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DONALD IS TRANSPARENTLY PATHOLOGICAL

**COGNIZANT CEO BRIAN HUMPHRIES**  
HOW COVID IS ACCELERATING SHIFT TO DIGITAL

JOURNALISM WITH A HUMAN TOUCH

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**STEVEN RICHARDSON**  
OF ICC'S ANTI-CORRUPTION  
UNIT: BETTING IS NOT  
CORRUPTION

# THE WEEK

AUGUST 16, 2020



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## MIDDLE-AGE MAKEOVER

As Rahul Gandhi turns 50, his team attempts an image revamp, presenting him as a self-assured and empathetic leader

### PLUS

**DIGVIJAYA SINGH**  
The Gandhis are made of sterner stuff than what Modi and Shah think

**MANISH TEWARI**  
Uncertainty at top should end

**ADITI SINGH**  
Party should end chamchagiri





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## NEW AVATAR

Over the past few months, Rahul Gandhi has been carrying out an incessant and informed critique of Prime Minister Modi's handling of the pandemic, the economy and the Chinese intrusions. Is he ready to make a comeback as Congress president?

### PLUS

- ♦ Only Rahul can lead the fight against Modi: Tarun Gogoi, former Assam chief minister
- ♦ The Gandhis are made of sterner stuff: Digvijaya Singh, former Madhya Pradesh chief minister
- ♦ India will soon discover its need for Rahul Gandhi, writes Salman Khurshid, senior Congress leader
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COVER IMAGING **BINESH SREEDHARAN**

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Record for posterity

Your cover story on India’s participation and influence on the outcome of World War II was quite special (‘We were there, everywhere’, August 2).

R. Prasannan has played the role of a war correspondent, while reporting the events, one at a time, chronologically, for readers.

It is prudent to add here that the cover story should be recorded for posterity, as that will help young people in our country know much more about World War II.

The letter from the editor made a good read, and it was like a curtain-raiser to the whole issue.

P.M. Gopalan,  
On email.

what India was before Independence is much about the freedom struggle and the distorted accounts of the time.

I believe that your cover story and its valuable pictorial additions should become part of history curriculum, perhaps as a separate chapter. This will enlarge and correct the view of India and its proud countrymen in the pre-independence period, instead of depicting the distress alone.

Dr Prem Anand Nagaraja,  
On email.

There seldom was a cover story in THE WEEK as elaborate and fact-laden as the one on 75 years after World War II, if memory serves me right.

Viewed from this distant time, the fallacy of the war gets more pronounced when Indians in the colonial army and Indians in the INA had to fight each other.

The silver lining for India, it seems, was that the war helped India create a shipshape

defence force.

Raveendranath A.,  
On email.

Get growing

India needs to free itself from the knots. Mere vision is of no use, if it is not accompanied by the will to undertake drastic reforms (‘Still the economy, stupid!’, August 2).

India has a large workforce that needs employment. What is the use of a plethora of laws that restrict rather than encourage new investments. So, simply scrap them.

Let ‘I’ in India denote infrastructure, ‘N’ denote network, ‘D’ denote development, ‘I’ denote industry, and ‘A’ denote *atmanirbharata*.

If the size of our economy expands, we will be a force to reckon with.

Ashok Goswami,  
Mumbai.

Good job

Hats off to the men from Andhra Pradesh for having excavated a temple (‘On a temple’s trail’, August 2). I am impressed by their perseverance. We need

more enterprising people like them in our country.

I hope the temple regains all its lost glory and attracts visitors from all over the country.

Tapesh Nagpal,  
On email.

Some action please

It seems that Rajasthan will not go the same way as Madhya Pradesh, and we can safely presume that the Congress’s high command would be chuffed at this outcome (‘Departure lounge’, July 26).

Sadly, being thus deluded into complacency, the central leadership of the Congress continues to live in its own ivory tower, while the grand old party gradually slips into oblivion.

The Congress needs more than an interim president in Sonia Gandhi and an indecisive leader in Rahul, who is awaiting an opportune time to pick up the reins once more. Till then, a rudderless Congress will remain on the high seas, buffeted by political churning, as in Rajasthan.

Vijai Pant,  
On email.

Wait and watch

The likely return of Sasikala from prison this year or early next year should unnerve the present dispensation

of the AIADMK, led by Edappadi Palaniswamy and O. Panneerselvam. She will become a thorn in the flesh for many if she were to resume her political career, which was cut short abruptly when she was imprisoned (‘Return game’, July 19).

A sizeable number of MLAs in Tamil Nadu owe their gratitude to Sasikala, as she wielded considerable influence within the party, even when J. Jayalalithaa was alive.

C.V. Aravind,  
On email.

Even if Sasikala is released from jail, there is only a remote possibility of her entering politics. She knows that people of Tamil Nadu have no liking for her, and that some are angry at her because of the mystery surrounding the death of Jayalalithaa. Moreover, she will remain quiet and dance to the tunes of the BJP leaders, as her prime motto will be to save the wealth amassed by her.

Further, the present AIADMK government returning to power seems very unlikely. People of Tamil Nadu are fed up with it, and they are waiting for the elections to throw them out lock, stock and barrel.

Tharcius S. Fernando,  
On email.

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## Trains for the future

**T**he power to dream big in times of difficulties is both brave and poignant. For the Indian Railways, the pandemic season has been a very shrinking experience. From the normal of 13,500 passenger services a day across the country, it is just plying 230 special trains. Several of these trains are running empty, even with Covid-related restrictions on coach capacity.

The national carrier's budget has taken a hit by the loss of ₹40,000 crore in five months, forcing the Rail Bhavan to suspend all developmental activities, and allowing only safety-related works to continue.

Yet, there is one exception to the curfew on new projects. The Railways is pushing ahead with the prime minister's dream project of a 300kmph bullet train between Ahmedabad and Mumbai. The Railway Board's optimistic chairman, V.K. Yadav, with strong support from the PMO, has again green signalled the project, which has been mired in difficulties ever since Narendra Modi and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe laid the foundation stone in 2017 for the mega project costing more than one lakh crore rupees.



The project, which gets ₹80,000 crore soft loan from Japan, has been delayed because of hitches in acquiring 1,434 hectares of land in Maharashtra and Gujarat. Even when Maharashtra had a BJP-Shiv Sena government, land acquisition, which included the prized Mumbai Terminus (Bandra Kurla Complex), proved complex. Now difficulties have multiplied, as the Shiv Sena-NCP-Congress coalition has no enthusiasm. Even in the BJP-ruled Gujarat, there were strong protests by farmers, and the leader of the agitation has been persuaded to join the BJP, smoothing the tracks.

The disparity in land acquired is clear—76 per cent in Gujarat and 24 per cent in Maharashtra.

But the government wants tendering to begin during the auspicious Diwali time.

The constant for the project has been Abe, who, in May 2013, signed a memorandum of understanding with Manmohan Singh for a feasibility study to be conducted for high-speed rail corridors in the country with Japanese collaboration. But, it was Modi who catalysed the first segment on the 508km stretch between Ahmedabad and Mumbai.

The project has been criticised as one of the prime minister's vanity projects, along with the Central Vista scheme for a new Parliament and government buildings in Delhi. But Modi has strongly advocated that India has to enter the high-speed rail league of Japan, China and France. Interestingly, the Railway Board has now proposed six more high-speed corridors, two of which link Modi's Lok Sabha constituency, Varanasi, with Delhi and Kolkata. The national capital will also get linked with either bullet trains or semi-bullet trains (of 200 to 250kmph) with Ahmedabad and Amritsar. Mumbai will get additional links to Nagpur and Hyderabad, while the southern

representation will link Chennai with Mysuru.

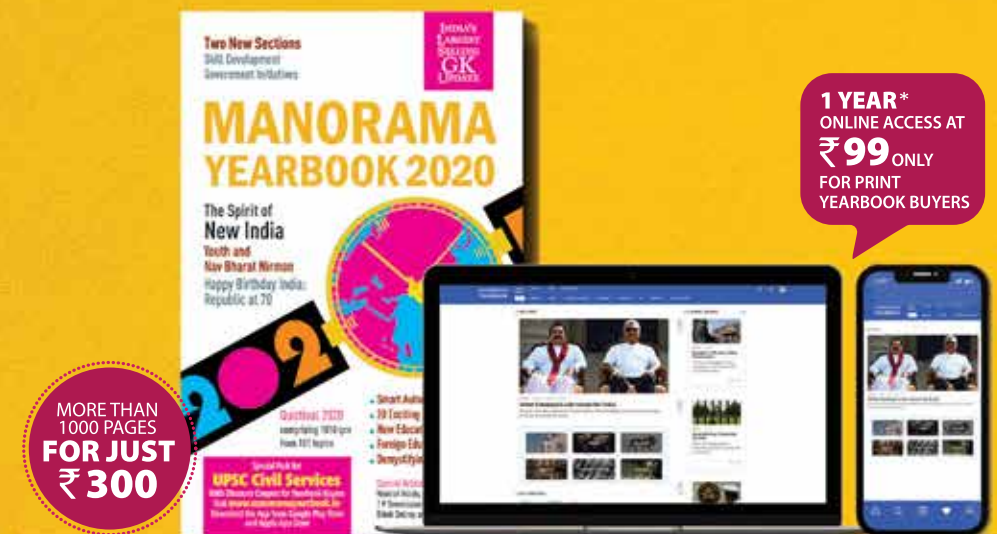
Ironically, even if the land acquisition is completed and the Maharashtra government cooperates fully, the first train, with each passenger paying ₹3,000, will run from Ahmedabad to Mumbai only in December 2023. The original date scheduled was August 15, 2022, which marks 75 years of India's independence. It would be just ahead of the next Lok Sabha elections and would not be a handicap in campaigning on government's achievements. Even as the bullet train track is being developed, the Railways is keeping a weary eye on the track of the Covid pandemic, which has gone spreading beyond official deadlines.

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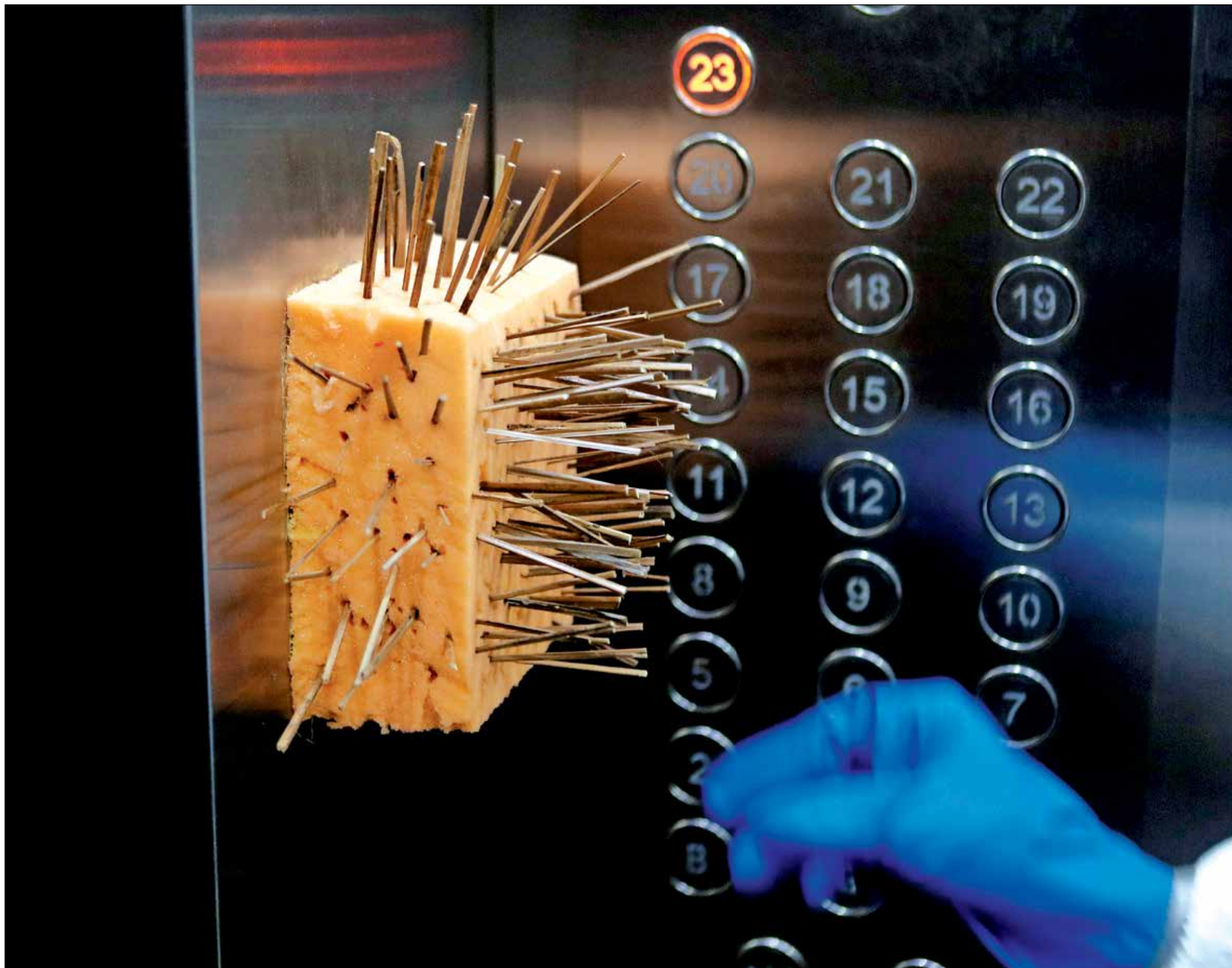
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THE BIG PICTURE

## NO LIFT FOR THE VIRUS

Elevators are high-risk places in Covid times. To prevent people from touching elevator buttons, a housing society in Mumbai has found an inventive way—a sponge plugged with toothpicks attached next to the buttons. The virus can survive up to 72 hours on steel surfaces.

PHOTO BY REUTERS



## POINT BLANK



Narendra Modi brings a broad lifelong collection of learnings and his natural curiosity into his ability to reduce the complicated to the uncomplicated. His handling of enormous challenges is fearless, as it is peerless.

**Rajyavardhan Rathore,**  
BJP MP

I always compare my children's marks with mine. They do much better than I did. But my wife expects them to match her marks, which were pretty high.

**Rahul Dravid,**  
former cricketer

There were some ups and downs, challenges, and lessons learnt. Sometimes I feel like I have reached my ebb, sometimes I thought I peaked. That's the beauty of it, and I hope I will be here for the rest of my life.

**Vidya Balan,**  
actor

If by God's grace I live and survive, you shall have to be weathering the swipe storm, not just from me, but on a very conservative level, from 90+ million followers.

**Amitabh Bachchan,**  
actor, on a troll, who said he should die of Covid-19

The cult of Narendra Modi resembles the cult of Stalin in its portrayal of the leader as the embodiment of the party, the people and the nation.

**Ramachandra Guha,**  
historian

## WORD PLAY

In China, **revenge spending** is fuelling a rapid recovery for luxury brands, post lockdown. Revenge spending refers to the activity of excessive shopping of luxury items, more as a reaction to not having been able or allowed to do so for a long period of time. Many high-end brands like Louis Vuitton, Gucci and Prada are seeing rapid rise in sales in China. Many experts believe that instead of splurging on experiences, the rich will now focus spending money on products.

## MILESTONES

### ARAB POWER

On August 1, the United Arab Emirates became the first Arab nation to have a nuclear energy plant, with the launch of unit 1 of the Barakah nuclear plant. Once all four planned units are built, the plant is expected to meet 25 per cent of the UAE's electricity needs.



### SUPER SWIFT

Taylor Swift became the first musician to have seven different albums with each one selling at least 5 lakh units in a single week. Released on July 24, Swift's latest, *Folklore*, is already the biggest selling album of 2020.



### GOODBYE, LEGEND

Iker Casillas retired from professional football at the age of 39 on August 4. Casillas led Spain to the 2010 World Cup victory. He won three Champions League titles and five La Liga crowns with Real Madrid.



## MANI-FESTO

MANI SHANKAR AIYAR



# The perils of presidentialism

Shashi Tharoor in a newspaper article has attempted to revive an old argument about whether a presidential rather than a parliamentary system would give better results in India. His long argument is best summed up in a single sentence of his own crafting: A president "would have stability of tenure free from legislative whim, be able to appoint a cabinet of talent and, above all, to devote his or her energies to governance".

Since his inspiration comes from the US, let me cite American examples to show that he is wrong on all three counts.

First, the US president does indeed have enviable "security of tenure". But because the elections to the House of Representatives and a third of Senate seats are held in the middle of the president's four-year term, every president is constantly looking over his shoulder to keep both houses of Congress in his favour for fear of falling foul of "legislative whim".

Shashi, I am sure, has read more memoirs of US presidents and their closest aides than I have. So he is certainly aware of how preoccupied the White House is with keeping relations with the legislature on even keel. The expression "pork barrel politics" comes from American experience. It refers to the well-honed practice of finding out what each legislator wants either for himself or for his constituency, and holding that in reserve till the president's army of illegitimate hatchet men have found ways of buying that Congressman's vote.

And, surely, he knows that every president maintains—through the FBI, the CIA and the Internal Revenue Service—tabs on all the moral misdemeanours of Congressmen and women to turn the screws when needed. Can I send him

the link to *House of Cards*, or would he prefer the non-fiction accounts of Seymour Hersh, Steve Bannon and John Bolton?

As for the president's right to "appoint a cabinet of talent", the difference in our age—I think Shashi is nearly 20 years younger than I am—perhaps accounts for his not recalling a book that transformed my generation, which was in its twenties during the Vietnam war: *The Best and the Brightest* by David Halberstam. The charismatic John F. Kennedy had indeed appointed perhaps the most outstanding "cabinet

of talent"—the Best and the Brightest—ever assembled by any US president. Halberstam showed how, precisely because they were so mesmerised by their own talent, they led the United States into the quagmire of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia from which it took decades for the US to extricate itself. I was posted in Hanoi at the time and had a ringside view.

Nearer to home, who can forget that the most intellectually brilliant US

secretary of state ever, Henry Kissinger, was the one who spurned Indira Gandhi, opposed Indian intervention in the liberation of Bangladesh and tried to rope in the Chinese to open a second front in 1971. Not to forget that the nuclear-powered USS Enterprise sailed into the Bay of Bengal to intimidate India into calling off its support to the Mukti Bahini. Kissinger failed, and that is the point of my story.

As for his final argument that the presidential system frees the president to "devote his energies to governance", is Shashi unaware of President Donald Trump, who has brought more death and destruction on the US than Ho Chi Minh ever did, by focusing on his reelection instead of governance in a time of Covid?



ILLUSTRATION BHASKARAN

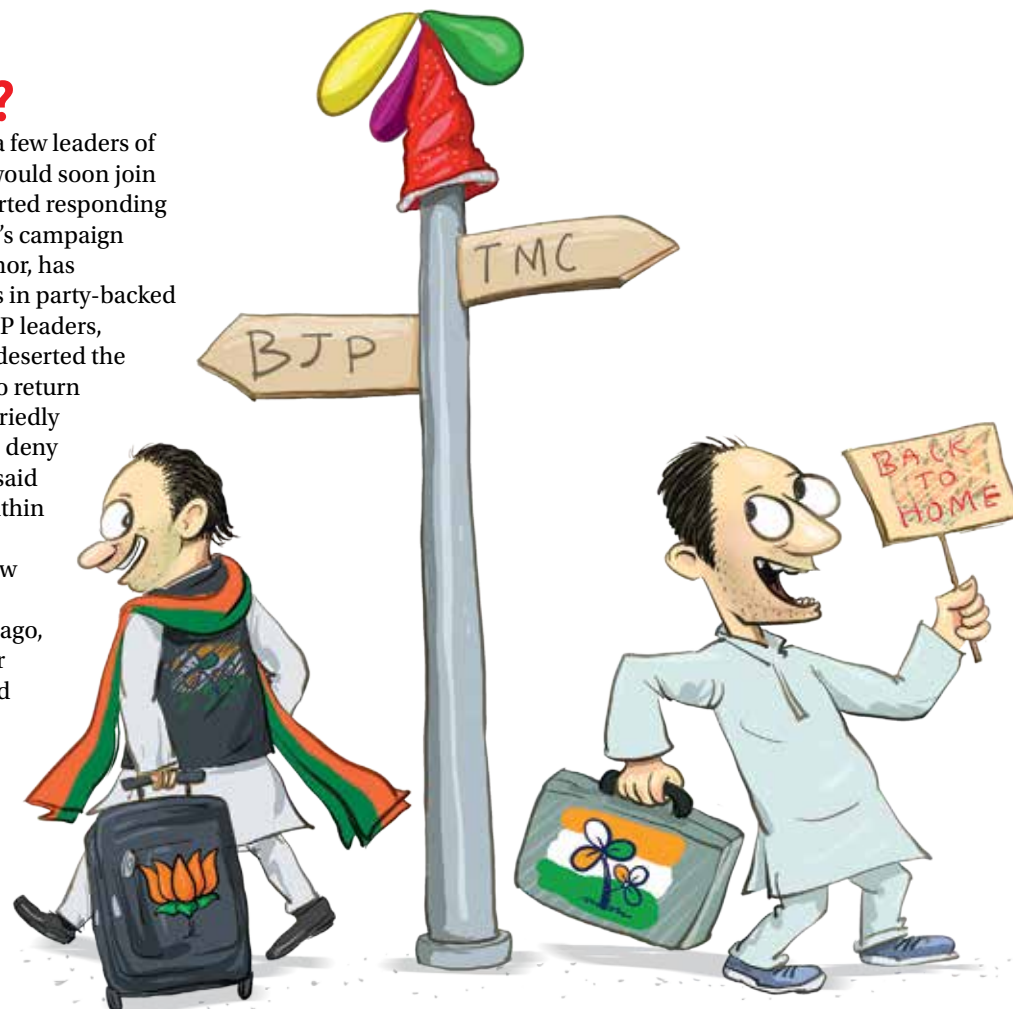
Aiyar is a former Union minister and social commentator.



