

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

JUSTICE LODHA: HOW COULD BCCI DEFY SC?

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Jai Infra Jai Agri

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Printed and published by Indranil Roy on
behalf of Outlook Publishing (India) Pvt. Ltd.
Editor: Rajesh Ramachandran. Printed at IPP
Limited, C-4-C 11, Phase-II, Noida and published
from AB-10, S.J. Enclave, New Delhi-110 029

Published for the week of February 07-13, 2017

Released on February 04, 2017

Total no. of pages 92, Including Covers



Comment

2019 Ahoy!

It is rare for any political party to treat an assembly poll as a do-or-die situation. Nobody dies a sudden death in politics. It takes aeons for a political outfit, particularly if it's one of the bigger ones, to gradually fade away. And in our post-Independence existence, very few parties have really disappeared into thin air. Most of them metamorphose into something else. The Swatantra Party and the Praja Socialist Party, representing two diametrically opposite poles of the polity, are two examples of parties that ceased to exist though they live through other merged and transformed entities.

Yet, one should insist, this round of assembly polls is very important or even crucial for several parties. Mayawati's BSP does not have a single Lok Sabha MP. She doesn't even consider the Leader of Opposition's position in Lucknow important enough to stay back for the term in the Opposition benches. So, another term in the wilderness could be dangerous for her and her flock. Her 19% vote-share is intact, but if there is a Muslim consolidation in favour of the Congress and Samajwadi Party, she may get reduced to a mere presence in the Rajya Sabha.

But the bigger challenge is for the Congress and its leader Rahul Gandhi. A win in Punjab and a decent show in UP are an absolute necessity for the Grand Old Party to remain in business. It may lose Uttarakhand and Manipur and may not win Goa back, and in that situation the polls in Punjab and UP become some sort of a lifeline for the Congress, as it stumbles at hurdles in its forced march towards the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. The party believes that it can win Punjab and, along with the SP, get on the treasury benches in UP too. But if it doesn't do either, there is a possibility of an implosion of the scale that was witnessed after the 1977 polls.

The Aam Admi Party's predicament is somewhat similar. It badly needs to win an election to retain the tempo of its high-visibility anti-corruption campaign and to continue to project itself as a national alternative to the BJP and the Congress. It had won four seats and over 24% votes from Punjab in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls. Any decline in voteshare or assembly segments could create the damaging impression that AAP is primarily a Delhi-centric party, yet to make that giant leap across state borders. Though the AAP is also contesting the Goa polls and has made an interesting dent in the voter psyche, it remains to be seen how electorally successful the newbie could be.

That leaves the biggest party of them all: the BJP. It is a contender in UP, Uttarakhand and Goa (besides hoping to repeat the Assam victory in Manipur too) and all three are tough elections. An all-out Modi campaign has to succeed, otherwise it can trigger a small storm of discontent as it happened after the loss in Bihar. Modi, to be sure, is still immensely popular at the national stage, but the assembly polls are often about local issues, local tie-ups and local candidates. The Congress and the SP have got the alliance right in UP, so the BJP could find the going tough. Even so, how far it could come down from the dizzying heights of a 42% voteshare is the moot question. Whatever be the results, they would not leave even the BJP untouched. In that sense, this round of polls offers a strange signboard of sorts to the tortuous path towards 2019.

RAJESH RAMACHANDRAN



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Cover: R. Prasad; Photograph: Jitender Gupta

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Online



INTERNATIONAL

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by RAJESWARI PILLAI
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NATIONAL

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by AAKAR PATEL



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by R. BALASHANKAR



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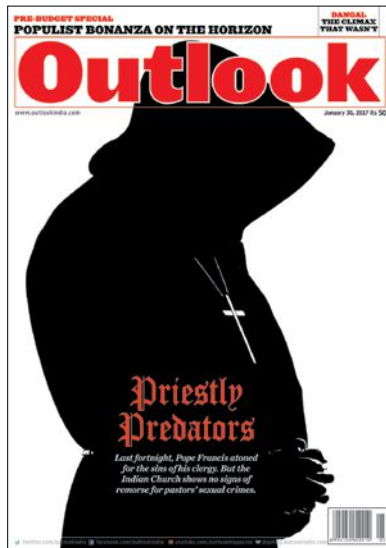
Book of Cardinal Sins

UNITED STATES Megan Peterson: This is with reference to your January 30 cover story, *The Sins Of Our Fathers*. I am a survivor of childhood rape by a Catholic priest and native of India, Father Joseph Jeyapaul. I want to thank *Outlook* for publishing stories on sexual abuse within the Catholic Church and for sharing part of my personal story. By doing so, you are helping create a place where a much-needed dialogue on this issue can be started and continued so that Catholic officials and offenders are held accountable. It is incredibly painful to endure something as heinous as child rape. It's also extremely difficult to deal with the aftermath of the traumatic experiences. I hope that all individuals reading these words, especially survivors, know that they are not alone, and that help and healing are obtainable.

CHENNAI Akash Verma: The problem the Vatican is facing is nothing new. In the seventh century, Mahendra Pallava wrote a humorous treatise depicting the degradation of the Buddhist monks of his day. All sorts of scandals were mentioned. How many priests submit their 'personal' details before they enter priesthood?

NEW DELHI Pramod Srivastava: Your magazine deserves compliments for this comprehensive cover story on an issue that has been largely ignored by the rest of the media. A few rotten apples exist in all religious bodies who use their influence and position to exploit devotees. But the most shocking and unfortunate aspect has to be when the superiors of these religious bodies do their best to shield the culprits instead of condemning them and handing them over to the law enforcement authorities.

MUSCAT P.A. Jacob: *Priestly Predators* is a daring cover by *Outlook*.



January 30, 2017

The subject is and has always been a controversial one. There has been a history of sexual exploitation, especially of children, associated with the clergy since time immemorial. In my opinion, the practice of forced celibacy also has a role to play in these atrocities committed by a few priests. Unfortunately, the Church has not been vocally remorseful enough for these unpardonable sins. In most cases, the sinners are protected by the Church. Let's hope the compassionate plea Pope Francis made recently to Catholic bishops will help curtail these acts of depravity by some in the clergy.

LUCKNOW M.C. Joshi: It was an interesting coincidence that your cover story *Malevolent: Badly Drawn Mama's Boys* was followed by the story about the Church's badly drawn Fathers. Why only churches! There have always been black sheep among the priests of all religions. Reading about the incidents of sexual abuse by clergy members was not sur-

prising for me. Since there is little room for 'divine intervention' in these matters, the laws of the land must certainly punish the culprits. The churches should call out these Fathers, disown them, and let the law take its own course.

PATTAMBI V.N.K. Murti: Being a Keralite myself and having heard about the incidents mentioned in your cover story from the local print media of the state, I can say that I fully endorse your story. Such incidents rarely get coverage in national/mainstream media. Religious leaders hold great influence in society. This means they hold great power too, to do both good and bad. And no religion is without such black sheep. Constant media exposure seems to be the only cure.

BANGALORE Hilary Pais: American writer Mark Twain said that religion began when the world's first fool met the world's first conman. One thread that runs uniformly in your narrative is that all the girls exploited by the clergy members of the Roman Catholic Church come from poor families. The article also mentioned an effort by the Catholic laity to bring about a law regulating civil matters, including those of property connected with the Church. That could be a beginning for reform, if formulated and pressed adequately in Kerala, where, at present, a Left government is in power, which may not be as beholden to the Catholic church as the previous Congress-led government. In the US, Mexico and Ireland, incidents of sexual exploitation and paedophilia by the clergy have been reported in recent years. A number of Catholic priests in some of these countries have also been convicted for the crimes and sent to prison to serve long sentences.

I do not appreciate the lament of the judge when he says that the accused in the Abaya case does not appear for trial.

one-liner

ON E-MAIL George Jacob

Clinically speaking, celibacy could be done away with so that the priests can ease out.

Surely, the courts can demand for the accused to be present in court so that the trial for such a grave crime is concluded swiftly and justice delivered. In 1936, in Catholic Spain, there was a popular revolt against the then fascist government of Franco. The first thing that happened in the revolt was the killing of hundreds of Roman Catholic priests and bishops. I would wonder how such a thing can happen in a Roman Catholic country. But, by and by, I have come to understand that religious bodies are also seats of power.

Live and Let Live

MUMBAI K.P. Rajan: When human-rights activists are least keen to get dangerous sports like mud bike racing or F1 races banned (despite their competitors dying or suffering injuries while competing), why should animal lovers go up in arms against a traditional sport in Tamil Nadu (*Jallikattu is just a sport*, Feb 6). When Indians are poor in sports and games at international levels, let the country have at least its village games flourishing. It's wrong to ask for a ban on such a tradition that finds mention even in Sangam texts.



BULL'S SIGH Jallikattu in progress



Jan 30). The Uttarakhand leader's surprise comes after decades of being a Congressman, minister, governor and squeezing in a short but scintillating interval of heading his own little party. Seven years ago, in end-2009, he landed in a sex scandal after a CD featuring him showed the octogenarian governor in compromising position with women in the Raj Bhavan of Andhra Pradesh. The colourful man now gravitates to the BJP with his son, Rohit Shekar, who has been eagerly looking to establishment himself politically after a long paternity battle. We might feel exhausted just watching Tiwari's hectic record. For the BJP's rangeela recruit, though, age is just another number.

Make-believe Trump Card

BANGALORE Mathew Thomas: As an Indian, I am astonished that *Outlook* would like the US president's foreign policy to be dictated by that country's intelligence agencies (*The House of Flying Daggers*, Jan 30). You seem to be telling Donald Trump that his success will flow from the collective wisdom of the CIA, NSA, FBI, et al. Apparently, the writer is ignorant about what the US agencies did to several countries in Latin America, the Gulf and others. Anyone keen to know what the US agencies are doing to India need only read the contract between the Aadhar card authority and its contractors.

CHERTHALA M.K. Somanatha

Panicker: Who'd think that the resident of the White House could be afflicted by the Orwellian fear of big brother watching you! But maybe that was the norm. No more...the new prez is a big guy who came to power unruffled by universal

Turncoat at Evening

HYDERABAD Jayatheertha S.A.:

Congress veteran N.D. Tiwari, who hoped to be come the prime minister after Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in the summer of 1991 ahead of national polls, has now joined the BJP at age 91 after perceived threats from Congress bosses Sonia Gandhi and her son Rahul (*Deep Throat*,

ridicule from the media, the liberal establishment, even the Republican old guard—audio leaks notwithstanding. He may well have given foreign agencies a chance to test *their* influence on international politics. But the man can tear off many masks of pretension—the way he managed to hold off Hillary during the televised debates, attacking her on her own trail of leaks. Expect significant changes in the way the chain of command runs. Ultimately, it may only serve to strengthen America's otherwise discredited intelligence wings.

NEW DELHI Rajiv Boolchand Jain:

With Trump at the helm, it seems the US will now get to learn the vitality of India's role in the subcontinent so that the smaller powers do not become Sino-centric. Beijing should not be allowed to foster the growth of Pakistani terror or continue to stop the increase of free-market growth in SAARC nations, lord over the South China Sea, stop

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letters

Afghanistan from being a gateway for trade and investment in Central Asia and use Nepal as another pawn in its 'string of pearls' policy. Washington needs to solidly support New Delhi in becoming a superpower in the region. That alone can recast the global balance of power and values in ways that will make the two countries—more than China—the leaders of the 21st century.

Heartless Mart

NEW DELHI Mahesh Kapasi:

Government hospitals do provide free primary and second healthcare, but they are overcrowded and ill-equipped, thus prompting many people to opt for private hospitals (*No heart in this Mart*, Feb 6). However, any institution that supplies high-end medical equipment, including the stent, must have government control on its pricing. Patients are being charged extraordinarily high, giving the cartels huge profits at the expense of people whose desperation leaves them no choice. This should end.

Indochina dynamics

ON E-MAIL C.V.: The dragon does breathe heavily over the necks of Vietnam and Cambodia (*Viet-Cam Diary*, Jan 30). The Chinese patronisingly call Vietnam 'Yue Nan', meaning south of Yue—an erstwhile Chinese kingdom. The Chinese invaded Vietnam on a massive scale in February 1979 and called it "a punitive war" to teach the Southeast Asian country a "lesson". This animosity between the two countries goes back centuries, and is likely to continue. Beijing's dominance in trade in the region had made Cambodia sometimes use renminbi as a de facto reserve currency instead of the US dollar. China's aid and assistance to Cambodia far outsteps that of the US.

Shameless Cover

ON E-MAIL V. Verma: This refers to the cover of your year-end issue (*Partnership & Pleasure*, January 2). I have been a regular reader of your magazine ever since its inception. But sometimes your deeds embarrass me. Why did you have to put an erotic image on the cover? When I pick up the issue, people wonder what I am reading. Why is it always about naked women? Why not naked men? Please be decent with your cover pictures. Big faces of politicians are equally disgusting.

INBOXED



Body of Corruption

PALAKKAD Col (retd) C.V. Venugopalan:

This refers to your Leader comment *Listen to Yadav's Last Whistle* (January 23). Are you writing about the coffin scam of Kargil war vintage? Now, read about an act of inhuman corruption in what goes into a coffin—a dead human body. I retired as a colonel in the Indian army. Decades ago, I was posted at the Area HQ, then at St Thomas Mount, Chennai. One day I was playing tennis on the courts adjacent to the GST Road. I heard a screech and a scream, followed by commotion on the road. I rushed out, only to find our gardener knocked dead by a speeding vehicle. We informed the police, took the body to the Stanley Hospital and informed his next of kin. The next morning, when the kin went to collect the body at the mortuary, the staff there told him in a low voice, "Give me Rs 250 and I will sew up the mutilated body, wrap it in a clean, white cloth and tie it properly so that you can carry it conveniently. Otherwise, here is a gunny bag. You can pick up the bits and pieces of the body yourself, stuff them into the sack and take it after cleaning the bed. Got it?"

Cluelessly Cashless

CHENNAI M.Y. Shariff: In his short essay *The Nation is Not a Lab* (January 30), the writer has rightly said that the government cannot make experiments on the nation and its people by imposing restrictions on the day-to-day life of citizens in order to achieve a goal that could be achieved by other means. The government took the people for granted by announcing demonetisation and implementing it the way it did. How can the Digital India dream come true when the majority of the people are living in villages and depend on agriculture, a

January 30). The state has been in election mode for over a year as the ruling SAD leadership was overly mindful of the gathering anti-incumbency mood. The Congress leadership has reluctantly overcome its reservations and named Captain Amarinder Singh as the party's chief ministerial face. But it could be too late already. Though the Congress should naturally benefit from the anti-incumbency mood, some of its leaders have a unique gift of making self-goals and carrying out sabotage. AAP, on the other hand, going by its sustained campaigning and engagements on the ground in the past few weeks, has recovered some of its lost sheen. It is in the rural areas, where the people are annoyed with the Badals, that the rookie party has made its most formidable breakthroughs. But the least understood factor is the disruption caused by demonetisation. On election day, the people will get their chance to give their opinion on demonetisation with their votes.



DIGI DOC Queues outside ATMs

fourth are illiterate and only a tiny fraction is comfortable with online transactions? The government should come out with a white paper on what was achieved with all the trouble and inconvenience heaped on ordinary citizens.

Note the Vote

ON E-MAIL L.J.S. Panesar: This refers to your story on the Punjab election scene (*Bring On That Patiala Peg*,

No Reliance!

ON E-MAIL Novonil Guha: This refers to *Advantage Alliance, If Any* (Jan 23). A nobody in Uttar Pradesh (Congress) forms an alliance with a party facing anti-incumbency with the worst law and order record in recent history (Samajwadi Party). The SP also went through their fake baap-beta drama to give credibility to Akhilesh Yadav in order to whitewash his image and detach it from the controversial figures in the party. The announcement of the alliance was also a complete fiasco with major ego battles happening everywhere.



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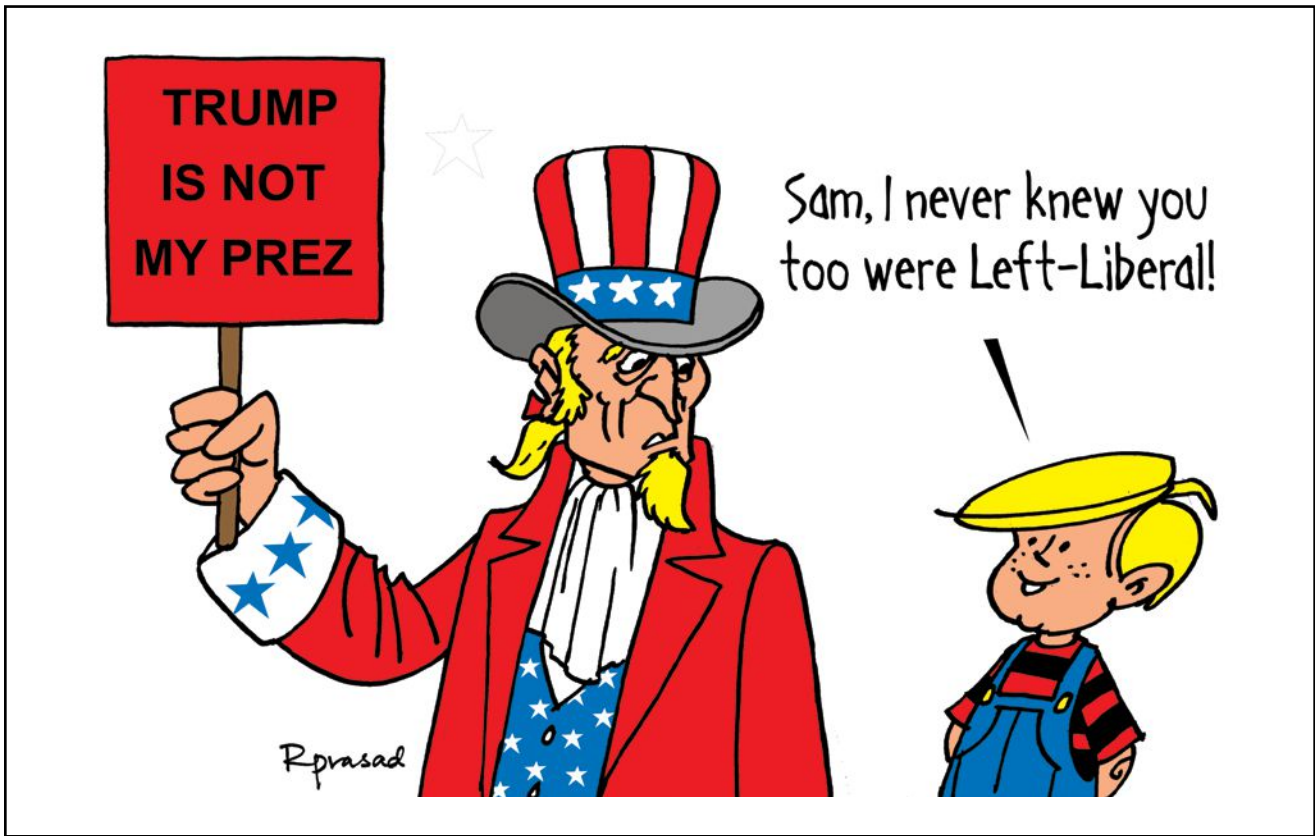
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CLASSIFIED CAMPAIGN

It appears team Prashant Kishor and the Congress social media team in Uttar Pradesh are not allowed to socialise. They are not even permitted to interact over a cup of tea. While Kishor reports directly to Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi, the Congress volunteers' team reports to party election committee head Raj Babbar and senior leader Rajeev Shukla. While hired professionals of Kishor's team are looking after the campaign part, the team of volunteers led by the leaders are handling the content part. The buzz is that the lakshman rekha has been drawn so that PK's campaign strategy doesn't get leaked to rival political parties.

PRASAR BHARTI MAY GO

The government is believed to be working towards winding up the Prasar Bharati, an autonomous broadcasting agency controlling Doordarshan and the All India Radio (AIR). The corridors of Shastri Bhavan, that houses the Information and Broadcasting ministry, are abuzz with talk that the body will again be subsumed in the ministry as it was 20 years ago. The government is said to be unhappy about the Prasar Bharati's functioning, its constant complaints and its continuous demand for funds. Not only has the government been cutting grants to the body, it has also not appointed a full-time CEO after Jawahar Sircar resigned in October last year. And there are no plans to appoint anyone as the head till now, we hear.

UNDER PRESSURE NOMINEE

It has been quite a comedown for a BJP spokesperson who has recently got a ticket to contest Assembly elections from Uttar Pradesh. He is believed to have tried his best to get a Lok Sabha ticket in the 2014 general election but an internal party survey had indicated that he had no chance of winning from the constituency. We hear that he was very close to getting a Rajya Sabha seat on the recommendation of party president Amit Shah but a senior Cabinet minister had objected to it saying he was not only "too junior" but also had never contested any elections. So now is his turn to prove his electoral mettle.

OVERHEARD A BJP leader from West Bengal is lamenting that everyone in the party's state unit wants to be a leader. "There are no ground workers. That's why we are not doing well in the state," he says.



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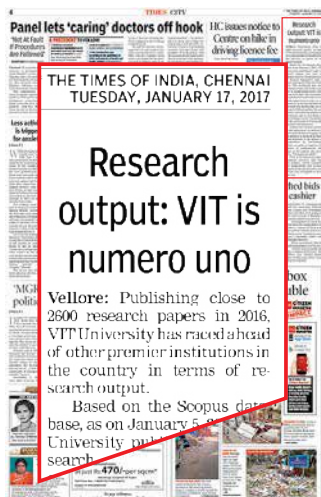
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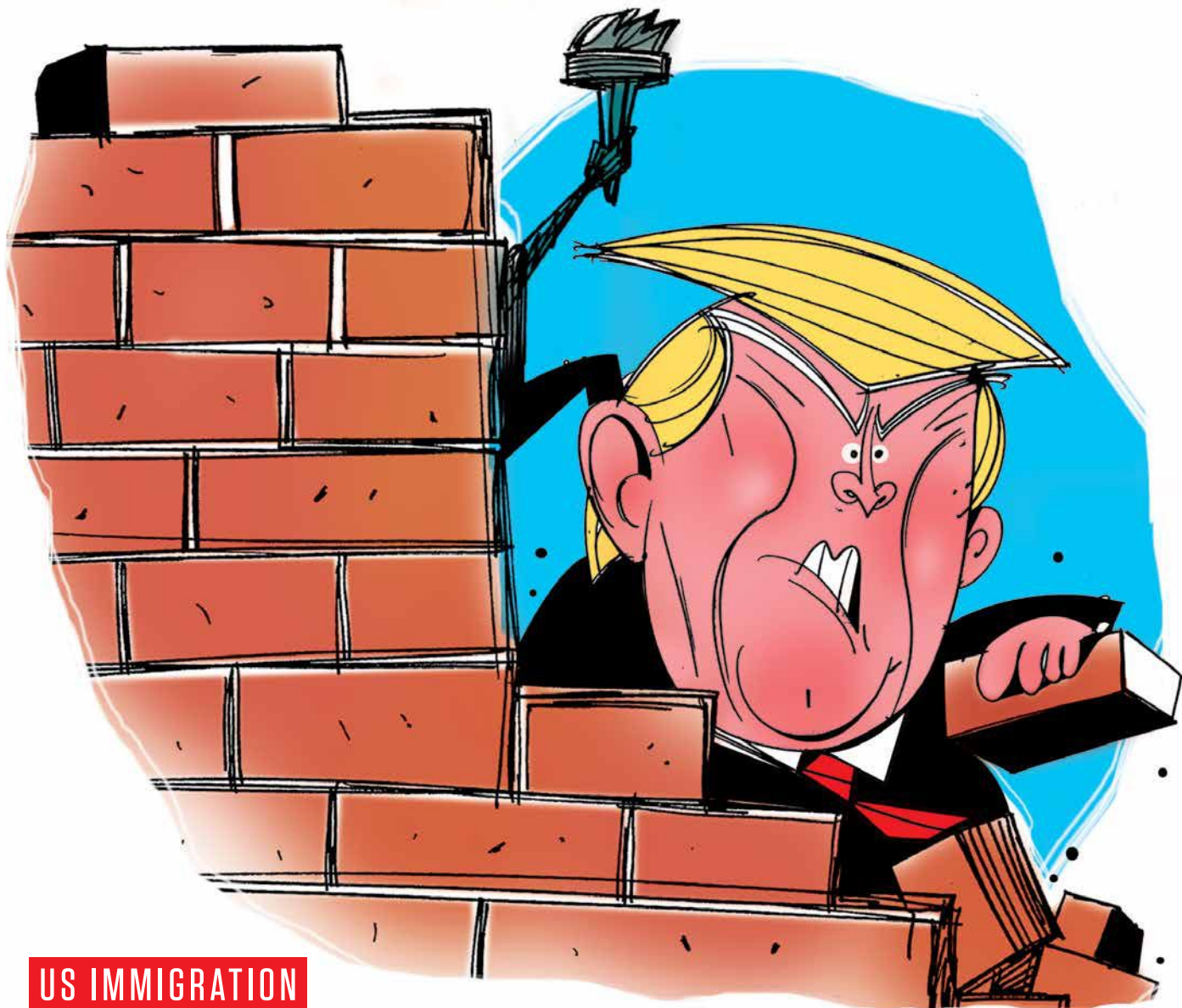


Illustration by SAJITH KUMAR

US IMMIGRATION

Pastures Less Green

Trump is living up to poll rhetoric. More Muslims may find America a mirage.

BY PRANAY SHARMA

THE Islamophobia that had dominated Donald Trump's presidential campaign got translated into the US government's policy on January 27, sadly, coinciding with a day observed in large parts of the world—including America—as the International Holocaust Remembrance Day in memory of millions of Jews who perished during Adolf Hitler's anti-Semitic pogrom. The new president's measures sparked off large-scale protests in the US, dividing the admin-

istration and judiciary vertically. Nearly 100 American diplomats signed a petition questioning the policy, which drew street protests in other countries as well. In the UK, a nation that has traditionally been a close ally of the US, thousands gathered in London to demand the cancellation of Trump's proposed state visit that included a meeting with the Queen and stay at the Buckingham Palace.

Trump, who had barely been a week in office as America's president, issued an executive order, putting on hold for 120 days entry of Syrian refugees into the US and banning people from seven Muslim-dom-

inated countries—Iraq, Iran, Libya, Syria, Sudan, Somalia and Yemen—for 90 days from entering America. The argument: they needed "extreme vetting" before being allowed to come in to keep the country safe. There are indications that more, particularly Pakistan and Afghanistan, could join the list of banned countries.

Trump dubs the media reports as false. "This is not a Muslim ban," he says. "This is not about religion—this is about terror and keeping our country safe." But his assurance did not convince most, including several sections in the US administration. On January 30, the president sacked act-

ing attorney general Sally Yates, an Obama appointee, for questioning the legality of the immigration ban, indicating the divided house his decision has created among American administration officials.

Not one to mince words, Trump called his executive order, 'Protecting the Nation from the Entry of Foreign Terrorists into the United States'. However, its "bigoted and self-defeating" nature led commentators to question not only the policy's effectiveness but also the arbitrariness with which it was being implemented.

There is a growing fear that the move will erode the confidence of many close allies of the US in the Muslim world, like Iraq, where American soldiers are engaged in a fight along with Iraqi forces against the Islamic States. At the same time, serious doubts are also being expressed on Trump's choice of countries, as the list doesn't figure some like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates—the two main countries from where most of the 9/11 terrorists had come. The reason, some felt, was Trump, a real estate billionaire-turned-politician,

had business interest in these countries, because of which he did not want to jeopardise relations with their rulers.

