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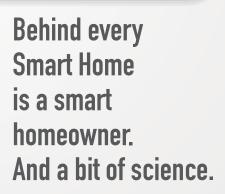
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Outlook

Volume LVII, No. 9

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Printed and published by Indranii 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

Published for the week of February 21-27, 2017

Released on February 18, 2017 Total no. of pages 84, Including Covers



Comment

Kshatriya CEO?

HE Chief Executive Officer of a postmodern tech firm is harking back to the accident of his birth and to a pyramidal hierarchy of oppression to reassure himself and his cronies that he will fight a good fight and crush a lowly whistleblower. Nobody likes a whistleblower. Be it Tej Bahadur Yadav who shot a video exposing the daal-less daal served by the Border Security Force for those standing guard at the border for 12 hours or the one who wrote a letter pointing out the absurdity of a 30-month severance package instead of a three-month payout. Every time someone whistles the song of a scam, the accused invokes the authority of power or Kshaatra balam, the beefy biceps. And poor Krishna takes the blame. After all, didn't he endorse the wretched caste system when he told Arjuna, "chaturvarnyam maya srishtam." Well, did he?

Depending on your belief system, you can argue whether he created the four varnas or not. But there, indeed, are teachers, warriors, traders and servants in real life

and not just in mythology. And that has nothing to do with accidents of birth. Modern-day Dalits—Pariah, Pulaya, Mahar and Mazhabi warriors—had won the empire for the British. Both the grandparents, maternal and paternal, of Dr B.R. Ambedkar were Subedar Majors in the British Indian army, the highest and the most coveted position an Indian warrior could achieve those days. As the supreme commander of India's armed forces, K.R. Narayanan was a Kshatriya in letter and spirit.

Long ago, Shivaji's army composed of all kinds of people fighting for a charismatic leader. In fact, Shivaji's own coronation and Gaga Bhatt's role in



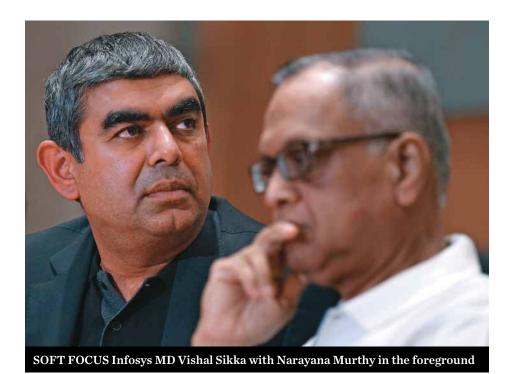
it is a matter of great interest for students of varna mobility in medieval times. Old stories of kingship from Kerala have a strange anecdote of a Sudra getting anointed as a Kshatriya by diving into the hollow of a cow's stomach. Thus the king gets born again as a Kshatriya. Then the cow, a golden one obviously, goes as dakshina to the Brahmin priest. Varna is the vocation that one chooses, fights for and creates assiduously. Narayana Murthy, though a Brahmin by birth, was a wealth-creator and hence a Vaishya. So are Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, all Vaishyas. Of course, they made their billions in a knowledge-based industry, but they didn't opt to learn and teach, but to trade and earn.

Only a person who doesn't understand the difference between caste and varna would make claims of varna pride. There is no such thing. Yes, there is caste pride: the puerile pride over birth, an immediate family and a false identity that one inherits. Is this what the CEO of one of the world's biggest and most respected software companies is talking about? I hope it is not. If it is so, this is another proof of how wrongly we understand ourselves, our histories and our mythologies. If everything is pre-ordained and determined by birth, then there is no new knowledge, no enterprise and no need for software and hardware.

By some quirk of fate, we were born into a casteist society, but should we strive to pursue that or make a leap for modernity? Every time a leader in politics, business or bureaucracy makes a casteist statement, we as a nation and society get dragged back to the dark ages of oppression and ignorance. We cannot afford that any longer. After all, ISRO just dropped 104 satellites safely in their orbits and those who are supposed to wire these machines shouldn't blow up their ancient caste fuses.

RAJESH RAMACHANDRAN

navigator



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India may have little choice other than looking on at China's decision to block the declaration of JeM chief Masood Azhar as a designated terrorist at the UN

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Amidst an economic blockade, Manipur goes to election

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Infosys, once India's IT pride, has been slowly losing its sheen. Has managing director Vishal Sikka not been able to steer the ship as ably as N.R. Narayana Murthy?

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Cover: R. Prasad; Illustration: Sajith Kumar



Online



NATIONAL

The Supreme Court verdict is a strong indictment of Jayalalitha's legacy by S. MURARI



Usurper or inheritor? The irony of Sasikala's succession binge.

by R. BALASHANKAR



A huge number of jobs are going to go. How will the redundant workforce survive? And what about Universal Basic Income? by EKTA KUMAR



SOCIETY

More than half of engineering degrees at MIT went to women, but IITs' share is a pathetic eight per cent by BHIMASHANKAR SANGA



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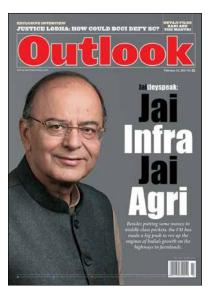
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Digital Bharat Fiscal

NOIDA Bal Govind: This refers to your cover story on the 2017 budget, Hinterland In Sight (Feb 13). Like every year's budget, this one also had its hits and misses. It's the first time in the last 20 years that taxes on individual incomes have been reduced, a move that should be welcomed by the middle class. Affordable housing has been a much discussed issue but it is only now, when the 2017 budget has given it infrastructure status, that it will witness some momentum. It is a well-known fact that the real estate sector has been languishing at the bottom of the graphs. Some of the changes suggested in the budget should help it revive. Other positive signs are the tax reduction for the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) sector up to a certain turn over and the extension of tax holidays for start-ups. Now, in order to bring change, the government shall have to revive the stalled projects. Regular monitoring of expenses on infrastructure and greater accountability will have to be a must. But despite the overall balanced nature of this budget, it was strange that the finance minister did not speak a word on cash demonetisation and its impact on the people of India.

ON E-MAIL R.N.: It's high time the government shifted its focus to the development of rural India. This budget seems to have done a lot more than previous budgets for the majority living in the interiors of the country. Strangely, after all the budget talk that dominated all media discussions and reports in the country, it seems that people have forgotten about demonetisation, which had only recently triggered a panic among the people. What happened to the promised eradication of black money? Nonetheless, at least this budget has been a forward looking one. However, the most disappointing aspect of the budget for me is the complete silence



February 13, 2017

on NRIs, who do a lot to sustain India's economy. Since he took over, Prime Minister Modi has toured the entire world and acknowledged the diaspora like no other leader ever has. Their concerns also deserved some space in the country's budget.

NEW DELHI Mahesh Kumar: With regard to income tax, this budget has failed to live up to expectations. The financial hardships of the tax-paying middle class are not accounted for in any way. The tax exemption limit has not been raised to a suitable amount-a minor relief of five per cent for an income of up to Rs 5 lakh following a reduction in tax rate from 10 per cent to five per cent is inadequate. Senior citizens will not get the full benefit of this. They need relief under TDS (tax deducted at source) rules as they are the ones who need the most cash in hand to cope with the current inflationary trends. Also, from now on, the maximum donation receivable from an unknown source by a political party will be decreased to Rs 2,000 from Rs 20,000. Pray, what is the logic behind merely reducing this amount? In a populous country like ours, it is not at all difficult for political parties to solve the problem by merely increasing the number of donations on paper. The amount should have been made zero, or the donations made completely transparent, only then would it have made even a modicum of sense.

HYDERABAD J.N. Bhartiya: The budget did not disclose the extent to which the currency will be inflated, so that we could sort out the reality camouflaged by the haze of jugglery of words and bikini statistics. I have a hunch the value of money will go down, thereby escalating the value of per capita income etc, but yielding nothing to the hoi polloi. Why have political parties been allowed to accept Rs 2,000 in cash? The BJP should have adopted the 'less cash' it is enforcing upon the country!

LUCKNOW M.C. Joshi: The Modi government's 2017 budget is somewhat historic in the sense that, firstly, the colonial tradition of presenting the budget on the last working day of February has been done away with, and secondly, another colonial practice, that of presenting a separate budget for the Railways, has also been stopped. Finance minister Arun Jaitley's speech left the opposition disarmed, with nothing to raise objection to. Maintaining balance between relief and reform, rural and urban, small and big, this growth-oriented, futuristic budget is, in all senses, a no-nonsense budget.

AMRITSAR L.J. Singh: Finance minister Arun Jaitley has made only half-hearted efforts to alleviate the pains of demonetisation in this budget. When he was in the opposition, he would

one-liner

KOCHI George Jacob

A jugglery of figures and melodramatic media analysis—the budget 2017 in a nutshell.

vehemently criticise UPA's budgets, demanding more for the senior citizens and salaried classes. Now, as FM, he has himself ignored these very categories in all his budgets so far.

Trumping Trump

HANAMKONDA (TELANGANA)

Seetharambasaani: This refers to your story on Donald Trump's immigration policy (Pastures Less Green, February 13). The president of the United States has been endowed with 'executive privilege' to withhold information from the public, the Congress and even the courts for the sake of 'national security' and diplomatic interests. With a Seattle judge placing a temporary restraining order on Trump's travel ban on citizens of seven, mainly Muslim, countries and the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in San Francisco refusing to overturn the verdict, the stage is set for a face-off between the new government and the judiciary. Blaming immigrants for joblessness in the US is not a solution. It is plain reactionary and can only lead to more hatred among the nations. But is anyone listening?



NO XENO Against Trump's travel ban

The state of the s

Watch Thy Mouth

OMAN Ramachandran Nair: After reading the interview with the so-called former Kerala Law Academy principal Dr P. Lekshmi Nair ('I was the one who moved court in 2014 to get an order...., Feb 20), I was ashamed that she belonged to 'God's Own Country'! Ms Nair is an arrogant woman; furthermore, she has political backing. I strongly doubt her

claim that the state can't stand her being "bold and smart". Her high-handed behaviour as principal is already well-known in the state. It shows a great lack of common sense on her part, something that disqualifies her from being in the chair of principal of an institution, especially a place that teaches law. All these years, as seen on television, Ms Nair was perceived in a different way in Kerala. I suppose political muscle and money, quite shamefully, have wrought a change in her behaviour. The Law Academy incident is a commentary on the management of private institutions in Kerala, and how they are influenced by political parties. This trend needs to change.

PUNE Lt Col (retd) Ranjit Sinha: Though Trump's order may sound like it is against Muslims, he has only banned citizens of certain countries for a certain period of time for purely security reasons. The US has a heterogeneous population comprising of people from varied religious and ethnic backgrounds, all of whom have contributed to making America what it is today. Banning immigration of people from any one community is, therefore, not in the interest of American society. Fighting terrorism needs the participation of all and no community should see counter-terrorist measures as an attack on itself.

Kashmir Counter-Narrative

CALCUTTA Ankush Poddar: On reading your story on J&K's decision to commemorate Maharaja Hari Singh's birth anniversary (*A Monarch in Praise and Loathing*, February 13), I can't

help pointing out that my knowledge of Kashmir's history is quite contrary to the viewpoint given in the article. I choose to believe that Abdul Qadir was not of Kashmiri ethnicity but an absconder from the Swat region, who rallied people for jehad against the king of Kashmir. Only short-sighted and delusional people do not believe that the 1931 agitation against the king was merely a cover for pillage and victimising people from a particular community. The article incorrectly goes on to say that all Kashmiris-Muslims, Hindus and people from Jammu, Gilgit and Ladakh—were part of the uprising.

No-Finesse Agenda

HYDERABAD K. Shirasagar: Apropos Who Awaits the Native's Return? (February 6), your story on the J&K assembly's resolution on the Pandits' return, I believe the Pandits

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letters

were thrown out of the Valley as part of a deal struck during V.P. Singh's reign as India's prime minister, to get the sister of the current J&K CM released from her abductors. Now the BJP regime wants to settle the Pandits in the Valley in order to change its demographics. They have even proposed settling 'sainik colonies' (of retired soldiers) there. But how many Pandits really want to return to a life of uncertainty? The larger conflict is rooted in Pakistan's claim that India illegally occupies Kashmir and the US's ambition to create a vassal state with its own flag and constitution, even though a Russian veto in the UN Security Council had stalled, once and for all, the old resolution on Kashmir's right to self-determination.

Poli Toli

GOA M.N. Bhartiya: Your stories on the run-up to the assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh (Feb 6), Uttarakhand, Punjab and Goa (Feb 13) were done well. Opinion polls are a lucrative business today. Vested interests motivate the media to twist the facts, with most media owned by people closely aligned to political parties. Outlook comes across as a rare exception. This time, the Congress and the BJP are contesting elections in a do-or-die mode. Their stakes are high; it concerns their very survival. Other parties are proprietary or partnership concerns of Machiavellis hungry for power, and they will have to disappear eventually in a fast-maturing democracy. Too many buttons on the EVMs confuse the voters. so we either get a fractured mandate or one like 2014 in which just 31 per cent votes secured a majority. The people are restless and want things to change. They don't care for this or that 'ism', but only for their own and their children's welfare. This election season will be a trendsetter for 2019 and a turning point, good or bad, for our liberties and development.

Turning Square

MUMBAI K.P. Rajan: I write about the article on the BCCI's SC-appointed administrators (Gang of Four Leads the Charge, Feb 13). The appointment of an auditor (Vinod Rai), historian (Ramachandra Guha) and a banker (Vikram Limaye) to run the BCCI (the other member is cricketer Diana Edulji) is a perfect example of the saying, 'a square peg in a round hole'. Granted,

these are eminent people, but not in cricket. I don't think cricket lovers will be able to digest this potpourri.

Khan Rajya

DEHRADUN Rakesh Agarwal: I read the cover story on Shahrukh Khan (*The Khanate Without End*, Feb 6) with great interest. But SRK, the seller of fairness creams for men can never be an icon like Meryl Streep, Richard Gere or even Leonardo Di Caprio.

ON E-MAIL Rini Sinha: I noticed some errors in *Outlook*'s otherwise well-written cover story on Shahrukh Khan. On Page 59, first para, 'work' has been misspelt. On page 60, third para, Aamir is spelt as 'Amir'. Such errors are jarring to the eye. Hope this is noted.

Whence The Anger?



Paperback Angst

JAMMU Rajiv Chopra: This is about Talmiz Ahmad's review of Pankaj Mishra's new book, Age of Anger (The Wrath of Our World, Feb 6). Mishra has been an apologist of Islamic fundamentalism for a long time now. Religious fundamentalists have refused to look within themselves, and have just blamed their troubles on the historic wrongs committed by the West. The United States is also to be blamed to the extent that they had forged the Faustian bargain of support with the Saudi royal family, which had been the centre of so much fundamentalism in many ways.

Creeping Flesh

PUNE G.L. Karkal: *Outlook's* excellent report on brothels (*The Cruel Business of Brothels*, Feb 6) correctly points out that without the connivance of the police, local administration and leaders with traffickers, prostitution and brothels

cannot just exist. But I couldn't fathom why the article fails to mention the one essential link in the whole trade—the male customer. Like in any trade, whenever there is a demand for a 'product' or service, some 'entrepreneur' meets it by supplying the same. Is it wrong to say males are responsible for perpetuating this dehumanising business?

Wandering Away

ONE-MAIL R.S.: I would like to thank Outlook for bringing into focus a most relevant chapter of our independence movement related to Bose in the story Nehru, Netaji, Car and Envy (Feb 6). There are enough signs that Bose may not have died in a plane crash at Taihoku in 1945; the government seems to have deliberately obfuscated the truth, fearful it may just shake our accepted versions of history. Considering the fact that Bose would certainly have not been alive now, there should be no reason for secrecy. Also, it is distressing that we don't have a detailed history of lesser-known freedom fighters. A few were given 'tamrapatras' in recognition of the sacrifices they made, but they are not remembered in any other way.

Top Tweak

MUMBAI C.K. Subramaniam: This is with reference to Eleven Firm Against Invaders (Jan 9). Among the current stalwarts in the Indian cricket team, the case of Ashwin seems to me to be special-a bowler who's a darling of the crowd after a long time, a bowler who has steadilly improved his gritty batting. Ashwin is now a force to reckon with. The tally of 250 wickets and more in 45 Tests is not a small achievement; it is a testament of his immense variety as a spinner. His dismissals of Kumar Sangakkara, Ken Williamson and Joe Root will not be forgotten. It is refreshing to see such a talented bowler in cricket after a long time.

To the Reader

We have been receiving a fair number of complaints regarding the font size of the printed articles in *Outlook*. Readers have been experiencing difficulty in the most basic relationship they have with a magazine—the act of reading. Beginning this week, we have decided to increase the font size to ease your reading experience. Happy Outlooking!—Editor



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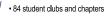
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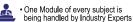
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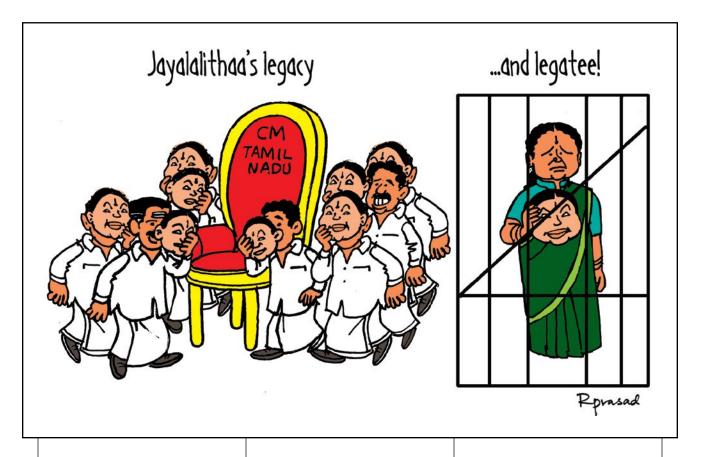


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TEST OF INEXPERIENCE

Delhi lawyers keenly observe careers of children of top lawyers/judges. The trajectory that the ward's career takes is often proportional to the parent's rise in office, they grumble. So they took notice when a young lawyer, son of one of the seniormost judges, did not pass the SC's advocate-on-record examination. We are told it is a difficult exam, but one that judges' children clear smoothly. The same lot were quick to wonder if he were too busy to study since he had been engaged by some government panels in a special tribunal, handling top cases. The young lawyer's skill was not in question; his inexperience was.

TALES OF A HALOED PRISON

Betul in Madhya Pradesh may have developed as a major centre for the RSS, which is headquartered at Nagpur. Sources in the Sangh Parivar say that this was a wish of the RSS's second Sarsanghchalak Madhay Sadashiy Golwalkar-referred to as 'Guruii'who was incarcerated in Betul jail for five months in 1949 after the RSS was declared unlawful in the wake of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination in 1948. On a recent visit to Madhya Pradesh, incumbent Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat visited barrack number one in Betul iail where Guruii was detained. The state unit of Congress cried foul, alleging violation of jail manual, but could do little to prevent Bhagwat from paying tribute to the RSS ideologue.

POLITICS OF SIBLING RIVALRY

Politics, it seems, has come in the way of sibling affection in West Bengal. An articulate lawmaker from the ruling party is believed to be having serious differences with his brother, who joined a rival party a few years ago. Initially, they had vowed to respect each other's political choice and not let it affect their relationship. But now they are not seeing eye to eye anymore. At a recent event at a Calcutta private club which both frequent, the two were heard having a loud, heated exchange. In the verbal duel-not much different from what their respective leaders indulge in-each was heard defending his leader.

OVERHEARD A big business house in Uttar Pradesh, known for its loyalty to the BSP, was wooed by the SP. The biz house considered this for a while, but preferred to stay with the BSP.



Importance of retirement planning

Importance of retirement planning

Many people fail to understand the importance of retirement planning. To live a smooth life after retirement, you need to carefully strategise your retirement planning. Developing a retirement plan will help you discover the actions you need to take to prepare for a financially secure future. The sooner you begin this planning process, the better it is for your future.

Waiting until you are only a few years away from retirement may not give you the time necessary to accumulate the funds you will need for your retirement years. If you are married, it is important that you include your spouse in every step of the retirement planning process. This will help establish a team approach that is essential for couples to develop a viable retirement plan.

There are two components to retirement income planning: Personal Planning and Financial Planning. Personal planning is important because it is the determining factor of your satisfaction with your retirement lifestyle. Financial planning is crucial because it identifies your sources of income and expenses and establishes your retirement budget, based on your personal plan.

Personal Planning

Many a times, people entering retirement do not place enough emphasis on personal planning to ensure they maximize their opportunities. So take the time now – at an early stage in your planning process – to think about the choices you have about how you would like to spend your time during retirement. Do you want to volunteer? Take up that hobby you were always interested in, but never had the time to start? Start your own business? Travel around the world? These, and many other lifestyle questions based on your preferences, are all important factors to consider when planning your retirement since your choices will drive the financial circumstances that must be met in order to achieve your goals.

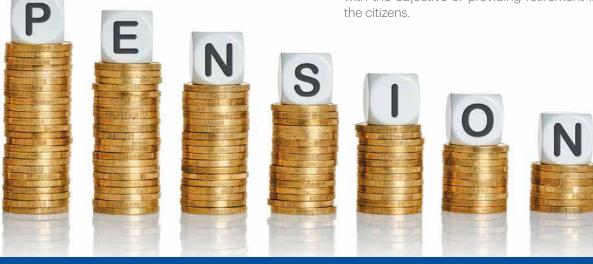
Financial Planning

Will you have adequate funds to provide the kind of retirement lifestyle you envision? Remember your income will likely come from three general sources: employer provided pension, your own self-funded pension and your own personal investments. Your retirement will be more enjoyable if your income is structured to fit your lifestyle choices and if you have developed a retirement plan to protect the assets you have worked hard to acquire.

In short, your retirement needs to be sketched out with a wise plan that shelters your requirements and addresses your desires enough for you to be carefree. Keeping the above pointers in mind, it is wise to seek assistance from a financial planner before investing in a retirement plan.

Creating a pensionable society

There are many schemes that the Government of India has initiated to encourage people to plan for their retirement, which will ensure old-age financial stability. In recent years, the scheme that has changed the way one perceives retirement savings is the National Pension System or NPS, which was launched on 1st January, 2004 with the objective of providing retirement income to all the citizens.



Working of the NPS

- NPS is a government-backed retirement savings plan for any Indian citizen aged 18-60.
- The general scheme has two tiers or accounts: Tier-1 is mandatory while Tier-2 is optional and only operational for those with Tier-1 account.

Tier-1 pension account

- The initial contribution is ₹500 and minimum annual contribution is ₹6000.
- You make a lump sum payment or pay in instalments of ₹500 or more.
- If you have joined NPS as government employee or through company, you can contribute higher sums of money.
- Unlike other pension schemes, NPS locks your funds until you retire.
- Withdrawals are subject to restrictions.

Tier-2 pension account

This pension account is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw your funds at any time. However, you can only activate this account when you have an active Tier-1 account.

Initial contribution is ₹1,000 and minimum annual

contribution is ₹2,000. You can make yearly payment or pay a minimum ₹250 or more per instalment.

Investment options under NPS

To provide you with maximum benefit on investment, PFRDA has provided three classes of assets.

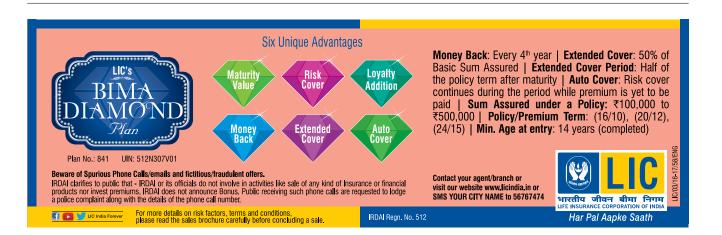
- **E** Equity (stocks) -> high-risk and fluctuating returns
- **G** Central and State government bonds or gilt funds -> Low risk but low returns
- **C** Fixed income securities (non-govt) and riskbearing instruments with fixed income like fixed deposit, corporate bonds and liquid funds
 - -> Medium risk and medium returns

You, as an individual contributor, you can make investment choices:

If you are not sure about handling investments, choose the auto choice, wherein you let fund managers handle investment decisions and allocate your pension wealth among different asset classes. Based on your age, contributions and PFRDA stipulations, your manager will choose relevant investment assets.

What first started for only the new employee workforce of the government of India, is now available to every Indian citizen. The NPS is a voluntary pension scheme that is regulated by the Pension Fund Regulatory & Development Authority (PFRDA) and introduced with an aim to provide for retirement needs. The best part of this scheme is

that it also offers tax benefits under Section 80CCD of Income-tax Act, 1961 within an overall limit of ₹1.5 lakh as prescribed under Section 80C. In the last budget, an additional deduction up to ₹50,000 was also allowed for the contribution made towards NPS. This made the total deduction under section 80CCD to ₹2 lakh.



Planning your retirement

Time was when the very mention to the word retirement would cause gloomy images to conjure up. Times have changed, or so indicate several recent retirement surveys on how Indians perceive retirement. Apparently they are less fearful of how they will manage life in retirement and confident that they will have the money to retire comfortably. Unlike the earlier generation, where several people had some form of a defined pension system in place, today, hardly any employer offers any significant retirement. Despite that, if people are confident about their retirement plans, we have come a long way.

