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The Bitter with the Sweet



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GST on Track for July 1 Rollout

New Delhi: The GST Council has fixed a 5% tax rate on small hotels and restaurants and approved a draft of key supporting legislation to enable the rollout of the new indirect tax regime from July 1. The key decision-making body for GST, the council, approved the final draft of the Central GST (C-GST) and the Integrated GST (I-GST). The council will take up the State-GST and the Union Territory-GST (UT-GST) laws at its next meeting on March 16.

The C-GST, which will give powers to the Centre to levy GST on goods and services after Union levies like excise and service tax are subsumed, and the I-GST that is to be levied on inter-state sup-



plies, will go to Parliament for approval in the second half of the Budget Session beginning March 9, said Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, who chairs the council. The SGST, which will allow states to levy the tax after VAT and other state levies are subsumed in the GST, will have to be passed by each of the state legislative assemblies. The UT-GST will also go to Parliament for approval.

Jaitley said the model GST Law will have a clause to enable levy of up to 40% tax (20% each by the Centre and states) but the effective tax rates will be kept at the previously approved levels of 5%, 12%, 18% and 28%. The rates will be what has been decided by the council. There won't be a higher rate of taxation. But the cap rate in the legislation is always put at a higher level to leave a headspace, just as in the Customs Act you have a difference between the bound rate and applied rate. So the applied rate is going to be what the council has decided," Jaitley said.—Our Bureau

A Tale of Two Roadshows



PM Narendra Modi (L) and Congress' Rahul Gandhi & SP's Akhilesh Yadav in Varanasi on Saturday

Modi Evokes 2014 in Varanasi Roadshow

In an effort to convince voters to back the BJP in the assembly election in Uttar Pradesh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday led a roadshow in his constituency Varanasi.

The last time Modi held such a roadshow here was during the run-up to the 2014 general election. The BJP swept that election in the state, winning 73 of 80 Lok Sabha seats, along with its ally Apna Dal.

Forty-nine constituencies in the state voted on Saturday, in the sixth phase of the election. BJP leaders believe the roadshow, broadcast live on most of the regional TV channels, will help them when the remaining 40 seats, including Varanasi, go to the polls in the final phase on March 8.

84% Polling in Manipur

Manipur saw a turnout of 84% — the figure is tentative — in the first phase of polls in 38 seats on Saturday. The polling in 49 seats in UP was 57% till 5 pm

The BJP, which is locked in a tight battle with the SP-Congress alliance and the BSP, hopes that a good performance in eastern UP will take it past the halfway mark in the 403-member assembly. The BJP has been out of power in UP for 5 years. Modi started his journey through Varanasi from BHU after paying tributes to its founder Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya. He later offered prayers at the Kashi Vishwanath and Kaal Bhairav temples, before addressing a rally in Jaunpur.

CM Akhilesh Yadav, his wife Dimple and Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi also held a roadshow in the city. BSP chief Mayawati too addressed a public rally in Rohaniya, around 20 km from Varanasi.

—Varanasi, Jaunpur/PTI, IANS

Mumbai: BJP Pulls out of Mayor Race

In a major climbdown, the BJP has withdrawn from the race for the mayoral post of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis said on Saturday. This would make it easier for the Shiv Sena to get its nominee elected.

Fadnavis said BJP is ready to support Sena, its ally in Central and state governments, but would not

take up any post, including that of deputy mayor. The Sena has named Vishwanath Mahadeshwar for mayor and Hareshwar Worlikar as deputy mayor. The party with the highest number of corporators can get its candidates elected to the two posts if others do not put up joint candidates.

—Mumbai/Agencies

Trump: Obama Tapped My Phones

Washington: US President Donald Trump on Saturday accused his predecessor Barack Obama of "tapping" his phone during last year's



White House campaign, without providing evidence of the explosive charge. "How low has President Obama gone to tapp (sic) my phones during the very sacred election process. This is Nixon/Watergate. Bad (or sick) guy!" Trump tweeted. Trump's administration has come under pressure from FBI and congressional investigations into contacts between some members of his campaign team and Russian officials during his campaign. Obama imposed sanctions on Russia and ordered Russian diplomats to leave the US in December over the country's involvement in hacking political groups in the November 8 US presidential election. Trump's national security adviser, Michael Flynn, resigned in February after revelations that he had discussed US sanctions on Russia with the Russian ambassador to the United States before Trump took office.

—Reuters

US Suspends Speedy H-1B Visas

Washington: Beginning April 3, companies cannot have their H-1B



visa applications expedited by paying an additional fee. The US Citizenship and Immigration Services in a statement said the suspension of "premium processing"

could last six months, adversely affecting Indians, who get three-fourths of the 85,000 H-1B visas issued to high-skilled foreign workers every year. However, petitioners can submit a request to expedite an H-1B petition if they meet certain criteria. Premium processing costs around \$1,200 more and has a response time of 15 days, compared to up to six months for standard applications.

—PTI

Indian-Origin Businessman Shot Dead in US

New York: Just over a week after the killing of an Indian engineer in the US, an Indian-origin businessman was shot dead outside his home in Lancaster, South Carolina, on Thursday night.

Harnish Patel, 43, had closed his convenience store at 11.24 pm, and barely 10 minutes later he was shot dead outside his house, according to media reports. Patel's death

comes two days after US President Donald Trump had said the nation condemned as "hate and evil" the killing of engineer Srinivas Kuchibhotla the previous Wednesday at a bar in Olathe, Kansas.

However, local officials in Lancaster said they do not believe that Patel's killing was a bias crime and that investigations are continuing, according to *The Herald*. "I don't have

any reason to believe that this was racially motivated," county sheriff Barry Faile said.

Patel is survived by his wife and child, who were at home when he was killed. People left balloons and flowers outside his Speed Mart store in his memory. A sign on the door read, "Store closed for few days because of family emergency. Sorry for the inconvenience."

Kuchibhotla was killed by a man scream-

ing, "Get out of my country". Alok Madasani, who was with him at the bar and an American, Ian Grillot, who tried to stop the shooting, were shot and injured. Adam Purinton, a 51-year-old US Navy veteran, was arrested and charged with the murder. The hate crime had sent shockwaves across the Indian-American community.

—Agencies

“Paid News Should be a Crime”

As a high voltage election across five states draws to a close, Chief Election Commissioner **Dr Nasim Zaidi** in an interview to **Anubhuti Vishnoi** says paid news should be criminalised and made an offence. He identifies complete disclosure by political parties on funds received as the single biggest electoral reform needed in India. Edited excerpts from the interview:

How would you rate the political discourse in this round of elections?

Overall the elections have been free and fair. There has been no casualty, no direct election-related death. So by and large the election management has been very good. A couple of cases were brought to our knowledge involving 4-5 major parties in which parties or their leaders have mixed religion in their election campaign. But we also found that most of these statements were made outside the poll-going areas or outside the model code of conduct (MCC) areas. We took a holistic view on those cases. On the statements made outside the polling areas, we have said this is per se not a violation but if they make any reference to the poll-going states, that is a violation of the MCC I would say that our advisory has had a proper effect, though sometimes some find tangential ways to avoid the code.

The Commission always expects, leaders, star campaigners to maintain a very high level of political debate, its content, its tenor. But the real impact of this will be felt after election when the period for filing election petitions arises. The High

Courts will judge whether there has been a corrupt practice or not and that will be a significant reflection.

It is good to note that the government has accepted the EC recommendation to make bribery a cognizable offence

You have had a serving CM questioning the credibility of the EC and the defence minister's comments attracting an EC notice

So, we treat all alike. The commission has taken the decision in both cases that you mentioned and I think the matter has closed. If political leaders or others criticize us for taking those decisions, so be it. We issue notice wherever matter of violation of MCC comes to our notice.

The Commission has repeatedly written to the Centre on need for electoral reforms...

Let me put it this way, that the EC has conducted so many elections – close to 350 general assembly and 16 parliamentary ones. The very fact that our credibility and integrity is well established not only in India but globally shows that EC is equipped with due constitutional powers and with existing legal powers. I would say that it will go on to conduct free and fair elections in the same manner. How-

ever, there are certain aspects which require reforms or legal amendments so that our process becomes more free, more fair and more peaceful. To ensure it is more free, each and every voter must be able to cast his or her vote freely – there should be no intimidation or threat. So, in this regard, EC is saying that totaliser machines must be employed at the polling station level so that candidates do not know the voting pattern. This we are seeking time and again from the Law ministry. For a truly inclusive election, Commission has been seeking amendments to ensure that as soon as a person turns 18, he or she should be eligible to be registered as a voter. If that is not possible, then this facility should be available 2-4 times a year. The other aspect relates to fairness of election – to prevent all inducements. It is good to note that the government has accepted the EC recommendation to make bribery a cognizable offence. The home ministry has moved a relevant bill to the effect for circulation. Further, if we have credible evidence of widespread use of bribe, we should have the power to countermand the election like we did in Tamil Nadu.

Again on fair elections, we are seeking that paid news should be criminalised. It should become an offence and we also want that role of black money in political funding should come to an end. Therefore, we are saying that there should be total transparency in funding of political parties and their expenditure.

Your view on the ₹2,000 cap announced on anonymous funding

The Commission stands for four things – any money that is received by political parties should be disclosed in the public domain. There should be legal cover for it. Two, if there is a violation, there should be penalty regime. One of the steps just moved is to reduce the anonymous donation cap from ₹20,000 to ₹2,000. I think it is a welcome step. Ideally, people say, there should be complete disclosure but you always make some beginning. Also, there are certain parties that raise their funds through collection during rallies. They say, how can we keep account of these contributions. Considering these aspects we decided that ₹2,000 is good to start with. There is a school that says ₹2,000 will also be violated. Let us see, as it comes.

Has there been a visible impact of de-



monetisation in helping curb black money in these five elections?

I won't comment on the demonetisation part because it is a government decision. But we have noticed during our five elections so far, there have been extraordinary seizures. In 2012, we seized ₹112 crore in terms of cash and liquor and this time we have already crossed ₹350 crore. We also say that we have a very stringent expenditure control mechanism but the fact remains that there was considerable cash and liquor. In UP alone liquor worth ₹60 crore has been seized.

What is your view on simultaneous polls?

The most important part relates to amendments in the relevant laws. The implementability lies with us and we feel that conduct of simultaneous elections will not be an insurmountable task. Desirability of this remains of course but the system will also have to deal with certain unpredictable things – President Rule, no confidence, alliance government splitting, or inability to form government. These issues have to be addressed as well. We have to bring in EVMs and VVPATs and we have estimated a very ballpark figure: ₹10,000 crore for these. We will take time in production; requirements will be double. Lead time is required for it.

One of the biggest controversies before these polls – the SP feud over the symbol – was resolved by the EC in record time. Was it a difficult decision?

All documents were made available to us by both parties in time. Both parties agreed to be heard on the date we fixed.

Both parties completed their arguments on the date we fixed. Nobody asked for further adjournment and all of them wanted it to be decided before date of notification in UP. Under such circumstances, we have taken the decision at the right pace.

You complete your term as CEC in July. What is the single biggest reform you wish for?

In my five years at EC, I have seen through 72 elections – 36 states, 1,600 million voters. One reform I strongly feel is needed is transparency of political party funding and expenditure. Disclose what you have received, from whom you have received and if you don't comply with it, be ready to face the penalty. ■



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PM Modi at a roadshow in Varanasi

As the holy city gears up to vote on March 8, the BJP led by the prime minister embarks on a final assault to capture the Banarasi vote

By Saba Naqvi

Varanasi is the sort of place where a political question can get a philosophical answer. Between the ghats and the chaat, the chants and the music, there is a view and a counter-view in every street corner. And unlike the rest of India, including state capital Lucknow, Varanasi comes alive at night, when the city's residents, emerge in fresh kurtas and shirts to chatter and discuss the sublime and the ridiculous in every street corner.

Surendra Kumar Mishra runs a shop selling artefacts and bric-a-brac on the steps leading to the Dasaswamedh ghat, the most frequently visited ghat in Kashi. One can't miss him seated to the left of the steps. He's a happy, amiable soul who ponders why the PM talks of Hindu and Muslim elec-

tricity. "Sometimes even he is wrong because we all know this *kabristan* and *bijli* talk is false. But Narendra Modi is strong like Indira Gandhi was and all else is weak. If Rahul were Indira then we would have an option..."

After Demonetisation

Notebandi hit the pilgrims and tourists hard, says Mishra. Some of them sat on the steps of the ghats and wept, others did not have money for food and began to skip meals. Mishra says he distributed ₹30,000 among tourists who paid him back one by one after they reached home.

"We were local people so we would not starve, so I gave away the cash I had."

So did notebandi make him angry? "It

made my wife angry whose hidden wealth came out. I say to her, we have to vote for the BJP again and she replies mysteriously that time will tell who I vote for," says Mishra cheerfully.

It is 9 pm and the boatmen at the ghat are lounging against the shoreline of the Ganga. These are the people referred to as "manjhi" in old Hindi film songs, a word that evokes the romance of the river and long gentle rides on open boats. The boatmen are part of the OBC bloc called Nishad that the BJP wooed successfully in 2014 as part of its overall strategy of reaching out to non-Yadav OBCs. This group has mostly scattered and only a small percentage is left with the BJP.

In Varanasi, it was the attempt to build a jetty from which tourists could watch the famous Ganga aarti that has incensed the boatmen. Notebandi too hurt them for weeks. There is even a Nishad party in the fray but most seemed to be headed for the SP-Congress alliance.

Indeed, if there is a rebirth for the Congress as part of a political alliance led by the SP, it could ironically come from this city that three years ago chanted the slogan of "Har Har Modi". Five assembly seats comprise the Varanasi Lok Sabha of which three are in the city. Even predating Modi's ascent in the city, the BJP won the three seats in the last assembly elections of 2012. But in Varanasi Cantonment and North, the combined votes of the Congress and the SP were more than that of the BJP (but in a pre-Modi age) while in Varanasi South a re-

spected seven-term BJP MLA has been dropped. The city seats have all been given to the Congress, and local pundits round every street corner say there is a "solid fight" in South and Cantonment.

The alliance is working well in Varanasi but that's before the Modi blitzkrieg from March 4 to 6. The prime minister is giving three days to the city that elected him and there is even a night halt planned.

Bhupendra Yadav, handling the BJP media, says that there will be "such amazing photo opportunities" that the "doubts will fade". Many residents too believe that Modi can pull off some magic.

Cabinet Checks In

Meanwhile, the cabinet drops in. One day a sunburnt Rajnath Singh, tired after campaigning and completing over 100 rallies, tells this writer that during his brief stint as UP CM in 2001 he tried to create a separate bloc within reserved quotas for "ati-pichda" of the Scheduled Castes and the OBCs, but Mayawati had removed it.

Two days later, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley is in Varanasi for a night just in from London and off to Kathmandu. He too believes that it's the non-Yadav OBCs and non-Chamar Dalits who will carry the BJP in UP. The state, he says, has five voter blocs: upper castes, Yadavs, Muslims, Dalit, non-Yadav OBCs. Anyone who carries two blocs wins in a triangular contest. As things stand, he believes the BJP could have chunks of three blocs. "The SP and the BSP know who their voter is. The Congress



Devotees take part in Shiv Barat procession on the occasion of Mahashivratri in Varanasi

Rahul Gandhi during an election campaign rally in Varanasi





does not know what its base is," he says with reference to the party's response to the new GDP figures.

Modi had carefully chosen Varanasi to make his all-India debut outside of Gujarat. Deepak Malik, a retired professor from the Banaras Hindu University, with an old communist movement association, told this writer in 2014 that the BJP was the most "intelligent at systematically building strategies. They float an idea, withdraw it, they try another idea, then back it with cadre strength. They take different shapes and avatars and now they come with a well-packaged persona of Modi."

That still applies to what's happening in Uttar Pradesh, and Varanasi is packed with Modi fans. Amitabh Bhatnagar, a veteran journalist, is treated as something of a philosopher and raconteur in Varanasi. He always has delightful observations about the city that he claims to have spent a lifetime studying. It's a 6,000-year-old city, he says, and its inhabitants like to count stars. "Look how well Modi has kept up the craze for him. Every ball he throws is a bouncer and people just say 'Wah, mazaa aa gaya (Great, that was enjoyable)'. Why, you ask, and they will not have a logical answer." Banaras, he says, is a city of habitual users of paan, bhang and charas, and people like a "little intoxication".

Reading the tea leaves is a full-time occupation in the chai shops of the city. Take the atmospheric at the Pappu chai shop, an institution that is a short walk from the Assi ghat, but really the sort of place many would miss. It's a hole in the wall with benches and tea is being made in a big, blackened kettle outside in typical dhania style. They recognise this writer from earlier visits and refuse to take money for the tea, a very typical generous Banarasi gesture. Have a sweet here, have some chaat there, some thandai in the city centre... people love to engage with those who are interested in the city.

At Pappu's shop, teachers, students and professors from BHU stop by to have a cup of tea, journalists pop in – as does bhajan singer Arvind Yogi, who records with T-Series. He's a BJP bhakt but wishes caste was not a calculation. As the cacophony of voices increases, he sings a bhajan for this writer: "Shiv Shiv bolo Kashi wasi", a beautiful rendition. For a moment the voices at Pappu's shop are silent. Beyond the pleasanties, however, visitors also reveal an enhanced consciousness of their Hindu identity.

Varanasi is an interwoven city with large Muslim pockets. There are 3 lakh Muslims in

the Lok Sabha seat, scattered in pockets of 50,000 or more in the assembly segments. The Muslim community in Varanasi is overwhelmingly linked to the business of weaving the famous Banarasi saris. There is a small prosperous merchant class among the Muslim weavers in this town but the majority are poor and illiterate. Many do not send their children to school as they need them on the looms. At the most a few years in a madarsa and then a life spent in the ghettos, in narrow lanes, between garbage dumps and cramped houses where people sleep around their looms.

Madanpura, a locality dominated by the community, also comes alive at night. Preparations are being made for a night *nukkad* rally of the Congress that will be addressed by Raj Babbar and Pramod Tiwari that turns out to be a lively, packed event.

