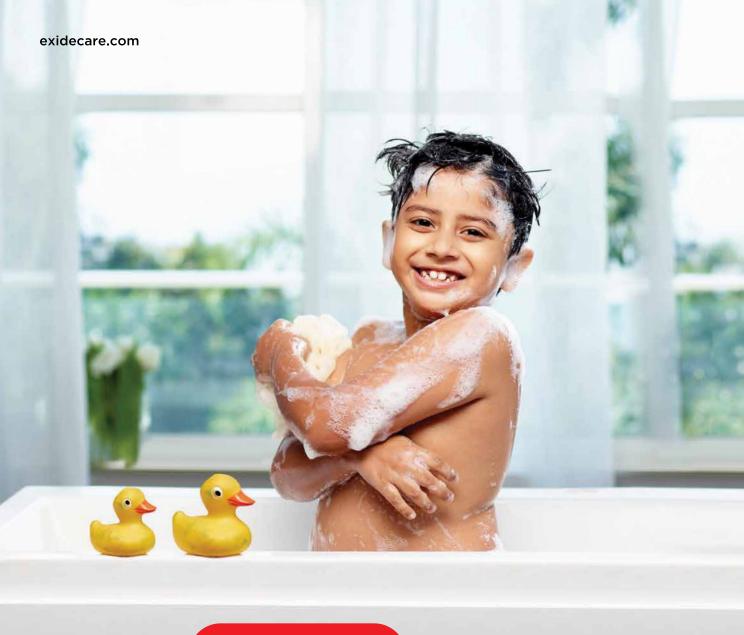
CALM PROTEST Indians hold a vigil in Bellevue for Srinivas Kuchibhotla

been here for long. Leaving the country and going away at the drop of a hat is not possible." She gives her own example. "My parents (in India) are really scared. I talk to them every day about this. Like any parent, they would love for me to be back with them. But then they know that we can't leave our studies and careers and just return."

The Indian ambassador, Navtej Sarna, has raised the issue of rising hate crimes with the US administration. In a series of tweets, the Indian mission said the ambassador conveyed its "deep concerns" to the administration following the attacks and "underlined need to prevent such incidents and protect Indian community". The US state department, it added, had "expressed condolences and assured they are working with all agencies concerned to ensure speedy justice".

As a local leader, Kumar also works with the local Indian consulate in San Francisco. He hopes the Indian mission can also be engaged in community action. "I think our consul general has to run things by the Indian administration. We can work through them, but they have to get the green signal from India," he said. "Having Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi engaging with the administration here would be a good starting point."

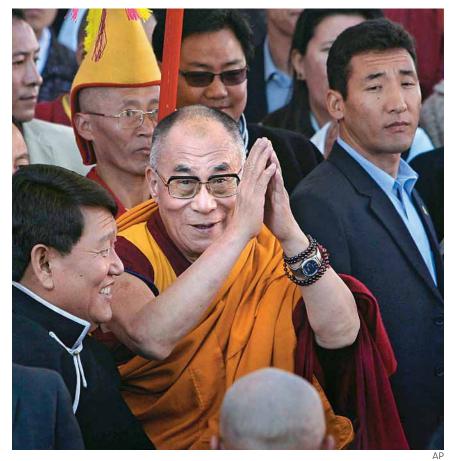
cerned about us."



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The Hint Of A Forked Tongue

The Dalai Lama's proposed visit to Tawang elicits a warning and tough talk on the border issue from China

BY PRANAY SHARMA

HE Communist Party of China has mostly remained unimpressed by what it sees as the hoopla surrounding Tenzin Gyatso—the 14th Dalai Lama—for nearly six decades.

A much revered religious leader in India and the West, the Dalai Lama counts among his admirers Hollywood stars, TV talk show hosts, royalty, leading political figures of key nations as well as ordinary Tibetans and people from other creeds. He was awarded the

Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for highlighting the Tibetan cause through peaceful means and reconciliation.

Every year, large numbers of people travel to his residence in Dharamshala for an audience or simply to seek his blessings. When visiting abroad, his events get top media billing; auditoriums where he speaks usually spill over with people. Even some Chinese from the mainland, who have had the rare opportunity to meet him, cannot help but talk about his charisma.

But the world's adulation for the Dalai Lama has left unmoved the Communist FOCAL POINT The Dalai Lama arrives at the Tawang monastery in Arunachal Pradesh in 2009

leaders in Beijing, who continue to watch his every step with suspicion and regard him as a "splittist", a "wolf in a monk's robe"—more of a wily politician than a spiritual leader.

Ever since the Dalai Lama and his followers fled Lhasa in 1959 to take shelter in India and subsequently set up the Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamshala, China has been implacably hostile towards the pontiff. However, over the past weeks, the acerbic exchange of words has got sharper. In a recent interview with American TV show host John Oliver, the Dalai Lama described Chinese hardliners as people who have some essential parts of their brain missing. Beijing responded promptly, describing him not only as someone who encourages anti-China separatists but also as a "deceptive" actor.

Observers feel Beijing's reaction stems from the growing nervousness among the Chinese establishment over the proposed April 4-13 visit of the Dalai Lama to Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh.

That the Chinese focus is now firmly on Tawang became clear from the remarks of its former chief negotiator for boundary talks, Dai Bingguo, who said in an interview to the Chinese media last week that a possible settlement of the boundary was possible if India conceded Tawang to China, which in turn will allow the latter to show accommodation in the western sector, perhaps in Aksai Chin.

"What Dai Bingguo has stated has been China's formal position at least since the mid-1980s," says former foreign secretary Shyam Saran. According to him, it was around then that China formally shifted its stance from its earlier socalled "package proposal", which would have settled the boundary on the basis of "as is and where is"—repeated thus by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in 1982 to the former Indian ambassador to China, G. Parthasarathi. A reiteration of the formal Chinese position on the border issue, Saran says, should not be regarded as significant, since there is no substantive shift by Dai, neither a hardening nor softening of Beijing's stand.

"However, the timing of the interview could be related to the news that the Dalai Lama will soon be visiting the historic Tawang monastery and offering prayers there," adds Saran.

Somewhat ominously, Beijing's recent remarks have not only been against the Dalai Lama, but also less obliquely against New Delhi—the Chinese foreign ministry and a host of their commentators have been cautioning India against allowing the Tibetan leader's visit to Tawang, as it would seriously damage future Sino-Indian relations.

But Saran points out that despite Chinese opposition, India cannot prevent the Dalai Lama from visiting

Arunachal Pradesh, since it is regarded as an integral part of national territory, just like UP or Karnataka is. "Preventing him from going to Tawang, but not to any other part of India, would be acknowledging that the status of Arunachal Pradesh is indeed different from other parts of India," says Saran, adding that China needs to understand this rationale behind India's acceptance of the Dalai Lama's visit to Tawang.

Yet, the Dalai Lama has been to Tawang before, in 2009. So why is China cooking up this fuss? Indeed, what explains its emphasis on India ceding Tawang as part of the boundary settlement? During earlier negotiations, the Beijing leadership had accepted New Delhi's argument that areas along the boundary that have settled population cannot be part of the negotiation.

T is true that in concluding the 'Political Parameters' and 'Guiding Principles' for the settlement of boundary issue in April 2005, China accepted the principle that settled populations would be a factor in determining the boundary alignment. Both sides were fully aware that this referred to Tawang, since it is the only border area with a significant settled population," says Saran. However, he points out that "since then, China has tried to walk back from the principle in the border negotiations, but this predates the Modi government".

So the question remains—why are the Chinese going back on what they had agreed on earlier?

"The Chinese position has been gradually hardening since 2007," says senior fellow at Delhi's Centre for Policy

Research, Srinath Raghavan. He points out that it all began as an attempt to regain some of the ground the Chinese had apparently conceded in the 2005 agreement on the matter of "settled populations" etc. "That agreement happened in a context where the Chinese believed they could entice India to a strategic partnership. After the Indo-US nuclear deal, their position began to harden. There was also the context of unrest in Tibet ahead of the Beijing 2008 Olympics," says Raghavan. He adds, "And Tibet is always an important factor in their thinking about the boundary."



China's stand is a reaction to burgeoning India-US ties; it also stems from a perception of its greater power, says Saran.

What importance, though, has Tawang for China? China claims Arunachal Pradesh by arguing that there had been historical ties between the Tawang monastery and Lhasa. Since Tibet is part of China, so should Arunachal Pradesh, or, more precisely, Tawang. But experts also point to its strategic importance to Chinese policy planners.

"Aksai Chin is far less important to China today, with the Lhasa railway and the Tibetan road system being put in place, than it was in 1962," says professor of international affairs at the Georgia University of Technology, John Garver. "On the other hand, a southern-extend-

ing salient around Tawang to Bhutan's east would place Bhutan, India's protectorate, between the Chumbi Valley to the west and Tawang salient to the east, thus adding difficulties to India's ability to defend its Northeast," says Garver.

He adds, "Could be the message from China is: don't expect a sweetheart deal from us. It's you, India, who is in a bind, and who needs to be nice to us, accommodate us. You better think about it."

"There are a couple of things at work here," says Raghavan. "First, the Chinese have taken a tough line on maritime disputes. The assertiveness on

> our boundary is part of a larger trend in its policy. Second, the Chinese are watching India's ties not just with the US but also Japan, Australia, Vietnam, Indonesia etc. As India joins countervailing coalitions, there will be a pushback from the Chinese."

But Garver doubts if India can rely on the US under the Trump administration in the same way it did with Bush and Obama. "India has gone a considerable distance down the road of partnership with the US, much to Beijing's dismay. Now, India finds a radically unorthodox US administration, perhaps leaving it out on a limb."

Saran, however, argues that the tough Chinese stand stems not from close US-India ties but with its own perception that today it is a much stronger economic and military power than India. He feels the only way India can deal with an assertive China is by building stronger relations with the US and with countries like Japan, South Korea, Australia and Southeast Asian nations. "India will find itself more vulnerable to Chinese pressure if its network of relationships with other major and emerging powers were to weaken," says Saran.

As the debate among experts rages on the best way to deal with an assertive China, one thing is perhaps clear—an armed conflict between the two Asian neighbours, with unpredictable consequences, is not in the interest of either side. Hopefuly, that would also be the sobering conclusion of the leadership in the two countries. Only then would they summon all the power in their disposal to avoid a situation that could throw the entire region into instability at best, and a ruinous future at worst.

Realty in Paradise

Demonetisation makes no dent in Kashmir as land prices keep going up



BY NASEER GANAI IN SRINAGAR

VEN as demonetisation has led to a steep fall in real estate prices across the country, insurgency-hit Jammu and Kashmir is showing a reverse trend with land prices going up. According to the office of the Srinagar City Judge, where sale deed registration takes place after any land transaction in the summer capital, there have been 10 to 15 transactions every day since the Centre demonetised Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 bank notes. Officials say demonetisation affected the sales only for few days and now it is business as usual.

"I don't think demonetisation had any impact in Jammu and Kashmir," says J&K finance minister Haseeb Drabu. Unlike most people elsewhere, decades of insurgency and crackdowns have ensured that Kashmiris stock up on grocer-

ies for months to come and prefer to keep their money in the bank. Moreover, for several weeks after demonetisation, shopkeepers, grocers, petrol pump owners and vegetable vendors accepted the old notes that had been declared illegal tender, so there were no queues outside the ATMs and no chaos in the banks.

According to Sajjad Bazaz, head of corporate communications with the Jammu and Kashmir Bank, around Rs 14,000 crore has been deposited since the old notes were banned. That demonetisation caused little distress in J&K's economy has given the lie to the allegation by several BJP leaders that Kashmir has been flush with black money, which helps sustain the prolonged pro-freedom agitations, point out Valley-based business leaders. "This proves the Kashmir issue is purely political," Shakeel Qalander, former president of the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce

and Industries tells *Outlook*.

Qalander insists Kashmir's economy has been stagnant for too long to let something like demonetisation make any difference. Land prices, in particular, remain high. "The prices won't come down as land has become an investment asset and its transaction is restricted to people of the state only," says Drabu. Because of Article 370 of the Constitution of India, which guarantees special status to Jammu and Kashmir, and various state laws, only state subjects can buy and sell land.

Explaining why people prefer investing in real estate, leading to high land prices, Drabu recounts the story of a businessman, who got a loan of Rs 20 crore from a bank for business enterprise, but used it to buy land instead. "A few years later, he sold the land for Rs 48 crore and returned the loan. Such is the situation."

Khurram Parvez of the Jammu



Photograph: JAVED AHMAD

Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society says the army and security agencies have hugely contributed to the escalation of land prices, mainly in Srinagar. Prime land in high-altitude areas has been allotted to the army, pushing the locals to live in flood-absorption basins such as Mahjoor

Nagar. The army has been allotted 5,70,133 kanals (one kanal=0.8 acres) of land in the state, of which 56,221.2 kanals come under the Defence Estate Office, Srinagar, which looks after the seven districts in the Valley.

Fayaz Khan, chief town planner of Kashmir, says land transactions largely take place on the basis of trust. "It is a closed market, where the buyers and sellers know each other, trust each other and wait for money to change hands even WORK IN PROGRESS A housing complex being built in Srinagar

after the transaction," he says. "That has helped in keeping land prices high."

In 2015, the state finance ministry had come up with the idea of land bonds to ease pressure on real estate, but it found no takers and eventually the government gave up. According to ministry officials, the land bonds were intended to enable land holdings to be traded across various markets. This was supposed to encourage investors to invest in money market instruments rather than real estate, helping correct a situation where land as the only investment opportunity has created an artificial demand and contributed to its rising prices.

Governance, however, is in such disarray and the whole setup so archaic and out of gear that such innovative financial solutions usually take a backseat, say officials, pointing out the absence of general provident fund for employees, the use of maintenance funds to pay wages to ad-hoc employees, 20 different categories of casual employees, liabilities to contractors not backed by tenders, defunct public sector corporations and so on. So, when the government fixed land prices in 2015, it was primarily aimed at ensuring a rise in revenue from stamp duty and not to rein in the prices. "Before the government order, one

> kanal was sold for crores in places like Rajbagh, but on paper it was registered as sold for a few thousand rupees," Nazir says Ahmad Dar, chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Housing Cooperative, Srinagar. The land rates announced by the government for Jammu city and Srinagar did little to change the saituation. For

example, Rs 36 lakh per kanal was the rate fixed for residential use and Rs 53 crore for commercial use at uptown Hyderpora. Similarly, at Eidgah in Old City, Srinagar, the rate for one kanal is fixed at Rs 30 lakh for residential use and Rs 38 lakh for commercial use. Land brokers and commission agents, though, describe such rates as a charade. "In Rajbagh, one kanal costs Rs 2.50 crore, if at all anyone is willing to sell, while the government rate is

around Rs 40 lakh," says Dar. "Everyone is investing in land—mostly police officers, shopkeepers, lawyers, doctors and, above all, bureaucrats—and prices are going up as a result even in the mountains around Srinagar."

According to brokers, police officials have become the state's nouveau riche and have bought large tracts of land adjacent to Srinagar Airport, in Budgam district and in Shopian district, which is the gateway to the road connecting the Valley with Jammu's Rajouri and Poonch districts. With land prices going up, brokers such as Mushtaq Ahmad Wani say builders are now targeting buyers from low-income groups, who "buy the land and start construction immediately instead of waiting to sell it after prices rise further".

large number of people, including Kashmiri diaspora, buy land, construct houses and then leave them vacant for years. In 2011, of 36,03,632 houses in the state, 3,04,413 houses were lying unoccupied and the total investment in such "ghost houses" was Rs 90,000 crore. Over the preceding decade, 64,410 uninhabited houses were added, of which 47,000 were in Srinagar and Jammu city alone. For example, a leading businessman based in Lal Chowk bought a house built over five kanals of land at Hyderpora Bypass eight years ago and it remains uninhabited. Investment in "ghost houses" indicates the appetite for land among the rich sections of Kashmiris.

Officials admit that government bodies such as the Srinagar Development Authority (SDA), the Housing Board and the Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) have done little to promote affordable housing, which could have stabilised the land prices. "The Housing Board has not added any significant housing stock to the market during the past one decade," says an official. "The SDA may be completing some apartments, which hardly makes a significant number in the housing supply. The SMC was supposed to provide housing for the poor, but its contribution is insignificant."

Clearly, with land prices going up and everyone who can afford it investing in land, ownership of land continues to be a major factor determining economic status in the conflict-hit region.

Many people, including Kashmiri diaspora, buy land, build houses and then leave them vacant.



BY PRAGYA SINGH IN HISAR & ROHTAK

ARYANA'S Jats have donned the agitator's hats again, gathering in Rohtak, Jhajjar, Hisar and Jind, in large numbers. While the wheat crop ripens, the Jat peasantry, relatively free until the April harvest, is drawing up plans to besiege Delhi. Led by a new generation of pro-reservation leaders, the Jats are sure they aren't going home until cases filed against their "boys" during last year's agitation are withdrawn.

The bluster comes from the newfound cross-state camaraderie Haryana's Jats have forged with their caste fellows from Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere. Jats from UP and Madhya Pradesh as well as Bharatpur and Dholpur in Rajasthan, where they are excluded from reservations, regularly attend the protests. The Jats' actions are sending out the message that they are a community with plenty of regional clout. They are a quarter of Haryana's population and their political influence on neighbouring UP is quite disproportionate to their two per cent

A Farm Twist to Caste Power

Jats queer the agitation pitch, tapping into agrarian discontent to forge alliances across states and castes

share in the population there.

Although Haryana's local politics has so far left no large footprints in Delhi, these alliances could well change that. "This is not a movement confined to one state. We are Jats from 13 states," says Yeshpal Malik, president of the All India Jat Arakshan Sangharsh Samiti (AIJASS) and a retired IAF airman-turned-businessman with roots in western UP's Muzaffarnagar. It took him five years to climb to the top of Haryana's pro-reservation leadership, reflecting the growing cross-state fellowship of Jats.