Retirement is not an individual decision, it is a decision that you need to make with your spouse and family. While it is tough to decide when you want to retire, it is tougher these days to choose where you want to retire. Our working lives are such that we tend to have explored several cities before figuring out where to retire, but that should not be a reason for you to postpone the

In your 30s and 40s

Although there are always better things to spend money on at this stage, remember that saving even a small amount every month can add up to a big payoff at retirement.

- Learn the tricks of creating a budget, with savings for retirement a priority
- Make sure you are adequately insured health and life
- Take higher investment risk in this stage with higher allocation to equities
- Take full advantage of compounding
- Track PF contributions
- Start an NPS account
- Start saving for a retirement plan if not done already
- Assess the progress of your existing retirement contributions



planning process.

And although when we first start out in the workforce, retirement often seems a long way off. The reality, however, is that as time goes by we get caught up with buying a home, raising a family, and doing all the things that make life rewarding. All these financial activities result in planning for retirement being pushed to the backburner. Contributing to your retirement plan is one of the best ways to give yourself greater long-term financial security—regardless of your age.

The earlier you start, the better

Generally speaking, the sooner you start saving, and the more you save, the more money you could have set aside when it's time to retire. In addition to helping contribute to your future financial security, there are also benefits you can enjoy today when you participate in your retirement plan. Moreover, when it comes to investing, time can literally be money. This is particularly true with respect to an investment process known as compounding. Compounding is what happens when the money you save (in a savings account, a mutual fund or the provident fund) grows—and that increased amount remains in your account to be reinvested to potentially earn even more.

When it comes to savings for retirement, most tend to wait; actually delay the start as they feel they have plenty of time. The advantage of starting early on the other hand, however small a start it may be is far better than the impact the cost of waiting can have on your retirement balance. Someone in their 30s may not have an idea of the exact expenses after retirement, which makes it difficult to estimate expenses in retirement

Reasons to plan retirement

- Longer life expectancy*
- Pension
- Nuclear setups
- Financial independence
- Retirement goals

*Life expectancy has been rising consistently in India. It was 58 in 1991,62 in 2001 & 65 in 2011, as per World Bank reports

Monthly savings to build ₹1 crore corpus at the age of 60 30 35 40 45 50 55 Age Annual returns 6.710 10.515 16.977 28.899 54.661 1,36,097 (8%)Annual

13.169

Source: Outlook Money

1,29,137

48,817

at this stage. In such a situation one should compare income to expenses and go with a 75-80 per cent of the current income figure to save for.

returns

(10%)

4,424

7.537

To address the dilemma of how much you need in your 20s and 30s, make sure that you are saving a significant part of your income towards retirement. The approach needed is of income replacement in this stage. So if you are earning ₹1 lakh a month, think of inflation adjusted figure that you should invest towards when you retire 25-30 years later. Likewise, when you are closer towards your 50s, you would be in a better position to know of your essential expenses, which will help you save and invest to build a corpus that can take care of the expenses you will incur in retirement by way of expense replacement calculations.

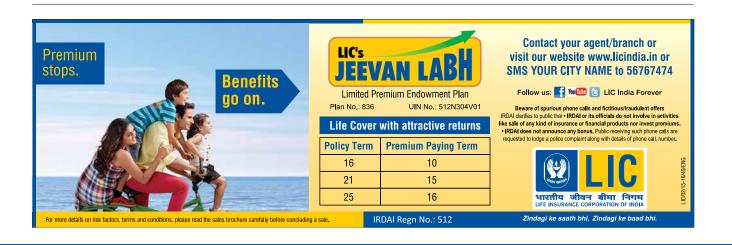
It is natural to ask how much is enough when it comes to saving for retirement, but instead of putting off saving for it because of no clear answer to it, do not deprive yourself of the money that you could otherwise save towards retirement. Have a casual conversation with retirees to get an insight into the expenses post retirement, mainly to gauge the impact of inflation.

They would perhaps give you examples of how day-to-day expenses have grown over the past three to four decades since their first employment. These discussions could provide greater insights into the importance of retirement planning.

24,127

If you have already started saving, you're on the right track and should consider increasing your contribution level periodically to further fuel your retirement savings. If you haven't started saving through your retirement plan, think about starting on right away, and contributing what you can. Make monthly contributions so that it is in line with your monthly earnings by way of income. This approach will not put undue burden on you to park lump sum into investments from time to time

Planning for retirement is a lifelong process, not just something you worry about once you are nearing it. But a good way to start working towards your retirement plan is to set a financial goal, a roadmap that will lead you to it. The inherent advantage of starting early is that it becomes a habit which pays off in the long run. Keeping this logic, delaying retirement planning is not an option.



Smart way to build a corpus through LIC's

New Jeevan Nidhi policy

Aiming to build a ₹1 crore retirement kitty is a good start. But you need to put money into an instrument which can help you build this sum. One of the options that you have is to contribute regulalry to LIC's new Jeevan Nidhi policy.

How it works?

This is a non unit-linked insurance pension plan, which can be purchased to cover the risk of living too long and hence has multiple pension options to cover that risk.

The corpus that is created to provide pension for old age is the Sum Assured + Accrued Guaranteed Additions + Simple Reversionary Bonus + Final Additional Bonus. The age where pension is payable is called Vesting Age and the date when pension starts is called Vesting Date.

Key Features

- Deferred annuity plan with bonus facility
- Guaranteed Additions available for the first 5 years
- Offers Bonus from the 6th year onwards
- Optional cover of Accidental Death and Disability Benefit rider available
- Large sum assured rebate

Policy benefits

Death Benefit: In case of death of the Life Insured before the vesting date, but

Within the first 5 years of the policy: provided all premiums have been paid, the nominee will be provided the Basic Sum Assured + accrued Guaranteed Additions which can be paid in a lumpsum or as annuity or a combination of the two.

After the first 5 years of the policy: provided all premiums have been paid, the nominee will be provided the Basic Sum Assured + accrued Guaranteed Additions + Simple Reversionary + Final Additional Bonus, if any, which can be paid in a lumpsum or as annuity or a combination of the two.

In case of death of the Life Insured after the vesting date, it entirely depends upon pension option chosen.

Vesting Benefit – At the time of vesting, there are 3 choices

- Withdraw 1/3rd of the entire corpus tax free and then purchase an Immediate Annuity Plan of LIC from the remaining amount at the prevailing annuity rates
- Buy an Immediate Annuity Plan like Jeevan Akshay of LIC from the entire sum at prevailing annuity rates
- Buy a Single Premium Deferred Annuity Plan like LIC's New Jeevan Nidhi

Income Tax Benefit: Premiums paid under life insurance policy are exempted from tax under Section 80 C and 1/3rd of the maturity proceeds are exempted from tax under Section 10(10A). Pension amount will be taxable.

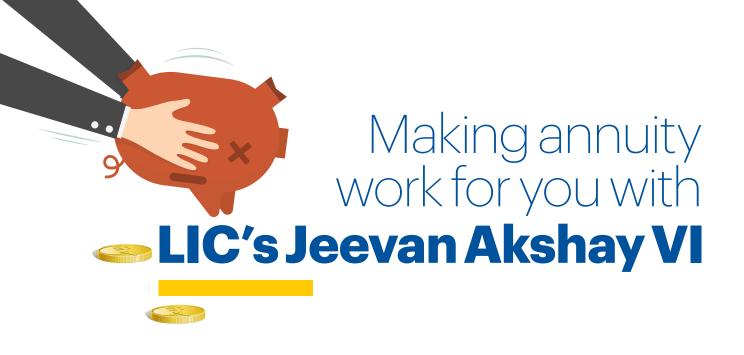
Targeted corpus: 1 Cr Approx

Age	Yearly Premium* (Rs)		
30	1,23,124		
35	1,76,440		
40	2,59,225		
45	4,13,695		
50	8,13,974		

Vesting Age: 60

Assumed investment return @8%; *Premium exclusive of service tax

Eligibility criteria			
Min	Max		
1 lakh for RP* 1.5 lakh for SP*	No Limit		
7 for RP 5 for SP	35		
Single	Regular		
20 years	58 for RP; 60 for SP		
55 years	65 years		
	Min 1 lakh for RP* 1.5 lakh for SP* 7 for RP 5 for SP Single 20 years		



The Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) has introduced its immediate annuity plan Jeevan Akshay VI with certain modifications. It is a single premium policy and has to be purchased by paying a lump sum amount at once. Immediate annuities are a very simple product. You pay a 'purchase price' to the insurer in the form of a single premium (lump sum). In return, the insurer pays you a guaranteed monthly, quarterly or annual income (the annuity) as long as you live.

The annuity can be paid monthly, quarterly, biannually or annually as chosen. This pension plan has 6 options to choose from. Once the individual chooses an option, it can't be changed during as the payout starts immediately with the plan. But immediate annuity plans, which guarantee lifelong income, are a good fit for investors who value certainty over everything else. In case of Jeevan Akshay VI, there is additional benefit of guaranteed returns throughout the life of the policy.

Which option?

LIC offers 10 annuity options under this product. This is best explained with the real-life example of LIC's immediate annuity plan Jeevan Akshay VI.

Purchase price: When signing up for your plan, you can choose either lifelong annuity with or without return of purchase price. Let's assume you are 60, have just retired and can pay ₹10 lakh to purchase an annuity. If you choose a lifelong annuity without return of purchase price, you will receive an annual payout of ₹93,650 (or monthly income of ₹7,450) for the rest of your life. The initial premium will never be returned. But if you choose a plan with return of purchase

price, you will receive a lower monthly income of about ₹5,592 for the rest of your life, with the ₹10 lakh repaid to your nominees upon your death. Opting for

the plan without return of purchase price is your best bet if your objective is to get maximum bang for your retirement buck. In any case, 25 years hence (assuming your life expectancy is 85), the value of that ₹10 lakh would be eroded by inflation and may not mean much to your heirs by then.

Increasing annuity

Apart from a fixed annuity, LIC offers you the alternative of an increasing annuity, which rises by 3 per cent every year. Investing ₹10 lakh in the 3 per cent increasing annuity from LIC for instance, will start you at a monthly income of about ₹6,000, which will rise by ₹180 annually.

Inclusion of Spouse

If you want to take care of the income needs of your spouse also, after your death, you can choose from the available annuity options H, I, & J.

Eligibility

Minimum age at entry: 30 years last birthday

Maximum age at entry:

100 years (LBD) for Option F and 85 years for plan other than Option F

Minimum Purchase Price: ₹1 lakh and ₹1.5

lakh (online sale)

Variou	us Annuity options to choose from					
Option	Type of Annuity					
Option A	Annuity for Life at a uniform rate					
Option B	Annuity guaranteed for 5 years and for life thereafter					
Option C	Annuity guaranteed for 10 years and for life thereafter					
Option D	Annuity guaranteed for 15 years and for life thereafter					
Option E	Annuity guaranteed for 20 years and for life thereafter					
Option F	Annuity for life with return of purchase price on death of the annuitant					
Option G	Annuity for life increasing at the simple rate of 3% p.a.					
Option H	Annuity for life with a provision of 50% of the annuity to the spouse on the death of the annuitant					
Option I	Annuity for life with a provision of 100% of the annuity to the spouse on the death of the annuitant					
Option J	Annuity for life with a provision of 100% of the annuity to the spouse on the death of the annuitant with return of purchase price on the death of last survivor					

Premium Payment

LIC Jeevan Akshay is a single premium payment plan, meaning that the premium has to be paid in lump sum at once. The annuity can be paid annually, biannually, quarterly or monthly depending on what the assured chooses. Listed to the right is an illustration of a table showing annuity payouts for ₹1 lakh for different options of the plan.

Age Last Birthday	Yearly annuity amount under option								
	А	D (15 Years Certain)	F	G	н	1	J		
30	6750	6730	6430	4870	6640	6530	6410		
40	7080	7020	6470	5230	6870	6680	6430		
50	7710	7530	6520	5900	7330	6990	6470		
60	8930	8390	6600	7140	8220	7620	6530		
70	11650	9460	6730	9820	10130	8970	6620		
80	17410	10080	6920	15440	14170	11940	6760		
All figures in ₹									





Don't fall prey to misleading advertisements of the MNCs in the name of health drinks for your children.

Only adopt Patanjali Herbal Power Vita confirming on scientific ayurved and food science for your children.

IN & AROUND THE SUBCONTINENTAL MENU

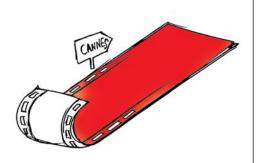
SHABREENA, DESTROYER OF MINES

Living along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir is no mean task, as cross-border firings are the order of the day even in times of relative peace. At times, when the tension between the perennially bellicose neighbour-nations escalates, the shell-shocked residents are often asked to vacate the land of their ancestors and advised not to return until the normalcy returns. But with no let-up in the tense situation for days together, many of them have now learnt to live with it. Now, a good Samaritan Kashmiri woman, Shabreena Sidiqi, has come up with a novel, "mine risk education" initiative to help save lives from landmines and unexploded shells through an awareness campaign. A post-graduate in business administration, the 27-year-old braveheart visits different villages along the border in Rajaouri, Poonch, Baramullla and Kupwara sectors along with her team to apprise people about the safety and security measures to be adopted in emergency situations in highly sensitive zones. May her doughty type prosper.



A DIFFERENT SKIN SHOW

THERE is more to Cannes than all on the red carpet. Far from being the resort of choice for glamorous showstoppers from across the globe, the prestigious international film festival traditionally provides a platform to film-makers of all hues to showcase their cinematic sensibility through the labours of their love, big or small. This year, a Punjabi short film, Chamm (skin), revolving around the struggles of Dalits, will get an international podium. The movie, directed by Rajeev, is about landless Dalit labourers of Puniab who are struggling to get their onethird share of land. Little has been heard of their struggle, which has been going on in around 70 villages of Sangrur and Mansa districts for the past nine years. Now, hopefully, their plight will get enough eyeballs in Cannes, irrespective of its resident distractions—statuesque stars in resplendent gowns, or the lure of money-spinning Hollywood.





PERSONA NON GRATA

HEN the BBC made a documentary on poaching of rhinos in Kaziranga, little did its enterprising reporter realise that the Indian babus were not as thick-skinned as he would have liked them to be. Olfactory sense for a scoop led its South Asia correspondent Justin Rowlatt to the interiors of the famous wildlife sanctuary in Assam to investigate if the government was taking far too stringent measures to pre-empt poaching. Out came a chilling film-Killing for Conservation—highlighting what it called the "dark secrets" of the state's ruthless strategy to deal with the issue. The film claimed that trigger-happy forest guards had gunned down more people than the number of rhinos killed by poachers. The environment ministry was not amused. It has not only brushed aside the 'shoot-at-sight' slur but also recommended blacklisting of the scoop-hunter from the internationally venerated broadcasting behemoth.

SEEDS OVER SOLAPUR

If there is one community

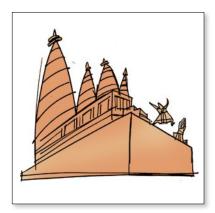
endured a credibility issue over F there is one community that has decades, it must be the meteorologists. There was a time when people carried raincoats when weathermen predicted a sunny day. But now, thanks to rapid advancements in technology, especially in satellites, they are trying their best to undo their image by hitting the bulls eye more than ever before. These days, they are even trying to be adventurous. Come monsoon, and a team of weather scientists will fly airplanes laden with silver iodide over clouds, hovering over the drought-prone Solapur in Maharashtra to launch a three-year probe to ascertain whether cloud seeding produces sufficient rain. Under this process, silver iodide is released into the atmosphere. Its particles then rise into the clouds and cause the moisture to freeze. The particles actually act as a base for water vapour to settle on. The water vapour finally crystallises and falls as snow or rain.



Illustrations by SAJITH KUMAR

FRUITS FROM THE WONDER TREE

Well-known Bangladeshi dance school Shadhona has been invited to represent the nation for the prestigious Khajuraho Dance Festival this year, to be held from February 20- 26. A display of the crafts and culture of Bangladesh will be showcased too. Besides, there will be daily performances of dances from Bangladesh on an open-air stage. Raibeshe, Baul, Poddar Nachon and other folk dances will be presented. The highlight will be a Bharatanatyam recital by dancer Amit Chowdhury and his students from the dance school Kolpotoru.



LISTEN TO THE RADIO

THE UN's decision to celebrate World Radio Day since 2012 has enth-used Sri Lankans who believe that they should be at the forefront of all festivities to mark the occasion. Sri Lanka was, of course, a pioneer among broadcasting nations—the first in Southeast Asia to adopt it. The history of Radio Ceylon dates back to 1925, when its precursor, Colombo Radio, was launched on December 16. Radio transmissions in the island nation commenced just three years after the launch of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), making it the first-ever radio station in Asia and the second oldest in the world. Broadcasting on an experimental basis was started in then Ceylon by the Telegraph Department in 1923. Long before TV grabbed eyeballs, most Sri Lankans used to get breaking news from the radio. It was the radio that had broken the news of the conquest of Mt Everest by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay on May 29, 1953.



THE TASTE OF HOME

I was a homecoming Wang Qi had never hoped for. But when the 77-year-old former Chinese soldier set foot on his native country, it resulted in a tearful reunion with his long-lost kin after over



50 years. Wang had been caught in Indian territory shortly after the India-China war in 1962 and was imprisoned till 1969. Instead of returning, he chose to settle down in Tirodi village of Balaghat district in Madhya Pradesh. Not only that, he married an Indian named Sushila. Taking note of Wang's extended Indian sojourn in the media, Chinese diplomats in India facilitated his return. An emotional Wang went to China with his son Vishnu Wang, daughter-in-law Neha and granddaughter Khanak, though his better half stayed back. Wang now has the right and the choice to either stay back or return to India, his home for more than five decades.

MR JUSTICE RINGS A BELL

INDIAN prisoner Sarabjit Singh may have been killed in a cold-blooded manner at Kot Lakhpat jail four years ago, but Pakistan's judiciary has never

ago, but Pakistan's judiciary has never fought shy of asserting its august presence in the country. A court in Lahore has issued a warrant (so what if it was bailable!) against the deputy superintendent of the jail where Sarabjit had been allegedly murdered by Amir Tamba and Mudassar, two inmates facing the death row. The court was peeved at the prison official's temerity

to ignore its summons to appear before it in connection with the Indian's killing. The judge has also expressed his displeasure with the tardy progress in the case and

admonished the jail officials for not cooperating with the court. Pakistan had earlier set up a one-man judicial commission under Justice Mazhar Ali Akbat Naqvi to probe the case after Tamba and Mudassar confessed to having killed Sarabjit to avenge the killing of people in the Lahore and Faislabad blasts, which they alleged had been carried out by an Indian.



CHINESE DILEMMA

BY PRANAY SHARMA

NLIKE Pakistan, readily identified as a bitterly hostile neighbour and 'state sponsor of terrorism', most Indians and the country's leadership in particular, holds a more ambivalent opinion about China.

Significantly, though the much bandied about 'all-weather' Sino-Pak ties have usually worked to India's detriment, leaders in New Delhi, who mercilessly castigate Pakistan, show much more restraint and caution in criticising China in public. Views critical of China are mostly limited to opinion pieces in the media or aired by retired government officials in TV debates. A statement from South Block against Beijing is a rarity.

"Our relations with China are not in black and white; they are more in the gray," affirms a senior Indian diplomat. His remarks are reflective of the differing assessment, born out of past experience and ground reality, the Indian leadership have about the two neighbours.

With Pakistan, successive generations of Indian leaders and diplomats have spent entire careers in pursuing policies in the hope of normalising and improving relations. Unfortunately, most have ended in failures, leading Delhi's political establishment to resignedly conclude at times that 'good neighbourly' relations with Pakistan would remain elusive, especially as long as Islamabad opts for cross-border terror as the most effective tool in its engagement with India.

With China, however, India's relations have mostly been layered, providing the two countries to look for areas of cooperation of mutual benefit, even as their differences on crucial issues remain. The best example is their disputed boundary that, even after nearly six decades, is still unresolved. But this has not intruded in the two nations' cooperation in other areas, especially in trade and other economic fields and also at international and multilateral fora to further common interests.

But whether this assessment of China is still valid is now coming under fresh scrutiny. An immediate provocation of this rethink has been prompted by China's decision earlier this month yet again to block a move at the UN Security Council to designate Pakistan-based



Xi Stoops To Co

China privileges its converging interests with Pakistan over

terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist. Masood is wanted by India for carrying out the murderous attack in January 2016 at the Indian Air Force base in Pathankot, in Punjab.

"We had expected China would have been more understanding of the danger posed to all by terrorism," foreign ministry spokesman Vikas Swarup had responded, expressing disappointment at the "prevalence of double standards in the fight against terrorism".

However, now the issue can be discussed further when foreign secretary S. Jaishankar and executive vice-chairman of China Hang Yesui meet for the first ever strategic dialogue between the two nations on February 22 in Beijing.

The fact that the Chinese decision at the UN comes as part of a long line of anti-Indian decisions by the Chinese, including its reluctance to see India as a Nuclear Suppliers' Group member or getting a seat in the UN Security Council, has deepened concerns about its intentions towards India.

Questions are now being raised on whether it was time for India to build 'pressure points' that could hurt Beijing and force it to be more sensitive to some of key India's concerns.

Former foreign secretary Kanwal Sibal points out the fact that stalling the move against Azhar not only shows China's determination to shield Pakistan in the UN Security Council on the issue of terrorism and prevent it from being isolated at the international stage, but also a total disregard for its own international reputation and its likely negative impact on India-China relations. "We should draw the red line with China," says Sibal. "The Chinese should realise that if they continue with such policies there will be a price to pay," he adds.

Sibal points out steps like using the Dalai Lama's international stature more



nquer

benefits of warm ties with India

effectively, organising conferences on democracy with Chinese dissidents in India and opposing the 'One-Belt-One-Road' initiative of China could be some of these 'pressure points' against Beijing.

But there is also fear in some quarters that such aggressive steps could also force China to unleash similar tactics against India, whereby such a highstakes shift in policy may ultimately prove to be counter-productive.

The UN resolution on the JeM chief, interestingly, was moved by the United States and backed by both the United Kingdom and France, countries that were earlier reluctant to go out of their way to back a resolution against Pakistan. So why did China block it?

"In reality, Pakistan has become so important geo-politically for China that it is willing to be seen in our eyes as complicit with Pakistan on promoting terror against India," says Sibal.

His remarks refer to the \$46 billion in-

NEW AGE Chinese president Xi Jinping with Narendra Modi in Delhi

vestment that China made in developing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that passes through Balochistan, linking Gwador to China's Xinjiang province. The fear that its support for a ban on Masood could turn militants active in the area against it and jeopardise the CPEC might have played a major role in China's decision.

But former Indian Permanent Representative of the UN, Asoke Mukerji, argues that it is the People Liberation Army (PLA) and its link with the Pakistan army that was behind the Chinese decision.

The PLA's decision-making role had been significantly reduced since 1978 when China embarked on its economic liberalisation and opened its market to outsiders. "But under Xi Jinping they are back in favour and now play a crucial role in many foreign policy decisions, overruling Chinese diplomats," says Mukerji.

He points out that since Masood Azhar is a valued asset of the Pakistani army and often used by it against India, the Chinese leadership, with an obvious bit of nudging from the PLA, decided to prevent his ban at the UN.

Historian and strategic affairs commentator Srinath Raghavan, however, feels the latest Chinese decision on Masood has to be looked in the context of the ongoing US-China tussle, which has only increased since Donald Trump came to power.

"The Chinese had already raised technical opposition to the resolution at the UN. It would be foolish on our part to think that they will now blink just because the US has decided to flex its muscle against Pakistan," says Raghavan. "I think it will only make the Chinese resolve stronger to defend Pakistan."

But the question remains as to why



GETTY IMA

Xi with Nawaz Sharif in Islamabad

this ban has become so important for India and also how effective will a UN sanction be to change Pakistan's consistently errant behaviour?

Perhaps on the ground it will not change much, as the JeM chief may just go underground for a while and resurface some months later to head another new terror outfit and continue his anti-Indian activities as usual from Pakistani soil. "But we have to create awareness about these terrorists and expose Pakistan's duplicity," says Sibal.

He points out that since the Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif talks about both his commitment to fight terrorism and build peaceful relations with India, his seriousness on this issue will make it clear how sincere he is in pursuing them. "We have to ensure that he is forced to demonstrate that resolve," he says.

Dealt a grievous blow from China's repeated rebuff at the UN on an issue central to the Indian state, where do Sino-Indian relations go from here?

South Block officials point out that today the two countries are more engaged with each other than ever before and have managed to make significant progress in various areas. China is India's largest trading partner in goods. It also has the potential to play a significant role in India's economic development and growth, especially in infrastructure.

The contacts between the two sides have been expanding to newer areas and the two sides have been conducting joint military exercises at regular intervals since 2007. In addition, more than 11,000 Indian students now study in China.

More importantly, the Sino-Indian border has remained largely peaceful, in glaring contrast to the Line of Control and international border with Pakistan.

But as former NSA Shivshankar Menon points out in his recently published book, *Choices*, "Finding the balance between rivalry and incentives for good behaviour, between competition and cooperation, is among the hardest tasks in strategy."

The simultaneous rise of China and India will continue to pose challenges as well as opportunities for both countries in the coming days. Whether they can build a foundation of trust and goodwill and extirpate ill-will and suspicion will depend on the maturity with which leaders in New Delhi and Beijing handle them.



