SPECIAL ISSUE

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# THE WEEK

AUGUST 2, 2020

**EXCLUSIVE:** HOW THE WOMAN MAYOR OF A SOUTH AMERICAN CITY BEAT BACK COVID

LONG-LOST TEMPLE UNEARTHED IN ANDHRA

**THE WEEK VIP** CEC SUNIL ARORA ON BIHAR POLLS

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WORLD WAR II @75

## HOW INDIA SAVED THE WORLD FROM HITLER



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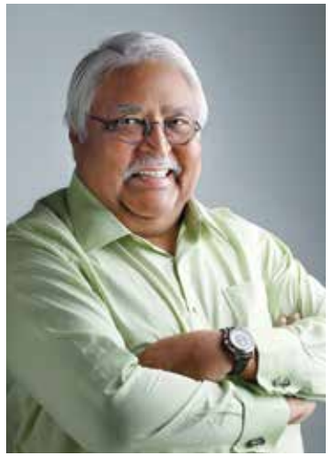



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**DESPITE CONTRIBUTING THE** "largest all-volunteer army in the history of human conflict" to the British war effort, India has largely forgotten its role in World War II. Is it because we see it more as a British effort rather than Indian? But how can we forget it when Indian lives were lost and Indian heroes won honour on the battlefield!

By all accounts, the war was closely watched in India when it was playing out in the European theatres. The forgetting came much later. Perhaps, the most recent, and most public, forgetting of Indian soldiers came when the film director Christopher Nolan whitewashed *Dunkirk* (2017). So this issue of THE WEEK is in remembrance, and from the word go I had no one else in mind to write it other than R. Prasannan, our chief of bureau in Delhi. Prasannan has fully vindicated my decision by writing enthralling stories of the Indian role in the war.

Let me also mention two new regular sections that we introduced last week—Very Informed Person and Dear Doctor. While THE WEEK's VIP is an authority on a chosen topic, Dear Doctor brings in voices from the health care sector. Please do let us have your feedback. As always, I love hearing from you.

Now, back to the issue. Relying on memories and my grandfather's notes, my father has made a few interesting observations about World War II in his autobiography. My grandfather, K.C. Mammen Mappillai, was a political prisoner in Poojappura Central Jail during the war. He was housed with other Congress activists who had opposed the policies of dewan Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar. As his fellow detainees were also quite interested in news about the war, Mammen Mappillai would read out the newspaper to them and discuss every detail. Having been a schoolteacher and always a keen follower of international developments, he took great pleasure in these interactions.

Not long after Mammen Mappillai was imprisoned, a young undertrial was put in the cell next to his. A former member of the Congress Party, P. Krishna Pillai was by then a leading light of the Communist Party of India. So much so that in Kerala he is known simply as Comrade, an honour denied to titans who followed in his footsteps. Pillai, too, was part of the 'salons' that analysed the war. Mammen Mappillai describes him as a "brilliant young man... fluent in English and Malayalam".

Their friendship continued well after they were released from jail, until Pillai died of a snakebite in August 1948. My grandfather mourned him deeply. I look at their incarceration and friendship as symbols of a principled time, when men embraced their convictions unto death and loved one another sincerely even when they believed in two entirely different political philosophies.

Politically, too, World War II was seen differently in India. I have read that the leftists in India saw the early part of the war as a clash between imperialists, and went hammer and tongs only when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. The Congress saw fascism as a greater danger and was prepared to support the British war effort—but only in return for the right to self-government. The detailed story is on Page 48.

I feel it is easy to look at World War II as a war against Adolf Hitler. Sleep well; the bogeyman is dead. But it becomes difficult when we look at the war as a clash of ideologies. As a war against dictatorship, majoritarianism and the stifling of voices. Suddenly we realise that there is no happily ever after and that eternal vigilance is the price of democracy.

Eternal vigilance.

Philip Mathew

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**SPECIAL ISSUE**

## INDIA & WORLD WAR II

From the beginning to the end, World War II was India's war as much as it was of any other people. Indians fought on every front. THE WEEK expounds the forgotten story of India's participation and influence on the outcome of the war

PLUS

- The major battles that Indians fought and the heroes that won laurels
- Tracing the series of events during the war that resulted in India's independence
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## Entertainment guaranteed

The presidential election in the US is going to be crucial for all Americans. Nothing can be said about the final outcome, as the two contestants have ample time to put their feet in their mouths and make the other appear like a saint ('War by other means,' July 19).

The choice, I suppose, is between the lesser of the two evils, the one who blows his own 'Trump'et, or the other who 'Bide's his time for next four years.

The US is a superpower, not because of its presidents, but in spite of its presidents. For non-stop entertainment and additions to the lexicon, Americans have to continue with the impetuous Trump.

**Parthasarathy Mandadi,**
**On email.**

If past elections for the US presidency are any indication, pre-election support may not necessarily reflect in the final result.

Trump is a maverick with many aces up his sleeves. With the advantage of being the incumbent president, Trump's chance of winning one more time cannot be discounted, unless his ham-handed approach to handling the pandemic upsets his applecart. As regards Biden, it suffices to assume that the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

**Raveendranath A.,**
**On email.**

## Total chaos

So far, Maharashtra has had no reprieve from the pandemic ('Besieged and vulnerable,' July 19). The state has been locked in a battle not only with foes but also friends. Orders are issued and withdrawn in no time. The differences among ruling parties are using up reams of newsprint.

All said, the success story of Dharavi is a consolation prize to the state government, as the containment model there has been appreciated by many.

**D.K. Mishra,**
**Mumbai**

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POWER POINT | SACHIDANANDA MURTHY



# Prevention and fear

After ruthlessly launching the Rajasthan Police against his own party's ministers and MLAs, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has hurriedly withdrawn the general permission given to the Central Bureau of Investigation to take up cases in the state. The order came just when it seemed that the Centre was going to transfer to the CBI an audiotape case against Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and some MLAs, which was being probed by Rajasthan's Special Operations Group.

The Gehlot camp insisted that it had ordered the SOG investigation to expose an "unholy nexus" between the BJP and Congress rebels led by Sachin Pilot. It also alleged that the Centre was misusing the Enforcement Directorate to raid two businessmen friends of the chief minister's family. But, the BJP argued that the ED raids sought to expose rampant corruption around the chief minister.




The ED, the National Investigation Agency and the income tax department—unlike the CBI—do not need state government permission as they investigate crimes under the Central list, like terrorism and tax evasion. But in the case of CBI investigation of crimes not on the Central list, the states can withhold permission under the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act.

One of the cases that the CBI is investigating in Rajasthan involves the Olympian discus thrower Krishna Poonia, who is a Congress MLA. She is accused of pressuring a police officer in Churu district who killed himself.

The CBI has long been at the centre of a tussle between the Union government and states. A few years ago, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh withdrew consent for CBI operations. However, Andhra Pradesh cancelled its decision after Jagan Mohan Reddy replaced N. Chandrababu Naidu as chief minister in 2019.

It was in 1977 that the CBI was denied investigative freedom in a particular state for the first time. The Janata Party government at the Centre had at that time decided to act on a corruption charge-sheet against Karnataka chief minister D. Devaraj Urs of the Congress. He quickly withdrew permission to the CBI and appointed an inquiry commission headed by former High Court judge Mir Iqbal Hussain. The Centre appointed its own commission, headed by retired Supreme Court judge A.N. Grover. The apex court ruled that the Grover commission had the sole right to probe the charge-sheet. But, Grover could not use the CBI as Urs had withdrawn permission.

Gehlot's preventive action would not stop the Centre from using other agencies. The NIA is under the Union home minister, and the ED and the income tax department are under the Union finance minister. Until the 1970s, the CBI was part of the home ministry. But, the prime minister's office felt it gave too much power to the home minister, so the agency was placed under the department of personnel and training, which is under the prime minister. Later, the Supreme Court gave supervisory powers to the Central Vigilance Commission, to provide autonomy to the CBI. However, the three vigilance commissioners are appointed by the Central government.

The Congress alleged that Central agencies were "skilfully" used to topple its governments in Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. If Gehlot survives Pilot's revolt, he would be in a strong position to take on the Centre, which may bide its time. For now, CBI teams can continue to work on cases in Rajasthan that are already registered and have been referred by the Jodhpur High Court or the Supreme Court.

ILLUSTRATION **BHASKARAN**

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PMO BEAT

R. PRASANNAN



# Work from home or the house?

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu are caught in a dilemma. How they will solve it should tell us a lot about the success or otherwise of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Digital India.

Don't get me wrong. The lords of the two houses of Parliament are not being asked to pronounce judgements on issues of bandwidth, internet speed, mobile penetration or patronage to Mukesh Ambani's Jio. Those are issues being handled by officials in the ministry of information technology who tell us that half of "we the people" of India are linked to the net. Jio Ho!



Birla and Naidu have a different task. The two gents have to decide how they will hold the monsoon session of Parliament.

With a Covid-19 lockdown, an economic breakdown, and a military drawdown being negotiated in Ladakh, the monsoon session is expected to be thunderstormy. Already, Congress non-president Rahul Gandhi has been tweeting fire and fury on Modi and his government, though most other opposition leaders are keeping their masked mouths shut.

How Modi will weather this monsoon storm is none of Birla's or Naidu's business. Their problem is how to hold the session itself.

There is a pandemic wreaking havoc in the country, and the virus is in no mood to vanish, vaccine or no vaccine. The Indian Council of Medical Research has given a deadline of August 15 to scientists to make a vaccine, ostensibly for Modi to announce it from the ramparts of the Red Fort. But wiser men of science say vaccines take their own sweet time to evolve, and that anything forced out from the test-tubes before time would end up like being Gandhari's children.

But the houses cannot wait till the cows and the cow-poxes (which made the first vaccine) come home. Article 85(1) of the Constitution says, "The President shall from time to time summon each house of Parliament to meet at such time and place as he thinks fit, but six months shall not intervene between its last sitting in one session and the date appointed for its first sitting in the next session."

Six months is 180 days, give and take a few days. Now, the budget session ended on March 23, and so the monsoon session ought to start on or before September 19—that is not just parliament protocol but the law. The Covid-19 protocol has it that people have to be physically distanced from one another. With 543 honourable MPs in Birla's house and 245 in Naidu's, neither knows how to seat them even a metre apart.

When they run out of laws, rules and norms, law courts and legislatures look to precedents. But neither Kaul & Shakdhar, who are the Manus of Indian parliamentary practice, nor Erskine May, who is the master of Westminster practices, is of any help. When the Great Plague of 1665 killed a quarter of Londoners, the British Parliament adjourned to the safer environs of Oxford. Not possible for us, with the whole of India being unsafe. But the staff have checked the enormous halls of the Vigyan Bhavan as a possible venue.

Another option is to improve on what the US Congress did when the Spanish flu hit them a century ago. They closed the public galleries. Birla and Naidu are thinking of seating a few MPs in the galleries.

A third option, being explored, is to have a webinar-style session. Several parliaments have already gone digital, partly or wholly. A few rules will have to be amended, which they can do in one sitting and then adjourn to their homes.

But are our MPs ready? More importantly, is the National Informatics Centre, which runs the government's digital ops, ready? Therein lies the test for Digital India.

ILLUSTRATION **BHASKARAN**

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INFOCUS

# Read A Book, And Help Preserve Our Environment

Climate change is here. As its impact intensifies over time, it is the children and young people of today who will face the worst effects. But far from being passive victims, young people all over the world have begun to fight back on a scale never seen before. Whether through education, technology, science or law young people far and wide are tapping into their skills to speak up for climate action. Ms. Rajlakshmi Vijay Patil is one such young firebrand from Mumbai, who cares for our Climate and has undertaken a lot of initiatives to preserve our environment & support the underprivileged sections of the society. Rajlakshmi Patil a 17-year-old student of Aiglon College in Switzerland, is a dedicated environmentalist & social activist.

She has organised a successful Mangrove Cleanliness Drive in 2019 and has participated in regular beach clean ups and other environmental activities in Mumbai & Switzerland. She is also involved in social advocacy in India, founding the Charity Soccer League in 2018, an initiative to raise funds to improve the medical amenities for paediatric patients.




Her latest initiative with the D.Y.Patil University - 'D-CAL'(Climate Action Lab) which is an institutional body that encourages student participation, engagement, and contribution to environmental action. D-CAL is led by academicians from D.Y. Patil University and activists from the local community. As an organisation, it seeks to promote interdisciplinary dialogue that is rooted in both comparative and contemporary contexts of problem-solving and policy action. As a first step towards this initiative she has directed her artistic energies to publish a book of beautiful poems which she has been writing since the age of 13. Rajlakshmi enjoys expressing her emotions through poetry and believes that words have the power to change the world.

**MYSTIC** - is a collection of poems that dwells into the beauty of nature and the phases of life. The poems express her perception of nature during her stay on the serene locales of the Swiss alps and her time spent in Mumbai by the coast. The rhythmic use of words and description of the natural surrounding leaves the readers bereft of the stupendous imagery of life and the natural world. It is a collection of poems written for and by a teenage girl undergoing a plethora of insightful moods penned down into words that showcase her emotions. This book contains poems that deal with subjects that vary from overcoming the challenges in life to accepting oneself.She has published this book with the sole thought of raising funds to fight Climate Change. All the proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to D-CAL. These funds will help facilitate D-CAL research proposals and tackl important ongoing Environmental issues.Purchasing a book is almost always a good choice, and if we can do so by lending our hand to a great cause, it doubles the joy. The very least we can do to contribute towards this great social cause of addressing Climate Change, is to buy this book, and help in giving back to our society.Be prepared to dive into a realm of fantasy as Rajlakshmi's book 'Mystic' will awaken your senses and make you look at your surroundings from a mystical view, at the same time you would have done your little bit to help our environment be a better place.

**"MYSTIC – An Anthology of 16 poems"** is available to be purchased on Amazon & BooksCamel.

**Sunil Arora**

*chief election commissioner*

# Confident of holding elections during pandemic

BY SONI MISHRA

The pandemic has thrown up new challenges, and conducting polls will not be easy, says Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora. He is, however, confident of holding the Bihar elections, due in October/November, on time. Requisite changes are being made in electoral processes, he says, to ensure that safety guidelines are followed during campaigning and voting. Excerpts from an interview:

**In view of Covid-19, how confident are you of holding elections on schedule in Bihar?**
Since its inception, the Election Commission has been conducting elections amid varied circumstances. In the recent Rajya Sabha elections, [our ability to] conduct polls amid a pandemic got tested. Though the scale was smaller, our new standard operating procedures (SOPs) are [being] laid down. We are confident that we will be able to fine-tune logistics and requirements for the forthcoming elections.

**How will elections be different now?**
Electoral processes would be suitably modified to ensure social distancing, sanitisation and the use of masks and gloves. We conducted the Rajya Sabha polls quite successfully, and even made arrangements for Covid-19 positive voters. All guidelines pertaining to electoral machinery, voters, political parties and candidates are being tweaked. Training and capacity-building of electoral machinery is underway.

**But campaigning involves rallies and gatherings.**
The commission will ensure that SOPs are followed. During campaign, political parties will have to ensure that the safety guidelines issued by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) are adhered to. Any violation would be an offence under the Disaster Management Act.

**How will social distancing be ensured at polling booths?**
The number of voters per polling station will be restricted to 1,000, as opposed to the current limit of 1,500. The chief electoral officer in Bihar has already identified 33,797 additional polling stations. A requirement of 1.8 lakh additional polling personnel, sector officers, vehicles has been worked out. Additional EVMs and VVPATs have been provided.

**Any concerns about voting percentage being affected because of Covid-19?**
CEO Bihar has been directed to launch a campaign to enrol citizens left out [of the voters' list]. This will help migrants who have returned and are not registered as voters. Postal ballots for senior citizens and Covid-19 positive persons will help ensure that the vulnerable sections are not exposed to risk during voting. We shall step up the use of digital technologies in voter awareness.

**The Election Commission has proposed expanding the ambit of postal ballot, but it ran into political opposition.**
The NDMA guidelines for Covid-19 state that vulnerable persons, including those over 65 years, should stay at home. The commission considered the extraordinary situation and recommended extension of postal ballot to two identifiable categories—voters above 65 years and voters who are either Covid-19 positive or suspected to have the disease—to avoid their presence in polling stations and yet not deprive them of their voting rights. However, the Commission has decided not to extend the facility of postal ballot to voters over 65 years of age in the Assembly elections in Bihar and byelections due in near future in view of constraints of logistics, manpower and safety protocols of Covid-19. But the facility will be available to those who are over 80 years of age, people with disabilities, voters engaged in essential services and voters who are Covid-19 positive or suspected to be infected and in home or institutional quarantine.




**Political parties said the changes were unconstitutional.**
The statutory framework prescribed under Section 60(c) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, says that any person belonging to a class of persons notified by the Election Commission in consultation with the government can cast his vote by postal ballot. The commission had earlier extended the facility to three categories of voters—80 years and above, those with disability and those employed in essential services. This was notified on October 22, 2019. The commission did not receive any concern on this from any stakeholder, including political parties.

**With electioneering moving online, how will it be monitored?**
We have elaborate mechanisms of model code of conduct. Candidates have to provide details of their social media accounts while filing nomination. All expenditure on social media shall have to be accounted for, and advertisements pre-certified by the Media Certification and Monitoring Committees. Regulations applicable to electronic media also apply to social media.The commission, after consultations with social media platforms, has successfully executed a voluntary code of ethics for social media since the 2019 general elections. Necessary advisories will be issued to political parties.

**UPCOMING ELECTIONS**

**Bihar**
October/November 2020
243 seats

**Assam**
April/May 2021
126 seats

**Kerala**
April/May 2021
140 seats

**Puducherry**
April/May 2021
30 seats

**Tamil Nadu**
April/May 2021
234 seats

**West Bengal**
April/May 2021
294 seats

**POLLS IN PANDEMIC**

- Electoral processes being tweaked to comply with social distancing norms and safety measures
- No rallies; political parties will have to improvise campaign strategies
- Candidates will have to provide details of social media accounts; expenditure on social media campaigns to be monitored
- Remote voting being examined by experts

# BATTLE FOR GUAYAQUIL

## How the woman mayor of Ecuador's biggest city beat back the pandemic

BY MILAN SIME MARTINIC



TAKING THE LEAD
Guayaquil Mayor Cynthia Viteri with Vice Mayor Joshua Sanchez Camposano

Covid-19 has taken more territory and broken more defences across the planet than Genghis Khan, Attila and Alexander the Great combined, and it looms over humanity with a menace that appears to leave no refuge. At the current rate of doubling of casualties, the world could see some 36 million deaths in a year, and over 140 million dead just four months later. In this world war, humanity is fighting to survive and dominate a strand of DNA that itself is hard-coded to survive and dominate. The battles fought in this war are a record of reference for the rest of humanity.

"The war on Covid-19 cannot be fought in the emergency rooms and ICUs but in its breeding grounds—in the homes and neighbourhoods," says Guayaquil Mayor Cynthia Viteri. "You have to take from it the element of surprise. Using the knowledge that you develop, you avoid open battle in the hospitals, you launch raids and surprise the virus in the zones and barrios where it is beginning to gain ground." The Ecuadorian city of three million was the earliest example of Covid-19 horror in the Americas. Now, it deserves another title: The city that beat back Covid-19.

Viteri knows well that waves of aftershock might come, yet she is focusing on the takeaways from what has already happened and why it happened when the city was at its lowest moment—deaths in one day—and how it turned the tide, reaching a zero-death toll in just 34 days.

As Covid-19 stormed through her city, Viteri was in quarantine along with her husband and son—the three of them had tested positive for Covid-19. At a time when there was no clear playbook and the central government was not able to provide health and sanitation services, she began a campaign that relied on a public-private voluntary effort and top-down implementation and leadership. By increasing the city's hospital, ICU and direct piped-in oxygen-delivery capacity in record time and by addressing the funeral, morgue and cemetery shortages, Viteri delivered the services her city needed and her county was unable to provide.

Additional help came from the city's former mayor and two-time presidential candidate, Jaime Nebot, who lent his skill and connections to set up an emergency committee to secure early-treatment medicines through a global acquisition effort. His efforts procured PPEs and later helped rework food supply chains. "The goal was to ensure populations did not have to mix with large groups far from their homes to acquire food,"he said, and that "people did not have to choose between dying of hunger vs dying of coronavirus."

Viteri and Nebot then focused on hunting the virus through door-to-door visits to thousands of homes every week, providing sanitation, disinfection, pest-control, food and medicines. Those presenting symptoms were given treatment and kept in quarantine at home; when a home was not adequate for quarantine, an ambulance took them to one of the newly outfitted hospitals.

"People knew they would be in a good place, with good medical attention, good care, oxygen, food, and that they would not be cut off from their families," says Viteri. A weekly survey of homes with sample-population testing helped identify hot spots and allowed the city to respond quickly to the area and cut-off any foothold the virus may be gaining. To ensure there were enough doctors and nurses, Viteri says "the city provided hotel rooms for health care workers brought in to supplement the hospitals, and for those who wanted to remain isolated from their families".

As streets that once thronged with life stood empty, fully equipped teams walked the cracked sidewalks daily with one tense purpose—to ensure that the virus had no place to hide. The city delivered more than one million food kits to help keep people at home. It hired some 200 women to sew masks to outfit those who could not afford one.

During the same time, the city launched a telemedicine platform for those who could not attend to their medical appointments because of Covid-19, and for those suffering stress and mental illness as well as for those with addiction problems. This service, run through the

city website, allows the continued employment of doctors in risk categories and begins with a symptoms evaluation of callers to screen for Covid-19.

The city also embraced the use of SOSAFE, a citizen participation smart-city app, to establish a direct channel of communication with all levels of the municipality. From their phones, free of cost, citizens can contact city departments from telemedicine, health services, to trash pick-up, to police and fire services.

There have been no deaths for 36 days since May 10 as of the date of this interview. Though many early steps can be criticised, it was textbook crisis leadership. Viteri and her city, the civic leaders, the former mayor, the emergency committee, the doctors, the front-line workers, the brigades, and the people have together beat back the pandemic in Guayaquil.

Despite that, its citizens are defeated, says Guayaquil-based sociologist Cesar Aizaga-Castro. "There is no optimism; there is conformism,"he says. As Guayaquil got infected and the authorities were not in a capacity to intervene in a direct manner, people felt they were without a government, without support, and lacking all the capacity to mount a fight, says Aizaga-Castro.

The media did not have accurate information, people suspected they were hiding information, he says. "Lack of hospitals, lack of the necessary equipment. In a matter of weeks, you could see bodies in the streets. People died and died," he says.

People realised there was total chaos, and at that time lost all confidence in the media, says Aizaga-Castro. "People did not follow the quarantine, they went out because they had to," he says. "They lived of what they sold, their little businesses. The country did not have a structure of authority to handle the situation." That is when the local government decided to take control, he says.



AFP

**LIVING ON THE EDGE**
Relative of a victim of Covid-19 in Guayaquil waits with a coffin for the remains

At first, city hall did not make the case for staying at home, says Aizaga-Castro. Soon, most people realised that everyone had a family member affected, that there was contamination in places like markets. "There were people who had someone sick at home but did not go out to seek help because they knew that going out meant being exposed and getting sick," he says. "There was shock and great anguish because you knew your neighbours had died. We could see this happening, and wondered who could save us."

Many people went into hospitals and their relatives never even saw their bodies again. Parents were saying goodbye to their children, and telling them it would be ok if they were incinerated, says Aizaga-Castro. "You could see common graves, you looked up and could see vultures circling over the hospitals," he says. "Guayaquil smelled of death."