The executive order also led to other interesting developments elsewhere. The Pakistani government, which was yet to officially react to Trump's proposed move, surprised everyone on January 30 when it decided to put under house arrest Jamaat-ud-Dawa chief Hafiz Saeed. In India, it was seen as a happy coincidence as New Delhi had been trying for years to convince Islamabad to act against Saeed for his alleged role in masterminding the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. Though Pakistani authorities said the decision was taken in national interest, Saeed, who is nearing 70 and had been roaming freely and spewing venom against India all these years, reacted angrily: "The decision was taken in Washington, not Islamabad."

A defiant Imran Khan told a Lahore rally that he hoped Trump goes ahead with his ban on Pakistani nationals. The Pakistani cricketer-turned-politician felt this will allow his compatriots to seek jobs within the

country and help in nation-building.

Former ISI chief and retired Lt-Gen Asad Durrani, who had worked closely with the Americans, felt the political storm created by Trump should be allowed to settle down before making a proper assessment of his policy and the ways it will affect Pakistan. But he was quick to point out that merely working close in Afghanistan did not make the US and Pakistan "allies". He added, "Our interest there was too divergent."

However, Islamabad's growing nervousness of how the new US president might look at the Islamic republic was evident from commentaries in its leading newspapers that had been advising American nationals of Pakistani origin or students studying there to immediately return to the transatlantic shores. This was anticipating that, sooner rather than later, Pakistan too, will be included in the list of countries from where people may not be allowed to enter the US.

If sections in India were feeling happy over Pakistan's discomfiture, much of it soon evaporated with the news of a new US



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(1904-1966)

legislation seeking to raise the minimum wage of H-1B visa holder to \$130,000 from the current range of \$60,000-80,000, making it difficult for Indian IT companies to replace American workers with Indian IT professionals. The stocks of the big four Indian companies—Infosys, Wipro, TCS and Tech Mahindra—fell between 3-6 per cent in the Bombay Stock Exchange on anticipation that their edge over other global competitors is likely to erode with the introduction of the bill in US parliament.

The South Asian sideshow notwithstanding, the new president's decision on Muslims has brought to surface, within America, fissures that had been evident during his campaign last year. With regularity, Trump had fallen back on xenophobia and 'Muslim baiting' to energise his supporters and consolidate his own constituencies, especially the White Americans in the country's 'rust belt' made up mainly of Christians and largely unemployed people left behind by the effects of 'globalisation'.

"Ultimately, we fear this executive order will become a self-inflicted wound in the fight against terrorism," Republican Senators Lindsey O. Graham and John McCain said in a statement. They felt it sends a signal that America does not want Muslims to come into the country. "We fear this executive order may do more to help terrorist recruitment than improve our security." Much of that apprehension was borne out by the response of the Islamic State. Through postings on social-media sites linked to it, the terrorist group predicted that Trump's order would galvanise Muslims as the United States is at war with Islam.

But Trump, typically, attacked his Republican Party colleagues. "The joint statement of former presidential candidates John McCain and Lindsey Graham is wrong—they are sadly weak on immigration," he tweeted. "The senators should focus their energies on ISIS, illegal immigration and border security instead of always looking to start World War III."

He argued that the seven countries named in the order are the ones the just-exited Barack Obama administration identified as "sources of terror", while pointing out that his predecessor, too, barred refugees—from Iraq for six months in 2011. "We will again be issuing visas to all countries once we are sure we have reviewed and implemented the most secure policies

over the next 90 days," Trump assured.

But the weekend saw chaos and panic all around. Passengers who were already mid-flight were detained on arrival despite having valid visas or immigrant permits. Many were turned away at airports overseas when they tried to board their flights to the US. Several demonstrations were held outside the White House and Trump Tower in New York. World leaders, including many of US allies from German Chancellor Angela Merkel to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, reacted sharply and dissociated themselves from the American

GRILLED Pakistan has decided to put terrorist Hafiz Saeed under house arrest



PTI

Islamabad is getting nervous about how the US will view the country. Its media has advised American nationals of Pakistani origin to return to the transatlantic shores.

President's decision. Iran and Iraq threatened reciprocal ban on US citizens coming into their country.

But scepticism remained about the motive behind the presidential move. "Trump knows that if he admits it's a Muslim ban, it would be legally indefensible," says Jamal Abdi, policy director of the Washington-based National Iranian American Council. "But on the campaign trail that is what he called it and he asked his advisors to figure out how to make it happen."

Abdi points out that even the Bush Administration had tried to implement a registry programme for mostly Muslim-majority countries after 9/11 but it was shelved because of strong opposition

by the US court. "With Trump, the intent is clear—he said it was his aim was to ban Muslims many times," he adds. "So just because he's changing his story now doesn't change what this is."

In a way, Trump's intent became clear two days before he issued his order on the immigrants and Muslims. That was in an ABC TV interview, where the president said he was going to sign an order banning Muslims from entering the US.


But when Trump was asked if he was concerned that his measures could cause more anger among Muslims, he pointed out that "there's plenty of anger right now" and much of it was because of the US's invasion of Iraq. "We shouldn't have gone into Iraq.

We shouldn't have gotten out the way we got out."

According to Trump, the biggest mistake the US committed was not to have kept control over Iraqi oil. "If we took the oil, you wouldn't have ISIS and we would have had wealth. We have spent right now \$6 trillion in the Middle East and our country is falling apart." Baghdad has already reacted by making it clear that the country's oil is for the Iraqi people and some had even been thinking of keeping Americans out of Iraq if Trump continues to harass Iraqi nationals.

In Iran, it has been bad news for moderates and only vindicates what hardliners have been arguing all along that Iranians should not trust the US. "Trump has given even those who want better relations with the US no choice but to condemn what he is doing," says Abdi.

But how is it likely to play out in South Asia? "I am sure he will eventually go to Afghanistan and Pakistan," says Pakistani commentator Ayesha Siddiqi. "But that will end American war in the region. It means that next time US needs help in that part of South Asia, these states will extract greater concessions." She also felt that the new developments could push Pakistan further towards the China-Russia camp, tilting the balance against the US in Afghanistan.

If this gives hope to some sections in India of a closer Indo-US ties in Afghanistan and the entire region and beyond, one must be mindful that under a Trump presidency nothing can be taken as a given. With his pronounced stress on "America first" to deal with the world, any country can slip off from his list of friends. 



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PROD FOR THE LONE WOLVES

The US prez's actions can likely increase the allure of jihadis

ON Friday, January 27, President Donald Trump issued an executive order that banned the entry into the US of Muslims from seven countries: Iraq, Syria, Iran, Sudan, Libya, Somalia and Yemen. The order also banned the entry of Syrian refugees, the establishment of “safe zones” for them in their country itself, and instructed American agencies to collect information on foreign-born persons in the US who have been radicalised after entry into the US and have carried out terrorist acts. The order added that, in future, refugees who face religious persecution will be allowed entry into the US on a priority basis—provided they are minorities in their countries. There are suggestions from Trump officials that more countries could be added to the list.

The inclusion of the seven countries has caused consternation among observers: no national from these countries has caused the death of any US national in a terror act. Again, all terror acts in the US since 9/11 have either been the handiwork of US residents or of nationals from countries that have been curiously excluded from Trump's list: the 9/11 hijackers, for instance, were Saudis, Emiratis, Lebanese and Egyptian.

Nor does the list include countries that provide the largest number of recruits to the Islamic State: Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Morocco. The ban on Iraqis also includes its Kurds, whose aspirations for statehood the US has backed over the last few decades.

In fact, most lethal attacks carried out in the US and Europe in recent times have been those by “lone-wolf” homegrown perpetrators with no direct links with any jihadi group, but who were inspired to violence through social media. The FBI is said to be monitoring about a thousand “potential homegrown violent extremists”. Also, in the last 15 years, more Americans have been killed by homegrown right-wing extremists than by Muslim terrorists.

The Trump initiative is not unexpected: throughout the election campaign, he had railed against Muslims. He had, in 2015, proposed a ban on the entry of Muslims into the US (after the San Bernardino killings). Trump later called for restrictions on immigration from countries with Muslim-majority populations. He had also expressed anguish over the sufferings of Christian minorities in West Asia, a concern that is now reflected in the executive order. Recently, in his inaugural address, Trump referred to uniting “the

civilised world against radical Islamic terrorism”, raising concerns that he could direct his venom against the faith and its adherents; not just the jihadis.

Trump's electoral success has been welcomed by the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), largely due his overt animosity for Iran. The appointment of the hardliner general (ret'd) James Mattis as defence secretary and the inclusion of Iran in the ban list have affirmed the view that the US will now back them against what they see as Iran's hegemonic and intrusive designs in the region.

Hence, in his telephonic conversation with Trump on January 30, Saudi monarch, King Salman bin Abdulaziz, made no mention of the ban on Muslims, but backed the Trump plan for “safe zones” in Syria and agreed that Iran's implementation of the nuclear agreement should be closely monitored. This GCC complacency may be misplaced since some of Trump's actions will agitate local populations and governments in West Asia. These include a planned shift of the US embassy to Jerusalem, the possible court action against Saudi Arabia by families of 9/11 victims, blanket ban on the entry of Syrian refugees, and an obvious bias in favour of Christian communities in the region.

Trump's actions are likely to increase the allure of jihadi outfits who have long insisted on the West-Islam divide and the inherent hostility of the West towards Islam and Muslims. It will also increase the motivation of troubled misfits in western societies to carry out “lone-wolf” attacks on their unsuspecting neighbours. In the US and other western countries, it will give a fresh resonance to the “clash of civilisations” thesis that could over time shape mindsets and deepen prejudices against Muslims in general.

The Trump action directed at Muslims as a community is obviously pandering to the bigotry of certain sections of the US electorate that backed him in the recent polls, the sections that have not been part of the success narratives that globalisation has spawned all too selectively in the US and most other countries.

Trump has tapped into what essayist Pankaj Mishra recently referred to as the “fury and frustration” of the excluded, and focused it on Islamophobia, the 21st-century repeat of the anti-Semitism that accompanied Europe's march into modernisation in the 18th and 19th centuries—and culminated in the holocaust. □

(The author is a former diplomat.)



If Gulf nations have hailed Trump's poll victory, it is largely due to his animosity for Iran. The Muslim bias of the West may deepen.

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FOOTPRINTS OF RELENTLESS GROWTH: MIZORAM

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Having being ravaged by political unrest for over two decades and thus a late starter in the development process, Mizoram today is one of the fastest developing states in India. In spite of all the inherent disadvantages the State experiences owing to its remoteness and geographical isolation, the State has become one of the best performing small state in the country in terms of infrastructure development and good governance. The Mizoram Government has made concerted efforts to transform the state from a subsistence level to a self-sufficient economy, and at the same time ensuring all-round sustainable development, inclusive growth and socio-economic justice. Two major policies framed to give the economy the required thrust toward a higher growth trajectory are the New Economic Development Policy, and the New Land Use Policy.

NEW ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The New Economic Development Policy is a Rs. 250 crores comprehensive growth strategy for Mizoram with a long term framework. This policy has been formulated keeping in view the paradigm shift in fiscal federalism under the Fourteenth Finance Commission, imperative economic and strategic action plan including Act East Policy and evolving economic environment. The policy provides for practical and effective strategies to enhance productivity, create opportunities, improve public finances, improve business environment and improve public service delivery in a sustainable manner.

The annual action plan for the current fiscal year 2016-2017 focuses on developmental projects considered to be key growth drivers in various sectors, operation and maintenance of existing infrastructure, strengthening of NLUP through convergence with NEDP and other special projects. Policy Agenda includes reforms in public financial management, credible skills develop-

ment policy and climate change adaptation.

NEW LAND USE POLICY

Since its inception in January 2011, the Flagship Programme of the current Mizoram Government, the New Land Use Policy continues to have a strong impact on the economy which registered a high growth rate of 8.45% (Mizoram Economic Survey, 2014-15). This policy was formulated to give assistance at the rate of Rs. 1 lakh and above (depending on the trade which includes agriculture, horticulture, sericulture, animal husbandry, micro enterprises, etc.) to lesser advantaged sections of the society, thereby enabling them to give up shifting cultivation and take up sustainable livelihood activities. Over 1.32 lakhs beneficiaries have been covered by the scheme, out of which 99.51% have bank accounts through which payments are made. Area under Jhum cultivation has decreased by 29.75%, production of rice and milk has gone up by 28.55% and 34% respectively, and the average suc-





Mizoram : Tuirial Hydro Electric Power site, Passion Fruit , Mandarin Orange



cess rate under Mizoram Enterprise in rural areas registered at 70.21%.

In the course of implementation of the NLUP Scheme, the policy has been linked and converged with various ongoing schemes like MGNREGA, BNRGSK, RKVY, etc. accounting for efficiency and better implementation. Mizoram has also collaborated with specialized agencies of the UN Joint Initiative Project – UNDP, FAO, UNIDO and ILO since October 2014. Through this partnership, comprehensive studies and survey are undertaken and policies formulated to further transform livelihood dynamics in their respective areas of concern.

ADVANCEMENTS IN PRIMARY SECTOR

Agriculture was the main occupation of the traditional Mizo and continues to play an important role till today, with 60% of the population engaging in agricultural activities. As demand for organic produce increases in the national and international market, Mizoram possesses comparative ad-

The climate and altitude of the state is especially conducive for horticulture products like mandarin orange, grapes, kiwi, dragon fruit, spices and flowers.

vantage since most of the agriculture products are organic by default. The climate and altitude of the state is especially conducive for horticulture products like mandarin orange, grapes, kiwi, dragon fruit, spices and flowers. Rain water harvesting for irrigation purposes is also an important area of concern.

PROVISION OF CIVIC AMENITIES

Provision of drinking water is among the key priorities of the government. In this regard, various undertakings is made by the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) and in compliance with central directives, 52% of urban towns are provided with 70 lpcd, while in 83% of rural inhabitations is provided with 55 lpcd and 39% of the same with 40 lpcd water supply.

The state PHED have performed an astounding feat of constructing a Rs. 6.31 crore solar-powered water pump project in record time of just seven months, against the initial given time frame of two years; Located at Kelkang, a village in Champhai district, this NABARD sponsored project is considered to be one of the biggest solar water pump projects in India. It consists of a four-stage system of booster pumps extending to a height of 520 metres, whereby water from downstream (River Bangla) is pumped, treated and stored in a 1 lakh litre capacity main reservoir in the village, all powered by





204 solar plates. This project successfully caters to the requirements of the 1,234 inhabitants of Kel kang village at 55 lpcd.

Regarding generation of electricity, Mizoram has harnessed only 2 percent of its potential of the hydro-electric sector. Various possible options to increase power generation have been explored and presently more than 90 percent of the villages in the state have been electrified.

Mizoram has finally been connected to the Broad Gauge Railway Map of the country with broad gauge goods train flagged in at Bairabi Railway Station on 21st March 2016, while the broad gauge passenger train was flagged out of Bairabi Railway Station on 27th May, 2016 by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi via video conference. Existing road networks are being improved upon through Periodic Renewal and work on the World Bank funded and Asian Development Bank assisted roads are making steady progress, as do development of the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP), touted to play a crucial role as trade route of India with East Asian countries, as envisioned by Act East Policy.

JOURNEY TO A CLEAN AND HEALTHY MIZORAM

Since the health of the workforce and thus that of the people positively affects development, providing affordable healthcare and improving healthcare facilities are given top priority by the government. The resultant Infant Mortality Rate of 37 (40 at national level, SRS 2013) and sex ratio of 975 (national ratio 940) indicate optimistic figures and future.

Mizoram has always maintained a serious attitude towards sanitation, with several cleanliness movements formed in various districts and as community undertakings with support from the government since decades back. This cleanliness movement gains further momentum with implementation of the Swachh Bharat Mission. By December 2016, Champhai, a district in the eastern region was officially certified Open Defecation Free, with other districts expected to follow suit shortly. The capital city, Aizawl was ranked fifth cleanest city by the Centre for Science



and Environment (CSE) in 2016, while Swachh Sarvekshan under The Union Ministry of Urban Development ranked Aizawl at 41 amongst 73 cities. The State Investment Programme Management and Implementation Unit installed Sewerage Treatment Plant to treat solid wastes in the capital city, and public awareness regarding solid waste resource management is also carried out.

DIGITIZATION

Through the application of Information Technology, the government is committed to creating an environment of transparent and accountable Good Governance. Towards this end, The ICT Department is taking steps to provide delivery of Government services to citizens via 53 online and mobile channels. The ICT Department has also facilitated establishment and setting up of major e-Governance projects under NEGP and Digital India and also state initiatives project for easy and direct service delivery, including Governor Online & CM Online. On September 2016, the ICT Department was awarded the Skoch Platinum Award 2016 in the category of smart governance from its three projects, viz- Government of Mizoram Content Management System (CMS), Inventory Management System (IMS) and E-District Project.

Also in keeping with many other government offices across the country, the Urban Development & Poverty Alleviation Department on 15th November, 2016 digitized the entirety of its file management system in the directorate and secretariat offices, becoming the first e-Office among government offices in the state.

Mizoram State Archives Actions have also taken initiative towards preservation of important documents for future reference and record by converting more than one lakh documents and papers in digital format.

HUMAN RESOURCE AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

With a literacy rate of 91.58% (2011 Census), Mizoram possesses vast stock of human resource. To decrease the gap between education and employment, the government has taken various steps to enhance the competency of its greatest resource. It prioritises the enhancement of quality of education right from elementary stage to higher and professional levels of learning in its policies. Notably, Mizoram has been recognized as the star performer of North East and one of the best performing States across the country regarding the implementation of Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyaan (RUSA).

Besides formal education, Skill Development is a relatively recent area of attention yet arduously pursued and already yielding optimistic result. The Mizoram Youth Commission (MYC) has facilitated vocational training of youths in selected institutions across the country under Skill Development Initiative Scheme since June, 2014. Presently, of the 2000 trainees 1600 are already employed. Under NERLP, the MYC also undertakes training of students from Mizoram and other North Eastern states in Aviation, Hospitality, Travel & Tourism, Retail Services and IT Enabled Services sectors. Along with other training programmes carried out under various schemes, the MYC has imparted skill development training to



A TOURIST DESTINATION OF RICH FORESTS AND CULTURE

Mizoram possesses a forest cover of 19,238 sq. km, accounting for over 91 percent of total area of the state, with 138 sq.km. of untouched virgin forest. This accounts for a rich biological diversity which when combined with its dramatic landscapes and comparatively clean atmosphere as indicated by low levels of toxicity in fauna, the state is a veritable eco-tourism destination. Towards this end, work for a Rs. 94.90 crore mega eco-tourism project which includes eco-friendly tourism infrastructure and nature centric adventure facilities commenced recently to usher in a new era of tourism in the state.

The rich and unique artistic tribal heritage translates into the beautiful weaves and designs in handcraft and handloom products. Owing to the inherent skill of the people but in no small part due to constant support of and promotion by the government, steadily but surely the cottage industry has been progressing. To protect the cultural heritage of Mizoram, Geographical indication/patenting of traditional Mizo "puan" such as Puanchei, Puandum, Ngotekherh and others are being taken up for legal protection and preservation. Measures are being implemented to develop and strengthen industrial infrastructure in the State with emphasis is being laid on Bamboo Development Sector and Handloom & Handicrafts.

MIZORAM, apart from the above stated facts, possesses an exceptional social environment where there is virtually no class based distinction, where compared to the overall national scenario, women are positively empowered and encounter little or no hurdles in the face of employment or in their daily lives; and a close-knit community which culminates into a selfless, charitable and peace-loving society. All these contribute immensely toward the development path ardently pursued by the Government, steering the state toward an optimistic future.

over 6000 youths from within as well as from neighbouring states.

A SPORTING SPIRIT

Mizoram has a vibrant sporting culture and the state government, recognizing the skills and talents of its sportsmen, has directed its capacity towards enhancing these skills. Since the last few years, rapid development in sports infrastructure like football and hockey grounds, sports stadiums and training halls are taken up across the eight districts of the state. Since construction of the first all-weather artificial turf football ground at AR Ground in 2011, Mizoram have been making headways in football, winning the coveted Santosh Trophy in 2013, and in the 2015 National Games.

The state government's unique sports promotion and talent spotting policy "Catch Them Young", has also started playing dividends in various disciplines. Successful sportsmen who stand as a testament to the success of this initiative includes a woman hockey player representing India in the Rio Olympic Games, two football players forming part of the silver medal winning team at 12th South Asian Games, and a gold medallist in Commonwealth

The rich and unique artistic tribal heritage translates into the beautiful weaves and designs in handcraft and handloom products.

Youth Weightlifting Championship, who went on to compete and win silver medals at the 2016 IWF World Youth Weightlifting Championship at Penang and Asian Youth Weightlifting Championship at Tokyo. Mizo footballers are becoming one of the most sought after players in India. During 2014-2016, athletes from Mizoram have won total of 185 Gold, 191 silver and 231 bronze medals at various championships at regional, national and international level. Notably, Mizoram also produced two Mt. Everest Summiteers since 2013.

BY NASEER GANAI IN SRINAGAR

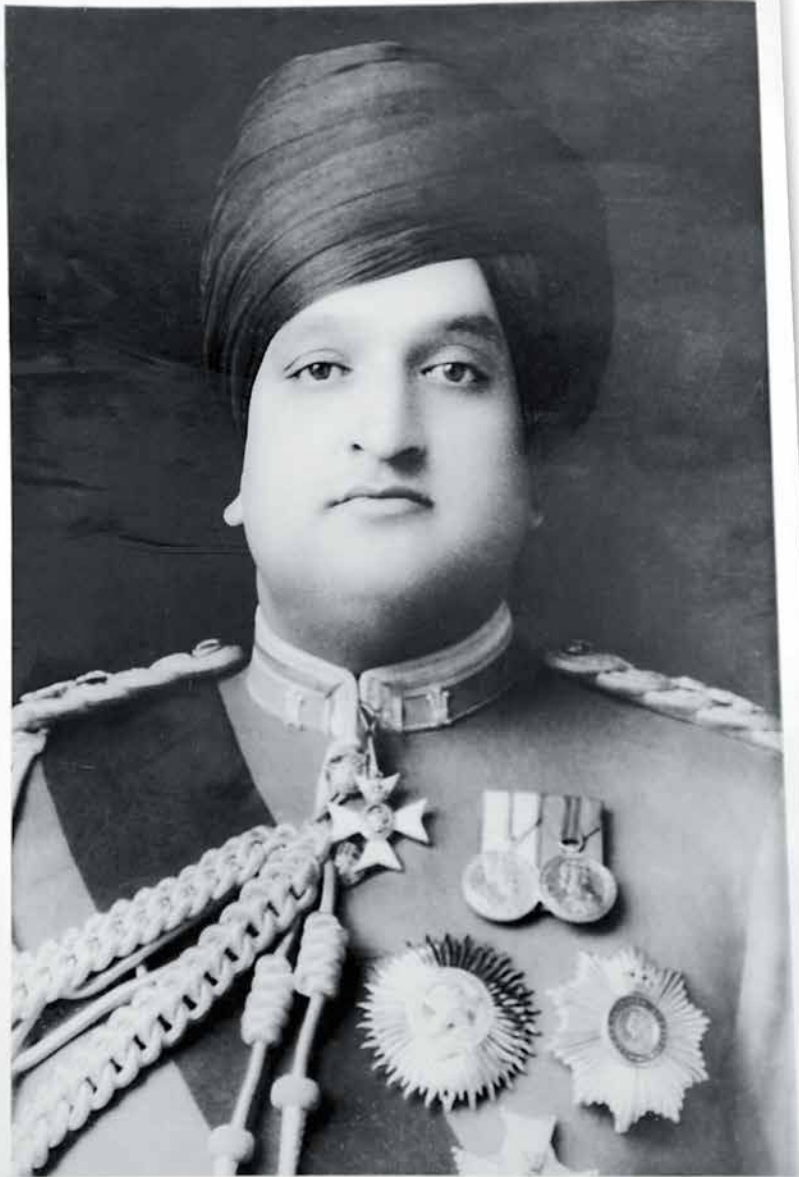
As the Upper House of the Jammu and Kashmir assembly—the legislative council—passed a resolution to observe a holiday on September 23, birthday of Maharaja Hari Singh, the last monarch of the princely state, there was no protest call from separatist groups, not even a statement. To them, it was a non-event that has further weakened the position of pro-India ‘mainstream’ parties in Kashmir.

Indeed, the National Conference was left red-faced when its Jammu provincial president Davindar Singh Rana, who is also former CM Omar Abdullah’s confidant and aide, welcomed the resolution, followed by senior party leaders distancing themselves from him. “The resolution”, an unfazed Rana tells *Outlook*, “represents the sentiments of the Jammu Dogras and we must respect it.” Omar tactfully did not say a word for or against, leaving it to the party’s Valley-based leaders to do the firefighting by criticising the resolution.

The regional political parties found themselves in a tight spot trying to defend a resolution that flies in the face of their grandstanding on the Kashmir conflict. For instance, on July 13 last year, CM Mehbooba Mufti had placed floral wreaths on the graves of 21 Kashmiris killed by Hari Singh’s forces in 1931, outside Srinagar’s central jail. The maharaja whom J&K’s legislative council wants to commemorate had got a Kashmiri leader Abdul Qadir arrested for calling upon the people to fight the “oppressive” Dogra monarchy—with sticks and stones if guns were not available.

When people protested against the arrest, the maharaja’s forces opened fire, drawing first blood in Kashmir’s long history of street agitations against the Dogra rulers. Omar’s grandfather, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, who went on to become the first Kashmiri prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir, would later compare the political impact of this massacre on the Kashmiri movement against monarchy with the effect that the Jallianwala Bagh massacre had on the larger freedom struggle. The day is observed every year as a state holiday in Kashmir, with the CM, other ministers and Opposition leaders visiting the graves to pay homage to the martyrs.

It was after the PDP formed the govern-



A Monarch in Praise and Loathing

The J&K Council’s resolution to declare a holiday on Maharaja Hari Singh’s birthday touches a raw nerve

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ment in alliance with the BJP that for the first time the state had ministers—all from the BJP—who refused to participate in the official Martyrs' Day function, exposing a faultline within the ruling coalition. When Mehbooba visited the graves in Old Srinagar last year, it was five days after the killing of Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani that had triggered widespread protests across the Valley. She described them as brave heroes who laid down their lives in the fight against autocracy, in the process laying the foundation for democracy in the region. Later that day, she said it was one of the greatest chapters in the history of Jammu and Kashmir.

But, when on January 25, BJP legislator and the maharaja's grandson Ajatshatru Singh moved the resolution in the Upper House, Surinder Choudhary from Mehbooba's party seconded it. Deputy chairman of the House, Jahangir Mir from the Congress, and forest minister Lal Singh supported the resolution. Incidentally, Ajatshatru was a minister in Farooq Abdullah's NC government from 1996 to 2001.

Education minister Naeem Akhtar, a senior PDP leader and spokesman of the government, told the House that the maharaja deserves credit for maintaining the secular character of the state. He said the maharaja was also responsible for bringing in Article 370, which helps in maintaining the state's identity and keeping cultural erosion in check. Effusive in his praise for the monarch, he said the state should, in fact, do more than just declare his birth anniversary a holiday. He hoped after his gushing tribute, Ajatshatru would withdraw the resolution. Instead, it was put to vote and passed, with only two PDP members abstaining.

A seething NC general secretary and brother of Farooq, Mustafa Kamal, whose statements were previously disowned even by Omar, tells *Outlook* that Dogra rule was a curse on Kashmiris, who were "driven like dumb cattle and faced hardship and tyranny". "The resolution is aimed at portraying a rosy picture of a dark chapter of Kashmir's history, which started with the ignominious Treaty of Amritsar," says Kamal. "It is an insult to the struggle of Kashmiris and I believe there are ulterior motives behind it."

