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OCTOBER 25, 2020

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China is to be blamed

Virologist Li-Meng Yan has to be taken seriously. We cannot simply dismiss her allegations, and rule out the lab-escape theory ('Made in China', October 11).

There is no smoke without fire. It is a fact that China never took Covid-19 seriously, and the world at large is paying a price for China's sins.

Also, the World Health Organization has lost face over its handling of the pandemic. It did not criticise China the way it should have in the initial months. Once Covid-19 disappears fully from the world, the onus will be on China to prove to the world as to why it was not wrong in its handling of the virus during the last few months of 2019.

Having said that, all countries must be utmost vigilant to prevent accidental leaks of dangerous viruses from labs.

K.V. Prasad,
On email.

We cannot completely rule out the possibility that Covid-19 came from a lab in China. That no person in China is allowed to know or say anything without the government's permission smacks of dictatorial tendencies and foul play.

Let us assume for the sake of argument that it was not a lab in China from where the virus originated. But, then, why was the government of China so slow to react to the outbreak? If China was careful, we would not have seen the pandemic in the form that is now, affecting almost everyone in the world.

Tanushri Nagori,
On email.

Dr Li-Meng Yan's revelations were interesting and thought-provoking. There appears not an iota of doubt about her observation that the Covid 19 virus originated from a lab in China. The WHO has failed to convincingly repudiate her claim.

A security cover should be given to her, and a panel of virologists should verify all her claims.

Surinder Sharma,
On email.

Make amends

Two stories on judiciary that appeared in your issue dated October 11 were quite interesting.

While the first one ('Address change') talked on the issue of addressing the court while arguing a case, the second story ('Unsettled, unsettling') talked on the undue delay observed in disposal of cases by courts, focussing on cases involving politicians.

It is really intriguing that in spite of clear suggestions and decisions by various courts and judges, most advocates are reluctant to change the way the courts are addressed. This is probably to satisfy the ego of the judges, or out of the fear that such a decision on their part will have an adverse reaction on the case they argue.

One only hopes the highest court in the country will put its foot down and make it mandatory for all to not use archaic terms such as 'Lordship' and 'Your Honour.

As the old adage goes, justice delayed is justice denied. Justice is denied in almost all cases these days, for various reasons!

The main reason for undue delay should be

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attributed to the delaying tactics of advocates who ask for adjournments on flimsy grounds. It is also a pity that the judges grant such adjournments. It is high time the system itself enforced some basic discipline, restricting the number of adjournments, fixing a time limit for each stage of the case, like filing affidavit/counter affidavit, arguments, submission of briefs and verdict.

B.C. Unnikrishnan Nair, On email.

It ends here

With the CBI special court acquitting all 32 accused in the Babri Masjid demolition case, the Ayodhya movement should end, all for good ('Ripples of the ruling' October 11).

The call by some people to "liberate" the other two temples in Kashi and Mathura is uncalled for, and the Uttar Pradesh and Union governments should never support such movements.

Vyom Prakash, On email.

Well-crafted issue

THE WEEK deserves a standing ovation for its cover story on Syama Prasad Mookerjee ('The man, the melange,' October 4).

The well-crafted issue had a surprise inclusion in form of an interview of a person named Chandra Bose, whose identity in Bengal politics is below minimum.

His comments on Mookerjee gave me this impression that he is not aware that his grandfather and granduncle were keen to form a political axis with Mookerjee in the 1940 Calcutta Municipal Corporation election. But, then, the idea got scrapped because of the narrow political interest of Subhash Chandra Bose. It was pathetic that for the sake of power Bose and his elder brother secretly sided with the Muslim League.

Chandra Bose also does not know that his grandfather's plan to form a united sovereign Bengal with Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy would have not gone well for Bengali Hindus.

Somen Sengupta, Kolkata.

Difficult without Jayalalithaa

The AIADMK is going to hit a rough patch in next year's Tamil Nadu assembly elections, with or without V.K. Sasikala in party's fold ('Opposite leaves,' October 4). There is no charismatic Jayalalithaa now in the party, who can guide the party back to the treasury benches.

R. Namasivayam, Nagpur, Maharashtra.

Pathetic admission

The column by Mani Shankar Aiyar ('The Congress's unique adhesive,' September 13) is a pathetic admission of the state of affairs in the grand old party of Indian politics.

C.P. Belliappa, Coorg, Karnataka.

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CLEANLINESS, GODLINESS

People in PPE sanitise a *pandal* for Durga Puja. With Bengalis thronging markets and political parties holding election rallies, there is fear that the festival, held over a few days, could worsen the Covid-19 situation in the state. Kerala and Maharashtra had seen a spike in the number of cases after Onam and Ganesh Chaturthi.

PHOTO BY REUTERS

POINT BLANK


ARVIND JAIN

My stance on secularism has not changed. I joined the BJP because I see a change in my understanding of the party. The Congress takes up the cause of Muslims. Does that mean they are against Hindus? It is the same for the BJP.

Khushbu Sundar, BJP leader

Every injustice owes its origin to the sense of impunity that is entrenched in the system: my power is my sword; my epaulette above my breast pockets, my shield; my caste folk will fight for me; my government and the ruling party will not admit any lapse or complicity, and so on.

P. Chidambaram, Congress leader

Super happy for everything. For me, as everybody knows, this court is the most important court in my tennis career. The court that I enjoyed the most.

Rafael Nadal, Spanish tennis player, after winning his 13th French Open title at Court Philippe Chatrier in Paris

It has become the primary duty of the government of the day to obfuscate issues through a cocktail of untruths, half-truths, innuendos and pure lies. Yet, like the sun's rays through a dark cloud, some facts peep out.

Yashwant Sinha, former Union finance minister


AFP

James Bond is all about shaken and stirred, but Ruskin [Bond] left me moved. He just has an innocence, a quality unmarked by decades of living that makes you feel strangely optimistic about ageing.

Twinkle Khanna, actor and author

WORD PLAY

No, **grand-millennial** is not an addition to the list of generational cohorts—though it has some connection with the millennial generation. Grand-millennial refers to a home decor style that combines old-fashioned items with modern equipment. Millennials show maximum affinity to this style, hence the name. While trying out this style, it is important to use prints and colours judiciously, otherwise your interiors may end up being more granny than grand-millennial.

MILESTONES

HI-TECH STATE

Kerala became the first Indian state to have completely digital, hi-tech classrooms in all its public schools. Under the smart classroom project, the state government installed 3.74 lakh digital equipment in 16,027 schools in the state.



MOST VALUABLE LEBRON

LeBron James became the first player to win the NBA Finals Most Valuable Player award with three different teams, after he led the LA Lakers to a 106-93 win over Miami Heat on October 11. He has won the NBA Finals MVP award four times: Miami Heat (2012, 2013), Cleveland Cavaliers (2016), and Los Angeles Lakers (2020).



AFP

CLEAN SWEEP

India became the first country to win the prestigious Blue Flag certification—accorded by the Foundation for Environment Education, Denmark—for eight beaches in a single attempt. Blue Flag beaches are considered the cleanest beaches in the world.



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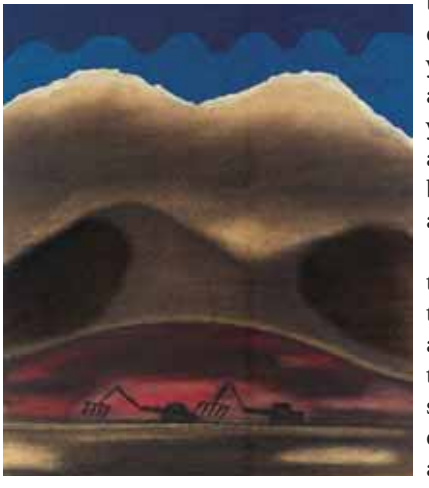
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Problem peaks

For saving his salary, an adviser-level officer in the Union ministry of environment, forest and climate change is bearing the entire weight of the Western Ghats, with its 77 high peaks, more than one lakh square kilometres and valleys. The figures in his monthly salary are pygmyish compared with the physical numbers of the ghats. But the National Green Tribunal has said the adviser dealing with the ecological sensitive zone would not get a rupee if the government does not implement the K. Kasturirangan committee report on declaring a large portion of the ghats as a silent zone.

The tribunal's order, passed on September 28, has given the official less than five months to convince the governments of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu that they should agree to final notification of 56,825 square kilometres of the ghats—of which Karnataka has the most (20,669 sqkm) and Gujarat has the least (449 sqkm). But the states together want at least 6,386 sqkm saved for development activities. Maharashtra has tried to balance its stance by saying that 2,570 sqkm in the state should be excluded, but an unlisted area of 1,740 sqkm can be added.



The tribunal, headed by retired Supreme Court judge A.K. Goel, has held that the Union government cannot alter the contours without the tribunal's orders. It has also held onto a very optimistic undertaking given by the adviser at a hearing that the notification would be issued in March this year—by which time Covid-19 began spreading its tentacles even in the sparsely populated Western Ghats.

The tribunal's ultimatum shows the limits of its power, as the Western Ghats issue is beyond the power of any single official or a group of officials. Political leaderships both at the Centre and in the six states have to hammer out a solution to the issue which is deeply entangled with conservation and development, as well as crores of lives. There is an urgent cry to save the fragile Western Ghats which are getting denuded by logging, industries, agriculture and urbanisation. On the other hand, there is intense pressure from residents that their right to livelihood, agriculture and industry should not be curtailed.

Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar has tried to bring the states together to agree for a broad consensus, but the BJP-ruled Karnataka itself has demanded that the draft notification should be annulled, which the Centre does not agree with. Javadekar has also not been able to get an election-free window, and the calendar is crowded in the next four years. Kerala and Tamil Nadu assemblies go to the polls next year, Goa and Gujarat in 2022, and Karnataka in 2023. There will be both Lok Sabha and Maharashtra polls in 2024.

Some experts have suggested that the government should try to notify areas on which there is agreement between the Kasturirangan committee and the states, while more discussions can be held on contentious areas. But other experts say that a piecemeal approach would leave the disputed areas permanently out of the ecological sensitive zone, as more political pressure will be applied to retain human activities there.

Meanwhile, the salary stoppage threat may not work, as courts have ruled that the salary committed to an employee is sacrosanct, and even when an official is suspended, he/she gets half the salary as subsistence allowance. The tribunal may have to wield other sticks to prod the recalcitrant governments to move forward on the very important issue of conservation of the Western Ghats when the matter comes up in January 2021.

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RIDING THE WAVE

Politicians riding tractors seems to have become the trend, as they try to project themselves pro-farmers. Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat joined in, too. Dressed in traditional Marwari attire and a colourful turban, Shekhawat drove a tractor during a recent visit to Jodhpur, his Lok Sabha constituency. Playing the role of a farmer to the hilt while participating in a farmers' meeting, the minister accused the opposition of misleading farmers about the new farm laws.

ILLUSTRATIONS **JAIRAJ T.G.**

STICKY WICKET

Rohan Jaitley, son of late Union minister Arun Jaitley, has had a false start to his career as cricket administrator. He was set to be elected unopposed as president of Delhi and District Cricket Association (DDCA), but former chief election commissioner Navin Chawla, who is also returning officer for the DDCA elections, countermanded the elections due to illegal "interference" by the cricket body's secretary Vinod Tihara. Jaitley's panel of candidates also left many—including BJP leaders like ex-cricketer Gautam Gambhir—dismayed as it consisted of persons often accused of bringing the DDCA into disrepute. The matter went to the Supreme Court, which ruled that elections would be held—but on a different date.

LEFT OUT

There has never been any love lost between Indian communists and capitalist America. Of late, the comrades may have softened their stand towards the US, but the Donald Trump government will have none of it. According to a guideline issued by the US's citizenship and immigration services, "any intending immigrant who is a member or affiliate of the Communist Party or any other totalitarian party (or subdivision or affiliate), domestic or foreign, is inadmissible to the United States". Although only a guideline to visa officers, this could affect communist party members who love to fly to the US at any given opportunity.

BPH: BENIGN PROSTATIC HYPERPLASIA



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What is Prostate?

The prostate is a part of the male reproductive system, is about the same size and shape as a walnut. It is located below the bladder and in front of the rectum and surrounds the urethra, the tube-like structure that carries urine from the bladder out through the penis. The main function of the prostate is to produce ejaculatory fluid.

What are the common disease conditions of Prostate?

Some common problems related to Prostate are

- Prostatitis
- Benign prostatic hyperplasia, or BPH
- Prostate cancer

What is BPH?

Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH) is the non-cancerous enlargement of the prostate; usually begin in the fifth decade of life in men and which in many men may cause obstruction to urine flow.

What causes BPH?

Although the cause of BPH is poorly understood, the two major factors necessary for the onset of BPH in men are age and normal testicular function.

What are some of the symptoms associated with BPH?

Since the prostate surrounds the urethra just below the bladder, its enlargement can result in symptoms that irritate or obstruct the bladder. A common symptom is the need to frequently empty the bladder, especially at night. Other symptoms include difficulty in starting the urine flow or dribbling after urination ends.

Which are the most troublesome symptoms?

Many men find that having to get up and go to the toilet at night is the most troublesome aspect of this condition, as it makes them tired during the day. Having to urinate frequently during the day, sometimes with a sense of urgency, can also be trying for patients, and can make travelling or attending events, such as the theatre or cinema, rather difficult. Incomplete emptying of the bladder can be progressive and eventually result in complete retention of urine. If this occurs a catheter (tube into the bladder) will be necessary as the bladder rapidly becomes over distended and painful.

Is BPH a sign of cancer?

No. It is possible to have both BPH and prostate cancer, having BPH does not increase your risk of having prostate cancer. However, because early symptoms of both conditions are similar, it is important to see your doctor if you are experiencing any symptoms associated with a urinary condition.

Is BPH a rare condition?

No, it is a common condition ,that can affect approximately 50 per cent of men between the ages of 51 and 60 and 90 per cent of men over 80.

How is BPH diagnosed?

In order to help assess the severity of such symptoms, the American Urological Association (AUA) BPH Symptom Score Index was developed. The AUA diagnostic system includes a series of questions that target the frequency of the urinary systems identified above, and as a result, helps identify the severity of the BPH—ranging from mild to severe.

There are a number of diagnostic test procedures that can be used to confirm BPH. The tests vary from patient to patient, but the following are the most common:

- Physical examination
- Laboratories Studies

What are some of the treatments available for BPH?

Watchful waiting: Is recommended as an important option for men who have mild symptoms and do not find them particularly bothersome

Medical therapy: Today's most common method for controlling moderate symptoms of BPH. Several medications are available to control moderate symptoms of BPH.

Minimally invasive treatments Several minimally invasive therapies are available that allows the doctor to access the prostate through urethra and reduce the size of the prostate or decrease obstruction of the urethra.

Surgical treatment surgical intervention is necessary in patients in whom benign prostatic obstruction causes renal insufficiency, urinary retention, recurrent UTIs, bladder calculi,hydronephrosis, or large postvoid residual volume.Surgical options for such patients include transurethralresection of the prostate, transurethral laserprostatectomy (which consists of resection, ablation,and vaporization), transurethral incision of theprostate, and open prostatectomy (usually when the prostate weight is > 100 g).



SHOW OF HANDS

Ex-Congress MLAs who are now BJP candidates for the upcoming Madhya Pradesh bypolls are facing a practical problem. Having been in Congress for years, they are used to seeking votes for 'haath ka panja' (hand symbol). So, while they wore the saffron and green scarves of the BJP around their neck, at least two of them—state Cabinet Minister Imarti Devi and ex-MLA Narayan Patel—have asked people to vote for 'panja' during their campaign, before hurriedly amending their plea. Old habits die hard.

CASE IN POINT

Dr Vinod K. Paul, member, NITI Aayog, and the Centre's chief spokesperson on Covid-19, has been emphasising on Covid-appropriate behaviour. During a media interaction, when Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan lowered his mask to answer a query, Paul could not contain his disapproval. As soon as Bhushan finished, Paul told the audience: "You must have seen that everyone is now used to talking while wearing a mask. If we take it off to speak, then what is the point?" Bhushan immediately took the cue. He answered the next question with his mask on.



INSULT TO INJURY

What is sweet to two ministries can be very bitter for another. This was evident when Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that government employees eligible for leave travel allowance could encash the amount without travelling, provided they spent three times the allowance. As demand for automobiles and white goods would go up, Industries Minister Piyush Goyal was happy, as was Sitharaman, who would benefit from the higher GST returns. But Tourism Minister Prahlad Patel was upset that lakhs of people would forgo domestic travel plans as a result. Sitharaman's announcement further dampened spirits in the tourism ministry.

ALL ABOUT KIDNEY STONES



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What are kidney stones?

A kidney stone, also known as a renal calculus, is a solid crystal build-up formed in the kidneys from dietary minerals in the urine. Stones can occur within the kidney itself as well as in the ureter (the tube draining urine from the kidney) or in the bladder.

How do kidney stones form?

Kidneys filter the blood by removing excess water and waste chemicals to produce urine. Urine passes from each kidney down a tube called the ureter into the bladder, then out of the body once the bladder becomes full. Many waste chemicals are dissolved in the urine and these chemicals sometimes form small crystals in the urine which clump together to form a stone.

How common are kidney stones?

Lifetime prevalence for kidney stones approaches 10 per cent, but it can vary according to
geography. They can occur at any age but most commonly occur in people aged between 20 and 40. Roughly, half of all people who develop a kidney stone will have a recurrence again in the future.

What are the symptoms of kidney stones?

Flank Pain (discomfort in your upper abdomen), Haematuria (blood in Urine), Dysuria (painful urination), nausea, vomiting, fever and chills (if associated infection).

Do all kidney stones cause pain?

Kidney stones generally cause pain if they are blocking the ureter and trying to pass down towards the bladder. Stones that are not obstructing are thought to be non-painful. This explains why some patients can have extremely large stones filling up their entire kidney with no or minimal pain.

What are the possible complications from kidney stones?

The pain of kidney stones can be severe in some patients. Sometimes a large stone can completely block the passage of urine down in one ureter and this may lead to severe infection, swelling of the kidney, pus formation and damage to the kidney. If left untreated, large kidney stone may cause kidney cancer (squamous cell carcinoma). All these complications can be avoided by early diagnosis and treatment.

How is Renal Calculi diagnosed?

History and physical examination, Imagining Modalities Plain Radiography, IVP ,USG, CT Scans & Urine culture.

How can kidney stones be treated?

There are various treatment options for managing kidney stones. Some stones may be treated with medication. Other stone types may require surgical intervention. Surgical management may include non-invasive surgery [Extracorporeal shock wave lithotripsy (ESWL)], minimally invasive surgery [Percutaneous nephrolithotomy (PCNL) or ureteroscopy] or infrequently, open surgery.

Do all stones require surgery?

No. Some stones can pass spontaneously without medical or surgical intervention. The size and the location of the stone are factors that may affect whether a stone will pass spontaneously. Stones that are smaller than 4 mm have a 40-fold greater chance of passing spontaneously.

How much fluid should a person drink to prevent kidney stone formation?

People who have had a kidney stone should drink enough water and other fluids to produce at least 2 liters of urine a day. The amount of fluid each person needs to drink depends on the weather and the person's activity level, people who work or exercise in hot weather need more fluid to replace the fluid they lose through sweat.

What can be done to help prevent a recurrence of a kidney stone?

If one stone is detected, there is less chances to have a recurrence by drinking plenty of water throughout the day. By keeping urine diluted there is reduced chance of chemical build up.

- Increase fluid intake to maintain urine output of 2-3 l/day
- Decrease intake of animal protein (≤ 52 g/day)
- Restrict salt intake (≤ 50 mmol/day of sodium chloride)
- Normal calcium intake (≥ 30 mmol/day)
- Decrease dietary oxalate
- Reduce the intake of foods rich in oxalate—spinach, rhubarb, chocolate,and nuts.



Kosamattam Group
SINCE 1850
Trust grows with time

Kosamattam Finance: Trust that grew-up with time

Honesty is the most needed virtue when it comes to banking and finance sector, and the 170-year old Kosamattam Group sees honesty as the key mantra for its successful legacy. The organization values its customer's trust more than anything. Mathew K. Cherian who heads the Group has more than four decades of experience in the financial sector. Under Cherian's able leadership, Kosamattam became a pan-Indian brand. The Group had a humble start with chit funds. But today Kosamattam has its presence in a number of other segments such as tourism, gold loan, agriculture, healthcare and construction. The organization is among the leading taxpayers in its home state and pays crores and crores as tax every year. Unlike many other profit-oriented corporates, Kosamattam carved itself a service-oriented path. The company's discipline has been key in its growth. The managing director of Kosamattam is a man who spends almost 11 hours daily at his office. He would call it a day only after a detailed analysis of the daily progress reports. Born in the God's own country, Kerala, Kosamattam today has loyal customers across the country.

Group chairman Cherian talks about the success saga of his group.



To Gold loans

Gold is precious and this metal is quite unique in all manner, there is some truth in it. Gold business also demands truthfulness. That is why Kosamattam decided to concente more on the gold business.

Customers' trust

Customer's trust is our biggest capital. When somebody thinks about a gold loan, Kosamattam immediately comes to their mind. It is a recognition given by the people for our dedicated service. We have adapted well to the disruptions happening in our business segment, and ensured that we provide the best service to our people and environment. Years ago, during the days when we were concentrated on chit funds alone, we provide an avenue for the common folks where the chit doubled as a savings instrument and also as a source for credit in case they wanted a loan. The banks were not common, the laws governing the financial business were not strict as compared to those today. Even then, we offered the best value and prompt service to our customers. Customers have always had trust in our service, and we ensured that it is never lost. We started from our single office in Kottayam town, and in the initial days itself we managed to attract customers from across Kerala. We continued our trustworthy service all these 170 years and also ensured that our business helps in the growth of our country and society. When we expanded our reach, we ensured that we have branches even in the remote corners of the country which were unbanked till then. Today more than 70 per cent of our branches are in rural areas.

Uniqueness in approach

Gold is close to the heart for our people. It carries the price of their sweat and hard work. So many people, especially women, have a sort of emotional attachment to their gold ornaments. So, parting with their gold is quite unbearable. Most people think about a gold loan only when there is an emergency. We give an assurance to them that we will keep and return all their gold intact on closing their loan. We offer competitive interest rates, more money and fast transactions. We give maximum time period for the repayment of the loans. We allow customers to pay back in installments, and they can repay the money digitally. We give our customers the maximum amount that can be availed from an NBFC. and, we don't levy any hidden charges from our customers. Our normal branch timings are from 9am to 5:30pm. Some of our branches





operate from 8am to 8pm. We keep the gold entrusted with us by our customers with utmost care. We keep them in our highly secured strong rooms and lockers. Also, we ensure that the gold deposited with us are insured in accordance with their market value. We also have an advanced surveillance and security system. We have a complaints redressal system, too—in each branch, the branch heads or regional-zonal heads are handling it. Each customer is coming forward for a loan to meet a specific purpose. We have taken this into account while shaping our loan schemes. We give utmost care in recruitment and training of our employees, to ensure professionalism. Retired bankers and experts, with decades of experience in banking sector, head the various departments in our organization.

We have divisional, zonal and regional offices in the model of nationalized banks, an internal auditing system, and experts to ensure the quality of gold deposited with us. Our internal vigilance system consists of retired officers from various state police forces. We also ensure that we are up-to-date with the technological developments. We see our satisfied customers as our brand ambassadors. We are a NBFC with branches across India. Our schemes are meant to meet the expectations of the most ordinary people also. We keep our schemes highly transparent and all schemes related details are duly explained by our branch personnel to the customers.

Additional services

*Kosamattam Finance is a corporate agent for leading major life and general insurance companies providing Motor Vehicle insurance, Health Insurance, Home insurance and overseas travel insurance etc... Kosamattam Finance also offers ticketing services for domestic and international air travel and interstate luxury bus travel through its branches.

Foreign Exchange services

Kosamattam Finance holds a Full Fledged Money Changers (FFMC) license, and provide foreign exchange rates related services via its authorized branches.

D MAT & PAN CARD services

Kosamattam Finance is a member of Central Depository Service Limited (CDSL), and customers can open D MAT accounts, at any of its branches. PAN card services also is available at bran ches.

Wind power

Kosamattam Finance setup its wind farms in Ramakkalmedu, Idukki, with an objective of exploring the possibilities of renewable energy. The power produced from its wind farms is being injected to the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) grid in accordance with an agreement with the board.

Farming and farm tourism

Kosamattam group has its cardamom and coffee plantations in Vandanmedu, Idukki, it also has a well-equipped goat farm in Kottayam. The goats in

this farm are chosen with utmost care, and they are housed in special cages. Our farm tourism is intended to create awareness and interest among younger generation to farming and agriculture. Efforts are on to start a lake related tourism project shortly.

Healthcare

Our diagnostic centres provide medical check-ups at affordable rates to public. We ensure that they get all necessary tests at affordable rates. We also make sure that results are provided with best accuracy.

Real estate

Within a short span we have become a prominent name in the real estate sector too. Our commercial complexes in Kottayam have paved the way for the growth of the town. These spaces have also helped in creating a number of job opportunities, indirectly.

Five Star hotel

A luxurious five-star hotel in Kottayam is one of the pet projects for the organization now. A convention centre also will be set up close to it. This will be a boost to the tourism industry. The hotel is coming up right at the heart of the city.