Guayaquil attorney José Chiriboga-Hungría says the reaction of the national government was late, and that even the minister of health resigned during the height of the onslaught saying the government had not released sufficient money to face the pandemic. Facing the abyss, people even questioned Viteri's Covid-19 infection, notes Chiriboga-Hungría. "People died in hospitals or in their homes, the bodies laid there for three to seven days without burial," he says. "Cemeteries were not ready to receive so many dead. People chose to take their deceased relatives (out) to the streets to ward off the smells and contagion." That is what the world saw on its TV screens.

> Viteri boiled down her mission to two simple problems: save lives and feed the people. The strategy: coordination and discipline.

"In hospitals, the bodies of the deceased rested in containers, some without identification...," says Chiriboga-Hungría. "And, around this there was much corruption...where certain people charged the relatives of the deceased, to be able to help identify the bodies."

Yet, the saddest thing was that due to restrictions, says Chiriboga-Hungría, "many Guayaquileños could not say goodbye to their loved ones; others, to this day, have not found their relatives' bodies."

**Why? Why? Why? Why?**

*Por que? Por que? Por que? Por que?* The mayor recognised the voice of her neighbour lamenting the death of a loved one. As she quarantined at home with her family, Viteri felt the grief pierce through her in a way that forms a knot in her throat even today. Death was everywhere. It was heartache that went on and on, she says. "It was confusion—a sea convulsing with more confusion," says Viteri of her time at home in isolation. Asked to recall those moments, Viteri closes her eyes and visualises herself in the middle of waves as great as mountains that come from every direction—with every statistic, with every wail of an ambulance, with every death report. "And I am in one of those waves, and I need to—with my team, with the military, with the police, with all who help me—go and wrestle life from death," says Viteri. And, she did that.

Covid-19 had crushed the medical system, the funeral system, the morgues; in hospitals, people had to walk past wrapped bodies without even knowing who was inside, recounts the mayor. "Those were the worst days of my life," she says.

The city's worst day was many days, adds Viteri. Guayaquil was a city in turmoil, its local government overwhelmed, a national government absent, people agitated, a hectic chaos in the street, public workers irate, exhausted resources, food scarce, general despair, and no clear way forward. "Suddenly, there was nothing certain and the population lost total confidence. The country did not have corresponding authorities to manage the situation," says Aizaga-Castro.

This is when Viteri stopped looking for help elsewhere and took charge. Structurally, she did not have all the authority, says Viteri. As dictated by the country's constitution, the entirety of the health and sanitation systems come under the jurisdiction of the national government, leaving the city in charge of water, sewer, trash, transportation, markets and the like. But that would no longer matter. She would assume the responsibilities in front of her and take charge of rebuilding the collapsed health, funeral, morgue and cemetery systems.

**Leadership and strategy**

With taking charge came clarity of purpose and Viteri boiled down her mission to two simple problems: save lives and feed the people. The strategy: coordination and discipline. Guayaquil was lucky it could rely on the emergency committee to generate strategies to reverse the crisis. The committee included Viteri, business titans, doctors, pharmaceutical executives, health professionals, farmers and members of civil society. If this was war, this would be the city's counterattack.

Focused on her two-pronged war strategy, Viteri set out to marshal money and assistance, commandeering the yearly budgets of the city's departments, including those for public works destined to commemorate the city's 200th anniversary, and taking on responsibilities beyond her mayoral powers. To save lives, Viteri's team began to look at death as one of three tactical areas: attending to the dead, epidemiologic control and attending to those alive. Each tactic engendered its own strategies.

The city moved to take care of the bodies in the streets and in homes. Viteri moved to address the shortage of funeral homes, morgues and cemeteries by securing freezer trucks outside hospitals, building cemeteries and contracting a company to pick up bodies. In its first week, it



**CARING HANDS**
Health care workers collecting swab from a person in Guayaquil

collected 500 bodies off the streets.

To attack the pandemic, the city hired hundreds of doctors and medical personnel, spread them in satellite medical tents so that people would not have to go into the high-concentration areas of the city and risk infection. Viteri also set up free-of-cost birthing clinics so expectant mothers could give birth without fear of exposure. Then came what she considers the coup de grace—the deployment of medical teams going door-to-door to find the virus. This entails visits by special brigades to homes to evaluate early symptoms and get immediate attention to those in need so they would not worsen and arrive at the hospitals too late. "We are chasing the virus," says Viteri. "Instead of it chasing us."

To get this done required work on several parallel tracks. It began with outfitting 51 health centres, field hospitals, outreach tents in peripheral areas, hiring some 500 doctors, adding 25 ambulances, turning the convention centre into a hospital and finishing an abandoned construction project for a second hospital with 300 beds. When it was clear oxygen supply would be a problem, the city set up an oxygen-generating plant to supply piped-in oxygen to hospitals and to stem the speculation that had inflated the cost of an oxygen tank from $50 to $1,500.

While governments from Washington to Buenos Aires to La Paz were frantically purchasing ventilators, Guayaquil noticed that half of the patients on ventilators were dying, so they focused on treating people before they needed to be intubated. To that end, the effort focused on purchasing medicines for early-stage treatment and on keeping people off the streets to avoid infection. For the quarantine to work, Viteri wanted to make sure her people were fed. Ensuring food entailed a shortening the supply chain, cutting out middlemen and supplying neighbourhood stores directly.

Prevent. Treat. Avoid death. To build that wall of defence, the cornerstone would be quarantine. To prevent the strategy from collapsing upon itself, the emergency committee set out to address the social impact of staying home without an income.

Guayaquil re-engineered supply chains with substantial participation from the private sector. Cerveceria Nacional, the country's largest brewery, led a group of other companies in the logistics battle. To stop price speculation, they began by supplying nearly 5,000 neighbourhood stores. Donations from farmers provided some 1.5 lakh fruit deliveries to the neediest neighbourhoods.

Eventually, in-home visits delivered one million food reserves, vitamins, supplements, even diapers, at the same time disinfecting, fumigating homes, leaving disinfecting kits, chlorine and some 1.4 lakh food kits to 5,000 families each week.

It is an elaborate campaign to effectively chase the virus, and effective follow-up is necessary. Viteri describes the work with a statistical survey group that samples 1,600 homes across 17 districts of the city, identifying where the virus is so that efforts can be concentrated there to put down any spike. Teams are there the next week. Nobody is waiting to be surprised.

This is all built on a monumental effort that was mounted to outfit, retrofit, and supply all hospitals for the central government as well as all clinics, public and private. They were all stocked, free of charge, with a cocktail of drugs for early treatment.

Medicine acquisition was undertaken by a team of the country's top private sector leaders—pharmaceutical executives, buyers, importers, custom-clearing specialists—who fanned their efforts across Europe, Latin America and China. The team worked for free, says Nebo.

"*Dos prioridades* (two priorities)," repeated Viteri. "People did not want to go to public hospitals. They were afraid," and with good reason, says Viteri. "They would go into the hospital and they would not come out, even when they died," referring to the corruption that extended to making bodies "disappear" only to be found for a fee.

"People lived the tragedy in their own homes, only seeking help when they turned gravely ill, often too late," says Viteri. "We changed the strategy, we went out to find them before, at early onset and intermediate stages to get them immediate treatment to avoid complications so they could be saved." At the time of writing this story, they had assisted 1,02,573 patients who never went to a health centre, and there had been 36 days of zero deaths.

"But our vigilance continues," says the mayor.

Viteri's arsenal relies on the telemedicine initiative so that people can keep up with non-Covid-19 related medical care while keeping them off the streets and providing doctors in vulnerable groups a way to continue to work while helping the war effort.

In the post-mortem as to how and why Guayaquil ended up as one of the hardest-hit cities in the world, the start of community spread is placed by experts on a March 4 soccer game for the Copa Libertadores that had about 20,000 spectators.

"It resulted in massive contagion which led to the saturation of hospitals, institutions that collapsed and couldn't handle the number who came for help; besides, they didn't have enough equipment to fight the contagion," says Chiriboga-Hungría. "The reaction of the national government was late." He also calls out Viteri for a late response and controversial missteps early on.

In the end, the battle plan has succeeded, and there is one takeaway of global import: it is essential to control the element of surprise by surprising the virus in early stages. It is the one thing Viteri wishes she had known before all of this started.

What about the city's 200th anniversary later this year? It will be marked with a memorial to the 10,000 dead, says Viteri.

The city's response to Covid-19 was not perfect. But during the battle there emerged a healthy respect for what the virus can do, and a steely willingness to do anything it takes to defeat it. The mayor is not declaring mission accomplished. Vigilance, she says. "Every day." She says she will never stop.

"Vigilance," she says, again. "Unwavering."

She looks up.

INFOCUS

## MANAV RACHNA INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH AND STUDIES : QUACQUARELLI SYMONDS BESTOWS MRIIRS WITH QS 4-STAR (OVERALL) RATING

Quacquarelli Symonds has bestowed the QS 4 star rating to Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies (MRIIRS). This is a highly commendable achievement as no University in India has yet been rated QS 5 star (overall) and only very few have been bestowed with the overall QS 4-Stars.

As acknowledgment of the strong teaching learning processes, MRIIRS has been rated QS 5 Star for **Teaching, Employability, Academic Development, Facilities, Social Responsibility and Inclusiveness.** This is testimony to the quality standards and exceptional performance of Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies across these six most important parameters that impact a student's career progression. The rating bestowed by QS is valid for a period of three years (upto July 2023).

The university has also been accorded a QS 4-Star rating for the Program Strength of its Computer Science and Engineering degree courses. Very recently, the University Grants Commission has accorded 12 B status under the UGC Act, 1956 to Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies (deemed-to-be-university) which makes MRIIRS eligible for Central assistance (UGC grant) for furthering the research and development initiatives by students and faculty. This shall serve as a huge motivation for students and faculty




members who shall be able to pursue major/minor research projects with travel grants, grants for attending seminars/workshops or support for establishing start-ups. PhD students or those pursuing higher studies in research shall be eligible for scholarships and grants. This Status is also an affirmation of the contribution of Manav Rachna, not just in India but at the global platform through its multifarious innovations for social good.



INTERVIEW

**Hardik Patel**
*working president, Gujarat Congress*

# We will avoid the politics of 'opposing'

BY NANDINI OZA

**EVER SINCE** he launched the agitation in 2015, demanding quota for Patidars, Hardik Patel has been in the limelight for his fiery speeches and the sedition charges levelled against him. He openly supported the Congress in the 2017 Gujarat assembly polls and joined the party in 2019. Now, Patel, 26, has been appointed working president of the Gujarat Congress. Apparently, this was done to clip the wings of president Amit Chavda, who is considered ineffective, and also to infuse new blood into the party. Patel's elevation also aims to balance caste equations. While Chavda is an OBC leader, opposition leader Paresh Dhanani is a Leuva Patel and Hardik is a Kadva Patel.

In an exclusive interview with THE WEEK, Patel talks about his challenges and plans:

**Q/ Were you expecting to be appointed as state working president?**

A/ It happened suddenly so I was a bit worried, too. It is necessary to shoulder this responsibility as, perhaps for the first time in its history, the party has given this [role] to a 26-year-old.

For me, it is not happiness. It is a responsibility. I will surely succeed. But, for this, I will have to start work from now. My target is to have 50 strong youth in each of the 16,000 villages of Gujarat. They should fight for the party, die for the party. They will be used in the 2022 assembly elections.

We will also keep away from the politics of 'opposing' and focus on solving problems. For example, if there is an electricity problem in a village, we do not have to go there and hurl abuses at Narendra*bhai* (Prime Minister Modi) or the Gujarat government. The idea is to see how the government solves the problem.

If someone asks about the growing unemployment, I would say that it is because of the wrong policies of the government. First fill up three lakh posts that are vacant; that will help three lakh families.

**Q/ How do you feel?**

A/ It is nice that a farmer's son has got this opportunity after just five years of public and social life. It is a big thing that Rahul*ji* and Sonia*ji* have kept faith in me. Priyanka*ji* has also supported [me]. When I met Sonia*ji*, she told me, "Youth like you are needed in the party."

**Q/ What are the challenges you face?**

A/ The biggest challenge is to bring people (into) the party. My first responsibility is to bring in youth between 18 and 24. They have never seen Congress rule.

**Q/ What else do you plan to do?**

A/ Politics is of two types—table and field. I am not one for table politics. I will go to villages. I will sit on someone's cot and eat and sleep at someone's place. If I speak to them, I will get to know the real issues.

It is necessary to bring back enthusiasm among the youth by winning all the seats in the byelections. (Byelections to eight assembly seats are likely to be announced soon). It will also be about giving prominence to the party worker who has been fighting the BJP rule for 30 years. He may be weak, financially and socially. But give him an opportunity as he has remained with the party.

**Q/ The Gujarat model of development is being highlighted. Do you agree with it?**

A/ There is a need to prepare a list of problems in Gujarat. When you are part of a television debate, and if a minister says that Gujarat has witnessed development, then we should show details about villages that have not been developed.

Gujarat's health care infrastructure stands exposed during the Covid-19 [pandemic]. There was no need to kill [gangster] Vikas Dubey in an encounter. Instead, he should have been admitted to Ahmedabad's Civil Hospital. His last rites would have been done and nobody would have known. Things are that bad.

**Q/ Is health care the only sector that is lacking?**

A/ Look at education. It is the primary responsibility of the state government, and more than 170 schools have shown very poor results [in the recent state board exams]. What development have you done? If you say that you have made bridges and a riverfront in Ahmedabad, then that is not development.

If laying roads in Ahmedabad and Surat is the definition of development, then what will happen to the people in villages? Development means progress for each person. [Enough development that] he gets good money for his yield in the fields, does not need to take a loan and can marry off his children. If parents spend 80 per cent of their money on children's education, then the children should have jobs. Where are the jobs?

**Q/ The Congress does not accept outsiders easily.**

A/ Even in a house, children have a difference of opinion with their parents. Yet they stay in the same house, eat together, sleep together. My case is similar. We will discuss, fight, work for the people and form a government. I do not believe in factions or camps. My faction will be that of the people.

I would like to tell the masses that they have reposed faith in the BJP for 30 years in Gujarat, and yet there are issues. At least put your faith in the Congress one time. Send us back to the opposition if we fail. We do not have public relations companies. We will go to the villages and solve problems faced by the people.

**Q/ Do you think the cases against you can damage the Congress?**

A/ They will send me to jail. They will not allow me to contest elections. [But] they will not be able to take my life. They cannot take away my courage and determination.

**Q/ How will you stop more Congress MLAs from joining the BJP?**

A/ A mother keeps a child in her womb for nine months, the parents bring up the child and still they are sent to old-age homes. If a mother cannot read her children's mind then we also do not have that capability. We need people who speak up, who can go into the chief minister's chamber and fight.

**Q/ Some state Congress leaders are unhappy with your appointment.**

A/ Half an hour before my appointment was announced, all the senior leaders called to wish me. They said the party had done some good for the first time.

DEAR DOCTOR | **Professor (Dr) J.C. Suri**

*director and head, pulmonology, critical care and sleep medicine, Fortis Flt Lt Rajan Dhall Hospital, Vasant Kunj, Delhi*

# No need to panic buy oximeters and oxygen cylinders

Pulmonology expert Prof J.C. Suri on how to improve and maintain one's respiratory health in these pandemic times



drjcsuri.com

## Drop in infections

In some ways, it has been a blessing in disguise. All the hand washing, physical distancing, taking other precautions and maintaining hygiene have actually worked to reduce some infections, particularly flu. What has also helped is that pollution has gone down. People are staying home, not travelling in crowded metros or visiting busy markets. This has led to a drop in some respiratory infections.

Seasonal allergies, too, are not typical to this season—the months of March, April and May see a rise in pollen that leads to allergies. During monsoon, we see a rise in vector-borne diseases and patients with flu as well. October onwards, we anticipate a rise in patients with asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and pneumonia.

Before Covid-19 struck, we were treating several patients for asthma, COPD, lung cancer and other respiratory problems [in hospitals]. Since the pandemic, many of those receiving regular treatment are staying away from hospitals because of the fear of contracting the virus. It is true that patients suffering from chronic lung diseases, severe asthma and TB are more prone to severe Covid-19. Age also plays a role—the vulnerability increases with each decade after the fifth (50 years), along with the presence of comorbidities. However, regular medication and video consults for follow-ups are advised for chronic disease patients.

## Panic buying

What I notice is that people are buying pulse oximeters and oxygen cylinders out of sheer panic due to Covid-19. For normal people, these things are not required. People cannot administer oxygen by themselves at home; you need to be in a hospital if you require oxygen. However, if you have a pulse oximeter at home, you need to ensure that oxygen levels are between 97-98 per cent. If the oxygen levels are at 95 per cent, with fever, then it indicates mild disease. If it is between 90-94 per cent, then it is moderate, and if under 90, then it is severe. Those suffering from mild disease can be managed at home, provided there is adequate facility for isolation. Those with moderate disease need to be taken to a hospital, and those with severe disease need intensive care.

**"There is some evidence that vitamins such as D and C and zinc can help fight infections in a better way. However, there is no definite proof that they can increase immunity."**

## Immunity boosters

There is some evidence that vitamins such as D and C and zinc can help fight infections in a better way. However, there is no definite proof that they can increase immunity. People with these vitamin deficiencies can take supplements. But these should be taken under medical supervision. Besides these, good food, good sleep and good exercise also help in staying healthy and avoiding diseases. Deep breathing can help open up lungs; it also reduces stress. Respirometers are useful in a group of patients; for healthy people, they are of no use.

**—As told to Namita Kohli**



MANI-FESTO | **MANI SHANKAR AIYAR**



# Fix with flexibility

If Pakistan had not been torn out of Mother India, our most difficult neighbour would have been Afghanistan for we would have stoutly defended the Durand Line, arguing that we will not surrender to the Afghans "an inch" of our holy territory. Instead, we watch with considerable schadenfreude, the Pakistanis wrecking their relationship with their immediate neighbour to their north and west by clinging to a frontier conceived by an imperial power.

The Mughal Empire itself could be seen as the extension into the Indo-Gangetic plains of Babar's Afghan empire. He was re-buried, as he had desired, in Kabul. Indeed, it was an Afghan marauder, Ahmad Shah Abdali, who laid waste the Mughal empire. History is no respecter of mythology nor even of historical precedent. Assam and the seven (now eight) sisters of the northeast became part of India only because the East India Company overthrew the Burmese monarchy and compensated itself with territories that it prised out of the defeated Burmese. We became the proud possessors of much of Uttarakhand only because the Company Bahadur, having gorged itself on all of the Gangetic plains from Bengal to Bihar, turned its attention to Nepal, defeated it in battle, and through the 1816 Treaty of Sugauli decreed that henceforth Kumaon and Garhwal belonged not to the Gorkhas but to the John Company.



Ladakh became part of India when Aurangzeb conquered it in the 1670s and compelled the local Buddhists to build a grand mosque in Leh in token of their humiliation at Mughal hands. Then Zorawar Singh Kahluria reconquered Ladakh, at the behest of Raja Gulab Singh. East of Ladakh, all of Aksai Chin remained a colour-washed unoccupied territory on British-Indian maps till Jawaharlal Nehru, claiming that "Aksai Chin was part of the Ladakh region for centuries", ordered in 1954 that Aksai Chin be shown as indubitably Indian on Survey of India maps. No Indian (other than pastoral nomads) had ventured into the barren mountain desert that was Aksai Chin, nor even any Chinese despite the Brits begging them to do so to be available if the Russians advanced beyond central Asia. The Russians did not, and the Brits then lost interest for they believed in "flexible frontiers" in their northern reaches. It was only when the communist Chinese undertook the engineering miracle of linking their two most troublesome provinces, Xinjiang and Tibet, through Aksai Chin that this barren mountain desert was put to its first-ever strategic use.

Rajiv Gandhi rescued Indian national interest when he broke with the 1962 syndrome, and, after careful preparation of the ground, visited China in December 1988 to start (or, more accurately, restart) a process of reconciliation based on opening up the immense potential for India-China cooperation while placing the settlement of the border dispute on the basis of "mutual understanding and mutual accommodation (MUMA)". This cut through the thicket of argument and counter argument that had grown over Aksai Chin, especially as MUMA would safeguard our security requirements better than keeping the dispute unresolved and thereby risking military confrontation that might snatch away what remains of our strategic control of the area.

Over three long decades, neither we nor the Chinese have carried to its logical conclusion the mutual adjustment, on the "MUMA" formula, of the alignment of the Line of Actual Control, let alone the border. If, since Shimla 1972, we have wanted to convert the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir into an international border, why cannot the sensible, practical, time-tested policy prescription of "flexible frontiers" in our northern reaches apply to Aksai Chin?

ILLUSTRATION **BHASKARAN**

**Aiyar** is a former Union minister and social commentator.

IVORY TOWER



SANJAYA BARU

# Still the economy, Stupid!

Look at where the economies of China and India were in the 1980s, and look where they are now. The power differential between the two today is largely a consequence of the different trajectories of economic performance. That was the reminder that External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar offered last week in a televised discussion, echoing Bill Clinton's famous slogan: It's the economy, stupid!

It reminded me of what one of his distinguished predecessors as foreign secretary, K. Raghunath, told members of India's National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) in 1999. Asked what needs to be done to make Indian foreign policy more effective, Raghunath's reply was quick—improve India's economic performance. A stronger, more efficient and more competitive economy would facilitate more effective diplomacy. The era when good speeches and clever posturing made up for poor economic performance was over.



The NSAB report that was then prepared reflected the strategic thinking at the turn of the century. China had gained power and influence with its economic capability and performance. Higher economic growth helped improve state capacity, including the fiscal capacity of the state. This, following Kautilya's famous axiom in the *Arthashastra*—"from the strength of the treasury, the army flows"—enabled China to become a military power.

If China is today more influential globally it is not because the world has discovered its civilisational greatness or exciting cuisine, but because it has demonstrated economic and human capability and has built relationships of interdependence with nations big and small.

In the first two decades of the 21st century, China became an economic superpower and so became a great power. India has yet to become an economic superpower. From Raghunath to Jaishankar and after, Indian diplomacy can do its best to manage a difficult world, but at the end of the day India's global standing and power will be shaped in farms and factories, in classrooms and laboratories. When India is economically not only stronger and self-reliant (*atmanirbhar*) but also more efficient and competitive (globally engaged), it will also be regarded a great power. Till then, we need clever diplomats and generals to mind the gap, and cleverer political leadership to bridge the gap.

I am not yet convinced by the argument that external trade is a threat rather than an opportunity for the Indian economy. Jaishankar is wrong to buy into the Swadeshi Jagran Manch argument that Indian industrial development has been hurt by external trade, especially the few free-trade agreements negotiated by the Manmohan Singh government. India's decision to walk out of negotiations towards a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement was a consequence of such thinking.

While Indian business leaders who run globally non-competitive firms may agree with what the external affairs minister was saying, those who have benefited from globalisation will not. Indeed, this year the trade surplus being generated signals a slowdown in domestic economic activity, not the growing competitiveness of the economy. There are many reasons why the share of manufacturing in India's national income is stuck at around 16 per cent for two decades. External trade is certainly not the most important one.

Moreover, there is a contradiction between the government seeking more foreign direct investment while turning away from external trade opportunities. Surely, *atmanirbharata* does not mean getting foreigners to produce more in India for the Indian market alone. Foreign direct investment policy is about tapping the world market. Trade is the means to that end.