Dogra rule over Jammu and Kashmir began in 1846, with the Treaty of Amritsar, after the defeat of the Sikhs in the First

Anglo-Sikh War. Historians say Gulab Singh (1792-1857), the first in the line of the Dogra kings, was rewarded by the British Raj for betraying the Sikhs in the war. He was allowed to "purchase" the territory spread over 84,771 square miles and home to 2.5 million people for 50 lakh (nanakshahi) Rupees. In 1946, Sheikh Abdullah, father of Farooq and Kamal, launched the 'Quit Kashmir' movement against the maharaja's rule.

In the eyes of the BJP, though, Hari Singh made a greater "contribution to Jammu and Kashmir than Sheikh Abdullah" and his stature is bigger. It



GETTY IMAGES

TWO SIDES & A CM Mehbooba Mufti honours Kashmiris killed by the forces of Maharaja Hari Singh on July 13, 1931

is only right, therefore, to observe the monarch's birth anniversary as a state holiday just like the birthday of the first prime minister of the state.

"Once you go through the 100-year history of the monarchy, you will realise whether he was greater or Sheikh Abdullah," says BJP general secretary Ashok Koul. "These days, leaders of the National Conference talk about the state subject laws. But it was the Dogra rulers who introduced them.

The separatists see the resolution as a defeat of the regional parties, which insist that struggles against Dogra rule culminated in 1947 with the advent of democracy.

The maharajas contributed to education, health and other sectors, while the NC has done nothing during its rule."

About the killings on July 13, 1931, Koul says, the last maharaja's son and Rajya Sabha MP, Karan Singh, is more right than any historian. Two days after the resolution was passed by the legislative council, Karan Singh welcomed it and slammed those who "attempt to brand" the state's erstwhile ruler as "communal". In a function at Jammu, the Congress leader held the NC responsible for spreading "poisonous rumours" about his father and Dogra rule in the state.


"Peace prevailed in the state during the rule of the Dogras," said Karan Singh. "In 100 years of Dogra rule, bullets were fired only once—and that too because the shops of Kashmiri Pandits were probably being looted. Some people were killed in the firing and that is being observed as Martyrs' Day."

KARAN Singh claimed that when his father came to power, he had said "justice" was his religion and that his closest friends were Muslims. There were always Muslims in his staff. He called his father a "progressive" leader who carried out several reforms.

As 'mainstream' political leaders get entangled in a war of words over Maharaja Hari Singh's legacy, the separatists are calmly watching from a distance. They seem happy that the resolution has pulled the rug from under the feet of the regional 'mainstream' parties, which insist that the protest of July 13, 1931, and other struggles against Dogra rule culminated in 1947 with the advent of democracy in Jammu and Kashmir. They see the resolution as underlining the political defeat of these parties.

"We believe our struggle continues since 1931," Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, head of the moderate faction of Hurriyat Conference, tells *Outlook*. "We fought against Dogra rule and we have been fighting against the so-called democratic aggression of India since 1947. For us, there is no difference between the Dogra rulers and their current avatars."

For decades, pro-India political parties, especially the NC, have been arguing that their struggle against the maharaja led to democratic rule under India. "Now, they have to celebrate autocratic rulers in this so-called democracy," says Mirwaiz, summing up the separatists' take on the matter. ■



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TAKES TWO TO TANGO
Congress and BJP flags
vie for attention at a
Rishikesh riverfront

Congress vs 'Congress'

The spotlight in the Uttarakhand duel is on the CM and those who quit his party

BY BULA DEVI

LAST year, Uttarakhand hogged the limelight for all the wrong reasons—sting operation, defections, horse trading, floor test, President's rule and so on. Voters are annoyed but not surprised, and it seems to have helped many to make up their mind for the forthcoming assembly polls. In fact, only the first assembly elected in 2002—the state was carved out of Uttar Pradesh on November 8, 2000—was free of the instability caused by internal squabbles that plagued both the subsequent governments. In the past 15 years, the state has seen five chief ministers, with two of them taking oath more than once. And the CM who gave the state its only stable government, Congress leader N.D. Tiwari, has now made his son join the BJP.

The fight between the Congress and the BJP is now neck and neck.

Indeed, the two biggest national parties have not allowed any regional party to grow in the hill state, turning every election into a Congress-BJP duel. The election this year is likely to be no different, except that there are too many rebels or turncoats this time on both sides. Interestingly, Uttarakhand has always voted to power the party not ruling at the Centre.

Besides the usual factors—anti-incum-

Harish Rawat is up against three former CMs... Locals say the contest is between the "Harish Rawat Congress" and the "non-Harish Rawat Congress".

bency, corruption, shifting party loyalties—demonetisation is likely to be big on the voter's mind as it has affected households across classes. In Doiwala constituency, traders are unhappy over demonetisation. For instance, the family of Virendra Kumar had to face embarrassment when the groom's side refused to accept a cheque as guarantee against cash for dowry.

Migration in search of livelihood is a huge issue in both Garhwal and Kumaon regions, but every party in power has pushed it under the carpet. There are many villages like Huna (in the Garhwal hills), which is now left with only two families, with most villagers shifting to the plains to find work and make ends meet. With the majority of young people moving to other states for higher education and jobs, agricultural production is down in many villages and the demography is changing.

Much of the BJP's support comes from



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Garhwal and, with the army chief, R&AW chief, Director General of Military Operations and the National Security Advisor currently from that region, the party hopes to reap a bigger harvest of votes this time.

In the battle for Uttarakhand, CM Harish Rawat is up against three former CMs—B.C. Khanduri, Ramesh Pokhriyal and B.S. Koshyari. Former Congress CM Vijay Bahuguna has also joined the BJP and his son is contesting for the BJP from Sitarganj. Moreover, the Congress MLA from Haridwar will be taking on Harak Singh Rawat, who led a group of Congress MLAs into the BJP last year. After the CM refused a ticket to irrigation minister Yashpal Arya's son, the minister joined the BJP; now, both father and son will contest on BJP tickets. Satpal Maharaj, a former Union minister (1996-97) and Congress MP who has been with the BJP since 2014, is contesting from Chaubattakhal, while his wife, Ramnagar MLA Amrita Rawat, is also with the BJP now.

In Kedarnath, an important seat for the Congress where the government had undertaken massive construction and rehabilitation work, former Congress leader Shaila Rani Rawat is contesting on a BJP ticket. No wonder many locals say the contest is actually between the "Harish Rawat Congress" and the "non-Harish Rawat Congress". Observers say the winning margin this time could be just as slim as it was in 2012, when the Congress had bagged only one seat more than the BJP.

"It's a tough fight," says Ambika Soni, Uttarakhand in-charge of the Congress. "We have re-nominated 28 MLAs for their loyalty to the party during difficult times. Each one of them will have influence in four or five seats around their own constituencies. While we have re-nominated our legislators, the BJP has given tickets to almost everyone who shifted their loyalty."

Observers say half of the 'rebel' candidates have little chance of winning. The BJP's decision to give them tickets does not seem to have gone down well with many voters as well as party workers, some of whom have actually ended up joining the Congress after being denied tickets. In Roorkee, long-time RSS supporter Suresh Chandra Jain, who lost by around 600 votes in 2012, is contesting on a Congress ticket after he failed to get a BJP ticket, while his rival, MLA Pradeep Batra, on being denied a Congress ticket, is now contesting for the BJP.

"Uttarakhand politics has become

highly lumpenised and corruption has seeped deep inside the system," says writer Mangalash Dabral. Vijay Thapliyal, who teaches at a Haridwar college, points to a "deep sense of disenchantment" among voters with the political system, which may reflect in the voting pattern and a difference of just one or two per cent in voteshare can change the outcome. "Locals have become dispassionate and detached," he says. "The BJP may win the election by the skin of its teeth in a tough and keenly fought contest."

Another challenge for the BJP is that it has no chief ministerial face and too many claimants. Satpal Maharaj is said to have managed to crack the inner coterie in the RSS, but Trivendra Rawat is said to

JITENDER GUPTA



DRUMMING IT UP Harish Rawat has taken oath as CM thrice since 2014

be close to Amit Shah.

Thapliyal believes that while the bureaucracy is an entrenched stakeholder in the affairs of the state, the politicians have no sense of local issues. "Voters should realise that politicians come and go once every five years, but the bureaucracy stays put," he says. "Infighting in political parties has created a vacuum in the system and the bureaucracy has stepped in to fill it. When it comes to choosing between ideology and political power, politicians will certainly choose the latter. The values that the RSS had inculcated in its workers are slowly but surely losing their relevance and depth. It is happening not just in the RSS, but also in the Left, which is facing similar dilemmas."


Indeed, many RSS workers seem to be disillusioned with their superiors. "Sometimes I feel the RSS does not want

the BJP to come to power in 2019," says Indraprakash Pareek, an RSS supporter in Rishikesh. "Why else would they react on the reservation issue in Bihar and now in Uttar Pradesh?" That could have been a slip of the tongue or a matter of sticking to their principled stand on the issue, but there's no denying that both the RSS and the VHP are already busy canvassing for the BJP, going door to door.

VOTERS of Karnaprayag are unhappy about the condition of schools. They complain that many government schools have been closed for more than five years due to lack of teachers, while most children end up in private schools. And yet political parties are least bothered about the issue, they allege.

Then there is a long-pending demand to make Gairsain the capital of Uttarakhand as it is located at the meeting point of Garhwal and Kumaon. Though the secretariat has been set up and an assembly session has also been held there, it has not been declared the capital. "Leaders come, make promises and then vanish," says Pratap Singh Rawat, a teacher. "They do not return until it is time to seek votes again. And by then, they may have shifted their loyalty to other political parties, for reasons of self-interest."

In Ranikhet, the fight is between leader of the Opposition Ajay Bhatt and Harish Rawat's brother-in-law Karan Mahara, who is contesting on a Congress ticket. "All eyes are on this seat as it is a high-profile constituency," says Sunderlal Goel, an advocate. Bhuban Chand Satyawali, sarpanch of Ringadiya village, which is in the neighbourhood of Harish Rawat's native Mohanari, says his fellow villagers would vote for an independent candidate as they are disillusioned with both the Congress and the BJP. The chief minister is contesting from two constituencies—Kichcha and Haridwar (rural)—in the Tarai region. If he wins both seats, sources say, he will leave Haridwar (rural) for his daughter, who has been working in the constituency for the past five years.

Mohammed Zafar, sarpanch of Shivilpur Pandey village in Ramnagar constituency, says that no party has done any social development work worth noting and so the villagers will do "tactical voting". "Harish Rawat must explain why so many leaders deserted the Congress and joined the BJP. If the BJP does something good for the youth, we would give up our loyalty towards the Congress," says Zafar. 

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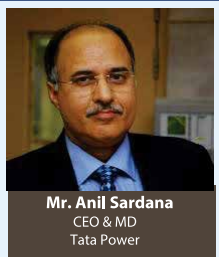
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Weariness with a decade of SAD rule and 'cashless' anger against ally BJP makes the Punjab

BY PRAGYA SINGH

THE massive crowd is perfectly still, rapt in attention. Bhagwant Mann, Aam Aadmi Party's Member of Parliament from Sangrur, is on stage. He is AAP's most heavyweight campaigner for the Punjab assembly election, due on February 4. His 'kikli', or ditties, are a massive hit at rallies. When Mann sings, people in the audience turn on their mobile phone torches, making scores of pale lights glow in the twilight.

Those gathered for Mann in this Jalalabad rally have heard his kikli before. So many times, in fact, that they remember it. "Kikli? (This song?)"

Mann booms into his microphone and the audience shouts back, "Kalir di (It's about a girl)." "Gaap? (Lies?)" Mann croons and the crowd responds, "Sukhbir di (They come from Sukhbir Badal)." "Smack?" he asks and they respond: "Order it from the border."

The audience grasps Mann's message, which is about holding Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Bikramjit Majithia responsible for the state's drug problem. Freeing Punjab of drugs is not just a key promise of his party, it is, quite literally, AAP's rallying cry. Around this, it has built up a state-wide campaign to directly target top leaders of the SAD on all issues, from corruption to governance.

At Majithia, half an hour from Amritsar by road, the impact of this strategy is ap-

parent. This seat is held by Bikramjit, who is also deputy CM Sukhbir Singh Badal's brother-in-law. "*Jhandi Akali ni, vote Lalli ni* (I will let the Akali banner flutter on my roof, but my vote is for Lalli)," says spare parts dealer Harpreet Singh, expressing a common sentiment in this region. Weariness has set in after 10 years under SAD rule and Harpreet, who once voted for Bikramjit, has now turned to Congress candidate SRS Lalli.

Others in Majithia are gravitating to Himmat Singh Shergill, the AAP candidate. Yet, it is the SAD pennant—scales set against a saffron background—that flutters on practically every rooftop. "Badal's men" have put them up, residents say, so they dare not remove them. "The banner, however, doesn't indicate



**'ENTRENCHED' (left) Congress harps on its tried-and-tested credentials
BROOM-BOX OPERA AAP MP
Bhagwant Mann at a Jalalabad rally**

as the party does last-minute push-ups for the Majha and Doaba voters. Like Lalli, Kejriwal too believes Majitha might indeed slip from Bikramjit's hands, but he hopes it would fall for Shergill's ardent embrace instead of the Congress's waiting handshake.

Outside a dusty, old godown in Majitha, while Akali-branded vehicles bustle to and fro, their loudspeakers blaring, stands Manjeet Singh, a white-bearded Sikh well into his 60s. It is men and women like him, who usually voted Akali but are now shifting allegiance, that the Congress and AAP are vying for, everywhere in Punjab. "*Pakoda Akali ka, chai Congress ki, vote jhadoo ka* (Eat Akali snacks, drink Congress tea, vote AAP)," he says. The reason Manjeet cites for wanting to move away from the SAD—the "*be-adabi*" or desecration of the Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, by unknown miscreants in different parts of the state—are not unusual either. The Sikhs have expressed outrage not just in the Majha region, but also in Patiala and Sangrur in the Malwa, Jalalabad of Fazilka district and Zira in Ferozepur district.

"The Badals punished nobody for repeated sacrilegious acts on the Granth Sahib. They did nothing. Moreover, they are money-minded. Parking fees are now levied even at the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple, Amritsar). This is unacceptable," says Manjeet. "We voted Congress or SAD for 70 years. Now there is someone new here."

Just about a mile to the east of Majitha is another twist to the Punjab election tale. At the tiny settlement of Idgah, the rage of the 350-odd voters is directed against political outfits of all shades for their neglect of civic facilities, education and healthcare. "*Hamara vote gupt hai* (our vote is a secret)," say a group of residents. "You will find out only on March 11 when results are declared." Among the AAP rank and file, there is a strong belief that all such voters, who are keeping their intentions under wraps, have already chosen the jhadoo, or broom.

If Majitha is in ferment, Amritsar is in a flap. Every street corner has, it seems, people supporting a different party—the AAP has votaries among traders in the

ng five rivers

election a toss between grand old Congress and newbie AAP

whom we will vote for," says Gurcharan Singh, a local merchant.

A pepper-bearded and moustachioed Lalli, a political powerhouse who is energetically taking on a still-youthful Bikramjit and the 'newcomer' from AAP, says, "I assure you, they will vote for the Congress. Shergill will not be able to make a dent here. I will win Majitha and this constituency will also have the highest polling percentage in Punjab."

Congress leaders, Lalli tells *Outlook*, are "entrenched" in Punjab's system and hence more suited to take over from the flailing SAD. He dismisses Delhi CM and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal as an "outsider". As for the SAD flag fluttering all over Majitha, he chimes in cheerily, "*Jhandi Akali ni, vote Congress ni.*"

The charge of being "outsiders" in Punjab is one that repeatedly comes the way of AAP's top leadership, including Kejriwal. "If AAP is an 'outsider' then what is Rahul Gandhi? An insider? And Sonia Gandhi? Are not AAP's contestants and leaders from here? This charge make no sense," says Kejriwal, who has been camping in Majitha and Amritsar

Among the AAP rank and file, there is a strong belief that a large section of voters who are keeping their cards close to the chest have already chosen the jhadoo.

walled city and many from the middle classes. On the whole, it is the Congress that gets talked about more. This apparently has less to do with the party's high-profile candidate, former cricketer Navjot Singh Sidhu, than with the fact of the Congress being "entrenched" in the state's system, as Lalli put it, offering a known alternative to those with strong anti-Badal sentiments.

"I will vote as the pradhan of my colony wants," says Bhagwati, a middle-aged tea seller whose stall is outside a shopping mall. "If we do as he says, he will at least give us food to fill our bellies for five full days." She is a typical Amritsari voter, who will swing wherever her 'network' swings. In her case, the pradhan has been leaning on 'Panja' (hand), the Congress's election symbol, so far.

Bhagwati lost Rs 3,000 in the aftermath of demonetisation—a solid blow that has left her seething against the BJP and their ally, SAD. The majority of traders share this sentiment. Many feel this is reason enough to deny the vote to the old established parties—the BJP, the Congress and the Akali Dal—making AAP the natural choice.

THIS is what makes the average AAP volunteer believe that this election in Punjab is not a "normal" one and hope this would be an election for voters to seek a total break from their past choices. While AAP hopes this shift becomes widespread, the Congress is consolidating voters around its most popular leadership, often in urban and semi-rural constituencies.

"*Jhadoo ka zor hai yahan* (Here, AAP is a force to reckon with)," says Kuldeep Kaur, a resident of Chuchak village near Zira town in Firozpur district, south of Amritsar. She, too, cites the Granth's desecration as a key grouse, but others here have more complaints. "Badal did only one job—drugs," says Gursekh Singh, a farm worker. Harjinder, a carpenter, says, "The fight here is between Congress and the jhadoo." Echoing the words of a senior state police CID officer, who said there were reports of "silent support" for AAP in the villages, Bohra Shah, another resident, says, "This time the mahaul (buzz) is more around Kejriwal. Politicians fool us every time. This time, we will fool them." Here, too, people insist the brand new SAD and Congress pennants flapping all over their homes are no indication of where their sympathies lie.



KERNEL IS ALL Only long-time supporters seem to be with SAD this poll season


"We can't refuse any leader, so we end up attending every party's rallies. It means nothing. Since they started tearing down or blackening Kejriwal-jhadoo posters, we have stopped displaying them," says Manjeet Kaur, from one of the better-off landowning households. In Punjab's scheme of things, the coming together of the poor and rich sections of villagers in Chuchak and elsewhere indicates a possible Dalit-OBC combine taking shape.

Deeper south, still in the Majha belt, lies sleepy Jalalabad within the Fazilka assembly segment, now transformed into a nerve centre for Punjab politics, as the seat is held by Sukhbir Badal. He is being challenged by AAP's Bhagwant Mann and another MP, Ravneet Singh Bittu of the Congress. The dominant Rai Sikhs here are watching the pre-election hubbub with wry, slightly anxious indulgence. "Oh we don't know if jhadoo will win," says Jagneet Singh, who runs a medical store, though he readily admits there is "more anger against the Badals" here.

Bittu has teamed up with disgruntled SAD MP Sher Singh Gubaya. The apparent reason is the release of 'sex tapes' implicat-

ing Gubaya, also a Rai Sikh. This turned him and other Rais against the Badals. So he backs Bittu for these polls. "*Pata nahin, jhadoo na chal jaye* (I can't be sure, but the broom might sweep us up)," says Ravneet Kaur, a housewife who attended an AAP rally led by Delhi deputy CM Manish Sisodia in Jalalabad.

Further east, in Patiala, the Malwa region's eastern district, and in the urban areas of Sangrur, the Congress and AAP are snapping at each other's heels. "I always voted Akali, but now I am with AAP. I got tired of the Akalis treating us as a vote-bank," says Manjit Singh, a small shopkeeper at Patiala's Paranda Bazaar. Overwhelmingly, all but the older generation of Badal-Akali supporters say they want to signal their disenchantment by voting "for something different". "People didn't have a choice before—it was either Badal or the Congress. Today, there is a new option and it wears a stamp of honesty on its forehead," says Jaspreet, a chemist in Galbatti, a Patiala village.

The situation all parties want to avoid is a three-cornered contest, but in Majha and Malwa, where lie 90-odd of Punjab's 117 seats, this is exactly what seems likely in urban areas. "Sikh families often vote for the Akalis out of sheer loyalty," says Prabhdeep, a panchayat member of Bagrian in Sangru. "That is why, even though AAP was poised to win some time ago, now things are not that clear. Everyone is in the race." There is, however, still that matter of a silent vote—who knows, on election day, who will they shout out for. 

At many places across Punjab, people insist that the SAD and Congress pennants flapping all over their homes are no indication of where their sympathies lie.



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NO OUTSIDERS Workers of AAP on Panjim roads ahead of the assembly polls

Mine Out The Nexus

Criminality must first exit no matter which party comes to power, say Goans

BY PRACHI PRINGLAY-PLUMBER

JUST as a wave hits the shore and retreats, a strong roll of advancing water bounces over it. The noisy overlap is symbolic of two Goan leaders who, till recently, belonged to the same political camp. Their friction divided the ruling BJP in the tiny coastal state: a breakaway faction led by former RSS chief Subhash Velingkar is a party since last October. His Goa Suraksha Manch is now with the Shiv Sena and the Maharashtra Gomantak Party ahead of the February 4 assembly election. This has worked against Velingkar's protégé Manohar Parrikar, the defence minister with the NDA government. The two often spar.

A scholastic issue triggered it. Dispute over primary education in local language led to Velingkar's revolt. "Parrikar has cheated Goans. He also misled the RSS when this matter came up. The split was

over principles," says Velingkar, 68, seven years older than Parrikar, who was the state's chief minister for 32 months from March 2012. "We are sure of winning more votes than the BJP. There is absolutely no chance of a (post-poll) tie-up."

Velingkar, perhaps after suffering the challenge of being relieved by the RSS (in September last year) after 55 years of association with the Sangh, is prepared for any eventuality. "If things don't work our way, it's better we walk alone."

Parrikar faces flak for spending more time in Goa than in Delhi and controlling the BJP's affairs in his native state with 11 lakh voters. He is unruffled. "I will do whatever the party wants me to." Then, he asks, cryptically: "Is there any complaint of file delays in the defence ministry?" As for the Sangh support, the minister says he enjoys the confidence of "the real RSS of Nagpur", not of Velingkar (who held no post in the BJP anyway).

While the feud goes on, it isn't that the

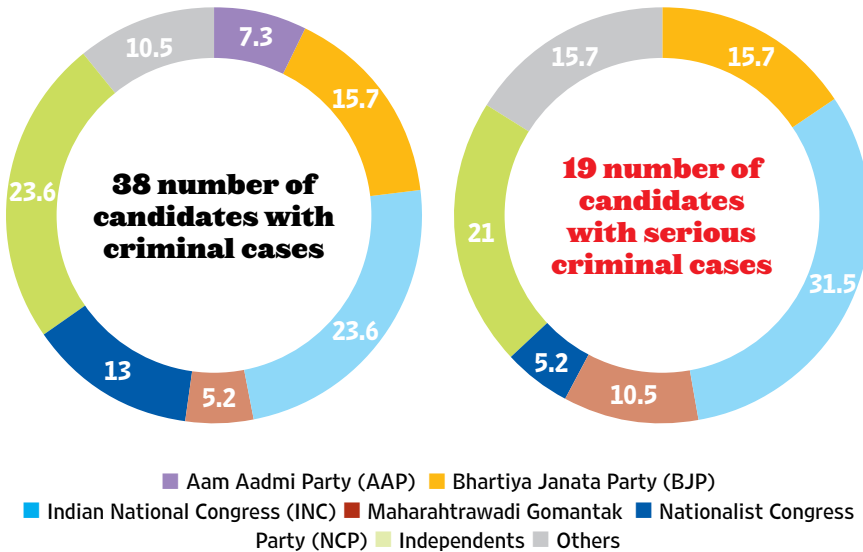
opposition Congress is able to capitalise on the split in BJP-RSS-Sena factions. Fraught with infighting, the Grand Old Party that won only nine out of the 40 seats in 2012 is most recently in a hot dispute over whether to forge alliances with smaller parties. In fact, two of its MLAs joined the BJP, but the Congress has put up a brave show, claiming the voters will give the party a majority.

"On battleground, we go united," claims senior Congress functionary Luizinho Faleiro, two days after party national vice-president Rahul Gandhi addressed a rally in Panjim. His colleague Digambar Kamat, an ex-CM, highlights a pending district hospital project in Madgaon. The party continues to find itself on the back foot when it comes to a core environmental issue such as mining. Its leaders predominantly hope for anti-incumbency—if at all.

The Aam Aadmi Party is a new story here. The nascent outfit has no baggage or skeletons of the past, yet most people are not expecting the AAP to trigger a political

CASINO COUNTRY KALEIDOSCOPE

Goa Election Watch and Association for Democratic Reforms analyse the self-sworn affidavits of all (251) candidates from the Goa 2017 assembly elections slated for February 4



All figures are in percentage

landslide even as they are appreciative of its efforts against corruption. While a few hoardings over a 60-km stretch from Panaji to south Goa talk about the BJP's failed promises and U-turns of Parrikar, images of current CM Laxmikant Parsekar are almost unseen in the state that has seen electioneering by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his party president Amit Shah, Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray, Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, his Maharashtra counterpart Devendra Fadnis and NCP supremo Sharad Pawar, besides Rahul.

Notwithstanding the placidity of its beaches and hills, Goa has residents largely disappointed with all political parties. "People needed a different option in 2012 because of rampant corruption in the Congress government," recalls Prasad, a fitness trainer, not wanting to divulge his second name. "The BJP could have done much better. They just brought up issues like grants for primary English education and closure of casinos, but didn't do anything. These weren't the most important issues for the common man."

Activists working for youth and for the state's fragile environment ravaged by illegal mining for years say political parties have not made sustainable mining an honest agenda. Estimates vary about the num-

ber of people rendered jobless or the loss to exchequer because of non-payment of royalty or undervaluing of extracts, but activists hope for a solution. "We need to adopt a system like Norway where a permanent fund is created and the government is able to get enough revenue," says urban planner Dean D'Cruz who works for the AAP, though he is not a member of the party. "For, the ore does not belong to the lease owners; it belongs to the people of Goa."

AP is the only party to have declared its chief ministerial candidate: Elvis Gomes. A former IG (Prisons), he has worked in the system long enough to know what ails the bureaucracy. "The AAP started serious preparations four months before anyone else did," he points out, readying for his door-to-door campaigning at 8.30 a.m. "We were the first to declare our candidates and to bring out party manifesto. We have given representation to five women and four ST candidates."

Gomes takes a dig at Modi's recent assurance of making Goa "more comfortable". "The state needs delivery systems with clear vision. This time there is an alternative," he says about the AAP, which has promised to monitor mining and to close casinos.

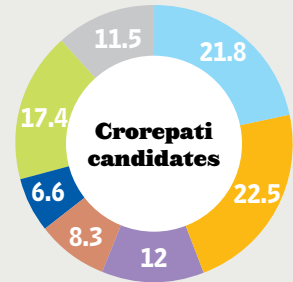
The state's gambling houses seem to have

● **Criminal background of candidates with criminal cases:** Out of the 251 candidates analysed, 38(15%) candidates have declared criminal cases against them.

● **Candidates with serious criminal cases:** 19 (8%) candidates have declared serious criminal cases against them.

● **Candidates with cases related to crimes against women:** Two candidates have declared cases related to crimes against women.

● 156 (62%) crorepati candidates
● Rs. 4.75 crore is the average assets of candidates




become an election issue with every party promising to shut them, but none actually doing it. "It has become a social problem because all parties are getting funds from them and the youth are losing all their income at the casinos," says an old citizen. "It has also become a starting point for crimes related to drugs and prostitution."