Professionalism of our employees

Our professionalism is what makes us distinctive. We are frequently providing human resource training to our employees.

We have a team of more than 35 experts for imparting training to our employees on the latest developments in financial sector and also to train them on ways to ensure customer satisfaction,. Around 75 per cent of our employees are women. We are committed to the cause of ensuring women empowerment and job security.

Care and compassion

Those who can understand the problems and pain of the people are the real believers in God, and never sent back anybody, who is seeking help-empty-handed,



my father used to say. I have always kept these guiding principles in my mind, always tried to help the needy. And we value the blessings and prayers such people. We are also conducting medical camps, hospitalization support and reconstruction of schools via social welfare organizations. We have plans to widen our social welfare activities via our charitable trust.

Success Secret

Our approach towards our customers is not profit-oriented, instead service minded. And we are hoping to reach every corner of this country. We garnered funds via 19 public issues of NCDs; 20th is ongoing.

For each public issue of NCDs, the response we had was highly encouraging—it is a testimony for the trust our customers have bestowed on us. Kosamattam Finance is named after our family, and we will not do anything that would hamper its fame.

Integrity and transparency

Our integrity and legacy lead us from success to success. In each branch we have displayed the contacts numbers and email IDs of our higher officials, including that of the managing director. The working of complaints redressal cells is so professional. Customers can escalate their complaints to different levels—from branch manager to managing director till they are satisfied.

Countrywide presence

We aim to have presence in each and every location in India within the next five years. We already have presence in almost every state in the country. We are hoping to take it more to the grass-root levels. We also try to ensure that we give jobs to the natives from each location in our branch network.





Battleground ready

With a major reshuffle in alliances and the emergence of a new set of leaders, the political equations in Bihar are changing

BY PRATUL SHARMA

BIHAR IS SET for an interesting, yet unpredictable contest. At the heart of the 2020 elections is a strong push to effect a generational change in the state dominated by Lalu Prasad, Nitish Kumar and Ram Vilas Paswan for the past three decades. In fact, this will be the first elections since the 1990s—when the Mandal Commission changed the politics of the Hindi heartland—without Paswan Sr and Lalu Prasad. The former had passed away in Delhi on October 8, while the latter, currently in jail, may only be released on bail just a day ahead of the election results—on November 10.

This change was visible in the reshuffle of political alliances in the state ahead of the elections. The two major opponents—the NDA and the Grand Alliance—had witnessed the exit and entry of partners in quick succession. Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party, now helmed by his son Chirag Paswan, made a curious decision which could impact not only the outcome of this election, but also the entire political scenario in the state. The LJP announced that it will contest alone in 143 of the 243 seats—primarily focusing on seats fought by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United). Chirag cited reasons for his stance against Nitish Kumar, saying the latter had humiliated his father. The letter Chirag had written



to the BJP chief, J.P. Nadda, detailing the reasons behind his decision to go solo was made public sometime before Paswan Sr's death. Chirag said that the LJP has full faith in the BJP. He also indicated that he will not even shy away from using the name of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the LJP's campaign, which the BJP warned against. The BJP is pinning its hopes on Modi's appeal to tide over any anti-incumbency that may be there in the state against Nitish.

The LJP conundrum left the JD(U) leadership jittery as they saw it as an attempt to hobble it. Two days after the LJP's decision, and after an internal decision, the BJP reaffirmed its faith in Nitish Kumar's leadership. "There should be no confusion on the issue of leadership," said Deputy Chief Minister and senior BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi. "Nitish Kumar is the chief minister candidate, and even in the post-poll scenario he will be chief minister. Four parties are contesting together—the BJP, the JD(U), the HAM (Hindustani Awam Morcha [Secular] led by Jitan Ram Manjhi) and the VIP (Vikassheel Insaan Party led by Mukesh Sahni). He will win with a three-fourths majority."

But the LJP's move has given rise to speculation as both the BJP and the JD(U) are contesting on almost an equal number of seats. The JD(U) will have 122 seats to contest, of which it will give seven seats to the HAM, while the BJP will have 121 seats, of which it allotted 11 seats to the VIP. If the JD(U) were to get fewer seats because of the LJP, it may lead to clamour within the BJP for the top post. The LJP has already said it will support the BJP in the state after elections. This will fulfil the BJP's desire to be the lead player in the state rather than play second fiddle to a regional satrap.

On the other side of the political divide, the Rashtriya Janata Dal-led Grand Alliance lost three partners—Jitan Ram Manjhi, Upendra Kushwaha (Rashtriya Lok Samta Party) and Mukesh Sahni—as they dared to question the leadership of RJD's de-facto supremo, Tejashwi Yadav. The RJD has now joined hands with the left parties; the Congress is already a partner.

Smaller parties that command pockets of influence have also formed regional alliances to try out their luck. Kushwaha has aligned with Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party to form the Grand Democratic Secular Front. Asaduddin Owaisi-led All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen and Devendra Prasad Yadav-led Samajwadi Janata Dal (Democratic) have also joined this alliance. Kushwaha is the chief minister face of this alliance.

Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad Ravan's new political outfit, the Azad Samaj Party, will make its electoral debut in alliance with Pappu Yadav's Jan Adhikar Party (Loktantrik) under the banner of the Progressive Democratic Alliance. The Social Democratic Party of India, the Bahujan Mukti Party and the Indian Union Muslim League are the other parties in this alliance.

Another factor that is powering a change in Bihar's electoral politics is the changing demography of voters. Since the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the number of voters in the state has



GETTY IMAGES

DIGITAL CONNECT
JD(U) supporters in Patna watch Nitish Kumar's address during a virtual rally

INTERVIEW



Neeraj Kumar, *senior JD(U) leader and state minister of information and public relations*

There is no alternative to Nitish Kumar

Q/ With what message are you going to elections?
A/ The people of Bihar are aware of the village-centric development carried out by the Nitish Kumar government without any discrimination against any community. This is reflected in our work. There is no alternative to Nitish Kumar.

Q/ The RJD is making unemployment an election issue.
A/ They ruled for 15 years. What did they do? But we have created huge infrastructure, roads were built, electricity was provided in villages, social harmony and rule of law was maintained. We provided jobs in organised and unorganised sector.

Q/ How did you navigate the state during pandemic, floods, and reverse migration?
A/ We mapped all the migrants who returned, and created work through Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. We spent ₹8,500 crore during Covid-19, while states like West Bengal spent only ₹200 crore, and Rajasthan ₹2,000 crore.

There have been no protests or unrest during the pandemic as the government gave people economic security. People of Bihar trust us.

Q/ What are you promising the people this time?
A/ The last time, we formulated a seven-point programme which managed to provide electricity for all, apart from other facilities like toilets, drains, roads, and financial empowerment for women.

This time we have resolved to give water to all households. This will be part of our seven-point [project] part two, which also includes programmes for youth, women empowerment, clean villages and cities, and additional health benefits for people.

increased by over 20 lakh to reach 7.29 crore. This includes first-time voters, and over 2.3 lakh migrants who had returned home during the pandemic.

The 29-year-old chief ministerial candidate of the Grand Alliance, Yadav, has already promised to create 10 lakh jobs if he comes to power. The RJD draws its power from the fact that nearly 9.5 lakh people have registered in its digital portal for unemployed youth, launched on September 5. The portal also got 13 lakh missed calls since its launch. Bihar has seen widespread loss of livelihoods and unemployment because of the Covid-19 pandemic. A recent Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy survey has pegged the unemployment rate in the state at around 46 per cent—three times that of last year.

Yadav is cautious about seat sharing after the bitter experience of his father Lalu Prasad, who had said while accepting Nitish Kumar as chief minister candidate in 2015 that he was ready to drink any poison to keep communalism at bay. Though the RJD had won 80 seats, they accepted Nitish Kumar, who had 71

> **Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad Ravan's Azad Samaj Party will make its electoral debut in alliance with Pappu Yadav's Jan Adhikar Party (Loktantrik).**

seats, as the chief minister. But Kumar left the Grand Alliance in 2017 to join hands with the BJP. The RJD realised that its votes helped alliance partners win, but the latter's votes were not transferred to them during elections. So, this time the RJD will contest in 144 seats, the Congress in 70, and left parties in 29.

In order to counter the RJD's youth-centred approach, the BJP immediately sent its newly-appointed Yuva Morcha chief and Bangalore South MP, Tejasvi Surya, to Patna. "Tejashwi Yadav and Rahul Gandhi should not talk about employment," said Surya. "They themselves are unemployed. It is the Narendra Modi government which has created jobs for the youth."

Like Yadav, Paswan Jr is also focusing on his image as a "young leader". He has singularly made 'Bihar First, Bihari First', a slogan for change in the state, his uncompromising choice.

The JD(U), on the other hand, is trying to build a

narrative based on 15 years of rule of Nitish Kumar vs 15 years of Lalu Prasad. The effort is to revive the memories of the "poor law and order situation"in the state during Lalu's "misrule". But the campaign may have its limitations. Nitish Kumar has built his reputation around doling out development schemes where women are one of the biggest beneficiaries. During the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the state witnessed higher women voter turnout as 60 per cent of them cast their votes. Coupled with Prime Minister Modi's appeal, the ruling JDU-BJP combine is looking for an encore.

What is worrying JD(U) leaders is the criticism over the state of affairs in terms of development and job creation. "Many people say that Nitish Kumar's first tenure was better than his other terms,"said Sanjay Kumar Jha, state water resources minister and JD(U) general secretary. "It was better as he got the state in a hopeless condition, and he helped it get out of it. As he set the benchmark very high [during the first tenure], it led to higher expectations. Ask people what we have done. See how much work we have done in creating infrastructure."

Another big factor in the Bihar elections is caste. The NDA expects support from a bouquet of castes. Apart from the state leaders, the BJP has roped in former Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis and Tejasvi Surya to handle the elections in the state. Both are brahmins—ideal choices—as the saffron party is trying to woo the forward castes. Meanwhile, the Grand Alliance's focus is primarily on the Yadav and Muslim vote banks, which have 14 and 17 per cent population in the state, respectively. The Congress appeals to forward castes and dalits, too. The left parties are joining hands with the alliance as they also have pockets of influence across the state; the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) had won three seats in 2015.

The parties are looking for emotive issues, too, to win over people. There were efforts to use Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput's death, too, as an election issue, as the actor's family hails from Purnea in Bihar.

As the electioneering picks up amid the pandemic, the state claims to have recovered fast from infections. State Health Minister Mangal Panday said there were only 10,450 active cases in the state and it has a 94 per cent recovery rate—the highest in the country. But what remains to be seen will be the state government machinery's ability to ensure a free and fair election, keeping social distancing norms in mind.

■ INTERVIEW



Manoj Jha, *Rajya Sabha MP and senior RJD leader*

It is Nitish Kumar vs the people of Bihar

Q/ Is it a generational fight as Tejashwi Yadav is pitted against Nitish Kumar?
A/ I will not put it to such stereotypes. It is Nitish Kumar versus the people of Bihar. In the long-term memory, people of the state remember many things which the chief minister could have done, but did not do. In the short term, they remember Muzaffarpur shelter-home case, plight of returning migrants—first, the way Nitish Kumar *ji* obstructed their arrival, and then could not provide proper arrangement—and huge mismanagement during the Covid-19 pandemic in providing health facilities.

Q/ What message are you giving to the people?
A/ Our manifesto is ready. It is not a promise of cosmetic changes. It is a commitment from leader of opposition, Tejashwi Yadav, for transformation agenda. Complete transformation of agriculture, health and education, and [of the] unemployment situation, [along] with women's safety.

Q/ Is the party missing Lalu Prasad's presence?
A/ Not only the party, [but also] Bihar is missing him. An entire generation of Biharis, they have never witnessed or participated in an election without Lalu Prasad *ji*. He is such a valuable voice.

Q/ What do you make of Chirag Paswan's decision to contest against the JD(U), but maintain ties with the BJP?
A/ In independent India's history, for the first time, a political party [the BJP] is in two alliances. Many big BJP leaders have sought tickets and got it from the LJP.

Q/ The HAM, the RLSP and the VIP left your alliance.
A/ First of all, we wish them good luck wherever they are. Secondly, the people of Bihar have made up their minds that 1 Anne Marg (chief minister's official residence) will see a new occupant, a new young chief minister.

PMO BEAT

R. PRASANNAN



An ally for all reasons

Who is Ram? Where is Ram?

There was stunned silence in the Lok Sabha as Ram Vilas Paswan hurled this rhetorical poser during a debate in the 1990s.

As the house broke into pandemonium, Paswan delicately removed his spectacles, pointed its stem towards his heart, and said: "I am Ram—Ram Vilas Paswan."

Before the BJP benches could catch on to what he was trying to say, Paswan continued: "Not just the name. There is the spirit of Ram in me; there is Ram in you; there is Ram in every Indian's heart. Ram dwells in the hearts of all Indians— not just in your temples."



There was desk-thumping from the left, the centre and even the mandir-right.

That was Ram Vilas Paswan—a man who practised combative politics, but carried a rounded personality. He made enemies in politics, but befriended them in personal life.

The country, the world and the Guinness Book took note of the young Lohia socialist when he, just out of an Emergency jail, won the largest majority from Hajipur. A decade later, Janata Dal's V.P. Singh spotted a future prime minister in him, and gave him labour and welfare.

In welfare, the dalit from Bihar had a brahmin secretary from Kerala who believed passionately in dalit and backward empowerment. P.S. Krishnan prepared the historic note for VP and Paswan to discuss in the cabinet on August 6, 1990. That note, envisaging job quotas for the backwards, would radically change Indian politics. A new political elite would rise in the Gangetic Plain.

As Mandal shook the brahmin-thakur-dominated polity of the north, Paswan and Sharad Yadav stood like rocks behind VP. They went down fighting the BJP's mandir with Mandal. However, as the Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh duo blunted the sting of Mandal by creating jobs in the non-Mandal economy, the Janata parivar fractured into pieces.

Yet, prime ministers and party chiefs sought out Paswan (in 2004, his long-time neighbour Sonia Gandhi walked into his house seeking an alliance), not just for his political clout, but for his administrative acumen. He had a computer-like brain that could absorb facts and figures, and reel them out without having to check his notes. This columnist remembers his incredible performance at his first presser held a day after he took charge of fertilisers and steel. For two hours he briefed us, without checking a single file or consulting an officer even once, on the performance, plans, problems, promises, profits and losses of every PSU under the two ministries.

Civil servants adored him. He addressed them with a 'ji', and rose to receive the seniors when they entered his chamber.

However, Paswan could not become the messiah of the dalits and the backwards, as VP had hoped. As he got sucked into the coalition politics of the 1990s, he became a political weathercock, aligning with the BJP first, then with the Congress and again with the BJP.

That was a problem with most caste-justice chieftains. As a political commentator said, none of them could ford the mighty stream of the Ganga. Most of them turned into warlords in their fiefs, and failed to cross the political Rubicon of the Ganga. If Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mayawati stayed put on its left bank, Lalu Prasad, Paswan and Nitish Kumar were confined to the right.

Tailpiece: Paswan's two bids to strike roots in Uttar Pradesh came a cropper. He lost the 1985 Bijnor by-poll, to the Congress's Meira Kumar. In 1987, the Guinness record-holder lost his deposit in the Haridwar by-poll finishing behind Ram Singh of the Congress and Mayawati of the BSP.

Sharad Yadav is perhaps the only Mandal neta who has won from several states—Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

PHOTO **PTI**

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Next issue...

- When a doc, a patient and a robot come together
- The science of touch
- The power of genome sequencing
- The importance of being Dr Anthony Fauci

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MANI-FESTO

MANI SHANKAR AIYAR



Lost sheen of the IFS

On October 9, the Indian Foreign Service entered the 75th year of its existence. A wit in *Seminar* magazine years ago said it was constituted of "dispossessed princelings, illiterate cavalrymen and well-connected nit-wits". Entering the service 17 years after it was formed, it was easy to spot which of our joint secretaries and ambassadors fitted each of these categories!

The IFS was conceived when the centre of India's world lay in London. Today, London is only a save-your-face posting for superannuated diplomats who did not quite make the grade and politicians whom the government of the day wants to put away. Now, it is Washington and Beijing that constitute the twin foci. On the European continent, Brussels, once an obscure provincial capital, alone really matters as a key element in foreign economic policy. Moscow has lost out ever since the Soviet Union stabbed itself in the back. Islamabad has ceased to matter with the paralysis introduced into India's Pakistan policy ever since Narendra Modi took over. The needless quarrel with Nepal has only compounded the sidelining of south Asia, which is where, in my eccentric opinion, we should concentrate our foreign policy effort.



The collapse of the Non-Aligned Movement means that African and Latin American posts, as well as our permanent representations to the United Nations in New York, Geneva and even Vienna, that gave us our leadership position among the newly-liberated countries, have lost the sting they used to have. Nonalignment as the fulcrum of our foreign policy has been overtaken by military alignment through the 'Quad'. Where we were the strongest link in the NAM chain, we are now the weakest in the Quad chain. Our withdrawal from championing the Palestine cause, in tandem with the Arab monarchies, has also meant that where Cairo and Baghdad were prize postings once, they now matter little. We have been reduced to small fish swimming in a very big pond—and are led into thinking we are sharks. The only work left to most ambassadors is organising International Yoga Day!

All this, of course, means an alteration in the orientation of the foreign service. Where six (out of 16) of my 1963 batch were instructed to learn French as our compulsory foreign language, now it is, unsurprisingly, Chinese that commands the top slot. Perhaps English should be introduced as a compulsory foreign language. Moreover, the coveted IFS is no longer the goal of the student intellectual elite. How coveted the IFS was is, I think, well illustrated by my own case: I stood seventh in the All-India exam but only fifth in the foreign service because, of the six who were ahead of me, four picked the IFS over the IAS! Now, the UPSC has to scrape the bottom of the barrel to fill the IFS quota.

I met one IFS probationer a few years ago and asked him, in passing, what his position was. He said, "600". I thought I had misheard. I asked him to repeat his answer and when he again answered 600, he added that he hated being in the IFS. He joined only because he was threatened that if he did not, he would be demoted to a class II service. I understand (although this might be a wicked rumour) that the favoured service now is the Indian Revenue Service (as being the most "lucrative"!).

To cope with the humongous numbers, the UPSC exam has been reduced to a lottery. In consequence, a remarkable candidate of my acquaintance, who won over a dozen gold medals in her finals, has repeatedly been tripped at the prelims. The UPSC seems to believe, like Napoleon, that they do not want able generals but lucky ones.

ILLUSTRATION **BHASKARAN**

Aiyar is a former Union minister and social commentator.

On your knees

Stretching exercises will help in creating a balance between your knees and prevent long-term arthritis

During the past eight months of the Covid-imposed lockdown, we have seen a lot of patients coming to us with problems that are related to sitting for long hours, working from home and staying indoors resulting in back and neck aches, postural issues, muscle pain issues and full body aches. Interestingly, we are also seeing a lot of older patients with osteoporotic fractures of the wrists, hips and shoulders, and these are patients who have not gone out at all, but have fallen at home.

Right posture matters

There is an increase in complaints of body aches during the lockdown. A lot of factors have contributed to this such as being sedentary or the absence of the right kind of infrastructure required for long hours of work. It all starts from the right chair. Make sure your back is supported by the back rest, the legs are under the table, the tummy or the chest nearly reaches the edge of the table and the elbows are well-rested on the table. The computer should be at your eye level.

Osteoarthritis, the villain

Osteoarthritis is very common among Indians; the knee is the most commonly affected joint which is impacted, followed by hips and shoulders. Genetics, lifestyle and injuries are all the factors that would lead to the wearing out of knees. Stretching exercises will help in creating a balance between the two knees and prevent long-term arthritis.

To maintain bone health

I am now seeing osteoporosis in much younger patients than say, a decade back. It is a silent disease which becomes overt and obvious only when the bone fractures and gets injured. Increase your bone density as much as possible in the formative years itself. A high intake of proteins is crucial for bone health, much more than calcium and vitamins. Also, one's bones must be attuned towards impact exercises such as walking, running, skipping and jumping.

Localised treatment

We are now seeing osteoarthritis in much younger patients and in more active patients, and also arthritis is mainly observed in certain parts of the knee among Indians rather than the whole knee. So, our focus has been on minimally-invasive joint replacement and in that respect, we came out with the tissue preserving total-knee replacement technique which gained immense popularity. It has also been picked up by the Limca Book of Records for its speed of recovery; A 94-year-old patient who underwent this surgery for both the knees, began walking within hours of the surgery. At times, patients do not really need full knee replacement, so that gives way to the unicompartmental knee replacement surgery in which we can focus on the damaged area of the knee rather than the whole knee. This has long-term benefits: one can carry out normal functions and the best part is, we are preserving the natural biomechanics of the knee except for the small area that needs medical attention. The first Oxford unicompartmental surgery in the country was done by me 16 years ago. Even in hip replacement, we are the only unit that offers the direct anterior approach (that involves a 3 to 4 inch incision on the front of the hip) with a minimally-invasive procedure.



Dr Kaushal Malhan
director, orthopaedics & joint replacement surgeries, Fortis Hospital, Mulund, Mumbai

"We are now seeing osteoarthritis in much younger patients and in more active patients, and also arthritis is mainly observed in certain parts of the knee among Indians rather than the whole knee."

—As told to
Pooja Biraia Jaiswal



Increase your bone density as much as possible in the formative years itself.

A high intake of proteins is crucial for bone health, much more than calcium and vitamins.



Uttar Pradesh, besides being the most populous state in India, is also the heart of India. The huge population puts the state in a unique position, because of which development activities in this state have an impact on the entire country. The proactive measures taken by the Uttar Pradesh Government in recent months on various fronts have reinforced this.

As the entire country battles the Covid-19 pandemic, Uttar Pradesh has taken quick and effective measures to curb its spread and to strengthen medical care facilities. Be in Noida, Lucknow or Gorakhpur, a large number of beds have been added in existing hospitals and new hospitals have been set up to provide relief to patients. Quick thinking and speedy action by the Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath, made the state keep the fatality rate low. As part of the State Government's commitment, Uttar Pradesh now stands at number one position in the entire country in conducting Covid-19 tests per day. The state also has impressive recovery rate of 90.24% from Covid-19, which is well above the national recovery rate.

The early days of the pandemic saw an unprecedented movement of workers from several states to Uttar Pradesh. Uttar Pradesh was among the first states to provide transportation and facilitate the return of such people. Till now, more than 38 lakh migrants have returned to the state.

Once they reached their destinations safely, a massive exercise was started to absorb these workers into the state's workforce. The skills of these workers were ascertained so that work opportunities could be found for them accordingly.

Skill mapping of 35 lakh workforce has been completed and employment have been provided to 1.25 crore labourers/ workforce in micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME), self-help groups, expressway construction,

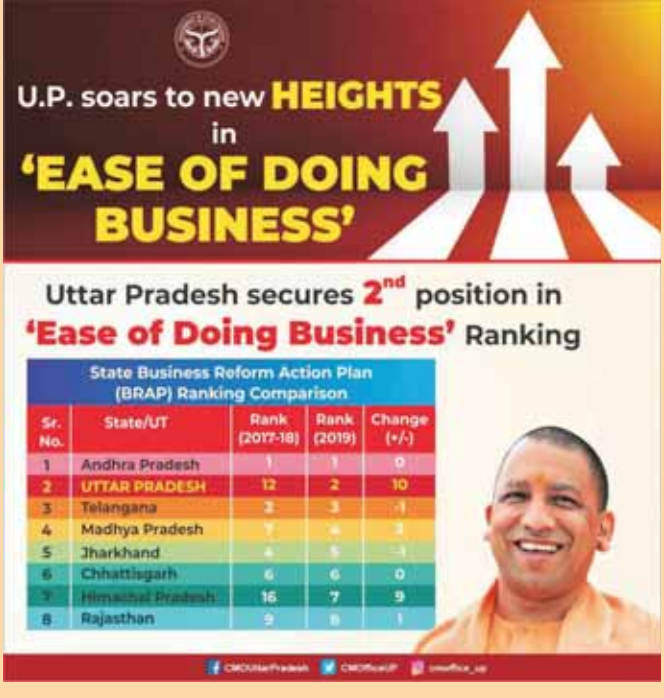


Uttar Pradesh Leads the Way in Economic Resurgence

irrigation projects and other large sectors.

Loans have been provided to small street vendors for livelihood under the economic package announced by the Prime Minister. This is part of the *Atmanirbhar Uttar Pradesh Rozgar Karyakram*, and loans worth Rs 24,064 crore have been given online to MSME units. Incidentally, UP also leads other states in implementing the *Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyan*, which aims at providing employment for the poor.

It is because of these measures that economic and industrial activity in the state is gathering speed. Under the latest phase of unlock, it is remarkable that most of the industrial units are now running at full capacity. The state is now aggressively seeking investment in several areas, including defence, aerospace and electrical vehicles. Talks are already on between the State Government and South Korea for setting up an EV unit in the state. A 380-acre industrial park is





proposed to come up in Auraiya with an expected investment of Rs 300 crore, under which 160 units will be set up there. It will provide employment to state workforce.

SIGNING OF AGREEMENT FOR JEWAR AIRPORT

A dream is soon going to be realized in Uttar Pradesh. Recently the Concession Agreement for Construction of Jewar Airport was signed on 7th of Oct, 2020 by Noida International Airport Authority on behalf of Uttar Pradesh Government with the constructing Swiss company Zurich Airport International AG.