Mushtaq Ahmad Noori, a small mobile shop owner, says there is almost 24-hour power supply in Varanasi "but how do you separate Muslim power from Hindu power"? Next to Madanpura is Sonarpura and Pandey Haveli, all areas with a mixed population. One can walk to Dasashwamedh ghats from these parts. It's impossible to physically separate people, even if there are increasing divisions of the mind.

Vishvambhar Nath Mishra, *mahant* of the Sankat Mochan temple, is also a quintessential Banarasi. Besides being one of the foremost citizens of the town, he is a religious head and teaches physics at BHU. The influential Mishra family is the greatest patron of a festival of classical music and he says that since Modi came to power we are in *aalap* mode (that is before the raga comes to full flow). The Mahant family has also been engaged in getting the Ganga cleaned up and is a strong critic of many steps taken by governments, current and past. "We can't turn Ganga Ma into Sabarmati and create a modern riverfront like the Gujarat model," says Mishra. He is an old-world traditionalist who values humanist ideals and is uncomfortable with polarisations. All the greatest cultural traditions, he says, have emerged on the banks of the Ganga. As we talk, the temple bells ring and the chanting begins. It's another magical Varanasi moment.

Later at night a group gathers at Assi ghat: academics, writers, poets, a local psephologist. Someone talks of the verse of Kabir, another gives his political breakdown, a third regrets the student culture in BHU. It's dark but every now and then light shines on the river. ■

The writer is a freelance journalist



Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley at the Traders Meet in Varanasi

"SP-Congress and BSP-QED Alliance Have Benefited BJP"

On the campaign trail in eastern UP with Union minister and Ghazipur MP Manoj Sinha and a regional ally

by Perna Katiyar

The chopper is about to land on a patch of barren land at Deedarganj in Azamgarh, our first stop. Thousands of people wave from below. They are here to meet "hamare chaheete rail mantri (our dear railway minister)". That is Manoj Sinha, telecom minister, MoS for railways and Ghazipur MP. Om Prakash Rajbhar, president of the Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party (SBSP), has come along and has made the crowd swell.

The two men hit the ground running. Rajbhar is the first to engage and he does that in his inimitable style in warm Bhojpuri. "Kaa bhaiya! Koi laptop-smartphone milal kaa? (So, people, did anyone of you receive any laptop or smartphone?)"

"Naaahiiii," is the response, in perfect unison. That's the cue to go in for the kill. "Ab piraat ba! (Now it must be hurting!) Ee log revadi bhi cheen-cheen ke baat hai (These people distribute even sweets after identifying one's caste). Ab ee baar aapan galti dohraai ka naahi (Do not repeat the mistake of electing this party). UP ke Sappu miya aur Dilli ke Pappu miya se bachna ka chahi (Beware of UP's Akhilesh and Delhi's Rahul). Ek se mahtaari pareshan, ek se pita pareshan (The mother is fed up with one, and the father with another)."

Soon it's the turn of the BJP to be at the receiving end of Rajbhar's jibes; it, of course, doesn't matter that he was with Mayawati in the last assembly elections. "Ek bakhat mein haathi peepal ka patra khaat ba, aaj-kal rupya khaat hai – toh kaha se motaai (There was a time when the elephant used to feed on foliage but these days it is swallowing money – no wonder it is not gaining weight). Aaj Modiji ki leher jo Noida se chali, woh Poorvanchal tak



Telecom and railway (MoS) minister Manoj Sinha is an MP from Poorvanchal's Ghazipur constituency

aate-aate tsunami ban chuki hai, jo Sapa-Basapa ko Hind mahasagar le oo paar jaa phelegi (The Modi wave that emanated from Noida has transformed into a tsunami by the time it hit Poorvanchal; it will wash away the SP and the BSP across the Indian Ocean)."

The crowd is by now hysterical, with many recording the speech for after-laughs. Almost half of those gathered sport bright mustard turbans – a sign of being a follower of Suheldev, a legendary warrior king who stopped the invasion of Mohammed Ghazni's nephew in the region.

The Main Event

The Rajbhars represent one of 17 extreme backward classes in UP and constitute 18% of the population in eastern UP and 2.5% in the country. BJP chief Amit Shah unveiled a statue of Suheldev and launched a book on him in Bahraich district in February. The rail ministry, at the initiative of Sinha, also started the Suheldev Express to send the message far and wide.

The SBSP is contesting eight Poorvanchali seats in alliance with the BJP, whose other partner in the state is the Apna Dal faction led by Anupriya Patel, which is fighting in twelve seats. While Rajbhar is in the fray from Zahoarabad in Ghazipur, his son Arvind has staked claim from Bansdih seat in Ballia.



SBSP led by Om Prakash Rajbhar (L) is contesting eight Poorvanchali seats in alliance with the BJP

It's now time for the main show, and the junior rail mantri gets into the act. "Aaj kal TV par do hee vigyapan dikhte hai – Baba Ramdev ka utpaad aur Akhilesh ki sarkar (These days only two ads are visible on television: one of Ramdev's products and another of Akhilesh's government). Vigyapan jaisa sukhi-sampann kisan aap mein se kisi ne dekha hai? Maine ab tak ki beeso sabhao mein ek aesa chehra nahi dekha (Has anyone of you seen such prosperous farmers like in the ad in real life; at least I have attended)." If anyone does, he declares he will quit politics and serve Akhilesh for life. The gallery erupts.

The junior rail mantri's next station is Lucknow Metro. "The credit for starting the world's first invisible metro goes to Akhilesh." The rally by now resembles a comedy club.

The crowd is swelling and Sinha is elated. "This is the same venue that Akhilesh visited yesterday – the crowd today is more than one and a half times, I have been told," he tells *ET Magazine*, pointing towards Nizamabad, our second stop in Azamgarh. After the by-now-familiar Rajbhar hijinks, Sinha invokes Kalyan Singh. "Remember what he used to say: be-

"The credit for starting the world's first invisible metro goes to UP CM Akhilesh"

Manoj Sinha

gunah to chhedo matt aur gunehgar ko chhedo matt (Do not touch the innocent and do not let go the culprit)."

Eastern

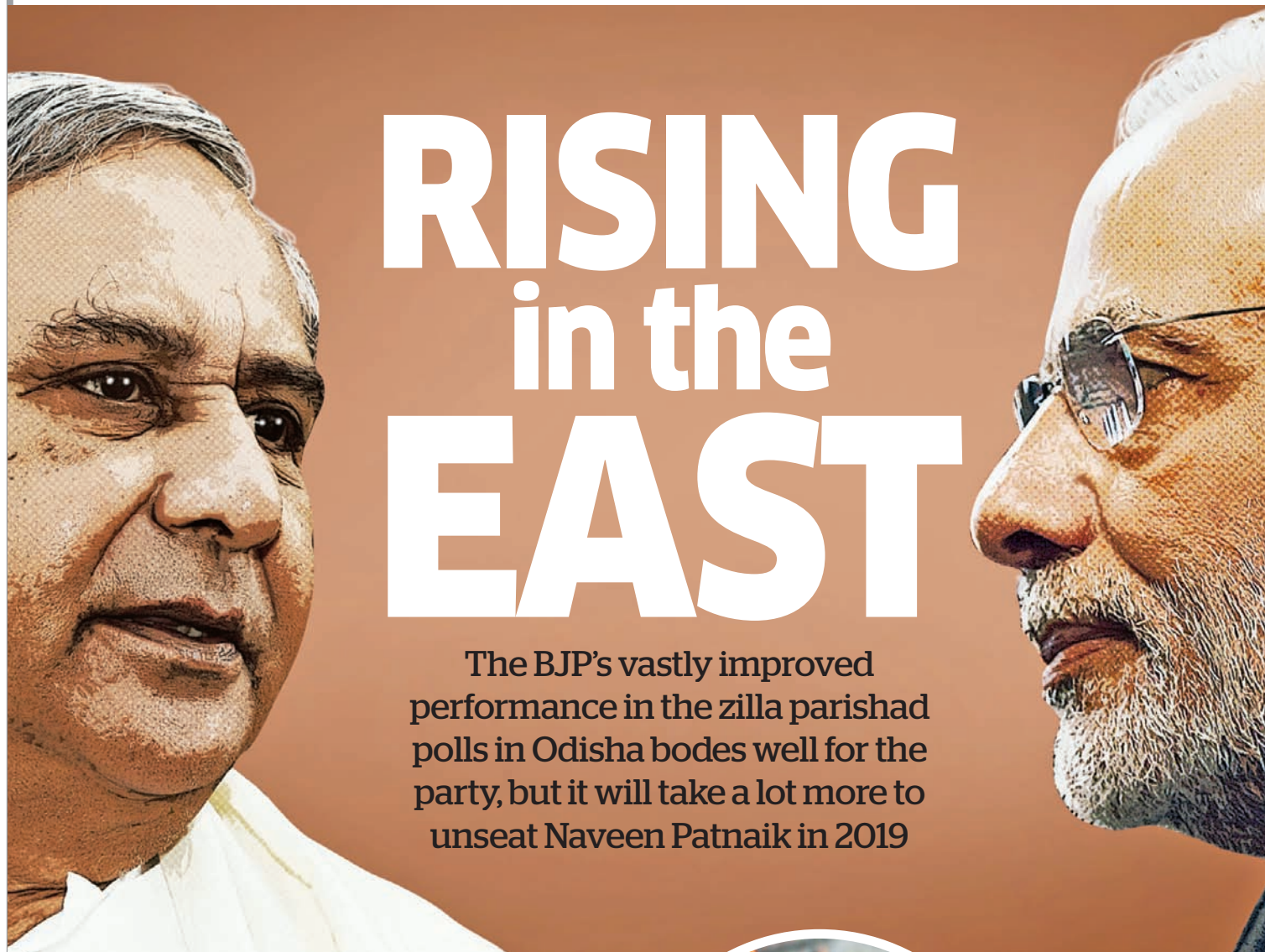
UP's 49 assembly went to the polls yesterday. The last phase of 40 seats will be contested on March 8.

The belt is also home to the Quami Ekta Dal (QED), led by the jailed Mukhtar Ansari. The QED merged with the BSP last month.

Sinha's next stop is Mohammedabad in Ghazipur to campaign for Alka Rai, the widow of slain BJP legislator Krishnanand Rai. Ansari, the prime accused in the murder, is fighting for Mau Sadar constituency from jail. Sinha corners the Ansari brothers (the others being Afzal and BSP candidate from Mohammedabad Sibgatullah). Sinha says the beneficiary of the BSP-QED alliance – as well as the SP-Congress tie-up – is the BJP. "The Muslim vote will now split between the SP and the BSP, in effect giving us the advantage," Sinha tells *ET Magazine*, just before the chopper is about to land at the day's last stop at Zamania in Ghazipur.

Sinha is a Bhumihar, the community that represents 8% of Bhojpur; he knows the importance of OBCs as well. "Today, non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav Dalits are also with us."

As the whirlwind tour comes to an end, it's time to fly back to Babatpur airport in Varanasi. Sinha sits back and declares the party is going to win in all the six seats of Ghazipur. It's been a long day. The days leading up to March 11 may be even longer. ■



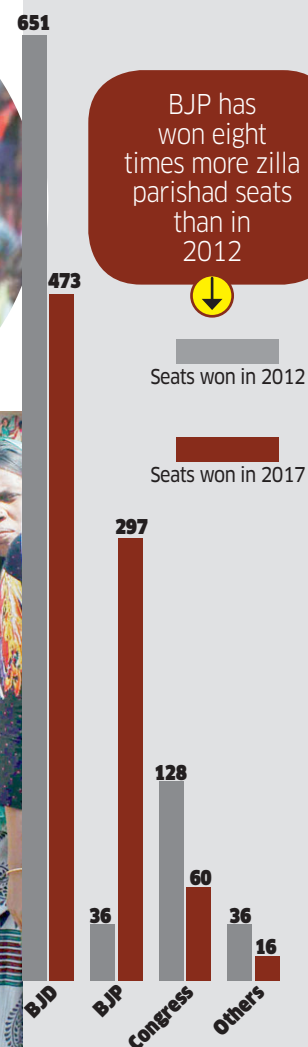
The BJP's vastly improved performance in the zilla parishad polls in Odisha bodes well for the party, but it will take a lot more to unseat Naveen Patnaik in 2019

:: G Seetharaman

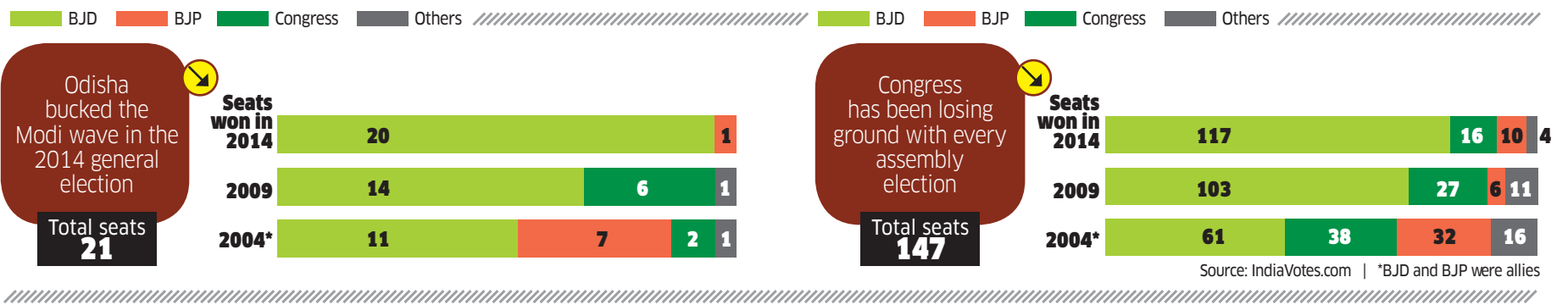
It is hard to dispute Naveen Patnaik's hold over Odisha. After all, only two incumbent chief ministers – Sikkim's Pawan Chamling and Manik Sarkar in Tripura – have had a longer unbroken stint in power than Patnaik. The chief of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) assumed office in 2000 and has won three successive elections since. He made light of concerns over anti-incumbency by improving the party's seat tally and vote share in 2009 and 2014.

However, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a BJD ally in the government between 2000 and 2009 is hoping to deny Patnaik a fifth straight term in 2019. And the national party believes its impressive performance in the recent zilla parishad elections could be a step in that direction. The BJP won 297 out of the 646 seats in which elections were held in February, up eightfold from 36 seats in 2012 (see *The BJD Won Eight Times More Seats*). The party dislodged the Congress from the second position, with the latter winning a measly 60 seats, less than half its total in 2012.

The BJD continues to be on top, winning more than half the constituencies, but its tally dropped by a quarter from 2012. In a statement issued after the results were announced last week, Patnaik said in a statement that in some of the 30 districts the BJD had not performed as well as expected and a course correction is needed. "They (the people) have given us a golden opportunity for serious introspection... We shall review our performance very seriously and shall apply suitable correctives both in terms of government and on organisational issues."



Source: State Election Commission, Odisha
 *Elections were held in 851 out of 854 seats
 **There was one less constituency in 2017 than in 2012 and elections were held in 846 out of 853 seats



Expressing the Angst

According to Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo, one of the BJP's 10 MLAs in the east Indian state, this is the first time in 17 years the people have voted against the Naveen Patnaik government. "It's an indication that the government has failed in all-round development of the state." He adds that the wins were also a vote in support of the ban on old ₹500 and ₹1,000 currency notes, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on November 8.

Rabi Das, a senior journalist, says the voters who backed the BJP not out of love for the BJP but because of anger against the BJD government. "The BJD had full control over backward tribal districts like Kalahandi and Malkangiri but the people there have now repudiated faith in the BJP."

The BJP won 33 out of the 36 seats in Kalahandi and 10 out of 15 in Malkangiri. Sudhir Pattnaik, editor of *Samadrusti*, an Odia fortnightly, says the BJP was strong in western Odisha districts like Kalahandi, Sambalpur and Sundergarh during the days of its alliance with the BJD. "Their popularity dipped during the Naveen Patnaik wave but now they have gained ground again."

Deo says the party scored victories in zilla parishad seats in the nine Lok Sabha constituencies where the party finished second in the 2014 election. The BJP managed to win just one of the 21 Lok Sabha seats, despite getting 22% of the votes, which Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan says was due to lack of organisational strength; the BJD bagged the other 20. Odisha's assembly polls have been held with the general election since 2004.

Pradhan, who has become the BJP's most visible face in Odisha, attributes the BJP's performance in the zilla parishad polls to the Modi government's welfare schemes, like those related to cooking gas connections to poor households, financial inclusion and toilet construction in homes. "The disenchantment against the ruling dispensation helped us too."

Modi also took a swipe at the Patnaik government recently. "Odisha, where there is so much poverty, starvation, unemployment and where the BJP did not even have a foothold to place its flag, people have given so much support that everyone is taken aback... even the poor of Odisha have come with the BJP," said Modi at a rally last week in Uttar Pradesh, where the assembly election is on, alluding to the zilla parishad election results. The remark evoked strong reactions from both the BJD and the Congress, which slammed the prime minister.

BJP & Affiliates

Odisha is the seventh poorest among India's states and union territories, with a third of the population, or nearly 14 million, living below the poverty line in 2011-12, compared

to just over a fifth for the entire country. (The average all-India poverty line is a monthly per capita expenditure of ₹816 in rural areas and ₹1,000 in urban areas.) But poverty reduction in the state since 2004-2005 is also among the steepest, with Odisha's poverty rate falling from 57.2% to 32.6%.

Patnaik's populist schemes like 25 kg of rice a month at ₹1 per kg for every family below the poverty line and ₹5,000 for every pregnant woman have served the BJD well at the hustings, and the party will be hoping for a reprisal in 2019. But the BJP has repeatedly pointed out the central government's financial contribution to some of these initiatives, like the subsidised rice.

What has come in handy for the BJP, according to Sudhir Pattnaik, is the Sangh Parishad network, with members of the Rashtriya

Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the BJP's ideological parent, and its affiliates like the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram, which works with tribals, and Saraswati Shishu Mandir, a network of schools run by the RSS, throwing their weight behind the BJP during the recent polls.

While the CM's statement may indicate that the BJD is a bit concerned at the results, one of its ministers, Damodar Rout, sees no trouble for the BJD on the horizon. "The votes of the Congress have been transferred to the BJP and this election will not have any impact on the general or assembly election."