What bothers activists is increased percentage of candidates with criminal backgrounds. "One worries if this is the start of criminalisation of politics in Goa," says Bhasker Assoldekar, the state coordinator of the Association of Democratic Reforms, a 1999-founded national NGO that works for electoral reforms.

Youngsters, largely, refuse to attend poll rallies. "They somehow expect us to simply do some business around tourism. Job is the real issue," says a local youth. Chimes in his friend: "The Congress was corrupt, but they gave jobs to Scheduled Caste people. This government has not done even that."

Amid jokes about the candidates and manifestos, the commoners and experts predict a hung assembly, with the BJP taking the lead. The Church has advised voting against "communal" forces. Victory of independents and possible horse-trading will play a key role in the formation of the next government.



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Hinterlan

Bracketed between demonetisation and GST, Jaitley finds an occasion to quietly focus his



d In Sight

lens on rural India. Shoring up the fundamentals there may need more big ideas, though.



Photograph: JITENDER GUPTA

BY LOLA NAYAR AND ARINDAM MUKHERJEE

THE looming background noise of demonetisation, the rail budget's integration, a controversial advancement to February 1, the cusp of a crucial election season—Budget 2017 had a lot brimming around it that was circumstantially novel. And yet, in retrospect, the alarm among Opposition parties proved to be unduly excessive. They would have feared, perhaps justly, that the Modi government would roll out a gravy train with an eye on the five poll-bound states. However, finance minister Arun Jaitley's fourth budget—an exercise in balance that took great care not to upset any segment of voters without deviating from the path of fiscal prudence—had nothing in its content to evoke political uproar. "We were expecting fireworks, we got a damp squib," Congress leader Rahul Gandhi told media afterwards. The tone signalled more relief than disappointment.

Was the budget really a damp squib? Not really. There's a consensus among experts that the FM had to walk a tightrope to formulate this year's budget because there was little elbow room for him to paint in bold strokes across the canvas. For one, the economy is still coming out of the shock induced by demonetisation. And then, there's another big bang to look forward to—the indirect tax reform via GST, which will set in from July this year. Bracketed between two tectonic events, the FM had little cause to cook up another storm with his budget. For instance, there was a subtle tinkering in personal tax rates—which would halve the tax burden on those in the lowest slab—and not the grand I-T perestro-

COOL EYES Arun Jaitley's 2017 budget bears a non-controversial tone, seeking inclusive growth

ika dreamt up by social media speculators. The coming polls could have occasioned some populism, but whether out of political caution (because of EC diktats) or fiscal prudence, Jaitley didn't fall for the bait and instead went for quiet, long-term goals.

The budget's overarching tenor was a non-controversial one: pushing inclusive growth. This is to come about via a stepped-up focus on infrastructure, whether in rural development or the construction sector, especially through higher public investment. Judged against its own orientation towards the economic fundamentals, though, the budget also fell woefully short in many quarters, particularly in the vital sectors of health and education. India is in serious danger of eroding its demographic dividend—the largest young population on the planet will turn into a bleeding liability if quality education and nutritional indices do not get urgent budgetary attention.

To be sure, as a broad document of intent, the budget showed a keenness to address rural distress, especially after two years of drought. The government has taken care this year to step up investments in rural, agriculture and allied sectors by 24 per cent to Rs 1,87,223 crore. Development economist Jean Dreze is a tad underwhelmed, though. "The budget, along with the finance minister's speech, indicates yet again that the NDA government has little interest in social policy. The general pattern is one of roughly constant expenditure in real terms on social programmes in 2017-18, compared with the Revised Estimates for 2016-17. In a fast-growing economy, this is not good enough," he says.

Dreze cites cases like the National Social Assistance Programme (one of India's best anti-poverty schemes), the allocation for which has been kept constant even in money terms. Also, the central government continues to abdicate its legal responsibility to pay maternity benefits of Rs 6,000 per child to all pregnant women: the budget allocation for this is sufficient for barely one-third of all pregnant women in India. "More than lack of funds, what is striking is the lack of creative ideas and initiatives in the field of health, education and social security," says Dreze.

Development expert N.C. Saxena also feels this is an "incremental" budget—with "some increases but not enough to make a difference". In real terms, he too says, there is a "decline in expenditure provisions". The feel-good factors are not supported by adequate resources, says Saxena. For him,



UP.... To go big on infrastructure is one intent; below, UID card is multi-purpose

this could have been addressed by slashing many among the 960 government-run/subsidy schemes and channelising resources into better implementation of the good ones. The government is handicapped on the revenue side: only a 6 per cent rise to Rs 15.16 lakh crore is expected in 2017-18, as against the Rs 14.23 lakh crore revised estimate for 2016-17 and Rs 11.95 lakh crore in 2015-16. "If you are not expecting more revenue, you cannot spend

more. Much of the added expenditure will be on salaries," Saxena points out.

And yet, there is a distinct rural focus, consisting of a promise of better irrigation facilities and market linkages. And an intent to go big on infrastructure via affordable housing and transportation—roads, rail, waterways and airports. One tangible feel-good factor lay, of course, in the tax relief that would be substantial for those at the base of the pyramid. Clearly, the largesse is not just meant to improve tax compliance and widen the tax net (currently only 3.7 crore individuals pay tax)

but also to boost consumer sentiments and spending by putting more money in the pockets of middle-class consumers. The biggest gainers are the 1.95 crore taxpayers in the Rs 2.5-5 lakh per annum income bracket, with the FM slashing their tax liability by half to 5 per cent. Those in higher slabs too will get a Rs 12,500 tax relief—except those earning above Rs 50 lakh as annual income, who need to cough up a 10 per cent surcharge. Increased spending by the aspirational classes is expected to address the present challenge posed by large consumer goods inventories and, as a corollary, reinvigorate investments.

Similarly, micro, small and medium enterprises with a turnover of up to Rs 50 crore have been provided a 5 per cent tax relief, bringing their slab down to the promised 25 per cent. This is expected to encourage MSME units to move into the formal sector and also help create more jobs with bet-



GETTY IMAGES

"The budget indicates little interest in social policy," says economist Jean Dreze. "It lacks creative ideas in health, and social security."

TOWARDS WIDER DIRECT TAX

The idea is to hold maximum people in the net. For, data still shows low compliance.

THE Union Budget 2017 carries a distinct set of tax proposals for each of the three broad group of taxpayers—individuals, domestic corporates and multi-national enterprises. There are also a set of tax proposals to capture those who have historically avoided being in the tax net.

Coming to the first group of individual taxpayers, who the finance minister applauded for being honest and compliant, the proposals have two features: a marginal relief to those in the lowest tax-bracket (earning less than Rs 500,000 per annum) by reducing their tax rate to 5 per cent, and a surcharge of 10 per cent on those who earn greater than Rs 50 lakhs and up to Rs 1 crore. Those earning higher than Rs 1 crore were already subjected to a surcharge of 15 per cent. The finance minister's intent for not exempting those earning less than Rs 5 lakh from a personal tax liability, albeit it is quite nominal, is possibly to keep maximum people in the tax system. Hidden in the fine print: a tax deduction on housing interest on rental properties can be set off against other incomes (such as salary) only to the extent of Rs 2 lakh; it's possible to roll forward the balance to the subsequent year.


The domestic corporates have always been divided into various categories based on their income, as the surcharges and cess are varied as the earnings go higher. Now, to fulfil his commitment to lower the corporate tax rates, the minister has taken a staggered approach. Last year, he lowered the rate to 25 per cent for new



GOKUL CHAUDHRI

manufacturing companies that refrain from availing tax concessions. This year, he has lowered it for all the corporates with a turnover of less than Rs 50 crore. Maybe, the next two years, to fulfil his roadmap to lower corporate taxes to 25 per cent in four years since 2015, he could bring the rate down for all. A start-up gets an extended period of seven years, within which it can enjoy a three-year tax holiday. So, the corporate sector too has been given some reliefs that can help them improve bottom-lines, invest more and create jobs.

For multi-national enterprises, the transfer pricing rules have been a bugbear. These have been made more extensive with secondary adjustments. However, it is a relief that more sensible rules have been provided for indirect transfers.

The budget raised the concern that the anecdotal data still indicates a low tax compliance in India. Only 1.72 lakh people show an annual income of more than Rs 50 lakh. Holding the cash economy responsible for this situation, the tax laws now have a slew of measures to ensure the country moves to digital payment system (now both direct tax laws and the shift to GST is likely to help this initiative), build a wider robust tax base to enable sharing the tax burden with a larger number, and allow further reduction in tax rates. 

(The writer is leader, Direct Tax, BMR & Associates LLP. With inputs from Kaushik Saranjame, Director.)

ter social security. The tax relief to the lower middle class and MSMEs is a politically astute move that can also bring economic dividends. MSMEs with a turnover up to Rs 50 crore account for around 96 per cent of all companies in India and were among the hardest hit by the money squeeze in the wake of demonetisation, leading many units to temporarily shut operations and send home casual workers.

The farm sector, similarly, is in focus, with the target for agricultural credit in 2017-18 raised to a record level of Rs 10 lakh crore. Agricultural economist Dr Ashok Gulati calls the allocation for rural development “a way forward in the right direction, coming in the wake of two years of drought”. In particular, he is happy about the greater focus on creating and expanding irrigation facilities: the corpus of the Long Term Irrigation Fund, already set up in NABARD, has been doubled to Rs 40,000 crore to help achieve the objective of ‘per drop more crop’. The fund is to have an initial corpus of Rs 5,000 crore. Gulati is disappointed that “there is no radical reform as no attempt has been made to rationalise food and fertiliser subsidies that together account for a Rs 2,15,000 crore outgo.” He

did appreciate the provision for improving and expanding dairy and food processing facilities at the local level, though.

YET, the outlay of Rs 8,000 crore for dairy development and Rs 9,000 crore for higher insurance coverage for crops has left many dissatisfied. Raju Shetti, MP and leader of Swabhimani Paksha, the political wing of Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana of Maharashtra, says the “insurance enhancement will benefit insurance companies more than farmers. If this was a pro-farmer budget, it should have provisioned for a price stability fund to protect farmers’ interest, particularly when there is excess production. We have been seeking more infrastructure for storage, processing and exports, including cold storage, warehouses and packhouses etc. There is hardly any provision for these.”

For last few years, Shetti has been pressing the government to engage the Food Corporation of India (FCI) in helping farmers with the storage and marketing of crops like onion and pulses. Though Swabhimani Paksha has been supporting the BJP in Maharashtra, Shetti is upset that his party's political ally has not done enough to

keep its electoral promise to double farm incomes. “The government should at least try to bridge the growing disparity between the incomes and economic well-being of urban and rural populations,” says Shetti. “The BJP cannot expect any political gains if it does not address the real issues and concerns of farmers.”

Krishan Bir Chaudhary, executive chairman of Bharat Krishak Samaj, too feels the government could have done more to address the real issues of farmers, many of whom are leaving agriculture as “it is not a profitable enterprise. It can only be profitable if processing and value addition facilities are provided together with direct market links to consumers.”

Indeed, farmer leaders are positive about the thrust being given to agriculture marketing reforms, including e-mandis, and the plans to set up 600 skill development centres and soil testing labs in panchayats, beside encouraging entrepreneurs from the agri sector. Yet, there is also considerable dissatisfaction at the neglect of key reforms, including in PDS. Chaudhary calls for a proper assessment of outcomes, particularly with irrigation facilities, to know where the money has been spent. He cites

PTI



the example of Madhya Pradesh where improved irrigation facilities have considerably helped improve productivity without any additional technology inputs.

The proposals for infrastructure growth in rural areas have been appreciated by industry, which feels the measures will help push India's growth processes to the hinterlands. Says Shailesh Pathak, CEO, City-Infra Capital, "The budget is focused on 90 per cent of India. It would help youth, the poor and farmers. With focus on infrastructure, everyone benefits, since infrastructure is always pro-poor. After demonetisation, the budget will help push growth and investment, with additional resources coming from better tax compliance."

Pankaj Munjal, chairman & MD, Hero Cycles, echoes this. "There are no big-bang announcements, but there are small progressive steps. From a rural perspective, the increased allocation under NREGA also comes as good news. The finance minister's announcement of more impending steps to benefit farmers promises to help revive demand in the rural economy."

On the lack of 'big-bang' steps, experts

HALADHAR PM The budget has shown keenness to boost the farming sector

cite the many constraints and conflicts the FM had to overcome. Says Girish Vanvari, national head of tax with KPMG in India, "There were three main conflicts for the budget: the FRBM Act and fiscal deficit, how to spur demand as demonetisation had slowed demand, and how to convince people in the face of elections as people were largely unhappy post-demonetisation." At the same time, he says, there were many external constraints. These include the looming uncertainty over Donald Trump's policies and what those may portend,

Microsoft India's Anant Maheshwari supports "push of technology to aid a digital economy", latest instance being payments via Aadhaar.

the chaos that GST could bring in during its first six months, and uncertainties over how the monsoon will behave and how oil prices will move. Low crude oil prices for most part of 2016-17 helped India lower its import bill by 18 per cent. But with the price of India's basket of crude rising from \$39.9 in April 2016 to \$52.7 in December 2016, the import bill is likely to come under renewed pressure—and this may well spill over to the subsidy bill for kerosene and cooking gas too. This means a bout of popular anger may well be on the cards later this year, since the government has largely been committed to a policy of keeping a check on fuel subsidies to domestic consumers, and is not likely to reverse its stance. GST, simultaneously, will help its revenues through greater compliance.

The broad tendency to err on the side of caution and fiscal prudence—keeping the fiscal deficit target at 3.2 per cent—has been appreciated by the markets, which went up soon after the announcement of the budget proposals. Yes, the absence of a dreaded shock in the shape of a capital gains or inheritance tax helped too. In sum, the market response seemed faintly analogous to the political one expressed by Rahul Gandhi, albeit sarcastically.

"No big bold measures have been announced and most importantly, while he has not done anything to benefit people in a big way, he has not done anything to hurt anyone either," says Gokul Chaudhri, leader, direct tax, BMR & Associates. "It was a bold move to raise capital expenditure by 24 per cent in the given circumstances. The finance minister is trying to deploy sufficient amounts of capital to kickstart the economy. Despite the fact that revenue collection might not be as high next year, he has committed to growth."

Some sections of industry, particularly in the renewable energy sector, are feeling a little ignored. Besides solar power, the budget makes no provision for other renewable sources. Says Suzlon Group CMD Tulsi Tanti, "With a special mention about the drive towards 100 per cent electrification, the renewable industry was hopeful of an announcement to support the achievement of the government's RE target of 175 GW, and a long-term policy framework to achieve our INDCs and commitment made at COP-21 to reduce carbon emission to 30-35 per cent by 2030."

That said, the infrastructure sector is generally happy with the increased outlays. "The budget attempts to enhance domestic demand by increasing the outlay on

PROPOSALS PRAGMATIC, USEFUL

No big move on the indirect taxes front only means the country is set for July 1 GST rollout

DESPITE a last-minute uncertainty, the finance minister delivered the Union Budget 2017 in parliament as per the advanced date. It was announced with the stated agenda of TEC (Transform, Energise and Clean) India and based on ten distinct themes including proposals focused around farmers, energising youth, uplifting the poor and underprivileged, stabilisation of financial sectors and digital economy among others.

In line with the customary practice, the industry made a plethora of pre-budget representations covering sector-specific as well as general issues. The industry expectations included rationalisation of inverted duty structure, liberalisation of CENVAT credit rules and announcements of measures to promote 'Make in India' initiative.

The current budget seems to have partially met the industry expectations. The Budget seeks to encourage indigenous manufacture of solar panels, LED lights, by affording exemption and concessional rate to certain components for use in manufacture of such products. Also, levy of 2 per cent special additional duty on import of printed circuit boards for mobile phones is in response to industry demand—and is likely to foster domestic manufacturing. However, no incentives for manufacture of IT products such as desktops, laptops and notebooks in India have been extended.

Positive and pragmatic are the decisions to keep the service tax rate unchanged and abolishment of Research and Development Cess (R&D cess) levied in respect of import of technology. Doing away with R&D cess will make the import of technology cheap-



**RAJEEV
DIMRI**

er for service as well as manufacturing sector and thus complement the 'Make in India' campaign. The budget also provides the much-needed push to the 'Digital India' scheme by providing excise and customs duty exemptions on POS terminals, scanners and parts thereof.

As for 'ease of doing business', an amendment has been brought into the scheme of Advance Rulings, wherein it is proposed to also appoint a retired High Court judge as chairperson of Authority of Advance Ruling (AAR) in addition to a retired Supreme Court judge. This is expected to fast-track disposal of cases pending before AAR. The budget also includes proposals for amending the Customs law, thereby easing the prevalent procedure around import of goods and reducing the time involved in clearance of goods from customs.

The minister re-affirmed the government's commitment towards the GST rollout as per the scheduled date and also placed the progress card in respect of this tax. He also made a statement that most work around the GST legislative framework has been completed and the GST IT network would be ready as per the schedule.

Thus, with respect to indirect taxes, there have been no significant announcements in the budget in view of the impending GST implementation effective from July 1. All in all, the budget seems to be balanced and without giving any surprises to the industry, setting the platform for the introduction of the GST.

(The writer is leader, Indirect Tax, BMR & Associates LLP. With inputs from Poonam Harjani and Divya Mahajan.)

key economic and social segments as well as taking measures to improve the ease of doing business," states T.V. Narendran, MD, Tata Steel India & SEA. "Focus on areas such as ports, roads, affordable housing, physical infrastructure should provide the economy, the industry and steel sector the necessary impetus to meet its growth targets. This focus on infrastructure will definitely improve the efficiency and competitiveness of the steel sector."

AN area where the FM has laid significant emphasis is rural and affordable housing, which is expected to attract and benefit a lot of home buyers. Still, the lack of specific incentives to new buyers is seen as a drawback, particularly in a realty scenario where buyers continue to remain cautious. Says Anuj Puri, chairman & country head, JLL India, "The Budget missed out on giving any additional I-T incentives to first-time home buyers or providing higher tax savings on housing loans and house insurance premiums. Nor did it raise house rent deduction limits."

In the aftermath of demonetisation, the

continuing push to digital transactions has received an upbeat response, at least in urban centres—on the rural side, it continues to face huge challenges and the gap will take some more years to bridge. Experts are upbeat about the outcome of measures to push the digital economy and Aadhaar payments. While a fully digital economy is expected to yield a higher taxpayer base, reduce scope for evasion and improve compliance, Aadhaar-linked payments are expected to plug leakages in subsidy transfers and tax compliance loopholes.

Anant Maheshwari, president, Microsoft India, is fully supportive of the "continued push to using technology to aid a digital economy. I'm glad to witness the increasing focus on cyber security, which is critical to securing the economy's digital transformation." Mishi Choudhary, international technology lawyer, however, has misgivings over the move to expand Aadhaar for payments. "We applaud the focus on improving digital infrastructure. But the focus on Aadhaar without a right to privacy and data protection law shows lack of comprehensive policymaking. A democratic soci-

ety without rights for its citizens and security for its financial infrastructure may be efficient but is far from just," he says.

Many experts lean towards a broadly sanguine view though—in due course, they feel, many of these proposals, including the abolition of FIPB, Aadhaar, the digital push, and specific legislations like the Metro Act to promote and improve public transportation, would all converge to make the economy look much better.

But will it bring political dividends for Modi in the states going to polls or, further up the road, in 2019? Political economists are not too sure, given that there are too many gaps to be bridged in meeting people's aspirations. Joblessness is yet to be meaningfully addressed, and the levels of farm distress are such that a general tonic cannot bring about a miraculous recovery—or a bumper harvest of votes. The government pins its hopes on its big-ticket measures outside the budget. Within it too, there are little baits, like the proposal to confiscate assets of big defaulters like Vijay Mallya. Seeing the rich pay the price of fraud always has universal appeal.

PRUDENCE OV

Without digging deeper into borrowings, a better balan

BY ZIA HAQ

NOTHING outlandish. Nothing damaging either. Finance minister Arun Jaitley's fourth budget (his first was only for seven months) was a surprisingly measured one. Given that growth projections are lower than last year's, along with the demonetisation impacts, expectations of higher spending were high. And given the upcoming state elections, there was speculation that the budget could roll out big sops. Jaitley stuck to prudence, projecting a fiscal gap of 3.2%, deviating only slightly from the target of 3%. Net borrowings will remain flattish. The budget was somewhat disappointing to those hoping for a big income-tax relief as a reward for patiently putting up with demonetisation's pains. The overall downside is that if nominal growth (GDP not adjusted for inflation) ends up shorter than 11.7% as estimated, the government's goals could go awry. Budget 2017-18 unveiled a landmark shift in poverty alleviation with targeted poverty reduction based on the Socio-Economic Caste Census-2011 through Mission Antyodaya. Is this the NDA government's answer to the UPA's MNREGA? The decision to junk the Foreign Investment Promotion Board is significant; it will help India better its ease-of-doing-business score. To prevent dirty money masquerading as FDI, a new gate-keeping mechanism is however needed. The big misses in the budget announcements were, of course, a clear roadmap on the Goods and Services Tax and full details of money deposits, post-demonetisation.



Illustration by SAJITH KUMAR

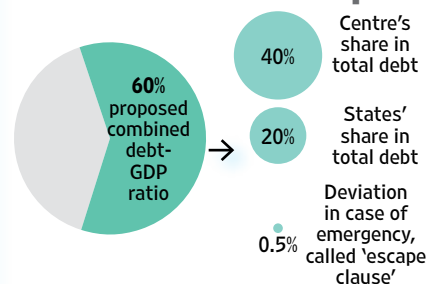
The macro picture

	Govt's wallet (in lakh crore, ^RE)	Fiscal deficit (% of GDP)	Revenue deficit (in %)
2015-16	17.9	3.9	2.5
2016-17^	20.1	3.2	2.1
2017-18	21.4	3.2	1.9

TAKEAWAYS

- The government's fiscal deficit at 3.2 per cent is only slightly higher than the target of 3 per cent. Clearly, the government is sticking to a path of fiscal consolidation.
- The rise in expenditure is to the tune of 10.7 per cent, almost similar to last year's rise.
- To achieve the fiscal-deficit target, nominal GDP growth must be 11.7 per cent as estimated. Any shortfall will spell trouble.
- Resisting the temptation to overspend augurs well for inflation.

FM hints at a new fiscal path?



TAKEAWAYS

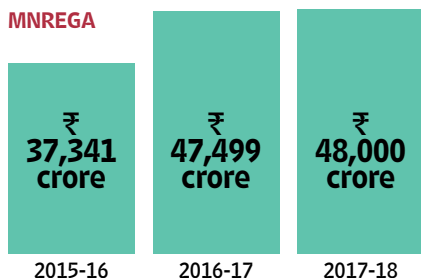
- These are the new recommendations for a fiscal roadmap by a committee that reviewed the FRBM Act, India's fiscal-discipline law.
- Although there is a case for higher spending, Jaitley said he is refraining from it
- The government could be deferring a big splurge to next year, closer to 2019 polls.

OVER POPULISM

Balance between pro-industry and pro-poor wasn't possible

Paradigm shift in poverty fight

MNREGA



BIG PUSH: MISSION ANTYODAYA

10 million
households to be pulled out
of poverty by 2019

50,000
panchayats to be made
poverty-free by 2019

TAKEAWAYS

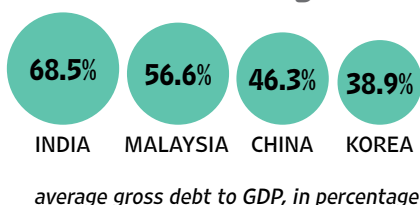
- Though MNREGA allocation is the highest ever, the effective raise isn't much. A substantial chunk will go into paying past dues of nearly Rs 3,000 crore.
- The government will introduce a composite index of poverty-free panchayats, a new poverty metric.
- The baseline for the new index will be created with data from the Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011, rather than the official poverty line.

How the government spends more than it earns

	Borrowing	Securities against small savings	Provident Fund	Others	External debt
2015-16	3.4	0.4	0.1	-0.1	0.1
2016-17	2.4	0.6	0.1	0.1	0.1
2017-18	2.1	0.6	0.1	0.3	0.1

Debt Receipts (Net), as percentage of GDP

Our debt-to-GDP is high



TAKEAWAYS

- The government's fiscal deficit has been progressively coming down, largely due to compliance with the FRMB Act.
- The government has limited ability to take on big debts at this juncture.
- Spending, therefore, is largely from within budgetary resources.

Key terms in the Budget

MULTIPLIER EFFECT An increase in input, such as spending, resulting in comparatively higher change in output or income across the economy

GDP The value of all goods and services produced in an economy

REVENUE EXPENDITURE Spending that doesn't go into asset creation, such as interest, salaries and subsidies

CAPITAL EXPENDITURE Spending that goes into asset creation, such as roads

TEC 'Transform, Energise and Clean' India, summing up the government's goals

Digital Push

GOING ONLINE, ALL THE WAY

Rs 3 lakh
cap on cash spending

Rs 745 cr
allocation for an Electronic Development Fund

3 million
more swipe machines to be added by Sept 17

250
number of electronic investment proposals under process

350
online training courses in collaboration with Microsoft under Swayam, a new scheme

1,50,000
number of panchayats to have broadband by end of 2018

Tax: Take some, give some

5%
Tax rate for income between Rs 2 lakh and Rs 5 lakh for all, from 10% earlier

10%
Surcharge on income between Rs 50 lakh and Rs 1 crore

15%
Surcharge on income beyond Rs 1 crore

25%
Lowered tax for small firms with turnover of Rs 50 crore

TAKEAWAYS

- Given the pain of demonetisation, people expected bigger tax sops as a reward. That didn't happen.
- The lowered tax rate for the Rs 2-5 lakh slab will result in savings of Rs 1,000 a month.
- 90% of Indian firms, which fall in the Rs 50 crore turnover bracket, will pay lower taxes now.



NEW SIGNAL There is a proposal to set up a Rail Safety Fund

PTI

Uneven Buffers

Fare hikes were anyway unlikely. The railways, in need of extra-budgetary funds, will look forward to finmin.

BY BHAVNA VIJ-AURORA

IF Suresh Prabhu looked relaxed after finance minister Arun Jaitley subsumed the Railway Budget within the general budget on February 1, it perhaps also masked the loss of an opportunity to helm a whole conceptual transition for the railways. Sure, Prabhu had been spared the onerous, but thankless job of trying to present a rosy picture of finances when none existed. He didn't have to spell out what happened to the High Speed Rail Authority, meant to implement the government's famous bullet train promise. Or how 48,000 hectares of vacant railway land could be monetised to shore up non-fare revenue. He didn't have to walk the populist track and announce a

slew of new trains and lines. He didn't even have to touch the tricky area of fare hikes—either risking one on the eve of crucial assembly polls, or letting status quo prevail and causing more harm to the financial health of the behemoth.

Instead, Jaitley made it easier by unveiling a new paradigm to fix passenger fares, essentially enabling a hike. Tariffs would henceforth be set “taking into consideration cost, quality of service, social obligation and competition from other forms of transport”, he said. Sources in Rail Bhavan told *Outlook* that by introducing these criteria, the finance minister has freed the railway fare structure from populist and political pressures. “A hike in fares, especially in the highly subsidised passenger segments, including sleeper and non-AC classes, will soon be announced. It can be

anything between seven to 10 per cent,” a senior railway official disclosed.