Jewar Airport will be an international world class airport, bringing in a mix of Indian hospitality and Swiss efficiency. It will be located at 70 kms from Delhi, 40 kms from Noida and 130 kms from Agra. The construction is scheduled to start next year and its first phase will be completed by 2024. It will handle 1.20 crore passengers per year.

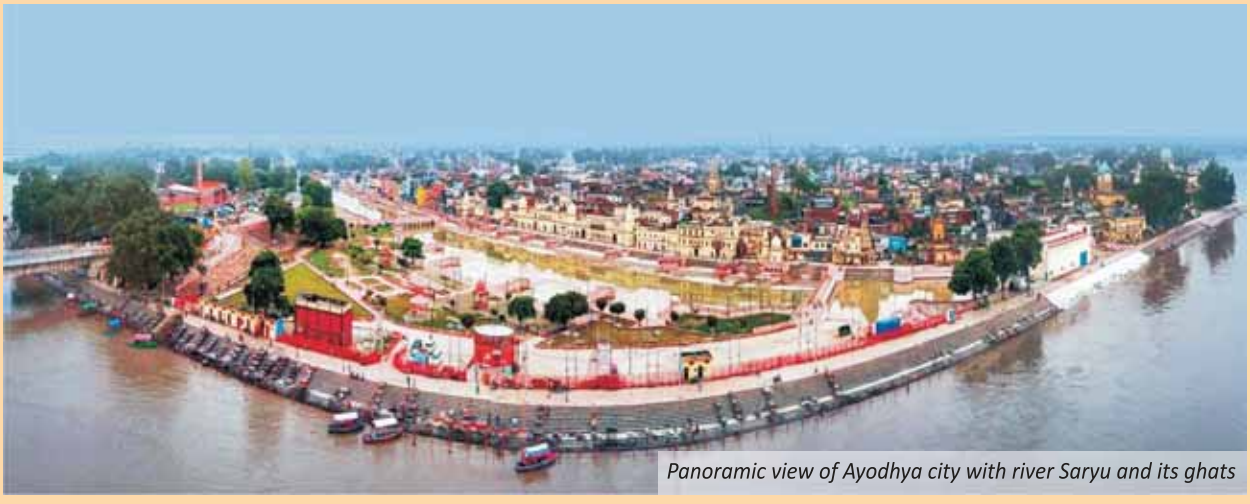
The Airport will be fully completed by 2040 and by that time it will handle around 7 crore passengers per annum. It is estimated that the directly and indirectly the Jewar Airport will provide employment to about one lakh people .

PLANS TO DEVELOP AYODHYA AS A HUB OF CULTURE AND TOURISM

Religious and Cultural tourism in Uttar Pradesh is set to get a huge boost with the ambitious plans to develop Ayodhya as a hub of cultural and tourism related activities.

The objective is to recreate the ambience of the Ramayana era and establish Ayodhya as a symbol of pride and faith.





Panoramic view of Ayodhya city with river Saryu and its ghats

The Uttar Pradesh Government, headed by the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, has initiated measures for economic and cultural development of Ayodhya on a grand scale, so that it emerges as the national cultural capital besides being a Smart City.

Plans in this regard are being prepared across several departments such as Tourism, Cultural Affairs, Urban Development, Public Works, Water Resources and Electricity.

A GRAND SRI RAM STATUE

The Uttar Pradesh Government had a few months ago approved a budget of Rs 447.46 crore to install the 251-metre tall statue of Lord Ram on the banks of river Sarayu in Ayodhya. The statue is part of the Ram Nagari Ayodhya project. This amount will be used to purchase land in Mirpur area. Besides, the funds will also be used for development of tourism infrastructure and related projects, overall beautification of Ayodhya, a digital Ramayana museum, an interpretation center, library, parking, food plaza, landscaping and other tourism facilities.

The statue will be built of bronze and it will consist of an overhead umbrella of 20 metres and a pedestal of 50 metres.

A model of the proposed Ram statue has already been shown and presented to the Chief Minister. Work is progressing fast on this ambitious project and soil testing is being done in the area where the statue is proposed to be installed.

According to officials in the Irrigation Department, the water of the Sarayu river is proposed to be diverted in such a manner that the water touches the feet of Lord Ram statue once it is ready.

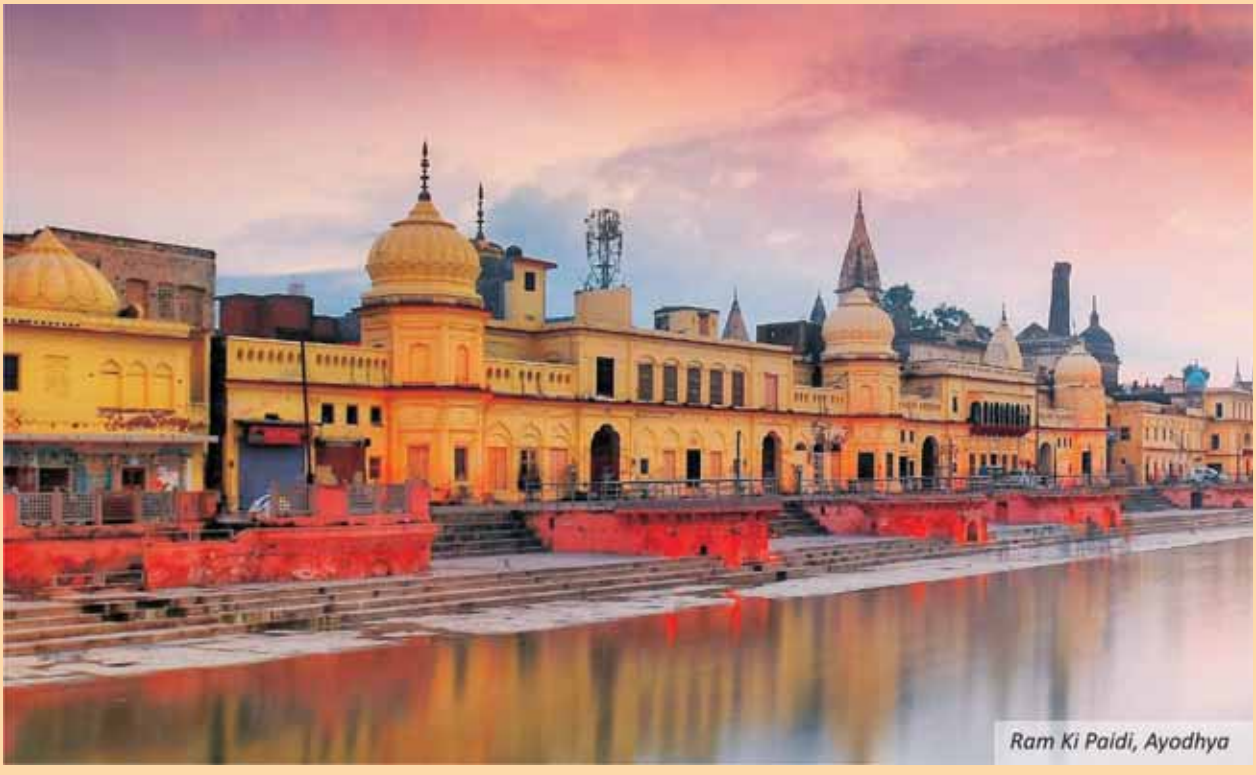
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT BOARD

“The Uttar Pradesh Government, headed by the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, has initiated measures for economic and cultural development of Ayodhya on a grand scale, so that it emerges as the national cultural capital besides being a Smart City.”

For coordinating all activities and to ensure better monitoring of projects, an *'Ayodhya Teerth Vikas Parishad'* (Tourism Promotion Board) is being constituted with five members and the Chief Minister as the head of the Parishad. It is an indication of the seriousness with which the present Government views Ayodhya, and since he assumed power in March 2017, the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has visited Ayodhya several times to personally oversee the progress of various schemes in Ayodhya.

The visit of the Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi, to Ayodhya in August 2020 for the grand ceremony to mark the ground-breaking for construction of a magnificent Ram temple was a major catalyst to expedite the several schemes that have been already launched in Ayodhya. In fact the Uttar Pradesh Government and the Centre are jointly working on a plan to develop Ayodhya as a big centre of tourist and economic activity.

As the Prime Minister himself has said, the proposed temple will not only increase the grandeur of Ayodhya but also “change the economy” of the region. It is


Ram Ki Paidi, Ayodhya

expected that with thousands of people visiting Ayodhya to see the temple, new opportunities will arise in this region.

MODERN INFRASTRUCTURE

According to officials, the plan includes an international airport in Ayodhya, a modern railway station, facilities around the proposed temple, development of the entire perimeter area around the city as a tourist destination. In view of the large number of visitors expected to arrive in the city every day by different modes of transport, several multi-level parkings, a network of widened roads and highways, an elevated road leading to Ram Janma Bhoomi, underground cabling and deployment of electric vehicles to ferry people are on the anvil.

There is also a proposal to expand the area under the Ayodhya Development Authority to allow the coming up of hotels, restaurants and tourist-related infrastructure, along with development of banks on both sides of the Sarayu river.

Among the futuristic facilities proposed to be created in Ayodhya is a Digital Ramayana Museum, where episodes from the epic will be brought alive through the use of sophisticated technology involving hologram, 3-D projection, laser sound and light show and display, video and film screening, 3-D sound and open-air performances. Also, part of the innovative facilities will be a library, picture gallery, prayer hall, food court, solar lighting and an extensive green belt.

The pilgrims and the faithful also go to complete a 84-mile perimeter route (Parikrama) around Ayodhya as part of the pilgrimage. There are plans to develop 60 religious spots along the route which is more than 250-km long and touches five adjoining districts.

AMBITIOUS SMART CITY

In September 2019, the Uttar Pradesh Government had announced that Ayodhya was included in the five cities that were to be developed under the Smart City Project.

Subsequently in March 2020, the Nagar Nigam of Ayodhya, as the nodal agency to steer the Ayodhya Smart City Project, had initiated the necessary process on this project.

The scope of work under the Smart City project includes heritage conservation, lake restoration, cultural hub-related projects, improvement and renovation of urban infrastructure which includes water supply, sewage, solid waste management, urban mobility, power supply, telecom, health and education.

The objective is to develop Ayodhya Smart City as an entity with integrated IT services for all urban requirements of the residents, including smart streets and smart roads.

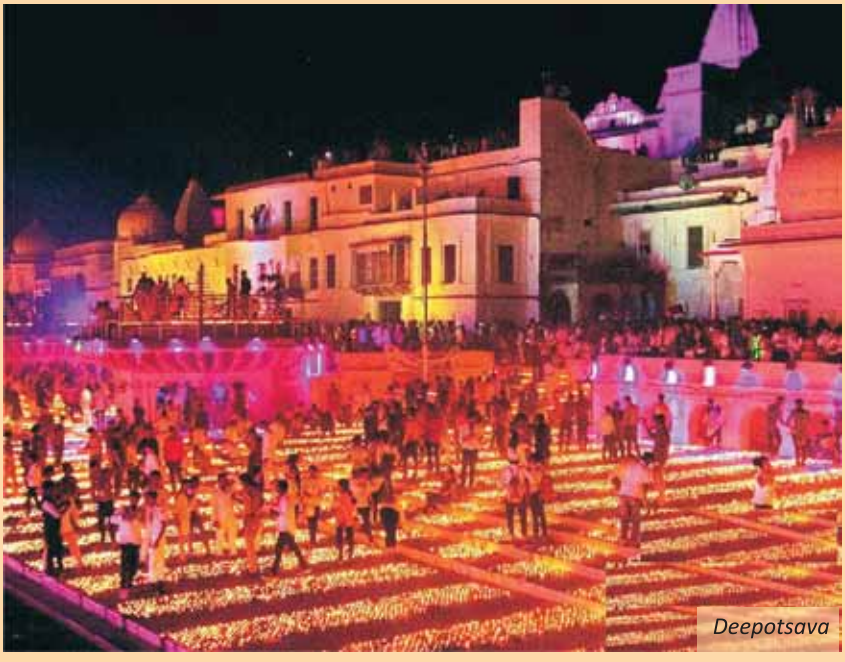
The total estimated block cost of Smart City Proposal is Rs 125 crore.

The old areas of Ayodhya are to be renovated, such as roads, temples and cultural places. The city is to be developed as a pilgrim and tourist city, a heritage city and also a modern and liveable city, making it a global destination.

The Smart City will be a vibrant city creating a growth hub for weavers and artisans of the city. It will have safety and security for women, children, the elderly and the minorities.

The modules identified for smart road and city proposal are Uday Chauraha to old Parikrama Marg, main road to Hanuman Garhi, Kanak Bhawan. The proposal incorporates smart bus shelters, smart toilets, e-rickshaws, parking space, footpath development, multi-modal transport system, leading to reduction in traffic congestion and travel time.

An integrated traffic management system, e-booking of boats, guides, taxi and hotels, online utility bill payment and developing an app having all information are part of the project.



Deepotsava

HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE

Ayodhya lies about 130 km northeast of Lucknow, on way to Gorakhpur, the hometown of the Chief Minister. It is a pilgrimage centre for Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and also Muslims. Ancient monuments of all these faiths are scattered all over the city.



Ayodhya- proposed Railway Station model

The district was earlier known as Faizabad and was renamed as Ayodhya on 6th Nov, 2018. The administrative headquarters of the district were later shifted to Ayodhya city.

Ayodhya and erstwhile Faizabad had always been important in history, for not only being seats of power in successive regimes, but also for being located strategically on the routes towards eastern parts of India.

The National Highway moving through Faizabad has been a key route for connecting not only districts of east Uttar Pradesh, but also Bihar, West Bengal and the states of the North-East.

Now, Ayodhya is assured to become a seat of harmony and tourism activities.

With a dynamic leadership with far-sighted vision, Uttar Pradesh is now poised to provide leadership as India moves to regain its strength ■

People are investing in a new 'work-style' in this new world



BY K. SUNIL THOMAS

Only one woman made it to Hurun's list of India's richest self-made entrepreneurs under 40—Devita Saraf. She has been a constant fixture in *Fortune*'s list of India's most powerful women in the past few years. But for the lady who found her fortune at the crossroads of business, technology and design, it would perhaps be of greater satisfaction when the market takes to her products.

Saraf founded Vu Technologies when she was 24, and from nowhere broke into the high table of India's television market. Last month, she took another bold plunge, placing her bets on the post-Covid new normal with Meetings by Vu, a video conferencing solution on large screen with multiple camera features and a flexible system where any video call software will work.

On the eve of the start of festive season shopping, THE WEEK caught up with Saraf for her thoughts on how the business will evolve and the effects of Covid-19. Excerpts:

Vu created its own niche in the Indian TV market. How did you figure out what customers wanted?

Our biggest focus always has been to reach more educated buyers. We are not price players or the cheapest option in the market. And we realise that while educated Indians love consuming content, they also want something flexible with their lifestyle, new and innovative, has show-off value and something they can play around with. We understand this audience very well, and make products for them and distribute them accordingly.

Innovation and pricing surely helped, right?

Yes. At the end of the day, when you want to convert a customer, you require good pricing. But the good thing is most people who buy Vu TVs tend to repeat it. About 87 per cent of our customers are repeat buyers. So it is not only innovation and pricing each time, but also about giving fantastic quality, customer service, and brand value. This is what has helped us become a ₹1,000 crore company. Vu is now offering video conferencing solutions.

What are your USPs in the crowded market?

The product we have launched, Meeting by Vu, is a first not just for India but the entire world. This is because other companies in this space, like Cisco and Polycom, have proprietary systems. They need the same software and hardware at both endpoints and are clunky and difficult to use. They also require expensive real-estate investment in the form of immersive video conferencing rooms. At the other end, mobile phones and laptops are running easy-to-use software like Zoom, Skype. But these



Vu Televisions are sold in **60 countries**

Vu sells about **6.5 lakh televisions** a year

The components for panel manufacturing come from **China, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan**

Meetings by Vu is **a video conferencing solution on large screen TVs with a flexible system** where any video call software works

have terrible picture and sound quality and are tiring to use. Meeting by Vu has the best of both worlds; it has professional-grade audio and video quality and the ease of being able to install Zoom or your choice of software on the system. It is much more relaxing, as you can sit back and do your meetings. Secondly, we offer both sharp and wide-angle cameras, so you can use the system in a small meeting room or a conference room with multiple people. And third is the fact that it works with all software. No one else in the world is doing this.

If you can stick your neck out a bit, which would be the next business area that you may focus on?

With Meeting by Vu, we have just entered a new business area. And unlike other companies that only focus on doing what is next, we always make sure that we do it right. We have started a new company as we see work style as a major blue ocean market for us. So before we look at other areas, I want to make sure that I have built a ₹250-300 crore company in this space. It is always best to be disciplined, focused, and grow rather than be taken in by the current latest thing.

Where do TVs go from here?

We have a new high-end TV coming by the end of October. But we can only share more information once we officially launch it. But you will see what the best in TVs is, coming soon.

What is Vu's strategy on the prime minister's call for Atmanirbhar Bharat and getting 'vocal for local'?

I'm proud to say that Vu is the only company that has invented a product that is made in India—Meeting by Vu. Assembly and manufacturing are also being done in India. So it is a "vocal for local" product. We also hope to take this product abroad.

What is your take on post-lockdown recovery and by when do you think it will be 'business as usual'?

First, you must change your definition of 'business as usual,' as things are not going to fully go back to pre-lockdown days since many habits have changed. People will live in a more hybrid sort of world where certain habits learnt during the lockdown will stay. For example, people will continue using software like Zoom instead of travelling for business.... They will utilise their time much more efficiently. So we feel this new segment will stay highly relevant post-lockdown.

The economy is also recovering as we see consumer spend happening on televisions, and for a product like Meeting by Vu, where people have the money to spend. But most importantly, people are investing in a new lifestyle and work style in this new world.

How will the upcoming festive season fare?

We have found that general trade is doing very well in mom-and-pop stores. E-commerce is growing quickly, too. However, large-format store retailers are not doing as well because of the lack of footfalls. But we do not sell in any of these large-format stores, so we have not seen a dip in sales. It will be quite interesting this Diwali, to wait and watch to see the sentiment in the market. But the main thing that people have realised is that the lockdown will not be lifted anytime soon. We will be sitting at home, at least, till the end of 2020. This means that Diwali TV sales will be higher, as this is the only way customers can travel the world. People are also wanting more TVs per household, larger-sized TVs, and more content on their TVs. So it is a great opportunity for this industry.

Unfriendly fire

Ordnance factories say the Army's complaint against the quality of their ammunition is a ploy to promote privatisation

BY PRADIP R. SAGAR

THE INDIAN ARMY has deployed its T-90 and T-72 battle tanks in the Chumar-Demchok area in eastern Ladakh to deter any misadventure by Chinese troops. At 15,000 feet, it is possibly the world's highest battlefield for tanks. But what perhaps worries the Indian soldiers more than the altitude and the threat from China could be the quality of their ammunition. According to a report prepared by the Army, faulty ammunition supplied by ordnance factories have caused more than 400 accidents in the past six years, resulting in 27 deaths and 159 injuries.

"On an average, one accident takes place every week," said the report, which also revealed that the Army has suffered a loss of ₹960 crore since 2014 on account of faulty ammunition. It said the Army could have purchased around hundred 155mm artillery guns with the money it lost. Former Army chief General (retd) V.P. Malik flagged the issue as a serious one. "It directly affects the morale of the troops and their confidence in their weapon systems," he said.

The ordnance factory board (OFB) refuted the allegations and said only 2 per cent of the accidents were caused by faulty ammunition. It blamed poor gun maintenance and faulty firing drills for the alarming numbers. The board also pointed out that between 2011 and 2018, more than 125 accidents were caused by ammunition procured from foreign and domestic sources other than the OFB. Responding to the Army's view that it could have bought a hundred artillery guns with the money it lost, the OFB referred to the Army's controversial purchase of ammunition from Russia during the Kargil war. By the same logic, it said, the "faulty Krasnopol ammunition imported from Russia during the Kargil war, amounting to ₹522.44 crore, could have financed another 55 artillery guns".

The OFB's history goes back to 1775 when the British government officially recognised the East India Company's Board of Ordnance in Fort William, Calcutta. The first factory, called the Gun Carriage Agency (now Gun and Shell Factory), was opened in 1801 at Cossipore in north Calcutta. The OFB now has 41 factories, 13 development centres and nine institutes of learning, which are administered by the department of defence production under the ministry of defence. These are divided into five operating divisions based on the products they offer, ranging from ammunition and explosives, vehicles and weapons, material and components, and armoured vehicles and equipment.

Some defence ministry insiders expressed concern that a corporate lobby was trying to weaken the OFB. "Currently, hundreds of thousands of (rounds of) defective imported ammunition are available in various depots," said an OFB official. Malik said even a single accident was unacceptable. "It is the question of a rifle failing when a soldier is about to fire at the enemy. When the barrel bursts, not only does expensive equipment get damaged, but precious lives of soldiers are also lost," he said.

OFB officials said a decision was made in 2013 to test random samples whenever ammunition was handed over to the Army. They said the test had shown that up to 99.8 per cent of the samples did not have any problems and that most of the



POWER DISPLAY Soldiers participate in a mock drill during the Army Day parade in New Delhi. The Army, in a report, said that faulty ammunition supplied by ordnance factories had caused more than 400 accidents in the past six years

accidents happened because of training errors, expired ammunition and faulty, incompatible weapons.

Hari Mohan, who retired in September as chairman of the OFB, told THE WEEK that there was a deliberate attempt to malign the ordnance factories. "First of all, the Army should have shared its report with the OFB." He said ammunition supplied by the OFB was involved in only 19 per cent of the accidents, while the remaining cases were being ignored. Mohan also highlighted the fact that the OFB supplied ammunition at a much lower price compared with international market prices.

The Army, however, said the OFB overcharged its products, hurting the defence budget. It also accused the board of maintaining a monopoly over several essential products, resulting in minimal innovation and slow technological development as there was hardly any incentive to improve quality, cost-efficiency and accountability.

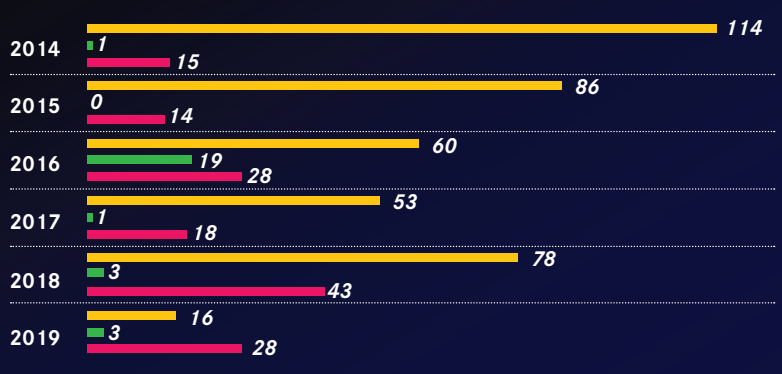
OFB sources said the Army had a mechanism to monitor the quality of the arms and ammunition it produced. The directorate general of quality assurance (DGQA), which is headed by a lieutenant general, certifies everything from ship to shoelaces made for soldiers. There are DGQA units in all ordnance factories, headed by a colonel-rank officer known as senior quality assurance inspector.

Lieutenant General (retd) V.A. Bhat, who had served as director general of quality assurance, said the OFB was not owning up to its responsibility. "The first party quality check by the ordnance factory is practically absent. From empty shell check to field check, the ordnance factory has to inspect everything. The DGQA has only a limited role." He blamed the OFB for not implementing the Six Sigma methodology recommended by multiple experts committees, which emphasised the reduction of faults and accidents to 3.4 occurrences per million units or events.