## COMING OR GOING?

With the BJP hinting that a few leaders of the Trinamool Congress would soon join its ranks, the latter has started responding in kind. Mamata Banerjee's campaign team, led by Prashant Kishor, has reportedly planted reports in party-backed news portals that many BJP leaders, mostly the ones who had deserted the Trinamool, were in talks to return home. A flustered BJP hurriedly held a news conference to deny these claims. The leaders said there was no confusion within the BJP and that the TMC was alarmed because it saw looming defeat.

Incidentally, a few days ago, two BJP leaders from Uttar Dinajpur, who had jumped ship last year, returned to Mamata's side.



ILLUSTRATIONS JAIRAJ T.G.

### UNITED IN PRAYER

Devotion for Lord Ram has crossed the political divide. After Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, the Congress general secretary in-charge of Uttar Pradesh, tweeted in support of the bhoomi puja at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath organised a 'Hanuman Chalisa' reading at his home. He also donated 11 silver bricks to the temple. In neighbouring Chhattisgarh, Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel has announced plans to construct a grand temple of Mata Kaushalya, Lord Ram's mother, near Raipur.

### HINT OF SAFFRON

The Congress and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Kerala are testing each other's DNA for traces of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. First, CPI(M) state secretary Kodiyeri Balakrishnan wrote in a newspaper article that opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala was "close to the RSS". The very next day, it was revealed that CPI(M) Polit Bureau member S. Ramachandran Pillai was with the RSS when he was a teen.

Both parties are reportedly doubling their efforts to find a tie-breaker.

### IN FULL FLIGHT

A fortnight before the Rafale jets left France, the Indian Air Force had issued repeated advisories to the media, reminding them that clicking pictures of air assets such as warplanes was a "punishable offence". However, when the Rafales took off from France, the IAF and the Indian embassy in France themselves released multiple pictures and videos of the jets, turning their arrival into a public relations frenzy.

### NO RIGHT ANSWER

Right-wingers in Tamil Nadu have for long been attacking the DMK for its commitment to rationalism. Recently, though, they seemed stumped. A. Raja, the former Union minister, asked in a television interview: "Who is a Hindu? Please answer me. I am a Hindu. Does that not mean I have all the privileges like others here?" The party's supporters on social media were elated. For once, it was the DMK that had sent the BJP looking for answers.



### SISTERS ON THE FORCE

Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh had a special Rakshabandhan this year. As head of the state police force, Deshmukh invited a handful of female police officers and constables, who were doing exemplary work, to become his *rakhi* sisters. In doing so, he was making a promise to protect those who protected the public. Though initially surprised, the policewomen were happy to oblige.

### CHILD POLITICS

As is common on Rakshabandhan, social media was flooded with pictures of children in traditional attire celebrating the festival. One such photo, however, attracted special attention. The Telangana information department tweeted a picture showing Information Technology Minister K.T. Rama Rao's daughter tying a *rakhi* on her brother's wrist. Within moments of it being posted, followers began asking why an official handle was tweeting about people who were not part of the government. As the comments turned political, the tweet was deleted, but screenshots and potshots continued.





Exclusive

INTERVIEW

Mary L. Trump,  
psychologist, author and niece of  
US President Donald Trump

# Donald is pretty transparently pathological

BY MANDIRA NAYAR

There are no photos of her in the public domain, except the slick-shot on the back of her controversial book on President Donald Trump—*Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man*—which has already earned record sales. Mary L. Trump has chosen to spend her life flying below the radar; her celebrity real-estate name only pops up when she signs a cheque. The relationship between her and the rest of the Trump clan is strained. She and her brother took the rest of the family to court over their grandfather's will. Publishing the book, where she spills Trump family secrets, also took her to court against her family.

For years, she has remained almost invisible. Two years ago, however, she did become the anonymous source for the longest expose against Donald Trump—on how the wealth was acquired. Her book has already gone into several print runs

in America. Its publication was not easy as the president tried his best to block it. Unlike the other books on the Trumps, this one is personal, scathing and deeply disturbing.

It makes for grim, even disturbing reading, offering a ringside view of a dysfunctional First Family. Mary believes her uncle is a 'narcissist', and her grandfather Fred Trump a sociopath. Cruelty is common and kindness is considered a weakness in the family. She writes about a time she wakes up to find her father aiming a rifle at her mother for fun. Fred humiliated the husband of her aunt—Maryanne Trump Barry, Donald Trump's sister—by offering a job as a parking lot attendant when the couple went broke.

Mary's father, who turned into an alcoholic, was also bullied by Fred. Her grandmother was cold; her aunt Elizabeth once kept a watch from her because she felt it was too grown up for her. At Christmas, she was once gifted a cheap three-pack underwear.



GETTY IMAGES



PETER SERLING

## PLASTIC SMILES

Donald Trump with his sister Elizabeth Trump Grau (left), mother Mary Trump and girlfriend Melania Knauss in 1999; (left) Mary L. Trump

When her father was dying, Donald Trump went out to see a movie. Not surprisingly, he once passed a comment on her when she wore a bikini.

In an exclusive interview over Skype, Mary gives an insider perspective of the Trump family, and its role in creating the psyche of the president. Edited excerpts:

**It must have been a hard book for you to write. You refer to your grandfather as a sociopath.**

Actually, that was not hard. Given the way he treated his children and his grandchildren, I felt no responsibility to protect him from his own horrible deeds. On the other hand, the rest of it was quite hard. I could not

write about Donald without writing about everything else. The only way to understand him was to put him in the context of his family and his childhood, and what that experience was growing up.

**You talk about him being the most dangerous person in the world. How important it is for the America, and the world, to recognise it?**

If he did not have the position that he currently holds and all the powers that come with that position, he would not have been dangerous to anybody but himself and the people around him. But he has shown himself perfectly willing to destroy, if not weaken, alliances this country (the US) has built up for decades. He has unilaterally (ripped) up treaties that professionals have spent years crafting.

It is not just the sheer power, in terms of nuclear weapons—which also is terrifying—it is the other ways



(in which) America's standing in the world has been diminished. Four years ago, I knew it was going to be bad. But I did not understand, nor did many (other) people, just how enabled he would be by the other people in the government.

There has been no efforts to rein him in or moderate his behaviour. Exactly that I was thinking of when I came up with the title of the book.

**You wrote that Donald Trump was enabled by the Republican Party. This mirrors what happened in your family. Why do you think this is happening?**

Yes, they did. It is really striking. In fact, when I started writing the book, one of the things I found most mind-boggling was the thin line between Donald's treatment in my family to his treatment in the Republican Party. I cannot answer the question "why". That remains a mystery. But he remains to this day protected by money, power and protection: when he was younger, it was my grandfather's; now, it is his power, the US government's money and all the people surrounding him who completely let him do whatever he wants without any accountability and push-back, whatsoever. It is extremely dangerous.

**Do you think it is, as you put it, because of his superficial charm? Or, is it because he is a bully?**

I think it is a little hard for me to wrap my head around it. There are people in the world who are weaker than he is who are susceptible to his charm, which is extremely superficial. He has no sense of loyalty to other people; he only requires it from them. But it is quite mystifying that people admire him, or see him as a strong person.

**The book has an episode, quoting your aunt Maryanne, where you claim Donald Trump sent in papers**

**to be signed by his father, who had dementia, to swipe all the money.**

It was not just to swipe money. It was to change my grandfather's will, so that Donald would be completely in charge of the estate, (and) my aunts and uncles would be entirely dependent on him. It was a very bold ploy. He almost got away with it. My grandfather was not faring well at the time. He just happened to have a relatively lucid day, and he knew something was suspicious about it. But he could not tell what it was. He ended up telling my grandmother who ended up telling my aunt Maryanne, who was a lawyer. When a colleague of hers looked into it, they realised what Donald had tried to do.

**You wrote that while your father was dying in the hospital, Donald Trump went to see a movie.**

Yes, it is true. I cannot explain it, because it is so heartless and cold. But it happened.

**Can you explain why no one from the family was there in the hospital, when they knew he was dying. How do you reconcile with it?**

I do not. It is by definition unforgivable. But it is because my grandfather, at that point, had entirely given up on my father. There was no reason for him, it would be a waste of his time, to go to the hospital. My grandmother (always) did whatever my grandfather (expected of her). As for Donald, waiting around by the phone would have been boring, so he went to the movies.

**Can you explain Donald Trump's relationship with his mother. This, you write, is at the heart of his whole abandonment issue. You also quote your grandmother saying she was relieved when he was sent to military school.**

When he was two and a half years old, my grandmother had become ill



**RICH KIDS, POOR KIDS**  
Donald Trump (fourth from left) with his siblings (from left) Robert Trump, Elizabeth Trump Grau, Fred Trump Jr and Maryanne Trump Barry

“

**Donald is now in this position, where he views the US treasury as an extension of his own wealth.**

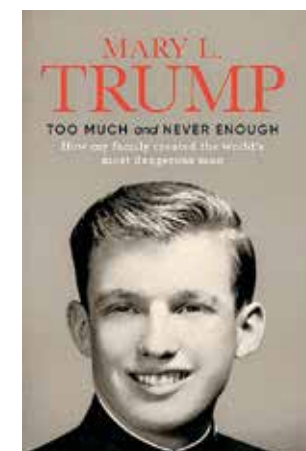
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**Donald Trump's dealing with other countries has been called "transactional". Do you think it is your grandfather's attitude that shaped Donald Trump's vision?**

In my family, everything is a zero-sum game. If you were not winning, you were losing. The same thing applies to money. The more money you had, the more you [were] worth in every sense of the word. Donald is now in this position, where he views the US treasury as an extension of his own wealth. He often talks about saving money, like that is the point of NATO [The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation]. I think it absolutely has a negative impact on how he approaches other countries.

**One attribute you think that makes him dangerous, that the world does not know.**

I do not think there is anything we do not really know about. He is pretty transparently pathological, if you will. The most dangerous thing about him? It is hard to choose. I would pick between his impulsiveness, but also his malleability. It is extremely easy for smarter, more powerful men to manipulate Donald into doing what they (want him to do). ●



**Too Much and Never Enough: How my family created the world's most dangerous man**

Author: Mary L. Trump  
Publisher: Simon & Schuster  
Pages: 228  
Price: ₹699

**out right now, especially in front of millions?**

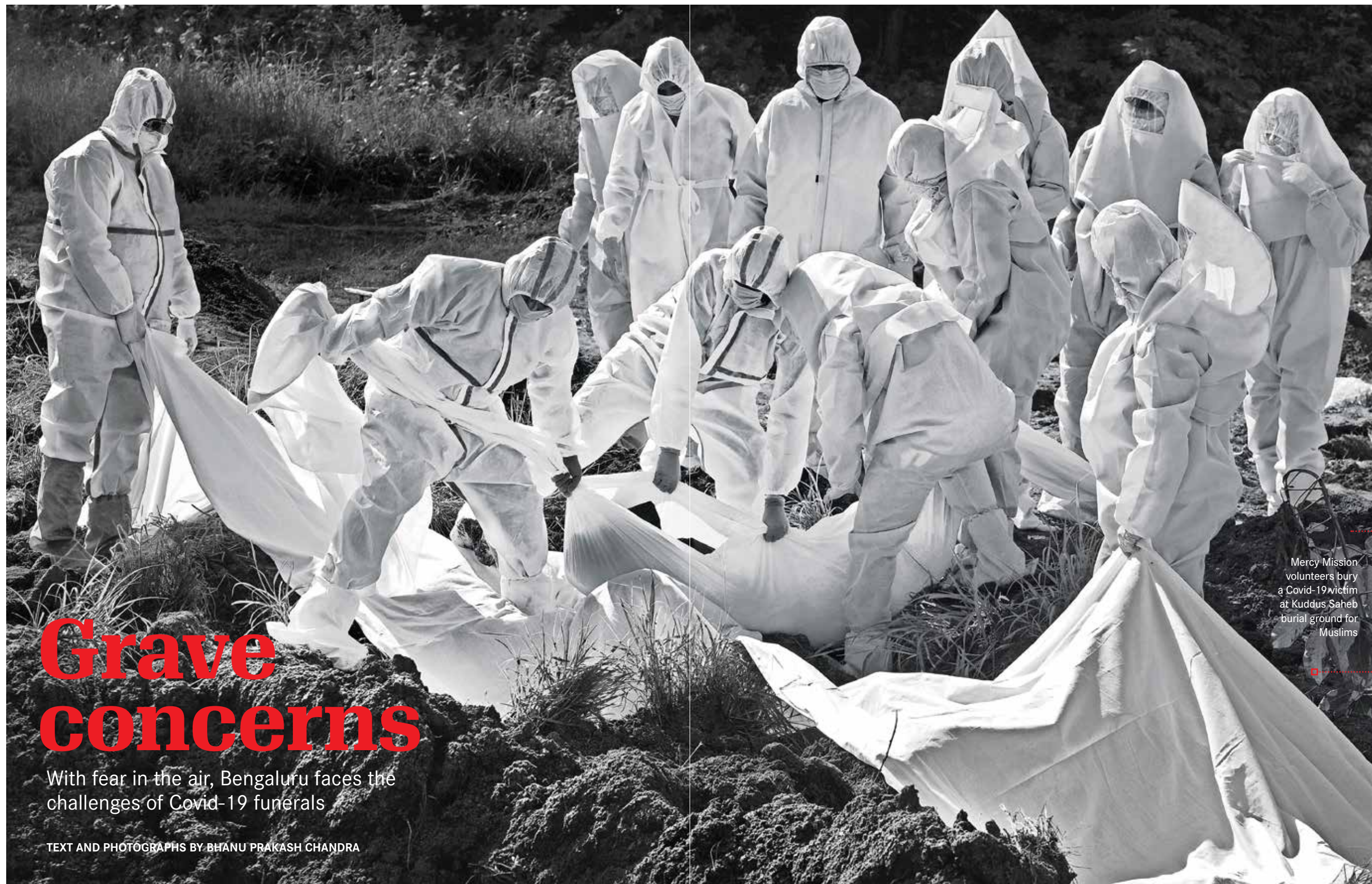
I think it explains, in large parts, his need for constant attention. As if he can make up the losses in the past, which obviously you cannot do. He is filling up this void, left by both my

grandparents, with adulation and media attention.

**Has he ever talked up about India? His casino was called Taj Mahal.**

No. Never. I did not know [that] he had been there before.





# Grave concerns

With fear in the air, Bengaluru faces the challenges of Covid-19 funerals

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY BHANU PRAKASH CHANDRA

Mercy Mission volunteers bury a Covid-19 victim at Kuddus Saheb burial ground for Muslims



There is a deep fear attached to the funerals of Covid-19 casualties, and the chimneys of the crematoriums in Bengaluru are alleviating this. As the electric furnaces reduce the bodies into ashes, the chimneys send out the visual proof.

Around the time Bengaluru became a Covid-19 hotspot, a few videos went viral—they showed families keeping vigil beside bodies kept on the streets, waiting for ambulances to arrive. Ambulance drivers, gravediggers and volunteers are now toiling to give proper funerals to those who have succumbed to the virus. Personal protective equipment (PPE) has become the new dress code at funerals, irrespective of religion.

The fear often borders on paranoia. Residents near a Christian cemetery in Vishwa Nagar, outside Bengaluru, stopped an ambulance carrying the body of an 86-year-old man who had tested positive for the virus. The police and civic authorities tried to reason with them, but the residents would not budge. The family eventually buried the body in a cemetery on Hosur Road.

Taking into consideration all these challenges, the Karnataka government recently earmarked 35 acres outside Bengaluru as an exclusive cemetery for Covid-19 victims.

“Almost 90 per cent of the bodies I transported were of people above 55,” said Naveen Gowda, an ambulance driver in his early 20s, as he leaves the Hebbal crematorium. “I do up to four trips a day, sometimes ferrying two bodies on a trip.”

The fear generated by social distancing has evolved into a stigma towards burials and cremations. Charitable organisations like Mercy Mission are working to eliminate that stigma. Their volunteers, called mercy angels, have helped more than 200 families across religions bid adieu to their loved ones, free of cost and by following protocol.

At the end of the day, the elements of nature do embrace the departed souls without discrimination.



A PPE-clad volunteer waits with the body of an elderly woman at Banashankari Crematorium

Family members of a Covid-19 victim perform funeral rites by circling an ambulance as it queues up for cremating the body

“If you want to punish someone, make them wear PPE for a long time,” said Yashwant, an ambulance driver. The drivers handle bodies that are released from mortuaries

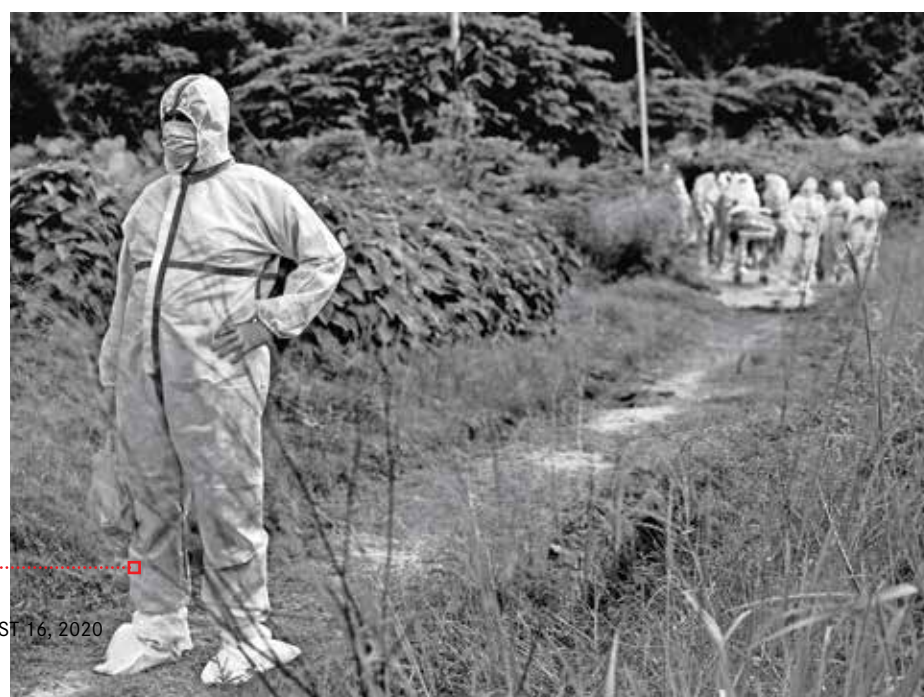




The chimney of the Hebbal crematorium has been a grim symbol of the Covid-19 tragedy



Vishwa Nagar residents stop an ambulance from entering a Christian cemetery in their locality. They feared that burying a Covid-19 victims would spread the infection



A funeral handler watches a burial as a team behind him waits at a distance with another body



A Muslim cleric and burial ground staff offer prayers for two victims unknown to them at Kuddus Saheb burial ground

A priest recites a prayer at the funeral of a 48-year-old at Indian Christian Cemetery



# NEP 2020 is transformative, not incremental

BY REKHA DIXIT

The Union government has announced a new National Education Policy, 34 years after the last one. The proposals in it have largely been welcomed by stakeholders. Higher Education Secretary Amit Khare speaks to THE WEEK, explaining how the policy will take effect over the next few years. Excerpts:

## By when should we see the NEP rolling out?

There are around 140 recommendations each, for school and higher education. So, the policy will be rolled out in phases. For the new degree system, we will have credit transfers, and [for that] we have to create a credit storage first. The credit bank should be ready by December. So, from academic year 2021, flexible degrees will be introduced in the Institutes of Eminence (IOE) and in state universities that wish to join.

In schools, we need to have the curriculum framework ready for the first five years of the 5+3+3+4 system. The working groups have been formed, their reports should be submitted by next March, so the new system can be introduced gradually from 2021 itself. By 2023, the first batch of students should be taking the new board exams for Classes 10 and 12.

However, for the next few years, both systems will contin-

ue, in schools and colleges, so that students who are already studying in one system are not inconvenienced.

The National Education Technology Forum (NETF) should be set up by December, the Higher Education Commission Bill will be placed in public domain by September end, so that vice-chancellors and academicians can share their comments. The National Research Foundation (NRF) should be ready by December.

## So now, will the bachelor's degree be a four-year course?

The NEP committee was clear that the graduation course should be a four-year programme, leading to a one-year master's and then directly to PhD. However, a large proportion of students acquire a degree for employment and are not interested in studying further. So, we proposed two degrees. There is a three-year programme, which allows for exits even earlier. For those who want to continue in research, the programme continues to the fourth year.

The system is flexible, and allows students to get back to education after a break, so even those who did the three-year degree can return for a post-graduation after collecting the required credits. Ultimately, the system will be more on collect-

ing credits and not on the strict first-year, second-year format.

Since the new system will bring down the strict walls between the arts, science and commerce streams, now the degree will be called a Bachelor of Liberal Arts, and not a BA or BCom. The graduate can now, for example, have a bachelor's degree with an honours in physics and a minor in music.

## As a spinoff of the policy, will the prerequisites for writing the entrance test for a professional course change, too?

Yes. We already have the Common Aptitude Test (CAT) that does not distinguish between candidates on the basis of subjects studied in school or college. Other entrance tests will also prescribe a syllabus. It is up to the candidate whether she studies for the syllabus through her school curriculum or by herself. These changes might take some time, though.

## For a reorientation of education, one requires the right human resources. How long before we have the new army of teachers?

The policy is clear that teaching needs to be of a certain quality. Teaching cannot be considered as a last option, it has to be treated as a respected profession. Presently, we will be introducing a four-year integrated



course for teachers. We will also have to focus on re-training existing teachers. Yes, we need a huge capacity building here. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that education has to be about critical thinking and not rote learning.

## What is the mainstay of NEP 2020?

It is transformational, not incremental. The focus is on foundations.