Fares in AC I and II were already pretty high and, what's more, this is the segment that faces competition from airlines. So there was little scope for a hike there, the official explained. “There's still some margin (for a hike) in AC III. But the main target is likely to be non-AC classes where barely 35 per cent cost is recovered by railways. Even taking social obligation into account, at least 50 per cent cost should be recovered,” he added. Suburban train fares, unchanged for years, could also see a hike.

Incidentally, Prabhu's pet theme of two years—a Rail Development Authority (RDA)—found no mention. Planned as an independent tariff and freight regulatory authority, its job was envisaged as delinking the fare and freight structure from political exigencies. The power to fix fares was to be transferred from politicians to technocrats, with the underpinning logic being economic rather than populist.

On a broader canvas, it was to be empowered to resolve disputes and ensure a level playing field for private investors. As for fare structures, a cabinet note on the RDA had underlined the nature of its autonomy. If the government did not

“accept” suggested tariffs, it would have to “compensate the organisation appropriately”, it said.

Even an enhanced gross budgetary support of Rs 55,000 crore against an annual capital expenditure fixed at Rs 1,31,000 crore—described as “unprecedented” by Prabhu—leaves the railways in need of extra-budgetary resources. “Since Jaitley has only announced the capex plan, it’s the duty of the finance ministry to help us find that money. Any debt by a body like railways is a debt of the government too,” Prabhu said after the budget.

A touch of controversy had already marked the Rs 94,000-crore capex figure for 2015-16, with railway officials themselves raising questions—at least 25 per cent of it was not actually used to create capital, they said, but included money extended to implementing agencies for future works and equity infusion into rail PSUs. “The railways will have to be completely transparent in showing how they utilise the Rs 1.31 lakh-crore capex,” a senior government functionary told *Outlook*. “They’ve shown they lack a mechanism to spend this kind of money.” The absence of a separate railway budget only sharpens the scepticism, he said. “Maybe the ministry should be asked to give some sort of a monthly report to the finance ministry.”

Safety was the other big theme. The railways have been badly floundering of late, with three derailments in as many months killing 200 passengers. Rail officials say there is too much pressure on the system, with poor, ageing infrastructure and little time for maintenance. The move to set up a ‘Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh’ (National Rail Safety Fund)—with a corpus of Rs 1 lakh-crore for five years—was welcomed by most. Says D.P.S. Sandhu, a former railway officer now with audit firm KPMG: “With one billion tonnes of traffic and 23 million passengers daily, safety can’t be undermined. The money needs to be spent carefully.” Prabhu says India is “in talks with countries like Japan to know the best global practices.”

Shifting the accounting method to an accrual system by 2018-19 was also a big reform step, according to Sandhu. The scrapping of the Foreign Investment Promotion Board may present a timely advantage to the railways, he feels, as it could robustly examine a new alternative source for funds. Listing railway PSUs such as IRCTC and IRCON on the stock exchange too will help unlock their underlying value, he feels. ■

OVERHEAD LINES ARE STILL IN A MANGLE

The hopes were many: quantum jump in project allocation, open-access system, network expansion.... None happened.

A great sense of anticipation had accompanied the news that the Railway budget would be made part of the general budget after all of nine decades. Such a bold step, it was thought, was surely a prelude to big-ticket railway reforms—after ports, highways and airways. But the first set of proposals under the merged document has not been particularly encouraging. It was natural for people to hope the railways, too, will move towards an open-access system and initiate network expansion with both state and private funding. One expected freedom for owners of non-government railway systems to set tariffs—plus a realistic, transparent formula to apportion earnings and expenses for inter-operated traffic. None of this happened.

Worse, we have been promised the continuing ‘autonomy’ of railways—perhaps meaning decision-making will still be guided by narrow organisational and local/political interests. This when a national perspective has been long awaited in new projects—imagine the symbolic and strategic takeaways in, say, having at least one new line project towards border regions.

A big thrust to infrastructure, rural development and poverty alleviation was expected in the post-demonetisation budget. Since committee after committee has been underlining the funds crunch in railways, it was natural to hope for a quantum jump in allocation, either as subsidy or soft loan, facilitated by the merger of budgets. But we got the opposite: gross budgetary support has been pegged at Rs 55,000 crore, a mere Rs 9,000-crore over last year. No clarity is at hand on how the railway safety fund is stocked; one assumes the central contribution to that goes out of this Rs 55,000 crore. If so, in real terms, budgetary support has dipped from last year’s figure. Take the total outlay of Rs 1,31,000 crore—an 8 per cent hike over last year. Now consider the 12-15 per cent annual price escalation on projects and a 6-8 per cent wage bill escalation, and do the math.

Again, the revised estimate for “safety-related activities” is Rs 63,063 crore for



SUBODH JAIN

2016-17. For the new fiscal, it’s Rs 65,975 crore—an increase of 4.6 per cent, which means what’s budgeted is 5 per cent less than the projected inflation. This when a paradigm shift is required to ensure reasonable levels of safety, without compromising on capacity and profitability.

This shrinkage will adversely affect industries that are solely dependent on the railways. Moreover, such a hand-to-mouth budget for the basics seems not a little ironic when seen against big-ticket ideas like Talgo, bullet trains, magnetic levitation and hyperloop.

The safety is broadly covering all relevant issues, but the approach is incremental and departmental. We need a paradigm shift to ensure reasonable level of safety without compromising on capacity and profitability. Time-bound implementation, too, will remain a big issue.

Station redevelopment and elimination of level-crossings have been a ritual of rail budget speeches. A lot of good work has been done on the latter front, and casualties have come down despite ever-increasing traffic on rural roads, but stations are still a sorry story. Of the three stations mentioned, railways will fund Gandhinagar and RITES will do Varanasi. Only Habibganj will be PPP, and only visible progress can remove question marks on private-sector efficacy in this area.

If fares are to be defined vis-a-vis the totality of factors—cost, quality, social obligation and competition—it could imply cheaper premium classes, and costlier sleeper, general and suburban travel. The removal of service charge is very welcome—it bore no moral rationale in the first place, being only a captive revenue stream for IRCTC to offset its losses elsewhere. The fast shift to solar power at stations and depots merits appreciation. Congratulations are also due for the Srinagar-Baramulla link being put back on track after it fell victim to dirty politics. Overall, ‘One Nation One Budget’ is a reasonable idea, being far less political, but this one misses the reform train. ■

(The writer is former member, mechanical, Railway Board)



SUBRAT DAS

A Mixed Bag for Social Sectors

A push to the rural and digital economy but not much for the rest

WITH the budget for 2017-18, the Union Government has continued adhering to the path of fiscal consolidation, which has resulted in the magnitude of total expenditure from the Union Budget declining from 13.4 per cent of GDP in 2016-17 (revised estimates) to 12.7 per cent of GDP in 2017-18 (budget estimates). In the wake of the impact of demonetisation on economic activities in a number of sectors, many would argue that an expansionary fiscal policy stance was needed at this juncture. The total expenditure is projected to increase to Rs 21.46 lakh crore, from Rs 20.14 lakh crore in the revised estimates for the current fiscal. This increase of Rs 1.32 lakh crore is mainly on account of an increase of Rs 35,000 crore in capital outlay across sectors and an increase of Rs 40,000 crore in interest payments in 2017-18 (BE). What this indicates is the absence of any significant increase in Union Budget allocations in most of the sectors.

With regard to budgetary priorities for the sectors where public provisioning of services and government interventions are directly relevant for the poor and underprivileged sections, development programmes for rural areas have received relatively better attention in this budget. The overall budget outlay for the Ministry of Rural Development has been stepped up from Rs 97,760 crore in 2016-17 (RE) to Rs 1,07,758 crore in 2017-18 (BE). However, the only scheme under this ministry that seems to have witnessed a significant increase in the allocation is Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Rural (from Rs 16,000 crore in 2016-17 RE to Rs 23,000 crore in 2017-18 BE). But one should also take into account the increases in allocations, in 2017-18 (BE) over 2016-17 (RE), for some of the programmes under other ministries such as the National Rural Health Mission (from Rs 19,462 crore to Rs 21,189 crore), the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) - Rural (from Rs 10,500 crore to Rs 13,948 crore) and the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (increased from Rs 5,189 crore to Rs 7,377 crore). Thus, one would not be off the mark in acknowledging that the 2017-18 Budget does make an attempt to step up government interventions in rural areas at least to some extent.

The other social sector ministries that seem to have got a better deal in this budget, as compared to their outlays in 2016-17 (RE) include the Ministry of

Women and Child Development (with its budget increasing from Rs 17,640 crore to Rs 22,095 crore) and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (the overall budget for which has gone up from Rs 40,995 crore to Rs 50,281 crore).

On the other hand, there are several social sector programmes for which the allocations in 2017-18 (BE) are either at the same level as those in 2016-17 (RE) or only marginally higher. These include the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan and the Mid-Day Meal scheme, among others. This could have been influenced by a number of factors, one of which is the expectation that state governments would step up their shares of funding for these programmes in the post-14th Finance Commission phase. However, the government will not be able to address the problem of growing disparity in public spending on social sectors across states in the coming years, unless it continues to provide adequate budgetary resources for the central programmes in social sectors. The other factor underlying this stagnation in allocations could be the perspective that it is more important to improve public expenditure management so as to get better results from the programmes rather than putting more money into those.

Nonetheless, the changes introduced this year in some of the budgetary processes (like, advancing the presentation of Union Budget to push ministries to expedite fund flow and a consolidated outcome budget covering all ministries) are steps in the right direction. But these steps alone won't be very effective in improving the results from the government's spending in social sectors; district planning committees and decentralised planning in schemes need to be strengthened and the problem of acute shortages of staff across sectors needs to be addressed fast. Moreover, while doing away with the plan and non-plan classification in this budget would help address the problem of non-plan expenditures being neglected by most states, too much emphasis on the other classification of public expenditure, i.e. revenue and capital expenditure, could be problematic for important social sectors like education and health, where large proportions of government spending are reported as revenue expenditure. ■

(The author is with the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability, Delhi)

The budget makes an attempt to step up the govt's role in rural areas to an extent.



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What does budget 2017 hold for you?

Here's what you need to know for growing your wealth while partaking in the country's economic growth

BY PREETI KULKARNI AND
NARAYAN KRISHNAMURTHY

THIS year's budget showered benefits on a vast majority of Indians. For most taxpayers, a portion of finance minister Arun Jaitley's speech must have been music to the ears, when he said, "I propose to reduce the existing rate of taxation for individual assesseees between incomes of Rs 2.5 lakh to and Rs 5 lakh to five per cent from the present rate of 10 per cent. This would reduce the tax liability of all persons below Rs 5 lakh income either to zero (with rebate) or 50 per cent of their existing liability." But, the benefits under the personal taxation ended right after this statement

On the flipside, the rebate on tax payable of Rs 5,000 now stands reduced to Rs 2,500 in view of the cut in tax rate for this category. The move to reduce the tax rate at the lowest level to five per cent has been done to widen the taxpayer base. But, the big shift is towards simplifying the tax filing process for those in the lowest tax bracket with a single-page form, which will remind many of the Saral form of the bygone days. The budget has also introduced a provision where the first-time income tax return filer may not face any scrutiny.

OF THINGS TO COME

Cleaning up of the tax anomalies is an aspect that this government is serious about—be it the ending of tax loopholes on which the fixed maturity plans (FMP)

floated by mutual funds thrived before July 2014, or bringing in equal lock-in among similar financial instruments, which ensured that no single financial instrument unduly benefits from tax lacunae.

This approach was the basis on which several investors in equities and equity mutual funds were worried during the past few weeks when the issue of bringing in changes to the lock-in period of investments in equities was being discussed. A one-year holding period in equities is considered long term and gains from exiting

Equities are the only asset class that beats inflation. The long-term average return from the Sensex is 16 per cent and it is tax-free.

investments in them after a year are treated as long-term capital gains, which is nil. To some extent, the logic of reducing the holding period of investments in land and real estate from three to two years, tries to bridge the holding period gap.

For first-time taxpayers, the assumption that they will be at the lowest tax bracket to begin with is being unfair to young Indians, many of whom enter the job market with salaries that put them in the highest tax bracket. For first-time taxpayers, the

minister said there will be no scrutiny in the first year of filing taxes irrespective of the tax bracket they fall in. This brings respite to taxpayers in the five per cent tax bracket, who will be subject to easy tax filing with a single-page tax filing form.

Likewise, to curb false house rent allowance (HRA) claims, in case of payment of house rent exceeding Rs 50,000 a month, it has to be accompanied by a five per cent tax deduction at source (TDS). Deducting TDS on HRA would mean there would be a trail that can be easily examined by the tax department. This measure seems to have been introduced because the earlier requirement of furnishing the PAN number of the landlord while claiming HRA benefits was being misused. This way, the loopholes are being closed.

TAX PLANNING 2017

This budget will change the way you plan your personal finances. The reason for such a change stems from the fact that money in cash in our lives will no more be the same. Mention of near-cash money instruments will get louder. Going by the returns one earns from banks in the savings account or even under the fixed deposits, one will be advised to earnestly get into the habit of setting aside money in liquid funds. These are a type of mutual fund, in which you can park the surplus for tax-efficient gains compared to bank savings.

Today, several AMCs have taken advantage of the digital medium, which makes it a tap of a few fingers for you to transfer money from your bank to these funds.

Nil

Tax paid by those earning Rs 3 lakh or less

5%

The new tax slab for those earning under Rs 5 lakh

Rs 12,500

Minimum tax savings for all taxpayers

Rs 3,900

Additional tax paid by anyone earning above Rs 50 lakh

THE NEW TAX SLABS

Individuals below age 60

Income slab (in Rs)	Existing income tax rate	Proposed income tax rate
Upto 2.5 lakh	Nil	Nil
2.5-5 lakh	10 per cent	5 per cent
5-10 lakh	20 per cent	20 per cent
Above 10 lakh	30 per cent	30 per cent

Resident senior citizens individuals (above 60 years of age and less than 80 years)

Income slab (in Rs)	Existing income tax rate	Income tax rate
Upto 3 lakh	Nil	Nil
3-5 lakh	10 per cent	5 per cent
5-10 lakh	20 per cent	20 per cent
Above 10 lakh	30 per cent	30 per cent

Resident super-senior citizens individuals (above 80 years of age)

Income slab (in Rs)	Existing income tax rate	Income tax rate
Upto 5 lakh	Nil	Nil
5-10 lakh	20 per cent	20 per cent
Above 10 lakh	30 per cent	30 per cent

Non-resident individuals


Income slab (in Rs)	Existing income tax rate	Income tax rate
Upto 2.5 lakh	Nil	Nil
2.5-5 lakh	10 per cent	5 per cent
5-10 lakh	20 per cent	20 per cent
Above 10 lakh	30 per cent	30 per cent

1. Surcharge of 10 per cent on income of individuals above Rs 50 lakh and less than Rs 1 crore (new levy)
2. Surcharge of 15 per cent on income of individuals above Rs 1 crore (existing levy)
3. Rebate under section 87A available to resident individuals reduced to Rs 2,500 (from existing Rs 5,000) and available only to individuals with income up to Rs 3.5 lakh (existing limit was Rs 5 lakh)

Yes, they do not guarantee returns, but experience them and you will find that what they offer is more than what the bank pays, and it is tax efficient to boot. Basically, unlike the interest that you earn from the bank savings account, which gets added to your income and is taxed accordingly; the gains from monies in liquid funds do not attract tax.

The near-end of guaranteed return instruments, lower interest rates and higher inflation are all ominous signs of the erosion of money's worth, if it is not deployed in instruments that beat inflation. One will have to get used to living with the global trend of high returns coming only with high risk. The only asset class that beats inflation is

equities and the long-term average return from the Sensex is about 16 per cent and it is tax free. This should be seen as an opportunity to not only grow your wealth, but also an option to partake in the economic growth of India.

Similarly, no matter how tempting it looks, do not think of parking your money in financial instruments just to save income tax. Use tax savings as a benefit that will also meet your overall financial needs. Every taxpayer will have additional Rs 12,500 this year because of reduction in tax liability, but what can a little over Rs 1,000 a month change in your life? Prudent investors know the benefit of investing every rupee. You could take a leaf out of their wisdom. 

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When the Houses Come Home

For scores of Indians, the dream to own a house may just have got the necessary push with this budget



BY PREETI KULKARNI

A 2016 report on the affordable housing space by real estate consultancy Cushman & Wakefield, indicated a 100 per cent rise in new launches in the first half of 2016 (H1 2016), in the affordable housing segment. If one goes by the announcements made by finance minister Arun Jaitley in his 2017 budget speech, the thrust on affordable housing has the potential to fulfil every Indian's aspiration of owning a house. Industry players in the segment and observers of the sector believe that granting infrastructure status to the segment will bring the housing dream within many home-seekers' reach.

"Easy and dedicated access to institutional financing and higher limit on external commercial borrowings will attract more investments and assure sustained growth of affordable housing in India, making it the core driving segment for real estate," says Brotin Banerjee, CEO and MD, Tata Housing. The speculative trend in the real estate sector ended post the financial crisis in 2008, which also changed for good lending norms for both builder and buyers. Several delayed projects also changed the appetite for buyers from bigger homes to smaller homes, as real buyers started scouting

for homes instead of speculators looking for a quick buck.


DRIVERS OF CHANGE

The definition of what qualifies as affordable housing and preferential lending to this segment have resulted in an increased demand for affordable homes. By introducing profit-linked income tax exemption for promoters of affordable housing projects in the budget is a boost for developers. "This is very significant," says Anuj Puri, chairman and country head, JLL India. "It will provide the vital budget housing segment with cheaper sources of finance including, but not restricted to, ECBs (external commercial borrowings).

HOME TURF Developers get a boost with profit-linked tax exemption

Also, re-financing of housing loans by NHBs (National Housing Bank) can give a leg up to the sector."

The 30-60 sq m limit measured previously as built-up area and now as carpet area, as also the applicability of the 60 sq m unit size at extended suburbs of metros as affordable homes, will bring more units under the revised description. "The 30 sq m limit will only be applicable within the corporation limits of the four major metros. For fringe areas of these metros and all other cities, it will be 60 sq m on carpet area. This will effectively serve to increase the number of projects falling under this segment," explains Puri.

"The infrastructure status will help increase resource allocation for the sector, catalysing housing supply and reducing the supply gap," says Banerjee, while calling for clarity on the definition of affordable housing. Moreover, developers of such housing projects stand to gain from relaxed deadline for completing their projects—it has gone up from three to five years. "The joint developers' liability to pay capital gains tax will be in a year after the project is constructed. This will be beneficial for landowners and land prices can ease; this benefit can be passed on to home buyers," adds Puri. 

At a glance

Reduction in the holding period for computing long-term capital gains from transfer of immovable property from three years to two years.

The base year for indexation is proposed to be shifted from April 1, 1981, to April 1, 2001, for all classes of assets, including immovable property.

Under profit-linked income tax deduction scheme for promotion of affordable housing, carpet area instead of built up area of 30 and 60 sq m will be counted.

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Quiet, Happy Fiscal

The focus on rural economy and infrastructure has lifted the hopes of the listed companies affiliated to these sectors

BY OUTLOOK MONEY TEAM

STOCK markets favoured 2017 Budget positively, with both the Nifty and the Sensex closing with gains on budget day, a trend that continued a day later. Some of the expectations of investors were met, such as a fiscal push for infrastructure investments and tax breaks in hands of consumers and corporates. In addition to this, the fear of the introduction of capital gains tax on equity holdings was nullified with no change in the status of taxation.

The budget stuck to a broader fiscal consolidation roadmap with fiscal deficit at 3.2 per cent of the GDP. This is a more responsible step to take in light of 7.9 per cent net household financial savings and increased pressure on state finances in the next fiscal year. The RBI is likely to perceive the budget as a positive event. A prudent budget combined with contained inflation

TIED TOGETHER FM and the market



GETTY IMAGES

NO FRILLS, NO FUSS EITHER

The FinMin's speech acknowledges the common taxpayer in an unprecedented way

ARUN Jaitley surprised me by delivering absolutely nothing in the fourth budget of his tenure as Union Finance Minister for taxpayers like me. Yet, what's right with this year's budget is a continuation of his earlier policies—Jan Dhan, Aadhar and Mobile and addressing India's infrastructure needs. He did not tinker much with the income tax slabs and neither did he change the holding period of equity investments, which would then have had an impact on stock market investments.

For the first time I found any minister being sympathetic to us salaried taxpayers who by virtue of the income tax system;



NARAYAN KRISHNAMURTHY

pay taxes before the salary comes into our accounts. Those in business, first spend the money, claim expenses on business and then settle to pay taxes. That is why; the income tax paid by many businessmen is minuscule. Many small business owners just file returns, and they manage to show their income as so low, that it barely ever crosses the basic tax bracket.

By acknowledging my contributions as a taxpayer in his budget speech, he definitely has managed a melodramatic connect. The masterstroke of demonetisation is yet to show any clear signs of how it will change the equations for tax evaders and cash hoarders. But, from what I hear, the big data compa-


SECTOR	BUDGET ANNOUNCEMENT	IMPACT
CAPITAL GOODS	Increased capital allocation to defence sector by 15-20% to Rs 900-950bn	Neutral BHEL, ABG and Thermax to gain
CEMENT	Affordable housing has been given infrastructure status Allocation for Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana – Gramin increased from Rs 15,000 crore in FY17 to Rs 23,000 crore in FY18 with a target to complete 10 million houses by 2019 for the houseless and those living in <i>kutcha</i> houses 100% deduction of profits allowed to developers on development/sale of residential units with carpet area (earlier built-up area) of up to 30sq.mtr. The National Housing Bank will refinance individual housing loans of about Rs 20,000 crore in 2017-18	All these measures are expected to boost cement demand as almost 2/3rd of total cement demand is driven by the housing sector. Ultratech Cement, Ambuja Cements, Shree Cement, J. K. Cement and JK Lakshmi Cement to benefit.
CONSUMER GOODS	MNREGA allocation increased from Rs 38,500 crore to Rs 48,000 crore Aim to bring 10 million households out of poverty by FY19 A slew of other positive measures have been announced for the rural sector 6% hike in excise duty on cigarettes – against 8-10% expectations. This is the lowest hike in past 6 years.	Positive for all consumer goods companies Positive for ITC (cigarettes)
OIL & GAS	Integrated PSU Oil Major - Merger of oil PSUs across upstream, refining and marketing (OMCs, ONGC, Oil India)	This is just a proposal and it's up to the individual companies to participate in the consolidation
PHARMA-CEUTICAL	MAT credit entitlementment period increased from 10 years currently to 15 years for all companies	Positive for companies with significant MAT credit entitlements - Sun, Alkem, Glenmark, Cadila, Aurobindo and Apollo Hospitals, among others
REAL ESTATE	Affordable housing awarded infrastructure status	Good for Developers and lenders focused on affordable housing Positive for building materials, sanitaryware, tile manufacturers and paint companies: Sobha Developers, Kolte Patil, Ashiana Housing, Godrej Properties, Somany, Kajaria
RETAIL	Change in income tax slabs for salaried individuals following in the income bracket of Rs 2.5 lakh to Rs 5 lakh has been reduced to 5%	Increase in disposable income will lead to increase in discretionary spending. Positive for all retail companies, QSR and theatre companies.
TELECOM	The government has stepped up the allocation for Bharat-Net Project to Rs 10,000 crore in 2017-18. By the end of 2017-18, high speed broadband connectivity on optical fibre will be available in more than 1.5 lakh gram panchayats.	Positive for Sterlite Technologies; no impact on telecom service providers

nies engaged by the government to snoop into banking and financial transactions will definitely bring in more people under the tax net.

A paltry 3.7 crore individuals filed tax returns in 2015-16 and in the same year, the number of people showing income more than Rs 50 lakh in the entire country was only 1.72 lakh. Today, the PAN card has become more of an identity card. There is a small sentence in the PAN application which states that the applicant is seeking a PAN as s/he expects their income to be taxable. So, we have about 25 crore PAN cards allotted in the country and last year alone, 24 lakh new Demat accounts were opened.

But, somewhere, the number of people who have the money does not match the number of people who pay taxes. Just by fixing this equation a lot can be achieved. By stating a long known fact that we are largely a tax non-compliant society in the budget speech was a mockery of the honest taxpayer. Yet, I am happy, that at least he had the gumption to go on record and state it and show the grit to do something to bridge this gap.

By discouraging cash transactions with measures spelt out loud and clear in the budget speech, the FM has left a very narrow window for people to hold on to cash. What this means even for the businessman who earlier thought he was smart keeping cash and reporting less income—he will have hardly any means to follow the old formula. He could sit on the cash, but the barriers that have been put to curb the use of cash, leaves him with no incentive to hold the cash. So, either he will need to spend it as business expenses and claim the depreciation benefits or simply show the real income, which will be taxed accordingly.

A simple but effective way of making tax evasion look scary is the fines on cash transactions that have been stated and anyway, the digital footprint on financial transactions leaves little room for escape. All these actions should result in more taxpayers than tax evaders. This is the biggest take away from the budget, which should make taxpayers take pride in it. 

(The writer is editor, Outlook Money)

MOVING TO FINANCIAL ASSETS

The current scenario makes for a compelling situation to invest lump-sum amounts

THE government has focused on creating a good macroeconomic environment in the form of low current account deficit, reasonable fiscal deficit and thereby, keeping a control on interest rates. The Budget has set in motion places where money comes into assets which are much more productive and positive for the economy like equities and fixed income, and doesn't flow into physical assets like gold and real estate, where incremental capital output ratio is not high. This focus is very positive for the mutual fund industry and we could not have a better budget from the point of view of the mutual fund industry and investor.

As a means to discourage incremental investments into physical assets, especially real estate, in this budget, the finance minister has brought about a change in the tax benefits extended to house property. This step is likely to drive people away from real estate. When it comes to gold, the yellow metal has hardly delivered any returns in Rupee terms. Before this, gold returns were a factor of the rupee-dollar exchange rates. Now with the country's current account deficit under control, the exchange rate is likely to remain well-balanced. Hence, gold is not really likely to be a favourable asset class with investors.

Given these circumstances, we expect the flows into the capital markets and other financial assets to remain robust in the near and medium term. The reduction in income tax in the lowest tax bracket



**NIMESH
SHAH**

is another move which will enhance savings in the hands of people. This will also positively help the capital markets. Overall, we expect corporate earnings to steadily increase over the next two years.

Budget 2017 provides the impetus for further growth in equity valuations. With the inflows into financial savings set to rise because of the broader budget moves, the market's price-to-earnings looks to get re-rated. Hence, investors should keep investing in financial assets regularly.

In terms of themes, we are highly positive on the infrastructure sector. The rural focus and increase in spending on infrastructure is a positive outcome. Giving infrastructure status to affordable housing is also a welcome move. We expect this sector to do well over the next two years. The government's support to this sector with its intent to improve the country's infrastructure is positive. This sector has been an underperformer for many years and investors will benefit due to current low valuations. Savvy investors can take exposure to this theme via infrastructure dedicated funds.

Another interesting theme that long term investors can currently consider is information technology (IT), which is poised to offer good risk-adjusted returns. Many of the names in this space are available at low valuation as the sector is currently facing some challenging times given the US political scenario.

(The writer is MD & CEO, ICICI Prudential AMC)

is bound to increase the scope of monetary easing at the margin.

Furthermore, the budget stated that the budgeted expenditure on infrastructure has been increased by 25 per cent. Market experts have cheered this, especially since private spending on infrastructure is poor. Any activity in the infrastructure space will have a trickle down effect in the economy. The impact is visible on HFC stocks, which are financiers to the housing segment which has now been granted the 'infrastructure' status. Stocks of developers, who are players in the affordable housing segment, are already benefiting from the stock market momentum.