Congress leader Narasingha Mishra, leader of the opposition in the assembly, concurs with him. "The Congress did well in the zilla parishad election in 2007 – we won 303 seats, but we did badly in the 2009 assembly election." The party is staring at oblivion in the near future in Odisha, as in several other states, one key reason for which is infighting. Mishra does not deny it, but adds that every party has inter-

nal squabbles.

Rout says neither the BJP nor the Congress has a leader who can match 70-year-old Patnaik, son of former Odisha CM Biju Patnaik. There has been talk for sometime now that Pradhan is the party's most probable chief ministerial face. However, Pradhan, who is presently a Rajya Sabha member of Parliament from Bihar, says he has no such ambitions. "I want to strengthen the party first in the state. *Party jeete to pehle* (Let the party win first)."

Journalist Rabi Das believes Pradhan is emerging as a leader but has a long way to go before he can take on Patnaik. Other BJP leaders like Jai Oram, the party's sole Lok Sabha MP and Union tribal affairs minister (tribals account for a fourth of the state's population), Bijoy Mohapatra, and Dilip Ray have been sidelined, according to political observers.

"The votes of the Congress have been transferred to the BJP and this election will not have any impact on the general or assembly election"

Damodar Rout
BJD minister in Odisha



Game Plans

Deo says the party will now focus on next year's urban body polls in the state, which he says will be the semi-final before the final in 2019. The BJP's key election plank would be the alleged corruption in the Patnaik government. A ₹4,600-crore chit fund scam, which broke in 2012 and a key election issue in 2014, did not weigh on voters' minds. (After the election, an MP and a former MLA from the BJD were arrested in connection with the scam.) Ditto the ₹59,000-crore iron ore and manganese ore scam, which was looked into by a commission before the elections.

Moreover, the opposition cannot really claim the moral high ground, given that an ex-MLA of the BJP and a former Youth Congress chief were also put behind bars in the chit fund case.

While it is too way too early to say which issues will take centre stage in the run-up to 2019, analysts say despite being opponents, top BJP leaders maintain friendly relations with Patnaik and the scenario in Delhi will determine whether the BJD might consider joining hands with the BJP in the state after the election, if the need arises.

Odisha is among the key states – along with West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu – where Modi has not brought the desired results for the BJP. But the key difference between Odisha and the other states is the BJP has had more success electorally in the former and was even a junior partner in the government for nine years. So while it is not entirely unreasonable for the BJP to hope that one of its own would be the state's next chief minister, dislodging Patnaik is bound to be a huge challenge. ■

Additional reporting by Prerna Katiyar

With two years to go for polls, where does the BJP stand?

The network of the RSS and its affiliate organisations like Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram **could come in handy for the party in 2019**

The decline of the Congress has helped the BJP and 2019 will basically be a fight between the BJP and BJD

A good performance in the urban body polls next year could provide the party a leg-up

Dharmendra Pradhan has emerged as the party's most visible leader in the state but he has a long way to go to match Naveen Patnaik's popularity

There's large-scale migration of workers, malnutrition and there's no healthcare system, no irrigation schemes... We took these issues to the people"

Dharmendra Pradhan,
union minister, BJP

How the BJD stacks up

Naveen Patnaik is perceived to be "clean" though corruption allegations plague his party

While common sense dictates that **anti-incumbency will be a factor given that the BJD has been in power since 2000**, the party's seat tally and vote share increased in both the general and assembly elections in 2009 and 2014

Patnaik will be betting on his government's populist schemes, which helped the party secure victories in 2009 and 2014, to deliver again in 2019



Plug in, Spark up

Electric vehicle sales are set to get a boost amid pollution and energy security concerns. Startups and better battery tech will act as catalysts

:: Malini Goyal

This love affair began in the 1980s. Chetan Maini, then a sprightly teenager, was part of the core solar car team at the University of Michigan in the US and Australia. Soon after at Stanford University, in the early 1990s, hybrid cars kept his passion going. By 1999, he gave it a name: Reva Electric Cars, India's first maker of e-vehicles.



"We need a stable, consistent long-term policy and a public transport program that pushes EVs"

Sohinder Gill, CEO, Hero Electric and director, Society of Manufacturers of Electric Vehicles

"It was an idea ahead of its time," recalls Maini, a pioneer of e-vehicles (EVs) in India. Hybrids, alternate fuel and EVs weren't a fad then. Pollution and climate change were not making headlines yet. And India's fledgling automobile industry was barely selling six lakh cars, often with dated technology. Playing in a niche space, it was a tough ride. Despite making some headway on the technology front, and a presence in 24 countries, Reva was losing money, and in 2010 was sold to Mahindra &

Mahindra (M&M).

"Today I see a 180 degree change," said Maini, now 46, on a visit to Delhi earlier this week where he was attending a two-day workshop organised by Niti Aayog on mobility innovation. Attended by over 70 delegates, the VIP list included four ND A ministers – Suresh Prabhu, Nitin Gadkari, Venkaiah Naidu, Anant Geete – and high-ranking government officials like Arvind Panagariya and Amitabh Kant.

"All these years, it would be mostly us manufacturers who would lock ourselves in a room to discuss issues with nothing concrete emerging. This (the workshop) was refreshingly different," says Sohinder Gill, CEO of Hero Electric and director of the Society of Manufacturers of Electric Vehicles.

Adds an upbeat Maini: "The workshop looked at a range of issues from energy security to a thrust on renewable energy and brought together multiple stakeholders. This hasn't happened before. I see everything coming together."

Electric Start

Seven reasons why the e-vehicle industry is getting all the attention

Emission targets: Tougher emission norms by 2020 will make diesel and petrol engines pricier, and non-polluting EVs attractive

Government nudge: Facing heat from the judiciary, NDA government is weighing many policy sops for EVs to lower vehicular pollution

Corporate push: Mahindra Electric is pushing firms like Bigbasket and Ola to use EVs as part of their fleet with the bait of better cost economics

Startup spin: Ventures like Lithium Urban Technologies, which uses EVs to offer staff transportation services to firms in Bengaluru, are entering the fray

Glamour quotient: Companies like Elon Musk-led Tesla have added a touch of glamour and buzz to EVs globally; Tesla may enter India this summer

Cheaper battery: It helps that globally, lithium battery costs, a big hurdle, are declining; expected to dip from \$600 per kwh in 2011 to under \$200 kwh by 2020

Ecosystem enabler: Policy support, cheaper batteries, better range (the distance EVs can run on single charge) and charging infrastructure will push growth

Tell-tale signs are all over. The headline-grabbing American EV maker Tesla reportedly plans to debut in India this year. Guillaume Sicard, president of Nissan India's operations, says the company will soon be testing its popular Leaf EV. Home-grown M&M thinks there would be takers for a ₹25-lakh plus electric sports car that it is developing. Rahul Ansari, head of luxury carmaker Audi India, says that it will soon bring electric models in its high-volume segments like the Q-family. They are upbeat not without a reason. Today, 95% of the Toyota Camry sales in India are of the hybrid variant, says Shekar Vishwanathan, vice-chairman, Toyota Kirloskar Motor. He claims that the Camry hybrid is 47% more fuel efficient than the conventional variant.

The government is readying a scheme where commercial EVs may not be required to get permits, which are costly and time-consuming, to help boost electric mobility. "The government is determined to make this (EVs) happen," says Ashok Jhunjhunwala, advisor, ministry of power and new & renewable energy. Cab aggregator Ola and its investor Softbank have made a proposal to Niti Aayog to run electric taxis. In a pilot, Mahindra Electric, Ola and the government are partnering to introduce a fleet of 300 electric cars in Nagpur to test the feasibility of e-taxis in India. Road and highway minister Gadkari has promised all help including charging stations in his home constituency (Nagpur) for this. "We are working with the government to push mass mobility solutions in electric. The ecosystem is falling in place. The industry is at an inflection point," says Mahesh Babu, CEO Mahindra Electric. Cities in Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh have been reportedly identified for the next phase.

It is a story playing out globally too. Global EV sales are expected to double by 2024, accounting for 6% of new vehicles sales.

Startup Experiments

Startups are likely to play a critical role in building the ecosystem around EVs, says V Ramakrishnan, cofounder of automotive consultan-

Global Pioneers

Four countries that are leading the e-vehicle wave

Norway

Oslo is the world's EV capital. At 5 lakh units today, it has the highest per capita of EVs. By 2025, it expects 100% of its new car sales to come from zero emission vehicles, up from 40% today

China

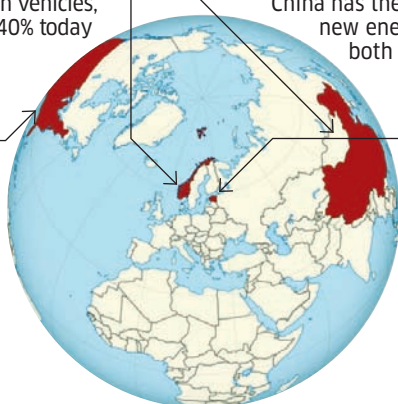
Pollution concerns and energy security have pushed China to nurture the EV industry, which could create new jobs and boost exports. With cumulative sales of 9.5 lakh, China has the world's largest fleet of new energy vehicles that include both passenger cars and LCVs

US

With 30 EV models, sales grew 37% in 2016 over a year ago to touch 1.59 lakh. About 50% of EV sales come from California, home to Tesla, which hopes to sell 1.5 million zero emission vehicles by 2025

Estonia

The Baltic state started on its EV journey with a bang when in 2011 it set up a nationwide electric charge network to boost EV sales and usage. It has since run into rough weather with the state subsidised project likely to end in 2017



cy Advanteum. In July 2015, Sanjay Krishnan founded Lithium Urban Technologies, a Bengaluru-based startup that offers employee transportation services using EVs to companies like Tesco, Unisys, Accenture and Adobe. "We wanted to look at transportation from an energy level as oil security and a surge in pollution were making headlines," he says.

Lithium has 10 customers, 55 employees and owns 400 EVs. Each vehicle has two drivers who work on shifts. "We have done lots of things that have never been done before," he says. His company owns and operates charging stations, too. "Companies initially come to us not because of the green factor but the cost economics that we offer," he says. For example, he says, the running cost of a Mahindra E20 (an electric hatchback) is 70-80 paise per km as against say an Indica which could be upwards of ₹4 per km. Beyond cost, bear in mind that the 102 million km that the startup's fleet has logged so far have a green footprint. In three years, Krishnan plans to take the company pan India with a "few thousand EVs" in most big cities like Chennai, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Pune.

Bigbasket too is one of the early adopters. The e-grocer has been using about 10 eSupro vans for intra-city delivery in Noida and reportedly plans to increase the number to 50 over the next six months. Mahindra Electric, which launched four variants in 2016 – e20 plus, eVerito, eSupro Van in cargo and a passenger version – is hoping sales to grow exponentially with demand from companies like Amazon and Ola. "We have reached a stage where the models have been fine-tuned and are now ready to scale up," Babu says.

Progress has been slower in two-wheelers for which India is the world's largest market. In 2016, the industry sold just 22,000 e-bikes, or just 0.5% of total sales. "There has been a huge negativity around high battery costs," says Gill. But that may be set to change. Last year, Hero Motocorp invested ₹205 crore in Ather Energy, an IIT-Chennai incubated startup that is developing e-bikes. Gill of Hero Electric says that demand is picking up from customers like food delivery companies and ebike taxi startups like Promto.

NOW, a bike taxi and delivery platform, is one of them. With over 70 merchants including companies like Subway and BurgerKing, it has over 290 bikers offering food delivery services. With 120 e-bikes in its stable, it expects the number of e-bikers to grow to 1,500 by the end of this year. "For conventional bikes we pay ₹2 per km as fuel cost. E-bikes take the fuel cost out of the equation making it much cheaper for us," says Bharat Khandelwal, cofounder, NOW.

Shifting Undercurrents

If EVs are so cost-and-fuel efficient then why has growth been so patchy so far – the segment has grown by just 9% between 2013 and 2016 on a compounded annual basis. In 2016 India sold just 34,283 EVs (two-and-four wheelers). There are several reasons for this. Typically, the cost of an EV is substantially higher than conventional vehicles thanks to the high battery cost. This is despite the government subsidy often available to EVs. The Indian government offers incentives of up to ₹29,000 for e-bikes and ₹1.38 lakh for e-cars under the

"EVs faced lot of hurdles. But oil security and pollution are now nudging government and industry to find solutions"

Chetan Maini,
founder, Mahindra Electric, (formerly Reva Electric Car Co)



A, B, C, D of e-vehicles

Hybrid electric vehicle or HEV Pairs internal combustion powertrain (petrol or diesel) with an electric one to achieve better fuel economy and performance

Example: **Toyota Prius**



Battery Electric Vehicle or BEV Uses rechargeable battery, electric motors and motor controller to power the vehicle and has no internal combustion engine

Example: **Nissan Leaf**

Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle or PHEV A hybrid that can be recharged by plugging in and is paired with an internal combustion engine

Example: **Chevrolet Volt**



Fuel cell electric vehicle or FCEV Uses fuel cell, instead of battery, to power the vehicle. With almost zero emission, they are also used in indoor applications like forklifts in warehouses

Example: **Toyota Mirai**

FAME India scheme of 2016. The Delhi state government has further slashed value added tax from 12.5% to 5% for EVs. Yet, they remain expensive. For example, the e-Verito is around ₹1 lakh pricier than the Verito diesel in Delhi despite the government subsidy, says Babu of Mahindra Electric. The price difference is even more striking in two-wheelers. An Ather e-bike is two times the price of a conventional bike. "In a ₹1 lakh bike, the lithium battery alone would cost ₹40,000. Think of it like this – you pay for five years of fuel upfront when you buy an ebike," says Gill. There are other challenges – of charging infrastructure

for plug-ins, patchy availability of power and drivers' range anxiety (typically on one charge, a battery can run a limited distance making drivers anxious if they run out of charge midway). Also, for companies like Toyota, hybrid kits are currently imported (as current volumes don't justify local manufacturing) and hence pay stiff duties of over 80%.

A combination of factors – improving technology, rising pollution concerns, government policies and startups evolving new business models – is creating an enabling environment. Lithium batteries, a critical factor in popularising EVs, are becoming

more efficient and less expensive. MNCs are working together – like Nissan and BMW and Daimler and Qualcomm – to reduce battery cost and charging time. According to an Ernst & Young report, these collaborations will help bring down the cost of battery and charging time to \$50/kwh (it was \$600/kwh in 2011) and to just 2030 minutes of charging by 2025. The range (how many km can an EV run on a single charge) has been improving rapidly. Most EVs in the market today can barely manage a range of 100 miles. But the recently-launched Tesla model S P100D promises an average of 35 miles per charge. Add to this two other important factors. Countries like the US and India, for which oil security has become a strategic issue, have been exploring alternative energy sources to reduce their oil dependence. Also, amid growing concerns around pollution and climate change, governments globally are tightening emission norms. For example in India, tougher emission norms by 2020 will make diesel and petrol engines pricier and non-polluting EVs relatively more attractive. The best global example is

Norway. Through a slew of financial and non-financial incentives, it leads the world in per capita EVs. It has 5,00,000 EVs on the road today and in 2016 EVs comprised 40% of newly registered passenger cars. Progress like this

will disrupt the automobile industry, says Anil Sharma, principal analyst, IHS Markit. EVs require new technologies and component systems that will offer windows for new players across the value chain – from batteries, charging stations to even full-fledged cars – to get into the game. Chinese mobile maker LeEco too is betting on EVs.

Change Afoot

Worried about surging pollution, the government is likely to push for electrification of commercial vehicles and public transport. It is expected to ban diesel vehicles in a phased manner while targeting to roll out over 50 lakh electric and hybrid vehicles in the next three years. Reports suggest that if the government manages to introduce 50 lakh EVs, it will save up to 9,500 million tonnes of fossil fuel and cut emission of greenhouse gases by up to 2 lakh tonnes. Studies suggest that India could potentially sell 7 million EVs by 2020. Power availability, a big precondition for EVs, should help. In 2016, for the first time in history, India turned from a power-starved to power-surplus nation. With a thrust on solar power, India's solar power generation capacity crossed 9 GW by 2016 end; the plan is to get to 175 GW by 2022, even as tariffs have tumbled to under ₹3 per kwh from double digits in 2011.

The future looks bright, as long as the government plays the lead role. "What we need is a stable, consistent long-term policy – a public transport programme that pushes EVs," says Gill. The concern is that with multiple ministries involved – from road transport & highways and heavy industries to ministry of power and urban development – there might be coordination issues. "Challenges are always there. But there are huge compulsions too (of rising pollution and oil imports). We will figure a way out," says an upbeat Junjunhwal. ■

Driven to Desperation

Plummeting incomes and unyielding cab aggregators are taking a toll of thousands of harried drivers

:: Rajiv Singh & Rahul Sachitanand

A year ago, SP Soni, 41, went from driving a private taxi in Dwarka in Delhi to signing up on cab aggregator Ola's platform. Flush with incentives from Ola, his earnings skyrocketed to as much as ₹85,000 a month as he zipped around the national capital region, rushing to meet his quota of rides. While those heady days allowed the likes of Soni to make a killing, the good times came to an abrupt end earlier this year when incentives were lowered and drivers – used to a comfortable cushion of sops – found themselves staring at drastically reduced earnings.

Soni, the sole breadwinner for a family of six, has driven into uncharted territory. He has defaulted on three successive payments on his car and emptied out his savings trying to make ends meet. "It's hard to fight against Ola and Uber. But I take inspiration from Gandhi who defeated the mighty Britishers," he says.

Having gotten used to earning as much as a lakh of rupees monthly (and splurging on the back of this increased income), drivers across the country are considering a new, tough reality.

Gagan Yadav, 32, curses himself for being too ambitious and splurging on a new car last year. "Badi galti kar di (made a big mistake)," he rues. "Garibon ko kabhi bada nahin sochna chahi ye (poor people should never think big)." While his income has tumbled from ₹90,000 to ₹20,000 a month, he has to continue to pay ₹600 a day for his car. "I don't know how I will manage my family," he says in a choked voice, as his two-year-old son tries to attract his attention in their two-room rented apartment in Dwarka. "I put in 16-17 hours every day but am not able to earn even ₹2,000 now."