JEHADIS ARE SHARED ASSETS

A deeper design can be read in China's cosseting of Masood Azhar



GETTY IMAGES

HERE are different kinds of jehadi leaders in Pakistan-there are those that are shot dead after they become redundant and seem troublesome, like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi's Malik Ishaq; then there are others such as Hafiz Saeed, who, despite their relevance, can be put under house arrest in the name of national interest to negotiate more affectively with a larger power. But then there are those like Jaish-e-Mohammed's Masood Azhar, who remain so relevant to the security institution that help is sought from powerful allies like China to protect them at international forums. In the past calendar year, China blocked Indian and now even American efforts to pass a resolution in the UN Security Council declaring Azhar as terrorist.

Azhar's significance for Pakistan's security establishment is beyond doubt. Though originally a member of the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), Azhar opened his own shop called JeM after his return from India as part of Indian Airline flight IC-814 hostage swap in 2000. At that time, he was ready to engage

Chinese diplomats say they don't push Pakistan on jehad or Azhar like the US, as it would create bitterness. India in Indian Kashmir, fight in Afghanistan and also not attract attention internationally through killing Shias. Sectarian violence was one of the reasons that the military intelligence searched for a Deobandimilitant alternative at that time. Fazlub Rehman Khalil, who headed HuM, was rabidly anti-Shia. It is not that Azhar and JeM did not have a sectarian agenda, however, they were ready to postpone that violence to a later date. This also made JeM different from its mother organisations, the Sipha-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and the LeJ.

The JeM went through its rough patch after 2001, during which some of its members broke away and established an organisation called al-Furqan that turned against the state, but the Azhar faction remained docile and connected to the security establishment. So, when Azhar was connected with one of the 2002 attacks on Pervez Musharraf, it was not an attack on the army but against a chief who was viewed by segments of the army as having crossed a line vis-a-vis America. The seeming friction inside the JeM dissipated after Musharraf's departure.



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CHINESE WHISPER OPINION

Azhar, whose family belongs to a small town of Karohr Pakka, on the other side of the now dry Sutlej, shifted to Bahawalpur sometimes in the 1980s. Born to a school teacher, Azhar's maternal grandfather was part of Majlis-e-Ahrar, a pre-Partition radical Islamist group. Partly trained in Bahawalpur, Azhar went for higher madrasa education at the Banori Town seminary, which had good contacts with the Taliban and al-Qaeda. As member of the HuM, Masood Azhar developed such good links with al-Qaeda that Osama bin Laden partly financed his new JeM and bought out HuM's financial interests in several madrasas in Karachi and certain other cities. JeM continues to have links with al-Qaeda. Omar Saeed Sheikh, the British jehadi involved in the killing of American journalist Daniel Pearl, was one of the prominent militants shared by al-Qaeda and JeM. Sheikh was also one of the three whose release was demanded by the IC-814 hijackers. He remains safely inside a jail in Hyderabad.

NLIKE the Ahl-Hadith LeT/JuD network that has diversified activities and tried to spread through welfare activities, Azhar kept his organisation dedicated to Jehad. His close aides always dismiss the idea of any social work by calling it a distraction from their main work of jehad. In fact, Azhar's role is significant in Deobandi militancy—currently, his books on jehad, especially his magnum opus, Fathaul Jawwad, are seen as the most critical works on the subject. JeM uses the book to train people and convert them to the idea of jehad on a regular basis. It is from amongst the group of people that complete the Daura-e-Tafseer that men are selected for minor and major military training. After the 2002 Indian Parliament attack, the JeM remained in the background, till the attack on Pathankot, that his men proudly own.

It is not just because of his willingness to fight in Kashmir that Azhar is important for Pakistan. The fact that he is a Deobandi militant turns him into a solid line of ideological connection with the Taliban in Afghanistan. The latter is a group that remains key to Pakistan's strategic community for setting the future course for Afghanistan and Central Asia. Notwithstanding the public claim made by the former army chief, Gen Ashfaq Pervez Kiyani, that the policy of strategic depth was redundant, Rawalpindi continues to be interested in having an influence over the future of its northern neighbour.

This equation is perhaps easier to understand than China's continued support to Pakistan for saving Azhar. Beijing blocking any effort at the UN Security Council flies in the face of the popular myth that China is deeply interested in seeing an end to all forms of militancy due to its larger concern for its Muslim areas. The Uighurs remains a problem for China. It is a kind of a problem that forced China to

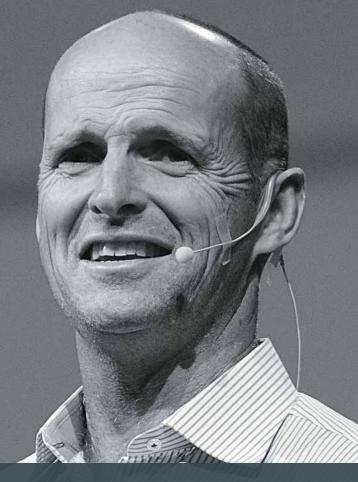
China has developed a network with jehadis, even hosting them in Beijing. Azhar, other Deobandis can be useful to them. temporarily close its borders with Pakistan at several occasions in the past decade, a country with whom it is supposed to have a relationship 'deeper than the Arabian Sea and higher than the Himalayas'. Chinese diplomats are quick to tell you that they do not push Pakistan on the jehadi issue or Masood Azhar because they do not want to impose on the country something that would result in the same kind of bitterness as Islamabad has with Washington.

However, this may not just simply be a matter of respecting sovereignty. We know that Beijing can put its foot down if needed, as in 2007, when it pressured Musharraf to take action against the Lal Masjid and its clerics after they harassed some Chinese masseuse in Islamabad. Most probably, China is not worried about the main Deobandi militant groups in both Afghanistan and Pakistan attacking Chinese interests. It is noteworthy that the Chinese have remained relatively safe at a time when nationals of Western states (both civilian and military) came under attack by the Taliban or other jehadi groups. In Pakistan Chinese workers have worked in Gilgit-Baltistan for long without being attacked by the Taliban. The same goes for southern Punjabknown for the JeM's presence-where hundreds of Chinese are employed in construction projects.

But the question is that, with China investing in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor an the onebelt-one-road project, Pakistan's military should have by now put a process in place to make these groups redundant and weed them out. If the former ISI chief Rizwan Akhtar thought that mainstreaming them through bringing them into politics or giving jehadis jobs in para-military and police would solve the problem, then this won't happen, because militancy is linked with radical ideas. The more hardcore jehadis believe in what they do not because it is fun and games. Nevertheless, a serious plan to retire militancy is not visible, which does not even seem to bother the Chinese, unless they have their own independent plan to secure themselves against the jehadis, or feel completely safe, and have their own plans to use these militants to their own advantage. Azhar is an ideological mercenary who along with his other Deobandi militants could be utilised in limited battles in the region. Since they have taken greater interest in South Asia, China has developed its own communication network with various jehadi groups and religious parties. Many of the leaders were flown to and hosted in Beijing. The result was development of greater understanding that will probably help China in times of need.

Thus, Azhar may be Pakistan's baby but China seems equally guilty in wanting to milk and fatten this child. He is certainly of more strategic use than meets the eye. \square

(The writer is a research associate at the SOAS, University of London South Asia Institute)



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BY ANOO BHUYAN

lage road, but for the fact that this is NH-2 and connects four states-Nagaland and Manipur in this sector. Cars zigzag up the hills and also simultaneously zigzag on the asphalt, to avoid massive craters, one nearly every 15 feet. It's only 60-odd km from capital Imphal in the Meitei-dominated valley to the ethnic Naga-flavoured Senapati district up in the north, but the road makes it a nearly three-hour drive. Metaphors may be the last thing on a traveller's mind, but the state of the physical link in this case really does mirror the psychological distance between the two zones.

T could pass off as an unfinished vil-

Just a fortnight left to assembly polls, and Manipur's faultlines are all too visible. An overarching signboard announces the arrival at Senapati. Large, old oil tins pock-mark the road—markers of a de facto shift in administrative power.

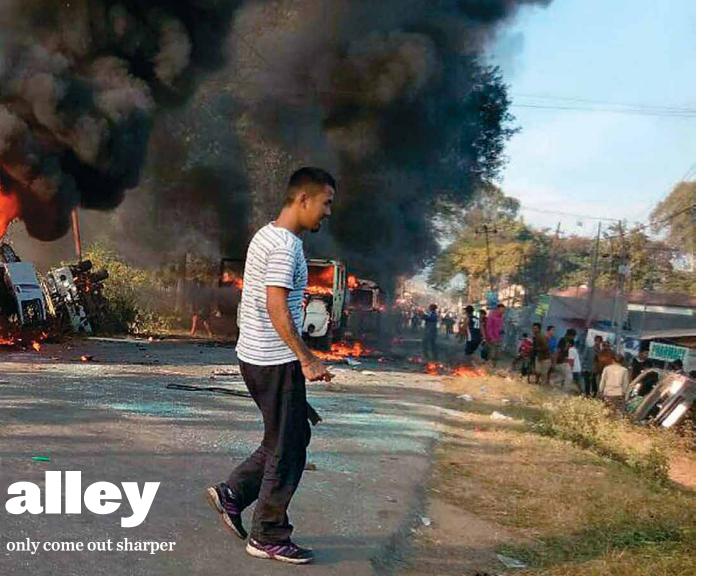
Cars must slow down to weave through. Young men from the Naga People's Organisation (NPO) mill around, glaring at you from behind bandanas that cover their faces. They are armed with sticks and stones, and cars that try to speed away do so at some risk of broken glass.

These young men have been camping here since November, enforcing a blockade called by the United Naga Council (UNC). They check all vehicles to see if any commercial items are being transported. If they are, the drivers are told to unload the items at the NPO office a little distance away. There is no sign of the Manipur state police. Or the paramilitary forces deployed in the west on NH-37, opening up the highway coming into Imphal from Karimganj in Assam that too had been initially blockaded. Here, on India's easternmost national highway, it's these men in their twenties who decide what goes and what doesn't.

The UNC blockade is an angry response to the state government's decision

to bifurcate seven of Manipur's nine old districts, creating seven new ones. The government went ahead with its move in December, citing a decades-old demand, and saying smaller units make for better administration. The UNC suspects otherwise-they question how the government has cleaved tribal land that has been guaranteed to them by the Constitution, and that too without their permission. They fear it displaces them as the majority in some of these districts for instance, Tangkhul Nagas have been rendered a minority in the new Kangpokpi district carved out of Senapati, with its Kuki-dominated areas consolidated in response to an old demand.

Politics in Manipur can be counter-intuitive. 'Iron lady' Irom Sharmila, such a totemic presence over the years, has gotten nowhere in formal politics. And the Christian Nagas have an ally in a new force, the BJP, which hopes to extend its footprint in the Northeast with a meaningful electoral debut here. In a curious



Photograph: GETTY IMAGES

inversion of what's taken to be the paradigm nationally, the BJP had come into a state riven along ethnic lines with a narrative of unity; the ruling Congress is identified with a partisan line favouring the Hindu Meiteis, Manipur's dominant group that controls the state's levers of power. Both the UNC and the BJP ask a basic question that the Congress is yet to answer: after 15 straight years in power, why did the Congress choose to divide these districts so close to the elections, towards the end of their third term?

Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh answers that mostly in platitudes. But in an interview to *Outlook*, he lets on with a smile, "We have done this strategically." His chess move is seen as part of a shrewd plan to subvert any pan-Manipur sentiment solidifying against the Congress retaining power. One might feel anti-incumbency, blockades, extrajudicial killings and low levels of development would be reason enough to boot out the Congress. Yet, the state saw a

four-month-long blockade before the 2012 state elections as well, and it didn't stop an Ibobi-led Congress from wresting 42 out of 60 seats then.

Why? The answer is polarisation. Asked if the blockade will have any impact against the Congress, the chief minister simply answers, "No." Support for the Congress, he claims, will consolidate "not only in the valley, but also in the hills. It will be in favour of the government and our party." But that's for the record. The logic actually works by harnessing the disaffection among Meiteis

The BJP has come into a state riven along ethnic lines with a narrative of unity; the ruling Congress is seen as pro-Meitei.

OUT OF BOUNDS Vehicles from Nagaland burned during the blockade

at a time when Naga politics threatens to set the terms. And the BJP, which had of late made inroads in the valley—winning over two high-profile faces from the Congress (ex-footballer Nongthombam Biren Singh and Y. Erabot Singh) last autumn—now finds itself painted into a more pro-Naga position.

Indeed, post-blockade, the BJP's leader in the state assembly, Khumukcham Joykishan, a young face who could have been in line to be the CM candidate, made an angry exit. Joykishan, who had won last time as a Trinamool candidate before switching over to the BJP and giving it its first MLA in Manipur, joined the Congress in December, citing the Centre's inaction over NSCN(IM) attacks. The NSCN(IM) is in talks with the Centre, and the BJP is a partner of the ruling Naga People's Front in the neighbouring state—an association that might undo

MANIPUR POLLS





some of its leverage among the Meiteis. Naga politics spills over to Manipur—the NSCN(IM) has a chapter here, and it's seen to back both the UNC and the NPF, which is a player here too. The precise content of the Naga agreement is a matter of some nervous speculation in Manipur. While the Congress fishes in these murky waters, it can't wish away the BJP's arrival as a factor. Last time, there wasn't a viable alternative. This time, blockade fatigue and the attractions of the larger development narrative means the BJP is in line to be a strong opposition, if not make it to power.

Manipur is a key step in the BJP's larger ambitions in the region. It's already in Nagaland's ruling alliance, and a series of defections helped it wrest Arunachal Pradesh too. Its dream in Manipur is to replicate Assam, where the party went from four seats to forming the government. That would take it closer to a Congress-mukt Northeast—in its vision, a uniform bloc under the North East Democratic Alliance. Ram Madhav, old RSS tactician and the party's chief minder in troubled zones, is in charge of this end of the battle (see interview).

After three terms of the Congress, it would seem obvious and normal for peo-

ple to want change. In the short term, though, there's still the blockade to think about. And the counter-intuitive meanings it carries. Identity talk, a hill-valley rift, all this could also cause people to also retreat into familiar spaces, in this case the status quo offered by the Congress. Ibobi has played it cannily: crafting the image of a strong Meitei leader defending the valley against Naga dominance. The UNC blockade, paradoxically, may end up fortifying the foe. It allows the Congress to gain from it, while not taking responsibility for the chaos, since Naga intransigence can be blamed.

And yet, whether in the Hindu Meiteistrong valley which accounts for 40 seats or in the hills, people generally concur with the picture party tacticians paint: that till last year, there was a mood for

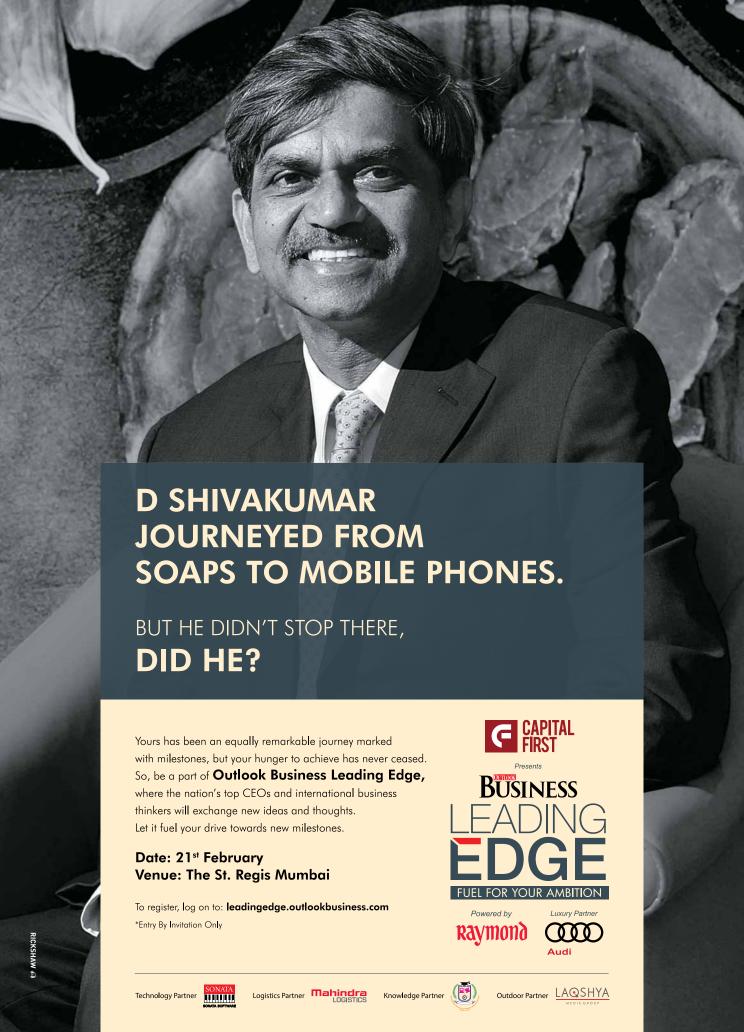
Both the national parties agree on the state's power to create new districts. Only the timing grates on the BJP.

OFF THE BLOCK (left) Illegal petrol sale in Imphal; a shop with a BJP sign

the BJP uniting the hills and the valley. The blockade came in suddenly and threw things off course. But there is still an interest in what the BJP might offer. At the NPO outpost in Senapati, Simon, who is overseeing the work of the others, sits on a wooden bench outside the shed where they are keeping seized items and says, "Congress for 15 years is too long. We should give a chance to BJP."

In Imphal, Bazan Khaidem, waiting at a petrol pump in a line of 80 cars and bikes, says he will vote BJP. "I'm an artist. I liked the designs on the new currency. Neither demonetisation nor the blockade has changed my mind," he says. At Kangpokpi, a fish-seller says the same. The candidate Nemcha Kipgen was in the Congress but switched sides recently. "We feel the development which Modi has been talking about will reach us here. The Congress has given us little. Of the two highways blocked, NH-37 was opened up only because the Centre sent forces over," says the vendor.

A number of people also profess loyalty to the Congress but cannot always answer why. Says Joy Singh, a 32-year-old



'Centre's talks won't upset Meitei interests'

As the BJP's general secretary in charge of northeastern states, Ram Madhav savs the popular expectation is that the Centre should do more in Manipur. He talks to Outlook's Anoo Bhuvan.

On the urgent issue of the blockade...a tripartite discussion has been held to resolve it. What can we expect?

The blockade is unfortunate and incorrect. Those who are managing this are not fighting with the chief minister-the victims are the people of the valley. The blockade should end. When we say 'tripartite', this is actually an internal matter of Manipur that the state government should handle. Its inefficiency and vested interests are leading to a situation where the Centre has to intervene.

So what can the central government actually do here?

When the state government sought paramilitary and central government forces, we provided them but none was used. The state government is trying to blame the Centre. But constitutionally the Centre has limited powers in law and order when there is a government in the state.

Several analysts say the BJP was doing well before the new districts were announced, but has this scrambled your chances?

Creation of new districts is well within the rights of any government, including that of Ibobi Singh. But why did he

not do it in 15 years? Having created a situation where you wanted to maximise political benefits, you pushed the state to an anarchic situation—and now you're unable to handle it. People are seeing this even while they see the benefit in creation of districts. As for us, there's an expectation that the Centre should do more, because they are frustrated with the state government. They don't realise the constitutionally limited role the Centre has to play.

You said you don't want any community to feel marginalised. How will this be balanced against the talks between the union gov-



ernment and NSCN-IM? Any cause for insecurity to people especially in the valley?

There's absolutely no question of compromising the territorial integrity of Manipur in any central government actions. Also, there's no reason why Meiteis or others should feel that their interests will be sacrificed because of negotiations the Centre is doing.

If this is the case, then why not release more information on the Naga Framework Accord that is being worked out?

See, it is a one-page understanding. It's a framework, not a final agreement, based on which further negotiations will happen. How can we disclose anything? That doesn't mean there's anything secret. This is sacrosanct: on territorial integrity there is no compromise. On the contrary, the BJP as a party will fully secure the interests of the Meiteis living in the valley. We will fully address their concerns about their language, culture, lands. 🖸

truck driver from Moreh district, bordering Myanmar, "My family has always voted Congress. What can I say...I will do what my parents want me to." At N Songlung village, 27-year-old Satmin Haokip inherited the village chief's post when his father died a few years ago. It's a Kuki village, Christian by denomination, and Sunday church services are on. "The Congress has done good work. We have proper electricity now," he says-continuous supply since last year.

But over the afternoon, he opens up a bit more about how hard life is. His wife's family has had to support him, he says ruefully. "Under NREGA, I have not got more than 8-10 days of work. We need government jobs. But if your father is not already working there to influence things, you can't get a job," he says. Another villager says he teaches in the local school and takes a bit of extra money left over from the midday meal scheme.

Visible corruption permeates daily life in Manipur. Women sell golden petrol in plastic bottles all along the main roads. Sometimes they sell this petrol right outside the petrol pump. Locals call this the "chhota pump". If one doesn't have time to wait in serpentine lines, you can pay more and get it quick at the chhota

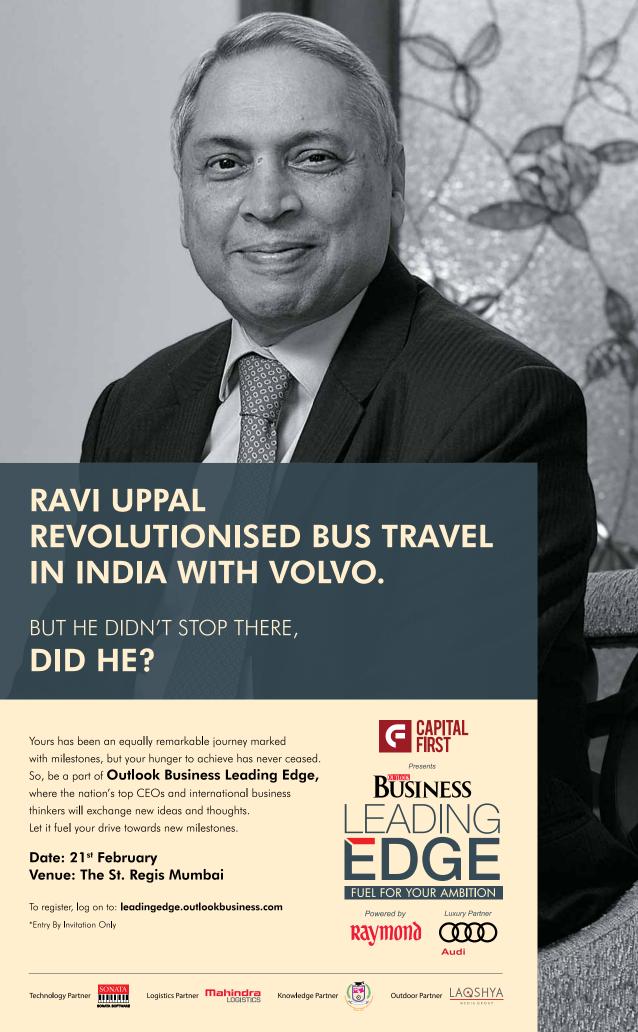
pump. In busy areas, policemen stop every autorickshaw menacingly. Auto drivers keep a few notes pressed in their hands, and in a well-practised motion, slide it smoothly into the hand of the cop.

At more exalted levels, you don't see corruption, unless it's documented in CAG reports. In 2016, the CAG studied how the PM's Gram Sadak Yojana rolled out in Manipur and concluded that dubious contracts resulted in a loss of over Rs 1 crore. Par for the course, like anywhere else. As are the cratered roads. So when Ram Madhav called this "the most conducive moment for BJP", he may have been right. There's certainly a fertile climate for pushing a pure development agenda, but it's difficult to march with merely good slogans on the thin ice of identity politics. And the BJP, not a stranger to such tactics elsewhere, found itself at its receiving end in Manipur.

After a tripartite discussion in New Delhi on February 3, the buzz was that the blockade would be called off on February 7 with the release of two top UNC leaders-but without any rollback on the new districts. The CM, in an interview to Outlook on February 6, said as much. But by the next afternoon, the UNC presidential council retracted. "If the

blockade had ended, credit would have gone to the BJP and the Centre who got everyone to negotiate. The CM wanted to jeopardise this right from the beginning," says a BJP source. The Congress, meanwhile, is trying to reinforce the idea of the UNC as aggressor, writing a letter to the PM to declare the Naga body unlawful for its "anti-national, anti-people activities." Whether or not this happens is immaterial; giving itself a veneer of Meitei guardianship is what may finally count in the intricate optics of Manipur.

Either way, a complex balancing act awaits the next regime. The two national parties may seem like foes, but the blockade exposes a certain convergence. Both parties agree on the power of the state to create new districts and its administrative logic. Both oppose the blockade and do not want a rollback. It's just the timing that grates on the BJP. Now, with the code of conduct in place, the Congress claims it cannot undo its act. Two senior party sources also cite the fear of President's rule-in case of a long faceoff. In the short term, the districts will remain. the blockade will continue, and elections will only interrupt a painful status quo. If nothing changes, it won't be a novelty in Manipur's long-term memory. O





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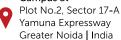
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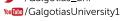


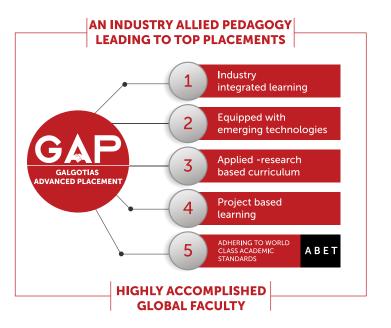
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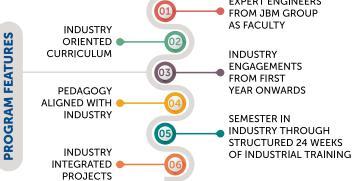
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9

FEATURES



SUCCESSION DUEL

BY KAVITHA MURALIDHARAN

HE script kept shifting with the same stunning immediacy as the scenes, acts and dramatis personae. The story that began unravelling on the night of December 5, when the colossus-like J. Javalalitha passed away, had the usual tangle of twists and turns—as always happens when a great mogul exits the stage. As the denouement wound on, a wildcard entrant, Edappadi Palanisamy, was in the spotlight. Saturday, February 18, is the day of reckoning for this relatively low-key Gounder face from Salem. By then, the one who had threatened to dominate Tamil Nadu politics, Sasikala Natarajan, would be into her first lonely weekend in a Bangalore jail.