"From the debt market point of view, the net borrowing levels have remained largely contained," feels Nimesh Shah, MD, Kotak Mutual Fund. "This has created headroom for further rate cuts by RBI later this week. The surplus liquidity due to demonetisation is also likely to find its way into the banking credit line over a period of time." The expectation that interest rates will remain low, will make commercial borrowings by the private sector very competitive. Those who have invested in duration funds

(long term funds) can continue holding their position for a few months more to take the full benefit of easing yields.

This is in line with the expected increase in corporate earnings over the next two years, which offers ample opportunities to invest in the stock markets at the moment with a five years investments time-frame. Other than infrastructure, the sectors that could gain from the budget announcements include cement, consumer goods, pharma and real estate. Another theme to look out for is the IT sector, more so from the US political perspective, which is currently at a low valuation, and offers opportunity for good risk-adjusted returns.

Shares of automobile companies and

PSUs also witnessed decent gains because the budget mentioned a boost for rural incomes and targets to raise revenue through disinvestment. Talks of introducing another CPSE ETF have fuelled interest in PSU stocks as well.

This budget has been balanced on numbers and projections. The corporate, excise and service tax targets that are proposed are reasonable and likely to be achieved. The implementation of GST from July 2017 may cause some hiccups at the implementation process but such teething troubles will get resolved in a couple of quarters. Likewise, the rural focus and increase in spending on infrastructure is a positive outcome to selectively invest in stocks that will gain from activity in the rural sector. The infrastructure status to affordable housing will definitely impact the BFSI sector favourably.

With the Budget now behind us, the focus will shift back to the execution, corporate earnings and global cues to factor in when selecting stocks and entering sectors. The Trump era is already posing trouble for the IT sector, one should watch the market movements more closely.

Increase in spending on infrastructure is a positive outcome. Time to invest in stocks that will gain from activity in the rural sector.

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**AJEYA SINGH**

Towards A Less Cash Economy

From a discretionary administration to a policy-based one

NDIA has been weaving the mantra of digital economy and all efforts have been streamlined in this direction. The demonetisation of the physical economy translates to the remonetisation of digital economy. In addition to remonetising with bank account money and private e-monies, India should also remonetise the economy with 'digital India Rupee' to secure its monetary sovereignty and monetary policy effectiveness. The 2017-18 budget has been welcoming for the national agenda of digital India. With digital economy being one of the key focus areas in this budget, we are sure that India is set to embrace a radical change in achieving this vision. This budget shapes initiatives in transforming the country from discretionary-based to policy-based administration and from an informal to a formal economy, as indicated by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.


The Union Budget 2017-18 is critical as it places high importance on improving the digital infrastructure of the country, while looking to explore the appointment of a payment regulator to revitalise the existing payment system along with other recommended structural reforms as per the Committee on Digital Payments. This is a welcome initiative towards efforts we are driving in the digital fiat currency (a legal tender backed by the government that issued it) space. These are the key recommendations made in the Watal Report that clearly indicates the way forward for digital India. This further reiterates the budget's focus on garnering a better reach to rural and semi urban India, which can be achieved through this digital fiat currency. While the budget has been optimistic in taking additional steps, we expect that radical changes will take place in the months to come. The budget further strengthens the vision of a cashless economy by capping cash transaction limits to Rs 3 lakh and ordering political donations in cash to be limited to Rs 2,000. With a view to creating transparency in the system and better regulation, these initiatives complement each other.

Any technological solution chosen to issue the digital India Rupee should ensure that the Ministry of Finance and Reserve Bank of India can discharge their legal responsibilities as the sole providers of coins and notes, and separate the role of the nation as currency issuer from the role of payment system

operator. No solution based on consensus of a network of peer-to-peer participants would fit this basic principle, let alone security, performance and cost considerations. Hence a sovereign digital currency has all the necessary prerequisites to be termed as a fiat currency.

The aspect of interoperability with a digital fiat currency bridges the gap between banks and non banking institutions with the common man. It brings more innovation and competition, can protect consumers better, and it means more open access; it can manage better systematic risks and functions with more regulatory transparency in digital economy. While the industry continues to stride for innovations and new payments systems for digitisation, it becomes critical to note that there is a cost for infrastructure that is required to support these systems for an efficient digital payment infrastructure and grievance handling systems. With a digital currency that can operate with the existing infrastructure under a secure environment, there will be ease in ensuring mass usage for such a currency.

According to IMF, India is one of the fastest growing economies in 2017, so transformational reforms, like mandates for a digital India, are the need of the hour. This government's initiative for financial inclusion and the JAM trinity has set a strong background for digital transactions. There is visible increase in digital push currently with the schemes driving the BHIM app, Aadhar pay, UPI, IMPS, NEFT, USSD and debit or credit cards.

The budget adoption of recommendations made by the Committee on Digital Payments, when fully implemented, will cumulate in the deployment of the digital Rupee. Further recommendations made by the Committee on Digital Payments as noted in the budget are being reviewed and will be implemented shortly. A digital India Rupee will contribute immensely to the key objectives of the 2017-18 budget by reducing black money, reducing tax evasion, providing better public service, protecting the digital money supply from cyber counterfeit and expanding the user base in rural areas for a truly digital economy. 

(The author is former country head, India, Lehman Brothers and Credit Suisse, India)

A digital India Rupee will contribute immensely to this budget's objectives.



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CNN Asia Business Forum is back for its second year in India to explore new ideas, innovations, and technologies that will shape India's economic future.

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BY INVITATION ONLY

Date: Monday, February 13, 2017
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Confederation of Indian Industry



**RAMESH
ARUNACHALAM**

A Cautiously Optimistic Budget

This new economy blueprint is calm and shows foresight

BUDGET 2017-18 is historic in more ways than one. The first of the post-planning era, this budget comes in the wake of the “tectonic policy initiatives” in the form of demonetisation and the adoption of the upcoming GST. The budget needed to be a roadmap providing policy direction to an economy that has showed signs of stagnating post-demonetisation. The aim was to provide growth stimulus in the form of increased allocation on infrastructure development, put more disposable incomes in the hands of the middle-class, to influence spending patterns impacted by the cash crunch, and most importantly, to encourage wholesale adoption of digital financial systems so as to achieve the government’s stated objective of a ‘less cash’ economy.

Going by these parameters, it must be said that the Finance Minister has not disappointed, even if he has not taken the full-on radical approach that was expected in the wake of demonetisation. The budget has ticked the right boxes in terms of an increased resource allocation for agriculture, rural development, infrastructure, poverty alleviation and schemes oriented towards marginalised sections, the youth and women. The special emphasis on the rural economy and the informal sector in particular is much warranted, given that these sectors were the worst hit during demonetisation. As expected, and as should be the case, there is a definite thrust on infrastructure development with a record allocation of Rs 3.96 lakh crore.

There has been a huge hike of Rs 1 lakh crore in the agricultural credit targets for the coming fiscal. This is apart from the Rs 20,000 crore long-term irrigation fund that is being set up under NABARD (National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development) and increasing crop insurance coverage to 50 per cent over the next couple of fiscals.

Relief to the MSME (Micro Small and medium Enterprises) sector, which witnessed a significant loss of jobs and productivity in the wake of demonetisation, has come in the form of a cut in corporate tax with an estimated 96 per cent of the companies expected to benefit from this. Flexibility in terms of time-frame during which to avail tax holiday benefits has also been provided to eligible SMEs. Tax rules have also been simplified for the sector with a view to ensuring greater tax compliance and the accrued revenue benefits to the government.

The 2017 budget allocations point to a clear shift towards ‘Digital India’.

The real estate and housing sector has received a much-needed boost with affordable housing being provided infrastructure status. A change is also on the cards in terms of capital gains tax for housing with the holding period for land and building to be reduced to two years from three years.

A significant increase in funds allotted to MNREGA also means increased investment in the social sector with the objective of achieving the government’s goal of ensuring that one crore families are brought out of the poverty bracket within the fiscal. While increased allocation might be a good thing on the face of it, there are serious anomalies that need to be addressed in execution and delivery if the poor are to truly benefit as also the local infrastructure development projects that they are most often engaged in. The middle-class dream of increase in income tax exemption limits hasn’t been fulfilled but a carrot has been held out in the form of a 50 per cent reduction in tax rates for incomes falling within the Rs 5 lakh bracket.

A big ticket announcement has come in the area of campaign finance reform with cash donations to political parties capped at Rs 2,000. Any donations in excess of the same may either be accepted in digital form or cheque/bank draft or in the form of RBI bonds that they can redeem after a specified period. This could be labelled a case of ‘walking the talk’ to a degree, what with the government demonstrating that political parties are not exempted from the rules and standards applicable to the common man.

The continued emphasis on the shift to a digital economy is demonstrated by the fact that a Rs 10,000 crore budget allocation has been made for increasing broadband coverage. Cash transactions in excess of Rs 3 lakh have been disallowed, clearly with an intent to furthering the twin agendas of demonetisation i.e. anti-corruption and the shift to digital financial systems. All taxes and duties on PoS machines have been cut to encourage e-payments, although there has been no proposal to bring down the service charges and other additional levies to help people used to the comfort of cash make the digital switch.

In all, the budget can be labelled as one which generates a quiet optimism for the future even if there aren’t too many big bang announcements for the present. 

(The author is an economic development and strategic advisor, who has written several books)

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“It was disgusting that some people tried to defy the SC verdict”

Rajendra Mal Lodha, during his tenure as the Chief Justice of India from 2008 to 2014, handled the 2G scam and the coal scam, officially pegged at Rs 1.86 lakh crore by the then Comptroller and Auditor General of India Vinod Rai. On January 30, the Supreme Court appointed Rai chairman of a four-member Committee of Administrators (COA) to run the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI)—a first in the 88-year existence of the world's wealthiest cricket organisation—and oversee its structural and governance reforms. As chairman of the COA, Rai will also ensure that fresh elections at the BCCI and its state affiliates were held as per the Lodha Committee recommendations approved by the apex court. Lodha, 67, is confident that the COA is a “good mix” and would have no difficulty in implementing the proposed reforms. Widely known for his impeccable credentials and clean image, Lodha tells Qaiser Mohammad Ali in an exclusive interview that the BCCI assignment was a “unique experience” and “an entirely different cup of tea” for him. Excerpts from the interview:

What is your impression of the four-member committee of administrators the Supreme Court has appointed to oversee BCCI?

I think the selection is a reasonably good mix. Vinod Rai is a top bureaucrat and has handled many departments. Vikram Limaye is a corporate person, and has been managing companies. Diana Edulji knows cricket from inside. And Ramchandra Guha is also a knowledgeable person with an interest in the game; my committee had an interaction with him in Bangalore [on the BCCI case]. This four-member panel must implement the reforms that we suggested and the court accepted. I don't think there will be much difficulty. Of course, it's a challenging task, but under the watchful eyes of the Supreme Court, the COA would be able to do it.

Will this panel get a free hand to implement those recommendations?

Yes. Now, they are the administrators, so I think they will take up the matter with BCCI's state associations. With their financial constraints, I think the state associations will realise there is no way out, but to fall in line. It may take some time, but it will be done. The Supreme Court has not fixed a timeline for that.

When do you see fresh elections to the BCCI taking place?

The Supreme Court asked us in its July 18, 2016, order to implement it and also fixed

the timelines. So, the first task was to amend the by-laws of the BCCI and the state associations, and the last thing was to hold elections, with a lot many things to be done in between. Elections can't be held under the old rules as that would serve no purpose. First, all that we have suggested must be brought to the statute book; once that's done, everything will fall in place.

Was this the toughest case you have handled so far?

I wouldn't call it the toughest, but it was an entirely different cup of tea, particularly the structural reforms. Awarding punishments to the two delinquents [IPL franchisees Rajasthan Royals and Chennai Super Kings were suspended for two years each for their role in the 2013 IPL betting-fixing scandal] was not that tough because we had been doing that as judges too. But suggesting structural reforms was a challenge.

Some big names were involved in this



Nobody wants change, especially a change that brings transparency... Therefore, there will be opposition to reforms, as it affects a few individuals.



case—industrialists, politicians, ministers. I am sure you knew this.

Yes, we were conscious of the fact, but to us it hardly mattered. We were not concerned with who the administrators of the BCCI were. We were given a task that we accepted as a challenge and we did what we thought was for the betterment of the game. Before I retired, I had handled the coal allocation case, which had big political repercussions, besides other cases. That way, I don't think there was any such thought in my mind.

Did your panel face any resistance from the BCCI officials?

Not at all. Like the first exercise regarding punishment to delinquents, as soon as we issued notice to the then BCCI secretary Sanjay Patel, asking him to send us the rules etc, he immediately appeared along with his secretary, appointed the treasurer [Anirudh Chaudhry] as the nodal officer and gave us whatever information we wanted. And whenever we issued sum-

mons or issued notices, it was no problem... even when we started the second exercise regarding the structural reforms.

Was it difficult to implement the same Memorandum of Association in both the BCCI and its state associations.

Our suggestions were to the effect that it hardly mattered. Even if they remained a society or a company all these changes could have been brought in.

But in the Supreme Court, the Attorney General of India has raised this difficulty. He gave the example of the Delhi and District Cricket Association, a company. Do you still think that your recommendations can be implemented in companies too without altering the existing Companies Act?

Of course. These changes can be brought in because the recommendations prescribe certain eligibility—what should be the governing body, what should be the administrative body etc.

For a cricket body, which would be better—to be registered under the Societies Act or under the Companies Act?

We have said in our report that it would be desirable if all the members of the BCCI, i.e. all the state associations, have a uniform structure. That's what we have suggested. The report doesn't give emphasis on whether a body should be a society or a company, but its ultimate objective was that there should be separate governance and management. Governance should be in the hands of elected office-bearers and management should be in the hands of professionals who know how to administer a company or a society professionally.

But some people say that the Lodha Committee has intruded in their domain, overstepped its brief.

Everyone wants status quo; nobody wants change, especially a change that brings transparency and takes their functioning to the public domain. That is because everyone likes to keep whatever they do inside closed chambers, so it doesn't see the sunlight. Therefore, there will be opposition to reforms, particularly because it affects a few individuals.

After Shashank Manohar became BCCI president for a second time, he announced several measures to be taken, as per your recommendations. Had he been there now, would it have been easy to implement the reforms?

I wouldn't guess, but Manohar met us a couple of days before he became president. Most of our suggestions that we

discussed were implemented. Now, what would have been the position had he continued is anybody's guess. Surely, he looked to be quite objective and was also interested in achieving transparency in the BCCI's functioning.

Did the audacity of the state associations in repeatedly refusing to implement reforms surprise you?

Not only were we surprised, we were actually shocked because the highest court's judgement is the last word in the country and everyone has to obey it. We were shocked there were people who could try to overcome the highest court's judgement. It was a little disgusting. Being from the judiciary, we believed that rule of law was supreme, and once the Supreme Court passes a judgement, it is accepted by everyone. So, if somebody tries to defy that, obviously it hurts you.

Some BCCI officials alleged your committee interfered in the board's financial matters, including an imprest account.

We didn't touch any financial matters. We didn't want to do that. That was the reason why in our reports we had requested the court to appoint administrators. The CEO was dealing with the finances. Once he wrote to us that some amount was to come to the BCCI from some IPL franchisee and, because most of these accounts were not operational, he wanted guidance from the committee as to where that amount should be deposited. He said the only account that was being operated was the imprest account and we said, "Okay, you deposit it in that account."

There is confusion over the maximum tenures for officials. Is it a total of nine years or nine years separately at the BCCI and the states? The court recently redrafted this recommendation for clarity, but confusion prevails.

It's very clear. After the report was accepted by the court on July 18, lots of emails came to us. Instead of responding to all these mails—one of them related to nine years at the state associations and nine years at the BCCI—we put up a few FAQs on the committee's website. One of the FAQs related to this aspect—whether it was nine years cumulative or nine years separately. We had clarified, with regard to the language in our report, that it would be nine years in the state associations plus nine years in the BCCI, but with mandatory cooling-off periods. It is clear; it is in black and white. Then what seems to have happened is that on January 3 this year, amicus curiae Gopal

Subramaniam mentioned the matter and made a request to the court that in the January 2 order, which was passed a day earlier, a clarification should be made that nine years is cumulative of the state associations and the BCCI. And the Supreme Court passed that order. As soon as that was brought to our notice, and since a Supreme Court order is binding on all of us, we said that our earlier FAQs and the report have to be read as directed by the court. So it should now be, nine years in all and not separately.

But your committee's intention was not a combined nine years in total, isn't it?

That wasn't our intention, but the Supreme Court is the final interpreter, whether of a law or a report. So if it has interpreted it in a particular way, it's the final word. No committee or anybody else has the authority to change the Supreme Court order.

The attorney general, who represented Railways, Services and the Association of



Awarding punishments to [Rajasthan Royals and CSK] was not tough as we had been doing that as judges too. But suggesting structural reforms was a challenge.



Indian Universities (AIU)—BCCI members whose votes are proposed to be taken away—remarked in the court that if bureaucrats or ministers from these three institutions can't attend the BCCI meeting, then who else can. Did your panel appreciate this aspect while recommending a bar on ministers and bureaucrats as cricket administrators?

Yes. We discussed it threadbare that they were not required to be continued as members of the BCCI because they don't have territories of their own; the states have their territories. We have given the reasons [in the report] why Railways, Services and Universities should not continue to remain as regular members. Once they are not regular members of the BCCI, obviously the eligibility that we have prescribed for office-bearers would have no relevance for associate members.

But this step has made the three institutions angry.

This matter is sub-judice, therefore I wouldn't like to comment further on it.

The three institutions say they are very old members of the BCCI.

That is applicable to the Cricket Club of India [founded 83 years ago] in Mumbai, the Kolkata's National Cricket Club [founded 65 years ago], the three associations of Maharashtra and the three associations of Gujarat. But we have given reasons why there should be one state-one vote, and why these associations shouldn't continue to have regular [full] membership.

Since your committee submitted its report, CJI T.S. Thakur has retired, a new bench headed by Justice Dipak Misra has come in, there are now two amicus curiae. Is there any apprehension that your recommendations may be diluted?

No. Two things should be very clear. When we submitted our report on January 4, 2016, they were recommendations, and on July 18, when the Supreme Court accepted most of the recommendations, they became a part of the court order. Once the report got the seal of approval, it has merged into the order of the court—and now it too is the order of the court. Once it is an order, it should be clear it's binding on all and has to be implemented. People come, people go. Individuals don't matter in institutions. The July 18 judgement is the judgement of the Supreme Court. Unless the court changes it or makes any modification as per the legal processes available, it remains as it is. And when it remains as it is, it has to be obeyed and implemented, even though the judges may have changed. There can be a delay, but it has to be implemented.

The Mukul Mudgal Committee, which probed the IPL betting-fixing scandal, submitted to the Supreme Court a sealed envelope containing some names. Did your committee also discuss that?

The Supreme Court order told us that if it was necessary for the committee, in giving its report on structural reforms, to look at the part of Justice Mudgal's report which has those names, then the committee was free to look into that and do whatever it felt was necessary. But since there was no connection between the structural reforms and that part of Justice Mudgal's report, we didn't deal with that part. That's what we reported to the court. It was not necessary and, therefore, we have not seen that [the contents of the envelope]. □

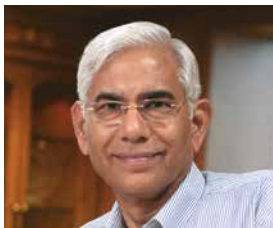
BY QAISER MOHAMMAD ALI

In October 2004, Ranbir Singh Mahendra, the newly elected president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), and his co-office-bearers secured a stay from the Supreme Court against a Madras High Court order that sought to stop them from functioning. The high court had also appointed retired Supreme Court judge Justice S. Mohan as the BCCI's interim administrator. Dalmiya and his team of lawyers successfully thwarted Justice Mohan. Mahendra's rule lasted a year, before Sharad Pawar came roaring back to avenge his defeat, inflicted by Jagmohan Dalmiya's famous casting vote in Mahendra's favour.

In 12 years since, a lot has changed in the BCCI, though not always for the better. Dalmiya has passed away; Pawar has been forced out of cricket administration by the Lodha Committee's SC-approved recommendations; Mahendra's son Anirudh Chaudhry, who has been treasurer since 2013-14, could be on his way out after the SC in January ordered some other office-bearers to "forthwith cease and desist from" the board; and the IPL 2013 betting-and-fixing scandal has tarnished the BCCI's image massively.

The ongoing court case is an offshoot of the IPL scandal and has led to the proposed reforms in the board. To implement the reforms, the SC has appointed a four-member Committee of Administrators (COA) to oversee the transition to the proposed constitution and, eventually, the holding of elections under the new rules. The COA is chaired by former Comptroller and Auditor General Vinod Rai, with Vikram Limaye, Ramchandra Guha and Diana Edulji as members.

Under Rai, CAG reports blew the lid off the multi-crore coal block allocation scam and the 2G spectrum scam in 2014. Limaye, managing director-cum-CEO of IDFC, has contributed to various committees of government and industry associations involving infrastructure, economic policy, markets, trade, minority affairs and so on. Guha, an acclaimed historian and writer, has been a staunch



GAME-CHANGERS?

(clockwise from top left) Vinod Rai, Ramchandra Guha, Diana Edulji, Vikram Limaye


Thakur and secretary Ajay Shirke from the BCCI.

Besides the task of implementing reforms across the BCCI and its state affiliates, the Rai-headed COA will have to ensure the success of the 10th edition of the IPL, scheduled to start on April 5, despite the uncertainty surrounding it. Sources say the ousted BCCI officials would like to see the IPL disrupted. "After all, a scuttled IPL would reflect poorly on the SC, the Lodha Committee and all those in favour of change, and give the impression that only the ousted officials could run a smooth show," says a BCCI insider.

IPL is the BCCI's second most lucrative source of income, after the media rights of the national team. This income is also distributed among the BCCI's affiliates, so the states too stand

to lose in case IPL isn't staged. Also, due to the ongoing court battle, the process for the IPL television and digital rights contract, which was set to be awarded for the 10 years starting 2018, has been put on hold.

On the field, although India has played two bilateral series with New Zealand and England, a one-off Test against Bangladesh and a four-Test series against Australia is scheduled for February-March, and BCCI-run tournaments are taking place, cricketers' annual contracts have not been decided as yet. Usually, the contracts are announced in September.

The BCCI is facing trouble on another front—employees' exodus. In the last two years, several prominent people have either left, disenchanted with the atmosphere in the board and "absence of HR policies", or have been asked to leave. IPL COO Sundar Raman, production unit head James Rego and General Manager (Communications and Coordination) Amrit Mathur were part of the exodus and could well nurse a grouse or two about the "volatile place", as one of them described the BCCI. Well, it seems the administrators have their work clearly cut out. 

Gang of Four Leads the Charge

The BCCI's Supreme Court-appointed administrators have their task cut out

critic of the BCCI and IPL. Diana, a former captain of India women's cricket team, has often taken up the cause of women cricketers.

On January 31, the very first day of taking charge, the COA made its presence felt by barring outgoing joint secretary Amitabh Choudhary from convening a meeting of the selection committee to pick the team for the one-off Test against Bangladesh, set to start on February 9. The day before, on January 30, a three-member SC bench, headed by Justice Dipak Mishra, had asked the COA to scrutinise the work done so far on the Lodha Committee's recommendations and submit a status report in four weeks. This order effectively makes the COA members the new BCCI 'office-bearers' as the bench had already, on January 2, barred president Anurag

The Committee of Administrators will have to ensure the success of the 10th edition of the IPL, scheduled to start on April 5, despite the uncertainty surrounding it.



**DESH GAURAV
SEKHRI**

LAYING A RISKY, BOUNCY PITCH

An overhaul on this scale has never been tried anywhere

ON January 30, more than two years since it had appointed the three-member committee headed by former Chief Justice of India R.M. Lodha, the Supreme Court of India passed what would likely be its final order on the reformation of cricket and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). Six months after its historic verdict on July 18, 2016, in which it had accepted most of the Lodha Committee's recommendations, the court appointed a four-member panel of administrators, headed by former Comptroller and Auditor General of India Vinod Rai. The other members are former Indian women's cricket captain Diana Edulji, historian Ramchandra Guha and IDFC MD and CEO Vikram Limaye. By appointing this panel, the court brought closure to the matter and likely put an end to any further requests for review or curative petitions against the July 18 verdict. With this appointment, the transition to cricket's reform will finally begin.

The court stayed true to its objectives and appointed a panel that represents what it aims to achieve by reforming cricket—good governance, accountability, players' representation (inclusive of women's cricket) and a voice of reason for the fans. Working primarily with BCCI employees led by its CEO, himself a relative newcomer to cricket administration and appointed by the erstwhile regime, the panel has a lot to do. The time is short, the pressures are many, and neither the panel nor the Supreme Court, one assumes, is expecting it to be easy. Moreover, it is not permanent—a fact that must be taken into account before assuming this is merely a new kind of status quo. The panel has its role cut out—ensure the implementation of the Lodha Committee's recommendations and create a framework that allows arms-length systems of professionalism and governance models, paving the way for transparent and meaningful elections that usher in an era of accountability.

And yet uncertainty abounds. The BCCI and the state associations have vehemently opposed certain aspects of the Lodha Committee recommendations, deeming them unacceptable or impractical. Acceptability concerns have been dealt with by the court and will not be tolerated anymore. But what could be a concern is the ability to expeditiously implement the Lodha Committee reforms and en-

sure that measures are introduced to keep them in place effectively and not just optically present.

Another concern is how the Indian Premier League (IPL)—a major casualty of this conflict so far—will be managed. Decisions that impact the IPL, including the imminent broadcast rights tender for 2018-28, must be taken in the next few weeks.

The Lodha Committee roadmap is seen as a panacea for sportspersons, reformists and fans. Already, the Supreme Court has agreed to hear a petition made in a PIL by a group of 28 Olympians seeking the implementation of the Lodha Committee recommendations across sports, to reform the National Sports Federations. The respondents are the Sports Authority of India, the Indian Olympic Association and, interestingly, the Union of India. It is likely to be listed before the same bench—Justice Dipak Misra, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, and Justice A.M. Khanwilkar—that passed the final order on January 30 announcing the panel of administrators.

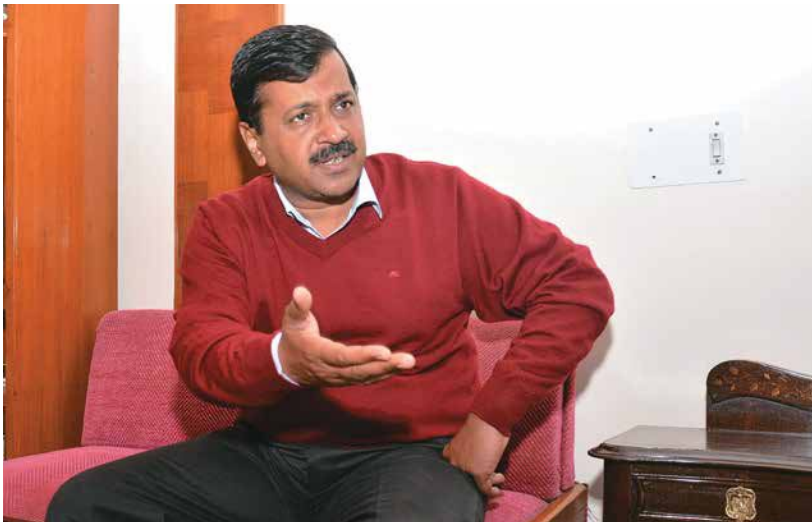
The Supreme Court ruling on the Lodha Committee recommendations has its share of sceptics too, who feel a successful administration that has led Indian cricket to unprecedented heights has been unfairly and unceremoniously displaced and replaced for no defensible reason. This is what makes the entire upheaval a high-risk move, which, if it fails, could send sports reforms into a tailspin. And there is no certainty it will succeed.