## There is criticism that the policy is focussing more on the vocational aspect and less on academics.

I would not call the thrust vocational, but rather, on life skills. Today, we have huge dropout rates. While enrolment for pre-primary is almost 100 per cent, only 26 per cent make it to graduation level. Similarly, there are huge dropouts after Class 8, 10 and 12.

There are two aspects here. One is, the syllabus should not cause students to drop out. We are even planning that for certain subjects like mathematics, schools will offer two levels, A and B, at the +4 level. Because, if a student wants to get into statistics, why should he be forced through trigonometry?

The other aspect here is that not every student needs to reach the degree level. Yet, those who leave the system at any level should be equipped with life skills. This is for the student as well as for the country. Because their contribution to the GDP increases with skill enhancement.

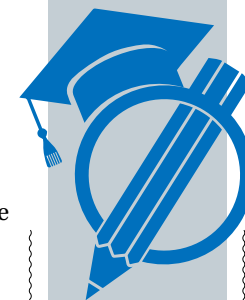
## Implementation is a worry. How will you provide quality teaching when many schools are not more than a shed?

Equity has been a major focus of the policy. Technology-enabled systems are great levellers. In a conventional system, it might take more than a lifetime to see every school equipped with just a good laboratory. However, through virtual labs, we can reach out much better. IIT Madras has already made some virtual labs.

The NETF seeks to look at technology solutions in association with leading software companies and academic institutions. The question of equity is very important for us, we are aware that even technology-enabled solutions may not bridge the gap if schools and students cannot access these technologies.

To read the full interview

Visit [www.theweek.in](http://www.theweek.in)



## MAJOR PROPOSALS IN THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020

- Expanding age group of mandatory schooling from 6-14 to 3-18

- 10+2 school curriculum to be replaced by 5+3+3+4 structure

- Emphasis on mother tongue/regional language as medium of instruction until at least Class 5

- Replacing the UGC and AICTE with Higher Education Commission of India

- Introduction of a four-year multidisciplinary undergraduate programme with multiple exit options

- Scrapping of the MPhil programme

- Setting up of a National Research Foundation



K. Kasturirangan,  
chairman, NEP committee

Leena Chandran-Wadia,  
member, drafting committee, NEP

# Quality education requires constant reinvestment

BY REKHA DIXIT

Former chairman of Indian Space Research Organisation K. Kasturirangan was tasked with heading an eight-member panel to draft the National Education Policy (NEP) in 2017. With the changes that have taken place in education over the past decades, the existing policy was inadequate, so the new one seeks to reorient towards the new normal. Kasturirangan and Leena Chandran-Wadia, member of the drafting committee, spoke to THE WEEK about the way forward. Excerpts:

**Q/What is the cornerstone of NEP 2020?**

**A/**The policy is an end-to-end roadmap for the country, flexible yet integrated, with a singular focus on quality education—quality educational institutions, curriculum and pedagogy, and teachers who are empowered with training and support.

**Q/Are there any major recommendations by the committee that were not reflected in NEP 2020?**

**A/**The policy in its final form reflects the recommendations of the committee, both in letter and spirit. Some details are different, of course, but as the policy went through major reviews by different groups of stakeholders from the Central and state governments, and eventually by the prime minister himself a few times, the fact that it is still preserved,

speaks volumes about our efforts. We are satisfied and happy with the outcome.

**Q/While most have welcomed the policy changes, they voice concerns over implementation. Your comments.**

**A/**Implementation of this policy at the size and scale of effort that is needed has not been attempted previously. However, in the past four decades, we have taken up several initiatives in other sectors like space, where we have put in considerable investment, been ambitious, taken risks and succeeded. This shows that we can do it. Given India's projected economic strength of becoming a ten trillion-dollar economy by 2030-32, we are confident that over the coming ten-year period, we will be able to invest substantially into education. The policy sets out an ambitious vision and provides a flexible framework within which all stakeholders—governments, managements, faculty, researchers, educators and civil society—can work together and ensure the desired outcomes.

**Q/The private sector feels that the policy should have allowed for private funds to be injected into education, apart from the PPP and philanthropic models.**

**A/**There is already considerable private sector investment in education. Nearly half of all students in school education,



over 120 million students, study in private schools. Over 45 per cent of them pay less than ₹500 per month. In higher education, the participation is much higher, with private sector accounting for 78 per cent of all institutions and 69 per cent of all enrolment.

All of these institutions are working under the non-profit model as per law, but we know that they use well-known ways to extract profits. It is important to highlight that the education sector is not really amenable to the for-profit model. Quality education requires constant reinvestment into academics. If reinvestment is not done, quality suffers, as it does in India.

**Q/What could be the biggest stumbling block in achieving the policy objectives?**

**A/**The biggest challenge comes from the



Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is the starting point of the reforms in school education and it is imperative to get this done correctly in all aspects.

present mindset and culture among those involved in education. There are a variety of roles and responsibilities that need to be approached with a 'can-do' attitude. Everyone will need to relook at the way we teach and shape the lives of students, evaluate them, govern or administer institutions, and discard entrenched viewpoints that have not worked so far. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is the starting point of the reforms in school education and it is imperative to get this done correctly in all aspects. Not succeeding in ECCE will have a cascading impact on all the later stages.

**Q/Do you think the NEP will be able to control the parallel commercialisation of education by private coaching classes?**

**A/**Coaching classes thrive on the paucity of good opportunities for students, forcing them to compete very hard. NEP aims to raise the overall quality of education offered by most institutions. It is also trying to do away with rote learning and focus on education that helps students discover their own interests or passion and develop them, while also picking up critical competencies. When the teaching methods and concomitant evaluation strategies change so much, [private] coaching will also become redundant.

**Q/How much have lessons from the pandemic been incorporated into the policy?**

**A/**Two big challenges that arose due to the sudden shift towards online education were the lack of adequate internet connectivity and access to devices, and the readiness of teachers for making the shift. The policy contains several recommendations for addressing this, such as providing internet access and devices to educational institutions, teachers and students; training and support to teachers for preparing and sharing rich content; creation of a National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) to help institutions select the platforms, software and tools that can be used by them; and provision for making content available in regional languages. ①



# RITEs OF RETURN

Rahul Gandhi gets repackaged as a leader with intellectual rigour, empathetic to the poor and willing to consult the best minds on crucial issues as a crisis-ridden Congress waits for him to make up his mind

BY SONI MISHRA

W

hether you like him or not, you have to admire Rahul Gandhi for his gumption to walk back into the limelight despite the crushing electoral defeats, the myriad questions raised about his leadership abilities and the ignominy of being held up as an object of ridicule by his

political rivals.

In the midst of Covid-19, the former Congress president has taken a new avatar and is tirelessly carrying out an incessant critique of the Narendra Modi government's handling of the pandemic, the economy and the Chinese intrusions in Ladakh.

There is a hectic pace to Rahul's online interventions, and his effort is to project the Modi government as incapable of handling the pandemic and the economic slowdown, and as dishonest on the skirmish with China.

It, however, appears that the main purpose of the endeavour is to refurbish Rahul's image and project him as a person who delves into issues with the rigour of an intellectual and the sensitivity of an empathetic, thoughtful leader.

The image revamp coincides with the Gandhi scion crossing an important milestone—he turned 50 this year. He cannot be referred to as a young leader anymore, having well and truly entered middle age.

In keeping with the seniority that he has assumed, he has given up the belligerence of the angry young leader persona of yore, appearing calm, composed, thoughtful and self-assured in his online outings.

## CHANGE OF GAME

A repackaging of Rahul is under way, and the effort appears to be to project him as the antithesis of Modi

Achievements of the government during the corona period: February- Namaste Trump, March- MP government toppled, April- Got candles burned, May- Government's sixth anniversary, June- Virtual rally in Bihar, July- Attempt to topple Rajasthan government.

I kept warning them on Covid-19 and the economy. They rubbished it. Disaster followed. I keep warning them on China. They're rubbishing it.

India's economic mismanagement is a tragedy that is going to destroy millions of families. It will no longer be accepted silently.

BJP has institutionalised lies. 1) Covid-19 by restricting the testing and misreporting deaths. 2) GDP by using a new calculation method. 3) Chinese aggression by frightening the media. The illusion will break soon and India will pay the price.



Clean-shaven, hair neatly combed, the kurta replaced by a formal blue shirt in his videos on the Chinese incursions, the get-up seems aimed at showing him as a leader with a difference. The tone, too, is markedly different, shorn of the aggression of the 'chowkidar chor hai' slogan.

Rahul has said he wanted to offer constructive criticism over how the government was managing Covid-19 and its impact on the economy. He has had a series of online conversations with experts such as Raghuram Rajan, Abhijit Banerjee, Ashish Jha, Rajiv Bajaj and Muhammad Yunus on the socio-economic effects of the pandemic. He sat down on a footpath with a group of migrant workers to talk about their struggles and interacted with a taxi driver at a tea stall, the events gaining traction on social media.

He has held news conferences, posted video messages, has been active on Twitter and has even launched his Telegram channel. And the latest online tranche of four slickly produced videos on the Chinese incursions attempts to show him as a leader with a deep insight into the problem, thereby trying to project Modi, by comparison, as not telling the complete truth about the issues with China.

A repackaging of Rahul is under way, and the effort appears to be to project him as the antithesis of Modi, as a leader who is empathetic to the vul-

## Give up the sycophantic culture

**ADITI SINGH**  
MLA, Raebareli

After the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Rahul Gandhi said there would not be another Gandhi at the helm of the Congress and that things needed to change. But the party went ahead and appointed Sonia Gandhi as interim president. Now we hear that Rahulji is poised to come back as president. So, is there any change happening? Leaders like Jyotiraditya Scindia and Sachin Pilot might have thrown their hats in the ring for the post of Congress president.

The youngest member in the Congress Working Committee is 37. Why cannot you have leaders who are in their 20s and 30s in the decision-making process? For me, what has been most frustrating is that things just do not seem to move in the party. Nothing happens, no new thing gets done.

Twitter trolls call me opportunistic. But I joined the Congress in 2016 when it was not in power at the Centre and was not in a position to win in Uttar Pradesh. I joined the party because I had faith in the party's ideology. But now I do not think there is any ideology left.

I think India deserves a better opposition. The party needs to get rid of the 'chamchagiri (sycophancy)' culture. It needs an active leadership and inner-party democracy. We have brilliant leaders in the party. But if you do not know how to make use of them, then nobody can help you.



## Congress is not a bunch of sycophants

**S. JOTHIMANI**  
MP, Karur

Rahul Gandhi is the best thing that has happened to the Congress. I am not saying this because he is my leader and my mentor, but because of the qualities that he embodies. A leader has to be committed, honest, truthful, knowledgeable, visionary, democratic and compassionate. Rahul is upfront, speaks the truth irrespective of the consequences and he understands the idea of India. He empowered young leadership and tried to build a party with all kinds of leaders.

We are not a bunch of sycophants. We have strong views. We have many differences with Rahul. But we trust the Gandhi family and his leadership because of what they stand for.

Rahul said he himself was the symptom of a disease called nepotism. He fought against the status quo. That is why he is what he is now. He could have been prime minister in 2009 itself. But he is not after power. When the Congress was in power, he moulded leaders like me.

I was not disappointed with his decision to resign as party president. The party lost the Lok Sabha elections. It was not his fault alone. Yet, he put in his papers. Now I feel it is high time he returned as party president. He should build the Congress and its organisation from the grassroots. The clarity that he has for fighting the RSS and the anti-people regime of the BJP has to percolate down through the party.

nerable sections of society, willing to seek suggestions from experts and is prepared to take questions from the media. He has sought to come across as the voice of sanity in these uncertain times.

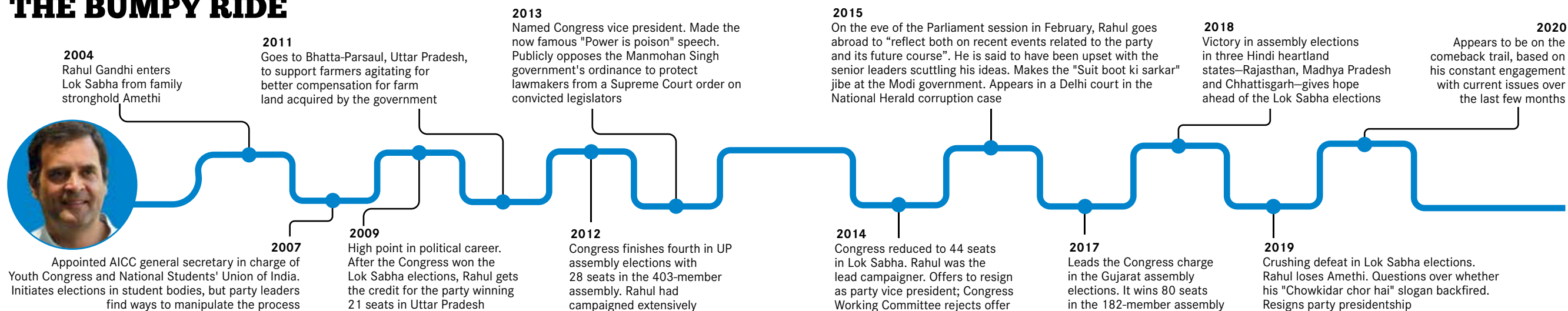
While Rahul was not altogether missing from the public eye after his resignation last year, he did stay under the radar, hence there is intense speculation whether he is now ready to make a comeback as Congress president.

The timing of Rahul's efforts makes it all the more interesting. His mother, Sonia Gandhi, who stepped in after his resignation, completes one year as interim chief of the Congress on August 10. With no sign of a process being put in place to elect a new president, an option before the party is to extend Sonia's interim presidentship. The other possibility is Rahul agreeing to take charge and settling the leadership issue.

At a news conference a couple of months ago, Rahul was asked whether he was on a comeback trail. He replied: "Please see my letter from a year ago.... I stand by my letter." Sources close to him said the reasons why he quit were spelt out clearly in his open letter issued at the time of his resignation and that it stressed that accountability needed to be fixed at all levels. They said he would come back on his own terms.

A close Rahul aide said his return as Congress president was imminent, although he could not

## THE BUMPY RIDE



GRAPHICS SREEMANIKANDAN S./TEXT SONI MISHRA



# A HOUSE DIVIDED

## TEAM RAHUL



### BHUPESH BAGHEL

Chhattisgarh chief minister. Supports Rahul's aggressive line on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The only Congress chief minister to implement NYAY, Rahul's brainchild



### RANDEEP SURJEWALA

Former Youth Congress president; ex-MLA from Haryana. The AICC communications-in-charge has been valiantly defending Rahul in the media



### K.C. VENUGOPAL

Was made AICC general secretary (organisation) by Rahul. Seen as a link between Rahul and Team Sonia

### AJAY MAKEN

Part of Rahul's inner circle; was sent to Jaipur with Surjewala as the party leadership's representative during the recent crisis



### NIKHIL ALVA

Enhanced Rahul's presence on social media. Used videos and interactions with experts to project him as a thoughtful leader

### K. RAJU

Was secretary in the Sonia Gandhi-headed National Advisory Council, and was brought into the Congress by Rahul. Now said to be advising Rahul on how the organisation can be made more democratic



### RAJIV SATAV

Former Youth Congress president. Key role in the Congress campaign in the 2017 Gujarat assembly polls; later made AICC general secretary in charge of the state



### JAIRAM RAMESH

A key adviser to Rahul on policy matters, especially on socioeconomic issues



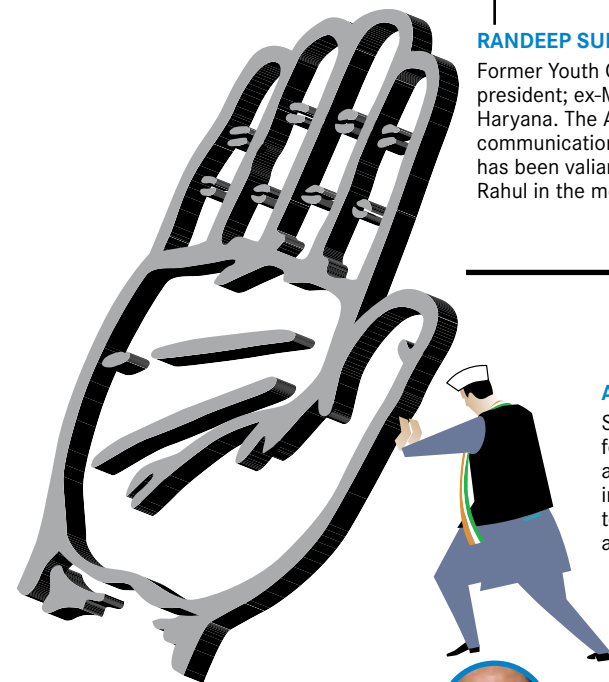
### PRAVEEN CHAKRAVARTHY

Head of the Congress data analytics cell. Played an important role in drafting NYAY. After the Lok Sabha debacle, questions were raised about his interventions, but he managed to hold on



### SAM PITRODA

Rajiv Gandhi's friend. Planned Rahul's successful trip to Berkeley. Raju and Pitroda fine-tuned the response of state units to Covid-19



### A.K. ANTONY

Sonia considers the former defence minister's advice to be of the utmost importance. She is learnt to have advised Rahul to always seek his opinion



### GHULAM NABI AZAD

Leader of opposition in the Rajya Sabha; the party's face in Parliament, where its numbers and influence have dwindled



### ANAND SHARMA

Seasoned leader with experience of working in the government. Has been questioning Modi on foreign affairs

### ASHOK GEHLOT

The veteran leader has the backing of the Gandhis in the wake of Sachin Pilot's revolt



### DIGVIJAYA SINGH

Was seen as the real power behind the Kamal Nath government; Scindia called him the villain of the piece



### TARUN GOGOI

The former Assam chief minister and Congress Working Committee member is a family loyalist; while he backs Sonia, he is keen on Rahul making a comeback as party president



### BHUPINDER HOODA

The Haryana veteran, at odds with Rahul-appointed Ashok Tanwar for long, made a comeback on the eve of the assembly polls and the party came close to winning



### KAMAL NATH

Strengthened his position with the party leadership after Sonia became interim president. Sidelined the challenger Jyotiraditya Scindia, who then revolted and brought down the government



## THE EXODUS

Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy

Himanta Biswa Sarma

Jyotiraditya Scindia

Pradyot Deb Barman

Ajoy Kumar

Vijay Bahuguna

Rita Bahuguna Joshi

S.M. Krishna

Kishore Chandra Deo

Srikant Jena

G.K. Vasan

Ajit Jogi

Giridhar Gomango

Ashok Tanwar

Bhubaneswar Kalita

Ashok Chaudhary

Yashpal Arya

Pema Khandu

N. Biren Singh

Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil

Mausam Noor

## TEAM SONIA



### AHMED PATEL

AICC treasurer; sidelined by Rahul. He is active again now in intra-party matters, but with reduced efficacy



### P. CHIDAMBARAM

The Congress's foremost voice against the Narendra Modi government on policy matters; the Gandhis defended him strongly amid the probes against him



### CAPT AMARINDER SINGH

The Punjab chief minister was made the party's face in the assembly elections, though Rahul was reluctant. He firmly established his position by leading the party to victory





ARVIND JAIN

LOST IN THE CROWD

Rahul and Priyanka with senior Congress leaders at a protest against NRC and CAA in Delhi

confirm whether it would happen now. “Majority of the Congress workers definitely want him back. It is also a fact that Sonia Gandhi’s appointment was on a temporary basis, with a certain date, which we are now nearing. There are serious health issues. She stepped in to fill a vacuum, and she cannot continue doing that indefinitely. So I am sure there will be a resolution soon, though I am not sure what that resolution will be,” he said.

Rahul’s supporters have begun calling for his return. Demands were made in the Congress working committee (CWC) meeting of June 23 and Sonia’s meetings with party MPs on July 11 and July 30. Rahul’s staunch supporters, who had defended his decision to resign, now want him to come back.

“As someone who worked with him, I was not disappointed with his decision to resign as party president. The party lost the Lok Sabha election. But it was not his fault alone. Yet, he came forward to put in his papers. But now, I feel it is high time he returned as party president,” said S. Jothimani, MP from Karur and a close aide of Rahul.

Along with the demand for Rahul’s return, the divide between the old guard and the young leaders in the party—the principal reason for his

**There is a growing feeling that the Congress has failed to stop its decline. Its national footprint has shrunk drastically and its organisation has become weak.**

resignation—has reappeared, too. It played out in Sonia’s meeting with members of the Rajya Sabha on July 30. The leaders in this meeting, many of them representing the old guard, were not so effusive in their demand that Rahul come back, quite unlike the fervent demand heard in her meeting with Lok Sabha members on July 11.

The meeting, in fact, became a war of words between the seniors and the young leaders identified as Team Rahul. The call for introspection made by senior leaders and the organisational issues raised by them were seen by Rahul’s supporters as expressing reservations about his leadership. Rahul aide Rajiv Satav reportedly said the introspection had to begin with the functioning of the second United Progressive Alliance government and how the Congress fell from more than 200 seats in 2009 to just 44 in 2014. There was an immediate retort to this from leaders like Manish Tewari and Shashi

Tharoor, who were ministers in the UPA government and are uncomfortable with the way the leadership issue has been dragging on.

The seniors are also said to be uncomfortable with Rahul’s online interactions, especially his China videos. They complain that he is setting a line of attack against the Modi government without consulting party leaders. It has been an old grouse that Rahul relies on his set of advisers rather than taking the senior leaders into confidence, betraying a distrust of them. Moreover, they feel he has been going on a trajectory of his own, without taking the party along or conveying the impression that the view that is being offered has been discussed and debated in the party.

In the past one year following Rahul’s resignation, several voices within the party have demanded an end to the leadership conundrum, arguing that it was hurting the party badly. The sentiment gathered steam after the party drew a blank in the assembly elections in Delhi, second time in a row, and leaders including Tewari, Tharoor, Abhishek Manu Singhvi and Sandeep Dikshit spoke about the need for Rahul to make it clear whether he wanted to be Congress president or not, so that the party could then go ahead and settle the issue. Some leaders suggested having a non-Gandhi at the helm, while some others felt that general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra can step up, although she has made it clear that she wants to focus on Uttar Pradesh, her current assignment.