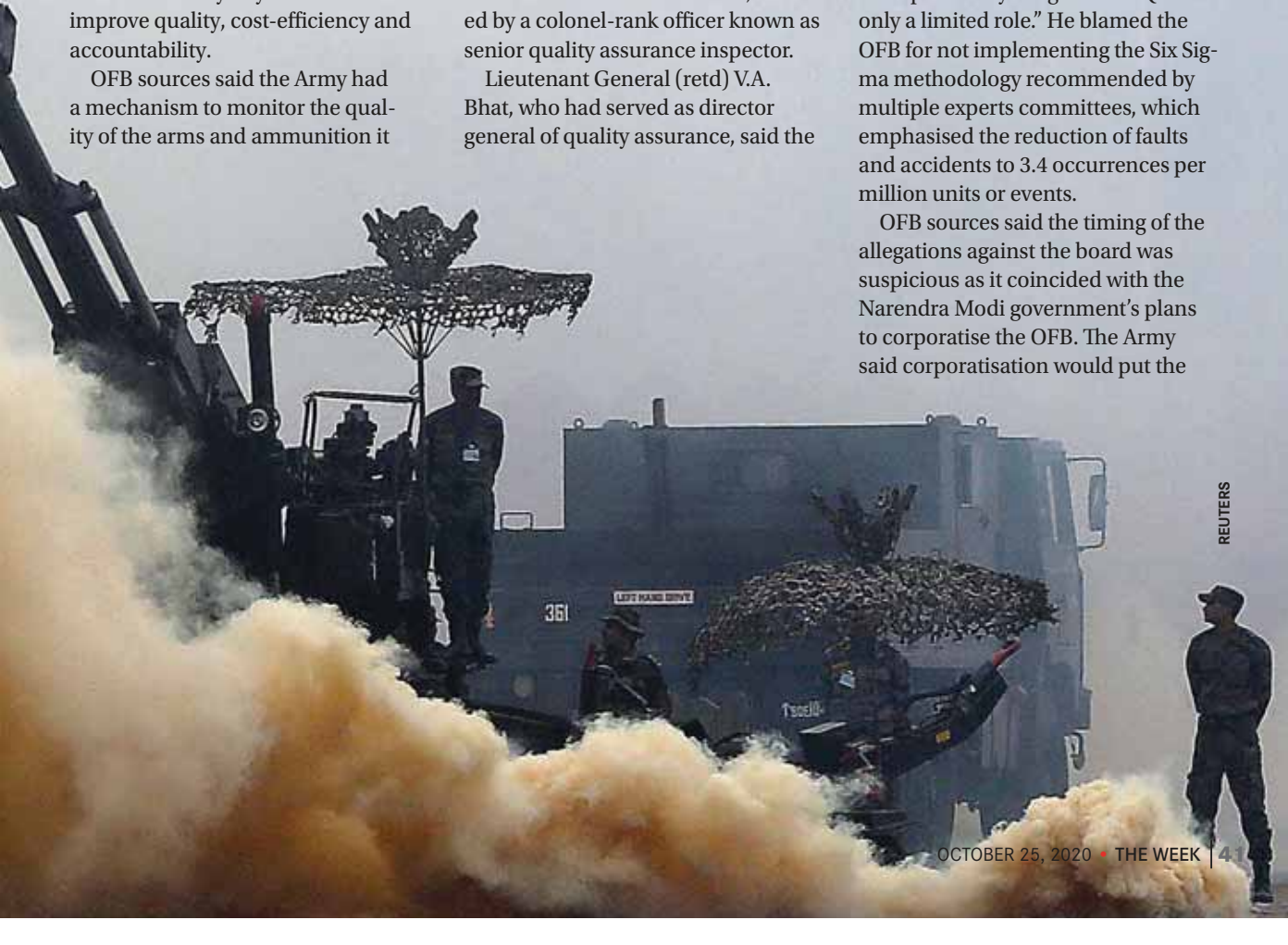
OFB sources said the timing of the allegations against the board was suspicious as it coincided with the Narendra Modi government's plans to corporatise the OFB. The Army said corporatisation would put the

DEFECT COUNTER

Army's account of accidents caused by faulty OFB equipment



GRAPHICS **SREEMANIKANDAN S.**\RESEARCH **PRADIP R. SAGAR**



REUTERS



PTI

TALK TIME
Additional Secretary (department of defence production) V.L. Kantha Rao along with officials from the DDP, defence ministry and other senior civil and military officials during a videoconference with employees of the ordnance factory board in New Delhi

OFB at par with other defence public sector undertakings, which were managed by their own board of directors under broad guidelines from the government. The government hopes corporatisation will help the OFB improve its turnover from ₹12,000 crore to ₹30,000 crore by 2024-25.

Lieutenant General (retd) Sanjay Kulkarni, who was director general of infantry, said corporatisation was the only way forward because of the trust deficit between the OFB and the Army. As part of the corporatisation plan, the Union government will support the OFB in case of losses, with a loan for 30 per cent of the total shortfall and equity investment for the remaining 70 per cent. The government will also provide working capital for the first five years as a one-time corpus fund.

Subhash Chandra, who had served as secretary, defence production, said four committees had recommended the corporatisation of ordnance factories in the past. In August 2019, a cabinet note was prepared for the process. In September this year, the government constituted an empowered group of ministers (EGoM) under Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to oversee OFB's corporatisation and also selected a consortium led by KPMG Advisory Services for assisting in the process.

> **"The ordnance factory board said only 2 per cent of the more than 400 accidents in the past six years were caused by faulty ammunition."**

Opening up the ammunition sector to private players, the Army has recently given at least five contracts to private firms. "We want a parallel capacity to come up, although it may not be on the scale of the OFB," said Lieutenant General Santosh Kumar Upadhyay, master-general of the ordnance, in a recent media interaction. OFB employee unions are opposed to the move. M.K. Ravindran Pillai of the Employees Federation of the OFB said the government was looking to encourage private participation as part of the Make in India initiative. "Recent trends in defence procurement have shown a shift away from heavy reliance on ordnance factories and defence PSUs," said Pillai. OFB workers have meanwhile deferred their indefinite strike against corporatisation, which was scheduled to begin on October 12, after the defence ministry offered to negotiate with them. A. Bharat Bhushan Babu, additional director general (media and communication) in the defence ministry, said the ministry would not alter service conditions of the employees till the conclusion of the talks. "However, it will not affect the government's decision to corporatise the ordnance factory board," he said.

Malik said the present controversy should not degenerate into a turf war between the Army and the OFB. "The defence ministry should have a composite committee to investigate the matter in a time-bound manner," he said. "A detailed investigation will establish the exact cause of the accidents."



POINTING FINGERS
Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy accused Justice N.V. Ramana of interfering in the functioning of the High Court

PTI

Supreme showdown

By accusing Justice N.V. Ramana of abetting corruption and hindering administration, Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy launches an all-out war against the second senior-most judge of the apex court

BY RAHUL DEVULAPALLI

The city of Vijayawada has been experiencing heavy rains since October 12, which has thrown normal life out of gear. The Krishna is in spate, inundating highways and agricultural land. The city, meanwhile, is witnessing a political storm, too. On October 10, Chief Minister Y.S Jagan Mohan Reddy's principal adviser Ajeya Kallam distributed copies of the CM's controversial letter to Chief Justice of India Justice S.A. Bobde. In his letter, Jagan accused Justice N.V. Ramana, the second senior-most judge of the Supreme Court, and a few judges of the Andhra Pradesh High Court of abetting corruption and hindering administration. Two days later, the High Court directed the Central Bureau of Investigation to probe defamatory posts against judges and judiciary on social media put up by members of the ruling YSR Congress.

"Since the month of April 2020, this court has noticed that a new trend has developed to abuse the High Court and its judges on different sites of social media and even in the interviews given to electronic media," read the order. A day later, the Supreme Court Advocates-On-Record Association issued a statement condemning Jagan's letter and its public release, observing that it vandalised and breached the independence of the judiciary.

A fight has been brewing between the judiciary and Jagan's government for quite some time. The government has been unhappy about the large number of public interest litigations finding their way into the High Court. In the past 18 months, the court accepted around 300 PILs regarding various decisions of the government, according to the ruling party.

Sriram Subramaniam, the ad-

vocate general of Andhra Pradesh, said—in response to PILs on the alleged diversion of temple funds and on government advertisements—that every street conversation was being converted into a PIL. "Benamis and phantoms of political parties are using the High Court to further their political games. The court cannot be permitted to be used as a platform," he said.

After a spate of judicial reviews, oral observations and a recent gag order against the media, the state government and a section of legal experts said Justice Ramana was "interfering in the matters of the High Court and influencing it". Former advocate general of Andhra Pradesh C.V. Mohan Reddy said Justice Ramana's interference was the foundation of the present crisis. "He has a vice-like grip on the AP High Court and is controlling it. It has become suffocating for the political executive," said Mohan Reddy. "In the past one year, any action by the government—from the construction of a guest house in Visakhapatnam or even the shifting of an office—has become a subject matter of PIL. The nexus between Justice Ramana and [former chief minister and Telugu Desam Party president] N. Chandrababu Naidu is well known, at least in the legal profession. In 2005, retired judge B.S.A. Swamy wrote a full page in his book, *A Caste Captures the AP Judiciary*, about Ramana becoming a judge. In 2017, Justice Jasti Chelameswar also mentioned it in his letter."

There have been instances in the past when senior elected representatives filed complaints against judges. In 1961, Andhra Pradesh chief minister D. Sanjivayya wrote to Union home minister Lal Bahadur Shastri against chief justice Chandra Reddy of the Andhra Pradesh High Court for acting with bias regarding certain appointments. The chief justice was later transferred to the Madras High Court. Six years later, prime minister Indira Gandhi wrote to chief justice of India Koka Subba Rao after the apex court delivered a verdict against her in the Golaknath case.





PTI

The nexus between Justice Ramana (above) and [Telugu Desam Party president] N. Chandrababu Naidu is well known, at least in the legal profession.

C.V. Mohan Reddy, former advocate general of Andhra Pradesh

What pushed Jagan to take the extreme step of approaching the chief justice was clearly the Amaravati land scam. One of the most important promises of the YSR Congress in the 2019 assembly elections was an investigation into allegations of massive amassment of wealth and land by TDP members. The new government set up a cabinet sub-committee to examine the issue, which found illegal transactions involving 4,000 acres of the Amaravati capital project. The state anti-corruption bureau registered an FIR naming former advocate general of Andhra Pradesh Dammalapati Srinivas and a few others in the case. The High Court, however, stayed the investigation and also issued an injunction against any reporting by the media on the contents of the FIR. The court observed that elected governments did not have the power to administratively review the decisions of past governments.

On October 6, Jagan met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi for consultations. He submitted the



REALTY BITES
Jagan's allegations come in the wake of the High Court's stay on the Amaravati land scam case

letter against Justice Ramana the same day. Along with the letter, Jagan also submitted "material"which could prove Justice Ramana's "interference"in the functioning of the Andhra Pradesh High Court and also his links with Naidu and Srinivas. "It is a notorious fact that Mr Srinivas is too closely associated with Sri Justice N.V. Ramana and Mr N. Chandrababu Naidu,"said the eight-page letter. It said Justice Ramana had been influencing the sittings of the High Court including the roster of a few judges and alleged that matters crucial to the TDP were allocated to a few judges. Jagan, who named four judges in his letter, also gave details of their orders on recent PILs.

TDP leaders refuted the charges and said Jagan's actions had set a bad precedent. "This is not between Andhra Pradesh and the judiciary. This will have larger implications for democracy,"said TDP leader C. Kutumba Rao, who was vice chairman of the state planning board. He said Jagan violated the Official Secrets Act by revealing confidential government documents. "Forget about what happened in the last 16 months, from here on, the chief minister will be judged by this incident,"he said.

Honour at stake

BY SONI MISHRA

Supreme Court judge Justice N.V. Ramana sounded prescient when he said last month that as judges are self-restrained when speaking out in their own defence, they are now construed as soft targets for criticism. Last week, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy wrote a rare letter to Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde, accusing Ramana of influencing the functioning of the state High Court and his alleged proximity to former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and referred to an Anti-Corruption Bureau investigation into "questionable transactions"of land by Ramana's two daughters and others in Amravati.

The optics of a Constitutional functionary complaining to the CJI against a sitting judge is worrisome for the judiciary, which has been dealing with crisis after crisis since the press conference by four senior judges of the court in January 2018. The development has tainted the ascendency of Ramana, who is set to take over as CJI in April 2021. All eyes are on how Bobde deals with the latest crisis.

"Any citizen of the country has the right to send a communication to the CJI if he or she feels that a wrong has taken place. Whether the charges levelled are correct or false...will have to be assessed by the CJI,"said senior advocate Lalit Bhasin.

Bishwajit Bhattacharya, senior advocate of the Supreme Court and former additional solicitor general, said the CJI may consider "convening a full court meeting of the Supreme Court and initiate measures to put its own house in order and protect the independence of the judiciary from the onslaught of the legislature and the executive".

He said the chief minister should be asked to proceed in accordance with Article 124 (4) and 124 (5) of the Constitution, which deal with the process of impeaching a sitting judge. It is also being debated if the court can initiate criminal contempt proceedings against Reddy since he chose to go public with the charges.

"If the chief minister genuinely meant to raise an issue of concern, he should have written a confidential letter to the CJI,"said senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan. For much less, he said, activist-lawyer Prashant Bhushan was convicted of contempt of court.

"It can have a catastrophic effect on the justice delivery system if judges are targeted like this,"said Supreme Court advocate Sneha Kalita. "A petition has been filed on the issue. However, I feel that the court should take suo motu action to send out a strong message."

It is claimed that Reddy's public campaign against Ramana is a result of an order passed by the three-judge bench headed by Ramana that resumed proceedings against Reddy in a disproportionate assets case on October 9. "The timing is questionable,"said Supreme Court lawyer Shilpi Jain. "A letter has been addressed to the CJI regarding a sitting judge who is hearing a matter that could have repercussions in a case in which the letter writer is an accused."

Reddy may have his own credibility issues, but he has managed to put the top court in a spot of bother.

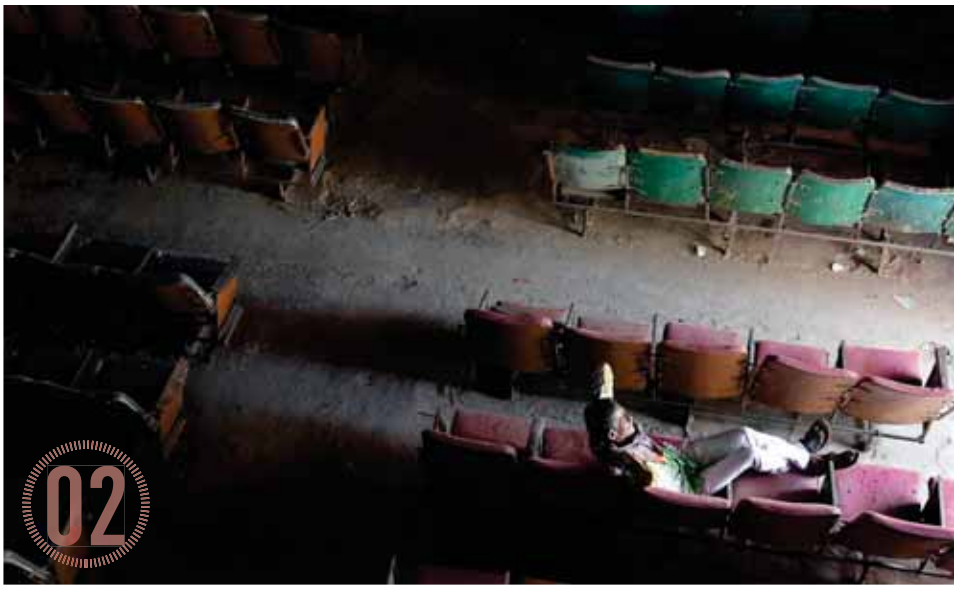


Let the popcorn flow

IN A FILM-CRAZY country like India, the shutting down of theatres was almost as disastrous as the pandemic itself. The OTT platforms tried to fill the gap, but nothing can replace the experience of seeing Tiger Shroff's deadly dance moves or Rajinikanth's death-defying stunts—up, close and personal. That is why the cinema halls re-opening on October 15 was met with much hip-hip-hurrahs. Even without any big ticket releases, cinephiles still have a delectable spread to feast on, including the Ishaan Khatter-Ananya Panday starrer, *Khaali Peeli*, and *Kedarnath,* which will be re-releasing in memory of Sushant Singh Rajput. Before the action begins on screen, we bring you the action that happened behind the scenes!











01 Cleaning in progress at the famous Basusree cinema hall in Kolkata, where *Pather Panchali* was shown

PHOTO BY SALIL BERA

02 A worker lounges in the deserted Balaji Saravana theatre in Chennai

03 A projector being cleaned at the Sri Radhakrishna theatre in Bengaluru

PHOTO BY BHANU PRAKASH CHANDRA

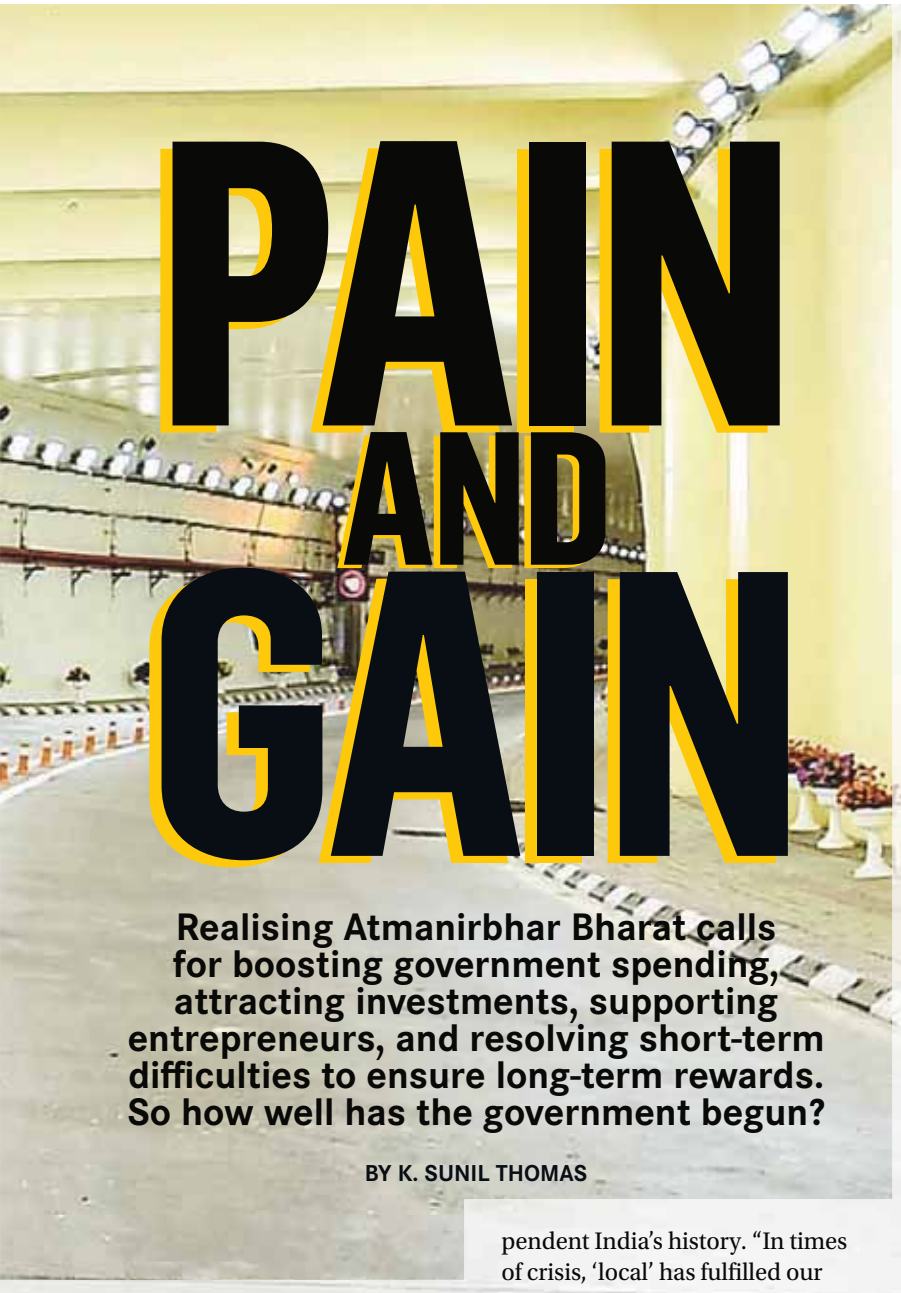
04 The popcorn counter at Delhi's Delite Diamond is ready for business

PHOTO BY ARVIND JAIN



AFP

MAN WITH A PLAN
Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the Atal tunnel in Himachal Pradesh. He wants to reduce India's reliance on Chinese imports and make it a manufacturing alternative to China



PAIN AND GAIN

Realising Atmanirbhar Bharat calls for boosting government spending, attracting investments, supporting entrepreneurs, and resolving short-term difficulties to ensure long-term rewards. So how well has the government begun?

BY K. SUNIL THOMAS

Eshah Panthah. Or roughly, 'That is his only way forward,' in Sanskrit.

Addressing the nation on May 12, Prime Minister Narendra Modi used the obscure words to announce what would be the guiding principle of India's post-Covid recovery—Atmanirbhar Bharat.

"The state of the world today teaches us that making India self-reliant is the only path," said Modi, announcing an economic package of ₹20 lakh crore, the biggest in independent India's history. "In times of crisis, 'local' has fulfilled our demand; local has saved us. Local is not just the need, it is our responsibility, too."

After Modi's speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman unveiled a slew of measures, ranging from structural reforms and easing of rules to pumping money into the system. The big moves included business loans at concessional rates, debt relief for micro, small and medium industries, allowing farmers to sell directly to private players, completing 'One Nation, One Ration Card' scheme by March 2021, additional funds for creating and guaranteeing rural jobs, opening key sectors like commercial mining to private players, and raising FDI limits in defence and space.

Modi's clarion call for Atmanirbhar Bharat generated paeans from industrialists and analysts, and a viral hashtag, #VocalForLocal. Detractors, however, soon pointed out that this export-oriented swadeshi drive was just the old 'Make in India' wine in a new bottle.

Undaunted, the government has gone into a publicity overdrive—wooing start-ups, conducting an essay contest and an all-India app innovation challenge, publishing Atmanirbhar progress reports of various departments, and so on. Modi himself has been pushing the agenda in virtually every speech.

The biggest push for Atmanirbhar Bharat, however, came inadvertently on June 15, when scores of Indian soldiers died fighting Chinese troops on the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Patriotic outrage over the incident resulted in calls to boycott Chinese products. Hundreds of Chinese apps were banned, including the wildly popular PUBG. Infrastructure deals involving Chinese firms were revoked, and investment and tender-contract barriers were erected tactically to keep China out of the Indian market.

The bad blood between India and China fits in neatly with Modi's twin goals of reducing India's dependence on cheap Chinese imports and making it a manufacturing hub for the world, as an alternative to China. But, fanfare aside, how much of Atmanirbhar Bharat has translated into concrete action on the ground?

It is a mixed bag, really. But then, Atmanirbhar Bharat is hardly a short-distance sprint—it is a race of a lifetime. "The reforms introduced as part of Atmanirbhar Bharat require long gestation periods, and there has to be some level of normalcy before we can determine progress," says Arvind Sharma, partner at the law firm Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas. "Dividends of the reforms would be

reaped over a period of time across various sectors."

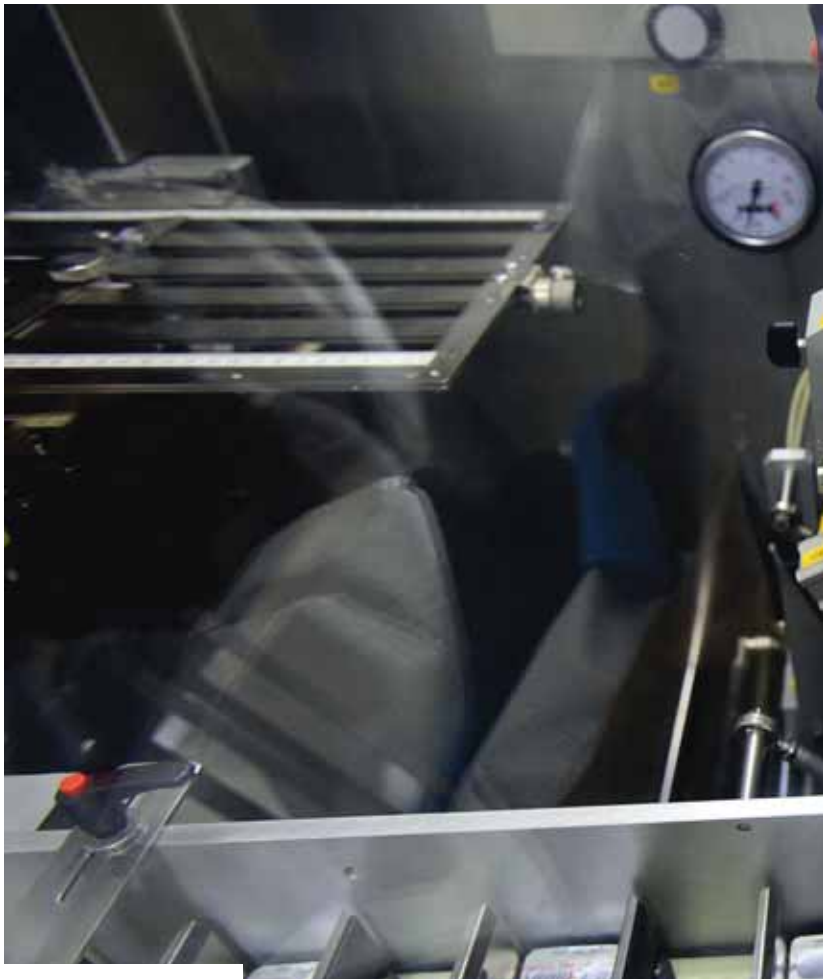
Modi has put a good share of his eggs in the corporate India basket, especially in sectors like electronics, pharma and defence, which are highly dependent on imports. "The world is looking for a reliable partner, and India has reliability and talent," said Modi at the annual summit of the Confederation of Indian Industry in June. "India's industry should take advantage of it. This is a 'rise-to-the-occasion' moment."

It will not be easy for India Inc, though. Indian companies have for long been dependent on cost-effective imports from China—raw materials, components and even finished products in some cases. There are companies, particularly in electronics retail, that sustain themselves by importing Chinese products in bulk and then rebranding and selling them in the domestic market.