Off-Track

Stung by this steep decline in their fortunes, drivers such as Soni and Yadav had been part of a strike that began on February 10 in Jantar Mantar in Delhi, attracting some 5000 drivers initially; union members claimed all 1.5 lakh drivers showed up in support. Drivers and union leaders claim that aggregators pushed cabs they helped finance, prioritising bookings ahead of those who purchased cars externally.

The aggregators suddenly stopped incentives to the drivers in an attempt to stem their ballooning losses. It was not only the number of rides or hours logged in by the drivers that made them earn close to a lakh till a few months back. It was hefty incentives – at times four times the amount earned by the drivers – which got them hooked to the cab aggregators. "As our business has grown over three years in India, we are seeing sustainable earning opportunities for driver partners... With a 60% year-on-year increase in driver signups in January 2017," Amit Jain, president of Uber India, said in a blog post on March 3, 24 days after protests kicked off in Delhi.

Over the past couple of years, both Ola and Uber have been in a rush to expand their busi-



NARASIMHA MURTHY



What Drivers Want

Increase in fare from as low as
₹6 km to ₹16 km

Elimination of 25% commission charged by app-based aggregators

Restart incentives to boost income

Slow down or stop the addition of new cabs

Provide for accident insurance, and allow unlimited hours to meet targets



PHOTO: ASHWANI NAGPAL

"It's hard to fight against Ola and Uber. But I take inspiration from Gandhi who defeated the mighty Britishers"

SP Soni, 41

Before Uber/Ola: **Was driver with a private taxi stand**
 Been with Ola since last year

Monthly earnings at peak:
₹85,000/month

Monthly earnings now:
₹30,000/month

ness in India. They have aggressively poached drivers from other allied areas (radio cab providers, private taxi fleets, private drivers even mechanics) and beyond (students, young graduates, electricians and more) to grow their platform.

Currently, Ola claims to cover 102 cities on its platform, with 5,00,000 vehicles and 5,50,000 drivers and Uber is present in 29 cities with 4,00,000 cars. It doesn't disclose the number of drivers it has signed up.

Both aggregators have lined up ambitious expansion plans (see *The Aggregators' Roadmap*) as they look to unseat legacy transport options (buses, autos and kaali-peeli cabs in cities like Mumbai) in their race to disrupt urban transport.

Keeping the funnel of drivers flowing, then, is critical to the success of these aggregators in India. "Because Uber is a two-sided market, we need to balance the needs of riders and drivers. Uber rolls out incentives and promotions to introduce the service in new cities," Uber's Jain said in the blog post of March 3. "Without doing this, it's hard to ensure drivers are compensated for their time when few riders are aware of the service. As more riders use Uber, drivers are busier and can earn more. This in turn attracts more drivers, which helps guarantee faster pickups for riders, and allows us to adjust incentives over time." Ola declined to answer emails and text messages seeking comment.

"If I drive, I will struggle. But if I don't drive, I will die"

Rajesh Pachore, 45

Before Uber/Ola: **Worked as a mechanic for 20 years**

Been with Uber/Ola since: **Two years. Was on strike for 12 days**

Monthly earnings at peak: **₹70,000/month**

Monthly earnings now: **₹25,000/month**



Driver Gagan Yadav is one of the hundreds of taxi drivers in Delhi who dared to dream big when app-based cab aggregators lured all to earn lakhs by turning entrepreneur. "I too bought a car on loan," he says, "but never realised it would turn out to be a disaster." Once the incentives and other perks were removed, drivers started choking. What was never an issue – aggregators charging as low as ₹4 to 6 per km from consumers – suddenly became a flashpoint.

Dark Stretch

Early operators in this space like Meru Cabs and upstarts like DriveU, a driver aggregator, sniff an opportunity in the standoff. "We've had 7,000 new signups from the driver partners of other platforms in the past two months," says Nilesh Sangoi, CEO of Meru Cabs. "The entire ecosystem of driver partners is able to see through the impermanence of incentives and are pleading to increase the minimum fares."

Meanwhile, Ashok Shastry, COO of Bengaluru-based DriveU, which has some 1,600 drivers enlisted, says dozens of aggrieved aggregator partners are signing up or are seeking to align with his platform. "We provide a more sane work environment and let drivers decide how many hours to work," he says. "There's a sense of sanity with their lives."

It isn't as if Delhi's cab aggregator drivers are the only ones affected. Across the country, disquiet has spread among drivers roiled by falling earnings. While protests have occurred in Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Delhi, Mumbai too has had its fair share, with the next one scheduled for March 21. In Bengaluru, the protests have become quickly politicised, with the JD(S) leader and former CM HD Kumaraswamy joining an increasingly noisy agitation. "We want drivers to get a fair deal," says Raju Patil from the Sangharsh Taxi Tourist Taxi Chalak Malak Sangh in Mumbai. "We will have thousands of drivers join us for a day to press for our demands."

Drivers in Mumbai too have similar needs. Besides incentives, the drivers also want aggregators to fork out for health insurance and help stop harassment from law enforcement over enthusiastic to enforce local transport norms.

In Delhi, protesting drivers say that Uber and Ola need to charge customers more. "They must charge ₹16 for every km of

ride," says Ravi Rathore, vice-president of Sarvodaya Driver Association of Delhi, which claims to represent over two lakh drivers in Delhi-NCR. Rathore blasts the cab aggregators for exploiting drivers, with their very survival at risk, he dramatically claims.

Meru's chief Sangoi agrees that unviable rates have wrecked the odds of profits in this space, especially for drivers. "We don't want to sell below cost price... we don't provide unviable incentives and our goal is to be equitable for the consumer, driver and the company," he contends. While Meru has around

20,000 cabs on the roads, he hopes this driver-aggregator conflict will give the radio taxi operator a fresh lease of life.

On the road, there seem few options available to drivers. In Delhi, the protests have fizzled out as pragmatism has trumped idealism for drivers. Some 70% of drivers are back on the roads in the NCR and aggregators have shown little interest in engaging with unions. The courts too have decided not to interfere. A rude jolt was in store for Rathore, the Delhi taxi union rep in the High Court. "You cannot go on fighting, as you do with the government. You will have to resolve and end this agitation as it will not get you anything," observed Justice Rajiv Sahai Endlaw earlier this week.

Saddled with car loans and slimmer earnings, drivers now find themselves down a dark stretch with few signs of escape. Two drivers reportedly attempted suicide outside

the Ola headquarters in Bengaluru and many others are getting increasingly desperate.

Rajesh Pachore was on strike for 12 days. Going on strike was a Catch22 situation for the driver from Rohini in north-west Delhi. Compelled to restart working to pay his 13-year-old daughter's school fees, his gloomy forecast typifies the challenges his peers face. "Driving is the only skill I know," he laments. "If I drive, I will struggle. But if we don't drive, I will die." ■

The Aggregators' Roadmap

Ola has invested ₹50 crore into its leasing subsidiary Ola Fleet Technologies

In September 2015, it announced **plans to invest ₹5,000 crore** in the cab-leasing programme

Uber too reportedly invested **₹244 crore in its cab leasing business** last year

Uber plans to **lease up to 2,00,000 vehicles** over the next two years

Ola has signed a **₹2,600 crore deal with M&M** to buy 40,000 vehicles

"Drivers are being exploited. We don't demand the moon, just fair terms of doing business"

Ravi Rathore, vice-president, Sarvodaya Driver Association of Delhi



"We've had 7,000 new signups from the driver partners of other platforms in the past two months. The entire ecosystem of driver partners is able to see through the impermanence of incentives and are pleading to increase the minimum fares"

Nilesh Sangoi, CEO, Meru Cabs

"I put in 16-17 hours every day but am not able to earn even ₹2,000 now"

Gagan Yadav, 32

Before Uber/Ola: **Was driver with a private taxi stand**

Has been with Uber since last two years. Was on strike for 10 days. Now with Ola

Monthly earnings at peak: **₹80,000-90,000/month**

Monthly earnings now: **₹20,000/month**



Hack to the Future

How non-tech companies are using hackathons to decode consumer behaviour and hunt for retail solutions

:: Rajiv Singh

In January last year, Mark Zuckerberg gathered a couple of hundred Facebook engineers for a much vaunted fiftieth hackathon. As helium balloons spelling HACK 50 danced in the air at the Menlo Park headquarters, they slumped over their laptops for a backbreaking 24 hours as they tried to put dazzling ideas into a workable code. Hackathons are the lifeblood of technology companies. Twitter was cranked out at a "hack day". Facebook dreamed up Chat and Post and Safety Check at hackathons. But these marathons for programmers are no longer the preserve of technology companies or of Silicon Valley.

"Innovation is the oxygen for any company. A hackathon supplies that oxygen"

Shripati Acharya,
 managing partner,
 Prime Venture Partners



Anheuser-Busch InBev knew that neatly stacked Budweiser bottles and discounts aren't enough to bait lager lovers. Factors driving incremental volume are far more complex. Early this month in Bengaluru, the world's largest brewer hosted a hackathon on retail optimisation where it asked coders to create solutions to gauge return on investment and to capture changes in price promotional activities.

The beer maker, as it turns out, is not the only non-technology company using geeks to decode consumer behaviour and hunt for retail solutions. Take Daimler India. The hackathon by the automaker in Bengaluru last October resulted in three innovative ideas: vehicle detection and traffic mapping, which included a prototype to help ambulances ease their way through traffic; a Skypelike, interactive, Android application for cars without internet for peer-to-peer video communication; and an app to tackle driver distraction.

"The perception about hackathons has undergone a sea change in India," says Sachin Gupta, cofounder of HackerEarth, a Bengaluru-based online platform for programmers, which conducted 18 hackathons in 2015. The number shot up to 30 in 2016 India, says Gupta, is slowly transforming into a hub of innovation. If, in the past decade, the country was largely seen as a back office for corporate giants from the West, now it is evolving into a product nation. And businesses need technology more than ever before to survive these changing times.



On the **Hackathon** Wagon FROM BEER TO AUTO TO FMCG, ALL ARE ON IT

AB InBev,
 February 2017,
 Bengaluru

Hackathon on retail optimisation by world's largest brewer asked coders to create **solutions for gauging return on investment; capture changes in price promotional activity; to build a tool to support data visualisation;** and to gain insights into effectiveness of investment toward driving sales

GE Healthcare,
 February 2017,
 Bengaluru

Hackathon on digital health technologies looked for solutions by analysing videos. This involved **emotional gesture detection like distress alarms for ICU patients for proactive attention from nurse** or tele-nurse staff; motion detection like restless movement by patient that can trigger alarms

Tech Interest

One reason why hackathons are gaining acceptance among non-IT firms is the blurring line between technology and non-technology companies. From operations to human resources, from finance to sales, every division is either enabled by technology or fundamentally disrupted by it. "Every function of a business is being transformed by technology," says Gupta.

"Engineers and techies are no longer at the periphery of business. Hackathons are one way to engage with this community"

Shivakumar Ganesan, cofounder, Exotel



Over the next decade, he says, a lot of companies will develop strong technological capabilities in-house because tech is going to drive their business. This will require them not only to build strong technical teams but to also cultivate close relationships with the programmer community to foster innovation. This is what Exotel, a cloud telephony company that helps businesses communicate with customers efficiently over calls and texts, did through its hackathon on machine learning. For a company that claims to power over 3 million customer conversations every day and has processed 1.2 billion calls over the last five years, the challenge was to offer actionable analytics based on customer conversations. It was planning to build a system that could flag the sentiment of conversations as happy, sad, angry and neutral.

"We wanted to see how some of the smartest engineering minds would approach this problem," says Shivakumar Ganesan.

The Benefits of Hackathons

Innovative ideas:

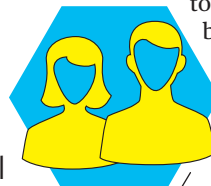
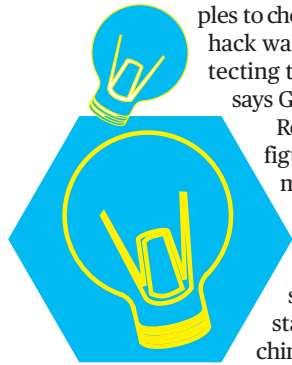
Ideas for new products usually take months, if not years. Hackathons fast-track the process

Low-cost solutions:

It takes loads of investment to create a product or solution. Hackathons help in creating same solutions at a fraction of those costs

Stoke creative mindset:

During internal hackathons, employees need to step out of their normal roles and skillsets to perform unfamiliar creative tasks



san, cofounder of Ekotel.

About 890 teams were given sample audio files and asked to use speech-recognition algorithms and machine learning to write code that would use the voice as an input and recognise the emotion behind it. The code would then be run across thousands of voice samples to choose the best model. "The winning hack was the one that came closest to detecting the sentiment of conversations," says Ganesan.

Retail giant Walmart too is trying to figure out the dynamics of human-machine interaction. In August 2016, Walmart Labs India, the tech arm of Walmart, conducted a hackathon in Bengaluru to crowdsource ideas in retail and understand customer analytics using machine learning.

In a brief presented to coders, it pointed out the challenge: while customer transactions are both online and at physical stores, how can one get a single view of customer behaviour and transaction patterns? How can one leverage the latest techniques in machine learning and deep learning to provide insights to the marketing team? The solutions, the brief concluded, should be actionable, cross-channel, repeatable, scalable and reusable in other domains for maximum impact. Sreekumar Bahuleyan, senior director, human resources, Walmart Labs India, says: "Today, technology

drives an incredible shift in customers' expectations and we have to build capabilities to meet them. One way to build those capabilities is through hackathons. They also create opportunities to reach out to developers across various communities. A recent trend that is emerging is that non-tech industries are exploring hackathons as a channel to crowdsource talent and ideas. Thought-provoking ideas get transformed into applications/products in a few days to a few weeks."

Tech evangelists, however, are not surprised to see a metamorphosis in the nature of hackathons as diverse companies experiment with the idea. "Innovation is the oxygen for any company. A hackathon supplies that oxygen," says Shripati Acharya, managing partner at Prime Venture Partners, an early-stage investment fund in Bengaluru.

Acharya points out three quick benefits: innovative ideas, low-cost solutions and the stoking of creative mindset. While ideas for new products can take months, hackathons fast-track the process. The cost advantage too is huge. During internal hackathons, says Acharya, employees step out of their normal roles to perform creative tasks.

"Software is eating the world and every business that exists today is becoming completely transformed by technology"

Sachin Gupta, cofounder, HackerEarth



Public Service Too

Even state governments are wracking the brains of engineers to find solutions to everyday problems. Take, for instance, Code for Karnataka. The IT department of the state government conducted a hackathon in December 2015 to explore mobile technology for better governance.

One of the ideas emerging out of hackathon was mFIR, a mobile app that registers complaints at the site of an accident. The app sends notifications to the police by sharing the location so that they can reach the spot quickly. People present on the spot can also add images related to the accident.

Even local administrations are persuaded to use coders to solve real-life challenges. Urban Hack was the first ever smart city hackathon in India by the Bangalore City Police and the Metropolitan Transport Corporation in October 2015. The challenge for the police and the local administration was manifold: growing traffic, declining public safety, increasing commuting time resulting in loss of productivity and rising crimes. The hack proved to be a blessing.

SatarkApp, one of the solutions by coders, addressed the issue of personal safety and reporting of crime. Tag Car, a road traffic management system based on IOT (internet of things), used unique RFID (radio frequency tags identification) to track vehicles in real time and helped in spotting traffic violations, rerouting traffic, tracking lost cars and suggesting green corridors for emergency vehicles.

Zuckerberg is not alone. His grey tees and helium balloons may be missing, but many are hacking their way to a better future. ■



Hackathon by FMCG major on gamifying purchasing behaviour of customers; the challenge for developers was **to build the biggest multiplayer social gaming system** plus loyalty programme in the IVR (interactive voice response) and **messaging space**



HUL,
April 2016,
Bengaluru



Walmart Labs India,
August 2016,
Bengaluru

The hackathon to crowdsource ideas in retail, explored three themes: **human-machine interaction; customer analytics using machine learning/deep learning**



Daimler India,
October 2016,
Bengaluru

The hackathon by the automaker resulted in three innovative ideas: **vehicle detection and traffic mapping**, which included a prototype to help ambulances ease their way through traffic in case of emergencies; **Skype-like, interactive, Android application for cars without internet** using peer-to-peer video communication; and an app to tackle driver distraction



MakeMyTrip,
October 2016,
Bengaluru

Hackathon by India's biggest online travel player on building innovative apps explored applying analytics to data to describe, predict, quantify and envision a smart future; **using big data to solve real-life challenges**; leveraging cloud infrastructure; and creating apps to make the experience of a traveller hassle free



We Shall Overcome

No political movement succeeds without the youth and energy of students. This raw energy was harnessed by the leaders of the Indian freedom struggle, by Jayaprakash Narayan in the '70s agitation against Indira Gandhi, and more recently by the forces that galvanised around Anna Hazare. No wonder then Indian students have strong and sometimes opposing political views and ideas. India has a history of violent student politics; passionate rivalries are a given and casualties are not uncommon. These struggles are also excellent launching pads for national leaders, a great way to get an early start for those without dynasties to prop them up in politics. It also makes heroes/villains out of youngsters, as it did with Gurmehar Kaur last week. *ET Magazine* takes a look at the rough and tumble of Indian student politics over the ages

:: Suman Layak

ABVP Versus the Poster Boys/Girls



The way Delhi University student **Gurmehar Kaur** (daughter of a martyred soldier) dominated discourse once again showed the power of social media and its role in student politics. In the aftermath of the violent clashes between rival student unions, the RSS-affiliated ABVP on one side and the AISA and SFI on the other, the 20-year-old had posted a profile picture of herself holding a poster saying she is not afraid of the ABVP. The campaign and the 2016 video by her went viral, getting a lot of support and some celebrity trolls like cricketer Virender Sehwag and actor Randeep Hooda. Kaur complained about receiving rape threats over social media.