Gathering momentum is the view that either the CWC appoints a full-time president or elections be held for the top post as Sonia completes a year as interim chief. Many leaders feel that if Rahul does not want to come back as president, then the party should ideally have elections for the post.

There is restiveness in the party, even among Rahul’s supporters, over the way he has kept the leadership issue hanging, and it is felt that the uncertainty is doing the party a lot of harm. The state of drift, with the leadership vacuum not allowing the party to have a sense of direction, is proving to be a big impediment in countering the aggressive politics of the Modi-Shah combine. Electoral contests apart, the party has found it difficult to keep its flock together; its government in Madhya Pradesh fell a few months ago and its chief minister in Rajasthan, Ashok Gehlot, is struggling to save his government.

There is a growing feeling that the Congress

## RESTIVE LOT

The number of unhappy Congress leaders is increasing

### SACHIN PILOT

Aggrieved at not being made chief minister of Rajasthan and being sidelined by Ashok Gehlot, Pilot has gone into open rebellion

### MILIND DEORA

In recent months, he has aired views contrary to the party line. There is speculation that he could be weighing his options

### JITIN PRASADA

Has a prominent role in Uttar Pradesh Congress. But, his comments like the one backing the Modi government’s proposal for a law on family planning, has the Congress on high alert

### KULDEEP BISHNOI

Has been vocal about the young leaders in the party feeling alienated, wasted and discontented. Did not mince words when Jyotiraditya Scindia left; repeated the concerns after Pilot’s revolt

### NAVJOT SINGH SIDHU

Constantly at odds with Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh. Rarely seen or heard from, except for the rare picture a few months ago of his meeting with party president Sonia Gandhi and AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra

### SANJAY NIRUPAM

Has been extremely critical of the party’s functioning, especially the dominance of the old guard and the party’s tie-up with the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra

### ADITI SINGH

Brought into the Congress by the Gandhis, the young leader from Rae Bareilly is upset at being treated unfairly and has defied the party line on various issues

### SANDEEP DIKSHIT

The former East Delhi MP and son of late chief minister Sheila Dikshit has stressed that the leadership issue needs to be resolved at the earliest

GRAPHICS SREEMANIKANDAN S./TEXT SONI MISHRA



has failed to stop its decline. Its national footprint has shrunk drastically, and its organisation has become weak and lacks direction. Leaders have deserted it in a steady stream, with a weak high command unable to negotiate with regional satraps from a position of power. And the party has been unable to get an ideological footing to take on the BJP-RSS.

Statistics bring out the current state of the Congress. It has just 92 MPs in parliament which has 790 members—52 in the Lok Sabha and 40 in the Rajya Sabha. It has about 800 MLAs of a total of 4,123 MLAs in the country. In the last Lok Sabha elections, it failed to win a single seat in 13 states and five Union territories. In the politically crucial Uttar Pradesh, it won only one seat—Sonia Gandhi's Raebareli. The victory in the heartland states in the assembly polls in December 2018 failed to translate into any gains in the Lok Sabha elections.

The party which was in power in 14 states in 2014 now rules only three states—Rajasthan, Punjab and Chhattisgarh—and the Union territory of Puducherry, and is a junior partner in the government in Maharashtra and Jharkhand. There are vast expanses where the party has either become redundant or is riding on the back of a regional player. Madhya Pradesh was won back from the BJP after a gap of 15 years, but the Kamal Nath government fell because of desertions. The northeast, once the party's stronghold, is now Congress-mukt.

"Not enough has been done at the state and Central levels to revamp the party. The party has to make a serious effort to train leaders and workers to make them understand the Congress ideology, the history of the party and the nation," said former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijaya Singh.

There is dissatisfaction with the manner in which the high command

GUEST COLUMN ♦ SALMAN KHURSHID

## India will soon discover its need for Rahul Gandhi

**THE LEADER IS GONE;** long stay the leader. The modified conundrum of leadership might well help perplexed minds, within the Congress and without, to understand the situation in our party.

No standard rules of the game can be applied to the Congress, even if any other party goes by any rules beyond *jo jeeta wo sikander!* The problem for them is to understand that two successive defeats in Lok Sabha elections and the subsequent resignation from the post of party president have not conspicuously impacted the hold of Rahul Gandhi on the party. His repeated assertions about having decided to distance himself from the top post, sometimes with surprising adamance, have put some entreaties on pause, but have not made people give up on hope and habit of Congress ethos.

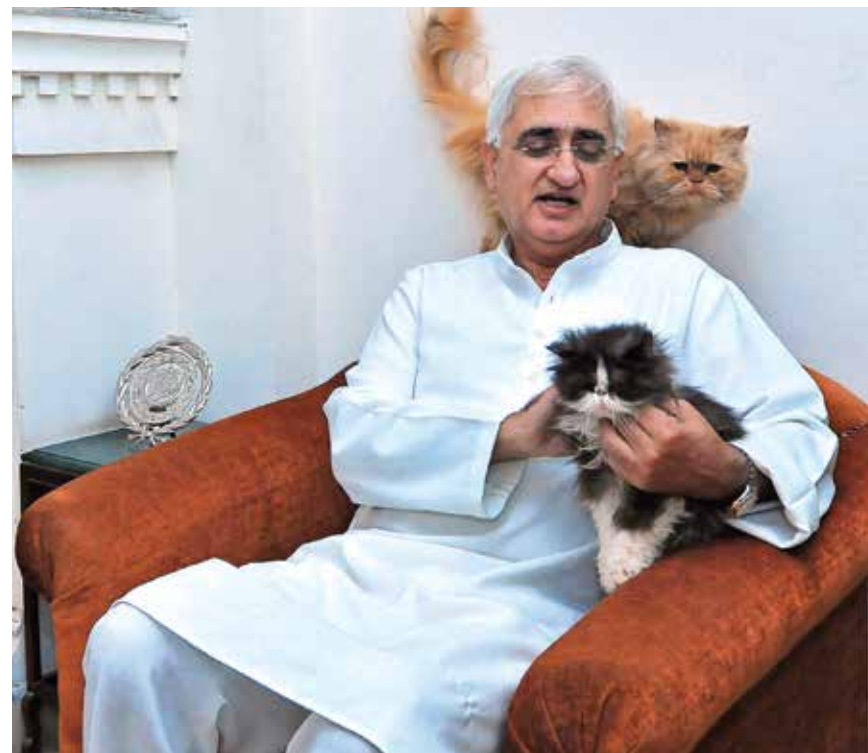
One thing is clear though: vacating the president's post did not mean retreat from leadership, which, in any case, is a trait not amenable to being switched on and off. Rahul has remained in control of guiding the party and has concentrated on a leadership style unique in terms of the standard we are accustomed to in the dreary political landscape. Indeed it is commendable for modern democracies, closest to the likes of Barack Obama and Tony Blair rather than Donald Trump and Boris Johnson. Contrast prime

minister Nehru and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and you will understand that there are many role models and the Congress preference is obvious.

Ultimately, however, it must work with the voter. I recall a brilliant piece written by Vir Sanghvi many years ago in memory of the late Madhavrao Scindia whom he described as the 'best PM India never had'. But then as Shah Rukh Khan would add, picture *abhi bhi baki hai*.

We hear a great deal about the urgent need for the leadership ambiguity to be removed. We all think that in principle that is fine, but the ambiguity, as I said, is for outsiders, not the homegrown Congress cadres and leaders. That is a fact that outsiders can continue to deny for as long as they wish; it has and will make little difference for party faithfuls. Nothing is on hold that we would do with a full-time president. There is, of course, much more that we can do even now and hopefully will in the weeks and months to come, factoring in the constraints of Covid-19 and the political atmosphere in the country.

Rahul is an idealist, something some people consider a disqualification for a mass leader; he is a hardcore professional, something that some people believe sits uneasy with the malleability needed for the rough and tumble of politics; he has clear likes and dislikes for ideas and people, something that people used to politicians who are everything to



AAYUSH GOEL

everyone do not understand. The unrelenting attacks on Modi and the RSS made some leaders uneasy about taking on the popular mood.

At one gathering of intellectuals suggesting more diplomatic alternatives he asked as only he can, "Why? Are you afraid of the RSS?" His steadfastness and political fortitude showed in his response to the Scindia and Pilot episodes. In the world of compromises, he is loath to depart from principle. Some of his uncompromising democratic positions, like the Youth Congress elections, made dyed in the wool old hands nervous.

Once India tires of being told it is deprived by the 'other' and inevitably returns to collective destiny, it will discover the need for Rahul. The only question that remains is whether this happens naturally or will require strategic steering. The truth is that no party has figured this out as yet. Many are hoping that the fruit of change in public mood will fall in their lap like in the past, but politics has transformed considerably to

assume that. The tree needs to be shaken and from the record Rahul is the only public figure to be attempting to do that.

Any honest person will admit that contemporary politics in India is surreal. There is public approval of vigilante justice and crowd lynchings, criminals use crime to secure political power and then use power to subvert justice, botched governance is being proclaimed as high accomplishment, and inexplicable military ambiguity is being brandished as unprecedented success. Audacity of the political class is the new norm, while dissent and public protests are being painted in dark shades. Enforcement agencies are unselfconsciously becoming dramatis personae of the drama of political vendetta, while disguised and open defiance of India's composite culture has become entrenched in the landscape.

In this crowded space, Rahul has thoughtfully chosen to harp on the devastating medical and economic consequences of mismanaging

Covid-19 and the knots we are tying our foreign policy into. The future of India depends heavily on those two frontiers, yet people continue to ask what he is doing about the party. Politics is as much about the idea whose time has come as indeed about the nuts and bolts of the organisational machine with circumstances dictating priority.

His commitment to liberal democracy is second to none, but as we learnt in the economic competition with China, democracy has its own timeline for development and growth. It is the very time that Congress is taking to shake itself free of the shock of two consecutive defeats that will give it a sustainable thrust for the future. Many of us in the Congress continue to have faith in the proposition that the future will not only include Rahul, but will be substantially shaped by him. His detractors and ambivalent well-wishers will just have to understand that he will write his own script and pick his own timeline.

Boxing great Muhammed Ali's career seems to have interesting parallels that fit the trajectory of Rahul's politics. When the body was young, it was the dance trick to tire the opponent with 'I dance like a butterfly, I sting like the bee...' In tougher moments it was the rope-a-dope: lean back on the ropes to take more beating than the opponent has the stamina to give. Ultimately it is the left jab that will decide the match. Lesser mortals can seldom guess where and when it will come.

The dream of Camelot, 'the once and future...' is still alive. Those who have gone to the current power house without character will miss being part of it and resign to the fate of being part of the best team that did not happen because of their unwise decisions.

The author is a senior Congress leader and former Union cabinet minister.





GETTY IMAGES

#### HOLLOW SHOW

Electoral contests apart, the Congress has found it difficult to keep its flock together

culture works and there are demands that decision making should involve diverse voices and must be decentralised. “Why can’t you have leaders who are in their 20s and 30s in the decision-making process? The party needs to hear new and diverse views,” said Aditi Singh, MLA from Raebareilly, who was once close to the Gandhis, but is now seen as a rebel leader.

Former Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi said the party should put in place a dedicated cadre like that of the RSS. “The workers should have a sense of commitment to the party ideology and be ready to fight and make sacrifices for it. We used to have committed leaders. But that is not the case now,” he said.

Ideological clarity is, however, what the party appears to lack at the moment. It looked confused in its responses to crucial issues such as abrogation of Article 370, the

Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the National Register of Citizens. It could not take a clear stand on the construction of the Ram temple and on the tie-up with the ideologically opposite Shiv Sena. The party has found itself doing a tight-rope walk between its own ideological bases of secularism and inclusive politics, and the hindutva-based and nationalism-infused narrative of the BJP.

The Congress needs a powerful story of its own to counter the BJP’s narrative, and this has to be provided by the leadership. Rahul found a potent line of attack, unveiled in his Berkeley talk in 2018, but it was lost in the noise over nationalism in the post-Pulwama situation and in his own reliance on the ‘chowkidar chor hai’ election slogan.

Even as the party debates the efficacy of Rahul’s renewed attacks on the Modi government, his supporters insist he is on the right track. “Yes, he is a dynast. He has that baggage. But there is no denying that he has a unique voice and he speaks from the heart,” said a Rahul aide. “He is talking to an audience those in power

do not care about. He is resonating, maybe not on a tsunami scale right now. Will that happen in the next two to three years, given the current state of affairs? I definitely think so.”

Rahul has complained that he finds himself alone in his fight against Modi. This is a point he stressed in his resignation letter and has repeated in party meetings. However, Randeep Surjewala, head of the Congress communications department, who is close to Rahul, said, “Rahul Gandhi has never said he is alone in the fight against Narendra Modi. He only expects every Congress leader, who has served in positions of power, to rise in unison in these difficult times to fight the battle unitedly and not be hesitant of the brutalities unleashed by the Modi government by false cases of ED or the Income Tax or the CBI. When he says ‘*Daro mat*’ (Don’t be afraid), which is his clarion call for all, he says it also to Congress leaders to be not scared of Modi.”

Members of Team Rahul have felt abandoned and sidelined after his resignation, and some of them felt compelled to leave the party, the most significant one being Jyotiraditya Scindia. Some others have been sulking or striking discordant notes, such as Milind Deora or Jitin Prasad. Sachin Pilot, another prominent young leader, has gone on the war-path against the leadership, leaving the Gehlot government in dire straits.

“There are problems in the Congress across the country and that is largely because there is no direction. Party leaders and workers don’t know where the buck stops or to whom to address their problems,” said Pradyot Deb Barman, who quit as Tripura state Congress president last year. “Circumstances in the party changed drastically after Rahul’s resignation. Young leaders like me were in the party because of him. But after his resignation, he became unresponsive to our concerns. He

#### ? INTERVIEW



**Tarun Gogoi**  
former Assam  
chief minister

**Q/ From Himanta Biswa Sarma to Jyotiraditya Scindia, so many young leaders are leaving the Congress.**

**A/** Sometimes, it is a mistake to appoint people as state Congress presidents at a very young age. As regards Himanta Biswa Sarma, he was originally not a Congressman. He had links with the United Liberation Front of Assam and had cases against him. To save his skin, he came to the Congress. Yes, I encouraged him and gave him opportunities. He was not humiliated. He left because of other reasons. The BJP government raided his house. There was a case against him.

If a young leader proves his mettle, for example, like Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy did in Andhra Pradesh, he or she deserves to be put in a leadership position. Reddy may not be with us, but he proved his leadership capacity and organisational skills.

**Q/ It is said that the young leaders in the Congress are feeling sidelined.**

**A/** The problem is that people like Jyotiraditya Scindia are not committed to the party ideology. Sometimes, you get impressed with the smartness or intelligence of a youngster. But that is not enough. They must be committed to the party ideology. We must choose people who are

## Only Rahul can lead the fight against Modi

BY SONI MISHRA

committed and have worked their way up from the grassroots. It is a mistake to promote people who have not worked hard for it. Some of them are capable, but in most cases, you will find that youngsters, particularly those who have come in because of their father’s blessings, are most likely to commit mistakes. That is because they have not come through trials and tribulations. That is the case with my own son also.

**Q/ Is the leadership issue wrecking the Congress?**

**A/** I have always been in favour of Rahul Gandhi being Congress president. I was not in favour of him resigning and had asked him why he was stepping aside. In a democracy, defeat in an election is a part of life. Even a leader like Atal Bihari Vajpayee could not get his party elected for so many years. But Rahul felt he was morally responsible for the defeat.

Today also, we want Rahul at the helm. Of course, we need Sonia ji’s guidance. But because of her age and other reasons, she cannot move around the country as much as Rahul can. And that is important, particularly when you are in the opposition and pitted against a leader like Narendra Modi who is an expert in perception management, has money power and has no qualms in using institutions to target his adversaries. We feel that among us, only Rahul can fight against these forces.

**Q/ Rahul Gandhi and the party do**

**not seem to be in agreement on taking on Modi directly.**

**A/** Rahul is attacking Modi like anything. Many senior leaders, whom I do not wish to name, are completely silent. The BJP attacked Pandit Nehru, Indira ji and Rajiv ji. And now, they are attacking Rahul. Why? If Rahul is a nobody, they should ignore him. But they attack him, even though we are in the opposition and he is not even the president of the party. They know that by finishing him, they can destroy the Congress. They know that he is one of the main pillars of the party, just as Modi is the symbol of the BJP and the head of the government. Who else should we attack with regard to wrong policies of the government?

**Q/ What does the Congress need to do on an urgent basis to get back on its feet?**

**A/** We have to change our strategy. The world is changing and Modi has changed the nature of politics. It is all about marketing. We must change our outreach to beat him at his game. We need to vigorously use new media. We also need to create a dedicated cadre like that of the RSS. The workers should have a sense of commitment to the party ideology and should be ready to fight and make sacrifices for it. We used to have committed leaders. But that is not the case now. Look at Scindia or Pilot. How can you leave the party and join a party that is diametrically opposite to our ideology? ●



changed his number and it became impossible for us to get in touch with him,” Barman said.

As questions were raised about Rahul abandoning leaders who had grown in the party with him, some leaders said he had actually promoted ‘babalog’, who came from entitled backgrounds and could not deal with loss of power. Newly appointed Congress working president of Gujarat, Hardik Patel, said it was wrong to say that young leaders in the party were not getting their due. “Had that been the case, a 26-year-old like me would not have been given such an important assignment in a crucial state. While the party leadership recognised Sachin Pilot’s abilities, it also gave regard to the experience and political sagacity of Ashok Gehlot. Similarly, in Madhya Pradesh, it was felt that the experience of Kamal Nath was important to run the government. Young leaders need to exercise *dhairya, dheeraj aur sahas* (patience, endurance and courage),” he said.

Countering the criticism that Rahul left young leaders to fend for themselves or was inaccessible, Surjewala said, “Scindia and Pilot were treated by Rahul Gandhi as not just friends but as members of the family. So if either of them says they were unable to meet him, they are simply lying.”

Said Surjewala, “When you work in a political scheme of things, you have to negotiate the political waters without looking at Delhi 24x7 for intervention. So Scindia had to learn to negotiate the political waters alongside a Kamal Nath and a Divgijaya Singh or Pilot had to learn to deal with Gehlot. To expect Rahul Gandhi to be on their side 24x7, negotiating those political waters, would be too much to ask.”

Meanwhile, as friends turn foes, supporters get restless, detractors get into attack mode and the party withers, the time for Rahul to make up his mind is running out. ●

GUEST COLUMN ◆ MANISH TEWARI

## Revisit secularism

**THE CONGRESS** lost both 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections with only 44 and 52 seats, respectively. Congress president Rahul Gandhi resigned on July 3, 2019, stating, “As president of the Congress party, I am responsible for the loss of the 2019 elections. Accountability is critical for the future growth of our party. It is for this reason that I have resigned as Congress president. Rebuilding the party requires hard decisions and numerous people will have to be made accountable for the failure of 2019. It would be unjust to hold others accountable but ignore my own responsibility as president of the party.” Only an honourable man with the courage of conviction would quit considering that no one held him accountable or much less asked him to step down.

On August 10, 2019, the Congress working committee, after wide-ranging consultations with state leaders, appointed Sonia Gandhi as provisional president under Article 18(h) of its constitution. Says the article, “In the event of any emergency by reason of any cause such as the death or resignation of the president elected as above, the senior most general secretary will discharge the routine functions of the president until the working committee appoints a provisional president pending the election of a regular president by the AICC (All India Congress Committee).”

The reappointment of Sonia Gandhi, much to her disinclination, was a wise choice and was widely welcomed. From 1998 to 2017, she led the party with

sagacity and compassion and was responsible for two Congress-led governments at the Centre. Since then, the Congress has managed to be a part of coalition governments in Maharashtra and Jharkhand. It got 31 seats in Haryana—35 being the half-way mark—but unfortunately drew a blank twice over in Delhi where it had governed from 1998 to 2013. The Bihar assembly elections are now round the corner.

However, the trials and tribulations that confront the Congress today have roots that stretch back over five decades. The process commenced in 1967 with the loss of Tamil Nadu, deepened with the defeat in West Bengal in 1977 and worsened further with the loss of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha in the 1990s. These are the states the Congress has never won back. There are certain other states such as Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Punjab where the party was out of power for 10-15 years, but has been able to reclaim. The reason why the losses went unaddressed was due to the four stunning victories that the party pulled off in 1971, 1980, 1984 and, to a lesser extent, in the 1991 general elections.

Coupled with this electoral deficit are profound ideological challenges it needs to address with dispatch. After the collapse of communism in 1991, it re-oriented the nation’s economic trajectory and made it congruent with the Washington Consensus. Unfortunately, the Congress has never been able to align its own economic philosophy with that economic shift. A millennial today wants to know whether the party recognises the pursuit of individual wealth through legitimate means as a valid



J. SURESH

aspirational goal. The challenge to reconcile the animal spirits unleashed by liberalisation with social equity has never been adequately communicated.

The Congress needs to revisit its position on secularism, which is a classical construct imported into the Indian socio-political environment by the founders of the Constitution who were acutely cognizant that there must be a clean separation between the Church and the State, especially in a profoundly religious country such as India. Over a period, their ideological offspring reinterpreted it to mean ‘*Sarv Dharm Sambhav*’ (equal respect for all faiths).’

What the last couple of decades has taught us is that when secularism is interpreted as patronage of all faiths, you skid down a slippery slope where religious preferences of the ‘powers that be’ then start dictating the policies and priorities of the state. This is the spectre of majoritarianism. Can this genie be put back in the bottle?