In pharma, dependence on Chinese imports is above 80 per cent in many cases, even though some raw materials are available domestically. "In many products, there are alternatives available in India," says Kushal Suri of Morepen Laboratories. "But the way Chinese products became cheaper in due course of time, their production in India has become totally unviable."

The first step for India Inc, therefore, would be to achieve self-sufficiency in sourcing raw materials, or to at least reduce its dependence on China. Jindal Steel, for instance, has promised to cut down its imports from China—from $400 million today to zero in two years.

The second step would be harder, though pivotal. As Modi and his ministers have repeatedly said, self-reliance does not mean shutting out the world; it means attracting the world to do business in India. Except for a few high-profile cases—like Apple's contract manufacturers and German shoe manufacturer Von Wellx moving out of China and setting up shop in Agra—that is still to happen on a large scale. Also, such investments are more likely to go to countries like Vietnam than India.



AP

UNUSED POTENTIAL
Cipla manufacturing unit near Mumbai. There is high dependence on China in pharma despite raw materials being available domestically

"The fight is between India, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Cambodia," Ashish Jain, CEO and director of Von Wellx Germany, told THE WEEK. "The country that will be more aggressive both in terms of government policy and private investment would take the crown from China."

Infrastructure spending will also be significant. The Bharatmala project—which involves building a network of highways that will cost at least ₹10 lakh crore—could be a big decider on the effectiveness of Atmanirbhar Bharat. Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari has modified the tender process to eject Chinese bidders. At a recent industry meet, he proposed public-private partnerships to speed up delayed infrastructure projects. "Highways will increase productivity and open up employment prospects," said Gadkari.

Yet, there are worrying signals from the ground, especially in the disbursement of MSME loans. Bankers burnt by non-performing assets are so worried about being saddled with bad loans again that RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das has had to warn them that "extreme risk aversion can be self-defeating".

Lack of coordination between the Centre and states is also a stumbling



block. BJP-ruled states like Uttar Pradesh and Assam have hit the ground running, while others have stuck to a cautious pace. "Success would depend to a large extent on the level of coordination between Central and state governments to facilitate grounding of investments, and on the ability to institutionalise good practices," said Arindam Guha, leader, government and public services, Deloitte India.

Atmanirbhar Bharat's lasting legacy could well be its boost to entrepreneurship. "It will go a long way in benefiting the Indian economy," said Sharma. "The reforms are intended to ensure inclusive growth for various economic groups and regions. It will result in jobs and export opportunities."

The lockdown churn in the jobs sector has prompted young professionals to innovate and become entrepreneurs. "We have witnessed a massive spurt in queries from young entrepreneurs who want to be upskilled," said Divya Jain, founder of the placement platform SafeJob.

According to Apoorva Ranjan Sharma, managing director of the venture capital firm 9Unicorns, the youth are embracing the self-reliance mantra. "Many youngsters in smaller towns have taken their maiden step to become self-reliant by starting their own businesses after losing jobs in the last few months," he said. "We see this to be a bigger success than all other such initiatives in the past."

UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

80%

The dependence on Chinese imports in pharma, in many cases

90%

Reported dependence in the case of certain life-saving antibiotics

JBM GROUP: Committed to Build an Atmanirbhar Bharat

*The father-son duo, **Shri S.K. Arya, Chairman** and **Shri Nishant Arya, Executive Director, JBM Group,** are an outstanding synergy of entrepreneurial vision and tech driven millennial aspirations. Together, they have built JBM, a global conglomerate having diversified business verticals of Auto Components & Systems, Buses & Electric Vehicles, EV Charging Infrastructure, EV Aggregates, Renewable Energy, Environment Management, Railways and Artificial Intelligence. All these businesses of the Group are linked to the socio-economic growth of the Nation supporting the **Hon'ble PM Shri Narendra Modi's 'Skill India' initiative, 'Make in India'** mission and call for **'Vocal for Local'** to realise his Atmanirbhar vision for a new India.*



JBM ECO-LIFE ZERO EMISSION 100% ELECTRIC BUS

How does JBM envisage itself in a defining role to realise PM Modi's vision of an Aatmanirbhar Bharat?

As a group, JBM is a '35-year-young' business entity established in 1983 having interest in diverse business portfolios with over 45 state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities across 20 locations in India. We cover and address the entire gamut of surface transport or mobility ranging from the ubiquitous two-wheeler to even the high-end railway. Having generated a very high employment opportunity for over 30,000 people, this massive manpower strength stands tall in integrity and values while delivering its products & services across the wide spectrum of stakeholders. JBM is actively focussing towards building sustainable solutions indigenously, thereby, aligning itself with the government's vision of making India self-reliant.

How is JBM's business strategies aligned to the 'Make in India' vision?

Technology, Innovative business models and People i.e., TIP is what JBM focuses on as an organization for achieving 'Make in India' mission target. In reality, it is a conducive environment that promotes sustainability and scalability where People are driving Innovative business models using the right Technology. JBM businesses are propelled by this basic premise to contribute towards the nation's big dream- 'Make in India' and more importantly 'Make for India'.

How are you working towards achieving sustainability and scalability?

If comfort, safety and affordability of JBM products were to come for a price, we would fail in our purpose to address the needs of the common man. Therefore, the technology or innovative business models are being used in a manner that optimum benefit reaches the common man. This has led to JBM adopting an ecosystem approach which is being amplified by venturing into renewable energy and shifting focus to sustainability and scalability. In fact, scalability is achievable only when an organization is working on sustainable business models failing which the strategy will eventually collapse. Therefore, at any point of time it must be borne in mind that the success of a business is driven through the growth of the society and the Nation, at large.

Can you please tell us about products and solutions that you have developed in the electric vehicles segment?

Our Buses & EV division is perfectly aligned with the Make in India mission, a precursor to Atmanirbhar Bharat vision. At JBM we have curated the 'Well-to-Wheel' concept that aids towards building this ecosystem as an end to end solution. We manufacture 100% Electric buses in India and to support the running of these buses, we provide EV charging stations as well. Our renewable energy division caters to setting up solar power plants for generation of green energy that is, in turn, supplied to the EV chargers. In a nutshell, we have entire range of in-house solutions right from green energy generation to energy consumption. India is well poised to become a key player in the EV space considering the size of our market. We have already deployed our EV solutions across various locations in India, starting with Navi Mumbai where JBM has supplied 30 ECO-LIFE 100% electric buses. ECO-LIFE, a Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) saves around 1,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide and 350,000 litres of diesel over 10 years of its operations.

India aims to achieve a total installed solar capacity of 20 GW by 2022. Since JBM has ventured into the solar energy sector, what progress have you made?

For the past three years JBM has been focusing on ways to propel EV and solar energy by building a very sustainable model and to


JBM's STATE OF THE ART MANUFACTURING FACILITY

scale it up across the country as also to other parts of the world. JBM again works around three things - Comfort, Safety and Affordability (CAS) that again brings our attention to how individuals are able to use that product, servicing, solutions and experiences. Strict adherence is maintained to achieve CAS.

JBM entered into renewables for sustainability with two solar energy business models. One directly feeds the grid at different locations, where large-scale ground-mounted projects supply power for industrial, commercial, agricultural use etc. JBM has already started switching to renewable energy to power its various manufacturing facilities. Besides, several iconic buildings of the country such as the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi, Lucknow Railway station and many more are being powered entirely by JBM solar power. Among the various solar projects already operational, one of our largest solar projects in India with a power generation capacity of 135 MW spanning over 600 acres of land is in Maharashtra. We have also executed the largest project in the state of Haryana with a power capacity of 20MW. Similarly, JBM has such multiple solar projects in its pipeline.

'Skilling India' is closely linked to economic development. How is JBM contributing to the initiative?

JBM is setting up multiple skill development centres having accreditation from various central ministries. The Group, rated as one having the best skill development centres at different forums is enrolling thousands of people every year at three of its centres across the country i.e., Faridabad, Ahmedabad and Chennai. JBM intends to go pan India very soon by setting up self-sufficient centres in multiple states. Skilling is integral for maintaining the value chain for the success of this kind of ventures. Government recognised certified course ranging from one month to three years include both classroom training i.e., theoretical and real time training at mechanical shops where the trainees are trained for initial understanding and thereafter sent for on the job training. Candidates come from as far as Chhattisgarh and the Northeast who are trained and employed either in-house or in other companies. In the last 3-4 years, JBM has trained more than 10,000 candidates. JBM's work culture and objectives are clearly aligned to Atmanibhar Bharat Vision and supports the spirit of 'Vocal for local'.

How does JBM Waste-to-Energy (WTE) interlinked with the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan?

Through JBM's Municipal Solid Waste/ WTE, we are trying to explore at a basic level how government's initiative 'Swachh Bharat' is being looked at in the society and where we can provide technology and invest our resources. As an organization, we were among the pioneers in India to do so and our MSW experience started in Chennai and Ambattur in Tamil Nadu. JBM has been carrying out WTE operations across multiple cities in Haryana such as Sonipat, Panipat, Gannaur and Samalkha among others.

What is JBM doing in areas like AI and Digital Manufacturing?

AI is the norm today that not only simplifies the processes and systems but also enhances productivity and quality multifold. Keeping with our vision of incorporating and upgrading our processes and systems with latest technology, graduating to Artificial Intelligence and Digital Manufacturing is like a natural progression for us. AI will also aid in channelizing the manpower towards value added jobs rather than repetitive and routine tasks. Our BI and MI tools and other processes are done through AI with real time data and analytics.

India is being looked at as the next manufacturing destination from global companies. Your views?

The bilateral ties between India and Japan, Korea, and the USA will certainly have a long-term positive impact in this regard. Japan has already announced a $2billion investment package for companies to move out of China. The Make in India programme is sure to gain increased momentum with the inflow of foreign companies, thereby, strengthening the manufacturing capabilities inhouse and India well-positioned in becoming the contract manufacturer for the world. The government can come up with new tax brackets to promote new companies to invest in India in sectors such as automobiles, textiles, high-tech manufacturing, EVs, etc.


SHRI S.K. ARYA, CHAIRMAN & SHRI NISHANT ARYA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JBM GROUP



DEFENCE

Locked and loaded

With a well-defined policy and funding commitment in place, the defence industry in India is primed to deliver

BY PRADIP R. SAGAR

On a webinar organised by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry on August 27, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spelt out how the government wanted to make India's defence industry self-reliant. "Our resolve for Atmanirbhar Bharat is not inward-looking," he said. "It is to make India capable and to boost global peace and economy."

India has the third largest annual defence budget ($70 billion in 2020), behind USA ($732 billion) and China ($261 billion). It imports 9.2 per cent of global arms, second only to Saudi Arabia. As much as 30 per cent of India's defence budget is spent on capital acquisitions—90 per cent of them are imports.

In May, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who held the defence portfolio earlier, raised the automatic-route limit for FDI in the sector to 74 per cent from 49 per cent, allowing foreign players to own a controlling stake in joint ventures with Indian companies. Several other measures were announced to boost domestic production.

Under the 'Make in India' initiative, the government had been trying to increase domestic defence manufacturing and create jobs. The renewed impetus under Atmanirbhar Bharat is aimed at reducing dependence on imported military hardware. To give priority to indigenous items, necessary changes have been made in the defence procurement policy, the guiding document for military procurement.

The government's thrust is evident from the two proposed defence industrial corridors—in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh—and the launch of the Innovations for Defence Excellence, an initiative to boost technology development. A defence planning committee headed by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, with the three service chiefs and the secretaries of defence and expenditure as members, was constituted to speed up modernisation of the armed forces.

The defence ministry has bifurcated the procurement budget into two: domestic purchases and foreign procurements. An import embargo has been laid on as many as 101 items—including artillery guns, light military transport aircraft and conventional submarines—worth almost ₹1.3 lakh crore for the Army and ₹1.4 lakh crore for the Navy. Under Atmanirbhar Bharat, the domestic industry will get contracts worth ₹4 lakh crore in seven years.

The Defence Research and Development Organisation has come out with a list of 108 systems and subsystems—including unmanned aerial vehicles, mobile decontamination units and marine rocket launchers—that it wants locally designed and manufactured. It has earmarked ₹100 crore to help the private sector, especially the nearly 6,000 micro, small and medium enterprises that supply products and components to defence behemoths. "This will help DRDO focus on more advanced technologies," said DRDO chief Satheesh Reddy. "The industry will be a partner right from the beginning of all our projects."



ARVIND JAIN

PROMOTING LOCAL
Defence Expo 2020. India has imposed an import embargo on 101 items, including artillery guns

WHY GO INDIGENOUS?

30%
Portion of India's defence budget spent on capital acquisitions

90%
Share of imports in capital acquisitions

According to Laxman Behra, research fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, the government has simplified policies for private players. "In the next few years, the government will reap the benefit of these policy reforms," he said. "Efforts are on to provide a level playing field to private players."

With a well-defined policy and funding commitment in place, the focus is now on the acquisition process and the procedures to ensure ease of doing business. "The four waves of business process restructuring between 2018 and 2019 and the new draft defence acquisition process (DAP 2020) have focused on extensive involvement of the industry in its formulation," said Jayant Damodar Patil, defence head, Larsen and Toubro. "[It] addresses all generic issues faced by the industry."

Private players had built infrastructure, capability and capacity over the past few years. L&T, for instance, invested in establishing seven state-of-the-art centres for making weapon and armoured systems, warships and submarines, and missile, aerospace and military communication systems. The next logical step for the government, said Patil, is to expedite placement of orders.

"Programmes worth more than ₹4.1 lakh crore have already been granted acceptance of necessity (AON) by the defence ministry," he said. "All that is needed is initiating issuance of RFPs (request for proposals) against the AONs, reviewing their progress periodically, and awarding [contracts] in a time-bound manner."

Granting a level playing field for both public- and private-sector units would be crucial. The defence sector was first opened to private players in 2001, and each subsequent edition of the defence procurement procedure had added provisions to boost the domestic industry. But the complex policies and processes dampened enthusiasm.

The Atmanirbhar drive is expected to finally set things right. "Private players feel that there is still a continued bias towards public-sector undertakings," Lt Gen (retd) Subroto Saha, member of the national security advisory board under the Prime Minister's Office, told THE WEEK. "The prime minister's initiative strives to bridge this gap in indigenisation and self-reliance with greater private-sector participation."

DYNAMIC DRDO

A look at what the Defence Research and Development Organisation has accomplished in the past few weeks

Shaurya

Nuclear capable surface-to-surface missile. An advanced version with a range of around 1,000km was tested on Oct 3. Soon to be inducted into the Strategic Forces Command, which handles the nuclear arsenal for the three services

SMART

Anti-submarine torpedo release system. SMART (supersonic missile assisted release of torpedo) was tested on Oct 5. Using it, a torpedo with a range of 10km can be carried up to 1,000km by a hypersonic missile before being launched



BrahMos ER (extended range)

Surface-to-surface cruise missile. The ER version with a range of 400km, up from 290km, was tested on Sept 30. BrahMos, developed jointly by India and Russia and first tested in 2001, is capable of striking ships and targets on land. The land cruise missile can hit Mach 2.8 (2.8 times the speed of sound)

Rudram

New-generation anti-radiation missile (designed to detect and home in on a radio emission source, typically radar). Tested on Oct 9. It has inertial navigation (internal instruments measure acceleration and position with stored data), GPS and passive homing (enabling it to find and hit a radar installation even if it stops transmitting)

HSTDV

With HSTDV (hypersonic technology demonstrator vehicle), India joins an elite group of countries—the US, Russia and China—who possess this technology. It has a range of uses, including in development of air defence missiles of the future, surveillance and reconnaissance, and in the development of energy efficient, low cost, reusable satellite launch vehicles

ATG missile

Laser-guided anti-tank guided missile was test-fired from battle tank Arjun. It can destroy armoured vehicles from a distance of 3km. ATGMs use different guidance systems like laser, cameras and even wire. DRDO scientists claim some of these are flexible enough to be used from aircraft, land vehicles and by the infantry

Rustom II

Medium-altitude long endurance drone. The indigenous prototype achieved eight hours of flight at 16,000ft. DRDO scientists are trying to achieve a height of 26,000ft and endurance of 18 hours by the end of 2020. India is trying to get Rustom II to match the specifications of Israel's Heron, which is being used by the Air Force and Navy

GRAPHICS **SREEMANIKANDAN S.**\RESEARCH **PRADIP R. SAGAR**



PTI

INTERVIEW

Air Chief Marshal Rakesh Kumar Singh Bhadauria,
chief of the air staff

Our requirements provide huge opportunity for domestic industry

BY PRADIP R. SAGAR

Air Chief Marshal Rakesh Kumar Singh Bhadauria led the team that negotiated the purchase of 36 Rafale jets from France, but he is a strong supporter of the Make in India programme. He played a major role in the development of the indigenously-made light combat aircraft Tejas. In an exclusive interview, Bhadauria explained why being self-reliant is the only long-term solution to ensure India's security. Excerpts:

Q/ How is the Air Force preparing to become self-reliant through the Atmanirbhar Bharat mission?

A/ The vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat finds innate resonance with the planning process in the Indian Air Force. The IAF has had indigenously designed aircraft such as HT-2 and HF-24, and versions of Kiran and the [Tejas] MK1. Among indigenously manufactured aircraft are the Gnat, MiG-21, MiG-27, Jaguar, Avro (HS-748), Chetak, Cheetah, Dornier 228, Hawk and Su-30. [Also, the domestic industry has] upgraded MiG-21, MiG-27, MiG-29, Mirage, Jaguar, Dornier 228, An-32 and Mi-17.

Q/ How self-reliant is the IAF in air-defence systems?

A/ All our current inductions in the ecosystem of ground-operated radars are either indigenously designed or made by Bharat Electronics Ltd. Among airborne radars, we have already inducted the AEW&C (airborne early warning and control system). We have also inducted indigenous missile systems and locally manufactured early-warning suites for our fighter fleet. Certain critical operation support systems such as the integrated air command and control system (IACCS), the air force network (AFNet) and integrated materials management online system (IMMOLS) are completely home-grown.

Q/ Which are the future air assets—like fighter jets, transport planes, helicopters and trainer jets—that can be made indigenously?

A/ The indigenous projects that we wholeheartedly support include the advanced light helicopter, Tejas MK1A and its future upgrades, light combat helicopters, and the HTT-40 trainer jet. In medium- to long-term, we have placed our trust in the fifth-generation advanced medium combat aircraft project. The Avro replacement project, which will be under Make in India, has the potential for orders from the civil sector as well. Overall, our requirements provide a huge opportunity for the domestic aviation industry to evolve rapidly.

Q/ What is the scope of the Atmanirbhar Bharat mission in the IAF?

A/ [The Air Force wants] the domestic industry to develop niche technologies specific to military aviation. This is indeed a golden period of opportunity for all stakeholders in the Indian aviation industry. We must remember that in the long run, a strong, indigenous and self-reliant defence ecosystem is the only counter to the technology, weapons and platforms that our adversaries have or will have.

Q/ Is being self-reliant the only solution to future wars?

A/ India's wars—today or in the future—will have to be fought by us alone. *Atmanirbharta* is the only long-term solution.

AGRICULTURE

Seeds of change

The recent agriculture reforms could well make India's farm sector self-reliant

BY PRATUL SHARMA



The most radical of Atmanirbhar Bharat measures has been the recent agriculture reforms. Braving protests in and outside Parliament, the government pushed through three bills meant to dismantle the old, restrictive structures that cover much of India's farm sector. Oddly, though, farmers themselves have been at the forefront of the anti-reform agitations, and especially so in Punjab and Haryana.

Of the three new laws, the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act is the most contentious. It allows farmers to sell their produce to anyone or anywhere, bypassing mandis run by the legally mandated agriculture produce market committees (APMCs). The government says the law will set farmers free, increase their income, and promote competition.

But opposition parties, including the Shiromani Akali Dal which recently broke off its alliance with the BJP, allege that the reforms will weaken the APMC system, which guarantees farmers minimum support price for their produce. They say it would result in corporates exploiting farmers.

The BJP has accused the opposition of spreading misinformation and launched a drive to "educate" farmers. "Why would a farmer sell outside the mandi if he is not getting a higher price? The agitation is politically motivated," said Agriculture Minister Narendra Tomar.

The government says the three laws—the other two being the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Prices Assurance and Farm Services Act, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act—have opened the sector to investments and technology interventions. "These laws have a certain historic value, and they would be in favour of the farmers," said Sanjay Borkar, CEO and cofounder of FarmERP, a tech platform that assists farmers through pre-sowing, harvesting and selling stages. "It is now very difficult for an individual to buy produce directly from farmers. Farmers also have to go through the arduous process of going to the mandis and finding the right buyer. They usually enlist the help of commission agents for the end sale, which narrows down the field for [independent] players. Post these reforms, farmers will have direct access to buyers."

There are more than 500 agri-tech startups in the country; the government hopes for 1,000 more in the next few years. They can link farmers to markets, consumers and technology, and provide help in selling or processing produce. "We aim at bringing two million stakeholders to our platform by the end of 2021," said Borkar.

From increasing productivity, the emphasis has shifted to ensuring profitability. The protection and price assurance law provides a legal basis for contract farming. Small, struggling farmers can now enter into agreements with companies or lease out land for cultivation. Similarly, the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act has eased controls on storage of agriculture produce. This, and an agriculture infrastructure fund of ₹1 lakh crore, will help create facilities where farmers can store or sell their produce at competitive prices.

Currently, only 6 per cent of farmers in the country sell their produce to government-mandated procurement agencies. But there is much anxiety among them about whether the reforms would prevent the government from continuing to offer minimum support prices in APMC mandis, where the government is the major buyer.



AFP

REAPING PROFITS
Labourers at a wholesale grain market in Amritsar

They fear that if the government stopped supporting prices, the mandi system would weaken and market forces would drive prices below MSP.

"The government says farmers will get a price higher than the MSP outside the mandis; if so, why not give MSP a legal basis?" asked Devinder Sharma, an expert in food and trade policy. "The government should bring a fourth law that guarantees that the farmer will get MSP even if the crop is sold outside mandis."

Agriculture has largely withstood the lockdown distress. The past few months have seen record yields and procurement of wheat, paddy and pulses. Maintenance of buffer stock of pulses has resulted in a 74-times increase in procurement during 2016-17 to 2020-21 over the 2009-10 to 2013-14 period. This has been attributed to the government setting MSP as 1.5 times the cost of production.

The Food Corporation of India has also increased paddy procurement to allay farmer fears. "Maximum procurement has happened in Punjab, where 7.82 lakh metric tonnes of paddy has been procured from farmers through the APMC system, as against 24,452MT procured last year," said FCI chairman D.V. Prasad. "The pace of procurement as well as the enthusiasm of farmers in selling stocks to FCI in Punjab and Haryana put to rest any misgivings they have had regarding the continuation of MSP after the introduction of the new farm acts."

India, however, is yet to become *atmanirbhar* in edible vegetable oils, pulses, fresh fruits, raw cashew nuts, raw sugar, raw cotton and spices, which together constitute nearly 84 per cent of agri imports. On the other hand, agri exports in April to September this year increased by 43.4 per cent to ₹53,626 crore, up from ₹37,397 crore in the same period last year.

"The way forward for the sector is through increasing the income of farmers, so that they are not forced to move out of rural areas," says Sharma. "[During lockdown] 80 million 'agriculture refugees' returned to their native places in a reverse migration. Second, the government should pump in investments in the sector to make it a major driver of the economy."

INNOVATORS' INFUSION

500
Agritech startups in India

1,000
New agritech startups expected in the next few years

nafed
A Farmers' Cooperative

BOOSTING AGRI SECTOR STRATEGICALLY

The spotlight was on the dynamic Dr Sanjeev Kumar Chadha, MD, NAFED when Covid-19 pandemic struck. He deftly mobilized mammoth resources of man, machine and material overcoming extremely challenging situations to feed the country's teeming populace under lockdown. This was made possible because of Dr Chadha's farmer-centric and market savvy initiatives that transformed NAFED into a profit- making entity. As a result, in the year 2019-2020, NAFED achieved an unprecedented turnover of around Rs.15043.80 Crores with net profit of Rs.165.35 Crore. In a chat with THE WEEK, Dr Chadha shares his vision on creating avenues for rapid expansion of NAFED's portfolio that reflects an impressive list of new clients.

Q.1.: What were the measures taken by NAFED to ensure food for all during the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic?

It is a matter of pride for me that NAFED was functioning 24/7 during the COVID 19 pandemic and lockdown. Food being an essential commodity was exempted from lockdown restrictions. NAFED carried out record procurement operations for Rabi oilseeds and wheat, and simultaneously supplied milled pulses to all states and union territories for distribution to the poor under the PMGKAY scheme. Under the PMGKAY, the states require 1.95 lakh MT per month of their preferred pulse. NAFED has so far supplied a total quantity of



11.30 lakh MT to ensure that the poor get uninterrupted supply of this nutritive food during the pandemic. The supplies shall be continued till November as per orders of the Government. Apart from this, NAFED also supplied 38,000 MT of gram to the migrants. Despite the challenges, we completed the first three months' target of supplies well before time. Also, the Centre's approval for creation of a buffer stock of upto 20 lakh MT of pulses led to record procurement of oilseeds, pulses and food grains under PSS, the highest ever in the history of NAFED. The benefit percolated to both, farmers and consumers.

Q.2.: How do you envisage NAFED strengthening the value chain of FPOs and essay its prominent role in FIFA to benefit all stakeholders?