**Baru** is an economist and a writer. He was adviser to former prime minister Manmohan Singh.

ILLUSTRATION **BHASKARAN**





ANDHRA PRADESH
EXCAVATION

**REVIVING THE PAST**
The unearthed temple in Perumallapadu village in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh

# On a temple's trail

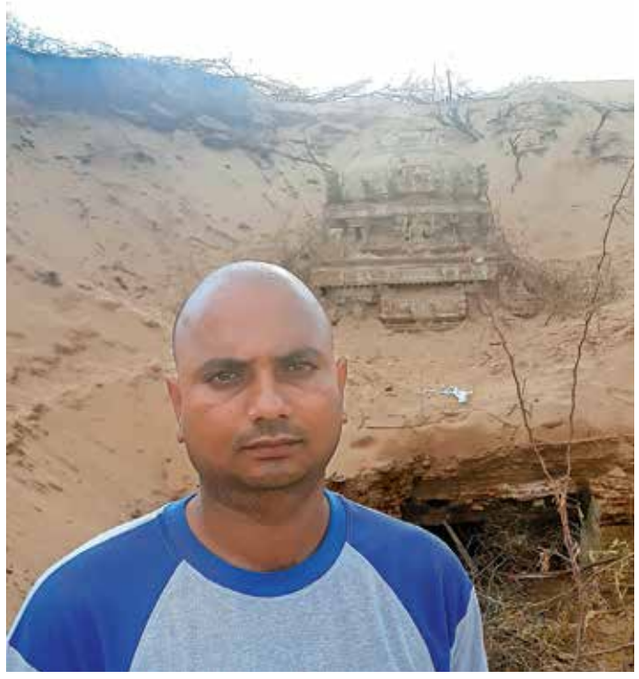
These young Telugu men went hunting for a long-lost temple during the lockdown

**BY RAHUL DEVULAPALLI**

**IN THE 1850s** or so, a series of unusual events rocked Perumallapadu village on the River Penna, which empties into the Bay of Bengal. One day, the village, which was then part of the Madras Presidency, woke up to the news of a village elder's death. Mourners carried Vemana Narsapa Naidu's body to the cremation grounds outside the village. Legend has it that, just before lighting the pyre, a relative whispered a few words in his ears as per Hindu custom. Suddenly, Naidu sprung back to life. He then told the mourners that he had received divine instructions to restore a Shiva temple built by Parasurama. In the years that followed, Naidu reconstructed the temple, which came to be known as the Sri Nageswara temple.

"He restored the temple, dug a koneru (pond) and reared a tamarind grove with his property. The temple is in the shape of a tower. Nandeeswara is installed in front of this temple," reads an excerpt from a 1961 manual, which is in the possession of the state archaeology and museums department.

Lore has it that around 60 years ago the Penna river changed course after a flood. The temple itself was buried by the sand and debris carried by the floodwaters. The floods forced the villagers to shift 1km away. Over time, the 800-odd villagers forgot the location of the temple.



Cut to 2020. Till early this year, Potugunta Vara Prasad was busy developing software at an IT firm in Stockholm. And then the pandemic struck. Prasad, 36, was given the option of staying put in Sweden or returning to India and working from home. He chose the latter, wanting to be with his parents, wife and son in Perumallapadu, in Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh.

Growing up, Prasad, like most of the villagers here, had heard the legend about the temple. "Deep in my heart, I always wished to see the temple. I wanted to find it in my lifetime," said Prasad. While Naidu's decision to restore the temple was a divine calling, Prasad decided to look for the temple after his spiritual guru from the adjoining village told him to do so around five years ago. Every time he visited the guru, he would remind Prasad about the temple. Prasad, perhaps, never had the time earlier, but the pandemic provided him with the perfect opportunity.

On his return from Stockholm in March, Prasad quarantined himself for a month. Like him, around 50 young men had returned home owing to the pandemic. "After the quarantine period, I felt lively, meeting my friends, family and walking around the village," he said. "We spent the initial days playing cricket and gossiping."

Soon, Prasad broached the topic of the temple with the young men. When he got their support, he approached the village elders. "They had a lot of doubts. I came back with a plan and presented it to them," he said. "Then we sat together and brainstormed. Finally, there was a consensus on going ahead with the excavation."

> "Deep in my heart, I always wished to see the temple. I wanted to find it in my lifetime."
>
> **—Potugunta Vara Prasad,** who led the effort to find the lost temple

According to the villagers, previous attempts to find the temple had failed, and they had little hope of success this time, too. Nonetheless, Prasad, like Naidu, decided to fund the exercise. "We approached the local endowments department and sought permission," said Mannem Manohar, 21, an engineering graduate who had returned to the village from Nellore city. He was part of the group that held discussions with officials. "We explained the importance of the temple," said Manohar. "A few days later, they gave us oral permission."

On June 15, the villagers gathered at the spot where they thought the temple once stood. Eyewitnesses said that the atmosphere was festival-like. Prasad's spiritual guru was also present. An earth-mover was rented and, after an elaborate prayer session, the excavation began. Hours passed, but there was no sign of the temple. By evening the villagers were demoralised. The turning point came just as they were getting ready to throw in the towel.

"A shepherd who lives on the outskirts of our village came to us," said Manohar. "He said that we should dig at a particular spot. We did not take him seriously. But he was insistent."

The next morning, the villagers gathered at a new location. At around 7am, the excavation started. In an hour, a pointed structure was unearthed. It was the tip of the entrance tower of the long-lost temple. "I had tears in my eyes. It was an unbelievable feeling," said Prasad.

As the villagers celebrated, the young among them posted photos and videos on social media. Soon, the posts went viral and hundreds of people from different parts of the district streamed to the site. While some wanted to click pictures, others came to pray. Government officials, too, reached the site.

"The area has been designated as a containment zone and such crowds cannot be allowed during a pandemic," said mandal revenue officer Geetha Vani, who was among the first officers to reach the spot. "We held discussions with the villagers and immediately stopped the activity. We barricaded the site and secured the place so that it does not turn into a picnic spot. It is dangerous for people to go inside the structure as it can collapse anytime. We have to ascertain the facts related to this temple. We have written to the collector and endowments department."

Currently, only a quarter of the temple has been excavated. The outer walls and the top portion of the temple have sculptures of goddesses. A narrow passage hemmed in by sand mounds leads to the main entrance. There is visible damage to the structure; the woodwork and bricks are exposed. According to locals and officials, all idols and ornaments from the temple were shifted to another temple just before the floods had hit the region.

Meanwhile, officials of the state archaeology and museums department, who were unaware of the existence of the temple, are trying to find out the age, history and the significance of the structure. "Preliminary examination has revealed that stones were not used in the construction," said assistant director O. Ramasubba Reddy. "Only lime mortar, wood and bricks were used. This structure does not seem to have the influence of the Pallava-Chola style of architecture, which is found in other temples in this region. It is difficult to tell the age of the temple till we have a closer look at the inscriptions." On his visit to the temple on the first day, Reddy spotted something strange. "The tiles in one section inside the temple were dug up," said Reddy. "It is strange and we have to find out why."

The village youth now take turns to visit the site every day to make sure there are no trespassers. Prasad and his team are now waiting to discuss with officials the next step in the restoration process. Prasad came to know about Naidu's temple restoration initiative only after the team found the structure. And, to his utter surprise, one of Naidu's descendants—Vemana Dasaradha Rama Naidu—is his neighbour. In his 70s, Dasaradha had walked all the way to the temple when the excavation began. "It was a different feeling seeing the temple as my ancestors built it," he said. "I faintly remember playing inside the temple as a child. My grandparents told us stories about the temple and the village, when it was situated on the riverbank. All I want to do is go inside the temple and spend time there."

INFOCUS

## Emerging of a new dawn @ REVA

**By Dr P. Shyama Raju**, Chancellor, REVA University

**As REVA** believes in growing and growing consistently, the University has gone ahead and introduced the School of Multidisciplinary Studies. With the emerging trends in education oscillating between bioinformatics, biomedical engineering, bioengineering and agriculture engineering, we believe this is the most opportune time for REVA to offer a course like B.Tech in bioelectronics engineering to students. That the students would broaden their horizons in their study as they course through subjects from science and engineering-related subjects itself gives me the conviction that this would be a programme for any student to aspire for. I am happy that we have opened new vistas in the career world to students even during these unprecedented times. Graduates from this discipline would gradually be absorbed by the industry for medical instrumentation, medical electronics and other allied careers in healthcare sectors. This is a new pathway and the dearth of such expertise in the market speaks for itself. Truly an amalgamation between the industry and international faculty, this is indeed a good avenue for students to aspire for when they choose destination REVA.

Bioelectronics is the discipline resulting from the convergence of biology and electronics, and it has the potential to significantly impact many areas important to the nation's economy and well-being, including healthcare and medicine, homeland security, forensics, and protecting the environment and the food supply. The current fields such as biotechnology, bioinformatics, and electronics work independently. They are unable to provide skilled workforce and they fail to provide ground-breaking solutions. A multidisciplinary approach thus will be the game-changer in higher education.

There is an opportunity for dramatically increased synergy between electronics and biology, fostered by the march of electronics technologies to the atomic scale and rapid advances in system, cell and molecular biology. Bioelectronics is the discipline resulting from the convergence of biology and electronics, and it has the potential to significantly impact many areas important to the nation's economy and well-being, including healthcare and medicine, homeland security, forensics, protecting environment and the food supply.

The target is to educate young eager minds, inclined towards multidisciplinary studies to transform them into engineering experts who have versatile comprehension of detection, processing and analyses of bio signals from various sources. This is where REVA's focus lies, and it is articulated clearly in REVA's vision and mission statement.

Career avenues are open-ended for these graduates be it in research and development, in companies that rely on bioelectronics to help in the manufacture of their product, in entertainment and the gaming industries to list a few. Bioelectronics is the future and promises better prospects in various fields, and REVA has been a forerunner in academics and research.



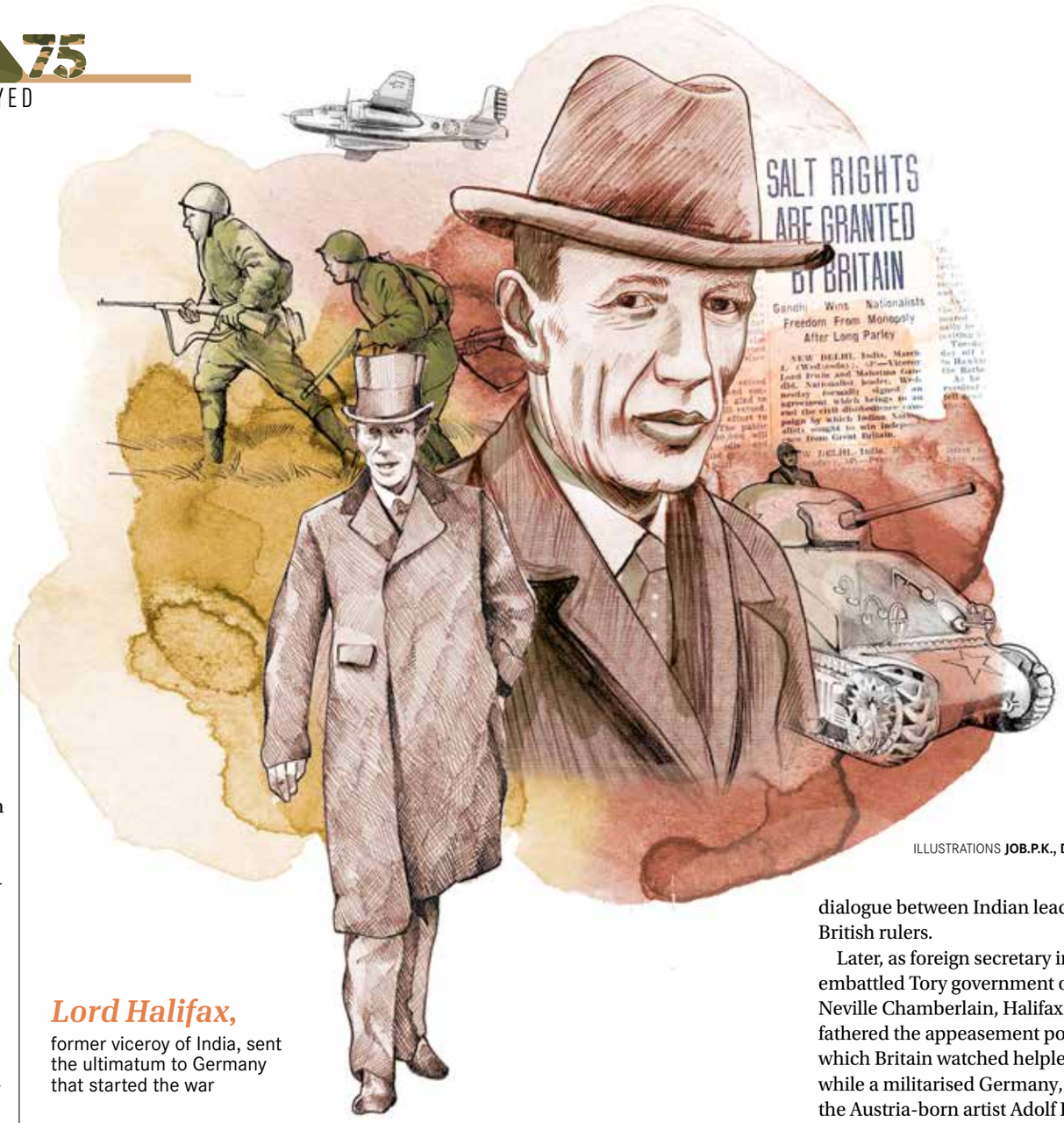

**FLIGHT INTO DANGER**
Indian troops emplaning for the Burma front

USI OF INDIA

# WE WERE THERE, EVERYWHERE

Indians fought on every front in World War II—the deserts of North Africa, the plains of Europe, the isles in the Pacific, the plantations of Malaya, the jungles of Burma, and finally the hills of Imphal and Kohima. Their valour and resilience helped the Allies win some of the fiercest battles of the war. THE WEEK looks at India's world war—a story that is now all but forgotten

BY R. PRASANNAN




ILLUSTRATIONS **JOB.P.K., DENI LAL**

***Lord Halifax,***
former viceroy of India, sent the ultimatum to Germany that started the war

It was a former ruler of India who sent the ultimatum that started the war. It was a future ruler of India who received the final document of surrender that officially ended the war. From the beginning to the end, World War II was India's war as much as it was of any other people.

Let us begin at the beginning. At 4am on September 3, 1939, Lord Halifax sent a telegram from London to Neville Henderson, Britain's ambassador in Berlin. The cable contained a message for Germany's foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop: Withdraw Germany's occupation army from Poland. "I have accordingly the honour to inform you," continued the Halifax cable, "that unless not later than 11am, British summer time, today September 3, satisfactory assurances to the above effect have been given by the German government and have reached His Majesty's government in London, a state of war will exist between the two countries as from that hour."

That was perhaps the harshest step that Halifax, a man of peace whom his old friend Mahatma Gandhi had described as "the most Christian and the most gentlemanly" personage, had taken in his eminently successful public life. Born without a left hand, Lord Irwin, as he had been known before he was made the Earl of Halifax, had finally landed the most prestigious job in the world at that time, the secretary of state of Great Britain.

Indeed, as viceroy of India, he had put Gandhi in jail for breaking the salt law, but had soon made amends by receiving the "half-naked fakir" as an equal at the magnificent palace that he had inaugurated in the new imperial capital of New Delhi. The two men had also signed a pact that had led to Gandhi sailing to London for the second Round Table Conference and having an audience with the king-emperor. Though the conference had failed, the Gandhi-Irwin pact had opened the way for political dialogue between Indian leaders and British rulers.

Later, as foreign secretary in the embattled Tory government of Neville Chamberlain, Halifax had fathered the appeasement policy by which Britain watched helplessly while a militarised Germany, under the Austria-born artist Adolf Hitler, was gobbling up country after country in Europe. All along, Halifax had been avoiding a war that he was convinced would not only destroy Britain and her empire, but also wreck the whole of Europe and the free world. His admirers say the appeasement helped Britain gain time to rearm.

Halifax's assessment was not wrong. The same afternoon after his ultimatum expired, British ocean liner Athenia was torpedoed, killing 112 passengers. Only then did the harsh reality hit the great sea lords of England—that they might still be ruling the world's waters, but German U-boats were ruling the underwaters. The Battle of the Atlantic opened the same day, and within a month the Royal Navy would lose half a dozen ships.

The dry ground, too, was shaking under Britain's feet. Most of her land forces were dispersed across Africa and Asia. There was an expeditionary force of about 1,50,000 men in France, but the generals knew that they stood no chance before the German panzers. Finally, the entire expeditionary force, along with an Indian animal transport contingent, would be ferried to safety in May 1940 across the English Channel from Dunkirk, on every little boat that could float, making it the largest military evacuation in world history.

As the hour set by Halifax elapsed, his office sent cables to hundreds of offices across the world. One landed on the desk of the viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgow, in Simla. At 8.30 the same evening (3pm London time, just four hours after Halifax's deadline expired), Linlithgow went on air pledging India's wholehearted support to the war effort. The proclamation, done without even a modicum of consultation with Indian leaders, would later prove politically the unwisest step taken by any viceroy (see story on page 48).

> Halifax had been avoiding a war that he was convinced would not only destroy Britain and her empire, but also wreck the whole of Europe and the free world.

No one—not even the viceroy—had any idea how India would fight the war.

At the hour when Linlithgow was going on air, the Indian Army had just 1,60,000 troops, including about 16,000 British officers and men, and 72,000 with the princely states. The Royal Indian Navy had just 1,700 officers and men, and the Indian Air Force had just one squadron with 200 officers and men who were busy quelling a tribal uprising in Waziristan. The squadron was commanded by its first Indian commander Subroto Mukherjee, who would later become the first Indian chief of the IAF; among the officers was Arjan Singh, who would also later head the IAF and become India's only marshal of the air force. By the time the war ended in 1945, the Indian Army had swelled to "more than two and a half million", writes Harry Fecitt in *Distant Battlefields*. "It was the largest all-volunteer army in the history of human conflict." Close to 25,000 of them perished in the war, 64,000 were wounded and 12,000 went missing.

But at this moment, it was nothing but a small border army. Most of the land and air forces were deployed to guard the northwest from the Russians, who, the British feared, had been coveting India, first under the

imperial Tsars and now under the godless communist Joseph Stalin. When the war opened, the Soviet Union was an ally of Germany. Only months earlier had Stalin signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler, and occupied most of eastern Europe. The two dictators, it had appeared, were dividing Europe among themselves, and Stalin would soon be reaching out to Asia, particularly India.

Britain's position was precarious—alone and friendless with a huge empire to defend. The United States, with its enormous grain granaries and industrial might, offered some hope; but its isolationist politics made it stay neutral in what was perceived to be another European war. The US offered arms, but on cash basis.

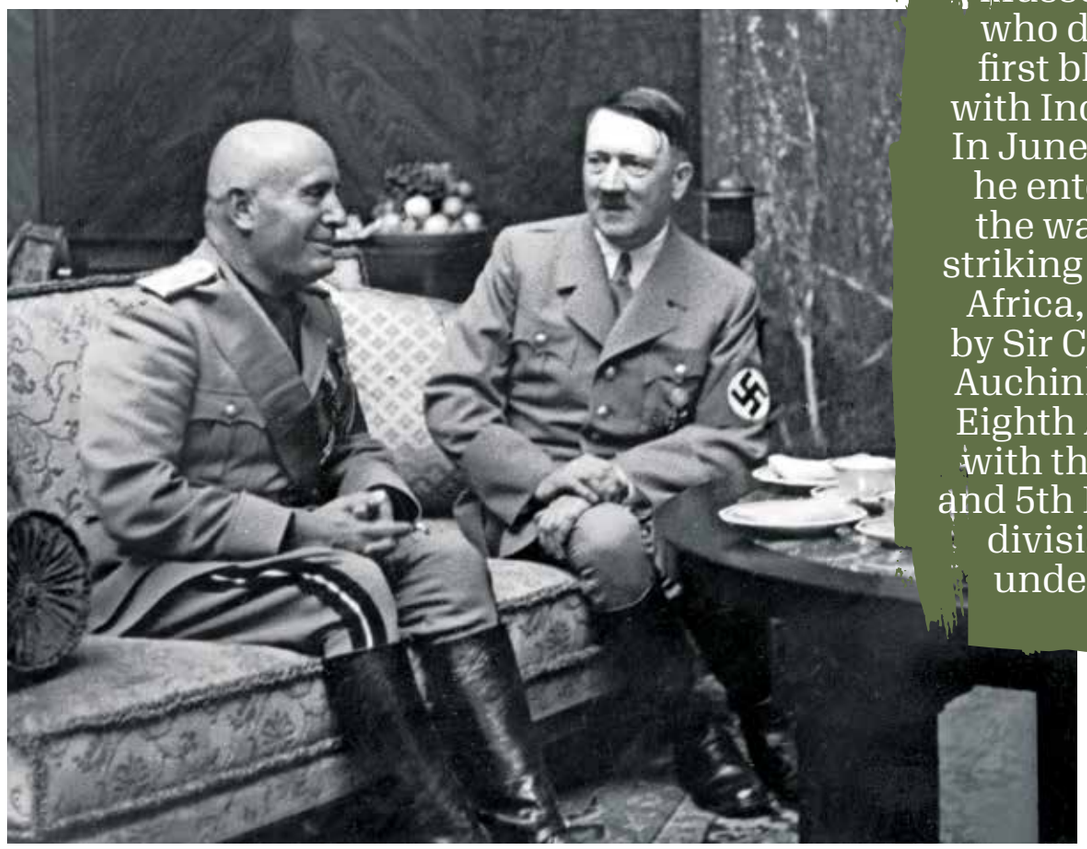
Cash was what Britain did not have. Britain's strength lay in her colonies, the crown jewel being India, where the Linlithgow regime launched a massive recruitment campaign. Indian leaders, despite their non-cooperation, did not try to block it. By late November, the first Indian troops joined the expeditionary force in France, allowing part of the main British force to move north. By then, Stalin had conquered Finland.

Early in 1940, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini met Hitler on the Austrian border and promised to enter the war "at an opportune moment". In April, Norway and Denmark fell to Germany. On May 10, Hitler shocked the world by invading Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands and attacking Britain's staunchest ally, France. Chamberlain resigned the same day, giving way to an all-party government under the India-hating Winston Churchill.

It was Mussolini who drew first blood with Indians. He chose his "opportune moment" in June 1940 to strike in North Africa, held by Sir Claude Auchinleck's Eighth Army with the 4th and 5th Indian divisions under it. The overall command of the region was vested in the one-eyed Archibald Wavell, a general who wrote poems when he was not planning strategies. (He had lost his left eye in the Battle of Ypres in World War I.)

Both men took an instant liking to the Indians. Before the war would end, the two would come to India, both to command the army here and Wavell to also rule India as the viceroy who would pave the way for a constitutional transfer of power through an interim government.





It was Mussolini who drew first blood with Indians. In June 1940, he entered the war by striking North Africa, held by Sir Claude Auchinleck's Eighth Army with the 4th and 5th Indian divisions under it.

PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES

**THE BELLIGERENTS**
(From left) Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin; (below) Mussolini and Hitler

We will leave the two Indian divisions under these two men for the time being, and see what was happening in Europe.

**THE PICTURE WAS** getting dismal in Europe. As regime after regime fled to London, Churchill ordered Operation Dynamo by which 3,40,000 Allied troops, including four Indian mule transport companies, were ferried to England from Dunkirk on warships, sloops and country boats. On June 25, France surrendered. Hitler was now the overlord of the entire western Europe, leaving the east, the Baltics and Finland to Stalin.

In July 1940, Hitler asked his general staff to plan an invasion of Britain, a venture that several European kings and dukes, including Napoleon, had planned but never succeeded since 1066. In what came to be known as the Battle of Britain, history's greatest air war, German bombers pounded the cities of Britain day and night.