The Congress must define its vision of nationalism. In the past six years, its delineation of nationalism has been the antithesis of what the BJP stands for—a narrow, chauvinistic and patriarchal view of nationalism. It is unfortunate that the party that was in the vanguard of the free-

dom struggle has not been able to articulate its vision of nationalism cogently.

Finally, it must exorcise politico-economic neo-feudalism from the political firmament, including its own backyard. In 1971, the Congress leadership took a stout position against the vestiges of feudalism that paid rich political and economic dividends. Over a period, those feudal interests have been able to re-ingratiated themselves into positions of influence within the party structure.

Of late there has been persistent comments that the Congress must have a non-Nehru-Gandhi president. The fact is that the Congress rank and file across the country still identify themselves with the Gandhi family. Between 1991 and 1998, no Nehru-Gandhi was part of the Congress. For the past 21 years, no Gandhi has been a part of any government at the Centre or in the states.

Under Sonia Gandhi’s leadership, the Congress did form the government twice at the Centre. Following Rahul Gandhi’s resignation in 2019, the Congress now has three options. It can either confirm Sonia Gandhi as the full-time president or Rahul Gandhi can withdraw his resignation and return as president for he was elected for five years till 2022. If both these are non-sequiturs, then the Congress

must hold an election to the post of president and to the working committee. Article 18(h) of the Congress constitution puts the ball squarely in the AICC’s court.

The CWC’s mandate ended after appointing a provisional president. The ideal solution would be a Nehru-Gandhi presidency, elections to the CWC, the reinstatement of the Congress parliamentary board and deep organisational reforms. The uncertainty at the top must end.

Recently, some relatively younger people who always got things on a platter have left the party. For them, power and positions are the only aphrodisiac. They never went through the organisational grind of the National Students’ Union of India and the Youth Congress. They never spread mats for a public meeting or pasted posters or did wall writing or, for that matter, got knifed in a student union election. They never asked themselves the basic question: Why am I in the Congress?

Scindia, Pilot, Priyanka Chaturvedi, Ajoy Kumar, Pradyut Kishore and many others belong to this genre. They received in disproportion to what they deserved at the cost of other young people. However, the party must also look within. If it keeps rewarding people who repeatedly lose their security deposits, decimate the party in states they once headed and cross vote against the party in Rajya Sabha elections, it demoralises those who believe in ideology and diligence and patiently wait for their chance. Where then is the accountability that impelled Rahul Gandhi’s resignation? It cannot be ‘you show me the man I will show you the rule.’

The problem of India today is not the government. Its credibility lies in tatters. It is the absence of a viable opposition.

The author is a lawyer, MP and former Union minister. Views are personal.



INTERVIEW



**Digvijaya Singh**  
former Madhya Pradesh chief minister

# The Gandhis are made of sterner stuff than what Modi and Shah think

BY SONI MISHRA

**SENIOR CONGRESS LEADER** Digvijaya Singh says former party chief Rahul Gandhi's image has been spoilt by the BJP and the RSS through a concerted social media campaign, but insists that it is on the mend ever since he has started taking on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on critical issues such as national security, Covid-19 and the economy. In an exclusive interview with THE WEEK, Singh says Rahul should never have resigned as Congress president and that he is a leader with a different temperament, who believes that "power is poison".

Excerpts from the interview:

**Q/ What does the Rajasthan episode tell us about the state of the Congress?**

**A/** Narendra Modi and Amit Shah have brought the Gujarat model of politics to the national scene. Under Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani, the BJP was a different party. We have seen the most unethical way of functioning in the BJP since the advent of the Modi-Shah partnership. They are on a buying spree. I have never heard of MLAs being given ₹20-25 crore.

**Q/ Is the BJP not merely taking advantage of fissures in the Congress?**

**A/** Fissures will be there in a party. The Congress may not have managed its internal dissensions. But look at the offers to defect, and defection is not because of ideology or discontent. Those who joined the Congress seeing it as a party of power and authority started looking elsewhere when they found that it is unable to give them power or authority. But they are not the majority. Only 15 to 20 per cent people may have left.

**Q/ Why are the young leaders upset?**

**A/** In Madhya Pradesh, the majority of the MLAs supported Kamal Nath. In Rajasthan, the majority of the MLAs supported Ashok Gehlot, and Sachin Pilot was given the posts of deputy chief minister and state Congress president. In Madhya Pradesh, these positions were offered to Jyotiraditya Scindia. They should have waited. They should have been more active in winning over MLAs if they wanted to be chief minister.

**Q/ Is not their exit a big loss for the Congress?**

**A/** They worked hard and the Congress looked after them. They took off from where their fathers—Madhavrao Scindia and Rajesh Pilot—had left. They were both in the Union cabinet. One became state party president and the other was national general secretary, appointed over thousands of Congressmen. But these youngsters, who in 10-15 years got more than what they could get in any other party, are unhappy. And to do a somersault and join the party against whom you had spoken with such force and venom [seems unthinkable].

**Q/ Scindia attacked you.**

**A/** Did I ever oppose him in the party? He was given ample opportunity. He became a Congress working committee member surpassing many others. In fact, I always promoted him. I had brought his father into the Congress. I mentored him after his father's untimely death. We saw him as a future leader. Then why this mad hurry?

**Q/ Were Scindia and Pilot asking for more than what they deserved?**

**A/** Yes. I became chief minister at 46 after I got more support in the Congress legislature

RAHUL R. PATTON



party than my senior Shyama Charan Shukla. I was not nominated.

**Q/ Was Rahul Gandhi's resignation as party chief a correct move?**

**A/** There was no reason for him to resign. He had emerged as a national alternative to Modi. His ratings had gone up. Yes, we did not do well in the Lok Sabha elections, although I do not want to mention the reason here. But he should have carried on.

However, he was the first person to warn the government about Covid. He was the first to question Modi over Chinese incursions. Among the opposition leaders, Rahul is the only one taking on Modi on every front, and he is doing it convincingly.

**Q/ Do you feel he can provide a viable leadership alternative to Modi?**

**A/** He has a different temperament. Power does not attract him. He could have easily become a cabinet minister or even the prime minister between 2010 and 2014. We would all have supported him. But when he be-

came the Congress vice president, he quoted his mother to say that "power is poison". He wants to connect with the poor and the downtrodden. His is the lone voice for the people who are not heard. Had his idea of NYAY been implemented, the poor would not have been so badly affected during the pandemic. His ideas are absolutely right.

**Q/ The Congress does not seem to have recovered from the Lok Sabha defeat.**

**A/** I agree. Not enough has been done to revamp the party. We have to make a serious effort to train leaders and workers to make them understand the Congress ideology, the history of the party and the nation. And then, democracy within the party is important.

**Q/ How do you see the probe into the Gandhi family trusts?**

**A/** The Bofors case was investigated by the V.P. Singh government and then by the Vajpayee regime. They

found nothing, because there was nothing. These trusts are regularly audited. The probe is meant to scare and create a bad image of the Gandhi family. But the Gandhis are made of sterner stuff than what Modi and Shah think.

**Q/ Is it high time Rahul Gandhi returned as party president?**

**A/** This is my grouse with Rahul Gandhi. Of course, he always treats me with great respect and I find him to be a very sincere person. He is a voracious reader and understands the basics of democracy and the socioeconomic conditions in India and the world. But because of his tough stand against the BJP and the RSS, they have tried to destroy his image through a concerted social media campaign. For a young emerging leader, his image has been tarnished by the misrepresentation of facts.

**Q/ Do you feel he has an image problem?**

**A/** The image problem is in the minds of the people. But it can be countered. Ever since he started challenging Modi on issues of national security, Covid-19 and the economy, things are changing. He is getting as many likes and retweets as Modi does. So people are realising their mistakes.

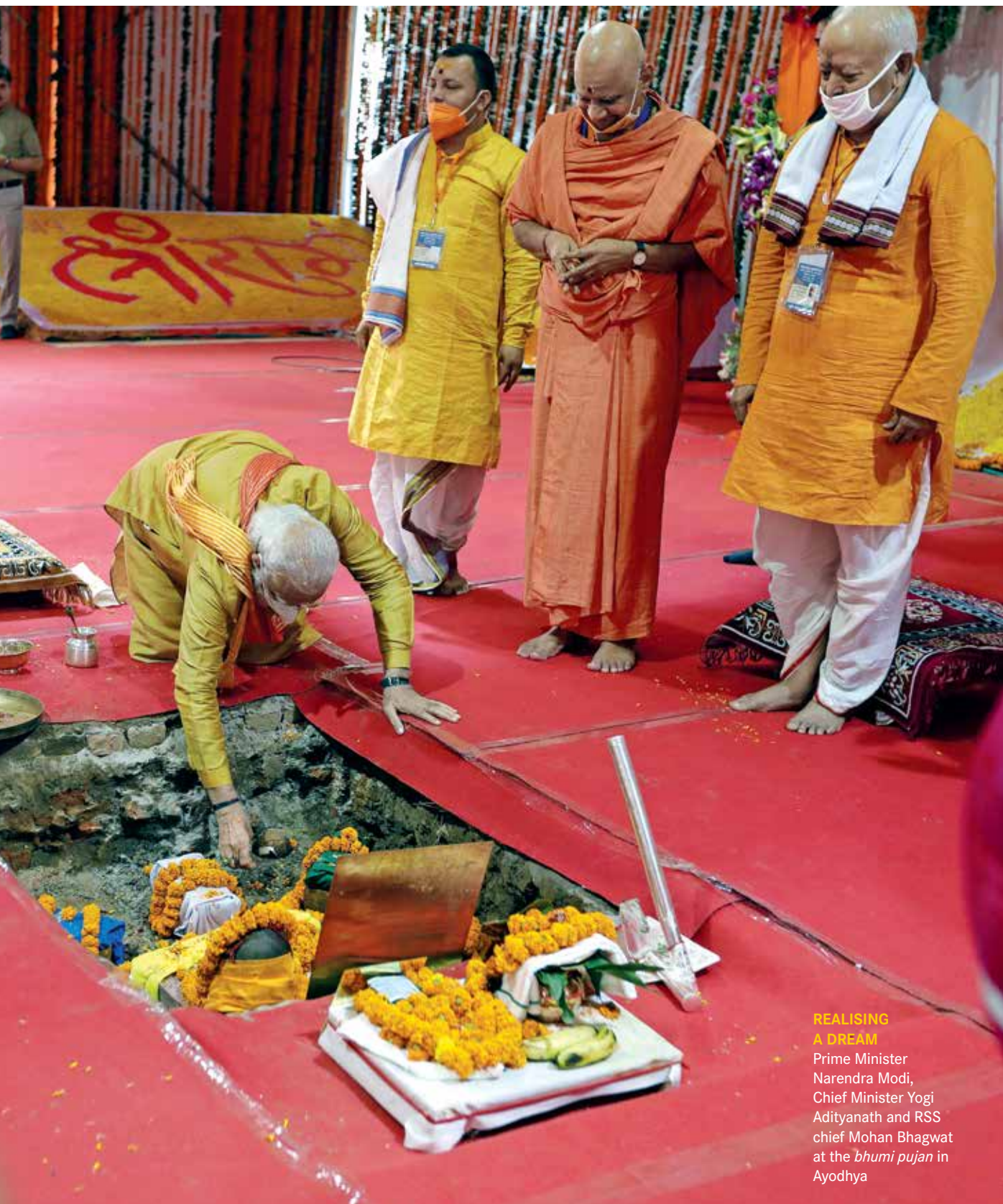
**Q/ Will he be back as Congress president soon?**

**A/** There can be no comeback since he is already there. He has voluntarily held himself back, which I think is not the right decision.

**Q/ Sonia Gandhi is completing one year as interim president of the Congress. Can we expect a leadership change?**

**A/** There is no such thing as interim president. She has been appointed Congress president by the working committee. She is a full president. Let the CWC decide on the leadership. **●**





**REALISING  
A DREAM**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat at the *bhumi puja* in Ayodhya

AP

# Rendezvous with Ram

Having kept the Ram Mandir promise, hindutva now needs fresh ballast from the youth in Ayodhya to sustain its momentum

BY PUJA AWASTHI / Ayodhya

Part resilient, part frail—faith is a strange being. It is also a magical being, and it must be poured into the foundation of the proposed Ram Mandir, for it to be the embodiment of the many symbols that would lie beneath its promised grandeur. These symbols have shaped politics, society and culture in myriad ways. To burnish them, the temple needs to be invested with the faith of a generation that was not born when the mandir movement began gaining momentum.

In Uttar Pradesh, one in four voters is aged between 18 and 29 years. It is a generation that does not have tangible memories of the most visible flashpoints of the movement—the firing on *kar sevaks* in 1990 and the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992. It is a generation that did not gape at television screens as the domes came down. It did not hear the bloodied calls that exhorted the faithful to step out in service of Lord Ram. It did not weep over the deaths that followed, and it did not live through the dark fear of those days.

This generation will only grow bigger. For those who belong to it, the movement and its symbols are stories bequeathed—often embellished or toned down depending on the narrator's convictions.

Deepa Singh Raghuvanshi, 28, heard her stories from those who were intimately involved in the movement. A folk artiste in Ayodhya, Raghuvanshi was six months old when the masjid was demolished. Her home is close to the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas Karyashala, the workshop where columns for the temple are carved. The workshop was set up the year she was born. So for her whole life, Raghuvanshi has had a ringside view of the tasks that went on quietly and persistently even when the mandir seemed a mirage.

She has also seen the unbridled devotion of visitors who prostrate before the pillars, as if they were in the presence of Ram himself. "Since childhood, I have spent hours in the *karyashala*," said Raghuvanshi. "I have heard many stories from artisans. The hopes and pains of those who chiselled these stones have seeped into me. Many who worked in those initial years are gone, but today I feel as though I bear their happiness as well."

Would she then vote for the political party that claims credit for that happiness? She thought for minutes and said, "There are other important qualities one looks for in leaders. The Ram Mandir will be at the back of my mind, though."

Arun Kumar Choubey, 33, state convenor of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, said there was no need to drill Ram and *hindutva* into the youth, because there was already an "innate" bond. "We grew up listening to the stories," said Choubey. "No picture or book is necessary to foster that connection. The *bhumi puja* (stone-laying ceremony), however, is a great opportunity to reinforce our core messaging. We don't look at it as a chance for the organisation to grow, but as a chance to do more in service of the nation."

The Viswa Hindu Parishad, which spearheaded the mandir movement, is not leaving anything to chance, though. It has tasked itself with a massive youth connect programme to ensure that the relationship goes beyond social media campaigns, which are often amorphous and simplistic and do not yield movements in the real world. One example: The hashtag #ProfileForRam, which gained popularity on the night of August 4. Users were asked to change their display pictures or post their favourite picture of Ram. In the accompanying messages, some shared stories of family members performing *kar seva*; others asked when these relatives were returning and how they could join in.





**I HAVE HEARD MANY STORIES FROM ARTISANS. THE HOPES AND PAINS OF THOSE WHO CHISELLED THESE STONES HAVE SEEPED INTO ME.**

—Deepa Singh Raghuvanshi, folk artiste in Ayodhya

The *kar seva* in Ayodhya is not a continuous process, of course. No fresh calls have been made. And the *seva* is not as simple as getting to the town, helping around, taking a few pictures and leaving.

Mahendra Pathak, associate professor in the department of ancient history at K.S. Saket Postgraduate College in Ayodhya, was a postgraduate student when the movement began to intensify. In 1986, when the main entrance to the site was unlocked, Pathak felt a “distinct excitement”. In 1990, when hundreds of *kar sevaks* were arrested, he walked out of his home, clutching the hand of his five-year-old son, to give himself up to the police in protest.

“This sense of service was not born in a day,” said Pathak. “I became an RSS member when I was seven and was studying in a missionary school. My devotion is to the *dhwaj* (the saffron RSS flag) and the values it represents. The *dhwaj* is consistent. So is



PHOTOS PAWAN KUMAR



**ROHIT PAL, 24, HAS A SOCIAL MEDIA PAGE FILLED WITH PICTURES AND STORIES ABOUT AYODHYA. “I CANNOT IMAGINE MYSELF LIVING ELSEWHERE,” HE SAID.**

my devotion. The youth of today are different. Their first question would be: ‘What is in it for me?’ That is not an emotion that drives movements.”

Rohit Pal, 24, a student of tourism and hospitality at Dr Rammanohar Lohia Avadh University, has a deep emotional connection with Ayodhya. His social media page is filled with pictures and stories about the town of winding lanes and countless temples. “I cannot imagine myself living elsewhere,” said Pal.

He is, however, unsure about whether he can call himself an *Ayodhyaawasi* (resident of Ayodhya); according to his postal address, he said, he lives in Faizabad. Interestingly, Pal seemed oblivious to the fact that the Uttar Pradesh government had renamed Faizabad district as Ayodhya in 2018. The memory lapse may be a minor detail, but it holds a mirror to the amorphous nature of the bonds that Pal and his peers have with Ayodhya.

Pal’s political preferences are tied to development. “I want to make a career as a photographer and storyteller of Ayodhya,” he said. “All that needs to be done to develop the tourism sector must be done soon.”

Shikhar Kapoor, 25, is the director of one of the oldest hotels in Ayodhya. It is a family property. A graduate in hospitality management, Kapoor was offered a job after he completed the course. “I was in a dilemma, but I chose the safe way,” he says.

That safe way was the absence of competition in Ayodhya and the relative ease of work. With the government’s focus on developing the area as a pilgrimage circuit—complete with an international airport—that perceived ease has vanished. Yet, Kapoor says he is so immersed in Ayodhya’s pace of life that he would be a misfit elsewhere.

“I would never consider getting involved in any movement. It is all too easy to identify troublemakers now. I keep my head down and work. I do not want any *jhamela* (nuisance),” said Kapoor, who last visited the temple site when he was in school.

Will the grand *bhumi puja* capture the imagination and faith of youth like Kapoor and thereby yield political dividends? Ajit Kumar Pandey, professor of sociology at Banaras Hindu University, believes that it has the potential to draw the youth away from the values enshrined in the Constitution.

“Think of the state as an elder. It is from this elder that the young draw their examples and inspiration,” he said. “The [title suit] has been resolved—rightly or wrongly. A mature, peaceful state need not make propaganda out of it. This is not in consonance with democratic values, and is likely to influence young minds into thinking that such displays by the state should be acceptable.”

But faith—that wavering being—does not always accede to logic. That is its charm and challenge. ●



## Licence to make, licence to kill

No fighter plane has come in with a bigger bang than the Rafale. TV anchors and studio strategists spent hours waxing eloquent about its capabilities—a lot of it real, a lot more yet to come with India-specific enhancements, and still more imagined. Many called it a game-changer.

In the olden days, there were separate planes for separate jobs. There were heavy bombers, interdiction bombers, interceptors, air superiority planes, ground attackers, short-range fighters, long-range fighters, spy planes and so on. Each type was designed, built and armed for specific roles. The current trend is to have more multirole planes and a few specialist planes.

The Rafale will be our first multirole bird. By all accounts, it is the most agile multirole fighter that money can buy—it can perform dogfights, drop bombs, and shoot missiles air-to-air or air-to-ground. The French know how to pack a first-class punch in every plane.

We have been buying warplanes since the 1960s, and never ever have we bought a dud. Our tiny Gnats stunned the world when they shot down US-made Sabrejets in 1965; our MiG-21s shot holes through the roof of the governor’s house in Dacca in 1971 with more precision than what the Americans achieved when they shot a missile through the window of the Al Jazeera office in Kabul in 2001. The MiG-21, and its Biz (now Bison) version from which Abhinandan Varthaman shot down an F-16 last year, have proven to be the most enduring fighters ever made in the world.

Our MiG-23s and MiG-27s were neighbour’s envy and owner’s pride—airplanes that could fold their wings and turn around in mid-air like birds of prey! Our pilots became Scarlet Pimpernels of the skies when they flew half a squadron of the super-secret MiG-25, the fastest and most elusive

airplane ever made, one that could not be reached by any known missile.

We got the Jaguars, the meanest interdiction bombers which the Chinese think can still cut deep into the treeless Tibetan territory. Then came the MiG-29, the beastliest air superiority fighter which has bested F-16s in several NATO wargames. And there are the French Mirage 2000s, flying with their delta wings which look like pretty skirts but packing awesome power. And finally the Sukhoi-30MKIs that can stop dead mid-air, swoop up like a cobra, and also can deliver an atom bomb anywhere across the Eurasian landmass from Wales to Vladivostok.



All these planes were game-changers in their time. So will be the Rafales, provided that we get them in sufficient numbers of squadrons. As of now, we have got five planes and have contracted to get 36.

What the critics ask is: wouldn’t we have to knock at the doors of

the French again when we need more? Indeed yes. The members of the Narendra Modi government’s defence acquisition council would have been reminded of this when they approved two fighter buys only a month ago. With the Chinese breathing fire across the Ladakh Himalayas, the council was, on July 2, constrained to order 21 more MiG-29s and 12 more Sukhoi-30MKIs.

The order for the Sukhois has gone to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited thanks to the Narasimha Rao and the Deve Gowda governments. While negotiating the original Sukhoi deal, they had also got the technology and licence to make the planes in India. The order for the MiG-29s has gone to Moscow because, when the Soviets offered the technology and licence as well the planes in the 1980s, the Rajiv Gandhi regime said: No thanks; keep the licence, we will take only the planes.



# Do not delay cancer treatment for the fear of Covid

Oncology expert Dr C.S. Pramesh offers guidance for cancer patients during the pandemic

**FOR THE PAST** four to five months, most cancer hospitals have seen a significant reduction in patients. The 220 centres attached to the National Cancer Grid have seen a cumulative drop of 30 to 50 per cent in the number of new patients. Now, it is open to interpretation whether they have been going to smaller centres, or they have avoided hospitals because of the fear of contracting Covid-19. Fortunately, we were able to convince many state governments to not convert cancer centres into Covid-19 centres.

Cancer patients who have been staying away from hospitals are likely to delay diagnosis, which is bound to have an impact on outcomes, particularly if they are in advanced stages. This is particularly true for blood

cancers such as lymphoma and leukemia, where days, and sometimes even hours, matter a lot.