It's surely been one of the longest political dramas in three decades-and that's saying something in a state not especially new to drama-but it may not end with an oath of office, or even Saturday's floor test. After the rebellion mounted by the 'almost man', O. Panneerselvam, Sasikala's camp had just about stanched the loss of blood-and the numbers are behind Palanisamy for now. But there are seeds of instability too. For one, Sasikala's family, the 'Mannargudi mafia', will make a play for control over party and government and no one knows if AIADMK leaders and cadres would accept it in the long run. And interested parties with a stake, from opposition DMK to the BJP central leadership, will be watching keenly.

Before this, it was the Supreme Court (SC) that put a spoke in Sasikala's plans her conviction came as a body-blow to Chinnamma's hopes of becoming the successor to Jayalalitha. She was already styling herself as the first properly Tamil woman CM! But given how Governor Vidyasagar Rao had delayed playing his hand, and the court hinted at how it had scheduled the date of verdict, perhaps she was aware that the long arm of justice would finally catch up with her.

The disproportionate assets (DA) case in which Sasikala and her relatives Ilavarasi and Sudhakaran have been sentenced to four years began in 1996, soon after Jayalalitha's first, somewhat notorious five-year rule. Subramanian Swamy, then president of Janata Party, had filed a case saying she had amassed wealth to the tune of Rs 66.65 crore disproportionate



THE LEGACY Sasikala arrives at a Bangalore special court to surrender

Who Wants a **Bound Script?**

After a flurry of coups and near-coronations, TN may settle down to a Thevar-Gounder tug of war

to her known sources of income. Ironically, Javalalitha had declared in 1991 that she would only take a token Re 1 as her salary for discharging her duties as CM. Jayalalitha was arrested in December '96, and the investigations proceeded apace.

It was in 2003, when Jayalalitha was in power, that the DMK's K. Anbazhagan requested the SC to transfer the case to Karnataka, saying a fair trial was difficult in TN with Jayalalitha occupying the CM's post. The SC then ordered the constitution of a special court in Bangalore

to try the case. In 2014, special court judge Michael D. Cunha held Javalalitha, Sasikala, her sister-in-law J. Ilavarasi and estranged nephew Sudhakaran guilty and sentenced all accused to four years of imprisonment. In May 2015, Karnataka High Court judge C.R. Kumarasamy overturned this order, acquitting all accused. In June 2015, the Karnataka government went on appeal against the acquittal and on February 14 this year, the SC restored the trial court's order holding all accused guilty and dropping the case against

Javalalitha because of her death.

Activists feel the DA case is only the tip of the iceberg. Jayaram Venkatesan of the Arappor Iyakkam, an NGO that has been exposing Sasikala and her family's 'excesses', says they have evidence that the family owns at least 43 benami companies. "Midas Golden Distilleries, arguably the largest supplier of liquor to the government-owned Tasmac in Tamil Nadu, was started with an investment of Rs 14 crore in 2002," reveals Venkatesan. "It was later established that the entire investment was made in black money. Midas was initially owned by Hot Wheels Engineering (48.37 per cent stake), but this was in turn owned by Sasikala (31 per cent holding), Ilavarasi (31 per cent) and Sri Jaya Finance and Investments (38 per cent). Hot Wheels later became 'Jazz Cinema', owned almost entirely by Sasikala. Midas had a taxable turnover of Rs 360 crore in 2010-11, this increased to Rs 1,412 crore in 2013-14 within three years of the AIADMK coming to power."

Arappor Iyakkam has also filed a complaint against Sasikala and her relatives usurping government and private lands, but no action has been taken. According to Iyakkam, music director Gangai Amaran was forced to part with his palatial bungalow in Payyanur for a mere Rs 13 lakh to Sudhakaran in 1994. It was later established that the bungalow was registered in Sasikala's name.

"But we are not giving up. We are sure there has been widespread corruption even after 1996. Even Midas is a clear case of conflict of interest and there are many companies which have received investments from Sasi Enterprises and Jaya Publications named in the DA case. We are collecting all the details. For now, we are focusing on land grab cases because very many commoners have been affected by them," Venkatesan adds.

Sasikala, however, is keeping a straight face. Calling the DA case a vindictive action of the DMK, she says she would continue to "work for the party" from jail. Observers say her plans betray her deep insecurity. She brought back her nephew T.T.V. Dinakaran, expelled by Jayalalitha in 2011, to the party fold and within hours made him the party's deputy general secretary. "It is evident that she doesn't want to trust the party with anyone else but her family. Even though he was not a party member, Dinakaran accompanied Sasikala when she met the governor to

stake claim," says Durai Karuna, a political observer. "Dinakaran was made an MP by Jayalalitha, but she did not readmit him into the party even when she took back Sasikala in 2012. Sasikala doesn't seem to realise this will not go down well with cadres, who are already seething with anger against the way she has operated after Jayalalitha's death."

When Sasikala picked Palanisamy, a Jaya loyalist rather than her own person, as the CM candidate after her conviction, she was doing so perhaps under coercion, say observers. The names doing the rounds otherwise included Deepak Jayakumar, Jayalalitha's nephew and a political greenhorn. Deepak was asked to visit Sasikala at the Golden Bay resort in Koovathur on February 14, hours before the judgement was to be pronounced, fuelling rumours about his elevation. Sources say the suggestion was quickly rejected by many MLAs who demanded that 'one among them be made the CM candidate.'

Besides being a powerful Gounder leader, Palanisamy was among the four seniors who constituted Jayalalitha's influential coterie. Soon after her death, speculation about an intra-OBC Thevar-Gounder power struggle within the party was rife. After Thevars, Gounders form

GETTY IMAGES

"In making Dinakaran deputy general secretary, Sasikala has ensured that the party remains under the family's control."

the second most influential caste bloc in the party with 28 MLAs and five ministers. Though Thevars had only 20 MLAs, the community boasted of nine ministers in the cabinet. Observers call it unfortunate that with 31 MLAs, Dalits could not exercise the kind of influence Thevars or even Gounders do in the party. When Panneerselvam became the CM after Javalalitha's death and Sasikala took over as the party's general secretary, the two most influential posts had been pocketed by Thevars. But senior Gounder leaders in the party decided to play it down, preferring the stable attractions of the fourand-half years left of AIADMK rule.

Y anointing Palanisamy, Sasikala would have appeased the Gounders for now. But by making Dinakaran the party's deputy general secretary, she has thwarted any total Gounder coup in the party. "The scenario is this: If Dinakaran is like Jayalalitha, Palanisamy is like a Panneerselvam to him," says Karuna. "That's how Sasikala perhaps thought it out. But one can never be sure if Palanisamy will be as loyal to Dinakaran or Sasikala as Panneerselvam was to Javalalitha. In fact, Sasikala brought in Dinakaran only to ensure the party remains under the family's control in her absence."

Sasikala tried all she could to woo the party to stay by her side. She visited Jayalalitha's memorial at Marina Beach before starting for Bangalore and, while paying respects, dramatically hit her hand on the stone thrice as if taking a vow. Party sources say she vowed to 'finish off Panneerselvam and the DMK'. But observers say it's another 'crass attempt by Sasikala' to claim the Jayalalitha legacy. Karuna says Sasikala wants people to believe that she is Jayalalitha's true heir. "But once she's in jail, it will be difficult for her to exercise the same kind of control she did when she was in Poes Garden."

Meanwhile, all's not well with Panneer-selvam's camp. They were jubilant over Sasikala's conviction, and had hoped that more MLAs would come over after the judgement. But many factors, including the announcement of Palanisamy as the CM candidate, contributed to stymie his newfound ambitions. His supporters still keep the faith. Like former education minister K. Pandiyarajan, who says the rank and file stay with Panneerselvam and they will eventually sustain.

Catharsis, Conspiracy And More Puppetry

Despite her conviction, Sasikala managed to ensure control over AIADMK. How long will it play out?

BY RANJIT K.

HE night before the Supreme Court was to deliver its verdict in the disproportionate assets case against Jayalalitha, Sasikala, her sister-inlaw Ilavarasi and nephew V.N. Sudhagaran, Sasikala decided to spend the night at the sprawling Golden Bay beach resort, 90 kms south of Chennai.

She had a foreboding about the nature of the verdict. The MLAs lodged there had become edgy after five days of confinement, despite the luxurious surroundings. So she layered them with sob tales of her sacrifices for Jayalalitha to keep them committed to her camp. "If I spent 33 years with Amma, it is not only to look after her but also to look after the party she loved so much. If I have to sacrifice my life to protect this party, I would happily do so," she said in a dull monotone. She also described herself as a lioness, who would guard the party and the MLAs as lion cubs, who would rally around her if she was in trouble.

The next day she woke up to the news that there was no need to sacrifice her life, the 'lioness' was sent to a Karnataka cage. But protecting the AIADMK was not exactly the thing on Sasikala's mind. She was used to controlling it—through

Jayalalitha or behind her back. And that is exactly what she continued to do after the judicial setback.

Once her jail term was confirmed, Sasikala had Edappadi K. Palanisamy elected as chief minister by the captive MLAs. A known loyalist and a money bag, who, as PWD minister ensured the regular payment of EMIs to the Sasikala family, Palanisamy was the perfect proxy who would unhesitatingly take orders from the family. To make sure someone from the family was at his elbow, she appointed her nephew T.T.V. Dinakaran



PROXY 2.0 Edappadi K. Palanisamy



as the deputy general secretary.

Dinakaran, a former MP had been expelled along with 11 other relatives of Sasikala from the party by Jayalalitha in December 2011. Sasikala brought him and another nephew, S. Venkatesh, back into the party before driving down to the Bangalore jail, sending the message that the family would pilot the party. "Dinakaran's appointment would ensure that the party would remain in the safe hands of Chinnamma. Palanisamy would have to take his orders from Dinakaran. And since Dinakaran had been the political mentor of O. Panneerselvam, he would find it difficult to oppose Dinakaran that vehemently," says Thanga Thamilselvan, the Andipatti MLA from the Sasikala camp.

"Edappadi (as he is known after the village in Salem district he hails from) would soon become Dinakaran's 'edupidi' (a Tamil word for a lowly servant)," quipped an MLA in the OPS camp, forgetting that his new boss was very much that a few months ago. Even now, OPS refers to Dinakaran as "Dinakaran sir" for having suggested him as Jayalalitha's first proxy CM in 2001. Dinakaran, though has a few chinks in his armour—a fine of Rs 28 crore to be paid in a FERA case and a couple of more FERA cases in which Sasikala is also indicted. He has however emerged



Photographs: PTI

as a good political manager

As more than 120 MLAs stuck together behind Palanisamy, it became obvious that the Governor would give him the first shot at power, provided he proves majority in the Assembly through a trust vote on Saturday. That would see the installation of a Sasikala-friendly government which would run or ruin the state to meet the demands of her family.

Their first job would be to move her out of the second class cell in the Bangalore prison to more comfortable environs in the Central Jail just outside Chennai. "It is unlikely that Sasikala's family members will remain mute witnesses to her existence under such tough conditions. Having lived in the plush comfort of Poes Garden, she is simply not used to it. Even during the 21 days she had spent in the same prison in 2014, the presence of Javalalitha, a serving chief minister, entitled her to better facilities. But not now, as she is confined to a small cell given to B-class prisoners. Her family would work overtime to move her out of the Bangalore prison," says a senior Minister and a Sasikala lovalist.

Subramanian Swamy, the man who first filed the DA case against Jayalalitha, has already fired the first shot seeking Sasikala's transfer to a Tamil Nadu prison citing security reasons. If that happens, the state government will be

run from a prison. Imagine the sight of ministers with beacon-fitted cars making weekly visits to prison to pay obeisance to 'Chinnamma.'

From proximity to proxy has been a journey of ups and downs for Sasikala. The last time she and Jayalalitha got jailed in Sept 2014 in the assets case, 'proxy Panneerselvam' lived up to his name, when he surrendered the seat back to Amma in May 2015.

Sasikala could take pride that the man she chose as proxy in 2001—during Jayalalitha's first disqualification—had not betrayed her trust. When he became a full-fledged chief minister after Jayalalitha's death, Sasikala expected a similar surrender from him when she asked him to step aside. He did under protest but then had a rebellious afterthought that stopped her from occupying her late Akka's CM chair.

Tamil Nadu's main political battle dur-

"Sasikala's family would work overtime to move her out of the Bangalore prison to the Central Jail just outside Chennai."

S TEAM Sasikala with her supporting MLAs at the Golden Bay resort

ing the coming weeks would be one between proxies—Dinakaran and Palaniswami versus Panneerselvam. While the anti-Sasikala mood in the state crystallised into support for OPS and brought in MLAs and MPs in ones and twos, he could not sustain the momentum beyond a week, in spite of an indulgent Governor offering him more time to apparently wean away the required MLAs, at least to deny the opposite camp a majority.

Pannnerselvam could not go beyond nine MLAs (out of the 134) and could only helplessly complain to the Governor that as long as the 120 MLAs were confined to the resort under protection of bouncers, he could not eject anyone out. The trickle which he hoped would become a tsunami never happened as the bulk of MLAs remained bottled up in the resort. "If OPS was short by 30 MLAs, the stragglers from the Sasikala camp would have joined him. But he was short by more than 100 MLAs, that left little room for hope. Even the DMK, with 89 MLAs could have propped him up if he showed at least 30 MLAs behind him, but he failed even on that count," says Prof Ramu Manivannan, HoD of political science, University of Madras.

For someone who till a week ago was the toast of Tamil Nadu, OPS now stares at an uncertain future. He has to refashion himself from follower to leader. As a 'by-the-way' leader, he ran the government during the last two months, but the supplicant in him reared its heads whenever he was before Sasikala. But he has not given up as he has teamed up with Jayalalitha's niece Deepa Jayakumar, who was the anti-Sasikala fulcrum in the AIADMK until Panneerselvam's revolt.

"The two will float an Amma ADMK and join hands with the BJP for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections hoping that the mood against a Sasikala-centric government would help him consolidate the Jayalalitha vote bank," says P. Thirumavelan, editor of *Ananda Vikatan*. The women in particular would not be enamoured of a party run by Sasikala as the ministers would be only invoking Chinnamma's name."

Even a government blessed by 'Chinnamma' and run by her proxies could prove to be short lived for two

A New Set Of Actors

Theatrics are inseparable from Tamil politics

BY RANJIT K.

OR a state where four chief ministers were from cinema—two script writers, one hero and a heroine—Tamil Nadu has never been devoid of drama in real life. Its political theatre is replete with scenes that would effortlessly fit into a movie.

An MGR with a bandaged neck seeking votes, a Jayalalitha pushed down from the gun carriage ahead of MGR's last journey, Karunanidhi staging a farcical half-a-day fast on the Marina with his two wives on either side—the state has been witness to such unending drama. "You can take away politics from cinema but not the cinema from Tamil Nadu's politics," observed Cho Ramaswamy, himself a film actor/director-turned political influencer.

Two months ago, Jayalalitha passed away while the nonagenarian battle-scarred script writer, Karunanidhi, got overtaken by old age problems. Confined to his bedroom, he remained immune to all the histrionics happening around him.

With Amma and Ayya out of the way, just as the state expected its politics to turn normal, two new players emerged. Only this time, they had nothing do with cinema. O. Panneerselvam, the tea-shop-owner-turned-CM and V.K. Sasikala, the video-shop-owner-turned-CM aspirant, showed the world that experience in films wasn't a perquisite to putting up a good show. The two proved their acting talents during an eventful week of political theatre.

OPS had already qualified as an expert mime, always doing namastes to Jayalalitha, her airborne helicopter and even the front wheel of her SUV, but rarely uttering a word while Amma was around. Even as CM post-Jayalalitha, he had no compunction in extending a similar subservience to Sasikala. "If you needed a character in ser-

vility, it would be OPS," explained theatre personality Nijanthan. This was true until OPS sat at his mentor's memorial for forty minutes. The image of the man, in rigid concentration, statue like, was a new form of protest for the Tamils. They had been used to fasts (day long ones are most convenient for aging leaders) and self-immolations (always reserved for cadres), but never a meditative sit-in. For once, dialogues became less important than the silence he had observed. A rarity for a state used to the loud histrionics of Sivaji Ganesan and the punch lines of Rajinikanth.

His new rival, Sasikala, proved she was no less of an actor. At the same memorial, she took a 'sabadham' (pledge), slapping her palm thrice on the grave, and vowing in Jayalalitha's name to come back just before she drove to the Bangalore jail.

"The heroines of the Tamil classics, like Kannagi and Sivagami, had shown that the pledge is a powerful weapon in a woman's armoury. Even Tamil poet Bharathiyar chose Draupadi's humiliation in the Kaurava's durbar to pen his classic *Paanchaali Sabadham*. While Sasikala cannot be equated to those personalities, the anger and vehemence that burnished her pledge cannot be ignored," points out stage and



Sasikala at Jayalalitha's memorial

television actor T.V. Varadarajan.

Since December 31, when she arrived at the AIADMK headquarters to take over as general secretary, Sasikala had attempted to copy Jayalalitha's style statement—though with pathetic effect. The full collared, long sleeve blouse, her pony tail folded into a neat bun and even the streak of vermillion on the forehead were attempts to create Amma 2.0. In a recent interview to Ananda Vikatan, she had justified it: "I've spent most of my life with Jayalalitha and was influenced by how she carried herself. When I try to match her in dress and style, I feel I am one with her. I know there can never be another Jayalalitha."

The only improvement was in her communication skills after a stuttering start. "Her first two speeches were from prepared text and there was nothing natural about her body language," remarked lawyer and public speaking mentor Sanjay Pinto. "After OPS's revolt, she found the confidence to speak impromptu, even answer the questions posed by the media with aplomb. She brought in a lot of emotion to the table. And the final act of the pledge at the memorial was translating all those emotions into imagery. In just one week, we saw the transformation of Sasikala from a hesitant debutante to an accomplished performer."

The post-Jaya stage has thrown up a third actor as well—Jayalalitha's niece Deepa Jayakumar. Deepa came with the advantage of resembling her aunt and even sounding like her. Her English also measured up to the late leader and hence, she could make an emotional connect to the AIADMK cadres unhappy with the rise of Sasikala. "We are seeing a younger version of our Amma," was some of the cadres' observation about the 41-year-old former journalist.

Deepa lost her traction after Panneerselvam's revolt but veered around to the theory of befriending her enemy's enemy. "OPS-the-rebel and Deepa-the-niece versus Sasikala and her proxies," now showing in Tamil Nadu, will be the next keenly watched political theatre in the country. Stay tuned.

reasons. In the absence of a strong, hands-on leader, Sasikala may slowly lose her moral authority and egos will come into play while running the government. Seniors like K.A. Sengottaiyan are already peeved that his disciple Palanisamy has been elevated over his head. A veteran MLA since 1977—when MGR first became chief minister—Sengottaiyan could be the man to revolt next if he feels sidelined.

The internal caste contradictions with

Palanisamy's powerful and numerically stronger Gounder MLAs (28) gaining the upper hand would not be relished by the Thevars (20 MLAs), who had their man OPS as the head of government. Similarly the Dalit MLAs, who form the largest chunk at 31, would expect to be constantly placated since they have been at the receiving end of the Thevars and Gounders socially. Dalit boys have been victims of honour killings that have happened at the hands of Thevars

or Gounders across the state and this inherent caste tension will also have its play in the way the government is run.

"A mid-term election remains a distinct possibility as the haze of uncertainty would continue to hang in the air," says *Thuglak* editor S. Gurumurthy. "In the absence of Jayalalitha's all-pervasive command, a convicted Sasikala will show up to be a charlatan only keen on protecting her family and its wealth. Only fresh elections will clear the air."



COVER STORY





Nandan Nilekani **CEO for 21 Otrs** Double-Digit Double-Digit Revenue growth Net Profit growth 7 Otrs 10 Otrs **Negative Negative** Revenue growth Net Profit growth O Otr 2 Otrs

URAFH2F



As the first non-founder CEO of Infosys, Vishal Sikka was supposed to be the chan





Vishal Sikka

CEO for the last 10 Quarters

Double-Digit
Revenue growth
O Qtr
Negative
Revenue growth
2 Qtrs

Double-Digit
Net Profit growth
1 Qtr
Negative
Net Profit growth
3 Otrs



BY ARINDAM MUKHERJEE

UESTIONING, doubt, heated assertions that betray a sudden erasure of confidence—the cream of corporate India seems to be going through a phase of intense self-reflection. And there's a pattern: criticism emanating from elders and peers at a time of generational change. All of that in a context of global flux. Four months ago, it was the cut and thrust for control at the Tata Group, where a promoter questioned the competence of a professionally appointed chairman. Now, Infosys—a talismanic name in Indian infotech, its second largest software and services exporter—is going through similar pangs.

At the heart of the controversy is a kind of performance audit conducted in the open, in full view of everyone. Promoters led by N.R. Narayana Murthy have publicly called into question the wisdom of several decisions taken by the present management and board. Specifically under the lens are two symptomatic issues: a lavish severance package given to two employees who left Infosys recently; and the slightly-more-than-lavish compensation package of \$11 million per annum for CEO Vishal Sikka. (That's Rs 73 crore-plus.)

The Infosys management is fighting to establish its discretionary turf: deciding the CEO's compensation or severance packages is a clear prerogative of the management, it says, and it's done in line with employment agreements. It justifies the huge increase in Sikka's remuneration package in the name of competitive and difficult times and steep

ge. But a look at the graphs shows him rubbing shoulders with those at the nadir.

targets that lie ahead of the 1981-founded company. But the over 40 per cent spike in the CEO's compensation from this January has not gone down well with the promoters. They feel it was not justified, especially in the light of Infy's performance under him—and his stint has now spanned two-and-a-half years, long enough for an appraisal of how the worm has moved on the graph.

But first, all that may be profitably read against a wider context. The tussle between Sikka and the founders comes at a tough juncture for the \$150-155 billion Indian IT services industry. For a company that has been a bellwether entity for long, the times are ripe for some hard introspection. Infosys, like the rest of the industry, is facing a decline in new deals from clients in the West, the US in particular. On top of that, the industry is gearing up for changes in work visa rules in the US, Indian IT's largest market, something that has the potential to cause a real dent in industry numbers.

N recent quarters, business has not been very good and IT growth rates have dipped to single digits, with the weather forecast showing mostly endless cloudy skies. Infosys has found no way to immunise itself from this general trend. The last few quarters have been rough. In fact, revenue saw a negative growth of 0.2 per cent in the last quarter. And the uphill trek required to restore status quo ante looks arduous and slippery. In October 2016, Infosys cut its annual revenue growth target for the second time in three months as India's software service exporters felt the pressures from major clients holding back on spending.

No surprise, then, that CEO Sikka's New Year message to employees fairly bristled with cautionary truisms. "The mountains ahead are tall", "there is a long way to go", "the road ahead is long and not easy"...gloomy motivational metaphors tumbled out one after the other. To his peoplewhose collective moniker, Infoscions, recalls grander days—he warned against a "lackadaisical" attitude towards greater value creation and stressed on the importance of automation, something he has been driving after taking over the reins. It would not suffice, he said, to "just mechanically execute the job we are handed". That last line could just as well have been a self-directed one. It's an open question whether the concerns raised by Narayanamurthy are limited to the payouts-or, by implication, stand as a general pointer towards the company's performance in recent times, especially Sikka's performance as a CEO.

To be fair to Sikka, in the time he has steered Infosys, its revenues have increased from \$8.2 billion to about \$10 billion. Simultaneously, attri-



FOUNDERS (From left) Nandan Nilekani, N.S. Raghavan, Kris Gopalakrishnan, N.R. Narayana Murthy, S.D. Shibulal and K. Dinesh

Infosys **Shareholding** Pattern

Total shares held 2.29.69.44.66

Shares held by Public

1.99.28.45.531 (86.76%)

Shares held by Promoter & **Promoter Group** 29,28,06,199

(12.75%)

Shares held by **Employee Trust**

1.12.92.934 (0.49%)

Non Promoter-Non **Public**

1,12,92,934 (0.49%)

tion-one of the banes of the software sector and especially a concern area for Infosys-has come down from a high of 23.4 per cent to 14.1 per cent. "In the last two-and-a-half years, we have laid out an ambitious strategy to transform ourselves to being an automation-based company. Revenue growth has caught up with industry-level performance," Sikka said at an investor call earlier this week. He specifically mentioned "automation, innovation and new services" as factors that have helped the company hold its margins.

There's more on the credit side. In Sikka's tenure, Infosys added five new \$100-million clients to its kitty and its top 10 new products and platforms— Mana, Skava, Edge, Panaya, Cloud services, Cloud Migration, Mainframe Modernisation, API economy, BI Renewal and Cyber Security-now produce over \$110 million in quarterly revenue. This was around \$22 million in Q2 of FY15. According to Sikka, \$100 million accounts increased from 12 (when he took over) to 18 now-and \$200 million accounts too doubled from three to six. And all this in a challenging environment. Says business historian Raman Mahadevan: "Sikka's leadership is different as compared to Narayanamurthy's because the whole scenario has changed. The market is much more competitive and requires a different approach. His is suited to the times."