It was into this dismal picture that Indians entered. Italy had a vast empire in East Africa from where they threatened British territories and invaded British Somaliland. The first major Allied action in Africa, Operation Compass, was against the Italians in Sidi Barrani area of Egypt. The 4th Indian Division, commanded by Major General Noel Beresford-Peirse, was pressed into battle in December 1940; they pushed out the enemy in three days, capturing 38,300 prisoners, 237 guns, 75 tanks and 1,000 vehicles. The 5th Indian Division, under Major General Lewis Heath and comprising only two brigades, defeated the Italians at Agordat in Eritrea and pushed them out of Keren. But the Italians took up defensive positions on the mountains 70km east. The Indians soundly defeated them at Ad Teclesan, where Subedar Richpal Ram (4/6 Rajputana Rifles) won a posthumous Victoria Cross. The Italians surrendered at Asmara in Eritrea on April 8, 1941.

In short, it was the Indian forces that liberated the city of Addis Ababa in April, paving the way for Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie to return to his homeland. Ever grateful, Sudan and Ethiopia would later contribute money for setting up the National Defence Academy near Pune. The main building of the NDA is still called Sudan Block.

By now, the Italians fighting in Eritrea regrouped in Amba Alagi. The 5th Indian Division stormed the heights from the north, while a British force pushed from the south. On May 18, the Italian viceroy and the entire Italian force surrendered to the Indian division. Even Churchill conceded: "The whole empire has been stirred by the achievement of Indian forces in Eritrea." In the sub-



***Erwin Rommel,*** Hitler's celebrated general, was a master tactician respected even by his British enemies

sequent mop-up operation, second lieutenant P.S. Bhagat (later lieutenant general) won the Victoria Cross.

**MEANWHILE, ANOTHER THREAT** arose in the Middle East. A pro-German junta, led by Rashid Ali, seized power in Iraq, from where Britain was getting most of its oil to run the war machine. With all her forces tied down in Europe and Africa, Britain sought India's help. In mid-1941, the 8th Indian Division reached Basra in Iraq, followed by the 10th division. They occupied Baghdad and secured the oil fields, winning the theatre honour of 'Iraq 1941'. Another Indian brigade, along with Australians and the Free French Forces, captured Damascus in a bold night attack and secured Syria and Lebanon.

Embattled in Africa by the Indians and the Allied forces, Mussolini sought German aid. Hitler sent his celebrated general, Erwin "the Desert Fox" Rommel, a master tactician who was respected even by his British enemies, as head of the Afrika Korps. Rommel struck in March 1941. A brilliant action by the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade delayed him at Meikili on April 6, which allowed an entire Australian division to withdraw to Tobruk in Libya. Rommel besieged Tobruk, forcing the Allies to withdraw further. In December, Rommel defeated the Allied force, including 4th Indian, but their subsequent actions forced him to withdraw to El Agheila.

In May-June 1942, the 10th Indian Division joined the Commonwealth forces in the first Battle of El Alamein in Egypt. Soon the 4th Division, which had gone to Syria, too, returned and helped in the famous victory of Bernard Montgomery over Rommel in the second Battle of El Alamein. An exuberant Churchill declared: "This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

It was not just the genius of Montgomery (his father had been one of the greatest administrators of Punjab and had lent his name to a district in West Punjab, now in Pakistan) alone that turned the tables. Hitler was losing interest in Africa; his eyes had by now been on a larger pie—the vast territories of Russia, its oil in the Caucasus and the cherry cities of Moscow and Leningrad. If he could conquer Russia, he would be the master of the entire European landmass, save perhaps the little island of Great Britain.

**ON JUNE 22,** 1941, Hitler committed a Napoleonic folly—he invaded the Soviet Union in a three-pronged operation. The blitzkrieg of tanks faced no resistance for miles and miles. Taken by surprise and speed, the Russian defences crumbled in town after town. More than five lakh were captured prisoner within weeks, and starved or tortured to death.

In July, Stalin ordered his people to burn their crops, bridges and buildings and withdraw, so that the invading Germans would not seize them. By autumn, the German forces had begun the siege of Leningrad that would last 872 days, and were almost sighting the spires of Moscow. Russia was starved of food, fuel and ammunition. They needed immediate supplies, especially oil, as did Britain. Most of the oil had been coming from Persia, and now that was under threat from the advancing German army. An Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran was planned, but where would the forces come from? Again



**CHASING THE ENEMY** An Indian signaller on the lookout for Rommel's Afrika Korps in North Africa

USI OF INDIA

> The 10th Indian Division fought the first Battle of El Alamein in Egypt. The 4th Indian Division helped in the famous victory of Bernard Montgomery over Rommel in the second Battle of El Alamein.

the British looked to India.

The 8th and 10th Indian Divisions, the 2nd Indian Armoured Brigade and a British armoured brigade, all fighting in North Africa, were pressed into an incredibly rapid invasion of Iran in August 1941. Two Indian battalions made an amphibious crossing of the river Shatt al-Arab and captured the oil rigs of Abadan. Eight battalions of British and Indian troops under Major General William Slim, who would later defend India from the Japanese, advanced from Khanaqin in Iraq into the Naft-i-Shah oilfield in Iran and on towards the Pai Tak Pass. The pass was taken on August 27, and two days later the defenders surrendered. It was all swift, and fairly easy, but very vital to the further conduct of the war. As Auchinleck, who had commanded Indians in the Middle East and would later become the commander-in-chief of India, said, the British "couldn't have come through both wars if they hadn't had the Indian Army".

The operation would give relief not only to the British, but also to starving Russia. The job of opening a supply line to Russia from the Middle East was also entrusted to the Indian command now. The Persia and Iraq Force (PAI Force), consisting mostly of Indian troops, developed ports, roads, river and canal routes from the Persian Gulf to the Arctic reaches of Russia, through which tens of thousands of soldiers carried 62,000 tonnes of aid. Later, in 1944, a grateful Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR would award the prestigious Orders of the Red Star to Subedar Narayan Rao Nikkam and Havildar Gajendra Singh Chand of the Indian Army Service Corps.

By late 1941, the German advance, though slowed, was reaching the outskirts of Moscow. Stalin moved his government further east, but he stayed in Moscow with his celebrated general, Georgy Zhukov, who, too, moved his troops behind the city and waited for the snow to fall. Into this freezing picture, now entered another enemy and a friend. And that enemy was going to pose a direct



GETTY IMAGES

**THE RAJ AT WAR**
Queen Elizabeth, wife of King George VI, visiting Indian soldiers in London in 1945, after they were released from German prisoner-of-war camps

threat to India. With that, the war also would become a world war.

**ON DECEMBER 7**, Japanese planes bombed the US Pearl Harbour. America's entry into the war, with all her industrial might, was a big relief to Russia, which had been worried that Japan would attack them from the east. Japan's attack on the American port revealed that her interests were in the Pacific. Relieved, Zhukov moved his Siberian divisions, the world's best snow-warriors, to fight the Germans around Moscow.

For Indians and the British, however, this also brought new dangers. Japan, the Allies realised, was coveting the Pacific and also Britain's Asian empire, of which India was the crown jewel. It also meant that thousands of Indian lives were in danger. For, most of Britain's Asian empire—from distant Hong Kong to next-door Burma—was garrisoned mostly by Indian troops.

Within four hours of the attack on Pearl Harbour, Japan struck at not only the British garrison in Hong Kong, which included 5/7th Rajput Regiment and the 2/14th Punjab Regiment, but also Malaya, where the bulk of the British army was Indian. On December 11, the Japanese invaded Burma.

The Rajputs and the Punjabis in the Hong Kong garrison fought bravely for 18 days before surrendering. Bearing the brunt of the ferocious Japanese attack on Malaya that began December 8, were the 9th and the 11th Indian Divisions, the 12th Indian Infantry Brigade and several independent battalions. They tried to stop the Japanese at Jitra, Kampar and Slim River in Malaya; two Indian brigades which had arrived as reinforcement in January 1942 joined them at Muar. More than 3,000 of the 4,000 men in these brigades perished.

Malaya looked a lost cause, yet the troops fought bravely. But the biggest blow came in Singapore, considered the eastern gate of the empire. Despite the brave fight put up by the 9th and 11th Indian Divisions, Singapore fell to the superior might of the Japanese on February 15, 1942. About 55,000 Indians were captured by the Japanese. The fall of what was called Fortress Singapore, like the disaster in Mesopotamia in World War I, was the hardest blow that the British suffered in the war. In both, it was Indian troops who suffered the most. The surrender signalled that the sun was going to set on the empire in the east. An alarmed Churchill exclaimed at the fall of Singapore: "Australia is threatened; India is threatened."

Naturally, the subsequent battles were the most desperate ever fought in any war in modern times. Military historians say that in terms of ferocity, the battles in the east—on the islands and atolls of the Malayan archipelago, the vast malaria-infested plantations of Malaya, and the dense jungles of Burma—were the most desperate, for both the British and Indian regiments. A battalion of 15th Punjab were in Kuching, the capital of Sarawak, ruled by a British rajah since James Brooke set up a kingdom styling himself rajah in the mid-19th century. The Punjabi bid to hold an airfield cost them 230 men on the Christmas eve of 1941. The survivors crossed into Dutch Borneo to fight the Japanese under a Dutch command for three months before being captured.

> The brilliant defence of the Admin Box against Japanese and INA troops boosted the morale of the Indians and the British. It proved that regimental loyalty in the Indian Army was as strong a bonding as were national loyalty and ethnic bonding.

Into Burma, it was not an attack but a massive invasion by the Japanese on December 11. The 17th Indian Division held the Japanese at the Bilin River for two days in February 1942 in close-quarter fighting. As the Japanese outflanked and encircled them, they fell back wading through the jungle track for about 50 kilometres to Sittang bridge. In the pitched battle that followed, they lost most of their guns, vehicles and other heavy equipment. The remnants made their way to Pegu in March.

In April, the 48th Armoured Brigade, along with the 48th Indian Brigade and 1st Burma Division, could finally inflict some damage on the Japanese. By the time the battle ended, the troops were too exhausted to even hold on. The high command in India tried once more to hold on in Burma with a bold campaign in Arakan, beginning December 1942. But with neither the Indian nor the British troops having been trained for jungle warfare, the campaign flopped. The repeated defeats affected the morale, and stories of Japanese invincibility began spreading among the troops and the public. About 12,000 of the 40,000 Indian prisoners of war who were captured in Malaya or surrendered at Singapore joined Mohan Singh's First Indian National Army, and subsequently Subhas Chandra Bose's forces.

By now, London decided that their Indian high command was not capable of training and equipping the army for jungle war. A new Supreme Allied Command for South East Asia was created under Admiral of the Fleet Lord Mountbatten, leaving the India command in charge of internal security. General William Slim, who commanded the entire force in Burma, concluded that it was time to take a last stand for India.

But where? It would have to be at the eastern gates of India itself, he decided. The entire army in the Arakan was airlifted with American help to Imphal and Kohima. This far and no further, Slim decided.

Slim's grit paid off finally. As the British and the Indians stood defending India, the Japanese infiltrated through the gaps, crossed the Kalapanzin River, turned west and south, and attacked the headquarters of the 7th Indian Division in February. In what came to be known as the Battle of the Admin Box, one of the most ferocious battles ever fought, the 5th, 7th and 26th Indian, 81st West Africa Division, and 36th British Infantry Division dug in and fought back.

For Indians on both sides, it was a war for their country. The defenders at Imphal and Kohima were told that they were now, for the first time, fighting to save their motherland from unknown tyrants of the east. On the attacking side too, the INA troops were told that they were seeking to liberate their motherland from the European enslavers. To the great glory of India, both sides fought hard. Hitting like typhoons from land and air, the defenders mauled the Japanese. The ferocity of the defence took the Japanese by surprise; though more Indian and British soldiers were killed in the battle than the Japanese, for the first time the Japanese realised that capturing India, even with the help of the INA, was not going to be a walkover as they had thought.

The brilliant defence of the Admin Box boosted the morale of the Indians and the British. It shattered several myths, the primary one being that the Japanese were some sort of supermen who could not be defeated. It also proved that regimental loyalty in the Indian Army was as strong a bonding as were national loyalty and ethnic bonding. If many troops had switched over to the INA during the Burma campaign, many more had stayed on with their buddies, platoons, battalions and regiments, even risking their lives. And by the time the Japanese arrived at Imphal and Kohima, many of them had



**Bernard Montgomery** scored a famous victory over Rommel in North Africa, helping turn the tide of the war

also been trained in jungle warfare through the famous Chindit operations of Orde Wingate (see page 38).

So when the attack on Imphal came, the defenders were in fairly high spirits. The 17th, 20th, 23rd Indian Divisions, 50th Indian Parachute Brigade and 254th Indian Tank Brigade defended Imphal and Sangshak from March till July 1944, yielding not even an inch, and finally pushing back the enemy into Burma with heavy losses.

Almost simultaneously, the Japanese were pushing at Kohima, too, where the 50th Indian Parachute Brigade, 5th and 7th Indian and 2nd British Divisions captured a ridge that was dominating the area. The Japanese held on to the road that was leading to Imphal for more than a month from May 16. Finally, the defenders blasted them out, and captured the road, which was a major supply line for the army. The battle ended on June 22, when the troops from Kohima and Imphal met on the road at Milestone 109. Finally, the Japanese abandoned their invasion plans and began a retreat into Burma. As Wavell would remark later, Kohima was where "the Japanese were routed and their downfall really began".

**SLIM DECIDED THAT** his victory would be complete only if he reconquered Burma. He sent his Indians and British troops after the Japanese. Probably inspired by the memory of the 70,000 who had fallen in Malaya and 1,75,000 in Burma as dead or wounded, they hit the enemy hard at Meiktila and Mandalay from January to March 1945. They proved to be as good as the Japanese in jungle warfare, and superior to them in the use of armour and mechanised forces in jungles. Even Slim was surprised at the ferocity with which the Indians hit the enemy.

The twin victories at Meiktila and Mandalay virtually decimated the Japanese army in Burma. The subsequent operation to capture Rangoon, Operation Dracula, was a walkover for the Indian divisions.

There were still pockets of fierce resistance. In the Battle of Ramree Island in southern Burma, which had been captured by the Japanese in 1942, the 26th Indian Division fought for six weeks in early 1945.

By now the Allies were gaining the upper hand in both the Pacific and Europe. General Douglas MacArthur, a brilliant tactician, had led the American forces 'leap-frogging' from island to island, kicking out the Japanese. In Europe, the Allied forces, under the overall command of Dwight Eisenhower, had landed in Normandy and also pushed up from southern Italy, fighting their way into Rhineland. Meanwhile, Zhukov's Russians, who had suffered the most in the war, were having their revenge by pushing the Germans back into Germany and Berlin.

As the Russian forces were finally pounding Berlin, Hitler knew the game was over. He married his mistress Eva Braun on April 30, 1945, retired to his bunker, where she swallowed poison, and shot himself. Seven days later, at 9:20pm, his nominated successor, Admiral Karl Dönitz, signed the instrument of surrender.

The guns went silent all over Europe, and celebrations broke out. Wandering incognito among the London revellers were two pretty girls named Elizabeth and Margaret, much like the bored princess who sought a few nightly adventures in Roman Holiday.

But there was still no revelry for the Indian soldiers fighting in Asia. As Churchill said in his radio broadcast next afternoon, "We may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing [as Japan] remains unsubdued." In Washington, DC, Harry Truman, who had succeeded Franklin Roosevelt as president, said, it was "a victory only half won".

The two were now after the Japanese. As Burma was conquered, the British made plans to retake Malaya and Singapore. The 25th Indian Division with 3 Commando Brigade had joined in the first large-scale amphibious operations in southeast Asia in January 1945. They had occupied Myrbaw and Ruywa. In April, the division was withdrawn to south India to prepare for Operation Zipper. They were chosen for the assault landing role in the invasion of Malaya.

> The twin victories at Meiktila and Mandalay virtually decimated the Japanese army in Burma. The subsequent operation to capture Rangoon, Operation Dracula, was a walkover for the Indian divisions.

But Truman decided to cut everything short. After the Battle of Okinawa in April, in which 82,000 US troops and 1,17,000 Japanese soldiers and citizens were killed, he decided enough was enough. From Potsdam on July 26, he ordered the Japanese to "surrender or suffer prompt and utter destruction". Japan rejected the ultimatum.

On August 6, a USAF B-29 Superfortress bomber Enola Gay, named after the mother of its pilot Colonel Paul Tibbets, dropped the atom bomb Little Boy on Hiroshima, killing about 80,000 innocent people. Even before the mushroom cloud dissipated, Truman issued another warning to Japan to surrender or "expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth". On August 9, Stalin invaded Japan. Within hours, another of Truman's bombs, Fat Man, fell on Nagasaki. The next day, Tokyo agreed to surrender on one condition: Please let our emperor remain in place.

The big three, now the rulers of the universe, agreed.

On August 14, the Allied governments announced the surrender of Japan. On September 2, the Japanese generals officially surrendered to General MacArthur on board USS Missouri, berthed in Tokyo Bay.

For India, however, there were a few more days of war left. The 5th Indian Division had sailed from Trincomalee and Rangoon to retake Singapore in Operation Tiderace. The fleet arrived in Singapore on September 4, 1945. The 23rd and 25th Divisions landed in Malaya on September 9.

On September 12, exactly six years and nine days after Gandhi's friend Halifax had sent the ultimatum to Ribbentrop, the war officially ended. Jawaharlal Nehru's future friend Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, the supreme Allied commander for southeast Asia, accepted Japan's surrender in the Municipal Building of Singapore, now known as City Hall. Representing the Indian Army at the ceremony with General Slim was Brigadier K.S. Thimayya, the only Indian officer who had been given an operational command in the war. He had led the 8/19th Hyderabad Regiment against the Japanese in the Burmese jungles, and would later save Kashmir and command the Indian Army.

Thus, the war that had started with a cable sent out by a former ruler of India ended with a document received by a future ruler of India, who would also bring the curtain down on the colonial phase in India's history. But the armed forces that they left behind would march on to greater glories.

# Theatres of war

## A snapshot of the major battles that the Indian Army fought

BY R. PRASANNAN



**Arjan Singh** was one of the officers in the Indian Air Force's first squadron, which helped thwart the Japanese attack on Imphal. He later rose to become India's only marshal of the air force

**THEY FOUGHT IN** East Africa; they fought in North Africa. They fought in Iraq, Iran and Palestine, and in Italy, southern Europe, Borneo and the Philippines. They fought in Malaya; they fought in Singapore; they fought in Burma; they finally took a last stand at the gates of India, where they vowed not to surrender.

To paraphrase a famous Winston Churchill speech, they fought on the beaches, on the islands, on the landing grounds, in the streets, in the deserts, in the jungles, in the hills—they fought everywhere. Where they were not fighting, they were serving the men who were fighting—even on the frozen Russian front.

That was the story of the Indian Army in World War II. As military historian Rana Chhina says, they "fought against two of the finest armies of the world—the Germans and the Japanese—and proved [their] worth."

When the war started, the Indian Army had less than two lakh men, including a few thousand British officers and men. When the war ended, they were 2.5 million, after losing 87,000 dead and 64,000 wounded; the largest voluntary army ever raised in the history of the world, as Churchill grudgingly conceded.

Here we present a broad picture of the major battles that the Indian Army fought. They won some, they lost some, but they fought all well.

### ★★NORTH AND EAST AFRICA★★
Defeating Italians; taking on Rommel

#### OPERATION COMPASS

This was the first large British operation in the war, and the Indian Army played a major role in it. British, Indian and other Commonwealth forces attacked Italy's 10th Army under Marshal Rodolfo Graziani in western Egypt and Cyrenaica, the eastern province of Libya from December 1940 to February 1941.

The 4th Indian Division, commanded by Major General Noel Beresford-Peirse, joined the battle on December 9, 1940. In two days, they pushed the Italians out of their fortified positions, enabling the British to capture the Libyan ports and cut the enemy's supply line. They captured 38,300 prisoners, 237 guns, 73 tanks and 1,000 vehicles.

#### OPERATION BATTLEAXE

This was a British attempt to raise the Siege of Tobruk and recapture eastern Cyrenaica from German and Italian forces. It was the first time that a major German force had to be on the defensive. The celebrated General Erwin Rommel launched his Afrika Korps in late March 1941 against the British Desert Force, which included the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade and the 11th and 18th Frontier Force Cavalry. They could not stop the Germans, but the motor brigade held ground at Meikili, and finally made breakthrough on April 8. This enabled an Australian division to entrench at Tobruk.In June, Archibald Wavell launched Battleaxe to drive out the Germans and Italians beyond Tobruk, but failed. The British and Indians fell back to Sidi Barrani. The failure led to the replacement of Wavell by Sir Claude Auchinleck.

#### OPERATION CRUSADER

Auchinleck was trying to bypass Rommel's defences on the Egyptian-Libyan frontier and defeat the German armoured forces to relieve Tobruk, which was under siege. The 4th and 5th Indian Divisions and the 29th Indian infantry brigade formed part of the attacking force. On November 18, 1941, Auchinleck launched a surprise attack, but it lacked punch since he had dispersed his attack force. The attackers lost 530 tanks. On November 24, Rommel ordered the "dash to the wire", causing chaos in the British rear echelons. The timely arrival of a New Zealand force saved the British and the Indians. By December, Rommel's supply lines got thin. He narrowed his front and shortened his lines of communication. By mid-December, he withdrew to El Agheila.

#### FIRST BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

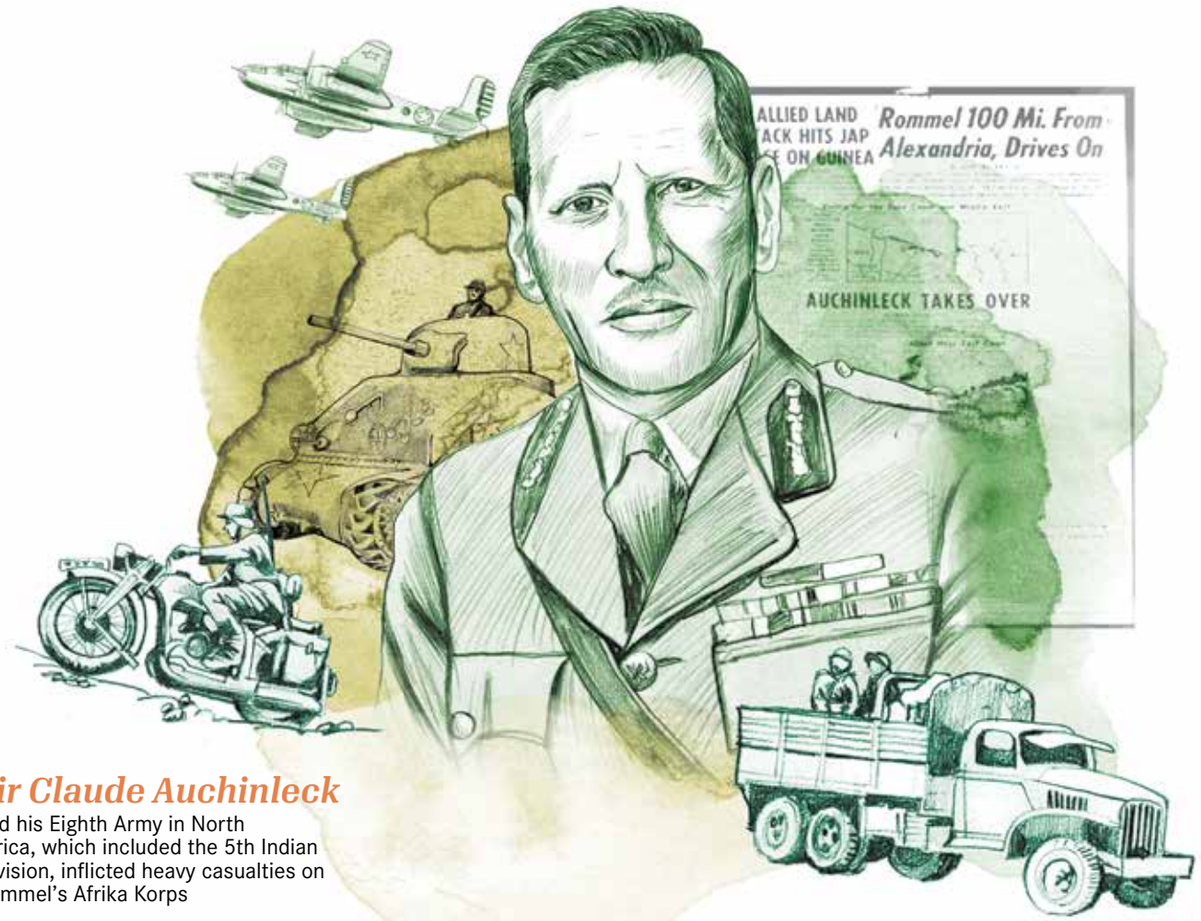
The British Eighth Army settled at El Alamein, only 106km from Alexandria port, from where their supplies were coming. Rommel, too, had his forces nearby, planning to capture Alexandria, and then Cairo, and ultimately the Suez Canal. But he was hampered by the fact that his supplies had to come from distant Tripoli in Libya. In July, Auchinleck's Eighth Army launched six attacks employing, among others, the Indian 5th Division. Rommel resisted fiercely. As he suffered 13,000 casualties, including 3,000 Indians, Auchinleck decided to wait. But Churchill, who wanted immediate action, removed him and appointed Sir Harold Alexander as Middle East commander and William Gott as Eighth Army commander. Gott was killed when his aircraft was shot down. So Lt Gen Bernard Montgomery was appointed in his place. He took command on August 13.