"My next goal is to unite Jats with non-Jat OBCs," says Malik. "We will unite all these groups socially, just like we united the Jats. Did anyone think the UP, Delhi and Haryana Jats would ever come together?" As the Jat agitation does need a wider anti-government sentiment to sustain itself, the leaders are trying to tap into the larger agrarian discontent, to strike a chord beyond their own caste.

"They deducted Rs 100 per acre for crop insurance without asking us and yet our insurance claims are often refused," says Ashok, a Jat from Jasaiya in Rohtak on whose farmland the protesters now gather. "Haryana CM Manohar Lal Khattar's government takes all the cream, but refuses to share even a glass of milk."

The peasants' discontent against the Khattar government has spurred the Jats





Jat power comes shining through a list of notables that includes a PM and many CMs

PRIME MINISTER



Chaudhary Charan Singh

DEPUTY PRIME



Devi Lal

CHIEF MINISTERS



Chaudhary Charan Singh Uttar Pradesh



Bansi Lal Haryana



Bhupinder Singh Hooda Haryana



Om Prakash Chautala Haryana



Sahib Singh Verma Delhi



Balram Jakhar



Gen Dalbir Singh Suhag



Admiral Sunil Lanba



Justice Mahavir Singh

Nathu Ram Mirdha

Ram Niwas Mirdha



Natwar Singh



Ajit Singh



Ch Birender Singh



Kamla Beniwal



Kamal Patel



Sanjeev Balyan

TOP COPS



M.S. Malik Former DGP, Haryana



Dr Satyapal Singh MP and former Mumbai police commissioner



G.P. Pilania Former DGP, Rajasthan



Suraj Mal Maharaja of Bharatpur



Sir Bhagwant Singh Maharaj Rana of Dholpur

Lal Singh Verma, former DGP, UP; Satyendra P. Singh, former DGP, Maharashtra



Virender Saina Sehwag



Sushil Nehwal Kumar



Vijender Singh **Beniwal**



Babita Phogat



Suman Kundu



Geetika Jakhar



Randeep Hooda



Mallika Sherawat



Minissha Lamba

Sqn Ldr S.P. Singh (Asiad gold medallist), Mamta Kharab (former Indian women hockey captain), Giri Raj Singh Sirohi (first Indian in Antarctica)

Satinder Pal Chaudhary (producer, Sharaabi)

to believe that a coalition of Jat and non-Jat OBCs can take shape. "The poorer Jats or Sainis wouldn't mind earning as little as Rs 200 a day as farm labourers, but the real wages are even less," says Raj Singh, a 62-year-old farmer from Balamba village. "Everyone suffers if labour is this cheap. The farmer still spends Rs 6,000 to grow a quintal of wheat that gets him just Rs 1,500."

Another protester Karambir says, "The BJP promised two crore jobs across India and, in Haryana, Khattar promised one lakh. But people don't believe these promises anymore. That's why even the Sainis support reservation for Jats."

HE need for an OBC-Jat alliance became more salient due to the war of words between Saini leaders and Jat protesters last year. As OBCs in Haryana, the Sainis know the Jats would eat into their share of jobs if given OBC status. "Last year, the Khattar government wanted to create a permanent vote-bank by pitting Jats against non-Jats. This time, they won't succeed," says Dinesh, a young man from Bhagwatipur who has camped at the Rohtak protest site for over a month. Indeed, Raj Kumar Saini, BJP MP from Kurukshetra, has been relatively quiet through the Jat agitation this year, but that could be because the party wants to avoid any disruption during the UP assembly election. "This agitation is totally peaceful. Even a bird hasn't dropped dead. We are in it together, Sainis and all," says Ashok Balhara, Haryana coordinator of AIJASS, who reads in Saini's silence the community's support for Jat reservation. "Most Sainis don't hate the Jats," says Kishan Lal Huda, one of the organisers of the agitation at Jasaiya. "If anyone needs Rs 10,000 at midnight, they go to the Jats. We have the OBCs' support in Haryana as they live with us 24x7."

While the BJP awaits the poll results to decide what to do, the Jats are waiting too. "We sent teams to western UP to tell the Jats not to vote BJP," says Malik. If the BJP slides in western UP, they expect the party to come under tremendous pressure to broker peace with them. "And if the BJP does well, the agitation may either fizzle out or turn violent," says a senior Jat leader. "It is unpredictable as the Jats do not seem to have a Plan B."

In 2013, the then UPA government asked the National Commission for

Backward Classes (NCBC) to examine existing documents and ascertain if the Jats should get reservation. The NCBC concluded they should not, for they were not lagging too far behind the upper castes socially. There have been Jats CMs and a Jat PM and the caste is well-represented in government jobs.

Malik, however, points out that "social backwardness doesn't change if one person does well". "H.D. Deve Gowda was PM, Mayawati was CM. Does it mean all is well with the communities they come from?" he asks. The UPA, in fact, went on to overrule the NCBC in 2014 and included Jats among OBCs, but the Supreme Court struck it down.

Last year, the Jats' clamour for reserva-



NO RESERVE Sonepat last February

tion as OBCs in Haryana reached a crescendo and the agitation ended in violence against the better-off non-Jats. This forced the state government to create a new 'C' category for reservations, under which Jats and a few other OBCs were allotted a 12 per cent quota. This was stayed by the high court.

"Under these circumstances, the ongoing agitation can achieve nothing," says ex-serviceman Hawa Singh Sangwan, who launched the first Jat agitation for reservation in 2006 under the AIJASS banner from Maiyar in Hisar district. That agitation had support from Congress leaders such as the then Haryana CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda. Explaining why he opposes the current agitation, Sangwan says, "Now, the reservation matter is sub judice, so the agitation's main agenda is to get the criminal cases withdrawn. This can be achieved only through discussion with the state government, not by agitating."

Jats are a socially and economically diverse community, with the majority eking out a living as sharecroppers. While educated Jats from urban areas stand to gain the most from reservation, the poorer Jats in the villages stand to gain little from job reservation as many lack the educational qualifications needed to take advantage of it. And yet it is the latter who have taken to the reservation cause with gusto, with every village contributing roughly Rs 6 lakh on an average to sustain the agitation. As much as Rs 3 crore has been collected from Sonepat and surrounding areas, besides carrots, milk, potatoes, LPG cylinders and 50 men who cook meals.

Jat voters in Jasaiya, the nerve centre of this agitation, had shifted lovalties to the Hooda-led Congress in the 1990s, away from the Chautala-led Indian National Lok Dal (INLD). "In the name of Jat reservation, the INLD is trying to break Hooda's grip on the region," says Sangwan. In fact, leader of the Opposition in Haryana, Abhay Singh Chautala, has been visiting Jasaiya regularly. Some see it as an attempt to challenge Deepender Hooda, who won the Lok Sabha election from Rohtak in 2014. Jasaiya is one of the villages around Rohtak, besides Sangi, Bhor and Kaneli, which were once Chautala strongholds.

Whatever its fallout on Haryana politics, the Jat agitation has certainly divided the AIJASS. Daljeet Panghal, its Hisar president, is visibly uncomfortable with the agitation. "On February 27, the government assured us on reservation and releasing innocent Jats," he says, alleging that Jats are being misled by the protests and that the agitation could well slip out of control unless there is some conciliation soon. "How long will the agitators be patient?"

This, indeed, has been the question ever since the violent agitations last year. Three rounds of talks with the government have failed so far. "The officers who came for talks were rigid, so we refused to entertain them until they meet our demands," says Malik.

As for reservation, that is a long-drawn affair, calling for fresh surveys by the NCBC, and could well lead to untenable politics. If, say, the Yadavs are excluded, the Jats, being socially similar, would be excluded too. Meanwhile, unless last year's cases are dropped, there's no telling where the brinkmanship leads.

Introducing







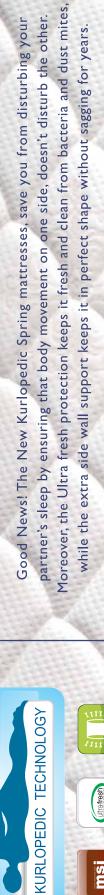








SIDE WALLING



Things that never mattered before, suddenly begin to matter after marriage.





MURTHAL GANGRAPES

BY USHINOR MAJUMDAR IN SONEPAT AND CHANDIGARH

T is very rare for a high court to remark that a judge should not be pressured. But the Punjab and Haryana High Court surely has much to be exasperated about, given how the special investigation

given how the special investigation team's (SIT) efforts over the last one year may have diluted the case of the alleged gangrapes during the Jat agitation in February 2016. The SIT has so far failed to trace the survivors and the accused even as the high court (in a written, operational order) has accepted the gangrapes did happen near a highway eatery in Murthal, Haryana, and is also probing how the state machinery failed during the agitation, with policemen, state ministers and bystanders being subjected to mob violence. The Haryana government, though, has only conceded there was molestation, no rape.

The alleged crime took place at Kurar village, behind Sukhdev dhaba, and Hassanpur, right opposite. The local police say these are "crime-prone areas".

Many leads were lost in the SIT's hands even though additional district and sessions judge (ASJ) Gagan Geet Kaur and the HC have done their best to keep the investigators on their toes. Nobody is willing to talk since the case is sub judice. Outlook got in touch with Kaur in the backdrop of speculation that influential people may have tried to coerce her, but she refused to meet. Her supervisor, the Sonepat district judge, said he preferred not to comment without the HC's permission, Anupam Gupta, a senior advocate assisting the court as amicus curiae, declined comment as did inspector-general (south range) of Haryana Police, Mamta Singh, who heads the SIT. This report has been culled from the available court records and off-the-record conversations with key persons and observers.

The HC judge who had remarked that ASJ Kaur was under pressure and should instead be allowed to do her work in peace was Justice S.S. Saron. Lawyers in Chandigarh say Justice Saron is the antithesis of an "activist-judge" and doesn't make sensational statements. "So, coming from him, it is a serious observation," says a senior lawyer.

HC lawyers note that ASJ Kaur doesn't



The Missing Victims Case

What's with the Murthal gangrapes that a trial judge is under pressure and the survivors yet to be traced

want to let this rape trial become another tragedy and has picked holes in the SIT's work. The SIT hadn't informed the HC that five people had been chargesheeted, an SIT member told Kaur's court during the proceedings on November 9, 2016. The next day, Kaur sent a report to the HC with two material orders from her court, since the HC was monitoring the rape probes. The inconsistency between the SIT's statements to the district court and to the HC was also noted.

In the first order (September 20), Kaur pulled up the SIT, noting "that no scientific and professional investigation has been done till date to go deep into the matter", "no sincere effort had been made by the investigating agency" and vital clues that could have helped trace the survivors had been ignored.

Kaur noted how journalists who had first reported the rape (that led to the suo motu HC motion) have not been followed up with. The SIT didn't chase leads that could have come from a potential witness who had put up a social media post and a TV channel that had reported the story of an NRI rape survivor.





During the next hearing (November 9), the SIT presented a supplementary chargesheet, dropping the rape charges against the five accused. HC lawyers were surprised to learn of this because, in criminal law practice, the police may say they have no evidence of a particular charge (rape, in this case), but the charge cannot be dropped.

The inclusion of the five accused is a mystery to some. In an August 2016 order of chief judicial magistrate Surender Kumar, the five (Bhanu Partap, Vinay, Jasbir, Jaideep and Jitender) had been

CRIME SITE The alleged gangrapes took place near this highway eatery

accused of burning vehicles and assaulting people on the night of February 22. Call detail records and their custodial confessions led the SIT to accuse them of being part of the violent mob in Murthal. Somehow, they were also investigated for rape. The forensic lab, obviously, could not match their DNA with the semen found on women's underclothes retrieved from Murthal because they had not been named as the accused. In Kaur's court, the SIT also mentioned that they

The audio clip

testimony was

fabricated by a

of a rape

fake and

journalist.

survivor's

found to be

had "secret" information about their involvement.

A lawyer located and presented a witness, Bobby Joshi, to amicus curiae Gupta. Over an hour or so, Joshi narrated how agitators had stopped his vehicle while passing through Murthal that night and that he had seen women being dragged into the nearby bushes. Gupta

had recorded Joshi's statement by hand and presented both Joshi and his statement to the high court at the next hearing. The SIT condensed 12 pages of testimony into a paragraph or so.

In April 2016, the SIT located another witness, Raj Kumar, who corroborated Joshi's testimony in court. Strangely, they never mentioned this to the HC. Kaur forwarded Raj Kumar's statement to the HC along with her orders. "Later, they tried to discredit Raj Kumar," says a lawyer observing the case. "They took him to the site and wanted to debunk his testimony because he couldn't identify the exact bushes to which the women were dragged."

A convincing factor for the HC was the semen-stained underclothes. The forensic lab report mentioned that the age of the semen was indeterminable. This was used to argue that these were discarded by a nomadic tribe that had camped nearby some time ago. The courts were not convinced that nomadic tribes would discard branded clothes or underwear at the exact same spot.

Other witnesses have changed or withdrawn their statements. Two truckers had claimed, on camera, that they had witnessed women being dragged away. Later, they said the journalists had

coached them to say so on camera. There was a similar turnaround by Amreek Singh Sukhdev, the owner of Sukhdev dhaba, where the alleged rape survivors supposedly took shelter after the rape along with others who had been attacked by the agitators.

An important witness (whose name Outlook is withholding) is a trader whose testimony was video-recorded by journalists. In the video, he says he met the agitating youth before the violence peaked and claims that the agitators had said they also planned to sexually assault women. While the trader's statement

> might be discounted as hearsay, it falls in with the narrative that sexual violence did take place.

> There was one lead the SIT investigated with sincerity, which led to the audio testimony of an alleged rape survivor, created and circulated by journalist Tariq Anwar (then working with a news portal), being exposed as

fake. He is said to have visited the site and done a story on the violence, which has since been pulled down by the portal for lack of credibility. Later, he got in touch with the amicus curiae and shared the fake audio clip.

"This heart-rending audio clip of the rape survivor narrating her ordeal was played to the SIT chief and the HC judges in the latter's chambers and everybody was moved by it," says a source. "She must be a consummate actress to have pulled it off."

The journalist admitted to fabricating the audio clip in front of both the SIT and a magistrate. Gupta recommended that the state should prosecute the journalist, but it was declined.

Other journalists compiled authentic bits of evidence they had collected on a CD and sent it to the SIT. Instead of probing the leads, the SIT sent the CD for a forensic analysis to verify its authenticity. The CD had been bought from a store to pass on the leads gathered by journalists and its contents were important, not its casing.

In the past, the HC has waited for the SIT to finish its task and the CBI has been reluctant to take over due to a lack of manpower at its local office. That situation could change soon.



SOLD INFANTS



BY DOLA MITRA IN CALCUTTA

N January 20, 2017, the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA), the Indian government's regulatory body for adoptions, sent a letter to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), the West Bengal police's detective department. The letter said that certain "irregularities" pertaining to a Darjeeling-based destitute women's shelter and children's home had come to the notice of CARA, and it urged the Bengal sleuths to initiate a

probe. According to sources, CARA's suspicions were raised when it found that a number of backdated adoption registration forms were being hurriedly uploaded on to its website in a short span of time. CARA's cyber-crime wing traced it back to a server in the Darjeeling-Jalpaiguri area in north Bengal.

Between the letter's arrival and February 19, when, after a month-long investigation, the Bengal detectives made their first arrest—of the owner of the shelter and home, Chandana Chakraborty—an unusual meeting took place at the residence of the general secretary of

the district BJP women's wing, Juhi Chowdhury. The January 25 meeting was between Juhi and Chandana, who, it has since emerged, had alleged links with local Trinamool Congress leaders.

The meeting gains salience because Chandana claimed during interrogation that actually it was Juhi who was the kingpin of the adoption racket. Still, the meeting of the two unknown local operators in north Bengal would perhaps have remained a footnote in the CID's probe report had the names of two top BJP leaders—Rajya Sabha member Roopa Ganguly and Kailash Vijay-



vargiya—not been dropped by Chandana. CID officials, speaking to Outlook, confirm that Chandana, during questioning, stated that she was taken to Calcutta and New Delhi by Juhi to meet the leaders after January 20 (when, after receiving CARA's letter, the CID began to act in earnest) to get 'clearances' for the orphanage, from where babies were allegedly sold to childless couples in India and abroad. Her allegations raise the question of the BJP leaders' complicity in the child-trafficking scam. And, equally, that of even deeper intrigue.

In an interview to Outlook, Nishant

Ashray, the women's shelter owned by Chandana Chakraborty in Jalpaiguri

Pervez, CID's DIG (Operations), dismisses allegations of political interference laid by those who have been named. "Our arrests are made on the basis of our probe and interrogation of those arrested. We are not guided by political considerations. Some names revealed by the accused happen to be those of politicians. If required, we will call them for questioning too," he states. Asked specifically if Roopa Ganguly and Vijayvargiya would be questioned, Pervez reiterated his stand.

But Roopa insists such an allegation is "exactly what the Trinamool wants to raise to divert attention from the chit

fund scam, in which its leaders are implicated". Talking to Outlook, she offers a detailed counter-narrative. "Juhi was used in order to frame me. She is young, only 28, and too innocent to know that she was being used." The film star-turned-politician says Chandana sent Juhi "repeated text messages", seeking help with her NGO,

which she claimed was going through a bad financial patch. Juhi was even told that as the district general secretary of a national party's women's wing, it was her duty to help a shelter for women and children, according to Roopa.

The MP's version relies on Juhi herself being an unwitting, innocent interloper in the drama. "If you see the timing of her first meeting with Chandana (Jan 25), it was directly after the probe against her began. Juhi was always ready to help people and it doesn't occur to her to find out who she helps. She may have been pressurised by Chandana for meetings with leaders and sought it from us without knowing what the NGO was up to.... she had too much faith in people. She was framed. The state government is using her through the CID to try to get to me."

Juhi, who absconded soon after Chandana's arrest, was tracked down and arrested by the police from a relative's house in Kharibari, in Darjeeling district, near the Nepal border, on February 28.