Continuity in the BCCI has been a double-edged sword and, eventually, the cause of its downfall. However, to expect the panel of administrators to be able to acclimatise and pick up where the BCCI left would be unfair, given the sheer volume of urgently pending matters that will demand attention. An overhaul on this scale has never been attempted anywhere in the world, and its impact on all other sports will be determined by its success or failure in reforming cricket. Should it succeed and create an arms-length professional culture that operates as international sports leagues do, it could steer Indian sport away from historical futility and a feudalistic structure, placing it on par with the elite sports nations. The intent has been admirable; implementation and feasibility is what will really matter now. ❑

(The writer is a sports lawyer and author of Not Out! The incredible story of the Indian Premier League.)

The upheaval in BCCI is a high-risk move. While success is uncertain, failure could send sports reforms into a tailspin.

'Forget surveys, AAP will get 100 seats'



PRABHJOT SINGH GILL

The Delhi chief minister and AAP national convener is camping out in poll-bound Punjab, challenging the state's mighty war-horses: ruling Shiromani Akali Dal and the Congress. He tells **Pragya Singh** why his party, though new in Punjab politics, is looking for clear majority.

Pre-poll surveys say the AAP is number two or three in Punjab. What's your prediction?

Most of the media is corrupt now. I don't think any 'survey' is being conducted. These are all being faked. The media makes crores (of rupees) during elections. To publish incorrect and fake surveys is criminal. We will take this up.

We should get 100 (of the 117) seats. They were saying we are weak in Majha region, but not any longer. There's an upsurge for us. It is going to be uniform (support) for the AAP.

A few weeks ago, the Congress wasn't talked about as much, but now it has come back in towns, even villages. Is the AAP slipping?

I don't agree. It's the Congress that is sliding. We, in fact, dominate rural areas, which form 70 per cent of Punjab's population. Among cities, Patiala is entirely voting for us. Jalandhar too, so is Amritsar. Patiala too?

Yes, yes, even many journalists have surveyed it in the last two weeks. They have distinctly noticed that the AAP is what people are talking about.

There is another tendency in rural Punjab: avid support for the Akali Dal. Jat Sikhs, it is said, will back the Akali symbol. The panthic (faith-based), too, support the Akali Dal.

The AAP talks only about one thing: truth and honesty. That touches the heart of everybody—Sikh, Hindu, Muslim and Christian. We are honest and that shows in our body language, in what we say. That's what people like about us.

There are strong rumours about the AAP sympathising with separatists, that you stayed at the house of a 'separatist's' relative.

This is complete nonsense. The house I stayed in has three flats. In one lives an SHO of Punjab Police, in one a joint commissioner of the local municipal corporation and in the third, our volunteer—my host. If it is a terrorist's house, how come a joint commissioner and station house officer live there?

What will you consider your 'success' in Punjab?

We will consider ourselves successful after the election results are out. We'd start running the government and fulfil our promises; that will be our success.

What are your promises?

We have to wipe drugs out of Punjab. Also corruption, waive loans of farmers, resolve traders' problems, provide jobs to youth.

All parties make similar promises...

The difference lies in what promises are believed. We have done what we said we would do. In Punjab, whoever talks about us says two things. First, that they have tried both parties (Akali Dal and Congress) and now only the AAP feels convincing to them. Second, they say that they have spoken to their relatives who live in Delhi. And those relatives have told them what all we have done in Delhi. Delhi's example is speaking for itself in our favour.

So the AAP needs a majority in Punjab, or you won't be able to showcase your work?

Yes, we want to demonstrate the corruption-free government we spoke of during the Anna Hazare movement. In Delhi, we achieved this to the extent within our control. The rest they (Centre) did not let us do.

In Punjab, they will not be able to put roadblocks in our way. We will bring an end to corruption here. All Punjab's problems are ultimately related to corruption. There is *nasha* because they (Akalis) want to make money. There's crime because there is corruption. Industries fled Punjab because of a monthly 'goonda tax'...

Yet the discourse in Punjab is only getting vitiated. Even you said, on the NRI issue, that you'll show the Congress its 'aukat'...

How can Amarinder Singh (Congress' CM candidate) say NRIs would not be allowed to enter Punjab even for relatives' last rites? Is he now calling all NRIs separatists when he says this? □

The people of Punjab have tried both Akali Dal and Congress. AAP alone is convincing for them now. They know, from relatives, what we all have done in Delhi.



UTV-DISNEY

DANGAL

Approximate Budget:*

90 Cr

Collections

385+ Cr

Too Many Play

When Hollywood studios entered the Indian film market, they were being touted as the

BY GIRIDHAR JHA

WHEN Divya Rao, erstwhile member of the creative team of UTV Motion Pictures, chanced upon a small newspaper write-up on an ageing Haryana wrestler, Mahavir Singh Phogat, and visualised the potential for a gripping biopic on his life story way back in 2012, she could hardly have anticipated that her small idea would become the highest-grossing film in the history of Indian cinema five years later.

Dangal, Aamir Khan's spectacular hit, has been breaking box-office records left, right and centre since its Christmas

release. With a business of more than Rs 385 crore in the domestic circuit alone so far, it has infused a fresh lease of life into the 104-year-old industry, reeling under demonetisation in the past few months.

Dangal is believed to have benefited everyone associated with the film. And yet, Walt Disney Productions, which has co-produced the film with Aamir Khan Productions, seems set on its decision to opt out of the movie production business altogether in Bollywood. As of now, Ranbir Kapoor-Katrina Kaif's *Jagga Jasoos*, slated for an April 2017 release, may well be the last Hindi movie to roll out from the famed Hollywood stable, which had acquired UTV Motion Pictures in 2012. And Disney is only following the script of other

Hollywood studios—with many of them, having entered Bollywood at a time when the industry was overhauling its financial model, being unable to stay in the game.

Under normal circumstances, *Dangal's* phenomenal performance at the turnstiles might have prompted any other studio to plan its next blockbuster, but not Disney. Faced with financial setbacks caused by the failure of big-budget movies such as *Mohenjo Daro* and *Fitoor* last year, Disney decided to shut down its movie-making wing in B-town citing "the challenges with the current economic model for investing in the local film industry" without even waiting for the outcome of its at-the-time ambitious under-production project, *Dangal*. Disney India will, however, continue



ers In El Dorado

game-changers. Now, they are planning to quit the game they couldn't quite comprehend.

its operations in other areas such as television, animation and Hollywood projects.

Given the fate of some of the big-budget Bollywood movies made by the big studios in recent times, many had seen it coming, though. "The big studios and other corporates have their own style of functioning as well as model of film-making," says Pahlaj Nihalani, chairman, Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). "These companies review their business models every fifth year and take decisions on the basis of their profit and loss margins."

Nihalani, who was a leading producer for more than two-and-a-half decades before Bollywood was taken over by the big studios, says all the corporates involved in film business are listed companies in

the share market. "Their fate in the stock market is determined by the success or failure of their projects. While reports about their films doing Rs 100-crore or Rs 400-crore business boost their prospects on the bourses, flops force them to review their business models," he says.

Despite its past graph, *Dangal* might have given a flicker of hope for the Hollywood major to rethink its decision, but the studio is yet to take any call in this regard. Disney India did not respond to *Outlook's* questions or phone calls to reveal its future plans with regard to Bollywood films.

A few weeks before *Dangal*, the studio had stunned Bollywood by announcing that it would concentrate on Hollywood movies as part of its credo "to periodically

review and align its business priorities in response to evolving market dynamics".

Ironically, the shift in the studio's focus was announced in a year when it had raised the box office bars not only for Bollywood films but also for Hollywood movies released in India. In 2016, its Hollywood production, *The Jungle Book*, pulled off a business of approximately Rs 188 crore, becoming the biggest-ever Hollywood grosser in the country. The studio followed it up in style towards the year-end with *Dangal*, replacing Aamir's *PK* as the most successful commercial Hindi film ever.

But that hardly turned out to be any stimulant for the studio to roll back its decision. In the past two years, there has been a substantial growth in the business



of Hollywood movies, both originals and dubbed Indian language versions. The last *Spiderman* movie was even dubbed in Bhojpuri. A studio such as Disney apparently wants to tap the immense potential of Hollywood projects instead of backing risky Bollywood projects. Disney had a huge disappointment in the Hrithik Roshan-starrer *Mohenjo Daro* last year. Made at an approximate budget of about Rs 125 crore, Ashutosh Gowariker's directorial venture could only collect a measly Rs 53.66 crore at the box office, dealing a big blow to the studio which had pinned a lot of hopes on the Hrithik-Gowariker team, which had the success of *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008) on their resume. That was not the only disappointment of the year for the studio. At least three other big-budget movies—*Fitoor* starring Katrina Kaif and Aditya Roy Kapoor, *Tamasha* featuring Ranbir Kapoor-Deepika Padukone and the Saif Ali Khan-Katrina Kaif-starrer, *Phantom* bit the dust one after another. Other Disney flops included *Katti Batti* and *Sala Khadoos*, which incurred losses not so small as to be offset by the profits earned by random hits such as *Baaghi*.

But how could Disney lose out on hope despite giving a historic box-office hit like *Dangal*? Trade experts believe

that in a superstar-driven industry, it is Aamir who might have walked away with the lion's share of the film's profit, leaving the studio with little to cheer about.

Nihalani agrees. "Today's film-making is dominated by seven to eight big stars. Film-making used to be a team work in the past, but now it is the stars who dictate the terms in all aspects, creative or commercial. They make movies for their own banners or those of their friends and relatives. Their share in the profits is, at times, as high as 70 to 80 per cent. So even in case of a massive hit, it is the star, not the studio or the co-producer, who emerges as the biggest beneficiary."

Bollywood analyst Nitin N. Sethi says that stars such as Aamir deserve to get such profits. "It is not right to blame big stars for all the financial problems besetting these

studios. An artiste like Aamir Khan puts his heart and soul into a project and does only one film at a time. If he gets a substantial part of the profits, he thoroughly deserves it because at the end of the day, his star appeal pulls in the crowds," he says. "It is basically the unprofessional manner in which some of these studios are running in India that has harmed their prospects."

Sethi avers that if the foreign studios are in a mess, they are themselves to be blamed. "Why is the same studio which earns millions of dollars through Hollywood movies unable to deliver money-spinners here? There must be something drastically wrong in the way they do their business here."

Sethi, also the co-founder of Bollywood portal glamsham.com, says the studios do not make judicious decisions in selecting their projects and end up paying the price for it. "Even before Disney, big studios such as Warner have exited Bollywood. Others like Fox Studios and Viacom are also struggling now." Sethi has a point. Disney is not the only big studio facing the heat of duds in recent months. Fox Star Studios had its own *Mohenjo Daro*-like damp squib when Anurag Kashyap's *Bombay Velvet* crashed despite a big star cast. It also had other big flops in *Akira* and *Traffic* last year but

"The film star's share in profit is as high as 70-80 per cent. So even in case of a big hit, it's the star, not the studio, who emerges as the biggest beneficiary."



managed to tide over the crisis with the good returns generated by *M.S. Dhoni – The Untold Story* and *Neerja*.

Fox Star Studios too had entered into a Rs 500-crore deal with Karan Johar's Dharma Productions some time ago to co-produce and distribute nine films. Their partnership has since borne fruit with *Kapoor & Sons* and *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil* clicking at the box office, but other big-budget projects under their joint banner such as *Shandaar*, *Brothers* and, more recently, *OK Jaanu* failed to live up to expectations.

Eros International too had its share of flops last year, the biggest being *Rock On 2*, sequel to the 2008 movie that marked Farhan Akhtar's acting debut. The success of Akshay Kumar's *Houseful 3* was the saving grace. Despite the duds, the company remains undeterred and plans for many movies. Another big studio, Viacom 18 Motion Pictures, also had box office turkeys like *Force 2*, *Budhia Singh Born to Run* and *Santa Banta Pvt Ltd* in 2016. It had scored its last hit in *Pyaar ka Panchnama 2* in 2015.

In the past, other Hollywood majors such as Warner Brothers and Sony Pictures have also dabbled in Bollywood film production only to burn their fingers. Out of the eight movies made by

Warner Brothers, six turned out to be disasters in box office parlance—Akshay Kumar-Deepika Padukone starrer *Chandni Chowk to China* (2010) being the major letdown. Warner has not made any movie since 2011. Sony Pictures had a disastrous debut with Ranbir Kapoor in *Saawariya* (2007), and its biopic *Azhar*, where Emran Hashmi played the former Indian cricket captain Mohammed Azharuddin, also failed to click last year.

MANY in the industry believe most studio honchos and their management-savvy teams lack in a vital, though intangible ingredient: a sharp movie sense. "Movies are a creative business but they tend to treat cinema merely as a commodity," says a former employee of a Mumbai-based big studio who does not wish to be identified.

She may well have a point. Compared to foreign studios, the home-grown ones such as Yashraj Films and Dharma Productions, nurtured by the likes of Aditya Chhpora and Karan Johar, have had far better box-office records because of their film background while those run by the corporate bosses, innocent of the nitty-gritty of showbiz, have floundered over the years. From Reliance Big Pictures and PVR Pictures to Sa-

hara Motion Pictures and Saregama's movie division, many Indian corporates failed to make any impact in tinsel town.

Nihalani believes that the current model of film-making is not conducive for the growth of the industry in the long run. "Hollywood studios and corporate houses will have to change their model of film making if they want to survive," he says. "Bollywood is immensely popular even abroad, so the movie business will survive with or without them. It's only the model of film-making that will keep changing. The film industry is like a *musafir khana* (inn) where people come and go."

The CBFC chairman says that the studios will have to make "Hindustani" films, such as *Dangal* and *Sultan*, having a pan-India appeal, to stay afloat. "The studios will never succeed if they keep investing in the multiplex-centric movies meant for select audiences only. Even Shahrukh Khan had to reinvent himself with *Raees*."

Nihalani, however, also has a word of caution. He thinks that any model will go bust if the stranglehold of big stars is allowed to continue. "How long will the reigning stars at the top continue? May be in five years or so from now, this model will collapse if nothing is done to nurture new talent the way it used to be done in the past." □



Rani's Crown May Slip

Poor rains can take the juice out of business in pineapple's Indian homestead this season

BY MINU ITTYIPE

PRICKLY-skinned and many-eyed on the outside, sweet and golden yellow on the inside, this variety of pineapple is simply referred to as the Rani in the Indian market. Except for a few states like West Bengal and those in the Northeast that still prefer the pulpier and milder Raja (Cayenne pineapple variety), the Rani holds most of the Indian palate under its spell. Delhi with ambivalent preferences enjoys both Raja and Rani, but Mumbai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Chennai, Hyderabad, Latur, Satara, Nagpur, Kota...and even some rural areas are diehard Rani loyalists. The Rani, which belongs to the Queen Cultivar (Mauri-

tius) variety, grown in Vazhakulam and round about, is trucked all the way from central Kerala right to the farthest end of Kashmir, and even hops across the Wagah border to the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Afghanistan. And these two countries, despite the high transportation costs can't get enough of the succulent, sweet Rani. There are always enquiries for more, but the logistics of getting the fresh fruit across the border bogs down exports.

Vazhakulam, known as Pineapple City, is a thriving agri-town. Post demonetisation, the pineapple prices had plunged vertiginously, but now it has steadied at Rs 25 to Rs 30 a kg—and farmers are hoping to recover their losses in spite of a weak winter monsoon. As the summer scorches in, the

demand for fruits increases. Unlike the seasonal Raja grown in Assam and West Bengal, the Vazhakulam Rani has the advantage of fruiting through the year. Though the pineapple traders still operate from its place of origin in Ernakulam district, the Vazhakulam farmers have spread themselves across Kerala taking with them their knowledge of cultivating the perfect crop.

They take land on lease to cultivate the crop. Traditionally, pineapple is grown as an intercrop during the first three years of rubber replanting, but now it is even grown as a pure crop. According to the Pineapple Farmer's Association, Kerala has at least 30,000 acres of land under pineapple cultivation whose productivity is 3.25 lakh tonnes per annum and the turnover from the pineapple busi-



ALL IN HEAPS Pineapples being loaded in Vazhakulam; right, at the village mela

ness is about Rs 700 crore per annum. In 2009, the GI (geographical indicator) was registered for Vazhakulam Pineapples.

There are big and small farmers cultivating pineapple in Kerala. They think that this year, even if the prices are good, it is going to be tough. The rains have failed during the peak harvesting season between September and January. While, two years ago, there was a glut in the market when the prices crashed to less than Rs 13 per kilo. James George, a pineapple farmer in Vazhakulam, says the growers were hoping for a technology developed to dry the fruit in such a situation. "But this year, we are worried productivity will come down considerably because of land unavailability and the decrease in rainfall," he says.

Baby John, 55, who has been growing pineapples for 30 years and now has over 400 acres of crop, recalls that the Vazhakulam farmers were, in the 1960s, also cultivating the Raja pineapple that was sup-

plied to the canning and juicing industry. "There were processing units around here and much of it was being exported to Russia. The Russian markets collapsed, after which we switched over to the Queen variety—and found that there was a good Indian market for this table variety," he says. "The Vazhakulam variety was developed slowly. We had always supplied to Chennai and Bangalore, but in the '90s we entered the Mumbai market. Now the Vazhakulam pineapple dominates the market; so is the case in Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh."

Jose Thomas is a partner with Classic Pineapple Traders in hilly Thodupuzha of adjoining Idukki district, and has been in the pineapple trading for three decades. "It's during Ramzan that the demand peaks in Hyderabad and Mumbai. The pineapple enzyme bromelain helps in digestion of proteins; so the Muslim community consumes a lot of fresh pineapples during this period," he points out. "In places like Mumbai, from the small retail shops to the big five-star restaurants, it is the Vazhakulam pineapple that sells. Only if it is not available does the Raja variety, grown in Karnataka's Sirsi move into the market. The ones grown in Sirsi and Silguri are best for the juicing and canning industry."

Trader Vincent Marcelline of Zeenath Pineapple sends his pineapples to the

THOMAS JAMES




Jammu and Kashmir capital. "It is during the beginning of winter and summer there is demand from Srinagar," he says. "The fruit is harvested at the green stage...before maturity sets in, since it takes about a week to get to Srinagar by truck."

Altaf Ali, a trader in Srinagar, notes that the price of the pineapple touches Rs 50 to Rs 60 per kilo during the summer. "A slice of pineapple easily sells for Rs 10," he tells *Outlook* over phone.

Mumbai-based Organic Manna Exporters is trying to figure out how to get the pineapple to Karachi without the crop rotting during transportation. Sangeeta Janumala of Organic Manna, says small quantities of pineapple goes from Srinagar to Pakistan, but there is a "huge demand" for Rani there. "It takes five days to get to Mumbai," she points out. "We are thinking of transporting it in reefer containers (refrigerated containers) from here. We are working out the logistics."

The Rani-Raja tale, like all once-upon-a-time classics, had the royalty coveting this rare fruit at one time. The Portuguese brought the pineapple, along with tapioca, rubber and papaya, with them in the 16th century. It is thought to have been first cultivated only for the royalty before it caught on in a big way. According to Prof P.P. Joy of Pineapple Research Station, the western world discovered pineapple only five centuries ago when the natives of Caribbean Gaudeloupe island served Christopher Columbus the fruit in 1493. They called it ananas (excellent fruit). It can be imagined that Columbus took it back to Europe and perhaps one pineapple survived the ordeal of a long journey his successors took out to England and presented to the king.

It can be arrived at that the royalty of England went crazy over the fruit. They went about trying to cultivate this tropical fruit in temperate England. There is even a painting of King Charles II (reign: 1660-1685) receiving a single pineapple from the royal gardener John Rose, believed to have first been grown in England. There were others, too, quite mad about pineapple like the Earl of Dunmore, who put a giant pineapple into the architecture detail atop the hothouse growing pineapples now known as the Dunmore pineapple or the Dunmore folly. There are other architectural disasters involving the pineapple called the Big Pineapple in Australia and South Africa. Back in Vazhakulam, its people are as mad about their pineapples, but they have as yet not done anything in gravel, stone and water in the name of the fruit. 

PRESENTS

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MONEY AWARDS 2016



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AWARDS 2016 THE WINNING SET



The winners of the 15th Annual Outlook Money Awards were announced at The St. Regis, Mumbai on January 24, with Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha), giving away the awards. The awards are a widely respected benchmark for recognising excellence in the financial services sector. For consumers of financial products, the winning institutions are the first stop point to select products and services.



Associate Publisher Johnson D'silva welcomes the chief guest Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha)



Narayan Krishnamurthy, editor – Outlook Money, addresses the audience



Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi addresses the captains of the financial industry



Winners with their trophies pose for a group photo



An invigorating panel discussion with Shipla Kumar, MD and CEO, ICICI Securities, Anuradha Rao, MD and CEO, SBI Mutual Fund, Dhiraj Relli, MD and CEO, HDFC Securities and Nimesh Shah, MD and CEO, ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund



Team ICICI Securities waiting for the call



An attentive Susan Bradley of Sudden Money Institute



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Prashant Kapoor, Outlook Money and Vijay Agarwal, CARE, explaining the awards criteria



Waiting for our turn



Shilpa Kumar with Arijit Basu



Vikaas Sachdeva and Deepak Mittal of Edelweiss with Johnson D'silva



I told you we are the winners



Indranil Roy, ED, Outlook Group, in discussion with Vinayak Aggarwal, MD, Hathway Investments



Kumar Sharadindu of SBI Pensions makes a point



Ashish Chauhan, Nimesh Shah and Anuradha Rao exchange notes



Lovaii Navlakhi and team greet KS Rao



A heady discussion with the award trophies in tow

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Bose's Ranis: 'Not even one

Very few have heard of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, which was an integral part of the INA. Fewer

BY SUBHASHINI ALI

WHILE reading her strenuously researched book, I remembered a conversation I had with author Vera Hildebrand when she visited our home in Kanpur to interview my late mother, Captain Lakshmi Sahgal. She told me that she enjoyed spending time at the sea shore in a home she had in either Denmark or Sweden. I asked her if she would go swimming in the icy waters. She said she liked nothing better than diving into and swimming in the freezing waters. She has displayed the same intrepid spirit, diving into archives in India and the United Kingdom, undeterred by tight-lipped, often forbidding keepers of secret documents, ferreting out information, some of it hitherto unknown to researchers and writers on the Indian National Army (INA). An interesting example is the way she found and then accessed boxes full of interrogation reports of captured INA personnel by British Army officers – getting around the Cerberus guarding them jealously.

Her doggedness to extract information and to unlock long forgotten memories also led her to track down all the living 'Ranis' (the women soldiers in INA's Rani of Jhansi regiment) in India, Malaysia and elsewhere. Then, with great precision, she compares one account of an event with another, ruthlessly exposing mismatches and discrepancies and goes on to state what she believes to be the true sequence of events, the actual number of people involved in a certain event, and so on.

The story that Hildebrand chooses to relate should be an important part of India's heritage, but unfortunately, it is not so. In fact, it has been largely forgotten in most parts of the country.

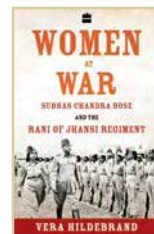


Her account of the incredible story of the formation and activities of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as part of his INA is, therefore, welcome and much needed.

Hildebrand received her doctorate in Indian history and culture from an American university and the early chapters of her book give useful information about the status of women in India and about the participation of Indian women, especially in Bengal, in the militant movement against the British Empire. Hildebrand uncovers some important stories of the Independence struggle that have been almost forgotten with time—the heroism of young girls like Preetilata Wadadar of the

Chittagong Armoury Raid, of Bina Das who at 14 attempted to kill the British Governor of Bengal and of Suniti Chowdhry and Shanti Ghosh who, in their late teens, shot dead the British district magistrate of Comilla district in Bengal. The influence of these women soldiers on Bose, who personally knew the last three of them is underlined. The author says that Bose mentioned the last two in the speech that he delivered at the opening of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment training camp.

But Hildebrand also falters. In the early chapters, she goes into a long description of an incident which she, and many others, consider seminal to Subhas' political development. In 1916, Subhas was elected



abandoned the regiment'

still, have heard of the extraordinary stories of the women who made up the regiment.



(Left) The Rani of Jhansi Regiment training with guns; cadets walk into the regiment's training camp

to represent his class on the Students Consultative Committee of the Presidency College. He was rusticated because he, along with some other students, was accused of beating Prof Edward Oaten "black and blue". This was in retaliation to the Professor's racist remarks, an example of which is "...the mission of the English here was to civilize the Indians." When called by the principal for an explanation, Subhas neither accepted nor denied his role in the physical violence. He remained ambiguous in his autobiography but said that he was proud of having sacrificed himself for honour and self-respect. Subhas never admitted to beating the British professor but neither did he ever

deny it and, at the crucial meeting with the Principal, he made no effort whatsoever to save his own skin and abandon his comrades. Hildebrand, however, concludes that, while writing his Autobiography, "Bose still did not admit to participating in the violent act. Apparently, 'his youthful insight of the importance of taking responsibility for his actions did not last.'" (p. 40).

This is fallacious and, unfortunately, this kind of disparaging and illogical remark is repeated quite frequently in the book. In fact, the constant presence of the author who, rather than let the facts speak for themselves, inserts her own assessments and interpretations of them, does mar the narrative and should have been avoided.

The Rani of Jhansi Regiment was inaugurated in Singapore on October 22, 1943 and comprised 150 recruits. Subhas Bose entrusted the command of the regiment to Dr Lakshmi Swaminathan, whom he had met soon after his arrival in Singapore. Of course, Lakshmi or Capt. Lakshmi as she was to be known after the inauguration of the Regiment, occupies a part second only to Bose himself in the book. Hildebrand, strangely, is often dismissive of Lakshmi's many strengths. For instance, she says that while a student in Madras, Lakshmi was known to be a 'social butterfly'. This assumption seems unlikely as, had it been the case, why would Bose, on his very first meeting with her, be convinced that she was the person to whom he could entrust a task that

was so serious and dear to his heart. We learn from Hildebrand that he had been dreaming and planning for the creation of such a Regiment of "fighting Ranis" for years. Even when the submarine transporting him from Germany to Tokyo was torpedoed, he continued to make notes about these plans, completely indifferent to the danger his life was in.

Lakshmi's qualifications for the job, however, are referred to in many of the interviews quoted in the book, including comments made by those who later interrogated her after her capture by the British Army. (Because of my own relationship with Lakshmi, I would only request readers of the book that they read very carefully through what has been written about her capture and interrogation. I am sure they will find refutation of insinuations about her integrity within the text itself.)

There is much, however, that is valuable and of great interest in the book. The chapter on the Indian diaspora in South East Asia, with its focus on women and the poor migrants, is extremely interesting. The author provides significant information about recruits to the Rani of Jhansi Regiment from these sections and speaks movingly about their malnutrition, their lack of education and the bleak futures that most of them saw looming ahead. Despite all these handicaps, so many young girls from this background came forward to join the Regiment and fight for the freedom of a country they had never seen but to which they felt they belonged.

The women from better-off, prosperous and educated families were also inspirational. Hildebrand's wide-ranging interviews with many of them make for fascinating reading. Most of them were younger than 18 years of age. Many of them were inspired by the words of Netaji or Capt. Lakshmi and they did everything in their power to force their parents to allow them to join. A few, on

Hildebrand uncovers some hidden women's stories of courage from the freedom struggle. For instance, the heroism of Bina Das who at 14-years-of-age attempted to kill a British Governor.

the other hand, were encouraged to join by their fervently patriotic parents.