> When the war started, the Indian Army had less than two lakh men. When the war ended, they were 2.5 million, after losing 87,000 dead and 64,000 wounded; the largest voluntary army ever.

#### SECOND BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

Rommel's Afrika Korps launched a determined attack at Alam-el-Halfa on the night of August 30, 1942, but Montgomery resisted fiercely. On October 23, Montgomery launched an attack in which the 4th and 5th Indian Divisions played a major role. The Indian 5th Brigade broke through Rommel's defences and captured El Alamein. By the end of November, the Allies took 30,000 prisoners.

The victory at El Alamein was the first big success against the Axis forces anywhere in the world. It eliminated the Axis threat to Egypt and the Suez Canal, which was Britain's main supply route for oil from the Middle East and troops from India. The 4th Indian Division fought hard; the 10th Indian Division, too, joined at a later stage. Subedar Lal Bahadur Thapa and Company Havildar Major Chhelu Ram won Victoria Cross in these operations.




**Sir Claude Auchinleck**
and his Eighth Army in North Africa, which included the 5th Indian Division, inflicted heavy casualties on Rommel's Afrika Korps

## ★★MIDDLE EAST★★
Securing oil for the war

### ANGLO-IRAQI WAR

In 1940, a pro-German junta took power in Iraq, threatening Britain's oil supplies and opening a route for Germans to invade Afghanistan and India. Since the Indian Army was even otherwise guarding the northwest against threat from Russia, it was asked to neutralise the threat. Gen Robert Cassels, commander-in-chief of India, who had successfully commanded a cavalry brigade in Iraq in World War I and helped end the Mesopotamian campaign, sent the newly formed 20th Indian Brigade under Brigadier D. Powell. Along with the British forces, they swiftly captured Basra and Baghdad, reoccupied Iraq and installed the pro-British Prince Abd al-Ilah.

### SYRIA-LEBANON CAMPAIGN

In mid-May 1941, trouble arose in Syria, where French Vichy forces, which were friendly to Germany, captured the airfields. The 5th Indian Brigade joined the Free French forces and captured Damascus airfield in a bold night attack on June 21, 1941. Syria sought armistice in July 1941.

### ANGLO-SOVIET INVASION OF IRAN

Iran ruler Reza Shah had good relations with Germany, and he threatened to cut oil supplies. Russia, which had just joined the war on the Allied side, panicked. The British moved the 8th Indian Division along with their own and Soviet forces in an Anglo-Soviet invasion. The 8th Indian Division attacked from the west while a Russian contingent attacked from the north. They installed a friendly regime and this ensured supplies to Russia. A new Persia and Iraq (PAI) Command was raised, consisting mostly of Indian units, to ensure the supplies to Russia.

## ★★EUROPE★★
Chasing Mussolini

### ITALIAN CAMPAIGN AND THE BATTLE OF MONTE CASSINO

The victories in North Africa in 1941-42 enabled the Allies to plan an invasion of Italy from the south. The 8th Indian Division, which was with Mongomery's Eighth Army in North Africa, captured Taranto port, which was the first bridgehead captured by the Allies on European soil. When the task of advancing to Rome was given to the British Fifth Army, the Indian 4th Division joined them. The division assaulted Cassino, but it proved costly. So the overall Middle East commander, Gen Harold Alexander, sent the 5th and 8th Armies to attack Liri Valley and force a way to Rome. The 8th Indian Division, too, joined the attack. They broke through the Gustav Line and chased the Germans into Rome. Soon the 10th Indian Division secured the north up to the Adriatic. As many as 4,720 Indians died in Italy; another 17,310 were wounded. Six Indians won the VC.

> British and Indian forces chased the Germans into Rome. The 10th Indian Division secured the north up to the Adriatic. As many as 4,720 Indians died in Italy. Six Indians won the Victoria Cross.

## ★★THE FAR EAST★★
A Dip in the Pacific

### BATTLE OF HONG KONG (DECEMBER 8–25, 1941)

The day they bombed Pearl Harbour, the Japanese also attacked Britain's crown colony of Hong Kong, which was garrisoned by British and Indian troops. The first attack was faced by the 2/14 Punjab. On December 8, 1941, their forward troops virtually wiped out a Japanese platoon. Despite being subjected to dive bombing and heavy mortar fire, 5/7 Rajputs held on to Devil's Peak on the mainland until ordered to retreat to Hong Kong island. The Japanese followed them to the island, where they fought till the last man. The garrison held out for 18 days before being forced to surrender. Some were captured alive and murdered by the Japanese. Among the prisoners who survived were 5,072 British, 3,829 Indians and 1,689 Canadians.

## ★★SOUTHEAST ASIA★★
Enemy from the East

### MALAYA AND SINGAPORE

The Malayan and the subsequent Burma campaigns were the bloodiest battles for both the British and Indians. About 1,30,000 of the Allied troops were captured by the Japanese in Malaya alone, and 15,703 killed.

The British were caught off guard when Japan's 25th Army, under Lt Gen Tomoyuki Yamashita, invaded Malaya and began bombing Singapore. The Indian III Corps, the 12th Brigade and a number of independent battalions resisted them, but were smashed in the battle of Jitra (December 11-13). The enemy swiftly advanced to Kota Bharu on the northeast coast of Malaya. As the British abandoned Penang, the local Indians felt betrayed, and many began to cooperate with the invading Japanese.

On January 11, 1942 Kuala Lumpur, too, fell to the Japanese. As the Japanese moved towards Singapore, less than 320km away, the Indian 11th Division resisted them bitterly in the battle of Kampar (December 30-January 2). But as the Japanese brought more forces by the sea, the Indians and the British retreated to Slim River. Two Indian brigades were wiped out in the battle of Slim River (January 6-8).

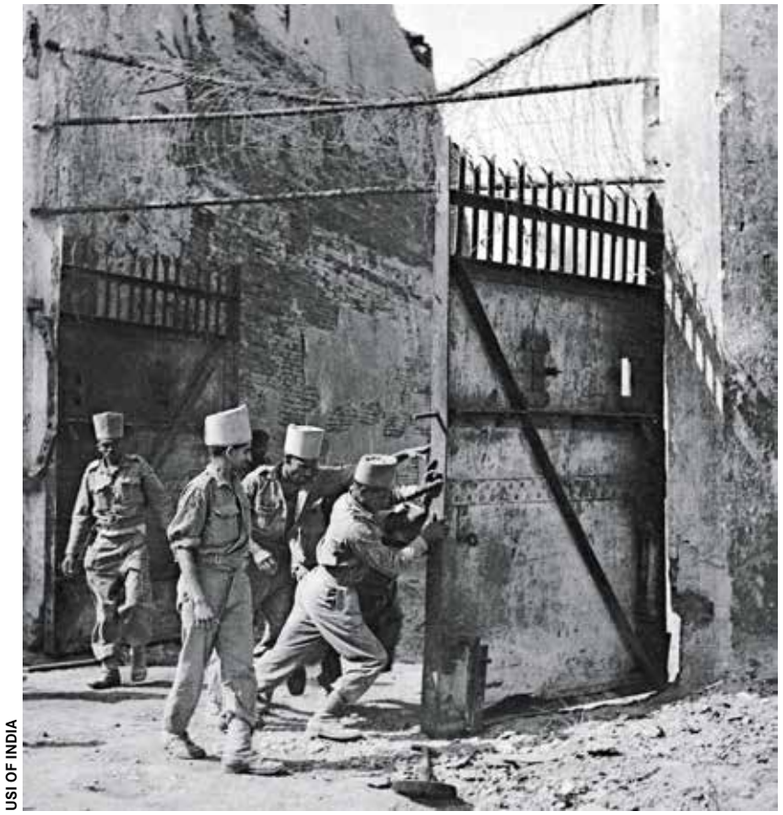
In the Battle of Muar, the 45th Indian Brigade was destroyed. The survivors grouped themselves into a Muar force and tried to keep off the Japanese while allowing the remnants of the Allied forces to escape from northern Malaya. When the wounded and bleeding force finally reached the bridge at Parit Sulong, they found it had been captured by the enemy. Every man was for himself then. They took to the jungles, swamps and rubber plantations. All but two of 135 troops were captured, tortured and killed. About 3,000 Allied troops were killed in the Battle of Muar. Of 4,000 men in the brigade, only 800 survived.On January 27, the remaining forces crossed over to Singapore. The Japanese invaded the island on February 7. The Allied force of about 80,000 was taken prisoner.

### BATTLE OF BORNEO

As the Japanese threat loomed, the British sent the 2nd Battalion of the 15th Punjab and a gun battery from the Hong Kong-Singapore Royal Artillery to guard the airfield at Kuching, the capital of Sarawak. The Japanese attacked, killed 230 men of the battalion in one night, and captured the city on December 24, 1941. The defending force was disbanded, and they crossed over to Dutch Borneo, where they were placed under Dutch command. The men continued to resist the Japanese in the dense jungle of southern Borneo until April 1, 1942, when they finally surrendered.

## ★★ENEMY AT THE GATES★★
Burma campaign and Defence of India

On December 8, Japan invaded Malaya and, later, Burma. The 17th Indian Division fought and delayed



USI OF INDIA




GETTY IMAGES

the Japanese at Bilin River in February 1942. Outgunned, they retreated to the Sittang bridge. The enemy followed and in the ensuring Battle of Sittang Bridge, the division lost most of its guns and equipment.In April, the Japanese attacked the Yenangyaung oil fields, where the 48th Indian Brigade defended it with the British 1st Burma Division, inflicting heavy casualties. But the Japanese reinforced and struck. The badly bruised army retreated through the jungle, mostly without even transport, towards Manipur and were joined even by the Chinese.

In 1942 the Allies attacked Arakan with the Indian contingent trying to capture Mayu peninsula and Akyab Island, but failed. Then, Brigadier Orde Wingate raised the famous Chindits, who infiltrated through the Japanese front lines and marched deep into Burma, so as to cut the main north-south railway. They damaged communications of the Japanese in northern Burma, but most of them were killed or captured. All the same, the adventures of the Chindits became legendary and helped instil confidence in the Indian and British troops.By early 1944, the Indian XV Corps broke a Japanese counterstrike in the Arakan. As the XV Corps came under attack in the Battle of the Admin Box in February, the 5th Indian Division broke through the Ngakyedauk Pass and reinforced them. Both sides lost heavily, but that was the first major battle won against the Japanese and it was mainly by the Indian units.

**FIGHT TO THE FINISH**
(Left) Sikh soldiers fighting alongside the British Eighth Army in Giovanni Berta, Libya, on January 23, 1942; (top) members of the Madras Engineering Group, known as Madras Sappers, opening the gates of Fort Dufferin in Mandalay, Burma, in March 1943





WAR HEROES

# Courage under fire

## With their valour, loyalty and presence of mind, Indian soldiers helped turn many a battle around

BY R. PRASANNAN

**BATTLES OF IMPHAL AND KOHIMA**

Yet the Japanese pushed forward. William Slim correctly judged that they would now lunge forth towards India, and that is where the British would have to take a last stand.As the Japanese 15th Army under General Renya Mutaguchi and Subhas Bose's Indian National Army crossed the Chindwin River on 8 March, Slim and Lt Gen Geoffry Scoones ordered a fighting retreat to Imphal and Kohima. Having blunted a Japanese attack on Arakan, Slim airlifted the entire 5th Indian Division to the Indian border.

The Japanese now struck Imphal. As the enemy rolled down the hill into the Imphal plain, IV Corps opened up while airplanes piloted by Arjan Singh and his buddies roared up into the skies and pounded them from the air, blunting the Japanese attack. By May, a counteroffensive was ordered.

Another Japanese division, under Lt Gen Kotoku Sato was pounding Kohima to capture it and advance to Dimapur. Lt Gen Montagu Stopford quickly reached there with his Indian XXXIII Corps and stopped Sato. The two brilliant defences finally stopped the Japanese march, which had never been stopped since the war began.

As Sato retreated, the troops of IV Corps and XXXIII Corps met at Milestone 109 on the Dimapur-Imphal road on June 22, signalling they shall not pass. That was the greatest defeat that the Japanese had suffered ever in history—60,000 dead and more than 1,00,000 wounded.As the enemy retreated, Slim ordered a pursuit. The 5th Indian Division advanced along the mountainous Tiddim road, captured Kalewa and crossed the Chindwin. Soon Mandalay and Rangoon were taken, and the Japanese were on the run.

**INDIAN ARMY PERSONNEL**—native Indians, Nepali Gurkhas, natives of future Pakistan and Bangladesh, and Britons who were commissioned or enlisted in the Indian Army—won nearly 6,300 awards in World War II. The tally included 31 Victoria Crosses (VC), which were the highest military gallantry honour, seven George Crosses, which were the next in order, 252 Distinguished Service Orders, 347 Indian Orders of Merit and 1,311 Military Crosses.

The VC was awarded for "... most conspicuous bravery, or some daring or preeminent act of valour or self-sacrifice, or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy". Here are the 31 bravehearts who won the award.

**NORTH AND EAST AFRICAN CAMPAIGN**

**Second Lt Premindra Singh Bhagat** (Corps of Engineers) was the first Indian to win the Victoria Cross in the war. When his men were chasing the enemy after the capture of Metemma in Ethiopia, he personally cleared 15 minefields in 96 hours from the night of January 31, 1941. Bhagat rose to the rank of lieutenant general in independent India's army.

**Company Havildar Major Chhelu Ram** (6th Rajputana Rifles; posthumous) was already wounded when he took command of his company at Djebel Garci, Tunisia on the night of April 19, 1943. He led them in a hand-to-hand fight, was wounded again, but continued rallying his men until he fell.

**Subedar Lal Bahadur Thapa** (2nd Gurkha Rifles) spotted enemy posts on both sides of a pathway winding up a narrow cleft when he was commanding two sections at Rass-es-Zouai, Tunisia on the night of April 5, 1943. Stealing his way up, he killed them all, including a machine-gunner, with his khukri and bayonet. Then he fought his way up the bullet-swept approaches to the crest, where he and his men killed four. This enabled an entire division of troops (more than 15,000) to advance further.

**Subedar Richhpal Ram** (6th Rajputana Rifles; posthumous) led an attack at Keren, Eritrea on February 7, 1941, and repelled six counterattacks. Then, without a shot left, he brought the few survivors of his company back. Five days later, his right foot

was blown off when he was leading another attack, but he continued to encourage his men until he died.

ITALIAN CAMPAIGN

**Naik Yeshwant Ghadge** (5th Mahratta Light; posthumous) was commanding a rifle section on July 10, 1944 when he came under heavy machine-gun fire at close range, which felled all except him. Ghadge threw a grenade which knocked out the gunner, rushed at the post shooting another, and clubbed to death the two remaining members of the crew. He was shot finally by an enemy sniper.

**Rifleman Thaman Gurung** (5th Gurkha; posthumous) was patrolling Monte San Bartolo, Italy on November 10, 1944 when his gallantry helped his platoon withdraw from a difficult position without many casualties. The platoon also picked up some valuable information that resulted in the capture of the area three days later.

**Sepoy Ali Haidar** (13th Frontier Force) and two other men of his section were the only ones who survived machine-gun fire during the crossing of the Senio River on April 9, 1945. Haidar then attacked the nearest strong point and, in spite of being wounded, put it out of action. He was again wounded while attacking a second strong point, but he crawled closer, threw a grenade and charged the post. Two enemy soldiers were wounded, the remaining two surrendered. His company was able to cross the river and establish a bridgehead.

**Sepoy Namdeo Jadav** (5th Mahratta Light) carried two wounded men to safety under heavy fire through deep water, up a steep bank and through a mine belt on April 9, 1945. His party was almost wiped out. Determined to avenge them, he eliminated three enemy machine gun posts. Finally, climbing on top of the bank he shouted the Maratha war cry and waved the remaining companies through. He not only saved many lives but enabled the battalion to secure the bridgehead and crush all enemy resistance in the area.

**Sepoy Kamal Ram** (8th Punjab) was part of a company that was advancing on May 12, 1944 when it was held up by machine-gun fire from four posts on the front and flanks. Ram volunteered to get round the rear of the right post and silence it. He attacked the first two posts alone, killing or taking prisoner the occupant. Together with a havildar, he went on to destroy a third post.

**Rifleman Sher Bahadur Thapa** (9th Gurkha; posthumous) was part of the company that was resisted by a German-prepared position on September 18–19, 1944. Thapa and his section commander, who was badly wounded afterwards, charged and silenced an enemy machine gun. Then he went alone to the exposed part of a ridge, where, ignoring a hail of bullets, silenced more machine guns, covered a withdrawal and rescued two wounded men before he was killed.

MALAYAN CAMPAIGN

**Lt Col Arthur Cumming** (12th Frontier Force) led a counterattack with a small party when the Japanese attacked his position near Kuantan, Malaya on January 3, 1942. His men were felled, and he was bayoneted twice in the stomach, yet Cumming fought on till the rest of the battalion could pull out. Later, he drove in a troop carrier, braving enemy fire, to pick up scattered men when he was again wounded. But his effort saved his entire brigade.



***Second Lt P.S. Bhagat***
personally cleared 15 minefields in 96 hours in Ethiopia in January 1941. He later rose to become lieutenant general in independent India's army

BURMA CAMPAIGN

**Captain Michael Allmand** (6th Gurkha; posthumous) and his platoon were 20 yards short of Pin Hmi Road Bridge when the enemy opened heavy fire. His men sought cover, but Allmand charged alone, hurling grenades into the enemy gun positions and killing three Japanese with his khukri. Inspired by his action, his men followed him and captured the bridge. Two days later, Allmand took over command of the larger company, and charged through a marsh towards Japanese position braving enemy fire. He personally killed a number of enemy machine-gunners and led his men to the high ground that they had been ordered to seize. Again, in a third action, he attacked a rail bridge at Mogaung, in which he walked alone with trench foot to charge at a Japanese machine-gun nest, but was felled. He died shortly afterwards.

**Major Frank Blaker** (9th Gurkha; posthumous) was commanding a company on July 9, 1944 when they were stalled by close-range firing from machine guns. The major went ahead of his men through heavy fire. Despite being wounded in the arm, he located the machine guns and charged alone. He continued to cheer on his men even while lying mortally wounded, inspiring them to accomplish the objective.

**Naik Fazal Din** (10th Baluch; posthumous) personally attacked the nearest bunker when his section was held up by fire from enemy bunkers during an attack on March 2, 1945. As he led his men against the other bunker, six Japanese, two wielding swords, rushed out. Fazal Din was run through the chest by one of them. As the sword was withdrawn, he wrested it from the hands of its owner and killed him with it. Killing another Japanese with the sword, he waved it aloft to encourage his men before collapsing.

**Havildar Gaje Ghale** (5th Gurkha) was in charge of a platoon attacking a strong Japanese position on May 24–27, 1943. Wounded in the arm, chest and leg, he continued to lead assault after assault, encouraging his men by shouting the Gurkha battle-cry. Spurred by his action, the platoon stormed and captured the position.

**Rifleman Bhanbhagta Gurung** (2nd Gurkha) and his company were pinned down by an enemy sniper on March 5, 1945. Gurung stood up, exposing himself, and calmly killed the sniper. The section advanced but came under heavy fire again. Gurung attacked the first enemy foxhole, throwing two grenades and killing two occupants. He rushed to the next enemy foxhole and killed the Japanese in it with his bayonet. He was under machine-gun fire during the entire action. He cleared five enemy positions single-handedly, and his party repelled a counterattack with heavy loss to the enemy.

**Rifleman Lachhiman Gurung** (8th Gurkha) was manning the most forward post of his platoon on May 12, 1945 when it was attacked by 200 enemy troops. He hurled back the two grenades that fell on his trench, but the third exploded in his right hand, shattering his arm and wounding him in the face and right leg. Yet he loaded and fired his rifle with his left hand for four hours, calmly meeting each attack by firing point blank. Afterwards, it was found that he had killed 31 Japanese with only one arm.

**Jamedar Abdul Hafiz** (9th Jat; posthumous) and his platoon were ordered to attack an enemy position on April 6, 1944. The only approach to the position was across a bare slope and up a steep cliff. Hafiz led the assault, killing several of the enemy himself and then pressed on regardless of machine-gun fire. He

received two wounds, the second of which was fatal, but routed a vastly superior enemy and captured an important position.

**Lt Karamjeet Singh Judge** (15th Punjab; posthumous) dominated the battlefield with numerous acts on March 18, 1945. As a platoon commander, he destroyed ten enemy bunkers. Then he directed one tank to within 20 yards of another and asked the tank commander to cease fire while he went in to mop up. While doing so, he was mortally wounded.

**Rifleman Ganju Lama** (7th Gurkha) was attempting to stem the enemy's advance on June 12, 1944 when his company came under heavy machine-gun fire. Lama took his anti-tank gun, crawled forward to 30 yards of the enemy tanks and knocked out two of them. Despite a broken wrist and two serious wounds to his both hands, he moved forward and killed the tank crew as they tried to escape.

**Rifleman Tul Bahadur Pun** (6th Gurkha) found that he, his section commander and another trooper were the only survivors in a section that attacked a railway bridge on June 23, 1944. The section commander then led a charge on the enemy position but was badly wounded, as was the third man. With a Bren gun, Pun continued the charge alone, reached the position, killed three, put five more to flight, and captured two light machine guns and much ammunition. He then gave accurate supporting fire, enabling the rest of his platoon to reach their objective.

**Rifleman Agansing Rai** (5th Gurkha) killed three machine-gun crew under withering fire on June 26, 1944. After taking the enemy position, he killed three more machine-gunners who were firing from the jungle. He then attacked an isolated bunker single-handedly, killing all four occupants. The enemy fled in fright, and the second post, too, was captured.

**Sepoy Bhandari Ram** (10th Baluch) was pinned down, along with his platoon, by machine-gun fire on November 22, 1944. Although wounded, he crawled up to a Japanese light machine gun, in full view of the enemy, and was wounded again. But he continued crawling to within five yards of his objective. He then threw a grenade into the position, killing the gunner and two others. This action inspired his platoon to rush and capture the enemy position.