In February 2020, a dedicated central scheme was announced for formation of 10,000 new FPOs in 5 years period for adequate hand holding and professional support to develop an economically sustainable ecosystem for FPOs. NAFED was nominated as the 4th National Implementing Agency in addition to SFAC, NABARD and NCDC for the creation of the proposed FPOs.

NAFED recently took over the Federation of Indian FPOs and Aggregators (FIFA) for supporting the Cooperative Societies and FPCs by linking them directly to the value chain

system for sale of their agricultural produce as well as supply of agricultural inputs. Presently, more than 3.5 lakh farmers are associated with FIFA which in partnership with MAHAFPC inaugurated the first NAFED e-Kisan Mandi at Gultekadi, Pune on 3rd September, 2020 that would benefit 1.50 lakh farmers of 300 FPOs in the state of Maharashtra. This is the first e-Mandi initiative launched after the new Agricultural Ordinances passed by the Government. More such e-Kisan mandis would be opened in other parts of Maharashtra and states like Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Haryana, Gujarat and Jharkhand.

The NAFED e-kisan mandies (NeKM) would be equipped with infrastructure like electronic auction, product display, retail counter, drying, cleaning, grading, packaging, warehousing and cold storage facilities for its member farmers, agri-producers, traders and small buyers bringing them on a common platform for trading agricultural commodities. The members and users will have to be registered on the (NeKM), enabling direct online purchases from farmers that would fetch better prices for the cultivators. The e-platform model would do away with intermediaries and reduce logistical, handling and storage costs.

Q.3.: How do you see the recent Kisan Bill 2020 benefitting the agricultural community, its impact on MSP and the nation's food security?

The Centre in a bold move has recently passed three Bills — the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill and Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill. I believe that the new legislations will improve efficiency in the existing system transforming the agri sector and raise farmers' income by liberalizing the farm sector that would eventually make Indian farming a more remunerative enterprise than it is right now.

This would enable farmers and traders to sell and purchase products outside APMC 'mandis' fetching the them a better price, encourage intra-state trade and reduce transportation costs. The farmers can now engage with agri-business companies, exporters and retailers for services and sale of produce while getting access to modern technology. Small and marginal farmers will be greatly benefitted. The removal of items such as cereals and pulses from the list of essential commodities to attract FDI, is a good step.

Q.4.: What are the new initiatives of NAFED for home consumption and exports?

NAFED is setting up Bio CNG plants across the country from agri waste in partnership with IOC, a technology partner, municipal corporations and other organizations in various states. For our organic farming projects, we are collaborating with private partners. Our focus is also on creating a niche for pulses and millets cultivation and sale of products in the market. In a first-of- its-kind initiative, NAFED has setup an all women FPO with 25,000 members in Ghumla, Jharkhand. Soon, FPO mandis run only by women would be a reality.

Q.5.: In what role does NAFED see itself in fulfilling the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri. Narendra Modi's vision for an Atmanirbhar Bharat'?

Through its procurement operations of oilseeds, pulses, foodgrains etc., NAFED is providing remunerative prices to farmers for their produce and making its contribution for achieving the Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision for creating Atmanirbhar Bharat. Infact, we are the biggest importer, consumer and producer of pulses in the world. NAFED's procurement of pulses at MSP for the national buffer stock is benefitting the farmers and the consumers. For the first time during the crop year 2016-17, India produced 25 million tonnes of pulses almost touching the self-sufficiency level, thereby, reducing the dependence on imports and the huge burden on the exchequer. Presently, the production has risen sharply touching the range of 23 to 25 million MT. Similar initiatives for oilseeds is boosting its domestic production, bridging the gap between demand and supply.

nafed
A Farmers' Cooperative



FEEDING THE NATION

National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India limited (NAFED), is one of the largest procurement as well as marketing agencies for agriculture commodities in India, besides promoting the welfare of farmers and safeguarding the interests of the consumers as well. Recently, the organization was in the limelight for its relentless efforts that ensured the much-needed food security for the nation during distressing times of the Covid-19 pandemic. NAFED has magnanimously donated Rs.5 Crore to PM Cares Fund and is also taking forward the Hon'ble PM Narendra Modi's vision to double farmer's income and enhance agricultural infrastructure through various farmer friendly and sectoral schemes.

NAFED HIGHLIGHTS

An outstanding example of a 360-degree turnaround from a loss-making cooperative into a profitable entity, NAFED is proactively taking forward the food security of the nation to feed a staggering 130 Crore population, the second largest in the world.

NAFED, through its strong interface with farmers of the country in Pulses and Oilseeds Sector, has a prominent role in reportedly providing for 1/3rd of India's population, who are basically vegetarians, to get their protein needs from pluses. Besides, pulses and pulse



crop residues are also major sources of high-quality livestock feed in the agrarian country. As India is witnessing a continuous burgeoning of the middle class, reciprocally the demand for pulses and other proteins has risen. India is considered as a global granary for pulses and oilseeds. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, India reportedly meets 25 percent of global production, 27 percent of world consumption and 14 percent of imports of pulses in the world.

NAFED was established on 2nd October 1958 with the object to promote co-operative marketing of agricultural produce to benefit the farmers, who are the main members of the cooperative with a voice in matters of their sector on the General Body platform of the country's colossal agricultural body.

AVERTING FOOD CRISIS IN COVID PANDEMIC

One of the most farsighted moves by the NAFED during the pandemic lockdown which brought the nation to a standstill, was increasing procurement of Rabi crops. This averted a farmers' crisis while ensuring sufficient food stock and supply. Speaking about NAFED's pre-emptive role in the wake of Covid-19, the visionary go-getter who changed the image of NAFED into a dynamic one, Shri Sanjeev Kumar Chadha, MD, reportedly said, "We need to act with courage in difficult situations and do our duty. The pandemic in India occurred at a time when the crop was standing and ready for harvest. If NAFED did not take the initiative to purchase stocks of farmers in these circumstances, it would not only have been devastating for the farmers but would also have posed threat to the food security situation in the country." In April, NAFED, acting on the directions of the central government, took on one of the most gigantic tasks of supplying processed upgraded pulses to around 80 Crore people in 36 states across the country so that no one sleeps on an empty stomach.! The relentless effort continues.

NAFED has also been in the forefront fulfilling humanitarian commitment made by the Central government not only in India, but also to developed and under developed countries across the globe. Likewise, when any natural calamity occurs in the country or elsewhere in the world, the Government of India sends emergency relief materials including food grains, which NAFED diligently carries out. This achievement has instilled confidence and trust in the ability of the co-operative and its employees. During Covid, the nodal agency proved its worth once again by rising during the time of a health crisis of global proportions.

BUILDING ON STOCKS

NAFED reportedly benefitted 14.40 lakh farmers during Rabi season 2019-20, by purchasing 14.08 lakh MT of Oilseeds and Pulses valued at Rs. 7,811.95 Crore at 1992 centers across the country. Also, During Rabi season 2020-21 as on 31st August 2020, NAFED is said to have procured 29.62 lakh MT of Oilseeds and Pulses like gram, moong, masoor, mustard seeds and sunflower seeds valuing Rs. 14130 Crore at 3201 centers. Despite the Covid challenge, the cooperative has stepped up its purchases which are in progress in various states while stocks are under distribution to the beneficiaries.

The Government of India took pre-emptive steps to rule out any possibility of food crises or disruption of food supply chain in the face of both, short and long pandemic situations at the crucial time of Rabi harvesting and procurement season. The government gave suitable relaxations during the lockdown for transport of essential commodities and the farm sector that enabled uninterrupted Rabi harvest as well as maintain the food supply chain. This year the country had a bumper wheat production, setting a record, and the entire crop was harvested without any hassle. Private trade has also not impacted. NAFED is procuring oilseeds, pulses and wheat under PSS, the heaviest being in Rajasthan during the lockdown, that surpassed previous year's procurement levels at several centres. Under PMGKY scheme announced by the Hon'ble PM, the cooperative is supplying pulses to all the states for onward distribution to the poor. NAFED is confident of maintaining a steady food supply chain despite the humongous magnitude of the exercise.

NAFED REVAMP AND WAY FORWARD

Driven by a relentless passion to see the Indian agricultural sector, farmers and its stakeholder prosper, the smart working and ingenuity of its MD, Mr Sanjeev Kumar Chadha, who made history by taking on the daunting task of reviving and turning around a gigantic loss- making establishment into a profit-making cooperative and creating a grand new image to match with.

What triggered the turn-around was Mr. Chadha's in-depth study of the NAFED ecosystem, including reasons for its decline along with a detailed SWOT analysis. He implemented with alacrity a three-fold strategy for bringing NAFED back on its feet. This began with aggressive pursuance with the government for allocating a revival package. It was followed by boosting the sagging morale of the employees and lastly launching aggressive business strategies for a building a robust income generation module, which led to the incredible turn-around of NAFED worthy of reference as a case history of revival in business schools. One who believes in making things happen and that too grandly, Mr. Chadha is of the opinion that the happiness and motivation quotient of the employees decides the image of an establishment. The profound change in the working and fiscal turnaround of NAFED has augured well for thousands of its employees and most importantly lakhs of farmers whom the cooperative serves.

As the nodal agency for implementation of short-term price stabilization measures, NAFED has reportedly rolled out the "Operations Greens" launched by the Union government to address price volatility in TOP (Tomato, Onion and Potato) crops. Organic Farming projects allocated to 100 clusters in the states of Uttarakhand and Bihar under PKVY scheme of the centre, NAFED is working on environmental and health-friendly initiative, for which it would soon set up 100 Bio Diesel plants across the country.

Much ground has been covered in the pulses sector to achieve for the first time, near self-sufficiency in pulses production. With the aim to improve farmers' income with increased productivity of dairy sector, NAFED is reportedly implementing the NADCP programme supported by government funding of Rs. 12652 Crores for vaccination of livestock across the country that would eradicate FMD and Brucellosis in the livestock. Also, creation of additional post-harvest infrastructure at point of production is envisaged to improve the shelf-life of produce, prevent distress sale by farmers and generate employment making the rural economy prosperous. NAFED is all geared up to sincerely aim its endeavours at providing remunerative prices to the farmers for their produce that would benefit and raise their living standard.





AMEY MANSABDAR

ON TOP OF THE GAME Even small businesses are now using apps like Paytm

FINTECH

Tap and transfer

UPI is a huge 'Made in India' success story that is ready for export

BY NACHIKET KELKAR

An electrician in Mumbai, Ashok used to queue up at a post office to send money to his family back home in a village in Bihar. Now, he transfers money through an app in his smartphone. Thanks to the unified payments interface (UPI) developed by the National Payments Corporation of India, his relatives can simply walk into a neighbourhood grocery store and withdraw money through an app-based product provided to the merchant by a fintech firm. "UPI has become a very convenient method for sending and receiving money," says Ashok.

The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) began pilot-testing UPI in April 2016. After a slow start, Indians rushed to embrace UPI as the go-to method for financial transactions, from paying bills to buying shares. In August this year, UPI clocked a record 1.5 billion transactions worth ₹2.85 lakh crore.

The pandemic has helped the growth of the platform—thanks to social distancing norms, people have been increasingly shopping online and choosing UPI apps for payment. Since its inception, UPI has raced past credit and debit cards to become the fastest platform to hit one billion transactions a month.

In 2019, UPI transactions surged 188 per cent to touch 10.8 billion, according to the payment service provider Worldline. The transactions were worth ₹18.36 trillion, a three-fold jump over 2018. Debit and credit card transactions, too, grew in the same period, but their combined transaction value was less than ₹14 trillion.

So how does UPI work? It is essentially a digital platform that links a bank account to a smartphone app, allowing the transfer of money between two parties and their bank accounts. Apps such as Google Pay, PhonePe, Paytm and NPCI's own BHIM allow users to send and receive money through a few taps on their smartphones.

Earlier, NEFT (national electronic funds transfer) was the preferred means of account-to-account money transfer. But it used to work only on business days and had a cut-off time of 7pm on weekdays, until it was made available 24x7 on December 16 last year. UPI has no time restrictions; it has always been available 24x7.

"UPI is built for the smartphone generation," said Harshil Mathur, CEO and co-founder of the payments

Swadeshi is our slogan for the future!

*They are committed to bring nature's therapeutic and nutritious benefits as it is to your food bowl through **Nutriorg**. In a conversation with The Week, **Co Founder Mr. Karan Singh Tomar**... Talk about the journey they have embarked on to make a difference in the farming community and propagate healthy eating...*

Q/How did it all start?
A/The nascent journey of Nutriorg began 10 years back with the revolutionary vision of the Founder Directors Myself & Mr. Satish Ragha along with our mentor Mr. Rattan Pal Singh. We visualised of promoting and providing healthy and nutritious products proclaiming that eating right is the cure to all ailments. The humble quest of these pioneers towards organic farming to grow organic food marked the remarkable beginning of Nutriorg. It all started out as a mission to build a generation of health-conscious youth and population. Nutriorg impels the masses to switch to healthy eating habits and lifestyle. Our products all cater to Immunity, detox and overall wellness of the body.

Q/What was your perception behind starting this initiative?
A/Nutriorg has successfully been able to create awareness among the rest of the farmers belonging from different parts of the country with a number of them switching to organic farming methods as a result of this awareness. Nutriorg encourages these farmers by purchasing their produce and abetting them to increase their income thus preventing them from using hazardous chemicals and pesticides which is detrimental for their body and health as well due to direct exposure. The entirety of these efforts is directed towards creating a healthy sustainable future where everybody in the ecosystem is benefited.

Q/What do you want to assert through Nutriorg?
A/This whole revolution is also aimed to procure a sustainable living, encouraging the end consumer and growers to reduce their carbon footprint. Nutriorg in its farms has switched to eco-friendly energy saving methods putting to use drip irrigation, efficient energy consumption by the use of solar energy for the entire project the limelight being on the implementation of optimum eco-friendly packaging.

Q/Tell us what sets apart Nutriorg farms from other farms?
A/Nutriorg farming projects are not only sustainable but create job opportunities in rural areas empowering women and locals making them a part of this revolution. More than 80% of the total workforce in these projects is women. Specifically womens' training and empowerment has been spearheaded by a dedicated department supervised by Ms. Purnima Raghav.

Q/How do you plan to shape the future of this project?
A/Our Mission is very clear to provide high quality products to our valuable customers and give the right price to our farmer friends. We plan to increase our farmer base from 1000 farmers to 10,000 farmers within the next 2-3 years. We strive to give the farmers a fare price for their hard work and produce.

Q/Why do you think that your brand is unique in this segment?
A/The USP of our brand is that we have our own farms, in different parts of Rajasthan from where organic produce is grown involving more and more indigenous labour. We are also working with 10.000 farmers across the country that is growing organic as per our standards. We are an Indian native brand; all our products are made from homegrown produce in our own local farmlands where ethical organic farming methods are practiced with intensive care and supervision.

Q/How positive are you about the 'Vocal for Local' Model and the 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat' Policy put forward by the honorary P.M?
A/India has always been an agrarian country and one of the chief occupations of the country is agriculture. But due to a lot of discrepancies and a lot of 'middlemanship' farmers are losing their jobs and are never fairly paid! This is where we want to intervene and encourage the farmers to adopt purely organic methods of farming as the future is in organic. We are completely for the 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat' Policy and we have been talking about this since a long time. The policy has just added momentum to our actions in this direction.

Q/Why do you think growing and consuming Organic Important?
A/Organic farming is both beneficial for the land as well as the farmer and the most benefitted is the consumer. Commercial Farming tatters the health of the soil and takes away its fertility. We do not believe in exhausting Mother Nature for our own selfish whims we believe in nourishing her fully so that she is content and happy. Since no chemical fertilizers and pesticides neither HYV seeds are used in the organic method of farming even the farmers are not exposed to their harmful effects on their body. Healthy Farmers are happy farmers and that is what we want as they the building blocks of our economy. Organic food is also very nutrient dense giving the consumer the best benefits through their consumption It is time that we should go back to the traditional methods of production to live more sustainably and lead a healthy life. Nature's way is the best way!


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platform Razorpay. "It is also extremely simple for a new user to learn. Costs are low for a merchant; almost free. From that perspective, UPI has a lot of value."

UPI was launched with 21 member banks from public, private and cooperative sectors. Soon the platform was adopted by fintechs like PhonePe. In the past few years, UPI has attracted more banks and global fintech players like Google and Amazon. Last year, Chinese company Xiaomi, India's largest smartphone seller, launched Mi Pay, a UPI-based payment platform.

"UPI is the world's first truly interoperable platform built on mobile-first principles," Hemant Gala, vice president, payments and financial services at PhonePe, told THE WEEK. "It provides a user with the ability to send or receive money instantly across the network. It is a highly safe, secure and convenient way to make payments. And it has made financial inclusion a reality by enabling instant money transfers and merchant payments in even the smallest towns in the country."

UPI's success has been a boost to fintech platforms. In March this year, NPCI allowed payment service providers to offer cash withdrawal facilities in shops. Since UPI allows players to create a user interface on top of the payment layer, an entire ecosystem of fintech startups is thriving.

Take Paynearby, set up by the financial services company Nearby Technologies Private Ltd. It allows neighbourhood retail stores to offer assisted digital financial services like Aadhar-based cash withdrawals, utility bill payments, insurance and mutual funds, and UPI payment services. "When you go to a *kirana* shop to buy grocery, you can withdraw money or just ask for a fixed deposit to be opened on the spot. Banking has got merged in the grocery list now and you don't even need to go to an ATM for it," said Anand Kumar Bajaj, founder and CEO of Paynearby, which clocks more than 10 lakh transactions now.

BharatPe, which focuses on merchants, offers a single QR code, enabling shop owners to accept payments from multiple payment apps. "Banks have completely [distanced] themselves from customer needs. That gap has been filled by fintechs, and that has only been possible with UPI as a layer in between," said Ashneer Grover, co-founder and CEO of BharatPe.

Based on the cashflow generated by merchants using its QR code, PhonePe has begun offering them small-ticket loans. It has tied up with non-banking finance companies to lend more than ₹175 crore.

But how safe is UPI? "It has enough safety factors built in," said Mathur of Razorpay. "For doing a UPI transaction, you need a smartphone. It's your smartphone and your pin. Even from a liability perspective, RBI has a strong set of guidelines to ensure that a customer's money is not lost during a transaction."

Last year, HDFC Bank warned its customers of an app called AnyDesk, which fraudsters were using to gain remote access to smartphones and steal banking credentials. Gala said PhonePe was investing in sophisticated, fraud-detection technology. "We score every transaction in real time for authenticity before allowing the user to authorise the same," he said. "We also invest in real-time analysis of mobile numbers, devices, cards or bank accounts for patterns of abnormal behaviour."

Buoyed by UPI's safety and success, Google wrote in December last year to the US Federal Reserve, asking it to implement a similar, real-time payment platform. "We believe the right model for driving digital payments is through partnership between banks, governments and tech companies; through open and standards-based infrastructure like UPI," said Caesar Sengupta, general manager and vice-president, payments, Google, last year.

NPCI itself has plans to launch UPI abroad. It recently launched its wholly owned subsidiary, NPCI International Payments Ltd, to internationalise RuPay and UPI. "Several countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East have shown interest in replicating our model," said Dilip Asbe, NPCI's managing director and CEO, while launching the subsidiary.

In November last year, NPCI demonstrated a BHIM-enabled, QR code-based payment in Singapore. If made operational, it will allow people who have BHIM app to make payments in Singapore. "There is scope for enhancing global outreach of our payment systems," the RBI recently said, "through active participation and cooperation in international and regional fora, and by collaborating and contributing to standard setting."

FLOURISHING UPI

188%

Surge in UPI transactions in 2019

₹18.36 trillion

Worth of the transactions



*The Week in conversation with **Managing Director Mr. Kunaal Kumar** who talks about promoting local groceries under **Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan** through his family owned venture **Modern Bazaar started in 1971** with a small bakery shop in Delhi's Vasant Vihar to now owing 12 sprawling outlets across Delhi NCR. He has taken the **Modern Bazaar** to new heights.*

Q/Aatmanirbhar Bharat - What's your thought and view about this mission announced by PM Modi in May 2020 and how your Modern Bazaar is supporting the country to become Self Reliant?

A/The Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan announced by Prime Minister Modi is an appeal from him to make India completely self-reliant in all aspects as well as his vision for making the 'local go global'. Given the current situation and the state of the economy, we feel that this is a great initiative that will provide necessary focus on local produce as well as the services sector. It will mean making India an even bigger part of the global economy.

Modern Bazaar has since inception been stocking local products for sale through our stores. While we do stock international products these comprise only about 20-25% of our SKU's and the balance is all locally produced products.

Q/Has anything changed since this mission announced and how Modern Bazaar is keeping the pace between foreign brands and Indian brands in their stores?

A/Modern Bazaar provides support to SME's in the food and grocery business by providing them access to the retail market in the NCR through our 12 stores. There are several local companies that are able to produce items of a very high quality that are comparable to similar international products. It is our firm belief that entrepreneurs in India have the capability to manufacture high quality products but lack the means to access the right market. At Modern Bazaar we are able to provide them with visibility for their products through our stores.

Q/Modern Bazaar - How rediscovering of Local Groceries happened here?

A/In addition to international products there has always been a focus on local products at all our stores as we cater to a very diverse clientele whose needs are being met by us at all times. During the lockdown and COVID-19 times there has again been a rush towards local and basic products as people were stocking food in fear of there being a shortage of food in the short to medium term. It is only through our excellent relationships with the supply chain that we were able to have fully stocked stores and meet customer demand.

Q/How this pandemic have gone through your stores/company; was it a fall or an opportunity to scale up your business (Lessons Learnt or any new Avenues Opened)?

A/All our stores have remained open throughout the pandemic and fully operational to meet the food and grocery needs of our customers. Irrespective of the prevailing situation and the difficulties faced, our shelves have always been full to meet the requirements of customers. It has definitely been an opportunity to scale up our business specifically with regard to online sales. We have a large number new sign-ups on our portal as well as our mobile app. During these difficult times the online delivery business has increased several times and we are confident that this mode of shopping is here to stay. We have also ensured that our stores are completely safe for customers walking into the store to shop for their requirements through proper sanitization and maintaining social distancing etc. as mandated by government protocols.

Q/Way forward for Modern Bazaar.. Are you looking for Pan India expansion?

A/We are always looking at new markets to expand into so as to increase our footprint. Within this financial year we will be opening another 3 stores in key locations in Delhi and Gurgaon. With a solid presence in the National Capital Region and having established ourselves as a recognized brand in peoples minds, it is time to look to other markets initially in North India and then in the West. We are also investing in our online presence as we see that as one of the main sales channels.



ENERGY

Power up

India will have to stick to its clean energy commitment to power itself towards self-sufficiency

BY REKHA DIXIT

Though self-reliance in energy generation is not one of the five pillars of Atmanirbhar Bharat, energy is essential to power it. The mission finds synergy with the government's lofty commitment made five years ago in Paris of bringing new and renewable energy to 40 per cent of the total energy mix in the country by 2030. Given that India is a developing economy with an increasing demand for electricity, it cannot eliminate fossil fuel from the energy equation. While long gestation periods slow down nuclear projects, the new and renewable energy commitment will at least keep the country's carbon footprint from expanding.

The renewable energy sector comprises solar, wind, tidal and biomass. Though wind is the largest source of clean energy, comprising 10 per cent (37.68GW) of the total energy generation of India, solar is now the flagship. At the Paris summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi floated the idea of an International Solar Alliance, which is now the first multilateral organisation to be headquartered in India. The country has also given itself the target of generating 100GW of solar energy by 2022. With 37GW capacity installed and another 25GW under construction, India could reach the target by the deadline, despite the pandemic and economic slowdown.

The issue, however, is about how self-reliant and "clean" this solar energy generation really is. Solar energy is generated from a composite unit called a module, which itself is made of a number of cells. These cells are composed of wafers, made of polysilicon. The focus has been on ramping up the capacity to manufacture cells and modules, the raw material for which is imported largely from China. In 2019, India imported cells, panels and wafers worth $1.5 billion, of which material worth $1.2 billion was from China, says Sanghamitra B. Jayant, senior manager, corporate strategic management wing of Bharat Heavy Electronics Limited (BHEL).

Industry experts feel that the government needs to step in here, and provide variable gap funding (VGF) to boost domestic production of solar plant parts. Their production itself is energy-intensive and requires big investment in R&D. China, with its economies of scale, is able to produce them at costs that Indian



BHANU PRAKASH CHANDRA

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MIND THE WIND
Wind is the largest source of clean energy in India, but the growth in wind energy generation is stagnating

manufacturers simply cannot match under present conditions.

The government certainly has given the boost to solar energy production, with several government enterprises mandating the use of clean energy. Indian Railways, for instance, plans to procure 3GW of solar-generated electricity, and domestic content requirement (DCR) is an important prerequisite. But without giving sufficient boost, the domestic manufacturing remains largely at the assembling stages. The initial parts are still imported.

The other challenge with solar power is that it requires vast acreage, much higher than thermal generation. According to the ministry of new and renewable energy (MNRE), 1.31 lakh acres has been identified for solar parks, of which 82,600 acres have been acquired for developing 50 parks with an aggregate capacity of 40,000MW. However, the government has not focussed as much on rooftop solar generation. As Jayant says, the future has to be rooftop panels, given the limitations of space. Yet, rooftop generation has only reached around 10 per cent of its 40,000MW target for 2022. Elsewhere in the world, rooftop generation is the mainstay of solar production.