Some more positive data. Infosys estimates show that revenues under Sikka grew from Rs 50,133 crore (in FY14) to Rs 53,319 crore (FY15) and further to Rs 62,441 crore (FY16). And net profit grew from Rs 10,648 crore in FY14 to Rs 12,329 crore in FY15-this 15 per cent rise slowed to a more modest 9 per cent as FY16 clocked Rs 13,491 crore. The total headcount in the company increased from 1,60,405 in FY14 to 1,94,044 in FY16, a near-21 per cent rise, even as attrition dipped.

However, a closer look at quarterly results paints a different picture of Sikka's leadership. During his tenure, the net profit figure for Q2'15 was Rs 3,096 crore—and this grew to Rs 3,708 crore in Q3'17. However, in that December 2016 quarter, net profit grew by a mere 2.8 per cent and revenue actually dipped by 0.2 per cent. In fact, read at that degree of magnification, the 10 quarters Infosys has spent under Sikka's leadership have been marked by low revenue and net profit growth.

Three of those 10 quarters have clocked negative net profit growth, and two quarters have also seen negative growth in revenues. Barring the double-digit figure of Q2 '16, when net profit grew by 12.1 per cent, there has been no high growth in net profits, with growth mostly in single digits. The story with revenue growth is similar—no double-digit growth in revenue in his entire term so far. Q2 '16 saw the peak at 8.9 per cent.

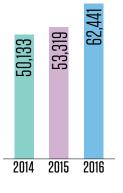
To put that in perspective, Sikka's figures compare poorly with even the performance of former CEO S.D. Shibulal, whose stint (2011-14) is considered one of the worst in Infosys history. During Shibulal's term, which spanned a comparable 33 months from Q2'12 to Q1'15, both revenue and net profit saw good growth-from Rs 8,099 crore to Rs 12,770 crore, and Rs 1,906 crore to Rs 2,886 crore respectively—despite the term as a totality seeing four negative quarters for net profit and three for revenue. Even Kris Gopalakrishnan's term (2007-11) as CEO saw revenues grow from Rs 3,773 crore (in Q1 '08) to Rs 7,485 crore (Q1 '12). And neither of the two original legends, Murthy and Nandan Nilekani, saw a single quarter of negative revenue growth during their terms as CEO.

Does that make Sikka the worst performer as Infy CEO so far? Well, maybe Murthy (1981-2002) and Nilekani (2002-07) may have been at the helm in vastly different times and Sikka is struggling against a global context that his illustrious predecessors did not have to face in those nascent/boom years where growth figures have to be read against the low base. And yet, Sikka's performance does not sit very brightly at all against even that of one of his peers in the sector—N. Chandrasekaran of TCS, India's largest software company.

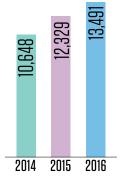
Chandrasekaran's performance was exemplary to say the least. Under him, TCS's revenues jumped threefold, from \$6.34 billion in 2010 to \$16.5 billion in 2015-16. Its profits too rose threefold—from Rs 7,000 crore to over Rs 24,000 crore in the same period—and exports alone touched

Infosys Financials In Sikka's tenure

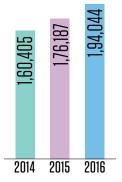
> Revenues in Rs crores



Net Profit Rs crores



Head Count



\$10 billion. As on January 5, 2017, TCS under Chandrasekaran had a market capitalisation of \$67.69 billion. Against this, Infosys had a market cap of \$33.96 billion on February 15, 2017.

F course, these are early days for Sikka and much could change if he gets a long innings. He has followed a transitional strategy, adjusting to circumstances and reorienting Infosys towards more competitive times. He has altered the organisational structure and work culture with new initiatives like design thinking, knowledge-based IT and a platforms approach. Besides the focus on growing its core business, Sikka has said he would also sharp-focus on consulting, an area of disappointment till now. Artificial intelligence too is a big part of his vision 2020.

The piquant part is that his chosen path to redemption is itself a difficult one. Sikka's strategy of 'New and Renew' raises the bar for Infosys. It has set a target of achieving revenues of \$20 billion by 2020 at 30 per cent net margin and revenue per employee of \$80,000. A stupendous task, considering the current turnover is around \$10 billion. If Sikka's vision is to be achieved, that will have to double in the next three years. That too, in a tough and much more competitive environment.

Add to that the problems the Trump administration is creating for companies that are beneficiaries of outsourced jobs. Almost 62 per cent of Infosys's business comes from the US. With the curbs on outsourcing the American president is imposing, Sikka may as well say goodbye to any chance of robust growth from that market. Also, with curbs on sending workers overseas, he will be forced to hire locally in the US. This will be more expensive than Indian workers and will cut into margins, ultimately reflecting in its balance sheet.

Investors, though, are keeping the faith—they seem sanguine that Sikka's strategy will pull Infy through the tough times. Oppenheimer Developing Markets Fund, which holds a 2.13 per cent stake in Infosys, has reportedly said Sikka has improved the company's operating performance and is generally on the right strategic path.

On closer inspection, the CEO's New Year message was more than a bunch of generalities—it was a call to action in tough times, getting employees and investors braced up for the ride. At the wheel, Sikka still has a lot to prove, to his investors, to his employees—and yes, to his promoters. For now, the board and the promoters have acceded to the massive increase in his pay package. But Sikka has to finally show a commensurate spike in bottomlines. Or else, he will go down in the books as one who validated the sceptics.



TRUCK BETWEEN THE TWO CAMPS

The chairman isn't exiting. Taking a pacifist line, R. Seshasayee has reached out to NR.

BY AJAY SUKUMARAN

ON'T look at this as a battle," was what Infosys Chairman R. Seshasayee repeated several times during a marathon press conference the other day at Mumbai airport's Taj Santacruz. The situation was indeed unusual: the Board having to clarify on issues that were seemingly smouldering for months until N.R. Narayana Murthy spoke his mind in a newspaper interview.

Seshasayee, 68, is no stranger to Infosys: he was an independent director for four years before stepping in as the non-executive chairman in June 2015. He has known Murthy for three decades, and in the middle of this fortnight's flare-up, the Infosys founder told an interviewer that Seshasayee was a man of highest integrity. Yet, the auto industry veteran is leading the Infosys board when it has no founders or those managing operations in the company. The board, except for a couple of members, comprises people fairly new to Infosys.

"Here we have some stakeholders with nothing

Cultural changes will be natural, but the new CEO hasn't gone off Infosys's basic framework of **fundamental** values, notes Seshasayee.

other than the best interest of the organisation in their mind...lot of passion, yes," said Seshasayee. "We are a bunch of professionals with no interests other than discharging our duties to the best of our abilities for the best interests of the company. There is no conflict but convergence of interests."

A chartered accountant, Seshasayee, or Sesh as he's known among peers, joined Ashok Leyland in 1976 after a stint with HLL. Over a 40-year career at the truck-maker, he rose to become its vice chairman-a position he held until July 2016. Infosys, he's said earlier, is a unique company because in India, other than the banks, "you do not have companies of large size with a professional board, professional management and a vast number of shareholders". While it's natural that there would be cultural changes, he reckons the company, under his watch, hasn't swerved from the framework of fundamental values. "But I have no hesitation in saying the cultural milieu is different, and therefore there will be differences on perceptions on this," he told reporters on February 14.

When the Bhishmapitamaha—as Vishal Sikka once likened Murthy to-raised concerns of weakening corporate governance, it was Seshasayee's response that was keenly sought. For the present, given the support of the board, he doesn't intend to step down. "Shareholders have elected me to do a job, the Board has asked me to do a job. So long as the board doesn't say that you haven't done the job and go home, I have to do the job and I will do the job," he said. However, Seshasayee did reach out to Murthy. He later told investors that both agreed "that we should not have these kinds of interactions taking place through the media".

Shriram Subramanian of the proxy advisory firm InGovern reckons all this would serve as an alert for the board. "It's also a wake-up lesson for the founders to not air their views through the media," he says. "Obviously, they (board) haven't answered exactly what happens to Rajiv Bansal's suspended (severance) package, and why he was paid is still not clear. We don't exactly know the angst of Mr Murthy and whether those concerns are shared by other founders because they have not made any letter public," he says. "If, for example, I compare the same situation with what happened with Elliott Management sending a letter to the Cognizant board, I know exactly, sitting here, the concerns and remedial actions they are suggesting." Still, he says, it's a pointer to the Board of Infosys that they are going to be under increasing scrutiny.

Seshasayee says dwelling too much on issues that don't add value could be distracting. "We live in a glasshouse, but don't stare too long." [7]

'COME CLEAN ON ALL ALLEGATIONS'

This week, the Board of Infosys responded to concerns its founder N.R. Narayana Murthy raised about corporate governance at the firm. But it only popped up more questions than provide answers, feels V. Balakrishnan, a former Infosys CFO and board member who quit the company in December 2013. The Board should do more to put the matter to rest once and for all, he said in an interview with Ajay Sukumaran. Excerpts:

How do you view the Board's response on Monday after the concerns raised by Murthy?

It's very disappointing because they have not said anything different from what they have been saying in the past. See, the core issuse is one of governance. I don't think the founders are talking about strategy or operations or the CEO because a new CEO has come, he's a professional CEO and he has come with his own vision (of achieving) \$20 billion revenue by 2020. We all should support him. What the founders raised is a governance issue. The first one is the severance payment to the ex-CFO (Rajiv Bansal). If you look at the employment contract, it clearly says any key personnel leaving the company should have a notice period of three months. But the Board in its wisdom has agreed to a large severance payment of Rs 17 crore. Why should it when, contractually, there is no requirement? Where is the need for such a largesse? Second, after paying Rs 5 crore, they stopped the balance payment. These are all pertinent questions anybody will ask.

The second was the CEO's salary which last year was increased from \$7 million to \$11 million when the rest of the organisation has not seen that kind of an increase. There's no reasoning given for that increase and even when the variable pay is larger in the overall salary package, investors are not being told on what basis the variable will be paid. Any company, for the CEO's salary, will publish the matrices behind that variable salary. See, ultimately, the shareholders have every right to understand the Board decisions and the Board has every obligation to come and explain to the shareholders certain events and put the matter to rest. And, there are several rumours floating around on why such a large severance

66

The company should do a probe, a forensic audit and put all that in the public domain to put the matter to rest. If you did make a mistake, the best thing is to admit it and move on.



payment was agreed for the ex-CFO. There's even a whistleblower mail floating around. These are all damaging allegations. I think the company should come clean on all this, do a proper investigation, do a forensic audit and put all that in the public domain and put the matter to rest.

The company has explained that these complaints were probed and there was nothing amiss.

Put the investigation report in the public domain. Give it to shareholders. When you say I'm following the highest standards of governance, this is part of it.

So, it still needs closure?

See, the best thing when you make a mistake is to stand up publicly, admit we made a mistake and move on. The press conference raised more questions than answers; that's the issue.

Is there reason to believe there could have been a mistake?

If you look at all the things coming in the public domain, it raises a lot of questions.

How do these situations crop up?

I don't know. Here, what we are saying is there are some internal control weaknesses, so the Board has the obligation to explain everything to the shareholders because people can come to different views. It is in the interest of the company to set everything to rest. That's why we said get an interim chairman, do a full investigation, reconstitute the Board if required because Infosys is considered as the gold standard for corporate governance. Give comfort to investors and move on. This public spat is not going to end anywhere. \square

CODE LOAD ON CYBER COOLIES

Three US H-1B laws, seeking to raise costs for firms, may hit Infosys, but make crucial points

BY SAIF SHAHIN IN OHIO

HE alarm bells may have started ringing a little too soon. Indian infotech firms like Infosys began losing the confidence of shareholders last month when bills proposing changes to the H-1B visa programme, which allows nearly 1.5 million skilled Indians to work in the US, were tabled in Congress. If passed, the legislations could make it harder for Indian companies to send workers here—or for US businesses to hire them. Statements by President Donald Trump that he will review 'abuses' of visa programmes made the bills appear even more ominous.

But Indian diplomats in Washington DC as well as local advocates of immigration reform say it is too early to worry. For one, there is nothing new about efforts to change the H-1B system. "Some of these bills were introduced in the previous Congress too," said an Indian embassy official. "But it is very difficult for them to get through."

A total of 85,000 H-1B visas are allotted every year, but applications last year were more than thrice that number. Winners are chosen by computerised lottery. Indians get nearly 70 per cent of these on average. Many work for India-based technology companies such as Tata Consultancy, Wipro, Infosys and Mahindra, although US multinationals including IBM, Amazon and Microsoft also apply for and get H-1B visas in large numbers.

Three Congressional bills, premised on the belief that the H-1B system is being exploited to the detriment of American workers, were tabled in January. One, introduced by Darrell Issa, a Republican from California, tries to make it more expensive for firms to hire foreign workers. It proposes to raise the minimum wage of H-1B workers to \$1,00,000 per annum from \$60,000—the floor set in 1998. But it only targets firms with over 50 employees, at least 15 per cent of whom are on H-1B.

A more comprehensive bill, tabled by Zoe Lof-

A techie says that US firms have built a model which denies jobs to deserving Americans and abuses foreign workers, and many Indians.



gren, a Democrat from California, calls for doing away with the lottery and favouring companies willing to pay the highest salaries to foreign employees. Potentially, this could make it even more expensive for firms to hire H-1B workers.

A bipartisan bill tabled by senators Chuck Grassley and Dick Durbin also proposes to scrap the lottery system. But it gives priority to foreigners educated in the US, especially those with advanced degrees. As workers more likely to get H-1B visas under this would be the "best and brightest", it would also make it much costlier for companies.

The H-1B programme is intended to allow companies to hire highly skilled workers from abroad when they can't find such employees among Americans. These bills assume that the spirit of the law is not being met—that firms are exploiting it to hire foreign employees willing to work on low wages, denying jobs to Americans in the process.

But Ashwin Venkatraman, a petroleum engineer from India who was on H-1B until last year and has recently launched his own cloud computing start-up for the oil and gas industry, said that is not the case. "There isn't enough local talent to take up all the jobs on offer," he said. "In oil and gas (sector), there is a shortage of technical workforce. That is broadly true for all technology-oriented industries. Foreign workers are not replacing American workers, except perhaps in software services."

Some argue that the economic stimulus provi-



Photographs: GETTY IMAGES

ded by H-1B workers helps create jobs for Americans. A report by Partnership For A New American Economy, an immigration reform thinktank, said that "workers who received H-1B visas from 2010-2013 will create more than 7,00,000 jobs for US-born workers by 2020". States such as California and Texas, which host among the highest numbers of H-1B workers, will benefit the most.

"This H1B scheme has been crucial in making US companies competitive globally, in increasing their client base, in increasing their innovation," Navtej Sarna, Indian ambassador to the US, told CNN. "The Indian tech industry has been creating jobs here. Indian firms have invested \$2 billion in the US. They have paid \$20 billion in taxes. Nine of the top 15 companies in India are American. This is a relationship which is symbiotic."

But Vikram Desai, a tech firm worker on H-1B since 2005, welcomed the proposals to 'enforce' the H-1B system. Desai said technology companies have built an entire business model based on exploiting legal loopholes—a model that not only denies jobs to deserving Americans but also abuses immigrant, and especially Indian, workers.

"The H-1B system is meant to make up for shortage of skills locally" rather than as a backdoor for exploiting cheap labour, Desai says. "The law says H-1B should be offered only when an American worker is unavailable. It also says (immigrant) workers should be paid the prevailing wage. Com-

Members of the New York Immigration Coalition protest Donald Trump's immigration policy on February 14



The H-1B bills may not be passed, but Trump could issue more executive orders on immigration and visas, including H-1B.

panies should be fair and pay the wages workers deserve, irrespective of their origins. Any bill that stops this exploitation of immigrant workers and displacement of American workers is welcome."

The main reason why immigrant workers, especially those from India and China, can be easily exploited is the massive backlog of applications for permanent residency from these countries, he explains. Because of country-wise quotas for 'green cards', it can take an Indian or Chinese worker decades to get this, which forces them to keep extending their H-1B status year after year. With their green card application under review, such workers "can't change jobs or even return home to attend family funerals," Desai says. "Their lack of options makes them easy targets for exploitation by companies, especially in terms of unfair wages."

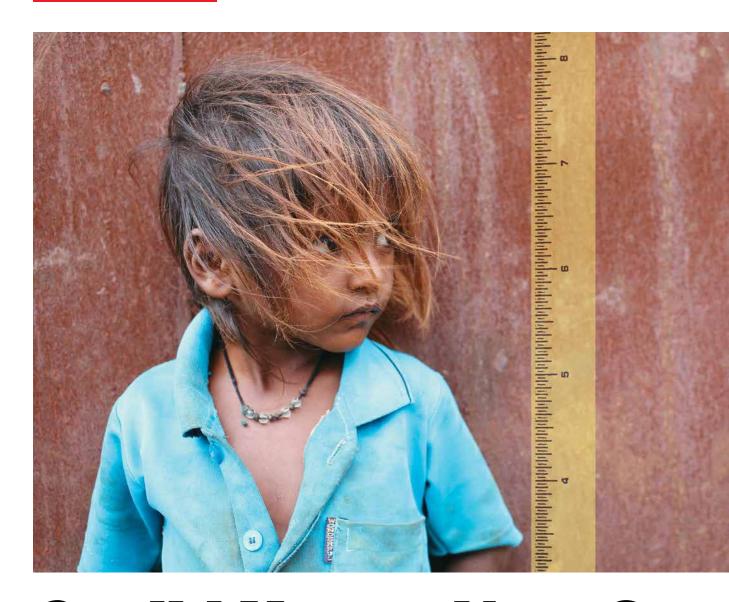
Eleven years ago, Desai, along with some friends, founded Immigration Voice, a non-profit organisation that is creating awareness about the issue as well as pressure lawmakers to do away with country-wise quotas for green cards to make the immigration system fairer. "That, ultimately, is what will make the difference," he says.

Although Desai, too, conceded that the "Trump effect" has given the H-1B bills more publicity than usual, he saw their reintroduction either side of the president's inauguration as coincidental. "Issa's bill was also introduced in September last year. After the Congress dissolved in December and a new Congress was constituted, Issa reintroduced it. That's how Congress functions," he adds.

Grassley and Durbin's bill, meanwhile, has been in Congress since 2007. The only new H-1B bill is the one introduced by Lofgren—but she is a Democrat in a sharply Republican Congress, and the chances of that bill getting all the way through are probably the slimmest.

That said, the new president's protectionist tendencies and anti-immigration stance are not to be taken lightly—nor his willingness to issue executive orders bypassing Congress. A week after joining office, Trump ordered a temporary ban on immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries, sparking protests and concern from the technology industry about its foreign workers. Although the order was stayed by the courts, Trump's press secretary, Sean Spicer, has said the president could issue more executive orders on immigration and visas, including H-1B visas.

In recent years, tech firms have spent millions of dollars pushing for 'reforming' the H-1B system by raising the annual cap, which would allow them to hire more foreign—and particularly Indian—workers. For now, though, they would be hoping that the system stays just the same. \Box



Garibi Hatao, Now Out

No more top-down, India's official fight against poverty now speaks a new global lan

BY LOLA NAYAR

OMEN will now play a central role in the poverty eradication programme. Moving away from the long-debated mapping of poverty based on parameters of income alone, a new approach is being adopted under the Centre's flagship poverty-eradication programme, Mission Antyodaya. The aim

is to use the resources of ongoing government programmes through a new saturation approach to meet the post-2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for eliminating poverty by 2030.

Poverty will now be measured on the indices of social and gender equality, agricultural development, livelihood options, rural infrastructure such as power and roads, health and food security, education, skill-training and enterprise, housing, land ownership and

access to bank credit, among others. "SDG covers all forms of poverty," says Amarjeet Sinha, secretary, Department of Rural Development. "I can be poor if I don't have access to housing, education or skills, or if I am malnourished or weak because of gender-based discrimination. As poverty is multi-dimensional, we need to address all the issues."

In his budget speech, finance minister Arun Jaitley said the new programme, in its first phase, will seek to improve the well-being of one crore households



GETTY IMAGES

of Silos

guage to address local issues

spread across 50,000 gram panchayats by 2019. Even as the process of mapping and selecting these gram panchayats out of around 1.42 lakh in the country for rolling out the programme is being done with the help of state governments, 35 indicators have been fixed for identifying the beneficiaries and also measure the success of the programme. Field functionaries will be deployed to oversee the work and monitor the outcomes, while measuring outcomes at all levels is likely to be more uniform

due to the pre-defined goals or indicators. The DISHA (District Development Coordination and Monitoring) committee comprising MPs, MLAs, zila parishad head and mayors of urban and local bodies will monitor the outcomes looking at the same set of indicators and programmes.

Given the mission's multiple goals, 18 departments-the National Health Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Panchayati Raj and so on-will be working with the rural development ministry to implement the programme. Under the draft framework shared with the states, "social capital" (in terms of instances of community participation) has to be a major vardstick for selection of the gram panchayats, howsoever remote.

Sinha points out five categories that will be prioritised in the selection: first, villages that have become free of open defecation, implying there is already some social capital there as people have come together to work for a cause; second, wherever there is a strong women's self-help group (SHG) movement; third, villages covered under Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana; fourth, those that come under urban clusters; and fifth, villages that have a large deficiency of irrigation facilities or a grave water table problem and need to be made drought-proof urgently. "We will select the panchayats based on these criteria and share the list with the states. The list will be finalised taking into account where they want the poverty eradication programmes to be focused. Even in backward regions, the focus will be on gram panchayats that have built good social capital," says Sinha.

Women will be central to the poverty eradication programme as they have been found to be the game-changers in livelihood missions, improving PDS distribution, entrepreneurial ventures and other development efforts. Out of 33 ODF (open defecation free) gram panchayats Sinha visited in the recent past, he found women SHGs to be the "prime movers" in 27.

"Many of the social gains happen only where women have organised themselves, not elsewhere," he says. "If that is the case, we must focus on the efforts of the women's groups. Today, 3.5 crore women are actively involved in SHGs across the country. We are trying to involve them in the social development

programmes. In fact, we are making educated women from among them a community cadre of social auditors. We have developed a certificate course with TISS, Mumbai. The women social auditors would also be asked to provide input on how to improve the programmes and outcomes."

Ahead of the programme being rolled out in April, a baseline study is being carried out in coordination with the states. A headstart has been made with the Socio-Economic Census 2011 having helped to identify households and their deprivation. As per Sinha, roughly around Rs 2.5 lakh crore (including 14th Finance Commission grants to panchayats and the states' share) is expected to be invested in all the programmes to be undertaken under this mission.

ERALA chief secretary S.M. Vijavanand calls the programme an improvement on earlier attempts at eradicating poverty. "The earlier attempts were in silos, with a topdown approach to attacking different aspects of poverty, while now a bottom-up approach has been mandated by the ministry of rural development and the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP), so they have to do a situational analysis and try to identify local priorities," says Vijayanand, who believes SHGs and gram panchayats backed by NREGA and a stepped-up skill development plan would be the main pillars of the programme.

Experts point out that the SHG experience has not been uniform across the country. Although the government, corporates and multilateral global agencies have set up some of the SHGs, the majority comprise village women coming together voluntarily. The latter are proving to be major change-agents as their strength lies in the volunteers' willingness to take on new challenges. There are nearly 30 lakh SHGs in India, with nearly 3 crore rural women linked to them. Many SHGs are actively backed by state governments. For instance, in Kerala, the Kudumbashree initiative enjoys government support and works in a number of areas in close coordination with gram panchayats. However, in some states, the SHGs engage only in saving and credit activities.

"Women are better managers than men, but they do not usually get opportunity

'Cash deposits have no corelation to

Post-demonetisation, there were expectations that the government would use the gains to boost economic growth. But there remains no clarity on what were the gains. Shaktikanta Das, secretary of the Department of Economic Affairs, assures Lola Nayar that a huge tax inflow is expected, either as voluntary disclosure or as penal tax. Excerpts from an interview:

The 2017-18 budget speaks about low resource generation and more steps to curb the generation of black money. Is the shift to digital payments robust enough to make a meaningful difference as cash transactions without sale receipts are continuing? What was talked about were revenue receipts, particularly tax receipts, which have been realistically projected. If there is any deviation in the tax numbers, it will be for the better. Tax revenues can only go up as this year also we have not taken into account what will be received under the Garib Kalyan Yojana (the income disclosure scheme). Next year, too, there will be additional revenue, thanks to the huge amount of cash deposits.

How much cash has come in?

That the RBI will reveal. Data mined by the revenue department shows that in a large number of accounts, the cash deposits made have absolutely no co-relation to the income tax returns filed by the individual or the business for the last several years... There is an opportunity for these people under the Garib Kalyan Yojana until March 31-if they do not avail of the benefit, they will have to pay the tax. This opens a new window to additional revenue. As far as tackling black money is concerned, it is an ongoing process. Once GST is introduced on July 1, every dealer and every sale will

have to be brought into the network so that every sale gets the input tax credit. Without input tax credit, the prices will be higher because GST ensures there is no tax on tax. While purchasing goods from a wholesaler, the retailer would have paid a certain tax to him. Unless the retailer sells the goods to someone and shows it in his sales register by issuing the buyer a bill, he will not be able to get credit for the tax that he had paid the wholesaler. Once GST comes in, incidences of not issuing bills, or transactions outside the tracking path, will automatically reduce.