Through the predictable thicket of allegations and counter-allegations, one indisputable fact emerges: the women's shelter and the children's home owned

by Chandana Chakraborty were used to run a nefarious trafficking racket.

A narrow gully in a careworn Jalpaiguri neighbourhood called Kerani Para, lined on either side by fetid, open drains and infested with mosquitoes, hits a dead end where stands a three-storey house, the ground floor of which was used by Chandana Chakraborty for her 'NGO' work. "The children were cramped into that tiny room," a neighbour, Rana Bhattacharjee, who owns a shop nearby, tells Outlook, pointing to a high, slit window covered with a net. "Chandana lived on the top floor with her husband, Jibon, an employee of the PWD in Jalpaiguri. While he is a quiet, polite gentleman, his wife was the opposite-quarrelsome and

> given to throwing her weight around. They have lived here for 20 years, but it was only since the last 10 to 12 years that we started noticing children being brought in and people entering the house at odd hours and even staying over." Rana says that at times, Chandana would bring out a child or two-of different ages, and invaria-

bly emaciated-for a stroll. "She explained that they were given up for adoption by the poor, or born to unwed mothers, or were abandoned. There was even a foreigner child, white-skinned with blue eyes." Rana says that when Chandana opened the 'adoption agency', he had gone to her with his sister, who was childless and wanted to adopt a baby. "It was around 2006. We even bought a form from Chandana for Rs 1,200. But something seemed wrong. She kept haggling with us about money. We instead went to the Missionaries of Charity."

Rana informs Outlook that he noticed no signs of Chandana's avowed TMC links. According to other locals, it was her rival factions in the party who tipped off the police detectives about her activities. "We are proud to belong to the Trinamool. It is people like her who ruin our party's name," says a local youth.

The CID has found evidence of illegal sale of over 70 children in the past decade. Chandana and her accomplices would allegedly trace poor pregnant women and take them to Ashray, the home for destitute women run by her. The women, after delivery, would be told their babies

Chandana told the CID that Juhi had taken her to meet **BJP** leaders **Roopa Ganguly** and Kailash Vijayvargiya.

SOLD INFANTS

were stillborn. Forged documents would be made, and the infants spirited away to Bimala Sishugriha, the orphanage. In raids on these places, the police have recovered documents that show names of possible adopters and the names and photographs of children alloted to them. The shelter and the orphanage used to be run by Chandana's NGO-North Bengal People's Development Centre.

Juhi's lawyer, Akhil Biswas, tells Outlook that her defence is built around the premise that she was framed. "There is definitely a political angle," he says. "Chandana has links with the Trinamool. Her brother is a party worker and is seen with important leaders at rallies. We have enough evidence to suggest that Chandana herself was used as a bait. Even if TMC is not directly associated with the racket, its leaders could see in the scam an opportunity to implicate the BJP. Juhi, being the local BJP general secretary of the Mahila Morcha, is the softest target."

T Juhi's Jalpaiguri house, her mother, aunt and sister are listless. "Juhi takes after her father and has followed in his footsteps to join politics. When I was unhappy with his decision to join politics, he told me, 'Politics doesn't always have to be dirty.' He has inculcated these values in my daughters too and Juhi always went out of her way to help people. Ours has been a well-respected family, now our reputation is tarnished. I know Juhi can't be associated with such a heinous crime," her mother says. Her sister rushes in with a copy of a degree from the University of California in Berkeley, where Juhi was selected to study as an exchange student.

Whether the family narrative will be borne out is not clear yet. A CID official tells Outlook, "We are not overruling the possibility that she may have been framed. Chandana is a very shrewd player, extremely manipulative."

However, other CID officials point out that Juhi's being on the run does not help her case. "We had to track her down to the Nepal border. She may have been advised to go on the run when Chandana named her.... Whoever advised Juhi to flee to Nepal also considered the possibility that if central authorities were approached for permission to arrest her-essential for arresting an Indian in a foreign country-Juhi would come to know through her sources and hide.



PATSY? Local BJP leader Juhi Chowdhury is produced at a court in Jalpaiguri

Whether or not she was involved in the trafficking racket is another matter."

Juhi's lawyer argues that if she was not at her home or even in the country, it does not legally imply that she was absconding. "The CID or police did not leave a summons for her. She is a political figure and moves around a lot. She could only be declared absconding if she was contemptuous of a court or police summons, which she was not doing."

Political parties have been quick to distance themselves from the child trafficking scam. The BJP has removed Juhi from the post of district general secretary of the Mahila Morcha. Two of the seven arrested were part of the district administrations of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri



KINGPIN Chandana Chakraborty

(Moloy Ghosh and Sasmita Ghosh, who were both in charge of child welfare departments in their respective districts, and were supposed to scrutinise activities of all homes and orphanages). This, according to the CID, is a mark of their 'politically neutral, decidedly impartial" investigation. A district magistrate was also transferred and demoted.

In the meantime, the families of those arrested wait around the CID camp office at Siliguri's Pintel village-where the accused in custody are brought at regular intervals for interrogation-for a chance to meet them. "I cannot imagine that he would do that," says the distraught wife of the doctor who was arrested for allegedly issuing false birth certificates for a cut, among other allegations. She has brought a bag full of freshly-washed shirts and home-cooked food for him. "He is not a criminal. We have a 15-yearold daughter and she is completely shattered. I work at a reputed company. Our family's reputation is completely destroyed," she says, holding back tears.

"After years of investigating crime," a veteran CID official tells Outlook, "it is my observation that almost 99 per cent of crime is not committed by hardened criminals, but by ordinary people who cross that imaginary line called conscience." To many, it would seem that this is one commodity still at large in this sordid affair. O



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COVER STORY

HOW START-UPS DIE

They were to inherit the earth. Start-ups, the playfield of the young and the restless, have had a hard reality check. What gives?





In December 2016, after running it for four years, India's largest e-commerce company Flipkart pressed the shutdown button on DigiFlip, a company it had started to sell computers and accessories. Around the same time, Flipkart's logistics arm Ekart discontinued its hyperlocal delivery and its courier service. This January, a Fidelity-managed mutual fund pegged the valuation of Flipkart at \$5.56 billion. Just a year-and-a-half ago, in May 2015, at its peak, Flipkart commanded a valuation of \$15.5 billion. An erosion of \$10 billion in less than two years (to get the scale, that's more than the whole NREGA outlay for 2017-18).

In start-up city Bangalore, a couple of young 'uns are hitting the obituary columns every week—they are just not being able to cope with competition and high cash burn. In 2016, over 200 start-ups bit the dust—50 per cent higher than the previous year. Across the board, start-ups and e-commerce firms are laying off people to reduce costs. Besides Snapdeal now, Craftsvilla, Tolexo and YepMe also shed flab in the recent past, according to reports. A large number of grocery, food delivery and education start-ups have folded up. Someone could make money with a start-up offering quick, clean online funeral services for start-ups.

Across India's e-commerce and start-up ecosystem, a rosy promised land till the other day, all the optimism, euphoria and brisk activity have given way to despair and doom. Investors, normally beelining to India with open purse-strings, have suddenly turned parsimonious and thrifty, asking many more questions, setting more stringent conditions, generally raising the bar.

India has over 10,000 start-ups, putting it among the top five countries in those numbers—the US, naturally, is number one with 83,000+. More specifically, India is also the third-largest tech start-up hub in the world—4,500 of its start-ups operate in that domain—and that hub is in trouble.

Typically, Indian players showed GMV (gross merchandise value) and growth coupled with high valuations and a strong leadership team on paper. The ploy worked as long as investors threw money around. Few had a clearly charted path to profitability. Now all that's changing as investors see no returns from market India.

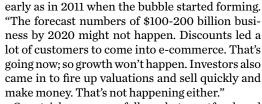
Snapdeal founder Kunal Bahl, in his e-mail to employees, might as well have been making a universal diagnosis: "We started growing our business much before the right economic model and market-fit was figured out. We also started diversifying and started new projects while we still hadn't perfected the first or made it profitable. We started building our team and capabilities for a much larger size of business than what was required with the present scale."

So was it a bubble and has it burst? Absolutely, says K. Vaitheeswaran, Indiaplaza founder and a start-up frontiersman, who "saw this coming" as



"E-commerce has yet to find a model in India. The bulk of the business has been based on unit-level economics that is flawed."

Arvind Singhal Chairman, Technopak



One trick everyone followed—to outfund and outspend competitors—worked well as long as there were Indian competitors. Once MNCs like Amazon and Uber came in, not only the goalposts but the whole football field shifted. Soon, investors latched on to the fact that returns from India will be illusory and started looking elsewhere. Tiger Global, one of the largest venture cap funds that had backed a large number of Indian companies, including Flipkart, recently picked up a significant amount of stock in Amazon and Uber.

Tiger was the bellwether, and others also started turning off the tap. That pricked the bubble. India's start-up funding dropped from \$4.9 billion in 2015 to \$3.8-4 billion in '16, says a Nasscom-Zinnov study. In fact, in the December 2016 quarter, less than \$300 million had actually come in!

Retail expert Arvind Singhal, who is the Technopak CMD, says the investors should have questioned the business model and kept a close eye on the metrics. "Many came on board without much understanding of the business. There was no model in e-commerce: they were buying at Rs 100 and selling at Rs 90. The bulk of the business was based on flawed unit-level economics and discounts."

Now, with oxygen low, the focus has shifted from GMV to revenue and profits. While aggressive advertising and deep discounting did help spike revenues for FY2015-16, truth be told, losses mounted as well. Add to that the leadership changes, the entry of heavy hitters like Amazon, Uber and Facebook and multiple rounds of devaluation. Another deterrent layer was added for investors when tech stocks started coming down at bourses like Nasdaq, which made investing decisions dicier.

So what did the companies do wrong really? Firstly, they spent money irresponsibly on marketing. They also did not think of unit-level economics or how to make money. None had a robust revenue model. Instead, they used a lot of money to outsmart each other rather than using the money to build a fundamentally strong business. They also raised so much money at unreal levels of valuation that the bar was set too high. Failure was, in a sense, built into the logic of things.

Says Sreedhar Prasad, partner, start-ups and e-commerce, KPMG India: "Companies are being forced to reinvent their business model. Many are not doing well because their business models are skewed towards burning cash and acquiring revenues. Today, investors are not keen on companies that run only on investor money and don't have a sustaining model by themselves. That's a major





AskMe Bazaar

Consumer internet search. Closed August 2016. Cash crunch

TinyOwl

Food ordering Closed all 11 cities except Mumbai, Laid off 600 people Financial problems



Dazo

Meal delivery Oct 2016

Financial problems

PepperTap

Grocery delivery April 2016 Pressure from rivals; Financial problems



Fashionara

Fashion portal May 2016

Financial problems

Purple Squirrel

Education May 2016





Zupermeal Food delivery

May 2016 Competition



Auto n Cab

Auto rickshaw booking Competition

Frankly Me

Video micro blogging Feb 2016 Could not capture market



Localbanya

Grocery delivery Financial problems, competition

Groc Shop

Grocery shopping No profits





Parcelled

Online courier booking June 2016

Low margins high cash burn

iProf

Education Competition





GoZoomo

Used car marketplace Aug 2016

Low margins

Doormint

Laundry Cash burn, could not scale



iTiffin

Meal delivery Financial problems



Bite Club

Food delivery

Low margins

Zepperv

Food delivery Low margins, could not scale



Lady Blush

Fashion

Lack of funds

Klozee

Apparel, fashion rental Lack of demand, market



Truckmandi

Truck booking Financial problems

Jewelkart

Bagskart watchkart jewellery, bags, watches Competition



ShopO

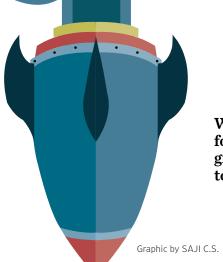
Online marketplace for handicrafts owned by Snapdeal

Feb 2017 No market

Ekart

Logistics Flipkart's logistics unit shut its customer-to-customer service and hyperlocal delivery offering.





With oxygen low, the focus has shifted from gross merchandise value to revenue and profits

change. Unless there's a clear path to profitability, companies will find it difficult to attract money."

That engenders a new dilemma. If refocusing on tangible outcomes like revenue can impress a fleeing investor, it may well alienate consumers, who will be suddenly bereft of the deep discounts that had prompted them to use services from startups. Deep discounting is likely to taper off in the medium term, and start-ups will have to put in the real hard yards—retain consumers on the strength of their shopping experience, a strategy spoken about earlier but not necessarily put into practice.

Sanchit Vir Gogia, founder & CEO, Greyhound Knowledge Group, calls 2016 "a year of anxiety" for Indian start-ups, with "a much-needed market correction" that saw "both devaluation of category leaders and challengers and, in some cases, total erosion of those with a near-clone strategy". Investor sentiment was deeply hurt, he says, for they expected big bang returns in the near term, and the mood of disaffection "can only be expected to intensify" in this quarter. Sandeep Ladda of PwC India says funding was drying up as valuation was skyrocketing. "All the same, margins were waferthin and customer acquisition costs were too high."

Says Vineet Singh, chief business officer, Mobikwik: "The venture capitalists have taken a small pause—asking harder questions, doing harder appraisals and asking when companies will be profitable. The market is going through a tightening." Obviously, such tight monitoring has never happened before and has taken the somewhat spoilt start-up ecosystem unawares.

Investors, showing signs of impatience, are also moving in to take the wheel themselves. Earlier this year, Tiger Global put its own man, Kalyan Krishnamurthy, in the corner office at a beleaguered Flipkart. Even better-performing companies are not entirely immune to this. Recently, Alibaba, a key investor in Paytm, increased its stake in Paytm E-commerce—effectively moving closer to wresting control of the company.

Online retailers are now vulnerable to funding risks, according to India Ratings and Research, with access to easy private equity funds tightening. Flush with PE funds till 2015, their fortunes ebbed last year, with muted deals during January-April 2016. A funding squeeze becomes disquieting at a time when e-tailers are attempting a structural transition in their business model, involving considerable capital expenditure. Trying to shift out of deep discounting to a more sustainable model—creating durable customer loyalty through improved efficiencies—requires considerable investment commitment. Existing players have large planned investments in the value chain.

There was another cause for pain for e-commerce players: demonetisation. After last November, a lot of them were hit hard and numbers started plummeting—a large amount of e-commerce hap-

Tech Two: At a Glance							
Year	Amount Invested (\$B)	Number of Deals	Number of Funded Companies	Number of Compa- nies Founded			
2013	\$1.48	404	377	3023			
2014	\$5.13	513	491	5342			
2015	\$7.83	1060	952	10053			
2016	\$4.08	1108	1026	3852			
2017 (YTD)	\$0.96	177	203	44			

E-comm: Weight Loss						
Year	Funding Amount (\$M)	Number of Deals	Number of Funded Companies	Number of Compa- nies Founded		
2013	693.28	86	77	740		
2014	3212.85	100	89	1503		
2015	3604.13	256	215	2864		
2016	1652.04	266	228	890		
2017	255.04	32	32	6		

Source: Tracxn Technologies

Funds raised by Indian start ups

2014

2.9 billion

2015

4.9 billion

2016

3.8-4 billion

All figures in US \$ Source: Nasscom-Zinnov study



"More than a third of online buyers don't prefer digital payment. In fact, for Indian start-ups, 2016 was a year of anxiety."

Sanchit Vir Gogia CEO, Greyhound pens through the cash on delivery model. Says Gogia, "As per Greyhound estimates, cash-on-delivery contributes on average 65-75 per cent of total online sales, a chunk that has been impacted in a big way. More than a third of Indian online buyers remain averse to using digital payments as a method of purchase. Current spending sentiment continues to be towards basics and not on luxuries."

For all the gloom, analysts hew to a rosier prophecy for the long term. Ladda says the India story is intact. "There is enough opportunity to grow. E-commerce has penetrated the major metros and cities but not the smaller, tier-2 towns. We haven't crossed even a tenth of what is available."

The sense of virgin territories out there is stronger for another reason. Organised retail has not played out as expected and is yet to reach tier 2-3 cities—players feel e-commerce will eventually fill that space. Says Radhika Aggarwal, co-founder, Shopclues: "E-commerce is still very nascent in India. Organised retail is 5-6 per cent of all retail; e-commerce is a fraction of that. Funding will be available for a business with a path to profitability; the consumers are here and investors are willing to come. About 50 per cent of our mobile traffic comes from tier 2-3 cities, 90 per cent of these are Reliance Jio customers, brand new to e-commerce. That's a pretty good sign for the future."

KPMG's Prasad says the India story will see a clear path out of the fog. For one, the fundamental fact—the existence of a big, active market—has not altered. "It's just a temporary thing and things could come back to normal in two quarters. At present, there's a correction happening and companies too are correcting their models," he says.

Everybody concurs on one fact: there's space. Of the \$650 billion Indian retail sector, organised retail accounts for less than a tenth. And e-commerce fills only a minuscule fraction of that—\$10 billion, or 1.6 per cent. The logic of technology is on the side of e-commerce. So are the mass of Indian consumers waiting for the next big deal or service. Being spoonfed on investor money had, ironically, not left many start-ups combat-fit. But eventually, as Singhal says, many of them will see version 3.0 or 4.0. Maybe all we're waiting for is someone with a bright idea to crack the profitability riddle. \square

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ANYTHING FOR THAT FEELING

They've all burnt their fingers, the pioneers as well as their cohorts. But once bitten is not twice shy: the start-up feeling is too addictive.



BY AJAY SUKUMARAN

HE experience of a first job at a startup, as a young professional in Bangalore recounted recently, went something like this: mostly everyone was younger than 35 and the work atmosphere was exciting. The pay was reasonable and a raise came by fairly quickly. The company, then a few years old, hosted a grand party on its anniversary. A year later, the celebrations were more muted. And a bit more down the road, it was letting people go. The word was 'restructuring'.