Chetan Singh Solanki, IIT Bombay professor and founder of Energy Swaraj Foundation for popularising solar energy generation at domestic levels, notes that small plants are not a priority with the government, given its big target. "It is easier to sanction a 500MW project than to encourage five lakh homes with rooftop panels of 1KW," he said. "Also, the government's claim of having already provided electricity to each home comes in the way of promoting domestic production."

Rooftop generation depends largely on the system of net metering, where the individual gives the power to the grid and adjusts it with the monthly power bill. "In India, the discoms (distribution companies) are still not too savvy with the system. The bureaucratic hassle is huge and therefore is a disincentive," said Solanki. "Worse is the trend of providing free electricity, forget subsidised (power). No competition can withstand a freebie."

India is a newcomer to solar energy generation, with the National Solar Mission coming out only in 2010. Wind energy is a more mature project here, with a presence of over two decades. Yet, according to ministry figures, the growth in wind generation is stagnating—it grew by only 2.07GW last year. Unlike solar, the wind energy sector already has a good Make in India tradition, with leading producers Tamil Nadu and Gujarat already having international players like Denmark-based Vestas manufacturing components, largely towers and plates, in these states.

Wind power generation, too, could do with some more attention. According to the National Institute of Wind Energy, India has an offshore wind energy generation potential of 70GW, as well as an installable capacity of 695GW on land, of which 347GW can be done on cultivable lands.

A little more attention to solar component production and a boost to the wind sector can go a long way in making India's renewable energy production more *atmanirbhar*.

SOLAR DRIVE

1.31 lakh acres
Identified for solar parks. 82,600 acres are for 50 parks

40,000 MW
Aggregate production capacity of the 50 parks

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INTERVIEW

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat,
Jal Shakti minister

Ganga is among the top ten cleanest long rivers in the world



BY REKHA DIXIT

Har Ghar Nal Ka Jal (piped water in every home) is Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship mission in his second term. The new ministry that was formed by merging the ministry of water resources, river development and Ganga rejuvenation with the ministry for drinking water and sanitation, has a telling name—Jal Shakti or water as a force.

India is not deficient in water, however, its distribution across the country is not uniform. Despite the many rivers, agriculture still remains largely dependent on underground water. The water bodies, meanwhile, have gone into distress because of exploitation and pollution.

Under Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, the ministry is handling two big missions—a ₹20,000-crore endeavour to clean up and maintain the Ganga, and providing piped water to every home by 2024. In an interview with THE WEEK, Shekhawat speaks about the progress and the success stories so far. Excerpts:

Q/ Only 17 per cent of rural households gets tap water at home, as of last year. That is a shocking figure.
A/ When Narendra Modi became prime minister in 2014, less than 20 per cent of the population had bank accounts. Sixty crore people defecated in the open. Eight crore households did not have a cooking gas connection. So, is it shocking that in homes where there was no electricity, toilet or gas connection, there was no piped water?

The stunning bit is not the figures of 2014. What made the world sit up and take notice was the speed at which the Modi government has achieved targets with 100 per cent success—look at rural electrification or toilet construction.

Q/ You have a humungous task on hand. Are you confident of meeting the target by 2024?
A/ We have been working hard and in the last year, we have already brought piped water to another 2.24 crore homes (30 per cent coverage), despite the pandemic restrictions. We are providing one lakh connections every day. Goa became the first state with a functional tap in every home. Telangana is almost there with 98.5 per cent coverage. Across the country, already 52,000 villages have piped water in every home. There is still a lot more to be done. Not every state is progressing at the same speed. West Bengal has only 2.4 per cent coverage, Meghalaya 4.22 per cent.



ARVIND JAIN

Q/ What are the challenges?

A/ Sustainability of source [of water] and treatment and disposal of grey water are big challenges. The prime minister is clear that both the quantity and quality of the water supply have to be maintained. We have a commitment of providing 55 litres per capita every day. We have asked states to install sensor-based systems to monitor the two Qs. We are encouraging water testing by establishing and strengthening laboratories so any consumer can get the water tested.

We are also working on ways of treating used water in villages and the reuse of grey water in agriculture, industry if any, or recharging groundwater, so that the sustainability of source is ensured.

Q/ A recent report from the Central Pollution Control Board said that the Ganga's water quality did not improve during lockdown, unlike other rivers.

A/ I think the report has been misinterpreted. Our efforts have borne fruit. After the mission was announced, the ministry organised a rafting expedition from source to the mouth in 2015. We did a similar expedition last winter and the results were visible. One of the best yardsticks of a clean aquatic system is the riverine life it sustains, and we have seen fish, dolphins and other animals return to the river.

Another way of assessing a river is the amount of dissolved oxygen it has. I can say with pride that from the source to Haridwar, there is not even a drop of sewage discharge into the river. All the 4,600 villages along its path have been declared clean villages that have sewage treatment plants.

We took a year and a half to assess the work needed on the Ganga, since previous efforts to clean it were piecemeal and not sustainable. We have undertaken 352 projects [sewage and effluent treatment plants] on a hybrid annuity model, to ensure that the concessionaire runs it for the next 15 years, so that the plants will not be abandoned midway.

The Swedes have ensured that the Danube leaves the country cleaner than when it enters. The Germans have brought back to life the dead Rhine. It took the Germans 29 years and the Swedes 30 years. We are only four years into implementation. Also, our rivers are different. They are living entities. The number of people living on the banks of the Ganga alone rivals the population of Europe. Yet, today, I say with authority that the Ganga is one of the ten cleanest rivers in the world, of its length.

Q/ The country is facing water stress. Two years ago, a NITI Aayog report predicted that urban India would run out of groundwater soon.

A/ I do not want to delve into the report, but in 15 of those 21 cities, groundwater is a minuscule part of total water supply. But yes, there is a challenge, our dependability on groundwater is very high. Twenty per cent of the geographical area in the country is in the 'over exploited' or 'exploited' range for groundwater. This is a concern. The PM launched Atal Bhujal Mission last year, targeting the seven most vulnerable states. We are focussing on the demand side, instead of supply, and working on ways of water use efficacy through participatory water management principles. Since 89 per cent of water used in India is for irrigation, we are working on reducing this requirement through smart and micro-irrigation systems.

Q/ What is the progress on river linking?

A/ We have identified 30 links, and put five of them into the national perspective plan. We are coordinating with states to come on board and develop water-sharing understandings. The Ken-Betwa link is very close to some big announcement soon.

WATER

Life in litres

Proper management of water resources is a must for a self-reliant India

BY REKHA DIXIT

Self-reliance, whether in industry or agriculture, depends on water. "If we run out of water, we can forget any sort of *atmanirbharta*. Water is about survival," noted Mukund Vasudevan, co-chair of FICCI's Water Committee and member of the recently formed CEO Water Alliance (CEWA), a body that works towards finding solutions to reduce the demand for water.

India supports 18 per cent of the world's population on 4 per cent of the world's freshwater supplies. While much of the water dependence is on underground aquifers, more than half the water received through precipitation flows into the sea. Agriculture gulps between 80 to 89 per cent of the total water consumed in the country. Experts note that with a little prudent water management, India is fine for the present. However, unless we plan for the future, we could be staring at a severe water crisis in 20 years.

"Reducing consumption is to everyone's advantage, and the industry is realising that it also reduces costs in the long run to invest in new technology for it," said Vasudevan. Recycling may be second nature to India, but as Saravanan Panneer Selvam of Grundfos India asked, "Are we recycling enough?" The general manager of the pump manufacturer said that industry water can be recycled up to four times with good technology, but most units in the country recycle water through only one cycle. In the fields, too, water consumption can be reduced by investing in smart agriculture and irrigation.

Domain experts point out that the biggest challenge in India, whether in the field, factory or home, is the lack of awareness about water management. Rainwater harvesting remains patchy and there is still no concerted effort at recharging aquifers. The Centre's Atal Bhujal Yojana to target the most critical districts in terms of groundwater depletion is a move in the right direction.

Vasudevan notes there needs to be more private sector involvement. "The government has made a laudable start with the annuity hybrid mode for Namami Gange projects," he said. "The same needs to be extended to other ventures, too."

The other challenge, said Selvam, is that the technology for smart use of water is expensive. The *atmanirbharta* boost might incentivise Indian manufacturing of equipment for water management, but the sector needs more support from the government, he said.

Water is a sector in which *atmanirbharta* itself could generate livelihood, said Poonam Sewak, vice president (knowledge and partnerships), Safe Water Network India. The network has worked with the government to plan the Har Ghar Nal scheme for providing piped water to every rural household. "The small water enterprise market alone has the potential to become a $2 billion industry," said Sewak. "It can generate a whole lot of livelihood, whether it is manufacturing components for water ATMs, running these units or maintaining them."

At the other end, a market in grey water needs to be created. Under Namami Gange, the government has come up with a public-private model of monetising treated water. This industry has great potential, but it requires more R&D.

H_2O INSUFFICIENY

18%

India's share of world population

4%

India's share of the world's freshwater supplies



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IVORY TOWER

SANJAYA BARU



The uncertainty conundrum

The International Monetary Fund was once the bastion of what its critics have dubbed "neo-liberal economics" and the home of what is famously known as the "Washington Consensus"—that free markets, free trade, economic openness, less government and more private enterprise are all good for growth. Covid-19 is upending much of that orthodoxy. The IMF convenes this week for its annual meeting under the leadership of a woman chief born in communist Bulgaria, Kristalina Georgieva, and a chief economist, Gita Gopinath, who briefly advised the communist government of Kerala. Neither of them is a lefty, but neither swear by neo-liberal economics.



Under the watch of these two women leaders the IMF's World Economic Outlook, unveiled in time for the annual meetings of the Fund and the World Bank, makes a case for greater public investment as a way of countering the post-pandemic economic slowdown in developed and developing economies. The WEO suggests that a 1 per cent increase in public investment could trigger a 10 per cent increase in private investment. A third lady in the equation, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, has responded with alacrity announcing a new spending programme aimed at boosting demand in the coming festive season.

A major post-Covid-19 challenge for economic policymakers remains that of dealing with the consequences of uncertainty triggered by the pandemic and the economic slowdown. Households and firms have become risk averse, unsure of future income. While lockdowns are being eased, uncertainty about the likely course of the pandemic continues. The US-based National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) has put out an Economic Policy Uncertainty Index (EPUI), which seeks to measure the incidence of uncertainty in an economy, by gathering data from mainstream media in 26 major economies.

The index measures the frequency with which words like "uncertainty" and "economic policy" occur in the media along with the incidence of news coverage on fiscal, monetary and trade policies. The EPUI team finds a global spike in reporting on economic uncertainty from the early part of 2020, with EPUI increasing from an annual average of 267 in 2019 to 320 in the first eight months of 2020. The NBER study shows how Covid-19 "triggered a massive spike in uncertainty", caused by absence of definitive assessments of the "infectiousness, prevalence and lethality of the virus; availability and deployment of antigen and antibody tests; the capacity of healthcare systems to meet an extraordinary challenge; and how long it would take to develop and deploy safe, effective vaccines". It also draws attention to continued uncertainty about state capacity— managerial and fiscal—to deal with the consequences of the pandemic and the fall in economic activity. There is uncertainty about future incomes, employment prospects, speed of recovery, consumer spending, and saving behaviour and investor sentiment.

Much of current economic activity is based on expectations about the future. If uncertainty has gripped economic agents around the world, that would alter expectations in ways not seen before. After the Second World War there has been no other global phenomenon that has generated so much uncertainty about the future. The oil crisis of the 1970s was one such event but its consequences were managed within a reasonable period of time and the world economy adjusted itself to a regime of higher prices. The Asian and transatlantic financial crises of 1998 and 2008 were addressed before they became truly global. Many countries, including India, have been hesitating to spend more and it appears the IMF nudge has helped Sitharaman move.

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

ILLUSTRATION **BHASKARAN**



NEVER OUT OF IDEAS
Arvind Ltd was the first in the country to introduce anti-viral textile technology; (right) Amul has introduced several innovations during the pandemic, including milk infused with immunity boosters

Antivirus programme

The Gujarati entrepreneurial spirit makes many an opportunity out of the pandemic

BY NANDINI OZA

THE GUJARAT Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation collects milk from some 36 lakh farmers twice a day like clockwork. Any interruption would make around two crore litres of milk go waste. It was a challenge in the months of the lockdown, but GCMMF, which owns the Amul brand, made sure that every cog in the machine worked without any glitch. "There were instructions from the Gujarat chief minister's office that milk procurement had to continue," said R.S. Sodhi, managing director of Amul, headquartered in Anand in central Gujarat. From coordinating with the authorities for permissions to ply tankers to teaching farmers' families hygiene practices to connecting with them regularly on videoconferencing, arranging langars for the people in the supply chain and giving 20 to 30 per cent extra incentive to the labour staff, Amul did it all.

"During the lockdown, private players were not collecting milk. The government asked us to collect milk from non-members as well. We agreed, and as a result 40 to 50 lakh litres more of milk was collected daily," said Sodhi. Collecting milk, however, was only half of the problem, as the lockdown had severely affected the supply chain, and the ice cream sales tanked owing to consumers' concerns about the virus.

Amul wasted no time to shift the supply chain workforce in the ice cream segment to dairy products, and introduce products that instantly created a large customer base. "Normally it takes a long time to introduce a product," said Sodhi. "However, in such a situation, decision-making and action become faster."

While the lockdown had been a period of financial turmoil and layoffs for most businesses, many Gujarati enterprises saw it as an opportunity to keep innovating and use management skills to remain afloat, minimise losses, increase profitability and introduce relevant products. Amul's immunity boosters in milk with turmeric, ginger and basil variants, for instance, turned out to be a major sales driver. The company has been getting large orders from temples for its panchamrit, which is given as prasad. Amul's 10ml single-serve packs of panchamrit contain cow milk, curd, honey, sugar and ghee. "Our creamer plant was idle and we used it for panchamrit. It remains touch-free and can be taken home as prasad," said Sodhi.



About 270km from Anand is Morbi, the heart of India's clock-making industry. It supplies India with about four crore clocks a year. But the lockdown was a severe blow. "We brainstormed and came up with the idea of making electric mosquito killing rackets," said Jaysukh Patel, managing director of Ajanta Oreva Group, India's largest clockmaker. Almost all of India's requirement of three crore mosquito rackets a year is met by imports from China. Patel took the lead and the Morbi Clock Manufacturers' Alliance was formed to manufacture mosquito rackets. The clockmakers had the machines and the raw material were available. "Though the rackets from China are

cheaper because of under-invoicing, we are hopeful that people will give preference to an indigenous product," he said. Ajanta Oreva is manufacturing 8,000 rackets a day and plans are afoot to increase the capacity to 25,000.

While these innovations have been in response to Covid-19, many of them are likely to be around even after the pandemic. "Lifestyles have changed. I do not see the possibility of things returning to pre-Covid days," said Satendra Aggrawal, business head of foods & FMCG and marketing at Adani Wilmar, the second largest player in India in the packaged food segment. The company, which is part of the Ahmedabad-based Adani Group, recently forayed into sanitisers and liquid handwash. Aggrawal said the sanitiser market grew from ₹150 crore in 2019 to ₹500 crore this year. The company expects the liquid handwash segment to grow by 30 to 40 per cent in five years.

Adani Wilmar's mainstay, the edible oil portfolio, is also getting a makeover prompted by the pandemic with immunity booster oils and balanced/mixed oils. Aggrawal said products induced with high proteins were also being fast-tracked, which would include healthy food for children.

Morbi, which is about 60km from Rajkot, accounts for about 90 per cent of India's ceramic production. But the town saw the lockdown forcing some 40,000 of its workforce back to the villages. The cluster, which has small-, medium- and large-scale ceramic units, however, is back to normal now. Nilesh Jetpariya, president of Morbi Ceramics Association, said the companies ensured that the employees came back. "To ensure that the production does not suffer post-lockdown, we started the system of advance payment. About 80 per cent of the business is now on advance payment and people give it willingly," he said.



LOO AND BEHOLD Sanitaryware manufacturer Cera has come up with anti-bacterial toilet seats and rimless western commodes

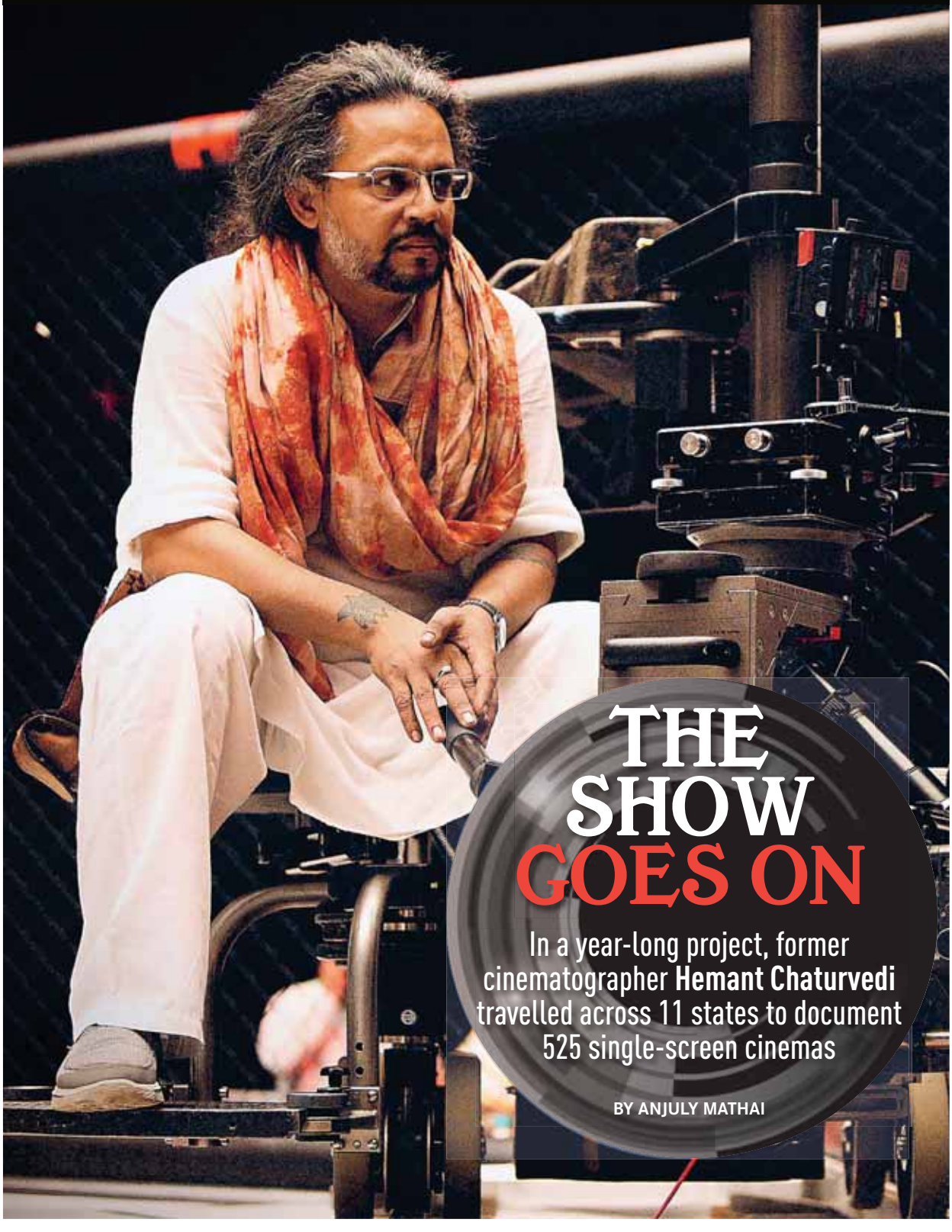
The cluster now has a renewed focus on exports. Jetpariya said the annual exports, which was around ₹12,000 crore, has increased by about 20 per cent and they have started competing in Chinese-dominated markets.

And there have been innovations to cash in on the trends. Sanitaryware manufacturer Cera, for instance, has come up with anti-bacterial toilet seats and rimless western commodes. The company has also introduced touchless, sensor-activated faucets. Atul Sanghvi, executive director and CEO of Cera, said had it not been for the pandemic, the introduction of such products would have been much slower.

Pathik Patwari, honorary secretary of the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said Gujarat grabbed the opportunity and put the existing infrastructure to manufacture products that are in demand. A point in case, he said, was face masks—Gujarat is the largest exporter in India.

Ahmedabad-based Arvind Ltd, one of the largest manufacturers of denim in the world, was hit by the dwindling exports owing to the pandemic. But the company, headed by Sanjay Lalbhai, swiftly started making masks and PPE kits. Punit Lalbhai, executive director, said Arvind and ACT Grants, a non-profit coalition of venture capital funds and startups, have partnered to manufacture 30 million N95 masks in 12 months.

Arvind was the first in the country to introduce anti-viral textile technology under the Intellifabrix brand in partnership with the Swiss company HeiQ Materials AG and Taiwanese speciality chemicals major Jintex Corporation. Garments treated with HeiQ Viroblock inhibit viruses and kill them upon contact, minimising the potential for retransmission of pathogens.



THE SHOW GOES ON

In a year-long project, former cinematographer **Hemant Chaturvedi** travelled across 11 states to document 525 single-screen cinemas

BY ANJULY MATHAI

MAAJID KHAN

Hemant Chaturvedi, 52, who has done the cinematography for films like *Company* (2002), *Maqbool* (2003), *Ishaqzaade* (2012) and *Kurbaan* (2009), remembers seeing his first film as a six-year-old at a single-screen cinema in Assam, where his father, an Air Force officer, was posted at the time. "It was one of those makeshift cinemas where you watched the film sitting on Dalda tins. The I.S. Johar film was about a dog and a rifle. Halfway through the film, the reel got burnt and we returned home. That was the end of that," he says with a laugh, adding that he has always wanted to watch the rest of the film on YouTube but has never gotten around to it.

Over four decades later, Chaturvedi was at the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, which he attends every year. Last year, though, it was a bit "overcooked" because of the political situation in UP, so he decided to take a walk to the Allahabad University. "I get my best therapy when I wander off somewhere with my camera bag," he says. Along the way, he saw a dilapidated single-screen cinema and went inside to take a look. That was a defining moment for him, when the idea of travelling around the country to document such cinemas first took root. He visited two more of them in the city, one showing B-movies with the audience mostly comprising drug addicts and prostitutes "making mischief in the corners".

Since then, he has travelled 28,000 kilometres across the country, as far as Kashmir (where four of the cinemas he visited required special permission as they were located inside Army and CRPF camps) and the Indo-Pakistan border in Punjab. He says his journey so far has been exhilarating. "It was just me driving alone with my camera in my Jeep," he says. "As it was not possible to research these theatres beforehand—not much information about them is available online—you would get an idea of what one looked like only when you parked in front of it." He plans to compile the stories and photographs of the 525 single-screen theatres he visited into a book and a series of exhibitions.





EACH OF THESE CINEMAS IS UNIQUE—IN THEIR ARCHITECTURE, ARTISTIC LEANINGS AND THE ECOSYSTEM AROUND THEM.

Chaturvedi is brimming with stories about his expeditions. Like the time he visited a cinema called Asha Talkies in central Maharashtra and the owner told him about his grandfather who constructed it in the 1940s. He overspent on construction and could afford only one of the two required projectors. This meant that there would be an interval of three to four minutes every time the reels were changed. So the grandfather hired a troupe of Lavani dancers and set up a small stage in front of the screen, with a halogen spotlight and a colourful spinning wheel. When the reels needed to be changed, he would switch on the light. That was the cue for the Lavani dancers to come in and entertain the audiences. Once the reels were changed, he would switch off the light—the cue for them to exit.

Then there was the time Chaturvedi hunted down a theatre called Deval Talkies in Maharashtra. In the projector room, he noticed an old, black-and-white group photograph with the inscription: "Deval's Circus, 1946." Upon inquiring, the owner told him that for over 200 years, his family had been in the business of training wild animals for maharajas, like pet cheetahs to sit next to them on their thrones. In the 1800s, they decided to start a circus. This was the last remaining photograph of the troupe, before the ship in which they were sailing to Africa sank. If you had come a year earlier, the owner told





PHOTOS HEMANT CHATURVEDI

SCREEN TIME
(Clockwise from left) a theatre in Nashik and Rajkot; a projector operator at a single-screen in Gujarat

Chaturvedi, you could have met my great-grandfather. Even though he was blind, if you gave him three balls, he would immediately start juggling them for as long as you asked him to.

Chaturvedi gave up being a Bollywood cinematographer in 2015. The problem, he says, was the content he had to shoot. He could be standing in front of the Northern Lights at just the right moment, with the perfect frame and aperture. And instead of the beauty of the lights, he would have to capture Salman Khan "twitching his boobs" in a song-and-dance sequence. "You need to shoot something that matches your passion," he says. Since then, he has done over 12 projects, including one on cemeteries and another on Hindustani classical music, which were intensely satisfying because they were "purely mine", he says. He travelled, shot and financed them all on his own. "I know I might run out of money sometime," he says. "Then I might have to rethink, but I don't live in that fear. Even if I have to sell something from my home to self-publish my work, I will do it."