Kaur came into the spotlight after the issue of clashes between the ABVP and AISA over a seminar at Ramjas College in Delhi boiled over with well-known student leader Shehla Rashid, an MPhil student and JNU Students Union vice-president leading the charge. The seminar had invited **Umar Khalid**, one of the JNU student leaders who had shot to fame last year. Khalid was among the two students arrested along with Kanhaiya Kumar, former president of the JNU Students Union, last year. The Ramjas agitations saw violence and stone pelting between two groups of students and also between the police and students.



With the ABVP growing in strength over the last decade or so, it has repeatedly clashed with student leaders from other political dispensations. In January 2016, Hyderabad University PhD student **Rohith Vemula** committed suicide, following his suspension after complaints by ABVP leaders that they were assaulted by Vemula. Last week, even as events in Delhi unfolded, there

were clashes between ABVP and SFI at the Savitribai Phule Pune University in Pune. Way back in 2006, a violent student mob had killed professor HS Sabharwal of Madhav College in Ujjain after he cancelled elections to the students union. All the accused were later acquitted.

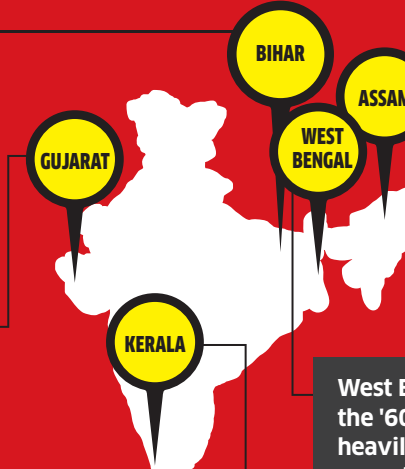


History of Campus Protests

The Bihar Movement that was ultimately led by Jayaprakash Narayan was also a product of student agitations started by the Bihar Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti (BCCS), and the prime demands were better food and facilities in student hostels. The movement snowballed and in 1974 the BCCS gheraoed the state legislative assembly, damaging government property, setting fire to a minister's residence and a telephone exchange.



The Navnirman Movement in Gujarat in the '70s against the Chimanbhai Patel-led Congress government turned violent leading to multiple deaths. It started when in December 1973 students of LD College of Engineering, Ahmedabad went on strike in protest against a 20% hike in hostel food fees. The movement spread across cities, and needed the army to be called in. Patel was asked by Indira Gandhi to resign.



The All Assam Students Union's movement in the late '70s to mid-80s against illegal immigrants from Bangladesh was largely non-violent. However, the blame for the 1983 Nellie Massacre, a pogrom that saw the killings of hundreds of Muslims settled in Assam during the British period, is often laid at the door of the movement.

West Bengal have seen much violence on campus. In the '60s and '70s the Naxalite movement recruited heavily from among students and violence was perpetrated by the student groups affiliated to the CP(ML) as well as the police. Even after the Naxal movement died down the culture of violence did not and clashes between the CPM-affiliated SFI and the Congress-affiliated Chhatra Praishad, with regular use of fire arms, became commonplace over the next few decades.



Young Turks who Became Veterans

Student politics, like trade unions and political families, are one of the fast tracks in Indian politics

Narendra Modi and Arun Jaitley

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley both can be considered products of student politics and student movements in India. Modi was associated with the Navnirman Movement in Gujarat while Jaitley was president of the Delhi University Students Union in the 1970s.



Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and Mamata Banerjee

Both the current chief minister and her immediate predecessor came into mainstream politics from student politics. While Banerjee learned the ropes in the '70s, emerging as an MP in 1984, Bhattacharjee was an active SFI leader in the '60s and a minister since 1977.



Sitaram Vechury and Prakash Karat

Karat was one of the founders of SFI at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, and prior to that had been active in anti-apartheid agitations at the University of Edinburgh in Great Britain. Karat was rusticated from the university for the agitation and then later taken back on good behaviour. Vechury joined the SFI in JNU and was its president after the Emergency was lifted.



The Bihar Group



Lalu Prasad Yadav, Sharad Yadav, Sushil Modi were associated with the JP movement and the BCCS.



The Assam Leaders
Prafulla Mahanta and **Bhriku Phukan** were leaders of AASU who later formed the Asom Gana Parishad.

The Kerala Leaders

Pinarayi Vijayan, Kerala CM, and former CMs **AK Anthony** and **Oommen Chandy** were products of student politics.



The Bitter With The Sweet

It may be time to think about sugar the way we do nicotine, but can an essential substance be called addictive?

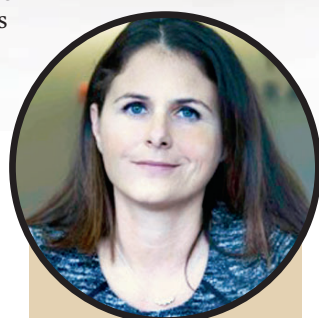
:: Hari Pulakkat

It is a situation you may have faced at some point in your life. You have been living responsibly, exercising frequently and avoiding fatty food and desserts. You go for a party and eat a piece of cake. It tastes good, and you have another piece. The next day you feel hungry and crave for a sweet snack. You give in to temptation, as sugary snacks are within easy reach. Before you realise, several weeks have gone by and you have consumed a lot of sugar. You are under threat of a long period of high-sugar diet. What would you call this behaviour?

Even a decade ago, few people would have called such a habit an addiction. The word was reserved for more serious stuff: alcohol, drugs and nicotine. Eating sugar was a habit that came and went, thought scientists, and not as dangerous or permanent as drinking alcohol or smoking. In the last decade, some psychologists and neuroscientists have begun to change their opinion, after they studied people who consume junk food excessively and found several similarities with well-known addictive behaviour. Not just in what they do every day but also in how their brains respond to this behaviour.

Food Addiction

This is causing a change of mindset among some neuroscientists. Around the world, neuroscientists have seen that animals can be addicted to certain foods, and that this addiction can have serious consequences for them throughout life. "We observe in animals all the classic symptoms of food addiction," says Nicole Avena, assistant professor at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York. "We see bingeing, craving and withdrawal symptoms." Such findings are being extended to human beings, as neuroscientists observe similar



"Those who are addicted to sugar show all the signs of addiction: bingeing, craving and withdrawal symptoms"

Nicole Avena,
 assistant professor,
 Icahn School of Medicine

behaviour in people as well. Some scientists are also researching ways to counter food addictions.

Last year, a set of two papers published by scientists from the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Australia, provided clues to food addiction and how to control it, in experiments conducted on laboratory animals.

They found that long-term consumption of sugar produces changes in animal brains, somewhat like those produced by nicotine and drugs. They also found that it was possible to reduce an animal's craving for sugar with drugs used commonly to treat nicotine addiction. The association between sugar and nicotine was unlikely to be accidental.

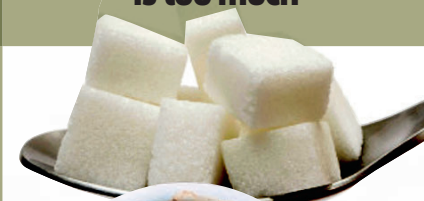
"Maybe we should think about sugar the way we think about nicotine," says Selena Bartlett, neuroscientist and professor at QUT.

Other studies back up this finding. In a paper published last year in the journal PLOS One, Nicole Avena and her colleagues show that highly processed foods - which contain a lot of sugar - produce addictive behaviour. Avena, a research neuroscientist at the New York Obesity Re-



How Much is Too Much?

The maximum allowed intake is still not clear, but most researchers think that **more than six teaspoons a day is too much**



Sugar is consumed in beverages like tea and coffee, and it is easy to exceed the limit



Sugar is also present in many other common foods like bread, biscuits and sauces

So the combined intake of all these often far exceeds the desired limit

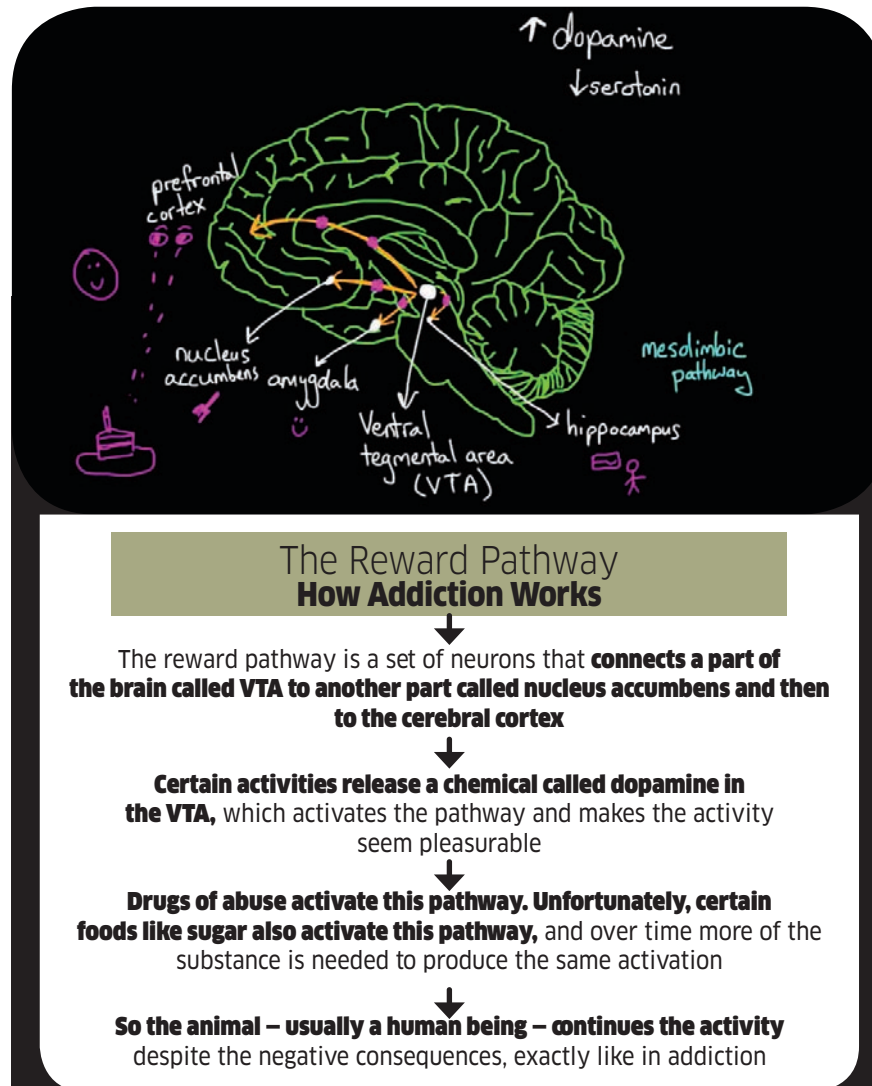
search Center at Columbia University, had earlier shown in animal models that binge eating produced changes in the brain similar to those produced with addictive drugs. Avena is now at the forefront of the movement among neuroscientists to establish that food in general, and sugar in particular, is addictive. PLOS One is a peer-reviewed, open access scientific journal published by the San Francisco-headquartered Public Library of Sciences (PLOS).

Other laboratories around the world have been reporting similar findings. Three years ago, David Ludwig and other scientists from Harvard University showed that foods that raised blood sugar levels quickly lit up a part of the brain called nucleus accumbens, primarily because of their high sugar content. This portion of the brain is involved in addiction. Among others, Mark Gold of the University of Florida and Kelly Brownell of Stanford University have both pioneered the concept of food addiction, based on their own research in their labs. Gold had found that overeating reduces drug use in many people, which suggests that food itself might work as a drug.

Flawed Argument?

Not all neuroscientists agree with these definitions. There is not enough evidence to say that food is addictive, they say, because much of the research is based on animal models. They also say that sugar is part of food, and never eaten by itself like other addictive substances. "The idea of food addiction is a flawed idea," says Hisham Ziauddin, senior clinical research associate at Cambridge University neuroscience department. Ziauddin reviewed all recent research literature on the topic and found that the results are not yet convincing. He thinks that some standard aspects of drug addiction, like dose dependency, are yet to be evaluated fully.

None of the substances normally thought as addictive – nicotine, alcohol, drugs – is necessary for survival. Food is necessary for survival, and sugar in small doses is also an important part of the diet. Can an essential substance be called addictive? Those who champion the idea of food addiction, however, say that the evi-



dence is getting stronger by the day, and that the issue is largely one of semantics.

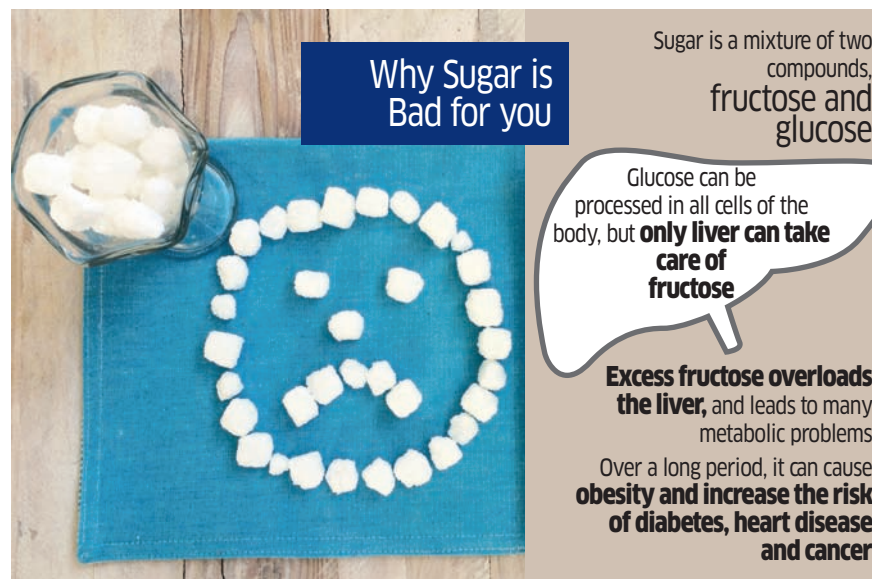
While scientists wrestle with definitions, it is clear that some of the consequences of high sugar consumption are in no doubt. People like desserts very much, and it is easy to lose control of your urges when eating sweet stuff. "People want to stop," says Ashley Gearhardt, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Michigan. "But they repeatedly fail. It is not due to lack of desire to stop that they fail." Interestingly, the more you get exposed to sugar, the more difficult it is to control eating more of it. Your brain starts responding less and less to the pleasure of eating sweet stuff, forcing you to eat more and more. Even at the level of common sense, these are parallels with drugs of abuse. Common sense, though, is not considered technical evidence in science.

Bad for You

There is another aspect of sugar consumption that is also beyond doubt: sugar is bad for you. Although it is self-evident, medical scientists have only recently realised how bad sugar is for the human body. Sugar's role as a disease-causing agent got worldwide attention when Robert Lustig, a professor of paediatrics at the University of California in San Francisco, gave a lecture that went viral on YouTube in 2009.

Sugar these days is a term commonly used to describe sucrose, the white substance that we add to desserts and beverages. It is half glucose and half fructose. Glucose can go all over the body and be processed in all cells. Fructose can be processed only in the liver. So eating too much of sugar – even in unrefined form like jaggery or in disguise like in fruit juice – can tax the liver too much and cause many metabolic diseases. Obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancer are mentioned frequently in combination with eating sugar.

In technical parlance, sugar is a term used for a variety of biochemicals with a specific structure. In this sense, glucose is a sugar. So is lactose – found in milk – or maltose, formed when enzymes break down starch. Our story is applicable to sugar in both senses, but especially to the common variety that we add to our des-



The Most Addictive Substances in the World



Heroin

Causes dopamine levels in the brain's reward system to increase by up to 200% in experimental animals



Cocaine

Prevents neurons from turning dopamine signal off, resulting in abnormal activation of the brain's reward pathways



Nicotine

Sucked by the lungs and delivered to the brain, with drug levels peaking in 10 seconds



Barbiturates

Block some of the brain's chemical signalling, effectively muting several brain regions



Alcohol

Interferes with messaging in the brain, slowing breathing, thinking and heart rate

serts. High-calorie food contains sugars in plenty, and can raise glucose levels quickly. Any food that raises glucose levels quickly is a potential addictive substance, according to scientists that argue in favour of food addiction. Such foods provide energy for the body and pleasure for the brain. Eat them too much and too quickly, and you have a serious problem.

All Calories Aren't the Same

The big advance in our understanding of food in recent times has come from one fact, now accepted nearly universally by the medical research community. Not all calories are the same. A hundred calories from protein or fat have a different impact on the body when compared with 100 calories from carbohydrates. Different kinds of carbohydrates with the same amount of calories also produce different biological effects. And the difference in impact is not just on the body. It is on our brains as well.

As the Harvard study three years ago showed, the total amount of calories in the food did not matter to the brain. The brains of individuals in two groups, each given

a glass of milkshake with the same amount of calories and tasted no different, responded differently to the drink because they raised the blood sugar levels at different speeds. One had a special kind of starch that raised it quickly, while the other had a different kind of starch that was absorbed slowly. The addiction area in the brain, the nucleus accumbens, lit up in the brains of people whose blood sugar spiked.

This was strong evidence that the so-called high glycaemic foods were bad. The brain rewarded eating high-glycaemic foods by making their consumption pleasurable, but in an environment where people are generally not short of energy. It is a good reason for addiction, although high-glycaemic

foods are eaten regularly. The jury is still out on the technical use of the term, according to some neuroscientists, but the evidence is getting stronger by the day.

Semantics does not always matter in science, but in this case it does. The consequences of eating sugar or high-glycaemic foods are different if we call the process as addictive or not. Addictive behaviour gets gradually worse over a period of time. So a head start in exposure is the worst thing you can do. "The risk of addiction is considerably lower if you get exposed to a substance at 25 years of age compared with 16 years of age," says Vivek Benegal, professor of psychiatry at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (Nimhans) in Bengaluru. Benegal studies addiction, especially alcohol addiction.

We could interpret this finding in the context of food addiction. It is rare for a child to get exposed to a substance of abuse, like drugs or nicotine, or alcohol. But even toddlers are exposed to sugary snacks in modern lives. If you give them too much junk food early in life, they are in danger of developing a life-long liking for high-calorie food. Eating sweet snacks can be even worse, and set them on a course for disease very early in life. Changing course can be difficult in adult life, even for those with the knowledge of the risks. After all, every addict is aware of the dangers of their behaviour. ■



"Addiction behaviour leads to changes in the structure and function of the brain"

Vivek Benegal,
professor of
psychiatry, Nimhans,
Bengaluru

Just Desserts

Why do we like the sweet stuff so much?