The professional, who preferred to remain anonymous, moved out when she got another offer. The unsettling feeling—of old colleagues leaving—perhaps tipped the scales. But ask her: given another chance, would she go again for a start-up job? Coming from one who has seen that world both close up and from a safe distance, the answer may be surprising. "I think I would. It's very

Most start-up ideas in India have just been replicas of ones running elsewhere, and launched with no idea about market sensibilities.

different in other (traditional) companies. There, stability is the lone thing that's encouraging."

Two years after start-up activity peaked in the country with big money flowing into the on-demand economy, the risks that everybody always knew were possible have caught up with many new entrepreneurial ventures, most visibly at some of the homegrown 'unicorns'—as billion-dollar start-ups are called—especially in e-commerce.

"Right now, it's possibly a bad phase because we have heard bad news either in companies changing course or folding up or eventually coming down to employee layoffs," says Thammaiah B.N., managing director of the HR firm Kelly Services. Of late, quite a few start-ups have consulted the firm to manage career transitions in the event of a downsizing. "We help employees to find new jobs," he says. "We have seen millennials also break down. So, it's not that it does not affect them. It definitely does."

More than finding a new job, it's the lingering



LET'S NOW LEARN A 'start-up funeral' TechHub Bangalore held in February '17

social stigma in family circles that mostly affects employees, even though peer groups may sense the scenario. "I hope," says Thammaiah, "startups understand this angle and make space for some of these good practices. For, it is inevitable for many to lay off-that's a reality. But they can do many things to soften it. It's good for them."

Last month, TechHub, which provides co-working spaces for tech entrepreneurs, held its first Start-up Funeral in the country in Bangalore, an event it has conducted in a few cities globally since 2014. It's a meet-up to discuss what happened and what you learnt from it. Global research indicates that more than 95 per cent of start-ups close down by the fifth year and it's generally taken that nine out of ten start-ups in India fail every year, says Sreenivasa Prabhu, general manager at TechHub, Bangalore. "Though we are open to celebrating success and treating these so-called successful start-up founders as heroes, no one talks about failures and learning from all

Start-ups are finding ways to tackle career transitions in the event of a downsizing: helping those laid off find new jobs is one big part of it.

such failures. Also, we wanted to apprise the world that failure is not the end of the journey and there is nothing wrong with failure as long as you learn from it," he says. To be sure, the reasons could be very specific to each but a few do seem common enough, including the fact that most start-up ideas in India were copycat versions of those in markets elsewhere and probably floated without learning the local market sensitivities.

"If some idea is found to be successful or is attracting investments, a whole lot of start-ups emerge doing the same activity without offering any specific value to the customer," says Prabhu. "One such example is the food-tech sector, where there were close to 350 food delivery apps in India during the late 2015 to mid-2016 period, when food-tech was a hot sector. Some of these are also an outcome of investor competition to get a piece of the hot sectors without actually looking at the value that they are creating." It's an observation many would tend to agree with.

'NO DUE DILIGENCE ON STRENGTH AND **PROFITABILITY**

Angel investor T.V. Mohandas Pai, co-founder of Aarin Capital and chief advisor to Manipal Education and Medical Group, feels that valuations in the Indian start-up and e-commerce sector were totally unrealistic and were inflated and that is the basis on which funds came into the companies. The former Infosys CFO feels a correction is going on and henceforth companies will focus on profitability and not just growth. Excerpts from an interview with Arindam Mukherjee:

Why is there such a downturn in the start-up and e-commerce sectors in India?

It is a cyclical development and will turn around at some point of time. Valuation goes ahead of value creation and then funding slows down and then again value creation and profitability is looked at. It moves in cycles. You must see that in the last 2-3 years huge money came in as people threw money looking at the high valuations.

66

Newer firms will come up and get finance in more realistic ways. **Profitability** will play a big role in the operating model. Online business has to be more efficient than offline.

There was no due diligence about the strength of a company and its profitability path.

There are three types of companies. The first is where valuation comes slowly, like Snapchat. The second has companies that sell technology like Microsoft and Infosys that are B2B and have long cycles. The third has companies that have technology in the centre and sell through a portal. They put up a large number of products to pull customers. Here growth comes fast, but what one must remember is that these companies have to eventually make a profit. That was not happening. Amazon has not made money from retail and its turnover is at \$100 billion. They make money from AWS and cloud.

But in most of the sectors there is no profitability and high cash burn...

Some of the e-commerce companies are selling branded goods and going only by discounts. They are burning capital heavily. There is no revenue model. That is what is happening in India. They have to learn how to do business and not just burn capital. They have to learn when to stop the cash burn.

How will this affect the sector and where do we go from here?

From a dispassionate point of view, it is a good thing that is happening. It is a good correction and I am not worried-I have seen a similar thing happen. At the end of the day, what matters is the growth rate, EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation) margin and sustainability. Of these, two can be negative

Quite obviously, start-ups are still hiring (financial technology and healthcare are apparently sectors where some of the action is) and the pay still compares well with those by established companies. But salary hikes for a job shift have somewhat cooled off, unlike in the past. Generally, there's been a 10 to 15 per cent drop from what would have been offered three years ago, say headhunters. These days, a mid-to-senior level employee switching jobs could get a 25 per cent increase, which is probably closer to what an established firm offers. Notes Thammaiah: "They are not trying to make salary one of the biggest attractions. In the earlier phase, they had to attract the best talent. Now, with the profitability aspect coming in, they are cautious of not going overboard."

Sometime last year, Raj Lalwani called it a day with a start-up, iServe.io, he had bootstrapped and worked on for 18 months. Lalwani was building an app to aggregate services-the annual maintenance of white goods, for example-and act as a sort of bridge between customers and companies. "It is a huge pain point and we were just address-

Start-ups are still hiring. The pay does compare well with those by top firms, but salary hikes for a job shift have largely cooled off.

ing the need for communication," the 39-year-old says. But selling the idea to enterprises, he had slowly figured, was a tough nut to crack.

"I wouldn't say that one day I got up and decided to shut down. It was a gradual process. This is true for every entrepreneur. You don't have a steady run of successes only, you have ups and downs. Any successful start-up you see simply had more successes than failures. Towards the end, I started seeing more failures than successes," he says. By then, his financial situation too was in distress with missed card payments and electricity bills. Lalwani now works for one of the bigger ondemand start-ups and he's enjoying the challenges he's tackling at the new job. With hindsight, there were possibly a few things he would have done differently with his idea. Would he revive it? "Maybe not now. But you never know," he says.

Would the word 'bubble' fit? Not everyone thinks so. "Like Rome wasn't built in a day, there will be false starts or screw-ups as companies try to scale and mature. Those things are par for the course, right? People will make wrong moves,

and it would still be fine, but in the case of Indian e-commerce companies all three were negative.

What will happen in such a situation?

It will be a question of survival. Some people will die and get sold at low valuations, which is more realistic.

So will the funding stop? Will it be the end of the India story?

No, newer companies will come up and will get finance in a more realistic way and at more realistic valuations. The operating model will change from growth and losses to some growth and a clearer path to profitability. Online business has to be more efficient than offline.

In that case, do you think Indian e-commerce companies will survive?

What is an Indian company today? The big tragedy of the start-up sector is that Indian capital is not playing its role. In the fourth wave, all unicorn companies are owned by foreign capital and registered overseas. So which is an Indian company? That way Amazon is as much an Indian company as compared to Flipkart.

What will happen in this sector? Will we see large-scale consolidation or will some of the existing companies die out?

That is possible. But what is expected is that there will eventually be 2-3 players in e-commerce in India. A new player will come in with new capital and challenge the incumbents in their own territory. The companies will realise that at the end they will have to make money. You cannot grow faster and bigger and continue to make losses.



mostly unintentional," says a senior executive who's worked with several start-ups. "Let's look at what e-commerce has achieved. It has fundamentally changed how people shop. I think that's amazing progress. Has it been without any scars? Absolutely not. We will still see a lot of bad news coming. The way to look at it is these handful of companies have changed India forever."

This executive, too, had started a company a few years ago and ran it for 18 months before it shut down. "A bunch of things went wrong. Thankfully, all of us found jobs again," he says. "But what I took out of it was something else altogether. It made me into a far better professional and far better start-up person." Of course, the scenario has changed. For instance, a year ago, when there was more enthusiasm, investors were willing to write bigger cheques. "I think people are still writing cheques and they are being more cautious," he says. "In fact, they are looking for better discipline and their investors in turn are demanding better discipline. Things are harder and people are asking for the right metrics finally."

Companies can't continue to burn money like they used to. But not all think start-ups are a bubble. Wrong moves, they say, are quite natural.

Ajay Hattangdi of InnoVen Capital, which lends to venture capital-backed start-ups in India, explains that much of this has to do with the cyclical nature of the industry. He has seen three up-and-down cycles in the last 12 years. "What you're seeing right now is no different," he tells *Outlook*. Of course, at a more specific level is the realisation that companies can't continue to keep burning money like they used to. "And that has come on the back of what, I would say, has been a long drought in the venture capital industry for exits which is exacerbating the whole issue."

In InnoVen's recent Start-Up Outlook Report 2017 (where it spoke to 170 start-up leaders), around 65 per cent respondents felt that the Indian start-up ecosystem may be in a technology bubble. "There is a clear recognition in the industry that this is an issue. It's not like anyone is trying to hide it," says Hattangdi. It's a natural course of events to allow companies that fail to die. "Clearly, what is happening is good. Let's not kid ourselves. The companies that are dying are the inefficient ones."



Value For Losses

R. JAGANNATHAN

Mistaking users for customers has been the bane of start-ups

HE purpose of business, said iconic management guru Peter Drucker, is to find or create a customer. He defined a customer as someone who pays a business for goods sold or services rendered. Drucker made this point way back in 1954 in his book *The Practice of Management*. But several decades of boom, bust, bubbles and corporate collapses later, it seems businesses are still to come to terms with the truth underlying this one simple sentence.

Today's start-ups, in India and abroad, many in the digital world, have confused 'users' with 'customers'. They have conflated an expansion in the usage of their goods or services with the creation of customers. Whether it is the world of digital publishing, or online groceries, or e-marketplaces, or even ride-sharing apps like Uber and Ola, the stupendous growth in usage has often increased losses for most players. In other words, potential customers have been bought with freebies or discounts, but they are yet to become truly paying customers where revenues are at least Re l above costs.

The fundamental error promoters have made ever since venture capitalists have been plying them with oodles of capital is to play the valuation game rather than the revenue model game. In the former, you get more capital at ever-inflated prices by showing huge additions to the user base; but without the conversion of users to customers there is no revenue or business model worth the name. Capital is being set on fire. Valuation models have a shelf-life dependent on the investor's patience quotient.

Flipkart, India's market leader in e-commerce, was going great guns till mid-2015, when it raised capital at a valuation of nearly \$15 billion. Today, many investors are sheepishly marking down their valuations to a third of that level, thanks to mounting losses despite rising gross revenues. Users were paying, but not enough to cover costs.

One reason why investors have been indulgent so far is that the world has been awash with capital. With US, European and Japanese interest rates ruling near zero post-2008, investors were willing to take more risks to earn more. In 2016, America Inc had cash surpluses of nearly \$1.7 trillion.

But risk appetites sooner or later reach satiation point and investee firms are called to account.

Aswath Damodaran, finance professor at New York University's Stern School of Business, has a

Investors have been indulgent as the world is awash with capital. But sooner or later; investee firms are called to account. term for this moment when high-growth start-ups are made to realise that business means more than just accumulating free-loading users. He calls it their bar mitzvah moment, a "time in their history when markets shift their attention away from surface measures of growth (number of users) to more operating substance (evidence that users are being monetised)". This is the moment when such companies not only have to grow users, but also start converting a steady stream of users to customers.

This logic applies not only to start-ups, but even large companies in new businesses, like Reliance Jio, which aggregated 100 million users in the shortest possible time by giving them free voice and data services. During the launch in September 2016, Mukesh Ambani called Jio "the world's largest start-up", and his moment of truth will come in 2017-18, when users must start paying for Jio services. Having invested over Rs 1.5 lakh crore, and with further commitments to invest upto Rs 1 lakh crore more, Ambani has essentially bet the farm on data revenues when tariffs are crashing due to hyper-competition. His challenge is to ensure that revenues not only cover the cost of running the network, but also the humongous cost of capital invested. An investment of Rs 1,50,000 crore, assuming a minimum return of 10 per cent on capital, means Rs 15,000 crore of annual operating margins merely to break even on capital costs. Other costs-like maintaining the network, retail presence etc are extra.

While Ambani needs no lessons on the creation of a paying customer, many of India's thousands of smaller start-ups, driven by nothing more than entrepreneurial excitement and a desire to change the world, need to take another peek at Drucker's 1954 tome. Damodaran of Stern says in his blog that "young growth companies have to be managed at two levels—delivering the conventional metrics on one level, while working on creating a business model to convert these metrics into more conventional measures of business success (revenues and earnings) on the other".

For many of India's much ballyhooed start-ups, valuation is no longer the name of the game. The goalposts have been moved, and they now need to deliver on the bottomline. Creating users can be a hobby; making them pay is business.

(The author is a senior journalist)





THE DRIVERLESS CAR: COMING SOON

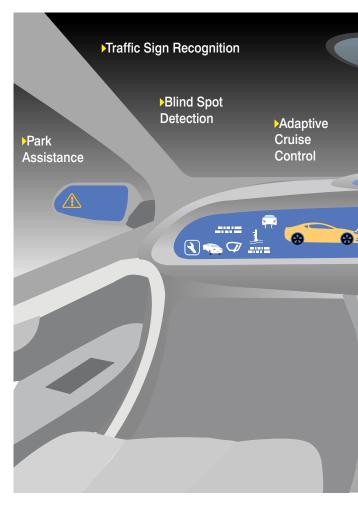
Taking the cue, perhaps, from HG Wells' The Invisible Man, automakers plan to bring in invisible drivers and revolutionise transport as we know it

PRESENTED BY



Relax, Digi Driver Is Here!

"Sit back and enjoy the drive." That's the message autonomous technology has for today's driver.



BY SUDEEP KOSHY

OUR attention please. This car is backing up." In the late eighties and nineties, that was pretty much all the assistance a driver received during his reversing manoeuvre, more like having a talking horn in the rear. The message was meant to alert people outside. Today, automobile gadgets interact with the driver in more ways than one.

Sometimes it's a blip from the window, a thrum on the steering, or the feeling of the pedal being snatched from under your foot...It's a whole new generation of driver-assist features at work for you. They alert the driver through sound, visual or sometimes even physical mediums, when they sense a potentially dangerous situation. Some just warn you, some support your action and some act on your behalf. Most driver assistance features are there primarily to enhance

safety while a whole bunch of them are designed to make life easier and the drive more efficient and enjoyable.

The In-built Valet

Evolving from the looped voice alert in reverse gear, concepts and technology of 'back up support' have changed by leaps and bounds through the last two decades. First came the sensors on the bumper, then a camera on the rear and a visual that combined both to show you how far or near the objects were. The camera evolved into wide-view

that captured objects on the sides as well. Accurate guidelines evolved showing you precisely where you were headed with every degree of turning the wheel. Then additional cameras were added to show you what lay ahead, by the curb, on the sides. Not long ago, a simulation of the top view was devised from all these camera images to place the car in the right context. Now, the driver can simply reverse the car into the designated parking lot by simply drawing a line on a console!

Just when parking was made foolproof for drivers, in came the 'automatic parking assistant' and took away the entire task of parking a car, leaving the driver a mere onlooker! These days, a car can park itself without the driver's intervention on brakes or the accelerator. Better still, it can watch out for approaching

> vehicles while reversing out of a parking space, alert the driver and if required, apply the brakes to avert a collision!

Changing lanes

The blind spot alert was one of the earliest driver assistance features introduced into the cabin, and not without reason. Few drivers consistently stick

"Among all automotive cabin gadgets, I find the 360 degree parking camera the most beneficial."



Graphic by SAJI C.S.

to the habit of shoulder check when changing lanes or overtaking, and often satisfy themselves with a casual glance sideways. The blind spot information system, or 'lane departure check' as different manufacturers call it, flashes and beeps to warn about the presence of a vehicle in the hidden area.

Complementing the blind spot detection system is the lane departure warning. Addressing the driver's tendency to drift unintentionally into the adjacent lane or even cross over without using the indicators, the gadget senses the lane markings and alerts the driver—with a thrum on the steer-

ing in some cars! Crossing the thin line between driver assistance and autonomous driving, the lane-keeping function goes a step further to gently steer back the straying car by selectively applying brake pressure.

There are many drivers on our roads who pay no attention to lane discipline. The smooth implementation of these functions will require us to add lane discipline to our driving habits. But, it will only be possible when our roads have clear lane markings.

Another traffic safety concern is failure to keep a safe distance, one of the biggest causes of accidents. Which is why, the use of radar based driver assistance was a major leap towards autonomous or semi-autonomous driving. While cruise control, which was one of the oldest advances in modern driving convenience, automatically maintained the speed of a vehicle, radar-based cruise control made it possible to maintain a constant distance too.

Many manufacturers call it 'advanced cruise control'. Mercedes has named it Distronic. Soon, the technology will be used to warn of unsafe car-to-car distance, even when the car isn't on automatic cruise. Forward collision warning, and eventually forward collision avoidance, allows the vehicle to slow down or brake to a stop, in case the vehicle ahead stops or slows down abruptly.

Manufacturers like Volvo, Audi, Ford and Honda have fine-tuned the camera and sensor-based technologies in another challenging area of road safety—pedestrian detection. The German trio has exclusively added night vision using infrared sensors to their list of safety features.



Collision, and beyond

A large part of the safety assistance features are built around the eventuality of a collision and its outcome. We have seen collision warning systems and avoidance systems. There are collision mitigation systems, and going beyond, safety applications that consider the possibility of a second collision. After the safety devices, including the airbags are deployed in a powerful collision, what happens if the car continues on its deflected course and hits another object or a wall? Volkswagen has introduced an automatic post-collision braking system that contains the remaining kinetic energy so as to reduce the impact of a second collision. This feature is standard in its latest Passat models sold in Europe.