According to him, some of these single-screens are disappearing almost overnight. Many theatres have closed down during the lockdown without any plans to restart. "If I had to do a book on multiplexes, I could tell their story through one multiplex, because all of them are identical. But each of these old cinemas is unique—in their architecture, artistic leanings (which reflect the ambition of the owners) and the ecosystem around them, which includes the juice stall owners and the black-market ticket sellers."

The theatre experience, too, was different in those days, he says. In a theatre with a capacity of 1,000 seats, tickets would be sold to 1,500 people. There would be people hanging off the balconies, sitting on each other's laps, spouting dialogues, throwing money at the screens and dancing in the aisles when a song came on. "The belief was that if someone went for a pee during a song, the film would be a flop. But if they held it in and went to the loo after the song, the film would be a hit," says Chaturvedi with a laugh.

Undying love

Even after 25 years, India is still smitten with *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*

BY K. SUNIL THOMAS







This October 20, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* completes a quarter century. DDLJ, as the film is referred to, holds the record for the longest running film in the history of Indian cinema—its 1,274-week run at Mumbai's Maratha Mandir cinema hall was only broken (temporarily) because of the nationwide lockdown, necessitated by the pandemic.

While this unique 'silver jubilee' may have to be marked without a physical screening (in Maharashtra, cinemas continue to remain closed), the DDLJ juggernaut is not done yet. "It will run again once theatres re-open," confirms a senior official with Yash Raj Films, which produced DDLJ. "[Director] Aditya Chopra has a great understanding of the medium of filmmaking. The genre and characters, looks, acting, plot development, everything was fully realised," says Manish Malhotra, noted fashion designer and film stylist, "The characters were beautifully written. They were young and fresh. The film indeed had something new to offer."

DDLJ has accrued many more illustrious feathers to that cap it flaunts on its title (that Shah Rukh Khan's character Raj sports while tagging alongside Kajol's Simran across Switzerland).

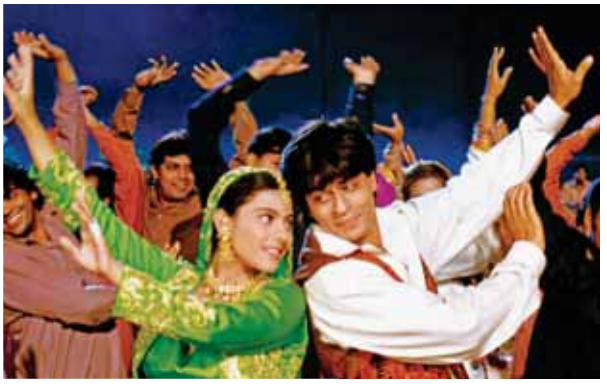
An instant smash upon release on the eve of Diwali 1995, its ₹524 crore box office gross is one of the highest in the history of Bollywood. When it swept 10 Filmfare awards that season (besides a National Award for the 'Best Popular Film'), it was a record at the time. It firmed up the careers of the largely newbie team, right from debutant director Aditya Chopra to musicians Jatin-Lalit and designer Manish Malhotra. Future movie mogul Karan Johar was assistant director, even appearing in some scenes as SRK's friend.

DDLJ's phenomenal success rocketed Shah Rukh Khan's already flourishing career beyond the stratosphere.

The magic of DDLJ goes beyond sheer numbers and milestones. The love saga of Raj and Simran, who meet on a train while on a European vacation, was at once a cocktail of contradictions, as it was sublimely palatable—Raj's carefree streak perfectly balancing with the traditional upbringing and reticent longings of Simran, even as the storyline sang paeans equally to both traditional family values as much as individualism and following one's heart—thus smartly placating all sections of the audience. The film turned Indian cinema's '*sanskari*-Indian vs wayward-*firangi*' trope on its head—London boy Raj, for all his beer-stealing and flamboyant flirting, respects Indian culture and will wait for parental approval, while the homegrown respectable groom Kuljeet comes through as the bad guy. But, is that enough for a film to be remembered, loved and feted a score and more years later?

Shah Rukh Khan, who did not respond to THE WEEK's request for an interview, was quoted recently saying he never changes radio stations when a DDLJ song comes on. Mumbai travel guide and influencer Priya Pathiyan recalls her outing with a gal-pal to catch the film at Maratha Mandir some time ago. "The audience was largely male, so we were a bit uncomfortable at first, but then









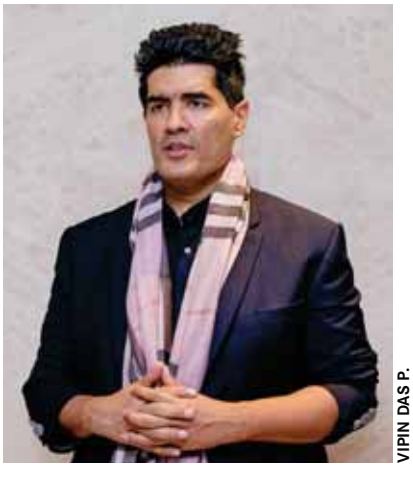
the movie started and everyone got together for the love of the movie," she recounts.

"It has great repeat value," analyses Jatin Pandit, one half of the Jatin-Lalit duo who composed the soundtrack of the film. "I still watch the film whenever it comes on TV. The script, music, photography, everything about the film was top-of-the-line and gelled well."

> **THE CHARACTERS WERE BEAUTIFULLY WRITTEN. THEY WERE YOUNG AND FRESH. THE FILM INDEED HAD SOMETHING NEW TO OFFER.**
>
> —**Manish Malhotra,** fashion designer

As it happens with any cult cultural phenomenon, everything about the film went viral, from the songs, the outfits, dialogues and even the locations it was shot in Switzerland, with dedicated DDLJ trails and Yash Chopra itineraries becoming popular with Indian honeymooners. One particularly epic line from the film, "*Bade bade deshon mein...*" was even mouthed by former US president Barack Obama during his India visit, to wild ovation.

The film does have its fair share of detractors. While the climactic closing line in the film, *Ja Simran ja... jeele apne zindagi* (Go Simran, go... live your life!) is much acclaimed, women's rights activists have held it up as symbolic of the patriarchy prevalent through the film. "It reinforced a lot of stereotypes," writes Jayesh Sharma in a blog post, "No matter how charming though, the movie was dragging us backwards into elder worship, even when they are wrong."



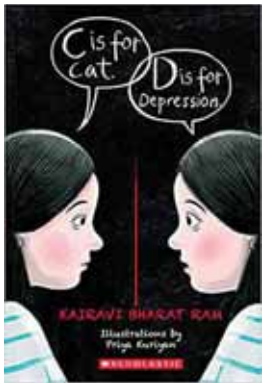
VIPIN DAS P.

While the central theme of star-crossed lovers striving for the acceptance of elders may have been new for Indian cinema at the time, it may appear out-of-step and uncool in a brand new century. "I've watched it lots of time, it's fantastic, but it's not something I will discuss with my friends," reveals college student Taaha Motorwala. "DDLJ is a bit over the top than what today's kids are used to." While it may not define 'cool' for today's youth, new technologies like streaming platforms ensure that DDLJ finds new, and younger, audiences every day.

"DDLJ is not outdated," said Kajol, in an exclusive interview to THE WEEK. "I think most kids when they take the big decision in their life, [would] want the approval of the people they love. And they try desperately to convince them that this is the right thing for them to do."

"Youngsters identify with this film even now," says Mahen Vakil, who was the executive producer of DDLJ, "Romance is the same. It is a matter of the heart, and that doesn't change. And this film encapsulates that timelessness of romance."

Lalit Pandit, the other half of the Jatin-Lalit music duo, recounts a conversation he had with the film's lyricist Anand Bakshi, right after the script was narrated to them by director Aditya Chopra. "Bakshi saab said, 'if this boy [Aditya Chopra] makes the film half as good as he narrated it, it will never leave the cinema halls.' And see, it turned out to be prophetic—it is still playing in cinemas 25 years later!"



C IS FOR CAT, D IS FOR DEPRESSION
By **Kairavi Bharat Ram**
Published by **Scholastic**
Price **₹495;** *pages* **65**

SONNETS OF HOPE

BY ANJULY MATHAI

In her new book for children, *C is for Cat, D is for Depression*, Kairavi Bharat Ram, 22, uses a number of metaphors to describe depression. She compares it with a movie "full of colour and so bright, that loses all vibrancy, and is now black and white". Or with walking around with a dark cloud over your head. "Around you it is sunny, but on you, there is a storm instead," she writes. Bharat Ram says she has only ever been able to write in verse, and that, too, when she is very emotional. When she was diagnosed with depression in Class 12, her chaotic feelings lend themselves beautifully to poetry.

In the waiting room outside her therapist's office, she used to see children as young as five or six needing counselling. She wanted to help them express their feelings, so came up with these metaphors that describe "a treasure chest of different emotions".

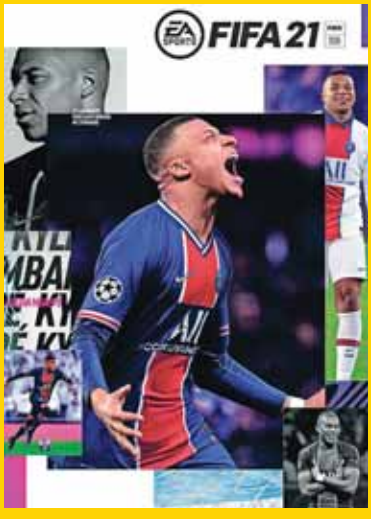
The book works, and not just for children, because it is honest. It captures the essence of depression in a way only poetry can, because poetry lends itself so beautifully to emotions which prose struggles to pin down. The writing also has a pleasing effortlessness to it. Priya Kuriyan's illustrations accompanying the poems are spot-on and give them sparkle.

C is for Cat... ends on a note of hope. "The only thing you cannot control is that things change," says Bharat Ram. "No matter what you are feeling today, tomorrow will come." Perhaps that is the reason for the pages beginning in black and ending in yellow. Because when the sun comes out in the morning, it will bring its paint box with it.

THE BEAUTIFIED GAME

Football gaming giant FIFA is back, with fancy footwork and spectacular goals

BY KARTHIK RAVINDRANATH



Cost: **₹3,999** (standard edition) **to ₹6,499** (ultimate edition)

The world is a scary place, complete with inept political leaders and lethal viruses. But, there are a few things you can still count on. Like Electronic Arts releasing a new version of FIFA every year. The franchise, in its 28th year, is the best-selling sports video game series. The latest iteration, FIFA 21, released on October 9.

It comes with subtle changes which make a significant difference to the game play. The basic skills (like passing, shooting) reflect the real-world abilities of the players more closely. So, a cross by Trent Alexander-Arnold will be discernibly better than one from your average right-back. Free kicks are more realistic, but hard to master.

Even the not-so-skilled gamer may stumble upon a few cool moves. I got Neymar to juggle and shimmy his way past three defenders and have no idea how I did it. So, the "serious gamers" can rip others to shreds, more so, because the keeper and defence will be shambolic unless the gamer pays real attention to defensive play.

The game modes have all been updated, but none more so than the manager mode—where you can take control of a football club. The FIFA 21 manager mode offers a truly immersive experience; you are involved in everything from transfers to player development, handling the media and, of course, the matches.

There does not seem to be many glitches, but it is too early to say. Hopefully, EA can sort out any problems through constant updates. Also, do not forget to check out the likes of Pele and Maradona, rated 98 and 97 (out of 100), respectively, in the Soccer Aid team made up of legends. If you cannot win with this team, stop playing!

POIROT POWER

BY KARTHIK RAVINDRANATH

Hercule Poirot, the fictional Belgian detective created by British author Agatha Christie, made his first appearance in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, published in October 1920. His exit in *Curtain* (1975) was followed by an obituary on the front page of *The New York Times*.

Initially, Poirot was shown as a conventional clue- and logic-based detective. Later, he becomes a psychological detective who progresses not by thorough examination of the crime scene, but by inquiring into the nature of the victim or the perpetrator. He focuses on getting people to talk. He lies freely, tries to make people underestimate him and at times, poses as a charlatan. His aim: To make people give themselves away.

In honour of 100 years of Poirot, here is a look at five actors who have played the role in movies:



1974

ALBERT FINNEY
Finney played Poirot in *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974). He is, to date, the only actor to receive an Academy Award nomination for playing Poirot



1931

AUSTIN TREVOR
Trevor first portrayed Poirot in the British film *Alibi* (1931), and reprised the role twice. His Poirot did not have what Christie described as "the finest moustache in England"



1978

PETER USTINOV
Ustinov played Poirot six times, starting with *Death on the Nile* (1978). Christie's daughter Rosalind Hicks once said that Poirot was not like Ustinov's portrayal of him. Ustinov said: "He is now!"

1965

TONY RANDALL
Randall played Poirot in *The Alphabet Murders* (1965). This was more of a satire and Christie objected to the script; one of the objections being to a bedroom scene featuring Poirot



KENNETH BRANAGH
Branagh directed and starred in *Murder on the Orient Express* (2017), with an all-star cast. He is set to return in both roles for the upcoming *Death on the Nile*

2017



BITTER CHOCOLATE

SWARA BHASKER



Stand up, Bollywood

On my first trip to Pakistan in 2005, I was walking the bylanes of a Lahore market and was struck by the number of stalls that sold posters of popular Bollywood actors. I drew a direct correlation between the Pakistani public's love for Bollywood and the warmth with which they received two young Indian girls. In subsequent travels around the world—the non-English speaking world, in particular—I found that the connection between India and Bollywood always ensured an open smile of recognition, and a feeling of bonhomie with strangers.

A taxi driver in Turkey communicated with me in sign language except when singing, "*Awara hoon, ya gardish mein hoon aasmaan ka taara hoon*." A group of young girls in Gaza, living amidst the rubble of a ceaseless war, were keen that I pass a message of admiration on their behalf to Shahid Kapoor. A band in a Morocco *shisha* lounge realised that I was Indian and played "*Tujhey dekha toh yeh jana sanam*" to wild cheering. A Lahore wedding party where only Bollywood numbers were played or a Nigerian driver, a hardcore Amitabh Bachchan fan, who claimed that he had become a five-time *namazi* when Allah saved Bachchan's life after the fateful accident on the sets of *Coolie*. These were all foreigners who felt a special connection to India because of Bollywood.

Every time I have travelled I understood the reach of Bollywood's 'soft power'. Used judiciously, Bollywood could have been India's benevolent weapon on the world stage. However, no government has really understood the potential of Bollywood, and if they did, they chose to ignore it. Until 2014.

The Modi government has been the only government in the history of independent India to not just understand the extent of Bollywood's usefulness in serving state agenda, but also to have made use of the star power. Unfortunately, instead of using Bollywood's soft power to propel Indian values on the world stage, the government put Bollywood to use for a more personal agenda.

The last six years have seen Bollywood elite endorse government campaigns, tweet vociferously in support of the government, lavish praise upon the PM, make films that barely conceal the obvious references to the PM and his various welfare schemes, and contribute enthusiastically to disaster relief funds named after the PM.

Bollywood stars have graced the PM's functions and posed for selfies. Popular dialogues have been put to the service of BJP's campaign and films eulogising the government have turned the government's self-proclaimed military successes into the stuff of legends. What has Bollywood got in return?

Bollywood has found itself playing villain in a salacious, high-pitched, delusional, divorced from facts, sleazy narrative about drugs, nepotism, mafia influence and rape accusations in the four-month-long media trial following the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput. The industry has been described as "filthy", as a "den of drugs" and as having a stench that "all the perfumes of Arabia" cannot conceal. Top actors and producers have had their characters assassinated by hysterical anchors, their WhatsApp chats leaked, and summoned for questioning. Not a sound of support from the government that a lot of mainstream Bollywood spent the last six years paying obeisance to.

In fact, pro-government actors, who have had immense success from Bollywood, turned on the industry often with accusations that were not entirely fair, sometimes in Parliament. And the Sangh-inspired rightwing social media system is dripping with bizarre theories about the many evils of Bollywood—ranging from Jihad and Pakistani ISI connections, to incest and murder!

While it is understandable that no businessman wants to jeopardise their investment by taking up cudgels against the ruling dispensation, especially given the amount of control various government bodies can wield on the release of films, mainstream Bollywood needs to ask itself whether it landed a raw deal in choosing the path of blind unctuousness. And as it prepares for a court battle with two news channels over defamatory content, maybe Bollywood needs to shed some more servility and fear, and start standing up for itself.

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

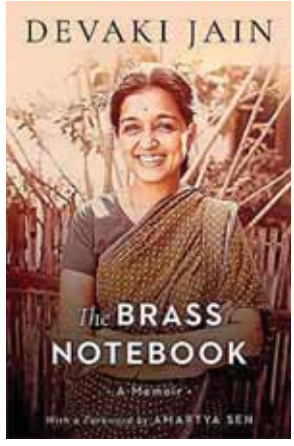
LIFE AS TRESPASS

BY MANDIRA NAYAR

There is very little Devaki Jain, 87, has not done. She once drove a Land Rover from London to Kabul, eloped, lived with her lover for a year before they got married, worked with freedom activist Vinoba Bhave and befriended women's rights activist Gloria Steinem. One of the leading economists of her generation, the Oxford-educated Jain's memoir, *The Brass Notebook*—a twist on Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*—is worth its weight in gold for younger women, and not just because of her academic accomplishments.

The Brass Notebook begins with a quote from Moroccan feminist writer Fatema Mernissi: "To live is to look outside. To live is to step out. Life is trespassing." Jain has done plenty of that. The book is a powerful testimony of that wonderfully freeing idea of life being a trespass.

Jain writes engagingly—and incredibly honestly—about her life. Her lessons in gender started young. She was eight when her sister had her first period. Her aunts decided it was important to celebrate her entry into womanhood. "Thus, as the day of her first period arrived she was put into a room where she was completely isolated," writes Jain, who was chosen to live with her for four days. "We were like animals in a zoo."



THE BRASS NOTEBOOK: A MEMOIR

By **DEVAKI JAIN**

Published by **SPEAKING TIGER**

Price **₹599**; *Pages* **215**

There are very few books that come endorsed by Amartya Sen, Desmond Tutu, Romila Thapar and Steinem—all of whom she knows personally. But that is not reason enough to read the book. *The Brass Notebook* is essential reading because it chronicles her life beyond her achievements. It is her adventures—and she has many—which make the book engrossing.

Her relationship with her husband, Lakshmi Jain, began while he was engaged to someone else. "He was 'my man', even though he belonged to the inconvenient caste…." she writes. "I plotted to be with him on our way to a wedding." The story of their romance, in the face of opposition from her father, is thrilling. The power couple of that time, Jain writes about their public life and their contribution to the cooperative movement.

Along with writing passionately about passion—a rarity in the field of academics—Jain also brings alive the dream of India. There are her interactions with global stalwarts like Sen and her work for the Indian Cooperative Union. But more than that, the book is the story of a woman who is idealistic, determined, courageous and in love with life.

Not squeamish, she writes about her abortions during her live-in relationship with Lakshmi, about desire as well as pleasure. It is this candid, almost brutal honesty—a trespassing of forbidden boundaries—that makes the book extraordinary.



Riding high



Director **Ram Kamal Mukherjee's** *Rickshawala*, a tribute to actor Om Puri's rickshawala character in the film, *City of Joy* (1992), will be screened at two prestigious film festivals—ImagineIndia International Film Festival in Madrid and the International Film Festival of Melbourne. Starring Avinash Dwivedi and Sangita Sinha, the film revolves around issues of unemployment and migrant oppression in India. "I wanted to tell a simple story and since I have spent my childhood in north Kolkata, I wanted to tell this story of rickshaw pullers," said Mukherjee.

Grown-up and groovy



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Actor **Shweta Basu Prasad** first wooed audiences as the gullible yet feisty Chunni in the Shabana Azmi-starrer, *Makdee* (2002). The Vishal Bhardwaj directed horror-comedy won her a national award for best child artiste. Now all grown up, Basu Prasad has been spotted in a number of films recently, like Sudhir Mishra's *Serious Men*, in which she plays an Ivy League-educated Dalit politician. She will next be seen in the ZEE5 "comrom" called *Comedy Couple* as a stand-up comic in a metropolis.

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

***Aparshakti Khurana,** actor*

Taking centre stage

Many might still know Aparshakti Khurana as the brother of Ayushmann Khurrana, but not for much longer. Aparshakti, who made his debut with Aamir Khan's *Dangal* (2016), talks about his upcoming release, Satram Ramani's *Helmet*, which marks his first outing as male lead, after playing supporting roles in films like *Stree*



PTI

All's not well

On World Mental Health Day (October 10), Aamir Khan's daughter, **Ira Khan,** 23, posted a video on Instagram revealing that she has been suffering from depression for more than four years. She described her struggle with it and admitted that, for a while, she has been wanting to do something for mental health, but was not sure what. "Things are really confusing and stressful and simple and okay but not okay and... life all together," she captioned the video. "There is no way to say it all in one go." Ira had directed a theatrical adaptation of Euripides's *Medea* last year.



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(2018), *Luka Chuppi* (2019) and *Pati, Patni Aur Woh* (2019)

Q\ Tell us about Helmet.

A *Helmet* is a fun film set against the backdrop of the use of condoms. This is my [first] lead project and there is this feeling of happy nervousness. This is definitely a special film and has been executed as per plan. Yet, most of the times things are not in your hands and it is for the audience to decide if you are cut out to be on the poster or not.

Q\ How will the success of Helmet define your career?

A I am playing the lead in this film, but even in films in which I have only played supporting roles, I have got immense satisfaction from the teamwork involved. Of course, when your baby becomes successful, you do get recognition, better work and respect, and in that context, of course it is very important.

Q\ Was it the right decision to experiment a lot with your roles?

A I do not know what is right or wrong here. I am only looking at it as an enjoyable journey. At times, really good actors have gone wrong. How does one know or plan a journey? We are all doing things the best possible way we know, and life is unpredictable. Also, I stopped planning my life after the age of 26 or 27, because in the first three to four years of my working life, I planned too much and realised that things were never so hunky-dory.

Q\ Which of your films are you most proud of?

A *Dangal* has also been very close to my heart. Standing in the same frame with Aamir sir, of course, was extremely special. There was no way people would not have gone to watch it. But having said that, *Stree*, for me, is really special. Sharing space with Rajkummar Rao, Pankaj Tripathi and Abhishek Banerjee and people appreciating your work as well as theirs makes you feel great. Even today, when I am at a webinar, people recognise me for my work and dialogues in *Stree*.

—Pooja Biraia Jaiswal

It's raining bigginis

Taapsee Pannu will put a smile on your face with her latest video from the Maldives, where she has been vacationing. In it, she, her sister Shagun and cousin Evania can be seen boogieing to the song 'Biggini Shoot', while boyfriend Mathias Boe puts in a blink-and-miss appearance. She captioned the video: "So what did the Pannus do in the Maldives?" If you would like to spice up a drab day with a hearty laugh, watch these 'biggini girls' work their magic.



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

BARKHA DUTT



Barking news

India's television news is in meltdown. Channels are fighting among themselves. The relationship between television hosts is as volatile as that between India and Pakistan. And the audience is sniggering at the circus, where the media itself has become the main entertainer. I joked the other day to the razor-sharp stand-up comedian Anuvab Pal that his job was in danger. Prime time anchors, I warned him, might be funnier than he is—and without even intending to be.

Then I amended my words. The difference, I said, self-correcting, is that the news hosts are both funny and dangerous, whereas satirists were benign, if occasionally acerbic.



As TV news becomes a caricature of itself, it has also played to the basest prejudices a society can have; loose talk, instant judgment, slander of women, anti-Muslim rhetoric—everything that good journalism once rose up against has been normalised and made mainstream by television now.

The navel-gazing quarrel over who is worse on the spectrum of options is one more excuse for the TV media to not to its job. First, the tragic death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput was the perfect excuse to not report on the Covid-19 pandemic, the threat from China or the state of the economy. Now the *tamasha* has been overtaken by the state of play within the media industry. Channels that were till yesterday just as irresponsible and inflammatory in their coverage of the Rajput case and the misogynistic coverage of his girlfriend, Rhea Chakraborty, are today acting sanctimonious.

The worst are the networks which play on the formula of yin and yang. In an effort to keep all sorts of audiences on their side, some of their presenters are voluble, gossipy, aggressive and downright irresponsible. Then they have another set who are projected as more rooted and responsible. This way they get to run with the hares and hunt with the hounds, and seek to be all things to all people. Frankly, this last category is the most disingenuous; at least with the others you know precisely what you have signed up for.

The serious impact of all this is, of course, the death of credibility. When journalists become the subject of memes and mockery, what you have is a weakened and divided fourth estate. And guess who that leaves with the last laugh—India's politicians. Journalism was meant to hold the powerful to account. But if the media is so busy bickering, sniggering and pulling down its own, it is hardly in a position to take a united stand on anything.

Television anchors, with delusions of grandeur, may believe that being on air every night offers them some sort of immunity. But now that a furious debate has erupted over how news ratings are measured and how easily they can be manipulated, channels cannot even hide their venom behind the boastful claims of numbers.

No matter which way you look at it, perhaps not since its inception has television news been this disrespected and irrelevant.

As a former practitioner of TV, I wish I could seek comfort in an "I told you so" moment.

But a weakened media is terrible news for democracy.

ILLUSTRATION **BHASKARAN**

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