When we remember the conservative homes that these young women belonged to and the kind of seclusion that they and their mothers experienced, it is nothing short of a miracle that they should have given up the security of their family homes for the hardships of camp life and the dangers of the disease-ridden swamps and jungles that beckoned. Every one of them knew when they left home that the probability of their return was extremely small but the accounts show that not only were they prepared for martyrdom but eager for it.

The strict and strenuous training that the Ranis received is described in absorbing detail—their camaraderie and easy rejection of caste and communal differences, the torments of camp life in Burma from where they hoped to go to the front and fight and then during their even more difficult retreat from Burma to Bangkok and Singapore.

AN aspect of Subhas' character that has been missed by his many biographers (probably because it was not their focus), is revealed in detail in the book. Along with descriptions of his courage, fortitude and single-minded devotion to the freedom of his country, which have been testified to by many others, Hildebrand details his abiding concern for each and every Rani, his commitment to their welfare and well-being and his undiluted belief in their capacity to fight and sacrifice. Despite the fact that the Japanese had refused to help in the formation or maintenance of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, Subhas cajoled and pushed the Indian community in South East Asia to contribute to both. Despite the problems that this state of affairs created, he paid attention to every detail concerning the Ranis: their training as soldiers and nurses, their food and nutrition and their safety. He made it a point to visit their camps regularly and to interact with each one of them. He encouraged them to put on cultural programmes, to sing and dance and perform and was always an enthusiastic member of the audience. While he was willing to subject them to hardship, unbearably strenuous physical activity and tremendous risk, he never forgot or allowed them




Courtesy: PONNAMMAH ESTHER NAVAREDNAM

to forget for a moment that he regarded himself as being responsible for whatever should befall them. Subhas emerges as a champion of women's rights who went far beyond lip service and sloganeering in Hildebrand's book. It is gratifying that the women reciprocated by justifying his faith in them in every way. Despite the trials and tribulations that they underwent, even when the victorious Allies were clos-

(L-R) T. Suppiah, Papathi Thevar, Lakshmi Naidu, Dhanam L. Suppiah

ing in on them and hundreds of their male comrades were surrendering or deserting, not a single Rani abandoned her Regiment. Many INA officers and British Army officers testified to this and have been quoted in the book.

The book ends with stirring words: "Through their moral strength and commitment to liberate their country and their people, these pioneering women set an enduring example for succeeding generations of Indians. Their courage, their resolve, their loyalty to the cause and to one another have exemplary relevance for the women's movement today, indeed for the human race...Despite the failure of their noble ambitions (to win India's freedom), the Ranis and their leader deserve to be honoured for their commitment to the highest of human aspirations – freedom."

As does Hildebrande for uncovering a unique chapter in the history of freedom movements and women's movements to, hopefully, a wide audience in India and abroad. The Rani of Jhansi Regiment, which was probably "the first all-female infantry combat unit in an established army," deserves recognition, admiration and must be emulated. Hildebrande and her *Women at War* will certainly help the Ranis of the Regiment achieve this. 

(Subhashini Ali is a member of the CPI(M) and daughter of Lakshmi Sahgal)



Bose entrusted the command of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment to Lakshmi Swaminathan aka Capt Lakshmi Sahgal (above), whom he had met soon after his arrival in Singapore.

NEWS & UPDATES

SPOTLIGHT

THIS
&
THAT

GoodEarth Malhar – an Eco Village in Bangalore

GoodEarth, led by Jeeth, Natasha, Parthasarathy and Stanley, pioneers in sustainable architecture and development in India, is building an Eco Village called “Malhar” on the outskirts of Bangalore. The Eco village, a green housing project consist of 5 communities and 400 homes is spread over 45 acres. Their journey started as a team of passionate architects, engineers and craftsmen in the early 90s exploring sustainable architecture and developments. Malhar Eco village showcases their vast experience.



The project has already won many awards. The national award for Sustainable architecture from HUDCO, Asian award from Singapore based Future Arc magazine for green architecture and NDTV's best group housing project.

They believe that “Green” is not just about technology or products, but a way of life where architecture and natural environment plays an important role in the quality of life. According to GoodEarth luxury is an everyday experience of aesthetics, nature and a vibrant community.

The craft is an integral component of GoodEarth projects and they believe that the play of natural materials like stone, brick and wood is important in the design. The bricks for the Malhar Eco Village was made at site with the soil from the project land. A project of this size with cement stabilized mud blocks is probably the largest in the country.

GoodEarth has also established about 300 varieties of plants and trees in the project. Conservation is stitched together with the aesthetic experience in the landscape design. GoodEarth continues to explore an appropriate development in the Indian context with its geographic, cultural and ecological diversity with a celebratory spirit.



VIBGYOR Group of Schools- Setting Benchmarks in Education



Ashish Tibdewal, CEO and CFO,
VIBGYOR Group of Schools.

VIBGYOR Group of Schools has made a mark in 7 major cities across India with a network of 25 schools and is steadily growing. This growth is a result of VIBGYOR Group's mission to create innovative, reliable, replicable and quality-driven global institutions. VIBGYOR Group of Schools cater to students from pre-primary to Grade 12 and offer a mixed spectrum of national and international levels of University education such as ICSE, CBSE and IGCSE and A-levels. A diverse, experiential and integrated learning programme is the key highlight of VIBGYOR's curriculum which is a unique blend of Academics with Sports and Performing Arts.

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VIBGYOR Group has witnessed many exceptional achievements from its students on the academics as well as sports and performing arts front. As a Group it has garnered various awards and recognitions like:

- Economic Times Best School Brands 2016 – ‘Symbol of Excellence in School’ award,
- ‘Award for Quality in Education’,
- ‘Award for Outstanding Contribution to Education’
- ‘Best Academic Innovative Curriculum’ and the recent
- ‘Most Admired Brand in Education 2017 (K12 chain of schools)’.

“**VIBGYOR's insistence on quality education is what sets us apart**”

- Ashish Tibdewal

From Google to Microsoft LPU Alumni working with top Global Brands

A few years back, aspiring students from North India used to prefer educational institutions in southern states presuming these to be far better. However, Lovely Professional University (LPU) in Punjab has broken this myth as students not only from North but South India also take admission in bulk number in LPU Programmes. Presently more than 4000 students from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra and other states are pursuing higher education in different LPU engineering programmes.

One of the strong reasons for this all is LPU's great academic record, overall exposure, very safe environment, and the most important its great placements record with top companies of the world. From Google to Microsoft, CISCO to IBM, TCS to Cognizant, Tech Mahindra to Maruti and many such other prestigious companies have preferred LPU students for coveted jobs. With the state of art infrastructure, passionate faculty team, students at LPU are always motivated to do things beyond their capabilities. At LPU, students just do not learn through books but they learn through practical hands on projects.

Imbibing such a spirit, LPU students of computer engineering prepare mobile apps; mechanical engineering students design their own cars; electronics engineering students make robot; electrical engineering students learn live on 100 Kilo Watt solar panel installation; and, similarly students of other streams, too, work on live projects. To ensure students work on meaningful projects, LPU has tied up with companies like Google, Microsoft, CISCO, Oracle, Maruti, SAE India and many more. Under these tie-ups, students not only learn to work on live projects but even faculty from these companies reach LPU campus to teach LPU students.

If aspiring students are prone to think big and want to be highly placed, become illustrious entrepreneur or to pursue their dreams in reality, LPU is a place to be in. Admission to LPU B Tech Programs is only through its national Entrance Test ‘LPUNEST’, which is ‘Entrance as well as a Scholarship Test’. The test is conducted in 100+ cities across India under flexible schedule for the convenience of students. In the last two years, more than 5 Lakh students appeared for LPUNEST tests, thus augmenting this test to be the largest private entrance test, including all state, central government and private tests held in India.

THE OLD CAPTAIN IN BERLIN

Arathil Candoth Narayanan Nambiar, Nanu to friends, is one of the most enigmatic characters of India's freedom struggle. He was Subhas Chandra Bose's deputy, and a close friend of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. The British accused him of being a Soviet spy. His biography has been written for the first time, A Life In Shadow: The Secret Story of ACN Nambiar by Vappala Balachandran, a former senior RAW official. In these excerpts, it is revealed how much Bose depended on Nanu when he was in Europe in the charged atmosphere just before World War II.

BOSE faced many difficulties, protocol and content wise. Soon after his arrival, von Trott (Adam von Trott, the diplomat who led a dual life, resisted Nazism) took Bose to his first meeting with Keppler where he was treated 'with a long and wholly uninformed oration on the subject of India, the British Empire, Congress and kindred matters, never stopping to allow a reply and never thinking of inviting the other's views, until he declared the interview at an end.'

Ribbentrop (Foreign Minister of the Reich, Joachim von Ribbentrop) delayed meeting Bose and the latter 'became so enraged at this insulting procrastination that he declared that he would not again ask to see Ribbentrop and furthermore would ignore an invitation if one arrived.' Sykes' (Christopher Sykes, von Trott's biographer) research led him to believe that Ribbentrop's hesitation was partly because 'India was treated as a Russian sphere of interest, and the last thing Ribbentrop wanted was any action likely to excite Russian suspicion...' Finally Ribbentrop met Bose sometime in May 1941, agreed to help in propaganda work but said that 'any public declaration on the part of the Axis on the subject of the future settlement of India would be premature.'



A LIFE IN SHADOW: The Secret story of ACN Nambiar

by Vappala Balachandran

Roli Books
344 pages | Rs 695

Sykes' story on the relationship between von Trott and Bose provides an answer to the question as to why Bose was looking for Nambiar 'from Turkey to Morocco' despite knowing that he was very close to Nehru. It was only on 11 February 1939 that Bose had written to Emilie Schenkl (Bose's companion) complaining that Mahatma Gandhi and his lieutenants had opposed his re-election and Pandit Nehru was indifferent. Bose is also reported to have directly accused Nehru through his letter on February 4, 1939 as having done 'more to lower me in the estimation of the public than all the twelve ex-members of the Working Committee put together.'

Bose was known to not dwell on setbacks for too long but instead choose an immediate course of action. Bose knew that only Nambiar could do the job, what with his experience and knowledge. Besides, Bose had already relied on him and trusted Nambiar despite the latter's closeness to Nehru. So that became Bose's task: to track down Nambiar and arm-twist him into moving to Berlin. Bose had forgotten his bitter experience with the Congress Party or had risen above all factional feuds in his single-minded pursuit of freedom and chose to place his trust on Nambiar.

The logistical difficulties he encountered in Hitler's



GETTY IMAGES

Germany made him feel that he needed an able deputy who knew the German psyche well, besides the language. There was none with Bose to perform this role. Another reason is given by Sykes. Bose was a lonely man in Berlin but he could not make a friend of von Trott. One day von Trott told his wife Clarita that he was sure Bose had detected that he was not a Nazi at heart, and so looked on him with suspicion. Nevertheless he accompanied him on many journeys to Vienna, Rome and Paris.

Von Trott, it was to become clear, had his own agenda. Nambiar developed better relations with von Trott. Although von Trott never revealed his double life to Nambiar, the latter told Sykes that 'he could often feel Trott's unrest, his doubts about the political course and his hatred of the Nazis.' Von Trott also converted the Indian Legion as a refuge for some persons like his younger brother Heinrich 'from the horrors and miseries of the Eastern Front.' The Berlin premises of the Free India Centre were good meeting places to hold conspiratorial discussions.

Contrary to general impression, Bose had the idea of making Asia as his main centre of operations even as he left India for Europe. This he told Nambiar in January 1942 when the latter joined him in Berlin. He

**BATTLESHIP
BERLIN** Nambiar (centre) with Keppler (right) at a ceremony for the Azad Hind

Bose felt that Nambiar would be more than capable of being in charge of the Free India Centre in Berlin when he left Europe.

wished to keep his European stay as short as he could. That was the reason why he was searching for Nambiar – he felt that Nambiar would be more than capable of being in charge of the Free India Centre in Berlin and attend to certain specific duties when he left Europe. Most of the members of the Free India Centre were relatively young and lacked experience. At the same time Bose did not reveal his plans of going to South-East Asia to anyone except to Nambiar.

Bose met Foreign Minister Ribbentrop for the second time on 14 October 1942. At the conclusion of the meeting he introduced Nambiar as the 'future representative of the Free India Centre'. Ribbentrop agreed that the house placed at Bose's disposal could be taken over by Nambiar.

Singapore fell to the Japanese army on February 15, 1942. Since then Bose was making preparations to go to the Far East. Nambiar says that the news of an Italian aeroplane having made a non-stop flight from Rhodes in Europe to Tokyo stirred his imagination and stimulated the idea of departing to South-East Asia. He quickly contacted Italian sources of competence in that connection. At first Italy showed favourable interest. 'The interest faded and it disappeared when Anglo-American troops landed in North Africa.'

Courtesy: HIRALAL RAJGOPAL



Disappointed, Bose even thought of going by steamer, a risky venture. Finally a joint German-Japanese submarine idea came up. It had to be a joint venture since a German submarine alone would not have been able to go that far. A German submarine was located for his use and was ready at Kiel. However, tension arose when the expected Japanese reply did not come. The Germans conveyed that they could wait only for three days. Bose, who was very agitated, called on General Oshima, the Japanese Ambassador, who said the reply 'would come' and asked him to meet his Counselor, Kawahara. Kawahara, typical of diplomatic bureaucracy, revealed that the delay in announcing receipt of the reply was because the communication was addressed to the Naval Attaché, an admiral, and as per protocol it was he who had to announce the reply. But in this case, he was willing to make an exception. Bose was very pleased. Soon, the expected announcement from the Naval Attaché also came. The Germans said that Bose could take one person along with him. Bose

(Above) Nambiar (podium) speaks on the founding day of the pro-Axis provisional government of Free India in Berlin; Nambiar (left) with Bose (centre) and Emily Schenkl (right) in Austria

telephoned Abid Hasan (officer of Indian National Army) asking him to get ready 'for a journey' without indicating the destination.

While he waited, Bose was busy giving policy guidance to Nambiar. There were plans to open new branches of the Free India Centre, for more broadcasting, for Indians to study German police methods and for the training of Indian seamen and airmen. As for the Legion, Bose indicated it must be used actively as soon as possible, the German officers and NCOs must be quickly replaced by Indians, and there must be no communalism. Legionaries were to be trained on the most modern German equipment, including heavy artillery and tanks. Further instructions would be issued as early as possible.

Great secrecy was maintained over Bose's departure, which was February 8, 1943. There was suspicion that the news may be leaked.

"The Italians were not informed, because, when the talks proceeded of Bose going by an aeroplane to the Far East, news about the proposed flight reached Britain, it was believed, through an Italian source. This time the information of the journey was confined to a small number of Germans and Japanese. As far as Indians came in question, only I had information about the submarine trip of Bose."

The other members of the Free India Centre and the Legion came to know of the departure only weeks later when Bose was already in South-East Asia. This was a security precaution since the British were keeping close watch on Bose's movements. To camouflage this secret departure several things were done. On January 26 'Independence Day' was observed in Berlin with a big party where six hundred guests drank to Bose's health. Two days later he made his speech to the Legion on 'Legion Day'. To conceal his departure he recorded two speeches which were to be broadcast after he left. One was used on February 28 1943, according to Volkischer Beobachter dated March 4, 1943.

Abid Hasan asked Nambiar in the train to Kiel whether he knew the destination. He was carrying a book for learning Greek, under the misconception that that was where they were headed. There had been a plan of stationing a part of the Indian Legion in Greece. It was only when he got to Kiel that he learnt the real destination and the nature of the trip.

The one day Bose passed in Kiel, he remained silent and contemplative. Early the following morning, he got into the submarine. The German State Secretary Keppler wanted to take a photograph of Bose in the submarine. It was not allowed. The submarine quickly submerged and steered to Madagascar, where it was met by the Japanese submarine. Nambiar was there to see Bose depart silently. It would of course, be the last time he saw Bose.

"So ended the stay of Subhas Chandra Bose in Europe of the War period and another chapter in his eventful life". □

NEWS & REVIEWS

CISF Contingent adjudged "Best Marching Contingent" in Republic Day -2017 held at Rajpath, New Delhi



CISF contingent consisting of 148 Officers and men (AC-01, Lady Sub Officers-03, Other Ranks-144-Total 148) led by Shri Prabh Simran Singh, Asstt. Commandant participated in Republic Day Parade -2017 held at Rajpath, New Delhi. The Contingent of CISF has been adjudged the "Best Marching Contingent" amongst Para Military Force and other Auxiliary Marching Contingents. It is a matter of pride and glory for CISF to participate in this prestigious National Celebration. This is fifth time that CISF Contingent has won the Best Marching Contingent. Earlier CISF Contingent was adjudged Best Marching Contingent in the year 2007, 2008, 2013 & 2015.

Shri O.P. Singh, DG/CISF congratulated the contingent of the Force for their excellent performance and bringing proud moments to the organization. DG/CISF also congratulated Shri Shikha Goyal, IG/North Sector, Shri Dayal Gangwar, DIG/ NCR and Shri P. P. Singh, Sr. Commandant, 5th Reserve Battalion, Ghaziabad, Inspector Tejvir Singh, Inspector Pawan Kumar Bhati (Chief Drill Instructor), Head Constable Arun Dhama (Drill Instructor), Constable Ombir Singh (PT Instructor) for their hard work and shaping the contingent perfectly to achieve the Best Marching Trophy.

It is to mention here that selection, preparation/practice and final show at Rajpath in smart ceremonial dress and crisply marching before the saluting base and salutation to the President of India, passes through a very strenuous schedule in the chilling winter. Force personnel having strong built, height about 6ft and age profile between 23 - 25, are called at 5th Reserve Battalion Ghaziabad.

Thereafter, selection of the contingent including Contingent Commander is made through a tough selection process.

This year, Force personnel of the contingent reported on 01st of November 2016. Their daily schedule of practice started with rigorous physical training. After which marching practice was conducted under the supervision of selected outdoor instructors from 0900 hrs to 1230 hrs and in the evening 1500 hrs to 1715 hrs. Special sessions of Yoga, Massage and Motivation were also conducted for the contingent.

It can truly be said that CISF safeguards the major pillars of development of the marching India. It has the unique distinction of securing all around growth and the entire critical infrastructure of the country ranging from Airports to Seaports, Atomic Energy Stations to Space Organizations, Power Plants and Steel Plants to Delhi Metro.

Dynamically evolving, CISF is a versatile Force. Adaptability, professionalism and use of cutting edge technology have been its hallmark, to up-hold its motto - "Protection and Security."

The smartly dressed Band of CISF, played the tune "Amar Senani" under the command of Assistant Sub-Inspector "Karan Singh". The Band and Contingent marched with great enthusiasm & commitment, and finally stood first.

BHEL has won the prestigious Golden Peacock HR Excellence award for 2016. The award was received by Sh. Atul Sobti, CMD, BHEL and Sh. D. Bandyopadhyay, Director (HR), BHEL from Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Founder, The Art of Living, in the presence of Lt Gen J S Ahluwalia, PVSM (retd), President, Institute of Directors; Mrs Rajshree Birla, Chairperson, Aditya Birla Group and other dignitaries.



The award has been conferred on BHEL by the Institute of Directors for exemplary contribution to the HR function, initiatives taken towards enhancing the engagement and satisfaction of employees and BHEL's best practices.

Hon'ble Union Minister for Heavy Industries & Public Enterprises inaugurates BHEL's upgraded, state of the art Solar PV Manufacturing Lines at its Bengaluru based manufacturing plants



BHEL's state-of-the-art 200 MW Solar Photovoltaic Module Manufacturing Line and upgraded 105 MW Solar Photovoltaic Cell Manufacturing Line were inaugurated by Hon'ble Union Minister for Heavy Industries & Public Enterprises, Sh. Anant Geete, at the company's manufacturing plants in Bengaluru today. Sh. Atul Sobti, Chairman & Managing Director, BHEL; Directors on the Board of BHEL and other dignitaries were present on the occasion. With the commencement of commercial operation of these lines, the annual manufacturing capacity of BHEL has been enhanced to 105 MW of Solar Cells and 226 MW of Solar Modules.

MoU signed between POWERGRID and Abu Dhabi Water & Electricity Authority (ADWEA)



Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd. (POWERGRID), a central Power Sector PSU and CTU has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Abu Dhabi Water & Electricity Authority (ADWEA) & its group of companies on 25th January, 2017 in Gurgaon. The MoU was signed by His Excellency Saeed Al Suwaidi, Managing Director, Abu Dhabi Distribution Co. (UAE) and Shri Anil Mehra, Executive Director- International Business, POWERGRID in the presence of Shri I.S. Jha CMD, POWERGRID and Senior officials from both sides.

The MoU inter alia envisages cooperation between ADWEA & its group of companies and POWERGRID to work in areas like smart grid, Transmission technology & providing capability development and training in the field of Operation & Maintenance (O&M), Asset Management, Project Management, Power Transmission & Distribution, etc. POWERGRID shall also assist ADWEA in setting up an advanced "World Class Capability Development institute" in UAE.

“Thank you so much. Wow, to be an actor, playing an actor and receiving forgot everything that I ever have thought in my life.” — **EMMA STONE**,



SANDIPAN CHATTERJEE



PTI

Everything Minus the Go-Go Girls

You don't want to museumise Virat Kohli just yet! But Boria Majumdar's sports shrine in Cal has a lot of bric-a-brac: Sachin's '100th 100' gloves, Messi's boots etc. We want David Shepherd's Triple Nelson hop!



Rippling Fresh Water

Drinking all that RO water has done her good. In her biography, Hema Malini says dancing has always been her first love. Just don't do it in front of dirty canids, ma'am!

PTI



The Boss and the Shahenshah

The redoubtable T. Subbarami Reddy, politician and industrialist, pulled off the unthinkable at his grandson Keshav (and Veena's) wedding. Two megastars at once! Both Kabali and Quizmaster look in the pink of health.

THIS TOO HAPPENED

It's not a problem that would make homeless Indians sit up and take notice. But former *Rent* star Daphne Ru raising her real-life rent. In a lawsuit, she said the landlord is bypassing rent control laws. They were paying

an actor award by a guild of actors, it's pretty exceptional. I
on her Best Actress win for La La Land at SAG Awards.



GETTY IMAGES



À Bout De Souffle

In this case, we're strictly anti-ageist. French diva Iris Mittenaere, Miss Universe, is all of 24. Our own Sushmita Sen, part of the judging panel this year, was only 18 when she wowed the world in 1994. But, salut, Iris.

Elizabeth's Secret

This lady is not touched by age. Liz Hurley, now going on 51, was holidaying in India with son Damian. A swimwear designer now, seen here in one of her creations, she clearly doesn't need a model for her products.



bin-Vega must be going through some major pangs of déjà vu as she, along with her husband, battles her real-life landlord for \$1,800/month in 1997, but say they shelled out \$5,141.28/month in 2016. So it happens in Gotham City too.

Tides of a March

"GOD may be in the details, but the goddess is in connections. We are linked, we are not ranked. This is a day that will change us forever." Activist Gloria Steinem's words meet with thunderous applause from the 500,000-plus crowds at the Women's March in Washington. Headliners of different stripes sing and chant to wild cheering. The atmospherics is as thrilling as Obama's historic Inauguration. (If you ignore Madonna's comment on blowing up the White House.) My daughter, who worked for Planned Parenthood (now under GOP attack) on her college break, is moved by Scarlett Johansson's speech about it.

The uteri have spoken. But men and kids are also part of this sea of pink. My retiring husband is shocked to be on display in a Washington Post picture inside the metro.

People sing "We Shall Overcome". Some hold funny signs: "We Shall Overcomb". The official ASL for "Trump" actually mimics wind on hair—it was the Swiss Deaf Association's sign of the year. Peaceful signs ("Love Trumps Hate") play off against edgy ("Fuck Trump's Hate") or silly ones ("Eat Cheetos, don't vote for them"), urge Trump's tweets to get out of their twats, and misspell "misogyny" every which way.

The DC march alone needed 1,000 more buses for out-of-towners than the entire Inauguration the previous day. In other cities nationwide and worldwide, protesters come out in the unlikeliest pockets—Syria, Antarctica—with a thundering show of hands and middle fingers.

Pop Ammo Recharge

AT the small, exclusive Women's March after-party, Gloria Steinem stands up on the table to egg us on. Katy Perry comes over to chat from the next table in rimless eye glasses, chic hat, pleated dress, pink faux fur-lined jacket (with peace sign) in honour of the "pussy hat" sorority. My daughter is thrilled. Back in school, it was her song, I Kissed A Girl, they played to shut up fundamentalist Westboro Church's homophobic rants against Walt Whitman, after whom her school is named. I can see her activism recharge itself when actress Ashley Judd tells her that her march performance poem, 'Nasty Woman', was written by a 19 year old.

Bulletin Board

SINCLAIR Lewis once said, "When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying the cross." Every day is a weary retread of the Beatles' "I read the news today, oh boy" as we reel from climate change and identity denialism to "alternative facts". Trump's education secretary and Supreme Court judge picks are alarmingly ill-qualified. "The Monday Night Massacre" sees the unprec-



NANDINI LAL

The author is a columnist based in Washington

edented sacking of Sally Yates for declining to defend the travel ban, with a vindictively worded official release. The Wikipedia edit for "acting Attorney General" by an outraged liberal corrects that somewhat.

Expat talk this week is an exercise in my-visa-status-is more-endangered-than-yours competitive breast-beating. Trump now affects people outside US borders—his selective Muslim ban has left bewildered, sick octogenarians and five-year-olds in tears at airports filled with angry protesters; green card holders are interrogated on what they think of Trump; six men at a Quebec mosque

are shot by a Trump follower; a leaked dossier on Trump's blackmail by Putin leaves a KGB chief killed in Moscow. A terrified British spy is sure he's next.

But defiance is the new mood du jour, not helpless outrage: nonstop calls to Senators, petitions signed. National Security's Steve Bannon (ex-Breitbart) is seen as the sinister puppet-master, counselor Kellyanne Conway as the slimy side-villain. But new heroes emerge every minute: the Starbucks CEO pledges to hire 10,000 refugees, braving Trumpster boycotts, the LAPD chief defies the ban, Malia Obama joins Dakota Access pipeline protests, University Of Michigan refuses to divulge its students' immigration status, Big Bang Theory's Mayim Bialik and Madeleine Albright say they'll register as Muslims. Even Tea Party's Koch network condemns the ban. The Uber CEO supporting the ban is scared off by the #DeleteUber campaign into offering a \$3 million legal fund for immigrant drivers.

Us And Them

THE only thing that keeps us going on is gallows humour. Somebody edits the "Invertebrate" Wikipedia entry with Paul Ryan's description. Underground tweets from White House staff leak unflattering gossip about Trump. When Trump puts a gag order on the EPA and the National Parks Services, they taunt, "You can take our official Twitter, but you'll never take our free time!" A dozen government organisations services go

rogue with tweets against oppressive policies. There are memes about daily post-truth whoppers from all the resident Pinocchios.

The satirical Onion's piece on Pence and the March is misunderstood as real news. The bungling press secretary Sean Spicer mistakes another Onion item poking fun at him for real news and real praise.

One Graphic Dystop

HERE in the belly of the beast, the melting snow falls down with a "Drumpf". My heart beats out a hollow "Drumpf, Drumpf." Eventually, Drumpf will fall splat. There are too many of us now.

Till then, if you need me, I'll be in my room, reading a dystopic novel. Happy new 1984, people!



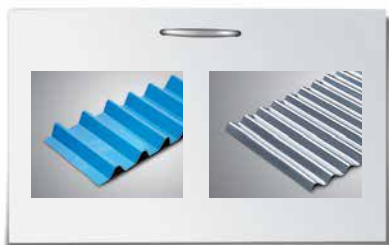
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