Adaptive headlights-sparing the swearing!

This is a very considerate feature on Indian roads, where the headlight goes where the incline of the road throws it. Often the beam from an oncoming vehicle ends up right in the drivers' eyes, blinding them temporarily. The adaptive lights shift to a low beam when it senses traffic from the opposite direction and goes back to high beam, once the road is clear.

Aiming at eliminating human error

The aim of autonomous driving is

Create MyKey

Max Speed

Speed Warn

01234.5m

daringly ambitious-to reduce the possibility of human error to a point that makes zero accidents a reality. Gadgets aimed at improving safety in a vehicle have the advantage of staying alert all the time,

unlike the driver's attention that is likely to flag sooner or later!

Life is hooked to a screen

One of the most conspicuous changes inside the car can be seen in the touchscreen itself. In a range of luxury cars, the screen has become wider-from 10.2 inch displays to virtual cockpits filling the entire dashboard. Even as the tablet has been all but pushed out of everyday use by large smart phones, they have popped up in vehicular cabins as multimedia and navigation screens.

These devices can go a long way in making one feel at home in a cabin like that the Volvo XC90. The 'tab', with its familiar flick and flip, and pinch and swipe functions opened the gateway to a whole set of digital controls. The new

Gadgets For The Owner. Take Cruise Control!

OST drivers are reluctant to hand over their keys to others—be it the punk who does the valet parking, the self-styled rock star at home or the freeloading colleague. Now there is hope for them to stay in control, thankfully without much of an argument!

Volvo calls their control device 'Red Key' while Ford does it with 'MyKey'. The key to both gadgets are pre-set limits and functions that cannot be turned off. Safety settings are maxed out; speed limit is set to safe levels; and speakers are prevented from blasting through the sunroof! Not surprisingly, someone has described the Ford MyKey as "a remote babysitter for children while they are behind the wheel".

Hyundai's system is like a strict governess. It alerts parents if teens are 'hanging out' after the time they are supposed to be home or if they drive beyond designated boundaries, or hit the key fob's panic button, besides setting speed limit warnings. This 'parenting feature' has almost become a statement of commitment for automotive brands now. Pioneers like

Mercedes-Benz have a teen driver safety programme too. Chevrolet's programme even flashes a report card on the young driver's performance!

Understandably, such self-regula-

tion has been welcomed by parents for the peace of mind it affords, but what about the children? If a few more restrictions mean they can have the car more often, isn't that worth the barter?

Talisman from Renault too features a similar tablet like screen, giving it an advantage of familiarity and tech-savviness in its segment.

There is still space for imagination

Smart phones introduce us to the technology that we meet in car cabins much later. Voice command functions have made way to gesture control in many vehicle cabins, like the new BMW 7 series or Porsche's new electric fourdoor. In fact, gesture control was among the concepts that Jaguar Land Rover wowed the world with, a couple of years

ago. While they still remain largely concepts, their fascination still refuses to wear off! Imagine rolling down the windows or winding back the sunroof with a sweep of your hand. Or even better, what if your car waited on you like an attentive butler to adjust the climate or music volume, and all you had to do was to think aloud!

So what next, mind reading? Well, Jaguar's proposed cabin technology came alarmingly close to just that. It would predict behav-

iour using algorithms to come up with 'helpful advice' for the driver. It would remind you to top up on fuel before a long drive, or to cancel your drive-in order and

get going in case something urgent came up. Well, if you still wanted to pick that sandwich after all, your car could even text your colleagues that you'll be late. But it wouldn't cook up excuses. Not yet, thankfully!

Questions such as "shouldn't lanes be clearly marked on our roads before introducing lane keeping assist" notwithstanding, some of the technology currently available can make driving easier and our roads safer. The dread of not fitting into a reverse parking is as universal as of failing license tests. So, 'park assist' is a blessing wherever in the world, and so is cross traffic alert. The former in its more ubiquitous form uses guidelines and sonic alerts to guide the driver into a parking lot, and simply parks the car for him. The latter watches out for vehicles approaching from the sides while reversing out of the parking space and in its advanced form will even stop the car in time to avoid a collision.

Advanced technology for everyone

While advanced technology involving cameras and sensors was introduced in the luxury segment by global brands like Audi or Mercedes or Range Rover, as technology evolved and became more affordable, other manufacturers like Nissan, Hyundai and Mazda began enthusiastically using these to keep up with competition. As with everything good that arises from competition, the customer is the ultimate beneficiary!

(Sudeep Koshy, based in UAE, is a leading motoring blogger. You can find him at drivemeonline.com)





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Test Drive Into The Future

Automobile companies have geared up for the new era of tech-driving

BY SUDEEP KOSHY

N the last week of February, Nissan invited the media to East London to get a glimpse of its autonomous drive prototypes. Audi showcased its piloted driving skills to journalists on a driverless drive from Silicon Valley to Las Vegas as early as January, 2015. The number of cars that are being tested on behalf of major automotive brands are enough to jam up a street-except that a traffic jam wouldn't happen with autonomous cars. A journey that started in the 1920s and gathered speed in the last two decades is now close to finishing at the start line of a new automotive era.

Autonomous driving has become a global buzz anticipated by the public, propagated by experts, and sponsored



by automakers and governments. At the World Government Summit held recently in Dubai, auto-innovation giant Tesla was officially introduced to the UAE and so was a 'self-driving' flying vehicle that could automatically carry passengers to preset destinations and back. Dubai expects to be at the forefront of autonomous mobility by 2030, when one in four journeys undertaken is expected to be driverless. Not too ambitious for a place that introduced the first driverless Metro train service, earlier in the decade.

The implications of autonomous mobility go beyond safety and environmental gains. In a city like Dubai, autonomous mobility is expected to yield Rs 40,000 crore, reduce mobility spending by 44 per cent and curb the demand for parking by half!

Stages of autonomous mobility

There are five levels of driverless mobility according to a US system. The grading starts with the ability of the vehicle to stop by itself when approaching an obstacle. At the highest level is the ability for unhindered mobility without human intervention. Most of the commercially available technology is currently placed is at Level 3, which stands for the ability of the vehicle to be operated without a driver for some time in normal circumstances but still needs a human hand in certain circumstances. The Challenges

Driverless transport faces four key challenges, anywhere in the world. Infrastructure—which includes the highest quality maps and road markings for artificial intelligence to make sense of it; laws and legislation—compliance



and discipline are paramount for coordinated functioning; safety and public acceptance—social integration is an essential part of change, and requires widespread awareness campaigns; technological requirements such as efficiency of sensors and cameras. While each of these parameters will present potholes en route to a driverless era, the greatest challenges will still be behavioural rather than technical.

A recent report from the Boston Consulting Group shows that public perception and social acceptance are still a challenge even in developed cities. People are concerned about issues of reliability and safety. They should be led to that goal, step by step. In his keynote address at the world's largest consumer electronics show, Nissan Chairman Carlos Ghosn points out how the innovation has to be ready for the market and regulations ready for the innovation. Otherwise, it runs the risk of being rejected.

In a country where the share of buses among total vehicles has declined from 11per cent in the 1940s to one per cent as of 2014, autonomous mobility should also inspire an increased use of public transport in Indian cities.

The journey to autonomous mobility cannot happen as quickly as online taxis and reservation systems were adopted. The idea is to populate this evolutionary space with autonomous driving concepts and supportive technologies while we wait for the driverless car to arrive. It will see waypoints in reducing congestion and pollution, such as shared mobility, discouragingly high city parking charges, and economically viable electric and hybrid vehicles. As the paradigm shift is expected to take up to two



"Within 20 years, driverless vehicles will be the norm around the world." Elon Musk, founder and CEO of Tesla

decades, hopefully that would give the infrastructure enough time to catch up! Successful Stories

Having recently served its two millionth passenger in six years, the Personal Rapid Transport (PRT) in the Masdar City in Abu Dhabi is an example of everyday implementation of driverless transport. The lithium batteries that drive the PRT rely on the solar energy generated within the facility, and have a 99.6 per cent availability record. A similar system has been serving London's Heathrow Airport passengers for more than half-adecade. Interestingly, the oldest of these has been operational in the West Virginia University since 1975.

There are also talks of implementation of PRTs in the Abu Dhabi-Dubai corridor, where a sci-fi styled 'hyperloop' will be used. That should reduce the 160 km distance to 10-minutes!

A world that moves together

The concept of autonomous mobility is the harbinger of a new era of not only technological development but also technological cooperation.

CloudCar, based in Palo Alto, California, is a world-leading developer of connected driver experiences. While CloudCar has been working with Jaguar Land Rover on their vehicle technology programme, the opportunity for involvement from other automotive manufacturers is immense. This can reduce the costs of having to integrate into the car hundreds of driver-focused global cloud services and content.

Laying the bed, or infrastructure development, is the part that demands maximum cooperation and concerted efforts. The 'Digital Motorway Test Bed' is a joint initiative among Germany's Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure, the free state of Bavaria, the automotive and supply industry as well as the IT sector. The task involves, among other things, the modification of materials used for marker posts and guardrails so that they can reflect radar waves better, and from further away, and car sensors that will read these markings more effectively.

A thousand kilometres west of the Autobahn, the Connected and Autonomous Vehicle technologies research of Jaguar Land Rover is underway, conducted in conjunction with Ford and Tata. They are testing new connected technologies that allow cars to talk to each other, as well as with the roadside infrastructure, such as traffic lights. The result could be a car that knows what speed to travel so as to pass through traffic signals with lights always on green!



The Duke's Quick Quarter Litre Surprise

It's not the much-anticipated 'Super Duke' but it holds its own. Duke 250 will hit the market soon.

BY LEO XAVIER

HIS Bullet lover's affair with KTM began in 2012 after taking the newly launched Duke 200 out for a test spin. I cannot say it was love from the first gear, but the machine grows on you, And there's no denying that the Duke has become the first choice for touring as well as city commutes,.

The formidable Duke 390 entered the market after the bratty 200. And, while all eyes anxiously waited for KTM to step up the horsepower even further—by bringing the Duke 690 or the Super Duke to the Indian market, the Austrian manufacturers and their Indian partner, Bajaj, surprised enthusiasts by launching the Duke 250 this year.

The Duke 250 beats logic, especially when you can pay around Rs 50,000 extra to bring home the 390. Having said that, one really cannot resist what the newbie coming out of the KTM stable have to offer. There must be something to the bike!

For starters, it's sharper than the other two models out in the market. The Rs 1.73 lakh (ex-showroom Delhi) motorbike is a bit of a Frankenstein—it combines the aesthetics of both its upper and lower models. The brakes, instrument cluster and electronics are derived from the Duke 200, but it gets the design, (base) engine, wheels, frame and suspension from the 2017 Duke 390. The curves, and sharper edges are inspired from the mother of all KTMs. the Super

Duke. This makes the model look meaner and gives a 'premium' bike feel to it.

There are a lot of positives in the design aspect of the bike, the most striking being the steel tank with an increased 13.5 litre, capacity. That means longer rides on the highway with lesser fuel stops.

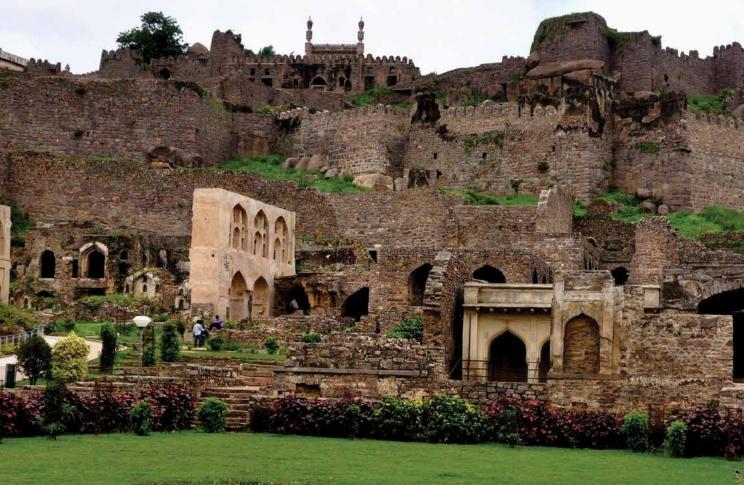
But, beyond aesthetics, what hard-core riders need is performance. And the 250cc engine, downsized from the 390cc motor, provides a refined experience, unlike the nervous and twitchy 200. Understandably, the top-end power, which translates to top-speed on the road—an important number for the bikers out there—will be lower than the 390.

That takes us to handling, which is pretty much as good as the other two Dukes in the market in India. It takes the corners confidently, while the MRF stock tyres that come with the motor-



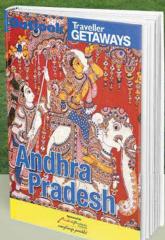






A rendezvous with the Koh-i-Noor's roots





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A Fleet Of Head-turners For 2017

017 is going to be a roaring year for performance bikes as the best international names are eagerly burning the rubber to take off. There is plenty of action at the entry-level segment of superbikes. And a large share of spotlight will be on homegrown auto major TVS, which has partnered with Bavarian giant BMW to manufacture the BMW G310 R and the Apache RTR 300.



BMW G 310 R

The BMW G310 R, which carries the genes of the S 1000 R, is just days away from being launched in India. The entry-level performance motorcycle, designed by the German company and manufactured by TVS on the outskirts of Bengaluru, will be BMW's first offer under the 500cc category. A 313cc liguid cooled, single-cylinder engine will churn out 34 BHP and 28 Nm of torque. The motorcycle, on sale in the UK with a sticker price of around Rs 4 lakh, is likely to be priced between 2-2.5 lakh in India. The manufacturing machines have been imported from Germany, and the new bike will help the homegrown auto company to finally catch up with the top players in the industry. The bike will be exported to foreign markets from India.

TVS Apache RTR 300

At the 2016 Auto Expo in Greater Noi-



da, TVS turned heads with its Akula 310 concept. When it hits the road next month, it will be called the TVS Apache RTR 300carrying the heart of BMW's GTR 310 R but built based on a TVS design. The bike, though, will be built on the BMW GTR 310 R platform. The RTR 300 is an attempt by TVS to enter the 'premium' category with its first fully faired model.

Just as is the case with the VW Vento and Skoda Rapid, which try hard to look different though they are produced from the same kitchen, the TVS RTR 300's brawny looks might go in its favour.

TVS might tune down the Apache engine a bit so that the BMW GTR 300 R and Apache don't cannibalise each other.

The expected sticker price for the RTR 300 is around Rs 1.75-1.9 lakh.



DSK Benelli Tornado 302

The Italian company took the TNT 300 that was launched in December 2015 and fitted it with a drag-reducing shell. And voila, you have the new DSK Benelli Tornada 302. A 300cc, twin-cylinder liquid cooled engine that produces 36 BHP and 27 Nm of torque does duty in both the motorcycles.

The bike has a top speed of 154 km/hr and can do 0-100 in 8.3 seconds. Since the TNT 302 has inherited almost all the components of its sibling, the bike is expected to run 25 km on a litre. The sporty slits on the shell and the double-barrel exhaust top the come-hither looks of the bike.

It is likely to be priced a little upwards of Rs 4-4.5 lakh and throws the gauntlet at the Kawasaki Ninja 300 and the Yamaha R3. It is expected to be launched around April, though showroom mangers say they haven't got any intimation from the company yet.



Ducati Monster 797

Priced at around Rs 10 lakh, the Ducati Monster 797 will be the entry-level motorcycle from the stables of the Italian motorcycle maker, which is a part of the Volkswagen Group. The upcoming Monster, which is expected to be launched by Mayend, borrows design cues from the Monster 821. The engine, that fires 75 BHP and 68 Nm of torque, is taken from the Ducati Scrambler. The 797, the smallest yet in the Monster series, comes with a slipper clutch and a six-speed gearbox mated to a twin-cylinder engine.

bike are very good, although, they aren't as grippy as the Metzelers on the 390.

One of the weak points of the 200 is the braking. The 300mm front disc is the same as in the 200 and doesn't give adequate stopping power. However, the subtly improved suspension is impressive.

The 390s, while touring on bad roads, like, say the Ladakh valley, are a pain in the butt (quite literally). The Duke 250 proposes to offer more comfort in such treacherous tracks.

Despite all this, KTM's reasons behind

launch of the 250 are rather inexplicable. If you are looking for an upgrade from a 150cc or a 200cc bike, one would rather go for the 390, or wait for the BMW to launch their yummy 310R, or its clone, the TVS Akula.

The 250 will face its biggest competition from the inhouse 390, which would attract the customers away from the new baby. And if one is insistent on a quarter-litre bike, then why not go for a twin-cylinder motor. Yes, I am talking about the Gixxer 250 from Suzuki (considering the price range).

So, as good or tempting as the bike is, the KTM 250 may not be the upgrade that you'd rather go for, since there is going to be a lot to choose from out there very soon. But hey, it a great bike to ride-every bit a KTM-and I dare not say otherwise! 0

(A national-level wrestler and martial artist, the author is the former editor of mobilemag.com, a freelance writer and photographer. He loves the open road and two wheels)



Hassle free 2-wheeler long term insurance



riving in India in itself is a risky business. The risk is double if one is riding a two-wheeler. And to conduct this risky business, there are two must haves – a valid license and a liability only insurance. However, very few people renew their insurance policies. By doing this, one is putting oneself into a huge risk considering how common road accidents are in our country. And, not renewing your insurance policy exposes you to third party liability risk, which may be enormous, in case of any accident in which there is death or bodily injury involved.

Those who do in fact get their policy renewed, however, they only renew the liability only cover and discontinue the damage cover that the policy provides. Clearly, there is an existing gap and there is a need to address this issue. Hence, when the IRDAI allowed insurers to bring out long term two wheeler policies; I was overjoyed.