Quality of food matters to animals. If we look back a few million years, it was the quality of food coupled with serious mental challenges in acquiring food that increased our brain size, and helped us evolve from arboreal monkeys to human beings. Early humans ate a diet rich in protein and plant nutrients, cleverly combining meat and fruit to obtain maximum nourishment.

That was long ago. Human diets may not have changed much till the invention of agriculture, when our ancestors started eating cooked cereals. We grew shorter and our brains started reducing in size for the first time after increasing three times through several million years. Our brains have continued to shrink in the last 10,000 years, but this doesn't mean we have become less smart.

It may be a way to make the brain more efficient. It may also be that frequent famines and food shortages have affected our development, and availability of food now is reversing the shrinking of our brains.

While this is speculation at the moment, an abundance of food has certainly affected human beings and their brains in a different way.

By making them sick. Over thousands of years, bodies of human beings have adapted to scarcity in many ways. We stored fat around our bellies, to be used up when food became scarce. When we continue to eat and accumulate belly fat through many years, our body processes are no longer able to cope. Result? Diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

In the old days, when human beings were living in the forest, sweetness was an indication that a particular thing was safe to eat. We knew fruits were safe because they were sweet. There is probably no food in nature that is both sweet and toxic. So the brain developed a reward pathway (see *The Reward Pathway: How Addiction Works*) that made eating sweet foods pleasurable, and forced people to eat such things more and more when hungry.

This was fine in nature, as these foods were not just sweet. They were also packed with nutrition. "Food was scarce in the forest," says Ashley Gearhardt, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, "and sweet things were packed with calories." The brain is an energy-hungry organ that needed a constant supply of calories.

Fruits have had an important role in our evolution. The dexterity of our hands may be an adaptation to pluck fruit. A fondness for sweet things was an adapta-

We have taken the sweetness out of food and used it in isolation, away from all the good stuff that comes packed with it in nature

tion that gave people energy and, probably, saved their lives. Things are different now. Human beings have completely altered their food environment, and a once-useful adaption has been turned on its head. We have taken the sweetness out of food and used it in isolation, away from all the good stuff that comes packed with it in nature. Desserts and sugary drinks spike your blood sugar quickly. Fruits seldom do so, unless you eat too much too quickly, which is a very difficult thing to do in a natural environment.

Nature rarely makes a substance in isolation. Fruits come with fibre and other stuff that slow down the release of glucose into the bloodstream. Which is why an orange and a glass of orange juice have completely different effects on our body. Taking the sugar out of fruits was an unnatural thing to do. The brain used an adaptation that once saved lives to the new situation, without understanding the difference. The results were disastrous.

Sweetness in isolation has thus become deadly, the precursor of many illnesses. To make it worse, our brains were also fooled into believing that the sweet stuff was good for you, thus making you eat more and more of it. This behaviour was good when eating fruits in an age of scarcity. But not when eating desserts in an age of plenty.



From Vibrancy to Violence

A Ramjas College alumnus on why last week's clashes on campus were unprecedented at an institution that is no stranger to debate and dissent

:: Shantanu Nandan Sharma

Delhi University's Ramjas College turns 100 this year. In mid-February, President of India Pranab Mukherjee released a centenary postage stamp of the college which had a humble past in old Delhi's Daryaganj locality in the pre-Independence period before being shifted to DU's north campus.

In one of the centenary celebration programmes held late last year, former SC judge Justice Mukundakam Sharma thundered from the podium, "I am a proud Ramjasian", prompting students to cheer in one voice. The college departments that have societies of their own have in the past one year organised a number of programmes; these included historian Romila Thapar's talk on secularism, a slideshow on 800 years of architecture of medieval India and a host of dance, drama, music festivals and fine art exhibitions.

The festive mood on campus came to an abrupt halt last week and was replaced by unprecedented violence of a political nature. Student groups belonging to two opposite ideologies, the BJP-affiliated ABVP and Left-backed AISA, clashed in the presence of the police, leading to further protests, counter-protests and a tense atmosphere in DU's north campus. There were reports that some Left students chanted slogans like "Kashmir ki azadi", which were countered by ABVP protestors' with diktats such as "Desh ke gadaro ko, goli maaro saalon ko (kill the anti-nationals)".

Kumar Rahul, an assistant professor of the college's political science department, says the atmosphere has been vitiated because of the existence of a highly polarised political discourse. "There's no neutral space left now. If you question the ABVP, you are bracketed as anti-national. If you question the Left groups, you become a Sanghi," he says. Sanghi is derived from the word Sangh, meaning followers of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the parent organisation of the BJP and the ABVP.

"I have been in Ramjas for the last 22



Protests erupted at Ramjas College after members of the ABVP opposed the presence of JNU student Umar Khalid who was supposed to speak at a seminar organised at the campus



Ramjas College



years, both as a student and then as a faculty member. Yes, there used to be some clashes between students belonging to various regions. But never before have I seen a political violence of this magnitude," Rahul adds.

Revolutionary Crossroads

Rajesh Jha, a former Ramjas students' union president and present assistant professor of DU's Rajdhani College, claims he somehow escaped being manhandled by ABVP students on the day of last week's clash. Another associate professor of the university, Prasad Chakravarty, was hospitalised and would need protracted treatment after getting roughed up reportedly by ABVP students.

"Ramjas has always taken a lead in dialogues and debates where differences of opinion and dissent were respected and even encouraged. Within the teaching community too, various ideologies have co-existed," says Jha. "The problem started only in the recent years when the DU administration got marginalised and University Grants Commission and ministry of human resource development began to micromanage the affairs of the university."

Jha wants to remind today's generation how two professors from Ramjas, NK Kakkar and SS Rathi, belonged to two different political camps of the DU Teachers' Association in the 1990s. Kakkar leaned towards the BJP and Rathi towards the Congress, but they did not bear any personal grudges against each other. "Ramjas' political science society, Spartacus, has always encouraged vibrant discourse by inviting politi-

cians belonging to various ideologies. But it used to be vibrantly, not violence," Jha adds. Spartacus, for example, has invited politicians such as former BJP minister Arun Shourie, Prakash Karat of the CPI(M) and Arvind Kejriwal when he was an RTI activist, not Delhi chief minister.

Even the epicenter of the students' movement of 1990 against the Mandal Commission's formula of extending 27.5% reservation to other backward class (OBC) candidates in government jobs, was located near the Ramjas College. The agitators dubbed the area surrounded by Ramjas, Delhi School of Economics and DU's law faculty as Kranti Chowk (revolutionary crossroads). This writer is a Ramjas College alumnus.

Rajendra Prasad who was principal of Ramjas College for 32 years and who witnessed many episodes of student turbulence in those decades, retired last Tuesday. A day before he retired, he wrote an open letter with an emotive appeal to the students to promote a peaceful atmosphere and restrain from any kind of confrontation.

Meanwhile, Delhi Police's crime branch has begun a probe into the Ramjas violence. The National Human Rights Commission has issued a notice to the Delhi Police commissioner over reports of female students being attacked by the police during the clash. And Gurmehar Kaur, whose "Not

Afraid of ABVP" challenge on social media stirred a row, withdrew from the agitation, demonstrating how tense the situation had been within the University. Kaur, who was trolled by cricketer Virender Sehwag and actor Randeep Hooda and nudged minister of state for home Kiren Rijiju to wonder on Twitter who had "polluted" her mind, is an undergrad student of LSR College of DU and the daughter of a Kargil war martyr.

PC Tulsian, the newly appointed principal of Ramjas, says that debates and deliberations that are an integral part of the college, will continue, but academics will remain the top priority. He mentions how the college's statistical department organised an inter-college debate on a macroeconomic subject early this week, even as protest marches were continuing outside the college. "The college is functioning as usual. The classes are going on, laboratories are open. We have produced some of the best talents including many IAS and IPS officers in the past. The recent incident was the result of an ego battle between two groups. Had there been no external elements, there would not have been any violence." ■

"The recent incident was the result of an ego battle between two groups. Had there been no external elements, there would not have been any violence"

PC Tulsian, principal, Ramjas College

Hottest Property

Kamala Mills in Mumbai is transforming into the country's hippest dining destination, with one of the highest concentration of restaurants

:: Anoothi Vishal

"What I think is this: You should give up looking for lost cats and start searching for the other half of your shadow"
 – Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*

There are no cats on the wall but there are shadows, lines, distances, women crossing the street, not in a frenetic New York way but in a placid Kyoto fashion, peering down, perhaps looking for missing parts of their shadows and souls.

The art work on the walls at the new Fatty Bao in Kamala Mills, Mumbai, is more nuanced, complex and stylised than the cheerful, colourful mural that defines the restaurant's older outlet in Delhi's RK Puram. It's as if the little, gregarious, ramen-slurping girl grew up to be a mysterious sophisticate. It's hard to define what exactly you feel for her – till you come back home and pick up your well-thumbed copy of *Kafka on the Shore*. Then, it adds up. If Murakami's world is filled with gaps, missing shadows, fragments of dreams, words never said and, indeed, the Japanese aesthetic of wabi-sabi, a word that is hard to define but which loosely means finding beauty in the imperfect, this is exactly the sense of fluidity, transience and imperfect beauty that you glimpse on the walls of this new restaurant.

As a brand, The Fatty Bao is a work in progress. It's more grown up here at Kamala Mills than its older eaters in Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai's Bandra. While some of the trademark features and foods remain, others have shifted shape – and taste. There's *kathal*



PHOTOS: BHARAT CHANDA



The 37-acre premises of Kamala Mills in Mumbai's Lower Parel is bursting at the seams with almost all major restaurant companies in the country setting up shop here

PHOTOS: BHARAT CHANDA



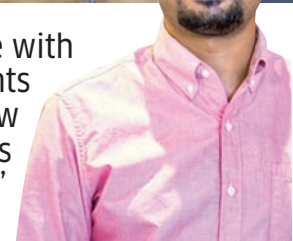
"Food hubs help because they attract diverse customers with their diverse brands and it becomes easier to get clearances and licences"

Manu Chandra, partner, Fatty Bao



"Since all boats rise with the tide, restaurants that have come in now have to do much less to get customers"

Sameer Seth, partner, Bombay canteen



bao for fashionable vegetarians (as also a Jain menu) and baked pork dim sum that reminds you of Cantonese puff pastry but also of Portuguese-influenced egg tarts from Macau. The well-loved Fatty oysters (with chorizo, panko-crumbed) now have a fresher sibling – fresh Kochi oysters cured in yuzu and dotted with Sriracha caviar in a nod to millennial gastronomy. The drinks are more elegant, less syrupy; the brand is upgrading.

It's fitting this change should have come in a space that itself is undergoing major transformation. From being a sleepy industrial-turned-office zone of two years ago, Kamala Mills in Mumbai's Lower Parel is transforming itself into the country's hottest dining destination, with one of the highest concentration of restaurants in an area that was not exclusively planned for F&B retail. The upgraded Fatty (which opened on February 27) is its newest tenant but almost all major restaurant companies in the country are setting up shop here.

It's only the last six months that have seen so much activity. The erstwhile mill is suddenly the Indian restaurant world's favourite incubator. Brand new concepts or tweaked ones are looking to test the reception that Maximum City's millennial audience affords them. The 37-acre premises are bursting at the seams; weekends are chaotic,

traffic jams a given and in Mumbai where people are loath to stir out of their neighbourhoods, food-centric treks to the south from as far as Juhu and Bandra are now being undertaken just to be at Kamala.

I am mulling this change as I stand outside The Fatty Bao with Manu Chandra, its partner. It's a quiet break from the frenetic preparations inside for a launch party that night. We are not talking anything in particular till Chandra, his nose for news as sharp as his prodigious sense of smell, murmurs under his breath, "That's the man to know."

Before I can ask, "Who?", he has already called out to a well-dressed young man stepping out of his car. "So, Chirag, what's happening?" asks Chandra. The young man bursts in on the scene and into the story with a stream of information: X restaurant did a stupendous ₹2 crore sales last month. Y has seen the sharpest dip in business. There are two new deals he has brokered, he says, and Z restaurateur will now rent space where something else is shutting.

Mills on a Roll

Meet Chirag Maru, 33 who is much more than the go-to broker for all restaurant deals in Kamala Mills and increasingly in all of Mumbai too. Diners swirling their wine may not know him but all restaurateurs do. Maru is on their speed dials, often their friend and confidant. If "location, location, location" are the three most important factors for any restaurant's success (as is the common belief), Maru is currently the most important man to know in the business in Mumbai. By his own admission, he has a decisive say in the leasing rights to all properties within Kamala Mills and decides which brand to place where, if at all – though he doesn't own these sites. His rise to influence parallels the rise of Kamala Mills as a hip dining destination. Their stories and destinies are linked. Both are compelling.

"Till two years ago, I used to beg people to take up space here. Now, restaurateurs beg me," he says. A commerce graduate, who "liked to party," Maru started off with property consultants Knight Frank India. Because of his personal interest in restaurants, he started a restaurants division in the company. After a while, as his client base grew, he decided to go it alone. Having seen concepts like Clarke Quay in Singapore and the Dubai malls where space is sold to many restaurants as a consolidated retail space, Maru says he decided to focus on selling "hubs" rather than individual deals. The big break came three years ago with Kamala Mills.

In 2014, Maru says, the conservative business family, the Govanis, that controls the mill was reluctant to give out space to restaurants. "It took me six months to convince them," Maru



The two most buzzing restaurants of the last two-three months in Kamala Mills seem to be Koko by the Tham brothers and Theory by Mickhiel Pinto



says. The Fatty Bao has come up incidentally, in the site for the first restaurant, Tilt. However, it was The Bombay Canteen (TBC) in 2015 that changed Kamala Mills for ever.

With its "chotas" and "badas", platters of no-fuss modern Indian food rooted in a regional context, The Bombay Canteen was a hit. Mumbai's hipsters, the arty crowd, tourists and even south Mumbai snobs started visiting the area; perhaps inevitable in a city starved of good Indian food. "When we started, because of the neighbouring offices, we knew we would get lunch business. We didn't know whether we would get a dinner crowd, so we focused on our dinners," confesses Sameer Seth, partner at the restaurant. Today, about 400-500 people sail in every day during weekends. "Since all boats rise with the tide, restaurants that have come in now have to do much less to get customers," says Seth, who, however, cautions that while Kamala Mills may seem a huge success story, most restaurants have been here for only six months. "That is too soon to say whether they are succeeding."

The Incubator

Nothing succeeds like success, or at least the perception of it. With TBC being its leading light – we are like the show house,"

laugh its promoters – restaurateurs have been gravitating towards Kamala Mills. "Food hubs help because they attract diverse customers with their diverse brands and it becomes easier to get clearances and licences," says Chetan Rampal, partner The Fatty Bao. "Also, since the ownership is controlled by a single family, infrastructure here is better than at some of the neighbouring mills where ownership is split."

Maru – who has signed 65 restaurants in the complex, selling, he claims, ₹350 crore of stock last year – says owners are widening the roads, building parks and more to improve conditions. Rentals have doubled from two years ago, restaurateurs say (from ₹200 per sq ft to ₹400 per sq ft) but the common model that seems to be prevailing is a certain fixed rent or 15% revenue share, whichever is higher.

Meanwhile, a slew of interesting concepts has already come about. D:Oh! by deGustibus Hospitality (that owns Indigo) is a casual, no-frills place, with jhoola seating, a coffee shop with comfort food and self-service. Anurag Katiar, CEO, says the plan is to roll out 50 restaurants pan-India, but Kamala Mills, "with the presence of every major restaurant company", was deemed the ideal place to incubate it.

Near D:Oh!, Anjan Chatterjee's Speciality Restaurants is readying to foray into modern Asian food in April. Called Mr Poh's (Progressive Oriental House), the concept is likely to be helmed by a top chef in the country (watch this space for more) and have top-of-the-line sushi, dim sum, small plates plus a section on modern Asian cooked with cutting-edge techniques – for a younger, casual audience.

There is also buzz about AD Singh's Lady Baga, Zorawar Kalra's modern European bar and a new concept by Riyaz Amlani, three of the top restaurateurs in the country. Meanwhile, at the moment, the most successful restaurant in Kamala Mills (and Mumbai) seems to be Koko by the Tham brothers. Just a few months old, the "gastropub" has been packing a punch with its matcha whisky sours, gin and champa liqueur combinations, top-grade hamachi and pork belly. It's an expensive restaurant (in the vicinity of ₹2,000 per head) but has been doing the best sales in the premises, we hear.

The other hit seems to be Theory, a mammoth gastronomic (that word again) meets nightclub, by Mickhiel Pinto, who used to be part of the Indigo and Tote team with Rahul Akerkar. Delhi restaurateur Priyank Sukhija has opened a huge outpost of his brand Tamasha next door to Kamala Mills and a slew of Delhi restaurateurs is now apparently looking to bring their brands to this part of the world.