The arrests of former IDBI Bank and King-



JITENDER GUPTA

enables her to draw on the collective strength of the members," says Manoj Rai of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), an NGO that works in 12 states. "She may be putting in only small amounts of money, but she is assured of greater support, which helps her break out of the vicious circle of poverty and exclusion. That is why poverty programmes linked to SHGs have been

or support within the family. The SHG

Tied into the anti-poverty programmes

is the NDA government's promise to double farmers' income. This will see more emphasis on animal husbandry and other income-generating activities for rural India, as well as private sector engagement in skill-development and enterprise development through the PPP (public-private partnership) mode.

Amitabh Behar, executive director of Delhi-based NGO National Foundation for India, believes the concepts on which the new approach to poverty-eradication is based are not new and, in fact, two

fisher Airlines (KFA) officials have sent a strong signal. More arrests from other banks involved in the KFA case are said to be likely.

It is for the investigative agency—the CBI-to take a view. As long as the action has been taken on a legitimate basis and in good faith, the concerned officers have nothing to worry.

The budget talks about confiscating the assets of wilful defaulters who try to flee the country. What about other wilful

The finance minister was talking about big-time offenders. Regarding many others who are in the country, it is for the banks or the law enforcement agencies to investigate their individual cases, take appropriate action and bring them to book where required. The big-time offenders, however, are those whom the investigating agencies or the banks are not able to reach at all. So how do you deal with those NPAs? You are unable to proceed because the person is missing. The intention behind this [government move] is to quicken the whole process. Ultimately, the law of the land will have to prevail. If somebody is evading the law by staying away from the country, he has to be made accountable. The confiscation of assets is only to ensure that he presents himself before the court or the law enforcement agency.

What safeguards are being put in place to prevent more KFA-like loans?

The government is focusing on improving governance standards in banks. It has set up a Banking Board Bureau (BBB), which will recommend nonofficial, independent directors to be appointed to the board. The posts of chairman and the MD have now been segregated, doing away with over-concentration of power. The focus on improving governance stand-

critical demands of civil society organisations working on issues concerning sustainable development have finally been addressed. "We have always been demanding two things-a bottom-up micro-planning approach so that the community plans for its own needs, and convergence around the plans that the communities are already making with the existing government schemes and programmes. It is good that the plan is trying to address both," says Behar. "My only concern is that there is no actual

found to be more successful."

tax returns'

ards should ensure that appropriate quantum of due diligence is followed for all decisions taken on loan proposals.

At a recent RBI press conference, deputy governor S.S. Mundra said that the overall NPAs are rising due to many of the restructured loans slipping into NPAs. What is the failure rate of restructured loans?

What they are referring to is bound to happen. As the finance minister has already clarified in Parliament as well as outside, in the press conference, for the same loan, given the sluggish nature of demand outside and inside India, the interest burden and penal interest burden keeps rising over time. Therefore, as time passes, there are some more defaults on the loans that were passed earlier. The RBI, being the regulator, has announced a number of steps, such as SDR (Strategic Debt Restructuring), CDR (Corporate Debt Restructuring) and S4A (Scheme for Sustainable Structuring of Stressed Assets). Now, it is for the banks to come in and resolve the stressed assets problem.

One problem faced by the banks is that when they put up an individual asset for auction, there are not enough takers. So in the budgets last year and this year, we have brought about necessary changes in the Sarfaesi Act (Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002) and the DRT (Debts Recovery Tribunal) Act. The procedures and the processes under the DRT Act are now time-bound. Then the FDI regime has also been liberalised as far as asset reconstruction companies (ARCs) are concerned. In this year's budget, the finance minister has announced the listing of the securitisation receipts (when an ARC takes over an asset and there are others who are investing in it, in return for those investments the ARC issues securitisation receipts, which can now be listed and traded). The marketability of these securitisation receipts is assured once it gets listed in the stock market. This will bring in greater liquidity into the ARCs. So if I am investing in securitisation receipts, my money is not locked up; I can always sell my securitisation receipts and get out. So, the government has taken a number of measures. Also, a number of foreign investors from Canada and other places are also looking into and investing in various ARCs. A major thrust of the government is in infrastructure. Are the Kelkar panel recommendations on restructuring public-private partnerships (PPPs) being taken on board in the infrastructure push?

Almost all the recommendations of the Kelkar panel have been implemented. There



The focus on improving governance standards in banks should ensure that appropriate quantum of due diligence is followed for all decisions on loan proposals.



is one with regard to dispute-resolution, on which we have already issued certain guidelines for renegotiation of PPP contract wherever there are completely unforeseen developments. So we have already issued certain guidelines and communicated it to the other ministries for general guidance. In his budget speech last year, the finance minister spoke about bringing in a law regarding dispute-resolution of PPP contract. Now, on further stakeholder consultations, instead of a new law, the government would be bringing amendments

in the Arbitration and Conciliation Act to facilitate quicker dispute-resolution in PPP contracts. This will achieve the objective of the Kelkar panel recommendations.

Alongside domestic private sector investments, uncertainties on taxes are holding back foreign investors. How far have the budget proposals cleared the air on taxes? On tax issues, there is far greater certainty now. On direct taxes, the finance minister had announced two years ago that corporate taxes would be brought down to 25 per cent over a period of four years. The process has started. Last year, corporate taxes were reduced for new manufacturing units to 25 per cent, and for small units to 29 per cent. In this year's budget, for companies with a turnover of up to Rs 50 crore, the tax rate has been reduced to 25 per cent. The government has also given a commitment that it will not undertake any legislation which will have a retrospective effect. The whole concern about retrospectivity of taxation has been completely settled. In indirect taxation, GST will bring complete certainty in the tax regime.

Why are health and education low-priority areas for the government? The government talks of improving rural health facilities, but can that be done without raising the salaries of service providers such as ASHAs (accredited social health activists)?

This is an area where both the Centre and the states will have to work together, especially after the 14th Finance Commission recommendations that the central government has accepted. Tax devolution to the states has gone up from 32 per cent to 42 per cent. The 14th Finance Commission had stated that the additional 10 per cent should be placed at the disposal of the states so that they are able to design schemes and programmes, keeping in mind the local requirements. The resources available with the Centre today is far less, so if anything has to be done in these areas, it has to be a joint exercise between the Centre and the states. •

real allocation for this scheme. It will have convergence and integrate several programmes like food, watershed and so on, but to run a programme of this kind, you do need a certain amount of operational infrastructure, which has not been taken care of."

Vijayanand too shares this concern. "We would have been happier if more funds had been allocated," he says, stressing that unless there is a focus on health, education and nutrition for children up to adolescence, the real issues behind

poverty cannot be addressed.

Shaktikanta Das, secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, counters this and insists "there is enough money already available". He points out that Rs 3 lakh crore is spent every year under various schemes in rural areas, including central government schemes, state government schemes and centrally assisted schemes. "In fact, I would say that for any anti-poverty programme, there is enough money available in the current allocation under various programmes and schemes of the

Centre and the states," he says. "The approach, now, is to prepare micro and targeted plans for individual villages or cluster of villages."

Experts agree that although no special resources allocations have been made, the new micro-planning-led targeted programme is an improvement on earlier disjointed efforts. If the programme is rolled out in keeping with the spirit of people's participation that seems to be its USP, it could help change the lives of millions for the better.

SCAM OR MURDER

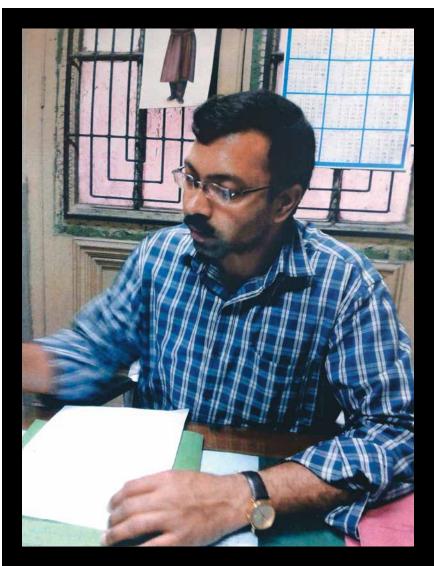


BY DOLA MITRA

E are afraid that the case will fizzle out, as most dowhen the media stops talking about it, and my little brother will never be found," Anil Upadhyay tells *Outlook* on the phone from Jaun-

pur city, UP, where he works as a railway station master. The eldest brother of Sunil Upadhyay, the 35-year-old scientist and chief conservation officer at the Indian Museum in Calcutta (IMK), who is missing since July 2014, says the family has moved the courts in Calcutta for a CBI inquiry. "We do not want to suggest that the CID is not trying," he says, clearly not wanting to rub the Bengal Police's detective department, which is handling the case, the wrong way. "But since the CBI is the country's biggest investigating body, we would feel reassured if it took up the case."

He wonders why the different agencies cannot work together to trace Sunil. "We are very small people" he says, his voice quivering, "but Sunil was a big scientist. He was a bright student and fought diverse odds, like backwardness, to reach where he did, completing his PhD in Chemistry from Delhi University and being sent to the US for higher studies. Doesn't the government care about him anymore?" The glimmer of hope when Outlook first spoke to him soon after Sunil disappeared (see Museum of Little Secrets, Aug 4, 2014), has given way to a sense of resignation. "Sometimes my mother searches through the newspapers' 'missing persons' columns and cries. When there is news of a missing person who has been



Sunil Upadhyay, the Indian Museum employee missing since 2014

Tales From The Darkest Of Crypts

India's oldest museum has murky secrets in its vaults that may have consumed a young scientist.

discovered dead, she goes stone cold. We often fear the worst...." he breaks down.

Early last year, the CID had submitted a "final report" to the court of judicial magistrate in Alipore, Calcutta, in which it stated that the investigation drew a blank. The court was not satisfied and directed the CID to continue the probe. CID deputy superintendent Madhushudhan Nath, who is currently incharge of the case, tells Outlook, "We are leaving no stone unturned. We are following every lead, making inquiries and going through documents. We are even revisiting the leads followed earlier."

Sources in the CID tell Outlook that their initial view as expressed in the final report suggested the possibility that the scientist may have left on his own. One official justifies this argument with claims such as "he is supposed to have been suffering from depression because of a host of reasons, including work pressure and office politics and was taking medication for it." Another says, "He didn't even take his cell phone with him. He could have been in a mental state where he did not want to be contacted." The scientist is said to have been blamed for the damage to a priceless sculpture, the Rampurva Lion Capital, during the museum's renovation. Another CID official tells Outlook, "While it is difficult to speculate, the investigation has not ruled out the possibility that the scientist may have met with an accident and lost his memory. We deal with many such cases. It is not unusual."

But Sunil Upadhyay's colleagues at IMK, who suspect foul play, are reluctant to accept these explanations. "Sunil was a whistleblower who fearlessly raised questions about corruption in the IMK," an IMK employee tells Outlook. "IMK is an institute which deals in crores of rupees worth of art and artefacts. From rare gems to antique coins, from priceless paintings to ageless sculptures, the museum is a treasure trove of high-value items. He was convinced that a money-laundering racket was operating with help from within IMK, which formed a chain, involving influential people, including politicians, police and possibly the international art and antique-smuggling mafia."

Sunil's cousin, Sirish Upadhyay, tells Outlook, "Just a few days before he disappeared, Sunil had told us that he had been offered Rs 90 lakh as bribe by unknown IMK officials so that he would keep his mouth shut about the smuggling out of some antiques. But he refused. Anyone offering that kind of money cannot be a petty thief. It would have to be someone capable of foul play like kidnapping and eliminating someone." Not willing to accept other explanations behind Sunil's disappearance, he says, "If he had gone off on his own, he would have at least withdrawn money for basic survival. But police found no transactions since his disappearance. He only had Rs 50,000-showing how an

Photographs: SANDIPAN CHATTERJEE



Officials allegedly help in producing duplicates of original artefacts, even in smuggling them out, to be replaced by replicas.

officer of his stature, who could have minted money, was honest to the core." According to insiders, Sunil, who was suffering from depression and possible heart disease when he disappeared—was a rare voice of dissent within the IMK, where corrupt officials allegedly accepted bribes from art and antique smugglers for looking the other way. One such serious charge against these operatives within, according to IMK officials who spoke to *Outlook*, is that they help in producing duplicates of original artefacts and even in smuggling the originals out, to be later replaced by the replicas. "In one case, a dozen Burmese teakwood beams were burgled out and sold to furniture manufacturers," an IMK official reveals. The institute was embroiled in a scam in 2011, when a few (among several)

Rabindranath Tagore paintings from the museum, which were put on display at the Government College of Arts and Craft, were found to be fakes. "The perpetrators had hoped that the fakes, once passed off as the real thing, would fetch attractive dividends if they could be sold," the IMK official points out. In another instance, before a visit by then PM Manmohan Singh for the bicentenary celebrations of IMK in 2014, antique coins were hurriedly put on display using common glue (Dendrite, to be precise), instead of a special chemical that is non-corrosive. "The pieces were ruined forever," the official says. "But behind this was more than mere neglect. It was an attempt to have the coins brought out for repairs and deliberately misplaced."

letter written by Saumyo Mukherji, an outgoing legal consultant of IMK-who infers that his contract was not renewed due to his pursuance of cases of mismanagement and corruption as well as the resultant disagreements with higher ups-addressed to the governor of West Bengal, who is also chairman of the board of trustees of the IMK, enumerates a host of such alleged irregularities, including misappropriation of funds, disproportionate expenditure and underutilisation of allocated money, and even mishandling of and damage to invaluable and rare works of art, sculpture and other memorabilia. The letter raises questions about a sum of nearly Rs 100 crore allocated to the museum for renovation work, which "remains unaccounted for". Furthermore, to bring the governor's notice to slackness concerning the safekeeping of the precious collections at the museum, Mukherji writes, "It is generally known that only five to six per cent of the total number of art objects in a museum are put on display.... The rest are kept in separate reserves and exhibitions take place on rotation basis. IMK's collections exceed one hundred thousand items. Obviously, a large number of objects at any given time are stored in reserves. These reserves are not just in a ramshackle condition, simple security mechanisms such as CCTV cameras have also not been installed, making these vulnerable to theft and burglary." He points out that this is all the more shocking considering that break-ins, thefts and burglaries have already taken place on more than one occasion.

'We are duty bound to cooperate with any probe'

When the Indian Museum's former director was forced to resign amidst wide-ranging allegations soon after a key scientist went missing, **Dr Jayanta Sengupta**, director of the Victoria Memorial, was given additional charge as director. The professor and scholar, who admits IMK continues to be besieged by "bad press", answers the charges levelled against India's oldest and largest museum.

Why has the Indian Museum (IMK) not taken initiatives to track down Dr Sunil Upadhyay, the chief conservation officer, who has been missing since July 2014?

The case is being investigated by the CID. I understand that IMK had cooperated fully with the agency during its inquiries. Since May 2015, when I was given additional charge of director, I have not had any occasion to deal with the probe.

Upadhyay's family and some of his colleagues are asking for a CBI enquiry. What is the view of IMK's top management?

Such decisions are not taken by us. IMK's role is to assist in the probe. If the agencies need to question anyone we are duty bound to comply. If they require any documents or records we must provide these. Such matters are routine. But the CID has not shared anything regarding the status of the case with us. In fact, in another, nearly 13-year-old case regarding the theft of a priceless Buddha idol from IMK, the CBI has not submitted any report that we know of.

Upadhyay is understood to have raised uncomfortable questions pertaining to a host of ills supposedly plaguing IMK, including corruption.

I have heard such claims but by the time I was given charge, he was no longer there. IMK has received a grant of Rs 99.76 crore for a "renovation and modernisation" project from the Union ministry of culture on the occasion of its bicentenary. There are allegations of "misappropriation of funds", against the management.

By May 2015, when I joined, most of the "modernisation and renovation" project

work had been done. The grant money too had accordingly been more or less spent. As regards "misappropriation", I think the expenditure structure is designed in such a way that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for any IMK official to steal from the grant money. While the grant had been received in the name of IMK (electronically transferred into its accounts with the SBI) and IMK is the sanctioning authority, the responsibility for implementation of the project is vested with another independent agency, the National Building Construction Corporation (NBCC). They receive the grant money from the IMK as per their requirement. They determine the exact amount needed, ask for it from IMK and are paid accordingly.

According to a letter from Saumyo Mukherji,



a former IMK employee addressed to the governor, the grant was meant to be utilised by 2014, but it has not been done.

As I said, when I arrived in May 2015, work was at its tail end. But there had been a set of obstacles in its completion because of certain structural problems. Though the museum owns the premises on which it stands, it comprises a number of other survey buildings that are independent and come under different ministries of the government of India. This posed a complex problem, because any works in these would entail negotiations between and permissions from these ministries. Our rare collections also need to be handled with great

care, so we must not lose perspective.

Interestingly, IMK employees and former employees have complained to higher authorities, including the governor, about the museum's negligent treatment of rare collections of art and artefacts.

In 2014, one of IMK's most valuable possessions, a 2nd Century BC sculpture, the Rampurva Lion Capital, was damaged, possibly because of mishandling. The unfortunate incident has made employees who handle the collections extra careful. Workers also complain that lack of CCTV

cameras expose collections to theft. There are currently around 400 CCTV cameras at IMK. Perhaps a few (around 20

to 25) are not functioning properly. I personally oversaw the installation of over a hundred cameras.

How do you reply to charges, as levelled by the former legal consultant, that recruitments at IMK do not follow protocol?

Several RTI applications filed with the IMK before I was given charge do pertain to 'irregularities' in recruitment. Currently, there is a stay order by the Calcutta High Court on recruitment because of a case related to a hiring.

You have initiated a number of cultural projects at IMK, introducing the performing arts as part of the museum's cultural activities. But this is overshadowed by these allegations. Your comments.

When I was given additional charge Indian Museum was steeped in "bad press". I am aware of the many hiccups in the way that business was conducted for long. I have been trying to address these. Some problems have been solved; others still need attention. But since I have arrived, I have endeavoured to turn it into a kind of cultural "hang out" zone. I was inspired by the success of similar programmes I initiated at the Victoria Memorial. IMK is India's largest, oldest museum and houses one of the world's rarest collections. One of the ways in which I thought that we could turn the spotlight back on it was to turn it into a locus of cultural activities. [7]

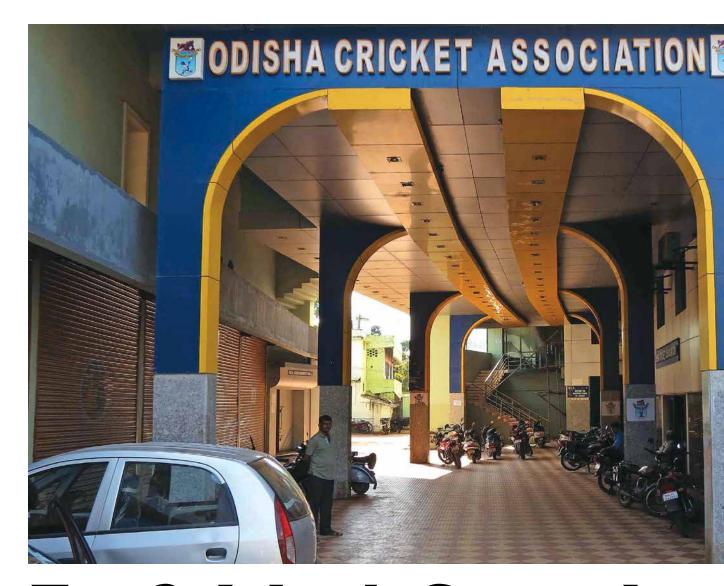
Another IMC official goes to the extent of suggesting that this is not mere negligence, but a deliberate ploy to keep the option of siphoning off of valuable materials open. "In the past items have been stolen and there was no record of who entered and went out of the vaults. That there were no CCTV cameras to guard the safes was one of Sunil's biggest complaints," says the officer. "But for some reason, the au-

thorities seem reluctant to take this most basic security measure."

In an interview to *Outlook* (see box), Dr Jayanta Sengupta, who has been given additional charge of the museum since 2015, replies to the allegations against the institute he heads, though IMK workers who make the charges are quick to point out that the soft-spoken professor and scholar, also director of the iconic Victoria Memorial Hall, is himself not

culpable. "He is a gentleman who is trying to revive the cultural tradition of IMK, but the museum is crumbling from within because of corruption at various levels; criminal gangs are controlling money laundering rackets inside," an IMK official says. "We believe our colleague Sunil Upadhyay was silenced because he knew too much and because he raised his voice. And those who removed him are still lurking in these corridors."





For Cricket's Satrapies,

An audit of the account books of 27 state cricket bodies reveals a pirate's chest bursting

BY QAISER MOHAMMAD ALI

RICKET statistics—that bringer of unadulterated joy—normally doesn't cover this. Everyone knows, as a general but vague truth, that cash flows in the Indian cricket Board's coffers like runs from the blade of an ace batsman—but exactly how much, and more importantly, how? In October 2015, Shashank Manohar, the then BCCI president, made a first-of-its-kind

move towards transparency: he commissioned an audit into the accounts of all state associations. With its penchant for playing ostrich at the whiff of a scandal in all its 88-year existence, the call for a close scrutiny of the Board's accounts shocked many.

Global consultant Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu was appointed for this exercise, termed 'Project Transformation'. No one expected a squeaky-clean copy-book, but enough states would have dreaded the kind of hot spots that would show up on Snicko. Now, after auditing the account

books of 27 state associations, and putting the expenditure and utilisation of funds well over Rs 2,000 crore under a microscope, Deloitte has come out with a damning and scathing report.

The document, accessed by *Outlook*, is like a scoreboard for scams, laying bare financial irregularities—like huge, unexplained escalation of costs in stadium construction, land bought at astronomical rates, contracts given to firms known to BCCI officials, bills worth crores submitted on plain paper and associations spending large sums on administrators'







UNDER FIRE Top, ex-OCA secretary Asirbad Behera; below, Assam's Bikash Baruah, who was banned for financial misdeeds involving lakhs

Cash Is Karma

with financial irregularities, one more flagrant than the next

privileges like travel, accommodation, mobile phones and cars. For instance, a few years ago, Hyderabad cricket association officials bought gold coins for themselves! Strangely, the associations left out of this exercise are the Delhi and District Cricket Association, Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association, Rajasthan Cricket Association and Chhattisgarh State Cricket Association—places where Deloitte could have struck a goldmine.

Among those who have been audited, the Orissa Cricket Association (OCA) occupies the prime slot in this rogues list, with unexplained expenditure topping Rs 500 crore. Among the things under the scanner is its lease agreement on Cuttack's Barabati Stadium with the Odisha Olympic Association (OCA). Close behind Orissa are Assam, Tripura, Hyderabad, UP and Karnataka. Deloitte has unearthed transgressions in account books of associations that receive massive BCCI funds. Both present and former administrators, rulers for decades, come out looking tainted. Here are some of the report's most telling revelations:

• The cost of the Ranchi stadium went up

by a whopping Rs 103.72 crore, or 113 per cent, from the original tender price of Rs 73.72 crore to Rs 177.44 crore.

- OCA paid Rs 168 crore to a construction firm when it presented the bill on a plain piece of paper. The OCA Club also spent Rs 30 lakh on Holi and New Year's.
- The Assam Cricket Association's upcoming stadium is set to cost Rs 70 crore more than the initial estimate of Rs 180 crore. Former secretary Bikash Baruah, who was banned for life from the ACA for financial irregularities of Rs 30.5 lakh, is under police investigation.
- Goa Cricket Association (GCA) officebearers swindled Rs 2.87 crore, for which they were jailed last year.
- Haryana Cricket Association purchased a piece of land for building a stadium at Lahli at a premium of 102 per cent over prevailing rates. It has purchased several pieces of land—almost all acquired at over market-determined rates.
- The Anti-Corruption Bureau of Andhra Pradesh/Telangana is probing financial irregularities to the tune of Rs 115 crore involving present and former officials of Andhra Cricket Association.
- All members of Gujarat Cricket Association executive committee received laptops—the cost of Rs 15.62 lakh was shown as "honorary expenses" in 2014.
- In Tripura Cricket Association, fixed deposits worth Rs 44.18 crore are held in the joint name of TCA and that of a former TCA secretary—also an ex-employee of the bank in which the deposits are held.

The audit report is most damning of the OCA, which has failed to properly account over Rs 475 crore. For example, in 2014-15, major repair work of Barabati Stadium was carried out at a cost of Rs 3.27 crore by one Sanjay Mishra, despite the budget being only Rs 30 lakh-an increase of 1,090 per cent! The Rs 50 crore infrastructure subsidy the OCA received from BCCI was clubbed with its corpus fund, which is against the norm. And the OCA built around 100 flats at a cost of Rs 14.81 crore and gave them to its staff for free. It also granted life membership of its club at huge discounts to 'outside parties', incurring losses of Rs 2.38 crore in the last three years.

The Barabati Stadium deal is most interesting. Asirbad Behera, OCA secretary for 16 years, has also been general secretary of the Odisha Olympic Association (OOA), and both organisations are housed at this Cuttack stadium. The OCA

has entered into a lease agreement with the OOA—a clear conflict of interest—to use the stadium. PILs have been filed alleging "illegalities" in the sub-leasing; a separate case is being fought between the state government and the OOA regarding "illegal use and cancellation of lease".

Behera, who stepped aside this month, says he has not seen the Deloitte report but "there's no mismanagement". "We've spent money on raising infrastructure. All payments were made after due diligence, following preparation of budget and inquiry of parties, then approving of bills by the subcommittee, finance committee and AGM," he says. He also denies the charge of free flats, saying they are staff quarters.