For a start, a three-year term seems decent enough and policies which offer such long terms. Apart from not having to renew the policy annually (which makes it more convenient), there is also a possibility of paying lower premiums (as administrative costs go down when issuing a single policy). This could bring you a savings of around 25 per cent.

By taking a three-year duration policy, one need not constantly worry when to get the policy renewed and hence avoid inadvertent policy lapse. This also ensures that policyholders aren't breaking the law by riding their vehicles on roads without a proper insurance. Even when we take the case of No-Claim Bonus (NCB), it is a multi-year two-wheeler insurance policy that would have the advantage over single year policies. In a 3 year policy, if there are no claims during the policy period, you will get an additional 10 per cent NCB discount

on the premium. This also ensures that your NCB won't get zeroed if there is a single claim; a benefit that single year policies are devoid of.

Annual premium policies also face the increase in premiums in case of third party cover. This is annually reviewed and regulated by IRDAI. To provide better services to their policyholders, these new facilities for renewing policies are beneficial for insurers too and are considered a welcome change.



speech baloon Rajiv Pratap Rudy

"Shortage of trainers is a challenge"

JITENDER GUPTA



Steering an ambitious government plan of making millions of youth job-ready, minister of skill development and entrepreneurship Rajiv Pratap Rudy tells **Lola Nayar** that after being in the making for more than two years, an "answerable structure" is finally in place and would enable the outcomes to be checked "physically". Excerpts from the interview.

A plethora of skill-development schemes have been announced in the 2017-18 budget. How are the proposed initiatives different from earlier programmes?

The biggest challenge was that there are 24 ministries and 50-odd departments, with each one of them doing skilling in their own way. In the past two-and-half years, we have been able to create an ecosystem for skilling. The language, the parameters and the outcomes have been defined. The structure and the process are now in place and so we have started rolling out the schemes. This is an answerable structure in which you can physically check the outcome.... The biggest challenge was to look for those who have to be trained. These are not high-end educational skills; we are talking about entry-level skills for the largest employment segment (around 80 per cent) in the Rs 8,000-15,000 per month slab. If they are good, then they keep on migrating up. The total budgetary allocation to us so far has been around Rs 32,000 crore. As we are answerable for the money's utilisation, we are cautious about how the training takes placeat an international skill centre or a Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Kendra (PMKVK) or a Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK). The PMKKs are the benchmark of skill centres in every parliamentary constituency

and others have to match their levels of training and process. While the processes and structures are in place, we still have a weak point—the quality-assessment process.... We need two-three months to settle on the quality-assessment process. We had a major constraint with the Quality Council of India, the government accreditation body, which we were not happy with. It is not under our ministry, but under the ministry of planning and programme implementation.

Do you propose setting up a separate accreditation board?

We are thinking of setting up a national accreditation and certification board. The process is under consultation with the PMO and will take another three-four months.

Your ministry deals with entry-level skills, but the private sector needs people with higher or incremental skills. How are you going to address that requirement?

We are talking about incremental skills when we are talking about a bartender, a mason or a plumber. We are identifying them. If you look at the qualification packs (around 600-700), we are talking about actual day-to-day demands. High-end skills are specialised skills and need a lot of investment. Now, it's not just about manufacturing or industry, but also services. Services, as a vertical, is a

huge creator of jobs, so we are focusing on it equally. In the overall ecosystem of specialised skills, it was confined at the entry level with the ITIs (Industrial Training Institutes). There are 13,000 ITIs and the process of training there had been compromised to a great extent. Over the past year, we have been remodelling and revamping the whole process. We found that out of 126 trades taught at the ITIs to 2.3 million students, under the one- or two-year courses, there were hardly 10 or 11 trades in which 90 per cent of the training takes place. Nobody trains in the remaining trades. It was a flawed ecosystem.

How closely is the government programme allied to the needs of the private-sector job market?

Prior to the creation of the new initiatives, there were always statements from the industry that we do not need highly qualified people, but hands-on people who know what we are calling them for. That is where the concept of sector skill councils emerged. Now there are 40 sector skill councils and around 22 of them are doing a good job, while the rest are trying to pick up. The sector skill councils are not headed by the government. The chairman is from the private sector—Ajit Gulabchand heads the construction sector council and Dr Naresh Trehan is the chairman of the health sector It is the industry conglomerates that decide what kind of skill training is required for what kind of persons. Thus the qualification pack is created and mandated by them, and then our ministry approves it under the NSQ (National Skills Qualifications) alliances. So the whole process is in place and anybody who wants to do training will have to do it exactly in the process mandated by the industry.

What do you think are the biggest challenges in achieving the government's Skill India target of skilling 40 crore people by 2022?

Skill was earlier a part of education, so everything was focused in and around education. But we have taken it out of education and are trying to create a parallel vertical for the skill training ecosystem. At this stage, school dropouts are being taken care of by the National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC) under the NSQ. Then we have Class 8 pass students going to the ITIs,

which have a two-year course and award an ITI certification. Then you have Class 10 pass students going for a threeyear course at the ITIs. But, so far, ITI certification was not being treated as equivalent to matriculation. For the first time, we have introduced that. Similarly, plus-two here was never given equivalence to higher secondary education. Now we are introducing that. So, for the first time ever in the history of India, ITI training is being given equivalence to formal school education. We are also working to see that school dropouts are trained and are able to survive in the system with two years equivalent to Class 10, plus two years equivalent to Class 12, one more year diploma and two more years graduation.

The government has set a target of creating at least 10 crore new jobs by 2022, even as there are an estimated

"Skill was
earlier a part of
education. We have
taken it out of education
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ecosystem."

30 crore among the existing workforce who require further skilling. How are these dual challenges being met?

We have a whole programme of recognition of prior learning under which the trained workforce is mobilised, identified, their credentials checked and they are retrained under short courses. Assessment is done thereafter and certification provided. This is as far as existing skills are concerned, which does not get captured anywhere. Going beyond that to connecting them with jobs, I feel entry-level jobs are in plenty in India. Only specialised and high-end jobs may not be available. On re-skilling, we have made a start in every sector.... We have a target to re-skill 30 lakh persons and we are moving on that.

There has been much talk about multi-

skilling of youth to improve their chances of employment. How is the proposal faring?

The cabinet proposal on this is under consideration and 1,500 ITIs are to be set up as multi-skilling institutes in the PPP (public-private partnership) mode. They should not have any skilling system equivalent to the government-run ITIs. An announcement can be expected any time after the state elections are over.

The NSDC had come under some cloud a few years ago on issues of accountability and discrepancy in the number of people who had been made job-ready and those who had got jobs? What has changed since then?

Absolutely, the whole system then was riffraff. It took some time, but we have been able to completely revamp and put in place a more robust, foolproof system. I can say with authority that in the existing Rs 10,000-crore PMKVY-2, we have been able to sort out 80 per cent of the leakages of quality or the conduct of programmes. We are still trying to fine-tune the remaining 20 per cent.

How much is the improvement in the placement of skilled people, which is reported to be around 15 per cent?

We have categorically defined placements now. The training partners now have to either place those who are trained in wage employment or put them in an apprentice programme with a factory, or else get them entrepreneurially connected. For instance, if a lady has been trained as a beautician, she must also be financed by a bank for acquiring the kit to start her own business. It is similar for an electrician or a plumber to get self-employed. The mandatory figure (for placement) is 70 per cent.

How closely are partner trainers being monitored? Reports from the ground reveal that many trainers do not insist on attendance to get certification.

Yes, it was happening, but now it is not the case. We have introduced biometrics and as many systems as required, including digital technology, to ensure compliance both by teachers and students. The shortage of trainers, however, remains a big challenge. We are trying to get trainers through international organisations, while the sector skill councils have been entrusted with the task of training the trainers. \square

Of Mind Games And Brain Fade

In this season of trial by spin, India tweaks an emphatic comeback in Bangalore, even as the Australians' DRS gamesmanship raises a stink

BY QAISER MOHAMMAD ALI IN BANGALORE

N no other sport do 'home conditions' weigh as much materially as in cricket. When it comes to Indian pitches they, almost as a rule, are prepared to suit spinners, the home team's long-standing strength. So, the pitches dished out for the first two Tests against Australia in the ongoing series were no different, though the first one in Pune looked utterly underprepared. Successive Indian captains have supported the theory that Indian pitches should be made to assist slow bowlers; in that respect, Virat Kohli is no different. Kohli, armed with those slow-shooting 'Kalashnikovs'-Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja, is happy that these two have played prominent roles in winning the second Test in Bangalore, levelling the series 1-1. So, he said, there was no need to change this gameplan. "Yes, spinners have been outstanding, and they will look to back their strengths and dominate the home season as they have done so far. If guys are picking six-wicket hauls why would you change anything?" he said, when Outlook asked him about spinners' domination this season.

Kohli has good reasons to back his words. The statistics, too, support his policy. Spinners—particularly Indians—have dominated batsmen in the 11 Tests played so far this home season. A total of 371 wickets have fallen till the end of the Bangalore Test; 235 have been captured by spinners—a 63.34 per cent share.

Leading the charge down the wicket are, of course, Ashwin and Jadeja. So, Kohli's reliance on them is unsurprising. Together, Indian spinners—the rampaging duo and others—have bagged 141 of the 213 wickets of all opponent teams this season. Of these 141 wickets, Ashwin (76 scalps) and Jadeja's (58) share is an overwhelming 134 wickets, or 95.03 per cent.

India is a haven of turn, and so the four teams to have visited India-New Zealand, England, Bangladesh and Australia-this winter-spring have heavily banked on their spinners too. For instance, Aussie left-armer Steve O'Keefe and offie Nathan Lyon have snared 15 and 13 wickets, respectively, in the first two Tests in the ongoing series. Ashwin, on the other hand, has 15 and Jadeja 12. After the second Test, Jadeja climbed to a career-best No.1 position on the ICC Test rankings. Their absolute dominance is reflected by this miraculous fact-Ashwin and Jadeja now jointly occupy the perch.

Former India wicket-keeper-batsman Farokh Engineer says spinners are always expected to lead the onslaught on opposition batsmen. "Ashwin got a

> Of the 141 scalps Indian spinners have taken this season, Ashwin and Jadeja have got 134. They now occupy ICC's No 1 bowler slot jointly.





five-wicket haul in the second innings of the Bangalore Test (6/41), but we would expect that spinners would do the maximum damage," Engineer tells Outlook. Simon Katich, the former Australia batsman, says Australia's main concern was how their batsmen would tackle Indian spinners. He points out that the 0-3 drubbing in the three-Test series in Sri Lanka last year shook the Australian team, whose highest second innings total in Lanka was a puny 183. "Our biggest challenge was how we batted in these [Indian] conditions, given what had happened in Sri Lanka last year, when the batsmen really struggled. We bowled pretty well in Sri Lanka; Mitchell Starc was the standout. But we didn't get enough runs to put pressure on the opposition," says Katich, now assistant coach of Kolkata Knight Riders.

The pitch, naturally, became the focal point of attention at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore. But, fortunately, after the initial scare, it played true-barring the occasional ball that kept low-till the end. That the Test got over well inside four days couldn't be attributed to a poor pitch; it was due to batsmen's inability to tackle the web of spin adeptly, as also spinners' varied skills. Engineer is not happy with the overall pitch policy. "I think we should prepare more sporting pitches. Sporting pitches give a batsman and a bowler even chances, not like the wicket in Pune; it was disgraceful, not fit for a Test. But this was a more sporty wicket; it gave both sides an edge. Although it finished inside four days, it was a very absorbing Test where both teams had a good chance of winning," he says.

India's rank turners are the handiwork of pitch curators who, as a lengthy home season approaches, have to tackle the immense pressure bearing down upon them. A member of the BCCI's pitches and grounds committee puts the matter in perspective: "India is playing 13 Test matches this season at home. They have won nine and one was drawn. So what if they lost one match?"

When foreign teams visit India their batsmen apparently start with a handicap. They seemed to be bothered by two factors: Indian pitches and Indian spinners. In that context, the Pune defeat would be regarded as an aberration for India—fatigue and complacency could be cited as reasons for the rever-

TURN-AROUND

sal. Why, Ashwin and Jadeja once again showed their class in Bangalore! And Kohli has already dropped hints that for the next Test in Ranchi, starting March 16, the pitch could again assist spinners. "We can't do much about the Ranchi pitch. It has always been slow and low. They know exactly what to expect there and we know how the wicket will play as well. It's how you mentally prepare and what kind of zone you are in as a team. This was the kind of game that we needed to forget that hiccup in Pune and then move forward as a pack," Kohli said after the win in Bangalore.

O far as India's spin arsenal is concerned, it is not limited to Ashwin and Jadeja. The bench strength too is enviable. This is evident from a quality leg-spinner like Amit Mishra not fitting into Kohli's horses-for-courses policy. Off-spinner Jayant Yadav, who played the first Test in Pune and earned kudos from Kohli and uncapped Chinaman bowler Kuldeep Yadav are also in the squad. Among the KKR youngsters he has worked with during last year's IPL, Katich picked Kuldeep for praise. And among the tweakers knocking at the doors of the selection committee are Shahbaz Nadeem, a left-armer from Jharkhand who was the top spinner, with 61 wickets, in this domestic season. Then, leg-spinner Karn Sharma, who has already played Test and ODI cricket, left-armer Shadab Jakati and off-spinner Parveez Rasool are also on the selectors' radar. All three are among the top wicket takers of this first-class season, with over 40 scalps each.

While all seems well on the spin front, the Decision Review System (DRS) is again a debating point. Kohli would like to use the DRS more judiciously and successfully. "There are loopholes in every technology and system; there're no two ways about it. People are bound to make mistakes. At the moment, the call that's made on the field stays, and that's what everyone is playing with, and there've been a few instances where it has been a little tricky. Benefit of doubt used to go to the batsman before, but now that seems to have gone out of the window and we have also not been that consistent with taking the right DRS calls," he feels. Engineer said India should use the DRS option carefully. "Virat was plumb LBW (off pacer Josh Hazlewood in the second innings









JUST NOT FAIR A series of TV grabs shows the scene after Steve Smith was given out LBW, where he looks up to the dressing room even as the umpire interferes, Kohli protests, and puts his case across to the umpires

in Bangalore); I don't know why he wasted it. We should learn not to waste it. You don't get many chances. You've got to make the best of it."

Interestingly, it was the use of DRS that raised a storm on the fourth and final day of the Bangalore Test. When umpire Nigel Llong acted swiftly and stopped Australia captain Steve Smith from seeking assistance from the team's dressing room, all hell broke loose. Kohli said in his post-match press conference that

Llong, a former English first-class cricketer-turned-umpire, knew the reason of Smith delaying his departure after being given out as he (Kohli) had informed the umpires and the ICC match referee Chris Broad about Australians unfairly taking help from their dressing room vis-a-vis the DRS. Smith chose to describe his unlawful act as a "brain fade". But Kohli was not impressed. "I saw that happening twice when I was batting out there. I pointed it out to the umpire as well-that it's happened twice, that I've seen their players looking upstairs for confirmation, and that's why the umpire was at him (Smith)." When an Australian reporter asked Kohli if he intended to use the word 'cheating', he shot back archly: "I didn't say that. You did."

The BCCI posted the video of Smith's dismissal and his 'act' on its official website and facebook wall, and as if to rub salt into his wounds titled it the 'Dressing Room Review System'. The 2.36 minute video has so far been watched and liked by thousands. The Board issued a statement fully backing the Indian captain.

The ICC introduced DRS for more accuracy in decisions that umpires make. The BCCI, under former president N. Srinivasan and till recently under Anurag Thakur, has been reluctant to accept the DRS for home matches, as home boards have the option to not adopt it. But before the start of the 2016-17 home series against England, the BCCI announced that it would use the DRS on a "trial basis to evaluate the improvements made to the system over a period of time". This season, the BCCI decided to embrace the DRS, though without the Hot Spot technology, and it has been used in the series England, Bangladesh and Australia. India has obviously not fared well with DRS so far and Kohli has no qualms in admitting his weakness.

Apart from that irritant, the Indian team has been in such supreme form this season that Pune can be regarded as an aberration, albeit a striking one. And now with two Tests left in the series, Kohli would like to finish off the home season with wins in Ranchi and Dharamshala. And with Smith cornered over the unsavoury incident, India will start with an added psychological advantage in Ranchi. Millions of Indian fans are licking their chops, expecting to send a beaten Australia down under.



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LIVING THE PAST

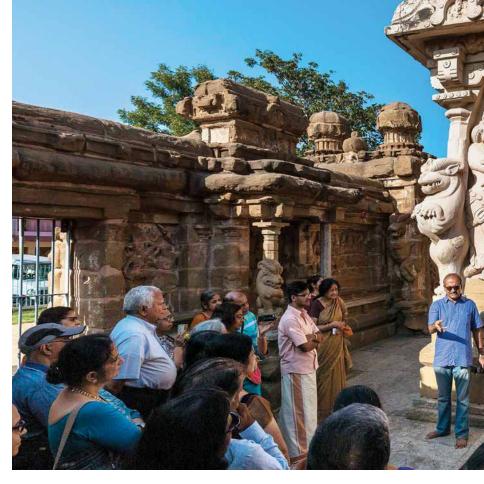
BY G.C. SHEKHAR IN CHENNAI

N a pleasurably nippy Sunday morning in February, a group of middle-aged residents stand in front of a school gate in Gandhinagar, a residential colony in South Chennai. The leader, a chartered accountant by profession, brings out a yellowed book studded with photos and explains: "Four decades ago, this school auditorium used to host the cultural events of this area every weekend," and goes on to list the celebrity actors who had performed there.

Three Sundays earlier, another group of curious Chennaiites had ambled along Luz Church Road in Mylapore, listening with rapt attention as a marketing professional-turned-entrepreneur strung together the names of legal luminaries who used to stay in the area. By a singular coincidence, as if united by a common purpose, all of them had helped writing the nation's constitution. "Though he never lived here, even Ambedkar used to stay at a friend's place close by during his visits to Madras," he recalled.