**Lance Naik Sher Shah** (16th Punjab; posthumous) was commanding a left forward section of his platoon on January 19–20, 1945 when it was attacked by an overwhelming number of Japanese soldiers. He broke up two attacks by crawling right in among the enemy and shooting at point-blank range. On the second occasion, he was hit and his leg was shattered. When the third attack came, he again crawled forward, engaging the enemy until he was shot in the head.

**Naik Gian Singh** (15th Punjab) was in charge of the leading section of his platoon on March 2, 1945 when he went on alone firing his Tommy gun, and rushed the enemy foxholes. Though wounded in the arm, he went on hurling grenades. He attacked and killed the crew of a cleverly concealed anti-tank gun, and then led his men down a lane clearing all enemy positions. He went on leading his section until the action was completed.



USI OF INDIA

> Undaunted, Havildar Umrao Singh picked up a 'gun bearer' (a heavy iron rod, similar to a crowbar) and used that as a weapon in hand-to-hand fighting. He struck down three Japanese infantrymen, before falling to a rain of blows.

**Naik Nand Singh** (11th Sikh) was commanding a leading section of an attack on March 11–12, 1944 when he was ordered to recapture a position gained by the enemy. He led his section up a steep, knife-edged ridge under heavy fire and, although wounded in the thigh, captured the first trench. He then crawled forward alone and, wounded again in the face and shoulder, and captured the second and third trenches.

**Havildar Parkash Singh** (8th Punjab) drove his own carrier forward and rescued the crew of two disabled carriers under heavy fire on January 6, 1943. Again in the same area on January 19, he rescued two more carriers that had been put out of action by an enemy anti-tank gun. He then went out again and brought to safety another disabled carrier containing two wounded men.

**Jamedar Prakash Singh Chib** (13th Frontier Force; posthumous) was commanding a platoon on February 16-17, 1945. He was wounded in both ankles and relieved of his command, but when his second-in-command was also injured, he crawled back and took command again, directing operations and encouraging his men. He was wounded in both legs a second time, but continued to direct the defence, dragging himself from place to place by his hands. When wounded a third time, he lay shouting the Dogra war-cry as he died, inspiring his company that finally drove off the enemy.

**Havildar Umrao Singh** (Artillery Regiment) was a field gun detachment commander whose gun was in an advanced position supporting the 8th Gold Coast Regiment on December 15–16, 1944. After a 90-minute bombardment from 75mm guns and mortars, Singh's position was attacked by two companies of Japanese infantry. Using a Bren gun, he held off the assault and was wounded by two grenades. A second attack killed all but Singh and two other gunners, but it was also beaten off. The three soldiers had only a few bullets remaining, and these were rapidly exhausted in the initial stages of the third attack. Undaunted, Singh picked up a 'gun bearer' (a heavy iron rod, similar to a crowbar) and used that as a weapon in hand-to-hand fighting. He struck down three infantrymen, before falling to a rain of blows. Six hours later, after a counterattack, he was found alive but unconscious near his gun, almost unrecognisable from a head injury, still clutching his gun bearer. Ten Japanese soldiers lay dead nearby.

**Subedar Ram Sarup Singh** (1st Punjab; posthumous) was commanding a platoon attacking a strong enemy position on October 25, 1944. They routed the enemy and he was wounded in both legs. But he insisted on carrying on, and his dashing charge alone halted an enemy counterattack. In this action, he killed four of the enemy. He was again wounded, in the thigh, but continued to lead his men, killing two more of the enemy, until he was mortally wounded.

**Acting Subedar Netrabahadur Thapa** (5th Gurkha; posthumous) was in command of a small isolated hill post at Bishenpur, Burma, on 25–26 June 1944 when the Japanese attacked. The men, inspired by Thapa's example, held their ground and beat off the enemy, but casualties were very heavy and reinforcements were requested. When these arrived some hours later, they also suffered heavy casualties. Thapa retrieved the reinforcements' ammunition himself and mounted an offensive with grenades and khukris, until he was killed.

# Birth of a nation

## How World War II started a chain reaction that resulted in India's independence

BY R. PRASANNAN

**LORD LINLITHGOW'S BIGGEST** handicap, as Labour Party leader Clement Attlee remarked, was that he lacked "imaginative insight". Jawaharlal Nehru thought of Linlithgow as a man "heavy of body and slow of mind, solid as a rock and with almost a rock's lack of awareness".

Unfortunately, Linlithgow happened to be the viceroy of India when World War II broke out. The man made things difficult for both the Indians and the British.

Though fighting the British for political freedom, most Indian leaders, except Subhas Bose, had been well disposed towards the British cause against Nazism. The Congress working committee had resolved not to make things difficult for Britain, in case of war.

Nehru had a record of anti-fascism that "far surpassed that of the British government", writes Donny Gluckstein in *A People's History of the Second World War*. While the British government of Neville Chamberlain was appeasing the fascists in the 1930s, Nehru toured Europe and declared support to the democratic elements fighting the fascists in Spain and Czechoslovakia. In Italy, he even refused an invitation to meet Benito Mussolini.

In short, Linlithgow only had to ask, and India would have supported the British cause in the war. In return, India wanted self-government, at par with the dominions of Canada and Australia. But Linlithgow had neither the imagination to ask India, nor the sagacity to advise London to promise self-government.

Instead, within hours of Britain declaring war on Germany, he proclaimed that India was at war. He did not consult the central legislature or the provincial governments that had been elected on the strength of the Government of India Act of 1935. He did not consult the Congress or the Muslim League. He did not consult any of the stakeholders in India's political destiny.

When Linlithgow went on air, Nehru was on his way back from China, where he had declared support to Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist forces that were fighting the imperial Japanese for nearly half a decade. During his stopover in Rangoon, when the press asked him about Linlithgow's proclamation, Nehru said: "This is not the time to bargain. We are against the rising imperialism of Germany, Italy and Japan and the decaying imperialisms of Europe."

In India, Subhas Bose, who had just resigned as Congress president over his differences with Nehru and Sardar Patel, seized upon this. Proclaiming that "British adversity is India's opportunity", he organised protests when Nehru landed in Calcutta. Sensing that a split was imminent within the national movement, Mahatma Gandhi declared that the Congress would finalise its stand only after Britain defined its war aims.

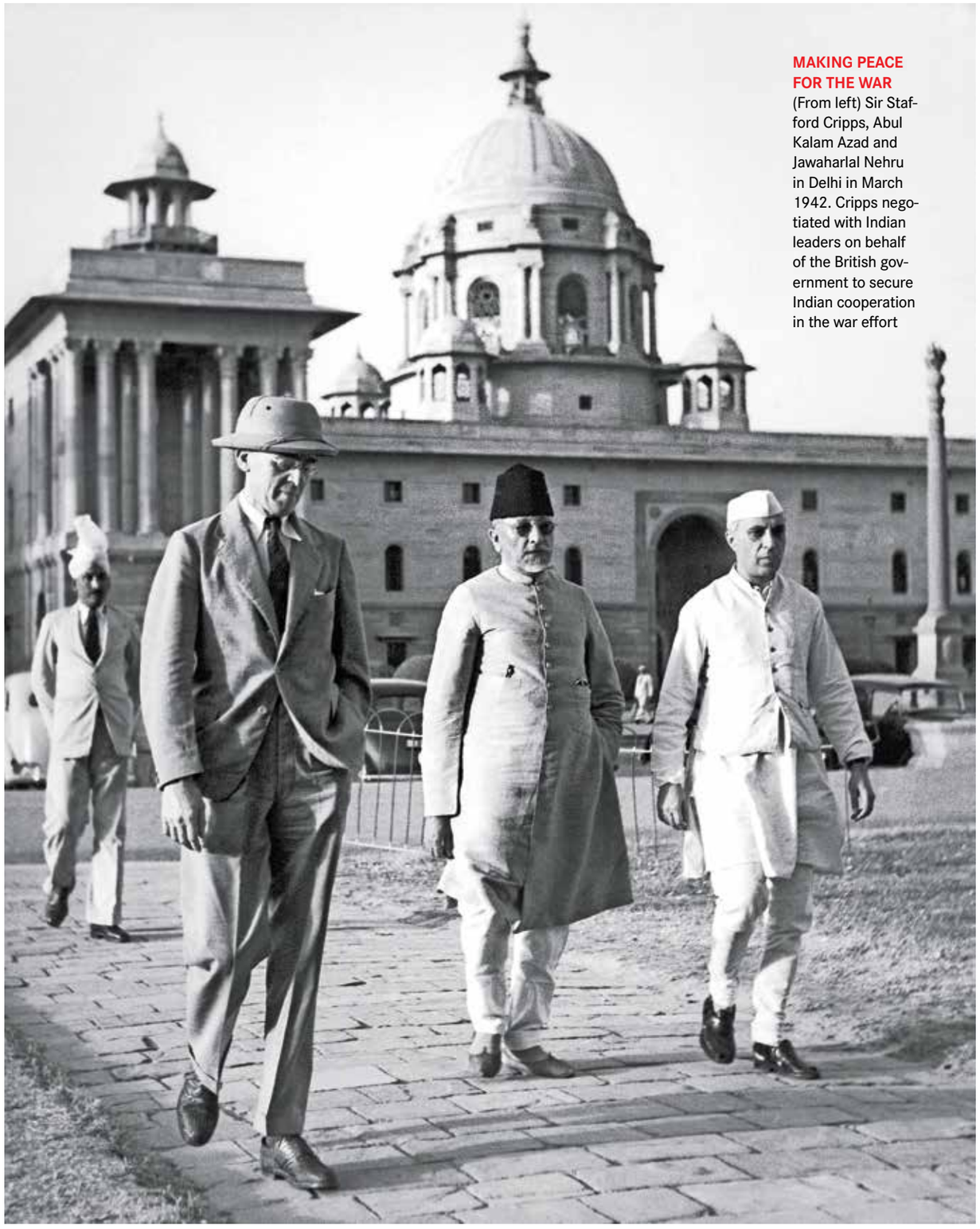
It was the memory of their bitter experience after World War I that made the Congress and the Muslim League hold back. They had wholeheartedly supported Britain in World War I, and had hoped that the British would move towards granting self-government after the war. But all that they got was the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, and a diarchy through the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. So now, when World War II broke out, they told Linlithgow: No more promises; give us self-government now and we will be there to defend the Commonwealth.

Linlithgow refused. The Congress governments in the provinces resigned in protest. Later, in February 1940, the viceroy told Gandhi that a new constitution would be drawn up after the war; but Gandhi was not impressed.

Linlithgow called Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who agreed to support the war effort if the British promised not to deal with the Congress behind his back. Linlithgow gave his word.

Gandhi, quick to sense the danger of a communal divide, persuaded the Congress to declare "nothing short of complete independence" as their demand and threatened civil disobedience. The political parting of ways between the British rulers and India's leaders happened there.

Linlithgow had one more chance in August 1940. When they heard of



**MAKING PEACE FOR THE WAR** (From left) Sir Stafford Cripps, Abul Kalam Azad and Jawaharlal Nehru in Delhi in March 1942. Cripps negotiated with Indian leaders on behalf of the British government to secure Indian cooperation in the war effort

GETTY IMAGES

the fall of France; of the desperate evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk; of the misery of the British people facing the daily Luftwaffe bombings; and of the fear of imminent invasion of Britain itself, Indian leaders' hearts melted again. The Congress made another offer to cooperate if at least a provisional national government could be established in Delhi.

By now, the government of Chamberlain and the India-friendly Lord Halifax in London had given way to arch-imperialist Winston Churchill. On London's instructions, Linlithgow replied with the most mulish 'no' ever said by a liberal regime to a friendly offer. Not only the Congress, but Jinnah's Muslim League, too, was outraged. As the Congress threatened civil disobedience, Linlithgow threw most of its leaders into jail.

By March 1941, Bose had escaped house arrest and fled to Moscow. When the Russians spurned his pleas for help against the British, he went to Berlin. Soon he began radio appeals to Indians in Europe and elsewhere to support the Axis cause.

By now, big power equations were changing. Having signed a non-aggression pact, Germany and the Soviet Union had been dividing Europe into their spheres of influence. But in mid-1941, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, suddenly turning his ally into an enemy. Britain thus got a powerful ally in Europe, and the British administration in India got the support of the Soviet-leaning communists in India.

The strategic perception from India, too, had changed. Since the 19th century, the biggest British concern in India was a possible expansion of the Tsarist and then the communist empire into India's northwest. Thus most of the Indian army and air defence installations had been stationed in the northwest when the war broke out. Now, with the Soviet Union having become an ally, there was no more concern about India's northwest. This enabled the viceroy to withdraw Indian troops from the northwest and send them to the Middle East and North Africa to secure British interests.

But, soon a new enemy appeared on the eastern horizon and he was coveting India.

On December 8, 1941, Japan not only bombed America's Pearl Harbour, drawing a new power into the war, but also invaded British Malaya and Singapore, all of which were garrisoned by mostly the Indian Army. In two days, the Japanese sank two British warships in the South China Sea and, on December 11, invaded Burma. The war was now coming close to home for India. A panic-stricken Linlithgow freed the national leaders and expanded the executive council, but was still unwilling to make any political offer.



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**GRUEL AND THE GRUELLING WAR**
Viceroy Lord Wavell during a visit to a kitchen for famine victims in Kolkata. The fall of Burma, from where rice used to be imported, led to widespread deaths in Bengal

## *Lord Linlithgow*

failed to consult the central legislature of India or the provincial governments before proclaiming that India was at war



> With the fall of Rangoon, Gandhi and the Congress were convinced that the British would be defeated at the gates of India, and be forced to leave India, leaving a vacuum which the Japanese would occupy.

The biggest shock of the war in the east came on February 15, 1942. That day, Fortress Singapore, considered the eastern gate of the British empire as also India's strategic perimeter, fell to the Japanese. An exasperated Churchill described it as "the worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history".

Within days, the Japanese bombed Chittagong and other ports in the Bay of Bengal. By now, the Americans, too, were putting pressure on Churchill to consider India's demands more favourably. As Rangoon fell, it was clear that Calcutta would not be far behind. Alarmed, Churchill offered to send his cabinet colleague Sir Stafford Cripps to negotiate with Indian leaders.

Cripps was chosen for his three qualities. One, he had leftist leanings and thus could jell well with Nehru and others. Two, he had a sympathy for the Indian cause. Three, he could sup with the vegetarian 'devils.' Like Gandhi, he was a sworn vegetarian.

But Cripps could not make much headway because his mandate was limited. The most he could offer was a constitutional assembly and dominion status, both of which would come after the war. Gandhi dismissed the offer as "an undated cheque on a crashing bank".

It was not just rhetoric. Gandhi and the Congress, though sympathetic to the British cause, were convinced that Britain was crashing. They were worried about the security of India in the event of a British defeat. With the fall of Rangoon, they were convinced that the British would be defeated at the gates of India, and be forced to leave India, leaving a vacuum which the Japanese would occupy.

They did not want that to happen. Instead, as the journalist Durga Das observed, they wanted an Indian government to be in place in Delhi, with the Indian army commanded by an Indian, to fight the Japanese even after the British were forced to leave. Interestingly, even Archibald Wavell, who was then commander-in-chief of India (he would later become viceroy), was favourable to the idea. But Churchill simply refused, leaving Cripps helpless.

Yet, the Indian leaders were willing to help. The Congress passed another resolution on July 14, 1942, offering that once given self-government, they would not only commit India to the Allied war effort against Japan, but also allow British and other Allied armies to be stationed in India, along with Indian troops, to fight the Japanese. But Churchill did not even acknowledge the offer.

Disgusted and desperate, the Congress authorised Gandhi to decide the next course of action. He did it with the strongest two words that he ever uttered in his political life: "Quit India," he told the British. Linlithgow

promptly sent all national leaders to jail, throwing India into turmoil.

Meanwhile, Bose's efforts to rally German aid for Indian freedom got nowhere. The Germans told him to seek the help of the Japanese, who were fighting the British in Asia. Bose undertook a submarine journey to the east and reached Tokyo. The Japanese gave him charge of 60,000 Indian prisoners they had taken from Malaya and Singapore. He took them to Singapore, where Rash Behari Bose handed him the command of the Indian National Army.

With about 25,000 of 60,000 surrendered Indian troops, Bose joined the Japanese march towards India. By then the Indian Independence League of Japan had sent 14 men in four groups by land and sea to spread the seeds of revolt in the Indian Army, but they were captured and executed by the British.

In October, London recalled Linlithgow and appointed Wavell, the well-loved general who had commanded Indian divisions in North Africa and had been impressed by them. But he had not impressed Churchill, who had sent him as C-in-C of India and now viceroy. Within days, the Andamans fell to the Japanese who handed over the islands to Bose. As Bose hoisted the Indian flag there, Japanese bombers were pounding Calcutta.

Wavell, a man with poetic imagination (he used to compose verse even on the battlefield) and military common sense, realised that the situation was getting precarious on three grounds. One, thousands of Indians were dying in a famine in India after the fall of Burma, from where rice used to be imported.

Two, Wavell's military mind understood that the Japanese could not be stopped anywhere in Burma and they would invade India. By March they were knocking on the gates of India at Kohima and even planted the INA flag on a corner of the Indian soil. With the presence of so many Indians in Bose's ranks fighting alongside the Japanese, there was no guarantee that even the most loyal Indian mind would not turn against the British.

Three, Gandhi's health was deteriorating in the Aga Khan Palace, where he was incarcerated. Kasturba's death in prison, too, had devastated him.

In May 1944, Wavell released Gandhi. Gandhi told Wavell's emissaries that he was willing to withdraw civil disobedience and offer full support to the war if Wavell could at least promise freedom soon enough. Once again, Wavell found his hands tied by London.

Fortunately, the war was turning favourable. Having evacuated the entire army from Arakan in Burma with American aid, Gen William Slim decided that Britain would take its last stand at the gates of India. The battles on the Indian frontier would ultimately decide the destiny of the so-called free world.

The gamble paid off. Indian and British troops fought what they thought was the final battle at Kohima and Imphal, where they finally blocked the Japanese. For Indians, it was the last chance to save India from another tyranny. For the British, it was the last chance to save the free world and exit from the empire with honour.

Most military historians say the battles of Imphal and Kohima were among the worst and the fiercest ever. For the first time since the war had begun, the Japanese land advance was halted. On July 8, 1944, Gen Renya Mutaguchi accepted failure and ordered the remnants of his army to withdraw. India was saved.

Slim came to be known as the man who saved India. He would later declare with pride: "My Indian divisions after 1943 were among the best in the world. They would go anywhere, do anything, go on doing it and do it on very little."

Slim came to be known as the man who saved India. But in his hour of glory, he would not rest on his laurels. In a brilliant counterattack, Slim sent his Indians to chase the Japanese across the river Chindwin, into the Irrawaddy basin, into Rangoon and beyond, in what he himself described as "a forgotten war". Slim would later declare with pride: "My Indian divisions after 1943 were among the best in the world. They would go anywhere, do anything, go on doing it and do it on very little."

The victory strengthened Wavell's hands. He could now persuade the home government to divert food supplies from Australia and elsewhere to India.

With the Japanese in retreat, and the INA having surrendered or been captured, Wavell invited the Congress and Muslim League leaders to a conference in Simla in June 1945. Slim was planning an amphibious invasion of Japanese-held Malaya with his British and Indian forces when US president Harry Truman atom-bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki and brought a quick end to the war. Within a week, Bose was reported killed in an aircrash in Formosa while trying to escape to Russia.

The final surrender of the Japanese was accepted on September 12, 1945, by Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia Command, who would preside over the transfer of power in India. But as the British moved to try INA officers and troops at the Red Fort in Delhi, protest broke out across the country. Nehru, who had political disagreements with Bose and the INA, himself donned the barrister's gown and went to defend them along with eminent lawyers like Bhulabhai Desai. The protests drove home a message to the British, that the loyalty of Indians could not be taken for granted any longer. India was ready to be free.

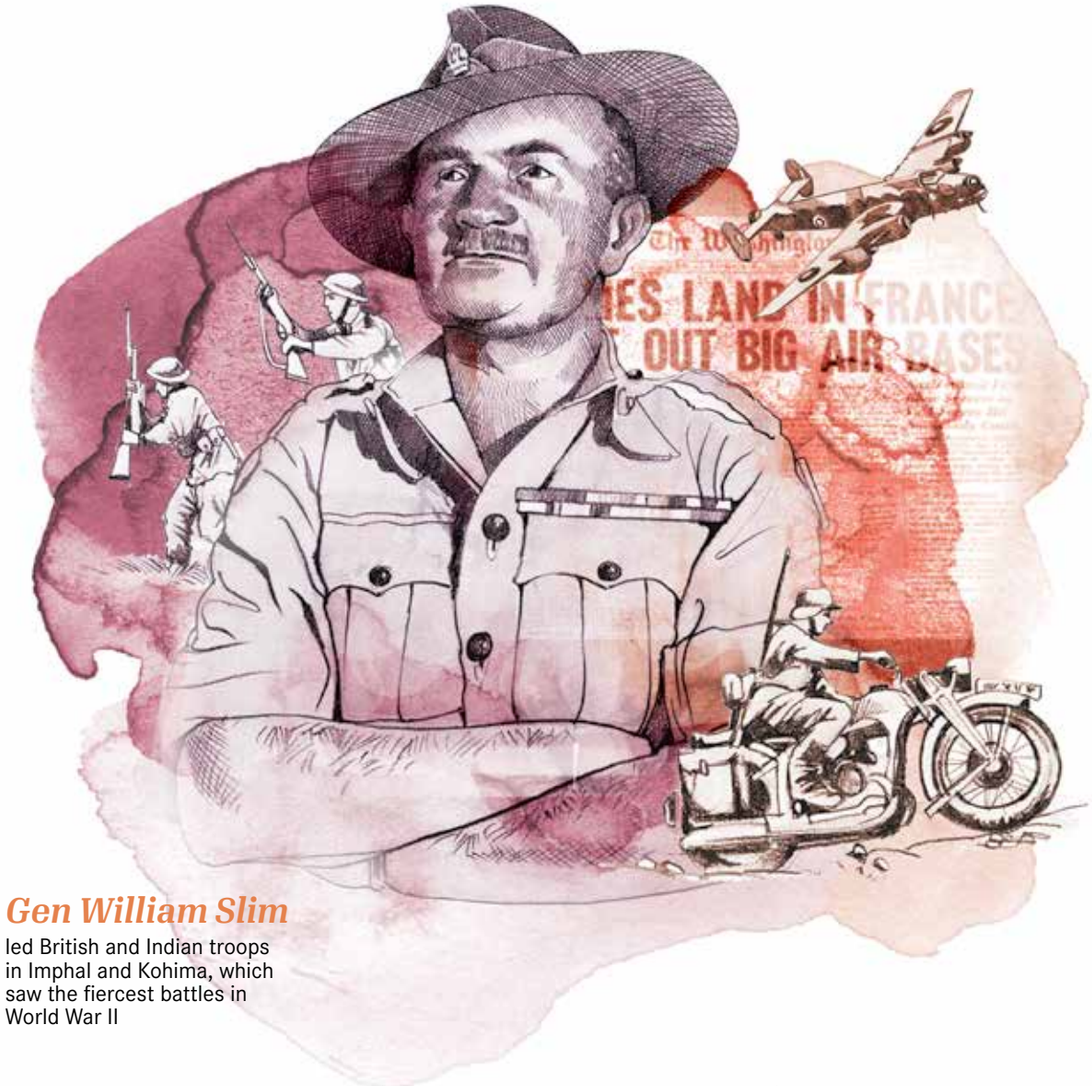
Saner counsel prevailed on Wavell and his C-in-C Claude Auchinleck, both of whom had commanded Indian troops in war and in peace. Early January, they freed the INA men unconditionally. Parting from India, they realised, had to be with honour, or at least without rancour.

Within a month and a half, they received the final warning, too. The sailors of the Royal Indian Navy rose in revolt in February 1946. Finally, it needed persuasion by Indian national leaders for the rebels to call off the mutiny.