Deloitte's audit report already seems to have had some impact. Hyderabad and Goa have given written undertakings to the BCCI, saying they would implement reforms. In separate but almost identical letters, each of the two associations has promised that it "understands and acknowledges that it is crucial" to "comply with all the undertakings made" in the letters. Both associations acknowledged that the "BCCI shall not advance any payments" to them "unless it is satisfied of the steps being taken".

HE Goa letter has been signed by 12 executive members, including the office-bearers. For Hyderabad, it's president Arshad Ayub and secretary K. John Manoj. A few days after giving the undertaking, the Goa police arrested three officials, president Chetan Desai, secretary Vinod Phadke and treasurer Akbar Mulla, for misappropriation of funds. They later got bail.

The Assam Cricket Association (ACA) is another offender. Its former secretary Bikash Baruah is under police investigation for financial misappropriation worth at least Rs 21.5 lakh during his 13-year reign. The police have seized all ACA documents, books and records for ten years till 2015, after the Guwahati High Court ordered the probe, taking cognisance of a PIL filed by former ACA secretary Sahajananda Ojha. ACA is also feeling the heat over construction of the Barsapara Stadium in Guwahati. Deloitte has found a huge escalation of construction cost: From the initial ACA budget of Rs 180 crore, the cost has risen abnormally; the auditors were told it might cost Rs 250 crore.



GETTY IMAGES

Ex-BCCI chief Shashank Manohar had commissioned the audit in 2015

Then there is the perennially unresolved issue of double taxation that has given an excuse to associations to delay paying income/service tax, resulting in a backlog of unpaid taxes running into crores, or in some cases paying it under protest. "That's the issue across all associations. The BCCI pays tax once, and when they give the same money to the state associations, should that be construed as double taxation or not? That's a global issue," Jyotiraditya Scindia, Madhya Pradesh Cricket Association chairman, tells *Outlook*.

But who exactly will take action against the erring associations now? Shashank Manohar has quit the BCCI and is presently the ICC chairman. After the Supreme Court debarred president Anurag Thakur and secretary Ajay Shirke from the BCCI, it's up to the four-member Committee of Administrators (COA), headed by former CAG Vinod Rai, to take cognisance of the report. The COA can either punish the guilty administrators or recommend these cases to the SC, to which it reports. The audit report is for four financial years—2012-13 to

The unresolved issue of double taxation is an excuse for cricket bodies to delay paying tax—the backlog is in multiple crores.

2015-16. What the COA will have to deal with immediately are multi-crore scams that appear to surround stadiums—in the purchasing of land and construction. In many cases, like that of Jharkhand, Assam, Orissa, Hyderabad and DDCA, construction costs have escalated manifold—in one case (the UPCA's) construction has not even started on land bought for Rs 21.52 crore in Unnao. Now, this land, says the report, is also up for sale.

A lot of these irregularities was always suspected, with many officers maintaining a knowing silence. What this report does is to put things in black and white. There is a separate, detailed report on each of the 27 state associations, going into the minutest of details. "I wish this report is made public," says a BCCI official. "The BCCI cannot punish states as they are its own associations. How can it punish them? But the SCappointed COA's powers are limitless. If it wants to take action, it should stop allotting international matches to tainted states; that's what hurts them the most. Or it can suspend their recognition, or refer the cases to the BCCI ombudsman," he adds.

The bigger question: can money spent illegally be recovered? "It will be difficult, unless the Supreme Court issues directions that assets of rogue associations be pledged to the BCCI until the funds are recovered," says another official. Given the punishing mood the apex court and the COA are in, it might just do that.



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Home At Last

Leaving the baggage of his past behind, Sanjay Dutt makes his final comeback

BY GIRIDHAR JHA

HERE is an unusual buzz in the bustling Tajganj area of Agra, not far from the Taj Mahal, on Wednesday where a big crowd is waiting patiently for a glimpse of Sanjay Dutt, who is about to resume his career with a shoot for *Bhoomi*, his much-awaited re-launch vehicle in Bollywood.

As a bearded Dutt enters the location in his trademark gait, there is a hint of nervousness on his face—a long-awaited comeback can remind one of a debut. A loud cheer from the crowd dispels the tension, brings a faint smile on his face. The veteran looks a bit reassured now as he waves to the crowds before facing the camera for the ambitious project being helmed by director Omung Kumar of the *Mary Kom* and *Sarabjit* fame.

It must have been déjà vu for the 57-year-old actor, as he has been through similar situations more than once in the past. As a matter of fact, Dutt may well have forgotten how many times he has staged such a comeback and made his mark in the tinsel town marquee before the recurring quirk of fate, a protracted legal battle, interrupted his rides to fame. But now, he is a free bird, with the baggage of the tumultuous past way behind him, ready to pick up the threads of his career from where he left off four years ago.

And yet, it has taken almost a year for him, since he left Pune's Yerawada jail, to choose his first film. "I had been looking for scripts that went beyond my screen persona," he says. "I wanted to do something vulnerable yet powerful. *Bhoomi* is an emotional and sensitive drama that explores the relationship between a father and a daughter."

Choosing the right subject was, of course, not easy for him. Since he made

his debut in *Rocky* (1981), he has had a chequered career marked by upheavals caused by personal problems ranging from drug addiction to prison terms. Arrested for the first time on the charge of possessing illegal weapons in the wake of the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts, Dutt had been in and out of prison; his last sojourn behind the bars being an almost three-year-long stay in Pune's Yerawada jail after the Supreme Court held him guilty under the arms act in 2013. The term ended in February last year.

This time, Bollywood's best-known 'comeback man' returns in a mature *avatar* in front of the camera, with a clean slate, to play a father to Aditi Rao Hydari in a pivotal role in a revenge drama that he thinks will give him an immense scope to showcase his histrionics.

Bollywood could not probably have waited for long for his final comeback to see if his prolonged incarceration has blunted his talent, his star appeal or the

SANDEEP SINGH & BHUSHAN KUMAR'S

BHOOVIL
AN OMUNG KUMAR FILM
DOP. ARTUR ZURAWSKI

SCENE NO. SHOT NO. TAKE NO.

O2 O1 O1

DATE: DAY/NIGHT

"Bhoomi is extra special primarily because it is Dutt's comeback. It's great to have him back where he belongs." pull at the box office. Of course, there has been no dearth of film makers who are vying with each other to put their money on Dutt and want him back on screen at the earliest. "Bhoomi is extra special to me primarily because it is Dutt's comeback film," says Omung "It is great to have him back where he belongs—in front of the camera. Bhoomi is an emotional revenge drama that centres around the relationship between a father and his daughter."

Dutt was last seen on the screen in the Aamir Khan-blockbuster, PK (2013)which was released after he was imprisoned. Vidhu Vinod Chopra's Marco Bhau was initially supposed to be Dutt's first film after his return. Chopra's next on his popular Munnabhai series, which saw Dutt essaying his career's best roles, was also in the pipeline and so was the next project of director Siddharth Anand (of the Bang Bang, 2014, fame). And then, there were also talks about a sequel to Mahesh Bhatt's 1991-hit, Sadak. But at the end, it is Bhoomi that got Dutt's nod as being the first film in his new innings.

Bhushan Kumar of T-Series, who is producing the film along with Shailendra Singh and Omung's Legend Studios, says everybody is looking forward to the film, and there is much enthusiasm 'over the comeback of Baba (Dutt's nickname) on screen'. "There is also the exciting father-daughter jodi played by Dutt and Aditi in the film," he says. "His versatility will be on display. We are all geared up for the making of the film in Agra, where the unit will camp for about 50 days."

The movie, which has Sharad Kelkar in the antagonist's role and also marks the return of Shekhar Suman on the big screen after many years, is scheduled to release on August 4. Singh says that Dutt believed in the subject from the day he heard it. "He has been the driving force behind this film. Its story will buck the



trend. This schedule is going to be an emotional one for me," says Singh, who has co-produced and written the film. "Hats off to Dutt for the way he is making this comeback, fighting the odds and coming out as a winner."

But then, Dutt has been no stranger to such struggles. Even after his high-profile debut in Rocky, which was followed by the Subhash Ghai-hit Vidhaata (1982), he had to undergo treatment for his drug problems in the US that brought his career to an abrupt halt. Post-rehabilitation, he made a successful comeback with Ajay Kashyap's Jaan ki Bazi (1985). But his talent was first noticed in Mahesh Bhatt's 's Naam (1986). Bhatt went on to do a handful of movies with Dutt, including Sadak, which catapulted him into the big league. Following it up with the super success of Lawrence D'Souza's Saajan (1991) around the same time, he came tantalisingly close to the numero uno position at the box office in the post-Amitabh Bachchan era, when his arrest in the wake of the Mumbai blasts put paid to his hopes. Given the nature of the charges related to aiding and abetting terrorism levelled against him at that time, the industry was quick to write him off. But he fought back despite odds.

UTT'S close associates believe that he has always faced the vicissitudes of life with equanimity and closed the black chapter of his life now. "Forget about those days of Dutt. He has left his past behind, as he begins his career afresh," says Kashyap, who had directed him in *Jaan ki Baazi*. "He is resilient enough to bounce back and has a bright future ahead."

Kashyap says that Dutt is not only a good actor but also a good human being. "Had he not been a professional, would we have worked on so many movies together?" asks Kashyap, who directed him in six films, including *Namo-o-Nishan* (1987), *Do Qaidi* (1989) and *Do Matwale* (1991) between 1985 and 1992.

Trade experts believe that the court cases that dragged on for more than two decades at the prime of Dutt's career might have harmed it, but his worst is over now. "Many producers were wary of casting him because of his legal problems earlier," says film writer R Mohan. "But now, he has got over that phase and will have an array of roles exclusively written for him."





BORN AGAIN Dutt (left) and Aditi Rao Hydari on the sets of Bhoomi

It is to his credit that in between his jail terms, Dutt pulled off several creditable performances in movies such as Mahesh Manjrekar's *Vaastav* (1999), which not only earned critical acclaim but also commercial success. In fact, he reached the acme of his career with Raj Kumar Hirani's *Munnabhai MBBS* (2003), but what would have been the best phase of his career was once again rudely interrupted by his conviction by the TADA court, barely two months after the release of *Lage Raho Munnabhai* (2006), the second movie in the *Munnabhai* series.

In fact, Dutt's life, both personal and professional, has been such a roll-er-coaster ride over the years that it has prompted Raj Kumar Hirani, director of the Munnabhai series, to make a biopic on him. With Ranbir Kapoor essaying Dutt's character, his biopic is expected

Dutt has remained a saught-after star all these years, despite a prolonged legal battle, because of his fan following and goodwill. to release later this year.

Bollywood watchers believe that Dutt has remained a much saught-after star all these years, despite fighting an uncertain and prolonged legal battle, more because of his fan following and his goodwill in the film industry than his acting prowess in particular. Director Leena Yadav, who directed Dutt and Aishwarya Rai in her debut-making movie, Shabd (2005), says Dutt was a big pillar of support to her during the making of her maiden film. "Even though I was a debutante director, he extended all support to me during the making of Shabd. I am sure he will come up with very good films on his return." Leena, who directed the critically acclaimed Parched (2016) recently, considers him to be as an actor of immense potential and possibilities. "Whenever he has put his heart and soul into any movie, he has come up with a great performance," says Yadav. "All he needs to do is put his heart into his role. If he manages to do that, his performance will match up to international standards."

That may well be a matter of debate among the critics, but Dutt certainly has a chance now to live up to all expectations in his final comeback, howsoever lofty they may sound.

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COVER FOR CRITICAL ILLNESS

Smart ways to address financial upheaval when contracted with a critical illness, by **Taenaz Shakir** and **Preeti Kulkarni**

he WHO statistics on deaths among Indians by contracting critical illnesses is startling. There are about 3.5 lakh deaths due to heart diseases and 10 lakh due to cancer each year and this number is only going up. Thanks to advanced healthcare a lot of illnesses are treatable, but the treatment cost is pretty steep. Treatment for a heart ailment can put you off by a few lakhs and not to forget the quality of your life, which means it could also reduce your future earning potential. Hence, a critical illness insurance cover is imperative.

Today, there is plenty to choose from the health insurance options which cover for simple hospitalisation to complicated surgeries. You have policies for individuals and groups; there are policies tailored to address the needs of senior citizens and those who just wish for critical illness cover as well. Yet, chances are most people may not have health insurance at all and those who have may have a wafer thin insurance cover. Insurers—life, health and general insurers are all looking at ways to address the needs of policyholders with critical illness cover to address situations that could put a person in a situation which is at times worse than death.

Selecting a plan

Within the critical illness options you have policies from health and general insurers, as well as life



SANJAY TIWARI

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benefit insurance
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RAJIV KUMAR
MD&CEO, UNIVERSAL SOMPO
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"A floater health plan
comes cheaper than
taking a cover on
individual sum
insured for each
family member and is
useful when including
elderly parents."

insurers. A critical illness policy from a health or general insurer is a must have, especially when you are being treated and need the policy to address the financial costs associated with such treatments. In insurance parlance this is known as indemnity or compensation based on the policy cover you opt for, wherein the insurer reimburses you for the actual cost of hospitalisation you have incurred, subject to limits in the cover.

In contrast, critical illness insurance policies from life insurers offer a fixed payout on the detection of the critical illness stated in the policy. These are essentially fixed benefit plans—that is, on the diagnosis of the specified disease, a pre-decided lump-sum is handed out. "The fixed lump sum benefit relieves you from the monetary tensions thus allowing a reasonable recuperation period," says Sanjay Tiwari, Executive Vice President - Product Management, Exide Life Insurance.

So, even if you have already made a claim under your indemnity-based regular health insurance policy, you can secure a benefit under these critical illness plans of life insurers. This way you could use money for treatment and also for recuperation or any other expense incured, such as loss of pay that you may incur or those attending to you.

Ring fencing

The increasing incident of critical illness makes it nearly impossible to



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We focus on consumer benefits



■ In the Union Budget 2017, Government has focused on inclusive agenda with increased allocation towards schemes like PMFBY. What's your view?

The Union Budget rightly focuses on pursuing an inclusive and long term development of the economy. It targets the key building blocks i.e. infrastructure, digitisation and rural development among others. While pushing for growth is important, it is equally essential that we maintain a balance through risk mitigation. The introduction of schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana rightly aligns with this thought process. By increasing the budgetary allocation to ₹13.240 crore for coverage under this scheme and thereby extending its coverage from 30 percent to 40 percent in FY2018, Policy makers are ensuring that growth is well protected by adequate risk management measures in place.

☑ 'Wellness' is a theme that your company has been very vocal about. Please take us through the process for choosing 'wellness' as a focus area?

Conventionally, non-life insurance as a sector is perceived to play a role only in case of an untoward incident. At ICICI Lombard, we believe in adopting the principle of 'prevention is better than cure'. We offer benefits such as gym and yoga reimbursements, nutrition consultation, sports and fitness therapy.

We introduced open access platforms, which allow clients to benefit from peer opinion pertaining to quality of treatment at hospitals. We also provide detailed information on the infrastructure and cost of treatment at specific healthcare providers through our website www. healthadvisor.icicilombard.

➡ What technology-driven initiatives have you taken in recent times?

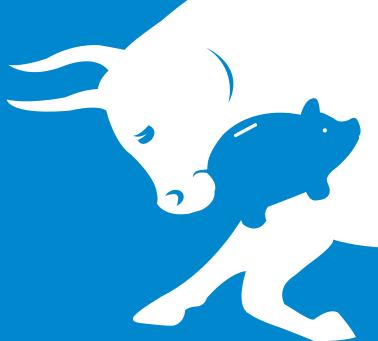
Developed a suite of innovative, tech driven solutions for our customers that is easily accessible, we launched a unique solution recently. This is hassle-free renewal of lapsed motor insurance policies. Its 'Mobile Self Inspection' feature allows customers to upload a self-inspected video on ICICI Lombard's 'Insure' app. After its review and online payment, the policy is renewed.

be without insurance. Ideally, one should not be left without a health insurance and add critical illness cover over time. One could buy a policy with a large sum insured of around ₹10-15 lakh, choosing an independent critical illness cover or even a rider attached to life insurance plans.

"It is a golden rule that purchasing health insurance early in life has numerous advantages like less cost, no-medical checkups, comprehensive plan without many exclusions, guaranteed lifetime renewability, exhaustion of waiting periods at older ages, accumulation of cumulative bonus, to name a few," says Rajiv Kumar, MD&CEO, Universal Sompo General Insurance

The advantage of starting early is also the possibility of gaining additional scope of insurance cover for the number of years one does not make a claim on a health insurance policy. Moreover, you lock-in at low premiums and easy entry into the policy with less stringent checks on your health before the policy is issued to you. Such an approach will also help you start with a small value cover, which you could enhance over time by adding to-ups and other standalone options which may emerge later.

Today, you have policies from Bajaj Allianz Life, Aviva Life and Exide Life among others. "There is no compulsion to take a life cover along with Exide Life Sanjeevani," adds Tiwari. You also have the advantage to claim tax deductions on the premiums that you pay for these policies. Under Section 80D of the Income Tax, you could claim tax deduction on premiums up to ₹25,000 for self, spouse or dependent children or ₹30,000 if you are a senior citizen. Make sure, you do take a mix of insurance policies to address costs incurred on treatment of critical illness and choose both health and life plans that cover critical illnesses.



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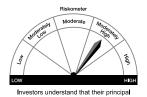


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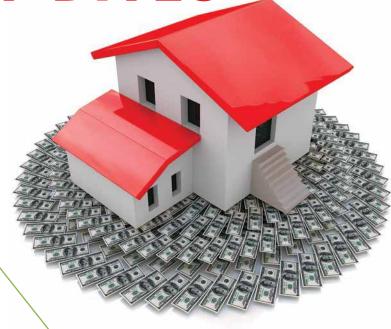
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REALITY BITES

What's changed about the home loans post Budget 2017 that you need to know of before going in for a second home, by **Narayan Krishnamurthy**

he saying the devil is in the detail applies to sifting through the Budget documents and interpreting its impact. No doubt the housing sector has gained, especially affordable housing segment which has got the 'infrastructure' status and is shifting the focus to this segment of housing. There were two other announcements that were made in the Budget speech, which have a direct impact on home



owners who are planning to sell their properties and also those who have a house property on a loan that they are servicing. Holding period for immovable property was reduced to 2 years and base year for indexation has been shifted from 1981 to 2001.

Indexation change

Until Budget 2017, if you were to sell your house, which was bought before April 1, 1981, you had the option to substitute the fair market value (FMV) as on April 1, 1981 as the cost of purchase. So, when you got into selling this property, you could take advantage of indexation on such fair market value on the basis of cost inflation index for the year of sale announced by the government from time to time. The big shift in this Budget was to move this date to April 1, 2001. This is very good for people selling old properties as the price appreciation between the date of acquisition and April 1, 2001, will become fully tax-free.

The FMV of properties bought before 1st April 1981 was based on the valuation report of a registered valuation expert. Lot of the properties from that era have witnessed structural changes and modifications to arrive at a proper price. These were perhaps the reasons for the government to

Impact of cost of inflation index

Base year shift in cost of inflation index

For calculating gains on sale of a property acquired before 1981, taxpayers have a choice of either considering its actual cost or fair market value (FMV) as on April 1, 1981. Also, from FY 2017-18, the base year for calculating indexed cost has been changed from 1981 to 2001.

Property purchase: ₹25 lakh in 2000-01

Sold in 2012-13: ₹75 lakh

Indexed cost of property: ₹57,82,020

[₹25 lakh X (939/406). Where 939 and 406 is the CII for 2012-13 and

2000-01, respectively]

Capital gains: ₹75 lakh – ₹57,82,020 = ₹17,17,980

shift the base year to 2001. So, if a property bought before 2001 is sold in FY2017-18 or later, its cost will be its FMV on 1st April 2001.

Let us take the example of the cost of inflation index (CII) for 2016-17, which is 1125 and compare it to the 1981-82 base of 100. What this means is that the index gained an average 7.16 per cent over this period. To understand the impact, let us look at the BSE Sensex, which had a base of 100 in 1979 and is hovering around 28,100 at present. The growth in this case is about 16.47 per cent annually.

In effect, by shifting the base year, the government is going to give the taxpayer a huge relief as the price appreciation during the date of acquisition till the date of sale will become fully tax-free in the hand of the taxpayer (See: Impact of Cost of inflation index). So, owners of property who bought them before 2001 stand to gain from this base year change. This change will result in higher cost of acquisition and therefore lower capital gains.

Reduction in holding period

The holding period for immovable property has gone down from three to two years, will benefit home sellers. They will now pay lower tax, as their holding period goes down. This move is beneficial to taxpayers as once the capital asset sold by them qualifies for being a long-term asset; they just need to pay tax at 20 per cent on the profit and that too with the benefit of indexation.

One also has various options to save tax by investing the sale proceeds or capital gains in residential house or capital gains bonds, which can legally help one reduce the tax liability on the long-term capital gains. And, as the government has proposed to include more bonds under section 54EC, it will help sellers to invest in these bonds to claim capital gains exemption.

Cap on tax benefit on a second home

	Pre-Budget	Post-Budget
Rent Received	2,40,000	2,40,000
Municipal Tax	12,000	12,000
Net	2,28,000	2,28,000
Deduction 30% of Net	68,400	68,400
Home loan interest paid	4,67,500	4,67,500
Loss from house property	-3,07,900	-3,07,900
Loss allowed to be off-set againt income in current FY	-3,07,900	-2,00,000
Tax savings at the highest tax bracket (30%)	-95,141	-61,800 All figures in ₹

Disadvantage second home owner

The tax benefit on home loan repayment has for long been the reason why people would opt for a second home, which they would take on a loan. The Budget papers restrict the loss on house property, which was allowed to be adjusted from income under 'other heads of income' and 'salary income', up to ₹2 lakh only. It did not have any limit earlier. This works unfavourably for people who own two homes, especially those who use one of them to earn rental income.

What has changed is that from a situation that allowed taxpayers to offset any amount of loss on account of interest on housing loan on a rented property against other heads of income, now there is a limit. The restriction of ₹2 lakh was

applicable only in case of a selfoccupied property, the government has plugged the loop which earlier extended the benefit to rented and even deemed to be rented homes of taxpayers (See: Cap on tax benefit on second home).

Several taxpayers in higher tax bracket had used the offsetting facility to go in for a second house on loan and benefited by claiming losses from rents which they set off against income under other heads of income such as salary without any limit and saved hugely on taxes they would have paid. With this move, the government has further reduced the avenues available for taxpayers to use loopholes in the system to benefit from. But, there is plenty to look forward to for first time home buyers who continue to enjoy preferential treatment.



utual fund investments are tricky. There are times when fund managers hold on to cash and do not deploy it as they feel there are not enough opportunities for them. And, there are times when the fund refuses to accept fresh money instead of sitting on cash. The outcome may be the same, but the latter is more often perceived to be a better approach. From the 20 February, 2017, DSP BlackRock Investment Managers will suspend fresh flows into its popular micro cap fund, citing the need to protect investors' interests by restricting large inflows.

This is not the first time that such an approach has been taken by AMCs. When Kenneth Andrade managed IDFC Premier Equity, he would stop fresh lump sum flows into the fund, but accepted SIPs. His reasoning was that the regular inflow allowed him to plan his moves to deploy the collected money, unlike large value lump sum inflows which could upset the investment approach. A similar approach was adopted by SBI Small & Midcap fund in 2015, when it stopped accepting fresh investments. In the case of SBI, the offer document of the scheme had mentioned that it will have a

capacity constraint of ₹750 crore and as it was approaching this limit, it stopped accepting fresh money.

Opportunity constraint

DSPBR Micro Cap fund's investment universe is made up of stocks beyond the top 300 companies by market capitalisation. "Most of these companies have seen huge surge in their valuations, thus, restricting the investment universe further. As the fund size grows, it becomes difficult for the manager to buy a sizeable position in a company to have a meaningful impact on the fund," according to Himanshu Srivastava, Senior Analyst and Manager-Research, Morningstar Investment Adviser India.

DSP BlackRock's senior vicepresident and fund manager Vinit
Sambre, is credited with the
scheme's runaway success,
highlighted the challenge of liquidity
posed by its current size. "It is
challenging to incrementally build
positions, i.e. to increase stock
weightage of companies to a
meaningful size in the portfolio," said
Sambre. You need not worry if you
are investor, but do closely watch its
performance from here on.

ATTENTION SMALL SAVERS

The monetary policy announcement did not change any rates. It did not mean that there was nothing to look forward to for investors. The RBI Governor hinted at the possibility of linking of interest rates of small saving schemes with 10-year G-sec yield. This is not a good news for small savers, as it would amount to reducing the rates on these instruments, which are lapped up by several small savers for the guaranteed returns these offer and also tax benefits in case of some of them.



However, it is a good development for those looking at investing in debt funds, which have the potential to provide better returns than small savings instruments. This move could shift savers in small savings to consider medium term debt funds, especially income funds. At present, the 10-year G-sec yield is hovering around at 6.6-6.7 per cent whereas small savings schemes offer yield between 7.5-8 per cent. And, although from December 2015, the interest rates on small savings is being reviewed every quarter and going down, it has not yet linked interest rates of small savings schemes with 10-year G-sec yield. Once this is done, the entire small savings space may no more exist as it does currently. M



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The Spy | Knopf | 208 pages | Rs 299

Serenity Before Death

Mata Hari was modernity's first exotic beauty and celebrity. Her tragic, dignified life has now inspired the best-selling Paulo Coelho.