The aforementioned groups aren't aberrations-they simply illustrate Chennai's growing affinity for peeks into its past through heritage walks. It was pioneered by entrepreneur Sriram V., who led music lovers in the first heritage walk through the bylanes of Mylapore in 1999, using his deep knowledge of Carnatic music to show them houses where musicians—past and present—lived. Anecdotes, funny and poignant, from the maestros' lives enlivened the experience.

"The first walk gave me the confidence that Chennai was yearning for more such heritage walks. I started doing one every December during the music season and now I do one every month on different subjects," explains Sriram, who also co-edits Madras Musings, a magazine on Chennai's history. Sriram has a knack of conjuring a walk around any interesting context. So when he discovered that Rajaji, D.D. Deshmukh, K. Santhanam, Alladi Krishaswamy Aiyar and O.V. Alagesan-all shapers of the



Here Clive Ate His Noonday Tiffin

In Chennai's warm embrace of heritage walks, the present gently melds into the bristling past

constitution-had lived down the Luz Church Road, he curated the Constitution Walk during this Republic Day.

When demonetisation struck the citizenry like a bolt of lightening, Sriram was leading a band of eager walkers down Mint Street, in north Chennai, where the British government had located its Mint in 1830. "The presence of the Mint also saw communities involved in currency exchange-Shroffs, Arya Vaishyas, Komitti Chettys and Marwaris-settle there, spreading their cultural influence over a century. British governor G.M. Pitt's attempt to demonetise the old coins with MM Pagoda coins misfired so badly that the Shroffs had to melt the new coins to re-mint the old

ones," Sriram recalls with a chuckle.

Such heritage walks took their rightful place on the itineraries of the packed weeklong celebration of Madras Day every August. "During last year's Madras Day, there were nearly two dozen walks, organised by locals who tapped senior citizens for information about their localities," points out Vincent D'Souza, editor of Mylapore Times and a founder of Madras Day celebrations. Vincent, who organises walks in Fort St. George-the seat of power from the British era till date-says people want to know more than what a 'tourist-guide' would offer. To ensure that there are informed people to anchor such walks, he is now training a few history majors of Stella Maris College



on preparing for such walks.

Though Sriram remains the numero uno organiser of heritage walks-he has done over 60 such walks, invariably enriching them with talks-others have been quick to follow. Like Sukumar the CA, who needed little preparation when, in 2013, he put together his first walk around Gandhinagar, the first organised residential colony in Chennai. Having been born, brought up and lived there—in all, over six decades-he knew about every bungalow and its occupant. He can reel out a stream of lively nuggets, like how yesteryear movie star B. Saroja Devi learnt to cycle on the shaded avenues of the colony, or how S. Venkataraghavan used to play on the local cricket ground once. "While most bungalows have given way to apartments, there are tales that successive generations want to hear. That is why the Gandhinagar

walk is in its fifth edition," says Sukumar. The walks are also used to spread messages on rain water harvesting and the importance of maintaining a shallow well.

As a cultural experience, too, the walks have evolved. Documentary film-maker S. Anwar has showcased the rich tapestry of Islamic influence through his Nawab Wallajah Trails through Triplicane. "While researching on Muslim monuments of Mount Road I discovered that the Indian Union Muslim League was founded in the Rajaji Hall (where Jayalalithaa's body lay in state). There are a lot more areas steeped in history and we would unravel it during the coming years," he says.

Corporate honcho and historian Pradeep Chakravarthy's heritage walks concentrate on temples and how they influenced Tamil society. "While exploring a temple's history, I concentrate on its behaviourist influences on society. So the theme on Mylapore's famous Kapaleeshwarar temple was about the mutually supportive roles played by religion and politics in its history. While doing a tour of Parthasarathy Temple in Triplicane, I

explored how even gods have their own popularity charts," he says, remembering how for his first walk 12 years ago, 30 people enrolled, 15 promised to come and only nine showed up. "Today, at least 30 show up and remain glued to the group till the end," he points out.

Lawyer N.L. Rajah orga-

Sriram V. with his group before the Kailasanathar Temple in Kanchipuram

nises his walks through the Madras High Court campus, telling tales about judges, judgments and scintillating courthouse battles, even while exploring the historicity of the Indo-Saracenic architecture of the sprawling complex. In December, Kalakshetra organises its own walks—the stories surrounding founder Rukmini Arundale and the cultural ambience she created attract visitors from across India and beyond.

Sriram also took the walks outside Chennai, to Thiruvaiyaru, a hallowed ground of Carnatic music; to Madurai, where the walk wound its way around the home of M.S. Subbulakshmi; to Kancheepuram and to the awe-inspiring Gingee fort (in Villupuram district). Though he charges for the walks, Sriram makes sure it only just covers expenses. Having done his schooling in Calcutta, he already has 24 eager enthusiasts raring to go for a walk through Calcutta during this year's Durga Puja. "As long as you have an interested audience that wants to unpeel layers of the past, this genre would continue to thrive and even diversify," he predicts.

Diversify it already has. Green enthusiast Shobha Menon has her Tree Walk, "Poochi" Venkat has come up with an insect walk, Sridhar Venkatram has a food walk and Ramanujar Moulana has a cycle heritage tour. Sriram recollects how matches have been made during his walks. "One marriage even got unmade I think," he laughs. One couple even celeberated their first wedding anniversary on his midnight tour of Georgetown—the beating heart of old Madras—themed on 'Murders, graveyards, dacoities and thefts', retreading the footsteps of sensational crimes, now consigned to oblivion.

"Heritage walks are not only about discovering your city and your neighbourhood. It is a form of self-expression too. The experience makes you an instant expert, something you can broadcast during your talks or on your social media posts. As long as the walks are conducted by well-researched experts, heritage walks are good for health and your love for the city," observed V. Ramnarayan, editor of *Sruti* magazine. Solely by that yardstick, Chennaiites will hardly tire of this favourite avocation of theirs in the near future.

ACTOR IN FOCUS

BY PRACHI PINGLAY-PLUMBER

MIT Masurkar, whose film Newton, starring Rajkummar Rao, has been selected for the competition section of the prestigious Tribeca Festival, remembers observing Rao during his debut film Love, Sex aur Dhoka in 2010. While Masurkar was quietly shooting the making of the cult film by Dibakar Benerjee, he felt there was something special about Rao. "I was just watching him and I could sense something special. He had confidence and he cracked jokes. He worked very hard. Anyone who has known Raikummar should not be surprised at his success at all. That is how hard he works," says Masurkar.

Seven years and more than 15 films later, Masurkar isn't the only one who thinks Rao is special. After having worked with directors like Anurag Kashyap, Hansal Mehta and Dibakar Banerjee, Rao is looking at a splendid 2017 with five films—all of them promising—starting with Vikramiditya Motwane's urban survival drama *Trapped*, which had premiered to standing ovation at the MAMI film festival.

Following Trapped, there will be Behen Hogi Teri, Bareilly ki Barfi, Newton, Love Soniya and Hansal Mehta's Omerta. Rao has been shooting non-stop all of last year. "After Aligarh I didn't have a release. I was just shooting continuously. Finish one film, take a ten-day break, get into preparations for the next and shoot. But I am excited and thankful for all the work," says Rao.

The 32-year-old actor has had no time to do up his newly-acquired home, a mark of 'having arrived' in the fiercely competitive city of Mumbai. He runs to his home leaving his car stuck in the notorious Andheri Link Road—Lokhandwala jam to receive the delivery of a new sofa. He insists on making and serving ginger tea by himself. He reverts on SMS—quick, matter of fact and polite. All trademark signs of the manic city finally settling under your skin.

It helps his latest film *Trapped* that Rao, originally from Delhi, has vivid memories of how isolated one can feel in the matchbox apartments of Mumbai. The film has Rao essaying the character of Shaurya, who has just moved into a top floor apartment in a vacant high-rise

Trapped In The Gravity Of Film

Of the captivating grayscale explorations of Rajkummar Rao on screen...and his lighter hues



and gets trapped for days. Loneliness, fear, helplessness, desperation are all too palpable in the trailer. Is it as much as about the city as the situation itself?

"In Delhi we live in houses. When I first moved here and I saw grills outside the windows, I wondered how I'd get out if something happened, what if I was trapped, if there is a fire. Then I got comfortable, it has all been smooth. But yes, in the past I have heard horror stories. I'd come back to the building and see an ambulance and people standing. You ask and some old person is dead for five days and nobody knew. That's so scary on a human level. In that sense *Trapped* is also a subtle comment. The city was my co-actor in the film. I am talking to the city, to the people."

Director Vikramditya Motwane, of

Udaan (2010) and Lootera (2013) fame, says Rao is a powerhouse of talent and could go to any length for the role. He would stay aloof from the film crew. survive on black coffee and carrots and even volunteered to cut himself for a scene. He is known to work on roles so much that it goes beyond lending credibility to the character, be it Shahid, Deepu in Aligarh or Govind in Kai Po Che.

His mentor, family and frequent collaborator Hansal Mehta is all praise. "He has facilitated making of good cinema. *Shahid* would not have been half the film without him. I keep writing parts for him. He has rekindled my pas-

sion to make films. He doesn't carry the baggage or arrogance of a great actor. His humanity shines through in the work he does." Mehta also mentions that Mira Nair, in appraisal of his performance in *Shahid* said it was one "without any ego."

The feelings are reciprocated by Rao in equal measure, if not more. "We have that comfort with each other. When I work with Hansal sir I feel very safe, I trust him blindly. We don't need words to communicate and the connection started right from *Shahid* (their first film together). Now it's more personal. He is

family now, father figure. We do believe in the same ideas and ideologies. These are the stories we want to tell." Together they have done *Shahid*, *Aligarh*, *City Lights* and are now working on *Omerta*, a political thriller, which has Rao in a "never-before" dark role. Amidst these he has also done *Kai Po Che*, an important film in his career along with *Queen*, where he plays Kangana's hypocritical, possessive and desperate fiancé.

After having done theatre in Delhi, Rao applied to FTII, which was restarting its acting course after a gap of 28 years. "FTII was an eye opener. Watching international films, legendary actors like Daniel Day Lewis, Robert De Niro. Before that the only actor (from the west) I knew was Tom Cruise...Their books, biographies, discussions... I realised acting is

not a simple thing. It's vast, huge. You have to keep learning, keep exploring. You can never say I am an accomplished actor now. There will always be a character you won't know how to play."

He says he does one film at a time-the shorter schedules and delayed releases are probably the reason for a whopping five films this year-and likes to have a different look for each character. Be it as subtle as a twang in the accent in Kai Po Che or the curls in Newton, a look, director Masurkar says, that was designed by Rao himself. "I was worried if Rajkummar would be okay with wearing a full vest (baniyan), which

would have made the character more interesting but wouldn't look nice and so I had kept two before him and asked him to make the choice. He went with the full one on his own."

Rao has got good work, right from the start, but there have been times when he was looking for work and nothing came by. It's his friends, acting exercises with FTII friends and travelling that kept him busy, but never was he troubled or anxious. "Acting is my true love, if it is not talking to me for a year, it's okay you know. I can handle it. You keep busy and stay in touch with acting exercises. God

has been too kind, guiding me to go to Pune, Mumbai, meet this one, go there, there, and there," he says animatedly.

Now that guiding light has led him to films like Newton, Bareilly ki Barfi and Behen Hogi Teri, which mark a departure from the gritty, grey roles that Rao has come to be identified with. "Newton is a black comedy. Comedy is something you don't do; it is the situation that is funny, like life. You react and it will be funny. The other two are commercial, but I am not lip syncing. There is a story, characters. Actually, commercial cinema is also changing now. Imagine the biggest film, Dangal, is a rather non-commercial film about a 50-year-old father. Salman Khan and Shahrukh Khan are doing Sultan, Fan, Raees. Tanu weds Manu made Rs 150 crore, Queen made 70-80 crore," he goes on about how much difference it makes when superstars tell these stories.

HOUGH immersed in his craft, Rao goes back to Delhi to meet his 'best friends from school' and family, but only to hurry back to the feverish grind of Mumbai. "I can't live anywhere else now. This is my *karmabhoomi*. I love my work too much to be away," he gushes about the process, the industry, the trends. "Sometimes I have some ideas so I note them down. May be I can use them later. I am not a writer. It needs patience, time and commitment. But I like reading non-fiction."

Many of his films have been based on solid issues-urban migration, human rights. How important is it for him to be aware, to be involved? How does it translate in his work? "Even if we are not participating, we should know what is right and what is wrong. I am socially aware. I follow what's going on all over the world. And then, there are things I am not aware of. For example, I did not know what actual courts were until Hansal Sir and I visited one for Shahid. My conditioning for courts was Hindi films. When we went, we said we want to show this. I spent lot of time with Shahid's brother Khalid to understand him. For Omerta too I had to do my research."

And while doing so, it goes beyond getting the truth in his performance. "I learn about the history of our world, and where we come from. Whatever bad happens, I learn how it started. I am becoming a better human being just by doing these films." \(\to \)



"Acting is my true love, if it is not talking to me for a year, it's okay you know. I can handle it," says Rao.



Drop dead gorgeous.

BUT, NATURALLY!
YOU DON'T NEED ANY PROPS FOR A BREATHTAKING,
RESPONSIBLE HOLIDAY.

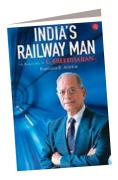
URE HAS YOU COVER

The mists that rise from the Chitrakote Falls, and the rainbows that colour it, are a daily reminder of the fact that nature is the best, most responsible 'tour operator' you can find... Left to their own devices, the waters of the Indravati river wash away the grime and the pressures of city living, as they tumble over the edge and into your memories forever. Barely 40km from Jagdalpur in Bastar, this is the widest waterfall in the country, and is often called the Niagara Falls of India.



Closely Watched Trains

An able administrator, Sreedharan was a stickler for integrity, efficiency and good business practices. This non-eulogistic account serves us well.



BY SUNIL BAHRI

F the causes attributed to India's limited success in sustaining development and alleviating poverty, despite seven decades of stable democracy, the one that finds resonance in most discourses is its poor public administration. In particular, the apathetic, status quoist and corrupt bureaucracy is perceived as the toughest shackle on realising our true potential. Very few civil servants have managed to leave behind inspiring legacies. 'Metro Man' E. Sreedharan is one of these. We now have one more account of his life-India's Railway Man by Rajendra Aklekar. It relies upon conversations with the man himself and his friends and family, but Aklekar goes further and digs up government archives to verify facts.

By now, most know that Sreedharan steered first the Konkan Railway and then the Delhi Metro to fruition. What was remarkable was that they were completed on time, despite being complex engineering projects, entailing not only large financial outlays but also coordination between several central agencies and state governments.

A substantial part of this biography logs the details of these two projects. Despite his respect for the man, Aklekar does not deify Sreedharan. His career follows the course of an average civil servant till he retired in 1990. There are frequent transfers, some challenges, some disagreements and some excitements. He is a devoted son and a loving family man. He rises by seniority to become a member of the Railway Board. All too familiar. His opportunity comes on retirement. A railway minister passionate about the Konkan Railway line finds an enthusiastic man in the railway board. Thus, when most enjoy the fruits of retirement, did Sreedharan begin his match-winning innings.

Again, Aklekar, and the conversations with Sreedharan, stay away from encomium. He used modern management practices and a lot of common sense. He built a team with caution, focusing on integrity, empowered his managers and created an environment of mutual trust with contractors, prompt payment of bills being accorded priority. He provided a clear and focused vision to deliver the highest standards adhering to time schedules within the budgeted costs. What helped in his accomplishments were his long stints at both the Konkan Railway and the Delhi Metro (unlike his frequent transfers while in service). Autonomy enjoyed by his organisations enabled both technological and administrative innovation, leading to better outcomes, winning Sreedharan the confidence of the political leadership.

Most tales of entrepreurship, including those from the Indian corporate world, are replete with far more innovation and enterprise. There is also no dearth of persons with high integrity and competence in the government. What is rare about Sreedharan is his ability to com-



What is rare about
Sreedharan is his ability
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achieve the impossible.

bine technical competence with administrative acumen to realise not individual excellence or glory, but build teams, institutions and models that collectively achieve the impossible and thrive even after the leader departs.

Sreedharan drew his philosophical and spiritual bearings from the Bhagawad Gita. His sense of karma and lack of attachment to either the project or its success were rooted in the Gita. He perceives this as the most critical factor in his success. It is ironical that the best outcomes are obtained when the dictum of detachment from outcomes is followed.

The key takeaway from the biography is clear: you don't have to be a Sreedharan to be a 'Metro Man', so to speak. Most civil servants would love to leave a legacy like Sreedharan and be so honoured and rewarded, but they would presume that you have to be extraordinary. This book establishes that with the basic values integral to our culture—namely, integrity, hard work, professional excellence and commitment to society—each government manager can become a Sreedharan.

The key lesson for governance is that there is a need to seriously review the policy of transfer and postings of government managers, so that the long tenures that Sreedharan got post retirement are granted to officials still in service. Their tenures should be linked to the life cycles of projects, apart from providing them security. And retired and retiring people should be nudged to go find their Konkan Railway, for they have realised only a small fraction of their potentials yet.

The book is a must read for all civil servants. There are no startling revelations, there is no idolatry, there is no hero who knew all and achieved all. It is a story of a retired man embracing an opportunity and creating magic with simplicity, integrity and common sense. The book will also provide insight to students of transportation and urban development. We need more such inspiring tales. \Box

Infinite Visions Of Faith

A Pakistani immigrant family returns to Karachi from Chicago. For the children, it's a bewildering can of worms, as well as a sentimental education.

THOSE CHILDREN SHAHBANO BILGRAMI

BY RAKHSHANDA JALIL

'Baba, what are "kaafirs"?'
'You and me, Chhoti.'