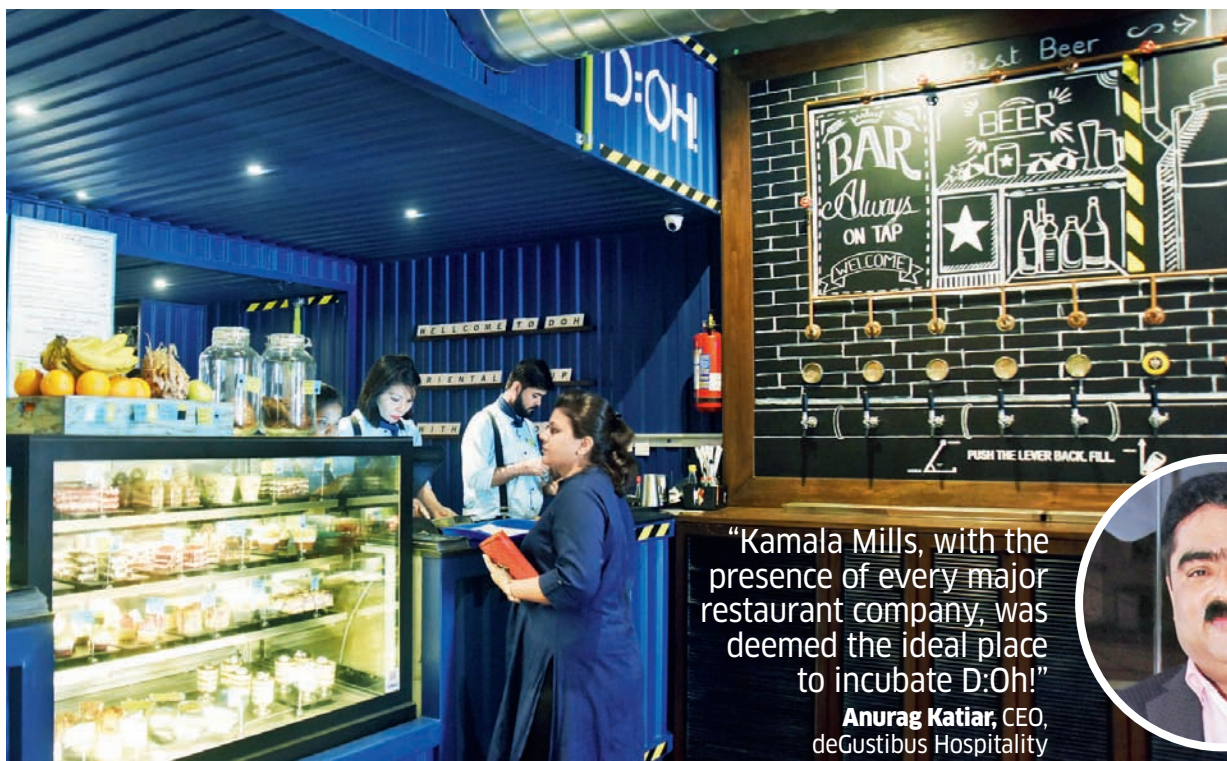
While the NCR has its cyberhub, which is also one of the largest planned restaurant hubs in the country (though smaller in area than Kamala Mills), uncertainty vis-à-vis policy – post a Supreme Court ruling that no licences for liquor sales will be given along national and state highways; though the ruling pertains to liquor vends only, as was clarified earlier this week, restaurateurs apprehended that it may be used to apply to them – means that restaurateurs have been increasingly looking at alternatives. For the moment, Kamala Mills is where the goldrush is, though there seems to be some kind of vetting before the pass.

"We don't want to give space to newcomers who have ill-defined concepts or those who spoil the market with cheap ₹90 beers. We want good concepts by seasoned restaurateurs..."

I interview newcomers and also study the personal habits of restaurateurs," says man-of-the-moment Maru. Despite the upbeat mood, there have been failures too, like the much-vaunted Chemistry 101, an ambitious molecular mixology bar that shut in less than six months. Location is important but clearly there's more to the fickle business of restaurants. ■



Chirag Maru, 33, has a decisive say in the leasing rights to all properties within Kamala Mills and decides which brand to place where, if at all



"Kamala Mills, with the presence of every major restaurant company, was deemed the ideal place to incubate D:Oh!"

Anurag Katiar, CEO, deGustibus Hospitality



The writer looks at restaurants, food trends and culinary concepts

When in Jerusalem...

The ancient city takes you on an overwhelming journey – from the Wailing Wall through the murals of the Cardo to Calvary



1. & 2. The Dome of the Rock is a shrine located on the Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem; **3.** Zion Gate, one of the eight existing gates into the old city; **4.** Street in Jew Quarter

:: Anita Rao-Kashi

Stark and rough, and rising more than 60 ft into the sky and nearly 1,500 ft long, the wall was massive, built with limestones, and looked solid and ancient. In the mid-morning light, it seemed bathed in a golden-orange hue. In front of it, seemingly dwarfed due to its sheer proportions, were clusters of women. Some sat on chairs, others stood. Most of them had one or both their hands on the wall. Apart from a muted buzz, generated from collective prayers muttered under the breath, an eerie silence hung in the air. There was an occasional wail, though many of the women were weeping silently, while they stuffed the crevices between the stones with pieces of paper filled with prayers. Of all the places in Jerusalem, the Western Wall, better known as the Wailing Wall, is the most unsettling as well as the most indescribably overwhelming.

Considered to be over 2,000 years old,



the wall is the only surviving portion of the Temple Mount, part of the Second Temple, built by Herod the Great around 20 BC. Jews come here to mourn the destruction of the Temple Mount by the Romans, from where it gained its epithet. But unlike what I had imagined, there was no melodrama or overt expression of grief; instead

The historic city of Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and is located in the eastern part of the country



How to Reach: El Al is the only airline that flies direct to Tel Aviv and operates from Mumbai with a few weekly flights. Jerusalem is about 70 km to the south-east of Tel Aviv with convenient bus connections

Where to Stay: Jerusalem has plenty of accommodation options and staying near or within the Old Town is a good idea. One can also choose a hotel like Inbal Hotel which is located a bit outside the Old Town, and serves some delicious Israeli breakfast dishes

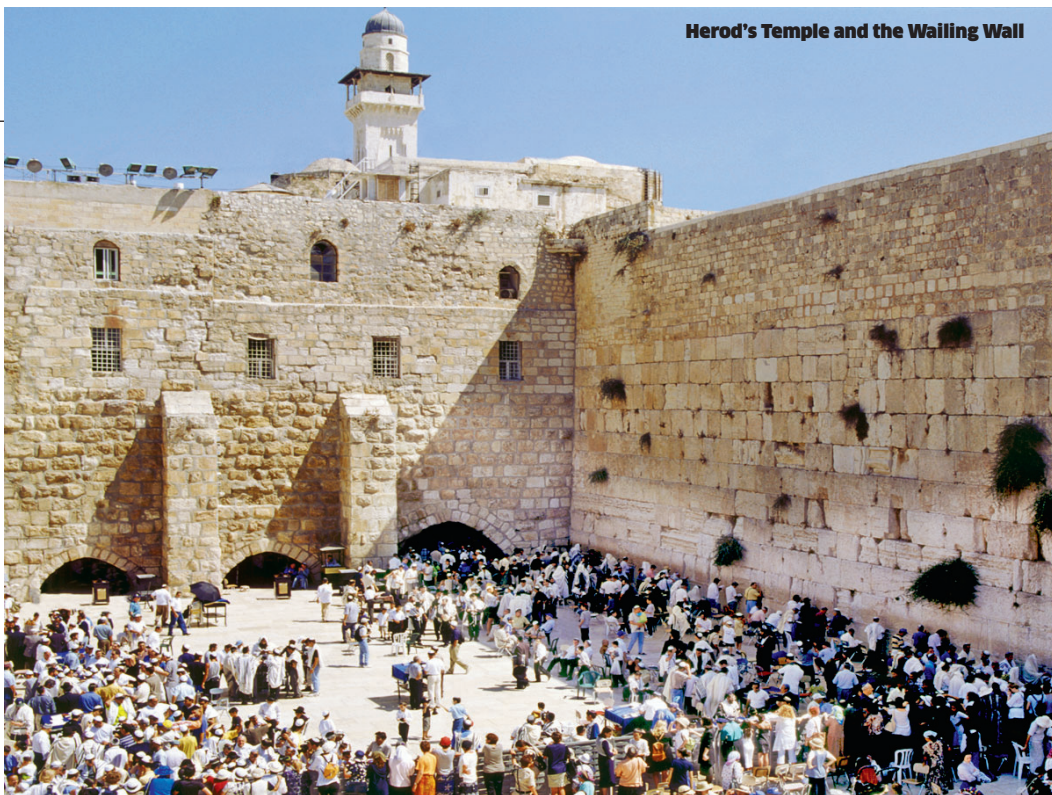
What to Eat: The Old City has a plethora of street vendors and cafes dishing out falafel, kibbeh, hummus and other Middle Eastern and Mediterranean staples. Also worth trying are *shakshuka* (an egg and tomato dish), *tabbouleh*, stuffed vine leaves, *sambusak* (a kind of empanada), *bureka* (stuffed filo pastry) *baklava* and *halva* (a pasty sweet dish in various flavours)

Know This

The Old Town is a warren of **cobbled streets, undulating terrain, tall walls and winding paths** so make sure you have **comfortable footwear and plenty of water**. Some places may have a dress code, so check ahead



Anita Rao-Kashi is a Bengaluru-based travel writer



Herod's Temple and the Wailing Wall

GETTY IMAGES

I was buffeted by waves of silent emotion that seemed to radiate from those around me, which made it all the more disconcerting. So I stepped away to give myself a bit of space and sat silently on the steps where I was joined by my guide Sharon.

Glaring History

Snatches from my guide book came to mind: about Jerusalem being the birth place of three Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and that it had an incredibly complicated history that went back 5,000 years or more. It was perhaps one of the most fought-over cities in human history and continued to be something of a touchy issue. I knew it would be impossible to take in everything in a day or two, or even a week – there was simply just too much to see and absorb. Even as I sat on those steps, it was difficult to escape the sheer history and its convergence with religion and politics. And even though I belonged to none of the three religions that were birthed here, I started to feel like I was drowning. So Sharon whisked me through an arched pathway above the tunnels of the Western Wall that went back to the time of the First Temple to parts less overwhelming.

We arrived at the Cardo, an excavated thoroughfare going back to the Byzantine era with beautiful pillars, mosaics and even a huge wall mural depicting everyday life in ancient Jerusalem. Encased within towering walls that came up sometime during the 16th century, Sharon told me that the Old City of Jerusalem was made up of four rough quarters, designated Jewish, Christian, Armenian and Muslim. As we took an arbitrary path through them and crossed from one quarter to the other, there were subtle differences and interesting sights.

Narrow, noisy, crowded and colourful alleys in the Muslim quarter became wider and ornate in the Jewish quarter. It included the towering wall and the Cardo as well as a handful of other beautiful structures and squares. In the Christian quarter, there was an abundance of churches but none more popular or stunning than the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (see *Via Dolorosa*). The Armenian quarter was the quietest but also had the beautiful Jerusalem

Way of Sorrow

If the Western Wall is the highlight of Jerusalem for the Jews, Via Dolorosa occupies that position for Christians. Translated to way of sorrows/suffering/grief this is ostensibly the path that Jesus Christ took on the way to crucifixion. It ends at the equally important and iconic Church of Holy Sepulchre, the place he is believed to be crucified and later buried.



Offering prayers in Temple Mount

GETTY IMAGES

The devout faithfully trace it to identify with the suffering of Christ. There is no clear agreement on the length of the path and depending on who you choose to believe, it could be anywhere between 250 m and 600 m, tracing its route via narrow cobbled lanes, arched doorways and gently-stepped avenues.

The route is broken into 14 stations, each of them associated with a specific incident, story or encounter during the last journey. It starts with the place where Jesus is condemned to death and moves through the place where he donned the crown of thorns, where he stumbled and fell three times, where he met his mother Mary, where Simon of Cyrene was commanded to help Jesus and where Veronica wiped blood. Many of the stations are also marked by monasteries which take their names from these incidents and encounters such as the Monastery of Flagellation, Church of Our Lady of Spasm and Chapel of St Veronica.

The last five stations are located within the Church of Holy Sepulchre. A large stone edifice, it has an air of poignancy and piety. It is also dimly lit but beautiful mosaics on the vaulted ceilings reflect the light and give it a very unreal look. Inside is located a large boulder that is protected by glass and is called Calvary or Golgotha where Christ is believed to have been crucified. While all these are accessed by narrow sets of wooden stairs, near the entrance of the church is a large rectangular slab called the Stone of Anointing where Christ's body was prepared for burial.



The mount where Jesus was crucified



Altar in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Citadel or Tower of David, a massive fortress dating back to the 2nd century BC.

We stepped out in between, using one or the other of the eight main gates, which had names such as Damascus, Jaffa, Zion and Herod. Leading off from the Zion Gate was a path flanked by tall limestone walls that led to the Franciscan Monastery. Nearby was another iconic spot – the supposed site of the Last Supper. Called the Cenacle, it was a large room with pillars and Gothic architecture. The building itself is estimated to be around 1,000 years old but is believed to be the place where the monumental event took place. There were a handful of people there but an air of solemnity pervaded the whole place, with people speaking in whispers occasionally.

Simple Beauty

When I stepped out, darkness was already falling and the alleys were almost empty. So Sharon and I headed back to one of the many clusters of cafes in Old City. Since it was a little humid, we sat in a tiny pavement cafe while the owner efficiently put together falafel pockets and iced tea. It was crunchy from fresh lettuce and tomato, while the falafel balls were massive, crispy and mildly spiced. The pita was soft and the creamy hummus beautifully tied everything together. As we chased it down with the cold brew, we also interacted with other tourists and locals, in between discussing the touchy and fraught-with-tension politics of the region.

Then all of a sudden, Sharon jumped up and said, "Let me show you something interesting." I seriously doubted it as my head was still whirling from the staggering amount I had seen through the day and had abandoned any attempts to process it. But I wordlessly followed her as she led me out of the Old City through Jaffa Gate and to the Citadel where a crowd was waiting. She left me for a moment to buy tickets and then led me inside. The fortress was dramatically lit and we walked along the ramparts to a corner where rows of seats had been set up. Soon the lights dimmed, music filled the air and for the next 45 minutes I was treated to a mesmerising and stylised rendering of Jerusalem's history through an incredible sound and light show.

The music faded and the big lights came on but I was still in the grips of the story. Silently we made our way out and I hung behind, wanting to spend a few more moments. I stood on the terrace opposite the Citadel, leaning on an iron fence and stared at the brooding walls. Jerusalem's history, despite the just-concluded show, was still too humongous to wrap my head around. A gentle, cool breeze blew across, bringing with it distant strains from an unseen violin. It seemed to sweep away the heaviness and induced a sense of calm. Quite apart from the other heavy adjectives, it also pointed to simple beauty. Above, beneath and beyond everything, perhaps that is what's most enduring about Jerusalem. ■

WOMEN WITH A MISSION

:: Ishani Duttagupta

Cooking with Stella, a 2009 film directed by Dilip Mehta, brother of filmmaker Deepa Mehta, created quite a buzz in Delhi's diplomatic circles, especially among women. A light comedy, about a Canadian diplomat (played by Lisa Ray) who arrives in Delhi with her husband, was largely shot inside the Canadian High Commission. Many women diplomats could identify with the scenes where Ray's staff were agog about a woman going out to work while her husband stayed at home and learnt cooking. Cut to the summer of 2017 and things have changed somewhat. New Delhi has around 15 women heads of missions, representing countries as diverse as Kenya, Argentina and the Philippines. However, there's still a long way to go, points out Australian High Commissioner Harinder Sidhu, since only around 10% of the missions in India are headed by women. Last month, Sidhu organised a lunch for all her women counterparts where they discussed the issues they have faced, including gender discrimination in foreign services and violence against young women in India.

CB Muthamma, the first woman to join the Indian Foreign Service in 1949, had fought against flagrant gender bias in the services – a woman officer had to, for instance, obtain permission from the government to get married and she could be asked to resign because of that. From the first woman foreign secretary Chokila Iyer to Arundhati Ghose, Nirupama Rao and Meera Shankar, women have made their mark in the services. Yet the number of women IFS officers is a matter of concern. Suryakanthi Tripathi, a retired Indian diplomat and former ambassador to Spain, says that the small number of Indian women who make it to the top jobs in the foreign services is not because of glass ceiling but because very few women opt for the IFS. "Back in 1974, when I joined the foreign service we had two girls in a class of 20 and even after so many years the proportion is not too different," she says.

What are the takeaways from women heading missions in India? On the eve of International Women's Day on March 8, ET Magazine caught up with some of them:

The American Dream-Come-True

MaryKay Loss Carlson

Chargé d'Affaires & deputy chief of mission, US embassy

Reached India: August 2016

Credentials: She was principal deputy executive secretary in the department of state's executive secretariat in Washington, DC. Also served in Santo Domingo, Nairobi and Maputo

What she loves in India: Delhi's lush greenery, flowers and gardens



She's the woman caught in the middle of a big transition in the US administration. But MaryKay Loss Carlson looks at the change as a great opportunity to follow up on the strong legacy set up not just by the Barack Obama administration, but also presidents before him. "The framework is strong and the platform has taken off under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. We now hope to see a tremendous acceleration in the positive trajectory of Indo-US relations under President Donald Trump," she says.

Carlson says the posting has come at a very exciting time and on an assignment which is a dream-come-true. "This is a really good place to be in also because India has such a long and strong tradition of women leaders in positions of power at the highest level," she says.

She looks forward to travelling in India not just to enjoy the diversity of language and culture but also to meet people. "The Indians are noisy and the democracy is messy; but it's the same in America and that's the connection."

She says while the department of state has gender equality in the middle and lower ranks, things become tough for women at senior positions. Across cultures, priorities are considered different for men and women, she says. "The reason why women may not be vying for deputy chief of mission or chief of mission jobs is partly because they may have elder parents to look after at home and moshy away from bidding for senior positions half way around the world."

In the first ten years of her diplomatic career she thought she would remain single but met her husband Aubrey Carlson, a fellow foreign services official, during a trip to Washington, DC. "I had to leave the job I was doing and make a career decision in moving to China because my husband was posted there," she recalls. Although she hated making the choice at that time, she believes it turned out to be good in the long run.

PHOTOS: ASHWANI NAGPAL

Just Right

Suzannah Jessep

Acting New Zealand high commissioner

Reached India: January 2016

Credentials: Senior policy officer at the ministry of foreign affairs and trade, deputy high commissioner to Vanuatu in the Pacific

What she loves in India: Spending time with her kids at Delhi's gardens

Suzannah Jessep can proudly say that the foreign service in her country, New Zealand, is very well represented by women at all levels. While Joanna Kempers, the high commissioner-designate for India will soon be presenting her credentials to President Pranab Mukherjee and then heading the mission, chargé d'affaires Jessep is the deputy high commissioner. The head of immigration in India too is a woman and so are the two trade commissioners and the consular officer. "We are very proud of the fact that a majority of our

staff here in India are women."