It is true that cancer patients with their immunocompromised systems are at higher risk of contracting Covid-19. If the fatality rate is 3 to 4 per cent in the case of Covid-negative cancer patients, it is 8 to 10 per cent for those who have the disease. However, the chances of cancer patients contracting the infection in a hospital are very low. Hence, I would advise those with suspected or proven cancers to approach a hospital and get treated. I would also suggest that they seek an expert with reasonable experience—by reasonable I do not mean only an oncologist, but someone who is an expert in surgery so that the urgency of the situation can



**In terms of Covid-19 precautions, cancer patients need no extra precaution other than physical distancing, maintaining hand hygiene, wearing masks and avoiding crowds.**

be assessed and care can be sought. The risk and fallout of not getting appropriate and timely cancer care is much higher than that of contracting Covid-19 in a hospital.

One of the things we have been promoting aggressively is tele- and video-consultations for follow-ups. Since we are a tertiary care centre, we usually get patients who have already done at least a few preliminary tests. If they come to us with symptoms alone, we ask them to get the tests done at a centre closer to their home, and then seek a second-opinion through tele-consultation, if needed. In terms of Covid-19 precautions, cancer patients need no extra precaution other than physical distancing, maintaining hand hygiene, wearing masks and avoiding crowds.

—As told to Namita Kohli



## Strategic promiscuity

Nations have no permanent friends or allies; they only have permanent interests. So said Lord Palmerston, a mid-19th century British prime minister. That should settle the issue of who India's partners are at any given point in time. When the Chinese invaded India in 1962, the United States offered military support. When India faced a US-China-Pakistan axis in Bangladesh, the Soviet Union stood firmly with India. Both in 1962 and in 1971, India's interests remained the same—to bolster her own security—her friends changed. A nation has both short-term and long-term interests. Those who stand by it in achieving short-term objectives are tactical partners. Those who stand by it for the long run are strategic partners.

Throughout the Cold War India opted for non-alignment as a strategy, but had no problem seeking tactical support from one side or the other. In the post-Cold War period, however, India got into the habit of calling every tactical alliance a strategic partnership. From France to Russia, from the United States to China, from Japan to... (hold your breath) Rwanda, every other country was signing up to be India's "strategic partner"! In 2011, Arvind Gupta and Sarita Azad of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses listed as many as 30 strategic partnerships that India had by then entered into.

In April 2005, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh hosted China's prime minister Wen Jiabao. New Delhi went into a tizzy and the two heads of government ended up signing a joint statement in which they said, "the two sides agreed that India-China relations have now acquired a global and strategic character". They then went on to establish "an India-China Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity".

All the actors responsible for that statement are still around. The national security adviser and foreign secretary of the time are now regular

columnists. Perhaps they could enlighten us now on what made them get the prime minister of the day to sign on to that statement and what was so "strategic" about that partnership.

Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi was seduced by this promiscuity in strategic partnerships. The India-Rwanda strategic partnership was signed by him in 2018. Thanks to China's President Xi Jinping, India's strategists have been forced to define more precisely what they mean by a strategic partnership.

Anything strategic must derive from a strategy. The distinguished scholar of war and strategy,

Lawrence Freedman defines strategy as "the art of creating power". As theorists of power, from Kautilya to Antonio Gramsci, have suggested, power itself has many dimensions and military power is just one of them. The foundation of military power, as Kautilya suggested in the *Arthashastra*, is economic

capability and fiscal capacity. Thus, in identifying a strategic partner, a country must determine which other country would assist it in the "creation of power", with a clear understanding of what form such power would take—military, economic, technological, cultural and political.

Fifteen years after India and China signed the 2005 statement it is clear that it has not delivered on the promise of peace and prosperity, not to speak of enhancing Indian power. Rather, by aligning itself firmly with Pakistan it has enhanced the latter's power. On the other hand, in these 15 years, the US, Japan, France and even Russia have helped enhance India's power.

But military capacity building is only one leg of such a partnership. Enhancing India's economic capability should be the other. To qualify as strategic, a partnership must deliver on both counts. It is time we defined strategic partnerships more strategically, and not just tactically.



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

ILLUSTRATION BHASKARAN



# Punting in a pandemic

Fixed matches and ghost games have kept anti-corruption officials busy during the lockdown

BY NEERU BHATIA

Fans in need of a fix might have chanced upon a rare live cricket match streaming on YouTube on June 29—a Uva T20 league game played in Badulla, Sri Lanka. Except it was not. It was a fake match played at the Stokers Cricket Association ground, in a village about 16km from Mohali, Punjab.

The privately owned ground, located in Sawara village in Landran, sits in the middle of farmland and has hosted many corporate matches, leagues and small-time tournaments outside the purview of the Punjab Cricket Association and the Board of Control for Cricket in India. It is temporarily closed.

A police crackdown revealed that the ground had hosted the “Uva T20 league” during lockdown. Uva is a province in Sri Lanka. The league was promoted on various apps and websites, and live-streamed on apps like Fancode, Diamond, Sky, Lotus, Tenbet and Spin. Some sites even claimed the presence of former Sri Lankan national players in the league.

As news of these matches broke, the Uva province cricket association in Sri Lanka denied any association with the league. The BCCI anti-corruption unit and the Punjab Police intervened and the league was, in anti-corruption parlance, “success-

fully disrupted”. The promoter and six accomplices were arrested. The players had been wearing masks during play and were thus hard to identify.

The man behind the league, Ravinder Dandiwal, is a known “corrupter” whom an Australian daily had accused, in June, of “fixing tennis matches in Brazil, Egypt and Thailand”. The Victoria Police is investigating him.

Kuldeep Singh Chahal, the Mohali senior superintendent of police, described Dandiwal, 35, as an expert in organising fake or fixed matches; he had earlier held matches advertised as being from Afghanistan and

Nepal. Chahal told the media that Dandiwal had admitted to being in touch with some bookies in Delhi. Among his accomplices was cameraman Durgesh, also from Delhi, who provided equipment for the telecast of the matches.

Dandiwal, now out on bail, had also formed his own Cricket Council of India, whose logo resembles the BCCI’s own. Originally from Rajasthan, the Mohali-based Dandiwal is also founder and chairman of the Cricket Premier League and owns a sport-cum-player management firm called Ultimate Sports Management.

Ajit Singh, head of BCCI’s anti-corruption unit, told THE WEEK: “Dandiwal was on our watchlist. He is a free operator. He organised a league for the purpose of betting. You create odds and know the end result for the purpose of making money; it is as simple as that.”

The “Uva T20 league” was not the only one held in India. Reportedly, a Universal T10 League took place in Kurukshetra, Haryana, between June 2 and 8. Live matches from this “tournament” were telecast on apps like Cricheroes and Cricclubs. Two months earlier, the International Cricket Council had slapped a two-year ban on Deepak Aggarwal, one of the owners of the Sindhis franchise in the 2018 T10 league played in the

**Cricket aside, football and eSports, too, have had their run-ins with “match-fixing” during lockdown. Several “pop-up matches”, played with the sole intention of corruption and fixing, were reported during the lockdown.**



UAE. As per the ICC and the BCCI, Aggarwal is reportedly a known bookie.

“He started his own league during lockdown in Noida,” said Singh. “He gathered a number of players who wore face masks so that they could not be recognised and got [the matches] live-streamed. Bets were placed. We asked the Noida Police to take action. They were booked under the pandemic act for violation of prohibitory orders. More than 51 persons were arrested.”

In July, the Limassol Gladiators, one of the five teams in the European Cricket Series Cyprus, was suspended following its match against Am-docs. Reportedly, one major betting company refused to pay out on the match, which was streamed on various platforms worldwide. The ICC’s ACU had found suspicious betting patterns before the match.

Cricket aside, football and eSports, too, have had their run-ins with “match-fixing” during lockdown. Several “pop-up matches”, played with the sole intention of corruption and fixing, were reported during the lockdown.

Sportradar, one of the world’s leading sports integrity firms, recently red-flagged six matches of the Goa Professional League for “suspicious betting patterns indicative of match manipulations”. Sportradar brought it to the notice of the Asian Football Confederation, which in turn alerted the All India Football Federation. Javed Siraj, AIFF’s integrity officer, sought a report from the Goa Football Association, which confirmed that the matches “detailed in the report were fixed”.

With Covid-19 halting major sporting activity, desperate bookies and fixers have eyed live matches across sports that can fly “under the radar” of administrators and anti-corruption officials.

Oscar Brodtkin, Sportradar’s director of intelligence and investigation



BIG BITE

Ravinder Dandiwal, now out on bail, had formed his own Cricket Council of India

services, recently published a white paper called “Ghost Games—An Explanation”. “(A ghost match) is a match which does not take place as stated and is falsely advertised to bookmakers, punters and the public in order to achieve profits from betting markets,” he wrote. “Perpetrators have advanced knowledge of the final score, which they have decided.”

These are different from fixed matches, and anti-corruption investigators say ghost games are not prevalent in cricket yet.

In a presentation at a sports policy symposium in June, Brodtkin also said that fixing was “rife” in eSports and forecast it to rise further. During the lockdown, with no on-ground sports, gaming and eSports hit a new high. “Match fixing in eSports is incredibly widespread as performances can be easily manipulated,” he said in the presentation. “It has a young and vulnerable audience and the governing bodies are yet to organise themselves effectively enough to deal with this issue.”

According to Brodtkin’s report, the lockdown also saw corrupters targeting new, amateur or youth leagues

with fewer entry barriers. Another point raised was that players were now more vulnerable as their salaries had been reduced or cut altogether. “There will be a heightened risk in the short term of approaches to players, managers or officials who have not been paid or clubs that are documented as not having paid their players,” the report said.

Brodtkin’s presentation also warned administrators of approaches by organised crime groups or lone wolves, particularly if the leagues were from poorer countries. The inroads made by fixers now will pay dividends when more leagues return to normalcy.

The presentation also highlighted the possibility of fixers buying clubs, across sports, which are going under because of a cash crunch. Hence, suspicious player transfers, too, are being noted. “Match fixers will try to place their players,” said Brodtkin, “or those wanting to fix will move themselves, in unusual directions.”

## INTERVIEW



Steven Richardson,  
coordinator of investigations, Anti-Corruption  
Unit, International Cricket Council

# Ghost matches are not at all common

BY NEERU BHATIA

**What challenges have you faced during the pandemic? Most people would assume that no matches means no betting or fixing.**

Actually, a number of lower-level competitions have taken place during this period. Being the only cricket being played, it did attract betting markets and that will always attract unwelcome elements. The ACU also received reports from players during lockdown, because corruptors will still seek opportunities to contact players on social media. So, it has been a busy period for our investigators and intelligence team.

**How big a threat are ghost games, or made-up fixtures that bookmakers advertise to make money via betting? Has the ICC found any such cases?**

This has certainly happened in soccer and we are always alert to it in cricket. But I am not aware of a specific match that was a ghost game, where no cricket took place.

**Recently, a match in Mohali was being streamed as a Uva T20 league match happening in Sri Lanka. How big a threat do such cases pose?**

We are aware of the allegations around the Uva match. These are always a risk because they erode confidence in cricket. Such events are put on by fraudsters and there can be a crossover with people who would corrupt regular cricket. So, we are very much alive to the possibility and will work with our colleagues to stop them as we did in this case.

**Are ghost matches and fake games**

**increasingly prevalent? Are they more challenging to spot than a regular match which has been fixed or data fraud?**

Ghost matches are not at all common, so there is not really a comparison to be made. Data fraud or pitch siding is a low priority for the ICC. It has to be remembered that while betting is illegal in some countries, it is not so in many others. Betting itself is not corruption.

**Recently, a team in the European T10 league was suspended for match-fixing. The league says it is working closely with the ICC. How difficult is it to ensure the hygiene of such a league?**

All leagues have a responsibility to (put in place) anti-corruption and safety measures to protect participants and the event. With the right resourcing, skills and expertise, it is possible to give them a reasonable level of protection. But no system will provide guaranteed security against corruptors, and sometimes players make bad choices.

**The ACU works with sports data and integrity firms. Is it true that their algorithms are less suitable for cricket than for other sports?**

We work with a range of partners including betting companies and integrity units to protect the game. The lifeblood of our work is information from many sources and that gives us the intelligence that we need to protect players and keep corruptors away from the game.

**Is it possible to indulge in data fraud in cricket and has that happened before?**

Not sure what you mean by this. You may be referring to what happens in tennis, where the score in some tournaments is entered by the umpire. We do not have that system.

**With no legislation in India to curb betting, and with a huge grey market, how will the ICC increase its scrutiny, considering that India will host two ICC events in the next three years?**

We have a well-trying framework and detailed plans for how we work at tournaments to protect them. We work with law enforcement and our colleagues in the BCCI to ensure that we have a robust system to prevent and disrupt corruptors. Key to this is the information we give players to educate them on how they can recognise a corrupt approach, reject it and report it to anti-corruption officials. The lack of legislation is more of an issue for those outside cricket and do not fall under our rules. It would be useful if the police could take action, but with no legislation to criminalise match fixing, they are in a difficult position.

**How do you see betting markets reacting to the return of cricket?**

We would expect the markets to resume some normality in terms of where they are focused. For example, the CPL, the IPL and other more mainstream competitions as opposed to the lower levels. It is important to remember that betting is not corruption.



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



Tom Mace,

director, global operations integrity services, Sportradar

## Negative economic conditions have played into fixers' hands

BY NEERU BHATIA

### How do you spot unusual activity in betting markets or fixing attempts and data fraud?

We work with more than 80 sporting federations and partners across more than 20 different sports, including FIFA, Cricket Australia and the Indian Super League. On behalf of our partners, we monitor sporting events using a sophisticated software called the Fraud Detection System (FDS).

When the FDS flags abnormal betting activity, our team of integrity experts—specially trained to analyse betting patterns—start their investigations. In instances where we confirm match-fixing, we report to the sporting body and, from this point, we work closely with them, providing betting evidence and supporting information to assist investigations. Our integrity work has led to over 5,000 matches being reported [and has led to] over 400 sporting sanctions and 33 criminal convictions.

### What challenges do you face while tracking grey or illegal betting markets, like in India?

The FDS monitors odds from over 600 betting operators worldwide (regulated and unregulated), including many prominent Asian operators. With a large proportion of the bets placed on fixed matches flowing through these operators, the ability to track betting activity there is vital. In our experience, betting activity in the underground Indian market invariably presents itself in

the legal market, due to the interwoven, interacting nature of the global betting industry. The challenge, therefore, is not in detecting fixed matches, but more so for investigators who will be unable to cooperate with the unlicensed betting operators in the subsequent investigations.

### Did betting activity stop under lockdown?

Over 90 per cent of global sport halted as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, [and] we estimate that global betting turnover decreased by over 75 per cent during some of the worst-hit weeks. [But] the main trend we observed was the dramatic increase in betting interest in events that continued during March and April. For example, the top tier of Belarusian soccer saw an increase in betting turnover of almost 4,000 per cent. Bettors [were] hungry for any “live sport” they could get during this crisis.

### What was the betting scene during this time in India?

In India, we estimate that betting turnover between March and May decreased by over 60 per cent. However, it is noteworthy that an India-facing betting exchange was reportedly still generating turnover in excess of Euro 25 million on matches being played in this period.

### With economic slowdown, no matches and no salaries, how vulnerable are players right now?

The negative economic conditions have certainly played into the hands

of match-fixers. On the other side, match-fixers operating in certain regions have also been starved of their avenue of illegal revenue, and will be eager to orchestrate fixes as soon as competitions restart.

### How do you keep pace with smaller, emerging T20 and T10 leagues?

Although pop-up cricket leagues and new formats are difficult to keep on top of, especially regional T20 and T10 leagues in Asia in recent years, the FDS is built to monitor any suspicious or unusual betting patterns from these events. The formats may be different, but the key betting markets and ways of betting remain the same, and from a sports integrity standpoint, the methods of manipulation remain similar. For instance, one of the popular methods of fixing in limited-overs cricket is manipulating the sessions or brackets. In T20 cricket, this may result in only a set number of runs being scored in the opening six overs, while in T10 cricket this session or bracket is merely reduced.

### How different is tracking betting activity in cricket compared with tennis, golf or football, in terms of resources and technology?

We learned very early on that there is no “one size fits all” monitoring strategy. To think otherwise would be akin to sending a cricket umpire to referee a soccer match on the basis they are both a “sport”

BITTER CHOCOLATE

SWARA BHASKER



## Connect with their uneasiness

I remember going for a trek in 2016 to the Kinnaur Valley in Himachal Pradesh. It was a 10-day trek that I had undertaken alone, with a group of total strangers as an exercise in independence—both from my close-knit support network of friends and family, and digital independence from constant access to social media, the internet and telecom! I knew what I was in for. It was announced on the website of the trekking company—gorgeous Himalayan vistas, day-long walks as we trekked from one mountain to another, pitching tents for the night and no mobile or data networks on our phones. As promised, an hour outside Shimla, as we drove to our base camp, we lost mobile and data network.

The Himalayas are spectacular and the Kinnaur Valley is surely among the most beautiful spots in the world. I had ample time to soak in my independence, reflect on life and make new friends. But every night before I slept, I would battle an anxiety—were my parents okay? Were my pets being looked after? Were they alive? Was my *nani* well? Was the boyfriend missing me? Was he not missing me? What if something happened to my parents? Or my brother, who was always travelling? How would anyone reach me?

Every night these thoughts gave me palpitations and I prayed myself to sleep. On the seventh day, we finally reached the highest point. Sitting atop the snow-capped peak, every single one of us, had their cellphone in hand, aimed at the sky, trying to catch network! I caught both mobile and data network and anxiously opened the messages from family and boyfriend. Parents were well. *Nani* was fine. Brother was safe. Boyfriend missed me, and pets were alive and flourishing. One by one, I quickly called everyone, tearing up at the sound of the voices I loved so much.

When the national lockdown was announced, my greatest fear was whether the internet and telecom would be affected. Luckily, they remained untouched, and soon the internet became not just the national pastime but a national occupa-

tion. During the first two months of the lockdown, people turned to social media and internet-based content consumption almost like a crutch to help them get by the uncertainty, anxiety and emotional upheaval that such a decision necessarily brought about. I became an addict, literally spending days and nights surfing the internet.

Every night our immediate family, scattered over different parts of the world—Delhi, Mumbai, New Haven and Jakarta—assembled on Zoom calls to check in with each other. I had read on some ‘feel-good-guide-your-soul-with-positivity’ kind of website that one way to deal with anxiety was to list the things you feel grateful for, and to make a ‘gratitude list’. I began to do this couple of times a week and couldn’t help notice that in every gratitude list the numero uno place belonged to the internet.

One night I made my list, and my eye caught sight of an article on Twitter—‘Limited Internet too slow, too little: Kashmir’. With some circumspection I recalled that Kashmir had only just come out of a seven-month near total internet ban. Despite the fact that the Supreme Court had ruled that access to the internet was part of the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression, the internet was still heavily restricted in Kashmir. I remembered August 5, 2019, when along with abrogating Article 370 and dismembering the state of J&K in a peremptory manner, the entire population of Kashmir was placed under a communication blackout. I remembered how a majority of Indians had cheered that, often in a vulgar manner. And, I remembered the anxiety my own voluntary 10-day communication blackout had produced in me. I couldn’t begin to imagine not speaking to my loved ones, not knowing how they were for 40 days! I wondered: how did we become a society that took delight in the totally relatable anxiety and pain of families, in the discomfort of the elderly and ailing, and in the heartache of an entire population? The answer is blowing in conch shells on the banks of the Sarayu in Ayodhya; but we don’t care to hear it.

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



Brian Humphries,  
CEO, Cognizant

# Current situation is accelerating shift to digital business models

BY ABHINAV SINGH

New Jersey-based Cognizant Technology Solutions is one of the largest IT services companies in India. After a decade of rapid growth, the company underwent large scale restructuring recently. The company had a dream run under CEO and co-founder Francisco D'Souza, from whom Brian Humphries took over last year. In the short period at the wheel, Humphries has focused on giving the company a strategic direction. In an exclusive interaction with THE WEEK, he talked about the restructuring and the growth challenges. Excerpts:

**Q/There have been several high profile exits from Cognizant of late.**

**A/**We are focused on returning Cognizant to its position as the IT services industry bellwether. To achieve this, we need a combination of Cognizant veterans and newcomers



who can bring in fresh perspectives to our business. That is why I have sought to create a senior leadership team that balances internal promotions with external hires. We decided recently to hire a more senior Indian MD who will join our executive committee. A comprehensive search is under way, and it has seen a lot of interest.

**Q/What kind of challenges does Cognizant see in the current business scenario and how do you see things shaping up in the future?**

**A/**We are confident that our industry, geographic and customer segment mix, strong balance sheet, momentum in our digital imperatives, and growing competitiveness allow us to compete well on a relative basis, regardless of the macro environment. While there are certainly demand challenges in some sectors such as travel and hospitality, we believe that the current situation is leading customers to accelerate their shift to digital business models. This secular trend plays directly into our strategy around our four digital imperatives. Companies that proactively manage this crisis will emerge stronger than those that assume an eventual return to business as usual.

**Q/Cognizant has been witnessing growth challenges for quite some time. What are you doing to fix it?**

**A/**We are gaining commercial momentum. This is illustrated by our bookings trends, which grew 14 per cent year-over-year in the first half of 2020. North America, which grew more than 25 per cent in the first half, is particularly strong. This momentum speaks to how well clients have embraced our strategy and have responded to our renewed sense of client centricity. It also (illustrates) how our executives and their teams have embraced our focus on growth.

At the same time, we are making noteworthy progress in the digital space with revenue up by 14 per cent in Q2, and 1H 2020 digital bookings up almost 50 per cent year-over-year. Digital is now 42 per cent of our mix. This becomes a virtuous circle as the greater our digital mix, the greater our overall company growth prospects. As digital reshapes business landscapes and competitive environments, Cognizant is focused squarely on four key areas where we believe we have industry leading capabilities, deep industry knowledge and the best global service delivery teams. These are cloud, digital engineering, internet of things, and artificial intelligence and analytics.