HE diasporic South Asian novel being done to death, we seem to be witnessing the coming of age of the 'return of the native' genre, a sort of reversal from 'leaving home' to 'coming back home'. Recent years have shown a clutch of novels from Pakistan about members of the non-resident Pakistani community returning home and finding an irrevocably changed world. Starting with Sara Suleri's Meatless Days, there have been several autobiographical attempts at revisiting the past with the dual purpose of recording family histories, but also to search for meanings in what seems to be a flawed present. The underlying theme of several such novels has been a search for answers: what went wrong? What happened to the early days of idealism and hope? When did the

dealism and hope? When did the dreams sully? And, more importantly, why?

In Shahbano Bilgrami's Those

Children, a widower with four children moves from a comfortable Chicago suburb with its picket-fenced garden and its orderly life to his father's house in Karachi, where an extended family of colourful and eccentric aunts and uncles and cousins live in a home that is fractious, secretive, splintered and unforgiving. Narrated by the ten-year old Ferzana Mahmud

aka Chhoti, the youngest of the four siblings, this is a story of losses and gains. While the biggest and most immediate loss for the Mahmud family is the loss of their mother, who has recently died of cancer, and the subsequent loss of a "complete and happier life" in America, there are also the other

losses that pile up as the family attempts to settle down to a new life in their grandfather's house in Karachi, the city by the sea. There is a loss of innocence and naivete as the Mahmud children navigate the choppy waters of familial relationships, religious schisms and deeply-ingrained biases and hostilities.

An escape into a world of fantasy and make-believe seems the only way to cope with the new and bewildering world and also find answers to the many questions that puzzle Mahmud and his siblings-the first and most obvious being the complete erasure of their beloved mother, the beautiful Najma, from all family narratives. When did their parents meet, and how, and why did they have to elope to get married and go away to America to build a life far away from their respective families? In the absence of any clear answers, the four children turn into sleuths, with superhuman powers of observation and detection. Their sleuthing, which comprises heavy

Bringing together international and Pakistani writers to promote reading and showca at its best

An escape into a world of fantasy seems the only way to cope with the new world for the Mahmud children. They also find answers to puzzling questions, like the erasure of their mother.

hidden family albums, intercepting emails, reveals startling truths.

The one about their parents—she a Shia married to a Sunni, much against the wishes of both families—opens a window into a world of many divides, not just the socio-economic differences that the children are still finding difficult to grasp, but others way beyond their comprehension.

Befriending a girl from the servants' quarter, Chhoti is struck by the fact that people are "not always seen as individuals, but as products of several abstractions which, when combined, typecast them as surely as if they were mediocre actors in a third-rate comedy. Whether it was ethnicity, religious affiliation, lineage, economics, class, or that most divisive of factors, point of origin...." And Dadi, proud of her roots in Lucknow and very much a stereotypical Muhajir grandmother, is an expert at racial profiling. She can tell at a glance not merely a person's social or economic class, but more importantly their roots,

the all-important "point of origin" in a Pakistan riddled with ethnic rivalries and fractious class-based national politics.

And the gains? A family drama involving foundlings and war babies of doubtful parentage leads to a transformation in the extended Mahmud family. The biggest 'victory' for the Mahmud children in the one year since their return to Karachi is the honouring of their dead mother: their staunchly Sunni grandfather attends the majlis held in her memory by her

stoically Shia family. Another 'interfaith marriage', between their paternal aunt to a maternal uncle, holds out hope. *Those Children* is an engrossing book with an occasionally babbling tone, given its author's somewhat unfortunate tendency for overstatement and verbosity.

Her Emotions Curdled Thick

This slim novel stews in the passionate juice of wronged love. The protagonist, symbolically wedded to deep Krishna love, rages on.

Pile Poison of Love ...

BY ANJANA BASU

ELL hath no fury like a woman scorned. In this case of course, the lovely Tulsi hasn't been scorned. She just made the mistake of falling in love with the wrong man, like quite a few well-educated Indian women who should have known better, she saw a 'cute' cleft chin and long eyelashes and fell hook line and sinker. Love seethed in her veins like a cobra's strike and in the best tradition of Indian soaps, she eloped with her beloved two days before her arranged marriage.

Madhav, her beloved, was a serial heart-breaker and Tulsi was the 28th woman in his life. She assumed that the number meant 28, full stop, and went onto discover that it did not. Typically, the ex-es kept coming out of the woodwork like the ants she saw everywhere, the ants of death that crawled over corpses. K.R. Meera's story, stripped to its bare essentials, sounds like a typical tale of love and betrayal, perhaps leading to an avenging fury with a knife, but something sets it apart from the reel life that throbs on TV screens or the pulp fiction genre.

Perhaps it's the fact that Tulsi is perverse. Love betrayed curdles and poisons everything, including her relationship with her children. She throws in comparisons with Putana the rakshashi, who tried to kill the baby Krishna by smearing poison on her nipples. There are Greek tragedy undercurrents in Tulsi's self-destructive selfishness—Medea with her bloody locks wreaking vengeance on a husband who betrayed her and then flying dragon-back from the scene.

K.R. Meera does not begin at the beginning but somewhere near the end, in Mathura, the playground of that other serial heartbreaker, Lord Krishna. In Indian literary tradition, Krishna is the lover who possesses but can never be possessed. His beloved Radha waits and

yearns for him at trysting places, wondering whose heart he is breaking at that moment. His other beloved is the Rajput princess Meerabai, who became the symbol of infatuation for the unattainable expressed in song after song of rage and yearning. Mathura is where widows and abandoned women go to find refuge, losing themselves at Krishna's stone feet.

Krishna's troupe of women is divided into Radhas and Meeras, the abandoned wives and the widows. Tulsi sees herself as the mystic Meera tormented by passion, which is why her heart leads her to Mathura. Intensity breathes through her style and every sentence is almost anguish. Despite the fact that Madhav is a journalist and Tulsi's father a well-known police inspector in Kerala, there are few of the trappings of modern-day living, like mobile phones. Mathura is primordial, haunted by lecherous priests in red silk dhotis, who are drawn like magnets by Tulsi's beauty, despite



Tulsi is perverse; betrayed love poisons everything, including her relation with her children. Comparisons are made with Putana the demon. Tulsi can also draw parallels with Medea.

the fact that she describes herself in terms of hard hands and shrivelled feet. And in Mathura, inevitably, Madhav comes looking for her, drawn by her poisonous ardour, and it is no coincidence that his name comes from the Krishna canon.

Her feet recur—Madhav paints her toenails and kisses her feet in the beginning and then in the end, begging forgiveness. he kisses her dusty, worn beggar's feet; the touch of his lips sears her flesh. So do the ants which are killers with their corpse bites—their trail returns both in words and illustrations throughout the pages.

There are a few key characters—Vinay, the man she jilts because he is too sensible to be passionate and Madhav. The rest are sketched in a few lines and defined in terms of expected situations. All 27 exlovers are hard to detail, so one thrusts herself into the house and two are pregnant, while the rests are names in searing love letters.

The plot seethes and twists like the Ganges by Mathura, with its banks lined with widows. Women who, despite everything, cling to their praise of Krishna. The river is not a bringer of life, but a serpent in Tulsi's fevered eyes—the black three-headed serpent that sheltered Krishna. Even her narrow room, decorated with posters of Krishna, becomes the prison cell where the child was born. Perhaps the fact that this book is a novella and easily skimmed through makes it possible to survive so much intensity. Like the late Josephine Hart, famous for slim books like Damage, there is not a single light moment. Despite her education. Tulsi does not choose to be sensible and stand on her own two feet when her marriage fails. Instead, she is convinced that hating well is the best revenge.

Ministhy is new to translating K.R. Meera, but barring that single adjective—'cute'—applied to the dimple in Madhav's chin, she manages to wring out each drop of obsession.

National Cooperative Development Corporation organizes National Workshop on 'Strengthening of Women Cooperatives'.

National Cooperative Development Corporation in collaboration with National Cooperative Union of India organised a National workshop on 'Strengthening of Women Cooperatives' on 7th and 8th March, 2017 at New Delhi. The workshop was inaugurated by Dr. Chandra Pal Singh Yadav, MP and President, NCUI and was attended by more than 200 women cooperators from different parts of the country. In the workshop, women cooperatives discussed the problems faced by them in running their enterprises and their possible solutions including possibilities of diversifying their business. The societies also discussed NCDC's possible financial assistance for development of their cooperatives.

Hon'ble Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Shri Radha Mohan Singh delivered valedictory address on 8th March, 2017. He congratulated MD, NCDC and her team as also NCUI team, which has contributed for successful organisation of the workshop.

NCDC's financial assistance is also dovetailed with subsidy available from Govt. of India for various programmes, thereby reducing the effective rate of interest considerably.

Hon'ble Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare expressed happiness over enthusiastic participation of women



cooperatives in the workshop. He expressed confidence that the workshop will be helpful to the cooperatives in availing financial & technical assistance from NCDC, NCUI and other sources, which will result in expansion of their activities. With the increase in their profitability, the cooperatives will be able to service their women members in a better way. Success of these women cooperatives will inspire other women, and more and more women will be able to bring about required improvement in their standard of living.

BHEL pays 40% Interim Dividend for fiscal 2016-17



Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) has paid an interim dividend of 40% for fiscal 2016-17. In value terms, the dividend paid amounts to Rs.194.8 Crore. With this, the company has maintained its impeccable track record of earning profits and rewarding investors by paying dividends uninterruptedly for four decades without a break.

A cheque of Rs.123.47 Crore towards the interim dividend for the year 2016-17 on the equity (63.06%) held by the Government of India, was presented here to Sh. Anant G. Geete, Hon'ble Union Minister of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises by Sh. Atul Sobti, Chairman and Managing Director, BHEL, in the presence of Sh. Girish Shankar, Secretary, Department of Heavy Industry. Directors on the board of BHEL as well as other senior officials of the Ministry of Heavy Industries & Public Enterprises and BHEL were also present on this occasion.

Bahaar e Kashmir a Mega Tulip festival will be organised from 1st to 15th of April 2017 for promoting Kashmir as the native of best quality fragrant flowers in the world.



The secretary Tourism and

floriculture FAROOQ A shah while giving details said here in Srinagar that this year will witness the mega Tulip festival which will be part of ,Bahaar e Kashmir event to showcase the asia's largest Tulip garden which has more than 20 lakh tulips in its lap with 46 varieties spread across huge Tulip garden in Srinagar in the backdrop of mighty humbled zabarwan range of mountains. The secretary announced that this festival will be of fifteen days duration and will have properly decorated food and handcraft stalls, kiosks to showcase the rich craft and cuisine of the valley with traditional ethnic touch. The secretary also said that on the sidelines of this mega Tulip festival Bahar e Kashmir one Aalmi Mushaira will be organised in which world famous poets will participate and deliver their latest poems in Urdu this will be one of the first of its kind in the valley ,the secretary Tourism was accompanied by the Director Floriculture Kashmir M H Mir, Director Tourism Kashmir Mahmood A shah ,Dy Director Tourism Kashmir Zahoor Peerzada and other officials of Tourism and floriculture, later the secretary also had an interactive session with the skicc staff and discussed about various methods and strategies to improve the quality of services in the said international conference centre, He stressed the employees to work with zeal and ensure the delivery of quality services with adequate quantity and maintain the international standard of the centre.

trending

"Feminism is not a stick with which to beat other women. It's about WATSON hits back in the controversy over a Vanity Fair photoshoot



Edible Morsels

Blessed are the restaurateurs of Innato, in Tenerife, Spain, where patrons eat off unclothed model-waitresses and waiters while in the buff. Bamboo partitions offer privacy, but they fall away as morsels uncover more, leaving only the final lettuce. The top draw? A slurpy affair with molten chocolate.



Though it's a nobrainer who you would actually cast-mother or daughter-in a new Bollywood movie, one has to admit that expert advice, excellent make-up, Manish Malhotra creations and maternal love have worked wonders for Janhvi Kapoor. Now for that debut in a Karan Johar film.







Their Pledge Ours

On Women's Day, it's this one scourge we have to combat. Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis's wife Amruta and daughter Divija flank a young acid attack survivor in a show. Take their pledge.

THIS TOO HAPPENED

After his Twitter battle with Donald Trump over who did a better job of hosting *The Apprentice*, Arnold Schw on as executive producer despite being elected president. Striking back at Trump's talks about the fallen ratin

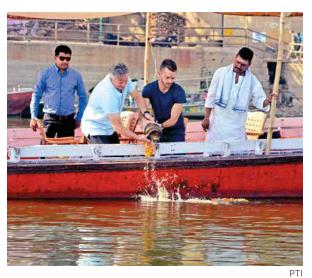
freedom, it's about liberation, about equality." - EMMA

in which she posed with her breasts partially exposed.



Count Them Out

The human body can't get more muscled, rippled, bronzed and sculpted than this awesome display at the Women's Body Building National Championships. The winner was a mother of two, Thingbaijam Sarita of Manipur. Do her kids pull pranks on her?



Peace Be Unto Him

Varanasi has been in the news, but not for Steve Waugh's poignant service for his friend Stephen.
As per his last wish, the Aussie great immersed his friend's ashes in the Ganga before Manikarnika Ghat.

The Tides Are High

Alas, to all-round disappointment, Katrina doesn't dress much like this anymore. But a Facebook photo-post of hers talks about "rowing against the tide" all her life. They say she was dressed accordingly too.



arzenegger, 69, has quit the show. The actor-turned-Governor-turned-reality-TV-host had taken over from Trump, who stayed gs, Arnie said that he loved working with NBC and would love to be part of another show that didn't have "this baggage".

JAPAN **diary**

Huck Finn in Osaka

"THE more you watch Japanese television, the more you feel it's watching you...." You can't shake off that line from Sans Soleil, Chris Marker's dreamwalk through place, time and memory. Every pop fragment and artefact you've known of Japan has that quality, like something unknowable brooding beneath the surface. The runic stick-figures of kanji, the parchment catching fire with Basho's sunlight, the electric-blue miasma that pervades the world of anime...a perfectly foreign place. You have the thumbnail sketch

of a generic Japanese as a moody, intense, faintly misanthropic human, with melancholic violin strains. Each one an island.

Cut to the chirpy Huck Finn who serves us at a subway alehouse in Osaka, the kimono ladies clicking selfies (just like the rest of us) on the Thousand Gates path at Kyoto's Fushimi Inari-taisha shrine, the factory manager chortling at his own English, the funky washlet that didn't work! To have the myth busted gives you the pleasure of a migraine lifting—you quite *like* the people, as an experience. Japan, as you feel it on your skin, has none of that fabled fear of the gaijin. The impressionistic sense is of something warm, well-composed, light on its feet, simplicity itself. If anything noirish lurks beyond the sakura tones, it's not apparent. It's light Chopin on the surface.

A Frog Jumps In

ONLY the distant cackle of tundra bean geese flying low over the water disturbs the chilled hush around Lake Biwa. It's Japan's largest—imagine an area larger than Bombay in zenlike stillness. We are out of a dainty breakfast place in Otsu in Shiga prefecture, briefly the capital in the 7th century. The cherry trees on the shoreline are leafless, a month short of spring. Later, in sunnier Tokyo, we catch an early blooming variety. Here, an old man poses, he wants his wife to get him with his reflection in a puddle. We have to wrench ourselves away.

Back in Osaka. Don't know if it's the warm glow the name brings forth from childhood stories, but this city has a comfy, agreeable quality. Yes, the night skyline is a very 21st century beast, a breathing installation in steel and twinkling neon, but the cobbled streets and brightly-lit resutorans have enough period small-town charm. Dotombori, the canalside food and entertainment district, is a sensory explosion. I lost my way amid giant plastic squids and okonomiyaki stalls! A name is retrieved from an e-mail, written down in Japanese by a helpful cash counter boy. Walking around with that paper, trying to match words in that jungle of kanji signs...might as well have been swimming in the Sea of Japan



(The author is Deputy Managing Editor, *Outlook*)

looking for a particular oyster. But the tale had a happy, very happy sushi ending.

Mishima's Ghost

NOT having seen the famed bamboo grove, and the rest only in a three-hour touristy blur, Kyoto on the fly wasn't like, say, a Shekhawati town, oozing flavour from every pore. The city itself is slightly featureless, modern lowrises set in a modular grid, but comes alive in concentrated bursts—the aching beauty of Kinkaku-ji, the orange light of Shinto. The tofuness of tofu abides as a deep puzzle. This

piece of blandness is philosophically sound, we conclude, and something vitally Japanese resides in its soul, but what exactly? And, for god's sake, there are octopus dumplings selling in the quaint street swarm outside, near the Heian-era Kiyomizudera temple, where we are all Orientals doing Orientalism.

The Test-Tube City

THE Panasonic Center in Tokyo is a petridish of futurism. The Japanese factory is a thing of legend, and we've been taken to two-one up near freezing Yokaichi, past exquisite wooden houses with snow peaks fringing the green rural expanse—but nothing from that old Fordist assembly-line primes you for this 2030 AD digirama called Wonder Life-Box. The genius seems to lie in converting every conceivable surface into a sensor and a screen, all interlocked in a data grid. Glass tables tell you what to cook, smart phones open up product info as you point it at the shop window, signages turn on as they sense a passer-by, the info-gremlin guarding your house does everything from stopping viruses to offering disaster help, the mirror not only suggests matching clothes, but reads your BP and your mood...changing lighting and music on cue. Things scale up to stadium solutions and smart cities that integrate healthcare, security, hydrogen energy. For all the old Japanese aestheticisation of imperfection and transience, what happens if

material conditions do not at all reflect the flux of our emotional life?

Roppongi On Ice

THIS night club scene is at hand to restore us to normalcy, with generous lashings of global grunge. We safely wind our way past an ethnic salad-bowl of pimps and hookers to some Japanese moonshine. Shochu from sweet potato and hot sake top my rankings. On the return flight, I switch on <code>Scoop!</code>—a loud, fast Japanese comedy thriller. Scene 3 takes me back to Roppongi, a paparazzi botch-up in a topless bar. The overgrown Otaku boy on the next seat is hooked to a moody anime romance. The chic, brooding, moonlit Tokyo skyline on his screen is indistinguishable from the real thing.





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