By now the British were reading the writing on the wall: They had won the war with India's help; now it was time to leave India to Indians.

London sent one last delegation, the Cabinet Mission, to make the parting as friendly as possible. The members were chosen carefully. Heading it was, of course, the good old leaf-eating leftie Sir Stafford Cripps. One of the two other members was Lord Pethick-Lawrence, a pacifist Labour leader known in England as 'Gandhi in a suit'.

The rest is history—of the dawn of freedom and the birth of the largest democracy in the world.




**Gen William Slim**
led British and Indian troops in Imphal and Kohima, which saw the fiercest battles in World War II

# Sterling effort

## The Jew who shaped the finances of India and Pakistan

BY R. PRASANNAN

**WHEN HITLER WAS** blaming the Jews for Germany's economic miseries, a British Jew was running India's finances. Ironic as it may sound, he would later run the finances of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, too.

Sir Jeremy Raisman was the finance member (finance minister) in Viceroy Linlithgow's cabinet when the war was declared. Though an Englishman, he was not from the British civil service. In fact, he was the only member of the Indian Civil Service to handle the finance portfolio since 1922.

During World War I, India had voted for gifting £100 million towards Britain's war expenses. When World War II was declared, Raisman knew that there would not be any such largesse, with the Congress and Indian leaders being non-cooperative. "He, therefore, devised an ingenious plan," wrote the journalist Durga Das, "under which he was not only able to get all he wanted for the war effort, but created such a powerful profit motive that even Gandhi-capped businessmen came forward to provide supplies."

One such businessman, though not Gandhi-capped, was J.R.D. Tata. Tata Airlines, the forerunner of Air India, took part in the evacuation of Baghdad when Iraq was taken over by a pro-German junta. Raisman encouraged Tata to enhance his steel output and allowed him to open Tata Chemicals in Baroda state. Tata Chemicals would be the largest chemical factory in India to produce industrial chemicals needed for the war effort.

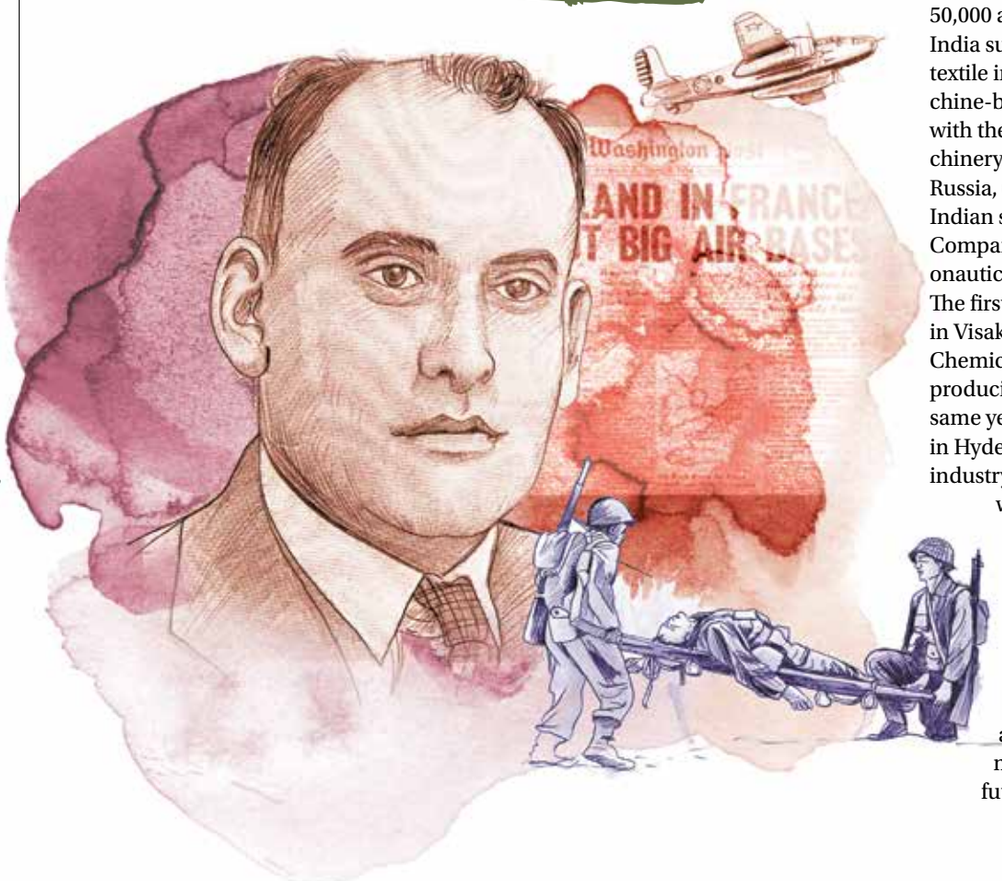
Raisman encouraged Indian traders—mostly Marwaris, Parsis and Gujarati Banias who had accumulated wealth during World War I—to get into manufacturing. The Birlas set up Hindustan Motors in Calcutta in 1942; Walchand formed Premier Automobiles in Bombay in 1944. Though cars were not directly linked to the war effort, the British sourced ancillaries such as pistons, springs, bulbs and fuel pumps from the plants.

The war effort required some 50,000 articles made of cloth, and India supplied 37,000 of them. With textile industry booming, machine-building for textile mills began with the opening of Textile Machinery Corporation in 1941. Even Russia, China and Australia received Indian supplies. Hindustan Aircraft Company, the future Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd, was founded in 1940. The first shipbuilding yard was set up in Visakhapatnam in 1941; Mysore Chemicals and Fertilizers began producing nitrogenous fertilisers the same year. Allwyn Metals was set up in Hyderabad in 1942. Aluminium industry, vital for aircraft building, was started with the launch of Alupuram works of Indian Aluminium Corporation in 1943.

Walchand Hirachand, who had almost pioneered aircraft building before Hindustan Aircraft Company actually did, began making motor cars in 1944. Three of future India's engineering majors—TELCO, Mahindra & Mahindra and Bajaj Auto—were launched in 1945. Jute industry boomed during the war. Millions of jute bags were needed for transporting goods and for sandbags in bunkers.

> Raisman adopted a simple device under which Britain would pay India for the goods and services in sterling, and not in gold. The rupee reserve would be held in paper currency, and not in metal.

***Sir Jeremy Raisman***
encouraged Indian traders to get into manufacturing, which later allowed Britain to source from India ancillaries for the war effort






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**SEW FOR PEACE**
Workers in a textile mill in Bombay in 1943. India supplied 37,000 of 50,000 cloth articles required for the war effort

Raisman adopted a simple device under which Britain would pay India for the goods and services in sterling, and not in gold. The rupee reserve would be held in paper currency, and not in metal. As the journalist Sunanda K. Datta-Ray wrote later, the reserves "amounted to a handsome £1,300 million or ₹1,733 crore at the prevailing exchange rate, being mostly money an impoverished Britain, which had to spend vast sums buying equipment from America..., owed India. [Prime minister Winston] Churchill's government expected India to pay even more for the war effort than the Indo-British agreement on sharing expenses stipulated. Some in London, including [the economist John] Maynard Keynes, wanted Britain's debt reduced or cancelled. As India's effective finance minister, Raisman objected to both. He wanted the agreement adhered to, and told the war cabinet in London on August 6, 1942, that being a belligerent had already caused a heavy increase in India's own expenditure. It could not accept a larger defence liability."

The effect of all this was that "India... built up a huge sterling balance but the country suffered considerable inflation," wrote Durga Das, who deemed Raisman "one of the architects of the Allied victory. It was primarily his design that provided the manpower and goods worth hundreds of millions of pounds which brought the British their victory at El Alamein in North Africa."

But there was also a geographical shift. As the war effort grew, several ordnance factories came to be set up, most of them in central and western India so as to be away from the reach of the Japanese bombers flying in from the east. Thus small towns such as Itarsi, Jabalpore and Kanpur grew into ordnance hubs.

Indeed, the war story of India was not one of prosperity. On the contrary, a severe famine struck the country, especially the once-rich province of Bengal, during the war. Several reasons have been proffered for the

famine; most of them put the blame on Churchill, who had asked India to export grain in the early stages of the war and, ignoring pleas from the Indian government, refused shipment from Australia and elsewhere. When Secretary of State for India Leopold Amery and Viceroy Wavell asked for stopping of food export from Bengal, Churchill asked them if the famine was that bad, why Gandhi had not died of starvation.

A third reason was the Japanese conquest of rice-exporting Burma. Fourthly, the British themselves followed a scorched-earth policy. Fearing that eastern India would fall to the Japanese, they destroyed several roads and bridges in Bengal to slow down a possible Japanese advance towards Delhi. This affected the transport of food in the eastern provinces. Fifthly, with lakhs of refugees coming in from Malaya and Burma, there were more mouths to feed.

Towards the closing weeks of the war, it was thanks to Raisman's efforts that India, though still a British colony, was invited to the Bretton Woods conference that would shape the post-war economic world order. India was a creditor now to Great Britain, argued Raisman leading the Indian delegation. Two members of the delegation, R.K. Shanmukham Chetty and C.D. Deshmukh, became finance ministers in free India.

The Jewish Raisman was sympathetic towards the Nizam and the creation of Pakistan. After partition, he became an adviser to the government of Liaquat Ali Khan and headed what would become Pakistan's finance commission. He was the author of the Raisman Programme or Raisman Award, a series of economic reforms programmes by which Pakistan distributed its revenue to federal institutions.



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**WHEELS OF WAR**
A soldier driving a tracked vehicle leads a convoy of military supply trucks over the muddy Ledo Road to Burma in December 1943

THE HUMP OPERATIONS

# A road for China

## How India helped create one of the longest supply chains in the world to support the Chinese war effort

**BY SQUADRON LEADER (RETD) RANA CHHINA**



**BY MAY 1942**, the Japanese juggernaut had driven the ill-prepared and outnumbered British and Indian forces out of Burma and sent them reeling back into northeast India. Along with them went 23,000 troops of the Kuomintang, the Chinese nationalist party, who owed their allegiance to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.

These Chinese troops were housed at Bihar's Ramgarh (now in Jharkhand). The USA was supporting the Chinese in their fight against Japan, and the Chinese presence at Ramgarh gradually rose to 75,000 men equipped and trained by the Americans. They were to be used in the reconquest of Burma under the command of their crusty commander of the China-Burma-India theatre, Joseph "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell.

To keep China in the war, it was vital that supplies were sent to the Chinese. Having lost the supply route through Burma, Stilwell decided to do the impossible—build a road from the easternmost corner of the Brahmaputra valley at Ledo in India, to Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province in China. The Ledo Road, which came to be called Stilwell Road, wound its way through the Patkai mountains and traversed swamps and jungles in northern Burma to its destination some 1,700 kilometres away in China.

The road was mainly built by Indian labourers and black American soldiers at immense human cost. Construction started in December 1942. On February 4, 1945, a convoy of 113 vehicles entered Kunming, breaking the blockade of China and securing the US strategic objective of opening a land route to China. The Chinese divisions that trained at Ramgarh spearheaded the advance and evicted the Japanese troops barring the way in northern Burma.

During the two years that it took to build the road, supplies to China were delivered by air. The US built a network of airfields in eastern India for this enormous effort. Carried out by a variety of transport aircraft of the US Army Air Force (USAAF), this airlift over the Himalayas was given the nickname "the Hump operations".

The Hump operations delivered more than 6,50,000 tonnes of fuel and supplies to support the Nationalist Chinese war effort. It was one of the longest supply chains in the world, as supplies travelled some 12,000 miles from the US to India, first by sea, then overland from Karachi or Bombay by rail and road. The Hump supplies were delivered at a considerable cost. American sources estimate that they lost 590 planes and more than 1,650 lives.

Apart from supporting the Hump operations, India also provided training facilities for the Nationalist Chinese air force. Chinese pilots were trained on Ryan and Stearman trainer aircraft at the Elementary Flying Training School set up for the purpose at Walton, Lahore, from the beginning of 1943 till it was disbanded in February 1946.

The author is secretary and editor, USI Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research.

# For the country, against the crown

## The INA thirsted for sacrifice but Japanese officers distrusted the prisoner-turned soldiers

**BY R. PRASANNAN**

**IT WAS NOT** just for the king and the crown that Indians fought. Many fought under an 'Indian' flag of Subhas Chandra Bose, and a few under the Axis flags of Italy and Germany.

The Italians, who were initially successful in north Africa, had raised a unit composed of Indian prisoners of war. But when ordered to Libya in 1942, the Indians refused to fight their compatriots on the British side.

In Germany, where he fled first from house arrest in Calcutta, Subhas Bose raised a legion of about 2,000 Indian soldiers whom the Germans had captured in north Africa. But as Bose failed to raise them into a composite unit, German general Erwin Rommel refused to induct them in north Africa in late 1942. They were then sent to Holland where they mutinied, and later to France. By then, Bose was fed up with the Nazis and made his submarine trip to Japan.

In Singapore, meanwhile, Captain Mohan Singh, who had been captured by the Japanese, had raised the first Indian National Army consisting of Indian prisoners of war. Soon, Mohan Singh became suspicious of the Japanese intentions. The atrocities they committed on the locals in Malaya, and also on the Indian prisoners who refused to switch allegiance, shocked his gentleman-officer conscience. He declared that only Bose could lead the INA and stand up to the Japanese on equal terms. By the time Bose arrived, Singh had relinquished command. In October 1943, Bose formed the Provisional Government of Free India, with his newly raised INA as its army.

Bose's cries of "Chalo Dilli", "Jai Hind" and "Give me blood, and I will give you freedom" had inspired not only thousands of captured soldiers, but also many more Indian civilians living in Singapore, Malaya and Burma to rise against the British. The cowardly evacuation of Malayan towns by British troops and families when the enemy came knocking had made Indians there feel let down.



GETTY IMAGES

**AGAINST A COMMON FOE** Subhas Chandra Bose with Japanese prime minister Hideki Tojo at a parade for Indian national independence at Shonan, Japan, in 1944

Bose had plans to raise an army of 2,50,000 Indian civilians and prisoners of war. The Japanese political leadership was accommodative of his plans and had signed a treaty that they would treat the INA as an allied army as distinct from a fifth column. But Japanese field commanders were suspicious of the prisoner-turned soldiers. They thought that the prisoners had joined the INA only to escape torture in PoW camps. Field Marshal Count Hisaichi Terauchi, the Japanese commander in Burma, was reluctant to employ the INA, and when he finally did, he allowed only 12,000 of them. He feared that the INA troops would switch back to the British side at the opportune moment.

> The British feared Bose's popularity among the troops and thought that many might defect. So, either side unleashed propaganda wars maligning the other.

The British too had similar worries. They feared Bose's popularity among the troops and thought that many might defect. So, either side unleashed propaganda wars maligning the other (see story on page 60).

The high point of the INA's campaign was when Bose planted the flag of his provisional government on the Andaman Islands. His plan, in the event of a Japanese defeat, was to make the INA infiltrate into India and wage a guerrilla war against the British in India.

But the rout of the Japanese from Imphal and Kohima, and General William Slim's decision to pursue them, put paid to the plans. The expected desertions from the British Indian side also failed to materialise at Imphal and Kohima. Bose walked with his troops while retreating from Rangoon to Thailand, refusing a commander's vehicle. When the war ended in 1945, and Bose died in an air crash while trying to escape to Russia, the INA had about 40,000 soldiers.

More than during the war, it was after the war that the INA became a threat to the British. Even Bose's critics were outraged when the British proceeded to try them for treason. Jawaharlal Nehru, who was also a critic, donned his barrister's gown and joined Bhulabhai Desai to defend the prisoners' case in the Red Fort trials. Sensing the mood in the country, the commander-in-chief Claude Auchinleck granted them pardon, though they were not taken back into the Army.

# Mind hunters

## A propaganda war to capture the hearts and minds of enemy soldiers

BY ADIL RANA CHHINA



**IN THE MIDDLE** of 1944, when the epic battles of Imphal and Kohima were raging in the east of India, a parallel war was being fought on the margins. Both the Allies and the Japanese were fighting this invisible war for the minds of men. The British Psychological Warfare Division was working full swing to churn out propaganda leaflets directed not just at the Japanese, but also at men of the Indian National Army (INA) and the peoples of Japanese-occupied territories.

It was a herculean task, but the British hoped that their efforts would tilt the outcome of the battles in their favour. The fate of British India was at stake. These leaflets were fired through mortars and airdropped in their thousands over enemy territory. The main objective was to demoralise opponents and make them surrender. While the British were slow to start, the Japanese were well ahead in the game.

Unlike in World War I, India now had to contend with a direct threat on its doorstep. This came from the east as the Imperial Japanese Army sliced its way through southeast Asia in December 1941, taking the wholly unprepared British garrisons by surprise. The swift Japanese offensive led to the capitulation of Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaya, and the expulsion of British and Indian troops from Burma. Indian soldiers who became Japanese prisoners of war formed the nucleus of the INA, which gave the British considerable cause for concern and led to a propaganda war directed at Indian troops fighting in Burma.

The Japanese employed propaganda from the very beginning. Japanese propaganda leaflets were inspired by the famous Manga comic art and were produced in colour. Prominent among their Indian leaflet series were satirical caricatures of British prime minister Winston Churchill, US president Franklin D. Roosevelt and Nationalist Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek. The central message to the Indian target audience was that the British had bled India dry and Japan was the true friend of India.

Leaflets were only one of many propaganda mediums used by the Japanese. Radio broadcasts were made in a number of languages, pushing the Japanese grand scheme of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Indian PoWs were recruited as agents to infiltrate the ranks of the Indian Army to spread rumours, affect morale and entreat men to desert their units. These men came to be known as JIFs, or the Japanese-inspired fifth column. To combat the JIFs, the British created their own counter-propaganda organisation called 'Josh' groups, which tried to raise the morale of Indian troops.

While the Japanese had coopted the use of propaganda in their overall plans, the British had been slow to follow. British psychological warfare efforts in southeast Asia came about through trial and error. Eventually, the British developed their own propaganda leaflets in a diverse range of languages. Employing the same fundamental principles of demoralising their opponents, they made the imminent defeat of Japan and the Axis powers a recurring theme. Many of these leaflets doubled as surrender passes. They urged the reader to lay down his arms while there was still time and assured him of good treatment as a prisoner of war. A weekly news-sheet titled *Hamara Hindustan* was also published in Urdu targeting INA troops.

Additionally, the British raised 'Indian field broadcasting units' to carry out broadcast and leaflet propaganda specifically targeting Japanese troops. Broadcasts were transmitted over loudspeakers in forward areas and emphasised the futility of fighting the British. Interspersed with these broadcasts were Japanese gramophone records meant to induce a feeling of homesickness.

Soldiers who fought on India's Burma front are known as the 'Forgotten Army'. Lesser known is the titanic struggle that was waged for their hearts and minds in the hills, swamps and jungles of northeast India. These forms of psychological warfare were precursor to the present use of information warfare and 'fake news'. The medium of transmission has changed, but the concepts are still very much the same.

The author is an independent researcher currently focusing on propaganda in World War II.



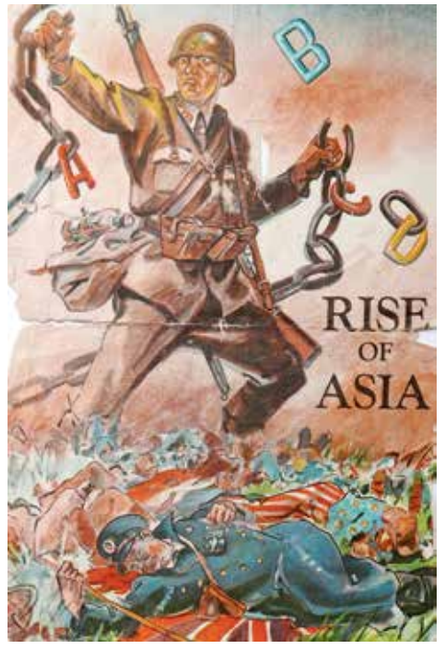

A British propaganda leaflet targeting INA troops. It asks the reader whether he prefers death or the work of a *coolie*, which would be his fate in the hands of the Japanese. On the reverse, it urges the reader to come back to India



A Japanese leaflet asking Indians to break their ties with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. India played a crucial role in supporting the Nationalist Chinese war effort even after the Japanese cut off the supply route through Burma




The front page of a December 1944 issue of *Hamara Hindustan*, published in Urdu by the British to target INA troops. The photograph is of Naik Yashwant Ghadge of the 5th Mahratta Light Infantry, who won the Victoria Cross posthumously that year




A Japanese propaganda leaflet depicting the rise of Asia. A Japanese soldier breaks the chains of colonialism forged by America (A), Britain (B), China (C) and the Dutch (D). At his feet lie the corpses of his enemies. The British officer in the foreground bears a striking resemblance to Churchill

# DAYS OF RECKONING

**JAN 30, 1933**
Adolf Hitler becomes chancellor of Germany

**SEPT 1, 1939**
Germany invades Poland; WW II begins

**SEPT 3, 1939**
Britain sends ultimatum to Germany to withdraw troops from Poland. Hours later, British ocean liner Athenia is torpedoed

**MAY 1940**
In the largest military evacuation in world history, Britain evacuates an expeditionary force of 1,50,000 men, along with an Indian animal transport contingent, from Dunkirk in France

**DEC 1940 TO FEB 1941**
In the first large British operation in the war, Operation Compass in North Africa, British, Indian and Commonwealth forces attack Italy, capture Libyan ports and cut the enemy's supply line

**SEPT 16, 1940**
US Congress passes first peacetime draft

**JUNE 1941**
Germany invades Soviet Union

**FEB 15, 1942**
Singapore falls to the Japanese, the biggest setback to Britain in the war

**MARCH 1941**
The US passes Lend-Lease Act to supply food, oil and equipment to the UK, France, China and, later, the Soviet Union. The celebrated German General Erwin Rommel launches Afrika Korps

**DEC 7, 1941**
Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor; US enters the war

**JUNE 4-7, 1942**
American naval forces defeat the Japanese navy at the Battle of Midway

**OCT TO NOV, 1942**
Second Battle of El Alamein in Egypt. With the help of Indian divisions, Lt Gen Bernard Montgomery scores Britain's first big success against Axis forces

**MARCH TO JULY 1944**
Battle of Imphal and Kohima. Japan suffers its biggest defeat in the war. Britain begins reconquest of Burma

**JUNE 6, 1944**
D-Day: Allied Forces come ashore in Normandy, France

**OCT 26, 1944**
Japanese navy defeated at Leyte Gulf; first use of Kamikazes by Japan

**DEC 16, 1944**
Battle of the Bulge, the last German offensive, begins in a frigid northern European winter

**APRIL 25, 1945**
American forces meet up with their Russian allies at the Elbe River in Germany. Mussolini is executed in Italy three days later. On April 30, Hitler commits suicide

**JAN 27, 1945**
Soviet troops liberate Auschwitz death camp

**AUG 6-9, 1945**
The US drops atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

**FEB 4, 1945**
Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin meet at Yalta to discuss post-war Europe

**MAY 8, 1945**
Victory in Europe (V-E) Day

**SEPT 2, 1945**
Japan signs the surrender agreement. The surrender in southeast Asia concludes in Singapore on September 12. The war officially ends.

SOURCE **THE NATIONAL WWII MUSEUM, NEW ORLEANS**

GRAPHICS **SREEMANIKANDAN S.**





PHOTOS USI OF INDIA

TOP GUNS
A ship of the Royal Indian Navy hunts for enemy submarines in the Indian Ocean in 1943; (left) a Hurricane IIC of the Royal Indian Air Force is readied for a sortie in Burma in 1943

# In the sky, on the waves

## India's Air Force and Navy came into their own during the war

BY SQUADRON LEADER (RETD) RANA CHHINA



**UNLIKE WORLD WAR I**, which was primarily an army affair as far as India was concerned, World War II saw the active participation of all three Indian fighting services.