**Q/How does Cognizant intend to grow—organically or inorganically?**

**A/**Our growth strategy has two parts. First, we are protecting and optimising our core portfolio, which includes increasing efficiency, tooling and automation and delivery optimisation, protection of renewals,

Building a global delivery network is important because we need to better reflect today's world of agile development, where solutions are created in a rapid, iterative and flexible manner by having more near-shore and onshore skills, more automation and greater access to talent.

strengthening our industry alignment, and scaling our international footprint. And second, we are building leadership positions in the four key digital imperatives I had mentioned earlier. We are investing aggressively in these areas. And as we do so, we expect to accelerate our revenue growth. The two parts of our strategy reinforce each other. It is our core portfolio that has built our strength in the market and that historical strength means that we know how to help clients transition from managing their current legacy state to enabling their digital future.

**Q/What has been your approach while hiring local people in overseas markets, particularly in the US?**

**A/**North America is 75 per cent of Cognizant's revenue and we have a momentum in the region, with bookings up by 27 per cent in 2020. Our customers expect us to have diversity and inclusion in our workforce to represent society at large. As a global company, we are committed to hiring in all geographies. We are building a global delivery network with centres throughout the world that will complement India, which will always remain our major delivery centre and is home to our two lakh talented and engaged colleagues. Building a global delivery network is important because we need to better reflect today's world of agile development, where solutions are created in a rapid, iterative and flexible manner by having more near-shore and onshore skills, more automation and greater access to talent.

**Q/What about campus hiring?**

**A/**We plan to hire 20,000 new graduates in India this year and have strong relationships with major Indian universities. We are also investing in upskilling and reskilling tens of thousands of our employees in newer digital technologies where we are seeing demand above industry averages. 1





The Sensex you should be worried about is sensible expenditure. Budget without fail.

—Gaurav Mashruwala  
Financial planner and expert on yogic wealth



Memory triggers recency bias in investors. You might have made or lost money in the recent past, but that should not affect your long-term investment plan.

—K.S. Rao,  
Head, investor education and distribution development, ABSLMF



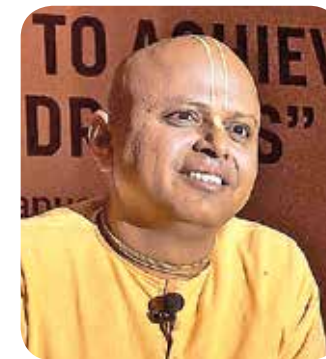
Investing is a bit like cricket. Currently, the wicket is turning, so guard your wicket. Take a close look at your contingency fund and insurance policies.

—Amit Trivedi,  
Financial planner, author and trainer



Many worried NRIs are reaching out. Please do not worry. Look for personalised solutions based on your assets and needs.

—Dhirendra Kumar  
Founder, Value Research



Do not worry about a situation you cannot control. Covid-19, for example. Be prepared. Be calm.

—Gaur Gopal Das  
Monk and motivational speaker



We think too much. And, we often forget to breathe when we think. Balanced breathing and balanced thoughts go hand in hand.

—Dr Hansaji J. Yogendra,  
Director, The Yoga Institute, Mumbai

# Peace and perseverance

THE WEEK-Aditya Birla Sun Life Mutual Fund webinar series focuses on twin worries of investors—wealth and health

BY MATHEW T. GEORGE

**SHOULD I STOP** investing in ongoing Systematic Investment Plans? I am ready to invest, but where should I put my money? I have lost my job; is there an order in which I should liquidate my assets? The rain of questions during THE WEEK-Aditya Birla Sun Life Mutual Fund webinar series highlighted two things: investors are worried, and hungry for credible information.

The tumult in the bourse, the uncertainties of the job market and

the worldwide health scare have all contributed to this feeling of deep unease. The webinars were launched against this backdrop, to reassure investors and to fill the knowledge gap. From a purely financial theme, the series quickly widened its scope to include well-being, too.

Financial speakers on the series were K.S. Rao, who heads the investor education and distribution development wing of Aditya Birla Sun Life AMC Ltd; Gaurav Mashru-

wala, author, expert on yogic wealth and founder of financial planning firm ACE; Amit Trivedi, author, trainer and founder of Karmayog Knowledge Academy; and Dhirendra Kumar, founder of financial advisory firm Value Research. To this galaxy of financial gurus, the last two episodes added two sought-after motivational speakers: Gaur Gopal Das of ISKCON and Dr Hansaji J. Yogendra, director of The Yoga Institute, Mumbai. Yogendra's session also had a virtual yoga class by Varsha Gala, a certified yoga practitioner and PhD research scholar.

As a seasoned investor educator, Rao says, "Often, what affects an investor the most is not the fluctuations in the market, but the fluctuations of his own mind. Unless one invests holistically and harmoniously, the rewards can be elusive." He cannot stress enough the fact that an "informed investor is a protected investor".

A master of plain speak, Mashruwala says that one question often asked by investors is, "How big should my corpus be for me to

retire?" His answer: "I tell them that they can never retire. You are basing your retirement on a number. And you arrived at that number after considering variables. What happens when these variables change? Change is constant. Hence, you can never retire." As with many things in life, retirement, too, is a decision that must be based on multiple factors. In fact, the upcoming webinar is exclusively on retirement planning.

Mashruwala also spoke at length on yogic wealth and said that it was based on three kinds of riches—social, physical and financial. "It is like a three-legged stool," he said. "Many investors do not realise that their wealth is incomplete if one of the legs is missing."

Emphasising the need to remain calm in these uncertain times, Gaur Gopal Das, popularly known as Prabhuji, said that while "worry does not rob tomorrow of its sorrows, it certainly does rob today of its joy". A former engineer with HP, he quoted from the scriptures and corporate case studies with equal ease. The quote that stayed with listeners much

after his session was one by American writer William H. Johnsen: "If it is to be, it is up to me."

The graceful Yogendra told viewers that she had a free tool to help them make decisions calmly. "*Pranayam*," she said. "*Pran* is bio-energy and *ayam* is management. Manage your breathing and your body will come into balance. Your thoughts will soon follow."

There were hilarious moments like the time a young investor asked Trivedi if this was the right time

to invest. Trivedi had a grin and a question for him: "Why do you want to invest at all?" He elaborated that all investments must be tied to goals. One does not invest or stop investing because the market is down. One can certainly re-look one's portfolio, Trivedi said, but that is a rational process and not a knee-jerk reaction.

Kumar's thoughts were in line with other panellists. A simple habit every investor must follow is to write down his plan and stick to it, said Kumar. "You decide you will invest when the market is down by 10 per cent. When it touches that mark, you will wait for it to go down further," he said. "However, if you write down your decision, you are more likely to carry it out. It is a promise to yourself."

All panellists agreed that these are unprecedented times and that new rules will be in place going forward. This was reflected in a recent tweet by Kumar. It was the photo of a mug with the abbreviation EBITDAC. The abbreviation minus the C is known—earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization. C for coronavirus. ☹

**NEXT WEBINAR**  
**AUGUST 21**  
**Roadmap to Retirement Planning**

**Panellists**

K.S. Rao  
Amit Trivedi  
Kiran Telang  
P.V. Subramanyam

Scan to register







COURTESY: INSTAGRAM

# Power and powder

The arrest of a Brazilian celebrity has whipped the cover off a high-level prostitution and drug trafficking network

BY MILAN SIME MARTINIC

**QUEEN OF LIES**  
Flávia Tamayo, 25, was recently arrested after a two-year investigation

**GREEN EYES. FLÁVIA** has green eyes. Her hair dances between black and blonde. But with 110cm-hips, a 68cm-waist, and 90cm-chest, she was Brazilian hotness personified.

*Playboy Portugal* billed her a “true Brazilian beauty” when she graced their cover. She was a former Miss Bumbum Brazil (an annual beauty pageant to find the woman with the best buttocks in the country), a dancer, showgirl and erotic video starlet. But the face that sold countless magazines in Brazil and Portugal is now on a mugshot in the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo.

Flávia Tamayo, 25, who went by the stage name Pamela Pantera, was recently arrested from a luxury hotel in Vitoria after a two-year investigation. It is alleged that she was a “\$200 call girl” (per session) who flew across Brazil servicing the rich and powerful, and that her services were often repaid, at least in part, with cocaine and hashish.

When the police approached her to bring her in, she lifted her dress, stood nude in the crowded lobby of the hotel on Camburi Beach, and shouted at them. The stunned male officers called for immediate backup from a female colleague. Tamayo was then taken into custody, handcuffed and driven to the police station.

Tamayo’s clients knew her as the “Powder Panther” or the “Queen of Powder”, said authorities, adding that she offered a combination of sex and drugs. She would deliver drugs along with love-for-pay or accept narcotics as part payment for sex. In the second scenario, sex was offered for half the price; she would keep the drugs for personal use or sell it. Allegedly, she ran a tele-drug service in Brazil’s capital, Brasília.

Tamayo was born in São Paulo and raised in Brasília, according to her profile bios. Her Facebook page says she attended the Adventist School of Tucuruí in the northern state of Pará; a school “based on biblical principles and permanent values... committed not only to pedagogical quality... but to integral formation [of students]”. But, somehow, Tamayo’s religious formation translated into a life of luxury and glamour and, apparently, sophisticated cosmetic procedures.

After winning Miss Bumbum Brazil in 2018, she said that she had to prove that she had not undergone any surgical procedure to have perfect buttocks. “As they doubted me, I even did a live ultrasound on television to show that there is no procedure, but, honestly, I was not offended by this mistrust,” she said.

However, her assertion that she was all-natural turned out to be false. In May 2018, months before winning the title, she had been operated upon by Dr Denis César Barros Furtado, 45, aka Dr Bumbum. She paid the surgeon 40,000 reais (\$7,600) for the bioplastic procedure. Furtado is currently a fugitive; he was charged with culpable homicide after a female banker from Rio de Janeiro died during a cosmetic surgery in 2019. Six other police investigations have indicted him for crimes such as illegal exercise of the profession, misleading advertising and for refusing to provide medical records to patients.

Tamayo’s current stature was largely built on the Miss Bumbum aura. Her Instagram page showcases her in seductive positions, prominently featuring what she considers her most valued asset. She has more than 1.2 lakh followers on social media and became an erotic film star in the *Brasileirinhas* series.

She has said that she represented the beauty of Brazilian women and that she had dreams of a future in politics, starting with running for the

When the police approached her to bring her in, she lifted her dress, stood nude in the crowded lobby of the hotel on Camburi Beach, and shouted at them.

city council. She had also complained that the electronic ballot boxes used in Brazil were not reliable and that voting “should be on paper, the same as in the United States”, evidently unaware that the US employs electronic voting. Her comments on politics and her desire to run for office led to her being featured as the muse of the 2018 Brazilian presidential elections by both *Playboy* and *SEXY* magazines. For the *SEXY* centrefold, she posed on the Esplanade de Ministerios, the grand avenue of Brasília’s Monumental Axis that is home to important government buildings, monuments and memorials.

Now, the police say the muse also offered a sexual menu to her sophisticated customers and that the highest prices were always accompanied by a hit of powder. According to the police, her wealthy clients came largely from the federal civil service—members of the executive, legislative





and judiciary.

“The movement of men eager for easy pleasure has always made Flávia earn high, both with programmes and with the sale of powder,” wrote reporter Carlos Carone in *Metrópoles*, a Brasília-focused news and discussion website. “The delivery of narcotics was done by taxi drivers, who left the papers in a flat, in the Northern Hotel Sector, where the call girl is accustomed to serving men who seek her for hours of sex in absolute secrecy.”

The arrest warrant for drug trafficking was issued about a month ago by the 1st Narcotics Court of Brasília. But her whereabouts were not known until the Civil Police tracked her down to Espírito Santo and contacted the state police, which alerted the 1st Regional Police Station in Vitória.

Tamayo was in Espírito Santo for a photoshoot. According to a photographer, who requested anonymity, she had wanted to pose with snakes; he had arranged them from a biologist. Police allege she was also there to meet clients.

“She had a very busy schedule and she did not

have a fixed place; she travelled throughout Brazil,” said police spokesman Ricardo Olivera of the 5th Police District, which was in charge of the investigation. The day before the operation, she flew 1,600km to see clients in Florianópolis in the southern state of Santa Catarina, he said. Information also put her in São Paulo in the preceding days.

“We already had information about the time when she would arrive at the hotel,” said the chief of the division that arrested her. “I personally positioned myself outside the hotel.... When we showed we were serious and that she really would have to go to the (police station), she realised that she really had no way out. Then, in that moment, in a psychological lapse, [she] lifted her dress—she was not wearing underwear—and started screaming and struggling in the hotel lobby.”

After she was arrested, the police found in her possession of a small amount of marijuana, which, according to the police, was for personal use, about 60 reais and a rolled-up dollar bill, which she reportedly told police was to inhale drugs. “She had a thresher, which is a piece of equipment used to make marijuana in a better condition for consumption, with a small amount inside it,” said a police statement.

Perhaps more importantly, Tamayo’s cell phone was also confiscated. It may contain leads that will further the investigations being carried out by the Civil Police. The phone is currently being analysed. Now, the investigation’s focus is on finding the origin of the drugs. “We are going to identify its suppliers,” said the police. “What was the origin and where did these drugs come from?”

After being booked, Tamayo was transferred to the Centro Prisional Feminino de Cariacica of the Espírito Santo penitentiary system, where she is one of 1,159 prisoners. She awaits transfer to Brasília, but her attorneys are fighting extradition and requesting her release from preliminary detention.

In an interview in the *Jornal de Brasília*, two days after her arrest, Tamayo denied the accusations of the Civil Police and said that she works in adult entertainment and never got involved with crime. Last year, the model had said that she would feature on the cover of *Playboy Italy* this year. Noting that she often visited exotic locations like Ibiza, the authorities have revoked her passport. For now, Tamayo will have to stay in jail and in Brazil. Meanwhile, her lawyer said she wants to “change her life” and help other women. ❶

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MADPARK

Women are not programmed to question what they want, says musician-activist **Kiran Gandhi**



BY PRIYANKA BHADANI

SARINA SIVAN





SAJNA SIVAN

**DARE TO DREAM**

Kiran Gandhi and the school girls in her music video *Waiting For Me*



At the age of four, Kiran Gandhi remembers watching the Disney movie *Aladdin* (1992) and wondering why the impoverished Aladdin was the one on the magic carpet, saving everyone and living the best life. What about Jasmine? She was the princess who had everything going for her. Why was the focus not on her story? “Problematically, we always tell boys’ stories with three-dimensionality,” she says. “We tell girls’ stories in a very limited way where she either has to be saved, or is secondary to the main character. We never learn holistically about her

journey.” Even as a child, Gandhi—an Indian-American electronic music producer, drummer, artist and activist now popular as Madame Gandhi—understood that it was a major problem in society.

“It was early on that my passion for gender [parity] started,” she says. This awareness developed with her growing interest in music. When she watched videos of songs she liked, she would feel upset about the sexualising of women in them. She wondered why men were not objectified in these videos. “I don’t have a problem with male fantasy, but I do have a problem with the fact that the majority of what we see is normalised misogyny,” she says. “And there is nothing to balance that. That is why in my music, I am constantly trying to combat these norms and re-depict the world I

wish we lived in.”

She is speaking from her mother’s house in New York, close on the heels of the release of her latest music video—*Waiting For Me*. The video, shot in India in February, encapsulates everything that Gandhi talks about in the interview and as a TED speaker. It is directed by Misha Ghose and produced by Aastha Singh with Chalk and Cheese Films. The video features 10 women who act out their journeys of gender and bias.

“I knew that I wanted a female-led team,” says Gandhi, who has toured as the drummer for M.I.A and Thievery Corporation, and with Oprah Winfrey on her 2020 Vision Tour. “I think it is really important that we are telling our own stories. Otherwise, these jobs in production typically go to men.... It is not about reverse sexism. It is just about actively [counter-

ing] the inherent biases that exist in creative [and other] industries.”

The 10 girls, in dull grey school uniforms, robotically traipse through a building under construction. The tedium in the frame is broken by a spurt of florescent green ribbons and socks, symbolising the women’s closeted desires.

Gandhi studied at St Anne’s High School in Colaba, Mumbai, for three years from 1997 to 2000. “I actually loved my experience [there], dancing to different Bollywood songs,” she says. “Even then, I used to write so much poetry and take acting classes. I had a good time.” But she did feel limited by the rote learning and the lack of scope for imagination. In the music video, she celebrates the aspects of Indian culture that she truly loved, but also criticises the ones that she thinks are conformist. “Honestly,

it is the culture of conformity around the world that I think is problematic,” she says.

After graduating in mathematics and gender studies from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., she pursued an MBA from Harvard Business School. Of course, that taught her the basics of business and empowered her as an individual, but what it did the most was to help her question what she wanted. “That, honestly, we as women are not programmed to do,” she says.

The course also showed her how powerful patriarchy was, how we revere businessmen, and how we idolise the loudest voice in the room, instead of the most thoughtful one. It showed her how much work there was to do, the many problems there were, “and how I have felt unseen at times in those places when I would rather have preferred to feel like the voice that was most critically aware”. These feelings often reflect in her music. If *Top Knot Turn Up* aggressively attacks misogyny and the rules imposed on girls, *See Me Thru* is focused on queer femme.

Born to entrepreneur Vikram Gandhi and Meera Gandhi, the founder and CEO of The Giving Back Foundation, she is acutely aware of her privilege. In 2015, she famously ran

the London Marathon without using a tampon or a sanitary napkin on the first day of her period to combat period stigma around the world. It sparked a global conversation about how we treat menstruation in various cultures.

“I think each of us has some degree of privilege, no matter who we are or where we are from,” she says. “Now, we have to acknowledge that privilege and include it to bring about social change. In my mind, I was in a privileged position and that is why I ran to combat global menstrual stigma. I knew that if I crossed the finish line, I would just do some laundry and be able to comment on global issues, whereas if I were in a more vulnerable position with less privilege, I might have got into life-threatening trouble for doing what I did.”

For a year after the free-bleeding run, she spoke about the notions around menstruation on various global platforms. “That is the reason we must be brave enough to acknowledge our privilege and do something with it,” says Gandhi. She says she will always focus on gender liberation “because that is my passion and that is where I feel my mission lies”.

Gandhi, who started out as a digital analyst with the record label Interscope Records, branched out into music and various other things later on. But after being a drummer her whole life, she found a stronger foothold in music with her EP, *Voices*, in 2016, followed by *Visions* last year. The last part of the trilogy, *Vibrations*, is now on the anvil. “I will always use my music and my public speaking as part of my mission to celebrate gender liberation,” she says. “Even if I show up for other causes, it is through the lens of gender.” She has been vociferously supporting the Black Lives Matter campaign “especially because it is a female-led movement and it is a queer female-led movement.”

**“I DON’T HAVE A PROBLEM WITH MALE FANTASY, BUT I HAVE A PROBLEM WITH THE FACT THAT THE MAJORITY OF WHAT WE SEE IS NORMALISED MISOGYNY.”**



Shubigi Rao

curator, Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2020

# I see challenges as creative opportunities

BY KARTHIK RAVINDRANATH

**I**n Our Veins Flow Ink and Fire. That is the title of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale's fifth edition. Its curator, Shubigi Rao, says in her curatorial note: "There is optimism even in the darkest absurdity, and this is what leavens the direness of our time." When KMB 2020 released its first list of artists on July 21, it was indeed a breath of fresh air amid the gloom of the pandemic.

But, the shadow of Covid-19 still hangs over KMB 2020, scheduled to run from December 12 to April 10, 2021. Rao, a Singapore-based artist and writer, says that while the pandemic is a big challenge, it is also an opportunity for people to work collectively with common cause. The Mumbai-born polymath talks to THE WEEK about her plans for KMB 2020. Excerpts:

**Q\ The KMB is known as the people's biennale. But with Covid-19 showing no signs of abating, would it not be challenging to welcome huge crowds?**

**A/** The Kochi Biennale Foundation (KBF) is in touch with the government of Kerala to devise strategies for safety and precaution and are following the health ministry's protocols.

Since our venues are large, it is possible to regulate movement and also maintain social distancing comfortably. KBF is currently working towards determining these measures. We are also in touch with other international and regional biennales and institutions to learn from one another and navigate these times collectively.

**Q\ What are the key concerns of artists? Especially in the light of global travel restrictions. Artists may need at least three to four months to finalise site-based installations.**

**A/** We have been in touch with artists since last year and almost all the works were finalised well in advance. Over the last three months, my team and I have been in constant touch with the artists, figuring out solutions to halted production and lack of access to sites. In many ways, this has been an opportunity for (many) artists to rethink their approaches, methods, and the reliance on conventional resource-intensive processes. This is also a time to think creatively and share resources—a number of artists are producing their works on-site, while they continue to speak and work

with local skills and techniques.

**Q\ The last edition had 90 works and other parallel projects. Is there a plan to bring down the number of works this time? Last edition's curator, Anita Dube, had to travel extensively to select the artists. Considering the unavailability of international flights, how are you managing?**

**A/** We will be bringing together over 80 artists and collectives for this edition. I was able to travel extensively and complete my curatorial research before the lockdowns came into effect. In these journeys since June 2019, I was able to find tremendous diversity in works that were regional but also so familiar to the times and contexts we come from.

As I have maintained, in speaking to and working with overlooked artists and collectives, my conviction remains that the KMB is a well-suited structure to hold these practices, ideas, and conversations from the majority world. My time in Latin America, in Sápmi (the Sami lands in Northern Europe), southeast and east Asia and in Africa has immensely influenced my curatorial work for KMB 2020.



BIMAL NATH C

OVER THE LAST THREE MONTHS, MY TEAM AND I HAVE BEEN IN CONSTANT TOUCH WITH THE ARTISTS, FIGURING OUT SOLUTIONS TO HALTED PRODUCTION AND LACK OF ACCESS TO SITES.