Even though she doesn't deny that there is an underlying gender bias in diplomacy she feels that meeting many inspiring women in government and civil society in India has been very positive for her. "Motherhood and childcare are challenges that many women diplomats have to face in their career paths," says Jessep. Husband Mike Hogan, a musician and composer, is at home when she is at work and helps with bringing up their two children – Grace, 8, and Max, 5. "During my previous assignment, my children were very young and it was tiring looking after them. My husband and I made the choice that he remains at home and looks after them when I go out to work. Now they go to school," she says.

Jessep is soaking in India's diversity and the vibrant democracy, but feels confronted every time she finds an instance of a young woman being treated differently from her male counterparts. Even as she plans an outreach programme for international women's day with a local NGO, she will make sure that all male colleagues to join in the activity.



The Crusade of Oz

India is among Australia's largest missions and Harinder Sidhu chose the Delhi posting because she felt the bilateral ties were at a high point. "The relationship has accelerated quite dramatically and spans strategic, economic, cultural and people-to-people ties," she says. Sidhu is the second Indian-origin Australian ambassador in Delhi after Peter Varghese. Sidhu, whose parents are from Punjab, says: "I never visited India when I was growing up, so now I have a great opportunity to explore my heritage and history in Punjab."

She is also part of the Australian foreign ministry's Women in Leadership initiative. "It became evident to us a few years back that women were not moving up the ranks as much as we would like. When I joined the foreign service 30 years ago, exactly 50% of my batch were women, but when we looked at statistics a couple of years ago we found that only 27% of ambassadors were women." She knows it is not easy. She herself returned to Canberra from a foreign posting when her child was six. Now, when her daughter has graduated, Sidhu felt liberated again to take up an overseas posting. Australia has put in place workplace flexibility. It is making efforts to tackle cultural and other unconscious biases and trying to find out why women don't put up their hands to take up leadership positions.

Efforts are also on to support spouses of diplomats. "Traditionally, the diplomat was a man supported by his wife to help in entertaining and other social duties. Now we help spouses who want to work and encourage them to travel and continue with their careers," she says. A lot of Sidhu's activities in India involve engaging with women leaders and running economic empowerment and leadership programmes for women.

Harinder Sidhu
Australian High Commissioner

Reached India:
February 2016

Credentials: A career officer with the department of foreign affairs and trade

What she loves in India: Visiting Hauz Khas Village in Delhi, where shopping, food and monuments mingle

Just Like Home

Judith Kapijimpanga
Zambian High Commissioner

Reached India:
January 2017

Credentials: Was high commissioner in different African countries, including Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda. Was also the cabinet minister

What she loves in India: Street food



Judith Kapijimpanga likes to call herself the new kid on the block having arrived in Delhi in January this year and presenting her credentials last month. This is her first posting outside Africa, and she's excited that she is in a neighbourhood that has so many women heading diplomatic missions, including a few from Africa like Botswana, Uganda and Kenya. Kapijimpanga is all set to focus on economic diplomacy and enhancing bilateral ties with India.

"This is my first time in India, but I feel at home because back in Lusaka we have a large community of people of Indian origin and I even went to school with some of them," she says. While people of Indian origin in Zambia have traditionally been merchants, traders and businesspeople – most of them being fourth-generation Zambians with roots in diverse Indian states – many are making forays into manufacturing and agri industries. "Historically, since the time of Mahatma Gandhi, our two countries have been natural partners and now the Indian government is providing collaborative support in key areas of infrastructure, health and education. But I would also like to see more exchange in tourism because we have a lot to offer such as wildlife and the famous Victoria Falls. We want Indian investors to tap our country," she says.

A mother of four, she looks forward to her two daughters and son attending school and college in Delhi. "My eldest daughter is going to college in Tanzania while my husband has stayed back in Zambia to look after his business," says the high commissioner, who is upbeat about a new era of gender equality in her country, with women being accepted in all walks of life, from senior positions in policymaking to loading trucks.

Auto Motif

Ambassador Melba Pria is known as the autorickshaw diplomat as the humble three-wheeler is her official mode of transport. She is also outspoken enough to publicly criticise the immigration policies of US President Donald Trump and has even suggested that Mexico will welcome Indian IT professionals whom the US may want to send back home.

Pria has been travelling to India for 20 years and loves being in Delhi – she had in fact asked for the posting. "India is a lot like Mexico with its warmth and colours – and I live in awe. But the country also confronts you in different ways," says Pria. Her explanation for the unusual choice of official vehicle is simple – it brings her closer to the people as she travels like millions of Indians do. As for the fumes and pollution, she feels that the Mexican ambassador can breathe the same air that the children in Delhi do, thereby highlighting environmental problems as well. Her own security on the streets of Delhi is of less concern to her than the safety of thousands of women in India.

For her, International Women's Day is about recognising women in rural India who work hard but don't get paid. "They do productive work but don't get paid. We need to recognise their work and contribution," she says.

Melba Pria
Mexican Ambassador

Reached India:
April 2015

Credentials: Ambassador to Indonesia

What she loves in India: Visiting markets in Delhi



Language No Bar

Aashna Kanhai

Ambassador of Suriname

Reached India: April 2012

Credentials: A political appointee, she graduated in law from the Netherlands

What she loves in India: Visiting temples

When Aashna Kanhai arrived in Delhi, she was a single mother with a baby daughter. In the last few years, her daughter has grown up even as Kanhai explores life in India.

There have been challenges – one of the worst being harassment by a former disgruntled male employee of the embassy from whom she faced cyber bullying. “But I took up the matter with the Delhi Police like any woman in Delhi would do rather than use my diplomatic influence,” she says. The matter has been sorted out and she is all praise for the police and the Indian government.

She says her fluency in Hindi helps her to blend in easily. “My daughter and I travel around a lot in the Metro and autorickshaw. We go for picnics and visit monuments and parks,” she says. Kanhai enjoys a special bond with External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, who communicates with her in Hindi. “I feel inspired and empowered by her. Last year, on International Women’s Day, she invited all the women heads of mission in Delhi for tea and that was truly a special occasion.”

Kanhai’s discovery of India goes on alongside her diplomatic duties.



Going the Extra Mile

Maria Cristina Ueltschi

Argentine Ambassador

Reached India: September 2016

Credentials: Served in Nigeria, Spain, Russia and Chile

What she loves in India: Visiting Jaipur

This is Maria Cristina Ueltschi’s first posting as ambassador and she is already enthralled by the colours, sights and sounds of India. Her 17-year-old daughter too is happy in Delhi. The challenge for Ueltschi is “huge”: the fact that Argentina is relatively unknown here – apart from its football team.

She is trying to promote Argentina as a tourist destination for Indians seeking experiences beyond Asia and Europe. She is also pitching the Argentinian Malbec wine and wine tourism. “There are different festivals and activities around the wine industry which we think will be very attractive for Indian tourists looking out for new things,” she says.

She also feels that cultural ties between the two countries can be tapped – starting with a project to translate the works of Jorge Luis Borges into Bangla and Hindi. To celebrate International Women’s Day, Ueltschi is promoting performances by tango singer Gabriela Torres who is touring India. In the last few months, the ambassador has explored quite a bit of the country, including Ajanta, Agra, Jaipur and Jodhpur. And there are many more states to go and many more people to meet. Overall, 2017 promises to be a very busy year for Ueltschi, who feels that a woman diplomat, like all other women professionals, has to go an extra mile to prove her mettle.



Nordic Goal

Ambassador Nina Vaskunlahti, who has been in the foreign service for 32 years, knows that moving around the world is part of a diplomat’s life. Still, India has been daunting. “The size of India with its 29 states is a challenge and I have to prioritise my work and travel,” she says.

She is focused on taking Indo-Finnish relationship to a new level, with stronger ties between the political establishments, businesses and civil society of the two countries. She also spends time in Helsinki talking about India.

“It is an exciting time to be in Delhi when the country is making its way forward,” she says. She wants to make Finland, a small Nordic nation, more visible in India amidst fierce competition from other bigger countries.

When Vaskunlahti joined the foreign service in 1984, there were 11 women and 4 men in her batch. Today 10 of her women classmates hold senior positions in diplomatic service. “Most of them are married with kids and have made it to ambassador posts,” she says proudly about the Nordic enabling environment where gender equality is promoted in all walks of life.

She is married to Dr Andreas Herdina, who lives in Helsinki. But Ambassador Vaskunlahti is happy that they meet regularly and get to spend time together in Helsinki, Delhi or somewhere in between.

Nina Vaskunlahti

Finnish Ambassador

Reached India: September 2016

Credentials: Ambassador to Turkey

What she loves in India: Yoga lessons



Based on Books

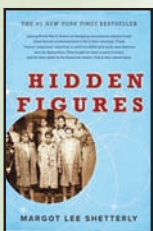
In February, readers invested their time in reading books that were adapted into movies. Here are the top 10 bestsellers of last month that have made it to the big screen and more so to the Oscars 2017:



Lion
Saroo Brierley



Fences
August Wilson



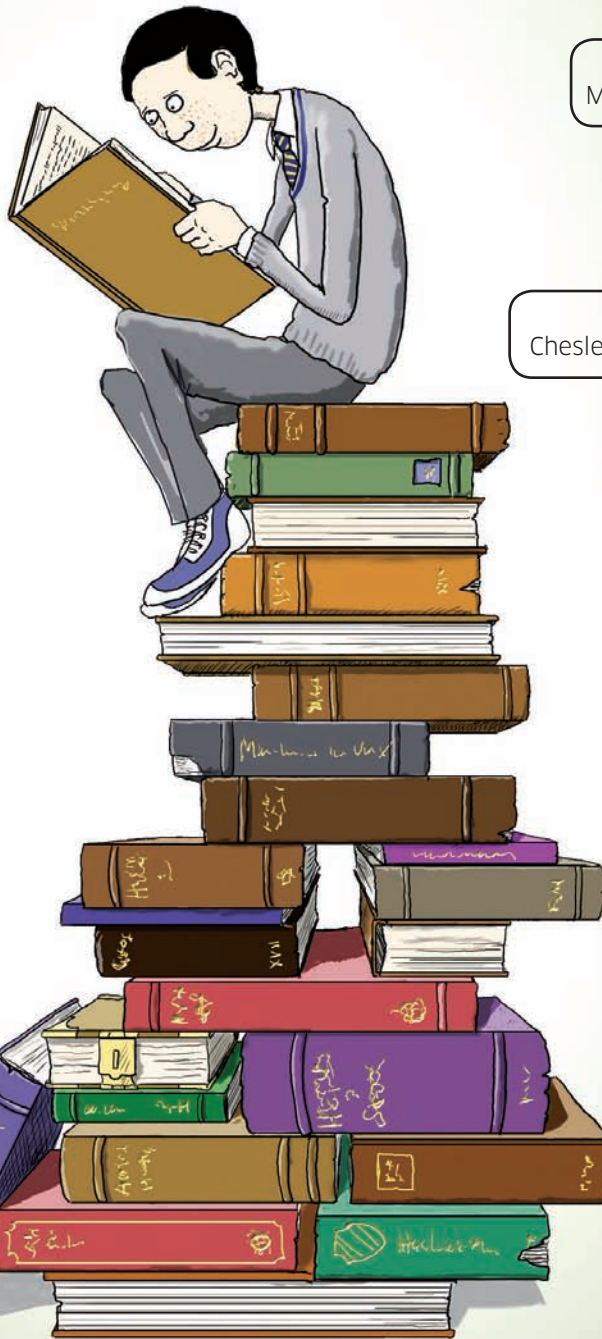
Hidden Figures
Margot Lee Shetterly



The Jungle Book
Rudyard Kipling



Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them
JK Rowling



13 Hours
Mitchell Zuckoff



Sully
Chesley Sullenberger



Story of Your Life
Ted Chiang



Silence
Shusaku Endo



A Man Called Ove
Fredrik Backman



REMEMBERING GAGARIN

Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin was born on March 9, 1934 in the village of Klushino, Russia. Check out some interesting facts about the first man who went to space on April 12:



Gagarin's space mission lasted just 108 minutes, and the trip once around the Earth at **17,500 mph** took less than an hour and a half. He orbited the Earth once in his **Vostok 1** spacecraft

One of the factors contributing to Gagarin's selection for the launch of Vostok 1 was the fact that **he was only 5ft 2 inch tall, a distinct advantage in the spacecraft's cramped two-metre wide cockpit**



He was a **fighter pilot** before becoming a cosmonaut and he continued to fly jet planes in the 1960s

The launch of the **first reusable spacecraft, the space shuttle Columbia**, took place 20 years to the day after Gagarin's historic achievement



Yuri's Night is celebrated every year on April 12 to commemorate milestones in space exploration. A 50-gun salute is held in Moscow. A statue of Gagarin, a gift from the Russian Space Agency, was installed in Greenwich, London in 2013

The data has been collated over a period of one month – February 01-28, 2017

SOURCE: FLIPKART

SOURCE: LIVESCIENCE.COM, PRIMARYFACTS.COM

WEEKLY VECTOR

Quality of Life

These are the leading nations according to the Quality of Life Index 2017:



190.3

AUSTRIA



189.7

GERMANY



184.9

DENMARK



184.7

NEW ZEALAND



183.6

SPAIN



182.9

FINLAND



179.7

US



101.5

INDIA

Compiled by Numbeo.com, the scores are based on purchasing power, pollution, house price to income ratio, cost of living, safety, healthcare, traffic commute time and climate; India is ranked 51



IS THAT WHAT WE ARE CALLING 'BHAI' NOW?

No, not Bollywood's Salman Khan. This is Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, the king of Saudi Arabia.

WHAT ABOUT HIM?

He is on a trip to Indonesia, the first Saudi leader in about half a century to visit the country. Three days of work, six days of holiday.

THAT'S NOT SO UNUSUAL.

I forgot to add that the king arrived with an entourage of 1,500 and 459 tonnes of luggage.

KING SALMAN

PEOPLE, PLACES AND IDEAS MAKING HEADLINES

His packing check list included plates, carpets, gold-coloured elevators and two Mercedes Benz S600s.

NOT REALLY A LIGHT PACKER, THEN.

One could say that. In Jakarta, they were staying in four luxury hotels, with some 10,000 personnel to provide security and over 150 chefs to cater to the party, 24x7.

WHAT ABOUT THEIR PRIVATE HOLIDAY?

That's on the beach, in Bali, where they will be guarded by 2,500 military and police personnel, not to mention naval vessels parked offshore. One of the resorts has put up two-metre-high screens to give their royal guests privacy, as well as a wooden staircase for them to access the water, should they fancy a dip.

HOW ARE HIS HOSTS DEALING WITH THE, AHM, SITUATION?

Well, Indonesia is hoping the visit will yield investments of \$25 billion so they are going all out to ensure their guests comfortable. They have even covered up any statues of naked men and women, lest the Saudi visitors take offence.

PHEW. GUESS THIS IS WHAT IT MEANS TO TRAVEL KING-SIZE!

This is hardly a first. When the Saudi royal family visited the Maldives in 2014 for about a month, they booked resorts on three entire islands, for the princely tab of \$30 million.



FORM IV

Statement about ownership and other particulars about newspaper THE ECONOMIC TIMES MAGAZINE, New Delhi to be published as per Rule 8 of the PRB Act

1. Place of publication : The Times of India
7, Bahadurshah Zafar Marg
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b) Nationality : Indian
c) Address : The Times of India
7, Bahadurshah Zafar Marg
New Delhi-110 002

Name & Address of shareholders of the Company holding more than 1% of the paid up capital as on 28.02.2017.

- 1). Sanmati Properties Ltd., 10, Daryaganj, Ground Floor, New Delhi - 110 002, 2). Bharat Nidhi Ltd, 1st Floor, Express Building, 9-10, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi - 110 002, 3). P.N.B. Finance & Industries Ltd., 10, Daryaganj, Ground Floor, New Delhi - 110 002, 4). Camac Commercial Company Ltd., 1st Floor, Express Building, 9-10, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi - 110 002, 5). Arth Udyog Limited 16-A, Lajpat Nagar -IV, New Delhi - 110 024, 6). Jacaranda Corporate Services Limited, 10, Daryaganj, Ground Floor, New Delhi - 110 002, 7). T.M. Investments Limited., 10, Daryaganj, Ground Floor, New Delhi - 110 002, 8). Ashoka Viniyoga Ltd., 77A, Block-B, Greater Kailash-1, New Delhi - 110 048.

I, Rajeev Yadav, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

March 5, 2017

Rajeev Yadav
Publisher

GET

LISTEN DO BR

OWSE W

ATCH DO

WNLOAD

Hamley's Mega Wheelz Segway

Get It For: ₹79,999

Two wheels but placed side-by-side instead of back to front, like on a cycle. For the beginner, it can be quite intimidating to get on one of these. But once you learn, it's loads of fun. The difference between this and the numerous so-called 'hoverboards' is the handle. On a typical hoverboard, there is much more of a learning curve because you have to find your balance plus use your feet (rather, ankle movement) to turn left and right. Here, the handle takes on the responsibility of turns.

In that sense, it's more like a Segway. Although they use the term Segway here, it has nothing to do with the brand Segway. It comes with a small wireless remote (to power it on/off) and a wall charger. A small backlit display near your feet shows you the speed and battery status though the speed is superfluous because you can't see it while riding. Step on and the built-in motors auto-stabilise it and then you simply lean forward or backward to control the speed. If all this



wasn't enough, the machine also has a built-in Bluetooth speaker that gets fairly loud. Just pair it with your phone like any Bluetooth speaker and you can play your music while you ride along. Obviously, this will affect your battery life so if you want to maximise range, don't use the speaker. A set of LED guide lights in front and back come on when the device is powered on.

We tried it on smooth roads: driveways, paved areas and even inside the house. However, it can't go over any obstacles (even tiny stones or bumps), which means using it on the road is not advised. It's ideal to use inside a large mall or if you live in a large apartment complex with lots of paved areas. And be prepared to take a few spills at first – a bike helmet and elbow/knee pads are recommended.

This is a brand that is sold and serviced by Hamley's in India – so you can stop worrying about poor quality batteries and explosions. Having said that, it is still not something that airlines will allow, either in carry-on or checked baggage. If you need to transport it anywhere, it has to be by road or train. The price is a bit on the higher side too – if you're willing to forego the Hamley's name, we've seen very similar machines priced at ₹25,000 from a brand called iD-rift.

– Hitesh Raj Bhagat