BY A.S. DULAT

HE Spy is based on Mata Hari's tragic story, beautifully woven in her own words, of a woman who dared to defy the hidebound conventions of a century back and paid for it with facing a firing squad in a French prison. Coelho has painted a sympathetic picture of a vulnerable tragic figure, which still mystifies the world.

Paulo Coelho, the Brazilian author, is an international phenomenon whose books have been most widely translated and sold worldwide. His readers include the former US President Bill Clinton. Belonging to the generation of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, Coelho has been a non-conformist, living life on the edge. His books have been inspired mainly by his own life.

The story begins with an innocent Dutch girl, Margaratha Zelle, named after a famous dancer, who marries an officer of the Dutch Army but comes into her own as Mata Hari, who dances her way into the hearts of Paris despite being desperately poor when she arrives in the city. As Coelho says in one of his earlier works, "you don't choose your life, it chooses you". Mata Hari dreams and lives life abundantly. But life was not always a bed of roses for her. She was raped by her school principal when she was sixteen, and raped and abused by her husband who took pleasure in re-enacting the scene.

In Oscar Wilde's words, Mata Hari was "the nightingale who gave everything for love and died while doing so". But not before she had charmed and seduced the major concert halls and salons of Paris. In course of time, she made friends in the highest places, including ministers and the president of France.



Life made Mata Hari go through much, leaving her bitter, lonely and sad. And her story, intertwining the two oldest professions. retains a powerful mystique to this day.

Pablo Picasso yearned to sleep with her. Mata Hari's greatest sin was that she had a mind of her own; like the Greek princess Psyche, she was too independent. Even as her beauty faded with age and her fame declined, the Great War intervened, making her a plaything for the great powers— Germany and France. As Coelho says, "The first casualty in war is dignity". Recruited by the Germans with the code name "H21", sounding like "a seat number on a train", Mata Hari found the whole business of intelligence a ridiculous game. Yet she offered herself to the counter-in-

telligence service of her beloved France, only to be accused of espionage in the paranoid wartime atmosphere.

The French, who pride themselves on its legal system, found Mata Hari's trial an aberration of justice during the war. The French counter-intelligence could find nothing incriminating against her, but all they needed was a convenient scapegoat. As the Ecclesiastes says, "Instead of justice there was wickedness; instead of righteousness there was still more wickedness". As her lawyer contemplating her trial says, "The evidence against Mata Hari was so poor that it was not fit to punish a cat". She may have been a liar and a prostitute, but Mata Hari was never a spy.

Life made Mata Hari go through so much in so little time. An optimistic woman whom time had left bitter, lonely and sad. The courageous and fearless woman paid the price that she was destined to. In the end, she

did not need to fight anymore. Even as a prisoner, her spirit remained undiminished. Yet, when death came, she was ready for it, dignified till the bitter, unjust end. She faced the firing squad impassively. One of the soldiers who fired at her fainted even as Mata Hari collapsed.

Mata Hari's story, intertwining the two oldest professions, still retains its mystique—it has spawned volumes of fiction, non-fiction and a celebrated Hollywood biopic. Women have been employed by intelligence agencies since time immemorial. During the Cold War, the CIA frequently resorted to 'honey traps' to neutralise the Soviet 'swallows' notorious for seducing foreign diplomats. Indians going on a posting to Moscow then were given special security briefing so that they did not fall prey to the artful fair sex. But none would have been like the inimitable Mata Hari. 🖸

(The writer is the former chief of R&AW)

Nothing Personal About A Crusade

Setalvad's indefatigable fight for justice for the victims of communal riots takes precedence in this memoir over her personal life



BY PRACHI PINGLAY-PLUMBER

OR lasting peace, and harmony, an edifice of justice must exist or be created. But do the paths of the peace-maker, the harbinger of harmony need to be distant or parallel from those who seek justice? Can they not, through concerted action, merge?"

Philosophical and tender moments like the above are few in this memoir by Teesta Setlavad, a lawyer, an activist and a journalist, but they are revelatory of the commitment of the activist towards her cause. Setalvad's life is an interesting and inspiring journey of someone who has sought to walk the path of truth and justice through relentless advocacy, though this slim volume leaves you wanting to know more.

In this autobiography, she talks about her illustrious lineage and the influence it had on her at an early age. Her grandfather, M.C. Setalvad, was the first attorney-general of independent India and her father, whom she lovingly calls by his name Atul, a lawyer in Mumbai, has been a great support through her struggles. Though memories of her family and childhood make for a warm and effusive reading, personal life is not the focus of the book.

Setalvad is straight in her descriptions of her childhood and her college days. But all that comes later; up front are incidents and cases about the Godhra riots. It is much more concentrated on the raison d'etre for her and her husband Javed Anand, which primarily now involves the legal fight for justice for survivors of post-Godhra riots by prosecuting those responsible. The book is full of the cases she has fought for. Passages like: "It is the Zakia Jafri case that began with the complaint filed in 2006. This became too much for the system to handle. It was when we pushed on in this case from 2010 onwards that the attacks on me re-doubled...", are aplenty, with attributions to newspaper articles, reports by commissions and their own publications, Communalism Combat or Sabrang India.

Setalvad doggedly provides the tedious details-investigations by different agencies, dates, case papers, reports and so on, to reiterate what Citizens for Justice and Peace, their NGO that provides legal aid for survivors of riots, including Zakia Jafri, wife of former MP Ehsan Jafri, who was killed during

AMIT HARALKAR



"Sloganeering aside," writes Setalvad, "India's so-called secular parties have shown a reluctance and ambivalence to identify with victim-survivors' struggle for justice."

the Gujarat riots, have been going through. Critique of mainstream media also occupies her. She talks about the lack of investigation and scrutiny of existing power centres. She brings out nuggets like, "Vajpayee wanted to see improvements on the ground and, therefore, did what was very unlike him, interfered in the functioning of a state by offering direct advice on how to manage relief and rehabilitation. The Gujarat riots had bothered Vajpayee immensely and this letter is a proof of the anxiety he experienced for a major

part of 2002. However, this has escaped the public discourse related to 2002."

Not only does she put a spotlight on the media, but also on previous governments and other political parties such as the Congress. She writes: "Sloganeering at election time notwithstanding, India's so-called secular political parties have shown a reluctance and ambivalence to identify with the victim-survivors' struggle for justice." She does not shy away from addressing the allegations against her-about the financial embezzlement of funds. She goes on to explain in detail what her NGO's sources of funding are, what they are used for and how none of it is diverted for personal gain.

But what made Teesta this indefatigable crusader for public causes? It could be growing up in a family that upheld values of justice, or working in a newspaper, or covering riots early on career-the 1984 Bhiwandi riots and then, of course, the Bombay riots, and subsequent attempts of pinning the responsibility on politicians. But this memoir, if it can be called that as it's predominantly about her work, rarely gives any insight on how the past two decades-spent in relentless pursuit of cases of riots and its aftermath-have affected her. Equally, what toll has the witchhunt against her had on her family?

Perhaps repetitions relating to the cases could have been edited better, or explained chronologically, instead of going back and forth. Certainly, it would have made more space for her personal life. But as she writes: "The law, public ethics, and family-these are the influences on me. Examples of commitment and integrity from my larger family have stood me in good stead, as the challenges life has thrown at me have demanded that I dig deep into these reserves." The personal and the professional for her seem to be not two different realms.

Shouldering The Stars: Small Towns, Big Stories | Aleph | 200 pages | Rs 399

From A Baggageless Kipling

The timeless hills, the brooks and forests, the creatures that inhabit them and the small stories of innocents among them carry a whiff of old India



BY ANJANA BASU

N old television serial in the UK used to begin, 'There are a million stories in the naked city and this is just one of them....' For Ruskin Bond, however, naked cities hold very few stories. Three years in London and five in Delhi left him dry-unless you count The Room on the Roof. Whatever he wrote evolved from Mussoorie and Landour-the small towns where everyone knows everyone and where stories of the everyday-simple ones of love and aspiration-are rarely at a pressure cooker pace.

Bond's stories trickle through the pages like drops of water down a window pane. A Long Walk for Bina, for example, talks about the animals and plants on the hillside and the easy co-existence of school children with leopard cubs. Bond acknowledges that leopards are dangerous, but points out that if they are not meddled with they leave people alone. The nature he knows is an integral part of life, almost a character—it gives children beetles for races and a wealth of guavas to be plucked from the neglected orchards belonging to the rich who couldn't be bothered.

At the heart of Small Towns Big Stories lies the beauty of the surroundings, the mountains and the tree-lined roads and dips into icy cold pools with boys who have no bathrooms with running hot and cold water. This matches the natural wisdom and innocence which characterises Bond's style-it is a world in which for the most part evil does not exist, despite scams, cash crunches and even murder-his murderers tend to confess in weak moments. Some might say it's almost too ideal, but the rustic setting gives Bond the opportunity to talk of the mysterious mountains that shoulder the stars.

Bond has a cast of characters with whom he is perfectly familiar. His human comedies are acted out by Dukhi the gardener, whose name recurs, attached to various occupations throughout the stories; Amit, who sells goods on the streets; Ranji, the feisty Koki and sundry maharanis.

The leitmotif is that of the lonely boy scraping a living with his pen in a room at the top of the stairs, but reluctant to move to the big city, or the lonely young man mesmerised by the beauty of a pair of dark eyes glimpsed at a station but unable to move beyond that single moment of poetry at night. This is possibly because the stories Bond wrote when he was younger are more nostalgic and reflect his own loneliness. Autobiography creeps in and on occasion the character in the story is Bond himself without the disguises-young boy, young man, ageing writer. In fact, the order of the stories very often leaves the reader



The leitmotif is that of a lonely boy or young man scraping a living with his pen. This is because the stories the younger Bond wrote are nostalgic and reflect his own loneliness.

guessing as to who the narrator is—Bond or not Bond. One can assume that the story of the child at his father's funeral comes from Bond's own life, though the child remains anonymous against the backdrop of hill station bungalows and resigned servants.

Towards the end are a cluster of nonfiction pieces about life in the hills, with their murders and romances-though like all old yarns they sound like tall tales told over a fire. Agatha Christie was in fact inspired by the report of a long distance murder in Simla and Kipling asked Conan Doyle to help him solve the case. Bond does deftly suggest a solution, because he gives the reader the story of the Roys, silver screen stars now no longer matinee idols. The lady falls ill and survives but her husband dies cities away and the rest is the silence of a once legendary hotel with long verandahs run by Nandu.

Bond unabashedly admires Kipling for his vivid descriptions of a vanished Hindostan, though Kipling has been derided for generations for rabid colonialism. But then, issues of who is colonial and who isn't do not form part of Bond's writing—as far as he is concerned there is an Anglo-Indian world that embraces the hills, their beauty and all their legends. After all, the hill stations were set up by homesick Brits looking for a climate they could relate to and their legacy is in Bond's blood.

This is a pleasant book, an old-fashioned kind of thing to curl up with on a soft bed with the stars peeping through the windows and a lover or a dog snoring gently behind one. Bond throws in all kinds of advice, all comfortably delivered. And over the years he has acquired the gift of selecting and reshuffling so that his books have become a well loved combination of old and new. That said, two episodes are exactly the same, barring changed names, and could well have been avoided with a little editorial care.

Outlook

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'Manmohan is decent, don't scoff at him'



Shiv Sena supremo Uddhav Thackeray ended his party's 25-year-old alliance with the BJP at the level of civic bodies in Maharashtra, Not only is the Sena actively campaigning against the BJP, its chief is also praising Indira Gandhi and finding virtues in Manmohan Singh. Ahead of the four-cornered fight for the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, Uddhav speaks to Prachi Pringlay-Plumber.

When did you first sense trouble in your alliance with the BJP?

It started after the (2014) Lok Sabha elections...the way they behaved with us then and, later, ahead of the state assembly polls (in October that year). Even then, I allied with them because the Congress had, after many years, lost power both at the state and the

Centre. I didn't want to jinx our victory. That's why I didn't True, the insist on the Sena getting **Modi government** the deputy chief minisdid surgical strikes ter's post or important across PoK. But, long portfolios. But our expeago. Indira Gandhi as the rience over the past two PM went into Pakistan. years shows only a tende-I am not praising her. ncy of them eating up our **Just stating** space. There needs to be facts. respect for an alliance partner. In the last few local elections, we decided that if we ally with the BJP, then we won't go with anyone else. But they went ahead with every party, including the MIM-thus became number one. You spoke about making alliance with regional parties to counter the BJP. Wouldn't there be a conflict of political ideologies?

There is a sugar-coated term to tackle that

problem: common minimum programme. Our common maximum programme is to work for the good of the country.

Won't the Hindu votes split now?

I don't think so. The BJP has dropped the Hindutva agenda. Earlier, there used to be monks; now the party has criminals. Those who voted for them will vote for us.

Are you disappointed that Bhim Shakti leaders have gone with the BJP?

Only the leaders. The people forming the real Bhim shakti (Dalit power) are with us.

There was a suggestion about the grand Chhatrapati Shivaji memorial.

People can build as many statues or memorials of Shivaji Maharaj. We can't create history like he did, but the symbols of the history, the way he ruled, the forts and fortresses are there for us. Preserving them is our duty.

After Mumbai hosted much-publicised Make-in-India week a year ago, many projects were announced. What has come to the metropolis?

Yes, there was a lot of response to Make-in-India (February 13-18, 2016). MoUs worth lakhs of crores of rupees were signed. But the willingness of people to come here went down; there are many administrative obstacles. Also, demonetisation has created fear. Investors are worried.

Of late, it seems as if you are criticising the BJP and praising the Congress.

Former PM Manmohan Singh is a decent person. He is not just anybody. We have also criticised him about his silence ear-

> lier, but to make such twisted allegations that he is luccha lafanga (raincoat etc) is not good. He had in fact come forward to support (RBI governor) Urjit Patelyou have created bubbles without soap and they are saying such things. Indira Gandhi had rejected demonetisation. (Her successor) Morarji Desai went ahead with it.

Why did corruption and black money increase despite that? If Indiraji was unpatriotic by rejecting demonetisation, then Morarji showed patriotism, right?

Does this tussle result in more problems for the common man?

The BMC's work is not entirely in the control of corporators. Many things are dependent on the administration. The money for much of the work comes under the CM, and the corporators also belong to the BJP. •



AIR INDIA

Connecting India to the World

AIR INDIA, a name that denotes a long and distinguished lineage, pioneered civil aviation in India and carved for itself a special place since its inception in 1932. Today, Air India has grown to become a mega international airline with connectivity across USA, Europe, Australia, Far East and South-East Asia. The international network offers multiple non-stop flights across the globe.

Air India recently fulfilled the long-pending demand of linking the national capital, Delhi with Kerala through its Dreamliner service. The Air India Dreamliner B787 will operate from Delhi to Dubai via Kochi and return the same day, on a daily basis.

The company has been continuously adding domestic and international destinations to its network. On the domestic front to boost regional connectivity, Air India started its first ever thrice-a-week flight between Delhi-Bhatinda and Delhi-Kanpur. Delhi will now be connected to Coimbatore via Chennai. Air India has introduced five more direct flights from Kolkata to Dimapur and to Dibrugarh and from Kolkat to Imphal and Aizwal. Air India is set to introduce asecond flight from Delhi to Guwahati and link the capital with Dibrugarh for the first time. A second flight to Hyderabad is set to commence as well via Bhubaneswar from Kolkata. The frequency between Delhi-Vijayawada and Delhi-Vadodara has also been increased from five flights a week to daily connections.

In the international sector, the frequency of flights between Delhi and Kathmandu have been increased from 10 to 14 flights a week. To make the journey luxurious and comfortable, Air India has introduced Dreamliners between Delhi and Moscow and Delhi-Kochi-Dubai sectors. In December 2016, the company launched a non-stop flight from Delhi to Vienna and Madrid. This flight operates thrice a week and is being operated by a B-787 aircraft on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

Due to high demand, the company has doubled its number of flights between Delhi and San Francisco, one of the longest duration journeys in the world, from the existing thrice-a-week. Chandiharah and Kolkata will now be linked with Bangkok.

There is no other airline that understands the need of the customer like Air India, therefore we are perhaps the only Airline that has matched fares of the Rajdhani Express Trains, thereby giving passengers an economical option for faster travel. Air India not only offers extremely competitive prices but is also the only carrier in India to offer a competitive free baggage allowance of 25 kg in domestic sectors in Economy Class on all their tariff slabs. We also understand the needs of our 'little flyers' and have allowed a free baggage allowance of 10 kg for infants. This service is extended to passengers travelling on Alliance Air flights and connecting to Air India domestic flights and vice versa, holding a single ticket, are also eligible for 25 kg.

In a unique gesture, Air India is now reserving an entire row in economy class for women passengers travelling alone at no extra cost on its domestic flights. Women travelling with infants can also occupy these seats. Designed exclusively for Indians residing overseas, Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) and foreign nationals to experience the true heritage and culture of India, the company offers its travellers a Discover India scheme as well. Available in two categories, the Discover India scheme can be bought with a 15-day and 30-day travel validity, from the commencement of the first leg of the journey. The fare, exclusive of taxes, for the 15-day ticket is INR 32,500 and for the 30-day ticket is INR 60,000.

There are many more promises to be fulfilled and this year will witness Air India's aircraft operating to new destinations with the addition of 35 new aircraft to its fleet.

trending

"I love Drake he's so brilliant, talented, amazing. We made a song to is amazing. I have so much love for that boy," - JENNIFER LOPEZ on

Carpet Bagger

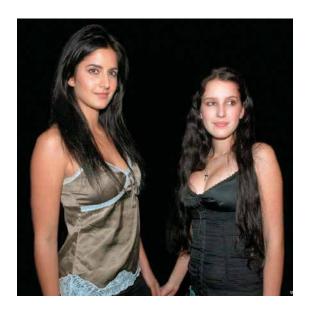
Huma Qureshi is a natural on the red carpet of the Berlinale's Potsdam Theatre—not a glimpse of the extra preening or pouts Bollywood dames save for such occasions. Huma, seen with actor Manish Dayal, was there for the premiere of Gurinder Chadha's Viceroy's House.

Sister Act

If Katrina didn't come to the aid of a sister as dishy as this, we're sure others would have, but poor Isabel, who debuted in *Dr Cabbie* (2014) pines for a Bollywood release. Launcher Salman was rumoured to help, but backed out. 'Bad!', as Potus would tweet.



GETTY IMAGES





They Sang Of Joy-Filled Hymns Of Peace

They won the Grammy for 'best new age album' for *White Sun II*, and they are (from left) Adam Berry, Gurujas and Hari Jiwan Singh. What's special? Ten prayer-filled songs are from the Granth Sahib; another is influenced by Guru Gobind Singh. Well Done Grammy!

THIS TOO HAPPENED

Congratulations, Adele! The British singer won the 2017 Grammy Award for the Album of the Year, this time for (*Lemonade*), Drake (*Views*), Justin Bieber (*Purpose*) and Sturgill Simpson (*A Sailor's Guide to the Earth*). Adele

gether, absolutely we hung out, we had a great time. He rumoured relationship with rapper Drake.



How Walls Are Torn Down

It takes a sloganeering rump to answer the bumbling Trump. Fashion and politics are old comrades in arms, and LRS Studio didn't want the well-attended stage of the New York Fashion Week to go waste. Off went a model down the runway, giving the finger to 'The Wall' with every swing of her hips.



The Boys Think Twice

Is au naturel normal? Yes, says *Playboy* in a joyous harking back to its unclothed roots. Readers (well, viewers too), forget last year's ill-advised cover-up. Playmate Elizabeth Elam (look up!) would make your flesh tingle.

Lady Flash

Even if this reminds you, for a blink, Salma Hayek with a python around her neck, Beyonce's open-bellied celebration of maternity was more poignant. Described as a 'sci-fi fertility ritual', her Grammy routine featured her mother and daughter.



25. Adele has made history as the only artiste ever to sweep the Album, Record and Song of the Year twice. Adele beat Beyonce won all her five nominations, including Best Pop Solo Performance and Best Pop Vocal Album in addition to the above.

BELWA **diary**

Return of the native

WE are fruit of the earth, all of us. It was over two decades ago that I left the place behind, chasing my dreams, landing in Mumbai via Patna and Delhi, but the name still smells and tastes of home: Belwa! And like the hands of a clock, I come back to this little dot on the map in West Champaran, Bihar..., every now and then. This is where I spent my boyhood, in what you would call a remote village. The nearest town was Narkatiaganj; the Nepal border was closer, less than three miles. Sometime in the future, I yearn to

settle down here in Belwa. It's like cinematic memory, each moment I spent here, scampering across fields, taking a dip in the canal, swimming across the river.

Nostalgia washes over me on every visit, but if I so much as hint at my latent desire, my wife Neha offers a prompt reality check. "You're thinking of settling down in your village? Most of them have left for the cities," she tells me. That's a reality, sadly. And the canal and the river where I used to have all that fun with my friends have dried up too. But nothing can keep me away from Belwa for too long.

We've Got Change

I'M taking my six-year-old daughter, Ava Nyla, to Belwa for the first time this month-it's the land of her ancestors, and the sense of the moment is overpowering. But imagine the distance we've covered in just one generation! She recently saw the picture of a bullock cart and was all excited at the prospect of seeing a real one on her trip! I wonder whether she will find one in Belwa these days, though. The sight of schoolgirls riding bicycles still stands out as a novelty, and my mind rushes back to how things were once.

My early education happened at a small school near my village. Till class II, I used to sit on a jute sack laid on the bare ground in the class. My teacher was my resident master at home as well. My father had provided him accommodation so my classes could continue beyond regular school timings. Despite the proximity of family, it was not uncommon to get a whacking from mastersaab! It was never frowned upon. Rather, it was considered a sine qua non for the learning process, something necessary to instil discipline. Today, parents get finicky if a teacher so much as raises his voice in class. Corporal punishment seems as retro as Chambal daaku films now.



(The author is an award-winning actor)

Escape Movie

FOR Class III, I was enrolled in a missionary school at Bettiah and kept in a dingy lodge run by a teacher of the same school. Those were the nightmarish days, as I was constantly bullied by the resident seniors. I used to look forward to school! All the time spent on the campus was an escape from the trauma at the lodge. I was pretty decent at all the languages-Hindi, English, Sanskrit-but more than that, it was there, in that mofussil school, that I had my earliest brush with performing on stage.

The Initial Stage

THINGS finally started happening for me after I shifted to K.R. High School, a boarding school in Bettiah. The miseries of my lodge days finally came to an end! This school had an amazing atmosphere—four big playgrounds, a proper uniform, all the things that would thrill a village boy. I owe a lot to this school—in some ways, being an actor is itself a role, and this is where I really internalised it. And if you are more than the sum of your parts, and the human being exceeds the artiste, dues must be paid to the places that made it so. I have never gone back to my other schools but I make it a point to visit my high school to relive my memories.

People Tree

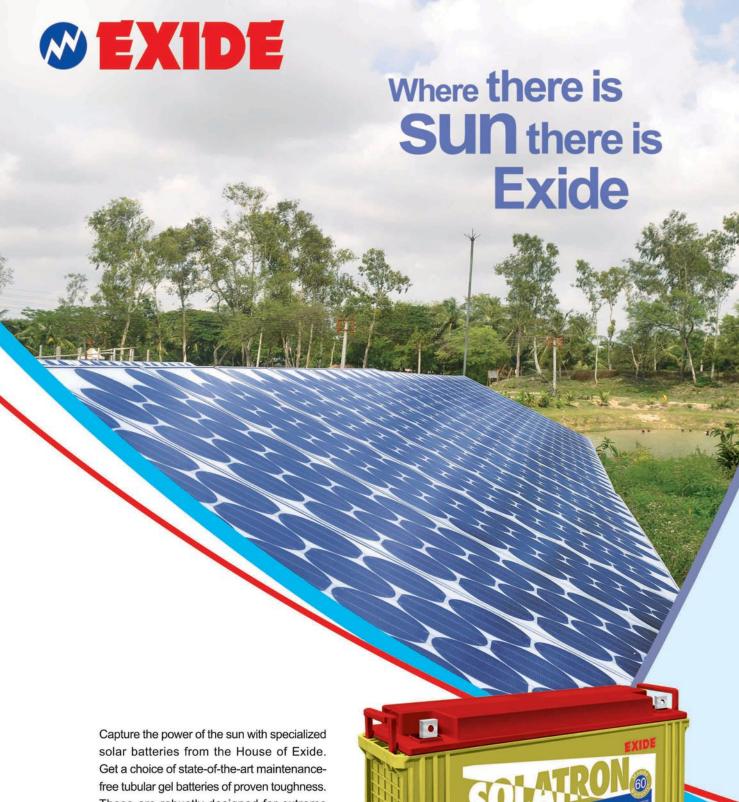
AT my village these days, I hardly get a moment to myself. There are hardly any solitary walks in the fields. Every time the prodigal returns, people throng my house from early morning to late evening. Of course, I don't mind at all! I see genuine pride and affection in their eyes, and it's a princely feeling. Their warmth is so real, because many of them have

seen me grow. But on the inside, it's actually me paying them tribute, because I have taken from them.

> The simple, unvarnished human character is an infinite resource for an artiste. In tiny bits ever so often, and sometimes overtly, I draw from them something to build my characters in my movies. For instance, I modelled my character of a wily politician in Prakash Jha's Rajneeti on the elder brother of one of my friends-

someone from an erstwhile zamindar family, with a set of mannerisms. I may have left Belwa long ago, but a portable Belwa is inside me all the time. And one day, I'll take it back.





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