Both the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the Indian Navy were fledgling services when the war broke out. The IAF came into existence on October 8, 1932. The Royal Indian Navy (RIN) evolved from the Indian Marine founded in 1612, undergoing a series of transitions till it was reconstituted as a combat service on September 8, 1934.

The outbreak of the war gave a great fillip to the growth of the Indian armed forces. The IAF and the RIN both came into their own as a result of the wartime expansion. Both services used a system of 'volunteer reserves', akin to the present Territorial Army, as the nucleus of their expansion. The IAF Volunteer Reserve (IAFVR) in particular formed the basis of the IAF Coastal Defence Flights (CDFs), which grew into regular IAF squadrons as the war progressed.

While officer commissions into the RIN were open to both Indians and Europeans alike, the IAF was the first truly 'Indian' service. Only Indian nationals were commissioned into it as officers or recruited as airmen, although in the early years a number of Royal Air Force personnel served in it on attachment. The ratings (sailors) of the RIN were recruited from all over India, but predominantly from Punjab and Konkan, while a large number of Bengali lascars served on board merchant marine ships.

In the IAF, the ground crew were initially recruited on an all-India basis as 'Hawai Sepoys'. But soon after the war began, the RAF rank structure was adopted by the IAF as well. The senior-most Hawai Sepoy, Harjinder Singh, was one of the early proponents of the 'Make in India' policy. He rose to be the first AOC-in-C (air officer commanding in chief) of the IAF's Maintenance Command after independence.

India's commanding geostrategic location ensured that it played a pivotal role in the Allied war effort in the Middle East and southeast Asia. India's defence was no longer confined to its national borders; its frontiers were seen to lie in Singapore and Egypt. Apart from defending the country's 5,000 miles of coastline, the RIN had to protect all sea routes in the Indian Ocean.

In the early stages of the war, it was deployed to keep the Red Sea safe for the passage of troopships and supply vessels between India and the Middle East. It succeeded in this task despite sporadic Italian attacks. The RIN later took part in the operations against Italian East Africa and in a brief campaign in Iran. After the entry of Japan into the war, the RIN was increasingly built up. By 1944, it was 20 times larger in terms of ships and men than in September 1939.




In November 1942, one of its ships, the HMIS Bengal, a Bathurst-class minesweeper, fought an epic battle against two Japanese raiders on its maiden voyage in the Bay of Bengal. Its operational duties in the war against Japan included convoy escorts, anti-submarine patrols, constant minesweeping and collaborating with other services operating on the Burma seaboard.

The IAF began the war with a single squadron equipped with antediluvian Westland Wapiti biplanes. It initially took over 'watch and ward' duties from the RAF on India's rugged mountainous North-West Frontier. Simultaneously, five IAFVR-CDFs were formed in major coastal cities.

IAF pilots won 22 Distinguished Flying Crosses (DFCs) during the war. One of them, the indomitable K.K. "Jumbo" Majumdar later became the only Indian pilot to earn a bar to his DFC while flying reconnaissance missions over Normandy prior to the 'D-Day' landings.

IAF personnel saw service as far afield as Occupied Europe and Australia, but by far its most important theatre of operations was Burma, where it flew more than 16,000 sorties involving more than 24,000 operational flying hours. In recognition of its contribution towards victory, the service was bestowed with the prefix 'Royal' in March 1945, becoming the Royal Indian Air Force.

The author is secretary and editor, USI Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research.

# The remembrance

## A multimedia installation will spotlight the forgotten history of Indian soldiers in World War II

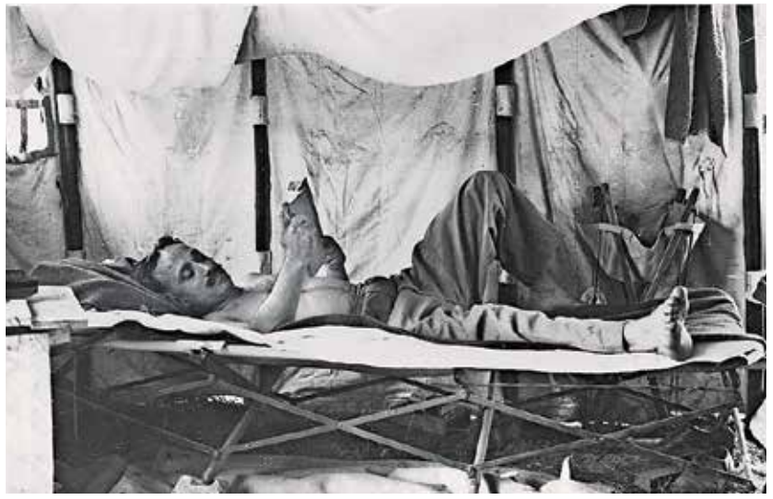
BY ANNU PALAKUNNATHU MATTHEW



**A SOLDIER FELL** into the ocean and was there so long that his nails fell off; a young groom left his wife of six weeks to fight in another continent; four prisoners of war escaped and were hidden by Italian villagers; a soldier came home to find his wife remarried. She thought he had died. These are some of the largely unremembered stories that I heard, of the 2.5 million Indians who fought in World War II, during my project to collect their stories and pictures.

The project started on the opening day of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in December 2018, when a friend, Yamini Nayar, read that I was exhibiting an installation on Indian soldiers and the Battle of Monte Cassino of the Italian campaign of World War II. She sent me a photograph of her grandfather, Lt Col Goal Chakraborty, posing casually in front of the Leaning Tower of Pisa in his army uniform. The striking photograph gave me a visceral connection to those 2.5 million Indians.

This has led me down a rabbit hole of sorts. I recently completed six months in India on a Fulbright fellowship, crowdsourcing poignant images and stories of these unheralded people (mostly men) who fought for the British and by extension, the Allies. (I am still collecting images, so do send me more.) These photos and stories came from the north, south, east and west of India. They came from middle-class families, royalty and the poor. Some were swashbuckling young men who believed "in the cause"; others were looking for a regular salary. Once enlisted, all of them took their duties seriously.





**FRAMING THE PAST**
Flight Lieutenant Arjan Jethanand Mirchandani in a camp in Burma; (left) Mirchandani's sister dressed in his uniform; (above, right) Lt Col Goal Chakraborty in front of the Leaning Tower of Pisa

I received one poignant story from Iona Sinha. Her grandfather Lt E.C. Joshua was one of the unremembered Indian soldiers. He contracted cholera on the Assam front in 1943 and was shipped back to Kirkee (now Khadki, in Maharashtra) where he died—12 days before her father was born.

Another is of Flight Lieutenant Arjan Jethanand Mirchandani. He had won a scholarship to pursue a PhD in England, and got stuck when the war started. He joined the signals unit of the Royal Indian Air Force and served in Europe, Africa and Burma. On his way to Burma, he passed through Hyderabad and Sindh, and was able to see his mother briefly. That same family was uprooted during the partition of India.

Mirchandani often sent photos and postcards of the murals that he made along the way. As Saaz Aggarwal writes in her book *The Amils of Sindh*, Mirchandani's children say art was his way to shift his thoughts away from the atrocities and hardships of war. I have a photo of him on a camp bed in Burma and another of his sister dressed in his uniform!

I also have photos and stories from two prisoners of war, Lieutenant Ramachandra Salvi and Lieutenant General D.S. Kalha, whose families told stories of being sheltered and hidden by local Italian families in an extraordinary testament to our humanity.

During the process of collecting these, I have been fortunate to meet families of the soldiers and even a few veterans. As an artist, the viewers of my work have to connect with these soldiers to empathise with them. The universality of family photographs allows us to do that. Family snapshots create a sense of intimacy beyond the more formal imagery found in military archives. The family photographs that we all love reflect the personalities of these soldiers, allowing us a glimpse into their lives, their loves, their families and their personalities.

As with most of my projects, this archival material will go through an artistic intervention as it becomes a multimedia installation that spotlights this forgotten history. The installation will make the history accessible to a larger audience, and spark interest in the sacrifice of these soldiers.

The question sometimes asked is: "Were these soldiers serving on the wrong side of history?" Acknowledging their service will expand our understanding of the tapestry of who we are. Breaking free from our colonial past does not mean negating their experience. Instead, it can give us perspective. As Yasmin Khan wrote in The Raj at War, "Britain didn't fight the Second World War, the British Empire did."

If you have family photographs and stories, I would be happy to receive them on indiansoldiers1945@gmail.com.

The author is professor (art) at the University of Rhode Island.

BITTER CHOCOLATE



SWARA BHASKER

# The pain behind the anger

It's been over a month since Sushant Singh Rajput's death, and the air on social media and electronic media is heavy with terms like nepotism, favouritism, insider, outsider and mafia. Bollywood biggies, and a well-known critic, have been summoned by Mumbai Police, following a loud volley of accusations from fans, and some sections of the public, led by Kangana Ranaut, whose contention has been that Sushant was harassed by industry 'insiders' (mainly Karan Johar) and driven to suicide. This theory has caught steam and Kangana has been fanning the coals at regular intervals. On July 18, she gave a primetime interview, where among other accusations, she called actress Taapsee Pannu and me *chaaploos*, *chaatney waaley*, needy outsider and B-grade actress (yes, a lot of flattering adjectives). A Twitter war ensued. Taapsee and I both had our say; Kangana gave fresh statements. Journalists, critics, directors, twitterati weighed in. As the din ebbed, I contemplated what it is that has actually disturbed us so much?

It is obvious that Sushant's demise was a tragedy that has moved everyone. There is genuine grief. But, to understand what is making people latch on to conspiracy theories and possible explanations, we have to accept that there is something incomprehensible about Sushant's tragic action, something too painful to accept. And, in a strange way, all these accusations and terms are helping people cope with this disturbing incomprehension. It is comforting in such a time to lay the blame on someone and vilify them—it makes the pain easily consumable. Is it possible that underneath all this anger, all this need for accusations and name-calling, there is genuine grief and pain in the audience and in the public? Is it possible that there is also guilt? A feeling that we did not appreciate Sushant enough while he was alive? And now he is gone, and we can do nothing, so almost as a reparation we are turning the incomprehensible part of his demise into a cause and attacking constructed villains. At the level of a collective psychological consciousness, there is something quite complex and deep happening behind this vengeful cacophony.

It is irresponsible to speculate as to the reasons for Sushant's unfortunate actions. It was painful to learn of it. At a personal level for me, it left me shaken for many days, though I did not know Sushant personally at all, but I felt strangely bereft. I felt sad and almost guilty that I had not made an effort to meet him or get to know him—even though our paths never really crossed.

It is hard to recall Sushant's death without referencing the *tamasha* that followed it. Perhaps, a second tragedy is that the moment of his passing should have been about him. Not about us. About his talent, not our vendetta. About his successes, not our frustration. Sushant is a story of tremendous success. His sadly short-lived career was like a meteor that just rose so quickly. Perhaps, that is precisely what has shocked us into disbelief. Sushant, in the act of his suicide, pulled the cover off the glittering, glamorous world of showbiz. His suicide has demolished the understanding of 'success.'

We do not know what Sushant went through, many 'proofs' suggest that he was frustrated by the industry. We all are from time to time. But, was that frustration the reason for his death? Initial police investigations suggest that there was no foul play. There is a demand for a CBI enquiry and the government may indeed order one. But, will that satiate our appetite for meaning, for justice? Will that calm our anger, which perhaps masks our collective grief and helplessness? Most importantly, will it bring our now beloved Sushant back?

Shouldn't the real lesson here be that we never know what pain another human being is in, and so endeavour to be kinder to each other? We must try to listen to each other, to watch for signs. And to educate ourselves about mental health. Undoubtedly, there is pain behind this anger. But, as a society, should we allow this anger to consume our sense of balance, objectivity, rationality and our empathy?

*The writer is an award-winning Bollywood actor and sometime writer and social commentator.*





# BROTHERS FOR LIFE

Mukesh Chhabra on making his directorial debut with *Dil Bechara* and his bond with its lead actor, Sushant Singh Rajput

BY PRIYANKA BHADANI

IMAGING: DENI LAL

Casting director Mukesh Chhabra remembers discovering Sushant Singh Rajput, who stars in his directorial debut *Dil Bechara*, while scouting for *Kai Po Che!* (2013). "I spotted him," he says proudly. Chhabra was looking for three young actors for the film when Shobha Sant, a movie marketer and talent consultant (currently head, content alliances, JIO Studios) introduced him to Rajput. After auditioning the television star along with Rajkummar Rao and Amit Sadh, he would get him one of the lead roles. "The audition tape is on YouTube. If you watch it, you will see how charming all three of them were. We would soon bond and become brothers for life," he says.

And like a brother, Chhabra is extremely proud of Rajput's journey. "He achieved so much," he says. "Look at his television days, or his dancing, or his film career. He was flawless in everything. It is so sad to think that he is not around to continue that journey. It is so difficult for me to talk about him in the past tense."

Their close bond would take them on a journey that, according to Chhabra, has been very emotional but, at the same time, fulfilling and fun. In 2017, when Chhabra decided to direct a film, he shared the idea with Rajput. "He told me that whatever my first film was going to be, he would star in it," recalls Chhabra. Perhaps that was Rajput's way of thanking the casting director for giving him the break he needed to make a spectacular transition from television to films. It would take another year for Chhabra to finalise the film he wanted to direct. "In 2018, I got a call from Fox Star Studios to direct a film based on [John Green's book made into a 2014 Hollywood movie], *The Fault in Our Stars*," he says. "I had not read the book or watched the film. But as an idea, it seemed like something I could take up." He agreed to do it and the result is *Dil Bechara*, a romantic drama about two cancer patients who fall in love. The film, starring Sanjana Sanghi alongside Rajput, releases on Disney+Hotstar on July 24. Its trailer has already crossed one crore likes on YouTube.

When Chhabra called Rajput and told him about the script, the actor immediately agreed. "'Let's do it,' he said, no questions asked," says Chhabra. The debutant director waxes eloquent about the trust that they shared. On May 27, Rajput had called Chhabra to wish him on his birthday. "He had a way of making you feel special," says Chhabra. Later, they discussed the possibility of *Dil Bechara* premiering on a streaming platform instead of getting a theatrical release on May 8, as earlier planned. "He was happy with the idea," says Chhabra. "We all understood how difficult the times were, and this seemed like the best way to take the film to the audience."

**HE WAS FLAWLESS IN EVERYTHING. IT IS SO DIFFICULT FOR ME TO TALK ABOUT HIM IN THE PAST TENSE.**
**— Chhabra on Rajput**

Chhabra's journey in Tinseltown is in itself a story of struggle. A trained actor from Shri Ram Centre for Peforming Arts in Delhi, he worked with the Theatre In Education Company, which is affiliated to the National School of Drama, for years before moving to Mumbai. He lived in penury for the first one-and-a-half years there. "It was [casting director] Honey Trehan who called me when I had no work and no money," he says. "He took me on as an assistant casting director on Vishal Bhardwaj's films *The Blue Umbrella* (2005) and *Kaminey* (2009), and gave me a salary that helped me survive. Otherwise, I would have had to return to Delhi." He says that it is a happy coincidence that Trehan's directorial debut, *Raat Akeli Hai*, is releasing on Netflix a week after his film.





**FINAL ACT** Chhabra with Rajput on the sets of *Dil Bechara*; (below) Rajput and Sanjana Sanghi in a still from the film

Chhabra's big break came with the Ranjit Kapoor-directed *Chintu Ji* (2009), followed by illustrious films like *Chillar Party* (2011), *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012) and *Rockstar* (2011). He still makes it a point to call Trehan occasionally to thank him for taking him on. Today, Chhabra owns a sprawling office in the suburbs of Mumbai and is one of the most prominent casting directors in the industry. He has a knack for discovering theatre actors from the nooks and crannies of the country. He was famously adamant about casting rookie Pankaj Tripathi as Sultan Qureshi in *Gangs of Wasseypur*, although director Anurag Kashyap wanted a more famous actor to play the part. He strongly recommended Rajkummar Rao for his national award-winning role in *Shahid* (2012).

Transitioning from a casting director to a director has not been easy. "Every first step is difficult," he says. "When you are a casting director, you have a director above you to guide you and to give you directions. When you are a director, people are waiting for your validation and your go-ahead. It was difficult to get everyone on the same page. But the whole journey has been really interesting."

Having closely worked with almost all the celebrated directors of today, including Rajkumar Hirani, Anurag Kashyap and Imtiaz Ali, one would assume that he would have drawn from their styles of filmmaking in some way. But he says he was deliberately and consciously trying not to get influenced by anyone's filmmaking styles. "I wanted to find my own voice instead," he says. He does, however, admit that subconsciously he might have learnt something from these directors.

To direct a film is a milestone in his career, but Chhabra says he will never give up casting. "That has made me who I am. I am never going to leave that for anything," he says, adding how excited he is about his upcoming projects–Kabir Khan's *83*, Ayan Mukherjee's *Brahmastra* and Advait Chandan's *Laal Singh Chaddha*.

CONTRIBUTOR / **SNEHA BHURA**
COMPILED BY **ANJULY MATHAI**

# Revisiting a classic



GETTY IMAGES

Actor **Lindsay Lohan** virtually reunited with the cast of *The Parent Trap* to celebrate the film completing 22 years. This was the first time the actors were meeting up after the film, which is about a pair of twins (played by Lohan) trying to unite their separated parents, played by Dennis Quaid and Natasha Richardson. During the reunion, which took place on Instagram, many secrets tumbled out of the closet, like how Lohan was the second or third out of six girls competing for the role. "She had that quality that just sort of leapt up at you and pulled you in," said director Nancy Meyers.

# Chhilling with chess



FOTOCORP

**Manushi Chhillar** is that rare blend of beauty and brains. She recently proved that she can not only catwalk in kitten heels but also make a killer move in chess. "Chess stretches your mind in terms of strategy and imagination, because you have to outwit your opponent at any cost," she said. "Playing chess with my dad is something that I have always loved because he is the most unpredictable, intelligent and the sharpest person I have ever played with." She also recently revealed that she is a talented painter. Is there anything she cannot do?

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

**NAMIT DAS, actor**

# It's raining shows

Namit Das has had back-to-back releases in the last few weeks. First, it was *Aarya* on Disney+Hotstar followed by *Mafia* on Zee5. He will soon be seen in the much anticipated miniseries *A Suitable Boy*. Born into a family of musicians, he says his journey in showbiz has been eventful.

**Q/ You have had quite a run, with *Aarya*, *Mafia* and now *A Suitable Boy*. Did you expect *Aarya* to be so successful?**
A/ Not at all. I was sure it was something special, but I did not expect it to become so big. It is a great feeling. Nothing can be greater than three projects happening one after the other. My character in *Mafia*, too, has been appreciated a lot. I am looking forward to *A Suitable Boy*, which will be on Netflix later this year. What could be better than being visible on all the [main] streaming platforms? I feel really grateful.

**Q/ You have been in the industry for a while now. Has the journey been challenging?**
A/ Challenges are challenges if we look at them as challenges. I look at it as a journey where I have learnt a lot. I have not seen it as a daunting task. It is a process. This whole argument about nepotism—yes, it does exist, but if I do not have a godfather in the industry, then I have to support myself. It is a crude reality. I only feel that one should have patience which, today, people don't.

**Q/ You have had a long association with Mira Nair, having worked with her on the musical *Monsoon Wedding* and now, *A Suitable Boy*.**
A/ My association with Mira Nair has deepened. She is just so delightful to work with and such a perceptive person. She is like a godmother to me. Four-and-a-half years ago, when we connected on the musical, I knew that it was going to be a lasting friendship. *A Suitable Boy* came as a gift from the universe. It is one of those really special projects. I play the character of the shoemaker, Haresh Khanna, in it. He is one of the suitors who is in the race to become a suitable boy for Lata. [The story] is similar to the novel, but Mira has added her own touch to it. That is what makes Haresh really special.

**Q/ You have also composed music for the show?**
A/ I am a small part of the music, having composed three tunes for it. Mira called me one day and told me that she wants to give me the chance to do these three tunes. She felt I was perfect for it because these are folk-based tunes. She loved [what I came up with]. In fact, one of them is written by my mom.

**—By Priyanka Bhadani**



# The French connection



Comedian **Danish Sait** will be seen next as an auto-driver in the Kannada comedy-drama, *French Biriyani*, which releases on Amazon Prime on July 24. Directed by Pannaga Bharana, the film is about the three-day journey of a French expatriate and an auto driver from Shivajinagar in Bengaluru. The stand-up comedian, television host, radio jockey and actor has been vocal about battling depression while coming out with several comedy sketches during lockdown.

# Hotness overload

**Prabhas** and **Deepika Padukone** are joining forces for a sci-fi film to be directed by Nag Ashwin of *Mahanati* fame. "The pairing of Deepika and Prabhas will be one of the main highlights of the film, and I believe the story between them will be something audiences will carry in their hearts for years to come," said Ashwin. Padukone shared the first look of the film on Instagram. "Beyond thrilled," she captioned it. Prabhas will next be seen in the romantic drama *Radhe Shyam* and Padukone in the sports thriller *83*.



AFP

LAST WORD | BARKHA DUTT



# Crisis at the core

It would be a mistake to see the Rajasthan political crisis as a story bound by geography. At one level, yes, it is about an old warhorse of politics, Ashok Gehlot, being challenged by a second-generation leader, Sachin Pilot. But more than what happens eventually in the state—and a lot will depend on whether Pilot and his rebel MLAs are disqualified by the court from participating in a trust vote—this is a story about the state of the Congress party. And, once again, it is a story that shines a light on the leadership crisis within.

There can be more than one reading of whether Pilot played his cards right. And Gehlot, by virtue of being an old-style politician who is not easily outfoxed, may well win this round. Audio tapes released by the Congress allege that Pilot's aides were in contact with senior leaders of the BJP for a bargain to switch sides. I also believe that Pilot made a mistake in a half-way exit, keeping one foot inside the door and one out of it, as he declared that he was still a Congressman. Instead, he should have walked out neatly and outright. Similarly, Gehlot's use of debasing language ("*nikamma, nakaara*") vindicated Pilot's claim of being shown no respect.



But no matter what side of the Gehlot versus Pilot battle you are, it has split wide open the fissures within the Congress and exposed its real problem—the decision-makers at the very top.

The Gehlot camp and the Pilot camp both aver that the central leadership of the Congress—the Gandhi family—has been alerted to the growing divide between the chief minister and (ex) deputy chief minister for months. The one thing that both men would agree on is the ineffectual response from their leadership in Delhi.

We know now that it was not Sonia Gandhi or even Rahul Gandhi, but Priyanka Gandhi Vadra who worked the phone lines to Sachin Pilot. But nobody knows what her official locus standi to do so was. As interim president of the party, Sonia Gandhi should have been seen and heard on the issue. But she chose to remain in the background, as she has been for several months. Rahul Gandhi remained silent for most part as well, choosing instead to launch a new video series to "counter the narrative of hate". His first video was on China and its release was the same day as the party released the audio tapes that purportedly showed evidence of horse trading and bribery. Talk about poor timing—by the evening the media was discussing Rahul's renewed persona instead of the Rajasthan story.

In any case it has been more than a year since Rahul walked out from the post of party president. He had insisted at the time that no member of his family would take the post. That did not happen and now the ground seems to be prepared for his return.

If you talk privately to second-generation Congress leaders not one of them is happy with the state of play in the party. Many believe that Sachin Pilot will not be the last exit either.

The Gandhis can console themselves on outplaying the BJP in Rajasthan. But even that credit must go to Ashok Gehlot. The Gandhis, on the other hand, continue to be in entitled denial about the existential crisis that plagues their party.

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