**Q\ Personally, would you call this experience of curating a biennale in the time of a pandemic a great challenge. What are your key learnings from it?**

**A/** The current global pandemic is a big challenge but there are always challenges to exhibition-making, especially one on the scale of KMB. I do believe that the creative act—of thinking through problems, circumventing obstacles, and working with people collectively, inventively—dismantles challenges. As an artist, I am driven by many things—the need to situate myself in this world (historically and in my current reality), my responsibilities to not just our species but to the planet, and to recognise that artistic and literary practices have the potential to strengthen existing communities and to generate new thought and action. These imperatives continue to be present in my curatorial work for KMB, and this work will, in turn, inform my praxis. Quite a few artists manage and perform multiple forms of artistic labour and production, and are often continuously reflecting and rethinking. I have to say that I see challenges as creative opportunities, and a chance for people to work collectively with common cause. ●

**Q\ How far can technological solutions be useful in this scenario? What is the new normal that you are expecting?**

**A/** Technology is already embedded in our lives and some parts of the biennale will naturally be present online in terms of works as well as programming. But this is not an alternative or a replacement for a

physical exhibition. Not all works translate well online and in the past few months we have also seen digital fatigue set in. I do not know what the new normal looks like yet. The pandemic is still an evolving situation and will take some more time for all of us to work collectively and create new and safe modes of navigating social spaces.



# SUITED TO STARDOM

Juggling an international career and mainstream Hindi films could overwhelm many. But Ishaan Khatter is doing it in style

BY PRIYANKA BHADANI

When Mira Nair came to Mumbai last year for the shoot of *A Suitable Boy*, there were two things she was looking forward to—guava ice cream with chilli powder and Ishaan Khatter's acting. The young actor, who was selected to play Maan Kapoor in the six-part BBC miniseries, jumped in joy when he heard that. It was one of the biggest compliments he would get as an actor.

In Vikram Seth's eponymous novel, if a character could be described as unsuitable, yet fascinating, it has to be Maan. The novel, set in the 1950s, revolves around the hunt for a suitable boy for college-going Lata. But it also captures the essence of newly independent India and the burgeoning hate for Islam in pockets. In the midst of all this, Maan—the younger son of India's revenue minister Mahesh Kapoor and brother-in-law of Lata's elder sister Savita—is full of dichotomies.

His friendship with Firoze, and his fascination and later romance with a Muslim courtesan—Saeeda Bai (played by Tabu in the show)—almost double his age marks him as unconventional. But, "it is just so true and honest," says Ishaan, who was thrilled to be cast opposite Tabu. "Mira di has given me an opportunity to play this kaleidoscopic character," says Ishaan over the phone. "Certain times you are attracted to a character for a certain quality. Maan was an all-encompassing character,

with many elements and dimensions. That makes him the most unpredictable character for me. He is functioning on his own rhythm. He is the non-conformist of his family. His flaws make him interesting."

But there were certain things about Maan that took him completely by surprise. "I come from a family of artists, politics is the farthest from my reach," he says. "My childhood has been full of cultural arts, literature, films and music. To play the son of a minister and to understand that background was important, but what fascinated me the most was that he is not as much a result of his background as he is of his own individuality and curiosity. His actions directly affect everyone around him, but he does them be-

**"I THINK IT IS BECAUSE OF THE DIVERSITY OF MY FIRST TWO FILMS THAT PEOPLE CAN IMAGINE ME IN DIFFERENT ROLES. I AM GRATEFUL FOR IT."**



**UNCONVENTIONAL LOVE**  
Ishaan Khatter and Tabu in a still from *A Suitable Boy*

cause he has to follow his truth."

Son of actors Neelima Azeem and Rajesh Khatter, and half-brother of Shahid Kapoor, Ishaan made his acting debut in 2018 with Majid Majidi's *Beyond The Clouds*; he played a drug-peddler from an impoverished background. He considers Majidi a father figure, "a spiritual saint who taught me so much and set me on a journey for which I will always be indebted to him". His second film, *Dhadak* (2018), was the Hindi remake of Marathi film *Sairat*. Though it was panned by critics, *Dhadak* did steady business.

Ishaan's background in syncretism (combination of different forms of belief or practice) often plays a role in him seeing a character's innate characteristics through a finer lens. "Maybe that is why I was able to see certain elements in Maan," he says. "That is, of course, the result of the upbringing that I have had and the life that I have lived. I have been able to see so many shades and so many sides of life, and have had varied influences from a rather young age. That directly contributes to the actor that I am."

Alongside *A Suitable Boy*, which is scheduled to stream soon on Netflix in India, he was also shooting

**ISHAAN'S BACKGROUND IN SYNCRETISM OFTEN PLAYS A ROLE IN HIM SEEING A CHARACTER'S INNATE CHARACTERISTICS THROUGH A FINER LENS.**

for *Khaali Peeli*, a romantic drama directed by Maqbool Khan. It is an out-and-out Bollywood affair that would see him as a typical Hindi film hero.

Juggling an international career along with mainstream Hindi films could overwhelm many. But Ishaan says it is no big deal. "My job is the same, to act," he says. "I have been lucky enough to have these opportunities where people can see me on different platforms. I think it is because of the diversity of my first two films that people can imagine me in different roles. I am grateful

for it." The challenge in managing the two different worlds, however, was more practical, he says, like juggling the shooting schedules of the two projects and achieving the look for the different characters in a short span of time.

He is looking forward to *Khaali Peeli*; its shoot was stalled because of the pandemic. He also has another project to look forward to, a horror comedy—*Phone Bhoot*—co-starring Siddhant Chaturvedi and Katrina Kaif. The film's announcement came at a time when nepotism was being widely discussed on social media. Ishaan had to bear the consequences. "I think we are living in unprecedented times that is leading to a hostile climate, at least on social media," he says. "Social media has become largely toxic; kind of a weird place, going against what it could have done [positively] for society and the world. But I think, for me personally, being a part of the film industry has only helped me grow."

However, one thing that Ishaan is certain about is that to be an actor, empathy is important and the world, he feels, is functioning in a way which is opposite to that. That pains him, but he is trying to understand life, one day at a time. **1**



# Closer to home

In Estuary, Perumal Murugan sets aside his usual theme of caste violence in a rural setting and takes a closer look at urban middle-class mores

BY SNEHA BHURA

Some of the errors that might creep into a novel, writes Perumal Murugan in the foreword of *Estuary*, include elaborate, hazy descriptions. Then he goes on to admit that he has deliberately indulged in repetitions and long descriptions in this new book. “And it does give me some excitement to make these errors,” he writes. “One could call it deviant to be excited by errors.”

Five years ago, Murugan had to declare his writing “dead”, and urged readers to burn his book after right-wing Hindu outfits and caste groups hounded him for his novel *One-Part Woman* (2010). The novel’s depiction of extramarital sex during a religious festival, where childless women were allowed to sleep with other men to be able to conceive, was seen as an insult to women and the temple deity. The public outcry over it forced Murugan into literary exile. In July 2016, the Madras High

Court cleared him of all “criminal” charges. Since then, Murugan has released a novel—*Poonachi: Or The Story Of A Black Goat*—and poems under Songs of a Coward. This July, his debut novel, *Rising Heat*—written when he was 25 in 1991—was translated into English from Tamil and released.

Now, in the middle of a pandemic, the prolific writer of six novels, four anthologies of short stories and poems each, has released *Estuary*. In the book, Murugan departs from his decades-long preoccupation with caste violence and the rural milieu. It is a heart-warming tale of a bittersweet father-son relationship told through the prism of technology and its disruptions, and how it shapes the values and aspirations of the urban middle class. Murugan has employed satire ever so gently to prod the reader into the impostures of cram schools, the fitness industry, smartphones, social networks, art

appreciation and political manipulation.

Set in ‘Asuralokam’ where everyone’s name is suffixed with the word asura, the story opens with Kumarasurar trying to make a phone call to his only son who is studying engineering away from home. Kumarasurar is used to the monosyllabic, demi-syllabic or quarter-syllabic answers of his teenage son and always wonders what he can do to be as normal and chatty with his son as his wife is. One night, Kumarasurar is elated to see that his son had tried to call him multiple times. His joy fades when he learns that he had called to demand a phone that costs more than

₹50,000. Kumarasurar, who has held one government job all his life, is now in a quandary: how to politely refuse the unreasonable demand of his only child.

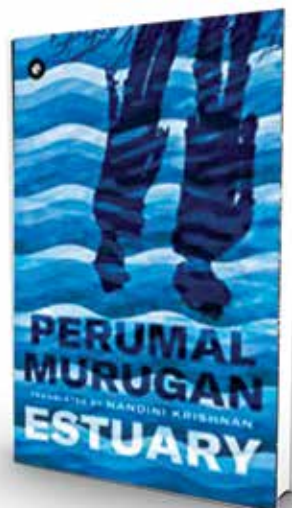
The touching character portrait of Kumarasurar is the best thing about the book. One

can completely empathise with this lonely man whose son thinks he is incredibly naive and whose wife is only worried about the happiness of the child. Endearing and funny, Kumarasurar shines as a community poet, always ready with a verse for every occasion. His incurable love for free vadas at Gluttony Vilas and his banter with his three close friends are some of the happiest passages in the book. The college hunt for the son assumes ludicrous proportions, as Murugan sets out to pan the manufacturing aesthetic of colleges that sell MNC dreams to gullible parents and extract every penny from them.

*Estuary* is a breezy, giggly, extremely tender homage to the simpler ways and values of life, forever lost to the depredations of technology and professional growth. 📖



**Estuary**  
By Perumal Murugan  
Translated by Nandini Krishnan  
Published by Eka  
(Imprint of Westland)  
Price ₹499, pages 243



# Soul searching

BY R. PRASANNAN

How many Delhis have been there? No one has an exact count. The Delhi government website lists seven cities. Delhi Tourism lists eight. This reviewer can count more. In *Masalik-ul-Absar*, Abu Bakr Bin Khalal has mentioned as many as 21 cities that made up Delhi.

A lot of these is folklore. Therein lies the charm of Delhi. All these myths and histories that lurk behind every nook and corner of the city make up the vibrant soul of Delhi which no conqueror could put down. This book is a search and discussion of that soul, though limited to two of its manifestations—the sultanate period and the Mughal period, followed by a concluding elegiacal chapter on the great poet



**Delhi in Historical Perspectives**  
By K.A. Nizami (Translated by Ather Farouqi)  
Published by Oxford University Press  
Price ₹1,100, pages 172,

Mirza Ghalib’s Delhi.

The book is actually a compilation of lectures by celebrated historian K.A. Nizami, published in 1972. Ather Farouqi has now translated them from Urdu to English.

While giving a vivid portrayal of the life of the city through the sultanate and Mughal eras, the book also gives us a peek into the eclectic atmosphere that prevailed not only in the royal courts but also among citizens. The book is a heavily footnoted treatise with sources cited precisely.

The final chapter is a discussion of how Mirza Ghalib lamented the fall of Delhi after the revolt of 1857. He was moved by the cataclysmic events that happened in front of his eyes.

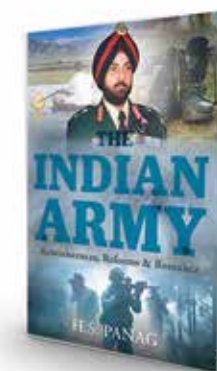
The book leaves us there, shocked and numbed. But beyond the purview of the book, we know that another great city, which has drawn sustenance from the eclecticism of its past, has been resurrected from the rubble. 📖

# Shooting straight

BY REKHA DIXIT

Let General H.S. Panag has discipline like any military man. He exerts this discipline over his words, too, unlike military men who are wont to hyperbolic accounts. The adjective is his least favoured tool, so it is no surprise that he writes in the prologue that when he joined Twitter in 2009, he found it a medium suited to the “cryptic style of military writing”.

Yet, Panag is able to grip the reader with his words. The book is a compilation of articles he has written for various publications in recent years. The topics range from his views on the Indian Army to the ideals he holds high and of the reminiscences of military and cantonment life, which civilians read so enviously about.



**The Indian Army: Reminiscences, Reforms & Romance**  
By H.S. Panag  
Published by Westland Books  
Price ₹599, pages 272

His arguments are forceful, but never offensive. So his comments, be it about retired officers debating on news channels or the merits of Hemant Karkare, Ashok Kamte and Vijay Salaskar getting the Ashoka Chakra, are without sting. In these polarised times, Panag may be that rare writer who criticises Jawaharlal Nehru’s handling of the 1962 China war in one article, and critiques Narendra Modi’s experiments in Kashmir in others.

Panag is a natural storyteller and his reminiscences are evocative, amusing and, sometimes, emotional. His stories move across cantonments and field stations. There is the ghost of Bungalow No 1 in Mathura Cantonment’s Mall Road, whom he first met as an eight-year-old, the mismatched boots of his academy life and the tragic love story of a soldier and a Kashmiri girl. This book has something for every kind of reader. 📖





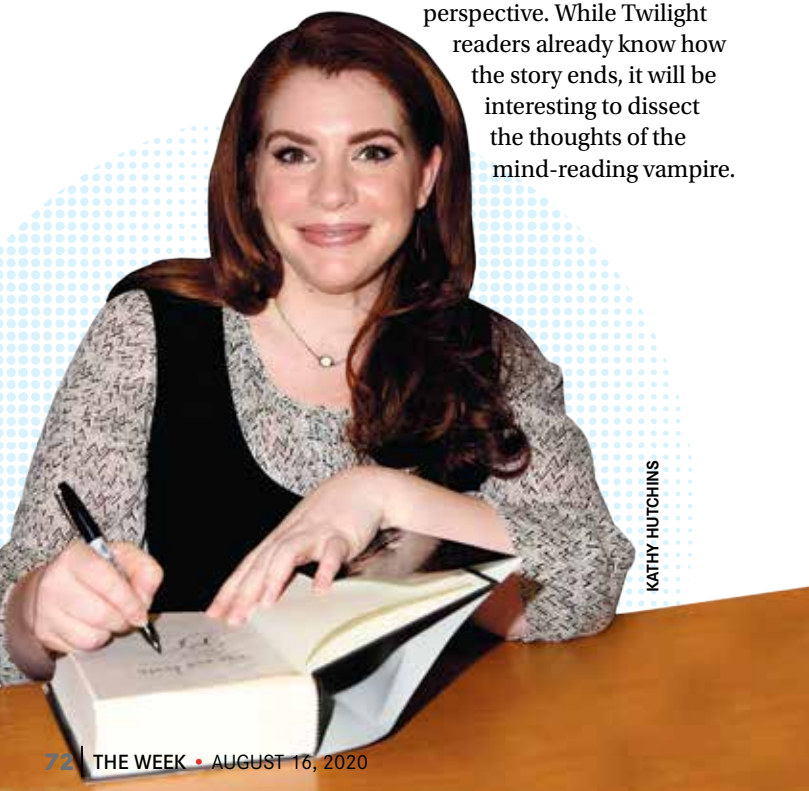
## Cheat hunt

Filmmaker **Asim Abbasi's** *Churails* will be the first Pakistani show to be made by an Indian company for an Indian OTT platform. The 10-episode web series is about an all-woman team of detectives who expose cheating husbands in Karachi. It will premiere on August 11 on Zee5, under its Zindagi brand. Abbasi's critically acclaimed film *Cake* was Pakistan's choice for Oscars in 2018. A banker for 10 years, Abbasi chose to study films only at 30.



## Table's turned

The vampires are back. After more than a decade, **Stephenie Meyer** is out with her new book in the *Twilight* series—*Midnight Sun*. The book goes back to “the beginning of Bella's and Edward's story”, only this time it will be from Edward Cullen's perspective. While *Twilight* readers already know how the story ends, it will be interesting to dissect the thoughts of the mind-reading vampire.



KATHY HUTCHINS



AASIF MANDVI, actor

## Straddling two worlds

Just two days before the lockdown began in New York, actor **Aasif Mandvi** and his wife had a baby. While the tiny tot is keeping them on their toes, Mandvi, who was *The Daily Show* correspondent, is excited about the Indian audience watching his latest show, *Evil*, that is currently airing on Zee Café. Born in Mumbai, he spent his growing up years in England, before moving to the US to pursue writing and acting. Excerpts:

**Q/ The concept of *Evil* is interesting.**  
A/ Yeah, it is an interesting show. It is a show about three characters investigating paranormal activity. But it starts this conversation between science and religion, whether there is a demon or possession or something just scientifically explainable. The script was remarkable. I am also a big fan of Robert and Michelle King and their work. So, I was really excited to work with them....

**Q/ You have often spoken about the biases in Hollywood. How has it evolved in your almost three-decade-long career?**  
A/ The industry has evolved. And I am glad. When I first started out, there were not a lot of roles for South Asian or brown actors.... Now, we see stories being told from much more divergent points of view....



CONTRIBUTOR / SNEHA BHURA  
COMPILED BY SUSAMMA JOY KURIAN

It starts in the writer's rooms and the people who are making decisions about what gets aired. As we see more diversity in those rooms, we start to see more diversity on screen.... We are also seeing it from purely the business side of it—that there is an economic and financial incentive, that now we are speaking to a global audience, not just an American audience, and that, I think, is continuing to change the types of stories that are being told.

**Q/ In *No Man's Land* (2014), you wrote about immigration. How have things changed since then?**  
A/ The story of immigrants continues to be a divisive and a hot button issue, especially here in America, especially within this administration.... This idea of the more progressive the world becomes, the more we move towards inclusivity and diversity—[but] the more tribal it becomes as well. So there is like a yin and yang reaction, where you see this movement towards progressivism and inclusivity, and then the reaction to that are tribalism and nationalism and this fear of the other. That is a dangerous and scary thing. As Hamilton said in *Hamilton*, you know, immigrants get the job done. It is true for anywhere in the world. When you have people who come from somewhere in order to make a life, they contribute far more than they take away from that society. I think somewhere in the conversation, especially here in America, that has gotten lost.

—By Priyanka Bhadani

## Bond time

As far as Raksha Bandhan gifts go, this one takes the cake. On August 3, actor **Akshay Kumar** announced his new film, dedicating it to his “sister Alka and the most special bond in the world... that of a brother and sister”. Titled *Raksha Bandhan*, the film will be directed by Aanand L. Rai. “It makes me happiest that my sister Alka is presenting and producing this film along with ace director Aanand L. Rai. Can't thank him enough for bringing me one of the most special films of my life,” Kumar said in a statement.



## High honour

**Neeru Bhatia**, THE WEEK's deputy chief of bureau in Delhi, has been nominated to this year's National Sports Awards selection committee. Other members of the jury include former cricketer Virender Sehwag, paralympian Deepa Malik and Sardar Singh, former captain of the Indian national hockey team. The committee will pick awardees for the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna, Dronacharya Award, Arjuna Award and other sports honours. Neeru has been working as a sports journalist with THE WEEK for 19 years and has covered numerous hot button issues in her beat with great passion and verve.







## An Indian definition of recession

The origins of chess are shrouded in mystery. We know *chaturanga* (a reference to four kinds of forces—infantry, cavalry, elephants, chariots) was played in India. We know a board known as ashtapada (8 by 8) was used. Ask a chess player about relative values of chess pieces. Normally, you will be told a bishop/knight is worth three pawns and a rook five pawns. I find it interesting that in an *akshauhini* (an army described in Mahabharata/ puranas), the ratio of chariot, elephant, cavalry and infantry is 1:1:3:5.

There is an apocryphal story about the invention of chess. The king was so delighted that he offered the inventor whatever reward he wanted. The inventor wanted one grain for the first square on the board, two grains for the second square, four grains for the third and so on, till all 64 squares were completed. The entire treasury and all grains on earth were exhausted, but the desire could not be fulfilled. Such is the power of the exponential function and typically, the human mind, as with the king, is unable to comprehend the magnitude— $2^{64}$  has 20 digits and is equal to 18,446,744,073,709,551,616.

Some countries are more developed than others. Per capita income is one way—but not the only possible one—of measuring development. To make cross-country comparisons, per capita incomes of various countries (which are in domestic currencies) are typically expressed in US dollars. That conversion can be through official exchange rates or PPP (purchasing power parity). Using official exchange rates, in 2019, US per capita income was just over \$65,000 and Indian per capita income just over \$2,100.

Per capita income is income divided by population and income depends on rate of growth, say in GDP. Population apart, the faster a country

grows, the higher its per capita income. When we look at a figure like \$65,000, we often do not realise the US economy never grew very fast, as a long-term trend. Since 1870, its real growth was between 1.7 per cent and 2.25 per cent, with a few periods when it approached 2.5 per cent.

The precise figure may be different, but the proposition will be no different for any other developed economy. They got where they are today by virtue of such 1-2 per cent real rates of growth sustained over decades. Such is the power of the exponent. Obviously, I do not have in mind east Asia, China, India or Africa. We are usually myopic and focus on the immediate. I do not have in mind India's real growth rate in 2019-2020 or 2020-2021. Since 1980s, India has grown at say 6.5 per cent, to take a rough average.

There is a difference between growing at 6.5 per cent and growing at 1-2 per cent. Socio-economic implications are different and changes that took generations in developed countries are compressed into a few generations. What

does "recession" mean? There may be many attributes of recession, but economists love precision. Therefore, recession is typically defined as two consequent quarters of GDP decline, or some variant. The growth rate turns negative. Intuitively, recession means when an economy is performing below potential. Potential can be 1 to 2 per cent, or it can be 6.5 per cent. If potential is expected to be 1 to 2 per cent, a negative rate of growth is indeed symptomatic of recession.

Given how recession is defined, an expression like "growth recession" is an oxymoron. However, recession has been defined in the context of developed countries. For countries like India, we need a new definition, with a focus not on rate of growth, but change in rate of growth, rate of a rate.



ILLUSTRATION BHASKARAN Bibek Debroy is the chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the prime minister.

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